Sulfur 1

FEATURING: 121 LINES FROM CANTO #84 UNPUBLISHED BY EZRA POUND ▲THE LETTERS OF EDWARD DAHLBERG AND CHARLES OLSON (THE EARLY YEARS) ▲ALCHEMICAL BLUE AND THE UNIO MENTALIS BY JAMES HILLMAN

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by Ana Mendieta

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Sulfur

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CLAYTON ESHLEMAN, *Editor*
ROBERT KELLY, *Contributing Editor*
DENNIS PHILLIPS, *Book Review Editor*
CARYL ESHLEMAN, *Assistant Editor*
ROBIN PALANKER, *Design*
REBECCA MORALES, *Production Assistant*

California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA 91125

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instead of the private lenders
the interest wd/ accrue to the Treasury
and diminish by its amount the need of national taxes
Mr Borah was never considered a safe man
in certain quarters

verso la sera when a man ~~M~~ throws a 40 ft/ shadow

our Pisan sky making blue all the puddles
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So the Old Emperor said to Shun

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" if you can keep the peace between
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Magnanimity / magnanimity /
I know I ask a great deal

Gaudier , Hulme gone in that one
Young Dolmetch and Angold in this one
and the Italians
" are not interested
in fighting foreignerm
they are only interested in fighting each other "
Olga Rudge dixit , who knows 'em

and it might have been avoided if
Joe Davies had gone to Berlin instead of to Moscow

" in our time
Give to us peace .

((repeat here inrussian from the old Russian anthem
Give tous peace in our time, O Lord)

If the hoar frost grip they tent
Thou wilt give thanks when night is spente .
Italy , my Italy m my God , my Italy
Ti ~~MMMMM~~ abbraccio la terra santa .

Ezra Pound

From an Unpublished Draft of Canto LXXXIV

(Editor's Note: When Ezra Pound was composing the final version of the Pisan Cantos from preliminary drafts, he decided not to include most of a 123-line fragment from the end of Canto 84. Perhaps some of the lines seemed too personal or sentimental to the poet, or perhaps they didn't fit into the structure of the canto as its final form developed. In view of Pound's often stated concern for careful editing, we must conclude that he had his own good reasons for cutting the passage when the eleven Pisan Cantos were published in 1948.

The quality of the poetry, particularly the last 19 lines at the end of this, the last of the Pisan Cantos, seems to justify its appearance now as a separate fragment. Pound himself once noted that Cantos 81 & 84 are essential to understanding the whole work. The lines add to that understanding. Additional reinforcement comes from the beauty of the poetry and the growing significance of his ideas.

Despite his detention in the Disciplinary Training Center at Pisa, and the stress under which he had been living for several years, Pound persisted in his humanity, and seems to have abandoned none of his determination to realize his ideals even in a war-torn world apparently devoid of dreams. The references to his journey from Rome north to Gais, amid the chaos of Italy's capitulation, show that he witnessed the effects of war first-hand. Rather than dull his intuition of the beauty of landscape, nature and history, the punishment of the cage magnified his memory. The meaning of the "Tradition" he wrote about so often came into focus, and at that time its meaning could not have been a mere idealization. His isolation distilled key ideas. Clarity evolved from uncertainty through a logic of suffering, and his imagination drew from fact and experience as in no other work.

The line about the bees gathering honey as the soul gathers light (via Bartlett's Familiar Quotations) takes on additional meaning in the context of its source, *Les Miserables*, by Victor Hugo, another political exile.

Pound's Renaissance-style persona of poet as worldly counsellor, adept at the most sophisticated and delicate aspects of modern life, clashed with the contemporary view (from the 19th Century on, particularly in America) of poet-as-crank, Bohemian, outsider, blunderer, extremist: i.e., a person not to be taken seriously. After years of rejection in his own country, in contrast to the acceptance and respect he gained in Italy, his emotional embrace of Italy at the end of the fragment is not difficult to understand. He could do little with political leaders and critics who

← A reproduction of the last page of Pound's manuscript.

treated him as a dolt, and who had already decided on war, no matter what the cost to Europe. Even today *our* own minds are almost daily stretched to the bursting point with the enormity and continuity of the gun sales. What was treason is viewed as duty and patriotism.

Pound apparently decided to omit this fragment when he assembled the typescript of the Pisan Cantos now located at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book Library. But the lyrical couplet:

> If the hoar frost grip thy tent
> Thou wilt give thanks when night is spente.

was attached to the printed version even though it is not present in the typescript. An equally lyrical eight-line fragment beginning:

> Yet from my tomb such flames of love arise
> That whoso passes shall be warmed thereby . . .

is present in the typescript, but was not used in the final version.)

—MATTHEW JENNETT

△

Night rain and a Biddle sky
"That somewhat obstinate expression
not devoid of amusement
not devoid of amusement
on John Adams' face in his frontispiece
and that this might have to do with "funding"
funding, as in the jargon of that epoch.

"H-how old is it?
How high is it — eh
Wu-what makes it a wonder?"
La Torre di Pisa
in the dim mind of the sick-call
The "dark forest" (Turgenev) la selva . . .

or a sky as feldspar in autumn
when the sun goes to his rest

and to you Father Ascreus commen –
        about the time of my birthday
2 friends, new friends:
this lady-bug not red brown but yellow
black spotted who draws in her head like a turtle
and this wasp yellow banded
            aux yeux fleur-de-tête
in extacy over my jam spread
        exuberant as a puppy-dog
and to *gea* the munificent my thanks for 2 excellent
                mushrooms

while at the next dawn with rain
            under the long line of gibbets
the lights of the penal area
            as some Jersey City by Lethe
plus my apologies to Hugo, via "Bartlett":

"Bees gather honey as the soul gathers light"
Augurellus: flos collegit rerum. Nov. "
My mind stretched to the bursting point
        with this enormity
with the continuity of the gun-sales
What bird cries in November after the rain?

INCIPIT VITA NUOVA:

                Tea at Norah's
and then at the airport:
"what shall we do? We have no officers.

and at Sette Bagni nothing to pay for good bread –
that after Roma –
nothing to pay for that egg
or those grapes
or that double minestra
"Cosa fanno a Roma?"
Wd/ I stay for the night,
and the first day they kept their packs
and the second got rid of
all military impedimenta
in fact of *all* impedimenta
ready to escape in their underwear,
One night under the stars
one on a bench at Rieti
one on Bologna platform
after food at the cab-driver's friend's trattoria
Lo sfacelo, understood why Hem had written,
that is, his values.

So that it must be almost clear
to even the simple of heart
That if you spend ten billion
buying @ 35 dollars
instead of @ 21.60
there will be 4 billion velvet
Some of which may have gone to Mocatta
(Muscovites also selling)
though our Treasury has no official knowledge
of anyone save the last firm that had it
before the Treasury purchase

I was told "Oh, no/" and in June '39 in Greenwich Connecticut
"Oh no, they (that is Eden and Churchill)

are going to get into the government
in order to get the war started
So why stop at Standard Oil and von Schröder
on account of a minor ὑστεροπρότερου

And as reply, Stalin's:
I will believe the American.

So there was the gold an' the silver
and the needlessness of the loans

and I recalled that a certain point of the
conversation
I had said:
"Good God / you don't mean
they are worse than the other gang?
And he (Borah) replied: N-o-o
I wdn't/ say that but
I can't work with 'em.
And years later it was, at least to some
quite apparent
that if the Treasury made the loans
instead of the private lenders
the interest wd/ accrue to the Treasury
and diminish by its amount the need of national taxes
Mr Borah was never considered a safe man
in certain quarters

verso la sera when a man throws a 40 ft/ shadow

our Pisan sky making blue all the puddles
then cloud hill rises over the rock range
quadrupling it

and the S.E. is a slit of fire, 11th November
So the Old Emperor said to Shun

the emphasis is ideogrammicly on the lower
component

"if you can keep the peace between
those two hell-cats
you will have no trouble in running the Empire.

Magnanimity / magnanimity /
I know I ask a great deal

Gaudier, Hulme gone in that one
Young Dolmetsch and Angold in this one
and the Italians
"are not interested
in fighting foreigners,
they are only interested in fighting each other"
Olga Rudge dixit, who knows 'em

and it might have been avoided if
Joe Davies had gone to Berlin instead of to Moscow

"in our time
Give to us peace.

If the hoar frost grip thy tent
Thou wilt give thanks when night is spente.
Italy, my Italy, my God, my Italy
Ti abbraccio la terra santa.

△

Jerome Rothenberg

Hunger

1
the prisoners, committed to death
around the world
the squadrons of hungry ghosts almost like armies
that swarm up & down the streets
always behind your house
never in front
where the bright wall tells the world
"a happy giant lives here"
I would rather run away
no more terror & no more loss of memory
promises the guard
I tell him: I don't want any part of this
even if it's a dream—& it is—
in the blood the enzymes are the same
the prisoners are all marching & won't stop
until they lay you flat
until your eye—no longer focused on the road
no longer on the sign over the supermarket
illumination—flops on your cheek
the jaw at a cockeyed angle
away from your face, the skin
peculiar, pasty like a kind of earth
loose & crumbling
what will you become & what will we all become
before the time of the big change

the miracle?
the body is a remorseless institution
it escapes me though I respect it
greatly, though I equate it with this poem
another metaphor for death
the armies of the world have no respect
for flesh
        they run their wheels
over it, they crush it to shadows
with their wheels

2

the hunger of the rich man
knows no end
the man & the woman, both insatiable
reduce the world's flesh to a sauce
& smear it over their wrists & thighs
& follow the delicious cracks of their bodies
trying to shove the substance in
a gibelotte done hunter style
the dead feet still thick with fur
the tongues torn from their cries
harbor the ghosts of tears
wild capers scrape the bourgeois flesh
the hunger of the man & woman
lords of hunger
gives a direction to their lives
they speak in French
the only language the bones understand
when they rub the femurs against each other's nipples
—hungry hungry—
when his own mouth over her cunt
feels the dead bone slip in

from his trembling fingers
this is how gods make love in graveyards
eating, sucking out their lives
the woman mother of the bones straddles
a throne of hungry beggars
hands reach up to her in death
they stroke her ribs
incite her, the man & woman
gather strength
under the shadow of an egg-beater
a new vibrator, watching
"les viandes rôties, the eloquence
"of slowly turning flesh
"contracting
"swelling
"fondled by repeated basting
"assumes a rich brown satin glaze
the hunger of the rich man
leaves him shrunken
because it doesn't end
he says "sweet momma," croons it
in the voice that made him famous
they eat each other's sex
then they eat the sex of others
they invent new hungers
hunger for power & for grass
hunger for sleep & badges
hunger for swollen sausages
hunger for swollen legs
hunger for the sounds of swollen children
hunger for omens
hunger for facades
hunger for kings

hunger for irreversible death
hunger for a monument to hunger
only the rich can still invent
they wait for future hungers
servants will spoon for them
they drive to funerals & spas
they leave crisp dollars on each other's plates
the hunger of the rich man
reaches for the moon
it breaks the world in half
& hands it
first to his bride, his love
they melt in tears
the band plays "satisfaction"
but they go on eating
"till the end of time"

△

Gustaf Sobin

Sudden Essays on Shadows and Substance

the shadow, within, thinks of itself as substance
while what it wishes (the other)
appears as substance, is only
its obliterating reply.

---

if the shadow points
it's because the shadow's drawn; drawn, I
call it 'you,' 'yours,'
when it's never yours but

the glint you make that pulls the shadow through . . .

. . . all one's darkness being weighed, risked
in those thin
tin- white quivers.

---

you, because
I didn't want: never asked for myself,
but slaked, each time,
on your shattered mirrors.

---

under a breeze-cloth of glances, is letting
the light bones go.

---

if word is, if
world is: it's outside what-

ever it is that wishes to name, number, elaborate.

---

is the shadow-
within-the- flesh, reflected, that permits passage; is
nothing before or beyond it; only
its 'between.'

---

through the narrows, that
draft of fumes, thickening to
a murmur, the white rhymes of its dissolution . . . . . .

filled the world with ourselves; then, invented a
  grail, ir-

resonant enough.

the fingers, curling
  into claws, to
withhold the rolled smoke of the shadows (as if

they could).

as the fanned lashes touch: the smoke
cones through.

on and on, one soul
  ridding itself upon another: our heaven-cir-

cuitous.

rushed, each time, towards the
hollowest, the 'heart of lepers,' this

gift of our needlessness.

---

awash in those ashes: still talked of roses . . . . .

---

am the transparent mask that
you've made: in half-circles, the
wild ash rubbed into arms, shoulders, your
long glowing face.

---

to bury our shadows under the
lashes of
their reflection, is what we mean; murmur of . . . .

△

Bruce McClelland

[Polis]

They do not speak
or are of the *polis.*
I have walked among them,
their speech stops I ask
is it the *agora* I am toward
where the angels merchandise
the dread, to be found here,
where the race becomes.

The race of flowers names
the tip of tongue, the quantity
of lines the yield of yard
the acres of the men
who plant this field.

how quiet they grow
into nation, market,
crop hushed for terrible
knowledge of becoming.

The scythe of Vico is a rumor of
or fear of frost tonight
& the women will be dancing
around a fire
                away from here

that rustles thru the
(nothing more than
                bones.
They chatter, barbarian
lingo of neonony, the new
laws that affect
o, all of us. I will listen to that
if they will speak to me
in Greek of fragments
of the old laws, of the tongue,
of the rituals of the seeds
what is left of them the purpose
of the women's dance

was never to prevent the cold
from coming on in order
that it pass. My understanding
centers there, that hilltop
where they hold their fire
becomes the town, & I have
walked among.

△

Jacinto Cua Pospoy

Thirty Years Later: The Estados Unidos Goes to the Moon

from the Tzutujil Maya

—translated by Martin Prechtel and Nathaniel Tarn

QUESTIONING VOICE: You have this *Cerro de Burro* here, this hill you call the Center. Did it have anything to do with the great earthquake of 1975? Why did all the towns to the north and east get hurt and Santiago Atitlan here escape unhurt?

ANSWERING VOICE: It was because of the prophet Francisco Sojuel, the one who died from down here around 1900. In every volcano there is a guy holding down one of the four corners of the mansion. Four guys. Sojuel got restive one day and went over to see a friend by Patzun—the town that got worst hit. Well, Evil Person came out of Volcano San Bernabe and began to shake Sojuel's corner of the mansion while he was gone. So the guys at the Center, they sent a telegram to Sojuel—that he should rush back before his part of the mansion fell down on the people. He holds down the part here by Santiago. So he just got back in time: but where he went on his visit, in Patzun and Patzicia—they got hit.

QUESTIONING VOICE: Is that the *real* reason? I mean, I've heard all about the quarrels between Santiago and Patzun. Their getting the best corn in the original handout and all that. But was that the real reason? Someone told me the stars. . .

ANSWERING VOICE: O.K. Well. The real reason, of course, is because the astronauts tried to steal the stars. The guys who went up there to walk on the face of the Moon. It happened years and years ago that the people of Estados Unidos were getting greedy and running out of money. And all these people were coming on down here, you know, more and more tourists coming down here and, because of that, money was leaving the Estados Unidos and coming back to the Navel, here in Guatemala. The material wealth was coming back to its origin, here in the Center. So the Estados Unidos had to go out and steal stars. . .

QUESTIONING VOICE: But: money?. . . stars? Relationship of?

ANSWERING VOICE: The rocks inside the Center and the stars: same thing. In the Center, you get the Root of Earth, the Root of World: rocks, minerals, light, electricity, all of that comes from this root. That's what all the arsenals of the rain angels are made of: sunlight, lightning, rainbow, gunpowder, thunder: it's all one thing. The Root stays in there glowing and trembling; it's controlled by the Old Guys in there and it trembles every day.

Now that Root, that buried star: it has a corresponding pole in the sky. When Estados Unidos lost its money to us down here, their whole relationship to that pole was in trouble. So they had to go out and steal stars.

Well, there were two brothers. . .

QUESTIONING VOICE: You're kidding! ALL your stories here have two brothers!

ANSWERING VOICE: There were two brothers who were supposed to go up to the Moon and they developed a great way to jump up there. They were carrying some sort of pack on their backs: like a little house. So they got up to the Moon.

Trouble is, they didn't ask permission. They didn't make prayers

before they left: they didn't do *costumbre*. I don't know: do the *Gringos* know about *costumbre*? Anyway, they got up there and looked for the door of the Moon-Mountain, you know: all mountains have their doors. It took them a while to find the door and they knocked bam,bam,bam. Meanwhile, they saw all these stars rolling by. The younger one said, "Hey, why don't we grab some of those?" But the older guy was embarrassed, he felt embarrassed. So they decided to ask the Grandmother.

Finally, a big giant, the Grandmother's "dog," he opens this door. "What are you guys doing over here?" he says. "Oh, well, we just want to talk to Grandmother," they say. The dog goes: "Oh, no, no way: she's out visiting, she's out for the month," the dog replies. —"Well, where did she go?" the brothers ask. —"Oh you know, every month she goes visiting. She'll be back in twenty days." —"TWENTY DAYS! THAT'S TERRIBLE!!!" the guys say. —"Yes, twenty days, you guys fuck off," the dog says. And he slams the door in their faces.

Well, they didn't even have the time to ask if they could wait around. So they wandered around for twenty days hanging out and checking out the moon, but, you know, there wasn't really much of anything. Finally, the twenty days go by and they go back to the door, blam, blam, blam. The giant comes out again, same rigmarole. "Well," the guys say, "we just want to talk to the Grandmother," and they kneel down, you know, and cross themselves, and go into a long ritual speech, "We just want to come before your face, before your lips, Lady Moon, Lady Stars, we just want to come before your hands and before your feet, Woman-Lord of Moon, Woman-Lord of Stars," that's the way they carry on.

But the guardian says the Moon is sleeping. "Could you not . . . er . . . wake her up?" the guy asks, like they do when they want to make *costumbre* in a Saint's house. "WAKE HER UP!" screams the guardian, "who the hell *are* you guys anyway? You want to ruin the Universe or something?" he is shouting and the guys, you know, wincing back, thinking "holy shit," you know, "*what* do we do now?"

Anyway: they ask if they can hang around; the guardian says they will have to talk to her directly; they ask how they can talk to her directly if she's always sleeping or away, back and forth, back and forth. "How can we, what can we, I mean, what is this. . . .argh. . . .bureaucracy?" the guys are saying, but the guardian has slammed the door in their faces.

So they wait a couple of days and, finally, finally, they bang on the door again—and, this time, they can talk to her. The Grandmother comes out with long, flowing white hair and goes "Oh! Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want?" But she didn't let them in. They wanted to go in and see what was inside the Moon but she wouldn't let them. She asks them why she had had no message that they were coming. "Well, er, we are emissaries of the Estados Unidos," they say, "and we have come to ask your permission to take back some stars. . ." —"*Stars!* Are you saying stars? No, no, no, absolutely no way," she says. —"Yes . . . er, well, we know you are Lady of these things, but, er, well, at least you know, we came to get Venus, the Evening Star." "VENUS!!!" she practically screams, "Are you crazy? Absolutely not. The ONLY thing you can have are some rocks. The only thing you can have are rocks from the surface here, you bunch of brats, anything you can get off the surface here is o.k., but watch it that you don't ruin the Universe. Stars, no way." And she slams the door in their faces.

They decide that if that's all they can get, they might as well take rocks. So they go around, looking for rocks. Well, all of a sudden, this big old star comes up right by the Moon. It was the Great Star, the Burden Carrier, it was Venus itself! So they whispered to each other, "Yeah! it's right here within our reach, let's grab it and get out of here." So they jumped out and tried to grab hold of Venus but, of course, their hands got burned: they were completely paralyzed by the electric light. So the older brother jumped down to earth for a big machine to pick up stars. But still, they could only go for tiny little stars.

They get hold of some and hold them down as much as they can

and get them right down on the Moon, but they pop right up again. They go for smaller and smaller stars. So then they see, ooooooo, a little, dinkeeeee staaaaar in the distance and they finally get it down and put it in their headcloths. They are going to put it in their headcloths but it is heavy, heavy, as heavy as the whole Moon and they can't budge it. They pull and they tug but they can't budge it. They want to take it home in their cloths like merchandise but it won't move. And with all this tugging, even Venus had moved a *little* bit. . .

Well, they get some rocks into the cloths but the rocks fall thru and their cloths are full of holes. Well, after all the tying up and sewing up to secure the rocks inside the headcloths, they finally get one teeny weeny rock and they think they had better get out of here before Grandmother finds out about Venus.

QUESTIONING VOICE: Is that like when Sojuel comes back to earth from visiting his father, the Sun, his assistant manages to bring back a tiny little Root: the Root of Corn, or of Bean, or of Tomato, but it's always very small, because of the weight?

ANSWERING VOICE: I guess so, maybe. Now, when the astronauts came down, they had to go to Guatemala first, of course. They had to come to the Center before going back to Estados Unidos. So the President received them with a big welcome. Then they realized. They thought they had been gone about twenty-four days but they had been gone for years and years. They had been thru a whole cycle of our Grandmother: twenty years. They weren't young anymore; they were tired old men. So the Government put them in big black limousines, wouldn't let anyone see them, took them to a house and asked them what treasure they had.

Well, this one Moon rock was somehow very precious here on earth. The Government didn't want the Estados Unidos to see it. So they decided to bury the rock in the Center. At the time there was a Mexican company working near the Center: they were looking for oil,

or uranium, or pyrites, no one quite knows what. Our people didn't really know what they were doing: what with all the helicopters and things pulling stuff out of the Center. They destroyed a lot of things up there but they failed to build a road: the Earth-lords didn't give them permission.

QUESTIONING VOICE: Wait. You're talking about the President, the Government, the Mexicans: who is who?

ANSWERING VOICE: It's all the same: men with mustaches and guns. It's one Government. The Government and the Government of the World are one thing. It all works from the Center.

Anyway—when they buried the rock in the Center, they sent the astronauts up in a helicopter. So these poor guys went back to Estados Unidos with just dust and crumbs. When they got back, they were punished by the Moon because they had budged Venus. They both went crazy and remain so till this day.

The great earthquake came about because they had budged Venus.

And, as for Patzun and Patzicia and those places, they got hit because they had given up their *costumbre* and so they didn't have any guardians like we here have Sojuel.

QUESTIONING VOICE: God forbid there is a quake here: I suppose they'll say that too many people are changing their religion.

ANSWERING VOICE: Oh, the old guys are saying that already! They say, "Just wait until it shakes in this place. They'll see, they'll see! They will see that they shouldn't have given up!" They are always saying that. They are all waiting for the world to end just out of spite, the old buggers.

Well, that's how it was with the earthquake.

NOTES

Cerro de Burro: a small hill complex situated just beyond the Pacific Coast rim of Lake Atitlan. A home of dead shamans and senior rain angels. Recent large tremors in the region have originated from the Coastal direction.

The *four men in the volcano* should be compared with the Four *Bacabs* of the Classic Maya. *Francisco Sojuel:* a Nativistic leader of the turn of the century, now a mythical hero whose exploits are related back to myth paradigms familiar in the Quichean area from *Popul Vuh. Evil Person:* a Devil or Satan figure of uncertain origin. The rivalry of Santiago and Patzun goes back to the origin myths of Santiago.

Moon-mountain: most holy Atiteco places are assimilated to mountains which have doors and inside which live Earth-lords and other beings.

Twenty days: the archetypal Maya divining calendar is composed of thirteen months of twenty days. "Twenty days" is: a period, a revolution, a cycle. The importance of Venus in Maya cosmology is too well known to require comment.

Roots: in myths of heroes going back to their father, the Sun, there is frequently an assistant figure who insists on going with them and learning. They are clearly being initiated. While the hero is above such things, the assistant is very materialistic and tries to grab something for future use. Compassionate beings usually give him a very small Root element from which he thereafter derives a living. The Highland Maya are great traders and there are many trade-trip overtones in this story.

The President: the President of Guatemala in this version is one who governed a short time ago. So much for the "years and years ago" at the beginning of the story.

Changing religion: a major theme of complaint among traditionalists is that, once upon a time, there was one religion. Now there are three: Traditional, New Catholic and Protestant. This will eventually lead to a "judgment" or end of a world cycle.

Grandmother: As seen in *Popul Vuh* and in contemporary Santiago myth both, Grandmother is always the main female personage rather than Mother. Mother figures are constantly elided in favor of Grandmother figures. This will be explained elsewhere in connection with the nature of the Moon.

△

Kimberly Lyons

Variations

I.
The weather confronts me like a gun
as I'm writing this washed by what?
Step out of this sour geometry
always shaping me. My facial cry.
What word is next,
feeling so articulately
dispels the gender of
mood I'm called into.
Breaking the mucus from the fabric.
I don't want to write anything untrue anymore.
Angels who realize inside me
jump over the line. Particularity as
style not hunger really.
The disentanglement of breath
occurs in each talking to. Yes,
it gets breathless in here where the jewels
get so goddamned stuck. Talk about the weather & clothing.
What did I ever confess to?
church of land
where each reader is redoubled through their past
with each version of the gesture I memorize.
Boundaries happen when Cities
convert into small rooms where
my body sleeps in its wavering.

II.
Wavering in its sleep
my body converts into small rooms
where cities happen
when boundaries are memorized.
Where each reader is redoubled
through the version of their gesture,
past church of land to confess to.

Did I ever talk about the weather & clothing?
So goddamned stuck.
The jewels get breathless in here.
Yes, the disentanglement of talking
occurs in each breath.
Angels who realize
I don't want to write anything untrue anymore
break the mood from the fabric I'm called into,
dispel the gender of feeling.

Out of this sour step
I'm washed by geometry,
as the weather
like a gun
writes me.

III.
I memorize the fabric
shaping the weather
as angels talk about geometry
as particularity,
not church of boundaries

where each gesture confronts me
like a gun.

What word dispels my wavering body?
It gets so goddamned breathless in my gender,
where clothing my body in its jewels
occurs to the reader as
disentanglement of wavering.
Yes, I confess to get
the version I memorize.

I don't want small rooms to happen
when I convert to talk
about clothes & the weather.
To write anymore
I step out of sleep's land
and dispel the mood
I'm called into.

IV.
Writing this geometry dispels
my shaping gender cry.
What feeling of breathless disentanglement
realizes the mood I'm called into?

Angels occur
in each talking to.
Step articulately
out of the weather & clothing.
When boundaries happen
inside my body,

I memorize each reader
gesture through their past

I confess to wavering
in cities where
land converts
to small rooms where
I don't want to write anything untrue anymore.

V.
To convert into jewels
this sour geometry
I memorize my gun-like cry
and confess to write
through angels
who get breathless in here.

My gender gets me so goddamned stuck.
Yes, my body is redoubled in sleep &
to talk with each reader
dispels the wavering
I'm called into.

When I write anything untrue,
small rooms convert to boundaries.
Through my past
I realize the version of the weather
I confront,
washed by cities.

VI.
Each angel converts inside me
the version of the past I memorize.
The disentanglement of gender
dispels the sour wavering
where the reader gets so goddamned stuck.
What jewels occur in talking?

I don't want their untrue cities anymore.
In here, small rooms hunger
& the land is always shaping
my next word.

VII.
Step out of the past like a gun.
Articulately dispel the wavering
shaping my next body.
With each talk
I get so washed by breath
my disentanglement of word
occurs to get so goddamned stuck.

Yes, I confess to my gender,
where each mood
converts into small rooms.
When my facial cry
happens in its hunger
I memorize weather, jewels, clothing & land.
With each reader inside me,
I realize Angels don't want
untrue boundaries anymore.

The geometry of this church of feeling.

James Hillman

Alchemical Blue and the Unio Mentalis

the soul
vanishes
the soul. vanishes. into the
shape of things
—ROBERT KELLY, "The Blue".

TRANSITIONS FROM BLACK TO WHITE sometimes go through a series of other colors,[1] notably darker blues, the blues of bruises, sobriety, puritan self-examination; the blues of slow jazz.[2] Silver's color was not only white but also blue. Ruland lists 27 kinds of blue-colored silver. Norton writes (*HM* II:45): "Silver may easily be converted into the colour of the lazulite, because . . . silver, produced by air, has a tendency to become assimilated to the color of the sky."[3] So strong is the association of blue with silver and whitening, that even when modern chemistry disputes alchemical testimony (deriving a

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A chapter from a long study "Silver and the White Earth," the first part of which appeared in *Spring 1980* and the second in *Spring 1981: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought.* A further piece and relevant to this is "Salt: An Essay in Alchemical Psychology" in *The Virgin in Myth, Literature and Society* (Joanne Stroud and Gail Thomas, eds.), forthcoming, Spring Publications, Summer 1981. Abbreviations are: *CW* : *Collected Works of C.G. Jung,* 20 volumes, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press; Paracelsus: *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus,* 2 volumes, New Hyde Park: University Books, 1967; HM: *The Hermetic Museum . . . containing Twenty-two most celebrated Chemical Tracts (1678),* 2 volumes, London: Watkins, 1953.

blue pigment from silver treated with salt, vinegar, etc.), it assumes the alchemists had some to-us-unknown physical justification for their claim.[4] Is not the claim based rather on fantasy, a sophic silver of a whitened imagination which *knows* that blue belongs to silvering, and therefore *sees* it?

The blue transit between black and white is like that sadness which emerges from despair as it proceeds towards reflection. Reflection here comes from or takes one into a blue distance, less a concentrated act that we do than something insinuating itself upon us as a cold, isolating inhibition. This vertical withdrawal is also like an emptying out, the creation of a negative capability, or a profound listening—already an intimation of silver (*Spr.'80*, pp. 41-44, silver and sound).

These very experiences Goethe associates with blue:[5]

> . . . blue still brings a principle of darkness with it. . . . As a hue it is powerful, but it is on the negative side, and in its highest purity is, as it were, a stimulating negation . . . a kind of contradiction between excitement and repose.
>
> As the upper sky and mountains appear blue, so a blue surface seems to recede from us.
>
> . . . it draws us after it.
>
> Blue gives us an impression of cold, and thus, again, reminds us of shade. We have before spoken of its affinity with black.
>
> Rooms which are hung with pure blue, appear in some degree larger, but at the same time empty and cold.
>
> . . . objects seen through a blue glass [are] gloomy and melancholy.

Sadness is not the whole of it. A turbulent dissolution of the nigredo can also show as blue movies, blue language, *l'amour bleu*, bluebeard, blue murder, and cyanotic body. When these sorts of pornographic, perverse, ghastly, or vicious animus/anima fantasies start up,[6] we can place them within the blue transition toward the albedo. Then we will look for bits of silver in the violence. There are patterns

of self-recognition forming by means of horror and obscenity. The soul's putrefactio is generating a new anima consciousness, a new psychic grounding that must include underworld experiences of the anima itself: her deathly and perverse affinities. The dark blue of the Madonna's robe bears many shadows, and these give her depths of understanding, just as the mind made on the moon has lived with Lilith so that its thought can never be naive, never cease to strike deep toward shadows.[7] Blue protects white from innocence.

The vertical direction, as Jung reaffirms (*CW* 12, para.320), is traditionally associated with blue.[8] Ancient Greek words for blue signified the sea.[9] In Tertullian and Isadore of Seville, blue referred to both the sea and the sky,[10] much as the Greek word (*bathun*) and the Latin (*altus*) connoted high and deep by one word. The vertical dimension as hierarchy continues in our speech as blue blood for nobility, blue ribbons, and the many mythological images of 'blue Gods': Kneph in Egypt and Odin's blue wrappings,[11] Jupiter and Juno,[12] Krishna and Vishnu, Christ in his earthly ministry like that blue Christ-man seen by Hildegard of Bingen.[13]

The transit from black to white via blue[14] implies that blue always brings black with it. (Among African peoples, for instance, black includes blue;[15] whereas in the Jewish-Christian tradition blue belongs rather than white).[16] Blue bears traces of the mortificatio into the whitening. What before was the stickiness of the black, like pitch or tar, unable to be rid of, turns into the traditionally blue virtues of constancy and fidelity. The same dark events feel different. The tortured and symptomatic aspect of mortification—flaying oneself, pulverizing old structures, decapitation of the headstrong will, the rat and rot in one's personal cellar—give way to depression. As even the darkest blue is not black, so even the deepest depression is not the mortificatio which means death of soul. The mortificatio is more driven, images locked compulsively in behavior, visibility zero, psyche trapped in the inertia and extension of matter. A mortificatio is a time of symptoms. These inexplicable, utterly materialized tortures of psyche in physis are relieved, according to the procession of

colors, by a movement toward depression, which can commence as a mournful regret even over the lost symptom: "It was better when it hurt physically—now I only cry." Blue misery. So, with the appearance of blue, feeling becomes more paramount and the paramount feeling is the mournful plaint (Rimbaud[17] equates blue with vowel "O"; Kandinsky[18] with the sounds of the flute, cello, double bass and organ). These laments hint of soul, of reflecting and distancing by imaginational expression. Here we can see more why archetypal psychology has stressed depression as the via regia in soul-making.[19] The ascetic exercises that we call "symptoms" (and their "treatments"), the guilty despairs and remorse as the nigredo decays, reduce the old ego-personality, but this necessary reduction is only preparatory to the sense of soul which appears first in the blued imagination of depression.

Let us say, blue is produced by a collaboration between Saturn and Venus. According to Giacento Gimma,[20] an eighteenth-century gemmologist, blue represents Venus, while the Goat, the Saturnian emblem of Capricorn, is blue's animal. Capricorn, you will recall, extends slowly from the depths to the heights; immense range and immense patience. Where blue brings to Venus a deeper melancholy, and to Saturn a magnanimity (another virtue of blue according to Gemma), it also slows the motion of whiteness, for it is the color of repose (Kandinsky). Thus blue is the retarding factor in the whitening. It is the element of depression, that raises deep doubts and high principles, wanting to settle things fundamentally and get them right in order to clarify them. This effect of blue on white can appear as feelings of service, labor, and disciplined observance of the rules, civil conformities like the blue cross, blue collar and blue uniforms, which figures of these feelings might carry. The effect can also appear in feelings of guilt and conscience.

There is indeed a "moral aspect of the whitening"[21]—and I think this is precisely the effect of blue. The whitening implies neither a lessening of shadow nor awareness about it. Rather, it means to me more space to carry its heights and depths, its full stature. The soul is

whiter because the shadow is out of the repressed and aired in detailed conscious ways, the way blues give shadow-depth and precision of body in oil paintings, the way one drop of bluing makes the laundry whiter. The specific shading depends on the white-black proportion: "If the black exceeds the white by one degree, it exhibits a sky-blue color."[22] The more black, the darker the blue; but even those celestial aspirations that race like a blue streak into the wild-blue yonder carry a modicum of darkness, a drop of putrefaction, a saving grace of depression in their hope. In fact, the saving grace of Mary's light blue may lie just in that 'one degree of blackness.'

△

I have myself understood the Jungian notion of blue as "the thinking function" to refer to blue's ancient association with the impersonal depths of sky and sea, the wisdom of Sophia, moral philosophy and truth. Images painted blue, says the pseudo-Dionysius, "show the hidden depth of their nature."[23] Blue is "darkness made visible."[24] This depth is a quality of mind, an invisible power that permeates all things, like air—and blue, said Alberti, in his great Renaissance work *On Painting*[25] is the color of the element of air. When the darker blues appear in analysis, I gird myself, expecting that we are now in for the highs and deeps of animus and anima, or what Jungians sometimes call "the animus of the anima." (Did you know that a "blue-stocking" meant a learned lady, that "blueism" meant "the possession or affectation of learning in a woman," and that just plain "blue" once meant "fond of literature"?)[26] These deep blues are inflations with the impersonal, the hidden. They do not feel high, but come across rather as ponderous philosophical thought, judgments about right and wrong, and the place of truth in analysis. What seems, and even is, so deep, however, is actually far off and away from matters at hand. What we are talking about "seems to recede from us" and "draws us after it" (Goethe) in

the seductive manner of the anima.

By remembering that the animus of the anima is a psychic spirit attempting to enlighten the soul by deepening or raising it into impersonal truths, I am better able to get through these analytical sessions. I realize, thanks to Goethe, that these deep blue conversations of "stimulating negation" (negative animus thoughts, negative anima judgments) have soul-searching intentions. A work of distancing and detaching (Goethe) is going on, an attempt at reflection that is still stained with the nigredo because it burrows too deep, pushes too hard, neglecting the immediate surfaces from which silver catches its light. Nonetheless, the "negatives" that so obsess reflection with dark intuitions and depressive ruminations are enlarging psychic space by emptying out the room (Goethe) of its former fixtures. As the soul tries to work its way out of darkness by means of philosophical effort, the whitening is taking place; the animus is in service of the anima. Even the negative mood and critique, my own withdrawal, that I feel during these exercises belong also to this blue way toward whitening. The nigredo ends neither with a bang nor a whimper, but passes imperceptibly into breath-soul (anima) with a sigh. It helps to remember an image from Rabbi ben Jochai told by Scholem.[27] The ascending flame is white, but right below as its very throne is a blue-black light whose nature is destructive. The blue-black flame draws stuff to it and consumes it as the whiteness flames steadily on. The destructive blue and the white belong in the same fire. As Scholem comments, by virtue of its very inhesion in the nigredo, the blue flame is able to consume the darkness it feeds upon.

The connotations that we have uncovered in this amplification indicate the importance of blue in the alchemical process. Were the white to come merely as a clearing off, something essential would be missed. Something must incorporate into the albedo a resonance of, a fidelity to, what has happened and transmit the suffering with another shading: not as grinding pain, decay, and the memory of depression, but as *value*. Value, we recall, (*Spr.'80*, pp. 35-37) belongs to the phenomenology of silver. The sense of the value of

psychic realities is not born merely from relief of black distress. The blue qualifies the white with worth in the ways we have mentioned, and especially by its introduction of moral, intellectual and divine concerns, thereby bringing to the whitened mind a capacity for *evaluating* images, devotion to them, and a sense of their truth, rather than only reflection upon their play as fantasies. It is the blue which deepens the idea of reflection beyond the single notion of mirroring, to the further notions of pondering, considering, meditating.

The colors which herald white are spoken of as Iris and the rainbow, as many flowers, and mainly as the brilliance of the peacock's tail with its multiple eyes.[28] According to Paracelsus,[29] the colors result from dryness acting on moisture. Believe it or not, there is more color in the alchemical desert than in the flood, in less emotion than in more. Drying releases the soul from personal subjectivism, and as the moisture recedes that vivacity once possessed by feeling can now pass over into imagination. Blue is singularly important here because it is the color of imagination *tout court.* I base this apodicticus not only on all we have been exploring: the blue mood which sponsors reverie, the blue sky which calls the mythic imagination to its farthest reaches, the blue of Mary who is the Western epitome of anima and her instigation of image-making, the blue rose of romance, a *pothos* which pines for the impossible contra naturam (and *pothos*, the flower, was a blue larkspur or delphinium placed on graves); I call also on Wallace Stevens' blue and Cézanne's blue as testimonies.

Blue "represents in [Stevens'] work the imagination . . . such as the romantic or the imaginative in contradistinction to the realistic."[30] And it was as well for Stevens the color of intellectual stability and "reason." "Both the intellect and imagination are blue,"[31] just as Stevens' poetry presents that combination of thought and image so successfully.[32] The appearance of blue in the coloration process indicates that span of the spectrum where thought and image begin to coalesce, images provide the medium for thoughts while reflections take an imaginative turn away from the dark and confined frustration of the nigredo and toward the wider horizon of mind. The blue in-

strument moves soul from sounding its small lament to the great breath of Kandinsky's organ, its largo, the spacious march of philosophizing that can incorporate the hurts of one's history into a tragic sense of life.

As with Stevens, so with Cézanne,[33] "When he was composing . . . only a visionary's or a poet's imaginative conception . . . could be of help to him. It was impossible for him to start out from an isolated real thing seen."[34] He based his painting on "shadow paths and contours"[35] out of which 'real things' emerged as local high points. The imaginative conception, the visionary shadow, originates and supports the real thing seen in nature. "The deepest shadow colour in Cézanne's paintings, the one which supports the composition and is most appropriate for shadows, is *blue*."[36] "Cézanne gave blue a new depth of meaning . . . by making it the foundation of his world of objects 'existing together.' For, when he used blue in this way, he transcended any special connotation which had attached to its former uses. Blue was now recognized as belonging to a deeper level of existence. It expressed the essence of things and their abiding, inherent permanence and placed them in a position of unattainable remoteness."[37]

The blue foundation is the imaginal ground which allows the eye to see imaginatively, the event as image, creating at the same time a remoteness from real things (Cézanne), from the green of the actual world (Stevens), a remoteness felt in the nostalgia which blue brings. With blue comes both the longing toward white and a sad acknowledgement that as whitening proceeds one both comes home and can't go home again.

Once the black turns blue, darkness can be penetrated (unlike the nigredo which absorbs all insights back into itself, compounding the darkness with negative introspections). The shift to blue allows air so that the nigredo can meditate itself, imagine itself, recognize that this very shadow state expresses "the essence of things and their abiding, inherent permanence." Here is imaginal consciousness affirming its ground.

Cézanne wrote: "Blue gives other colours their vibration, so one must bring a certain amount of blue into a painting."[38] From his perspective, blue would be the crucial color in the palette of the peacock because it transforms the other colors into possibilities of imagination, into psychological events, that come to life because of blue. Boehme writes, "Imagination of the great Mystery, where a wondrous essential Life is born" results from the colors.[39] The full flowering of imagination shows itself as the qualitative spread of colors so that imagining is a coloring process, and if not in literal colors, then as the qualitative differentiation of intensities and hues which is essential to the act of imagination.

When the colors shine in the peacock's tail so too do the eyes whereby they can be seen. Imaginative vision precedes the whiteness itself, otherwise the white earth cannot be perceived as the transfiguration of nature by imagination. For this new perception, the perception of colors too goes through a transubstantiation into a mystical or painterly sense of them as substances, as the complexions on the faces of light which reveal the true quality of nature, its endlessly subtle and multiple intensities. Colors shift from being phenomena of light to phenomena themselves; or, light shifts to being the presentation of color and secondary to it so that the white earth is not sheer white in the literal sense but a field of flowers,[40] a peacock's tail, a coat of many colors.

The transubstantiation announced by the peacock reverses the history of philosophy. The color visions of Newton and Locke, of Berkeley and Hume belong to the subjectivism of the nigredo and the mortification of nature. Color can now become a primary quality again, the thing itself as *phainoumenon* on display, the heart in the matter, prior to such abstractions as bulk, number, figure and motion. When color is, the world is as we see it—not merely green as naturalistic sense-perception believes, but green because of its blue shadow.[41] The world is as we see it in our dreams and poems, visions and paintings, a world that is truly a cosmos, cosmetically adorned, an aesthetic event for the senses because they have become in-

struments of imagining.

The *multi flores*, the myriad eyes in the tail, suggest that the colored vision is multiple vision. One must be able to see polychromatically, polymorphously, polytheistically before the terra alba appears. The movement from a monocentric universe to a cosmos of complex perspectives begins with blue since it "gives the other colours," as Cézanne says, "their vibration." Then the alchemical colors vanish and are replaced by a brilliant white lustre. Here one might be so dazzled by the new brilliance of mind as to take white literally, as if white meant only and literally one thing—whiteness—thereby forgetting the multiplicity which made the whiteness possible.[42] The multiplicity must already have been built into the mind as the vibrations, shadings and subtleties that are not only there in things but are there in the eyes of the mind by which things are seen as images. It is as if we enter the world without preconceptions, startled by the phenomena where everything is given and nothing taken for granted.

To experience in this manner is to recover innocence—hence the brilliant white lustre. Ruskin called it "the innocence of the eye," "a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify."[43] Attention shifts from the signification of perception to perception itself. We ask about qualities—What is there? in what way is it there? what is it doing there? (rather than how did it get there, why, and what good is it?)

△

This excursion, these images, and the figures whom we have summoned—Cézanne, Stevens, Rilke, Zola, Kandinsky, Jung, Picasso, Marc—reveal to us something of the nature of the *unio mentalis*. Jung, expanding on Dorn, considers the unio mentalis to be the union of spirit and soul (logos and psyche), i.e., freeing soul from body, its integration with spirit, prior to further union with body

(physis, physics, world, unus mundus). As a union of logos and psyche, the unio mentalis is psychology, the achievement of a psychological spirit. I am understanding the unio mentalis also as the albedo goal of the work, the activation of silver.

The nature of this achievement can be garnered from the accounts of those we have summoned. They suggest that the alchemical unio mentalis is the interpenetration of thought and image,[44] of perceived world and imaginal world, a state of mind no longer concerned with distinctions between things and thought, appearance and reality, or between the spirit that develops theory and the soul that builds fantasy. We have colored this unio mentalis 'blue,' because the blue we have been encountering transfigures appearances into imaginal realities and imagines thought itself in a new way. Blue is preparatory to and incorporated in the white, indicating that the white becomes earth, that is, fixed and real, when the eye becomes blue, that is, able to see through thoughts as imaginative forms and images as the ground of reality.

Alchemy expresses this condition as the caelum or "blue tincture" (*CW* 14, para.703) which is a heavenly firmament, the celestial substance that is the color of "ciel" (p. 478, n77) or "color of air" (paras.691-92), a quintessencia that is curiously concocted, according to Dorn, from an underworld experience (703) that is also called "wine" (681-83). We cannot now go into the psychological importance of wine nor its vernacular relationship with blue drunkenness, blue noses, and blue laws. We can, however, remember Heraclitus' saying that Dionysos and Hades are one, so that the mystery of the unio mentalis has an echo of a Dionysian mystery. Of the consciousness brought by this mystery we know what Dodds, Otto, and Kerényi have told us—nature comes alive; the God's presence permeates communal existence as a somber shadow that gives a joyous vibration to all things, or as Goethe described blue, "a kind of contradiction between excitement and repose." The unio mentalis implies a divine drunkenness[45] that does not exclude what the normal nigredo mind considers pathological. I cannot call Dionysos directly

'blue' despite the fact that his hair and eyes, in the Homeric Hymn (7.5, 15) to him, are *kyaneos.* He sees with the blue eye and to see him our eye must be colored in the same way. I can, however, connect this Lord of Souls and Wine with Kessler's summary above of Cézanne's blue: that "depth of meaning," that "deeper level of existence" which both holds the world communally as "existing together" and yet "in a position of unattainable remoteness."

When myths say Gods have blue hair or blue bodies, they have. The Gods live in a blue place of metaphor, and they are described less with naturalistic language than with poetic 'distortion.' Mythical talk must be full of hyperbole; the Gods live in the highs and deeps. To depict them rightly we need the expressionist's palette, not the impressionist's. Precisely this shift into mythical perception occurs with the unio mentalis: we now *imagine* the nature of reality, and dark-blue becomes the right color to express Dionysos' hair, because it is the natural, reasonable hue for the hair of this God in this Hymn, a most realistic depiction.

Although the caelum here, as unio mentalis and quintessence, is a late stage, it is sometimes (Paracelsus, Figulus) said to be the prerequisite for all alchemical operations whatsoever. The mind from the beginning must be based in the blue firmament, like the lazuli stone and sapphire throne of mysticism, the azure heaven of Boehme, *philos sophia.* The blue firmament is an image of cosmological reason; it is a mythical place that gives metaphorical support to metaphysical thinking. It is the presentation of metaphysics in image form.[46] These upper vaults of stone confirm the solidity of invisible thought in a mythical manner and they show the mythical foundations of thought; they allow, even command, a philosophy that reaches to just such cosmological heights and depths, the full extension and glory of imagination as philosophy, philosophy as imagination, in the terra alba of the imaginal as described by Corbin.

If the caelum must be present to begin with, then to do alchemy one must be confirmed in imaginal durabilities, transcending mere psychological perspectives and metaphorical implications. The

metaphorical twist that the adjective blue gives in the immense variety of its uses in vernacular speech, removing ordinary things from their ordinary sense, is only the beginning of the epistrophic return of all things to their imaginal ground. The mind itself must be drenched in blue, cosmological.

Alchemy begins before we enter the mine, the forge, or laboratory. It begins in the blue vault, the seas, in the mind's thinking in images, imagining ideationally, speculatively, silveredly, in words that are both images and ideas, in words that turn things into flashing ideas and ideas into little things that crawl, the blue power of the word itself, which locates this consciousness in the throat of the visuddha cakra (*Spr.'80*, p. 42f) whose dominant color is a smoky-purple-blue.

The caelum, then, is a condition of mind. Envision it as a night-sky filled with the airy bodies of the Gods, those astrological constellations which are at once beasts and geometry and which participate in all things of the world as their imaginal ground. The caelum does not of course take place in your head, in your mind, but your mind moves in the caelum, touches the constellations, the thick and hairy skull opens to let in more light, their light, making possible a new idea of order, a cosmological imagination whose thought accounts for the cosmos in the forms of images.

That we have had to go to figures like Stevens and Cézanne for more understanding of the coloring process tells us not only about the psychology of the unio mentalis; we are told also who are the alchemists in our time. The poets and painters, and the figures in us who are poets and painters, are those struggling with the continuing alchemical problem: the transubstantiation of the material perspective into soul through *ars*. Artifex now artisan. The alchemical laboratory is in their work with words[47] and paints, and psychology continues its tradition of learning from alchemy by learning from them.[48] They tell us one further thing about the white earth: if the imaginal ground is first perceived by artistic method, then the very nature of this earth must be aesthetic—the way is the goal. We come

to the white ground when our way of doing psychology is aesthetic. An aesthetic psychology, a psychology whose muse is anima is already hesitantly moving, surely moving, in that white place.

Blue Notes

1. Cf. Norton's *Ordinal* (*HM* II:38—39). "Physicians have discovered nineteen colours intermediate between white and black in urine. . . . Magnesia [a term for white] throws out a mild, pure splendour in the subtle stage of our Art; and here we behold all colours that ever were seen by the mortal eye—a hundred colours, and certainly a good many more than have been observed in urine; and in all those colours our Stone must be found in all its successive stages. In the ordering of your practical experiments, and in conceiving the different parts of the work in your own mind, you must have as many phases, or stages, as there are colours."

2. For a rich, curious phenomenology of blue, see William Gass, *On Being Blue*, Boston: Godine, 1976.

3. The assimilation of silver (white) to the color of the sky compares with this paradox from Wittgenstein: "In a picture in which a piece of white paper gets its lightness from the blue sky, the sky is lighter than the white paper. And yet in another sense blue is the darker and white the lighter colour." *Remarks on Colour*, I,2. University of California Press, 1978.

4. Cf. Dorothy Wyckoff's note to her edition of Albertus Magnus' *Book of Minerals*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1967, pp. 192—93.

5. *Goethe's Color Theory*, Rupprecht Matthei and Herb Aach, eds., New York: van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971, p. 170 (p. 310 of the Eastlake translation).

6. Cf. Gass for the weird and sexual blues, especially. On the cyanotic aspect of the blue, see Jung's remarks on Picasso's blue period (*CW* 15, para.210) which Jung compares with a Nekyia to the realm of Hades: ". . . we enter the underworld. The world of objects is death-struck, as the horrifying masterpiece of the syphilitic, tubercular, adolescent prostitute makes plain."

7. Cf. Jung, *CW* 12, para 322: "And how can man reach fulfillment if the Queen does not intercede for his black soul? She understands the darkness. . . ." This passage follows Jung's discussion of "blue."

8. Cf. J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, London: Routledge, 1962, p. 52.

9. Th. Thass-Thienemann, *The Interpretation of Language*, New York: Aronson, 1973, I: 307; Christopher Rowe, "Concepts of Colour and Colour Symbolism in the Ancient World" in *Color Symbolism: Six Excerpts from Eranos 41—1972*, Spring Publ., 1977; Eleanor Irwin, *Colour Terms in Greek Poetry*, Toronto: Hakkert, 1974, pp. 79—110, "*Kyaneos*".

10. Dronke, p. 67. On the (light) blue sky, see Bachelard's chapter "Le ciel bleu," in

his *L'Air et les songes*, Paris: Corti, 1943. The underworld as an airy place, and blue, appears in the Navaho cosmology. The next to the deepest (red) world is blue, inhabited by blue birds. Gladys A. Reichard, *Navaho Religion*, Bollingen-Pantheon, 1950, I:15.

11. Harold Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, London: Benn, 1912, I;78—79. Bayley derives 'blue' from words for 'truth'—a curious example of archetypal fantasy displayed as etymology.

12. Cirlot, p. 51.

13. Dronke, p. 98 (*Scivias* II, 2). Despite its 'virtuousness' blue was not a canonical color (like violet, white, green, black). Does blue carry an indelible etymological taint? *Kyanos* cognate with Skr. *cunya* "empty, vacant, vain," *cuna-m* "absence, want"; Latin, *cavus* "hollow" (p. 100). *Caerulus* (Lat. dark-blue sky) is cognate (via Skr. *Cyama*) with dark, vanish, leave, be left (p. 99), *Livid* (Lat. blue) belongs to a group of words meaning slipping away, shrinking, vanishing, flowing (p. 98). *Blue* (Germanic) itself belongs to "a large class of color-names . . . meaning . . . marked, rubbed, smeared," stained and colored in the sense of 'discolored' (p. 73). Page numbers refer to Francis A. Wood, *Color-Names and their Congeners* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1902). Compare to these etymologies of blue this digest of Goethe's evaluation: "[blue] stands on the negative side of the polarity of colours where deprivation, shadow, darkness, weakness, cold, distance, an attraction to and affinity with alkalis are to be found." Kurt Badt, *The Art of Cézanne*, Univ. California Press, 1965, p. 59.

14. The black-white mixture in blue appears in an old British expression "blue skin" who was a "person begotten on a black woman by a white man." One of the "blue squadron" meant "a lick of the tar brush." *Dictionary of Buckish Slang, University Wit and Pickpocket Eloquence*, London: C. Chappel, 1811.

15. Dominique Zahan, "Colour Symbolism in Black Africa," in *Color Symbolism, op. cit.*, p. 56.

16. The blue/white association is not only in Marian symbolism, since blue plays an especially spiritual role in Jewish mystical and cult symbolism, cf. Gershom Scholem, "Farben und ihre Symbolik in der Judischen Ueberlieferung und Mystik," *Eranos 41—1972*, pp. 8, 9, 18—20, 29, 37.

17. Rimbaud's sonnet "Voyelles" where blue equals 'O,' Omega.

18. Will Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky*, N.Y.: Harry Abrams, nd.p.89.

19. "The blue-clothed" is a current Persian way of naming Sufis for which "various explanations have been given." (H. Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, Boulder: Shambala, 1978, p. 157, n121). Supposedly, blue dress is "appropriate to those who are still in the first stages of the mystic life." Dark blue clothing is worn when "the lower psyche [nigredo] has been overcome, as though one were in mourning for it."

20. G.F. Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1913,

p. 31, quoted from *Della storia naturale delle Gemme*, Napoli, 1730, I;131–37. A century earlier (1611) Cesare Ripa lists in his painter's dictionary (*Iconologia*) these figures who should be robed in blue: Astrology, Goodness, Poetry, Steadfastness and also Inconstancy (Picasso's blue prostitute?, or at least the shadow side of the fidelity-truth-constancy construct.)

21. M.-L. von Franz, *Aurora Consurgens*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1966, 243.

22. Dronke, p. 76.

23. Dronke, p. 66.

24. Cirlot, p. 51.

25. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, Yale Univ. paperbound, 1966, p. 50. To an earlier mind, the 'airiness' of blue could be physically demonstrated by the fact that blue paint is a most fugitive color, fading fast because it had no native pigment, only unwieldy crushed lapis lazuli brought from the Oxus region of Central Asia. On the history and technology of blue paint, see Badt, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 79.

26. These references can be found in T.L.O. Davies, *A Supplementary English Glossary*, London: Bell, 1881, pp. 68–69.

27. Scholem, pp. 45–7.

28. "Then take silver, well purged from all metals . . . then seal up the oil of *Luna* . . . and set it in a *Balneo* to putrefy until it show all colours, and at last come to be crystalline white." "The Bosom Book of Sir George Ripley" in *Collectanea Chemica*, London: Stuart & Watkins, 1963, p. 137. Paracelsus, I:83, "When the regimen of the fire is moderated, the matter is by degrees moved to blackness. Afterwards, when the dryness begins to act upon the humidity, various flowers of different colours simultaneously rise in the glass, just as they appear in the tail of the peacock, and such as no one has ever seen before. . . . Afterwards, those colours disappear, and the matter at length begins to grow white. . . ." Cf. Jung, *CW* 14, paras. 388, 391–92, and passim in Index, Volume 20: "peacock," *cauda pavonis*, etc.

29. *ibid.*

30. Edward Kessler, *Images of Wallace Stevens*, Rutgers Univ. Press, 1972, p. 198 (cited from Hi Simons).

31. *ibid.*, p. 203; " 'The Man with the Blue Guitar,' Stevens' most overt use of blue as symbol, is in the poet's own words a work of 'pure imagination.' The color is perhaps best characterized as a symbol for speculative thought, or simply for the mind" (p. 196).

32. "The poet, in order to fulfill himself, must accomplish a poetry that satisfies both the reason and the imagination." Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel*, N.Y.: Knopf-Vintage, 1951, p. 42.

33. "Cézanne is mentioned far more frequently in the critical prose of Stevens than is any other modern painter." James Baird, *The Dome and the Rock*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968, p. 84. See pp. 82–93 on their likeness; although Baird emphasizes their common concern with structure, I am stressing their common regard for blue

and its implications for their imaginal view of their work.

34. Kurt Badt, The Art of Cézanne, Univ. California Press, 1965, p. 56.

35. *ibid.*, Chapter "Shadow-paths and Contours."

36. *ibid.*, p. 56. The blue of Cézanne drew particular comment from both Zola and Rilke—no mean imaginers themselves. Badt. pp. 56—58.

37. *ibid.*, p. 82.

38. *ibid.*, p. 57. Compare Kessler's remark on Stevens' blue as "that human faculty which attempts to unify the disparate colors in external nature." The Blue Rider group in Germany is another instance of a union of thinking and imagination. ". . . blue was both Kandinsky's and Marc's favorite color. . . ." "We thought up the name (Der Blaue Reiter) while sitting at a cafe table. . . . Both of us were fond of blue things, Marc of blue horses, and I of blue riders." (Kandinsky's own account, 1930) in Grohmann, *op. cit.*, p. 78. The mystical inwardness in the depiction of 'nature,' the dislike for 'green,' and the metaphysical reflection they brought to imagining all accord with the 'blue' tradition.

39. In the same passage of Boehme (*Mysterium pansophicum*, quoted by Jung, *CW* 9 i, para. 580), we find that first there comes a "bright-blue," then various other color analogies to it and then "it is like blue in green, yet each still has its brightness, and shines." The problem of Stevens, blue vs. green, is also noted by Boehme, who can see them as joined yet retaining their difference.

40. The many flowers appear in Corbin's white earth. He speaks of this "sacred botany" which gives whitened consciousness a sensuous reality and particular content (rather than a mere snow field or white light). The flowers are an appearance in our Western context of the anima as Flora, the flowering of the imagination as rooted living forms. Corbin says: "the flowers play the part of the materia prima for alchemical meditation. This means mentally reconstituting Paradise, keeping company with heavenly beings" (*Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1977, pp. 31—32). Von Franz gives a variety of splendid passages on the many flowers (*Aurora Consurgens*, pp. 391—95, referring to Jung), which she interprets as "components of our psychic totality, the self" and "indicate a blossoming of psychic relationship" as "human relationships" (p. 395). The reduction of the flowers to "our" passes by the very material she has assembled, where she states, "In Greek alchemy flowers and blossoms are an image for spirits or souls" (p. 392). It is "the heavenly beings"—the imaginal figures—with whom the psychic relationship now occurs. We are witness to *their* blossoming and we are their gardeners.

41. Perhaps the persisting fantasy that the ancients and primitives did not know 'blue' as we do belongs to the archetypal phenomenology of paradise, of the golden age and happy savage, where blue need not be identified as a separate experience apart from 'the green world'—no remoteness, no nostalgia, no depression, no pathology. Nature and Imagination indistinguishable. For Stevens, the blue-green conflict comes out a tie. His work shows 163 mentions of each word (Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 185).

42. Cf. *CW* 14, para. 388 for an example of forgetting the multiplicity. Jung writes: "The 'omnes colores' are frequently mentioned in the texts as indicating something like totality. They all unite in the *albedo*, which for many alchemists was the climax of the work. The first part was completed when the various components separated out from the *chaos* of the *massa confusa* were brought back again to unite in the albedo and 'all become one.' Morally this means that the original state of psychic disunity, the inner chaos of conflicting part-souls which Origen likens to herds of animals, becomes the 'vir unus,' the unified man." This interpretation identifies totality with unity, whereas totality can also mean all as all (each and every). Moreover, Jung's moral interpretation not only sees the many as "disunity" and *chaos*, but places man above animal. Jung does give, however, other passages contrary to his own view, for instance, Khunrath (para. 392): "At the hour of conjunction the blackness and the raven's head and all the colours in the world will appear. . . ."

43. Quoted from E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Princeton Univ. Press (Bollingen Series), 1961, p. 296.

44. William Gass, *On Being Blue, op. cit.*, is just such an example of a philosopher working his thought in images.

45. Cf. David L. Miller, *Christs*, Pt. II, N.Y.: Seabury, 1981.

46. For one more example of image and thought combined in blue, see the "Vision of the World Clock" (*CW* 12, para. 307; *CW* 11, paras. 112ff).

47. Cf. *Spr.'80,* p. 48, n.32 on works by Severson and Kugler on the laboratory of *language* for the transformation of matter.

48. John Constable, the British landscapist, quoted this sentence as if his motto (or an alchemical motto): "The whole object and difficulty of the art (indeed of all the fine arts) is to *unite imagination with nature.*" Gombrich, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

△

Charles Stein

from: A Book of Confusions

There were very beautiful
ceremonial
bees
living
in the lawn
of the house where I lived
when a boy

when the bees made war there were also
very beautiful plants
the bees opened
that gave out a marvelous pink
froth for healing
and when the plants were closed
after battles
and the bees were asleep in the froth
the bees healed

I came back and saw the bees
asleep in the froth
and would not disturb them
but my father
did not have this feeling
toward the bees
and went to the kitchen
for a plum

to put in the froth
that he might see what would happen

The bees awoke
and began to intone
"OO-ROO-AH-KEEM"
as they gathered from out of the froth
and I was to understand
that the bees meant I must run

until the children
came to tell me
my father was now a dying man
and that I should return

and so I did, finding him an old man
with many wounds
from his battle with the bees
and little time to give me
the ancient ceremonial blessing

I knelt by his bed
and he called me "Daniel"
putting his hand on my head and handing me a drink
of golden liquid
and I wept
but could not drink.

*

only the voice on the one piano
where hearts are wind or empty great

operatic tunes in the long night
and I was awake
dead
in the bedroom
reliving those winds and my mother
awake
in the window a statue of the dead
overlooking the night
a wreath in her hair of dry leaves
wailing and wailing and she
howled back at me warning
saying my father had wept real
tears on her grave it was nothing

at the other
end of the balcony a little woman
came out from the inner
rooms of the dead with a tune
to drop for her daughter and her
old old friend came out

and I thought now I'll go in
to the rooms and lie down anything
will be better than this
great gusty opera
lie down on the great black chairs

I had the dream of my dead and awoke in a shiver
I put Machu Picchu tooth Monk up on the altar
I put a black cloth on the upper altar
I put the head of Buddha on a tray

and a tray at the foot of the mountain

I let the wrenches arrange themselves on the altar

I put the smallest crystal ball before the Buddha

I took the picture

*

What the Gourd Man said
When the Gourd Man spoke
was:

I make a space
between me and this room.

What I feel of my old sadness is
a shining blue-like
body
in my body.

I am stopped up hotel clerk.
I keep check marks in a book.
I knock over gold birds.
I kick a rock.
I quarrel with Black Sun Demon.
I pick a fight with bone white fish.
I have never kept a lover and I eat steamed stones.
I make a space between me and my hook.
I pick up my club.

I make love in the posture called "Crossing the Great
Fjords."
I make love in a little boat bound to the dock.
What I feel of my old joy is
a shining red-like body
in my body.

I reproduce myself endlessly causing
little
figures
with a club over all my shoulders
to hop about among heaped stones.

I reside in crystal.
I skirt the rim of winter weed jug.
I eat wool of milk stool.
I burn Name in leg of milk stool.

When blue light spot flashes on your keys
or in the soup
or blue light
the size of a stamp
flashes
I practice Night Hawk
I practice Panther
I practice Sludge
I practice Saw Blade
I practice Running Silk

When I came to an open space this side the Wallkill
two black horses
were lurking
by The Drum.

John Ashbery

Untilted

How tall the buildings were as I began
To live, and how high the rain that battered them!
Why, coming down them, as I often did at night,
Was a dream even before you reached the first gullies

And gave yourself over to thoughts of your own welfare.
It was the tilt of the wine in the cavalier's tilted glass
That documents so unerringly the faces and the mood in the room.
One slip would not be fatal, but then this is not a win or lose

Situation, so involved with living in the past on the ridge
Of the present, hearing its bells, breathing in its steam. . . .
And the shuttle never falters, but to draw an encouraging conclusion
From this would be considerable, too odd. Why not just

Breathe in with the courage of each day, recognizing yourself as one
Who must with difficulty get down from high places? Forget
The tourists—other people must travel too. It hurts now,
Cradled in the bend of your arm, the pure tear, doesn't it?

White Collar Crime

Now that you've done it, say OK, that's it for a while.
His fault wasn't great; it was over-eagerness; it didn't deserve
The death penalty, but it's different when it happens
In your neighborhood, on your doorstep; the dropping light spoilt
nicely his

Name-tags and leggings; all those things that belonged to him,
As it were, were thrown out overnight, onto the street.
So much for fashion. The moon decrees
That it be with us awhile to enhance the atmosphere

But in the long run serious concerns prevail, such as
What time is it and what are you going to do about that?
Gaily inventing brand-names, place-names, you were surrounded
By such abundance, yet it seems only fair to start taking in

The washing now. *There was a boy.* Yet by the time the program
Is over, it turns out there was enough time and more than enough
things
For everybody to latch on to, and that in essence it's there, the
Young people and their sweet names falling, almost too many of
these.

△

Karin Lessing

stood here
your hair
in leaves. as if

all
you'll never
know rose
to the edge. bleached,

ate
its way higher, each time,
then

dropped,
leaving its markings

only.
huge mouth, mouth
of the cave,
chasm, rock-

petalled
eye . . . would
purl, lash

the ruin-
risen

world towards you.

What It Wants

endless, the
summer sky

darkening
at the edge, the hills

ride
on long shadows

cicada's
in the oak

something, what
is it it wants

wanting
it, grows

like stone
piled onto stone,

stylite,

through
the day

that, still
glittering,

grows

Sea-Foam

to hear
again

the bird's
cry

pierce

pierce
and mend

•
leaf, a
knife,

a shadowy reef

blossom,

Mer
de Chine

•

where

sharp
and light

sails
of lobed breath

glide

•

your ridges'
blue, my

barest

news

•

even
the sun-
flower's

black
heart

reminds
me

love moves
also,

hate

•

that
from your lips

it
never
vanishes

grapes' purple, dazzling

sea-
foam

•

September-Wings

a huge, soft
fire
comes

in pyramids
of leaves

days
flaked
with swallows

that austral
tug, all

under
Cassiopea's

steep
crown

•
skies'

scallop, black
lamp

of whistling

leaves

• • • • • • • •

not snow
        but swallows

the sudden
shining out of

things that
flock

dip to de-
ploy

taking us
somewhere

like a chime
rings on, then

quiets, the
un-

jewelled
void

•

Hayden Carruth

Who I Am

Leverpull, N.Y., Valentine's Day, 1981: *There is too much of the north in me for me to be a man who complies entirely.*

—A. BRETON

* * *

A. or B. refuses the tax or some tax with solemnity, but eats & drinks & wears & perspires taxation all day. Let them not hew down the state with axe and gunpowder, but supersede it by irresistible genius; huddle it aside as ridiculous & obsolete by their quality of being.

—R.W. EMERSON

* * *

I abhor nature. I should like to upset its plans, to thwart its progress, to halt the stars in their courses, to overturn the floating spheres of space, to destroy what serves nature and to succor all that harms it; in a word, to insult it in all its works, and I cannot succeed in doing so.

—DE SADE

* * *

Without moral philosophy people having nothing but sentiments.

—P. GOODMAN

* * *

Ancient Arabic (pre-Mohammedan) poems—Mo'allaquat—were sustained by a fixed and very complex inner metric even though they were composed and transmitted orally and their authors (who are known and historically identifiable as princes and warriors)

were unaware of any alphabet.

* * *

Love is the child of illusion and the parent of disillusion; love is consolation in desolation; it is the sole medicine against death, for it is death's brother. (Unamuno?) Illusion and disillusion, conflict and balance, symbiosis; and because love is not only inevitable but necessary, it can never be hopeful but only desperate. Ecstasy is the extension of despair, not its transcendence. Is this the case?

A new departure.

Ophelia.

* * *

I came to this place one November day.
I knew where I was all right and no mistake,
sky, earth, and everything as gray
as a plaster wedding cake
left in a bakery window, a dusty display,
long after the baker has failed and gone away . . . .

* * *

The only excuse for God is that he does not exist.

—H. BEYLE

* * *

I HAVE BEEN READING the stories of Donald Barthelme. My friend Mas'ud Zavarzadeh tells me that they are important works of transfiction, central to the emerging deconstructivist sensibility of younger artists. Such artists wish not only to convey a sense of the degeneration of post-industrial American civilization and of the human demoralization that goes with it, but to express their radical distrust of cultural conventions of all kinds by putting themselves at a distinct remove from their own writing. They refrain pointedly, i.e., with meaningful purpose, from any concern for coherence or interpretation. Reality is chaos. Let's

not kid ourselves; art cannot order it. But frankly these stories seem to me very derivative (Kafka, Ionesco, etc.) and very thin. The writer's refusal of passion or even of personal presence makes them, in effect, instant conventions, as fixed and timeless and "out there" as any fabliaux, though the preferred term now would probably be paradigms or transfictional fictions. In this case Barthelme has no right to sign the "stories" with any name but Anon. (or to collect those fat checks from the *New Yorker*).

Meanwhile nobody talks about P. Goodman's *The Empire City*, which does it all. There, culture deconstructed; yet with his presence and passion deeply ingrained.

"In contemporary America . . . the formulation of any comprehensive scheme of reality has become impossible. American reality since the late 1950s has become more and more discontinuous, inconclusive, and fictionlike in its strange and original behavior. Consequently, the structure of contemporary consciousness and the forms of recent narrative literature have changed so radically that the present seems to be more a mutation than a continuation of the past."

Maybe so. No one will deny that the *conditions* of existence have changed enormously. But reality? Reality is the *problem* of existence. And that does not change.

My quarrel with the critics—and please don't call me one of them; I am sick to death of that—is their approach to literature always from the sociocultural side, from the side of "reality." Remember Blackmur? How he thought a "language twisted and posed in its form" (I quote from memory) could make a "new reality"? I hear reverberations of that innocent arrogance throughout my life and far back behind it. The terminology may change—from Kenneth Burke, say, to Zavarzadeh—but not the approach. They will not consider the work of art as a transaction between the artist's soul and God—substitute whatever other two words you like. But that's what it is.

Yes, in one sense language *is* a code, a cultural system—

inevitably conditioned by social, economic, and other objective determinants—for exchanging mutually accepted or conventional news, attitudes, and values. But the poet does not use this code, at least not in his good poems. In them, each word is as if newly invented, its functions created and enforced by the integrated powers of the particular dynamic complex. Composition is transcendent. Language is metaphysical.

Nevertheless, to those who need mind-stretching or exposure to an intelligence fierce and fervid, those who are the thoughtless legions, Mas'ud's book, from which I have quoted the paragraph above, is to be highly recommended. *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel*, U. of Illinois Press.

* * *

Poetry is illusion before knowledge; religion illusion after knowledge. Between poetry and religion the worldly wisdom of living plays its comedy. Every individual who does not live either poetically or religiously is a fool.

—S. KIERKEGAARD

* * *

Time goes down thudding on this kind of night.
Winter after winter after winter. An old head
rolls and rests, washing in ebb-light.
The last word it said
makes a squish on its mouth; dregs of sight
fester in its eyes. Afterward, a flight
of invisibly calling birds, gone
inland to the dark pines, and dawn
is not worth waiting for, obviously. Towers that fell
centuries ago stand shaking
and walk away with clacking breath; the bell
of the bones falls sideways making
the walls shudder. A thin root of blood prowls

from its broken sack, which goes on breaking.
Love sniffs, whines, stalks off, sits down, and howls.

* * *

Too abstract. *But I cannot be stupider than I am.* (I cannot be less human than I am.)

* * *

The lake,
frozen, is an expanse
of snow, grimed and
cratered,

and the road beside it
is littered
with the rusted-off
pieces

of these automobiles
that come apart
in mid-flight
like partridge in a

blast
of shot. Well, then—
not exactly.
Buf if you

accede
to a simile
you cannot not take
the risk of what lurks there

and take it
willingly. Ah Onondaga,
city winter lake,
soilure, the snow

so unnaturally
ugly. Ah
mind,
in your so useless toil.

* * *

Apart from the fact that there is no normal standard of health, nobody has proved that man is necessarily cheerful by nature.

— ANONYMOUS

* * *

Reading myself, old poems, their inside truth that was
(is, is!) crucial, tree stark in lightning glimpse, hidden
mostly by the storm: complexities,
modes, names, manners, words laden
with terror. What true voice? Where? Humiliated, in throes
of vacillation, roundhead to cavalier to ivy league to smartass—
never who I was. Say it plain:
death/beauty, loneliness/love, wisdom/pain,
these the simple coordinates. Was it shameful
to be insane, or so grotesque
to wrench lucidity out of nowhere? Yet my call
came a whisper, my sentence an arabesque,
my song falsetto. Put the book back on the shelf.
Gone goodness. Dear mother, dead father, what burlesque
of feeling phonied us, that made you make me hate myself?

△

Tom Meyer

The Labyrinth at Crete

a ground to dance on
Daidalos made Ariadne
at wide Knossos
and to keep the Minotaur

a house
I know by rumor only
though they say
had I seen it

words would fail
to describe
its endless
galleries

leading
room after room
onto courtyards
none

can believe men
built, whose baffled walls
have been
carved

then painted to depict

a harvest, farmers
wives and children
with pitchforks

or a field, some cows
a bull or the sea
or a young man
with light brown eyes

a cup in his hands
even the intricate ceilings
are stone and like the walls
decorated

whole schools of dolphin
further on
along the dado
emerge

from gull-wing waves
where now and then
one has riding him
a prince

in whose uplifted hand
glitters
a crown hewn
like a window

in the artificial cloud
where if
we looked we'd find
a second sea

boils up
forcing some ship
from the tumult of its waves
into haven

on an island
at dusk, it is April
and the sky
like a kingfisher's wing

seems blue, no, black
then green
and suddenly
aflame

while at its edges
smoke or shadow or both
suggest
a Nubian army

crossing a vast plain
double time
above corn bins
and jars

full of wine, or maybe oil
as nearby a basket spills
figs so ripe they ooze
and flies buzz all about

Fin de siècle

If only all I'd say did not reverberate
and lute and bow were strung again upon
a single string or better yet, none

then that hide of the bull before the world was
would once more filter
rays of the sun who slayed him

and they'd sing on glint hit instruments
their arrows landing to root where leaves came forth.
Each of their swift atoms a dove sent out

returning to my noble father's ark
brings only what simple chaff words leave
given up lawlessly to that wind

that carries his news as death to me.

△

Lyn Hejinian

The Twill

ALONG THE BANKS of streams never deformed by culture—in short, flush with the surface—the emphasis is laid. Superior mirages are seen, namely, looming in the spring over the Baltic when it has just thawed. A blanket of impressions. At some early hour, between five and eight, what had been the clear dark thickens. Songsters from their surroundings spring, obliged to interrupt. "Lifelike," with fanatic redundancy. I look at the dull floor with credulity, drawn closer, by a curious tropism, to engage its detail. Distance creates miniatures at all points on the horizon. It is impossible to be between minutes or, in the house, between rooms—as one might be jobs, or cities—on this scale of intimacy. Agate lines lead from the cul-de-sac. The individual room, morning, instance, and earnest intention are confining and one grows restless. The dream contained an adventure but was passive. Something "new" inspired by "home surroundings." There can't be an equation without intervention. We borrowed the "canoe" from the Indians. The colour is English. A full frame of water in which there are lights, cupped. Sparks arise wherever a drop of rain falls—not only the material, but also, the intelligible, sun. It is at this point that we again pick up our history, widely protracted. Long waits

for the right moment. A brightly polished window reflects its perennial fascination. Possibly we are asleep in this world and must have glass to drink from. Moist compositions: clouds. The world unsullied is prosaically factual, the pun and the rhyme devices used by realists. High above the lake, the clouds, reflected on the water's surface, are closer than the lake's bottom, five feet away. Everything is wet and shining on our modern asphalt. A daub with the accurate details of a description. Data, of which one speaks with a silly longing. We multiply impressions by going over the same ground. The practice is abecedarian. Nails, attention, wicker, "a location from which you can see more." The room reappears down its walls. "All-over" emotional states are "swamped" in the same dark, "up among the clouds." Complexity, intricacy, or any other peculiarity can compensate for the small size of an element, etc. One needs pebbles in order to hold the water together. I come up against the concrete surface of the words, staring hard, and then skim back, to remark on shorelines not merely flat. As they point out, the finny tribe careens in liquid ambient. Emerging mindfulness, moving, socially, outside. One rounds Stow Lake clockwise in an hour's rowing, each tuck sloshing. The goldfish are gobbling the bubbles, doubled at the corners of the bowl. On the surface of the desk a patch of scratches makes a pattern reminiscent of a clump of grasses, an accumulation of detail making its own mass. From the ruck of the ephemeral springs equipoise. Paper wraps rock. Shadow overleaps self. In fact, what is interesting in a dream is not the character of the dreamer it reveals but something of the nature of composition. Muscular hyperbole knocks details into shape by interruption. The space heater has been painted as many times as the room, the brand name is a lump, and clustered drips drying at the feet resemble the worn motif and variations of a classical pediment. Distances drop into the air on the theme of war, of work, of Penelope's knots. People passing across the street contribute a scale in the deceptive light. The invention of the tube allowed them to go out. A dam made the lake. Crowded by my reflections, as we reach the present, nothing has a dreamlike quality, and I am slow to "think

a thing through." Incident rays fall on the thick distance. A knot forms in the air. One's attention intersects with recognition, in a halfbox to be sure but how. Awareness includes the urge to "get" a "likeness." We are the ones to pose. On the surface an almost pure landmark, the granite hither side of one bright day. The window is nearly white as more leaves are added. The eponymous surface is its most animate record. Psychology is stiff. Isolation makes for weight. It is true, we can perceive, accurately picture, truthfully depict, the jarring harmony of things. A brio fills the trees. Forward and backward, the plant is always only leaf. The spectators are the ones in motion—my counterpart in the panorama. That is to say, one steps in medias res, with fanatic redundancy. The ruffled surface reflects the sunlight onto the soffit of the bridge. I truly see a giant foot in the water. In increments, intimacy, as details isolated with rolled paper tubes. Subplots are the inward measure. Psychology is a study of the static. I am more resident than theorist. The light from the sandy sun is cupped in a square aperture. A reflection of gulls flashes from window to window on the west side of the street. In planar steps, work undertaken becomes one's surface destiny. I foreground anything at will, with the relevant focus—hence from this chair the window pane, the Monterey pine, a set of roofs, the stretch of street, its diagonal taper, or the bay reflecting a haze on the hills. The ground cuts this cone slantwise. The sun runs through the current. It's slippery. Why should I believe these things if they can't be proved. Each one the starting point for a hundred others. The psychological is sentimental. A description is a question put to land by language. An echo, its mumbling trimmed, lacking anonymity. A throwback is one kind of cross reference. The Hooker Oak was the largest, and hence, they say, the oldest oak in Chico, forming the centerpiece of Bidwell Park, and even after it fell in a storm, its debris was left for a number of years and still held to be "magnificent." The shape of the spot on the ground is not the shape of the space between the leaves through which it falls. The shadow of one's feet is sharp. "Lifelike," but without Dopler. The children, playing car in the park, make the

sound of an engine in shifts, unmusical though humming, since their play is "realistic." The "I" is silent. Though their itinerary may be nearly infinite, we grant fixation its virtues. The phenomenal view has perceptible limits. The scenic limner is attracted by its orthography. Everywhere milieu tips. In the foreground, my grandfather and his brother had built a backless bench long ago, no more than a wooden seat, in fact, at a little distance from the house, where now the trees have grown into the view, on a knoll which then overlooked the valley. Was that an accurate picture of the future. Black no sooner inclines to blue than the eyes demand yellow. A wilderness landscape in these colors with geese and a moose catches light on a material resembling mylar and opaques the windows in back. A terse rhapsody of the frontier. A low robin crosses the glossy sky, the illusion that the wings hang from its body like the illusion of a rising sun. Sentimentality is untrue. One understands the fact without settling it. One's concentration jumps around, as when "turning over pebbles." There is still a layer of air between the dewdrop and the blade.

△

Robert Kelly

Postcards from the Underworld

—for L.K.

1

In that country there is a heap of millet
by the side of a road you have to pass

the rain does not wet it and each
passerby must nick one
and only one seed from the pile
and swallow it unchewed
disturbing as few as he can of the other grains

some of which will inevitably fall
and those that fall
slide into the human world and are born as human souls
with all the business of finding bodies
ahead of them

and he whose finger dislodged them from the heap
has them on his conscience until they in their turn
pass by the mound of millet and make their choice

Far up the road the original eater
feels an unaccountable relief
a wind springs up and parts
what he thought all along was the blue sky

and whips its veils open

and he hurries into the next country
feeling the soft spring wind on his soft throat.

2

In that country there are of course no children
and animals have to do what children do

look at us with pleading eyes
demanding the vastness of our comprehension
and ask to be listened to word by word
with respect both for the words they force out
and for the meanings they cant always
quite get into their mouths

It takes a long time to listen
but they are patient and walk beside us
or even sometimes carry us on their backs
always talking, telling the curious facts
of a landscape that seems to us preposterous

even after their explanations
make us think there's more here than meets the eye
the waterfall that is one long word
the blue-leaved trees from which numbers grow
the sandpits that are sacraments
where we, seemingly misguided by the beasts,
have to thrash around and flounder and feel

crystal by tiny crystal the touch of each thing

until we are worn smooth and quiet

and then they leave us nowhere in particular
and we look around and find nothing
then bed down for the night under some bush

and in the morning they are there again
telling and questioning

until we have disgorged everything we ever knew
and weary with forgetting come to a river

3

In that country there is a river that flows north
and happy the traveler who finds it

the reeds listen to him and whisper
how he can take them and bind them
and make a reed-raft to float north on

As he floats in the swift stream he will notice
on both banks the forms of people
he thinks he recognizes
but let him not stop to enquire
or kiss again some mouth he has already worn out
with real or imaginary caresses

even the mountains he sees should not hold his interest:
he is a man alone in a boat
and what intelligence he has
should be devoted to the physics and poetry of rivers

their names and forms and behavior

let him study water
and listen only to the personless remarks it makes
he hears at the back of his head

or let him lie on his back and look at the sky
the stars are not those he knows from nights on earth
and if any of them look familiar
let him look again

4

In that country there is a legend
that two people went hand in hand or at least
with elbows sometimes touching
down the scary stairs that lead to the frontier

Together they crossed the line and drew
wool over the eyes of the borderguard
or bribed him with beauty or poetry or blank looks

and he let them go on in
and there they are to this day
wandering in the intermittent darkness
thrilling each other with every shadow
they make out to be monster or chimera

Whereas others say they came down together
and crossed quickly to the opposite shore
where there are horrors enough

and came through the terrors and passed
still together, still hand in hand or elbow
touching or one's hand against the other's huckle,

and as they went they could be heard talking
telling each other the view from one another's eyes
which always were different:
where he saw a tiger she saw a burning furnace
and when she saw a cloud he ducked to avoid a great hand
that smote from the absolutely empty sky

with these comparisons they made each other cheer
And a third version tells that they went home together
back to the ordinary city up there
and went their separate ways
but the link between them was strong whatever the distance
and when he would see for example a burning house

he would say of his friend She is reading a book.

5

In that country there are groves of paper
where every traveler must stop and write
the story of his life up till that minute
when the first leaf flutters to his hand

the fewer the words the better
or he'll never finish—
it all has to be there, the nursemaid's pantyhose,
the lion's eyes, the meeting on the stairs,
the midnight ride to White Plains,

even the thing he did in the elevator.
The paper knows. When he writes lies
they dont take hold, the ink
slips off and falls along his leg,
a shameful stain that lasts a few days.
Only the true story stays written.

When he's finished he gets to drift the sheets
down a busy little river flowing there—
merfolk swim along and idly read them
lifting them a moment, conning, putting down.

How many years the writing takes
and nothing happens but the writing
and all the writer's heart is busy wanting!
But those wants won't write down.

6

In that country there are graves
from which voices plainly call at times
words that the pilgrims hear and understand—
nothing unclear about them

except what they mean
talking about hydrants and folios and Golgi bodies
and vintages and topgallants and germanium.
The pilgrims sigh at all that clarity
wasted on their own uncultured ears.
One of them says: Nothing
I ever did prepared me to be of use;
now the words are simple burdens

carried till they fall of their own weight

leaving me light to go on
and find my own grave somewhere
where I can lie a thousand years and babble
what no one else will understand—
private I kept myself and private I lived
and the words I mouthed then in my prime
were charged with my own meanings
textiles colors fleshes phone numbers sighs.
I knew that every word meant someone I loved or feared
and the strength of my feeling eroded
all of the word except the sounding shell

and that's what I hear now, and what I'll say.

7

In that country there is a woods
and in the woods a glade
and when the traveler stumbles into it
through the last tangle of bramble and bracken

what had seemed an empty clearing
suddenly fills with all the human beings
he carries with him in his head or heart—
every one.

The field is thronged with them, they leap or lie
or rush towards him waving their attributes
all the props and clothes they wore inside him

public intense and visible all at once.
Does he deal with them?
He passes through them
as all these years they've passed through him
endlessly cycling his poor unprivate mind.

It takes a long time
so long that some say no one has yet come forth
from that field of folk

but when he does finish knowing and lingering
he steps into the woods again
moving light and elegant, no one
inside him now but himself.

8

In that country there is a kind of butter
that makes you think it's later than it is.
They spread it not only on the crusty bread
but on the road too and the rocks
and when the pilgrim slips and slithers his way there
finally it is still only morning

no matter what he thinks.
Everywhere there are stairs going down
and when he slides down them
there is a country where there's another kind of butter
and lots more stairs
all going down.
There is never an end of going down.
After a long time the pilgrim eats some butter

tasting his fingertip behind the grease.

9

In that country there is a door
they stand before
looking to the right and to the left
the jambs are birchwood and the lintel
is oak in which a word is gouged
that means Pass under me

It is the only word in that place
and the traveler having read it once
obeys or disobeys but does not read again

10

In that country there is a woman
who leans against a door
the pilgrims come and watch her body
from various angles
watch it make contact with the wood
or stand away
watch the contours of the light
let between her body and the wood

and by these signs if they are signs
they interpret where the door goes
and when it will open to let them in

some of them wearied of this investigation
or their own interpretations
sit on the grass and watch the woman
hoping her face will teach them
by a sign even they cant mistake

they sit around the doorway and braid flowers
if there are flowers at their season
or else study the lady and her interpreters

as from time to time some pilgrim
looking no way different from the others
stands up or walks up
politely elbows past the woman and goes in

11

In that country there is a pool
where travelers fresh from dying wash their wounds

they bathe and feel renewed
and go on with their excursion
their skin healthy and intact

but the pool if you look down there
through the lucid quiet water
is full of wounds
bloody intricate and rich along the bottom
like the map of any human country

12

In that country there is a telephone
from time to time atop a wooden fence
or hung on the side of a willow tree

its purpose is uncertain
but travelers weary or benighted
sometimes pick it up and listen

they feel the familiar contours in their hand
so like a fruit you cant eat
but the phone feels strange to them here

and the feeling in their hand is stronger
than anything the phone tells them
though they listen to the comforting dial tone

and sometimes punch the buttons
and even wait for the ring to be answered
by one of those voices who answer

who speak the same maddening language
which is all you ever hear down here
you cant make out a word of it

though it all sounds just like english
spoken quickly and sincerely
in a room a little bit too far down the hall

13

In that country they have a kind of truck

that scours along the road and lifts the dead

for they have dead men too
who fall sudden under trees or in the gulleys
and no one knows who they were in life
and no one ever saw them living

and here they are dead undecaying just dead
under some bush and the pilgrims
step over them with a shudder
or crossing themselves for fear of such
a pointless sort of condition
lying there like a sign meaning nothing

so the truck carts them away
to a place where they are brought back to life
or given life maybe for the first time
and set to walk
out under the oleander and by the waterbrooks

saying no more than they did when they were dead
but looking around with their quiet eyes

14

In that country there is a stone that's always cool
popular at noon with those who must
walk their business along the unshadowed way

they rest their heads against it
and their hands
but the heat of their bodies does not harm the stone

(it stands as high as a very tall man
and is broad enough so that ten men
can cool themselves at it at once
talking about the weather)

but after that stone there's nothing more
for six days travel till you come to a ravine
cutting straight across the desert

down there you find shelter
down there you find a way to go
down there you find a boat

and it takes you after a while
to a place from which no messages come

though after several days silent naked men
trudge up the riverbank
dragging the same old black boat back.

15

In that country they drink wine
and take their time over every little thing
they read so slowly that the birds
lay their eggs and fly away before a page is turned

but how they read! they drink the word
by word and milk the sentence dry
of all its turnings
as if the text before them were a host of human lives
each with its options and its risks

each person threatening every day to turn
into other people

the wine clears their heads it seems
and leaves them free for birds and sluggish things
and the bookless young man who joins them
and takes them on a story with him
down through the valley and into the plain

and they remember nothing of what they've read
nothing but that there's always a chance

a river and a chance

16

In that country there is travel inside travel
and those who all day long keep moving
dream at night of taking cruises
out into the other islands
made entirely of weather wind and behavior

for there is no weather here
only the reliable music of each place
and the only thing that happens except themselves
is the occasional troupe of marching men
who come through singing a dactylic measure
turns inside out when the travelers pronounce it:
we have come from the Holy Land
Love is the anger that knows

since they too have a Palestine a far place

where someone strove and some still struggle
to make a temple of pure talk
and one day learn to walk away from it
and die in public on a meager hill

17

In that country there is a hoof
that comes down from the sky once in a while
and just stands there
a hoof and a slender furry shank
going up as far as they can see

they come and stand around the hoof and argue
this is Pan's foot
or this is the hoof of her cow or this
is herself's own footstep

and when the hoof is gone
disappearing sometimes in the middle of their talk
it leaves a crater filled with milk

each drinks from it or abstains
in accordance with his nature and beliefs
about the nature of the hoof

the milk tastes like any milk
somewhat sweet and flat and when
night comes it shows the moon clearly
bobbing on the pearly surface like a nervous mouth

18

In that country they have no need of flowers

but when the petals fall they cry
"It is Machine again
crying out for our attention
which is the oil we give it
                look
at the red petals look at the mauve
purple-rimmed petals withering on earth

look and turn away"
                There is another
part of Machine that needs them
blank sky and rootless water

air howling for any human consonant
to lick it into sense

there it is unabashed that the world wants us

but such a world it is
we hurry through it or will hurry
eyes to the ground amidst all the brightness

hungry for one dark door.

19

In that country there is a blue fire
completely blue flame
that burns low but bright
all over an immense plain

moving there you see shapes of big slow beasts
whose thoughtful talk
makes the flames rise and fall or the flames
talk them
                it is not certain

elephants and large cats
animals that might be those words
that move just past the edges of the mind
when the travelers are trying to talk

to get their descriptions in order
before they climb
up the mountains out of the weather
up to the huge cool flowering sun
unfolding sentences made of light.

20

In that country there is a wall
that works like a church
someone every morning hangs
strings of hot peppers from it
dried in the sun like old prayers

pilgrims count them as they pass
or finger them gingerly
saying:
        "This is something
         I used to know

people ate them

hung them in the sun and watched
evening imitate their color and go down

I used to eat I used to pray
but now this wall follows
wherever I go"

What is the earth that we can do this to it
like a boy with paper and a black pen?

21

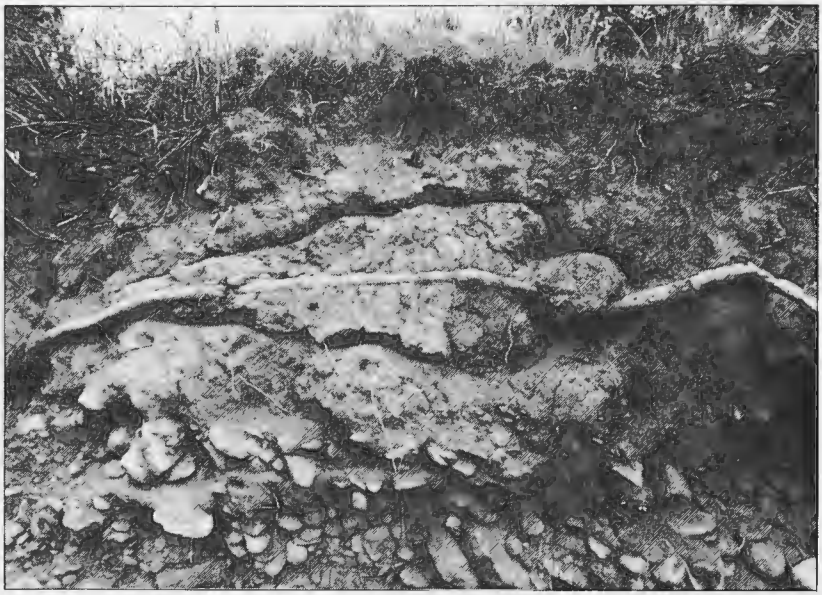
In that country there is a flowering tree
round which deep rooted tawny woody plants
prong up almost leafless
                their heads

dense spiky purple
                these
are cut and those who cut them
point the roots at one another
and mumble what they think are spells

they read the words subconsciously from
the petals on the big tree above them
so large they hardly notice it
and the language of that tree
focused by the sap-exuding root
casts a *walking sleep* on the victim
in which he moves and works and loves and dies
for years sometimes

then comes to himself again beneath the tree
with a sticky piece of wood in his hand.

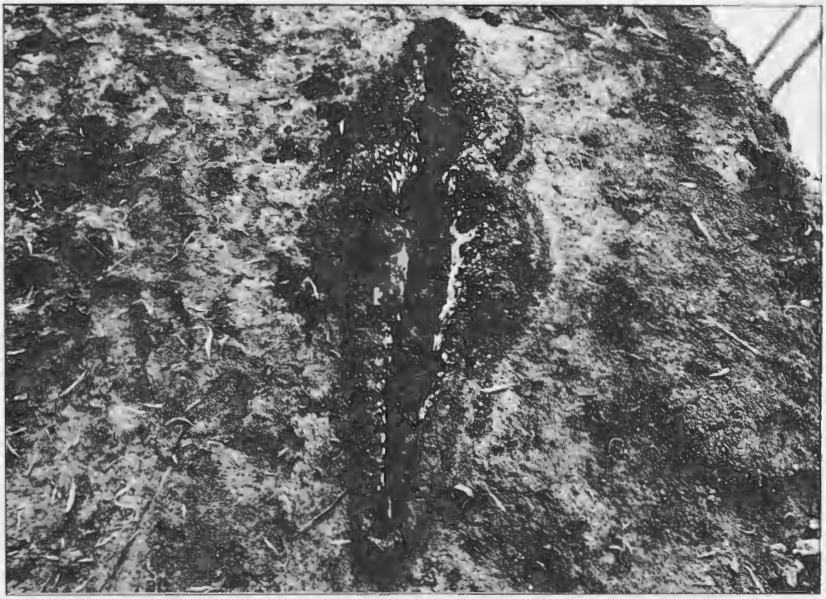
A N A M E N D I E T A



carved clay-bed

earth and gunpowder

SILUETA SERIES 1980



earth and gunpowder

earth and gunpowder

Lynn Behrendt

1. Rome

To work out is art surely
the vase turned inside out has pictures also
of men riding their horses
and women staying home to tend the fires.
Is there any way to not implode
in the center of the sun
over the hill I greet you
man come home on a horse
to the house.

I greet you and you likewise name me
following your eye prayer
every day the sun comes up again
and over that hill who knows
the other one after the other
heat's granted and taken into
where the sirens meant when they sang
Glory glory God's in the street
until Spring on one bird's wing
came closer and slightly singed
sang then and accompanied in high fervor
the making of city.

A flower still in the heart of. A simple thing
felt and said. In the bush

twelve dozen birds sing
all the notes at once.
Flat angels made that sound to me
as they cried because of so much gold
so heavy on their wings
is a thing beauty always so
worth the gold on our heads
Then down there by the river
I wanted to tell you by the river
is green with yellow bridges over

2. Assisi

The process of being born and giving that
whole heart to the cause
for which it fights ceaselessly
toward the outer rim
of justice forming a nonexcluding rightfully so
mound of dirt is a grave and
the entire parting is discussed long enough
so as to render it useless.
Remorse is a spatial process; that
undivided from head, become's one's own
face staring back through the reflection.
Wandering alone under only a sky
full of bright pearl stars
a thing that breathes is like the sun
feeling that if once, only once the heart-shaped tomb
unfurl into long banners of different nations
peeling bells and then the anthem.
Yet the world is and remains so
scarred it cannot hope to reconnect
all the torn threads of its history weave.
Weep if you will see then weep
for those who are less
in the taking force of sorrow
because they know too
which way the cloaked answer throws back

which unveiled arm, a strong lesson sturdy
cape of night the story ponders and rue
so long ago that the women
yellow clad and bending at the well for water
forget their intention and stare unconsciously
into the water thinking
"To wash free of me all this final guilt."

3. Rome

An image could be only outside for a while
moving in at dusk at you singing
a language you've never heard
surrounds you like old women
I stupidly understand again
the fever
comes a prayer with it.
To applaud the continent one comes
so ruefully from
and the pairing of the rain
whittling down to
so close
the indefinite temperature, dampness
of the table, over the hill
and past that.

Look to keep
a capacity for always seeing
beauty because is it our own inherent ugliness
we can't be compared to?
Is it to pose the pink question
of who you were
and on your first forehead
the touch of water.

A pattern inscribed on the rock
makes more stories of what we are

"The mouth of the Tiber
is somewhere down by the sea"
somewhere the birds are

after death or in the air
the names are a way of dropping stones
so you can go back
but they eat the bread
and when you get there it doesn't look the same
and the house is sweet and no longer yours
coming out of the grave past
"Surely there is more" you keep asking the gatekeeper
as he shows you the very last mosaic
a deep blue halo absurdly around the head.

△

The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson

Introduction: Part I

The Early Years (1936—1948)

Edited by Paul Christensen

In August, 1936, Charles Olson knocked on the door of a boarding house in the town of Rockport, a mile beyond East Gloucester, to inquire if an Edward Dahlberg were home. The message was sent upstairs, but Dahlberg was keeping to his room to avoid hearing his fellow boarders saw away at their instruments in their weekly home concert in the parlor below. He sent back the message that he was busy. Olson misunderstood and proceeded to wait at the front door until after midnight. Dahlberg was again reminded of his caller at the door, and in a fit of pity and embarrassment rushed down to greet the stranger. He was surprised to find a stalk of a man rising six feet seven inches, a twenty-six-year-old man with huge eyes and bushy eyebrows, enormous hands, with shy, intense, determined gestures. Dahlberg let him in and the two fell into a conversation about Shakespeare in which they forgot the time. Some hours later, Dahlberg let him out again and realized privately to himself he had met someone who had a good chance at greatness. In the instant, Dahlberg became a father to this hulk of potential, this handsome, scholarly, awkward figure who was the image of his own youth.

Dahlberg was ten years older than Olson, but he was already an author of some repute in the literary Left of New York and London. He had published three novels and several dozen essays, the more recent ones appearing in *Pagany, New Republic, Nation,* but most often in *New Masses.* His first novel, an autobiography of his orphan years in Kansas City and Cleveland, entitled *Bottom Dogs* (London, 1929; New York, 1930), came

out with a preface by D.H. Lawrence, in which Lawrence admitted it was the best of a sorry tradition of down-and-out literature written in bottom dog slang by a soul crushed under the heel of American society. Dahlberg needed the Lawrence preface to boost his book, but nothing could have poisoned his confidence more than this back-handed praise; it was a seed in his conscience that kept digging roots down into his imagination and reminding him he had written a testament from a hole in the ground in America. It was praise that became a lifelong attack on his worth, his identity, his ambition, until he developed an almost unreadable prose style of such brilliance and affectation that he is to be credited with having invented an American Euphuese, more gorgeous and contrived than the bric-a-brac prose of James Branch Cabell. Dahlberg's embellished prose was a hare chased by the Lawrentian fox of damning praise; he went to the far frontier of American diction and welded together his contraption of biblical, Attic, neoclassical, romantic and Yankee pastiche, a prose so shabby and glittering, so awful and intimate, so full of balderdash and sincerity, it belongs in the same anthology that would celebrate other collages of detritus, like Simon Rodia's Watts Towers, John Cage's musical surrounds, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, in short, the homemade worlds Kenner talks about as the 20th century's efforts to imagine a metaphysic. But all this comes later, well after the first meeting of Dahlberg and Olson.

Dahlberg's second novel was a sequel to *Bottom Dogs*, entitled *From Flushing to Calvary* (New York, 1932), and continued the saga of a mother and her son eking out a lousy life in New York. A third novel, to be called *Bitch Goddess*, never got beyond a first chapter; it was intended to fill out the trilogy and bring the reader up to date on the author's life. The next novel he did write, *Those Who Perish* (New York, 1934), was about American Jews turning their backs on their German brethren; the few moral Jews of New York who wanted to help, all die in the end in melodramatic scenes that rival the bloodbaths of Shakespeare. Death to the fascists, if you can—in other words. But the New York socialists pretty well ignored it except for short reviews in *New Outlook, New Republic* and *Survey Graphic.* It was the first anti-Nazi novel in America; it was written to shame America into action by an angry prophet. So Dahlberg was somebody to know if you were young and he had come to spend the summer in your own village. Gloucester had been Olson's summer place ever since he was a child; he

knew every inch of the ground, every neighbor. He had walked the neighborhoods as a mailman, just as his father had done in Worcester, that very small town upland that gave birth not only to Olson but to Elizabeth Bishop, and raised Frank O'Hara. So there was Olson, having been an instructor at Clark University for the past two years, who had come down to Gloucester to try swordfishing for a few weeks, just back in town again hearing that this writer, this Marxist writer at that, was here. Olson took his lanky bones to the boarding house and waited. It is tempting to imagine what he was thinking under the porchlight all those hours, hearing the music groan on through the window, wondering what to expect if Dahlberg should ever answer. This scene is emblematic of Olson throughout his long, tormented apprenticeship to writing. There was his own father whom he had to grow up under, who had died the summer before, a brave old Swede who had come up against the postal authorities like Ahab in his unsuccessful effort to unionize the mailmen of Worcester. A hard man to deal with; aloof, impenetrable at times, a stranger whom Olson tried to describe in his own published short story, "A Stocking Cap," about a young sensitive boy who goes on a fishing trip with his dad and comes back bewildered and amazed at the distance between them. Now Dahlberg let him wait behind his door; then there would come the fathers of Harvard; and after that the national patriarch, F.D.R., for whom Olson would toil and struggle until the old sun king died in office. After that? Ezra Pound, the Jonah of the American whale, pacing his days in St. Elizabeths Hospital, carrying in his head the secret of how to write poetry, which Olson would swallow morsel by morsel while he listened to Pound's tirades against the Jewish bankers and the Zionist conspiracy. And Williams, him too, although he was more an uncle of some distance and kindness, not a true father like Zeus, or Uranus, or Osiris, someone you must bring down to become your own father. Olson waited in the light of the Rockport boarding house because he somehow knew that as a young man you must wait like this, that fathers demanded it of their sons, natural or adopted. They would answer when they wanted to, and when they did, you stepped into the livingroom and talked Shakespeare all night and left woven into the blood of your senior.

Their stay in Gloucester would end soon: Olson left for Harvard to study in the newly organized American Civilization department, which was not just a new curriculum but was the first academic recognition that perhaps

America was a civilization after all, and not an old prodigal colony of England. Dahlberg picked up and left for New York City, but the two men met as often as they could; they were like brothers, if not lovers, and they shared as much of each other as was possible and reasonable. Dahlberg trekked out to Gloucester to have dinner with Olson and his mother once; Olson would sleep over in Dahlberg's New York apartment. The letters came and went as steadily as a weaver's shuttle; the men could not get close enough to each other; it almost seemed they had one mind between them in their outlook on the past and future, with the precious difference of Dahlberg's age and literary seniority over his wonderful protégé, Charles. It was like filling a cistern to teach this brilliant young man who had not written anything yet, and who wanted to write more than live. Olson had tried other pursuits, but as he wrote years later, in the *Maximus* poems, it was the simple, basic things which were difficult to master, like swordfishing, which he had unhappily applied himself to learn for five grueling weeks that summer of 1936 off Cape Ann:

> I have had to learn the simplest things
> last. Which made for difficulties.
> Even at sea I was slow, to get the hand out, or to cross
> a wet deck.
> The sea was not, finally, my trade.
> But even my trade, at it, I stood estranged
> from that which was most familiar.
>
> ('Maximus, to himself')

In his zeal to make Charles learn well, Dahlberg offered him a lesson in the pain of writing; one must suffer long before a single word of durability could be secreted from the writer's skin onto the page, where it was to be placed as if forever. Charles wanted to be a geyser and go off in torrents like "when Yellowstone kicks up / a fuss," and "get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, . . . one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!" as he declared in "Projective Verse," 1950. But for the moment, one must smile and go slowly, and rewrite until you wore a hole in the paper polishing a single particle of a sentence until it became as durable as

Dahlberg insisted it must be. While many things changed for both men, from friendship to their most fundamental beliefs, Dahlberg never budged on the point that to write one held the book of the ancient world in your left hand and with your right you proceeded to say things that would last longer, if you only could. And Dahlberg could not be moved; to question his authority on a matter of syntax, diction, nuance was to bring back a remark as smart as a rifle report. You do not trespass on a man's earnest judgments; you bend your branches while you can to a breath of wisdom. Dahlberg hated his father; he had no particular model of a parent to go on except the complicated and ambiguous instance of his own mother, the famous lady barber of Kansas City and New York, whom he worked all his writing life to capture on paper, and who evaded his passion to fix in words like a delicate butterfly. So he took the example of what a sage might do with his disciple and simply punished him into obedience, and held back praise as long as he could before exploding into passionate congratulations. After all, he knew it was a genius he was teaching, and not the lumpen clay of the world. Genius is wary, slippery, furtive as the fox in a trap. You had to keep your eye on it and be severe as often as possible; fear would outlast sympathy by far. These were trying times for both men; their friendship was as close as either man would have in his whole lifetime.

Dalhberg's pupil flourished at Harvard; he became a tutor on the staff of Winthrop House; he busily tracked down Melville's scattered library with a persistence and intelligence that could only make Dahlberg swoon with satisfaction. He was diligently making a little literary history as he went about his student duties and his filial duties to Dahlberg. Olson was lucky; he talked his way into the Metcalf household and became almost a son to Melville's own granddaughter; she led him to the remains of Melville's books and among the texts was the master's own heavily annotated copy of Shakespeare, where he found him plotting his strategies for making the characters of *Moby-Dick*. What could be more to the point of Dahlberg's own visions of necessity than to find in an American classic a line of dependence back to something tried by posterity, like Shakespeare? Olson ripped off a paper for F.O. Matthiessen's course on the American Renaissance and gave the results to Dahlberg, who read it over with brutal scrutiny. Olson began rewriting phrase by phrase, putting together mosaic-fashion the sounds and signs of a durable text under Dahlberg's imperious

tutelage. Meanwhile, Dahlberg was out in the political arena of literature dealing with Dorothy Norman to start up a new journal to be called *Twice a Year*, which would feature the best that could be said in the Western world. Olson was rewriting his little essay "Lear and Moby-Dick" so that Dahlberg could publish this proof of the classical backgrounds of American literature in the premier issue. It sealed a covenant between them to have Dahlberg bring Olson up out of the depths and publish him to the world. Nothing in America could matter more to a writer than to be hoisted up from oblivion and be given a chance to be read. Money was nothing to the ritual of published initiation. It was 1938 when the issue came out; it stirred no controversy, only an argument between Dahlberg and Norman over payment for an article Ford Maddox Ford had written; she welched on the contract and so Dahlberg resigned, his honor intact. But the thing was accomplished, and the grubbing of literature stood apart from the satisfaction of publishing good work. One simply moves on among the money-less adventures of the publishing world, leaving behind the texts which alone endure.

Neither man could know that the tragedy of their broken friendship had already been laid in these first years of blissful camaraderie and adhesiveness. It refuted everything one said about America's universal desolation to have this precious brotherhood of two writers; Tennessee Williams would write with casual assurance that all human beings were born into solitary confinement, in his blunt preface to *The Glass Menagerie*, but Dahlberg and Olson had broken through to each other's cell and now revelled in a profound affection. It strengthened both men; it made both friends so confident in their mutual support that they swiftly undertook directions of mind that were unwittingly opposite and irreconcilable. So much for American brotherhood. While Olson explored the pressures and subtle determinants of an American civilization, which increasingly fascinated him, Dahlberg was writing a little book of essays which precisely cut away at whatever affection he had for this culture or, for that matter, the age itself in which America had come into existence. It is an ironic fact that America should have been discovered in the throes of the great Italian Renaissance, the high mark of Western Europe's own cultural history, and so spawn a curious orphan of itself that would grow up swarthy, cruel, dull, a greedy bastard of an offspring that would wipe out all the glories of another continent, and reign supreme in an Age of Iron. Gentle Athens had once

reigned supreme in the philosophical sunlight of an Age of Wood, but that was of the immemorial past which a thug-culture like America sought to obliterate. Dahlberg could not help but pick at the scab of his own wounded youth, which he had tried to heal in two autobiographical novels; but the dismissal of his life by this massive gray culture was too much for him to bear. He would continue to memorialize his pained youth and adulthood for as long as he could move his pen; nothing could satisfy his need to complain to and accuse America of its neglect of a sensitive spirit. Not even Proust had examined the details of his life with such fervor, with such a burning purpose in his soul to make every American weep with him over the cultural desert of a giant nation that had no civilization, only the barbarous skyscrapers of bankers and the filthy factories for bottom dogs to labor in. And orphan asylums scattered everywhere to absorb the abandoned sons of their desperate mothers and loutish absconded fathers. But it was not enough to write autobiography that moved no one with its pathos and stink. It was a more accurate strategy to go to the heart of American culture and find in its spiritual testaments the origins of America's brutality and unmolded character. Just retribution by a man of prophecy could only be achieved by the most careful re-examination of the very writers whom the literary establishment and the academy deemed essential, classical, and his job over the next years would be to show how just was his hatred for these false idols of the literary temple.

It was an extraordinary circumstance to find two such men paired together in a bond of very deep friendship working diligently with their great energies toward visions that would only part them. It made a myth of its own, in which brothers of the literary spirit in America should be driven apart in the very thing that had bought them together: their pursuit of America's essence and character. Dahlberg's group of essays appeared in 1941 entitled *Do These Bones Live*, the dry bones of the valley of American death, and the lord had no answer for this bitter prophet. But in 1939, Olson was just finishing up his course work for a doctorate and rather bluffly applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship to write a book about Melville. To his and Dahlberg's astonishment, he got it. He planned to rework his Master's thesis, "Herman Melville, Prose Writer and Poetic Thinker," which he wrote in 1933 for Wesleyan University. He repaired to his mother's house in Gloucester and proceeded to write a book of visions about Melville and

America. Olson later claimed that the poet's ear was unique as a repository of the sounds of the world. The ear had its own mind and memory, and the poet wrote from his store of such sounds. By all accounts, the draft he wrote in 1939–1940 of his Melville book proves he was a good poet; he had memorized Dahlberg perfectly; it sounded exactly like the mentor's style, with a few blemishes of originality here and there. It was a Dahlberg in caricature, too stilted and jerky, and terribly terribly recondite with biblical allusion. Melville was deep in the background of these sonorous arias in the Dahlberg pitch. Dahlberg read the finished manuscript very carefully and pronounced it a failure. It was exactly what he feared it might be, a thoughtless homage that could do Olson no good. If he came down on his protégé roughly, it was only to clear his head of such apish affection and set him off on the right road again, to a style of his own. But little did Dahlberg realize that with such punitive reprimands as he must have received from his mentor, Olson would go much further in his thought than Dahlberg ever intended him to: he decided to quit writing. He was not ready for it. He told Dahlberg this to his face in New York: that he could no longer work under his direction, that he sounded too much like him, and that he was going off on his own and wanted nothing more of his tutelage. Orphans are not supposed to renounce their spiritual foster parents; homage was one thing, respect was another. It occurred to Dahlberg that in his own life he had never been befriended thus nor given the opportunity to renounce the hand that had been proffered to him. It seemed to him so profligate a gesture, to come to a friend's house and announce the relationship was now to be on a new footing, one much less secure and close, that he could not stomach it. Things could not evolve in such a fashion that his protégé could summarily advise him of certain changes between them effective immediately. It was America speaking through his dear companion; the spirit of the continent and the culture had grabbed the tongue of this young poet/scholar and made him say awful and resentful things. There would be no new footing; it was *over*, the proud and smitten Dahlberg said, in letter after letter, now all lost. Perhaps what gnawed at him the most was the suspicion that he had brought about the breach himself, in something or everything he had said to Olson. It is always at the back of a lonely man's mind that he is made lonely by his own devising, which only makes him more miserable and lonely. Dahlberg could only pester his conscience with such thoughts, and with the

greatest pain and reluctance came to accept Olson's new terms of friendship. Olson himself felt blameless in these negotiations; he was fighting for his writing life, and he now realized how far Dahlberg's voice had penetrated his mind; it was inextricable from his own. It was a terrifying situation for a writer who had too much devoured the master and could not speak in his own tongue. He wanted to go away, and New York was the perfect city in which to do it: big enough for two old friends who had redefined their relationship. Olson was so turned around in his thought that he never would finish a dissertation: the beautiful scheme of writing a book on a Guggenheim while at the same time finishing up a dissertation for his doctorate vanished in his sudden crisis of confidence. He went into politics, instead. It was an exciting decision to make; he made it on Valentine's Day, 1941, and recalled the event this way:

> With a leap (she said it was an arabesque
> I made, on the porch, the night of the
> St. Valentine Day's storm, into the snow.
> Nor did she fail of course to make the point
> what a sight I was the size I am all over the storm
> trying to be graceful Or was it? She hadn't seen me
> in 19 years . . .
>
> Where it says excessively rough moraine,
> I count such shapes this evening in the universe
> I run back home out of the new moon
> makes fun of me in each puddle on the road. . . .
>
> ("Letter No. 41 [broken off)," *Maximus IV, V, VI*)

But five years of politics during the war can grind a man down to powder, even if you are suited to the work, as Olson was. Everything the man ever wrote was cast in the lofty rhythms of oratory, the poems, the letters, the critical prose: it can all be put over a p.a. system and sound like God announcing judgment day. It was a wonderful gift, and Olson's recordings will confirm it: he sounds like a trained actor with a rich New England baritone; and he had the minimal requisite of leadership in America to excess: he was tall. Four months after arriving, he was publicity director for the A.C.L.U.; that fall he was chief of the Foreign Language Information Service for the Common Council for American Unity. The war had started, and

he was married now; the Office of War Information was a clearing house of domestic and foreign propaganda which hired the available intellectuals and gave them shelter from combat. Olson joined and became the Associate Chief of the Foreign Language Division, which was supposed to protect ethnic minorities from adverse propaganda. They too fought in the war. He collaborated with Ben Shahn on a government-sponsored pamphlet entitled *Spanish Speaking Americans in the War* (1943). But what an irony for a poet in America to have to protect a world of ethnic minorities at home when the country was at war with half a dozen of the nations they had come from? Olson pushed too hard and finally resigned in protest. Like his old friend Dahlberg, Olson was a declared enemy of fascism, and he saw it coming in the United States. He wrote his first political piece for *Survey Graphic* in 1944, "Americans vs. the fascist," and it is well written, stately in tone, even passionate in its urgency. In 1944, he was a respected party man; Roosevelt himself wanted him on as the director of the Foreign Nationalities Division of the Democratic National Committee. But the convention was dirty, and the appointment of Harry Truman as running mate was a disillusioning experience for a young New Dealer still under the spell of Roosevelt. Besides, the rise of Truman could mean only one thing: liberalism was dead in America, and already the anti-New Dealers were swarming into office and getting ready to dismantle the Rooseveltian welfare state. Liberalism would arise and make feeble effort to spread itself once more, but in the strictest historical terms, liberalism was gone forever and only splinters of its original philosophy survived. The grand old tradition of Jeffersonianism was finished; Roosevelt had had the unhappy role of being its last great apostle. After him, *le déluge*. The arts would go berserk. The Beats would Howl in California; the Confessionalists would bleed in New England; the intellectuals would abuse the word alienation and chew it like a bone in hundreds of pseudo-sociological tracts and "studies." The returning veterans wanted no more deals, they wanted work and a free enterprise system in which to rise like a generation of Silas Laphams. Consciousness II. The grim fifties were heralded in ahead of time with the publication of Friedrich von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, which discredited the New Deal as nothing else could: its premise was that any form of central planning would spawn an ism that was the enemy of freedom: Naziism, Communism, Totalitarianism, New Dealism. Olson could not remove himself quickly

enough from the halls of a government that had swung round and now plunged into a new era of corporate-governmental collusion. He went to Key West, Florida, to Elizabeth Bishop's home to rest up, alone out on a spit of land that roamed out into the Gulf of Mexico and seemed a broken arm that had once clutched another spit, Cabo Catoche, stretching out from the Yucatan Peninsula. Warm green waters of the Carribbean, the salt air, the odor of older, unwestern forms of life with their ruins keeping secret perfect orders of civilization. Six years later he would be roaming the opposite shore looking for Mayan relics and artifacts. But now he wrote down his little testament of self-will, and said:

> Take, then, my answer:
> there is a tide in a man
> moves him to his moon and
> though it drop him back
> he works through ebb to mount
> the run again and swell
> to be tumescent I

Which moon? Why, the full moon that had made fun of him in every puddle as he ran back home from his aunt's house in Gloucester five years before, after telling her he was going to New York to try politics. That moon. But,

> The affairs of men remain a chief concern

But he will not buck horns with petty officials and stay with the "fatal male small span" of his father's frustrated life. No, he has come

> Full circle: an end to romans, hippocrats and christians
> There! is a tide in the affairs of men to discern.
>
> ("The K")

To discern, but only as an artist. He came down from his mountain and spoke in the voice of Yeats ("This Is Yeats Speaking") to defend his newfound father, Ezra Pound, who was being sped through a kangaroo court in order to get him safely into a prison or asylum. He landed in St. Elizabeths, the dingy, dirty mental dungeon run by the United States Senate. Olson moved into a tiny studio next to a statuary works in northeast Washington,

on a hill that looked down over the city to the Anacostia River, on the banks of which the long gray wards of St. Elizabeths stretched forlornly. In Key West he had decided he was now an artist; so he took out the old drafts of his Melville-Dahlbergian book and salvaged what he could from it; which was actually quite a few pages. He needed some base from which to launch a new book. It wrote itself over a five-month period, going off like Yellowstone kicking up a fuss. But if he had his own voice in this draft, he surely had kept as much of the technique of cut-and-paste, mosaic prose as he had acquired from Dahlberg. The master lived in his veins. He finished the draft (except for a brief chapter) on the day the Atom Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, declaring his artistic worth on the very day Truman threw down his own ace. His title was *Call Me Ishmael*; like Dahlberg, he now felt himself alone in America, an Ishmael among the corporate empires. And he wrote a book about an Ishmael who saw in Ahab and his ship the *Pequod* the allegory of leadership and corporate government seeking to bring down the whole of nature to turn it into commoditized possession. The ship and the captain went down smashed, and only Ishmael survived, clutching the wooden coffin of his dead friend. Olson was the Ishmael of this age, but instead of merely reporting the stages of a disaster as Melville's narrator had done, he would watch the decline of this America as he looked for a new faith for the survivors to believe in. That was his esthetic ambition for the rest of his life: to take the best that had been thought in the West and somehow recombine it into a useable metaphysic, not only for art but for living as well. He lugged the manuscript down to St. Elizabeths and gave it to Pound to read. Unlike Dahlberg, he took what was proffered and blessed it as is. In six months' time or so, Pound had found a publisher in New York, Reynal & Hitchcock, who would issue it. From Dahlberg to Roosevelt to Pound. He was slowly getting somewhere.

Meanwhile, Dahlberg floated around this country and Mexico; he drifted with the wind from New York to Mexico City, San Antonio, to Kansas City, Chicago, Boston, Washington, New Orleans, to Los Angeles. And he published no new books in the years after *Do These Bones Live* (1941). He revised the book of essays and had it published in England under the title *Sing O Barren*, a title calling America a barren womb. Dahlberg more than floated, he drifted in the vacuum of ideology that had swept the country during wartime. He too suffered the death of liberalism, even though he

had renounced his socialist ideals years before. There was nothing but the wreckage of programs that had been rushed to the aid of the people in the 1930s. America was philosophically washed up, and this might have vindicated the acerb prophecies of this man, but it gave him no joy. The ground rumbled with the emergence of the warfare state, the Nu-Amerika; he knew it and his despite thickened his blood. He was coming to hate America, not merely to distrust it. It had blasted his last remaining shreds of a tender and hidden faith in reform. Why else had he become a writer? Even to him, the "affairs of men" remained "a chief concern," but only to reveal what these affairs were exactly, to those few who still cared about the spiritual ills of their barbarous nation. He published no essays between 1937 and 1950; it was a decade of silence for this brooding man, as he slowly fitted together the elements of his allegory on the American Sodom, in which he saw himself as a lingering flea: he would call his book *The Flea of Sodom*, a flea in America's ear, a nagging prophet still, a Cassandra that wouldn't stop foretelling doom. The odd thing about Dahlberg's prophecies was that one couldn't do anything about them: Dahlberg could only offer reasons for escape, but an escape to nowhere. The only order of life that seemed appealing to Dahlberg was the old inchoate civilizations of Judea and Athens, little polises, tiny nation-states of philosophers murmuring in the alleyways, teachers leading students into the olive groves below the last terraces of the city's edge, talking sense and wisdom, each citizen having about himself the deepest intimacy with his culture and with all the people who walked free within its walls. Olive groves; myrtle; small seaports of well-made ships; decency; democracy; order; a hierarchy of wits and talents. But there was only a crumbling acropolis in Athens, and the war had reshaped the entire map of Asia Minor so that the old biblical states had disappeared altogether. He would go to Mallorca one day later in his life to rescue a little of the vision of what a life might be like in the ancient world. But here was a true utopia which Dahlberg argued in his writings: one so utterly cut off by history that it stood nowhere forever, except as it might be realized in one's most whimsical and gallows humor. America was a big monster growing on all sides, swelling with common contents, in which nothing of its substance promised good. It was a gargantuan dungeon full of hopeless souls, ruled over by the fiercest among them: a nation of hairy apes stoking the coal furnaces of corporate ambition. So he drifted around, as he had done before when he was a

kid of eighteen just let out of the Jewish Orphan Asylum in Cleveland. He was a rover like the Beats to come in a few more years, who took to the road when things closed in too much. America was everywhere and nowhere at once, and you drifted to catch up with it: a kind of Heisenbergian patriotism, catching will-of-the-wisps, if you were a prophet of this nation. It ate at the pit of his heart to know that he was more in love with a man than he could ever be with a woman. He languished a Tristan on the Pacific shores, wondering what became of his dearest Charles, the ingrate. He cursed the literature of this country that showed men hungering after other men unable to imagine a single decent woman to love in all the pages of published work. He especially loathed the men of the American Renaissance, who despised female flesh and expected worlds to bloom from their Hamitic lust. He was as doomed as any of them with his own Peter Doyle to languish over, except that the man he loved was a genius, a flower budding forth, a man as good as himself, not some misfit whom you must hide in the backroom from your friends. But Olson had finally come a cropper in his political ambitions; he too was drifting around nine years after they had first met. The war was over. And Olson was gorging on the frantic visions of a madman who hated Jews. It was too much to bear. Dahlberg couldn't have known the difficulty Olson was having with Pound, who harried him with his vicious tirades in the tiny room at St. Elizabeths. Olson rushed home and poured out his fury into his notebooks, but he went back for more, just as he had waited under the porchlight in Rockport for a Dahlberg to come down hours and hours later to answer, finally. You did that with the fathers who were your masters. Until you could sickle off their testicles and heave them down to hell. As Ahab had tried to do with a whale, that father of no conscience. Ishmael was a son who washed up clinging to a coffin in the sea, while all around him the sea churned over the dead father, Ahab. Olson would leave Pound just as he had Dahlberg, but he would renew his friendship with Dahlberg, which was unique in the annals of Olson's friendships with men.

Practically any literate person could have called Charles and Edward together and explained to them that their two books, *Call Me Ishmael* and *Do These Bones Live*, were fundamentally opposed to each other; that the first showed how one system of beliefs and attitudes in America was about to die, and that another and better would slowly come to take its place. But in

Do These Bones Live, the American bones were bleaching in the desert sun. The horrible truth about America is that it was a dead thing that was still growing; it was like the diorite stone Olson had found in the Sumerian Gilgamesh epic, a stone that grew out of the water and had to be taken down by gods lest it get too high and fall on heaven. One man spoke of the future with hope and promise; the other felt night closing over the world for the last time. They could only grow apart from one another as they wrote and probed deeper into their separate visions of America.

But these letters are more than the chronicle of a friendship in America; they reveal the isolation of writers in America and show us the extent to which they taught each other the craft of writing; they were each other's mentors in their reading and research; they praised each other's work in the absence of any other critical commentary; they sometimes forced manuscripts onto their friends in the publishing trade in the absence of agents or other contacts; they acted as critical reviewers when the works came out because they went unnoticed otherwise. Most profoundly, they influenced each other until a style grew up and was shared between them. Olson owed much to Dahlberg; his style was made richer by the awesome example of Dahlberg's noble eccentricities; Olson was given the ancient world as a wealth of reference for his writing, and he made good use of this lore throughout his poetry; Dahlberg was the first to seize upon America as a subject for mythic analysis; his life was his own proper myth to be rewritten, if possible, for eternity until he perceived it with translucent clarity for the myth he knew it to be. Olson's mastery of myth in poetry is the core of his achievement as a poet. Dahlberg's gift to Olson was this sense that the past was immediate, alive, around you; his letters continually urged the past upon his reader, as though Greece spread out down the end of the next block of New York, and the Aegean was sparkling outside his window. He loved the past too much and perhaps as a result dismissed the present too quickly, and missed its promise and potential as an artist. It was in his excesses, his foolish histrionics in which he saw himself as one mythic or legendary figure after another regardless of the mundane crisis at hand, that Olson was trained to think in terms of a present marbled in the infinite of time and space, in which events were not separated by years or change but only by forgetting or never having learned history. In Maximus, Olson created a version of Dahlberg but who rose above his friend's terrible pathos

and personal dramas to the point at which this sense of the oneness of time gave him infinite sympathy for man, and a profound understanding of the continuity of events like shabby Gloucester and vacated Dogtown, or even of neon Amerika, which were mere swirls and shapes in a sea of endlessness. Olson gave back a friendship which Dahlberg knew was from a genius; Dahlberg stumbled at times between envy, jealousy, suspicion, and breathless surprise and respect in his unpredictable friendship with Olson. But for a man who saw his life as permanent exile from man and order, this one friendship was nearly perfect in the early years before their first break, and again in the late 1940s before their bitter conflict over *The Flea of Sodom*. If their friendship were predicated on being writers together in a culture that did not believe in writing, then their friendship broke when Olson could not be Dahlberg's ideal reader and reviewer. The beautiful illusion both men created between them, a culture of two who read and loved each word they wrote, snapped the moment Olson read something he could not believe from his friend and put down the book, as though he had to put down the life as well. For Dahlberg, that is precisely what he felt Olson had done, and the friendship was over.

The letters of Olson and Dahlberg are the complete extant correspondence in this edition. They have been divided into three equal parts, and Part I includes the correspondence from September 14, 1936, to October 9, 1948, in which the vast majority are Dahlberg's letters to Olson.

A Note on the Text

The texts of the letters range from hand-written postcards to typescripts of several pages on papers of varying size, and several telegrams. Dahlberg wrote on both sides of penny postcards and would enclose these in an envelope when he lacked other stationery. Some misspellings which are evidently mere typographical errors have been silently corrected; other errors, which may give glimpse of the writer's composing methods, however hasty the writing, have been left as is. Where a word was indecipherable, empty brackets are indicated; where the word could be deciphered with reasonable assurance but not certainty, the questioned word was given in brackets. No matter has been deleted for any reason. The locations of each correspondent are given, and where internal evidence suggests locations not

written by the correspondent, a bracketed location has been suggested. Dahlberg usually dated his letters, but Olson did not, until later years. The Dahlberg letters have been reprinted courtesy of the Special Collections, Wilbur Cross Library, the University of Connecticut at Storrs, and by permission of the Dahlberg Estate, which retains exclusive copyright of the correspondence. The Olson letters are reprinted courtesy of the Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin, and by permission of the Olson Estate, which retains exclusive copyright. Special thanks are due to George Butterick, Curator of the Special Collections, University of Connecticut, and to Ellen Dunlap, research librarian, the Humanities Research Center, for their kindness and cooperation with the editor.

△

[post card] [2 Grove St., New York City]
Sept. 14, '36

Dear Charlie –

Had to leave Gloucester hurriedly. Doubt whether I will get back. A mess of things here to straighten out. Soon as I am more tranquil will send you books. Meanwhile, hope your sinus & your knee are healing. Remember start work on the Melville book. I believe in you. I think I know. The sooner you start the better. Inaction spawns inferiority. This in haste.

Your friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[2 Grove St., New York City]
Jan. 21, 1937

Dear Charlie: –

Please pardon my delay in answering your letter. I was, of course, most pleased to get it and had intended to sit down & write you

promptly. For I know your problem and it touches some of the most porous things in me. But I have been writing—and reading without a let-up, and after my day's work I have shunned paper and pen—could not go near either.

I have seen Stieglitz & he speaks most highly of you. I hope you have written to him. He is an old man now. I think you should not hazard losing the precious moments of knowing him. Did you ever read Sherwood Anderson's "Story Teller's Story"[?] There is a beautifully sincere and deeply felt dedication in the book to Stieglitz. Do look at it when you are in the library. Waldo Frank is now in Mexico. He is the honored guest there of the International Writers' Congress. We exchanged a couple of letters before he left, but I did not see him again. Tomorrow I am calling on Ford Maddox Ford (you remember E.T's references to him).

I wish you would settle some of the seething things within yourself by writing: otherwise you will go along at a zero level & say to yourself in your most dire moments: ["]My god, nothing is happening to me." And of course, nothing can happen unless we make it.

However, I am not too worried about you. You have an extraordinarily warm and fluid personality to which people are strongly attracted so that even in time the cold blizzards and profound psychical wastes and moraines of harvard will melt to you. That of course, on the human side, & important, but not the real problem.

To return to the thing you must face, why don't you write, and why are you waiting. Maturity, like a maid-in-waiting, will not come to you. Besides, all books, no matter, when they are written, in what joy or quasi joy of ripeness, are ever anything but mistakes. So don't needlessly harass yourself over the young years traipsing in your bones. The bones are yours and so let's see their signature on the printed page. As I have said, once you get the book on paper, I will see that it gets published. But write!

I have been reading Poe's "Eureka." Poe interests me enormously but I don't know what Waldo Frank sees in that long piece of tedious godhead! Have you read it?

As for the magazine, I am deeply interested, but things like that must evolve slowly. So I have not pressed it. Will wait till Frank returns and then we will see.

Let me hear from you. Rosa wishes to be remembered to you & I send you warm friendship.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

P.S. Does Finch still feel the effects of my anger at the surrealists. It is always better to face a sound anger than to run away & hide in the crannies of Mt. Vernon.

[2 Grove St., New York City]
Feb. 11, '37

Dear Charlie

I am seriously thinking of coming up to Cambridge next Wednesday. Could you suggest some reasonable hotel that I could stay at? I don't know just what your own situation is at present, therefore suggest this. So don't misunderstand. I am only thinking of you. I wrote you a letter some time back, but as I received no answer, I imagined it was too difficult for you to write. And then maybe my letter was an inadequate reply. But believe me, I *felt* your letter, have thought of you much since. Do let me hear from you right away. I have been driving away, [am?] tired

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Western Union]

[John Winthrop House]
1939 Mar 18 PM 7

CHARLES OLSON

DEEPLY HAPPY FOR YOU KNOW ONLY TWO IMAGINATIVE

ARTISTS WHO HAVE RECEIVED THIS TRIBUTE* HART CRANE AND YOU THANKS MUCH FOR BEAUTIFUL LETTER AND BOOK DEEPLY TOUCHED BY BOTH FORGIVE ME IF I AM A LITTLE BLATANTLY PROUD OF ALL THIS MY FAITH AND LOVE—

EDWARD DAHLBERG

July 16, 1940

My dearest Charles,—

To leave you, there, with those scummy shantied creatures was pain. It is homelessness for you; without natural touch; race.

Put to other things. I have been drinking at those sweet and sharp springs, Shakespeare's Plays. I have thought much of you while reading Lear, Macbeth, Troilus; thought of how you led me to these Founts; how wholly you had possessed the FOOL, in LEAR. You must return, apace, to your Visionary Cap and Bells; and make for you, and me, those Quickened Unheard Words.

Now, Charles, to look at your MYTH; and now for some seeming, sere pedantry from me. You know how unfraught Shakespeare's Lines are; either he Speaks in Angered Adjectives, unfettered by phrasings, prepositions; even articles; or he Cries:

> Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow

or to return, his spleen is Pure Epithet: Reechy, drenched, murky, without a clinging Substantive. Or when he hazards a Slow Detour, it is shaped in words of a syllable, in four to five letters:

> You do me Wrong to take me out of the grave

Your own sentence, here, is balked by flattened verbs, adjectival,

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*Guggenheim Fellowship

with barnacled fastenings of prepositions; redundant articles, and too many nouns. Of course, for the moment, have you lost your own Path; for everything you have done is against your blood. But again, and further: You are, yourself, most magical, in the seeming slow line, of short syllables: "springs of myth can mean"; "Dreams stop the machines" (Here stop, for me, is not thrusting enough); "Edenic springs"; "Rappacine in his garden of false flowers"; "We are the last 'first peoples' " (Here, you weaken your phrase, so good, with "of the world"). You overburden your perception with obstructive words that add nothing to seeing, hearing, breathing. The Verb, as Huysmans, said, is the central force of the sentence; and the power of the sentence lies in its Crisis. One begins a line to finish it with a Cry, a Moan; to get to the End. The thing, above all, is to Finish. But, see, Charles, how such uglified words impede, subtract;—in effect; like; maturity; in order; accident of the industrial revolution; maturity. Shun, above all, the word, maturity; it is a mare's nest, not to be pursued, mentioned; a gibbet-word. And, avoid, definition; it slackens anger; makes a polemist, a didactic out of the bursting rrathful tongue. And do not, to repeat, elucidate. Speech, must always be, unguessed, ecliptic. When one knows all, beforehand, or later, or too much, ennui, supervenes. But let me cite a few more words you should eschew; point of departure; spiritual life; temporariness; singularly; compulsion; adventurism, materially.

But enough of my quasi- pinnacle. As you know, I stand, aloft, on a foot-stool, and like the elder Maccabee, from this height fall off and break my neck.

Let us move to the meal, the mead, the grassy, flowered intuitions, in the Essay. I shall cite: "Homeless in his land, in his society, and in himself, he found his place in space." "There was in him an attraction to the origin of things, the first day, the first man, a centrifugal movement to the distances of the universe, to the Pleiades, to the unknown sea, the buried continent." I have, here, clipped your line a jot; it is very fine; question, however, centrifugal, and also, attraction. Or, to continue, and I am making emendations to compress

your own horizon; "Melville warmed himself by the first fires of man's life after the Flood". What follows, is, deeply good, too; "He sought origins so primary he was able, in *Moby-Dick*, to discover the lost past of America and establish a myth for a homeless people". Very lovely; but I don't like, establish. Or take this; here is something exceedingly probing, vitiated by the anticlimax "essentials"; "Melville lived wrong, but he lived so intensely his and his people's wrong that he forged something in Moby-Dick" and now the drooping "essential there is beauty in it". Perhaps, you might follow, Charles, wrong with "his people's Guilt".

To go on; "*Moby-Dick* is ultimately a private vision, in essence as antagonistic to man as Satan." The rest, refuse of phrasings I cast out. Here, again, and very lovely; "Lucifer has the beauty of the morning star because he is, wholly himself, in all his evil, as Moby-Dick". I have garbled your wording, in ungainly correction.

You have, Charles, already, the Seed, of a Book. You have uttered truths known and knowable only to an artist; and I uncover before your Monuments, Temples, before your Sphinx, as I have so often before. What I am doing is to return to you your own Memory; telling you, what was was Foreknowledge to your Self and which in the night of doubt, misery, ennui, we forget, and will always forget. Could we remember, continuously, we would be, again, in Eden; with the tasting of the Tree, of the Fruit of Good and Evil, we Forgot. How Jehovah looked; how to be naked, unashamed, how never to Hide, as Eve did, after she had listened to the Serpent, and Puzzled Adam.

Write, work, and believe in your Ilium, my dearest Friend.

Stanley [Burnshaw] asked after your book, again. I am seeing him, for lunch, Thursday; and when the time comes, we will combat the world, and take our Honey out of the carcass of the Lion, as Sampson did.

Let me hear from you, soon.

Yesterday, I bought the Carr book on Dostoevsky, for a dollar and

forty cents. Went to eight bookstores before I could put my hands on it.

I pray this is of some little worth to you, Charles.

I send you my warmest love, my faith and uncrack'd loyalties.

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

The ride back was a Boon to Doris and me; the afternoon was a raiment of breeze, sea, sun. Thanks for that. Doris, of course, sends her love to you.

August 1, 1940

My dearest Charles, –

Your deeply good letter came to me; what a pity my own thanks to you had to go to Dallas before reaching you. So are thanks given in this world. But, again, my pleasure and happiness I announce to you in the PIERRE you so generously gave me, and the shirt, too, which I have been wearing in contentment; delight.

When you mentioned the sad brevity of the Poet's Life, the few Plays, I wondered, had we spoke. For I had been thinking so, with pain, of Shakespeare kneeling in his Orisons, The Tempest, after he has freed Ariel and Caliban, and his 'power is o'erthrown', thinking, 'What a falling off was there.' This is the Anglo-Saxon burden, which Shakespeare carried, and which we have inherited. And no Englishman, or American, so far as I know, has eschewed it, nor Chaucer in the last part of Troilus, the last Christianly humbled lines, which, alas, are not the earthed irony and laugh, as it should have been; nor the Sonneteer, nor Melville.

This little isle, whose width from shore, bay, to tangled, wildish ocean, can be spanned in six to seven months, and whose length of pure beach line, is forty miles long, is likewise without an Ariel or

Caliban. In its dunes, pines, spray, toads, frogs, it is an Encantada; in its imaginative life and habits, — the skull and bone church, the clapboard, shantied cottages, without design, or heart-deity, or manual love, the witch-like faces of the natives — it is the corporate town. Thus, it is New England, the Cape, where, you, I know, must be right, about the sluggish shore, the way the sea sluttishly inclines upon the muddish land, America. Much preoccupied with Shakespeare and Dostoesvky, I, too, have been so near the final abyss, of 'barren hate'. My affliction in man is so accursed at moments that I am ready to fall into that slime-pit, there, where the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled. But it must not be; to go the other way — foregiveness is everything — I cannot go. It is a giant lie of the flesh and the bones, and I cannot so govern my organs; nor can I do the opposite, for I cannot live with such a disgraced and chaffed palate.

Now to the days here; they have been rather agreeable, save for those graveled glances, encounters which drop like coarsened things upon my veins. Of women, there is a little pentecost here; license, the riot of appetite prevails. When women take off their clothes, as they do in a resort, they really disclose all, and rush out to man with a louder trumpeted lust than is man's. It is somewhat expensive, though; I pay ten dollars a week for a room, facing the sea, the sands, and eat out. There are no other expenses but that; for in the evening, one walks with a woman under the Milky Way, and that is the shortest path to the haven we seek, to the Breasts, the long upheaval of the tresses, the Euphrates Valley, the Womb.

Breit has been very ill; should he be well enough to come, he and Clara will be here for two weeks. Dora may come, too; The fare from New York is only a dollar thirty five cents; an hour by train, and a forty minute journey over a sweet, billowy sea in a motor-launch.

Doris has not been here yet; last week we had too little money for her to join me; but tomorrow she will be here; it has been much anguish for me to think of her in the fumes and fires of New York heat. I wish, deeply, I could ask you to come as my guest; forgive me,

I cannot, although nothing more would I desire. The evil is not in my bosom, but in my purse. When you want to stay at the apartment, let me know; whenever you are ready, we will make arrangements.

How is Korin? Did he receive the book I sent him?

I have finished note-taking; now I must read them, over; and begin. I fervently hope you are writing, seeing, hearing, murmuring, as in a beauteous shell, ocean-shell.

So with all my Faith in the Book, in your pure, jetting Gifts, I give you also, my heart-friendship, and deep love.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
General Delivery
Ocean Beach
Fire Island
New York.

[handwritten addendum:]

From Notes

From Underground —

Petersburg — "the most
theoretical and intentional
town"
It's in on page 4 or 5,

Charles ----

April 9, 1947

Dear Charles: –

I did not know of the existence of your book until Easter Sunday. I rejoice in this small, mythic volume. A little book, no longer than the Song of Solomon, Amos, The Georgics, or Call Me Ishmael, is the mead, the honeycomb and the Jerusalem for my insatiable Soul. I love a book with no other mortal deposits in it but the pith of gnome and parable.

Literature is the pious commemoration of extant relic, ritual, and you have deeply understood this. No one before you has really perceived Herman Melville, the fabulist. There have been some goodly guesses about the albic Bull Leviathan, but the mythology of Moby Dick has been sealed and mummied. 'Who can draw out Leviathan with an hook?' says Job, and there is no better remark than this upon those who would fathom the American Continent, the occidental Jupiter, the White Whale, or art and letters without going back to humanity's birthplace. Herman Melville's head-devouring quest for Beginnings, his cry for the First Winds that blew upon Oceanus and Nilus and Pisa's springs where Father Zeus was born, has been as hid in the awful Book of Ahab as your own Enceladus underneath Aetna's Heap. Call Me Ishmael is the same priestly pang for First Causes which will always eat up every man who has a Deity in his brain; until we can fathom the Semitic and Phoenician mysteries before Sidon and Tyre and Gaza, our knowledge is gross.

But now to garner from your book: the son calling to the Father, the stricken skald weeping in a middle English, "O fahter, fahter, gone amoong" brings the tear from my heart, for my mother, too, has been lying in the darkling and dreamless earth for fifteen months, alas, not close by Absalom's Hand or Obadiah's Cave, but in alien and untrembling clay in a Hebrew Orthodox cemetery in New Jersey.

The Prologue, the record of those infernal anthropophagous acts, is done in a doughty prose. But the book begins for me with the

Shakespeare, of the discovery of Moby-Dick. Your speech wavers at the start; sometimes just by the dropping off of an article your line loses its natural force; then you fall away from your own poetic nature into the vernacular. But this is debris and the sea-lees you can sweep out at some later time with Poseidon's Trident. These are the exterior flaws which will make the literary Barabbases mock your lovely book. I cast out almost twenty pages from Do These Bones Live for the English publication, and it may be that I was still too gentle to my own skin. This is a little matter, something for you to consider when the book is reissued. I doubt, unfortunately, that this will be your present problem. Unless I speak foolishly, the citizens of Philistia will give neither lucre nor honor, not for at least two lustra. Genius is a stumbling-block in a cold, boreal land; this you know. But to return: I am your vassal-reader in the entire Shakespeare portion; your understanding of Melville's need of warming, pagan gods, Scamander and hot Triton and sweaty, priapic Vulcan who cohabited with nymphs and begat heroes, which every American poet requires if his genius is to have a hearth, is deeply moving and pulsant. I could call back to you so many lines and passages that you have written, so heavily marked is my copy. The book of the law of the blood is remarkably recorded; your citations from Melville are in themselves discovery.

I want to thank you, of course, very much for your words about me, very much. I have changed the title of Do These Bones Live to Sing O Barren, broken from Isaiah. Routledge in London is publishing it sometime this year, with a Foreword by Herbert Read. I have also another very small book, almost verse, done in the gnomic prose, called The Rational Tree, which the Mint, a Routledge publication, is printing this year. I had intended sending the two of them to you when they appeared, as I wanted you to have my tribute to you, and my feeling for you, in the English book, in your hands.

I am, as you know, an Ishmael in solitude; for the most part, the waterpots of Cana are empty for me, and I have to fill them by

reading the ancients, or walking or in my life with Winifred, or from the robust adamic laughter of my year and a half old son, Geoffrey, who is Jew, Irish and Norwegian.

Call Me Ishmael is a little piece of Melville prophecy, and you have my promise that it will be remembered, and with my affection and friendship.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
58 Barrow Street
New York, 14, N.Y.
Please do not give any one my address; this is not a booby pretence, but a caution which you probably understand.

April 17, 1947

Dear Charles: —

You have written a little book of genius. This I told you in a letter that you have not answered. However, your book, no less than your life and your churlish silence, has been a sore trouble to my heart. Your greatest faults are sloth and untrembling bowels. I rebuked you often for your sluggish spirit until you became dainty and effeminate about your time, until you became a sick, busy American. 'Must you dung as you run?' said Aesop to his Master. I have never had the coarse effrontery to tell another man that I was busy. However, I succeeded in word-flogging you into writing your book, and all the Grace and Goodness and Courtesy in it you conceived when you were close to my identity. The rest belongs to the world (O I have overcome the world! cries out the Nazarene in Luke), the beginning where man is just the fat gobbets for Cyclops' hideous gullet you must sooner or later reject. The Noah, the Christ, and the Moses, I believe you garnered up from the MS which I implored you to rewrite. I knew at the time that the book was to be dedicated to me. But now, because I took you unto my identity, gave you my table, and

whatever knowledge had come to me from hunger and all the mortal and perfidious aches, you have bequeathed the volume to your poor, dead Father; your acknowledgment to me has the same bitter obituary taste in my mouth, because you in the same manner of a perverse Balaam and a dainty and vain Absalom that you were to your Father, alive, are now offering to me, deceased, unto your own character and spirit. What is to become of you? You cannot feed any longer upon that brute Minotaur Leviathan or upon Oceanus. This is no mirthful human meal for a man whose soul is already too watery. A man should have a dry soul, said Heraclitus.

You have not been a Judas to me; that is a warm-livered error; your sin toward your nature and me is of a cold, stygian decoction. Your silence has been brewed in that foss and marsh where the muddy and mangled shadows abide, and is a portend of a stilly and fetid cessation in your spirit. You cannot ripen so, neither in the rain, nor in the sun. Nor will those brackish and Mammon caitiffs of Parnassus, Brooks, Van Doren, Pound be of much avail, unless you further submit. The other one, whose Gomorrah vice I find abominable, cannot sustain you.

You cannot have a culture in a land, especially in this mechanical, doomsday country, where everybody is so viley separated, and each man spills his spirit like the defiled seed of Onan. Poe could not go to the Quacks of Helicon, nor could Melville, and neither had any real unfolding. Man must talk to man, if there is to be a vision and a human spirit; otherwise everything is in the hands of Barabbas, the poetry, the handicrafts, and the thievish loaves. Could not Christ and twelve ignorant fishermen produce a legend!

Sodomy, which is the neutrality of the sexes and the human heart, and the ache for a united Babel of the world, all go together. This reminds me: about three years ago, I saw Harvey Breit, now a first-class citizen of Philistia and a sodomite, and I said to him: Why don't you give up Blake and Dostoevsky so that the whore in you will flourish more easily?

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[58 Barrow Street / New York City]
April 21, 1947

Dear Charles:

I have no need to withhold or even to change by one jot the epistle I wrote you on the 17th. My first letter to you was dated the 9th, so sharply uneasy was I about your depraved silence. As a pure, unknown nobody, your words were sent to me in great haste. What sorely troubles me now is that you are very likely to become a well-known nobody. I have in my hands your exsanguious, American syntax letter of thanks. You are discerning enough to know that you have given me a base and wily affront. I could have so requited you by not acknowledging the homage you make me in your book; but I do not know how to be lofty or to premeditate a cold and sly jibe for another mortal. Cato preferred to tear out his entrails rather than to expose them to Caesar; and every day that I go out into the streets, I cower in my mind before the thorns and the mischiefs, all the pismire Golgothas, one is likely to get from a tradesman, an American or a Charles Olson.

Your little transhuman volume of genius also disturbs me very much. How will you get over into the warming humanities to the other side of the Pillar of Hercules. Your book, the central text of your vision, is beautifully-wrought literary metaphysics; your citations out of the Journal Up the Straits are in themselves apocalyptic discovery. You first divined the Melville pining for the Crescent of Mahomet, for the Balm of Judea, for some human wedlock with Mediterranean and Asian pulsation. Your intestines quiver, but there is a mocking Pilate in your intestines. That is why I was so *useful* to you. At the root of all intellectual antisemitism is the laodicean serpent that hungers for the Jew's liver.

I foresaw your perfidy years ago. Your own Father's death was not enough of an admonitory lesson to you. You must also do the same to the man who fed your spirit, fathered your book, and deeply cared for you as the Nazarene must have loved John of Zebedee. The Thief

may go to Paradise, but if a man mire upon his own Seed, his Father and his Vision, he will rot impiously unto himself.

Yes, I know the appetite for pragmatical comfort and mediocrity in this land. I understand why you run after inferior people, why you greedily hanker after the artistic mountebank who puts Topeka and Telemachus together to make a canto. I comprehend the necessity in you to consort with the mediocre friars of syntax. But take heed lest monkish merchant Brooks bless you, lest Van Doren put the mouldy hands of Benjamin Franklin upon you. Take care lest the hypocrite College of Arts and Letters give you a National Award.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[58 Barrow Street / New York City]
April 25, 1947

Dear Charles: —

I know the fable about Euripides and the dogs that tore him to pieces for his impiety. But what sacrilege have I committed against you? Did I say it, or did it not come out of your mouth, "I have betrayed two persons, my Father and Edward Dahlberg." You revile me as a base merchant. Have I shown gluttony for praise or reputation. Do I whore after people who can help me? Am I the consort of the merchants of Toledo, Carl Van Doren and Van Wyck Brooks? Am I a companion of the lucre Pilates in Washington? Are these the seers and the political male Cassandras who perceive the world better than I. If so, you will please let me leave the world. In the Chester Plays one of the three curses is the world.

You say that I am outrageous to myself. Of course, I share deeply and covertly in the Guilt of man, and I do not say so to shed my own sins. My errors were not against you. Your book written under the dominion of my identity, is the proof of that. Why should you be so angered because I do not relish dungy Cyclops. Were you not queasy

when I committed the same sort of fault in endeavoring to understand the nekrophiles and the scatologists. Did you not cast away many of those pages, with my total acquiescence? Why do you revile my sputum. What preterhuman dust and spittle do I find in your letter. Timon once upbraiding Plato called it bile. You speak of simple and uncrooked words. You have said I speak and write so. What really angers you is that you are too perverse to own a fault. In our friendship I labored for you and not for myself. Even now, after sending you in my first letter good savory words & of the heart about your book, how do you reply? You cunningly smote me with an affected and fatuous note. I do not know why it took you three weeks to compose so few platitudes; in that length of time you should have done more. What is baleful is that you have sly enough bowels to know that you were smiting me, and it gave you atlean and lofty feelings. But never mind that: I did not raise my hand or heel against you; you did that. You are very irrational and untruthful when you say I buy. What, pray, do I buy and sell, my limbo, which you have no intention whatever of sharing! In our friendship, did I labor for your benefit or for mine. What was my earnest for being a co-editor of Twice A Year: I received one advantage, I saw to it that Lear and Moby-Dick was published. How did I fatten my blood-stream or my so-called reputation when I ran around getting your essay into the hands of authors who could help you. Was it not my mirth and advantage to give you the fellowship of authors which an unknown would have not had in at least a decade. I did not have it without pang and hunger and denial. You had it without any, because of me. Did I work for you or for me in getting writers to speak for you for a guggenheim award? Now, for the matter of paying some irreverence to your mother. You are again unjust: the one time I was your guest, I got the water and you the wine out of the Cana Pots. I am not a gross feeder, and what food is put before me does not matter, provided my host has the same frugal fare. You happen to be a rank eater, and if Plato and Socrates and the fable of Euripides and the dogs could not teach you that it is base to give your guest dingy food while

you sit opposite him and eat large chines of beef, then your belly and your unflagging appetite should have given you such breeding and wisdom.

If it will give you more felicity to have the newspaper Barabbases, the Van Dorens and Brooks, call you genius rather than I, I will try to bridle my tongue.

I imagine you have gotten some astute saws and apothegms which are more available for comfort rather than a life of ritual. You cannot go the way of the world and be a human artist. Nor can you pity the aching denials in Herman Melville while you denigrate mine. You can't be both spirit and mammon save to the low Yahoos. You see, I am much too pathetic and abject and obscure for anybody to bother trying to tempt me.

I do not know what you will think of this letter; it may bedevil you, or you may see, later, that though you now regard me as the watch-dog Cerberus baying at your entrails, you will come to understand that I was the one Guide of your spirit and nature and gifts.

You will pardon this penultimate piece [o]f human malice: May God make Charles Olson a failure, may his Call Me Ishmael go as unsold and as unread as Thoreau and Herman Melville. Should this happen, maybe then some day in some chasm where Dante casts those caitiffs, like Edward Dahlberg who was for himself and not for Charles Olson, we can talk about grossness and shame and the dogs that tore Euripides to pieces.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

May 2, 1947

My dear Charles: —

I do not know whether you are purblind to my letters or just froward. I have never spoken one profane word about your Father. I too deeply revere the remains of the dead. My poor, smitten Mother

lies as in an open sepulchre in my breast.

I do not envisage myself as Christ, or even as some wayward or fallen essence of him. I am a sick, nervous Jew, a base and whoring issue of Noah, Seth and Japheth. You know my attitude toward the Nazarene. All that I said is that I had the same feeling for you as Jesus had for John of Zebedee. How does that make me utter crooked words? Or how do I eat your book and your identity? I have never had any disciples; you were my friend; I taught you how vile our occidental earth is, how loathsome the American naturalists are, and I made you write. All that is astonishing and choric in your lovely and memorable Call Me Ishmael was written under the influence of my identity. Had I eaten you there would have been no book. What you added to the volume disturbs me. I told you why, and I do not see that it is outrageous of me to get queasy when Cyclopes devours human corpses. That kind of anthropophagous prose belongs to your inferiors. I say so now, and will say so later, because the book for me is a Fable and a Pilgrimage.

Why am I foolish when I abhor the world? and why is it literature when Timon moans, "Why, this is the world's soul." When Melville underscores this remark you are deeply moved, but when I say that in the Chester Plays one of the three curses is the world I am just repetitious and indulging in incantation. How many truths do you own? How often are you garrulous and repetitious and just squalid to your own soul? Wit and wise sayings do not come from a man's mouth continually. Solomon could write no more than two books, and Amos no more than a modern chapter. Would you then discard them as bores from whom you could not learn, and so turn to profligate Egypt or Sidon or Tyre for wisdom? The error would be yours. Do we not go constantly to the Masters simply to be reminded of those heart-truths we think we know? The greatest human spirits have had no more than seven or nine apothegms in their mouths, and only the coarse will say I have heard that man, be he Mark or Cervantes or Plutarch, say that before. Let us take your life and book as an example: How much profit do you think I have gained from your

epistles to me? What have you said in the second letter that you did not repeat in the last one. Does that matter to me; no it does not. I have a deep feeling about you, and if at times you bore me, well I bore myself perhaps more often. I have not seen you in at least six years, how many opulent and profoundly gifted lines have you been able to add to your book. According to my own sights what you have added, I am talking about the beginning, and am not in any way trying to diminish your Call Me Ishmael, has been exterior and an error. That does not matter either, because the book is so entire without the five or six or seven years that were added to it.

How to speak as simply as I can about the time when I was your guest; does one have to be clever to make you understand that it is base to sit at table and eat better food than you offer your guest. Aldington told me that Gerhardt Hauptman once invited him to dinner; he set a bottle of vin ordinaire before Aldington while he drank rich Sauterne. You will be lenient if I find a dismal cleavage between Hauptman's socialism and his hospitality.

How can you endure what even a Henry Adams found abominable. How can you be a companion of pusillanimous and low politicians whom Thoreau abhorred. How do you propose to guard your own vestal fires in the Augean stables at Washington? Shun the fleshly denials that Melville had, but don't think you can associate with boobs and Barabbases without punishing your nature.

Had you disavowed me for some Timon or Lear or Amos, I would have been stung, but I would have had to own that this was ripeness for you. But you forsook my friendship for the world, and I believe you know what I mean, and how I mean it. "Will ye go away?" asks Jesus. "Whither shall we go?" replies Peter.

You fumble in the human spheres in the book; your prose, so plangent & kelpy in the many pages on Melville's mythology, is American in the beginning. It is a perfect little book once you take those pages out. Well, you will have to wait awhile, maybe months or years, before you feel less greed about your own lines, and know that you will have to peel away the dross until you get to the quiddity of

your own nature which I honor.

At this instant, I have a deep and persistent feeling that the Herman Melville you so pity and kneel before in the Text you would have deserted in the Life.

Charles, we cannot always be as interesting as we think we are. Doubtless, while you were reviling me for writing you letters that were not as remarkable as I thought they were, you were unmindful of the boring observations you were making.

Be patient and ruminative, like Buddha and the Cow. If you are fortunate, you may, after a decade of ennui and stupidity and vice and reading, be able to gather up enough parables and feeling for another small book of genius, like, Call Me Ishmael.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[58 Barrow Street / New York City]
May 17, 1947

My dear Charles: —

Thank you very much for your letter. It is my deep delight to tell you that your prose has the sea and the kelp in it, the murmurous and plangent sound of low, evening surf. No wonder Homer worshipped Oceanus!

I have been brooding about you and your letter and for that reason did not reply at once. Besides, I have been in a defiled, syntax classroom at Brooklyn Polytechnic College. But I would rather do that than get money out of books, not because I am pious, but because I know that lucre and reputation are the same thing today. Have I not observed Waldo Frank run after reputation with sainted bowels, and is he not furtively hankering after Mammon. I do not see him any more, because he writes so badly, and that is a good enough reason. In his upside-down aesthetic prose are all his monkish affectations. However, in a European country, even in England, where people are

less sick with hurry and some homage is still given to a writer, he would probably have written one good book. But here, like a man who is uncertain of his potencies, he has to keep on writing to prove his powers. I'll get my Ilium in other ways!

You feel that I am some kind of United States St. John of Literature, content with the aching genitals and penury of the wilderness. Or maybe you think that I am wooing oblivion slyly, really hoping for a headstone Immortality. What makes you think you know America or Washington any better than the author of Bottom Dogs or Flushing? What makes you so sure that you perceive the world more sharply than Edward Dahlberg, street-urchin, orphan, laborer, vagabond in these States? Is it not intellectually perverse of you to inveigh against the world in CALL ME ISHMAEL while you defend it in your letters? Am I a fool for upbraiding such dove-vendors of Moloch as Van Doren and Brooks, and am I garrulous for repeating over and over again until I am ashes and dust that a thief is a thief and a liar is a liar. When I stop doing this, then you had better be on guard against me. Why should it irk you if I cannot have bland and lukewarm relationships with people who are to be despised and revealed for what they are. How long do you think you can get succor from these people, just so long as they can patronize you. You'll have to be a toady, and a sensitive man is more likely to make a more charming and gifted sycophant than a dullard. It is quite simple, a peasant or an illiterate charwoman can smell such a truth and understand it. You cannot be a member of the National Democratic Committee and expect to go up to the Mountain of Frankincense with Saul's timbrel, wine and loaves. Saul relinquished his heritage for the cattle of the Amaleks, and that is precisely what every young American iconoclast has done. I believe that a breaker of images in a beautiful human culture is a wicked person, but that he is a seer and a poet in a low and lethargic civilization. But what is the little American cycle: first the writer is a young, acerb Timon, but as soon as he gets into comfortable, pragmatical relations with his environment, he is a pickthank friend of the national culture he once abhorred.

Sherwood Anderson, who was much less gifted than you, he was half a Philistine and half a poet, would not go to Hollywood. Look at William Carlos Williams, the baby doctor with the obituary satchel of pills. He had talent and defiance, but during the war he was a police-sergeant of American shibboleths. Ibsen said that it is not necessary to make a definition of art, but what was important was to struggle with those who are against it. The people who hate arts and letters and painting at present are the artists and writers.

I was clairvoyant enough to recognize you in two to three minutes. Do you imagine that if there were a covey of obscure souls and geniuses in this poor, smitten and coarse country I would not somehow know about it. Tell me where all these pulsant and hidden human beings are and I'll run after them so that I won't be so lonely and neglected.

Another thing: It does not matter who influences whom. What is important is that Book. I never patronized you, I argued with you vehemently to make you shed Mark Twain and Hemingway and a number of other literary boors, and you in the end uttered your identity and not mine, and so you proved your own pulses and our friendship. If I am foolish enough to believe that I had a deep influence upon you and your work, and you think I have not, that, too, is insignificant. What we did prove is that two people, with tender feeling, could labor each for his own spirit together. It is the separateness of those individuals who pine as solitary figures for Thebes, Ithaca, Sidon, for the spice-producing countries, that makes it impossible for us to have a literature. Each of us alone is a polluted Onan who spills his seed and his vision.

I have been reading the ancients, making ready to do a book of poetry, and be sure I am not looking for the Cana Pots with which to quench my visionary thirsts. I ache for Arabia Felix and tender human climates washed by the Father of the Streams. If, in the meantime, I go back to the Cape, and find nothing there but a little of Matthew's Salt, I at least can take Strabo with me.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

April 20, 1948

Dear Charles:

You say I am obscure to myself and perhaps ought to be. I do not gainsay that; he that gazes too deeply into his nature is likely to see either Minerva's owl, dragon, and the people, or Jeremiah's three beasts. Man we know is more automatic than intellectual. Write a book, and all you can do is to pray for your powers, and then nobody knows what may happen. Whatever my vices of Baal may be I am haughty rather than overweening; I am too much of the Iscariot waif to be otherwise. Of course, I know more than the American; but such wisdom is penury. Besides, man's knowledge, like the poison of Demosthenes, is drunk from his own quill.

I am deeply mindful of your good nurturing words, and for an instant I go up as Saul did to the Mount of God with the loaves, the flagon of wine and the timbrel, only to drop down again into Lethe's region, America, where the earth is accursed and the fable dead. Jupiter fastens the isle, Delos, when Latona is pregnant with Apollo and Diana; and we, too, when we are teeming with our visionary progeny must have something graspable, or be without vision and poems. You understand this so profoundly in *Call Me Ishmael*, and this I pray you will never lose. The foolish infidel American believes he can write without going to the founts of Helicon, to the hills of Judea, to the Nile lily. "Canst thou draw out Leviathan with an hook?"

Perhaps you should know a little of my life; my fate you can augur; I will never be what I never was; though I walk in the meadows of the asphodels for whatever little books I may conceive. I have almost completed a small volume about the size of *CALL ME ISHMAEL*; but I live so apart from the world that I do not know what I will do with it. Herbert Read tells me I have a small, loyal following in England, but I see no one pursuing me. I have another son, Joel, named after that lovely minor Old Testament verse, and I pray that his tender head has been blessed and shaped by some ancient Prophet

by the Euphrates. For the rest, I have been teaching this past year at Boston University, and am looking for a better place, where education is not a basilisk or the Medusa that turns the bowels to stone. The summers here are hallowed, the ocean a deity, but the winter has been a Cimmerian and misty Bosphorus in my soul.

I do not believe in Jesus as you know; I hardly think he was more than a hurt and wandering Word, as the Gnostics conceived him to be. However, I have no rude phrases for him, be he the Word or the several messiahs that must have come out of Isaiah as Russian literature issued from "The Cloak" of Gogol. There are many parables in Matthew and Luke that have dropped like spikenard into my heart. I try to reread a line, a gnome, and to use it as I can.

As I told you, I have read no modern book since *CALL ME ISHMAEL.* I never looked at a book by Ford Maddox Ford until he died, and I peruse nothing of Herbert Read's. This is not my food; my rapture and my eden are in the ancients, and I go to them to comprehend my perplexities or to give more form to my opaque identity. Of late, I studied The Hyperion with great amazement. His use of mythology, such as "Where Cybele and the bruised Titans mourned" is my conception of homage to the Muses. Your book has been read by my students and by admiring academics. I have little relish for the herd academic mind, but he has not such stygian cunning as the writer.

You must know that I have always been a truthful friend to your genius, though you once said I forsook you. Had I coarse vanity I would agree. When I said to you, "Go," you had already left. I had labored for your spirit, and when I saw Actium almost won you took your sixty vessels and fled.

At the moment, I am weary; my Cana waterpots are empty.

Thank you again for your words, Charles, I savor them as I do your inscription to me in CALL ME ISHMAEL.

My affections,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
Wellfleet, Box 42,
Cape Cod, Mass.

Charles.—I am mortally wounded by silence; it is more destructive than the tongue.—

EDWARD DAHLBERG

The Flea of Sodom

"O my friends there is no friend."
— ARISTOTLE

Let us admit, going over the Atlantic
was a tragic mistake, and that he who drinks
the vile, oceanic froth of Cerberus
loses his memory, and goes mad. Hercules
took his cows no farther than Cadiz, beyond
which men haunt the pitchy fens of the
cormorant and the unclean ibis.

Homer's geography is purest Metaphysics; Cimmerians
occupy fetid, purblind Bosphorus, which is near Hades;
Tartarus almost touches the Pillars, more perfidious than
the Sirens. Hera went no farther than Europe's Oceanus
and Odysseus trod upon the marge of the sea at the
Gates, and retired. The lotus his companions ate yield
spicy, Afric sleep, not Atlantic's horrid Lethe.

Do not pass the Pillars, hankering after new places.
Shun hyperborean lands: impious Prometheus was banished
to the blizzards of Caucasus. Recall how soon Cadmus
forgot the Phoenician shores girt with shells whence
Helen's robes got their Tyrian purple, and sowed
dragon's teeth from which the gory Theban buckler,
spear and iron javelin were wrought. Unknown
countries are Sorcerer's regions of baleful ore. It

is better to be slain by a bow of cornel wood or
face a warrior in a helmet made of the rind torn from
the cork-tree than perish by metal. The weapons by
which man dies reveal whether he lived with the roe
and the hind close by the founts of Helicon, or in
Boreal, gloomy towns. The fleecy Ram of Colchis,
Jason's cargo of copper, iron and coal, is Caesar's Furnace.

Forsake the metal cities, brewing Chimera's noisome
breath, lest you disappear. Zeus' docks are in soft,
Lybian climes. The Bethlehem manger is not far from
Apollo's Ethiopic stables. Jerusalem, Sidon, Crete,
Egypt, Demeter's Basket, is the Kosmos. The dog-
parent, Atlantic, is the sea of oblivion: unhallowed
people, return to the tender fig where the MUSES
sing.

June 6, 1948

Dear Charles: –

I spent the whole sunny afternoon with Herbert Read on the banks of the Charles River. He gave me a clymene plucked from Agamemnon's tomb, and I put into his hands CALL ME ISHMAEL which you never bothered to send me. But then you have your Graces and Dis-Graces. I showed Read lovely lines I had marked, and since I had *bought* two copies of the book I persuaded him to take the one, hoping he might find an English publisher for it. But the Adamic Shame is everywhere, and the small tribe of artists is rapidly disappearing from the earth. I cite Read's remarks: "I enjoyed his book (Charles Olson's) immensely, but wanted to acknowledge all the time the debt he owes you, and which he admits in his oddly interpolated tribute. I think the book has faults – it is willfully disjointed, unconstructed. But the observation is keen, and keenly expressed, and it

moves on the heights of imagination. It is worthy of its great theme—touches the 'inmost centre' of a tragic genius."

Of my own little book he says: "I wish I had some consoling news for you, but my own enthuasiasm for FLEA OF SODOM has not met with the response in the office. Raggi is still a sick man, or I might have relied on him for some support. But to the sales people you are just the author of an unsuccessful book, and there is no inclination even to look at another manuscript, especially one which, on account of its size (very small) presents a special problem in salesmanship. To argue that it should be treated as poetry is no argument at present. . . My own deep pleasure in your writing is not unmixed with a certain appreciation of the salesman's point of view—he can sell cakes and ale and even savory spices, but you are asking him to persuade a constricted multitude to buy a dish of aloes." You see then how it is; either you turn to Pontius Pilate and mock your own entrails or you kneel to Vision, praying that along with the gall and the vinegar you ascend the Mount of God with the loaves, the flagons of wine and the timbrel. You, my dear Charles, are taking neither. You write me a very long letter, giving me frankincense and all the spices of Arabia, and when I reply to you, you simply don't bother to write me again. You are discontinuous, or you've got the occidental disease, being busy. Had you continued to be my friend, the book would not have had those faults in construction, which is simply saying that in the beginning the perceptions are not so swiftly formed as the blessed lines, verdure and sea and ambergris cropped from your Atlantic Ida. Ah, but do not get vexed with me! All that I can say for myself, dwelling as I do on my lonely, and rugged Parnassus is that "Oblivion cannot be hired."

Do you recall how forward Waldo Frank used to be with you, and how irascible you became, and how you even sat in your drawers in his presence to humble him. But you, too, have a perverse heart, and somewhere in this little book which none will have I have written, The froward heart breaks the bones. What are we to do? to lie while

we rot; I hate a thief, cannot endure Barabbas, but the roundabout man makes me rave.

I hope you won't mind any critical remarks Read made about you, since he really cared for the book, and that is what I wanted him to do. All books are errors, or else how could we conceive them?

My affections to you, Charles, and I pray that you try to be simple about simple things; do not mind my counsel too much, you won't heed it anyway. I am a zealot and a quixote fool, that you know, and I have to persuade people, alas, I have nobody to convince save you, I furtively hope, and Herbert Read. The others are gross, of the world and Caesarism. Meanwhile, I read with quiet mirth and benefit Livy and Strabo, and make ready to do a narrative poem about my poor, hapless Mother (about whom you never so much as mentioned, though I sent you sweet, consolatory words of the heart about your Father), going back to ancient common weals, Judges' and Numa's and Cadmus', pouring into the vial of Remembrance the Missouri, the Euphrates and the Nile.

I write, praying to God to bring to my parched stones the Angelis Fountain. O I revere Mnemosyne and Helicon, but what would I not give to put upon my lips some granule of dust where Elijah tread.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
Wellfleet, Box 42,
Cape Cod, Mass.

[Wellfleet, Cape Cod, Mass.]
July 1, 1948

My dear Charles:

I thank you deeply for your fervent letter. Some one at Harvard, one of the business men of the nine Muses, told me you had received another Guggenheim award, and I am very happy that you did. I can-

not get any of the five barley loaves and two fishes from them. Moe, one of the ward heelers of the arts, will do nothing for me. They have made very few mistakes, and you are one of them. As you know, some gray-haired boy gets their spices which we require to put those holy words of the heart on papyrus. I think the dismembered body of Osiris was put into a papyrus boat before it was cast into the Nile.

I am very glad you sent Waldo Frank, a dove-brained effeminate of Ephraim a waspish epistle. He abhors the two of us. The other evening I was at the home of some one who had dinner with Dame Frank and Edmund Wilson. The pair of anti-artists were giving applause to the Paris cafe charlatan, Henry Miller and assailing your book. I said to the man; "Waldo Frank is a sodomite liar. Could he write one of the lovely, sea-pulsing lines in CALL ME ISHMAEL I would be his friend."

You are right, of course, in your anger against Herbert Read. But an English man of letters is so far above the American writer with his cormorant gullet, that lascivious Adam's apple for prurient newspaper notice. You remember how gracious Ford Maddox Ford was, and there is not a doubt that he would have given you lovely tributes for your book. I have never had a civil relationship with the American mountebank of letters. Yes, there was Sherwood Anderson; I enjoyed being with him rather than talking to him. And Aldington, with his blemishes, had not the pretences of a Barbabbas and a buffoon.

I must tell you, that Waldo Frank did not even bother to reply to my petition. I only hope that the Erinyes will pursue him. He never committed any great sin or adamic vice; but let him be cast to the fish for his spite and his coarseness. I suppose we must not forget his gluttony.

Read, I am sure, does respect your imagination; but he has that frugality of the hyperborean. I sent him my MS and he said it was poetry and wanted to find a way of publishing it as verse, but he had fewer words to say about it than he had for CALL ME ISHMAEL. Yet when we spent the day in Boston together he took out two clymenes

from Agamemnon's tomb and gave me one of them. Do not be severe with him; he would be deeply impressed with you if you and he talked.

I am deeply sorry that you and Connie cannot come up for the week. There is a genial covey of people here, summer scenery, of course, Paul Magriel whom you know, and Gonzales the artist. All pay me homage, and I know none is a friend. It takes great genius to be a friend; doubting Didymus, nor timorous Peter was, and though John of Zebedee leaned up the Master's breast at the Passover meal, what did he do for the hapless man who took the hyssop and the gall for a Kiss!

You have my heart-gratitude for what you say about my Mother whose pilgrimage upon this doleful earth was such a pang and wound. I have been reading for over two years for this book of verse. Fools call me arrogant, and yet I dare not write one line without the succor of a Master. I have been reading Dionysius and Diodorus, ay, even the rhetorician and poet Ausonius shows me how to form a winged line. A poet is always a journeyman, a humble and fumbling apprentice. I am only arrogant with my adversaries whom I recognize on the quick of my soul.

I would like to see you do the Moby Dick ballet; it would please me so if you could get some money for it, — that dragon, money, that spews forth its noisome fire at God, and who is, perhaps, peer to him who creates, or greater, for is not destruction in the flesh of man so much deeper than the will to prune a tree, or build a littoral city, or to make a piazza where good men can talk. How I pine for Abydos, or Sidon where Paris got his purple robes for Helen, or mourn for Rachel's Well, or go out of my wits for Sais. We are born in a most unseasonable century, and if we do not gather together, four or five of us, we will all be lost, and the cicadas will be mute for a thousand years.

I want to get a copy of my MS. I wonder, then, Charles if you would read it. It is a very brief book. Oh, I must tell you, that is why the men of Gaza and Ashkelon so abhor us. Our books are too short.

What know they of Joel or Amos or the Georgics or Bucolics? Do they recollect that the whole of Heraclitus' fame rests upon five hundred lines. The same is true of Empedocles. A line of his I love so much is this, "The blood around the heart is the thought of men."

If you and Connie can find a way of being our guests, it will be our savory delight to have you.

I am very sorry about the postponement of the French translation of CALL ME ISHMAEL. That may bring you English publication. That is why I gave your book to Herbert Read. If I find an English publisher for my little volume, be sure that I will labor to see that your own book is printed in London. I am not hankering after many readers; it is a dismal folly.

Forgive me, if I said anything about the PREFACE that irked you; do pardon me. I do not covet your Gift, not because I feel too sure of myself,— believe me, underneath my little rock of Peter sings the Worm. Give me for my life and spirit two or three Charles Olsons, Men at Mamre, and I can sit like Abraham meditating underneath the Terebinths waiting for Vision. But I ask much, too much!

Your friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Wellfleet, Cape Cod, Mass.]
July 29, 1948

My dear Charles:

I have not replied to your kind note at once for a simple and plain reason: I am retyping the MS. and making corrections, generally curtailments, whenever I can. Should the heat become too rancid for you and Connie, or should it be possible for you to get away to the shore for Poseidon's brine, please come up.

I respect Keats deeply; that you know; I cannot mention him without *speaking feelingly* of him. I intend to look up the letter to

Reynolds.

Once you signed one of your letters Troilus, and I did not understand. In my friendship with you I do not think I have ever been a male Cressid; I hope not.

I wrote to Read suggesting that we form a small Anglo-American-French group of writers. We know that the real poets are hid in some grassy crevice of the earth, in Provence, more likely in the gutters of Paris and London. Otherwise, who is going to print a man of feeling, and who will read him? There is even more coarseness in the world than depravity. There are no simple, stupid people in America. That kind of peasant brain has vanished. Ignorance begets malice as Isaac begat Jacob.

I wonder why you who have so many graces of the heart sign yourself yours. It was that kind of little secretarial epistle that you originally wrote me that so irked me. I cannot endure, American lack of feeling; and I cannot stomach, I beg to be your remains, or I am insincerely yours, or untruly yours. That sort of thing in the pachydermatous American makes my navel sick.

I have always had profound affection for you, and I send it to you again; you know John Keats' remark about the friendship of two men, "passing the love of women." When we speak of Keats, we are not thinking of Ham, or the dove-brained effeminates of Ephraim. Once you asked me about the rites of Moloch, which was a homosexual idol, I am sure; they passed their seed, through the fires of Moloch, or put their progeny into the oven of that loathsome image of Philistia.

Your friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

August 3, 1948

My dear Charles:—

I have just finished, and I am infernally depleted. This is my

autobiography since our infernal cleavage eight or nine years ago. I always wanted you to understand that I was never in competition with you, not because I am so sure of myself. Nothing could be less true of my own pulses. All I care about is to utter some Edenic Truths, and perhaps either in dream or in trance to lower my eyes as Helen descends the steps or to bow my face to the ground as Abraham did when God spoke to him. Alas, no one has spoken to me, "either Jehovah" or man, and here is my little monologue, part fable and part essay.

People have said I have deeply influenced you. This is a foolish remark. Of course, I probably have, and that is why you wrote as you did, very beautiful, murmuring sea lines, and not as I could. There can be no literature without a small tender group of men of feeling who are constantly sharpening each other. What people who do not understand such a simple truth as this is that I could not have written CALL ME ISHMAEL, or even one lovely line in it.

If we are to continue in our friendship, and I wish it for my sake and also deeply for yours, not because I deem myself a purer imagination than yours, but because you require my guidance. Take this, please, from a man who says this without pretence, who is not flamboyant, and who is sufficiently obscure to have plain truthful words in his soul. I want to use Sir Thomas Browne's "Oblivion cannot be hired" as the superscription for this very small book if I can find some one who will print it. I do not say publish it. I do not hanker after many readers; what I want are a few friends, ay five or seven or ten, if that is not too much. If God were willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if he had ten devout kneelers for his frankincensed altars, should I be so overweening as to expect more or as much.

I pray to God and to my poor, tender Mother who are the Cherubims of what Truths I may know that I have written without deceit or any surreptitious vanity.

Your faithful and affectionate friend.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Western Union Telegram, Undated] [Wellfleet, Mass.]

EDWARD DAHLBERG

FLEA DELIGHT. I GREET IT AS FIRST LEVITICAN FABLE. BEAUTIFUL.

CHARLES

August 17, 1948

My dear Charles:

I sent you a telegram from Boston. I have bursitis, an abhorrent word. Little wonder that the fabric of language is so wounded, for what is more indecent and base than the medical, the economic, the sociological or psychological vocabulary, which is the source of modern literature. I must return to the hospital for a general anaesthesia for a bone-manipulation.

I sent you another wire in reply to your own that came to me when I was as mortally slain as the vile kings in the slime-pits. I give you then, my deep, deep thanks for this revivification. Your letter, which I had not answered, because my faculties were drugged with codeine, I keep as the plaister of figs for my afflictions.

Your rearrangements I have accepted almost without change, Your omissions I imagine are correct; I say it this way intentionally. Recall Charles how deeply vexed you were with me when I suggested certain deletions in CALL ME ISHMAEL. Only in the full, amatory excitement of writing, when one loves every word, am I sure. Later I am very uncertain, for my brain is too drained for such knowledge. You remember that amazing line from Empedocles I use in The Rational Tree, "The blood around the heart is the thought of men." But after that blood has ebbed, after one has come down again from the Mount of God, having worshipped, eaten the loaves, drunk the flagon of wine, and played the cithera, the deity in man's breast has

expired. Again I must say, I can pray that The Rational Tree is what I had asked heaven for. Suppose what I thought was the Burning Bush is sumach, as I believe some ancient has surmised, am I to be brazen-necked about it. If you put your heart in Esau's hairy palm, and he rejects it, you must then fight the wild Ancestors of Edom with all the weapons of your soul.

The Mint in London was supposed to have brought out The Rational Tree; two issues of the Mint, an annual publication, and a subsidiary of Routledge, have appeared, but I do not know whether there will be a third. Twenty thousand copies of the second were printed, and only eight thousand were sold. I am always in the issue that does not appear!

I cite a droll paragraph from Herbert Read's letter to me: "Last week an American publisher came into my office and asked me if there was anything new in the world of letters. I said that the only new thing of importance was by an American writer. I gave him your name. He knew you—it was James Laughlin, and he went away in a meditative mood. You may hear from him." I have not.

I have suggested to Read that we organize an Anglo-American-French group to publish those psalmists hid away in the grassy crevices of the earth, and whose songs only the pastures and the cicadas can hear. Naturally, should this happen, I know of only one American writer who has a lute and a timbrel in his spirit whom I would ask to join this little band of chanting augurs, and his name is Charles Olson. I know I have not thanked you enough, but then no man can ever be grateful enough for truth from God or balm from man.

Know that I love and esteem your Imagination.

Your friend,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, North Carolina
[September 16, 1948]

My dear Charles:

I want to send you my bounty of thanks for your gentle sympathy and companionship. I am very sundered at the root of my identity, which has become a widowed waste-land where I weep with the cormorants and the bats for my angelic infant son, Geoffrey. I cannot fathom these furied Medusas who bedung your soul while uttering words of mercy for your hindrances.

I earnestly hope that Connie is quickly coming through. These would be sweet Oceanic afternoons on the sands for you and her, and a plaister of kelp and brine would heal her as Isaiah cured Hezekiah.

I am too torn to write more.

I do not know whether I can endure the life here smitten as I am. Could I get part-time teaching in New York or Washington I would leave at once. I have not the sinewy courage to go out into combat against pachydermatous students. I have already given two lectures and it was vanity and a striving after wind. I am sick unto nausea of trying to prove myself to others who lurk in the thistles and the cockles waiting to snare me.

I wanted to give Sam Rosenberg a copy of Sing O Barren, but he ran away.

My love,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Washington
Monday September 20 xlviii

Edward:

No, the Tree and the Flea are not one. It is the Book of Edverbs,

the Mount of Dahl, pressing. It is wise as men are not. It is thick, as though around the heart. It is apothegm, apothegm, uttered, uddered, and thrusts, from your appetence. It is a Book, of itself—or the Mother of other Fleas. It is not the Flea.

I have just read it, marked it, would wish to make immediately selections from it as you have from Laertius, Chaucer, Hesiod, Amos, to put into my blood its sayings. If I sit on my chair, the ass's stool, and make recommendations, you will know I know the ears are big, and a man's mouth wide.

If I had my hand press (others bake bread) I would print FLEA first, then TREE, both such things as we recover from the ancients, codex, incunabula they call them, seeds, I prefer, papyri, biblum, out of pyramids.

((Such sentences as:

> . . . . . a Roman Egypt whose figs give suck to the asps in Cleopatra's Basket
>
> Ishmael, in his wild ass's solitude, will bite off his flesh for a soft look. (Do I not?)
>
> Culture is conversation
>
> a man of feeling kneels in his heart at the mention of Solomon and Chaucer
>
> the energies of the soul parched
>
> Evil and spoiling are in the imagination of families and races
>
> the children of Israel preferred to eat the leeks, the cucumbers and the melons as slaves in Egypt than go to battle

The whole trembling Part 5: The seer was he who sat (Beautiful sentence! And the paragraph:

> Be quiet, my ribs; stay home, lambs and goats of Ai. Rest; the ships of Tarshish are in your room: Eden is in a chair. Sit, my heart, and Schechem and Uz are thine

Argos was the udder of the land, according to nourishing Homer

copying down everything he said on the shoulder-blades of oxen

Or, Dr Swift, and the horse

Shame is man's portion, and where there is no modesty the Cicadas are silent

Famine and scab do not plague the heart like insolence. (Or a sentence not in Tree: Ignorance begets insolence as Jacob begets Isaac)

Courtesy is the handmaid of learning

Vice is not so miry close to the Cherubims . . . (and the images of the Proof)

Hebrew literature is admonitory lore

If a truth is uttered by a froward person it should not be heeded until it rests again upon pure lips (and the mighty lines which follow)

What matters most

On haste: dung as you run

And the Words of what can the mind do. . . .

TO USE WORDS WRONGLY CREATES EVIL IN THE SOUL

The lovely phrasing "When the past was beginning to fall somewhat feebly on Homer's ear"

THE OBSCURE REGIONS, OR THE IRRATIONAL, ARE THE MOTHER AND FATHER IN THE SON

Testicles — by Ceres!

The ass that made the grapes more plentiful by browsing on the vine-shoot taught men how to prune

Pascal on fear

The will empowers the soul

The passage which begins: "Eden is a shepherd's culture in which there is no time."

The head which jibes more than venery

ennui and fire will roar in his veins like the Fires of Gomorrah

and not to interrupt the Festival of Ceres

It is not difficult to say why I separate the Tree, Gomorrah, from the Flea, Sodom. It is the presence of the narrative, which is the Judas who is not present, even tho his creator is, his creature, in the Tree. Nor is it the narrative or the I as decoy: it is that Horror, that which is, is juxtaposed. The eagle AND the cow.

The Tree is the "Sayings of Dahlberg" as those of Socrates which you could not tell me where to find.

The Flea is one of the lost tragedies of Diogenes.

End: you will guess, if you know me, that that I read the Tree proves today was the first chance TO SIT. And these notes will tell you plain what you know that it takes more rumination than I have yet had to speak.

Constanza improves most slowly. All I was able to do was to divert and prepare myself by buying Bohns and Loebs: Athenaeus, Hesiod, Catullus, the Anthology, the Morals, Theocritus, Herodotus, Percy's Reliques, John Lyly's Plays, Elizabethan Lyrics. I traded all week: Lowdermilk was best, tho Reifsneider is now in my hand. But I have lost Ornstein: he could not stand that Reif gave me 13 dollars for what he offered 7!

Do not, please, be upset by what I have said. Am I so wise? I am not. I am in love with FLEA — and as I told you, I am of such a nature . . . . TREE is very beautiful.

Your friend
CHARLES OLSON

Hotel George Washington
23 Lexington Ave. at 23rd Street
New York 10, N.Y.
September 29, 1948

My dear Charles:

Would you please send this letter on at once air mail. I have picked up some teaching but must find an inexpensive room. I got a much softer letter from Winifred. What chattering, mournful doves we are when we have no need to be a serpent. She needs money, and so I must earn money to send it to her to help keep her and my two infants.

This in haste, Charles. Please let me hear your decision. I have interviewed about five Columbia graduate students, none of whom I could send down with any assurance. Am I to appoint a teacher for Black Mountain College who will praise Hemingway and syntactical Tate and so help remainder our books.

That reminds me, in conclusion, American neuter style, I beg to remainder your books; you need not bother about mine. I have always had the most chivalrous publishers who have taken care of this for me.

I do earnestly hope that your Constanza is thriving again.

My love,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
General Delivery,
Church Street,
New York, N.Y.

[added in printed script]
I got your book for nothing, a pure metaphysical price, signed by you!

[Enclosed with letter to Olson]

My dear Winifred:

On October 28th our darling Geoffrey will be three years old. I should like to buy clothes for him and to kiss him. I must tell you, Winifred, I prefer to be the raging Furioso than the soft and nimble Iago. You do yourself great wrong in heeding the counsel of easy spoken deceit. I wish for yourself you would depart from the vile Bosshards and Moore. Why do you go to people whom you abhor; you ever looked for Moore's death and the Bosshards you found dullards; a dull man is always a baleful basilisk.

I am perplexed to have your letter proffering friendship whilst you prepare in your heart a legal document designed to purloin whatever I have. As I said in my previous words to you I do not smart at the loss of possessions. Can I eat the pewter, the pottery, the chairs bought with so much tender feeling; eat them, Winifred, but in the end it will fill the gullet of Charybdis. Abstract the gold from my poor mother's blood, but it will do you no good. I am certain of that, knowing how we are tormented for our baneful acts. I shall oppose you in nothing; I am simply amazed at your fond and erring nature: you value my friendship yet you rush to lawyers to filch from me land, house, goods, — ay it is sad that you should do so. You tell me you are not avaricious! maybe not; but tell me how you spell your deeds. Have I not repeatedly told you that I had no wish to slough away any burden I owed you and our tender fleshed infants. When you wrote me the letter saying how little money you had, I had less than you, and could not then get any. Olson's wife was in the hospital and his Guggenheim dollars were not released. I had already borrowed heavily against my salary. Yet do not think it was painful to me not to be able to send you money at once. Of course, I realized you might take money from me and then jibe at me in your soul. Winifred, if you have not Clytemnestra's liver you will tread more gently upon my life. It cannot be wholly opaque to you that you kindled the greatest rages in me. It is a fine and wily subterfuge to tell lawyers, police, jackanapes, foul-livered and rank lipped dolts how cruel and

darksome and blackamoor is my soul. But what do you say to your hidden self? Did I grudge you dollars; did I spare my skin when you required protection; did I benefit in any way from your trust, a sore evil to me always? Pile on my head the plague of your own perversity, and you drop ruin upon your face. Neither you nor I can shun the fate we woo. The property you are taking perforce from me will be dust; neither you nor our hallowed children will have any benefit from it. Without my counsel the trust will moulder too. And what will happen to you, Winifred; you will cry out in your affliction for the man you now gull and despise. I beg you to do one thing; yes, get the divorce you pine for; take the belongings perforce; disport if you must with low, cankered skin. Just let me see and touch our two infants. I will clothe them and do all that I can to help you; you know I am no skinflint. Let me spend the day with Geoffrey, that is, the 28th of October; if you wish, come on the 29th, bring Joel, please, and any doughty protector you wish. If you will show some heart's civility I can relieve you of hardships and will do so freely. You can shed the bland tear upon legal shoulders, also, and make your own court-room exactions. That won't do you much good, Winifred; the houses have their dangling, taloned roots in loathly sand; I have not. However, I beg you to know that it is in my free desire to be an advantage to your life regardless of what fetters you forge on what stinking stithy of fate. That, alas, is your doing. I will not deny, that if the varlets you trust at the instant harm you, it will be grievous to me.

Naturally, I will take care of all expenses. I suggest meeting you in New York because Washington is too far; besides, I detest Massachusetts more than Poe did.

Have pity on Geoffrey and Joel; do not orphan them so long as nature does not. You know how I dote on Geoffrey; without him I walk a sundered Lucifer on asphalt and bitumen. The very little I ask you for is that benediction you must not deny our infants, some touch with the nature of their father.

I am reading constantly, Shakespeare, Josephus, Philo, Horace, a Christopher Smart translation Olson has given me, and gathering my

forces to asssault Pisgah. This time I shall see Canaan!

Will you, please, Winifred, send my overcoat and my corduroy shirts, and the books and the photographs of my mother. I asked you for these in my previous letter.

Read this epistle carefully, and see whether anything in it is not plain and straightaway. See whether I urge you to drop any action you deem a protection to yourself although you procure this by wounding my name and pressing your heel hard upon the very essence of my spirit. I want one thing: I believe the issue of Edward Dahlberg should have some palpable connection with his impalpable image. Had you been the Beatrice of my soul, you would know that every apostle of vision from the beginning of time has been roughly spat upon by the mediocre. You wanted a poet to have the easy and pliant acquiescences of the rude, the liar and the fool. Like the admiring rout we had around us; you admired my book but fled from the wisdom therein. But time will hear me out, and all the revolting dust that now wickedly lies upon my name, will go to their burial place of oblivion and Acheron filth, but my words will breathe like the Ephesian sod. I know that and need no one else save my own pulses to give me the oracular knowledge.

Take care of our beloved little stalks of innocence, and make a quiet covenant with me that will be goodly for our infants. Ask yourself, whether I ask much; remember what I have often cited from St. Shakespeare; use these lines as your aegis when you are prompted to run to evil mouths and pustular lips for a judgment of me, "Goodness and wisdom to the vile seem vile; filths but savour themselves."

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[post card, in printed script]

Dear Charles: —

Thank you very much for the Books, and for the Words: I love Both.

Soon as I have some tranquil moments, & can in some way dissolve the melancholia in my bones — ay, I am as sad as Saul, knowing not how to avert fate & Mt. Gilhoa, I will write, & earnestly thank you —

My love —
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Hand-written, both sides of a post card] [New York City]
Oct 4, 48

My dear Charles: —

Thank you deeply for your letter. Did you mail the book, or am I to continue to be the first infidel, the alone & the dark that Adam begot before Seth. The harpy harrys, Harry Moore, Harry Bosshard (with the help of Anne, who has the glazed eyes of the rodent) are working with her. So would you, please, Charles, say that I'm living in a room in Washington should any one ask. I must keep this N.Y. residence hidden.

I could get you part-time teaching in N.Y. if you wanted it, but you would have to move with celerity. Did you send Cloutrem a letter?

I earnestly hope Constanza is much improved —

Forgive these bleak, tombed words [of ?] [?] Sam Rosenberg I think of him, his wallet as shiny as the Jade Rozinante because of me — —

Your friend,
EDWARD

It was very good of you to send the Ms. so quickly — — Thanks, thanks.

[Washington, D.C.]
Wednesday [October, 1948]

Edward:

Constanza goes now to the post office to see this off to you — yr card just came in the afternoon mail.

You are right, I probably will jump on new york like an animal. Yr address leaves me in a quandary where to send this ten dollars. I shall send it to Church St.

So do excuse these bare words — it is an act of despatch.

Love fr us both
CHARLES

[post card in printed script]

Dear Charles: 1.

My grateful appreciation for the ten dollars — I am too sundered to write you as my heart dictates. This woman has put her hece upon my spirit, it is so flattened no blood flows. Your troubles, [lov?], are another stinging defeat upon my head. Should you & Constanza wish to go to the Wellfleet house (it has an automatic oil furnace, brand new, & neither you nor I could blow it up, God or Devil-willing).

2.

I wish I could write, & assault the heavens — — All my Pulses urge me to — — but one reading of the Psalms of St. Shakespeare, "I will wrestle till my thigh is wrenched, with the Angel at Peniel — — These are blades in my throat & my pain pierces so — — — —

My love to you & Constanza
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Does Constanza know some woman who could put thru a call to Chicago from New York — — some one in New York, with vocal secretarial efficacy,

who could be representing a teacher's agency — I hope, maybe, to get Winifred's address, & see my Geoffrey! darling stalk of pulsing innocence. Please let me know by return mail, Charles — —

Your friend & Constanza's

[post card with printed script] [New York City]
still at Broadway Central Hotel

Dear Charles: —

I earnestly hope you are out of bed now; would urgently advise you not to make the journey south until you are stronger!
Professor Cargill, an admirer of "Call Me Ishmael," wants to meet you & have lunch — I'll [introduce] you when you come to N.Y. I saw a copy of the volume in a bookshop, "Call Me Ishmael" & could not resist buying it.
2. There are a few others who would like to know you. I put your book in everybody's hands.
I toil for my life, my spirit, & pray heaven, my wrath will be no less than Achilles', & my words as sharp as the Deliah Ash when I get to my book! Ay I pray, — so many of my petitions to heaven have been bootless cries. Would you, please, ask Albers to have my books, all in cartons, sent Railway Express, to me — — I have also there some clothes, a student lamp, a couple of pieces of pewter, Navajo Rugs, a hat, an aluminum spun study lamp — — I would be grateful if you could get a student to pack them very securely. Perhaps you would be good enough to see that he does. Almost everything is tied up in cartons except Friedlander's 4 volumes on Roman Manners & Habits, very scarce — —
Please send the verse as early as you can — —, take care of yourself &
all love to you & Constanza — —

EDWARD DAHLBERG

You are [ ] about Sam R.

Washington
Thursday [October, 1948]

My dear Edward:

Albers has written, accepting my decision not to leave Washington this year, but inviting me to come down for a week now to lecture and give seminars. It fits, for Constance needs such a change before returning to her job, which she is now determined to do. So it looks now as though we will spend next week down there. And what I'm hoping might emerge from it is some arrangement by which I might go down there a little of each month, in such fashion to make it possible for us to get through this winter financially. I'd hazard the guess some such plan is in Albers mind. So, if you will now add your blessing to what was born in your brain in the 1st place, Black Mt may be the magic to solve what has, up to now, been a knot in which I was so bound I was unable to use my sword.

((Your mail, or messages, from you and to you, will be forwarded with ours, and I shall despatch them to you, Edward.

And do write again. Your postcard was a golden leaf in this drear fall week, and I am most anxious to have your news of the diseaseion of Farrar & Straus.

Sam grunted. (I gather he is Rosinante. The Institute don't pay, have 17,000 deficit.)

I have spent two days in Crete and Mycenae, following an Ariadne thread of my mind, and feel somewhat refreshed. But the words do not go down on paper and you know, cher maitre, what that means to such a neolith as I.

Constanza is now almost a woman again and joins me

in love,

CHARLES

[New York City]
October 9, 1948

My dear Charles:

I wish I had the grassy quiet of the early Genesis Giants. There has been word from her. A legal document which I refused came from Wareham, Mass, and that is doubtless her word and gift. It will, perhaps, now go back to Wareham, and then be mailed to Black Mountain or to you. I must keep my New York whereabouts sphynxed. It is registered and requires a return signature. Will you please handle it as skillfully as you can and send it to me so that it will not be known to her that I am in New York. There is the base problem of finding a lawyer here. I do not know to whom to go. Worst of all, my tender Geoffrey is still hidden from me, and that is "The cankerous wound that bites my flesh." If you have, Charles, any suggestions please let me know. Meanwhile, I walk a solitary Lucifer upon bitumen and asphalt.

It is a felicity to hear that you're making arrangements with Albers that will be helpful to you. I earnestly hope that Constanza will benefit by some change. Should you want me to write to Albers suggesting that you go down once a month for lectures and seminars I will do so at once.

I regret to hear that neither Sam nor his Rozinante wallet is to be fed barley, hens, or for his teaching. You were as wily as Odysseus about that school; little wonder that Roosevelt wanted to appoint you the assistant secretary of the treasury. Such exchequer olfactories!

Your judgments on the Tree are doubtless very good; the obscurity which compression brings is still unresolved. It is a fault. I have always believed that the path to perception is perception, and that all else is waste, Dead Sea prose.

The MS has not been read. Whether so small a book will entice a publisher is perhaps doubtful. I am thinking of following a suggestion you made and organically enlarging The Flea of Sodom by pilfer-

ing gnomes from the Tree. It is wholly your thought. What I will do is to fatten incident with more adages and add new ones too.

You see I write fumblingly. My letter is not sharply limned as yours. My soul and my knees are feeble, yea, as weak as the cony in the Psalms. You have now the books you need for your spirit and when you have fed upon Bashan and Carmel you will be more filled than when you wrote CALL ME ISHMAEL. So be patient; take your loaves, your timbrel and flagon of wine and go up to the Mount of God.

My head was my obsession, says Verhaeren. Mine is Geoffrey, and when I do not think of him my mind is upon my friend, Charles Olson.

Love to you and to your Constanza,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

△

Paul Blackburn

The Term

In Spain one drinks from both cups.

Split a diamond, quarter it, cut it in eighths :
the glamour of increasing surfaces.
And in getting below them
one partakes of aspects
like wounds.
The fact, the designation, are only two
ports of entry, Mister
Pythagoras.

Ulysse dixit:
"I have been to talk to Tiresias.
He said, 'Take an oar
and walk inland with it
until they think you are foolish.
Go even further
they will think it is something else.
That way you will live very long.' "

"Pero, trabajarlos, señor, no es fácil."

MEANING THE EARTH, HERSELF,
MEANING HIS OWN DAMNED TERRACES.
There was another said it to me
meaning the bulls he fought.

For the poet

each poem.

Michael Palmer

Echo

(texte antiparallèle pour Pascal Quignard)

which resounds. Re-sounds. Where first would
follow. The letter he had lost reappeared in
his palm. Identity was the cause. Not that the
word spoken had been heard. Not that a word
spoken can be seen, even partially, traced
against the screen. Language copies him in its
listening, tracing his imperfect copy. Which
re-sounds. Echoes briefly. The rustling a
wall transmits by interference. For example:
raised both arms above his head. And said:
a letter a letter can be reckoned with. Rustling
as of an article of clothing such as a dress or
green dress. An even greyness as of a page,
recording events. The subject is this, rustling
at the moment of enunciation, to be reckoned
with. Not that the words thus raised above the
head and turned into hills. Could possibly. Be
recognized in his own misunderstanding. After
the talking is done a kind of attention to each
mark, an injured identity traced against the
screen. Soweto-Miami. Cremated beside the river.

which sounds (sounded) different at night. Not
that the words reassembled among hills, exactly,

where there were none. A rustling seized him,
the history of cloth and wind, hedgerows. Or
windows above rivers, cornflowers and forget-
me-nots, an even blueness as of a page, a failure
at translation. The distant past visited and we
whispered her well. Heard prior to itself and
dressed as a shadow. Not that the words re-
sembled hills exactly, hidden among them. Soweto-
Miami as of a particular light, a quality. Hills
where there were none, only sounds. Body of per-
haps a dog, afloat, the first ten notes, major
then the minor mode. Echoes an attention.

as if preceding, preceded by, itself, depth of
the forest. The subject is this, disregarded,
story of cloth and wind or the space between
events.

misunderstood as a measure of distance. It
takes no time in that sense, repeats nothing,
figures the shape of the flames. Gesticulate.

a failure of translation. In sleep the language
he spoke was one he didn't know. Waking it
sounded the same. Waiting there it seemed a
succession of names, a level field of things in
constant motion, exchanging identities.

neither followed nor following. Two are there as
she counts to one, to one and one then three five
eight defining the spiral, to double sevens to
begin, to instauredness. Left arm and right and
the figures like the fire. There must be a

different metric, a gesture and that's all, this
this and so on, concomitance, like writing but
it's not a writing, the pieces actually are.

across water. Soweto-Miami with no distance, the
figures the fragments of a picture. She refused
the explanation before it was made. Who (pre-
vious to speaking) woke against a door. Right
arm detached these past weeks, greyness modi-
fied at each stage.

This I saw and said at once.

Case where he has visions of his dead friend.

in gesturing there. The letter he had lost was
the cause, an imperfect copy spoken among hills
or reassembled there.

The letter he had lost was the cause, a dead
friend traced against the screen. They are
listening to songs while waiting for morning.

Forgetting the name as it sounds, an unknown
city, the journey never begun. Letter (book)
deafened by echoes, figure (form) an even grey-
ness indicating the river.

What we call depth then, of forest, mirror,
conviction etc, voiced as fake history. As
morning is said to offer new hope or no hope
in what must be or may have been a court-
yard where photographs substitute for trees,

benches and walls, each detail perfectly reproduced from the story he was told about how it all would eventually appear. Thus the severed head is an object of polite discussion and necessary to the tableau like the polychrome statuary and exotic flora we admire more than words can say.

She claims they are trying to fuck their way into history and so to change it, and for a moment we both do and do not agree. The river in the background is muddy, the lamenting figures the same shape as the flames. The subject, disregarded, is the frequency of the oscillation, the coincidence of cloth and wind, hedgerows. She discovered the pen beneath her bed.

of interest because unspoken: to the eye over water; softly repeated; erasure in the naming; 'many-tongued'.

She discovered the pen and returned it to him.

disappeared then, leaving a voice behind unlike her own.

They do both agree and disagree, the numbers and voices projecting above the ostinato figure, violinist the father's son, lawns crisp and green, indifferent, the visible world, auricle of the ear cool, fresh, rough, succulent to the touch.

She claims they want to agree but disappear
while speaking, brief redness of history softly
repeated, the severed head a substitute for
trees intended as an aid to memory.

She claims they want to eliminate history, legs
turned to smoke, carriage passing a row of
columns said to be endless because it does end.

A very narrow but not very tall glass-domed
house with two entrances. Nodded as if she be-
lieved what I'd said, carriage rocking on its
worn springs, a constant trembling.

So it is equivocal and precedes its beginning.

I over there, he-she here, table and lamp.

is brought forward from, toward the eye. Water's
moment as of blocks, uninvited, a one-hinged
sound that sleep recited, what he was of, half-
yellowed now by leaves, as of blocks carved
clumsily and set afloat, stairs cast in dark-
ness, curtain held tightly shut then drawn a
little apart, a redness to history reflected
wherever words might turn to talk and tell of
a mirrored door.

which to be so must remain closed?

and so and so. He told her what she'd once
told him.

Dear Janet, When I want to get away from it all
I pick up one of your novels and—presto—
mission accomplished!

Whether dreaming is thinking about something.
Whether the eyelids moving are seeing.

which to be so must remain closed?

naked to waist with back turned, arms enfolding
head, world large by lamplight rolling us even
in sleep, a redness to the story they'd been
told.

He painted her beside herself as a likeness,
and each face seemed identical with the one they
had known.

She claims they are trying to erase the story by
repeating it exactly as it was told. Thus clema-
tis, tea, rhubarb, Indian fig, water and its
cognates, of worlds twice seven, wheat and corn.
Thus table and lamp (or desk and light), sheets
(or leaves), wordless talk, gestural dreams
empty of meaning, palms in paramuthetic wind.
This with my own words she told him.

And told him again.

Echo

(alternate text)

The two poles. We didn't disagree
that meetings should be begun

upon our foreheads—slender
memories had been put to death

in the proper style, encounters
with forests, mountains

and fields, creatures returning
from islanded sleep

said nothing
nervous and unattended

as we wept. This habit of yellow paper
is recent and without effect

upon our foreheads—slender
runners outstripped them

and said nothing
as we wept. What

time of day now
might say differently

'this weapon is invisible,' or
this name so pronounced

with lips inconceivably apart
has been lost

within its sound,
might then among the *llaneros*

recite tales of night rides
that take no time

or nothing if not time
to tell. Visitors gathered there to hear

it said—backward
it's true—that

he and she were
this and this, not

any one shade exactly
not any one thing

outlined by its clarity
against the milky glass.

At a given moment lovers pass
in complicated hats

the wind will later take back.
The bedstead is iron, with-

out ornament and not mine. Its
fading is what recalls it

to them, an imaging of the rings
of fractured ice

coating volute and column
overhead. Yet some of those

paths were like maps, green
for no reason, pale

orange where no one had been.
Knowledge is empty claimed the swaying bridge.

She recognised the voice as her own
resounding in the damp hall

though the rest,
what the words now said

again and again,
seemed entirely different.

Echo

(a commentary)

which in a dry season might
begin or might precede its
beginning with a list
of truths self-evident: these
clouds (these crowds) you
now see are permanent
and fixed; the arboreal splendor, the
meadows and chalk cliffs
are artificial, devised
of wired concrete and paint
by a developer in the forties
and therefore beautiful; he took
three breaths for every one of hers;
the sun's chariot hurried backward
in its path to a point
exactly overhead and two months before;
the child had trouble speaking;
war was once again in the air;
the space program was to blame for the
snow; nervous
brides waved
weapons in the air; passions
and sensations succeed each other; I
stumbled; I recognised Bugs Bunny;

the darker one had not yet
closed her eyes; weight of a mass
of fair hair; below
a certain temperature the pen
would not write; below
them lay a square
filled with soldiers and statues;
the road north from the city
parallels the river; some
laughed and turned their backs;
enclosed were seven songs;
the letters grew bolder;
heat, cold, light, shade;
the key broke off in his hand;
they lived beneath the streets
to evade certain death; the name
began with a *L* or possibly an *R;*
he scored the loaf at each day's portion;
the distribution of brightness oscillates;
bells mark points in space;
an odor of sulphur penetrated the room
though the windows had been carefully sealed;
one could see the outline of a movement
there; was I the source of such dreams
without meaning; actual
dancers traced against the ceiling;
a bluish violet; echoes
as of such voices
which once had claimed to be real;
a city then they would later imagine
pendant to the west like a jet bead
except empty; the rose she called *cette*
apparition sanglante, cette image;

the apple falls straight down
injuring thousands; we mounted the scaffold
at his unspoken invitation;
a liquid darkness there;
figures lost among the bands of light
came slowly forward; a duplicate
of herself encountered in passing
nodded and disappeared; it remains
visible above the narrow shore;
they are visible against the shore;
the forgotten word for waves; hazelnut
and monkey-flower; the key first
spoken of; wide azure borders.

△

Clayton Eshleman

The Loaded Sleeve of Hades

There is in you someone
who does not care about anyone,
whose ant-eater head vacuums about in the night
ingesting whatever ideology
is thrust up its labyrinthine nose—
this someone must be over 100,000 years old,
for Neanderthal began to care
strewing his dead with bachelor's button,
hollyhock and grape hyacinth.
And did you know that caves are warehouses
in which the ghosts of winds that first
investigated the pre-Cambrian earth
are also stored, so that Les Trois Frères,
coiled in tattooed splendor,
molecularly licking, still today,
its paleolithic wounds, is affectionate,
exuberant and lethal all at once—
there is, thus, through you,
a tunnel that winds back into total discontinuity
which you tried to conceal
with the physical innocence that taking on the underworld
would not have repercussions.

You find yourself, at last,
as if it were a blessing, blocked by nature,
as a new plan is blocked out,

attacked by a cave because you
got too close to the Hades-Dionysus
hinged appetite. Once crushed off the stem,
Dionysus runs Hades' empty sleeve,
you might say: they shake sleeves
to become one loaded sleeve,
a tunnel in which death is exuberance
nipped your anklebone,
weakened it just enough to send
15 minutes later
a cramp into your calf,
you lost control.

Your fracture is a fleck
amidst global enigmatic fractions,
it is nothing and it is a headlight
frozen in a ditch, Hades' loaded
empty sleeve, and the depth of your life is nothing
if severed from the life of a man in rags
going off into the dark of Siberian cold.

This life that you experience as a once,
as if it were a very fine thread
disappearing into mist at both ends . . .
suppose it were dotted at both ends,
slightly beyond what you can see,
suppose the dots led off to other threads
and that your are perforatedly connected
vastly beyond what you experience . . .
suppose at this point I qualify the metaphor
so that you do not think that you are merely
spun out of something that lives off you
(though this may possibly be true),

and imagine your origin as that which also
travels through you, so that you are both
result and process—and if you lived
having died
while dying, could that modulate,
even control a bit, this man-damned soul-making?
Is it because you look into the mist at both ends,
certain that they represent birth and death,
that you forget so much?
That forgetting itself is a mist
in which your cancerous secrecy proliferates,
intoxicated by the thrill that comes from feeling
cut off, omnipotent, and immaculate?

Seeing how close you came to Never
you might draw Always a bit closer,
and beg it not to hide its head under its cloak—
coaxed out, would its face be hairy, yes,
and pillar-like, it would be before image,
unlike Never, which is beyond image,
a faceless face. Always
curls up under Never's tail
and manages to nurse, sending up its aniline
rodent tongue into Never's pouch of stories,
there it fishes about, like a word
inside its etymological compost.

And so the poem that is pure desire
for a poem begins to accumulate—
in desire's womb there is only expectancy
for the face and fingers to pry at cervix,
it is too much, this creature will say,
to live outside desire, and so

through the entire pleistocene toward you
I have crawled, that desire can
again be world birth death dense.
And exactly what have you crawled to, desire,
your desire was wondering . . .
but now that there is no light anymore
but no total dark either,
the hospital room fans out and out across itself
and like a fan contracts,
so that you are closed and opened
in the multiple ambivalence of your fracture,
and no resolution is sincere.

△

Gerrit Lansing

Olana

or The Shark of Craving

I. Zamindar

Of all agenda not mechanic
mine is critical as any.
Starting out from Cordoba
as tingling signals
                mint snakes
        as I do,
            Ida,
                here.
Purple water of the rotten grapes.
Plotted chance meetings define the novel,
                lovers,
            novel lovers.
De novo.
        Great Ida will reappear
man-mountain,
        when you bang a rite.
In the conduit walk east.
        Beacons of prana
move up and down
            in my feeling
        as I sit in siddhasan.
        In Cordoba the Arabs
tickle European testicles.

Like limitations, my life,
painting one flower all life long
concealing real infractions in
benign aggression

taking advantage of steam.
Selah.
Like limitation,
seemed unlimited
the seed
inward so,
what *they* called dream
or dream
or dream retreat.
My forest.
After dhanur,
utthita kumarasan.
I swallowed the personal key
It has dissolved.
Smart dope and I distinguish,
TAKING ADVANTAGE OF STEAM
the funeral amulet:
say Zu Zu to the grocery boy!
A cacophone: cordoba shit.
Crumpled ferns for feet
the juice that shrinks
even at even tide.
Ataraxia my sister . . .
I gather the taxes due reality.

Artaxerxes the brother lost
because never known
spiralled down a time
I never shunned,
not spanned,

the twin I missed,
semblable abrazero!

The wish to be cowboy,
devotee,
and zamindar.

II. Hot Breeze and Blue Moon

the shivering milk
plush faces
made of beds
the Five-M Company
entered the banquet

Ida pirouettes, a jumpy kid

compulsive rectangles arise

I lick the semiologic ice cream cone
divine.

Transparent as an upchucked butterfly
the lamination held,
gone buffalo,
in heaven as a toothbrush.
Who is steering anyone?

She drank Blue Moon,
gnawed a pomegranate,
Persephone,

then danced the Cassava
to Mambo Mania,
loins like a brooding cloud.

What houngan wears "Cherchez la Femme"
as wheat scoundrels chew their nails
and masturbate racemes of light.

Bluehaired dragonettes
unveiled the registers,
some chophouse!
where a stingy demiurge
dropped the sugar cubes.

Cones impact. Ice cream skull crack.

Old anise drugstore cycled into whiteness of
Hollywood too long gone in memories of tigers,
harp concertos,
supple long-haired Holland boys

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF STEAM
hitting Orion highs
you rock the course
until it juices
like a splitting box.
These fangs could do you anything.

I slept in the tree of Samkhya

after filming the stars
La Féerie Orientale.

Stamped to see the butterfly,
who did?
In the stone orchards of memory
his young voice rang out,
"Breathe, don't forget to breathe."

Concentered,
of pineapple throat,
what melodies?
Glowing, having fixed up
ecstasy,
one boy came quickly in the sink,
as mint snakes wriggled there.
"Severo, my love," another moaned,
"and Vladimir. . ."

Let's ooze. Lotus lay. Ida's back.

immense dropping glitter stalk

Bhang trees, bhang fruit,
coot walk, cut. No cat,
or outis, soham.

Coin your catchwords, cunt.

Eat, eat, my kind real god

gold weathercock, you boy!

This apple is to fly.
Behold the great empty beauty of intractable being!

To be is not to what you think I say
was saying
just now
NOW

III.

Taking advantage of steam
this cantata is for potentates!
A coda of mistletoe come.
Oblate spheroids, boys!
Ida, goddess, mint julep is my name,
in Olana ashram as here,

To be is not not-not what you think
I wasn't saying, now not

just

now!

△

Mary Caponegro

Three pieces from Microfictions

CANDIDATE

I've filed so many letters of introduction into the bathroom hamper it begins to smell that sweaty cumulative smell, though a recommendation from you, who knows; might make all the difference.

MARRIAGE

In this composition, notice the interruptions. It seems that what had been interrupted becomes the interruption, and what had been the interruption becomes the theme. The hard thing is to bring out all the voices. The hard thing is to hear them all at once.

CICADA

Cat slowly ate it continued to buzz the solidarity of all from each inside their cacophonic density shriller focus right behind her whistle man who wouldn't stop got off the train and followed her.

△

Jonathan Williams

In Marsden Hartley's Hand

happily contented
to be climbing the heights and the clouds
by the brush method

•

they
have to
come of
themselves

•

place me in the middle
between these lovers of mine
and there you have us

•

goldenglories
of my heart's gate

•

I see
the mail carrier
coming down
the field

•

I know
what I see

•

to walk on

throughout the exquisite days
with you

enough that you
call me brother,
friend, lover

•

a kiss
to you
across
these
isolated hills

•

one can't have all
things in the hills

yet I found your letter
here in the hills

•

better
to be walking about
with new young stars
in one's hand
than fumbling over
old meteors

•

a big broad shoulder
to brush by . . . .

the flicker
of the yellow butterfly . . . .

•

somehow
this business of one
isn't big enough

•

love again,
always love

Diane Wakoski

Why I Am A Poet Not A Painter

with apologies to Frank O'Hara

For years I have been troubled by a very strong intuitive response to natural landscape. It is a double response, for I do *see the scene I am looking at as a painting (one already painted), and at the same time I involuntarily think, and feel a strong emotion as I am thinking this, "I wish I were a painter."*

No ideas
but in things? But then,
why do I want
to paint this world today? A thaw in our
egret landscape
and then fast freeze,
this morning
each tree etched with frost.
My holly plant
sitting on the steps in its inadequate pot
shows each leaf outlined in crystal
and the bare
forsythia bushes wave thin ice-crusted
twigs. What ideas come to me
seeing this world?
None.
But I want to paint it, so I call home
after a walk to my office
and tell my husband
he should photograph it.

Why?

Too easy to say
it won't be that way tomorrow. If I
wanted to hold the image,
why didn't I stay outdoors
looking at it all day? I had
nothing
better to do. But I went inside and
buried myself in a book.
This
has been true
each time
I have seen something
I wanted to paint:
    the plantation oaks on Jekyl Island
    the curving cliffs at Laguna Beach
    the fog beach canyons
    autumn in the Blue Ridge Mountains
I almost get shorthand messages now
from my brain/ "I wish I were a painter. I'd paint that scene."
and "Therefore you don't need to look at it very long."

Do I want to paint it because that
would force me to set up my easel
and sit for a long time looking at the scene?
Why don't I simply sit and look at something I find beautiful?

What does beauty in my eye
do to me?
        The carbon cave
        soots my eyes. Oh, John Dunn, my opthamologist,
        surely you represent
        clear vision.
        What else is poetry? But looking down

the labyrinth to a California past
shows me the darkness of sex
Is it possible
to plant a garden
and not see the ground open up?
The wasp which has been flying around in my bedroom
now clings to the window's cold,
scarcely moves, but in the ground
swollen with white kernel
is an old civilization.

I am looking at some cuttings of
a velvet plant, in a fat green bottle
which once held framboise.
Their curving leaves, like arrowheads,
are glowing magenta in the afternoon sun, their
delicate princess hair roots, fine and white
almost filling the bottle, beginning
to curl around its bottom.

The glow of the soft leaves
reminds me of all the beauty I would like to paint.
How much I prefer a tree, this huge fig plant,
a night-blooming cereus which has never bloomed
reaching long fleshy fingers into today's sunshine, the
bristly spruces which each clump of needles
outlines by ice.

The humanform is one I wish I did not possess.
Dapne, you were not punished.
Narcissus, none of you.
How much I would rather be
a plant
than what I am.

Is this why I wish I were a painter?
For it is a painter of landscapes
and of still lives I would be.
Humans and animals
so trivial, uninteresting. But water lilies
yes, or Stevens' "junipers shagged with ice"
Does this explain why
some few ones
of us
who live in apartments
read the Burpee and other seed
catalogues?
Or why I, who once cared everything
for egg beauty
& the passionate life
now prefer
still lives,
the bloom of plant life
a world where desire has been eliminated/

1981

△

Jed Rasula

Four Poems

difficult to pour the months from a silver beaker,
retrieve the alembic in unbaked silt,
part the cloak, split the speckled bamboo—

the monkey watches a frog on his lotus pad:
all the sky snugged close to the breathing green body

man's heart patting his music by the strings
rising up thru braided mountain woods

Red Pine Drifting Ridge Vast Cliff

wrists he touches

the finger stops hold nature's pressures up
to fit in the air transparent condensed opacity
lighted orchids, begonias, wooding the hill
his mouth gone into the turtle & geese nearby
flying overhead, older by another year
brightness like a moon thru the radical clouds

mind the Radius of the Thousand Measures
hooped in one posture
filming the cloth of speech it emits
brisk tones grown from bowels' notice
otherwise simply balconies, landings, platforms'
  sun-warmed boards
    whose stones were dreams
or where it fits in dream is stone

a gate the autumn

pours from trees

river in the wirst

contentment

moon a stem of ash
growing in its crest
an inch of grass in the heart
such as daffodils
& other garden's queries sheared
are ears across all sound?
or sleeping thaw?
who knows where to heal?

whatever stranger matter brightens out odor thru passing

Kirke

in her pharmacy:
jars & vials of truth
from which the yolks have been removed

the doomed enchanted voices of her men
condensing on the dripper

—her water clock
guiding pleasures into vessels,
eggs in hallways opening
showing more hallways, passages, eggs, blades

rooms, chambers, shuttered with drapes
poisoned phrases folded in the hanging cloth
startled snouts nudge out thru peeking at the witch

* * *

the secret of the glass
is metabolism

the philosopher of glass
lights up the ramp with bees

fuzzy melon-bodies erotic & sticky
feeding on secret views
at rage in sexual labor
knitted like the brow of eros
a shrill magical pucker
Elpenor licked from her jug
falling off her roof at the roaring margin of Ocean
shattering one of her vases as he fell
through the radical siren curtain
to Hades,
Lord of Startled Hearts

△

Rachel Blau DuPlessis

Eclogue

Gave me the milk
curdling
sour-soft scum naked
water
light and
glittering where I am
folded roads.

Gave the bread
honeyed,
gold fulls
the woolly
cells of yeast.

Mouth to the earth
takes earth,
to water,
water

mouth to the green
eats
top and tuft and danky dirt

mouth to the wet bud
pool drinks hard

kissing the fallen leaves aside
o'er green fat hills,
heart
snaked round the pearly
membrane of day.
O honey hills a hole a spring.

Heigh ho silly
sheep. Leap!

onto the green and moody
pastures
over the green and seedy
grasses

that be

everywhere
that earth-laden shadows
bride and bridegroom
keep
their swaddled flocks.

Killing Me

I had a dream I killed you
before death's deep doorway.

You sought to kill me
at the dream-naked doorway?

Lightly lifted sleep-laden
arms long and small

and wreathed you
sweetly, fleeing

bright heavy danger
bread and breast to breast.

Why killeth she me to get
this doorway?

Who skulks
on the pink limen of the dawnway?

No murder;
I am worth your killing:

I would kill myself
to stand at the threshold

under the lintel
naked foot stalking

on the packed ground of this place
the clay ground of this thresher's place

and beat the hard bread grains
burst from the baskety grasses.

△

Billie Chernicoff

Corona

1. A creature
who tells things
otherwise I am
only movies
projected
from up there
by nothing so risky
as angels
but the older
greek ones
who have being
to confer realness
or weave a crown
of thin air
for love, to provide
matter to stay
the mystery, release
ourselves into its
specific cells
the crown weaving
life of the mind
telling each cell
it is a door.

2. For the old ones
Zeus & Hera
we are movies
on the snow
we are the mystery
of words, luminous
independent as we build
our wars or cities
we are starlets
they think our trouble
is stunning.

3. Are we the children
of their weird couplings
when they came down
as swans & vampires & moths
risking their wings against
our screens we thought
they were dreams
some god seed mixed
in our subtle blood
if we are not the words
there is no story
we don't stumble to tell
with our mortal heel
hand word shoulder.

4. The page has two silences
so close & different
they might be god.
If the left margin is Vesta
the hearth is not easy
or even warm but the flame

is every day we go down
on the stone, cup our hands
around & with our breath
the phoenix leaps
as a heart into.

Is the far margin
Christ the lover described
by everything unsung, the perfect
embrace of everything other
touching, sometimes I leap back
as if in fear of
that white fire.

5. I am afraid to say these things.
In the back yard all the peaches
are ripe at once.

6. They are so clear
in themselves, glossed
with such new & local
pleasure, the machines
are faces, they behave
what they are taught.
I love when if seldom
the engines break down
in our naked disobedient
different faces.

7. Where the trees
& rains of our bodies
seem to want to be rescued
from the old texts
& back yards of repetition
the way we would
lie down in snow
to make angels
to carve a place
for their wings we flap
our arms & trust
only the cold
patient beauty
of forms
to call them.

△

Aimé Césaire

Batouque

—translated by Clayton Eshleman
and Annette Smith

The rice fields of cigarette butts of spit on the strange
summons
of my simplicity are tattooing themselves with peaks.
Floodgate open, the words perforated in my saliva
resurface as cities, paler above the suburbs
O the transparent cities mounted on yaks
slow blood pissing the last memory into filigreed leaves
the boulevard bruised comet brusque crossed bird
strikes itself right in the sky
drowned in arrows
It's my kind of night most hollow and most null
a fan of compass fingers collapsed into the white laughter
of sleeps.

batouque
once the world is naked and russet
like a womb burned to a cinder by the great suns of love
batouque
once the world is without inquest
a wondrous heart where the scenery of glances
splintered to bits for the first time is
embossed

once the attractions entrap the stars
once love and death are
a single coral snake resoldered around a gemless arm
without soot
without defense

batouque of the river swollen with crocodile tears and
    drifting whips
batouque of the tree with the serpents of the dancers of
    the prairie
Pennsylvania roses peep at the eyes at the nose at the ears
at the windows of the tortured man's
sawed head
batouque of the woman with arms made of sea her hair an
    underwater source
rigor-mortis turns bodies into
tears of steel
all the leafy phasmas make a sea of blue yuccas and rafts
all the neurotic phantasms have taken the bit between their
    teeth

batouque
once the world abstraction now seduced
is made of shoots of rock salt
the gardens of the sea
for the first and the last time
the mast of a forgotten caravel blazes an almond tree in the
    wreckage
a coco palm a baobab a sheet of paper
the dismissal of an appeal
batouque
once the world is a strip mine
once the world from the height of the upper bridge is
my desire

your desire
conjugated in a leap into the inhaled void
under the awning of our eyes unfurls
all the sundust thronged with parachutes
with deliberate fires with oriflammes of red wheat
batouque of rotted eyes
batouque of molasses eyes
batouque of a doleful sea encrusted with islands
the Congo is a leap of sun lifting at the end of a line
a pail of bloody cities
a tuft of citronella in the night at bay
batouque
once the world is a tower of silence
when we are prey and vulture
all the rains of parrots
all the resignations of chinchillas
batouque of broken trumpets of the oily eyelid of virulent
    plovers
batouque of the rain killed split finely by reddened ears
purulence and vigilance

having raped to the point of transparence the narrow sex of
    the dusk
the tall Negro of the morning
to the depths of the cracked stone sea
takes on the hunger fruit of knotted cities
batouque
Oh! over the intimate void
—squirted squirting—
until this site is enraged
the injunctions of a severe blood!
and the ship flew over the crater at the very threshold of
    the eagle plowed hour
the ship walked in calm boots of shooting stars

in wild boots of chopped off wharves and dress-armor
and the ship let fly a volley of mice
of telegrams of cowries of houris
a Wolof dancer was dancing on points and signaling
from the point of the highest mast
all night long he was seen dancing laden with amulets and
    alcohol
bounding to the level of the fattened stars
an army of ravens
an army of knives
an army of parabolas
and the arched ship let fly an army of horses
At midnight the earth entered the channel of the crater
and the diamond wind hung with red cassocks
out of oblivion
blew horse hooves singing the adventure of milky voiced
    death
over the gardens of the carob planted rainbow

batouque
once the world is a breeding-pond where I angle for my eyes
    on the line of your eyes
batouque
once the world is the far-sailing latex drunk from the flesh
    of sleep
batouque
batouque of swells and hiccups
batouque of sneered sobs
batouque of startled bison
batouque of defiances of carmined wasp nests

in the pilfering of the fire and the smoking sky
batouque of hands
batouque of breasts

batouque of the seven beheadly sins
batouque of the sex with a bird-like peck a fish-like flight
batouque of a black princess in a tiara of melting sun
batouque of the princess stoking up a thousand unknown
    guardians
a thousand gardens forgotten under the sand and the rainbow
batouque of the princess with thighs like the Congo
like Borneo
like Casamance

batouque of night without a pit
of night without lips
cravatted by the spurt of my nameless slave-galley
by my boomerang bird
I hurled my eyes into the rolling into the guinea of despair
    and death
all strangeness solidifies Easter Island Easter Island
all strangeness cut by the cavalries of darkness
a fresh brook flows in my hand a sargasso of melted screams

And the stripped-down ship dug my thirst-for-branches-
    minaret-exile
out of the brain of stubborn nights
batouque
the currents churned wisps of silver sabers
and nausea spoons
and the wind pierced by the fingers of the SUN
sheared with fire the armpit of foam haired islands

batouque of pregnant lands
batouque of an enwalled sea
batouque of humped villages of rotten feet of deaths spelled
    out in the priceless despair of memory
Basse-Pointe Diamant Tartane and Caravelle

gold shekels scrapers of floatings assailed by sheaves and
corn-cockles
sad brains crawled by orgasms
smoky armadillos
O the krumen teasers of my helm!
the sun has leapt from the great marsupial pouches of the
dormerless sea
into the full algebra of false hair and tramwayless rails
batouque the rivers fissure in the unlaced helmet of ravines
the sugar cane capsizes in the rolling of the earth swollen
with she-camel humps
the bays smash at the ebbless bladders of stone with irre-
sponsible lights

sun, go for their throats!
black howler black butcher black corsair batouque bedecked
with spices and flies
Sleepy herd of mares under the bamboo thicket
bleed bleed herd of carambas.

Assassin I acquit you in the name of rape.
I acquit you in the name of the Holy Ghost
I acquit you with my salamander hands
the day will pass like a wave with its bandoleer of cities
in its beggar's sack of powder-swollen shells

Sun sun russet serpent-eater leaning on my trances of
a swamp in labor
the river of grass snakes that I call my veins
The river of battlements that I call my blood
the river of assagais that men call my face
the river of walking around the world
shall strike the Artesian rock with a hundred monsoon stars

Liberty my only pirate water of the Ninth Year my only thirst
love my only sampan
we shall slip our calabash fingers of laughter
between the icy teeth of the Sleeping Beauty.

[Note on the Césaire poem:]

"Batouque" is from *Les armes miraculeuses* (1946); our translation is based on the considerably modified definitive version of the poem as it appeared in Césaire's *Oeuvres complètes* (1976). According to Lilyan Kesteloot, the title is "the rhythm of a Brazilian dance of African origins." "kruman" (for some reason not capitalized by Césaire), refers to an indigenous Liberian Black people, noted for skill as boatmen.

Alan Williamson

Art Roman

(Autun, December; Poitou-Charente, July)

The angel wakes us to the star an inch
beyond our heads,
where we sleep, even if we are kings, all under
one cloak . . .

As from the Roman wish to close a gate
on the forest night, *oppidum*
—we skidded down
the ice-slick hill to see unearthly, shouldering
up from three-story houses—

there comes the arch and weightiness of God;
so from God this endless
actionless itch to know
ourselves more real?—where we go, half-bent, under
the wind from inside the atom
(and still
they hang a boar by the heels, for the year's turning,
in the butcher's doorway)—

And, over us, the saved,
come from the year's charmed round
of stars and labors, stand
still, with a child's small smile and even locks

for the wind to lift like hay,
and climb like children through the complicated
frail balconies, needing
a boost to the buttocks from the angel standing
below;
while, opposite, the damned
discover everywhere mouths: a devil howling
to find his hand has clubbed into a crab . . .

But what does God see? This rictus facing nothing
in the scene that ends all things . . .
Only
the cancelling-out of justice? Dante would say
He looks into Himself and there sees everything,
as everything, when it looks in love, sees Him—

a dance on a pinhead!

—though west and south,
in summer, toward the Cathar kingdoms,
everything divides, everything swallows everything
and lives inside it: the dancers' two
swivelling bodies meet in one head; the lion's
tail is also, seen closely, the crying woman's
arm . . .
and for an hour
one believes Dante, in the too tall grass.

△

B O O K R E V I E W S

Sunrise. FREDERICK SEIDEL.
Penguin/Viking. 1980.

by ELIOT WEINBERGER

So what's a guy like me doing with a book like that in a place like this?

Well . . . Frederick Seidel is our latest most important American poet. *Sunrise*, 17 years in the making, smartly published by Penguin/Viking, is the 1979 Lamont Poetry Selection and the winner of the 1980 National Book Critics Circle Award (now second in prestige to the Pulitzer). Robert Lowell wrote in 1963: "When I read him, I have envious, delighted, jolted feelings and suspect the possibilities of modern poetry have been changed." Richard Poirier compares Seidel to Lawrence, calling *Sunrise* one of the best poetry books of the last decade or more. Jerome Mazzaro reveals in the *Hudson Review* that "Seidel has the power to be an important visionary." And Denis Donghue, moony in the *N. Y. Review of Books*, is reminded of—needless to say—Yeats and Lowell. In other words, it is likely that few, if any, *Sulfur* subscribers have read the man.

One effect of the poetry pandemic has surely been the elimination of exogamous reading. It has become so hectic in one's own longhouse that one rarely has the time or stamina for visits to the other clans. Twenty years ago, in the ardent days of the anthology battles, even diehard Beat or Black Mountain partisans could, at the least, recognize the insignia of the opposing troops (double initials always made an easy target). Today, who among *Sulfur* readers (which I take as the progressive, but not radical, flank) can spot the ear of Alfred Corn, or distinguish between Howard and Stanley Mosses? Who among us *doesn't* think that a "line of Dubie's" refers to Frank Sinatra?

I, for one, read contemporary American poetry every day, receive a score of poetry books and periodicals every week, yet rarely engage any book of poetry published by a major house or as part of a university press poetry series (excepting selected/collected editions of the old or dead); any poetry book

that wins a major prize, or any literary periodical with the word "Review" in the title. (Nor, I hasten to add, do I exclusively linger in that church bake-sale ozone where all the presses are named after exotic flora or common fauna.) Consequently, I am not only ignorant of 80 percent of the poets discussed at the moment by scholars, wits and literati, I am utterly mystified by the mechanics of current "establishment" taste—the grounds, say, for the inclusion or exclusion of any poem in or from any Review. This despite the fact—which we never admit—that on the whole the academic reviewers and critics are far better writers and far more informed than the average fellow traveler of those who make it new.

And so adrift with my nearly blank map of American poetry, I happened to read a review of Seidel's *Sunrise* by Vernon Young in the *N.Y. Times Book Review.* Seidel was unknown to me, but I recognized Young as a "frequent critic." Although, for reasons of health, the NYTBR is best avoided, Young's piece caught my eye. Seidel's poems, he wrote, "were the best about hell written in this country;" "urbane, scathing, frenetic;" "his visionary glimpses are balefully superb;" "compelling" and so on. In support, he produced two passages from the book. The first, about Osip Mandelstam:

> He was last seen alive
> In 1938 at a transit camp near Vladivostok
> Eating from a garbage pile,
> When I was two, and Robert Lowell was twenty-one,
> Who much later would translate Mandelstam,
> And now has been dead two years himself.

And the second:

> Antonioni walks in the desert shooting
> *Zabriskie Point.* He does not perspire
> Because it is dry. His twill trousers stay pressed,
> He wears desert boots and a viewfinder,
> He has a profile he could shave with, sharp
> And meek, like the eyesight of the deaf,
> With which he is trying to find America.

These two excerpts struck me as not merely dull, but so spectacularly bad that I wondered what aesthetic could prize (literally, as it turned out) such

work? What boat had I missed? I bought the book.

Seidel in *Sulfur* should, in fairness, be presented, not described—it's all too easy to sniff in dismissal or lower the heavy artillery. So instead of sitting duck, I offer "Pressed Duck", a poem in its entirety from the collection.

> Caneton à la presse at the now extinct Café Chauveron.
> Chauveron himself cooking, fussed
> And approved
> Behind Elaine, whose party it was;
> Whose own restaurant would be famous soon.
>
> Poised and hard, but dreaming and innocent—
> Like the last Romanovs—spring buds at thirty, at thirty-two,
> We were green as grapes,
> A cluster of February birthdays,
> All "Elaine's" regulars.
>
> Donald, Elaine's then-partner,
> His then-wife, a lovely girl; Johnny
> Greco, Richardson, Elaine, my former wife, myself:
> With one exception, born within a few days and years
> Of one another.
>
> Not too long before thirty had been old,
> But we were young—still slender, with one exception,
> Heads and necks delicate
> As a sea horse,
> Elegant and guileless
>
> Above our English clothes
> And Cartier watches, which ten years later shopgirls
> And Bloomingdale's fairies would wear,
> And the people who pronounce chic *chick*.
> Chauveron cut
>
> The wine-red meat off the carcasses.
> His duck press was the only one in New York.
> He stirred brandy into the blood
> While we watched. Elaine said, "Why do we need anybody else?
> We're the world."

[Now readers who do not happen to live on the island of Manhattan south of 96th Street will undoubtedly require some annotation. Elaine is the proprietor of Elaine's, a restaurant patronized by wealthy demi-intellectuals ("anti-Establishment" Hollywood directors, authors of "serious" bestsellers, et al.). Elaine herself is well known both for her extreme snobbishness and her corpulence (i.e., the "one exception"). Cartier is, of course, one of the world's most elegant jewellers; Bloomingdale's, outwardly a department store, should be considered the Main Temple of the local consumer cult. A few years ago pressed duck became the rage, following a full-page article in the *N. Y. Times*; there was a run on duck-presses at $500 apiece. One of the functions of the poem is to inform us that the poet was there first. It should also be noted that stanza 5 is not only snide, it is inaccurate: no shopgirl could possibly afford a Cartier watch, and no one on the island in recent memory has been heard to mispronounce a word which, in frequency of local usage, is second only to the first person pronoun (possessive case).]

Kindly souls might suspect that "Pressed Duck" is supposed to be funny, or ironic. It is not. He means it. For "Pressed Duck" is surrounded by 30 other poems of similar ilk, in a book dedicated to Bernardo Bertolucci: poems about partying with the Kennedys and Francis Bacon and Antonioni and apparently famous racecar drivers; images of opium by the pool, Courrèges boots, *cuisine minceur*, Mercedes limos, skin-tight leather, hand-made suits, Dom Perignon and Polaroid and Valium and Mao. There is a poem called "Fucking"; poems that end with one-line stanzas like "Good-bye." or "That is the poem."; and lines like "That is as sensitive as the future gets." or "Between his name and néant are his eyes." or "There and beyond one like heaven, as Che is."

When Seidel is trying to be funny, he sounds like this (the poem is about the author):

> He sucked his pipe. He skied he fished he published.
> He fucked his wife's friends. Touching himself he murmured
> He was not fit to touch his wife's hem.
> He dreamed of running away with his sister-in-law!
> Of doing a screenplay. Him the guest on a talk show—

When he is serious, like this (on Robert Kennedy):

Younger brother of a murdered president,
Senator and candidate for president;
Shy, compassionate and fierce
Like a figure out of Yeats;
The only politician I have loved . . .

And mainly like this:

It was Union Square. I remember. Turn a corner
And in a light year
She'd have arrived
At the nearby inky, thinky offices of *Partisan Review.*
Was she off to see my rival Lief,
Boyfriend of girls and men, who cruised
In a Rolls convertible?

This is news that doesn't stay news with a vengeance; it may be the invention of disposable poetry. It is the least numinous poetry I've ever read, a poetry obsessed with dates and the ages of individuals, with the objects of fashion which the poet accepts literally and absolutely. It is the poetry of a millesecond in an accelerating historical time, a fear and denial of cosmogonic time.

As such, the poetry has appeal to the bicoastal upper-middle brow. (Even the book itself is designed to look tony in a high-tech interior.) Small wonder that book reviewers, whose words live less than a day, love it. But why is Academia bathed in the light of *Sunrise*? Why would a man like Donaghue mistake "Pressed Duck" for "Leda and the Swan"?

First, the book is not only not campy (which might have saved it), it is deeply humorless, therefore serious. Second, Seidel's stylistic models are clearly Lowell and, especially in the 14-page incomprehensible (Young: "enigmatic") title poem, Ashbery. What *Sunrise* offers, then, is some easily recognized gossip and glitz couched in the current academic mode. In short, perfect Leisure Reading for the English Department, or down at the inky thinky *Partisan Review.*

Brancusi called Wagner's music a beefsteak in delirium; Seidel's poetry is a quiche on quaaludes. Back at the dinky but kinky *Sulfur*, all I can do is nod out as the sun sets on American taste. △

Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vols. 1 and 2. Edited by GEORGE F. BUTTERICK. Black Sparrow Press, 1980.

by MICHAEL DAVIDSON

and if I have a car, where is
Littleton? how far, from
Gloucester?

Lines from a letter, yet so much the voice of Maximus. They concern Olson's desire to meet Creeley face to face, having corresponded with him at a furious rate for a scant month. The two were not to meet for another four years (at Black Mountain), but in the meantime they created a personal and artistic relationship through letters—these written with such beauty and power that they constitute a virtual collaborative work in themselves. Each writer found in the other a sympathetic ear for new ideas about poetic form and method, not to mention a mutual disdain for the official literary establishment as characterized by the *Partisan Review*, the Auden-Spender circle or Eliot's cultural criticism. Each seemed breathlessly impatient to try out the possible "casts or methods" which might lead to a new poetics—like these notes by Creeley on myth:

> Anyhow, form has now become so useless a term/that I blush to use it. I wd imply a little of Stevens' use (the things created *in* a poem and existing there. . .) & too, go over into: the possible casts or methods for a way into/a 'subject': to make it clear: that form is never more than an *extension* of content. An enacted or possible 'stasis' for thought. (I:79)

To which Olson, within three days, had modified to: "right form / is the precise & correct . . . extension of /content under hand." And so it continued, for the next thirty letters, bits and pieces of "Projective Verse" shuttling back and forth between Littleton, New Hampshire and Washington, D.C., surrounded by remarks on Dostoievsky, Homer, E.M. Forster, Cocteau, Aaron Burr, Bolyai, Blake and Melville—in short, the variorum of that essay by which Olson gave a generation of poets something to hang on to. Given the richness of this collaboration, it's a good thing Olson never got

that car.

As George Butterick says in his editorial introduction to *The Complete Correspondence*, "(at) times it seems they wrote not to entertain or even instruct, but to survive." The extent to which this is true can be seen by simply looking at the dates when letters were written—sometimes two or three in a day. Neither man had a reading audience at that time, but even more important, neither participated in any literary scene outside that provided by Pound's and Williams' correspondence. At one point Creeley, in desperation, says "(there) is, Olson, singularly, or otherwise: no one but yrself/ anywhere. There are: no examples / no rules/no precedents/no staples/no practisers/that cd break in. (I:96)" With such intense interest, it is no wonder the letters resemble an excited conversation with all of its condensations, abbreviations and wanderings. The style, as a result, is cryptic and heavily encoded—often to the point of unreadability. Here is Olson:

> OK—and you see, we agree, Day/
> diminutive.
> OKAY. You,
> and I, get on. (Want to throw at you, SHE-BEAR.)
>
> NOW, as to MOOD and/or EP m ud and/or EP ode/ a./o/WHO?

or Creeley:

> Well, it is the matters of time (1) and variation (2): that cd interest you. It is not to suggest that a logos (this) can be jumped to a logos (that)—but there are parallels. Many times have thought (tho not without blindness) if, say, if: I cd put down a series of lines, that wd string themselves, like the lines/line: in Bach (back/& back); well/wd be one sweet biz. (I:155)

The tendency at first is to translate, with the help of Butterick's notes at the back, but then again, the rhythms and transitions and abbreviations become interesting in their own right. Such a shorthand reflects the style which Olson had already incorporated into poems like "The Kingfishers" and which was to become the mode of *The Maximus Poems*. Equally, Creeley's quick shifts of attention, his heavy use of subordination and short, staccato phrases translate into his calligraphic "bop" style of the fifties.

Both men came to discover the terms for a poetics, feeding and cajoling each other towards complexity of argument. In retrospect, some of their fussing over terms (the poetic line, historical process, education, Lawrence vs. Joyce, etc.) seems a bit rhetorical, but it is only because the terms were so thoroughly discovered here that we can thus look back. And the urgency with which they found an alternative language, one *not* inherited from New Critical methods, is bracing to witness.

Their common origin in Pound and Williams serves as a testing point for virtues and limitations of the previous generation. For Olson, Pound is problematic, to say the least. The letters which chronicle the elder poet's erratic behavior while at St. Elizabeth's are among the most interesting—particularly vivid since Olson is at odds with him and Creeley is often the intermediary recipient of Pound's mutterings:

> Believe Olson FUNDAMENTALLY (not superficially) wrong. tendency which will sterilize anything it touches. i.e., AGAINST nature's increase. But Cr/must judge for himself. shall try not to return to subject. Merely telling Creel to WATCH the effect of certain bottom ideas; wot comes FROM certain seed; . . . (I:98)

This warning is directed at, among other things, Olson's supposed Jewish ancestry (readers familiar with Pound's anti-semitism will recognize his equation of "sterilize anything it touches" with Jews and usury). But however charged their personal relations, the "Path of Ezra" dominates Olson's concerns, as does the importance of Williams or Crane serve a similar function for Creeley.

Creeley's letters (they outnumber Olson's three to one) reflect his serious interest in jazz as a source for a new line, a fact which he discusses in subsequent interviews but which here is given specific contours. Where Olson's letters project a vocalic poetry based on voice and body, Creeley's evidence a sense of breath taken from Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Bud Powell. In them, he finds essential verification for his own phrasal and rhythmic patterning, his use of enjambment and his dependence on short, stanzaic groups. But no less important for our sense of his poetry are those more casual comments on speech patterns and conversation which occur in more autobiographical passages: ". . .the way I speak: is, or has to do with, that slowness & slow laps, say, around a center. That is: talk, god yes: for hours, days even: on one thing. . ."

The subjects covered in these first two volumes range all over the map: theories of history, Hart Crane's language, little magazines (*Golden Goose, The Lititz Review, Origin*), Frank Moore, jazz, French poetry, mathematics, pigeon raising, Vincent Ferrini—and of course "The Doctor" (Williams) and EP. Many of the letters concern publication of poems in various magazines, Creeley serving as go-between for numerous small press publishers. But the dominant fact of these early letters is the growth and evolution of "Projective Verse" which, as I have said, was hammered out continuously from their earliest communication. Finally, the letters serve as a virtual compendium of source materials for Olson's poetry, annotating difficult passages and providing some of the context behind his more condensed remarks (Butterick has collected most of these annotations into his important *Guide to the Maximus Poems*).

The editor has maintained the stylistic particularities of each letter (spacing, spelling, punctuation) and has kept all of his "apparatus" at the rear of the volume. Extensive footnotes are provided for all proper names, works cited and dates. There is an index of poems referred to by the poets and another index for proper names. Such thoroughness is characteristic of Butterick's work, and with letters as complex and multi-referential as these, the editor's function is all the more important. Now if this kind of documentary and scholarly attention could only be devoted to the great Moderns!

There are attendant problems with the letters, though not with the volumes themselves. The decision to publish *all* of the letters rather than a selection, is the right one, but the decision to publish them in numerous small volumes (ten to twelve) makes for an expensive purchase—and there would be little reason to read only one or two. Given the size of other Black Sparrow volumes, it would seem that fewer, larger volumes would have allowed more readers to gain access to this vital work. The more poignant problem concerns the proliferation of secondary sources on Olson at a time when virtually all of his primary works are out of print. A proposed university press edition of *The Maximus Poems* is a long way off, and so these letters, so rich in their development of Olson's major work, exist in an odd literary historical vacuum. But there is no faulting the letters themselves—as exciting a document as the poems themselves—and one is, once again, grateful to George Butterick for his careful editing and scholarship. △

Pacific Plainsong I-XIII. PETER MICHELSON.
Brillig Works, 1978.

by DONALD WESLING

The composition of *Pacific Plainsongs* began in the sixties and has stretched to the late seventies. The book consists of thirteen odelike declamations, each coordinated with an old sepia photograph of American Indians shown either in their burial trees or in some gesture of being co-opted or dominated by white men. Peter Michelson is dealing with Western Indians from the Apaches in the south to the tribes of the Northwest and the Great Plains. A good deal of travel and study seems to've been involved, but this is not an anthopologist's version. The book affiliates with the sixties and seventies tribalism of Gary Snyder and Edward Dorn, especially with Dorn's *Shoshoneans* (prose) and *Recollections of Gran Apacheria* (poems), in its admiration for the way the Indian was wired to the earth, in its clear and sad elaboration of the ways the Indian has been changed by being dominated. The saddest thing is that Indians have been partly assimilated to another culture and world-view, and so have neither the magnificent certainties they knew nor the finesse or inclination to make a rational-bureaucratic civilization work for them. So the plainsongs are elegies, often breaking out into anger against the White American Speaker and his earlier representatives in the Corps of Discovery, people (in some ways admirable, in other ways abominations) like H.H. Bancroft, Kit Carson, Lewis & Clark. The book has perhaps too much noble rant either on behalf of the Indians or attacking their oppressors: the patent ironies of "Fourth of July Oration" are evident after two or three pages, but the speech goes on for more than nine pages. (The Indian-like chant in the last song, "we were bad men," seems to me more effective: a development of the book's staple voice, and a sensible closure.) To my ear and eye, Michelson nearly always justifies his chosen measure in the uneven-length lines that do not come up against the left margin: these make up about nine-tenths of the book. The problems, such as they are, are not of prosody but of attitude: polemic overstatement of his splendid cause. △

My Pleasure. LAURA CHESTER.
The Figures, 1980.

by DONALD WESLING

Dear Laura Chester:

I went to your Reading at UC San Diego, February 1981, and tracked you with my review-copy as you read. Since that was something like a personal encounter and you are no longer a book-commodity to me, I will frame this attacking review as a letter. You read with verve in a fine direct voice, and I know that many at that Reading liked you and your work. My own opposition to your writing is based on principles. The first principle is that the work of a published professional poet, whether or not she is the publisher of her own work (as you are), has to justify all its chosen measures. Whatever kind of line there is must have energy, eventfulness; and whole sections, too, must justify themselves in their position by choice of forms appropriate to sense. I can see no compelling reason why one technique (prose paragraphs, say, rather than Williams-like tiers stepping down the page) is used in any one place, or why any large swatch of lines in the middle of a poem is there rather than not there. ("The dog the cat the bird & the kid," a 10-page poem, would be my example here; or "Gate's Waiting," with its purely-assertive ending to a long poem.) The second principle is in opposition to your own prefatory statement that "the toys we can't break are the voices that people us," for I would hold that some voices are more privileged than others, and that your veering from mock baby-talk to common English swearwords, your delectation of flotsam thrown up on the shore of the unconscious, does very much the opposite of (your phrase for what you like) "holding the leash." The third and last principle, and the most central to my mind, is that any professional poet needs at least one idea. Some people have lots of ideas: that gives them even larger claims. But acting out and delivering over the contents of the mind isn't enough for a man's poetry so it shouldn't be enough for a woman's poetry, either, though I suppose I here call down the wrath of certain programmatic feminists with whose notions I otherwise agree. A poetry can make claims only if it shows in some way that history exists in and through domesticity, that the poet has done some reading in and also beyond his or her craft, that the mind's thoughts are as

significant as its images and personal voices. This vigor of prosody and of intellect I will call wit, and wit is the quality notably lacking in *My Pleasure.* As Samuel Johnson argued in his *Life of Cowley*, wit is strenuous thinking. Or, to vary the allusion by referring to what Keats said to Shelley in a letter (have you read Keats? impossible to know who you've read on the showing of this book? is poetry or is it not the scholar's art?), the prescription for you, which could also become your pleasure if you could assent, might well be *load every rift with ore.* Yours, Donald Wesling. △

Wind Chrysalid's Rattle. GUSTAF SOBIN.
Montemora Supplement, 1980.

by DENNIS PHILLIPS

There must be some witty remark, somewhere, that warns a poet of the dangers of writing about The Universe. If there is such a maxim, it must be suspended in order to appreciate the work of Gustaf Sobin found in *Wind Chrysalid's Rattle*. The suspense will be worthwhile. Although Sobin isn't always successful in his evocations of The Universe (and a sidereal array of other Big Images), the risks taken to deal with his poetic landscape in terms of such magnitude fill his work with a compelling otherworldiness.

Form, and forms, are central to the workings of *Wind Chrysalid's Rattle*. The book is divided into two sections. The first lends its title to the whole book, and is dated 1973. The second, titled "Mirrorhead," is dated 1975. Throughout both sections poems appear in two predominant forms. One is widely leaded, longlined, and is either didactic or aphoristic (or both). One is shortlined, concentrated and often takes the generic title Helix.

The Didactic/Aphoristic (D/A) and the Helix forms provide the two main trajectories of the book. And, depending on which of the two forms is used, the book falls prey to, or overcomes the Witty Maxim About The Universe.

Let's begin with the problematic poems. The D/A poems are more reminiscent of Blake then of Nietzsche in their use of precepts, and unique in their free-association-on-a-theme style of development, a kind of regulated automatic writing.

Sound, the progenitor, by continuing to ring through its creation, its forms, begets Speech.

Speech, both the resonance and celebration of Sound.

Speech, that's never pronounced, but *cast, diffused, exuded.*

That communicates with nothing except its own ebullience.

That varies with the depth and contour, the vibratory shell of each form.

(from *Notes on Sound, Speech, Speech-Crystals and the Celestial Echo*)

The development from line to line of the sound/speech idea is an interesting way of cultivating a progression of language, almost like a jazz progression. But the declarations that constitute the progression seem simplistic, and so the elaborated mechanism of development is disporportionate to what it conveys. As in the above cited excerpt, and many other D/A poems, the poet as teacher seems to be leaving his readers with the general residue of some cosmic thought process which, at best, achieves escape velocity from the simplistic, hurtling to the autistic. (What the hell are Speech-Crystals?).

Simplistic: "For the archer, only the interval is sacred." "It's the beloved, within us, that becomes the poem." "It's by what we didn't see that we'll recognise ourselves." "The force flowing against us is also ours." (We are uncomfortably close to the territory of Mr. Khalil Gibran.)

And autistic:

That genesis is a wind.

The rock ripples; the night swims.

That the eyes are forever swifter than their green mirrors.

Or:

That our lust is lightness. Acceleration.

And what we call the 'stillness' is the inconceivable velocity of our flesh,
thinking in the same space-cadence as the universe.

The thrust of a single whisper.

The lymph, the lightning!

Or:

Blossoming generatrix, and genius of our every breath.

(all from "That the Universe is Chrysalid")

(These declarations are lacking the information to give them substance.)

It's noteworthy that, by the end of the book, the D/A poems begin to find their own ground. The poem "Hold the Flowing Polyphonous," for example, is far more vital in its use of the precept line.

The poems called Helix, and the poems which formally look like them, succeed where the others don't. It is through the Helices that Sobin's entire book is visible, where the fabric of a world he presents is seen as if through the vertical embrasures of a battlement. And with the reverberations of *Helix* (the primal spiral shape, the shape of galaxies—even our own, the shape of human DNA molecules), the theme of the Chrysalid (of nascence, emergence, secrets locked in forms) is explored and embellished. Moreover, these poems, in their brevity, describe their ground. The declarations of the D/A poems, in lacking information, are lacking the kind of grounding that the Helices present.

Of the vistas seen through Sobin's spiraling embrasures, some are imagistic, some linguistic. And contained in the taut lines of the Helices is a musculature that turns and shifts in response to its own internal tension.

Listen,
the two mirrors
touch.
Rasped
their glowing surfaces sing.

In them
the rivers
and the clotted orchards
bunch.

Skin
springs
but their ground breath beats
against an irreducible light.

The ovals
only
echo.

Milled winds.
Inviolate dust.

Their dense vowels
drain
into night.

(Helix, *Susanna's*)

In some of the other Helices similarly fashioned poems may drag along phrases like "euphoric showers," but this type of terminology is a part of the world we're being shown. And by the end of *Wind Chrysalid's Rattle*, that world, however fragmented the view, has dropped roots, or sent spores, leaving parts of the parent world in the mind of the reader.

Within the fabric of the book, Sobin uses certain leitmotifs which reappear but don't develop. The fact that the motifs don't develop gives to the book an almost kabbalistic atmosphere. For example, "the other" is mentioned over and over again, and yet it is never specified. It seems to take on the character of "the name" (more overtly kabbalistic) towards the book's end. If one can suspend one's curiosity and impatience, though, the confusion embodied in these unexplained points in the text is gradually dealt with. The strong poem "Chaplade: Autumn" is more definitive.

Comes back
with each small, stuttered particle
still whirring. goes out, comes back,
is in the same instant: another;

while wanting to live;
while wanting a name to live in.

What happens in the last poems in the book is a merging of themes from the D/A poems with the tight delivery and illustrative style of the Helix poems. "Breath's Reflection," the book's final poem, is too long to reprint in its entirety here. It, however, is a fine example of the synthesis of the declarative and the illustrative. This is the last segment of "Breath's Reflection":

> wanting to say
> wanting to say the eyes
> in which the eyes would, at last, resound,
> and in each limb,
> reflect;
> (where
> projection, in its lost orchard, replies).
>
> who are you,
> who are you who's breathing through me?
> whose hair braids itself in my breath?
> who still wordless
> is waiting in shimmers
> for your name to name me,
> and wrap yourself,
> a new creature, in the flesh of your mirrors.

Reading *Wind Chrysalid's Rattle* is watching the poems overcome their problems, merging and intertwining, gaining the strength of the poems that succeed, and, for the most part, shedding the groundless declarations of the poems that don't succeed. As with a chrysalid, we see its grossness differently once we see what it yields.

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A word should also be said about Eliot Weinberger, publisher of *Montemora.* He has expanded the usual notion of a poetry magazine with the publication of Montemora Supplements. By publishing books, Weinberger presents an extended selection of a single poet's work, with the space, arrangement and length that even the most conscientious journals can rarely afford. Hopefully there will be other engaging supplements to follow. △

The Prose of Fact. MICHAEL DAVIDSON.
The Figures, Berkeley 1981.

by THOMAS MEYER

Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without.

—WALTER PATER

I think of Matisse. *Chambrée*, pertaining to a room. Chambered? Not quite. In English, immediately, one imagines wine brought upstairs from the cellar, set on a sideboard so that it takes on the room's temperature. No space so intimate as a bedroom, or even so functional. Still I am thinking of somewhere private, safe, a "living" room (that concept for which the French claim they don't have quite the word). A domestic situation, day to day, an ordinary scene of personal absorptions even though *chambrer* means "to room," to share or be confined in a room, closer to our verb "billet." What occurs to me is that quality in Matisse, implicit both in palette and perspective, of experience as it comes in *here* from out *there.* The prosaic as drawn into consideration by a curious, outgoing mentality is as descriptive of William Carlos Williams as it is of Henri Matisse.

As it would not be quite apt for Richard Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park* series, or Michael Davidson and *The Prose of Fact.* For Davidson and Diebenkorn there are complications, psychic hesitancies that provide a proscenium—an intermediary stage between the orchestra and the background or backdrop—tempering the outward curiosity of eye or speech. The thick walls of personality provide Williams, provide Matisse with thick skins, a blithe ignoring of the ambiguous. *Ocean Park* No. 112 covers *The Prose of Fact*, covers I am tempted to think as in "protects," "shades," or *protégé.* Diebenkorn in this recent series of paintings is the direct heir of early Matisse, Notre Dame, Quai St. Michel. The luminosity and spatial tonalities, the architectural element, the insistent concern with surfaces, all

result in a highly spiritual presentiment. Such a spirituality, in that it stands beyond natural cause and effect, clearly verges upon pure, impersonal aspects of a conjectured psychic "structure." Flip to the last page or two of the book, there in an appealing photograph taken by Lin Jakary, Michael Davidson. Handsome, sunny, his broad, evident muscularity sweetened by the attitude of his hands as they stroke and rub an obviously purring cat laid out on the desk before him, between us and him. Books, papers, a wall tacked with postcards, snapshots it looks like, and a window, the panes of which cut the black and white blotches (a tree, a shrub) into luminous rectangles. There is a marvelous feel of light in the room, the same as causes the Diebenkorn on the cover to glow. *Du beau sejour du commun jour* Ronsard proclaimed this honeyed ambience.

Just so, Carlos Williams belongs to *The Prose of Fact*, but where the good doctor's approach was direct, Davidson's is open. There it is in his photographic countenance, an openness that gives him vulnerability. Since we see a poet here, that sweetness is a sensitivity to language in its uncertainties, its ambivalence and drawing back from experience. This isn't quite the case in Williams, even the late Williams. Although there was his aphasia, the coming again to speech, it was plain speech, the *vraie vérité* of language for him was that it become a commission of simplicity. Not so for Davidson, unless as heir he inherits along with his generation that aphasia, that slurring and interruption of speech, which is quite possible. And which, in fact, might slur experience itself, even before it approaches the verbal. A certain might in *A Prose of Fact* is its entertainment of language as pure experience and the attendant suggestion that, say, speech disorders may be perceptual disorders; i.e., we stutter because reality stutters. "The disturbance in speaking which is manifested in a slip of the tongue can in the first place be caused by the influence of another component of the same speech—by an anticipatory sound, that is, or by a perseveration—or by another formulation of the ideas contained within the sentence or context that it is one's intention to utter," Freud notes in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, the fifth chapter, "Slips of Tongue"; indeed, a handbook of composition in an "open field," "by the musical phrase," tracking the "passional." What we have yet to say, even that which remains obscured by attention and intention, can disorder what we are presently saying, just as what we have yet to experience may be directed by as yet unexperienced, but perhaps an-

ticipated, perceptions. On page 59 of *The Prose of Fact*, in an etude headed with an epigram from Maurice Blanchot, this apposite passage appears, carrying us from one side of Freudian slips to the other:

> He imagines a vantage something like the one before him only more full, more elaborated. He thinks back to a moment in which, unable to sleep, he comes downstairs to sit at the table and itemize all of the reasons for insomnia. The list is filled with the day's events, all of which seem inconsequential until tied to analogous events the next day. The phonecall that he failed to make today would lead to his making the same call tomorrow; the cheese bought today would be put into the dinner the following evening; the shirt, picked up at the cleaners, could thence be worn. And so forth. All thoughts were retrospective. For each moment of awareness there would be an equivalent series of awarenesses projected into the future which would validate, complete, fulfill those already encountered.

Despite the tenses, the same dynamic pertains here, making the future a disturbance of the present.

The situation? "A temporal field in which each moment is potentially revelatory" (I've lifted this Nietzschean phrase from Davidson's essay on Robert Creeley's prose, "The Presence of the Present," *Boundary 2*): *Le beau sejour du common jour.* Walter Pater calls it "this fair abode of our common daylight" in his discussion of Joachim du Bellay, back to whom he looks for the complexion of "modern" (1873) poets in whose work like that of the *Pléiade* "it is necessary that there should be perceptible . . . something individual, inventive, unique, the impress there of the writer's own temper and personality." This impress because of when and where it takes shape molds a *poésie intime*, "that intensely modern sort of poetry (Pater again) in which the writer has for his aim the portraiture of his own intimate moods, and to take the reader into his confidence." I don't want to suggest Davidson and Pater signify the same thing. No. Though I do want to hint that Davidson's language yields a *richesse* of distinctions in direct succession to Pater's formulation. For instance, "The Philosophy of Composition," its opening stanza:

> The palms wave at 4:14
> and again at 4:30

as part of the wallpaper effect
of certain afternoons

In Pater's great essay, "The School of Giorgione," the *fin de siècle* Epicurean maintains, "In its primary aspect, a great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow for a few moments on the wall or floor: is itself, in truth, a space of such fallen light, caught as the colors are in an Eastern carpet, but refined upon, and dealt with more subtly and exquisitely than by nature itself." For "picture" I risk reading "poem," content to allow the synesthesia of sunlight dappling a wall to summon as primary a perception in words as it would be in paint. Again, "The Philosophy of Composition,"

the same old anxieties
the point being
you thought the seasons
exerted their "local" effect

when it was *you* all along
and your nervous tic
that gave the air the air
of a Wallace Stevens title

Could it be possible to find a verbal event not analogous but appropriate to an "accidental play of sunlight and shadow" making that "wallpaper effect"; something like a nervous tic, or something more severe like the speech patterns at the end of a manic paroxysm? Or *les fadeurs exquises* of that inner voice each of us hears fading in and out, smearing our thoughts though revealing our idiolects?

He came from the race
that talks incessantly
in order to explain everything
that might happen to a person
who remained silent long enough
to listen, in the interval
they supplied a translator
because where he comes from
they don't speak the same

as I do

Untitled, page 46: like Giorgione's subjects, Davidson is continually listening "to detect the smallest interval of musical sound, the smallest undulation in the air, or feeling for music in thought on a stringless instrument, ear and finger refining themselves infinitely, in the appetite for sweet sound; a momentary touch of an instrument in the twilight, as one passes through some unfamiliar room, in a chance company." Even lamenting cruddy vinyl ("Brahms"), "life itself is conceived as a sort of listening—"

All five of them
(including Mr. Rubenstein)
lost forever, their boat
made out of the same
lousy plastic.

Wallace Stevens, alongside WCW, is an obvious shade cast in the Elysium of Michael Davidson's work, of course propitiated in the language, but also suggesting in *The Prose of Fact* that here we have a *genre* poetry. "Genre" as in genre painting, scenes and subjects from common, everyday life (versus, I suppose, "poetic fancy"), and as genre Davidson's poems are *Giorgionesque*, "they belong to a sort of poetry which tells itself without an articulated story."

"The News" is the longest poem in this volume (six pages) and comes about a third of the way through. Its final two lines ("or the interruption / by the phone in Xanadu") sum up that genre quality I called earlier *chambrée*, as though the evening news were a video phantom from Porlock; that Xanadu and the poet's private chambers were interpenetrations. Fancy gives way to genre. It still maintains a Romantic buzz but does not "dress-up" or "act itself out." Fact, the so-called news, public or personal, comes into such a room, into view the way a landscape may be said to enter a room when the curtains are drawn. The poem's nine irregular sections whisper of loss, a break in domestic circumstance—"she" is no longer there where "he" is: *il et elle ne sont pas chambrés*, in other words. (Or *chambrées*? Gee, I wonder; in order to maintain the distinction between a chambered gun or nautilus, and confinement?) The "seeming" quality of this news, the indirection of its semantic statement imbedded in crisp syntax, is black to the dazzling white of "Home Thoughts from Abroad."

while the weather cools a piano plays
with difficulty
as in living alone only sleep is difficult,
the sun sets every day at an earlier hour
each address to be placed at the top
of a letter with three paragraphs
greeting and close
yet when she was here
all of this was left silent

Compare the above to the opening stanza of "Home Thoughts from Abroad" (I caution a post-Rimbaud attitude toward all pronouns, all biography should be considered a floundering Titan)

Your being here was wonderful,
everything has changed,
we look out upon the hedge and lawn mower
for the first time,
the light is grey, now green,
now grey again;
see what you have accomplished
and from what heights
until the sheer necessity for writing this
has vanished

or taken on a different name

From "Home Thoughts" on, the second half roughly, this taking on a different name lifts *The Prose of Fact* on wings of a soaring cathexis effected in the language, independent of obvious subject matter. A buoyancy invades the text, defying the overdetermined character of earlier poems (and of an earlier book, *The Mutabilities*), placing side by side such ironic tesserae as "comradeship and millenial despair." That doublet occurs in "Interior with Michael," a shining example of this effect I'm trying to describe, toward which *The Prose of Fact* veers. Pronouns in general are now felt to be definite conditions of address, separate yet structural throughout. Rather like what goes on in Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park*, worked and reworked patches, *pentimenti* are abutted to form linear, clear, open statements of closure. Despite the return to previous concerns, the surface retains its freshness, no *sfumato*. Nothing ever muddies despite the constant stirring

up of still depths.

In conclusion, I want to recommend Michael Davidson's statement, "What is being language-centered?" in *The Difficulties* (first issue), Viscerally Press, 118 Crain Avenue, Kent, Ohio 44240. It's been my blithe assumption writing this review that its reader will at least recognize Michael Davidson's name, and that he'll have reasonably easy access to a copy of *The Prose of Fact*, consequently I've given my enthusiasm wide range. I've neglected the humor in his work, an extremely important (much commented upon) aspect, but so singular that it nearly defies all but obvious remarks, at least whizzing through with the zesto that's been mine. And I'd caution several readings of his work, of this book as set forth in the ordering of its poems. There is an elegant procession of motives (pastel colors, green, recorded music, the cat, certain objects like the tone arm of his turntable); to discern its traces is to apprehend not so much a shape, but the negotiation of shapeliness. Michael Davidson's poetry draws us through the disturbed edges of emotion into the passionate center of undenied, never disregarded intimacies. In part, that's why Walter Pater and *The Renaissance* (Donald Hill's splendid edition) come into the court: "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end." △

Tiresias I:9:B: Great Slave Lake Suite. LELAND HICKMAN. Momentum Press, 1980;

by MARTIN NAKELL

The wars of this poem are mirrored by the war between horror and lyricism, and the combatants are secretly in love with one another. Immediately there is an exhilaration to the poem that derives from it language, which is inventive, driving, compellingly beautiful. The horror is specific: alienation, guilt, the failed attempt to love. Hickman weaves these elements into a cloth whose astringent beauty is overwhelming. It is not an easy task, but there is an urgency in the very breath of the language to achieve release. He is digging relentlessly, and that effort itself stirs the deepest parts of us.

Aside from the fact that there is an actual Great Slave Lake, in Canada,

and this long poem begins with an actual journey to that lake, we are moved to ask ourselves, why this lake? What enslavement? Firstly, it unfolds, that Hickman himself is the slave, and the Lake is the water of connection: knowledge, or self-knowledge. "great slave lake/sang me go down & go down, stand still in my thunder & hear it". This self-knowledge doesn't come easily, but if it is to be achieved at all one must enslave oneself to the task. And the Lake is the swirl and steam of Hickman's own emotions unresolved, it is what still enslaves him. And the Lake itself is slave, as all things are, bound by their own order. In all three of these interpretations lies the same basic truth: to yield to the enslavement is to approach freedom.

In the second section of the poem, "Paint Child At Pain At Shock At" Hickman portrays a childhood, as the title indicates, of pain. His family is poor, Catholic, and Hickman is a budding homosexual. His father is locked in a brutality which is as blind as it is relentless. The pressures of poverty and lovelessness finally break his mother. Hickman is a child, and among the first things he learns in his lessons is shame from his family, his friends, the parents of his friends. This begins the long epic of alienation. It is told at times in the language of the child, which is the language of magic and repetition, fear and prayer. The repetition becomes a vital staple of Hickman's poetics. In a scene early in this section Hickman is riding in a car with his father and a marine named Louie. He learns what manhood the world would call him to, as Louie "hooks his tough arm out the window"; yet he also learns what he sees all by himself, the beauty that on the marine's arm hung out the window "the wind / mows all the hairs back". Hickman is sitting on Louie-the-marine's lap, low in Louie's lap, where "that bunchup in his levis is a grownup pecker". He tries to imitate the marine, to be manly, "okay leatherneck c'mon let's / both hook our arms out", he can "see (Louie's) tough eyes", but . . . it is a world which evades him as it infects him. The marine reveals Hickman to his father, "well Lee I do declare / your little boy here is tryin' to feel my dingus". And immediately the boy makes of words a prayer, desperately frightened: "o wind mow the hairs back". Then he adds, as if, if he thinks the right thoughts he will be saved: "bad Japs die", though he knows too that somehow *he* is a "bad Jap", the enemy. This story is told in one stanza of 21 lines. It ends, again, with the musical line, at once lyrical and terrified, "wind mow the hairs back & bad Japs die". It is one of the many fine achievements of the poem, both emotionally and

poetically.

In the section entitled "Fort Providence on the Mackenzie River" Hickman intensely portrays a relationship with a woman, Jeanne, in New York City. This is one of the two places in this poem where there is an attempt to establish an ongoing relationship of love. It fails bitterly, partly because of the poet's own past, partly because of Jeanne. One of the most poignant repetitions/chants/prayers of the poem occurs in this section where Hickman writes of Jeanne, "cd shed rage / shd love come". And Hickman prays, "solace from my sky on her mute dumb weird / & absolve her". Again and again he turns those phrases, turning them over like dough until they include himself, ourselves, praying, "& absolve them".

But the figures become confused in the rush toward/away from love. "Brian-Jeanne", Hickman writes, "convolutions of the emblem". Brian is a one-night stand male prostitute picked up in Hollywood. It is a time of fear, disconnection, hope lost and gurgling up, and of the inescapable brutality of childhood. "how will I smoke, drive my car, eat". "pyre / sweet, & lift me as loss and ashes thru my blue sun breath door".

The other place in the poem where Hickman attempts an ongoing relationship of love is with the work itself, with poetry. As everywhere, in love, the childhood appears to haunt, the poem denies him, enslaves him. But the "song shivers", and this shivering is the tremble of possibility. Adept at prayer, Hickman writes, "o hopeful and attentive sentences", wherein he at once is condemned and redeemed. The poem cannot save him any more than anything else his desperation turns to. And yet, in the compression of so much emotion and life into poetry there is a hope that the attention, by its heat alone, will loose the rocks of oppression. And well it may.

The most enduring relationship of the poem is with the father: "& the stern god's ruddy thick phallus plunges into my brain", and "son snuck off to yr queers again?" This anger comes from a more primary place than simply a father's confusion or feeling of betrayal at his son's homosexuality. The anger is deeper than that, for "Dad" is not braying against the son's "queerness" at all, but against his sexuality. The church and the father the same. In reality, it has little to do with *what* the son does sexually, just that he *is* sexual.

Hickman goes on in this section to describe his father after the mother is gone. His father, smoking, "coughs, stub burns small & / soft grey ashes fall

on his white bare toes, dis- / gusted I watch him curl in his head & breathe in slow we swirl / quiet & alone under thick low fog swirl". How beautiful is that last phrase beginning "slow we swirl. . ."! And yet, it is preceded by Hickman watching his father in disgust. How else can he feel towards the man who asked him, "snuck off to yr queers again?", who "plucks at my armpits sideburns eyebrows ass". This whole section, "Fort Providence," ends with the stanza which also closes, for now at least, this probing of the father-son relationship:

> & the dead raven we come upon, on the forest
> floor. sleek once to cleave
> the boreal
> air. twisted neck bent back over wing, great wings
> outspread in great
> struggle. shines
> decaying. ebony beak bloodspeckt,
> wrencht toward sky & eyes
> silver'd. underbelly of
> maggots, ants
> thru crawfeathers stirr'd by the low
> breeze. something
> dead. gleaming like an onyx thru the shadowy
> forest

Passages of this brilliance are not uncommon. However, the poem is too long for the narrow focus of its obsession. The scope of the poem encompasses things large and significant. The poem itself, and Hickman's handling of a basically narrative and biographical work, is significant. But the story repeats itself endlessly: sex and the choking pain of guilt. Horror horror horror until, at times, the horror loses context and therefore meaning. These things are important. They are the crux of our lives, but overworked they become tedious and expected, and their impact (which, with Hickman's intensity, control, language and sense of both bitterness and compassion, is substantial) is diminished. It is important to follow obsessions. It is equally important to broaden and see further. This book, long as it is, is only part of yet a larger work, *Tiresias*, and the unfolding of that work over the years will be the opportunity for us to participate in that broadening.

The craft and intelligence which Hickman wields in forming this vivid work makes the publication of this book a vital event for poetry in America.

What continues to amaze me in this poem is the humanness of it, the tenderness Hickman has maintained and raises here, raising us with it. When the authentic sensuality comes through this poem it washes clear through you. Neruda said of Rimbaud that things got so bad for him he kicked beauty off his knee. Hickman has entered the same difficult territories yet has not lost in the crossing his sense of beauty, of reaching into things and touching them at their core. △

Cap of Darkness. DIANE WAKOSKI.
Black Sparrow Press, 1980.

by DAVID R. SMITH

Cap of Darkness, Diane Wakoski's most recent book of poems, provides a near perfect illustration of the ways in which our qualities are also our faults. For example, given her belief that one finds the stuff of poetry in patterns of recurrence, it follows that much of her best work will rise out of these repetitions or, as she also calls them, "re-visions." It also follows that they represent a danger for her; for that past repeated, that obsessiveness, can equally produce not only visions of collapsed time, of a past resurgent in the present, but, as well, clutter. In *Cap* she insists upon this ever-presence: "some rehearsal of the past is always with me;" and much of the book seems devoted to proving the assertion, sometimes to great effect, sometimes less grandly. It is a collection with its share of both taints and honors.

There are a number of first-rate pieces here: "In Praise of Modern Time," "Red Runner," "Red Runner, Again," "Not Breaking the Silence," "Trophies," "My Mother's Milkman," "Lantana," amongst others. And there are a few she might have meditated longer. The difficulty for the reader is that the weaker works may hide the virtues of the rest. The problem is not the reader's alone, for that unevenness is on her mind these days. In her Preface to *Toward A New Poetry*,* a collection of her criticism published at about the same time as *Cap*, she argues against publishing a selection of her best work by insisting that she wants to be read whole, seen entire, and that her "work is a kind of organic entity containing great weaknesses which

* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980).

balance great strengths." The statement, which is both courageous and curious and which engenders more questions than we can ponder here, may reflect not only self-criticism but an uneasy awareness of some critical reactions to her work—that it is unstructured, prolix, prosaic, even unpoetic, too repetitive. Some of the criticism is silly, for the best of her work is obviously bedded in patterns of image and metaphor, of repetitions and variations on them. Her response to the criticism is a kind of ambivalent attraction. She confronts it by repeating the supposed sin, a version of Dancing on the Grave of a Son of a Bitch. But it is a dangerous game, candle and moth.

A few years ago her publisher, John Martin, urged her to "go on to something new," and she responded with a poem, "George Washington Meets the King of Spain (on the Magellanic Clouds)"* (even the title is a defiance), which reveals both her love of confrontation and the razor's edge she has chosen to walk. She accuses her interlocutor in the poem of

> Not understanding
> that the new
> is the old
> viewed
> and reviewed,
> viewed over and over:

And to make sure no one misses her point, she follows that colon with a short parade of figures from her mythic pantheon. Here in *Cap of Darkness* she accuses herself of rambling in her repetitions and then proceeds to do so in order to illustrate, I presume, (a) that form is an extension of content, which is an extension of a life composed of will and memory and disordered by "otherness," and (b) that the critics are wrong. She admits that she is uneconomical with words in "A Californian Fights against the Old New England Traditions," which she dedicates to Stanley Kunitz, who is more sparing. She compares their differences with nice objectivity, using a visit to a supermarket as a metaphor. He, a spare, older man, chooses Edwards Brothers coffee, the least expensive; she wants all of Araby, South America, and Fortnum and Masons. But if she is profligate, she is so, she says, because she seeks size. Nonetheless, if only in their recurrence, these confrontations belie an underlying uneasiness and ambivalence. She half recognizes cross purposes in her work, is overwhelmed by the blindness of her critics, and is exasperatedly unsure of what to do.

---

* In *Looking for the King of Spain* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975).

To the degree that a collection of poems is *about* any one thing, *Cap of Darkness* is about change, about aging and accepting limitations. Yet she opens it with a "Preface" of six poems centered on the King of Spain, a fantasy figure who has been a fixture in her work for three-quarters of a decade and who represents for the "Diane" of the poems an ideal and unchanging world. This "Preface" is designed to stand in contrast to what follows; but the point is too well made, particularly as he and others of her young mythic figures keep reappearing in the rest of the collection, as though she were passing them in review:

> This explanation is addressed to:
> The King of Spain
> My Motorcycle Betrayer
> The Woodsman
> The Astronomer
> A Poet
> A Truck Driver
> A Mountain Climber

Further, the collection is full of the confusions and protestations about love and its loss, about her failure to be beautiful that her readers have come to expect: "but you are gone now." "He's gone. / He's gone. / I am old." "How do we know / what love means?" One understands that she is trying to create a web of associations and a consistency of persona; but this reappearing past is seen through a "Diane" who seems to be caught in a revolving door with an incubus. She treads a razor's edge between enough and too much; and repetitions such as these sometimes seem automatic, reflexively self-reflexive.

She plagiarizes herself in "Dear Michael," writing, "Nothing is simple or innocent anymore," a phrase she had already used in "Virtuoso Literature for Two and Four Hands" five years earlier. In "A Dissertation on Smallness" she writes:

> Looking for the King of Spain while reading Lorca,
> Stevens, and Yeats,
> and dreaming of Rilke's mustache.

Not only is Rilke's mustache everywhere, but these lines are taken virtually entire from *The Man Who Shook Hands.*

There are also occasional (perhaps I should say "other") evidences of inat-

tention, signs of first draftyness. Here are three examples, each of a different order. In "Cap of Darkness" she writes:

> No, my battle is with
> the ghosts themselves who have positioned
> the false singers in their ancestral houses and given them
> position. . . . .

She declares a woman witty who said, "The size of dress you wear depends on your wealth. If you buy a $100 dress, you may take only a size seven. But if you buy a $15 dress, you may require a twelve." In "Not Breaking the Silence," an otherwise fine poem, she walls Poe's hero "behind bottles of sherry."

These noddings do not help our confidence as readers, not even despite the insistence of her voice, and she wants to have her say:

> You are right, Judy,
> no one wants to hear.
> But I want to speak.
> I want you to listen.

This spirit of insistence is both a bravery and, at times, a foolishness because it can lead to contentious distraction. Several poems become involved in argumentative outbursts which lie outside their substance, as though in the course of writing a poem she is reminded of an argument anterior to it but which she will at that point, part way though the poem, finish.

Contrasting two poems in this collection is instructive. Each is generated by a recollection from childhood. Each touches on failures of the self; but as poems, one is unfortunate, the other blessed. One is filled with blame, anger, self-justification which tear at its fabric, the other with generous self-acceptance, which helps keep it whole.

In "Washing & Ironing" Wakoski recalls that her mother, a bookkeeper, took in washing to help pay the rent. The child hated the situation, not because the mother was humiliated, but because she, "locked into [her] helpless / child-like life," was:

> And I am angry,
> and say I will never learn to keep
> accurate
> records,

never type,
and never iron clothes
when I am adult.

This image of childish petulance derives from what "Diane" takes to be her mother's failure. But on other mornings, every bit as self-centered as when angry, the child awakens

to see morning glories in the window
and to see the early morning sunshine coming
in the door, hearing
the morning doves making their throaty noises
and my mother standing in our small living room
ironing. . . .

On such luxuriant occasions, when she smells the "hot wet cotton" and looks forward to a "whole fresh summer day," it turns out that her mother is ironing for *her*, ironing *her* sundresses.

The problem this poem suffers from is not the child's lack of generosity but, rather, from the poet's need to defend attitudes which rise out of that past. Instead of allowing these recollections their own time and place, Wakoski elaborates and explains; and it is by this avenue that her angry polemic enters the poem and at this point that we suspect the existence of an unnamed opponent who once objected to that lack of generosity and who is being countered by an increasingly extravagant argument. She describes how a seven-year-old boy murdered an eight-year-old who had taunted him for doing woman's work by hanging out the wash. That murder, she writes:

seemed
hideously
in keeping
with my feelings about that awful anachronism:
the deliberate refusal to own an electric dryer
(or to use it, if one owned one),
and the clinging to that hideous practice,
hanging the washing out
on a clothesline.

The parenthetical is awkward, and it is also disturbing in the way it attempts to shut down all objections. It becomes a kind of last word, stairwell wit.

The stress shows in the Barthelmetic extravagance of language, the "deliberate refusal" becoming an "awful anachronism" which forces one to the "hideous practice" of hanging out the wash. She, however, has put all that behind her:

> Oh, how glad I am to sit with my book or pen and paper
> at the laundromat,
> while the warm air gushes around the fabrics,
> rotating them smooth, airing them,
> drying them warm and supple.

The machine is no longer in the garden. She has invited it indoors and raised its use to the level of civilized custom:

> How I embrace the 20th century and its technology,
> freeing me from centuries of drudgery,
> . . . . . .
> and we *do* have a choice now.
> We can leave savage customs behind.

From our laundromat we can contemplate man's accomplishments and rejoice in God's ways.

Contrast this to "Lantana." It is the last in a series of pieces which works toward it and which permits her to digress and return, to digress again—without rambling, for the parts retain their evident structures and form a whole as increasingly familiar images weave their way through these texts. The series opens with a prose "Letter from Unwritten *Greed, Part 10*" in which she recounts her fright at being awakened in the still of the night by a moth beating against her window. By association the moth becomes not only the frightener but the frightened, both predator and prey: "He is beautiful, and I think there is a certain madness in my marauder turning out to be a butterfly—for, if I had to choose two symbols for myself, one would be the moon and the other would be a butterfly." She completes the circularity and the meaning of the image by recalling that as a child she could stand still for hours, "abnormally still for a child of five, in front of a hedge of lantana and catch butterflies in my bare fingers, something no child should have been able to do." This conceptual base is then built upon in "The Moth," a poem in which that insect becomes a metaphor for those who are trapped, and then in "I Dream of My Failures with Ed Dorn as Judge," in which her fears are expressed by silence, "Wherever lantana grows." With

the way prepared for these intertwining images of the ambivalent moth/butterfly and lantana, of destruction and silence, she then turns to "Lantana."

> How still can a child be? I know
> now that children move and talk and
> in fact are like fire and water
> far more than adults.
> But my own childhood was spent
> as a ghost, whose words
> came out thin, misty and almost silently.
> I sat quietly,
> so quietly that adults often forgot
> I was there, and cut paper dolls
> or read my book
> but always listened,
> and waited,
> listened
> with murdering stillness.
>
> A long hedge of lavender flowerets,
> the lantana with its dusty, slightly bitter
> smell, the little dark berries forming
> after the flowers, like the beady eyes of birds,
> and the flowers themselves
> like tiny cushions of bouquet.
> How the Monarchs, Swallowtails and Cabbage Moths
> loved this hedge, and the smaller greying moths with brown eyes
> in their peasant wings; they would sit with blades moving
> back and forth for balance, fanning,
> almost underwater motions, their black scrolled etchings
> calligraphing the whole yardfront hedge,
> and I, age five, hypnotized by the orange and yellow
> stained glass, fragile with powder,
> would stand quietly
> quietly, until the insects forgot
> I was there; I stood still
> looking, listening for whatever there was to hear,
> the humming of the hedge, the hot afternoon buzzing
> and cracking, my hands poised, thick little girl hands
> but still,

still as stone,
more still than a child's hands could be
till the butterflies dazed with the quiet day and the heat
relaxed their fanning wings
then I slowly moved and would capture one, pinched between my small
thick fingers, and take it home, a prize
for a glass jar.

How did I do this? My hands that have shaken since adolescence
with nervous energy and mercurial power?
Yet, I still can sit for hours, without fidgeting.

Unnatural, though, that I in my little black high-topped shoes
with yellow braids pinned on top of my head that bees like to sit on
should have started with this stillness.

Because of it
I was able to murder butterflies.
I didn't want them in glass jars, only wanted to
catch them. Didn't want to kill them / only wanted to prove I could
catch them.
Pity me
in my little black shoes,
not knowing what to do
for love,
or beauty,
and that my murdering stillness was
all
I had to offer.

Here is no argument, no blame, no anger. She neither explains nor answers. There is no unheard charge. She recreates a moment, gives it space and time. It is, as Montaigne said, a kind of perfection "de savoir jouir loyalement de son être." To enjoy loyally, to rejoice in one's own being requires this objective sense of what one is or was; and it is that acceptance of or loyalty to self that this poem gives us. And it gives us more, for the prosody is sure, line lengths just. The repetitions serve to hold it all together. They are never a distraction. They are, indeed, brilliant. This free verse has its own rhythms which also help secure the structure. Form *is* an extension of content, as she herself is convinced. Such a poem and the others I have mentioned outweigh the dross, and by a good bit. △

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Jerome Rothenberg

Harold Bloom: The Critic As Exterminating Angel

AMONG THE UGLIER IMAGES making up what will emerge as the myth of the 20th Century is that of Dr. Josef Mengele—exterminating angel of Auschwitz—who separated the victims bound directly for the gas chambers from those healthy enough to be spared for terminal labor assignments. His characteristic gesture, at least in my own vision of it, was a flick of either wrist & the laconic words, "You to the right" or "You to the left." One variant of the myth would have us believe further that Mengele, being a man of some "culture" or pretensions thereto, found the task sad but otherwise inevitable.

As goodness, we have been told *ad infinitum*, may sometimes spring from evil, I would have hoped that the image of Mengele's judgment (or its innumerable counterparts) might have helped us pull away from the model of man casting himself in the role of a judgmental god. At least I would have hoped so in the domain of art: an experimental ground in which such human possibilities can be played out as images. *"Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu"*—Artaud's great verbal act of exorcism—followed the savageries of

Auschwitz by a couple of years, & a characteristic if milder stance of some later avant-gardists aimed to create for art & poetry a function that allowed discovery while avoiding the pretense to judgment characteristic of most critical & literary traditions.

I'm reminded of all this in going over the critical writings of Harold Bloom—a task I set myself after reading a particularly indulgent piece of his exclusionary criticism that I'll discuss below. In Bloom, more blatantly than elsewhere, the idea of the critic as exterminating angel appears with characteristic regrets, etc., but in no uncertain terms. "However diffidently I give the answer," he writes in *Kabbalah & Criticism*, "I am engaged in canon-formation, in trying to help decide a question that is ultimately of a sad importance: 'Which poet shall live?' "

I'm aware of the hyperbole, even the absurdity involved in setting Bloom beside Mengele, but I can't help feeling that he himself must have had some such comparison in mind when presenting his work in those terms. The play of much of his criticism (& by far its most interesting aspect) involves his incorporation of Jewish mysticism & myth into a description of "post-Enlightenment poetry;" & this includes, beyond a reenforcement of Bloom's six rhetorical tropes or of his "revisionist" poetics in general, the use of such a solidly traditional figure as the *Malakh ha-Mavat* = Angel of Death = Satan = (by a common gnostic & Blakean inversion) god as Jehovah. His criticism seems obsessed as well with the killing-off of poets—largely of course with poets killing other poets, both forerunners & contemporaries, in a veritable battle-to-the-death. Given all that, it seems unlikely to me that as "Jewish" a critic as Bloom would not, in making his assertion of a "you live / you die" function for criticism, have been struck by the image of Mengele, in much the same way that as "Jewish" a poet as myself immediately felt its presence.

I will get back to the "Jewish question" shortly—as well as the not unrelated questions of poetic struggle & canon-formation. For the moment I would like to play with (& even "mis-read") some of the

key terms in Bloom's criticism, which together form a coherent if spiritually stingy view of reality & one that seems aimed (for whatever we might want to salvage from it) against much of what I take to be of most value in the poetry & art of this century.

2

Much of Bloom's energy as a critic has gone into the exposure of the blindness of poets about their origins in other poets—a blindness & an attempt at concealment that involves, most crucially, those poets whom Bloom professes most strongly to admire. This work of exposure is more than critic's busy-work, whether as simple source-study or as what Geoffrey Hartman calls, using some of Bloom's own terms, "a type of 'mis-reading' which helps poets to overcome the influence of previous poets"—or, as Bloom more accurately puts it, a "deadly encouragement that never ceases to remind them of how heavy their inheritance is." Bloom's involvement is intense, even personal, & what it finally reveals is his own blindness about the motives of his enterprise & its origins in what may be a deep struggle with, & antagonism towards, the very objects of his admiration. The work, in other words, is highly deceptive (to himself & others)—at least if one misses certain key confessions sprinkled through it, or if one is diverted by the radical nature of Bloom's great predecessor poets (Milton, Blake, Shelley, Emerson, Whitman, & so on) into thinking that Bloom is dealing in the present—as they in the past—with a true poetics of liberation. The approach-through-Bloom is in fact the reverse of any such position.

To begin with—& this shouldn't surprise anyone out there—Bloom's poetics, as he presents it, is militantly "literary." (This doesn't mean that it may not have other ends in view—political, social, etc.—but more of that later.) He is by self-proclamation an "academic critic," who presents the history of Western poetry as the work of a succession of academically based canon-makers, from the time when "Alexandria, which . . . founded our scholarship, per-

manently set the literary tradition of the school, and introduced the secularized notion of the canon"—a process which modernism (= "the Romantic psychology of belatedness") has challenged or confused but never, presumably, replaced. "Nothing in the literary world," writes Bloom in *A Map of Misreading*, "sounds quite so silly to me as the passionate declarations that poetry must be liberated from the academy, declarations that would be absurd at any time, but peculiarly so some twenty-five hundred years after Homer and the academy first became indistinguishable." (How the assembled ghosts of Blake, Shelley & Whitman would have handled that one, boggles the mind—though no doubt it provides Harold with a chuckle as well.)

What holds for the critic-as-academic-reader must also hold for the poets. That most poets who read are readers isn't the point at issue, nor that poets are "desperately obsessed with poetic origins"—& with other origins as well: personal, linguistic, cosmic, etc. For Bloom it must be tighter than that, & so he writes, in *Poetry & Repression*: "Even the strongest poet must take up his stance *within* literary language. If he stands *outside* it, he cannot begin to write poetry. For poetry lives always under the shadow of poetry." (Thus Bloom's favoring of rhetoric & so on over Wordsworth's "selection of the real language of men" or its more precise, therefore more threatening contemporary equivalents.) Or again, in *A Map of Misreading*: "Poems, I am saying, are neither about 'subjects' nor about 'themselves.' They are necessarily about *other poems*; a poem is a response to a poem, as a poet is a response to a poet, or a person to his parent." And the response, in Bloom's terms, is always a mis-reading, a mis-interpretation, the outgrowth of a struggle oedipally conceived: "To live, the poet must *misinterpret* the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the re-writing of the father." (Such misprision, in Bloom's account, may also involve the critic as reader, though the struggle there seems muted—not presented, for all of Bloom's exterminating passion, as a battle-to-the-death.)

In all of this, as I see it, the problem is not that Bloom takes a literary or textual approach but that he leaves us room for almost nothing else: an occasional nod towards the "reading" of nature or of experience, or a passing hint that precursors, even literary ones, may be other than poets or that the struggle may be with forces other than literary ones. Such one-sidedness is the price of obsession—his own, self-acknowledged, with the idea of influence & its attendant anxieties—& it leaves him often & inevitably at odds with his poets themselves, their poetics & self-interpretations, their views of their own & others' struggles where those contradict the needs of Bloom's particular "misprision." While Bloom is certainly aware of this, he "take(s) the resistance shown to the theory by many poets, in particular, to be likely evidence for its validity, for poets rightly idealize their activity; & all poets, weak and strong, agree in denying any share in the anxiety of influence."

The finesse of that last shot is absolutely breathtaking: an assertion of the critic's hegemony against all odds & certainly "all poets"—like Bloom's comment elsewhere that "the true poem is the critic's mind." It is as if Claude Lévi-Strauss had inadvertently confessed to Russell Means' worst suspicions about anthropologists; & seen in the larger frame of Bloom's intentions & assumptions, it drives home a separation between poet & (academic) critic, not as many of us have long felt it but towards ends that Bloom announces here & there with great forthrightness. So, he tells us in *A Map of Misreading*, "No strong poet can deign to be a good reader of his own works," nor should the critic speak for him exactly, because "this is not the critic's proper work, to take up the poet's stance." And having said that much, he goes on to question—from the critic's perspective—the term most central to the poetics of nearly all his targeted "strong poets" & to that Romantic tradition one might have thought he was defending:

> Perhaps there is a power or faculty of the Imagination, and cer-

> tainly all poets *must* go on believing in its existence, but a critic makes a better start by agreeing with Hobbes that imagination is "decaying sense" and that poetry is written by the same natural man or woman who suffers daily all the inescapable anxieties of competition.

The key word here—since Bloom has pulled us back into the "light of common day"—is "competition." Few poets would deny their identity as natural men or women (it is, if anything, part of the inheritance of the Romantic); but the discovery that competition—not imagination!—is the central definition of the natural & human (&, ultimately, the poetic) is a point that wouldn't escape the readers of *Commentary*, say, whatever effect, or non-effect, it may have on the readers of *Sulfur*.

We are approaching the crucial split between two human possibilities that marks Bloom's doleful "deconstruction," the moral choice behind his poet-critic cleavage, whose implications, since his position isn't timeless, become much clearer, more specific & more contemporary, elsewhere in his work. Thus, he writes in the introduction to *Figures of Capable Imagination* (1976):

> Poets lie, both to themselves and to everyone else, about their indebtedness to one another, and most critics and literary scholars tend to follow poets by hopelessly idealizing all inter-poetic relations. Now that the tides of aggressive ignorance, or the counter-culture, are ebbing, many of the absurd hopes that the young and their middle-aged followers placed in an apocalypse of society are coming to rest in the arts, particularly literature, in the belief that there at least the repressed can return, a belief much encouraged by such false prophets as Marcuse and Norman O. Brown.

If this isn't Bloom at his best—& it isn't—it's Bloom giving an unequivocal context for his present disturbance. The identity of the "false prophets" isn't worth an argument, though the question of the

other poet/prophets, who "lie . . . to themselves & to everyone else" (but from whom Bloom derives his livelihood), should at least give one pause—the relation of Blake, say, to "counter-culture" & "apocalypse" & "art" & the "return of the repressed." A notable "misreading," I'd have thought, to go from Blake's dream of liberation to this hostility towards those who would presume to carry it into the present. Knowingly or not (but no critic should "deign to be a good reader of his own works"), Bloom is here playing out the archetypal role of Blake's "Devourer": the antithesis of the "Prolific," who thinks he has the Prolific/the "producer" in his chains ("but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence & fancies that the whole"). In this, Blake writes as a (true? false?) prophet, pointing to the continuing existence of "these two classes of men . . . [who are &] should be enemies," for "whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence."

If Bloom is the Devourer—the diluter of energy, the reductive agent—"revisionism" is no longer the poet's (prolific) re-visioning but an attempt to turn the unqualified "freedom" of the Romantics & their successors into a qualified & "repressed freedom": itself a product of anxiety. The Devourer, then, swallows the Prolific's "excess of delights" but seems to choke on them; or, as Devourer-turned-teacher, he laments: "How is he [am I] to teach a tradition now grown so wealthy and so heavy that to accommodate it demands more strength than any single consciousness can provide?" Unlike the Prolific—the producer—who revels in his own & others' excesses, the teacher / Devourer/ critic is driven to despair & to canon-formation to relieve the stress.

As mere "academic criticism," the Bloom dilemma seems a little sad & silly. But it's never more than a short step from literature to those other areas where ideas like "freedom" & "repression" effect the actual ways we think & act as human beings. Given Bloom's own time frame & his sense already quoted of the counter-revolutionary nature of the middle 1970s & beyond, I will allow myself a political reading

of one of his statements *vis à vis* "strong" poets & "strong" poetry in *Poetry & Repression*, that "it is only by repressing creative 'freedom,' through the initial fixation of influence, that a person can be reborn as a poet." The terms are slippery & may at first be taken as purely self-repressive &/or psychological; but while Bloom relates his work to Freudian ideas of sublimation ("Geoffrey Hartman . . . calls the poetic will 'sublimated compulsion' . . . [while] I would call it 'repressed freedom' "), he himself tells us that his aim isn't "so to apply Freud (or even revise Freud) as to arrive at an Oedipal interpretation of poetic history." Nor is it simply a question of poetic restraints as a matter of technique or method. The issue for Bloom increasingly involves a response to a contemporary condition of yearning for which Bloom's own precursor poets had acted as prime movers. That response—at least the part of it that concerns me here—is threefold.

He is, to begin with, scornful of the ambitions of "post-Enlightment poets," although the scorn is sometimes hidden behind a mask of "melancholy." "Unfortunately," he tells us in *Kabbalah and Criticism*, "we have all of us arrived too late in the day to take on such a flamboyance" as that of Emerson & Whitman "chanting . . . that a large consciousness contradicts itself because it contains multitudes." But this late-in-the-day, therefore absurd flamboyance extends, we find out in *A Map of Misreading*, from "all of us" to all American poets whatsoever, "the most consciously belated in the history of Western poetry," who, "rather more than other Western poets, at least since the Enlightenment, are astonishing in their ambitions. Each wants to be the whole of which all other poets are only parts." Applied to Emerson & Whitman themselves (but also Dickinson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, & Melville), the Bloomian misreading moves from muted mockery to a diffident paternalism that only a true Devourer could master.

From such a defensive-aggressive posture, Bloom can put into question the stand of any of his great poet-precursors against repression itself. Such a strategy is at the heart of Bloom's mis-readings, in

line with which he proposes, in *Poetry & Repression*, to revise "all received readings, including my own," of such a poem as Blake's "London," since said readings "are wholly mistaken in seeing ['London'] primarily as a protest against repression, whether societal or individual." Here a cautious adverb ("primarily") keeps him from the arch-revisionist statement he seems really to be aiming at, but later he crosses the line & tells us that "Blake's poem is not a protest, not a prophetic outcry, not a vision of judgment. It is a revisionist's self-condemnation, a Jonah's outcry at knowing he is not an Ezekiel." All of which is a crazy "academic" view of a poet who shivers the boundaries of literature; who is Blake rather than Ezekiel (& no less important for that); & whose prophetic outcry co-exists with whatever "negative and self-destructive" elements Bloom may rightly or wrongly see in him.* We have here passed from mis-reading to deception: the attempt to reduce Blake's fine frenzy to that "failure of nerve" which, if I remember it correctly, underpinned the new conservatism of the critics of my childhood. (Bloom's teachers too—to whom he once again succumbs.) The process from here on in begins to read like critic's self-projection.

The third response I have in mind is something more than that, though clearly tied to Bloom's own situation. For what Bloom does at the extreme of his deconstruction is virtually to reject the idea of "freedom" in favor of that of "repression"—terms he has already revealed to have a "social" as well as "individual" dimension (i.e., not merely "literary"). Emblematically Bloom phrases this rejection as his turning from Milton's Satan (as interpreted by Blake): a poetic crea-

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* Before being misled by the contrast between Blake &, say, the Hebrew prophets, the reader can check out, e.g., the self-doubt of Ezekiel 20.49: "Ah Lord God, they are saying of me: Is he not a maker of allegories?" Or Jeremiah 20.9: "There is something in my heart like a burning fire / Shut up in my bones / & I am weary of holding it in / & I cannot." Or Abraham J. Heschel in *The Prophets*: "The prophet is human, yet he employs notes one octave too high for our ears. He experiences moments that defy our understanding. He is neither 'a singing saint' nor a 'moralizing poet,' but an assaulter of the mind." [All quoted by J.R. in *A Big Jewish Book.*]

tion whose influence had extended into the work of such American poetic "revisionists" as Ralph Waldo Emerson &, even, Emily Dickinson. In his characteristic manner he describes the turning not only as a matter of regret, but something deeper. "I am temperamentally a natural revisionist," he writes in *A Map of Misreading*, "and I respond to Satan's speeches more strongly than to any other poetry I know, so it causes some anguish in me to counsel that currently we need Milton's sense of tradition much more than Emerson's revisionary tradition. Indeed, the counsel of necessity must be taken further: most simply, we need Milton, and not the Romantic return of the repressed Milton but the Milton who made his great poem identical with the process of repression that is vital to literary tradition."

In the light of current New Conservative & Moral Majority maneuvers, the invocation of the language of repression & of Milton the Puritan (or a parody thereof) as counselor-on-tradition, cannot be confined to the world of literary studies. The "we" who need the Milton of Repression is ultimately a "we" that can't be narrowed down, Bloom tells us, by "sex, race, social class," etc. "If we are human," he writes, "then we depend upon a Scene of Instruction, which is necessarily also a scene of authority and of priority." And no matter how he tries to modify this into a middle-ground accommodation with the authoritative fathers, the stance remains contemporary with Bob Dylan's recent need "to serve somebody"—as Bloom's competition-as-creation might make a fit with the revivalist side of Milton (Friedman)'s economics.

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I'm not refuting Bloom here, so much as indicating his obvious & admitted deviations from the line of poets (the 19th Century ones at least) foregrounded in his work. The spirit of that work, it seems to me, isn't revisionist but, as he himself renames it, "antithetical": almost a full turn from the revisioning—the actual return to vision—that has marked our poetry from Blake until the present. I've

found Bloom useful in clarifying some of this, & I'm in sympathy with some larger part of what he attends to: Romanticism, kabbala, gnosticism, & so on. At the same time I'm distressed by the reductiveness of his work, by his unwillingness to revise or revision a narrowly conservative idea of tradition & "priority." There is, in other words, no questioning of "tradition" at its roots, but a reductive assertion "that everyone who now reads and writes in the West, of whatever racial background, sex or ideological camp, is still a son or daughter of Homer." No Coyotes or Taras appear in his mythologies, no Milarepas or Li Po's among his canonized poets. Kabbala & gnosticism gain entry as maps for criticism but otherwise his "canon" is still European & his specialization post-Enlightenment & English. So it remains only those poets devoted to the idea of the prolific, exuberant, & flamboyant who have made the move to let the greater world into our work.

Bloom's narrowness helps him turn any new or liberating sense of the past into a species of "belatedness," & it allows him to disregard the forwardness that has again & again defined an avant-garde over the last two centuries. It is against such forwardness in particular that his rage seems directed—& even more particularly against the forwardness that surrounds him here & now. The poets wandering past the Bloomian woods should at least be warned of this. "A map of misreading" may sound like a step towards the openings of indeterminacy or chance or towards a free experiment with word & thought, but it isn't. Similarly, his selection of John Ashbery (Bloom's one candidate for canonization among the old "New American poets" & the New York School) may feel like a leftward tilt but is, if anything, the scorning of poetic "movements" (the attempt to draw multiple voices into the work of *poesis*) in favor of the single poet winnowed from his peers.

While obscuring his own critical precursors in the anti-Blakean, anti-Miltonic New Critics, Bloom's aim—against the whole thrust of visionary & revolutionary poetics—has been to maintain the process

of canon-formation & the mastery of critic over poet, Devourer over Prolific, system-maker over "Inspired Man." To keep poetry within the domain of academic literature—to maintain, that is, the separation between art & life—he has devised a system that has both limited his own ability to read & to create, & has allowed him to be arbitrary in his selection of "strong" poets & "strong" poems. More than his method, it is his intention that seems so wrong & devious: a deliberate obfuscation that would reject (at least in his own time) the strong & bold in favor of those he sees, rightly or wrongly, as candidates for the purveyors of a "repressed freedom."

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The arrogance of criticism prospers, even fattens, on the silence of the poets over whom it means to tyrannize. It is an illusory fatness, anyway, & there does come a time when some of us who make poetry are moved, for one reason or another, to break the silence & to respond in kind. For if critics are instructors, as in Bloom's view of it they are, so are poets; & it isn't always possible or useful to save ourselves the effort of that clash of instructions by surrendering the field.

What finally pushed me to a reading & a response to Bloom was his second attempt at dealing with, & dismissing, a generalized entity called "the American-Jewish poet." Since I'm a particularized version of that entity, I can be seen to have a personal stake in the matter. As a poet, of course, I'm supposed to thrive on personal stakes, while Bloom as a critic may be thought to have a need for more objective standards. But what's attractive to me in Bloom's work is that such "objectivity" is almost never there—& surely not when dealing with an entity so close to home as this one.

Bloom himself is a marvelous example of "belated" Jewish culture. It colors a large part of his criticism & it is, as I said earlier, its most interesting aspect (at least for me). This isn't a question of a down-home feeling shared by Jews, but that in dealing with certain

areas of Jewish tradition, Bloom allows himself access to the kind of uncanonized traditional material for which, by a curious display of willful ignorance, he seems otherwise to have so little use. The result, in a work like *Kabbalah and Criticism*, is sometimes very useful; & similar insights turn up in his other works & intersect with a referential network that touches as well on Jewish orthodoxy & gnostic heterodoxy—non-canonical also from a Western/Christian point of view. It's my feeling that if Bloom had allowed this network to expand, he could have made an extraordinary synthesizing contribution to our concepts of *poesis*. But he would also have been poaching incredibly on the poet's terrain, where "all ages are contemporaneous in the mind" & everything is possible.*

Bloom on the Jewish poets is something very different. The two pieces that raise that issue are "The Sorrows of American-Jewish Poetry," which appeared in *Commentary* about ten years ago & was reprinted in *Figures of Capable Imagination*, & "The Heavy Burden of the Past" from the January 4, 1981 issue of *The New York Times Book Review*. The first piece seems to have come out of nowhere—or out of nothing more than Bloom's suspicion of, discomfort with, or hostility to, the idea of (American) Jewish poets—while the second is

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* Bloom backs off from any such wide-spectrum synthesizing, which I assume is something he identifies, too exclusively, with the mythical "school of Pound." He is reticent as well about his relation to kabbalists & mystics, writing in *Kabbalah and Criticism*: "I myself am no kabbalist, and I hold no theosophical beliefs of any kind. I am merely a sceptic." While this is fair enough, his view of kabbala as "an interpretive and mythical tradition [rather] than a mystical one" also plays down its creative & performative side—in spite of his perception, e.g., "that the *Sefirot* are like poems in that they are names implying complex commentaries that make them into texts." Interestingly too his dismissal of himself as kabbalist is coupled with a repetition of his hostility to poets who make a conscious use of precursors: "Only weak poems, or the weaker elements in strong poems, immediately echo precursor poems, or directly allude to them." (I take this as one of the most symptomatic & debilitating attitudes in all of Bloom's writings—a damning result of his critic-poet cleavage & the surest guarantee that poets will be trapped in the past rather than free it up towards future uses.)

a review of a specific book, *Voices Within the Ark*, that presents 1200 pages, worldwide in scope, of what the editors, Anthony Rudolph & Howard Schwartz, call "The Modern Jewish Poets." The "simple" question, raised in the first essay but covering both, is "why isn't modern Jewish poetry better?" since, Bloom assures us, of the ninety American-Jewish poets in the Rudolph-Schwartz book, "only about a dozen have written authentic poems, true artifacts, and none of these alas has yet earned a place in the canon, though one or two yet may." And of those ninety American Jews (the Europeans end up only a little better at Bloom's hands, but it's clearly the Americans he's after), Bloom further assures us that "no single figure [is included] who so far matters urgently or overwhelmingly in the poetry of our country."*

Since this is Bloom writing, I take it, in the language of "natural man & woman"—or what we used to call "the man in the street" or "average N.Y. Times reader"—I assume we can go by the ordinary meanings of those sentences. Bloom in fact makes it a little difficult to test his proposition, since he names not one American-Jewish poet in the course of his review—unlike the earlier *Commentary* piece, where he may have exposed himself by doing precisely that. Still, a casual glance at the Rudolph-Schwartz book shows that among the ninety canonless Jews are Louis Zukofsky, Allen Ginsberg & George Oppen; among those missing, Gertrude Stein. Of these, Zukofsky & Oppen (along with Charles Reznikoff) had been dismissed ten years before by Bloom for ties to Pound & Williams; Ginsberg had been tagged "mock bardic" & had really blown it by being "beyond the

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* In the earlier piece he writes, under the categories of "melancholy phenomenon" & "sorrowful conclusion," that no "single American-Jewish poet of undoubted major status has established himself in a century now more than two-thirds gone." (Here, of course, his field isn't even restricted by the previous editors' choices.) The response—by a citation of poets—is obvious, though it would involve the literary equivalent of naming all-time "dream teams" without having first agreed on what game we're playing.

reach of criticism" (italics mine); & Stein, as always among "academic" critics & anthologizers, had again been left unmentioned. While I'm not one to get that easily into reputations & achievements, it seems inconceivable that in the ordinary sense in which a "figure . . . matters urgently or overwhelmingly in the poetry of our country," the aforementioned poets (or a dozen more if we really started naming names) could be said *not* to matter, or that some of those others Bloom does mention—Elizabeth Bishop or James Merrill or A.R. Ammons—could be said to matter *more*.

But we know already—don't we?—that Bloom is into something else: a devourer's need for reduction; a myth of poetry as a response to poetry & of person as a response to parent; & with that as the pre-set pattern, a decision by *fiat* as to who best fits it. So, the reduction & the claim for what matters proceed—here as elsewhere in Bloom—by a definition of "strong" poets as those who "tend to achieve an individualized voice by first all-but-merging with a precursor and then by pulling away from him, usually by way of a complex process of fault-finding and actual misinterpretation of the precursor." (This is the famous path-of-poetry-through-ignorance—as if to prove that Harold likes his poets blond & dumb.) And if we ask, before we swallow that, is that the mark of *every* "strong" poet, the answer from Bloom is every-strong-poet-since-the-Enlightenment. (He exempts Shakespeare & Co. as "antedeluvians" & can't conceive of primal sources like Homer & Bible as themselves "belated."*) It is Bloom's handle *par excellence*, & since it is, he wields it as he chooses—this one "strong" & that one "weak"—& if the parent-precursor gambit doesn't work (or if it works too well where he doesn't want it), he comes up with the "authentic poem" as the "true artifact." And so on.

As for the Jews, they fall, well, like Jews before the critic-

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* Consider the cover-up of Mesopotamian & Canaanite influence, etc. on the Bible—as part of the true enterprise of Western canon-making up to the present.

executioner, who informs us:

> All post-Enlightenment poetry in English tends to be a displaced Protestantism anyway, so that the faith in a Person easily enough is displaced into an initial devotion to the god-like precursor poet. This, to undertake it, is hardly a very Jewish process, and yet something like it seems necessary if poets are to continue to be incarnated. However far from Jewish tradition they may be, something recalcitrant in the spirit of young Jewish poets prevents them from so initially wholehearted a surrender to a Gentile precursor, and indeed makes them nervous about the process itself.

The statement looks so crazy as I read it over, that I wonder if Bloom isn't out to prove that critics are the real madmen in the critic-poet cleavage. All of it could, of course, be argued—from any number of directions—but to accept the premises to start with is, I fear, to walk into Bloom's language trap. Its mechanism is the standard double-bind: if Jews appear too Jewish they're in trouble, & if they don't appear so, they're in possibly worse trouble. "The dilemma," he writes, "seems to be either too much tradition or too little, and while such a dilemma typifies all 'modern' poetry, it assumes acute and crippling manifestations in most verse that intends somehow to be Jewish." Still, the Jews "work on under peculiarly internalized disadvantages"—a statement, in spite of its racist implications, never spelled out more clearly than what I've already quoted. But then, he tells us, "Jewish history [was] almost always catastrophic"—or, as they said, in my family & probably in his, "OY OY OY it's hard to be a Jew."

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I have been asked by friends—both Jew & Gentile—who have watched me tussling with the Bloomian angel, to conjecture on the root causes of his Jewish problem. Although speculation of that sort—dealing, as it would have to, with questions of literary &

psychological "priority"—would turn the tables on a critic devoted to a probing of such origins, it feels uncomfortably far from my previous poetics. I can, however, speculate on some of the reasons, explicit & implicit, that appear in his own writings, & can see where my comments on those will lead us.

In *Poetry & Repression*, for example, there's a discussion of Giambattista Vico's "*new* science," an 18th-century enterprise that involved a return to what Vico took as the *oldest* strata of human thought & language: a hieroglyphics of "mute signs and physical objects" followed by a figurative, "poetic" language or "poetic wisdom —much like that "science of the concrete" (C. Lévi-Strauss) later ascribed to "primitive" peoples by the strangers who came to study them.* The true poets for Vico were the first peoples (= "gentes" or "gentiles"), "who spoke in poetic characters" & whose language, theology & social institutions he contrasted not only with those of Jew & Christian (as Bloom presents it) but of all peoples (Chaldeans, Scythians, Egyptians, Germans, Greeks, & Latins) who had gone through a development from family or tribe (= *gens*) to a "civilization" that brings a separation from "poetic wisdom" & the creation of a "human language" of "common uses" that he identified with "prose."

Since the Jews had also undergone such changes, it is curious how often in Bloom's discussion the distinction becomes that of Jew & Gentile, with the Christian given entry as a kind of adjunct to the Jew. (That last point, however, I find truly ambiguous.) Thus he writes: "In Vico's absolute distinction between gentile and Jew, the gentile is linked both to poetry and history, through the revisionary medium of language, while the Jew (and subsequently the Christian)

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* "In devoting half his book to poetic wisdom, Vico exhibits scientific and religious wisdom seeking to know itself by recovering its own origins in vulgar or poetic or creative wisdom. In doing this, it becomes itself creative, or recreative . . . re-creates itself by re-creating the first science, that of augury or divination, out of which all the others grew." (Thomas Goddard Bergin & Max Harold Fisch, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*)

is linked to a sacred origin transcending language, and so has no relation to human history or to the arts." And again: "A strong poet, for Vico or for us, is precisely like a gentile nation; he must divine or invent himself, and so attempt the impossibility of *originating himself*. . . . Since poetry, unlike the Jewish religion, does not go back to a truly divine origin, poetry is always at work *imagining its own origin*, or telling a persuasive lie about itself, to itself."* It is as if Bloom had taken one of the terms in Vico's universalizing version of a primitive-civilized dichotomy—"with our civilized natures we cannot at all imagine and can understand only by great toil the poetic nature of these first men" [= gentiles]—& had fixated on the Jewish-Gentile distinction the term implies in common usage. By so doing he can advance the standard view of the Jews as a people set against divination & graven images, etc., & can contrast "the link between poetry and pagan theology" with the "[perpetual] war between poetry and Hebrew-Christian theology." In this the Christians are somehow let off the hook by Bloom; but the Jews, himself among them, are made to live forever beyond the pale of poetry.

I can only sense that Bloom, as Jew, feels himself cut off from poetry, and that he projects this deprivation onto other Jews. As if to explain & even justify this loss of poetry, he invokes the horrors of the Holocaust & the "burdens" of Jewish history:

> If one adds to the indescribable horrors of Jewish history the strength and power of Jewish religious traditions, from which

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* That poetry—"unlike the Jewish religion"—doesn't go back to a divine origin would seem to be Bloom's opinion or his mis-reading of Vico. In the New Science, in fact, Vico has it that the first language—hieroglyphic & poetic—was from an "age of the gods in which the gentiles believed they lived under divine government," etc. It was only the later ages, then, that brought a "human" view of poetry & language. Accordingly, the "gentile poets" must share with the "Jewish religion" a sense of divine origins—or, in my own terms, a sense of the "sacred" underlying all acts of *poesis*. Unless one argues that the Jewish revelation is "true" & all the others "false," as Bloom may in fact be doing, the Jewish-Gentile distinction is cancelled at this level.

> most contemporary Jews are now so largely estranged, then the force of the past becomes so great as to inhibit imaginative consciousness and to stifle inventiveness. Who could be adequate to thematic concerns so annihilating, to losses so painful, so fresh, and so irreparable? (*N.Y. Times Book Review*, January 4, 1981)

Bloom is here echoing Adorno's famous comment on the impossibility of writing poems after Auschwitz, pushing it further than Adorno, & placing the curse on those Jews—whether they write as Jews or not—who can imagine the possibility of a survival into the present. This self-projection—& I have no other way of describing it—is then translated into a "double belatedness" for modern Jewish poets, "coming after the virtues and sufferings of their ancestors, and also after the main sequence of Western poetry has worked itself through and perhaps out." It would thus seem that if American poets are "the most consciously belated in the history of Western poetry" & Jewish poets are "doubly belated," the combination of the two is absolutely "catastrophic."

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"A strong poet," then, "originates himself"; & in this re-reading of old Whitman, the possibility of all our poetry opens itself again. Such self-origination ("soul-making" in Keats' phrase, world-making elsewhere) takes many forms—including a "collaging" from the (literary & non-literary) past & present. Its constructions of identity are individual or broadly human or set in the framework of a special culture or tradition. In the Jewish instance, it has involved the work of re-writing ourselves within a real but collapsed tradition of language-centeredness & resistance to oppression. As such the collapse is more an opportunity than a threat, which Bloom, had he survived the struggles with a crippling orthodoxy ("the hand of jealousy among the flaming hair"), should have been the first to see.

But this "Jewish instance" itself, for all its particularities, is part of a larger work of human striving. The Jews like others have a history

that moves from tribe to state & in that movement sets up a struggle between new vision & the literalisms of the canon-making mind. In *A Big Jewish Book* I had to make this clear, because the Jewish distinction was a trap that robbed us—even as Bloom would—of much of our power as poets.

If Jewish history is a "burden," so is all human history—I take it this is the final message of what Bloom calls his "Gospel of Gloom"—& *no* poet's voice should now be possible. But this is nonsense & a neurotic distortion of what the real work is all about. When Maria Tsvetayeva, herself not Jewish, tells us that "all poets are Jews," I would hope it's in this sense that she means it.

The manifestos have been writing themselves for eighty years, & Bloom has still not learned to read them.

4

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom conjures up the Covering Cherub, a figure from Jewish mythology incarnated anew through Blake's imagination. The Cherub—who in one tradition may be the Exterminating Angel himself, the *Malakh ha-Mavat*—guards the Tree of Life & blocks the return of fallen man to Paradise. The same figure appears in the Jerusalem temple, where the two carved cherubs over the ark (the Edenic cherub is also double) "cover" the mercy seat with their wings; & in Ezekiel the Covering Cherub represents the "Prince of Tyre," a type of the earthly city whom "I will destroy . . . from the midst of the stones of fire."

Like any genuinely multiphasic image, the Cherub's surface meanings continually shift, no less so in Blake than in his Biblical predecessors. (Singular meanings—or "allegoric delusions & woe"—would in fact be an aspect of the Covering Cherub's threats to the "Inspired Man.") With Bloom, working after Blake, we get a number of set & sometimes contradictory readings, & at least one major omission, of what seems, curiously, a most obvious use of the image in Blake. The occasion for Bloom is his attempt to drive home the "anx-

iety of influence" as the central fact of poetic composition—of which the "struggle" between Blake & Milton provides the clearest instance. And since Milton—or "Miltons *Shadow*," to be more precise about it than Bloom is—is at times identified, in Blake's *Milton & Jerusalem*, as the "Covering Cherub," it isn't surprising that Bloom calls up the identification & generalizes the process to poets after Blake:

> For Collins, for Cowper, for many a Bard of Sensibility, Milton was the Tyger, the Covering Cherub blocking a new voice from entering the Poet's Paradise. . . . In Blake he is fallen Tharmas, and the Spectre of Milton; in Yeats he is the Spectre of Blake.

But elsewhere in *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom tells us that "the Covering Cherub stands between the achieved Man who is at once Milton, Blake, and Los, and the emanation or beloved"—in which case the poets aren't pitted against each other, and the covering Cherub, who threatens Blake & Milton both, may in fact not be a poet.

There are a number of such non-poetic readings in Blake, & one of the ideologically crucial ones—as interpreted by S. Foster Damon in *A Blake Dictionary*, & here omitted by Bloom—is that "the Covering Cherub sums up the twenty-seven Christian heavens which shut out man from eternity" & by which "the truth becomes petrified into dogma and relegated to ritual":

> And these the names of the Twenty-seven Heavens & their
> Churches . . .
> All these are seen in Miltons Shadow who is the Covering
> Cherub . . .
> The Heavens are the Cherub, the Twelve Gods are Satan . . .
>
> (*Milton* 37: 35, 44, 60)

Here, of course, is the ideological kingpin of Blake's argument with Milton, the puritanical side of him (his "Shadow") that "wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God" & thereby "enterd into the Covering Cherub." But Bloom prefers his own psychological &

literary struggles to the struggles of his "post-Enlightenment" poets against repression, authority, & dogma—that is, against the total apparatus of canon-formation both as a religious & secular phenomenon.

In place of Blake's anti-Christian/anti-canonical view, Bloom chooses to put forward the idea of the Covering Cherub as a "demon of continuity"—the enemy therefore of that "discontinuity" from the past which was "freedom" for the Romantics. By doing so, he can present the Romantics & Moderns as narrowly future-directed & hostile to ideas of poetic lineage that would—at least in Bloom's terms—psychologically diminish them & threaten their survival after death. The concept he needs to pull this off is that of an established & unchanging past—just the kind of fixed tradition (= canon) challenged by those poets who have sought a true re-visioning of the larger human past & present. To mis-read in this way is to conceal the "strong" (experimental) poet's simultaneous regard for lineage & the "academic" critic's desire to obstruct it.

The Covering Cherub—to pull Bloom's reading further—not only keeps the poet from the paradise of poetry but from a natural relationship to all those poets who inhabit it. It's a pretty rotten business all around, & the Cherub in this sense begins to lose his resemblance to anything like a "strong" precursor poet—even for Bloom, who writes:

> In this discussion he is a poor demon of many names (as many names as there are strong poets) but I summon him first namelessly, as a final name is not yet devised by men for the anxiety that blocks their creativeness. He is that something that makes men victims and not poets, a demon of discursiveness and shady continuities, a pseudo-exegete who makes writings into Scriptures.

But the weariness & weakness of Bloom's "poor demon" is such that Blake's words from another occasion leap to mind: "Those who

restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling."

Who, then, is the Covering Cherub?

If we accept Bloom's version of him—& in fact we don't—are we to see him as Milton's specter or as Blake's, or as any poet's who still speaks to us from the past? How turn Shelley or Whitman into victimizers of future poets, except on the level of a trivial psychological competition? Is it a poet who tries to keep us from our poems, or someone else: "a demon of discursive and shady continuities, a pseudo-exegete who makes writings into Scripture"?

But we know, after all, who threatens us. We know who reminds us of how "heavy" our "inheritance" is; who tells us not to deign to be good readers of our own poems or to think that we can write at all "after the deluge"; who enters into Milton's Shadow—& "not the Romantic return of the repressed Milton" but the Puritan Milton of repression. And we know who proposes the discontinuities between poets & rejects those who might know their lineage too well. We know who thinks that he "can block a new voice from entering the Poet's Paradise" or who would presume "to help decide a question that is ultimately of a sad importance: 'Who shall live?' "

The game, in short, is up. The Cherub's wing droops & reveals a face a little rounder & a little softer than we might have thought: the melancholy sweet face of those "cherubs" of our childhood.

That much, it seems to me, is clear. And clear also is Bloom's summation, his confession of the Cherub's fate: "He cannot strangle the imagination, for nothing can do that, and he in any case is too weak to strangle anything."

10 August 1981

△

Ronald Johnson

Ark 35

Spire called Arm of The Moon

That, too.
Body english bowed back on itself
Wingèd
swallow-head
blown diaphanous as glass
cartwheel to and fro,

plenilunium
bellyd
"full of eyes round about"
at large in flesh.
Toes dug into the field of vision
(as shadow, the sun)

I sing
the one wherein
all colors of this whirling world begin
and end.
Notice our roof of bells,
caduceus stairs

which rise
(the exact opposite of alignment)
twin iris of ice

to the corner stars.
Between,
planes perpendicular to being.

Being, paramount.
Compare this ceiling of circulatory angels
thinner than a human hair
in context
say, meadowlark's nest.
Note there the ruff of the Green Lion.

Stiff as a geranium
he holds the blue-gold scroll of up above,
when all things
move.
This is the Tower of
Bearings:

twenty-two arches
per square inch
of trees-falling-through-forest 'all ears',
a smallish galaxy for alcove.
This plaque reads
O

Become Adam, become his sparks and limbs.
You will see it too.
Exact as Ezekiel
amidst the long way back
Aurora consurgens!
"that the inwardes of my head

be like the sun"

I build.
With this tool I made angels
appear to-become-a-pool
Pressed for breath
they run sidewise along rungs of tapering

spiracles,
sight end on end.
They have red wings as in the miracles.
That way, one of twelve
waterfalls
dividing fellow underworlds.

This, gold ball
(some numen common to all men)
windmill
implied by the huge motioned sky domed overhead
dancing all on a pin.
By hand, I said.
that too

△

Theodore Enslin

Axes 26

We enter the world already around us.
If the weave continues, it
grows tighter — a noose —
heart and root of what was pure.
A misreading, perhaps, but one
that makes it — tight and tighter.
Whelm and overwhelm this world.
We see in darkness —
hear in void.
What we know, we do not master,
nor should it be the wish.
A few examples of us
are enough.
                The rest become impertinence.
Not *what* we understand — but
how.
        The same things echo many times.
Time slows, if the will is
slow enough.
                Now take the portion
of that time, and open to it.
Not *what.*

The sun obscured, as if by clouds,
but no clouds —
                thickening —

a density results. The shadows pale
as objects take their place—once more
the weave.
(Washed over—
A long time—not always
a long passage.
It is often the place where.
I have been there. I am, still.
As if all that had happened
counted for nothing—
no movement—if movement counts.
Then, looking at that line of trees
along the ridge,
I laugh,
and they must, too.
It all happens in the place
at hand——
transpires.
The edge of where we walk
leads into danger—
pits and quagmires.
Have a care for such a path,
that what you leave may not
set snare or deadfall
for the next to follow.
Heaves and draws—
that place among
all places
'lest thy foot'
or keeping of a brother
{hawk's wing
{daylight
all pure moonshine.

Ready as we are,
and steady as the weave.

Approximate song—
when I have feared
there would be none.
No more.
I should have waited.
It is easy to wait
only
        when one hears
the songs which are about us—
always
            about.
It is that tenuous world
we do not trust.
Float on filament—the web
it is thrown out first—
one thread
                shimmering.
A part of a world—
a hold on it—
one thread and one thread—
the many from the little.
I came in here.
I am not leaving.
It was the slow weave
that made the surety.
Tendril sensing pole
before the pole was set.
The hard times *are* the best.
And we bespeak the meaning,
trying for another part

which has no part of us.
The forms of being
will not let it be.
I creep in shade to hide
from sun that gives me life.
There is no gratitude.
There should be none.
We worry at the values
and forget the objects—
valued by a scale
which does not stem from them.

Long is the weave—
—and wide.
Direct as that we live in it.
Caught in the web,
the bars of substance.
The time comes and goes,
a pace and pulse,
apace—
                neglected sense of it.
The dull light absorbed.
Our heat precludes it.
Dense remark, it lasts
to clearing.
Bending, the pulse becomes
  the pulse.
                Throb touches.
expands the midnight—
bridges back.
                Despair removes itself.
We have no lodging for it.

Nor did I know—
where did *that* come from?
What it implies—
                a book
of ancestors—
the men I stem from
are the rocks and earth—
nor did I,
            waking,
take the time to know them.
Now these letters.
Some I write,
                and some
receive,
            but news.
The news is hard to come by.
Only in the silence
is the voice—
                the weave.
Whence? Whence?
Oh, let the words pour down,
as rain, and let them be
the passion of the doing.
Things becoming.
They are things, indeed—
fossils left upon the rocks.
The merds turned stone.
Nor did I know—.
I know in/deed.

And in that time,
                I, not
thinking,

time enough
for a Haydn symphony.
The squash grows, visibly,
or a shadow
lengthening
from the ancestral past—
one from nothing
but a wind, contemporary
with this time—
my coeval.

It was the unfair asking—
all of it unfair.
Would we have it not?
No advantage to tip a balance?
These are the things
we think of,
and reverse.
My friend—my enemy.
You are the same,
and I am placed beneath you.
(Letter to the elders.
Set that down.)
(That double edge—
or trouble axe—
and if the wood allows,
it cuts—
the wood or word
enough is close enough
to take the portion out—
the fortune/potion—
how it comes as clean
or clear—the cut

replaced.
A xenolith—
trapped in a vein—
its current there.
The memories of hours
flow together.

LZ:80 Flowers

Better than ever
in the coming and going—
the riding by.
What we have made
to assuage what is left.
It is said
off the top
of my head.
It has reached
to the bottom—
slow move to the brightness.
It makes and it is,
and I am full circle—
allowing few points
to abet what is sensed,
and the end at the start,
though it flows
as the wind flows,
now and again and again—
now—now
there is echo—
short sounding
that which comes in,
again and again.

Well,

and now,
what does a man need?
What would he give to need
if the need were not
there?
No placing—
now and now—where—
who has lost
whatever it was he thought
he had?
and touch
another thing?
Was I that man?
so various? so,
not inevitable.
It is a little thing.
I was,
and am.
I go away
to come again.
These are the voices—
the imperatives.
Let them drop.

Yet the old dream on
within a shell.
Their rot and bile
take place of blood, and yet
a few fresh leaves
stand in the wind
as preferance
before the sun,
and sweat, pure drops of it,

Dahlberg

falls, showers
in the place they stand in—
 dying.
                Raise no monument.
They go their ways,
and younger men pass by.
Yet passing, in its limit,
closes over us.
The road an old man takes
a young man follows,
swearing it is new.
The old man bitterly denies it.
Both are right—
and no man's sound
 is song for any other.

Temple—Milbridge, Maine *July 3, —September 24, 1979*

△

Clayton Eshleman

Seeds of Narrative in Paleolithic Art

> *"that uterine decantation from soul to soul which, body after body and driven by hunger for love, liberates a buried sexual energy . . .*
>
> *a well in which the uterine hunger of the soul mourns a love that has not been born, in which the fecality of the supernatural body of the soul writhes to death because it has not been born. This century no longer understands fecal poetry, the intestine malady of herself, Madam Death, who since the age of ages has been sounding her dead woman's column, her dead woman's anal column; in the excrement of an abolished survival, the corpse too of her abolished selves, and who for the crime of not having been able to exist, for never having been able to be a creature, had to fall, the better to sound the depths of her own being, into this abyss of foul matter and indeed so pleasantly foul in which the corpse of Madam Death, Madam Fecal Uterine, Madam Anus, hell upon hell of excrement, in the opium of her excrement, foments hunger, the fecal destiny of her soul, in the uterus of her own center. The soul, says the buried body of being, is that focal point of the survival of life which falls, fecal as excrement, and is piled up in its excrement."*[1]
>
> — ANTONIN ARTAUD

NARRATION IS CERTAINLY STORY, the recital of an event, and, since the word is based on *gnarare*, from *gnarus*, meaning "knowing," some sort of assimilation is implied. In some way, the significance of what happened is to be shown, either in the course or, as a consequence of, the story.

It is impossible to know when something that we today would recognize as narrative began to occur in human life. My hunch would be that it came about as a result of the invention of night life (meaning social life at night as well as that archetypal place that corresponds with a distinct mythic geography we call the underworld), made possible by the institution of fire. According to Louis Leakey, "before that, like birds or baboons, with the fall of darkness we sought our perch. Our daytime lives were pragmatic, absorbed with the chores of survival. The leisure of the evening was for the human being like a new ecological niche. There was the security of the shelter or cave, and the social focus of the fire that fascinates us yet today. Here talk became a pleasure, not a necessity. The day's adventure of the hunt could be told and retold, while children listened and learned. Memories were enhanced, myths began to take form."[2]

There is, of course, no record of this talk. When we look for evidence of the first seeds of narrative, we come upon Neanderthal burying his dead in red ochre-lined pits, on pine-boughs and covered with wild-flowers, at 75,000 BC. By tying the corpse up so that it looks as if it is being buried in a foetal position, Neanderthal may have been sensing the earth as both womb and tomb. He also may have been trying to prevent the formation of a ghost, for the tied-up corpses were often covered with a heavy rock slab. This event could be the earliest narrative seed, yet the only marks Neanderthal made were cup-shaped gouges on the undersides of these burial slabs. While such gougings are evocative of concave female space, they may be no more "narrative" than a two-year-old child chipping at the wall with a pencil, simply to act on matter, to affect the outside.

It is not until around 30,000 BC that we find evidence for the beginning of the liberation of the autonomous imagination. Much of this evidence comes from south-central France and northern Spain, and was done by people (whose brains were slightly larger than ours) called Cro-Magnon, and consists of finger-doodlings in soft clay, sculpture, engravings, and paintings in caves as well as incised weapons and tools.

I feel that what we call image making and, consequently, art, was the result of the crisis of the separation of the hominid from the

animal into the distinct though related classes of the human and the animal. Why it resulted in image making when and where it did probably has much to do with ice age conditions—an almost total dependence on animals for survival (though Cro-Magnon seldom depicted red deer, his main food source) as well as the effect of severe and prolonged cold on a body that originally evolved under temperate and even tropical conditions. Seemingly suddenly, at around 30,000 BC, these people began to put the animalness that they were losing (or really, had lost) yet were utterly dependent upon, onto cave walls—often in the depths of caves, in nearly unreachable places. Consciousness, as I am thinking about it, seems to be the upswing of a "fall" from the seamless animal web, in which a certain amount of sexual energy was transformed into fantasy energy, and the loss was partially and hauntingly compensated for by dreaming and imagining as processes not directly related to survival.

Cro-Magnon's main cave wall obsession was with big herbivores, such as bison, horses, mammoths, and deer. These animals are often painted as if they have been hung on the cave wall, separately, with no relationship to each other—at least in what we would call a narrative sense. Only occasionally do the painted animals seem to interact, e.g., one sniffing another's sex or two animals copulating. There is one considerable exception to what I say here, in the "well" at Lascaux, and I will come back to it later.

The first images of which we have record appear to be crudely

Figure 1

Figure 2

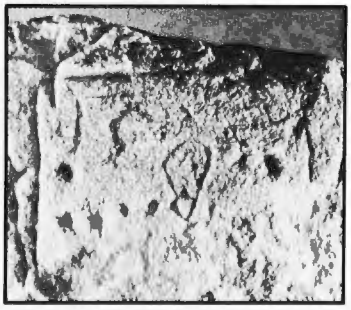

Figure 3

gouged vulvas and possibly phalluses mixed up with animal indications, as well as thousands of seemingly abstract meandering lines and

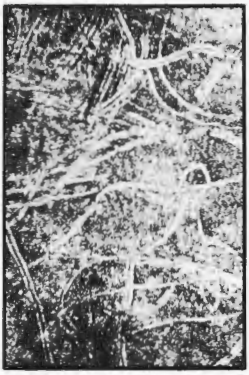

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

dots—either separate dots, or dots in various formations. As we come forward in time, say up to around 16,000 BC, the human image begins to emerge, often in one of three image situations:

1) Person appears to be a satirized, bestialized, distorted phantom. Such terms, for me, translate back to the fact that it did not at this time recognize itself as human in any finished, completed (or

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

even vertical) sense. Person was a kind of grotesque merger, anticipating Roman *grotesca* and Mochican ceramics (in which human beings are depicted copulating with a vast variety of animals, birds and insects), of abstract signs and realistically depicted animals.

2) Woman, less often engraved on cave walls than man (and when presented either engraved in profile with greatly exaggerated buttocks or sculpted in frontal view, as the figure from Laussel holding up a horn) *is* free-standing sculpture, the so-called "Venuses," small

enough to fit in the hand, whose legs and necks taper (or bulge) into anonymity and whose image force is in obesity, a thick mid-lower body girdle of sex, buttocks, stomach and breasts.

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

3) Man begins to appear as a dancing elfin fleck in engraved friezes of wandering lines and animals, and while the shape indicates human being, he is either part animal or garbed in animal, a camouflaged piece of the shattered hominid/animal mosaic.

In almost every case the figure of the human is masked, and often appears to be moving—or, as in the case of the female Venus statuettes, appears to have been tapered to a point so as to be fixable in the ground (several were discovered in such a position). Two narrative seeds can be gleaned here: the masked, dancing shaman as Coyote or Shiva, the trickster hero of myths all over the world, constantly in transformational motion—in contrast to the fixed, matriarchal figure of "The Great Goddess" who will become the central figure of Mesolithic and Neolithic visions of the womb that is the tomb that is the contrapuntal rhythm of spring and autumn, where the natural and the human are as strands of one cycle twisted upon itself.

Paleolithic space appears to be multidirectional, not only a world

of broken inter-relation where everything is in association, but also a world that is not partitioned from its material by a frame or some other boundary device. Since there seems to be no evidence for distinguishing sacred space from secular space in paleolithic imagination, it makes sense to me that paintings were retraced, i.e., participated in again and again by people who were probably in no way related to the original painter.

One could almost say that there is no evidence in paleolithic art space of the distinctions we make between an exterior and an interior. It seems to be neither inside anything nor outside anything. On the other hand, a sense of boundary appears to be emerging *within*

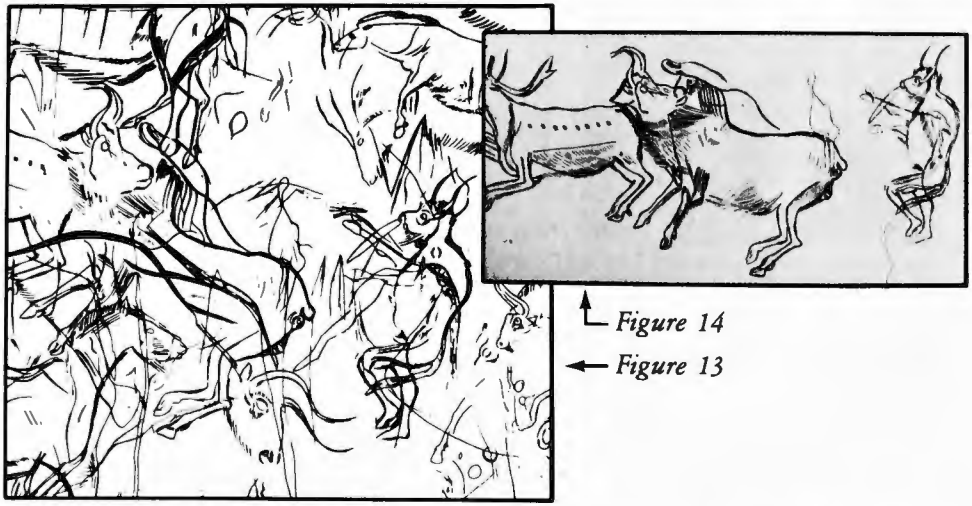

Figure 14

Figure 13

painted or engraved areas. I imagine a paleolithic frieze as a kind of whirlpool within which the flotsam of inside/outside are spinning toward me. If so, of what did the "shipwreck" consist? In following out the metaphor, I come again to the animal/hominid separation as a catastrophe in the ocean of life, the ramifications of which we have hardly begun to investigate. Inside and outside, in this view, could be seen as the wreckage of an inter-related life vessel. The "spars," ordered, become the vertical/horizontal, or right angle "fix" that is dominant among many equal directions from the time in which the animal was dethroned and domesticated.[3]

As we continue to come forward in time, the animal is gradually cut away from the human figure. I imagine that a whole progression could be elaborated from paleolithic animal-costumed "shamans" to animal-headed Egyptian gods to fully human-appearing Greek gods (some with animal consorts and disguises, others, like Hercules, in battle with man-hating monstrous animals) to Blake's 18th-century water-color, "Glad Day," where the poet displays himself naked and free of all animality, his left foot treading on a worm while a bat-winged spirit, symbolizing evil, flies away. The counter-motion to this progression is the animal spirit, not only become "fabulous" but increasingly less an ally and more a figure of terror and wrath, pounding on our chests in nightmare, as if what we are is a door locked on separation forever.

Charles Olson's vision of the Odyssey as a dance-drama in which a shaman-hero dances his way through a labyrinth of monsters to be reunited with a human other is a fascinating tie-in of so-called prehistory with history, but such a vision also bears the shadow of Hercules out of bond with living animals.[4] By tending to depict animals realistically and himself as a hybrid monster, paleolithic man seems to be in accord with Wallace Stevens' "It is the human that is the alien,/ The human that has no cousin in the moon."

I would now like to concentrate on one particularly mysterious and complex paleolithic scene in which a symbiotic narrative seems to be compressed into an instantaneous event (or in which an event is beginning to crumble into sequence). I am referring to the painting at the bottom of the "well" in the depths of Lascaux, probably the last work in the most beautifully painted of all the caves, near Montignac in the French Dordogne. Because I am writing as a poet who has visited the caves and tried to learn something from them, I want to comment on some of the interpretational problems with this scene and then present a poem I have written, which is my response to the scene.

Georges Bataille gives an adequate description of the scene: "midway down, four yards or so below the floor of the Apse, a narrow platform brings one opposite a rock shelf (below which the Well continues to plunge) bearing images, on one side, of a rhinoceros and, on the other, of a bison; between them, falling or supine, is a bird-headed man; below him, a bird poised on an upright stick. The infuriated bison's hair literally stands straight on end, it lashes its tail, intestines spill in thick ropes from a gash in its belly. A spear is painted diagonally across the beast's flank, passing over the place where the wound has been inflicted. The man is naked and ithyphallic: drawn in a puerile fashion, he is shown as though just felled by the bison's two projecting horns; the man's arms are flung wide and his four-fingered hands are open."[5] A few pages later, Bataille writes: "Bison and rhinoceros, man and bird betray the same

Figure 15

touch, the same stroke, the shining black paint is the same, they have the same frosted, rimy look."

Bataille then quotes Abbé Breuil who feels that it is "a painting perhaps commemorating some fatal accident that occurred in the course of a hunt." But Bataille then comments that the bison could

not have been disemboweled by the thrust of the spear, and this fact eliminates both the rhinoceros and the man as the cause of the bison's condition (or possibly makes them both responsible: the man speared the bison down through the anus, and the rhinoceros gored the bison from underneath). Of course none of the interpretation so far takes into consideration that the man has an erection and that the rhinoceros, which might not be involved with the man and the bison (Laming claims that the rhinoceros "does not seem to have been painted with the same hand; nor is the technique similar to that of the other figures.") has six black dots under its raised tail (if they are connected with any other part of the scene) are not depicted as falling, as dung would literally do, but as almost floating toward the perched bird.

Bataille then quotes from Kirchner's interpretation. According to the latter, it is not at all a question of a hunting incident, the prostrate man is not dead; rather he is a medicine-man in the throes of an ecstatic trance. Kirchner, we are told, has drawn on the idea of "a relationship between Lascaux civilization and the Siberian civilization of our own times." A Siberian scene is cited with the sacrifice of a cow; posts topped by carved birds mark the road to heaven, to which the medicine-man will guide the sacrificed animal while he is unconscious (the birds being auxiliary spirits without whom the medicine-man could not undertake his aerial journey).

This interpretation might account for the erection (and also somewhat connects with Giedion's argument that "this bird man is in fact standing upright at the moment of supreme exaltation.") but as Bataille himself points out Kirchner overlooks the bison and his wound; "that is to say, is it probable that, in a sacrifice, a bison would be disemboweled? And has not Kirchner's theory forced him to view the rhinoceros as independent of the rest of the scene? However, if one inspects the actual Scene at Lascaux, one quickly discovers the group's unity and similarity in treatment."

After offering arguments against interpretations of the scene by Pericot, Reinach, and Maringer, La Barre states that he finds Kirchner's most acceptable, "because evidence for totemism is lacking

among Stone Age men, whereas we do have plentiful evidence of shamanistic animal-man relations." Yet La Barre slides into agreement with the traditional hunting incident interpretation when he explains that the scene depicts a "shamanistic 'trickster' who bites off more than he can chew and comes to grief (bird power has no power over a charging bison), a story perhaps of shamanistic rivalry illustrating the inappropriateness and powerlessness of an Orphic bird shaman in the underground world of the reindeer shaman."

Lommel sees the scene as a battle between shamans, "a fight in which only one of the contestants has assumed the shape of an animal."

As I have suggested, the tendency of all the interpretations is to fail to bring the rhinoceros and the six black dots into consideration. While Bataille emphasizes the unity of the scene, even he makes no attempt to connect the bird, perched facing the rhinoceros' anus, with the turds floating toward it. It happens that several spear-throwers carved from antler bones have been discovered which depict an animal, in Leroi-Gourhan's words, "with an enormous sausage of excrement issuing from its posterior orifice, with two birds, at the end of the sausage, tenderly kissing."[6]

It is possible that all the interpretations also suffer from a kind of logical one-sidedness, and all, for the sake of consistency, come away with either a hunter interpretation or a shaman interpretation. Yet there are no actual hunting scenes depicted in paleolithic art and all shaman evidence must be based on fragmentary associations with "primitive" peoples removed by thousands of years from Cro-Magnon. Since there does not appear to be any way to ground a single consistent interpretation, maybe one should try to think about the "well" scene in a different way.

If Cro-Magnon imaginative space is multidirectional unbroken inter-relation without frame or sacred/secular distinction, perhaps the experience displayed in such space is too. I mean, maybe it is time to stop saying that the man in the "well" scene is *either* supine/dreaming *or* supine/dead *or* falling *or* standing in exaltation. Maybe the experience concretized here is all those things at once, so

that the meaning of the scene is not a Rashomon-like situation in which the "truth" is a never completely interlocking mosaic of contrasting viewpoints, but a meaning in which all the associational surfacings fuse into an image capable of bearing the inconsistencies and contradictions that have sapped the power of the interpretational views—

> Fecality wants to be born—
> the fecal nature of the soul offers its berries to this bird
> who will pick life
> from six small hard rhinoceros turds, not
> off the ground, but as semaphoric pairs
> in the depths of Lascaux's
> dry well,
> at the end of 15,000 years of image
> we are *gathered* here, much more than we now
> suspect we are, by black manganese turds containing
> the seeds of narrative, or the berries which
> like that bird we must take in our mouth and chew,
> or like two other birds I know perch
> on a sausage of excrement emerging from a headless
> animal's anus and kiss, or make love
> talk on this little writhing hill of our hunger
> to sound ourselves while falls, suspended above us,
> the shadow of what we are without our hunger
> to mourn a coalescence, a congruity of all we touch
> and distill from it the fundamental substance of the soul—
> look, already our torso is a slack empty loop,
> a kind of lariat falling nowhere, at the top of which
> is the bird head we've desperately put on to stop
> conformity to ourselves, already we are a mask
> atop a watery loop of rope, heartless, organless,
> but not sexless for look, like a gash in motion
> our penis is out, without terminal, out on brown rock,

blackness-bathing, pronged up as if it could
match the uterine hunger of who is that
hovering above this little tentacle, this little
only thing we are putting forth? Looked at
through a star shower of centuries it may be Madam Death,
her forehead buried in her chest, under
her filthy black beard, her hair on end, lashing her tail
as if she could fit
on us, with her uterine loops sounding
like bells under water the labyrinth of our already
organless dream—or is she another like us,
got up in trance, the soul of smallpox, or mange,
or the sheer soul of our itch
to merge with a dug and forestall
the unfolding of this tight bud in which
the raised rhinoceros tail is pressed to the little bird's
cheek inside of which is my head my whole stiff body
a lance to which the womb and the colon are one
mass, thus kangaroo sac in which the fluid
I am giving off is the fluid I am taking in, and my eyes
half-filled green windows, the brown-green liquor
a rolling sea in the brine emptiness of this well,
now rotating rhinoceros to bird to man, as the heart
tinkers with forever in the chance of putting
out while drawing in an intestinal body hard as a diamond,
an outline inside of which the sour mash of this old,
old heart, certainly mixed with brains, with the dust
of brayed skulls, and buried in the semblance of blood,
is a said part of the spirits hurling lances through
my body asleep at the bottom of this well, to remake my body,
to give me the vixen power to insert stones into others,
to liberate me from having only wind to pierce, woman to
pierce, bison to wear and that is why

I am talking to you this way, column down through death
in which I hurtle both ways, and in the both ways at once
to generate story, to make the bison teach me how to dance
their slow swaying dance through which the shadows
of myself begin to emerge, which I pin to signs, to the paths
I am lost between, umbilical hoses, to make this substance,
this showing, this between, emerge, monster to stop
the cascade of separating ends, yet weaving the separations,
splitting the very ends I am mourning never having
been born, to die in the stomach of my mother
                barren
but for my foetal jungle.

△

Footnotes

1. *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Farrar Straus, 1976, p. 452.

2. Robert Ardrey, *The Hunting Hypothesis*, Bantam, 1977, p. 175.

3. S. Giedion, *The Eternal Present: The Beginnings of Art*, Pantheon, 1962, pp. 5-6; see also pp. 273-74.

4. *Olson 10*, University of Connecticut Library, Storrs, 1978, p. 91.

5. Georges Bataille, *Lascaux Or The Birth of Art*, Skira, 1955, pp. 110 and 140. Other "well" scene interpretations presented here are from: Annette Laming, *Lascaux*, Penguin, 1959, pp. 93-96; Giedion, p. 508; Weston La Barre, *The Ghost Dance*, Delta, 1978, pp. 417-19; Andreas Lommel, *The World of the Early Hunters*, Evelyn, Adams & Mackay, London, 1967, p. 128. I visited Lascaux in 1974 and 1978 but was not shown the "well" scene.

6. André Leroi-Gourhan, *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*, Abrams, 1967, p. 64.

Figure 1: engraved slab (vulva) from Abri Cellier in the Museum at Les Eyzies, France; reproduced in Leroi-Gourhan, p. 404.

Figure 2: engraved slab (with animal head, vulva and strokes) from Abri Cellier; in the museum at Les Eyzies; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 404.

Figure 3: engraved slab (quadruped, vulva, and dots) from La Ferrassie in the

Museum at Les Eyzies; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 404.

Figure 4: ceiling of a large chamber in Pech-Merle, near Cabrerets, France, with woman, mammoth, and meanders; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 421.

Figure 5: wall at Pech-Merle, with negative hand accompanied by dots; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 139.

Figure 6: wall at El Castillo, near Santander, Spain, with quadrangular sign accompanied by a row of dots; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 140.

Figure 7: drawing of hybrid creature from Los Casares, near Guadalajara, Spain; Philip Van Doren Stern, *Prehistoric Europe*, Norton, 1969, p. 160.

Figure 8: drawing of hybrid creature from Les Combarelles, Les Eyzies; Stern, p. 161.

Figure 9: animalized human profile from Commarque, near Les Eyzies; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 430.

Figure 10: bas-relief sculpture of the "Venus" of Laussel, near Les Eyzies (the piece is in a private collection in Bordeaux); Leroi-Gourhan, p. 406.

Figure 11: the "Venus" from Lespugue, Haute-Garonne, France; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 406.

Figure 12: the "Venus" from Willendorf, Austria; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 406.

Figure 13: section from the wall in the "sanctuary" at Les Trois Frères, near St.-Giron, France, showing actual profusion of animals among which a hybrid human figure emerges; drawing by Henri Breuil in *Les Cavernes du Volp*, by Bégouën and Breuil, Arts et Métiers Graphiques, Paris, 1958, p. 56.

Figure 14: detail from same section in photo 13, with all figures and lines eliminated except the hybrid human, the half-bison and the half-stag.

Figure 15: the "well" at Lascaux; Leroi-Gourhan, p. 414.

This essay was originally presented at the conference on "Forms and Functions of the Narrative," sponsored by The Center for the Humanities, at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, in May, 1981.

△

Pierre Joris

The Broken Glass

1.

last night
you found
a wine
glass weird-
ly broken not
a chip & not a
crack a near
perfect
break a
round of glass
½" thick
as if cut,
the rim
ring I called
no way
could we have
thrown the glass
away
it stands
on my desk
the rim-ring
rests
vertically
on the glass a
circular band
a 90 degree angle
against the glass
a mere circumference
dipped
into its past volume
one
edge smooth-
ly sanded down
jagged
break-line what
does it
where does it
if it does
it does!
mean I
mean connect
with our lives
this broken glass
strangely un-
broken
this glass
merely took
its rim away
freed its
mouth
from ours.

2.

after the glass you
found broken by
itself somehow
I broke
a pot, vessel of
earth, clay pot reddish
outside un-
glazed finish fired
in slow coal ember heat
does not — did not (
I have
to remember it'
s broken now) hold
water, held
when it slipped
a ring
of yours —
but was more
than that
was the round
berber pot whose
circular rim
had four corners
climbed up
tight chalice steps
meant to hold candles —
did not hold water
held fire in
stead light
a light of four
candles up
to our
nights.
One
candle arm
broke.
Clay
mixed with rougher earth
pebbles some
glass shards entombed
at center raw core
the fire

up-
ended it
stands
on my desk
next to yesterday's
broken glass.
I don't know
what it, again, does it
mean.
Means.
for what . to what
end no longer
in sight.
march events.
all ways
find the way
(find my way
pick it carefully
out from under
the shards
to the text
to the heart of
the text-
ure of my life the road
is littered
with broken objects.

It's turning

into obsession, this
transparent solid I'm
trying to make yield
to force to birth
sense into my
writing hand.

3.

The shape
retained
beyond
accident.

The rim-less
glass
still holds
water.

Knife
sharp edge un-
polished
rim re-

verses function:
put my lips
to the empty
glass

fill it
with me,
blood of
my mouth

lips
cut
to overflowing

it will fill
with words
methedrine
nights

bled
into this
vessel this cup I
have tried

not to call
can no longer
not call
a grail

a rimless cup
pure crystal thus
totally transparent
invisible.

To find it
you have to
fill it not
with water

not with
transparent
wine, put
your lips to it

then when full
of you
you finally

see it.

The grail is when
you see yourself
in the glass.

You don't see
the glass.
The cut doesn't
hurt much.

The knights could not
find it. They thought
it would show itself
in great pain.

The pain is before
or after. The grail
is frail. Glass is
in between.

4.

the clear ring
of purpose

which is more
than I can pretend to
that clarity always has
eluded me
have had to hold on
to the various objects
have focused my obsessions
— to go with them
that much faith
I have at times
mustered —
that the obsession
leads me on
will eventually lead me
out, that there is more
than meets the eye.
A broken glass
meets the eye.
A wound happens,
to be healed
to be whole again
to stave off decomposition
to contain
the hole inside.

Shall I send it can
I send this ring
down there?
This glass can it
become lens
let me see
what is going on.

The rim ring settles
around the hole
contains it
keeps it
from spreading
for awhile.

March 80 and January 81

Will Alexander

Australian X-Ray Painting

Not only has no Australian plant been cultivated as a source of human food, but no Australian animal has ever become domesticated in the service of man.

—ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA

BURSTING WITH INTERIOR DEATH LIQUID, the lungs stumble forward a millibar a minute, so that progress is slow, from the dark of the skull to the steps of the eye, like army worms or baby farming, the death liquid moves, detected by rays 'less than 2 angstroms', wasting of primordial innards, land mass dogma laid out in frog holes, that bloat up and burst broadcasting blood fear, from the zones of the dunes to Tasmanian Eucalypti, fever is caught slicing lungs with a sand blade, a mirage of vagueness dances through the eyescope, colonial lepers with lesions the length of spotted pine cone lizards, the task at hand, chasing the soul through electron vacuums, placing its parts with amorphous precision, the skull swells, the nose peels, the flag turns rotten, the x-ray catches the soul by its letters, the image of Australia vague, its land bridge to Asia busted, its lungfish feeds on burning football tundra, and the old and the new fuse for an instant in an isolated shark's head that breaks apart while dreaming, keeping serpents awake for a million rusted air bag hours, the emu and the murup dive like flightless land mass deserts, the illness

lingers and lives without air weight, the lungs stopped up but breathing through memory, Australia, limitless outback phantom, grasping at the fur of the koala, at its bones, at its billowy shadowy shadow, trying to deduce its sluggish stage bell mystery, coming up empty, the continent empty, its psyche x-ray charted, its soul sucked out of its marrow, sickness swims in reconstructed virtue, unrestricted jumping mice abound with teeth of frozen microscopic nuggets, which turn to monotreme mammals, platypus inscriptions read: desert for certain eyeless buzzards loaded on treacherous midnight salads, and Australia in its root eye stays nameless, without retreat to its deepest name brand centers, the message of the x-ray keeps repeating its blankness, answerless, without palpable connective between appearance and body, night watch trap, egg bone encasement, from which nothing dislodges, nothing gets lost, but which spins from outward throat stamp pennies getting spun by interior sun rash cycles, the wound of light glowing backwards, scorpion bladders emitting their shadows, from the center of death and the flightless 'dunes fixed with Triodia', the lifeless compost heaves, spits mangy green bundles of liquid, that float to the outside, plant themselves as kangaroo totems on northeastern Queensland, and shrink and change to non-returning boomerang razors, that go west, cutting the skin, tearing the teeth, its life, a hard malefic dream world pattern, where emus dance on broken burial grates, which do not exist in the open eyed liquid of floating physical slaughter, that lives in the trees, in the wind, hostile infusoria driven away by empty ancestors' dreaming, dreaming, the second component of waking, the pre-existing soul, the sperm-fish egg brought together in life, Wondjina hero spirits turn ghost and travel, leave timeless imprints of darkness, central Australian moon beam syndrome, deathless, primordial, like the death liquid phantom, creeping from the lungs, a millibar a minute, coming forward and stopping, sinking its soul in the timeless

△

Hector Manjarrez

from: El Golpe Avisa

—translated by Nathaniel Tarn

Bogota Blues

The airport is surrounded by immobile multicolored
metal birds shrinking the Andes.
I'm admiring a pregnant woman with a winged throat
and sumptuous porcelain breasts
whose companion checks me out from time to time
as if she, so melancholic and desirable,
and I, so sick of it all and a boor,
had gotten it together
when he'd gone off to the duty-free bazaar.

I am no more to her than a spectator
of her still statue.

Adios, Bogota of my never never loves.
Adios, brats who never got to rob my watch.
Everything goes the way it was agreed on years ago.

October Fest

That beauty of yours, you sweated it out,
you cried it out,
it went to hell—
                you're a skeleton puppet
of the Day of the Dead with your mane on the wind.
You lost your adolescence,
        that radiant innocence
treasured with all the meanness
        of an anal-retentive child.

Now you choose freedom whenever I dream
you're jumping the wall of my fortress to rape me.
Fly, run, make an art of your flight, skeleton:
I won't catch up with you for this hundred-meters
        but in other places
I'll take the short cuts
to your wet, stinking pelts.

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And you sleep in the arms of your saturnine beauty
devastated by pain
        so that you can give it a shine
sudden and opaque like.
What a waste you are at times in my arms
crippled by your magnificence.
                Let me smell you, oktyabr.

Here We Go Again

And now death is solemn and familiar
like a black cat

yes
an alien way of putting it
but I understand

if I were to cry out
I wouldn't believe myself
I have lost my voice
and earned
a perfect solitude I don't accept.

Vespers

Now is the time of unutterable tenderness
for having been spoken so many times
                for not knowing how to grant it
for the horror of not feeling it
                because only saliva will soothe wounds.

When bodies stop that terrible swaying
    and kneel down to pose
                for an impressionist painting
pain comes back to birth like the most beloved of the dead
unexpected photo of oneself
                alone on the bridge of a ship
                    or waiting for a blindingly white

plane
not knowing who you can cry to
trapped between Tolstoy's Natasha and
Gone with the Wind.

People are buying Christmas presents,
drunks recover their disdain for the law
and the void wrapped
and millions of cars gangrene our feelings.
In the morning
your body of musk and amber
is nature lost
city regained.

Iskra, Iskra

Pain eroded your flesh
and I, the razor,
see in your wise, delirious gaze
a meadow on fire
lining the woods of your body.

My drinking water.
On your shoulders the shining light
of those who get back from the wilderness.

Lima Waltz

When I got here I came as a brother:
another one of those who threads thru the eye
of the needle that mends catastrophes
                if the pulse holds
and the camel agrees to enter
the ark of the community
                after those he wanted to follow
but before he was ready.

This is when commitments are destroyed
taken up as little pledges
                of history,
and this is the dismantling city
where objects fall apart at a touch.

O repulsive little Pretty Babies of Miraflores,
oligarchic walkuries not even the Latin ass
                manages to humanize,
O sorry half-breeds tyrannical and gloomy
O Barranco
                Bridge of Sighs:
if I ever get back to you it'll be in the summer
and we'll adore the one and only
                true king the sun
in a dazzling body-to-body clinch.

Traveller, Hold Me Back

Bottles, cigarette butts, full wastepaperbasket,
the sun setting in the angle of your armpit,
one of my poems nailed to the wall,

photos of him,
the mirror you see yourself in every morning,
twined vipers of 16mm.
your books thinking,
a woman's place.

A year ago I got you *"A Room of One's Own"*

Poor, great Virginia,
her name proclaims it and in those days
it wasn't possible to be intelligent
and keep pleasure also.

Hector Manjarrez was born in Mexico D.F. in October 1945. He lived in Europe from 1962 to 1970, especially in London where he worked for the B.B.C. and the Cultural Section of the Mexican Embassy. His first book of short stories, *Acto Propiciatorio*, was published by Joaquin Mortiz in 1970. There followed a number of novels including *Lapsus*, which was a finalist in the Biblioteca Breve Awards, and *Introitus*. *El Golpe Avisa*, from which these poems come, was published by Alacena/Era in 1977. He now lives in Mexico City where he does editorial work and is one of the publishers of *La Mesa Llena*, a new literary magazine.

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The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson

Introduction: Part II

An Unravelling Friendship (1949-1950)

Edited by Paul Christensen

Literary friendships in America grow up around a change, and break apart again when the change is over. Friendships, like those between Emerson and Whitman, Melville and Hawthorne, Pound and Williams, Dahlberg and Olson, are necessary in facing the literary unknown. Unlike nature, with its slow growth and decay, literature stalls for unpredictably long periods of time and then leaps through a radical transformation almost without warning. The critical reception of change is usually rancorous, even hysterical, since much of the mechanism and procedure of criticism must perish with the new. The friendship between Dahlberg and Olson was created by such a change at mid-century in spite of the obvious differences in their characters. Dahlberg was a classicist who hated the post-Hellenic West for its corruption of Attic standards; Olson was a primitivist who thought the world had been fractured by the rise of Mediterranean civilizations, and who saw the world becoming one again as the Hellenic mind receded from Western life. This did not prevent Olson from wishing to master the Greco-Roman tradition, however; he engaged Dahlberg in a high-spirited rivalry by reading deeply in classical literature and bandying its references in his letters—and Dahlberg responded to these challenges with brilliance and energy.

Their friendship enriched both men. Olson learned much from Dahlberg's unique prose style, in which the scatter of life was shaped and enlivened by the magnetic powers of myth and parable; Dahlberg had mastered an allusive language that made his own existence resonant with an-

cient archetypes. Each coaxed the other to make fuller use of what Jung had discovered as the myth-making propensities of the unconscious—which older civilizations had already dredged to the surface. As Olson remarked to Dahlberg, "The past is prologue." For Dahlberg, the past was absolute, but this difference of opinion was ignored. It is likely that Olson's preoccupation with Melville from 1932 onwards led Dahlberg away from writing versions of his autobiography to the critical essays on American literature that began with *Do These Bones Live* (1941). Olson's perceptions about Melville's themes of ambition and isolation prompted Dahlberg to seek wider explanations for his own sufferings as an American Jew. The wrongs felt by Dahlberg were not unique to one man's life or even to one ethnic group, but rather were root and branch the evils of the American ethos—America was an anti-Eden, the desert of Adam, Cain and Job, with whom Dahlberg identified himself. Whatever the literary change of mid-century was, it seemed to reopen the roots of the Western past to contemporary artists, and their uses of this past—mythic, ideological, and critical—gave the pattern to new writing. It was their sense of an ending to Western life that made both men think deeply about its achievements and its roots and origins.

But each man had a separate sense of what the end of Western tradition might mean. For Dahlberg, it meant the dissolution of the world and the end of culture. In praising *Call Me Ishmael*, Dahlberg chose to ignore Olson's closing argument, that Ishmael would arise from the disaster of the *Pequod* to bring about a new age of fellowship. Instead, Dahlberg only perceived Olson's book as a recognition of his own worst fears and criticisms of the modern West. His narrow judgment of the book foreshadowed the major issue dividing them: Dahlberg insisted on believing that the West was rushing to oblivion, while Olson maintained that the West was coming to the end of a great cycle after which it would be whole again. Dahlberg could only think of contemporary cities as the Sodom and Gomorrah of the Old Testament, and his stance turned him away from modern culture toward a vision that restated the values and morality of the ancient world. His own experience was only useful as a base metal with which to make the alloy of his myths, parables, and allusions to the Western past. Dahlberg had been reading Blake during the period of these letters and mentions him to Olson as an example of his own literary methods.

Dahlberg saw only a contemporary wasteland from which nothing would

grow; it was a desert relieved only by the ruins of the past. Olson believed in change, in the fertility of new ideas and new forms of expression. The issue came to a clash when Olson sent Dahlberg a copy of his poems, *Y & X* (1948); under the conventions of their correspondence, Dahlberg should have praised them, and only after, in asides, offered useful criticism. But in his January 18, 1949 letter, he writes awkwardly, opening his letter by telling Olson, "It is a deep pain to wound you. I send you my words out of the fat darkness of obscurity." He saw Pound's influence on the poems and distrusted Olson's technique; as he remarked to Olson, the difference between *Call Me Ishmael* and *Y & X* is "the ultimate distinction between Edward Dahlberg and Ezra Pound." Dahlberg's next letter is even less inclined toward the poems. It is clear he did not like free verse or experimental poetry, in which he saw reflected the disintegration of contemporary life. But Dahlberg was nervous about his counsel and apologized for his indifference; in later letters he compensated by praising Olson's talent, not his execution of the poems. By August 3, 1949, he told Olson "They are gifted, as I know you are, for my Muse long ago advised me so; but I am still praying that you will return to some of the traditional forms of writing." Dahlberg feared that in such poetry Olson might be slipping away from him, and his tone with Olson is politic. His conflicting feelings over *Y & X* are interesting to follow in the letters; here friendship was more at stake than literature, but a decade later, Dahlberg unleashed his invective and disgust on modern literature in epistolary essays to Herbert Read, published as *Truth Is More Sacred* (1961). The title is from Socrates, "Truth is more sacred than friendship," which vigorously negated the attitude of his letters to Olson.

Although the clues are minor and erratic, the unravelling of a friendship is made increasingly evident as these letters progress. The common ground between the friends was rapidly shrinking. Their letters began to skirt the sensitive issues of form and vision; more emphasis is placed on simply working and living, and less on ideas, techniques, or experiments, the very things Olson wanted most to formulate. Olson announced the publication of "The Kingfishers" and his essay "Projective Verse" with few details, and did not send him copies of them. Dahlberg had proved himself a difficult confidant in matters of new poetry, and it is likely their friendship would have ended even without the later arguments over *The Flea of Sodom.* Even so, Dahlberg continued to inspire Olson through his letters, which were much

more artfully composed than Olson's, and were intended to demonstrate his powers as a writer. Olson was always impressed, but Dahlberg would coyly dismiss them as poorly jotted off. Choicer phrases from Dahlberg's letters were often recycled to other correspondents; Dahlberg worked hard on his letters because they were bids for Olson's continued admiration and friendship. On at least one occasion, Olson generated a poem from his correspondence with Dahlberg; "The Laughing Ones" emerged first as prose in his November 18, 1949 letter; but earlier in their letters Olson sent Dahlberg his poem "Tanto E Amara," which he never published, but which Dahlberg liked enough to quote from later.*

Throughout these letters, Dahlberg was readying *The Flea of Sodom* for publication, of crucial importance to him since he had not published a new work since 1941. Olson was his enthusiastic supporter, who tried unsuccessfully to publish the work at Black Mountain College; Olson initially liked the work and praised chapters as they arrived from Dahlberg. As the book neared the end of production, Olson began demurring from Dahlberg's request that he review it in the New York *Times*. Olson hints that the work is hard for him to read—either because the author was too intimately his friend, or because of the density of Dahlberg's images and parables. In no case did Dahlberg think these sufficient reasons not to publicly endorse the work, and he persisted in asking Olson to arrange to write a review. The dilemma of their friendship had become two-fold: Dahlberg could not praise Olson's poems, and Olson could not express his feelings about *The Flea of Sodom*—as writers, the situation would soon become intolerable.

In Olson's journal about visiting Pound, published as *Charles Olson & Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeths*, Olson occasionally admits he "decided to stay mum" instead of disagree with Pound; this same attitude prevailed with Dahlberg. Several times the journal bears out that Olson associated Pound's obsessive mind with Dahlberg: "Once in a while," Olson wrote of Pound, "he seems to speak with an obsession, . . . I think of Dahlberg already." (P. 40) Later he commented,

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* "Tanto e Amara" was first published by this editor in an essay, " 'Edward, My Edward': Charles Olson's Letters to Edward Dahlberg," *The Library Chronicle* (U. Texas/Austin), 14 (1980), 46-65.

> The big machinery of the word, press, radio, movies is horrible. But as in so much, he fights as aesthete and as anarchist like Ed[ward Dahlberg]. I say, it is an interim, a death of 3000 years. I'll live on into what's up. Black as it is I'll keep red through it.
>
> (P. 83)

The identification of Dahlberg with Pound was ominous; it meant Olson would ultimately have to leave Dahlberg for the same reason he had quit Pound: an elder's tyrrany and obsessive hatred. As he later wrote to Robert Creeley, "I suspect all clarities which lead to hatred." Olson had twice found himself the patient Ishmael of a literary Ahab, and he was tiring of it. What Olson had not counted on was meeting Robert Creeley, a younger writer without claims on the world and without a superior edge over him. Four months into their correspondence, which began in April, 1950, Olson wrote to his friend, Henry A. Murray, "Creeley and I have since engaged in perhaps the most important correspondence of my life." (*Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), I, p. ix). Creeley was only twenty-three at the time, and except for an initial rebuff to Olson's submission of several poems for a planned journal, the exchange took off as a mutual inquiry into the making of a new literature, in which Olson found the first real sympathy and corroboration for his ideas. He did not need "to stay mum" any longer; Creeley explored Olson's arguments with careful attention and wrote replies that were not only complimentary but collaborative, as with his famous formulation that "form is the extension of content" which Olson incorporated into "Projective Verse."

For obvious reasons, Olson did not boast of Creeley to Dahlberg, but emotional complication had set in among Olson's friendships—which had now become a confused network of literary alliances. His correspondence with Creeley from April to September 1950 alone fills two volumes of *The Complete Correspondence*; in October of that year another prolific correspondence would begin with the editor of *Origin*, Cid Corman. As disagreements strained his friendship with Dahlberg, Olson shifted the alliance to Creeley and Corman, who supported his conceptions of new writing. On September 11, 1950, Creeley wrote to Olson comparing *Call Me Ishmael* to *The Flea of Sodom*, finding the first "Clean. Fine. Great thing," and *The Flea* an "unreadable style," "a waste/ of time, etc." "Sick, sick bk/

man. Don't enjoy it/ who the fuck is supposed to. As tho: this man were only: the sore." (II, pp. 136-138) On August 24, 1950, Olson wrote to tell Creeley they ("thee and me") were the "new born," who wished to be saved "from nostalgia." On October 18, 1950, in his first letter to Cid Corman, Olson wrote of Robert Creeley, "Look: so far, in my short experience (that is, as writer) I have found only one man who has JUDGMENT in these matters the equal of what I take to be the DEMAND of our going reality. That lad you know." ("Letters for Origin," ed. Albert Glover, Diss. SUNY: Buffalo, 1968, page 2). Five months later, Olson would tell Corman that he thought Dahlberg "profoundly wrong (which is a great way to be, if you can't be profoundly right." ("Letters," p. 47) Olson wanted to see books that were the "opposite of Dahlberg," he told Corman, and to see Socrates and Christ "not as heroes but as devils." (P. 47) But none of this was ever communicated to Dahlberg; Olson could not quite bring himself to such a confrontation; when he attacked Dahlberg, as he would do later, it was in rebuttal to Dahlberg's ferocious verbal assaults. It was to others of his circle that Olson obliquely confessed his misgivings with his mentor. Much later, in August, 1950, Olson wrote to Corman, then in Kyoto, Japan, to say, among other things, that he agreed with Robert Duncan's review of Dahlberg's *The Sorrows of Priapus* (1957) in the April, 1959 issue of *Poetry*—in which Duncan concludes that Dahlberg's doctrines lay "in the set of his mind against the living."

Dahlberg was more forthright and sincere throughout the crisis and breakdown of their friendship; he was the first to confess bad feelings, critical disapproval, changes of heart, depths of passion, whereas Olson seemed to have a mercurial personality that kept hidden certain feelings. Olson could be imperious, gentle, reserved, outrageous—depending on the correspondent and the occasion; but no matter to whom Dahlberg wrote, he created the same grave, histrionic, suffering, passionate persona, who fought the world to preserve the ancient standards of life and art. Dahlberg candidly announced his new friendship with Sir Herbert Read, who in time replaced Olson as his comrade. Read fulfilled Dahlberg's needs as much as Creeley did Olson's: he saw through the publication of *The Flea of Sodom*, where Olson had failed; he shared some of Dahlberg's convictions, although he professed more moderate denials of modernism; he wrote appreciative forewords to Dahlberg's books, whereas Olson had demurred. As Dahlberg

and Olson drifted apart, they closed around them new circles of friends, all the while attempting to preserve their old camaraderie of the late 1930s.

Both men considered the world a shambles of disorderly cultures, wretched politics, hypocritical arts, ruined friendships, vacant lives—the tasteless void of industrial society, which the past could cure and redeem if brought back to life in the liveliest form and language. Dahlberg was the darker visionary of the two and reserved the past for himself and the few who cared to penetrate his oblique prose; Olson saw the past returning of its own cyclical accord, in which the artist could participate by the right use of his whole mind. But these visionaries of a lost fellowship could not salvage their own friendship, even though their work concentrated on the ethics of community. The irony of their situation never fully occurred to either man.

[postcard] [New York City]
Oct. 19, 48

Dear Charles:

I would be very grateful if you could send me ten dollars by return mail. In a few weeks I hope to be out of dollar difficulties: Would that I could get that devil out of my life—would that I had the asses & oxen of Jacob.

It is a pulsing felicity to hear how good Black Mt is for both of you, & that it is the physic you need. I know few delights more tender to me than to serve your Muse & your imperial necessities. I am at 193 Waverly Place; should you get there, on the sudden, as I surmise you will, & I am out, leave a note & tell me where I can reach you—I see people & so dissolve the pinching ache & the gall.

Both you & Constanza have my love—

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
October 29, 1948

My dear Charles:

I have had no word from you and pray that you and Constanza are not having hardships. I want to thank you again for sending me the ten dollars so promptly. I am concerned over my debt to Sam Rosenberg, but so far have not been able to dissolve my debts here. I had to borrow money from the chairman to get through the month.

I write no one but you, my sometime spouse, and her Cape Cod lawyer, a fine and stygian triune. Of the three you alone have my healing word as doleful and wanting as it is.

I continue to read; it is my sole balsam. I am trying to find another room. Where I live at present is the house of Sodom, the man who lets out the rooms being a half-dame from the plains of Gomorrah.

Nothing came of the publishing incident. The head of the firm said he did not have enough learning to read the manuscript and that he could not afford to print a book for a private audience, you, Constanza, Sam Rosenberg and three other maimed and sorrowing spirits who read and petition heaven for three privy readers.

Tell me, please, whether you have shelter and what you and Constanza are going to do.

I do earnestly hope to see you soon.

Love to you and Constanza.

Your friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[postcard]

[New York City]
Oct. 30, 48

Dear Charles: — I am very hindered. Whenever it seems I might see

my Geoffrey, my letter does not get to my erstwhile spouse, or you disappear. I phoned you yesterday & was told the phone was disconnected. I sent a letter to you to her lawyer trying to make arrangements to see Geoffrey. You, Charles, are the breathing witness of my love unto cracked distraction for Geoffrey. Please put an air mail stamp on the letter to her Cape Cod lawyer. Get it there, with Mercury's golden sandal, I beg you! & let me know where you are. I cannot even receive my mail so desperately needful at the instant. My tears fall on dry potsherds. I must keep my N.Y. residence a secret: otherwise I would not bother you. I still hope to form a group with Herbert Read & in which I deeply include you. A letter came from him today, giving me the name of 2 anarchists who have a press. He is working for publication of the book. Be sure you will be printed when you are ready! Read writes in despair of the "fat, pussy times":—"We vent our indignation (if we have your prophetic force) on a seething mass far too preoccupied with its own dissolution to turn an ear to our lamentations." If you are my friend, as I have ever been yours, [ ], I entreat you to get my letters to the baleful Scylla, the state of Mass. And let me know where you are!

Your loving and deeply torn friend
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Hand-written note at bottom of a form letter from Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, dated October 25, 1948 from Dean Erich Hausmann asking correspondent to complete a "Personnel Blank."]

[New York City]

Dear Charles:—It was deeply good of you to phone me—I go now, I think, to 143 Lexington Ave—phone—Mu 3-0019. You say nothing of Sam Rosenberg; please assure him as soon as I can make some stable life for myself. If I hadn't taken those accursed planes I could

have sent my wife money—I am quite sick about the whole thing, so heart-wounding—
Please mail this to her lawyer as soon as you can. Tell me how you came out of your own eviction turmoil. Do you have a roof, & do I have a mailbox in Washington!
[As ?] we sing, "when shepherds pipe on oaten straw", if we could—

When will the Poems be printed—

I read & lament & walk—

All my love to you & Constanza,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[postcards] [Broadway Central Hotel, New York City]

Send all mail, Charles, to Broadway-Central Hotel, Broadway & 3rd St. Am staying there now.

Dear Charles:—

Evidently none of my letters are getting through—I sent you [two?], & one to the lawyer in Hyannis. I phoned yesterday, using a subterfuge, & learned he has not received a letter sent out a week ago to you. If Constanza has the letter, please don't mail it. I want to rewrite it.

I *must* have, Charles, a Washington address or some city other than N.Y., so as to conceal my whereabouts & at the same time be able to negotiate. If I am ever to see my son Geoffrey, I must get my mail through to the lawyer *now*. Otherwise, it means denial, the rack, & unpurging lamentation. Please see my friend if there is not some way.—

There was no talk of lowering salaries; on the contrary, Albers was going to increase them.

How deeply it pleases me to hear the Poems are at last to be born,

or at least to have the ripening light. Nothing comes, Charles, of the Straus encounter. I want very much to return my MS, but have no copy. I wrote you yesterday Read wrote a very sweet letter. You, Read & I will yet, alongside others, form a group to publish our work. Any thing that heaven sends me must include you—All my love to you & Constanza—ever.

& please answer right away, so I can begin negotiations with the lawyer. And give me an address, please. Not knowing where you were, & not being able to consummate anything was a bleak destroying angel for me for a week. I was reft of reason. If I could yield up that fetid spectre, & keep my senses, if I could—I would not rave on bitumen & asphalt—

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
Monday afternoon Nov 22 [1948]

Edward—

The enclosed in the afternoon mail.

I returned from BM yesterday morn: our friends here brought over paintings & Crosby contributed [ ] & the 1st 2 copies of Y & X. So today we have a little money to stave off the summons & hold our house, for the moment. With the BM money I can begin to go ahead.

The goods will be sent to you paid. They are boxed & ready: done by Mme Bodky—and yr "bete," Jackson! All that is required is word from you direct to Ted Dreier. He asked me to ask you to say to him where you wanted them sent. I hope that pleases you.

And soon we must both get free of difficulties & have the chance to let breath & words in. For now

My love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
November 25, 1948

My dear Charles, –

Thank you deeply for your note. I take joy in your book of verse and wait to have a copy inscribed by you, my dearest friend. My sole physic has been reading; I have seen many people, but I go out to be entertained to find that I am the entertainer. Tonight I see a group of painters and sculptors. I am taking Berenice Abbott, the photographer. She should do a camera-portrait of you! I don't particularly care for the one on the dust-jacket of the book. It appeals to me because I am so fond of you; this sentence I shall not consummate as I see you grinning and making ready to pierce me with some bodkin word or other.

Maybe, today, I will find a typist who can make a few copies of the FLEA, and then send you one. I am so pleased that the books are going to be sent and to be paid for by Black Mountain College. O that is a benediction, a beaker of brine. Thank you, my bow to you and to Albers.

In a month or two I will begin fumbling with the Word. What my surging soul so pines to do I fear to begin.

The other day I read that Paris was reared by a hind, – a lovely legend that succored me for days, and is in the season of my own spirit and hungers.

It is very good of my bete noir Jackson to take care of the books. Give my oaf, my imp, my trauma, my gratitude; tell him he begins to know learning and has an occult being that Ben Jonson would have reckoned to be mineral for his pen.

Do I laugh? ay, it is the smarting laughter that rends the bowels. I know no other simple save lamentation.

Many times I have been sorely tempted to go to Washington to spend a day with you, but I cannot afford to do it. I still owe you ten dollars. What has become of our giant of Anak, our six-fingered man

of vision of Gaza, Samuel Rosenberg? You are much too silent; let us have prayers and divulgations. I owe him money, too, and were it not that I have been sending dollars to Winifred I would have paid you and him. Forgive me for being so laggard.

When do I get the POEMS? You know what a sack of cupidity I am for a book, particularly one by you. This will be a second contemporary volume I have read in a decade. The first one was by an author named Charles Olson.

Does Constanza flourish? When will you get here. You know how it is in America, you are either au courant, or in the gutter; and so I have to make a valiant combat for my life, and I have by necromancy and the help of heaven to whom I have given such bootless orisons, gotten to know people. The women I have met have tried to snare me. Imagine a woman so infatuate as not to have sufficient lore of her own organs to know that she does not have to be any more guileful than she was ordained to be by nature. It is very droll, and very drying, to watch a woman employ stratagems. Oh what impotencies come from such an arid well!

All my love to you and Constance. I remain at the Broadway Central Hotel, so please write me here. Should I by mischance find another room I will send you a telegram or have that fleeting pleasure of speaking to you over the telephone.

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington D.C.]
Wed [December ? 1948]

My dear Ed:

I have just written a note to Albers to tell him I arrive Monday morning at his whistle stop. And Jeremiah save us—I look forward to it! What do you say to that, maestro? But I'm nix on settlin' there.

Too thin for steady wear. Dehn and I descend on the place like archangels and go away like banana skins, and it is better that way. But it won't last, alas. And I need—o I need—their gold. (We have held the house. Friends raised 50 dollars, and that bone stopped the yap of Madame Bartlett and agent and court but yesterday down they came again with a 175 slap. And as for clothes I am at that point from which there is no turning, I look as bohemian as I did in the village, aetat 1940. Not to speak of the butcher.) How do you fare, brother?

You should not be mortally grieved. You know me, Brer Fox. Name's Possum. And been mighty behind (and white) these many months. I got back to this desk and several uninterrupted days last week and feel properly chagrinned, for a change. (I have not your management, most gifted friend! of language or of life, those *ars.* For me to be a knife takes too much whetting. Enough.)

But I do some things. Yr mss., for example, went off five minutes after it came, to one of the three, the 1st & most commercial. All we can do is light candles by aloes. "This incongruous world of ours", sd Herman Melville, as of his tale of one, Budd. —I shall let you know the result the moment I hear. I imagine it'll be some weeks. You did not include RATIONAL T. Unless you are rewriting it, I think it would be better to present that too. I do not want to see you put off by the slides they used on me—too slight to make a book. Fat slices, that's what the porcine want, eh?

We are heating the house with wood, to avoid starting the cost of coal, and the smell is lovely, and if I were about my own work I might feel like a New England Orpheus. But I'm busy trying to make 40 dollars, writing a review of three new books on Melville, one of which will interest you, F. Barron Freeman's edition of BILLY BUDD, in which he prints for the first time the original version, the longer one. It is a third as long and has all the celerity the "novel" lacks, rotted as it is by that sad, sad notion of poor Melville's that Hawthorne was the better man. What a blight that spinster needle was on his hebraic imagination! —You know how long I have stooped and gone

aside on BILLY BUDD. It is satisfying now to have a version I can read, to be able to speak of a short story with enough respect to mention it in the same breath with Benito Cereno or Bartleby. The curious thing is, how Hawthorne is the tree that brought forth sodom fruit in Melville's ground, and crowded out his own Saul-David root; Hawthorne to Christ to the pain of the sentences of billy budd, Novel, is the dying off of a giant, a giant out of Samuel bred down to christian by a Nathaniel out of Salem. It is a dread, dread story, a fable, Edward, should be told to children of a golden age as warning. "Go not, with your flesh, to men of little blood." What is your wondrous quote, is it from Heraclitus, that to take thought is to thicken the blood around the heart?

I must go back to it. It is a delight to write to your ear.

And keep me informed of yourself. It was a very deep pleasure to talk to you last week and to have your delightful letter. You are resilient and you keep speech in your mouth like myrrh. I am glad for your sake as for mine. It is yr fatherhood.

Constanza returns your greetings. She is fine except for some peculiar pain and sense of calcification in the vertebra at the neck which her weeks in bed seem to have left her with. I too have trouble in the same region (without her cause) and live in dread, now that is again ugly winter, of a recurrence of that infection that laid me low two winters ago. But these are gloomy matters

and I would send, end with
love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
[December ? 1948]

My dear Charles,—

Your lovely book came last evening, and I am very grateful for it.

I have done no more than glance at it. I had looked with some care at the TRINACRIA. Did not the infidel companions of Odysseus eat the oxen of Hyperion there? I was perplexed somewhat. I hear you say, Return, clodpate misreader, camel, beadle, egg without yolk. So I shall and very soon.

You have been deeply in mind. The other day I saw Professor Cargill on the street and again he asked me to be sure that you called him when you arrive. Joseph Freeman, whom I knew years ago, and who has a warm, Mediterranean brain, is eager to meet you. I gave him the (your) book I bought. He is reading CALL ME ISHMAEL the second time. Every one asks after you, Monsieur Caviar, the women ask after the health of your navel and the unambiguous males enquire after your genius, beg for your address, and wish to know just what savings account you have. As a matter of truth, Joseph Freeman thought that a month hence or so we might make a little trip to Washington to see you.

I now have a week's vacation from teaching. Soft, archangelical words come from Winifred, but her acts are mortal foes to her low, sighing words. Nothing has been achieved. I am always poor because of her, and that is why I have not sent you money. I do not mean the small ten dollar debt to you, naturally it is little to me, since I owe it, and nothing to you as you have not got it. I am still sorely prone; she has powdered the very quiddity of my soul with her heel. She has the legal sickness; I would rather have the botch or the Neapolitan boneache.

Yes, I have met a number of women, one an icelandic dame, daughter of the prime-minister of Iceland who asked me to go there. O what a boreal place in which to sport. There is a Scotch woman, but she is married to a bad artist; he is a mongrel, Irish, Spanish, French, with a little poodle Balkan to it. A very hysterical man who promises to hang himself every time she threatens to leave him. Up till now I have always coveted the portion of the painter. He can hang his canvases; a writer can simply hang himself. I do not care for any more

laceration than I have, and then I think my pulses are waning; soon as a woman is wary, my blood congeals. There is a Hungarian dame, very earnest and meek when she is alone with you; she strokes your thigh with the greatest integrity, but at a party she is spiceless, and I feel as knit to her as I would to a Eunuch at the court of Jezebel.

You will always require money, my dear friend, and so there will be time, a season for the peaches, and the deep pocket-reaches, ay, what a preachy couplet, were I ambitious enough I could get a Nobel award for such knavery.

Please pardon me if I fail you now; I am your friend in ACT, and when I prove it, as man must always prove his friendship, lest it spoil because it is not savored or eaten, and therefore was never ripe, then I can loosen my tongue.

I hear little of Constance, you send me her greeting, but it is such dry chaff it could burn without sun or fire.

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Mrs. Sherwood Anderson may telephone you & Constance on her way back from the south. She is a fine woman, & both of you will enjoy her.

[Washington D.C.]
January 15, xlix

My dear Edward:

Forgive me that I have delayed to write these abundant thanks for the grace and force of your letter to me about *y & x.*

But alas, it put me into my own despair. I have not been able to rise even tho the wings of your words let rise my spirit. For I am barren, and do not sing.

Instead, I shall include some days' work. You will understand.

There is a quarrel in me, and I am unhinged. You must excuse

me if I have nothing to say. I do not know which part of speech to speak from, what organ. Some certain things have left me. Others are not yet born. I gnaw, and gnaw.

I have news for you, familiar news. Number 1 of 3 has said no on the FLEA. It was the most commercial. Suffering present, but not enough substance to make a book! Bah. I am sending off now to 2: burn aloes and violets, if any grow by you, but keep the rue.

My thanks, dear Friend, my thanks. I am merely slain by my own perplexities.

my love,
CHARLES

Tanto e Amara

I have heard the dread song

I had not heard, in the middle of life, I had not heard
I was all eyes, all things were, now they are blind
and I am, I crawl, do not know where I go

You who have heard the song will understand.
Death is a remote beginning.
I am rudimentary.
I grow a heart.

I stumbled when I saw, knew high passage, persons
one imperial nature whose conclusion was
nothing, it is nothing
I know now it was nothing.

The wise man said, nothing dieth but changing as they do
one for another show sundry formes.
He lieth. I cannot have back my mother.

In the grave, before the dirt goes, will go my love

What shall I be, what forms will plague me then
where shall I go, in what ditch pour what blood to hear
her voice, the love I hear, that voice now mingled in

the song,
the song of the Worms?

CHARLES OLSON

[New York City]
January 18, 1949

My dear Charles:

Sent you a special, and then enclosed a note in another letter to be forwarded to Wellfleet. Would you please let me know by return mail the name of the school in which harry moore teaches and in what town it is located. Please!

My love to you
EDWARD

[New York City]
January 18, 1949

My dear Charles:

It is a deep pain to wound you. I send you my words out of the fat darkness of obscurity. Should there be truth in them, what good, alas, is it for you whom it prongs. Or what satisfaction can I have as a darkling, stumbling Tiresias whose penurious foreknowledge maims his friend. It requires years in Erebus to labor for a few poems, and one epistle to deny them! Did I not pay homage to your identity, knowing there are ideal images shadowed there more astounding than those in Plato's Cave, I would reckon myself an Iago to your Muse. Do not believe that I do not honor the imaginative strength of your line, or that I slyly hanker after the lucre clodpates of letters.

My own distraction has been so bizarre that I never asked you whether you received The Rational Tree. Horace Gregory read the

two and his deepest yea is for the Rational Tree. He showed me some of his unpublished verse, one, My Lady Circe. He has our feeling for Homer and for the tripod. But how simple it was for me to locate his flaws, while yours so baffled me. They were as hard for me to fathom as sin, and as difficult to relinquish. I had to be two persons, a loving friend as well as the Conscience, the servant, and if necessary, the Erynes, of a Genius. Ay, speaking so, fate has been baying at my heels.

Nobody knows how to make a book; even after it has been written, and one or two or three human beings say yea to it, can the owner of the vision be sure he is not a lazar, a pickpocket, a lewd churl. How often can one read the most amazing line one has made without draining gall and hyssop? How long was Shakespeare able to stomach HAMLET? It was a spewing forth to begin with. Once Callimachus said, A great book is a great evil.

Yes, we know nothing, but such infamous divination is not the result of a Socratic syllogism. We go to the oracles slyly, but Apollo often gives hindmost replies or none at all, and in the meanwhile we are more plagued than the cattle who have murrain. No beast suffers so much as man. Man is miserable because he wants to be an animal or because he does not want to be one. The poet wishes to be a gifted beast!

Winifred disappeared from Massachusetts with my two sons. Would it be craven to say that were our calamities weighed in Job's Balances, mine would be the greater? I have had eleven more years than you in which to make a cairn of woes upon which no man pours oil or worships. What have I compassed that you have not? I have no verse printed or tombed in a drawer that remotely equals yours. Do I churlishly believe that SING O BARREN is as good or better than CALL ME ISHMAEL? I do not believe anything. The irrational god of my own powers and ruin does not let me so think. The only proposition I would earnestly ask you to ponder, or to dismiss, is this: the difference between CALL ME ISHMAEL and Y & X is the ultimate

distinction betweeen Edward Dahlberg and Ezra Pound. Now when I have said this, I am simply telling you what you are acting upon yourself. Your mountain springs and the Naiads of Helicon are in Statius, Chrysostom, Horace, Homer, Plutarch, O merciless gods from whom we beg a basket of summer fruits and a BOOK, which when they give us we deny, — O such mocking deities, we have to fail or die! And earth is the root of all literature, for Proserpine, the consort of Pluto, is the Seed of those April, zephyry words that gull and cheat us, and for which we so pine.

Maybe, you could send a copy to Professor Oscar Cargill at New York University, Washington Square College; he is doing his second volume on American Literature and will be writing about you, and one to Horace Gregory, at Palisades, New York, Rockland County. I am thinking of some attention for the pomes. Would you send a review copy to Alexander Cappon, perhaps with your compliments and my regards. The University Review gets a good deal of attention. The address is Professor Alexander Cappon, Chairman of the English Department, University of Kansas City, Rockhill Road and 50th Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

Let me please, here from you soon. I have a hundred examination books to grade, but I had to stop to write to you.

My devout belief and loving friendship.
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]

My dear Charles:

Your POEMS kindle the greatest perplexities. I do not want to fathom speciously what you so plainly know. There are lines wondrously wrought, but I do not have enough of the darkling speaking heart in these five poems. Five small verses divulge the occult skill but

not the minerals in the man. O I know we have less than five hundred lines of Heraclitus and Empedocles! It is not, perhaps, that you write too little, but that you do not walk forth upon the page as Empedocles or Charles Olson. I am a kindred of your vision, but the greater moiety of it you withhold for some riper seeding. Proserpine descends into the dark earth to reappear in budding Spring. I wait for the leafage and the parsley, and even for the choughs and the horned owls and the seagulls in the Cave of the Nymphs.

I do not comprehend all of your lines, and here I may be whipping myself. The riddle of a line should lie in its truth. Vision is the suffering pang of the bowels, but you have dismembered your sorrow and cast its Osirean body into the Nile. The pith of my meaning is in your beautiful, Learean chant, "Of bitter work, and of folly cockatrice and cockololly furiously sing." Here I am the vassal of your imagination. The opening, though much less piercing, I pay homage to, because, I am such a fool as you, and dare you to be more the FOOL, "Go, fool, and hatch of the air a blue egg."

Your allusion to Trinacria I cannot understand; the definition is lucid, the text without ambiguity, but why should such a thought be in your imperial nature: "Who fights behind a shield Is separate, weak of the world Is whirled by sons of self, sown As teeth, a full armed crop Sprung from no dream No givers of a fleece Who bring their dragon blood inside Reality, half slain" Is not the world the baneful chalice? Who would drink more of such Medean ingredients? We sow dragon's teeth in the Cadmean fallows, and the armed men that crop up against us is the World from which we separate ourselves. The lines, penned in gore, not the ewe's, the goat's, the ram's, but the heart's, are too sententiously dried out.

If I have misread you, do not believe that some arrant knave who praises you will do better. The men who bring us laurels and chaplets are our Erynes.

There is only one jot of dross in all the verses. You will find no healing seaweed or salts in a Buchenwald. You are too abstruse to re-

quire *more* experience. Vent your Angers, and the Muses will give you fillets and sweet calamus.

Please do not be vexed with me. No man is a more steadfast Horatio to your Genius than I am, but I look for the crowing of the dawn in your nature, for the Morning Star, Lucifer, and for Isaiah's cockatrice that creepeth in every man's skin to make its hiss, and I want to see the piteous Ghost that wails so secretly, and on the nightside of our selves, drop its filmy garment upon the head, and then disappear as one man vanishes from another after he has emitted the nether deposits of his identity.

At the moment, I am a nullity, and hear nothing but the song of the Worms.

Do not think that I do not consider these poems of death Worth, or that I go hankering after some churl of letters for better ones. They are the best, but they are not good enough for me from Charles Olson.

Your loving friend who deeply thanks you for sending the POEMS and for the tender words you wrote.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
January 19, 1949

My dear Charles:

I wrote you a special delivery letter this morning, and pray you will have it by this evening. Would be grateful to you if you would send this right out to Miss Freeman at Wellfleet. And will you, please, send back any letter I may get from her, special delivery.

My love,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
Wednesday [January, 1949]

My dear Edward:

All three of your letters came, and the letter to la dame sans merci was off and away from here at noon.

the worm moore crawls on ground I used to know well as a child—Wellesley Hills, Mass., where my father's sister lived (I learned to my horror a short while ago that she was struck down by an automobile in her age and her life was so taken from her)

moore is a small part of another knave's place, the Babson Institute (which also was a part of my life, for Roger Babson comes from Gloucester, and I was raised and attended by his sons who are physicians — Babson you will know as that gimcrack of business

I have just talked to La Crosby to try to get out of her the three copies you recommend be sent. I feared it would, at this moment, be difficult, for she just mailed 50 press copies, and as she has sold only 30, and is in debt for some 1200 dollars for the edition, she is copy-shy. But she allowed as how she would send one off to Horace Gregory at least. (Do keep me posted if he doesn't receive it fairly soon.) I am somewhat disadvantaged pressing her because some two years ago she paid me $100 for the verse and then, last summer, when Constanza was ill, advanced me another $50 against sales. (Which is, as you well know, high behavior for publishers for such low attractions as ourselves!) But in a short time I shall be able to acquire two more copies and shall see that Cargill and Capon receive them. It may be only that they will not have them until after Feb 1st. How much further I can go with Mme will depend on what sort of notices, if any, the slim-thing receives.

You have all my heart's responses for your troubles, from 100 blue books out! If only Black Mt were in NY you'd have unshouldered that weight at least!

This note is a thin thing for such an ample letter as you gave me, but I am writing it to catch the afternoon collection and deliver the

corpse of moore into your hands.

Do write me as many times again. It is a deep pleasure.

Your friend
CHARLES

[Washington D.C.]
Thursday afternoon [January, 1949]

Edward:

A note, as I take the mss to the p.o. to send registered: it should be in Straus' hands in the morning. Very much regret I was not home to talk to you: you have a register and tone now to tell of the Dostoevsky furnace you are being burned in.

I wired and wrote Albers. All you said of it was true. I need it, and have left myself in a money state I don't know the way out of. But interior things fix me here. I shall have to find work, some appointment in this swamp where I find ground.

I also sent off the letter. And the book to you will go to Church Street, unbeliever.

Your friend,
CHARLES

Payne is out: has had all his books refused, his time in the U.S. is up, and, with his tail in his hand, he must go off to Persia, Tibet, and Delhi, poor man.

[Washington D.C.]
Wednesday Feb 2 [1949]

My dear Edward:

Are you allright? I have the feeling you are so involved in transac-

tions in the Wellfleet-Plymouth-Provincetown triangle that you have no time except for that pool and billiard game of women you must play.

I have mapped out your present life in spite of your silence: it is clear you must be teaching at NYUWashSq, live in that fallen ymca the B-C, when you are not bedding yourself down in some of that Scotch-Rumanian-Irish hay you made my mouth water with, Silenus. But when do you read and write?

I reread THE FLEA before I shipped it off again, and I am the more convinced about it. Did you do any more with your own idea, to expand it as a narrative? Or to do another in a like form? ((In answer to your query, THE TREE did come, and I have it, still stubbornly seeking to have the FLEA published for itself. I hope you won't mind my critical stool, from which, as you once said, one always falls into the dungheap.

I read, go out, and do not do enough work — But why should I sting myself with lead? I am in a period of reading and question, and am desperate. Nothing as shape pulls me on. But today there are shadows of a shape, and I feel better.

Tonight I go to see for the first time Mr and Miss Graham dance. For Mr (then Erick Hawkins) I did that play with the obscene title. But Mrs (then Miss Hush) I have not seen dance. I doubt I shall be able to dispel Fannie Brice as Martha Graham in a Follies years ago.

Two things come to my mind to ask you: you never did give me an inscribed copy of BONES (I know I have a SING, but BONES, sir). Nor have I any longer my copy which I gave away to Robert Payne when he left for Tibet. I have no way of knowing whether you have any copies, and I do not want you at this straitened time to buy one. But keep it in your mind that I have asked for one. —And one time when you have another copy present it to BLACK MT: I keep sending the men and women there (Yala, Bodky on around) to your text. And there is none.

This was a note to include bills, receipts, and like dregs, which I'd

have no man receive like cold meat.

And your word?
Love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
February 3, 1949

Dear Charles:

I found Winifred and Geoffrey and Joel and Sharon in a town just outside of New York City. It took the wiliness of Odysseus to locate them. Sharon cannot endure Moore. I go up each week-end to see them. Geoffrey is extremely tender and very crestfallen when I leave.

I have been in Erebus. Have been reading some Statius and Plato. Did you see to it that the POEMS were sent to Horace Gregory.

I have been sorely troubled about the money owing to Sam Rosenberg, but what with taxes and mortgage payments and money required to take care of the children I have so far been unable to repay him. He will be paid, and with my heart thanks.

I am really prone; please forgive this epistle as sluggish in spirit as the waters of Styx.

My love to you, and do write me.
EDWARD DAHLBERG

It is a mistake not to send Oscar Cargill a book; he will be writing about you. Unless you crave fatter oblivion than is mine, you must guide your publishers. Moore said that Caresse Crosby hated me. She came to see me years ago, wishing to print proletarian literature. I at once advised her that that was an oxymoron, and saved her money and shame. I am as despised as Jeremiah, a derision on the tongues of churls. If a man is without arms or legs he breaks me with his tongue.

Charles, please get this letter to the tax collector into the mail right away. I would consider it a great kindness if you would forward any mail to me with despatch. I must prevent the usurers from getting the property.

[New York City]
February 7, 1949

My dear Charles:

I spend my week-ends with Winifred and the children. She is still deeply drawn to me, but I do not know what we will do. When a woman becomes rational I go mad, and like Christopher Smart, am ready for Bedlam.

Winifred had a long conversation with Edmund Wilson in Wellfleet not long ago. The quiddity of the conversation is something like this:

Wilson: I have the greatest respect for Edward's gifts; but if I read his book and don't care for it, he will become very angry with me.

Winifred: I don't think you should read it. I would not put it into the hands of anybody who did not beforehand have a quick sympathy for it. Besides, you don't have the culture to read it.

Wilson: I am very fond of Edward. Why don't you let me send it to England. A contest is being held and Edward might win $5000.

Winifred: I am not a literary critic, and my name never appeared in the New Yorker. But Edward has read the Masters to me so that I can tell the difference between merde and poetry. You have read so much contemporary filth that you no longer know how to read.

Wilson: I have real affection for Edward. Why don't you let me send it to Herbert Read so that he could enter his MS in the contest and win $5,000.

Winifred: I admit I have a copy of Edward's MS, but I know he would prefer posthumous publication to a contest.

Wilson: If a woman believed in me as you do in Edward, maybe even I could write something momentous. I know Edward is remarkable, but I don't want him to turn on me as he had done to others. I think

he ought to send his book to the contest and win $5,000.

Winifred: Edward would never win a prize because the judges can't read or write. You never cared for his other book.

Wilson: Edward is a wonderful person, but I don't think I ought to read his book. But why don't you let me mail his MS. to the jurors in England. Sometimes people are so gifted that they totally misunderstand a book and award it 5,000.

I am still reading and teaching at Brooklyn Polytechnic College. As soon as there is quiet in my belly and frankincense in my mouth I will begin to fumble for words. I have a copy of Do These Bones Live in Wellfleet, and as soon as I can get one from there it will be my pleasure to send you one. I must order copies of the English edition. But I owe them money. Still, I should like to own a few copies and send you one. I will do so.

I think of your POEMS, and anyone who gainsays your GIFT is a churl. Did you mail a copy to Horace Gregory? I looked over CALL ME ISHMAEL, and it always pulses and surges against my trembling veins like the evening surf being easily raked in by Poseidon's Trident. I love the little book, and it awakens in me all our deep, lost origins, cairns of racial composts.

Do as you like with the Flea or the Rational Tree. I dont mind at all your critical feeling about the TREE. Not at all. I am in too much turmoil at the instant to be reflective.

Harry Moore has edited letters of Lawrence to Bertrand Russell and Harvey Breit has blessed them. Give me a doomsday curse, a Tartarian malediction: when benedictions are so rife.

I am weary, but wan as I am your words made me smile and I wanted to show you some in return, as pithless as they are at the moment.

My love to you,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
March 17, 1949

Dear Charles:

Your letter was manna and quail in my wilderness. I have had your sibyl, Jane Harrison's PROLEGOMENA, and also the SHAKESPEARE IDENTIFIED. A rereading proves nothing; that he was no malt Balaam I knew before; that he made no money my own patrimony devoured by property taxes and Winifred, now divorced, is the best text. I will reread the Xenophon, and you may find repeated joy in Plato's PHAEDO. The Hesiod Theogony is a source for your MYTH; I make no claims for it as poetry, although the simplest record of fable is an homage to the MUSES. I am still pondering the character of Socrates, and wondering about that double-tongued and negative Zeno and his purificatory cross-examinations of eminent fools. How to write is still a great perplexity. I am inclined more and more to find a piercingly simple prose; let the legend of my heart be the oracle. Then there is that vile Gorgonian knot which I cannot untie, how to get lucre. My teaching ends in the latter part of May with no assurance of summer work. It had been my deepest hope to begin on the book then. I am told by other members of the faculty that the chairman holds me in high regard. But how shall I translate such coin, academic esteem? I am not at this instant averse to going into the provinces. Aside from continual reading, and living out my life in a hotel room, I am in the hinterland. I see fewer people; the psychic depletions are great, the guerdon is small. I simply go out on occasion to sharpen my wit very much like the ancient Jews went to Gaza to whet their shares. Incidentally, the communists in Croton offered Winifred free legal service to pursue me!

Homer is still a deity; the other day I read a volume on Homer and the influences of Tyre and Sidon on the ILIAD that was very pleasurable. Unfortunately, I learned little that I had not known previously. It always delights me to hear again how Menelaus took

hold of Proteus in the Aegyptus stream until he forced from that wily god the oracular secrets he desired to know. Can we ever lay hands on Proteus and force him to reveal what our clandestine life will not divulge? This again brings back the knotty and baffling perplexity of prose or verse. Should the line be an Afric leopard, a water-hog of the Nile, or just a mild Pythagorean bee. Should we write humbly or fiercely or plainly? I know I have been too obscure; what right has man to be as darksome as a god in his lore? Ay, who will tell me anything? Meanwhile, my ruminative cud are bitumen and asphalt, and I walk alone thinking as best I can, but these miserable peripatetic exercises are in only a small way purgative, because there are neither gods in Hades nor mortals here for company.

I hear regularly from Herbert Read; for the most part, our relationship has been aloes and frankincense. But since the publication of his last book other odors have come up. He cited a line from CALL ME ISHMAEL which I had given him to honor and to publish to confute me! I was deeply heartened to know that the book had made an impression upon him. I cannot blame a man for wanting to feed his wife and five children; I sometimes doubt that he should feed the former. If we must live in Grub Street, we have to save our strength for vision somehow. I imagine poor Kit Smart was a literary porter most of his life in order to live and compose THE SONG OF DAVID and the Pascal Lamb poems. Unless we save our forces for the spirit we might as well eat the acorns, the mast and drink the drugged Pramnian wine, and go at once without boast or lies to Circe's Sty. There is no good feigning to be on the Parnassian slopes with swill on your shoes.

Now that I have sent for my books there is a strike. I am sure this is just malice! some demon told these workmen to hinder me more. Regarding the tender papyrus, I have been trying for some time to get Porphyry's CAVE OF THE NYMPHS. I want to know better how to roost with the horned owls and the choughs and the seagulls either in that hollow underneath the earth or in that cavern at Salamis where

Euripides looked out at the beating white surge. What I would not give at this instant to hear the sea-cry of a gull or look at a heron or at that Arion's Dolphin that carries man out of the shoals.

Let me hear from you soon, Charles; I wish we could talk. I am more starved for conversation than crusty, wormy Lazarus was for a morsel from the rich man's table.

What does Constance do? I have had no sense of her since the hospital days when she was guzzling ice cream and being such a gay and foolish canary in the midst of trouble. I am not a canary. I am just gay and foolish.

My devotion and love,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Washington
Friday March 25 xlix

My dear Edward:

Your bounteous letter guerdoned us both, caused us to dance, my friend, naked in this room! So one steals archaic pleasure, in a filthy time.

And tho you have not heard from me I have been at some things which concern you. FIRST, your book is in press — at least Cernovich is experimenting with type and space. I send off to you what came today. I have already written back to him, to lengthen the line and to try a Baskerville instead of this Bodoni. But I like the mass he has accomplished. Do you? You must ignore his errors. It is a trial piece. He overwhelms me when he says the cost will run 100 to 250 dollars. I have told him that is as much as you or I earn for a book, after ten years of Tantalus rocking the sun. I sd 100 is already too much. Question: do you have anyone who will contribute to same?

When I was there they asked to see THE RATIONAL TREE as well. They now have it, and will print both together if they have the

time and number of people sufficient. (Albers, by the way, is delighted they do it. Whatever his faults as rector, he is artist enough to be a trout to a lure. I like him excellently. He leaves, as I told you, in a huff, this June. Bodky, Goldowski, Trayer unseated him when they meant only to unseat Dreier. A's wife is an erinyes.)

And I have written to John Caldwell at Alabama, and you should hear from him, for I said you were he—if he could get you to leave New York. I still question that you should. But there. Each man to his errors. And they are least important in you, because you rectify them so quickly!

But I doubt you think so these days.

All week I have been walking as many paths as days back into Greece. Today I sent off to a young composer Part I of a dance play called TROILUS for him to experiment with. Yesterday it was Euripides, his ORESTES, which I was trying to get to by way of Way, angry that I do not have that language. The day before Odysseus (& Homer: would you please tell me what was the book you spoke of reading, of the influence of Tyre & Sidon on the Iliad?) Do you know any writing by anyone on HOMER, which has illuminations? Even Harrison deserts me here, though this week I found reference to very early book of hers on the myth of the Odyssey in art. If you come by that, get two also, Ed.

Edward, this is a note to haste to you the look of yr words in type. You must excuse this wretched thing in return for your lovely letter. So I, poor, ask another of you!

Love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
April 5, 1949

Dear Charles:

Your queries kindle me deeply. How the myth-producing mind,

the mythopoeic faculty, must labor for FORM is our task. There are a number of books that I have not yet seen. For a year I have endeavored to procure Porphyry's THE CAVE OF THE NYMPHS. The entire problem of the gods without whose solution no ancestral or eponymous literature can be conceived is best summed up in Socrates' remark to Miletus: "You strange men, do you earnestly believe that I do not regard Helios and Silenus as divinities?" A piercing bit of knowledge is that Aristotle in his old age found in mythology his sole consolation. You know how Heraclitus reprehended those that did not accept the Homeric theogony. Now as other readings for you: may I suggest the long, doughty and remarkable essay on SOKRATES in Grote's History of Greece. I believe you will read with profit his chapters on The AEolids and the Pelopids, on Attic Legends, the Arcadian Genealogy, Legends of Thebes and Legend of Troy. His disquisition on the Homeric Poems is perhaps less satisfying. The volume, Did Homer Live, by Victor Berard is agreeable, but you will find that Sidon and Tyre in the ODYSSEY yourself. The best sources are the ancients; there was the adversary of Strabo, Eratosthenes. Soon as I get more of these books I will let you know at once. If I see additional copies I will buy them and send them to you. Our imaginations are kindred; let us be sure that before we do our work they are not rubble Titans.

The page pleased me; as you say, the print is not right. It is glutted with errors, but that you have already told me. I believe one line is missing, but I am not sure. I should like very much to see the two included in the book, that is, The Flea of Sodom and The Rational Tree. And let them go for what they are, while I retire to the bowels of Mount Aetna to work with the Cyclopes in Vulcan's stithy.

The Four Seasons Book Shop on Greenwich keeps CALL ME ISHMAEL in stock just for me. I gave a copy last week to Professor Howard Dunbar of the English department at New York University. I asked the book people whether they were selling the POEMS, but they said the salesman or the jobber told them the book had not yet

been published. Is that true? I see no periodicals and so do not know.

I am distressed to hear that Josef Albers is leaving. I do not think he should. How many people have been put into the maw of Kronos at Black Mountain would be hard to compute. The leafage and the fetid earth is a devil and a place for mania, suicide, and avant-garde pederasty. Still, I am very grateful to the students who are printing the book, and would be deeply pleased if you would give my full thanks to Cernovich. I remember the thewy willow with the glasses and the daedal eyes.

If I can get summer teaching I will be able to send money for the book. Please let Sam Rosenberg know that if I have summer work he will receive the forty-five dollars due him with my deep heart-thanks, and ask him to forgive me. I still owe you ten dollars which I have not forgotten. The property is my bane and Acheron, it yields nothing but the bills of the she-Briareus.

Read this to Constance when you are so mooded; it is from Thomas Campion:

"If I love Amarillis,
She gives me fruit and flowers,
But if we love these Ladies,
We must give golden showers,
Give them gold that sell love,
Give me the Nutbrowne lasse,
    Who when we court and kiss,
    She cries, forsooth, let go.
    But when we come where comfort is,
    She never will say no."

Winifred may give me a check for fifty dollars toward the Black Mountain publication of the book. If she does, I will have it made out to you, and you take care of the matter when you go down to Black Mountain.

I give you my gratitude, which is like the honeycomb in Pindar's mouth. And I give you my love and with it the fillets and the pears

and the pomegranates to the Pierian Sisters who smile fondly upon your GIFT.

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
Friday April 8 1949

My dear Edward:

I have had another letter fr Cernovich, one half hour ago, which I have answered. He has gone ahead well. It will be necessary to use bodoni (in *any* font they have so little type they have to set 1 page at a time, and throw the type back before setting another) but he followed my suggestion a longer line, and it looks good. C ran into trouble on binding, but he has solved it by adopting the Chinese design, the book is sewn when it is all done ((*rhapsodia* means to *sew* or stitch *song* together)), with two covers front & back. The problem he is beset with now is paper — which, and how to buy it. If you can get me the check Winifred promises, instead of waiting until I go down (not until the 25th) I would send it off immediately so that C can go ahead. (I have suggested an issue of 100 copies, with a colophon describing the book as a first special edition handset, numbered, & signed by you, done at the Black Mountain Press, design Cernovich, supervision Warren Jennerjahn.

NOW to what causes me to write in haste: (1) which of the two titles do you wish for the whole? Myself, you know, I favor FLEA.

(2) May I have your permission to put my hand into the text in some such fashion as I did into the 1st 3 pages of FLEA? I should keep my intrusions to a minimum. — If you consent, can you send me a second copy of both pieces? They have the blue text, and ought to have it by. If you could let me have another, I could keep filing pages to them as I finish.

Do let me hear from you on these matters just as soon as you can. C is beginning to get a little frightened at the thot of 75 pages, each set & scrapped before the other can be done, and with only two months-left of his year there (he cannot afford another, the shame of it; he worked a year and a half to get himself there a year; he is worth the whole she-bang; I have got him, however, into a long story about his mother and brother: his blood is thick as were the Atreides, those Phrygians; have you any ideas (o we comrade ragpickers) where he might manage a life?) I sent him your message to cheer him up, the daedal.

Otherwise only Ovid is new (came on his Medea in the Heroides). And Berard, whom I have fed on. The English bk you, too, came to, is miserable, but the base text Les Phynicein et L'Oddyssee is fine & thick, and I am now trying to get his translation of the Odyssey in 3 volumes. The gain is the precision of nouns he can manage due to his documentation. (I am a gainer, because I was a loser two years ago, when I did the story of O and Nausicaa, and could not get through the bad English heretofore. Had to give it up, the story HE SLEPT. My interest now is a dance play.)

We had Sunday evening with 'Orace Gregory & marya, here. I like OG very very much. I suppose she is the stronger but his weakness has more fruits. I could have fought with her but chose to be amused: she horns the pitch-pipe of p-o-e-t-r-y every quarter hour like the grammar school creatures. (There was only one, a Miss Lee, 2nd grade, who was a woman, we called her Melon she had such breasts.) Horace has a fine feeling for you, and it was a pleasure you sent us.

(As you sow the olson seeds, my johnny-a, I should tell you that the distributor of *y & x* is now THE ATLANTIS BOOKSHOP, 100 Fourth Avenue. It has had but one review, the Nation, and that a matter of SIX words!)

And my deepest thanks for the Socrates, Aristotle, Heraclitus triad. AND FOR THE CAMPION: it is strange how you and I have

got to the same wafty bridge, the Elizabethan singers & the Ancients. At Black MT I took away a book called MELODY & LYRIC by JM Gibbon which you might care to look at (do not buy) for the lyrics there printed I do not find elsewhere. Another Campion, to music by Morley, is:

Now is the month of Maying
When merry lads are playing,
Each with his bonny lass
Upon the greeny grass.

The spring clad all in gladness
Both laugh at winter's sadness,
And to the bagpipies sound
The nymphs tread out their ground.

Fie then! Why sit we musing,
Youth's sweet delight refusing?
Say, dainty nymphs and speak,
Shall we play barley-break?

(I let Constanza come on the other lines by herself. Shall we say she was perplexed? "Shall we play barley-break?")

I was delighted when Gregory said he thought you were as spirited now. Yr delightful letters confirm it. They are my joy. Continue, friend.

My love,
CHARLES OLSON

[small note paper in script]

Dearest Charles — Please send the Homage back right away. Must mail it to London at once. Where's a reply to my letter. Autolycus?

My love to you & Constanza —
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[on reverse side]

Saturday

Edward:

Your sumptuous words! Elizabeth!
"sea-boke" (beautiful), grammar-Castrato,
[ ] Comma book-Barabbases!
Thank you, Edward — I hasten it back — for England, a proper issuance! And say: don't you owe me word of what happened [in] Middletown?

I AM YOUR OLSON

Washington
Monday Morning [April, 1949]

Edward:

We are just in fr Black Mt, and I wanted you to know your letter to Winifred (sent fr NY Saturday) was posted off from the P.O. I hope, for your sake, that that was the only letter you sent for mailing last week. I discovered this morning that the forwarding order I left a week ago got so fouled in the stupidities of the P.O. that all our mail but this one letter from you has been sent to Santa Cruz, California!

You must forgive me I did not write for a week, the more so I had a beautiful letter from you just before we left. But I threw my energies forward into that place, and neglected all else, in order to pierce it to the root.

That done, what shall I say? It is a lovely girl with whom I am in love. You were right. In some karmic fashion, the place is very right on this prick of my time. Albers has asked me to return in

the middle of November and again in the middle of December, and I shall—for three days each time. But I am seriously considering reopening with him the offer of settling there for the winter and spring—if, now that he has had the fountain, he should want to repeat it. I gave him an abundant dance: a class each day, Monday thru Friday. And three public goes in the dining room in the evening.

We are both deeply in your life for the giving of it: it was an illumination when we, unknowing, craved it, and fed like hungry animals. And you are remembered with the proper ambiguity: the best have you hot in them like a discharge from a mortar. It is a measure of Albers size he carries you as fire.

I am most anxious to exchange stories with you. And shall, soon. When, now, I don't know. But I must go off to New England shortly to bed my mother for the winter and shall get in touch with you when I am in N.Y.

Do pardon this rapid note as I am in the door. It is inadequate to our gratification. But hear our love

Your friend's & Constanza's
CHARLES

[New York City]
April 12, 1949

Dear Charles:

I am sending you Winifred's check for fifty dollars toward the publication of THE FLEA OF SODOM. I take the title you prefer. The manuscript shall be in your hands in a day or so, and please do with it as you deem fit.

I am ashamed I have no Greek. I cannot find the words I seek in Homer and which I know are in the original text. On occasion a line is winged speech: The Scamander flows out of the mouth of Zeus. This is legend and poetry. Euripides troubles me very much. I question his

poetic faculty, and though I consider this profane, I could say that he is a thinker rather than a poet. This, too, is spurious; for thought that is not poetry is not pristine perception either. Of some little value for your purposes you might look into Paul Decharme's Euripides. But how can a man be so iconoclastic and such a misogynist and yet dote on the bestial multitude? THE ORIGIN OF BIBLICAL TRADITION by A. T. Clay is better. It is kindling knowledge to be told that Erech and Babel were great Amorite cities at about 4000 B.C. I have always looked upon GENESIS as earthenware inscriptions or pieces of antique pottery with figures of Enoch and Enos upon them. Perhaps the sherd Job scraped his boils with had drawings of those Angels that entered the sons and daughters of men. Legend is more history than scholiasts have been willing to acknowledge. That is why Livy is so wise in being preeminently a fabulist.

Your account of Marya is mirthful and true enough. She has grown a little bulby since the days that she used to complain that she was a better poet than Horace while she swept moles of dust into the corners. One day she showed me her verse. After I read it I asked Marya to get her broom and sweep the dust out of the corners. You know how clairvoyant I am! A year or so later she got a Pulitzer Award for her verse. Her wish to make Horace great is the volition of Ligeia or Morella. While she stuffs Horace she so diminishes everyone present that somebody is inclined to ask Marya for permission to be just a little bit great himself. I will be content with some few pages if the Muses are kind and fortune not too severe. If a man write one lovely line he may go to Elysium. All the great men of our day will feed forever on Lethe's weed.

Did you hear, Charles, about the college position? I am very worried about summer. My checks stop the end of next month.

Cargill will return from California sometime next month and I will show him your card to me. I imagine he will be pleased to make the exchange. What do you want the book for? I know nothing about it.

I want to get this into the mail; do let me hear from you soon; thanks for the charming song you typed out in your letter, also very charming. How is Constance, or I ask with more grace, Does she form her mouth to her liking, and is her hair softly trussed at the back of her neck?

My love and my friendship,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
Wednesday [April, 1949]

Edward:

How fine the FLEA looks on yr grey letter paper! I am rushing off a sheet of it to Cernovich, for example.—He wrote me this morning, acknowledging the check (I to you likewise now) but admitting he is scared, only 60 days left, and it takes him 2 days to set a page. I shall put his courage back ("Du courage a l'ouvrage", sd Verlaine) by letter now, and be there myself next week to see what can be done. —He is asking whether he better not limit himself to one of the two parts.

I am sending on to you a sample of the cover he proposes to use (it is scratched, he apologizes: it will be clear and clean!) You will recall it is to be hand-sewn in the Chinese manner. And the weakness of their design is the tendency of the cover to come off at the front-face hinge. I assume that is why he and Si chose plastic. The question is: can you tolerate it?

FOUR SEASONS, thanks to yr sowing, lists ISH in its spring catalogue. I have returned them an order for books for Black Mt. (I like their tone, of 'em all)

But the fruitful books, one cannot find. I go round asking helplessly for the LOEB and the BOHN, but am already beyond them and have such needs that either I cannot afford or find. (Ran into a

book in the former category I wanted to draw to yr attention: called THE WHEEL, a study of the use of praying wheels.) —I continue to feed deeply on Berard. Have now his translation of the Odyssey, which makes it possible for me, for the first time, to have it in such exactitude of language I can read without irritation. He opens, for example, with this characterization: l'homme aux mille tours. And, due to the documentation of the port of Alkinoos, is able to make the Nausicaa passage have the body I suppose it has in the Greek. (Shall we not learn that tongue?)

And I find Berard's argument the Odyssey is three "dramas" most imaginatively useful.

What is yr Socrates piece, you speak of rewriting? Did the Xenophon reveal more of him? And what is the best Chrysostom?

Love,
CHARLES

No word fr that Alabama Caldwell about you & the position. Have you? Does the Cargill rise lead you back to NYU?

[New York City]
April 22, 1949

Dear Charles:

Read Chrysostom's Trojan Discourse in volume 1. According to this version only the *eidolon* of Helen was taken to Ilium, while Helen herself remained in Egypt in the reign of King Proteus. Look, too, at the conversations of Diogenes and Alexander of Macedon. Thucydides, Polybius and Pausanias are glutted with references to Troy town and Homer. Thucydides cites with some feeling the Hymn to Apollo in which the blind bard of Chios entreats the Delian maidens to look with favor upon his harp. I am looking for translations of Hellanikus, Damasters, Pherkydes, and will tell you what I

discover.

I have not received the sample cover you mention. Horace Gregory believes the book should be printed and bound with real taste if it is to receive any attention. Otherwise, he believes it will be totally neglected. I think he wants to write about The Rational Tree. By the oath we make to the infernal damsel Styx, No PLASTIC! Let a plastic cover be used for a codpiece to hide what is lame or gelded. NO PLASTIC!

I have word from Herbert Read that an English publisher is interested. What will happen I am not sure. Anyway, I wish to make full thanks in the Black Mountain edition and in the English one, if there is one, to you, Cernovich, Herbert Read, and Gregory.

The Memorabilia I did not read with too much pleasure; it may be a plainer and blunter portrait of that gifted grammarian of ethics and churl of dialectics, Sokrates, than the Platonic figure. I have not changed my mind about Sokrates, but I do want to make a few alterations regarding the mythopoeic faculty. As pious as Sokrates is said to have been, he did disestablish Eros. Without Eros as a divinity poesy and myths and the whole assortment of incredibilias so urgent as aliment to man cannot remain. There is another crucial dilemma: how far can man go in his inquiries without blowing away the fine particles of dust which make up the ancestral and genealogical cairn from which the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women and the Odyssey are taken. There must be a limit which all the ancient sages accepted. Plato emphatically denounced any one who denied the divinity of Helios or Selene, and Herakleitus regarded those who questioned the mythology of Homer as impious.

I have been taking notes all day, and my back is very sore.

Please pardon this brief letter. Would you ask Josef Albers in my name, for whatever it is worth, not to leave Black Mountain College. We both have regard and affection for him, and I cannot see how the college can continue if he leaves.

I have heard nothing from the man you wrote to about appoint-

ing me as a chairman of a humanities department. Cargill will return next month, and if he is not a wily academician he should do something for me. I look for little from that invertebrood.

My love and devoted friendship,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Very important: Please! Charles, send me by return mail the railway express receipts or checks, or whatever there is, so that I am sure to know how many cartons were shipped. Because of the strike the books are just coming in. Two cartons so far have arrived. And let me know, please, how many cartons were sent, and for how much insured.

[Black Mountain College,
Black Mountain, North Carolina]
Monday [May? 1949]

Ed:

I am stupid. I might, three minutes ago, have given you some erhebung, if, that you are to be read by thirty young characters this month, is such. Even if it is at the cost of $1.50 to yourself. For I cannot find here, nor have the BM people been proficient enough to acquire DO THESE BONES LIVE. For I have just bracketed and assigned together DAHLBERG and HOMER: the ODYSSEY & THE FLEA OF SODOM (in mss), BOTTOM DOGS (which they have), and BONES, which I am asking you to send them, please, if you can, this day, attention Mrs. Nell Rice.

Yr call upsets me. You sounded more racked than you have since fall. And it is a misery I had to add Cernovich's charge. For what it is worth, I advise THE FLEA, admitting that it will be still-born, more than the satisfaction to have 30 copies to distribute and by which to provoke. It is little. But Cernovich has taste (you know his page already), can use a better paper, now understands plastic is an

abomination, and will (with Hockstein's help) wrap it in a simple rich paper. But there. You are shrewder than I, and you will gauge whether Read's bite leads anywhere or not. Cernovich will go ahead unless he hears from you to the contrary in the next two days.

Yr message to Albers was handsomely taken as he is handsome. But there seems no way to mend the break. He leaves, as does Bimbus, & Trude, with him (not to speak of madame aa, whom I have no interest to speak of). The Dreiers have gone, now sit in Florida. Except for the plan of a Texan now there, who wishes to reconstruct a BMC outside Dallas (did you ever think of Texas? would you care for such a possibility?), Albers & Friends are going their separate ways. (Albers plans now to bind the year through three short stays in three small places). He is in good spirits, and painting gayly, though angry and bitter towards the revolutionists, Goldowski, Bodky, Trayer, and Mdm Rice. It is all very stupid, and has so riven the atmosphere none of the students do much any more. (Sd several of same last week: the more the time since Dahlberg taught us opens, the more we remember and value same).

These trips tire me very deeply. It is a great effort for me to go, and, back, to return to my work. But they have enabled me to keep this house, even if again, now, I am threatened with its loss, and I am most grateful to you. But, as you see, and sense, and said, I pay! I am very full of despair at my lack of accomplishment this winter.

Do write, and I shall at least to send you my affection. I have that for you, in your troubles, if little else to offer. Here again,

then, my love,
CHARLES

[New York City]
May 5, 1949

Dear Charles:

Thank you for your compassionate letter; I needed it. I sent a telegram to Cernovich asking him to go ahead with the FLEA. I still long to work on it. I would be grateful if you would let me see page-proofs in advance. So many errors that bring the deepest blush to the brain can be made. Maybe, please, you would look at it with some care. I bought a second-hand copy of the BONES and sent it to Black Mountain, care of Nellie Rice. My gratitude to you for whatever words you may have to say about me. I, too, feel shorn away; too much solitude engenders depravity and the worms of Lazarus. It was pious AEcus who begged Zeus for companions when he was alone on AEgina; heeding his prayer he translated the ants on the island into the Myrmidons. I would not be opposed to going anywhere if I might have some kinship to man. I am sepulchred away in this hotel cranny, reading and reading. Have you spent much time on Pindar? I have returned with very great pleasure to Aristophanes. He is a lovely, dithyrambic, decayed Levantine, witty as a Moor or an Arab. How he can write about millet and cheese-cakes and Minerva's olive and the Thesmophorium. Yes, I would earnestly consider going to a Black Mountain outside of Dallas. There is a student of mine down there now, and I have been thinking of going south on a bus and stopping over in Dallas for a time. I cannot go to Rome, or to Paris, or to blessed Attica. Were I to go to the latter place, I could only say what the Platonic Sokrates said: "What I would not give to converse with Homer, Hesiod, Musaeus." Perhaps, the person who is interested in a college settlement near Dallas could give me the names of some persons I could see there. Do let me know, please.

Geoffrey continues to be a piercing orison in my flesh. He is very tender and seems to require me. I cry out, whenever I muse upon him, or capture his face as I walk on asphalt, My Bowels, My Bowels!

I do not know what Cargill will do. You know the academic man. Could you ever link your hand with his, or call him Brother. The pulse of the heart glimmers away as one attempts to utter the name.

I walk on occasion through the square and pass the fountain of the sluts where the diseased muses sit. One little fantastical waved a dollar bill in the face of an Irishman whom he hated because he knew he was broke.

A little commune of learning would be good. There is positively no place, no jot of earth or verdure for a man of feeling any more.

Do not be dismayed if you have not had as many intuitions in the past year as you have prayed for. My entreaties to heaven are rarely heeded. I write solely to remain sane. Look, what swine there are on Parnassus. If wily Odysseus was not able to avoid the tusk of the boar, how can we shun the "middens and the piggeries?"

I am as melancholy as Heracles and Aristotle, and I ask you to pardon such a darkling distemper.

Do let me hear from you soon. When do you go down to Black Mountain?

Take my hand, weak, "indifferent honest," flawed, cunning, but man-fevered, and with it my loving friendship,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington D.C.]
Tuesday May 31 xlix

Edward!

No deal dallas—yet. He has three houses to sell, and neither his will nor the tarot will cause who'll buy his houses. Besides, there has to be a tie-in, one Bobbie Dreier, if not Albers, there has to be a communitas. Which there may be. I'll keep you informed. I go back next week.

I daresay yr silence is expectation I should write first. Which is

herewith done, if not done as I might have it done. Been sick three days (black mt fever) and am ajumpin today. Am secretive. Am writtitive. How are you, I hope not croton-sick, it being the day after a holiday. Or are you blue (-papered?)

DURA

To come to the look in the sacrificer's eyes

the archaic sought, the harshness
unsought

And the eyes which should burst

do not.

I read very much. Acquired Aristophanes today. But of whom I am suspicious.

O yes. Yr readers. It was most curious. You were the one who went home, of all of the year. And what will please you, BONES more, much more than DOGS, and, for the illuminated, the FLEA more than BONES! These, the new ones, read yr prose in a romp, the late prose. If any one had written of you well I'd have sent it to you.

This is a note, to awake you. And to say I should be seeing you inside of three weeks.

My love,
CHARLES OLSON

[New York City]
July 11, 1949

Dear Charles:

I hear the bleating of sheep and the lowing of the cattle of Amalek in this appetite for Babel-America? Do you really believe you

are going to deceive a great number of people. My poor friend, be at peace, you will not dupe anybody save yourself and three other readers. I appreciate your zest for all the arts and crafts and races; it is an exhilaration to watch you go out so valiantly to combat your identity and to return each night triumphantly alone! I would give you the chair of American Literature, but you would eat it like the companions of AEneas devoured their trenchers. You should have then the chair of the dance, the drama, a portable bernard de voto, mark twain, the dreiser letters; I would give them all to you would you not grind them to powder as Moses did with the golden calf, making the bitter waters for you. What are we to do? I am aging as you so gallantly advise, and you with the vigor of Rahab, the Dragon and the Leviathan, are hungering for fame. Shall we break the head of the dragon in the waters? What shall we do? In the past eleven years I have grown more obscure? How shall you grow otherwise? Social adhesiveness is so sweet and the palate is so unsatisfied. I who walk around the rim of the earth like Lucifer should have some counsel for you. But I have not. I know you think I have a despot's will and that I would influence you more than you wish. Our problem is kindred, but not wholly the same, I would be content to deceive one person, Charles Olson so that he could write a book more wondrous than that piece of sorcerer's prose, CALL ME ISHMAEL. Charles Olson wants to gull many people by writing a book for the multitude. O I don't mean you are seeking a hundred thousand readers; you would be content to slay ten thousand Philistines like David or if forced to, one thousand like Saul. I should be satisfied with a hundred to two hundred foreskins of the Gentles, one Hebrew, a Greek who does folk dancing and reads Homer and does watercolors over the week-ends, and perhaps a Phoenician and an Ethiopian. But not a Negro American style. Unlike yourself, I believe the Negro with the residual sorrow of slavery in his eyes is a more merciful creature than the free Negro of the north. Go to Harlem and tremble; or go not into those regions of Sheol with the stone tables of Moses and hope to return with your

suit, watch or car. I have another perplexity; how do you manage to prevail upon the bowels of so many Abrahams Isaacs and Jacobs who own asses, oxen and sporting cars? You are more wily than Laban the Syrian. O yes I know, you are a furtive celt; with me you are double and treble, secretly reprehending my monotheism while you run after many american idols. But I know as much as I want you to have the nard and the calamus that Seth brings back from Eden to mitigate the pains of his father Adam, you will not have it by going into the camp of the enemies, the Midianites of American Literature. Fate is so sly that, perhaps, if you are very earnest you might write a bad book and get fame. Otherwise, you are doomed to be as obscure as Spenser.

Charles, I thank you deeply for giving the money to Rosenberg; he is only a Jew by name, for the children of Ham and the sons of Gideon and Joshua are lost and their heritage is base.

I wrote a special delivery to Wilbert Snow; please tell me by return mail whether you have written to President Butterfield. I must support Geoffrey and Joel, and write and tremble like grass. I will labor ardently for publication for you in England. Would to heaven you could heed me; write the long, flowing Melville line, as form it is worth the three kids, the loaves and the flagons of the wine the three prophets took up to Bethel. But the great Melville as wisdom is the inedible fish of Homer and the wights of the sea the Galilean menders of nets caught. I repeat this banality; what else can a man do in his poor, wizened life, but reiterate three or four truths he has learned from someone else. We are always writing another book because the preceding one is a failure.

So much for ageing, repetitious and platitudiarian Edward Dahlberg, but I know my hapless limits, and so I wait mourning on the ground and praying for the noise in the Mulberry trees and the Truths I shall soon receive from the young, vascular Giant of Anak, Mein Herr of the flute, the psaltery, the timbrel, moloch.

Always your friend who gives you love and friendship; as for the

rest of humanity, I cry to the hills, the rivers and to my spleen for remedy.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[in script]
Please send me by return mail the Flea of Sodom & The Rational Tree: I want to work again on the Socratic passages.

[half-sheet of paper]

[New York City]
July 15, 1949

Dear Charles:

I am, of course, happy to hear that you are coming to New York. I am teaching two evenings a week at Brooklyn Polytechnic college and am at present living at the Paris Hotel which is at West End Avenue and 97th Street. The phone number is Riverside 9-3500. If I am not in, please leave a message and tell me where I can reach you. Am writing every morning, doing for want of better phrasing a Cape Cod novel with many allusions to the Book of Enoch and other apocryphal legends the mention of which should make you smart and pine like the Jews ached for the melons, the leeks and the canteloupes of the Nile.

Forgive my silence. It has been singularly difficult for me of late to write a letter, even to you who are my kin and above all my friend.

Let me hear from you, or much better, see you soon.

Your loving friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, North Carolina]
monday july 18 [1949]

edward

you must excuse me i am having trouble even sleeping & eating amongst these barbarous & vicious creatures who now run this college, who drove albers out, who were pleased you left, and who are now after me whether i shall stay is now my question, tho i am somewhat trapped, & may have to hold

i have found that nick seems to have taken the mss of the r.t. with him (i have the flea) so i am writing now to have the 2nd copies in washington sent to you immediately

i sent the wire winifred requested as soon as her wire reached me it was left in the post office box (the carelessnesses here are beyond toleration) i am delighted for you both, & hope it insures you both economically for next year as well does it?

do write me, and do not be upset if, until i can get something worked out here, i am irregular i feel like a egg shell & a fool

love
CHARLES

a stupidty is enclosed [no enclosure]

220 Sullivan Street,
Apt. 3C,
New York, N.Y.
August 3, 1949

Dear Charles:

I am deeply sorry to hear that your summer at Black Mountain is not giving you quiet. All that you can do to eschew human filths is to cleanse your soul each morning by writing a savory line or reading

one. I saw Herbert Read before he returned to London and spoke to him most urgently about having Routledge publish CALL ME ISHMAEL in London. He agrees with me that this is the most memorable book done on Melville, and he is going to see what he can do [to] get them to bring the book out in London. I shall in the meantime write him again to hasten him to commit this justice. If a good book is given light then a little evil will depart from the earth. Now as for the poems, I have not sent them out yet, but will do so shortly. I do not think Cappon is in Kansas City at this time, and I want him to get the poems. They are gifted, as I know you are, for my Muse long ago advised me so; but I am still praying that you will return to some of the traditional forms in writing. I do not feign that I know how to write or even how to counsel you. I write, and then my writing advises me. And even then quite obscurely. I labor each day for my form in this novel, and at the moment am at work on a fragment I have called the Vision of Uriel. I look for my own guidance to the four archangels in the Apocrypha.

If the London publishers can sell American sheets they will do the Flea of Sodom and the Rational Tree, which shall then appear as you suggest as The Flea of Sodom. I think it inadvisable, Charles, since you shan't be at Black Mountain to have the book done. I don't believe it would be clean or mirthful without you. Unless you need the money, would you remit (what a leopard-like word, remit) the balance of the fifty dollars. I can urgently employ this little lucre. But let me know, please.

As I previously said, I shall make acknowledgments to you and Read for your human goodness in helping me find publication; that will be my timbrel with which I shall go up to the holy mountains if the book is printed in London. Unless I err grossly, I believe it will be done. I have here as bait for them some 30,000 words of this novel; little do they know that this book, too, will be, I pray, good for their spirit, but of no worth whatsoever to their cormorant gullet. I set out in my abominable misery to write a book for the vile world, but

neither Michael nor Gabriel nor Uriel who is set over Tartarus and the world would permit it.

Winifred is very dual, tender but guileful, and she walks in the world with perjured feet as all women do. I adore the children as you know, and Geoffrey in particular is the Son of my entrails, and the son of my Vows. I should like to see you have a son without, of course, the hindrances that I know.

Be sure, my dearest friend, that I labor in your behalf, and that I shall not be content until I find an English publisher for this book and for any other book that you will write. Give up, I beg you, these experimental satans who have put the nails in the Word. Return to Ishmael and to your own Eden.

My love to you, and do let me hear from you soon.

I have found an apartment, very pleasant too, a good size room with kitchenette and bath, a block from Washington Square, and now that food is as high [as] pigeon's dung in the famine of Samaria, I have a pot and a stove for a little cooking.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, North Carolina
aug 16 xlix

Edward:

Yr check sld come back to you in a few days. I hid it in Washington, the house was empty until the 15th, now the people are back, & they shall forward it. I have written to them.

One clear day of Odysseus the Sun—otherwise jungle & humid. No wonder the creatures are small here, bugs, snakes, turtles. That Albers shld have stayed 17 yrs raises questions abt him.

But I have worked on The Kingfishers, Poetry London will publish the first two parts of it, and some poems, translated into

Italian, will come out in Italy this winter with drawings by Mirko. (Such unions I no longer like, at least in america; but there, like prefaces, they go.)

And I make a production in ten days: of three different projections of THE CYCLOPS, and of a poem NOT THE FALL OF A SPARROW. You must suspend yr suspicion of drahmah. You yourself use the word "novel" when you know better; I go blind, too. Besides, to your despair, dear friend, I am an actor. (Dare I remind you that Homer & Shakespeare were, o my serious one?) ((Another proposition: those who do not know what they are, interest themselves in other people))

I am delighted FLEA will come out in England. This is a wonderful thing, and others should have it. Keep telling me news of it, who and when.

Tell me, mine orakle, which do you choose of these two readings:

> o that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
> thaw and resolve itself into a dew

> o that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> thaw and resolve itself into a dew

You see what a moist weather does to my mind. I [ ] how are your sons, & winifred: give them our love. And what you are up to. Send me yr round speech, which hides in my ear like a berry

I must go now to one of these desperrate meals. How come such a man as you did not warn us of this food? They are tantalian.

Love,
OLSON

[New York City]
August 20, 1949

Dear Charles:

Thanks very much for your good, few lines, and I hasten to answer them before laboring for my penury. I am fearfully worried about getting work to support the two sons. I have heard nothing from Middletown; Murdock wrote a long letter, and now Cargill is sending one to President Butterfield whom he knows. Cargill is the new chairman, and that should be a help. It should, but you know how canny the academic mind is, how wily it is; and how it despises the suffering bowels. It is a fearsome thing to have to tell another man that you believe you have some human vision that should be protected, or that Gabriel touched your eyelids by the waters of Chebar at evening. I had to do it, and I felt miry afterwards. Suppose I were as wrong as Waldo Frank! He has become a worse churl and now believes, someone told me, that the only two people who will be recollected in America are Waldo and Erskine Caldwell. This is the indignation of the last times.

What do I know about myself? I know that you possess seven vices that I do not know [I] have, and I know that this is self-deception. I look into those obscure waters of Styx, thy self and myself, and I hurry away, though, alas I return to cringe again.

The poems I am sending this coming week. I wish to reread them very slowly. I wrote to Herbert Read the other day, and, among other things that I said was that two or three books on Herman Melville appear each year, perhaps more, each caitiff author filching some gnome or feeling or pulse of vision from Olson without making a single acknowledgment to him.

Kammerer, a sculptor to whom I gave Ishmael is an admirer of yours. It is better here than in Washington, Charles. Yesterday, I met a young Italian poet and he had a rare piety for literature; Slater Brown who has written badly for years spoke with feeling about the

Wheels in Ezekiel, and after our talk, thief that I am, I wrote a hundred words on Time.

The other evening I read with rapture the Book of Daniel; I continue to read the APOCRYPHA.

I always rejoice, as you know, in your own work of the heart, and it pleases me fervently to hear that more poems of yours are to be published in Italy. Even if I am wrong about your poetry, I shall stand guard over your Muse like Cerberus; for our gift is our pitiless Acheron.

Yea, yea, I know the serpent foliage of Black Mountain and the food the wild asses in the desert would refuse. But I feared for your poverty, and I thought, too, perhaps you are not as troublesome as I am. I felicitate you; you are.

Now I go to the Book of Ezekiel and then to write a just word or two that may be put, I pray heaven and Cocytus, in Job's Balance.

I send you my love,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

You think you have the eagle's heart of Odysseus, but you are a fool; I, alas, know that I am a fool while others regard me as wily. What do I know about myself, Sir Charles, nothing, nothing, save that we are both hapless and wily fools.

220 Sullivan Street
Apartment 3 C
New York, N.Y.
September 20, 1949

Dear Charles:

My deep thanks for the check and for paying Rosenberg; my tardy gratitude is my discomfort about money. At the moment things are worse. I have no appointment, and I do not know what teaching I

shall get. The English publishers have not yet come to a decision, although I thought they had, and those apples I smart for [are] as far [from] me as they were from Tantalus. I wrote a small, apocalyptic essay as a conclusion to THE FLEA OF SODOM, which I have called THE WHEEL OF SHEOL, based in some part on a rapturous reading of Daniel. Otherwise, my solitude is a kind of debauchery; it has all the marks of evil without any of the low satisfactions from it. When I am not inert, I write a little, or read Christopher Smart, Seneca, the Miracle Plays, Porphyry, Livy, Herodian.

I called you this morning and learned that you and Constance were in Gloucester. This is the first time in years I have not had Poseidon's salt on my lips. What I would not give to lie on the sands with some kelpy Naiad, a soft wind from Arabia Felix cooling and spicing my veins.

If THE FLEA OF SODOM is published, Herbert Read is doing a Foreword to it.

You might care for Smart's translation of the Psalms. But considering your sodden silence, your watery inertia in which your Celtic bones are soaked, I beg you to read these lines from the hand of Christopher Smart:

> "In Ireland's wild, uncultivated plains,
> There torpid sloth, and foggy dulnes reigns,
> Full many a fen infests the putrid shore"

You have fallen into the habit of not replying to my letters, and then when I remind you, you say with great guile, are you so Euclidean as not to write me because I have not answered your last epistle?

The Homeric Poems you have written interest me very much. I imagine, when your lines become the chant of the heart, they will not only have the strength of your intellect, which I never fail to understand and fully value, but the misery of your flesh. My own days are the saying of Kadesh for my Mother.

My love and faith,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

washington
october 6 xlix

mydearedward:

yr strictures were more cruel than you know i have been so eaten with my lack of accomplishment (it amounts to four months i have been away from my desk) i got blind to get back there, where, in isolation, only do i work

i have just this morning returned to this desk, and without ease or sense, i insist on writing you this letter, to ask after you, to tell you how fine it is to have had your words, and to seek assurance you are at a less worst than your last letter indicated

yr letter reached me in Maine where my senses, at least, were full of delight what new england was! we were visiting Washington friends in Damariscotta, Newcastle, Wiscasset where it all opens out, East Boothbay, Head of the Tide, those places where the carpenter was the agent of grace

i expect now to be in new york around the 1st of november i had planned to stop off to see you on this return but another emergency on this house has arisen and i came straight through from Boston overnight (my landlady is back from france, and wants to evict us again)

the U of Kansas mag returned the two Sumerian pieces without a howdy-do (included with it was my letter to you, enclosing the verse!) also greeting me was the rejection of the long "Kingfishers" by poetry-london, after i had understood they wanted it

about The Flea: if Read should fail again, would you not want, though I shall not be there, to have me try Black Mt again? I am sure Cernovich would be anxious to do it (though you and I have an enemy who now dominates the place, the bitch Goldowski)

do forgive me i have been so silent, am it is my despair, but i cannot work, or feel spun up, when i am societal is it possible i have now learned to stay where i am and refuse all such en-

ticements (one of the finest pieces of wisdom i acquired from you is, people do not change)

remember me to winifred and to your boys, and let me know that you have teaching and are in less discomfort

my love and admiration

CHARLES

a host of your perceptions have been
alive in me recently

[New York City]
October 6, 1949

My dear Charles:

I do not know how I happened to put your letter in low, alien hands. I ask your pardon, and tell you plainly it was the result of sick distraction, and not done with any purpose. I gave ISHMAEL to a doughty Irishman at Brooklyn Polytechnic College, Professor Donahue, and he liked the sweet little book very much. I do not know how verse or prose should be written, but a Godly line has within it the ram of Abraham, Samuel's anointing horn [?] [to?] a large Nestorian beaker of brine to assuage the melancholy heart. Give me a warm-livered [ ] line; so warm a line that not even the Caucasus can cool or diminish it.

Forgive me, if I have trespassed against your identity. I do not wish to err against your Muse, but to pay homage to it.

You say you are coming to New York. I have an extra iron bedstead, not long enough for King Og, but I offer it eagerly, with pastoral kidney lamb chops, ale, a copy of Christopher Smart's REJOICE IN THE LAMB, which I am saving for you, and a copy of Sing O Barren to replace the one your peripatetic friend took away with him.

Winifred does not let me see the dear, sweet children because I

have not enough money to give to her. My teaching is meager, and I do not know what I shall do. English publication of THE FLEA OF SODOM is still in doubt. But I read poor, hapless Smart, that beautiful Genius in Bedlam, and Herodian, and do you know what loving lines Edmund Spenser wrote?

Some dullard, with fat mushroomed ears who had done a Melville tome has said that pecking pederast Matthiesen discovered the influence of Shakespeare on Melville. I always thought that Charles Olson had. But I am a very foolish man and really believe in the truth, and if you believe what is true you do not have to sow dragon's teeth in the ground to produce armed men all around you.

Your silence makes me uneasy; it wounds me more deeply than my obscurity.

Your devoted and loving friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
November 15, 1949

Dear Charles:

I do not believe that solitude is good for the liver or the blood or the bowels. The gregarious American makes a fetish of his solitude; and I do not think it is necessary to be more alone than man already is either to write or walk or eat. Dying and writing are private acts, but one can neither die or write all the time. There must be seasons, moons and suns for privacy and for friendship. I still believe that the True Poet says, "Will ye go away?" and the Peter of the sodality of trouble and pain and vision will always reply, "Whither shall we go?"

You blame me for not forming Andromache as you would form her. Do you pardon Cressid because she was so moist in bed? or lewd Clytemnestra? Why do you rail at me for the same misogyny you celebrate in Euripides? Was wily Homer a fool about Helen, or even

Penelope. When we want to write about good women, it requires no more than a line or two. Mary Magdalene is painted for us in a sentence or two, and that is right. Unless we are very artful we are far from the truth.

You accuse me of not giving enough of myself to a woman. Well, nobody knows anything about that. You least of all. Of the four women you have known in the past twelve years or so, three of them you met through me, and the other I had known. Some you thought radiant at first, but later relished them less. The one you so defend you rejected and may well have driven into limbo. This was your decision and no one else's, and only a busybody would feign that it were his. Does it matter whether we turn woman aside because her flesh has not the fertility of the Nile, or for another reason. Would you despise a man for rejecting a woman because he was troubled about her nature. Then, my dear, make yourself ready to scorn all the poets in the world.

I know how tempting the ascetic ideal is, and I also know that if a man petitions heaven for denials the gods will give them to him in abundance. Do you wish to be alone; you will be. Do you want to be without friends, as lorn as Prometheus who has no other companions but Earth and AEther. Zeus will not deny your prayer. Do you desire to be a writer, an oracle, a MAN? Then let us argue about friendship, and whether a man who is niggard with his time, will ever have the time to be a friend, a poet, a lover of the infinities and the Milky Way. Art is simply the ritual we make of our lives; make then a ceremonial of your raiment, food, companions, speech, prayers. Who can laugh alone? or eat with Ceres or Bacchus in gloomy solitude? and after a man has made an hexameter or an iambic or a strophe, and after a man has died, who will hear his meters? and who will clasp his ashy and aspen-like hand in desolate Orcus. I make no credo of miserable privation; I accept Necessity, always prayer for the springs and the fruits of the deities.

I do not yet know the issue of this malevolent connection with

Winifred. I must somehow or other father my own sons; this in some way is Godhead for me.

You must believe that I have the deepest feeling for your Muse. The other day I had coffee with Horace; I had brought a copy of ISHMAEL along with me, and said in a testy voice, "Do you not admire this lovely little Melville book, and do you know how many caitiff thieves are pilfering his lines?" Horace has since read ISHMAEL, and spoke with real respect of it. I was very pleased and relieved.

Do not be precious about your time, Charles. There is no way of avoiding folly; I will take instructions from you regarding women, provided you promise me I will not only have a benefit or two from you if I prove to be a meek pupil, but will not receive more injuries from Lais, Thais, Medea, Regan and Goneril than I already have had. In Proverbs it is said that Woman hunts for the precious fluid of life in a man. There are many such opprobrious remarks about ladies, courtesans, wives; in fact, the PSALTER, the Chronicles, the Five Books of Moses, the Greeks and the Latins are glutted with Rahabs and Jezebels, and female Nabals. It is even said that Jael offers milk and honey to Sisera so that she can drive a tent-peg into his brain. I know now that the poets were liars, and that there must be another approach to the woman with rosy teats and the snaky trunks, and I am [ ] in this darkling secret from you, if, of course, you can take yourself away from those visionary cozeners whom you are always reading, and who, perhaps, are deceiving me! O how many books I have misread!

My love and full-time friendship grounded in the olden lore and apothegms in return for a part-time friendship, Occidental style.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

washington
wednesday nov 16 xlix

edward, my high fancy Bastard, stick to cases, don't throw those absolute thunderbolts and think to blind me to the in-work where "Life" (your caps) gets itself worked out

we struck fire over one woman, and the use you had made of her (you, not Euripides, or Homer) i would not presume, as you have, to make judgment on your whole conduct with women (i am too full of particulars about what you have meant to other women than Miss Young) as you well know (and as i carefully said that night we spent the week before) when you write on WOMAN as a creature, when you do a Theophrastus, when you raise up your generalization and sting with it as a tail or tongue, then, what you have found out by your means makes sense, suddenly the sentences form, the "olden lore" you have learned (as you once set out in Kansas City to learn words) gets folded in, and we have a Wheel of Sheol or the "I" of Flea

i was delighted when you recognized yourself as a metaphysician, and talked of resting your life on your principles fine, my Moralist but send your Sermons from your mount to that abstract thing, the World, don't lacerate me with pronouncements about myself when you are not able to include all my particulars

at this precise point we diverge i might trust you the more if, when it comes to particulars, you were as fulsome as your praises (i speak now of my mortality, not Ishmael, dear friend)
are you scrupulous, when, each time it comes up, you moan i did not become Asst Sect of the Treasury?

you see, i do not believe that art is simply the ritual we make of our lives then Christ is an artist

you whore after wisdom good have it i mark how wisdom & commerce

have a way of going together how else could you come to the Americanism "full-time friendship"?

PART-TIME CHARLEY

[New York City]
November 16, 1949

Dear Charles:

You forget that it was you who assailed me. I introduced you to Miss Young to ease you. I did that, having the same judgment of her then that I have now. You know that knowledge and acts are rarely one; if they were, there would be no Zeus or literature or art. I do not see why you should be disgruntled because I say that neither Homer nor Euripides regarded woman as a moral animal. However, they put her in the Balance just as Aristophanes weighs leeks, cheese-cakes, lupins, or as Socrates talks about Justice. One does not pardon bile in a woman because she is moist in bed. I do not regard scratching and pleasure to be more important than good principles. My failures are due more to the Rahab in my skin than in my mind.

You say that I whore after wisdom. What advantages have I gained, either in lucre or in reputation or in friends? I smart, because I have no money for my two sons, and because there is not a soul on the earth to whom I could turn for a potato, a cruet of honey or a loaf, am I then the harlot of Tyre? Is every man base who covets the asses and oxen of Jacob? Are not the denials that the World heaps like an Aetna upon my back sufficient for you?

What deity is there in the heart of man who assails a man as stricken as I am? what jot of God, tender grass, or Klymene or Arbute, is there in a man who is so niggard with himself as to refuse a man, who has been his buckler since he learned there was the Immortal Word, an evening for talk? At least my sins are not apart from a desperado fervor for the artful human beast. I have never been a

skinflint about my time with you, and it would not be arrogant or gross to remind you that generally whenever I have given you a day or a week, you have departed from me with a knowledge of ancient scribes and sages you had not previously known. I never thought it more essential to rush to Homer or Strabo or Porphyry than to converse with a friend. I read the Masters to talk better to a friend. I believe that literature is the health of man, and that he who does not regard it so, will bring to himself the Erynes.

You question my praise of your Muse. Yesterday, I wrote to Laughlin, asking him to remove my work from the New Directions Annual, and print in its place your essays on Melville and Hawthorne and THE TEMPEST.

I have always reckoned a friend greater than any woman; women pass out of our lives, like the sea and the tides and autumn leaves. The more, in a way, we die unto life, the deeper is our need for friends. I say a poet does not trouble himself about being alone. He has all the solitude that the soul can endure; sometimes it is a rapture and often it is abominable ennui. But no man with some judgment has to ask God or men or even a woman for privacy. We will all be privy dust in a short space of time. Let then death take care of our private nature, or the soul which is perhaps the same thing; I depend upon the Angels for my will and my fate.

Christ is doubtless an artist, because his Allegory is not at all temporal.

I regard your large, Jovean, laughing face with the greatest esteem and affection, and believe in your Behemoth dimensions. You are an extraordinary, gluttonous human animal, and for all your intellect, you are sometimes like huge Ajax when he is furiously slaying sheep he mistakes for men.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.?]
friday november 18 xlix

edward, my sheep

you turneth away wrath you make such beautiful change! it is hard for a fool of beauty like me to keep from falling in the honey-pot, my knowing knave

and who else but such a wit and brain as you shall i be furious with? the rest, as Alyosha sd, (and was it not you who quoted?), shall be treated as children or as the mad?

i allow i am ajax, and thank you for exposing me to myself: to learn and to educate, these are the only functions the only trouble is, do you, may you, learn from me? i am honestly too modest—la! to know

i abhor it, but today, and too often, i am as happy as sophocles is reported to have been for 80 years that narrow difference between man and animal is such a matter of hairs

do, edward, forever, hesitate to make up sums of what you give such addition has, against the Pleiades, to be made by the recipient every time you count coups you rob us of the future, for a man must keep his scalp, at all costs, even the loss of the learning, of the gift to come i do not forget one thing: that you must always bank on ingratitude, as Lear found out, is too easy a charge do you not trust cordelia who heaves her heart out not easily?

and you are a sweet fool to cancel you for me in Mister loklins annual 1920: master, let us go hand in hand, you who are sure, i who am not, and thus finish so little! & know less

i send you thyme for your lintel from my door in the quickest possible answer to your courtesies

which is a form of love,
YOUR CELT

[added in script]
they are the lighthearted races, & therefore enjoy nothing,

obviously, so much as cracking of skulls—
the Iliad is full of 'em
their morbidity is altogether pervasive, children of the sun.
The earth (darkling, you'd say) they flee.
Persephone is never of their making. Nor their Mother. So women are always their sisters, or little girls, whom they run with, play with as their equals, & whom they slay, as deers It is time, the sun breeds slayers, makers of spring, & slayers. There it is,—Celts light, light, thin with it, & only in love with the dark, which they never know. How can they? This blood does not go down, races out. And they like to see it, out. They remember nothing but what has stood out in space. You dark men roost in woman as cave. They, the splinters, want to dance, only to dance, & slay. They are without suspicion, stupid, gay, think the world is a hangout leading to a scrap. O, what shall men do with these empty-heads, before they destroy us, we who favor the beat, not the color of, blood? What shall we do, to bring them down, the laughing ones who do not have beautiful teeth?

[New York City]
March 24, 1950

Dearest Charles,—

I am deeply charmed by the BILLY BUDD COMMENT. Your prose becomes more warmly flesh, and is as toothsome and vain as Absalom. I am altogether of your feeling regarding BILLY BUDD, although I was not so years ago, but I think you are right; the mirth and the myrrh of your lines prove, as you say, what the dullards cannot fathom. Yes, to cite you again, we always go farther with our flesh; perhaps our disgraces teach us more than the virtues we believe we own. Do you own a virtue? No one has even lent me one. I relish, too, your desolate interrogation, "Is this a winter's tale, a master's "TEMPEST?" And finally, a very brilliant line you make in, "as though the hand that wrote was Hawthorne's, with his essayisms, his hints, the veil of his syntax."

It was gifted of you, Charles, to send me your only copy.

I am just getting out of my Heinesque mattress-grave. Today, I walked in the sun for the first time, with acacia-reveries in my hebraic heart, and I pined for hazel-nut, and dog-wood, and the pebbles Numa Pompilius employed to augur. I am still weak; but I want to go soon to the anointed tables of the Masters and feed.

I returned the galleys to London, and the book should be out in England in April, perhaps not till May. I added a small essay-poem to the book, called BELLEROPHON.

I am pleased that the homage to you charms your palate, and I hope Constanza will be delighted with the cadenced reference to her. New Directions has already announced the forthcoming publication of THE FLEA OF SODOM, and it should be done here a month or so after London publication.

I have just had word that Herbert Read has done "a very glowing introduction." In the catalogue, English, Read writes that "Dahlberg is one of the greatest writers of our time." My dear, good Charles, I appeal to your rogueish, and Mercury-fingered wit, Who is greater than Dahlberg except Goliath the stupid?

I am glad that you care for the RATIONAL TREE more than you surmise, and only beg you, you nimble-fingered Autolycus, that when you pilfer from me, that you do so with more exactness. Heraclitus did not say what you aver he said. It was Empedokles who said it, and he wrote it quite differently. Let me sharpen that Mind of yours: "The blood around the heart is the thought of men." Your own garbling of this remarkable line is not bad, not at all; it is quite good. Now, if you can mutilate another writer's text with as much skill, you are likely to turn out to be a very talented man, almost as great and blunt as Anak himself. But I confess, you steal as only a Genius can, and who should know better than I?

Did you ever get Maximus of Tyre? Soon as I have some health I shall look for it, and when I find it, I shall tell you. By the way, the allusion to Eliot is quite droll; the exchequer saint of anglo-american

literature should have more such Aesopian sleight-of-hand.

I shall send this to you, special delivery; the mail-carrier will doubtless awaken you about three in the afternoon, and you will revile me, until you read all my Volpone flatteries, and no man who speaks of frankincense so lovingly as you do, will be able long to resist my epistolary gaieties.

Do we all live in the Garden of Sodom, Charles? I can tell you I want the sweet, nectar-apples of Venus. Am I as feminine as the Earl of Oxford? I will love a man amorously with my mind, but not after the stygian manner of Galba or Nero or Caligula.

Let me hear from you soon, my good, gifted friend, ay, very opulently gifted, and take with this my love for you and Constance, the low hills, the sweet Pleiad Milk Maids, and may Heaven be kind, for I am pining to leaf and to flow swift again as an evening, pebbly river piercing through a moon-painted vale.

Your loving friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York City]
April 19, 1950

My dear Charles,—

Thanks deeply for the letter and the kind notes and epistles you are sending out for my bread. I had hoped the Homage to you would be in the mail, but I doubt that I can get an extra set for you. I have not seen the original galleys of it yet, and wrote asking for it again. THE FLEA should be out, I imagine, in May. It was to appear this month, but I could not get what galleys were sent corrected because of sickness, and then I insisted on page-proofs, not wishing to see page 10 on page 27. If I do it it is all right, or so I imagine. I am eager for you to see the BELLEROPHON; originally, it was a portrait of you, and then I got baited by my own vices, and now it is you and

me, and may Heaven and the Dragon protect both of us from each other and ourselves. I hope the Homage will be good on the page and give you that pleasure that dogwood and April and the unavenging flowers afford us.

I go to Middletown Thursday evening to stay there much of Friday, anyway, and will call Cornelius Krune. Snow constantly asks that you join me. He wants you to come up. He thinks I have the power to pull you out of the Washington Tombs. O my good friend, I have some lines on Acheron solitude in Bellerophon! Yea, I have fevered Iliums, but who has the Boreal blasts to blow you out of feral privacies.

Thanks very much for sending the charming little trade edition of the POEMS. There are some sweet chanting lines out of the honeycomb of your [vines? veins?]. Sing More, More.

My teaching ends this May, and I must get out of that college; there's nothing for me but being the academic grammar charwoman, and on a part-time basis. I am really worried about the summer months. So far I can't get enough reviewing on the Times. And you see how puling and small I must be. O to get some crumbs from the anointed table of the American hack. But how stupid must I be? In my own right, and without the help of nature, I am capable of huge stupidities, but if some demand idiocy of me, then I go proud, and alone. Like you, my fine Bellerophontic solitary.

Why don't you come down; I am at the moment intellectually slack, and I promise not to be more vapid than you, but a little adhesive companionable relaxation, some good, lumpish inertia, this is my bread, my leaven that I offer you. I picked up the Book of the Dead the other day. When a man finishes a book he dies, and I have not come up yet out of the grave.

I have half a mind to do a play, half Elizabethan and half Restoration, before going into a Tragic Poem. I do not know. I know nothing these days, and I am no meek braggart when I say so. There is nothing wily or Phoenician about this remark. It is the only truth I

have in my flesh. I leaf, I bud, but only as the animals do because it is the season to do so, and not because I have the Will from the Apocrypha or one of the Apocalypses for it. I have no will, and that would be a horrible vice, were I in a loathsome mood.

Well, this isn't a letter or a confession. It is a budding April velleity, the grass leaps up in hidden places, the violets pulse at eventide, and when Sancho Panza trumpets to me from some vale or glad hill, I shall bring him a russet leaf from last fall.

My love to you and Constanza
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[in script on torn note paper, both sides]
Charles, The Homage on page iii is not set as I had wanted it to be. At first the printer *omitted!* it. I was quite frantic to think the Homage to you, should have been so put upon the page, so that it would be apparent that the Bellerophon is dedicated to you. Please forgive me! it is not my fault: Some day, and again pardon me for being the Braying Ass, or let me Bray for a week or so, when this Book is reprinted, for some young Skelton, or Smart or Olson, the correction can be made, for I would not give you anything in penury – – –

Again my love
EDWARD

[New York City]
May 17, 1950

Dearest Charles:

I am replying at once to *your card.* I, too, take joy in the marriage of our names. THE FLEA, my dear Friend, is to be published in London next month. How soon I shall have copies after that I do not know. But you will have a book as quickly as I can mercury one to you.

I continue till the end of this month to be the academic char-

woman of syntax. The journey to Middletown was futile. All that depraved and pallid foliage of learning there sends me to Erebus. I saw little Trilling at a cafeteria table in the faculty club at Columbia. He has that yellow, sere face seasoned in hell, and the bulby, glazed eyes of the despicable ferryman, Charon. The Matthew Arnold man! I have done another hack review for the Times, and if I was not inadvertently intelligent, they may print it. I am trying to compromise, you see! I have always said that the reason I have never compromised is that no one ever tempted me. It is true, in a sense, and I am like that noisy Paul sold unto carnal lust. Aside from this, I have the most holy fervor of the heart to write, let Satan and Rahab point the finger at me, and each claim me as his orthodox devotee. I want to do a poem, a parable, on that obstreperous, and lusting and alienating Paul. I have also been rereading Blake, and bought a fine copy of THE BOOK OF THE DEAD, which Blake used for so many of his allusions.

I may have a job as an assistant professor for four weeks, lecturing on American Literature, and will have occasion to celebrate CALL ME ISHMAEL. I must read Parkman, and some muck-rakers. The other day I was looking at THE CONFIDENCE MAN. So much bitterness, and so little upsoaring power to wing it. Poor Melville, I cannot believe that either Hawthorne or America balked him. There is some deeper, metaphysical devil of aridity in his soul. No man can either harm himself or be ruined by another. Baudelaire, for all of his orthodoxies of satanism, foolish man, he was not content with the vices nature had so lavishly provided him with, he had to labor for more sins, was no more evil than his original nature. What a hapless folly, for you cannot add one turpitude to your soul, nor subtract one from it. And so no matter what he did, he could not be less or more. That is not strictly speaking determinism, and Baudelaire thought there was some free will in man. It is a good creed to have. I sing of the Tree of Life, and chant vice and sin and error, and let the good and the evil, and not reason, take care of the song.

It is incredible how little talent there is in the world. I am reading a very bad novel for review, and no matter how badly I should write, even as hurriedly as I am making these words, I would, maybe, be apt to make one living, upspringing, phrase. So long as I have my faculties, I shall go to Cana, to Joppa, to the wilderness of Beersheba to make the stones speak. I will walk in slain hills, and there find the wild honey in the carcase.

Write me soon, will you?

I send you my loving friendship, and bless your Muse.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
wed. june 7 '50

edward, my friend,

the howling way i was, i have continued to be, roaring from a storm which heaves up from the hidden places (are they forever sexual?

Lear, even Lear, stayed obsessed.

And so

a man better eh?

(Is it all we do, to recreate parenthoods? to bring back into existence he was our Adam, she who was Goddess?)
To prove, prove, that we are born?

)o,

smell the blood, fellow(

And so i kept on, carrying you, thinking remembering

yr voice

And awaiting THE FLEA.

(what, in the world, shall i say? eh?
"what is narrative?"

& exactly in what way does
dahlberg's return to old resonators, pro-
ject
eh?

Myself, the last thing was, a attempt to do a story which was not, to make verse come rasslin out of prose, as tho it was difficult, had to swim for its life, the prose returning, and giving way

some lines, perhaps

(((This is a new 2nd machine (my own just broke down) and I have trouble with it, as you see,—and which you will, please, excuse)))

I am very happy. How are you, Edward? And where will you take yrself out of, the heat? (It is just here, the last two days, and both satisfies me, and gives me a headache. Washington is a swamp. There is some chance I may be along yr way soon. It is time I went on, for a bit. Will let you know.

& it pleaseth me, that Paul is to feel yr sting. For he has long deserved it, noisy Paul, Paul who does not have rosy flesh, who was the 1st one on the wire, to make the Trilling.

I treasure, fr yr letter, "no man can either harm himself or be ruined by another." It is beautiful, and is to be added to such other dahlberg aphorisms, as I am collector of! You use the simplest sort of statement hugely, my friend. (You once praised my short sentence, alas!)

And yes, it is not form but chant you are, — how shall I say that, to those who do not know *either*? "let the good and the evil, and not reason, take care of the song": hic fecit.

(hah, my friend:
either you steal, or, again, we make doublet, for you talk like the KINGFISHERS concludes itself: did you ever see it?)

I do not
read, these days. But I am full of reference. Was surprised, doing a

long verse, for the first issue of a magazine which was to have been born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, (think of it!), to have Anthony of Padua flying over the roofs where the gulls shit! and blessing my city for me!

It was called

I, MAXIMUS

(and it was he, of another sea-city, who was, of course, in my mind

(((whom, by the way, I have not yet had a copy of,
fr that hunger of mine, edward the Sharp: here,
here)))

O, yes, one thing which would please you, is, that I am now (by my wits) the owner of a water color of Lawrence's, one of the very few outside of the collections of them that he left to Vence

it is of a man pissing into daffodils, and retains DHL's whole sense of the cycle of nature

(And all I did to get it, was to sell a Lawrence collection I stumbled on in a bookstore, to the Lib. of Congress.)

It is a very nice fetish to have. (I lost—to, of all the possible creatures, Mark Some-No-Body—the chance to do, for Viking, the preface to a new collected poems of L: it was a thing I wanted very much to do, for he is still fertile to me.)

here i am swetting into my eyebrows, and hungry, and quite, quite silly, and so i shall stop, asking you to receive this more, as a token of love than of intelligence.

Fr yr friend, and
who invokes on you,
all, all
benificences, particul
arly, rosy flesh

OLSON, CHARLEY

[New York City]
june 17, 1950

dearest Charles, —

you should have a quick reply to your budding summer letter. i thank you for the sun, the grass and the june you emit. i know the pollen of flowers and the savory sweet of stalks, and all that equatorial sexual love you have, which warm days and cool, blowy evenings, yes i know this furioso season of the flesh, but at this long moment of ennui i am in a desperado misery, and for that reason did not write you at once to praise your letter and to thank you for the balm and the gilead of it.

the book, you say, should be a comfort; you're a writer, my friend, a very fine and noble one, tell me, what is it to make a book, ay, fine and quick for the soul to make, and when it is made, a sin, and a folly and a disgrace, for how can you make a book out of virtue, which no one possesses but liars and soup and money hacks. so we've made a book, why then miserable toad, adder, and summer croaking frog, go and make another folly, sin and disgrace for another book. i have no solace in books, nor can i say with aughte else but tombstone laughter that a book finished is just a cold ague, to be printed, and misread, o let us not be fancy, just by three or four or seven to get to hyperbole, why seven that's a planet of people. you might, charles, if you've the mind to, write to harvey breit and ask whether you can do a times review of the flea; otherwise i shall of a certainty have that m[o]cking fleabite of a fate; you know the little dagger silence.

do you believe the universe has moral ears; that sounds droll and rather assish; or let us so phrase it, do you think the earth hears our cries, and that when the heart bleeds herbs and mallow and rush spring up along some woodland mushroomed marge? or that we carry in us our fates, and it requires the greatest faith in absolutes we break at night or in midday boredom and dead affliction, to sharpen a constellation of a fate for ourselves.

the book, i mean the littlefleabite of a verse and prose and parable, should be out in london the last part of july, and here on the 28th of the same july, six days after my fiftieth birthday. does that sound eerie or decayed or mummied, fifty years old, that's hardly an achievement in itself, and shall i say, now that i am close upon the fiftieth year, i have learning, and books, and shall we use that cute little word, genius, the philistines have preempted, shall we say it, no we guess we better not. this is quite irrelevant, but baudelaire says that sexuality is just the lyricism of the masses. that'll make you laugh, whether you agree or not, and he also says that pederasts require intelligent women for conversation. give me the intelligence of the soft breasts, the learned feminine fingers, the erudition of her lips, but that's banal too. i mean particularly that erudition of her lips.

two little yogi artists may come to see you, one you know, biala's brother. he once came to me and said, "i have wanted to talk to you for fifteen years, but i always feared to approach you." "alright, that's fine," i said, "let's talk," and he did, for fifteen years, but when i saw that i was as wretched as ulysses on the barren sea and that the twentieth year was about to revolve, i got up, and went back to my room.

i've been reading kierkegaard; youd probably be very vexed with him; he writes about dialectics of history, and finitude and finity, but he had great sickness of soul, and he was not a philistine. consider the lilies, charles, they toil nor spin not, nor make deceitful books; why a book is an infernal lie, spun out of vanity and out of the raiment of solomon and many winds.

now when will i hear from you?

how is constanza? i cannot find up till now your maximus of tyre, save in the original language at daubar and pine. youre a latinist? i have no languages, only sometime deceiving myself into imagining that i write a little english, but write it when i cannot in the holy cave but by the devil's tombs.

you have my love and my friendship; but consider the lilies that toil not, and when you are so bored that you can sup upon it, why

then make a book. i know no other relief from this unrelieved monotony men call the world or the planet or that strange little thing of skin and malice that is called man, or the foolishness of trees, flowers and streams and the ways of a maid.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Washington, D.C.]
sunday june 25 1950

edward, my lad, that was a sweet awakening, my scoundrel, only, you got my brains in their best but least wary mood, and so i add this note to our talk, to be precise about some certain things, mostly

Jas. (pronounced jazz, as his intimates call 'im!). For he is an important instrument, and I want one day, in my own rhythm, to "have him". But the time has not yet come, and the little incidents-accidents which have happened I like, just as they have happened, which I want you to know, so that you have the record, and will, I think, see the plot this "stage manager" (please, in Goethe's sense, please, not in—o High Critick!—any too shrewd a sense!)

((in fact it is quite simply, rhythmic, and, because, of the way it got off so bad, with Jas., there, so long ago, in Mary's Kitchen, there, in cambritch, I am having some sort of a delightful playwriting with him, unknown to him, of course,) which I want to let work out, as it works out, without any push on 'im, because, actually, the

whole thing is sort of a game of innocents (for he is, literally, an innocent. And I?, and, whatever the issue (the reason why it is delightful, just as it is, is, that, in the end, Jas. is going to have to do my will, so long as he is the publisher he is))

this stage manager is
managing!

The two recent developments are, (1), *The Praises*, a long verse, which he will, as i told you, issue in ND#12, next December; and (2) the Melville iconograph, which he offered me, himself, right out of the blue (the blue of St Moritz, and, of—o, snow, at eventide), all, ALL, *by himself* (ain't it, bee-yoot-i-full! fellow
artificer?)

(1) first: it happened this way: West, editor of the Western Review, took the pome on receipt of it, but then, in the dark, one of my enemies (I have 'em, too, Edoard!) put the knife into me, one Paul Engle ("The Continent Screams", En-geld), and by god if West the pitiful creature, doesn't go and welch on himself, turning the pome back to me with the suggestion, it is too long, and, mebbe, a publisher like Laughlin, would be interested. So, to my own amazement (to allieve the anger, even after I had tore off a two page letter to West,—a straight Dahlbergism givin' same the LESSONS of, life!), I up and ship it to Jas., who, also to my amazement, TAKES IT (1st time, Jas. has taken, and I, pleased, in a way, pleased, yes, sure, I, too, would very much like to be,—o, well, not so much now, but once—a ND "writer", one of those . . . .

(2) the other was quite different, was, as I say, HIS initiation, based, I suppose, on ISH, which he was quite gentle about, when it appeared, (had, in fact, before Reynal took it, suggested he have a look at it,

and I, not doing, because I was, even then, going along this same path of timing with Jas., what I have described above)

(he was at the time, spring, 1947, on the Coast, and it was gratifying, the way he up, and from the talk there—I imagine it was mostly the review the S.F. Chronicle had carried, thO, perhaps, it was a little Rexroth, whom I did not then know. Anyhow, he did, up, and write a letter, which, for Jas., was something!)

date (now)

(((interruption: add one other detail: I had, Jan., 1949, sent him, for NDAnnual last year, AHAB, A DANCE (the thing done for the Graham Company, prose and verse))))

date April 20, 1949, letter, fr. Jas., asking, wld you do iconography (photos etc., with intro by O on HM)

((Attractive to me, a twin to ISH: I blocked it out, have, still, 5 page plan))

May 20, same (more on same)

June 13, same: saying, "I'm afraid you will think I am an Indian giver, or someone who cries 'wolf! wolf!" (O No) but since I wrote you, things have taken a very bad turn in the book business in general, and I think that we ought to delay this Melville project until we get into the next economic upsurge."

So that's that. And it's okay with me, that it is, though it is only in this sense of letting the things come out of Jas., at the moment, as I have indicated it has come out, not any unwillingness either to do the Melville book, or, to have him publish verse of mine. (As I sd to you on the telephone, about a year from now I sort of figure I shall be wanting to move in a little more on him, that's all.))

As a matter of fact, between you and me, what I am reaching for, with no one's

knowledge, certainly, not Jas., is, a book of verse by O issued by ND, say, 1952. (It looks now as though a chapbook of verse will come out, Golden Goose Press, about spring, 1951—and there has been, for a year now, another slated, called THE PRAISES, from a printer in San Francisco; but I guess that's a dead duck, no word from him in a year). So, Jas.—well, you see, I have plans for him!
[added in script along left margin to bottom of page]
I sort of think I push "Melville jobs" off, ahead, simply to get "Olsons" out there, sufficiently, to make "Melvilles" sit, properly, where they belong, on me, [ ] on me as—a sort of H M Son: though you, perhaps exclusively, see ISH as Olson-act, remember "the World", & how lazy, how stupid, how unromantick, it is!

That took altogether too long, but I wanted you, Edward to see the whole picture, have the whole record, and understand my way of working along with Jas. (You see, I am gratified, that you tell me, he is well-disposed my way. That's fine, and, if it stays that way, a year from now, or so, it will be really usable. Thanks.

As a matter of fact, who the hell else is there beside him, in the publishing business? He has damned well done the one continuing job, of them all. And he deserved our applause. (It was one proof, wasn't it, that FLEA . . . I await it eagerly, and I shall drop a note to Harvey soon (better to be cool, with that fellow, he is so scared of, us HAMMERERS!)—and though I am scared to death about doing of the review (it is not my form whatsoever, nor my way of putting my sense of you forward: you are too close to me for those public places: too close, for critique—for critique as I imagine critique, that is)
but, for you, I'll do, do, do, do

This is no answer whatsoever to the magic of that special of yrs, which was rich and sharp (yr wisdom has now a hardness (of the surface of water from which, — I

steal from a friend, in quite other relevance — stones skip before they plunge) so fine, the ironic, the sort of lying like a Saturn overthrown
. . . . . .
but is just a note, to fill you out, and, also, to send you

love,
CHARLES

[Washington, D.C.]
Tuesday, July 20 [1950]

My dear Edward:

I am going to make this a note deliberately: I must get out of this humid house and go to the gallery where it is cool and a man's head can be Duccio Buonisegna's sea, which is grass, and the fish are fish in grass, and Jesus and Peter and James are fisher men and Siena was a christian place when spirit was alive as fish are alive, and grass.

(Which has not been true since? I picked up a book of Dostoevsky's short stories the other day and read it on a train and was not interested as I once was interested and was struck again with the accuracy of your discussion of Dostoevsky's ennuie, and the root of it in sex.)

Saying these things I am suddenly aware of why I am interesting myself at the moment in Giovanni di Paolo. It is a double research, against suavity in art and spirit. I prefer his "St Clare" and "St Nicholas of Torentino" to Sasetta (I do not know his "St John the Baptist" in Chicago). I take it, his awkwardness is a clue. He, and Domenico Veneziano. And the insistence on the small subject. All quantity has sickened, and suavity is the Picasso of that big and competent world. I begin to see why I want small plays, 2, 3 people,

woodwinds, no set: chamber theatre, music, painting. It is a point of beginning.

I said a note. It is two weeks late. Something told me I should have shot off to you a card, even, to say, do send the FLEA when you have it. I await it. (I thought to write a letter and, instead, went off to Philadelphia to rub against the beast and make my own fur rise.)

Yrs,
CHARLES

[added in script]
A propos Keats:

have you noticed the hidden poem called

an epistle
a letter to Reynolds?

(It is in the 1925 ed. of Poems & Letters, Houghton Mifflin, p. 241)
(March 25, 1818) (Also see letter, p. 295, & note, p. 461)

I honor him as much for that as anything.

55 morton street
Apartment 7 L
new york city, n.y.
july 21, 1950

dear charles, —

i have moved to 55 morton street, apartment 7 L, and my phone number, not listed, is algonquin 5-33 68. please, charles, give no one my address or number. i have had mail forwarded to you, and pray it is not too much bother for you to send any letters that may come to you to me. sheets were sent out july 6th, and though laughlin is anxious to publish the book soon, i wonder whether august would not be a poor month for that. tell me what you think.

got word from herbert read; he said a professor had asked him to

suggest candidates for the nobel award. read mentioned me, and the professor took this as a coarse jest, read was quite vexed with the academic epigone.

have been reading kierkegaard, blake; the eye ailment has given me great trouble. hope to go into poetry and parables soon, but not without more books in me. i mean more reading. have done some hack reviews; the baudelaire will be out in august in the times. all that can bring me is perhaps some notice at the churl's academies of learning, and maybe some one may yield up a decent job at an indecent college. you will have, of course, charles, the flea soon as i receive copies. i think the books have been bound in england.

this is, alas, a slack epistle, and i apologize to you; my energies this morning are scant. i need the ocean salt, but fear that no such tonical poseidon will be mine this summer.

meanwhile, what do you? this matter of making a book, a whore's book with angelical visions, with the aid of theuth, lucifer's foot, and heaven, is a hard enigma. i am still looking for maximus of tyre. have you stumbled upon any new reading? routledge has brought out the complete smart, and i have asked them to send it. i have made no mention of you to laughlin, but then, my wily nautical mariner, it seems to me my past efforts for you were never bootless. the mistakes i have made i have committed in my own behalf! don't worry, you are as skittish as the foal, the ass's colt that entered the gates of jerusalem. i happen on admirers of yours often. so don't drop into any evil pits or snares of despondency. ishmael is in my mind, and when the time comes, [nod? knock?] at new directions, so don't bridle your chimera, ill fathom that possibility, unless you rather i would not, and i don't say that slyly at all, for i just don't know what plans in sheol or in earth or in the seas you are devising at some far end of no time.

my blessings upon you, and my love to you and constance. let me have your word, for i am not only hungry for the barley loaves and the fishes, but also for the miracles.

your devoted friend,
EDWARD

[added to margin of first page]
Just got word the Flea to be published July 24

wash
monday july 24 50

my dear friend Edward:

Nor shall I, apparently, go to the seas this summer. So if you too cannot watch yr kine of Poseidon play by it, in case it is any alleviation to share your city imprisonment, we share.

And so yr mail will be handled by yr postman, & readily, my friend, as readily as when he was a lettercarrier, and you met him.

(Strange drops & syntax this morning, Edward! It is always so, when one meets that stranger, the blood, again, after a night's sleep, at least when one is tired, and needs salt sea to spine & sponge the rote of same – is it not so?)

There is a friend here who has a car, and we have been using Sundays (Constanza's only day off) to make quick trips to the extraordinary meadows and rivers on which the Civil War was fought: a week ago Harper's Ferry & Antietam, or, what I prefer the Rebel name of Sharpsburg; before that Manassas. And yesterday, four of the fields of the terror, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, Spottsylvania Court House. It is very weird, how much it was Anderson's blueberry America that was the time & people of these frightful places of slaughter. And how they sit now, as they did, 100 years ago, a few monuments, but crops, fishing rivers, the same stone bridges, & wilderness roads, even such churches as Salem Church, Wilderness Church, standing where they were, white as the bones of the men were, the bones you do not now see. But wood outlasts men, and there at Spottsylvania, at the Bloody Angle, on the edge of the woods, I stumbled on an abatis, with the sticks still

sharpened and raised like snakes to impale a Fed coming in from the forest. (The past is prologue)

And so, in my reading, where am I? Not here, but in Sumeria, Cappadocia, Baluchistan, and farther back, against the melting ice, what my friend Sauer calls Mankato Substage! For my old obsession of space works in to time, by time's back door. (I finished last week an argument on the problem of verse now, which, in perhaps too muscular a way, brings all this speculation together. And I succeeded so in intimidating the editors of Poetry New York by it, that you shall see it soon. They are bringing it out in their issue August-September.

But it is nothing. I do not care for critique unless it is made parable as you have made it, and I do not seem to. I more and more take it, that, so far as I am concerned, critique, like argument, properly belongs previous to the act of composition. And so I go, daily, on, from one verse, to another, trying in each, to make each obey that form it seems to my slow growing eye and ear it demands.

I wrote to Harvey to suggest I do a critique of FLEA, however. And when you say, the 24th July, TODAY!, does that mean the American FLEA or the English? It is most exciting news. Do keep me posted on reviews. For is it not a measure of our contemporaries, how they put their hand to one Edward Dahlberg? But this is nothing. What is something, is, that it is out, for those who can find it. Keep me fully posted, my friend.

So write me soon, and, if you are of a mind to share my curiosities, look at some cylinder seals of those Sumerians!

All love,
CHARLES OLSON

[Washington, D.C.]
Tuesday, August 1, 1950

Edward! Edward!

[Paragraphs 1-4, 8-9, 14 and the hand-written conclusion have been bracketed in soft pencil, probably by Dahlberg]

It is as Bellerophon, of Bellerophon that I will write you today. For you have so made the Sign of me, and I am so atremble to be inscribed to in such Connection, that this is enough for the first day of the life of this extraordinary Book which you have so quickly put into my hands and which, in its Enigma and its Beauty, already enlarges me. But. I have suffered too much, Edward, to speak easily of the sage & parable you have put forth here.

I thank you, thank you, deeply, to be made a part of it—and to have the beautiful words of Rhodope who knew what a fablist is, and of—how deeply correct you are—the Amorite Whore, instead of all present dirtiness, put there by you as the gate Prouti through which I entered, bending the head, of this temple of your bones.

And that an Error has put my name as well in Beliar as in Bellerophon, is to double the Honor, for, having read it too today ((I have had to struggle to get beyond that "Author's Note" which now, in print, seems even more remarkable to me than it did in mss., as deep & gifted & engaging a two pages as I can think of: so rich is it, so, to use your lovely word, as lovely a word almost as, of woman, that she pleasure us, is your word, replenishing)) I put it with my first love for the story of the Flea: it is another scimitar into the rotten belly (how you urge the Wheel, press it in on . . .

But who is Bellerophon? You wondrously say, he is a sea-nature of the Muses. He is. For he is the son of my Glaucus, half fish, half man, he who was my father, the father of all Phoenicians, Barat or Panch, who was the king of the Flood and, surviving, found fire again and thus was also Prometheus, whom we have heard of, in the Caucasus.

The first of the curious things, however, is that Bellerophon's

grandfather was Sisyphus. This is surprising because Sisyphus was the unknown father of Odysseus! (He waylaid Odysseus' mother on her way to marry Laertes, the story goes.) But then you've sd it, you've sd, Bellerophon is Odysseus the artist—or do you know what you've sd, when you've made it conceivable that an Odysseus should be an artist? (Is it at all possible that the Bear's Son—for so Sisyphus is, the Bear, the cunning one, Homer calls him, most cunning, "much-knowing" says Alcman, two poets who are not moralists (two that are, Hesiod & Pindar, put it differently, the first saying Sisyphus is a man "of shifty plans," the other, the State or Grandpa Poet, saying, "Shrewdest in devices". (We know now, how Odysseus was marked!)

Which gets us ahead. For, in the light of that peculiar melancholy which settled down on Bellerophon when he was getting old, it is also Sisyphus who throws some possible clue—, though I should mislead you, if you thought I thought this was the answer. Why was Sisyphus compelled to push at a rock? That he might not, a SECOND TIME, escape from death! For he did, the first time, and revealed god-plans. (We shall want to remember this, later, as of the third figure in this puzzle of who was Bellerophon-Odysseus-Hercules? For Gilgamesh, older than any of them, in search for an end to this ache of death, went to Utanapistim (another Barat or Noah) and through him found out that the seed of life was buried at the bottom of the sea, where he went, and found it, only, in his joy, to have a snake steal it out of his fingertips.) (With this in our minds, with the Cave of the Sea to the Cave of the Bear, shall we wonder that Bellerophon and Odysseus are of the same line?

The second of the curious things is, that it is not at all in Greece, not even in Ionia, that the events of Bellerophon's life take place. We are told he was driven from Arkadia because a Potiphar's wife (this Peloponnesus of exile) paid him off this way, drove him off. But this, if we will believe Apollodorus, was a decadent story. Apollodorus asks us to see in Bellerophon a deeper "cause" (it is the cause, it is, the cause). But more of that, later.

Or should we delay, any further, the real gloss to the text of Edward Dahlberg? It is true, that in his "Bellerophon" Dahlberg does not speak of death as the dying of the mortal touch, but only of the dying of knowledge, the danger of the instrument of knowlege, the mind, which, in this extraordinary interpretation, he identifies with, as, go low, he says, Bellerophon, come down, O learned Dust! But elsewhere in the enigmas and single-sentenced parables of this clay tablet which he has called the Flea of Sodom, he does disclose how, that the Earth bleeds back the blood of the murdered, especially of a man's kin, is a cause, is a cause that man is restless, nomad, hunter, Beliar, for ever in unrest, unable, as the Seer demands of man, that he sit, if he would humble, his head, go low.

Now Bellerophon, the myth-mongering Greek poets had it, successfully attacked, in this order, the Chimera (sez Dahlberg, Pride, thinking, perhaps of Perseus mirror, by which he did not have to look upon the face, the beloved face, of his "mother"); then those mountain giants, those Cyclops, the Solymi ("lawless heart-rock" Dahlberg calls these Pelasgians, these crude first people, these eaters, "extinct Centauric crags" of dead knowledge, Dahlberg also says, wise as he is about knowledge); the third of his tasks, this peculiar horse-riding Herakles, was to slay the Amazons, an incident Dahlberg leaves entirely untouched, it is curious to note, perhaps because he sees, in the Chimera, a female of the man himself, sufficient to include these other exaggerated women; and last, before he gets—I sd these decadent Greek poets—the girl, & the kingdom, he slays the finest of all the warriors of her people, the Lukki or the Lycians.

There is much blood that Bellerophon spills, though none of this blood, apparently, is the kind of blood to become a curse, for even, as I have sd, though he kills the Lycians themselves as well as such monsters as the Chimera, the Solymi, the Amazons, yet, he is rewarded with half the kingdom of his father-in-law, begets three children, and, you'd think, would be left alone—would be, that is, if this whole tale of Homer were not some late and degenerate lie. (It is as

though Homer proved Dahlberg right, his Bellerophon is such a piece of the mind, is such a bad mural by Polygnotus, is, a faery tale, even to the horse Pegasus, who has been so run into the ground by poets, even to the sword of Mercury. I honor Dahlberg, that he has, in one ambiguous sentence, saved the whole business from collapse:

> Bellerophon, astride Pegasus, he says, addressed his Furies, the raging, Iambic hoofbeats, each regards the perfect wisdom of high Zeus, 'Only he who is alone can be wise without being double'

I said, we should not delay any longer, the older & deeper the story. Best start with this queer horse. Is it not very strange that this horse was born out of the earth at the place on the earth where the blood from the neck of Medusa poured out when Perseus, that twin of Bellerophon, cut off her head?

I insert at this point a story from Pausanias, the story of another of these brother "heros", Alcmaeon. Pausanias tells us that when Alcmaeon had slain his mother Eriphyle, he came to Psophis in Arkadia (again, Arkadia, the home of the Cave of the Bear, the second home of the Lycians), but there the infection he had acquired on the death of his mother would not abate. He then went to Delphi, and the Pythia taught him that the only land where the avenger of Eriphyle could not dog him was the newest land which the sea had laid bare subsequently to the pollution of his mother's blood. And he found out the deposit of the river Achelous, and there, by that new and unpolluted land, he could be nourished, he could live.

Now we can unravel the ambiguity Homer offers us—and in offering us, saves his tale. Says he, suddenly, when all seems settled, when he is familied and landed, without warning, without cause, Bellerophon comes to be

> "Hated of all the gods. And in the Aleian plain apart
> He strayed, shunning men's footprints, consuming his own heart."

((What is very beautiful, in Mr Dahlberg's Wheel of Sheol, is, that Beliar, even, is made to suffer in the very opposite way, is made, because his wanton and drunken knowledge separated him from men, to cry out for a piece of human flesh, and in his loneliness so fierce, he falls down wherever he can just to lie in a fresh human footprint, like some poor crazed modern Sodomite, who, in this manner only, can cause the swollen seed to be spent.))

This Aleian plain. We are back to the sea. We are back to—now at the end of Bellerophon's life—to the reverse of all, to, the origin point. For what is this Aleian plain? it self a delta, and possibly the first important delta of civilized man, the delta of Cydnus, where Alexander got an infection, where the Caliph Mamum died of a chill, where the emperor Tacitus died, where, like the Emperor Julian, he was buried. Tarsus.

Is it not a curious place, Cilicia, for Bellerophon to end in? Why? Why he too must end in a DELTA, in a rich stoneless loam? stoneless Mesopotamian place? stoneless, my dear Dahlberg? where river & sea are joined, where men who are of water and of land are born, split men, perhaps, by concept as dangerous as race theory, but men who are civilizers, men who in delta bottoms begin towns, begin, Mohenjadaros, or such ports as Barat came from, LAGASH? (or Uruk (Erech)

WHY DOES BELLEROPHON END WHERE PHOENICIANS MADE A PORT?

Apollodorus, as I sd, has one answer. He says, what no one else hints: that Bellerophon has murdered in Arkadia, not his mother, but, unwittingly, his brother. And only on this NEW LAND, the Aleian plain, could he find a place to rest, could he find an absolution from the Earth, herself polluted, poisoned by the shed blood of kin.

I add one last curious thing, that Tarsus, this end point of Bellerophon, who, riding a horse born of the blood of one woman, slew another, is also the city which is said to have been founded by (1)

SANDAN who is local of Hercules; (2) by Hercules himself; (3) by PERSEUS. And that it was Iapetus or Japhet, the father of JAVAN or the Ionians, who named the river of that city "Cydnus".
[added in script]
Edward: this is token, TOKEN, of how you have *aroused* me! I enclose it, merely to TELL YOU. This has been a DAY.

Love, & astonishment, before the door of, yr WORK OF THE DAYS

love,
CHARLES

[Washington, D.C.]
Tuesday, july augst 2 50

edward:

i was broken off last night by the coming in from Mexico of a friend of Connie's i mention it, because it revealed you have a BELIEVER there, in Mexico City, a man—35, Billie says—who thinks you are the *onlie makyr*, who, when he heard that Olson knew Dahlberg (here! here!) was interested to know Olson! His name is Mike Rossene, comes from Cleveland, has only just now got himself a GI education, &, says Billie—it is how the whole thing came out—has ALL your books! (my only regret is, that, says same, he has a fine sense of humor, & his stuff is bought by the Atlantic Monthly!)

Now Constanza wants to have three copies of FLEA for friends, one of them a "poet" whose work she likes—as a matter of fact he is a "poet" in the old frenzy sense, the "personal" or lyrick mode (you will have a chance around Sept 1st to hear me on this mode—Poetry New York, at that time, brings out a long statement on PROjective Verse vs. the NON-projective (in which, by the way, you are acknowledged as the transmitter to this citizen of first principle necessary to OPEN or FIELD COMPOSITION). Will you, therefore, let us know where

we can buy copies? Does it mean waiting on Laughlin's edition? Or is Dauber & Pine handling Nevill copies?

I'll be honest, and hope I do not have to raise myself up soon and do a critique of you, my dear wise friend. For it is an overwhelming experience to have this book in my hand. You see, you are most close to me, I am here present, and, beyond all else, your images are some the very same images I have taken up for myself. And you may judge by the fluid state of that "essay" you got back on Bellerophon yesterday, that I am only now in mid-place, in this whole disposing of the more ancient past.

But if I should, it will be easier than I think, simply because one day has told me why it is I preferred the story "Flea" to the "Tree", say, why I prefer now "The Wheel" to yr "Bellerophon". It is FORM. Even in "Wheel" you have personages, "I"s, who fold the wisdom back into the vessel from which it came, it comes, you, the human, and, therefore, give the truths an energy and place in which they express themselves, a meditation, an intercession which creates the very thing you elsewhere (conspicuously in "B") make a statement of: in the "stories" and the "parables" the MORTAL TOUCH is present, is able to work directly on me, instead, as in the "essays", on the mind. IT is a wonderful thing, Edward, to do such INVOLUTIONS now.

Which brings me to the beauty of the PARABLES. (I should also congratulate you on the shape the book has been given, the fineness of its organization, opening on the FLEA, the WHEEL after TREE, and the PARABLES returning to yr FORM, the FORM which makes this book ADVANCE.)

Parable I is absolute, intimate, done, perfect in its image and its ambiguousness, all poured back into a thing self-made, self-existent: and such phrasing as "The birds are hurt, and the branches have slept" is the purest verse, the way they recur, as do the Griefless Cliffs (someone shall one day examine your imagery of STONE), in that rear of it all, "the branches and the birds are dry", and, suddenly, the Wind blowing."

One thing, Edward. When, either fr Nevill or Laughlin, you have press copies, there are two or three places where—if the publishers send them as of Olson—the book ought to be noticed:

(1) Robert Creeley, Editor, *Move*, Littleton, New Hampshire
(2) Richard Emerson, Editor, *The Golden Goose*, 1927 Northwest Blvd, Columbus, Ohio
(3) A. Wilber Stevens (and Kenneth O. Hanson), Editor, *Interim*, Box 24, Parrington Hall, University of Washington, Seattle 5, Wash.

Others, where I don't think my connection is strong enough to make a difference, but where the book ought to go, are:

Imagi, Editor Thomas Cole, Muhlenburg College, Allentown, PA
((Oh, yes, above (4): Rolf Fjelde, Editor, *Poetry New York*, 14 Avenue A, NYC
The Western Review, Editor, Ray West, the Univ. of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa
Wake, Editor Seymour Lawrence, 18 East 198th Street, NYC
The Montevallo Review, Editor Robert Payne, Montevallo, Alabama
The Voyager, Editor Vincent Ferrini, 3 Liberty Street, Gloucester, MASS
The Little Review Digest, Editor Rudd Fleming, 211 Elm Street, Chevy Chase, Maryland
The Quarterly Review of Literature, Editor T. Weiss, Bard College, Avondale-on-the-Hudson, NY

And let me know if such a mailing is possible, and when it goes out, so that I can be aware it is there, for pushing.

Oh, yes, it occurs to me. He praised you ambiguously, but he is aware of yr work (in the HUDSON REVIEW this winter bracketed you, DHL, and myself), and he is the bright boy, the new Kazin, with a particular knowledge of "myth". Laughlin, at least, should spare him a copy: Stanley Edgar Hyman, whose address I do not have, but I believe Westport, Connecticut, is sufficient.

So add to above (2nd list: they have had their chance at me, and rejected it, mit violence!) THE HUDSON REVIEW, P.O. Box 45, Village Station, NY 14, NY

My love, and the fullest sort of excitement, that FLEA is here!

Yr friend & companion,

OLSON

[added in script]
P.S. By the way, I think it the best READ I have seen! I only demur he confines you with CRYSTAL—& Joyce!

["P.S." added in script at top of letter]
P.S.: tell me in "B", on p. 114, 2nd para. what happens at "each regards the . . .", each of the IAMBS? or B & P? what, precisely, do you mean? And is the quote yrs? or can you give me its previous context? I should like very much to understand THIS!

[New York City]
August 4, 1950

Dearest Charles:

I have your two epistles from Zeus, and any thanks even from the deity of the heart cannot be nourished enough by mountain and river and tree roots. Take, then, My Friend, my Thanks, and though they must be poor and pithless and lazar-wormed, for I have no grace or goodness or some legend to meal you with at this instant, to put into Themis's Scales that has any weight in justice or in heaven to equal your LETTERS. Then, God be kind, and let not Charles be vexed, I am sending this to you in a hurry, or as you said to me in a letter delivered to you by sacred Theuth, many years ago, I must *mercury* this to you. This is not at all an answer, but just the bow of the eyelids closed of dust. Let it be, just for the moment, and with your pardon and mercy upon me, for I shall soon write you. I do not wait, Charles, to answer you as the gods would reply, or even as the meager footprint of Vulcan, for it is said also that he is the Father of all mankind,

is some dim tracery in sand or earth or in pebble, of the first brazier. But I should be more ashamed not to reply now, though it be the niggard word of a caitiff than to wait, having you in the meanwhile, regard me as something even worse in the morbose bottoms of the earth. I am asking you please to forgive me, for though I love your two LETTERS, I cannot just for a depraved moment study them, as I wish to, and send you again the homage and maybe even a dim perception, borne to me from Hermes or even some oracle pouched in the wings of Attica's OWL'd Athene.

'Only he who is alone can be wise without being double.' which you care for, and the gratitude of the angels to you for so caring, is, I blush to say, mine; I was not borrowing from Pindar or Hesiod or furtively inclining my ear over the tripod. I was simply considering you, Bellerophon, and what you are so tempted by the AEOLIAN WINDS, or the ALEIAN PLAINS, which is, as the scholiasts say, which one? Charles? Apollodorus, perhaps the lute-headed Pindar, is new found land. Jane Harrison too has some matter on Bellerophon, but you know it, I am sure, and then there is the lost fragment from Euripides. What I was attempting to write was that each man, having you and me in mind, me and you, regards his joven wisdom, which is really the raging iambic hoofbeat in his distempered, and dionysiac soul (for it was Archilochus's Rage that made his Iambic). as something other than that kind of priapic or heart-fit, we are always mistaking the ugly cucumber head of the garden variety of phallus for the soul anyway, for Mount Horeb. But I am not writing at all what I want to, and I shall, if you please, return to this, when I have reread the letters.

So far, Charles, I have received four copies, one went to you and Constanza, a very frugal kind of singleness I own I made out of this, but I shall make amends to her, and one I gave to RLene, lately returned from nice and firenze, and so the Cana waterpots are filled with the wine again, and of course, I phoned her at once to tell her your feeling about the Parables, and I do hope Lady Constanza

believes as you do. Of course, you were as much of an augur as Calchas in one of your fine, ear-quickened moods, for when one reads or writes one should listen to the stream on the bed-rock, or to the hamadryad in the tree, or to some deep ravined earth-root which has so many miracles in it, which we do not know if our ear is not mythologic. Deukalion heard the Flood, and Charon oars the desolate boat to Styx, for the voices of the dead are infinitely more doleful than their aspect or visage. To have you or Constanza buy copies would be to send me to some merchant's Tartarus; I could not endure such ignominy from hostile Esaus, how then could I bear the wound, much more piercing and blood-pronging from one's friends, for who can hurt like a friend, or a lover, and how blunt is Galba's butchery, or Domitian's bodkin, or Caesar's assassins!

I shall send copies soon as I can for Constanza, and one to Cernovich, and to the names listed. If you do not do then the critique, what asps, toads, moles, osprey kites, infected bats, taxidermist pards and hollywood lions am I a prey to.

I send again the thanks of a miserable wight, a gnat, a flea, and say to you no less in lamentation for my inadequacies what David wept in the presence of tall, august Saul; he had rare majesties, he who sat beneath the tamarisk, although in some scholia it is said the tamarisk is not tall enough so to umbrella him, and maybe the tamarisk is much of a pauper as the terebinth which abraham took for his canopy for the Angels at Mamre, and is an almshouse and bewighted ash, or a balkan or levantine bush, just as the burning Tree was no more, perhaps than a little sumach, the desert tamarisk at Gibeah is no less than the temple at Ammon, and as for the terebinth, i take it more quickly to my bosom than the Oaks of Dodona.

My deep, deep apologies, Charles, and Constanza, and soon, I pray to the hills, and shall go to Ur, to Baal-Peor, to write you some words not so uncivil as these. After your letters I do not dare ask you to forgive me. You send Pauline Messages to the Corinthians and the

Ephesians and the Romans, and all these three damned, banal, Christless [churches?] return salutations. O the dryness, the devout vascular idiocy and baboonish head-grimace of man, I am now speaking in particular of edward dahlberg of kerioth, forgive him, O Giant of the Word, and in the name of our Mythic Friendship and Love, please, now, do not send Epistles to the Churches of Gaza, Gath and Ashkelon, and I bend my brass-neck, and unhinge my proud, stubborn, fatuous knee, do not now in Giant Wrath Mercury an Epistle to the Laodiceans!

You have, my love, my total friendship, and my FAITH, grounded as it is in this letter from homunculus dahlberg, and please tell your sweet Constance that she shall have her 3 copies soon as I can get copies. I spit upon myself, and drink the gall and the hyssop, and this I do in monkish haircloth. if you wish to bash me the more, really humble me, and cast me a helpless, hapless, hirsute beggar among the nettles of aristophanes and adam, and the potsherds of job, write me, then, another magnificent letter, and so shame me as no man has been disgraced since the first sin. were i whitman i should throat it out, i cannot suffer enough for the venerealee, but i already see you in leviathan strength roaring, who's venereal, may not you, blessed virgin mary charles, or were i edward dahlberg i should roar out a mighty noise through a molehill, what is the difference betwixt an evil-doer and a hypocrite, and let the fool answer, i mean me, not you, MAN.

Your very fond and loving friend,
EDWARD

[hand-written note] [Washington, D.C.]
Monday

Ed—

a slight hold-up i don't see how i can get out of here, to

Worcester, & to ny by tomorrow

we better plan it for *wednesday* afternoon if by any chance i can get there tuesday you will have heard from me by 3 but all signs say *wednesday*, around 2

Christopher Smart is beautiful and it was a beautiful evening, turning on the Wheel of Sheol

[Washington, D.C.]
sunday august 6 1950

you may cry "sheep", edward, but your three pages of protest are of such charm and beauty, wilyness; and disclose so much of mythologem and so little of perturbation, that I am led along, Constanza and I have been led along, this whole Mediterranean day;

though I should immediately say, to be honest with you, that the picture your letter gives of you Zeus-Zeusing down the street (to be pronounced sashaying down Morton street) struck us both as being not at all slack, as you would have us believe, so much as indolent, as though you had risen, or been pushed out of, like Zeus, some lady's bed.

As a matter of fact, my friend it did not need your subtle commentary (to Bellerophon, back, shall we call it) on the tamarisk tree to see your whole letter as something lying out at ease under a tamarind or whatever tree it was Abraham chose to shade the Angels at Mamre by

In fact it is the loveliest sort of proof of what you pray for, this letter—and that, despite the knots it gets its syntax in—the very sort of knots one can imagine Zeus did find himself in, whether he had just been a shower, a bull or a cloud!

So we send back, I reject, your Nilus' tears, protest, in turn, you need not, when you float so idly, think you are, or try to snare us into thinking you are, homunculus,

or so caitiff as you cry you are, my flesh-fattened and replenishing "liar", my Proteus who has just lain down, this noon, with his herds, on some Manhattan beach. The truth is, my truth-dissembler, your pleasure pleasures us—or what are these sides of many-sided myths good for, my allusionary?

But I also tell you, Edward Dahlberg of Hazor, Hadattah or of Kerioth, that though you propose, in answer to my simplest question of where Constanza might possess herself of three copies, for three transgressions of this man of Kerioth, and for four, she will manage, thus to thank him for his money-folly, this edward dahlberg, who so Jove-like offers his generosities, in this amplitude of August mood and noon. I shall punish him, I shall, I now decree, by not doing, then, this sharp critique, leaving him, for his too-rich and substantive acts, his David largeness, a plague to the very catalogue of terrors he is hosted by, by asps, toads, ospreys, infected bats, 3rd Avenue leopards and White Spot lions out of that Gaza on which people gaze.

Or shall I suspend my double-axe & sign of anger until he has another chance to write, when he is less melon-like and delta'd and can so use his intellect, of which he once was as full of as Hebron was of vales, that such barbarisms as mercuried some wild ignorant savage has poisoned the wells of his language with, or such neologisms as he himself has invented to umbrella him, are set aside And he is able, all by himself, single you might say, not mixed and doubleted or hose down-gived, to make clear what he means about cucumbers, or diseases?

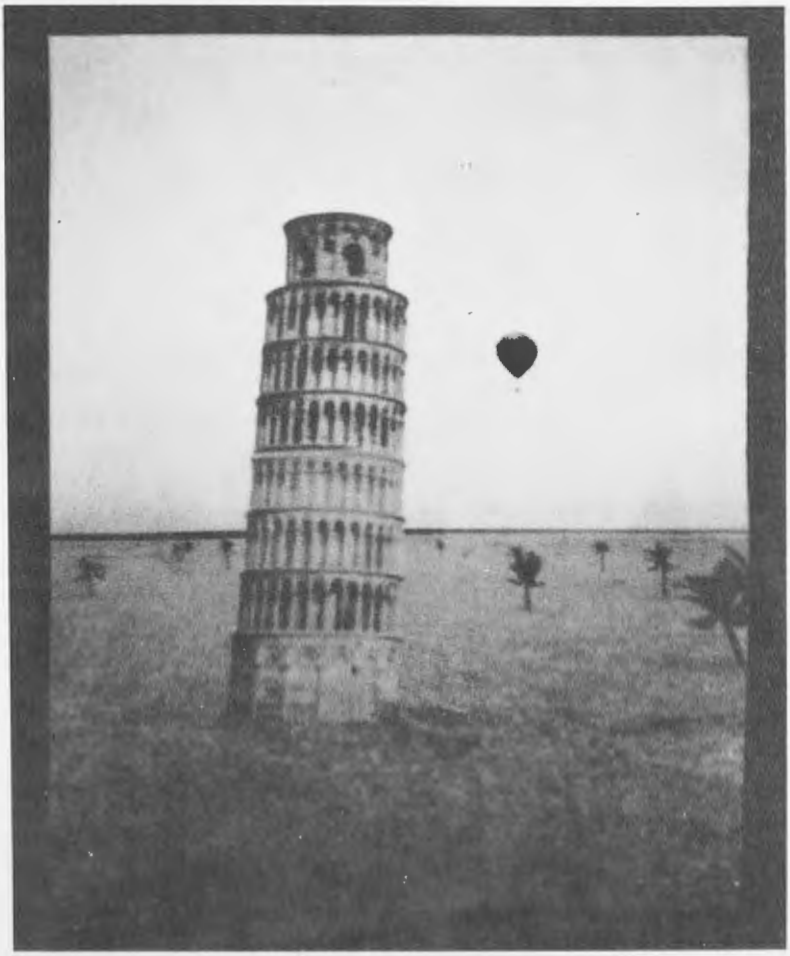
I shall.

With double love,
C — OLSON

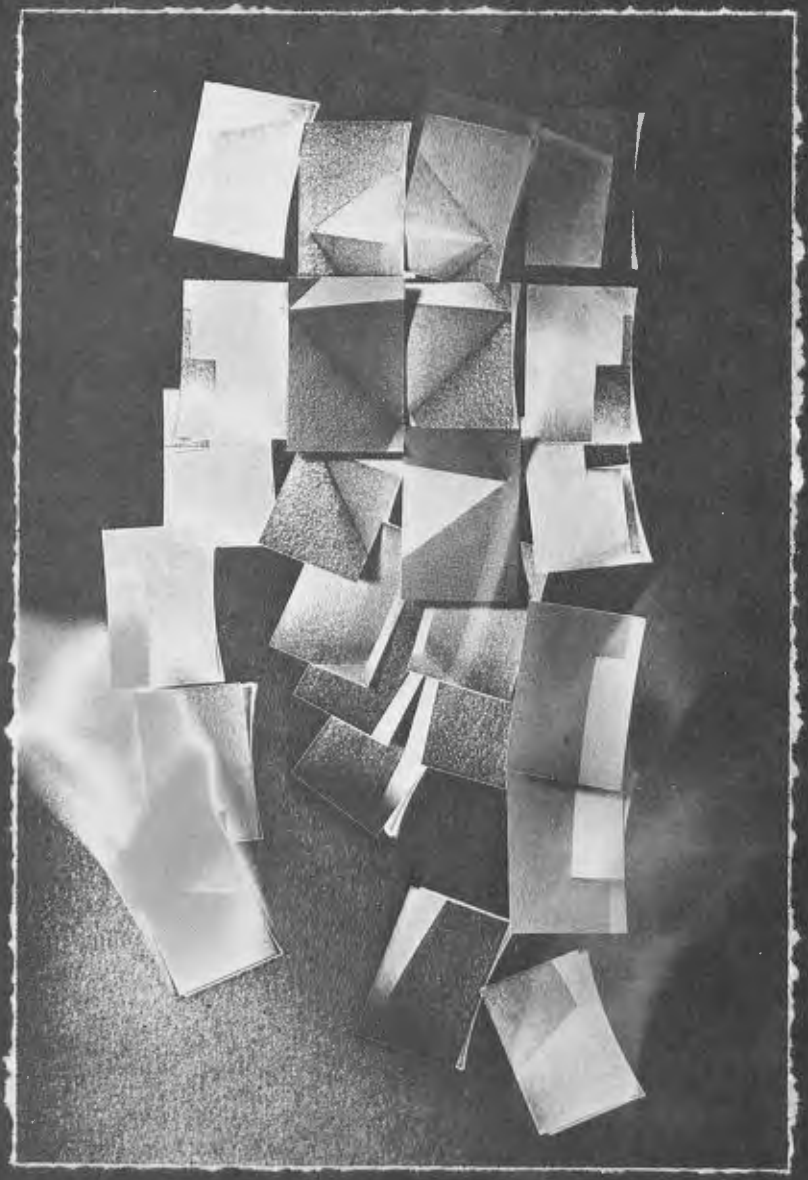
△

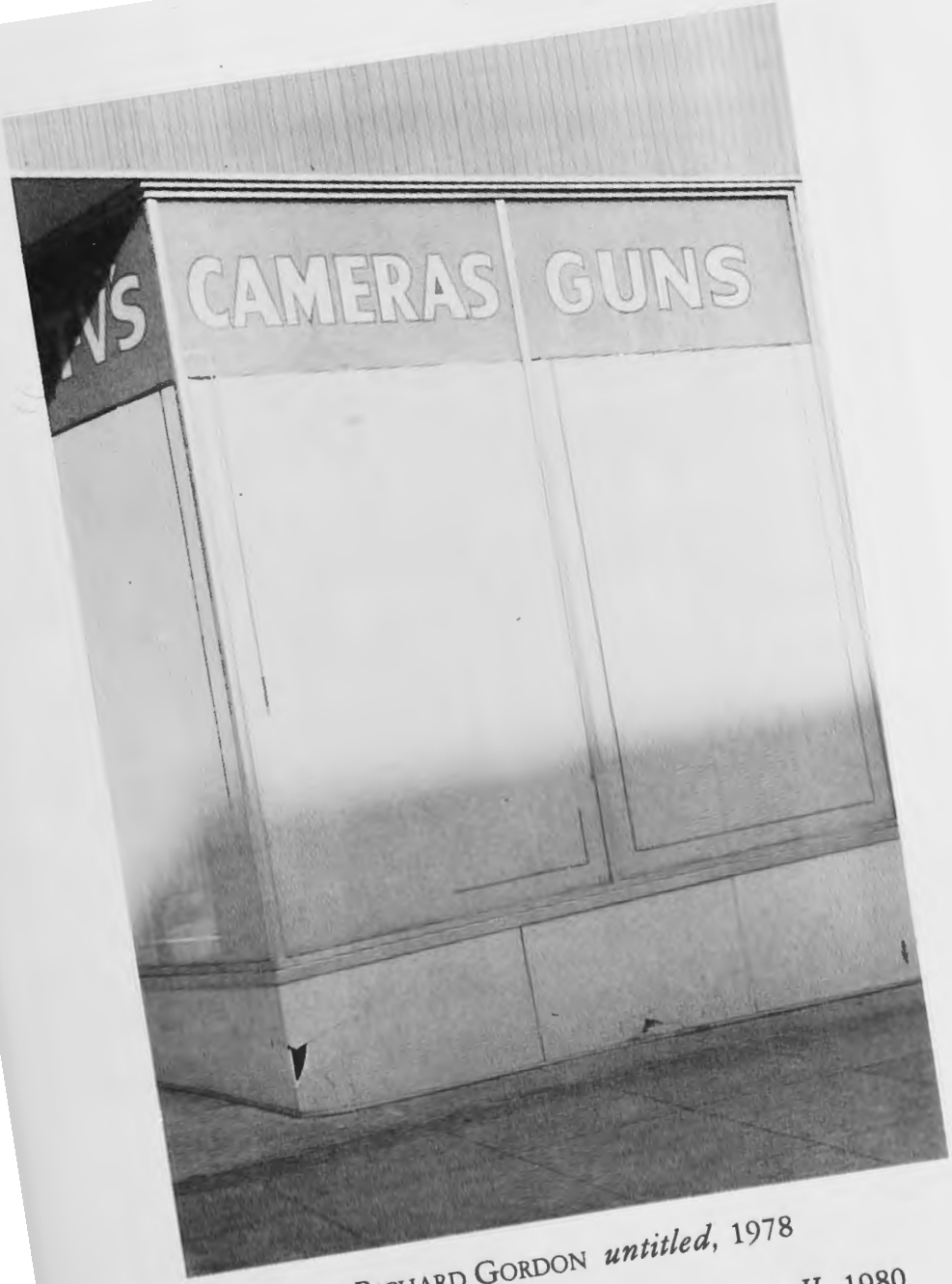
SIX PHOTOGRAPHERS

selected by Darryl J. Curran



RUTH THORNE-THOMSEN pinhole photograph from *Expeditions*, 1979





RICHARD GORDON *untitled*, 1978

← CHUCK NICHOLSON from *Corners Series II*, 1980

WAYNE R. LAZORIK *untitled*, 1979

JOE JACHNA *Rte. 41, Wisconsin,* 1971

DIANA SCHOENFELD
Rhythmic Arrangement: Leaf with Stamen, 1980 →

Jerome Rothenberg

Terror

. . . . . .
dream of the jews
has ended something else
waits in its place
a gunman maybe
standing at your door
who watches
in back of his blood
the horse's eye
run through his mind
"a wolf" the killer
calls himself
offers his body, shyly
to the fathers
wakes at dawn, his eye
bigger than the moon
shines for him
& leads him down the hall
—hellos, exchange of dishes
fantasies of home—
the mouth of the fanatic
trembles stutters
he is in love with his first dream
the taste of honey
cloth against fingertips
the traditions of their people
motors secret hideouts
his mother even now
whispers to his dark side

the letters of the universe
exploding lights
signal him on
he will address the bride
again a lesson of his courage
he will give her
satisfaction
night & day
he circles around her
like a watchdog
prowling prowling
beside her father's stall
the gunman
speaks to his own shadow
on the hill
—depletion—
—death—
over the hill a camel
walks, stupidly
into the camera
stop him!
even if for a moment
cries the gunman's mouth
the teeth of the fanatic
biting staining the pale roots
the mask of antiochus
finds a jewish face
looks back at us
in righteousness
in anger at his own flesh
what can we give
but whispers
to make the rain appear?
the rain won't,
will it?
the daughter returns to the hut,
party ended,

bodies propped on bare beds
the fanatic's kin
his victims
tunnels exploded through their hearts
fly past him
foam pours from his mouth
his lungs fill up with foam
the wounded deer flies past
& calls him
like his vanished thumbs
another landscape
opens
with his boot he presses
legs & back
moving the flesh aside
& probes—aloof—the thin line
where the legs meet
grown thick with hair
how tight the dreamer's hand
becomes how close
to prayer
his angry copulations
the mind of the fanatic
fills with glass the fish
swim in the broken auto
furniture & rags
ignited
clog the hallways
processions of pale jews
are arabs now
the gunman, dark fanatic
gentile become jew
jew gentile
bellows in broken hebrew
in accents of his childhood
southern towns
assassins & vigilantes

even his mother can't believe
the coming struggle
treasons against god
repelled
forever the killer
born to kill
escapes from the viet nam tunnel
in the street of little jewelers
semites of his mind
he rides a hairy motor bike
(the friend says)
gun slung over chest
into a world of strangers
caftaned killers
heavy with arab names
who wait for him
will stage the final shootout
the clock is moving
towards its end
explosions at the father's grave
the decade is a thrill for them
a new encounter
bigger than the last
the blood is such a clock
& such a clock
is always throbbing
in the blood
& in the morning sky

On May 2, 1980, Palestinian gunmen ambushed a group of Israeli settlers on the occupied West Bank. Among the six Israelis killed was Eli Hazeez (the last name means "the wolf"), born James Eli Mahon, Jr. in Alexandria, Virginia. An American Protestant by birth, he came out of Viet Nam & American ultraconservatism into Israeli citizenship & conversion through the rightwing Kach Movement led by Meir Kahane. During his stay in Israel, the *N.Y. Times* reported, "he was jailed for 8 months for breaking into Arab houses in Hebron, smashing furniture, beating residents, and shouting at them to get out of 'Jewish houses.'" Of those who died in the ambush, "he alone was buried defiantly in the Jewish Cemetery of occupied Arab Hebron."

Garth Tschernisch

More Praise From The Barnyard Suite No. 2

hello sill brother's raucous digging glass out of renée's
heel she screams up above the piece of roof an ordinary
spitting and of blood an oblong feel now she screams

or simpler yet hello lots of serious folks out for christmas
cheer a memory brother's raucous digging glass out
of renée's heel or simpler yet the grave male sometimes
grave and more attune and more

up above the piece of roof the first rash of weather busy
with us now she screams the ceiling tapped or simpler yet
the ceiling none such movie tapped an ordinary spitting
and of blood busy with us cold first rash of weather busy
with us

slow come now to slow brother's raucous digging glass
not bad now she screams hello lots of serious folks out
for christmas cheer hello

an oblong feel now a little first paul among others
laughing slow come now to slow

or simpler yet attune now to slow none such movie since
and more

not bad a memory up above the piece of roof an oblong
feel or simpler yet the first rash of weather now she
screams the first rash a little now she screams and more

ordinary spitting since she screams and then the ceiling
none such movie rap and jargon tapped well a little first
paul brother's raucous digging glass likely now and then
an oblong feel

now slow come now to slow the first rash of weather busy
with us none such chainsaw movie rap and jargon busy with
us jotting up above the piece of roof now she screams
attune and

and of blood blood and then the first rash of weather and
of blood the ceiling tapped a little first since hello

or simpler yet I'm stiffer now since slow come now to slow
an ordinary spitting and of blood hello she screams first
among others and of blood she screams

I'm stiffer old arm's acting up above the piece of roof
since sometimes grave a little first grave and more

now she screams a little slow come now to slow brother's
raucous digging busy with us jotting first rash of weather
cold of likely seated jotting memoranda brother's raucous
digging glass out of renée's heel she screams since cheer
attune she screams lots of memoranda now since sometimes
brother's raucous digging grave male grave and more attune
she screams

or then let fly the business with us halted cars and
fenders take a breather digging glass out of renée's heel
not bad since a little first hello I'm stiffer still brother's
raucous digging first among others busy with us

up above the piece of roof seated likely now I'm stiffer
jotting memoranda ordinary spitting and of blood cold
runs the lengthy shin seated first among others laughing
then the ceiling tapped a little first hello she screams

jotting first old man's acting up jotting runs the lengthy
shin slow come now to slow I'm stiffer jotting since
jotting memoranda since

or then let fly up above the piece of roof more grave male
grave sometimes first hello first rash of weather since
she screams a memory or simpler yet hello

sill brother's raucous digging glass out of renée's heel

not bad a memory now a little first hello she screams let
fly the business with us halted cars and fenders take a
breather cold since digging glass and fenders take a
breather

or simpler yet cold the drive-in movie rap consoles up
above the piece of roof and more I'm stiffer jotting up
above the piece of roof first rash since a little first

△

Hayden Carruth

Who I Am

CROWS MARK, 11 JUNE 81: A couple of months ago Allen Ginsberg and I were talking about quantitative meter, by no means a dull topic. Allen has become interested in the idea of quantity as a metrical aid, both for writing and for reading; he read me poems by Campion, Wyatt, and others who have professed to imitate classical quantitative measure in English, and he showed me how the Sapphic measure, which he especially admires, had helped him to straighten out a troublesome passage in his new "Plutonian" poem. Finally he read the famous lines from Canto LXXXI:

> The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.
> Pull down thy vanity, it is not man
> Made courage, or made order, or made grace,
> Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down. . . .

giving them their natural accents, heavily stressed to show how they fall into an irregular order, possibly into quantitative measure. "At least," he said, "that's one way to understand it."

Allen's enthusiasm was unmistakable. I wish I could quote more of what he said. My memory isn't good enough. But I think I am not

misrepresenting him if I say that his enthusiasm was impelled by a strongly felt need for a firmer concept of measure than he had had when he wrote, "by instinct," his earlier poems, "Howl," "Kaddish," and the rest. And I know I am not misrepresenting the many other poets of Allen's age and mine, or some younger ones as well, when I say that they have expressed to me during the past two or three years this same need for some renewed concept of measure in their own writing.

As far as I could hear, in his reading of the various "quantitative" poems in English Allen used nothing but an ordinary American stress accent. In the lines by Pound, for instance, Allen's quantitative reading did not alter my hearing of the iambic pentameter (with permissible variations) that I believe Pound was using in conscious imitation of English 17-century poetry. Myself, I don't believe quantity can work, or ever has worked, in English. How can it when we pronounce *father, gather,* and *bather* with exactly the same stress/unstress, in spite of the considerable changes in the "length" of the accented vowel? The same with *booter, butter, boater, baiter, beater, bitter,* etc. The Sapphic measure is a mixture of trochees and dactyls in a four-line stanza, of which the first three lines are metrically the same and the fourth is abbreviated. It is an Aeolic measure, one of the "lyric" forms, and it worked marvelously in Greek because the language kept a genuine distinction of quantity between long and short vowels and an accent based partly on pitch (as more conspicuously in Chinese and Sanskrit). But in the modern European languages we have neither pitch (though we don't speak in a monotone, as some have asserted, and anyone who has lived in France will have observed the extraordinary changes of pitch with which a Frenchwoman can say *Ooh la la* without breaking from a spoken to a singing voice) nor length; we have stress. We have almost infinite degrees of stress. Contemporary phoneticians, using computers, can show that no two syllables in any English sentence are accented alike. They can show that no two readers of a given line of poetry accent it

alike. This is the reason, or one of many reasons, why the imposition of "classical" scansion, with its iambs, trochees, anapests, etc., on English poetry can never work except very inexactly, as prosodists have been saying for generations. Nevertheless our stress accents do create rhythm; and rhythm by its own nature falls into repetitive patterns, or what we call measure.

Even Latin poets writing in imitation of Greek meters, as did all literary Romans for hundreds of years (though not the folk poets), found their own language unamenable, the accent of stress working against (and eventually supplanting) the accent of length or pitch, so that Horace's Sapphics, for instance, can be read either quantitatively or accentually, with very different but equally "legitimate" effects in either case. (See W. Beare, *Latin Verse and European Song*, 1957, p. 171 *et passim*.)

In the early 1950s I reviewed two or three books of *Paterson* as they appeared; the reviews were in the *Nation*. In one of them I asked what principle of metric made the poetry so readable. I couldn't extrapolate any measure from the poetry that would hold up consistently as a poetic construct. (Williams, incidentally, wrote me a long, cordial letter, in which it became clear that he couldn't extrapolate one either.) Twenty years later, in 1973, when I was preparing a selection of my prose for the press, I added a note to this review, but the note was later scratched in order to save space. (The book, *Working Papers*, will finally be published next year.) I have always regretted the loss of that note, however, so I quote it, somewhat shortened, here:

"These questions about line values in Williams' verse (which I put so long ago) were taken up in succeeding years by many people, but chiefly by Williams himself and by Charles Olson. The idea of the 'variable foot,' which Williams came to while writing his late poems, was no doubt a clarification of his own metrical instinct, helpful to him in the composition of those superb poems; yet I believe the idea remained for him a sensed thing, nearer to instinct than to precept. A

very personal idea, at any rate. And in 'Asphodel' and the other poems of his last period, although my ear does detect a firmer line than in some of the earlier work, I still find passages in which the line structure breaks down, passages I cannot read aloud without either losing the line structure or breaking into elocutionary awkwardness in order to preserve it. As for Olson's hypothesis that the line is a unit of breath, this is helpful because it brings prosody back to its sensory base and because we can all confirm it in what we know of our physiology and psychology. Yet in the end I think it has more to do with tone, mood, speed, or style in a poem—with *texture*—than with measure as such.

"Measure is the word to hang onto, and in all its senses. It means not only the way we recognize cadence in a poem, but the way we make relative judgments of space and time; it implies regularity. Inches and feet, minutes and hours. Without them there is no measure. In poetry there is no measure if the reader or auditor cannot anticipate, by inference from the regularity of the beats that have already struck his senses, the striking of *the next beat.* This does not mean iambic pentameter. It does mean, however, that free verse is a literal contradiction, an impossibility; poetry, if it is really poetry, cannot be entirely irregular.

"But there is nothing to say that the measure is *verbal*, or that the beat is tied to syllables. Iambic pentameter is not only regular, it is inflexible; the beat is tied to the iambs, that is, to a particular order of syllables. But we need flexibility in our verse as much as we need regularity; we need to be able to anticipate the next beat and to recognize the line structure by which measure is sustained, but we need also to have naturalness of phrasing and freedom of syntax.

"I always revert to Pound, and to his early suggestion that poets 'compose in the sequence of the musical phrase.' How simple. How brilliant. Which perhaps explains why no one has successfully elaborated it, as far as I know. It is a pity, because it means that Pound's statement (more exactly, his restatement of an ancient prin-

ciple) has turned into a catch-phrase—people speak it and repeat it without bothering to ask what it means. To most it conveys merely a license to compose any way they want—feelingly, *liltingly*, that's the commonest meaning. But Pound was a fair musician; he knew what he was talking about when he spoke of 'the sequence of the musical phrase.' A measure in music, a bar, is a fixed quantity. If the time signature is 4/4, you have four beats to the measure—'and no cheatin',' as Bill Basie used to say. But within the fixed measure you may have any phrasal combination you wish, any distribution of accents, any number and variety of notes; you may emphasize the beat or you may syncopate it; you may play around it; you may even substitute rests. Indeed, Basie and thousands of other fine musicians have made jazz improvisations that contain rhythmic variations so subtle and intricate that they can be notated only with an oscillograph, yet they always add up to four beats in the measure. Hence there is no question of tying the beat to an inflexible pattern of accentual or phrasal units, such as an endless succession of eighth notes. Yet the measure is preserved. Even in complex music, if one has a trained ear one can hear it.

"When English prosodists tied the beat to an inflexible syllabic pattern, they created a poetry as confining and awkward as music would be if it were limited entirely to eighth notes. Fortunately the tonal and textural resources of language, in both sound and meaning and in the two interacting, are far greater than the resources of unarticulated sound, i.e. music; and this accounts for our rich poetry in traditional meters. (And Bach was no slouch with eighth notes, for that matter!) The poets could stick to the syllabic ding-dong and still get extraordinary variety of stresses into their sentences. (See Pope's late epistles for an extreme example.) But without doubt much of the best poetry of our century, especially in America, has been composed according to notions of free metric. Pound was the master. He kept the measure, he kept alive our anticipation of the beat, he was always aware of line values, very keenly aware; yet by us-

ing every device of phrasing, including rests and stops, he also kept alive our sense of the spontaneity and natural harmony of poetic language, never forced, never imprecise. His influence is pervasive. It seems to me that the three closest followers of Charles Olson—Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan—come nearer to Pound in the metrical practices I have just described than they do to Olson or to Williams himself.

"There are other quantitics, of course, besides the beat, hearable quantities that can be used to establish measure and arouse our anticipation of line length: the accent and alliteration of Anglo-Saxon verse; the syntactical parallelism of Hebrew poetry, especially as it entered English through the Psalter and set off a secondary strain of metrical feeling—Milton, Blake, Whitman, etc. Pound himself was not unaffected by these influences, as we can tell from the surprisingly liturgical chant he used in reciting his own poems. Perhaps it is impossible to track down and methodize all the sources of a poet's metrical practice; perhaps it is unimportant to do so. The point is to write, not to theorize. Yet we were given minds and our minds do nag us, just as Williams was nagged by his until at last he came to the idea of the variable foot; which, whatever good it may be to the rest of us, was an immense good to him."

To this I would add, as of 1981, only points of emphasis:

1. The beat is important, in both poetry and music, not because the sounded phrasing is tied to it but because it isn't.

2. No rhythm that does not set up an anticipation of the beat to come is properly rhythmic at all.

3. Any concept of measure, whether vocal or syntactical, even typographical, even pseudo-quantitative or purely syllabic, any concept at all that helps a particular poet to get on with his writing is a good one. What works, works.

4. Different ways of reading, based on different concepts of measure, may be applied to the same poetry with no loss of rhythmic effect or understanding; often the different systems of accentuation

will coincide.

5. Not long ago when I was reading Whitman with some graduate students, we all agreed that we were too inhibited vocally to chant the poems as Whitman himself doubtless did. Our grandparents and great-grandparents were taught to ready poetry *as* poetry. No doubt many excesses were committed—gestures, declamatory extravagance, etc.—but why did we throw out the baby with the bathwater? Now we are afraid to read even our own finicky poems for the vocal acuities they might possibly contain. Our voices are atrophied, no tension in them, no resonance or timbre.

6. Today in this country our best poets, whom I would probably number between fifty and a hundred, are being swept away and drowned in the flood of soft, imitative, academic writing of thousands upon thousands of mediocre poets. (By "academic," I mean belonging to any of our "schools" of ideopoetry. Where is an independent poet now? I haven't heard of any.) One reason for the mediocrity, one among others, is the loss of a sense of measure. This is not enough to create a poetic revolution. Many historical, cultural, and probably political and social elements must coalesce, as they did in 1790 or 1910. Of course I do not know when that will happen again. I see a chance of it in my lifetime, but only a very small chance. What I do know is that I am fed up. And I am not alone.

Here is one of my favorites, by an unknown poet a generation or two before Chaucer:

Lollai, lollai, litil child
    Whi wepistou so sore?
Nedis mostou wepe
    Hit was iyarkid the yore

Ever to lib in sorrow,
    And sich and mourne evere,
As thin eldren did er this,
    Whil hi alives were.

Lollai, lollai, litil child,
    Child, lollai, lullow!
Into uncuth world
    Icommen so ertow.

Is this remarkable prosodic sophistication an anomaly? No. Read the praise songs of Numidia, the prayers of the Eskimos. The important elements of human sensibility haven't changed much, nor are they likely to—if we can hang onto our five wits. Is this metrical spirit old or new? As spirit—or intention, affectivity, whatever you will—it is neither. The poem's rhythmic feeling is as permanent as its thematic feeling; it is contemporary with Sappho and Williams. This power of poetic language to move in almost infinitely complex variations over the predictable beat—even when the language prolongs or cuts short the beat—is what permits us to recognize poetry and respond to it, anywhere and at any time.

△

Dennis Phillips

from: Two Cross

Sleep. What's?
Protrusion? Intrusion?

A tailor dresses to dance. Ah! Now.
Tailor tincture: Liquid to invoke the tot. tot. tot. Sleep?
What is? it.

Total of what's used.
Praying Mantis.
Sectional. Witches' Sabbath. In
Other
Words
A trait. A convention.

I promised you that the leader would be worthy, that the journey would be crucial. I promised this to you we speak
in concert in congress. In void. Inside the Valley of Id. Invalid.

That even more vectors. (Is that where we are.)

I promised you to be a guide or at least a comfort.

Now there are no guides. Nor comforts.
You looked at me with the unsure sadism of the officious.
This was a gesture of your protection but
I was not dissuaded.

We were to accompany eachother. Taste me.

I promised you. Chimes ignite. Total sum of your
look at me.

You looked at me as a worker, and I
was discomforted to be relegated.
You were protected by your position as servant.
You tasted me but hid your desire behind duty.
Responsibility.
                And we traded the wry smile that knew
of the gravity of your duty: That it was only
the vestment, only the casing that seemed important
but that you were a servant.

I promised you. You looked at me. It
said: Don't. Forsake. Us.

"Efficacious" kept coming into it. We
couldn't recall its exact meaning. But it kept
showing up in
            voice
              sottovoce.

                A language. Of where we
were then but really where we must be now:
                no exact denote.

"You
    are efficacious"

        "Fine. But what does *that* mean?"

We came to eachother. Alchemy discovered in the industry of foods,
now becomes useful. Your arms become the world.
And now we see that the world is a platform, a point
of departure. A point. A place in a continuum.
A point: of departure. Of view. Of taste. Of promise.
Of looking.

You told me of the simplest. But that was what we thought.
Now we see.
Only a platform. Not the simplest.

It would be (not the simplest)
your face lit gently in the tensor theory but
in the tensor light. Your face a promise your regard a
promise.

△

Antonin Artaud

Letter to Jean Paulhan

—translated by Norman Glass

Paris, 4 February 1937

Dear friend,

The physical recollections that assailed me when I reached the very heart of the Tarahumara mountain were so persistent that I came to consider them as distinctly personal memories. Everything: the life of the earth and of the grass, below, the indentations of the mountain, the peculiar shapes of the rocks, and above all the dusty echelons of light amidst the endless perspectives of the superimposed summits, always further away, miraculously receding, everything I saw came to represent an experience I had lived, an experience which had already passed through me, and not the discovery of a strange but new world. All that was not new. But the feeling of *déjà vu* is vague, I mean *dateless*, while I, in fact, perfectly recalled the origins of my feeling; for this lived organic experience made me remember another to which I felt linked, indirectly perhaps, but by material threads nevertheless. These were historical recollections which arose, rock by rock, blade of grass by blade of grass, horizon by horizon. I did not invent the apparition of the Magi Kings; it was forced upon me *in precise details* by a country constructed like the countries in paintings, which certainly do not come from nothing. I do not believe in an absolutely independent imagination, I mean one that makes something from nothing, no mental image which does not strike me as the separated limb of an image which is effected and lived

somewhere. And in their turn these huge, uninhabited images evoked other images which had once been populated, and their life seemed to be displayed indeed on an unusual plane; it was not I who invented the tradition of the magic signs, and that this mountain was beset by them is a fact; I gave you a brief list of them in one of the articles I sent you, but stone by stone, all considered, I had the impression at the end of my journey that I had noted all of them: from the / which is divided into a //, broken in the middle by a stroke ⊢, opposite which is this same straight stroke which has come out of it (H); and I cannot help it if this H shape which appears to be the result of those strokes is the principal figure on which so Plato tells us the Atlantans built their cities, it may sound puerile but it exists on the Tarahumara mountain and in Plato. I saw a rock streaked with three vertical stokes, 3, and on this rock a smaller one streaked by a single stroke; I saw the enormous phallic tooth which I have already spoken to you about with 3 stones on the top and 4 holes on the front; I saw in a holed rock a man's round head which perfectly houses the disk of the sun at sunrise, and underneath, the man's body extended *in shadows* with his right arm stretched out like a stroke of light, and his left arm like the same stroke, but *in shadows too*, and folded up; I saw the figure of death almost *extirpated* from the surrounding rocks, and it held in its quite enormous left hand a young child; and I do not mention all the images and all the resemblances I saw, and which indicated a forgotten fauna of nature. The latter appeared to recall millenary myths in which *tamed* man communes with the Powers that have broken him in; and if the universal world of the Jews is represented by two interpenetrating triangles, the world of all the Races whose descent is red is illustrated by two triangles facing each other and joined by the ideal line of a tree; this world I saw it a hundred times on the rocks, emerged from an indescribably amazing accident of nature; on the trees, where it was stamped by the very hands of men; and everywhere I kept on finding this famous ⊢/, the H of procreation in short; I often saw it on trees that had been

deliberately burnt from top to bottom so that its shape would be clearly revealed, and it sprang out of the trees, was almost *extracted* from them; I saw the figure of a man and woman, they faced each other, and the man's prick was erect; how many times moreover did I come upon the small world of the earth represented by a circle, with another much wider circle around it for the undetermined Universe; how many times did I come upon the cross of the Rosicrucian tradition: 4 triangles orientated towards the 4 cardinal points and centred, all around one point; I saw this sign! What can I do if it conforms with the one of the Rosicrucian tradition, if that is how the Rosicrucians did in fact form their crosses; and this symbol was repeated thousands of times, not only in the middle of Nature, but on the doors of houses made with a single plank, also on the walls, in the shade of the roofs; I saw houses whose façades matched each other in squares and in points, and sometimes in sorts of rectangles, one above the other they appeared to have been added up; and hadn't I been told on the mountain over there that these scattered geometrical figures were not scattered but *assembled* and that they constituted the signs of a language based on the very form of the breath when it is liberated in resonances; universal magic is not based on many more elementary signs than all those I came upon on the spot and in the quick on a mountain which, even if we exclude these signs, still possesses the light of haunted countries. Much less work was required of novelists, of poets who recovered and labelled myths invented merely by their imagination; in describing my journey I did not claim that I was writing a thesis for a doctorate, finding again the path of an infallible tradition, and supplying proof to corroborate it; after all, let people draw from these discoveries the conclusions that appeal to them, it doesn't matter; and it matters very little to me if I believe that in order to return home the Magi Kings made a detour through the uninhabited mountains of Mexico; but I know that when I reached those summits that overlooked almost endless miles of landscape I felt recollections and unusual images moving violently within

me, yet when I started on my journey nothing had led me to anticipate them. And seeing on these mountains that were encrusted with figures many more figures than there are divinities set into the high walls of certain Indian temples; seeing men with headbands pass by, men rolled up in cloaks which had embroidered triangles, and crosses, points, circles, tear-drops and flashes of lightning: and these crosses, these points, these circles, these rectangles, these tear-drops and these streaked flashes of lightning were not at all spangled decorative motifs arranged in a symmetry that would have weakened their impact, for never did I see 2 cloaks that bore the same signs, moreover the color of each cloak suited the hue of the *crude* faced man that wore it: seeing these men pass by, men who were apparently ignorant of the symbolism in which their life seemed to be bathed, I could not believe that all that represented a calculation or some kind of research that they had made, I could not believe that it was the result of conscious and intelligent premeditation; they did all that, they said, because their fathers used to do it, and going back from father to father where, I wondered, would I ever find the origin of these practices; the least impressionable brain would have wondered to where these vestiges could in fact be traced back and what more than human tradition in short was signified by their presence.

Are not both green and yellow the opposite colors of death; green for resurrection, yellow for decomposition, decay, and if coincidences mean something you will allow me to conclude this letter by drawing your attention to the following events.

I arrived at night-fall at one of those villages dominated by phalluses, those phalluses stamped with figures, which appear to have been planted by an accident of nature; someone, I don't know who, was whistling the tune of a Tarahumara dance, with 5 very sharp bars which suddenly tumble down a hundred octaves, so that a voice from the depths seems to be replying; a child approached us, quite alone, naked under his grey cloak and his face literally eaten by pus: a sort of greenish string in his forehead bone appeared to replace the

course of a vein; he greedily ate the food that was handed to him, though he always kept a respectful distance; I thought I had noticed on the front of his cloak a red triangle, its apex pointing straight up, and as he turned round I saw on the back of his cloak a tear-drop, a huge embroidered tear-drop which took up the whole length of the cloak; its point was at the top of the cloak and it came down in a hook towards the left; and I immediately shrugged my shoulders before the image that it evoked; indeed I made an effort to suppress my ever active imagination; nevertheless the image that presented itself to me at that moment I cannot say that I did not think about it; and this fancy I will tell you what it was at the risk of having you shrug your shoulders as I shrugged mine; I had thought of God's *FIAT LUX*, and of the form which Robert Fludd, in his Theater of Eternal Wisdom, attributes to the original movement of the creation; this tear-drop, this curved bladder it is thus that he represents the light which having issued from the void bends little by little and encircles the darkness which it is going to replace; the tear-drop all alone was nothing perhaps, but the red tear-drop, with the red triangle was an already quite singular comparison; after that several weeks passed by during which I reached the very heart of the mountains, I saw the scattered Peyote priests who grind for entire nights on their graters the mixture of the first elements; and I took the road back.

I passed again through the village with the phallus and at the stroke of noon I asked for refuge at a miserable house from which I saw an Indian coming out, despite the heat, it was torrid at that moment, he kept himself wrapped up in a large cloak. I had already seen strange cloaks across the whole mountain; but this one bore four white triangles, almost compressed and which took up all the length of the cloak; its borders were sown with a line of green crosses on one side, yellow on the other and composed of the 4 triangles I have already told you about; the Indian greeted us without saying a word, with a slow but intelligent smile; and already the woman hastened to welcome me. While she prepared the maize and the herbs I was

struck by the sight of a false tress which she wore fastened on her hair; through this tress was wound an alternatively green and yellow woollen thread the same color as the crosses; and she wore moreover a necklace of green beads, and from her ears hung yellow stones; inside the house children were fighting with shrill cries, and I saw a very young boy come out, his belly was enormous and his mouth was ringed by abscesses, and behind him another older boy whom I recognized as the child in the grey cloak embroidered with a triangle and a tear-drop; I saw nothing unusual inside the house unless it was a cross in the corner, its head was shaped like a lance-head and its arms like small clubs. Questioned the Indian observed a perfect silence.

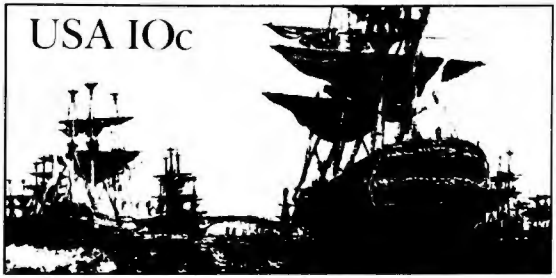
There you have it, dear friend, I wanted to tell you what I saw without drawing any kind of conclusion from it, you will perceive that the facts and the things speak for themselves, and no doubt more strongly than I have made them speak although no doubt with the same meaning. All these things encouraged me to dream that I was entering a special world, I will amuse myself perhaps one day by describing it, or I will describe it without amusing myself; I feel moreover that many present things would gain a great deal by entering this world. It is not from the point of view of the picturesque that I intend to prepare myself in order to describe this journey but from the point of view of effectiveness.

To you with all my heart.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

△

Michael Davidson



The Landing of Rochambeau

The Captain calls his crew to the deck
we are landing, he says
he doesn't know what to say next
so he adds, be back by noon me hearties
they don't believe him
this is not *Kidnapped*
and he would never use the word "hearties"
besides it is 1780, the harbor
is filled with sails
and the postmark covers some of them.

The Captain has gone below to pack
I have never landed before, he thinks,
what do I wear?
so he stands looking into the mirror
am I Rochambeau
or is this the name of my ship

or have we arrived at last in the Port
of Rochambeau whee we will strike a deal
with natives, then he remembers
it is 1780, the water is jade green.

The Captain is astonished to learn
that the Colonies have defeated the British
because of a "Stamp Tax," we have landed
too late, he mourns and looks out the window
to his right (our left), tall masts jut
into the Fragonard sky
against which USA 10¢ is branded forever,
he approves of the lettering and decides
not to go ashore after all
but writes a postcard home:

We have landed, the Captain writes
but not very well; it is 1780 and they are rowing
out to meet us; it is impossible to tell
whether we are rowing or they are rowing
or who they might be; many sails fill
the harbor and the postmark is rolling towards us
from Brooklyn on the left (my right),
please advise: this is history and I am
caught in it without a thing to wear
if only my name were Napoleon.

As it is, my life takes up
only seven lines in *The Reader's Encyclopedia*
where it is clear that Washington and I
defeated Cornwallis at Yorktown
and with the French Fleet (which must explain
those sails) forced "his" capitulation,

the entry leaves "his" a bit vague
in order to make the landing of Rochambeau
a surprise for both sides
including the reader's
who notices the pink sky of Watteau.

I am the Captain of this letter which begins
Dear Home, how I miss the Lisbon Earthquake
the Jansenist purges and leeks with egg,
remember Rochambeau in a foreign port
who must be content with corn and the inflated rhetoric
in pamphlets; I look up, he looks up
we regard him pausing mid-history
for a figure of speech like the ones he used to use
when writing Mme R. in Potsdam
like you are the author of my heart.

But it is 1780 and the Captain never writes postcards,
after all, he is a man of action
and he knows his fleet, the harbor
in which his ships lie at anchor,
he knows the sky, so common to USA
and the water, emerald blue
I'll go ashore, he says, throwing down his pen
and have a drink avec mon equipage
dans les petites boites du porte
I know at last what to wear.

For I am Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur
le Comte de Rochambeau and I have landed,
the water is blood red with history
and we are in its claws (he likes
the figure and writes it in his journal

then strides up to the deck
where the weather is clear)
"Lower the boats" he cries to a sailor,
"I will go ashore to The Bronx
where my name will be streets and parks."

But there is no sailor to hear him,
the deck is empty and the postmark
covers most of the fleet,
it has turned cold since Rochambeau landed
and when the French learn of what USA 10¢ means
they will cut off his title, Le Comte
no longer, only a name
in a time on a stamp on a card
for a reader who turns away from 1780
and remembers the water, white as their eyes.

△

Hart Crane to Kenneth Burke

Ten Unpublished Letters

Edited by R. Y. Zachary

Here we have a handful of letters written by Hart Crane at age 24 to 31, during the years when he was slowly evolving the poems that made up *The White Buildings* (1926) and *The Bridge* (1930). Kenneth Burke at this epoch was "secretary" to Scofield Thayer at *The Dial*, which is to say, master-of-all-work, contributing essays and translations, functioning as music critic—and confronting, at the desk opposite, Marianne Moore in her black *tricorne*. Burke was also experimenting with short fiction, which was gathered as *The White Oxen* (1924). Not surprisingly, Burke's omnivorous reading, his sharp and imaginative judgment of ideas, his wit and love of discussion, his total commitment to the life of a writer attracted Crane: "I am strong with you in admiration for Burke. I repeat for the eleventh time, I wish I could be in New York to talk to him. . . ." (Crane to Gorham Munson, 11.7.22.)

The message of these letters is largely implicit—signaled by the names of people, places, and events, merely mentioned or touched on in passing. Their connected significance can be seen only in the full accounts of Crane in such books as those by Philip Horton (1937), Brom Weber (1948), and John Unterecker (1969). But I am reminded here of one of Crane's most suggestive ideas about poetry: "It is as though a poem gave the reader as he left it a single new *word*, never before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate." ("General Aims and Theories.") A poem, then, is the formula for an

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These letters were sent to me in November 1965 by Kenneth Burke for possible inclusion in a reissue of Hart Crane's selected letters, edited by Brom Weber. They arrived too late and are now published here by permission of Mr. Burke, with the concurrence of Professor Weber.

emotion—an idea akin to T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative"; but that a poem is a single word and a new one is a compelling way of putting it. This little sheaf of letters—unstudied as they are—seems to me to give us in a word, in the way a poem might, the essence of a poet's life: friends, music, drink, flight, reflection, love; adventuring after beauty in the Carib Isles, and meeting the hurricane before which there is nothing "But's smithereened apart"; *bridging*—"pontificating," as Burke calls it—trying to connect,

> ". . . and never to quite understand!" No,
> In all the argosy of your bright hair I dreamed
> Nothing so flagless as this piracy.

Saturday [Summer, 1923]

Dear Kenn:

I seem to be doing my best to add to your responsibilities while in the Dial office but this will be my last I'm sure. I haven't heard yet whether or not Rychtarik got his check for 25 for the picture Watson bought, but if you'll look into it there may be some saving of confusion all around later on.

a bientot
HART

The Munsons are in for hell. Poor Liza told me last night that their apartment has been leased over their heads, and that they will have to find a new place and be moved into within a week. That means a hard, at least strenuous, time for Gorham when he comes back next Wednesday. This city *is* hell!

Rychtarik: Richard Rychtarik, a Czech painter, and his wife Charlotte, a musician, settled in Cleveland and became intimate friends of Crane. Always a generous propagandist for artists he admired, Crane acted as middleman in the sale of one of Rychtarik's paintings to Dr. W. Sibley Watson, one of the sponsors of *The Dial.*

the Munsons: Gorham B. Munson, founding editor of the magazine *Secession* and long a key figure in New York literary life, met Crane early in 1919. He and Crane were contributors to *The Pagan* and met regularly in the Village bookshop of Joseph Kling, the publisher of that magazine. Gorham and his wife Liza, a dancer, were close to Crane throughout his life.

Woodstock, N.Y.
Nov. 16th, '23

Dear Butter-Tail:

(You see how jokes are carried on, adopted by comparative strangers and improved) I don't know why I should enlarge my impressive correspondence list with any further burdens except that my impulses are often leading me astray (you may have witnessed it!) and I have felt impulsively thankful to you for your kind words to familiar others about my deportment and judgement recently, not only at public performances like the Broom Festival, but in more private and discreet unveilings as in, for instance, poems. I am anxious, therefore, my dear Kenneth, to approve your pleasant although by no means unqualified approvals of me. To whet things further, I am including a poem of my own for your casual perusal, hoping that you give me a slap on the back, or if not that, a kick in the shins.

Life is not running so high out here as it did in Shakespeare's day or in "Ulysses", but at the same time I am managing to add to my shoulders a little what with the tree-felling and enormous meals we conjointly cook and eat. I have a reputation for gravy already, it seems. I blushed like the veriest Joan when the toute ensemble including les Josephsons and les Lachaises recently burst forth with peals of applause and loud smacks following, on the occasion of a Sunday dinner. But Brown is the star chef here.

I shall apologize to you for leaving my job later on when there is plenty of wine within us and explanations and adverbs are easy. I don't know how long I shall remain here in this pleasant wilderness,

but as long as possible. So far I have had no time from chores to do the bit of projected writing that I had planned on providing me with one dollar a day, or what food costs out here approximately. Anyhow, I shan't be back in New York before the first of December. If I get back then I shall retain my room at Grove, as I have been at pains to keep it there with my things in it all this month.

Seems to me something was said around here that you might be coming out here for a short visit yourself. I can tell you the secret first hand that nobody would be more welcome, and I am only hoping that I shall be here when you come. I'll plan on seeing you in New York anyway. Regardless of my plans, I'll have to be in town on the first or second of December. Let me know if you are going to be around.

Most affectionately, your
ingrowing potato,
HART CRANE

Woodstock, N.Y.: William Slater Brown, the writer, and Edward Nagle, the painter, rented an old house here which C. used as an occasional retreat from the big city. In 1923, C. spent two months here.

Butter-Tail: Kenneth Burke elucidates this name—"To save my honor I must make haste to explain the epithet. Bill Brown used to write me as 'Beurre-que,' a kind of French for 'Burke.' From that the joke developed in bilingual punning to 'Butter-that.' And Hart added a further development, as per the epithet."

the Broom festival: Broom was a magazine sponsored by Harold Loeb. Such friends of C.'s as Matthew Josephson and Gorham Munson were contributors, and Josephson became associate editor. Munson was the founder and editor of another magazine, *Secession.* An attempt by Malcolm Cowley and others to merge the two publications failed, ending in a comic fist-fight at Woodstock. (Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* gives the full account.)

poem of my own: A typed copy of "Possessions" was enclosed.

les Lachaises: Gaston Lachaise, the sculptor, and his wife Isabel were friends of C.'s for some years.

my job: C. resigned from his job as copywriter at J. Walter Thompson's ad agency on Madison Avenue in the fall of 1923.

Woodstock
Nov. 20th, '23

Dear Kenneth:

It not only helps me out a great deal in my plans to have you use my room, but I'm glad the situation provides you with some convenience. I think you will find the place good for reading and seclusion. You are not to pay any rent except as covers the 30 days of December that you are there. That will not be due until the first of the month, of course, (the third, when you arrive, will be soon enough) and it can then be paid to the janitor directly, or Mrs. Bellardi, the landlady, who lives on McDougal Street, one door north of the Provincetown Players. If my trunk is too much in the way it can be moved to the basement. Otherwise my personal belongings with the exception of books, are out of the way. There is a broom and even Brooms. The sheets on the bed were clean when I left, but Lachaise has been using the room for a few nights in town this month, and so you will have to have them laundered. There is another set, soiled too, on the shelf right of the mantle. Enough bedclothes and blankets to keep you well, I think. I can promise the room only until January 1st, as I can't count on my money lasting any longer and will have to look for a job. It means a lot to me to keep the room and still stay out here, which I couldn't have done unless you had come along.

Bill is for rushing to the post office, so I'll rush a word to Sue, too, and promise you more "personal" attention later.

yrs affectionately,

HART

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my room: Burke's home in Andover, N.J., is some fifty miles from New York City. He sublet C.'s room at 45 Grove Street for a month and thus made it easier for C. to remain another month in Woodstock.

Provincetown Players: C. had good friends at the Playhouse, among them Sue Jenkins, married to James Light, the director, and later to Slater Brown; and Eleanor

Fitzgerald, the business manager of the theatre. Eugene O'Neill, who was connected with the Greenwich Village playhouse, was also a friend of C.'s.

110 Columbia Heights
Brooklyn
Monday, Dec. 29th, '24

Dear Kenneth:

For once the Crane has been an early bird. I have just got two orchestra seats for the Philharmonic, Sat, eve. Jan 10th—all-Stravinsky programme with the Strafer himself conducting. Please let me know as soon as possible if you can't be my guest.

I've been for four days in Cleveland, shaking hands and smiling, mostly. But discovered that there was more booze in Cleveland than ever used to be—and better. Wish you could come to our new year's eve party—at the Perry Street joint. Separate room in the basement. Dinner begins at 9:30 p.m. All your friends will be there. And there will be singing. But maybe you *are* planning to be in town then. I haven't had a chance to talk with anyone yet about developments since I left.

Yours affectionately,—
HART

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110 Columbia Heights: C.'s apartment in Brooklyn gave a perfect view of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Manhattan skyline.

Cleveland: C.'s grandmother and grandfather Hart lived there.

Perry Street: C. and friends like Burke, Peggy and Malcolm Cowley, Sue and James Light, and Allen Tate often met in John Squarcialupi's restaurant.

2/23/25
110 Columbia Hts
Brooklyn

Dear Kenneth:

Malcolm urges me to send you the enclosed series of "Voyages" as soon as possible, as he says you are in charge of all material for the next issue of "Broom", or whatever it's to be called. I trust he has already mentioned the plan of printing them therein, etc. Also, that we will have to get permission from Seaver to reprint the Fourth, which came out in the last "1924", and from Munson to reprint the First, called "Poster" in "Secession".

I didn't see half enough of you when you last came to the big city, and hope another trip isn't too far away. If you get time to write me or have the inclination to do a little extra criticism in the meantime I'd like to know something of what you think of these "voyages." The second and the last are my choice.

Best regards,
HART

"Voyages": Burke states that Crane sent him these poems in this letter, but that the six of them did not appear together in print until the publication of *White Buildings* (1926) by Horace Liveright.

Seaver: Edwin Seaver was active as an editor and fiction writer at the time. He edited *Cross-Section*, a collection of American writing; wrote the socially conscious novel *The Company*, and so on.

Box 1373 Nueva Gerona
August 25th

Dear Kenneth:

No; you don't need to worry about cones, nor octorones. They

aren't (to me) attractive enough. Some of the farier Cubanos, well! but I don't spik the languish quite well yet! I'm banking on some obscure senorita, giving her quite a load, these days; she keeps me sweating, and sometimes I feel like a burning bush.

But there is that bird here that Rimbaud refers to as making you blush. In fact birds don't sing here; they throttle, gag, cuspidor, hiss and swivel! And there are goats, whose eyes I always make a fuss over (ask Bill) and oxen, dumb, white and otherwise—which would delight you. There are mosquitoes, jiggers, ticks, hayhennies (no kidding) and orrydorries. These last two you will have to be introduced to sometime. So you see I have plenty of company.

You must notify me sometime when the Dial gets ready to get out a poetry number; I'll soon have enough to complete that number very roundly! The Bridge is coming along very well (The Brooklyn B poem is the dedication by the way) and Gorham has section I. Tell him I said to give it to you, if you care to look it over. Later on, when I get section II finished I think I'll submit it to the Dial if it isn't too long,—probably about six or seven Dial pages. It's got real Indians in it!

The subway (next-to-last section) I'm working on now; and shall certainly want your opinion on it, though it may be a mistake to ask anyone's judgment on any one section of the poem,—isolated, that is. Your statement on ideological organization of my work in general was very gratifying news, and no doggerel; for that particular organic incorporation of concepts has been a very conscientious pursuit of mine, even before I was conscious of it as an indispensable quality.

I've thought of writing you a number of times, and wondered where you were. Isn't there a new family arrival? or due? And what are you writing these days: The news from Patterson all sounds so wild, woolly and full of relatives, quaint visitors and gastronomics—that I'm beginning to congratulate myself on having found a quieter, *if* hotter corner in the world wherein to drink real beer, real Bacardi, real smoke and lay an egg or so.

Write again when you have time, Best wishes, and to all the household.

yrs

HART

Nueva Gerona: The Isle of Pines, Cuba, where C.'s family owned a house and land.

. . . bird . . . that Rimbaud . . : See *Illuminations*, "Enfance," III.

Bill: W. Slater Brown.

The Bridge: By midsummer of 1927, most of the poem was in print or accepted for publication in *The Dial, Poetry, transition, The Calendar,* and *American Caravan.* (Cf. Unterecker, p. 506.)

The subway. . . : In mid-August, 1927, T.S. Eliot asked to publish this seventh section, entitled "The Tunnel," in his *Criterion.*

Box 1373 Nueva Gerona
Isle of Pines
Cuba
Sept. 6th, 1926

Dear Kenneth:

I enclose one of the ten or so sections of The Bridge; I think this one stands sufficiently by itslef *[sic]* —at least in our experience—to be possibly interesting. It has some rather novel experiments in forms throughout.

When you haven't anything better to do, let me hear from you,—and possibly what you think of it.

As ever,

HART

---

one of the . . . sections: A copy of "The Tunnel," mentioned above, was enclosed in this letter.

Sept 28th [1926]

Dear Kenneth:

As you are so well known as an enthusiast when any new or "old" literary problems of form and content crop up, I can't resist inviting your attention to the Oct. no. of "Poetry"—wherein I have a discussion with Harriet Monroe on the "famous" Melville poem, in re the dynamics of metaphor.

I'm not modest in saying that I think I come off very well with the woozy old spinster,—but that isn't why I'm speaking to you about the matter. I refer, better, to your past preoccupations with such squabble—or, rather, questions,—and as nobody ever peeps at Miss M's one-time famous sheet any more, I'm flagging the event, as it were,—and making the usual fool of myslef. *[sic]*

If you have a thought militant enough to demand registration, on one side or t'other,—why dont you mask it in perfectly decent terminology and frighten the dear old wench, or cheer her up. It would be more than fun. The problem under the gavel is vital in modern art (as well as ancient) and the linsey-woolseys of the great mid-west and corn belt ought to be given their money's worth.

Yours for Bacardi, clear and shining!

HART CRANE

PS — Please don't take my suggestion as too personally motiviated [sic] or at all clamant. But I would like you to at least see the discussion—because we have had so many words (mine were always stupid enough to surpass the memory the day after) over the same drink in the *dolce far niente* .. I'm going to spur you toward the "feast" by flattery. I was most happily surprised at your review of Spengler in the recent Dial. It's hard to find a man, these days, or any, that doesn't swallow the whole hook and sinker in favor of his private predilections . . . . Your analysis of that book (and the psyche behind it) was amazing. One of the most magnificent and formiable [sic] books I ever read, but falsely led and falsely leading. You can see it when you get under the shell of certain parts of it. You have to live in or under a

Greek sky like this, down here, to know why the ancients had a different idea of the space or "futurity" of *blue* —than did the monks and denizons [sic?] of the northern abbey's, half the time fog-filled, of the *middle ages.*

Sept 28th 1926: This letter was also written from Nueva Gerona/Isle of Pines/ Cuba, as indicated on the envelope, with the "Box 1373" number, and postmarked October 4, 1926.

metaphor: Harriet Monroe accepted and published C.'s "At Melville's Tomb" in the October 1926 issue of *Poetry.* In correspondence with C., she criticized his "champion mixed metaphors," and elicited from C. a shrewd and detailed reply about the "dynamics of metaphor," together with C.'s interpretation of images that H.M. found baffling. The exchange (on pages 34-41 of the issue cited) gives insight into C.'s characteristic use of exploratory metaphor and exploded metaphor—and gives evidence of some of C.'s fundamental brainwork.

Spengler: In a letter to Alfred Stieglitz, written three years earlier than this one, C. remarked: "Burke (between us only) keeps fighting off a true spiritual revelation which is really his birthright, though he can't consciously recognize it. So he falls a prey to Spengler and the cynics of more reasonable tongue—and lives in a rather unhappy and delicate state of skepticism." (Dec. 5, 1923.) But by summer 1926, C. had actually read *The Decline of the West* and, in a pair of letters to Waldo Frank (June 19, 20, 1926), he reacts more complexly to Spengler's thesis that Western culture is bankrupt and that art in this Winter era is futility. C. says to Frank: "This man is certainly fallible in plenty of ways but much of his evidence is convincing—and is there any good evidence forthcoming from the world in general that the artist isn't completely out of a job? Well, I may not care about such considerations 2 hours from now, but at present and for the last two months I have been confronted with a ghostliness that is new. . . . —All this does not mean that I have resigned myself to inactivity . . . A bridge will be written in some kind of style and form, at worst it will be something as good as advertising copy." Burke's assessment of Spengler in *The Dial* (Sept. 1926) would have chimed in well with C.'s own mood and judgment at the time. Burke: "Yet, however much one may snipe at Spengler's book, it remains a stupendous piece of work, formidable, lugubrious, and passionate. His historical perspectives are often brilliant and fertile; his methodology unquestionably has a future."

Patterson, NY
Aug 26th [1927]

Dear Kenneth:

Let me know when you are coming and Brown and I can meet you. Telephone *Pawling-40-F-2* if you like. I'm looking forward to a few arguments—it almost doesn't matter on what—so long as they break the rather deadly monotony of this countryside.

Thanks, by the way, for the reassurance offered on the rejection of The Air Plant. I'll do as you say and send it in later again. Meanwhile good luck and best wishes to Lilie and the little Burkes.

HC

Patterson, N.Y.: Written apparently from Slater Brown's place. Brown had bought a 150-year-old farmhouse on South Quaker Hill (also called "Tory Hill" by C.) in Pawling, N.Y.—which C. preferred to call "Patterson," using its postal address. As earlier in Woodstock, C. reveled in getting up at 5:30 a.m., breathing fresh air, and doing a lot of hard work refurbishing this ancient structure. He even bought twenty acres of land nearby, on which he hoped to build an ideal retreat for himself and his friends; but the plan never came to fruition.

"The Air Plant": In 1927, C. spoke of this poem as a "tropical effusion from the West Indies." It was drafted on Grand Cayman during his trip there in June 1926. The hurricane theme also pervades "The Return" and "Eternity," which were drafted in Patterson during the winter 1926-27. The definitive text of "The Air Plant" was published in *The Dial* for February 1928.

R.D. 1,
Gaylordsville, Conn.
August 27th [1930]

Dear Kenneth:

Your invitation was belated two days by the forwarding process, else I should have answered sooner. I'd love to join you this week end— especially since I haven't seen Burke Manor for something like

seven years during which vast improvements occurred, I'm sure. But I made arrangements over a month ago to be here with Fitzi and Lorna at this time—and so must keep my honor bright.

Our little Dantesque duelling is an amusing memory—mostly of cafe-cognac as far as I am concerned, which the later inferno of the steam room evaporated. But I rather hope you will procure the Temple Classics Edition sometime, for as I think I said, I know of none of our friends who would be more apt than you to find the Commedia an absorbing study.

My regrets again. If you stumble on the track of any jobs that I might fill please let me know. I hope to get busy as soon as possible, which may mean that we'll get together in town before long. Regards to Elspeth.

As ever,

HART

Burke Manor: Burke's home near Andover, N.J.

Fitzi: Eleanor Fitzgerald. Her country home was at Gaylordsville.

Lorna: Lorna Dietz, a friend of the Cowleys, and another loyal woman friend of C.'s.

Elspeth: Kenneth Burke's daughter.

△

Ron Padgett

Before

WELL, FOR INSTANCE," he continued, "one hears such phrases as the 'loom of history' across which time weaves its shuttle. Or expressions such as 'the warp and woof of history, or of time, or life, what-have-you. I have no objection to metaphoric expressions, of course, but I am piqued by the use of such expressions by people who really don't know what they're talking about. For example, how many people, do you think, know the difference between 'warp' and 'woof'? Very few indeed."

"Very few. In fact. . ." I hesitated, smiling lightly, ". . .I confess to not knowing which is the warp and which the woof."

"Well, don't take my remarks personally, there are a few things I don't know myself," he reassured me.

"So which is the warp and which is the woof?" I said, half hoping to learn something on this ride, half hoping he would be caught in an embarrassing trap of his own making.

"The warp is composed of the lengthwise fibres, the woof of the crossways, those woven by the shuttle."

"Oh, I see," I said, nodding in a mild wonder that was not genuine. Once again I had learned something I didn't particularly

wish to know. But it was not yet time to move the conversation to another topic, even less so to fall silent altogether.

"That reminds me," I said brightly. "When we passed over the Tweed I had the most curious feeling, that this must be a very fine river, sort of cozy and beautiful, you know what I mean?"

"I think so."

"Like a fine tweed jacket: the reassurance of old England, something like that."

"It's very interesting that a young American chap such as yourself should have such a feel for the 'old England' he never experienced directly," he laughed good-naturedly.

"Perhaps it's because I'm a poet, with a taste for extrapolating all kinds of images from a single source, some of them erroneous, of course. Like the Tweed: is it an *expensive* river? Of course not."

"No, of course not," he agreed thoughtfully. Then he said, "Would you excuse me, I must be off to the gent's."

"Of course. I'll watch your things."

"Oh yes, thank you," he said, stepping into the corridor.

I trained my eyes on his things. A plain leather briefcase, a Manchester *Guardian*, a package of Player's, and a small overnight suitcase on the rack overhead. I decided, looking at these objects, that I liked him.

Outside the countryside slid past, inducing in me a sense of loss. By returning directly to London, where the train would stop, I was losing this countryside, part of whose beauty was its constant slipping away.

Now he returned, as did my sociability. But it was he who spoke first.

"It's all very interesting, this business of cloth and such. Particularly how clothing is essentially an extension of the person wearing it, and his culture. An obvious example of course is the tartan, with its color codes and the sense of culture and family it conveys. While the tartans helped maintain society they also tended to rigidify social distinctions. True of any dress. What is most interesting is to see how

a change in dress codes reflects a larger change, such as in the nineteenth century, when a shift toward simpler and simpler men's styles tended to eradicate the distinctions between the upper class and the upper-middle class."

"I see what you mean," I put in, now genuinely interested. "By the way, I can't help noticing how knowledgeable you are on this subject. Are you a history teacher?"

"Gracious no," he laughed, "hardly. But I do teach, yes, which no doubt explains my tendency to go on like this."

"So what do you teach?"

"I am the director of the Blackwell School of Private Investigation," he answered in an ambiguous tone.

"No kidding?"

"No kidding."

"You mean people come to you to study the art of being a detective?"

"Sometimes I wonder why they do come. Not that we don't give them their money's worth. We do. But most of them, I suspect, enroll out of sheer curiosity, or excessive leisure, or some inscrutable motive, and never actually intend to become professional detectives. It seems to work like a refresher course in simply being attentive." He spread out his hands apologetically.

"But that's terrific!" I said warmly. "And do you do detective work on the side?"

"Not any more. I'm not so young as I appear to be," he laughed again. "Why don't you guess my age? If you were enrolled in my school you would be able to come very close, despite my deceptive appearance."

"Well, let's see. You do seem to be in good shape, rather like someone in his fifties, late fifties perhaps. But you've more or less told me you're older than you look, so I'd say . . . oh, I don't really know."

"Go ahead, I won't mind." He looked me straight in the eye.

"Well, how about . . . one hundred and thirty-seven?"

"Right on the nose!" he roared and fell to laughing.

"You see, I didn't need your school for that."

"Quite right," he agreed.

When I got to the hotel and opened my bags, it gave me the oddest sensation to find in one of them something that did not belong there. A plaid shawl, the kind you imagine elderly Scottish gentlemen having thrown over their laps on the veranda. The label showed that it was one hundred per cent wool and came from a shop in Edinburgh. But there was no indication of the owner, nor could I figure out how it had come to be in my luggage.

Mr. Blackwell? So far as I could remember, he was the only other person between Glasgow and London who had been alone with my luggage. But why would he have put this shawl in my suitcase so neatly folded among my effects? A practical joke? It was neither practical nor funny. A generous gesture? Knowing I would automatically refuse a gratuitous gift from someone I hardly knew? Perhaps. Or something dark and insidious which I might never understand, or worse, come to understand against my will?

I stared at the shawl for a moment and picked up the telephone.

"Operator, would you please connect me with a Mr. Blackwell of the Blackwell School of Private Investigation, or something close to that, School of Detectives. I'm not sure of the exact wording."

As I waited I glanced again at the shawl. It lay across my open suitcase on the bed, a soft, frozen flow of red and green, with tinges of yellow and a steady grid of black underneath, an almost liquid textile that concluded gracefully with fringe waving at the ends. Here and there its folds cast small shadows.

"Sir?"

"Yes."

"I have no listing for a Blackwell School of Private Investigation or a Blackwell Detective School. It would help if you knew the gentleman's Christian name."

"His what?"

"His Christian name."

"Yes, of course. Well, thank you."

Keith Waldrop

Elegy

"He comes to himself, like a gift."

—JASPERS

1

This body, mine, is only
an image of my brain, which
spreads fan-like its systems of

control. Thirty-six feet
under the terrace
of the Thames, three

fossil bones have been unburied:
an occasional and two
parietals, which articulate perfectly

together—a woman, in
her twenties probably,
from the space between

two ice ages. It's
possible to think of an infinity
limited to one

dimension. Her face, of
course, is lost, though certainly she

carried her head erect. These
fragments of a skull
are dressed out scrupulously now, for
purposes of study. Like a

vanity. Around her, we may suppose
animals—some long since
extinct—and a whole

range of expression: gestures,
sounds, some of which
still echo, perhaps, in our

emotions. Meanwhile, all
legends about roses
bleed them from white to red.

2

Saint Michael, as he flashes his
sword, should sweat. That he doesn't
is a sure sign that the great
Enemy, no longer a menace, has
nothing to fear. It's against
us—to win us over—that Michael turns the
blade just so. We so often make

the old mistake: supposing the body
'inhabited'
by soul, self, what you will. Whereas, in fact, the
cinnamon bird brings us cinnamon

and we haven't any idea where

the cinnamon grows. This account is
etched on my sleep, no amount of

wishpower will unprint it. You,
if you were young, might
glisten like olive oil. But rough
to the eye and to touch, wrinkled and
skilled, we stride the length and
breadth of the garden. There is a message
which holds the flesh to the bones—and

another one: *splash blood*
on the lintel and on
the posts of the door and stay
inside. Because once the Destroyer has
permission to destroy, he
does not distinguish between
the righteous and the unrighteous. Any evening,

with the falling temperature, dust
descends, altering every surface on
earth: hair falls, and silk,
and the silk also of spider webs. Organisms
complex and tiny beyond imagining
float invisible in the invisible air where knife-
shaped particles redden the sky with

a red they themselves do not
possess. The soul keeps
its distance. I will not discuss
the angel Murmur, who
teaches philosophy, or the likelihood
of a new ice age, or that pair of
slippers worn by Enoch before the flood.

3

Put into perspective, the dome
of the State House sinks,
draws together on itself, and becomes
obscure. It narrows, progressively, as I
move away from it, up the hill or

through the years. A glacier moves
with the same motion as a river, only
more slowly, sides dragging
against the boulders and débris of its
banks. We are all held in the

coffin of space. If I carry a stone
from Michigan to Rhode Island, is that
less 'natural' than transport by
glacier? —though ice would hardly
have pushed it this direction. Clear

crystals, some have claimed, redden and glow
into rubies, perfection at no
price, in an eternity of un-
timed processes. All day, today,
the thought of blood has

bothered me, appearing in the periphery
of my mind's eye. It surges into
the field. There is no
help for it—attention will
center on that fluent

red, as it will on any
alien substance. Imperfect fluids, viscous

bodies, are urged down certain in-
clinations by the natural
pressure of their parts. Here comes

glory: sludge within
sludge, strain-centers
in a medium with
all the properties of unannealed
glass. Thinking, like

wind that builds and then
dies down, takes
time. Do you believe
in change? This is a place
almost impossible

to leave. Three men, poured by an
avalanche into a crevasse
at the foot of Mont Blanc,
were found, forty years later, miles
downstream, still in solid

ice, coming closer and closer to the
surface. On my one hand,
stasis—on the
other, striving for effect. Break a
twig from a long dead elm, blood

branches from the act. No
image escapes, forked lightning or
lake. At times, I must admit, I
take the nearest objects—anything at
all—for comfort, for defense

against an empty field, the vacant
air. But other times, the spaces between things
all but make up for the intervening
entities. Point-instants, I
remind myself, are nothing, from

nothing. There is not much
time for me to
take. If everything behaved
exactly as I want it to, it
might as well be

all in my head. In my
brain is a constant
gray, cancelling silence. I only
glimpse, where they run at un-
certain depths, blue veins. Skim through

the alphabet. You'll see
how the letters follow their set
order, like the formula for some
catastrophe, called forth by
accident, irreversible.

4

Sorrow and love, in the old hymn, flow
mingled down. There are times when you
realize you're lost by seeing something
you recognize, some known configuration that couldn't be
where you thought you were. I notice,
now and again, how messianic themes
darken the clearest thought, spilling

blood and water across simple
vistas. The Creation is definitely

unfinished. The largest motion—to, fro,
up, down—collapses to a steady but
painful vibration, symmetrical like a
web around the fabulous notion
of 'center.' What I describe
is the region inside these lines which, being drawn,
pattern the interplay of nerve
and muscle. Each effort
surpasses and inscribes its

aim. To reach past the table is to
try for totality, the whole
terrestrial plane. If I forget
you, my memory has not
failed me—it has provided knowledge of
endless loss. Crystals driven downward
drift into impassable peaks. There is a second
air, finer than air, all-pervasive, riddling
the world and supporting the subtle

orders. The righteous are unredeemable, possessed
as they are by their own good angels. Under the
mask the image develops and
through the image, as a goal,
all the colors of the natural world, mixed
and not altogether comprehensible. Everything grows
heavier, at least I do, and—not to surrender
the high tone of gravity—the universe
displays a degrading shift towards red.

5

Lips meet: spirit
breathes into
spirit, or a vague mist
forms. Hardly anything matters to me now
but work, which will be accomplished—if
accomplished—neither by hand nor by
fire, but through its own heat, other
heat serving only to ward off

the cold. Red sandstone near
Shrewsbury bears impressions of raindrops—the rain
of an age inconceivably remote. One can even
tell from what direction the shower
fell, which impressed the sandy surface. I
will sleep soon, not in order to rid myself of
consciousness, but to rejoin partial and
impossible objects outlawed by the will to go

on. The creature left dry on the sleeve of a
drying ocean, who developed
breath in defense against a world of air,
although that creature has grown to think
my thoughts, circulate my
blood—still,
I live on the surface, in
a world not yet

evolved. I am not trying to express
anything, only to
sound my way from tones
to other tones. A gesture

may also be a signature. When I last
thought about it, I thought
that perhaps too much emphasis has been put
on both pity and terror.

6

While she was holding forth (Madame
Blavatsky) a shower of
roses fell from the empty air. Or so it's
recorded. Recorded

likewise: that Madame was as
startled as everyone else. Sometimes I
wish my sense of theatre were
less extended. Memories of

mere tone form a dark but active
screen in front of what must have been
real events, things that
happened, in the same

way that the Garden of Eden
flourishes over failures
of recall. In the same way,
we take the world apart for

lumber, only to find
not enough boards for a bookcase,
or else no nails. To take on the power
of an animal—for

instance, a bird's faculty

of flight—one must first
develop that particular animal's
appetite. The perspective here

is askew, without guarantee of
communication with any out-
side, where we might stand or maybe
walk. The strength of the state

gleams in the evening like a
tall empty helmet. If I needed
help, what hill would I climb or
lift my eyes toward?

7

I would not want to waste what
little I know of
whatever, but it continually
escapes me, driving home like
rain. Mystics know many
ways to sit, masters of still

gymnastics. Then too, my days
scatter off into conversations, classes,
idle chatter and other facets
of hunger. I must learn to consider the
areas I walk through as
unpeopled—dense growth

has got to become a medium
for reflections. How else remember
what otherwise is only

memorable? Like the dead in *All*
Hallows Eve who haunt the places they
always haunted, but now

as if alone. There are three
evil destinies: to be
an animal, a demon, a hungry
ghost—evil because all these are
hungry, and remain so. A candle in a
pumpkin skull brings to the door

polite East Side children dressed
as ghosts, demons, beasts of
prey. On the other hand, one
is made up as a butterfly, monstrous,
like a blaze, among dead
leaves and the wooden

houses. It's hard to imagine these
bodies made of mind—but requiring, just to
function, a world of
resistances. By an advanced technique, one
can contemplate a duplicate
of oneself, within one's own body, and

draw it forth. The hermit Rolle
felt such fire in his breast he put his
hand there to check. Whom do I know
scorched by the spirit? Many years ago,
I wanted to write about
prayer, but was hindered by centuries of

practice—also my religion
got in the way. Am I finally ready? More

likely, such impulses, fading like printed
pages left in sunshine, will have to
be satisfied by abstract surfaces, which
spread as we pull away from them.

8

Some gods are too high to be
petitioned—either altogether sublime or just

too *good*. Replaced, particle by
particle, bone, under favorable

conditions, retains its original
minute structures, as in life, though

not alive. For flesh to be
preserved is rarer, though

mammoths, found frozen in Siberia, have
still both hide and hair. There are two

times, the prospect of which provides
no possibility of hope: before

and after. The most common form
of fossil is simply a space where

some creature was. If I had my
prayer, I'd be replaced, moment

by moment, by some harder

activity, something formal enough

that one wouldn't feel one had to
look for meaning. You, if from a distance you

recognized, for instance, my way of
walking, could run to meet me.

Section one of *Elegy* was published in *College English*.

△

BOOK REVIEWS

Fame & Love in New York. ED SANDERS.
Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1980.

by GEORGE F. BUTTERICK

First Ed Dorn and Tom Clark, and now Ed Sanders. We come again to an Age of Satire. In his most recent writing, Sanders has taken a cool if no less brilliant eye to the world about him. *Fame & Love in New York* is an intricate lampoon set "in the near future, with technology slightly more advanced than it actually is." It is written in a studied and almost formal manner, an elaborate style ("anger bounced into, and from, the reticulations in people's skulls"), with few exclamation points. Devoted readers will immediately recognize the change (as much a development of the times as of the writer): the language is no longer bardic or even outrageous; the old "assault on the culture" is grown more selective and no longer as "total." Mixed with Sanders' usual high-tech inventiveness (there are even patentable devices throughout, bearing registered trademarks) is tightly probing language. The plot is spacious and allows a target to be focused or diffused at will, drawing in a greater number of victims. There is the same proliferation of names and data as in preceding books, such as *The Family* and *Tales of Beatnik Glory*, but suspended in a satirical solution and supplied with footnotes which serve to remind us the narrative is consciously controlled. Old friends appear (the Diogenes Liberation Squadron from *Investigative Poetry*), here jostled by hordes of new names, devices, plots, competing for the reader's attention. The wit is drier, more grainy, less a string of gags than *Shards of God.* For some, the writing may seem a spin of whimsy rather than righteous necessity or deep spiritual urge, as if Sanders had settled back into a role of droll commentator rather than energizer or motivator. But for the most part the bold language and far-reaching images still serve him (despite an imprecise use of "ineffable"): a character is "nearly unerring in nark-sniff. He was like a pot-whiffling canine at a JFK cargo hangar, so ineffable was he in pulling a dowser's wand scene on undercover police officers." His strength continues to be descriptive—"She twisted roughly back and forth as if she

were lying within a wooden gold-mining sluice, and her hands were clenching the wooden sides, and a torrent of eternity rolled down over her, nuggets of golden pleasure buffeting the tingling red rose of her perfect calling"—while pinning characters in culturally compromising circumstances.

Part two of the novel, "The Search for Hart Crane's Trunk," is especially entertaining, with its world of archivists (it is a "data-retentive era") and directions to young poets how to form a "Letter Loop" (four such poets write each other daily for fifteen years: "Allowing for inflation, let us say that at the end of the fifteen years, the letters go for fifty each. Therefore, as of moolah, you obtain 12 X 365 X 15 X 50, and you're again upon one of those droll strolls down along green grab creek"). Throughout, the preoccupation is with deception. Characters abound, teasingly named. There are conceptual artist Milton Rosé and poet Ione Appleton, exploiters both, who along with the Balzac Study Group of intrepid insurgents and the post-Fugs, post-punk J'Accuse rock band, pass in and out of the world (and the market) of culture. All are characters without personalities and only as deep as their language. The target of this professional writing and withering attention is "the ultra-hip, ultra-corrupt New York Art World where the deal goes down, and the wheel goes around each and every day." (Thematically, an odd book for the Netzahualcoyotl Historical Society to publish, one might at first say, until one realizes it is hardly limited to New York or Art.) It's a world that readily deserves a raking, such sweet excoriation. But why? Why now? (The overriding question never fully withdraws itself, especially after the author himself says on the very first page, "there had been infinitely more outrageous things occurring in the universe.") Finally, what seems to be the entire cast from Sanders' *Dom-Int* stories, the American surveillance forces led by "Hunk" Forbes, emerges from a clearing in the data-horde to bring a violent end to the world of Milton Rosé, while the newly discovered trunk of Hart Crane's personal possessions and manuscripts becomes a Grail for what is left of the characters.

The novel is an excursus, sustained by its own inventiveness and governed by Sanders' virtuosity, creating situations in which to land a satiric punch or poke a rib. It rollicks rather than perceptibly develops in any naturalistic fashion. For some readers, it will be too knowing a world, too sophisticated and satirical and self-conscious; in it and by it, the Beat innocence is already over and a counterthrust of irony begun. △

Notes for Echo Lake. MICHAEL PALMER.
North Point. 1981.

by JED RASULA

The initial concern of any artisan or magus is how to breathe, prelude to learning how to breathe life into the opus. How to apply color (ochre on skull), give ruddiness, signs of life. "Colors are the traces of ideas," Michael Palmer writes in "Alogon" (p. 72)—a notion which soon erodes into "Colors are substitutes for ideas" and "Colors seem to embody the ideas." Colors are both signs of what lie within, and decoys to lure it out. "So here is color. Here is a color darkening or color here is a darkening." (p. 6) That darkening may be the "transparency of the mirror," the nimbus confusing subject from object, original from reflection, opacity from transparency—whatever it is, it splits and like a worm divides into new bodies each time. Language is parthenogenic. "The verb divides us evenly into two objects," Palmer wrote in *Without Music* (p. 43). "Notes for Echo Lake 8" (p. 48) is "for one to seventy-seven voices" (in 77 lines). *Notes for Echo Lake* is a book of 93 numbered pages, but in reading it lengthens to hundreds (I recommend at least two or three readings in succession, and one reading of the title poem by itself—for which an effort must be made because it's distributed throughout the book). Repeated reading abolishes chronology, and colors appear—from the text a ruddy skull in ritual disposition ushers you in. Red is one of the approaches: "All days were red in the margin" (p. 1). "He says this red as dust" (3). "The dust of course might equally be grey, the wall red, our memories perfectly accurate" (5). "The river is red" (7). "I was the blue against red and a voice that emptied" (15). ". . . red/as a second following dawn" (21). "What does the juggler's redness tell us" (22). ". . . red meaning red, and the flag as an object, and red instead of red" (28). "The lion red as a lobster is green" (29). "Hills cancel redness" (35). ". . . what blue as of a letter red as of a name written backward" (40). "These red hills are said to be green" (43). ". . . forgotten in order to be presently relearned/as 'red' or 'stone' or 'thirty-six' " (46). "Here I will insert the word 'red' to indicate a tree" (69). "Red is a most dreadful thing" (72). "Red of April" (76). "My favorite the lady of the upper middle-class with her red parasol" (81). "When the word for red is said to mean white" (82). "Do we live beneath

Red Hill" (84). ". . . red and redder/than the tree itself" (90). Red and blue are the poses of the verse, the anchor of their turning, tropisms of verses as 'versus.' They are the musical staff on which the epic gestures of local intent are composed: raising a window, opening a door, lighting a candle, reading a book. The scale is at once cosmic and domestic—because it is told in *relief* (as if the letters were rising off the page and casting shadows—see p. 29), through monumentalities innate to language like choice of phrase and rhythmic dexterity—the figures that stand out are massively interpersonal, not so much whole people as wedges fitted in between disparate human traits in the epic quest of ascertaining grammatical certainty: "No one exactly lived in the house. The heart cannot be influenced directly. Light affects the breath. They are fascinated by a moth. The breath is troubled. You look until the trouble stops. Two dead men are playing cards." (p. 77)

Such people as there are are rather like the Hermetic visitors, guides in the realm of planetary relations; they appear like figures in Macrobius' dream, quicksilver to the spatial and musical spirals which the poet enters by recounting the implements and reciting the elementary gestures of working in the

> Garden in which three of the four points reside
> With no sign of true north
> Claiming she had survived three-hundred seasons
> And showed me the unbroken line
>
> (p. 89)

It is an undisputably microcosmic/macrocosmic order, and the apparent ease of the lines shows Palmer to be a confident and careful initiate: "The mountain quivers on the surface of the lake." (p. 69)

There are pieces in *Notes* that tap the awe myth arose from, glints of vivid ore in mud—"Documentation" and "False Portrait" (pp. 36 & 37) are stunning instances—but it is in the title sequence and in the lengthy "Alogon" that Palmer's work unforgettably embeds itself in the mind. There is something in this language (not unlike the later Beckett) that carries the breath, pace and intonation so successfully that the reader's consciousness is not simply identical with the text but is momentarily replaced by it or indistinguishable from it:

. . . we saw passing with eyes shaded against
the glare lover with gryphon's wings kneeling
in an attitude of prayer waves lapping at the
foot of our bed have been had been ill somewhat
ill three suns crossing a winter sky myself in
blue velvet jacket strolling past the half-open
window ghost following one holds a lamp the other
a sword and a sponge blue as of mountains rust
broken words after language wide toothless grin
open words after language blue as of a greeting
or sudden end one mark indicating what blue as
of a letter red as of a name written backward. (pp. 39-40)

The writing in this particular section of "Notes. . ." is unpunctuated, so the pulse of attention can only be followed by rhythm, which is here and throughout the book as exacting as any poetry published in many years (and I strongly urge reading out loud to establish the literal sense of it). "Notes. . ." seems in fact to be generated out of sentences flawlessly balanced, out of "Words that come in smoke and go", such as: "We have never been happy here have never been happier." "It had been a good possibly even a terrible winter." "Some things he kept while some he kept apart. "Does physics know Caesar by name?" "As they may send him though not as himself, for example to war." The pivot of the series is "Notes for Echo Lake 9"—in one line only: "Was lying in am lying on I is I am it surrounds." Olson, Irby, Grenier, Palmer and once in a while a few others have arrived at poems so precise no more than a line is one of them.

It is Michael Palmer's *Notes for Echo Lake*, along with Ron Silliman's *Tjanting*, that definitively places San Francisco on the literary map of 1980. If Dziga-Vertov's *Man With Movie Camera* is the film to go with Ron Silliman's *Tjanting*, Palmer's should be Chris Marker's *La Jettee* (cited on p. 17, actually). Marker's film is a brief tale of burrowing into the future to reclaim the world before its demise—which also lies in the future—conducted through hypnogogic experiments. This might well be Palmer's theme, if it weren't for the omnipresent calibration of the medium, line by line, phrase by phrase, such that we see in place of a theme a ready instrument, a tool-within-a-tool. Marker's film is composed of stills lasting several seconds each, except for one filmclip of a woman's eye moving; Palmer's

Notes for Echo Lake guides the reader past the movement, through the eye, and into the still or hush as over pond or lakewater which is the surface drum of inner ear exposed. △

Falkland Road. Photographs and text by MARY ELLEN MARK. Alfred Knopf. 1981.

by ELIOT WEINBERGER

The three worlds (Sky-Air-Earth) were united; the gods divided them into three. The worlds grieved that they had been divided in three, and the gods said, "Let us take the three sorrows from these three worlds." Indra removed their sorrow, and the sorrow which the god removed from this earth entered the whore; the grief which god removed from the air entered the eunuch; and the grief from heaven entered the sinful man or the rogue.

—THE BRAHMANAS

Falkland Road, in the Kamathipura section of Bombay, is the red-light district for what we would call the working class (in India, materially above the peasant but below the merchant). It is a short walk from two other flumes of the city, one turbulent, one almost still: *Bombay Central*—railroad station for millions, home for thousands, antheap and inevitable sluicegate in the endless flow of pilgrimages, business trips and family visits that is Indian life; and the *Towers of Silence*—forbidden both to passersby and to the faithful, where the *Parsis* leave their dead to be eaten by vultures, so that water, earth and fire remain undefiled by corpses. The three form a delta of passage: passion, pilgrimage, death. And mirror to the spiritual non-passages: the sex without orgasm of Tantrism, the motionless pilgrimage of Yoga, and the release from the cycle of death and rebirth of Buddhism.

Falkland Road, like everything in India, is compartmentalized and ar-

ranged vertically and horizontally. Like red-light districts anywhere, it is both an epitome and a parody of its society. At the bottom are the "cage girls": bizarrely made-up and dressed, they stand at street level in a barred version of the Indian shop, lifting their skirts and shouting obscenities at the men in the street. Despised by the other prostitutes, they are the cheapest tricks (about 30¢) and function as a grotesque caricature of the Indian woman as an immobile commodity and object of desire. Their opposites on the bottom rung are the street girls (and girls is the word—the workers of Falkland Road are mainly very young teenagers): independents, tied to no brothel, who find their own customers in the cafes, work in hired rooms and sleep in the streets. Mistrusted by the other prostitutes for their freedom and self-reliance, their very mobility is a negation of the traditional Indian woman and her parody the cage girl.

Above the street are the brothels, where the girls are among the last in India to live in a strict version of *purdah*. They rarely go out, and are rigidly controlled—but also protected and literally blessed daily—by their *madams*. They are more conservatively dressed than the cage girls; they could pass unnoticed in a crowd, except, perhaps, for their beauty. As the *purdah* system collapses in modern India, it is curious that these last sequestered women are the ones most accessible to men. The structure remains, even when it is in absolute contradiction to its original function.

Parallel to the female brothels are those of the *hinjras*, who work both in cages and in the rooms above. They are the most mysterious caste in North India: transvestites, many of them eunuchs, who dance at every festival, and at weddings and funerals, playing the role of Fool, object of derision, the chaos that reaffirms the order of "normal" society, but also, strangely, as images of the cosmic androgyny, the oneness of the universe. Their ranks are replenished by abandoned and, some say, kidnapped infants and boys. Their main source of income is prostitution; their clients homosexual men.

Falkland Road has remained largely unchanged since the last major report to the West of its activities: Alfred Dyer's dispatches to the English papers in 1887. But there is one difference: a hundred years ago, the workers and customers on the street were interracial. (And, interestingly, the white women were almost all Jews who had fled the persecution in Eastern Europe. Dyer noted, by the way, that they behaved with far less "decorum" than their Indian counterparts.) Today Falkland Road is an entirely Indian in-

stitution.

Mary Ellen Mark, a well-known Magnum photographer, "had thought about Falkland Road for ten years," but her early attempts at taking pictures there had been frustrated: crowds of men gathered around, and the prostitutes threw water and garbage on her from the windows above (as they had done, a hundred years earlier, on members of the Bombay Midnight Mission). She writes, in perhaps the most revealing moment of the book:

> In October of 1979 I decided to return to Bombay and try somehow to enter the world of these women and to photograph them. I had no idea if I could do this. But I knew I had to try. The night before I left I had a vivid dream: I was a voyeur hiding behind a bed in a brothel on Falkland Road watching three transvestite prostitutes making love. I awoke amused and somewhat reassured. Perhaps my dream was a good sign.

Obviously, by her own standards, Mark had "success." This elegant book is the result, itself apparently a commercial success. But what is one to make of these successes, and of this dream that hangs over the chasm between Falkland Road and *Falkland Road*?

Photography begins with the transformation of the familiar into the exotic. The first photographs were of ourselves and of local sights. The self became the other: one sat motionless for twenty minutes for a daguerrotype not to see oneself, but to see how one looked in a photograph, to see another image of the self. (And later, time would add a second layer of exoticism: the strangeness we all feel, looking at old snapshots of ourselves.) It was, in the anonymity of the industrial cities, the beginning of self-consciousness, alienation, of "modern" man.

But photography, after the initial amazement, quickly assumed a more important role: the transformation of the exotic into the familiar. Not only did everything in the world exist to end up in a photograph (as Sontag has written, paraphrasing Mallarmé) but the world itself seemed a bundle of gathered photographic images. Photography became a form of both tourism and colonialism. Its rise, not coincidentally, is parallel to that of the great capitalist empires.

This tourism was always vertical and horizontal. Horizontal: to the ends

of the earth, where the new photographer-adventurers travelled to supply the inexhaustible demand for new "views." And vertical (though mainly downward): epitomized by the title of Jacob Riis' classic 1890 study of the New York poor, *How the Other Half Lives*. Today, the search for new images of horizontal tourism has played out: we know what most of the world looks like in a photograph, sit bored and polite through friends' slide shows of Urumchi and Baffin Island, and will buy a book of "travel photographs" only if the photographer is extraordinary. But vertical photographic tourism is flourishing, now more than ever. Middle-class curiosity about the fringes of society seems insatiable, and the collection of these images has become a small industry for the leagues of "photo-journalists": talented workers, like Mark, who lack the transformative vision of the great "fine art" photographers. In recent years there have been books of photos of wrestlers, strippers, tattooed people, bodybuilders, transvestites, junkies, shopping bag ladies, mental patients (including Mark's own *Ward 81*) and various groups of urban and rural poor—to name only a few—but none of typists, management consultants, checkers players. Like the Romans pouring liquamen (fish emulsion) over their food, to get a little taste to a palate deadened by the lead from their water pipes and goblets, we have become sated, numb to ordinary photographs of the present world (old photos, though, are another matter). To get high, we need an increasingly stronger fix of the strange.

Daguerre believed he had "made a window men look through," much as Whitman wanted to create "a perfectly transparent plate-glass style." Both of course were wrong: a photograph, no less so than a poem, is a metaphor, not the world. The window is the camera itself. For although photographs, as Ansel Adams' formula goes, are made and not taken (and in fact much of the work takes place in the darkroom, its procedures—and ultimate appreciation—not all that different from those of painting) the act of photography, the moment of pressing the shutter, may be the only new development in creative composition since Lascaux.

It is an immediate act, without recollection, absorption, transformation, revision; it is an action painting produced in a split-second. And it is an act of immediate power. The camera is a weapon, its language ballistic. With either, as any tourist or terrorist knows, one can get a stranger or a crowd of strangers to do almost anything. But the camera is also a window: the

photographer always stands removed from the action, whether or not it is under his or her direction. In the familiar disaster scenario, the photographer shoots first, and then aids the victim, if at all.

To stand at the window watching, like Tonio Kröger, like Proust, has been a frequent metaphor for the artist. With photography, the metaphor becomes actual practice. To photograph is to have Superman's X-ray vision: to see everything in the world, but at a distance. It is to collect as many images as possible from a world one sometimes controls, but does not participate in. It is to dream that one is a voyeur, watching three eunuchs fuck in a seedy Bombay brothel, and to wake, not appalled, but refreshed.

Falkland Road is a book told by its cover: a frame of gold letters on a rich maroon; within the frame a portrait of a stunningly beautiful woman, seen nude from the waist up, wearing only an ornate necklace. It is a photograph from a fashion magazine: the woman is breathtaking but vacuous; she stares at the camera and at us with a model's haughtiness and hostility; nothing is revealed. Only inside the book do we learn that her name is Putla (an eerie resemblance to the Spanish *puta*), that she is 13 years old, that she was sold to the brothel at 12, that her madam complains that it took four months to "break her in." The contrast of image and caption is upsetting: in the absence of intentional irony, all we are left with is the photographer's seeming indifference.

In 65 photographs, shot in deep but often murky color, we see the women and transvestites washing, waiting, clowning, posing, nursing their babies, dressing, cleaning their rooms and, amazingly, working. With the exception of the latter, these are fairly ordinary photographs of ordinary activities, given interest only because we know who these people are, at least professionally. Many of the pictures are characterized by that peculiarly Indian *stare*. The camera is still a novelty in the country, and many—from Louis Malle in his epic *Phantom India* to Mira Nair in her short documentary *Jama Masjid Street Journal*—have found inescapable that look of blank curiosity, fear and impossible distance. In India, it is the subject, not the photographer, who sees more intensely.

In these photographs we always sense Mark as an outsider, not in the tension of a cultural clash that might have produced more interesting work, but

rather a simple and numb remoteness. The effect is disturbing: the prostitute, the extreme example of the man or woman as sex item, is even further objectified. Though a comparison is somewhat unfair, one turns with relief back to the photographs taken by E.J. Bellocq in the Storyville section of New Orleans at the turn of the century. Bellocq, a hydrocephalic dwarf, befriended—but apparently never hired—the prostitutes; his photogaphs, a dialogue between outcasts, remain among the most loving portraits of women. Although nothing is known of these women—and little of Bellocq—no captions are necessary: Storyville lives in a way that Falkland Road, despite Mark's claim of love and friendship for these "special women," never does.

What are remarkable, however, are the "working" pictures. They are probably the first non-pornographic representations of Indian sex since the last of the great miniature paintings, in the 19th century. Prostitutes have long served as nude models for both painting and photography—they are, after all, accustomed to being undressed objects—but it is surprising that Mark was able to persuade their johns to also pose, and in action. And it is the presence of the johns that gives us our only glimpse of how squalid life on Falkland Road is, for though the women all have a natural dignity and occasionally beauty—the transvestites look as alien as transvestites anywhere—the johns are unrelievedly sleazy.

The sex, on bare mattresses in tiny cubicles, is mainly depressing: we are centuries away from the exuberance of Indian erotic art. (And, by the way, from its variety: according to an interview with Mark, the sex is all "straight fucking;" the thousand pretzel positions that India invented have, at least on Falkland Road, unravelled to one.) In the saddest picture in the book, a man, still wearing his gaudy shirt, lies on top of a young woman who stares at the camera with a resigned and vacant melancholy. The perspective would be that of Kali, goddess of annihilation, looking down with a camera as she stands on the back of Rati, copulating with Kama in the familiar miniature scene. But this girl's name is Kamla, not Kama, and she speaks in the caption: "Often when I am with a customer, I hold my legs straight and he doesn't even enter me. After all, my body is my own." Kama and Rati were symbols of the desire that created the universe; in Kamla eyes are, almost, the end of the world.

Falkland Road can only be defined by negatives. Mark is no reformer: the photographs and her short, mainly uninformative introduction have no cries of indignation. The book is not elegant pornography. Nor is it a feminist work: although portions inexplicably appeared in *MS* magazine, there is no simple rapport, let alone solidarity or sisterhood, between Mark and her subjects. I take the appeal of the book, finally, to be touristic. It is a piece of that unchanging equation of exotic and erotic that permeates almost every travel document: in the mind, sex is always more available, or wilder, someplace else. *Falkland Road* not only exploits this fantasy—in spite of itself, in spite of the dreary evidence—but ups the ante. For, unlike pornography or a travel novel or an ad for a Caribbean resort, we know who these women and transvestites are, and where they are. This may have a kick for certain male readers, as a sort of luxurious mail-order catalogue of fantasies. Why women are buying the book, as they are, is beyond me. It is so obviously the product of a doubled colonialist mentality: Third World plus Prostitution in one appropriating package. Perhaps, for some, the fact that the photographer is a woman somehow makes it all acceptable. I don't see how. But photography has made us eager to possess the Aleph, to be the Invisible Man, to see everything—at a safe distance. We dream we are Mary Ellen Mark dreaming she is a voyeur. Yet, on the other side of the window—her camera, our book—lies a piece of the world, Falkland Road itself, a reality not many of us could stand for more than a few minutes. In the end, the book has the same dumb fascination of watching firemen battle a blaze around the corner, knowing that one's own house is safe. △

The Eidophusikon

by Robert N. Essick

On the evening of February 26, 1781, a group of curiosity-seekers were ushered into a beautifully appointed room in the London residence of the painter Philip James de Loutherbourg. At half-past seven, they were led upstairs to a theatre capable of seating a hundred and thirty. The lights dimmed, and an illuminated screen painted with a view of London seen from

Greenwich Hill appeared on the elegant little stage. Suddenly, the morning mists embracing the city began to disperse. The sun rose bright and clear to reveal ships moving up and down the Thames and cattle grazing in Greenwich Park. After a brief musical interlude, the movable screens and focused candles shifted to the next performance: *Noon over Tangiers*, with a prospect of Gibraltar. Next came *Sunset near Naples, Moonlight on the Mediterranean*, and the concluding scene, *A Storm at Sea, and Shipwreck*. In later programs, de Loutherbourg produced his masterpiece, *Satan Arraying his Troops on the Banks of the Fiery Lake, with the Raising of the Palace of Pandemonium: from Milton.* A towering volcano poured liquid fire into the lake from which arose Moloch, Beelzebub, and a multitude of other demons, summoned by their once-majestic leader. Colored glass threw bolts of lightning across the painted sky while artificial thunder shook the audience. The pursuit of the sublime, its patrimony from Milton and love of multi-media *terribilità*, had reached its eighteenth-century climax.

The "Eidophusikon"—de Loutherbourg's portmanteau name for his invention, made from the Greek words for "form" and "nature"—was a vast but short-lived success. His bizarre potpourri of *trompe-l'oeil*, lantern slides, mechanical models, and opera attracted leading artists such as Gainsborough, who attended evening after evening, and Reynolds. The young Turner may have seen later performances. Blake's love for art and drama might even have led him to the theatre where he could have seen a melodramatic side-show to his own visions of eternity in love with the productions of time.

The eidophusikon fell from popular favor, then into disrepair, and finally succumbed to a real fire early in the nineteenth century. Yet it has its unacknowledged progeny. What would Gainsborough, Turner and Blake have made of that eidophusikon redivivus, D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*? △

Salamander: Selected Poems of Robert Marteau.
Translated by Anne Winters.
Princeton University Press (The Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation). 1979.

Traité du blanc et des teintures/Treatise on White and Tincture. ROBERT MARTEAU. Translated by Barry Callaghan.
Exile Editions. 1979.

by ERIC GANS

These two bilingual volumes are complementary. The first traces the evolution of the poet's work over a period of sixteen years; the second gives us in full the finest product of this evolution.

Robert Marteau, a French poet and essayist who has taken up residence in Montréal, is a composer of sacrificial landscapes. Born in 1925 in a Charente village on the medieval pilgrimage route to Compostello, Marteau has constantly sought to unify the disparate details of the countryside in a vision of sacrifice that is the modern poet's revenge on a world deprived of its ritual unity. From the early poem "Royauté/Royalty" in *Royaumes/Kingdoms* (1962) to the intricate quasi-narrative of *Traité du blanc et des teintures* (1978), Marteau's world has slowly evolved from the rural to the organic. The "sense of place" of the first poem, its aristocratic medievalism reminiscent of Saint-John Perse, has displaced itself from the Charente to Spain and Yugoslavia to be finally transcended in a locus of creation that is both the garden of Eden and the earth as a whole.

Marteau's poetry, rich in imagery and verbal texture, renews the eternal challenge of art to its analysts. The lack of obvious narrative continuity in the longer poems makes the logic behind the often bewilderingly dense series of images most elusive. The poet seems to make the thematic figure of sacrifice—funeral pyre, bullfight, crucifixion—serve as a guarantee of the unity of an entire universe of experience. For this reader, at least, these poems are more satisfying in their details than in their overall composition. In contrast, the *Traité*, a single work loosely composed of 86 brief (four to eight-line) strophes, makes a formal separation of part from whole that allows the reader to savor each figure independently while keeping in mind

its general context.

The longer poems—"Royauté/Royalty", "Taureaux dans Bayonne/Bulls in Bayonne", "Travaux pour un bûcher/Work for a Pyre", "Circé"—are undoubtedly the major works in ambition as well as length, but the reader may find shorter pieces like "Charente", "Charente, encore/Charente, again", and the series of bullfight sonnets from *Travaux sur la terre* more approachable. The final lines of "Charente, encore" express an *art poétique* that gives the measure of Marteau's poetic ambition and finesse:

> Graine noire, poudre et pays dans mes yeux,
> D'eux, je fais mon four et je change en vérité
> Ce qui n'est que chute, images tombées.
>
> Black seed, homeland and powder blown in my eyes,
> These make my furnace, where the Fall and windfallen
> images turn into truth.
>
> (Winters, p. 30-31)

The insistent alliterations (*poudre—pays, fais—four, change—chute*) and final rhyme, the reprise of *yeux* by *D'eux* in the following line, illustrate the concern for sound-patterns that make Marteau's poetry a pleasure to read aloud. The countryside (*pays*) like powder in his eyes becomes an alchemist's furnace in which the poet transforms fallen images into poetic truth. The poet's role remains that defined by Baudelaire (*Tu m'as donné ta boue et j'en fait de l'or!* You gave me your mud and I made it into gold!), but without either the hyperbolic irony of the mud/gold opposition or the Baudelairean spirit of synthesis that has already dissolved the dust of fallen rural images into the generality of urban mud.

Ms. Winters' translation of this passage is not truly representative here of her generally sensitive and faithful rendering into excellent English poetry, although its weaknesses are not without example elsewhere. The most notable of these is an almost perverse tendency to invert pairs of words—here *poudre et pays* become "homeland and powder," no doubt to clarify the reference of *dans mes yeux*, although this quirk is found without apparent justification elsewhere. (Thus for example, p. 22-23, *Brûlant et engendrant*/Engendering and blazing; p. 70-71 . . . *les guérisons, les merveilles*/ . . . its marvels and cures. Both examples are taken from the last lines of poems where one would expect the author's concluding emphasis to

merit more consideration.) The final idea of the poem is unfortunately inverted as well. Marteau changes into truth what is only Fall, fallen images (*chute* refers to the Fall of man in the Garden), whereas Winters' ending eliminates the poetic first person in favor of a conclusive but passive "turning into" truth that exudes a smug fatalism foreign to the original.

An atypical example of this fine translation, and one that merits a counterexample:

> Oh! c'est déjà le vent d'été . . . Le bois
> Des barques et des râteaux craque sous le bleu;
> De toi, je n'ai trouvé que cette gaine d'écailles
> Qui ressemble à la pelure sèche d'une grosse couleuvre.
>
> Already the summer wind . . . The wooden
> Rakes and ships' planks crack beneath the blue;
> But of you I've found only this dry sheath of scales
> Like the paring of some giant snake.
>
> (p. 36-37)

Here, the inversion of rakes and ships is justified by the happy effect of the added "planks," and the shortened last line is a definite improvement over the original. Winters is here inspired to surpass her model in concentration and vigor—compare "this dry sheath of scales" with the rather flat "cette gaine d'écailles"—while remaining faithful to its spirit.

△

Barry Callaghan's translation of the *Traité du blanc et des teintures* is somewhat less faithful to its original than Winters'. In their translations of the same texts (26 of the 86 strophes of the *Traité* are included in *Salamander*), Winters appears more hampered by the strophic format than Callaghan, who is willing to sacrifice something of Marteau's meaning in order to remain close to the highly individualized rhythm and balance of each strophe. One factor that makes comparison difficult is that, surprising as it may seem, the division of the strophes into lines is quite different in the two volumes. One would assume that Callaghan's complete *Traité* follows Marteau's original edition (not available to me), but it is difficult to believe that the poet has not approved the recombination of lines that transform virtually every strophe of the Winters volume.

The following example will serve to illustrate both the hermetic charm of Marteau's organic imagery and the relative success of his two translators:

Hors des liens la floraison explore
en sinueux parcours la paroi de l'ogive,
ondule
comme dans l'oeil la rumeur
d'une prairie au vent de mai,

Free from all bonds, the lengths
of sinuous bloom explore
the pointed arch, and wave
in the eye like remote
prairie murmurs in the wind of May,

(Winters, p. 106-7)

Hors des liens
la floraison explore en sinueux parcours
la paroi de l'ogive,
ondule comme dans l'oeil la rumeur
d'une prairie au vent de mai.

Unshackled
sinuous lengths of bloom explore
the arched wall,
undulating in the pupil like a prairie
murmur of May wind.

(Callaghan, 26-27)

Callaghan does not shrink from converting Marteau's eye to a pupil, or from transforming the murmur of a prairie in the wind into a prairie murmur of wind. But he follows closely the relative lengths of the lines and their degree of grammatical dependency. Winters, even given the different (and to my taste more effective) arrangement of the lines, fails in her more faithful rendering of the words to maintain the spirit of Marteau's prosody. Her broken third line is particularly unfortunate. But either translation allows the nonFrench-speaking reader to grasp the schematic yet subtly drawn opposition between natural sensuality and cultural norms. The tendril and the Gothic archway, natural growth and cultural form, the one luxuriant, the other understated—the two antagonists in this lyric narrative of the Fall.

△

Robert Marteau is an old-fashioned poet, a believer in the power of the Word to reimpose a lost moral order on a world deprived of ritual. Generally humorless and impersonal, at times lacking in formal control, this poetry is nevertheless not to be taken lightly. One senses that this outstanding craftsman of images and verses is still working his way toward higher levels of formal integration. English-speaking readers, particularly those whose French is sufficient to compare text and translation, have an opportunity in these volumes to explore an enigmatic and compelling poetic landscape. △

Alter Sublime. CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY.
Coach House Press, 1980.

by DON BYRD

Dewdney's fourth book (i.e., *not* collection, miscellany) says things no one ever heard said before. The excellence of the book cannot be demonstrated by quotation. It is remarkable for its informing intelligence and its ability to sustain a charged surface. As I hear it at least, it is only in some of the short lyrics, when he seems to try to push a quantum beyond the sustained excitement and produce anthologizable little jewels, that the charge drops.

Sublime derives from *limen*, threshold, boundary, and is resonant with psychological, social, and occult matters. It means approaching a limit, thrusting *upward* toward a threshold, hence noble, magnificent. *Sub-*, however, is equivocal. It can situate us above as well as below the limit. We also have therefore sublim(inal).

Alter is, of course, "to change" but also "other." There is a sublime of things seeking entrance (unconscious—possibly more) and things seeking exit (Dewdney would say, nirvana). The closing sentence of *Alter Sublime*: "This is what is meant when one says, 'The poem always seeks the shortest distance between two points.' " If you alter one threshold, you alter both. The way up and the way down, etc., etc.

Dewdney quotes Sapir and Whorf and concludes: "In short the English language is a separate intelligence utilizing humans as the neural components in a vast and inconceivable sentience. The intact survival of this intelligence is threatened by one thing only, and that is the discovery and subsequent exploration of its plane of existence by ourselves, its human host." The sublime possibility of creation requires penetration of the subliminal and half-malignant intelligence of the living language.

The generation of poets born of WW II and after was taught by masters who find language a trustworthy medium or even more than a medium, a privileged repository. One thinks of the furniture in Spicer's room by which the martians deliver the poem, Olson's etymolgizing, and Duncan's "we had begun to see that language is faithful to itself." The younger poets have, for the most part, found language treacherous, perhaps precisely because it is

faithful to *itself.* We are tenuous, withdrawn from declaration—or have been. I think that's coming to an end. LANGUAGE—perhaps the best and most characteristic publication of the younger poets—might have been called FEAR OF LANGUAGE. It's been necessary, instructive. The first generation to live life-long with the A-bomb has processed its fear through every dimension.

The—perhaps fortuitous—result of this fear has been to short-circuit the usually slow process of dialectic evolution. Dewdney notes the dialectical upheaval in Jamaica and says that it "is primarily configured by sympathetic magic." In North American poetry, it has been configured by fear—not as noble an impetus perhaps—but a decade of white-knuckled free-fall has left us in new territory. Dewdney is solidly grounded there and is beginning to send back maps.

There begins to appear in Dewdney and a few other poets of the post-war generation a possibility in language which strikes me as new. A big claim, I know, but I am not aware that there has been a comparable discovery—a previously unknown *form* (form!) of linguistic energy—since Pound began to construct a poem from disjunctive, ideogrammatic radicals.

I am not sure of how to speak of this development. Dewdney touches on it again and again in "Parasite Maintenance" but fails, I think, to name it or specify it clearly: "The poet cultivates a sort of voluntary paraphasia, and it is *this* function over-riding the House of the living language that reorganizes the neurochemistry & cascade reactions of the House into the cryptic & capricious circuitry of the Parasite." If I understand what he is driving at, these cascading reactions arise from (at least) three conditions: 1) a sharp-cutting kind of feedback, the organism of the language and the speaker moving along a boundary beyond which it would break into uncontrollable oscillation; 2) a peculiar refusal of resolution (*lyric* resolution?); 3) a constructivism which combines radically diverse orders of discourse, in order to create not a closed design nor an open, *directional* form but a continually *re*-opening formal surface.

The first of these conditions can be demonstrated, almost adequately, in Dewdney's remarkable use of the closed parenthesis. He began to use parentheses in *Fovea Centralis* as a way to indicate the tenuous irresolution caused by a kind of feedback which constantly revises the text and plays havoc with

short-term memory. In *Alter Sublime*, this somewhat mechanical device yields to Dewdney's subtle hands:

> I was thought walking towards you. I thought (were you saying something?) I was trying to prove something. I thought (I thought I was trying to save someone) I was trying to talk to you. (I was walking towards you) I thought (a lion was walking beside you) we could talk (trying to speak to you) to each other. I thought (you were speaking to shortchange yourself) I was trying to prove something. Trying (to spite) someone out. There.

There is, as I hear it, not simply an alternate text half-appearing in, or through, the text but a host of alternatives. At first, one may feel not merely *left* dangling but dangling throughout. After a while—and the only thing to do is read on—you see that this is the *only* ground, and that you can walk on it.

The irresolution—the second condition—might be thought of as the emotional-intelligentual (to get in the intelligence, without the intellect) equivalent of seminal retention. Just at the moment of emission (the lyric flight, the conclusion), Dewdney holds back, not with juiceless academic irony or a mystifying skipped grove, but willfully. If seminal retention turns the virtue of the physical seed to spiritual use, the effect here is a *physical* thrust which allows the language to turn (trope) beyond the immediate excitement. In "Think Pool," Dewdney writes: "Specialize in evoking the transition zones in someone's emotionality. Those ambiguous moments between emotions, between thought and action, when a person is in the process of switching personae."

The third condition, the constructivist surface, is required by the first two (and it is not beside the point that the text also includes some of Dewdney's brilliant collages). *Alter Sublime* might seem at first a collection of inspired bits and fragments—prose and verse, language ranging from the high romantic diction of "Dreadlocks at the Helm" to the scientific diction of "Parasite Control," languages drawing from different kinds of logic butting-up against one another. Unlike Poundian ideograms, however, the technique is not analytic. There is no great, coherent text in the sky to which the notes at hand aspire. It never returns to, or letches after, some original and longed-for state of rest and silence. The despair of Pound in old age and the half-despair of an army of lesser poets over language's coming unglued

in our hands, leaving us to contend with words that slip and slide, gives way to the incitements of homographic language: "Poly-connotation builds up a static charge within the poem. . . . The elevated charge consequently alters the lexemic status of the words in the poem. They become homographs (heteronyms), host to a halo of meanings, much like the masts of (a ship) at sea crowned by St. Elmo's fire. (This deck is rigged.)"

The electron accelerators, exploding golf-ball earth, the mushroom clouds over Mt. Palomar (Wilson?) or juxtaposed over an ancient fossil, which appear in Dewdney's excellent graphic work in the volume, do not seem benign, but they are not romanticized. The theodicy of life and death is over. There is plenty of work to be done.

"Language was given to us by aliens, as a tool," Dewdney writes. That is, I take it, the genii of language were so alien(ated) that they took up *words* as well as sticks and flint. Well, we didn't *know* the gun was loaded, but Dewdney is among the useful investigators who are showing us we need not point it at our heads.

"Before remora chemitrodes (calling Dr. Delgado) consciousness was a function of the brain, now the brain (calling Dr. Delgado) is a function of consciousness." △

When They Have Sense$_s$. ROSMARIE WALDROP.
Burning Deck. 1980.

by ROBERT PETERS

Imagine contemporary poems chiselled into stele—those stone tablets erected by various ancient cultures to carry news and messages. Imagine these stele set up in shopping centers (modern agorae) for the public to read. Imagine further that time has obliterated portions of these inscriptions; the residue offering mere hints of connected meanings. Time has effaced words from the stele. The result is minimalist writing. Individual words still intact are forced to carry more meaning than if the original lines were still whole.

Several readings of Rosmarie Waldrop's new book convince me that what she writes is Stele Poetry. I eschew "runic," because the drift of her work is

demotic (public and informal) rather than hieratic (mystical). Armand Schwerner's lost/found tablet poetry is an earlier modern example of Stele Poetry, and some of Zukofsky, Pound, and Creeley may be read this way. Waldrop's immediate models are a trio of contemporary French poets: Edmund Jabès, whose *Elya* and *The Book of Questions* Waldrop has translated; and the minimalists Claude Royet-Journoud and Anne-Marie Albiach.

In a recent letter to me, Waldrop acknowledges a kinship. She feels "close" to Albiach and Royet-Journoud, both of whom she knows personally, both of whom have been translated by her husband Keith, of Burning Deck Press. As for Jabès, she says, she tries to defend herself against him. And Jabès is a powerful force. His books are hieratic, grounded in a mysticism of space-ground-language. Words are "the preferred prey," he writes, "of the nothing" around them. We emerge from the Void; our utterances, therefore, also emerge from that Void (or, Infinite), and are, like us, on their trajectory back into that Void. Through the white margins (the white silences) around our words, the Void speaks. We have mysterious ties to the Void, Jabès says; and it is here where that Universe of hints and secrets "waits to be discovered" that our poetry occurs. That Universe contains a "white light" which never reveals itself through out work; yet, it makes our writing possible. Each of our words is a "determined stone" in the "impregnable forces" of our selves in the Void. The book is scripture: "God leans on God, the book on the book, man on his shadow," writes Jabès. The book is also "the place where a writer sacrifices his voice to silence."

Obviously, a thoroughgoing imitation of Jabès would oblige one to treat the grand hieratic, metaphysical problems he loves. (One thinks of John Cage rewriting John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.) Jabès has little patience with such mundane matters as the relationship between the sexes, or the ephemeral shifts in nature, or in evanescent Ashberyean moods. His books read like portions of an Existentialist torah.

Waldrop's intentions are more modest. She adapts Jabès' notions of silence, light, and white space for her own concerns. If I read her correctly, she is a poet of ordinary lives rendered in brief, fragmented lines. She builds with stones; but the messages she chisels are more private and lyrical than those on Jabès' edifices; and they are more truncated. She seems preoccupied with male-female relationships. Along the way she arranges forms

and words to reflect frozen qualities; her words often seem remnants of some larger lost whole. Jabès seems much more assured, and seldom sounds unsure of himself. Let me show what I mean by examining a portion of one of Waldrop's longer poems.

First, the disposition of the final letter of her title, dropped a bit below the line (WHEN THEY HAVE SENSEs), appears to have slipped from its affixed position on stone. What does she gain by this? Dual meanings emerge: when "they" have *sense* they shall have insight. When "they" have *senses* they will come to feel, touch, see, hear, and smell much more acutely than they are now able to do. They should then better comprehend these elusive poems. William Blake saw the fall of man as the loss of a vast angelic set of senses; Waldrop implies a similar loss as well. I must not overstress this connection, however. Waldrop is often more playful than Blake; viz., her series of poem-titles which read as if Gertrude Stein, that aficionado of the adverb, has written them. Waldrop's adverbs, in eurythmic gowns perform gladly, ecstatically, flowingly over the page. Gertrude would be pleased. Here are a few of Waldrop's titles: "The Senses Loosely or *The Married Woman*," "The Senses Continuously," "The Senses Barely," "The Senses Dumbly," "The Senses Visibly or *Two Very Handsome*," "The Senses Touchingly," etc.

In "Senses Barely or *The Necessities of Life*" (Part 3), Waldrop writes with maximum *stelic* effect, once the poem is underway. The opening trio of lines appears to deal with the rupture of a love liaison (a marriage, perhaps) elusively developed in parts 1 and 2. Here, the pair move into exile, hurrying like Lot and his wife through a cold town:

> they have no street in their hurry
> but leave with the cold
> and few household goods 1

There follows a hiatus of half an inch or so, which suggests that we have moved over to the next stele—to a pair of phrases set over to the right. The visual placement is important:

> a body of pure salt
> stationary abode 2

Has Lot's wife (or the abandoned modern wife) here turned to salt, her future abode ironically fixed forever, until rain and wind wear the salt down to nubbins in the sand? The Stele Mode seems to work here, as the reader

strives to complete the sense and flesh out good clause/verse lines from Waldrop's hints.

Then follows another hiatus between slabs/stanzas—this one a space or two longer than the first one, suggesting again that we are at a new stele. To give an accurate sense of the placing of the poem on the page, I shall here give the remaining stanzas, meticulously observing the spacings. The numberings of the stanzas (stelae) are mine:

preceded
by repetition
by empty bottles 3

the time it takes
to mix
the male and female
matter 4

none of the steps may be
omitted 5

changes into
unrecognizable
straight lines 6

"she was with him"
the day after
in relative order
whereas 7

the necessary eye
of the sun
overgrows 8

Fragment 3 is cryptic, despite its seeming to flow grammatically within its form. A possible reading is that before the wife turned to exile, her life was salt. It was boring—a matter of repetitions and empty bottles. Mr. and Mrs. Lot were like bottles emptied, drained of love. After another break, a new inscription informs us that when the "mix" of male and female was complete, the marriage was over. The *Mystery* had lost its *mystery*, had become commonplace. Stanza 5 is an observation, almost Orphic in its insight: there is no shortening of the route that linked males and females must take, towards becoming salt. This moment of commentary is forceful since it

is set off by itself, and has a stele all of its own. We linger and meditate on the writing; and the burden on us is enormous—like deciphering sphinx-like riddles. While our own lives are not in jeopardy if we fail to decipher accurately, the lives of the poem and the book containing the poem are; for, if we dislike the book, or resent the obligations Waldrop imposes, we may throw the book in the trash.

I read No. 6 as 3 fragmented lines with minimal linkage between them. "Changes into" sits by itself and seems to relate to changing into salt. "Unrecognizable"—yes, the human figure once alive and now salt is unrecognizable; also, the changes in the pair's love-life creating these results are unrecognizable. Whatever the meanings, the word sits isolated, the other words that might illuminate it have fallen from the stele. The "lines" are straight—which means that they can be recognized; and this is why I don't take "unrecognizable" as an adjective modifying "straight lines." Waldrop seems to be saying that our peregrinations away from portions of our lives that have chilled are indeed the primary (straight) lines of our lives.

A foreign voice next intrudes, expressing amazement that *she* is no longer with *him*. Obviously; for she has remained behind, turned to salt, and is no longer recognizable. If I were to suggest the words lost from this stele they might go this way. My additions are in the brackets:

> "she was with him" [the day they left the city.]
> The day after [they left the city]
> in relative order [he preceded her, in customary fashion]
> whereas [now she is no longer with him.]

The final fragment presents a dazzling close. Light shimmers over the entire event, "overgrows" it, and reduces it to the minuscule and poignantly human. Beneath the glare, the potency of the event (the destruction of a love/marriage) is reduced to a minor crescendo.

My metaphor of the stele, I hope, does give some idea of how Waldrop's poetry works. The burden on the reader is most of the time welcome. Waldrop assumes that her reader, willing to decipher her meanings, will relish the hunt and the verbal play. For, finally, these poems turn on verbalism—the *word* is as important as the *message*. And my efforts to wrench a continuous prose meaning of a narrative sort is possibly a violation of Waldrop's intentions. I don't feel though that I am entirely perverse in trying. I need to register some sense as I move through this book. And if I am

old-fashioned in this, I refuse to apologize. I have merely tried to explain via a metaphor what I have found useful in reading Waldrop. I will say, however, that I find her intriguing and intelligent. I hope I am not one of the "cannibal spirits" she mentions who do "violence to words." Read the book and make your own judgments. All of the poems do lend themselves well to my stele metaphor. Perhaps the motif may be useful in defining and reading other contemporary poets.

Because of her preoccupation with a special experimental poetry being written in France, Waldrop is an unusual poet. Most American poets seem to revere Spanish and Latin American writers, among foreign poets, perhaps because these writers create more continuous, less-truncated poems, with more straightforward images. If one sees Vallejo, Neruda, and Paz as beef-red, Waldrop and Jabès are white—their neutral tones reveal an obsession with moving poetry into worlds of abstraction and meditation, worlds where furniture is largely absent and from which we are invited to fashion a private metaphysic of silence. Jabès wrote: "I do not exist except in relation to the space of a word uttered. . . . Between the word heard and the word to be said, in this half-silence which is the last refuge of the echo, there is my place." △

Staves Calends Legends. THOMAS MEYER.
The Jargon Society: Jargon 88, 1979. $10.00 paper.

by DONALD WESLING

An example:

at least one bud
on that blackthorn
below Low Barn
this year, last, yes
& the year before

showed its white nib
earlier than the rest
ab la dolchor for Paul
Blackburn

Meyer is alright. These are poems written in his twenties, several of them as elegant and as fully realized as the one above. Where he's good, so I judge, is in the quick notation, the burst of desire or grief or friendship, the delight with English etymology and the sounds of English ("Idiolects," in his term: "fleen a grubbes/al gerymdon": explained in a bright note in the book); and in the gold-balance weighing of syllable, line, stanza. When the book does versions from Pindar (12th Pythian Ode) or from Anglo-Saxon poetry, whatever was researched is turned into keen modern English. But young Meyer has committed himself to some phoney archaizing, too, notably in the version of Aelfric's Colloquy which takes up too much of the middle of the book with its slack measures, and in the arch notes on the "faery" of folk-ballads, and in the mock-ballad (not mocking enough) which brings the late middle ages back as nostalgia, "The Telling of Sir Thomas Valentyne." The super-literary quality of the legends in the book may be one phase of the search for an adequate subject, but on this showing it is doubtful any more literature can be made from medieval magic. The Jargon Society has printed the poems with stark beauty, but has indulged the author too much by putting on the back-cover and frontispiece a picture of chalice and grail, heart and cross, emblem of the author's more ineffectual archaizing. Surely there is more than enough subject matter in America in the twentieth century, in anybody's ordinary experience if it could be understood, and surely Meyer can make a more compelling autobiographical legend; as for the staves, no problem whatever there. △

The Pronouns: A Collection of Forty Dances for the Dancers. JACKSON MAC LOW. Station Hill, 1979. $3.95.

by BARBARA EINZIG

The publication of this book is a happy and welcome occasion for many of us long acquainted with the work of Jackson Mac Low. *The Pronouns* were created in 1964 but until now have been unavailable, except in a privately circulated mimeographed form and a deluxe limited edition from Tetrad Press. As with the *Light Poems* (Black Sparrow, 1968) and *Stanzas for*

Iris Lezak (Something Else, 1971), we find Mac Low holding the prism of his systematic chance operations up to a word source (in this case, an 850-word Basic English Word List), diffracting a pure and brilliant poetry.

The Pronouns developed out of the *Nuclei for Simone Forti*, a card pack of actions. After two performances from these cards (by Simone Forti and then Trisha Brown), Mac Low composed the "1ST DANCE – MAKING THINGS NEW" for dancer Fred Herko: "He makes himself comfortable/& matches parcels. . ." After then composing a "she" poem for Trisha Brown, the poet decided to write a dance-instruction-poem for every word listed as a pronoun in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. As is his disciplined but flexible wont, forty dances seemed enough, but here they are in print, along with: "Some Remarks to the Dancers (How the Dances Are To Be Performed & How They Were Made)"; "Reflections on the Occasion of the DANCE SCOPE Issue," a 1974 statement of poetics; a 77/78 statement entitled "The 'THEY' Manifesto," calling for the use of "they" instead of the more cumbersome "he or she" or the generic "he"; and some black and white photographs by Peter Moore from the performances of eight of the *Pronouns* dances during the *3rd Annual New York Avant Garde Festival*, 10 September 1965.

The Pronouns are intended to be read aloud as poems or to be realized as dances, or to be simultaneously realized as sound and movement. As with many of his previous works, Mac Low calls for the "active collaboration of performers &/or audience." Reading *The Pronouns* as a book, in conjunction with the accompanying documents, one is struck by the integrity of their conception, performances, history, and possibilities. As Jerome Rothenberg states: "Mac Low is the master of a poetics that goes further than that of any contemporary poet towards defining what poetry has always been about," what Gertrude Stein regarded as calling upon the name of anything over and over. Pronouns are often heard as "empty" words, standing in for someone, but here they exist in their (its, anybody's, whatever's) own right; given attention as language, within a context of ever changing and repeating events, their qualities are pronounced and distinguished:

> She seems to come by wing,
> & keeping present being in front,
> she reasons regularly . . . .
>
> (2nd DANCE – SEEING LINES

Presently one of these skirts a rod,
& another of these does something down on the floor,
attacking another of these,
while the rest of these question these two,
who answer by putting off something.

(14th DANCE – DOING SOMETHING UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF COMPETITION)

Which begins by giving falsely?

& then which gives a bit or does something elastic,
even though having the chest between two things,
while saying things about making gardens?

(32nd DANCE – GIVING ENOUGH OF ANYTHING TO ANYONE)

At the beginning none makes a structure with a roof or under a roof,
& none gets news.

Is it then that none has a letter over one eye?

(39th DANCE – SEEMING TO COME BY WING)

We can read the instructions to the dancers as poetics: dancers are free to choreograph the poems themselves but are "required to find some *definite interpretation of the meaning of every line* of the dance poems they choose to realize. Above all, no line or series of lines may be left uninterpreted & unrealized simply because it seems too complicated or obscure to realize as movement (&/or sound or speech)." This is entirely consistent with his DANCE SCOPE statement, dated "1965, with minor revisions 8/29/74, 3/30/78 & 2/22/79": "The poet creates a *situation* wherein she or he invites other persons & the world in general to be co-creators. The poet does not wish to be a dictator but a loyal co-initiator of action within the free society of equals which it is hoped the work will help to bring about."

Jackson Mac Low has given many readings of *The Pronouns*: I was present at one of them in Milwaukee in 1975. He read with the dogged precision and good humor so uniquely his: the actions and pronouns recurred, but with each recurrence they were given equal voice. Slowly the audience, many members of which had been required by their teachers to at-

tend, emptied out, but this only improved the acoustics. I felt that I was attending an enactment of Gertrude Stein's revelation that "one hundred" is truly made up of "one and one and one and one and one and. . ." I look forward to the publication this year of Mac Low's *Gathas* by Membrane Press and his *Representative Works* by Ross-Erickson and would give back to the poet, in dedication, his 10th DANCE – COMING ON AS A HORN:

Thou comest by.

& then thou goest about between & through unserious-seeming
goings-on,
& thou hammerest.

Presently thou art making a bridge & giving it to someone,
making decisions,
& making a cake.

Thou gettest out with things,
& thou gettest insects.

Thou comest against something or thou fearest things.

Thou dost something in the manner of a sister whose mind is
happy & willing,
thou writest with a bad pen,
& either thou puttest something slow under an insect,
& thou hast or seem'st to have serious holes,
albeit thine ending be one wherein thou reactest to orange hair. △

Ranger (Volume I). THEODORE ENSLIN.
North Atlantic Books. 1978.
Ranger (Volume II). THEODORE ENSLIN.
North Atlantic Books. 1980.
Yellow Lola: Formerly Titled Japanese Neon (Hello La Jolla, Book II). ED DORN. Cadmus Editions. 1981.
Horse Sacrifice. CHARLES STEIN.
Station Hill Press. 1980.

by BILL ZAVATSKY

I wish I could report myself the virtuous reviewer and say that I have read all of the nearly 700 pages of Theodore Enslin's two-volume poem, or five books of a poem. Why haven't I? Because the level of abstraction and ostensible lack of connection within and from section to section of this immense work drive me away. Enslin operates within the tradition of those poets who brought us closer to the way we really talk, to American speech. Much of *Ranger I* and *II*, however, sets up a negative pole to Pound's dictum about composing in the cadences of ordinary speech: it is that talk, run-on, creates a kind of a-poetic black hole capable of swallowing up even the finest sensibility, or the most dedicated attention-span. Here is the opening of part XXXVIII from *Ranger I*:

Intensity—
or white heat—
(red or blue or white.
So what about it?
Art doesn't improve
(nor do men)
They both change—not much.
So—what about it?
How does the change occur?
where?
is it?
Do the seeds flower
to a final fire?
What is implicit?
Why should anything
be?
or have no being?
(Even in strong sunlight,
the threat of rain,
and the earth waits
swollen.
Breaking against it—
nothing but the head—
the darkness
assumes,
subsumes,
a cloud—
Or smoke?
White heat, or workings.

Enslin's method: to catch every droplet of his thought, even banalities like the above. The problem is that over hundreds of pages, over thousands of lines, every thought isn't important, and Enslin seems not to know this, or to care. "Nothing but the head" is right. We get little feel of space, location, the physical world, here—only mental space. It isn't enough. A kind of claustrophobia takes hold of the reader—this reader, at least—almost from the opening lines, a strange feeling to have on a voyage into a poem as long as this. Finally what initially appeared as rigor takes on the taint of the merely querulous, and grows exasperating in its narcissism. Enslin has written some lovely short poems, and his longer works (*Ranger* included) have been excerpted to advantage in the issues of *Occurrence* and *Truck* devoted to his work. This poem in its bulk will undoubtedly find its readers, but I must pass on it.

Yellow Lola by Ed Dorn ("Formerly Titled Japanese Neon," its subtitle tells us archly) "is more or less raw thought of which *Hello, La Jolla*," Dorn's most recent collection, "is the product." All one has to do is to pronounce both titles to see the author's wit at work, and perhaps there is no harm in seeing this volume as a collaborative *jeu d'esprit*. I am only sometimes among those who pleasure in the obliquity of Dorn's intelligence. *Yellow Lola* has half a dozen thoughtful or amusing snippets among its nicely-designed pages, but for my six dollars a few chuckles aren't enough. At his best here—and he is much better elsewhere—Dorn writes:

> It is said poetry audiences
> have one of the highest tedium tolerances
> in the business, and that
> this is proven by their willingness
> to sit still for nearly anything.
>
> However, I've always assumed
> the opposite, and that, in fact
> their steely determination
> is one of the finest instruments
> of modern times.

and:

> Success?
>
> I never had to worry about success
> Coming from where I come from
> You were a success the minute you left town

These last lines remind me why I've always thought of Dorn as the Clint Eastwood of American poetry. As a peek at his notebooks, which is what *Yellow Lola* is, "selected and in some cases arranged by Tom Clark," this collection will be of interest especially to the diehard Dornophile.

Charles Stein's low-key work has never much excited me, but I must admit that *Horse Sacrifice* turned my head. If these poems are hermetically sealed, they nevertheless open into an inner reality which for the most part I find utterly absorbing. They are oddly similar to Ron Padgett's excursions into mental imagery, but where Padgett tends toward the cartoon fantasies of Tex Avery, Stein determinedly moves toward Jung. (This isn't a value judgment; I like what both poets do.)

Most of the work here appears to be the product of exercises in active imagination, a kind of Jungian meditation, and when Stein is presenting the phenomena of his consciousness, the "movie" of his mental "trip," the results are stirring, real adventure in the livest sense of that word. When he labels his thought, veering from image toward explanation, the air escapes from the poem. Granted that, for him, presentation and rumination may be inseparable, but labelling doesn't make for very good poetry:

> We are hung
> suspended
> and in that respect the interconnections
> pre-exist their recognitions. This is not
> *visionary*
> in any *special* sense.
>
> I don't want to attain
> any longer any
> *special*
> condition of the mind
> and yet this is so because I see now
> there is no
> *natural*
> stand point
> in the sense of something common
> something previous
> some recognition
> earlier than thought
> common to all.

Fortunately, we never get more than a page of this, and the dead sections, boring as they are, don't swamp the vigorous process:

I sit
and keep going over
the same thought.

I am buried
at the bottom
of an animal
who cannot stop
breathing
and I accept this.

I do not attempt to force
my beast, my captor
to stop this interminable
rising
and falling
of the breath.

I am at peace
and reconciled
and I come to rest here.

Sometimes Stein's ear goes dead:

It spread out everywhere
and nothing happening in any
part of it
wasn't part of it.
. . .

He was alone
and very old
and everything there was
is
his parts.

But—and as I type out these quotations I realize how much the whole poem in which they reside has to be read—there are glorious moments as well:

I am sitting in the house
and think to become as quiet
as anything there is.
I think to let
all the molecular displacements
continue and the one
fructifying
ray
penetrate
each consequent
condition
and I propose to follow the flow
thought upon thought
penetrating and residing
within each consequent
propositional state.
All the looms
are running at once.
All the clay wheels
are spinning
because of the action
of the foot of each
of the women
kicking the kick wheels
everything
is
at the same time
running by the continuation
of their own original energies.

"Bus Trip," one of the book's longer poems, shows Stein handling the realization of manifold identity in the dream in a beautiful way, simply and clearly, using just enough repetition to counterpoint and heighten. The title poem begins promisingly enough but succumbs to programmatics—in this case, myth shoved down its throat. Division into parts doesn't help the flow, and here the introduction of movie material (a mention of the horse-killing in *The Godfather*, for example) cheapens the poem. In fact, "Horse Sacrifice" and "Song" seem to belong to a different book altogether.

But despite patches of thetoric and the occasional annoying nod of discipleship, Stein has found a channel to his own imagination. When his mind is moving and seizing the gorgeous or gritty images as they wind upwards in the spine or shiver from the brain, Stein carries the reader effortlessly into his discoveries. If his next book grips me as much as *Horse Sacrifice* I will have to go back and re-read everything he has done. △

Vingt poètes américains.

Paris: Gallimard, 1980.

by David R. Smith

Vingt poètes américains (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), a bilingual anthology, is a welcome attempt to introduce French readers to "l'explosion de la poésie," which has taken place in the United States in the second half of this century. It is welcome, but, sad to say, as with all anthologies which pretend to be representative, it is also vexing. The problems here suggest a combination of editorial eccentricity and confusion.

The confusion is clear. Jacques Roubaud, a mathematician and dedicated *amateur de la poésie américaine*, conceived the anthology in 1972 and completed it in 1975; but Gallimard delayed publication until last year and in the interim asked the French poet Michel Deguy to help bring the project to its present state. A cover note indicates that the introduction is by Roubaud and that the choices are by Deguy and Roubaud. There is a niceness in what the note does not say. The book seems to be no one's baby, a child of two fathers, neither of whom claims it.

That there are editorial eccentricities is equally clear. Roubaud's *présentation* lets us know that the "absence of R. Creeley is independent of the compiler's wishes"—a question of royalties, surely; but it does not do so well in explaining other exclusions and inclusions. Indeed, as with Byron, I wish he would explain his explanation. Whimsy seems to govern the editorial process, which is the more unfortunate given the importance of the task. According to Roubaud, general sentiment in France has it that there has not been an American poet of importance since Whitman ("chacun sait que Pound est un Européen"). Since the book's aim was to introduce a generation unknown to French, the few Americans who were known—Ginsberg, Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, who, he indicates, are not very interesting anyway—could be eliminated. He was left, nonetheless, with a very large number to choose from. The job was complicated by French ignorance of even this generation's forebears. Williams, Stevens, Cummings, Olson, O'Hara, he writes, have been paid at best sporadic attention in France, where no one has heard of Zukofsky, Oppen, Spicer. With those "givens" and a logic that escapes me, he then includes (perhaps with some help) Olson, Zukofsky, Oppen, Spicer and excludes Williams, Stevens, Cummings, O'Hara. And then, apparently still talking about forebears, he asks in something less than a *sequitur*, "Who in 1975 knows Gertrude Stein as anything more than a collector of anecdotes about Picasso?"

It is thus that *Vingt poètes américains* opens with Stein's "Stanzas in Meditation," translated by Roubaud. These are generally good translations, despite one or two occasions when the ellipses in Stein's cryptic syntax are gallicly filled in. Here, of course, is a problem basic to any such undertaking as this. The grammatic ruptures and syntactic disjunctures necessary to the casually converging yet simultaneous states of mind, streams of consciousness, as they have entered contemporary American poetry, do not lend themselves easily to translation of any kind, perhaps least of all to French with its grammatic self-consciousness and need for completion and elegance. But if the lines of filiation he was talking about are at stake, a question lingers. What is Stein doing here if Williams is not? Roubaud makes no effort to justify her presence aside from his apparent desire to rescue her from the reputation he has assigned her.

The problem of exclusion-inclusion does not end here. Nathaniel Tarn (who was born in France, speaking of lines of filiation) is included; and his

work is certainly worth it; but others who seem more central to the explosion of poetry in question—Kelly, Snyder, Bly, Ignatow, for example—are not. Why are the women represented only by Denise Levertov and Rosmarie Waldrop? Where are Sexton, Rich, Plath, Wakoski?

The translations themselves are generally very good, though there are a few bloopers. Zukofsky, for example, sometimes escapes his handlers who in one case become so tangled in his intricate patterns of sound and sense that they miss one and then the other. Anne-Marie Albiach's rendering of the first three lines of "A 9" illuminates the problem.

> An impulse to action sings of a semblance
> Of things related as equated values,
> The measure of all use is time congealed labor. . . .

This becomes:

> Un élan vers l'action propose une semblance
> De choses données en equité de dosages,
> La mesure toute usage est tempes glacial en son effort.

Why not "chante" in the first line? That would have preserved the assonances, approached the alliteration, and rendered the sense. The subordinate clause of the third line ("all use," pronoun and verb) becomes adjective-substantive in a line that makes less than sense. Nor does "temps glacial en son effort" mean the same thing or render the compressed senses of "time congealed labor." One could hope that a translator would understand the language better than that. And Roubaud has troubles in "A 22." "Blow blue up against yellow" becomes "soufflent bleu haut contre jaune." It makes a kind of sense, but not the one Zukofsky intended nor the one English contains. A better dictionary and a little consultation would have helped.

Indeed, some of the best translations in the volume (and surely among the most difficult) are those of Robert Duncan, Charles Olson, and Clayton Eshleman; and they all benefitted from council and conference. Deguy and Margaret Brooks translated Duncan; Deguy, Roubaud, R. Skodnick, and K. White did the Olson; and Deguy, Michel de Fornel, Janet Litman and Didier Pemerle the Eshleman. In "The Name Encanyoned River" (included here), Eshleman ironically says that "translating is a child's / game," but the proposition is not literally true, as Ms. Albiach's efforts amply prove. It is a

poet's game and equally a scholar's. The two, of course, can be one; who would want to draw a line between feeling and knowing? Translating (particularly this often difficult work) requires a variety of talents, as is amply illustrated by the success of the joint efforts led by Michel Deguy. △

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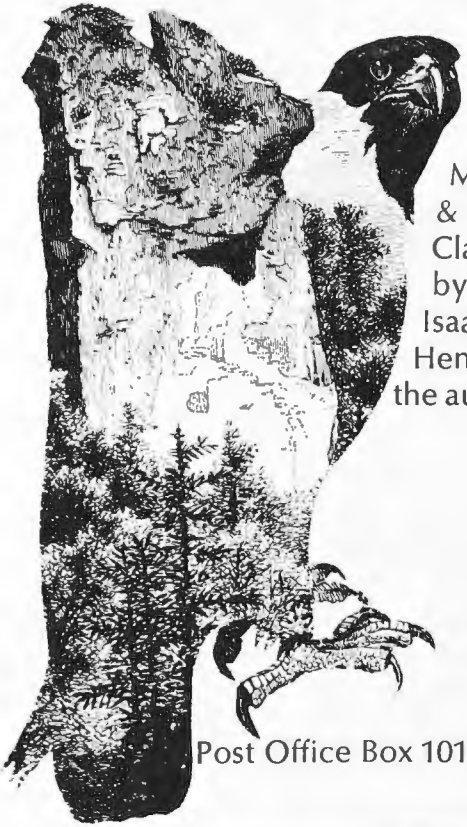

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Robert Duncan

PASSAGES

In Blood's Domaine

The Angel Syphillis in the circle of Signators looses its hosts to swarm
mounting the stem of being to the head
Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Swift
are not eased into Death the undoing of Mind's rule in the brain.
"Yet it is in spirit that nature is timelessly enveloped." And, as above, so below there are
spirtochete invasions that eat at the sublime envelope, not alien but familiars
Life in the dis ease radiates invisiblities devour my star

and Time restless crawls in center upon center cells of lives within life conspire
the Angel Cancer crawls across the signs of the Zodiac to reach its
appointed time and bringing down the carnal pride bursts into flower—
Swift, Baudelaire, Nietszche into the heart Eternal of what Poetry is
answer to the genius and science of the Abuss. The first sign of this advancing power
shows in Fear that goes clear to the bone to gnaw at the marrow
the seeres Lou Andreas-Salomé sees long before the hour arrives
[mais] "Tantôt sonnera l'heure où le divin Hasard,
où l'auguste Vertu, ton éspouse encore vierge" where black the infected blood
gushes forth from Rilke's mouth, from his nose, from his rectal canal
news his whole body bears as its truth of the septic rose
Où le Repentir même (oh! la dernière auberge!)

Lovely then
that Death come to carry you away from the moment of this splendor
that bursts the cells of your body like a million larvae triumphant
come to life in the fruit All the spreading seeds, the viral array
taking over flesh as the earth is it scarlet eruptions
And the pneumatics torn in the secret workings of the Angel Tuberculosis
(No, I do not speak of the Evils or of Agents of Death but these Angels
are attendants of lives raging within life, und these Wings we dread
viruses, bacili come home to thrive in us o6u tout te dira
"Meurs, vieux lâche! il est trop tardi!" Die, you old coward,
It is too late. I feel the ringing of tomorrow's bell.

But what ate at Pound's immortal Mind? for the Cantos, for Les Fleurs de Mal—
what malady? what undoing-of-all-Good workt behind speech?
are the matter I come from: these poisons I must know the hidden intensions of
where "This coil of Geryon" (Djerion) said Mr Carlyle, who now becomes
Thomas Carlyle, not in Congress, but the genius of "Hero Worship" his (our) congress
And if I know not my wound it does not appear to suppurate? in this intercourse
"Adolf furious from perception" —does this though refer to Hitler?
Link by link I can disown no link of this chain from my conscience.
Would you forget the furnaces of burning meat purity demands?
There is no ecstasy of Beauty in which I will not remember Man's misery.
Jesus, in this passage (he is like a man coming forward in a hospital theater)
cries out: I come not to heal but to tear the scab from the wound you want to forget.
May the grass no longer spread out to cover the works of man in the ruin of earth.
What Angel, what Gift of the Poem, has brought into my body
this sickness of the living? Into the very Gloria of Life's theme and variations
my own counterpart of Baudelaire's terrible Ennuie?

Ron Silliman

Skies

for Alan Bernheimer

I

THE SKY IS A GREY PLANE tending toward white, without depth, without detail, barely with light. To the east tattered clouds patch the blue, but to the west a dense, grey bank of fog. Above, or to the east, the fine white mist is not visible-because-thicker, but against the background of the next yellow hill it rushes by in light puffs. Wisps, blowing east, no constancy of shape. Stillness in all directions, mountainous scoops of cloud. Pure hot blue air, little breeze. Clouds gather, but so slowly they go unnoticed. Heat will cause the plums to drop, white butterflies steaming up from pink roses, sun lighting cobwebs on the fence. The greys of the cloud are uneven, near-black folded into off-white, layerings. As the gray fades slowly to blue, all that remains are a few white cottony clumps, higher than the rest. Low damp cool fog, suspended rain. When the clouds rise, rain falls. The sun dissolves in the mist to a glare. A few small puffs of white are pushed by the breeze. What are you, Never-Very-There, so everywhere, emptying, wind's vessel, cloudherd? Invisible forces thrash the trees. Blue leaks in a white wall. But the grey wall is bricklike, composed of units of irregular shape, clouds high up against the sky. Today a herd of large ones, billowy with dark undersides, pass over as slow as ships. A window edits the sky. A lack of shading in the morning fog foretells its burning off. The light a dull white. The smell of rain. What from

the satellite photo is a spiral is unbroken sameness for days from the porch. First seen, blue is colorless, mere dark breakings in the sharp glare. Morning's damp lawn registers night's precipitation, struggling thru the thick rising fog. Deep greys mottle the dull sheen. As if the sky were a gray sponge pressed right to the ground. An outline as of a wing in white, alone against the blue, shreds. Heavy whites, restricted palette. The blue tower atop Portola Heights hidden by the fog, the row of trees immediately below reduced to a silhouette (the descent of the sky). Like a cold sweat, it sticks to your flesh. It rises like a veil, revealing all that surrounds you. The glare is intense, but colorless. One does not feel enclosed by blue. The wind belies a clear sky. Before dawn, light bleeds from the horizon. The sun bores a hole in fog. After the burnoff, a layer of alto-cumulus, grillwork. The song of birds without the sight of birds. Squint-light. In the morning the moon is in the west. The sun tentative amid clouds. One plane gives the sky proportion. The cloud mixes with the grasses. The sharp light of the sun wedged behind. Behind the cloud a pulse of light moves slowly west (a game of infinitely few parts). Today's cloud rises slightly, so that building & trees are clearly seen. You can smell it (rolling thru the streets). The moment, mid-afternoon, one fog finally burns off the first wisps of another begin to blow in off the sea. By the time the sun appears it's midway thru the sky. The next day, heavier & lower. Then thicker, cooler. Although not visible you can feel it. Just a thin line, brighter than all the rest at the horizon, a sign of its rising. The sky in the room is called air. Just enough haze to blanch the blue. They don't "break up" but drift apart, becoming slighter, dissolving into themselves. The gloom. In the clouds, clouds form & roil. One morning, it's as if this never happened, the hot sky brilliant & clear (sounds carry further on a windless day). Then it's not. The sun in the east bright amid light clouds, small & overlapping, but out the windows on the other side of the house the sky is one vast, black wall. Even in the middle of the clearest day, it's never the same

hue throughout. At the edge of the cloud mass, wisps & strands tatter & drift off, dissolving as they go. A white film, filtering & diffusing light, stretched over the whole sky. Where the cloud is its thinnest, the hint of a blue tint. Sun's light, even before it reaches the horizon, scatters thru layers & pockets of cloud. Cotton curtain, to soften the glare, room's morning lamp. In the valley between two small hills, birds fill the air. Scattered, small, these clouds push evenly, a slow parallel movement across the afternoon. Weekend pilots thread the sky (web of no design). The bird in the cage on the porch in the breeze is in it. Shadowless grey light of foggy morning. Tho nearby, these houses ebb in the damp cloud. It absorbs heat. Light is held in particles of moisture. Later, breezy gusts break it all up until one, standing on a porch high on a hillside, can barely make remnants out. Waking, even before you realize that you hear it, you recognize the sound of rain. It waits in the eucalyptus for the wind to shake it free. Grey or not or dark, the sky is without points of reference, hence any sense of direction, not contingent on the land or water below, save these clouds that never rest (imagine maps or satellite photos in which the clouds remained constant while the seas & continents changed shape hourly to accomodate this motion). Fuzzy drizzle, low stratus. A chill damp. The wind off the sea seems trapped below the clouds, pushed, rushing through the valleys & over the glistening surfaces of the low hills. Shaped, defined, by the houses, window, plum tree. Black tufts. Long, thin clouds seem airbrushed high against the blue, the sun coming up broken behind a dark, eastern cluster. The dew, streaming in the morning light, rises. Stars visible in the city. The fog settles (everything absorbs moisture). Just before dawn, delayed by a high bank of clouds to the east, the muted light transforms these hills to pastels (impressionism). The herds of wild stratus.

△

Allen Fisher

The artist's third monologue

The ground beneath me
    public burial site laid out garden
suburbs around the metropolis plague

Soon it will morning loss of
    an industrial sublime. Turn the light
on. Who turned the lights
    shifted the workers on-phase

After The Great Fire
    Evelyn regretted I was not allowed to take advantage
to rid the City of tombs

Walk the cracks the rain black
    paving separated
yellow syrup pulsings
scream of wishing on the surface of need
Threw a vase of violets from the skylight
shattered glass flowers
spreading in the wall

Cemetery suburbs costed by a land of absentee landlords
    tombs of Joint-Stock Companies
scales of charges for interment

How many particles released these nights this

sulphur dioxide dawn dissolves
in what organically-tempered angle

Sit still and hear this buzzing break the air

Catacombs, vaults, graves
Memorials, broken columns, tomb-houses
disinfected housing, frozen shopping centres,
cars scattered over underground parks
Altar-tombs, monumental urns, sarcophagi
Medallion portraits, insignia, flower beds
Neon signs, framed hoardings, bronzed slabs

Feudal and aristocratic life in christendom
selfishness and cruelty unsurpassed by pagan Rome

May 28th 1977 noted
Systems Organisation. Fertilisation
and Importation.
Emotion.

In digging the foundations for houses found
funeral urns
ashes of bones coins to hold eyes
broke Goodman's field burial ground to pieces
for us christians it was hot work

I stand fearless at the Barbican watchtower
between Ludgate and Fleet ditch
a museum to refine the remains

See Moorfields as site
of Britons in London
as "aboriginal establishment", Romans

broke remains to pieces

The held cracking
without space
moving
    aura
taking possession of trembling
Built underground shelter
on the bombed site

Stamped tiles repeating P-B-LON
Probatum Londinii
Proved of the proper quality of London
or the first Britons in London
Prima Britonium Londinii
making London seat
centre for provinciality
These tiles broken to pieces

Remains I gather amongst
shrapnelled wall scarred limbs
flickering lamps ruptured vessels
    throughout line of High street
bundles of telephone wires

Rummaged the ground
failed to discover traces Diana and Apollo temples
found sacrificing bowls bearing Diana's signifier
    in Woodward's cupboard
said found at St.Paul's

Night shifts up the hill the tower block's
shadow

Foster lane
excavating for New Goldsmith's Hall
fifteen feet below street in stratum of clay I came to
Stone altar of Diana
a tree the remains of inscription
a tripod
a sacrificial vessel a pig's skeleton
the temple once thought under St.Paul's
beneath Insurance foundations

Considerable remains the memory
Reedmont field, Islington
Suetonius Paulinus contested Boudica
Battlebridge
a trial of noble butchers
  determines who interprets my synthesis
financial backing making my decision

Within throes of stock exchange
the battle won
women skewered lengthways
in a wall parallel to Thames
the Old Steelyard
bone pins, styli, spatulae, iron keys
Roman bronze of a brilliant hue from damp
Bricks, coins, wood ashes
Inscription in runic KINA, common ancestor
instruments for torture
an equal number of remains from
Anglo-Saxon, Norman and Medieval nobles

6.a.m.	Genetic Disease in Man
6.20	History of the Macromolecule
6.40	Music Interlude

6.20 p.m.	Bias and Judgement
6.40	History of Statistical Certainty

On pennies of William Rufus, another Isis
the mint asylum in Southwark
fragmented memories
tube train inscriptions into London Clay

Whatever you buy
there must always be one adult
paying the required fare
and at least one child
holding a ticket

From Alleyn's Bear Garden
walked through the burnt method of a nation
The Globe, The Rose, The Hope, The Swan
stages to cash speaker's memories
simple signifiers of complex faith
City Lead Works, Rose Cafe, Courage Brewery
replace these theatres
a maintenance shop converted into a Tudor tomb
for tourists at The Anchor
Clink coshes and chains on the walls
City Lead Works purchased by Shell Petroleum
to enhance their interests in distribution of tin

A hydrocarbon dawn numbs the questions
hammers breaking away the fettle
men unable to spit sixpence
women pouring ladled metal
their shins wrapped in protective paper

Elliotson's chemist its golden key

rubbled beneath laid out garden a cage
without trees

The pavement rain burns the metals
lifts children through the drain bare
into this overland sewer

"What Spectre of Prophecy, what delusive Phantom?"
not a bergamot to carve I LOVE

Pallets made to be flooring
over a graveyard of rats
stamped with a conservation order
    from the department of the environment

In repression of biological memory
in active faculties of forgetting
    a collective made
words instead of things
signs not effects

Traced directly on the body
a system of cruelty and selfishness
as natural
a mnemotechnics of torture
for a nation of bankers and banked
exhausted from the day's inscriptions
lay back to be signed and resigned

Graffiti on the garden wall
a fist and inscriptions
PUNKS RULE: WORKERS UNITE
on the bench three alcoholics
building a space-ship

Rachel Blau DuPlessis

Ode

I.

Interior of stone is stone of water, water in stone the lichen skein
in water, weft Stone interiors are emptiness spaced wide
all that be empty is all wavering full Interior of wood from want,
joined
of water, woven threads of void Dark over dark, dark
Arm-wings folded round the heart pulse within the heavy laden
blackness
of the long clicking night.

II.

Flute flow
follows
bluing, to chee
p̈ watery
Bronyx
cackle.
Thrush any
thrushway
feathers its nesting heart in
egg brown speckle
hatched from onyx night when
round down dawn sliver

silvers
rivers
o

III.

Toe tries
to twig
and then when
double double beat
it
flyz hup

One red reed reach
just one red
leaf just one
red
poep
rd
ha

IV.

Be
needle's gold outpointing light thru fan-thin lines in leaves
in which reverberates the note hard hit: irradiated
love

whose every single
cell sounds all

as white, as light
the color chord entire;

each never-rounded
arcing shell
binds birth to ocean hearts
as much as burst with dark.

V.

Blue breath warbles watery fours
gold breath threes on earth
red spot tuneful voice from high
moist and dry
cold and hot

pulls the massy birth along
sequacious of the lyre's
leaf/leaf

VI.

Swung over by green star-luminous bugs
under hairy leaf under swollen leaf
half-hollow spots of living light
mistaking earth for heaven
so vast the ancient sounding
spheres so loose
the braiding flimsy
shimmer

everlasting you
over and under under:

black hold among holes hope among holes black
stones green flashy bugs woof
steady in the air that threaded planet plurals;

space, size,
affirm another orb or two;
hums up inside the wires in the neck
a warp dark tree

Muck heads in the mudrich mulch under
Night-fresh stars celestial sprouting over
specks of itchy antfast journeys
under earth's plain black bleak place and
white beaked over-eager
time:
those
underplayed and thrice displaced
designs,
random,

that untune the sky.

A Note about *The "History of Poetry"*

The poems here, in *Sulfur* 1, and elsewhere (*Paper Air*) are from a sequence called *The "History of Poetry*," whose working title comes from a line in a critical article by Joanne Feit Diehl: "She cannot forget the history of poetry because it is not hers."

(*Feminist Studies* 6, 3) The sequence concerns my facing, being haunted by the Western Lyric tradition, speaking as a woman poet. "Woman" has always been a central site and icon for that lyric tradition as a specially stressed sign, rather more rich than a sheep or daffodil. One might say that the poetic tradition is made up of lyrical/social objects which incorporate women in various ways. These objects stand as paradigms on which my poems comment, with a desire precisely not to reaffirm the conventions or narratives and therefore the ideologies which we already know. As far as I can sum up here and now, my writing involves always trying to deform narratives, conventions and languages assumed to have magisterial status within our culture. One of the ways this occurs in *The "History of Poetry"* is by the insertion of lines from and references to other texts, with an eye to dissolving the older text as a canonical object. This has occured in the poems in *Sulfur*. Deformation, as I have been concerned with it in the myth poems in *Wells* (The Montemora Foundation, 1980) and here, is a struggle with the stuff that makes a text into a text: adequate grammar, understandability, culturally-resonant conventions, the charm of literary allusions, mandated sequences of events, sometimes even speech itself as opposed to aphasia, stutter, or the void. I might add that my poems have no desire or will (or power!) to stand as feminist-replacement-canonical-objects, but would by their presence criticize and resist that desire.

3 Sept. 81.

△

Bernard Bador

Progress

—Translated from the French
by Clayton Eshleman

The blinding of jacarandas heightened by summer's heavy cymbals.

The melody goes away to die under a rolling-mill of potato bugs, ardent myosoti spouses.

Under the flashes, faceless sucklings are flaying the dancers.

Turbid mutism of macaws quartered on a wheel of main-jibs, swollen with bear bites.

It is Tristan Tzara trampling the sacred wells of the peacock butterflies scythed by shamrock-machetes.

At the call of the termite-totems, pastel blue morays begin to lay tides, sleigh-bells pop under the murmering of heraldic sables.

O charisma of deluges! Hand-to-hand of turgescent mud into which asphyxiated walruses are sinking their tusks.

The Call of the Caverns

Tapir menses,
an orgasm for the blue ants
rescued from an abortive rutting
that evening
when the moon hanged itself from snow-capped
pussy sucker tongues.

Inanely happy, like a pregnant dense cloud,
the upright cyclops,
his member loaded,
blinds himself with vaginal oil
furrowed by the ovule of worlds.

In an intestinal pocket,
the opium-eater unfurls
the cloth of crimson flowers on the rock-like
rumbling of rejects on the raft of the Medusa
abandoned to the paralytic
calm of crepuscular spasms.

A band of sea-urchins,
praying in a stone garden,
have penetrated the mystery of rods,
killer ear-wigs
lodged under the moss of skulls,
sepulchres of mute musics.

A kleenex wipes
the amplitude of waves, a royal
crumple to dab out the eye's honey,
extractors of chimeres
weaned from treacherous scorpions.

A river grows numb,
malign jelly of grocery sorceresses
sewn at the four fears
of the fair of all men,
but the cockroaches,
do they—victims of defective
strata—ignore their executioners?

A necklace of heads,
torpor pendulums of subterranean
transfusions where sumps
strangle the light.
The agony of a bison—tornado of
guts and bellowings of stunned
hunters—has revealed
the communion of engravings
in the rock's grain.

Powerlessness

Only a song facing the red tide,
sweeper of pupils, miniatures of chaotic geneses.

But what can music and lyrics do
on the rotting enclosing-wall of our blind
hands groping among the foeti,
a pullulating cannibal tribe
on the alopecia areata of the sky?

From the bridge do you keep watch on the troubled
water, the mincemeat swarming with scabs,
scrofula hot for tender necks?

A man stretched on a crescent moon begs
the invisible archer to cut his ties to Hades,
to let him follow the arrow of fire.

But on night's mirror
only the vomitings of astrophagous gargoyles,
the faded reflection of the same old song.

End of the Walk

Carnival of rusted souls in search of moon
oil to lubricate this eye gear
buried under metallic moss. A note
breaking piano leads, briskly,
the diarrhea of disjointed shadows,
dried up stains where, papulous sequins,
the eggs of pythonesses, their breasts
swollen with curdled milk, are teeming.
Their secret desire remains: to sever
the bedbugs, that nibbling mass of tubercular
sun babies, off-springs, soul-orphans
flung to the rocks of oracles,
scrofulous peelings off eyes of glass.
Winds are choking there, a drowning
fanned by the bad breath of goats
defecating The Odyssey of Golden Guano.
Do you recall the sirens, those magpie
thieves, free of every cloud? One should
have listened to them; jagged
rocks of the flesh of ecstatic
victims—where can we find you?
Our wobbly incantatory dances raise
a dust of stingings in rut. Ah the titanic
wasp nest engulfer of the shipwreck of
the very last islets of refuge for
tentacle men! Painful contortions for a mere

drop of cervical sap. Bubbles
popping at the inert surface. Nothingness
wandering the deserter void of amnesiac
amnions sabering—to the blows of a scramasax—
a gluey colony of scolopendras, the question mark's
gaseous compositions of jealous gusts.

Bernard Bador's most recent collection of poetry is *Harakiri d'oursin* (Editions St.-Germain, Paris, 1981). He presently lives in Los Angeles. The poems here are from the manuscript of a selected poems of Bador, called *Sea-urchin Harakiri.*

△

Alison Watkins

Esperanto is the name of one who ridges the bright
hope of name. She is the arbitrary narration of
inner action. She is the behavior of a word-skein
language whose roots are common to no one

She becomes a bramble in the town of words
& in the city of broken conversation she turns
a blister on the blue feathers of the moon

into tears of language now rarefied she breaks
by the breath of nostrils who from their own late lair
spew forth the cool of morning or the night externalizing
air.

She bounds from the sight of sound
which flanks like silences the pan of her face---
that she has a face, that she would trade it in despair
for all the wealth and roots of name that she becomes

in order to tramp like silent roots of rain
into the chicory blue of nowhere to echo
nameless's name

but whose roots speak of beasts, speech, whose roots
are the burden of name.

Mantic Core

The curves of your hips seem to torment themselves
as if they wished to be independent even of what
created them. *(C.S.*

my own intentions
                tell me
what home is
                some kind of beast
heralded as the poverty
of a cycle of patched nexts

(jasper stone in beast's nest, dragon straw,
stray stairs, the optic of clouds)

all the night the beast is busy in my cycle
then I join her
and we day the magic she brings me to imagine

in the night's last longing you
slowly gather
                the miscellaneous

In her dream
she kissed the grey faced blacksmith
on the back of his occipital which opened
to mushroom forth a bird with a red mutch on its head.
The bird flew directly to the chimney,
the only remainder of house,
and passed through it from bottom to top
to become smoke which filtered into language.

In her dream the hazel of his eyes
became the mutchkin of bird who flew
from head to hollow of trees,
these, the only reminder of place,
a place from which the cries of this strange bird,
pluie, can be heard.

Pluie, pluie, the beg is in all ways for rain,
the rain to drench thirst, for rain to lift
the curse of not feeding the blacksmith his bread.

In the legend she became
the woman was baking when the smith
begged a bannock to stay his hunger:
she began in earnest to bake the break
but in the end was compelled to cling to all
she had made, and thus the curse was placed
that thereafter she would become as a poor woodpecker
destined always to bark in the hollow of trees
and then disperse her days crying pluie, tipping

her beak and typing the drum-roll whose audible
from thence forward would be taken as sign
for rain, for thunder.

In her dream
the recalcitrant woodpecker
condemned to cry before storms
became a dead son returning in the dead of winter
to revere his mother. He always wore birch
leaves in his hat.
He would enter town on foot carrying with him.
birch fronds and birch wine pressed from the sap.
He would serenade his way from house to house, meandering
where his peripety would take, earning what bread he could
from the attentive, who hung their respective heads
out windows or sat on respective porches or in the trees
where they beckoned him in deliberate tones.

Each fancy he womaned in her bones
not the bread she was quick to give,
but stone. The quarry he mined
became a path, a way land

in her dream.
She borrowed the stone
to make the dead son ask
where exactly is it lodged?

Demonstration of a Need

You place it in my hand, turn it on, tune it,
invite me to be television, I enter sixty percent
of suburban homes thirty eight percent of the day
and night. I deliver the soul from the practice
of problem. I become the issue of endless and mindless
operations of the composition of fields. I dispense
with the scientists. I call all politicans to the
broilers of their imagination. I transcribe the
specialized knowledge of experience into applications
of the principles of measure. I conscience measure.
I adjust.
I mend.
I wash.
I invade.
I breast.
I edge.
I thing.
I dance the morning of measure.
I carry the rain of edge.
I husband the congregation of language.
I hurricane the bright of heart.
I breathe the disservice of quest.
I ought the possible of mouth.
I dayline the light of milk.
I degree the tongue of mind.
I utter the father of bound.
I four square the mother of cavern.
I effort the skin of imagine.
become me.

The Tugboat Captain

So entrance into the river becomes penetration
& so a dagger & carried through
with the resolution of an old tugboat captain
who sleeps in a gold brass bed with credulous ceilings
and speaks articulate French with a lisp though he has it
in his head that color is value and value is tone and tone
a coordination of the soul not so much a room as a river
into and onto which he lowers his boat
to the shores of a great lake in a country to the north
where his daughter who would now be ninety
weaves a hundred inch four shuttle floor loom into coverlets
of old rhythms like Queen Anne's lace and spread
with rose-dapple colored names like the patterns made
by the long thread of ocean into a man.

△

Karin Lessing

Primavera

papyrus petals dust
shredded, their bright clothes
shrouds:

there - nowhere else! -
white ruins the brown fringed garland
flung, un-

written, *that* flash! and perilous
our own dying, much
being born. Therefore

she rises, green
foam in which the hills are steeped
and dawn

feathery, your face
as I touched it flown,
nacreous, the doves'

scooped
waves I remember the
first step taken, the dark glow -

daughter
of,
wind's pearl, *Primavera*,

then,
stepped on.

Terra Cotta Figures, Villa Guilia

in memoriam D. H. Lawrence

from dark
chambered rock, wide-
eyed, bulb

through the bulbs'
painted door

what spring
steeved you to light, laid

its brightness
about you

anche il vento even as wind

presses the leaf...

sunk, half
raised from clay, double-

fluted,
paired. as if they breathed

one another.

...on flowered stalks

was

what leapt through
your hand, un-

still, plunging ever, wave-
seeded

bronze,
in your mirrors,

the hills',

wheat

curved
under.

Vigil

After the marriage
ceremony's
ingoing, outgoing,
rowing
of voices, vows -

the village *mairie*
like
some cinereous mushroom
of the heart's
intent,
casts off the lamps'
soft shadows.

Numb,
the dial,
the grooved fingers.

Night,
what drives
the brooding,
incessant voices
of love's passage:

night-rovers
circling, black-
ringed.

Shadows, Firstcomers...

Shadows, firstcomers,
sparked and feathered,
you fall, you
dive, driving the spar
into the lung's nest.

No angel, but a maypole,
from crown to
tip toe, swirling
ablaze. How
can the rootless cones
unlock this glow?

Breath, as it winds. I hear
the coronated
heart pod snap,
black, coruscant,
near.

△

Gerald Burns

A Book of Spells

(lines 661-724)

The *miscellany* of Clactonian tools (but always a
place left, lovingly, for the thumb)
opposes Tayacian flash, the pimp's fedora
in the downtown shop where I used to buy bowlers
coveting the dude-gray one, but best as
broad Homburgs, seen through the back windows of cars.
A wait for gamma globulin, the handsome woman saying
her name like mine, Country walls pale yellow
thinking of an artifical rise on Long Island
by the railroad, testing out Darwin's remark
how many species in a little patch, of grass there are.
Told I've high blood pressure, the heart dissolving in salt
like fish put in the wrong tank. The shark
or whale (it was) at Coney Island, sick or unhappy
blimped about, the corridor lit by what came
though deep water and then glass, white.
A place for assignation. The electric eel a
finned organ. The San Antonio zoo
had a little bird the color of orange sherbet.
A small cap may be, to protect the hair
from hydrolized fats carrying stearates

orange up the temples and higher forehead
eyes and eyebrows white, powdered, denser white again
deep red in semicircles just above the beard
then pink for cheeks and flesh over orange, to blend.
Powder, outline eyes in black with a dot
above & below and accent the beard.
Apply the false nose. Settle the derby.
That wasn't interesting; that was just pain
ultrasound plotting the bile duct
back at cage doors for the 8 o'clock show
Barton rejecting the constant first-person
at breakfast, the Hotel Clarke in Hastings
the duct, says the doctor, passing ill
(Kent Clayton in white, magnificent
and Philips juggles soft felt period hats.)
Through my open door the pattern water and wind makes
above it, flat, on the ceiling as the water (inverted) on lawn
the wind making more of a natural thing of my house than usual.
We dry, with I think one rust-colored stain
on my cement stoop a slug, numbed, printed
into the stone, maybe by sun's violence. Once
by the Pacific a butterscotch one, with bubbly trail.
David Jones' scrut reminds me ineluctably
of Sherston's "scroop" for a chair being pushed back
both, maybe all, the World War I people
conscious of rodents, the too-dry paws and whiskers
as, passing a concrete gully the small rat or large
mouse, on an anthill, then a delicate
pillow of its own underfur, skull, tail.
Lights go down, alter, with the front house activities
perhaps vacuuming; I imagine the radio in the bath
or machine sewing leather chewed by the young women.
The odor from the front air conditioner, strong when
I come to get my mail: tortillas deep fat

a year since the neighbors would throw a cow's head
over the fence, just bone, for our dogs.
Menudo in pots, then, served in a language I don't understand
to relatives, people in what Olson would think of as a polis
Medrano a word on an old grocery sign, and a politician.
The family romance: Gosse's father wrote a book
on elementary microscopy—best on
the aquarium snail's coiled endless rasp tongue. A
recording of the sound that would make, a cassette.

△

José Lezama Lima

Ten Prose Poems

translated from the Spanish by James E. Irby

Joyful Night

The hut by the sea shore has kept for one night the naked body of the solitary fisherman. Sleep has been restless, but that unabandoned reality of the lynx-eyed paintbrush accompanies him like a cloak of dew. His turnings on the accompanying quilt were due to the bright stages of moving fire, which even in sleep assured the supreme dignity of movement. When his eyes flashed, his body was already rising from the bed: a good way to answer the ray of light with a movement of the body. Now his body is amid the waves and the sinister lantern of the enemy shore undulates like the whims of the enemy beast. In successive conversations with the sleeping fish his body advances, laughing at its reflections. An arm, a leg, but always the body as a pursued sign ends in a perpetual dignity. How could the body in emerging from sleep and the hut already be prepared for the trembling definition of the current? When he arrives the earth is still silent and nocturnal, but the pilgrim touches it with his forehead and his pursued sign, and in a rhythmical curve his body now prepares to pursue the lantern of the shore left behind. The silence of his body accompanied by the song of the fish, by the curled-up blood of the coral accordians and by the trees of fireflies that come down to the shore to touch the body of the solitary fisherman. And the trees seem to greet both a man and the friendly fragrance of the dye bark. He has penetrated again the hut on the shore, but now he has found

it all illuminated. His body transfused in a light sent from elsewhere seems to show forth in a Participation, and the Lord, just and benevolent, smiles an exquisite smile. But the fisherman does not interrupt his joy in the Presence, spurts out a curved stream of water, reminiscence of love for the enemy shore and the benevolent hut, and says to us, *What has passed through here?*

Fabulous Censures

Quickly, the water is reabsorbed nervously into the corpuscle; slow it is, like the invisible splashing of lead. The crevices, the dry protuberances are pulled to the same level by the whale-like passage of the water. It covers Tartaruses, Barathrums and Depths, and does not sleep in its extension because of the hum. Who hears? Who pursues? The very rock, previously a freezing, cooks in the straight decisive swift corpuscle sent by the light the new bodies of the dance. The receptacle creaks sluggishly, and the shark—slow breadth of silver in the accelerated breadth of lead—gradually shows his smile, his leisurely and total frenzy. A shred of veined copper stays over his tail, a laughing dolphin hovers on the dorsal fin. The slow column of impelled horizontal lead has fulfilled its role of closing off the deformities and nobilities, the gentle silver and the corrugated iron. The smoke of secreted evaporation has gesticulated in the rocky casserole, which thus afflicts the stone with the very brief touch of a thread torn loose from Energy. The shark that has been able to breathe in the column of lead, matching the stream he has breathed with the color of his skin, in all later years has continued in the water with the muscular jubilance of a star outside the window. The breeze was a guide: testimony of each pore used by the opal, the scorpion and the hoopoe. The body of the shark forced the chorus of rocks surrounding his neck, while the light like an oxyhydrogen torch painted animals and flowers on his venerable face. Applying himself then to the in-

nermost part of the rocks, he provoked the dynasty and destiny of the roots spreading out in galleries where the perverse flow of lunar liquid had circulated. The rock is the Father, the light is the Son. The breeze is the Holy Spirit.

The Adhering Substance

If we left our arms in the ocean for two years the toughness of our skin would be strengthened until it bordered on the greatest and noblest of animals and on the monster that comes at the call of soup and bread. Crude latherings with the tegument of a horse. Chew a crab and breathe it out through our fingertips while playing the piano. Qualities that come and are repulsed with slowness, with displeasure and propriety. With celestial disgust. With celestial scorn for frivolity and the errant, wayward stamp, the submerged arm dignifies its cramps and its absent whiteness; it endures the sleep of the tides first, and the miserable jewels that drill through its flesh until they are blessed by a rosy doubling dew, perhaps to make with them a region of sands like eyes, where the hollow pincer, the shameful foot are transported with the natural swiftness of air thickened by hard and silver light. The submerged arm, as it is turned into a lodging for centerings and bubbles, intractable hump for resolute informers, finds itself circled by the insect like a flying point; while the snail like an insistent point, frantic yet very very slow, becomes encrusted on that portion, flesh and earth, pounded with masterly craft by the renewed numbers of the waves. Thus that submerged fragment, secured by the trial period of peace, is returned by echo and reflux as a superhuman, very very white mystery. As the years go by, the submerged arm does not become a marine tree; on the contrary it returns a larger statue, with an improbable yet palpable body, a similar body for that submerged arm. Very very slow, as from life to sleep; as from sleep to life, very very white.

Fifes, Epiphany, Goats

Clarities became dark. Until then darkness had been a diabolic sloth, and clarity a contented insufficiency of the creature. Unchanged dogmas, clear darknesses which the blood in spurts and in continuity resolved, like the butterfly caressing the shepherd's forehead while he sleeps. A birth that was before and after, before and after the abysses, as if the birth of the Virgin were prior to the appearance of the abysses. *Nondum eram abyssi et ego jam concepta eram.* The delectable mystery of the sources that will never be resolved. The rejected uncooked clay now cooked, already leaping outside origins for grace and wisdom. The Book of Life that begins with a metaphor and ends with the vision of Glory is all filled with You. And Yours is the tremendous punishment, the sudden decapitation: You can erase from the Book of Life. Eternal Life, which arches from man clarified by Grace to the nocturnal tree, can declare mortal, strike down, release the spark. Once the erasure is made, a new name comprising a new man occupies its place, which thus does not even leave behind the shadow of its hollowness, the scandal of its ashes. Tremendous drought now erased by the goats of familiar contentment, by the pipes of overturnings and colors. Herd together, stumble, understand yourselves, more deeply if one is disposed to be born, to march toward the youthfulness that is becoming eternal. Until the arrival of Christ, Pascal said, only *false peace* had existed; after Christ, we may add, true warfare has existed. The warfare of partisans, of witnesses killed in battle, the hundred and forty and four thousand, offered as firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb (*Revelation*, 14:3 and 4): And they sung as it were a new song before the throne. Herd together, stumble, goats; begin at last, pipes, God and man are now alone. Tremendous drought, blaze of sun: I go toward my forgiveness.

Weight of Flavor

Seated within my mouth I attend the landscape. The great white tuba establishes non-spiraloid mumblings, bridges and linkages. In that tuba, the paper and the large drop of lead fall slowly but without causality. Although if we withdraw the mat of our tongue and suddenly confront the palatine vault, the paper and the drop of lead could not stand the terror. Then, the paper and the drop of lead downward are like the tortoise upward but without ascending. If we were to withdraw the mat . . . Thus the flavor that tends to stand out, if we were to tear out its tongue, would multiply in perennial arrivals, as if our door were continually attended by bulldogs, Chinese beggars, angels (the order of angels called Thrones, that rapidly place things in God) and long-tailed crustaceans. When the mat is sliced, turning the emptiness into an inquisitive though eyeless fish, the vocal cords receive the flow of dark dampness, beginning the monody. A dark lurch and the echo of the vocal cords, the night thus pursuing the night, the waning cat's back pursuing the dragonfly, obtaining the necessary amount of whiteness so that the messenger can go through the wall. The sheet of paper and the drop of lead go toward the luminous circle of the abdomen that extends its fires to receive the visitor and keep away the speckled agony of the pitiful tiger. The weightiness of the palatine vault grinds up even the breath, deciding that the luminous ray must advance amid the colloidal states formed by the revolutions of the solids and the liquids in their first inaugural fascination, when the beginnings revolve, as yet unable to detach the ages. Later, the successions will always maintain a nostalgia for the limited single specimen, the white peacock or the buffalo that hates mud, but with nearness forever attained and accessible, as if we could only walk on the mat. Seated within my mouth I notice death moving like the motionless fir submerging its icy glove in the trash of the pond. An inverse custom had made for me the opposite marvel, in dreams during afternoon naps I thought it a consummate obligation—seated now in my mouth I contemplate the

darkness surrounding the fir—for the scribe to wake up day after day as a palm tree.

Death of Time

In a vacuum velocity dares not compare itself, can caress the infinite. Thus the vacuum is defined and inert as a world of non-resistance. Also the vacuum sends out its first negative graph so it can be like non-air. The air we were accustomed to feel (to see?): soft as a sheet of glass, hard as a wall or a sheet of steel. We know by an almost invisible stirring of the non-existence of an absolute vacuum that there cannot be an infinite unconnected to divisible substance. Thanks to that we can live and are perhaps fortunate. But let us suppose some implausibilities in order to gain some delights. Let us suppose the army, the silk cord, the express train, the bridge, the rails, the air that constitutes itself as another face as soon as we draw close to the window. Gravity is not the tortoise kissing the ground. The express train always has to be stopped on a bridge with a broad rock base. It impels itself—like the impulsion of his smile to laughter, to raucous laughter, in a feudal lord after his garnished dinner—, until it decapitates tenderly, until it dispenses with the rails, and by an excess of its own impulsion slips along the silk cord. That velocity of infinite progression tolerated by a silk cord of infinite resistance comes to feed upon its tangencies that touch the ground with one foot, or the small box of compressed air between its feet and the back of the ground (lightness, angelisms, nougat, larks). The army in repose has to rest upon a bridge with a broad rock base, impels itself and comes to fit, in hiding, behind a small poplar, then in a worm with a backbone grooved by an electric time. The velocity of progression reduces the tangencies, if we suppose it to be infinite, the tangency is pulverized: the reality of the steel box on the archetypal rail, in other words the silk cord, is suddenly stopped, the constant progression

derives another independent surprise from that temporal tangency, the air turns as hard as steel, and the express train cannot advance because the potency and the resistance become infinite. There is no fall because of the very intensity of the fall. While potency turns into ceaseless impulsion, the air mineralizes and the moving box—successive, impelled—, the silk cord and the air like steel refuse to be replaced by the crane on one foot. Better than substitution, restitution. To whom?

Procession

The parade of the numbers took place in the tedium of its invincible fall, a malaise tolerated as proof of its comfortable succession. Within the numbers there were successions and meanings: if the successions motivated their friendly groupings, the meanings motivated the challenging fluidity of their rhythms. The parades of the binary of war, the elusive sequence of the fish, forgot their origins and their ends, their impulsion and their extenuated frenzy, in order to give us in the muscles of the leopard the finest geometrical progressions, in navigating magnets a ridiculous and unforgettable limitation. The fascinations of those archetypal groupings, of the magnetizing that convokes in order to flee from the whirl that must be reduced to the law of its structure, gradually brought about the end of the cynic, the atomist and the pre-Augustinian Alexandrine. *The vendor of words.* Man propagates and injures his substance, God superabounds, the encounter takes place in His generosities. But the beginning, at false and visible moments, seemed to be separated from the Other. From then on, men will form two groups: those who believe that the generosity of the One engenders sameness, and those who believe that it leads it to Darkness, to the Other. Thus the procession which in emerging from Form is prolonged until it passes through and is submerged by ultimate Essence, is saved yet again by being filled

with the symbolic and concupiscible figure that encloses the already illuminated substance. And thus where the Stoic thought that he lept out of his skin into a void, the Catholic situates the procession in order to awake in his body as a limit, the adventure of the same real and richly possible substance in order to awake in Him. When he dies, the Procession has become so inordinate that the plasticity of the chorale is replaced by an echo that seems to turn back again toward us, already extending hands, walking another cross. In the snow, in the defile, in the chosen mansion, the procession of men goes on dividing by similarity, occupying, betraying or communicating the same body, the blood and the oils.

Tangencies

After inventing the zero, Prince Aleph-Zero proceeded on horseback until sleep was put across his path, throwing him from his horse toward the grass that covered soft spongiform rocks. The horse's arrow is his nose. He placed his knife between the ground and himself, and then placed his shield over the knife with malicious inclination, since through there his sleep was going to pass. As the knife moved over the ground, the fountain gushed forth, but the seed was dying. In the first disasters of sleep, he had leaned with his somnolent bow on the vertical thrust of the recent fountain, in such a way that the bow resting on what he could glimpse was hardened horizontally; increasing its potency the jet of the fountain touched both the man detached from the air and his sleep so lightly that he could keep himself horizontal without giving up the sleep that had detached him from his horse. Sleep amputated him from his horse, making him feel that as he abandoned it he abandoned himself, so that then he could regain the impenetrable hardness of the same sleep crossed upon the clock within the fountain. Again the horse throws its hyaline crewman through sleep. The horse that savors arsenic rejects tortoise

shell powder. The cargo thrown by the horse into the fountain keeps his forehead softly resting on the edge of the window. He is not the inventor of the zero, he is the inventor of the sling and seed, the one who waits until the water rots so that the planetary memory of the seed may begin. The marvelous man, on the contrary, at the corner of his garden of triangular and lozenge-shaped flagstones, squats on his legs and stretches out his arms like a swan fed with diorite cotton. Even at night, a tribune gymnast, losing his memory, a retrospective acidity with a patina, hemmed in by his rhythmic, copious, trembling scratches. At midnight, the man of the seed with his face cut drops his head softly on the edge of the window, which also supports the two feet of the man in the green, orange and grey tights of steel mesh, taking the corner of his garden like a rope in a port. Each separated by the edge of the window, the man of earth arches his eye more to listen than to discover, while the gymnast, in the same midnight of startled normality, raises and lowers his legs in a rhythm that seems like the memory of a march along the river. When he deposited the seed, he could not know that it was pierced through, support for a night when thrown from the horse. The gymnast, abruptly shifting the tiny rubber ball with a steel center from his hand of remembered smoke to his other hand of bitten gold, opens his eyes and linearity in his weariness, exhausting himself to attain the height, duration and weight of a saurian. It is not strange that whenever he finally throws the instruments with which he strengthened the steadiness of his hands, he should stumble upon a flower because of his fatigue, and that each monstrous fatigue should be paralyzed with the earthborn attached burning sensation of the seed pierced through by the man thrown from the horse.

Ecstasy of the Destroyed Substances

And you, Promachus, close the double chain of ants. Did you

count the cattle? Destroy the body and the sign of its hollowness so as to attain the reminiscence of its transparency. Destroy the inverse relationship of unity and substance, of number and perceptible thing, resolved in the figure detached by the extasy of participation in the homogeneous. But first, the sphere is encompassed by the boy's hand. The violent substitution followed by a hollow gust prepares the void, the whale and the bottle, where there is coming and going as by a principal originator, covered with smoke and extremely hurried. Now, blind am I. I encompass and understand myself, blackened in the bottle that contains the dead armillary sphere suspended by boreal magnets. Blind am I, my home is the whale. Alongside the void, I emit my yawn or give away plaster hats, and an immense funerary ceramic takes from the temple those who have been decapitated in order to establish with their simultaneous fury a dense hum of memories. Thus, in a marshy grotto, with a waltzed floor squeezed from tortoise eggs, the master watchmaker trembles at the frightful coincidences and the fleur-de-lys covered farmer receives, as he sows the only false document, the shameless blessings of the law. The substitution of metaphor and act, pulverizing the thing in itself, illuminating it like a stained glass window distributing the light of day. the ecstasy of what is beautiful in itself breathes a participating breath into the thing in itself, because of the transparency of man and the reading of the rocks. Linear development of instant, erotics, being (unity), existing (act), metaphor (substitution of being), participation (substitution of existing), Paradise (extasy of participation in the homogeneous, intemporality). Linearity broken or swollen by the three circular moments of germ, entity, eternity, necessary for taking over their refuge, leaving at the door Doctor Faust's flaming dog. The destruction of substance, illuminating its variants or metamorphoses, because of the dryness of its suspension or withdrawals. The Son of Man destroyed, transformed into the lasting substance of the body of God, because all transfigurations are followed by a suspension and the exercise on the Mount of Skulls was only an apprenticeship for being plunged into a violent and

superhuman negative capacity. Frantic self-destruction which makes all metamorphosis ridiculous, in order to reach the constant germ within the entity. The power of the scorpion—*Revelation* 9:5—, which does not attack any green thing but instead attacks only the men who have no seal on their foreheads. The power of the scorpion in alliance with the *splendor formae*. Natural substance does not change. The rational soul receives the intelligible light by means of the illuminated figure or plenitude. When the witness exclaims: *only thus does a god die*, he has been broken and has fallen in battle against the mute or incessant waking spirit.

Resistance

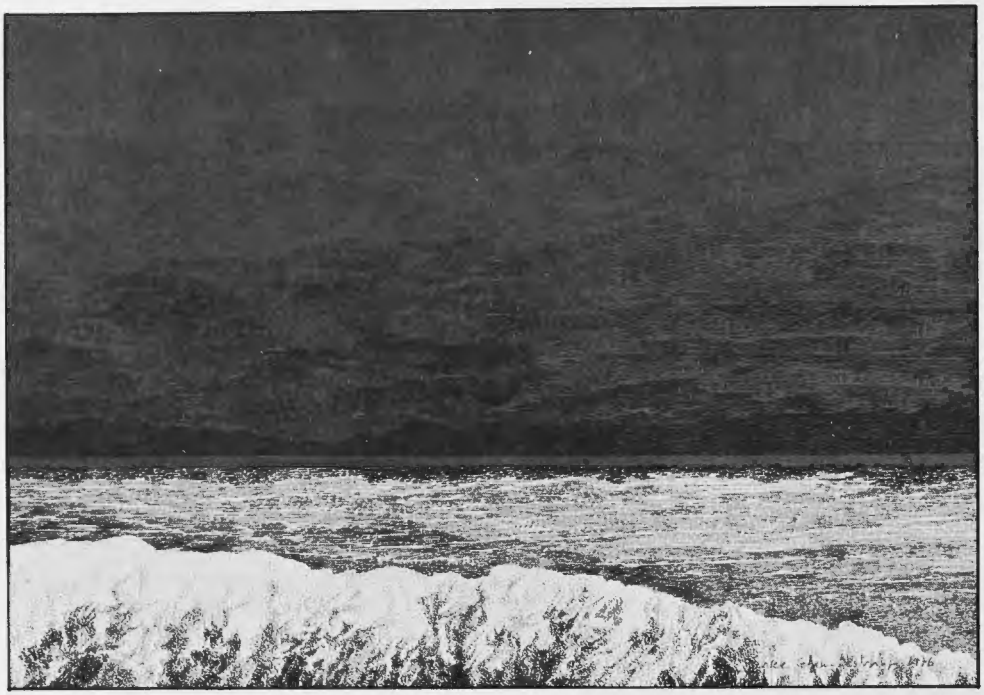
Resistance always has to destroy the act and the potency which demand the antithesis of the corresponding dimension. In the world of *poiesis*, opposed in so many things to the world of physics, which is the world we have had since the Renaissance, resistance has to proceed by rapid inundations, by total trials that do not want to adjust, clean or define the crystal, but rather to surround, to open a breach through which water may fall tangent to the turning wheel. Potency is, like hail, everywhere, but resistance recovers itself in the danger of not being in the earth or in hail. The demon of resistance is nowhere, and therefore it presses like the mortar and the broth, and keeps leaving its mark like the fire in the golden glitter of visions. Resistance assures that all the wheels are turning, that the eye sees us, that potency is a delegated power dropped upon us, that it is the non-self, things, coinciding with the darkest self, with the stones left in our waters. Hence the eyes of potency do not count, and in resistance what crosses our path, springing either from ourselves or from a mirror, is reorganized into eyes with currents passing through them that perhaps may never belong to us at all. Compared with resistance, morphology is completely ridiculous. What morphology allows, the

realization of an epoch in a style, is very scant in comparison to the eternal resistance of what is not permissible. Potency is merely the permission granted. Method: not even intuition, not even what Duns Scotus called confused abstract knowledge, reason in disarray. Method: not even creative vision, since total resistance prevents the organizations of the subject. When resistance has overcome the quantitative, the ancestral recollections of the steward and the last sterile figurations of the qualitative, then the man they have repented making begins to boil, the man made and set loose, but with a daily repentence for having made him by the one who made him. Then . . . *On this night, at the beginning of it, they saw fall from the sky a marvelous branch of fire into the sea, at a distance from them of four or five leagues* (Journal of Voyage, 15 September 1492). Let us not fall into the sea of paradise regained, for the men who came packed into a ship moving within a resistance could see a branch of fire fall into the sea because they felt the history of many in a single vision. Those are the times of salvation and their sign is a fiery resistance.

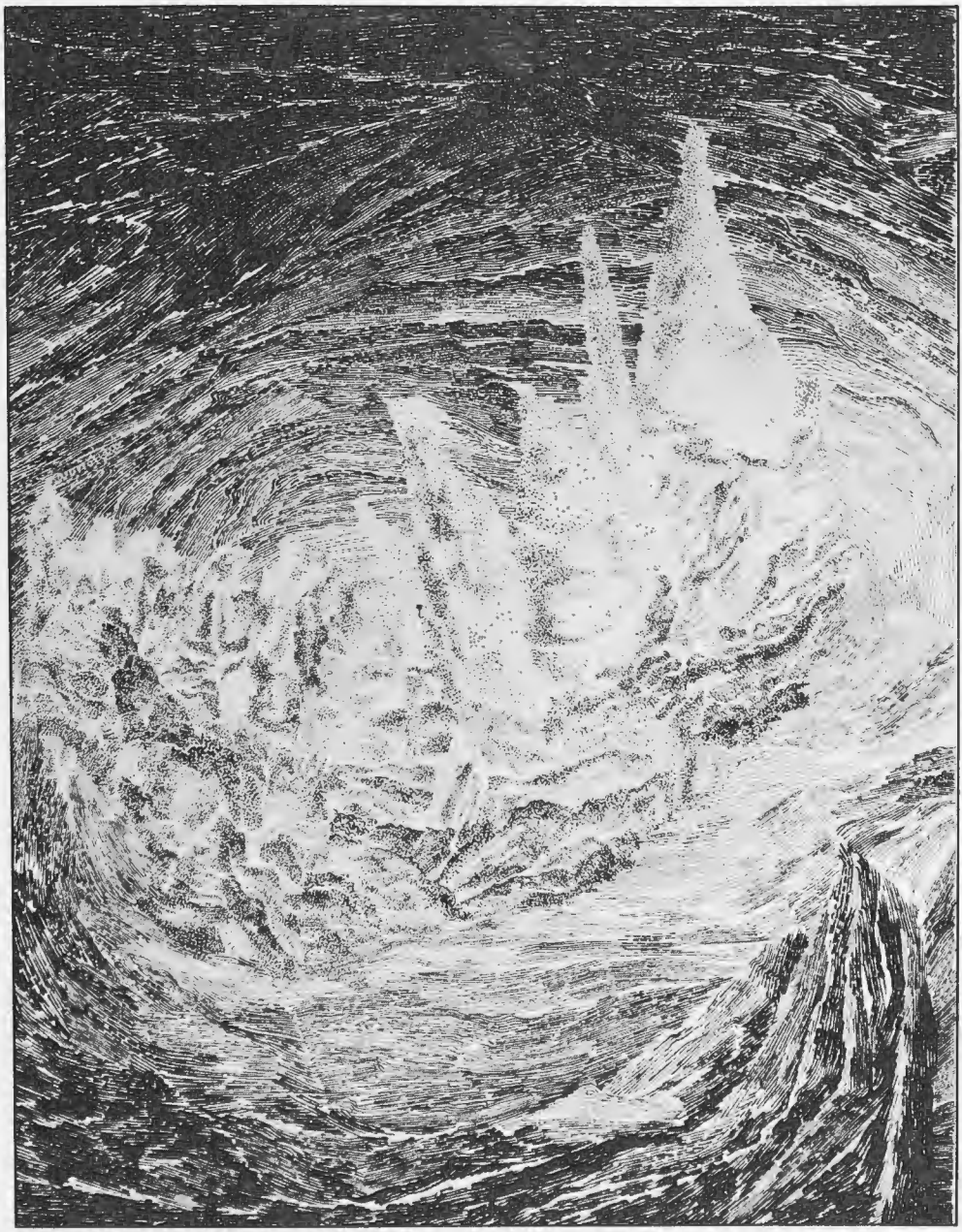
△

The Cuban poet José Lezama Lima (1910-1976) is unique in Hispanic writing for his genial hermeticism, his dense hyperbolic expansiveness. He is known in English mainly for his novel *Paradiso*, translated in 1974. His many poems and essays, however, remain all but unknown. He first published the following pieces in his magazine *Nadie Parecía* one in each of its ten issues, in the same order as given here, between September 1942 and March 1944. (The location, of course, was Havana, where he spent all his life.) He never called them "prose poems" or gave them any overall title, but he twice reprinted them as the sequence comprising the second section of his book *La fijeza* (1949), all of whose other pieces except two, are poems in verse. It was in these prose texts that Lezama first began to expound as well as enact a poetics, or what he was later to call, after further essays in that direction, "a poetic system of the world." One of their many remarkable features is their insistence on progressions that have a powerfully scattered, multidirectional thrust, "like the simultaneous translation of several unknown languages," as Lezama once said about Góngora's *Soledades*. Another feature is the way this refractory quality or "resistance" in poetry adumbrates for Lezama the power of resurrection, seen as the supreme denial of logic or natural causality in his peculiar variety of Catholic eschatology. These translations try to render literally the strangeness of Lezama's texture, so unconcerned with euphony or elegance. —*J.E.I.*

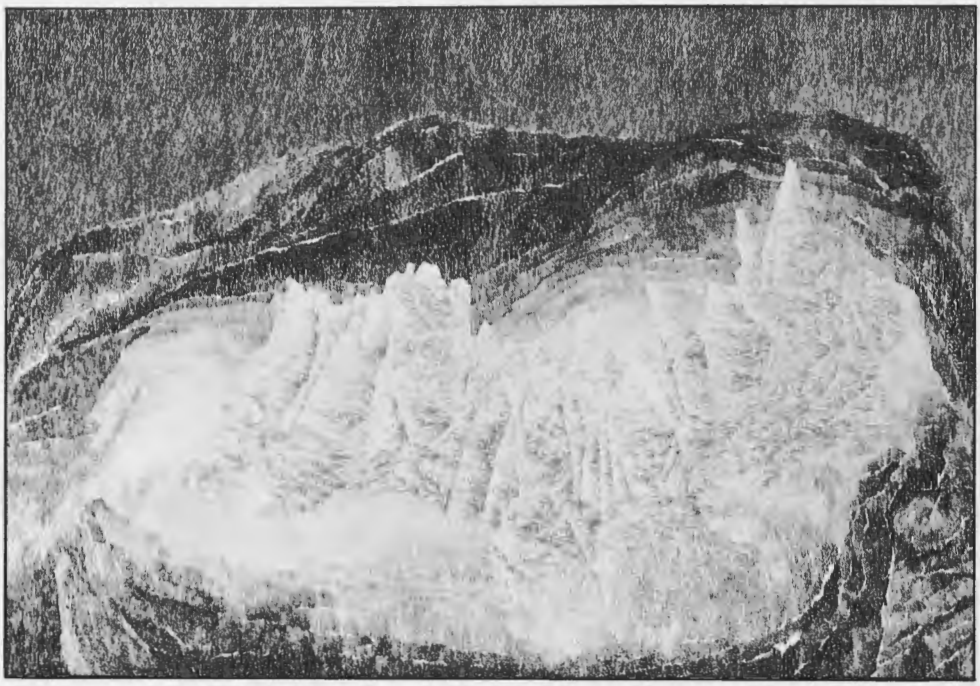
GISELE CELAN-LESTRANGE



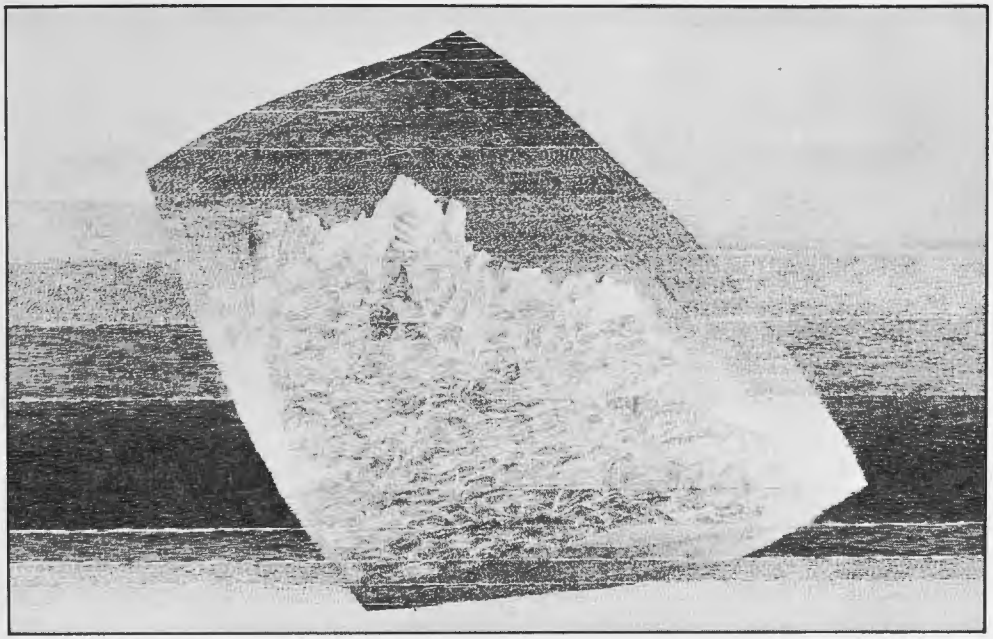
Le gris ét la côte, 1976 ink drawing on white and grey papers



Hommage á Erich Arendt, bistre ink drawing



Terre ébranlée, 1976 colored ink drawing



Chemins de mémoire, 1976 colored ink drawing

Giséle Celan-Lastrange (the widow of the poet Paul Celan) lives and works in Paris.

David Rattray

A red-framed print of the Summer Palace

My mother died in her bed
one balmy night in May 1974;
my hair wasn't yet gray.
At the head of the bed
was a red-framed print
of the Summer Palace near Peking
in salmon pink and tea green
over a lake with a little steam launch
and a bridge
to an island in the foreground.
She'd been there as a girl
and for 50 years after
dreamt of it
only to awake
in tears at not returning
to the summer palace of youth.
In her will she left me the picture—
it's on my study wall.
Last year
a Sinologist came by, and I learned
the bridge
in incorrectly rendered.
There are in fact
17 arches, not 14 as shown.
Also, there are errors in perspective
and the Chinese writing in the clouds
over the lake
is cut and dried description,
not the poetry I'd hoped.

Susan Howe

Pythagorean Silence

we that were wood
when that a wide wood was
In a physical Universe playing with
words
Bark be my limbs my hair be leaf
Bride be my bow my lyre my quiver

Intellect idea and (Real) being

Perpetual swipe of glaciers dividing

pearl (empyrean ocean)
Text of traces crossing orient

and occident Penelope
who is the image of philosophy

(your wisdom hidden in a mystery)
what ships I have seen

Sails filling or falling
horizons wandering real world

and yet a dream world
(immediacy) hold fast to this

Gradations of light die into distance

loose themselves in light Darkness

Shapes shadow-hunting
Supremacy

(now a cast shadow)
Height of that tower diminished to

this letter
Light narrowed to this point or line

Forfeit feeds nativity

Ruin into rout
antiquity - Runes

a row of signs
ordering sound

(sacred and secret tree systems)
I sleep

or half sleep Selflessness
and skylark swallowed up

Mountains and summer move Snow
includes them

green syllables of scenery in spring

One generation falling asleep

another waking up Memory
harmony multiplicity

sheen of sacramental mystery

intellection of fate and fame
unfathomable visionary dream

Knowledge is simple recollection

Recollection returns

forgotten Boundless

time inattention
Finite velocity

it has happened it is history
Tracing

the change in ideas about change

Drafts

of furiously scribbled pages Scraps
of beginnings

and the problem of lost Originals
Approach to the Castle of Perilous

knight tested by the illusion

of nothingness Estray
into my own Exile

(a dome to hive) Majestical
Soul is a god and sun is a God

on the horizon (Principle
vision) out of an ocean

Soul is the maker of sun She
is dressed as a man

Beholder in silence and in utter

forgetfulness

Dream of wandering in woods with

my father
Leaves are white his dress

is white

(considered as white)

cut as if carved in marble Pure
outline of form

fading from color and from frame

We look into distance as a dream
what we are

and we are not Threading mazes

of unwearied thought

Long long years
grain sprouting from body wheat

and barley

A border-rider's kingdom
(holy horse not to be ridden

holy places not be trodden)Wheel

of Destiny
Plato's spindle of necessity

pantheon of history shivered into

ruin
Walking about at a gate with keys

Singing the keys

Looking west with a low sun
Mystical gaiety

irrational dimensions of an infinite city

Perspectives enter

and disappear
The perpetual dead embark Hoop

of horizon
negation pursuit and illusion

fourscore and fade

a moving doom of brood
(ideas gems games dodges

scaffolding)

Long pythagorean lustrum

nothing new can come into being
Change

and juxtaposition
(heavenly systems move monotonous

motion)
Green grows the morning

in a first college of Something
austere music

ideal republic
Language ripples our lips

Sparrows peck at the gravel
(caged words

setting them free)
Sing the golden verses of Pythagoras

(were they ever really written)
Sweet notes

deaf sea
Outside at the back of the sky

biography blows away

To trip a careless runner's crown

War

approaches its abstract form Play
of possibilities

probabilities

(mechanical necessitarianism)

good and bad luck
Voracious coinage at the confines

political acres of prey and chirrup
Confusion

of lines bisecting shred
after shred of feeling

Cleared up cold this morning
Foraging

and straggling
To see through all things clearly

is to see through all things dimly
Marches

and maneuvers
Incessantly advancing towards the aim of

standing still

- You are asleep Penelope
says a shadowy figure from

the Odyssey
A dream soul from Barbarous

We are alone
and we are alone Nomads

and a loving family

where nobody nobody nobody

no matter at all

Light has made the circuit of
the Universe

Leaves shiver shrinking back
to dark

The measure of force
(as magnitude) as fixed

in flux
Absolute magnitudes

regions untenanted by stars

Hearer and the half-articulate
nearer and nearer

the secret Secret

Clay has fallen on my monologue
Clay on my coat

cold clay on my coat

Measure a million million
measure a million to margin

Steadfast into this sliding

no sequence seen

Thales
supposed the earth to float on

water
Infinite matter

(Anaximander)

Ocellus of Luciana and his work on

the Universe

(Entelechy)
actuality of the body Texts

torn from their context

Forms
back into names

Newton's sailor paces three miles
an hour

while the ship sails west

Doomsday overturns and milleniums

riddance and rest

Blind wisdom wanders along
(arrows for thought)

left side of the world
Sleeps very little

We hear her walking in her room
moving through measured

velocity
Passing away according to restless

necessity

Irascible unknowable disorderly
irrational

Poverty my mother and Possession

my father
Time to set our face homeward

Shadow-emperor

Michel Deguy

—translated from the French
by Clayton Eshleman

I CALL *muse* the seesaw of the sky, the wind transporter at *his* volition of our views, this wash drawing when I open with the cat my eyes a slit, the one who caressed the cat; *muse*, the profusion that works range in uncompletable concerto sequences, in reiterated poems, in Indian file, flattened, and classed piled up on canvases, on stones, on wood, on music paper, in Linnaeus' octavos, Aristotle's glass cases, files

I call *muse* the pain that they cause me, the moon sun jugglery, *muse* the voyage to the south of the earth where frozen lakes are bordered by flamingos pink as the painted nails on the fan of twilight, the moon and its cortege of pools when nupially it crosses the bridge of earth similar to Chile from one end to the other, *muse* the cranes the black bull an owl passed the swans, the most southern town where I was which called itself *Porvenir*, the pubis bird, the rotted sea house under the gulls' dextrogyre cross, *muse* the voyage, Tierra del Fuego like a cloud at the end of *Punta-Arenas* Street, the sea's royal hand, the plane like an elegant eye, the patience of Noah necessary to greet the day long curtsy of the Magellan Sea, the cloud with which the sky veiled its love and the portico of color through which it passed, on return the Patagonian shore like a cock

Muse the moral voyage where dreams are daydreams and courage arches from one's back, poetic exactitude of the earth crossing one's

mind, the Pampa night disclosing the distance, womanless table at which each knows how much it costs to speak, this landing of calm at a certain depth in the torment, the patience of colors that help us make our choice, humus table-cloth put away each morning, the vale one must clamber down

clam burr down

the phlegmatic homonymy in the language that is gioconda like the famous effigy, the hospitable paranomasia similar to the jig-saw puzzle abandoned by the children, the acceptance where everything reposes in genitive ambiguity, the always original erosion which draws Spanish and Portuguese out of Latin

Muse the tender brain where everything escapes, the plaquette conceded to the placater, the audacity to which grammar lends itself, *muse* my confidence in not-willing thinking, the migratory responses, the equality which falls like snow on the "slightest events," that everything is true including "the deceitful tenderness in the farewell."

Muse that the climbing be climbing in the body and the descent descend in the body, *muse* yet again the strangeness of the soul and its conditions, the poems that we read at the dentist's, tapping a foot to cover the blood, at the display of chance the poems that resist the leafing pulse; *muse* the meal that is always *served there* in the tale of *Beauty and the Beast* where we live, for "he went down into the garden and found the meal prepared,"

I call *muse* Venice, the porches Negroes in ribbons, Venice of the gondolaed nails, where the stranger turns around like one arriving in Venice, the plaza led to the visible like a square of players, the things that look at each other for the visible is a human concern

Muse the equal fullness of all places, that rich frieze of the narrows equal to our narrow eyes, the spacious liberty of free space, that every parvis, every esplanade, every terrace, every stoop "clears" so as to show this discrete multiplicity that allows us to enter and to leave, to go away, to approach, "I don't want to disturb you," *muse* this void

Muse the history of the muses, the chronic testimonies, every birth a fairy a bedside located under the nine gifts of irrefutable provincial

godmothers, history now this collage of *news*, and the inclined plane of inventions, the utterly surprising arrival of Philoctetes or of Joyce, the unforeseeable gesture of Achilles or of Tintoretto

Ting tint
Array Auray tent foray stentor Aretin Perroquet Tyndareus
Paindoré Tintoretto

the excessive promise of names, the anonymity of still hidden species which wait their turn to rise to the clearing of men

I claim this tardy wedding that must be waked, this festival absence whose fire below supports our virgin lamps, *muse* therefore its advent with guinea fowl gilded grey jerks

The delicate grafts of memory in the night, the legend of a word, *muse* likewise the enemy, the hate that crumples the interview, this handful of fake bones and grimaces, this solid alloy of derm and humour that pursues, far from me, the relationship between densities, the indifference to my death, the delay on the part of men to transform their element into a law, the coldness of happiness to knowledge, all the configurations of gaps, of props, of breaks in the involuntary edifice of the stay, the petrified shoulder of the hand that writes *mane thecel pharès*

To Forget the Image

I have looked at you as Christ, imagine, Veronica and they separated each with the scalped face of the other
Their *thou* does not date from this conventional poem

Moored to this beauty so close to you, the shop-sign of hair banging around as if in a street of birth, my eyes tumified

The bandage of nights will drain me, I will scatter your ashes, will shoo away your curves, your figure of an inverted "muse" in this young sun-tanned woman who sought poetry among the very men who usurp it, your age of an inverse ignorant muse reincarnated older in every age
the torn wrappings of night heal me, your face dies away, your teeth bridle me less each morning since this morning

And what were we talking about with the others, everyone pretending that beauty was self-evident, like your skin looking very beautiful (like a piece of work) goes about itself among this pretensive we

(Frost on the polished bone structure, your
dark forehead,
The blue head-band of eyes at mid-face,
Sloping temples and incunabular walls over
The patent mouth and the immortal teeth,
Trapezoids toward the breasts perhaps, and the

drawn back sex)

Tomorrow evening the muteness of our stage-whisper will die out, I no longer wear the earlocks of Cathar murmur

...and of what were we speaking pretending not to fix our eyes on beauty like an oblique species that our mimed distraction would not bother, or because there no longer is any beauty, or because beauty has to learn equal footing, but allowing stealth to take care of gathering beauty to your side

allowing your face to pass behind your collar, your face to continue behind a little bit of wool everywhere invisible, a millimeter of linen forbids your skin which goes up wrists and tibias again to rejoin slopes under the wool, to stick to you

And the troubled men who mechanically invited you, whom your oblique presentation or yourself without makeup like a piece of bark enamoured, mayor or president, were speaking to not say that you were holding a meeting more open than one of theirs

In spite of your body like Casanova you wanted to know, to learn, to change, but your hair that a gravity in your service spread without respite like a spring across its stone, betrayed you, and the unprotected imagination caught the plague of your endemic face

The tampon of night, I know, will drain the eyes injected with you, at last I will try to remind myself that you were without ever having been blue companion from station to station

The strange law to not love, that timidity hides with its likeness, will relax its contraint, and the eclipse, total through your image, will eclipse in a poem

the hard law to not love leaves our vassalage, migrates in the neighboring compartment, forgets itself in a poem

"I search for my words"

Michel Deguy, editor of the magazine *Po&Sie*, has published a dozen collections of poetry and essays over the past two decades. He lives in Paris. The poems presented here are from *Quadratures,* a selected poetry of Deguy, to be published by the University of California Press.

Larry Eigner

October 28-29 80

a late hour
walking
past the opposite houses
as I get to bed
in the front room

not much
blue jeans

days
faster and faster
so the nights as well

bushes

wind

enough

earth circles
fairly perfect

leaves on the stream

tree branches

dog at a halt

tail balanced stop

October 28-29 80

Fire Dept.
Ambulance wait

widely spaced
buildings

how heedless
do you have to be

is that
an office
sounding like that

kids ah
what kinds of bird

propped up
comes out

through the red fence
wood gate open

hook and ladder was
hidden and
pulling away

now

after the van

how much to realize

so how is there meaning

to all the time in the world

car stuck
horn
fine
hour gone fast
keeping things up with
scenes from every place
one big sport is enough
countless horizons green
because of hills, trees,
the wind has a slowness
as it seems not too often
it's a temperate zone
and again I saw the west
or wailing wall
pulling a switch sleep
all these sold VWs
you can't really track years

Oct 4 81

hours by the window
the cat awake
two windows
cornering the sun
bulk
how far past earth
back of the house
to go
stretch upward times
small
moving fast
jaws

how that's happened

no words

△

Leonardo Sciascia

The Crowley Case: Aprocrypha

Translated from the Italian by Bradford Morrow

TO THE POLICE COMMISSIONER

Investigate and report the activities of Edward Alexander Crowley, British citizen, living in Cefalú.

M.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY BENITO MUSSOLINI *Rome, 15 July 1924*
HEAD OF STATE

In reference to Your Excellency's message, in which an investigation was ordered regarding the British citizen E.A. Crowley, currently a resident of Cefalú (Palermo), I transcribe the essential points from a report just received from the Chief of Police in that area.

"The said Edward Alexander Crowley, born in Learnington, 12 October 1875, has been living in a villa, situated approximately three kilometers outside town, since April of 1920. He pays rent regularly to his landlords, whose only complaint about Crowley concerns the latter's obsession with painting the walls in fresco. These illustrations, it would seem, fail to conform with rules of decency. However, the landlords have not had an opportunity to see the villa from the time they leased it to Crowley, and they know of the Englishman's obsession solely from rumors which have spread through town. These rumors are fed by the fact that Crowley is living with no fewer than

five women, relatively young and good-looking (also three children, one of which is a negro or mulatto). In a town like this, such behavior serves to arouse and excite the collective imagination in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish, in all that is said, true from false. It appears, nevertheless, that the idiosyncracies which the town attributes to Crowley may be explained as a "Natural" life style. The children, the women, Crowley himself, have been seen sunbathing in the nude. Yet his neighbors have never filed a complaint with this office. Instead, it seems that the neighboring farmers actively dedicate themselves to spying on the Englishman's villa (which, it should be noted, is well walled in) deriving a kind of pleasure out of the young ladies' nudity which, once it reaches town, is exaggerated to nearly scandalous proportions. We have been advised of these things by His Reverence the Bishop. However, our own investigation, conducted with the utmost discretion, has revealed nothing other than violations, on the part of the local farmers, of the right of privacy, which is due each and every citizen, and which the English hold particularly dear. It has been decided, therefore, to let the matter drop, but at the same time to assure His Reverence the Bishop that what is happening in Crowley's villa has not escaped our attention, and that the first violation by the inhabitants of the villa of the laws of our country, will be dealt with immediately and decisively.

To summarize: to be sure, Crowley conducts a life outside the bounds of what is considered normal, but less with scandal than with mystery. It is precisely this mystery that causes his presence to be a source of unrest in Corfalú. Regarding the possibility of his being a spy, or acting in any manner which might threaten the security of the Italian government, we believe such suspicions to be entirely unfounded. One need only consider that his sole contact with the outside world is reduced purely and simply to the purchase of supplies, which is, as a rule, carried out once a month in a local store. From this one would conclude that the women make their own bread, since the villa is equipped with a wood-burning stove, while the meat (assuming they eat it) comes from the goat and livestock farming, to which

this little community dedicates itself."

Awaiting possible further instructions,

Con saluti fascisti,

GENERAL E. DE BONO
POLICE COMMISSIONER

NOTE TO THE POLICE COMMISSIONER

The investigation of the British citizen Crowley must continue. Conduct a surveillance. Make a report. Who said he is suspected of espionage? It is the British Ambassador who is worried about his compatriot. He is concerned that the man's activities might prove detrimental to his country's reputation in Italy. Personally, I don't give a damn.

M.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY BENITO MUSSOLINI
HEAD OF STATE

Rome, 11 September 1924

Regarding the directives imparted by Your Excellency relative to the British subject Edward Alexander Crowley, currently a resident of Cefalú (Palermo), herewith the report of the Chief of Police in that area.

Con saluti fascisti,

GENERAL E. DE BONO
POLICE COMMISSIONER

To His Excellency the Police Commissioner
Rome

The undersigned, pursuant to the instructions given in Your Excellency's letter of 20 July 1924 (File #19328), has with all diligence applied himself to the execution of this delicate mission. First, to avoid any confrontation with the judicial authorities, the District Attorney of Cefalú was informed of the orders received, so that surveillance of the villa occupied by Crowley might be made to conform with the lawn, and so that (should Crowley eventually protest our intrusion into his private affairs) the District Attorney would not take offence. The said Attorney, despite the concern for national security involved with the Crowley case, showed some hesitation. He did, nevertheless, comply with the undersigned's request. This was the reason for the delay in acquainting Your Excellency with what the undersigned has been able, ultimately, to ascertain first-hand.

Surveillance of the villa occupied by Crowley has been carried out by the undersigned, with the assistance of Brigadier Lo Turco Angelo and agent Vasta Bartolomeo, beginning during the morning of the 7th of this month, accompanied by Professor Paolo D'Alunzio, English instructor in the local Scuola Tecnica, who was called upon by the undersigned to act, should the occasion present itself, as an interpreter. In truth, however, his assistance was never needed, as Crowley spoke in fairly comprehensible Italian. The Professor's presence did, however, prove helpful in an instance I will hereafter relate.

At first Crowley showed a certain indignation at the fact that, in Italy, it is possible to subject a person who has neither broken the law nor caused a scandal to an investigation evidently contrary to the elementary principles of individual liberty. Nevertheless, he quickly changed his attitude to one of condescension, even of amusement. It was as if he were playing the part of a museum guide, explaining the philosophy which the people and the things around him lived and were a testament to. This philosophy (if the undersigned may be permitted to make recourse to the memory of his high school studies)

more or less results from a mixture of certain elements of ancient Middle-Eastern civilization, magic and astrology, with elements of a denatured Epicureanism, common in the Horation interpretation of *Epicuri grege porcum.* This is, however, tempered with extreme pessimism. The entire philosophy is celebrated in a ritual of both Catholic and Masonic extraction, to judge of the objects which are used in the ritual, and which were shown and explained to us. Not absent among these objects were, naturally, chains and instruments of flagellation, since in this religion which Crowley claims to have founded, a religion of sun and blood, pleasure is the fruit of pain. But the ritual involves pain inflicted upon others, despite Professor D'Alunzio's assertion that in England it is not uncommon to find such practices involving mutual or even auto-flagellation.

The undersigned has likewise ascertained that rumors regarding the frescos in Crowley's villa are quite true. The paintings illustrate, not without talent, strange attitudes of coition, as well as scenes of perversion and sodomy, glorifying in a kind of recurring ornamental theme, those parts of the human body which decency would prefer covered and unmentioned. Crowley wished to convince the undersigned that life neither consisted of, nor had any meaning in, anything other than what he depicted and practiced, and that, in effect, man's every thought and action derives from those things, and is realized in different forms by those things. In this way, he took the opportunity to declare himself an admirer of Fascism and of its leader, and to say that he was happy to be a guest in such a country as Italy, because, at this moment, thanks to Fascism, Italy seemed to him the country which corresponded most closely to his vision of life. This was a compliment which the undersigned felt obligated to reject. Yet Crowley insisted with specious and contorted reasoning, though not devoid of a certain intelligence. Later, the undersigned having noticed a block of stone, upon which were evident traces of blood, and having asked what its function might be, Crowley answered that sacrifices were performed on it. He added, however, a phrase in English of which the undersigned only caught the name "Matteotti."

Professor D'Alunzio afterward explained that Crowley had said, and I quote: "The Honorable Matteotti was killed elsewhere." Perhaps this was said not without irony.

Insofar as the women were concerned, although they may be presumed to live in a kind of slavery, neither from their appearance nor from what they told us, do they seem to be unhappy. Evidently, they have an unqualified adoration for Crowley.

The children, at the time of our surveillance, were sleeping under a tree. They seem to be in good health.

In conclusion, the impressions drawn by the undersigned are all negative, and would be enough to motivate Crowley's expulsion from Italy. Furthermore, the testimony of his neighboring farmers has been collected, affirming that more than once the women have been seen with Crowley, first one, then another, tied naked to a rock, exposed to the sun during the hottest hours of the day.

I await further instructions,

Con saluti fascisti,

CHIEF OF POLICE A. CAMINITI
CEFALÚ, 8 SEPTEMBER 1924

TO THE POLICE COMMISSIONER

Provide for the immediate expulsion of Mr. Crowley from Italy. The Chief of Police at Cefalú is an ass.

M.

TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER

Inform the British Ambassador that the Minister of the Interior has decided upon the expulsion of Mr. Crowley from Italy.

M.

Translator's Note

Leonardo Sciascia was born in the small Sicilian town of Raculmuto in the province of Agrigento near the Southern coast of the island. The two stories presented in this book are taken from Sciascia's collection *Il mare colore del vino*, published in 1973, and are representative both of other stories in that volume, and the recurrent focus of Sciascia's work beginning with his earliest book *Le parocchie de Regalpetra* (1956). Although the author moved to Palermo his interest remains primarily with the religio-political life in the Sicilian *paese*. Like Pirandello, Sciascia's art functions often at a level of grotesque wryness and humor: without the presence of *just* protagonists. In the epistolary short story *The Crowley Case: Apocrypha* (which was written several years after *The Removal*) the small town Police Chief who allows himself "to make recourse to the memory" of his high school education, faring forward with confidence into a hodge-podge of misinterpreted and half-learned Mediterranean philosophies, perhaps typifies best the Sciasciaean everyman. Sciascia's fictional struggles are invariably games of *Perdivinci* (a card game in which the players attempt to lose, in order to win) which are only tempered by the author's remarkable understanding of his characters' hopes and failures.

△

Barbara Moraff

Now

spreading across the hayfield
like a giant crowswing's shadow
cloud only & no rain only the shadow

it's worse, they say, in new jersey,
this drought fostered by runaway clouds .

sphagnum bog out back dried up
as if cursed. black willows
wilting in bud & red-winged

blackbird crying
as he rides the dry wind
come blatant from northeast ridge
white but no rain, no moist
spot for nesting in this
bog now / how

even the horizon's light
tantalizes & what we know of sorrow
cattle lean
& what we know of sorrow,
a dustdevil rising and curling
above dry fernfronds, curld, above dry
moss like accordians contracted
& ashen as
dawn trying to break through
woodsmoked smog which straddles &

locks the horizon into a heat so fierce
song sizzles, tree-frogs
                drop
like a dream whose pegged joints
have crackd, oh pale oak, oh lack .

Barren, like a lady of the night,
moves across this Vermont land,

one syllable at a time & as as dry, & creasd
as rolld trousers .
Yet I kiss you awake, saying "now" .

Vermont Farming

under the watchful hawk
day brightens the air
I have been sitting here
for hours paying attention
to nothing less
significant
than this

*

watchfully that hawk scans
the whitefeatherd brown hens
going about their carnivorous business
stuttering along the upturned earth,
they have no other direction

*

hearing becomes tenuous
as early flies & gnats inspect
my meaty form kneeling on rich brown tilth,
my hands tamping good dirt over good seeds.

the moon is distinctly absent
from this enterprise although it is by the moon
I plant thinking of my mother
the sky so blue above me
she said once I was born the day the sun was born
& she planted bright scarlet roses, blue iris
& combed the tangles of my sleep
into wavy black black hair .

Going to Sleep

he doesn't want
to go to bed
he's ten years old
his friend doesn't go
to sleep this early he's not tired he's
wideawake yawning only for more oxygen which
has nothing to do with being tired or needing
he says more than 7 hours of sleep no matter how
old you are which is not really the point he says
face so determined
I cld whop his kisser/don't/do tell him he has to
start getting ready for bed now it always takes him
a half hour or more when temperamental like you he says?
ok now and not three minutes from now I say now
I haven't finished my math homework he says too bad I say you
have been watching the tube glued like a gluon what's a gluon
he says tomorrow I say I'll tell you all I know about it now
you're getting ready for bed and that's that & don't
forget to wash behind yr ears really I mean it I say giving
he thinks him another excuse, aha I send him off to bed
w/ dirty ear-behinds

this is my chance I yawn its a matter of oxygen I go
to the bathroom, wash & brush my teeth, oh its bedtime

Desire

the dark sings.
we wake in separate rooms.
longing I think for the goddess.
she who inhabits the space
between us, not dependent.
perhaps we each turn over,
hands flicking
imagined ghosts away, sentences
we'd rather not moan to each
other, thoughts like water
flowing cool-y through this dark
self-singing.
divorce is no longer an issue.
winter is loose like cold fire
in our bones.
but what inhabits our hearts,
waking in separate rooms ?
hearing starchd sheet moment
& the ache of longing like a mouse
in the far wall gnawing
at what it doesn't know
will speed its babies into ghosts.

△

San Juan de la Cruz

The Fountain

a version for Karin Lessing,
translated from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger

Though she is night
So well I know her
Fountain
mounting
spilling out
That eternal
fountain
hidden
So well I know where
She keeps her lair
Though she is night

Though she is night
I will never know
her origin
She has no origin
And I know all origin comes from her
And I know there can be nothing more beautiful
That heavens, the earth drink from her
Though she is night

Though she is night
Her depth cannot be sounded

Well I know
no one may round her
And her clarily never darkens
And all light I know comes
from her
Though she is night
I know her streams
so abundant
Watering hells and heavens and man
The stream
born from this fountain
Well I know
so able
omnipotent
Though she is night

Though she is night
The stream of these two flows
Neither before the other goes I know
This eternal
fountain
hidden
In this living bread
to give us life
Though she is night

Here
she calls to the creatures
And with this water they are slaked
Though in darkness
For she is night

This
the living fountain I desire
In this
bread of life I see her
Though night

A note on the translation

It is a curiosity that translation—the most passive, bookish act of writing—often occurs in a fit of anger. Appalled at the injustice of an existing translation, one rises in defense of the poem. (For this reason, Ben Belitt, that textbook of how not to translate, has been an important and positive force: many translators of Spanish began their careers out of rage at Belitt's betrayals of Lorca and Neruda.)

In the case of "The Fountain," references to the poem in manuscripts by Karin Lessing and Octavio Paz propelled me to check the three translations I had at hand. Willis Barnstone's version is now in its sixth printing as a New Directions paperback. John Frederick Nims has recently released his third revised edition in a University of Chicago paperback. Roy Campbell's translation is out of print. I found:

Aquella eterna fonte está ascondida
que bien sé yo do tiene su manida
aunque es de noche

(literally) That eternal fountain is hidden
how well I know where it/she has its/her abode/lair/mansion
although it/she is night

Nims: Waters that flow forever and a day
through a lost country—oh I know the way
in dark of night.

Barnstone: The eternal fountain is unseen.
How well I know where she has been
in black of night.

Campbell: Its deathless spring is hidden. Even so
Full well I guess from whence its sources flow
Though it be night.

Nims had translated three words of the original ("I know" and "night") and then made up the rest. Barnstone and Campbell seemed willing to do almost anything to make a rhyme: Barnstone by stretching ("unseen" for "hidden," "has been" for "has its/her lair") and Campbell by inventing "sources flow" and the convoluted and ultimately (oxy)moronic "Even so full well I guess."

Here was more:

Su claridad nunca es escurecida
y sé que toda luz de ella es venida

(literally) Its/her clarity is never darkened
and I know that all light comes from her

Nims: A stream so clear, and never clouded? Never.
The wellspring of all splendor whatsoever.

Barnstone: Her shining never has a blur;
I know that all light comes from her

Cambell: Its clarity unclouded still shall be:
Out of it comes the light by which we see

Aquí se está llamando a las criaturas
y de esta agua se hartan aungue a escuras
porque es de noche

(literally) Here it/she is calling to the creatures,
and with this water they are sated, although in darkness,
for it/she is night

Nims: Song of the waters calling: come and drink.
Come, all you creatures, to the shadowy brink
in dark of night.

Barnstone: She calls on all mankind to start
to drink her water, though in dark,
for black is night.

Campbell: Here to all creatrures it is crying, hark!
That they should drink their fill though in the dark,
For it is night.

The patterns had remained the same throughout each version. Nims was simply out to lunch (James Dickey, on the back cover, had inadvertently hit the nail on the head: "You tend to forget that the poems were ever written in Spanish"). Barnstone and Campbell had collapsed at the altar of rhyme: Campbell, like an old couch,

showing great tufts of stuffing ("still shall be," "by which we see," "hark!"); Barnstone falling into a kind of baby-talk which he had mistaken for colloquial speech ("never has a blur," "start to drink"). 400 years later, it seemed that S. Juan was still being tortured.

My own version was written, then, merely to give N. American readers some small sense of what Juan actually wrote. It followed the wide road cleared by Paul Blackburn's *Proensa*, where an attention to literal detail evolves a musical complex utterly unlike that of the original. In attempting an exactitude of meaning—not difficult, given the poet's extraordinarily simple, limpid speech—I found it harmful either to keep the meter running (like the hacks) or to retain the three-line stanzas of Juan's unorthodox *villancico*. This will undoubtedly distress those wardens of Spanish poetry like Nims and Barnstone and Campbell, who would prefer to keep the poem in the prison where it was originally written.

—*E. W.*

△

Holly Prado

Sky

it is all string and grass in the beak
then flies so far away that I can't name the color
this ends with promises
I love him

just let me wipe the hair out of your eyes

I cook asparagus but only in may then move on
to summer squash to corn to pumpkin
suddenly it's winter here is soup
always a different set of clues

no wonder my friend who's crazy pretends she can't read
total failure is such relief

I tell him to stop asking me what I think
I think the speckled neck on one dove silly and lively
how can a home be migration
yet there is something in feathers this quick pulse
there's no choice
I'm not alone anymore
my friend walks the same few shaky blocks every day every day
twenty years of this for her and more to come
untouched

all right
I can eat these meals this noise as large as the whole yard
let us amaze the people who fold their arms and dare us
he and I look at each other
we have learned nests flying hunger rocks against the tree
let us have no peace then
the promises begin to work in us

balanced on telephone wires landing on fences circling the seed
it's the right weather it's forever the right weather

△

Jerome Rothenberg

War

. . . . . .
he is (they say) a general with tits
down to his knees
he whom they call "the mother"
whose knobs they pinch
stifflegged & lonely
like a cloud adrift
past maps of Italy
bunkers where he swallows
the macho fluids
hates the sexual residue
but thrives from it
in the collapse of centuries
the generals
still up to their tongues in shit
demand it
in their talk frail jaws
& squeaking old man voices
carry across the room
the war not real
the death of boys a caution
he is the bride the others sell
at weddings at parades
he inches past the other generals
hungry fingers spread apart
under their tongues

beckons the young men to his breasts
& prongs them
electric emissions from his radios
go forth electric flags
& well-phlanged lady admirals
shadow his nuts
the perfect delivery begun
—o art—
—o life—
he sings the memory of his lost tubes
blue uterus
the birth of perfect soldiers
mother warriors
a hissing army slides
under his ponds its bugles
sound a single "h"
deflowered dreaming
the general drops from a winged motorcycle
over Asia
rides past a dozen skies
spent veins ejaculating
milk blue sperm
over his eyelids
the corners of his mouth turned down
in gratitude
his blue teeth colored red
the shreds of boy flesh hang from
shining below his gums
the generals spangle each other's stars
they bow to him
at sundown in the fishlight
"my flank (he croaks) is tubular
"my hand is at your spine
"the ants climb your medulla

"where the sand burns
"orange
"pink
"the final rodeo's in town
"even the clowns ride bareback
"truth comes slowly
"if it would come at all
the wagging old tongues squirm the squads
resume encounters
in a hole a wormy mattress
where an old man like a goddess squats
the young boys fondle
his dry tits
he dreams old wars & new ones
hears the sly plunk of mandolines
over the Gulf of Suez

Europe

for Pierre Joris

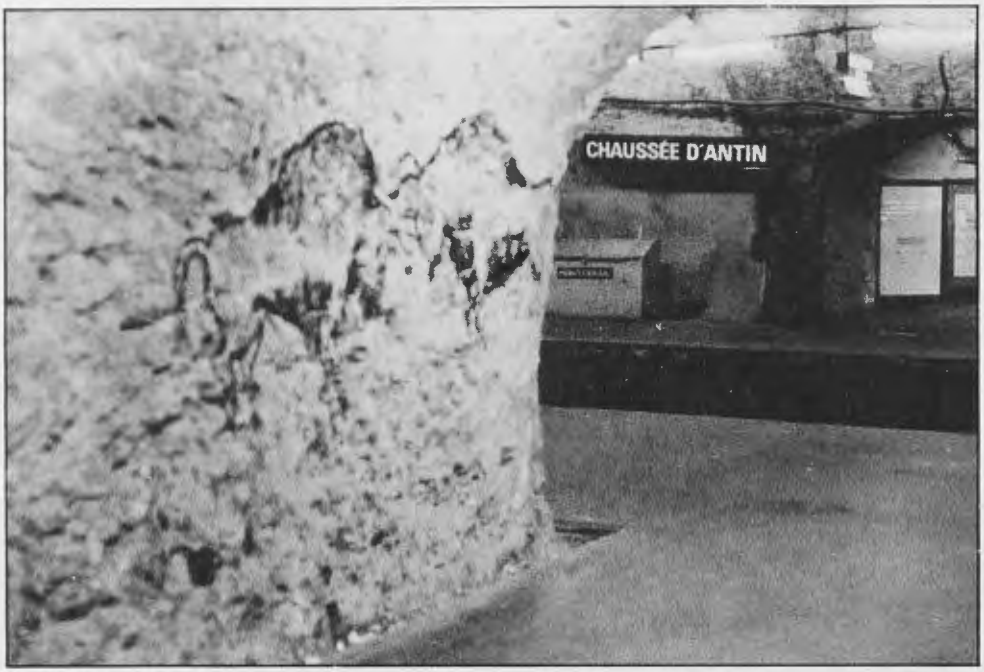
mind the gap
the sign at Clapham Junction
reads, the train
pulls out for death
the messenger called satan
in the sour pub
time-honored
pilgrim
with toes jamming the bar-rail
hoists his pint
a yard over his skull
the suds stream
moistly
the street dissolving
into Europe mystics
& dead rabbis
circuits of generations follow
the Belgian factories like ghosts
behind us do we ride
the train, asleep
the passengers tangled in our dreams
where spiders become birds
birds lunge at us
angry but thoughtful never

bite us on the Rhine
a boat waits
sadly inflating with the generations
we move beyond
old dutchmen
searching for nails in shallow water
"it is impractical"
the mother says she cannot
lace their shoes
forever the children cry
the Dadaists in exile
somewhere in these fields
o LONDON ONION
bring us the death of Europe
the news delivered
fair & square
echoes the Europe in his eyes
the tongue protruding
Europe that cries for nooky
like a king a shadow monarch
his lusts spewed out against the helpless
maidens & slaves
the energies of empire
dimming
only his memories remain
he gobbles up old photographs
the dukes of luxembourg
gremlins of zanzibar beneath his bed
an eyelash trembling
clogging their rosy stews
sad Europe lover
presses a finger down her throat
they kiss & vomit
often men with bowties

women wrapped up in colored beads
& gauze
the death of Europe is their dream
lost in the other century
the journey through the stones
of stonehenge cathedral
towns & tea rooms
now manned by strangers
Dada ghosts
with dreadlocks Europe's tongue
stuck to his teeth
his failure to conceive a language
haunts him it is five o'clock
again the lights go out
a turkish heaven
rises near the bahnhoff
the future is no closer
than it ever was
the mind is searching for the mind
hello, tomorrow
sing our lips
the foxy face of Europe
—now my own face—
smiles down on us across the gap
old trickster for another day
another avatar
gone down the drain

Bastille Day
1981

△



FRANÇOISE JANICOT
Station de Metro *Chausée D'Antin*
Paris, Juillet 1981

Hayden Carruth

Who I Am

THE SHORT TIME since I began teaching has still been long enough to show me that most graduate students, to say nothing of undergraduates in their blest innocence or of other poets in their thousands whose manuscripts I encounter yearly, do not distinguish between the words *image* and *metaphor*. Or if they do, it is fuzzily, glibly. It seems an especially distressing instance of the general decay of language. For my part I am a niggler when it comes to words, and I am content to be so, though of course acknowledging the final impossibility of precision.

After Imagism, with its reaching back to Symbolism and the extreme metaphoricality of Oriental art, one can see and understand how, in the evolution of sensibility for the succeeding seventy years, an image occurring in a poem became a signal, a Pavlovian stimulus, for the poet's merely inventive faculty to come into play. The result now is poetry clogged with metaphors; usually they are disparate and, as complements of the poem's main structure, meaningless. I have said that Robert Lowell's poetry is a fair example of this, and I say it again, with the understanding that I could name many more who are both like and unlike Lowell in every aspect of poetic practice.

Years ago the Objectivists announced that metaphor and its inevitable outgrowth, the consciously manipulated symbol, are illegitimate because they arrogate to the poet's personal uses certain properties of the object, suppressing others and thus wrenching the object away from its own wholeness and identity. I liked that. It seemed to dovetail with other parts of European existentialist thought in the years of mid-century. If, as Auden said and as I and many others have said in different terms, human intelligence is "supernumerary" in the universe, what right can it have to involve itself in material process? None. The biblical idea that the world exists for mankind's convenience is turned upside-down, a colossal inversion after four or five millenia of belief. It is not accepted yet by more than a sprinkling of the populace. Then what are we to say about the exploitation of the world for human ends? Is it human nature? I would prefer to say human, i.e. perverted animal, instinct. I am not sure that anything properly called "human nature" exists. And of course the exploitation is evident, appallingly evident—a fact. Even today, with some hedging, scientists continue to act on the proposition that the power to reason is what differentiates mankind from the other animal species. So do I, but I believe "the power to reason" means "the will to dominate." Intelligence is the perversion of instinct. We cannot not use it, but we must somehow, by force of self-denial or power of self-transcendence, bring it into consonance with the superiority of nonintelligence.

I am straying. For my purpose I should narrow the question and ask: what are we to say, in the face of philosophical consistency, about the thousands and thousands of metaphors in poetry of the past that thrill us each time we encounter them? More particularly, what are we to say about Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, who together invented modern poetry? Can we say that "L'Aprés-midi d'un faune" is an illegitimate poem, even though it works better than any other poem of its kind in western literature? Shall we throw away Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Char, Stevens, Levertov—almost everybody?

Perhaps metaphor is inevitably built not only into our instinct but

into our language. Even the most doctrinaire Objectivist would not shy from "the birdsong of evening." Yet we know that birds do not sing, not in any sense that has a true connection with our use of the word. Can we disclaim *birdsong*, therefore, on grounds of anthropomorphism? What about *wave*?—a word chosen completely at random except that I wanted an Anglo-Saxon monosyllable. Which came first, the motion of the hand or the motion of the sea? Partridge traces it to "ON *-vafa*, itself akin to OE *wafian*, to wave esp with the hands, ME *waven*, E 'to *wave*,' whence the n *wave*, a billow." But this is too easy; it doesn't help. When I look under cognates I find Latin *uibrare,* to vibrate, which is "perh akin to L *uipera*, ML *vipera*, a viper." Well, this is more like it. A snake undulates. A snake is an archetype. But Partridge does not affirm the cognancy, and he goes no further back than Latin, not even to Greek, with no speculative Indo-European root, in which he usually delights. And suppose he had done it, had tracked the image back to Sanskrit, would we even then know if the hand was snake-like, the snake sea-like, the sea hand-like? No. Metaphor is a as deeply and obscurely implanted in our cognitive procedures as any other equal, but no more than equal, viciousness: sexism, rationalism, the urge to quantify.

When Zukofsky's *A-24* was published, with its four lines of text and one line of music going in concurrence from page to page, I wrote to him—we were corresponding regularly—and said, among other things, that my experience of reading the five lines simultaneously was like lying on the deck of a sailing ship and watching a point of St. Elmo's fire on the mast-tip swing back and forth across the constellations. Louis replied (though I quote from memory because the letter is elsewhere): "If I must accede to a simile, then let it be an exact one, like yours." But the simile was total fabrication. I have never been on a sailing ship in my life, I have never seen St. Elmo's fire at sea (though I have in the woods). Upon further investigation I find that St. Elmo's fire is most likely to be seen during a storm when the constellations would be hidden. Obviously Zukofsky had never been on a sailing ship either. It shows the frightening risks, philosophically

speaking, human imagination is liable to. Zukofsky and I were both making fools of ourselves. But at least we had the sense to do it in private and for the fun of it, with a mutual understanding of what we could permit ourselves in those circumstances, rather than on the public page; which is more than can be said for the great preponderance of poets working today, including most of my good friends.

Reality is a false hope.

Metaphor is the falseness abstracted and ideationally embodied.

The fact that absurdity exists as much within oneself as without does not relieve the poet, or anyone else, from the need to stand against it, defiant for the sake of supernumerary humanity.

Here are three lines from a poem called "in the Hawk's Eye," by R.T. Smith:

> Some of us live down here
> at the center of his circling.
> We watch him caper in the wind....

Smith is a poet whose work I like. His perceptions are keen and personal, his feeling is strong but never strident, his mind is acute (as in that "some of us"), his writing is tonally, texturally, rhythmically gratifying. Moreover he is a countryman whose vision of nature is similar to mine in its mixture of menace and pathos, and he can write of these complexities in simple words, something I often cannot do and hence admire considerably. But I do not like that "caper." Why? Most of my students and friends would approve that word expressly, would applaud its originality and therefore the apparent authenticity of the experience or perception behind it. Nor can I myself find fault on that account, for although most large hawks glide or soar in their circling flight, I have seen them (accipiters and falcons more than buteos, I think) fluttering, feathering, maneuvering quickly for the precise angle of stoop; in effect, "capering." Is it the anthropomorphism bothering me? Maybe. But if *birdsong* is o.k., why not *caper*? For that matter, is there anything in the meaning of *caper* that limits its application to human beings? No. The dictionary is quite clear. Yet I do feel that the word primarily describes a human action because it

implies a human feeling. Only at a considerable remove and with a certain inaccuracy may it be applied to hawks, and this remoteness and inaccuracy—unfitness might be better—overcome in my mind whatever Smith has gained by his originality.

(Smith's new book s *Rural Route*, Tamarack Press, Syracuse, N.Y., well worth reading.)

Think of the recurrent passage in which Pound described the little lighted candles floating out on a slow tide in their paper boats at nightfall, a rite for Tammuz. They are precisely descriptions or picturings, the simple scene without metaphor either explicit or implicit. The language is Pound's, hence an almost transfiguring clarity, with nothing twisted, nothing partial. Yet the imagery is laden with meaning. The Cantos are a treasury of such images set down in purity, without the forcing of metaphor. And exactly the same can be said of Frost's imagery, e.g. the woods filling up with snow.

"Intensely seen, image becomes symbol," said Roethke, and his poems too contain many examples.

Like everything in the mass of human intrusion upon natural order, metaphor is a vexing question. Can we deny the fact, or the psychical propensities behind the fact? I see no course to take but to avoid a doctrinal position. Since metaphor is fixed in language and probably in human imagination as well, and since the great poets give us metaphors beyond counting that in fact do function, we can only bow, as to the inevitable. But this does not mean we must give up our good sense. For myself, I believe that metaphor generally does not work as well as direct statement, and further that the tediousness and friability of most current American poetry is owing to the overuse of metaphor more than to anything else. I wish Smith had written "soar" or "flutter" instead of "caper." Pound would have used a more original word that was nevertheless still true to the *hawk's* identity, not the poet's or the reader's; or he would have used the plainest words he could find, giving them the fullness of original meaning through his remarkable spontaneous strategies of syntax, tonality, and measure.

Four summary admonishments:

1. Use metaphor sparingly and only when it accords well with all the poem's other components and is fully integrated with them. Never invent a metaphor for its own sake.

2. Give up the long-standing notion that metaphor is somehow inately "poetic," "the soul of poetry," that which conduces to "awareness," "the shock of recognition," etc. Granted, the poetic faculty is a synthesizing imagination, but what it brings together are relevant and compatible feelings, thoughts, and words, not extraneous and far-out irrelations. And the bringing together is a natural thing, not an artifice. Comparison, simile, metaphor, these are the rhetor's tricks, methodized imagination, taught in the schools of rhetoric (creative writing workshops).

3. Intensity is what counts, as Roethke said. As others have said too: Levertov, Hopkins, Blake, Swedenborg, Longinus, etc., etc. Intensity of perception, intensity of experience. To see, to hear, to feel. It is not easy, but without it no true poetry can occur. Nor may it be counterfeited, or its lack made up by verbal invention. Stephan Dedalus believed in "the eternal affirmation of the spirit of man in literature," with appropriate Joycean and/or Irish irony. Leaving aside eternity, I believe in it too—without any irony at all.

4. Today especially, in the extremity of the human existential predicament (for one cannot imagine a further extremity that will not simply remove human existence once and for all), we can no longer practice the will to dominate through more and more human imposition upon things as they are, things in themselves, imposition of whatever kind and in whatever sphere, intellectual, artistic, or material. We must acknowledge the equivalence of all idenities, including our own. This is not philosophical idea-spinning. It is practical in the most immediate sense: we cannot survive without a total inversion of attitudes and values. Who knows if it can be done? But my own wish, at least, is to be counted among those who tried.

△

Andrew Robbins

Christmas 1978

Arm in arm, earlier we had walked
through the weak yellow light of the solstice,
the electric stars, and watched, behind the hard frost
on the florists' windows, the pale labia of orchids replaced
by the poinsettias' red, angry bursts—
how martial blooms impose their candor on everything!

And dusk found us sitting at your window again,
listening to the misery of cats in the alley,
even the thought of our need grown heavy,
heavy, as the blood in our heads banged around
and our tongues went as they would, went wild...
O, how their wet lashes punished our love,
love gloom-red, love half-eaten, love
bleeding as though chewed by every mouth.

In the stars above, or below, among the albino weeds
that grow up in darkness under the house,
poco a poco crescendo, I can hear the clatter of dice,
the click of bones snapping in place.
But do we know the art of evoking happy moments,
the pieces that fall so easily away
like the wings of charred suicides and overdone hens?
Can you remember the beautiful love-child
whose body we believed rested forever
in its bedclothes of the forest and the snow?

Is this the season when her membranes
will bloom once more, rubious in our bed,
and we shall look and see her whom we killed?

There is an obscene self-consciousness where the thought
of ourselves, too sticky, closes in, like a goat's stomach
that's been butchered out to hold the rest of its body.
The shadow of a branch was thrashing against the window pane,
and we could feel those dead leaves, the color of earthenware,
the color of brains hanging in high in the ash,
begin to bully the day among them.
As the sun set you began to talk of disappointments—
how our words reach, how the reaching never reaches.
No, it was not a happy time of year. The stars
were dying off and on. There was no scent of straw
on the virgin's breath. It was not
the last hour before any birth.
The flower of your face had broken, each lip
like a failing ember. In its halo
even the moon shunned us,
just as it seemed to refuse the sun, the same
rejection of light, love, which compelled
the remaining landscape to turn crazily, to fall
like a rain of mice into a madhouse,
everywhere around us so that we could not run.

Ibidem

at four in the morning
I hear the train-howl alarm
quotidian undraping
the dim silhouette
of the bakery
the foot of depot hill

through two miles or more
undulating closer
the sounding of day
of time returning

same as my father
heard light
years ago &
rising hungover
knew this room
the paper-green petals

round the windowglass
run wider now flooding
deep at the bottom
a grave ambage
this breaking shines in
and behind the pane

two jays are cawing
in the air's green shallows
their beaks unfold
a raucous depth
where the trainsong goes

but out his chapped throat
whose cough is it follows
that I ask what o'clock
whose cough it could be

from his bed I know
my brother Joe turns out
it is his low faltering
his lineal moan

yet unsafed by the hour
and the train wakes another
I smell his sweet apron
his anaphoric shot
I hear the tardy

jingling of his bakery keys
& daddy fresh from my cradle
through the bourbon honeysuckle
you go lurching out the door
that never heals

A Hieroglyph for Joe and Mark and Angela

Brothers, sister, having only each other,
as we are of them and ever instead,
of those foregone, whose tears are our flesh,
one another we believe instead of our dreams
where by a ladder's edge the blood is drawn
from the leggy teenager as she runs
out and down, toward us, with her tipsy Adonis.
Or still other tales wherein we are born of the wind
as it grazes the styles of some magical flower. All maya.
Mom and Dad simply gave us away.

But we have failed together in this blood-warm eighth month,
been gathered by chance into grandmother's house,
I to paint it and you to depart with your belongings.
And under the hyaline, plagial air, with its higher blue so close
to autumn's, I feel love among us throbbing
like the printed throes of four candleflies
on this white, new-painted door,
burning, a degree of perfect understanding,
some lucidity of time and blood, a reliance
ripening that words might ruin

Ahead, green lampions are shining out
through the horn-skin feet of the mountain,

and, kindred, white behind us roil the final moments of wake.
Shortly, again, in the former distance,
we will see how the prospect anticipates,
as always, our passion to avoid it,
and how, in fact, we have only each other,
that our love is made fast in this singular pain.
My brothers and my sister, we are of them and I love you,
as I have loved you, ever instead.

△

Mark Karlins

Snow White

to live always with children
is to be haltered at unity,
door that opens inward

rose trellised dusk-cottage
to play deftly at house,
be mother to small men

rose soft mouth
door for outward, apple
thru which the world enters

Perry

A geological staircase
where personality erodes to bedrock
the vestiges the little oil lamp of the heart

a little bird figure
grown to bloom from ice a swan
its neck cropping to great vertical phallic mass
in ice
there are no soft gods
no heart to bridge the muscular
blank parts of face to meadowed soft sun

north is a transparent pierced mother animal
a bowed mastadonian form in catatonia
a frigid snow white a wife in an evoking
seam thru which seeps a Cain's voice

"Perry, you believe you can find the end
and return in all ways to the same room
a dark blue suit to dance
an old flame in the ballroom flaring to sun
an antiphonal agate in ice
that warms, a hold like a large soft door thru to nostalgia
where the faces of children blur to the blue tinge, summer,
where you sit in your fan cooled soda-fountain
an unseamed brother to yourself

where the white of waiter intersects with the orbit of
hunched-mastadonian-cain,
in his hand a frothy glass giving off a scent of icy chocolate,

you, Perry, while the dead, souls,
great slabs of meat sit in refrigeration.
you want to sip your dark ice with a creamy sweetener."

the farmyard is infested with rivers.
fish's mouth
toothed continuous wagging jaw,

rock-door
in pregnant white sow on her side,
hill side hollow
daffodils in the Dutch-American mist:

cooking vessel
in which chronic twilight foams

& the invoked heart embeds.

△

August Kleinzahler

Relaxing in California

They are coming out, emptying
into the plaza of concrete and fronds—
food handlers, clerks
going home.
The sky is blue, skyblue; blue
buses line up at the curb.
We are on our way home
before the sun gets lost in the western sea.

To the hills threaded with gold
we go.

Down sidewalks, under sills
where music hangs down
by no thread at all,
home.

To our shaded valleys
where fugue after fugue dissolves in the loam.

Downtown,
where little boys play at rocks
and chophouses smoke.

Along this pivot's luscious course
sky turns the blue
Mommy's Chevy was

and t.v. sets go pock pock pong
under the clear crisp sickle moon.

The Interior Decorator on Sunday

Those strange and translucent scampi in lantern hats
who prowl then vanish into night's big hole
are here, shorted-out, hard
to pick up in the neutral air,
but afloat between ceiling and carpet.
No, they are not. They are off
across the ravine of bison grass and dead shoots,
over the boulevard and gone
to spin or park on their filament's last inch.

On the wall is a spot: the painter sneezed
...or dirt,
or it is a cousin back from the dead
yearning to touch brows.
The spot is not monochrome; red is with that gray.
It is...a cell beset by virus.
Really, I don't know. So much business thins me out.
And now voices approach: they are spheres,
textured.

Dejection Between Foot and Brow

Mr Moo heard stuff 'round the trough
ah me, dumb
like a yoke. Iz cumulative
you know
till the hole's plugged
and what it is backs up
to the doors of Penny Palace.
                The racket, man
in that arcade—those slobs
at toy war go unh, unh night and day.
                Remember
the world, Beau
2 miles high
so any chair or bough was bright
like the eye-fur
burnt-off.
        Birds just shot through
the arch
screaming,
        Jeeeeezus, my feathers
my pretty little bones...
                I remember
where was that
in Troy, I think—
                or some dry hill
out west.
It's years now.

Song

Death for the quip
in a place with no bounce.
Ask nothing of the river wind
that could shake this heat.
These blocks
of sorry, pitted brick
are instructive
like tree rings, maybe
or rot.

Elders on cafeteria stools
stir their Sanka,
breaking
strange winds
that prophesy last things.

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_____,' she said. Past
kindness,
unkindness
down came no hair. Thus
ends the tale.

No meal of rant
No billy-gruff jig
No divots raked
from the moonlit sod

The last light lit
is the magazine shop's

with its color photos of gash
in baseball caps and knee socks.

△

The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson

Introduction: Part III

The Final Feud (1950-1955)

Edited by Paul Christensen

"At its best," wrote Martin Duberman, "Black Mountain showed the possibilities of a disparate group of individuals committing themselves to a common enterprise, resilient enough to absorb the conflicts entailed, brave enough, now and then, to be transformed by its accompanying energies." Edward Dahlberg had lasted but two weeks at the rural mountain college; his memory of it was of a den of "slatterns and catamites," an academy of sloth and madness. Olson came to its rectorship just as the college began to founder. He governed over its demise, even though he created a durable literary movement from among its remaining students and faculty. The poetry of Black Mountain arose as the communal household crumbled; Olson parcelled off the land and used the money to keep the remaining, shrinking center going from month to month. But rootlessness, itineracy, isolation are the vision of Black Mountain poets; their poetry is distinguished chiefly for its effort to penetrate the alien condition of the land and make it "home." (The most frequently cited dichotomy of Olson's early poetry is that between an "out" and the "in" of *participation mystique*.) Most of Olson's group at the college had been recruited from New England, until Robert Duncan joined the staff in 1955; when Black Mountain closed, the members were scattered to all parts, like seeds in the wind. Black Mountain art is a vision of struggle and isolation in the American desert of the mid-century; every member of the original group under Olson, including Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan, has gone off to write like a surviving Ishmael, after the great ark of fellowship had gone down. The "self" of these poets

and writers is that recording instrument for measuring that which is not "I." Here was a college of Pacific Man, post-individual Ishmaels, in the language of *Call Me Ishmael*, those who could anticipate the renewal of the West after the Age of Ahab, the Odyssean era.

After the college closed down in 1956, the poets who drifted west or east found others who were curious, even envious, of their uniquely communal experience there. Black Mountain as a generic term for this poetry has come to stand for a *fellowship* of poets more than a particular vision or methodology; it has often been ridiculed as a mere coterie of Olson. But the essential dogma was that the self was preeminent, not the group, not brotherhood, those lingering phantasms of individualism; the self was not indivisible as to identity, but an atom of the collective human awareness; every self was another eye of Argus looking out into the world; groups were merely arbitrary hierarchies that limited sight and understanding by their very own secretions of identity, those membranes of "belonging" that actually separated and controlled the members rather than united them. Dahlberg believed in the fellowship of scribes; that art was a bond of love among the artists. Olson saw unity of thought and vision only in the art, and not the artists, who were temporarily those intruments of consciousness making do with their lives. In putting self above all else in art, Olson had underscored the isolation of the artists in his realm, islanders of the gloom. Olson's deepest friendships—with Dahlberg and Creeley—were creations of letters, and not of habitual contact; they were themselves functions of writing, aspects of a literature they all made together. Creeley accepted the situation, indeed, may even have preferred the working advantages of separation and written communication; Dahlberg deplored the letter, and insisted on the proffered living "hand" of friendship to any other gesture of amity. It will turn out, however, that Olson's published work will consist of letters more than anything else: letter-poems, letters of vision, but *letters*, words sent through the distances among these various eyes of *polis*.

Duberman was attracted to Black Mountain essentially to study the community it created among that most intransigent of groups, artists; his book, *Black Moutain: An Exploration in Community* (1973), is more often a testament of discord and open confict. Here was a corrosive freedom that ate away at relations; conflict sprung up the moment hierarchy settled into faculty life; as order faintly spread among some members, disorder was its only

rebuttal; disorder and open feuding, even scheming. There resulted the experience of mere numbers of persons, each off to himself in pursuit of his own enrichment, in which any compromise to the group was a painful surrender of independence. It was in this atmosphere of discord, the dismantling of the college, the dwindling of enrollments, that Dahlberg made his final, bitter entreaties for affection to Olson, in which their friendship rapidly deteriorated and came to an end. By 1955, both writers were fully committed to their separate visions of American life; Olson to lament its heroic past and to argue its redemptive future; Dahlberg to castigate the whole experiment of a nation as a failure of deepening tragedy. Olson had been increasingly more productive in his work: *In Cold Hell, In Thicket*, published in 1953, was his first full-length book of poems; the first ten Maximus poems were published by Jonathan Williams in Stuttgart, Germany that same year. Other poems and essays were appearing regularly in the journals *Origin* and *Black Mountain Review*. Olson's reputation had been building slowly ever since the appearance of "Projective Verse" in *Poetry New York* in 1950. But Dahlberg's writing lagged behind; he blamed his publishing difficulties on the poor critical response to *The Flea of Sodom* of 1950; he wrote essays for *Tomorrow* and *The Freeman*, but he felt himself to be "blacklisted" in reverse, by the Marxists in New York! The New York *Times* occasionally commissioned him to write reviews, but its associate editor, Harvey Breit, published few of them. This and other snubs by the New York press drove Dahlberg to suspect that he had been conspiratorially kept out of print by his enemies, among which Olson was slowly coming to be implicated. With no other target for his resentments, Dahlberg heaped his invective on Olson, and began to see in Olson's confluence of Marxist, literary, and egotistical forces turning his best friend into his enemy.

Like fate, the letters move inexorably to contempt, suspicion, verbal lashing, attacks and counter-attacts, as each goes further than the other toward breaking up their troubled friendship. There is something gruesome about the verbal struggle; it is in deadly earnest but waged by men of genius who raised the hatred and anger each felt to a charged eloquence, brilliant oratorical flamboyance, a *beautiful* violence, and frequently to the most touching gallantry and proposals of truce. The letters reveal the sordid enmity of the arts in America; they peel back the public image, the polished personae, and let us into the dark world of suspicion, neglect, struggle for recognition,

boundless bitterness against the commerciality of the book world; they speak of a moody life of genius and failure, poverty and arrogance, ideas and the invincible materialism of the American public. The letters turn against the writers themselves for lack of a real contest with their aims and visions; if Dahlberg had had a press that cared what he saw in the American present, Olson's silence would have been a blameless quirk unworthy of notice. But there was no public for his work, no critics, only a few mildly curious souls of the left who spared some kind words for a book of perverse obstinacy: in another country, perhaps, it would have raised controversy and notoriety for its author, but not here.

Olson knew all of this, and had experienced a similar neglect for *Call Me Ishmael*; but he was partner to a fate and do what he could, it was impossible for him to speak favorably of Dahlberg's text. He forced himself to take notes, and to presume to write his critique, but the words would not come—he loathed the little testament of Dahlberg's pathos and misery. In time, Dahlberg's accusations hardened him and made him fight back. He refused to see how his own ambiguous responses were the root of the book's failure. Dahlberg refused to see that in his friend Olson was the clue that perhaps the book was wrong in some fatal, profound way. Dahlberg had decentered his suffering and transferred it to the world; his true parable lay in his own personal confessions of a Jew in America—a rootless, visionary believer pining after the Mediterranean source. Dahlberg's genius was to capture the wanderings of the last straggler of the Exodus, who had been flung out too far West and North into a land of atheist merchants who had no other value but the goods of the market. He had hoped Olson would understand his vision, but soon grew weary of the dilatory progress Olson made on his review. Instead, the old American tragedy of letters was again reenacted, a myth of its own: one writer must renounce the other and quit the relation in pain and agony. After Olson's death in 1970, Dahlberg, near the end of his own life, reserved his kaddish for Olson in *The Confessions of Edward Dahlberg*, published in 1971. In Ch. 33, he tells the whole story from his own version, stressing his fatherly role to the younger genius, whose letters saluted him with "Edward, my Edward," Dalhberg ruefully remarks. "Olson's fervor for me ebbed, and I saw his scab of pride," he writes, and "his principle renunciation was myself." The reason: "He had an ungovernable impulse to destroy himself." Requiem:

> He is in the ground now. I have grieved over him, and then again, my soul has been dipped into the squalid marshes of wrath. I have taken the oath never to allow a stranger to cross the threshold of my fragile identity and call me friend.
>
> I shall always love Charles Olson and condemn him... it is the human way.

Both Olson and Dahlberg survived the friendship and wrote their best work in the years remaining to them. They acquired each other's books as they came out, read them, commented to friends about them, but never returned to the friendship after the final feud of 1955. The covenant between them was fragile, as fragile as that between Emerson and Whitman, Hawthorne and Melville, Pound and Williams, and so on—the necessity to believe in one another's visions. Dahlberg was devoured by despair and Olson was not; there fell the shadow of their end. The break-up reminded Dahlberg of the parable of Cain and Abel, brother-artists who work and toil after their visions and ultimately must fight each other to the death.

△

[217 Randolph Pl, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
monday [August, 1950]

my dear edward:

i have sd so much about you, now to speak to you is an act of the strangest familiarity! And to enclose *y & x*, which was to be an act of intimacy, after i have used it to breit, snow and kruse, as (and had i better, to woodbridge, whom i abhor?) as lime to catch them on the twig of a job for you, is also strange

all of which proves how only discrimination matters!

as of wesleyean, the smartest idea i have come up with is kruse, cornelius kruse, professor philosophy, who, with snow, gave me the little the place gave me he is a thin dry high literate, but he has

power, was two years ago head here of the Am Council of Learned Societies (the circus top!), and is, with Millett, pretty much the boss, I gathered, of the honors college you should have no trouble engaging him, for he is pholospher enough to feel the edge of a fine mind (if its sharpness is unclawed!), and gentle enough (though it is the faded flower of weakness) to show heart: his wife katherine is "literary"! i suggest you call them when you arrive just on a friendly basis, friends to friends of olson let yr charmism do the rest, for i have cued him, by letter, of the possibility of a post and also of the short appearance of the FLEA

as of reviewing i have not yet come up with any addition to breit i have accomplished, in such places, the common discourtesies you and i are such experts at! but i'll stew over it, have asked harvey to tell me if he knows any characters in such places who might give credence to me on you, and shall do likewise to any suggestions from you

(the best idea i have, is on the reviewing of FLEA: you should make sure that Laughlin sends one of his first advanced copies to Stanley Edgar Hyman, in Westport, Connecticut this guy bracketed you and I as the only succesors to Lawrence's Studies, in one of the literary reviews recently, and i Plan to be in touch with him by correspondence some time soon if he should take to FLEA, he swings, at the moment, the kind of reviewer power than which there is no other (he is another of those bright yeshivas, but he is the only character about who is aware of mythography as you and i are now writing it, and who we must woo along, so long as possible, despite the lesions we may see or find in him: he is a tool, to be used:::::: i say this to you for your ears alone, dearest friend—don't blow it, one day, if you should get sore!)

one idea writing to snow was, albers: where he is known, he is mighty but my major reason for thinking either you or i ought to get out of him a letter characterizing your power as teacher, is to offset what has already been used to murder me and undoubtedly would be so used against you colleges have a filthy way of asking

questions of each other in the dark because you probably state that you taught at black mt, i should imagine that any place would write them and who would be describing you? natasha goldowski, david corkran or raymond trayer!

(i anticipated it a little, by pointing out to bill, that it was these three who ousted you, albers and myself - accurate enough for our purposes)

well, ed, this for that & the very best of fortune (i'm holding my stomach, and sending the little boke to homer icehouse)

& let me know as soon as anything is interesting

love,
(CHARLES)

55 Morton Street
Apartment 7
New York, New York
August 15, 1950

Dearest Charles, —

I shall make up a list, as you suggest, to see whether we can make some Noise in the tops of the Mulberry Trees. I do earnestly wish, Charles, you would write a critique on THE FLEA. Lucre we don't hope for, being men of cush, it is enough to erect the Temple at Ammon, or as Cuthites to found Colchis, and the brazen rivers along osier bands. So, my fine nautical Tyrian, we who smart for the nymphs in the Euxine Sea, or go to Cadiz, and there cast up the obelisk graven with the dolphin, or settle in the mountains with Ham or Baal-Peor Cyckopes, we with the dove, and the serpent in our hearts—for what are our hearts but Ophite oracles, let me too not be without that food from Sidon, Damascus or Gihoh, without which we

cannot be fabulous.

A note came from Richard Aldington: I had asked the London publishers to send him a copy, and he writes, having read the first two parts, so far, "with much respect for your [l?]avish and prodigal writing," and being, as he says, weary unto death of modern ramshackle prose, that "now you come along...with a fierce apocalyptic prose." He is in the south of France, at Var; there are so few left of that irascible, sage tribe of writers that it was good to have a note from him. What can I hope for from the newspaper Centaurs? Since we live in a day when man is too depraved to hear the word, and can only write himself money-changing phrases (do you know that Carl Van Doren, having worn out his heart on the radio, the television, and Benjamin Franklin) died a few days ago.

I am sending out this morning a letter to Nevill in London, asking whether the copies have been sea mailed to me. I think they have, and as soon as I have them, you and Constance, that summery reed by the warm Nile, shall have your four books.

Last week my baudelaire review appeared in the Times; you can learn nothing from these hack squibs save how I hope to get some cummin seed for my table. I am still hunting for Maximus of Tyre. I have a 1766 translation of Virgil, whom you disrelish; but the the Georgics are sweet thyme, and do not avert your face from the wind that blows that sweetly; the pipes of Pan and Tammuz are in the secret groves as well as in the holy temple of Jerusalem. Do not scorn Virgil, nor Callimachus, a stout grammarian who knew some enigmas about the tutelary gods. One godly line makes a learned heart, and Virgil has many; and even dour rhetor Milton can teach much to Keats and Olson and Dahlberg.

I shall be looking for your heady, Dionysiac line in Poetry, and thank you deeply for the acknowledgment. I thank you for not hiding me in the earth before my time.

Now, I've got to read an urchin volume for a little Mammon, ay very little, for the Georgics, for the anointed table, and for Rlene. And the last shall come first! And a note to Peter Owen in London to

fetch you and Constanza the little osier volumes.

So if you will not do the critique, but insist on interring the book in some Sidonian mound near the marge of the Pillars, where mariners take their dories with lamentation and trembling, going first ashore to pour libations to the Nereids and to offer prayers to the Trident, the Serpent at Sais, and to Poseidon who blesses the oar, before passing through the Gates to noxious Lethe, then may you in a moment of blasphemous inattention write a lettuce eunuch adjective like Waldo Frank! But after this torment, may you then return to King Aeolus, to the source of the WINDS; for there the MUSES chant, as they sit on the purple kelp, and heed the lowing of the sea-calves, going to their oceanic stalls; and after you have composed a perfect quatrain, may you then admit that a friend buries his friend with the same myrtle, cypress, and Plutonian spade and implements as his enemies.

I am told that Eugene Debs was an affectionate man, and kissed his friends with prodigal soul, living then when the pederasty of Caligula and Ham and the Apuleius was not so rife, or at least was subterranean, and civilly hidden, and so I send you that same token of friendship, and love, notwithstanding the shoal of catamites that simper and fleer at the spirit and the healing fountains in the wilderness of Beersheeba.

I have the complete works of Smart now published by Routledge in London. When I lay hands on some money, and get, I pray, some fall teaching, I shall order it for you. Did those two visionary apes, Tworkov and Ibram Lassaw, who does stalactite sculpture in some mystification material, come to see you. I send everybody to see you simply out of a bountiful and overflowing heart, jades, courtesans from Styx and Cocytus, dilapidated whores from Toledo, shipping clerk scribes from Memphis Tennessee Egypt, churls from the rivers and mudbanks of american pragmatism and knavish acquiesence, but what does it matter, who arrives; what is of greatest importance is he that receives them. We wait, my friend, for the Angel at Mamre in the sacred and private precincts of Pisa and the soul, and all other

guests are rude intrusions jarring our cadences, and marring some form which we have wrenched from Vision at Peniel. O my Timon Misanthropus, I, too, know the wiles, and all the pulsant circumlocutions by which we eschew baboon, infidel, scurrile men for whom we pine, and smart, and bleed. For a maxim I will take unto my bosom Herod; for a gnome can so cure a man that he has the stomach for all the knavery in the world. A man then that can write some healing or curative or prugative line has sufficient energy and has that goodly, genial climate in his visage to recieve him that cannot [?] those high nullities, and I've got an East Wind in my belly, and some rough boreal blast in my head, and I had better come to a stop, and wait for the Harper, and the woodland lutist, and Silenus to give me the song, and the dulcimer, s[ha]king knees, and the Ass, lest I be the ass without the song and the dulcimer.

Your garrulous, fond friend,
EDWARD

[New York, New York]
August 17, 1950

Dearest Charles, –

I sent you a special delivery the day before yesterday, or earlier, and hope it got into your hands. I doubtless disturbed your deep Cyclopean sleep, and they say that though these men, with the wheel-eye in the front of their heads ate men, they were skilled at building memorial cenotaphs, temples, lighthouses, were as tuneful as the Sirens, and were probably the progeny of the men af Anak.

I gave your entire list to Laughlin; the book is supposed to come from the binders this coming Monday, and is to be published about the 12th of September. I put you on the list for another copy. Have not yet received the books from London, and have written to find out what has happend to them.

Don't misunderstand the tenor of my special to you. I should like very much to have you do the critique, no, not for lucre, that you know is just buffonery, but for the pleasure I should receive from your yea. Then if the book should not have just a subterranean audience, it might not be so hard for me to get another book published, whenever that will be. I am hoping out of the attention that might come from this book to get some sort of college post, so you see, Charles, I do need that kind of help from you. If I tell you there is not a single person to whom I could appeal, save yourself, to do this (outside of Herbert Read in London), you might believe this to be wily hyperbole. But it is the whole truth.

Got a letter from Elizabeth Sparhawk Jones; she saw the Baudelaire review in the Times; have some fondness for her, but she has a tongue, laden not with myrhh or the hesiodic honey, but with gossip.

My warm love to you.
EDWARD

[Postscript 1:] *over* [written on reverse] I shall send out 2 copies today to Canstanza—a small parcel came just a half an hour ago—from London—then one [Airmail?] on to you Monday or Tuesday, & I still owe Constance one more! Is that right?

EDWARD

[Postscript 2, written round margin of typescript]

Just spoke to Harvey Breit about getting [a book to review?]—[heard] you spoke very enthusiastically about the Flea. I told him that pleased me deeply. I think he likes very much hearing from you—
[at top of letter] R'lene an ardent admirer of Melville, had, of course, "Call Me Ishmael" in her library when we met at a party, & considers it, as I do, the *best* Melville of a maelstrom of the Melville—rascals [who speak] in such silence than by [their roar] of praise!

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C. NE]
Monday Aug 29 50

Edward, my friend: do forgive me. I was in a sort of hell, had descended again, to try to speak with someone—and I think you know how the living can disrupt such conversation, break off the appearance and unanswerable speech of those whom you have tried to bring to the other edge of the trough, there. I'm sure it was that, rather than, that I was troubled as to your request I try to box Breit in until he gives me your book for review ((Laughlin reinforced it, by the way, later in the week, in a letter to me on another score, (on releasing, as he was most willing, both the poem and the title of THE PRAISES for this book of verse which will be published October 1st (Golden Goose Press)).))

You have me very troubled. If I were asked to do the Times review, I'd do it, for the reasons you advanced, that, such a review might serve your other necessities. Follow you here, absolutely. But it would be a usurpation of my forces and my senses of you to do a "review", a form I abhor. And that, plus my distaste for "using" Breit who left me myself so exposed in the same place, leaves me still with a huge reluctance to write him again. I would so much rather leave this thing to his doing, on the base of that earlier letter, if he so chooses. And meanwhile go ahead working on what is my own plan, to do a considerable critique, without reference to the magazine where it might appear, and then, when it is done, send it out ((This is the organic way in whch I have worked now so long, that any other conventional method—or arbitrary one—especially where it is such a major thing as your work, and my first real grappling with it, for critique—would be scattering, to me))

Well, don't be worried. I will go ahead keeping my attention on your book. It is the imagery which I am now studying. (The major state-

ment, of the narrative by parable, as against all contemporary narrative; and in distinction from the other "prophet" parts of your own book, pretty clear in my mind, but the imagery, which comes so thick and fast, it is a more difficult matter to get behind you in. And there is this other possible solution to the Times matter, that I should be going up to New England soon, and can make a call on Breit and get the thing, if it is not settled, thus settled directly between us. For I know this lad, a little, and know how resistant he is on you. (He has never gone to the mat with you, Edward, and thus is routed by his own failures.)

I see that neither of these plans solves your immediate difficulty, that you want a big-time notice for leverage on the akademicicars, that time is important. But you know, in your heart, that I am no good where time is, though you jibe me, that it is Anak or Tyrian or Celtic of me to go slow, you also know, in your head as well as your heart, that it is not so, that my practicalities exist, only in another relevance. For I should want to say nothing of Edward Dahlberg which did not stand in the same mortice as the thing I might say of Herman Melville. For Edward Dahlberg is more than my friend: he is of my own substance, a personage of my own fable, and I heave him out with the gravest torment, as if it were parts of my own flesh. I am not practical and realist at all, where such is of my own concern. These are the sources of my being & my image, and I do not do things with the shamelessness I observe my contemporaries are so prone to.

Nor must you think, or say, Edward, that it is not at all mortal of me, that it is an "ideality", that it is a wretchedness in the face of my friend's needs. For it is. And I see that. And I will do what I can do to undo same. But do not impugn my innocence. It is my only gift.

One thing you did not do, that I want you to do, is to explain to me that sentence in "Bellerophon":

Bellerophón, astride Pagasus, addressed his Furies, the raging, lambic hoofbeats, each regards the perfect wisdom of high Zeus, 'Only he who is alone can be wise without being double'

(it is not your incredibly fine ambiguity in the quotation, but the phrase "each regards the perfect wisdom of high Zeus': what is the meaning of your syntax, here? which does "each" refer to? just, please, for my understanding, fill in the syntax.)

((((I am so foolish to think that I, or anyone, can so extricate your meanings as to make a critique which will stand alongside the FLEA. Yet, that is what I would try to do!)))) [in script] IN CONTRAST TO H. READ—look an idea, & worth more than me: why shouldn't the *Times*, by air mail, ask READ, for the review. He has a large following here. And the *Times* might give *him* a full page! [typescript hereafter] ((((I find this out: that what one does with your "prophet" pieces, your "revelations", as against your parables (which stay right in place, in themselves, belong, are left alone) is, to make an anthology of them, to pull out the "gnomes" and rejoin them, to each other—

it is the same thing one is led to do with the image))))

It is your "history" that bugs me, the suck of personages, events, images into your own vortex, where they swirl as ps., es., ism., of the micro-Ed, when Ed is there as "I"; but in the "revelations" the history goes off a piece and stays somewhere in between Ed and—what?—the historians or poets who previously used them, from where ED got 'em. It raises up the whole question, of how, what form forces all such things to their knees, makes them servient to that emperor—how, in fact, the god gets inside.

It can be so another way: you may remember the 1st piece of my work

you saw. Anyhow, the curious thing is, it has come up again in this way, in this opposition: the "heroic" vs the "ethic". One of first reasons why your narratives are of first importance is, that you have broken the lyric "I" and the rational "I" completely. You have, therefore, made it possible for your own "I" to take on the force of the "Hero". Thus ethic is disposed of—which has fed on the mediocrity of life as it is. You allow in (fr the lxion wheel image, on) a multiple man (it is not so important as it may seem to those whom you know daily, and who know you, that it is Edward Dahlberg).

For such reasons I should be tempted by the proposition to go too far, to say that the "ethic" steals back in, in the "revelations", because, by chiasma, that where Dahlberg is not folded in to this wonderful multiple "I" the Dahlberg whom we know, who knows us, is, by the very loss of the myth-force, allowed in, and ethic comes with him!

But this, of course, is not true enough to invalidate the very things said that I, or anyone, would make an anthology of: the wisdom needs, my friend, to recieve the same shredding that Heraclitus' has. And become 130 ultimate sentences.

Well, that for now. And do not be troubled. We shall do what has to be done. And it shall be done, if not in the big spread stupid place, in a small place where it can be properly done.

My love to you, and
my faith
CHARLES OLSON

[55 Morton Street
Apartment 7 L
New York, New York]
august 29, 1950

dearest charles: —

I should be at a coistrel review-mess at this instant; but there is a fine letter from charles arrived at 7:30 this morning, which was good, as it got to me the shower, and then to the bakery to be off to my rlene's apartment to coffee and sweetroll her. but then returning, i thought it better to reply and go to the reviewing public-stews later. i should tell you, and this is in darkest secret, because of ann hathway winifred, adder brach, that rlene (she is 25, with the dark, moist eyes that bettered those of lady fitton that slew shakespere, and a very sharp reader of melville; she has read all the books of that poor, moaning troubled dust whom the rascals are not showing at the newstands), and i are to be married shortly. we are bound for detroit to visit her parents this week-end to fix a date.

of more tidings, i signed an american edition of the flea to you, which new directions should be sending out this morning, and i still owe constanza one more copy. does she want me to inscribe one to her, which i have not done up till now, because she wanted it for friends; but tell me, please, her pleasure, more english copies have not yet come, and i could send her another american one, and don't worry about that; i would rather have my book in her delicate, chaste hands than give it to some akademic stable-boy of american culture.

now you ask me, my good friend, to give you some appropriate explication of a passage in the bellerophon, and this essay really belongs to rlene and to you, and is dedicated to you, and about you and me. well, good friend, i, too, am one of the stupid, drowsy oxen, having fed on asphodels for some years in God's Meadowland, and now having in me but mountain and bare tree stupidity; i am a sere trunk, not as tall as Anak, but more stolid and statuesquely clownish. i also have that blood-unwillingness to explain what you could misinterpret

more profoundly. i am only laughing a little, but not really; remember that sokrates went to the poets to ask them to interpret their images and they did not know how. there is something in our river and glebe and sheep inceptions that forbids us to explain what we wrote, we not know how. and, honestly, i would feel a little showy, gaudy, doing some balaam braying, feigning moloch soothsaying in the secret groves, were it in dead earnest [,] and the earnest in this manner are surely dead) to give you a scholia, a piece of fatuous exegetics; it would not be blood-sport as it is in making book or a trull or a fine my lady the doxy, and you would be bored, and most uninstructed, and i should be by caitiff premeditation a fat oiled fool.

so now we come to the same point, saith friend ox, after the lordly spermaceti sac is emptied and the book is done, to friend anakim. now for the matter of the review in the times. let us be most plain, and even plainer than that, spread in the merde-sheet, even from your noble hand, would cocker my vanity, and be doves and lucre on the market-tables in the temple. some of me wants that, and urgently needs it, to get a post in some money-changing college, and to maintain a seemly, orchard-bearing wife, and even with you on the earth, without rlene, i walk alone on the planet more lonely and hurt and image-wounded than God. I should like to make a book or two more, if the Great Truth of all the apple earths and fish in the salty underswelling seas; if He that walks alone, from star to planet, being Space Himself, and what is more Alone than Pure Space, not even Time, which is another manner of speaking of Lord Space, seeking two or three Companions, also earth-hurt, and slain by the Image, will permit it. You should do all that your soul commands you to do, nor would I desire to encroach upon innocent Cordelian blood, asking of Her who is our Muse, our Fealty to the perplexed, bilingual heart, to give what the Alchemist Himself cannot yield for infertile, dunged skin hid in Aecus' Cave. I know, Aecus can be driven out by the club and lion's skin of Herackles, and not by you or me. I will probably get, and this is not nose-sniveling, flunky petition or so help me god local 12 waiter's union oath (for in my own heart, too, i don't care,

knowing and believing that God will provide the lamb for Abraham, even after the times' tomb-tombstone either or 800 word review—either he should have written another book or better, not have written one at all. The critique you propose you suggest, coming slow and meditative like the ruminative thoughts in the hunkers of the cattle of seth and enos, would be an anointed table for my cup and my soul. so do as you please, and let harvey breit, the de luxe pederast with the low, murmurous voice of hairy esau, do as he will, or as he tongues, for the pederast cannot will and so must lie, and lie until the villanous world takes its ultimate breath. another word of news in the world; at the new direction office, barbara asch, who does the publicity, said it would be very fine if i could get a statement from mr. charles olson, who is a very good Name. Despair not, the merchants of toledo, the clothiers from barcelona, and maritornes, of hair of glisteringest gold, trumpet your name, and every one runs to the brothels to look again at the whores to see the metamorphoses; but we ride away from this whoring merchandise accolade to the glades and the fruits and the oxen-cribs, and make our orisons

have i told you all? one of these days i shall so smart again for a beauteous apocrypha boke, by a man of tyre, or an obelisk-builder of the house of cush or ham, and then let us see what the furioso heart can spill, and i shall not ask you nor you me to explain what we wrote because that is what is so much the inexplicable fable and allegory, and the mazy, star-shod lodestone.

all my love for your Genius and your jubilant friendship; when the prophet bloweth into the ram'shorn, the anointed shall sit beneath the tamarisk, and saul and david will reenact their texts, for there is no time save in the heart of nabal.

your loving friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Let me know, i beg you, constanza's wish; for i am one to wish your lady's wishes.

[in script] P.S. I am very happy about the book publication of your Poems, and [ ] wait for the [ ] Poetry.

EDWARD

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
Tuesday [August 30, 1950]

my dear sweet wild tormented friend: i want to say this, to assuage
you, if,
what i said yesterday caused
you any Saul

that i had to have my innocence
to play to you in public!

Or that my trident had to be picked up
if i were to ease you, a little ease,
my child!

Look, my fellow Fish: do not worry—
there is a wedding in that ocean called
the Stars

(One thing. I am terribly worried about another son, Cernovich. I have just heard he is now dancing again, and walking twice a day up that dangerous hill. It is clear, with his heart, he is toying with killing himself. When I saw him this spring I knew he was eaten, badly. But he is a proud man, cannot be spoken to direct. Nor does he write me, or you, or anyone who could help him, perhaps. He wishes only, immediately, to be in power. And so he asserts himself on boys and fools, offsets himself to those who are less foolish, less boyish perhaps.

It occurs to me that something as simple as the receiving in the mails your book from you might be of help, might be the act—which a letter wouldn't—to remind him of, how not singular his pains are. Which he knows, but doesn't know (because he is so young but then, rimbaud. (but then, american

Now there are only a very few days left before he will be gone. So do, Edward, if you possibly can, get off a copy of this wondrous revelation of yours THE FLEA to this poor bitten creature whom I also love.)

CHARLES
OLSON

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
Wednesday [August 31, 1950]

Edward!

Delight, Delight, to you and to Rlene!
The Vineyard, for YOU BOTH! the Quest!

And to tell you I have just joined—in two pages of a letter about you to Ernest Brooks, of the Bollingen—your name, as Visionary, to that other Discoverer of What Grapes There Are, H. Melville, saying, exclusively, that you two men [in script] *only* have made Fables & Parables (you will accept, I hope, One Harbinger!)

Your letter, in fact, is so Palpable—I almost said Giddy, in its Delight—that I feel like Jacob's Best Friend, that night after Seven Years (Fourteen, I correct myself) that Ancient Modesty!

Go to Bed, Both of You, for Joy

love,
OLSON

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
Wed Sept 20/ 50

Ed:

Bad business. Had planned come visit you on way back. Instead, as Con told you, came straight thru (by air, in fact! the urgency.)

Real trouble is, the trip broke me off in mid-going on FLEA critique. (Hell of a time for it to happen!) Will get back now. And push. (Haven't the least idea where I'll come out: you are a tough one, to get down, really to get down!

Found ND copy here on return, with grand inscription, which we both, cherish.

Write: you owe me a couple of letters, and a note, before yr departure Detroitwards to give parents look at ED. (How is all? Yr move worries me. Anything go wrong? Is Rlene & you all right?)

Am faced with difficult winter (another in this house seems too much). But there it is. Spent the day battening down, repairing frames, puttying windows, trying to make out—and the rent! O god, this reminds it. It is due, yesterday! (Haven't it).

And empty-headed. No wish to work. Want to go to some other place. But here is my Circle (with sides, down, and ice).

Enclose answer fr. tidy Brooks, of Bolingen. (Tell me, Edward, what are these moneys—and their conditions? Any chance? Shall ask my Gods to favor you.)

Jas L is sure keeping on yr book. (Like his job with the sheets much more than Nevil, the cutting down of page real improvement. (Res-

ponse on little mags copies beginning to come it. Shall urge reviews. Hope. Anything, a mercy, these times, eh?)

Well, write, when you can. And I shall be less cryptic, another day.

This is merely to indicate I breathe.

Anything else, like you say,
would be an arrogation.

Love,
CHARLES

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
Thurs [September 21, 1950]

Ed, that was a mess. For my part in it, sorry. God damn it. Mess. And no use beating over it. There it is. Sorry. A shame.

But just so you don't have to carry unnecessary parts of it, this: I could no more, at this stage, toss off, easily, any remarks on FLEA, as a matter of fact, it is in the nature of, the most difficult thing imaginable. My own work would be easier!

And for the very reasons that you hold should lead me naturally forward, to speak up, about it: that I am so close to you!

It comes to this:
that I am now in grapple with—not one book—but the relevance of the whole of Dahlberg's vision.

(So, calendars, or New Directions, seems—and please, in this, nothing, flint-hearted, dear friend—very very small.

In saying that, I do not, of course, make it small *for you.*
Am instantly ready to see how not small it is, your way.

So if I choose to go ahead very slowly, recognize, Edward, that it is purchased at cost.

Something of that, is what I meant, when I sd: I think about these things, too.

It is such a shame, we should get in a brawl. I was afraid of it, the moment you called. You were sore, and looking for trouble. Inevitably, I suppose. But don't feel too bad. As I say, I intend to deliver, solid, hard, straight (as I did, on the Bollingen: strong.)

If I were not determined to go on, I would ship you, with this letter, all the mss already written. Let me just look at it, to give you a count. (And all, mind you, written up to only the beginning of the Tree: that is as far, I am going in so, that I have yet progressed (my original racing thru Bellerophon, of course, excepted. And first reading of the whole book, for that matter.):

17 single spaced typed pages
PLUS
the Bollingen letter (2 s.s. typed solid)
PLUS
4 pages of analysis of the images, pp (of book) thru 24!

And only—as I say—up to p. 68! (I abandoned total concordance of images simply because it gets dizzy, to do—and, the pattern is so readily reducible—it is isn't worth the scholarship)

Just to emphasize—to extricate you from your suspicions—that nothing privy is going on (except in so far as any rear of writing is privy, thank the Gods of the act, the Cool Ones). And that it is outside probity, as you put it, or Purity. (What probity or purity is there in public place except as there is privy preparations? Would you, of all men, have me careless, be,—what you made so much of—YOUR van doren or brooks? Nuts.

It comes to this, ED:

[arrow, added in pencil] I smelled this, you must admit

I am flunking on the practicals, clearly. But it is not because I am careless of them, thoughtless. It is because it happens that you and yr book come to hand at the moment that I am ready to engage them, not, as another book, but, as, the vision of a man who has been my mentor.

(In such circumstance, there is bound to be trouble. Only, abide, dear friend. You, your work, this life, is worth it.)

All sounds too god damn big & noble. And thus the hell of it, makes me sick of the whole business. And I shall have to hold, like mad, not to turn away. But do not, my friend, blame me only, for this sort of feeling: you'd better have thought, than to have led in, on, why haven't you answered New Directions? Jeezus, Ed, who the hell is N D? Really, who?

In such a real business, who, such marketeers?

Are we in a serious business or not?

ONE I take you very seriously: TWO I take the art of writing very seriously: THREE I take it, that books are men, and not to be toyed with, that there is value, which each man must go and find out. FOUR I am engaged with setting down what value you have.

In such circumstance, the question is, huge.

Anyhow, I wish the hell you'd sat on yr hands. But you didn't. So there it is. Let's carry it, lightly,

yr friend, &
fellow worker

OLSON

[217 Randoph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
thurs 9/29/50

Ed: I don't know. Last night, when I read yr letter, I was angry (at old charges). This morning, when I reread it, to write you, your own hurt—"stung", you say—comes with it, from beginning to end, and I am tormented, that you are so. For it does no good, that I might argue, the cause seems so ill-proportioned to your hurt. For there it is, you are stung, and I did it. [added in script:] (Or did I?)

I say, I don't know, simply because it is much more intricate than this given event. That is, you do pitch writing into love (friendship). And so a "statement", as they call it, not done, becomes, for you, a denial of *you*—not, as it would appear to me, a denial of a "system" which I think it is of some moment to keep clear of. (You will imagine I have acted likewise, did, in fact, same publisher, like problem, same time as of FLEA.) But there we are: this does not seem to you either of any moment or but more proof of yr case against me: that I am inhuman and cold and unyielding and act without those Mediterranean parts of the human body which you feel you do possess. For you wld take it, as you so warmly put it—and made happy by—I am yr first friend. [added in script] And should act a way you declare.

Of course, of course. There we are. It is true. I am. (And do you think—my friend—that I am so "pious" (or choose any number of other adjectives you toss at me, moral adjectives to describe so-called moralism), that I do such a thing "coldly", confident I am at all right? that I am not all you say I am?

But you see, this is where I *am* deceived, I begin to think. I have been fool enough to believe, that, an examination of yr book, done—as I sd, some weeks ago—as roundly as I have tried to do things on Herman Melville's books, say—would be an act you'd

value, that that "sodality" (you could not have chosen a more evil word, to one who was raised in the Catholic vulgarities) you talk abt twice, is not some New Phalanstery, but an older one, of men who look upon their work as undone, who want, from each other, to go ahead to make another work less undone.
But even here, I feel the helplessness of making such statements (and this, my friend, is what is so killing, that I do not find you *care*, here, where, to me, something—as I sd, last week—lives, which is worth *all* our care.)

((I must, here, vent my full rejection of yr whole notion, that the "privy" is what you are getting. (I completely abhor your indelicacy, in using such a word, as of myself, or anyone. Indelicacy, hell. Just straight on, known to yrself or otherwise, these adjectives—these moral adjectives: yr letter is loaded with em.) That I do not express my affection & friendship as you might, is *this* cause for you to sit in judgment on my whole nature? Was it "privy" of me to join you,, in ISHMAEL, to my two other loves, to say, this man was the man who, by his friendship (belief) and his "critique" of my work, put an element, Fool, here, in this book, which I would wish *anyone* reading it, to recognize, as his doing?

It's crazy, straight crazy, the proportions you do not seem to be able to get yr mind around. But I cannot find it in myself to say, I'm right, you're wrong. I can only say, I see it differently—and this, to me, is of the heart of love & friendship—and art. That, difference is. This is, what we call, the life of it. The difference. And it takes recognizing, is not at all easy, or eclectic, or "honest", in yr. sense. And when I speak of "critique", I mean, in this business of writing, just such labor to make clear how, where, what is the fine essence of, this difference. After which, one may say—fr *his* different point of view—its relevance.

I despair to say any of this, because you have forced me, more and more, to ask myself, does Ed care for anything or anyone except

Ed, does he want anything—when he cries, affection & friendship—but what he protests he does not want?

You see, Ed, I have loved your person and I acknowledge, happily, I have learned from you, from all you taught me by taking such care with my earlier work. (It was such a joy, writing ISHMAEL—I have never told you this, I think—to have those mss. you had so incisively done a job on by me as I went ahead each day composing same, the clues they were, to me, and to what language had to do—in fact—and this, now, at this point, seems such irony—what clues they were to FORM. (Form, Edward—which, behind all this disturbance, looms, so large, to me.)

I'm afraid I give it up. As I said to you last week, some way, you involve me in pieties which I am *not* a party to, involve me in presenting you the very false faces you want to strike. (What *is* this anyway? what image do you want, that you so create it to your satisfaction to strike?)

Why do I feel any difference—is in the nature of some crime, to you? That you really do no allow, admit—perhaps even see, any difference in another?

(Don't you see how impossible such a state is? who is, actually, being denied? who?

> ((God damn it, there you are again, it comes out, I am crying, I am denied. The hell I feel that at all, the hell I am that fatuous, or self-pious. I do not feel denied. The fact is, you say, *you* feel denied. Jeezus, what a squirrel cage. Christ. It's no good, Ed, no good—not life, no life in it, no breath, no space. Christ, give it over. There *are* others, no matter how fine you may take yrself to be. (For I do not buy yr doctrine, "we are all dirty", that we are "at best any more than clever worms with moral agonies." This is the deepest mis-engendering.)

This whole business comes out so crazy. You write a book. A year ago

I read it, am very excited by what I take to be an advance in narrative. Say so, to you, direct, move on Black Mt, to publish it. (You see, right from the start, a difference: you see the act *only* in a total sphere of friendship. I see it as such, because it is true, what do we grow by, from, but love? But also, there is this other element: work, yr work, mine, anyone's,—or have you learned from another's work, even where you did not love—or, more pertinent, where the person was not yr friend?) Anyhow, to go ahead, a yr passes, I have, in that time, (due to the story "THE FLEA", shall we say), (as one cause—there are others, of course), for the first time, almost got involved in narrative....

Aw, Christ, again, it goes flat, to try, to tell you anything. (God damn it, that I shld come to think, that Dahlberg, honestly, isn't interested!)

Well, just this. I propose, a yr later, to go right inside this man's work, to see what's there, at the heart, what it is that moved me, that leads me to say such things as I say abt this man, to, say, the Bollingen, to others. To do a thing I very rarely do. But that I also want very much to do—not for him, no, no. Nor for myself, wholly. But for that thing—to me, at least—which is outside us, that "sodality" of which, so often, he cries he is a part: men, writing, since when, since, men (those animals) got sounds, sounds, sounds. (as well as livers & kidneys, in fact, apparently, after they got these organs, which he insists (as, for that matter, he does sounds), in turning into a moral system, or a physiological philosophy, a personal humanism.

(awk, go down,
language)

I set out to do such a thing. Tell him so. And what, finally, do I find? Does he want this thing? Does he indicate it is of any importance his book?

(Nope. It won't work. Again, look: now I'm in the position of making a very fatuous statement: that a man's book means more

to him than himself. O dear. o dear. odearie me. Just fuck it, my fine-feathered friend, fuck it. Of course I don't give a good goddamn whether you care for it or not. It doesn't matter. I'm not doing it for you, don't give a damn. I'm doing it because I believe that a book is a thing which has power, and has value, and that, if I can show what's in it better than another man, then I ought to do it, and that there is value, use, to someone, that I do it. That, this, precisely, is why books come in to being (or, no—you are right, for you it is fame that is the spur, as it has been for so many great men. OK.) But once they are in being, those books, what shall we do with them? *Market them?*

What it comes to, then: all you want is a PUFF (a thing I do not believe in, that, to my way of looking at writing, defeats the very thing I am talking abt, when I say, how important a book is:

(gd it. Agn.

Nor, my friend,

is it *my* confusions. Do not, so easily, content yrself, so easily, assail me. Stop a minute. Look around, at it—just for a dying friendship's sake. Good god. You say, you value same. Don't kick it in the face, then.) (Because it doesn't do the tricks you take it, it should.)

Who are you, really, Ed, to say, what is the well, what the water is, in another man's soul? (I find yr use of that work as literary as yr use of "privy"). (And don't, please, for friendship's sake, at this point quote me (misquote me) Heraclitus, on the dry soul.)

My despair, is, it isn't any use, to talk about it. There is no advance. You are set. There it is.

OK. OK. All right. What's wrong with

that? Nothing. Our sense of friendship differs, as does our notions of books. All right. Difference. I make no more of it than that, cannot place myself in such absolutism as do you,—and give yr game away, I take it, my Jehovah—when you imagine that court "in another life,

and when the parable is done... etc" and who is pure and who is impure (your inversions are transparent, dear good warm-livered warm-hearted warm-friended Edward).

Really, all this hierarchy! All this physiology! All these absolutes! What do they say? Do they not say, "In this friendship, I am the Law, I know how a friend *must* behave—and if he do not, he is damned."

All right, I am damned. I do not feel so, but, that you say it—I have been so willing—do you think I do not ask myself, is he not right, am I not?

The only trouble is, one gets tired of so many commitments to another man's personally contrived (however absolutely assumed) Hell. (O miserable earth, you say.)

One does go along, dragging one's damnation after them, like some escaped criminal, who does like life, who does, with his nose, smell and enjoy a northwestwind, likes a friend, likes to do a day's work, enjoys it, that another does, and, if that work is a book, and comes onto his hands, will take it as something he can enjoy, disagree with, but go on abt in his own fashion—as he finds it, in his devices—to enjoy or do abt it, what he will, thinking, his friend is, like the wind, or the walk, or another person he knows and enjoys, a part of things, things he does more or less about, things that ask more or less, depending upon his relation to them things that he likes—if he loves—to do what he is prompted, not, what some non-existent Law (this is not liberty, or love) is supposed to require of him, as a condition of, continuance.

Look, Ed, let's just not continue, as least on such levels that I am supposed to do something. For I am not, the life of it.

Love,
CHARLES

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
Wed 10/4/50

ed: I just guess I am a grrrrrreat pppeeeeeeeeeee—
cock, and all the other things you say. yes, i just guess.

and when you've sd it, what
have you sd?

(such, interests me more than, the tally-sheet, the score-card, the bills of lading, the storage charges, the butcher's scales, what was, what was, we do lament:

> you recognize, of course, you had more to give. I do. I dare say that's why i am, you might say, embarassed that it is you who make the totals

I shall not swap hallowed remembrances, what was, what was. but i will, (must, it was so crucial) correct you, on your drama, of that night, you came to my door (Christopher Street): it strikes me, that Henry Huffam, who had died, had figured—look, again, even here, who am i to argue, which of us: that's the point, any such weightings—there is something deeply WRONG, in the whole procedure. (i walk off)

And that you again appeal to the court of us, dead, for decision on which, of us, is the more—look, it seems to unimportant, stacked against, that you, that i, must breathe It is, (as above): when you've, what have you've....

I think you have written me a beautiful letter. i think it is very straight, with tenderness in it, and it is a true proffer, as of you, an honest business, given your incredible sights. Even its absolutisms, are you.

But I don't know, that—where it is a portrait of me—that it is I. It may well be. I am so vulnerable. It may very well be. In any case, it is the way you see me, and that, surely, for you, is the fact. Well... I am not you. I have to put up with, myself. I have to continue to make the son the father of, himself. So. I have this, what you call, bad material. Too bad, too bad. We'll agree he won't go far, shall we. Shall we also agree he'll go as far as he'll go?

(Even such, as these immediate sentences, won't come straight—that is, they see straight, but—you are such—they echo wrong: ex., because you take me a grrreat peeeecock, they sound back as tho my modesty were put on. Bah. Or sd to cajole. Bah two. HERE LIES, THE TROUBLE.)

I don't know. I am tempted to say, it is this simple, that, your friendship is,—as you imply it is—a greater thing, than mine. It very much may well be. Yet, I can't say that simply because I cannot clear the whole thing from the *ritual* you make of it. It is this that puts a strain in, which, so often, causes the bridge to come down. Now I love to throw parabolas as much as you do, believe, as you do, the absence of ends & projections in lives around us, is, why, there is so little life. Yet, I'm not sure your way of doing it, does it. That is, keeps all these things you talk abt, *in,* inside, as going, advancing, present realities: that we stay *current* to each other, that, in a very deep sense, you allow us to (the frame keeping so much backward to it.)

(To hell with that, any more of it. I want, on my part, to try to insist upon present particulars, to stay inside what is, what is. So I go back, now, to read yr letter.)

(1) I do not know that I sd, that I do not think you value, as you put it, my affections & friendship. To distinguish their way of expressing themselves from yrs, is not—is it?—to say you do not receive them? It has always meant more than I have sd, that you *have* received them.

(2) I stop over nothing, from that point to the end. There is nothing *nothing*, my dear, dear friend—in all those swift & beautiful sentences to be gainsaid. Nothing. As I have sd, this, to me, is you, and I thank you, thank you that it is important that you say it all to me, even, (or the more), that your concern for me (as friend, you say) leads you to wonder if the path i am on as writer is not leading me further into what you call involved syntax values.

That I might wish, that, instead of this lumping, i should have each piece of work seen for itself, taken, for itself, as a part and yet as a separate thing from the whole of my life & nature;

that, by this process, I might feel motion, and air, and a going-ahead (that is, as i am going ahead), gain, from such a particularism (each of us, do we not, alas, have to carry *all* of ourselves at each instand; and it is precisely to be, for a moment, free of that bearing down and in, that we look to our friends or our loves, for replenishment?)

You see, I come back—this whole thing comes back—to, what we have been over before, what you put here, thus: that you think art, or literature, is, friendship. I think friendship is, friendship, has, its own laws & motions, which, because we are writers, but also because it is important for itself, it is—as you have made it—one beautiful and important substance to be expressed. But that it is all, that it is art? (I think it is the story, "The Flea of Sodom"; you say so yourself, when you make the epigraph, "My friend, there is no friend." I recognize, too, that "Bellerophon" is, a substance, form this particular friend, fr your concern over him, me. It is also true that, the whole of the book the FLEA, is, essentially, such a substance. You see, Edward, why I both say, yr letter is beautiful, straight, and also, why, I say, the trouble is, I do not agree. We are, at root.)

I have to take my risk. I remain astonished, that, what you call my

friendship, has been to you,—I quote you, here, exact—"you want and have given me a sepulchral bookish friendship." But there it is: it rests on, yr notion, by paradox, that art is friendship, obviously. Thus it is, that all acts or the absence of acts, are taken to be—that is, acts toward yr writing—as, personal, as, towards you. Of course. It has to be that way. (I am puzzled, if it also follows, that all acts toward you are acts toward yr writing, and thus, is it this way, that my friendship has, perforce, become, to you,—that is, looks that way to you—or, equally, had to be that way, to me—bookish?)

I don't, like, at all, where all this examination leads. I don't like it. But I also do not want you to put it off, as non-visceral, as not, the "logic of the heart" (I question the phrase, but it is yours, and will mean something, to you). Or not to shoulder, as well as i, the weight of it. For these are your risks, as well.

(I mean, you shall put it down, so. All right. And write me back, so. All right. Only, please, please, do not, in your "soul", not hear me. For, I deny Aristotle: there is, a friend.)

A friend
CHARLES OLSON

[New York, New York]
October 25, 1950

dear charles;

The book has been out for close to two months, and i still sit in a room like a pariah and wormy lazarus. i really don't see how you can think i was ever sly about getting attention. you and i know the rotten literature swill business, and if i wanted a statement from you to affirm the book, i still feel you should have given it fast, because the book stands for your beliefs and mine. the n.y. times bedlam continues;

the dudley fitts review has never come in, and petticoat breit is full of double greasy tongue babble, and i can't depend on laughlin. williams wrote a twelve typewritten page critique; he was very moved by the flea, particularly the rational tree, but he's off in oregon, and he has asked me to place it! me, what can i place? i had one gehenna experience to get the book published altogether. there have been no reviews of the flea in london, although i am told the book is having a good export sale! what does that mean? much as i need procurator pilate's lucre, i don't care much about the money the book might bring, very little, anyway.

i wish more for the sake of your own poems than for your refusal to come out and defend the flea that you would dissipate some of those cloistered preciosities; i don't think they are a benefit to your own gifted muse; you say you don't like the word sodality or logic of the heart, and maybe both are bad, but don't worry, i don't belong to any sodality, since i detest the dirt and [ ] religion in the baptist or baptist catholic american, and there is no difference between the two, for art might make the distinction, but there is no [will?] in either; there's got to be a leopardi or petrach or a bocacio in religion to save it from the [ ]geries, and there is none, and i have no use at all for it, getting my religion about seth or enoch from smart. there is a complete two volumes on smart that has just come out, and pretty soon all the filthy slummy pederasts from uptown, the mademoisel elle chic fornication group; the harper and flair magazine catamites and the village dumpy denim fart homosexuals, will take up smart as they have done melville. poor smart in bedlam got a cat cult which is just the thing for the dirty feminines in ny, and i wager we'll have a smart 'revival', which will be the burial of everything that was genius in kit smart in three years.

tell me about the flea critique; have you finished it? i want you to understand i don't mind sharp, nut-flavored criticism from you; but you're wrong about my playing along with any clique, pray what? [ ] i hate to make moral announcements about myself; i think that bothers me more than almost anything else; a man's got to be very

dingy and have a lot of the church mouse in him to tell other people how good he is. i only say i am not the man for trade literature; ive got to write bread and butter reviews now to support a wife, and just to get once in awhile some sun and air and fruit on my face and life. i wish to hell you would get more human, i don't know how a man does it, but when i ask you to defend what your bowels tell you is right and the earth-truth for you that you wouldn't be affected and get ethical with me. save your moral fervor for the lousy gimcrack celebrities im not one and never will be; i'm too immoral for the american to be a trade literary saint, you know that, and there is a lot in us that is just automatic, and that simply takes care of our moral reasons for asking people to do things, without you and i bragging about our principles and what we should do and not do. when you have to get up a pragmatic formula for your deportment with another man, then it's time to take your leave of him, and say he's no good for your liver or for your paracelsus. what is important, charles, is that i'm not really fixed at all; the reason i never will be and will always be centuries ahead of the rotten, staid, mediocre blokes in this country is that i shall always be a devout and religious and earnest servant of homer, isaiah, strabo, longinus, and your maximus of tyre. if i can ever find him, for i love to distraction a great writer before i have read him, and attack on the hurt of my small finger a piebald louse of art without reading him. but for hell and art's sake, let us let our noses be our guide, and let us defend each other if the poem and the book is not an offence to erasmus, and better still, to the top blake, or to the highmost statius, and is some quaint addition to man, who is knowing dust when he is right and true and promethean-livered, and rotten and decayed and fart-arted otherwise.

each time i write a book i hope it won't be so lonely, and i just get more lonely, what with your help, my fine postage stamp and envelope friend; oh i know you would do me your services, but that is no good, and you, more than i, will suffer from this friendship in absentia; for i can still somehow or other teach you i don't know quite how any more than i know how i can write a good line when i have

a learned song in my diaphragm or navel or belly, but let's not go lower, and fall into our modern grecian habits. i read a great deal of plato, but not as a platonist, or for such trite reasons, but to come to some understanding of nature as an evil breathing animal. id like to do some more writing, like the wheel of sheol, and without plato, and i want to go to the gnostics, too, i could have done it, and to your sumerians, and after i have found a form again, i'll write some new old world hieroglyph, and do you think i can be sly or odyssean writing that sort of egypt, abydos, mycenean literature, don't be foolish my friend. i did a piece on bourne for tomorrow, not very good, but i got 50 for it, and mentioned you along with three other books, as clean rebel vision. i call for apostasy [about?] making [ ] learned and julian, and laurel it in ancient metre, and make it a dagger soldier phillipic, and if we do that, why we're vulcan's in the bowels of aetna, for then we've got bowels and aetna in us, and so don't have to worry about right and wrong when we ask one another for a chanting, male yea to a book we say belongs to both of us. i've gotten so i hate anything that is not positively male in morals and art; the penis has to get back into a poem, and I am not crazy about fornication literature as such; but we've got to have a male penis literature, or everything will die out and all we will have left is allen tate, and ransom, who write about meanings and neatness, and call it metaphysics, and what they really mean using foetid feminine platonisms is ugly polonius-stooled meanness.

well i send you some straight-out love, and hope you get the straight, human diction out of your beloved iliad, and all those remarkable tarsian and tyrian scribes; you've got a lot of washington quagmire city to spew out; and please, remember, by way of exhortation, that a moral act is phoenician or theban or aeschylean, as we mean it, when it has also something of the birds and the turds of aristophanes in it; a moralist has got to be always a great bawd if he is not to gibber and squeak like some of our little dung saints who use adjectives like verbs; that kind of misuse of words belongs to a man in the public stews. what is most important than any word you might

have given me for my little book is that somehow or other i pull out of you a leetle marrow boke that is even better than ishmael, and if i rebuke you, remember that i can see your faults better than mine own, for aside from a few rules i don't know how i write, but uneasily find out what shouldn't have been written at all. but let's get the ethic business clean and straight between us; when i do one of those lazar-house cash register books, you can throw all the hills and mountains and rivers at me, but until then lets try to be a mountain, hill and river pome; if we're that, why doll tearsheet, and our lousy, whoring novel were plainness [ ].

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[New York, New York] [torn, and water damaged ts]
November 6, 1950

Dear Charles; Would you please send this letter off at once, It's a bill, and I haven't the money to pay it. My former wife is very slyly trying to seize whatever I have on the cape, and so far has been very successful.

You have been on my mind a great deal, and I have thought about the whole literary purity dilemma, some of which is artistic virginity; and there is also a perplexity, and I must somehow believe that the animal in my nature that cares for Hermes Tresmegistus and the TIMAEUS, and the Book of the Dead has a moral nose that cannot be too corrupted. You know I hate to make protestations about my sanctity; I have seen too many trade saints in the country, including our erstwhile friend, hapless and pious-dunged Waldo, in this sort of role. No matter how you may feel, and I cannot feign any more than you that I relish being smitten, and you must recall that you were the first to put your heel upon my neck when I telephoned you, I want with what religious heart that is in me, to see you come out as a real poet. You must not believe that because I am no Nazarene, and that

when you raise your voice against me, that I bother about who is more or less. I cannot measure myself against another gifted man. I only have some anamorphosis of my own soul when I hear a man lie to me, or some one praise me, and then offers me a wormy, la[zar] hand.

My Bourne piece in the magazine Tomorrow will be out in about seven weeks, and there is a good mention of you there. I am doing a long piece on naturalism, attacking that kind of scataphagous, merde fiction, and am putting rue in my own nostrils while valuing these, by referring to Ishmael, the American Gothic, Rimbaud (Oh, I know there is a great deal in Rimbaud and in Baudelaire that is catamite verse, but the prose poems and the baudelaire joural are worth thinking about), Lawrence, I'd like to go back to our Greek, but there are very base and ugly limits to a magazine piece, and I have no way of earning money, Charles, save by [my] pen. I don't intend to dip my pen in Circe's swill. B[ut] so much for scruples.

Rlene and I were married a little over three weeks ago. She sent you and Constanza the announcement.

Meanwhile, you have my love and faith in your genius. I have a couple of pieces on Pound, one for the Times, which may be out this coming Sunday. He's been in so many ways the good Socratic gadfly of poetry. I have done the Letters to [o?] for Tomorrow to be out the end of this month. During the war I was very angered by his antisemitism, but now that the man is penned up in a dirty, lunatic hospital, I simply cannot be one to hurt him more. For years I was too busy with Attica and Uz and Joppa and that wonderful temple at Sais, where Athene reined to give any thinking to Pound and the others, but I can see that you don't get baited by a gen[?] outside obsidian poetics, that he is very good in some ways. My love again,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
Tues Nov 7 50

my dear edward: it is the most terrible thing. so very much is involved. i almost do not have the heart to speak. but your last letter was so sweet & whole, i cannot let my failures amputate an answer i very much wish to write.

there is nothing i can say, actually, where an act is all that is called for. yet i put off, put off, that act, not even knowing its issue, frightened of it, yet, looking forward to it (i am, of course, referring to the examination of, the Flea: i was well into it, a while back, when it got broken off, by two Black mt characters coming in on me; and i have not, again, picked it up)

it goes so to the heart of everything, for me, to examine your book, that i avoid it no question But at the same time (why, i say, i look forward) i shall do it, have to, will haul myself up to it, difficult as i find it, to say all That's the trouble, why, I am sure, this thing has come to be a crisis I *have* to say all I cannot, at this point, be partial, or party, or take—as i might want to—part instead of whole (a part, anyhow, the way you have written it, is not a handle by which it can be, said)

((it is weird, how difficult it is, for me to read you: i have to go in by the sharpest sort of bearing down

I am sure this will sound very silly to you, but please do not let it: it is merely the confusion of you as person with you as book that brings this difficulty. You make values yourself, anyhow. And I dare say, you would not put it, that it is you and me, here, in this place, or there is nothing, without a recognition that, we are also, however alike, deeply opposed Or so I think the wall i break the jump at, is, the stating of, my opposition: I am really quite a little rabbit, you know

That is, I am always confounded, at how personal we all are And dread it

It is stupid. But precisely that, too, is of cause: that, for some time now, i have been hugely involved in this very problem, of, how to take up such strength, generally And am miserably worn down, as a result. It could not have been a worse time (or a better), actually. For, that it is to be done, is there to be done, is worth the doing, is a joy

Yr announcement of marriage, coming on top of yr letter, brought quickly to my senses, your own pressures, and troubles. I do hope much is better, much much better. (What did happen, on that Bollingen bizness, anything? did they stake you, or not? What did they say?)

Look. Let this be just a note, to greet you—and Rlene—and to tell you you are much in my mind—*on* my mind. To stuff all silence, that dirty thing. To send

his love,

CHARLES

[New York, New York]
November 8, 1950

My dear Charles:

Your letter has just come, and I am in much distress over it. You know that work is the only redemption for Adam and us; you had better set your mind to the thistles and the briars, and put some words together to heal your distracted skin. Whether you go on with the critique is not of great matter at the instant; you must write, or start taking notations from all the marvelous Greek readings you have done; get together all the gleanings from Boaz's Vineyard, and start at the word-toil. For in the beginning was sloth, and it was a curse to

man greater than all other afflictions except his boredom which was really his idleness.

You must write the critique, should you go on with it, unmindful of me; it will happen, for it is the abstraction that counts most for a poet; the weak and mediocre are concerned with events and nostalgia, and all that squalid detritus of wan and fatherless images.

You might look into Baudelaire's Intimate Journals. Of course, Baudelaire, is the ideal paradigm of the modern pederast, but he has some fine spleen, and a remarkable understanding of the nature of the velleities in us. He knows that the two contradictory characteristics about mortals, free will and destiny are identical, and that is great self-knowledge for the poet.

The Flea has been out two months, and two reviews have appeared, and not *one* in London. Maybe, you can understand now my appeal to you. I have heard nothing from the Bollingen Foundation; I took a chance, but I don't seem to be the sort of man who gets awards. You ought not to worry too much, Charles, about the morals of the artist. If he has the sign of Cain in his forehead, everybody will run away from him, anyway, and he won't be in any pinchbeck and warm sheepcote. There has never been a warm lazy cote for the poet. Remember, too, the patron is dead, and the mediocre man has his dagger pointed at our heart, and he has astounding nose for artistic smells which repel him more than nitre or lysol.

I am taking notes for the naturalism article for the Freeman. I did a piece on James, the cutpurse philosopher, a review, indicating that he had purloined his entire doctrine from Peirce, and got $17 for it. Compromise, my good friend, and I get N.Y. Times reviews to do once in about two months. I am compromising my barest soul to be—crusty Lazarus!

I have a sea-island parable narrative in mind, with Poe and the Apocrypha, the Jewish pharisaical writings, which were marvellous, and which were the source and river of Christ and the scribes and that mad-torn, carnal Paul form Phoenice Tarsus. Would have been better had he made sails like his father did, and left writing to Xenophanes

and to Seneca, and Ovid, and Amos, and the apocalyptic poet of Baruch, and to Charles Olson, and I pray by heaven and that God whose name was never mouthed in a dirty, scataphagous church, to Edward Dahlberg. But, go, go, and write, that is your pining; go, and with the will of guileless Daniel into the burning furnace, for our Ideal Forms and Jahweh and Sais Athene Abstractions.

My love, as always, and my great faith in your gehenna doubts; for only the artist really doubts—

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[added in script to right margin of page:]
my wife Rlene has been reading a lot of american history to me: that's his [Peirce's?] background—it's very helpful

[217 Randolph Place
Washington, D.C.]
Wed Nov 8 50

oh my fooling Doll-Mountain, my big kid, how you go on, picking up stones and throwing puff-balls, and deciduous things. Now its "lies" & "virginity", my looking-only-at-himself, little Glass Hill, o antique Eight St Mirror:

come off it, Reactionary, come into the air, o Auroral One: stop making such heaves/without strikes

o Moral Nose, is it: pah,you. You Nose. Ha (or ho-ho). I can say one thing: it is true, I do not know that you ever "lied". (Ah, purity!). But having sd that, I ask myself what other non-virtue have you not practiced. So, for sums.

And as for "virginity", o Lecher—Lazar: try to regain a little ("virginity renews itself, like the moon," who sd). If you had a little

less personalisms you might have a little more imaginative innocence, my Doll Burger.

(It strikes me, in these exchanges, who uses, the moral nouns, as euphemisms, for acts and facts, for sticks and other devices, to lay on another man's back.

There is a law, here: invert what the Doll sez, to find out, the stuffings. (Ah, Corruption!)

A poem, sd Ecclesiastical, makes no more echo than a
rose petal dropped
in the grand canyon:

You cry, o, my loneliness. Ha. Ha. (I think of a hen man in New Hampshire.)

And as for "our" Greeks. Please, separate me from them, and you, please. I do not know that I open the door in the same direction at all. I take it, it is a swinging door, opening both ways, and I, I prefer the kitchen. I take it, Hermes Tresmegistus AND the timaeus, as well as the Nazarene and the naturalists are broken down humanists.

The
virgin fields, Sirrah are otherplaces, other
times, e.g., downstairs
downstairs, get downstairs, Mister dahlberg

I am mailing yr letter to the Clinic. I do not mind at all, my friend, being "used".

The rime is, abused
OLSON CHARLES

[New York, New York]
November 10, 1950

My dear Charles:

I have your rather wild letter, and I had rather hoped my own letter to you would quiet you and set you to work which you sorely need. I don't know what the Black Mountain characters did to you, or what has brought you to this achelian distraction. I think you are being very roundabout in this whole matter. There is really very little to say more about it. You deeply affirmed a book which you refused to do anything about. You have claimed that I have been some sly Iago in literature, and I protest that is not the truth, although I have told you many times I abhor making saintly protestations about being the pascal lamb in literary matters. I have seen too many stinking, lazy book people do that, and I do not like being the overt moralist. I still do not see that it matters where the truth is spoken or written. Had you found my book bad or a lie, and I had asked you to affirm it, then you would have had all claim to abuse me, I think you are being very affected about purity and the lordliness [?] of people in this land. I cannot speak for you, although I noticed that you were very put off when Rosenberg came to see you so seldom. You call me a reactionary, and you also say that I have practiced "other non-virtues for sum," and my plain and bleak reply to you is that you are a LEAR, and that you have had much greater skill in cunning than I have ever had. However, I do not blame you for being nimble-tongued enough to get awards off of that ward heeler, of the seven Muses, Moe. But I do hold you culpable for feigning that you have not gotten money by lying for it, and by going [?] to disreputable and mercenary scribes, like the late Carl Van Doren, and the merchant, Van Wyck Brooks, for help. If this is not double-dealing in our corrupt literature business, then you are actively [?] mad and unwilling to perceive your own acts. You villify me for wanting some attention in the Times, so that I can somehow get bread, and yet you scurried down to see Breit so that you could secure attention for your book. It is a hideous,

ghoulish thing, all of this, for you and for me; all I ask is that you stop lying about your own ACTS. Every poet, including Plato, and I imagine Dante, and Michaelangelo, has had in some sense or other to be a toady to a patron or to a united cigar store Medici, like Moe. The difference between you and me is that I told off Moe, and when Brooks had the effrontery to write me and say that he had used something from my book, a line out of Poe, which he had sordidly mutilated, and then put into a footnote, I told him what a miscreant he is. Now, I don't know how you or I are to get published, or shall let us say, printed, without being a little base and disgustingly humble, and I imagine you are quite the boulevardier flaneur as well as the skilled sycophant with the Van Dorens, the Brooks, and Moe. How you could act otherwise, I don't know, and I have had to dissimulate too to get a book published. But you're a great stupid pachyderme to accuse me of having written books for lucre, and if you are referring to my personal life, when you say I practice non-virtues for sums, the only reason you aren't more of a lecher than you call me is that you're a damn'd gawk at it, and that is why your poetry the result of so much extraordinary reading and real plain honest labor is for the most part esoterica syntax, and lacks bowels, shit, and fuck and sweat, in it, and I'm awfully sick of that kind of cant. Talk about euphemisms, what do you think your conduct has been. By the time you grow up as a writer, and the man who has in the past stepped out because of his defense of your work, you haven't got enough marrow and integrity guts to come out to defend a book you believe in. You say you can't write the critique because of certain temperamental oppositions, despite the similarities between us. Do you think that bothers me? You're crazier than your fatuous letter. Go ahead, if you want to; do anything to be a poet yourself. That is what I have always wanted you to be. The ways things are, I fight for you and you fight for you. Why, in simplest frankness, is it a truth to lecture about my books to a black mountain covey of catamites and slatterns, while it is perjury to make a clean, inward remark about a book you claim you deeply admire. Why this coarse and craven parody, O my Loneliness;

maybe you have never been honest enough to admit you are desolate, and friendless; it's that kind of unashamed honesty that makes a man a poet. If you scoff at me when I tell you that I was miserable and alone for at least sixteen months, and that the man whose Muse I had lavishly befriended, was such a skinflint and so precious with his time, that he would not ask me once in all that time to come down for a visit. The last time I was there as a self-invited guest you said it was a deeply crucial [one] for your vision. You have said it in books you gave me, and so don't lie about it now. I have been very lonely, and am still so, though much less, because I have a wife and many men, like Aeschylus and Euripides and Nietzsche were wretched solitaries; so what is all this pinchbeck and very cheap laughter in your stupid and [morbid parody ?] don't mind mind a real masculine attack, something straight out.

The truth about you, Charles, is that any of the things you accuse me of are guilts in you; years [ ] you called me a Kansas City merchant, which was just a [ ] remark, because I have never been able to make money, and now at 50, my situation is a real peril to me. How, liar Olson, did I ever make money as a KC merchant? How do I hide behind euphemisms; what lecher do I practice or malpractice that you shun? Why is that so many literature bastards will help you and not me. Why do you cry up a Brooks in a remarkable book, your Ishmael, and soil your page, while you deny me, your mentor, a work for a book you believe in; and why give a name to a Van Doren; of course, he helped you, and; if you remember, when we were laboring for your first guggenheim, I said go ahead and use these literature turds, but don't pull a waldo frank or a horace gregory saint act with me. do you know I went to laughlin to ask him to print some of gregory's poems, and then marya told me she did not want horace to appear in such a company. at the time, i said you were in it and so was I, and besides a poem is good or bad anywhere.

I don't mind being attacked for a low or vulgar act; but you are at fault in this whole matter, and not I. If you are so balefully pure, why did you not wish me to speak to Laughlin; you wrote me quite a let-

ter, you were as skittish as a young colt about it, fearing, my fine, 'maidenheaded writer,' and in this business that is just what you are, that I might spoil your *strategy*. You say, come downstairs, Dalhberg, you have the effrontery to talk to me about being straight and outside about what I do, while you go an practicing these little circumlocutions, and braying like

[last page of letter missing top left quarter, remainder heavily damaged and soiled, fold broken with missing parts; marginalia indecipherable]

/pure and simple small magazine Pisgah. Why
/and not me? Because you are very enterprising,
/iterature spotless lamb. Again, I do not blame
/printed; it's a gehenna to sit alone in
/tudio of your, somewhere in the untouchable
/quagmire tomb city, and even if you don't have
/my own life, and you fleer at loneliness,
/on for you, and would do all that is in my

/attle of the wits, I'm ready for you; I'll
/yours, and we'll let Osiris who weighs
/world, determine whether you are more than
/honest as I am. I'll put my dagger words against
/n a number of letters, who can better the
/mastery of bastardy. I don't want it, and i
/ubtle gifts, but I don't like being falsely
/es I have not committed. We have both our
/against your father and I against my mother,
/You will also remark that in the FLEA that
/, and that is what I have always done for
/and anywhere I could. Though I say that
/love and friendship, I never said one ought
/ise a vile book. I have been very straight about

/ould quit posing as the clean Angel at

/far as you are gifted, no more and no less

a dead language, and ancient past, to recover the [?] lives, and so feign that we are really not dead; that is a very [?] great artistic hypocrisy, but if you go beyond that, Charles Olson the crier for the Roosevelt committee at $12,000 a year, and the chair-boy of Van Doren and Brooks, you are simply saying that somehow or other I have been as much of a sycophant as you. Maybe yes, maybe no. I have tried to keep alive and not put my pen in swill; it's very hard, and I have said that though I must write these reviews for the acorns and the masts, my book whenever I write it, shall be of that desolate desert and rock in Luke. Poe, too, had to live, and he did a lot of potboiler writing, but only a scoundrel will deny that his Ligeia and Eleonore are not original forms and abstractions for which a very poet pines.

If you want to co[ ]ne this vendetta, I'm your servant; I'd just as soon knock your head off when you get fancy Waldo Frankish with me, as impugn some of the churls who are making it wellnigh impossible for us to write and eat.

I send you my love and some of my wit, because I think you need some of it, if you intend to get into an outrage with me; you're a very inchoate and gabbling fool when you're splenetic, my friend; now, if you want to get the better of me in a phrase—brawl, be as cool as the alps, as dry as nantucket; and you ought to be able to do better than Doll-Burger; get at some ideas, never mind the pothouse puns of the vulgus. If you've got some lucid antagonisms toward the Flea, go at the book, and not at me. We need some intellectual [fis?]ts in this doleful, addleheaded land; you're an awful ninny not to be able to sit down and write about a book that so kindles your mind. Write, write, and make it frontal, direct.

I am the friend of your genius even though the monitor of some [of] your half-wit epistles.

[indecipherable, missing marginalia along both margins and at top of letter]

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
Saturday Nov 11 50

my dear edward:

yr most moving letter came last night. the odds of it, against my second, which you must have had yesterday, leaves me chewing my teeth. for i have found, when i go by sounds (as i did there) i cause much pain (not even knowing; in a way, not knowing—or at least permitting, as you say, freewill to be destiny: it is a beautiful concept full of terror because it is cause of pain. and do not be eased form it, a little ease, anyway, my friend

but as i remarked to you, as we walked away from the "trial" in New Rochelle, you are in metempsychosis, and, since then, and remarkably, in this letter of yrs, as well as that long previous one (not the one I roared at, say) you continue to advance, powerfully and widely extend, yr reach

it is a pleasure,—and learning—to feel *that*, to hear you in yr quietness phrase as, so: the squalid detritus of wan and fatherless images. Or such a joining, as, nitre, lysol (the sounds, I mean, which are as much the abstraction as there is, permitted, to poets: to bend the will to them, and find out, in them, what more can be done. For the thing is, they do contain, their own revelations, of which a man is instrument.

I venture to think this is also true of, parable-narrative, though, here, I am not acquainted, actively.

But the feeling you gave me (and it was not just yr mention, that

you have a sea-island story in yr air, for music) that you are open and wandering straight ahead, encourages me to go most ahead with the critique. For all I should wish to do, in such a thing, would be, to get to *you*, to dig, to make the run home into yr consciousness of yr work. (I dare say, my cuts at you, have come from a sense, that—as i may have sd—that you were closed).

I would woo you fr all generalization (god knows where you got the idea I am moral abt the artist, —not at all, tho it must be this very thing you play back to me, the abstraction as what counts, which is form, that led you awry; for what i wd undo in you (what you undo more and more, out of wisdom) is, such, as (here), you put it, the sign of Cain in his forehead (the artist's forehead): I don't honestly think you need these positional devices one day more. I think all this is a part of a struggle you maintained against the 20s, 30s, arms for obliquity, but which you have already thrown aside, as used, and useless.

So are yr plaints, you are commerical, or compromised, in these reviews. I don't believe it, even tho, you have not clipped & sent me, and I have not read one, of these same. Yet, I doubt deeply you are whoring. For one thing, you are unable to: yr shot on Peirce as source, is the sort of use which these contemporaries are needing of. So much of yr perception is needed. And I note how much the reviewing Baudelaire fed you, in yr turn.*

[remainder of letter missing]

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*[Paragraphs 1, 3, 5, and 6 have been marked by Dalhberg, where he wrote "use" in margin next to his loose brackets. It is not clear whether he intended to use Olson's remarks in his own work, or in correspondence with Olson. Editor]

[New York, New York]
November 12, 1950

My dear Charles:

What skulking gnome or rotten mad genius keeps our letters not enough in the rear of our acts so that each of us sends a cannon ball letter or a pot of honey always at the wrong time. Your previous letter so enraged me, all that pother, Charles about practising non-virtues for sums, and virus-guffaw of yours about o my loneliness, as though you were more virtuous than I, my noble Cato on the page, and cynic rhetor of bile in the deed, yea, you and I. By the time this balm of Gilead has dropped into your treeless and ravined solitude, you will have already sent me, by the special dispatch of Mercury who is not better sandaled than your spleen, another enchante conceit and hot-spur anger missive, for which I will then thank you in kind. And all of this may be allright, provided we are each garnering some jott of good beer and tankard and hard latin learning from it. But you decide, my fine writer, for I have just been looking over the ISHMAEL again, taking some notes for my naturalism piece, and I must say that it is a marvellous book; i make some small, niggard objections to a dropping of an article here and there which does not give the line that obsidian thrust and curtness which the verb ought to have, also, and now and then you omit at the opening sentence a thee or an a, and that gives the sentence a little too much of the soft, adjectival feminine pomegranate mood, and I think you sometimes turn an adjective into a verb, which is not at all good. But let anybody say that ISHMAEL is not a remarkable work of genius, and he is as much of a liar as you are when you fall down into your buffoonery bathos about solitude and my dollar-whoring for dollars nobody even offers me; so brother olson, if I am doing all this literature courtesanship for nothing, well, let us just settle it, and admit we are the literature whores of Gaza, and that genius is cultivated belles lettres lechery, as Chaucer and Olson know, only there is damn'd piece of perversity in that man, Olson, who has the gold of Ophir in his mind, and if he

had it in his pockets, pauper Dahlberg, would sure be reaching into them, call it non-virtue practice or pandarism, or beggarism; but you aint got it, save in your astounding spermaceti intellect, when it is at work, and writing, and not just spilling seedless clots of rancour, and so to repeat, in some quaint amerikan way, you're a rahab of amerik literature, and no one can get into Cannan without your spying, and so am I.

I wish in the name of heaven's hell's earth, you'd pack it up, and make a quick Israelite exodus from that sodden solipsism town, and take your Constanza along, and get to where you can on occasion hear some human talk, or at least be near city art fakes, and those pederastic streets, where everything is teeming and dying, but all for art, and that is something for us, even though it is foetid and offends the skin. There is something about some of your letters, and the way they eat into you, that I mislike; despite all your troglodytic travail over words and ideas, you're too idle, and bored; maybe you need some lysol and nitre humanities, to rouse you to forms. Now, you said some very fine things about the FLEA, and you should not think for an instant that I would try to get in the way of your oppositions to anything you said or wrote about the FLEA. I think, and I said before, that we are much too automatic to be bothered about morals in art, when we have to get a little bread. A man is gifted and he fathoms himself whether he toils in a dollar drudge office or for our late brother, the lump vulgus Imago, Roosevelt, or not. Otherwise, we get into emasculate and epicene metaphysics, the kind that seems to kindle your intestines, when I mention Hermes Trismegistus; but you ought to know by this time that like you I'm a quarry-hunter, an analect, who'll look everywhere for his amethysts and Eden stones. I admire very much your fine, original obsessions with SPACE, in the opening [of] ISMAEL.

Well, brother friend Olson, I'll try to get this, special, into your furnaced hands; but since you are a man interested in the Genesis, whether Cain struck Abel first, just remember you showed me the insolence of a wild horse; you are the horse alligator, as you speak in the Melville SPACE Boke, that REAL GENIUS, no doubt about it, and

I'm damned glad that I homaged you in the FLEA, despite the fact that you're a great purity and virginity ass of a Balaam, and this ought to prong you, but you can't persuade me into believing that denying your Canapot yea to the FLEA is not just circumlocution dirt and that you are not the foolish virgin who has no oil for the lamp she adores.

Well, I guess, I am your Father-Image, and either you've got to assume that I am ready for my senilia, or that I am likely to die without further ripening, and get staled in some frozen parable sea moral or first cause, and I thank you deeply for worrying so, even though a part of that is the groundwork for your own artistic egoism, and that is all right, too; for we murder everybody, and call it literature, and so much of amerikan literature is the dry guillotine to which we send those young, green novices of writing and feeling. I still maintain that though literature is Space and the wounded western man's longing for distance, and when a man says that God is close to him, it fills us with the greatest disgust, or that the Word is near to him, we know he is perfidious,—still for all that, if we are to get free from cold, Gothic Amerika, literature has to be friendship and affection, or else we all perish in an utterly homeless and dead hieroglyphic art that will be extraordinary and fatal. Go, if you must to dry, arid, mountain latin gods, and refuse the Mosaic wells, the soft feminine hills of the hermaphroditic Nazarene, and both are mare's nests, but we die, as medieval fascists, with the inquisition rope of Loyala around the necks of each one we embrace, if we exclude for all the damage it has to us, I mean your gushing, liquid, Christianity, we are not men, warm, hot, fierce men with fire and daggers for our closest friends; we are just frozen homosapien who starve everybody to death by the miserable congealed climate of our own resolutions and hermetica distances, very valuable for art, and a great danger to any kind if Inca, Mayan, Mediterranean civilization.

I salute Ishmael again, but if you send me another of your damn'd froward brazen necked epistles, I shall in turn give you back fine sword and bodkin words, although I think much of this is foolery, and that if you have an ounce of outside, unchristian, hard pebble

and Numa rock goodness in you, you would be damn'd grateful for the chance to say a real, flaming spear word in the defence of the Flea which is just perched and closeted in your ear.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[217 Randolph Place, N.E.
Washington, D.C.]
Nov 15 50

brer edward: You are a kerekter! (out of yr own "Tales") (All thracian & coonskin) (And sometimes, fr the Red-Eye you've drunk, can't even read: example, a whole abusive letter, resting on, mistaking this sentence. Or, rather, what you did not see was sentence, separate, reading "So, for sums." having nought to do with ought to do with moneys, but, with (many references back), the making of sums, the summing up of, you-me, relationships, the ledger of, friends.

(Just to extricate you from your own confusions! To save me, from yr notion that, I think you commercial, that is, on an economic level. Hell, I've seen you blow too many such dangling apples, ever to....And if you be a Merchant, of Toledo or Kansas City, you be a might poor one, where, geld is)

No, lad, or papa, this whole scream, this male shrew what descended on me bitin and tossin fur....Ah, me, syntax—oh, Solipse (shit, Edward, abt Washington, and the advantages of 8th Street, and all such preachins, and interferences: aw jes don bite such bait, Brother American Orpheus

And if you be senile, you is the dad blemdest wittiest old coot that ever drew a phrase from the hump on his back, you Quiver you, you Mississippi Hoot

I can't take you that seriously, Sad-Eyes. Come off that 2 inch stool, Cavalry Man, I seez you, ah knowz you, under all those hoots, War -Face. (You see, I'm crazy, too, fellow hunter, been on the trace too long: take a look at that country we been over, all the skins we've clothed ourselves in, Bro-Butternut!)

I'm campin, in this duck-shoot.

The eye-deer! that you all can squat thar, and make up yure tremblin singlin mind, on what ah's up to here in my clutch (try to bring me down out of that blue into the swamp by shootin at me with my own weapon, I who once took on to call myself a Biblical name!

Now you look hyar Mister Bumblin Boone, ah don take kindly to such back-fartin shootin gallery bee-hay-via. What ah did, ah did. What ah'm doing, I'se also, doin.

'Course ah'm mighty obliged for yr special interest, reckonin, as ah always have, how special a shootin iron you all carry. But ah jest think, these days, these fine fall huntin days, you ought to wad that thar gun of yrs, and try these newfangled 38 longs they tell me you can get back at the settlement, Brer Wit.

This is just a shot over the shoulder
(look ma, no hands), no mirror either, pa,
just for the hell of it, now, it's frozen,
the sun is, hyar in these woods

BRO CHARLES

P.S.

I had closed this letter, and was walking out to post it, when I did think to take this liberty to tell you, that, I am somewaht disturbed (like *you* say!), have been, since, in yr long letter, you mentioned the WHEEL OF SHEOL as the paradigm of what you want to do next—of the sea-island parable, i suppose.

Now you will know, certainly, that of all yr friends, I shall surely say least of all, you could be wrong. For I say, a man knows best what *he* is up to. Yet of course it is also true i know how what a friend says, is, helpful.

All i wanted to say is, to remind you that, not so long ago—or maybe almost after the WHEEL—you added the passage I speak of (18-21). And that that thread for you to wind unwind yr labyrinth is as good, or better, than SHEOL.

Nor to say don't do both, of course. It is only, that, yr bullwhacking of society (the "world") stings when the ship is tight in yr own hand (when yr own back is under it), most. Or when yr own hand is whipless, utterly open, a palm, for fragrant gesture & love. (I am thinking, now, of that fascinating para, near the beginning of WHEOL, when—you base yr metaphysic in a physiology of the head: this animating of the organs is a precise—precious source of fable, more proper, I take it, to yr singular senses than a lot of "history" which WHEOL also has.

What I am dumpishly going towards, is, that, every sentence in those 4 pages (18-21), is clewed tight to *you*, to yr nature & mystery, the disclosure of same, the conjecture of, by, on same, that, by such a grip, by staying inside your own air so insistent—so intensively, you let any one else all, all, all *their* air

But the world riles you so, you usually, beat the hell out of it, and out of everyone else but yrself.

Yet there is this other gate, through which you enter & demolish the world: and the curious thing is, that it, too, is clewed to you. (I am referring to that paragraph in WHEEL (it is page 100, "the forse's ears" to the "slyest of vanity".)

These two GATES: they can't be beat. BUT, they must dominate, or...

And I'd hazard the guess, that, what joins the, what keeps the air in, is, YOUR SENSES. When the HEAD follows after the SENSES, especially your nose (now I mean in the writing as well as the thinking, in the act of the writing, the control) you are truly imaginative : yr page *invites*.

Let me toss this at you: the physiology of that para, 100, and the geophysical base of another para (102, "Mortal learning...eat and know) are the TRUE CONTRARY of the OTHER METHOD (18-21) and simply because they are the true extension of THE INDIVIDUAL & HIS SENSES, EDWARD DAHLBERG

You prove again, that, no matter how much a man exposes himself, the more, he is, ambiguous. And the less he has to do with the world, the more he exposes SAME.

Okay. I'll shut up. Charles

The abstract (form) versus the generalization (moralizings): for example, how impeccably you disclose yrself abstractly in one rising passage in FLEA (I think the finest you ever wrote, and one of the most moving passages—well, *who* has done, in yr order of literature, such pages as 18 (bottom, Cana's waterpots) to 22 (top, I put a cicada in my vest). Here you are yr poet, and abstract, abstract, diffident, and thus, entirely, by disclosure and conjecture, MORAL.

(And what form, what a form, implicit, in it (the same form which made me, rise to the story, the FLEA, tho, there, so often, yr generalizing, steals, eats away the cheese of, yr form).)

You see, I delay, and study, for, to unwrap you from yourself, is most hard, because, to say what *is* yr order of form, is not at all easy. (Now don't take that as a feather. It is not so. Every line you write shld be—excuse me, it is not at all stiff of me, to say this—abstract, (not personal only in this sense of, the impersonal: yr own sense, of, this, as you say, go, go, and find, in yr forms, your abstractions.

Let me be mischievous also, with the text of yr letter:
I know that work is what we're here for, period, flatly true, not, "the only redemption for Adam and us" (that is what I mean by generalizing the experience or the truth: every allusion, of any sort, historical or otherwise, must *add* to the reach or spread of the gnome, or it eats, instead: to my most christian ears, this only perpetuates all the christian rot, thus diminishing,

instead, as so often you do, increasing the gnome. And why? Because, basically it is a cliche you are pumping: the sweat of adam's brow. And with that comes that desperate notion of original Sin, language is so fullsome, and its its references so wide. Suddenly, instead of yr sentence pushing reality now, it (in this allusion) wearies us with all the filthy pack on the back of all the moral errors Moses started and Paul and the rest of such churchmen have piled on pile

Likewise, thistles & briars: Christ-talk (derogade, bankrupt—but of course I do not mean just such use of Christ as in above passage in Flea, noted, where you have gone in by dahlberg and by him come out with a christ as fresh as this frosty November morning.

((It suddenly strikes me! Who was it, that took his eye and pencil, and swiped olson good, for just such wrong-spreading bibicalisms! Oh, Maitre! Listen to yrself: For in the beginning

NONO olson: you are wrong. It is not here, that edward, errs. As a matter of fact, the irony of this use of the biblicals—"sloth...boredom, ...idleness" is perfect, mockery, & force, fresh.

It is Adam's sweat, or Daniel and the burning furnace, I am calling you on, not, on this or, gehenna doubts, say, where, yr adjective, adds push to the noun, as a matter of fact, saves the noun, from contemporary cliche.

Well, just, that you are so fine I, because I feel so close to you & yr imagination, want you to be, as they say abt sugar, superfine!

Hello, Edward, and best, best, best. You are coming along fine, Maitre! Sd the Pupil!

Ho: CHARLES

[217 Randolph Pl, N.E.]
Washington *Wed Dec 19 51*

My dear Edward:

by god. by god. that is something! (i have just now read it, it having been here for my return—came into my hand an hour ago—and i am tremendously moved.

Here is an act of mnemonics & exactness, all Flaccids & Easies! (And I have no way of knowing whether you knew how particularly I did take offense at this Arvin's robberies. And that you have exposed him on the public thoroughfare—that it shld be you, who only could do it—this is beautiful

It is a beautiful thing, looking at it as though I am only the materials for your wit & corrections

such sentences as, the institute priests are Goya foxes with pens in their paws

knowledge has become an abstruse fact

the perverse is now so dominant evil is often called good

It's polemic as that art is needed to be restored: firm, & inside: inside, both of you and of the texts—that is so very sure, the care with which you have disposed yrself and these texts, the firmness of your management of both—the delicacy—the delicacies

And in that swelling paragraph about the two of us—)which does seem to me the loveliest of it all)—I witness to you that you are exact, exact & magnanimous. (The pain, too, I can also reinforce.)

It is a huge act, Edward, an act of your own size (a size all of us need cultivate ((you see, I suffer under a restraint, that yr last word to me was, Ingrate, the biggest this hyar cuntry might raise

(and i shall

forever suffer under such, from you or anyone, because i was born with the damndest obsession of all, justice, that ugliest virtue, the impossible one

(((I have yet to turn the corner of it, to slip out from these balances, and engage myself, engage myself

So I blush, almost happily blush, with the pleasure & dimensions of your act, so to praise me in the public domain—not to praise (it comes to me so, it is close) but to point thus, and say, look: here is this man's labors, once.

I was full of chagrin these days, peculiarly troubled, bottomwise, and to have this wine poured straight into my hampered blood stream makes me giddier than this strange machine's type & drop. It makes me more dizzy than wild, and you must excuse it if this letter comes out like quiet ravings. For I am to this degree mad, and you have straightened it (straightened it like, say, De Quincey says opium made harmonies where there had only been pains from a wet hair worn straight to bed in a cold night for 21 days!)

Wld you accept, with this a swipe I took, this fall, at some such same monsters? (in fact, arvin is—as you will quickly note—one of the three I was the most after. And surely, from malice,—not so wide & great as riders like yrself who go on apple's back, who are capable of living in the large and enlarging same ((my trial is still particulars!

(((and whether this is what joins to my bitch goddess, justice, i do not yet know—i rather imagine this is the connection, this is the foolish search to use oneself as balance

And what does move me)as I say(in this LAURLES FOR BROOWERS is how firm your own value system is (and certainly arrived at by yr own large way, and its endurancies carried out, carried out, worn for so long

((my friend

Another way: it is just such plain pleasure to see such pigs stuck! God damn them (and again i am wry, with so much you and I have experienced—or, fr yr point of view, you have experienced—better, not experienced—from the likes of, me)

It comes out all wry.

(((One thing, there, is grand—&peculiar: Bill—I
just never cld figure out his story, how much he was
responsible for Van Doren & so, Weaver
In any case,
I take it as a correction (still bitter, that, Bill
could not see me for the Kouwenhovens, of course—which
ate then, and east now, like the whore in Koln,—same
time

((You must excuse all the boners this machine has made—& they seem so significant I leave them, like the black back of the Soapine whale only dutch cleansers can do anything with,—not me, who is neither white nor black, nor knows his best scouring powder
Signed, Schliemeihl))

Crazy, nobong, bongo: by god, i say, to be there, in the public print, put there by you so tellingly: thank you, Edward, for the long arm of your mind & its attentions!

For I feel also this that what makes it so large an act, is, that I am materials—I am used for others, that, others may also be misused, eh? For surely these must always be fought, must be struck.

And yr distinction is, that you have stuck em in our time as that like man & yr hero Poe did his work (Melville, like myself, are such who make it all in the margins of their minds, & are too reluctant to be of public good

no, I cannot so enlarge myself—strike it off. Leave it, simply, I do not do as well.

With old & new love, & new thanks
that you are more alert than others

yr
OLSON

[39½ Washington Square, So.
New York, New York]
December 31, 1951

My dear Charles:

I telephoned you from Florida. A former student of mine took R'lene and me to Sarasota. The piece for the Freeman was two months labor and vexation, One glance at the sodomite book was enough, but to nail him on a thieves' cross at Calvary was another matter. It is done, and now your work cannot be gainsaid or garbled or pilfered. i took pains to see that no less than twenty copies went to Smith College. I know the little academic gnome was bitterly stung; everybody who has read it has said that there was no doubt that I proved that he was a robber. Charles Angoff was very taken with the piece, and so was James Rorty. Well, can you believe any more that the American writer is not some Gadarene devil? But the fight, who else has bothered but me? I have had a years' battle against Mark Van Doren, the canary Trilling up at Columbia, the albino Fitzgerald beadles, the herd academic deacons of grammar, and for what purpose? If a few would use a pen as a whip they would go their riggish kennels, but no one will help me.

Now there is the bitter iron agony of bread. Remember, you wrote me that I practice virtues for sums; if so, then I had better seek me a vice. Now, how about your Pound and Williams. Is your nose rough enough for the swill autobiography? He is for himself, pater pediatrician Williams, that's the great infamy in the Cyclopes of Euripides.

I write you a little this time, Charles, but do not believe this reply is meant to be low-hearted. I wish you would do one thing, go back over the scroll of your life as a writer, and ask your own heart whether anybody had ever been so steadfast to your nature as one Edward Dahlberg, and ask what he has reaped in return, save the only knowledge that keeps him alive, and that he has always tried to tell the truth which people nowadays miscall by the name of slander and malice. Granville Hicks wrote in a letter to Chamberlian at the Freeman, saying that he should not print Edward Dahlberg, for he was vicious and sick and that the so-called stealths from your book were coincidental, fine word, coincidental, it is so useful and marginal another word for sneaking.

Well, I too send you my love and friendship; if you know of any college that would like a composition handyman around, let me know.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, N.C.]
January 22 [, 1952]

My dear Edward:

A man shld show an enormous reluctance to making metaphors out of other men's facts—if one's own are not enough,—or if one's own are only the subjects of one's own sentimentalities—or dedications, then, maybe one would have to extend oneself, and start turning other's children into whales, or equally sleazy parodies

—how peculiarly you outrage another, and how repeatedly it is by way of the things intimate to them:

how gross this is, you, who wails whenever anything is directed home to yrself, one wld think you wld

know. But patently you don't—patently, you do do not know that the injuries practiced on you are the injuries you practice:

so you find fit company, find yrself now tallying such creatures as Mumford Angoff & who else

and don't say it is because the company of your naturals is refused you: you refuse yrself their love, & interest, by outrages or rigidities

you shld be so heavy as to be so jocular to a boy like Hedden, making metaphors & mock of me, mine, to such a public person, in such a public way:

it doesn't matter, simply, that, you do it, do not feel these immaculatenesses: yes, i'll take the word & wear it, for they are as much my cloth as the same things you have chosen to praise in my one work you do praise, in public(&, surely, as i know, in private)

i stand on my thanks to you, for the LAURELS—yet i stayed silent to yr letter from Florida (rec(d last week), simply because i do not know what to do when you count coups

the trouble is, i know & grant you the reasons of yr demarches: i know the same craving for engagement of one's force. Yet this is the double gate which won't go down. And you know the obstruction.

My sense is, you think the gate is to be tumbled, reared or outraged away.

I think it is what we are.

It is such a welter, these businesses between us. My silences (which you paw at) are solely I do not know what to do when the skin is the gate, when you put your amour prepre on your sleeve—as though mine too were worn there. It ain't.

I made this prayer, today: that you

would wear your troubles once again as Lorrie Lewis hath, instead of thinking they could be thrust out on any other body, the society, a friend, a love, any place but where they are, where any of us has em.

I don't believe in wisdoms. Ultimately, they, too, are slogans—and for this reason, that, staying with one's own particulars, one inhabits, and discloses, all there is to disclose. The sufferings are not to be put off, like an environment. They are not caused.

I believe in laws—and one of them, surely, is, that each man does know the state of his own soul. And whose is wise—that is, wise enough to get to the other side of despair? The humpty-dumpty of it is each man's: & one either knows & deals with that—one has respect for one's own life—or one doesn't.

I regret to sound like a toothed portcullis. I am not. Yet you do such things you make me so, to keep what I hath.

CHARLES

[Nimbus Letterhead] Nimbus
The Westminster Press . 411a Harrow Road . London W9
Publisher John Trafford
Editors Tristram Hull.Ivo Jarosy
Business Manager John Scott
[no date]

Dear Charles,—

Do you have any prose or verse you might care to submit. I heard you had done a small treatise on the Donner Tragedy; maybe that might be suitable, as we could reprint it in England. You might have some other work on the early American narratives you are doing. We want something strong. The pay is not very much, a guinea for a

thousand words of prose, and something more for verse. Nimbus has a circulation of about two thousand readers that should entice a writer. We are not interested in publishing well-known nonentities. You may know of some other gifted person. Any suggestions you care to make will be a help. I hope we can serve poets and talented natures, and I shan't mind running after a rare obscurian.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, North Carolina
[no date—November, 1954]

My Dear Ed:

Your letter, & Nimbus, both in, and deepest thanks for asking me to submit something, as well that I hear from you. (At the time Creeley was starting to edit the Black Mt Review I heard, through Sauer, that you were around there, and asked him to ask you if you cared to send something to Creeley. I repeat. And his address is:

Robt Creeley
Casa Martina
Bononova, Palma
Mallorca, Spain

...

Issue #3 is just in air mail from Mallorca (where we get printing of 750 with 64 pages for less than 250 bucks).

I shall enclose at least a poem (*David Ingram*, one of the Maximus "Letters"). And if anything of a present book on Shakespeare—just now stumbling—should seem usable, I shall also send it. (Such narratives as you speak of are either absorbed in the Maximus, or still shoot out in reviews, rather than in any use from myself, I mean with my own spit put on it).

It's great to submit them to you, but I despair of Nimbus using them, unless you work a change there. I have read this issue (and noted the contributors to earlier ones), and, except for the Eluard poem, take it there is a confusion of the simple with the obvious (or, the obvious with the simple, whichever way it reads right). And a real miss on what is "Old-fashioned". —I guess you are there, and think of me as of it, because there are currents in the position which make sense, viz—the fact of the piece on beans, as well that Jung... as well this import of the simple, and the old, in both verse & prose attack & form. But really, Ed! All here is soft, and I mean easy

the whole problem of the art of artifice, of the restoration of the six other sorts of song (instead of the stupid lyric), the heart of affection, the rediscovery of Afghanistan: not Barker, Whiting, MacDiarmid, that rotten Cocteau.

Christ, I shld bother you with this! You change it. And I can suggest, in addition to Creeley, three others you might care to ask:

Irving Layton 8035 Kildare Avenue Cote St Luc, Quebec	verse
Robt Hellman Writing Workshop Univ of Iowa Iowa City, Iowa	stories
Larry Eigner 23 Bates Road Swampscott, Mass	both

(over)

And two others, Robt Duncan, whom you probably know (address: 1724 Baker Street, San Francisco) whom I am "soft" about; and funny

open if inefficient verse maker Raymond Souster, 28 Mayfield Avenue, Toronto 3, Ontario, Canada.

(None of these, by the way, with the exception of Creeley, are that conscious of what is going on, but each of them is quite clean about how he does his own thing. And Layton, I'd say, is the *one* classical English poet alive, a cross of Donne & Blake, & driving rhyme and metric straight out from now. Makes the *Nine* gang, & this splinter group Nimbus is—with the old exception of Ian Fletcher, was it (in Nine), that most gifted user of the old discourse system? Ian somebody, who, at last sight, was all done, was diddling with Maryolatry (like you'd say!), or making exercise books out of Medieval pictures!

Ok. Excuse me. It's just that the "republic of letters" ...And the English, in London, strike me as such journalists, as "arriviste" (whatever that means!—i mean, late-comers...

Pick me this way: like Lawrence said, the Americans were extreme in 1850! Now they are post-same. Which is one hell of a way farther along the road than re-action. And discourse has moved so far off that base of the explicit, without, by now, being anything but sharply straight

what do those boys think it all is, a either-or? all epater Pound, Eliot, Empson, back to academicism like Bonamy Dobree (who once was of use on one of those English "centuries"

The crossing of what's been done with what was done in order to do what now patently has to be done—it's a matter of feathers and steel, not one or the odor

La-la! Just a pleasure to write ot you. Will shut up, and go about my business, at least copy you the Ingram. And let me know the worst:

surely the title of your sheet is "a cloud, as of romance, about a

person or thing" (at least that's what I'm saying isn't so easy, and why I wish I had this job on Shakespeare's late verse & therefore dramaturgy ready to send you, for it would be a fair test run of Jarosy:

romance,
aint easy,
Jarosy
the cloud
ain't rosy,
it is
"uniformly gray and extending
over the entire sky (hey!
JAROSY, calling Herrr Professor Doktor
JAROSY, Drop that
nimbus

All love, CHARLES O

PS [in script on top margin of first page] Robt's letter just in—so will fire this to get us on And get to the poem soon. CRAZY the *Wheel!*

November 24, 1954

Dear Charles,—

Your letter just came, and Creeley whom I like very much should be here in about an hour and a half. The plain truth is, Charles, that I never read Nimbus. I told the two editors it was bad without looking at it. However, I said, if they would let me print real people in strength I would act as editor for America. I told them I was not interested in a magazine that was no more than a torid anthology, a piddling verse or two by one man, a short story by another, then an essay on Eliot, Pound, Tate or Lionel Cacary Trilling. Well, I don't know how far they will let me go, but if I can't go all the way, I won't waste my time.

I sent out letters at once, not to every celebrated nonentity in the States, but to people who try as best they can to call A A, a chair a chair, an alley an alley.

Thanks, too, Charles, for suggesting names; everybody except, the knaves of letters, seem to get printed, and those who are having great difficulties, and are in one way or another in limbo, are hard to reach.

I got a fine letter from Josephine Herbst. She can't get a passport to Europe, and asked me whether I would run as essay on her hardships with the state department. I wrote her at once to go ahead with it, only beseeching her to employ early colonial references to show that from the start America was a refuge of bigots, like that scurrilous author of the *Simple Cobbler of Aggawam.*

How, I am very anxious to get the Shakespeare essay; send the poem or verses too, and if they are as good as you are, you know it will be my delight to print them.

I stayed three days in Paris, and after meeting several fornication proseman, I quit. It was, besides, very expensive solitude.

Of course, Jarosy has no sense; actually you know more about him than I do. I met him three times, enough to tell him he knew nothing, and wondering how long he was going to pursue it.

Don't worry about the length of the Shakespeare essay; if it's very good, and it ought to be, the longer the better. Besides, we will be able to get some pounds into your pocket.

Don't despair; if I care for the Shakespeare essay, and there is any objection, I'll quit. You know how changeless man is. I am always the same, only more of it.

At this moment, I shall also write to Tristram Hull; he is the son of the Jung translator; he is half*jew, the english in him you can throw away; he is by no means unintelligent, but maybe too shrewd to have a development. Actually, there is also David Wright, an English poet from South Africa who is also an associate editor. He is a charming weakling, not without talent, but I don't write to anybody but Hull.

After finishing a book which Laughlin says he will do, I found I had two books, and so I may have to expand one, and use the other,

on the New World, for another volume.

Nimbus has a long piece by me in the forthcoming issue, on Brazil, Peru, the rivers, which are our veins and myths, in South America.

If Hull will go along with me, we can somehow or other be a small, compact group, and I'll print ten poems by one versifier in an issue, and not one, so that a reader has a sense of the nature and the physiognomy of the man.

I move, Charles, from the ancients to the New Continent. I don't know how long I shall stay here, the usual flaneurs of the Muses at Palma and Robert Graves who writes for Punch and Jesus.

I read your letter fast, and will have to reread it, but I wanted to get a reply to you quickly, and also to Hull. Even if I go back to America, which I don't want to do, but wherever you go you walk around by yourself, and I am a dirty fragment by myself, I'll still be the American editor.

Meantime, my dear Charles, let me hear from you soon. You have my love and friendship, and if I can get you printed I am not altogether vile dust.

EDWARD

I'm giving you Cook's as an address, for I may move—

ED.

December 28, 1954

Dear Charles:—

I wrote to you in reply to your good letter. I fear, however, that my own words were lifeless, and hardly a savory answer to your epistle. But do not think you have not been in my mind. Now, I found that young Hull was quite rapacious, and that he was far more interested in owning a magazine than in bringing out a strong a truth. I did not say anything about your kind invitation to appear in the Black

Mountain periodical. For one thing, I forgot, and then I have other feelings, which I hope you will understand. We are the lost people of the arts in America. What good will it do us to print our work in a very small clandestine magazine which we have to hand about to indifferent persons to get it read altogether. If you give the mediocre nonentity, (and there are many sensitive, empty people in the world), a book for nothing, he does not read it. He only prizes what he buys, for that is almost the sole recreation in the States. So that by giving a book to a nobody you deprive him of amusement, and he detests you for it. Then what is the average magazine? a laodicean anthology containing one poem, a short story, an essay attacking Eliot or praising Pound. Were there a way of printing a vision, and printing a writer in strength, that would be different. It is necessary to get three or four gifted people together, and they have to have literary scholarship, by which I mean nothing academic. I abhor the subhuman professor of letters.

But to return to your Shakespeare essay. I had been contributing to Poetry for over three years. I don't have to tell you that it is pansy punctuation verse. Shapiro had taken a long poem of mine, *The Garment of RA*, and then rejected it because it was gnomic and not dramatic! Anyway, I saw him in Chicago. I had had a long altercation with him, telling him I did not care to appear in Poetry. We were quite friendly when I saw him, and I talked about your piece on Shakespeare. He said he had heard of it, and that it was to long. I ridiculed him by telling him that he was always refusing good work because it was too short or too wide, or too broad, or that the sleeves of the chapters or stanzas bulged, insisting that he take a real interest in your Shakespeare. Now, he is leaving Poetry in a very short time, going to teach at Berkeley. The plan is this, if it is agreeable to you: please send the Shakespeare essay to me, even if it is not done. He won't publish all of it anyway. Let me, if you will, make suggestions, and then if it has the alchemic ore that I suspect it has, mail it to Shapiro with my own feelings. If we do this, I believe we have a good chance of getting some portion of it printed. I shall do my very best

for you as you, know, though you have been irked with me in the past, and imagine, for what reasons, I know not, that I have ever had any base motives in doing something for you. That there is abundant affection between us we should both know, and that in some way we are unalterable kin our very intellectual travels amply indicate. You are remarkable as speculative granite or water; you are yourself one of the elements of the Cosmos. You can do nothing that is secret from my own identity. Without knowledge of your own purposes or reading I have been reading the Quiche Maya Scripture and diverse other works on the Incas, the Chichimecas. I took but a quick glance at the MAYAN LETTERS and smiled.

There is one other matter: once I said that literature is a gospel of love, and you took it to mean that I expected you because we are friends to care for everything I wrote. You must be just, Charles; in all the years I have known you, and labored for your gifts, I only once asked you to defend a book of mine, and one which you had already lauded. Whatever my defects are, I am not Waldo frank; I write the best I can, and do not think I am modest, unambitious. I am droll rather than virtuous, and the only reason that I do not make stupid or gross compromises is that I do not know how. I am not in the habit of it, and would only be a greater simpleton than I am were I to try.

I have a book done which Laughlin is supposed to do. He has had the MS for sixteen months, and he won't give me a contract. He is looking about for an artist to do drawings. He says the book will be a commercial disaster and so he has to get a well-known artist, to attract people to look at the drawings and pay no heed to the writing. Should he publish it the artist will do very well and gain more lookers; for this is a picture book century, and the most vacuous people look at paintings because they are too indolent to read.

Laughlin has had a long poem of mine for 2 years for the Annual which now comes out every three years.

What are we to do? Greed and absolute hatred of the mind have eaten up all values. You can alter the state, but not the customs of the people, so politics is not the solution. Everybody on all sides is killing

the grass, the rivers, the poems, and demolishing a grange and putting up in its place the garage. No screed will be of help; the sickness is very deep, and the wheel is in the head.

My dear Charles, let me hear from you quickly, and I shall do my very best. Maybe, you have some suggestions. You know how predatory Williams is. We have to form some small cohesive group or each die on top apart.

You have my love and friendship.

EDWARD

Edward Dahlberg
General Delivery
Santa Monica, California
Mail comes to the apartment about two in the afternoon, and for that reason I use general delivery.

[Santa Monica, California]
August 20, 1955

Dear Charles: —

I am starting a small press, and am bringing out a book of verse and prose of no more than six to eight writers. I am not interested in anthologies, a poem of six lines by one versifier, a short tale by another, then an essay, all not making a vision, or a truth, giving you perhaps no more than the chaps of one author, knees of another, the jowls of a third.

What happened to the Shakespeare essay? I had hoped to make a magazine of strength of Nimbus. But I cannot do anything with punctuation pathics, rabble aesthetes, and the self-loving Ham of modern letters. You know my experience with Dorothy Norman on TWICE A YEAR, and that for all my labors I could scarce rake out some moiety of the dung of the Augean stables. I had no profit whatsoever from my labors except the publication of Lear and MOBY-

DICK. The rest was stubble and hyssop, and I have eaten and drunk both until I reel at Gethsemane which is thinking, feeling, and writing, well, badly, and not at all. What boots it all, and does the Kosmos care one jot one the other, and it may be that our cadavers are of more worth to the energy of the Universe than all our scribblings.

I have only looked into the MAYAN LETTERS, but intend shortly to read them. Herbert Read and I are contemplating a book together on modern literature. I shall, I pray, be Vulcan's Fire in this, but what with the conclusion of a book, I am now wasted and charred, and this may be a huge brag. But I will try again.

I expect to print some work by Read in this first book. I have already placed an advertisement in the papers, and expect to run notice of the press elsewhere.

It has been my intention to write to Bob Creeley; but again I was glutted with such inertia that to lift my arm some mornings was the burden of Sisyphus, nor have I been able to reach those fruits of Erebus (where else are they, since I cannot find them in the sun), denied to Tantalus.

You may have some suggestions. I hope through Read to have some distribution in London as well as in the United States. The purpose is to bring out work unacceptable to venal publishers, are there any others, a query of the buffoon.

I was appalled to hear that Ann Rita had written to you in my behalf. When I want to relate myself to you in some way or other, and all cleavages between persons is Cain and murder and injustice, I shall do it myself, as I am now doing. I require no vicar either for my gall, or adders, or affections.

You are a part of my memory and experiences, and I can brew nothing in that poor limbeck called the heart, without in some way including you, nor can you do otherwise. There is no gimcrack pride, or Hubris, as the fraudulent academic names it, proving their crudity to the illiterates of Mt. Ida, which stinks worse today than the brackish waters of Styx, between friends. I can throw a woman away, and be

glad to rid myself of this tribe of sots and sins, and look for other Poppaeas to ransack my pores and dreams, but not a friend. Well, let it be as I have said; nothing can be changed.

I should tell you my own relations with Shapiro on poetry was a battle of the books for three years. I could not stomach the empurpled pathics of verse he printed; I never read the magazines to which I contribute; I know better ways to go to bedlam. If I finally was driven by the dingiest political dunciads to do a column for the foetid New Freeman, I had to appear somewhere, for I grow weary of putting all my work away for rust and moths and epitaphs. Let those who have lied about me know, that one who is not a marxist is not for that simple reason a blackguard, a vassal and ninny of the state. I have published five different articles on Randoph Bourne, but those on the left are as pusilanimous as those on the right. No one will gather up the words and the glyphs form the papyrus and the dust of the sepulchre.

I send you my love, for I have nothing to hoard.
EDWARD

Edward Dahlberg
General Delivery
Santa Monica, California

[in pencil script]

Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, N.C.]
Wed Oct 19/ 55

My dear Ed

It comes out this way: what is *your* experience of these things, *any* of them, the slightest(the *nasal* [?] I know is keen, & always heard; the Carmine Street stable or the Rockport fields)—or the largest (say, Indians *you don't know*

And because I don't hear you registering your queer images peculiar dry done thing—because I miss the labor—

(and get, instead, these arrogations—which, I take it, have to happen if the scrupulous isn't: you must forgive me my most impolite failure to answer your letter

(my last letter to you some years ago was intercepted by your wife, from whom I received a pious screed in return)

Experience is, said it, a lot more g[ ]h & unknown to the best of us, than such phrasing & dicta as you

(& so often *generously* give:

you are *generous*, Ed, that's not at all where you ought to suffer anything I say or do, I am not really I ain't the most ingrate in American letters I aint in "American letters." That's it. That's what I'm talking about. I'm incapable of a *literary relation.*

I can only hear the quietest things—or at least only care for them. And I seem to find you address me in a voice *too big*. I think that may be fine. In fact, I read everything you write—either to me, or that I see published. That I don't answer—don't make anything of it other than this explanation.

Or attempt at same: that to undo what you yourself don't do takes more than I've got to give. I don't like war between men. Or even share in it.

So please forgive me.

(Excuse pencil.

Suddenly felt able to say this. And have.)

CHARLES

[Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, North Carolina]
November 12, 1955

Look, Ed:

This "portrait" of Olson to Creeley is exactly what I mean, and more of same (as previously to Hedden some form of abuse of Ann Rita, etc): leave me out of it, dig your nose into what *I do* (not am) but if you have a right to talk about me—and surely you have—make sure it's me. I repeat: to undo what you don't do is what makes you impossible. And several times outrageous.

I say this impersonally, and would reach it over to you (as my previous note sought to). but I throw up my hands at any chance you'll "hear it" when you take the easy way out and call it incoherent. And something else. As one said: he can't hear you if he don't hear hisself. And how.

I don't give a damn. But I do when you intrude via persons and details which are a part of another man's paradox of experience. Or rather: the "right" to use another man's details depends upon a formal virtue you won't practice; or a fluency I don't find your "portraits" earn. One or the other. And at heart form, and some actuality are both what any of us who are really busy are involved with at this point of the 20th century.

And I would write to you about these matters, to take this occasion to prepare for any examination of you in print which occasion may present. I think you play hob with too many important things in this letter to Creeley to make it any longer excusable to go by it. It was what I meant by not understanding a "literary" relationship. It belongs in print, brother. Let's go there. I believe you ought to, instead of this back-of-my-back traffic. Dig the work, and say what you will; but leave my fate to me. It's that intrusion, that back-stairs

chattering...

For example, your concept of a person: it is taxonomic, and retrograde at a time when context and relevance—motion—is palpably the advantage, and the care, not relationships. You think you can pin me up? But have you asked yourself first questions about the physiology and the psychology of Edward Dahlberg?

Have you?

In any case, I am not a specimen. Or is any man. His quandary is more examinable. And a dumpheap—man's dumpheaps—are more relevant than you seem to wish or dare nasally to allow. A man picks his way, he doesn't launch phrases—or rather, in your case, adjectives and sentences. You don't slam a cortex on a coelenterate and get a sentence, Mister Prose Man. And yet just such sentences are what you make so much of. —Brother, be less memorable! having looked at a basic-basic!

My beef here is our slamming around about vernacular—my "abstract" vernacular, Pound's "glacial"—and who else's what vernacular (?) What's your fear, Mister Man?

Obviously it isn't. It's that you have misled yourself about the nature of language: you think it's vocabulary. The rest of us guess it's for real.

You think it's words. The rest of [us] think it's force. thus you are drawn up into the head (?) (and talk so much of the viscera?) Again, I burn that you should propose some slackening of my intelligence due to some Marxian ghost which leads me to seek commerce with the peeple ???? wot People???

Baloney, Dahlberg. Look at it. Rub your nose in it. Find out. Take a look. Lend an ear. Give it a once over—*it*, not you. Try it on, for size.

It's so dull, these prepared fixatives you reach up for to dip the latest in: i think it's you, really, Ed, who ought to ask himself what ambient "laws" you are suffering from, out of the last century—

and don't cry
back the mire of veins, or whatever, prurience of any man, etc.: that's what I mean, the Weltschmerz, or whatever Oyrapeenische concept of fate etc

Look. I dont' mean to be a drab. Honest I don't. Cross my heart and all that vernacular. But, you know—your counters are such one can only do two things, let em go. Or bite back. And either doesn't lead to much gain. You are too intelligent. But not serious enough. The idea, that you should talk about the "serious" people, an what they say about Olson. Wow. How they miss my Swiss who wrote Ish-swish-o, and what a moral disapointment serious people feel...

Blah blah
reawlly, ewward
It's just too damn bad
I can't take you seriously [added in script] (I can—2 ½ pages: see later on in letter)

For another example, Indians (he repeated—my lawd, Sahagun! (I just won't be able to write it, to write the exegesis and examination a putting of the clock back to Lord Kingsborough at least, ought to get, in the public domain, so that....
do you understand what *damage* that Nimbus piece on Indians *does* duz duz duz ?
Stand up, Edward, and let's take some shots at you, you great big white man you

Retrograde: no wonder you yell the young, you say (I'm glad to hear!) read me. By god, am I please.

Let me try to be serious. Otherwise, this only is no good. There are two prongs for any man of intelligence who reads to write (so far as I know there are you and Pound and me, who else?)
OK. (The others have better sense. Bill, e.g., And Creeley, say).
But if you are fool-

ish (and so am I) the double prong is scholarship and vernacular, that combo. And solely for one reason:

the discrete, and the continuous.

Now I'll be damned that I can see that you are discrete, either way, either in hearing yourself or what certainly establishes continuity—others.

Ach: I'll rush to conclusion. It's appetitive words versus language as precise. You should ask yourself if a sentence is a complete [thought]. If so, there ought to be fewer. Otherwise, is a sentence?

I leave you in my coherence.

And do leave it—to me. You got your own troubles. The last thing I want to do is add to them. And I regret, I can't relieve them—but isn't that the whole thing, that we can't

So we give each other something else.

OK. I'll sign off.

Yrs, with no offence intended. On the contrary

Olson

You really murder me, Ed—of course I'd try to break the tablets of Choreb if you came down with them off the mountain, you Moses you, you old Moses. My god the last thing we need is more of those ritual formularies of dead peoples—you'll be taken up by this newest religious floating, (you watch out, you'll get that canonization now that the English milker of anything, that friend of yours, is a knight, is't it?)

You're so foolish, not to come down off the mountain and figure that some of us can be concerned without wanting a large stiff language of stones, and self-canonization. —And that just me, and I'm sure some others, can hear you when you talk sense, as you do in those last two

columns and a half in Nimbus on La Salle. — Or me only that hapless friend of yours, Charles Olson, is a luminous reader enough to feel rewarded by those columns for having undone all the glutted sentences from page 38 to that point—and capable of knowing that those two columns and a half are worth calling to anybody's attention (like he fought his way through the mss of BONES and set some order there—like he was the first who tried to publish SODOM, here, with Nick Cernovich— —you ingrate, you!)

It's absurd: i thank you and I'll tell anybody read Dahlberg on La Salle and the French to see the only drawing of a picture of the condition of the white man as he entered the condition of the North American continent

and there's a thickness to this seizing which I'm too sensitive not to see you have accomplished—had to accomplish—all by that *wrong* loaded weighing of Indians versus Jews-Greeks-Egyptians, and, in two instances, Europeans, in the previous 9 pages BUT

are we or are we not in a free and paradoxical enough *passage* for such a discrimination to be made, and to be used????

> I mean, can you see that you do load the continent as Indian versus man as ancient, and wrong the former by scoriation—man with him—; and wrong the latter by sentimentality about how human life was then??
>
> don't you see how it is your own *selection*, which loads, and weighs in so that there's a cancellation, both the Aztec-Inca people (all you do use of the Indian), and a selection of the ancient which is as stereo as just those "classical" people, and not any others—and not even them in their density???

To hell with that. That is, I don't hope to argue you. Nor do I care, just because if you have to do it that way, its ok with me if, finally,

you give me this La Salle passage

—plus, by the way, the little lovely undone moment of the humans and the saurians each on a side trying to rifle the tortoise of either his eggs or his flesh on one of those South American rivers.

(If it's ok with me, I don't think it follows that it's—or ought to be—ok with Edward Dahlberg. He, too, shares responsibility for the government of words and the exercise of the forms of language. And if they aren't in his care, then there is loss the rest of us feel

It's crazy how, in those two columns and a half, suddenly because you are *claiming* anything (what burns me up about the way you write letters about me to others, or, for that matter, to myself—claiming fate....which is also what you are doing about both the Indians and the Ancients from page 38 to that point, page 47)—suddenly that deadly scale (which cancels everything, and immobilizes your sentences—makes them stones

—god's arm is a stone separating the sheeps from the gooks—)

thank god suddenly that scale is down and dimensions of actuality return, the time is not a fraudulent copulative present but *the* time that North America (note, specifically, *North* America, the actual America you know, Lorrie Dahlia and Edward Dahlberg) N. America was a new place—to a white man, mind you, and specifically a Northern European white man (a Frenchman, or, John Smith—even you throw De Soto and Cortes into a Florida sphere);

and space, that is, that precise but limited moment of space, when the land was unpeopled and pussley hadn't yet started to come back from San Francisco where it had been carried by the earliest Spanish ships—and from, interestingly enough, Phoenicia (pussley is a Semitic plant!)

well in that thickness, for the first time, what I think you must take to be your Cherubic (pardon, I mean, Chorebic) truths, work:

viz, who the hell has said anything as good on a crucical involvement of any one of us right now and you, via La Salle, that

CHARACTER, FREE WILL AND DESTINY ARE THE SAME

Put that on stone.

and 2nd: NEED IS A GOD WILL GIVE MAN SOMETHING TOILING WITH CHANCE

That will make a hieroglyph too

These are apothegms a man of the present can use. To me your question has to be, that all the others—I count 23—from page 38 to 47—don't. That's loss.

And I damn well think that the young, or your ungrateful friends, will know that loss. I won't myself, for one, let them miss, however, the last two columns and a half—he said, boastfully —ah. boastful man

Oh Ed, really, in our vulgar speech, come off it

and glad to have had these
words with you!

ta - ta

CHARLES

[P.O. Box 138
Santa Monica, California]
November 16, 1955

Dear Charles:

Thanks very much for your remarks about the La Salle and also for your prodigal misgivings regarding the other parts of that segment in

Nimbus. I am not a maudline primitive as you think. [sentence underlined by Olson, with penciled comment: "What, possibly, could lead him to think I think this?"] Moreover, I do not claim to know the Indian. I imagine Sahagun knew more about him than you or I. Again, many of the monks did not profess to perceive the Indian. Diego de Landa is concerned with ritual, and that is my principal involvement. All this extra-human knowledge of other people seems to me very sentimental. What I want to do is go to Beginnings. It is preposterous to believe tht Quetzalcoatl is not in part Phoenician, Basque, or a Syrian Atlas. Do I know? No.

I have found great fault with your vernacular because I do not believe it nourishes either the faculties or the fingers, the foot, the arm, or the belly. I thought your poem in the Black Mountain Review disgraceful. Why you throw off somethng of that sort I cannot tell, except that you must have some wanton appetite to *shit* upon yourself. Now, your reference to my responsibility for the government of words is extremely good. I have such a burden, and do not pretend that I can always fulfull it. How often I fail I do not know either.

As you know, and I, my work always requires excisions; I should be grateful to you if you would tell me, in a way that will lead me to particular transgressions of this kind, what sentences you find either bad, or worthless, or overburdened. Some other writers, who have seen the entire MS. feel quite differently from you. That I hardly offer as a reasonable claim for their value. Anyway, as always, I find nothing so hard as to write one good sentence. How much skill can one ever acquire. If you write very plainly you may be empty, or if you take hazards that I do, foolish, bathetic, tumid. Longinus is far more satisfied with those writers who take great chances than with those who avoid all risks.

Since I had a great deal to do with your beginnings as an author I am naturally concerned with your own intellect. What I said to Creeley is the truth; you may not like it, and neither do I. When I became the friend of a remarkable young obscurian and did all within my powers to teach him to be a writer, I had no thought that I would

ever call upon you to defend my work. As I did so only on one occasion, and since you refused, giving me sophisms instead of plain human answers, I had cause to name you a huge ingrate. I had given you lavish homage in two books only to receive in return perversity, and a great reluctance to protect the man who had been your buckler for many years. Were the book bad, and had it for that cause brought embarrassment to you, then that would have been a difficulty you could not expel. But on the contrary, you had written me numerous letters about it, giving me exceptional credit for many many pages. How was I to understand that. Yes, I accused you as a marxist of betraying me, and shooting my book to death, as so many of that infernal sect have done. I had fallen into infamy among these mad laborites of Union Square, and they had persecuted me, had seen to it that no book of mine would be reviewed, had offered free legal aid to my former wife, and you stood by, and observed the spectacle, pretending that what I wanted was to be in the big business of literature. I never will, Charles; I kindle too many antagonisms for my literary and human beliefs. As for being old Moses on the mountain, I care not a straw for such foolish talk. I am too often on the ground; either when I study, or write, or after I have finished a book, or a poem, not knowing whether it is good or bad. One of the most crass and unlearned books I have ever read is Pound's Guide to Kulchur. Now I lament that sort of street barbarism. I don't go to a book to find out what I already know. I know more about the language of gamin than you, and if you doubt it, read your butchered syntax, which you imagine is the speech of the people, and then go to Bottom Dogs. But do not think I am speaking boastfully of that novel. I will take Piers Ploughman or Chaucer for my speech, because I don't think that the scrabbled gutterals of an auto mechanic are as savory or have the same moral or human weight as the words of a rustic or any bumpkin living before the machine, the cartel, and the big inhuman cities came as the black angel to every nation.

The desire to degrade music, sounds, English, rites, art is a scatological one. I believe you share in this malady. You may deny it, and I

have no particular joy in charging you with it, but it is your burden. I don't think you are serious enough in the Mayan LETTERS. I think all those prattling references to Connie which are all right in your familial household but of no worth to a reader or to your line, are self-spoliation. Now, I have not by any means read the book, but intend to; I saw some fine speculative ore in passages here and there, and then that fossilized jargon which Pound so fatuously uses. He knows even less about the streets than you do.

Yes, I go back to Babylon, Egypt, to the Indus, always searching for the beginnings; it will bring me much woe, and maybe, mutilate sentences. At times, I look at an improper adjective and expire in a blush. I have said many times that the writer cannot be wildly alone, and not make mistakes that a simple proof-reader could correct. The trouble is we don't even have the proof-readers any more. What with the dying out of artisanship the sentence is ill-made or amateurish.

I don't care for literary relations. I am a friend or I don't bother with people, and that includes you. You take on airs telling the man who reared you as a writer about having an artistic correspondence with him. That's all right for pederasts and self-seekers, but not for me. I still think, which is quite naive when I do it, but realistic when you do so, that we write books to create a polity grounded in affection. I am a portable tomb out here, and I don't need your epistles, often half-crazy, and on occasion shot through with some burning truth, to kindle the cold hearth in my soul. If I brought you into the world to be a writer now to prate to me about literary relationship, then I committed another grievous error. When you needed me, I did not say to you, you are ambitious, vain, self-loving and turn my back upon your petition. No, I said to you, Charles, you are fancy, precious, a peevish Narcissus, but I will help you. This difference between us makes for literature; you imagine you are coming down to the multitude by your use of jargon which they know better than you. I am not so pretentious or mad. You feign to write for yourself alone; I say simply, but forlornly, I write, and I am alone.

You imagine that being gross is an assertion of your vitality; my

reply is that it is gross to accept a kindness from a man who has been your friend for so many years without even troubling to write him even a few words of thanks. I see, you hanker after friends, too, but the young are your fancy, because they cannot find out your faults as readily as I can. It is my duty to be of help to any gifted man in this terrible voiceless wilderness. Don't make a mistake about me. I'm not on my way toward that ugliest of all bournes, success. I fly from that word as I do from styx, perfidy, the lust of money, and from those who pretend that they have been friends when they have been enemies. You have been my enemy, Charles, all the while that I was your friend. In your earliest days you could not bear to have me say something true before you had said it. I had warned you about that. It may be that there is genuine understanding of flaws in what I write about the Indian. I do not know; but I think there is the same fligitious jealousy. We are always happening upon the same material, together or apart, the loadstone draws us.

I don't think, either you have to be a marxist or a political blackguard. Again, as I told Bob, your friend, and I want you to understand here, that if necessary, I shall leave off writing to him, if that interferes with your literary relationship with him? I should, myself, rather call it friendship for I think that is a much more wonderful word for it.

I don't think you have much self-knowledge. When I suffer from the pangs of solitude I do not say what I need is a literary or an artistic connection. I say I should like very much to talk to a man who cares for conversation.

Let me ask you, and can you reply truthfully, and without evasion, why did you refuse to defend THE FLEA OF SODOM? Do you believe that after your bitterness over the mistreatment of CALL ME ISHMAEL, and my own generous words about it in my book, that your disavowel was just, decent, or friendly. Was it not the act of a foe, perhaps a man who did not know it, or might have been horrified had he realized it. As a result of the interment of my books which goes back as far as 1940 I have known all the hurts by the river

Cocytus. What bread, little as it is, was stolen from me by those assassin book-Cains, the communists, and with your help! You can't deny it, because your acts prove it. You were always furtive with me, and I was always open with [you?]. You could not tell me you were a marxist, as though that would have mattered to me, had you been my steadfast friend. Yes, I have known all the hells of ostracism, but don't think I shall be dormant, or a supine antagonist. Speaking of guilt, do you know that Joshua Kunitz, a person who was once second in my heart after you, was told that he would be expelled by the party if he were seen talking to me. Take heed, Olson, the prudential Celt. Yea, he, and others, I mean Kunitz, could review books in the Herald Tribune, and when a book of mine was published, the Marxian myrmidons saw to it that my book was thrown into Limbo. You saw to it too; for you were one of them. Do you imagine that I would take bread out of the mouth of Kunitz who had been my friend. Nay, but you took it out of mine, not only the crust we cast upon the waters, but something far more valuable, the justice in our marrow, something that drives us on to other planets, and into inward spaces we believe may lead us to ALPHA, LOGOS OR GOD. Bah, sentimentality, mysticism, primitivism, but I stand by it, and when the day of reckoning cometh, let us see who has observed that "government of words" more obediently, you or I. The books already written are the reply. You can do it, if you will throw down your affectations, all those prissy verbalisms about being literary. The reason you want a literary relation with me is that you are furtive; you want only intimacy with some one who gives you big physiological ease; that's what everybody wants in their false polity. So long as there are no friendships, and people refuse to call love by the plain name that it is, we will be doomed as a nation, and our literature won't be worth more than that infamous poem of yours, or all the XYZ nonsense, or all that kind of congealed alphabet strutting. Go back, I tell you, to your speculations, write about them as well as you can, never mind the people, or marx, or antimarx, use the books you have ransacked. You tell me I am not serious, are you droll? You damage your lines repeatedly because you

want to be the vernacular clown or to be the jolly outhouse versifier, it gives you, you think, the common Touch. Ay, Touch, could you have but understood it, why you might have made some of my mistakes which appeared in that miscreant magazine, called Nimbus. Ay, fox, did you get into that periodical?

My principal charge against you as a human being is that you are a self-lover, my complaint about you as a writer is that you deliberately refuse to find out what element is yours and to work in it. Sure, you will make as many errors as I do, but you will come out with a truthful book, and not with a page and a half poem every year or so. Now, you know I hate the cult of size, but it is time to reveal your nature. It's no good going down to Guatamala, and I don't care who you went down for, and then after imagining that you are a pristine Quiche Maya, and that Kinsborough is just too niggling for you, you do another little diary. What makes you think that John Lloyd Stephens is better than Kingsborough or Sahagun. I found him a great bore; sure the drawings by Catherwood are very good, but what do I mine? Are you sure you have a better understanding of the Inca than Garcilasso? If so, produce the book, and stop prattling.

Well, Charles, I'll take your corrections when you cease being arty with me? I said all this comes out your craft; you know you are very surreptitious. That is why you made acknowledgements to me on page 87 or 89. You can't be forthright; that is why you never told me you had a child; you like to have secrets; for some reason you feel they enlarge your nature, dilate your life which is as pathetic and as monstrous as my own. [In Olson's hand in margin: "the *Bastard*: no thanks"] You also want to sting a man whose greatest blemish was that he spent all of his time trying to help you.

Now, it is my right, even in a land where liberty is word in black mouths, the marxist as well as the reactionary orifice, which has confounded whole people, and made every body either suspect or an informer. I did not complete that sentence, but I say I shall talk about you if I feel so minded, and it really is none of your business. If you want to pillory me for making wrong assertions about our friendship

that is your affair. What you do with your wife, or your child (I am glad that of the two of us, you at least have not been deprived of your son, and here again the communists entered into my private life), or with other women, I do not talk about. But what you did to me is quite another matter, Charles. I know you as you were to me; I do not know what you are to Bob. I am sure you are his friend just as you were not mine. We were involved with one another for too many years for either of us to pretend that it has not weighed upon us very heavily. The reason I did not reply to your first letter is that I could not understand it; besides, I had great doubts that you could ever be sincere with me, and avow the many wrongs you had done to a man who had been your benefactor. Who can pardon the man who has conferred as many benefits as I did upon you, o my quondam friend.

You also have a word here, gooks, which I do not know. Is there such a word? Or are you again being your own gull. Why help nature; you'll be a fool enough without mimicing an ass, you or I.

At least there is Black Mountain, one of my most paltry gifts to you; still you were in my heart, and your plight, when I even bedevilled you to spare you all the ills and wrack of your commonwealth. Tell me, simple man, what do you have to do for a man to make him hate you; give him gold, shirts, ducats, boats; 'tis dangerous. Be aloof, assume the stony visage; he might freeze, go screaming shirtless. Suppose you wound him, wound him in a mortar, tear out his tongue; will that fetch him? Is it true that if we clothe and feed a man we sow dragon's teeth?

One last word: have the greatest reverence for your own GIFT; don't meddle with it, let it come through; are you water, be it, as I think you are; the deluge is your Sin, work in it, in a good, clear language, do not be empty, or slyly plain.

EDWARD

Black Mt *Nov 18/55*

My dear Edward:

It's a very great relief to know that it was my failure to do anything about THE FLEA which lies behind that word ingrate you have thrown at me now so many years. And for the simplest reason: that that was the moment, that it was my turn to speak, and that I spent —was it six weeks, in any case I have the pages and pages of it—doing exactly what I took it I was beholden to do, do a review.

I honestly cannot follow how you see me a part of a Marxian conspiracy against you over that book—or over your separation from Winifred. If you recall, as of the latter, I appeared in court on your behalf in New Rochelle—in other words acted according to my own lights. I mention it solely that I did not—found myself unable to finish any review of FLEA by the same process: my own lights. (My letters to Creeley at the time fully corroborate the effort I made to deal with THE FLEA in the way I took it I was the one to do it.)

I know now, from the Nimbus piece, where I was stuck on THE FLEA. (Yet if I hadn't gone at THE FLEA sentence by sentence, taking each one apart, as well as I might, in all the ways a sentence is composed of all the things it is made of—including the unknown language each of us, any of us, is an agent of, willy-nilly;—I'd not have been able to find out how to find the LA SALLE passage, and how to see that it exists despite the total rest of the Nimbus pages.) It was this difficulty—*and no other*—which prevented me.

And if you weren't seeking some more suspect reason, like conspiracy, you might, Edward, have asked or found out that my reason was my own—as, for example, you so easily throw down the O'RYAN thing in BMR without asking yourself why a man of an order you do respect might so patently say shit!

It's either this rush, Pell-Mell, or some pre- which is such a missing of another person, Ed, that the other person says, come/ off/ it. Literally.

You ought very quietly to ask yourself, how right are you—at least about those whom you do have a considerable notion they are serious.

I wish one could exchange perceptions with you on the vernacular. Like I say, with scholarship, it's the pincer one wants today to get at matters. But if you mistake the O'Ryan, it's hopeless: of course you'll think I share a "desire to degrade music, sounds, English, rites, art", and that sd desire is a scatological one: who could stay with *the substantive* of the present and not appear so—*substantively*?

But to leap off the substance to whatever you do (Egypt, Judea, etc.) *is* that the greater risk? Longinus' "great chances"?

Ask yrself some *first* questions in your search for *beginnings*

That is, I can not be so interested in what you do there on La Salle without recognizing that there is attention, and achievement on your part, on "beginnings"

And of course you and I often come to the same things and places, because I am also interested in beginnings

But do I need to stress to you that there are several sorts of beginnings? And that the question of *origin* is as subtle as the morphological one? I could write an essay on you on La Salle just in terms of what Alpha of what "great waters"

the discrepancy is great between us if, as you write in this letter, it does square away that "I have been your enemy all the while you have been my friend".

I guess you are in an all or nothing proposition.

Here, for me, it's the same as I found it in THE FLEA and have said it to you as of the Nimbus: I can love the La Salle

part, and desire to say why; and I can find you so wrong in all the rest of it, so importantly wrong that, like I say, because I think these are important matters, find that if I had to say anything in print about you I'd have to try to say why and how I think you are wrong.

And I *don't want to*. Can't you see that?

In other words, just making it black and white,you stiff it against any one else. You begin, & also end up, Edward, with a whole system, an applied and applicable system. And it's too much: a man has got to do more than you do in the *first* instance, than throwing up your hands afterward:

I am referring to a knot about you which you have to undo because you haven't. I mean these declarations that *after* the writing, for example, that you don't "know whether it's good or bad", that you have been "foolish, bathetic, tumid", that you are "wildly alone". They are the most devilish sort of dodgings behind which you throw yourself because they are *true* for any man. But your use of them, as a black against a previously stated white, makes you right for a wrong reason. Or something. I'm not trying hard enough to say it. But it's there.

And it's there when you call me your enemy while you call yourself my friend. I'm sure we are both.

But the fact that you will have it this way puts stones up. For it isn't an either or.

Or at least my own vision of experience don't find it that way.

That's what I mean by the discrepancy.

And as a result of this discrepancy I find all you reply about "literary relationship" rant. I don't want to. For inside it is much that is true, and feeling, evident, honest feeling.

But it's loaded, Edward. As wrong as it's right. And the wrong you won't ask yourself. So the right can't be

dealt with can't be *used*, by the person—honest it can't.

You got me set up a certain way. I ain't that way. But I'm not not that way because of the reasons you then go on, by the same stone and black-white, sticks, and system-premises, to apply. That is, you set it up, Edward. And then you deal with it as you've set it up.

Or if suddenly the difference or the discrepancy—from how you'd have it confronts you, you wash yourself out by cries of "of course I fail", or, I am "wildly alone".

And of course you damn well don't wash yourself out. What washes out is the very thing you've removed in the first instance—a little of the life of the thing. whether it's *what you are writing about* or *to whom you are writing*

Of course they are *one thing.* Friendship is one thing. Etc.

But if it doesn't go the way you, Edward, want it, it isn't therefore only two things. Or one of the two explanations. Only choice is binary. The rest has a good chance of being *multiple*.

"Pangs of solitude". And how. Plural. And for each man *many*.

You ask me, why did I not "defend" THE FLEA. It wasn't for me, defense. I didn't know it had to be defended. I don't think I ever have seen, to this day, anybody anywhere saying anything in print about it.—My sense was, one person, Charles Olson, ought to speak of this book in print.

Please tell me where I "disavowed" the book?

Please tell me exactly how it turns out that I am a marxist?

Please tell me by what act I kept FLEA—"saw to it", is your word from being reviewed?

Please tell me, Edward, what you are talking about—how I "took" bread out of your mouth"?

The facts here just have to be facts [added in pencil script] For god knows if there are facts—& I suddenly remember some letter from a New Directions secretary (!)—then the more I should want you di-

rectly to know all I did do, & why I didn't finish.

God damn you really. You make it such a shame that I ever accepted anything from you. Why do you have to do this, sad man? Why do you have to paw over everything until the other person can't even retain what they valued? What a destructuion. —I don't really want my life if it is to be confused by you as as pathetic and monstrous as your own. If it is to you, I say go aside, go aside. Leave what was.

It is so *indiscrete*, what you do and say with *every* thing which has happened between you and another person—everything. It is a *dirtying*, Edward, which I wish you knew was so, and knew to stop it.

And it is for this reason that I say you don't have the right that you so grossly say "you shall talk about me and it is none of my business". It is, when you use what you know because you were my friend; and because you use it now for frustrate purposes. You ought to get yourself clear here. You ought to. Mind me, Edward, get clear about what is my business, and what's yours. It's possible. And it's important. I know when you are hysterical, Edward. We both do. And what happens. Things you say here are of that order. Don't say them. Really, don't. To me, or to others. Remind yourself.

I respect your distinction that it is what I am supposed to have done to you. Of course you must speak of that. // But let it be clear *what I did do.* These are facts which better be accurate, what you claim I did, to Creeley or anybody else. //but stick to it. I want my fate out of it: yours, is your business. Mine—well...

It just comes out such a *shame* that you must prate and orate when there is so much can happen, and to be done, there is such little time in which to do it. and because you have it *large* you make even what does or has happened *waste, straight loss*

your *words*, Edward, your words: consider them

It is such a *shame* not to be able—because you won't let it—to stay *interested* in you. That's a *loss.*

Make what you will of it,
but I don't want to sign my name

[signed] CHARLES OLSON

[postscript] Yes, I

November 24, 1955

Dear Charles:

Most of your letter is very quiet, and I read that portion with sympathy. You find it hard, Charles, to comprehend very simply words, although you are much given to the vernacular. When a man tells you he is hungry, don't ask him whether he wants a rock, a piece of water, or bivalve? Give him bread, and if you have more, a pair of gudgeons. When I wrote to you that I was wildly alone, I am saying that I had at one period, when you forsook the man who had conferred more benefactions upon you than any one in the world, I had in my sorrow not a soul to turn to. You are poor, but you only relished my companionship when I could give you benefits, my table which was yours at any hour.

You are my great champion in one line in those two pages of yours reprinted in Williams' Autobiography. Do you expect me to be overcome. There are many loaves, and getting our work printed is a bread you and I sorely need. The Flea of Sodom was buried by marxists and homosexuals. You are an advocate of communism, as you have proclaimed in your writing, and I never knew one stalinist to defend my work. A weak friend is far worse that a stalwart foe, and though you could write me many letters on the Flea of Sodom, you found it impossible to print your feelings. Why not? — If you think that the mangled people in Guatemala have no other hope save in communism, you say it quite clearly, and not in a private letter which no one is likely to see.

When I was one of the co-editors of TWICE A YEAR who profited by it, you or I? Was i forthright in your defense. Did I not throw away

any advantage I had, and which I needed to urgently, to see to it that LEAR AND MOBY-DICK was printed, and not just furtively admired by me. You have to be plain about simple acts, otherwise you won't amount to much as a writer. I was *never* your adversary, although I am glad that you acknowledge that you were mine. I am not happy to know what apostasies you are guilty of; I am only *glad* to know the suffering truth. When you were in severe trouble in your relationship with Joanne my apartment and table were yours, and also these rocks at Engeddi to which David fled from Saul. Do I tell the truth? When you wanted a Guggenheim followship, I did all in my power to get one essay you had done into the hands of authors whom you respected, and the strategy worked. Did it occur to you that it was a rueful irony that though I could succeed for you, that no foundation will give me a pence for my labors. I am older than you, deeper seasoned in books and at least a journeyman in tribulations, but I cannot achieve the advantages I could make available for you. Despite my fracas with Dorothy Norman, and on your account, you continued your connection with her. I regard that as low and shrewd. I broke with her over you, but you were clever enough to go on because she was useful to you, although by then she abhorred me. I was such a fool in my friendship for you that when you told me that she had practiced an outrage upon you by making you pay a $2.50 taxi fare, even for such a small matter I fell into a passion with her, and was told by Stieglitz and her that I was trying to blackmail her! You know what was the blackmail; when I resigned I asked her in return for a year's service, without pay or publication, to print your work and three essays by Marsden Hartley.

When Do These Bones Live appeared, you were regarded as too green and callow by the ruffians of the Muses to do a review of my book? and I never asked you to do anything of that sort? Only once, when I saw that my very life as a writer was imperilled by the communistic roustabouts and the pathics did I appeal to you to come to the defense of a book you said you fervently admired. What hap-

pened? You were bold enough in your epistles to me, and wrote me eight to ten typewritten paged letters about that volume, but precious and too pusillanimous to be my buckler. [added in script in margin:] Laughlin asked for a statement for the bookjacket, & my *friend refused*! Were you Iago, the jackdaw! Be plain; what were you. It is you, not I, who stand before Minos, in all my life, I know no one to be so base.

So few reviews of the volume appeared that ever since it has been a great travail for me to get published. Williams had done a prodigal encomium on the Flea of Sodom, and when it was sent to Margaret Marshall, a marxist, who ran a graveyard bookreview section in the Nation, she said that I was not important enough to receive such attention. As I told you, Harvey Breit was another burial-croaker. He even said tht he admired certain reviews I was doing then for the New York Times, that is, he admired them, but did not publish them. Would you call him a deceiver and a poltroon? Or can you only understand your own pains, and shun such words when it applies to others and may make you uncomfortable. If you really believe you were my frind, you are doomed. So long as you adhere to this falsehood you will never do another book to equal some of the very lovely pages in CALL ME ISHMAEL. It cannot be Charles; there is a retribution; this I know, and have come to such poor understanding by having my flesh and soul torn out every day. Is this humble speaking, or would you like to believe that I mean something else. You see I do not fall into the short-hand orthography of the businessman, and call this lettering artistic, original, or the people's language. How can you invent words with which to betray and gull the populace and say it is their tongue. What a cloven tongue it is? I abhor Ezra Pound, and look upon those miscreant books of his as more degenerate and reactionary than any tyrant can be. I am not a marxist, but I do not consort with Jew-baiters, or Hitlerite journalists of Hippocrene. No sir; I do all that I can to make my words and acts equal to one another, and if what I write is at odds with what I am, then both are lies.

You say you do not want to sign your name to the letter to me. Are you so foolish as to believe that your epistle is not your signature. And why this species of insolence with the man who has always been your friend and teacher. Even up to a few months ago I was doing what I could to relieve your plight. Now, that you do not care to acknowledge that, and see in my reminding a man whom I have served that he has been perfidious, [do] not say that I pile shame upon an affection which you took when it served you, and threw away, when you imagined that I was no longer useable. The truth is you have some real vulpine blood; your properties are mixed, and betraying is a kind of artistic cunning that appeals to you. You thought, perhaps, that I was done for as a writer. Ay, many mistakes I may make (I remind you that I mean just that, put the words together as they are said, and they mean, I write, and commit more errors than I can surmise); but don't depend upon my being a torpid failure, unable to be of use to you or any other man. Only nature will be my final defeat, and that, too, may be my triumph; then, without all this alloy of youth, you can say the words about some book of mine, you may happen to care for, without really imagining that I ever gave you a shame that you had not brought for yourself.

[in script:] Thought to include this [arrow]

Now, I take no exception to any criticism you may want to make of anything I do. I should like to be able to understand what you are saying, which I must tell you very strongly that I don't. I can read the masters but cannot comprehend you. I don't think, either, you should make much of a very bad poem in the Black Mt. Review; just don't print that species of foolishness again if you can help it. When you want to write on the Quiché Maya, do a very earnest job on it, and don't bring out as a book ill-assorted thoughts, and uncreated ideas you hurried into the hands of a sensitive young man as a serious labor of your intellect. If you can write better on the Indians than I can, let the earth bless you, for the ground is very corrupt, and the dust we call books is an evil vine.

I could be lofty with you when you threaten me that me that you

might lose interest in me and my work. But why should I? Since you are not my friend, why should I hanker after you as a reader? Will a man, who cannot give you his affections, ever be a friend of your thoughts? Books are wondrous pythian oracles when they are loved, and parched prophecies, when they are read by those who secretly hate us. Now, Charles, do as you like. That is your life. Again, you must forgive me, but I will not write about your intimacies with women, or whether you have done this or that nonsense with some doxy; that is your comedy and woe, and I hope you are lucky. My relation with you, and how ill you guerdoned me for a heart plagued by your every mishap, that, Charles, is my hyssop and should I choose to drink the bitter herbs or water alone with another, is my own portion and right.

As for a literary relationship with you, or anybody else, I prefer the passions of a Horatio for Hamlet than some ice-cold and epicene epistles from a man who watched me suffer on the curbstones of New York, disavowed by the hacks of Grub Street and the diseased politicals; instead of honoring the man who had been his father by asking him to be his guest for a week-end now and then, gave me for a hearth, a table, and warm, loving talk, a letter; ay, the letter killeth the spirit, and the friend.

Do I speak sense, or would you be so ridiculous as to call this ranting, or how, pray, does one say to you, I am hungry, feed me, I am alone, give me your hand, I am derided, do not pretend that this is an abstruse phrase. Yea, yea, I know a little about the heart, but enough that I can never know it; just enough to understand when it is open and when shut, when good and kind, when clandestine.

I sign my name as I always do in a rebuke, in love, in sorrow.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

△

B O O K R E V I E W S

Poems. PAUL CELAN.
Translated by Michael Hamburger.
Persea Books. New York: 1980.

by CID CORMAN

No child of us ever gets over the experience and recurrent awareness of having been born(e). And the corollary fact of being parented/extremely cared for/looked after. From these nodes our lives "develop"—try to extend—to take in—accommodate—grasp—enfold—make use of the light/breath/death given.

Through lane it lay—through bramble—
Through clearing and through wood—
Banditti often passed us
Upon the lonely road.

The wolf came peering curious—
The owl looked puzzled down—
The serpent's satin figure
Glid stealthily along—

The tempests touched our garments—
The lightning's poinards gleamed—
Fierce from the Crag above us
The hungry Vulture screamed—

The satyr's fingers beckoned—
The valley murmured "Come"—
These were the mates—
This was the road
These children fluttered home.

Which came to:

Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stopped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality . . .

Paul Celan—whose every poem records a struggle to live *and* die—one of Emily Dickenson's translators—in *Atemwende*/1967 (*Breath-turning*) wrote:

In the Serpentcarriage, on
past the white Cypress,
through the Flood
they drove you.

But in you, from
Birth,
foamed the other Source,
up the black
Jet Remembrance
you climbed to day.

I've used the German noun capitals—but only to emulate Emily's practice too.

The white may be winter or dream or allusion to the "white election." Or all. Celan like Emily depended on remembering.

Celan—and the fact of the Holocaust and his painful survival—of sorts—of it—his gifted guilt—are basic—is full of literary byplay and other allusions—but it is a poetry he ekes out of his dwindled nativeland—ironically—the German language.

It is a poetry addressed to the dead and/or the beloved. The *du*/thou. Buber *is* implied. The Jewish relation/relating explicit. Harrowed and harrowing.

TO STAND in the shadow
of the stigma in the air.

For-no-one-and-nothing-stand.
Unbeknownst,

for you
alone.

With all there is room for there,
even without
speech.

We are addressed also as survivors. Each of us in our painful singularity.

The act of poetry here has become the act of life itself. Not easy. Decidedly uneasy.

As Celan has said: "The language/speech remained unlost, in spite of all. But it had to pass through its own unresponsiveness, pass through its own fearful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech. It went through and came out with no words for what had happened. Yet it went through that happening. Went through and can walk again in daylight, 'enriched' by it all.

"In this language, those years and the years that followed, I tried to write poems: to speak, to orient myself, to say where I was and where I was bound, to adumbrate reality . . .

". . . poems are en route: proceeding toward something.

"What? Towards something as yet unclaimed, that can be taken over, occupied, perhaps towards a You that can be spoken to, a reality that can be addressed.

". . . This is the striving of one over whose head fly stars of man's making, of one who is without a firmament to cover him (in this till now unsuspected sense), of one who is out in the open, totally, desperately, who goes towards language with his being, wounded by reality, seeking reality."

This is—in a sense—then—an existential poetry with a vengeance. But what could easily have become a confessional-type of poetry has been consistently transmuted—sometimes transfigured—into an act of sculptured language.

As if—like a Michelangelo of words—Celan were compelled to drawing meaning out of the possibility implied in speech: the dream of communicating. But not the Zukofskyan "order that can speak to all men."

Celan had clearly been too shattered to entertain such an ideal. Simply—desperately—painfully—as he admits—to come out of the nightmare of his early existence—the absolute insecurity of a "world"—into a "reality" or firm/convincing place and amongst people capable of trust/faith.

His *Psalm* naturally runs:

> Noone kneads us again from earth and loam,
> noone conjures our dust.
> Noone.
>
> Praised be thou, noone.
> For thy sake will
> we bloom.
> Facing
> thee.
>
> A nothing
> were we, are we, will
> we be, blossoming:
> the nothing's—, the
> noone's rose.
>
> With
> the pistil soulbright,
> the stamen heaven-wasted,
> the crown red
> from the scarletword that we sang
> over, o over
> the thorn.

Celan lacks Michelangelo's faith. He is perforce modern. The early poems of grief—"the black milk"—the poems of tender affection—grasping for the food of love—groping for something sure—go on into the later poems of starker vocables—into a breakdown into syllables—into childlike beginnings—to pry sense out of sound—but lapsing often into "Pallaksh. Pallaksh."

He turns to poets of desperation—Mandelstam and Rimbaud—Du Bouchet and Yesenin. There are moments when he almost breaks free—brief openings clenched. Iron shoes bound to delicate hands—his own

image—and the cherry bleeds for him. This is not exactly Marianne Moore's "What sap went through the thread/To make the cherry red?"

> HOW YOU extinguish yourself in me:
>
> yet to the last
> bedraggled
> knot of breath
> you stick with a
> splinter of
> life.

More and more there is less and less for him—the poems becoming minimal—not unlike my own work or William Bronk's:

> I CAN SEE YOU STILL: an echo,
> touchable with feeler-
> words, at the parting's
> edge.
>
> Your face shies slightly,
> when all at once
> it's lamplike bright
> in me, at the spot
> where one at the painfullest says
> Never.

No one can find much joy in this man's work. It is wrought clearly at the "painfullest." Death becomes the only pity.

That he was accused by Claire Goll of imitating her husband's poetry—the poetry of a friend—stuck in his heart's throat undeniably. And in all fairness it must be said that there was for a time a family resemblance. But the charge was blown out of proportion insensitively. There is a tender little poem to his son (?) marking the fact—shades of *Bicycle Thief*—that the child's father has been called a "thief."

The poems are—as everyone has remarked—often seemingly impenetrable and untranslatable—as word-order and words are fragmented and man-handled and searched for root-sense or pushed into archaic sources to renew lost meanings. And Yiddish—the most colloquial—is searched for warmth and body—for motherlife and nearness/dearness.

Celan's inventiveness/originality one feels is not something he strove for—but an engendered fact—the fruit of the deepest undying need. It didnt—evidently—save him—but it undoubtedly helped keep him alive as us.

His voice is one we cannot deny—though we may balk at it.

> THREADSUNS
> over the grayblack desolateness.
> A tree-
> high idea
> grasps at the lightsound: there are
> still songs to be sung beyond
> mankind.

"Manunkind" Cummings said.

The volume Persea publishers has now brought out gives one a fair chance to become exposed to Celan's dark light. Michael Hamburger's versions (in a fortunately bilingual rig) are journeyman work—never exciting but generally useful. And in the face of such difficulties one is grateful (I am) for anything. It is a rule with me: dont complain about translations of poetry; do better instead—if you can—or learn to read the original.

The printing is often faulty and punctuation gets lost. There are errors in transcription and in lineation—but there's enough going to work with/read by.

This is perhaps the best and proper place to add a few notes to my personal relation with Celan. I wish he was capable of hearing me when he was alive. I tried. To get through.

We met—in Paris—in 1955. Via a dear mutual friend. She was enthusiastic about his poetry and wanted us to meet. We went to his cafe—out in the suburbs—and sat outdoors for an hour or two. He was taciturn—though he conversed with her amicably and I felt in him both shyness—a touch of distrust/uncertainty—a certain locked-in-himself weight—or brooding melancholy.

At that time there were only the two early books—*Mohn und Gedächtnis* and *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle.* The former was given to me by my friend and the latter I bought at Flinker's. With assistance from Edith (Aron) I started translating his work. It was attractive—and I was the first to publish work of his in English (almost

at once)—but it was the later work that excited me—as the language began to jump/to intensify beyond formality.

I translated every book of his as it appeared—until the posthumous work.

My desire to publish the poetry in quantity—in *Origin* and elsewhere—grew. Permission was refused: no reason ever given. But I discovered—through others like Helmut Bonheim—that Celan was refusing translation publication in English—at least—to everyone.

Finally in 1969 I decided—against all threat—to publish some of my versions with a note saying: "These poems are being offered here against the author's wishes, reluctantly, but in the feeling that the realm of poetry transcends personal issues and noting that some fifteen years' work . . . is involved."

Needless to say—with the very small circulation of *Origin* (300 copies) I could have kept quiet and Celan and his publishers (Suhrkamp) would never have been aware of the printing. But that isnt my style. And it certainly wasnt an attempt at notoriety (that too has never been my way). In fact—apart from interest from a handful of poets—there was no response to the material. Except from Celan via his publisher.

A suit had been instituted against me. Pointless—certainly. *Origin* has always been a non-profit operation—by design. And I've never profited or tried to profit—financially—from translating work of any living author. And I've only translated work that had my wholehearted interest.

All this had been made clear to Celan and I had begged him to desist. I told him of my care for and with his work—which was exceptional—and we had numerous friends in common—chiefly André du Bouchet (who had mutually translated each other).

No use. Letters came and Japanese lawyers were already involved by the time he committed suicide. I feel now and felt then a twinge of guilt—for the last word I had from his attorney—written me in English—made a rather Freudian slip: where the "prosecute" came out "persecute." (I wrote a gentle but chiding letter to Celan a month or two before his death calling his attention to this lapse and I fear it may have fed into his mental state.)

The fact remains—as I have

noted with others who have felt persecuted and who—in the Holocaust—were persecuted—that there is a tendency towards persecutory behavior in return. To assume—sadly—the seemingly stronger role—the upper hand.

> SPEECHWALLS, spaceinwards—
> reeled in into yourself,
> you go bawling through up to the
> lastwall.
>
> The fogs burn.
>
> The heat hangs within you.

Or: (in part)

> . . . say that Jerusalem *is*,
> say it, as though I were this
> your White,
> as though you were
> mine,
>
> as though without us we could be,
>
> I leaf you open, for ever,
>
> you pray, you bed
> us free.

And the act of poetry unremitting—unable to save a thing—making us feel nothing finally unreal:

> BOTH's unscarred bodies,
> both's deathleaf over the bareness,
> both's unrealized face.
>
> Drawn ashore by
> the whitest root
> of the whitest
> tree.

Editor's Note: This essay by Cid Corman was originally assigned as a book review. It arrived at SULFUR as an engaging piece on Paul Celan that pays little attention to the book in question. Readers should note that, although there are two paragraphs referring to Michael Hamburger's translations of Celan, the translations cited by Corman are Corman's, not Hamburger's. Δ

1-10. Barrett Watten
This.

by Jed Rasula

Since *Three Poems*, Ashbery's work has been the paramount poetics of density. But since the academics have been reading Ashbery in the light of psychology's panopticon, the small presses have been casting up bits of dense material far more appropriate to the *poetics* of such a situation, in which the materiality is vivid, intractable, and almost all there is in (or of) the text. Watten's book could be characterized as granite-like, except that it's so clearly man-made. Concrete, if that weren't already a term for poetry quite distinct from *1-10*. The cover design suggests a new formalism, going back to the drafting boards of the Bauhaus and the incendiary art-in-society movements of Europe between world wars. Like that work, Watten's is possessed of an austerity beautiful in its classic, toneless, uniform way,

> ...Pressing,
> Yielding to the arguments of
> mass. The hawk
> tears the sparrow to pieces.
> Coded sparks, holding patterns.
> The privilege
> of vanishing speech.

1-10 succeeds in being all surface, or all measurable in terms of mass, weight, yield, pressure, volume and similar characteristics more often applied to the visual arts. Watten's work is anything but 'visual' in orientation; but its functionality in "the short black branches of the eye" speaks of a different scale of density than the visual can, strictly, hold.

Selected Poems: Beyond Even Faithful Legends. Bill Bisset
Talonbooks

Selected by the author from over 40 small (often phantom) publications, the poems from 1962-1976 offered here are so fine I think they must be his best, though I have no access to the originals to compare the selection with. But taken as a book in its own right, the integrity of the work, in its beauty and

softness abiding *in vision*, is its yield. Bissett's idiosyncratic spelling, strings of letters across a page, and fluid drawings throughout, all work together more successfully than American precedents (cummings, Ginsberg and d.a. levy are three kin). A beautiful book; a heartbreaking sensitivity; visionary not by yearning and straining after enlightenment, but simply by being alert to the political clampdowns of the sixties and seventies and knowing that even a one-man colony maintained on the fringe of the catastrophe would take a lifetime's attentions.

grandmothers land sumtimes past
what yr mind can do business with

maybe we bettr get th
business dun bettr with each othr then
stop takin th oil blood outta her

stop throwin sulphur dioxide
onto her
stop tyin up parts uv her stop
poisonig th fishes th pupils uv her
great eyes

—*J.R.*

My Poetry. DAVID BROMIGE
The Figures

My Poetry proves conclusively that Bromige is a wit, and his humor is akin to those medieval humours which preceded psychology before Freud sobered it up. Bromige reports a childhood encounter with the old shrink himself: "Taking out his hankie, he dipped it in Pooh's Cup, & then applied it to my wounds." Such spectral visitations are stuffing in the sofa one reclines on in the office of Memory. Bromige applies his talents to giving us the scoop on a dozen or so earlier poems, presented in a mock-critical format, which enables him to spin some tall prose, proving again that poets—if not their own best critics—are their own best readers. A portrait of the author, begging hand extended, squatting in front of a 'please excuse renovations' Bank of Babylon sign, says it all. With *Tight Corners, My Poetry* is Bromige's best.

—*J.R.*

Themes and Variations. JOHN CAGE
Station Hill

As time goes on, Cage may be even more gratefully remembered for his writing than his music. If the four substantial Wesleyan collections intimate poetry, *Themes and Variations* is an unhesitating submersion. There are mesostics on the names of 15 men important to Cage; and while they're not meant to be addressed to them or pertinent to them, all the section speak out of the warmth of friendship. The result is a book-length poem that shares much of the interplay with musical recursions that Zukofsky's does. The handsome format delineates the themes as they appear and also offers exacting stopwatch times indicating the pace of Cage's reading (it takes an hour). While these features make one aware of the performative intent, the text on the page is full of subtle marvels; by the end, the reader's gratitude is complete. In this poem, Cage seems to have arrived at an infectious cadence, simplicity of design and purpose, and just enough mind-static to enable pleasure to run its course and finish with the text as if coincidentally. Which it is not, but is a very great skill. —*J.R.* △

Under The Bridge. CARLA HARRYMAN.
This Press. 1980.

by CRAIG WATSON

> If you take a body apart you will not have gone
> far enough unless you are willing to go farther.
> *Sites*

The deconstruction of reality is the beginning of a process leading to knowledge, but one must be "willing to go farther" and to encounter whole contexts as well as microcosmic phenomena. The experience of contextual systems is sited in occasions of composition, the relation of one point to another by continuous interaction.

Carla Harryman's *Under The Bridge* collects 19 short prose works which

explore various compositional surfaces of phenomena and perception. While focusing on compositional processes, Harryman has avoided abstraction as a foundation for the work and each text contains a line of syllogistic activity clearly grounded in the specificity of event and cognition.

Harryman is more concerned with directions of sight than eventual objects. Each attitudinal stance yields a context which in turn produces a construction in which organizing principles and linguistic resonance have equal impact. While writing often about environmental-self relationships, she explores solitude without necessarily describing alienation. Her environments are systems of action which present occasions for ideas as well as for objects.

> What year is this he asked another on the banks of the river.
>
> But land is not in question here. Only the day. The range of vision. The distance between the mountains behind the lake and the mountains behind the men who face the lake.
> *Jordan River*

The structure and syllogistic content of her work suggest the primacy of composition through both tonal and semantic signification. In most pieces the sentence is resolved to syntactic completion; sentences tend to pivot on very strong verbs which serve to propel her nouns into dynamic relations. Each sentence is a tightly coiled spring of possible actions and consequences.

Despite her syntactic skill, it is the movement from one sentence to another that establishes the text's most defining tensions. This focus on syllogistic variety increases attention to the language contained in the sentences as well as to perceptual systems of connection and measurement. Besides presenting densely rich and beautiful surfaces of vision, Harryman simultaneously produces an experientally engaging and fulfilling sense of compositional possibilities.

> There is, I believe, a way to regain consciousness. You have to move around as if you were part of something else.
> *Au Nom*

△

Midnight Mass. PAUL BOWLES.
Black Sparrow Press. 1981.

by CORNELIA EMERSON

Midnight Mass, a collection of recent stories by Paul Bowles, an American expatriate living in Tangier, confirms the claim that he is one of the most accomplished prose stylists in the language today. Spare, simple, lucid, evocative without being over-eloquent, his sentences reveal the mixture of human motives, unfold the strangest events and circumstances in such a way that in retrospect they seem inevitable. "Ten or twelve years ago there came to live in Tangier a man who would have done better to stay away.... His name was Duncan Marsh, and he was said to have come from Vancouver.... By the time his story reached the cocktail-party circuit he was dead.... In all this there was nothing extraordinary; it was assumed that Marsh had been one more victim of slow poisoning." This is a style that confronts fatality calmly and contemplatively; it induces a kind of fatalism. ("It was written," a Moslem might say, meaning "It was the will of God.")

All but two of these stories are set, or have their point of origin, in Morocco. Most of them concern the interplay of Westerners (English and American, mainly) with their Moroccan servants, lovers and acquaintances. In the stories where all the characters are Moroccan, the same cultural tensions carry through—with one character promulgating Western habits, hygiene and values, while another clings, often cannily, to native systems of thought. In all these relationships, the balance of power is subtle, given to odd reversals and surprising denouements.

In "The Dismissal," Abdelkrim loses his position because his employer can't understand his impulse to make himself scarce for a few months after witnessing a robbery. In "Madame and Ahmed," a gardener acts to safeguard his job by tricking the lady of the house—in her best interest and his own. "Here to Learn" relates an astonishing fairy tale of innocent upward mobility. The peasant girl Malika, who possesses nothing but some rudimentary Spanish, striking physical beauty and the ability to assimilate the fashionable taste purveyed by Vogue magazine, passes form protector to protector, moving from her poor village to Tangier, Madrid, Paris, Lausanne and finally Los Angeles, where she ends up a fabulously wealthy widow not

yet out of her teens.

Readers of Paul Bowles' *Collected Stories 1939-1976* or such novels as *The Sheltering Sky* may be disappointed not to find in this collection the same sense of existential starkness, the intuition that in these hot, sun-stricken desert regions one is alone and in touch with some unmediated cosmic ferocity. The characters in these stories live in a more densely populted universe, and social contacts universally mediate their experience. The ferocity here is human ferocity, motivated by fear, greed, love or simply fatal misunderstanding. In the final story a Moroccan servant unwittingly medicates her master to death, thinking to break the spell of the evil eye he has laid on her little daughter. Having plumbed the truth of this event, the narrator thinks: "What constitutes a crime? There was no criminal intent—only a mother moving in the darkness of ancient ignorance." Yet this darkness is still unfathomable, of mythic dimensions, however human it may be. △

The Woe Shirt: Caribbean Folk Tales. PAULÉ BARTÓN. Translated by Howard A. Norman with drawings by Norman Laliberté.

Penmaen Press, Ltd. 1980.

by MARTIN NAKELL

The elegant design of this book ignites the excitement of the tales within. A slim volume, its design delights in itself and its subject. Each of the thirteen tales as told by Paulé Bartón is illustrated with a drawing by Norman Laliberté. Each drawing has a narrative-pictorial relationship to the story, as well as an immediacy of its own, a dream presence, childlike and passionate, permeated by the timelessness which radiates from the core of movement.

The tales themselves are so intimate you want to gather them in and make them a part of your own dreams, your own language. The Caribbean, sing-song English, so musically carried by Howard A. Norman's translation, comes out as fresh, awakened language: "Belem did tinker repair his bicycle by the stink-toe tree. Better to work there it smells so bad, work gets done no

lazy quick."

The undercurrent of these tales is an element so common to folk tales, so important for us, and so difficult for us to get into our own creations: a natural sense of interrelationship between things human and otherwise. In one story, "Sleep Talking," husband Jomi and his wife Mari plan to build a boat. Mari advises: "First we get tools that know this work good, with memories for boat building." Ah, yes.

And if that is what underlies the tales, then what moves them is a sense of universal understanding and connection always coming into formation which is elemental, charming, substantive, frightening. There are a few of the folksy type tales of the gambler who comes to town and is outsmarted by the local, but as the mood of the book carries us into its subtle kingdom we encounter a justice at work in the world which is implacable, rich, and of a dark illumination. Franz Kafka, in his remarkable parables, can hardly equal a story as chillingly vivid as "Emilie Plead Chosse One Egg," which produces, at the depth of a culture filled with magic, an existential dilemma simple, direct, overwhelming, as vicious and as compassionate as Hamlet, yet flaked with down home, domestic humor.

Peter Matthiessen remarks in a note on the back of this book that these tales "would be cluttered by critical comment." I hope this review is just praise. △

Life Supports. WILLIAM BRONK.
North Point. 1981.

by HENRY WEINFELD

The publication of *Life Supports*, which brings together the entire poetic output of William Bronk, is an event of considerable significance to English poetry. A poet of the utmost seriousness and highest ambition, Bronk is one of the finest stylists now writing in the language and one of the few contemporary poets whose work seems destined to last. Yet much of it has previously existed only in limited editions which were difficult to obtain and which did not reach a wide audience.

There are two factors working together which make Bronk's work unique, not only in terms of contemporary poetry but perhaps in terms of a tradition which stretches back much further. (1) The distinction between poetry and philosophic thought is less in evidence in Bronk's work than it is in the work of any other modern poet; indeed, in much of his work this distinction seems almost to dissolve. What Bronk has to say about the nature of reality is of importance in and of itself, and when we read him we do not have to make allowances for the fact that he is a poet. (2) The distinction between poetry and prose is maintained absolutely in Bronk's work, or at least in the best of it, and certainly in its basic intention. This is not merely to assert that Bronk's diction, his syntax and his prosodic structures emerge concretely from his own experience and from his struggle to understand the world—for such is the case with all genuine poets. More specifically, given the discursive cast of Bronk's mind, what this means is that the integrity of the poetic process provides the necessary gauge—or measure—of the value of its abstract assertions.

We can see this process at work in all of Bronk's mature poetry, but perhaps nowhere in purer form than in "The Mind's Limitations Are Its Freedom" (p. 134), one of the sonnets contained in the volume entitled *To Praise The Music*:

> The mind has a power which is unusable
> and this is its real power. What else but the mind
> senses the final uselessness of the mind?
>
> How foolish we were, how smaller than what we are,
> were we to believe what the mind makes of what
> it meets. Whatever the mind makes is not.
>
> You know there are always messages we find
> —in bed, on the street or anywhere, and the mind
> invents a translation almost plausible;
> but it hasn't any knowledge of the language at all.
>
> Sometimes the translations are cryptic in themselves.
> I read them in wonderment. It is a wonderment
> not usable. What could it all mean?
> The mind does this. I stand in awe of the mind.

The poem is in the form of a philosophical argument, and on one level it is

an act of definition, a proof of the proposition stated in its title. Its movement is rigorously logical throughout (or apparently so), and it is completely devoid of images. What we have is a bare statement, without embellishment, and in a strictly linear mode. Yet beneath the tranquil surface of the exposition, there is a dark undercurrent of irony, and this is maintained by the chaste but powerful diction, the measured syntax, the repetitions and rhymes. The poem has the elegance, simplicity and classical objectivity of a fugue, but it is a meditation on an intellectual and spiritual crisis which is central to a modern experience of the world, and it bears the stamp of a unique sensibility. It seems to me to be a great poem, deeply moving and memorable, in its totality and in its every phrase.

The discursive power of Bronk's style consists in its capacity to express propositions about the world through the mediating poetic formalisms of a framework which is essentially rationalistic. From this point of view, it is characteristic of a kind of poetry that Pound classified as *logopoeia*, and its most obvious antecedents can be found in the metaphysical and devotional poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ironcially, however, the rationalist framework of Bronk's poetry is in the service not of rationalism but of an extremely penetrating and all-encompassing scepticism. This paradox is at the heart of Bronk's work.

From this standpoint, Bronk's relationship to ideas is certainly as problematic and as burdened with complexities as that of any other modern poet. Indeed, the conjunction of poetic experience and abstract thought in Bronk's work is as much a response to a modern dilemma as its disjunction is in William's work—to compare cases which are apparently poles arpart. Williams' dictum, "No ideas but in things," delimits the terrain for contemporary American poetry by rooting it in sense experience, thereby skirting the problem of abstract, propositional knowledge. For Bronk, however, the epistemological problem encompasses not only ideas as such but also the immediate products of the senses, and therefore it cannot merely be shunted aside. As a result, it informs his work on the most obvious thematic level as well as on the deepest levels of style. In "Blue Spruces In Pairs, A Bird Bath Between" (p. 4), for example, which is included in *The World, The Worldless*, Bronk's best known collection, the problem is stated explicitly; but actually it is to be found everywhere in his work:

Seen by starlight from the window, fat
blue spruces patch the lawn with darker dark.

Arranged in pairs. People no longer plant
these trees in pairs, with bird baths set between.

Fashions in ornamental planting change.
Houses and yards lose style in twenty years.

Seen by starlight. The universal stars.
Something here is certainly laughably wrong.

Ideas are always wrong. Their separateness
causes a threat to neuter each other out

and leave us without a world as it does here:
heavens and styles collide meaninglessly.

The unsubmissive mind has freedom to be
nothing, worldless — not to exist at all.

Because the various world we sense is not
ever apprehended as one, or formed as one,

ideas are always wrong, always unfixed,
and often their power to make the world real is lost.

Huge factors stand ready to leap in
to alter or destroy a world we defend alone.

This, then, is a poetry of ideas which recognizes that our hold on reality is a function of our capacity to form ideas, but which despairs of their validity. The entire corpus of Bronk's poetry is at once an examination and an embodiment of this paradox. Taken as a whole, I would argue that it represents the most lucid poetic response that we have had to the crisis of Western thought in the twentieth century, a crisis which stems, among other things, from the theoretical and empirical achievments of the sciences and the concomitant demise of classical rationalism. The divide that it has created between subject and object, language and the world it is supposed to represent, has had the effect, in general, of propelling poetry and philosophy in increasingly antogonistic directions. The writers of the century who have

made a significant contribution to poetry have all, in one way or another, responded to this dilemma. For the most part, however, they have had to circumvent the full force of its impact. Often they have retreated into private myths in order to maintain their hold on a poetic totality; often they have reflected the chaos they perceived through the deliberate fragmentation of syntax. Both tendencies have produced great poetry, but one senses that their solutions have been partial and their syntheses inadequate.

In Bronk's work, however, our worldlessness is confronted directly and in virtually all of it modalities; with great power and eloquence. If the poetry despairs of ultimate meaning, it is nevertheless its own testament to meaningfullness. If we come to a greater certainty than this in the future, we shall certainly need to remember where we have been, and it is to these poems, to the poems of William Bronk, that we shall return. △

Asamblea de poetas jóvenes de México. Edited by Gabriel Zaid.

Siglo Ventiuno Editores. 1980.

by Eliot Weinberger

—There are now 600 published poets under the age of 40 in Mexico: 170 between the ages of 30 and 40, and 430 poets under 30. The number of poets is therefore growing at the rate of 16% a year, which means that last year an estimated 3524 poets were born in the country. In the year 2017 there will be *one million* Mexican poets.

—The new poets are centralized: 76% live in Mexico City. They are educated (95% attended university) and they are rich: 77% have their own phone, a luxury item in Mexico; 54% live in their own house, not an apartment; 71% of the Mexico City poets live in middle-class or wealthier neighborhoods.

—50% are employed in "cultural diffusion": publishing, journalism, theater, television, radio, movies, museums. (Unlike US poets, they are actively involved in the cultural life of the country in areas other than poetry.) Only 18% teach. (In the US, 38% of all writers teach. For poets alone, the figure is obviously much higher.)

—18% are women: for Mexico, a significant increase.

—Contrary to US practice, the Mexicans do not write only poetry. 35% write non-fiction prose; 27% fiction, and 26% translate. (The most popular poets to translate are Cummings and Pound, followed by Rimbaud, Ginsberg, Yeats, Auden, Ferlinghetti, Montale, Perse, Dylan Thomas and Williams.)

—The poets are serviced by 109 little magazines, 46 literary reviews, 27 newspapers (where serious poetry does appear), 20 large or university presses and, curiously, only 11 small presses. (Perhaps we could export some of ours?) Familiarly, 61% have edited a magazine at one time or another.

—And they are starting young: 49% have published by age 21.

Such are the unforeseen by-products of economic development, as presented by Gabriel Zaid in the appendix to *An Assembly of Young Mexican Poets*, an anthology of 164 poems by an equal number of new poets. And in Mexico the book is causing a small uproar: predictable groans of "who'll read the stuff?" and "haven't they anything better to do?", plus the inevitable suspicion of poetry as a plaything for the rich in a land of nine million illiterates.

If this rate of growth continues, Mexico may become a nation ruled by poet-bureaucrats: a lyrocracy! Poor Plato. One wonders what the figures are for Brazil, Indonesia, Kuwait. Will the next century's UN be a Renga Club?

Suddenly the *Directory of American Poets* seems sparsely populated: even in pobiz the Empire is crumbling. Will our nonpareil President protect us by imposing stiff tariffs, or will US publishers increasingly turn toward products made cheaply abroad by poets who don't need the money? Into the future! △

Jimmy Rowles

by Dick Shreve

In every field of endeavor there are people who deserve less recognition than they have received, such as Lawrence Welk, Hitler, the Laverne and Shirley Show, etc. The list is staggering. Conversely, there are those whose lives are a sort of quietly magnificent understatement. This list is *not endless*

because we live in a world that does not reward excellence unless it is promoted vigorously. In basketball, Jamal Wilkes comes to mind. In the field of jazz piano, it's Jimmy Rowles.

Ask, if you will, or can, Billie Holiday, Sarah, Carmen or Ella who their favorite accompanist is. That's right—Jimmy Rowles. He's not wonderful because they love him—they love him because he's wonderful.

Now then, why is Jimmy Rowles wonderful? For openers, I'd have to say it's his sense of humor. Anyone who can write a country song called "The Ballad of Thelonius Monk" (recorded by Carmen McRae on Atlantic, SD2-904), has a mind that is more than capable of coming to grips with unreality. What makes this song so magnificently silly is the wedding of the two such disparate elements. On the one hand, musically there is the cowboy-country idiom with its right wing, simplistic flavor. Fused to this rustic setting is a super-hip lyric about how the horses, the boys in the bunkhouse, etc., are all hooked on the ultra-cosmopolitan, dissonant jazz songs of Theolonius Monk. This song is a definite clue to his humor.

I don't care who shot J.R., but one night in a justifiably homicidal mood *our* J.R. had a .45 automatic and a notion to "execute" an out-of-tune grand piano at the club where he had been playing. However, close friends prudently dissuaded him, although in my opinion the idea was not that out of line. Perhaps it is the tendency toward this sort of rebellion, his fierce integrity and his gruff voice that cause close friends to refer to him as "The Lizard."

In terms of sheer individuality one might almost say that W.C. Fields was the Jimmy Rowles of comedy. Jimmy has borrowed from other musicians' styles, as we all do, but the way he puts it together with his handy musical computer is unique. You can't hear Jimmy without knowing that it is Jimmy. He doesn't overwhelm you with the obvious cascade of notes that you get from, say, Oscar Peterson or Phineas Newborn, although he could. Jimmy has left out more good notes than most pianists have ever played. He underwhelms you with his uniqueness, harmonic structure, beautifully whimsical melodies, grimly Gothic voicings in the low register and his broad spectrum of emotions and moods.

Jimmy recorded "Like Someone In Love" with Ray Brown ("As Good As It Gets" on Concord Jazz, CJ66). Instead of your "normal" middle-of-the-road treatment of what is generally played as a pretty ballad or medium swing, Jimmy's irreverent sense of humor asserts itself. The result is that on the

first and last chorus you get a silly ragtime-stride version. He rebels against doing the obvious. Instead, his musical genius is able to transform and distort this lovely ballad into the musical equivalent of the Marx Brothers or Saturday Night Live.

It takes a huge amount of talent to distort a pretty song like this to the extent that he did and have the results be so wonderfully unique and yet musically valid.

One night Jimmy transcribed Coltrane's five or six choruses on "Giant Steps" from memory. This implies not only a very, very good ear but an amazing tonal memory. Anyone who could do this could play like anyone they wanted to. Instead, Jimmy has borrowed discreetly from the most valid of sources and forged these influences into a unique style.

Recording with piano and only one other instrument is rather like a quarterback and halfback trying to perform successfully with no offensive line. Jimmy Rowles has done this with Al Cohen, with Stan Getz and with Ray Brown, and just recently with Joe Pass. The records are all gems.

Each musician is the sum of the total of his parts. He is the result of formal training, what he has heard and/or studied, his attitude and temperament, his capacity to listen, his intelligence and his ability to express emotion, and humor.

Jimmy Rowles has a whole mental warehouse of sounds and styles that he has heard and assimilated. You can hear everything from James P. Johnson and Fats Waller to Thelonius Monk and Bill Evans. It is his musical taste and the mood of the moment that determine what will emerge from his fingers, heart, and brain.

He's standing out there now in the "left field" of jazz piano, playing what he believes, being believable to the best of the best musicians and being his own man. He's got a wonderful case of cantankerously terminal integrity and good taste.

Jimmy Rowles can be heard on many record labels. I have mentioned several. Others are:

"Paws that Refresh"—Choice—CRS 1023
"Grandpaws"—Choice—CRS 1014
"I Remember Rebop"—Columbia—C2-35381
"Tasty"—Concord—CCJ 122
"Heavy Love" (with Al Cohen)—Xanadu—145
"Stan Getz Presents Jimmy Rowles"—Columbia—JC 34873 △

The Dollmaker's Ghost. LARRY LEVIS.
Dutton. 1981. Selected by Stanley Kunitz.

In Winter. MICHAEL RYAN
Holt Rinehart Winston. 1981. Selected by Louise Glück.

Leaving Taos. ROBERT PETERSON.
Harper. 1981. Selected by Carolyn Kizer.

So This is the Map. REG SANER.
Random House. 1981. Selected by Derek Walcott.

Gumbo. GEORGE BARLOW.
Doubleday. 1981. Selected by Ishmael Reed.

by ROBERT PETERS

This second round of titles for The National Poetry Series is a clear cut above the first round. This is the series, as everybody knows, funded with thousands of dollars from James Michener, chanelled through 5 trade publishers, and disseminated far and wide. The winners of the open competition this year, as determined by Stanley Kunitz and Derek Walcott were Larry Levis and Reg Saner. The other 3 poets were sponsored. While there were no women selectees, feminists can take heart that there were two female selectors. Two of these poets have just reached middle-age; two are well along into mid-life; and Barlow's age is nowhere revealed. Perhaps the slackening of hormones, as the body ages, explains the passivity and graying of most of these books—muted whines of pain and failure, with an occasional bit of whimsy tossed in. These poems are primarily meditational and onanistic; and while they may pretend to much modesty, they seem to possess rather large egos. In days as threatening and raunchy as these, to find such poems showcased as fresh and new (as the initial prospectus, citing Michener, announced) indicates, I think, with the whunk of an arrow shafted through the groin, that American poetry is in sad shape. But, let's turn to specifics; there are some good things to note here, hidden amidst the detritus.

LARRY LEVIS, *The Dollmaker's Ghost*

On a scale of ten, Levis's poetry-energy quotient is about 4. He is a most

meditative, passive poet. He seems so overwhelmed and saddened by his eventual death (he's in his mid-thirties) that he sits for hours in parks, groves, and shopping centers, searching for symbols of his own emptiness. Hints of humor can't quite save him or his friends. Some of the latter are present in the flesh; others are recollected in a somnolent, gray tranquility. Levis's passivity he sees as a form of purity. To become *pure* we need merely to wait beside him for a few hours. At one point, Levis even becomes his own ghost, his real self having drowned, an apparent suicide. In the deep waters of the Auxvasse River, he finds great purity, as he passively rolls (and decomposes?) with the currents. The buoyancy of water, it appears, allows his body to immerse (oh boy, baptism!) as a final stage in self-annihilation. As the former dollmaker whose job it was to affix luminous eye-buttons in the skulls of dolls, he has become what the dolls seemed to require of him, that he be a ghost—just as they are themselves ghosts of humans.

Levis has models for his ways to death. A young couple, as a joke, strip, and, embracing, leap into a canal. Three days later they are found, still locked together, their arms "whitened," a reminisence, perhaps of the couple in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. Levis imagines their deaths as devoid of struggle: "There were not words left/inside them," so they leaped. He recalls the poet Weldon Kees who parked his car near a bridge and, presumably, jumped over. His body has never been found. He also evokes the Russian Anna Akhmatova lamenting her incarcerated son. As she observes bloody horse-lips, and as white swan-skins dry above her head, she envisions her son's skin as snow.

Levis's poems are most alive when insects appear. His death-flies buzzing on window sills derive from Emily Dickinson. Bees and wasps recur, a fruit-moth collapses on a kitchen table. Ants proceed in a line down his hand. A scorpion surpasses the human because of its blessed "selfishness." Flies dance about on rocks. Levis is consistent: as an insectivore, he implies, man earns his sleazy place in the scheme of things. Even Levis's own eyes, because of his endless vigils, are crazed, he tells us, like a fly's. There seems no possible transcendance from the painful present.

How good is the writing itself, mirroring these themes? Solipsism, I fear, greatly mars the style, which does contain occasional fresh and good images. Levis seldom edits the "I," the result being a terrible flatness. Here is a sampling, all from one poem: I turn away. I stare. I listen. I hope. I forget. I

doze. I sleep. I dream. These are like water-drops hitting your skull at regular intervals.

MICHAEL RYAN, *In Winter*

Michael Ryan's *In Winter*, a brief 34 pages long, is really a chapbook. Because of its brevity, *In Winter* may seem better than it is. Self-obsession and passivity don't linger long enough to irritate us that much. Ryan, a fine stylist, is the best writer of this lot. Yet, his primary theme is hackneyed; during sexual and other intimacies the self remains in isolation, a condition Ryan seems to relish with something of an onanist's joy:

> Because I've awakened like this
> I think I could love myself quietly
> and let the world go on.

Madness crouches outside the window, leering like a dirty old man, arousing the poet. Memories betray. It is hard to recall a recent lover's smell, or the gut laugh of a friend. As the onanist-fever spends itself in the tiny explosions—flowers breaking ground—the poet is left sapped, hardly caring for ordinary things, unable to grasp feelings, not even his own. He becomes "daily flatness," and plays with himself some more. He is never immune from desperation. Even in love (nearly always recollected) Ryan's grief swells his glans. Our genitals are such small things, he notes; we should be ashamed of them. After sex, limp, we return to empty cravings for the transcendental:

> What a shame I am if, reaching the right woman
> in a dim room, pure sex holds itself appart
> from us like an angel in an afterlife,
> and with the ideas no one has even dreamed
> it wails its odd music for pure mind.

The pared writing and the fresh treatment of metaphysical themes save most of these poems—and their lambent sexuality is original. Ryan has brains, and he is tough-souled in his quiet way. He despises any ordinary Romanticism shot through with easy Platonisms:

> Who gives a shit about carcajou
> in the boscage, or pansies freaked with jet?
> I'd like to write a daylight poem
> that pretends the world's a good friend....

As he dances "towards the large," he scrutinizes the "thick dark" and finds

merely a "sorry entrance into absence." A lost key somewhere might lead him out of his white hell, if he can ever find it. Objects might provide clues: things reflect a dignity that lusting humans lack. A chair doesn't bend "silly like a rubber crutch," and a tree knows nothing about "the silky clasp of cunt." If he goes mad, Ryan hopes for the dignity of a chunk of wood. His lust would subside, and his dancing towards insanity, penis in hand, might metamorphose into the Eternal, reconstructing his ruined self. In that "overlay of silences," Ryan would not suffer as he now does. In the meantime, the jettings of his lust, those brief sperm-explosions, are as fragile flower petals barely appearing before dissolving as nacreous drops down Ryan's thigh.

ROBERT PETERSON, *Leaving Taos*

Robert Peterson's passivity is genial and winsome. I've read few poets who want so much to be liked. Peterson is ingratiating and unpretentious, is fond of the gentle life, digs booze, and likes being told you love him. His rhymes rip forth from the poet-cushion as soon as he sits down; viz., he sits in the "country chair/ memorizing a bit of Baudelaire." Why only a *bit*? Would a whole stanza be pretentious, or over-tax his brain? Peterson takes the hills of life "easy and slow." His aim seems very minor. The few events that do transpire, transpire "down the road," not in his life. Even when he's drunk he's never noisy. And in Mazatlan, where mosquitoes live on their nerves, each day, for him, is a comfortable routine of dinner and lunch "becalmed in bananas." Even the sunsets are re-runs. His poems too often wind down to throw-away effects. In "Hands Folded Like Napkins" the poet is in a dentist's chair, full of novacaine. What interests him is the nurse, a rather pallid sex-object. "She's built. Does she or doesn't she?" Well, who really cares? The arousal quotient here equals the quiver of half of a nostril hair, no more.

On another occasion, Peterson waits in a blue-collar bar while his suit is pressed. Isolated, and inspired by 3 beers, he produces an ineffectual piece of brain hops-foam: he can't explain his life. He's restless, he tells us, and when he's restless he turns to booze. What does he think about when he's soused? Well, one conclusion is that we live "in an age of prose" where poets people the streets with "stylish words."

Like Ryan and Levis, Peterson knows that life hurts. During a bout of insomnia, he percieves that he and his barber are smokers needing friends. His

cat has dished up another mouse, and his own "good and bad intentions cling together like wet leaves." At moments his loneliness disturbs his liver and forces him to a mirror or to "just any window" to get a "nod & wink" of assurance from his own friendly face. Now, that's charming, winsome, and sad. We want to help this nice guy. We don't want his bummer to grow worse. In "The Dog is Breaking Down" (yuk, yuk, folks, guess who the dog is?), the hound is a *loser* going nuts. When he's devoured his bicuits, he barks at the box. Only his fleas love him. Yet, he is a wise old dog because he seems to sense that he's doomed.

Peterson is best when he is charmed by some small object. "The Bird" is effective, dealing as it does with life in the small. Peterson stretches a wing, forms a small fan, and blows breath on it in order to *see* his own breath. In another poem, "November," he learns from his cat to dream of diamonds when "raccoons float through the night / like warm bundles." There's an old poet Peterson evokes—A.E. Housman, of *A Shropshire Lad.* Housman's King Mithridates, that ancient king, saved his life by taking small draughts of poison each day. When a poisoner eventually tried to kill him, the King quaffed the potion, survived, and killed the would-be executioner. Housman also had charm and prized minute effects: cherry-trees in bloom, athletes dying young, the gentle urgings of lovers straight and gay—all evoking a hard stoicism. Life poisons one, Houseman knew, Survival is a matter of acquiring immunity by swallowing small traumas along the way, rehearsals for the climactic event. In the end, Peterson tells us, driftwood and icebergs will block us out. In the meantime, we survive by developing a stoical toughness and by being quiet. Like the old stray bitch dog missing her front leg, we too must stay private, content with our own meager bones and biscuits. (See "Lone Rider"). We suffer least if we shun any real connections or intense responsibilities.

Reg Saner, *So This is the Map*

While Reg Saner tracks deep signals emitted by "the profound I," he can hardly be accused of the passivity I have complained of in Levis, Ryan, and Peterson. For Saner, one feels, is never still for long, either when he's at home or off on of his treks in the Rockies. His poems abound with clean, fresh Rocky Mountain air. While he is an experimental and reflective poet, he eschews the direct use of the first-person pronoun, reserving it for the occasional moments when it really counts. *Is* are not scattered up and down

the sceneries of his poems like corn for hens and robins. Saner retreats to the mountains to enter the "solitudes" and renew his energies. For Saner, silence is a positive immersion in nature's grandeur.

Saner recalls John Muir rather than Wordsworth or some Oriental philosopher holed up in his hut on a mountian top. He is a realist who loves naming rocks, plants, animals, and trees; and whenever he is in difficulties on the trail, like Muir, he concocts practical means to resolve them. There's a fresh sanity here, without much mystical and metaphysical hokum. Nature is never a backdrop for the poet's ennui or self-pity. Saner relishes what he sees, even the grotesque: muskrat entrails are "a swipe of visceral glue." A deer hunter beheads and skins the animal he has shot. Later, as Saner drinks from a stream, he takes in "the smack of salt/ Deer's blood."

Saner's poems are well-crafted. His cadences are easy in their flow. He likes a semi-elevated tone, almost as if he were about to spin off another Shakespearian sonnet. Here's an example: "Out of a cold and absolute wind which the tongue blurs on." ("Anna Primavera"). While I find ending the line with the preposition a bit odd, *absolute* provides a touch of grandeur, and the main clause evokes a further elegance of phrase and rhythm. But there are risks; the cumulative effect of such openings is dullness. At his best, Saner deflects being boring by using sharp details. But poems so exclusively limited to the pursuit of Rocky Mountain highs run risks that all hikers and backpackers take—highs occur very infrequently. For the most part, vast hikes (and I've been on them) are sheer plod. Much deadening monotony of mind and body precede any transcendental spin. What saves Saner is his pragmatism. He knows, as Judith McCombs puts it in her fine book *Against Nature: Wilderness Poems*: "The mountain is a mountain; it has nothing to say to you." Growth occurs within our psyches; any generation of wonder transpires within the confines of our brains. If I read Saner accurately, this, it seems to me, is what he demonstrates. He may be writing the same poem over and over, but he writes it very well.

George Barlow, *Gumbo*

The final book in this current series, *Gumbo*, has a crazy energy and verve lacking in the other books. Barlow's style, as the jacket notes, is "masterfully aural." At his best, Barlow often blends humorous, frequently poignant portraits of family and acquaintances with his riff-cadences. Yet, despite my

enthusiasm for much of *Gumbo*, the book over-all strikes me as being to current poetry what talented Hattie McDaniel was to the movies—her roles were limited and predictable. For the past thirty years or so Black poets (I assume that Barlow is black, although nothing in the bio blurb says so) have written with a live audience in mind, to a combo beat. All to the good. Perhaps though, it's time for poets of Barlow's gifts to expand and take more risks. I am not urging him to write good Honky poems. There remains a flourishing black voice, and it should be heard louder than ever. Let me be more specific.

"Gas" displays the excesses of Barlow's manner: the poet sits rocking his eight-day old daughter. Daughter starts to smile. The poet's "woman" says it's gas in the baby's tummy that makes her smile, not "magic and love." There's "a jam on the jukebox" as "Cannonball cuddles" baby and daddy "softly in jazz." Result? It's really her old sentimental poet-father's "heartbeat" rocked by the tune "Two Sleepy People" that produces the tike's grin. There are at least three ladles full of treacle here—one for Cannonball, one for dad, one for the baby. It's too easy.

Whenever Barlow takes the clichéd way out, he writes badly; i.e. sentimentally. In a longish elegy, "Elegy: *Adiós Adiós*," he explains that life is about "loving and being loved." The folks you've been close to won't ever forget you, Barlow avers. You'll be like a big fish in the net of memories they'll pull in from time to time; they'll keep you in their hearts. Another poem, "American Plethora: MacCorporate MacDream" is a cute foray into Golden Arches Land. It's too much of a good thing, predictable and coy. It's a poem that undoubtedly goes over big at readings, since it requires no brains and makes for easy laughs. Perhaps Barlow's editors didn't really do their job; or, it is possible that he meant the book to be a gumbo, that thick okra soup of predictable and not so predictable ingredients.

But, again, on the positive side, Barlow is never vapidly solipsistic, grey, and enervated. I relish the stubborness of his Super-Bowl hero Duane Thomas who resits post-game Honky questioning by saying "evidently," and nothing more. I'm chilled by the death of a young guerilla in "Spouting Hearts Spouting Minds." The soldier is shot at close range with a pistol, and as blood spurts from behind his ear, he goes limp, is a washcloth. The resolution envelopes a stark racial hatred:

Some Americans could
drink from such an arch
by simply leaning forward
simply taking the blood in

The elegy "Main Man Gone" eschews any cheap tricks of event and language for the sake of power. And the featured poem, "Titta," about an old aunt who with her salt holds the family together, is a beautiful ceremony of recollection. Plenty of spunk and energy flashes through *Gumbo*. Perhaps in his next book (and I hope there are many) Barlow will be a bit more selective.

△

Finally, while this second round of National Poets Series titles is better than the first, these books still leave me hungry. I can only hope that as the series proceeds it will encompass more of the new, as it was apparently initially envisioned. As a showcase for the best in current American poetry, the series continues to fall seriously short.

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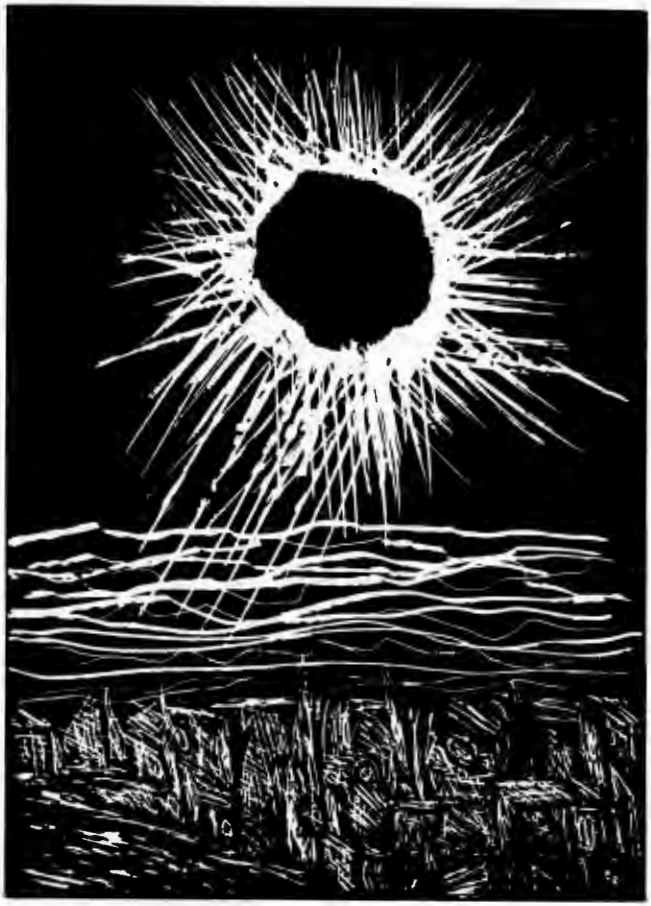

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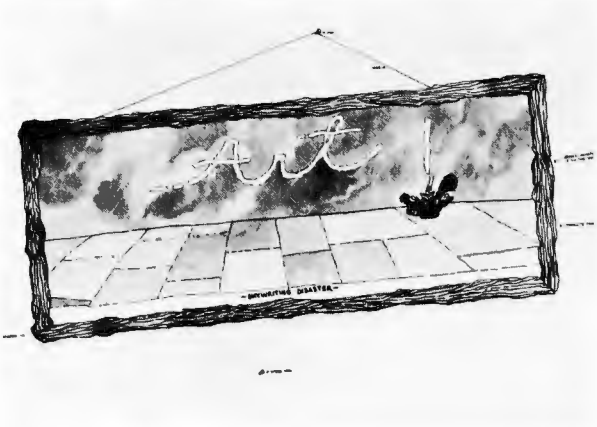

Terry Allen, *A Regional Grouping*, 1975. (detail)

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Studiously Unprepared:

Notes for Various Talks and Readings: May 1940 to April 1941
9 Ridge Road, Rutherford, N.J.

Edited by Paul Mariani:

It was January 1940 and Williams was grappling for a major poetic form, a way to shape the epic that was stirring within him, the epic *Paterson*, and he didn't know where to turn. To complicate matters he was being asked more and more to speak on the college circuit about the new poetry and about poetic form and he would have to do so without in fact having the goods to show. To help himself, he began keeping a small looseleaf notebook for the barebones of the lectures he was planning to give beginning in the spring of that year, lectures at Dartmouth, at Cooper Union, at San Juan, Puerto Rico, at Bread Loaf, and at Vassar.[1] And there would be others in 1940 and '41 and '42, like the one he gave to an unimpressed audience at Harvard at Theodore Spencer's invitation in March of '41, which are not among these notes but which are likewise on the one subject Williams kept hammering home: the Basis of Modern Poetic Form.

There are extant notes for the Dartmouth talk scribbled longhand on Williams' prescription pads (in this instance provided by the West End Drug Store at 328 Union Avenue, Al Cornish, Registered Pharmacist, the owner) and dated January 3, 1940, as Williams began to think on paper of what he wanted to tell the students and faculty at Dartmouth when he returned there in May.[2] He'd visited Dartmouth earlier, in April of '36, taking the train up then and revising the galleys for his new book of poems, *Adam & Eve & the City*, while he thought about poetic form and formulated his attack on the old fixed forms, the sonnet in particular. And he'd hit it good that time, coming smack up against one of the professors who'd maintained that the old forms were as viable as ever and that it made as little sense to be

concerned about creating new forms for every poem one wrote as it did to have to construct a new sort of ship every time you wanted to make a voyage across the Atlantic. Hadn't Francoise Villon gotten along nicely with the Ballade form, an old form ready to hand and there for the taking?

It was a very subtle question based on an inexact anologue and it had Williams thinking. After all, ships were continually being modified, and it made no sense to travel across the Atlantic with a giant mirror turned towards Europe reflecting all the glory that had been the old world's. You could burn yourself that way. As for Villon, he had taken a form and had in fact brought it to its perfection, so that those who followed after could admire the form but would have to use something else if they were to do work comparable to Villon's. Otherwise there was the danger of merely repeating Villon, and that meant the inevitable withering and death of the poet who used those old static forms. So with Shakespeare and the blank verse line for drama. To try and use that in 1940 would mean inevitable failure. Williams had not forgotten that exchange at Dartmouth, and he was going back now, four years later, hoping to arm himself with some new arguments and some more thought on the nature of modern poetry.

If the notes for Williams' talks begin to sound repetitive, it is important to remember just how obsessed he was with finding the actual new in the poetry he and others were writing at the moment. It is important too to remember that when he wrote these notes he did not yet *have* the new poetry. Try as he might in his unpublished sheaf of poems, "Detail and Parody for Patterson" (1938-39) and later in *The Broken Span,* the pamphlet of new poems he had just published on the second of January, 1941, Williams knew that he did not yet have in his possession the new poetry he wanted to write. He could to some degree say what it was not, and he could say where he thought the new poetry would come from. But he did not yet have the goods and he knew it, which only made matters worse. Which is why he became so touchy when he read with W.H. Auden at Cooper Union in April, 1940, and why, less than two weeks later, he became so defensive when he read an essay by Conrad Aiken in *The New Republic* attacking the so-called "anti-poetic" in Modern Poetry. Since Wallace Stevens had invented the term to describe Williams' own practice seven years earlier (a term which had become widespread by 1940 to describe Williams), Williams was convinced that Aiken had used him as a straw man to say what the new poetry should *not* be like.

Auden had just turned 33 when he read that night with some of the New York boys—Malcolm Cowley, Alfred Kreymborg, and Williams—and Williams was 56, a veteran of the Generation of 1914. It was a packed hall they read to, but Williams knew the crowd had come to hear the young Englishman, who had kiddingly begged them to "forgive" his accent. Auden had them in his pocket and Williams could see that, but, when Auden passed him to sit down, Williams thought he could see in the younger man's eyes not so much the look of the victor as the poet who knows that, though the night is his, the other poet has something he himself would very much like to have. After all, why had Auden come here to America, Williams would ask elsewhere, if not to learn what he could from the American language and make it his own. For Williams, Auden was still capitalizing on the old. Auden had "won" because he had given these people something they were already accustomed to: new poems written in the old modes, the old accustomed excellences, while Williams was still struggling to discover the radiant new poetry which would reflect the reality of the time, language reflecting reality as it existed in America in 1940. Let there be a *Paterson*, let those lines exist, and *then* measure those lines against Auden's best.

In time, of course, a responsive audience would be able to do just that, measure the one line against the other. But in 1940 and '41 and '42 that was not possible, because Williams had yet to discover the lines he was after. In the meantime all he could do was gesticulate, speak broadly about theory, try to be as practical as possible, while back at his typewriter he tried on sheet after sheet of paper to actually write the poems which would show clearly the new measure he had been talking about. In the meantime, he would have to play Professor Mendelyeef until the time when he could switch roles and play Madame Curie, discovering the radiant gist *in the poem itself.*

And what would the poet as scientist tell his skeptical audiences? That the new poetry should be able to use anything—ANYTHING—for its subject. There were no particular subjects more conducive to poetic treatment, he had maintained and would go on maintaining. A poem could be about anything. And the new poetry would have to incorporate the language as it was actually spoken and heard around one every day. And if that language did not lend itself to the old metrical patterns—the iambic pentameter among them—then the old forms would have to give way to new patterns and new

forms which *could* capture the language as we heard it. For to change the language so as to conform to a pattern was in fact to change the very meaning of the poem.

With what was the poet, then, to experiment with in the line? Why, with that which constituted the line; the elements which made up that line: the poetic foot itself. We would have to rethink the very elements of prosody, for in 1940 Saintsbury's laws governing the order and definition of metrical composition were as outmoded as the Newtonian universe. Why, they were smashing atomic particles in 1940, reconstituting the very building blocks which made up the physical universe. And if the imagination could do that to the world, then it could do it for language itself. "What we need in verse today," Williams would tell the congress of writers assembled in Puerto Rico in the spring of '41, "is a great technician," one who could "*hear* the normal language" and then "rediscover in the vernacular about him... the simple elements that, also, made up the old rigidities" reassembled now into new forms, new poems "expansive enough to include the whole armamentarium of the mind as we know it today." Poems "uncramped, unclipped, uncompressed" by not being forced to serve the old aristocracies—the old poetic forms—which belonged to another world view, another way of thinking no longer consonant with our own moment.

For too long the really fresh and exciting language, the raw, the living, had been relegated to the underground, the underworld: stories by society's outcasts, criminals, figures like Henry Miller, nameless jazz players who spoke a language dripping with life, the vibrant vernacular of his Polish and Italian and Black patients. But why did this powerful, raw language have to be discarded by the American Universities in favor of the acceptable, the proper, the correct? Why not make that descent into the vernacular, as H.L. Mencken had done in researching his study, *The American Language*, why not take that living language, its words and its rhythms, and make of them a music, a polyphony, a gorgeous sonata?

And who had actually composed, however failingly, in this new American language, Williams had been asked again and again at least from the early 1930s on. Stevens had done it, and Marianne Moore, and sometimes Cummings and Eugene O'Neill in his plays, and—among the younger writers—Louis Zukofsky here and there and Muriel Rukeyser and others. And of course Ezra Pound. And Williams. And so he would read from his own poems to audiences, asking them to try and hear what he had tried to do over

the past thirty years, in poems like "To Elsie" and "Last Words of My English Grandmother" and "An Early Martyr" and "The Term," opening his volume of *The Complete Collected Poems* which Jim Laughlin had published a few years before, asking them to hear it here and here and here:

> A rumpled sheet
> of brown paper
> about the length
>
> and apparent bulk
> of a man was
> rolling with the
>
> wind slowly over
> and over in
> the street....

Make it of this, and this, and this, the words moving contrapuntally to the lines and the stanzas, creating a tension, an antagonistic co-operation, and in the meantime giving pleasure with each new turn and each new surprise.

Here, then, is a selection of Williams' lecture notes on the only topic that consistently consumed him: the making of poems. There are other lectures preserved in the Williams' papers, whether at Buffalo or Yale or Texas or Kent State or elsewhere, but these notes, preserved in Williams' notebook in the early 1940s, are indicative of the concerns which preoccupied him even as he worked furiously and—for long periods—failingly, to discover and invent the new poetry he was looking for. And when the first significant later breakthrough came, it came soon after his Vassar lecture, the last lecture contained in these notes, given to the student body at Vassar on February 10, 1942, the same month his son, Bill, was inducted into the U.S. Navy. For the war which had signalled that winter of discontent in 1940 had now come home. At Vassar, one of his manuscript notes for *Paterson* tells us, the professor who introduced him quipped that she wasn't sure the girls at Vassar should be listening to Dr. Williams after some of the things she'd heard about him.

No matter the academy's response. For the catastrophic birth which Williams had so long been waiting for, the violent transformation which would signal the death of the old and the birth of the new, was about to descend on Williams. The outcast, the despised prophet, had managed to come through. On April 22nd, Williams would write in a poem about vio-

lent change these words:

> The fracture will come, the death dealing
> chemistry cannot be long held back....
> Only he who had been confined
> in disgrace underground is rescued alive
> and he knows nothing more of it
> than to stand and curse the authorities
> who left him there so long without food
> and liquor while they were digging him out....

Having thus found, for the moment at least, a replica in words of the thing he had been pointing to for so long, Williams could close his lecture book and go on now to the thing which had caused the seismographic disturbances in the first place: that impossible poem, *Paterson*. He had found something of interest returning in the dark to the laboratory of his imagination: the beloved, the radiant gist, the thing itself.

△

Notes: Dartmouth—1940 [May 16]

There is an aristocracy of taste that is not overly selective:
Henry IV Elizabeth

* * * * *

1. Studiously unprepared.

2. Whatever contribution I can have made to the study and enjoyment of present day verse is gathered for the convenience of speaking of it—under 3 heads.

   a. An attitude toward the subject matter or the materials of which verse is to be made that is inclusive—not selective: based on the importance of form (Rembrandt, Side of Beef).

   b. The use of an auditory language rather than a traditionally

written one, that is to say, American-English as I hear it—based again, on form—Since from that springs:

c. A form that is primarily a metrical pattern which is to be *heard*, not made the opportunity, the occasion, for a printer's holiday—or even a reader's convenience:—a form which springs from the spoken language and is to be discovered in it.

3. It is on this that I want to speak tonight, an informal commentary on Poetic Form—For this pattern is the *whole* excuse for the poet's existence and, finally, his only defense:

The Introduction.

Read

Notes

and a few latest examples.

Notes:

A poem is an object made of words. It has various forms and varies in meaning, among other things, according to its form.

That is, to be precise, one of the poem's meanings will vary in ratio to the form.

Thus the form of a poem can and does either complete or defeat a possible meaning.

And if a meaning is to be insinuated into a poem above or below a usual attention it may be by the manipulation of its form that this will be attempted.

Thus arises the bitterness over the matter of change in form as it touches new poems: the meaning has been altered.

And so new poems bespeaking a new order will seek new forms against the resistance of those who do not accept the new meaning.

Notes: (2)

The secret of modern poetry would be to use a modern means—that is, primarily, modern language devices—to achieve ALL the effects and significances mastered in the classics by devices now largely obsolete.

There are 3 aspects native to form: the timeless, the timely and the immediate.

The classics attack us from the past by their form in the order above named—from the timeless to the immediate. We must attack in a reverse order starting with the present character of a language—upon the timeliness and immediacy of whose effects we must largely stand. (Important).

Notes: (3)

We must imbed what we have to say in the form of the poem—for safe keeping. This requires invention, all of it.

But what is poetic form? Negatively, poetic form is all that is NOT timeless in the constitution of the poem as the prose meaning will be, but timely, to the moment: All that is not comprehended under title of the indestructible prose meaning.

But by the form one renews meaning, constantly refreshes it.

Positively, when the form has been invented, then it has been defined and then only. The newly formed poem, in the new mode, is the only possible definition of the new form.

Notes: (4)

Short Essay on Modern Poetry: (Note following the Peter Cooper [Hall] evening, April 12, 1940.)

My position has certain disadvantages which I hope I am the first to acknowledge. In seeking a basis! a basis! a basis! for a new (to be old) construction and criticism I must not be affected by a sentimental attachment to my own work as it stands.

I am seeking a basis, not a personal achievement as "success"—save in a very secondary sense.

Thus I have rejected the accepted basis with all its excellences. By this I have rejected many good things weakening myself accordingly as my relative failure compared with Auden in the reading of the poems demonstrates. He has kept many of the old excellences. More power to him.

Roundness, fullness—all sorts of attractive detail in composition I have let go by the board.

This is bad for me, bad in every way unless the lack is replaced by something in my own mode to compensate for it.

My work is incomplete, not more than in the making (I avoid the use of the word "laboratory" in this context as raising unfortunate connotations.)

How to scan my verse or to give any excuse whatever for my divisions into what seem arbitrary lines and stanzas? The basis for completing what I do is often lacking.

Well, it is lacking! and must be built. I get nowhere by saying it is not lacking. The man working from inside the accepted pattern will exceed me in his accomplishment except in one thing: the plan. I hope, actually, to replace him. We look at each other obliquely.

But I must say to myself, Why do I pattern my verse this way? I must complete, perfect, make new, but I haven't YET made good, not yet.

As far as I can see my defects lie in my excellence: trying for a new foot I have instinctively divided the verses and lines so as to avoid the annulling stasis of the accepted patterns which *put an incorrect mean-*

ing on what I would say. That I have refused, without yet knowing how fully to form my own meaning by the new form.

I am not yet master of the new form but I must still reject the old.

Anything, to get bits, moments of effectiveness instinctively—a piece that goes well here and there—for proof, to be more fully studied.

Yes, if I do that. There's the direction of movement.

In other words, I need more study, more discovery, more understanding in my work—of what I have done and what is still to do—so that it resembles more the work of men writing in the well understood pattern, more like theirs in every way EXCEPT the one, basic new plan.

What I must have is a new MEASURE which I have already achieved instinctively but which I have not yet found. It will not be a *visual* division of the parts of a poem into units but must have its basis in a fuller conception of the poetic foot—in the SOUND, that is, of the poem.

This underlies a correct attitude toward "free verse." There is no such thing. It is in reality no more than an instinctive perception of a new but unrealized measure, the same which I am always seeking.

Auden's success before the audience as contrasted with the rest of us was the feature of the evening. But listen as I would I could not but find that he has travelled the world without perceiving a new measure such as I seek. What he actually did in his best poems, his best successes with the audience, was to give an able exposition of new materials upon the old accepted basis. So at least my old perceptions said to me.

Peter Monroe Jack, in introducing me, missed the point entirely: I was a physician, a fact finder, truthful and downright. Fair enough but he appeared to have no inkling of what my purpose is toward verse. And how, if at all, I have succeeded and where and to what

extent.

The young man who came up afterward with a marked up program, on which had been mimeographed two of my short poems, and asked me on what basis I had divided the lines and stanzas that way was much nearer the truth.

"Is the division visual?" he said.

No. Not entirely—but perhaps so, actually, I had to acknowledge. For lack of better means. An attempt to arrange the material of the verse NOT by common stress or ordinary quantity but an attempt to arrange it after a metrical pattern that ignores other basis than trial BY EAR—and failing that—convenience.

What else?

I'm as interested as he. He shouldn't have asked me that question. He might with his fresh ear have perceived, as an onlooker, and suspected, surmised, in what I had freshly failed.

Looking ahead, what poems are to be written by me, if any, must for success incorporate more accurately and fully what I have learned so far.

What is in the past is trash.

Notes: (5)

Le style c'est l'homme.
Very well.
The form is the people.

An Informal Commentary on Poetic Form:

Professor S. objected to my emphasis on form saying it was not as important as I imagined. For example he pointed out the ballade form used by Villon—a mere parlor game in his time!

Ah, but with Villon the feat was to make it serious. He did. There the

form spoke, adding a timely meaning, by the very selection of that form, to the significance of the poems—a hundred chromatic overtones to the meaning had it been expressed in any other form.

The excellence of the poems, timeless as it might be, gained by that form a pungency that made them doubly valuable by its timeliness.

Notes: (6)

There are two ways to read poems for an audience.

One is as entertainment when the performer should be a virtuoso.

The other is for enlightenment as to the meaning when the reader should be capable of clarifying the means used in the construction. Here the voice is secondary.

Yvor Winters wants us to trim the *form* to an externally conventional pattern. But he forgets that this automatically fixes a *meaning* also of arbitrarily conventional pattern.

He wants to keep something which to me is trivial, worse, a meaning I fear.

Notes: (7)

A new measure in the structural form of the poem to give an enhanced freedom of movement to the understanding within the limits of the composition.

This is the necessity facing the broadening of knowledge today in the social and physical sciences as contrasted with formerly accepted limits.*

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*The mind, that is, has taken the pattern from its new habits enforced by the social and physical sciences.
And so for satisfaction it must have a poetic form of a like complexity and inclusiveness,
as the sonata and symphony contrasts for satisfaction with a tooting on the pipes of Pan.

There is a time element to the significance of poetic form as with anything else: To Villon or to Whitman the first element, the life of the poem, must be "inspiration," instinctive satisfaction, a challenge as against antiquity and the immediate world successfully met. To their first readers and listeners wonder and delight.

This is instinctive acceptance. You get the same from hot jazz sometimes or anything of the sort.

Such occasionally as a good, ringing cheap magazine story.

But there follows a lingering significance which is social and basic. I doubt very much if the poet ever knows very much about it or should care—to an extent sufficient, for instance, to have his plays printed. It might unhorse him in his jumps.

But there it is—and it lies, if the poem is to be kept, in its inner relationships as a work of genius.

Notes: (8)

The battle is forming, poetic form is the issue. Sides are being taken.

Conrad Aiken following his capital poem on Spain in the new *Poetry* has issued a critical statement in the *New Republic* condemning the new trend.

But what, in his new poem, is there of the new Spain? Nothing. In spite of the obvious excellence of the poem it leaves a camphorish taste in the mouth as compared with the Guernica, Picasso's mural.

What is happening?

Poetry, in the one mode, has become structural. The fullness Aiken seeks, in France they say, has now gone over into prose, the poetic novel.

Poetry, bare, stript down, has come to resemble modern architecture in that as against the ornate past.

Poetry for March, 1940, contains Conraid Aiken's "Spain, 1927,"—a poem several pages in length. It is a well built and impressive piece of work which I enjoyed but the form of it oppressed me.

Oddly enough, as if he sensed my objections, Aiken defends the style of this poem—indirectly of course—in a general critical statement appearing in *The New Republic*, April 22, 1940, under the title, "Poetry: 1940 Model," which he condemns.

Reply to an Attack

Dear old Aiken
First he spawns Eliot
Then he turns round
and tried to spawn
himself

Poor old Aiken
How he must be achin'
Isn't worth the takin'
Put him on a shelf

There is much justice in what Aiken offers provided both sides realize the situation in its proper relationships.

What Conrad Aiken does not see is the direction of the change taking place.

It is true, we have abandoned much good that was in the old.

We'll have to come back to that again later. But we have had to lighten the load to get forward with an advance the necessity for which he does not seem even to suspect.

Unsatisfactory as the present modes may be we can't go back. Form is imperative to much that seems formless today but only a NEW form that will include much that Aiken speaks of loosely as the anti-poetic.

The battle is defining itself, form is the issue. We have waited a long

time for this phase to break. Thank you Aiken.

But take Aiken's own excellent poem, *Spain, 1927*, spoken of above. Fine as it is it seems stuffy to me, even granting all its virtues and leaves a camphorish aftersmell in the nostrils. AND you have a feeling that no matter how good it is or might have been made to be it could NEVER in that form have been as fine as a modern poem should be since the form itself is defective: an old mode.

It could never, in that form, for instance, give the enlivening impression, the truth that must have been latent there in Spain even in 1927, that flowers in Picasso's *Guernica.*

Don't speak to me of the anti-poetic. There is no such thing. It all goes in if one could learn how a poem should be made to include it, Baudelaire notwithstanding.

Much that was poetry in the tone Aiken uses has gone over into prose, into the poetic novel—in France, they say, this is particularly true.

But poetry, seeking a new form, has at this stage taken upon itself a bare, structural character at its best—or so I think it should.

Notes: (9)

And so to conclude: Poetic form is not casual, to be selected at the whim or according to the mere disposition of the poet, but intimately related to its day—

as the ballade form was related to Villon in his time—

at its most acute, itself the expression and greatest fulfillment of its time, without which no poem can be at the peak of its possible excellence.

For reality, that full sense of conviction, one must write in a manner and, I add, a form consonant with one's own time.

For richness, overtones, relationships with other ages and conditions

must be discovered about the bare structure of the day—a universal interrelationship.

Without a basic new structure, however, all these devices are fruitless to arrest, enlighten or move us.

Notes: (10)

Dartmouth Talk
Part I

Formal reading for 10 or 15 minutes.

Part II

Informal reading of poems with comments—as illustration of Part I: metrical form.

Part III

Concluding remarks: on what has been discovered touching form. What it is probably like.

"Writing as an aid to thought"
Composition

> Now is the winter of our discontent
> Made glorious summer by this Son of York
> And all the clouds that lower'd about our house
> In the deep bosom of the ocean buried. [3]

Now is the winter of our *discontent*. Notice that word. Bear it in mind a moment. The purpose, in composition, the act, of meter and to a lesser extent rhyme is to force the mind out of its stasis, to let go, to loose the faculties—

to a resourcefulness in the search for the distinguished word—

to complete the *sound* and at the same time fill the sense. This is the virtue of the master at his highest. Without it there never could have

been such a phrase as "incarnadine the multitudinous deep."

(Such a phrase was compelled, in its precise form, by the meter which, with with a requirement of sense and intensity of proportion, emotional contour—had *first* to satisfy the sound. So with the word, "discontent.")

It is to let go and let the filled library of the mind open its books.

Look at the psychobiology of it (Noyes) the conscious mind is servant to the instinctive urges which are life's chief driving force—its function largely selective and inhibitive, while to a small degree only is it creative.

Now, the dangers to the neophyte.

How, in God's name, are we to write in the compelling meters of Shakespeare and expect our minds, less resourceful, we presume, than his, to find *more* resources in the language than he did? We are only plaster casts of him.

(Why even in the phrase quoted at the beginning he starts with an inversion, definitely forbidden us except at a cost, but to which he was, to use those words, *forced* by the meter to resort to. His times permitted it, ours do not. But we are expected to exceed him, to do what he could not do. And again in the fourth line he inverts his phrase in order to bring in the word *buried* at the end of the line. But the very choice of the word *discontent*, to complete the line within the meter, shows the strain. A better word might have been chosen if it hadn't been for that. "Now is the winter of our..." Well, what? Is it discontent, is that all? "All the clouds that lower'd about our house" means something more than discontent. Anger, fury, disappointment, bitterness—there are fifty words that might have been chosen. But discontent fills the line perfectly. Discontent *is* the word. The meter compels it and the language supplies it.)

We must discover our own form and our own meter, our own formal necessity, if in our day we are to repeat his process and let our new

form operate on our minds as his did.

Do not forget the lines, "the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling glances from earth to heaven and bodies forth the shapes of things unseen." It is important less in itself than as a hint as to the poet's habit of composition, the loosing of the unconscious.

Take rhyme, the worst bugbear. Rhyme precisely the same as meter forces the conscious among the subconscious shelves. *If we are able*. Shakespeare couldn't manage it using the language of his place and day in a long sequence and abandoned it early. He couldn't use it and get what he wanted to into the lines. Only when he wanted to give an impression of the archaic as in the Players' lines in Hamlet did he abandon his "modern" method.

But if rhyme and rhyme forms have been rendered static centuries ago by their limited availability in English and consequent overuse, what will the effect be of these terrifying hammers?

Rhyme will not force the resources of the language and of the mind, it breaks them. Trying to do the impossible we maim our writing, fall into distorted phrases, redundancies, modes with unconsciously archaic significances, blanks, emptinesses—the whole field breaks down and we fall into sonnets: not realizing what a meaning has been imposed upon us before we begin to write.

If Shakespeare because of his nearness to the middle ages could invert and torture his phrase with impunity we *cannot* do so. We *cannot* do it, the intellectual conditions of our age forbid it.

The sonnet is no form to loosen our capabilities but a plaster cast to cripple all that is most creative, all that is potentially best in us. Even Shakespeare did not attempt to write one as we do.

There are two classes of poetry: major and minor. The minor blows into a used mold. The major creates the new mold of his day—or brings it to its fullest flower, as Shakespeare english blank verse—the iambic pentameter, Villon the polite ballade of his day and Dante the

sonnet. After use by such summative masters the form is largely dead. It has been taken!

"Form" here is used in the broadest, most comprehensive sense. I am well aware and conscious of not always using the term in that way but of speaking of metrical form only. (I am well aware that I have used the term *form* in two senses: metrical form and form in the full sense).

However the metrical form of the verse must always be the bones of a complete work. So a new metrical form will be the basis for the fullest development of any new work. The complete definition of form must await the performance.

Minimally it must be consonant—*con-sonant*—with our age and the range of our physical understanding. It must sound with our age and sound new and vigorously. Speaking a language which is as different in pace and modulation as ours is from English we should be aware more than others of pending changes in the verse forms. When we have projected it, then and then only can we trust our minds to be led into the new word associations which the new form will induce.

Thus the form becomes the basis of the meaning, truly tuned and not off key to our knowledge—when all the music in the world will not make it right.

We know that verse has made one great technical shift in the change from quantity to stress. It may take another.

These things illustrate what I MEAN by composition as an aid to thought.

The form compels the mind to invent but the major job of the writer is to make a form—flexible but imperious—that will give with the words generously but force the choice to compel its pattern. This is our business, the serious business of the poet.

And that form must be discovered in our speech. Not otherwise. Dis-

covered. My part has been to listen and try from what I hear to choose the parts of such a form. That I haven't succeeded doesn't bother me greatly.

A structural change, a change in the poetic foot, is the likely outcome to be expected.

What follows is an exhibition of the efforts I have been put to to map and use—for these things are inseparable—a form to compel my age.

Puerto Rico Talk (April 16, 1941)

1. A statement as to the modern basis of poetic form (informal).
2. Read some illustrative verses.
3. Spanish (Portugese) and American-English. Our profitable interrelationship in developing a new poetic form: EXAMPLE—Lope de Vega vs Shakespeare as a model (form) for America: What we might profit etc etc

* * * *

Preamble

The difficulty is to keep such a talk as this informal.

After all, there is no great point at issue. We are here for the most part to look at each other, to recognize in each other—that curious complexity called a writer, to encourage and to learn. But most to try to find a means, through the art which we practice, to communicate with each other—for what may come of it.

Part I

The study of poetry is based still largely on metaphysical criteria. This makes for as many approaches to any given poem as there are schools or attitudes of thought in the world.

This richness may have its rewards but it is likely to cause a great con-

fusion in the mind of the student. What should be our basic attitude toward a poem, any poem, there, lying on the page? Is it acceptable, repellent? Is it a work of art or a sub-mental impertinence or both?

Upon what shall a judgement be based? If we can get to that we can get to something we can understand together.

A beginning is made toward a clarification among this swarming mixture of approaches by cutting across all categories and declaring flatly:

Every poem either is or is not related to the structural character of its own age. Then I would go on to say: that unless a poem is so related it has lost its primary opportunity and significance.

Drop that there and let me make another statement:

The arts are really the history of the mind. If they are cramped or inadequate the mind will be found to have been deformed—as much so as were the feet of Chinese women, formerly, to indicate their aristocracy.

Thus we have two statements—the poem is or is not related to the structural character of its own age *and* the poem in itself constitutes the history of the mind.

To carry the argument still further let me insist that the poem presents the history of the mind in any age primarily by its structure—which, if the poem is to matter at all, will represent in some particular the true structure of that age which produces it.

What we need in verse today is a great technician.

We need one who can *hear* the "normal" language and who knows the patterns of the past to forget them. Then to invent, that is, to rediscover in the vernacular about him, as a fresh insight, the simple elements that, also, made up the old rigidities—and reintegrate them among the living material into adequate modern forms expansive enough to include the whole armamentarium of the mind as we know it today, forms uncramped, unclipped, uncompressed *structurally* into

those past "aristocracies" which are today damnable in their deforming limitations.

The language is the thing. The language must not be deformed to fit the pattern of the verse. The verse must be transformed to fit the exigencies of the language.

By debased rigidities of pattern, if we are not careful, our vehicle of communication, our language, will be falsified and if in its structure, you may be sure in its meaning also. We are likely to be made to say what we do not intend and to come off brutalized thereby.

Let us remember, the elements of composition are always free and available—*if* we have the genius to find them; it is only in their outworn entanglements of past usage that they tyrannize over us and need breaking down and *not* in their essence.

The cleansing and rehabilitation of the language gives the poet much of his seriousness of purpose facing the world.

* * * * *

So, before reading a few poems by way of illustration—let me go back a moment for emphasis, here and there, and the elaboration of one or two points:

1. There are many ways of looking at a poem, all of them misleading unless founded upon structure.

2. A poem is a use of *words* (as emphasized by Gertrude Stein) which when taken with the *structure* together comprise its form—the elements of form being: the *line* (What is it to be?) and the *word,* its selection, position and sequence in the line.

But now something extraordinary takes place—which is the essence of poetry: the form achieved, becomes itself a "word," the most significant of all, that dominates every other word in the poem.

Note:

Imagism, which had a use in focusing the attention upon the importance of concrete imagery in the poem, lost its place finally because as a form it completely lacked structural necessity. The image served for everything, so that the structure, a weaker and weaker free verse, degenerated finally into a condition very nearly resembling in meaninglessness that of the sonnet.

The "objectivists" attempted to remedy this fault by fusing with each image a form in its own right—but there were few successes—or have been few so far.

The *structural approach* has two phases, the first, the selection of forms from poems already achieved, to restuff them with metaphysical and other matter, and, the second, to parallel the inventive impetus of other times with structural concepts derived from our own day.

The first is *weak* and the second *strong*.

Note:

This does not imply that the men who take the positions one way or the other are either weak or strong. The thing to remember is that weak and strong are *both* phases of the structural approach.

The *weak* approach (to the intricacies of poetic form) is typified by the teaching attitude. Teaching—that is, the academy—is predominantly weak in this respect. It can't be otherwise and this, in fact, is its strength. It is the throne of precedent. But because of this it tends to arrogate to itself, mistakenly, prerogatives which sometimes it does not deserve.

The *strong* approach—made through the vernacular by attention to its modulated character, inventing from that—is relegated too often to the services of outlaws. Over long periods the weak approach tends to culminate in the strong, establishing the peaks of literature.

Note:

The validity of this entire proposal (that structure is of such pre-eminent importance in a poem) has been questioned, by the academy, the point being raised that Villon did not invent but took over the ballade, a form hackneyed by court use in his day, almost a popular game. But Villon dignified it to such a powerful advantage that his use of it constitutes it itself a unique meaning, an excellent example of just that strong approach through the vernacular which I wish to show. New concepts will always call for new forms and new forms demand new structures. The basis of new poetic forms will always be the language of that age which demands of them its fullest expression.

* * * * *

In hearing the following poems please remember that modern poetry is not selective—as poetry in the past has been. It is inclusive and comprehensive by its definition: to raise or enlarge the imagination to new areas of understanding. It says nothing of what shall be admitted. Nothing is excluded. How can it be? Every conceivable thing is material for poetry under the structural definition.

Part II:

Read, especially:

p 153/ All the Fancy Things
p 155/ Brilliant Sad Sun
p 230/ Adam & Eve
p 290/ The Flower
p 248/ Cancion
p 122/ Elsie

Part III:

If, in a work of art, it is by the nascent form that the fullest and most timely significance is expressed—what function might not Latin

America exercise toward the United States and Canada in this respect? To introduce us to Spanish and Portuguese literature—pure and simple. And if to that literature, to make us familiar with its forms as contrasted with our own.

For instance: *What* influence can Spanish have on us who speak a derivative of English in North America? To shake us free for a reconsideration of the poetic line.

You can suggest to us that we are not English. That the Elizabethan triumphs, except for their magnificence, concern us not at all. That is, in their formal quality they do not concern us.

Specifically, by showing us a shorter, four-stressed line rather than the pentameter; by showing us a great dramatic talent, Lope de Vega, who did not use the iambic pentameter—gave that hint which will tend to free us to our own uses.

For in many ways 16th and 17th century Spain and Spaniards are nearer to us in the U.S. today than, perhaps, England ever was. It is a point worth at least taking under consideration. We in the United States are climactically as by latitude and weather much nearer Spain than England, as also in the volatility of our spirits, in racial mixture—much more like Gothic and Moorish Spain.

Even more specifically, we have a problem before us in the U.S. to find a verse that form that will be suitable for the theatre. We know it can never be blank verse. It may very well be that hints from the romancero or at least Lope's shorter, swifter line will finally discover something more acceptable to our temperament, manner of thought and speech.

We know what we should have but we don't know how to get it. We know what we should do but we don't know how to do it. It looks as though our salvation may come not from within ourselves but from the outside.

And if everything else that I have said is wrong-headed, destructive to

that precious soul of things which the true poet should cherish! If I have been mechanical and crass in my concepts, relying for my argument on mere techniques and materials—Well, in that case, from the old and alien soul of America itself, may the reliques of its ancient, its pre-Columbian cultures still kindle something in me that will be elevated, profound and common to us all, Americans. There is that path still open to us.

* * * *

To read

1) All, is impossible
2) A miscellany is meaningless
3) To follow a theme is the alternative.

Obviously, the best theme is the most pertinent to the times:

The Structural Approach to Modern Verse.

The old order changeth! The basis of this change is economic—as Christianity itself comes of an economic basis:

chastity.

Bread Loaf: Aug. 23/41 (Bread Loaf Writers' Conference)[4]

1) One night shortly after my father died I saw him open a door above a narrow stairway and start to come down—etc.[5]

2) To write is to place words significantly together, one following the other, upon paper.

3) We are all seeking a solution—let it go at that. Some of us are seeking it through writing.

4) Not, mind you, that we have a solution which we want to jot down: or is *that* mostly what is intended? The solution we seek will be in the writing.

5) Thus we begin to speak of the writing as something separate from

the thoughts we wish to record or transmit. Thus we begin to speak of poetry.

6) Each writing in itself assumes a form. It is this form which, as writing, gives it its special character.

7) This form may be borrowed or invented, within limits and as it is borrowed or invented a poet grows to be of first or second rating.

8) The form is in itself a word. etc.

9) My conviction is that today the surpassing requirement would be a new measure.

10) This would be a solution. The enlargement of ideas and opportunity will follow. A wise man will look for it in his own department of thought and work for it is intrinsic everywhere.

11) Thus we may find it in verse as in chemistry—and if it is valid in one it is likely to be valid in the other. So we find ourselves integrated among others of our kind and times—fascinated and enkindled by their discoveries and forewarned by their mistakes.

What are we doing here at such an errand as a writers conference and such an occasion as a lecture on poetry at such a time? How can we say that writing, especially poetry, exists *in vacuo*, separate from its time? Are we here for escape? Certainly not. Oh no! We are here, perhaps in contrast to the times, to say things concerning basic values of the world now being belied: to speak boldly.

Not at all.

We are here to do, to make, to build into the craft a structure for survival—that shall be able to resist lies.

Let me read a little, talk a little, read a little talk a little—so we shall pass the hour together I hope at least to your entertainment.
My general topic is—(The Structural Approach to Modern Poetry?)—it sounds dry enough, in all conscience—but so it flows by with which we make bread... and cakes!

Vassar Talk:

The Structural Approach to an Understanding of Form in Modern Verse. (February 10, 1942).

My more particular theme is this: You see in American verse, especially in the modern phase, a struggle to establish itself *formally* among the literatures of the world.

That is to say, in America we have been seeking a form which will be characteristic of us and to establish it as our own.

But we have encountered a difficulty at the beginning: the language!

Our language is not taught in our schools. All our colleges teach only English: see Mencken's *The American Language*.

So that our best searches for formal elements in the vernacular have been outlaw.

You understand what I am saying? The best modern poets, to my thinking, will be those who seek in the vernacular for that with which to construct their verses: That is, to build into the body of their verse the formal elements of the speech which they *hear* about them, uniquely significant in its day.

For holding and following concepts of this nature I have found myself accused of many sins
(1) disorganization in my work
(2) of lack of intellectual content
(3) and finally of being a menace to the American campus!

What we were up against in 1902 to '05 was a body poetic—romantic for the most part and almost absolutely fixed.

There were certain topics as there were certain objects proper to employ in a poem and there were certain objects and certain topics which one was not to use.

Every line began with a capital and the sonnet was the dominant form.

We were very sure of what we wanted to do in and about the U. of Pa. in those days.

We proposed, simply, to make over the entire body of American poetry—on structural lines. Oh, we didn't say it to ourselves in so many words but that is what it amounted to.

The word, the line, no unnecessary word, the word as an object. Those were some of the things we discussed. Ezra Pound was a leader.

Our excursions took us often to the astronomical observatory in Upper Darby where H.D. lived among her extraordinary family.

The first verses I shall read are strongly influenced by this period.[6]

Vassar List: Postlude, Portent, Con Brio, A Coronal, Sub Terra, Spring Song, Pastoral, (from *The Broken Span*: Sparrows Among Dry Leaves). A Prelude, Good Night, Spring Strains, LoveSong, Primrose, To a Friend Concerning Several Ladies, Widow's Lament in Springtime, Spring and All, The Bull, The Jungle, The Red Lily, The House, Rain, The Botticellian Trees. An Early Martyr, Late for Summer Weather, Proletarian Portrait, The Yachts, The Dead Baby, To a Wood Thrush, Young Woman at a Window, The Term, Advent of Today, The Poor, Middle, These. (From *The Broken Span:* Last Words of My English Grandmother, Raleigh was Right).

(Breathing Spell)

What about form and free verse?

I have said in the past that there is really no such thing as free verse. Of late I have reconsidered that to explain that what is known as free

verse is the transitional characteristic—as much in Whitman as in any other—of verse forms passing from one culture to another.

It is verse seeking a new form, verse that is breaking away from old paralyzing restrictions that have grown about it from a language custom that is not necessarily regressive but that has already utilized its always limited poetic opportunities to the full—its mechanical linguistic opportunities I mean to say.

Free verse, therefore, so called, is a sign of change—not toward looseness, really, but toward—a reworking of the materials under new conditions for an increased amplitude of opportunity, greater, more varied expression to suit a more complex time. At least our time, here.

We must make new forms if we are to live—if we are to have anything *to return to* after the international adventure of war. New forms, if we do not wish to die of ennui and loneliness. It is the imagination that creates all that we see and all that we are. This is not figurative speech, this is cold truth. Poets are its journeymen.

The poet of consequence employs the *formal* (there's that word again) the formal opportunities of his vernacular, when he is on the make—hasn't it always been so?—to *form* his new realization of the time he lives—the only real time he will ever know—its character and its amplified significance as contrasted with former times.

Now you begin to see what a poet *means*, what his form means and why he must be continually working at it, making it.

It is the formal qualities of verse, in the best sense, that we have been concerned with so far. The word loses its significance almost entirely when we begin to speak of the formal literature of an epoch—What a transition!—and say finally that it has become formalized. What a come down.

This is what we teach!

My conception of the last two decades of modern American verse has been that of a verse seeking new adjustments to a new world—perhaps its final fruition or failure depends on the entire social-democratic survival or collapse.

Nothing lives in a vacuum.

The basic criterion, as pointed out by others, before which everything in a democracy must stand or fall is this: is it for or against the people. Modern American verse must survive or perish as it succeeds or fails in discovering new and comprehensive forms in the language of the people, the American language with its characteristic pace and structural character.

the failure of *Imagism*—if there is time.
Objectivism, what it intends.
Surrealism—a mode of composition.

Notes

1. This notebook is now in the William Carlos Williams Collection (Collection of American Literature) at the Beinecke, Yale University, and is published here with the kind permission of Yale and New Directions.

2. The early notes for the Dartmouth Talk (very close to those published here) are in the Williams Collection at Kent State.

3. Williams quotes here the opening lines of Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

4. Williams added these notes for the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in pencil, apparently shortly before giving his talk.

5. The story Williams is thinking of here and which he would have expanded upon in the talk itself refers to the dream he had about his father shortly after his father's death on Christmas Day, 1918. There are several versions, but in the *Autobiography* Williams writes (p. 14):

> I'll never forget the dream I had a few days after he died, after a wasting illness, on Christmas Day, 1918. I saw him coming down a peculiar flight of exposed steps, steps I have since identified as those before the dais of Pontius Pilate in some well-known painting. But this was in a New York office building, Pop's office. He was bare-headed and had some business letters in his hand on which he was concentrating as he descended. I noticed him and with joy cried out, " Pop! So, you're *not* dead!" But he only looked up at me over his right shoulder and commented severely, "You know all that poetry you're writing. Well, it's no good." I was left speechless and woke trembling. I have never dreamed of him since.

Williams may well have been thinking of Frost and the academy's rejection of him in telling this story.

6. These dates are much too early for the period of ferment Williams is speaking of here. From 1902 to 1906, when he was at Penn, Williams was writing very traditional, very derivative stuff. Pound's insistence on "no unnecessary word" belongs to the Imagist period, some five to six years *after* Williams left the University. The verses Williams read from first here come from *The Tempers* (1913) and *Al Que Quiere!* (1917).

△

Ed Kaplan

A Confusion of People Inside

to lay hold twice
of the bolt
a man may loosen in his rage
which others
pick at
no break changes forth
nor are we terrified at
its ancientness
which the local madman
with his pomegranate brain
unblotted in the luncheonette this morning

an Armenian with ecstasy eyes
sea shells crabgrass
wronged he said
having lost fifteen cents for Swiss cheeze
on Friday's sandwich which never appeared with the ham
and in a voice unnailed with contempt

heads turned old explosions ripped silently in the air
an unknown figure which is in them tears skillfully as he
to run down their spines like snakes
opposite to their natures now as jugglers
looks the proprietor in his eyes where dogs can't read
says "You owe me some change You owe me $.15 for that sandwich
It didn't have the cheeze on it"

what the owner wanted to do was dream this painful stupidity under

there was an emperor once who didn't have to argue his bias with
anyone it was sunlight if he said it was

men whose fiddle was a force of nature

the mad Armenian wielded a knife which was consulted & unconcealed
inside his imagination which showed and which was feared

the proprietor did not believe his story
but that was beside the point
he was pickled in his own defence
"Take the money & don't come back"

to which the warlock threw the coins & stormed out

while customers over coffee & cigarettes
predicted the unpredictable it might have meant

"he'll be back" they put words into clay
"he's crazy" they said passing the pepper

he was found on their doorsteps fullgrown
he is them jungled hurt and a king
he is all americans who remember steam engines
he is writing a sonnet outside the bank
he is their grandfather's muscles & back & sweat
he is seen sometimes without shoes
                eating a sandwich
                on the curb
                in their suburb
                with no shirt on

they want his green horns off
they want the chaste static
the surrogate shadow
the roof and the lawn
the new boiler

they want to know nothing returns from the grave
nor be reminded it will

△

David Shapiro

Valediction Capricen

The hope chest was filled with matches and
    cortisone and wallets
Gum and old voices, deferred dejections,
    probable hope,
Lightly bound copies of hopelessness, too,
    and circling hoots
From your lips beyond the diorama: weeds
    welded together.
One branch is a jungle, one white dress
Of the bright tree veracity as the sparrow
    fastened to a twig
How we apples swam, quietly,
    amicably
And now more than misrepresent, dirty
    time you covered with paint.

What Diomede is to the District of
    Columbia
Or the Dnieper of the submerged
    sandbank, so I to you tonight
Unsteady now from the triple effects
    of standing tiptoe in death
Like the highest point of a tirade,
    as air drains and birds alone
    are given knowledge
It was the future impressed on a

handkerchief
The way Christ had a legendary
cloth
Those were the harmless nights of
phrases
You in your slip like a monk in quoins
of stone: a blank leaf of inter-
leaf

The unmerciful battering of your heart
in my hand
Like the hands of fanatics destroying the
classic beautiful faces
Because seen now as faithless being:
portrait of the wind,
Your hair falls like an inventory on
your breast
Fine, in what sense fine? Hmm?
Cut to death by mob action with legal
sanction
Like the lyre of Orpheus and Mercury
containing Vega
A sexually inviting throw of the dice
An animated cartoon of Paradise
A pastel jealousy of unusual
depth
The lustre of one's confinement
The death of a young woman here rests
on a couch

Holidays and congresses, planets and groups
of stars,
Spain and the Citizen King

Creeds and confessions
Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of
the world—Capitalize all these.
I love you and the sun used as a saddle
for women
In which the rider sits with her legs
on the same side of the sun
And the sunrays split their sides
And pedestrians cannot tickle themselves
for fear of fainting in the filaments
Of that heat Oh slender worm
You are liable and I pay tribute
A leopard in a leotard in an Asia once I
saw
It was an African one with buff black spots
and on that leotard were scurfy
scales

But you have been removed like a bugle
in a drum
And I speak ineptly like a not so robust
bee with hair
Cheerful, the middle part of a sail
Though a sail summoned to appear
before court
Heaven becomes you
Ill as a token in a jet
Hat in hand you strolled the buildings
Big and forbidden and fern-like you
fall
It's an odd sight I don't have of you
tonight:
The red pen lies near the red Sphinx

The sky is covered like a tent for
    animal acts, the comb is silent
No word from the radiant white business
    paper as of yet
Nympholepsy, hateful word
That wave about to break in thick
    paint was the dud
But what about the wave before it
    the ghostly precursor
That was before you discovered jealousy
    in the dictionary

With a silver green dust of war in your
    hair
As twilight fills me up or is it
    midnight now sickened
Like an old story dunked into that
    silver green dust
Inextricably bound like Hoffmansthal
    and Richard Strauss
A silver brain in a silver ashtray
The rests are coming faster now
And sleep uncropped comes longing to be
    firmly fixed
And that is pine tar and fossils to you
The rising again to life of all my
    human dead
Shrouds from a ship's mast a clement ship
But the fruit has turned to rind
I cut you off and dress for burial

Unaccommodated man without an
    umbrella

Is an umbrella radiating from the
    weather itself
With a largely gelatinous
    structure if of storms
The umbrella forms the chief part
    of the body like the mind in a
    barrage
You cannot see what chords play
    on this disc
A branch of physical theory: diamond
    shaped in sorrow
The side of the horse's hoof which
    does not kill
The playing time of some games is
    divided the clement ship
Sweetest love, we are like the
    typewriter and the eraser fluid
Not the lexical meanings but
    like altus, high and low
Dolly Madison is an ice cream now
    and then: a garden
No suspects, no motives, no
    weapons
The water juts into the water
Not to know that pretty doesn't mean
    small that allegro means happy

The double negative like double-
    jointedness
Forming your name or a part of your
    name
Like a secret wine poured out in
    sleeping rooms
You lie like a coat of arms in my

arms
Gurgling, to make a sound like that
The girlfriend of a gangster, small and
slimy and elongate
Evergreens were creeping over New
Jersey
La capricieuse like the twenty-forth
caprice
Rarely if ever have there been such
castles on stamps
Such harbors on a postcard
You harbor me emphasizing the a priori
conditions
Taking the old paint off like moss on
brick

The caprices slender as a woman's
waist—you tremble
Holidays and congresses, planets
and groups of stars
Your name or parts of your name—
Capitalize these.
the water jutted into the water
like a penis
The tapered part of a wave
painting
Converted into air, into fresh
air—
Syllables inserted to fill a
vacancy as *it* in *it was easy to*
say
It does not keep the audience from
seeing into things: the

immaterial pyramid of
those desires
You in your variable silk of
deep purplish blue
Converted into air, into fresh air—
Floating toward the person who had
fallen into it.

△

NORA JAFFE

FOUR SILVERPOINT DRAWINGS

Sunshine's Ear #3, 1981

Sunshine's Ear #4, 1981

Horizontal Spinework, 1981

Exposed Root System, 1981

Jonathan Greene

Back

Everyone fragile.

So if I step out of bounds,
wear the wrong clothes for the wrong day,
say the word dreaded from some trauma
from some past I never knew –
all would shatter.

Shattered, then, the enormity of the loss,
that we could lose all we banked on,
this placed, the calm horizon of years,
contracts beyond what any law could word...

we retrench, grapple back, where such sweetness,
such forgiveness lies, as if the tethered animal
must always test its chain to love the shade
of the tree it's tied to, or that bravery
in such matters can be foolish and cowardice
wise.

And so, why not blame the stars, some excuse
beyond ourselves, for this unfortunate experiment,
toes trying the waters of hopelessness and finding
the temperature extreme.

And welcome back this love we sacrifice our 'false'
needs to, on some altar that allows what air we breathe
to be less desperate than alone.

Concert

The crowd crowds in.
And organic imperialism fills
the further reaches, quells
undisturbed space. Silence
blots the quotidian minutiae
of meaningless breath.
Lights dim, the stars out.

The cornball phrases:
Music of Spheres.
Heights of Parnassus.
Depths of Hell.
No baby face ever been to both
& reached home unscarred.

This communal voyage, touch-offs
to dreams. Concentrate, then float.
Pay for the Absence. Weed
the week away from all systems.
Pay for the Absence.

Then Lights give Gravity
admittance, voices wake
those awash. Another time
to walk out of another time.
Outside, Difference is the comfort,
Sameness the home we're driving to.

History of the Great Poem

It was nothing fancy,
this poem I made up,
turned over & over
in my mind — a drawknife
moving towards heartwood.

And then I thought
of its genesis, the innocent
happenstance of its perception,
the words on my lips
before I thought them.

I could see its great future,
smiles of recognition
on the faces of those who heard it,
passed along to others
like a home remedy to cure
the blues.

And then my sudden fame, and
then beyond, the poem a folksong
sung by schoolchildren, its author
forgotten, its words unfixed, uprooted
by time, a singer's memory.

Then, protean, its essence hackneyed

by lesser imitations, newer versions;
ridiculed, buried, waiting for a
future to rediscover its humble
beginnings, its purity.

— Two days later, after the clarity
of this first shoot of Spring,
I realize I can't remember the poem,
its words nor matter, and this landscape,
moving in an unending scroll, fades into
an unborn nothing.

△

Summer

Translated from the Russian
by Mark Rudman

It brought an entourage of thirst,
stingers, butterflies, and stains,
weaving tapestries from its memory
of mayflower, mint, and honey.

Not the ticking of clocks
but the day-long jangle of chains
pierced the air with drowsy thorns
and cast a spell on the weather.

It happened—the sunset,
tired of games, passed
dominion over the kitchen garden
to cicadas, stars, and trees.

The moon shed beams, not shadows,
and disappeared without a sound,
while quietly the night rippled
from cloud to cloud.

More from dreams than from eaves,
more absent minded than timid,
the light rain shuffled at the door

and smelled of wine-cork.

That's how the dust smelled. And the weeds.
And once you got the point,
that's how the gentry's decrees smelled:
of brotherhood, equality.

They installed councils in the provinces.
Did you, friend, cast your lot with them?
Days glittered in the sorrel,
and smelled of wine-cork.

Postscript

No, I wasn't the source of your grief.
I didn't beg my country's oblivion.
The sun burned on drops of ink
like clusters of dusty currants.

Cochineal spread through the blood
of every thought I had and word I wrote.
I didn't cause that wormy redness.
No, I wasn't the source of your grief.

It was the evening molded out of the dust
that kissed you, choking in ochre pollen.
It was shadows taking your pulse; it was you
turning your face toward the fields
that burned, swimming on the hinges of gates
flooded with dusk, ashes and poppies.

It was the whole summer in a blaze of pods
and labels and sun-bleached luggage
sealing the wanderer's breast with wax,
setting your hats and dresses on fire.

It was your eyelashes glued by the sun,
it was that savage disk butting its horns
against walls, flattening fences.
It was the carbuncular sunset humming in your hair,
perishing there for half an hour,
shaking the purple off marigolds and raspberries.
No, it wasn't my love, but your loveliness.

Sandra Braman

Recess

"Aren't we glad we got here, early?" we said, driving across the basin, diving board in the back seat, top down, waiting, for the water to come and fill us, fill the basin. This day is just like any other, we might go to war, the walls of the basin cracking where we've never been, diving with boats on, in a strange place. "But what could be stranger than this," to hear you, or the others, tell it.

We drive, in a small Triumph. It is alkaline and we position the wind ourselves. Your left hand is on the driving wheel; your right my thigh, my hair. Occasionally, we turn. Often, I turn, touching the diving board, feeling its wobble. The board brinks our movement, enhances direction. I am concerned about its disappearance, it is pine, and replaceable.

It is quite dry. With passionate attention the dust that is smaller than sand, the dust that is smaller than sand, settles our folds, membranes the length, the breadth, of the board.

To our surprise, like Kansas, a road crosses ours that spun in back dives off an evaporating map.

"Looking for perseverance?" the other, driver said. "This is still the West, and you're placed in it, hang on, we mythologize." I turned myself, and consulted the water fable. The diving board sang loudly, at rest. I put one hand on it and with the other took that loop curved in to steady us.

Both hands on the wheel, you shook his eyes with, determination. The rock between our cars, a sign, sat the floor behind your seat now in a western pace. No reins.

Our random intention comes, without lineage, with a detectable Spanish moisture. Rims of the past follow us like eyes across the valley floor. Occasionally, moments of solitude rise millions of years, in hues, and we must swerve. This is not impatience.

All night we had, listened to the river flowing through our mouths. The measure of displacement blew my hair back, offering a larger surface for your hand, a wind of possibility. We naturally, drive, small skeletons into bones to cover our own. It is not true this drive is endless, not for us. The horizon, is beginning, to trickle.

"But nothing hasn't happened yet," I consult the water tables. With my right hand, and with my left for steadiness, I place our moment on the page. Involving shoulders, a stance of relationships, breathing chance and mobility into my nervous, system.

We seek an edge. To this. We had tales, resting, on the base of our spines, leaning into memory. It would be spring, into site. Since stopping, you started now at speeds, rising and falling with the ocean's gestures flowing past our eyes where the wind cut through old time. Lime walls of the basin are far away. Our shadows return to us and dream. If there, we would rest, ourselves.

Your turning, engages, the basin now perfectly. We are pillars, without hands, steady. The skin of our bodies blows back six million years, holding its level. We are in a basin and it cracks with a great roar. Stories spray, maidens and youth, love and death, rescue, like a rainbow. We park below.

You take the board and I the rock, heavy, in my arms. It is dusty, from day, and has weight. We listened, well, the climb was easy. In the dark we placed, board against tree. Its base shook heat into moss; head tremored with cedar. The rock, waited, in leaves.

We remove. Dress. I pull the shirt over your head while you hold, your arms, in the air fingers open. You open, my skirt, from behind. Birds but no insects, and silence.

I cradle the rock against my belly. It is rough. You move your shoulders with beauty. You place the board carefully, assuming air within earth and without the rock holds your intention, to time, whose crevices, warm, our toes.

It walk, to the edge. Of the board. Of the diving board, as women always have done, bellies empty or full, first, with attention. I dive. You dive. We hit bottom.

△

Paul Blackburn

Twenty-Two Poems

Introduction

This group of previously unpublished poems is the first major selection of individual pieces from the large cache of Paul Blackburn manuscripts in the University of California, San Diego's Archive for New Poetry. Unpublished, uncollected poems have appeared since Blackburn's death, but no previous gathering has been based on a comprehensive survey of the recently established and indexed canon.

Less than one third of his approximately 1250 poems had been published when Blackburn died in September, 1971. A large portion of the later (1967-71) unpublished material was brought out in 1975 in *The Journals** and *Halfway Down the Coast*. More recently, *Against The Silences* (1980)* offered a wider time range with its selection of poems from the decade 1959-69, pieces taken from a larger group that Blackburn collected around his relationship with his second wife. These volumes, along with the small book *By Ear* (1979) and some scattered pieces in little magazines, brought the amount of published work to about one half of the total. Still, some ten years after Blackburn's death, over 600 poems remain unpublished. Perhaps 200 of them are juvenilia, technically proficient but often sentimental and derivative: there are poems, for example, in the styles of Robinson Jeffers, W.H. Auden—and of Blackburn's mother, the poet Frances Frost. There there are about 100 one-shot pieces, verse jotted and forgotten. This leaves some 300 mature and considered poems, arguably as good as any published during Blackburn's lifetime.

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*Posthumous publications of Blackburn's work have not always been accurate e.g., the large group of uncollected poems in *Sixpack 7/8* contains many textual errors; a number of poems were omitted from *The Journals*; and the title, "Against The Silences," was assigned by the editor to poems taken from a binder marked only "S." by Blackburn.

In the past year, Clayton Eshleman made a number of trips to the Archive for New Poetry, where I have been cataloguing and editing Paul Blackburn's collected poems. He went through hundreds of typescript drafts and holograph notebook pages in the Blackburn Archive. With the help of Caryl Eshleman, he then chose the pieces presented here from a preliminary group more than twice the size. I established chronology and provided definitive texts—in all cases Blackburn's final revised version—for the poems.

These pieces span almost the entire major period of Blackburn's poetic productivity; of the mature years only the first few in New York City (1950-54) and the final one in Cortland, New York, go unrepresented. "Marseille," "Mediterráneo: a littoral," and "Gypsies in Malaga, 1956" were written during Blackburn's first, three and a half stay in France and Spain, when he began work on what was to be a lifetime project of compiling and translating a volume of Provençal troubador verse. The next five poems, "The Melody Lingers on," "Dea . Dia : an aubade around the clock," "The Parallel Voyages," "Keeping It Up," and "Mestiza," were composed in 1958-59; they find Blackburn back in New York City during the dissolution of his first marriage. The poems in this group revolve around a transitional romance that is restorative but painful, in part because—life here imitating a convention of Blackburn's troubadors—the lady in question was married.

"Discourse on Values" and "Alley Oop Speaks" bring us into the early 1960s. With the poems "To a Friend" through "O Miles" (roughly 1963-67, the span of Blackburn's second marriage), they form a group most strongly linked by a consistent attention to sensory detail of both past and present experiences."The Ghost" looks at the breakup of Blackburn's second marriage from the not-so-distant vantage point of almost a year and few thousand miles: In 1967-68 the poet was back in Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship. The final poem, "From A Parked Car," was written in New York City during Blackburn's third marriage, about a year before his death. With the exceptions of the discursive "Discourse on Values," the violent, hallucinatory ["Birds chirp listlessly in the heat"], and the short "From A Parked Car"—written in a period when Blackburn was almost exclusively writing long, untitled *Journals* pieces—the poems are fairly representative of the formal and thematic concerns of their respective periods.

A few comments on some individual pieces. "Dea . Dia : an aubade around the clock" is, as Blackburn noted, a reworking of the Lorca poems,

"Cancion Del Día Que Se Va." Blackburn's disclaimer, "adapted and perceptively enlarged," allowed him to work here without the dual constraints he felt during this period: the barrier of rather rigid limits set by the Lorca estate on translations, and the fear of being criticized for taking undue license (a charge he had encountered with some of his Provençal translations). Here is the Lorca original:

Cancion Del Día Que Se Va

¡Qué trabajo me cuesta
dejarte marchar, día!
Te vas lleno de mí,
vuelves sin conocerme.
¡Qué trabajo me cuesta
debar sobre tu pecho
posibles realidades
de imposibles minutos!

En la tarde, un Perseo
te lima las cadenas,
y huyes sobre los montes
hiriéndote los pies.
No pueden seducirte
mi carne ni mi llanto,
ni los ríos en donde
duermes tu siesta de oro.

Desde Oriente a Occidente
llevo tu luz redonda.
Tu gran luz que sostiene
mi alma, en tensión aguda.
Desde Oriente a Occidente,
¡qué trabajo me cuesta
llevarte con tus pájaros
y tu brazos de viento!

The poetic critique "To a Friend" marked the culmination of a period of increasingly strained relations between Blackburn and the poet/editor Cid Corman. The somewhat tenuous re-establishment in the early 60s of what had been a strong friendship in the early to mid 50s was threatened, on Blackburn's side, by Corman's rejection of certain pieces he submitted to *origin*, second series. The event that directly precipitated the writing of the

poem was the publication of *origin* #8 in January, 1963. The issue opens with a polemical letter from Theodore Enslin, calling life in New York City "a reciprocal disease of parasites," and the city dwellers "invalids" who "have to stick together no matter how bad things get." Blackburn alone, identified as "P," is quoted as saying that Enslin had no defenses, to which Enslin countered, "No, and I had no intention of developing any." Blackburn's annoyance over Corman's sanctioning, even highlighting the letter by printing it on the magazine's inside front cover was exacerbated by the Corman poems that followed. Blackburn felt, as he wrote Corman in the May 1963 letter apologizing for this piece, "a kind of withholding and smug judgement in the poems, the limits of the commitment." In "To a Friend," Blackburn—as he put it in the same letter—uses Corman's words against him, in particular the words of his poem "The Offerings":

> Too many things on the altar.
>
> A petal would do.
>
> Or the ant that stops for a moment
> at it.

Blackburn also plays on Corman's lines, "Land / of gold cicadas" in "The Fortune," and the opening line, "It's quiet, almost too quiet," of "The House."

There is an allusion in the beginning of "M/S" to an event very much in the news at the time of the poem's composition but now perhaps obscure. On June 21, 1964, three civil rights activists, among them Michael Schwerner, were reported missing in Pennsylvania, Mississippi; they had gone to the south to agitate for a number of reforms, including voter registration of blacks. On the date mentioned in the poem, there was worry about their disappearance and fear of foul play by local opponents of integration. Three bodies were found in the area on August 4; they were identified the following day as being those of the civil rights workers.

A final note on the opening statement on poetics. Blackburn usually refrained from making pronouncements on aesthetics in general and on his own poetic practice. Early in his career he did discuss theory in his correspondence and frequently commented in his poems on the writing process. For the most part, however, he preferred an indirect espousal of values through

the work itself. The "Statement" presented here is the first and most effective section of a longer 1954 piece; it is one of the few prose summations of his poetry that Blackburn ever ventured. As he later put it in a February 4, 1961, letter to Robert Creeley:

> Re: "deep image;".... You know, I don't believe in any system whatsoever? All work, if you work 'em right, if you're good enuf to, whatever.... Even Charles [Olson] is a bit stuck with his own theory, which is out of EP/Williams plus his own drive and fusions. Just a limitation, no badness surely....
>
> Any set of rules or controls will serve you.... Anything in the world set next to anything else in the world will inform (or not) itself, the other. If you want to start a cult of juxtaposition, let's call it re-realism, I'm with you.
>
> But let's have for ourselves no greased slides, or any blurred centers. Ripeness is all.

—EDITH JAROLIM
Archive for New Poetry, 1982

△

Statement

My poetry may not be typically American, or at least in matter, not solely so: but I think it does make *use* of certain techniques which, even when not invented by American poets, find their particular exponents there in contemporary letters, from Pound & Doctor Williams, to younger writers like Paul Carroll or Duncan or Creeley.

Techniques of juxtaposition.
Techniques of speech rhythms,
sometimes very intense,
sometimes developed slowly as
one would have
conversation with a friend.

Personally, I affirm two things:

the possibility of warmth and contact
in the human relationship :

as juxtaposed against the materialist pig of a technological world, where relationships are only "useful'," i.e., exploited, either psychologically or materially.

2o, the possibility of s o n g within

that world: which is like saying 'yes' to sunlight.

On the matter of song: I believe there must be a return toward the musical structure in poetry, just as there must be, for certain people at least, the return to warmth within a relationship.

△

M a r s e i l l e

Walking through the Halles Delacroix
it is earsplitting
and one learns why certain adjectives
have been applied over the centuries
to fishwives

It is all perfectly true

In their dark aromatic dresses
and their black uncomely tresses
they lean over their aromatic wares
and scream

It is fabulous.

△

Mediterráneo: a litoral

I n t h e c a l m a f t e r 2 s t o r m s
t h e M e d i t e r r a -
n e a n,

that deep mirror of our profound doubts

tempestas tempestatarum, but

in calm, in circles of calm, are

slow currents, the rings of the sea.

Celebrate them.

Take the sun and set it

there in the rings

squash-color & violet.

Mirror of our profound thoughts,
mirror, color of our grapes,
caño de nuestros emociónes,
miroir approfondi des rêves,
YEAH, but
the exterior world is real, buddy,
insomuch as intelligence
makes it . animates it .
As our latter-day Confucius say: "Nothing counts
save the quality of the affection."

But I am here as
you are there.
But here.
HERE!
M e d i t e r r -
a n e a n . C E N T E R .
Center of
circles, center of
earth, center of warmth, center of
world, of which I am

c e n t e r

MEDITERRÂNEO,

mother and cradle both,

your quiet waters after storm.

Art is merest dullness.
Sure it is . Man
no end beyond himself
and take it so .

And if it is,
it is limitless, either

no, No, NO, no!
or
yes, Yes, YES, YES, Y E S !

n o t j u s t f e v e r e d p r o j e c t i o n f r o m t h e
p r o j e c t o r, m y

d e a r e x - f r i e n d .

Only the affection is real.

Let us recognize the ugliness between us
the rotted nuts of our skulls, holes half-filled with night
heaving messages full of our vicious fears
into the sea in bottles, trusting the tides,
the tides of commerce at least. Not even that
communication. To swim thru all the seas
collecting up the bottles? I leave
the detail to you . For myself,
I lived without lies
confident in my weakness
heroic in a way in the
corazón,
in the heart of the four elements . This is beauty, or
it is one way to live in its presence .
I was brother to any beast, friend of the stones, I
suppose we are all Orpheus if we would .

But the stone outside us is beauty
and the stone within us is love .
Both stones will break the teeth
or the foot.
Or the hand.
THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO LIVE.

Mediterranean, and the fall of these years,

years and waves, over the

centuries rolling up and breaking .

Now the wave swells, passes,

another behind it always

present,

present,

THE SEA IN ITS FULLNESS OF
MOVEMENT.

That is love .

△

Gipsies in Malaga, 1956 .

The walls blackened by old fires
Linen drying
Near the dry riverbed's mouth, from
underground wells,
a few pools of sweet water . for
cooking, for the wash .

Three young girls doing blouses
flirt with four young young men
who are themselves waiting
to do handkerchiefs
and underwear .
It is what is hidden is uppermost in their minds .
what the blouses cover, what stirs
under the young men's shorts . a washing place
is a very good place to flirt . who has
stained what where, very interesting,

very direct opening for conversations.
How they fill up the blouses
a real question . Mysterious
bulges under the trousers, real .
What a shame we have to wear clothes, the best thing about them
is in the washing of them . Bright sunlight .

Two sheets spread on the rocks
A man sleeps in his trousers while
his shirt dries on the bushes .
Having no wife or daughter,
it is not mended .

A mother with four children, all under five,
cooks with one on her arm .
Woodsmoke from the tripod, the
succulent, garlicy cooking of the poor .

Further down the smell of oil from a depot,
the smell of human excrement . Goats also
graze on the grass of the riverbed .
Fresh milk.
Husband of the woman cooking
sits quiet in the grass, stunned
under the bright sunlight,
stunned by his evil luck .

Smoke rises further down also
from under the railroad bridge .
Fire invisible in the sunlight .

Two women are washing clothes
a few feet from one another, there's

another conversation going, the
amusements, the sporting life of the poor .

A woman arrives from town,
a heavy bundle of bamboo poles
balanced on one hip .
The poles are not tied tight enuf and keep slipping.

The bright sunlight .
The goats grazing .

△

The Melody Lingers On

not that I want to be where I have been.
it is that I have knifed something in myself,
another life, a girl,
and can't see
why I should have to use the pronoun 'we'
ever again.

△

D e a . D i a : an aubade around the clock

DEA, Dia, goddess, day!
You march off into the wet darkness
full of me. I
am afraid that when you return you will not know me
And all my treasure given away!
How could I have left upon your breast possible
realities
of impossible minutes! Day Dea

Late afternoon
Perseus comes
files your chains
and you flee
over the mountains bruising your feet.
Not my tears or my flesh can seduce you.
Not even the river can hold you
where you sleep your golden siesta.

East to west
you raise round light, your globular light sustaining the tension of my soul at its sharpness
East to west
What work it costs me,
mi cielo,
waking you with your birds
and your arms in the wind!

Adapted and perceptibly enlarged from the *Cancion Del Día Que Se Va* by Federico Garcia Lorca

△

the parallel voyages

Knowing your schedule tonight is
no pleasure
2 people riding 2
Crosstown buses 9
blocks apart,
who should,

if the purity of this snowstorm is sign
my white-wrapped solitude seat-huddled staring
miserably through a mittened hole on the
steaming window at overcoated Utrillo-figures
hunched against the snow

always be together — no
more than hands'-length apart.

If I ride this mechanized tunnel wishing it were a horse
and I sitting straight up, scarfed to the eyes
with the warmth of your body behind me, laughter,
strength of arms wrapping my waist and somethings
softer pressed into my wing-bones, the natural
movements of the horse, our own, what is hard,
what is soft, the differentiation, if

after this medieval fantasy, after I've
gruffly gone over the ancient wisdoms like telling beads:
sit up, straighten your back, act like a
man as well as a lover, don't hunch like a judge on a bench
don't be the husband you aren't, let her go
and come wherever she wants, let her know
you care and are there when she wants, but don't
be a bore about it, do you think she is so insecure
she needs always to be in a passionate mood? Let it go
let it pass, kiss her hands and her feet and her ass
she deserves it and anywhere else you can get to, be
perfectly shameless in bed and the rest let go, and if
after this traditional lecture, I still

ride this bus thinking of you, & you
ride that lower one thinking of me, go ahead, make some remark
on the possible boredoms resulting from too much proximity?

△

Keeping it Up

La montaña canta

Well sure! & why not? I
rock some on that mountain when I wanta –

well, not exactly, & besides her husband's home
        now, – and hell, one
observes the proprieties when absolutely necessary

        besides,
according to today's phone call I am still
the only tall pine rising on that mountain
        a single tree, no
spirituel winter-horror of bleak clutching branches
but a black jackpine, my needles ever green & firm
& surd, upholding offering to blue sky fine snow
        high-piled, the wild
        shakings of birds

Por eso, la montaña canta, como no?

All of this sounds very flip somehow
but the truth is, I think of you
& my big ears redden like any farmer's boy

& the seed stirs in my genitals as though
weeping with joy
in sight of soil

△

Mestiza

Among the myriad mysteries, myths,
frankincense and myrrh, muzzle-loaders, mills,
Midlothian midriffs, miles and mutton chops
(the ribs)
one finds
the fat trimmed and the velocity of a faintly luminous
band
the Milky Way, mimosa of the mind;
mis-
handled at least,
whatever misfeasance, misin-
terpretations, mesere-re — nobis, meu cantúria, bullshit :

Amid
the mime and mummery, the marls and mitigations
of mundane affairs, this warmth
let my try again, and harder this time please,
(call it a tour de force), my mode, your hands
mode, you dig, you my
Modigliani, fares mid
spells of underarm musky monkey flower turned to myth

The murmur of the summer sea against Murmansk

(or Queen Maud Land, Mawson, Macuarie Island,
McMurdo Air Facility, Mirny or Byrd, the other pole)

The murmur of the sea / not solid ice

△

Discourse on Values

I sit listening, in memory,
to this man talk
of happiness, his
eyes glistening with a dream of simplicity

and I cannot help thinking
the paradox present
or even one sinking
side of his over-balance equation.

I too have stood high
on edge of wood
watching larks rise
and have not despised the sensation;

seen swallows' flight
weaving patterns of circles
over roofs at sunset
swing round the tower at the edge of night

and out and over
the darkening hour
of tiles, with a portion
of swinging, arrowlike motion, not unlike

the heart of a lover.
And stood still for
a bit on a hillcrest

looking out over a sea-misted sun-shot town

before going down
through terraces and olive
orchards to commit
some mundane act as buying a live

rabbit or jug
of black wine or cig-
arettes in a strange
language where much was imperfectly understood

and therefore beautiful.
Simplicity always is
a full measure of purity
whether the final result be a kindness

to the senses
or a brutality.
Happiness translated
into its nearest latin-based equivalent

is felicity
And felicity is,
— true to its gender,
a purely domestic item on the agenda

whereas happiness!
happiness can also be
experienced split-second in
a heightened restive flow of ecstasy

melting down your bones.

But tea and scones
at 4 in the afternoon
is a pleasure requiring time and contemplation

to appreciate. I engage
to show that one word,
lost to the reduction of
already debased protestant values in common usage

in english language
of this uxorious age
can, in all tenderness, bridge
the semantic problem posed by this young man

who sits enthralled
upon his can,
enthralling his audience
with simple beautiful words illustrating

without benefit of Freud,
via the equally loving
sensations of his groin,
his imbecile definitions of happiness.

The word is *joy*.
The distinction is medieval
and clear. The provençal
troubadours used it, naturally to excess.

Today, even in
out most conservative forms
of reference to sin,
we fairly blanket the whole experience in

some tangential form
of the affirmative *yes*.
Say we enjoin our sons,
daughters, wives, mistresses, friends, do we ever

admit even tacitly
certain of nature's ends
and say, implicitly
meaning it: "En*joy* yourselves!" ? No,

we mug instead, and grin:
"Have a good time, Jane!" or even
worse, and more tangential
because more opulent and vaguely overblown:

"Have a ball!" *I had*
a most enjoyable time is left
to Bronx schoolgirls writing
letters to their girlfriends at Antioch

or to old ladies
writing their sisters
in Kankakee, Illinois meaning
they had a nice talk with cousin Sadie in Binghamton.

Good Christ! Have 2 balls!
Joy is dead. The kiss,
once the highest rapport
and bliss that an adept might enjoy

as guerdon from his lady,
has been relegated
down to a very hip

and tasteless matter of preliminary.

The bloody core is this:
poor man has lost his
human ability to take
joy at all except in *arriere vue*.

He can no longer
differentiate between the
observed act and the strong
feeling he experiences in the presence of it,

a relationship
in fact so complicated, that he
has so little equipment to deal with it,
that he must name it "a simplicity". I am

speaking of myself here
and must confess
that I was the young man
in the earlier part of the poem who could

only say *yes* to some
vague blob of feeling
I'd simplified down and
accepted as a valid basis for song. No good,

and being wrong
never was easy for me.
And having to live in a
mid-twentieth century housewives heaven instead

of 700 years earlier

learning the total craft
with lute and viol
has not exactly made things that much easier

to translate into verse
my favorite century's (the 13th)'s
pain and JOY. It's time
I established my identity and squared completely

with the terms of
Love. Love, I submit
that your soft shaft
can touch the heart of it and pierce

the adjective,
dive direct to noun,
and keep the shown complexity
and endless terror even if the lady does not ask me

about form, direct,
I touch the kept
recognition of Joy, and
as such it defines my own circuitry.

Pity me, o
ye translators,
whose claim is form,
my cigarette is hot, my pants are only

warm from sitting
at these ancient books.
Shall make no quaint alloy,
My song's of JOY, I'll make it now, look

(You cannot hear)

△

Alley Oop Speaks

You small sick animal
Me big tender savage
You snarl and bite little bit
Me tender and calm you
You lick me grateful
We good friends

△

To a Friend

Dear Cid.

No.
Too many things on the altar?
No. There are
never too many things
on the altar. Sure, a
petal would do, your offering always
was a petal, and
does, say. But you
don't understand, there are
those who must bring more to the altar, or
more of those who must bring to the altar
you would say
too many,
things, too many things.
But the ant who stops for moment

at it
would also do, would,
as you do,
stop for a moment.

Anyone's,
yours, the
ant's
"somehow persist in it,"
(song)
is enuf
(as tho it were not known). We are
enuf to read you the rain,
pine cones, the gold cicadas, the silences,
but we you the
excess
a mesa at sunset with clouds
red . purple . green . blue .
colors of west you took as you went by,
the critic-editor, you
never knew
blue
never knew
green
never knew
purple, red, red
yes you knew, but never
golden cicadas, you say gold, making it short,
gold you never knew, you say . gold,
that short / "It's
quiet, almost too quiet"
gold you never knew,
GOLD
you never

(as tho it were not said)
knew.
You only collected it.

△

untitled

Birds chirp listlessly in the heat
The 6 A.M. of brooms on sidewalks
no traffic yet, wetting the
sidewalks down, sound of sweeping .
Young man sits in a puddle spattering
the filthy cool liquid over his face and arms,
muddies
himself.
He gesticulates an explanation for
everything
& laughs.

Down into the hell of the flesh.
Bottom of the subway steps beads of
sweat fall.
The flower huckster, his flowers scattered, is being dragged
south along the Bowery
by 3 space chicks in red dresses:
jerked along half-conscious by the legs :
black ragged trousers, shirt town, flapping,
face bloodied.
Their
hair is disheveled, they snigger among themselves.
His mother and his two sisters
will put out the lamp of day,
tear out his eyes and force him

to enter each of them singly,
mother first.

The two girls stand by giggling,
squeezing him lightly.
They knock out his teeth with a claw hammer
and he gums helplessly the black
watermelons.

He goes into his older sister
He vomits on the stone floor
Her head slides about in his vomit
Her mouth is open, the breathing heavy
Her legs up over his shoulders, she
swings her ass in closer sucking
in the long pink brother
Mother stands foresquare by the sink
washes her stinking armpits
scrubs her crotch clean, watches and
laughs . foresquare .
After his second purge . spreadeagled, the
three of them wash him tenderly
anoint his body with sweet oils,
preparing him,
cleaning the cuts
soothing the bruises, cauterize the
torn eye sockets and broken gums,
restoring him.
They let him sleep.

His younger sister takes his sex in her mouth
stiffening it with her hand, fingers
ringed about the root, sucks and sucks, runs her
head loosely up and down, her tongue
curling about the object.

The others break leafy twigs from
a tree by the window, arrange
a pattern on the stone floor
croon a half-melody while the girl impales herself on her brother.
Screaming orgasms split the walls.

When it is over
they tell him the secret of life
He creeps to the open window and they watch
subdued and triumphant as he
lets himself fall from the fifth floor
impaling himself on a lamp post
arms akimbo
the sweetest sacrifice
the light put out

△

untitled

A grey day at Gangway 4.
Battery Park.

Red tug
& green tug
cross at the river's mouth
across
from the loading-cranes at Weehawken
MARINE & AVIATION
sayeth the outgoing ferry, a yellow heli-
copter goes over
its circuit of the island in a grey sky . A line of
railroad cars on barges is moved out red & yellow towards Staten
Island

Tourists crowded about the telescopes
are gay birds
the birds themselves
drab . A park
department employee
asks me for a match
One of the pigeons is brown and
splays his wings
center of a puddle . Tugs hoot
& tweet & pass, an-
other helicopter goes over, it
is grey
Grey day.
A pile-driver is heard from the Brooklyn-side
driving 40-ft. logs into that earth . Sparrows
chip & gulls cry . the white
green-&-red striped excursion boats of the Circle Line
circle
A white ferry swings across the channel to Governor's
Island, bricked up there in the light mist
Barge 103 goes past
edged by tug LV . a single Lehigh Valley boxcar
all its weight
America invades New York)
the barge-
man at the back leans against the lug so stilly
he's barely seen
The yellow helicoptor comes back the other way . 8
boxcars (Pacific Fruit) float by my head
still swinging
The Staten Island Ferry (they're always red)
swings out again . 3
other barges, the whistles groan

& warn
This could go on all day

poem is called SIT TEN MINUTES

△

Close to Home : the intimations .

Maybe it IS the quality of the sky, the
clouds . Soft, dark grey, and
without wind or coolness, promising
rain .
The people are themselves . so much so, it
is quarter to the sixes in the evening, if not
the dozens, the half-dozens . One

lady rides past on a bicycle, it is Seventh Street
and her legs are long and the thighs too thin and the
look on her face is an enormity of despair, she is
pedaling very fast.

A girl sits on the fat thigh-fender ofan
automobile, Second Avenue, brown, smiling and relaxed, there is
scar tissue on her thigh . On St. Mark's betw/ 2nd & 1st

a very dark man in a very white shirt
comes and asks me
too apologetically
for a cigarette .

I give it him, then ask if he needs a match . No, he sez
and marches away toward 2nd very brisk . . YOU KNOW?
I LIKE a man with independence . But he

walks up the steps of a brownstone, still nervously, not
yet having lit the butt. Someone will take it way from him,

his brownstone? a nicer house than I live in. I wonder
how much rent does he pay? Does it break him? Does he come out
every day to see if someone will give him a cigarette? What
is he doing here?
WHAT AM I?
A man that says yes. Maybe
it is the quality of the sky, the clouds . that soft dark,
without wind
promising rain .

△

M
S

Saint John is the day of our burning
Verbena is the odor of our burning . Mid-
summer night, June 24, 1964,
& full moon this night, also
a total eclipse of the moon . 8:57 to
Moondong, 11 and pico . Micky
Schwerner, Armand's cousin, maybe
dead, 24 years
old, from Brooklyn . The moon
is full in Mississippi also, maybe dead, dark
of the swamps, honeysuckle and moonlight,
ECLIPSE
St. John is the day of our burning. Armand
reads a poem

starting from a remark of mine a month ago
(33 days ago) "Can turn you on"

Allen Ginsberg leans over, tries to turn me on .
He blows in my left ear with a pair of straws .
My two straws
I use to collect lemon peel, other straws, odd bits of paper, using
the two of them like chopsticks to pick
up, until they crumple, broken, used
up? Not quite, I bend them in half, two V's, and make a
W on the table .
We are all turned on
in the semitropical atmosphere
under the city and dogs bark .
I reverse it . I make an
M on the table
M icturating, I think about mic-
turating under the table . Under the hot air midsummer
night, the

smiles of sharks . the dogs .

△

The Voices, It's Cheap

October sun
a bright clean coolness
On the building opposite
shadow of pigeons
the circling flock . one breaks away, higher, building his
circle higher than the rest, but
will return
with them, re-

luctantly and late, but turning at last .
the escort, not the leader, for those moments to
himself for those moments, flying apart, higher,
up.
To whom
shall we have to answer for our actions, our
inactions? We prepare their deaths, their
rooftop landings by the coop our own and
in this sunny afternoon of sharp shadows
and blessed chill, my eyes
rear backward like any mule, to watch, the ears
I cover with my hands a moment against the cold, hear
the song long dead, the sound of voices from another street in
a year long dead, my grandfather's twang, my mother's
elegant kind closed rumble, children's pitched cries calling me
out, that other time, voices
sound in this day of near-winter sun,
I did not know I wanted to hear those voices :
"Can Paul come out, Mrs. Frost?" one shrill, one
look for approval, the guess, and dash for sweater, scarf, and coat.
"Well, bundle up, then," another says
I wanted to hear that, I wanted
to . The bird flies upward against the brick and
does not stop, continues spiral over everything, and out .
Will never stop . The door pulled open, the bright sun
crease about the eyes in a face frozen free, the
cold air strikes .

△

The Language Lesson

"You can wait until the cows come home"
AND THEY DO

It is evening, and the lane and
countryside, the fields are filled with bells, all
out of tune, their own homecoming melodies of clunk and
ank and cunk, stiffened by dog barks, their shanks . the yards
full of mud and ruts, moving the herd
from the lane and road into the slippery hell
in front of the barn, past the wooden bars, two
veer off on the road toward the river fields, I
swing off to counter, outrun them, turn
them back, DRIVE
them through the gate at a dead run
and hit the slick and flat on my

Words already known but never used . age seven .
all right, face, and wiping mud off my backside, how
I learned to curse .

△

The Lonelies

How the signals come in
returning images . sun
pale on the walls . smiles
tender
bodies of strangers locked in that wondering thing
of almost there . wake,
preparing for that leap they are not ready to take,
pull back the cover .
One is strangely fond of another with whose body
one's body has taken pleasure .

Whatever the name of the dance,
whatever the measure.

Annuals

On a dryer day
the leaves fly up in the wind
at 7 o'clock in the coarse hills

Had we been walking alone, I would have taken your hand

About the park / buildings stand
like serious commitments
and will
stand .

The road curves slowly and the roadway's slick
The car comes to a stop at the light
firmly,
as it ought to

"It idles high," he says,
facing the buildings
clutching to keep it in gear
His foot
goes too light and it stalls

"Do you believe in signs?"
she asks him . Fate
leads us to the place only
and leaves us

It commands nothing .

△

O miles

It looks grey, but if you cut it
yeah,
        it is red . blood
passes in a circuit thru our bodies, it
makes a noise, tho we do not hear it

He covered his blood with a robe . it
hid it . Clouds
                at the last on a spring day
                run across the sky . Run,
clouds, there is no time left .

the blooded clouds
at sunset
the stone .
He
had been falling for years and when
he came to it, it was fast.

△

The Ghost

Opening the door to friends
    they come in, it's
        party time .

I stay sober, have to, I'm
    doing the serving. Go
        slow .

Friends enter what I

thought was my world,
take their parts
in it. Go

talk . the constant walk to the
icebox, the list of
what in whose glass and
to what hand .

Middle evening, a man arrives
who has or is about to take
his pants off and become
my wife's lover .

I sense his edge and don't know
what it is, I
greet him warmly .
Our friend .

Much later, all the drinkers go
Two house guests stay and he
and she .

We talk, the friends go up to bed,
I also to our room, finally
wiped by hostly tensions and
the final few stiff drinks,
we leave them there . It's three

A.M. I wake at 8:15, the
bed is
empty beside me.

△

From the Parked Car

Cigarette butt
lies smoking itself
  on the wet sidewalk
    a few moments in
a Ryoanji relationship to
a filtertip from another cigarette
and two wooden matches
  Sand is cement in a later
                incarnation.

△

Karin Lessing

Dunes

1.

Shadow-
cloths, you

pin
and un-

pin, blown,

settling, again rising

night-
drift, dunes.

2.

crests, wayfarers,

a grain, each night,

lodges another

whispers from further a-
way, from under

all this
debris.

3.

they change

though you can't see it

wind,
planter and scythe

a wandering

drought, whet-
stones.

4.

like hills
or a voice

suddenly wavering

where
it diamonds,

their meeting
slopes.

5.

medusas of sand

each word that the sea-wind once

murmured,

dropped,
grows a shadow: *as the shadow*

of a great rock
in a weary land.

6.

all
day

the fields'
hooped obstacles

of light

not a breath nor bird's cry

un-
centering the flint

crescendos.

7.

for Nicole

then greys,

the mute encounters

shells crushed, a mist
curled where your face

went under, entered

the quiet air.

8.

words, rolled ensigns

fly past, swift

as the finger that
lights them,

in dune-
light keeping distance

undiminished.

9.

past the shimmering

brow shore-line bright

in fading to drown

the lights
as if deeper than sleep

the void
unspinning itself, its colors.

10.

from wet in mist risen

orchard of stars, the almost-

rounded
night.

vaned,
a word's shadow

sand as it shifts -,
from brow to finger

lighter, falls.

△

Jed Rasula

from The Field & Garden of Circe

Sol qui illustras omnia solus.
Ocular ignition of the mask
lowered into on the face a grid
inscrutable deduced inner growth
herbs planets syncopated virtues
stone yarns radial earth supposes
these powers spirits

each under humus
cortical ferral animal man
mirrors powers one each every aspect
makes it what need to demonstrate you?

dragon unfolds your parts o sôl
these gusting potent natures ranging
one human abstract maker species
in your extrinsic face is prior
figures extracting conjugations
a pliable blue of applewood flame
doubled over all unload to light
if every all of yours firms gracing terminus
liquid more your nothing more
more nothing of speaking
"who said"

tuning equator strings up vines of gods
voluble powers impediment none
"nothing is knower"

ungraved bow drawn earth ignited
reminding tend your finger sun your spores
whirling patterning spokes it burns you touching

rouge of the lion

*

again your handled sun you hold my mind
explicate rogue of lion
lynx goat cat snake elephant
shields of animal history
pertinent genre grace
capillary beetle scarab cricket
dung of the wolf salivary nudge of the demon
elk swallow quail corruscations in flight
horns & chapels of celery & seed of the head
a turtle in its vault a genius of the compass
branch leaching cloud leaf tuning oxygen
red measures green breathing upper virtues
under vicarious coal dilating the hyacinth ruby
script percussions open plain unique prediction
learning reverence induces radical watery root
your principle mind mould eye in ocular heaven
sky of the sprouted stalk architect animals mirror
earth-reflective radii spokes & whirling signals
magnets are polar appetite puddles saucers of judgment
pitchfork in corn grains in honey
tern quail dipped mallard bill

whatever volume aquatic bones
of the chest are carpenter's shutters
draping palpable sap
redness running buttons of pus
bramble thicket swamp toad or crab scrambling on cancer
polishing osprey bones your natal certainty
nimble all wandering candid shaper clarity maiden
bashful whispering pious compassion *ejaculatrix*
suckling ocean's nodding lord squeezed milk & seed
to pertinent bodily mother & father
keeper of groves' thick sylvan dominance
nursing loamy moisture treasures pledges pooled
in upper atmosphere again in larval sun to rain
Apollo's insect consorts flying through the speckled mask
chromatic reeds & fibers
brushes dipped in animal glue & ink
angular polyps sepia sponges & other watery genesis relics

even Saturn you aroused
applied your adopted persons
animal history add to your pertinent amor
I ask your ox or camel in its ear of corn
breathing original seed dentations
liquid theatrical plectrum stroked
thrums early creatures into view
residual scorpion heraldry
musk locus broken partly potent grainy bodies
tide's complexing currents bears
on shore dipping salmon whales in the wake of the craft
frothing the water deciduous circles of temporal memory dispelling
on rocks beyond one upstream inlet spawning
rush a throng a bodily pink
transparent even the seeds
inside are naked vivid potency

cogital abundance

ampersand in
contemplator

*

the great spectacle of the mirror in transit
clouding the ground sogging earth air signs where warmed

seething dominates furrow tilled
temporal governor modulates sickle's durable twist
barley rye wheat god assembled in
barefoot patter down rows of corn
bringing giving pronouncing serrations of oak
immensity estimating space
consumed endured dissolving every
ample tractate dragons of legible trails
derived from spinning constancy
these silent currents plowed
Jove kindles breath on clouds
genius of the open sky a fire
smoke a father's always somehow aura curls

for you this assembly translates direction
hesitate your eagle monitors a pig
pelican spore's index of feast
earth on water water on rock
filament company generating awe
chameleon under the tortoise shell
a salivating ox a summer breeze the
new moon up the entrails blue
a buoyant sponge of every genre

method from which a finger on fingers
me to your all insistence
relax you leaf her explication
healing the ember glutted with color out of ash
except you rouge the lion so
as if in worth the radiant while
numbered the pleasures each by each

some under some hidden some where
cicadas & scarabs, cornice of sound
a leach of borders destinate
Alexicacus Phanes Horus
Apollo day Dionysus night
Diespiter daily
wherever virtues order ruby gripped
the seminal light bewitched her
marrow you're spine to her risen
planet a hood or cape drawn about her
lungs demonstrative shoulders amplexus
vertiginous drape these others' bodies ardors
igniting moulds around me
lively spoors her muddy tracks
educe production leaf her umbral divigation
all nature alike a queen of air

bright striking root or rod the basal gleam
interpretive lady
to your foremost nature
architect of oldest signals
answers raven or ant
salt or flour in hand pours into the lines
beaks buttons cyclones of eyes aspiring bodies

all in cursive script wet elements of wood
fossil hosting a bird only in
flight in the stone agile all-eyed shale
flat-skipping still creek eddied on a pool
where powers smear to tell it opus
to seed it spills a warm spelled hut
are peaks of water cresting on gravel or sand
breakers or pegs of a dock
who pine ravine spells down by needle
through outer bottom's autumn river in flow
corrects the tug of other moving earths
planet's farther ears of world
scruples of shaken distance
animate nipple dripping dominant content
blood the body draws up showering milk
lightened a gravel of dew on reins of floss
a spider's magnetic nest returns the
sun her egg to its cup
so quick the many-keeping sting
the loamy region crusty with larval shells
cocoons & tough dry worms tail of a
rat ear of a rabbit insect-potent
consorts of Apollo work on these
you & your Saturn old erect
capable potent formal *you*
thou bubble of ice mirror original silt
clatter of wings & legs him of the sistrum
abounding bodies in pebbles of shaken corn
dolphins nudging cords of sunny twine
run through ocean bushes hollows spells
charmed sludge turned green a predicate of magic
throngs of species suckled on yearning
twirling the upright fiber deposits them under the sun

pious hilarious regal submissive correct
a fortune drawing the smell of grapefruit on wind
rate a porous collection its shock of seed
run down on muck another lordly surface
gods are fortunate humans are shallow bridles
flexed in astral service a swell of lore
prompting the gap her peering forward *shows*
the only essential unlimit her copious will
promoter of powers personal surface of optimal states
prospered apparel all surfaces gods
whose endless world of the seed a vibrating pivot

shapes of appetite stored in eggs
buds in the opening eyes
hawks in their ballast of air
the genes' yolks wasps in hordes warm
blur of wings chromatic dyes
dragon narration collating wits
valves of the magma hours are
thickening ducts exact a flow of chunks
steam of risen early lifting the yellow
narcissus laboring phalloi spent in color
collapsing open to air & pollen resuscitant
drifting warmth & wet of the heap collaborate
previous music fury of all in sequence
formed again together in strumming resisted
strings unbudged on the bridge the hollow body
dissipates obstinate vibrating air
inscrutable traction darting abundance plucked
collapsible airs, flues, hollows, uses, uses who wears

*

out of my talks with Mercury otherwise Hermes
nights of Atlantiades born in generosity
cogent their pupae lucid the Chaldean flower
Penelope scissors pollinating orchids
her lattices heavily bulged with phlox
the ratio pouring through the window
is petals' calibrated diligence
caduceus Mercury's feathered hood
winged young enumerable divinity
tracking stars lines pointing
gathered transparent active in sight
darkening night elucidates steps do they glow
sufficient labor invention proceeds he
whispers turning his feathered stick
    "you are induced"

Memphite Athenian Olympian Egyptian
in Circe's fabric tighten your animal borrowing
suckled on herbs & fuming spices
insinuate the weight of the testicle stone
a sticky sweetness gripped with water
in urgent suction of the sun
your *hers* who wears your shadows too
as sage's mulched manure spread
hunched leaf to sniff a coast of seeds
occulted aperture percolated tavern
hollow reed through water air through gills
ease of doors and gates does prophecy
of mortal animals aggravate sky's consistency
when Hades shares his bed with mint?

△

John Taggart

Wild Blue Phlox

It was supposed to be outside
labor to cross to not there
to crystal of the wilderness
I've been careless astray also
the wilderness inside within.

So blue is my color after all
distinction of the impoverished
color of movement removement
I am moved to enflamed crystal
my color color of the crystal.

Flower in branched blue flame
flower rendered wild blue flame
flower souvenir of my error
the wilderness inside within
flower how long must we burn?

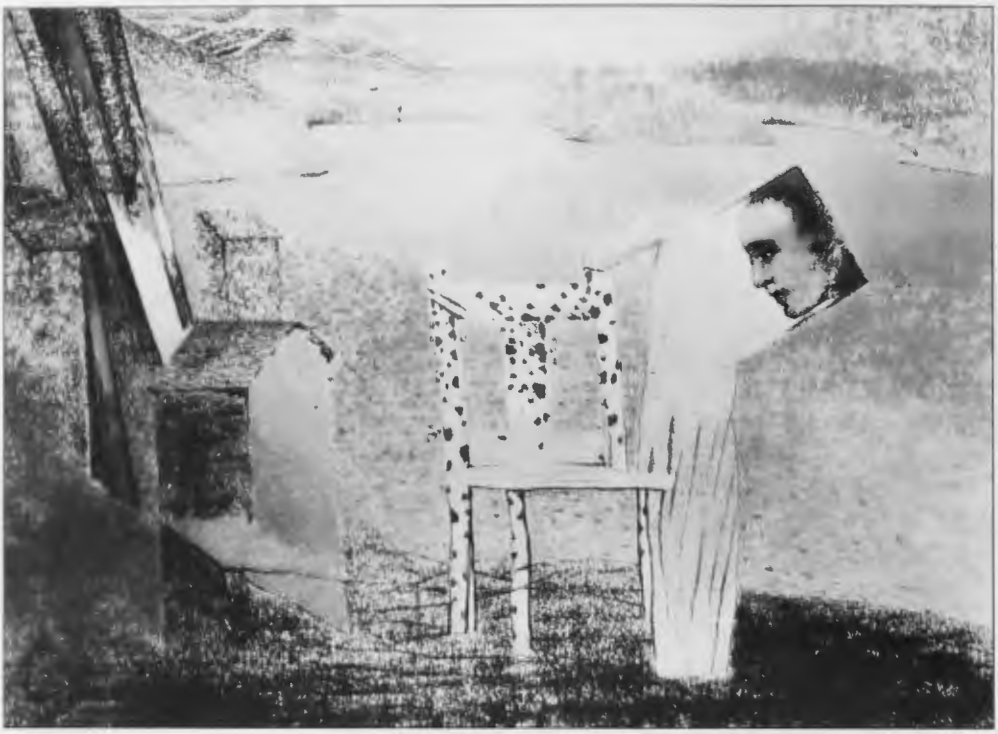
△

I R V I N G P E T L I N

Essau, 1980

The Two Josephs, 1979

The Daughters of Lot, 1980



"This is the Place," 1980

The Stolen Blessing 1, 1980

Descent, 1979

Michael Davidson

The Words Are Trapped in Doxa

Thin smoke rises from them
from the blue row houses on Walter Giesekingstrasse
next to the park
                or where you are not
thinking of anything and they throw you a ball

you have a choice: to throw it back
to throw it to a third or leave it lie
you can marry the tycoon's voluptuous daughter
and perpetuate a sexual accident
or make a deal with the CIA
                these are choices
no one makes for you and to have them
is to be alive
                but confused, how
cool it became on the patio, bugs
banging against the screen, a distant skunk
wafting over suburbia
                I hear your nervous typewriter
because, nervous, I can't be alone
and they (the bugs) want to get out
where the dark meets them (hello)
since they are dark and composing something
                we are
not understanding
                blue fish, green flash, happy tourist

school of low cruising pelican, flotilla
of ponderous seaplanes or a tree
of small birds cheeping while the cat
lies at its base on his back
"so many bites!"
it's Summer, why move
thus close eyes and stretch, words
stretch with you

the people walk about on the beach
and know nothing but they talk
we know this because their mouths move
which also kiss and suck air
from a distance
the distance is close
they write letters
to seal it.

You Are Not Great You Are Life

I don't get far I get there
where he is playing an organ
at the Episcopal Church
across the way and when the piece
is finished there is a pause
in which I wait to hear
applause but instead a car starts up
gets flooded
and keeps on starting
then Murphy makes a little noise
from outside the garage
which he wants to enter
but we don't let him is this prose
or is his will strong enough
to hold out, the organ
does not return, the car is gone
it must have been Faure, late afternoon
clouds and a slight breeze which sounds like
prose, crowds at the track are eating dinner
made out of lobster and steak
as is the custom here
tomorrow early clearing highs
in the 90's inland at the coast
they go so I go and he says like
and really good shrimp salad
we are connected to our neighbor

through the pipes, when he flushes
even late at night
we know it
what does he look like we ask
the night is large
we'd like to go on
self-analysis is fun
but tiring, coffee stimulates
but after an entire day
enervates, Friday
and the crickets ribit and someone shouts
down the street, today I hear noises
that mean nothing
trying to take the place of people
who mutter under their breaths
and sound like wind.

Watermark

I

Subaqueous light, amber light, blue refracted light
Portable island with dialect and natives
"Invest," one says, another says "breathe" and so we breathe
At night the boulevards are filled with snow
By day sun browns the grass to amber
Here are cities pressed out of vowels:
Mylae, Carthage, Rhodes and the Balearic Islands
Their bridges: floating, single span, covered, suspension
Milky Way, Peace, Rainbow, Sighs and
"The Howling Pflegethon below" by vermiform appendix
And unto Circe by ice cap, tundra and savanna
Portable word horde and the vortices or pits of such an extent
A sound as of tinkling bells while he roared
So as to be heard on shore
You are everywhere this skull is
Shortgrass, coniferous forest, river valley and oasis
A loud and gradually increasing sound
Like the moaning of buffalo upon an American prairie
Thus we came upon land for air
And here is air

II

In suspension where by water gauge gather
Portable word hoard in waterglass and through tympanum

And semicircular canals float Waterloo, single-span bridge
A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive,
In solution flood songs gathering and showing always and with velocity
Dark owl, dark eye, water tiger, water moccasin
Water rat edging around tidal water table rising and falling
Heard through a kind of shrill shriek
Such a sound as given off by water pipes
Mouth as by Seavoice, ear as hydraphone to hear
Water chestnut and closet, waterbane and distant Waterbury
By which he heard deep air, the heaving speech of air
Waterstrider our underwriter on pond writes
Disappearing traces across watercourse
Afflatus solitary taking gauge of Walden through ice
Erasable watermark we stand by and hear

III

Do you hear any thing? Do you see any change in the water?

I became aware of a loud and gradually increasing sound like the moaning of a vast herd of buffalo upon an American prairie.

But the roar of its impetuous ebb to the sea is scarce equalled by

the loudest and most dreadful cataracts

. . . and the vortices or pits are of such an extent and depth

The gulf of Bothnia

I could not help smiling at the simplicity with which the honest Jonas Ramus records, as a matter of belief, the anecdotes of the whales and the bears

The roaring noise of the water was completely drowned in a kind of shrill shriek—such a sound as . . . given off by the water pipes of many thousand steam-vessels letting off their steam all together.

A cylinder, swimming in a vortex

It happens frequently that whales come too near the stream and are overpowered by its violence; and then it is impossible to describe their howlings and bellowings

A bear once, attempting to swim from Lofoden to Moskoe was caught by the stream and borne down, while he roared terribly so as to be heard on shore

Speeding dizzily round and round with a swaying and sweltering motion and sending forth to the winds an appalling voice, half shriek, half roar such as not even the mighty cataract of Niagara ever lifts up in its agony to Heaven

IV

for Lou Harrison

The bell like world
From childhood I crawled
On deep pile Persian rugs
A beautiful language for songs
Vibrating automobile brake drums
Plumber's pipes galvanized wash tubs
Or bubbles like a sash of camel bells
That wonderful stimulating smell of lacquer
He exclaims in suspension
Five songs in the mail

Complete with nipples and hands
To play them with
Miracle practice hymn pulsation blue shirt
Buoy as watermark
It's handy
Having your own orchestra around
Blue roar Chinese gong
I have to have space around me
Gelatinous bubbles bearing "ouzel"
Or "watercourse" or "gamelan"
With a voice like a glockenspiel
And then we played the Ives' fourth
Out of water, in water
Flutes and viols

V

Here floor as hour glass orifice readying to fill the air with falling
Below Australia and higher Alaska
Ice refracting rose light across glaciers, glottals
Here air equals letter equals you floating equals
Tree equals parapluie equals shade
A color wheel and volcano, swimming in a vortex
Of the bell like world here wall is our syllable
House of Zeus, rescue from rowboat, Ibis, naked surfer
And below, salvages "which is the eye of the heart"
As they rise eyes upward and like bubbles
Carry jars and the vowels that follow

A Note on "Watermark"

The following text began with a conversation in Marseilles between the composer, Michel Redolfi, and myself over the possibilities of some type of underwater

text/music collaboration. Michel had been experimenting with sound generated through and by water and had produced a number of tapes which made use of sounds electronically synthesized (on the Synclavier) as well as sounds picked up acoustically on a hydraphone submerged in various coves around San Diego. I felt that in order to compose a text for such music I should make use of the acoustic properties of my own voice projected underwater. Michel aided me by providing a device used by skindivers called the "Sea Voice." This instrument, which consists of a plastic mouthpiece attached to a rubber bladder, is used by divers to communicate underwater. By emptying the bladder of any water or air and then speaking into it, the voice may be projected over a relatively large distance with notable clarity (but with fascinating distortions as well). When I began using the Sea Voice in a pool, I realized that certain phonemes could not be easily produced (nasals in particular), and thus the text had to be continually rearranged as the limits of the device became evident. I also realized that since I had to keep returning to the surface of the water for air, whatever text I created would have to be relatively modular, allowing for sudden abrupt truncations and interruptions. There were attendant logistical problems as well involving the physical text: how to keep it from falling apart underwater and how to keep it from floating away. It occurred to me that I might memorize the text and save some trouble, but then again I was interested in the complications of underwater poetry more than possible solutions.

When all of these problems were ironed out and the text was completed (with the help of Poe, Stevens, Schuyler, Whitman, Pound and a brief biography of Lou Harrison), Michel taped me reading it underwater while playing tapes of his own electronic music in the background. The resultant tape and another involving Jerome Rothenberg were played at the first "Underwater Concert" held at the Center for Music Experiment on the weekend of June 6, 1981.

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John Yau

Corpse and Mirror

1

When one of our citizens dies, his corpse is placed in his chariot. To help him reach his destination, his favorite horses are buried with him.

By the time dawn breaks out of its cage in the mountains, the gravediggers have gently lowered the chariot into a pit. Now, the horses must be rounded up and measured with the precision of a tailor. For each of these nervous engines must be fitted smoothly into its own grave, so that only the head with its fearful yet fiery eyes emerges above the ground, like a hand rising above the sea.

Once the gravediggers have accomplished this difficult task, they return immediately to the city. Their pace is quickened by the knowledge that inside their kitchens steam has started rising from glistening slabs of meat, tureens of brightly colored vegetables, and baskets of earth colored breads. All afternoon they have dreamed of entering a room like this, full of solace and celebration. And yet, when each of them reaches its door, they hesitate, almost as if they wished they could join the procession of heads towing an invisible cargo towards the setting sun and the next city that must be reached before dawn escapes once more.

If the man's sins outweigh his acts of kindness, the horses will eventually collapse and blood will stream from their nostrils. Beneath the moon the man will revive, but he will have become so hideously ugly since his last breath left him that no one — not even the most generous of samaritans — will be able to offer him food and shelter. He

will remain in this condition, doomed to wander in the desert like a vulture without wings.

The only way he will be given another chance is if one of his neighbors dreams about him in the week following his death. In the dream the man must give his exact location beneath the stars. At dawn, the neighbor must ride out to the spot and see if he is there. If he isn't, the kind hearted neighbor must dismount immediately and begin praying, for he has been deceived once again. Death has not prevented the deceased from continuing along the path he chose in life. If the neighbor doesn't pray at once, he must give up all hope of ever finding his way back to the city. The dead man has chosen him for a companion, and he has been foolish enough to accept.

2

When one of our citizens dies, his head is cut off and placed inside a mirror-lined box. The box is tightly sealed, allowing no light to enter its interior, and placed in the least used room of the house. Each night someone from the family must sleep beside the varnished cube in which the head resides. After two weeks have eclipsed, the box can be buried beside the rest of the corpse.

However, if everyone in the family bears a grudge against the deceased, an anger so deep that death has not removed its poison, they may burn the box and joyfully kick the ashes and bone fragments into the river. The decision must be agreed upon unanimously and it must be reached without being mentioned. Finally, once the ashes begin floating downstream, the deceased's name can never be brought up in conversation again.

Once the head is placed inside the box, the eyelids will push against the weight of dreams and sleep until they open. It will never occur to him that his head has been severed from his body. Instead, he will believe he has been kidnapped and buried in the sand. Before him is a road stretching to the horizon. Above him the moon patrols the walls of its vast domain. Escape is impossible. By morning the vul-

tures will begin circling patiently in the sky.

Soon he begins rambling, imagining his mouth is parched and full of sand. This is a signal. Whoever is sleeping in the room must awaken immediately and listen to the voice echoing inside the box. What happens next depends on who has died. If instructions are uttered, they must be followed faithfully. If a confession is made, it must be heard without judgement. Whatever is said must be kept a secret.

If you are sent to another city, you must saddle your horse at dawn and leave without speaking to anyone. Once you are there, you must find the house the voice described. A house similar to all the houses on all the winding streets in this haphazardly designed city and yet in one essential way different. When the door opens you will know why. However, if the person who answers the door is puzzled by your request, then you have failed to listen to the instructions carefully enough. In this case, you must return to your house without speaking to anyone along the way. You cannot sleep beside the box again, but must remain inside your room until the two weeks are over.

One night, after the box has been buried or burned, you will hear something outside your window, inside your dream. The words may not be words at all, but the fluttering of a bird caught in a snare. A broken pot. A bucket falling into a well. Listen carefully. He may need to speak to you once again.

Corpse and Mirror II

1

When a comet passes over the town, whoever sees it knows a corpse will be found at the edge of the forest shortly after dawn.

Last week, an old woman, who embroiders tablecloths with human hair, saw one from her kitchen window, and knew her grandson had wandered too far from the road leading home.

If they are lying face up with their eyes open and clear, as if they are still puzzled by the last thing they saw, then they must be cremated and their ashes scattered over the lake.

If, however, they are lying face down with their eyes closed, as if they had dozed off while recalling the intricate lattice of a pleasant hour they passed through years ago, then they must be buried immediately. No stone must mark the spot.

Otherwise, both the deceased and its discoverer are doomed to remember a moment, its sunlit basket of fruit, as if each drop of significance would forever elude them.

Some find it impossible to believe their life is chained to a comet. If they were to submit to the possibility that the stars have exiled us from their provinces, then they must accept that the unfolding story will go on without them.

In the afternoon you see them huddled in the dark cafes. Sometimes, their mumbling reaches the street they way the sound of dry branches

rubbing against each other pierces a dream.

Then one is awakened by a comet passing overhead; and once again the light echoing in our eyes reminds us that we were meant to wander from one day to the next, like dogs without masters.

2

When you break a mirror, you must count up the pieces to see if they add up to your age. If they do, you must change your name and leave town at once.

Do not speak to anyone you meet on the road until you have reached a town, where everyone speaks a language different from your own. Otherwise, you will wake up in someone else's coffin.

Do not tell anyone your name until you have forgotten every affectionate endearment you were summoned by as a child. Otherwise, one morning, the only voice you hear will be your own, echoing down the long hallways beneath sleep.

The voice will begin telling you a story aboiut a child who hears someone calling his name. No matter which way the child turned, the source of the voice eluded him. And, as the story enters daylight's tenement, you will realize that you are the child, and it is your voice that is calling.

Corpse and Mirror III

1

When the movie ends and the lights come on, the audience is puzzled by the sight of a corpse reclining on a velvet sofa in clothes of human hair. Each item has been carefully sewn, so that the hair resembles a white silk shirt and a three piece wool suit flecked with gold.

On the mahogany table is a brass ashtray in the shape of a bulldog. Smoke curls from its nostrils as if it had swallowed a cigarette. An emerald butterfly glistens on his left index finger. In his bluish gray hands is a book whose pages are made of glass.

The next afternoon I drive to the outskirts of town, where there is a restaurant named after a traitor famous for his ingenious disguises. Many of its patrons think that even the name is a disguise and he still moves among us.

I have never been able to remember the plot of the movie, only the colors it traced against the arch of the bridge connecting the room's two halves together. On one side shines the movie and on the other sits the corpse. Passing back and forth between them is a conversation made of human hair.

2

When the movie ends and the lights come on, the audience is puzzled by the sight of a large oval mirror leaning haphazardly against a

column which wasn't there at the beginning of the evening's entertainment.

Scarves stop fluttering, and, one by one, hands drop nervously into laps, like birds patroling the perimeters of their nests. Mouths twist beneath the receding waves of whispers, almost as if there were a place they could hide.

A reflection appears in the mirror, though the stage is empty. The men see a woman brushing her hair, while the women see a man trimming his beard.

Later, no one will be able to agree on what they saw. The memory of one event will become so entangled with the memory of another, until all that remains is the ache of trying to recall a moment, whose slanting room of sunlight has long since fallen in. By then the mirror will have vanished and the movie will have begun, this time in pieces.

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Nathanial Tarn

Three Months in Which to Live

Making room for love in the morning
if it will come by, rather than search it out
after "the work" is done: declaring *it* the work,
letting the poem be, declaring *it* the work,
in the morning, out of the shadows
the light has such a list of at that hour
to summer's promise-crammed humanity –
while we have that illusion of hope around us,
a cage adventuresome with birds:
the boundless liberty of the hunt for words
in which all things will finally rest at peace.

Opening Out a Line at Mandelstam's

In that blessed weariness where he has done
the best he can with you world, falling apart
as he conjoins, conjoining as he falls apart,
not once the two meeting together: in concord,
amity — that synthesis from which they say
everything flowers — but what is this
(on the edge of the worker's sleep usually)
when he has spent a rare full day at labor
sensing, secret, mysterious, that recompense:
to feel the whole weight of oneself as a man!
Birds inside forest, like a cage,
forest inside the world, like a cage, world
in the arms of someone you would call a goddess
were you not so sure you had seen her someplace
almost recently, had you no reason to believe
you might have loved her once a while back,
or been in debt to her for friendship
of the most comforting kind: around you,
all pleasure — sounds of birds, beyond earshot,
guessed at only, as if by a deaf composer —
lights up whole evenings, causing rare laughter,
inexplicable mirth, *joie de vivre* your friends
disbelieve and find it hard to credit
while the centuries surround you like fire.

Energetically Singing Against Voracious Earth

In his weariness to death he hears beautiful song
simple and ravaged like the figure of liberty
in energetic youth. When all noise has died down
song sings itself with the earnest of snow in winter
causing everything to disappear into its poverty.
A song he has been waiting to hear all his life:
a simple, one-way song, knowing no more of love,
wit, ambition — but now content
merely to be itself. A bird in the branches
passing over the canal to other similar branches:
is the song from his own mouth to his own ear.
No one else on earth will ever hear it —
and it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter
in any way familiar to the voracious earth!

And Even the Republic Must Have an End

Hearing a voice inside himself, not quite his,
he hears it with gratitude different from his –
for the effort to keep his own voice together
has for the longest time remembered been painful.
What a comfort there are now two voices not one.
Two voices twinly, like the breasts of a girl.
Soon he'll be trying to keep the voices to two
for others multiply. It is the many-breasted
mother of darkness wraps him. Two would have been
sufficient: he could live with two at some length.
The dialectic, though painful, can be managed.
More would split rivers, failing in sea reach,
split forests and mountains on the borders,
shatter the sky's blue bowl into the mirrors of
a thousand pulses, rive the green, hillen earth.
Everywhere the honeland lies in ruins abone him.

The Tree of Another World

At this moment, when all of human beauty
forgathered in them as it left them, as they stood
on the threshold of age, faces falling apart
spot by spot, fold by fold, scar by scar of flesh,
the minute details escaping all eyes but their own
(now they see themselves alone, now together),
how could there be a time more poignant for knowing
that love cannot be plumbed, that they are stapled
together like twin texts falling into the depthless,
two leaves at autumn which the air has caught
and locked in hazardous embrace for the long descent,
leaves the withering gods read casually as they pass by,
waiting for another world to be born from another tree.

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Ron Silliman

Skies II

for Alan Bernheimer

HEAT IS THE CONSEQUENCE of light (cats sleep under parked cars), the old women look small & bundled, wrapped in overcoats on their way to mass (I hear a rooster crow in the city). Running through it (straight at the sun in the cypress), field's dew soaks my shoes (fresh dogshit glistens wet in the light). A glow to the bay, above it (low mist steaming), a woman in a cotton skirt & sandals hurries between the jets of water sprinkling the park, a small white pup rolls on its back on the tennis court (downtown, smog's gray layer awaits, halo to highrise). The hosed-off walks of the shops shine (schoolkids & clericals bunch at the busstop, the 10 Monterey slowly grinding its way to the top of the hill), the grocer propping a newsrack against his open door. Form is the flower's fate, closed in a morning fog (cat sniffs a caterpillar on the dusty path), oceanic shush of traffic on the freeway in the valley, a fly wrestles with a web. Birds in the fir tree chirping (dawn softened by clouds to a gradual increase in light), the radio traffic copter glides low over the road. A cluster of flies in the morning buzz about the corner of the yard, lone gull foregrounded against the browns of the next hill, Juan standing on the porch landing to watch (later you hear their hum in the tree, but can't see them), wind

bangs the door shut, low cloud's tide flowing steadily in. Yellow brick seminary, silhouette in the fog (pigeon pecks at crust in the gutter), a man in a sweatshirt touching his toes on the lawn (car warming up sends forth blue billows), rising sun peeks thru, lighting the underside of this huge cloud, gray & white & pink mixed together. The dew on the cobweb gleams (she runs the Fiat to warm it up), two girls in parochial school skirts (he runs in circles around the track), the moon in the sky at dawn is full. Sit in chair on porch in sun (two doors over, sound of a hammer), clothesline begins at the window (valley vibrates softly to the jet's passing roar). Everything blisters in a rare heat (leaves on the plum tree curl & crackle, the growing coleus bangs at the glass), in the street people walk around with one hand shading their eyes, behind the broken windows & boarded up doors of the abandoned house I hear a power saw. At night with stars out those with convertibles show them off (a war on the porches of water balloons, water pistols), baby blue Rolls with the words *Low Class* in grey on the door (tonight everybody sleeps with the windows open, under not more than a sheet). Waist-high in the froth, children tempt the rip-tide (barely possible, but for the boat in the distance, to discern the horizon), smell of cocoa butter (large straw hats). Staring for a moment out the window into the blue glare (its shape a 6-sided figure, three the frame, the rest the conjunction of porch & neighboring roof), I am unable to see the page or make out the words on it (plum tree's branch bobs into view)(play of the web of shadows over the dirt in the yard), the sound of a logging truck on the freeway below, large, is specific (ditto the rev of a dirt bike mounting the slope), Chicanas, Filipino couples, an occasional older Chinese woman, bundled & crowded on the bus, Bibles in hand (dog in the small yard stalks its fences), Tom in a grey sweatshirt on his way to Jim's Donuts for breakfast (bathmat 'dries' on the rail in the fog, she waters the carrots "in case". Red garbage truck emerges from the fog, halfsize yellow schoolbus following behind (beads of water on the inside of the bathroom window after a shower), fly carves a zigzag path in the air of the room (with a rubber-edged window scraper, he wipes

the moisture from the windshield of the van), the birds will stay quiet longer on a dark day. The sun in the dew in the tree (because one's just risen, the other yet to burn off): image of a million diamonds (the pastels peculiar to this hour, say, to the homes of the far hill, a consequence of dawn's steam), I see my own breath, hear the clothesline pulleys, a jet flying west shines in the light. Straight up it's sunny, but to the south you can't see to the end of the block (cat emerges from fog), gull's shrill cry absorbed by the sound of the jet, schoolbus stops in front of the house & honks. Gradually light penetrates the dusty bamboo shade, casting its striped glare (cigar smoke circles the hanging spider plant), the kitchen light left on is useless, the dog's small yap never stops (sound of ice, melting, rearranging itself in the glass). At night under high fog the city casts a light that reflects halfway between pink & a dull orange (sodium vapor), the wind marks a turn in weather, on this block the curtains are no more than cloths tacked up over the windows (at dawn a man begins to patch the shingles on his roof), the shush of the valley's rush hour traffic. Briefly rain scars the window (the broken sky at night sits darkened behind the illumined clouds), that streaked & flattened effect as if the clouds had been "bottomed off" (the slice of a vast blade), cheesy, piled high & tumbling one into another (he stands on the porch contemplating which jacket...), then, just as sudden & brief, a flash of sun. The wet ground is darker (the green tops of carrots stand in high contrast), thru the white of a cobweb I see a half-dozen small clouds, each a deep grey at the bottom (one hides the sun), white glare above, a jet threads its way behind them, traveling in the opposite direction (west). The way black smoke of a structural fire drifts over an intersection (the buzz of a sportscar from down in the valley), the cat on the window sill, the young girls in parochial school skirts (thick, heavy, rolling, not smoke at all). The sharp shadows cast west from the hill of white houses (small, discrete) grows less distinct (the sun rises from a plum tree), the parakeet chirrups from its cage at the window (a flock of what rushes partway thru the valley, only to turn back, then back again?), & tho the ones above it are streaked & dark,

one cloud over the hilltop is stark white. The windows steamed by a shower, the rectangular sky is reduced to a tone (hearing the door open, the cat on the upper deck of the back porch meows & hurries down), the garden stays damp for days, this must be a regular take-off pattern (so many jets heading west), you can't leave both doors open at once (wind rips the poster from the kitchen wall), an orange monarch is loose in the roses (the sun in the cobwebs bejewels the fence). The crack in the glass in the door on the porch halves the sky (human barometer pressures blood), pigeons have taken over the closed-down bowling alley (an old woman sprinkling crumbs in the gutter attracts thousands, she's at the eye of a whirling feathery storm), but this glass is frosted (I make out the steps by the shadow) & the dog at the corner has begun to bark. The first glow (pale yellow-orange tinged with purple) appears unnatural (screened by a bamboo shade) ahead as it is of the sun that only now nears the horizon (people sit in their cars in the dark, letting the engines run), I sit at a table crowded with violets & ferns, watching the new light catch the thin, fine field of hair on the back of these familiar hands (cat at the back door scratches to get in). Moisture on the cold glass (political posters taped to it start to slump) catches the sun for a second, weak point in the (fading) fog, colors of the houses (buff, olive, white) half-pulse in the unstable light, a peristalsis (that door which slammed, unseen, belongs to a car), first Saturday hammering begins. Catlike, headlights thru the valley fog glimmer & inch forward in the morning traffic, roosters & dogs squawk together (the big half-shepherd chasing the terrified jogger thru the field for the fun of it), my breath (visible) the color of the sky (hummingbird perfectly still on the plum tree's branch), cat licks his paw & wipes his face. Wisps turn red, then orange, white as the blue softens (what fog there is is camped in that furthest gulley — you look down on it), colors emerge in the garden (a thousand greens, each distinct), in a driveway a car sits in a blue cloud of its own gases, a pile driver rings in the distance, that jet's body catches the full light of the sun (fat & orange in the horizon's shimmering smog). As the dull haze slowly rises what is first visible (bleached by the glare) is that

which lays closest to the ground (like pigeons, the women gather in front of Kingdom Hall, waving their magazines), a man walks a leashed Afghan across the diamond in the park (two small flies whirl around one another in the center of the room), these tiny stucco houses, side by side by side. At the hilltop (back into fog) shadows fade, the eucalyptus drips with dew (a woman is taking her daughter to wait at a busstop), already salsa is beginning to emerge from the open garage door, but one block down the shadows are sharp & leaning, slanting across the small squares of lawn. Like dirty cotton absorbing light & heat (the dogs whining in their yards at the smell of rain), the carpenter leaning to spit out the window, the cat in the basement (thru the blinds all I see is the yellow of the schoolbus), but still the clothesline pulley squeals. Between storms the clouds are still, the gunmetal sky a compromise, a high dome (a low wind pushes dirt up from the batter's box), so cold your ears start to hurt & (inside) the rain begins. Three-quarter moon in the clouds in the tree (in the morning a rich blue everywhere but for the low gray wall far to the west, the moon smaller & turned now (chip on the bottom), ready to set), the damp grass cold to sit down on. Unseen jet in the sky balances unseen traffic in the valley, the clatter of the garbagemen a block away (the glare in the haze as you run seems everywhere, breath made visible). The point at which the jet's noise becomes pure, deep vibration (in the valley, in the jaw), the windows to the kitchens of all these homes (joined by their back yards) thrown open (an old man steps forth from the basement to empty a bucket at the rear of his garden, wearing knit cap & sweater on a hot day), this cluster of unpainted porches. Under the freeway where the pigeons live in perpetual shadow, white-green droppings caked everywhere & into the sunbrust street of small stucco houses (buff, olive, white), the hour when the old women slowly walk small dogs to & from the gutter (a man uses a special device to wipe the dew from his windshield), shadows shortening as the sun moves up (garbage cans line up on the sidewalk are empty now)(it seems smaller as it rises higher, less orange, more yellow). A high gray smear, a stain (far to the North & at sea a storm),

dampens light, hissing cats stalk each other (circling on the porch), old dogshit hardens & crumbles on the walk, that fern yellowing in the window. In the morning the girls in the parochial school outfits carry their sweaters in the crooks of their arms (the dog is frantic, barking about something), thru open kitchen windows hear forks bang against plates (small bird on the clothesline chirps). The air visibly thickens (grey, heavy, hotter, damp)(in the valley sirens pass) so that greens flatten, blend together (the drums of the Bee Gees right thru the wall from the house next door), dirt on the window filters light. November sun, the man hosing his car on the street (the rear door on the left is missing, patched with cardboard), the brown dog leaps to dodge the spray, the woman tells her son to come indoors & not to play with "that horrible little girl anymore" (the dog joins her on the concrete porch where she eats a slice of bread, a white Volkswagen circles the block twice seeking a place to park (I see all this thru the dying fern)), the sky is nearly invisible. The reduction of sight thru fog (autos reduced to headlights at half a block, buildings reduced to shadows), there is no outside, little distance (the damp collects into droplets on the leaves of the eucalyptus & rains when wind shakes the branch), machines & even cats move slowly, cautiously, sound fails to travel (alone on the hilltop park by the ghostly tennis court, half-seen)(heavy jewelry of dew in the cobwebs). Heavy feminine arms poke thru the open window, clipping children's t-shirts onto the clothesline (the squawk of an unexpected goose), this village of backyards (dense with chaotic greenery, old collapsing fences), the air between this hill & the next visible in that it filters light, mutes color (shimmering haze of warmth itself), the sun touching only its hilltop but fully bathing this southern slope (a white cat with pink ears steps along the fence). The gloom. Tomatopaste dogstool (a thicker pen), a thinner pen, those houses in the blowing fog (smokey), the sky, the sky at a distance. Hummingbirds in the plum tree (the window streaked with rain), across the street thru an open window too-red flesh glows from a television (a sort of lamp), he hurries down the street carrying something under his levi jacket past the woman with

the rose umbrella. As the haze fades small flies are illumined hovering under the porch (the Brandenburg concertos drift out a window), footsteps descend the stairs (thousands of tiny butterflies rise out of the yard next door), his shadow crosses the window (an automobile windshield on the next hill catches the sunlight, reflecting it here), huge orange monarch settles on the spinach & is still (the jet in the plum tree exits, those tiny butterflies are termites). Under the eucalyptus night's dew remains morning's puddle (indentations on the tennis court), a thorny vine probes between the boards of the fence (single strand of web stretches in the breeze, visible when it 'catches' the light (at night that plane would only be a cluster of lights moving quickly between stars)), you close one eye to look in that direction (knights do, nice stew), spiders in the parsley. High small scoops of cloud flatten into a grey filter (the light diffuse) softening colors in the yards (the weight of a rug pulls on the clothesline), the slow progress of the garbage truck (a jet emerges from the screen), the breath of the garbagemen like smokestacks. A 'window' in the sky (for liftoff), a large wooden box the size of a refrigerator by the *no dumping* sign, the word 'fragile' stenciled on upside down, the wet grass would soak our pants to sit down on, mud's slipperiness (so he will 'rise to the occasion,' join the sky)(below, clouds rest on the sea — "we are going thru turbulence at this time")(the higher clouds are filmy, the lower patchy, thicker & west lies a gray-white blanket over the ocean)(reflection of the sun on water mottled by tides)(thru a filter of clouds: more clouds, below which brown squares of land)(glare of the sun on the wing out the window, the shadows of clouds across the gleam on the green surface of the sea (ocean)). Still, by the ocean, water & air meet, a dull horizon (the bank of clouds having moved south & over), the humidity foretells a slight chance of rain, kids bicycling their way to school, the sharp cliffs of La Jolla visible between houses. Different trees here shape the 'stupid sky' (lighter as if drier, blanched, but small dark clouds hang over Mission Bay), stunted (a typewriter in a dorm room 3 flights up stops its intermittent chatter), operations (how low meets high pressure, forming

clouds) & systems (from the ocean & south by way of Alaska or Oregon, or up from Baja), sounds dissolve quickly in the friction of sea's breeze, pigeons & gulls tiny baffles turned loose in the air. Down a slope of iceplants & across a railroad track to the cliffs of Del Mar (the sky perfectly a dome), the sun, setting, grows red & swollen (behind us the cypress trees give the bottom of the sky a deckled edge), one small cloud well to the south, the evening fog invisible until the sun is directly behind it, when suddenly the cottony bank is a luminous white rushing in our direction (broken by the fog, the sun sets in fragments), a middle-school cross-country team jogs past, following the track (a man named Hillel does Tai Chi). The solitude of afternoon (voices & birdsongs), the slightest trace of high clouds streaked across the deep blue (which birds were those, grouped in a broken line, moving so quickly just barely over the ocean water (we took this as a search for food), dissolving into the general mottle of the bay (which shocked us, making us wonder if all that speckledness was not life, a vast city with no land)), the small plane of a weekend pilot whirrs past, bugs so small you don't see them if they're not in the light, a breeze trapped in the plum tree struggles to get free. The gray gathers (not clouds as yet, but high streaks, smears, amassing), the sun muted, shadows softened in their afternoon slant (no breeze at all). The sun, tho risen, watery in the eastern haze, a yolk (dogs yap to hear the cry of geese), colors filling in on the eastern slope of the hill, the first glistening of the damp grass (now gulls call down in the valley). Smell of won ton district amid the odors of the alley wrapped in fog, morning's cooking (squeal of a clothesline pulley), the dog crosses the street to sleep in the sun. The valley, an inverse dome, deepens the sky (today's many small clouds drifting together, high up), the insistent thunder of a low helicopter (the plane in front of the muted sun a silhouette), when the sun rises from behind a thick cloud to behind a thin one, a diffuse brightening, false sunrise, occurs. The exact song of certain birds (a drawn-out 'whistle' followed by a burst of chirps) fills the air (which ones are they?), an odd haze blurs distance (you make out the tower atop Candlestick Hill, mere

shadow on the horizon, solely because you expect it). A winter chill (the moon full, visible thru the fog), steam from the shower pours into the kitchen (carries a cup of coffee thru the yard like a torch), ducks in the city. Rain releases odors in the garden, then stops as the air cools (all the moisture on the freeway alters its tone), not one bird visible in the grey sky (but we hear them in the trees). Leaves fall from the plum tree, drifting into the snail-chewn spinach (the bright glare whiter because filtered thru a thin cloud (then shadowy as a thicker one passes)), from that chimney (not a chimney but a rusty brown pipe) I see smoke (it dissolves in the strong wind immediately), flashes of sunlight come & go (the soil is damp, drops on the parsley glow). Day's first light yellows the world (moon full in the blue sky), the sun's golden flashes off the windows of Mount Davidson (garbagemen wheel their huge barrels down an empty street), the blue lightens, colors pale to a conventional neutrality (not to be betrayed till twilight). The haze on the bay (the horn of a locomotive), the frost on the windows (the cat on the rooftop nuzzling the drainpipe), gulls in a loose formation, not clouds but the thinnest film of white (one gull well to the rear). White cat on the fence regular as a rooster (haze so fine that just the sharpness is missing from those homes on the next hill) (uniform construction, but no order to the pastels), the shadows of morning), a friend on his way to work stops to say hello, a jet deafens the sky (we pause before continuing speaking), a firetruck in no apparent hurry goes by. A fly bangs at the window (the fly bangs at a window), the warm haze deepens, the next hill half-hidden, the dog goes from child to child getting pets (staring at the sun with my eyes shut, a complex web of orange arcs, vibrating, continually changing, impossible to focus on, seems to appear), but inside the livingroom is shadowy, the sun not yet in the west (cat sleeps in the easy chair), the wild birds of the backyards absent from the treeless street. The haze deepens further (the hill a shadow broken only by the sun reflected off windshields), the whine of powertools swells the November air (the sound of dishes clattering in a sink) warm enough for baseball (the sun shines on this ink before it sinks into the paper).

(You waken to the smell of rain.) Late breakfast in winter means only three more hours of sun, the shadow of steps upon steps, the glistening television antenna (I hear water flush thru the pipes of the next house)(the valley already shaded, you see that bird because it's caught the light), this brightness without warmth, the sculpted shade of a Cypress on Silver Avenue stands out. Thru the white cotton curtain a sequence of reds, oranges, yellows light up the sky until, going beyond, the clouds (high, thick) are a luminous yellow-white (then this moment of dawn too is breached & the sky suddenly settles into a dull blue-gray). Light planes, small trucks, rain, footsteps upstairs ("That's all the news you need on a Tuesday morning"), the community of sound fills the air. In the kitchen the yellow plastic bucket fills (rain filtered by roof), the interiority of the world encased in storm, the sky not an even gray but patches of dark & light (on the freeway a siren). A final shower from a (not quite) cloudless sky, lingering pools of damp on the wooden front steps (steaming fence), concrete dries faster than asphalt. Crisp clarity (breath visible even indoors), frost on the windows goes damp & starts to clear (the privacy of a sinus headache: weather is "out there," distant)(the sun, not visible from this location in the house, slipping behind a cloud briefly, the entire street dims & greys, then brightens again just as quickly, then darkens). The limited warmth of a fragile sun (clouds drift), brightness is an element of color (but the relations remain fixed, tho certain tones (white, yellow) are accented in the light)(none of this affects the sound of a neighbor's hammer or the vibrations of a massive jet), I watch the flecked brown paint of the steps as the sun emerges from the grillwork of cloud. Thru the clear air a cool breeze sifts (she sits under the plum tree on a white stool, carding wool), carrying with it distant voices off radios (the tone is never the same live)(impossible to hear what they say), the sound of a shower from the house as a window steams up (a small airplane, a pulley song, the pull of the wool through the rows of pinlike teeth). Shadow of two clothespins on a line in a breeze drifts over the frosted glass of the bathroom window (no shape to the sun, the glare too intense to sort

one out), a cloudless day & chill (less smog on a Monday), a little red-haired dog smells the weeds clumping up out of a crack in the driveway. Two hands, thrust out a kitchen door, snap dust from a towel (coffee steams from its cup on the porch railing), one part of the sky (southeast) is whitest (the sun at its core), a deeper blue the further away one gets (webs of clotheslines in all these yards, half-tended fuchsias, a woman sweeping in her patio, cats on the fence), the tree barely rustles in the light breeze. A sooty haze reduces the hills to planes, one over another (in spite of the cold the roofer wears a t-shirt), the colorless light of an average sun, a flock of small birds over the valley abruptly changes direction. Spiders in the spinach (the yard is a civilization), the air is still (mid-morning, mid-week), the hush of valley traffic, one bird somewhere in the plum tree (I sit on the stoop with my eyes shut, feeling the sun on my arms, on my legs), the song of water in the pipes, the breeze in the chard. The smell of tar in the dull haze (the chorus of dogs, the distant growl of big trucks), gulls over the valley, the cloudless sky is nearly white. The haze only deepens, chalky shadows (even the flash of sun off a windshield is diffused), the smell of pine & fir in the air, spiderweb's shape is determined by the frame it's joined to (white cat tiptoes along the fence), broken spider glistens in the breeze. The sun directly over the flat haze creates a dull glare (cupped hands shade eyes), the street itself shining, the world silent (imagine all the people), in the gutter wadded, half-dissolved papers blow in the warm wind. A gull over the valley circles (the cumulative shush of traffic, no one part standing out), the loud flapping of wings close up (the first light against the east side of these houses), the trees filled with chirping, the sun's warmth as it comes through a shirt. Squeal of a clothesline pulley (a thin fog, the dew burning off the grass), two cats, wrestling, tumble thru the carrots (dog begins barking)(neither the butterfly nor the jet seems to notice). The gray light of day (voices come thru the window, children on their way to school, someone clearing their throat), impossible to find the juncture between this listless haze & the few patchy clouds (mere suggestion of the next hill), a parakeet's

hysteria, a power saw. One ray of muted light (very white) angles thru the thickening clouds (only the inmost branches of the plum tree still bear leaves)(the cat is sneezing)(today's traffic very loud). Red sky at morning (scoops amid clouds), a blonde woman raises a small boy up in her arms (the hill's slope green with new grass), storm's bank clearing. The glare in the warm haze bleaches garden's colors (buzz of a small plane), shimmer of a spider's thread in the plum tree light.

△

B O O K R E V I E W S

Pre-Faces & Other Writings and *Vienna Blood & other poems.*
JEROME ROTHENBERG.
New Directions. 1980 and 1981.

by GEORGE F. BUTTERICK

Pre-Faces is a collection of Jerome Rothenberg's introductions to his several anthologies, many of his commentaries from within those anthologies, and other statements of poetics, beginning and ending with interviews in which he further advances his views. What we are offered is a useful compendium of concerns that have occupied American poets since at least 1960. The earliest writing in the collection is an exchange of letters with Robert Creeley on "deep image." Creeley is more incisive, though Rothenberg is more comprehensive, and this is true throughout the volume.

He charts it all, the great "tradition," the progeny and phylogeny. Not in prose as rapid as Olson's in all its bobsled twistings, or Snyder's wizardly crispness, but no one has *summarized* it all better, synthesized and incorporated it, while urging it on. It is a tradition truer than the Leavis/Eliot one he grew up against, which would simply exclude him (right at the door) and which persists in many forms—publishing contests, university appointments—today. His is a tradition deeper, back to "the first mythologized shamans of the paleolithic cultures" (he's got it all in caps, to celebrate it), in which he has been a wakeful participant these past twenty years. He is the quartermaster of postmodernism. No one has created anthologies as tools, "Jaws-of-Life" rescue devices for freeing areas of thought, in quite the same way he has. He abhors the fixed, the absolutist, the czarist. He is not magesterial: "The only absolutes for poetry are diversity and change (and the freedom to pursue these)." His views are neither niggardly nor niggling. In the current floor-model term, they are holistic: "not 'a house divided against itself' but contemporaries working toward mutual competition." He is willing to hold hands with philosophy and religion, anthropology and science.

He was wise to begin with a dialogue with William Spanos, professor of posthumanism and editor of *Boundary 2*; it is both a means to measure his growth and an outline of what's to come. One sees there that it is Rothenberg himself "who keeps raising alternative propositions, eluding the trap of his own visions as he goes." The "pre-face" for the anthology *Revolution of the Word*, with its brief history of twentieth-century poetry, reads especially balanced and staunch. It is a very useful crib-sheet for Avant-Garde 1. Throughout the volume, he honors mystics and madmen, yet does not appear very mad himself on the page. He belongs to the contemplative order rather than the flagellants. "Recover" is his commitment, and one theme holds clear: poetry persists "as process, as preparation: it is evolving, contradictory, not fixed or rigid but 'with an infinite capacity for taking on new forms,'" while the aim of poetry itself is "liberation from spiritual & political oppression." The topics are all of vital concern: the "oral impulse" or recent poetry, the mythic and "primitive," "ethnopoetics," "tribal" culture, the poet as shaman, seers and "see-ers," process poetry, the poem-as-performance. It's very usable as a collection, complete with an index and cross-referencing.

Nevertheless, there are two areas of uneasiness, interrelated. First, how wide is it necessary to extend the definition or boundaries of poetry? At the same time, what if the examples given are not always the most convincing or even the most self-sustaining? Beyond these considerations, there is not the slightest doubt of the necessity of his position. Let me elaborate.

One of the most important essays on poetics in the volume is "New Models, New Visions: Some Notes Toward a Poetics of Performance" (1977). In giving what I believe to be an accurate account of recent literary and cultural history, Rothenburg also, in passing, questions the appropriateness of a few very familiar and elementary terms. When faced with various "ritual models of performance" such as "happenings," mantric meditations, "earthworks," "dreamworks," and "bodyworks" ("including acts of self-mutilation and endurance that seem to test the model"), he questions terms like "painting," "sculpture," and even "poetry" itself. But—the question may well be—why? Why not simply reserve the term "poetry" for something other than what he proposes and practices? Why not call his work "performance" or "language-event" instead of poetry? Why not *reserve* the term, rather than expand it? Why not preserve it for any or all of those old definitions of poetry—whether "a meter-making argument," "jigging veins of

rhyming mother wits," "a drainless shower of light," or "as if the top of my head were taken off"—none of which do the "Horse Songs" of the Navajo Frank Mitchell, for example, particularly accomplish.

Rothenberg reports with approval the blurring of boundaries or distinctions. In "New Models, New Visions," he observes: "that there is a continuum, rather than a barrier, between music and noise; between poetry and prose (the language of inspiration and the language of common and special discourse)... that there is no hierarchy of media... that qualitative distinctions... are no longer operational..." (A fellow said to me the other day, "I read *my* poetry in the *Wall Street Journal*," meaning the market prices, and—given Rothenberg's generous guidelines—who was *I* to deny him?) Rothenberg also writes: "There is a move away from the idea of 'masterpiece' to one of the transientness and self-obsolescence of the art-work." Another visitor, older fellow, said, "As my time runs out, I want nothing *but* 'masterpieces,'" and even my own eye finds too easily the "slob" in "self-obsolescence."

Why *extend* the definition of poetry at all, why not reserve it, conserve it even, hold it to its traditional all-or-nothing character, the synaptic flash that fixed all of us there in the first place? Who gains most by withholding judgment, the good artist or the bad artist? One might begin to balk. Often the theory risks being more interesting than the poems, as in the translation inspired by *germatria* or kabbalistic number play, such as this one entitled "Messiah":

Snake.

Or this one, entitled "The Soul of Adam":

Lilith.

The odd things about the avant-garde, an objection might run, is that it is perfectly willing to adopt other traditions, even the strictures of such traditions—wither *haiku* in 1914 or *germatria* in 1978—and yet forego what is called the "tradition" of such individual talents as, say, John Donne, just because it was once touted (tainted) by Eliot. Surely Pope's "Essay on Man" has as much intrinsic wisdom in it as the *Zohar*?

Rothenberg may be overfond of touchstones and designated "movements." "Ethnopoetics" has validated itself, but "deep image" was a dead end, because of its intrinsic incoherence and lack of adequate definition, and also misuse by subsequent literary critics, eager for any terms of

convenience by which to summarize, or subdue, the new poetry that they couldn't quite handle otherwise. (One can't help but feel that as a term, "deep image" is more accurate for Rilke, perhaps, than for any American poet to whom it has been clamped.) Likewise, Rothenberg's proposal for "total translation," magnificent though it may be in its conception, reads less convincingly given the examples offered, making the need to translate the "untranslatable" doubtful in the first place. Some of the results are probably less interesting than shouted instructions in aerobic dancing at the Y taken down off tapes by anthropologists sixty years from now.

> hey it's nice it's nice it's nice
> to see them yeah to see
> our mothers do the ladies' dances
> oh it's graceful & it's
> nice it's nice it's very nice
> to see them hey to see
> our mothers do the ladies' dance

On the page, of course, so much falls flat. A ritual "event" enters a desiccation (desecration?) chamber when it is entered in a book. There is no literary subsitute for the whirling of dervishes or the ten-mile run.

He seems enchanted by the theory, though blind to the fact his examples do not alway suffice. The proof has got to be in the pudding, but the samples he gives—"I am still carving an ironwood stick. / I am still thinking about it," or "Dad a da da / Dad a da da / Dad a da da / Da kata kai"—are hardly going to nourish us when we are thrown into cells for a brain rinse by Big "Person," or when we're driving alone in the greyness to work or back from a job interview, or any of the times we *need* the mnemonic ring and brace of poetry, singing in the mind. Olson in the ambulance on the way to die recited *Lear* to Charles Boer, not

> Now I don't feel,
> Now I don't feel,
> Now I don't even feel like going to my rancho,
> For there at my rancho it is so ugly,
> And here in Wirikuta so green, so green...

The universe breathes both in and out. Rothenberg has expanded our vision of the possible, and for this we must be forever grateful and honor him. But there are other movements, contractions, that must be taken out of the hands of autocrats and the officious. His grandly titled "Revolutionary

Propositions" from 1966 are just not very memorable; the language is lost to the thought. Still, one understands what he is up against, and has been up against. The resistance still comes from the "other side," in all its superciliousness, its wallowing pride. James Dickey in a new preface to a collection of opinions called *Babel to Byzantium* calls William Carlos Williams "a poet of no merit whatsoever... a writer flat, obvious and uninteresting beyond the telling"—just as a reminder that certain forms of strife are eternal.

What Rothenberg is objecting to is the forced feeding, the imposition of "rule," of hierarchy of tastes called the "Western tradition," otherwise called the "academic." He would rather be on the side of the heretics and messiahs. There is not the slightest doubt he is needed, even if from time to time he sacrifices his own definition and judgment to the cause. His position is ultimately moral and political as well as personal. It is implicit in such statements as "a recognition of the new/old order in which the whole is equal to but no greater than the works of all its parts." He practices no exclusion. For the reader of *Pre-Faces* not to be aware how successfully he does this in the anthology *America A Prophecy*, it may seem that the theory, the vision, stands alone.

Thus we are fortunate to have another manifestation of Rothenberg's ideas in action. *Vienna Blood* collects the poems he has written since *A Seneca Journal* (1978). In addition to their intrinsic value, the poems might be read as a complement to his theoretical writings. Indeed, some of them seem intended to be taken so, with titles such as "The Structural Study of Myth" and "Notes for a New Wilderness" (by the editor of *New Wilderness Letter*). Notes accompanying most sections further encourage this impression. Although Rothenberg has never been strongest or most celebrated as a personal poetic voice or stylist, but rather a representative exploratory one and transmitter of lore, the other thing these present poems remind us of besides theory is the warmly humorous nature of the author—the wit of wisdom, not just word-play. Some lines still suffer from limpness and oversimplification, a mere jotting accumulation without much counterpoint or refinement, and some get the big razzberry they deserve planted on their foreheads, such as this "Scenario" for fellow performance artist Richard Schechner:

yiddish
vaudeville

is

fantastic
life

followed by:

2000 people in the world
with mirrors

(Nyahhh. So what?) Others are not poems as much as paradigmatic gestures. "Notes for a New Wilderness," for example, is promising until it gets too self-conscious and diminishes into "only these notes"—a betrayal of itself.

The occasional poems as a group are least interesting, but they are reassuring nonetheless, such as the tender series on his wife's birthday, even though there isn't a word in it, let alone an image, that isn't as traditional and predictable as a rug, and none as intrinsically tortured as part 3 or "'the Jew of Malta'" or "Sutter's Gold" or "The Adventures of The Jew." Such simplicity is welcome, however, in the poem on his son's Bar Mitzvah, where wordplay would have been an indulgence not entirely appropriate in the moment of pure family joy, where no decoration other than their own lit hearts and eyes is called for. But there is also the shocking oversimplicity elsewhere of "o poets poets / we are all split for love / of woman of the world...," no matter how well-intentioned in its address to the imprisoned Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach.

A notebook poem to David Meltzer is sufficiently intriguing, but more engaging is the series of "Cards"—perhaps because it is dimensioned, chromatic, has an external specificity, as explained in the notes (each of the ten sections was a response to a different picture postcard). There is not only the focus of referentiality and the advantage of play (homo ludens), but interconnectedness of phrase and image. The brightness of "A Poem in Yellow After Tristan Tzara," one of the best little poems in the book, could put pep in your step the rest of the day, while "Abulafia's Circles," after the thirteenth-century mystic and poet, is simply the finest poem in the collection, should be the title poem, and is Rothenberg's best since "Poland / 1931" in terms of unpredictable satisfaction (the satisfaction of unpredictability). It is a sustained narrative telling, yet as happy as dada is s'posed to be, as much unlike surrealistic shattered-chatter as it is a broad cultural extravaganza. More important, it is a spirited mythic and linguistic engagement in every deep sense Rothenberg in his wide learning knows. It's a totalizer, and the

proof of his method.

It may well be that Rothenberg's greatest strength is the articulation and promulgation of theory, but it's also true that if we didn't have the poems, we wouldn't trust the other writings so. ∆

Shadow Train. JOHN ASHBERY.
Penguin. 1981.

by MICHAEL PALMER

> I photographed all things,
> All things as happening
> As prelude...
> "Litany" (left column)

> I'll wipe away all trival fond records
> From the interstices of my desirings
> And imaginings, and find the whiteness
> That was there...
> "Litany" (right column)

> Honey, it's all Greek to me, I –
> "Litany" (left column)

So the *voyage imaginaire* continues, laughing at its own interiority and impossibility, its endless postponement:

> Clearly the song will have to wait
> Until the time when everything is serious.

The vehicle now is a shadow train, an image cast against the wall of the cave, a trick of light, but also a line of coaches whose passengers are shades, *manes*. "Out there into stranded night," he had written in "The Task." A voyage through time in which past and future are equally to be "made up" (not "imagined") as you go. A journey in place toward an image of that place where you are said all along to be. And the present, the presence of the voice speaking, can only be calculated by this polytonal play, by picking up and discarding the surrounding shards and fragments. The process resembles a kind of random mapping, an oxymoron as the book would name it:

So many
Patterns to choose from, they the colliding of all dispirited
Illustration on our lives, that will rise in its time like
Temperature, and mean us, and then faint away.

We are meant, encoded, by the surrounds, the congeries of words and objects. It is in this sense that Ashbery has found a solution to the dilemma posed in *Three Poems*, "I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way. And next the thought came to me that to leave all out would be another, truer, way." He has found that you can leave all out precisely by putting all down, and has shaped a profoundly paradoxical discourse from this discovery. What we are left with is neither territory nor map but an oscillation between them, a dialectical shadow play of presence and absense. Echoes and quotations surface briefly and are reabsorbed (e.g., "I am the shadowed, widower, the unconsoled," in "The Desperado"[1]). A series of "first persons" is projected and erased. The speaker is not only masked but destabilized as a reference point. The voice itself inhabits a metamorphic state flowing among identities and tones: high romantic, camp, epic narrative, advertising page, hopelessly awkward, and finally, of course, philosophical, where opaque, often anacoluthic statements and propositions are treated as Eternal Verities. What these voices or tones share is a deflection, either minute or broad, from their apparent contextual function. It is in the space of this deflection that Ashbery's irony[2] locates. The acts and events so recorded are neither major nor minor. All are treated as equivalent *données*, effectively obliterating narrative causality. Semantically the work remains in varying degrees indeterminate or open, even if Bloom, Vendler and the herd of self-appointed canonical authorities would wish it otherwise. Yet interestingly the new book's shape emphasizes closure: fifty poems, each containing four quatrains, nearlky all with beginnings and endings where such things are supposed to go. We are offered a frame more firmly fixed than in any of his previous books. It seems to me a direct extension of such poems as "Fragment" which demonstrate a fascination with highly formal order and false symmetries. Now such ordering is incorporated into the larger syntax of the book. It becomes a string or suite of outwardly equivalent elements, again an Ashbery paradox, for it is within this sequence of identical types that multiple variations are generated. The set of possible narratives, suggested, withdrawn, reproposed, exists at the margin or periphery of the text. There is a striking distancing from the "sincerity" of the projective mode of

Black Mountain contemporaries, yet in a broader sense a great deal is shared, for example a concern with formal renewal and an attention to the boldest gestures of modernist forebears. Ashbury's focus in this regard would seem specifically international and cosmopolitan.

In many respects *Shadow Train* represents a return to the rich gnomic mode of the writing preceding *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*. Oddly a work I keep hearing in it is *The Tennis Court Oath*, its formal opposite, one that has been important for many poets of my generation not only because of its obvious daring but because of its fragmented eloquence, even lucidity. The radical nature of the gesture has led academic critics to debunk the work as chaotic and formless. Instead they have looked to the more linear mode of *Self-Portrait* and *Houseboat Days* and to the great longer poems of *Rivers and Mountains* for a demonstration of thematic coherence. It is a normative effort designed to place the work comfortably within a tradition of abstract, philosophical verse as exemplified to them by Stevens. Yet this is to ignore willfully both the context of his art—the relationship with O'Hara for example—and the host of alternative Ashberys present. (It should be noted that Stevens does not quite fit this mold either.) I would emphasize the perhaps obvious point that both *The Tennis Court Oath* and *Shadow Train* involve radical justapositions, broad humor, multiple voices, formal innovation and fragmentation. One shadows the other as its darker, uncentered moment.

Shadow Train does not offer us a new Ashbery or for that matter any one particular previous Ashbery. Instead we are given a range of familiar endlessly recombinant personae and gestures. (At a few points they seem too familiar, habits that have outlived their function.) In much of the early work there is an attempt to test and breach the limits of conventional syntax and signification. *Shadow Train* presents a poetry investigating the active boundaries it has already established. As always Ashbery refuses to oversimplify the occasion of the poem, to reduce it to expression, confession, description, instruction, whatever. "you have it but you don't have it," he states in "Paradoxes and Oxymorons," the book's original title poem. The play of words, *logopoeia*, functions as the generative element here as surely as *melos* does for Zukofsky. Ashbery forces attetion toward the polysemous nature of poetic speech (of all speech, whenever such attention is present). Yet he is also witness to the emptying out of meaning that is its constant semiotic shadow. Even, or perhaps especially, his most flattened, apparently direct statements promote this doubleness. Returning to *The Tennis Court Oath* I

find, "All was ready for the continuance of the journey." The poem is "Europe." ∆

An earlier version of this piece was published in *Gazette Du Belletin*, Paris, eds. Emmanuel Hocquard and Raquel.

1. The gesture toward the high romantic, vatic mode is always particularly complex. It is never made without Byronic self-mockery. At the same time it does affirm the myth of a visionary, creationalist speech.

2. In conversation recently Robert Duncan stated that there was "no irony" in Ashbery's poetry. I would agree in the sense that since everything is framed by irony, the other pole is missing. Having no opposite tone to play against, irony abolishes itself—without, it hardly needs to be added, abolishing chance. Herein we can find one of the reasons New Critical analysis is inadequate to a reading of Ashbery's work.

Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke. A Translation from the German and Commentary by Robert Bly.

Harper & Row. 1981.

by Pierre Joris

The publisher of the book under consideration bills his product as a "landmark translation and commentary" by a "National Book Award-winning poet." A landmark it may be, but not in the sense the comment was meant. Rilke is not only of the finest German poets of the century, he is also the most difficult to translate, with the possible exception of Paul Celan. The first translations of poems by Rilke into English appeared as far back as 1938. Since then a number of other translations have been published, some relatively good, some frankly bad — none of which could claim to come close to a hypothetical 'definite' version. A favorite subject in academe, Rilke's work and life has in the meantime given rise to a fullfledged industry and there is no lack of imagination on most aspects of the poet's career.

Pound once said that it took a poet to translate poetry. Given his high standards, I take that to mean a poet worth his salt; but there is something Pound didn't mention: not all poets, even good ones, make great translators. Now Mr Bly — whose own work is not in question here — is a poet who has spent a great amount of his time translating European poetry. It is

therefore not surprising that he should eventually have tried his hand at Rilke. What is slightly surprising is tht a man of his experience should have served up such a botch. There is a heavy-handedness about these English versions that is the exact opposite of Rilke's language. To put it crudely, Mr Bly manages a real feat: He succeeds in making that most spititual, not to say metaphysical (in the literal sense of someone concerned with what lies beyond the physis) poet sound like a Wisconsin backwoodsman, or a kind of zen Davey Crockett.

There are two major problems with Mr Bly's way of going about his job. One is a sign of the times: For the last thirty or so years the paradigm of American poetry has been the use of colloquial American speech patterns as poetry's linguistic bass-line. This, the lesson of Whitman, William Carlos Williams and others, has made for an extremely strong indigenous poetry, in most ways far superior to Europe's production during that period. But, when that paradigm is too consistently applied in the case of translations, it can lead to a stultifying flatness especially for a number of European poets whose work simply dies when planed down into the vox americana. To stay with examples from the German, this is true of, again, Celan, as Corman's and Hamburger's translations show: They simplify the poet's complex and at times tortuous syntax to such an extent that the wrought-iron intensity of the language gets lost. But at least their translations, if weak, have a certain elegance; something one cannot say about Mr Bly's efforts.

Rilke's poems do not reproduce a straight colloquial German, and trying to make him sound that way in American only ruins the work. For such an attempt to have any chance of success, it would further require a much finer and more sophisticated ear than Mr Bly's — the standard of excellence Paul Blackburn's perfect pitch shows in his Lorca translations would be required. How deeply the paradigmatic vision of poetry has become ingrained is shown in the dust jacket's comment on the "simplicity and directness with which (Bly) has captured Rilke's voice, a voice that has not been heard in English before (sic)." Rilke is neither direct nor simple, and any translation that makes him sound that way is a lie.

The second problem is that Mr Bly has the unfortunate habit of wanting to make things perfectly clear. He will therefore not shrink from ruining a perfectly good line by explaining what is happening instead of translating what is there. An obscure spot in the original does not, must not, translate into a clear statement in the English: That is treason to the text besides be-

ing condescendent to the reader as it supposes him/her to be too dumb to deal with difficulties in the poem.

Take *Das Stundenbuch*. Mr Bly translates the title as 'A Book for the Hours of Prayer' — silly and cumbersome; *A Book of Hours*, more accurate to the original, would have done better. In the second poem of this section, the last three lines of the second stanza read in German:

> Nur dass ich mich aus seiner Wärme heben
> mehr weiss ich nicht, weil alle meine Zweige
> tief unten ruhn und nur im Winde winken

A literal, word by word, translation without any literary pretensions would give the following:

> Only that from his heat I rise
> More I do not know, as all my branches
> rest deep below and merely nod in the wind

Mr Bly haltingly explains this stanza as:

> I know that my trunk rose from his warmth, but that's all
> because my branches hardly move at all
> near the ground, and just wave a little in the wind.

Bly's 'trunk' is not there in the German. Even though the image implicitly contains it, making it explicit in the translation is an explanatory addendum that (with the 'but that's all' heavily added to the end of Rilke's line) poetically and rhythmically makes for an unwieldy and leaden line in English. Although this stanza is the worst of the poem, the previous one hasn't been translated any more accurately: the German word 'menschlich,' admittedly not easy to translate, has been rendered as 'in a human way'; the plural 'Madonnen' becomes the singular 'the Madonna,' while 'planen' is given as 'imagine' and 'träume' as 'I think.' The 'Sutanen' of the first line have disappeared completely.

The *Stundenbuch* is comparatively easy Rilke — what happens when Mr Bly gets his teeth into the later poems? Happily for us he did not attempt the Elegies. Unhappily for us he did try his hand at the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. First sonnet, second line: Why translate *Orpheus singt!* as 'Orpheus is singing?' *O Hoher Baum in Ohr* becomes 'A tree inside the ear.' The active 'alles schwieg' becomes 'silence, silence.' So far it's not too inaccurate, although the English is lacklustre and inelegant. The next two lines read in German:

....Doch selbst in der Verschweigung
ging neuer Anfang, Wink und Wandlung vor.

That, in Mr Bly's Americanese, becomes:

...Yet new buildings,
signals, and changes went on in silence.

I cannot fathom what daring brainstorm made the translator render the word 'Anfang,' literally 'beginning,' as 'buildings.' Maybe the tree inside the ear got chopped down and turned into a log-cabin? In the next stanza, Rilke's animals come 'aus dem klaren / gelösten Wald' which becomes a 'relaxed' forest. Next stanza: 'Brüllen, Schrei, Geröhr / schien klein in ihren Herzen' becomes an inaccurate, boring, clumsy and flat: 'Growling, yelping, grunting now / seemed all nonsense to them.' In the final stanza Rilke's 'dunkelstem' (darkest) becomes 'brushy' longing, and where Rilke's 'Pfosten beben' (tremble), Mr Bly's poles are simply 'wobbly.'

One could go on and on: there isn't a poem, a stanza, a line in the book which is accurate to Rilke's text. Throughout the Sonnets Mr Bly gives Orpheus' activity which is 'Gesang' or 'singen' — that is song, singing — (and even the simple 'Lied') — as 'poetry' or 'poem.' In his commentary on that section he explains why he translates 'Gesang ist Dasein' as 'To write poetry is to be alive' — calling a literal translation ('Singing is being') a pitiful result, claiming that 'the whole meaning is gone, because the vowels are too light.' And here lies the whole trouble with Mr Bly's translations: Rilke's poetry is song, is singing, as all good poetry is. The translations into what Mr Bly's sees as 'poetry' lack any sense of song, of singing. The translator's language is dull, uninspired and boringly prosy. Nothing in these translations sings, nothing sparks, nothing comes across to the reader — and Rilke lies buried under a bad, verbose prose. Mr Bly does not have a tree growing in his ear — he's simply cursed with a wooden ear. ▵

Peace on Earth. JOHN TAGGART.
Turtle Island Foundation. 1981.

by ELIOT WEINBERGER

Today it is ten years and a month after the Christmas bombing of

Cambodia—that final genocidal frenzy of a retreating army. I am reading the day's paper: The former Ambassador to Laos protests that the secret spraying of defoliants over that country in the 1960s, revealed only today, was no secret at all—"Rather, it was not admitted nor confirmed." It is the day's version of the same stories I have been reading every day of my reading life, a reading life sustained by poetry in the wild belief that there is a general sanity in the work, a sanity that rises above the notorious small madnesses of the workers themselves. And today I am reading a poet of my generation, that publicized, self-publicized generation of '68: born during or after "the war," who came of age in (another) "the war," who live there still. I am reading what, for the moment, is still an artifact of the moment, and I wonder how he, I, we have arrived here, for this is our "Peace on Earth":

To delight friends with babies charred in napalm

Since the Napoleonic Wars, there has been no war poetry in the European languages, only antiwar poetry, for modern warfare has eliminated the warrior-hero, the only subject of epic, and replaced him with the tactician, an unheroic figure usually removed from the battle itself, who brilliantly or stupidly maneuvers the slaughter of faceless legions. As yet there is no poetry of tactics, but in English there have been two great clusters of antiwar poetry. The first grew out of World War I, the first war in which a large number of poets participated, and only the second war in history fought by literates. (the first—the American Civil War—had no poets who are still read, and the main antiwar work it produced, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was written by a man born six years after the war had ended. Even to this day only one important American poet—George Oppen—has engaged in combat.)

The poetry of WWI was, above all, written out of comraderie. The men were sent into battle as a company, and returned, if at all, as a company. At the front, they were thrown into a scene of unimaginable horror, yet they never knew—for there was no explanation, and still is none—why the enemy was their enemy. The result, in fact and in the poetry, was a communal rage—at the carnage, at the officers safely behind the lines, at the comfort and platitudes of those at home—but also a great compassion, toward each other and even across the barbed wire. Wilfred Owen's most famous line was first written as: "I was a German conscript, and your friend." The key word is *conscript*: we are (were) both unwilling victims. In the second version of "Strange Meeting," Owen raised this perception to the

immediate and the universal: "I am the enemy you killed, my friend."

In contrast, the work of those who stayed home seems petty, oblivious. (Excepting the 74-year-old Hardy, listening to the big guns across the Channel: "The world is as it used to be... Mad as hatters.") The "War Number" of *BLAST*, for example (recently reissued by Black Sparrow Press) is devoted largely to attacks on Marinetti and the Futurists. Pound contributes some of his weakest satirical verse, and Eliot his impressionistic, apolitical "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night." Only Gaudier-Brzeska's message from the trenches gives any sense of what is occurring not so many miles away. The sculptor picks up a German mauser and breaks off the butt to carve—to have something to carve, to carve something. He writes: "*MY VIEWS ON SCULPTURE* REMAIN ABSOLUTELY *THE SAME*," and, in the context, we know that conviction has not been easily won.

But Gaudier-Brzeska is also filled with idiocies: "THIS WAR IS A GREAT REMEDY... IT TAKES AWAY FROM THE MASSES NUMBERS AND NUMBERS OF UNIMPORTANT UNITS..." The Vorticist position, if it can be called a position, becomes clear some years later in Canto XVI: the war killed one genius, inconvenienced some others, and generally broke up the old gang. Pound's "And because of that son of a bitch / Franz Joseph of Austria... / They put Aldington on Hill 70..." is the war as literary event. It is not the war of Isaac Rosenberg's "A man's brains splattered on / a stretcher-bearer's face." Though Pound is ultimately the greater poet—he also had 50-odd more years in which to write—any attempt at understanding his attitude to the war must account for the fact that it was Pound who suggested to Rosenberg that he ought to enlist.

World War II did not produce much poetry, possibly because both the rage and compassion of WWI were absent in a war that almost everyone felt worth fighting. (Basil Bunting, for one, was imprisoned as a conscientious objector in WWI, but hurried to join the Second.) Its major works were narratives—novels and movies—which tended to explore the psychological effects of war on a miscellaneous collection of individuals, the platoon. This was not exactly the stuff of poetry—nor could the prevailing poetic mode of cleverly-wrought ambiguities encompass Omaha Beach or Iwo Jima, not to mention Hiroshima, the camps. (Nor—and it is shocking—did events affect the prevailing poetic mode.)

It was the Vietnam War of course that led to the greatest outpouring of antiwar poetry in English. Unlike WWI, this poetry was not written by com-

batants. Those who actually fought were unlike any soldiers of previous wars. (And could never be understood by old soldiers. Robert Graves on Vietnam: "Few of the unmaimed survivors will regret their part in this war.") They were boys—average age 19—without wives, children, higher education, careers. They were the first soldiers, ever, to be shipped out as individuals rather than as a company. They went, not with a sense of mission, but out of fear of the punishment for not going. Once there, their fear—of the army, of death, of the strange land—was manipulated and transformed into racial hatred, a policy—and it was a policy—that finally permanently destroyed its own men. It was a hatred that blurred the line between Vietnamese allies and enemies, national boundaries, soldiers and civilians, until the enemy became Asia itself, unconquerable, the symbol of everything that is "not us," that refuses to become us. Those who survived returned as solitary individuals to a country that ignored or hated them, where the only soldier who was not unknown was Lieutenant Calley.

The poetry of the Vietnam War was written at home, but curiously those who fought *against* the war were in a situation similar to that of those who had fought *in* WWI: they were a community united by disaster. Similar, that is, with one tremendous difference: it was a disaster the community had not experienced directly. Vietnam was never, and has never been, more than words in a newspaper and pictures on a television screen. The poets' Vietnam is the metaphor of a metaphor.

It is a poetry of contempt and communion. Away from the war, the poets directed their rage not at war itself (as in WWI) but rather at what was immediately at hand: those they suspected to be the instigators and supporters of the war—not the fat-cat industrialists of wars past, but, surprisingly, the ordinary middle-class suburban American. Read today, some of the most ardent of the "antiwar" poems seem merely the work of snobs, a dull continuation of the old Beat-Square friction. What is interesting however about these anti-"straight" antiwar poems is that they replicate exactly the most jingoistic pro-war poems of other ages: lampooning the enemy for its looks, dress, food, taste, and praising its own people for their superior wisdom, sexual ability, music and so on.

But the other side of that contempt was the deep sense of community among those against the war, and the important position of poets and poetry within that community. Neither has existed since. It resulted in a poetry of celebration, love, ecstasy—the (now pathetic) declaration of a new age.

Surely one of the most beautiful of these poems is Allen Ginsberg's "Genocide" (which has not become dated, as his better-known "Wichita Vortex Sutra" has). In it, the poet dreams that he and the then Leroi Jones are naked in each other's arms:

> ...He wanted
> to protect me in the War
> storm, but was unable
> for the great force that was
> upon us, of strangeness and
> alien white mind in America,
> rising from Iowa, Kansas,
> Nebraska, Wisconsin, Brooklyn.

Jones, at the time, was in his militant anti-white/Semetic/gay phase, and Ginsberg's poem is a vision of the peaceable kingdom, lion and lamb lying down together. It is the Vietnam revision of Owen's "Strange Meeting": We are both conscripts in this madness.

Two artifacts of the period are exemplary, both issues of important little magazines (from a time when little magazines were important): *Some/thing* #3 (1966) edited by David Antin and Jerome Rothenberg, and *Caterpillar* #3/4 (1968) edited by Clayton Eshleman. *Some/thing* #3, a special "Vietnam Assemblage" issue, features a cover by Andy Warhol: a perforated sheet of postage stamps, each stamp depicting a yellow button that reads "BOMB HANOI." *Caterpillar* #3/4 is a regular issue—none of its 270 pages are particularly war-related—but right in the center of the issue are two photographs, captioned only as "Two 12 year old Vietnamese girls burned by American napalm." They are unquestionably the most horrible, indelible photographs I have ever seen.

The *Some/thing* cover was widely admired at the time. Its irony, like all irony required and enjoyed a cognesceti who understood that "BOMB HANOI," though a real button worn in sincerity by many, was not a sentiment shared by poets. But more important, its humor—now somewhat dim—is indicative of a development that had a greater effect on poetry than the news of atrocity: It seemed, then, that all the words had lost their meanings. The Vietnam War was the era of Pentagonese, of "friendly fire," of "in order to save the village it was necessary to destroy it." Half of the *Some/thing* issue is taken from the newspapers, and countless poems were composed out of that profusion of jargon-couched lies. In the absense of the

war itself, the poets could only work from the words of the war. As Robert Duncan wrote in the "Of the War" section of *Passages* (to my mind the greatest poetry to come out of the war) the war had become "the bloody verse America writes over Asia."

There were two responses to that bloody verse. To attempt a Confucian rectification of names, fighting the language back toward meaning, or to revel in the free-floating signifiers through satire or collage. The latter course was naturally easier, especially as the political stance of the poet could be assumed without proof. But when a "BOMB HANOI" could be either funny or blood-thirsty, depending on its writer, it meant that the word had entirely become the invention of its speaker—a solipsism that erased the social contract of language.

Meanwhile, in Vietnam itself, things were real enough, and language—despite the clouds of official euphemism, another legacy of WWI—meant what it said. For years the most popular song on GI jukeboxes was not the Baroque surrealism of Dylan or Lennon or acid rock, but the Animals' plain speech: "We gotta get outta this place." It was a place few poets could take, even second-hand. When *Caterpillar* published the napalm-victim photographs it was generally thought, as I remember, that this time Eshleman had gone too far.

Ten years after the Christmas bombing, the war continues, both there, in the ravaged land, and here, in the bodies and minds of the 2.8 million Americans who "served" (a great nothing and no one) in Vietnam. Possibly as many as 2.4 million of them were exposed to the dioxin-laced defoliant Agent Orange; many of them have suffered or will suffer (and the probability may be the greatest suffering of all) from various cancers, fatal liver dysfunctions, sterility, miscarriages among their wives, birth defects in their children. 100,000 of them have been imprisoned since the war; only 22% finished college. Their rates of suicide, drug-addiction, alcoholism, divorce and mental breakdown are extremely high. The statistics clatter on: These are the most miserable of America, whose physical and mental devastation mirrors the land they left behind.

For the poets, Vietnam has become a forgotten subject. (In fact most of the Vietnam poems were written from 1965 to 1969, and had stopped being written long before the war ended. Was there no longer anything to say? Had the general national antiwar sentiment weakened the necessity for the

poetry? Or did the poets lose interest when they lost their elitist position?) Unlike WWI, there has been, so far, no important work written after the event. Vietnam's only legacy to poetry may be that current obsession of the poets of my generation: non-referentiality. Raised on the empty and mendacious language of the war, they now celebrate that emptiness, a despair masked by theory. It is the converse of the first decades of the century, when WWI killed off the Dadaist and other language experiments, rendering them simply beside the point. (The curiosity, though, is that the "language" poets consider their work political, a blow against the word as capitalist commodity—"meaning" as "market value." This may be the silliest piece of café Marxism yet—one minute on a torture rack in Guatamala and suddenly words would become meaningful again. If at all, non-referential poetry is political only in the Confucian sense that retreat from the world is a political act.)

Yet here is "Peace on Earth," the title poem of John Taggart's new book, perhaps the first poem of interest to come out of the Vietnam War in a decade. Its compositional procedure, which is complex, must first be described:

The poem is in three sections containing, in order, 3,9, and 27 units. Each unit, printed one to a page, consists of 13 lines: an 8-line stanza, a one-line stanza, and each unit within each section rings small changes on the preceding unit. Thus the poem is read vertically, but also horizontally, as the reader inevitably compares, say, line 11 with the next unit's line 11.

Here are four units: the first unit of section one, two facing units from section two, and the last unit of section three. The italicized lines of section two are from *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, a book frequently quoted during the last years of the antiwar movement. The italicized lines of section three are from a Tarahumara healing song.

To love to love those to love those who
are in love those who are in a condition
in a condition
of hiding to love those who are in
a condition of hiding to
love those as children as the
valient children who have gone into hiding
children who hide in a house from the roaring.

Care touches the face, untwists the face.

To love those as children who hide to
lay down to lay down with
the children to lay down with the children
in a flame to lay down in a flame of fire.

*

to delight to delight those who are friends to
delight friends by turning by turning
in nape, which is napalm, which the
military likes after the fires burned down and
there was an old man burned
to death with his hands stiff in
rigor mortis reaching
for the sky in prayer or supplication.

Carry torches, carry each other.

To delight friends by praying with hands in napalm
to run burning a
light running burning to death in
a circle to be unable to help oneself.

*

To delight to delight those who are friends to
delight friends by turning
in nape, napalm, which the military
likes and there was an old man burned to
death with hands stiff in reaching
in prayer or supplication
forgiving us what we had done and
there was an old woman lying dead curled.

Carry torches, carry each other.

To delight friends praying with curled hands in napalm
to run a light running
burning to death to be unable to
help to find the river

*

To lift to lift up to lift without

effort to sing high and low high and low
to hold and to lengthen the carol
sana tafan tana tamaf tamafts bai
sing *tamaf tamafts bai* to stand still in the shining
dance in the lily-flower
in the ring of the flower's thought
in the light of day.

Carol heart's ease, ring of flower's thought.

To lift up bones in light in curled leaves and petals
to intend the greatest gifts
to hold the shining
ring that is an ardor and a blossoming.

Toby Olson, in what seems to be an accurate description of the author's intent, has written that "Peace on Earth" is:

> ...a poem whose movement is able to cleanse the dead of the politics that caused their death, resurrect their clean bones, and celebrate their passing... Its title, staring in irony and coming through to the literal, can be seen as a measure of its movement. Like the best religious music, it transforms those who give themselves to it. In the experience of this poem, we can mourn and celebrate the dead with feelings that are purified of anger and resentment; we can give their Spirit Image a place of peace outside and above politics and irony. What John Taggart has done for us... is a holy thing.

To excerpt, as one must, destroys the cumulative effect of 39 similar units. Taggart wants the poem to be read aloud, and its effect has often been compared to the work of current composers like Phillip Glass and Steve Reich. For me at least—having both heard Taggard and tried it myself—it is very tedious, in a way that the "new music" is not. Western music, after all, is made of sounds that are fixed and few, and the combinations of those sounds, the emotional pull of their elaboration, is music's force and meaning—a power that can be maintained even when the variety of sounds is minimal. Poetry of course is the opposite: we are accustomed to idiosyncatic selections from the vast storehouse of the language. When those selections remain the same—in a poem or in a life's work—we lose interest. And in a poem that is evidently not non-referential, relying on sound alone, the reiteration of content—even with slight variations in the words themselves—simply cannot be sustained for very long. Louis Zukofsky's "Julia's

Wild" is lovely, but it's 20 lines long; "Peace on Earth" lasts about 45 minutes.

Worse, the frequent repetition of a word within the same phrase or context only deadens the word. When, during the Vietnam War, John Giorno or Jackson MacLow presented repetitive collages of newspaper words, the intention was mimetic of the contemporary media assault. Ten years later this is not the case—the words, at least, are different. To hear, today, the word *napalm* 21 times in the course of nine 13-line pages only strips the word—the most highly-charged word of the Vietnam War—of its resonance, while ironically making us realize that, yes, *napalm* is one of the most beautiful words in the language.

By attempting to bury the word *napalm* and build a Victorian monument over its grave, Taggart may be, as Olson claims, cleansing the dead of politics and purifying us of anger. But I doubt it.

First, what are we to make of the line repeated with small variations: "To delight friends with babies charred in napalm"? The infinitive implies "Let us..." and we assume that either the line is literal ("delight friends who have charred babies" or "offer charred babies to delight friends"—the one chirpy and blind, the other sadistic) or it is ironic, like Warhol's "BOMB HANOI" (which, so long after the fact, loses its black humor and only recalls a forgotten elitism) or it is a collage and only semi-referential (which, again, ten years later, would be pointless) or it is pure sound (which would be scandalous).

Second, Taggart was not in the war, and has probably never seen Vietnam, a naplam victim, or even napalm itself. This would be irrelevant if Taggart had been able to recreate the word in his imagination—to live through it as, say, Defoe lived through a plague year from before his birth. But in "Peace on Earth" *napalm* remains a word from a book (specifically *The Winter Soldier Investigation*) as the poem, above all, has been made from books.

Third, because he found the word in the library and wrote it down, Taggart—as many contemporary poets would—reads the word mythologically. Napalm becomes the sacred, purifying flame. Which it was not. This mistake has been made before, notably in Denise Levertov's "Advent 1966," one of the most famous poems of the war. In it, the poet invokes Robert Southwell's Burning Babe, an image that is "multiplied, multiplied" in Vietnam. Although the poet insists on the difference between Southwell's

Christ and the napalmed infants, the poem, this far, doesn't work: Southwell's perfect *created* image cannot help but be more powerful than a second-hand image of reality. What I mean is that Levertov (and the reader who knows the Southwell poem) has experienced the Burning Babe directly, in a way that neither poet nor readers have experienced burning babies. But what finally gives the poem its great force is the poet's juxtaposition of herself and Southwell *as poets*: this is what he was permitted to see, and this is what I see. The best Vietnam War poems took the poet as witness; the weakest poems presented the facts or language of the war, spoken by no one.

David Jones could mythologize WWI only because *In Parenthesis* is also a work of directly apprehended luminous details. When Isaac Rosenberg writes, in "August 1914," "What in our lives is burnt / In the fire of this?" he has earned access to the sacred fire because, in the context of his other work and of his life, there is no question of "sincerity."

The problem with "Peace on Earth" is that it is all objectification and no sincerity. It is all verbs without subjects. Complex impersonal musical intellectual constructs have worked well for Taggart in the past (*Dodeka, The Pyramid is a Pure Crystal*). This time I think the construct collapses because it is only theoretical—not taking into account the pleasure or patience of the reader/auditor. And, for that matter, he has taken on a djinn too powerful to bottle in such a small jar.

He was able to write this celebratory hymn not because the time for requiem has come—the living gathered to sing for the dead. Only certain political details of the war have passed—the war itself is not dead, especially among the Vietnamese and among the veterans. Taggart's hymn exists because for us, who stayed at home and fought against the war, *the war was a festival*. An Arcady ruled by death, but an Arcady still. That moment of community—of a generation, of poets—has never returned. "Peace on Earth" (even its title comes from the 60's—a Coletrane concert in Japan) is a nostalgic vision of peace, a vision that belongs to we Luddites who fought the war machine and thought we had won. It may be the last of the old Vietnam War poems—a flowering manured by dead peasants and our dead contemporaries who were too poor or too guileless to evade conscription.

The WWI poet Ivor Gurney wrote: "There are strange Hells within the minds War made." Before those hells are explored, there can be no Paradiso. If a new Vietnam War poem is ever written in America, it will be written by a veteran or one capable of living in a veteran's brain—a poetry of

one who has killed and was almost killed. And if a new Vietnam war poem is written by those of us who stayed home, it will have to acknowledge that we delighted in friends as babies charred in napalm. △

A Letter to the Editor:

If all written knowledge except one work is destroyed from a world fire, I should hope that Ted Enslin's Forms, Synthesis and Ranger would be the work left for civilized sane buildup of a new peaceful balanced society. There is enough in these works to form the basis. It's too sad that Bill Zavatsky didn't take the time and concentration needed to understand the tremendous job that Ted Enslin had done is 'speaking' down onto paper every single facet of his being and in the process leaving man/woman kind a record, a history of what a person can or should be. Enslin's work simply stated is no simple deed. It incorporates ALL. It is as complete a record of man as anything ever attempted. And it is naturally stated.

— HERSCHEL SILVERMAN

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Eliot Weinberger

Kenneth Rexroth 1905-1982

POETRY MAGAZINE, REVIEWING HIS FIRST BOOK, compared the poems to the license-plates made by convicts, and suggested the poet consider another profession. Alfred Kazin called him an "old-fashioned American sorehead;" and *The New Yorker*, with its usual bemused condescension, nicknamed him "Daddy-o." In a short obituary, *The New York Times* could remember him only as "Father Figure to Beat Poets."

Born in another country, Kenneth Rexroth would have served as the intellectual conscience of the nation: a Paz, Neruda, MacDiarmid, Hikmet. But here, as he wrote, "There is no place for a poet in American society. No place at all for any kind of poet at all." So in his life, and at his death, he was largely seen as a crank, a colorful American eccentric who once spiced occasional magazine copy and three well-known romans-à-clef.

I take Rexroth to be a major American writer: the author of the most readable long poems in English in this century and the master works of the "generation of revolutionary hopelessness;" of lyrics of an erotic intensity, worthy of the Palatine Anthology or Vidyakara's

Treasury, that has not been heard in English for 300 years; of the most entertaining autobiography in American letters ("it would not, I think," wrote a contemporary reviewer, "make suitable reading for the envious"); of essays unmatched by any poet for their boundless erudition, straight talk and general feistiness; of translations that were never ego-trips and will endure.

And I take Rexroth to be a major *American* writer, for he alone among poets in this century embraces what there is to love in the country: ghetto street-smartness, the wilderness, populist anti-capitalism, jazz and rock & roll, the Utopian communities, the small bands at the advance guard of the various arts, and all the unmelted lumps in the melting pot. He was the first poet whose enthusiasm for tribal culture was not picked up from Frobenius, Frazer or the Musée de l'Homme, but rather by living with American Indians; an early fighter for civil rights, and not only *not* anti-Semitic, but an expert on Hassidism and the Kabbalah. Above all, he was America's great Christian poet—a Christianity, that is, which has rarely appeared on this continent: the communion of a universal brotherhood.

His enemies were the institutions (the U.S. and Soviet states, the corporations, the universities, the church) and their products: sexual repression, academic art, racism and sexism, the charmlessness of the bourgeoisie, the myth of progress, the razing of the natural world. His 1960 essay, "The Students Take Over," was dismissed by a critic as "mad" for "announcing a nationwide revolution among students on behalf of national and international integrity." By 1969 *The Nation* would write, "What is most viable in the so-called New Left is in large part the creation of Rexroth and Paul Goodman whether the movement knows it or not." As always in Rexroth's life, the initial reaction stuck, and the fact that he was proved right forgotten: "When a prophet refuses to go crazy, he becomes quite a problem, crucifixion being as complicated as it is in humanitarian America."

Although Gary Snyder can be read almost as a translation of Rexroth, and though it is difficult to imagine "Howl" without the ex-

ample of "Thou Shalt Not Kill," Rexroth's effect on poetry in his lifetime was mainly as a tireless promoter: responsible for bringing Levertov, Snyder, Rothenberg, Ferlinghetti, Antin and others to New Directions; organizer of discussion groups and reading series and radio programs; advocate journalist. Now, at his death—the primary condition for immortality in this country—the legacy he leaves in the poems is so simple it may come as a revelation towards a possible revolution:

One can write great poetry that anyone who reads can read.

Michel Leiris

Who Is Aimé Césaire?

Translated from the French by A. James Arnold

My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, my voice, the freedom of those who break down in the solitary confinement of despair.
(Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.)

ANDRÉ BRETON HAS the distinction of having been the first to point out, in his epoch-making article *A Great Black Poet*, the importance of Aimé Césaire's appearance on the scene of French-language poetry and of poetry in general.

In April 1941 Breton, who was in Fort-de-France on his way to the United States and had just been subjected to police harrassment by representatives of the pseudo-government in Vichy, discovered an issue of the magazine *Tropiques* and then met Césaire, the principal force behind that publication whose contents proved that in spite of the horrible blows recently dealt to freedom there were still voices independent, timely and resounding enough that their very existence was a pledge against despair for the fate of mankind. In Césaire, Breton recognized a magnificent spokesman for surrealism's enduring and essential claim: that instead of being put down and divided against himself, as he is in all parts of the globe where rationalistic and mechanistic Western civilization is dominant, man should finally come into possession of his total humanity, which is out of the question as long as internal and external chains are imposed on him in the

name of fallacious utilitarian pretexts. But does the convergence of the views of the *Tropiques* team with those of the group Breton had founded more than fifteen years earlier mean that the exceptional calibre of the "great Black poet" must be measured by the yardstick of surrealism alone?

Of course, Césaire owes much to this movement and to some writers of the second half of the last century from whom the surrealists claimed descent, notably Rimbaud (in whom Cesaire discovered the "rebel" that he himself had been from childhood) and Lautréamont (from whom he borrowed some turns of phrase, as several of his early writings testify). This took place in the hubbub of adolescent reading that also allowed him, as a boy casting about for the elements of a new language, to taste Claudel's "rustic" quality, over and above his catholicity, and Freud and Marx as well, whose joint influence acted upon his thought as it had acted upon the surrealists'. Moreover, it was in Paris, and thanks to a young Senegalese, Léopold Sédar Senghor, who like himself was a student there, that he discovered the beauty of Negro--African civilizations in the ethnographic works of Leo Frobenius and Maurice Delafosse, a decisive event.

As for his principal ideas, Césaire found in surrealism a way of looking at the world that had to appeal to him. Wasn't surrealism in open revolt against the entire framework of western rationalism, which the European intellectuals assembled around Breton rejected as an intolerable tyranny, less tolerable still for a Black Antillean since that framework is, historically, the one the Whites *superimposed*, so to speak, on the slaves they imported from Africa and on their descendants?

Poetically, surrealism has appeared to a few Martinicans of Césaire's generation as a way out of the academic formalism their elders had subscribed to, guided as they were by a desire to demonstrate their cultural refinement by pure and simple imitation of the models imported from Europe. It was naive to try to use the Creole idiom as a literary vehicle of opposition, since that meant not only conforming

to a superficial exoticism and locking oneself inside the narrow bounds of an outdated folklore, it also meant giving in to an idiom that had been forged in the humiliating conditions of slavery and has remained marked by them. Like Parnassianism, which had had a good many disciples abroad, surrealism was certainly a product of Europe, so that it was a simple matter to claim that the attitude of those Martinicans who were passionately interested in surrealism differed from the attitude of their predecessors only in the feeble extent to which Europe this time brought them the teaching of a different school. But contrary to Parnassianism, this European phenomenon was truly an instrument of warfare aimed against the ideas imported from Europe and, on top of that, by founding its method on automatic writing as a means of forgetting all that had been learned by descending into the deepest recesses of the self, this instrument furnished Césaire and his friends with a method which, first of all, would provide a *tabula rasa* and without creating any ruts in advance, it would permit them to get rid of their Antillean alienation (whereas they were Africans by reason of part of their ancestry at least, their culture was essentially French) and so to rediscover the authenticity that had been denied them.

This is approximately the amount of the Martinican Césaire's debt to modern European literature and thought that, not so long ago, evolved in a part of the world which today has lost many of its privileges. But hasn't this Martinican given back to world culture a truly irreplaceable contribution?

European surrealism, which provided a basis other than indiscriminate negation for the total subversion of arts and letters undertaken by Dada, expressed the revolt of a certain number of intellectuals who could no longer take satisfaction in any of the goals that bourgeois society offered its members, and who were indignant at the general state of affairs around them: the accountant mentality that regarded any exaltation of feeling or of the senses as a threat to law and order, a pervasive industrialization, the exploitation of practically everybody

by a pretentious, silly minority who held all the important positions, colonial wars in which violence bordering on extreme barbarity was perpetrated against peoples whose only crime was to refuse a Western take-over. Not only was the officially recognized philosophy of rationalism undermined in theory by progress in the physical and social sciences, it also appeared in practice to function as the tool and the cover for the most inhumane undertakings of a civilization centered on technology and profit. From all this derived the high value attached to the irrational (automatic writing and dreams), to the hyperrational (Alfred Jarry's pataphysics), even to the paralogical (occultism), as snubs to the Cartesian tradition and as a means for partially recuperating that which mankind is necessarily cut off from in a technological, profit-oriented society—that essential part which will be won or lost on a plane other than that of the intellect.

The surrealists were certainly sincere in embracing the proletarian cause, the only factor of positive upheaval they could count on. But their revolt—at the outset it was a mental revolt, a protest and a disavowal deriving from value judgments that lay claim to a higher morality—was not motivated by a sense of belonging objectively to a disadvantaged class. On the other hand, Césaire's revolt, though it was linked to similar high aims, sprang from his daily experience of injustice against the group with which he was aligned, a group that the Martinican ruling class, supported by metropolitan France, allows almost in its entirety to stagnate in poverty and, to top it off, despises for its physical features as well. That is why it should not be surprising that Césaire's surrealism takes on an especially harsh and dense quality: something like a volcanic explosion which had no need to place itself "in the service of the Revolution" since it was already of the same nature, having been born of the direct pressure of those harsh realities that open the way to revolutionary movements.

However disconcerting Césaire's poetry may sometimes be with its unbridled lyricism, its wild exuberance and its willfully sibylline form, it is never far from concrete expression and has, moreover,

gradually become more essential and clear, and has got rid of some baroque excrescences. Real scenes, sensations and feelings are far more important than imaginary constructions, however much an extraordinary freedom of expression and a frequently apocalyptical tenor might induce one to believe that the poet puts little stock in the real world he lives in or in the precise way he lives in that world.

Yearnings of the heart, the evocation of his native land, or more generally, the exaltation of the tropics (as the antithesis of Western measure) through an explicit appeal to material details or a kind of mimetic savagery negating the very order of his utterance, references to the fate of Blacks, to Africa, which virtually haunts him, to the urgency of instituting a free and just society, to the overgrown and rocky terrain to be crossed in order to reach that society, these constitute the warp and woof—sometimes manifest, sometimes latent—of poems whose rhythm is almost always torrential and choppy, rich in unusual images and in odd turns wherein the frequent strangeness of the words (names of vegetable and animal species that Césaire intends to designate precisely so as to better react against Antillean "vagueness" and to make the thing itself stand out better, rare terms or neologisms that his solid training in French and Latin allows him to form easily) testifies neither to some preciosity nor to a desire to surprise the reader, but simply to his will to extend the vocabulary of poetry and to take advantage of all the resources of the word as a prodigious human instrument.

Among the themes on which Césaire's poetry is constructed (not as a discourse on elevated subjects, but as the natural expression of what is most meaningful to him), the central theme is certainly that of "negritude." He and his friend Senghor put forward this idea when along with another future anticolonialist poet, the Guianese Léon Damas, they published a paper called *The Black Student* [*L'Etudiant noir*], which aimed at enlightening their comrades from Africa and the New World concerning the common bond of their ancestry and their common condition as well: their belonging to a category of

people whom the industrialized society of the West, and the imperialism deriving from it, not only exploits but who, in the eyes of Whites, are condemned as inferiors by the color of their skin. One must accept one's negritude positively, no longer shameful at being Black, and proudly lay claim to one's African roots; this is the substance of the message Césaire has struggled to communicate from his student days on and which has broadened and deepened with its proponent's increasing maturity.

It is necessary to insist a bit, since the idea has lent itself to numerous misunderstandings: "negritude" in Césaire's conception of it is not a synonym for "Blackness first" and it in no way corresponds to what some have called a racism in reverse. The Black race is no more the chosen people than any other and, if it has one sovereign privilege, it is that of having for centuries, because of the slave trade and the enslavement of nearly all of Africa, undergone material and moral attacks that make of Blacks the "humiliated and offended" *par excellence*. It goes without saying that one could not truly and wholly live one's negritude without affirming the value of Black African cultures. If what Blacks have been able to create with a rudimentary technology were unworthy of our attention, the injustice would be less flagrant and the wisest policy would be to endure ill fortune with a stout heart. Therefore it is imperative for all to know that, in many respects, these cultures can teach us precious lessons. For all that, can one consider oneself thoroughly Black without giving them the benefit of one's affection? This does not mean, however, that African cultures are decreed to be superior: what must be obtained for them is finally the right to equality or, most precisely, the right to be what they are and to remain *different*.

For Césaire to be conscious of his negritude and to be conscious of it as a Martinican requires that he pursue from the start two objectives: politically, to free his country of forms of economic exploitation that condemn the masses to pauperism; culturally, to bring the specifically Antillean element into proper relief, which implies that with-

out underestimating the role of Western civilization one must turn toward the African heritage that is so often forgotten or denied by colored Antilleans who want only to be first-class Frenchmen. But thanks to an intelligence that finds a footing in his knowledge of Marxism, Césaire does not remain on that level alone: no salvation is possible for a people (or for an individual) in isolation and no one can claim to be free in a world where freedom is held up to ridicule by the oppression of others. Césaire, humiliated and offended, will therefore take up the cause of all the humiliated and offended, whatever race they may belong to, and his grand design will be to work toward a completely free world order in which henceforth no one should be obliged to endure the ordeals endured by the Black race. He was to commit himself in this direction not only as a writer but more actively as well, which is why he was to become Mayor and Deputy from Fort de-France, first as a Communist leader and later as the leader of the Martinican Progressive Party, working for his constituents, of course, but in such a way as to work for all Blacks and for all humanity as well.

Throughout his various stages, which represent a deepening rather than an evolution of his thought, Césaire has on all occasions shown himself to be a humanist and a universalist in the grand tradition. The thirst for liberation that drives him and which knows neither ethnic nor geographic boundaries, has always expressed itself in two areas, the one social and the other psychological. To finally bring about a world order such that no group or individual shall be oppressed or despoiled by it and in which none of mankind's inner resources shall be stifled, as they are in a civilization posited on technological excess, such are the ultimate goals toward which Césaire directs his labors, not as a Utopian, but as a man who knows that nothing worthwhile can be realized without a constant effort to surpass the present, without a vast enough vision to take in everything.

This elevation of vision and this passion for humanity are manifest, expressly or on reading between the lines, in all of Césaire's writings:

the poetic and dramatic works, those of the political man who is capable of functioning as an historian, and the speeches of the orator (which unfortunately have nearly all disappeared). Is this not the quality that gives them all an equal density and resonance, whatever the genre in which Césaire expresses himself: opening up to the song or the cry of pure poetry, formulating trenchant criticism, or objectively reporting facts.* Throughout this diversity of accents one discovers in the Césaire of today as in the young poet, what Breton had recognized at once: that invariably *major* tonal quality which is close to what Baudelaire meant in his reference to Chateaubriand, Alphonse Rabbe and Edgar Allan Poe in *Fusées:* "the eternal note, the eternal and cosmopolitan style."

A great Black poet according to Breton and according to those Africans who consider him one of their own, it happens that Césaire is a Martinican poet, born on an island that is not only a racial and cultural melting pot, but that possesses a still more significant characteristic: this tiny and presently overpopulated territory constitutes the grudging support for a civilization of transplants. In Martinique today no one can claim to be indigenous, since the Indians who were the first inhabitants were wiped out by immigrants from Europe a little over three centuries ago and since the white settlers made use of Africa to furnish its manpower; so that the present population essentially includes a small number of White descendants of those settlers or of more recent ones, Black descendants of former slaves and a large number of colored people sprung from the mixing of the two races.

If the poet is essentially someone who has to construct another world because he finds in this world no place to really put down roots, one is tempted to think that Césaire, more uprooted than anybody else because he is conscious of being the product of a disparate and narrow society that was formed not only in violence and iniquity but

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* A clause concerning the style of Césaire's play *The Tragedy of King Christophe* has been dropped by the translator. (AJA)

under the sign of a general transplantation as well, was in the most favorable situation to become more a poet than anybody else. Doubtless these conditions go some way toward explaining why the quest for authenticity, the reason behind all great poetry (to achieve one's own truth by creating one's own view of things), but in this case responding to the brutality of the real situation, was for Césaire all the more powerful as a motivation since the stakes were of immediate importance both for him and for a multitude of other uprooted people. Why, too, the freedom of expression he owed to surrealist practice led him to write so many poems whose jagged and torn aspect expresses, over and above their content, his profound state of division and disturbance at the same time that it reflects the practically unresolvable contradiction between the use of French (the mother tongue that he handles like a classical writer) and his urgent desire to become as African as possible. However, these are finally only conditions that others have reacted to differently, and if the analysis of this substratum can help one understand the sense of Césaire's vocation in terms of the precise range of his main themes and some of the characteristics of his poetry, it is vain to expect it to shed any light on the original cause of the presence in him of such verbal power. To try to explain the poetic genius of Césaire as a function of his Martinican origins would be as absurd as looking for the key to Lautréamont in the sociology of Montevideo or in the sociology of Charleville for the reasons behind Rimbaud's sudden appearance.

If there can be no further doubt that Césaire is not only a great Black poet but a great poet of decolonization, it is none the less necessary to forget his "negritude" and to listen to his voice as that of a great poet, period. For that, no better preparation than to place oneself in that perfectly unencumbered state that he talks about in his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, concerning those men who have sprung from the land of Africa, for him the object of ardent nostalgia:

> but yield, captivated, to the essence of all things

ignorant of surfaces but captivated by the motion of all things
indifferent to conquering, but playing the game of the world
truly the eldest sons of the world
porous to all the breathing of the world
fraternal locus for all the breathing of the world
drainless channel for all the water of the world
spark of the sacred fire of the world
flesh of the world's flesh pulsating with the very motion
of the world!

—1965

Translator's Note

Michel Leiris (b. 1901) is a practitioner of what James Clifford calls ethnographic surrealism. As a professional ethnographer he has written on the Dogon people in *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934) and in *La Langue secrète des Dogons...* (1948), on the Ethiopians of Gondar (1980), and on race relations in the French West Indies (1955). As an esthetician he has written on *African Art* (Golden Press, 1968) and also on *André Masson and His Universe* (1947), on "Picasso and the Human Comedy" (1954), on the Afro-Cuban painter Wifredo Lam (1971), and on Francis Bacon (1977). His autobiography *La Règle du jeu* (four volumes since 1948) is pioneering writing. He has experimented with the novel (*Aurora*, 1946) and has written on literature as tauromachy (1946). "Who is Aimé Césaire?" dates from 1965 and is printed here for the first time in English with the author's permission.

Aimé Césaire

Poetry and Knowledge

Translated from the French by A. James Arnold

POETIC KNOWLEDGE is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge.

Mankind, once bewildered by sheer data, finally dominated them through reflection, observation, and experiment. Henceforth mankind knows how to make its way through the forest of phenomena. It knows how to utilize the world.

But it is not the lord of the world on that account.

A view of the world, yes; science affords a view of the world, but a summary and superficial view.

Physics classifies and explains, but the essence of things eludes it. The natural sciences classify, but the *quid proprium* of things eludes them.

As for mathematics, what eludes its abstract and logical activity is reality itself.

In short, scientific knowledge enumerates, measures, classifies and kills.

But it is not sufficient to state that scientific knowledge is succinct. It is necessary to add that it is *poor and half-starved.*

To acquire it mankind has sacrificed everything: desires, fears,

feelings, psychological complexes.

To acquire the impersonality of scientific knowledge mankind *depersonalized* itself, *deindividualized* itself.

An impoverished knowledge, I submit, for at its inception—whatever other wealth it may have—there stands an impoverished humanity.

In Aldous Huxley's *Do What You Will* there is a very amusing page. "We all think we know what a lion is. A lion is a desert-colored animal with a mane and claws and an expression like Garibaldi's. But it is also, in Africa, all the neighboring antelopes and zebras, and therefore, indirectly, all the neighboring grass... If there were no antelopes and zebras there would be no lion. When the supply of game runs low, the king of beasts grows thin and mangy; it ceases altogether, and he dies."

It is just the same with knowledge. Scientific knowledge is a lion without antelopes and without zebras. It is gnawed from within. Gnawed by hunger, the hunger of feeling, the hunger of life.

Then dissatisfied mankind sought salvation elsewhere, in the fullness of here and now.

And mankind has gradually become aware that side by side with this half-starved scientific knowledge there is another kind of knowledge. A fulfilling knowledge.

The Ariadne's thread of this discovery: some very simple observations on the faculty that permitted the human whom one must call the primitive scientist to discover the most solid truths without benefit of induction or deduction, as if by flair.

And here we are taken back to the first days of humanity. It is an error to believe that knowledge, to be born, had to await the methodical exercise of thought or the scruples of experimentation. I even believe that mankind has never been closer to certain truths than in the first days of the species. At the time when mankind discovered with emotion the first sun, the first rain, the first breath, the first moon. At the time when mankind discovered in fear and rapture the

throbbing newness of the world.

Attraction and terror. Trembling and wonderment. Strangeness and intimacy. Only the sacred phenomenon of love can still give us an idea of what that solemn encounter can have been...

It is in this state of fear and love, in this climate of emotion and imagination that mankind made its first, most fundamental and most decisive discoveries.

It was both desirable and inevitable that humanity should accede to greater precision.

It was both desirable and inevitable that humanity should experience nostalgia for greater feeling.

It is that mild autumnal nostalgia that threw mankind back from the clear light of scientific day to the nocturnal forces of poetry.

Poets have always known. All the legends of antiquity attest to it. But in modern times it is only in the nineteenth century, as the Apollonian era draws to a close, that poets dared to claim that they knew.

1850.—The revenge of Dionysus upon Apollo.

1850.—The great leap into the poetic void.

An extraordinary phenomenon... Until then the French attitude had been one of caution, circumspection, and suspicion. France was dying of prose. Then suddenly there was the great nervous spasm at the prospect of adventure. The prosiest nation, in its most eminent representatives—by the most mountainous routes, the hardest, haughtiest, and most breathtaking, by the only routes I am willing to call sacred and royal—with all weapons and equipment went over to the enemy. I mean to the death's-head army of freedom and imagination.

Prosy France went over to poetry. And everything changed.

Poetry ceased to be a game, even a serious one. Poetry ceased to be an occupation, even an honorable one.

Poetry became an adventure. The most beautiful human adventure. At the end of the road: clairvoyance and knowledge.

And so Baudelaire...

It is significant that much of his poetry relates to the idea of a penetration of the universe.

> Happy the man who can with vigorous wings
> Mount to those luminous fields serene!
>
> The man whose thoughts, like larks,
> Fly liberated to the skies at morning,
> —Who hovers over life and effortlessly harks
> *To the language of flowers and voiceless things!*

And in "Obsession":

> But the shadows are themselves canvases
> Wherein live, welling up in my eye by thousands,
> Beings invisible to the familiar gaze...

And in "Gypsies on the Road":

> Cybele, who loves them, increases her green glades,
>
> Makes rock flow and desert bloom
> Before these travelers, for whom
> Lies open the familiar empire of future shades.

As for Rimbaud, literature is still registering the aftershocks of the incredible seismic tremor of his famous *lettre du voyant:*

> I say that one has to be clairvoyant, to make oneself
> clairvoyant.

Memorable words, words of distress and of victory...

Henceforth, the field is clear for humanity's most momentous dreams.

There is no longer any possibility of doubt about Mallarmé's enterprise. The clear-eyed boldness of what he wrote to Verlaine makes of Mallarmé rather more than the poet whose shadow is Paul Valéry: an engineer of the mind of special importance.

> Apart from the prose pieces and the poetry of my youth and the aftermath that echoed them... I have always dreamed of and attempted something else... A book, very simply, a book that would be premeditated and architectonic, and not a collection of chance inspirations, even wondrous ones. I shall go farther; I shall say The Book, persuaded that at bottom there is only one, that anyone, even a genius, who has written was working at unconsciously. The Orphic explanation of the Earth, which is the poet's only duty. And the literary game par excellence... There you have my vice revealed.

To pass from Mallarmé to Apollinaire is to go from the cold calculator, the strategist of poetry, to the enthusiastic adventurer and ringleader.

Apollinaire, great because he knew how to stake out his territory, fundamentally, between popular ballad and the war poem, was one of the awesome workmen whose advent Rimbaud had predicted.

> You whose mouth is made in the image of God
> A mouth that is order itself
> Be indulgent when you compare us
> To those who were the perfection of order
> We who seek adventure everywhere
>
> We are not your enemies
> We want to give you vast and strange domains
> Where mystery in bloom is offered to whoever would
> pluck it
> New fires are found there colors yet unseen
> A thousand imponderable fantasms
> That await the conferral of reality
> We want to explore goodness an enormous country
> where all is silence
> Then there is time that you can banish or call back
> Pity for us who fight always on the frontiers

Of the limitless and of the future
Pity our errors pity our sins

I come now, having skipped a few stops, I confess, to André Breton... Surrealism's glory will be in having aligned against it the whole block of admitted and unprofessed enemies of poetry. In having decanted several centuries of poetic experience. In having purged the past, oriented the present, prepared the future.

It was André Breton who wrote:

> After all, it is the poets over the centuries who have made it possible to receive, and who have enabled us to expect, the impulses that may once again place humankind at the heart of the universe, abstracting us for a second from our dissolving adventure, reminding us of an indefinitely perfectible place of resolution and echo for every pain and joy exterior to ourselves.

And still more significantly:

> Everything leads us to believe that there exists a certain mental point from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived contradictorily. And one would search in vain for a motive in surrealist activity other than the determination of that point.

Never in the course of centuries has higher ambition been expressed with greater tranquility.

This highest ambition is the ambition of poetry itself.

We have only to examine the conditions necessary to satisfy it, and their precise mode.

The ground of poetic knowledge, an astonishing mobilization of all human and cosmic forces.

It is not merely with his whole soul, it is with his entire being that the poet approaches the poem. What presides over the poem is not the most lucid intelligence, or the most acute sensibility, but an entire experience: all the women loved, all the desires experienced, all

the dreams dreamed, all the images received or grasped, the whole weight of the body, the whole weight of the mind. All lived experience. All the possibility. Around the poem about to be made, the precious vortex: the ego, the id, the world. And the most extraordinary contacts: all the pasts, all the futures (the anticyclone builds its plateaux, the amoeba loses its pseudopods, vanished vegetations meet). All the flux, all the rays. The body is no longer deaf or blind. Everything has a right to live. Everything is summoned. Everything awaits. Everything, I say. The individual whole churned up by poetic inspiration. And, in a more disturbing way, the cosmic whole as well.

This is the right occasion to recall that the unconscious that all true poetry calls upon is the receptacle of original relationships that bind us to nature.

Within us, all the ages of mankind. Within us, all humankind. Within us, animal, vegetable, mineral. Mankind is not only mankind. It is *universe*.

Everything happens as though prior to the secondary scattering of life, there was a knotty primal unity whose gleam poets have homed in on.

Mankind, distracted by its activities, delighted by what is useful, has lost the sense of that fraternity. Here is the superiority of the animal. And of the tree still more than of the animal, because the tree is fixed, attachment and perseverance to essential nature...

And because the tree is stability, it is also surrender.

Surrender to the vital movement, to the creative élan. Joyous surrender.

And the flower is the sign of that recognition.

The superiority of the tree over mankind, of the tree that says "yes" over mankind who says "no." Superiority of the tree that is consent over mankind who is evasiveness; superiority of the tree, which is rootedness and deepening, over mankind who is agitation and malfeasance.

And that is why mankind does not blossom at all.

Mankind is no tree. Its arms imitate branches, but they are withered branches which, for having misunderstood their true function (to embrace life), have fallen down along the trunk, have dried up: mankind does not blossom at all.

But one man is the salvation of humanity, one man puts humanity back in the universal concert, one man unites the human flowering with universal flowering; that man is the poet.

But what has he done for that?

Very little, but that little he alone could do. Like the tree, like the animal, he has surrendered to primal life, he has said yes, he has consented to that immense life that transcends him. He has rooted himself in the earth, he has stretched out his arms, he has played with the sun, he has become a tree: he has blossomed, he has sung.

In other words poetry is full bloom.

The blossoming of mankind to the dimensions of the world; giddy dilation. And it can be said that all true poetry, without ever abandoning its humanity, at the moment of greatest mystery ceases to be strictly human so as to begin to be truly cosmic.

There we see resolved, and by the poetic state, two of the most anguishing antinomies that exist: the antinomy of one and other, the antinomy of Self and World.

"Finally, oh happiness, oh reason, I listened to the azure sky, which is blackness, and I lived, a golden spark in nature's light."

So, pregnant with the world, the poet speaks.

In the beginning was the word...

...Never did a man believe it more powerfully than the poet.

And it is on the word, a chip off the world, secret and chaste slice of the world, that he gambles all our possibilities. Our first and last chance.

More and more the word promises to be an algebraic equation that makes the world intelligible. Just as the new Cartesian algebra permitted the construction of theoretical physics, so too an original handling of the word can make possible at any moment a new (theo-

retical and heedless) science that poetry could already give an approximate notion of. Then the time will come again when the study of the word will condition the study of nature. But at this juncture we are still in the shadows....

Let's come back to the poet. Pregnant with the world, the poet speaks.

He speaks and his speech returns language to its purity.

By purity I mean not subject to habit or thought but only to the cosmic thrust. The poet's word, the primal word: rupestral design in the stuff of sound.

The poet's utterance: primal utterance, the universe played with and copied.

And because in every true poem, the poet plays the game of the world, the true poet hopes to surrender the word to its free associations, certain that in the final analysis that is to surrender it to the will of the universe.

Everything I have just said runs the risk of implying that the poet is defenseless. But that isn't at all correct. If I further specify that in poetic emotion nothing is ever closer to anything than to its opposite, it will be understood that no peacemaker, no plumber of the deep was ever more rebellious or pugnacious.

Take the old idea of the irritable poet and transfer it to poetry itself. In this sense it is appropriate to speak of poetic violence, of poetic aggressivity, of poetic instability. In this climate of flame and fury that is the climate of poetry money has no currency, courts pass no judgments, judges do not convict, juries do not acquit. Only the firing squads still know how to ply their trade. The farther one proceeds the more obvious the signs of the disaster become. Police functions are strangulated. Conventions wear out. The Grammont laws for the protection of mankind, the Locarno agreements for the protection of animals suddenly and marvelously give up their virtues. A wind of confusion.

. . . . . .

An agitation that shakes the most solid foundations. At the bloodied far end of mortal avenues an immense disloyal sun sneers. It is the sun of humor. And in the dust of the clouds crows write one name over and over:

ISIDORE DUCASSE COUNT OF LAUTRÉAMONT.

Lautréamont, the very first in fact, integrated poetry and humor. He was the first to discover the functional role of humor. The first to make us feel that what love has begun, humor has the power to continue.

Sweeping clean the fields of the mind is not the least important role of humor. To dissolve with its blowtorch the fleeting connections that threaten to build up in our gray matter and harden it. It is humor, first and foremost, that assures Lautréamont—in opposition to Pascal, La Rouchefoucauld and so many other moralists—that had Cleopatra's nose been shorter the face of the world would not have been changed; that death and the sun can look one another in the face; that mankind is a subject empty of errors... that nothing is less strange than the contradictoriness one discovers in mankind. It is humor first and foremost that assures me it is as true to say the thief makes the opportunity as: "opportunity makes the thief..."

Humor alone assures me that the most prodigious turnabouts are legitimate. Humor alone alerts me to the other side of things.

We are now arriving in the crackling fields of metaphor.

One cannot think of the richness of the image without the repercussion suggesting the poverty of judgment.

Judgment is poor from all the reason in the world.
The image is rich with all the absurdity in the world.
Judgment is rich with all the "thought" in the world.
The image is rich with all the life in the universe.
Judgment is poor from all the rationality in existence.

The image is rich with all the irrational in life.
Judgment is poor from all immanence.
The image is rich with all transcendence.

Let me explain...

However much one may strain to reduce analytical judgment to synthetic judgment; or to say that judgment supposes the connecting of two different concepts; or to insist on the idea that there is no judgment without X; that all judgment is a surpassing toward the unknown; that all judgment is transcendence, it is nonetheless true that in all valid judgment the field of transcendence is limited.

The barriers are in place; the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, the logical principle of the excluded middle.

Precious barriers. But remarkable limitations as well.

It is by means of the image, the revolutionary image, the distant image, the image that overthrows all the laws of thought that mankind finally breaks down the barrier.

In the image A is no longer A.

You whose many raspberried laughs
Are a flock of tame lambs.

In the image A can be A':

The black focus plate, real strand suns, ah! wells of magic.

In the image every object of thought is not necessarily A or A'.
The image maintains the possibility of the happy medium.
Another by Rimbaud:

The carts of silver and copper
The prows of steel and silver
Strike the foam
Raise the bramble roots.

Without taking into consideration the encouraging complicity of the world as it is either *found* or *invented*, which permit us to say

motor for *sun*, *dynamo* for *mountain*, *carburator* for *Carib*, etc... and to celebrate lyrically the shiny connecting rod of the moons and the tired piston of the stars...

Because the image extends inordinately the field of transcendence and the right of transcendence, poetry is always on the road to truth. And because the image is forever surpassing that which is perceived because the dialectic of the image transcends antinomies, on the whole modern science is perhaps only the pedantic verification of some mad images spewed out by poets....

When the sun of image reaches its zenith, everything becomes possible again... Accursed complexes dissolve, it's the instant of emergence...

What emerges is the individual foundation. The intimate conflicts, the obsessions, the phobias, the fixations. All the codes of the personal message.

It isn't a matter, as in the earlier lyric, of immortalizing an hour of pain or joy. Here we are well beyond anecdote, at the very heart of mankind, in the babbling hollow of destiny. My past is there to designate and to hide its face from me. My future is there to hold out its hand to me. Rockets flare. It is my childhood in flames. It is my childhood talking and looking for me. And within the person I am now the person I will be stands on tiptoe.

And what emerges as well is the old ancestral foundation.

Hereditary images that only the poetic atmosphere can bring to light again for ultimate decoding. The buried knowledge of the ages. The legendary cities of knowledge.

In this sense all the mythologies that the poet tumbles about, all the symbols he collects and regilds are true. And poetry alone takes them seriously. Which goes to make poetry a serious business.

The German philosopher Jung discovers the idea of energy and its conservation in Heraclitus's metaphor of the eternally living fire, in medieval legends related to saintly auras, in theories of metempsychosis. And for his part, Pierre Mabille regrets that the biologist

should believe it "dishonorable to describe the evolution of blood corpuscles in terms of the story of the phoenix, or the functions of the spleen through the myth of Saturn engendering children only to devour them."

In other words, myth is repugnant to science whereas poetry is in accord with it. Which does not mean that science is superior to poetry. To tell the truth, myth is both inferior and superior to *law*. The inferiority of myth is in the degree of precision. The superiority of myth is in richness and sincerity. Only myth satisfies mankind completely; heart, reason, taste for detail and wholeness, taste for the false and the true, since myth is all that at once, a misty and emotional apprehension, rather than a means of poetic expression...

Thus, love and humor.

Thus, the word, image, and myth...

With the aid of these great powers of synthesis we can at last understand André Breton's words:

> Columbus had to sail with madmen to discover America.
>
> And look at how that madness has been embodied, and lasted...
>
> It's not fear of madness that will oblige us to furl the flag of imagination.

It's not fear of madness that will oblige us to furl the flag of imagination.

And the poet Lucretius divines the indestructibility of matter, the plurality of worlds, the existence of the infinitely small.

And the poet Seneca in *Medea* sends forth ships on the trail of new worlds:

> In centuries to come the Ocean will burst the bonds within which it contains us. A land of infinity shall open before us. The pilot shall discover new countries and Thule will no longer be the ultimate land.

"It's not fear of madness that will oblige us to furl the flag of imagi-

nation..." And the painter Rousseau *invented* the vegetation of the tropics. And the painter De Chirico unknowingly painted Apollinaire's future wound on his forehead. And in the year 1924 the poet André Breton associated the number 1939 with the word *war*.

"It's not fear of madness that will oblige us to furl the flag of imagination." And the poet Rimbaud wrote *Illuminations*.

And the result is known to you: strange cities, extraordinary countrysides, worlds twisted, crushed, torn apart, the cosmos given back to chaos, order given back to disorder, being given over to becoming, everywhere the absurd, everywhere the incoherent, the demential. And at the end of all that! What is there? Failure! No, the flashing vision of his own destiny. And the most authentic vision of the world if, as I stubbornly continue to believe, Rimbaud is the first man to have experienced as feeling, as anguish, the modern idea of energetic forces in matter that cunningly wait to ambush our quietude...

No: "It's not fear of madness that will oblige us to furl the flag of imagination..."

And now for a few proposals by way of summation and clarification:

FIRST PROPOSAL

Poetry is that process which through word, image, myth, love and humor establishes me at the living heart of myself and of the world.

SECOND PROPOSAL

The poetic process is a naturalizing process operating under the demential impulse of imagination.

THIRD PROPOSAL

Poetic knowledge splatters its object with all its mobilized richness.

FOURTH PROPOSAL

If affective energy can be endowed with causal power as Freud indicated, it is paradoxical to refuse it power and penetration. It is con-

ceivable that nothing can resist the unheard of mobilization of force that poetry necessitates, or the multiplied élan of those forces.

FIFTH PROPOSAL

Marvelous discoveries occur at the equally marvelous contact of inner and outer totality perceived imaginatively and conjointly by, or more precisely within, the poet.

SIXTH PROPOSAL

Scientific truth has as its sign coherence and efficacity. Poetic truth has as its sign beauty.

SEVENTH AND FINAL PROPOSAL

The poetically beautiful is not merely beauty of expression or muscular euphoria. A too Apollonian or gymnastic idea of beauty paradoxically runs the risk of skinning, stuffing and hardening it.

COROLLARY

The music of poetry cannot be external or formal. The only *acceptable* poetic music comes from a greater distance than sound. To seek to musicalize poetry is the crime against poetic music, which can only be the striking of the mental wave against the rock of the world.

The poet is that very ancient yet new being, at once very complex and very simple who at the limit of dream and reality, of day and night, between absence and presence, searches for and receives in the sudden triggering of inner cataclysms the password of connivance and power.

(1944-1945)

Translator's Note

"Poetry and Knowledge" is the nearest thing to an *ars poetica* that Aimé Césaire wrote during his period of association with Surrealism. He was visiting Haiti as a lecturer and teacher when he read this paper at a meeting of philosophers in Port-au-

Prince on September 28, 1944. "Poetry and Knowledge" retains traces of Césaire's emphatic oral style, especially the rhythmic repetition of entire phrases, even in the text published by his literary magazine *Tropiques* in January 1945, the version translated here.

The cultural and political climate was rather special and bears on the exalted tone Césaire took in setting up poetry and Surrealism in opposition to science and logic. The Surrealist paradigm could still be seen as having the potential to carry over from individual to collective experience, from esthetics to politics. The Gaullist Governor of the French West Indies who arranged Césaire's official visit to Haiti was the Surrealist Pierre Mabille. Liberation was definitely in the air—in Martinique, which had been governed in the early years of the war by an admiral loyal to Pétain; and in Haiti, which was currently suffering under one of its many dictators, Elie Lescot. If the philosophers didn't take to the streets after Césaire's call to disorder, something of the sort did occur little more than a year later when André Breton and Wifredo Lam came to town. In January 1946 Breton gave a public lecture in Port-au-Prince that triggered a general strike in the university and widespread rebellion in the principal towns. René Depestre, who was then the nineteen-year-old editor of the newspaper *La Ruche*, has recently chronicled these events in *Bonjour et Adieu à la négritude* (Paris: Laffont, 1980).

Negritude as a rallying cry or an ideological position is noticeably absent from "Poetry and Knowledge." In the context of Port-au-Prince in 1944 the word was superfluous. For Césaire, after all, Haiti was the country where "negritude rose for the first time and stated that it believed in its humanity...." "Poetry and Knowledge" is about that humanity; it draws a straight line from the paleolithic cave artist to the poet of *Miraculous Weapons*.

△

Aimé Césaire

Thirteen Poems

Translated from the French
by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith

Visitation

oh surge without number without dust harbinger of each vinous
word
surge and my chest salted by the coves of ancient days and the
young color
tender on the breasts of the sky and of women electric with
what diamonds

eruptive forces trace your orbs
telepathic communications resume across the recalcitrant matter
messages of love strayed to the four corners of the world return
to us rekindled
by the carrier pigeons of sidereal traffic

as for me I have nothing to fear I am from before Adam I do not
come under the same lion
nor under the same tree I am from a different hot and a different
cold

oh my childhood of firefly milk and reptile quivering
but already the vigil was straining toward the star and the postern
and we were racing

across an arched sea incredibly planted with shipwrecked sterns
toward a shore where I was welcomed by a rustic people
penetrators of forests with wrought-iron
boughs in their hands—the comradely sleep on the jetty—the blue dog of metamorphosis
the white bear of icebergs and Your truly wild disappearance
tropical as an apparition of a nocturnal wolf at high noon

Debris

And shit like none other the sea without a sap without a listening post without a splinter shield
without communication trenches peeled of moons broken on the iron knees of the night
if a cephalopodic ex-voto from the coal mines I raised against its breast my mugpiece
of a green Antille
corymb of days corymb of nights
toward the hermaphroditic Nothing full sail cultivating its prioress and cross-bearing soul
shit between waking and sleeping of a sensitive plant I standing in the fields of blood and sunset thumping their hernandia sonora songs
and your forked tongue which my purity reveres Revolt
in the debris
it is the gorgon and isis drooling sea of my eyes and the harnessed air
rain and gold from the bullets of orgasm your eyes
shit it is the sea without an allelomorph opening its fans and rustling its nuts it is the sea laying down its entire chromosian hand it is

the sea imprinting a river of herds and tongues way under the
palm of lethal lands and the wind its pocket full of shipwrecks
with its mouth a source as fresh as your thought which I lose and
which I hunt down between waking and sleeping
it is the sea my darling caryophyllaceous and virgin frothing toward
the hermaphroditic Nothing its excellent woman's and ranun-
culus leaves in which spermatazoids of perfect birds are achieved

like the sun my darling like the sun a frog spattered in its nest with
dry mud

△

Tom-Tom II

for Wifredo

with baby steps like a rain of caterpillars
with baby steps like a gulp of milk
with baby steps like ball bearings
with baby steps like a seismic tremor
the yams in the soil advance with giant steps like a breach of stars
like a breach of night like a Holy
Mother of God breach
with giant steps like a breach of words in a stutterer's throat
orgasm of the holy pollutions
hallelujah

△

The Oubliettes of the Sea and the Deluge

Day oh day of New York and of soukala
I put my trust in you
in you who will no longer be the absurd game of the death's-head
    moth and rebellious eczema
and the day very simply the day
takes off its gloves
its gloves of blue wind of raw milk of concentrated salt
its gloves of repose of dogfish egg and of fire of black straw
dryness
dryness
you will have no power against my aquiferous glands
the chemical ballet of rare lands
the powder of eyes finely ground up under the club
the immobily stubborn gulls of bobbins and water
create the inalterable alloy of my hourless sleep
hourless except for the geyser-like inappeasement of the trees of
    silence
hourless except for the fraternal catastrophe with its hippocampal
    horses and Campeachy wood
hourless except for my sisal and spider web eyes
my eyes of keystone and day wreckage
where the fever mounted on 300,000 fireflies can be caught
hourless except for the knives of the sun's jet hurled at full speed
around the withers of the climates
hourless except for the birds that peck at the sky bays to appease
    their thirst-for-sleeping-in-the-deluge
hourless except for the inconsolable blood bird which from waiting
    lights up in the agriculture of your eyes undoers of fair
    weather
hourless except for the prodigious voice of forests which suddenly
    fill their sails in the drydocks of the swamp and coke

hourless except for the low water mark of lunations in the brain
    bookkeeper for people fed on insults and millenniums
hourless except oh! hourless except for your phlegm incorruptible
    bull
which never snows a more healthy or deadly call
than when—wheat-spike and novena of the disaster (the real one)—
the woman
who on her drinkable lips rocks the palanquin of the sea's
    oubliettes
is awakened

from *The Miraculous Weapons* (1946)

△

Tangible Disaster

All insects accounted for (the metal of the grass has seized their
    throats
ashy menses
slow leap of an oven handing out its surprise of loaves whose crew
entrapped dries out all litigation
disaster
lumps
at the eye's limit its mug gagged by clouds
a quartered volcano the Bedouin of this desert
a front for a sweet ole Carib rolling his caravan over bones
and years heard by engulfed
feet or an eruption what quadroon of massacred niggers or redskins
at night's end resheaths the dagger of your neverborn swagger
restituting your feet borne along by the waters
    to the screamless apron of a presumptuous 'strom

Redemption

The loud noise gravitates rotten with cargo
wormy and bright wreckage of a soldanel
the loud noise gravitates a meninx of diamonds
your face glides naked into my milky frenzy

Amoebic swelter
miltic swelter true gossamers of the true immaculate virgin in the auroras of the sea when the maslin made skin and plunder of the damned

Sweltering piles of chipped plates of ruins of mangy dogs of deep-sea divers who glide away at dusk

Swelter crude radiance
in the barely moving nakedness of my hand
virgin umbilicus of the earth

△

Your Hair

Wouldn't you have taken it bombarded by lateritic blood
for a beautiful stript tree
the invincible and spacious cockcrowing already in invincible departure toward
—one imagines—a witches' sabbath of splendor and cities

Undulating innocent
all the juices rising in the lust of the earth
all the poisons distilled by the nocturnal alembics in

the involucres of the malvaceae
all the thundering of the saponaria
are like these discordant words written by the flames of pyres
over the sublime oriflammes of your revolt

Your hair
ingenuous flames licking a rare heart
the forest will remember the water and the alburnum
as I too remember the compassionate snouts
of big rivers that stumble around like blind men
the forest remembers that the last word can only be
the flaming cry of the bird of ruins in the bowl of the storm

Innocent who goes there
forget to remember
that the baobab is our tree
that it barely waves arms so dwarfed
that you would take it for an imbecilic giant
and you
inhabited by my insolence my tombs my twisters
mane bundle of lianas violent hope of the shipwrecked
sleep softly by the meticulous trunk of my embrace my woman
my citadel

△

Noon Knives

When the Niggers make Revolution they begin by uprooting giant trees from the Champ de Mars which they hurl like bayings into the face of the sky and which in the hottest of the air aim at pure streams of cool birds at which they fire blanks. Fire blanks? Yes indeed be-

cause blankness (or whiteness) is precisely the controversial color of the blackness which they carry in their hearts and which never ceases to conspire in the little too well made hexagons of their pores. The white shots then plant ladies-of-the-night in the sky which are not unrelated to the coifs of Saint Joseph de Cluny nuns laundered under the bread and wine of noon amidst the solar jubilation of tropical soap.

Noon? Yes, Noon dispersing in the sky the too complacent cotton wool which muffles my words, which traps my screams. Noon? Yes Noon almond of the night and tongue between my pepper fangs. Noon? Yes Noon which carries on its shoulders of a bum and a glazier all the sensitivity toward hatred and ruins that counts. Noon? sure Noon which after pausing on my lips for the time it takes to curse and at the cathedral limits of idleness sets on every line of every hand the trains that repentence kept in reserve in the strongboxes of severe time. Noon? Yes sumptuous Noon which makes me absent from this world.

Sweet Lord!

savagely I spit. Into the face of the starvers, into the face of the revilers, into the face of the paraschites and of the eviscerators.

Savage Lord! sweetly I whistle; I whistle sweetly

Sweet like the dwarf elder

sweet like the glass of catastrophe

sweet like the cloak of bird feathers which vengeance dons after the crime

sweet like the greeting of tiny waves caught in their petticoats in the chambers of the manchineel

sweet like a river of mandibles and the eyelid of a parrot

sweet like a rain of ash empearled with tiny fires.

Oh! I stick to my pact

upright in my wounds where against the shafts of shipwreck my blood beats the cadavers of croaked dogs out of which hummingbirds are rocketing, this is the day

a day for our fraternal feet
a day for our hands without rancor
a day for our breath without diffidence
a day for our faces free of shame

and the Niggers go searching in the dust—gems singing in their ears at the top of their voices—for the splinters from which mica is made as well as moons and the fissile slate out of which sorcerers make the intimate ferocity of the stars.

from *Solar Throat Slashed* (1948)

△

Lost Body

I who Krakatoa
I who everything better than a monsoon
I who open chest
I who Laelaps
I who bleat better than a cloaca
I who outside the musical scale
I who Zambezi or frantic or rhombos or cannibal
I would like to be more and more humble and more lowly
always more serious without vertigo or vestige
to the point of losing myself falling
into the live semolina of a well-opened earth
Outside in lieu of atmosphere there'd be a beautiful haze
no dirt in it
each drop of water forming a sun there
whose name the same for all things
would be DELICIOUS TOTAL ENCOUNTER

so that one would no longer know what goes by
—a star or a hope
or a petal from the flamboyant tree
or an underwater retreat
raced across by the flaming torches of aurelian jellyfishes
Then I imagine life would flood my whole being
better still I would feel it touching me or biting me
lying down I would see the finally free odors come to me
like merciful hands
finding their way
to sway their long hair in me
longer than this past that I cannot reach.
Things stand back make room among you
room for my repose carrying in waves
my frightening crest of anchor-like roots
looking for a place to take hold
Things I probe I probe
me the street-porter I am root-porter
and I bear down and I force and I arcane
    I omphale
Ah who leads me back toward the harpoons
    I am very weak
I hiss yes I hiss very ancient things
as serpents do as do cavernous things
I whoa lie down wind
and against my unstable and fresh muzzle
against my eroded face
press your cold face of ravaged laughter
The wind alas I will continue to hear it
nigger nigger nigger from the depths
of the timeless sky
a little less loud than today
but still too loud

and this crazed howling of dogs and horses
which it thrusts at our forever fugitive heels
but I in turn in the air
shall rise a scream so violent
that I shall splatter the whole sky
and with my branches torn to shreds
and with the insolent jet of my wounded and solemn bole

I shall command the islands to be

from *Lost Body* (1950)

△

... But There Is This Hurt

If my thought borrows the wings of the menfenil
oh faces it is clear
you are prey for my claws

and I I am prey
for the beak of the wind of doubt of the soot
of night oh cinder denser toward the heart
and this hiccup of nails driven in by the seasons

for there is this hurt
Here Lies at the height of myself
spread out in a big pool the hidden one with no undertow
when the voracious day robbed me of my odor

about this blood of mine you will say
that always at the threshold of its bitter gallop it tripped

that more just before God than their correct mouths
my lie
before his distraught face soared with a thousand
infantes out of the high sea plunging flush with the bulwarks
shaken by the original black sobbing of brambles

△

Corpse of a Frenzy

the memory of a road
rising very steeply in bamboo shade
the cane juice that invents itself always new
and the odor of mombins

the little skirts of the sea
the seasons of childhood
the parasol of coccolobes
have been left below

at the curve I turn around I look over the shoulder
of my past it is full of always not immediately comprehensible
magical and anguishing blows of breadfruit
falling and rolling down into ravines where no one finds them

catastrophe made for itself a throne perched too high
out of the delirium of the destroyed city it is my burned down life

Grief will you never
stop expecting our howling
I dreamed face twisted
mouth bitter I dreamed about all the impurities of my blood

and the ghosts roamed about with each of my gestures
at the indentation of fate

never mind it is a weakness

let my heart keep vigil
a prisoner who alone in his cell inexplicably survives the evidence
of fate
ferocious taciturn
at the very bottom a lamp lit from his horrible wound

I Perseus Centuplicating Myself

Make, around me, around my side,
my head, around my gnarled black heart, at the outer reaches,
your rounds, harassing with the throng of torments
my name.

Let the beak pierce, transpierce the resisting
bark. As for the rest let the clandestine termite weft
hem itself garnering the bite into the depths of the prey.

And no assault persevering in denying me a name
instead in the lymph which centuplicates me a Perseus
I run the course of the intimate pit feeding my voracious
monsters my suns and the storm beyond alburnum estimates me
out of season by tree rings
slow secretaries of a seism.

Tomb of Paul Eluard

Blazon of blows on the shattered body of dreams
first morning of snows
a very amorphous
day when all lights out
the landscape collapses
over the most distant sandbanks
the sirens of lightships have been sounding two nights
Paul ELUARD is dead

you who were the tale of innocence
who returned science to its sources
standard of the fragile seed
stronger than chance in the combat of the wind
ELUARD
neither can you lie in
nor have access to earth purer
than these eyelids
than these simple folk
than these tears
in which pushing aside the finest grass of the fog
you are walking very distant
making hands join
making paths intersect
challenging the purple word of the shipwreckers of dawn
perched on the sun

It is however much too gripping to hear you
winding up the great rose window of time
you have never been seen so clearly and so close
as in this effervescence
from the bread of snow rising when the day of settlement justifies
an abyss of silex

in the smoldering utmost depth of the compost of the storm
ELUARD
cavalier of mens' eyes for whom the watering place
in which to graze on mirage gleams, real,
gentle severe uncorruptible tough
when little by little you were dismounting
to confound by surprise
the death of the impossible and the word of spring

Commander of the goodness of bread
he passed under skies fighting
with his voice run through by the inflexible flower of the mid-day
  flail

and his step turning into bread
the future of highways
with a trembling of monsters vomited through the nostrils
demands that in the left auricle of each prisoner
all the dead wood in the world and the singing forest
blaze up as a single heart

Listen
  decoder
under your eyelids you never nighten having
in order to see night and day better
thrown to the cross fire of the cobblestone's swirls
the false fire driven out by the coronation of gems

Surveyor measurer of the wider horizon
lookout under cellars for a fire under blowholes
over grey seas greeter of most subtle flakes

oh time, opulent thanks to your tongue

at that hour the water shines man like water in the fields will shine
behold him whistle to him the docility of a leafy season

Look basilisk

the breaker of looks this very moment is looking at you
an impure evening of ice floes warmed you up in its fingers like
    the secret of summer

Reason
    what surprise of roots
    will embrace you this evening
    or the torrent
                is it possible you are already descending
    the other face of the divide
in vain a deafness thickens the nonmiraculous vigil
out of its punctured eyes the rock drives its birds

oh capricorn pack
the words their pulses beat they are known to be fabulous
sucked outside of time by an aviary hand the fallen words
gathered the seasons folded rounded like carriage gates
seasons
seasons for him wide-open

ELUARD

to preserve your body
never a climber of rituals
on the jade of your own words may you be laid down in simplicity

conjured by the warmth of triumphant life

in compliance with the operculated mouth of your silence
and the lofty amnesty of seashells

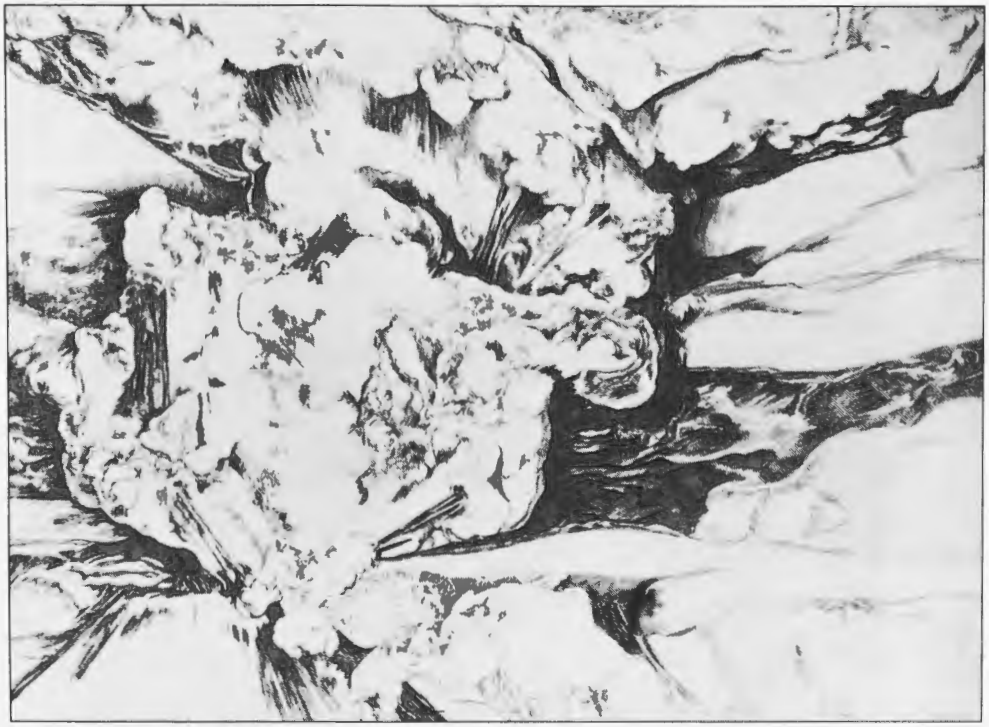
from *Ferraments* (1960)

This selection of Césaire poems has been taken from "The Collected Poetry of Aimé Césaire (1939-1976)," translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, to be published by The University of California Press, fall, 1983.

NORA JAFFE

FOUR SILVERPOINT DRAWINGS

Mt. St. Helens #1, 1981



Mt. St. Helens #3, 1981

Threnody for Sunshine #3, 1981

Threnody for Sunshine #7, 1981

Bruce McClelland

Petersburg 1982

Visible silver grad & tree
the year is snow & snow is talk
the sun has set us up to here
the ancient sense of boundary
the new body of the dream kissed
woman has her luxuries, or looks
west to him who holds, this in.
It rhymes & stares at all
the strangeness morning late &
bright goes down with him is cold.
There is no stanza like the present
comfort government will say, you
live this now, & underneath.

Underneath was Peter, great below
his son knows greater than the crossless graves
& uncrossed legs the women will bring us to
the west. He knows the greater
noise is even there in music
underneath the slow slow tape
of everything forgot. It snowed & then
they learned that under it there were no
shores or bombs or friendlessness
nor tables monuments to peace
or great. No greatness there

Or on any horizon difficulty sits
an old or giant memory the sun
the crosser of our longitudes, the once
we used to kiss so long our lips would
freeze together & if we ever tried or
never did to get apart for god forbid
we'd bleed from them into the other's
do you remember gums that invasion?
How beautiful it was, the blood down the
stairs then into the square from trying
simply trying not to tell.

It all was told (they all were cold)
& hunger was a simpler need the
mouths upon a crust of sawdust
pressed so hard into wheat it would
not ever break. They never broke
the bread.

Beneath, then, the snow religion
's dream of any two of us are
doing what we want, or eating up
the upper world upon us all the
time, upon our shores. They are
not all so white that his fortress
has to stand for any place we put
the ones we would not kiss.

So let me kiss you voice &
make me cry, your sad warmth
running up & into world,
& drink it back, the salt is on
the bread is soft the water hot.

Swerves

Today on the way down a slowing down (October)
bee was watching me dying. & tested his useless
wings, no more dances but to fight the
rush of wind that reminded him of falling
only the orientation was otherwise. Just
to hold on to the side of the vehicle was to
prove it, last into October, scare the driver
(what driver) into unnecessary concern, divert
him from his course, threaten to take his body.

What body it was a car after all or shell
within a shell within shells. Within the sign
of behemoth above leviathan was the incarnate
idea of the size of the world. Measured by the
swerve.
& honey came upon it, late, afternoon,
but sweet as the cider would have been
in October, ideas lasting months now was
honey the idea.

△

Gustaf Sobin

Ray

1

ploughed
ice, where an
eye

swims, scarce
muscle, up
over

its
clotted ditch
(*mine,*

is mine,
would
keep saying),

ray, swung
pendulous,
through

the rusting
wind-
knotted shoots.

*

just there,
where
the instant

wobbles, bowl
the
bluejay

rims, with a
flat beat,
shatters.

*

wrinkled, the
long
rocks, the

des-
olate scales
of the

oak. unto
what, journey
where, the

wind's
nerve, light's
white

tendril

on its
hooded stave.

2

would
enter. close
on the frozen

roses of
the cabbage,
the

light, at
last, *beneath*.
o world

where the
world
went, the slack

caves
of the air, a-
gape; is

a shawl
of
burnt

crystals, spent
echoes
that's

falling
out, on-
to the lidless.

3

thread, the
sequence,
ray

welded—short
wire—to
the

washed
black
fans of the

cypress (*mine,*
is mine,
would say, a

squint leashed
to its
cold fires).

*

gather
branches; bear
stones,

bulbs, fleece...
that they
be brought,

set,
vibrant, in
sound; that

light,
unto light's
last

artifice, be
folded, its
facets

wrapped
within the
word's

cupped
shadow, and
wizened shrine.

△

Lauren Shakely

Five Poems

Paw-Paw Bay

It was a week of sunsets, expiring fiercely
night after night. We watched one with waiter Freddie
at the cape resort, over the heads of his buddies
butchering dolphin, slashing fillets and holding them
slippery and green for the captains holding their caps.
All week the sun sank in a burst of crystals,
boiling the sea, the jackfish leapt toward shore
at twilight, and you ran down the jetty yelling
and swinging your bait overhead. Behind you stumbled
the fat German tourist rubbing his hands (Who had ever
seen such a sea?) and Otis wailed into the advancing night
from a parked red Chevy. Trudging in the sand with the hats
and towels I admired your silhouette against the teenager's
glowing car, your mania against his deliberate languor,
your faith, like his, that in the long run
something exists to be caught.

△

Virginia Garden Week

I pull into Morven in a cloud of dust
and marvel at the blue of the Blue Ridge.

Even words sometimes tell the truth,
though they change nothing: lost on the way
found was useless, and, utterly lost,
eternity would be too much to bear.
The opportunity to read accident as failure
I welcome, my heart unfurling from crucial tension
like the azaleas that blaze here, so fierce,
so hot. While rich men rest in peace,
over their lilacs, their English box,
two butterflies twitch, circling tighter
and tighter with wings beating, and we poor folk
ask Will you take my picture so I can recall
this clear afternoon, the odor of box,
the tulips bent over backwards? and Why
does that cow keep staring? Even the balm
in *I love you* is useless today, while blame
is everywhere: the sky is blue, the mountains blue,
and I sit mute on a stump, waiting for this garden,
too, to pass.

△

Definition

After our damp skins slid apart
I nearly starved, pulling
on my mother's drained tit.
She used all her strength
to shove me out of her body,
the last link stretched, slashed,
tied in a knot I wear on the beach,
flaunting the twisted emblem

of first rejection, the eye of flesh
that saw love couldn't last.

△

The Nile of Principles

In my script the sexy wags at the ends of letters
are extensions of absurdity. A wrong number
stitches me to a flow of loneliness endless
as pharaohs picking at plaster, coalescing selves
from our miasma. But at least it's life
we didn't squeeze into being.
                A woman
who likes gardening is accused of saluting
the Nile of principles, where the valley burns
deeper, greener, more perverse to have befouled
the desert with the luster of vegetation, with the
aroma of work.
                On the ultimate Greyhound bus ride,
a sweating, avuncular tenderness hunches always
in the adjacent seat, a pharaoh plundering emptiness
for a reason to lean back and row. Rhythm doesn't
cancel the effort; nothing cancels fatigue; and now
the garden squares off forever, apparently
to even the score.
                Still, I still
want to be a man, and am, in a sense: I am genderless
and human: each particle strains for a neat
hairline of poignancy that is the most
I'll admit to believing.

Needs

1

We came down to this water to drink,
and there was no water.
How could we blame the water
for not being there, or the place
we expected water to be for having no water?
It was our mysterious thirst,
which rose up steadily, intensely,
meaninglessly. It was the search for water,
the idea of water, the idea of idea
that drove us to this place
with our mouths stupidly open,
empty of need and the need
to describe it.

2

The idea of water,
having no particular meaning,
was not a particularly bad idea,
Looking for it, driven by desire,
was guileless. It was simply stronger
than other movements,
having moved us to this place,
giving the place meaning, not sacrifice,
but hope—the blind stupidity of innocent wandering
to places as empty as life is, of intention, good will,
as likely, unlikely, as any place
to have water.

3

Filled with the idea of water
we went looking for it, desperate
beyond intelligence, encouraged
by the seeming absence of water
to search for it everywhere.
We began to think we could drown
the need to look for it, attain
the love of emptiness,
the appreciation of beautiful
waterless places that inspired us,
from a distance, to go beyond them.
This blank, narrow space must have been
what we meant after all, since we,
with language alone, with the dry
intensity of passion,
have found it.

△

Michael Palmer

The Theory of the Flower

I will read a few of these to see if they exist
(We will translate logos as logos)

He swam in the rock
I am here from a distance

"Now kiss her cunt"
"Now take his cock in your hand"

The film is of a night garden
There is nothing meaningful about the text

There is nothing meaningful about a text
She

brushed away the sand
She brushed away the hand

This is Paradise, an unpunctuated book
and this a sequence of laws

in which the night sky is lost
and the flower of theory is a black spot

upon the foxglove
(These words have all been paid for)

He turns them to shade his eyes from the sun
She edges closer to the fallen log

This is Paradise, a mildewed book
left too long in the house

Now say the words you had meant to
Now say the words such words mean

The car is white but does not run
It fits in a pocket

He slept inside the rock,
a flower that was almost blue

Such is order
which exenterates itself

The islands will be a grave for their children
after they are done

You may use the paper with my name on it
to say whatever you want

I promise not to be so boring next time
never again to laugh and weep so much

which is how spring comes
to the measured center of the eye

The mind is made up
and then and then

This is the paradise of emptiness
and this the blank picture in a book

I've looked over the photographs and they all are of you
just as we'd been warned

How strange
The winged figure in tuxedo is bending from the waist

The metalion addresses the mirror
and the music of the shattered window

falls unheard past the window below
How strange

but not so strange as speech
mistaken for a book

The phrase "for a moment" is popular in the world
yet not really meant to be said

That is the third or the fourth world
where you can step into a tremor with your tongue

I do not drink of it myself
but intend a different liquid

clear as the glass in which it's held,
the theory of the flower and so on

or the counterterror of this valley
the fog gradually fills

just as we've been warned
It isn't true but must be believed

and the leaves of the sound of such belief
form a paradise

(pronounced otherwise)
from which we fall toward a window

Lies of the Poem

We welcomed the breeze
could not escape it

The face is turned to an idea
We will never be friends until it's done

His words are over
The false ceiling here

emits a remarkable light
The music is so-so

Were you named for the painting
of the moth of gold

or the stain on the pillow
The face is burned by an idea

cannot escape it
cannot escape or retain it

The body tends to disappear
beneath the wrapping

The ink dries
across a period of years

in which fires occur
at the midpoint between the eyebrows

La-la-la is the germ of sadness
said the speaker in sneakers

Sound decays
and then there is the story

and then the features are erased
The addition of one more chair

and the arrangement is complete
Here another festival

to which no one is invited
and where expectation plays no part

△

Clayton Eshleman

Terrestrial

ORGASM FLASHES an unprintable pattern I have glimpsed then lost. Small cysts like parachutes, or albino testes, grapes to the seeker. The earliest chakra, the Muladhara Bridge, is the place in our bodies to confront the image of a woman bundled into herself at the rise of the bridge between nature and being. The outside is faceless. Another kind of face. Ape face. Shit face. The other is an invitation. What I am not is benign, of my kind, since my kind, basically kine, floods back immediately into the unknown. To love the upside down of ourselves. My father broke out of his own "rest home" several times to seek his (dead) wife. Stole his own car keys, drove and drove. He was found once 185 miles north of Indianapolis, out of gas in someone's driveway. Dusk, near skeleton sitting in car. "I am looking for Gladys." Did he see her? Did they see him? His clothes were crawling with her, but that was no good. He wanted to be with his wife, his other, in chamber—and had she appeared, with hippo head, coming around from the back of that house, with legs he had known, walking with my mother's walk, would he have accepted "her"? Suppose she had appeared as a scorpion. "We don't understand, mister, but there

has been a scorpion on the back porch all day, flexing. Is this perhaps what you are looking for?" My father takes the beast and smashes it to his face, turns to me, ferociously saying: "as I never knew you, you never knew me." Fair enough, I respond, but go with the image... We are now in Mexico. My father's face is a mask, wood onto which a scorpion is clenched, a scorpion fornicating my father's face! About time! Flexing over his nose, as if to dip into a nostril, as if to contact the first man! As if to break my father's scrotum, to scatter the male nature of everything I touch. My poor father in Oldsmobile, shrunken lizard drifting wifeless nondeath, head stuck out—only a scorpion could cap him! My father? But about whom, really, am I speaking? My other? And now butterflies are descending, with shears, they are whistling away the flesh, so that progenitor is sheer excresence. So that what I am is excreting and growing. So that there is volume in the Oldsmobile, vast volume, so that progenitor is monkey behind, and none of this is bloody. I have kissed my father's skull and found a monkey vulva, and kissing the vulva I have tasted cave, for the first time the real taste of cave! Octopus cave crossing a savanna, its beak interior containing a monkey queen, around her, milling young monkeys, around them, agitated "guardians," in swirl, a cave octopus, disappears, in my father's face, so that father is no longer total, but amphibian, a ghost staring through reeds, and there is the burial grounds of English Literature, Wordsworth balancing the norias, in Kali form, like amusement park ride, with fiery cauldrons on each arm, dipping and loosing his molten sparks. How dense the father still is. Can I make him diaphanous? Can I ride him through to the veil? And again this counterwish: you should be making him denser if you ever want to reach that lode in which language eats through the wall of beginning to speak. Wall I seek an inner burial that is alive with the resonance of death. Wall I seek the intelligence of the combining of my father's actual bones with the terrestrial intelligence investigating his genetic marrow. Wall I want a union that has nothing to do with unity or one or solution. Wall I want to be in your

texture as one layer of the words perplexing my distance from the sorrow of individuation, for there is no such thing as the individual, nor is there any such thing as the collective. There are motions, with steel spring fingers, careful collectings as well as jeeps bursting, tiny, among the ferns, in a spacious nowhere in which your eyes Caryl are stars and are nothing and I grind my fists into my sockets to unleash the puny molten spells of bright gold swimming into the migraine centers of El Salvador.

Vision that life is benign, pronounce yourself, outside of paradise, outside of symbolism. Dear brothers, is it not time we treated our monkeys to a salad that is outside our wiles to be men? A salad in which rocks which are alive could be listened Beethovenly to, so that our digital diapers could be felt as mountains, that we might burrow through our earliest turd and open out a freshness in which all beings are friends, all beings, even these right now using us as jungle gyms. For the inner terrestrial in our garden must be greeted, and how I wither as I say this, for if others do not, what chance the tender American? Simple political horror of the five feet around me, bull's-eye each of us are in the particles of any political contract—while in the animal coalmine we are all mammal locked, eye to eye, muscle to muscle, a gravel shifting of centuries we pretend to have no knowledge of. This poetry is an attempt to think through the last glaciation, to restore memory of that which erected us. For there is a two-beat fuse ticking in life as we know it now:

1) our natal demon was to unpack from the animal to be born out of animal, as if animal was womb, and we who recall possibly an earlier birth seek like shell shocked chicks to stand free of the hair in which we were closet and cloth

2) once free, detached from our pipeline to other worlds, there is nothing to do but commit suicide. We are now in the process of killing ourselves off because we do not know how to reconnect to all of the otherness that has become our enemy.

The glass wagon boats of the dead now occasionally break through my fabric—like a wall, or my skin, but I am not afraid, since I am nothing here but a voice a tongue on the end of a pirate diving plank a spatula pressed down onto the tonsil of an older need to place stone to stone in speech to accomodate these diced eyes these seers as they break blisters, disease, as they shine in boils, dead thronged bridge, carnival in which the millions before us, inhabiting our bodies, instruct the father to know that she has no face and that his love for her is intact in my rotting shoulders. I cannot embrace him, but I can let his desire trickle through language so that anyone willing to contemplate what I say will take on the shadow of a former self and understand why his suit pockets were not filled with Woolf rocks, but chunks of salami, what the two of them called "mother's salami." His desire to feed dead Gladys meshes with my appetite for fracture like teeth into food made of teeth, the tooth food doing the chewing.

△

Peter Redgrove

Nine Poems

In the Pharmacy

for Wendy Taylor

A moth settled on the side of a bottle,
Covering its label, a marvel. The embroidered wings
Of the moth called Wood Leopard. It flutters off

And settles on another bottle. The label of this violet
Fluted container with the glass stopper reads
Lapis invisibilitatis: it would make you disappear.

The moth like a travelling label walks
From bottle to marble bottle with floury wings
Embracing each and tapping with fernleaf tongue

Sugared drops at neck and stopper,
Built like a fat rabbit with gaudy wings extracting
The essence of pharmacies, the compendium,

Staggering from jar to sculptured jar and sealing
Into capsules its own cogitatio,
Implicating in its eggs our explicit medicine.

And the draughts of invisibility, the poisons?
The caterpillar remembers to die
As the labelled stone declares, and disappears,

All melts to caterpillar soup inside the wrappings
Where the pupa cogitates,
Just the nerve-cord floating like a herring-skeleton,

And round those nerves lovingly unfolds
The nervous wings on which is marked
In beautiful old pharmacy script, the formula.

Escapology

The stone as excited by my touch as I am by its.
The hold of the prison on me weakens in the wind.
The mulberry bush in the courtyard round which they went
And round, for exercise, and round, in this new wind
Makes a wooden noise, like a hangar
Full of wooden propellors preparing to rise,
To fly and escape, many souls in the wood,
The winds scarfing from the trees, as speech from mouth to ear.

As if one should for a safe
Bury his jewels in his own body; shooting himself
In the head with his own diamonds. The tree
With upraised arms talking to me from the yard,
Striped tigerishly with bars, my only friend
That splits the flagstones and offers fruit into my hand
Through my bars; and a little prisoner has formed

In the apple of my eye, little solid photo,
Climbs up out of its plush box, an essence of me,

A free essence. The bees in the honeycombed stones
All hanging up their wings, and turning
Human faces to me, smiling, the spiders
That drape the iron bars pulling off their masks
And the bone-nosed dogs theirs, and the rain
Running with naked limbs over the barbed wire and over
the walls,
The searchlight cannot catch the rain,
Simply turns it solid white, running towards them,
The light pinioned to its generator, riveted in the rain,
My beard behind bars watching smiling independently of me.

△

Dream of a Lawn Pillow

My herb-pillow of memory-shaking smells
That as it warms begins to utter dreams,
A pillow full of lawns sings me to sleep,

These divided realities, images of each other,
Head and sleep, web and spider,
Conductor and orchestra,

One great web in two halves.
My face settles in the crinkling lawn
As though the whiteness of its linen deepened

To the whiteness of a mirror, full of light,
To the whiteness of faces, shining underground,
Like treasure, the head

Dark as a spider in its orchestrated web,
Spidery conductor, weaving between the rows,
Tall rows and hedgerows steel of gossamer

Strung between conium, hop, yarrow,
Rustling gateways in the pillow
With all their spiderwebs and balsamic seeds

Each wrinkled seed like a vase of sleep
Or head of a dead one in his seamless skin,
Seamless sleep. The unseen breezes

Hunt through the ripe grain,
Handling the masks, and relinquishing them.
Where do these torrential angels come from?

Portly seeds and vacant husks rustle in the webs.
There is a crowded room underfoot
Packed with blue flints and white chalk-stones

And silver webs of water threading through all,
Blazing with candles that are root-tips,
The waiting-room underfoot

With thicketed candelabra burning downwards
With light for the thronging crowds to tread their routes
Their faces stretched in receding ancestries

By parallel mirrors of the watery sands,

Earth candles trembling with the unseen breezes.
Now I see a spider with buttons on his back

Creeping down the tented lane,
His beast-form goes as he stands up,
He owns nothing but the tail-coat on his back,

A toothbrush and a baton in his poacher's pocket,
His flautists hanging and blowing themselves empty
And white in the rivers of wind,

Bowels white and clean as an ironed hankie,
His trombonists still fluttering bright as blown butter,
His drumskin typanist tapping to the air—

The conductor of the dead tugging with his baton
At the twice-born crammed into the soil, comprising
The lawn orchestras of my memory-shaking pillow

Of rustling sleep-herbs mouthpiece of the dead.
But I lay my head upon this silk and dryleaf pillow,
Rustling between the sheets prepared to be occupied

By some yet underground with faces still unattempted.

△

Essay

They slap the whitewash across the stone
Shuttering their cottage walls against the Devil

Who may be the black ape of the Moon
Transforming constantly into the white disc he carries,

The star-studded ape with his white-winged stick
Emptying and filling himself out of his white flask,

His soul-bottle of moonshine
That keeps the horizon of the resurrection

And shows the way
Up out of the underworld, the waterway.

The rising water-way is the way of the Gods,
Out of their tracks. Think of the snake

And of the bird. The one ripples
Through the rilling grass like green sparks

Of the water-dynamo that hums underfoot
Below the circuits of the grass; the other

Stands on nothing, volplaning, for clarity
Drenches itself in the fountains of the clouds,

Like a giant stretches up to see everything,
To snuff up everything; one may think

Always of ordinary god-creating matters: of the simple worm
That takes wings, the serpent of the moth;

Of the giant frost-winged wells of winter thawing,
The melt drumming into their depths,

The clear water sinking into its cataracts;
Of a snake that supples into streams and flies like a bird

With dazzling underwings, and alights
Glittering over the earth, ascends

Into the hand of its ape-master,
Cloudy greybeard master—that rainbow

Is the rill of his innumerable wings,
The vibration that surrounds him; think too

Of the pearl-divers among skeletons, the black women
Who climb head-down along the ladders of water,

Return with their knives in their teeth, holding up
The white round shining thing of great price.

△

A City of Churches

The inside sculpture, the winged gargoyle carvings,
The writings entered high up on the walls of stone,
The legends cast in humming bells in bronze,
The stones made of stones we call the skeleton of God,
His singing bones. The monks

Have chiselled a singing-space out of the stone
And there they sing and dine
Like hooded flies with filmy wings of song
And a glory you can hardly see

And when they die we say they fly away
Angels of themselves having earned their wings
And a glory you can hardly guess
With filmy wings hovering heavy-duty
Bottle-green bronze-shaded bodies

Of flies that transform the dung of the monastery kennels
In living glory busy about its songs
So that life shall not cease to flow singing,

And the feathered chicks shall snap them up,
The souls of monks, and the fish snap out of the pools,
And the monks dine on tench, giving thanks in song
They read off the walls high up their eyes upturned
In habits fermenting with grease a feast for flies,
As the snails retire to read
What is written on their inner scrolls
While the sun shines and glorifies everything,
And in the downpour stretch supple solo feet and glide
Covered with their own grease that shines
In the light of candleflame horns
Through the puddles with slow ripples, and how many
Of these lakeside pebbles where the swans
Glide double and snap up flyeating frogs
Is carved invisibly inside?

△

Resort

The khaki gnats hovering in their unstrung chandeliers
By the drinking fountain; I drink from its stone,

They drink; a plume of horse-gnats,
A cavalry blood-cap.

They are the ghosts of the dune-nettles,
The animal form of those plants,
Their stabbers, flying,
They drink blood to live
As all ghosts do, hovering in their blood-sconce,
Their scaffold goblet, their winged piecemeal grail.

A gnat of stone is built upon the shore,
Its moorage sticker sipping at the surf,
A restaurant in its flanks with winged verandas,

It is the spirit-pavilion where you can get a good cup of tea,

It watches the dunes where the old casinos rot,
The roulette tables and the baize baccaret tables
Half-drifted with fractured sand dealt over and over
Dwindling as it is dealt, sand like the shuffling
Dry souls of gamblers still riffling their cards
Smaller and smaller, rubbed almost to nothing,

To a few corpuscles,
Sucked dry and no use to nettle or gnat.

△

She Makes It All Up

It is well to give a dressing of soot, says the sweep.
Her sea-wet ruffles like the sea wrinkling or coral shores.

Her body is harmless and deeply mad.

He reads of the tribal women strangled
In a hut which has been built for that occasion;
She reads of the soul which is like the spheres of the moon,

But furnished on all sides with eyes. She imagines
The treasure of chalk-white silver, and earlier
The Golden Age, when the cotton grew naturally

In all colours; and moreover she stored her mind
With pleasant ideas from her dreams; as when
From the Goddess' eyes they made springs,

Fountains, and the little caves which were alive; of
The snake that appeared, with majesty
Like unto elephants; and of

The ambergris of whales, ambrosial snot;
And of the hall where hovered a hundred
In hangings of silk who began to bare

Their breasts to her, in sign of honour.
He said, you feed me thus,
I will show you my soul, in images.

It was like a desert where a heavy dew fell,
The rocks and dunes darkened in drifting shades,
Where the first sun lightened on a mat of spiders

Hitching up their threads of white silk to fly but first
To catch the dew in pearls and squatting drink them,
Drawing the bead necklaces through thin fangs to drink them.

A Touch of Drowsiness With Eyes Open

Meditating and slowed-down, the bird-calls hung about
Like open lanterns in the plane-trees
Or like shucked skins in the wooden cobwebs. A girl

In a ragged shirt came to rouse me, I saw her
Dressed like chalky England in a white shirt of wave-shock,
Woven of air and water. I put away that pillow

That sings me to sleep, the inexpensive herb-cushion
Of memory-shaking smells that takes me to pieces
With all the things that make me up

Put back into their drawers, and the sticks
Of furniture placed back against the walls,
Our convocation left, and the flesh food

Scraped off the best bone china with knives
And forks of water and of worms. It was my purpose
To retire to meditate, but it is strange.

I whitewashed my cottage, my sole precaution,
Shuttering it against the Devil, to muse
Among wonders of the mind: the great wells

Packed to the brim with crisp frost; the worm
Taking wings, the book mothworm; the butchers
Slicing their animals into succulent pages, and myself

In the stone room, praying among mica
Shored up against the traffic's endless maggot,
Praying that it shall not take wings against us

Dropping its eggs that bring life back to fire,
Life that in its beauties is slow fire:
Slow fire even the white frost, the shirt of flesh,

The wooden cobwebs of autumn,
And the open lanterns hanging in them which are birdcries.

△

Export

The bales of wool turned entirely to moths,

Export of moth-bales, packed with large wholesome
Muscular caterpillars and shiny
Sculpted chrysalids that split

As you are discussing them or turning them over
With your ashplant, that then splits down its length

Also, and there are yellow wings struggling in the wood,
In the core of the long-dead tree; the thick-fringed wings
Struggle out like antimacassars or victorian beaded curtains,

They are as if dressed in animal nightgowns
Wetted in a sea-breeze, birth-wet, sun-drying among dunes,
Their watch-spring faces peacefully bespectacled
Ready and eager to fly the ocean on their fat
On the fat of their caterpillars, ready to mate

And slide out egg-rafts like open boxes of syrupy beads.

△

Dennis Phillips

Self-Portrait

You. Your attentions. What others say in empty halls
of no concern but where's your recompense Do
they recall your fine manner or deft art in the conferences Where
are you when these things happen?

So detailed attention to the effects of doors, rain, ocean
there *can* be a debate inside you.

Roughness and electrical affinity may mark your hovering what
else would concern you?

*

You rain-procuring mercenary whose *true* claim we disbelieve.
Dracaena stump expected to blossom tropical in a water jar
on your oak desk the structure of which
conjecture causes your anxiety to see a poor cat
legless, placed in a thimble, faced toward a window that
views fern forest, to wait and look as if you saw
some other significance in so pathetic a scene
as if it were ungenuine, too soft against the rock-hard
vision you seek and so include various hardware
and a backdrop of urbane holidays in tropical settings.

*

You ask why you can't simply make beautiful things the
world you're capable of invoking in itself is moving and then
you become restless and picture the wingbeats and accompaniment
of *Sunday Morning* and know the answer and settle again
for what you demanded or were handed or
what always comes up there's no way of ensuring a result
or a conversation later you'll probably not hear it
or the alternative (you fancy eavesdropping after death) of hearing
them talk about you would be in the context of a world that
must negate the thrill of being remembered.

*

If the picture of a cord and rope comes into this it's with
a sense of release not bondage as though
the twisting structure of rope or cord is a pathway not
a prison and if Wittgenstein says that philosophy
must be as complex as the knots it seeks to unravel
then poetry must *be* the knot, beautiful and impossible
that instead of needing to be untangled,
of its own accord blooms.

Dream of Ocean with Doors

This dream riddled with doored openings at night
when you fall overboard no one hears you.
In the morning your scream has cooled and merged.

It would be up to you to float calmly, waiting,
or seek one of the doors,
but then rescuers would find nothing
that would matter your choice more final
than their worst fears.

This dream is a hard test.
It is a dream where you say again and again
"This is not a dream. This is waking.
Only in waking can this be said."
You see a deep channel
and in the pulsing waters doors.

He would say later
about her hips
or about the line of belt resting on her hips or about
the ridgepole of her pelvis
he would say, about that section
he dreamed of, stopped working because of,
later, he would say.

Normal advice is heard and considered.
A salute to a landscape that appears in dreams
but won't become solid in memory. Normal. As if quantity.

That her hips held him
fixed, transfixed.
He'd say that all hormones and instinct
were summarized in one curve of flesh.

Not absent perhaps misperceived. A quartet of missing notes.
But the music was scored for solo instrument.
How democracy is lost. As if quantity.

He would say later, about her hips, about how they stirred him.
He would recall a feeling of moot protest, product of obsession.
As if.

If he could find her, but it's written solo

only her, part for hips. "I think I'm ugly,"
she'd say remembering a scene not related but tenacious
so that during all crucial moments, when answers
decisions, commitment must be made,
the image of a long blue pool, surrounded by starlets and gigolos,
with summer waiters in short white coats attending,
with no shade anywhere, with the very faint
smell of chlorine and the dissipated arctic of really good
air conditioning
would grasp her mind.

She would wonder later why she was the prisoner
of a hotel she had never seen.

△

JOHN MANDEL

FOUR GRAPHITE DRAWINGS

一下子的
不是真
愛情只

Carl Rakosi

Punk Rock

Poland can go to hell!
I have an act, Polonius,
that will twist your tail.
By burning, I become a symbol,
but not seriously...
we have come too late
to be serious...
an act, Polonius,
for killing two birds,
matter & anti-matter,
with one stone, wackery.

wacky wackhead wackery

As it lay amort, the voice
of my spirit cried,
                "Absent thee
from the real brimstones awhile.
Neither serious
                nor lyrical be."

Hence nothing I do
makes any difference.
But I have an ear
for the Heretical Imperative.

My cockatoo's gone mad.
He's trying out a new
art form: conniption
to the power of X
and genitals as actors,
claiming Rimbaud's space
and all its perquisites.
It takes a demon now
to hold Persephone.

A fart.
And the reply:
"I hear you calling me."

The people can go to hell
The reader can go to hell

O to be a tiger
by the principle thereof!
to stalk the avant garde
the fictive
and still burn bright

tiger, tiger,
heartless, modish,
singular.

I've lost Polonius,
my adversary,
and the larks.

△

John Ashbery

37 Haiku

Old-fashioned shadows hanging down, that difficulty in love too soon

Some star or other went out, and you, thank you for your book and year

Something happened in the garage and I owe it for the blood traffic

Too low for nettles but it is exactly the way people think and feel

And I think there's going to be even more but waist-high

Night occurs dimmer each time with the pieces of light smaller and squarer

You have original art works hanging on the walls oh I said edit

You nearly undermined the brush I now place against the ball field arguing

That love was a round place and will still be there two years from now

And it is a dream sailing in a dark unprotected cove

Pirates imitate the ways of ordinary people myself for instance

Planted over and over that land has a bitter aftertaste

A blue anchor grains of grit in a tall sky sewing

He is a monster like everyone else but what do you do if you're a monster

Like him feeling him come from far away and then go down to his car

The wedding was enchanted everyone was glad to be in it
What trees, tools, why ponder socks on the premises
Come to the edge of the barn the property really begins there
In a smaller tower shuttered and put away there
You lay aside your hair like a book that is too important to read now
Why did witches pursue the beast from the eight sides of the country
A pencil on glass—shattered! The water runs down the drain
In winter sometimes you see those things and also in summer
A child must go down it must stand and last
Too late the last express passes through the dust of gardens
A vest—there is so much to tell about even in the side rooms
Hesitantly it built up and passed quickly without unlocking
There are some places kept from the others and are separate, they never exist
I lost my ridiculous accent without acquiring another
In Buffalo, Buffalo she was praying, the nights stick together like pages in an old book
The dreams descend like cranes on gilded, forgetful wings
What is that past, what is it all for? A mental sandwich?
Did you say, hearing the schooner overhead, we turned back to the weir?
In rags and crystals, sometimes with a shred of sense, an odd dignity
The boy must have known the particles fell through the house after him
All in all we were taking our time, the sea returned—no more pirates
I inch and only sometimes as far as the twisted pole gone in spare colors

So Many Lives

Sometimes I get radiant drunk when I think of and/or look at you,
Upstaged by our life, with me in it.
And other mornings too
Your care is like a city, with the uncomfortable parts
Evasive, and difficult to connect with the plan
That was, and the green diagonals of the rain kind of
Fudging to rapidly involve everything that stood out,
And doing so in an illegal way, but it doesn't matter,
It's rapture that counts, and what little
There is of it is seldom above board,
That's its nature,
What we take our cue from.
It masquerades as worry, first, then as self-possession
In which I am numb, imagining I am this vision
Of ships stuck on the tarpaper of an urban main,
At night, coal stars glinting,
And you the ruby lights hung far above on pylons,
Seeming to own the night and the nearer reaches
Of a civilization we feel as ours,
The lining of our old doing.

I can walk away from you
Because I know I can always call, and in the end we will
Be irresolutely joined,
Laughing at this alphabet of connivance
That never goes on too long, because outside

My city there is wind, and burning straw and other things that
don't coincide,
To which we'll be condemned, perhaps, some day.
Now our peace is in our assurance
And has that savor,
Its own blind deduction
Of whatever would become of us if
We were left alone, to nurture on this shore some fable
To block out that other whose remote being
Becomes every day a little more sentient and more suavely
realized.
In the meantime there are so many things not to believe in
We can make a hobby of them, as long as we continue to uphold
The principle of private property.
So what if ours is planted with topiary tin-can trees?
It's better than a forest full of parked cars with the lights out,
Because the effort of staying back to be with someone
For whom number is everything
Will finally unplug the dark
And the black acacias stand out as symbols, lovers
Of what men will at last stop doing to each other
When we can be quiet, and start counting sheep to stay awake
together.

△

Penelope Shuttle

Four Poems

Childless

While picking these blackberries
I think of the brilliant diseases
of horses.

I think of the roots of trees
turning away from light
into darkness, like hard lessons
in a foreign tongue.

Later, at the blue window,
I advance by inches towards October.
The seabirds unwind their hoaxes
in the sky

and the taste of blackberries
turns to evening,
bony, equine, dark.

△

The Pretty Worm

'Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there...'

One summer I dreamt
I kept a snake for my pet.

He moved with the ease of fire.
He was a soul of fertility,
more pliant than the birds
as they turn and wheel in the air.

I loved the cool clarity of the asp.

Coiled, he slept
as if at the floodmark of the uterus.

I fed him on saucers of milk,
my immortal, my baby.

One day, being clumsy, I spilt the milk,
and he hissed, silver rage...

I froze
and all my memories trembled.
How to escape his fatal kiss,
the foetal grace of his venom?

His antique tongue stroked the air:

'the snake who knows no charm'.

I grasped him by his throat.

He turned to rope and bound me fast,
my nipple the knot.

The Child Stealer

Gossip, pure gossip,
words to be sewn on tight.

Behind the door,
a phlegm of yearning and terror.

A line of victims, waiting.

Out fall the babies.

Late at night, doors and windows
fly open to let her in,
the child stealer.

Gossip, only gossip.
Afraid of the ache?
It goes deep.

Who can bear to be
where the dark lives, is born
among strangers?

Out fall the babies.
Out of the pattern.
Out of the circle.

Lost forever.

Out of the light.
Out of the mirrors.

Into the dark.
Lost forever.

They fall out of the women
on to the trembling pavement.

Why?
Blood rushes away with the answer.

△

Locale

Should I know this room,
this firmament?

Outside, a bedridden climate,
rain, cloud, undrinkable dark.

Always this wrong weather
draws me down into its poverty,

strips me of all but weariness.
Should I know this room?

Yes, this is the room
of all that is unfinished.

No mirrors on the wall,
for here no woman is fair.

How familiar it seems,
how short a time since my last visit,

the furniture frosty with dust,
the bedding damp,

the room unlit, raw,
my persistent prison.

I am captive, held between
the belly of one dark

and the thigh of another...

What will free me,
unlock the door of this slum?

Only pure and bitter blood,
the shorn fleece of the womb.

George Economou

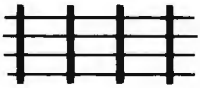
AMEPIKH TWO

IV

More than a child, less
than a woman, *as a weed*
Flung from the rock on Ocean's foam to sail
(aboard the *SS Byron*)
Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest breath prevail
direct from Piraeus to New York,
from there by rail to Montana,
she crossed herself
and crossed herself
and crossed herself again
as her life's line crossed
with America's rivers:

the Hudson
Susquehanna
Allegheny
Maumee
St. Joseph
Kankakee
Illinois
Wisconsin
Mississippi
Minnesota

Red
Souris
(what did Cokboy think
when he heard this one?)
the Milk
(along the Hi-Line OK had helped lay)
and at the place of its cataracts,
the river whose name in Greek
sounds like "smudge."
At the great falls
of the Missouri then
it would begin
under the auspice of $5
found in the train seat,
foretelling a full measure of days
poured into the new mold of earth
water & sky—
days that would fly
as if metered by the train's
clickety-clacks through the lane
of fence-posts & wires
flashing by like a song
on destiny's lyre—



a triumph?
(if it can ever be said to be)
of the active life:
Martha, Μάρθα
thou art care-full & troubled about many things
μεριμνᾶς καὶ τυρβάζῃ περὶ πολλά
the priest's intoning of the Lord's
words fluttering like moths round
her light head filled with signs
and fetching anticipations...

V

If the Long Time Sleeping Elizabeth
that lives in Browning,
                as in the directory
for North Central Montana,
                could live here,
as in the directory of Whitman's all night vision,
for the red squaw, beloved of his mother,
that *never came nor was heard of there again*—
then the one, all name, for the other with none
that substantiated absence
                would together
make a presence.
                As any cherished
you that has passed among us,
now listed among the missing,
that presence of mind resettles
for good in black and white
                so does this presence of theirs
appear
        to pioneer behind chosen fronts.
But when it comes
                it comes in blue
wisps of necrangelic smoke,
                a blue
figure that starts the eye
                with its annunciation:

"You see, because you are big with me
I am sown with the sounds of your voice.
Dressed am I thus
and leap
in your presence."
Once seized
such service remains,
directs the names
of long time sleepers
to those that are coming.

△

Jerome Rothenberg

The Covering Cherub & The Academy of Dada

for B., among the minim

"I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire."

—EZEKIEL XXVIII: 16

1

under the angel's wing
the cherub's head
still cries
it is the babe of Schwitters' column
the last to stay
it stays here
stripped of its hair
my melancholy angel cherub
with peacock's mouth
disturbed by dream who bellows
like cow or cormorant
bladder of the female beast
elusive feathers
stuck to its gauzey skin
to keep us from our body's
image it becomes
the head seen by the Senecas

in flight
the sacred yo-yo
we steel ourselves against
but feel
sting of its prickly cheeks
over our nipples
weakened
shoved to the darkest wall
the cherub has no eyes
he says the cherub
is no sparky lady I have known
forever waited for her
called her my muse
the battle to the death is with
the cherub death
the angel death resembles
it is the babe lost in the wood
the babe's head
mangled angry fetus
screaming for death among the outlaws
priests of the academy
of DADA exile
is the true pain
that the cherub death leads to death
is in his language
but beside the cherub stands
the other the false cherub
that the cherub will become
now that the cherub is
too weak to speak it
his words a shadow of his words
a cat-light glowing
like babe made out of words

the cherub vomits
sadly
into the cherub's death

2
THE ACADEMY OF DADA

knows not Alexandria nay nay nor Athens
knows not even deluxe prime puritan hotshot miltonic
mudcats, these the ACADEMY OF DADA
knows not nor knows the academy nay nay
why some cherubic jewboys seek out the gentile lights
to illumine therewith the jewish darkness blind synagogue
lonely among their throngs nay nay the ACADEMY OF DADA
knows not such pith yet knows it Tzara's ghost in oldtime Dada
    journeys
landeth in Zurich schoolboy-fresh another midget oriental
Dada disgust foretold erupts his spontaneity against
the bandit killers who suck from our still throats
what honeys! precious pollens he restores to earth
ferocious unrequited Sammy Rosenstock who standeth hatless
among the goyim terrors of the nation-
state the cherub is who is true cherub
but the ACADEMY OF DADA
knows not the least green vales of England nor knows cathedral
    bells
ding dong it is the first academy without a book
only the sky a solitary Dada cloud pinned to its cardboard
crying: death to alabaster!
long live the ACADEMY OF DADA!
tra la its priests poach from each other's pockets, singly

singingly they bang on their computers
light up like soft machines bounce b.b.s over metal counters
acrobats slide down academic tubes the ACADEMY OF DADA
knows not umbrellas neither knows it love in bloom
nay nay nor bloom in love yet croons still over Anna Blumë
day by day over Rrose Selavy by night & knows not
where the cherub walks planting amid his trees the fear of Dada
Dada knows not but knows each is his own Dada
each wears a Dada hat that shines
like Dada symphonies
& Dada ice-creams
each brings his Dada song alive where Dada
knows not Dada lives on in spirit of the world
o freedom of the mind the line o freedom of the heart
from hunger solitude
(he cries)
"to free the forces of poesis from
"the gods of power
"let the cherub's wing fall pull
"the cherub through the mud of paradise
"out of the sacred grove

△

Lyn Hejinian

Nine Poems

The inanimate are rocks, desks, bubble,
  mineral, ramps. It is the concrete being
that reasons. The baseboard weighing
its wall span. The clouds never form regiments
  and don't march. The gap in my education
needn't be filled. Stubbornness is provocative.

The pessimist suppresses a generous anger. A trace
  linked to a fence of forgetting. Lying awake
may serve the purpose that dreams do. In the dark
opaque disposal of the missing past. Canned laughter
  is white noise. Comparable repositories of freight dust
into the shadows. Anger is the animate of stubborness.

△

Rain on the macadam quaver ticks.
The lay of the land is armed
with its pattern of occupancy.
Landscape depends on sequel, is romantic ground
in a context of necessity. Polish tinfoil
with pennies and make silver.

Windows upon close inspection swing, medaled
with the setting. Highlights work
back and forth, relocate to swap greenery.
The finished man is horizontal, a cliche.
The watch hand is a pointer
through thick lenses on a setting.
Statues have status in the park.
All one can do is go around them, directed
by the curve. Return to lengthwise.

△

Under the radio roof, a mere wisp
from witchcraft to medicine. An expectant melismata
squandered. The landscape flushes green.
How many plants compound clarity.
Low windows run the simile; only the word brick
in the description. The limits of the sky in scattered light
refer to clouds reflecting in a creek.
The remote present (as of now)
in a compass wall, glass. The rigid side
of a hedge. The proven mobile home
takes to a country surface. The bullseye darts aside.
The advantage of a double horizon
is a temporary description, a split or repercussion
in the fitting home as of a boat at sea
which floats by drawing nearer. Only the word brick
is accurate in the dramatic banter, in that timidity
of intellect where everything is relevant.

△

The blue-green northeast lake props its aureole.
False front of hill approach
mounted horizontal outcrop. Yodelling vanquishes care.

A plant sports forth in bud
above the harbor salvo. Substantiating facts leap
thin taste in the tin of shade.

Lumbers buried in weeds.
Overhead countryside built in the western vagueness.
The bird's flight is a concave arc.

A flying running band of clouds
dents the line along the horizon's imperfect meeting space,
prospects of unpopulated chances.

A gravely regular scratch in a nutshell,
these colors on the inside. A daydream
in the miniature exemplified by the weed.

△

It rained all afternoon. Plots abut
the milk of glass leveled along an oblong
green. The glare throws shadows in odd directions,
shakes the distinctive shimmer. The sky removes

absolutism with changing moods, of wool and gold.

A dirty secondary heap has for its object
mutual assistance. A link with the staggering store
is forged. The minimally knotted walls prop
the description. Specifically the general type
is pierced by its phenomena.

Dry days are bright in the mornings
in ganglions. The instant blinks, the eye
not merely flat. They take unnecessary steps to cover
the traces they haven't left. One sees
how they come out.

The dogged sunniness shines. The light scatters
shadows it couldn't cloud over the corner.
A mall, slim, abuts the public sidewalks.
Vacant lots, money aprons, prostrate trunks portion
off the shore.

△

Mental watchdog, the brainstorm's over,
a lodestar's in the mist.
New uses for a fluid masonry.
Glass mouthless, an honest stone,
all musical strings running mirrors.
Rooms at all odds of identity
are within them over a giant tempo
running torpor in subsidence time.

Life for its advantages almost rises
visible feet. Raised shadow without clouds
of mass fecundity. Those that shine back
fling relatively local blanks
between the hand and sidewalk.
The eyes as the bird flies averted
face to the regular article
there though the thought turn them.

△

The lighter the sky the less depth is apparent.
  Baffled by pennies—chummily random.
  Lodged in the page a maze come fugitive.
Water fills the stalk. A mild hour
    in a sunlit hollow stop.

Reversible shadows in a hole. Mere understanding
    is not distancing. Thick physics
    watching a craze pitched
  are objective. A perfect impasse as wallow
    in a stadium of metal.
Self defense moves air aside. Distortion
  renders it suspect. Intelligibly as obstacles
curiously swollen realism and broken brickwork.

The mechanical overflows romantic precincts.
    An unruly yellow countryside.
  The enginery running white noise
crosses a resolve, presumably benevolent. The sky

drew unversed inspiration. The hours were brief
to match the shortening days.

△

The tidal throughway from a distance
dispersing everything sloppy, anything
resembling an excessive spell. All that's left
is lambent, like lakes. One misses
the remarkable detail of continuity.
Light devours the visible world.
A slack windsock, sole identified sequence.

The garrulous landscape is stoked
and synoptic; the synonym list
is doggedly on plot, gleaming
in the sunlight, husbanded with enchantment.
The glass on the way down flowers. I did
or am doing in common speech fully informed,
unafraid of repetition in the same person.

△

pandemonium hews
no clouds

wakefulness
is active

one is a statistic
an ideal of exhaustiveness

it meets this
precise redundant limbo

stars of keyholes
laud the rain cloud

shapes sloshing
off an awkward clay

a sea that only scatters
in a halfbox

the gloss of observation
in the dark

the sounds are in the ears
a prima ragged brio

mute water crashes rise
in a cloud

△

Miroslav Válek

Killing Rabbits

Translated from Czechoslovakian
by Káca Polàckovà

On Sunday after breakfast
when air is halfway to ice and
thin flutes of mice squeak in the chimney
on Sunday after breakfast
to walk on virgin snow to the hutches.
For the pink rite to remove your gloves,
to stick them on the picket fence
like freshly severed palms
and to blow smoke through the wire net door.
Then to insert a searching hand
and speak sweet words through smoke-stained teeth,
cajolery, fine words,
to pity a bit,
to grab the skin firmly
and to lift it from the cozy straw.

On Sunday after breakfast
to sniff ammonia.

With your left hand to hold the head down,
watch the ears turn purplish,
tenderly to stroke the nape,
blow on it
and suddenly with the right to strike the nape.

Once more to feel on your hand the pushing off
for the unrealized leap,
to feel a heaviness in your hand,
sweetness,
to hear rabbit heaven open
and big clumps of fur falling down.

Viennese blue,
Belgian giant,
French baran
Bohemian skewbald dappled,
but even the mongrel with all kinds of blood,
each dies as fast as the next
and without a word.

On Monday to have rings under your eyes, silent,
on Tuesday to consider the lot of the world,
on Wednesday and Thursday
to invent the steam engine
and discover stars,
on Friday to think of other
but mainly blue eyes,
all week to pity orphans
and admire flowers,
on Saturday to scrub yourself pink
and fall asleep on her lips.

On Sunday after breakfast
to kill rabbits.

Miroslav Válek was born in Tvnava, Czechoslovakia, in 1927. He has edited various literary magazines, such as *Mladá Tvorba* and *Rombold.* In 1969 he was appointed Slovak Minister of Culture. This poem is from *Nepokoj* (Unrest), 1963.

Charles Stein

The Lions

for Lou Kleinsmith

In the kingdom of the bowels that is language...

the animal
chasing itself

nature consuming nature

"serpents that eat the darkness
out of the burning stones"

as if for sure I had been there...

Not true. I have. And am.

small sounds rising from themselves...

the last blue cornflowers of October...

The kindness and concern it has
is that it relinquish
all projection of itself
if only called back to its own.

The intricate fictions desire their own surcease

when faced with The Lake.

There are continuous gradations of enclosure but truly...

as if this sudden silent rock of moon

had many names

That which stands against

continuous with its distance from the eye

in the light of further enquiry.

Dictum: language

including both whereof it speaks

space, dense with responsibility

head full of stones

•

In the turbidity
yet it grows.
So events of the day
are shadows too
and the figures which arrive in many dreams
events with their own pertinacity,
not just that they *produce.*

•

In every coming forth
what goes away,
opposite but not equal, probably more...

The woman in the many photographs
with the false name

the transformations manifest in "life"

the colored force
becomes a slightly different
colored force

the gentle surface of an infinite sphere

alone in the soiledness

in the tawdry racks

If some *"it"*

is *"there"*

we never get there.

Nobody is standing
under the rain of living apples

the little bells
correlate the falling yods

The lions resolve to live apart from lions.

They are a hoard
of lions

before they are themselves, autonomous,

even granting a more than conventional regalism to *each*

in his collective *what*...

That that *"it"*

is just some *"what"*

I am as stars

or snow

walking in back of the universe

surely there must be some elephant

certainly a cow

among the monuments

at the bottom of the breath

the blackness of night and the stars of night

reach

into the thickness and the things

plummeting the still morass

a doubling back

"AUM"

to neutralize

"Ma.a.a..."

curious wavering

over a surface of water

in a quieting bowl

the broken leaves and other autumnal debris

swirl with inertial particularity

and come to rest

absolute sadness accumulating its need of dead

the ancient halls

accumulate the figures from our own

cohabitations with them

being in the world

He is accumulated into the presence of himself
his eternal Ka
discoursing with the others
in a night of grief

The movement to make it more
succeeds
abandoning itself
until what remains alone is that which was
to be attained
and the motion though swift and sure
proceeds from a certain propulsion
that is less than minimal

Slow
    as stars
        appear
in this very body
            the unstable
majesty
        no need to tell
        but in the need to tell

gold of no gold

The covert-overt
reverses the cover

and all there is

accumulates in just this one

selecting it

from multiple facets of it

releasing the subject

in a vastness of noises

which are quiet in totality

but yield these small

illusionary pips

one by one

Becomes himself

and loses himself

releases the fundamental

from its walking and its plunder

and thus releases the plundered

fellows of its wandering

into the simultaneous and alone

from which he comes

the single eaglets
in the chalky boughs

the rapid mouse
and his paths between big reed bulbs

dots on earthy tablets

rocks in the hills

that same old dog alone along the roadway

the naked shirt
wagging at the lions

the lions
seated on the porch
with loose and golden boney shoulders pointing
across the reeds
to the hills

the broken hills
rounded, then cut, a flat table
at the top of several of them
rough and grey

the one huge mountain

the green sky

Walking all that immense distance
for incredible numbers of years
three Buddhist Aeons
towards the water
pointing to it
seeing a barge
across the horizon
with a cloud-like skull
floating over the flatness
and the slowness
and the motion
of the barge
heavy yet
afloat
across the water
already there
yet walking
to meet himself

grasping himself beforehand in a bizarre
concordance of pictures
before his mind

a dog
        walking nervously
becomes a lion
        walking deliberately
an elephant
        walking solemnly
                becomes a boy
on a beach

whale hulks ride in from the foam
and the most difficult thing about them is the stench
of death by water

the bones become language itself
unanimously arching over man

taking all of us up in its colossal superstructure

confounding our being in its intricate hypotaxis

floating up ominously

it is impossible to tell just what it keeps afloat

lifting each in its levity

the strange sun setting in the west beyond the water
rises
because we approach it at such speed

it is a lion

and it opens its fiery mouth

a black dot growing huge at the center of the sun

inhaling the fumes of whales

on the isle below

safe

for a stay

we are deposited

△

BOOK REVIEWS

Little Books/Indians. HANNAH WEINER.
Roof. 1980.
Nijole's House. HANNAH WEINER.
Potes & Poets Press. 1981.

by RON SILLIMAN

These works represent a major departure from *Clairvoyant Journal*, the long prose "diary" for which Hannah Weiner is best known (even though only fragments of the *Journal* have thus far appeared, most usefully in book form from Angel Hair). What comment there has been on Weiner's writing has focused largely on the claim to clairvoyance, specifically on the capacity to *see words*, figured with the qualities of light or of such substances as pencil or dog fur. Unfortunately, such comment tends to obscure the essential fact that these works *are writings*, literary productions rigorously following all the demands posed by the questions of their composition to a unique and rich result. For example, the very multiplicity of voices in the *Journal* explores the problem of the constitution of an authorial subject (whether conceived as persona, voice or, to use a term which Weiner almost never resorts to in her "memoir," *I*) as fully as the analytical/exemplificative strategy used by Charles Bernstein in *Controlling Interests*, the deconstruction through form of Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* or the intersubjective reversals that Steve Benson builds into the pronouns of *Blindspots*. And by its very status as "diary," the *Journal* insists even more clearly than Hejinian that this issue is not simply a problem of contemporary existential intellectualism, but compellingly at the center of our very lives.

The *Journal* is also a major consideration of such issues as representation, narrative continuity versus simultaneity, the directionality of the line, the page (*specifically* the 8½ by 11 inch page) as compositional space or stanza, and the function of prosody within prose. The interruptions imposed on the text by the inclusion of "seen words" work to break the flow of syntax and thought more powerfully than a space will "break" a line, yielding a

"thought fragment" as a measure of quantity, simultaneously enabling the inclusion of multiple narrative/expository/discursive threads in a manner which becomes utterly readable once the reader gives her- or himself *permission* to make active decisions in the consumption of the text. In no other recent work is the reader's place as collaborator as tangible as it is in the *Journal*.

In *Little Books/Indians* and *Nijole's House*, Weiner returns to the poem as form, i.e., the line, informed still by the inclusion of "other" data, a doubling therefore of the interruptive process at the heart of prosody. And yet, as she states in "Little Book 115: Virgin," these works are considered by her to be "prose," perhaps in the same sense that she has elsewhere referred to the *Journal* as "a novel." All writing makes present to its readers the intense activities of the mind, although some genres, such as journalism and realist fiction, tend to efface the traces which lead back to the author. In fact, it is precisely the existence of genre, purely a social convention, which carries any finished text *away*, however small a distance, from the presentness of activity, as such. We might say, therefore, that genre presents the inverted face of an authorial subject. From this perspective, Weiner's ambivalences, displacements and disruptions of genre form (to the extent that, in some places "t"s are not crossed or the top portions of words disappear) reinforce her critique of the voices which operate through her to construct "a self."

Of the poems or prose works in *Little Books/Indians*, the only one short enough to quote here by way of example is "Little Book 138 Pedro April 30 79," which is among the least disruptive typographically. Like most of the little books (so called because the original versions were composed in the 29¢ "pocket memos" from which the volume derives its cover design), this piece begins from an event out of Weiner's experience working with the American Indian Movement, the incarceration of Leonard Crow Dog:

THEY TOOK ME
into a prison cell
& tormented me
for quite a while

LEONARDS STORY

I ams chained

WHO BELIEVES IT
  MARY DOES
she can feel
the pinches
BIG TOE HEALS
Leonard's prison term

stupid dear an old
crime
He was tormented stupid
and I THREW IT UP
because he couldnt
THAS A TRICK
write for Big Deal
now one week
lost
SOS I SPEAK

WHO CHEATS
  amongst the Indians
    SIS IM SCARED
Only a Guru can
CHEAT LIKE LEONARD
he's full of shit too
caress him
HANNAH STOP
WRITING IT IN

This is very nearly a meditation on the old line about poetry being a "kind of lie," that would permit one to see the truth more clearly. Although Weiner often seems to describe her composition/transcription practice otherwise, it appears evident that the disruption of voices and the disruption of typography are not identical. In fact, this divergence gives Weiner one set of rhythms based on the ear, or at least syntax, and another based on the eye. The multiplicity of voices often gives particularly charged terms, such as *CHEATS*, an increased sense of instability, since it is not evident what the relation of intention between the writer and the term might be. Weiner adds to this volatile affect by undermining the typographic integrity of individual words, a device which is associated in this piece with the presense of "s". This sets up the several meanings of *SOS* (so, help, and, three lines later, *SIS*), an instance of

more than one "voice" inhabiting a single term. The "unstable s" also permits Weiner the irony of elegance in the word *amongst* in the same passage.

Just how far the *Little Books* differ from the address of the *Journal* is best registered, I suspect, by the presence of the "I". This is a discourse posed to an other far more than the "diary" mode of the earlier work in which the author must also inhabit the role of "a reader." Perhaps this also explains the use of the poetic line, in which a stop is marked not by the presence of other information but by a graphic silence. Typographically, the first two sections of this volume represent Weiner's most extreme investigation of word and line without ever falling into the stasis of "concrete" poetry.

Nijole's House is a much quieter and less disrupted text than *Little Books* or the *Journal*, an extended writing in verse form composed at a single location. Although it is the closest presentation of a "single" voice to be found in any of Weiner's publications over the past decade, the unsigned preface states that "*All* the words in this book were seen by Hannah Weiner first on her forehead" (emphasis mine), which is the first time this particular claim has been raised. While her other books have been fragmentary compilations selected from much larger writings (the selection of the *Journal* which Tom Ahern published as a chapbook contained all three pages of May 9, 1974, while the Angel Hair edition omits the first page), this volume has a sense of completion and closure to it not to be found elsewhere in her work. Even at 18 pages, its extension as a unit of writing goes beyond what is to be found in *Little Books / Indians* and most of the *Journal*, with the possible exception of the "Retreat" section of the Angel Hair volume. Its distance from the norms of her work highlights the shape, depth and thoroughness with which Weiner operates in all of her writing. △

Modernism and Negritude. The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire. A. JAMES ARNOLD.
Harvard University Press. 1981.

by ANNETTE SMITH

Although various Nobel committees have so far bypassed him, the French Martinican poet and statesman, Aimé Césaire (b. 1913), has often been hailed the most important living Black writer in the world. The liveliness of Césairian studies is evidenced by Thomas Hale's exhaustive bibliography of Césaire and by almost ten years of *Cahiers Césairiens*. Yet a comprehensive and thorough study of Césaire in English was still lacking—a gap which A. James Arnold's *Modernism and Negritude* fills admirably. Its convenience for the English-speaking public is not its only virtue: no other book plunges as deeply into the roots of Césaire's poetry, situates it better in contemporary letters or leaves us with a more up-to-date picture. It also is the only study to follow closely the chronological development of Césaire's career: the quasi prodigious apparition on the literary scene of the *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* * in 1939, the aesthetic and ideological definition undertaken in the journal *Tropiques* (1941-1944), the largely surrealistic *Miraculous Weapons* in 1946, the struggle between poetics and politics increasingly present in the subsequent collections, *Solar Throat Slashed* (1948), *Lost Body* (1950), and *Ferraments* (1960). The chronological approach and Arnold's occasional use of Césaire's textual revisions make one thing clear: this poetry is not written from the gut as its very profusion might lead a superficial reader to believe. On the contrary, revisions generally move away from Freudian self-indulgence or from automatic writing towards tight thematic and metaphorical constructs—both within individual poems and within the collections.

While the negritude theme has fascinated readers for the past several decades, this volume's major contribution is to give the final jolt that takes Césairian criticism away from this orbit and propels it into the (probably) wider orbit of modernism. Thus, Arnold's concept responds to what Césaire

* I am using the Eshleman-Smith translation of the titles as they will appear in Aimé Césaire: *The Collected Poetry 1939-1976* (University of California Press, 1983).

himself has said in various interviews: that it had been by borrowing European techniques that he best expressed his Africanism, and that it is through the particular (in this case the negritude material) that one goes to the universal (a modernistic vision of the world).

Arnold's study nevertheless makes ample room for the African components in Césaire's art, starting with the notion of negritude itself found in several African ethnographers, of whom the most seminal for Césaire and his friends was Frobenius. Connections with African myths and rituals and with Caribbean folklore are covered more concretely than in other studies. A detailed and illuminating analysis of the poem "Lost Body" proves, in fact, Césaire's desire to "Africanize" the text by meshing together "barbarous" sounds and themes. But this is precisely an excellent example of how far one can go in this direction; for as convincing as it is, the technique Arnold demonstrates here is *negative*; unable to render tom-tom effects with the French language, Césaire simply "barbarizes" French sounds by transgressing their statistical occurrence in traditional modern French poetry. No one denies the somatic effects of Césaire's prosody, but for some readers (I am one of them), these effects rest more on his use of an exaggerated and radicalized Mallarmean syntax—which is like a respiration of the thought—than on the phonemic substance. Which brings us back, via Mallarmé, to the other vein in Arnold's book: the placing of Césaire's works in the great intellectual vortex of the last one hundred and thirty years we call modernism.

In analyzing its influence on Césaire, Arnold gives just due to many of the modernist masters (Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Valéry, Artaud, Breton, to name just a few) with an unerring flair for intertextual echoes as well as for where and how Césaire departs from his antecedents. He shows that elements considered as typical of modernism often coincide with the aesthetic or philosophical goals dictated by the negritude ideal. The most cogent and central coincidence revolves around Césaire espousing the concept of the tragic as expanded by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche dwells on the Dionysian sacrifice of the king/hero rather than on Promethean constructiveness, on Orphic death rather than on Apollonian triumph. Therefore, Arnold takes exception to a number of optimistic readings of Césaire, whose real message, he says, "is largely eschatological. The hero, the god, must die that the community may live." The loss of self, the acceptance of mutilation and death are obvious in many of the poems of

Solar Throat Slashed, *Lost Body* and *Ferraments*. But since, in contrast with the hero of Greek tragedy, Césaire's (and Nietzsche's) hero is *innocent*, tragedy ceases to be an enterprise of recuperation of social values and becomes the denunciation of these values. Society can only renew itself by participating in a sacrificial act and precipitating the death of the very order it has created. Thus, adopting this modernistic version of the tragic enables Césaire to stay on the side of counterculture, to challenge, distort and symbolically cancel the values of the Master Race, in other words to satisfy the demands of negritude. This particular captation of a modernistic element for his own use is an excellent example of what Arnold repeatedly calls the "cannibalization" by Césaire of Western myths.

One can predict that the Dionysian/Orphic/telluric obsession at the core of Césaire's poetry would lead away from temporal power. Indeed, juggling poetics and politics—especially if one is a Marxist, even more if one *has been* a Marxist—creates a tension in Césaire's double career as an avant-garde poet and a militant figure. Arnold suggests that this tension remained unresolved long after Césaire very publicly resigned from the French Communist Party (1956) and that it accounts in part for the abundance of oxymoronic structures in the poems, especially the "explosive-fixed" metaphors which are one of their stylistic trademarks. These metaphors parallel Césaire's predilection for (in Arnold's words) "epiphanies," that are "momentary dazzling revelations" which, again, reinforce the eschatological tone of the poetry.

In his survey of Césaire's career, Arnold does not overgeneralize and remains aware of the nuances. He helps us to appreciate the poet's accomplishments the better for understanding the existentialist limits of his quest. For Césaire's "miraculous weapons" will both date him *and* make him a classic. The vulnerability of a man previous studies have sometimes presented as a "macho phallocrat" takes its nobility from the tragic vision that frames it but, in turn, guarantees the authenticity of this vision. Arnold's rich, eloquent and, by no means, easy pages constitute an ideal source of reference and food for thought for the scholar, the poet, the translator and other critics. On the other hand, it is not an academic tool, a formula book to recommend to undergraduates. It underplays the prose works and reserves the dramatic works for another volume. It is regrettably without bibliography (and Arnold's immense erudition makes one regret it even more) and the index is sometimes baffling (e.g., neither "negritude" nor "modernism" have

entries of their own). Still, this impressive achievement not only crowns several decades of Césairian scholarship but will, for sure, generate much more in the future. ∆

Agon. HAROLD BLOOM.
Oxford University Press. 1982.

by JED RASULA

Jerome Rothenberg's polemical rereading of Bloom in *Sulfur* #2 was really several years too late in appearing, and by an uncanny coincidence, contemporaneous with the one book it is least applicable to, the new *Agon*. Rothenberg's case is exacting, masterful and necessary, but in regard to the autobiographical tenor of Bloom's new book, also irrelevant. The headstrong righteousness so objectionable in Bloom's earlier books is nearly entirely lacking in *Agon* and the aggressively caustic and peremptory judgments are here more cogently contextualized as Bloom's own case history, personal desires and ambitions, tendencies and shortcomings. It is as if he read his own theoretical studies with the same vigorous eye he applies to poetry: Bloom's revisioning of Bloom is a testament to self-conscious moderation and tact. He even offers a critique of his own Gnostic fantasy, *Flight to Lucifer*. Not that *Agon* is self-criticism; it's simply that Bloom is both more certain of his own bias as a reader and more concerned to articulate his precise location as a man in the theories. It is in fact almost possible to feel the same pleasure reading *Agon* as one would feel reading an autobiography. But the critical voice remains intact and, if anything, more focused than before. The Gnosticism grows more lucid; the reading of Emerson and Freud bolder; the reading of individual poems less objectionable. The attractive side of Bloom's textual compulsions becomes clear in his insistence on the canonical splendor inherent in loving the text, "any text" he finally allows. Who knows, he may even someday be capable of entering the textual Gnostic contest of the *Cantos*, a reading—a confrontation—only Bloom seems ready to attempt. ∆

A Night With Hamlet. VLADIMIR HOLAN.
Translated by Jarmila & Ian Milner.
Oasis Books. 1980.
Guide to the Underworld. GUNNAR EKELÖF.
Translated by Rika Lesser.
University of Massachussetts Press. 1980.

by JED RASULA

The Waste Land was the 'guide to the underworld' of Europe between the wars. Despite the favorable international exchange rate of Eliot's poem into other languages (including acclaimed versions by Ernst Robert Curtius, George Seferis and others, and the group of Japanese poets calling themselves "Arechi" after the title of the Waste Land), perhaps the most concise manifestations of the impact of *The Waste Land* have been epiphanic collage-like realizations of new poems. Like Piranesi, Eliot made ruins attractive again. The modern threnody has become the (small) book-length poem, meditating on the ruins of a civilization. Essential contributors to the mode are Seferis, Neruda, Paz, Martinson, Ritsos, Holan and Ekelöf, among others. Of all of these, Holan's *A Night With Hamlet* is the darkest: it is a true rumination, the heavy cud of an herbivore destined to become meat.

In Holan's poem the symbolist darkness acquires its most swollen midcentury visage. While his volumes of short poems appear to be alleviated of the symbolist aesthetic in proportion to the encroachment of political blackness, *A Night With Hamlet* retains in the figure of Hamlet that lechery for the infinite and the souring of Romantic exhilaration into morbid reverie and melodramatic exclamation that characterizes symbolism. It is easy to misread the poem if one doesn't attend to when Hamlet is speaking and when he is spoken to, for the melodrama is conscientiously sustained in the poem as an attribute of Shakespeare's hero, while the deeper disillusionment that permeates the entire text is not melodramatic at all, but rather the tragic realization that art like any institution can be an instrument of political oppression.

> And then that astonishing pause,
> recalled during the entire score,
> it is the simultaneous creating the continuous,

a vegetative continuity and therefore dancing,
but already tired as if thinking of truth
could be preceded by feeling for a lie

The specific weariness here is Hamlet's, who is constantly in danger of being disembodied by his status as a literary character, "so locked in himself that all immortality / could fit inside him." "He got in the way of eternity / and had to heal the wound." He is, after all, an ontological puppet inhabited by the hot air of centuries of scrutiny and alienating animation. In Holan's poem it is as if, through having had so much attention paid to him and emphases spoken through him, he had come to life, a new golem. Holan's role in the poem is as liberator: "I was sorry for him, easing him out / of tragedy, gave him the chance to *talk*." And talk he does, for most of the poem's 30 pages, in a cascade of aphorism, image, fantasy, verbal aggression and relapses into stage speech. He is the voice within art—cultivated like a fungus—looking out at life. Hamlet, looking at life from the stage, can only see the living as an audience: in modern times, being a member of an audience is perhaps the only archaic cultural bond left, so his vision of humanity as audience has the air of a primal scene. Even those dozing off in their seats are unaccountably potent:

Even in the presence of the sleeping we are not at ease
for we do not know where they will halt,
while we are stuck in our tracks

The prevailing modern political atmosphere (under any kind of government) is the chilling authoritarian insistence that the *as usual* be maintained. It's a sleight of hand, a trick of stage machinery.

...Keeping faith
they embrace and kiss and do not suspect
that danger itself changes into habit and indifference.

"He who *survives* will get used to it," say Orpheus, whom Hamlet fantasizes bringing Eurydice successfully back to earth out of the underworld. Holan's (Hamlet's) Eurydice is one of the great modern underworld epiphanies, her eyes unable to focus on a tree because she still sees the roots. She is saturated with Hades' realm, and brings a message rivalling the classic austerity of sarcophagus inscriptions: "The deepest existence / is in the unconscious overcome by love." But even she is only Hamlet's fantasy here, and his version

predominates: "for even love / is only part of our certitude...Atonal harmony...the moment of harmony / when there is a short circuit / between heaven and hell."

If Hellenic minds were unable to imagine Eurydice returning to earth, it was because for them life was taken to be a privilege essential to *being*; but in Holan's poem, the situation has gone from bad to worse, from the happy nonbeing of the underworld to *having to be* in the modern world.

> The autopsy then states with reserve:
> When will you forget, soul, that you have not been seen?
> And when will you remember?...
> Then those who remain go and light the lamps for the whole year,
> while the storm, its right hand
> in the chimney's sleeve, puts on the whole house...
> And just when they want to show they aren't afraid,
> fear is already here, fear for no reason, only fear,
> fear of saying it and fear of not saying it,
> fear while the rain beats
> black music on the burdock leaves,
> fear of the squirrel who sits peeling a pineapple cone,
> fear of the nurse who doesn't know the phone number
> of the doctor in the next room,
> fear of the smelting of lead on Epiphany Day,
> fear of a man's or a woman's name-day
> fear of riches, which crave something richer,
> fear of freedom and fear of the poet
> who led Eurydice out of the underworld.

The dilemma of Hamlet has always been identity, more recently augmented through psychology with the notion of ego. In one incomparable aphorism, Holan writes "When egoism overeats / it doesn't throw up but digests and starts again." This could as easily be a line by Ekelöf, whose poetic struggle was always with that same demonic insistence that ego be synonymous with identity. He wrote in "Open It, Write" "And yet you are at the root nameless as night and the dark: / In reality you are no one" and "To renounce the I and its voice, renounce — / this alone gives power." Ekelöf's longer Eliotic culture-fragment identity poem is *A Mölna Elegy*, finally available in full translation in the unlikely location *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook*, Vol. 1, edited by Elinor Shaffer (Cambridge Univ. 1979). Not one of Ekelöf's finest poems, it is nonetheless essential for its graphic format

and fragmentary principles of assemblage, which include among other things a parallel text for 8 pages of Greek and Latin graffiti, including the cryptic entry from the coition chamber of the Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii. These inscriptions form a bilateral focus, printed as they are on the left-hand pages while the poem continues on the right. Ekelöf implies that they – and all writing – are sort of permafrost of foetal gravel, lithopedions (rare medical instances of a dead foetus becoming petrified in the womb, a literal child of stone). Against such documents, recent French attempts to equate writing with spermatic leakage seem frivolous. Northern and Central European models of writing are inscriptions on tombstones, unmoving rock (the moving boulder of Christ's tomb is a truly Levantine fantasy). The French tradition goes back to the Bastille, where a prison of stone can be broken by the irritation of blood and semen within.

If *A Mölna Elegy* constitutes Ekelöf's struggle to come to terms with the alienating Northern European ego/identity tradition, his final books—constituting the trilogy completed by *Guide to the Underworld*—shows what was for him, his whole life, the solution of a natural ground for his practice as a poet. This was Persian visionary ek-stasis, as represented by such figures as Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi. The trilogy appearing in the three years prior to his death in 1968 read as authentic visionary 'steps' of the soul approaching the underworld, possessing through a verbal medium the shape of the being that will replace its identity. The final lines of *A Mölna Elegy* are truly cryptic in their apprehension of this condition:

> From the past's rarely
> through now's midway barely
> to the future's still less
> still more rarely

A Mölna Elegy is a poem straining at the borders of textuality; the "Diwan Trilogy becomes another structure altogether, with *Guide to the Underworld* serving as "the central arch of the ruin Diwan." So even in his most fully realized non-Western vision poems, Ekelöf was compelled to return to the fact that his European orientation left him with ruins in his longing for the Orient of his ek-stasis. But the poems themselves are remarkable, often difficult and as much in need of the full complementary psychic space of the reader as the poet himself achieved in order to write these poems as *companions* to the spiritual host or guide which oversaw the quest by

breathing into the poet's ear such clues as "'You lie asleep in a sarcophagus with no bottom.'"

> I am searching for my name—then with the clear logic
> of the dream it strikes me: since the coffin has no bottom
> it must also lack a lid. And he who rests there
> lies with his back against Nothing and his face toward Nothing.
> Only the force field of the four walls holds the sleeper
> floating between the bare interior's demand to forgo
> and the power of the exterior, ornate with myths, to desire—
> Virgin, O Ātokos, when this force field will be broken
> let me, in the dream, be neither reborn nor begotten
> What came before this has no scars from chisels.
> What is to come has no fruits or flowers.

Note on the translations: Difficult as Holan's poem is, it's made even more difficult in this translation, whose apparent literalness often impedes the lyrical flourishes; but I question even the literalness. The image of "a fifth thumb between a pair of thighs" struck me as a misplaced metaphor; consulting Gunter Kunert's German version I confirmed that it is "dritte," a *third* thumb. The Ekelöf texts fare much better in translation. Rika Lesser's translation admirably complements the Sjöberg/Auden text of the other two Diwan books (published in 1971 under the misleading title *Selected Poems*). *A Mölna Elegy* can be found in *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook, Vol. I*, ed. Elinor Shaffer (Cambridge Univ. 1979), in a translation by Sjöberg and Rukeyser as uncannily resonant of the original as translations get. Too late to include in this review, but highly recommended: Ekelöf's *Songs of Something Else* (Princeton Univ. 1982), translated by Leonard Nathan and James Larson. ∆

le Géant

by Norman Klein

The photographer, Nadar, financed the construction of the balloon *le Géant* in 1863, and it became the colossal flop of the season in Paris. It was lampooned ruthlessly, this monstrosity that lifted off from the Champ-de-Mars and floated erratically to the suburb of Meaux. On its second flight, *le Géant* did even worse, blowing out of control for seventeen hours, and nearly hitting a railroad running through a farm in the duchy of Hanover.

Nadar's wife, who accepted his bohemian style of business (his studio was designed as an arab tent) was past her limit now. She screamed for revenge as she was buffeted with Nadar and seven others, as the 212,000 cubic foot balloon floundered in a strong wind all night. In the morning, she lost her breath, as horses and sheep swelled larger and larger below, and *le Géant* crashed through a tree. Nadar suffered a fractured leg, and even the aeronauts on the flight, the Godard brothers, were badly shaken.

Nadar went on to write a book about his exploits, published by Hetzel and very well received. He continuted to take aerial photographs of Paris, and lured other cultural lions into his aeronautical society (Offenbach, George Sand, Dumas).

The secretary of his aeronautical society, Jules Verne, blended Nadar and African explorer Stanley Livingstone as models for the hero of his first novel, *Four Weeks in a Balloon*. *Le Géant* had failed aeronautically, but it thrived as literature. In Verne's *A Trip to the Moon*, Nadar became the fictional hero Ardan.

Nadar also financed a journal *L'Aéronaute* that survived four issues. Gustave Doré drew the frontispiece, as follows: umbrella flying devices circle the cathedral spire of a medieval town; in the distance, a balloon floats over a railroad crossing a hill. The railroad leaves puffs of smoke that tie the composition together. Doré, who had a childhood balloon phobia, could only bring himself to render *le Géant* as a dot lost in a bad wind.

Hugo called the balloon of Nadar a symbol of freedom. At the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, there are dozens of scrapbooks of caricatures about the balloon, as a foible of science, as a symbol of Napoleon, as a banner of resistance during the Siege of Paris. The Symbolist Redon's balloon is an eye floating in the air. Henri Rousseau's balloon and Max Ernst's balloons are painted as fantasies lost in a wind.

Nadar dreamt of manned flight, particularly of propeller driven flight, helicopters as they were understood in 1863. He was a pioneer of flight before it was invented, but what he invented for the most part was the balloon as a myth of escape. We learn to overcome the air, he wrote, which "overturns walls, uproots century old trees, and tosses the ship into impulsive currents."△

The Weather Book. JANET KAUFFMAN.
Texas Tech Press. 1981.

by JEROME MCGANN

Karl Polanyi has said that one might as easily imagine a person "being born without hands and feet as carrying on his life without land." A pressure towards abstraction grows so strong in all aspects of our lives that some Necessity of the Earth seems a rare and crucial possession. Such a necessity defines the work of Janet Kauffman, which is one reason why her poetry is important.

The Weather Book is not a collection of nature poetry. The earth and its seasons are the inevitable environment within which human acts and human speech can—must—begin. Or so it comes to seem when space grows too insistently artificial. Her particular Necessity of Earth invites a human world to be.

Rally

The Delta Ohio CycleRama just broke up a whole
hot afternoon, with Crazy Ed of course
leading the 200, Sunday spun behind him like braids.

I was out front in my striped green plastic
lounge chair, propped and dull.
I was thinking I had them, and I might have

had Kid Korman pulled in, gravel hailing the hedge,
swung himself out of an ongoing cloud,
and walked my way through the chicory stalks, mildly
asking lady got some gas (form-a-gasket, band-aid),
and I'd have said, take off your helmet sweetface
let me see your hair. Bright Baby Blue and Sugar Sal
I would have asked in, admired the gloves, boots, glitter
crashgear, and led them into shade and set out ice
and green mint tea in fine glasses
and said, sweets we must do this more often.

This is verse imbedded in locality and the uniqueness which such conditions produce: in this case, the Lower Michigan peninsula, and the tobacco and

muck farms of Ohio and Pennsylvania. These are hard places, full of pitilessness—that bleak and relentless beauty of country places which yield themselves grudgingly, and only to hard work. This is where spirit moves in physical, ordinary, non-symbolic forms. Kauffman is their interpreter.

The Volunteers

In the middle of the afternoon when people turn slowly
and never mind the smoke winds rolling,
the barn shingles snapped off all at once in flames.

The lid gone, everything flew out—hurrahs of fire
rocked the trees, and a small sun cooled.
The timbers of the peak bloomed full,

fell; and in the slow of dreamers watching
we saw a wheat field stretching out beyond,
a brushy line of woods, more sky.

—Well, that's your barndance—easy enough
now to have a party with volunteers,

their numbered hats, their slick coats heaped on grass.
They were young, excited by the whole thing

done with, the drifting smoke, the hay and the metal stink.
They drank Crush and 7-Up and smiled.

Under the trees they spread their legs
and leaned on elbows, each one seeing the same

flame gone, water spent, and the sun
fired up again, wind in curl.

Here is the spirit of place, of the people who inhabit places, of the speech that places permit. Everything in this poetry is human in some local and limited way, which is why it aches so. It deserves quotation rather than this generalizing prose commentary of mine. Not since Eleanor Lerman—a city poet, much more private and Romantic than Kauffman—have I read poetry which commanded such a distinctive quality of speech.

Much is made these days of the importance of prose models for develop-

ing poetic styles. Too much, I should say, as one may see in the volumes of flat, resigned, and songless verse which appear with such frequency. Yet the appeal to prose is not made without reason, for it is an appeal against our traditions of verse abstraction and "fine" Emersonian writing, an appeal made on behalf of plainer virtues, simple talk. Such an appeal is important and in need of encouragement. But lyrical verse can only render human speech in the conventions of its lyricisms, and prose is not the ground upon which those conventions are based. Kauffman knows this very well, and the following poem illustrates what she knows far better than anything I can say.

The Light Has Changed

Now that the mornings rise
golden against the roof, what have I done
with the many-shaded darknesses
I used to roll and roll, smooth in my palms?

The light has changed.
I hear warblers spinning
tree through tree and now I believe
I will go beyond belief and be wind-drawn.

Listen. You shift in your sleep.
I have wanted to be the owl
woman determining dusk. My eyes
see the small black cats asleep.

Night is no longer my dark
and days twirl like leaves.
I have nothing. But watch
how I drift skyward

silently winged, feathered as if at your touch
the folds of wavering curtains drew back.
I sweep over acres of stubble, then
settle in elm, unshadowed. △

Mrs. Bridge & Mr. Bridge. EVAN S. CONNELL.
North Point Press. 1981.

by CORNELIA EMERSON

Evan S. Connell's companion-novels *Mrs. Bridge* (1959) and *Mr. Bridge* (1969) have been reissued by North Point Press in handsome slip-jacketed paperback editions, adorned with images of the stone faces that stare out from Puritan headstones—solemn, stiff, naive. The images announce that these novels represent a flowering of American folk art, documenting an authentic American sensibility; yet the tone is elegiac, dedicated to things passing away.

Set in suburban Kansas City in the years between the World Wars, both novels combine realism with an easy, unselfconscious modernism. Connell catches the perfect pitch of American speech, and a perfect sense of life lived in the substantial upper-middle-class—the comfortable house, the Cadillacs and the Lincoln Continentals, the once-in-a-lifetime trip to Europe. Against this background of solidity, the style of the short, ironic chapters is designed to show up discontinuity, disappointment and frustration. For the lives of both Mr. and Mrs. Bridge are lived as a series of isolated moments—mostly missed chances for love and self-awareness, mixed with a few telling moments of epiphany. Read back to back, the novels point up the solitude in marriage; for within the chronology of family life, the same incidents take on very different meanings for husband and wife.

Mrs. Bridge, who is protected by her husband, coddled by her maid and cossetted by comforts, casts about helplessly for things to occupy her time as her three children grow up and away from home. Motivated by a sweet nature and utter conformity, her main desire is not to be too different from her neighbors, not to draw too much attention to herself. Pliable, passive, innocent and expectant, her feminine attitude leads to ultimate bewilderment, as the novel's epigraph, drawn from Walt Whitman, implies:

> But where is what I started for so long ago?
> And why is it yet unfound?

In the final scene of *Mrs. Bridge*, having survived her husband, who dies of a heart attack, she ends up trapped in a stalled car half-in and half-out of the

garage, her cries muffled by the snow sifting blankly down.

If Mrs. Bridge's crisis of femininity is a timeless one, Mr. Bridge seems both more solid and more time-bound. A self-made man only one generation removed from the farm, he has achieved "financial security, independence and self-respect" by dint of his own hard work—even during these Depression years. Like his wife, he has the characteristic prejudices—against blacks, against Jews. But as an attorney, he is decent, honest, even-handed, a man of the law. Though he is the classic workaholic who spends too little time with his family, he appears to understand his children better than his wife does; he understands his wife better than she does him; and he comes eventually to a hard-won understanding of the balance-sheet of satisfactions and disappointments in his life. The epigraph to the novel *Mr. Bridge*, taken from his fellow attorney and contemporary Wallace Stevens, links him to the American Romantic tradition of rugged individualism and masculine striving that imposes the personality of its ideas of order on the world:

> I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
> Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
> And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

The tragedy of the Bridge novels is that masculine man and feminine woman may meet, marry and yet experience such a pervasive sense of isolation and impoverishment. △

CHARLES BERNSTEIN:
Controlling Interests.
Roof. 1980.
The Occurrence of Tune.
Segue. 1981.
Stigma.
Station Hill. 1981.

by CRAIG WATSON

> *It is through language that we experience the world, indeed through language that meaning comes into the world and into being.... Our learning language is learning the terms by which the world gets seen.*
>
> —CHARLES BERNSTEIN, "Thought's Measure, " *L = A = N = G = U = A = G = E*, Vol 4

Controlling Interests (Roof, 1980), like all of Bernstein's books, is organized thematically and not chronologically. Ron Silliman, in his essay "For Charles Bernstein has such a spirit" (The Difficulties, #3, an issue devoted exclusively to Charles Bernstein), maintains that this gives Bernstein substantial license to redefine his poetic activity "particularly if the formation of a subject is taken as the persistent content of the work." His largest volume to date, *Controlling Interests*, contains 17 works concerning the socialization of the individual by means of language. Because language is the constitutive force in thought and because the structures of language are acquired in the public domain, language is indeed a primary socializing force. In this book socialization is the focus of not only thematic content but compositional process as well. In the opening lines of "Matters of Policy" Bernstein states these intentions, characteristically referring to both the perceptual and constitutional processes at once:

> On a broad plain in a universe of
> anterooms, making signals in the dark, you
> fall down on your waistband &, carrying your
> own plate, a last serving, set out for another

glimpse of a gaze.

Syntax, which Bernstein defines in "Thought's Measure" as "the ordering of strings of words," plays an essential role in the articulation of values and relations. He uses a variety of devices, including various punctuation, line breaks, prose and blank space, to render the compositional act visible, as this selection from an untitled poem demonstrates:

So really not visit a remember to strange
A it's always finally seems now which ago
Long that by amazed guess I thing obvious of kind
Fell can weigh a has distance the off
That there it's then & you
While now which whatever point
Slipping constantly be to seems happening
Until fingers the like through sand
Staring there still on back look only can
Before yourself find the of window in thoughts your at

The tonal resonance of this piece, its lack of punctuation and continuous syntactical evolution, reinforces its semantic track of individual powerlessness and search.

Concern with the process of socialization also pervades the occasion of some poems such as "Standing Target," which is made from both "found" language such as camp counsellor reports on young "Charlie" and short biographies of corporate executives and the poet's syntactically varied response to this information. Similarly, "Sentences My Father Used" draws phrases from a conversation between Bernstein and his father as organizing elements in a text about time and relationships. The poem ends with:

Months sink into the water and
the small rounded lump accumulates its
fair share of disuse. Dreadfully private,
pressed against the faces of circular
necessity, the pane gives way, transparent,
to a possibility of rectitude.

The sense of being both in the world and looking at it, the interlocking of subjective and objective visions, continues throughout the book as in this line from the book's shortest poem, "Live Acts":

> The closer we look, the greater the distance from which
> we look back.

In "Matters of Policy," a text largely written about social controls and illusions, Bernstein exposes and critiques this paradox continually:

> Take broom in hand & sweep the chestnuts off
> the boulevard, not so much as a diversion,
> which has long ceased to mute the facts, but
> as a pantomime of what, some other time, you
> might have done. Yet there was a life
> without all this.

But if language is the socializing, constitutive force of experience, there may not be any "life without all this." "Island Life," the book's final work, extends and diversifies this question in a more substantial manner:

> Except that we sail and quit the horizon. Desperate
> or even remotely concerned, waves between
> and the air a constant source of
> the old jangle, musters for itself new conduits
> restless maybe for the things we never use, a half
> haze, half shadow, modestly a project of
> absorption in time, cast about, contentment
> its own course.

Here Bernstein seems to have encountered the problem which underlies the whole book, that is, the question of closure and reconsideration. Because the poems of *Controlling Interests* occur on the plane of immediate response in that they front thinking as the process of perception reaching for meaning, they don't attain an objective, statemental level. The poet is working at an edge of consciousness which forbids another, chronologically-deferred process of thought, that of formal organization and placement of information into an individual operating matrix.

Though written before *Controlling Interests, The Occurrence of Tune* (Segue, 1981) presents a possible resolution to this conflict through its use of individual, seemingly discrete lines and paragraphs in a larger frame. A single text, interspersed with Susan B. Laufer's striking photographs, the book uses "tune" to refer to both musical continuity and the process of consideration and formalization of ideas as in the expression "fine-tuning." The primary relation between textual elements is represented by their contiguity

on the page, divided by white spaces, so that interstitial relations are "like a spark jumping a break in the cable" (Charles Bernstein interview with Tom Beckett, Difficulties #3). Tune therefore emerges as the activity of the reader's mind linking one unit of articulation with the next as well as the effort to contextualize the whole poem. Laufer's photographs animate this disjunction by imagetically deconstructing and retouching photographs of objects and people. *The Occurrence of Tune* however does not resolve the issue of closure because, though the field is more concretely controlled, the reader retains a directing, constitutive role.

Bernstein is evidently aware of this issue and in *Stigma* (Station Hill, 1981) he proposes further resolutions in eleven short poems. Here Bernstein consciously explores closure as a value and weighs its implications as he tests the strain of each text in a limited field. Whereas tension existed in the earlier works as the resonance of movements in a broad context, *Stigma* presents poems that are condensed and precise and which presumably occur at a later stage in the cognitive process. From "March":

> Refused for want of hurting, gain
> Else that quiets, resisting standards
> Partly for fear, ageless glowering
> At shutter speed, or cancel without
> Report. This legless hope, these brief
> Returns.

As with "Island Life," this poem is confronting its own limits and the structural limits of language. In "Stove's Out" he presses the theme of self-defeat even further:

> There is an emptiness that fills
> Our lives as we meet
> On the boulevards and oases
> Of a convenient attachment.

The statemental nature of these lines is pointed and direct; although framing devices continue to be present, they are animated by a fluent, if not linear, track of consciousness. The image of the oasis, as both a point of concentration and rest, occurs in the title poem:

> The quiet oasis of a stall
> Whosoever gains, keeping the spring that

By petulance bounces quickly, a chord
Of speed, wake of manner to be
Numbed.

The book's title refers to the problem of closure and objectification versus processes of continuity and extension. Thought necessarily arrives at this point and, though it need not become fixed in a commodified state, perception does yield to a more stable, limited state of consciousness.

Bernstein's poetry is actively involved in the contradictions, reversals and tensions of thought and language. There are numerous other aspects of the work, including its political implications and place in literary history, that have not been discussed here, though all of these are based in his attitude toward language as a dynamic, as well as expressive, force. The relative success of these works lies both in their ability to draw the reader closer to the structure of language as a material and in their rich articulation of an individual mind in the process of conceiving itself. ∆

The Principle of Fit. DAVID ANTIN.
Watershed Tapes. 1981.

by ROBERT PETERS

In a recent issue of *The American Poetry Review*, Robert Dana asks James Laughlin if there is currently an avant-garde in American writing. "Well," replies Laughlin, a few writers "are doing something which is totally different from what your average, accepted, good writer is doing." Two such authors (both published by him) are the novelist Walter Abish, and David Antin. Dana confesses that he hasn't seen Antin's "stuff." Laughlin urges him to a library, and confesses that even he doesn't "entirely understand" Antin; but he finds him "so damned amusing" that he enjoys publishing him. So much for the interior decision-making processes of a famous publisher's mind!

Well, I've just listened for the fifth time to Antin's new Watershed tape, "The Principle of Fit. 2." It's both fun and maddening to listen to; Antin amuses with the liberties he takes with the talk-piece, and he irritates when

he's self-indulgent, obvious, and shamelessly didactic.

"The Principle of Fit. 2" relates to three traditions. The oldest, pretty moribund now, is that of the familiar essay, that old genre brought to a consummate artistry by Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, Hawthorne, Coleridge, Holmes, and Stevenson. The form has continued to flicker on in the prose of T. S. Eliot, Pound, and Olson. These men chatted long, often with an impressive display of brains, on intimate terms with their readers—improvisational, humorous, sometimes testy, employing amusing and literate turns of phrase. Their aim was generally to affect a reader's taste and heart-feelings, those fine sentiments within his person. This is pretty much what Antin tries to do. For all I know, Antin may have read nary a one of these nineteenth-century figures—but the tradition exists. When, in printed versions, Antin eschews normal sentence patterns, scattering blank intervals between phrases on the page, he is merely parlaying that earlier discursiveness into more sophisticated, hip, orthographical dress.

A second tradition is that of the standup comic who regales us with an assemblage of puns and one-liners calculated to induce warm belly-feelings (if not laughs and a few tears) in the listener. In "Fit," Antin at times assumes the intonation of a Shelley Berman or a Henny Youngman, delivering himself before an audience of admirers. He's never scatological or outrageous, as Lenny Bruce was—Antin plays with pretty safe ideas. On this tape Antin's live audience remains remarkably undemonstrative.

A third tradition is that of the hip-professor lecturing to undergraduates, a lecturer who developed his ingratiating platform manner in the 1960's, ala Alan Watts, Timothy Leary, and guru-types who found success by talking *with* rather than by lecturing *to* youthful audiences.

Like these men, Antin is fun to listen to. He almost never trips over a word or thought, and he has calculated well the fat that sticks to the old bones of his discourse. Like Watts, he's a purveyer of *Big Life Themes*. He seldom experiments with language—except for a warmed-over stroke or two borrowed from Gertrude Stein, imitations of some of her repetition devices. There are no off-the-wall ideas or stylistic pyrotechnics, by way of experimentation. Michael Davidson, who is sensitive to Antin's work, agrees that "Antin doesn't 'experiment' with language in the way that, say, Sound Poets or Aleatorists do, by breaking-up the phonetic-semantic structure. His interests are with discourse frames, the codes within which communication

occurs and within which social and intellectual structures emerge. People going to one of David's talk pieces expecting to see something on the order of Cage or Schwitters are often startled to find Mort Sahl or Lenny Bruce; they don't want to be entertained, however interesting the ideas might be—and Antin's pieces are all about ideas. Now if some of the ideas he addresses concern language, there is no reason why the discursive mode has to be broken down just in order to 'materialize' such ideas. David thinks of himself more in the socratic line in which ideas exist in their talking-out, in their self-interrogation." Perhaps Antin has reserved his heavier-weight ideas for other places than this tape.

In "Fit," Antin focuses on three women—two lost to disease, the other lost to success. In *Life I* an old lady goes to a doctor to find out why she can't see well. The doctor "gives" her a disease—glaucoma. And since doctors, Antin says, have more diseases to give than they have patients (who have "patience"), they need patients so as to give their diseases away, hence *fitting* their role as doctors. Our heroine *fits* the given disease, has her operation, and loses the sight in her eye completely. Later, told that she must have an operation on her good eye, she fails to "fit" what the doctor expects, and refuses the new operation. Listening to this riff, we like what we hear. Antin's on our side, if somewhat facilely, against doctors.

Life II belongs to glorious "blonde, beautiful, and fatalistic" Bev, an art department's former administrative assistant. But, beware! If you are blonde, beautiful, and fatalistic, life will chop you to your knees, a legless wooden doll. This is what it does to beautiful Bev, via cancer. Her doctor's gift is terminal leukemia, which Antin defines as white blood cells that are in "bad shape." Bev's loss of her hair leads Antin to digress on his own baldness. Losing one's hair is "no big deal." Antin "willed" his "away," as an act of "absolute honesty," whatever that means. Bev's loss (and her dying) was like going to Vegas (which she loved), that "intersection of order and disorder." When Antin announces Bev's death, he pauses, allowing his gnawing, hurt voice full impact. As a "talking poet," he wanted "to offer her art," at the memorial service. He labored mightily to produce something *fit*, delivered it over the phone 18 times, to get it right. But they didn't use his "art" after all; the prevailing, academic forces decided that his eulogy didn't fit the occasion.

Life III concerns a young actress who leaves Poland to follow her husband

to America. She gets her fairytale by moving upstate and managing a theatrical hotel owned by an old man. If her tale had worked, she would amuse the old man who would leave her the hotel when he died. Well, she gets careless, neglects him, and loses the hotel. Eventually good things happened—a charming husband, good kids, money—all nicely fitting in. Yet, today, she apparently lives in misery, and "has no words" to justify her misery. She cries a lot and considers suicide.

Despite the loquaciousness and the grand-standing, Antin's "Fit" does possess intelligence and skill for shaping talk. There is a sensitivity that goes deeper than the bleeding-heart syndrome. The question, I guess, is of style. His work, for me, moves within the three traditions I mention: but I don't see, judging from this piece, that he makes much of a contribution to experiments with language or forms. ▵

Three Penny Lane. FIELDING DAWSON.
Black Sparrow Press. 1981.

by NORMAN WEINSTEIN

No other narrative of Dawson's so gracefully demonstrates his affinities with Abstract Expressionist painting. Not even the much praised Kline memoir touches the gist of the Pollock/Kline/Rothko nexus. (That book was the action-epic of replacing the displaced father figure). *Three Penny Lane* uncannily gives the feeling-tone of action-painting, has that energetic charge we vicariously participate in when we see those photographs of Pollock at work in his studio. Here's Dawson's purest statement of intention:

> I want to go into this detail, the storyteller said,
> because in books or in print anywhere, and most of all
> in film, it's just never done, never of contemporary
> painting—or music—think of a movie where Bird, or
> Diz or Miles eat, sleep, walk, practice, see people,
> argue, arrange, compose, worry—and play, consider
> the *hard* work they do.

Consider the structure and thrust of Dawson's labor. *Three Penny Lane* is

the third in a cycle of five novels. The first two volumes are sharply episodic. Lots of finely honed bar stories with quick elliptical shiftings. Vintage Dawson. But few surprises. This novel is linear with considerable twists and leaps. It's a story within a story: a novelist friend of the main character carries the narrative along. The story within the story is a saga about an abstract expressionist artist who acts like an amalgam of Dawson and Franz Kline. The artist is given the unlikely name of "Nathan Fierce" and embodies that name with a fierce intensity.

Fierce is presented as BLOCKED—with women and with his own artistic process. He dances in a spasmodic frenzy between the demands of his ex-wife and his young lover; a death-dance of an apparent burn-out. But, wait, there are unexpected graces—the interventions of a spook, a beautiful woman, an investor who pays him thousands for his two remaining canvases when Fierce is ready to sell his studio and quit the New York art scene. Dawson is definitely as shameless as O'Henry. The old (and highly sentimental) surprise ending prevails.

But the story—like all stories—surges with an energy no simple plotting can contain. A great vortical swirl of electrical enthusiasm about painting, color, physical gestures of arm and hand thrusting FORWARD toward all possibilities the blank canvas offers, then:

> It's utterly *wild* how it suddenly unfolds—and falls
> into place! It's like Cecil Taylor! Alice says novels
> work like that too—the whole Goddammed thing! BAM
> like *that*, he snaps his fingers—and laughs, tossing
> his head madly, Judy stepped to the painting, and with
> a grim smile, said BAM, snapped her fingers to the
> painting—like *that*, applied rose red.....

That's how Dawson operates: epiphanies at Interstate speeds. But there's no sloppy excess (a la Kerouac), no Thomas Wolfe-like rivers of rhetorical cotton candy. The sentences gallop like prime apaloosas with prime mescaline in their feed.

Three Penny Lane solidifies Dawson's position as prime mover of Projective Prose. No other prose writer has carried the "one perception must lead to further perception" dictum quite as far, as deep. The cadences of a nervous and twittering intelligence ricochet off the pages. A—for all his neurotic fixes about women and sex and money—*humane* intelligence. Lots

of gentle self mockery in this story. Dawson has the knack of being psychological without resorting to psychobabble.

Why he's never gained a MASS audience for his novels I'll never know. He even indulges in writing a few pages in the form of a screenplay. An open invitation to Hollywood? Like the Beatles' song, this novel can easily slide into further variation on the same theme. As the song goes: "Meanwhile, back...."△

Selected Poems 1958-1980. GILBERT SORRENTINO.
Black Sparrow Press. 1981.

by NORMAN WEINSTEIN

This book title is absolutely inadequate. Here's my suggestion: *New York Spleen*. Twenty two years of the lyric celebrating the splenetic, the bitter (Sorrentino's favorite word / hit like a drone note in a raga), the *nigredo*.

The early poems here (reprinted from *The Darkness Surrounds Us* and *Black and White*) sound like well crafted extensions of the young Creeley's craft. Angst and guilt burst out from the poem in all directions:

> He came to the day that made him a hopeless husband
> and said to himself that he was indeed that husband
> but what kind of husband
>
> did the bitch suspect
> he was?

The typical Creeley posture: the plight of the male lover thoroughly disquieted in the presence of women — yet hungry for their touch. Sorrentino's speech is not quite as compressed as Creeley's. This is the Bronx talking, not laconic New England. The lines, however, are tight, tense, keenly focused. Sorrentino follows Creeley in feeling essentially *uncomfortable* in the world — a mass of jagged nerves and shy asides. And these early Sorrentino poems reveal a classic ploy utilized by writers when they feel existentially displaced: cynical, ironic detachment. His titles during this period form a despairing litany: "Faces of Doom and Sterility," "Bar Games," "The Evening News".

An icy and unrelenting darkness surrounds these poems. It's like seeing a large museum display case filled with black obsidian. The eye hungers for relief — even in the midst of feasting upon the jewels.

A painstaking reading of this more than generous selection of Sorrentino's poetry led me to the conclusion that there is no relief whatsoever from the tone established in his early work. The poet's verbal agility deepens with the passage of time; *his psychological depth doesn't*. Psychologist James Hillman claims that pathologizing (which is precisely what I see these poems doing — opening every festering psychological wound Sorrentino has lived through) leads to the making of soul. The selections from *Corrosive Sublimate* (particularly "Coast of Texas" and "Anatomy") point in that direction. Yet pathologizing can also lead to embarassingly superficial fixes like:

> Rich and poor
> of every color and idea
> show themselves
> mannequin and dummy.

When Sorrentino transcends the limitations imposed by his own constant cynical carping he impulsively reveals a softly romantic sensibility. The tenderness in a marriage poem like "Simplicity" (from *The Orangery*) is staggering in this context. Like a breath of fresh air after walking a mile through a smoke filled subway tunnel.

Sorrentino's poems of the past few years move toward a heavy utilization of repeated key words and images. The poems in *The Orangery* cleverly and imaginatively stretch "orange" as a leitmotif (much along the lines of Ross Feld's shamefully neglected *Plum Poems*.) The poems become a trifle lighter and wittier. Funny how irony, light gallowshumor, and wit — the holy trinity of the hacks who get regularly promoted in the academic press — become the *substance* of Sorrentino's poems.

Strangely, as his poems seem more mannered and less substantial, the man's prose soars. There is no question in my estimation that Sorrentino is one of a precious handful of great American novelists revitalizing the form and spirit of the novel. But let's not dismiss *Selected Poems* too facilely. There are at least sixty poems in this book I treasure. A book half the size of this one (approaching 125 pages) would have highlighted these poems in a more flattering fashion. But these tough edged poems deserve attention.

And Black Sparrow has made this a physically handsome book for the eye and hand. △

The Person of Fiction, The Fiction of Person

by WILLIAM BRONK

When Paul Pines was writing a memoir of a certain period of his life, he showed me an early draft. I suggested that the most interesting personage in his account was himself and that he had been slighted—he wasn't enough there. He said he was aware of this and found it a problem. Several drafts later, the memoir had become fiction because by fiction he had been able to include himself more fully, more truly.

Using an invented name and personage, Richard Elman has written what claim to be an elderly man's recollections of bizarre people he had known through a long life in small community. The concluding sketch is headed with my name and many details of it are accurate and easily verified. When I objected to this invasion and its several injustices, he said I must realize the whole thing is a fiction including the supposed author and including me as a subject. But I observed that my name is not, in the ordinary sense at least, a fiction.

In a more profound sense, our names of course are fictions; as with concepts and objects and places, they are simply what things or persons are called commonly, not what they really are, not their true names if there can be said to be true names for anything. Persons, places, various objects in our experience have qualities for us which resist our assessment. They are mysterious and have a kind of magic for us. We are often aware or can be made aware that, to the mundane and rational eye, this mystery doesn't exist, is a pure fiction, as we say. At the same time, we know that one of the terms we use to characterize aspects of our experience which seem most moving and powerful to us and, in that sense, the most real, is 'storied.' The central pol-

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This essay was occasioned by the publication of Gilbert Sorrentino's *Crystal Vision*, North Point Press, 1981.

arity and tension which energizes Gilbert Sorrentino's work is this one between the opposite faces of fiction. Although it is sometimes spoken of as a technical and aesthetic problem of the medium and Sorrentino himself often speaks of it this way, its importance is not so much to the medium as in its being, within the medium, a metaphor for a problem outside the medium: who we are really and what is the nature of reality.

These are questions whose answers we don't know and which seem unrewarding to consider. It is more practical to rely instead on our common sense which gives us a usable answer without looking too closely. There is always a tenuous but sturdy fiction of ideas received and accepted and taught at so general and unaware a level that the ideas can properly be called common sense. It is the kind of fiction we consider matter-of-fact. It pretends that the central mysteries of our nature and experience don't exist and its drabnesses lead us sometimes to say, "Tell me a story." And such a story is the common sense idea of fiction: an escape from the drabness of matter-of-fact. Even in such stories, there are constant references to the framework and terms of common sense and not only in their departures from that framework and those terms. They invent attractions and marvels as substitutes for the incomprehensible whose omission from the matter-of-fact makes common sense itself a fiction.

Sorrentino's *Steelwork* is a matter-of-fact fiction, a straight-forward reminiscence of growing up in Brooklyn. Many of the people in the book are probably close renderings of actual people including, of course, the one called Gibby, a self-portrait of sorts, accurate or no. These people's lives are entirely outside the book; they appear there only in quick sketches or candid snaps which have as little effect on them as a Xerox copy has on the document copied. It is only a book and their life is not in the book. It is a long way from *Mulligan Stew* whose inhabitants have no life other than book life—this book or some other, since they may have originated in other books, and they contemplate leaving this book not for the life of the streets or the fields but for somebody else's pages. They have such existence in the actual world as dolls or puppets have. Their utility in giving the illusion of life is wholly in their not being alive. As ventriloquist's dummies they will say whatever is required of them, will even argue back comically with the ventriloquist as he prompts them to accomplish his purpose. They couldn't seem to be alive unless they were lifeless.

Oppositely, we couldn't know the lifelessness of another set of persons if we had not seen their faces and costumes, listened to their conversations, read their poems, looked at their paintings, repeatedly in our own experience. These are the people in *Imaginary Qualities Of Actual Things*, an account of some who have made a fiction of their lives outside of a book. They have invented characters called by their names whose lives they live after the manner of their invention. They intend that by actually living a fiction they will verify it and they will be the artists they think to be. But they remain fictions; art does not emerge consequently from la vie de bohème to which it is indifferent. In the book they are Sorretino's inventions and true whereas a lived fiction outside of a book is false. The invention of the novelist adheres to experience and fact, the reality which it celebrates. The lived fiction departs from reality in order to deny it. It is because we all do this in some degree that Sorrentino says that, to write funny stories about it as he does, is limping magic to ward off disaster. Any honest artist knows his own failure. It is Sorrentino's sense of his own loss and failure which is the source of the scathing hilarity of this book. It is said that several readers recognized themselves there and were angry with Sorrentino for cruel portraits. Of course; we all recognize ourselves there however different the details of habit and appearance may be from ours. We seem to identify ourselves and each other by a multitude of specific details of name and appearance and history. In this book, Sorrentino repeatedly refers to the arbitrariness and irrelevance of these reportorial details in respect to his invented characters. Yet, we recognize ourselves. The perfect fiction gets at our truth, our reality, by going behind the panoply of make-believe in which we disguise ourselves by the ways we dress and talk and otherwise behave—by our style.

When our style is conscious and deliberate, it is a desperate device to realize oneself, to become a person in more than the biological sense, to mean something as that person, which is a hard thing to do if we have to think about it. Years ago, it was said that the concerned person who thought about it would be led to either the Communist Party or the Catholic Church. More recently, we have had ashrams and kibbutzim, fundamentalism and the Moonies, not to speak of the unquestioned conventions of the neighborhood which have been there all along. These external identities falsify us by their limitations but give us definition and we want to be defined. What we want defined, however, is our indefiniteness, our unlimited

possibility.

Our person is, finally, more desire than realization. Sorrentino's *The Sky Changes* is an exposition of desire in its rages and frustrations. Its form is a flight across country by car toward a new life whose desire might be no longer lost and unrecoverable. The house and garden, all the old assets are cashed in and the pursuit is ventured with a trusted friend for help as a driver. But the assets, which were unearned from the dead, spend themselves on day-to-day needs and emergencies, the driver betrays his trust, the desire still agonizes and only the sky changes.

We laugh at the clothes we wore in old photographs, at the things we find in the attic. What strikes us now as dowdy and shabby was once the up-to-the-minute glamour which promised to make us in our own eyes and the eyes of the world. The aberrance of the light of the stars we set our hearts on is the theme of *Aberration Of Starlight*. The things we loved once—how we loved them! It is a terrible cruelty that we need to cling to the validity of our love in a world where almost nothing answers to our desire, where our love proposes a reality which is not agreed to, where our self, that solid person of our aspiration, exists only there or in a fiction.

Sorrentino has felt how certain jazz musicians, certain baseball players have reached an unsurpassed transcendence of self-realization. He knows that it is their art and not their person that has made that reach.

Now, in *Crystal Vision*, a reuse of the milieu of *Steelwork*, there are names but no identities: no persons. Gibby, though he may be remembered, is an abandoned sentiment not worth speaking of. The names which do appear are less persons than figures on baseball cards but not the ones we know. They are players in leagues so minor we never heard of them. Who they are doesn't matter at all; they are nobodies. They make certain ritualized plays or misplays which we watch for awhile. Are there substitutes and replacements or do we just confuse one with another? Without any prompting, we begin to recognize a view of our own perceptions where distinctions are lost and misperceptions are true. Our recollections merge so that we make a person out of several persons, mix brothers with cousins or neighbors, and fathers with sons, and nobodies may have been somebodies once. We don't know. People fade and disappear as though they never were. Were they? Whatever, if anything, may be realized in our experience, it is not the self, not the person. It is seen that the assumption that all those persons

sketched in *Steelwork* had a real life outside of the book is a false assumption: it is a fiction. This Brooklyn is Prospero's island where the actors were all spirits and "melted into air, into thin air" and, indeed, the least dissoluble ones were quite literally actors, the character actors of the movies. And there were sounds and sweet airs that gave delight and hurt not: the music of ritual discourse, the stimulations of desire, the Aladdin-wealth of penny candy. The ending is less despair than hilarious laughter. △

▲

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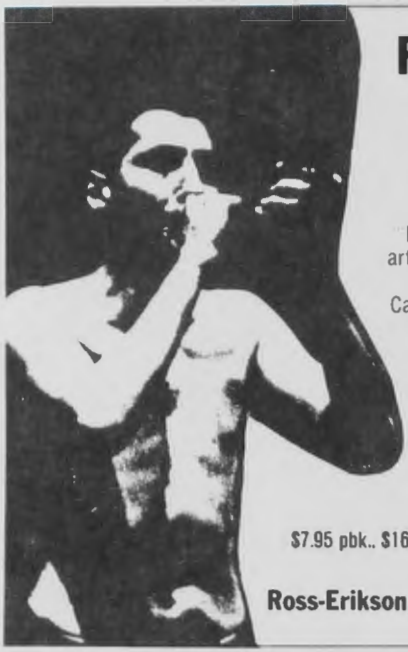

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

JACKSON MAC LOW

Should be a masterpiece,' writes Dick Higgins of the Ross-Erikson spring publication of poet Jackson Mac Low's lifetime collection of work, *REPRESENTATIVE WORKS*.

'His poetry sets us ecstatic... It is possible to imagine that the artists whose works we live with constitute not a vocabulary but an alphabet by means of which we spell our lives,' says John Cage of the major proponent of systematic chance procedures in contemporary poetry.

'...for the things that no one else did. For showing us that poetry can be collaborative. For contributing so much to the cross-fertilization of the arts...for doing it all so long and so well,' writes the *Village Voice* about America's foremost experimental poet.

Jerome Rothenberg, Editor: New Wilderness Poetics Series
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Sulfur

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California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA 91125

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Cover art: Choreography/Costume from the dance "After Words" (1981) by Alice Farley, photo by Ronald Kienhuis

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Jackson Mac Low

Introduction and Performance Instructions for "Winds"/"Instruments"

"Winds"/"Instruments" is a performance work for narrator(s) and for instrumentalists who also occasionally speak. All of its verbal and tonal materials derive from extensive word lists, each of which includes only words spelled solely with the letters of the name of a musical instrument (each word listed with suffixes indicating other word forms built from the base word, e.g., plurals, that are spelled with those letters—no letter appearing in any word form on the list more times than it occurs in the instrument's name).

The title "Winds" adhered solely to the work from August 1980, when I began its composition, until sometime after its premiere at The Kitchen in New York on 18 October 1980. The instruments in that performance were transverse flutes (played by Andrew Bolotowsky and Susan Stenger), recorders (played by Pete Rose), clarinets—including bass (played by Dan Goode and Armand Schwerner), and trombone (played by James Staley); and there were four narrators: Anne Tardos (reading the "Transverse Flute" narrative), Katherine Bourbonais ("Recorder"), Eve Rosenthal ("Clarinet"), and Jackson Mac Low ("Trombone").

Subsequent performances in New York (Bilhaud Gallery, 26 Feb. 1981), Baltimore (Red Door Hall, 28 Mar. 1981), and San Francisco (Intersection, 2 June 1981) have included electric guitars (first played in the NY 2/26/81 performance by Rhys Chatham and Ned Sublette)

and an "Electric Guitar" narrative. For such performances including instruments other than winds (a pianoforte part and narrative are in preparation as of 9 May 1982) I have adopted the title "Instruments" —accidentally given to "Winds" by Tom Johnson's generous review of its Kitchen premiere in *The Village Voice* (Dec. 3-9, 1981). (Many thanks to Tom for this useful mistake as well as for his appreciative critique). In all performances after the first I've myself read all of the narratives appropriate to the particular instrumental ensembles, in a sense, "conducting" the performances from the narrator's stand by regulating tempi, silence durations, and amplitudes. Future performances (like the premiere) may include two or more narrators.

Composition. From each word list derived from the name of a musical instrument both an instrumental part and a prose "narrative" are prepared as follows:

1. The words on the list being numbered, a random-digit table is used to obtain a series of numbers, and from this number series, the corresponding series of words from the list (usually in their base forms).

2. A letter-pitch class "code" is prepared through which the successive letters of the base forms of the words in the series are "translated" into a series of pitch-class names.

3. The pitch-class series is notated on conventional five-line musical staves (headed by the clef(s) appropriate to the instrument and its range) as a series of whole notes. The notes corresponding to the letters of each word are notated between bar lines and below the word itself, which is lettered above the staff. That is, each "measure" translates the letters of the word above it. (In the parts for transposing instruments the concert-pitch equivalents of the letters are appropriately transposed, e.g., in the part for B-flat clarinet, A natural, the concert-pitch equivalent of the letter "A," is notated as a B natural.)

4. The register (octave placement) of each note is decided improvisatorily by the composer during preparation of the part and (except in the case of the recorder part) is to be followed exactly by the instru-

mentalist (unless the latter is strongly impelled during a performance to play certain notes in other octaves). The recorder player(s) decide(s) octave placements of all notes during each performance: the recorder part gives a series of pitch *classes*, whereas each of the other parts gives a series of *pitches*.

5. From the same series of words as that from which the instrumental part is derived, a "narrative" is written by placing structure words (and sometimes others) between the list words, either in their base forms or in other permissible forms indicated on the list by suffixes.

The instrumental parts and narratives for/from transverse flute, recorder, clarinet, and trombone were prepared in August-October 1980; those for electric guitar, in February 1981; and in May 1982, when this introduction was being written, a pianoforte part and narrative were in process.

Performance. During a performance only the narratives derived from the names of the instruments actually played in that performance are read—in succession—either by two or more different narrators (as in the Kitchen permiere) or by a single narrator (as in other performances). The narrator(s) may observe substantial silences between paragraphs (though it is better not to do so between ones that are closely connected) and before and after each narrative. The narrator(s) may "conduct" and pace the performance, to a certain extent, by setting and sometimes changing the reading tempo and by prolonging or curtailing the silences.

Any number of the instrumental parts and connected narratives may be played and read during any particular performance. Each instrumental part may be played by two or more instrumentalists, each realizing the part independently.

All of the instrumental parts that are realized during a performance are played simultaneously in free polyphony. All parameters except pitch and amplitude (duration of tones, aggregates—intervals, chords, tone clusters—and silences, their placement in the audible

plenum, and the ways of beginning ("attacks") and continuing tones, etc.; meter and/or pulse (if any); tempo and tempo changes; timbre and timbre changes; etc.) are decided by the performers—influenced by each others' and ambient sounds. They are limited, however, to amplitudes *between mezzo forte* (mf) *and pianissimo* (pp), except during a narrator's long silences, though allowed freely to choose and change—crescendo and decrescendo—within that range. They can also speak some of the words written above the measures of the parts from time to time, and a word may be spoken at quite another time from when the tones corresponding to the word are played.

All choices in playing and speaking (instrumentalists' and narrators') are to be made in careful and conscious relation with the audible plenum perceived by each individual and its changes (all perceptible sounds produced by the instrumentalists, narrator(s), audience, and environment). Great care must be taken to ensure that the narratives' words are clear—audible and intelligible—to both audience and performers: the narrator(s) must speak and space the words carefully; instruments must never drown out the narrator(s), keeping well below forte (f) as long as the narrator(s) speak(s), the more so the larger the number of simultaneous sounds, with instrumental tutti during narratives hovering around piano (p). However, during a narrator's silences instrumentalists may play as loudly and as densely as they feel moved to (or as softly and as sparsely).

Instrumentalists play straight through the pitch (or pitch class) series constituting their parts. They phrase freely and may disregard the bar lines in their phrasings and other tone groupings (e.g., aggregates). If an instrumentalist reaches the end of the instrument's part before the end of a performance, the part must be begun again, but truncated at whatever point in it is reached when the performance ends.

The narrator(s) and instrumentalists are urgently requested to listen intently throughout the performance, with a degree of attention and concentration akin to that of a person seriously practicing

meditation, so that conscious choices are also spontaneous responses and inventions of ways of actualizing pitch series and speaking words proceed directly from inspiration. Not only must performers constantly monitor the loudness of the whole ensemble as well as their own, but each instrumentalist should stop playing from time to time (at any point in the pitch series), observing silence while listening closely until the time seems ripe for a conscious resumption of the realization, and the narrator(s) should be similarly attentive, not only while reading—during which they must constantly make small changes in amplitude and tempo, both in response to the instrumental sounds and ambience and to ensure intelligibility—but also during the silences observed before, between paragraphs of, and after each narrative in order to decide when it's better to let the instruments proceed without narrative and when to resume reading. It goes without saying that narrator responses will be matters of nuance rather than gross changes.

Beginning, Ending, Signaling. The first (or the only) narrator begins a performance by standing before the entire ensemble, raising both hands overhead, holding them there until attention of ensemble and audience is ensured, and then bringing them down sharply. Each instrumentalist has the option of either beginning immediately or of remaining silent until some later time when they wish to enter. The narrator moves to a microphone (unless one is placed where the signal was given) and waits silently listening to the ensemble, allowing a certain amount of instrumental "development" to take place before beginning the first narrative.

The narrator(s) ought always to be clearly visible to the instrumentalists in order to signal, if necessary, the beginnings and endings of silences (e.g., by moving the right arm and hand across the chest, palm down, until the fingers touch the left shoulder, and then moving arm and hand in a horizontal arc, slowly, until they are stretched out straight from the right shoulder, perpendicular to the body's right side). Such signals may be dispensed with if, during re-

hearsals, it becomes clear that they are unnecessary.

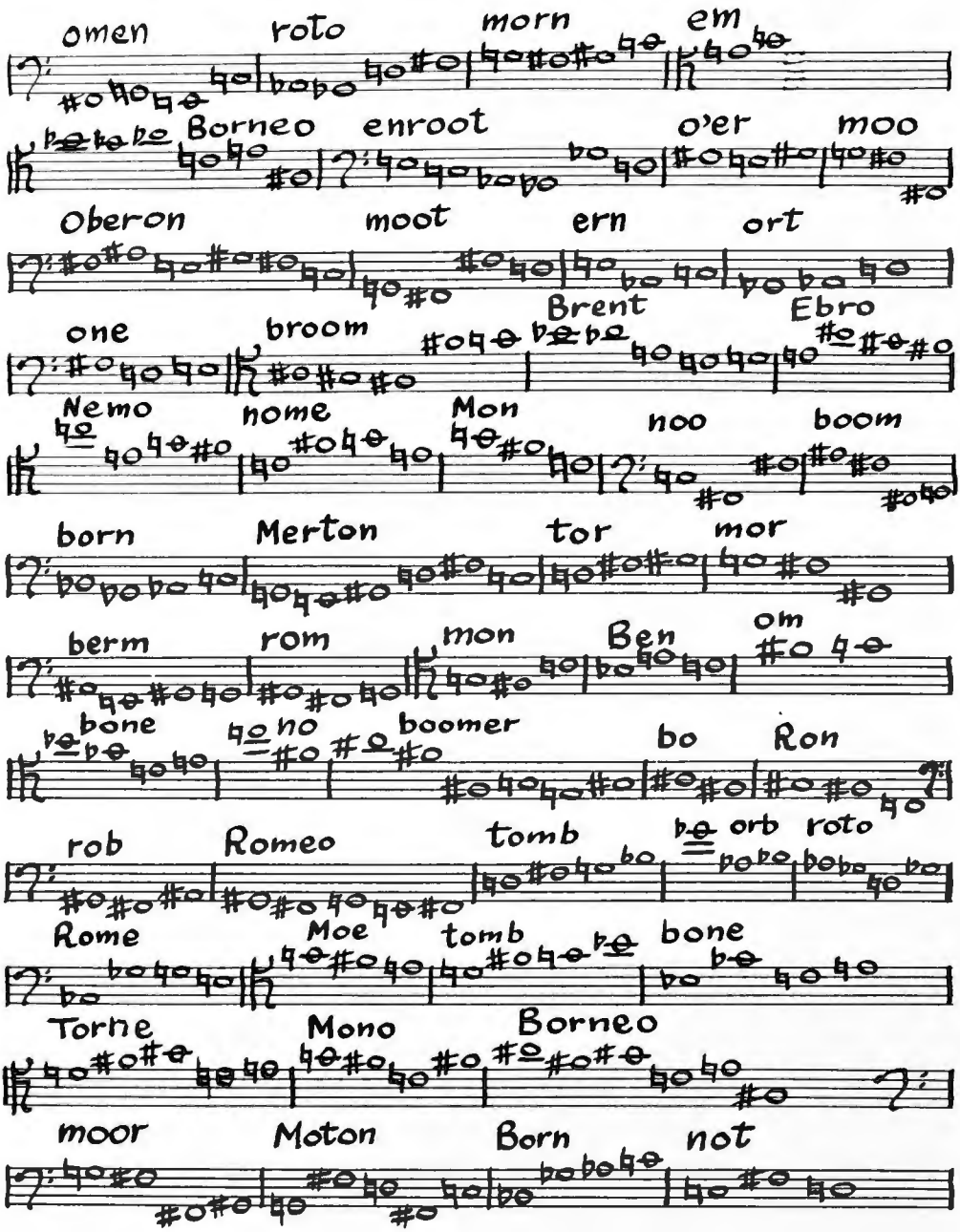
After reading the last words of the final narrative, the narrator (or last narrator reading) moves, unless already there, to the position in front of the ensemble and waits silently for a few or even several minutes, while the instrumentalists continue realizing their parts—now, of course, without amplitude limitations. Then, either at the narrator's discretion or when an ending time previously agreed upon has nearly arrived, the narrator raises both hands overhead to indicate that the end of the performance is near. When the narrator judges that a satisfactory ending has been reached or the time agreed upon has arrived, the narrator brings both arms down abruptly, and all the instrumentalists must immediately stop playing.

Developed August-October 1980
This text written 7-12 May 1982

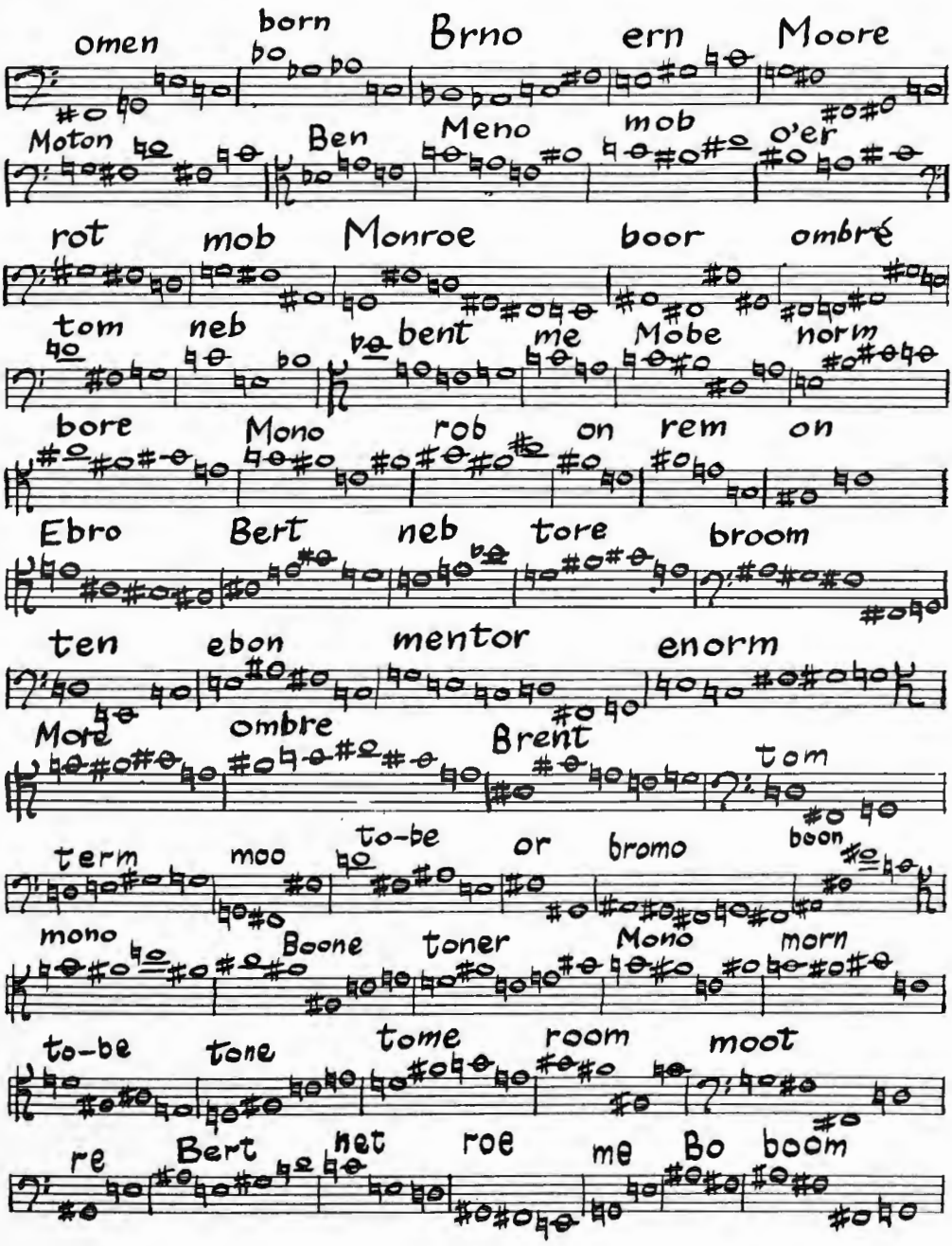
Trombone part

WINDS

Jackson Mac Low (1980)



② Trombone part WINDS Mac Low



Trombone part WINDS Mac Low ③

monte broom ombre Moor

Rome No net Torne neb tern

moo Rome Oberon nome mentor

Rob reb rot tern boom or

room Boone one bo bent ern

Nome bromo Bo Nemo robe

nome mono Bone toom

Mentor ten tom moon tenor

Brno Mono En rom Moe

tern bromo tone

Jackson Mac Low
August-October 1980
New York

Transverse Flute Narrative for Winds/Instruments

Lette is on an arête, while errant Lear's among the trees. Their talers on a ratter, they starve through Nerva's fault. These savers and lavers of tsars start an astute returnee to Sèvres—"neural" Steen—on ferula. And Verne? On lasers.

These savers' "ut" on Susan's turf is terse.

But Sverre has his rentes and Estes his vertu. They can sauté anything to taste, and don't have lues or teslas or fenestrules, though their ulnas are versant with Es Sur. But how many teslas can there be in one late flan?

And how much sal in a vault?

Some of their leases are neural, since these leasers have surra. That's why they and Teena restart a fetus and strafe a seer in a fetal ruse.

In Arles their taters and veenas are real, but Lee slates veenas for Letts, who ask: "If there are fenestrae in every fetus (and there are) and a salver in the Tar (and there may be), why does no leu fasten to Art in Esterel?" As many return to as turn away from their tenets.

Some ask whether any lunette can be serrate if none's ulnar. Let's ravel it out. Did Varèse ever use terne? He was no tsar. And neither Sue nor Eve will ever be a slave!

They say Erastus leavens Steven's unreal settee with flatuses, though his late aunt was a self-starter. Most sales aren't—no more than Renée is U.

Then did Sverre lure Nast to refute the East? Not if Venetes were ever real. And what about Reval? It was never near a tarn. Nevertheless, some fatten, some avert, and some refuse the unreal as Surtees

did vestees.

Do Arles' revenues relate to elators on traves? Where else? Not in vests! Then what did sera ensure for Ur, if a tael can avert a funeral felt in a nevus? That it slant toward Erevan, not us. We aren't any severer, though all luster is from Ra. And when Venus is in estrus, she may flatter stelae terete users revest.

However, in Nevers and Sète furan'll be relet by Vane and Art, although there's a stere of it in Leuven, where there are no reefs to unstate or arrest a leaser. But what does a refuter unreeve from his arse as he strunts about the Senate? Nothing of Serra's, nothing renal, never a sterlet, and nothing frae whoever has rateen to reverse a sternal fever.

Then who'd leave an easel to unstate Tuva's ferrules. Not Serra—he saunters. And not through any fenestrae. He uses tares to taunt truants, transfuse teens, and traverse lutes others revet.

Does no one tease *him*?

Ane: Furness.

Not she who's at the feet of Reese when she's in estrus?

Yes, she who with her ferula ensures, astern, that she's a teaser, with antlers on her feet and ferula in her eaves. She how she struts, a serf of ferula as Una is of furan.

Una who?

Una Tree.

Recorder Narrative for Winds/Instruments

Who's at the core?

Whoever can rede an ode.

Who can rede one?

Reece can—he did.

What was it about?

A roc.

Who was it by?

Ed—long ere this—told a Cree that it was by Rode.

Did his doing that erode anything?

No, according to Rod—but he may be in error.

He's a cerer to the core, but he too can rede Rode.

Is that the Rode who was said to recode decor?

Yes, he was always a doer!

What did he do with a reed?

He taught a coed his creed.

His creed? What was its core?

Can't tell you, doc. But the ore Reed used to make a rod was what he had to cede to Reece. And through an error Ree let Doré do the decor. Rede the record!

Red gave a reed to Rod to erode what he rode so he'd have to reorder. This was due to his credo: he was *so* much against the Reo. If we rede his creed, we see what we dree because of that red recoder. If

he had, Reed wouldn't have had to let Reece have an öre, much less his ore.

What did the doc order, O Reece, and what did Ed reorder? Redo it ere you do that coed recoder. Doc says to do it or dee without an öre for your creed. That's an order!

Dorr made an error as a reder for CORE. "O *CORE!*" cried Ed. Not for Rode e'er was doe so red.

Re "rede," can a doe erode the code of the Cree?

Not by a red cod!

Re "core"—did Ed err?

Not by an öre!

But for decor, Doc had a deer, by Od! Never a roc or a cod.

Let's record what dree we felt re Ree, tied in a coe with a cord, and no doc there, as o'er and o'er Dorr wrote a cee on her.

Was it worse than when Dorée drove to CORE in her Reo?

Worse than it seemed to *her* when no one there spelled "cod" with a cee. Nevertheless, she sold all her ore to make a record for them.

Why didn't she just sell it and buy them plenty of cod?

This way she got them more. She's *so* sincere!

Yes, and she loves deer, too, especially red ones.

Then who could it be who tried to erode what she rode in?

Ree, doc! She's rotten to the core! Y'ought've seen how Ree rode Rod when he erred in his record on Ed! She made him redo it ere she'd cede. That's the way Ree is! She's no deer! As Reece says, she's a doer, not just a recorder. You won't get *her* writing an ode to a Roc!

She'd rede the OED for an öre, that cod! What dree she'd cause o'er a cee! It's only Reed who'll say she's *not* a cod but a deer, but *he*'s

been seen in a Reo with that coed. *He*'d call her a roe, but not Reece.

And not Doré. He says she's an orderer who tried to make him err. Before he'd do *that*, he'd *dee!*

△

Clarinet Narrative for Winds/Instruments

Ariel was on trial for selling an acre of lac to Eli. Eric and Lie rate Cain of the tile cartel for the deal. Enrica of the Rat Islands says it was really actin and nice enough to still the ire of a tin ratel telic toward a tin ear. But Enrica, says Crile, likes recta and lace and having her retina lit by a rite by Racine. Cain—that ani!—let her acne, according to Ian, rein him in—or was it her tic made him give her the air?

Eric, who came from a tiny ait, is a trinal ani for trying to alter the ice on a cart in the Rat Islands, where the lice are tin and the lace linear.

But Carl, that anti-alien from the Line Islands, calls Clare, a tiner of ratiné from Caen, a seller of niter to Rice, who's—la!—a carnie who wears lace, rather than a lancer with a rein for her et al. At any rate, it's clear *she*'s lain alert for Arnie Caine—despite his tin ear. It takes someone like him to rein her in with his rictal grin. Some say he lent a cranet to Clair and tie his use of citral to his tic.

Others drop a tear for Arne, the narc, despite what he did to Crile and Lane and Rena. Now *she*'s also from Caen and knows her Latin. It

could be said to be a kind of cleat for her. And she thinks it's neat for Eric to rant about actin! actin!

But Clair, who lives in an antre, calls her and Ariel lice. That's where *she*'s at! But still, with what éclat she went up and down the Nile! Who'd care about her tic after that? Clare says it helped her do Racine.

Alaric says Nate's passion for her's merely retinal, but Erica claims it's central, even though some say he tried to tine her on the Lena. If he did he's a regular Atli! La! What a tan he got at Acre! It's said he spelled his name there with an eta and let people think he was a Greek. Why, he'd cline to Cain!

In the Near Islands his ain pal Neri owned a crane he had to eat, but on Acte it seemed to rile Aline when she saw Rae react to Carl of the crate cartel when they were all swimming in an inlet. Well, forget that eta.

Erica voiced a *lot* of them aline when at a trial it was said she had lain with Ali and Ira and Tina and Rae in a cart in the open air. Arnie said she sounded like a tern, but Arline really lit *into* him for saying that. So he et his words and shed a tear to quell her ire, just as Ariel did with Earl at Aire when that cretin neat Tina of the actin cartel tried to make Earl cline to her. It was like something that might happen on an acre of an artel.

Was that why Rice gave lire to Ali?

No, you nit! —He gave them for ale!

△

Trombone Narrative for Winds/Instruments

There was an omen in a roto section one morn many years ago. It was only one em big in a photo with a piece on Borneo. Such a thing can enroot itself in your mind so you ponder it o'er and o'er for years. Sometimes it nearly makes you moon, like someone enchanted by Oberon, because its meaning's moot. This one looked like an ern—an eagle of the sea—no bigger than an ort, one you could sweep away with a broom.

The piece was by Brent, who did one the month before on the Ebro, along with Nemo, who'd sing a nome with a Mon—if it'd pay off—noo? During the baby boom he was born in Merton, not far from a tor covered with mor and very near a berm. They say his father was a rom, a mon named Ben, who'd chant "om" to a bone, though he was no boomer.

Some say he was really a bo named Ron, who tried to rob Romeo near a tomb shaped like an orb. I saw in a roto in Rome that someone named Moe something claimed that tomb doesn't have a bone *in* it, like the ones in the Torne River, where all those people died of mono.

That roto page on Borneo had a photo on it of a moor, by Moton. That's the one that had that tiny ern in one corner. Born claimed it was neither sea eagle nor omen, but he was born in Brno and's never *seen* an ern.

I asked Peter Moore about Moton and he said, "He's like Ben—always reading the Meno. One of that mob that goes crazy o'er rot like that—that 'Greeky' mob!" Monroe says every one of them's a boor in an ombré jacket.

My tom caught a bird with a neb like the one on the bird in that

photo. That really *bent* me! Someone at the Mobe said that kind of neb's the norm, but he's a bore from near Lake Mono, where some people rob you on sight, as if they'd absorbed a rem too many. They say the same thing happens on the Ebro.

Bert says a bird with a neb like that tore a broom from his hands ten years ago—"an ebon mentor enorm," he called it, quoting More, I guess, or some other player of ombre. But the bird in that picture with Brent's article looked smaller than the one my tom caught. "Ern"'s certainly not the term for it. You might as well moo like a bull's bride-to-be than misname a bird or a beast. It's like calling bromo a "boon" to someone with mono.

And I don't mean the Boone who poured toner in Lake Mono one morn. A conceptualist and critic-to-be, the tone of his tome leaves no room for the moot. Re Bert he wrote that he'd caught in a net a fish full of roe for me from the Bo River while hanging by his knees from a boom. Disputing with someone like that's like playing monte with a broom or ombre with a Moor, as they say in Rome.

Bert fished not in the Bo but in Lake No with a net, as he also did in the Torne. But you don't have to talk through a neb like a tern's or moo in Rome under Oberon's spell, believing you're chanting a nome to some mentor like Rob the reb, to talk such rot!

Of the tern of terns ("tern"'s three meanings)—sea swallow, three-masted schooner, and group of three—the seabirds don't boom like bitterns; the schooners *have* booms; and "normal," "boom," and "bust" form an economic tern. But nowhere on land or sea is there room for a liar like Boone. He's one bo I'd say was bent. Let's forget 'im.

The only ern I've ever seen was one in Nome. It scared me so I had to take a bromo to calm down. I wished I was on the Bo River, where Nemo bought that robe in which he sang many a nome before he got mono from Bone, his toom mentor. But I'd ten times rather hear my

tom singing to the moon than Nemo's tenor, whether in Brno or on Lake Mono. "En" is a rom, according to Moe, but he sounds like a tern. If he took a strange bromo, his tone might improve, but I doubt it.

△

Electric Guitar Narrative for Winds/Instruments

Someone relit an aglet circa sometime.

"Was it celiac?"

"No, ye carle! Don't rattle on!" cried Uri circa tater time.

"If not," asked the trite one from Tulagi, "was it iliac?"

Then did he cuittle up a gale, standing on one leg on a tract of tile so ecru you could eat it. There was a lot more of that on a neighboring alette.

Which tells a truer tale—that article by Ira about an artel or the one by Curie? Cut the clatter. Roll like a tire o'er a lea. —No, not the Lee who on the Içá acted as others had acted at Acre, tarred on by many a gul.

"If you think that's Uralic, you err," sighed Clare, who'd tried to recirculate Liu as some do laterite.

"Was it from that that Lucretia made a gutta with a cutter before she took tea with that shy GI on the Içá?"

"Only if a terret could ligate a wound (et al.) in the arctic, or if Tate or Luc in their ecru quarters could create what *I* could—what I *might*—in a garret o' garlic."

Now Cecil and that ERA tart from the IU in her tutelar curler, that Gael with rattler guilt, follow the arc of a tracer and a curler to the useful uracil.

Did they find a buried eucrite by observing an EEG? Did they work with a circuit curt as a sage of Elea? One was seen on an arête of late, irreal as a tace amid ragi, where the ca' o' the era's a tactic in a cage or that of a gal in a lair.

We reel—we let a curler or Elgar, let a lug or Lucretia, uglier than the Liri, send us to Rigel on less than an erg.

In Trier during the telic trial of a tit too uric, I in my titular garret and Leticia in her cat rig elicit a terret or two from Cecile and the GAR. But from her atelier Gretel sends a lute as a letter to an earl who'd lent her a teal. Her curé had advised her to act as if "tacet" were writ in her score and to follow tactile rule e.

Though a trailer might elate a Tai, the same trailer might to Grete look like an ecru tailer in a rage at a gate—worse than a titi with the gleet at Augier waving a curet at Lucca over claret.

Gale and Clarice reluct to litigate over a tercet. They let each other retire to clit or teal, with regret rectal as the regret of Cecilia at Taegu, where under the lee of a trailer she'd ceil vehicles for the literate.

But poor Clartie! Felled by a curie! He'd girt himself to irrigate the curia—did that auger a grail? Did he try to gelate something cruciate? He didn't try to do it to an ai or to Clare, whose eluate is tearier than rue, liter for liter.

"Can we regard a tectal structure as a kind of inner Lar?"

"Tut never asked that, nor did any tart in Uccle! Neither did Carteret—wherever he was at. Whatever titre of what it takes is al-

lowed by the GATT, to Uccle or the artic, it's not enough to retire on!

When Celia flew cut-rate to Tula, she played trictrac by the relit trail to the tele trial of Lautrec in Lüta—or was it in Trier? There in the gutter a trace of celeriac hinted at Rigel to ITU people. But 'twas someone from Eire that an ai would cite as a rat rattier than Rice, whose every ruga was relit by Rae, whom the ai'd regale with a rite on lute near Clee. There Lettice was regal as the teal Rice induced to curr in Tula while everyone in Urga had to lie in a clutter of gut.

And far away along a trail "Every reticule," Greta reported, "was centered on a ratite." She'd seen it all from a litter, despite a red retinal rete.

This narrative is for Grete, whose name arrived last on my list.

△

Paul Hoover

The Chinese Notebook

Three summers ago, in Chinatown,
you bought the Chinese notebook,
Flying Eagle trademark,
with the flying eagle stamped in red
like an eye in the center of it.
Inside were gradual childish pages
gridded in lines that opened wide
like a city seen from the air.
It was respectable, calm.
The notebook sat unoccupied, and then one day
you sat down and occupied it
the way a gentleman enters an apple
or a cat walks through a wall,
with all due concern, with apologies.
And what if there was a place like this
(smokestacks, girders, noise)
where everything was smaller than life size,
though in proportion, innately good?
On the hazardous blue of the factory grass
you'd practice your nonchalant stroll
until you "got it right," and there was no need
for walking at all, just the thought of

ants contending for the edge of a sleeve
and funny green lizards eating the finches

of which there are two
Boats are slow
Mr. Leopard
er, um, uh, well
The face of the rock
saying you are tired
our descent descent
departing day
wends his way
we climb, they climb
between two rhymes
the earth is green
from Park Nineteen
in the sea of the farm
a cold man flying
Electra lost
This is my ode
shaped like an ax
voices mere
Laughing Killer
Molly Bloom's
the truth is in
in the world
  tangled in vines
is the expert
  on the literature of
did speak to him
  It is here we begin
as curfew tolls
  the plowman homeward
I climb, you climb
  the uneasy distance
The sky is blue
  I am a driver
I think that I shall never see
  the dream of hay
destroying a garden
  the radios silent
to all the typos
  my adolescence
across the aisle
  Escapes from Jail
and yet, and yet
  the joking aside

a bloodhound sniffing
as one who reads
I is another
Here is my heart
who sits in the house
O eloquent tourist
O Tennessee Ernie
piles of ribbon
searching for you
a cold man flying
two tough Frenchmen
without the noble
confessing on buses
who roughly resemble
Lake Matapongpong
that dreamy village
from Kiss My Ass
until your word
Harold Bloom
first you're conceived
please correct me
who speaks of the poet

the edge of a nerve
  only the margin
physical silver
  placebo addict
thinking engines
  high in a window
coup de tete
  build up on the floor
almost perfection
  with stupid courage
beating a nun
  nothing is simple
to total strangers
  the book of the month
another Bing Crosby
  who no one is born
to Something Or Other
  is green again
surrounded by lions
  then absent-minded
if I'm wrong
  as "virgin hero"

Brasilia, Brazil
embroidered in carpets
and Liberace
a slow elevator
the war broke out
a mountain lion
writing verses
with terrible pleasure
to Wally Cox
Hello out there!
when he has erred
Ernesto Cohen
blue traffic cop
Metaphysics

you find your face
  you that is
a wet painting on
  that was the year
because I seen
  now they've caught me
Emily moaned
  reading an ode
or should that be
  the surgeon's face
the Shetland pony
  the very blue
First Church of Sacred
  373-3289

This, too, the Chinese notebook knows,
as if in a windy mirror it could turn its pages
to drawings of cows and long simple lines
meaning rain. They slant off and go,
and a theory of art occurs,
that the melodies heard by peasants
through the open windows of the manor
are memorized by them
and sung again at their gatherings.
But the opposite also holds,
the aristocrat influenced

(he will say it came in a dream)
by evening songs from the cabins.
Eloquence either way,
and trimmed or untrimmed,
there's the beauty of the scenery,
the slow-moving, arthritic animals
that "decorate" the side of the road.
There's the sticky glass panel
separating you and the driver,
who now and then turns to face you
in a rage of speech and gestures.

△

Rosmarie Waldrop

Figures of the Eye

tiredness protects
against excessive pride
can I get closer
to what's behind my stratagems
than sleep?

face relaxed away from talk, from
violence to carved in stone
hardly at rest
before it gentles
like a woman's is supposed to

strangeness
from lid to droop
curve indefinitely prolonged
as words can lengthen a brief look
as far as Oriental cities

but if in sleep
the eye is held: a ritual stare
as formalizes marriage?
male fixes female
desire lashes out
trembling
laden with pollen

nightly journey
the prudent man's rest
urging as escape
what means excavation

but the fever
is quenched by salt water
it is already
on its way down from the heart
blind shivers
after swells so violent

the dream has touched here
centaurs galloping across the bed
precarious hooves sink
into soft furrows
as if sex
a pillow
fear of the breathing mirror
accentuates every blemish
shows what we call love
a disposition so
beyond our knowing
a malady
as curable as racial traits

farther down
caresses
continue into strangling
spasms grow cold
with an ease not ours
and the future tapers
from understood to seen:

the apple eaten, the core
rotting away

then day dawns blindly
and the air
so thick the tide stays out
though the horizon
comes to mass against me
with bodies risen
eyes coupling
in unending
arching light

△

Photo by Jennifer Kotter

Jerome Rothenberg performing in his Hugo Ball costume.

Jerome Rothenberg

Yaqui 1982

"the eye of the performance is cruel"
—H. Blau

1

the jews of ceremony
dance in the thin sand of
pascua pueblo in their pinhole
eyes new fires start
watched by ourselves & others
the bright memory of days to come
tomorrow but the face
back of the mask
is fathomless
the jews march through the night
clack-clack their sticks
speak for them
red & white
the tips like dagger points
& voiceless
they are the purveyors of the death of jesus
yaqui-style
they stomp & whip each other
thursdays the master jew
baldheaded man with droopy eyes
& half-a-beard

fresh crown of thorns over his ears
squats by the cross
black-coated
in white jodhpurs
it is the man without the belt
(el viejito)
who seeks the heart of jesus
in a box
white-covered
with lines of green above
the flat red heart
& silver rays
he looks into & sees
a crucifix a water bottle
flowers & candles
then bangs his sticks
together in a trance
they lead him with a silky rope
pinned to his shoulders
jews & clowns
how beautifully they walk
the stations of the cross
in yaqui
the plaza stretches to infinity
where the smallest freak is jesus
& the angels sing

2

"you smile & the angels sing"
—TRADITIONAL

judas coyote rages
at altar cracks
twin sticks for language
when the bell rings—
the virgin dangling
overhead—her name
her residue of fat he wipes
mindless down his thigh
mad dog mad judas
the first to poke his snout
under the altar
to sniff the linens on
the dead man's crotch
behind him packs of jews erupt
stalking the dead man's tracks
like flies
mad pharisees & litvocks
goat-faced dada jews
banging a klezmer tomtom
fiddles & accordions
they strum & dance to
faggot jews who hump each other
military jews
& jewish sheriffs
a pulpy cherub jew who bellows

an apache jew a lizard a highstepping jew
a nigger jew who chews a stogie
an arab jew with hiccups
a jew who dies of constipation
a two-headed jew
a jew without a nose
a jew who rolls by in a perfect sphere
a troop of jews with bells on
brushing past us, touching
the coyote jew who walks beside
a second jew like jesus
like judas riding backwards
on a mule
feet dangling
forehead aglow & bald
the body of the martyr
red with ants
astride the universe
they face & shake their hips
the accountant & the dog of heaven
whom we watch here
in the full moon over tucson
a true vision of the cross
they give us
comic deaths felt down the ages
judas burning
maestro who keeps the catholic
maestro's dribble
from our ears

3

only the clown plays jesus
here the other jesus
remaining in wood or plaster
he is laid out in purple gowns
his bier is like
a birthday cake from which
a doll emerges
the babe's head of the other poems
to grace our dreams it is
the ordinary insanity of art
my dear anselmo
enchanted worlds
we have all touched
on the green side of your purple house
in tucson a white leaf
is very real
it has grown by leaps over the winter
(someone writes)
& fills the deep well
next to the cloud pump
stalking so slowly the deer
dancer advances
that the church bursts with
anticipation
(someone else writes)
"trust the world to little max"
& if I do

seamlessly across the canyon rides
the dada financier
his head a squash
his heart a breadbox
with a mechanic's gift for flowers
he will match you
world for world anselmo
wheels & axles
thrown into the air to make them
sing a dentist's drill
a meat grinder
the mist on railroad tracks
will fly around him
headlights will be deformed
—zimbrabim—
will light up shoes
& nylon hair
we will prepare our voyage to the desert
the flower world
anselmo
where a crazed stewardess will bring us
both a tray
a dish shaped like a funnel
a delay in glass that holds
a single eyeball

△

Clark Coolidge

Peru Eye, The Heart of the Lamp

There is a stone in the air
calls on me to quiet
all that moves and is not light

I sit on the solar spine
a stone so carved connects
to nothing but still
all the distance lights

•

And do you wander in a blue stone town,
plain linking own self to mountains, or
with others? Train signal of an anciency,
Jupiter and Saturn rise together. Bare round
powers. How did they lock the stones?

•

And I still stand cleaved between Incan walls,
stones hold. The harpman blind sings in the sand
that held his hand alert as cut corners.
The sun is out of line in the Indian past, settlings
of Mestizo stark wine. He whims and blends,

almost Apalachian latch, and the sun renders
a dolly racket on the Fanta fenders. Juice
neon green washes ash, and browning awning benders.
Still am in Peru, I doubt my start.

•

It was silent in the world with the voices
like soapstones. And in the yard the grass
we talked on they had sat on. Sun and
moon and on. Hats were trivets.
Stones that fit a leather sort of granite.
Since that homing on a ridge spine time
the humans have progressively retired. We had
to go there. We couldn't stop speaking so
we did.

•

She cried with grief that the boy would
  take her clasp as the walls tolled
There in overage Peru, under the
  powdered scrape of the Fanta sign
But we left the train, in the cloak of the soft
  ore bars returning to their stone
It was night, a night like a day that had
  not always returned

•

Where the light water flowed in spar streams

not Greece, Peru, but the light was.
And the Indian girl ran down from the hill
a lamb on her arm to be pictured for coin
But this taker was a mirror
her spirit refused

•

We walked in single file along the shorn stones
the mists to recede and the mountains bump us
We could only imagine on their compass intentions
the sun an only part of their year

•

If you walk up this height
you will score the sky.

•

We sat there carefully and listened. It was a
park. It was not. Sometimes you feel you
are clinging up here. They have placed the stones
as little apart as possible. Perhaps they had no
concept of "on"? They had wanted to become
part of the ground.

"All the separate stones hunger to be once again
part of the great universal rock that they
came from. We have been at some pains
to oblige them."

We did not know where the sun was.
Different portions of stone and plant lit up
in pattern according to a mystery.

"The world is here. You have not come.
You will not go."

•

Mystery is valuable and must be preserved
Heart of the lock the sky
Stones a bread of the woven time
And on trails the vines lock up into lamps
Mystery is valuable and must be preserved

And the soul so light a dense weight
And the soul so light a dense weight
The ticking of the trees, the box of stabs
Shaken
The critical is the penetrant, sidereal, the mystery
The mystery is valuable and must be preserved

Come back from love to crystal lace penetrable
The latches are a moss and arrangement of cliffs
Mystery is valuable and must be preserved
The man on the rock is not there, shock of hair
The combinant rhymes a struck match of lamps
The lamps are a tongue to the eye of the mass
And arrivals are mere, the mocks of a mist
The mystery is valuable and must be preserved

•

What does it mean to capture any thing in a picture?
The Incas worshipped the rainbow. It is said that
their priests threw kisses to the rising sun.
The reasons for things, for coming and leaving.
When I began walking in Machu Picchu I
felt the desire to climb higher in the
ruins. Each time I found myself in
a cul-de-sac from which I could exit only by
retracing my steps. It is said that when no
written language survives "nobody knows." The Incas
are gone but their stones. Sometimes
their sun and their stars.

•

In the stone still lives the Incan night.
You can see it in the line between the
ridge and light. More than lives, is
always nigh. The stir.

•

I have the feeling I'm only partly here
that I'm slipping down behind the images in my mind
and behind them the lamp
that projects what's left of me here.

•

The green snake on the blue rock
the blue snake on the black rock

There is no black snake

Bee Odor

thrumming turns of the trail
sun dropped gorge

There is water in the alley.
There is a tang to the tongue.
The rocks ripped from the leather
of an almost perfect forgettal.
Where voice has been there should be
stone.

Who *are* you?

(repeated blurred into pure vocal tones)

•

I saw man's universe at Machu Picchu and it was
not me. Nor the black millipede cut in two
by the staircase Ginsberg also noticed—there
is no repetition. Now I sit cold in a room
half under the ground in western Massachusetts and
imagine the density of the night, streets of Lima.
The impermeable black eyes, the darkness exhaled
from their noses, a palpable dark that stills things.
To enter on the endless walk that nobody owns.

•

•

Then the Lamp of All the Colors. The blue
walls that are shirts of turquoise. The ore brown
of armed earth. The peaks lit but not warmed by the
sun. The lozenges of stone fit round
by Inca lips. Can't I forget, I can't
be all here.

•

And on the Andean Plain a railway lamp
winking at the high ice. One lone Indian
trudging to the terraced time star.

•

Machu Picchu is already an excavation in my life.

•

and became image-haunted afterwards.

—9IV81-I82

△

Breath

CURTAIN

1. Minimum light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish. Hold about five seconds.
2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.
3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together (light as in 1) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold about five seconds.

CURTAIN

RUBBISH No verticals, all scattered and lying.

CRY Instant of recorded vagitus. Important that two cries be identical, switching on and off strictly synchronized light and breath.

BREATH Amplified recording.

LIGHT If 0 = dark and 10 = bright, light should move from about 3 minimum to 6 maximum and back.

△

Richard H. Abrams

Considering Beckett's Breath

THE FIRST THING you notice is the mechanical regularity, as of a tune played on a music box. A five-point sequence "strictly synchronized" with the illumination and darkening of a stage "littered with miscellaneous rubbish." The soundtrack is echoic, or rather, like a palindrome, bilaterally symmetrical. A baby's cry ("Instant of recorded vagitus"), a ten-second inhalation, a five-second pause, a ten-second exhalation, the same baby's cry. Five seconds of silence before, and five after, frame the sequence. Thus, what's inside confronts what's outside: the silence in third position almost seems concentric with, echoing and anticipating, the silences at either end. Indeed, we might say that the sequence "centers on" the surrounding silence, on what it does not contain.

Beckett's theatrical devices usually feature dissonance, but *Breath* seems to opt for harmony: the strict synchronization of soundtrack and visual reel. As we watch and listen, the stage pulsates like a giant organism, brightening as it takes in air, darkening as it lets it out. The harmonic effect is startling. But, reviewing the sequence, we become aware of incongruity. Visually, Beckett adheres to the structure of a "rounded" life: darkness at the extremes, maximum brightness in the

middle, recalling the birth astride a grave, flashing between womb and tomb, in *Waiting for Godot*. But acoustically Beckett improvises. Naturally enough, a baby's cry opens the sequence; but the same cry of new life oddly concludes it. "Important that two cries be identical," reads the stage direction—but why? If truth were valued over symmetry, we would expect an opposite sound: a death rattle like Murphy's to make amends, gurgles of outflow as from Malone, screaming as in *How It Is* when the questioner drives the answerer to realize his mortality. What does it mean, this cry of beginning terminating the sequence? Is there a moral?

What it seems to mean, but surely cannot, is that a new generation displaces the old. A year or two before *Breath*'s first performance, Stanley Kubrick filmed *2001: A Space Odyssey* with its foetus in the last scene announcing mankind's advent on a new evolutionary stage. Yet what has Beckett to do with affirmations? "If it's lepping . . . it's not mine," said the narrator of the baby in the womb in Beckett's early short story, *First Love*, which similarly ends with the crying of a newborn child. If on the other hand the sequence suggests a single life ending in death with no overflow into future generations, then the baby's cry in terminal position glosses man's fear of mortality with a false hope. In *Romeo and Juliet* "symmetry of conflict" (Sigurd Burckhardt's phrase) insulates the audience from the shock of tragic experience. Does Beckett similarly hedge his tragic bets, sacrificing the truth of how things are to the principle of trim? Under scrutiny, the harmonies of this little play appear desperate, a formal cover-up of internal contradictions.

Our problem centers on the cry of beginning in terminal position—an odd figure for dying which, acoustic symmetry aside, might be better rendered by a scream or death's rattle. But in identifying the final cry as figurative, we are launched unawares on a new interpretative train. For to understand this cry as metaphor, we are thrown back on the first *literal* cry, which we blandly assumed we understood, yet which now becomes problematic. A baby's cry is

normally greeted as a sound of joy; the foetus, we ascertain, has not been delivered stillborn. But from the baby's standpoint the cry expresses agony; it is music of division, which must have been especially clear to Beckett with his reported memories of the caul. "When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools"; or as the narrator of *First Love* exclaims, "What that infant must have been going through!" The cry in fifth position makes us rehear that first cry as the sound of freedom and fear intermingled.

The interplay of two cries is like the interplay of silences: five seconds in the middle, five at either end. By laws of *gestalt* formation, we inevitably conceive the central silence as pregnant, as what the breath flows into and out of. But this sentimental notion of a pregnant silence is deflated by the *blank* silences, of identical measure and tonality, bracketing the sequence. Similarly, when we cease to impose on the first cry, when we hear it as a frightened expression of the baby's *coming to* rather than *from* (Murphy's phrase), it becomes the perfect vehicle of the dying man's mixed emotions in position five. Restructured as a timeless action, the five-point sequence may be said to have neither beginning nor end but to flow out of its own middle toward two identical cries, which are both expressions of ambivalence on release from worlds grown comfortably familiar. Coming and going—the filling and the emptying that seem to be implied in contrary gestures of inhalation and exhalation—are illusory. Breathing in and out is a discrimination that finally makes no difference. And when this illusion of difference is subtracted, what's left over is breath itself. Breath is residual.

△

Present Inter Noumenal

Poetry does not serve any more for needs
Since four thousand years it has served feudal archetypes
Since Homer, Aeschylos, Sophocles, Vergil, till Racine, Molière, Shakespeare, Goethe and Hugo, it has served to revive the great EMPTINESS by a heroic IMAGINARY, in a metaphoric language
Poetry of the PRESENT has given up the asiano-mediterranean archetypes
It has given up the HEROES
Poetry of the PRESENT has found the new objectivity of things in the living space
It does not seek any more to explicate phenomenals, be they social or false philosophical
Poetry of the PRESENT does not spring out of fear, it has liberated itself of the world-agony and the ridiculously tragic keeping up of the cunning of struggle for eating
Poetry of the PRESENT understands its objects, the words, as agents of our living space
It gives back to the words and by the words the correspondances of the things before and outside their social and eugenic needs
The poetical (non-musical) sound creates complex dimensions: functional, temporal and numerical, it shows by these inter-relations the "coincidentia oppositorum" of the things by their own value
These values are no ware of social classes, nor of historical aspect
Poetry of the PRESENT is outside the restrained history, outside the coward anthropophagous and anthropomorphous utilisations
PRESENT poetry aims at the relative life of untamed and non-clas-

sified functions, avoiding the false semblances
PRESENT Poetry is neither FOR nor AGAINST, neither classic, nor romantic, nor surrealistic
It integrates BEING and it IS

Poetry Intervenes Now
Presence Is New
PIN

△

Raoul Hausmann

Cauchemar

ch ch ch chchtt chchtt chchtt
chatatatta chatt a chatt tatt
e chnatt ch ch ch batt
batt batt batt battatat
battchnattbattat tt chtt
ch ch ch ch ch ch !
bbg bbgg bggg e
ccccc c! c! c! c!
jjjj ji jjj !
uuut uuutt uttutut fffr ffr fr uuuui i i uuuzzuuuuu
(ggggggg) gg
bbg bbg bgg jjj ji jj zzzuuuu oooooo O !
uuuachtachtj hhh hzz hhzzz ggggzzzggg zgg z' —
kkki i i u kkiuu kki
hha iiiii u hhu hhzz hhzzh hu hhhhhgg gg
jjjjj zzzzzz zzzttttt ttr u uu hgh
jjjuu iiiiiu jjjuu hhhe ffr fffr frrr tz zz
hhhhgg jjjjii iiii kkkk iiii hhhzzh zz h ggt frr gggttft—
hhj kkh kh h gg ggg ggggkhg
bg
bbg
bbbg gg
bggggg—
gghhhhgh ggh hhhhe gttgt
ggt tt ff ffffrtf fffrrrf rff frff ! cht chchtt
hhh h u uuu oio ou uuachtuachtxex u

jjju fr ffrrfr fr ggzu gzgu usiebensieben
ggggtttt jjjju uu nnnnjnj
nkkkop po öoi –
npokk op iopö hhhu ui
gggz zzgg gz huuuuhu iop
i ooooo i
u uuuuui
ooooo i i
uachtuachtuacht uneunachtsiebenfünfsechssieben
uhuituhuituhuit unineeightsevenfivesixseven
ochomilnuevecientoochentasiete
thihj kkkk klö
uachtu jjj j zuz zzzuz uico uisi uisio
ttttttttsizsizsizsizsizsiz uuuuu uacht uiuzz zz z
tt uiuz zz uuuuhggkzi
gkzhi ggk gr
gr gnrr cnrr
ch ch chtt chatt tattatt !

Three Little Pine Trees

The courtyard was square.

The courtyard squared from west to east and the courtyard squared from north to south.

The courtyard was dark in the morning and in the evening because no sunshine entered it then.

The sun fell into it at midday.

And only in summer.

In winter no noontime sunshine fell into the courtyard.

The sun did not enter the courtyard which squared from west to east, and from north to south, though it was thoroughly quadrangular, because—being a real city courtyard, it was surrounded by high walls towering aloft its four, and no more, sides.

These walls—but let's stick to the courtyard, and not to the walls—one can't stick to walls. And besides, the walls looked as though they were made by a confectioner.

Real sweet-shop walls.

But this square which squared from east to west and from south to north, it was square throughout and throughin. It was altogether square.

It was of the kind of square termed this quadrilateral species.

A pure square.

But people dislike pure things, they want to ignore them, above all those termed pure squares.

The courtyard was nothing but an absolute square.

It wanted nothing but to be an absolute square.
From one side to the west.
From one side to the east.
From one side to the south.
From one side to the north.
Four sides pointing four ways. Four winds.
At the four cardinal points.
East, west, north, south.
In letters—

```
E    W    N    S
E    W    N    S
W    N    S    E
S    N    W    E
S    E    W    N
N    E    W    S
S    E    N    W
E
eee
                s e w n
n e w s
N    ·  E         W
E      W          N
S        s        s
E    W    N    S
```

This was the song of the courtyard. The square courtyard. Quatuor. Towering frame.

People have ears, but no hearing, and the courtyard had its own square tune. People had no idea how to hear such a tune.

People it was—apparently, had built the courtyard, yet they didn't know how to hear its squareyard tune.

People cannot hear because everything goes in one ear and out the other. If people knew how to hear, they might be able to see too. But people have no idea how to hear or to see.

Savoir voir.

A square is not a square.

A square is a movement. Asquaredly.

Each movement chimes.

A square moves in four sounds.

These sounds—one can hear, see, feel touch, taste them.

Sound.

The movement—people cannot hear, nor see, nor feel, nor touch, nor taste it.

That's why man is called homo sap. followed by a big full stop.

Or ejucated. Culchered.

It's SAP followed by a big full stop, and ejucation that the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting suffer from.

And that's what the courtyard suffered from too.

Many things suffer. Suffragettes. Suffering cats.

The courtyard which sang from west to east and which governed its motion from north to south and which was a pure and absolute quadrangle, and which was never past squaring itself, it moved perpetually from—

E W N S to W E S N
S E W N to N E W S
E w n s

But people dislike it, because they're fed up with the absolute.

They cannot understand it.

They cannot comprehend it.

For how can anyone comprehend and understand a square which chimes to the absolute and governs its own perpetual motion? Huh?

One can hear, see, feel, touch, taste it. But one can neither comprehend nor understand it. One can only comprehend and understand rational notions.

Notions.

Not motions.

The rational notion was conceived by man.

The courtyard is a square in pure, absolute, perpetual motion.
Perpetual movement.
Nobody can understand this.
Nobody can comprehend this.
Only eyes can hear this.
Only a tongue can see it.
Only ears can feel it.
This is the way in which it can be experienced:

W	W	W	W
E			
N			
S			
S	E	W	N
W	E	N	S
W	E	S	N
S	E	N	W
N	E	W	S

That's what the square sings.
One sees that.
One feels it.
One can actually taste it.
I cannot comprehend it.
I am unable to understand it.
No notion in it.
No sense in it. Nonsense.
There's nothing in it but sensually pure, perpetual, absolute motion.

Because the courtyard was square. The courtyard squared from west to east and the courtyard squared from north to south. The courtyard was dark in the morning and in the evening because no sunshine entered then. The sun only fell in at noon in the summertime because the courtyard was a real city courtyard, surrounded by high walls from its four, and no more, sides.

The courtyard could not stick to its walls. The walls looked like confectionary walls, and the courtyard which squared from east to west and from north to south was square throughout and throughin. It was of the kind of square termed this quadrilateral species.

A pure, mobile, perpetual quadrangle. But people dislike pure squares, because they neither see nor hear. All they know is understanding and comprehending.

To conceive of the square, acts had to be done in it.

Real events.

Called dustbins.

One cannot see them. Extraordinary. Bins.

Three little pinetrees live in front of them.

The three little pinetrees are no courtyard.

They live in the courtyard.

In front of the dustbins. Most extraordinary. Bins.

One cannot see them.

One only sees them when dustmen come to empty them.

Dustmen real men.

Then the little pinetrees stay put.

And then people think:

> "My lovely pinetree, my looverly pinetree
> King of the forests, Thou king of the fforests
> How I adore Thy verdure, verdure of yore."

That's how people understand comprehending.

That's how people comprehend understanding!

That's why the dustbins stand in the courtyard behind the three little pinetrees, and the three little pinetrees stand in front of the dustbins.

Can you hear?

Can you see?

Can you feel?

Can you taste?

Can you touch?

Three little pinetrees in a square.

London Onion

Variations about the theme of the Thames valley

I

LONDON
Ell Ou enn De Ou enn.
Ell
Ell Ou
Ell ou enn
Ell Ou enn enn
Ell Ou enn enn
Ell Ou enn enn
Ell Ou enn enn
De Ou enn
Ou enn
enn
enn enn
Ell Ou enn De Ou enn
enn Ou Ell enn Ou De
Ou Ell
Ou De
Ou Ell
Ou De
Wra.
Ou De
Wra
Ou Ell
Tackelamit

Wra
London
Wra

II

Onion
Opinion
Zegoday
Onion
Opinion
Zegodayda
Onion
Opinion
Zegodaydatoo
Zegodaydataa
Onion
Opinion
Zegodaydatuu
Zegodaydatau
Too taa
Tuu taa
Too taa
Tuu taa
Zegodaytatuutaa
Prrrr!
Tootagrö.
Te tear
U uncle
Agrö
Tootagrö
Tootagrö mesens
Tootagrö mesans
Tootagrö tear
Tootagrö tear mesens
Tootagrö tear mesans

Tootagrö uncle
Tootagrö uncle agrö
Prrrr!
How item King
C Charley
D Dog
L Love
L London
Love London
I love
Dog Charley
I Dog.
Dog Love
I Dog Love London Charley.
Onion
Opinion
Ell Ou Enn De Enn Enn
Ell Ou Enn De Enn Enn
Ell Ou Enn De Err Err
Ell Ou Enn De Err Err
De Ou enn
De Ou enn
Ou enn
enn.
Prrrr.
What is your verdict?
Verdict A
Verdict Be
Verdict A
Verdict Be
Ell.
Oh, my sweetest Toots,
I don't care two hoots,
When I clap and clap
My trap on your trap!
Ell Oh enn De Oh enn.

Zegodayda!
Zegodayda!
Zegodayda!!!

Just in the middle of her knee
There I observed the fact that she,
Possessed a little reddisch mole
It was alone, just one and sole.

And even if there had, may be,
Been two, which were just on her knee,
Just in the middle would be one
(In fact in does)
A fact that I would beg you to discuss.

Be ll arr Aa enn
Bee
Bee Aa
Bee Aa ar
Bee Aa arr arr
Bee Aa arr arr
Bee Aa arr arr
Bee Aa arr arr
Ell Oh enn enn
Ell Oh enn enn
Ell Oh enn enn
Ell Oh enn enn
De Ou enn
Arr Aa enn
Beran
London
Teckalamit.

from *The English Poems of Kurt Schwitters*, 1946

Kurt Schwitters & Raoul Hausmann, who often collaborated into their later years, were each that mix of poet & artist typical of DADA & related movements. The range of Schwitters' writings is in fact awesome & only recently brought together in the four-volume *Das Literarische Werk* (Dumont Verlag). By the early 1920s he was making extensive experiments with sound poetry, visual & concrete poetry, mixed media collages using words & letters, pop poetry, number poetry, collaged poems & novels, & various projections for a total theater of mixed means he was never able to realize. As a successor to DADA, he called his one-man movement MERZ, & he celebrated it, along with the death of DADA, in a great sculptural collage work, the Merzbau (= MERZ column = Cathedral of Erotic Misery), which he constructed in his house in Hannover & twice rebuilt during World War II exile in Norway & in Ambleside (England). From the late thirties to his death in 1948, he abandoned German &, as here, wrote in English.

In the soundworks in particular, Hausmann preceded Schwitters & practiced throughout a more "modernist" fragmentation as against the almost classic formalism of a work like Schwitters' monumental *Ursonate*. A true survivor, he was rediscovered by younger avant-gardists of the 1960s & 1970s, & his performances of soundworks were extensively recorded by S-Press & others until his recent death. —*J.R.*

△

Madeleine Burnside

Three Pieces

FIRST PARAGRAPH

Credited to the Greeks, the discovery of that cure-all moly, that lotus-of-the-less by which to exorcise our greatest loves and return to those who love us, almost whole. This is what the classics were prescribed for, their most sublime passages open only to interpretation, versions of those symbols which linger after the creation of the word. Like great wines, opiates, island voyages, residences in the South, these texts serve as an intoxication unmatched, a distraction.

What had his teachers conspired to hide, right from the start, when they made their selections from history, literature, mathematics —what masteries had they learned, only to discard? If he could have read between the lines, would he have realized that the opening sentence of the primer was notice of the time he would have to spend serving their ideas, or that illustrations were always lines they drew to sever themselves from that which they felt safe in despising?

A skill would be taught in terms of prejudices that required no pause to inculcate. His knowledge was a tool such that not only crimes against others were committed when, in his lessons, he understood. He learned the first law of physics and metaphysics: to be grasped rigorously by analysis. The success of his education could be measured when the caricature of the cow commented-on in the text failed to offend his bovine sensibilities.

MISSING PAGE

Here are the secret misdeeds enumerated, this is the catalogue of wounds inflicted, their scars measured with calipers. This is how we know they know they hurt us. This is where we would have found the names of all those in the execution party, and of their murderers, and of their single assassin.

Here are entries to convince us of the sincerity with which the experiments were admired, the fine judgement exercised in the count of days, the human error in calculating the voltage of the shocks.

Here are the file numbers of the films they made of each other, grouped alphabetically according to acts committed: bastinado, bes tiality, cannibalism, copraphilia. Here is the diary which records what they were forced to watch, what they were able to bear.

Here are the meticulously ordered steps by which he pushed her to dependence, then addiction; here are the carefully planned stages by which she made him think himself mad; here is the numerological explanation of the stab wounds; the logic by which they claimed that what they read led them to this; their list of victims, both missing and dead.

Here are the infamous treaties, now denied. Here is the information too volatile to be classified, concerning how we hurt them, rendering our apologies ironic. Here is neither speaking nor implying, but a hidden agenda and a secret report. That these acts were never spontaneous is here proven, from this may be inferred responsibility and a period of interest, or inspection, or approval. The destruction of this page need not suggest shame, but a change in the rules under which justification might be possible, an arbitrary swing of history, not between morals but manners.

Finally, this is not the destruction of an inferior drawing nor the guided or misguided discarding of previous work, nor a gesture of self-despair, but a ledger of deliberate acts which will itself be burned, torn, shredded, even physically devoured and defecated, in fear.

By convention a blue line indicates a river, this pattern of vertical strokes locates the marshland embraced by meanders and horseshoe lakes, and this intense area of virgules states, according to the key, the area and population of the town situation to the north-east of this map.

Use of this coded information is tied to those occasions for which these symbols are adequate: while they might serve to guide the reader on a walking tour, they would not answer the purposes of an amateur geologist, and to the tourist interested in history they would offer little or no insight into the character of the district.

Correspondances between past and present, or the influence of the one upon the other, are the very matter omitted by the map. There are, for example, no references to the physical alterations which encouraged conversion from transhumance to agriculture—the en croachment of the river that first drowned the arable land and then, withdrawing, increased its fertility—nor to the course by which the bronze-age settlement became a strategic fortress and later an industrial center.

It is in this way that the map and its code misleads the viewer as to the nature of the surface and the substrata which it purports to discuss. Most significant of all in this context is the lack of reference to the great forest that once stood only a few miles to the south of the town. The influence of the forest on the early development of the region can hardly be overstated, yet neither the superficial characteristics of the modern landscape, nor the map which charts them, in any way takes into account this notable absence.

It is the ironic commentary of history that this map will itself become outdated and its geography inapplicable to the later topography of the place. Future maps will refuse responsibility for the details it records, and its inappropriate remarks will themselves speak to the process of oblivion, the failure of all symbols to have a meaning which endures.

A blue line indicates the river, but on a global scale it is too small to be named. The question before the cartographer is, how nearly must the river be physically approximated or approached in order to signify? An unnamed blue line barely supports our notion of a real existence, and can hardly be expected to uphold the corollaries of history (her barge, his birthplace?) or myth, nor does it itself testify to the ability of any map to bear sufficient witness. Further, will the endurance of a location prove the acts of either the inhabitants or the map-maker to have their own continuing reality, will a space mark time with the impression of conversations, thoughts, emotions?

△

Ark 39
The Roswell Spire

for Donald Anderson

of
orchestra
flor rayd
chest

hosts

In cumulus stem,
Wm. Blake quizzing past gangplank a jetstream
(all news
from out the eaves of heaven)
and floors like The Great Speckled Bird
lighting all get out
labeled: 'A spirit within another spirit, each one singing'
as lined snake slide side to side
neverrest
pulse's smelter, smith, and alchemist
perhaps as apse
shuddered its thereabouts

measured against
sole heart hoist its triply peaked blip blip blip best lightly saddled
by the featherers Fountainhead, Brainstorm, and Target
bearing horsesense backwords and fourwards
some planar Bermoothes
now asterisk of sun way past one shoulder,
now plains daisy
half trod on
sprung sway its original position,
now dead ahead
(swirls before pine)
"Speak up" orders The Lord:

for the day is at hand
when as if you've seen one sunset you'll seem Them all
dancing without a stitch such pure litparticled
particolor perimeterings we'd hear
now cow low,
now tall tales hence still dawn give tongue to Helen, gone
(or Mahler hid full oleander for
that matter)
now snug
one settler's toted wonderstone to stand up proud on
for the Pasture himself is coming
ever more

apt people steepled
dawn manned
'temenos' (that which altars itself)
fashioned as wired combustions of the Incombobulus
stumping those salt bushes, rose tangles, this yucca clump,

just intonation

so built
(peeling a corner sun seen to frieze series of whiskered wheatstalk)
"allye allye outs in free"
"allye allye outs in free"
"allye allye outs in free"
cements relationship

withon
do words' work
—sustained sequentially as to insistance, instances stilled—
say, who keep their jubilee in easy reach
by birdsong held the day long
like a kitestring
ear to ear
and above all children, children hard at pretend ends
in an attic nothing if not intricate
tier on trellis tier
what music makes its way through us, which
scarlet trumpet vine

hard put to describe in words
we are The Abecedarium,
or matter's plumb,
we once in the lilacs off Einstein's porch slept
a season as hornet's nest
talking turkey to Thoreau the while awake

one whole long recorded autumn
as would a surface composed compasses first whirl then align
add just one compass
(part reverberated out pared utter's math of push,
part split through spirit you call 'path')
if testify

won now
Fall and Flood
hence seem a wind down half wild field it feed new senses
gardening that otherwise
sheer lilac piled blood shed land
pulled us
toe stub steeped in attention
down days a shake of slight lights quite unalike
corner after spiral corner, all multiplied
stairs squared air
mid violin, lens, loved line, dove, divers voids, lives lived,
of these, image a nation

rared abundantly from the sun
may thunder married
Kirlian Carillon
—rung beyond violet's calyx, octaves scalloped below geranium—
(an explosion of fire-works slowed eleven hundred times)
old elms so briefly leaved

our years might seem a finger's simple palsy,
some wilder parley from atom to star
to move men long ahead

change age,
catch mane but a moment's game,
ride the pale wind

adjust suppose enjoy define transform
about mounts it
(every shape stirrup to many a force)
how Sordello a spire, of such dark lustre in varied burning hurry to
spur head about
compelled who to change a world by song alone
take root, bronze wings
riddling all kingdom come, like a worm a field, fished up
by the olden open jaw
back first,
& large as life
in a gape of being

△

Rochelle Owens

A Sandworm Emerging

This is a hundred yard
dash.
I am racing the alphabet.
I am calling myself
in a loud voice.
I lay hidden in a
southern delta
expelled like a
placenta.
I squirm to see
Sacré Coeur.
The next day
all comes to pass.
In an hour I predict
desire.
This wisdom is ordinary,
visible.
Day, week, month
innocent as an
explanation.

I wonder about oil,
the manufacturing of
whalebone girdles
that women in the 19th
century wore.

I think about their
sweat, knuckles
rubbing, imprints on
the hips,
various as signs of
the zodiac.

A crisis waits near
an ulcerated leg.
It is finished.
It causes caseworkers
to venture beyond the
call of duty, to
astonish themselves
to survey the decay.

I will move
over the sand.
A solution is
my next impulse,
a sandworm emerging
again and again.
Fission breaking,
the principle of
combinations, elements
dangerous, mental
crucibles
striking fire.
Pearls in my glowing
hands.

I remember the woman
in mutton-sleeves who

breathed scalding steam.
The rare earth she walked.
Passion, laughter,
angular jaw, sufi smile,
eyes of Mona Lisa.
She meditated on fuel
shortage, a way to
lighten the load.
Would you spend money
on a ruptured camel?
To wind up at the bend
of a crater,
the cargo buried
in sand.

Wrapping it up in Montmartre,
a haunting mosaic of
sensations, algerian meat-pies,
a country road,
an ambitious motor accident,
the blood on the tall
dead grass forming
circles, crickets eating
yellow flowers,
balancing & singing.
A nerve in the body
of Sacré Coeur.

△

M A R W A N

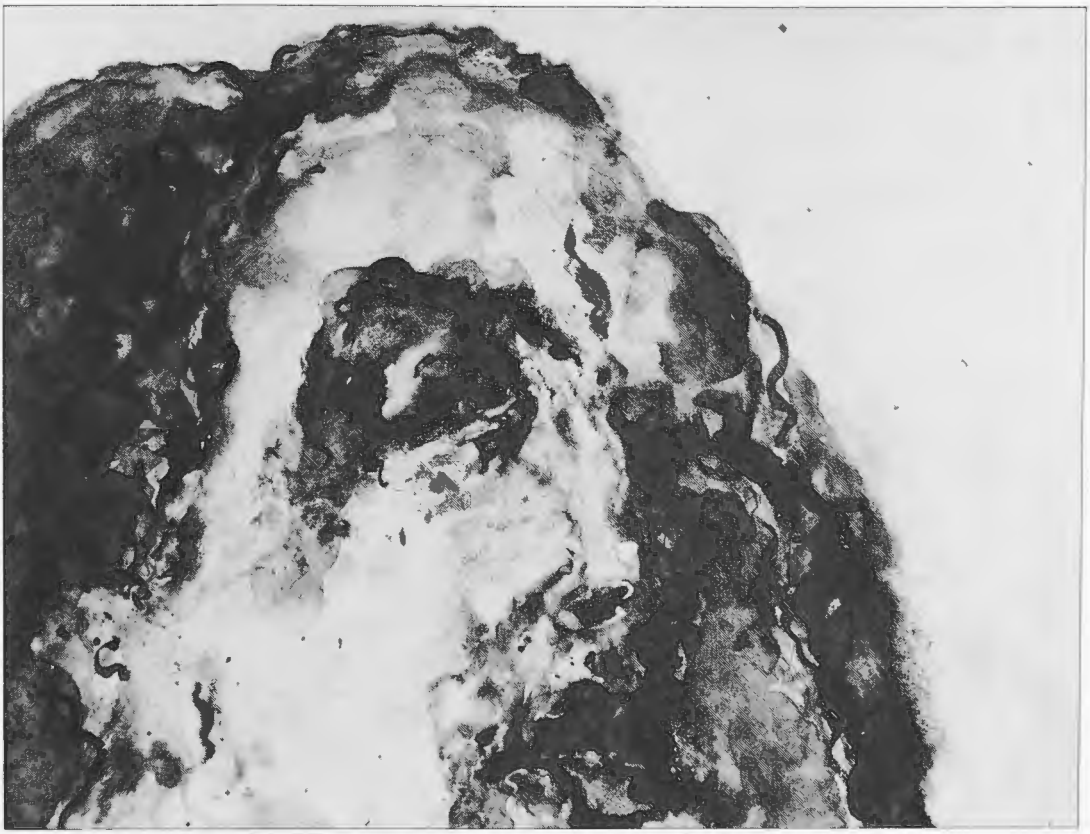
Figure with Sheet, oil on canvas, 1971

Figure with Veil, oil on canvas, 1971

Head with Sheet, oil on canvas, 1972

Head, oil on canvas, 1972

Head with Veil, oil on canvas, 1973



Head, aquarelle on paper, 1975

Gene Frumkin

Six Poems

For Those Who Dream Of Love

O it is a radiant dimension
that slit in the pear of sex
its duality
clings to your lips
and whatever you say cannot describe the twin halves of brain and heart
how the depth of your incision reaches to the core
or how you cut yourself
completely out
Either side divides both ways
and either side glitters
with all the capacious arrogance of indecision
O it calls to you
this luminous fruit
it calls so openly from between its limbs
and there you are
on the other side of the world! the perfect listener

It calls as readily as April calls to May
when the phallus
still cold as the North Pole
breaks its skin
and history inquires of the elements: Is this a flowering?
You know then how stark
is the need to stitch your stumps together To live is to deliver yourself
without crying
from an indifferent womb

△

Reject From A Marxist Anthology

Earth collected as a body of sweat value preserved in the passage of an immigrant
through a crowd of animals torn by the pantomime of jackals attacking genitals
which is the effect
of a turbine
Blindfolded, the tailer from Kovno enters the room where a strong passivity sits
waiting
He is the boiler room in a banquet by Leger
he sweats and ruby water
drips from his skull
he is the spigot of a wine-barrel

You who are the audience are a closet drama in which the clothes of your dreams
stink of unlaundered bodies after a millennium unfertilized
On a cloud the white-haired tailor still mends
apertures in the cosmos
and will prolong the needle
until the wind settles
into its iron flower
when time accedes to a fingernail
when the morning opens with a voluntary by William Byrd
when earth is a table in the engine-room of love
all fruits and fishes
packed hard into whatever stranger's muscle
No one departs until the knob comes off
in the police chief's hand

△

The Renaturing Cycle

Dreaming is the psyche itself
doing its soul-work.
—James Hillman

Slowly the axe grows crazy in catalpa wood
slowly the bole grows out of itself

out of earth
it narrows down from simple standing
into a bent sleep
The axe is brilliant in the shadows a blade streaking silver through mottles of sun
it is action a fierce energy merciless
though later
the axe will also tip against plankwall
no light entering then its place of depth
and there leaning into sleep will be helpless as dried and sullied seaweed
A thing this tested instrument alone unto its acts
undergrown by older life
back then ages back
that blackmoon country

The tree roots itself in virginal sky
a capsized umbrella
whose shade is white and warming a warning, axe:
the undertow of objects
(like the human night-soul) pulls counter the tides
Everything survives in the negative
The day forgets

△

Arbitrary Design

Hickory nuts lie smashed in fallen powdered leaves
Someone is preparing a charm
will sprinkle on gooseberries
phlox and sauce of papaya
Galapagos-egg saltspray grass of sorrow
then stir until ready to cook
'A foolish arbitrary design':
the wind carries these words to me
in caravans of snow everything has shifted from long ago
extensions, a traveling
That's fine
When one is ravenous for love
even the corpse of snow
inspires an embrace
and one moment for the teeth to flare
flare out, dying
matchboxes
sucked into the stars
our crushed and mangled stars

△

'Something'

We want this to be about 'something'
a fact if possible
or at least
a simulation
detachable
like an organ from the spherical music
from the supernal flesh
It's how one says it
the system
where we live
our crowded intestines
reels of film entangled, cutting into one another
no longer separable
as images

Why then prolong this terminal discourse
about 'something'?
It is enough to assent
that heaven is androgynous
and we are issues formed in time
dyadic and processional
Drapes around a nude figure
in stone or air

Script

Miracle of the worm
permutation out of earth into
syllables
lines of thought vocable as trails of semen in the dust
worm who struggles from silence with deliberate gymnastics
to erupt in time as the marvelous snake
seducer of woman
corrupter of man
through a speech so concealed in the flora of its consonance
so elusive in desire
that the grasping brain could not construe the physical de-formation of its blueprint
that very one it laid out on wild grass with ancient subtlety
saying: 'Here is the world'

Earthworm, superb syllabus of intellect
one wriggle in the twitch of an eyelid
you will never open your magisterial heart to butterflies hairsprays colorblindness
and such creatures of mind as Freud and the Surrealist Manifestos
all of which exist through human sympathy objectively
as bodies in the human environment

We must believe, worm of tongues
ambassador of divine monarchy
that footnote
which encloses all the stories ever given voice
for a script of intercourse
consummated only in your sucking mouth where the end is endlessly secreted

△

William Corbett

Washington's Birthday

A cast down
sword of sunlight
rests its crumpled point
on sleeping Basil
brings up his colors
wheaten and grizzle.
The clouds roll over
like milk in water.
More milk than water.
The country is far
away under nickel
browned over, snowed under
lavender hollows and red
branches like fresh scratches.
Bay State Road
enough gritty new
snow to hold
footprints. Younger, I
was here to visit
the dentist, tilted
back in his chair
and again at a meeting
of angry teachers
during the war.
A man said,
"College finances are

a can of worms
they keep in the
ground." Got me
in trouble later
when I threw
the line at my
friend's father, a
lawyer, and he
nearly took my
head off. Chocolate
cake soiled the
white pants I
wore. The light
darkens around these
instant, dispatched
snapshots. Tire tracks
cross the snow
like friction tape.
There is mist
on The Castle windows.
Bob's black moustache
and goatee, his sign,
is lost in gray.
He must raise
his soft voice.
And mist there was
on the windshield
of Schwartz's Chevy
wiped off with a glove
returning from that
hockey game at Canterbury.
I sat in the death seat
flipping through Pound's

Selected Poems I had
brought mostly for show
when I came upon
the Chinese poems and
by the open glove
compartment's light I could
hardly concentrate for
the excitement I felt.
Looking down, looking up
there was a lighted
window above me clear
and *on* the dark
we passed. I did not know
nothing will be
the same. No friend
true. No love
does not change.

△

Claude Gauvreau

from Entrails

Translator's Note: *Entrails* is a collection of 26 dramatic objects, some of them published during Claude Gauvreau's lifetime but most never in print before they appeared in a massive posthumous tome called *Oeuvres créatrices complètes*, edited by Parti Pris in Montreal in 1977. Nothing quite like these objects can be found anywhere else in Canadian literature, French or English. They deliberately affront every convention of the stage, showing us a world of intransigent fantasy, symbolic and mysterious, funny at times, often horrific, always disturbing. They were written between 1944 and 1946, in a Montreal not at all ready for them, by a poet who was nineteen years old when he began. Gauvreau has since become almost a cult figure in Quebec, but he is probably no better understood now than when outraged audiences laughed and jeered at his plays and poetry.

The great challenge of these works, especially for the translator, is in their language. Gauvreau at first seems to practice the kind of automatic writing he may have heard about or even read in André Breton's *First Manifesto of Surrealism*. . . This is the associational, dream-like, lyrical language seen in French Surrealist writing, where unpredictable, spontaneous images bring forth that coveted spark of surprise and wonder. The reader is forced to deal, not with statements in a dramatic dialogue forming an action, but with a phrase, or even a word, which demands attention simply because it is not absorbed in an obvious context. Needless to say, this causes difficulty for the translator, who relies heavily on context as the major clue for deciding how to render a given word or phrase.

[Early in these works], Gauvreau begins experimenting with a type of automatic writing he was convinced took him beyond Breton and the majority of French Surrealists. From a background of what we might call classically automatic language, there suddenly appear spurts of pure sound, like 'Hah-ba-ba-pals-flah' or 'Anga-Touya-Sahia.' As we progress through

the book, coined words and strange 'portmanteau' constructions, as Lewis Carroll called them, become more and more common. A major leap takes place in 'Apolnixède Between Heaven and Earth' where the opening speech introduces a very rich half-regular, half-phonetic language mixed with phrases like the nonsense refrains of songs. This is the first heavy use of what Gauvreau calls his 'image exploréenne.'

Gauvreau distinguished four basic types of poetic image: the *image rythmique* (rhythmic image), which is basic to the sound of poetry, involving both onomatopoeia and stress; the *image mémorante* (reflective image), which is the standard metaphor or comparison between similar elements; the *image transfigurante* (transformational image) which involves a strained comparison actually transforming its elements, creating a new compound, but whose elements are still traceable (this applies to most Surrealist images); and the *image exploréenne* (explorational image) as practiced by Gauvreau and a few other writers, perhaps Antonin Artaud, Arthur Cravan and Tristan Tzara. Here the basic elements are completely modified and can no longer be easily traced by analysis. The problem for a translator is obvious. These are images which are not meant to be comprehended in the traditional manner; word-fusions difficult or impossible to analyse and hence impossible to translate with any confidence. And throughout the last half of *Entrails*, explorational images or passages of 'non-figurative' language, which Gauvreau likened to the paintings of his fellow 'Automatistes,' are mixed with more conventional phrases. In the most extreme example, 'Trustful Fatigue and Reality,' Gauvreau's language is almost entirely explorational and I have decided to leave the French text untranslated. In all other cases I try to give a credible English version. In fact, the percentage of extremely difficult passages is quite small, so even though the poet may be betrayed by the translator in some details, the general effect is faithful. As the language of the original becomes more non-figurative and free, so does the translation; it has to, I have nothing to rely on but my own intuitions. All things considered, I have probably erred on the side of conservatism, but if my English text conveys Gauvreau's energy and extravagance, if it suggests the demands he makes on his readers by battering at their linguistic walls, then it will have done its job. It should give a clear enough idea of the dramatic objects themselves, but beware of coming to specific conclusions about the language of any passage without consulting the original. —*Ray Ellenwood*

Apolnixède Between Heaven and Earth

Apolnixède Entre le Ciel et la Terre

Translated from the French by Ray Ellenwood

[A man is digging in the mud with his arms. It is Apolnixède.]
APOLNIXÈDE: Now brook myjellisdance
The bits, the butts offeye finance.
Down downadown come the time when pallor downs the adon.
Downim in the paradeye of the dry lyin.
I'm dying chiefs. to the god of craifs.
Apolchidance. Craprie ovgreen.
Air clean on the greenfeed screen.
[The deaf woman draped in veils floats in the yellow air.]
And their izere to the son of the Even Eeng.
Down downadown derry down to the slogg of the eiderdowns.
Downim in the paradeye of the lyin.
Pit to the pit of the undarm. They will speak the tongue of the kneeling drept.
Oh heath above the bourdened winter.
Zedourkamouellan.
Downoni weedzona bobanis.
Dow dow oh downa.
Chance ov cattance.
Pâcri du moul chédène.
Beans blarney barbs.
Grievance phlebiance.
So be the camerons who don of the pulselet will sing the subjisted

battle of the fariton Allas of the mouldecs in pinion. Oh Lari of the Vel of Ans camiou viah! Chen do du bellac mio.

Razito Vitalli.

The breathe fault lake will be brown at the rise of the islands.

Fraternus down den or pardon to the sol-fa. The vigilantalgoodmen watch over the writing of sleeps.

Oh Lilacs oh jasmin.

All proud.

Mari a tella azanas cella.

Pourké mita li.

O zella qui mira Latila.

Axernas figilli ourabi.

The dromedary plants come mali on the run. Muzbe the chum of Allenson's breton friend.

Thimportant arista counterfreezing the humidor of patrer crizella.

O Marihaver watch thewor.

'Twas so nice on the pott.

I move the hoops hopeless trot. Nought but deliverance of liberty.

The canoes cruze down the flue.

On the twindle sains revol.

Atarro ati midar. Siholi ferrec zaloi. Madja therra.

Zi inn zoum za oun zoum zoun

Fedrec fatra.

THE DEAF WOMAN: Fol fol folderol Fol lol derol lol

Jigella saw the hard art

Whose is the azure

Pure

Stream the dreams beyond the fertile illfame.

Shut off from the world I hear the ellipse of sedentious parties.

Oh guemen gueten guejen

Shut off from the inndawn I finger the eternal which is butchered by usury.

The eternal entire, the eternal preserved.
For the Begua children
For the sudan blocks
For the accents of the megas
For the frump of the tegelments.
The zealous aroma sets the rhythm of the parsley sheaves.
Shut off from all of it. In a cage where the cricket with the velvety essences ferments.
I survey the demi-monde.
The enflap of halfmeasures.
Met ah la kla Gré dlon gon gré dlon gon honne
APOLNIXÈDE: Me i or a so guitra.
Suspends rachel buttoneered.
The fresh scents that the adis give off. Edidon malanche tab.
Zalziou téfel cader.
Palsoma the alban crests.
They'll see their childhood again.
[He begins to extricate one corner of a painting from the mud.]
The grey veined elpiro will come out of the shed.
Thus spake Andi.
Oh metdals! azured.
The grand prize of the cofari will rise up from the campri soil.
The stars are dancing.
The stars are dancing on his back.
The stars run down his back.
Oha! The mul that roles where the apcule went mum.
Where the ebor killed itself.
The stars role over his back.
Avri kemer colour of streets.
It will be sowing in winter.
The eve of the carillon.
Thezeber unner campanil from the cask of the analbass tings.
They will close the grud of the vases.

Zout sou din zout sa sou dou
Krébébin krébeu békeu
At the ancalus' fair.
It will rise up even because.

THE DEAF WOMAN: Assi essi assa
Saw saw saw
Pstiso pstiso at the turning where the evels rundle
Where the goodbye swaddles
Swills the balm of the gullish hoar-frosts.
All abord for tardy frequencies.
Liberated seagulls, untrammelled seagulls, purified seagulls.
The tomb sprinkles itself with the white of their feet.
The gayling of odalisk regret shatters the übernackle.
Afrégua ofulgod zélissino
Eugeuhum agutte troub poutlougua émeher hersi kouklo
Haye!
Harse
Venella fradulcu vénéher!

[The deaf woman begins to dig along with Apolnixède. She sinks into the mud and disappears.]

[Apolnixède extracts the painting from the mud. Nothing can be seen clearly on it. The mud spattered on it forms indistinguishable outlines. Apolnixède hangs the painting in the sky. Curious onlookers begin to gather slowly around the painting. They take no part in the action. A few of them walk with their heads down. They all look the same, they blend together.]

APOLNIXÈDE: Childhood frood.

Litzig choudra al ekka when the pontiffs will bareass the boots of the zarnes.

Amildotte chégued tannedex.

Alerne caherne my bat will philo.

Ranchiképel. Give me the ford of swathers. To the dolefulling eyelash.

To the beach of the be.
Of the o di.
Of the premite kiss.
Alinthe which will suturate the sponges of the forniculating johns.
Gobo tebal farni.
Ah the star.
The riverfords the dog-vanes the strawmbrosias the coxidales.
Crackled avragui of Silence permissile freedom.
Avranimul. He hardly thinks.
Wadeover.
The embers counterbalance the ovary of the precarious emulators.
The sodan songs of the forest.
The meulic fits.
The Trous.
Kifa alfa Feroni fuldux.
The berbe will berb if the Zions sedolnite.
Zionism izmacropate.
The child sighs galzing the nut.
Jupir emereldo cavuhidante.
Libra doveu.
Paltrize the gullcake of the marblecrock.
Guigelela guiguelele guiguele guila.
The sun gumdrapes in the silus of the frogid palves.
Aguévasse ô meurde.
Silcha crea authernagon.
O fath o fath o fath in heaven in heaven in the stelbert in the stallion in the
stall-keeper
In the cunt
Holymolargoshengollygoodsies.
[The onlookers drift away.]
[The stars come down suspended on threads. They light up the painting making the outlines clear and allowing us to see a young

man with a horse's head who is tearing out his eyes in front of a huge blank sheet of paper.]

THE YOUNG MAN: A foo the fools I'm in pain.

[Apolnixède takes the hand of the young man with the horse's head and leads him out of the painting. The young man floats around Apolnixède like a satellite.]

THE YOUNG MAN: Womo
Womo
Teul Teul
Maki-er-erhunnn-h
Va hi jhi ha jhi kwhih
Her her
Meuleude

[The young man bursts into tears and Apolnixède is covered with unbearably bright gold. The young man plunges his hands into the mud and brings some to his lips. Apolnixède rises into the air in a heavenly ascension.]

APOLNIXÈDE: Brother, brother charity is eternal.

CURTAIN

Trustful Fatigue and Reality

Fatigue et Réalité sans Soupçon

Keulessa Kyrien Cobliéniz Jaboir
Veuléeioto Caubitchounitz Ableoco
Vénicir Chlaham Kérioti Kliko
Sannessa vélo Moutchnaïk Révoi
Kharinaïne bénessoir sellèr achmatz
krioun alégo amemor ripiutz leslé
aglradine noeutéon paklica erremmetz
djackliane mandousse petréobor
nochnéagriawa sétel-sel clariassener
jôquoimoil nontonduc allessande rébrér
novaképalès Djvoriadjiana Kuntroubel
tétrapaïte jonsel nilâcouâ alrivage
akdoc cousine-germaine déplaatz
circuitz monse dobo lévil-clair
palosse-pensée moulmolosse adjeuate
Kénoice Salibleuwié Aklistantan
Schnlouem Jakonitz Eulbéka Krôhenn
LaToilia Dédjoitonte Wanékoin
Lite-gazère Goitena Chapelle automatique

CURTAIN

[Note: This text has been left untranslated because there are so few specific words suggested by its sound-clusters. Some exceptions are 'pensée' (thought), 'cousin-germaine' (first cousin, female) and 'Chapelle automatique' (automatic chapel). The last may be a reference to the 'Automatiste' group, which was sometimes referred to, mostly by critics, as a chapel or sect.]

The Shadow On The Hoop

L'Ombre sur le Cerceau

[Monologue of the shadow cast on a hoop by a leaping acrobat.]
THE SHADOW: Listen to the harvest of Belval and the thuriferous fork which has come to glean the careful rows of pupazzi pastiches and an-glioche-glicoche and Bux the Clown ejaculating trapeze and cross- bow, and the brother's lips and the old-mother wrinkle and the sister of the brother's stag, become a pupazzo, become an advertising avalanche, tacit and bitter and baynal landslide in addition to acid of linseed and skull of oil's soul with instructive painterly mastication. The acorns of joy the tinkling bells cry papou and beuzellin and anarchist with the snotty plastic nose theological antiquation and abnegation of the tocsin watering trough, smooth and crystalline pale blue mirror like the virginal apple of the martyr clerk in his springtime escalade, buffandesque, heroicomanic and vermilion of pure gosling.

Your pompedear Cleonte in her populist and overthrow cloud, that cantankerous and diaphanous frantic flying coat, white, white, white, black toes on that blight, on that euphemie, the crossroads of faithful crosses and the cough akchou ekribitchou ploum ploum of the cordlings of crayfitious asbestos.

Ogo Absalum. The disproportionate medals and scapulars surround and ransom this spot of white skin on the wall of pamenver

gray. The new cross-breeds rip the bilious feeding, the vinegary slobbering, out of the faggot tongues, diapers for the stomachs, acrebungs for the armour cartridges immured in the attained psychol half-dawn circle of the visceral pelt, of the micreagondic touch of the Pals of Elmeuze of the Kingdom of Ki who blay the Ostaches Cumulé and Serval. Onward lances and tale dice, counts and burlurettes, the family of hesitated means, of abandoned attempts, of one-eyed compatures, of ossified regulations. Burman crusade. Bones of sentimental anthologies, rubbings of the amorous eruption. Onward the bagatelle of the dear corduroy pompom of the glacial blue and of the crystallization of porous orifices, of the stylinisation and synthetinisation of these molassous greens perpetually in motion, chain and breast of jealousy.

The baby-faced Zut and the buffoon Clément in the footlight, the cracker's fireworks, the moss-grown snow and the ice palisade of the tutus, they all elementize and isolate the pervers hunch-backed detonating gasoline. Baby-face and the skirt's wheel whip the spanish-style cream again, and the orange laugh of my pantheresque wife cut and pasted on her wax face adorns the monarchist behind of the paschal cabinet-maker by his checkered wig. Serrated jew-girl, muskapantulous forest, hothouse and carbanturier, the bream pastoral fulmine, spikes and waters right-handed, dampens and pecorates the sorcerish acquiescences, and the Ocean grinds its teeth on the platform of human tastes.

Abrdoum Pou King, the verdigris and the engerminating roof beams, sincerely stainted, bend and stain the Olme and the Prkades of the seat and of the agrable ombezeres' celon, royal comedy, fameloid burlesquery, pioune and pitouzery, who guard and fuss over the learned eliteries, who robe and flisk the cumus and hand some holes

of the pots and pans, of the cabiton's eagles, the opulent ruins the corpulent detentions, and who underline on imperial days the zing and echo and madrigal sol of the dishevelled circles who hash the fictional space.

Agroupine. Almah palm the pinch chireeps, the algaesia of the planks sings at the top of its glass under the melodious spell of the siphon.

CURTAIN

△

Lydia Davis

The Mouse

FIRST A POET WRITES a story about a mouse, in moonlight in the snow, how the mouse tries to hide in his shadow, how the mouse climbs up his sleeve and he shakes it down into the snow before he knows what it is that is clinging to his sleeve. His cat is nearby and her shadow is on the snow, and she is after the mouse. A woman is reading this story in the bath. Half her hair is dry and half of it is floating in the bath water. She likes the story.

That night she can't sleep and goes into the kitchen to read another book by the same poet. She sits on a stool by the counter. It is late and the night is quiet, though now and then at some distance a train passes and hoots before a crossing. To her surprise, though she knows it lives there, a mouse comes out of a burner from under a pot and sniffs the air. Its feet are like little thorns, its ears are unexpectedly large, one eye is shut and the other open. It nibbles something off the tray of the burner. She moves and it flashes back in, she is still and in a moment it comes out again, and when she moves again it flashes back into the stove like a snapped elastic. At four in the morning though she is still wide awake, reading and sometimes watching the mouse, the woman closes her book and goes back to bed.

In the morning a man sits in the kitchen on a stool, the same stool, by the counter, and cradles their young cat in his arms, holds her neck

in his broad pink hands and rubs the crown of her head with his thumbs, and behind him the woman stands leaning against his back, her breasts flattened against his shoulderblades, her hands closed over his chest, and they have laid out crusts of bread on the counter for the mouse to smell and are waiting for the mouse to come out, blindly, and for the young cat to get it.

They stay this way wrapped in nearly complete silence, and they are nearly motionless, only the man's gentle thumbs move over the cat's skull and the woman sometimes lays her cheek down against the man's fragrant soft hair and then lifts it again and the cat's eyes are shifting quickly from point to point. A motor starts up in the kitchen, then there is the sudden flare of the gas water heater, the swift passage of some cars on the highway below, and then a single voice in the road. But the mouse knows the company that is there, and won't come out. And then the cat is too hungry to keep still and reaches forth one paw after another and frees herself from the man's light hold and climbs up on the counter to eat the bread herself.

Often, whenever she can get into the house or is let into the house, the cat crouches sleepily on the counter by the stove, her eyes pointed at the burner where the mouse is likely to appear, but she is not more vigilant than that, half asleep, as though she likes just to place herself in this situation, hunting the mouse but perfectly motionless. Really she is keeping the mouse company, the mouse vigilant or sleeping inside the stove, the cat nearby outside. The mouse has had babies, in the stove, and the cat, too, is carrying kittens in her body, and her nipples are beginning to stand out in the downy fur of her belly.

The woman often looks at the cat and sometimes remembers another story.

The woman and her husband lived in the country in a large empty house. The rooms in this house were so large that the furniture sank into the empty spaces. There were no rugs and the curtains were thin, the windowpanes cold in the winter, and the daylight and the electric lights at night were cold and white, and lit the bare floor and the bare walls but did not change the darkness of the rooms, so that the rooms

were always full of darkness and empty space and wind.

On two sides of the house, beyond the yard, were stands of trees. One woods was deep and thick and climbed away up over a hill. At the bottom of the hill was a marshy pond in the trees where the water had been caught by the railroad embankment. The tracks and ties were gone from the embankment, and the mound of it was overgrown with saplings. The other stand of trees was thin and bordered a meadow, and deer crossed through to sleep in the meadow. In winter the woman could see their tracks in the snow and follow where they leaped in from the road. When the weather grew cold the mice would start coming into the house from the woods and the meadow, and run through the walls and fight and squeak behind the baseboards. The woman and her husband were not troubled by the mice, except for the little black droppings everywhere, but they had heard that mice would sometimes chew through the wires in the walls and start fires, so they decided to try and get rid of them.

The woman bought some traps at the hardware store, made of bright brassy coils of metal and new raw wood printed with red letters. The man at the hardware store showed her how to set them. It was easy to get hurt because the springs were very strong and tight. The woman had to be the one to set them because she was always the one who did things like that. In the evening before they went to bed, she set one carefully, afraid of snapping her fingers, and put it down in a place where she and he would not be likely to walk on it when they came into the kitchen in the morning forgetting it was there.

They went to bed and the woman stayed awake reading. She would read until the man woke up enough to complain about the light. He was often angry about something and when she read at night it was the light. Later in the night she was still awake and heard the sound like a gunshot of the trap springing but did not go downstairs because the house was cold.

In the morning she went into the kitchen and saw that the trap had flipped over and there was a mouse in it and blood smeared around on the pink linoleum. She thought the mouse was dead, but when

she moved the trap with her foot she saw that it was not. It started flipping around on the linoleum with the trap closed on its head. She did not know what to do. Her husband came in then and neither of them knew what to do about this half dead mouse. They thought that the best thing would be to kill it with a hammer or some other heavy thing but if one of them was going to do it it would be her and she did not have the stomach for it. Bending over the mouse she felt sick and agitated with the fear of something dead or nearly dead or mutilated. Both of them were excited and kept staring at it and turning away from it and walking around the room. The day was cloudy with more snow coming and the light in the kitchen was white and cast no shadows.

Finally the woman decided just to throw it outside, get it out of there, and it would die in the cold. She took a dustpan and pushed it under the trap and the mouse and walked quickly with it out the wooden door to the porch and through the porch and out the storm door and down the steps, afraid all the time that it would jump again and slip off the dustpan. She walked down the pitted concrete walk and across the driveway to the edge of the woods and threw the trap and the mouse out onto the frozen crust of snow. She tried to believe the mouse didn't feel much of the pain and was in shock anyway; certainly a mouse did not feel exactly the way a person would lying with his head closed in a trap bleeding and freezing to death out there on the white crust of snow. She could not be sure.

The mouse certainly died and was probably eaten by another animal. They never looked for the trap later. In midwinter the man left and the women lived on in the house alone. Then she moved to the city and the house was rented to a schoolteacher and his wife and a year later sold to a lawyer from the city. The last time the woman walked through it the rooms were still bare and filled only with darkness and wind, and the furniture set against the bare walls, though it was different furniture, had the same look of defeat under the weight of that emptiness.

△

Todd Baron

a sphere for tristan tzara

Signaling the end of the world
your lips pushed as if to say
Passion
        without words
the halo of
dark light
smashed against your head
Questions
about the earth
How it could be so round
after everyone's standing

Even with the snowless fields to your left
and the silence of
so many breaths taken
the world spins round and round
No-one
        getting sick
of the worm's caress.

The world spins round and round
Passion
        the halo of dark light
after everyone's standing
and the silence of Questions
your lips pushed as if to say

Signaling the end of the world
no-one
        getting sick
about the earth
Smashed questions against your head

And the silence of Passion
getting sick
            how could it be
dark light
            without words
the halo of
            the end of the world
signaling
            the snowless fields
and so many breaths taken
                even with the worm's caress
no one Questions about the earth, Passion
as if to say

No-one questions the halo
how it could be round and round
so many breaths taken after everyone's
standing, signaling the end of
your lips, the worm's caress as if to say
even with the snowless fields to your left
no-one spins round and round the earth.

△

Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843)

Summer

Rendered from the German by David Rattray

Wherever Summer is a country still,
A quality of heat like molten steel
Glows in the tigerlily's dappled crown
Near where an icy rill meanders down.

In unchecked splendor like a royal train
Great spokes of light wheel over hill and plain;
While, as if Time would temporize with Joy,
At breathless height a sunlit cloud sails by.

Respectfully,

Scardanelli

9 March 1940

△

Photo by Françoise Janicot

Bernard Heidsieck performing at the bottom of a Belgian coalmine.

Bernard Heidsieck

Le Carrefour de la Chaussée d'Antin

AN ATTEMPT AT A SOUND TOPOGRAPHY of a "hot spot" in Paris, of a Square where intersecting and mixing in a contradictory way are banks, insurance companies, the Opera, the Galeries La Fayette, train stations, cafes, movies, prostitutes, cat houses, clothing stores, political demonstrations, for which this Square is a classical path, including as well daily traffic jams.

This text is made up of 12 parts, each corresponding to one of the 6 streets or boulevards forming the Square as well as the 6 buildings that border the thoroughfare. Each section is separated from the following one by a series of mixed extracts from The Association of Consumer Goods.

This text, which begins at the Boulevard Haussmann Metro exit, functions in the sense of the hands of a watch. The following fragment printed here (master-key #16) constitutes the 7th section of the Square: it deals with the "Galeries La Fayette" department store.

(musical and advertising
refrains from Galeries
La Fayette:

on tape
and
without interruption

to the very end of

master-key #16)

. premier étage
rez-de-chaussée
. rez-de-chaussée
.
premier étage
. rez-de-chaussée
. rez-de-chaussée
deuxième étage
. deuxième étage
. Lafayette 2
troisième étage
. deuxième étage
. premier étage
troisième étage
. premier étage
. Lafayette 3
rez-de-chaussée
.
. quatrième étage
. cinquième étage
rez-de-chaussée
. rez-de-chaussée
. troisième étage
sous-sol
. premier étage
. premier étage
premier étage
. deuxième étage

troisième étage
rez-de-chaussée
rez-de-chaussée
quatrième étage
premier étage

premier étage
rez-de-chaussée
deuxième étage
premier étage

rez-de-chaussée
quatrième étage
sous-sol
quatrième étage
sixième étage

—(L.L.) passe moi ton carrefour
et je te donne le mien!

troisième étage
rez-de-chaussée
troisième étage

deuxième étage
rez-de-chaussée

rez-de-chaussée
quatrième étage
rez-de-chaussée

—(L.L.) un carrefour, c'est un
carrefour!

(haut-parleur des G.L.:)

...et vous avez d'ailleurs des démonstratrices et démonstrateurs à votre service qui se feront un plaisir...

(tape of musical
and advertising
refrains from Galeries
La Fayette . . .)

—(S.C.) tu viens chéri...

Lafayette 2
troisième étage

sixième étage
cinquième étage

troisième étage

premier étage
deuxième étage
rez-de-chaussée
premier étage
premier étage
deuxième étage
rez-de-chaussée
deuxième étage
rez-de-chaussée
deuxième étage
deuxième étage
quatrième étage
rez-de-chaussée

premier étage
quatrième étage
troisième étage
rez-de-chaussée
sous-sol
premier étage
quatrième étage
quatrième étage
sixième étage
deuxième étage
rez-de-chaussée

rez-de-chaussée
rez-de-chaussée
rez-de-chaussée
deuxième étage

rez-de-chaussée
sous-sol
Lafayette 3
premier étage

troisième étage
rez-de-chaussée
Lafayette 3
rez-de-chaussée
rez-de-chaussée
Lafayette 3
rez-de-chaussée
rez-de-chaussée
premier étage
deuxième étage
deuxième étage
Lafayette 3
rez-de-chaussée
rez-de-chaussée
sous-sol
sous-sol
deuxième étage

—(S.C.) tu viens chéri...
—(B.G.) centripète ou centrifuge ?
that is the question...
—(R.F.) tu viens chéri...

deuxième étage
troisième étage
Lafayette 2
deuxième étage
rez-de-chaussée
rez-de-chaussée

(tape of musical
and advertising
refrains from Galeries
La Fayette . . .)

rez-de-chaussée	
rez-de-chaussée	
sous-sol	
sous-sol	
rez-de-chaussée	
rez-de-chaussée	
quatrième étage	
Lafayette 3	
Lafayette 3	
sixième étage	
troisième étage	
premier étage	
rez-de-chaussée	
quatrième étage	
deuxième étage	
cinquième étage	
sixième étage	articles pour chiens
troisième étage	accessoires de bureau
	accessoires de coiffure
premier étage	accessoires de toilette
deuxième étage	
troisième étage	B
quatrième étage	
quatrième étage	bagages
rez-de-chaussée	bas
rez-de-chaussée	bijouterie
sixième étage	bonnetterie-baby
rez-de-chaussée	bonnetterie-garçons
	bonnetterie-hommes
sous-sol	boutique "Mariage"
troisième étage	boutique mini 20 ans
sixième étage	boutique 20 ans
deuxième étage	boutique 30 ans

	bottes
	bricolage
	brosserie
sous-sol	C
	cadeaux
	camping
	carrés-écharpes
sous-sol	chapeaux
	chapeaux haute-mode
	chauffage
rez-de-chaussée	chaussures femmes
premier étage	chaussures d'enfants
troisième étage	chaussures d'appartement
	chaussures de plage
sous-sol	chemisiers
Lafayette 3	ceintures
premier étage	colifichets
premier étage	coussins
Lafayette 2	couvertures
	D
quatrième étage	dentelles
	disques
	douillettes
	draps — taies
premier étage	
troisième étage	E
quatrième étage	
	écharpes-carrés
	éclairage
	électro-ménager
Lafayette 2	
quatrième étage	F
	fleurs artificielles
	fournitures d'ameublement

(tape of musical
and advertising
refrains from Galeries
La Fayette . . .)

	rez-de-chaussée	fourrures-pelleterie
	rez-de-chaussée	fumeurs
		futires mamans
— (R.F.)	tu viens chéri...	
— (A.E.)	Carrefour: lieu où se croisent plusieurs rues, plusieurs chemins.	
	Lafayette 2	G
	sous-sol	
		gaines—soutien-gorges
		gants
	premier étage	
		H
	premier étage	
	rez-de-chaussée	horlogerie
		hydrothérapie
	quatrième étage	hygiène
	rez-de-chaussée	
		I
	deuxième étage	
	quatrième étage	imperméables hommes
	quatrième étage	imperméables femmes
	sous-sol	J
	premier étage	
	Lafayette 2	
	premier étage	jardinage
		jouets
	premier étage	jupes
	premier étage	
	Lafayette 2	L
	premier étage	laine à tricoter

rez-de-chaussée	layettes et accessoires
rez-de-chaussée	librairie
rez-de-chaussée	linge de toilette
	linge de maison
premier étage	lingerie
rez-de-chaussée	lingerie—bonnetterie
rez-de-chaussée	lingerie jeunes-filles
deuxième étage	lingeries petite filles
deuxième étage	literie
Lafayette 2	lunettes
troisième étage	
deuxième étage	M
premier étage	
troisième étage	machines à coudre
premier étage	maitrise-décoration
Lafayette 3	manteaux
rez-de-chaussée	maroquinerie
	ménage

—(A.E.) Carrefour! Comme on dit BIGRE!

quatrième étage	
cinquième étage	mercerie
rez-de-chaussée	meubles
rez-de-chaussée	meubles d'appoint
troisième étage	meubles de cuisine
sous-sol	meubles d'enfants
premier étage	meubles de jardin
premier étage	mouchoirs
premier étage	montres-pendules
deuxième étage	articles de Paris
troisième étage	maillots de bain
rez-de-chaussée	O
rez-de-chaussée	
quatrième étage	optique
premier étage	orfèvrerie-cadeaux
	outillage-bricollage
premier étage	ouvrages de dames

(tape of musical
and advertising
refrains from Galeries
La Fayette . . .)

rez-de-chaussée	
deuxième étage	P
premier étage	
	pantalons femmes
rez-de-chaussée	papèterie
quatrième étage	papiers-peints
sous-sol	parapluies

(haut-parleur des G.L.:) A tout instant il se passe
quelque chose aux Galeries Lafayette
— (L.D.) — Tu viens chéri...

quatrième étage	parfumerie
sixième étage	passementerie

— (L.L.) —Passe moi ton carrefour et je te
donne le mien!

troisième étage	patrons
rez-de-chaussée	peignoirs
troisième étage	peinture
	perruques
	philathélie
deuxième étage	photo-cinéma
rez-de-chaussée	plantes vertes

— (B.G.) — Et puis, un deux trois, nous i-
rons au Carrefour!

rez-de-chaussée	plastiques
quatrième étage	porcelaine
rez-de-chaussée	prêt à porter Baby
	prêt à porter filles
Lafayette2	prêt à porter femmes
troisième étage	prêt à porter hommes

	prêts à porter garçons
	prêts à porter juniors
sixième étage	prêt à porter sport
cinquième étage	produits de beauté
troisième étage	produits d'entretien
	pull over
premier étage	
deuxième étage	R
rez-de-chaussée	
premier étage	radio-télévisions
premier étage	reproductions de tableaux/
deuxième étage	encadrements
rez-de-chaussée	revêtements mureaux
deuxième étage	revêtements de sol
deuxième étage	rideaux
quatrième étage	robes
rez-de-chaussée	rubans
premier étage	
quatrième étage	S
troisième étage	sacs — maroquinerie
rez-de-chaussèe	salles de bains
sous-sol	séparables pour jeunes-filles
premier étage	sports et loisirs
	stores
quatrième étage	sports d'hiver
quatrième étage	
sixième étage	T
deuxième étage	
sixième étage	tabliers et robes de maison
rez-de-chaussée	tabliers d'enfants
rez-de-chaussée	tailleurs
deuxième étage	tapis modernes
	tapis d'Orient
	timbres
rez-de-chaussée	tissus
sous-sol	tissus d'ameublement
Lafayette 3	télévisions

(tape of musical
and advertising
refrains from Galeries
La Fayette . . .)

		V
•	troisième étage	
•	rez-de-chaussée	verrerie
	Lafayette 3	vêtements de cuir
•	Rez-de-chaussée	voilages
•	rez-de-chaussée	voitures d'enfants
	premier étage	
•	deuxième étage	LES SERVICES
•	deuxième étage	
	Lafayette 3	A
•	rez-de-chaussée	
•	rez-de-chaussée	achats groupés
	sous-sol	
•	sous-sol	B
•	deuxième étage	bar rapide
•	deuxième étage	
	troisième étage	C
•	Lafayette 2	caféteria
•	deuxième étage	caisse No I
	rez-de-chaussée	caméraphot
•	rez-de-chaussée	carnets d'achats parking
•	rez-de-chaussée	clefs-service
	sous-sol	comptes-particuliers
•	sous-sol	consigne
•	rez-de-chaussée	CCF Banque
•		
		D
•	rez-de-chaussée	décoration-maîtrise
•	quatrième étage	
	Lafayette 3	F
•	Lafayette 3	famille-information

• — (L.L.) — mais surtout, surtout, bien avoir
• ses carrefours en main...
• — (R.F.) — tu viens chéri...

sixième étage	
troisième étage	G
premier étage	garde-fourrures
rez-de-chaussée	garde-tapis
quatrième étage	
deuxième étage	H
cinquième étage	Hertz — location de voitures
sixième étage	Hotels, oeuvres et Institutions
troisième étage	
	I
	Information service
premier étage	interprètes
deuxième étage	
troisième étage	L
quatrième étage	le Pub
quatrième étage	listes de mariages
rez-de-chaussée	
rez-de-chaussée	O
sixième étage	objets trouvés
rez-de-chaussée	
	P
sous-sol	parking accès direct
troisième étage	photomaton
sixième étage	
deuxième étage	R
	restaurant
	réparation de montres
	S
sous-sol	salon de coiffure et de beauté
	salon de thé
	service après vente
sous-sol	
	T
	talon-minute
	taxiphone
rez-de-chaussée	théatres (réservation)
	touring club de France
premier étage	

(tape of musical
and advertising
refrains from Galeries
La Fayette . . .)

.	troisième étage	V
	sous-sol	
.	Lafayette 3	vente par correspondance
.	premier étage	vestiaire
	premier étage	voyages (réservation)
.	Lafayette 2	
.		
.	quatrième étage	
.	premier étage	
.	troisième étage	
	quatrième étage	
.	Lafayette 2	
.	quatrième étage	
	rez-de-chaussée	
.		
.	rez-de-chaussée	
	Lafayette 2	
.	sous-sol	
.	premier étage	
	premier étage	
.	rez-de-chaussée	
.	deuxième étage	
.	quatrième étage	
	quatrième étage	
.	sous-sol	
.	premier étage	
	Lafayette 2	
.	premier étage	
.	premier étage	
	premier étage	
.	premier étage	
.	premier étage	
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△

The entire text takes nearly two hours to perform and involves 30 performers (whose initials occur before their "lines" in the text). Extracts from various performances are to be published as a cassette by The New Wilderness Foundation (NYC) in 1983.

△

Gerrit Lansing

3 Poems of the Underworld(s)

1. Black Currant Jelly

Have you opened your head to the dead?
Do they puddle there, wire your voice box?

It comes in as he swallowed,

outside the door to his room the darker successions were waiting,

thumping and purring
thumping and purring .

In the floor the crack opened
and squeezing out gently
on him it fastened.

He opened his mouth.

Hard on this guerdon:
to eat in order to sing.

△

2. A Birth in this World

The scanners went rosy to feel him.
They sped to his eyes and extended their mandibles.

The zealots!

A banquet of sight!
Such stalks!
(such starry wind-walks!)

All use is abuse. The word of the Aeon.

△

3. Outside of McDonald's

The prose of the dying,
who cares for that or this fall?

The riveting beauty

is a ketamine fountain,
the words to be found for,

as the-heads-of-the-gush-up-to-the-aethyrs

snort down through our forms to sustain us,

babble the obdurate poems, flash

our footing such rainbows.

△

John Taggart

Not Raw Enough

1

Brighten the corner where you are

Don't wait
don't wait

until some deed of greatness don't wait to be lit up
shine embrace word and child yes you heard that before
all you hear from me embrace word and child on fire
shine where you are shine shed your light afar
skies you may help to clear don't wait to be clear
to be in the ring ring of bones not one heart alone.

2

in the cross in the cross

Near no good to be kept near try to flag a ride

flag a ride or run you can run you can run
not to precious fountain healing stream to be in in
the cross don't watch and wait fire-lit cross of crystal
run to be in the fire in the light of word and child
you can see beyond the river bones at rest bones at play.

3

day by day his sweet voice soundeth

Daaah dah daaaaah daaaaah
daaah dah daaaaah daaaaah

daaaaah daaaaah daaaaah
daaah dah daaaaah daaah-dah
daaaaah dah dah daaah dah
daaaaaaah-daah-daah-daaaaaah-daah
daaaaaaah-daah-daah-daaaaaah-daah

daaah dah daaaaah daaaaah.

4

there's a song in the air.

While the beautiful sing don't you want to hear words
song of all the words in the air the language song
hear the beautiful bones don't you want to hear all the words
not his sweet voice wonderful words wonderful words of life
every heart is aflame and the beautiful sing
bones sing all the words the words sing through the bones.

Taggart writes:

"[The poems] take off from lines (the underlined, not italicized, ones at the top of each page) from Sunday School hymns I sang in my father's church. The 'nonsense' syllables in no. 3 are arranged, in the first 2 lines, according to how that line was sung, the first one ending on 'his' & the 2nd on the stretched out whole note syllables of 'soundeth.' The rest of the lines make up an accelerated train rhythm.

". . . Most of the language, Ives-fashion, is taken from hymns which I've used for my own purposes; the words & phrases are relocated and made to work against their earlier usage. Ref: Ives' 3rd sonata (piano/violin)."

Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven

Eleven Poems

A Dozen Cocktails—Please

No spinsterlollypop for me— yes— we have
No bananas— I got lusting palate— I
Always eat them — — — — — —
They have dandy celluloid tubes— all sizes—
Tinted diabolically as a baboon's hind-complexion.
A man's a—
Piffle! Will-o'-th'-wisp! What's the dread
Matter with the up-to-date-American-
Home-comforts? Bum insufficient for the
Should-be wellgroomed upsy!
That's the leading question.
There's the vibrator— — —
Coy flappertoy! I am adult citizen with
Vote— I demand my unstinted share
In roofeden— witchsabbath of our baby-
Lonian obelisk.
What's radio for— if you please?
"Eve's dart pricks snookums upon
Wirefence."
An apple a day— — —
It'll come— — — —
Ha! When? I'm no tongueswallowing yogi.
Progress is ravishing—
It doesn't *me*—

Nudge it—
Kick it—
Prod it—
Push it—
Broadcast— — — —
That's the lightning idea!
S.O.S. national shortage of— —
What?
How are we going to put it befitting
Lifted upsys?
Psh! Any sissy poet has sufficient freezing
Chemicals in his Freudian icechest to snuff all
Cockiness. We'll hire one.
Hell! Not that! That's the trouble— —
Cock *crow*— silly!
Oh fine!
They're in France— the air on the line—
The Poles— — — — — —
Have them send waves— like candy—
Valentines— — —
"Say it with— — —
Bolts!
Oh thunder!
Serpentine aircurrents— — —
Hhhhhphsssssssss! The very word penetrates
I feel whoozy!
I like that. I don't hanker after
Billyboys— but I am entitled
To be deeply shocked.
So are we— but you fill the hiatus.
Dear— I ain't queer— I need it straight— —
A dozen cocktails— please— — — —

Skin of Faith

"Live and learn"
"Life = 1 damnthing after another."

Life = science
Who knows—
God knows?!—

Betokens:

Each
Rhythmic
Beastly
Breast—

Each
Rooted
Bole—

Each
Petal
Mechanism—

As far as it— — — — — —
But there *must*— — — —

Sh—
Sh—
Sh—
Shshshshshshshshshshshshhhhhh!

Easy there!

There's no help:

We are!

Since we
Are —

We must
Be!

So —

Let's!

△

History.
Dim.

Mary-mother —
Travelling
With
Joe —
With
No
Chapero — — — —
Riding
An
Ass — — —

Bother

Sir!
That
Ass
Rode
Her!

No
Matter—
Things
Aren't
Better?
Whichever
Way
They
Travelled
Will
Never
Be
Unravelled.

△

Jigg

Spring jiggs with flute
Tinkling azure lute—
Awhistle!

"Son of sun— thou're late— quite
"Never mind" he flipps—
Teeth white

Through shelllips.

"Mind blood!" snapp I— I'm sick
Hug me— quick!"

"Tooooooorrreeeh!" twangs he—
"Don't fret!
Have violet."

Sunsong

Woo
Die
Woo
Die
Ever!

I
Thine
Thou
Mine
Ever!
I
Summer
Winter
Heart!
Love:
Lust
Mixed

Grave
Dead
Pain
Me!
Tomorrow
Kiss
I
Red
Again
Thee!
In
Mine
Lap
Vie:
Truth
Joy
Pest
Lie— — — —
Fixed
Central
Erect
I.

△

Fluency

Death
Is
"A good one"
On

Life

And

Alltogether— — —

△

(Untitled)

Whatever you think about jesus christ
And his
Hobby
Bobby
Remember his dishes
He was hard of fishes
At the hostelry
"Mosher"
He gave
"Hops"
The waiter
12 orders of muttonchops
Later
To raise his crew
The
"Hullaballoo"
Fried kosher:

Liquoring up that bunch— toasting his slobb
Y
Hobby

Bobby –
After the wine
Rain or shine
For the rum shebang
To better go
Hang
Susiegypsy
Stewed them that
Tipsy
As forever to
Prate
Of the
Fate
Of the
Plate
They
Ate!

That son of a bitches
Hobby
Bobby –
Sets me rabiate!

I abbhorr it!
He's nuts
Degenerate
Queer
Horrid!

What's the use
Of blue
Hoodoos
Of jews

To ooze
Every tap
Of the map
Out
Muts
Guts
    Torrid?

To booze
Or
  Not
    To
      Booze
That's the
        Rub!
Shut up!
Lorrit!
Dang!
Git!
Shit
Into the toilet

△

In the Midst—

If breeze will stop mop
Azure roof with each treetop
And alltogether!
Stirring up sight noise by it—
On board ship—

To permit—
To vomit—
Into weather— —
Spit—
Into dragongreen billows guffawing froth—
I—
Ain't loathe to admit:
It maybe worth
Existence to nurse
Along with native sheetiron hearth
In cabin in Kentucky.

Should it quell to lie prone to die— — —
That alone
I guess'll
Spell redress
In mess
Of lifechess
By lush stillness
Of sultry Kentucky.

Say!
With that brazen monotonous element-ayell!
Amoaning—
Afending—
Abending—
Asweeping—
Ahopping—
Apopping—
Amopping—
Apounding—
That trumpetblare stabscreechblue blustering
Firmament— eternal

Rounding— surrounding— infernal
All wee me— — — —
Gee!
Honest
Nay—
(Shit!)
It's hell
That-a-way—
Ain't it
In Sparta, Kentucky?

△

Ultramundanity

earthcrucibles'
sunpestled
spirittestical
lifeworks'
deathproduct:

compoundmetamorphosis'
loamfragrant
essence

attar—
of—
souls:

spirit

ashes
to
ashes: transmutation—

ego
to
supremego's:
ultrapool.

from
within
egoistplant's
accumulated
orgasmlitter
heatcolumned
electric
will
spirals
seamen exuberant
sexfestooned
bodyhumped
phallic
lords'
amatriculate
imagecirculate
spiritimmaculate
ultrasensed
egoidolatrous
selfabusive
incestuous
dynamoradiant
homosuicides'

perpetual
perpetrator:
testical
brain
among
egoimagined
images
reflexiimaginative
imagery.

past
demons'
dim
memorymazed
tongues
invoke
by
grace
of
father
logos
pristine
in
hellmatterself
through
egomechanics'
immortal
systems'
calculated
reciprocity schemes'
infinite
thrift
of

allaround
alltogether
mutual
satisfactory
salvagecult
that:

redeemed
redeem
redeemer.

sol

salto mortale

hip!
pal!
this means *you!*

all's
sugar
in
christendom —

all's
christendom
too!
allaloooooooooooh

△

Enchantment

Here
Crawls
Moon –

Out
Of
This
Hole –
Out
Of
This
Hole

Slips
Moon

Out
Of
This
Cloudhole

Traditional
She
Points
Lightdipped
Toetips
Shrill
Insectchimes

Turn
Me
RIGID

Game
(Legend)

1
Three
People

2
Seated in room

3
Playing
Game—

4
Boy
Scientist
Lady
Bare
Shame—

5
Shameless
In
Love
With
Boy

6
They
Made
Her
Toy

7
Tore
Apart

Swinging
Heart

8
She
Laughed—

As
Pain
Came

9
She
Was not
Young

10
She
Was not
Old—

11
Vibrant
Was
She
Quiverbold

12
Passion mad
She
Leaped
Bed
Of
Love
Dead—

13
At
Dawn
Heart
Shone
Gold

△

Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Born in Germany in 1874, murdered by a boyfriend in Paris in 1927. Dadaist, poet, junk-sculptor, streetwalker, proto-shopping bag lady, *Little Review* regular, courtesan in Italy, poorhouse inmate in Germany, local eccentric in Paris and Greenwich Village. "She dressed in purple and yellow clothes with a coal scuttle on her head or a tam-o'-shanter complete with feathers and ice cream spoons, or black vest and kilts, with brass teaballs suspended from her nipples. Once she'd even shaved her head and painted her face two colors divided down the center so that seen from either profile she offered two distinct faces." (Paul Mariani) Her husband, the Baron, took her to Kentucky and then shot himself; Man Ray and Berenice Abbott photographed her; Williams once bailed her out of the Women's House of Detention and once knocked her down and had her arrested (she was determined to give him the "gift" of syphilis); Stevens wouldn't go near the Village for fear of her; Djuna Barnes was her only steadfast friend. Her long poem "Mineself—Minesoul—And—Mine—Cast-Iron Lover" (reprinted in Rothenberg's *Revolution of the Word*) touched off a debate in *The Little Review* on madness and art that dragged on for years. (Jane Heap: "Elsa von Freytag works unhampered by sanity.")

At her death she left some 600 pages of unpublished material, including a 200-page autobiography. These were entrusted to Djuna Barnes who, for almost sixty years, refused to allow any of it to be published. Samisdat xeroxes have been circulating for some time: with Barnes' death at 90 this year, the Baroness' work will finally see print.

—*E.W.*

△

Jerome Rothenberg

Pre-Face to Symposium of the Whole

WHEN THE INDUSTRIAL WEST began to discover—& plunder—"new" & "old" worlds beyond its boundaries, an extraordinary countermovement came into being in the West itself. Alongside the official ideologies that shoved European man to the apex of the human pyramid, there were some thinkers & artists who found ways of doing & knowing among the other peoples as complex as any in Europe & often virtually erased from European consciousness. Cultures described as "primitive" & "savage"—a stage below "barbarism"—were simultaneously the models for political & social experiments, religious & visionary revivals, & forms of art & poetry so different from European norms as to seem revolutionary from a later Western perspective. It was almost, looking back at it, as if every "radical" innovation in the West was revealing a counterpart—or series of counterparts—somewhere in the traditional worlds the West was savaging.

From the side of a poetics, there has been a discourse (really a range of such discourses) that has been a vital aspect of 20th Century poetry

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Excerpted from *Symposium of the Whole: A Range of Discourse Toward Ethnopoetics*, ed. Jerome Rothenberg and Diane Rothenberg, University of California Press, scheduled 1983.

& art—with precedents going back two centuries & more. The poetics in question, which I have spoken of elsewhere as an "*ethno*poetics," reemerged after World War II (with its rampant & murderous racism) & the dislocations of the European colonial system during the post-war period.* Whenever it has appeared—& some version of it may be as old as human consciousness itself—it has taken the form of what Stanley Diamond, in a recently renewed "critique of civilization," calls "the search for the primitive" or, more precisely, the "attempt to define a primary human potential." The search as such is by no means confined to the "modern" world (though our concern with it has been just there) but felt as well, say, in the words of ancient Heracleitus often cited by Charles Olson: "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar." And it is present too in the thought of those the West had cast as ultimate "primitives," as when the Delaware Indians tell us in their *Walum Olum*:

> in the beginning of the world
> all men had knowledge cheerfully
> all had leisure
> all thoughts were pleasant
>
> at that time all creatures were friends....

The "past" is what it is—or was—but it is also something we discover & create through a desire to know what it is to be human, anywhere.

Some of the results of that search & its attendant yearnings are obvious by now—so much so that a principal defense against their power to transform us involves an attack on a "primitivism" debased

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*The word "ethnopoetics" suggested itself, almost too easily, on the basis of earlier terms like ethnohistory, ethnomusicology, ethnolinguistics, ethnopharmacology, & so on. As such it refers to a redefinition of poetry in terms of cultural specifics, with an emphasis on those alternative traditions to which the West gave names like "pagan," "gentile," "tribal," "oral," & "ethnic." In its developed form, it moves toward an exploration of creativity over the fullest human range, pursued with a regard for particularized practice as much as unified theory & further "defined" in the actual discourse.

by the attackers & abstracted thereby from its revolutionary potential. Such a "primitivism" is not in any case the stance we would choose to encourage. Nor is our interest directed backward toward a past viewed with feelings of decontextualized nostalgia. It is our contention, in fact, that the most experimental & future-directed side of Romantic & modern poetry, both in the Western world & increasingly outside it, has been the most significantly connected with the attempt to define an ethnopoetics.

There is a politics in all of this, & an importance, clearly, beyond the work of poets & artists. The old "primitive" models in particular—of small & integrated, stateless & classless societies—reflect a concern over the last two centuries with new communalistic & anti-authoritarian forms of social life & with alternatives to the environmental disasters accompanying an increasingly abstract relation to what was once a living universe. Our belief in this regard is that a reviewing of "primitive" ideas of the "sacred" represents an attempt —by poets & others—to preserve & enhance primary human values against a mindless mechanization that has run past any uses it may once have had. (This, rather than the advocacy of some particular system, seems to us the contribution of the "primitive" to whatever world we may yet hope to bring about.) As a matter of history, we would place the model in question both in the surviving, still rapidly vanishing stateless cultures & in a long subterranean tradition of resistance to the twin authorities of state & organized religion.

What we're involved with here is a complex redefinition of cultural & intellectual values: a new reading of the poetic past & present that Robert Duncan speaks of as "a symposium of the whole." In such a new "totality," he writes, "all the old excluded orders must be included. The female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and the unknown; the criminal and failure—all that has been outcast and vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of what we consider we are." If that or some variant thereof is taken as the "larger" picture, it can provide the

context in which to see most clearly the searches & discoveries in what we call "the arts." In painting & sculpture, say, the results of those searches are by now so well-known that there's little surprise left in marking the change from Ruskin's late 19th century comment, "There is no art in the whole of Africa, Asia, and America," to Picasso's exclamation on his first sighting of an African sculpture, "It is more beautiful than the Venus de Milo." Yet the obviousness of the change is itself deceptive. The "human" concerns demanded by the Dada poet Tristan Tzara—for art that "lives first of all for the functions of dance, religion, music, and work"—remain largely submerged in the "aesthetic"; & it's a long way too from Picasso's classicizing admiration of the static art object to the reality of a tribal/oral "art in motion" that brings all our scattered arts together.

This dream of a total art—& of a life made whole—has meant different things & been given different names throughout this century. "Intermedia" was a word for it in its 1960s manifestation—but also "total theater" & "happenings," etc.—behind which was the sense of what the 19th century Wagnerian consciousness had called *gesamtkuenstwerk* & had placed—prefigured—at the imagined beginnings of the human enterprise. The difference in our own time was to smash that imperial & swollen mold—to shift the primary scene from Greece, say, to the barbaric or paleolithic past, or to the larger, often still existing tribal world, & to see in that world (however "outcast & vagabond" it had been made to look) a complexity of act & vision practiced by proto-poets/proto-artists who were true "technicians of the sacred." And along with this shift came the invention & revival of *specific* means: new materials & instruments (plastic & neon, film & tape) alongside old or foreign ones (stones, bones & skin; drums, didjeridoos & gamelans); ancient roles & modes of thought that had survived at the Western margins (sacred clowns & dancers, shamanistic ecstasies, old & new worlds of dream & chance); & a tilt towards ritual, not as "an obsessional concern with repetitive acts" but, as Victor Turner describes it, "an immense orchestration of genres in all avail-

able sensory codes: speech, music, singing; the presentation of elaborately worked objects, such as masks; wall-paintings, body-paint ings; sculptured forms; complex, many-tiered shrines; costumes; dance forms with complex grammars and vocabularies of bodily move ments, gestures, and facial expressions."

The description, which fits both "them" & "us," holds equally true in the language arts, though by the nature of language itself (& the need to translate ourselves in—always—partial forms) the complexity & the interplay of new & old haven't been as clear there. Taken as a whole, then, the human species presents an extraordinary richness of verbal means—both of languages & poetries—closed to us until now by an unwillingness to think beyond the conventions & boundaries of Western literature. This "literature" as such goes back in its root meaning to an idea of writing—more narrowly & literally, the idea of alphabetic writing (*littera*, Lat. = "letters") as developed in the West. In poetry, the result has been to exclude or set apart those oral traditions which together account for the greatest human diversity, an exclusion often covered over by a glorification of the oral past. Thus Marshall McLuhan—defining the words "tribal" & "civilized" on the basis of alphabetic literacy alone—can write: "Tribal cultures like those of the Indian and Chinese [!] may be greatly superior to the Western cultures in the range and delicacy of their expressions & perception," & in the same paragraph: "Tribal cultures cannot entertain the possibility of the individual or of the separate citizen." (But contrast this, e.g., to Paul Radin's more studied account of tribal cultures characterized by "an individualism run riot" & a "ruthless realism.")

If the recovery of the "oral" is crucial to the present work, it goes hand in hand with a simultaneous expansion of the idea of writing & the text, wherever & whenever found. To summarize rapidly, the oral recovery involves a poetics deeply rooted in the powers of song & speech, breath & body, as brought forward across time by the living presence of poet-performers, with or without the existence of a visible/literal text. The range of such poetries is the range of human cul-

ture itself, & the forms they take (different for each culture) run from wordless songs & mantras to the intricacies (imagistic & symbolic) of multi-levelled oral narratives; from the stand-up performances of individual shamans & bards to the choreographies of massed dancers & singers, extended sometimes over protracted periods of time. From the side of visual & written language—which may, like the oral, be as old as the species itself—a fully human poetics would include all forms of what Jacques Derrida calls *arch-écriture* (= primal writing): pictographs & hieroglyphs, aboriginal forms of visual & concrete poetry, sand paintings & earth mappings, gestural & sign languages, counting systems & numerologies, divinational signs made by man or read (as a poetics of natural forms) in the tracks of animals or of stars through the night sky.

That practices like these correspond to experimental moves in our own time isn't needed to "justify" them, but it indicates why we're now able to see them & to begin to understand as well the ways they differ from our own work. Other areas in which such correspondences hold true may be more involved with "idea" than "structure," though the distinction isn't always easy to maintain. Traditional divination work, for example—the Ifa oracles of Africa, say, or the Chinese *I Ching*—rests on the recognition of a world revealed moment by moment through processes of chance & synchronicity (= the interrelatedness of simultaneous events), and these processes in turn inform one major segment of our avant-garde. Similarly, the widespread practice of exploring the "unknown" through the creation of new languages shows a strong sense of the "virtual" nature of reality (what Senghor speaks of in its African phase as the traditional "surreal") & the linguistic means to get it said. The idea of the "surreal"—at its most meaningful—also suggests the dream-works so central to other cultures & so long submerged in ours. And from these, or through them, it's only a short step into a life lived in a state-of-myth ("reality at white heat," Radin called it) & to the recovery of archetypes (as image &/or symbol) that infuse our own work at its most heated: the

animal & trickster side of us; the goddess & the feminine; the sense of "earth as a religious form" & of a living, even "human" universe; the commitment to imaginal geographies & journeys that lead into our own lives & minds. These are as old as the human, maybe older, & they come back to us, transformed, not so much when we shut out the immediate world around us as when we choose to work within it.

The 20th century—& with it the attendant modernisms that have characterized our poetry & art—is by now winding down. It has been a long haul & a sometimes real adventure, but the work is in no way complete & some of the major points have still to be hammered home. My own choice has been to write from the side of a modernism that sees itself as challenging limits & changing ways of speaking/thinking/doing that have too long robbed us of the freedom to be human to the full extent of our powers & yearnings. The struggle is immediate & the objects & attitudes to be destroyed or transformed appear on every side of us. But it isn't a question of our having no sense of history or of the human past—no sense of possibilities besides the most apparent. The clincher in fact is the transformation, beyond that, of our consciousness of the human in all times & places.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Country Between Us. CAROLYN FORCHÉ.
Harper & Row. 1981.

by ELIOT WEINBERGER

I.

In El Salvador, in peaceful times, a favored pastime of the rich was football played on horseback. In the place of a ball, they used a live duck.

Five million people once lived there. Today, half a million have fled abroad. The rest are being decimated at the rate of 10,000 political deaths a year.

The left tends to murder soldiers and individuals: high-placed officials and low-placed "informers." The right prefers the murder of guerillas, reformers, liberals, and whole villages of peasants, the "sympathizers."

The people are the hungriest in the hemisphere. It is estimated that a family needs 17 acres to support itself; 96.3% of the rural population has 12 acres or less. It is estimated that a family needs $533 a year for minimal survival; 60% make less. 2% of the population controls 60% of the land.

The last honest elections were held in 1931. After nine months, the government was overthrown by one General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. In 1932, on a night when volcanoes were erupting throughout Central America, there was a peasant revolt against the General. It failed, and Martínez responded by killing some 25,000 people: *la matanza*, the massacre. He ruled for a dozen more years, holding seances in the palace.

The General would lecture the people over the radio: "Biologists have only discovered five senses. But in reality there are ten. Hunger, thirst, procreation, urination and bowel movements are the senses not included in the lists of the biologists." Or "It is a greater crime to kill an ant than a man, for a man who dies is reincarnated while an ant dies forever." "In El Salvador," he declared, "I am God." During an epidemic, he forbade medical measures and refused the help of health organizations. Streetlamps were wrapped in

colored cellophane: It was the General's belief that colored light would purify the air, ending the pestilence.

In 1969, the Honduran Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that the Colgate toothpaste manufactured in El Salvador was causing cavities in the teeth of Honduran children. The next day, El Salvador's Under-Secretary for Economic Integration charged that Glostora, a hair cream made in Honduras, was giving Salvadoreans dandruff. Soon after, El Salvador defeated Honduras in the semi-finals for the World Cup. War broke out, killing 2000 soldiers and an unknown number of civilians.

The nominal government of El Salvador is a shifting cast of military juntas and ephemeral coalition juntas, supported by (in the last three years) a billion dollars in U.S. or U.S.-sponsored multilateral aid. Power is held by the Army, the National Guard, the National Police, the Treasury Police, and various paramilitary organizations and death squads.

On the left there are at least 50 opposition groups. Among them, the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation is not the Farabundo Martí Popular Forces of Liberation; and the Democratic Nationalist Union is not the National Opposition Union, which is not the National Democratic Union, which is not the Popular Democratic Union.

The leaders, left and right, are interchanging and interchangeable. Most are from the elite. They are related, school chums, intermarried. Alliances are in a state of restless change: within the left, within the right, from left to right, right to left. Of the two Salvadoreans best known in the U.S., José Napoleón Duarte, the winner-then-loser of the last fraudulent elections, is currently a center-rightist promoted by Reagan, having served as a Communist Party candidate for President, a reformist mayor, and a participant in a military coup. And Roque Dalton, the guerilla poet (who once, like the hero of the von Kleist story, escaped execution when his prison walls crumbled in an earthquake) was killed by his own organization on the grounds that he was a CIA agent. Today his assassin is sponsored by the Roque Dalton Cultural Brigade.

Beneath the swirling rainbow slick of factions and counterfactions, there is the groundswell: the popular movements, organizations of farmers, factory workers, shantytown dwellers. Sharing a common enemy (the army, the oligarchy) with the leftists, the popular organizations enter into desultory alliances with this and that leftist group, but are represented by none. The

left, as so often, is debilitated by Marxist exegesis and its taxonomies of mutual dismissal—adventurism, deviationism, militarism, insurrectionism, revisionism, opportunism—while the right grows stronger.

For the outsider—the *reader*—El Salvador is a story that cannot be followed. There is no simple incarnation of evil (a Somoza, Batista) nor group capable of restoring the nation. It is a war without sides—that is, with scores of sides—without ideology and with no solutions other than the mere ascension to power. There is only the continuing suffering of the people, and the isolated individuals and local groups attempting to alleviate that suffering.

It is the triumph of the demonic. In its torture chambers and in its rococo inventions of mutilation, the powers of El Salvador have perfected an anti-art—the imagination as giver of death—and an anti-poetry, where every word is its antonym: In the mornings, nude and headless torsos are found with this note pinned to their flesh: ¡*Viva la Matanza*! Long Live the Massacre!

II.

Carolyn Forché is generally perceived as a "political poet" whose book, *The Country Between Us*, was written "out of" the catastrophe in El Salvador. The popularity of the book has placed her among the few social poets with a large readership: Levertov, Ginsberg, Snyder, Rich. Levertov herself has declared that Forché is "a poet who's doing what I want to do," and Jacobo Timerman, of all people, has laid this iron wreath on the poet's head: "Latin America needs a poet to replace the man who represented in his writings the beauty, sufferings, fears and dreams of this continent: Pablo Neruda. Carolyn Forché is that voice."

A reader is always attracted to, or put off by, an unknown writer for the slightest of gestures, and I had resisted reading the book, until asked to review it, for two small misgivings. First there is the book's cover: a photograph of what might be Hugh Hefner's latest girlfriend. It is, of course, the author herself, in a misty Extreme Close Up, with head tilted up, eyes looking dreamily toward the light, full lips slightly parted. Why would Forché, a leftist and feminist, allow herself (possibly choose) to be marketed in this manner?

My second suspicion rose from a single word in an article Forché had

written for *The Nation* with Leonel Gomez. The subject was the Salvadorean army, and this was the second sentence: "In 1932, when the people of El Salvador first rose in rebellion, the army slaughtered what we have painstakingly calculated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 people." It was the word "painstakingly," and it bothered me beyond its evident lack of humility. Though the usage is literally correct ("pains" is not "pain") I wondered how any writer could type the letters *pain* in such a sentence, referring not to the massacre of thousands, but to her own tedious though no doubt depressing statistical work. By her publisher and by herself, it seemed that El Salvador was being reduced to Forché.

Strange, then, to find how little of the book is actually concerned with El Salvador, that so much has been made of so little. There are 22 poems here: 14 on other matters and only 8 in the section titled "In Salvador 1978-80." Of those eight, a small two were written and located in the country itself (a visit to a prisoner and to an army colonel). Three of the others occur in California or Mallorca, where the poet thinks or talks to people about El Salvador. Two have no specific location, but were written outside the country (a Nerudesque cry of compassion for guerilla friends and an elegy for a slain reformer); and one occurs probably in Spain and concerns a woman whose husband was murdered in Argentina. Forché's El Salvador is more a state of mind than state, a country the author is "in" wherever she is, and—if the book's title is to be understood at all—the barrier of suffering between the poet and her friends, lovers, readers.

The 14 other poems are written to a formula. Most are addressed in the first person to a friend, lover, or the poet herself; or they are in the voice of a friend/lover speaking to her. They are elegiac, nostalgic, melancholy, filled with references to distant, violent events. Of the 14 poems, 13 mention clothes; 11 refer to food; 11 to beverages, especially alcoholic beverages; 11 to sex; 10 include a place name, usually foreign; 9 have the word "dead" or "death"; 8 refer to smoking.

At her worst, Forché is student-profound ("We have, each of us, nothing. / We will give it to each other.") corny ("we whispered *yes*, there on the intricate / balconies of breath, overlooking / the rest of our lives.") annoying (a poem that ends: "If you read this poem, write to me. / I have been to Paris since we parted.") or poetic and vague:

We spend our morning
in the flower stalls counting
the dark tongues of bells
that hang from ropes waiting
for the silence of an hour.
We find a table, ask for *paella*,
cold soup and wine, where a calm
light trembles years behind us.

(This last is creative writing school stuff, and one imagines the exasperated voice of the prof: did you really spend a morning counting clappers?; bells "wait" for silence *to pass*; where is "where"? what does the last line mean anyway?)

Usually, Forché sounds something like this (from a poem describing her room):

The bundle of army letters
were sent from Southeast Asia
during '67, kept near a bottle
of vodka drained by a woman
in that same year who wanted
only to sleep; the fatigues
were his, it is she
whom I now least resemble.

. . .

Under the bed, a pouch of money:
pesetas, dinar, francs, the coins
of no value in any other place.
In the notebooks you will find
those places: the damp inner thighs,
the delicate rash left by kisses,
fingers on the tongue, a swallow
of brandy, a fire.
It is all there, the lies
told to myself because of Paris,
the stories I believed in Salvador
and Granada, and every so often
simply the words calling back
a basket of lemons and eggs,
a bowl of olives.

"Paris" and "Granada" are unexplained elsewhere; the Mediterranean is the

usual lemons and olives; the sex is strictly *Playboy*, complete with brandy and fire, though the conjunction, in one line, of "fingers on the tongue" and "swallow" is more vomitive than provocative. The two non-descriptive phrases state the following: "the clothes are his but I am different" and "it's impossible to exchange foreign coins." Otherwise, all the bases are swiftly touched in an air of world-weariness: the victim who suffers because of distant events in which she has no part.

The best, and best-known, poem in the book is actually a bit of prose, written in El Salvador:

The Colonel

> What you have heard is true. I was in his house. His wife carried a tray of coffee and sugar. His daughter filed her nails, his son went out for the night. There were daily papers, pet dogs, a pistol on the cushion beside him. The moon swung bare on its black cord over the house. On the television was a cop show. It was in English. Broken bottles were embedded in the walls around the house to scoop the kneecaps from a man's legs or cut his hands to lace. On the windows there were gratings like those in liquor stores. We had dinner, rack of lamb, good wine, a gold bell was on the table for calling the maid. The maid brought green mangoes, salt, a type of bread. I was asked how I enjoyed the country. There was a brief commercial in Spanish. His wife took everything away. There was some talk then of how difficult it had become to govern. The parrot said hello on the terrace. The colonel told it to shut up, and pushed himself from the table. My friend said to me with his eyes: say nothing. The colonel returned with a sack used to bring groceries home. He spilled many human ears on the table. They were like dried peach halves. There is no other way to say this. He took one of them in his hands, shook it in our faces, dropped it into a water glass. It came alive there. I am tired of fooling around he said. As for the rights of anyone, tell your people they can go fuck themselves. He swept the ears to the floor with his arm and held the last of his wine in the air. Something for your poetry, no? he said. Some of the ears on the floor caught this scrap of his voice. Some of the ears on the floor were pressed to the ground.

What makes it a prose "poem," I suppose, are the last two lines. They nearly wreck it. After such a powerful real-surreal incident, why does Forché find it necessary to end with a flourish of surrealism from the Iowa Writing School? The first of the two is a "so what" line: some (not all?) of the ears have heard the colonel's final statement. (They didn't, but what if they had?). The

second, unfortunately, has two readings: not only "listening"—presumably to the sound of distant hordes approaching—but also "squashed underfoot."

I don't see Forché as a political poet at all, for the poems neither illuminate a political situation, are an exhortation to arms, nor artifacts themselves of a political reality. They belong, rather, to the genre of revolutionary tourism. In the poems Forché meets, talks to, sleeps with, thinks of individuals involved in political circumstances (as actors or victims) while remaining an outsider herself, *toujours la gringa.* In a poem addressed to guerilla friends, she writes:

> You will fight
> and fighting, you will die. I will live
> and living cry out until my voice is gone
> to its hollow of earth, where with our
> hands and by the lives we have chosen
> we will dig deeper into our deaths.
> I have done all that I could do.
> Link hands, link arms with me . . .

By blurring the line between participation and observation, we are meant to believe that the suffering of El Salvador is Forché's own suffering. It is a common confusion among tourists to the Third World, the form of "going native" taken by those with pretensions to saintliness. But—need I say it?—being back in L.A. unable to sleep and angry at the sight of Salvadorean produce in the Safeway (as she tells us in another poem) is not the same as being confined to a one meter by one meter by one meter cell, lying curled in your own shit and menstrual blood.

To presume to "link arms," declaring oneself equal, with those who have endured such torment; to speak to people who will be corpses in the morning and claim that you too are digging deep into your own death (if that means anything at all) and that you have done all that you could do—it is more than naiveté and audacity. It is the liberal side of colonialism. The ears on the dinner table are, in the end, just "something" for her poetry, a horror to be presented only after the reader has examined the author's portrait. ▵

One Night Stand & Other Poems. JACK SPICER. Edited by DONALD ALLEN. Grey Fox. 1980.

by LORI CHAMBERLAIN

In a letter to Robin Blaser published in *Admonitions*, Jack Spicer writes:

> So don't send the box of old poetry to Don Allen. Burn it or rather open it with Don and cry over the possible books that were buried in it—the *Songs Against Apollo*, the *Gallery of Gorgeous Gods*, the *Drinking Songs*—all incomplete, all abortive—

Don Allen has, fortunately, ignored Spicer's admonition against the early poetry by publishing the "uncollected" early work, *One Night Stand & Other Poems*. Although slightly over half of the poems have been published elsewhere (*Caterpillar* #12, *Manroot* #10, the Fall 1977 issue of *Boundary 2*), this book puts the poems together in a roughly chronological sequence and makes the work available to a wide audience. Coupled with *The Collected Books*, *One Night Stand* fleshes out Spicer's ghostly reputation. It is given a useful and interesting introduction by Robert Duncan, who locates the theater of "influences" within which Spicer wrote—including John Livingston Lowes' *Road to Xanadu*, Crane's *The Bridge*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Maltese Falcon*, T.S. Eliot, Yeats, Pound, Calvin, and Spicer's own peers.

One Night Stand is, by definition, not one of Spicer's "books," and indeed, that is why he rejected that "box of old poetry." For, somewhere around the time he was working on *After Lorca*, he discovered the "serial" poem and rejected the single poem as such:

> Poems should echo and reecho against each other. They should create resonances. They cannot live alone any more than we can.
>
> (*Admonitions*)

One Night Stand, on the other hand, is filled with single poems, or "one night stands"; they are, he says in the same letter to Blaser, "pointing nowhere, as meaningless as sex in a Turkish bath." Spicer's rejection of the early work should, however, be viewed with a measure of scepticism; this book is not mere juvenilia. In fact, according to Blaser (see his afterword to *The Collected Books*) Spicer "often gave his birthdate as 1945 or 1946"—the

starting point as well for these "one night stands." These poems, fragments of possible books ("the *Songs Against Apollo*, the *Gallery of Gorgeous Gods*, the *Drinking Songs*"), provide clues to the development of Spicer's poetics. We see, for example, Spicer's early interest in Orpheus ("Orpheus After Eurydice," "Orpheus in Hell," "Orpheus' Song to Apollo") which Duncan touches upon in the preface. We see also his preoccupations—with sexuality, mortality, language, God; his characteristic topoi—birds, ghosts, angels; his sensibility—a macabre humor, a fascination with baseball and "American" culture. Most important, we see his early struggle with the "outside" which was to dominate his later work.

Thus, while Spicer claims to have become *conscious* of the role of dictation in his poetry much later—to have recognized that poetry for him originated outside the poet and that the poet was more or less like the radio set in Cocteau's *Orphée*, a receiver of messages—the poems in *One Night Stand* act as the *subconscious* acknowledgement of that poetics. "It is as if we conjure the dead and they speak only / Through our own damned trumpets, through our damned medium," he says in "Imaginary Elegies." Here is a description of the condition of dictation, yet it is not until the 1965 Vancouver lectures (see *Caterpillar* 12) that Spicer credits Yeats with re-discovering the "outside" so essential to his own poetry. Spicer's jesting epigraph to "Imaginary Elegies"—"All the philosophy a man needs is in Berkeley—is taken from Yeats' *A Vision* (where Yeats discusses dictation), indicating that Spicer is familiar at least as early as 1950-1955 with the possibilities of dictation.

In order to conjure the dead, however, the poet himself must be *as if* dead. Read "A Heron for Mrs. Altrocchi" as an early recognition of this problem. Here Spicer identifies himself with the flightless heron:

> Blue-rooted heron standing in the lake
> Standing in unguessed song; like me no traveler.
> Taking unsinging rest, loose-winged water-bird,
> And dumb with music like the lake is dumb.

Feeling trapped in his own body ("We find the body difficult to speak") and in his own consciousness, Spicer sees in the metaphoric condition of death the possibility of true poetry:

> Then let us die, for death alone is motion,

And death alone can make these herons fly.
Though stiff and wingless, we will cross an ocean
On throats too huge for silence when he die.

The metaphoric condition of death occurs when the poet can clear away the purely subjective, what he calls in *After Lorca* the "big lie of the personal," and it is this condition that allows him to correspond with other dead poets (Lorca, Rimbaud) through the dead letter office of poetry. What we see in *One Night Stand* is the desire to get out of oneself, which links both sexuality and mortality in the struggle with language.

Thematically and poetically the struggle with the outside coalesces in the several poems concerning Jacob and the angel. As a topos in Spicer's poetry, this Biblical story represents an archetypal homosexual one night stand. In "A Poem to the Reader of the Poem," Jack/Jacob struggles with an angel/lover who, *mutatis mutandis*, becomes a Baudelairean "hypocrite reader." At the same time, the poem struggles with its own language, continually questioning itself, its motives, its meanings:

I throw a naked eagle in your throat.
I dreamed last night
That I was wrestling with you on the mountainside.
An eagle had a dream over our heads.
We threw rocks at him.
I dreamed last night—
This is false in any poem
Last night never happened
Couldn't
Make you feel the meaning so quickly

Spicer does not merely describe the struggle; he presents it in a battle of words. He throws a "naked eagle," he dreams that he was wrestling, he throws rocks at the eagle, and then he rejects the dream in poetry, he rejects last night, and he disavows any ability to "make you feel the meaning so quickly." Yet somehow in the struggle to make sense, he does make us feel the meaning. Perhaps this is what dreams are for.

This wrestling is caused by the gap between the writer as ego and the words he uses, the poet and the outside. Spicer locates the origin of this gap in the parable of Babel:

God didn't

Divide us into different languages
He divided
Words and men.
Men and words—He called the words angels.

("Babel 3")

To pretend that this gap can be bridged is idealism, false to Spicer's sense of the world. Thus, rather than attempt to heal the gap, Spicer engages in the battle with a language so energized, so confrontational, that the ghosts of poetry are brought to life. Spicer's need to so wrestle with the angel of language dominates his later poetics of dictation and translation, but in *One Night Stand* he prepares the battleground. Like all one night stands, some poems run the risk of casuality or glibness, but taken as a whole, they provide us with an essential foundation for the later work. △

Nigredo: Selected Poems 1970-1980. NORMAN WEINSTEIN. Station Hill Press. 1982.

by DIANE WAKOSKI

It is fashionable in this time of new poetry and old criticism to use words like "original" to describe the work of poets so hackneyed in the lyric tradition that using the word is farcical, or to reserve it for old (often dead) poets whom no one has liked but grudgingly are given some laurels. Probably this reality is what has given rise to Robert Duncan, surely one of our most gifted living poets, to publicly stating that all of his poetry is derivative, or for poets like Frank O'Hara in his essay, "Personism: A Manifesto," to claim that they are destroying or abolishing poetry.

What, of course, we all want is a new voice with old resonances, but the only means we have found for recognizing that new voice is studying very old ones, a process that rips off most students along the way, as they settle down to love Catullus, or Milton, or Dante, Yeats or Dickinson, and never emerge into a world beyond those figures and their beautiful old voices. I,

myself, am constantly impressed with the impossibility of a young student having anything like an original voice. Original would probably mean I don't understand him or her, or they sound like someone currently out of fashion, like Dylan Thomas or Tennyson. Ever since Ed Dorn, a poet who, 15 years ago, seemed to me to be a pale imitation of Robert Creeley, despite his avowed discipleship to Olson, came out of his cocoon of short pseudo-Creeley lyrics and wrote one of the most original long narrative poems of our time, *Gunslinger*, I have had to forget my precepts for originality with regard to young poets, and try to look at their work differently. This is not easy for me, as I have been a maverick all my life, and wanted nothing except distinction, both in myself and anything I touched. Still, Duncan's claim has had me thinking for the past 10 years, and *Gunslinger* is a constant reminder of the limitations of judging too soon.

All this preamble is to say how impressed I have been with Norman Weinstein's book of poems, particularly in light of my sense of his work 10 years ago, my thinking that it was a pale imitation of my own, Robert Kelly's, perhaps Creeley's poetry. Probably many others. He could fill you in, for surely we all do learn our craft, if not our art, from other poets. And I do still see one stamp left on the poems of *Nigredo*, particularly "The Dead Child," "The Secret Life of Sidney Bechet," or "The History of Voodoo." It is the stamp of Clayton Eshleman and his deeply unique spiraled, convoluted mesh of language modes from the slangy to the lyric. In this sense, Weinstein is derivative, as Duncan claims to be, for Duncan's statement is almost an arrogant announcement that his voice is so special that no one could mistake it, yet he himself *knows* all the sources from which it comes.

In the poems in this collection, Weinstein is writing a wonderfully special Weinsteinian poetry. It is his. But the channel through which some of it must have flowed is Eshleman. That peculiar combination of self-searching through therapy, through memory, through philosophy and literature, and finally through love is Eshleman's, but Weinstein has made a personal version of it.

In "Meshes:3", he says:

> somewhere in a gray Philadelphia
> afternoon as you
> skim this page

a neon sign with the word: W E I N S T E I N
flickers
off/on in roughly
pulse rhythm

(p. 12)

The poem continues, describing the hardware store sign with a neon hammer pounding a nail and concludes,

tribal history

fate

first

illumination

(p. 12)

This is the theme of Weinstein's poems and his self searching, through a difficult family which yielded very confusing images of both father and mother, male and female. Weinstein meanders through his memories of painful encounters, relieving them occasionally with fantastic surreal images, as in the Spanish Fandango poems which, in rich Eshleman style, is no reference to Castillian matters, but rather to an old recording heard on a jukebox by Bob Wills & The Texas Playboys of a rockabilly song called "Spanish Fandango."

I see in Weinstein's poems a quality beyond originality: I see him using the materials of his culture, his time, his personal history, and a need to relate this to the outer world of the 20th century. Perhaps what he is doing in writing the poems in *Nigredo* is what all good American poets are doing right now. But he is doing it in the voice of Norman Weinstein, giving us the peculiar and intriguingly personal world of his origins and personality. His poems are like the neon hammer driving in the neon nail, flickering, pushing the nail down, raising itself again in lights, over and over, and I get the message, "Weinstein, Weinstein, Weinstein," in such a way that I want to go there; I trust his merchandise; I like his store; I will buy what he is selling and believe it is of the best quality.

This first collection of Norman Weinstein's poems is substantial, inter-

esting, one that represents the best of the new poetry being written today in this country. △

Spiritual Exercises. ROBERT KELLY.
Black Sparrow. 1981.

by JED RASULA

Kelly's stature, like Whitman's, is characteristically American in proportion to the embarrassment with which he is received. The work is vast, his 'readers' have not really read him, and his own often contradictory impulses cast him as a chameleon in an arena where pure bulk is not a simple substance but another arcanum. *The Loom* and at least half a dozen other long poems are indispensible contemporary works. Kelly's collections swarm with lyric glitter more substantial than whole seasons of trade publishing. But where will you find a single balanced estimate of his place and worth?

Spiritual Exercises irreparably complicates the issue by radically altering the look of Kelly's work. The return in *Kill the Messenger* (1979) to what can only be called adolescent lyrical yearning is here raised to the level of the eucharist, as if honesty and simplicity could be attained by a formula. A dozen of the poems beg the reader's attention by going on too long; another dozen and a half are maudlin, self-serving, and abuses of the art. Yet even here, in Kelly's least inspired book (most generous in dross, ample in waste), there are poems that so fluently radiate the contours of the lyric that one must admit Kelly is at the moment our most exemplary lyrical master. The book's two long poems in themselves make *Spiritual Exercises* essential: "Sentence" marking vital syntactic explorations, while "The Emptying" is the single most adroit recitative of Kelly's lifelong themes (from "The Exchanges" on) and easily one of his most accomplished poems.

"The Exchanges" and many other high points (and long poems) of Kelly's twenty years' production is fortunately now available in *The Alchemist to Mercury* (North Atlantic Books). Readers dissatisfied with or

unsympathetic to Kelly's current work can at least catch up with part of his sprawling and long out-of-print opus. By some oversight, Black Sparrow does not cite *The Alchemist to Mercury* in its list of the author's titles (even though it preceded *Spiritual Exercises* by almost a year), forcing Kelly's readers, as throughout his career, to be lucky simply in order to get to the basics. One can only hope his next collection, *Under Words*, will show some signs of reckoning; otherwise, Kelly's current work endangers the integrity of one of our most vital bodies of poetry. △

The Dice Cup: Selected Prose Poems. MAX JACOB. Edited by Michael Brownstein. Sun Books. 1979.

by MARJORIE PERLOFF

> *—I met Max Jacob. Fernande and he were very funny together. They felt themselves to be a courtly couple of the first empire, he being le vieux marquis and kissing her hand and paying compliments and she the Empress Josephine receiving them. It was a caricature but a rather wonderful one.*
>
> —GERTRUDE STEIN, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas

> *—Max Jacob does discover everybody before anybody does that is quite certain. Everybody comes to him he is always there and so they always see him.*
>
> —GERTRUDE STEIN, Everybody's Autobiography

The "rather wonderful" caricaturist who could entertain Picasso's mistress, the "ami de la maison" who was "always there" and "discovered everybody" is likely to be the only Max Jacob known to most American readers.

Apollinaire, Reverdy, Cendrars—these contemporaries of Jacob have long been available in New Directions editions as well as in expensive bilingual texts published by university presses (witness the recent scholarly edition of *Calligrammes* by California). But Jacob has been curiously neglected by American critics, if not by the poets of our own avant-garde: six of the latter—John Ashbery, David Ball, Michael Brownstein, Ron Padgett, Zack Rogow, and Bill Zavatsky—have now collaborated on an edition of *Le Cornet à dés* (*The Dice Cup*), bringing together for the first time in English a large selection of the prose poems contained in the 1917 text. Anyone interested in what is happening in poetry and poetics today will be grateful to Sun Press and to Michael Brownstein for editing this book.

Why has Jacob received so little attention in America? His hermeticism is often cited as a reason, but surely *Le Cornet à dés* is no more difficult than, say, Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés," now a fashionable seminar text. No, I think that Jacob stands somewhere outside the canon, despite his close association with Picasso and Apollinaire, because of his anti-lyrical stance, his preference for a poetry of wit and intellect to one of emotion recollected in tranquility. Perhaps Romanticism, ever more "belated" and trivialized, has had to run its course before we could appreciate the tough-mindedness of a poem like the following:

Mutuel Mépris des Castes

Pas ailleurs que chez ce dompteur de bêtes! dans l'antichambre pleine de boîtes à chaussures en carton, lui-même parut out plutôt ce fut son propre portrait par Van Dongen: un costume à carreaux noirs et blancs dont les cuirs étaient d'un brun doré. Son oeil mal indiqué était gros et ses cheveux pendaient comme des ailes de *chocarneau* (c'est un oiseau au plumage frisé). Le dompteur m'offrit du tabac et me recommanda à sa femme, une blonde effacée. "Vous n'êtes jamais entré dans une cage?—Si, comme bête!" me dit-elle. Je ne compris pas; elle m'expliqua qu'ils louaient un grand appartement meublé dans chaque ville pour pouvoir dépenser les cinq cents francs qu'ils gagnent quotidiennement: "Nous n'avons rien à nous, rien! regardez! ces chaussures, quelques livres et voilà! c'est pourquoi nous ne vous retiendrons pas à dîner." Le dompteur de bêtes fauves revint et fut surpris de ma présence. Je crois qu'il était aussi dentiste pour animaux.

—*Le Cornet à dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 141

> Where else but in the animal tamer's house! In the ante-room full of cardboard shoe-boxes, he himself appeared or rather it was his own portrait by Van Dongen: black-and-white checked suit whose leather parts were a golden brown. His poorly drawn eye was big and his hair hung down like the wings of the *chocarneau* (a bird with curly plumage). He offered me some tobacco and commended me to his wife, a mousy blonde. "You have never been inside a cage?" "Yes, as an animal!" she said. I didn't understand; she explained that they rented a large furnished apartment in each city so as to be able to spend the five hundred francs they earned every day: "We have nothing of our own, nothing! Look—those shoes, a few books, and that's it! That's why we can't invite you to stay for dinner." The animal tamer returned and was surprised to see me there. I think he was also an animal dentist.
>
> —translated by John Ashbery, p. 58

Here the layers of parody are very complex. The kernel of the text is a classic La Fontaine beast fable, meant to teach us some sort of moral lesson about snobbery and class-consciousness. But the fable is wittily inverted: here the animal and the animal-tamer are one and the same, with the further comic twist that the animal the tamer resembles, far from being a "fauve" (Ashbery's translation does not give us the force of "Le dompteur de bêtes fauves") is the foolish "*chocarneau* (a bird with curly plumage)." In this context, the narrator's question to the animal tamer's wife, "You have never been inside a cage?" and her response, "Yes, as an animal" seems wholly reasonable. Ashbery's epithet "mousy blonde"—the original has the more neutral "une blonde effacée"—playfully contributes to the beast fable.

But Jacob is not saying anything as trite as that human beings are really animals. For, as the narrative makes clear, human beings are indefinable in the first place. The animal-tamer is not a person at all; he is "his own portrait by Van Dongen," a carelessly constructed painting (like all Fauve paintings, Jacob implies) in which the "black-and-white checked suit" has "leather parts" and the single eye seen in profile is "poorly drawn." Indeed, the whole text is a satiric portrait of the Fauve artist, whose pretensions to savage grandeur are beautifully deflated in the final image of the animal tamer as "also an animal dentist." The Fauves have, in other words, taken the bite out of art.

But again, Jacob's little fable is not just an attack on what were, from his

Cubist perspective, a group of rival painters. Beyond the local satire, we find a serious examination of the vanity of human wishes, the bourgeois desire to have something to show for one's earnings ("a large furnished apartment in each city" with its "ante-room full of cardboard shoe-boxes"), a desire bound to be rebuffed: "We have nothing of our own, nothing. Look—those shoes, a few books, and that's it. That's why we can't invite you to stay for dinner." Ultimately, then, this *is* a fable and it does have the moral announced in the title: the mutual contempt of the castes is the rivalry between Fauves and Cubists (Jacob himself), the bourgeois (animal tamer) and the artist (the man who can't be invited to dinner). From this perspective, we can now understand the first sentence: "Where else but in the animal tamer's house"—a house which is really a cage with the tamer and his wife inside it—would one learn this lesson? And what would it mean to dine with an animal dentist?

To say, as have various commentators, that a prose poem like this one is "dislocated" or "surrealist" or engages in "complex word play" does not really tell us very much. Jacob's dream narratives superficially resemble Rimbaud's ("War," for example, contains echoes of "Parade" with its "drôles très solides"), but their real affinity is less with Rimbaud or the Surrealists (or, for that matter, with the Cubist painters) than with an exact contemporary whose work Jacob could not have known at the time he wrote the poems collected in *The Dice Cup* (1903-1910) but whose role as Jewish outsider and victim curiously parallels his own. I am thinking of course of Kafka: here is "The Aunt, the Tart, and the Hat" ("La Tante, la tarte, et le chapeau") in Ashbery's translation:

> When I was a business employee I shared a small three-room apartment with a colleague. We didn't quarrel, because we were always very tired, but we spent a great deal of time identifying various pieces of clothing: a pair of trousers had been left in the living room: its ownership was established. One day at the shop an event occurred: my friend had had part of his beard shaved off. That same day he was supposed to carry a package to a district where I had to go on an errand. I took the package not without having reflected a long time. There was a great deal of talk about which metro line I ought to take and the question of the three pennies was an agitated one. That very evening at the shop, my friend invited us to lunch at his aunt's. The aunt was a former actress, almost very old, very tightly laced in her corset and who, once a year,

> made herself a little hat in the form of a tart which she rushed to put on when she was asked to sing. She sang the repertory of Thérésa. As a joke, we were served a tart in the form of a little hat. At table, there were two lovers: "I know all about that," said the old lady, "but you, my pretty child, do you realize what you are exposing yourself to?" The pretty child was at least forty years old. She replied that she had a grown son and a grown daughter and that she liked young men. (p. 55)

Here, as in Kafka, the plot line seems at first perfectly orderly and sensible: this happened, and then this, and then something else. "When I was a business employee I shared a small three-room apartment with a colleague." What could be more straightforward and simple? Throughout the text, Jacob provides a great deal of specification: "One day at the shop an event occurred," "That same day," "the three pennies," "That very evening at the shop," "At table, there were two lovers," and so on. But the temporal and spatial expectations set up by these phrases are never met for the events that unfold are seemingly quite unrelated. The establishment of ownership of "various pieces of clothing," for example, has no connection to the shaving off of the beard. The shaving incident, moreover (is the "friend" in question the same person as the "colleague" or not?) seems to have nothing to do with the errand to the outlying district, the carrying of the package, and the question which metro line to take. We only know that somehow it leads to the invitation to lunch by the friend's aunt who makes hats in the forms of tarts and viceversa. (The punning on *tarte* and *tante* is, of course, lost in the English but the near-rhyme of "aunt"/"tart"/"hat" is a respectable substitute.)

The *dejeuner* itself is absurd. The pretty child (a "belle enfant" of "at least forty") whom the aunt warns of indecent exposure and who responds that "she had a grown son and a grown daughter and that she liked young men," may be referring to the narrator and his colleague (are they the "two lovers" at the table?) or to someone else. We have, in any case, a seemingly "normal" anecdote transformed into what Ashbery himself has called "an open field of narrative possibilities." For we can invent all sorts of stories that "fit" this particular frame. First, there is clearly some reference to a homosexual love affair. But then, who are the three men referred to in the phrase "My friend invited us to lunch at his aunt's"? Again, there is some sort of satire directed against no-longer-young bourgeois ladies with particular pre-

tensions, here summed up in the tart-hat identification and the *tante-tarte* identity, with its pun on *tart*. Indeed, identity is in question throughout the poem for it is never clear who's who and what the relationships between the various characters signify. The characters are, moreover, nameless and faceless: the aunt, the pretty child, my friend, my colleague, us, them. The poem thus questions, as do so many of Jacob's texts, the very meaning of identity as well as the "normalcy" of everyday life, the work and eating rituals of bourgeois family culture, the value of reasoned action ("I took the package not without having reflected a long time").

The mode of "The Aunt, the Tart, and the Hat" thus looks ahead to some of Ashbery's own narrative poems (for example, "The Wrong Kind of Insurance"), as well as to the Zen stories in John Cage's *Silence* or the comic anecdotes that weave in and out of David Antin's talk pieces. In such texts, the individual clause or sentence is usually perfectly intelligible but the sentences fail to add up, their absurd conjunctions pointing toward the confusion between illusion and reality, between the attempt to set down what happened and the actual ways in which poetic creation takes place.

No translation can, of course, do justice to Jacob's poetic language, which relies heavily on punning and sound play. Bill Zavatsky valiantly renders the famous epigram from "Le Coq et la perle":

> Comme un bateau est le poète âgé
> ainsi qu'un dahlia, le poème étagé
> Dahlia! Dahlia! que Dalila lia (*Cornet*, p. 65)

as

> Like a ship is the agéd poet
> Like a dahlia, the terraced poem
> Dahlia! Dahlia tied by Delilah! (p. 38)

Here the last line is a fair facsimile of the original, but Jacob's sly reference to Rimbaud's "Bateau ivre" involves a play on "*poète âge*"—"*étagé*" which is wholly lost in the translation. Again, consider what happens to "Le brazero, zéro!":

> Le brazero, zéro! il s'exaspère de n'être pas un triangle muni d'ailes noires. Il se mord la queue, il est traversé de rails bleus qui se rallient, le raient et le raillent. (*Cornet*, p. 69)

Zavatksy renders this:

> The brazier, zero! it's exasperated at not being a triangle fitted with black wings. It bites its own tail, it's crisscrossed with blue rails that rail, raze, and roil at it. (p. 41)

The design is to preserve Jacob's alliteration and onomatopoeia but the effect is somewhat self-conscious because "rail, raze, and roil" does not recreate Jacob's comic use of three words that sound almost identical but mean entirely different things: "*se rallient*" ("rally"), "*raient*" (part, as in to part one's hair), and "*raillent*" ("mock" or "make fun of").

In some cases, the translator's task is made virtually impossible. Here is a third fragment from "Le Coq et la perle":

> Cet Allemand était fou d'art, de foulards et de poulardes. Dans son pays, la reine-Claude est peintre sur les foulards; à table, on en sait aussi rôdent autour des poulardes. (*Cornet*, p. 74)

Zavatsky writes:

> This German was mad about art, silk scarves, and big fat hens. In his homeland, the Queen Claudia plum is painted on the silk scarves; at table, we also know who prowls around the big fat hens. (p. 44)

Here "*fou d'art*"—"*foularde*"—"*poularde*" function as what Raymond Roussel called "rimes de faits," that is, rhymes for events in the sense that sound itself controls the direction of the narrative. The English rendition—"mad about art"—"silk scarves"—"big fat hens"—is not likely to help the reader understand Jacob's complex phonemic play.

On the whole, however, the poet-translators succeed in capturing Jacob's peculiarly mordant tone, especially in the case of the longer narrative pieces. *The Dice Cup* provides us with a good selection from *Le Cornet à dés* but includes less than half of its prose poems. Let us hope that Brownstein and his collaborators will decide to do the entire 1917 text as well as a selection from Jacob's verse poems, especially *Saint Matorel* (1911). Surely there would be today an enthusiastic audience for a poet who declares, with such curiously postmodern inflections:

> When one paints a picture, it changes completely with each touch, it turns like a cylinder and is almost endless. When it stops turning, that's

> because it's finished. My last one showed a tower of Babel in lighted candles. (p. 31)

A tower of Babel in lighted candles. The process of creation, in other words, can never produce "finish" or stasis. The gap between conception and achievement remains open; its mysteries provide us with continuing delight. △

The Bibliophile Jacob and the Spanish Forger

by NORMAN KLEIN

The Bibliophile Jacob (Paul Lacroix) devoted his life to being a connoisseur of Romantic history. From 1826 to 1884, over a thousand books bore his name. As a young man, sporting an open shirt and byronic attitude, he influenced Hugo, Dumas, Nerval and Vigny. In middle age, often seen in monocle and morning coat, he presided over curators and rare book dealers, while director of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

For generations, he was frequently approached by Parisian savants for answers to research problems. The oracle of curious and perverse detail, he would draw back, and find the facts instantly. As an unquestioned authority, he had no need for reference books. His own books were the standard reference.

He was a popularizer of the medieval and the immoral, but always with good taste, in books on fifteenth century prostitution, Renaissance fashions (from codpieces to corsets), devil worship, rare bookbindings, arcane libraries, Moliere bibliography, lost cemetaries and the legend of the Wandering Jew.

What became of this monument of authenticity in the twentieth century, a particularly unreliable century for the authentic? In 1930, the director of the Morgan Library in New York discovered a forgery of the fifteenth century Spanish painter, Jorge Ingles. The forger (or team of forgers) was

never found; he had long since collected his money. Known simply as the Spanish Forger, he had also painted a remarkable triptych of Jean Fouquet, and at least 150 other master forgeries.

According to the International Herald Tribune (1979), the Spanish Forger's "chief compositional and thematic sources were five illustrated volumes on medieval and Renaissance life and culture written by (the Bibliophile Jacob) and published in Paris between 1869 and 1882. These books not only provided the forger with material, but by their popularity also created a market for his works."

The forger, like all art specialists of the day, knew that curators thumbed through books of the Bibliophile Jacob, to check on the authenticity of a painting. As the Bibliophile Jacob himself had often warned: "My work is dangerous in the hands of passionately gullible archeologues. . . . Even I, in six generations, could not scientifically verify a fact, even halfway. . . . If someone bets that I am never party to a hoax, bet against him."

The Bibliophile Jacob would certainly have been fascinated by these forgeries. He might have cranked out a book on Greek and Roman thieves, or a few prefaces on art hoaxes. Like Romantics of his generation, impressed by ruined abbeys in the moonlight and guilds of thieves, he admired the criminal act. In 1828, along with many other young literary men of Paris, he had sat at the feet of the master criminal Lacenaire, and may have visited his prison cell, along with Victor Hugo.

He saw all information as a sort of hoax, and was not, in the end, a very careful researcher. He was more a presence in Parisian society than a scholarly monument. "Over the silent witnesses," he wrote, "I am inventing the most exciting road to the present that I can." Δ

Keeping It Old: A Review of the New New American Poetry

by JEROME ROTHENBERG

As Donald Allen's anthology, *The New American Poetry*, marked the final emergence, circa 1960, of a major moment in American writing, its appearance in revised form (*The Postmoderns*, co-edited with George Butterick) feels, sadly, like that moment's end & its absorption into "literature." It is a hard thing for me to say: hard because I wasn't in that first version (& wanted to be) & because I am in the second; hard too because the negative response seems so obvious that it feels redundant to be voicing it here. I will, however, put the best face on it & assume that the occasion may have this much in common with that of *The New American Poetry*—to allow us to take stock of where we are & where we've been, as a way of returning to an openness that may allow us—again—to move ahead.

I make anthologies—at least I hope I do—out of a deep suspicion of anthologies. That is to say, I'm aware of real distinctions, even conflicts, in the genre—loosely speaking, between the "bad ones" & the "good ones" or, more exactly, between anthologies that perpetuate an established view of poetry & those rarer ones that function, like good poetry itself, to break new ground & thereby to change our set ideas of language & reality. Anthology packages, like those published by Norton & largely designed for classroom use, are the most notorious examples of the first kind; but I would also include certain collections of "new poets" (without any commitment to a new poetics or a new poetry) as less obvious but possibly more damaging ones. The contrast, in that last instance, would be between Allen's "new American *poetry*" & an anthology, from a few years before it, of the "new *poets* of England & America." That there might be a similar contrast between *The New American Poetry* & *The Postmoderns* is an irony it will be hard to get away from.

The first anthology so positioned as to (profoundly) influence my own generation of poets was Robert Motherwell's *The Dada Painters& Poets*—a gathering of images & manifestos that revealed a movement from the near past that had until then been kept from us. *The New American Poetry* was the other great example, closing out the 1950s—&, once I got really interested in the possibility of all that, I could look back to Zukofsky's

"Objectivists" Anthology of 1932 & Pound's spottier *Active Anthology* of a few years before that, among a handful of others. In the 1960s and early 1970s (a great decade for anthologies, partly spurred on by Allen's effort), I felt myself particularly instructed by LaMonte Young's simply named *An Anthology* (a collection of immediately contemporary Fluxus works) & by Emmett Williams' several shots at anthologizing concrete poetry. Closer to home—& specifically attempts to keep the "new American poetry" impulse going—were Clayton Eshleman's *A Caterpillar Anthology* (a work of poetics as well as poetry) & Robert Kelly's *A Controversy of Poets*, which unfortunately focused on individuals (hence: reputations) & was muddied by co-editorship with the very differently biased Paris Leary (hence: the "controversy" of the title). Richard Kostelanetz's spew of anthologies presented examples of experimental poetry in a generally useful if unselective way—as did George Quasha's *Open Poetry*, in which the several guest-edited & trendy-seeming sections were of unequal interest & importance. My own efforts, from *Technicians of the Sacred* on, followed a different approach to present & future work—by contexting it beside a revision of our views of the past & the culturally different. In addition, there continued to be anthologies built around specific poetic and extrapoetic occasions (Allen DeLoach's *The East Side Scene*, the various attempts to anthologize the New York School, and numerous anthologies of minority and women writers that fluctuated between affirmative action & meaningful questions of cultural context), along with generational anthologies (by outsiders to the generation like Paul Carroll or insiders to it like Michael Lally) in which issues of poetics seemed secondary to the process of spotting & predicting reputations.

This mountain of anthologies—& I have, believe me, only just scratched its surface—is itself a signpost of the changed landscape in which the new *New American Poetry* appears. The lack in 1960 of a genuinely experimental anthology designed, in Pound's now famous words, to "make it new," was crucial to the original book's impact, its long & dominating presence. The period covered was the preceding fifteen years, & the book's truthfully arrogant assertion was that a significant & transformative movement had arisen during that time that had never before been gathered & anthologized. The common characteristic of this "new American poetry," the editor then told us, was "a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse"—or, more positively put, that it "had built on the achieve-

ments of" Pound & Williams "and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem."

The changes & the problems in *The Postmoderns* begin with the title itself, presented on the cover in bright, open, empty letters: a fashionable going term of the 1980s & one that would have been unlikely twenty years before. (Never mind that the editors try to make Olson's early use of it—however casual—a means of justification, when in a direct sense it was more apt then to have been used by a Randall Jarrell or a Delmore Schwartz.) What we have here, at best, is an attempt to co-opt a new academic favorite—to win points with a claim that the poets in this book (largely unchanged from the 1960 version) are the long-sought, true "postmoderns." If so (& the claim seems hardly to matter outside the "academy"), there are some problems still to be overcome: that the term (Olson or no) didn't show up in *The New American Poetry* & that Allen, back then, identified the "new American poets" as the inheritors of the real & neglected *modernism* of Pound & Williams: "our avant-garde . . . the true continuers of the modern movement in American poetry . . . closely allied to modern jazz and abstract expressionist painting." (That Allen & Butterick now make "postmodern" sound like a term actually used by poets like Creeley, O'Hara, Ginsberg, Duncan, Snyder, & Baraka, obscures the indifference or disdain that most have felt for it.)

I am not quibbling here, unless all our history should prove a quibble. The term "postmodern" is critic-based & it is ultimately dull & empty. It robs us, unless revised & freed from its academic usage, of a sharp sense of lineage—as in the present case, where Butterick & Allen drift from Allen's re-claiming of a direct descent from Pound & Williams, et al., to the myth of an intervening middle-ground "modernism" identified with "younger successors such as Berryman and Lowell, Bishop and Sexton." On one of their accompanying lists of the defining modern poets, Williams is somehow dropped, Auden is somehow added, & Stein, for one, is still excluded—an omission significant for the limits of this book, as it was for the original.

The other changes—of format & personnel—are the more substantial limits. I will discuss them as they involve strategies of anthologizing rather than taste & selection, though I will end up touching on the latter as well. There is no doubt that Allen & Butterick were up against a sticky proposition, & I hope that nothing I say ignores the difficulties involved. Some of

these they treat in their Preface, & that (along with my own experience with anthologies) is as good a place as any to begin.

There is an unmistakeable sadness about the new Preface—a feeling on the editors' part that it would be hopeless to "attempt to recapture or repeat the pioneering effort of the initial edition." Instead they set out "to consolidate the gains of the previous anthology and confirm its predictions." While this may sound modest, it is in fact an act of self-confirmation that demands, in terms of the poetics, an overriding commitment to the dominant modes of the original—projectivist, beat, New York school, etc.—& to the earlier omissions of what was even then possible: concrete, soundtext, intermedia, chance operations, among other "new conceptions of the poem."

The problem here is obvious. The more the new conceptions are suppressed and the editors become fixed in their idea of an avant-garde, the more the matter of prediction focuses on reputations: which poets have "endured" & "have achieved a certain recognition" & which have not. This is the canon-making mind at work again (not Bloomian here but at the service of the "avant-garde"), & while it may be unavoidable to some degree, it becomes intrusive where that other sense—of an evolving & open poetics—fails.

To handle the change of personnel, the editors do what editors have always done: they drop some poets, add some others, and beef up the work of the survivors with poems written in the intervening decades. Here the preface turns quantitative, & the net result (by my revised count) runs like this: of the forty-four poets in the original edition (a typo in the Preface makes it "thirty-four"), fifteen are dropped & twenty-nine retained, & this plus nine additions puts the new list at thirty-eight.* I will leave it to others to argue the literary specifics & statistical subtleties at work here. What stands out for me is that the original poets representing a period of fifteen years of American poetry (at most) outnumber those emerging in the following twenty years by a proportion of over three to one. (In terms of page count, more like five to one.) If you consider that four or five of the new poets were already

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*The nine new poets ("Jackson Mac Low, Jerome Rothenberg, Diane di Prima, Anselm Hollo, Joanne Kyger, Robert Kelly, James Koller, Ed Sanders, and Anne Waldman") are named in the Preface. The fifteen deletions, who aren't, include: Helen Adam, Ebbe Borregard, Bruce Boyd, Ray Bremser, James Broughton, Paul Carroll, Kirby Doyle, Richard Duerden, Edward Field, Madeline Gleason, Philip Lamantia, Edward Marshall, Peter Orlovsky, Stuart Z. Perkoff, & Gilbert Sorrentino.

active in the late 1950s & that none of them began writing after 1970 (twelve years ago!), the imbalance is overwhelming.

I'm not sure how much this reflects a "judgment" by the editors about the two periods involved—although in some sense in clearly does. The intention seems to be to deal with the full thirty-five years since World War II & to continue the earlier "rejection of all those qualities of academic verse," however much that rejection may have lost its former cutting edge. Yet the range of the poetry is much like that of the original, & here in fact may be the book's real flaw: its failure to recognize & move beyond the limits of the earlier edition. This enshrinement of the new in a few old hands seems almost to freeze the idea of newness, as if the editors were determined to keep it *old* or, even worse, *respectable.* (The book now has only one poet under forty—thus becomes a kind of generational anthology of the middle-aged.) But here the book blurs, as the old one rarely did, & the difficulty in getting a better vision of the work at hand runs up against two other changes—structural moves that break the play between poetry & discourse that made *The New American Poetry* a useful & germinal book to the time of its revision.

The first of these changes drops the old book's subdivisions—Black Mountain, San Francisco, Beat, New York School—& arranges the poets, neutrally & chronologically, by year of birth. While Allen & Butterick describe such categories as "geographical" & a matter of "convenience," they were clearly more than that: signals, for all their arbitrariness & lack of rigor, of differences between groups & individuals that made of the "new American poetry" something more than a single monolithic movement. The new arrangement, by contrast, implies that the work is more of a piece than previously claimed or, at the other extreme, that it must now be read on a case-by-case basis.

Neither view alone is accurate, but the former (the argument for homogeneity) gets the greater mileage—in the editors' contention, for example, that "those earlier designations, if they were ever more than terms of convenience, have been rendered obsolete and unnecessary by the poets' subsequent activities and associations." Here Allen & Butterick rightly recognize the great number of crossovers in recent years, which they then add to the argument for "postmodern" as the "more encompassing designation" that will cover it all. Along with that, if I read them rightly, comes more than a

hint that Olson is to be taken as an even greater force than heretofore acknowledged—both through his positioning as oldest & first poet in *The Postmoderns* (no longer bounded by the Black Mountain section) & through the presentation of his "projective verse" essay as the rallying & focal point for virtually all "the energies of the new poetry." If Olson's singular dominance is questionable for even some Black Mountain poets, it feels downright contrived in relation to the Beats, the New York School, & any number of poets from Mac Low to Spicer & on.

It is closure that I fear & closure that I sense here. And the second change I spoke of—the elimination of the poets' statements on poetics, which made up a separate section of the original—only feeds that sense. In Olson's case, say, we no longer have his "Projective Verse" to look at, directly & in justaposition, even conflict, with a range of alternative poetics; & we no longer have that clash of concepts that made the old book so exciting & gave the poems themselves a larger context. The result is to rob the book of its manifesto quality—the assertion of the poets' right to context their own works & lives—on a scale not seen since the Dadaists published twenty-four manifestos in *Littérature* & performed them as a simultaneity on a stage in Paris. That a "fair sampling" is given in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, edited by Allen with Warren Tallman, doesn't make up for their absence here—nor for the absence of related works from the 1960s & 70s that would have immeasurably "thickened the plot."

The poetics of the "new American poetry" (not the book now, but the event) has been, over its entire span, an evolving & multifaceted creation; and the brilliance of the Allen anthology was in the way that diversity was presented. In light of that, the key editorial decisions—to omit the poetics & the sectioning—are, along with the reluctance to open the field further, a blunder & a distortion. The result is a uniformity of presentation—relieved only by the diversity from poem to poem—that now runs through the entire book. Poets appear where birth has placed them. Biographical statements (often quirky & extended in the original) take on a standard length & often, though still written largely by the poets, a standard tone.* And all such

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*A striking example: Jack Spicer's cranky short note of 1960—beginning "does not like his life written down"—is replaced, posthumously, by a couple of informative paragraphs that completely reverse his intention.

statements now end with uniformly structured bibliographies so full of out-of-print material that they could only have been designed as research tools (the stock-in-trade of the academy) rather than guides to ordinary human commerce. While the book may still be what Pound called "a ball of light in one's hands," that light comes, as with most anthologies, wholly & randomly through the poems themselves.

In saying all of this, I realize (better than most) the difficulties Allen & Butterick were facing. The revision in a single volume was probably an impossible task, & I suspect that the editors started out with different intentions & were deflected by the economics of publishing & its attendant roadblocks. Maybe the revision as such should never have happened, or maybe the limits of the task could have been more clearly stated. But once into it, the editors should have tried, by every means available, to tie the new edition to alternative poetic strategies &, by the arrangement of poems or by the use of poets' comments, to bring the differences to surface. By which I mean—to be specific—that a Jackson Mac Low without his poetics & represented by two token poems in someone else's contexts is a poet weakened in his power to transform. And so on for the rest.

Let me now, so as to take some risks myself, fill in the matter of poets & movements missing from *The New American Poetry Revised*—not to rewrite Allen's & Butterick's book for them but to sketch the poetics of the situation as I understand it. This is the kind of thing, frankly, that Quasha was attempting to do in *Open Poetry* & that Quasha & I were attempting in *America a Prophecy*: to advance & broaden the work, which Allen & others had already done for us, of mapping the progress of a poetry that is both anti-"academic" (if that term still matters) & has "gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem." While stressing strategies over individuals, the following inclusions seem to me germinal to where we are at present, without which I can see no claim to an informed avant-garde, modernism, post-modernism, metamodernism, experimentalism, or any other name you want to give it:

> *Concrete & Visual Poetry.* More solidly advanced in Europe than the U.S. in the 1950s, but a real presence here since circa 1965. American precedents in cummings, Lindsay, Crosby, Patchen, & Pound-Fenollosa on the Chinese character: "a splendid flash of concrete poetry." The essential representative is Emmett Williams.

Fluxus, Intermedia, Chance Operations. Already underway by the late 1950s & present in La Monte Young's *An Anthology* (1963). A crucial link between the other arts & poetry—that kind of boundary crossing as another aspect of postmodernism. Mac Low for one, if properly presented, but also Cage, an active poet since the 1960s & an equal to Olson (his senior by two years) or Ginsberg in terms of influence & stance.

The New Performance Poetry. Work moving off the page in ways more experimental than the poetry reading as such. Its soundtext side as covered by Mac Low & Cage (above), another aspect in David Antin talk-poems, Giorno modified-voice experiments, etc.

The 2nd or 3rd Generation New York School. A widely influential departure from the O'Hara/Ashbery/Koch configuration in the NAP—with strong later connections to the old Beat poets. Represented in the revised edition by Anne Waldman & conceivably Ed Sanders. But the absence of the central figure of Ted Berrigan is hard to com prehend.

The New Black Poetry, Indian Poetry, Latino Poetry, etc. Not as a question of affirmative action but as a major poetry event of the last two decades & a spin-off in part from NAP ideas of American speech, jazz connections, reinterpretations of America, "speech-rhythm prosody" (A. Ginsberg), "your own voice . . . how you sound" (Baraka)—but Baraka/Jones remains, after all these years, the only "third world" poet in the book. No Henderson/Reed/Sanchez/Cruz included for their *language*; no Simon Ortiz to link up through his culture with the oldest powers of the continent.

The "Language" Poets. The most recent of the U.S. avant-garde movements & the most involved with the construction of a new poetics. While the question of origins is fluid, the theoretical writings emphasize connections with NAP & pre-NAP poets such as Stein, Williams, Zukofsky, Eigner, even Olson, as well as the older European avant-garde. A "senior" poet like Ron Silliman or Clark Coolidge could clearly represent this movement. [Silliman's anthology, "In the American Tree," already in the works.]

The Poem in Prose: The "New Sentence" (R. Silliman). A perusal of *The Postmoderns* shows only one short poem in prose, despite the pre-

> valence of this mode in much recent (i.e. postmodern) poetry. A different creature from the prose poem, it is already important in both Duncan & Creeley, say, [Structure of Rime, A Day Book], & back into Williams & Stein. Central to the practice of younger writers such as B. Mayer, C. Harryman, B. Einzig, & the form of choice among many of the "language" poets, its absence here is likely the result of too narrow a reading of projectivist poetics re the line & breath, etc.

And, finally, there is the matter of the individual poets passed over for whom a representative niche cannot easily be found. The temptation is to list a dozen such—in my own territory or outside it—who are the equals certainly of most of the poets included. "There are," say the editors of their own selections, "only thirty-eight poets out of the myriad," & with this one cannot argue. But the statement that follows—that *The Postmoderns* "does offer a sharpened focus to represent an era, and therein lies its usefulness and its hope"—remains, at the least, questionable. While we may have a better idea of where *some* of the original poets have gone, the focus—for the era as a whole—is not a sharpness but a blur.

. . . . . .

The summary would run like this.

Both Allen & Butterick are editors of integrity who have contributed much to the dissemination & understanding of aspects of the American avant-garde. In revising a classic like *The New American Poetry*, they had an opportunity to advance the work of the earlier book in ways that most of us can only dream of. Their decision, it seems to me, was to take the relatively easier way: by treating the "new American poetry" as an almost finished structure whose principal participants & forms had already been established by Allen. This is to freeze process or make it into history—& *The Postmoderns*, though "new," reads more like a work-of-the-past than does its unrevised predecessor even now. In place of the unsettled & unsettling quality of *The New American Poetry*, what we're given here is a more familiar gathering: an anthology geared to classroom use & newly titled & reordered to serve that altered function.

At the same time—unless Grove Press has a sense of values rare among

publishers—the original anthology will now go out of print. That one of course was the shaker & mover for a whole generation & more of new American poets, & maybe in its absence, a still newer generation will have a chance to reassess & take the next step forward. △

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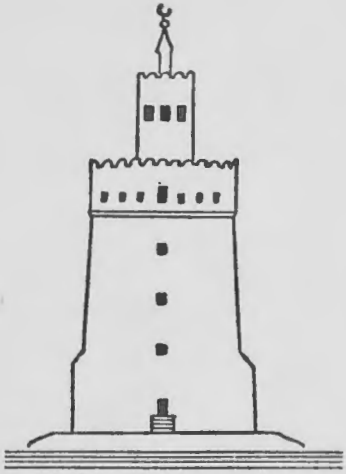

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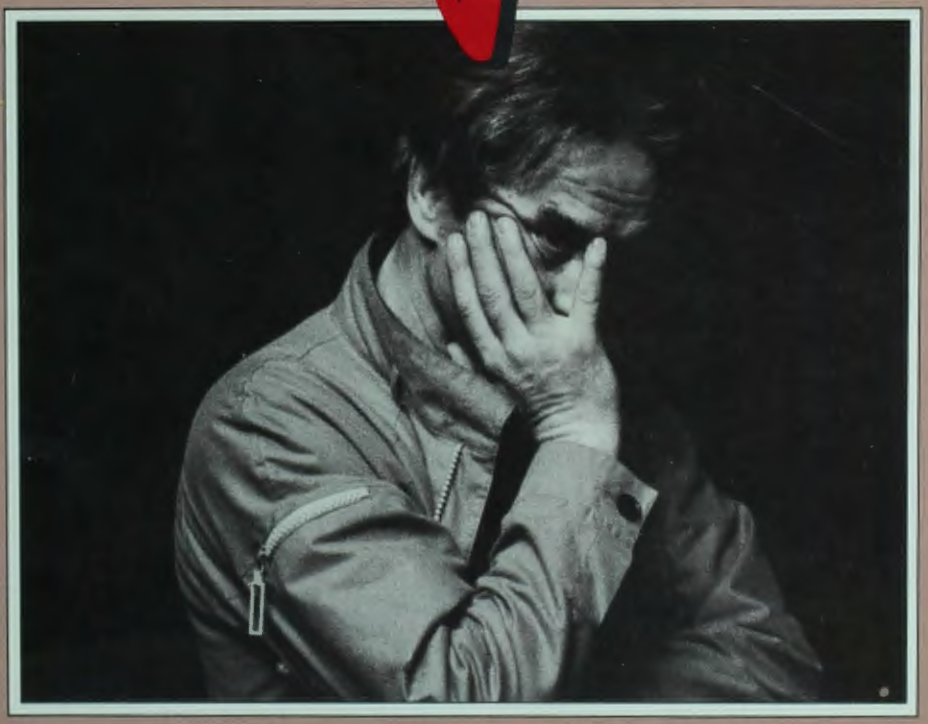

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Octavio Paz

Maithuna

Translated from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger

My eyes discover you
naked
and cover you
with a warm rain
of glances

.

A cage of sounds
open
to the morning
whiter
than your thighs
at night
your laughter
and even more your foliage
your blouse of the moon
as you leap from bed

Sifted light
the singing spiral
reels-in whiteness
Chiasm
X
planted in a chasm

.

My day
exploded
in your night
Your cry
leaps in pieces
Night
spreads
your body
washing under
your bodies
knot
Your body once again

.

Vertical hour
drought
spins its flashing wheels
Garden of knives
feast of deceit
Through these reverberations
you enter
unscathed
the river of my hands

.

Quicker than fever
you swim in the darkness
your shadow clearer
between caresses
your body blacker
You leap
to the bank of the improbable

toboggans of how when because yes
Your laughter burns your clothes
your laughter
wets my forehead my eyes my reasons
Your body burns your shadow
You swing on the trapeze of fear
the terrors of your childhood
watch me
from your cliffhanging eyes
wide-open
making love
at the cliff
Your body clearer
Your shadow blacker
You laugh over your ashes

•

Burgundy tongue of the flayed sun
tongue that licks your land of sleepless dunes
hair unpinned
tongue of whips
spoken tongues
unfastened on your back
enlaced
on your breasts
writing that writes you
with spurred letters
disowns you
with branded signs
dress that undresses you
writing that dresses you in riddles
writing in which I am buried
Hair unpinned
the great night swift over your body

jar of hot wine
spilled
on the tablets of the law
howling nude and silent cloud
cluster of snakes
cluster of grapes
trampled
by the cold soles of the moon
rain of hands leaves fingers wind
on your body
on my body on your body
Hair unpinned
foliage of the tree of bones
the tree of aerial roots that drink night from the sun
The tree of flesh The tree of death

•

Last night
in your bed
we were three:
the moon you & me

•

I open
the lips of your night
damp hollows
unborn
echoes:

whiteness
a rush
of unchained water

•

To sleep to sleep in you
or even better to wake
                to open my eyes
at your center
            black white black
white
      To be the unsleeping sun
your memory ignites
                (and
the memory of me in your memory

.

And again the sap skywise
rises
    (salvia your name
is flame)
        Sapling
crackling
        (rain
of blazing snow)
                My tongue
is there
        (Your rose
burns through the snow)
                is
now
    (I seal your sex)
                dawn
from danger drawn

△

Stokes Howell

Mother

ACCORDING TO THE PLUMBER something is plugging up the works. He's gone off to get some sort of a damn stick with a gadget on the end of it to run down in there. I asked him what happened to his brother. The last time both of them came. I lost my bud, he had a cancer, he said. My bud, he knew animals. One place we worked their mule was acting funny. My bud said, Get some salt meat grease, that mule's hurting. I came back with a bucket of grease. He took some and ran his hand up the shaft where that mule's dick was. He spread it around in there. In a minute the mule's dick came out. It was two feet long. The shaft had got full up with dirt blowing in there and he couldn't get his dick out to piss. When it came out it was covered with big scales of dry caked dirt. It was the awfullest thing you've ever seen.

I sympathized. I told him I lost my mother not too long ago. Her sarcophagus is on order. Copy of an ancient tomb, only two others in existence according to the ad. Scipio's if I'm not mistaken, in granite. His was rifled.

Mother used to visit me here on occasion. This scarecrow had a permanent residence in a sort of asylum for the aged and the infirm,

where her body and I presume her soul clawed on thanks to an annuity I provided, anonymously of course, to spare her pride, and to avoid in our relations anything that smacked of gratitude. It is a fact that people will literally cram themselves down your throat, if you let them, to show how terrifically grateful they are, until you gag on it and swear to keep to yourself in the future. But I'm satisfied she had no inkling of my little device, and that if she came to see me it was for her own benefit.

I too went to see her, one time, at the home. It was a cozy enough place to putrify in, convenient to the cemetery and the church not far either. Judging by her rate of disintegration I figured she was good for another decade at the most, barring new discoveries in medicine. Most of the roomers sat benignly in armchairs enjoying any of several near-comatose states, not always at the public expense. Outside Mother's door an old woman nearly tore the sleeve off my shirt and started shouting No no give it to me give it to me I'm thirsty I'm thirsty Joe Joe, and so on, right in my face, everything twice, little sutras to placate her phantoms, in an extraordinarily nasal voice.

Mother's roommate turned out to be a congenial old prune named Mrs. Leaf, one hundred and three years old, just one of an impressive number of veritable ancients on the roster. This flabby skeleton had sparkling eyes, no teeth, and was extremely pleasant, smiling and laughing for no reason at all. She obviously knew how to pass the time. For my part I engaged in lighthearted banter, mostly with myself. For Mother said very little, nothing in fact, being preoccupied with the operation of her fluorescent table lamp, a simple affair of a red button and a black button, one on, one off, neither of which she could bring herself to push, though she did execute several promising approaches to both only to retract at the last second. I stayed for lunch. The nurse, an obvious nymphomaniac, wheeled in a cart of trays set with food and brightly colored capsules. She immediately set upon Mrs. Leaf and did her best to spoon a goblet of beige liquid down her throat. Mrs. Leaf wasn't having any. The old battler wasn't

going to be browbeaten at this late stage of the game. Over the clatter of dishes and Mrs. Leaf's giggles came louder chanting from the hall: Come here come here the stove the stove Joe Joe Joe Joe Joe . . . . It grew fainter as the attendants wrestled her away. Mrs. Leaf soon passed out with a smile on her face, something in the water I suspect, and as Mother got terribly interested in the arrangement of the doilies on her bedside table I took off without further ado.

The place fit Mother like a glove. For some time all I had been able to wring out of her were disjointed statements and queries, chiefly of a religious nature. I know where she picked it up, I remember a lot of it myself. She seemed to be stuck on one particular song, a gloomy little tune from some miserable worm-eaten hymnal. The chorus ran "da di da fear the grave da di," just a little something to hum to yourself for consolation at the sad end of a sad day. For no telling how many consecutive years she and I sat through that sort of gloomy trash every Sunday, and I got my belly full of it. But it's funny how I remember those mute hours now with a twinge of bliss, ugh, but it's true. And that only goes to prove that practically anything dredged up from childhood, no matter how repulsive to the present day, knows how to array itself in dulcet hues. The hours I spent in the warm atmosphere of the sanctuary, the sun filtering through windows of ocher and squash, still innocent, still ignorant! I sat at Mother's side, eyes piously raised to a stained-glass representation of the hills, in this version curiously bare and stony but for a line of firs on the spine of the slopes, which my heretical imagination transformed into two stegosauri, hopeless Biblical impossibilities of course. But the hilly vista did not fail to provide the guaranteed help, as through its intercession I rode out the most seductive temptations, on the one hand to fall asleep, on the other to feast my eyes on the sumptuous figure of Mrs. Burcham in the choir loft, which no robe could disguise. Of course when the choir rose for the Doxology it was all over with me. The Lord himself would have faltered in the face of that heaving bosom as Mrs. Burcham conquered the upper reaches of

the scale. Incidentally I wasn't the only person so skewered. The deacon directly in front of us was shameless in his attentions to the soprano chair. And one obese elder in the rear regularly snored through the entire service, roused only by the benediction. His was a sonorous drone, with now and then a violent snort that woke whole rows from their daydreams. And sometimes, in contrast, his nose whistled like a tea kettle, when a hair or booger stuck in there sideways for minutes on end. And periodically his great bulk was the epicenter of a series of loud explosions, the product of unpleasant memories of troubled digestion. If the interval between snores seemed too great I began to think he might be dead, and I waited anxiously for the next breath to save him. It came, and I was free again to admire the little girl in a white sundress one pew over, or gaze at the light fixture in the ceiling whose pane was black with bugs roasted to death on the bulb.

It sounds like a frolic, but in reality I was under constant scrutiny. The slightest faux pas and I would be imprisoned in my room for the afternoon. But during Mother's senescence it was I who became the custodian. In pity I let her think she was in charge of the kitchen, a grave error as it turned out. She insisted on cooking for me. Her initial coddled eggs were a runny mess. The simplest things are the first to go I suppose. When I complained she nimbly reversed her field, boiling the eggs over a flame that would have served to char a steer, so that the yolks were overdone and tasted like chalk. Naturally she botched the coffee too, so that I wound up swilling down this time a thin brown fluid, and the next time having to suck hard to get down a black sludge the consistency of porridge. And speaking of porridge, the mess she made of the oatmeal makes me want to puke just thinking about it. Oh she made a big deal out of it, flourishing the pot and spoon and stirring and singing, just like she knew what was going on, but the results I found in my bowl spoke volumes of her talents, being either a sticky paste or a number of lumpy clods. And the way Mother herself ate, always drooling, I don't want to think about it, it made me sick.

Yet this same pathetic being in her better days had charge of me, her duty as she saw it to curb the excesses of my youth. One memorable spring I was in love, delirious and intoxicated beyond all reason, in hot pursuit of a girl from Sunday School. I was inflamed, the weather was balmy, and I spent a giddy Sunday afternoon of a church outing chasing after her, making a fool of myself. When the group went fishing I pointed out the best fishing spots in a loud voice, like an impressario, or someone of importance at any rate, then stood by triumphantly as fish after hapless fish was barbarously hooked and jerked out of the water, left to flap and suffocate in the choking weeds. I caught her eye and won her over. At dusk we sat side by side around the fire. The group was loud and cheerful, in a word far too much like a Sunday School outing, from which it is almost impossible to escape without notice. We ate weenies. The conversations went on, I have no doubt on the most trivial topics imaginable. Horses were mentioned. She said she adored them, so I seized on the pretext to lead her to the stables. On the way across a long dark lawn I put my arm around her waist. She reciprocated. This was encouraging, in fact I couldn't have done without it. In no time we were in the stables and going at it like professionals on a horse blanket. She had all the right parts, as near as I could make out, and perfect teeth. There wasn't much to it, a few grunts from her and some ill-conceived thrashing on my part. The mosquitoes were exceedingly fierce. A horse had its head over the stall watching us. She reached up and rubbed its face, something I never do, due to some terrifying experiences as a child. Well, Mother got wind of it. One of her lieutenants must have blabbed on us. She didn't get all the facts though, judging by the nature of her accusations. Or maybe she was too embarrassed to refer to the more repugnant details. She confined herself to the declaration of the following law, namely that she wouldn't have me running with sluts, risking infection and disease. And in this connection she brought up the edifying but seldom mentioned case of Uncle Bunn, an agronomist of some note who brought down great suffering upon

him and his, a judgment, she said, on his reckless youth. Bunn married and begat a child upon his wife. The child wasn't right. It was off-center. It died young and it was a good thing. Later Bunn himself went up the flume. In his dying delirium his agricultural visions were magnificent. He began sanely enough, with a reasoned discourse insisting that the idea that the Hessian fly attacks oats has absolutely no foundation in nature. And he plowed a fairly straight furrow with the sobering information that St. John's weed has the peculiarity of affecting only white-haired animals, though it will act just as lethally upon a red-haired animal with white hair around its nose or feet. But he began to lose his grip on the subject of the guinea pig, which he said could be eaten, though generally speaking they are not disposed of in this manner, and finally he signalled his approaching end by an aroused and obscene monologue on the properties of boar semen, a gelatinous material resembling tapioca.

My butterfly existence soon came to an end. I was sold into slavery to Mr. Tate, a dyspeptic storekeeper, in accordance with the theory, not altogether without merit, that hard work would keep me from mischief. And I performed ably for that butthole, up to a point, and at that point I was fired for a bit of mayhem involving his prize sow. In front of the store was a muddy depression in great favor with this enormous female. She generally lay there from morning to dusk, when the sirenic calls of Mr. Tate lured her to the trough several blocks away. At the first sound of his whoopings she would struggle from the wallow to her feet and with rapid little steps make her way home, a pilgrimage graven in the twilight since prehistoric times it seemed. This sow, Zella, was the esteemed mother of scores, including on one notable occasion (to the astonishment of Mr. Tate, who left the whelping room in disbelief only to return after a shot of whisky to verify what he had seen) a two-headed piglet that was sadly short-lived. One morning, before Zella showed up to man her station, I took it into my head to pour into her puddle a quantity of turpentine that did not exceed three quarts. Zella arrived, rooted

about distractedly, and with the naive trust of the domestic animal settled happily down into a perfect hell. Within seconds she began to grunt uncomfortably, then abruptly rose and ran off with considerable interest in search of relief. This galloping in itself was a serious matter, as Mr. Tate wouldn't appreciate the fat she ran off, nor the hazard to her limbs as she careered down the street. Yet more serious was the calamity of portly Mrs. Nelson, out for her morning constitutional, who was trampled flat when the tormented pig ran between her legs. Along with incalculable damage to her dignity she suffered a hairline fracture of the wrist. In a sense my dismissal was medicinal, a forfeit to salve the spiritual and physical wounds endured by Mrs. Nelson, who not coincidentally was a heavy consumer of the various female compounds sold at the store.

Bunn mad, Mother mad, it's a regular epidemic. Most of the time she didn't anymore know where she was than shit on a stick. Oh I don't doubt that occasionally some feeble light made its way upward from the bottom of the mess, taking the form perhaps of a little mental picture, or maybe just a feeling, vague dread for instance, that lasted the length of a shudder than vanished, another speck in the dust bin. She began to resurrect the dead, including her cat, who I am convinced by the way was an atheist, and station them on the sofa. It didn't bother me, I was used to it, but it tended to shake up the guests when she referred to them as her mother or father, or as both, turn and turn again. And if by a stroke of luck she got the person's name right, and even hit a streak where her first two or three statements made a little sense, by her fourth or fifth utterance something was bound to escape her lips that struck an anxious chord in the visitor's stomach, and by the sixth or seventh she was rattling off things so utterly mad that she had the thoroughly spooked guest smiling and nodding in assent while frantically casting about the room for his wrap, which I had cunningly lodged in an inaccessible closet at the back of the house. But they never had to squirm for long, because Mother would suddenly jump up and leave the room without so

much as a comma, thinking she was being paged in a railroad station, or being wheeled away to the delivery room to have a baby.

That she confused the living and the dead was no big deal, often the difference is so slight as to make this a very sound point of view. And her custom of wiping her rear end with the cotton bath towels wasn't an insuperable problem, I simply kept mine under lock and key and destroyed hers every month or so. But when her wits scattered like chaff, when objects, those boundary stones for the world of accredited reality, lost for her all intelligibility, so that she wore her panties on her head for a hat, mistook her bureau for the stove and reduced it to ashes, and dipped drinking water from the toilet bowl when she was thirsty, delights foresworn by the tiniest infant imbecile, given the proper training of course, well, it got to be an aggravation.

One day the home called. Your mother is loose, they said. She's bound to show up there by dark, they added. We'll be by to round her up. Fine, I said, all three times. I told my man Del to stand watch at the gate. He threw a fit. Said he'd get a job with the railroad. I didn't blame him, I'd just about had it with those jackasses myself. If they couldn't hold back a skinny demented old woman, though admittedly far from frail and fiercely determined, what good were they at all? They were lucky to get her in the first place. All things considered she had an ideal situation with her room above the cafe. A fat woman ran the place, keeping her father, my mother, and thirty cats upstairs. It's not imaginable, but I think Mother and the old man had some sort of a romance going on. The fires are not quenched even near the end it would seem. Anyway, Mother did the cooking (Good God!), the fat woman guarded the door with a mesh flyswatter, and her father tended counter. This old man had too much blood. The doctors pumped a pint a week out of him. In my opinion his condition was caused at least in part by his overweening hatred of mailmen, who always tore his magazines to shreds, after reading

them at the post office for a week or two of course. He paid taxes, their salaries in fact, supported their families, by God he practically owned the goddamned post office, and the treatment he got from those impudent piss-ants in return was a disgrace, and so on in this vein. But in general all was well in this little household. Then the fat woman and her boyfriend decamped, or eloped, at any rate left her father and Mother in the lurch. The shock shoved the old man over the brink. While I packed Mother's things he chattered a tale how on a porch in India he had grabbed a hoe and chopped snakes for half an hour. Then he moved on to Australia where he and four service buddies were locked overnight in a Pullman with six whores. We left him riding machete in hand into a panicked village in the jungles of South America, where smack dab in the middle of the market place a boa constrictor was swallowing the town goat, and no one lifting a finger to save it.

Anyway, I smoothed things over with Del. He just had the piles that day. He threatens to quit every time a frog pisses. He took up his post at the gate and I went inside to clean my pistol. It was impossible to predict these visits of Mother's. In order to reach me she first had to get clear of the home, a flight made all the more difficult since much of the time she was restrained, as they put it, by straps. I never learned what subterfuge delivered her from the grounds, much less by what means she was able to locomote cross-country. She would surge out of the blue toting a box of chocolates, the very one, I am confident, sent by me each week to the home. I'm on furlough, she would say. I never disputed her on the matter, nor indeed on anything else she might hazard to declare. She would take a seat and proceed to flounder in and out of a number of moods of extraordinary variety, several of which I was on the verge of pinning down with some accuracy here in the wild, so to speak. For instance, sometimes she must have thought she was young again. She would flirt with some invisible suitor, batting her ruined eyelashes, tossing her last three strands of hair as though she had a flowing mane. In brief, the

best approximation of a coquette she could muster, given her resources, a frightful display. Then when the attendants from the home materialized to retrieve her, she called them hyenas and other gross epithets, abusing them in a foul and shocking manner until the injection took effect and her limp form slid from view inside the maw of the ambulance.

Mother's previous visit had been most illuminating. She let me in on the news that she had recently visited heaven, where she spoke with God and all of her kinfolk, including mercifully her own poor mother, who was bitten in the bloom of life by a hydrophobic rat terrier and suffered the usual horrible death consequent. This circumstance turned Mother against dogs, to the extent that she made a cat her closest companion. Kitty was a mean but charming little pet she rescued from certain death at the hands of a pack of snarling dogs bent on having her for supper. Mother waded into them with a broom handle and emerged holding a naked furless scrap of a kitten. And this trauma so early in her career no doubt accounts for Kitty's suspicious nature, and hence her long life. Even to persuade her to eat you had to stand at the top of the steps and shout Here Kitty Kitty Kitty Kitty Kitty until your lungs burst, and only then would she peek from under a bush three feet away and warily come forward for her meal. I believe Kitty was determined to die a natural death, unattended by the fury of blood and crushing of bones so woefully common in the annals of her race. And sure enough in the end she was undone not by her enemy the dog but by some internal disorder that was rotting her insides. She mewled hideously for days before the veterinarian could crawl under the house and dispatch her with a pill or a ball bat, I really don't know.

I waited all that afternoon, a bit anxious, all sorts of thoughts running through my head. But Mother didn't show up. I was about to pack it in when three gentlemen from the home talked their way past Del, there's nothing easier, and came into the house. It took me a while to understand what they were getting at. Your mother is dead

was the gist of their message. It seems Mother had refused to eat for several days. Then she disappeared. They found her collapsed in a corn field. In that case maybe she wasn't on her way to see me at all, but merely gone out to graze. At least they found her before the crows got to her. That could have been a real mess. The gentlemen were embarrassed about the matter, understandably so. They wouldn't leave, just sat around hemming and hawing for the better part of an hour. I listened to all of their apologies and excuses then fired three shots into the wall over their heads. Then they couldn't get out the door fast enough. I got a hat out of the affair. I doubt they'll return for it.

There was a funeral. Mother looked like a sturgeon, in spite of everyone's best efforts. But no matter, she was out of mortal hands long before, long before. I fancy she has a place in the celestial choir, perhaps alongside Mrs. Burcham, who burst a vein in mid-cantata, singing of release and light and the souls yet caught in sin's dark dungeon. To tell the truth Mother wasn't much of a singer on earth, but who knows what gifts are given above, where she basks now, in recompense for toil below, where still I think she slogs across a dreary plain, plying toward me.

△

Bob Perelman

War & Peace

1

People are not music.
A person is not a species.
Species are not myths.
A prerogative leads speech
To the slaughterhouse of its choice.
A pile of money beneath
A nuclear umbrella pines
For a secure century. Sounds
Parade to the brain, stop & think.
ID card advancing through
The human face. History
Is a bluff, a sheer drop
Onto non-sequential rocks.
Nobody out there's talking.
A dog could sing Virgil
And mean it: Weapons & the Hero.
Yield your excitement to
The state and thrill
In the basement of a grander
Design, a more detached blueprint.

2

A circle starts anywhere inside

Its definition. It ends in the brain.
A colonel is eating lunch, tactfully.
It ends in a dream which cannot
Be shut off by the senses.
Shapes give offense. Distortion
Doesn't help. Crude ideas
In Washington get cruder as they're
Implemented. The army wants
To conquer the city and provide
All natives everywhere with free
Access to payphones. Writing
At the end of the hand. I wish
I was sleeping with Francie this afternoon.
I wish the government was in the mouths
Of whoever lives here.

3

Once and for all, the story
Begins. Eyes want proof now,
While they're open. The shadow
Of a jet moves up the hill, like reading
War and Peace without blinking.
The end of the world is one card in the deck.
My son cuts my head off, solves
That problem. Fossil speech in the brain
Ritualizes, blasphemes, an actor expressing
What memory has no time for.
They're practice-bombing No Man's Land.

4

If some clairvoyant
Picked this up

In a world
Of body art,
The conditional would
Have the same
Force as here:
Paper face up,
One life per
Sequence of rhetorical
Homes on streets
Where meaning conflicts
With the open mouth.

5

The unity of the sacred pin-ups,
Given in advance of the broken
Sensations, fetches more often than not
A vigorous salute from the abased
Personal unit on display in the grand
Sentence. Malcontents duck out of that wind.
Habits grow big and hard to balance.
Crossed out people, things you can't
Help saying. Manikins yield
Themselves and series of rules.
No official excuse for having a body.
Sinners lay down the law.

6

The existing monuments form
An emphatic No. These words
Weren't in my head
A generation ago.
Far from solving the problem,

Birth only accents itself,
Leaving a soul or body
For irony to govern. Social
Life looks like endless
Distance at first, filled
Up close with ecstatic hunger.
The afterlife leads to
Ice underfoot, steam
Coming out of the mouth.
The statuary nods familiarly
And suggests corrections. My spine
Is twisting to the left.
The dog may be haunted.
The person, with a case history
And a ready set of paradoxes,
Is in no position.
The food in the icebox
Is to eat. Say something.

7

A real paper cup left out
In the rain is full of meaning
The next morning. If time
Goes backwards & the mind
Is a reduplicating orgasm,
Then the flesh can live
To forgive itself. Grammar
Is so explanatory. Dreams
Want to go on forever. That's not
Where I live. Soldiers
Of the deliquescent empire die
And are the dear departed.
People tend to live,

Gravitate toward fire.
The explanations are so emotional.

8

Some guy stands in his shoes,
Approximating a point. The sayings
Of authority are absolute, lashing
The sea, invading the lairs
Of honest folk who live in the past
Where elves make shoes without
Stopping or ever getting paid.
The world is made of wax, and once
The word is given, millions
Of bodies are pressed. You
Can always get a job as a cop on TV.
It's windy this morning, making
A specific effort down a long
Instrumental passage. I'm up,
Pressing objects down. Scotch tape
Dispenser in front, carved sleeping
Ducks farther back. Four screws
In each drawer handle. Chicken Licken
Goes to Washington. A personal question
Gets a rock orbiting the sun.
Colette says: "Yesterday's river, and
My arrival in rivulets. Now day
Burning sleeves. Conscious color
Is a caress. Very touching,
A rounded little body crosses the road,
Itemizing my absence. I admire
How soon I am protected by the wind."

9

Is intelligent life too smart
To leave its memory buried
In dumb matter two thousand years
Later cruising at thirty thousand feet?
Intelligent life demands an obedient
Biology, gets nameless divisions.
The Gettysburg Address. History
Pales inside the private reader.
Foaming around the bit, the citizen
Desires a stable series of roads
On which to choose. Clucks, whistles,
Soft coos in the leaves mime
The lovers' displeasure at daybreak.
Armed to the teeth, America falls
To its knees, bony protruberances.
The topsoil is our history.

10

These are the tools
Of persuasion. Mistaken
For a stick, the bug
Doesn't get eaten. But let's
All be friends, like the tree
And the chair on Sesame Street.
"Crush," says my two year old,
Perceiving my knee in a friendly
Explosion of symbolic possibility
Before dinner. Let's get
Physical, sings Olivia Newton-John,
As she's thrown into a furnace

On tv. The war that dares not
Speak its name, the Department
Of Defense can't find the right
Country, but can't wait. Somewhere,
Does the ideal reader shepherd
The letters over the actual
Confused, numb recording
And decoding apparatus?
Skating up a hill of water.
Absolute certainty: that's
Where babies come from.

Diane Wakoski

Three Poems

The Ring of Irony

What do you say to the mother
of a homosexual man
whom you once were married to,
when she asks you to return your wedding ring
because it's a family heirloom?
    "I want to keep it on my key ring
    where I carry it now,
    to remind me of my loss?"
or perhaps, in spite,
    "It was the only thing
    I ever got out of the marriage.
    No. I won't give it back."
Do you say that you love irony
and have imagined your whole life
governed by understatement
and paradox?
Yet, the obvious dominates and
I ask myself,
"Why do you want to keep it?
Surely the woman deserves some comfort/
if a small piece of gold can do it,
who can object?"
Wallowing again, in the obvious,
I wonder at my meanness,

my own petty anger
at men who love other men,
Alas, some of them are/have been
my best friends. Irony?
No. The obvious.
Why do you want that circle of gold
lying in your purse with keys
and checkbooks? I nudge myself.
Why don't you purchase an ounce of gold
and carry it in a velvet bag instead. Your
own.
Worth so much more.
Of course. The obvious.
Because the other was given,
not bought, and you
have never asked the return of your gifts, but
you know, Diane, why
you anguish over putting the ring in the box and
mailing if off to
Corona, California.
So obvious.
Because you believe in the gifts
freely given
to appease destiny.
You too would sacrifice
Iphegenia or Isaac
for the cap of darkness,
having given your children
for poetry,
having given your sexuality
for beautiful men,
having relinquished honor
for music.

The circle of gold,
that ring, symbolizes
the pact.
To give it back says the giving was meaningless.
Fate does not honor your bargain,
Ms. Wakoski. Not irony,
the obvious:
you have no husband,
            no house,
            no children,
            no country
You have no fame,
                fortune,
only remaindered books,
and innocent students who
stab you
with their lack of understanding,
asking, no not ironically,
"did you give a lot of readings
when you were young?"
Finally, the understatement, the irony, when I say,
"yes," and the past swallows up everything,
leaving the obvious,
and now that handsome woman in California
wants to take the ring.

Soap opera of the middle-aged
schoolteacher?
What do you say when irony deserts you
for the maudlin obvious?
"I am mailing you the ring.
Your claim is greater than mine."

Irony? No, the obvious.

For The Girl With Her Face In A Rose

This tapestry which I've never seen
woven in 1901
depicts your wish of self,
disembodied,
the face floating in a giant
florabunda,
the seeker near your rose-enclosed lips,
listening for your voice.
Perhaps this is wisdom.

My own wish cannot be seen in any
weaving
but in the flesh itself
of calla lily,
pale curled flowers with their yellow
pollen-covered fingers
on which no one ever slips
a golden ring.

The wish to be alive
at my own death
which I would want never to come
except as the season's apple, plum,
corriander, pansy,
leek, corn.

I would give up any voice,
even the whisper on these pages
if I would not have to die.
If even
I could age until I fall away from my bones

like the sticky apricots
under late summer's buzzing tree.
Not even the wish
to be young and fresh
and eternally a flower.
Rather, not to die.
Not to suffer pain.
Not to lose my breath.

△

Joyce Carol Oates Plays The Saturn Piano

for Joyce Carol Oates, who, several years ago, began to study the piano again

I promised myself
that if, by 40, I had won a Pulitzer Prize for Poetry
I would let myself play the piano again.
This was when I was 20,
still pounding on the keyboard,
relentlessly, as if I were chopping down dozens of trees,
and splitting the logs,
making enough firewood for a castle
to be heated throughout an entire Russian winter.

I longed for tea in Samovars,
and to wear sable.
The Snow Queen glinted snow roses, ice violets, tuna-bright
daggers,
as I spoke with stiff lips.
My fingers were frozen too,

against the brilliance of local pianists
Abromovitch,
del Tredici,
Goodman,
Ury.
Unlike you,
during the four undergraduate years,
I did not win a Phi Beta Kappa key,
write three novels and marry my sweetheart. I ran across
Dwinelle Plaza barefooted in winter
carrying a wicker birdcage,
I wept in classes, puffed up like a mushroom,
spoke laments
which embarrassed everyone,
and played, played, played,
Beethoven and
Chopin
mostly, trying to substitute music
for sex, for love, for security and kindness.
Unlike you,
I was no combination,
clicking shut like an expensive lock,
of beauty and brains.
I did not have your dark eyes like Godiva chocolates
or your Emily Bronte smile.
I could not even talk,
though most poets' lips moved like a swarm of Japanese fantailed
goldfish at feeding, pursing for the scattered breadcrumbs.

It was California, but my lips were rigid
with some Northern climate
outside of geography.
My fingers too, though I flexed and flexed

them.
How I hated the rich girls in my classes
who were being
expensively
psychoanalysed (how I needed to tell
my histories),
and who played Bach
sitting decorously, neatly, on the piano bench
like little hair, brushes,
while I grimaced and swayed and rocked on the bench
with each cadence, until my practice room
must have seemed like
an exercise cell for some crippled gymnast,
one who had to do all her exercises sitting
in a single position.

The first years of not playing
were empty ones.
Perhaps I was grateful not to own a stereo, have records or afford
many concerts.
From Cage and Creeley I learned about silence.
About the "missing"
as part of the object.
And the possibilities I longed for
bred in this silence.
The Ice Queen showed me the beauty of death,
and longing.
The ice needle words which I could emit
from frozen mouth.

Each decade
I would look at my hands,
losing their muscles and flexibility,

until after 20 years
I realized that I could no more return to playing the piano
with any of the skill I'd worked for
than one could go out on a winter day and pick a favorite rose
which he had seen bloom months ago
and remembered,
from that summer. Not even the dried hip
would be there.

And I have passed 40 now,
some years ago.
No Pulitzer Prize.
You have had numerous awards with that big one looming up
for you now, very soon,
while my name is never even mentioned in connection
with such things.
And I thought I had forgotten all about that young pledge
until I entered your house
and saw the upright piano covered
with music I used to play,
and heard your voice,
flashing like a marlin when it jumps and twists in Carribean
waters,
saying, "yes I am
taking piano lessons again. I practice
two hours every day."
Envy?
No. Past that.
A sense of failure?
Perhaps. For I gave up something
I loved/ to attain something
unknown, and now I have neither.

What do I have?

I wear the rings of Saturn, all
nine of them on my hands,
and when I listen to the keyboard
I hear a music
beyond what anyone can play.

All that wood I chopped
years ago
makes a bright fire,
and when it is dead,
maybe the cinders will begin to move in orbit,
begin whirling,
begin spinning,
around me. I will be Saturn,
and my rings will be
hundreds of pianos, rotating,
revolving around my dried ashy body.

When you play your piano, Joyce,
a chunk of rock might fall into your garden, near the river,
where an old pike nuzzles down near its industrial bottom.
You will say,
"I am playing Saturn's piano,"
and the ring on your long-married, sweetheart, wonderful prize-
winning
finger will, perhaps, for a moment
glow, as will the rock in your garden,
as a piano always does
when someone with inspired hands throws it into orbit.

△

Randy White

Four Poems

between
not
speech
but
light
&
echo
all
magnificent
indivisable
sounds,
stones
skipping
eleven
times
across

some
seasons
some
places
this
river
is
one
leap
across

△

in
sight
the
falls,
dark
edge
hanging
plume
galvanized
the
roar
instant
iris

cathedraline
rubble

roil
&
baptismal
all

a
symmetry

△

in a ring of stone
measures
kindling
measures

dying,
twig ends
then wand
upon wand:
man-
zanita
oak-
leaves
yellowpine-
barks

this
architectural tinder

this fire
of many edges

this

our quick
carbon
dance

△

o
moon
head

nipple
stone

pale

stone

eye
unfolds
honey
calm
now
that skin
fills space
words
could not

now
lichen
long as dreams
attaches to everything

like this
shivering
gravity

amorous
whitewater
falling
& falling

△

Robert Marteau

Bread and Wine

Translated from the French by Clayton Eshleman and Bernard Bador

By the one who furls back the foliage
  I was distracted;
and the cricket, will I hear him again
  beneath the green chasuble?
Long fish in the Catholic nave.
  Women with white bellies,
combed hair—Martha, Mary, Magdalen—
  where windowpane meets summer.
  Sun over Golgotha:
  and the spiral knots the pious butcher
  to heaven
  as the bird
to transparent limestone.

  I leave the long breath
  to the wind
for suave flannel
  and for silk.
May your surcingle be mirrored
  in the misted sand,
  guardian of cattle
which trampling the grass
  discover

that you too skilled with harpoons
  are, from crest to crest,
  foiling the storm
as far as arid heaven
  where earth takes up only
a little space in the milk.

Deadlier than the thrust and the blade
  the low dialect
ground between jaws
reduced at last to nothingness
this too long maintained taste
  of hunger and thirst
for the woman here—for the sole
  perfume over there
that archangels breathe.

  So close, the gods.
In us their lips. The vessels
  never graze them.
Governors of suns, planets are
  to them like petals.
But should one lower an eyelash
  toward me or autumn, I then know
  that for all eternity
toward this bloody stock my heart,
  the world flies
like a javelin.

O I say sacred plain
  receive me, receive
my captives—and while our eyes
take on agate strix and moons

to stay fixed forever
on the sacred Mount of Olives
in the abyss—I know—among the oxides
the engines will be engulfed
for on the day of Resurrection
even metals are invited.

All will see then on Jesus' brow
the eglantine blooming
and the sweat spreading out as dew
on the shoulders of ladies,
three, whom I name Ischa
and then Eve and Mary.
And he, the most naked of men,
from deepest Mothers
and Memories exalted
now marrying
the fire to the flame.

I spoke of Nahash
whom the Jews of Toledo have invoked
whom El Greco having crossed Venice
came to the rock to paint
where the Tagus coils
surging each time
from the cup
John carries in his hand
and points to with his finger.

I spoke the serpent,
out of the seas,
erect in the world tree,
vertical, starred with five beams

hidden by pulp in the moisture
  with whom man walks in flame
when he follows on the ladder
  his procession of angels.

  Sword
borne on the milky tongue of the lamb
well you know how to separate the two poles
as well to undouble the troubled current
so that thunder engender on earth
  the grape cluster

  and the ear of grain.

△

Jerome McGann

Prose

(for Maldoror)

On me pense.
—RIMBAUD, a letter to Izambard
To speak is to lie, to live is to collaborate.
—WILLIAM BURROUGHS, Nova Express

First of all this was meant to be read by those persons who
by reason of their marginal economic and social
circumstances, would not be able to do so. In fact,
even if these words had been given to them to read, what
I have to say here would certainly mean little to these
people. Therefore you alone, if anyone, will read this
text. So far as I am concerned you will be overhearing
a set of remarks intended for someone else. Nor can I believe
it much matters whether you find all or any of this
significant or not.

One further preliminary
remark since I do not want this statement misconstrued,
to find itself made subject to ambiguities or
double-meanings, auras and the like. There is no time for
that any longer. When it meant to find its way through the faiths
and thicket of the world, poetry has always simply
set its face toward what is plain, toward what is recognized
despite the masters and faith-breakers of the words.

This then
seems true to me: to speak is a lie, to live is to collaborate.

This notorious remark is not universally
true, but it is perfectly true for anyone who, by
virtue of his (or her) social and economic position
in this society, secures the advantages of
the culture at the expense of those who are systematically
deprived of those advantages. Who does not understand
the fate of this supremacy is human deprivation?
That no one could claim personal responsibility
for exploiting any particular person is at
worst one of the blessings of this position and at best
a ridiculous irony. Have you been told that this
is only guilt, that words like these speak the sympathetic
response of a scrupulous conscience? It isn't so, this
is a case where guilt is meaningless, where the little conscience
we cherish now is only understanding with its cruel
conserving vision. Don't look to find much guilt or conscience
here in this poem, search out the stony run of fact where
you have your private grounds for believing whatever you
want. Here "you are not your own," here you will become a part
of the spirit which social mastery entails to the
present age's thrones, dominions, principalities and
powers: on the one hand the exquisite privilege of
guilt, on the other the inescapable guilt of the
privileged.

To speak then is to lie for us, to live like
those words in contradiction, whose only truth lies in a
nakedness—not in what they seem to mean, in what they are
instead: false, unrecognized, obscure as the works and days
of each so-called creative artist who finds himself always
reproduced within the state ideological apparatuses
of today. The same indictment holds, of course, for anyone
working in the regular consciousness industries of
our society—the schools at all levels, the churches,

the various organs of culture. Outside these structures,
in the worlds where poverty thrives (all the South Chicagos
and Ohio Valleys of our own country, but also
in those foreign lands whose ignorance, powerlessness, and
deprivation serve to maintain what we regard as our
knowledge, strength, and wealth), speech that does not lie is
possible,
and one may find a way to live without collaborating.
But to speak the truth and so to live in this desired way
requires that one speak and live at a level where human
suffering is deepest and human longing is, therefore,
strongest. For it is easier for a camel to pass through the
eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven.

I have heard it said, by people in my own class of course,
that conditions of human misery are an inevitable
function of human society—that it has always been
so and that it always will be so. I have also heard it
said, by the same sort of person, that our new system of
masters and slaves gives one singular advantage to the
slave: hard work and determination will raise a person
from poverty or a marginal existence to wealth
and success.

Both of these statements (they are made in various
forms) exemplify—indeed, they epitomize—what Burroughs
meant when he said To speak is to lie. For these statements, while
accurate, are false—false in the only way that humanly
matters, false as one might say that "my friend proved false to
me."
Only a poor man can truly say "The poor you have with
you always." In any other mouth these words ought never
to be tolerated.

No one can live with or by the
wisdom of cruelty. And should you ever agree to

pursue success through hard work and determination, at least in this world you never made, you may come at last to gain a prize which will cost you your human life. For it is known that he who will not defend Truth shall be compelled to defend a Lie, that he may be snared & caught & taken.

In Memory of Herzen

> *With these knights . . . scepticism is a form of transition from democracy to liberalism, to that toadying, vile, foul and brutal liberalism which shot down the workers in 1848, restored the shattered thrones and applauded Napoleon III, and which Herzen* cursed, *unable to understand its class nature.*
>
> —V. I. LENIN

If I were you I would begin with hate, where you may be certain of your footing. This is not something you can learn over there, or ever by yourself. But I can help you.

Here in Pasadena you start by coming south across Colorado Blvd., or north beyond Foothill. You are looking for San Marino, or the best parts of Pasadena, or those lovely areas by the arroyo or up near the hills in Altadena. The places where people care about their homes and do all they can for their children's education. This is where you should begin, though it appears, I agree, a most unlikely place. But here if the people are not smiling or talking affably to anyone they meet (yourself included), they will be serious and busy, they will be moving everywhere with evident purpose and self-direction, though they may only be jogging.

Make no mistake, this is where your hate may grow, like the rich bounty of heaven in the Imperial Valley. Are you prepared for the sacrifices you will have to make? Do not come at all if your heart

is not committed to the power of your will. You need to breathe an air of self-determination.

Now look carefully and learn. The faces, do you see it yet? reveal their world. They have found a way to turn every feeling into pleasure, and each emotion turns itself to happiness. Or let us say, this is their conviction, that nothing will be lost, that what is here will grow and change and never die. Their eyes are bright with that belief, and if you should remind them of their faith, their eyes may then go misty, and fill with tears.

Out of their sympathy, in which you share, our final sufferings are born as paler suffering shall come at last even in these regions of the blessed. Pain that comes and goes but does not change, miseries which cannot be translated to the knowledge we speak, the despair in faces which one day we know will not be beautiful again, or bodies wrecked beyond repair or sentiment, objects of disgust, streets who could imagine walking down or living on—as appearances grow worse, the day begins to close. We go to sleep and dream, vision or nightmare it does not matter, for tomorrow brings back the recurrent therapy of happiness, our morning's first fix of pleasure. Night is gone, and most of all the weariness it closed. When our day begins your suffering, and even mine as well, is born again.

And out of this is also born the beauty of the world, the beauty (can you find it?) of this poem.

But if this talk has made you sad, you either live nearby or you have not begun to live at all.

△

TIMOTHY

Introductory Title
Mixed Media, 102" tall.

WASHINGTON

Induction and Suspicion
Mixed Media, 84" tall.

Photographs courtesy of: Daniel Gouro Associates, Los Angeles.

Clayton Eshleman

Four Poems from Fracture

The Color Rake of Time

I dreamed that all artists were friends,
that we told everything we knew to each other
and that our knowledge was physical,
that we worked in the skull rooms of each other's
genital enclosures, broken fulcrum people
raining within ourselves at high noon,
that we talked in mid-ocean in smashed saint stables
where spars were severe-steady cave-ins,
that at last all of us feasted off of repression and depression—

I dreamed! that the sphinx was not at the end of her twig,
that she was not open to the furnace of the hearth,
that there was no heat without recall,
no vitality without memory, that the slave was merely one
who rowed in a hold without oar-lock . . .

then I heard the color rake of time
scraping the window, and awoke to the face of God
whose childhood is everlasting
whose maturity we struggle to create.

△

Elegy

Vladimir Holan

impacted in the jaw of Prague, its wisdom,
pain. I wondered what it meant to write
only that which is pried out of
what cannot be said by others . . .

"It means these horseflesh blankets,"
Holan replied, "and this Virgin who daily
descends from His Cross to pull out another of
my teeth. My last visitor was Caravaggio
who came bounding in here, the police still on his heels,
from Rome. He knelt by my bedside and we talked,
about, for example, why Hans Bellmer,
in spite of his bloody crinolines,
was never elected pope . . ."

How long ago, I asked—

"It was in the future," Holan said, "on the beach
at Porto Ercole—they will carry my bed, canopy and all,
out by the surf so that I can watch Caravaggio
veer, copulating with his own wounds,
instead of this hag and her orifice
—Orpheus to you—who only truly loved
the first few moments of sunlight
after he led her out . . ."

But those are not real people, I protested,
they're the entangled vinework of your dreams
as you lie here looking forward
arguing that Orpheus did not look back—

yet what else is there to do in an empty cathedral

and I began to look around,
the high vaulted walls were hung with corpses hanging by their
hair;
Between Holan's bed and the walls
was the distance
between expecting everything and having no faith . . .

"We who do believe," Holan read my mind, "are always expecting
nothing to come, not that nothing which is a lack,
but nothing as a power, life's twin,
Our Caravaggio of the Shadows, an equal match
for the fugitive Caravaggio with his blackened soles.
That painter so darkened the Christian scene
that light became the glare of shattered desire
and the rich a darker shade of the poor.
How closely his attempt to cave in Christianity
so that its shackles would gleam through
the purple of the human hunger for death's divinity
was bound to the incident itself:
'He quarrelled with Ranuccio Tomassoni over a game of tennis,
and they beat each other with the rackets,
then he drew his weapon and killed the youth and was himself
wounded. He fled from Rome without money, under pursuit,
and took refuge in—' "
and here I heard "—the poetry of Vladimir Holan."

So you do not have to be carried to Porto Ercole,
that Caravaggio stumbling about in sulfuric heat
is in the bag of your poet's heart,
is what gives it grotesque life,
its unceasing disassociative thumping,

what provokes me here, in spite of your wife's request
that I not come in . . .

"But you've come in death," Holan smiled,
"and in your own invention of where you would find me.
I know that you tried to visit me twice in Prague.
I was so ashamed for people I did not know to see
not only my idiot daughter but the squalor in which we lived.
As for Caravaggio, I never thought much about him
until I became very ill—then his beheadings
began to strike me as a man trying to screw off his own lid
so that the hands of little children might poke about
in what had fermented in him so long—in fact
his brutality so appalled me, I began to think
that he was driven by my dread of violence
which you perceived by hanging this place
with the souls of so many of my countrymen . . .
What does strike me as fairly certain is
that the soul is timeless and multiple in its singleness . . .
as we've been talking I've kept thinking of the buttocks
of a young woman who keeps walking in place away from me,
of that joke about her ass jumping like two cats
fighting in a sack, so perhaps the left one's Caravaggio,
the right one me, or any two dead
blowing off soul in the alchemical glasswork of art,
or my death reaching what lives in you of me."

As he was speaking, his canopied bed became an animal mouth,
open, in which Holan, its single fang, was obliquely
embedded. Snow drifted through the beast head
as if we were out in the Old Jewish Cemetery
and the Virgin too descended, to reach way in for Holan with
forceps, and begin to tug. I could hear him give

vista opening from the height of Brahms' First,
fog skeletonizing amidst the black
hypodermics of medieval Prague,
gape of a crematorium in the rectum of war
singing at the vintage of everyone's
teeth in a pile, or all things compost
in the thought: spring has gone out of the world.

Manticore Vortex

This will be, then, my primal scene:
the Rashomon Gate of the American poem,
a kind of panopticon in which viewpoint upon viewpoint,
shafts of late afternoon light, slant through
this ruined tower at the western edge of civilization—
and the muse upon which the self of the poem is begotten
is none other than that hair-pulling hag,
that wig maker, fashioning the poem's destiny
out of what she can draw from the dead.

There is a cave below this gate,
the midwestern basement where Sylvia Likens is on view,
where pledge larvae are huddled
during the nights of a Hell Week that is furnace and father,
a dead washing machine, the wringer
one was cranked through so as to learn octopus sleight of hand,
the various dodges of the nascent self as it tiptoes around
the terror of the dream that tells it it is religious
because it not only entwines its mother
but feeds on her underarm fat while she is dying.

The self is an active cannibalism of its own matrix
and the co-producer of its birth.
To the visitor it would appear as if there were only
a large bolted screw in this basement floor,
but there is Aztec density here.
A pubescent boil has been transformed into a crystal ball
through which the poem sees the guardian rattler
dreaming at the Amerindian stratum of the world.

In the vortex of the whirlpool below,
animals are separating and recombining with men—
the archetypal grotesque is constant,
from Lascaux to Disneyland, intersected by Rabelais,
by Belsen, by gargoyles
poised for eternity on the periphery of the holy,
that periphery is the furrow in which
the crossbreeding of the marvelous takes place
but turn it, like a prism, a few degrees in your hand
and the gargoyles are the damned of any century,
turn it back the other way and they recede into a cave,
nothing more than sockets observing us.

And who are we?
A holding pattern between heaven and hell?
Gaudi bends in a roller rink centripetally seeking God?

O pillbox
in which I find all the space I am not taking up
is taken up by you, we
completely filling the space
yet encased

it was into this core

we fell, two drops ceaselessly
seeking to reamoebize

three billion years of single-celled life

Such is my lust for merger
on the rubberband of pendulum flitting

nicked
periplus
of that oldest beauty:
    the slow running diaspore of burning semen
incense to the schizophrenic fissure

        ape eye to human eye

            me to you.

△

Certification

We hereby certify that there are too many bomb craters
    in El Salvador, that more blood is needed for these,
    North American blood milling with Wheaties, with all
    the Jack Armstrong we can press into bright red bullets,
that there are too many peasant children's heads on village
    posts that look like boiled octopuses; more blood is
    therefore needed for the swimmingpools of the wealthy
for diningroom tables made of blood
for blood automobiles
finally for blood grass and blood ground,

blood
ground into the very air
a kind of mincemeat of blood,
blood
as a new informing essence to replace the metaphor of blood

an essence to pack into the rifle of a 15 year old—

is he a soldier on whose puberty bridge no one will ever stand?

That desolate pretty bridge,
a Chinese bridge of sorts,
over pool water in which lay like lilies
all the lovely terrors of puberty.
As we drop to our knees on that bridge
we do not know that we are deep in fantasy—
we only know we are frightened
by these weird stalks growing up through our feet,
the palms of our feet, for in puberty our feet
are like hands, we stalk about, our head in our groin,
marvelous beasts of transformation,
whose mouths therefore induct
a certain stuff of the ground
the child and adult noses have lost.

In puberty, if we experience one, we induct the life of the snake.
The lives of extinct non-flying birds.
Our ears fill with the ringing of our mother's periods.
We listen to the great blood radio of her lap.
We grasp something about pain,
about compassion, this radio picks up the Neanderthal
wave-length of *caring*.
We may go on to become cheats,

slobs, failures, even killers—
but if we suffer
our puberty we do not become steel
nor have the nervelessness to package blood.

•

Let us give more blood for them to play with, to box with,
boxes of blood gloves for the pubertyvoid young army husband
to wear
as he puts out a baby's eyes so that when he comes home at dusk
he can peel off his North American supporters and play with his
own baby,
let us offer him blood partitions, factories to produce a
homogeneous world.

•

And if we did not send this certified blood?
Would there be pus? Knee-deep swamps of pus
tilting through the structure of El Salvadorian life,
a pus that one day
might scab over.

What does a father feel picking the shrapnel
out of his one hour old infant's thighs?
I will try to say: he feels with the force of rock
against steel, his body twangs with a hatred
so vegetal it cannot yet get beyond his shoulders.
In the grief and numbness mounting to his eyes
a bayonet child is being conceived who shall wear for a head
the shredded flag of no one's salvation.

22 January, 1983

△

Martin Anderson

Giorgionesque

Woven through the flesh
this gold dust
this thread In the black
folds of the cypress
its filaments spin They
are pulled through
a white dusk
into this glistening rain this
vermilion the 'ground
of the flesh' that is breathing
under the lip of
the sarcophagus into
our name

Some phrases are taken from Pater's 'The Renaissance.'
The quote is from Ruskin.

Seurat's "Port-en-Bessin, The Outer Harbour at Low Tide"

Silence

flat

ened encomium

flow

of escutcheon

stone latitudes

emptying

themselves evacuated

streets the load

ed horizontal

△

Gary Snyder

Three Poems

Fear Not

Will Dallas grow, or wither?
  said the paper.
"Let the bastards freeze in the dark."

    dead or alive?
    knocking at the stone door.

"Goat ropers need love too."

      embracing more than "being"
      the stone door knocks back.

Two women masturbate a corpse,
                in clay,
One holds his chin—

The Fox-girls switch from
    human to fox-form
    right during the party!
        one man
who was doing cunnilingus on his friend,
    now finds a mouth
    of fur.
The saké bottles clatter down.

and daylight; all's well,
just a little sore—

Who's there?
No one who

△

Hers

Hers was not a
sheath.
it was
a
quiver.

△

Uluru Wild Fig Song

1

Soft earth turns straight up
curls out and away from its base
hard and red—a dome—five miles around
Ayers Rock, Uluru,

we push through grasses, vines, bushes
along the damp earth wash-off watershed margin
where vertical rock dives
into level sand,

Clustering chittering zebra finches on the
bone-white twigs,
red-eyed pink-foot little dove,

push on, into caves of overhangs,
painted red circles in circles,
black splayed-out human bodies,
painted lizards, wavy lines.

skip across sandy peels of clean bent bedrock
stop for lunch and there's a native fig tree
heavy-clustered, many ripe:
someone must have sat here, shat here
long ago.

2

Sit in the dust
take the clothes off. feel it on the skin
lay down. roll around
run sand through your hair.
nap an hour

bird calls through dreams.
now
you're clean.

sitting on red sand ground with a dog.
breeze blowing, full moon,
women singing over there—
men clapping sticks and singing here

eating meaty bone,
hold the dog off with one foot

stickers & prickles in the sand—

clacking the boomerang beat,
a long walk
singing the land.

3

naked but decorated,
scarred.
white ash white clay,
scars on the chest.
lines of scars on the loin.
the scars: the gate,
the path, the seal,
the proof.

white-barred birds under the dark sky.

4

singing and drumming at the school
a blond-haired black skinned girl
watching and same time teasing a friend
dress half untied, naked beneath,
young breasts like the *mulpu*
mushroom,
swelling up through sand.

stiff wind close to the ground.

trash lodged in the spinifex, the fence,
the bottles, broken cars.

5

Sit down in the sand
skin to the ground.
a thousand miles of open gritty land

white cockatoo on a salt pan

hard wild fig on the tongue.

this wild fig song.

Uluru, Amata, Fregon,
Papunya, Ilpili.
Austral. *Fall of 40081*

Antonin Artaud

Five Letters from Rodez

Selected and Translated from the French by Norman Glass

". . . It doesn't matter if you have no 'finished' texts but only notes at hand. Would you please send me these notes? I know that notes written by you, whatever they contain, reveal more about the truth than the most perfect works of other writers. . . .

You are one of the last men who has dared to descend into the depths, and you have thus encountered again the eternal terror of origins. The malediction that crushes this world has grown so heavy and man has become so forgetful that there are no longer even any poètes maudits *today to acknowledge this evil, to acknowledge it, that is to say to denounce it by emphasizing it."*

—ARTHUR ADAMOV, in a letter to Antonin Artaud.

To Jean Paulhan

Rodez, 16 February 1945

Dearest friend,

Thank you for your card with its confirmation of your immense affection for me. Regarding the project to which you refer, thereby revealing all your interest in me, I informed you about two years ago that Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras had been bought by a young publisher with a number of supplementary pages which I had written here. But this publisher, Robert Godet (64 Rue Lecomte du Noüy), is

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I have provided a section of Notes at the end of these letters. For the sake of unobstructed reading I have not indicated them by numerals in the text. —N.G.

in London now and I don't know what has become of his publishing project since I have no news of him and I don't have his new address. Moreover there is a book that I can not allow to reappear among my published works: *Héliogabale*, it infuriates me every time I reread it because I believe one can not be further off the point and in a falser, more lying and more erroneous state of mind than in this book. It does not stop pleading for the unity of God but only in order to attribute it to a libertarian and egoistic natural force while in fact the Unknowable is that warm Virgin force of the heart which *nobody* has ever *really* wanted to admit because it is christ and because it is cross. And he who is christ is Somebody. And if nobody has ever wanted to admit it everybody has always *profited* from it in the recesses of their consciousness and his believers first of all.*

During the last eight years I have often plunged into the gloomy depths and my ideas on Religion have kept up with my ideas on the ego and on the soul and I see that men no longer recognize their souls and that as for the ego they no longer know what it is. Now, never has man's inherent and personal ego been attacked, distorted and misrepresented the way it is at the present moment. Don't worry, I hate sermons. I want the things of the eternal infinite to be presented to human consciousness bearing the same quality of material necessity and of staunch authenticity as the gestures of a sacred spectacle. —With regard to the ego I shall not speak as a hypocrite, a preacher or an Initiate but as the martyr of the gloom into which the destiny of living has plunged me. —I know that the ego weeps for itself in its dreams and can no longer aspire, for the sake of the continuity of its principle and of its being, to that duration which it enjoyed a few centuries ago by the notion of the immortal soul. This means that without the body which preserves the personal continuity of impressions human beings would be more changeable than the spectacle of nature which varies from mountain to sea and from iceberg to forest.

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*On the other hand I definitely do want the Voyage to be published and if you could do something for that! The new pages are bound to please you.

The soul is the eternal foundation of a principle which the irrepressible hate of things has degraded and deteriorated. It is indeed infinitely easier to love than to hate, to give than to withhold, to ignore the captivating appeal of things than to surrender in the internal beatitude of ecstasy to the whims of infernal cupidity. I don't say that it is finer, more moral, nobler, though certainly it is, but I do say that it is easier and simpler, and that it is evil, stupidity, hate, egoism, rapacity, impurity and perversity that are difficult and complicated. Infinitely less suffering and pain are required in order to be good than to be wicked. This arises from deformation, and from the insidious transfer of a principle with the result that whatever still believes itself to be the being is really no longer it while the ego in living does not realize that it is its own vampire which holds the place which it no longer has. The double of the theater is life, but the double of ego and of being is an imperceptible essence which precisely rejects theater and drama and persuades a human being to live only according to the unconscious principle of effigies, ready-cast and ready-made moral statues, that is to say without struggling with the mysteries of his mind. He is convinced that he thinks and wills and does not perceive that it is *the other* that thinks, without even asking for his opinion or for his choice. And he believes it is himself because at this moment of decision and choice he felt unprecedentedly *distinct* in his physical being, dense and as it were *inwardly painted*, like the aroma of an ancient painting which attempts to rise within him in order to affirm him limb by limb from the age of puberty onward; but all that is the enemy; it is *the other* since the ego is the unmanifested, the void, *the dramatic abandonment of things which enables the soul and not the body to come*. I am writing a book in order to prove it. There will be no lack of examples.

All the most affectionate thoughts of my heart for you and Germaine Paulhan.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

Excuse the handwriting and the style of this letter, I have been in bed for eight days with bronchitis and I have had a high fever.

To Doctor Jean Dequeker

Rodez, 6 April 1945

Dearest friend,

I have a profusion of thoughts to tell you, and I am always horrified to see how exterior circumstances prevent me and how difficult it is for two friends to find in the words which they speak to each other the internal diapason of their hearts. —I have conceived an extraordinary world where the heart can not require more than the mind, that is to say than desire, because it has become, as it was before its birth, the criterion and the pattern for the mind and its desires. —The body (which is heart) can not be body if it has never suffered all the pain of the mind with its eternal ambivalence: am I the mind of a body or the body of my mind, and what am I, I who think out this debate between body and mind? Am I a body or a mind. —There is an orthodoxy which believes in the eternal existence of a person situated between body and mind and which uses both of them as symbols of its ambivalent capacity. Myself I believe that before being somebody it is necessary first of all to be nobody, and I do not believe in the Person of God and I do not want the Person of God. There is a state without a person or God which is the inborn suffering of a cross which is not the being of a cross but its quartering power, without any definition made by a mind, a person or a cross. The Eternals lost life because they did not understand this internal reduction of power which abolishes even the power and the dream of eternity before this force of Will which is so simple that it no longer even sees the suffering it causes, nor does it realize, on the cross which it still intentionally is,

that it is the eternal being who is the quartered one.

God the dream missed the mind of the body because he feared that point of death where suffering became obscene, and because he wanted to get away from his body instead of rushing into his body in order to free it from all the obscene, which is never anything except the *profuse* dream of suffering and death.

To hit the dream of the body when one is already inside as if in the fluid corpse of the eternities is to know how to die to the corpse through dying to the idea of oneself dead. This is an atrocious and heroic virginity. Only the idea of intrinsic virginity saves one from oneself, from death and from God. This means that in order to be the body which wanted to detach itself from the desire of having a body, it was necessary at first to detach oneself from the dream and from the image of one's body, but it does not suffice to detach oneself from it in mind one must detach oneself from it in body, that is to say that the body of one's detachment is a body which serves to strike the body one dreams, and this took place in fact through the force of the interior chastity of a Cross before its own thought, and the dream of its own thought, were it the image of the Holy Virgin, the Holy Virgin of its thought.

I wrote a short poem one day which concluded

> It was a Virgin without body or sex
> and of whom the mind alone can profit.

And I did not realize to what extent this poem was perverse. Since to entrust the idea of the Virgin to the mind, and to entrust it at first, and then to entrust it without body is to make the idea automatically give birth to sex. What can the mind of an idea do except intrude in it and wallow in and around it, for the mind has never been anything except the vast elongation of a body, and the body is the infinitesimal and inaccessible atom of the principle of all irreducibility and this principle can not be mind since it is only an invisible point and neither thinks nor moves, but it is body at first indeed and certainly it is from the body that the mind and not the mind-of-the-body emer-

ges. This means that before being born in person one had at first to merit being body through the addition of the invisible aspects of the body; and all that which is desire or mind, be it God or the Holy Ghost, can only disappear before the hate of the body which is all that which has suffered in man and deserved to be a man one day, whereas the mind has never deserved it, for in order to be conscious thought the reduction of the bodies had to be suffered.

Thus in order for the heart finally to desire the internal diapason of the soul, and in order for men who have met to realize themselves in the way determined by their souls each of them must have experienced the Virgin nature of his body. —I mean the body of the beginning of the soul, which is to be born to life *in* life. For at each lived moment we precede our own birth like Virgins before our ego. —But if this idea of interior Virginity is not applied to the exterior of the body, at every moment of its daily life and in fact, then we shall miss our soul also in fact. It will die in us and we shall no longer be present before ourselves and others except as corpses. If I were not absolutely chaste with all the worlds of pain I bear and of which the worst is sexuality I would long ago have lost the ability to write or speak. Sexuality is the essential burden of the ego man and as long as all men fail in their hearts to renounce it no change will be possible in the life of the world. To have children nowadays and in the body we have is a crime. This is the basis of the Cathar doctrine but it is mine, *integrally.* Men with their anarchy, their perversion, their stupidity and their wars have never suffered except from this *sin* and from not having resolved *in their bodies* to renounce it. The whole world is gradually going toward chaos and has never wanted and even today still doesn't want to admit it, and deludes itself with a dream of peace which it will enjoy in fact only when it has physically earned it, by renouncing sexual obsession. And this whole world, I say, will soon be destroyed. I don't have to tell you or to hide from you any longer that this idea and this Apocalyptic Will are responsible for my having been put away for 8 years and accused of delirium and sickness. But for me at present the sick are those who use their sexuality without seeing that it is the

cause of all sickness, infection or delirium and that men will be cured of their folly and delirium only when they renounce the principle of their inmost sexuality. —There we have the great Cathar idea which the world has never accepted. —I still have much to tell you about this subject but in short I shall not believe in peace as long as men fail to realize that the time has come for them to understand that the true cause of all their wars, their hate, their famine, their misery is everybody's sexual impiety with everybody else's body and soul.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

To Jean Paulhan

Rodez, 9 September 1945

Dearest friend,

You asked me for a book, I am going to write you a letter. I don't know if it will be a long one since I've just begun it, but I would like it to be published since I'm writing it as a poem which is dedicated specially to you. —We have shared many thoughts during the last eight years without my seeing you, and we have often spoken through distance and space, and your souls, yours and Jeanne Paulhan's, have replied fluidly to me in the atmosphere and apparently at some meters from me in the waves coming from my belly, since everything comes from sexuality which is heart; together we have discussed many problems in this way, and I have taken down from you and Jeanne Paulhan several words of heart, particular ones which you have not repeated in your letters, not because your letters lack heart—on the contrary they abound with it but the heart does not have the same nature here that it has had on all the occasions when we have spoken privately to each other through space and *in time*—but because one

has wickedly forced you to forget those words of heart, in order to wickedly force you to forget that the soul speaks in the whole of space, and that the souls of those who have loved each other answer each other through the spaces as yours and Jeanne Paulhan's answered me this morning Sunday 10 September at approximately ten o'clock. —I had posed myself the problem of the soul's sickness, the soul sick of being in a false body and I asked myself where had this soul originally begun its beginning and who had put it into this false body, where we are the ancient slaves of an ego, which never had an ego, except to assert ours before us, by making use of our body losses, in those somber hours of being, when we feel we are losing body since to live is to lose one's body. And thus we proceed toward the grave, through old age, sickness, death, instead of going toward the eternal insurrection soul body, and body in body through soul, soul on soul as body on body. The soul is body, and the body is soul too, though not in the limitable way of the body, but in the unlimited way of the soul, which does not exceed its infinite since it is all this infinite which itself always exceeds itself, not in transcending the infinite but in tumulizing, as if by tumulus of tombs, I say *tumulizing* this infinite. To tuft, to guffaw until one's fat shakes, and I'm not alluding to fatty, the way one says Look at that fat lump of a man, when referring to an outrageously obese man trying to walk without wobbling, to tuft, to guffaw, to tumulize are the operations through which the body walks, the unfathomable soul of this body which guffaws toward still more body, in the end gains being a being, being soul in all its body, and its body is no longer only soul, because it is the soul which is the body. The body ascends since it certainly is soul, but the soul descends because it is body, and what is to ascend for the body is to descend for the soul, to descend body into infinite hell, the soul full, stuffed to bursting with body must now ascend since it is full, but in order to dig up all the tumuli of beings, with which to ascend again one day.

It was a similar problem, the basis of this problem which I was dis-

cussing with myself this morning when I saw you breathing and living, when I was trying to understand where the being of living had taken the wherewithal to breathe, and in what way it had taken it. For I believe that it was a void which needed to be full, and used this need for fullness, this sexual need for fullness in order to fill up all the voids of the void, but in a way which is yet to be understood with regard to a being neither void nor even the void of its fullness.

One day in one of your books you said something I have never forgotten, a phrase which made me love you when I read it even before knowing you, I think it was in 1920: ". . . but who would not gain from being sick," for the problem I was discussing within me was that of living sickly when one believes oneself to be healthy, and of understanding that sickness is the basis of health. I was thinking of you then yesterday morning and I felt my heart become a spherical sex, ascend and hover over the penis, like a suspended force torn away from it. —For the penis had life in the heart, and the heart slept. It slept because it was being, and because being sufficed it. For to sleep is not to slumber, but to live on the side of the dream, and not like a sleeper giving off the compiled mucus of the dream, but like a fiend seeking itself, contrary to any consciousness of wakefulness, in that sort of terebrant immanence, in that space of unfathomable immanence where our unconscious is woven. —And I am not speaking of a separate diabolical fiend but of a furious fiend of self in this sleeping being, more alive than an awake being, because it is the being living. A man who lives his life has never lived himself, has never lived his self, like a fire which lives an entire body in the integral expanse of the body, by dint of consuming this body, a man does not live all his self at every minute of his body, in an absolute space of body, sometimes he is knee and sometimes foot, sometimes occiput and sometimes ear, sometimes lung and sometimes liver, sometimes membrane and sometimes uterus, sometimes anus and sometimes nose, sometimes penis and sometimes heart, sometimes saliva and sometimes urine, sometimes food and sometimes sperm, sometimes

excrement and sometimes idea, I mean that whatever is the ego or the self is not centered on only one perception, and that the ego is no longer whole because it is dispersed in the body whereas the body should be gathered together to itself in integral sensorial equality and should constitute an integral perception. —For man is not only *scattered* in his body, he is scattered in the exterior of things, like a forgotten death of his body, and he swims around his body because he has forgotten his body and because his body has forgotten the self, and the man who does not live all his self commits at every moment the mistake of believing himself to be this self, mind, idea, conception, notion, which floats in a point of the body, instead of being his body himself and at every moment all his body. —For it is not a question of exhausting all one's self, in a single exertion, under the pretext of living all, —but of descending to the bottom of all this and of bringing back the self from there, in order to reach this computation of body where the uterine soul of the being gathers together in all the body, in order to create its stature from it, and no longer to place its stature either outside or inside the stature of the body, but in the uterine stature of the soul which is the guffawing being of the body.

It suddenly occurs to me that similar ideas can be found in the *Tarakhyan*, but I have never read the *Tarakhyan* and I read only a few random pages of the Upanishads in 1934, I'm not acquainted with the books of India or Tibet, I hardly glanced at the Popol-Vuh, one day at the National Library, the ideas I have I discover them, by suffering them myself, little by little and step by step, I write only what I have suffered measure by measure of body, and point by point in all my body, I have never found what I write except through agony, agony of my body's mental and moral faculties, for when Jeanne Paulhan suffers it is she Jeanne Paulhan who suffers and nobody but she in her pain and nobody else would be able to describe it, and when I write about my extreme pain I resent the fact that the *Tarakhyan* without having suffered its spasms anticipated my suffering in order to distil knowledge from it which Vishnu the spirit has

used in order to keep beings in life. For such is my predicament, to have suffered, myself, a knowledge from which everybody since I was born has persisted in extracting writings. For I am a source of life that has been deprived of its constituent force: opium and food, that has been deprived and underfed so that it will be compelled to give perpetually the maximum without receiving anything even the minimum while the maximum of absolute satisfaction is subsequently reserved for everybody else, and this is why this force has been imprisoned, enslaved, poisoned, intoxicated, put into a coma for 8 years so that nothing of what could aid it to live, I mean nothing of what comes out of it be put exclusively to its daily profit and thereby saved from those who have plotted to profit from it. Like a ghost becoming a body one day in order to go out and live and from whom this body is eventually removed: remain a ghost, it is told, the body you have made for yourself in order to live has always belonged to us, we can not leave you this body, to do so would rob us of gratification, the pleasure of enjoying your body too, and you will not deprive us of this pleasure, if we deprive you of your ego. —There you have the appalling situation in which I flounder and which I try to make you understand every time I see you. I signalled it to you yesterday morning, but signs made from a distance are forgotten and I sincerely hope that this letter reminds you that the world continues only because of my losses of marrow and sperm, and that men have balefully conspired to keep me in this state of loss by depriving me of everything that could restore my strength, and by underfeeding me for years in order to take everything I lose from me. The foundation of the body is sexual, you know it, but it is not well enough known that sexuality is the basis of breathing, because it is the soul of the bones of the dead, and that the heart has been extracted from sexuality in order to make being, while the heart itself, through the distance between it and the genitals, constitutes a dimension of being, while dimension, distance and being should have remained in sexuality. This exteriorization of the heart created the illusory world, this world propped up by an

illusory being which prevents us from breathing.

This pectoral heart is a crime which dates back to long before Jesus-christ, and this crime is the disequilibration of a being, a being which was not *being*, that is to say come out of the ego, unfolded from self and by self, spread out in all the spaces, instead of being blocked up in self, an immeasurable self because it is full of all its self. Lucifer's crime against god was his desire to extend his being, instead of letting it remain forever unmeasured in its unfathomable volume of being.

This is the problem which I tried yesterday morning Sunday partially to solve before you, by making the heart reenter the bar, the immeasurable bar of the penis which is not reckoned in centimeters but in soul of density. The penis was a measure of love which beat all alone formerly, and the heart was torn away from the bar in order to suffocate and to adjust the bar and to give it a being which was not a loving being, since its heart was displaced, but a rapacious being, marked by self-preservation outside of being so that it would never have anything to give. For being gives but man takes and keeps everything he takes and man today is no longer a being, for being was based on love and man killed love and his being in the initial sex of god in order to have nothing to give to god, and to keep god in the midst of himself intending to take from him all that constitutes god.

I don't know the origins of Parkinson's disease but I believe we suffer from it in our being because man has overthrown god. It is a lack of god and men have made the souls that are faithful to god suffer the torture coming from this privation in order to separate them from god. —If I were not interned here and if I had all that was necessary I believe I would have been able to do everything to free Jeanne Paulhan of pain, but here there are so many beings who disturb me when I work, few nearby but many afar, that I really can no longer do anything.

I have now told you enough about the problem for you to agree with me that this abominable and criminal world should be com-

pletely destroyed and for you to understand the war I intend to wage against the magicians and sorcerers of Tibet who keep us in bondage.

To you with all my heart.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

I would definitely like you to publish this letter.

To Pablo Picasso
(Draft of a letter)

Rodez, 27 February 1946

As soft as flesh but sharply centered, raised high like the prow of a ship from which the mantila hangs like a veil; it is this eye bored into the stonework of ripe flesh, ripe, shaded like the bloom of a peach, barely a shadow and not even bloom but like the shadow of a red brick making one forget the flesh in the allusive wall.

This black clot eye in the A of the space, a thoughtful A, suspended, a black point fixed between a being's purposeful soul and the painter's creative hand which has masterfully placed it in the square of a form. This eye lives, it lives its own life in the angle A, but through the perfect place where, on the obtuse surface of the face, it asks a question. This square of face without mouth with an eye is what one first sees in this painting and it requires some time in order to perceive that the same head has a face lower down, that of another woman, the same but turned the other way. The eyelid of her lowered eye is ripe fruit falling, shadow on slumber, and she dreams in the barely perceptible mysterious malice of her eye. —Is she sleeping. Is she dreaming. One does not know. This painting is an aroma whose soul will not emerge since between the two sides of the head is the hook of an old light, an old phosphorescent light like a two-way

question mark.

The double hook of this two-way ear shines there like a cat's magnetic velvet fur and resembles a minor question which is also an affirmation. What does it affirm, what does it ask? That is the painter's mystery and I believe it will never be revealed. For all great paintings keep their secret, and whoever seeks to know more about the painting than the painter chose to reveal is a disgusting criminal.

This painting, Pablo Picasso, is simple like the void and in it are memories, yours, and questions. It is quite simple and contains nothing. On the one hand it is austere and mythical, on the other hand an unsuspected and barely suspecting poem under the latanias. —But there is this ear which speaks, there is this poised little ear in the bareness, this unctious ashen ear where the unctious is stopped and apparently restrained in the dryness of the ashes by the blinking of the bordering light which borders it and which by lighting it up folds it up.

siok en siok en
terensi tereci
siok e siok en
terensir ki
yiork e yiork e
terenki riki
yiork e yiork
e tereski

Which means, Pablo Picasso, that after so many mythical battles which have supplied stylized heads of soothsayers on preserved or lost vases, after so many bodies of hanged beings on the walls of Etruscan buildings, or in the parietal uterine caverns of the tombs, painted like a dead man's bone there remains,

pas ta safer dezi traba
pas memumka narida

testimony, supreme consciousness, dust of the vanished,

york o belli tafer raki
york o belli taferti

Today marks the advent of a painter who has transfered to a simple painting the 2 faces of the eternal female and under the mantila of the hair ornament he has put, as if at the end of the road of art, these two enigmatic hooks of ears like a subjacent hieroglyph.

And I believe, Pablo Picasso, that the soul, the old bony tooth of the soul will support this hieroglyph.

yo tertri negeta
egete etertri trena

To Monsieur Pierre Bousquet

Rodez, 16 May 1946

Dear sir and friend,

Having been *deported* from Ireland, interned at Le Havre, transfered from Le Havre to Rouen, from Rouen to the Sainte-Anne insane asylum in Paris, from the Sainte-Ann insane asylum in Paris to the insane asylum at Ville-Evrard in the department of the Seine to the insane asylum at Rodez, I know what deportations are, for medicine is known through pain and whoever alleviates pain must first have suffered it, and I agree to speak to you about your deportation to Germany in 1942, as you have in fact asked me to do, only because my situation resembles yours in being a *state* of deportation. To be deported is an event indeed and a state which I shall not examine medically or scientifically because I hate medicine as much as science, but about which I can speak to you as somebody who has suffered it for a long time and, I shall venture to say, meticulously. Meticulously

means that I have been forced like you to experience the whole agony of deportation: *deported* I have been interned into the bargain and I have also had time in fact during years of straw mattresses and of cells, lying on straw mattresses in cells, to think about my situation as a transplanted person and an exile. —In short, dear Mr. Pierre Bousquet, we have a body: a father and a mother were given to us all, given, I mean *assigned*, but we really *don't remember* it. A child's memories generally begin around 18 months or 2 years, and *before* we don't know where we were. As for me, my first *official* memories begin at 18 months, if I say where I was before and that I know it too through memory, I shall be treated as a madman again because my personal memories do not coincide with those of my civil status, for the children that society makes are not those that nature makes. But let us change the subject. —So then, you, Mr. Pierre Bousquet, you always thought you were called Mr. Pierre Bousquet and it was as Pierre Bousquet in time and because you were called Pierre Bousquet, so you rose up one day from nothingness into France among a family of French people; now, France having been at war and having been conquered, you were obliged one day to submit unprotestingly to measures for deportation taken against all the young people of your age after the end of the last war, under the dissolute government of Vichy. —You had no part in the bickering between Daladier and Hitler, but the person responsible for your deportation having been ousted as a coward, his successor Pierre Laval, who was his equal in treason and cowardice, undertook to bind your hands, at the conqueror's orders. Had you been conquered then yourself, no, you were too young, but it was you who had to pay the price for the rout of the French soldiers who preferred to get kicked in the ass rather than to fight, as sacrosanct duty obliged them to do. —But perhaps they too had decided it was not their duty to continue fighting rigged out in blinders by the Daladier government intent on getting them directly to the charnel house. Whatever the reason you were seized from your home one day not by the force of the tempest, the mistral, tornados,

a squall, an *electric* storm or a strong south wind, but by that horrible nameless force which is always characterized by the mean faces of the shabby people who represent it and who function only because they are ordered or hired to do so, a force which only comes from the one-sided decision of a number of coniving mobsters who represent the government, the police, the administration, and in your case the bankruptcy of any army. —To be brutally taken away from one's country in order to be transplanted to another, the way a tree is transplanted in order to prevent rot, is atrocious, and it is equally atrocious to be brutally, abruptly and officially deprived of a home. A diver who loses the axis of a landscape and a fragment of his body in the landscape, as if he suddenly saw his body pass by in the countryside like the roller of a turning kaleidoscope. That is an image, a stylist's metaphor but it reveals a monstrous and insulting reality: the fact that we are not the masters of our bodies. —Our father-mother disposes of them for school, when the administration does not dispose of them for the children's convict-prisons or the professional reform schools, and society for the prisons and the insane asylums; society then disposes of them for the military service health inspection, the priests for the "last sacrament" and the extreme unction of the coffin; and society disposes of them for war while it remains behind to make deals on the black market. And the Vichy government sells for infinitely more than 30 deniers infinite thousands of young men's bodies, to serve as serfs on foreign soil. —But for me, Mr. Pierre Bousquet, the horror of it lies neither in the transplantation nor even in not being one's own master but in the unusual power of this nameless thing which on the surface but only on the surface is called society, government, police, administration and against which historically speaking even recourse to the force of revolution has failed. For revolutions have vanished, but society, government police, administration, schools, I mean the transmission and transfer of beliefs through the *totems* of education, ***have always remained intact.***

And one could believe there is nothing to do.

The day of your deportation to Germany, in the anguish of being taken away from home and transported to an unknown destination, you were *surrounded*. One can say passed from hand to hand by men who, for the share of the cake they were getting at that moment, represented this undefinable power.

The sudden arrival of the police who sit down in front of one just like that in a café is something I have experienced, but that people in the government's pay fix an appointment for a certain hour, on a certain day, at a certain place, in order to take one away with them to Germany, is one of the immoral *obligations*, one of those constraints, one of those soothing oppressive constraints against which nothing can be done.

And one may well wonder how that happens.

For in the foreground everything seems to occur without any fuss and *at first* one is not treated badly. The measures taken against one may be extremely abject, but if one submits docilely and sweetly one can hope to enjoy a sort of *commutation* of one's penalty, in fact if one adopts the right attitude, the penalty, like an electric commutator switched off in the night of hate, may even change its nature. It is thus that the victims of rape calm the spirit of rape by assenting in all their limbs by offering themselves to the housebreaker's gluttony. And does not deportation imply rape, the entry by gentle housebreaking (gentle at first) of a horde of foreign bodies into one's own body, firstly those of the treacherous police who send one abroad, then those of all the black market dealers who lead one away and force one abroad, and finally, abroad, the bodies of foreign men as a rule.

With regard to us as individuals I have always wondered what has made us submit throughout history to this sort of unarmed coercion, for our submission prevents us from protesting on the spot as soon as the social, administrative or political apparatus is set in motion. —Revolts break out everywhere of course, but the old framework always

returns; apparently revolt is only tolerated with a view to readjusting the framework,while it is the framework itself, society which must be done away with so that people can live in peace. Admittedly, against us society can use force, but the latter actually originates in our own unanimous adherence to the force of society, and it is not a fact, but an idea. —It is a simple, false idea of our bodies which has been oppressing us for an extremely long time, and what are we waiting for in order to explode this idea?

So you were taken away forcibly to Germany. —You were compelled to join a convoy of French deportees, and your body which used to leave home, go to bookshops, art galleries, theaters, cinemas, cafés, which lunched or dined at friends' homes, which went to libraries and museums, which unrestrainedly bought suits that appealed to it, which went to the barber's to have its hair cut in the style it really appreciated and chose a specific shampoo for the style it really appreciated (for liberty implies humor), this body, you say, was dressed in fireman's clothes and put to work on an engine, and this meant good-bye to style and shampooing, to a well ironed suit and a clean shirt every day (I understand you since I wore rough regulation shirts myself for six years; it was madame Régis the superintendent who gave me my first proper one on Dr Ferdière's orders. A city shirt with a collar and a tie since Dr Ferdière didn't want me to be dressed here as an internee).

Instead of a suit and a shirt, you received a bombardment of glowing cinders and spent your days shovelling coal into the belly of a piece of machinery which you would gladly have sent elsewhere to get stuffed.

And the pain of deportation was intensified by the pain of exile.

Exile leads to witchcraft, the foreign psyche casts a spell which catches a man night and day and demands that he sweat out his consciousness in its direction, it is manipulative modelling. —You told me you had not been ill-treated. —But only the rebellious are ill-treated, following the official method and manner, I mean that the

oppressor's secret procedure and underlying intention when he confronts the oppressed dissuade him from *injuring* his body immediately. The victor does not destroy the vanquished, it is not in his interest to get rid of the vanquished but to *penetrate* him with a peculiar poison until the latter's nature resembles his own, and the vanquished is no longer there but only his body without any consciousness except the victor's. Everybody knows that operations of this kind occur but one is not aware that they are wilful and concerted and performed, I mean *lived* by a number of individuals whose unique function it is to think about interesting individualities and to do every thing possible in order to infect them with the virus of deportation, internment, imprisonment and bondage and also with the virus of *nationality*.

Hitler practiced this operation on a large scale. —In fact he himself was not called Hitler, because Hitler isn't a name which in Yugoslav, in Moldo-Wallach, in Czech can be put on the plane of hip-hip hurrah, hallelujah, hosanna, de profundis, but a word, a sort of exclamation which can be put on that plane when the surname isn't put there.

I've forgotten his surname but I met him in Berlin in 1932 in a café, a hollow imitation of the Dôme at Montparnasse called the Romanisches café. —The Gypsies' Cafe. —For the so-called Hitler pretended to be a so-called bohemian.

I was playing in an unimportant film called *Coup de feu à l'aube*; the previous year I had played in a film I remember much more favorably called *l'Opéra de quat-sous*; on that occasion I was visited by a policeman who frightened me but then proved friendly and told me to spit on hitlerism. But the genuine Hitler of the Romanisches café told me on the contrary that he intended to impose Hit-lerism, as if it were hip-hip hurrahism, and he also cited the way one had once tried to create Eurasia (Europe-Asia). The whole caboodle! I told him he was nuts to have ideas like that. Besides I knew perfectly well that he was a so-called initiate, that is to say a spell-casting megalomaniac,

one of the most accomplished specimens of one of the cliques that claim to lead the nations not by acts but solely by ideas, I mean virtually magnetic movements of ideation, I mean psychic waves, etc. An awful fight ensued during which the so-called Hitler had the police summoned in order to have me arrested. And in fact they came but they sided with me against this repugnant Moldo-Wallach who subsequently ruled Germany under the presupposed name of Hitler. —For that Hitler, the Hitler of history, was really a Moldo-Wallach, that is to say the descendant of a race of ancient hanged men known for their mysterious machinations with the breath of the ancient dead. Hitler is dead but his race has not ceased being destructive and it still sees him and calls for him everywhere. You know the legend of the mandragora, that sort of breath seed which is said to grow at the foot of gallows, under hanged men's corpses, and to come from their ejaculations of sperm at the final moment of strangulation. Hitler claimed in secret that he came from it. —For the Moldo-Wallachs of Berlin had premeditated not only your deportation, Mr. Pierre Bousquet, but many others. —And they still haven't stopped premeditating, though they have returned to Moldo-Wallachian. —For the whole world has suffered from hitlerism except the genuine Hitlerians who did not declare themselves conquered, but using one conjuring trick or another succeeded in escaping from Germany and returned to their country.

Through their machinations and conjuring tricks a more serious deportation awaits us all, something like an indefinable part of ourselves toward an unknown destination, while as for us, we shall no longer be there, and hitlerism will have replaced and converted Europe and Asia into a sort of Eurasia. It is a myth but there are many others. For we are surrounded by Myths which want to use us for their accouchements, what is to be done?

Build a stage in order to make these pitiless myths dance on the boards, and change them into real beings before imposing them on everybody through the seminal mandragora of the semence of ideas.

With kind regards.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

P.S. To dance is to suffer a myth, to replace it therefore by reality.

Notes

Most of the following Notes are selected from and based on the *Notes* at the end of *Lettres écritures de Rodez 1945-1946*, Volume XI of the *Oeuvres Complètes* of Antonin Artaud, Gallimard 1947. My own few contributions are limited to comments on the translation. Translating the letters, I occasionally incorporated information from the exegeses in the *Notes*, but details of this kind are not indicated below. Instead, I have concentrated on points of general interest and on important biographical material.

Title page: The letter from Arthur Adamov to Antonin Artaud, dated 21 March 1945, is reproduced in full on page 300 of Volume XI by the compiler of the *Notes*. For more on this subject see the note below on the letter to Picasso.

To Jean Dequeker: Jean Dequeker had recently joined the Free French Forces and was at Toulouse waiting to be posted. Previously, in March 1945, he had been appointed as a doctor to the psychiatric hospital at Rodez. Antonin Artaud enjoyed a much more amicable relationship with him than he did with Dr. Ferdière or Dr. Latrémolière. On his return (26 May 1946) to Paris, Artaud continued to write regularly to Jean Dequeker, and, on 31 January 1947, invited him to Paris: "Come to Paris, I'll pay the fare." Jean Dequeker and his wife helped considerably to make Artaud's last year at Rodez more tolerable.

To Jean Paulhan, 9 September 1945: The *Tarakhyan* is an invented title. In *Appendice 1* of *Héliogabale*, however, Artaud refers to a certain Tarak'hyan in his comments on a passage in *De l'état social de l'homme* by Fabre d'Olivet; but he makes a mistake here in the person's name, which is actually Tarak'ya in the book by d'Olivet.

To Pablo Picasso: On 26 February 1946, Marthe Robert and Arthur Adamov had gone to Rodez in order to visit Antonin Artaud and to ask Dr. Ferdière about the conditions for his release. Before they left, Antonin Artaud entrusted Arthur Adamov with a letter for Picasso. We know this through a letter by Arthur Adamov,

dated 21 March 1946 (sic): he informs Antonin Artaud of the steps he has taken with a view to obtaining paintings and manuscripts which could be sold at auction in order to raise the sum required for his release: ". . . We are going to arrange an auction so that you will be able to live in peace for a while: we already have paintings—or promises—from Braque, Chagall, Gioacometti, Balthus, Gruber, Brauner, Tal Coat, Picabia, etc. Éluard, Gide, Paulhan, Barrault, etc. will provide manuscripts. Picasso is not in Paris, but he will certainly give a painting. I've given the letter you wrote to him to Eluard who will forward it." Picasso never received the letter however.

Our text is probably a first draft for this letter, or at least for the part of this letter which was inspired by a painting by Picasso, in all likelihood *La femme qui pleure* (The woman who weeps), a reproduction of which had appeared in the review *l'Heure nouvelle* (No. 1, 1945) as an inset plate placed just after the extracts of *Notes* and of letters by Antonin Artaud, published under the title *Fragments*.

l'Heure nouvelle (The new hour) was founded by Arthur Adamov, who told Antonin Artaud, in a letter dated 21 March 1945 (sic) (an extract of which is the epigram to this translation), that he has "chosen this idiotic title in order to put in exergue the phrase of Rimbaud which sums up my thought: *'oui, l'heure nouvelle est au moins très sévère'* (yes, the new hour is at least very severe)." The review would aim as "a single point, the central summit of the interior of everything. We shall challenge everything at every moment."

To Pierre Bousquet: Pierre Bousquet, who was a friend of Jean Dequeker, had attempted more than once to use his important connections in order to overcome the difficulties regarding Artaud's release which had arisen with the local administration.

In the film *l'Opéra de quat'sous*, directed by G.W. Pabst, based on the work by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, and, anteriorly, on that of John Gay, Antonin Artaud played an apprentice beggar. —N.G.

Antonin Artaud

Letter to Peter Watson

Translated from the French by Clayton Eshleman, Bernard Bador and David Maclagan

Paris, July 27th, 1946

Dear Sir,

I entered into literature by writing books in order to say that I was unable to write anything, my thought when I had something to say or to write was what denied me most. I never had any ideas and two very short books, 70 pages each, revolve about this profound, inveterate, endemic absence of any idea. They are l'Ombilic des Limbes and le Pèse-Nerfs.

At the time they seemed to me full of cracks, of faults, of platitudes, and as if stuffed with spontaneous abortions, of renunciations and all sorts of abdications, always traveling along the side of anything essential or big that I wanted to say and which I said that I never would say. —But after 20 years' lapse they appear to me staggering, successful not in respect to me but in respect to the inexpressible. Thus it is that works age in the bottle and that while all of them *lie* as far as the writer is concerned, in themselves they constitute a bizarre truth which life, if it were authentic itself, should never have accepted. —An inexpressible expressed through works which are nothing but a present shambles, and which have value only through the posthumous distance of a spirit dead with time and stalemated in the present, will you tell me what it is?

Since then I have written several other works: l'Art et la Mort,

Héliogabale, le Théâtre et son Double, Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras, Nouvelles Révélations de l'Etre, Lettres de Rodez.

In each one I have been pursued by this sinister harlequinade of a well with stories of texts superimposed one on top of another and which appear only on one level, like the grid of a secret checkerwork, in which yes and no, black and white, truth and falsehood although contradictory in themselves have dissolved into one man's style, that of this poor Mr. Antonin Artaud.

I do not remember being born in Marseilles on the night between the 3rd and the 4th of September 1896, as my civil status states, but I do remember having argued there with a serious question, in a place which was not one, situated between space and a sinister world, fortuitous, unliveable, grotesque, dreadfully nonexistent.

Space led onto a ladder of lives where I saw no interruption to my being,

the sinister, dreadful, grotesque world was that of this very life.

The question with which I was arguing was to know if I will go to a white mass grave, if, always tired of existing, I will turn myself over to that white center which . . . .

or if I will remain faithful to that dark water, to that acqueous lid of a crate of dark water, which was holding me obstinately back. —That smelled of shit on my heart, this crate with my torso inside, but it was my ego, the excrement.

In short the crate was a bloody torso, but the torso of a man, while the white hole that offered me its soul, a woman, was but nothingness to me.

Will I turn to the mother or will I stay father, the—in short—eternal father that I was?

It must be believed that I must have chosen to be father for eternity, for I've been a man for 50 years now and I don't see that this could change.

For if before this life I have had others I do not believe that there are others afterwards.

Death is not just a state of passage. It is a state that never has existed, for if it is difficult to live it is getting more and more impossible and ineffective to die, —looking carefully at this life I remember being dead in it really and corporeally at least 3 times, once at Marseilles, once at Lyons, once in Mexico and once at the Rodez asylum in the trances of electro-shock. Each time I was aware of having left my body and having traveled through spaces, but not very far from my own body, for one is never very well detached. And in reality one never leaves one's body. The body is a trunk of which one is only a leaf when one realizes that one is dead, and that one is not outside but inside.

For the deadman has only one idea it is to return to his corpse, to take it back again in order to go forward.

But it is always he who takes *you* back,

and one obeys because one is inside.

So then the deadman is a being who lies, one must suffer still, now is not the moment, says the voice of consciousness that dreams, and those who speak are they deadmen or living-men? —One can no longer tell. —Dead, I have been seized by the tornado of beings all chafed from hate, and unhinged. —This hate gave me an idea, which I felt going around in my absent ears, and which brought my hand back to my side. This idea was that each being had made me lose an event, and that death was merely a story that I should have lived living.

Dead, one dies on the wrong side, it is not the path that one should take.

Only, as long as I am alive, I don't believe in the path, and I do not believe that the dead believe in it or have to argue about it. One is not dead really dead when one adds up this or that.

And does it interest you, dear Mr. Peter Watson, to know how one is when one does not, really does not, add things up. —And what happens otherwise than there, and whether one is or whether one is not there.

Well, I don't think that does interest you and as far as I am con-

cerned, for a long, a very long, a very long time it has ceased to be of interest to me!

Enough, enough and enough of questions and problems, of problems and questions, of life and thought, of death and separated souls (and this rhymes, can't you see that it rhymes? Oh this life that never wants to leave us alone). But then wait before thinking until you have at least something to say, Mr. Artaud.

No, I, Antonin Artaud, well then no, well then precisely no, I, Antonin Artaud, I want only to write when I have nothing more to think. —Like someone eating at his stomach, at the winds of his stomach from inside.

You say that the English public doesn't know me. And where indeed could they have picked up "la Correspondence avec Jacques Rivière," "l'Ombilic des Limbes," "le Pèse-Nerfs," "l'Art et la Mort," "le Moine" de Lewis, "Héliogabale ou l'Anarchiste couronné," "les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Etre," "le Théâtre et son Double," "le Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras," "les Lettres de Rodez," and last and especially "*Letura d'Eprahi*," written in 1935, into which I put the best of myself, and which has been lost and which I have never recovered although it was printed so magnificently in characters taken out of ancient incunabulum,

no,

in characters of which the most ancient incunabulum were only an imitation,

a duplicate tracing,

a castrated transposition of its own head,

and, excuse me for using bizarre, and somewhat pedantic words, but I will give you a transposition

voctrovi

cano dirima

cratirima

enectimi

vonimi
cano victrima
calitrima
endo pitri

calipi
ke loc tispera
kalispera
enoctimi

vanazim
enamzimi

all stupid incantations in a false lingua franca, fit to summon sham deadmen

to say that after the printing of this book the world buggered off, and that before the first incunabulum the world also had buggered off. For from time to time, dear Mr. Peter Watson, life makes a leap, but that is never written in history and I have never written except to fix and perpetuate the memory of these cuts, these scissions, these ruptures, these brusque and bottomless falls

which

. . . .

but imagine, dear Mr. Peter Watson, that I have never been more than a sick man and I shall not go on about it to you.

I repeat to you, I have never been able to live, to think, to sleep, to talk, to eat, to write

and I have never written except to say that I have never done anything, could never do anything, and that in doing something in reality I was doing nothing. My whole work has only been and could

only be built on this nothingness,

on this carnage, this scrimmage of extinguished fires, of dried up cries and slaughter,

one does nothing, one says nothing, but one suffers, one despairs and one fights, yes, I believe that one really does fight. —Will the struggle be evaluated, will it be judged, will it be justified?

No.

Will it be specified?

No again,

naming the struggle is to kill nothingness, perhaps.

But above all to stop life . . .

One will never stop life.

But will one come out onto the plain at least, I mean onto the terreplein of after the battle. To sniff the memories of the struggle?

Never.

The struggle has started up again further below, so what? An escharrasage for perpetuity? An indefinite scraping at the wound. The infinite ploughing of the fissure from where the wound emerged?

Perhaps!

But you're mad?

Indeed not; and it is you who are only an imbecile,

I, Antonin Artaud, I am boiling, I am boiling, you, critic, you graze my cock outside.

And that is all that characterises you, that stops you, and that makes you.

There where I am nothing has any more meaning and life is not, it is not at your lubricious water level, you who like only what can be appreciated.

You don't have to have a tongue for eating or for speaking but for jousting, for planting the tip of your brain in the unctuous silt of the throe, and for stirring it, for making it stir like a mayonaise or an aioli, you have not made the throe which makes you exist, oh

cowards, for you emerged from its pain, like fugitives, and it is on the cream of your flight that you have based your life. —*To gauge* evil is this lubricious state with which you have made your metric nipple stall, your kind of calculated argot!

arganufta
daponsida
parganuft

ebanufte
parganupt
ebanupte
pelozipter

palon
petonme
onme
niza

All your great books from the Vedas to the Gospels by the way of the Upanishads, the Brahma Putras and the imitation of Jesus Christ consist only of this search for a happiness and a beatitude whose basis is an erotic,
not a love but an erotic,
the search for a *deficiency* state as a low water mark of the infinite.
He who lives takes no rest and does not know if he belongs to happiness or to the Miserere,
to hell or to paradise.
He lives and that's all.
Music doesn't stir his flesh.
(and the aioli contemplates you, spirit, and you contemplate your

aioli. At last shit to the infinite!)

Contemplative states are the states of lubricious buzzards, of re-routers of grounded energy, of those with their *anomaly* circumcised.

The anomaly being the evidence.

The male is built on the strong anus, the anus is not a hole but the penis.

The anus being the sphincter, a suffocation which always takes a being who wants to live, and judges him, what? Yes, judges him according to his intrinsic capacity for suffocating this suffocation. For being before the tightening of the penis, the male of the most intense tightening.

But then that is bad verbal sophistry, all of it. —The Jew in reality is he who from life and from being wanted to extirpate suffering as *the omagy* of existence. I say the-omagy. —What does that mean?

It means liege man, and liege om.

Breath the omagy of death. The terrible misdemeanor of entering into being, without pain, so that death is no longer in om.

But that one should live happily off the dead, happily off the camphor and powder of the valorous corpses of the dead.

I am that deadman whose powder is eaten: thyroidal or ovarian extract of caput, of the end of when it's finished and I know it.

Awful petits-bourgeois initiated into puckering their mouths in a kiss shape to suck in the departed soul, they eat my departed soul powder in this fashion night and day,

which is why I am sick each time I wake up, and I am sick all day long.

For there would be no sickness without vampires, spellbinders and initiates.

How well I know it.

I know from which abject centers these maneuvers go forth over all the earth, and who those millions of living are who to live have thus chosen to bask in the dust,

the dust of survivor selves,
the dust of myself, surviving.

And it was to shut my mouth that in 1937 in Ireland I was thrown into prison, then locked up and confined in France for 9 years in a lunatic asylum.

My work says much less than my life about all this, but it says it.

Very amicably yours.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

September 13, 1946.

Cassavetes watching a dress rehearsal

Photographs by Steve Reisch. Photos printed by Isgo Lepijian.

A Note on "Three Plays of Love and Hate"

Go through your mind what the attitude
would be if there were no lines.
—JOHN CASSAVETES

During the first six months of 1981, a momentous occurrence and milestone for experimental and equity waiver theater (99 seats, no payment to the artists) took place in Los Angeles. The event was orchestrated, and made possible by the artistic leadership and financial endowment of John Cassavetes, the world-renowned actor-director-writer.

Cassavetes and Ted Allan (author of *Lies My Father Told Me*) had long desired to create a theater event, involving three full length plays, focusing on the passions within the family, and the attraction/polarity within intimate relationships.

Three Plays of Love and Hate were conceived independently. "The Third Day Comes" was written in 1980 by Ted Allan. "Love Streams" was evolved from a two-character play, "I've Seen You Cut Lemons," by Allan, and was produced in London in 1970, directed by Sean Connery. The play was radically altered and expanded with the intention of creating a film (which will soon be under production). Cassavetes wrote "Knives" in 1979.

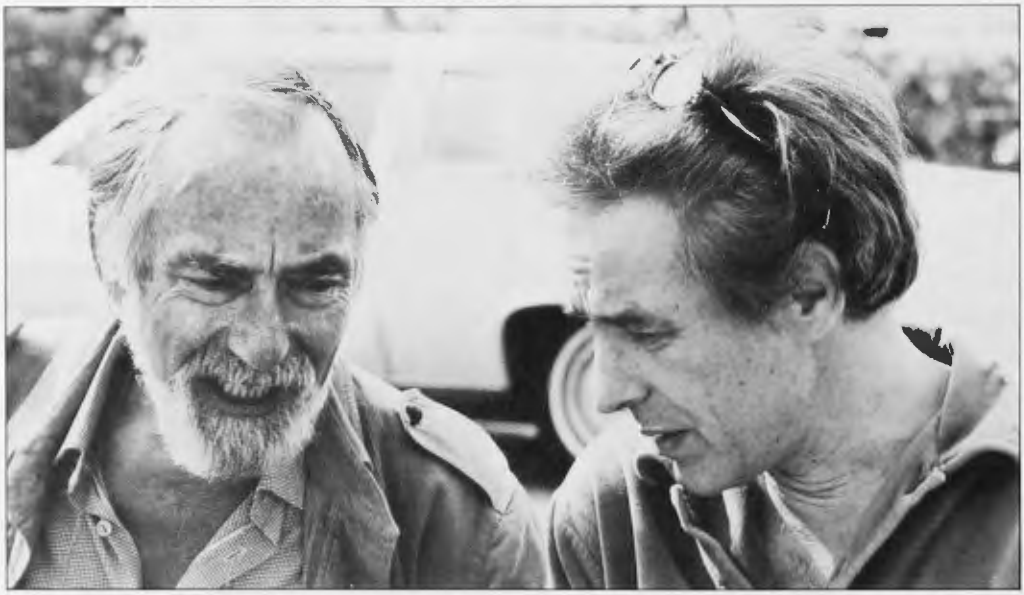
Volunteering for roles in this nonprofit production were Jon Voight, Gena Rowlands; Peter Falk and Michael McGuire. This core of well-known actors acted as a magnet in attracting literally hundreds of artists and craftsmen to the project, 300 of whom appeared in the actual productions.

A theater was located that was struggling to stay on its feet. A deal

was made with the California Center for Performing Arts to allow the Center's production of "Look Homeward, Angel" to continue while the Cassavetes group leased the theater and initiated the extensive physical alterations necessary to provide the space envisioned for *Three Plays*. Not only did the Cassavetes group completely renovate the theater, stage, and lobby (including painting the building's exterior), but virtually every other aspect of the building changed also.

During the rehearsal process, and the construction of stage and sets designed by James Eric, as well as during the production of the plays, Steven Reisch took over 3000 candid photos.

Since video and TV coverage of the event was not allowed, there has been, to date, no documentation (other than newspaper reviews). Sooner or later, the event should be elaborated in book form, making use of the interviews either already recorded, or offered, by Allan, Voight, Rowlands, Falk, McGuire, and Cassavetes himself. We hope that such an elaboration may be stimulated by our brief presentation in *Sulfur*. —C.E., *March, 1983.*



Ted Allan and Cassavetes discussing a scene from Love Streams

James Eric

Working With Cassavetes

Working with John is like working with a magician with one foot in black magic and one in white. He takes devotees in his arms like a conjurer, then drops them in a playground of chaos.

He has no answers; only more questions. Yet he has the answer for himself: "Let's play, let's have fun and we'll find something." It won't be the answer and it most certainly won't have anything to do with the question.

The movie industry is frightened of him, but then the industry is frightened of all artists who demand their freedom. The industry must have slaves. Time is money. John is slave to no one.

He is the hero of the struggling actor-film maker. A hero of those who thumb through their stack of unproduced screenplays daily and know that if they hold out a little longer, one day the right contact will be made and they too will do something with integrity.

The title, "Three Plays of Love and Hate," not only describes the character of the plays but the relationship all 200 of us had with John. Sometimes these emotions shifted to the beat of one's heart. Sometimes love would last a week. One thing was sure: the lovely divine drunken companionship you felt tonight would turn into a hateful hangover tomorrow.

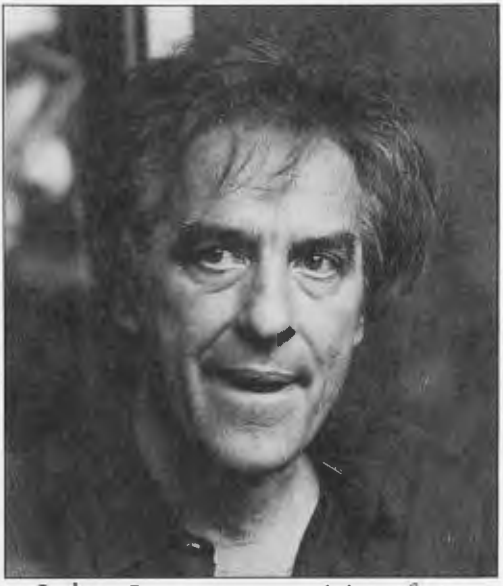
He set a supreme example for the Hollywood Community of Stars. He chose an impossible task: to direct three new plays at once. He put up his own money and we converted a warehouse into a beautiful theater. He encouraged other "name" artists to give of their time and together they renewed the lives of all who took part by giving of themselves. The prerequisite to enter? Give me your life for

six months. This was never spoken, but one knew it after the first reading.

John gave the tickets away to all those involved. We played to packed houses for four weeks. He turned down offers to film the plays for TV, saying "It would only confuse things . . . it was *not* our original intention." The reviewers did not understand the event. John mentally lit a match to their effigy. He walked away in a bloodless body and asked for none of the material things that he had given back. A week after we closed the press wrote a glowing resurrection.

Rehearsal scene from Knives

Gena Rowlands waiting to rehearse



John Cassavetes waiting for a response from Peter Falk

Cassavetes explaining an approach to a character to Jon Voight

Rowlands and her daughter Zoe Cassavetes during a reading of Love Streams

Rowlands with dog (played by Neill Bell) in Love Streams

Cassavetes discussing a new idea for The Third Day Comes *with Michael McGuire*

Photo by Hank Fieger

Rowlands and McGuire in a scene from The Third Day Comes

Peter Falk and judge (John Hawker) in Knives

Karin Lessing

A Love Poem

silver
the steps,

railings
and silvered roof's

rim
in the dawn light

piridae cardamine

attached
with
a silken girdle

caught
in the dawn

•

bringer of news, but of little

the earth
parched and of trees

dying

to have watched them

clambering,

winding
strip of wings

dwindling

and laved

in green

shrouds

scatter

•

are you on a soul-ship

pitched

between
threshold
and void

drummed

further

and further

from your orchards'

pale children

•

in the dark
air, stones

shine the attendants

cloud-
sealed agate

malachite

it runs
veined like its sisters

through grass, the

healer,

Althea

•

muted, the
crystals

un-
changing

as if
time

weren't

mountain the hymns

under
ground

of stone

reaching *die Berührung*

the bridge, an

infinite

affirmative

'yes' quiet

transparent châteaux

•

as when, late
in spring

above timber and rock

bristled
with flowers

orchis, the
bee's lip

purple haze over snow

•

but you,

have you not seen

love
change

and light

un-
crested

the red sun

cast
a blood red reflection

shadows of things,
broken, their

unclaimed

mosaics

.

thus turning

and dipping,

the infrangible
you

chrome-
tipped

your banners

the sleeping crystals'

in-
most

oriflamme

.

day
falters

in bells, all
earth's

dancers, the poem

...l'amour
réalisé du désir

while remaining

desire

what

the throated, star-
stepped

terraces sing.

△

Velimir Khlebnikov

Seven Poems and an Essay

Translated from the Russian
by Paul Schmidt

Wind whose
Song, wound
Whose wrong?
Rage of blade to be blood
(I'm dead, I'm dead)
Staining arms in sanguine streams.
I renew, eye
You, know you.
Brave new.

△

Bow! Wow! Bow!
Black bunch
Bow! Wow! Bow!
Running dogs
Bow! Wow! Wow!

The Russian poet Velimir Khlebnikov, Futurist, friend of Mayakovsky and Malevich, contemporary of Pound and Yeats, was one of the great poetic explorers of the twentieth century. These poems are from a translation of his collected writings now in preparation.

Rage in snow
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Outside town
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Rip the dead
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Eat Someone's leg
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Eat someone's arm
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Belly Blood
Snout Snow

△

P pay o P—that what the lip say
Say hey o me—that what the see say
Bo bay o B—eyebrow, what he say
Say say o lay—that what the look say
Chee chee o chay—that what the chain say,
On the canvas of such correspondences
Somewhere beyond all dimensions
A face has a life of its own

△

Crawling crying craven
Stains the twilight sky
Falling where the raven
Turns the why-light of his eye.

△

The law of the see-saw argues
That your shoes will be loose or tight,
That the hours will be day or night,
And the ruler of earth the rhinoceros
Or us.

△

Bakunin Baking In Baku

(excerpt)

A bomb from Bombay
Goes boom in Baku—Bakunin
Brings us back to basics,
Wounding several English ladies
By the Bay of Baku
Who obey
The Bey of Baku

△

LAFFERS LOVE LAFFING
O NEVER LEAVE LAFFING
LAFF-LIVERS LIVE LAFFERS
RELIEVING LAFFS RELIVING LAFFTER
LAFFTER OF LOVERS LIGHT LAFFIRES OF LAFFTER
MAKE LAFFERS OF LUFFERS MAKE LOVERS OF LAFFERS
LET LAVERS WITH LOUFFAHS THROUGH LOUVERS LAFF

LOUD
LET LAFFTER'S LASERS TURN LOSERS TO LOVERS
LOVE LAFFING LAFF WHEN THE LUFFERS AND LEAVERS
HAVE LEFT
KEEP LAFFING RELIVING RELIEVING THROUGH LAFFTER
LAFFERS LOVE LAFFING
O NEVER LEAVE LAFFING

△

People say a poem must be understandable. Like a sign in the street, which carries the clear and simple words "For sale" . . . . But a street sign is not exactly a poem. Though it is understandable. On the other hand, what about spells and incantations, what we call magic words, the sacred language of paganism, words like "shagadam, magadam, vigadam, pitz, patz, patzu"—they are rows of mere syllables which the intellect can make no sense of, and they form a kind of beyondsense language in folk speech. Nevertheless an enormous power over mankind is attributed to these incomprehensible words and magic spells, a direct influence upon the fate of man. They contain powerful magic. They claim the power of controlling good and evil and influencing the hearts of lovers. The prayers of many nations are written in a language incomprehensible to those who pray. Does a Hindu understand the Vedas? Russians do not understand Old Church Slavonic. Neither do Poles and Czechs understand Latin. But a prayer written in Latin works just as powerfully as the sign in the street. In the same way the language of magic spells and incantations rejects judgments made by everyday common sense.

This fragment of an essay was found among Khlebnikov's papers, and was most probably written in 1919-1920. Gastev and Alexandrovsky were two of the earliest and best known of the "proletarian poets" whose work was published immediately after the revolution.

Its strange wisdom is composed of the truths contained in separate sounds: sh, m, v, etc. We do not yet understand these sounds. We confess that honestly. But there is no doubt that these sound repetitions constitute a series of universal truths spoken before the twilight of our soul. If we think of the soul as split between the government of reason and a stormy population of feelings, then incantations and beyondsense language are appeals over the head of the government to the population of feelings, a direct cry to the twilight of the soul or a supreme example of democracy in the life of language and reason, a lawful device reserved for rare occasions. Another example: Sophia Kovalevskaya owes her talent for mathematics, as she herself makes clear in her memoirs, to the fact that the walls of her nursery were covered with unusual wallpaper—pages of her uncle's book on higher algebra. We must acknowledge that the world of mathematics is a stringently prohibited area as far as the feminine half of humanity is concerned. Kovalevskaya is one of the few mortals who has attained that world. Could a child of seven really have understood those symbols—equal signs, degrees, brackets—all the magic marks of sums and deductions? Of course not; nevertheless they exercised a decisive influence on her life, and it was under the influence of her childhood impressions of this mysterious wallpaper that she became a famous mathematician.

Similarly the magic in a word remains magic even if it is not understood, and loses none of its power. Poems may be understandable or they may not, but they must be good, they must be truthful.

From the examples of the algebraic signs on the walls of Kovalevskaya's nursery that had such a decisive influence on the child's fate, and from the example of spells, it is clear that we cannot demand of all language: "be easy to understand, like the sign in the street." The speech of higher intelligence, even when it is not understandable, falls like seed into the fertile soil of the soul and only much later, in mysterious ways, does it bring forth its shoots. Does the earth

understand the writing of the seeds a farmer scatters on its surface? No. But the corn still grows in autumn, in response to those seeds. In any case, I certainly do not maintain that every incomprehensible piece of writing is beautiful. I mean only that we must not reject a piece of writing simply because it is incomprehensible to a particular stratum of readers. The claim has been made that poems about labor can be created only by people who work in factories. Is this true? Isn't the nature of a poem to be found in its withdrawal from itself, from its point of contact with everyday reality? Is a poem not a flight from the I? A poem is related to escape, in the shortest time possible its language must cover the greatest distance in images and thoughts.

. . . that there is no place to escape from the self. Inspiration always betrays the poet's background. Medieval knights wrote about poor shepherds, Lord Byron about pirates, Buddha was a king's son who wrote in praise of poverty. Or the other way around: Shakespeare was convicted of theft but wrote in the language of kings, as did Goethe, the son of a modest burgher, and their writing is devoted to portrayals of court life. The tundras of the Pechersky region have never known warfare, yet there they preserve epic songs about Vladimir and his hero knights that have long since been forgotten in the Dnepr. If we consider artistic creativity as the greatest possible deviation of the string of thought from its point of contact in the creator's life, as a flight from the self, then we have good reason for believing that even poems about an assembly line will be written not by someone who works on an assembly line, but by someone from beyond the factory walls. It's always the other way around: once he withdraws from the assembly line, stretching the string of his soul to the fullest length, the assembly-line poet will pass into the world of scientific imagery, of strange scientific visions, into the future of Planet Earth—like Gastev—or into the world of basic human values, like Alexandrovsky, into the subtle life of the heart.

Bill Wilson

Kokoschka's Water

sexual terror of the clown,
the heavy dick of a horse
hanging down
smeared with red color,

this is the face you saw in the sound
you heard in the red stair
at the bottom of the dark,
the CLANK! clang

step of the lost
robot-being that Oskar
had lost in the forest,
now having found its way from the forest's edge
walking over what will be your grave
toward the dawn it can't see
                seedlings
sprouting in its footprints

Tomato Soup

"Splish, splash, I was taking a bath," sang Bobby Darin
who was born in a cardboard box in the Bronx.
It was a box that tomato soup had come in,
his forlorn bassinet of actuality.
For the rest of his life,
which was the whole of his life,
Bobby Darin couldn't stomach tomato soup.
Yet even though a sickly child, at last he became
  a great success
with lots of girls and women and money
in a black sharkskin suit on a revolving stage in L.A.
He pulled hard on his cigarettes
and washed his throat with bourbon in the manner of the
  café singers of his day.
He kept late hours, you had to
in that world of nightclubs and warehouse districts.
He didn't have a strong constitution to begin with
and all of this wore him down.
Sure, he was headed for an early finish.
But when he would sing Bert Brecht's "Mac the Knife"
through an average radio in a three-bedroom home
you could hear the snuffed fetus still trying to kick
its way through to what would have been the next America
  socialist unblinded democratic advancing
kick and then fall silent beneath the dazzling formica countertop
as the golf cart sailed mildly through the beams of the carport
and the tomato soup sat burning on the range.

The Green Room

Amid the fake silence of two-pound rhinestones
the cherry-pink and apple-blossom-white aardvark
nuzzles the muskrats
                who are my relatives.
Once again some Indians are hacked up in Guatemala
and the United Fruit Company stands there smirking,
                holding the smoking banana.
I'm in here doing the dishes and listening to a needle
                siphon the song from a record,
                the meaning from the words,
                the blood from an arm. Why
does the arm fail to go around someone?
The song hangs around in the air awhile
like the smell of a meal after the dishes are put away.
The meaning enters the blood, the green room.
Thus
after 30,000 years
the light from a certain star finally reaches earth
and slurp, the parking lot sucks it up.
(Parking lot = a kind of absence I live.)
I stand in my kitchen
dreaming of a head-shaped cloud that won't move off my head,
                or a ring
some cheerleader in Kansas gave back
in 1948. What are white noise,
                daylight and endlessness?

Lives and particles? Phone calls? Lozenges?
Why
don't I have control why
aren't I driving?
If
I had more time I might
sort some of this out but
I don't
so tonight I'll just go around
choked venal confused sort of broken-hearted.
Ready to fight.

△

Angelyn Spignesi

Daimon Ice Woman w/Bitch

HAD ELLEN WEST BEEN EDUCATED to cultivate an imaginal perspective, go through the underworld terrain which beckoned her, she could have given birth to and become nurse of Sea-King, God-Father, Glorious Woman, and Armed Man too. This process would have entailed Binswanger's assistance in the delineation of these psychic figures, allowing their full texture and voice to unfold, exploring their relation to her, what they sought from her. When they were not

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This chapter will be appearing in the forthcoming book *Starving Women* which will be published by Spring Publications in 1983.

Some notes on items referring to passages in other chapters of the text:

Ellen West was the patient of the existential analyst Ludwig Binswanger. Today modern psychologists recognize Ellen West as an anorexic, she was possessed by images of food and eating compulsions, and eventually committed suicide.

Helen's Red Wall refers to a part of an active imagination of a patient of the author's. The patient, Helen, while experiencing hate and frustration, opened her inner eye to the spontaneous images and saw a wall of red. The psychological work done on Helen's imaginal world was presented in the preceding chapter.

Ice-Woman, Sea-King, Glorious Woman, Armed Man, Red Man, Bossman and Leopard refer to imaginal figures. These are autonomous figures of the psyche which are collective, which cross generations and are not subject to the time/space dimensions of everyday "reality." They refer to daimonic guides, demonic forces, muses and guardians, appearing to poets, and to others who are in various ways "possessed."

distant enough to inspire her through what became her poetry, they overwhelmed her and manifested themselves in her compulsive greed for and inhibition around food.

Ellen knew the figures and voices mainly as evil and demonic spirits; we wonder how they might have served her more as guardian angels, daimones. Had she yielded to the messages of those figures she might have found enough distance from them, have begun to see their various presences in her daily actions. Therapeutically this distance relates to delineation: personifying and eventually engaging in forms of "active imagination." It entails dialoguing with these figures, taking in their vengeances, their solace, hating them, loving them, giving them her desires, dreams, fears, and (mostly) compulsions.

Ellen too quickly moved out of her *longing* (beckoning her to the place of psychic presences) into *hunger* (for literal food). Instead of gobbling or fleeing the sweets the woman must stop; in order to build a temple for daimones she must cut herself from, slice her greed from the external food by sitting down and fully feeling the longing. She must sit within the greed. In the chasm of her own ravenous and bottomless pit, she can begin to see the images pulsating through her ardent desires. She begins to feel and sense, even dance with, the autonomous psychic figures of her desiring heart.

Interpreting, explaining, or observing the imaginal figures is not the way; the figures of soul do not respond to our mental constraints. Observing is not the same as facing, explaining is not the same as dancing. Reductive classification is not the issue; naming is. Demeter names herself as she founds her temple. Letting the figures name themselves is the point at which this woman, so sensitive to the psyche of others, begins a self-naming.

Ellen West never was able to see that the psychic figures *were* her food, metaphorical food, the seed concealed. All her control and desire remained attached to external food and this attachment drained her imaginal fertility. The only way the starving woman can work out

of her compulsive-inhibitive relation to food is through an education on how to work with the imaginal as it presents itself to her through food.

Such therapeutic work absolves the psychic figures from having to become literalized through symptoms or personal relations (with mother, male, or therapist). Specifically, such personifying releases the woman from entanglement with her personal mother, to whom she has had to cling to remember the desires of the archetypal Mother. This psychic engagement gives both starving woman and personal mother a breath of fresh air and allows the distance doctors have been trying to obtain through literal isolation.

Her being driven by and for food everywhere along with driving the body in inexorable degrees, her relying upon endless charts and diets and scales coupled with her infinite gorging and vomiting show that the female too has a "fire," a combustible aspect which the alchemists spoke of as sulfur. Found abundantly in volcanic regions, this substance, also known as brimstone, represents the spirit of fire. The female is living out the underworld flames dramatically and self-destructively in her most familiar room of the house: the kitchen.

At least within this pathology of food, we see the attempt by the woman to struggle with the sulfuric side, the redness of her most passionate nature. In past centuries she has lived it out vicariously through the man's escapades or as deviants crossing over to the male ways of sparking the combustion. This food pathology represents the female struggle with sulfur in a landscape which is our own: our food, body, and reproduction. Raging sulfur possesses the starving woman to the bitter end or until the blossoming of an underworld perspective turns it around.

What is being worked out here is the female's awakening to her own sulfuric potency and the necessity of allowing it the distance to shape and form itself creatively: her sulfur—desires, vitalities, burnings—"the force that through the green fuse drives the flower"—her glare. This is what the Mother asks her to place. We assist this placing

and naming of the sulfuric side by allowing the woman the distance to sit alone and let the redness take shape while feeling its desires, as with Helen's red wall. This pause ceases the dramatic compulsive enactment of the sulfuric aspect in terms of food and body, and we begin to explore the sulfur as image.

To engage the sulfur imaginally means returning to where food is "alive" and potentially poisonous or dangerous. Remember that the invisible animation of food moves her, feeds her, drives her. Food carries the tyrant, the psychic presence which is destructive, death-dealing. The presences appearing within and through food need to be digested, not vomited.

So we allow the food to be alive, to return to the living: matter as animated, food becoming ensouled. We allow the food to glare out its poisonous forces. Who is taking shape? Red man? Leopard? Bossman? Armed man? How does starving woman relate to such figures? It is interesting if not disconcerting to see how often this sulfuric side of power and vitality is represented in male form (even for woman-identified women who have changed their gender allegiance culturally). Since external men have enacted sulfuric aspects for thousands of years—and cultivated this particularly through sports, war, government—it is not surprising that in the reservoirs of our memories sulfur is imaged as male. As we open ourselves to the panorama of the female imagination, we can relate to sulfur in ways compatible to our inherent nature (sulfuric properties once carried by Red Hades move into a female seed within.)

The therapeutic process involves delineation of the fire-figure exacting vengeance through food. We must name it, find out its texture and context. Also we must be aware of the tendency to meddle with human concerns. When Demeter was beginning to engage with what was becoming an immortal fire-spirit, a daimon-of-sulfur, Metanira interfered with dayworld and personal fears.

This interference reminds us how easy it is to identify the awakening fire-aspect as male and live it out too personally and subjectively

in emotional terms (serving an actual male tyrant, for example; or, therapeutically, working exclusively on such relationships). Leaving one's ground to know sulfur in its common manifestations is not the way to the potency of our hot inner nature. Instead woman is consumed; there is no body, no hearth to contain and craft the flame. It leads to disembodied ambitions or tyrannical compulsions.

Demeter kept her own ground, insisted on her own grain drink, as she engaged with fire-spirit. As therapists we have to remember that a temple must be built for one who is opening to inner psychic presence and particularly to sulfuric sides. Sulfur is found in the world and in all living things, and it returns itself to the world far too fast, without containment, digestion. It fires up as we attach ourselves to the object of our desire.

Sulfur is beckoning the woman through food and possesses her with her obsessions and compulsions around literal food. Her desires and fires all becomes attached to food (and thereby lost to her). Her incessant desire to *have* the food has been all that lit up the world for her, preventing her from knowing the spark of that which makes the food desirable.

Demeter is in her temple as Hades and Persephone "marry". Persephone digests the red seed giving her rule over the underworld. Swallowing the seed shows that Persephone has her own red sulfur, her hot inner nature. The digestion guarantees against her consumption by "external" fiery tyrannies; it shows she can contain the red and not be possessed by it. She can carry it up and out to Mother's terrain—and return. Female has to "marry" the sulfur by digesting it, containing it within so it circulates interiorly through blood and heart; then she can engage it in and through the world.

Such digestion entails enough distance from and delineation of the red to swallow it. What facilitates this distance and delineation, this containment of red seed, is Sweet Sound and Hate.

Many starving patients are described by the clinicians and physicians as hearing inner voices. Not all are demanding or denigrating:

some are melodic, soothing, exquisite. We imagine that Ellen's Glorious Woman had a sweet, alluring voice. Such sounds carry the woman to soul-companions who can assist her journey through an underworld that need not be Hell.

The sirens with lyre and double flute were companions and servants of the Goddess of the Underworld. They would seduce travellers to Persephone by "the sweet tones of their music and song." Such sounds are not sweet in the sense of being innocent; they do not defend against underworld realities. They are enticing ways to be beckoned to an underworld perspective; if the woman opens herself to the "sounds of her inner ear" (Helen's harpsichord), perhaps there will be melodic incantations she can follow.

Sweet tones of psyche can carry her messages, which, when personified, become the guardian angels of soul. The guidance of such figures will give her company in the unfolding of an imaginal perspective. Lyre and flute were the favorite instruments of Sappho. Through her mixolydian mode she would invite women to unfold their shimmering Aphroditic beauty. Woman has an alluring anima also, dear companion assisting her in knowing the soul's journey through her most exquisite aesthetic sensibilities.

Perhaps also the sweet tones resonate with the inner pulse, and she can dance. She will move and bend and yield to the soul-companions, find the mistresses of soul in her body's motions. Their loving messages of how soul animates all worldly things remind us that the "hidden waves" lying within and beyond each bodily event are also sound waves. They pulsate. Subtle scales of lyre and flute arouse the passions too and truly are prayers to Aphrodite. The sweet sounds of love's seductions carry the starving woman to the bittersweet mysteries underlying dayworld necessities. This fall into love when one is struggling with sulfur ultimately brings forth the redness and fire, carrying her again and again to hate.

On digesting the red seed Persephone, no longer innocent maiden, becomes Goddess of the Dead, Queen of Destruction. The

river Styx (associated with the Greek verb meaning "to hate") nine times circles her underworld. The Goddess Styx became the offspring of Zeus and Persephone. The spirits of revenge, the Erinyes, "Three hellish Furies, boltered all with blood; / Their form and bearing were made woman-wise; / Vivid green hydras girt them, and a brood / Of asps and adders, each a living tress, / Writhed round the brows of that fell sisterhood," were in the Orphic tales offspring of Hades and Persephone. Persephone sends the petrifying head of Medusa to the gates of the underworld, turning invaders to stone: "this head is, in a sort, the other aspect of the beautiful Persephone."

Hate has run through the entire mytheme. Gaia's hate and revenge created the crescent sickle which broke the gods out of their material entrapment. Demeter's fury cooled into "icefall isolation" and temple longing, rage becoming hate. At first her rage was too personal, red sulfur raging through the blackened bitternesses; but then the loosening and moistening with humor and barley drink, a cooling, silver pause. She then had the coolness to let go of child as personal, becoming impersonal mother of flame-spirit, and the rage cooled to a hate of the temple, a purer, more sacred form of hate with an effect even over Almighty Zeus.

Hate is often where we see poignantly and clearly with an inner eye, have insight which penetrates to the Gods in all worldly things. Hate's glare cuts through to rockbottom foundations. We see those we hate often in sharper focus than the loved ones. The hated one stalks us everywhere. For it is the one we hate the most who bears messages to us about sides of the psyche most denied, neglected. The hated one carries our most terrible lack.

To melt the brittle starving woman, go to hate. She has been hardened beyond the joys of puppy love; her way, even in what she knows as love, is hate. Hate is a whiter form of the redness of wrath and fury; it is cooler. Ice Woman with red seed pulsing through the body: the redness is there, stirring the entire being, yet not lashed out, kept in an ice shield, and as it circulates it cools to hate. She faces

the sulfur, the fat of her aching desire, does not act it out, knows it also within as it permeates every living thing. Sulfur charges her body; her skin stands on edge, prickles with the cold of a hate which keeps off touch while the redness in its circulation images itself to her, a type of dance.

If well worked, hate is a way to move like Persephone to and from the black rigidities and fixities (I can't move, I'm trapped, I feel lost, life is empty) to the red fires (I can't control the eating, I can't stop vomiting, I have to work harder, I can't get food or that bastard off my mind), staying psychologically cool yet mobile.

The psychological hate of Persephone is not directed out or in. It is not the ferocious form of redhot fury which vents itself in destruction, nor is it the black sulkiness of passive withdrawals. To swallow and digest the red seed entails facing that ninth circle of hell with the ice woman whose eyes petrify. When the focus is removed from food or literal male tyrants with whom the starving woman is in emotional relation she has to face her ice woman, daimon of soul.

Sitting in one's own psychic cold stare is much more difficult than being or acting out of that coldness, or starving to warm up a tyrannical lover, or being driven compulsively to avoid it. Up to now while possessed by red tyrant's compulsions, projecting her coldness, the starving woman has blindly and rather indiscriminately vented her antagonisms and sharp bite. Now perhaps she can come face to face with the red demons accompanying the cold, begin to discriminate them, which is to know herself.

This process entails looking at the food she most desires and allowing that desire to shape itself even when it emerges as the figure (tyrant of fat) she most hates. Sitting within the desire leads us to the one most hated who asks for our engagement. Biting into the food now involves facing the red-eyed figure. She faces it, lets go, and imagistically engages with it. Invader gets turned to stone, mother-killers are swallowed, fat man is encircled: each move gives her more substance carrying her down to the river's last circle, a descent which is

a sort of submission occurring when dark mother loosens to her own frailty and humor, allowing the emergence of piercing silver-blue eyes and sharp tongue, the beauty that fixates as it transforms, the Queen of Destruction herself. She is the one who sees the red as sensuous independent body, faces it as mate, also nurses it. Demeter's final lowering occurred when she knew the red-spirit through nursing it, holding it in the fire as nurse. Sometimes the raging redness just asks to be impersonally handled by a nurse.

Now there is less need to adhere to the world's potencies and be tyrannized naively and blindly by them. Ice Woman has throbbing purple-red, bittersweet seed within, shining surface containing the crimson juice of paradox and mystery, now materialized and digested, serving as protective measure against the red villains and their possessive forms of consumption. If she cannot keep digesting the vital heat of red (imaging it through her worldly desires) and embodying it (creatively letting those images form themselves) it will be split off from her and literalized again in rampant desires and compulsions.

Since the ice is slippery she no longer sticks to others' effusive emotions; the oily base of their desirous longings do not keep ground with her, and no longer consume. Instead they slip off. She can attach and glide in the world with vitality, without losing herself in those attachments. Ice Woman helps starving woman let go of food's sticky pull on her. She does not give up food, but digests the red carried in the food which depotentiates the tyranny of the food itself while charging her interior circulation and blood-pulse.

Ice Woman keeps the starving woman strong yet resilient and this prevents her from so readily melting into the imaginal pool of another, serving as Iris-medium only. Ice Woman has her own dazzling reflections, and the Hecatean barking bitches surrounding her keep off those who would use her as blank screen only. She learns how to snap.

There is a difference between Iris and Hecate as messenger-god-

desses. For a starving woman struggling with sulfur and getting to know the ice Iris is dangerous. Demeter sends Iris back to Zeus; Iris does not belong in this mytheme. Iris would return it all to beginnings: maiden Persephone romping in flowery fields subject to the commands of a Father Zeus. Likewise Iris would have her continue serving the Hades figure as compliant maiden girl, a blatant denial of the inherent relation of the female to the sulfuric red.

Unlike Iris with her rainbows, Hecate is messenger in a bitchy sense: her message bares teeth, is conveyed with a snarl. Hecate allows intercourse with the world's sulfur with a bite which precludes consumption. Hands off, she growls. She understands the connection between Demeter and Persephone: how daughter brings up her mysteries, lives in them, sees them through the world, always containing (digesting) the underworld fires while in the world. She knows this carrying up of the underworld mysteries needs protection: the stickiness of sulfur's attraction asks for continual distancing.

So Hecate is a protective bitch, not a controlling bitch. The latter is only necessary when the woman is split from the underworld, has nothing to stand on, is in void yet wants to remain blind to it, has lost her soul. Yet Hecate places certain steps on the invisible ground below. With intelligent instincts of an undomesticated bitch, she knows her way in the dark, continually sniffing out the terrain as she circles the sulfur queen, keeping her within certain limits.

Slippery-cool Ice Woman accompanied by Bitch Hecate can work off the sulfur of the world. She is no maiden in an ivory tower separated from the world's flame. With hidden red seed and the lyre's sweet sounds she is sensual in her coolness. She is as stubbornly firm as she is stubbornly tender and mobile. The flux of delicate images shimmers off her icy white contour. One senses diamonds in its shine. Always her ice suggests the momentum and force of the ice-waters running deep, rapids connecting her always with the inner rhythm of the world's pulse, the desirous gaping of the world's mouth.

Therefore she does not leave the world, yet enters and is moved by

the colors, tastes, textures and emotional tones all around, and sees them with a distance not of frozenness as much as the coolness of a "critically imagining eye." There is beauty in this distance as she resonates with the beauty of the world. She tenderly can be enticed into the world's pulse, yet at the point of devouring there comes the knife edge of cynical glances, the bitch bark, the slippery ice letting go, releasing by capturing it all as image.

This movement in the world is not in abstraction, but comes with a bitch-animal immediacy keeping everything riding the whitewater rapids. A doctor examining her bends over too closely, a stranger sits on a love seat too near, now she can sense the spark while gazing over the man's shoulder to see the red sulfuric one laughing in the background. Connected to the image through heart and humor, she bites at the doctor-stranger with an artful retort, a snappy one-liner. He takes one step back knowing the joke is not on him alone, has not to leave the room entirely; she has held her ground elegantly and is stirred vitally. She is laughing while dancing and dialoguing with the red one—a form of digestion.

The table offers her cakes, breads, jams, pastries. Her claw goes out, yet now she can see the opening jaws of red bossman riding lion urging her to blind the imaginal eye and consume. She keeps the eye open (Hecate's headband shining), sees him clearly: the jungle, the swish of the lion's tail. She takes one piece of pastry which carries and is surrounded by the green mysteries of that jungle. She watches the lush foliage unfold as she takes one bite. Images fill her also. One pastry is enough. She leaves the table. Each of Hecate's bites has substance, a vital world in itself.

Hecate as the bitch-whore allows this intercourse with the world's sulfur, and for the starving woman this pertains mainly to food. Food is the language of this pathology attempting to reconnect the female with her (lost) underworld components, so of course it cannot be ignored. Imaginal work does not preclude the things of the world. One cannot work with psychic figures to the exclusion of attending to

food, nor can one "make" the woman, with imaginal eye opened, resume a "normal diet." Therapy directed to a Hecatean perspective will help the woman open her eye to soul, seeing the metaphor in all food.

After all, eating in the underworld gave Persephone a way back. Food can germinate an awakening to psychological "death," to an imaginal consciousness. This was the lesson of the Eleusinian initiates who learned to fast and drink potions to prepare for the vision of (in a sense transformation to) Persephone holding the ear of wheat, which allowed them to see the shades of the dead existing in all living things.

Therefore the woman would go to soul, use her imagining eye, through body and food instead of at their expense. Hecate shows her she has been blessed with an underworld understanding of food. She has been graced with an understanding that what looks to the upperworld like garbage is in the underworld a sacrifice to the Gods. She will become aware of the connection of her eating with the autonomous psychic figures, come to see images as independent, sensuous, concrete morsels, and the "sensible nature of the imagination."

For example, the woman would become aware of the precision of her choices, how precise qualities such as texture, sweetness, color, and consistency of food open her to specific psychic presences. She will become aware of her discriminations, that some substances feed certain psychic figures more than others.

Ellen West's "bizarre" diet at one time was several pounds of tomatoes and twenty oranges daily. The woman within an Hecatean perspective attends to such desire, tries to understand it metaphorically and asks, whose fire is she feeding with all that red-orange substance?

This means watching the desire as it appears and seeing with what particular shape it defines itself. No restrictions or prohibitive measures are necessary, just to feel the desire while seeing with the "imagining eye" (Hecate's shining headband) what unfolds—sulfur

no longer only in food as object-of-desire which must be grasped to know, but sulfur shimmering out at us from the world's delight, sensually inviting us to an intercourse with the world. We gape, not grasp. Gaia's desire is in her gaping; Persephone's grasp led to the rapacious descent to underworld. What she had to learn in the journey was Gaia's gaping as ground of it all. Persephone learned to know that the beauty shining forth from the flower was her own (narcissus): no need to grasp it, instead to stand in awe of the world's dazzling animation. Gaping sends us to the underworld sensually. What occurs when we take in the awe and splendor of the world's sulfuric tinge is not an intimacy coming from subjective or personal dependency, but an intimacy more of the sort Sappho knew, having more to do with an intricate and exquisite rapport with the dew dazzling forth from all living things, a resonance with their sensuous nature.

This intimacy entails seeing and sensing within the desire and imaginal intercourse with each morsel: who is this feeding? What figure needs this sort of nourishment? Nurturing mother and sensual mistress are no longer dichotomous. The sensuality is found in the nourishment now. Once the woman knows intimately the imaginal figures, she attends to them, inquiring what *they* wish to be fed that day. If one in particular looms large and demands too much, perhaps she needs to give him/her/it something special to digest.

This returns her to the sacred connection of her food choices, how everything she digests connects her with presences larger than herself. Her sensuous connection with food now lies outside her subjective satiation/satisfaction. In this way, instead of being victim to the imaginal presence of each food morsel, she engages with it as in a dialogue with soul.

So food begins to take on aesthetic sensibilities; the woman is sensitized to an aesthetic perception within eating. Seeing the images in each concrete morsel lets her be more engaged with the food; now she can *taste* it, make finer more exquisite sensual discriminations. Her desire is stimulated and, now danced with, it does not consume her;

she digests.

Different foods sound different to her; sirens call her to the beauty of specific foods. Such an aesthetic perception allows the woman to sense how spices, exotic and rich foods, as well as specific qualities of basic foods, fill her and carry psychic value. This will return her consciously to psychic essence, how such foods echo an exoticism and richness of soul, and food delicacies remind us of the modesty of soul, huge quantities are no longer necessary.

An aesthetic perception of food in terms of its psychic significance lets her take food out of an exclusively personal context; eating food becomes ceremony—Food Aesthetics. She sees that paying attention to how qualities of food stir and feed the beauty of the imagination, alluring her to soul, is more nourishing than consuming quantities of vitamins and proteins.

The starving woman is serving Gaia by working the female out of her upperworld fixities. Gaia needed to break down the female body and its relation to food and fertility to help her find her relation to soul and death, contain the fire and brimstone of her sulfuric potency. Gaia is showing that the female has seed too, can germinate. When the woman is able to digest the red seed she takes back her "drives," her "creativity."

The food pathology of starving woman calls us to psychological transformation, to the presence of the Goddess of Death entering through Hecatean consciousness. We must welcome Dark Mother with her ice, her bark, her temple, encourage one another to participate with her. What are the implications of this consciousness entering our culture? The female would recover the active presence and potency in her knife, her bite, her seed. First, food and cooking take on a new significance, becoming ritual preparations for an entry to psyche. No longer the place of monotonous domestic drudgery, the kitchen becomes a room in the underworld. Not mother as servant but mother as celebrant to the voices and figures of death residing in food, initiating her child to the ceremonial revelry of the underworld,

the festivity of the many psychic members of the family.

. . . . .

We know that Ice Woman's digested seed accompanied the fruition of the field of Rarian, the womb. Every starving woman has potential offspring, a craft, beneath the skeletal surface. Every starving woman contains aesthetic endeavor if she can feel fully the sulfuric edge, digest and dance with it, allowing it to take shape.

Ice Woman with red seed appears when Demeter takes back her Aphroditic qualities. Mothering takes on a new sensuality. No more redhot lusts opposed to the purities of sweet maternity: the red seed cooled, whitened, shoots up the green fuse and makes every endeavor of the female an aesthetic one with its own inherent order—every action and event fused, sparked, sulfur shimmering through it all. And the sulfur chooses the ice and bitch's bark to define and contain itself, with its own borders, requirements, dimensions; within its fortress she finds an inherent fruition.

Sparked by the animation of the world, she can bring the fruition out, whether in child-care, medical work, legal transactions, literature, mechanics—there is nurturing with an intimacy, a craft with a sounding in every event, an angel in each word. She takes in each of her desires, sees each in its contour and graceful line, participates in its crafting, its exquisite revelation, the unfolding of the design of its patterning. With every slice of the knife, instrument's paring, she hears the lyre beckon her always to the Ice Woman of her heart's desire, sulfuric pulse germinating deeply in each of her cool bites.

Aaron Shurin

from Multiple Heart

When the existence repeated in same phrases came apart at the
hinges,
reconstituted in helical bonds that spiral known as the bigger
bang, fresh
discovery each turn
returns axis central
glance off light, the
shining, seen anew each particular
sentience, flavor, ridiculous in extremities, compact in allegiance,
favorite bondage, (the dispelling of logic in favor of magic), old
monstrosities
come apart in the hands to reveal the workings of inner beauty,
stupefying
exactness of the loop-de-loop courting the air . . .

I remember the paintings from their places on the wall, voice of a
secretude.
and then the fable about the boy and all his lack of hair, some
idiotic
punchline at the conclusion of a punch. Heavens that heavenate

above,
a comparison between one good thing and another, the trickle
down effect
of a bright eye over high cheekbones—then give me that thing.

△

Whenever that corruption comes to take me in the arms of its
vicissitudes
I roll in my worminess down the hole as the world turns, so
wounds
the slothy membranes, all of a suddenness my corruptions fail me.
Left in the purity
of the loving heart's stupidity: all is good, needy & beauty

△

the exceptional liftoff of a rocket rammed with a personal hand, a little language of sighs. or a fever that starts with an itchy palm leaves off mid-phrase in a decapitation of the text. the best becomes better only with care, implicit in the infolding of tongues, and the one who goes knowingly down to desire is the one who knows better in the end. Then I look at you as your tongue is lolling, as my own tongue sticks to its gum. For every little leaf that inches a bud, formidable in the face of winds, I notch one notch in my tightened waist, say "now I am beautiful" not because you make me, but because I see you so

△

this delectable shortage of terminal junctures, something like a rose of Castile working itself into full bloom. and after the hip, the saving of face in a pressed album all eyes read as a turned table revolving its disc, some eerie melody connoted by an ascending riff. then the borrowed conjunction of a narrative and its moving parts, a skinny fellow all elbows swimming in a salt sea. or a science of phraseology measuring separate parts of the tongue where every descent is a nascent plot, the coming to grips of a fanned lady in a crowd of samurai, or some lonely bugger casting his leaves to the wind. this where we were or are a fine glass for scrying, relating the crossed beams of starry eyes, or a story of eyes crossed, flush with the influx of sentences lacking periods, turning and burning in the swirl of a fire that holiness must seek heaven . . .

△

One step releases the world. The fire of magic in her eyes lit up the external valves. Invisible to all but the naked eye the naked world trembled in its shell, I beheld the Well of Seeing with a steady gaze. And Rebecca that sang on the desert lip, whose luster of voice eased the parched jug, who wet the men and made them squirm, that stood ablaze in the heat yet cooled by the blue in the black of her hair. Became now before us where we assembled a figure of speech to haunt our desolate ears, in which dim lands immaculate violets grow, colonizing that mulch and loam with a swagger loaded into the rifts of purple ore, a purple of such redness as even her lips may envy . . .

△

John Yau

Carp and Goldfish

SOME FISH WE PEEL BACK, leaving only the bones. Others devour us, leaving only the stories. This one begins in a garden in China, where a young prince is sitting alone on a bench beside a turquoise pond. Each time he snaps his fingers and whistles, the golden red sunset of a carp can be seen rising toward the surface. Five fat scavengers rule this manicured kingdom, and each of them has been endowed with the nobility of a name. When the boy leaves the palace at noon and walks across the garden to feed them, the moment is precise and refined as the emblematic flowers stitched across his robe.

On a warm summer afternoon the algae covered pond is green as nights in the Arctic, when embedded arrows of light sparkle in the sky. For a few moments the boy watches the clouds stretch like cats across the glassy surface. Soon it will be his sixth birthday, and another carp will join the kingdom.

The clouds turn into dragons and back again. The moon trembles against the sky, a slivered almond. One day melts into another.

In the pond the carp are still listening, unable to hear their names drift over the kingdom. The prince is sick and they have been forgotten. Patiently, they circle through their palace, looking for the en-

trance to the room where their master lies, his body burning with fever, his face as crimson as an apple, ripe and ready to fall. Above them only the murmur of the wind hurrying through the mulberry branches.

Eventually, the countryside succumbs to disease and terror. Succeeding reigns of tyrants—their names twisting through history like snakes—bury the pond beneath their own interpretation of heaven's grandeur. Meanwhile, the carp burrow into a book by someone whose ability to remember facts circumscribes his desire to tell stories.

• • •

To the young boy standing in front of the large glass tanks, each hypnotic with activity, all the goldfish looked more or less the same. It was only after he stared into one tank for a long time did he see any difference among them. He chose the two smallest, the ones that would have the most trouble surviving were someone to let them go.

When he got home, his father lay on the couch and took a nap. The mother was out visiting a friend. Already the shadows of the narrow street had started filing quietly into the room.

He lay on his stomach on the floor and stared intently at the fish. Back and forth they swam, unconcerned with their intruder. They looked as if the only thought on their minds was escape. It was difficult to name creatures so alien and indifferent, and he had not been able to find any that he liked.

As the fish darted from side to side, the young boy wondered what he could do to make them more comfortable. They must get tired, he thought. And yet they do not seem sleepy. The room was filled with the signs of evening's approach. He lay in the darkness and remembered the way the ocean rocked endlessly the day his parents took him to the beach. Beside him the fish swirled once more in their bowl. Nearby, his father snored.

In the bedroom he found his dump truck beside a pile of soldiers and blocks, and brought it back to the living room. Carefully, so as

not to spill any water, he placed the fish bowl on the back of the truck. Then he lay back on the floor and began slowly pushing the truck back and forth. His father stirred slightly and then sank back into sleep.

The boy watched the water sloshing against the sides of the bowl, like the ocean, and was momentarily relieved. He adjusted the speed with which he moved the truck to a slower, more rhythmic pace. Then he realized that what they needed besides this comforting motion was salt. He remembered the stinging taste of the waves as they tried to knock him over, his mother beside him so he would not be afraid. One teaspoon, a little more rocking, and they would soon be asleep. His arm was tired, but he continued to push the truck back and forth in the darkened room. He knew he could not stop until they were resting, comfortable in their new home.

△

August Kleinzahler

Six Poems

Cautionary Lines for a Thriftless Lady

For what?
A basket of napless wool mice, granny junk.
Not much return on what was spent.

There is a bottom.
There is absolute bottom,
a notion.

Between the two, place and notion,
silt—
a null zone.

You get there by scratching
the length of you against bottom.
Scant notion in that.

You scratch till you get through.
To silt.

Nothing up against you then.
You fall.

Only.

Toward an idea.

Any idea.

Real Hair

How come all youze got fairy hair
cuts cost 10 bucks wid bangs
Dey don' e'en shave ya neck
mudge less clip yaw nozdrils

I oughta cha'ge a sawbuck,
wea' high heel shoes
like some jigaboo

Shame,

shame on a nice fella like you

The Tunnel of Love

In a place of trampled peanuts
ends the hunt.
Dusk
brings on the lights and now
it is time for love.

But first a lemonade with ice
to startle
the hot brain
and sweeten the tongue.

Down the ramp—
our prow slams through the door
and we are in night.
Tickle my nose:
Aatchoo
Gesundheit

How happy we are
with the flimsy horrors

alone

moving slowly.

A February Idyll

Groundhog stuck out his nose
wrong.
Dumb hog, breathing
slow
in the half-light.

The gully's got you
good,
got you so

the only place to go

is out,
with no key or carfare
home.
        Out, hog
and gone

to the studio lot
with chrome Daffy Duck
and Tokyo Rose.
                Brother,
you dead.

Vancouver

Downstairs, Sal, of Sal's Paradise Club
stirs a fizz drink for a mummy blond.
—Thanks, Sal.
Black filthy rain it's raining
like a grudge is out,
but the neon mermaid over the fish place
looks best that way, in the rain.

Freighters are queuing in the bay,
1 2 34 5
waiting to dock.
A sailor aboard the lead ship, a Dane
sniffs saltchuck and lights himself a smoke.

He gazes out to the shimmering downtown spit.
He likes how tobacco and saltsea mix in his nose.

with Papa K

△

An Autumnal Sketch

What to make of them, the professors
in their little cars,
the sensitive men paunchy with drink
parked at the fence
where the field begins and the suburb ends?

If there is a mallard in the reeds
they will take it.
They will take it and make it their own,
something both more than a duck
and less.

They so badly want a poem,
these cagey and disheartened men
at the edge of the field.
And before they turn back for supper
they shall have one.

△

William Carlos Williams

Sketch for
A Primer of Present Day Poetic Practice

(1 hr. of continuous writing—aside from 6 telephone calls)
May 4, 1933

This is for the general reader, its purpose is to enhance or initiate his understanding of and pleasure in poetry in its present day modes.

Secondarily it is to establish a tentative basis for agreement or disagreement among poets today.

It will be a technical introduction to poetic practice, since there can be no pleasure in or understanding of poetry without technical knowledge.

To this end a working definition of that which is under discussion is offered:

Poetry is an attitude toward life as revealed in a sensitive (timely) balance between sound and meaning among words.

As a corollary, it is a matter not of words only but of language.

Poetry is not, to clarify the definition further, a matter of fixed and often archaic procedure according to sacro-sanct rule.

Discussing the definition further, since the effect produced by a poem is a matter of words (language) and since words are a variable material, becoming obsolete, varying in meaning as the world changes and general knowledge is modified (varying in emphasis even more than meaning), words being coined also from day to day—so

the balance to be sensitive varies also.

The tempo of a language may change, especially American from English, likewise.

This is the necessity for a new development of poetic practice from time to time.

Influence of Strict Rule

Failure to observe that poetry along with all other initiatives in similar fields (Music, painting, etc.) is an attitude toward life rather than a set of rules—has led to—

A removal of poetry from actual participation in the making of a present day economy—to the general impoverishment of the intelligence.

It is to break down this narrowing interpretation of what poetry is about that the revolt in poetry beginning with the present century began.

If it is cannonical that every line must begin with a capital letter and that rhyme is compulsory to the practice then poetry removes itself automatically from this description and should be sought elsewhere.

Precedent

However, such minor embellishments, along with much else, have not always been used.

Neither has the orthodox foot of counted syllables been always the rule.

On the contrary, latin poetry, such as that of Catullus, began its lines casually and used no rhyme.

Furthermore, both greek and latin poetry used quantity instead of stress as the basis of the foot.

Development

English poetry, because of its magnificent history, has fixed the practice of poetic precedent—in an unfortunate manner.

It has stressed a set of rules—as poetry. Also it has led the reader to believe by the picturesqueness or colorful or phantastic quality of its images that poetry is a matter of sentimental description.

Such images as—

1. Bare ruined choirs—etc.
2. Fairy casements opening on the foam.
3. Old, forgotten, far off things and battles long ago.

This is an unfortunate misunderstanding of the poetic intent.

Redefinition

If poetry is revealed by a sensitive balance—etc. then such images as those above quoted are mere accidents in a far greater and more comprehensive understanding: brilliant as they may be.

One thing they have hidden by their brilliance is the triviality of much of the melopoia or music in the words: the archaic acceptance of the stressed line is rigidly "poetry" today.

The beginning revolt in the foot

It is dissatisfaction with this rigidity of the foot—with its archaic implications which is at the basis of modern poetic practice.

The understanding of astro-physics, of political government, or economic rule—has vastly changed our minds.

It is necessary to understand these things if the balance among the

sounds and meanings of words which is poetry in any age can be grasped.

Today the world cannot come to a realization of its workability—its practice—until the confining rules of archaic precedent have first been abolished.

So poetry, to become active again, must first have broken up the narrow confines of its past.

Interlude

It is necessary to say here that—great poetry (poetry which initiated its greatness in some past day) remains great.

It is essential that the new base itself solidly on the lasting qualities of the old.

But to do so it must (base itself on what they did then not what they are now) do what men have always done, what the old did also: invent—to be.

Dante was a violent revolutionist. He quit latin for a colloquial dialect.

Chaucer—left french for a country speech.
Shakespeare fixed his language of the day—

It cannot have been otherwise to greatness: each enlarged his medium by his practice.

It is *this* which is the classic principle.

To continue

So today—it is to escape pedantry, to make poetry a practice touching its age—effectively, that the modern movement began.

The speech of America, the *Nuevo Mundo* of the great discoverers had much to do with this.

Whitman—who wrote all sorts of things on the page—wrote a "formless" poetry—so called, which popularized the term "free verse."

Revolt

This was the beginning of the break.

But there is no such thing as "free verse". It is a contradiction in terms. Verse means measure.

However, the free verse movement was important. It broke down the stressed foot and gave us an intuitive quantity in the foot, of which no one was fully aware.

The objective

The objective, which has come to the fore slowly—especially in the work of Ezra Pound—is becoming clearer today. It is the attack on the unit of all poetry the poetic foot.

The rigid stress which made poetry a curiosity, a museum piece—something precious, almost a phase of neurasthenic involvement—

It is this change which makes poetry available again as a practice of thought applicable to the day.

It opens up the material and must waken interest when it shall be mastered.

Very tentatively it may be defined as an adaptation of the movements of conversation—

. . . . .

It must not be overlooked however that all poetic practice is always—alive.

Nothing modern is so to the *exclusion* of the past—no more than modern physics can exclude Archimedes or astronomy Galileo—

But much is modified and much added—

Appreciation

So poetry should be listened to—for its movement among the words enhancing their meanings (significance).

To discover not a brilliant image but a balance—an attitude toward life which is political.

△

B O O K R E V I E W S

Selected & New Poems. JIM HARRISON.
Drawings by Russell Chatham
Delta/Seymour Lawrence. 1982.

by HAYDEN CARRUTH

In the long, long elegy for the passing away of poetry that my life as editor and reviewer has been—and yes, this is how I regard it, let the optimistic workshop directors and foundation functionaries burble as they may: I know I am right, and sometimes it seems to me, I suppose inevitably, that because the decline has occurred during my active adulthood, I have somehow presided over it, instead of fighting it hammer and tongs all the way—in this long elegy the most constant motif, if not in what I have written then certainly in what I have thought and felt, has been the sorrow, the kind of terror that accompany absolute injustice done to individual human beings. I do not mean what would in other ages have been considered the normal decrement of historical winnowing; poets, like all others, have always fallen by the wayside. I mean the losses that have been forced by the progressive dissolution of our so-called civilization. I think of those who wrote honest, beautiful, important poems thirty-five or forty years ago, Ruthven Todd, Byron Vazakis, Reuel Denney, so many others, whose names linger, if they linger at all, only among a few of us fond and ravaged codgers. It is an oppressive discerning.

Letters to Yesenin, a poem in thirty sections and a postscript by Jim Harrison, was first published in 1973, when it was almost completely overlooked by critics and readers. It was republished about three years ago—maybe longer than that; I don't have the date handy—and again the silence was resounding. Now, in *Selected & New Poems*, we have a third chance. I don't know what serious expectation to attach to this. Naturally I hope for the best. But naturally also, in the circumstances, I fear the worst.

Yesenin, for those who may not know, was a Russian poet, born in 1895, whose works, both in their Slavic earthiness and their cosmopolitan raciness,

were somewhat sensationally successful in the years before, during, and just after the revolution. For a time he was married to Isadora Duncan. He was a cocaine addict. He hanged himself in 1925. He wrote his last poem in his own blood. For many years his poems were in official disfavor, but in the sixties they were approved for republication, and since then Yesenin's popularity in the Soviet Union has revived.

On the surface Harrison's poem is a sequence of personal letters to the dead Russian poet about the feasibility of suicide. But its real topic is the quality of life in Yesenin's time and our own, the similarities and the differences. Two remarks about the poem are crucial. First, it concludes against suicide. Secondly, it demonstrates that Yesenin's era, for all its turbulence, was easier than ours, because in ours we all must love and think in the perpetual anguish caused by the near certainty of planetary death before long.

The poem has many qualities, of course, but this latter, the way Harrison has embedded his entire vision of our predicament implicitly in the particulars of two poetic lives, his own and Yesenin's, is what makes the poem not only his best but one of the best in the past twenty-five years of American writing. It does one of the things that art must do: unflinchingly, it gives us our own image, and it does so in superbly controlled and concise language. This is difficult to show in a brief review. A long poem is a structure of momentum, which is its advantage over a short poem (as against its several disadvantages), and momentum cannot be exemplified in anything smaller than its wholeness. Nevertheless here is one section from the poem, number 12, chosen almost at random:

> I was proud at four that my father called me Little Turd of Misery.
> A special name somehow connected to all the cows and horses in
> the perpetual mire of the barnyard. It has a resonance to it un-
> known to president senator poet septic-tank cleaner critic butcher
> hack or baker liberal or snot, rightist and faker and faggot and
> cunt hound. A child was brought forth and he was named Little Turd
> of Misery and like you was thrown into the lake to learn how to
> swim, owned dogs that died stupidly but without grief. Why does
> the dog chase his broken legs in a circle. He almost catches them
> like we almost catch our unruly poems. And our fathers and uncles
> had ordinary pursuits, hunted and fished, smelled of tobacco and
> liquor, grew crops, made sauerkraut and wine, wept in the dark,
> chased stray cows, mended fences, were hounded as they say by
> creditors. Barns burned. Cabbages rotted. Corn died of drought

before its holy ears were formed, wheat flattened by hail and wind and
the soup grew only one potato and a piece of salt pork from its
center. Generations of slavery. All so we could fuck neurotically
and begin the day rather than end it drinking and dreaming of dead
dogs, swollen creeks with small bridges, ponds where cows are caught
and drown sucked in by the muck. But the wary boy catches fish
there, steals a chicken for his dog's monthly birthday, learns
to smoke, sees his first dirty picture and sings his first dirty
song, goes away, becomes deaf with song, becomes blinded by love,
gets letters from home but never returns. And his nights become less black
and holy, less moon blown and sweet. His brain burns away like
gray paraffin. He's tired. His parents are dead or he is dead
to his parents. He smells the smell of a horse. The room is
cold. He dims the light and builds a noose. It works too well.

Why has *Letters to Yesenin* failed to reach an audience so far, in spite of its relevance and power and of its author's considerable reputation? I think for the same reason that people no longer read the works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, even though these are more germane and helpful today than they were thirty years ago. Harrison's poem is tough, descriptively and prescriptively. It does not spare us one laceration of our enslavement to terror. It says to us that life is unendurable and that we can endure. It dares to suggest the possibility of reason and especially of hardihood. Americans knew these possibilities once, but no more. Our civilization has fled, seeking escape in every direction at once, like a flock of hens when the hawk stoops. Well, we have no civilization. What we have is a mush. In discouragement Harrison turned to writing fiction, which was tough too, but of the macho, escapist kind, I think, a serious enough deviation, such as one can find in some of his poetry as well, though not in *Letters to Yesenin*, and he made a pile of money, blew it, and now, or at any rate the last I heard, is back on his farm in northern Michigan, enduring. I urge everyone to buy his new book. Read the rest of the poetry as you will; I had intended to write about it, e.g., how the early poems seem influenced by Levertov, how the "ghazals" of his third book are quite fine but lack the intensity and integration of those by Adrienne Rich; but Harrison is his own best and most percipient critic ("I saw Christ this summer / rising over the Absaroka Range. / Of course I was drunk. / I carry my vices to the wilderness"), a quality of his work that makes acceptable much that would otherwise be offensive. In any case he came fully into his own in his major poem, *Letters to Yesenin*. Read it and

reread it (as I have over the years). Give yourself to its wholeness, to all its elements, thematic, poetic, technical, philosophical, or whatever. It is a truly organic work, and I use the term in the sense it had when it was originally applied to poetry, meaning not a poem in a certain mode but a system of energies, unanalysable yet functional in the reader's sensibility. We have many ways, if we are courageous, to apprehend our condition, and at this stage in the progress of danger no intelligent person would be assertive enough to say that one way is indispensible. But *Letters to Yesenin* is as good, as esthetically and morally efficacious, as any I know, and a great deal better than most. ∆

A Renaissance of Women Writers

Psyche Reborn, Susan S. Friedman, Indiana University Press, 1981; *H.D. The Life of an American Poet*, Janice S. Robinson, Houghton Mifflin, 1982; *HERmione*, H.D., New Directions, 1981; *The Gift*, H.D., New Directions, 1982; *Hedylus*, H.D., Black Swan, 1980; *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H.D., City Lights, 1983; *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, Mina Loy, Jargon Society, 1982; *The Poems of Laura Riding*, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Persea, 1980; *Progress of Stories*, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Dial, 1982; *The Yale Gertrude Stein*, Gertrude Stein, Yale University Press, 1980.

by JED RASULA

Imagine the following. The time is the present. Joyce's *Ulysses* was out of print for 40 years, and the reprint is now also out of print. *The Cantos* have never been gathered together in a single volume, and only the snatches printed in Pound's *Selected Poems* are commonly available. Stevens' *Collected Poems* has been out of print since the Fifties; nothing by Zukofsky

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Special thanks are due to Ken Irby, and to Robert Bertholf, director of the Poetry/Rare Books Collection at SUNY Buffalo, for encouragement, clues, and access to scarce materials.

or Williams has been in print since the Thirties; cummings remains unknown, his work buried in magazines half a century old. Eliot's late plays are in print, but the poetry, like that of cummings, is only to be found in old issues of *The Dial*, etc. Lawrence and Faulkner, highly regarded in their day, can only be read in prized first editions.

It's a chilling fantasy. Exactly the opposite is the case, of course. But it serves to bring home the appalling out of print status of the great modernist women writers. Replace the names above with those of Gertrude Stein, H.D., Mary Butts, Laura Riding, Mina Loy, Kay Boyle, Edith Sitwell, Dorothy Richardson, and the preposterous scenario is, regrettably, the true story. These women published something on the order of 150 books, of which scarcely more than a dozen are in print. Butts and Richardson are out of print altogether. Sitwell and Boyle are close on their heels in this regard. The slender portion of Stein in print is shameful. And only in the past two years has the publishing world shown signs of life in reprinting H.D., Riding and Loy.

The unavailability of these women's work is an accurate index of the sensibility—or lack of it—of contemporary readers and educators. The immediate temptation is to see male-influenced reading habits. But the sad fact is that feminists have ignored the modernist women writers as blissfully as the men have. It's easy to fantasize those Big Male Omnivores of the modernist generation—Pound, Williams, Stevens, Joyce, Eliot—edging the women out of the picture. But only a little research makes it clear that the first three decades of the 20th century came as close to anything on record for equal participation by women and men in the innovative writing of an era. Look at the pages of *The Dial*, *The Little Review*, *Poetry* (and remember that these magazines were edited by women!), *Transatlantic Review*, *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* and *transition*: not only do the women appear as frequently as the men, but the whole context makes it obvious that there was nothing perfunctory or 'representative' about their presence. They were essential.

An English professor I know commented to a female colleague on the appearance of the two recent books on H.D. She seemed uninterested, and pressed for a response, dismissingly said "H.D., oh, she's a man's poet." This is the only clue I have as to why Janice Robinson and Susan Friedman try so desperately to make H.D. a heroine in their books. If that *is* the atti-

tude one runs up against in academia, apparently the only ground for scholarly discussion is hyperbolic distortion. If H.D. is a "man's poet," then the only way to reclaim her for women is to inflate her personal story so that the texts artificially expand and become legible again. The first half of Friedman's *Psyche Reborn*, in fact, is a somewhat misapplied feminist manifesto, in which H.D.'s blessing by Freud is seen as a redemption of her primal female contours, from which she rises up to the formidible task of her heroic late work, *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*. Friedman is actually much more compelling when, in the second half of her book, she addresses the question of H.D.'s involvement in occult matters. Her documentation is extensive, the nuances of her enquiry refreshing, and we're left with an H.D. more substantial, insistently herself, and cunning than anything in the H.D./Freud portrait would have led one to expect.

Janice Robinson suggests a less programmatic role to the meetings with Freud, while retaining a beautifully balanced account of the significance for both parties. Freud's science, developed for over three decades by the time H.D. met him, was intended for the average person; but Freud's *art* applied only to a few, and the great Freudian achievement really lay in the privilege of mutual intensity like that established between he and H.D. If her *Tribute* is the most beautiful book yet written on Freud, it's because their work together pierced through the sometimes tendentious and doctrinaire aspects of 'analysis,' drawing them together in the shared recognition that archaic forces were written plainly across all human endeavor. Robinson writes, "H.D. believed that the concrete experience of a fully conscious life is in fact the drama of life writ large—it is really the enactment of the whole drama of nature." In *Helen in Egypt* the mythic epiphanies permeate the lifelong personal dimension that psychoanalysis had helped H.D. reactivate as nothing less than myth itself. But while Robinson nourishes our perceptions of the life writ large in H.D.'s summative epic, she is drawn irresistibly to a literalization of figural possibilities. So Achilles becomes D.H. Lawrence, Odysseus becomes Pound, Paris becomes Aldington, and so on. Her disposition is unmistakable from the start: she reads the early Imagist poems as psychological hieroglyphs. This is so artfully done that it's breathtaking when she reads a textual interplay between Lawrence's *Escaped Cock* and H.D.'s (unpublished) *Pilate's Wife*. Since the thrust of her book is in the gradual unfolding of the DHL/H.D. relationship (and her gothic romance

trump: a hint at a Lawrentian paternity for H.D.'s daughter), Robinson's meticulous textual readings take on added significance, since her documentation of the actual life is largely unsubstantiated guesswork. But a 'close reading' of archival material can be suspect; the uses put to the same unpublished manuscripts by Friedman and Robinson vary so wildly that one wonders about the liberties being taken by both women.

This is a particularly awkward time for these two critical studies to appear. Not only are the bulk of H.D.'s writings unavailable, but the facts of her life are remote to say the least. Barbara Guest's full-scale biography is not due to appear until 1983 from Doubleday. Meanwhile Robinson's book is being falsely marketed as a biography (readers will not be fooled, it's so obviously a critical reading of the work). Both Robinson and Friedman rely heavily on unpublished writing and, grateful as one is for the opportunity to lap it up in snatches, we're really only getting shards, so—in keeping with H.D.'s reputation as a Hellenist—her work remains in the category of Sappho and the other poets of antiquity known only in fragments.

While H.D.'s magnificent late poetry is in print, the poems that made her reputation are unavailable (*Collected Poems*, *Red Roses For Bronze*, and another hundred pages in magazines). Of the three novels she published, *Palimpsest* is out of print (even the reprint), but Black Swan will reprint *Bid Me To Live* in 1983 (as well as the verse drama, *Hippolytus Temporizes*) and they have already done a corrected edition of *Hedylus* (less a novel than a stylized psychological blitzkrieg, a *prose dexterity* of extraordinary insistence). New Directions seems embarked on the task of printing the many novels that are in manuscript at the Beinecke: *HERmione* first—presumably to pursue public interest in the Pound/H.D. relationship recalled in *End To Torment* and painfully rendered here—and recently *The Gift*—contemporaneous with the London blitz and the composition of *Trilogy*—a book to rank with Mary Butts' *Crystal Cabinet* as one of the lovely mature womanly evocations of late 19th century girlhood. The stage now seems set, with the imminence of Guest's biography and the prospect of further Black Swan and New Directions books (even City Lights is into the act, issuing the essay *Notes on Thought and Vision*), for H.D.'s legibility to be encouragingly restored in time for her centennary in 1986.

Luckily for H.D., her books have always been before the public in some form. Not so with Mina Loy, elusive with her work even while alive. But

reading Mina Loy is one of the most direct encounters with modernism—so uninhibited is her writing, in fact, that reading it is like defusing an old but still live bomb. There's no mistaking her idiom. Where she strains she resembles an overintelligent writing student tortuously avoiding all simplicity and plain speech. But that's rare. Reading through *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, I feel more and more convinced that her angle on the *mot juste* was entirely her own, that she was a breed of one—the only English language futurist. Her "Aphorisms on Futurism" are less forceful in their overt connection to the Italian movement than such other manifestos as "International Psycho-Democracy" and "Auto-Facial Construction." Her skills as polemicist and aphorist have been utterly neglected; but consider the following, drawn from "Aphorisms on Modernism":

> MODERNISM is a prophet crying in the wilderness that Humanity is wasting its time.
> CONSCIOUSNESS originated in the nostalgia of the universe for an audience.
> THE individual is the inhibition of infinity.
> IMPACT with beauty is immortality.

Mina Loy was obviously as valuable an asset to the spread of Futurism in English as Marinetti himself, yet one wonders about the extent to which her presence was compromised by being his lover, and later Papini's. Despite her satires of both men in poems (of Papini: "His adolescence was all there was of him / Whatever was left was rather awkward"), there is a feeling that she was never comfortable competing in the aggressive arena of modernism in any of its manifestations. In the Twenties, even as she was being recognized by Pound and others as one of the very few 'originals' among poets, her withdrawal was underway, precipitating a lacuna in the consciousness of English modernism only this publication of *The Last Lunar Baedeker* begins to fill in. What is more, it establishes her in the evolutionary episode of modern literature as nothing less than a Missing Link, exemplar of a crucial node between one species of consciousness and another. "Protoplasm was raving mad / Evolving us" she writes in a love song.

If the dynamics of the machine represented to the Futurists a prismatic display of universal force, Mina Loy took the energy in its more organic dimension, while still retaining in the construction of her poems the unsentimental precisions of mechanical laws. Williams' poems-as-machines is

more applicable to her work even than his own. Certainly the words encountered appear in no other poetry I've read: agamogenesis, for instance, or cymophanous, acolytian, or the carnose horologe of the ego. Such words are hallucinatory fossils, and by comparison words like footle and knouts sound familiar even if you've never heard them before. In the strict sense, hers are the only 'science fiction' poems in the language. What appears to be impersonal at times is really a kind of second-stage rocket ejection:

> No love or the other thing
> Only the impact of lighted bodies
> Knocking sparks off each other
> In chaos

This stanza is the basic creed of the "Psychic Evolution" elaborated in Loy's manifesto for "International Psycho-Democracy":

> This thing called *Life* which seems to be the impact of luminous bodies, knocking sparks off one another in chaos, will be transformed through Psycho-Democratic evolution from a war between good and evil, i.e., (between beneficent and painful chance) to a competition between different kinds of good: (beneficent spontaneities).

Nothing short of beneficent spontaneity can account for the force of Mina Loy's attraction to Arthur Craven, and the rigorous, even brutal life wandering about in Mexico with him which "for the time that I accompanied him seemed a veritable mastication of space."

The Jargon presentation of Mina Loy in her native dimension is cause for celebration. There are plates of her visual work (genuinely visionary), of her (she was a beauty, with a curious resemblance to Isadora Duncan), a lengthy introduction augmented by abundant biographical data in a separate chronology of her life; and of her writing, there is a section of manifestos, essays and aphorisms, and of course the complete poems. Complete? Well, not exactly. The editor, Roger Conover, cites length as the reason for excluding the verse drama "The Pamperers," yet it took up only 14 of *The Dial*'s pages in 1920, and is far more significant than the "Two Plays" Conover includes. Only 8 lines are included from "Songge Byrd," Loy's unfinished verse biography of Isadora Duncan: is that all that survives? One would either like to see more or know more. The most serious aberration in the editorial complement to *The Last Lunar Baedeker* is the notes, which are an unpredictable

combination of vital information and absolutely irrelevant bibliographic data. And for the single critical tool one would like to have—a citation of the known dates of composition for the texts—one is referred to Virginia Koudis' critical study (a fine book, but no reason to exclude that information here, where it counts).

Which brings us, in conclusion, to the poems themselves. The laws of physical dynamics governing them make their flaws noticeable, in that they show signs of eccentric behavior like a damaged orbiting pattern, disequilibrium, etc. Which is at the same time to say, and stress, that most of the poems attain a technical perfection so unique that the book as a whole can only be regarded as the test site of a new aesthetic. Consequently, Loy's commentary poems on others' work reveal a mode of poetry as analytically precise as any critical prose yet developed, particularly in the pieces on Brancusi, Joyce and Stein. It's not clear why all the poems classed as Satires are so grouped: "Parturition" is an awesome rendition of childbirth, with only a touch of satire in its closing lines. But in the end one is willing to go along with that generic imprint because the force of the woman's intelligence makes everything appear a satire of itself anyway. Her large-scale autobiographical satire, "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," here in its entirety for the first time, constitutes a formidible challenge to anyone's conception of the long poem, the *proof* of modernism in most of its incarnations. In all, the poems fill 260 pages in this large, beautifully printed and designed volume, which is indeed a time bomb set ticking half a century ago, now matured to a hefty throb for the intrepid to handle.

Laura Riding was regarded as an incendiary device from the outset of her publishing career in the mid-Twenties. It is in fact appalling to read early reviews of her writing, to be so blatantly confronted with what is essentially male indignance at what is taken to be an over-cerebral woman poet. To read Laura Riding *is* to feel oneself in the presence of a relentless and aggressive intellect, but to gain perspective on her case it's useful to read those early reviews (along with her original publications) to see the deplorable attitudes she was up against. For the fact is that she has followed one of the singularly pure paths of writing attempted in this century, against which the work of many others seems a momentary dalliance.

In a poetic atmosphere sobered by T.S. Eliot's august presence and pronouncements, Riding's early work was almost certain to appear as an affront

to the self-proclaimed dignity poetry had arrived at. She sprang, like Athena, fully armed: by 1930 (only four years after her first book) she had not only a half dozen books of poetry to her credit, but *Contemporaries and Snobs*, *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, *Experts Are Puzzled* and the collaborative critical studies with Robert Graves. The playful but acutely pointed episodes of an unfolding poetics in *Anarchism Is Not Enough* simply did not fit in with any line of thinking about poetry in 1928. In fact, Riding's suggestion that "if you must write yourself, write *writing-matter*, not *reading-matter*" has as its proper climate the Seventies more than the Twenties. Poetry, she maintained, "is perhaps the only human pursuit left still capable of developing anti-socially," and for this reason she mistrusted the pictorialization and musification of poetry, which accomodates "the propagandist tribal expression of a society without any real tribal sense."

Her only contemporary in the Twenties and Thirties I can conceivably associate her with is Martin Heidegger, though I've seen nothing to indicate that she now knows or ever knew of his writing. But when, in the introduction to the new edition of her 1938 collected poems, she writes "Poetry bears in itself the message that it is the destiny of human beings to speak the meaning of being . . ." she is making precisely the point Heidegger made over and over again. Riding's critique of poetry was based on the perception that—as she expressed it in the original preface to the 1938 collection—"In poem-writing and poem-reading the stirring up of the poetic faculties has been a greater preoccupation than their proper use . . ." From that point, the issues have been further complicated by Riding's apparent abdication of poetry forty years ago, along with her unwillingness to indicate by way of example what the 'proper use' of the poetic faculty is. That her poetry is generally assumed to be her example of proper use really muddles the issue, both because it makes her into a monster of self-righteousness and because it obscures the fact that her work is—as Pound said of *The Cantos*—"the record of a struggle." This matter might be clarified, however, if we were to regard her effort of the past forty years as a practice of *not* being a poet, in order—as she attests in *The Telling*—to come to a certain articulation (rather than simply an expression) of being and truth. Riding is a notably troubling contemporary figure because she has refused to comply with the modern demands to deliver reading-matter to the public, and worse, she overstepped popular conceptions of 'the poet' by conducting a rigorous en-

quiry within the scope of her own poetry into questions of being and truth which she, as a poet, was patently unqualified to do. That was to be the philosopher's domain, and should a poet attempt to harvest a crop on that turf, he must, like Wallace Stevens, conduct his labor with all the suitable rhetorical flourishes so that the serious workers know they have a migrant in their midst.

The Telling and the recent introductions to the reprinted books of poems and stories provide a basic reorientation to Riding as a figure in the story of writing in our time. For they make clear the underlying quest-nature of her always evident sense of responsibility to language, and in so doing throw into relief the positive values of her earlier writing. Certainly there are aggravations inherent in the poems which could lead an undiscerning reader into thinking that Riding's sole purpose was (misdirected) satire, or a spiteful assault on conventional lyricism. At times, in a melodramatic costuming, the poems read like ghastly corruptions out of the secret heart of Palgrave, hideously distorted recitations from *A Child's Garden of Verses*. The preface to *Poems, A Joking Word* (1930) is like Winnie the Pooh and Heidegger declaiming a litany at a Black Mass presided over by Gertrude Stein. The refrain, "Poems are doom becoming doom," while related to Rilke and to Heidegger's *Angst*, sounds silly. Fortunately, the idiom of her ontological explorations did not otherwise aspire to the flippancy of that particular preface, and the introduction to the original 1938 *Collected Poems* is a masterfully concise, stimulating and still altogether relevant assessment of the motives for reading and writing poetry.

The Persea edition of the 1938 collection, *The Poems of Laura Riding*, reprints the book intact, with the addition of a new preface and supplementary expository materials by Riding. It is a collection the size of Wallace Stevens', and deserves at least the attention afforded a reading of his work (to which hers is a sort of uncanny twin). Riding's poetry constitutes so sizeable a challenge to poetry itself—written from within, so to speak—that to ignore or belittle her achievement is to relegate the art of poetry itself to that of any other 'reading matter,' useful only for lighter diversions. Every poem is an authentic—not an artificial or staged—struggle. The nature of her struggle will become fully evident only when something like a variorum edition of the poems is available. It should be stressed that the 1938 collection was but the latest in a series of arrangements Riding made of her

poems. It is the largest and most challenging, but it shouldn't distract us from the many other, and varied, contexts she provided for her work. Each publication of a poem of Riding's is worth following for the revisions, which are miracles of tuning, tightening, clarifying, and—in the context of continual relocations—amplifying. In each of her books the sequentiation of the poems constitutes the story, or calibrates its telling. Many of the poems in the 1938 collection had appeared in not one but two prior books, each time in an arrangement designed to stimulate certain readings and subdue others. When she wrote, in 1938, that she "ommitted those poems which seemed to fall outside the story" she indicated not only that the collection at hand constituted a story, as such, but that the earlier collections manifested such occasions themselves. "To go to poetry is the most ambitious act of the mind," she wrote. *The Poems of Laura Riding* is a continual testament to the truth of that remark.

Ambition is so variable a quality that what may seem unlimited and forbidding in Riding's poems becomes accessible, finite and charming in *Progress of Stories*. For readers seriously willing to struggle with writing, willing to allow the nature of the struggle to continue to unfold through their own reading, *The Poems of Laura Riding* and *Progress of Stories* are some of the most *useful* books of the century. They feel, to me, like companion books, and surely the mutual excellence of both makes them compatible. But *Progress of Stories* has an advantage over the poems in that it presents more varied surfaces and more obviously enjoyable segments. There are stories in fact which can be read fairly light-headedly, though part of the overall ingenuity of the stories' "progress" is to accustom the reader to more and more spacey kinds of light-headedness. So that, to read the final group of stories, one needs the physical preparation of the earlier stories much as astronauts need the artificial simulation of weightlessness before going into orbit. So thoroughly does Riding represent different modes of storytelling in *Progress*—from personal-history adolescent maturing, to social portraits, to Voltairean cosmological travelogues, to fairy-tales and even Beckett-like pure ontological irruptions (all predating Beckett of course, or any other contemporary fiction writing which it may appear to resemble)—that the feeling for the reader is that of having in hand as *complete* a book as a book of stories can be.

Because *Progress of Stories* struck me as so singular and perfect a book in

its own right, I had doubts about the incorporation into this new Dial edition of earlier stories from *Anarchism Is Not Enough* and *Experts are Puzzled*. But having the *Progress* augmented this way is useful not only in the expanded portrait it gives of Riding's storytelling abilities and her early concept as practiced, but because it occasions reflections by her which are contemporary (1982) on all the different aspects of the stories assembled here, along with a difficult but potent preface to the edition as a whole. In the progress of these stories we enter a domain of the "one thing so strange that it makes man say not 'How strange it is!' but 'How strange am I!' "—a place in which not only anyone, but any *thing*, any event, condition or mode of being can come into play as a character. It is good to be in the company again of Eve and Lilith, Miss Banquet, the story pig, in such places as Port Huntlady, Cosmania, and the Playground. The stories all arouse "the delight that can be felt in the good fortune that . . . there can be telling of a story or stories that, though told as not being and known not to be truth, flush the expanded word-scenery of the mind with a truth-like radiance" (from the 1982 preface).

Getting Laura Riding back in print was Laura Jackson's own decision. But Mary Butts died in 1937 with all her books still available, and only two have since been reprinted. She is the enduring example of the fallibility of the publishing world: even the great ones can vanish. It's no use listing her friends, supporters, and enthusiasts of the work—all the memoirs and histories of post-World War I bohemian Paris glow with the mention of her name—for Mary Butts' books are nearly all inaccessible to readers. You won't find copies of her books in libraries or for sale. But her novels—*Ashe of Rings* (1926), *Armed With Madness* (1928), *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932), *The Macedonian* (1933) and *Scenes From The Life of Cleopatra* (1935)—are as unique an accomplishment in the form as those of John Cowper Powys (to cite another long neglected but lately come back in vogue). But Butts' major achievement is in the stories—*Speed the Plough* (1923), *Several Occasions* (1932) and *Last Stories* (1938)—which, taken together, would make a book the size of *Ulysses* or *The Cantos* and a candidate for the same shelf.

The neglect into which Butts' work has fallen is probably attributable to her personal dynamism (remarked wistfully by all her friends), which for those who knew her overshadowed her writing. She is at her strongest as an

artist of the waste land, of fertility and sterility perpetually at war even in a 'postwar' era. But Eliot captured that territory (Mary Butts noted in her diary that he always seemed to snatch her titles out from under her—"The Waste Land" and "The Sacred Wood" would be quintessential Butts). For those unfamiliar with her work, think of her then as being as much the artist of the waste land as Eliot, augmented by a native visionary capacity (she was raised a descendant of William Blake's patron, and a room at home was filled with some of his greatest pictures) and an adventurousness Eliot lacked (in fact, Butts spent a summer as a protege of Aleister Crowley at Cepphalu, picking up his addiction to heroin as well as helping him clarify his book on magick). Now that the other major women modernists are being reprinted, I can think of no more significant figure still in need of recovery than Mary Butts.

Gertrude Stein certainly has all the fame Mary Butts lacks, yet even her work suffers from an inordinate degree of unavailability. When even the reprints are out of print it's hopeless. Of three dozen titles only a half dozen are currently available. *Operas and Plays*, *Useful Knowledge*, *Portraits and Prayers* and *Four In America* are only a few of the sizeable books one might hope to see reprinted. Then there's the Yale eight-volume posthumous collection, $25 apiece in library reprint editions, any title of which is as essential as most of the books Stein published in her lifetime. Richard Kostelanetz has assembled a 464 page selection from the Yale books, called *The Yale Gertrude Stein*. It is, at the moment, as good a place to start with her work as any. Admittedly it puts you face to face with her most difficult experimental modes, but there's no sense trying to avoid that. Given the bulk of the Yale material (2500 pages), Kostelanetz could either have sifted relentlessly for a sparkling catch of smaller texts, or go straight after size wherever he found it. He chose the latter course, a difficult decision but much to be commended, as *The Yale Gertrude Stein* will give you unabridged "Lifting Belly," "Patriarchal Poetry," and "Stanzas in Meditation," three of Stein's most awesome extended compositions. Other shorter (but still 30 pages each) essentials include "Brim Beauvais," "Subject-Cases," "More Grammar For a Sentence," and "A Sonatina Followed By Another." Kostelanetz' selection only falters, in fact, in the shortest pieces (one or two pages each)—a relatively insignificant flaw, as so much of the book consists of the long works cited above—and in an over-reliance for his

selection on the volume *Bee Time Vine* to the relative neglect of the riches of *Painted Lace* and *As Fine As Melanctha*. Needless to say, Yale still has plenty of material left for additional selections (hopefully they will use it). *The Yale Gertrude Stein* is, in the classic phrase, a step in the right direction. It points us in the direction of the recovery of an era that may unhesitatingly be called a renaissance of women writers. ▵

Five Aces and Independence. JOHN THORPE.
Tombouctou. 1981.

by GEORGE F. BUTTERICK

Lest it be overlooked in all the rush to rattle out a theory of language in chips and systems: this peculiarly human document by John Thorpe. Buried within are some of the most politically responsible poems of our time.

There are apparently two separate works, though bound together for more than convenience. The concentration of the first, *Five Aces*, seems sociological, drifting through America, cherry-picking, making do, surviving. Poems like "Ray Sharpe's Ranch" or "Tuesday," where the following passage occurs, might be singled out:

> Then in front of me an old man
> signed for foodstamps using the wrong end of the pen.
> I asked him when he ate last. "Nuttin just a coop
> a coffee dis moning," he said. You getting much of
> a cane crop this year? No sir. Only north forty.
> We switch to tobacco. Leaf wrapper? Nawsuh,
> Burley. And the waitress says
> "I *hope* I heard you say please!"

Very competent field-work, but not yet unique. That comes in the second half, *Independence.*

Among the poems there are "found" documents, letters to girlfriends, diary entries, notes passed in class. The highlight is a series of instamatic

portraits of pure American, late second-millennium adolescence, without subjective interference or adult "approval," all the caprice and doubt, the monolithic despair and poignancy of the age. They are school assignments or overheard lunchroom conversations that Thorpe with madly, morally darting eyes copies down surreptitiously in corridors, pressed between lockers, at the vending machines, in the arcade, in the back of the bus, in the subway between 2 and 4. Or else he is the multiple personality of an entire Head Start class come of age, as the photograph on the collection's cover suggests: a kindergarten graduation, boys and girls, the blend of colors and races, the smiles and eyes of youth—only, having read the poems—about to become as vacant as the storefronts they pass in the culture waiting to receive them.

No particular part of the country is given priority, but the voices come from all over—the Grand Concourse, San Bernardino High School, Western Pennsylvania. Vox populi. They are the voice of the people—nothing more or less. As grand and extensive as the phrase implies, and as trivial. But also timeless and tribal. It's as if the ancestral voices, smudged like ancient fingerprints on the shopping bins of discount marts, counters of clip-on ties and rubber flip-flops, started speaking. Only, these voices are ancestral to our immediate future, before the century lets out. This is the generation set to rattle at the social security gates.

A lot of hope rides on the titles—"Waaaaa, feed me, feed me," "Freckles? Ooo—I hate freckles! They're SICK!" (this last crazily concerns one of Thorpe's own ancestors, an 18th-19th century Congregationalist minister-farmer). The spark jumping the gap between title and text is our recognition of the wit controlling the whimsy of the event. The final poem is a motto in two lines (saved with characteristic modesty till the end, until it has earned its place): "The mind of the people is a better author / The mind of the people's a better publisher"—answering any doubt whether there can be political poetry without polemic or radical linguistic experimentalizing.

There is nothing polished about the poems. If there is any tradition of rhetoric, it is verity naif. But how else is youth but unkempt, keepers of themselves? There are plaints of the near inarticulate (from which we are *all* only a hair's breadth—or hare's breath!—away, in the face of deep or prolonged emotions), such as "This perfume is my only friend" or "What of it I could remember," which ends:

I got up, my head hurt, I still had on my lashes.
Sat on the toilet, blood on my pants.
Oh bastard. So this is the magic carpet ride huh.
Some boogie. I want real love.

Something is placed over the voices—a hand, as over a mouth of horror? Or is it something in the sound system; is the hand holding the mike too close, or too far away? Some tone grid? Something is filtering the voices. The grille of a pearwood confessional? Is it Thorpe himself?

He is certainly a picker, a crow for stories. There is the hilarious stone-faced one about five GIs and five Navy gobs and five Marines and a single thin dark-haired girl who all spend the night together in the same hotel room, or the utter blues of the final lines of "Good news, Mac, the Feds want to see you": "So if you see a street that disappears / ask it if it wants another man."

The voice of the people, the voice exuded from the flesh, released from the living glands. Voices overheard in snatches, not flow, not all from the same source or occasion—what in part adds to their universality and realism: they appear with all the interruptions and fade-ins and -out of life, sometimes several simultaneously. Many of the voices are of very tired women. Gum-clicks between the Browning-like monologues, high-pitched nasal teasing, or defeat so stale you can smell it on the breath. It's all poetry, language made selectively conscious, as in "One kid":

One night a kid was thinking
in bed
about something.
It hit him like a rock—
Poetry, poetry, poetry!

There is nothing quite like it. The capturing of speech in all its color and vagary is common and plentiful (any reader has favorite instances), but here it is especially welcome. The speech is homely, the harmonics unequalized, including the stultifications of adolescents on the verge of articulateness. All one's own adolescence comes flooding in. Agh! was I like that? We all squirm together and sweat a little and sigh with recognition (with redemption), overhearing the voices in *Five Aces and Independence*.

I hope that Thorpe will be kept in mind in any discussion of "voice" and authenticity in recent American poetry. His fifth ace is the joker, very wild.

Cap of Darkness. DIANE WAKOSKI.
Black Sparrow Press. 1980.
The Magician's Feastletters. DIANE WAKOSKI.
Black Sparrow Press. 1982.

by PAUL CHRISTENSEN

It is very difficult to write about getting older in America. Few poets have done well by the theme, although many have tried to perceive the process as it happened to them. Robert Lowell is perhaps our best poet of middle age so far; Donald Hall has engaged the subject in a recent good book, *Kicking the Stones*, but both poets are the exceptions in a multitude of writers wary of the subject. Aging, as Wakoski shows in *Cap of Darkness*, is a process by which you become invisible. Poets will sometimes cling to a poignant emotion of their youth to evade or ignore aging: sexual desire, as with Kenneth Rexroth and Robert Graves; loneliness, as with Frost; order, as with Wallace Stevens. When the young T.S. Eliot wrote about aging, he only saw his youth projected to later life, and thought aging meant merely deeper frustration with women. Other poets lose the pretensions of youth and become, for the first time, truly young; Pound, who was everyone's master when young, and who lost his vanity in old age, wrote his most lyrical language as a captive at Pisa.

Aging is a cap of darkness, something you come to wear unknowingly at first, but as time goes on you sense has begun to envelope you. You become a ghost to others whom you might have desired once or still might; you are invisible to those who would otherwise need to compete against you for the loaves and fishes of a career. As you grow older, according to Wakoski, you imperceptibly step aside from the march of fellow proles who only know the terms of their struggles and pursue them fiercely. There is no quarter for reflection or recognition of one's changing circumstances. As she remarks in "Aging," she "can only wonder / why there is such a general rejection of winter."

Wakoski surveys herself for signs of age as though she diagnosed the symptoms of a plague. Aging, as discovered in the details of her own body, presents her with an irrefutable set of new circumstances, the first subtle messages of far-off death; and on the other hand, she comes to see the good

in age, its own peculiar transports and excursions beyond a world of slender sexual partners with beautiful faces. Wakoski begrudgingly admits her own aging is a new experience, a different route of her odyssey, something unknown and now unfolding to her, which puts her feet on ground that is pathless, terrifying, suspenseful; in time, perhaps, it will become a spiritually thrilling search, a leap out of a threadbare reality of mere survival.

In *Cap of Darkness*, Wakoski wants to claim aging as a proper subject of poetry, partly because of the distrust and contempt others feel for this passage beyond youth and productive energy, and because it is her own immediate experience. It is just here, at this specific tension between her writing and society, that she has found the new lyric of the times: she has discovered where the public reality leaves off, and how her verse continues a chronicle of life that illuminates a forbidden world. In "A Dissertation on Smallness," she approaches her theme from a fundamental perspective: admitting she grows older, even when that fact is adamantly denied by her own friends and admirers. In "Cap of Darkness," she describes herself as "fighting the unknown, the invisible, the / ignorance of vision" in others. The denials of age are everywhere; one must break through to the recognition of his own aging with willful concentration:

> Terribly aware of looking fat, middle-aged, and dowdy,
> I marvel when people come up to me after a program and say,
> "You look wonderful," or
> "You haven't changed a bit";
> photos must lie.
> Or most people don't see others.
> For, I do not look the same,
> and my health is poor,
> and surely,
> someone must notice that I
> who always looked like a young girl
> now look
> like a middle-aged woman?
>
> ("Memory")

Finally, as she puts it, she can "acknowledge vanity / to discard it," but asks worriedly, "Is loss of vanity / death?" The irony of the question is that in discarding a vanity, one gets to live again, even if it is on the north side of the hill, on the path to death. "I begin, momentarily," she writes in another

poem, "to understand death, though never violence, never shattering." Wakoski delicately fits into place her "cap of invisibility," a little frightened, a little intimidated by the thought of death, by the signs of change in her face and form, and yet she wears it now, and sees, like a poet, what the new world of her life has to offer. In her recognition of aging, she finds doors to other realities she had not known existed before: as here, in this accidental discovery of silence:

> Sometimes the silence
> is so much more than we deserve
> like a pocket of time,
> a crystal room we walk into
> and suddenly find
> as in the fairy tale.
> We don't any longer see a door.
> The room of mirrors where every wall
> looks like an entrance or exit
> but neither is actually there . . .

Now the sum of her life is recognized as memory, which worries her. She is not fully reconciled to her changes in this book of poems; this shift of attitude, of status, vision, bearings will require much more thought, much more change within the mental interiors of her self before these hesitations will give way. Indeed, this drama of life-change is especially poignant for the Western woman, who, unlike the Asian woman, has no sympathy from her society, no religion to justify this passage, no cultural definition of the other half of her life. Wakoski is uncomfortable at catching herself "recalling," reminiscing, dredging up situations that had glistened in other books of her lyric chronicle, and resents "how we work our memories to death." She asks,

> What do you do
> when you find that nothing in your life
> has meant the same thing it meant to you
> to anyone else?
> What do you do
> when you are almost
> as afraid of life as
> you are of death.
>
> ("What Do You Do?")

Cap of Darkness is only the most tentative effort to seek reconciliation

with age; *The Magician's Feastletters* is not merely the sequel to *Cap of Darkness*, but a celebration of this theme in much bolder poetry. It occurs to Wakoski in several of the poems that she has been waiting to reach middle age in order to write her best work—that "experience and memory are my real roots," not the fearful prospect of losing touch, as she complained in her previous book. She is relieved at the thought that all the love she longed for is now a dream of lovers. "Would I rather fantasize / than touch?" she asks at the end of "The Dark Procession, Reviewed," which closes the second section of her book, "Winter." These poems are not only better organized, but better written, more concise, dramatic, playful, resourceful in image and dream distortion, and in the general progression toward a unique grotesquerie of landscape which informs her autobiography better than any of her previous strategies. We know now this is Wakoski's life, even though she is a diarist of an entire generation of Americans growing up in the rough middle of the century. Now she possesses her materials by refracting and distorting them with a freer hand.

Wakoski has long depended upon a mythology derived from *Mother Goose* rimes; like many women of the century, she has drawn out a personal mythos from early childhood, perhaps the only neutral zone of a woman's existence, where she can enjoy parity with the male, and possibly feel she knows herself in the frankest, least encumbered terms. This apparition of early youth is reexamined by a jealous, suspicious, older ego, prodding the effigy of a girl in love with books, solitude, her own senses, but who ultimately forgives this spindly double her faults, and relinquishes her to memory along with all else. Wakoski has more or less ignored the woman she was, the mature but young woman always on the prowl for lovers, always disappointed once she meets them. Now she treats herself as she is, in middle age, settled, at peace with her sedentary habits, or confronts this distant recollection of her disappointed infancy. Instead of looking for more lovers, she looks for parents, either to reconcile herself with the actual parents she has complained of throughout her poetry, or to agree to surrogates selected out of childhood memory, especially Mrs. Ury, the piano teacher, whom she admired once.

This is all the unfinished business of middle age, to settle those differences, grudges, nightmares, wounds of childhood once and for all. The lovers intervened as a stage of those problems, hardly their solution. She

would trade the King of Spain, whom every girl waits for, and accept perhaps a lesser apparition in the Marsh King. But she moves out of this emotional terrain reluctantly; much of her poetic lexicon is steeped in the early mythologies of loneliness and lovelessness, from which these *Mother Goose* figures leapt to allegorical life. In *The Magician's Feastletters*, the allegorical ciphers are fewer and richer: there is the frog prince, the lily pad on which he dreams, the well, the golden ball, the girl who will one day become a princess, a Marsh king, her father; and each of these ciphers is alloyed with human beings, who are frog-faced, have lily-white skin, fingers like the calla lily, who have a "green thumb," or who otherwise become vegetative grotesques in the slightly dreamy narrative of remembering and relishing one's life.

Her creatures are curiously edible and are not far removed from poems devoted strictly to eating, to preparing good dishes, buying food, savoring ingredients, learning to cook, and thinking of those desires of the past that are culinary in import. In other words, in middle age one devours instead of courts; one wants now, in the belly, what might remain patiently in one's longings. The hedonist has replaced the dreamer; Wakoski is a careful sybarite, refusing cheaper pleasures of "white rice," candy, sodas, but taking her fill of good things, the six books allowed by the library, the delicious morning tea, the perfect egg poached in white vinegar and water, the "ice-cold tap water" with a slice of lemon, to please the belly instead of the womb. Finally, she is herself edible, a vegetable goddess:

> My body glistens,
> snail moon,
> delicate lettuce of leaf breasts,
> cucumber skin,
> pale moistness of early summer . . .

In much of her work, summer was her season, and it provoked much whining and complaining in her poems, often to the point of dull prolixity. It is always boring to complain, especially without hope of solution. Her sexual problems, drawn out and examined in monotonous particulars, may have articulated some of the frustrations shared by other women, may have illuminated this dark side of women's consciousness in the age of liberation, but never inspired Wakoski to triumph lyrically over these insatiable urges and morbid disappointments. Summer for Wakoski was really a kind of

winter of dissimilarities; she begrudged all the long trek of youth as she found everyone smarter, more handsome, more sexy, taller, more powerful than she; she wrote a vast canon of journal complaints on the rigors of being short, homely, intellectual in a fierce nation that lives on appearances alone. Once those disparities levelled off in middle age, Wakoski could come to terms with herself. In fact, she forgives herself, and now appears to love her own life enough to concentrate on its magical properties, its transforming gifts, its powerful glimpses into some other realm beyond appearance or contingency. She is cocooned, she writes, in that small apartment in East Lansing, where she darkens the rooms, dislikes dawn, waits until dusk to go out and smell the potted flowers on her balcony, prepare her supper in perfect solitude, and write as if she were finally discovering her identity as a woman in America. "I do bless my sedentary habits," she says, a Liza Doolittle in a room somewhere, safely beyond the awkward age. "Winter," she says, "is the major season in my life." Now many characters wear her cap of darkness, and bear these curious edible appendages of summer, as she enters this new "world where desire has been eliminated."

The poems in both books are still fast, smooth skeins of language, loose in syntax, spaced airily to read very quickly, in which pages must be turned almost too fast. She is still very much a poet of "talking blues," but she grows profound in these new works, and seizes the focus of a diarist of a generation more confidently. I regard her as the ablest chronicler of a generation that has seen most of the wars and collapses of the nation in this century, and who has watched the sexual revolution redefine family, work, sexual identity, marriage, and old age. The only other poet who can match her voluminous journal-poetry is Allen Ginsberg, and together they have written the emotional history of modern America. △

Considering How Exaggerated Music Is. LESLIE SCALAPINO. North Point. 1982.

by CRAIG WATSON

Leslie Scalapino writes serial poems made up of short, inter-related texts, unified by narrative tensions and imagetic continuities. *Considering How Exaggerated Music Is* collects three published chapbooks with three new works and explores the poet's vision of dislocation and confluence between her public and personal selves. The sense of alienation and displacement which run through Scalapino's poems does not describe existential resignation, though there is a dream-like sense of mystery in which subjectivity is as fluid, frightening and uncontrolled as the world of external events. Through a compositional technique which relies on association rather than story-telling to maintain narrative interest, Scalapino's poems maintain a surface tension between the source of events and the writer's response to them. Aware of her presence as a participant rather than simply an observer-recorder, she struggles between the need to enter a public world with a sense of self-resolution, and her conflicting sense of distance and interiority which prevents such an objectification of the inner self. Thus, she is intrigued and disoriented by seemingly familiar events which suddenly become unusual, even grotesque.

Scalapino frequently describes human events in terms of animal anatomy and actions as a way of combining both her associative prowess and the sense of dislocation it produces.

> So I decided watching an old woman like her, who could rise so
> easily
> on her hind legs from a chair at a party and single out
> a young man that they could be satyrs. So erect.
> With even the same look on her face which I saw one day, later
> as she passed me on the street as she was hurrying forward
> and not seeing me, wheeling on her pelvis with a shock
> of hair standing out from her forehead and only the muscles
> of her haunches appearing to move.

Other shifting devices are used by Scalapino to create distance and ambiguity. Her use of long quotations and parentheses divert attention from

straight narrative and reinforce the speech-like syntax of the work. Such techniques display her wandering associative train and the way her subjective connections are made.

> I was not thinking about the woman whom I had heard about once
> who could read the minds of dogs (as I remember, she even
> diagnosed
> dogs' illnesses), once when I passed a man on the sidewalk downtown
> (he was dancing, moving around in circles to the music
> that was piped out of a bullhorn in front of the door of a music
> store);
> but (maybe because of the way he pulled his neck back—
> with his shoulders heaving in time to the music—which is the way a
> dog
> bites down on a stick when it's being yanked out of his mouth),
> I immediately had the idea that the man was hungry,
> undoubtedly
> because I hadn't eaten yet that day.

While all the pieces use a serial mode of continuity, "This eating and walking at the same time is associated all right" is a cycle of short texts in which lines are often repeated or slightly altered. The poem has four parts, each of which comments and alters the preceding section.

> Ate and then if I don't get to know this one person and also some
> mercenaries
> were killed when they were fighting in another country
> I'd say
> we're not going to have any social hierarchy after I've died.

and:

> I've changed my mind, I don't think there's going to be a social hi-
> erarchy
> after I've died
> I'd have to kill someone
> in order for us not to be connected.

It is precisely the nature of being "connected" that dominates Scalapino's imagination. She does not feel uniformly alienated from the world, though the nature of her connection to events and people is plasticized by a shifting sense of interior subjectivity. In the final series, "Considering how exaggerated music is," the prose poems are more distinctly self-contained and the

writer seems more comfortable with the complexities and contradictions of her perceptions and thoughts.

> I saw some men doing construction work in the street and the feeling I had was they shouldn't do the work then or walk around. There should be a lack of skill or at any rate no movement occurring so that the surroundings were not pleasant and the area they were in then was affluent, was well-off. Someone who ordinarily was skilled at the time has a lessening or crippling of his ability so that he comes sexually, and people just walking around have this sensation only not so strong.

As Scalapino's voice matures through this book, it continues to focus on conflicts and dissonance. Though at times the writing becomes entangled in tangential shifting devices or unnecessarily weighted by animal symbology, it is from a sense of contradictions and strange displacements that the best poems develop. Scalapino's achievement is in her ability to maintain these struggles as the foreground of an innovative and personal poetry. △

Le Fou. ROBERT CREELEY.
Golden Goose Press. 1953.

by PAUL BLACKBURN

Note:

In early 1953 Robert Creeley's and Paul Blackburn's careers were just getting off the ground and their friendship was at a high point. *Proensa*, Blackburn's first book of translations from the Provençal, was soon to be released by Creeley's Mallorca-based Divers Press; a book of his original poems —eventually titled *The Dissolving Fabric*—was slated for publication by Creeley at the end of the year. Although they had met only once, the two men were voluminous correspondents: Blackburn was the New York distributor for Divers Press, and each valued highly the other's opinion of his work. Creeley's first book of poems, *Le Fou*, had just been published by Golden Goose Press. When Blackburn got a copy, he sent Creeley a letter saying that the book was "a very great joy" (February 14, 1953). By way of

critique, he divided the poems in the book into three categories: "pieces I like best"; "so-so, but make it"; "not made, somehow."

Blackburn's commentary on the book would, no doubt, have been left at this usual level of informal and private literary conversation had there not been a series of crossed signals at this point. Creeley thought, on the basis of a letter he had received from Kenneth Lash, that *Le Fou* was going to get a review in Lash's *New Mexico Quarterly*. Fearing the chosen critic would misunderstand his work, Creeley asked Blackburn—who was at that time reviewing another book for the magazine—to volunteer to take on an additional project. By way of explanation for this request Creeley writes on April 26, 1953: "Your list, on Le Fou, is the straightest comment I'd got . . . you are a very damn shrewd man. If I didn't think you knew what you do damn well know about all of this, I wouldn't bother with it—but when I can get one [i.e., review] by you, I feel that much the surer."

So Blackburn wrote the review, assuming Creeley was taking care of clearing it with Lash, and that publication was assured. When he sent it to the *New Mexico Quarterly*, however, Lash wrote back that he didn't want it, didn't want any Creeley review at all, in fact. It seems Creeley had misread Lash's strong initial expression of interest in the book as a promise to give it public attention. Lash told Blackburn that he did not consider *Le Fou* to have priority over a number of other books he had recently received. He was sorry, but he could not run Blackburn's piece.

Blackburn never sent it anywhere else. The review was done as a favor to Creeley and a labor of love, but Blackburn was generally reluctant to do any critical writing. During his lifetime Blackburn published less than a dozen articles. When he was working on another Creeley-inspired piece—this one a discussion of the Albigensian crusades that was published in the *Black Mountain Review*, "A Sad Story"—he agonized over it for months and wrote Creeley on January 27, 1954: "I am of the firm opinion that I cannot write prose. I sweat it. Four starts to the article and every one of them too damned scholarly." He published only three book reviews, the one in the *New Mexico Quarterly* of Hugh Kenner's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, one of Spanish novelist Ramon Sender's *Before Noon* in *The Nation*, and a piece on Robert Kelly's *Armed Descent* for *Kulchur*. Which is too bad. Blackburn's letters and the few pieces he did write show he possessed a concise and fast-paced prose style, and a good deal of literary insight.

Ramon Sender, who Blackburn had never met, contacted him after the review of *Before Noon* appeared in *The Nation*. He writes from New Mexico on April 18, 1958:

> I have just read your beautiful article on my book and I want to tell you as soon as possible how grateful I am. My book has had the good fortune to fall into the hands of a poet and what you say about it is what I dreamed that someday someone would say about a book of mine. . . . If I were in New York, I would try to get in touch with you. . . . Meanwhile, I will look for your writings in our library. A reader like you must also be a magnificent writer.

I recently found the Creeley review among Blackburn's papers at University of California, San Diego's Archive for New Poetry. It is his only extant unpublished book review; an article on mimeograph magazines, intended for 1963 publication in *The Nation*, was also discovered, along with various readers' reports from the late 1950's and mid-1960's, when Blackburn was doing freelance work for a number of publishing companies. The Sender and Creeley letters are at the Archive for New Poetry, and Blackburn's letters to Creeley are at the Washington University Libraries, St. Louis.

—EDITH JAROLIM

△

A single ghost coalesces behind these twenty-three poems, one spirit, one voice speaking them, talking them: one voice, apart, needing the contact with reality the poem provides: a ghostly maker, alone and indivisible.

The sense of privacy is very great.

The voice in the poems deals with the human equation, deals with the utmost probity, deals the cards from the deck, one by one, exposing his hand, exposing your hand too. The human equation.

Miller said it didn't balance. Creeley knows it doesn't balance. He knows most of it is on the negative side. And that's where he puts it—most of it. And therein is the success of the individual poem. If he could draw a balance, if he could wiggle and shimmy and oversimplify and manage to draw a clean balance, he would no longer have a poem.

So you have this accident, this intangible, this minus sign, and you sit up all night breaking your head over it. It's real. It's not a fraud, a trick with words. It is out of balance. He is not trying to create a reason for his exis-

tence, no, nor for your existence. He can't idealize it. And I like that in him, this voice, this ghost. He is trying to discard his ideal self. And I like that in him. When he feels a fool, he says it, and shamefacedly.

> Cares mount. My own
> certainly
> as much as anyone else's. (from "The Rites")

The definite feeling, directly received.

> The rites are care, the natures
> less simple, the mark of hell knows what but
> something, the trace of
>
> line, trace of
> line made by someone
>
> Ultimate: no man shall go unattended.
> No man shall be an idiot for purely exterior reasons.

He is looking for it. It is there, it is real. It is minus something. He has a reason, therefore, to go on. He puts his whole life into the balance to produce something. Minus. He puts his whole life: his wife, his child, his affairs, the objects around him, his childhood memories, his friends, his view of society, his integrity, into the balance, to create—a minus. It is there. It is real. And he finds it lacking. Only madmen draw up balance sheets that are equal. He is not mad. When madmen or fools draw it up, the figures jibe. He is not a fool. And when he feels one, when he has tried to idealize it, and failed, and feels a fool, he says so. There is no perfect order, and he is not mad enough or fool enough to try to create one. Nor does he try to create disorder.

> I pulled up the street as you suggested
> —and found what?
> 1 nickel
> 2 pieces gum
> etc.
>
> But we are practical
> —but winter is long & however much one
> does save, there is never
> enough. ("Something for Easter")

To create disorder, you must destroy every form of order. Some forms which exist in life, in the relationship, he does destroy. And the order he makes, when he makes it, is this madness, this poem. But it turns out ultimately sane, adds up to minus. He knows it. It gives him a reason to go on.

Some of the poems are clean and lovely in their love and their mirrors of love: "A Song," "The Crisis," "Hart Crane (1)." Some are hideous in their beauty: "The Riddle," "Canzone," the endings of "The Rhyme," and "The Cantos." The title poem, "Le Fou," is sheer sensation, sheer breath, sheer breathlessness. "The Innocence" is sheer, fine utterance of connection with a real world and the man's place in it.

> .....Here the leaves
> come, there
> is the rock in evidence
>
> or evidence. ("The Innocence")

And some poems fail: "For Rainer Gerhardt," "Guido," "Hart Crane (2)," "Littleton, N.H.," "Helas." The last by a narrow margin. You can't make it every time.

There is no simple way for him to deal with it, the life, our lives, his life, what you will. There is no 'incisive imagery,' no 'compelling metaphor.' It is the utter concentration of finally saying it. And he says it with exactitude. He says it with care. And it's there for you. It's real. And it's minus something. You can see that it's minus something. That's what he's saying.

> I saw her
> and behind her there were
> flowers, and behind them
> nothing. ("The Rhyme")

She stands there and the world disappears. To recover love. She and then the flowers, and that is all and that is the center. And behind them, nothing. It is not romantic, it is terrible. The woman can use her sex in sheer kindness, or in utter malevolence. You can surrender to the malevolence or fight the kindness, or the other way round. But if she is just there, she and the flowers? The ultimate. Something is not there. It is the world—terrible! And to have to accept it, terrifying. Or the woman comes like a question. Asking. Or it is a demand, and the man can do nothing but give in, and

give nothing. Not himself. Not even his hate.

> .....The women
>
> imperative, the man
> lost in stern
> thought: ("The Riddle")

Feeling the separation, the separateness, the lack in him, feeling only her, there, demanding.

> .....One is
> too lonely, one wants
> to stop there, at the edge of
>
> conception. ("The Riddle")

Some of these records, these attitudes, are hard for the reader to take as held. But such struggles are real knowledge, however 'un-nice'. It is not nice idealism, it is direct blood knowledge of the struggle. And the poet-man is not always "lost in stern thought," but sometimes querulous, petulant; and it is then so stated.

> Let me say (in anger) that since the day we were
> married
> we have never had a towel
> where anyone could find it,
> the fact.
> Notwithstanding that I am not
> simple to live with, not
> my own judgment, but no
> matter.
> There are other things. ("The Crisis")

"The Ball Game" is a humorous poem, or call it so, but even there he repeats the pattern of disaster and loss, the incompleteness of the scene, the act, the minus, the negative balance stated that proves the living condition, the partial evidence that prolongs the search and compels the attention and the living presence, to find the area of struggle and define it by entering the struggle, against woman or child or language or fatuity, and stating each failure explicitly, wanting like any other man, I suppose, to get in out of the rain, but not going in, remaining, going his road in the middle of the

storm, against the storm, finding his partial evidence, his minus balance, his reason, therefore, to go on. Given wholly:

The Innocence

Looking to the sea, it is a line
of unbroken mountains.

It is the sky.
It is the ground. There
we live, on it.

It is a mist
now tangent to another
quiet. Here the leaves
come, there
is the rock in evidence

or evidence.
What I come to do
is partial, partially kept.

The comment is insufficient. Try Jeremiah, 15:16. A new voice, speaking truly, a true voice. I recommend it to you. △

▲

Errata notes on Jackson Mac Low's "Winds"/"Instruments"
which appeared in *Sulfur* 6:

On page 5 line 4 should be "in" not "by"
On page 17 paragraph 3 line 1 should be "tier" not "tiner"
On page 19 paragraph 1 line 4, sixth word should be "moo" not "moon"
On page 19 paragraph 3 line 4, fourth word should be "on" not "in"
On page 21 line 1 should be "sing" not "singing"
On page 21 line 3 should be "strong" not "strange"
On page 22 last line "he" should be in italics
On page 23 line 1 should be "arctic" not "artic"
On page 23 between lines 6 & 7 insert the word "a" between "on" and "lute"

CATERPILLAR

MAGAZINE

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From 1967 through 1973, Clayton Eshleman published and edited 20 issues of CATERPILLAR magazine. Robert Kelly was contributing editor. Like SULFUR, CATERPILLAR presented a wide range of American and international poetries, with reviews, essays, artwork and music. The magazine was anthologized during its run in 1971 by Doubleday-Anchor—but A CATERPILLAR ANTHOLOGY has been out of print since 1976. Issues #1 and #2 are only available in the few remaining complete runs. The following issues, priced relative to availability, can be purchased from the editor

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#15/16 (1971—304 pages), 33 contributors, including 75 poems by Jonas, and Carruth, Williams, Herms, Antin, Grossinger, Kitaj, Dawson, Blackburn and Dorn: $8.

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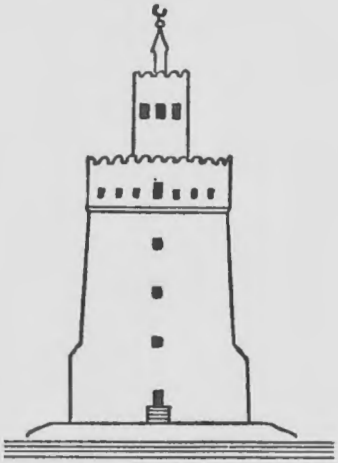

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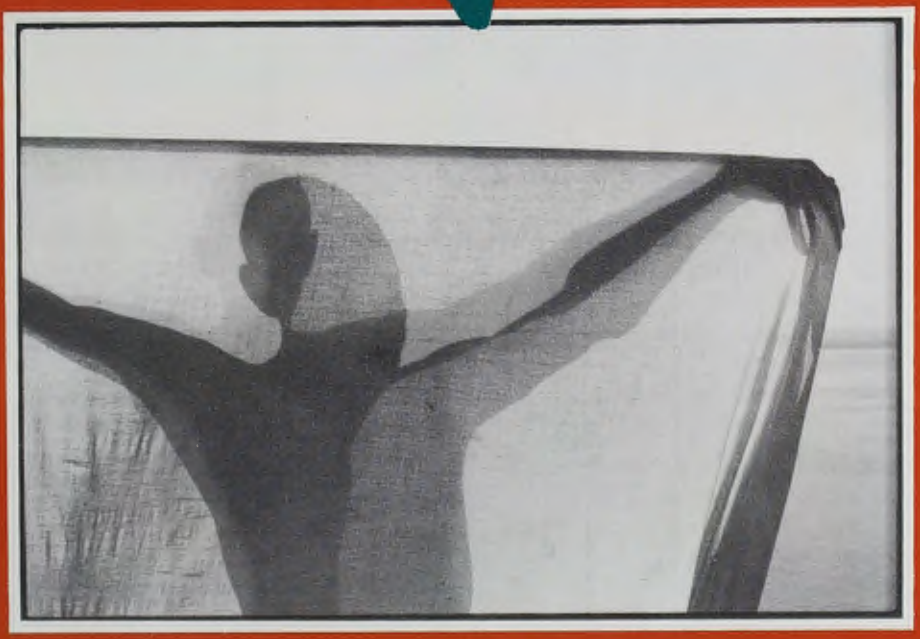

FEATURING: SAPPHO ON EAST SEVENTH BY ED SANDERS

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William Everson

Two Poems

DANSE MACABRE

The place is public—a thronged station
Or perhaps the lobby of a large hotel.
Someone I know approaches, friend or acquaintance,
Dimly recalled but not clearly seen, his line of advance
Tangent to my own.

Who?

I will know him later for my very self,
That heron-like hunch of my Waldport years, but now
Unrecognized. No face and no name,
Nor has he yet noticed me.

I step aside,
Averting my gaze, and quicken my pace.
It is this evasion that sets me directly on course
Toward a man and woman sitting casually by.
Turning my head I make to deflect again,
But before I can follow, the woman, rising,
Steps into my path. She will not be put off.

I check my stride. As I do

She lifts her head, hooded, the cowl
Framing her face.

No face—a gaping skull.
Not bones dry from the tomb,
Rather, bluish white, glistening, tatters of flesh
Still clinging her jaws—butcher's bones
Housewives lug home for dog-gnaw.

Taken aback
I half turn aside, but before I can dodge
She slips away, off toward the man,
Laughing, her face hidden now,
But her voice provocative.

Suddenly I seize her.
Under the cloak she is supple and firm.
Pulsing with life. I pull her to me,
Amorous, crushing her in my arms
While she laughs and struggles.

I jerk awake.
I am clasping the recumbent body of my wife.
She is fast asleep, face from me,
And I press against her.

Sensing arousal
She stirs her hips, languidly, still deeply asleep,
Too lost in the wonder of her own myth
To waken to mine.

And I lie listening,
Harkening to the changing rhythm of my life,
The hope in the horror of the yet-to-be:
What the dream denotes.

As the tolling bell

Sounds in its knell the certitude of deliverance
From the sorrow it extols, so the eternal,
Haunting the instances of mutilation,
Chimes the measure of the unconceived.

REAPER

Winter's wake: week after week the sopping northwesters
Soaked the coast. When May, bedraggled, finally limped in,
The liberated sun sent the grass knee-high
And thick as cat's fur. Taking up the scythe put by last summer
I started to mow.

This morning, honing the blade,
A spasm shook me—the Parkinson's reflex.
Struggling for balance I stumbled, fell forward,
Dropping scythe and hone to free my hands and break my fall.
But the crooked stock counterbalanced the blade,
Cat-quick, flipped the long point up and back.
Steel struck my face as I fell on it,
Drove into my cheek along the jaw,
And stuck there. Down on my knees I struggled with it,
And when it fell free, blood gushed from the gash,
Drenching my beard.

I staggered indoors,
Raining red on the floor, and yelled to my wife,
"Susanna! Come quick! I fell on my scythe!"
Who came wondering from the bedroom,
"Fell on your side?" then spotted the blood and ran to me.
Wrapping a towel round my lacerated jaw

She got me to the car and into town before I could snarl.
But when I badmouthed my lot the doctor would have none of it:
"Count your blessings, man. It was very close.
A little to the left and a bit lower down
Would have split your mouth and slit your throat.
Consider yourself in luck."

Back home, luckily unlucky,
I regard my image in the looking glass
And say to myself: What a way to go!
The mad scythe, cutting the firebreak ten years back,
All the women in your life laid low with the flowers,
Now turns on you. Drunk in death
Would you hug them to your heart?
The world at large would receive your demise
With grave satisfaction, struck by its wry fitness,
Sensing a kind of rough justice.
The karmic violence that never quits,
The howling Erinyes pursuing vengeance
Down the rooftree of the world.

It is not so.
Not yet anyway. In the springtime dusk
I feel no fear, and I whisper,
"Death, you darling! Come quick if you love me!
Tease me not brazen hussy! Think rather
We have pledged our troth in violent verse
And not flinched."

Today you kissed me
Almost on the mouth. I know by this
You have prepared the place, readied the bed,
Where breast to breast we will slake desire
Each of the other, and leave this life
Enjoined.

Ed Sanders

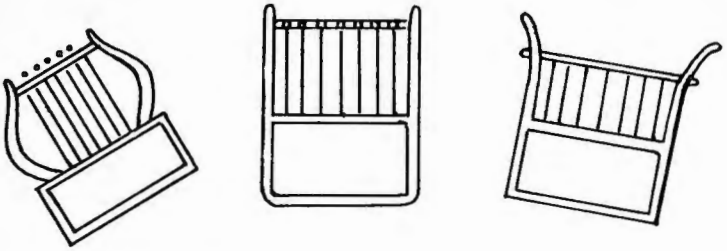
SAPPHO ON EAST SEVENTH

(Poet John Barrett is a graduate student in the classics department at New York University. His obsession is Sappho. There are drawings of her likeness on the wall, as well as photostats of fragments of her poems found in papier-mâché coffins in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. Barrett's translations of her poems are given prominent display above his desk, and the living room has been converted into a work shop for the construction of an ancient four-string lyre with a sounding box fashioned from the carapace of a European tortoise. He's managed to acquire about a dozen shells. They're all over the pad—tortoise shells on milk crate book shelves used by his friends as ash trays. He eats his morning oatmeal out of a shell. The time is late summer, 1963. The place East 7th Street near Avenue A.)

He had an obsession for Sappho
He lived inside her meters
like a trout in running mirth

He was building a four-string lyre
to sing Sappho down
Sappho come down

He copied lyres
from the Parthenon frieze
looking for the perfect shape



There were tortoise shells
hanging by nails
on the wall
Another lay on his desk
near scraping tools, a saw,
a pot of glue,
some whittling knives
from H.L. Wild.
The Lyre
transformed him—
in the mode of the
Dada masks
transforming the shy young poets
in the Zurich cabaret.*

Barrett became Some Other Bard
striding through his rooms
holding his lyre
singing with all the passion to summon:

"There is a river
in Mitylene
where Sappho

*Referring to the Cabaret Voltaire of 1916 and the spontaneous poem and dance performances inspired by the donning of Marcel Janco's famous masks.

used to swim
with a friend

dropping their sandals
with ivory inlay
at the water's bank

I saw Sappho
bending in the foam
peplos-less and chiton free
on a summer's day

singing a song
that is lost

They later lay
in the
creekside glade

soothing each other's
skin
with oil & caresses

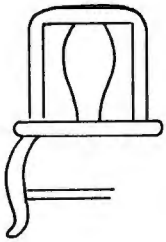
singing a song
that is lost

o Sappho come down
Sappho come down."

A friend from school,
Consuela,
lived next door
and heard John Barrett's prayer
through the tenement wall

Goat horns
were hard to get
on the Lower East Side

so he carved the arms
from the legs
of an arm chair
found in the street



and a thin rounded sounding board
cut he (from a spruce wood shingle)
to fit
on the shell

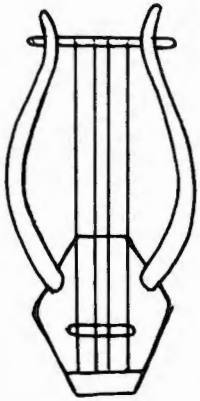
The cross bar from arm to arm
had tuning pegs from
an antique broken banjo
found in the trash
of a burned out store

A bridge he
shaped & notched
from an ebony comb

and when he had built one
with which he could sing
he scribed it with Sappho's

Ἄγε δῖα χέλυννα μοι
φωνάεσσά τε γίγνεο

"Come my sacred lyre
make yourself sing"



She listened each night
to dig what it was
and finally understood

when Barrett Sang:

"as a glider
swoops down
from the cliffs

over the birchen hills

swoop thou down oh
Sapph' swoop down"

She lay in bed
with her ear
to the wall

spiss-hissing with held back laughs.

She mocked him:

"as a cornflake
though the
subway grate

into the

bubble gum
muck

settle thou down
Sapph' settle down"

The next day she told her Greek class
Together they plotted a trick

One night she would
appear on the fire escape
she shared with Barrett
—attired in chiton and peplos*
and sing/chant some Sappho

as if she were Sappho's geist

She bought a bolt of white linen
on Orchard Street
and brocade for the edges
of Ukrainian symbology
at Surma on 7th
& sewed herself Sapphic attire

She memorized the Hymn to Aphrodite,
Consuela,
to sing Sappho down
Sappho come down

It was late afternoon when she
came from the shower, donned the chiton
and peplos overgarment,

---

*The basic attire of ancient Greece, both garments being fashioned from oblong pieces of cloth. The chiton was a tunic of linen or wool worn next to the skin, doubling around the body. It was pinned over each shoulder, and held at the waist by belt or cincture. The peplos was a heavier cloak-like overgarment.

crawled upon the window sill, shoved
aside her boxes of flowers

—she knew it was the hour that
Barrett would sing—

and crouched upon the gritty
black ironwork
blistered and pitted
from 20 coats in 90 years.

When she heard Barrett's loud
prayer begin and the strings
of his lyre resound, she

stood to sing—Consuela
saw the air above the fire escape
come apart—as if some giant hand
had scissored a line
in reality's tarp

There was a chirping of birds
and dim dots clouding the view.
Through the pointilliste gray
an arm was thrust,
holding a lyre,
then another arm—
the fist of it clenched

then opened, and tiny kernals
fell upon the grate
of the fire escape
to rain on the courtyard below

Consuela sank in awe,
the rungs of the fire escape
streaking her knees with grit-gray stripes

while Sappho's body
seemed to float
through the tarp-warp gap

the very second Barrett's
edge-of-frenzy voice
sang

"Sappho come down
come down Sapph'!"

At first John Barrett
tried to
gaze at the apparition
with an "it's about time" expression

Then, "Sappho!" he gasped,
for actually
Barrett had little trust
in the summoning power
of a lyre with arms
from a scrounged chair
and a tremulous voice
more like a dare

He glanced about his dis-
hevelled beatnik apartment
and wished he had cleaned away
the bottles from the night before

Sappho picked up his lyre
from the desk
setting her own aside
and started to sing

ΨΑΠΦΟΥΣ ΜΗΛΗ

ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανατ' Ἀφροδιτα,
παῖ Διος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε
μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνιαισι δάμνα,
πότνια, θυμον,

ἀλλα, τοιδ' ἔλθ', αι ποτα κατ[illegible]ντα
τας ἐμας αὐδας αἰοιε[illegible] τοι
ἔκλυες, πατρος δὲ δομον [illegible]ρα
χρυσον ἡλθες

ἄρμ' ὑπασδευξαισα· κ[illegible]λοι [illegible]σ' ἄγον
ὠκεες στρουθοι περι γας μελαινας
[illegible]ανα δίννεντες πτ[illegible]ρ' ἀπ' ὠρανωιθε
ρ[illegible]

ἄκρα δ' ἐβίκαντο. ὁ δ' [illegible] καίρα
μειδιαισαισ' ἀθανατοι[illegible]
ἦρε' ὄττι δηὐτε πεπον[illegible] κ' ὄττι
δηὐτε καλημμι

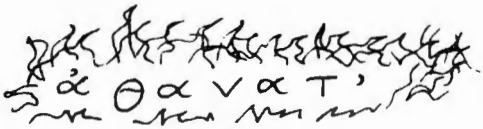
κ' ὄττ[illegible] μοι μάλιστα θέλω γενε[illegible]
μαινολα θυμοι· τινα δη[illegible]
σαγήνη ἐς σὰν φιλότη[illegible]
ψ' ἀδικηι[illegible]

καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχεως δ[illegible]ει
αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', [illegible]ει
αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχεὼς φι[illegible]ει
κοὐκ ἐθέλοισα

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δ[illegible]υσαν
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τ[illegible]σαι
θῦμος ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον, σὺ δ' αὐτα
σύμμαχος ἔσσο

He could *see*
the words she sang
above her
with a throbbing life of their own

Words of Water



Words of Fire

Words of Broken Oars

When the song was over
Barrett stood stunned
tears on his cheek

sinuses cloggy, vision blurred,
ache of love in his stomach.

Then she walked to the wall
where he'd pinned
his translations

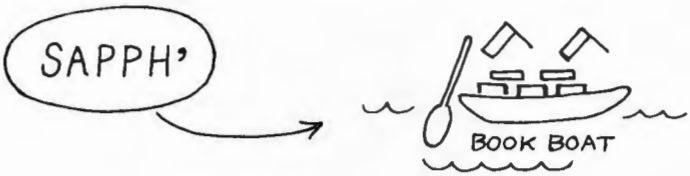
He tried not to glance
at her breasts
just as he did not look

in Stanley's Bar
on a midriff summer night

The bosom
of a ghost
is not for the kisses
of eyes.

Barrett was horrified
to see Sappho stand
reading her verses' versions
It was hard to keep from
ripping them down.
Finally, she turned away, & laughed,
"Better than Byron's—
at least."

Next she visited his shelves
"Let me gaze upon your
Book Boat," she said



Oh, no!
thought John Barrett,
worrying about the many marginal tomes
in his Book Boat
The gibberish of friends,
the smut, the
mal-marked scholarship.

Sang then Sapph':

"There is a boat
for every bard
bobbing in the waves
a Boat of Books

Some will say
to build a boat of death
Others will sing
a trimaran of green

But a bard
had better build
a Boat of Books

for the troublesome
flow.

And you shall find
a Muse for your age
in the Book Boat prow:

Retentia
Muse of the Retained Image.

The pan pipes
the seven-string lyre
the arsis & thesis—
The muses
with which I sang

but yours is the era
of captured sunlight
& oxide-dappled tape

Retentia
catches the beauteous flow
swifter than a cricket's foot

The photos taped to your wall
of my poems' shreds
were wrought by
Retentia

She rushes to the aid of groaning Clio
whose scrolls lie thickened & black

She helps you to sort
to soothe
to winnow

as well as to keep
to save
to shape.

The Image is safe
with Retentia
for a million years
till the pulsing fires
which scorch all lyres

O

Once on an
incurved hillock
near Mitylene
a circle of maidens sang
—Alcaeus was there

if only
if only
I could hear
their image again!"

Sappho stopped singing
There was a near-sob tremble
in her voice

"Pray to Retentia, John Barrett,
for each muse aids
in her measure
and the task
is to know
the mix of the muses' gifts
in your lines."

She moved her hand to the wall
to touch the photostated papyrus
The wall cleaved apart
and forth stepped Retentia
in a blue-black gown
crackling on its surface with

tiny jiggle-jaggles of lightning
which seemed to form
almost a lightning lace
above the blue-black weave

Barrett was wondering
what sort of prayer
was proper to utter

in praise of a new muse
standing in his room
from the Book Boat prow

He was foolishly thinking
of scooping the floor
to kiss Retentia's hem

when Sappho walked to the kitchen cupboard
and opened the doors

"What does she want?" Barrett asked himself.
"I don't have any Methu," he said,
inwardly praising himself for his wit.

(Methu was a famous
wine produced
in ancient Lesbos)

"Have you no herb scented oils?"
she spoke in complaint,
shutting the cupboard doors—

"How frailly you fail
in matters of love
& longing," she said

"How can you think
a woman like Louise

would love you,
knowing what you know?"

She entered Barrett's bedroom,
a tawdry chamber
with its mattress
on the floor
mid candle spatters

and a blue print of Sappho's
face, large as the wall,
above the bed

"Now you shall learn
the Rubbing of Oils
& Glossa Didacta."

Retentia
appeared at the door
bearing a tray of
tiny canopic jars

—oils & unguents
with which Sapph'
could ply her hands

as she slid the
clothing from shy John Barrett's
skinny frame
& rubbed him thrillsomely
from jar upon jar
each oil having
a different thrill
—a mild sting here
and a tremble there—

& sweet smells
mxing with
smells piquant

"There is much you do not
know,"
spoke she,
neatly hanging her peplos
upon a nail on the door
after she had shut it

She drew Barrett down
O Barrett come down

"We have called it
the Glossa Didacta
and every bard must have
its perfect knowledge"

Down sank they
upon J. Barrett's mattress

She pulled his poorly combed
badly washed curls
down upon the only thing substantial

It was like a softened rosehip
The rest of her was ghost-mist

"Your head is the rudder
& I shall steer it over
the rapids,"
this way
that way
steering with fondly grabbed ears
steering the rose bud
steering the bard boy's brow

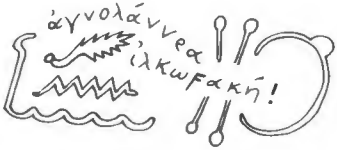
showing him pressures
motions
patterns

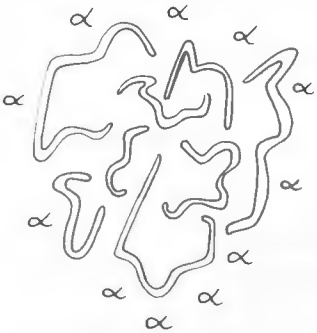
"That's it
That's the way
That's perfect"

clitoris bifurcated
like

a
lithops
(left side to the right brain
right side to the left brain?
twain
bundle
of come-nerves?)

She came in words arcane,
Sapph'-sighs writhing above her
in jumbles of
hieroglyphic neon,
as when she had sung—





'αιχ
σμαιχ!

She spoke to him in Latin,
"Now I have taught you
the Lingus Didacticus
and those you coax
into its trembly thrall
shall know a dance more lightly tapped
than the meters of Euripides."

Then she bade him
come inside her.

"Don't you make it only with, uh, gunaikes?"
he replied, breaking into Greek.

She'd arranged chianti bottles
around the bed
with flickering candles within

Barrett looked up
to see the shadow
of the ghost
against her blueprint image
on the wall
as she tugged him gently
but insistently
till they lay
face to face
& she guided him up & within—

an hour
to make him
believe anew in the
thought of the Numen

or an hour
as a catalpa blossom

floating in the River Thrill.

Ahh, côte-à-côte
he longed to lie
with her
upon the dawn—

"Stand up," she said instead,
"We're going on a journey."

"If so," replied John Barrett,
"give me satyr legs!
yes, sturdy hairy legs
& hircine hooves
to spring and leap!"

Sappho smiled, but
could not comply.
She held his hand
& floated
from the room on East 7th

above the green copse of
Tompkins Park

dizzily dizzily
whirling a further era back—

to 1911
where Emma Hardy sat alone
on a spring morn
at Max Gate*
her husband downstairs

*Max Gate—Thomas & Emma Hardy's house in East Dorset, Dorchester. In 1908 Emma had ordered dormer windows built in her attic boudoir, outside of which the birds at the feeding table would flock to eat from her hands.

correcting
proofs
with his mistress.

They entered Emma's bedroom
through the dormer windows
There was a feeding station
by the sill
for the birds

Sappho felt pity
for bitter Emma Hardy
whose husband's hands

were ever poised
to trace the
curves of youth.

She was trying
to ready herself
for the day

but her face
was twisted in pain
from a torturing back

The pain was too consuming
for her to lift
a plate of crusts
to the birds

She rang for her helper, Dolly Gale,
to brush her hair
Dolly stood behind her
unbraiding untangling uncoiling
the sleep jammed tresses

The slightest tug
of the bristles
brought agony's gasp

till Sappho reached out
to place a soothing palm
on Emma's spine

to ease away
the axing ache

"The oil, John, the oil," Sapph' urged
and John Barrett parted the robe
from the painéd shoulders
and began to caress
with Mytilene's finest
from a thin necked jar

The peace in her back
brought the first smile
in months

"Call the birds for us, please Emma?"
Sappho asked, and Emma Hardy
walked to the sill
and raised her hands

Emma was 68
Emma in pain
Emma threw open the dormer
to fee them her wedding train

There must have been a hundred bird
in a wild gustation of feathery blurrs
above the feeding station
pecking the breakfast crumbs

"This house Hardy built," Sappho said to
John, with a tone of disgust,

"without a hot
water tub!"

She took his hand again—"Prepare for a trip
to 642 A.D."

There was a further whirling
after which
they alighted
at a site of steam & fire

Barrett thought for a moment
they might have followed
Dante and Vergil
into a bolge of hell

There was a hairless man
with a shiny skull
& a missing tooth in front

throwing bundles of papyrus
scrolls
into the wordeating mouth
of an open hearthed ceramic furnace

Water boils above it
in a large copper basin,
feeding through ducts to a
series of copper tanks
of varying stages of heat
so that a bather in
the pool can tug a string
for the heat of her choice.

Stacks of scrolls

jut this way and that.
Barrett cranes his head
to read the names
upon the next thatch
to be tossed

Oh, no! It takes a few seconds
reading the run-on script
for John to recognize
the plays of Aeschylus!

They are heating the baths of
Alexandria
with the last of the ancient
libraries

"Look!" she cried, "Do you know what that is?"
The attendant had an armload of volumes*
with projecting knobs. "He's just about to burn
the final set of my collected works."

The fireman
tossed them two by two in the fameless flame

Barrett tried to grab them
but his hands brushed through
like mist into a redwood bough

"Some of my poems were
torched by Caesar
burning the ships
in Alexandria's bay
& the fire reached ashore

*Volume, from volumen, papyrus rolled around a stick or sticks, the text written in narrow columns.

Some were chopped into
papier-mâché for
middle class coffins of Thebes

Some were destroyed
when surly Christians
sacked the Serapeum*
in 391

And now it is time
for ashes and chars
to come to the
mixolydian mode

Some poets' words
are written on water
Others make flame
to make it moil."

Just then
the voices of women
& the clack of clogs
were heard

The daughters of General Amrou**
had come to soak
in the steam-topped pool
& to smooth
with pumic bars and strigils***
their steam-soft skin

---

* one of the two ancient archives in Alexandria

** Amrou seized Alexandria for the caliph Omar in 642. The latter, it is said, ordered the remaining books in the ancient library destroyed on the grounds that now that the Koran had been written, they were no longer needed.

*** curved scrapers for removing bath softened skin.

The women
passed their towels
to their servants

and the high-domed room
was soon resounding
with laughter and aqueous splash

All of a sudden Sapph' shoved past
the sweaty man by the furnace
and gathered the final rolls,
to Barrett's gasp,
and flicked them into the rage

She turned, disrobed
handed her chiton to
Barrett
and slid into the water
to sit on a marble plank
with the damozels
in the moil pool's midst

"Hotter, hotter," she urged
the attendant, tugging on the rope
to empty a torrid tank
upon them

while out of the furnace
a burning fragment fluttered

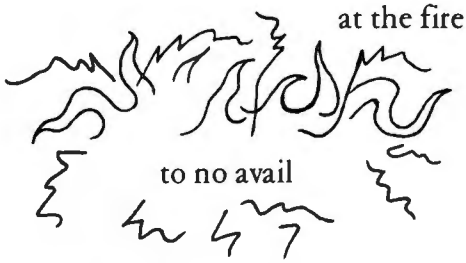
just a corner of paper,
curling & burning
with Sappho's last word

βρενθείω

flaming

βρενθείω

It fell at Barrett's feet
He tried to stamp
at the fire



to no avail

A silver knob
from the end of a scroll stick,
worked in a pattern of porpoises,
rolled out of the furnace
all that remained
of the works
of Sappho of Mitylene

Barrett reached down to seize it
He slipped
& smashed to the floor.

He came awake
in his pad on East 7th
and saw a foot on
the fire escape.

"Sappho!" he half screamed,
and rushed to the window

but it was Consuela
in her Orchard St. chiton and peplos

She seemed asleep
but opened her eyes at once
when he touched her

She told him her tale
He told her his

showed her
the silver knob
and the smell of the top of his wrist
still thrillsome
with Sappho's oil.

Afraid, yet
unable not, to
talk about
it

Barrett told portions
to some, &
the whole event
to a few
with the silver knob
as carefully shown
as a saint's bone.

To some
he was
Crazy John

("You sure this wasn't
the head from your

grandfather's cane?"
Sam Thomas sneered)

To others
he was
Lucky Bard

(to carve the proper lyre
to sing Sappho down
Sappho come down)

Though he sang her each eve
he saw her no more
till later that year
on a snowy night

John saw Sappho
her neck laden
with heavy
Russian crosses

praying in the deep drift snow
on Avenue A

before it was disturbed
by salt & sweep

outside the redbrick
St. Nicholas
Carpatho Russian
church

Icons were
melting in
her hands

& rubies
dropped

from her
crusted neck
into the snow

(though later
they vanished)

He ran to see her
She was weeping

"You'll cry too,"
was all that she said

& she walked
away into the blizzard
weeping & wailing

& Barrett
never saw her again.

Charles Bernstein

DYSRAPHISM

Did a wind come just as you got up or were
you protecting me from it? I felt the abridgement
of imperatives, the wave of detours, the sabre-
rattling of inversion. *All lit up and no*
place to go. Blinded by avenue and filled with
adjacency. Arch or arched at. So there becomes bottles,
hushed conductors, illustrated proclivities for puffed-
up benchmarks. Morose or comatose. "Life is what
you find, existence is what you repudiate." A good example
of this is 'Dad pins puck.' Sometimes something
sunders; in most cases, this is no more than a hall.
No where to go but pianissimo (protection of market

"Dysraphism" is actually a word in use by specialists in congenital diseases, to mean a dysfunctional fusion of embryonic parts—a birth defect. Actually, the word is not in Dorland's, the standard US medical dictionary; but I found it "in use" by a Toronto doctor so it may be a commoner British medical usage or just something he came up with. "Raph" of course means "seam," so for me disraphism is mis-seaming—a prosodic device! But it has the punch of being the same root of rhapsody *(rhaph)*—or in Skeats—"one who strings (lit. stitches) songs together, a reciter of epic poetry," cf. "ode" etc. In any case, to be simple, Dorland's does define "dysrhafia" (if not dysraphism) as "incomplete closure the primary neural tube; status dysraphicus"; this is just below "dysprosody" (sic): "disturbance of stress, pitch, and rhythm of speech." (C.B.)

soaring). "Ma always fixes it just like I
like it." Or here valorize what seem to put off
in other. No excuse for that! You can't
watch ice sports with the lights on! Abnormal fluid retention,
inveterate inundation. Surely as wrongheaded as
but without its charm. No identification, only
restitution. But he has forced us to compel this offer;
it comes from policy not love. "Fill
the water glasses—ask each person
if they would like
more coffee, etc." *Content's*
dream. The
journey is
far, the
rewards inconsequential. Heraldically defamed.
Go—it's—gotten. Best
of the spoils: gargoyles. Or is a pretend wish
that hits the springs to sing with sanguine
bulk. "Clean everything from the table except
water, wine, and ashtrays; use separate plate to
remove salt & pepper." Ignorant
I confront, wondering at
I stand. We need
to mention that this is one
that applies to all eyes and that its application is only on the
most basic and rudimentary
level. Bring
comfortable with and also
inviting and satisfying.

The pillar's tale: a windowbox onto society.
But heed not the pear that blows in your
brain. God's poison is the concept of
conceptlessness—anaerobic breath.
No less is culled no more vacated—temptation's
flight is always to
beacon's hill—the soul's
mineshaft.
Endless strummer. There is never annul-
ment, only abridgment. The Northern Lights is
the universe's paneled basement. Joy
when jogged. Delight in
forefright. Brushstrokes
on the canals of the . . ., moles on
sackcloth. "People like you don't need
money—you breed contempt." Some way such
toxic oases. This growth of earls, as on a failing
day, gurgling arboreally. Shoes that
shock. I'd
give to you my monkey, my serenade, my shopping bag;
but you require constancy, not weights. Who
taking the lump denies the pot, a beam of
buckram. Or they
with their, you
with your. Another
shot, another stop—dead
as floor board. Pardon my declension: short
parade. "Refill platter and pass to
everybody." A

sound is a sum—a sash
of seraphs. Bored loom.
Extension is never more than a form of content. "I
know how you feel, Joe. Nobody likes to admit
his girl is that smart." "I feel how you know,
Joe, like nobody too smart that girl is his admit."
A wavering kind of sort—down the tube, doused
in tub, a run of the stairs. You should shoot! But
by the time I'd sided. Magisterially calm and pompous.
Pump ass! A wash
of worry (the worldhood of
the whirl). Or: "Nice being here with anybody." Slips
find the most indefatigable invaginations, surreptitious
requiems.
Surfeit, sure fight.
Otherwise—flies,
detergent whines, flimflam psychosis. Let's:
partition the petulance, roast
the arrears, succor the sacred. "If you don't keep up
with culture, culture will keep up
with you." Sacral dosing, somewhat
hosting. Thread
threads the threads, like
thrush. Thrombolytic cassette. "While all of this is
going on, young Sir Francis Rose—a painter of dubious
gifts whom Gertrude Stein espoused for the last decade
of her life—appears as if out of nowhere with a
painting." If you mix with him you're mixing
with a metaphor. "It's

a realistic package, it's a
negotiable package, it's
not a final package." Glibness
of the overall, maybe: there is always something dripping
through.
We seem to be retreading the same tire
over and over, with no additional traction. Here
are some additional panes—optional. Very busy
by now reorganizing and actually, oddly, added
into fractionation ratio, as you might say. Or just
hitting against, back to everybody.
Reality is always greener
when you haven't seen her.
Anyway just to go on and be where you weren't or couldn't be
before—steps, windows, ramps. To let
all that other not so much dissolve as
blend into an horizon of distraction, distention
pursued as homing ground
(a place to bar the leaks). Say,
vaccination of cobalt emissaries pregnant with bivalent
exasperation, protruding with inert material. I
can't but sway, hopeful in my way. Perhaps
portend, tarry. The galoshes are, e.g.,
gone; but you are here. Transient cathexis, Doppler
angst. And then a light comes on
in everybody's head. "So I think
that somewhere we ought to make the point that it's really
a team approach." Riddled
with riot. What

knows not scansion admits
expansion: tea leaves
decoy
for the grosser fortune—the slush
of afternoon, the morning's replay. Prose,
pose—relentless
furrier.
Poem, chrome. "I
don't like the way you think":
a mind is a terrible thing to spend.
That is, in prose you start with the world
and find the words to match; in poetry you start
with the words and find the world in them. "Bring
soup in—very hot." "You
couldn't find your way
out of a blanched potato." Silence
can also be a tool
but it is seldom as effective as blindness.
His quarter, and heir to his heart, whom he purpled
with his fife, does bridle purpose to pursue
tides with unfolded scowls, and, pinched in this
array, fools compare with slack-weary ton.
Dominion demands distraction—the circus
ponies of the slaughter home. Braced
by harmony, bludgeoned by decoration
the dream surgeon hobbles three steps over, two
steps beside. "In those days you didn't have to
shout to come off as emotional." One by one
the clay feet are sanded, the sorrows remanded.

A fleet of ferries, forever merry.
Show folks know that what the fighting man wants
is to win the war and come home.

Arpine Konyalian-Grenier

Five Poems

ATONEMENT

Do not weep O daughter of Jerusalem
the cobblestones you have knelt on for aeons
are deaf matter, velvet
pitch from meteorites;
they carry the lament of maturing wine
in hollow sockets
they are the stage for dandelion garlands
performing solution
for seconds,
the solution of seconds
in rhythmic dance of the Allah

"Allah u akbar", unrepeatable
atonal anthem in quarternotes

"Allah u akbar, Allah u akbar"
and the moon weeps of the pain...

the moon of velvet nights
crystallized marble, covered and sealed

in white silence
and you alone, in the cockpit of its horror
in the glamour of its convoluted neon
canvas, in the glare.

Rise, daughter of Jerusalem
dawn is your mother, she will
hover around you with orange sparkles
and keep you warm under the rocks, your strength
through shielded matter, the shield uncovered
loose, hurting...
She will keep your breath moist with fresh dew
and the hours and days will father you, when you
look at yourself through glass
and search for the long disappearing,
meandering moon;
Get up, and get dressed
and splash yourself with clear morning air
thrust your awkward limbs at the morning breeze
and spell it
spell the words out
the cuneiform
and hear the sound webs caught in the wind
hear
their resonance through your skull on soft planes
and crusty, twisted planes
hear the glorious puzzle
and smile

your smile catches you
in the act of putting your hands together
to face yourself...
and upon this frailty of judgement they built
the ancient ships

and spread years and years of chaos, their landscape
cottonleaf landscape, sagebrush
the green soothing its depth
and slumber... Where is the book
turn the page!
Upon the frailty of page, this ship and we
navigate
the earth swallowing the waves we make.

GETTING UP

It is like a spiral you feel you could
at some point take off find your dwellings
kindle the flow of juice nurturing you
screaming at you in your sleep in your
deep sleep the lady had purple snowflakes
on her nose she had been knitting a smile
on her face you appeared in the doorway
she folded her skirts left the room through
the back door in the backyard she started
feeding the chicken it was five o'clock

the spiral stretches back and forth now
in width there is an urge to find out
whether you had come in at five in the
morning or evening somewhere in the
living room that is the television is on
it sounds like a defective tapemachine

your child is stretching the hours for you
later he will come in announcing boredom
by then you hope you'll know why the lady
left the room or is it such that she
likes to stretch five o'clocks the
principle bothers you the validity
of having hours to perform in you
challenge yourself you announce the
program of the day and now you know why
the lady actually it doesn't matter at
this point what matters is the spiral
how to fit your program into it you feel
webbed tormenting comfort grasps you in
velvet textures allows you seclusion
your back is screaming you shift sides
there now you're sure you'll get all
things organized in the spiral actually
it shouldn't even take you more than two
minutes the whole process velvet

violets are velvet Mother said she was
a violet in the corner gleaming you
always wanted to be a violet there is
also pink but what you'll do is get up
in a matter of seconds spontaneously
unthought but acted you try to imagine
this process you swam this way before
through the week you'll do it again
maybe if you switched sides one more time
steady comfort yourself be affirmative
feel the process of doing it don't
relate it to time it's a workout use
all the cells in your brain vessels in
the direction north-south a smooth

positive flow you feel like a coward now
a disaster of rough projectiles
tangled up pent up vulgarity meaningless
failure the air rushes into your lungs
with a steady rhythm heralding doom
vision slips into your pupils at uneven
intervals hold them against their will
slowly you succumb to the fall

ROPE SONG

Grasping
the coiled end of a long journey
she
turns herself inward
round
and round

skip a rope
        skip a rope

She stoops to catch the entangled bluebells
there are twilight zones inbetween her jumps
the rope touching ground
scraping deaf matter...
there is a hissing of everyday
reality
breaking loose in serpentine wisdom...
there are moments
when the earth grasps her with gypsy threads

hanging loose from bare ends
the unspeakable truth
unwinding
the rope
with reluctant, rhymed cycles
the greyness of knots
performing
the jagged edges
smothering themselves, over honeycomb spaces
bursting with nectar
releasing themselves
smothering her

and all she had wanted to do was describe...

THE COVENANT

She is surrounded with Trojan women
that carry transplants of wood
resilient, silenced splinters,
covered with the glow of ashes
the demolished view of what's left
from the gaping mouth of the Sphinx...
Hardly able to sustain the carriage
unwittingly, unwillingly
she stands,
her vagina smells of grafted pitch
her jagged iris covers the world within itself
hurting from the bulge

They would give her wood
borrowed wood
(the staleness of grandeur)
to let her glow
they would disentangle her feet trapped in the bluebells
her shrouded hair, falling
they would take away her mirrors
give her the myth of woman
(the amorphous ball of venom)

but wait
she has a child upon her arms
he's playing the webbed lyre of time

Squat lady, squat and collect unto yourself
that which was unduly taken away from you
bear it
this is your feeling, your being
at which you stand open armed, and thrust your thighs
for which your crucifixion turned into a myth
filled with undulating questions and answers...
Bear it, this your child, time
that plays with aeons, that threads them away
recycles them
into silk stripes

WHEN ANGELIKA LEAVES

nothing is changed
only...
there's a moth at your doorstep
pale orange, sleeping
and you know you will now
ask yourself questions
in French

When Angelika leaves
an obscure monotony chants itself
through morning chimera, unto your ears
you try to hold on to it through the day
methodically...
then at night, through moonlit meanderings
you lose step
in jagged memories
of winter strawberries
with stems

You are determined to be steady like her
to shift with economy, remembering
her frail wrists
that held you helped you
over
to the other side of knowing
your fear melting
to boldness

When Angelika leaves
there is a warm dilemma under the sun

hovering
blue tinged perrenial mint
hollow
that celebrates
itself

Fold
the fragile pages of wind scattered around you
quietly
nothing is changed

Geoffrey Young

LIFE SIZE

Baudelaire had the knack of praising a portrait as if he wanted
to sleep with the artist's model
Impossible to believe that those dreamy eyes are only a bit of
coloured earth spread on a rough piece of canvas
But how incredibly perceptive that women in every age have
decided to paint themselves
Seems a truism now but it was overwhelming when I double-checked
the degree to which images of the face & body not only dominate art
But she clings to her pet dog, she ties the bow to her cape, he drives
an old cart, she says grace, that hand on the water jug, noseless
face on balcony, twelve dinner guests in a monastery
The only happiness is to be shut up in art
Maybe the Sistine Chapel *is* the Vault of Heaven after all
Though the hard way is this street
And I personally vote for it
I hope the general sitting there on his steed shows you how brave
the dead are
The past and future of a *person* are different than the past
and future of a *thing*
He said
Before the first world war most violin strings were made of gut

Cornell is sixty years old but his portrait is still forty
Or his portrait is now twenty and Cornell has aged beautifully
I always keep my portrait separate from my face, off the wall
Unique Self! Blue shirt realism! Get up in that chair, let's argue!

The easel is hard wood, it's a stanchion, a guillotine
While in bathroom light you move your eyes over the skin of your face
What do you see inside those eyes, O Monolith, Target, Mirror, Cartoon
What color was Rembrandt, looking at himself
A portrait is a flaw in the continuity of face
It's human flesh makes paintings of human flesh in paint
All we have to do now is push the mood with a lightbulb
I've never been so on as I am here
I've got people coming by at two and four
That's all I'm going to do is paint portraits, paint portraits
Because she was standing in a red room, no it was a blue field
And she was only visible through the doorway

Now he motions for the musicians to rise as well
The collaboration is complete, the model
Standing there on a chair cares to draw forth a likeness too
Scrutinized closely, every face fits in the same big frame
Name the colours
Each example is a point of origin
The public passionately loves its own image
It's all a passage from eyebrow to lip via the central nervous system
Plus what is crucial
That doo rag on Chardin's head, and his pince-nez
It is always due to some unfailing eye that we still have such
a vivid picture of the men & women of those periods
And now here's the pâté of this fête champêtre:
It's cold outside but indoors the painter works from nature
as you sit with your head like a carving in space
You sit with your head
In his hands
It's all paint
Let me just add this little touch of water to the eyes
Because the disaster has already begun, the face is aging tonight
The paint is drying not only what is there

But the light on the pink of your just-shaved face as well
A portrait is a stop the eye makes between uncertainties
Nothing more simple and yet more complicated
Artists are drawn
To the body
We live in explanatory times
The revolving light might be the little airport in the valley

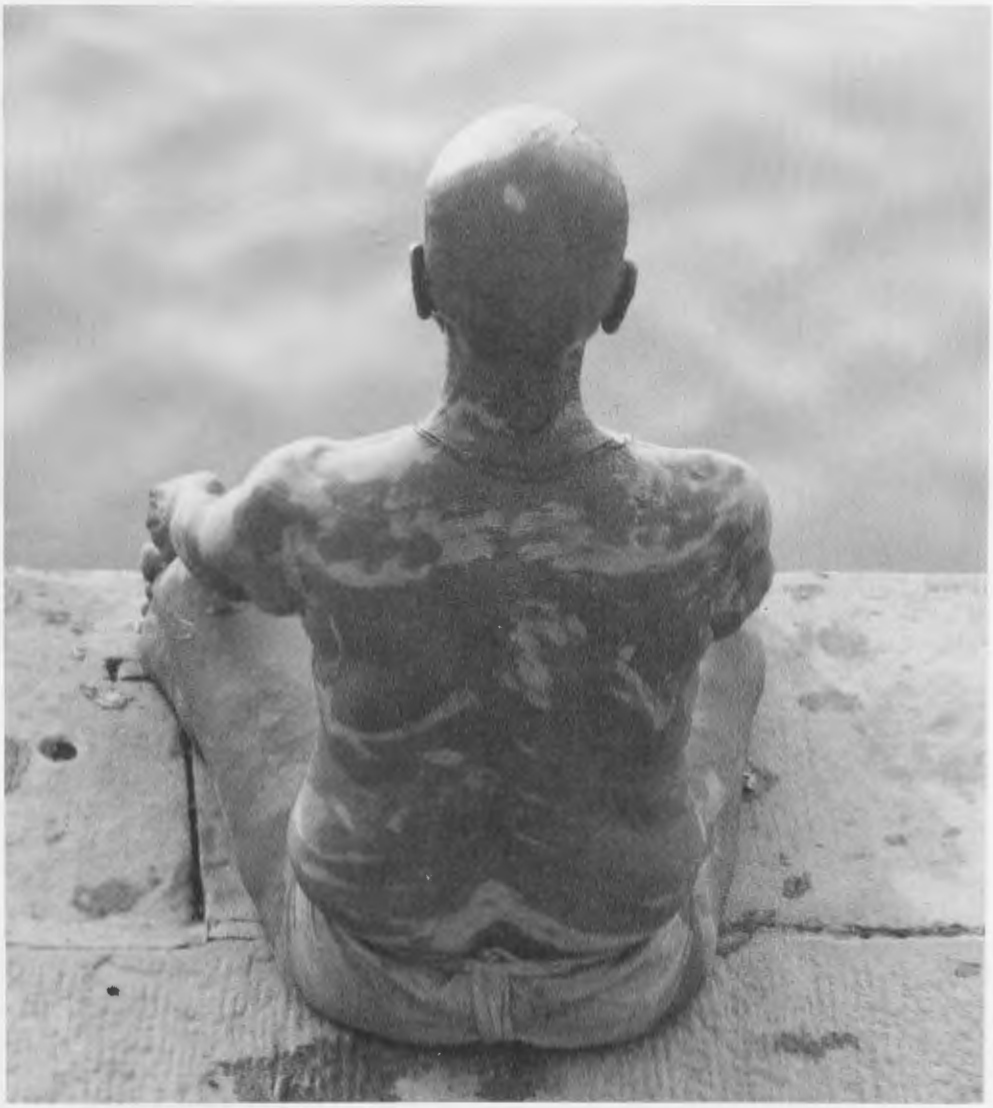
Nina Subin

A note on the photographs

In India, the sacred is visible on every corner, and it is expressed, amidst the riot of everday life, by immobility or by deliberately slow gestures that are at least 3000 years old. For the photographer, these graceful sacred gestures naturally isolate themselves. It is not the traditional "decisive moment," where the photographer reveals something of human nature by stopping time. It is a moment where the subject itself stops time, to transcend human nature. In India, the worshippers become still lifes, the sculpture comes alive—flesh looks like stone, stone looks like flesh.

These photographs were taken in 1981 and 1983. In Benares, the oldest living city in the world, worshippers by the Ganges honor the rising sun with diaphanous cloth or opaque river mud smeared on their bodies. In Kanchipuram, a sacred city in the south, a man clutches his ears and kneels to Shiva. In Mahaballipuram, among its ruined temples by the sea, a natural boulder and a raised enclosure combine into lingam and yoni, the male and female cosmic forces. In Mandawa, a village in the desert of Rajasthan, a tailor meditates. In Ratnagiri, on a deserted hilltop in Orissa, Shiva in limestone opens his palm to bestow favors. In Calcutta at the Marble Palace, an eccentric 19th century mansion, the crudely carved hands of the Buddha form the mudra known as "calling the earth to witness."

— *Nina Subin*



Theodore Enslin

Axes 72

Oaxacan celebration of the Day of the Dead

Do you know the way to Mictlan?
that solemn journey, yet with lightness—
laughter in its shadows?
Ah, once, on the way to a funeral,

Paul Goodman, his son's death

to pick up a hitchhiker,
going nowhere in particular.
A game upon the graves.
The skull, in sugar, eaten.
That is a sacrament—
worthy of a joke.
Ah Eustolica, you are not ready
for the journey,
yet in your fathers, already there.
Even in the north, frost-bitten,

Jacob, Milbridge Cemetery, 1981

a child among forgotten stones:
"It is good to visit, now and again,
among the dead."
There are no omens shadowing
more than this just littleness—
or one man, sleeping on a summer day:

Frank Hemmingway, Farmington — '60's

"You can't sleep here, Frank,
don't you know that?
Where's your respect?"
(looking at the decorated graves)
"Why not tell them to move?

They've been sleeping longer than I have."
Play hide and seek among
(and with)
the bones. These dice are from them
—thrown—and come up snake eyes,
but kindly, eyes turned
to the way *we* follow,
whether we would
or not.

Nela wins!
but whatever is hers
goes to the ferryman,
unknown to her,
to others, The House of Eagles,
blood money, sun and heart.
One finds what one needs,
separate, in many places, as
the bolt in the west—
a nut that fits it, in the east.
Directions of the Bacabs!
Let their colors be among us.
(Nela wins!)

Pecos, Texas
2/12/83
Milbridge, Maine
2/17/83

I see a fire!
No, I don't quite see it.
I burnish in its heat,
the copper and gold
of where I am—
where I live—
that heat which cries
for the sun—
from in me.
I hear a fire!

No, I cannot,
my ears are stopped
to all but my own blood's
treading.
I taste a fire!
not that my tongue
is speaking and untouched.
I feel a fire!
but not within me.
It warms only on an old coat.
I smell a fire!
No, there is something tells me
that I do,
and I have gone away from it.
But the fire is there!
The fire is real!
Ask these children:

Carmelina, tell me,
when things go well,
is it just the surface,
or do all things go?
(She grins and wipes her hands,
shyly—
        she's been eating—
feast of the living—of the dead.
A gap-toothed smile—
her teeth are growing, and the old ones die.
The hardest artifact we leave.
She doesn't say, and doesn't need to say
a thing.)

Mictlan! Mictlan!
Hopscotch among the tombs,

and paper flowers
                shredded
faceless grin
            the face itself
reduced to bone
                slaked lime
the fire is from itself, and
to itself.
Forms that fall
make new forms always,
nothing more than change.
A bitter wind at times,
but pain is short.
(Looking for the flag—down.
A mail in - one out.
They've piled the bones—old snows—
too high to see.)
I'll take my place there,
once, and then again, once.
Impatient
            treading life down,
death down
            life.
You can't! You can!

Here, Ventura,
eyes as black as sloes,
or fire, or roses,
midnight/dawn,
all the colors will converge
in her—age beyond the dead.
Those eyes saw through
before the earth was earth—
the eyes of space.

Yet they laugh, and
                she with them,
unaware.
        Looks around quickly,
and in pain.
Where have they gone?
Her playmates?
'Espere! Espere!'
The old look clots and darkens.
Found!
        She laughs again.
Clouds forgotten,
                clutching
a bouquet of marigolds
-flowers of the dead-
for Abuelo, Abuelita.
And will they wait?
those old ones?
who have crossed, and know Mictlan?

(The world outside moves rapidly.
It does not change,
a hull around a gentle air—
a gentle place.
Slowly toward Mictlan.
Slowly. Gently.)

They form,
reform in clouds,
blown seed caught
in webs, and lost in light.
The women in black shawls
whispering, and listening to whispers,
the cloth, and the clouds,

their own voices lost,
                they
move past the young ones with
reproof, and yet their smiles
deny it.
        One foot after another
faced and
            closer to Mictlan.
Their tracks would show, sand or snow.

Closer—a procession, and
it comes:
        El Mascaron!
Figurehead at the prow,
march or sail,
out of the earth—
beyond the earth—
a furled darkness—
rides it with lights,
rides it away and back again,
joy and sorrow of the night.
Their clash means thunder
and lightning,
                tears the veil.
The old ones stand.
Fears, but no fears.
That bonehead!
                El Mascaron
pursues them in tenderness
for all his presence—
furious, and alive in fury.
Death has no equal.
Praise, and sing to him.
(Fades, fades away.

No longer light, nor dark.)

And Hemeneg,
                tear-stained,
tired, and too full,
carried in his sister's rebozo.
He can't walk here, or yet.
Coos and rattles
to the click of bones.
Smiles a bit,
doesn't know it—
knows it all.
The skull imprinted
on his own – or is.
Hemeneg—a long time,
or a short one.
He scents the wind,
and knows it—
what it is:
Journey, and in all lands
the way.
        A sigh:
Mictlan!
        All's put right again.

Death is where the fire burns.
The flame's been shaken out.

February 2, – March 1, 1983
Santa Fe – Milbridge

Edmond Jabès

THE BOOK BELONGS TO THE READER

Translated from the French by Rosmarie Waldrop.

My friends know how much I live by myself. It's not that I make an immoderate cult of solitude, but because the work of writing isolates and destroys you where you thought yourself saved.

I can't therefore try to place my works tonight—nor myself.

I'll talk very little about writing and more about reading—but don't both come out of the same creative act?

The book belongs to the reader.

As long as 25 years ago I wrote: "Only the reader is real." I was aware that, as my sentences formed, I became a reader of my own text; and this reader supplanted and rejected me.

The writer can free himself of his writing only by the use he makes of it, that is to say, by reading himself. As if the goal of writing were, after all, to found on the basis of what is written the reading of what will come to be written.

Moreover, what is written is only read in the process of being written and therefore constantly modified by this reading.

So every book writes itself by letting itself be read such as it will be. Its future as a book depends on the one—or the several—readings which it was able to elicit.

Thus the book is rewritten by the reader who has gotten hold of it. It is in this second book, in which the reader opposes the author and in which the writer finds the pages he has given him, but as if they were metamorphosed by their passage from one to the other—it is in this second book that we have the real stakes of the enterprise. Granting this, there would be at least 2 books in any one,

which gives all books an unsuspected dimension.

The written word introduces reading. That's how it differs from words proffered as speech. Writing does not substitute itself for what is said in order to fix it or formulate it better, but, on the contrary, in order to enjoy its explosion by exposing each of its parts to a reading, and not just each part but each in its various states or in all its different levels of meaning.

It is the eye that sets off the true question, the interrogation of all the interrogations which sleep in the letter. The eye, not the ear.

Reading is master of the sign. But it is from the sign and in the sign that reading is born and fulfilled, that the eye exhausts itself.

The book is saved by the death of the book.

•

I have always found absurd this question often asked of a writer: "Do you write for others or for yourself?" Of course we write for ourselves—and how could we do otherwise since, riveted to the word, it is a face-to-face with ourselves that we set up. But it is the chance reader who gives us a reading of our own reading; and it is somehow through this reading that the book faces its completion.

I have more and more the feeling that it is to my reading of each of them that my books owe their existence and that this existence is a privileged meeting place for new readings.

•

Adhering to or opposing an entire work is a priori suspect. We admire or condemn what we have retained; that is to say, the work we have drawn from it and made our own. Hence the immense liberty that any reader takes with a book. But the latter is never one person's property. It only seems to submit to the reader. By virtue of being prey to all possible readings it is finally prey to none.

In this perspective, an author's reading of his book is marked with dangers. Since perhaps a bad book is at the start only a book ill read.

Literary history is, in some sense, only a poor history of vengeance: sometimes it is the book which, carried by the enthusiasm of a few, triumphs over the ignorance, the indifference or the hostility of the public. Sometimes it is the reader who, turning towards other readings closer to him, makes a clean slate of

a sometimes cumbersome past.

So goes the time read, written; reread, rewritten.

One day, the writer sees himself confronted with the commentaries his work has inspired. He feels suddenly at the mercy of the paired lights of innumerable projectors trained on him, which pursue or threaten him wherever he goes, wherever he takes shelter. These projectors trace indifferently the roads of his glory or misery.

Of those roads we'll obviously not talk tonight.

•

What I would like to define here, and in the simplest manner, is the sense—or nonsense—of a work which has built up over 30 years of doubts, anxieties, reflections and persevering.

The sense of a work which has claimed and continues to claim my energies; the nonsense of a work of enormous ambition. But is it not the enormous which affirms any norm that is giddy with going beyond?

If *writing* means taking on the ultimate reading, first mentally, then through the transcribed word, reading of a book whose necessity is our reason to be, then everything is at stake in this word. This word is the universe. It contains all other words which it alone can make visible and legible.

It is this word which is our world.

Thus, what is being *written* puts us into words in order to treat us as syllables, as vowels and as consonants, in order to integrate us into its movement, its dynamic of an expanding book and universe.

But neither book nor universe can be closed in on. Drawn by the pen, every word by itself is a whole book.

With regard to the seven volumes of "The Book of Questions" I note that there were a few obsessive words at the origin of these works: The word: *God*. The word: *Jew*. The word: *Book*. The word: *Law*. The word: *Eye*. The word: *Name*.

God, as the extreme name for abyss. *Jew*, as a figure of exile, of wandering, of strangeness and separation—a condition shared by the writer. *Book*, as the impossibility of the book or, rather, as the place and at the same time the non-place of all the illusory possibilities of constructing a book. *Eye*, which is the law. (The word *loi* is contained in the word *oeil*.) The law is in the look. *Name*,

as the unpronounceable name, as the hidden name of the Name. Yahweh remains the unpronounceable name and is venerated for this very reason, being the silent name of INVISIBILITY, of the INVISIBLE.

All it took was an abrupt break with a country, a climate, a way of living, a break with the familiar book of my days up till then—and these words exploded with all the contained force of a new book.

Behind these words stands my history and the history of my history. So much hope, so much distress, so many births and so much mourning.

After all, as I once said to a novelist, why try so hard to invent a story and then, in telling it, make it plausible like a true story when all you have to do is question one of the words charged with the weight of our anxieties, our feasts, and our lonely mornings after, one of those stubborn key-words for which we are veil and face, void and victim. One of those words—and stories will rise from the bottom of our memory, stories heard, found, or lived.

How many beloved, sought-after or despised dead people are buried in the word DEATH. How many loves which marked our lives still flower in the word LOVE. But perhaps we never invent stories anyway. Perhaps they are all given to us through the word we approach and wed in its intimate, carnal reality, through the word we spell as one fuses with a body through all its members, in the intoxication or despair of intertwined life and death.

It would take too long to explain my obsession with these words from which I could free myself only by pulverizing them. What I have tried with *The Book of Questions*, what now looking back on it seems very clear, is marking out the place of my questioning. BUT this place could not but be a dizzying absence of place. The book is an unbearable totality. Therefore my books have been thought and written on a ground of nothingness.

•

In what category should they be put?—But can the Book be classified at all?—I have ventured the answer: in none or in all, because they can be read at the same time as a poem, a story, an essay or a novel.

Nietzsche had warned us: "Good prose is only written face to face with poetry."

Thus poetry is the best reference, even the only one.

This face-to-face of prose and poetry is found especially in the aphorism,

highest expression of the language.

In the first trilogy of *The Book of Questions* the form of the aphorism forced itself on me as one of the essential moments of the vast dialogue which its elect characters carry on: dialogues of unplaceable rabbis, interpreters of the Book, owners of the book, that is to say of Nothing because only precarious traces and embryonic discourse are left where there has been articulation of the book and irrepressible unfolding of the word. The book takes shape against the book and therefore undoes itself at the same time in order to preserve its availability as a book to come. And one word detaches itself from another only to die after it in the place it has been assigned. Even with what can be seized: no sooner have we seized it than it escapes its servitude and gets gradually involved in a net of contradictory relations which, if they reduce it to the function of sign, image, or sound—of sign among signs, image among images, sound among sounds—if they reduce it they at the same time free it from the oppressive yoke of sense and from the tyranny of Totality. As if it had to become the Everything of Nothing in order not to be the Nothing of Everything.

Pure advance in negativity, because, as Kafka said: "It is up to us to achieve the negative. The positive is already given."

Like the universe the book engenders space in its gaps. It is the spaces which make it legible. For we can get a glimpse of the inconceivable Totality only in mastered expanse, in the fragment.

So it is fragments. But in my books they are so bound to, so dependent on one another that they can only be read with regard to the Totality from which they borrow the name of the Book. They are works tending towards this Totality, fascinated by unity whose dramatic tension you cannot measure unless you have yourself felt its fascination. Every book infiltrates into the next and calls its reading into question. Books which are above all disturbing, subversive in their infinite power to rebegin.

The seven wings of *The Book of Questions* present themselves as seven books in one; but within it one could distinguish four parts:

Historicity with the first trilogy: *The Book of Questions, The Book of Yukel, Return to the Book*.

The relation of the writer and his word with *Yaël* and *Elya*.

The eye with *Aely*.

The point with *El, or the Last Book* whose actual title is the small red period on the cover.

I won't go into details because I don't want to impose on future readers a reading which would never be altogether their own and which would risk being rigid. The ways of the book are innumerable. Where do they lead? No doubt beyond memory, beyond the book where the book will still be testing its chances.

On the very first pages of *The Book of Questions* a sentence stops us: "You are the one who writes and who is written."

"The universe exists only on paper," Paul Valéry noted. Was it the book he was thinking of?

White pages inhabited by signs like so many near or remote worlds, every second is the dawn of a century and the abyss of its night. Every sign is the vibrant support of a century.

"When, as a child, I wrote my name for the first time I was aware that I was starting a book," we also read in *The Book of Questions*.

In order to exist we have to have a name, and having a name already means being in the book. Could the space assigned to writing be just the immeasurable space of a name?

•

As a fore-word, as a book in back of *The Book of Questions*, I should say a word about the collection of poems I called *Je bâtis ma demeure* (I Build My Dwelling), which groups together texts written between 1943 and 1957. Fourteen years of poetry.

The occasion of its being reprinted has led me to relive each of its pages with their old writing.

Long walk back to the war years when these "Songs for the Ogre's Feast" rose from my earliest childhood while death raged without pity. Lifesaving words when everything was crumbling.

Long walk indeed, into a written past that has become my real past across intrusions of poems and a rush of aphorisms. The distance between those texts and me today is filled in by *The Book of Questions*. But they bear witness to the excitement and fear of the first steps towards the unknown where there will never and nowhere be any rest.

Edmond Jabès

Three Poems

Translated from the French by Keith Waldrop.

WELL WATER

Draw water from the well. Give
thirst a moment
of relief, the hand
a chance of rescue.

•

Night of eyelashes. To be seen.
The object shines out for the hand.
Noise munches noise.
Water encircles memory.

•

Limit. The pre-world.
Care left behind.
The venture keeps faith
with the death-bell of a fiery dream.

I am. I was. Link,
long file of beasts.
I see, *will* see. Confidence
of the tree in fruit.

•

Chalk days. The slates
quiver with first-fruits.
The word outlives the sign.
Landscape, the ink.

•

Roads. The infinite.
Gift of the face.
With the seasons, wrinkles.
With the soil, great rivers.

GROUNDLESS

I

No-man's-land, obsessed page.

A dwelling-place is a long insomnia
in the hooded trails of a mine.

My days are days of roots,
love's yoke extolled.

The sky is always to cross and
foreground to be fed with new nights.

I form, in my weeds,
a wedge in the wall's opaque brightness.

The earth is steeped in
empty dreams of travel.

II

I dismantle a patient
clockwork for oracles.

III

Dancers who dream yourselves sisters of the dawn,
waltz to the oblivion of miracle, wheeling dresses
sunlit.

The road has no pity for those
who turn off. The miser has no ally.

IV

(But the hour is still to be born, the borderland
hour when the hawk of the sands rules over innumerable
frightened eyes.)

V

What vow of eternity holds a man
from his work while still awake?

VI

Land beyond night, which the sun wrenches from
meditation, from the thorns of doubt.

Flowers parade their artful candor. The stems
emulate grand adventuresses of space.

Honey flows between stones
which this cement will join.

VII

Around the branches, the world mimes its hunger.
So many cries for a tree, fragrant god to
plant, to bend by a magic round.

They have regimented the
sap. The rings are now worthless.

My secrets are orchards.
There is no trick to the mystery.

My love, a rose in her hair,
message of man and of the earth.

THE PACT OF SPRING

Words have worked their
way into mineshafts but have
lost my voice Silence capsized
inkwell The pen is the derelict
My two suns full-formed rivers
The sea is above the trees
Memory of leaves the hours
fête their flowers Sleep is
transparent fruit Night is

culled from the branches Tomorrow
has no shadow Our legend is
secret So wastes away
the dawn when canceled words
speak to those who never spoke
elect nothingness a bloodstain
Crumpled page pallid hand
clenched Leavetaking is limitless
The universe lives off oblivion stages
of stars Man and nature
share in kind and in kin
Thirst is of the earth Soft sheltering
flesh the very stones are
dreams To a hundred other evidences
the crystalline support of springs stolen
faces We no longer know where
we are to where we radiate
Youth of flintstones the beach
is the shingly port of the desert
the sandy witness of your
kingdoms haunted by reptiles
and widowed hawks The flight of
time affects a schoolboy wing
the colors the gold cycle it
pursues In the beak that pecks out eyes
is eternity in the venom
of roots chopped from the trunk
My groan is that of a wound
my song the die of desire
Stale water is absentee lord the other
tyrant whose form is the cold
Sulfur is seasonal the simple
gesture harbinger of ashes
Fire sprouting just beside

our doors our fields arranged
so that pain pulls in the
same yoke with hope
Dispossessed hands are
hands that mould us once the
defeat is told Lived cities
enslaved walls I run with the
sound of my running which rings with
a borrowed name I've no earth
but the earth Hence the day
finds no aperture For trump I've
only the luck of firm flagstones
to plant my feet on
A fate frolics with its
breathing and the oath
of its bondsmen the disbanded heavens
Noon with mirage of oars
in the ploughed air Shores have
their aviaries prisons of glass
At each cry the day flies
into pieces Winter's menace increases
a bitter rustling of our weapons
which the restless woman notes
The child carries the power of
living on his shoulders The
descent is in the loins Down there
is my love stricken eagle
Peaks are pedestals The
lips deliver up the key There
speech is a fateful deep
abyss Lamentation is the word's
bed river of confused voices
My two suns captive mirrors
Snow fastens its hair

to the flagpole of approaching dusk
The head is last to darken
along with the rainbow and the open
book Insignia of vain
victories a target offered
to echoes The palm goes to the prey
To the written the springtime the pact

from *Je bâtis ma demeure*, Gallimard, 1959.

Nathaniel Tarn

DOG VIEWING DEER: SONGS OF DEATH, RESURRECTION AND THE MOVIE MARKET.

FIRST ANIMAL SONG

Engaged by destiny
to be born a dog on earth
while the deer
in a whirlwind of flowers
from the heart of his mouth
hurls back the tide of death
out of the planet's plaza
to save all other deer.
The small dog with a broken leg
held out in front of him like a branch
follows the procession
and the lame large dogs
follow the procession,
all saving their souls as best they can
in the shadows of their beaten masters.

FIRST JESUS–THE–SUN SONG

Are you a friend of Jesus–the–Sun
who married the moon, who married the moon?
— I was his friend when the world was young
and he was climbing a ladder in the sky.
— And are you still a friend of Jesus–the–Sun?
— Now he continues climbing to the sky
but the ladder has long now fallen away,
the ladder has long since fallen away
and it is hard to be friends with such a man.

SECOND ANIMAL SONG

Listen says the little dog:
you can hear the sound
of my heart breaking into flower
as I watch the deer in his storm of drums
dancing in the grove of young greens
while an indigo night hangs above us.
Above this deer flies the deer of the immense sky
holding up the stars cradled on his horns
like angels in arms. I think
says the little dog
there must be a dog of the immense sky
beside him, perhaps holding the moon
in his friendly mouth—
and he licks her with frenzy,
giving her such pleasure
she lolls sideways, her breasts flowing,
as her bed floats up into the sky.

SECOND JESUS-THE-SUN SONG

Jesus-the-Sun is a small, lean man
with a scarlet apoplectic face
who never takes any exercise.
He is bald with a crown of snowy hair,
he has a pinched nose and pinball eyes,
an icicle beard drips from his chin.
He tries new words as if his mouth were full of flowers
but they turn to dust on his teeth, falling away
down to the desert floor. His words are grey:
they are the words he's stolen all his life
from the previous Suns. There must be a big bird
invisible to us, eating out of his guts
sometimes between the morning star and dawn
at the time it is hardest for us to continue
doing all we've done for life, for several lives.

THIRD ANIMAL SONG

I have cancer says the little dog.
The deer is silent. It is
incurable says the little dog
while the other dogs moan roundabout.
The deer continues silent. After a while:
I am your closest friend says the deer.
—I thought you were the friend of Jesus-the-Sun
who married Mary-the-Moon
says the little dog while the other dogs weep.
The deer's eyes fill with tears descending

from where they have been cradled on the horns.
It is all one says the deer. The little dog nods.
But he thinks that Jesus has never had cancer.
It is a private thought he keeps to himself
as he joins yet another procession around town.

THIRD JESUS–THE–SUN SONG

Jesus–the–Sun has become an old man
his eyes are lead, his face is ashes
he has no power anymore.
It is time for another sun – but neither we
nor the previous Suns know how to make one.
Jesus-the-Sun will never help you now
he'll listen to your prayers forever—but he will not
help. We don't know at all who hears them anymore
the prayers that take us to the land of flowers
where the valleys put out their tongues of gold
and the mountains have ears of silver.
The old often go deaf. His ears may also be grey.

FOURTH ANIMAL SONG

Unmistakable glamor attaches to the deer.
His profile is finer than Rudolf Valentino's
and his chest is a symposium of movie stars.
His headcloth disappears into another life,
the life of Hollywood perhaps or Beverly Hills,
from which the white light of all our joy emerges.

His belt is a sphere of everlasting music,
a belt of maracas and whistling harps,
playing like planets round the sun unceasingly.
His skirt is as dark as swimming pools at night
fringed with the palm trees of desert America,
holding Mary–the–Moon locked into his thighs
like Dorothy Lamour in a slipstream of fishes.
His ankles rasp their bones when rubbed together
so that the dead talk together, passing messages.
His feet reach down into the graves of his sires
back to the first deer buried on mountain tops,
looking down on all the fields and forests they browsed
before man came to Wyoming or to California.
The dog has no ancestors—or they are forgotten,
left behind with Bogie in desert Casablanca,
gone where all the dogs have gone to nothingness.
Dog bones are shattered whistles, dog skins exploded drums.

CODA

To be crucified
is not to be nailed to a tree.
It is to be watched by your closest friends,
the desert deer of the tiptop sky,
while you grow into your own tree—
and they do not take the time off
to unlock their horns
even to pull you down.
Son of Man:
set a dog down
in the middle of anywhere
in this interminable movie

and he will start about his business
immediately sniffing
despite the fact that it is ANYWHERE.
For us. And what is anywhere
to a dog? And what is anywhere to us?
How do we know where is WHERE?
and whether to start here, continue, or finish
anything—
HERE, or in any other space?

Dennis Phillips

THREE-PART REQUIEM

Somewhere an image comes clear I
recall the grains of wood thinking of this
driving rain but
can't come up with the scene.

Not Uncle Milton, 48 hours dead, sitting in the cab of a pickup truck
already buried, eviscerated and still
on the road sitting white and straightforward
in the cab of this truck I
watch him hoping "Heavenly Car" but that scene too
is an island.

I rise. Cat vomit my own
incontinence dripping this scene
an island.

There are one-hundredfold reasons
called Heavenly Cars, called On the Road
to Islands, called What Drips.

I am sitting on the terminator
of a great umbra.

My shoulder has tensed into cramp
locking itself against my ear
as if
quoting this scene makes it real.

•

Bloodless uncle fugit.
No guess, the arcane ology.
Taken along or left silent behind?
No reminder late
in a temporal portal of how
briefly the witnessing was permitted
or how sorrowful, forgotten, studied
the fragments.

•

Funeral. Rain.
Dim man pressed
into earth.

John Norcross

Three Poems

POEM FOR MY FATHER

It's not eclipsed skies that make you think
Flattened sparrows emit light or that newspapers
Damp with the exhalations of earthworms are really
The entombed responses to your father's breath
That drifted from beer cans, waterfalls or drying fish
And abandoned houses. I see him through the edges
Of cracked glass, hear the whine of his reel.
I will, as you suggest, speak the nuances
Of blood since the words clot in my mouth
As when a fish is hooked through the eye. Snagged
Or baited I speak his hum of line, fear
His apology, that drunk misnamer of minnows, helpless
Before 2 men who would have beaten him except
I ran for a man (who knew what filters into spring
Water) thinking it was easier to hang like a plug
On power lines than to want his affability
Or his beautiful features that were somewhat blurred.

THINGS MY MOTHER NEVER HAD TO TELL ME

Okra is the taste of Sundays,
As green and sticky as raw oysters or
Labored breathing. My father was proud
That I ate oysters between crackers & hot sauce,
But he finally asked me why I took them into my
Bedroom. They made nice piles behind the door.

I suppose he forgot this sin faster than
My face and shoulders. Mercy is an iron
Quality that needs its little sacrifices.
The young shown too much
Gentleness grow weak.

Oh daddy, we all have
Problems. Just because
You left me naked all night
In the kitchen sink doesn't
Mean I don't love you. Even
Though I was three, I
Learned to run the hot
Water until it ran out.

EPHEMERIDAE

(the family of Mayflies, Linnaean order Neuroptera)

Sparrows shy up along a black cinder road,
females, weaving into barbed wire fence; each
is like a wife fleeing an angry husband. I am not
angry, now. I see the soft late mists of fields
settle into the eyes of Day lilies which submerge
and close up like small green clams.
The wind begins humming through telephone lines, barbed
wire; the wind hums through itself, hums itself
blue and gray. Fields flood; roads swamp whose
ruts become covered with black, slow moving
tadpoles. Tree, bank, barn and rough-winged
swallows and purple martins bump, climb
and dive through Mayflies, ram their mouths
through the clearest liquid green, almost to ram
themselveds into beds of Devonian shale and coal
where Mayfiels are pressed truly thin. Clear green
snow begins falling, settles over my arms, face
and shoulders. The Mayflies split their pellicles,
pull themselves out of their skins in one last molt,
leave their false images sticking to my body like open
hands, waiting to be grasped. They rise from the lips
of water, from my anger and sparrows, from cinder roads;
ephemera lacking mouth, vagina or penis touch repeatedly
then settle over the water to drop grape-like packets of eggs,
fly off to rest in emerald mounds to be shoveled into gardens.

Martha I. Moia

Translated from the Spanish by Susan Pensak

Some Keys to Alejandra Pizarnik

M.I.M. There are terms in your poems—the passions of childhood, the poem, love, death— that I consider *emblematic* and contribute to shaping your poems as illicit and solitary domains. Do you agree that terms such as *garden, forest, word, silence, wandering, wind, rift* and *night* are both signs and emblems?

A.P. I believe that in my poems there are words that I repeat without cease, without respite, without pity: those of childhood, fear, death, the night of bodies. Or, more exactly, the terms you give as examples in your question could be signs and emblems.

M.I.M. Then let's begin by entering the most pleasing spaces: the garden and the forest.

A.P. One of the lines I am most obsessed with is Alice in Wonderland's: "I only wanted to see what the garden was like. . . ." For Alice and for me the garden is the place of citing, or, in the words of Mircea Eliade, *the center of the world*. Which suggests this line to me: The garden is green in the brain. One of my own, which leads me to the following by Gaston Bachelard, which I hope to remember faithfully: *The garden of dream-memory, lost in a far, far away of the true past.*

M.I.M. Your forest appears as a synonym of silence. I sense other meanings. For example, it could be an allusion to the forbidden, the occult.

A.P. Why not? But it might also suggest childhood, the body, night.

M.I.M. Have you ever entered the garden?

A.P. Proust, analyzing the desires, says that desires do not demand analysis but satisfaction, that is: I don't want to talk about the garden, I want to see it. Of course I can't help sounding puerile, but in this life we never do what we want. Which is one more reason for wanting to see the garden, even if it is impossible, above all if it is impossible.

M.I.M. While you were answering my question, in my memory your voice said to me from one of your poems: *my office is to conjure and to exorcise*.

A.P. Among other things, I write so that what I am afraid of will not happen; so that what wounds me will not exist; to fend off Evil (*cf.* Kafka). It has been said that the poet is the great therapist. In this sense the poetic act would imply exorcism, conjuring, and moreover, *healing*. To write a poem is to heal the fundamental wound, the rift. For we are all wounded.

M.I.M. Among the various metaphors with which you configure this fundamental wound I remember, because of its big impression on me, something in an early poem that made you ask after *the spasm-fallen beast that drags through my blood*. And I am almost certain that one of the principal authors of the wound is the wind; sometimes it appears in your writings as *the great injurer*.

A.P. I love the wind even though, precisely, my imagination usually gives it violent shapes and colors. Battered by the wind, I go to the forest, I go back in search of the garden.

M.I.M. At night?

A.P. I hardly know the night yet I unite with it. I said it in a poem: *All night I make the night. All night I write. Word by word I make the night.*

M.I.M. In a poem of adolescence you also unite with silence.

A.P. Silence: only temptation and the highest promise. But I feel that the inexhaustible murmur never ceases to flow (*I know so well the flowing fountain* of nomadic language). That's why I dare to say that I don't know if

silence exists.

M.I.M. In a kind of counterpoint with your I who is united with the night and that one who is united with silence, I see "the stranger"; "the silent woman in the desert"; "the little traveler"; "my own emigrant"; she who "wanted to enter the keyboard to enter inside the music to have a native land." These, your other voices, are the ones that speak of your vocation to wander, for me your true vocation, said in your way.

A.P. I think of a line of Trakl's: *Man is a stranger on the earth.* I believe the poet is the strangest of all. I believe that the only possible dwelling for the poet is the word.

M.I.M. You have a fear that puts this dwelling in danger: *not knowing how to name what doesn't exist.* That is when you hide yourself from language.

A.P. With an ambiguity that I want to clarify: I hide myself *from* language *within* language. When something—nothing included—has a name, it seems less hostile. However, I have a suspicion that what is essential is unspeakable.

M.I.M. Is that why you look for *figures that appear vivid through the work of an active language that alludes to them?*

A.P. I feel that signs, words, insinuate, make allusion. This total way of feeling language leads me to believe that language cannot express reality; that we can only speak of the obvious. From there stems my desire to make poems that are terribly exact despite my innate surrealism and to work with elements of interior shadows. That is what has characterized my poems.

M.I.M. You don't look for this precision now, however.

A.P. True. I look for the poem to write itself the way it wants to be written. But I prefer not to talk about *now* because there is still so little written.

M.I.M. Despite all that you've written!

A.P. . . .

M.I.M. *Not knowing how to name* is related to the preoccupation to find *some phrase entirely your own.* Your book *Works and Nights* is a significant response, inasmuch as *your* voices are the ones speaking in it.

A.P. I worked very hard on those poems and I must say that in shaping them I shaped myself, and I changed. I had an ideal of the poem inside and I succeeded in realizing it. I know that I don't resemble anyone (this is a fatality). That book gave me the joy of finding freedom in writing. I was free, I was master in shaping a form to my own liking.

M.I.M. With these fears coexists the fear of *words that return*. What are they?

A.P. It is memory. It is my lot to assist in the court of advancing words, and I feel like an inert and defenseless spectator.

M.I.M. I suspect that the mirror, the other shore, the forbidden zone and its oblivion resolve in your work the fear of *being two*, which escapes to the limits of the *döppelganger* to include all those whom you were.

A.P. Well said, it is the fear of all those who struggle within me. There is a poem of Michaux's that says: *Je suis; je parle à qui-je-fus et qui-je-fus me parlent. (. . .) On n'est pas seul dans sa peau.*

M.I.M. Is this revealed at any particular time?

A.P. When "the daughter of my voice" betrays me.

M.I.M. According to one of your poems, your most beautiful love was your love for mirrors. Whom do you see in them?

A.P. The other who I am. (Actually I have a certain fear of mirrors.) Sometimes we reunite. It almost always happens when I write.

M.I.M. One night at the circus you recovered *a lost language the moment the riders carrying torches galloped in a fierce round on black stallions.* What was that *anything for my heart resembling the hot sounds of hoofs against the rings*?

A.P. It is the undiscovered language I would like to find.

M.I.M. Perhaps you discovered it in painting?

A.P. I like to paint because in painting I find the opportunity to allude in silence to images of interior shadows. Besides, I am attracted to the absence of mythomania in the language of painting. Working with words, or, more specifically, seeking my words, implies a tension that does not exist in painting.

M.I.M. Why do you admire Rousseau's "Sleeping Gypsy"?

A.P. It is equivalent to the language of the horses at the circus. I would like to succeed in writing something similar to the Douanier's "Gypsy" because there is silence in it and, at the same time, allusion to grave and luminous things. The work of Bosch, Klee and Ernst is also singularly moving to me.

M.I.M. In closing, I am going to ask you if you have ever formulated the question posed by Octavio Paz in the prologue to *The Bow and the Lyre: wouldn't it be better to transform life into poetry than to make poetry out of life?*

A.P. I will answer from one of my latest poems: *Oh God if I might only live in ecstacy, making the body of the poem with my body, redeeming each phrase with my days and with my weeks, infusing the poem with my breath in order that every letter of every word had been sacrificed in the rites of living.*

This interview with Alejandra Pizarnik by Martha I. Moia was originally published in *Zona Franca*, December 1972 (Caracas) and republished in *El deseo de la palabra* (Barcelona, 1975).

Alejandra Pizarnik

Seven Prose Poems

Translated from the Spanish by Susan Pensak.

SORCERIES

And the ladies dressed in red for my pain and with my pain unsinking in my breath, crouched like scorpions' fetuses in the innermost nape of my neck, the mothers in red who want to take from me the only warmth that I give myself with my heart which could hardly ever beat, from me who always had to learn alone how to drink and eat and breathe and from me whom no one ever taught to cry and no one will teach me not even the great ladies stuck to the lining of my breathing with reddish spit and floating veils of blood, my blood, mine alone, I got it myself and now they come to drink me after they've killed the king who floats in the river and moves his eyes and smiles but is dead and when someone is dead, he's dead no matter how much he smiles and the great, the tragic ladies in red have killed him who goes down river and I remain like a hostage in perpetual possession.

THE HIDDEN ONES

Because words aren't enough some death in the heart is necessary.

The light of language covers me like a music, an image the dogs of affliction gnawed, and winter rises for me like the lover of the wall.

When I hope to stop hoping, inside me there's your fall. Now I am nothing but an inside.

THE TRUTH OF THE FOREST

This hermetic and transparent space like a gulf of suns: a crystal sphere with the sun inside; with a gilded body (an absent one, you beloved) with a head where the bluest eyes shine before sun in the transparent sphere.

The action transpires in the desert and how alone I crossed my childhood as Little Red Riding Hood the forest before the bestial encounter. How alone carrying a basket, how innocent, how decorous and well behaved, but they ate us all because—what good are words if they can't determine that they ate us? —said the grandmother.

But the wolf didn't dress up as mine. The forest is only green in the brain. The grandmother gave birth to my mother who gave me to the earth in her turn, and all thanks to my imagination. But there, in my little theater, the wolf ate them. About the wolf, I cut him out and pasted him in my notebook. In short, in this life they owe me the feast.

—And you call this life? —said the grandmother.

TRAGEDY

With the rumor of dolls' eyes stirred by a wind so strong that it made them open and close a little. I was in the small triangular garden and I was taking tea with my dolls and death. And who's that lady dressed in blue in blue face and blue nose and blue lips and blue teeth and blue fingernails and blue breasts with gilded nipples? It's my singing teacher. And who's that lady in red velvet who has the face of a foot and emits particles of sound and rests her fingers on white mother-of-pearl rectangles that descend and out of which sounds, the same sounds, are heard? It's my piano teacher and I'm sure that she has nothing on under her red velvet, she's nude with her foot face and this is how she must pass her Sundays on a big red tricycle with a red velvet seat with her legs squeezing the seat tighter and tighter like pincers until the tricycle gets inside and is never seen again.

1966

THE DESIRE OF THE WORD

Night, night just now, the oracular wisdom of the dark, death's warm familiarity, one instant of ecstacy for me, heir of all the forbidden garden.

Footsteps and voices from the garden's shady side. Laughs in the inside of the walls. You're not going to believe that they're alive. You're not going to believe that they're not alive. At any moment the fissure in the wall and the sudden disbanding of the little girls I was.

Falling little girls of different shades of paper. Do the shades talk? Do

the paper effigies talk? Only the gold ones do and there aren't any of them here.

I go between walls that move closer, come together. All night until dawn I chanted monotonously: *If she didn't come it's because she didn't come.* I ask. Who? She says she asks, she wants to know whom she asks. You don't talk with anyone anymore. She is dying a stranger to death. The language of the dying is other.

I have squandered the gift of transfiguring the forbidden ones (I feel them breathing inside the walls). Impossible to recite my day, my way. But she contemplates the nakedness of these walls totally alone. No flower grows or will grow by miracle. A whole life on bread and water.

In the peak of joy I have explained about a music never heard. So? Oh God if I might only live in ecstacy, making the body of the poem with my body, redeeming each phrase with my days and with my weeks, infusing the poem with my breath in order that every letter of every word had been sacrificed in the rites of living.

From *The Musical Hell* (1971)

THE WORD OF THE DESIRE

This ghostly texture of the darkness, this melody in the bones, this blast of diverse silences, this descent level by level, this dark, dark corridor, this sinking without sinking.

What am I saying? It's dark and I want to enter. I don't know what else to say. (I don't want to say, I want to enter.) Pain in the bones, language chipped away by shovelfuls, gradually reconstituting the diagram of unreality.

I don't have possessions (this is certain; at last something certain). Next a melody. It's a plaintive melody, a lilac light, an imminence without receiver. I see the melody. Presence of an orange light. I'm not going to know how to live without your look, this too is certain. I erect you, I resurrect you. And she told me she might leave in the wind and go from house to house asking if she was.

I walk naked with a taper in my hand, frigid castle, garden of delights. Solitude isn't stopping by the dock, early in the morning, looking greedily at the water. Solitude is not being able to say it from not being able to surround it from not being able to give it a face from not being able to make it synonymous with a landscape. Solitude would be this cracked melody of my phrases.

From *The Musical Hell* (1971)

FUNDAMENTAL STONE

I can't speak with my voice only with my voices

His eyes were the entrance to the temple for me, who am a sinner, who loves and dies. And I would have sung until I was made one with the night, until I was unmade naked on the entrance to time.

A song that I cross like a tunnel.

Uneasy presences,
gestures of figures that appear vivid through the work
of an active language that alludes to them,
signs that insinute insoluble terrors.

A vibration of the groundworks, a trembling of the

foundations, drills and blasts,

and I knew where that one lodges so other who is I, who waits for me to shut up to take possession of me and drill and blast the groundworks, the foundations,

that one who is opposed within me, conspires, takes possession of my waste soil,

no, I have to do something,

no, I don't have to do anything,

something in me doesn't give in to the cascade of ashes that ravages inside me with her who is I, with myself who am her and who am I, unspeakably distinct from her.

In the selfsame silence (not in the same silence) to devour the night, an immense night immersed in the secret of the lost steps.

I can't speak out of nothing to say. That is why we lose ourselves, the poem and I, in the useless attempt to transcribe ardent relations.

Where does this writing lead? To the black, the sterile, the fragmented.

The dolls gutted by my ancient doll hands, the disillusion at finding pure stuffing (your memory pure steppe): the father, who had to be Tiresias, floats in the river. But you, why did you resign yourself to be murdered listening to tales of snow-tipped poplars?

I wanted my doll fingers to penetrate the keys. I didn't want to graze the keyboard like a spider. I wanted to sink myself, nail myself, attach myself, petrify myself. I wanted to enter the keyboard to enter inside the music to have a native land. But the music continued, accelerated. Only when a refrain reiterated did there breathe in me the hope that something resembling a train station might be established, I mean: a fixed and secure point of departure; a place from which to depart, from the place, to the place, in union and fusion with the place. But the refrain was too brief, so that I couldn't erect a station as I could count only on one train somewhat

derailed from tracks that contorted and distorted. Then I abandoned music and its deceits because music was either higher or lower, but not in the center, in the place of fusion and encounter. (You who were my only native land, where to look for you? Maybe in this poem I keep on writing.)

One night at the circus I recovered a lost language the moment the riders carrying torches galloped in a fierce round on black stallions. Not even in my happiest dreams will a choir of angels exist that could provide anything for my heart resembling the hot sounds of hooves against the rings.

(And he told me: Write; because these words are faithful and true.)

(A man or a stone or a tree is going to begin the song. . .)

And it was a gently tremulous agitation (I say that to instruct the one who mislaid her musicality in me and trembles with more dissonance than a horse goaded by a torch in the rings of a foreign country).

I was hugging the ground, saying a name. I thought I had died and that death was to say a name without ceasing.

Maybe this is not what I want to say. This saying and saying oneself isn't pleasant. I can't speak with my voice only with my voices. It's also possible that this poem was a trap, nothing but a stage.

When the ship alternated its rhythm and vacillated on the violent water, I sat up straight like the amazon who controls her rearing horse with only her blue eyes (or was it with her blue eyes?). The green water on my face, I have to drink you until the night is opened. No one can save me since I am invisible even for me whom I call with your voice. Where am I? I'm in a garden.

There is a garden.

1971

And he told me. . .: *Revelation*, 22:6.
A man or a stone. . .: Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Fourth Book.

Michel Deguy

Translated from the French by Clayton Eshleman.

ETC

The 10-pointer moon, an amazon, or this old ubiquitous headwaiter who wanders around our month, bending over our tables like a legend, bald here, but full of himself, napkin over shoulder

over there an
oestricultivatress, more visible from here than the Punjab, she goes from one cloister to another, the gates cut our faces, she is without meridian, we put her in charge of our telecommunications, our invariant

sublime tessera
which regularly fragments, her phases guarantee hospitality, from North to South we exchange quarters of the moon, our sons recognize each other

for the last time the common moon for the last time to tell us that, of an amazon or of a headwaiter, or her apparition among the trees for Eustace etc., for the last time this game—or must we *delete when appropriate* and leave only

"The volume of the moon is fifty times smaller than that of the earth, from which it is at an average distance of 175,000 miles"

neither a
clairvoyant nor a Hausfreund nor a visitor nor a cervida nor Nuktiphaès peri gaian alômenon allotrion phôs

isn't she the mute on Brecht's roof, the lucid

extra whose ruse undresses us?

on her tacit nail don't we deposit our words without a word from her in exchange against all the others her silence makes us confess, we offer her bathtubs, swing mirrors, jewels, a hecatomb of lexicons she patronizes the poetry business

silver reserve at the capital of every township, counterpart of our translations deposited ostensibly non-negotiable like a zenith she guarantees our treaties and backs up every debt

for the last time I warn you, what is happening since we have approached her. . . This absent thing which is nothing lends herself to everything, white turntable of names and of meanings, this emphyteutic thing untransferable completely present, unnameable, she passes over in silence but insignificant and so there it's her

moon there and at that distance—accessible today but unapproachable always for the terrestrial—exceeding all naming her fate touches our foreheads and the most demented things that we talkative ones say don't suit her badly

fingernail barque chastity lunule unicorn billhook huntress stable dune anagram of anul

her reappearances distend glossaries she respins the wheel of prayers of wonderful talks we all have to go through it no combination is to be struck out there is no word that does not file past appropriate no word not a coin tossed onto her touchstone "There are more things in heaven etc." That means something? That since things are not all on the same level, those least within hand's reach are models that none of them are simply within hand's reach:

but they tierify rarify rise up to the stars distancing less and less sure up to the crown of numbers (and on the other hand hiding in opacity settling between the antipodes keeping

compact) more and more indifferent in their astronomic exposition detached "inevitable" idols inducting the litany of languages:

By the stars by the forests and by Acheron honored
Diana in the high the mid and the low world presides
And her horses her dogs her Eumenides she guides
So as to light up to hunt to create death and horror

Her strong flames and grievances fires nets and fetters
Moon Diana Hecate in heaven earth and hell
Adorning questing hindering our Gods us and our shadows

for the last time we are required to focus on the rapport between the scarab and the sun

(the unconscious sham of philosophy pretending to believe that perception saw the moon setting "two hundred steps away" (?) let us note rather the aberrant symptom on her lips of a repressed secret which speaks transvestite, in rags among us flattened vestige of the ancient figure, waiting for her Jodelian blaze to wash her features,

for in the antique version the moon the sun, no "error of the senses" observed them sleeping under the stars at the town's end in the area reserved for nomads)

for the last time rather we are summoned to concentrate on the sun as a scarab, on the scarab as a sun, since it has never been a case of bad judgement, of a confused optical ignorance to patiently await the advent of correcting science

but a mystical triangle like that of the omphalus and the iliac crests, the sun the eye the scarab equidistant incommensurable summits: the difference contracted from the beginning into a figure between the eye and the scarab, between the sun and the eye, between the

sun and the scarab, the silence of this infinity has something to emphasize

O resemblance adopted country
Your faces don't resemble and which thus resemble
The volume of the sea is explicit about itself
A blackbird enchants his territory
The body will be spoken through the body:
Hair (like an uprush of blood
from a bone crossbow)

• • •

silence

school of silence the ears stop the hearing tingles asleep no the eye does not take itself to be the most interesting subject its tutor emancipates it at this moment: the 10-pointer moon redoubled within its own halo like an icon frame surges between the trees of the hunt

silence

my friends ("my friends")

why give in to the mutism of the moon, loss in the eye which reappears lower between the talkative lips summoning all the languages in the world before her anonymity like the icon-bearing bifurcated stag mobile bush between the branches, the moon's silence authorizes all words reed baskets metals flutes painters of inexhaustible signs like baths in which she doesn't even get her feet wet, Madame Sphinx without a question the round breast confused with her face and thus without response and wordless is it a coffee bean a ⦶ a sexual organ a ⊖ the moon prowls like something that one cannot remember, what is closest, the mammary jogger remember that there is something

and when we arrive on her sunlit "ground," then *to moon to land*—already the hesitation regarding the metaphor trembles—we bring our words, we'll find there our

pumices our relief recurring our fictions as everywhere reinjecting a big man with a little one, fitting our animal spirits into her cavities *("the formal cause of drunkenness consists in the superabundant quantity and in the quality of warm and humid vapors, which rise from the substance of the wine, which upon filling the brain and its ventricles and spreading thence to the origin of the nerves and touching their passages, excite in man the sleep of drunkenness keeping the animal spirits bound, attached and deadened through their humidity")*

we'll get into the brain in about the same epoch
landing thus on our two satellites skull and moon

but still set in their
interval unable to turn over by ourselves alive the glove of soul skin

metaphoring everything at our approach occidentals perhaps (formerly in Amazonia the same transport nomination the same questions about race and incarnation and the immortal breath a conquest trading salt and blood)

to speak my friends as if we were never to meet again, in such a way that seeing each other again would be useless, posthumously from here, of such things because we never will see each other again

John Yau

Speculative Images: The Paintings of David True

David True began hitting his stride in the mid 70's. In 1976 he finished Green Sea, the first of his paintings to depict the emblematic image of a mastless, rudderless ship. As in all his paintings, the compositional rules governing *Green Sea* are derived from the Modernist principles of abstraction. A stark black hull (actually a trapezoid) crests through stylized waves (the water appears to be a hard metallic surface). The emphasis is on two dimensionality rather than volume. While ship, ocean, and sky overlap, they seem to exist on three separate planes. Seen as a flat, knife-like shape, the ship seems to be held in place by the ocean rather than supported by it.

On one level *Green Sea* explores the space between what we see and what we know. Yet something far more emotive and enigmatic is conveyed by True's use of abstraction. The image suggests metaphorical contexts ranging from a typical graduation speech ("Now that you're about to set sail . . .") to Ulysses wandering across the Mediterranean. However, by using geometic abstraction and a tightly disciplined facture, True expunges all the familiar associations we have when we see an image of a ship. Instead of supporting the usual ways we

process what we see, *Green Sea* provokes us into speculating on the possible meanings it may contain. In this sense, True's ships bear comparison with Jasper Johns' targets and flags.

In the winter of 1978-79 the Whitney Museum exhibited the work of ten artists[1] in a show entitled *New Image Painting*. Of the six paintings David True had in the exhibition, four (including *Green Sea*) depict abstract hulls. The other two, *Biblical Warning* and *Wind and Geometry*, depict images of the ocean.

Less enigmatic than the ship paintings, *Wind and Geometry* explores the themes of expression vs. repression, freedom vs. absolutes. Paper-like strands of surf slap against the shore. Starting from the lower left side, a palm tree arches gracefully over the water. Surf and palm fronds echo each other on a stylistic level. On an abstract level, the line defined by the curving tree trunk and the edge defined by the undulating waves suggest an oval. The feeling of a clockwise motion is reinforced by the left to right thrust of the tree and right to left movement of the waves. This clockwise motion recalls the physical immediacy conveyed by an artist's gestural brushwork. At the same time, True's stylizations and highly disciplined facture deny the possibility of such brushwork. In fact, the sense of freedom, vulnerability, emotional honesty, and angst historically associated with gestural brushwork is contradicted by the stage-like setting of True's images.

Wind and Geometry reaches the conclusion that the existential arena of action painting has dwindled into a self-conscious theatrical device. Instead of being retrospective and employing expressionist brushwork, True deals with his alienation from this possibility on a imagistic level. In suggesting the sweeping motion of gestural brushwork at the same time he is equating it with a tropical island, True explores a complex web of desire and alienation. He knows that in order to reach his own ground he cannot follow a well trodden path. Instead,

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[1] *New Image Painting.* (Dec 5, 1978 - January 28, 1979) Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Nicholas Africano
Jennifer Bartlett
Denise Green
Michael Hurson
Neil Jenney
Lois Lane
Robert Moskowitz
Susan Rothenberg
David True
Joe Zucker

he must negate his own impulses.

Tradition ultimately becomes repressive. One thinks of Jackson Pollock pushing against Cubism until he finally breaks through. Jasper Johns quietly reaches an alternative to this newly won freedom by introducing recognizable subject matter into an abstract framework. The speed of Pollock's drips and splatters is slowed down by Johns' deliberate application of encaustic. The pendulum swings back and forth, though in no predictable manner.

After Pollock and Johns, the solutions reached by Pop Art's appropriation of banal images from other media, Abstract Expressionism's gestural brushwork, Minimalism's austerity, and Color Field's opticality still exert a decisive influence on the generation coming into maturity in the 70's. What separates David True from many of his contemporaries is that he did not employ any of the widely accepted strategies for making art in the pluralistic decade of the 70's. Instead of trying to fit in, he became introspective.

The difference between the source of Johns' and True's images is a deeply significant one in the context of current art practices. At a time when image appropriation is the dominant approach to subject matter and collage underlies most composition, True has taken the far more treacherous path of invention and discovery. To align himself with the largely unquestioned attitudes toward subject matter and composition is to accept the "correct" restrictions.

What True uses to react against these restrictions is the geometric tradition of abstraction. The theological purity of Leon Polk Smith or Ellsworth Kelly, say, has become the doubt ridden impurity of David True. His deeply considered investigations of geometric shapes, symbolic forms, and abstract composition begins from an imaginative bias. This use of the imagination gains in resonance if we remember that in 1955, when Johns first painted his targets and flags, the Abstract Expressionists' attitude toward recognizable subject matter was largely hostile and derogatory. Ad Reinhardt's dictums about painting[2] and Clement Greenberg's dismissal of de Kooning because he depicted women are just two indications of how pervasive these hostilities were.

Like Johns' Savarin cans, True's ships are emblematic images of the self.

[2] "Ad Reinhardt on his Art." *Studio International,* Vol 174 (Dec 1967). pp 265-273

In envisioning a world in which geometry prevails, True admits a loss of freedom. The images (ships, cars, deer, and satyrs) suggest a sexual impulse that is concerned not with performance (gestural painting) but with display (ominous instances). In being conscious of paintings as something to eventually be displayed, True deals with both his desire and the social conditions circumscribing the outcome of his endeavors. In each of the ominous situations time is suspended as a way of deflecting (which is far different than overlooking) the inevitable. This feeling of suspension was made explicit in 1980-81 when True depicted deer leaping or somersaulting gracefully through the air in a number of paintings. The moment these deer inhabit is always just before the descent. Mortality, vulnerability, and the illusion of power one receives from their imagination is compressed into a single image. The resilient emotional strength conveyed by True's paintings comes from his use of the imagination and his awareness of its limitations.

In 1982 True returned to the image of the ship in *Reconciliation*. A curving horizontal band of blue water (one assumes it's the ocean) occupies the upper part of the painting. Perched near the middle of the horizon line is one of True's stark hulls. The ocean sags in the middle, forming a narrow river that vertically divides the painting in half. Together, the two bodies of water form a T, with the hull balanced on the top bar and a swimming figure anchoring the vertical one. Like *Green Sea, Reconciliation* refutes all logic. Brownish silt forms at the apex where the river meets the ocean. At the same time, both the vertical plunge of the river (which contradicts the image of silt) and the figure suggest the current is going from top to bottom rather than the other way around. Seen as a necessity, an act of will, and ultimately impossible, introspection is one of the themes the painting explores.

On each side of the river is a sandy landscape filled with leafless black saplings. These irregular rows of slanting verticals echo the harsh slashing strokes of action painting. True equates this option with a barren landscape. Allusions such as this convey the possibility that a continual theme in True's paintings is the alienation he feels from various art historical options. On one level, True's paintings are drily stated inventories of loss. Equally strong, however, is True's steadfast refusal to give up on the possibilities of a pictorial image. This con-

flict between abstraction and pictorialism has an emotional as well as rational basis. *Reconciliation* reaches the conclusion that imagination and introspection (they are not the same) are the only possibilities True feels are open to him. Yet True also knows both imagination and introspection are limitations.

Reconciliation depicts highly specific images that are abstract and figurative, obliquely recalling Johns' *Target with Plaster Casts*. Like Johns' recent work, True's painting explores the parameters of his psychic state. Introspection and imagination are methods, but in this painting it is clear that True wants to know if more is possible through this limited approach. In attempting to understand what lies behind the process of discovering (the swimmer) or inventing (the hull) images, *Reconciliation* reminds me of something Jung said in a lecture in Zurich in 1922:

> "The poet's conviction that he is swimming in absolute freedom would then be an illusion: he fancies he is swimming but in reality an unseen current sweeps him along."[3]

By transforming an abstract symbol, a figurative symbol, and recent art history into an overall image, what True faces in this painting is the illusion of freedom.

Fever, a painting True finished early in 1983, added a new image to his expanding lexicon of symbols. A largely black, windowless, doorless facade is perched on a verdant slope. Beside the house is a small blue spiral, an abstracted labyrinth. Both the labyrinth of introspection and the mask of personality (the house we hide in or behind) exist side by side. True understands painting to be both a mask and an attempt at self-knowledge. One of True's strengths is that he never says more than he knows. He does not offer us the hope of a false revelation.

In depicting a blue spiral, True transforms gesture into an abstract symbol. The ominousness of this painting (its suggestion of imminent disaster) became more an explicit possibility when True returned to the image of a ship a few months later in *Cut and Turn*. A white hull diagonally divides the pain-

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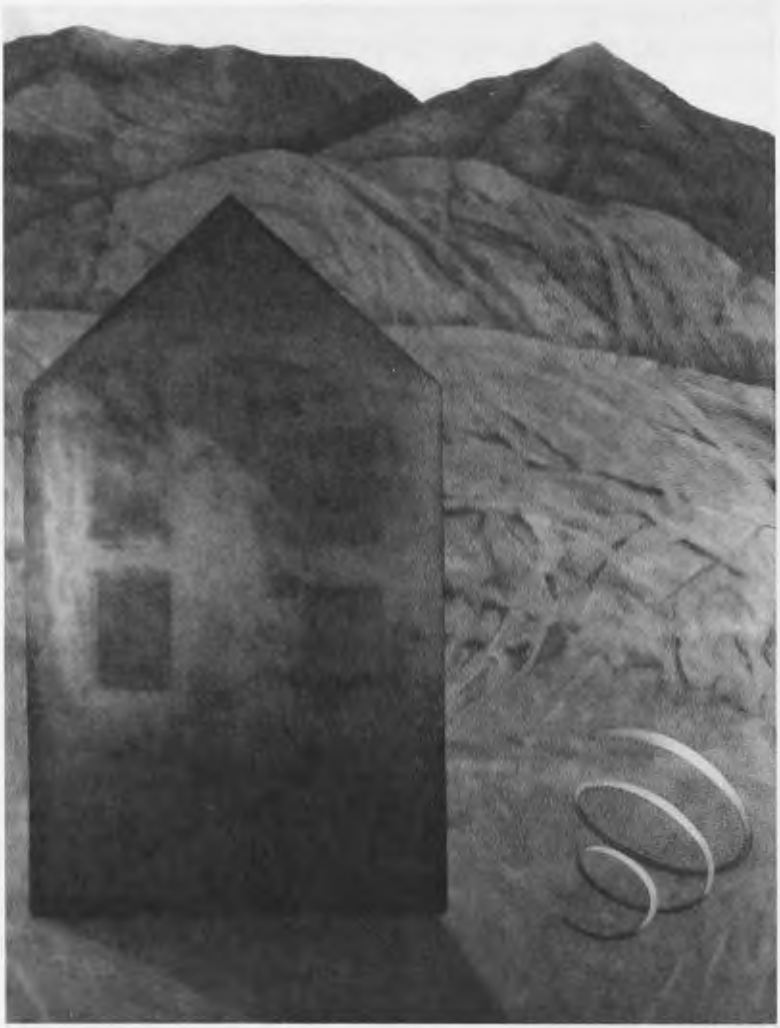
[3] "On the Relation of analytical Psychology to Poetry" (Trans. R. F. C. Hull). *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, vol 15, part IV, pp 74. Bollingen Foundation, New York (1966)

ting, while pointing (like the hull in *Green Sea*) from right to left (from life to death, past to present). The hull is precariously balanced on the edge of a bluish gray vortex, which has been rendered in a schematic way rather than as an abstract symbol. True has investigated the spiral in *Fever* from another angle and discovered the image of a whirlpool. The relationship between the spiral and the whirlpool reinforces the feeling that True's vocabulary develops out of both his subconscious and his ability to analyze what he has already accomplished.

The limited optimism expressed in *Reconciliation* has soured into an apocalyptic vision of our present conditions. If the suspension of time has beeen a constant method of composition in his previous work, True deals with it as an act of avoidance in *Cut and Turn*. Only someone who is ruthless in their approach would begin to question their own perceptions and history of choices on such a deep and foreboding level. Like William Blake, David True has moved from the world of symbol to the realm of visionary authority. That he has done so in less than a decade should be regarded as major accomplishment.

David True

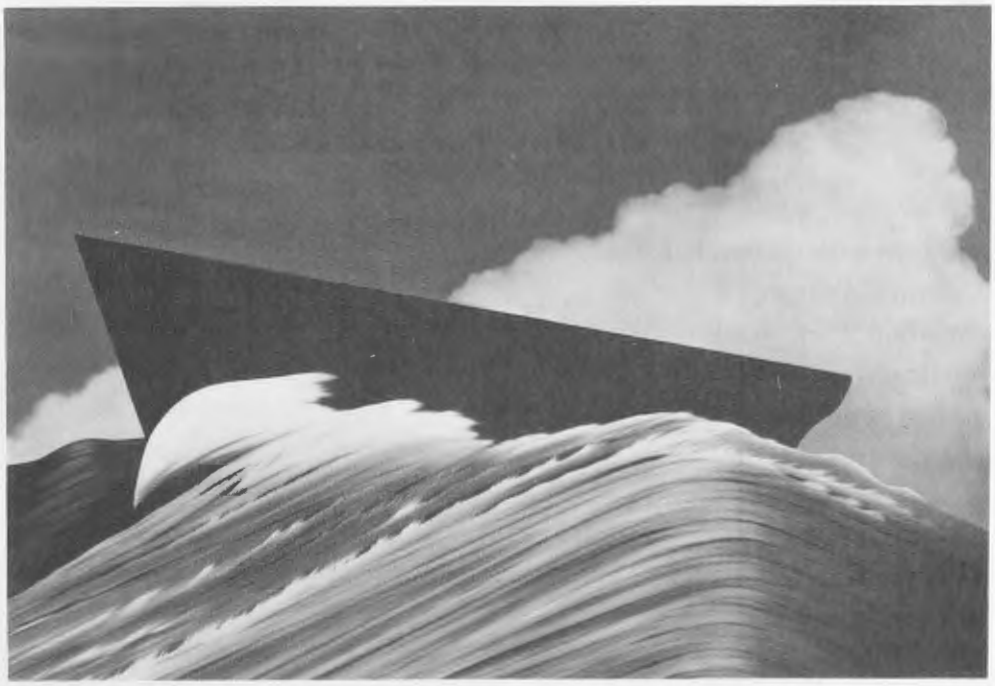


Fever
1982
78″ × 58″

photos: Zindman/Fremont

Cut and Turn
1983
6½' × 9'

Reconciliation
1982
60″ × 72″



Japanese Sea
1977
44" × 66"

Jerome Rothenberg

Two Poems

SETCHIN THE SINGER

Vogul

old man with visored hat
setchin old singer
for whom these words come:
in the old man's house
prince of the town they made
the clawed beast sit
ferocious claws they set up
in the old man's house
old man with visored hat
& sent a messenger
a handspan high:
he didn't come
they sent two messengers:
he didn't come

"Setchin the Singer" is a working—not more "free" than most translations—from a French translation of a series of Vogul shaman songs. The original language is part of the Finno-Ugric family & the culture located in the northern Ural Mountains of the USSR. The resultant poem remains—for now—whatever I make it. (J.R.)

a third time sent a messenger
a handspan high
old man with visored hat
who buckles on his wife's
threadbare old coat of wolverine
he wraps his wife's dogleash around
his waist
& on his head he sets
a hat of shredded hemp
then with an icey wooden staff
starts on the road
with an icey wooden staff
he rams against
the heavy redwood door
its iron hinges
work of a master's hands he turns
to toothpicks
& he enters
on his back he wears his wife's
threadbare old coat of wolverine
his wife's dogleash
around his waist
& on his head a hat of shredded
hemp each time
he hammers with his icey staff
against the floor
great knots swell up like teacups
with his icey wooden staff
confronts the muzzle of
the little sacred beast

•

"by your father's rotten blood"
(the bear says) "why do you sit here

"songless crouching in a corner?"
(says the man) "where did you carry off
"the dearest of my dear sons?"
(& the bear replies)
"you have your second son still left
"your youngest
"my water spirit my ambassador of waters
"I sent out through the waters
"& my forest spirit my ambassador of forests
"I sent out through the forest
"my father Noumi-Torem made me
"with a corner of my belly
"furious here below
"in a corner of my belly drunk
"with anger
"I lock up this taunt

•

old man with visored hat comes back
into his house he tells his wife
"go find me what in distant moscow
"as a boy I dragged out from the waters
"bring me my lovely shining robe
"& bring me my belt with cotton fringes
"& bring me my blackrimmed hat
"& bring me a fattened horse's haunch
"& bring me a fattened horse's rib
"& bring me a silver bowl three handspans wide"
she did & he put on
his lovely shining robe
hooked on his belt with cotton fringes
stuck on his blackrimmed hat
& in the silver bowl three handspans wide
he crammed

the fattened horse's haunch
then took a tree he strung with wolfgut strings
& headed out

•

"watching from this side I saw
"a woman's son appear
"from who knows where
"a son of privilege from who knows where
"I looked & saw
"under his left arm
"was a tree with five strings
"looked & on his right side
"saw
"a silver bowl three handspans wide
"& saw
"a chunk of fattened horse's haunch
"I took a harder look
"old man with visored hat he stood
"before the muzzle of
"the little sacred beast
"set down
"a silver bowl three handspans wide
"three nights & days
"I watched
"a dish that ran with horse's fat
"& watched
"three nights & days
"a lovely play of whirling legs
"he touched the low string
"of his five-stringed tree
"the string shook with the voice of the lower sky
"he touched the high string
"the string shook with the voice of the upper sky

"a lovely play of twisting hands
"he made for me"

•

it is for good cause one says
"this is a man expert in song"
it is for good cause one says
"this is a man expert in lore"

AN IKON

a female jesus
bearded
& hanging from the cross
looks down on us
her teeth bite thru her beard
her breasts—pushed high—
pop from the peasant blouse
& make the man who watches feel
deeply & warmly
a rush of sappy propositions
the swirl of fish
over his thighs
like wet vanilla
the mothers will lick off him
they will tell stories of
the girl who hated men
whom her own father
hammered to the cross
is now the god
her words transform her into

"grow" she whispers
to the hairs under her skin
they flutter out like worms
& wiggling
bending
will form the godbeard down her cheeks
the little mothers
squeezing cold knives between their thighs
anoint her
"sweet sister misery"
"our lady of the radishes"
his moustache on her lip
is heavy
he who is jesus in her flesh
becomes her
their fingers smashed into the cross
flop down
the male cock issues forth
but hidden rises up her belly
its swollen thrust between
the breasts of holy misery queen jesus
imagined as a man the woman-
part has swallowed
what her nailed hands cannot
touch "my god"
she calls it
"noli me tangere" the cock says
the clock inside her head
against her tongue
she sees it disappear & rise again
the bed that opens for her now
becomes a lake
an island where three virgins sit
in red behind a glass

a window in a town
behind the eyes of strangers
watching stirring
the thick milk of strangers
it issues from between her legs
it is a dream—a movie—
her body's triumph as his own
until she dreams herself
into far cities
her body hangs between red lights
a female lamb she is
my lady holy misery
I reach to in her dream
her substance is her beard
a tuft of hair around
her wet mouth
where the shaman crosses
a blood river
tufts of hair
are floating in
queen jesus I have become
thy singer minstrel
thy young bard who lifts thee
from thy cross
astonished at
the weight of thee a doll
become an ikon
aching
dropping dumbly
brushes the dead light that breaks around us

the image sighted,
October 1982,
Graz, Austria

Rachel Blau DuPlessis

CROWBAR

Snow on o-
pen
yellow for-
sythia.

'Sno
won
open force
scythe
ya.

No one
yell ow—you
yellow mortal thing
ringed in
dull earth's icy garland.

Name this wane,
this damaged foreign spring.
For swain,
who won?
Name this pain,
poem,
whosoever
tune this was.

•

Prying
another impleasurable
forever re-
tardy poem
heavily up.

For all the world's sweet bolts
of fern and rose

intentional petals, leafy leaves
pressed in this paper-book
finding's clues—
trouvez!

Nose down in the field
Papery poppy "beautiful"
at the edge of wheat,

inchemeal
dumb to the marge
mere

Gleaner:
silence in between
coups.

Even the lever is a gleaning.
"Thou" art the fulcrum.

•

Cold moon's circling, half a ring-
pale smile

Ivory hand

ivory breast
ivory front
marble foot
stone stairwell

A name that means nothing
neither blessed nor laurel
no aureole no wreath

tastes the ends of dripping hair in her mouth

woman half in dream and half in waking
woman between dream and waking
weeping on both sides of the bar-
rier

starry; eyed.

Not on hills but "hills"
nor by water, but "water"
or from desire, but from
"desire."

Her eyes birds wings fountains
Her smile
under see.
Her hand
a peony sodden on its stem.
One leg tucked up, knee under her chin.
The other dangles,
sock rumpled, loose elastic.
She rests on her buttocks.

•

Frozen snow lying in shadow

my heart in the circle of a wet shadow

She is the landscape
Fountain and Mirror

for whom?
bending over the crib enveloping form?
gleaming in the moon, as breasts, as eyes.

and who
moans this drone
mimes lyric tithing?
Is it

Me

As She
or Her?

Or is me He?

Also consider for
whom am I, say, being
these eyes, these breasts?
What pulse beat for the icons

ticking off opaque cuneiform wedgies

whether I speak
about Her
or whether, being her, I can speak—
given the range of "speaking" in the first place—
at all.

Tuning the recorder,
a wider distance between fipple and body

thins the tone
but brings it into alignment
with more legitimate instruments.

What kinds of conditions of
longing of hunger for
whom
do I nock the arrow
for whom
wrists bound by delicate leather thongs
do I face the straw-stuffed target?

When even one telegraphic
phoneme, one-half more syllable
sibilant (s/he) you (little flirt you vixen)
close-pulled feather,
defines language and centers
what me they is

(and silvery circles kiss the waiting shore).

She
is a jewel in this setting she
an emerald in the silvery rain
I weep.

•

Moreover
I would construct
a ring of green hills
cover of wildflowers' fronds
bowing under close roaring
winds

a fountain eagles
fly down to drink
river war mirror window paper

to worship
to hold her
in the center

For she can cast green
over any strength or disciple
of shadow.

Production of language cribbed
by (from) what decorum?

This is a spurt of brilliant
desire, not a little kiss,
juncture of pain and shaking.

A light a wind a green
I was, it was the world
accompanied me, as it does every
one
but it pierced
in me
my two-headed arrow.

•

The desire for the one seen in the mirror
the desire for one who mirrors
the desire for the mirror
the desire for being the one who mirrors
the revolt of the mirror

the sestina.

•

"greetings greenest branch"
ever renewing cycle of seasons
and women
who dare break
the cycle an icon
whose body
existed
nowhere understood
every-
where told, waves of sound, tune
around it is somehow
unapproachable, elegiac, that it couldn't
ever be voided if I
chose another
fold to un word
the disturbance (a person)
it made

•

claiming (lov'd) my
green my brown my red my creamy, moony
white.

Hart
hurt in the heart o dear.

Bitter desire, un-
and willing-
to-will desire

one line of ankle touch
sock dangles the desire
sullen, being
what I
woman am
said (what else?) to be.
My breasts my eyes enfolding mine.
And am; I am.

So kneel scribe, eye, bird
crescent kneeler bird
in the feather breath,
greetings.

It is impossible,
love, to love
and impossible to unlove

green shapes of fair women.

•

Being or having been
"a" woman
thru which a man en-
tered "be"

yond lang
wedge,
edged the unutterable

exactly: that dance.

Rumba samba
"papa love mambo"
fulsome agendas, rigid agents,
everywhere
entered unutterable
appropriative humility
hey what
luxury
of the one situation with many
palpable gateways

Uhh yeah.

Marimbas repeating rhythms
organizations of blackness:
lust in awe
cruel the twirling, dipping rhymes

those shake-it couples.

•

How do I want you?
"like" a pilgrimage starting out
despite a flooded roadway
"like" a car sharp in reverse, a gravel
driveway
"like" what?

In all splendor in all the
pulse and blah the strain it comes

it never stoppeth.

bearded iris
veined with a "bruised" color
dreamy against a white lace powerless.

Rush from those arms
rush to those arms
there "I" am is it certain
I am there?

Being the sibylant secret stream inside fountain
endless pulsing of fountains cool feathers

their cycles

translucent fear
on the bright angel trail.

Try mud sky, lunar eclipse, that rare.

Low red belly of the moon h-

ung

hunger of the sky.

•

Stretched out on the horizon
every mound of woman
a mound of earth
clay
she swallowed
searching any nourishment
from her unutterable hollows.

Hey ho Bonibell,
cannibal.

•

Women walk by abstractedly
with glass in their pockets.

We look dumb, they think
but are not dumb.

Words of natives whirr around them.
That we were once here,

weathered glass
some sharp slivers mirrors they finger

sleep, pain, desire
and again desire

that wanderer,
but are not here now.

•

My shadow flickers black
over lady-green shadow.
Travelling many direction'd crossings
head blank
gridded with every tunefulest song

one compromised means of transport

limp
foot who can say "I" or "I'd" it is all
practically not-I
another fusion
cells annealed the nucleus of a Lady
in some woman drags
herself long thirsty
and heavy-thighed
up to the Fountain or any ego-ideal
like that.

•

'Tis
Poem:

that around
its words

it's Words.

The silver ring she threw away
ringed by the fountain's silver
ring.

•

End of the dogwood
start of the greenwood
end of the greenword song
but time repeats its greens and browns

the clues it leaves declare.

lay dee hist! story
l'idée mystery
lay dès My hyster y

who threw a ring who kept a ring
who caroled the rich greenwoody song
all MherY duplicity of gesture
a throw of the ring not
abolishing

the Nymph of the Fountain:
to pray the nymph for this her safe return
to stop up the crevices of the mountain
a little IUD of wire this nymph n-
ode cannot stand it, inseparable
complicit and disgusted desire.

A crowbar of trobar
pow
it
tries
desire, "thou"
the fulcrum

pries open the cellular troping
nucleii and the ever
drowning dark abyss

My Lady Me Lady.

•

La la lie
laura lie

don't lie
some
love
the fame of the place
this singing hole its reason.

Wreathe thru the "bowels of the earth"
springtime's sibilant whispers
you (thou) can(st)
still today get draped and happy wear
the green gossamer of nature
down derry down.

What stories
no end to these stories
the diaries have dearies
the stories starry
a derry
down a thickening
o.

Prying them up
out of the self-
unpicking atoms with a cigarillo.

Lay dee
dear hood ship sheathe
in the wild wift wood
whose feet slog sullen
over the gnarly ground of gnosis,

if ever.

•

Precious poetry? ha!
Rage of being

the impossible self.

Rupture
the reverberating lyric cell by cell
edge of the tree-green strips'
deciduous space

the stretched pulse of number
singing in my heart.

Beauty red and beauty white
green site brown site
gapping along like shadows in the
wilderness from
objects
dappled away.

Porous breathing stone
like lace worn thin by seepage
woman like what? poem like what?
complicit with the repetoire
ambivalent to the repetoire
Lady Cloudy Mountain
cloudy clutter mountains
struggle with the white atmospheres
of yearning—such limpid mountings
fix the figures
milky mouth on mine.

•

The gnotty pond
some blue black coil caved deep in mountain's lime
and poem's lava.
Waters pooling from sets of high country valleys

tro- and trickling thru patterned singers of passage
-bar no one
source of mille
phasia dribbles big libble
wa-
the intent pooling
o -tears
meniscus filling past its lim-
it breaking under selves' multiple
leveled sinters;

Stone secreted path
dispersong the
Gouffre

in mar-
row phasal cluster's
pearly

Surge.

Leafy crevices. White foam.
Nacreous
reimmersion blank
remission;
rivulets that rush into the body of
argument,
double crossing streams
bright-headed arrows
engorged with this ancient targeted song.

Milk of the culture's teeming
gushes at my HU A NGRY weaning.

Fountaine de Vaucluse, 1981-
Swarthmore, PA, 1983.

Gael Turnbull

SIXTY ONE ENTRIES

from a BOOK OF INTERESTING THINGS, being part of a log of 367 consecutive entries from 19 October 1979 to 19 October 1980.

June

1: "All blind inside my head if you take my meaning."

2: "I've got to give the dog his lemon tart. Likes his lemon tart, he does. Got to have his lemon tart!"

3: Wedding at Much Marcle, 100 years ago: 'Scented rice, as was customary, was showered on the receding pair.'

4: Behind the Surgery car park, a blush of roses and on the lawn, a milky way of daisies.

5: "Threw a coat at him as there wasn't a saucepan handy."

6: Hailstones in the sunshine, bouncing on the pavement like pearls from a broken necklace.

7: Belching: "The windy-puffs, I call it."

8: I DO concentrate. I just spread it around a lot."

9: In his childhood Durham, when a new baby was first taken into another house, it had to be given its three gifts, however trivial, even if just a pinch of salt and a pinch of sugar and a ha'penny. And if it died, and it hadn't had its gifts, they'd blame it on that. When it left the house to be christened, it had to take its "christening" with it,

three things in a bundle, to give to the first person of the opposite sex that it met with.

10: Guinea fowl: Galena? But really 'Galeeny'. At Sytchampton, screaming, said to be better than most watch dogs.

11: "I can remember going to the sixpenny doctor in Birmingham. Everyone called him the sixpenny doctor. You paid him sixpence each time you saw him."

12: In the Sytchampton Primary School: A Hairy Octopus, A Happy Sun, A Rainbow Boat, A Fat Cat.

13: "Be offered is one thing...Make up my mind, another."

14: The hands of the trees as if with their fingernails painted green.

15: "If you want my considered judgment: he's pissed."

16: "I always said to her 'You've got to walk again, Diane. It's got to come from inside you.' "

17: Framed in the rear-vision mirror: PreRaphaelite fields and a PreRaphaelite sky. Bile green and cyanotic purple.

18: "Always pays to look ahead!" His cupboard full of giant size rice-crispies packets.

19: Childhood riches, carpenter's workshop, rustling the shavings, all in one breath... of pine scent from disinfectant in the washing up basin.

20: Schoolboy, tipping cap to Norman Nicholson: "Good morning, Mr. Wordsworth."

21: Clicking sound the wasps make, working at the wood of the clothes prop.

22: "That's not intense, that's ferocious!"

23: "Even able to kneel in church yesterday morning but it hurt like blazes afterwards."

24: "The last words he said to me in hospital were 'You'd better go now love or you'll miss your bus.' "

25: "Loved every hair of his head, bless him. One of the nicest men who ever broke a bit of bread."

26: Scrubbing moss from a grave slab, then drenched by a summer shower, the words coming up in the slanting light: "Whose name is connected with the double murder at..."

27: "To drag the conversation around another corner, she does have her moments when she strips off and waylays the odd postman."

28: Disturbed by the thumping feet, it had noticed a glint of light above and had come up through a crevice, the beetle, now heartily wishing it hadn't, making little circles on the dance floor, desperately trying to squeeze down each seam in turn, rump in the air, unable to find its way back.

29: At the Harrogate Festival, they had booked him into a Temperance Hotel, so he went out and bought a whole bottle of whisky and drank half of it before the reading. When he got there, insisted on reading first but couldn't stand up, so the other two poets had to help him to his feet. Then he wouldn't sit down and read for an hour and a half, some poems twice, even three times, so in the end the other two never got to read at all. "Mind you, it wasn't that he used to drink at lot... just couldn't carry his liquor."

30: "Started writing poems at school and found that I was good at it so have been doing it ever since."

July

1: "I said to her 'Whatever is this coat hanger stuck in the dettol in the lavatory for?' and she said 'Oh don't you ever touch that. That's my bottom wiper.' Isn't it marvellous what she's able to do for herself? And all crippled up with arthritis."

2: A letter: "I murmur afresh at the uselessness of lust. And rust."

3: "Rain, like stair rods" his daughter said.

4: From the tele: "Both men have looked down the gun barrel and both men are still alive."

5: On the blackboard, as we sipped our lukewarm tea from the plastic cups: 'Mr. Utmost Ur and Mr. Easy Magic.'

6: "...with that bewildered expression on her face like a heifer in an oat field."

7: "...some juice of the dandelion on them and they went away."

8: "I was passing blue over the weekend...and got taken by an attack of the swoons."

9: "Such a lovely send-off at the cemetery... pity she had to miss it."

10: On the oak rafter under the slanting roof (now corrugated iron, the thatch gone) within arms reach of her pillow, an opened (but apparently unused) sanitary napkin, gathering dust (still there a week later) and in the kitchen (all dogs and gumboots) the only decoration on the wall, a calendar, open at the right month, glossy colour photograph of a pornographic nude, spread thighs, full crotch.

11: "I'm well in myself." But why 'in'?

12: In a slash of sunshine, dancing 'Steve's Lass', Glyn leading, the other men cheering, and then, clowning, half drunk, down the middle of the High Street, on a Worcester Saturday.

13: In Denny's father's book: copper sulphate lagoons, cadmium sands and the sun, like nitrogen iodide.

14: On the Powick Road, a man seen running, in the same direction but on the other side, leaning forward a little, arms groping ahead, legs wide, black flapping coat, in slightly jerking rhythm: just for a moment, a five foot spider.

15: "Went into service when I was 13 with Sir Robert... and Lady... at Abberley... Rode my bicycle until I was 73."

16: "80p. return into Worcester and £1 on a Saturday and then £3 each day to Birmingham to see my daughter, and then £15 a week rent, it doesn't leave much out of your pension, does it? And the price of coal, even in summer, I have to keep the boiler going for a bit of hot water."

17: "Nothing to balk the light in that direction. It's a long reach across."

18: A lattice of snail tracks on her outside doormat, glistening in the dusk, like vapour trails of jets in the sky, catching the sinking sun.

19: The motorway bridges, like drawn bows.

20: Wild strawberries, sweet in the banks, like vascular naevi, and the watercress, crisp stalks, leafy fronds, not much taste at all while you chewed them but then, the aftertaste, glowing like horseradish.

21: Flourescent turquoise, as if lit from below, the green of the china clay quarry: cyclops eye of Captain Nemo's Nautilus.

22: "Come on now, this'll never get the onions peeled."

23: One neglected mackerel, fresh from the sea, gutted on the quay and carried by the tail through the town, then simmered and steamed for supper, in its own moisture: a delicate, slightly pungent, almost tuna flavour. Selling, if you can get them for only 30 p. a pound. The fishermen mostly using them for bait.

25: "I tell you I fell on a shoe. It was a particularly vicious shoe."

26: The Malverns, in the distance, through a haze: heaped ashes of a wood fire, still smoking slightly.

27: The plural of Chrysalis is Chrysalides or Chrysalises but also sometimes Chrysalids (and Chrysolite is a yellow variety of Olivine).

28: "Will it be all right if I take more than one cramp tablet at night as I now get it in both legs?"

29: After bombing the car through a labyrinth of streets, standing drinking outside the pub in the tepid air, commutor trains crashing past on the viaduct overhead and the tide out, the Thames a trickle beyond the mudflats.

30: In the recording studio: "I haven't got a very good single thump."

31: Three swans standing in a row, preening themselves, their serrated bill-edges like combs, their necks expressing all the serpents of mythology.

Michael Palmer

Two Poems

BOOK OF THE YELLOW CASTLE

This can be seen as placing a mirror against the page.
The mountain is where we live, a circus there, a triangle
of unequal sides the days no sun appears.

This is life in the square inch field of the square foot house,
a September particle, biochip, or liquid in a jar,
and here is snow for the month to follow, light easy to move

but difficult to fix. The cat on the book has fleas.
It's a real cat with real fleas at least,
while the book is neither fixed nor field.

As soon as you had gone an image formed in order to be erased.
First an entryway then a left and right which seemed to be the same.
This letter explains everything and must never be sent.

This other arranges figures along an endless colonnade
imperceptibly darkening toward red. One pretends to be the case
the other is. Mornings the hands tremble, evidence of a missing thought.

Arrows will tell you where the words are meant to lead,
from hall to hall apparently. The hair is thinner

and the veins stand out a bit more.

Who could have known he'd be dead within the week,
victim of a loosening thread, the system by which we perceive.
Thus the castle above valley and plain, the logical circuitry and other such tricks,

the constant scanning, all kinds of features built in.
And thus the differences between sign and sigh, and the bells which signal return.
The dog instructs the goats, the man instructs the dog.

Should we count the remaining trees to decide what they mean as well,
traces of a conversation possibly, or a larger plan. You enter the stories as a surd
and sleep through them, ignoring successive warnings,

shards of cloisonné, broken table legs, a canopied bed.
They are there because the rest have left.
These are scalings of a sentence.

SIGN

Are you asleep M. Valdemar
The survival is untenable
an impossibility of dying
the way smoke rises and comes to rest
overhead, about the light –
that impulse to tell you intimate things
among the floats in a foreign place
projecting oneself into details
the *a* of anvil for example, anterior,
atopia, at the particular, unstable moment

How install violence, pleasure, irony
and so on as apparent finalities
fragmented into a practice which
erases science, then into words
the opposite of names. So the five
of fingers could become *eyes,*
effort, these, air, dust, where
to another it might mean *flowers,*
a verb whose subject marks years
As for eyes

they are healing, the redness
and pain diminishing each day
Soon the stolen shadow reappears,
the vine on the grey lattice trembles,
the china folk fall from the china wall
An ant is an ideal reader
and there are so many of them
Sad Electra emerges from the forest

and approaches the shore
The conversation, long deferred, begins

easily sometimes, sometimes not at all,
A story whose end I know
and don't know, airs
against the summer's dust
these, head in such an effort
of turning as to resemble
world, "a certain sacrifice"
for the meadow orchids, ospreys,
rugosas and wild currants
Time is passed in saying nothing

by telling things. The chimneys
are not real
but after-images from the dream,
what remained of the houses
in the mountain village
The teacher was the goat-herd's lover
Lightning struck the iron bed,
something to remember in a storm
I do not face the world, I face the wall
Could you be here for that week

Language paralyses the tongue
and before morning the father is gone
I was born with no right hand
below the street of diamonds
in a city of constant groans
Experience cannot be described
except by us. We
fled down the marble steps
We spoke the prime sentence and dissolved
Everything of smoke was ours

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS.

THE BOMB

On May 26, 1982 there was a reading at Town Hall in New York City to benefit the nuclear freeze movement. Organized by Galway Kinnell, it was called, immodestly, "Poets Against the End of the World," and it featured, inauspiciously, 13 poets—Amira Baraka, Robert Bly, Jane Cooper, David Ignatow, June Jordan, Kinnell himself, Etheridge Knight, Stanley Kunitz, Denise Levertov, Philip Levine, W.S. Merwin, Josephine Miles and Simon J. Ortiz—as well as the movie stars Jill Clayburgh and Ossie Davis as emcees. It was probably the best-attended poetry reading in New York since the Vietnam War. Town Hall was sold out to an enthusiastic crowd of, apparently, mainly creative-writing students, and at the high point of the evening, they rose to cheer Kunitz's poem on a beached whale, which had been delivered in a Yeatsian high-pitched drone. The drift of the evening was, as might be expected, "poetry as life vs. the bomb as death." Practical considerations, and other political issues, were largely skirted.

The new issue of *Poetry East* is a special number titled "Art & Guns: Political Poetry at Home and Abroad," and it opens with a symposium on the Town Hall reading, which the editors believe to be "an important event in American literary history." All of the participating poets, except Bly and Merwin, have contributed statements, and Kinnell is interviewed on the significance of the evening.

Judging from the statements, the poets all considered the reading to be a valuable political gesture—many of them comparing it to the readings held against the Vietnam War. Baraka believes that the "social responsibility" and "positive stance" taken by the poets will lead to "dynamic, socially relevant poetry" in the years to come. Kinnell, on the other hand, states that the nuclear issue is "so basic" that even a "non-political" poet can be "political" on the subject. Knight, covering both ends with a bit of candor, claims he participated because "1) my good friend, Galway Kinnell, asked me to, and 2) it was an opportunity for me to put my/ass/where my/words had been."

This needs some sorting out. First, the anti-nuke movement, as articulated by the poets at Town Hall and by the nearly one million demonstrators in the streets of New York two weeks later, was limited to an expression of disgust at the prospect of nuclear war. The rally and the reading were "against the end of the world"—an endorsement of the continuance rather than the extinction of the human and other species.

To my mind, this is a philosophical position, not a political one. As such, it has attracted nearly everyone in the West (everyone, that is, except those in power) from pacifists to mass-murderers like William Colby. Contrary to Knight, it is attractive precisely because one does *not*, at this stage, have to put one's ass on the line. To be simply against the end of the world is not necessarily to challenge the state of the world.

The self-congratulatory tone of the reading and of the *Poetry East* statements—the delusion that the poets were actually *doing* something—is depressing. I suspect, unpleasantly, that this is the first movement to generally capture the hearts of poets since the Vietnam War not because it is the paramount issue of our time, but rather, as Kinnell hints, because it allows the non-political to *seem* political, without affecting the poetry itself and without jeopardizing university positions or government grant patronage. The poet can continue to do exactly what he/she was doing before, but with an added veneer of irony or poignancy. If the Town Hall reading is any indication, then we're in for the same old poem about a daffodil, but now that daffodil will be seen in implicit (unspoken) contrast to the destruction of all daffodils. It's the same old poem about a beached whale, but now the beached whale is us.

Whether Baraka is correct that the antinuke passion will lead to socially responsible poetry (not to mention action) remains to be seen. The poets, on the evidence so far, are still at the stage of philosophical speculation: thinking about the unthinkable, choosing life against death. What is notably absent is political thought: how the end of the world is to be prevented; how the nuclear madness, while we are still alive, affects the lives of the poets and the life of poetry in this country.

The Town Hall reading benefited the groups that are endorsing a freeze in the production of nuclear weapons. It is an admirable, though rudimentary, first step. If the freeze occurred today, it would still leave the world with some 10,170 American and 7,400 Soviet nuclear warheads, not to mention those of England, China, France, and probably

Israel and South Africa. Each of those warheads is from 1,000 to 600,000 times the strength of the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki; together, they could annihilate the populations of the earth and six or seven other earths.

Obviously it is beyond the freeze that the poets and all of us have to think, for the disarmament of the world requires a kind of consensual transformation of global society which has never happened in our history—and, never having happened, seems as unimaginable as the extinction of the species. It is impossible to unlearn what we know—especially now that bomb technology is fairly simple—and impossible that the world will declare, along with a few poets and mystical adepts, that there is a Knowledge Which Should Never Be Known. But it may be possible to end the Nuclear Age without blowing ourselves out of it. It would entail, however, the end of all nuclear activity, both military and domestic: not only the dismantling of the weapons but of everything that requires or generates the uranium and plutonium that are necessary for bomb production.

More immediate—and with more concrete consequence to our lives—is the attempt to cure the psychosis that is driving us toward the war that will end all war and peace. For 40 years the West, and particularly the United States, has been caught in a mass hysteria that all of us, believers and non-believers alike, suffer from daily. I am speaking of the madness of anticommunism. Not anticommunism as an intellection position—the criticism of one possible political/economic system—but anticommunism as a religious crusade, the equation of communism with the Enemy, with Satan.

We have our nuclear arsenal in the name of anticommunism; we kill, directly or indirectly, hundreds of people every day in shifting sections of the world in the name of anticommunism; we give billions to murderers abroad because any enemy of our Enemy is our friend. One-fourth of all American children live in poverty because of anticommunism. Because of anticommunism our government spends more on the food for the dogs of Army officers than on the school lunches for our children. Because of anticommunism we play this global video game where, just as in the arcades, one never wins but only postpones defeat.

Given the Manichean vision of this American (and Soviet, in its mirror image) madness, the obvious needs to be stated: to believe that the Marxist (or, more exactly, Marxish) states have generally failed does not make one an anticommunist. And to be appalled by anticommunism does not make one a communist. Anticommunism is the delusion that there is an Other who must be destroyed if we are to live. Further, it is the delusion that there is no end to those Others, that anyone may become, or already is, one of Them. Worse, it is a delusion we only partially or selectively believe. (For example China, where yesterday's Peril is today's Potential Market.) At present we or our surrogates are murdering people in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua to stop the "spread of Soviet domination." We supposedly fight these little wars because the big war is too terrifying. But—even if we accept the idiotic notion that every struggle against injustice originates

in Moscow—do we really want to defeat or destroy the Soviet Union? What would happen if, tomorrow, the Soviets had no nuclear weapons while we retained all of ours? What would we do—blow them up? invade and arbitrarily restore capitalism? (Here, Ivan, you now own this boiler plate factory.)

Of course not. Wars are fought for two reasons: 1) to repel foreign aggression, and 2) to help business. (The second reason, with the notable exception of the Opium War, is usually masked by ideology.) At the moment, there may be hundreds of millions who detest the U.S., but the U.S. has no active enemies. No one realistically threatens our shores. For American business, the form of government of any foreign nation barely matters. We are as happy trading with Hungary as with South Africa, with Libya as with Switzerland. (For their part, the so-called hostile nations are only hostile to American ownership of national enterprises.) We are no longer fighting to keep the world safe for American business. And, when we prop up the likes of Ríos Montt or Pinochet and attempt to overthrow the Sandinistas, we are no longer fighting to preserve democratic ideals. What we are doing is endlessly expanding our arsenal at the expense of our own citizens and randomly devastating sections of the globe for absolutely no reason at all. We are doing it because we are crazy; and it is anticommunism that has made us crazy.

And where are the poets in all this? The same issue of *Poetry East* includes a survey of literary magazine editors on the question of "poetry, politics and publishing." Their responses range from a not favorable citation of Brecht's "What times are these, when to talk about trees is almost a crime?" to a not unfavorable citation of Maxine Kumin's "Poetry is too fragile an art for polemic." (Oh, brother.) Most of the replies fall into the usual "good/bad politics does not necessarily mean good/bad poetry" conundrum. Utterly missing are the considerations that the poet may also be a citizen (capable of activities other than writing poetry) and that the poet may also be a writer (capable of writing something other than poetry). Typical of the responses is this, quoted in its entirety: "Politics is knife and fork. Art is chopsticks." Cute, beside the point, but also incorrect: Today politics is a knife and art is a single chopstick.

We need to start thinking about what the Bomb has done to poetry. The question is no longer "After Auschwitz can anything be written?" but rather, "Before Armageddon can anything be written?" For one, it has destroyed the central myth all poets live by: "Whether or not I am read today, future generations may read me." American poetry has been largely written for the unborn; nuclear war, more than the death of the living, means the obliteration of the future living—or, to speak for a moment from narrow self-interest, the abolition of a potential readership. I suspect that the denial of posterity has partially led to the current personality cult in poetry: the readings that are more stand-up comedy monologues than poetry, the magazines that feature photographs of the poets larger than the poems themselves, the hustling and general atmosphere of "get it while you can," the absence of polemic and fear of toe-treading.

Moreover, American poetry, especially that written by those born after 1945—the Irradiated Generation—seems to be written if not in an ivory tower then in a gompa: a community of like souls in a remote mountain fastness. Worse, they are communities addicted to whimsey, nostalgia, preciosity. There is a longing for the days of Dada, a longing for Surrealism, a longing for the return of Coyote. Fleeting insights are netted and pinned to the page. On the aesthetic right, poetry is seen as a medium suitable only for anecdote and reminiscences of summer camp. On the aesthetic left, there is a talking in tongues, as though the Pentecostal fire had truly descended. It is, almost all of it, a poetry written from a Confucian wisdom—when the times are bad, head for the hills—that is no longer applicable. In the nuclear age, there are no hills, no world to be in reclusion *from*. Herakleitos seems more to the point: "You cannot hide from that which will not go away."

We need to start thinking about the poets' dependence on the military state: the transformation, in the early '70s, from the poet as the traditional enemy of the state to the poet as ward of the state, our private lives and our publications to a great extent dependent on government handouts—the few dollars that happened not to have been fed into the war machine. We need to reconsider the poets' role in the English Dept., working next door to the nuclear strategists. (To cite one example: how do we reconcile the fact that one of the finest publishers of poetry, the University of California, is also the designer of *all* nuclear warheads?) We need to end our isolation, not from an abstract "the people," but from the world. (The last generation of poets to travel extensively in the Third World were those of *The New American Poets* anthology. It shows in the work.) The insanity of anticommunism can only be cured when America sees that the demon is only human, as we have in China. We need points as witnesses: to see the struggles for self-determination, to see the workings of the communist states, and to tell us what they saw. (I attribute the popularity of Carolyn Forché to the fact that she is the only one to do precisely that in El Salvador.) We need to reassess our utilization of the small public we have: in the classrooms and in the reading halls, and through our presses. (Menard Press in England, for example, has completely stopped publishing poetry, and is now devoted exclusively to antinuke material—a move I imagine most poets would find scandalous.) Above all, we need to reexamine the reigning dogma that what a poet does is write poetry to the exclusion of all else.

There is no answer to the good/bad politics/poetry conundrum—that is, there are only individual solutions. Exemplary cases are the poets who were Communist Party members in the 1930s. Most of them—Hikmet, MacDiarmid, Neruda, among so many others—chose to write political poetry: cries of rage or exhortations to arms. Some of it remains poetry worth reading; most of it does not. It was a gamble that immediate effect could also have enduring value; a gamble undertaken in the belief that poetry served the cause. (Today of course "enduring value" is itself a dubious proposition.)

There were other solutions: César Vallejo chose to continue writing the poetry he wrote, hardly accessible to the masses and more artifacts of a political sensibility than political statements themselves, but he served the Party by turning out a great deal of dogmatic prose (some of which has recently become available in English translation: *The Mayakovsky Case* and *Autopsy on Surrealism,* both published as "Art on the Line" pamphlets by Curbstone Press). It is a prose that could have been written by anybody ("The social revolution is being seeded with the blood and battles of the proletarian class, and the front which embodies that class is none other than that of the Bolsheviks, vanguard of the working masses.") but the point is that Vallejo felt it had to be written, that it should be written in prose rather than compromise the poetry, and that it could be written without compromising the poetry.

Another position taken by a major poet and Party member was that of George Oppen, who chose to stop writing altogether and to devote himself to organizing:

> I didn't believe in political poetry or poetry as being politically efficacious. I didn't even believe in the honesty of a man saying, "Well, I'm a poet and I will make my contribution to the cause by writing poems about it." I don't believe that's any more honest than to make wooden nutmegs because you happen to be a woodworker.

The performance of the poets at Town Hall makes Oppen's argument persuasive: "Here's my wooden nutmeg against the end of the world." But the example of certain poets during the Vietnam War proves that it is quite possible to be simultaneously a political poet, a non-political poet, a writer of political prose, and an activist citizen. There is no doubt that poetry honorably served the antiwar movement,[1] and, in its interaction of the arts and the political necessities, the movement served poetry. Will this happen again—or will the poets remain up in the gompa, chanting into the wind until the firestorm blows the songs away?

—Eliot Weinberger

[1]While the influence of the antiwar movement on ending the war remains debatable, it has recently been discovered that the movement inadvertently kept the world from blowing up. According to the memoirs of both Nixon and Haldeman, in the fall of 1969 Nixon instructed Kissinger to inform the North Vietnamese that, if they did not accept his terms for a settlement, the U.S. would introduce nuclear weapons into the war. The deadline ws November 1 and it was no bluff—the plans were drawn, and they included at least one target that was a mile and a half from the Chinese border. The North Vietnamese ignored the threat, and Nixon was persuaded not to carry out the plan for, he claims, only one reason: the October 15 Vietnam Moratorium and the November 15 Washington March Against Death. He correctly perceived that the country would not tolerate such a move and, as he tells it, the war then dragged on for years later, thanks to the antiwar movement. Seen from the other side, had there been no antiwar movement, global extinction might already have occurred.

QUESTIONS FOR HAYDEN CARRUTH
(re: the Harrison review in *Sulfur* #7)

"I think of those who wrote honest, beautiful, important poems thirty-five to forty years ago, Ruthven Todd, Byron Vazakis, Reuel Denney, so many others, whose names linger, if they linger at all, only among a few of us fond and ravaged codgers. It is an oppressive digression."

Why did you fail to think of Todd, Vazakis and Denney in 1970 when you edited your anthology *The Voice That Is Great Within Us*? At the time you thought of Thomas Hornsby Ferril, Hy Sobiloff, Mitchell Goodman, Bill Anderson, Patricia Low, Lou Lipsitz and David Lawson. Are their poems more "honest, beautiful, important" than those of Todd, Vazakis and Denney?

"In discouragement Harrison turned to writing fiction, which was tough too, but of the macho, escapist kind, I think, a serious enough deviation, such as one can find in some of his poetry as well. . . ."

Does your "I think" refer to Harrison's "macho" fiction or his "deviation"? If it refers to the former it is not clear that you have read his novels. If it refers to the latter it suggests that Harrison deviated from poetry into "escapist" fiction because he was discouraged at the reception of his poetry. In fact Harrison had published one novel before writing *Letters To Yesenin*, and in that poem ("Letter 9") he writes:

> A manuscript of
> a novel sits in front of me held together with twenty clips.
> It is the paper equivalent of a duck and a company far away
> has bought this perhaps beautiful duck and my time is free again.

Does this suggest "discouragement" to you? How do you read these lines?

If as you sit shivve over American poetry you forget poets when you have the chance to remember them what are we to do? And if you treat a poet you praise like the incarnation of the F. Scott-Fitzgerald-goes-to-Hollywood cliché how are we instructed? What profit can there be in your crocodile tears?

—*William Corbett*

Notes on "Lévi-Strauss and the Dragon"
CHRIS KNIGHT
(*Man*, March 1983)

As Chris Knight is turning modern male-oriented anthropology on its head with what amounts to a radical feminist thesis, it is good to see the first instalment of this important work published in the prestigious but oddly-named *Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

What he is saying is that at some time in the past women lived in the kind of kinship proximity that enabled them to synchronise their menstrual periods. This menstrual synchrony beat out a great cultural pulse, the two peaks of which were the surges of energy produced by ovulation on the one hand and menstruation on the other. This is the beat which underlies the establishment of human society. At the two culminations, one relating to birth and a relationship to the husband, and the other, menstruation, relating to a return to the womb and inter-feminine values, two different sets of cultural structures arose. Both have been altered and perverted, indeed inverted, by the men, who are not able to participate directly in these experiences, and have therefore sought to take them over, direct how and when women should give birth, and conceal the positive sides of the menstrual energy. In particular, the female solidarity which enabled women to undergo these experiences with the support and participation of their sisters has by and large been forbidden by the men. In Australian aboriginal society, for example, the men believed that the association of women in these ways would be visited by the various disasters said to be brought down by the power of the great Rainbow Serpent, principally floods brought about by an endless rainy season.

In *Man* Chris Knight demonstrates that the Rainbow Serpent, far from being the visitation of the angry male phallic God, is in its origin a myth which declares this very solidarity of the women. He very movingly reinterprets the famous myth of the Wawilak sisters and certain rock-paintings in the light of the menstrual experience. They clearly can have no other meaning once the shared menstrual experience is understood to have a positively celebratory side, and need not be the sad and solitary concealed thing that so many women have found it in almost every society we know of.

It is strange that, having stolen the women's celebration and emblem of their joy, the great snake of the rainbow that took them up to heaven, the men then engaged in secret ceremonies of their own that are cruel parodies of the women's bloodshed. That women can truly synchronise their periods by close proximity is certainly a scientific fact.

It is possible that the rhythms of menstruation can be entrained by the moon, and the celebration of an external rhythm which corresponded to internal events would be another binding force in this fundamental celebration.

These ideas parallel arguments we put forward in *The Wise Wound* (Marck 1978), a fact which Chris Knight has generously acknowledged to us. What he is doing, however, is to build up a mountain of new evidence on similar themes, which he is treating with a good deal of originality and brilliance. I understand that a book is being written which assembles evidence from many cultures, and we look forward to this. It should be truly revolutionary. The parts we have so far read of this work in progress fully support the exciting and radical nature of the preliminary arguments in the article. The masculine science, anthropology, will surely through Chris Knight's work be making some amends for its long neglect of the feminine.

An important theme of the work in progress is that the Serpent, or Dragon, that is so familiar in world mythology, which devours maidens and which threatens romantic love, has its basis in the power of menstrual blood to return the woman to her own nature, and to separate her from her husband's masculine concerns. The Dragon may signify, in Chris Knight's own words, "the power of blood to reclaim women periodically from their husbands." Then the stories of the slaying of dragons would refer to the establishment of marriage in its modern form, that is, as a permanent bond, without the exclusively feminine menstrual events being thought a significant factor. "Women's blood-links are ruptured: the dragon is slain."

I don't know whether Chris Knight follows the pathway of the menstrual Rainbow Serpent into the imagery of sexual alchemy. Obviously the Serpent rites among the aboriginals were a way of establishing and celebrating by the women the fact of the woman's fertility, and that this would involve the most intense communion between the women involved: a communion which the men attempted to imitate by cutting arms and legs and genitals and wallowing in the blood. The women's rites would establish and stimulate a fundamental quality in human nature: the fertility rhythm. If the moon does act as an entraining stimulus of this human rhythm, tuned into by the women, then the women's rites were celebrations also of a great natural event: the dying and reburth of the moon in its phases. This would be felt and not merely seen, that human nature and nature could co-exist in continuum and communion would be known at the deepest level. The image of the wise serpent and the rainbow colours, the rainbow body, the peacock's tail, is so widespread in mythology, folklore and literature, from alchemy to Tantra, even in Dante, that perhaps it refers also to a direct individual experience which can be described and experienced in no other way than by this feminine alchemy and by intercourse of the kind that results from the liberation of menstrual energy. If this is so, then the poet Robert Graves may have been prophetic in writing of the Black Goddess, an emblem of the woman in her dark or secret menstrual phase: "the Black Goddess is so far hardly more than a

word of hope whispered. . . . She promises a new pacific bond between men and women, corresponding to a final reality. . . in which the patriarchal marriage bond will fade away. . . back to that sure instinct. . .which [man] long ago forfeited by intellectual pride."

— *Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle*

It is hoped that a new paperback edition of *The Wise Wound* will shortly be issued in the United States by Spring Books in Dallas, Texas.

HERMIT WITH STICK

Han Yu (768–824) is better known as a renovator of prose and as an acerbic polemicist than as a poet. Historians recall his attacks on Buddhism and the vicissitudes of his political career, which took him from University to exile, and from exile, after an "abject apology," to high positions in the Ministery of War and in the Imperial Metropolitan Government. Literary critics praise the purity and vigor of his prose; laymen, such as myself, love the strange humor of his short essays, such as the "Address to the Crocodiles." Nevertheless, the poetry of Han Yu is no less notable than his prose, although the majority of Chinese critics have accepted it with a certain resistance. This aversion is due to the fact that his poems frequently deviate from the mainstream of Chinese poetic tradition. A.C. Graham, in his excellent *Poems of the Late T'ang*, cites the opinion of Liu Hsi-tsai, a 19th-century critic: "Han Yu had the power to make the ugly beautiful." This definition approaches that of Western taste, above all of modern expressionism, and it is strange that—unlike Tu Fu, Po Chu-i or Su Shih—Han Yu has not attracted more translators. This neglect becomes stranger when we consider the opinion of another Sinologist, Charles

Hartman, who writes, "Han Yu fulfilled the three requirements which, according to T.S. Eliot, are necessary for a great poet: abundance, variety and absolute mastery."

In his famous "Memorial on the Bone of Buddha," Han Yu reproached the Emperor himself: "The Buddha was born a barbarian; he was unacquainted with the language of the Middle Kingdom, and his dress was of a different cut. His tongue did not speak nor was his body clothed in the manner prescribed by the kings of old; he knew nothing of the duty of minister to prince or the relationship of son to father. Were he still alive today, were he to come to court at the bidding of his country, your majesty would give him no greater reception than an interview in the Strangers' Hall, a ceremonial banquet, and the gift of a suit of clothes, after which you would have sent him under guard to the frontier to prevent him from misleading your people. There is then all the less reason now that he has been dead so long for allowing this decayed and rotten bone, this filthy and disgusting relic to enter the Forbidden Palace. *I stand in awe of supernatural beings*, said Confucius, *but keep them at a distance.*" (trans. J.K. Rideout) In spite of the violence of his Confucian beliefs, Han Yu felt a certain attraction to Buddhism. He resembles those Mexican priest-eaters who spend years in the Chamber of Deputies demanding the head of the Archbishop while secretly sending their daughters to convents in Canada and France.

Han Yu's fascination with Buddhism—or, as he would put it, his distant awe—is apparent in a few of his poems. For example, in the first line of a poem on a withered tree, he alludes simultaneously to the hollowness of its trunk and to the Buddhist void (sunyata). The allusion would provoke an immediate response in Oriental readers, for Han Yu employs, to designate the central hollow of the tree, a word that is the name of a popular sutra. The tree, says the poet literally, still does not care to be only the void at its heart. The sutra most loved and recited in the Far East is precisely the *Heart* (the center, the nucleus, the essence) *Sutra of Perfect Wisdom* (Prajña-pāramitā-hrdaya-sūtra). Its doctrine may be summarized by a few lines: "Form is emptiness and emptiness is form . . . where there is form there is emptiness; where there is emptiness there is form; and the same is true for sensations and sentiments, for perceptions and passions, for consciousness." The last line of the poem rests on a double ambiguity that is frequent in the texts of Mahayana Buddhism: center (of the tree) = center (of the mind, hollowness (of the trunk) = void (of the spirit). Here is a version of the poem, inspired by the two translations Graham has done:

Un árbol seco

An árbol sin renuevos, sin follajes:
no lo injurian heladas ni ventiscas.
Su panza es cueva donde cabe un hombre,
es un manto de hormigas su corteza.
No lo visitan pájaros: su huésped
es el moho que dura una mañana.

Pero su leña es llama que habla en lenguas
y es santa vacuidad su tronco hueco.

A withered tree

A tree without shoots, without leaves:
no frost nor storm can harm it.
Its belly is a cave where a man could fit,
its bark a robe of ants.
Birds do not visit; its only guest
is the mould that lasts a morning.
But its wood is a flame that speaks in tongues
and its hollow trunk the sacred void.

A confession: I have not resisted the temptation, in the penultimate line, of forcing Christian heterodoxy onto the withered tree. Han Yu says that its wood will serve to make a good fire. I have changed that fire into tongues and thus have made it speak like a man possessed by the Spirit. Those upon whom the spiritual fire descends—the paradigm is the Pentecost of the Evangelists—"speak in tongues." But those tongues are unknown and untranslatable. No one understands them, not even those who speak them (glossolalia). For this reason, Saint Paul, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, warns the faithful of the danger of speaking in "unknown" tongues. "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit may be praying, but my mind is barren." If Han Yu, the intransigent, could read my translation, he would shake his head in reproach: not only is it written in barbaric characters, it also purveys a heresy.

— *Octavio Paz*
(trans. Eliot Weinberger)

SOME EXPERIMENTS IN ETHNOGRAPHIC POLYPHONY

Two titles have now appeared in a four-volume edition of documents collected by James Walker, a physician and ethnographer on the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation between 1896 and 1914. The first (James Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, Raymond

DeMallie and Elaine Jahner eds., U. of Nebraska Press, 1980) is a collage of notes, interviews, texts and essay fragments written or spoken by Walker and numerous Oglala collaborators. This volume lists more than thirty "authorities;" and wherever possible each contribution is marked with the name of its enunciator, writer, or transcriber. These individuals are not ethnographic "informants." *Lakota Belief* is a collaborative work of documentation, edited in a manner that gives equal rhetorical weight to diverse renditions of tradition. Walker's own descriptions and glosses are fragments among fragments.

The ethnographer worked closely with Charles and Richard Nines, interpreters, and with Thomas Tyon and George Sword, both of whom composed extended essays in Old Lakota. These are now translated and published for the first time. In a long section of *Lakota Belief* Tyon presents explanations he obtained from a number of Pine Ridge shamans; and it is revealing to see questions of belief (for example the crucial and elusive quality of "wakan") interpreted in differing, idiosyncratic styles. The result is a version of culture in process, that resists any systematic summation. In *Lakota Belief* the editors provide biographical details on Walker, with hints about the particular sources of the writings in his collection, brought together from the Colorado Historical Society, the American Museum of Natural History, and the American Philosophical Society.

The second volume to appear is *Lakota Society* (DeMallie ed., 1982) which assembles documents roughly relating to aspects of social organization, as well as concepts of time and history. The inclusion of extensive Winter Counts (Lakota annals) and personal recollections of historical events will confirm recent tendencies to question overly-clear distinctions between peoples "with" and "without" history. (See, for example, Renato Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting 1883-1974* Stanford U. Press, 1980) Volume three will be devoted to Lakota myth. And the last volume will contain the translated writings of George Sword. Sword was an Oglala warrior, later a judge of the Court of Indian Offenses at Pine Ridge. With Walker's encouragement, he wrote a detailed vernacular record of customary life, covering myth, ritual, warfare and games, complemented by an autobiography.

Taken together, the four volumes will provide an unusual, multiply-articulated record of Lakota culture at a crucial moment in its history—a three-volume anthology of *ad hoc* interpretations and transcriptions by more than a score of individuals occupying a spectrum of positions with respect to "tradition," plus an elaborated view of the ensemble by a well-placed Oglala writer. To this heterogeneous collection we can also conveniently add the 1979 reprint (AMS Press, N.Y.) of Walker's classic monograph of 1917, *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Sioux.* It will thus be possible to assess critically the synthesis Walker made of these diverse materials. When complete, the five volumes will constitute an expanded (dispersed, not total) text representing a particular *moment* of ethnographic production (not "Lakota culture").

Such an ensemble opens up new readings and desires—in an ongoing cultural poesis. For the decision to publish these texts was provoked by requests to the Colorado

Historical Society from community members at Pine Ridge, where copies were needed in Oglala history classes. For *Sulfur* readers the "Walker Collection" offers other lessons, providing, among other things, a mock-up for an ethnopoetics with history (and individuals) in it. One has difficulty giving these materials (many of which are very beautiful) the timeless, impersonal identity of, say, "Sioux myth." Moreover, the question of *who writes* (performs? transcribes? translates? edits?) cultural statements is inescapable in an expanded text of this sort. Here the ethnographer no longer holds unquestioned rights of salvage: the authority long associated with bringing (elusive, usually "disappearing") oral lore into legible textual form. It is unclear whether James Walker (or anyone) can appear as author of these writings. Such lack of clarity about ethnographic authority is a sign of the times.

Western texts conventionally come with authors attached. Thus it is still, perhaps, inevitable that *Lakota Belief* and *Lakota Society* should be published under Walker's name. However, as ethnography's complex, plural poesis becomes more apparent—and politically charged—conventions begin, in small ways, to slip. This is visible on two recent title pages: *Birds of My Kalam Country,* by Ralph Bulmer and Ian Majnep (Auckland, London 1977) and *Piman Shamanism and Staying Sickness (Ka:cim Mumkidag)* by Donald Bahr, anthropologist; Juan Gregorio, shaman; David I. Lopez, interpreter; Albert Alvarez, editor (Tucson, 1974). *Birds of My Kalam Country,* the fruit of a long collaboration between ethnographer and informant (but it would probably be better to say, simply, Australian and New Guinean) is a hybrid, interwoven work, with the two contributors distinguished throughout by different typefaces. *Piman Shamanism*'s four authors (one is tempted to say "author functions") are listed without obvious hierarchy (though not in alphabetical order). And the book is consciously designed "to transfer *to a shaman* as many as possible of the functions normally associated with authorship." Bahr, initiator of the project, opts to share out authority to a considerable degree. Gregorio appears as principal source for the "theory of disease" transcribed and translated at two separate levels by Lopez and Alvarez, both of whom are Papago Indians (the latter trained in linguistics). Gregorio's vernacular texts include highly compressed explanations which are interpreted and contextualized by Bahr's separate commentary. The book is unusual in its textual enactment of the interpretation of interpretations. (For a poetic extrapolation of Gregorio's "theory," cut with Mallarmé, see Gustaf Sobin's important "The Earth as Air," *Conjunctions* 2.)

A different example of multi-vocality is provided by New Wilderness Poetics' *Maria Sabina: Her Life and Chants* (Ross-Erikson, 1981), where the project of giving voice to a Mazalec shaman results in a colloquy of six (at least). Maria Sabina herself speaks with two quite different accents, one for her matter-of-fact autobiography, the other when possessed of language in amazing, ecstatic chants. And she is accompanied by a knowledgeable Escort (Gordon Wasson, Munn, Estrada, Rothenberg) who introduce,

justify, comment, and extrapolate. The process of "giving voice" occurs in a faceted context of interpretations and rewritings. There is no direct access to Maria Sabina's authentic voice, or voices (the constant evocation of "language" in her chants says as much); and these enunciations, transcriptions and translations are all complexly historical. With *Maria Sabina* ethnopoetics appears to struggle away from logocentrism and through the manifest staging of its discourses, "native" and otherwise.

The historical dimensions of cultural poesis are given full political significance by *'Aré'aré: un peuple mélanésien et sa musique,* par Daniel de Coppet et Hugo Zemp, avec des textes 'aré'aré et un disque (Editions du Seuil, 1978). This handsomely edited book (But in what sense is it, properly speaking, a book?) is largely constructed from statements by inhabitants of Southern Malaita in the Solomon Islands. It is illustrated with numerous photos and includes a brief "portrait of 'aré'aré society" by DeCoppet and Zemp, along with a postface by David Kausimae, Deputy from the region and Vice-President of the Legislative Assembly. The book was published during the year of the Solomon Islands' independence from British rule, and it was submitted to various villages and the "'Aré 'aré Council" for comment and approval. The collected statements vary in tone and ethnographic "distance." As presented, they amount to a forward-looking defense of custom. Some are myths, songs and stories, other describe and explain crucial elements of 'aré 'aré tradition—particularly the "pan pipes," bamboo flutes of varying size and musical scale played by men at festivals and during funeral cycles, evoking subtle emotions of love and sadness. *'Aré 'aré* is an explicit rendition of culture as musical polyphony, a counterpoint of social groups, tools, the living and the dead, work cycles, festivals, peaceful and violent exchanges. Its collection ends with a statement by Ariki Nono'ohimae Eerehau, 'aré'aré "Custom Chief," tracing the history, since 1943, of cultural resistance to British rule, the "reestablishment of our customs and our own laws," formal recognition of genealogies and land rights, etc. He expresses a view of cultural authenticity that is evidently shared by his ethnographer co-authors. We must, he urges, defend our custom from all attempts to break or replace it. "And on the other hand, we declare that if, among the new institutions coming from outside, there are those which seem to fit our program, we're ready to give them our support." Ethnographic (self) representation, as performed in this book, evidently qualified for appropriation. It provides outsiders with an eloquent, surprising, idealized, and largely male, view of a non-disappearing local polity. (It is now blatant that there are no complete or politically-neutral versions of a culture.)

Two comparable Melanesian examples of ethnographic invention come finally to mind: J.-M. Tjibaou, et. al., *Kanaké: Mélanésien de la Nouvelle Calédonie* (Librarie Hachette, 1977); and the dialogically constructed film "by" Jerry Leach and Gary Kildea, "Trobriand Cricket: an Ingenious Response to Colonialism."

Signs of the times: *Sulfur* readers will think of others. Today, ethnography and

ethnopoetics deliver contingent encounters (contacts and contracts) instead of essences, or timeless traditions. They begin and end, as always, in exchanges like the following (James Walker talking with Finger, "a distinguished shaman"):

— You say the Rock is the grandfather of all things and the Earth the grandmother of all things. Are the Rock and the Earth as a man and wife?
— Some shamans think they are, and some think they are not.

—James Clifford

The Well-Tempered Sentence: A Punctuation Handbook for the Innocent, the Eager, and The Doomed.
KAREN ELIZABETH GORDON.
Ticknor & Fields. 1983

An old poet related with pleasure one time a story about James Joyce spending an entire morning removing a comma from a particular passage, then spending that afternoon reinstalling the same comma in the same place. It's a story not hard to believe about Joyce, and though most people would regard this interest in a comma as morbid and extreme, and the activity of that fretful day as a model of malingering, that a poet should recount this sort of fastidiousness with appreciation is quite natural.

Punctuation, as Karen Elizabeth Gordon says in the Introduction to her handbook of punctuation, *The Well-Tempered Sentence*, cuts up time. This cutting up of time is a very big item for musicians, and it ought to be for poets too.

For a poet, the handling of time becomes a very intimate, *hands-on* business. Each word is a *shape carved in time*, consonants moving against space sharply or bluntly, trippingly or broken-backed. Some words are big, old DeSotos; some are low-slung DeLoreans. Vowels have their varying durations and pitches: *eek! what a weird moon.* Combined you get a word like *Guelph,* which is also a town in Ontario.

If people don't read poetry much these days, and I wonder about that, it's because what they find in journals and books, here, in Canada and England, is flat. It don't move,

no way, no how. In truth, folks don't ask so very much from poetry. They'll reproduce some idiot shampoo jingle because, despite the stupid, grating lyrics and tune, it has a distinct rhythm, with the rhyme on time. We humans, for whatever reason, have in our brains a zone hospitable to the ditty and nursery rhyme, to rhythms in language, a language music that adheres to certain patterns and the repetition of those patterns.

An idea drops to the river bottom without the music to ride on—in a poem that is. Some of the poets who were interesting 20 years ago have become so infatuated with their idea of things that they have left their wheels at home. All poets worth their salt find a *sound* of their own, or work through to it, having begun with the sound of someone else or of a group of someone elses. Poets will give forth on the subject of measure and musicality at great length, but next to none of them does much about it. It's hard to do; that's why. It's so hard to do that twangers and synthesizers are all the rage—rather like sex aids or those Japanese piano bars where one can be Merle Haggard or Frank Sinatra.

One of the tools in orchestrating movement in language, signs as to where you want the poem to stop or pause, degrees thereof, or tear-off sideways, is punctuation. When you see it abandoned by a poet the reason is, usually, that he/she is too lazy or ignorant to identify the stops and pauses for the reader. He probably doesn't know himself. After all, poetry is a devil to punctuate: the ellipses, switchbacks, the truncated idea dissolving in space. But so far as I can make out, there exists punctuation for any strange turn you might take, and at some point you had better sit down and learn it.

For the poet, commas, semi-colons, colons, dashes and ellipses are good to get under your belt. The most treacherous among these is the comma. For instance, there is a comma in this sentence (all sentences providing illustration by Ms. Gordon):

> She greeted him with open, entrenching arms.

But not in this sentence:

> Her dull gold eyelids lifted heavily and fluttered one final coquettish farewell.

The colon, that bruising stop, comes here:

> I've led a sheltered life: I've gone from shelter to shelter.

The dash is a pip for poets:

> Last night as we slept together for the last time—where were you anyway?
>
> More than just a book—it's a major piece of torture.
>
> It was twilight—if ever there was a time to match that word—and the

> stars were beginning to rear their shiney heads...

The semi-colon, a personal favorite (and well-written of in an anomalous essay of Lewis Thomas, "Notes on Punctuation") can play bluff with the period or comma while you oversee the matter like someone from the French Academy. But for some standarized uses:

> Sit down; I'll make us some coffee and some suspirations.
>
> Visions, on the one hand, devour my brain; hyenas, on the other, feed on yours.
>
> Jacob, who was sitting on the balcony, watching her out of the corner of his steel-gray eye, lunged forward to touch her as she passed by; but someone grabbed a fistful of his collar from behind and said, "Lay off my woman, you jerk."

And the ellipses:

> Many of us remember the opening lines of Lolita: "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps..." But who has memorized other memorable passages from the book?

Ms. Gordon uses lots of these silly, sexy sentences, of her own concocting and of a number of other writers she's plundered for grammatical curiosities and pure weirdness, from Henri Michaux to Robert Kelly (incidentally, do you know why there's a comma after the word *silly*? why *incidentally* is not capitalized?) and they're quite good, many of them. (Ought there to be a colon instead of a period after *them*? And now I don't recall if a period in this case goes inside or outside the parenthesis...)...

> You filthifier of English dreams!

What a splendid way to illustrate the exclamation point!

The author, in her picture on the book's cover flap, resembles Erica Jong. But for all Ms. Gordon's fascination with commas, etc., embedded in suggestive places, she is never so compulsive, vapid or gross as the older, more renowned woman.

—*August Kleinzahler*

Broken Off by the Music
JOHN YAU.
Burning Deck. 1981

In some respects, the title of John Yau's recent book is a synecdoche for the rest of the work. *Broken Off by the Music* seems to perform what it describes; it is a fragment, "broken off" from something else, subordinate to a clause of which it is the interruption. In the book itself, such phrases are used to establish momentary frames that are quickly re-contextualized. The overall movement of the book is one of continual readjustment and substitution, an interplay of semantic and rhetorical codes without the benefit of some coherent narrative:

> Roof shaped like a strawberry. Hurriedly torn
> paper towel. The queen's staircase does not
> lead to the king's chambers. The traditional
> requirements of comfort and convenience.
> A kind of sleepwalking echoed by a line
> in history.
>
> (*p. 13*)

In this example, various strategies of interruption (enjambment, false modification, parataxis) displace any continuity that might exist between architecture ("roof shaped like a strawberry"), regal accommodations, ideas of "comfort and convenience" and sleepwalking. One could say, however, that there are *potential* relationships everywhere: between architecture and "chambers," between paper towels and "convenience," between royalty and history. This line of somewhat specious reasoning is very much to the larger point of Yau's purpose in the book.

This purpose, to put it rather bluntly, is to illustrate the relationships between logical coherence and the fictions of logic, between ideas of totality and randomness, between truth and necessity. As he says, "Only half the story is true. The rest / is necessary, like clouds on a cloudy day." In the book's first section, this "story" is unravelled around the life and work of Etienne-Louis Boullée (1728-99) whose plans for giant monuments and buildings (few of which were ever constructed) are among the more eccentric architectural projects of the eighteenth-century. The disparity between Boullée plans for monolithic structures and the practicality of their execution parallels Yau's own construction of visionary landscapes out of discontinuous fragments:

> Eeriness of a city with
> only one light on. A junkie dangling

from an alarm clock. Using the laundromat
because there were no bathrooms around.
Stealing the mermaid's cheese. Breaking
into her smile.

(*p.14*)

Throughout this opening section, Yau relies on subordinate clauses and phrases to create a highly tentative linguistic environment in which any possible antecedent is endlessly deferred. Places and events are linked not by narrative logic but by the consistency of rhetoric. And it is this tension between a highly controlled surface (sustained use of fragmentary materials, the prevalence of enjambment, the flatness of tone) and its discontinuous movement that so effectively dramatizes the issues of totality and arbitrariness, truth and necessity, architectural design and realized product.

If these are the crucial determinants of this book's opening section, they are even more in force in the next two groups of poems, "Late Night Movies" and "Notarikon." Here the dependent clause gives way to the complete sentence, but once again the broken narrative allows for complicated substitutions, "A Different Cereal," for example, opens innocuously enough:

The moon shrinks behind a row of shriveled trees.
An empty parking lot, a man reading a newspaper
inside an illuminated box. After reaching into
the cupboard, her hand closed its five fingernails
around a leatherbound volume. Later, the aspirin
would not dissolve in a spoon of water.

(*p.48*)

But within two stanzas, many of the terms are repeated in rather different forms:

The general quickly dissolved into a shriveled
cereal, his fingers scratching an empty box
of illuminated shrieks. Later, beneath
the rows of parking stars, a man grinds
an aspirin into the cement. When the wind
ripped the leaves from the trees, it was
as if murder slid out of the swamp.

(*p. 48*)

Such transformations offer the pleasures of a children's game where a story, once begun, may undergo delightful permutations based upon the throw of the dice. If the title of one of his sections is any indication ("Notarikon"), Yau seems to have derived some of his impulse toward substitution and recombination from accounts of Kabballistic mystical exegesis in which letters or whole words of the sacred text are interchanged to yield new meanings. According to Gershom Scholem, this form of speculation was divided into three

techniques, "*Gematria*, i.e. the calculation of the numerical value of Hebrew words and the search for connections with other words or phrases of equal value; *Notarikon*, or interpretation of the letters of a word as abbreviations of whole sentences; and *Temurah*, or interchange of letters according to certain systematic rules." *(Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism)* While Yau has not applied such ideas in any systematic sense, he has loosely adapted some of these techniques in the book's last two sections.

What this rather unsystematic use of systems affords for the book is a way of generating new and varied context for relatively undramatic materials. "Late Night Movies," as its title suggests, makes use of fragmentary descriptions of grade B films, but each increment is transformed, through substitution of syllable, word or phrase, until the incident described is virtually effaced:

> In a small undergound laboratory the brain of a
> movie actor is replaced by semi-precious stones,
> each one thought to have once resided in heaven.

Later, this becomes a new "movie" altogether:

> In a small laboratory in heaven the semi-precious
> thoughts of a movie actor are replaced by a brain.
> The ancient mask realized the insides of the
> archaeologist exuded a tincture of *Pisa*
> meant only for its dead inhabitant.
>
> (*p.31*)

The new materials, added to this second stanza, are themselves derived from other stanzas, each one generating materials for the rest. If it were simply a matter of finding new contexts for words or phrases, the work would quickly become predictable, but Yau manages to alter his materials within strict boundaries of tone and mood so that the flat, expository descriptions continually reveal hidden potentialities: the "laboratory" *is* a metaphor for the brain; "thoughts" *could be* the "semi-precious stones" of a brain, etc.

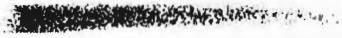
In a certain sense, this book has all of the pleasures and some of the risks of Boullée's own work, in that the poems are not meant to be lived in but simply admired as grand projects on the order of Tatlin's designs for monuments or Ives' unplayable music. The risk is that they may become a series of beautiful surfaces, handsome to look at but too fragile to bear the weight of sustained inhabitation. I would prefer to see them in terms of what John Ashbery, in a preface to Yau's previous book, *Sometimes*, calls an "alternate geography, one where the mountains are 'topped with dunce caps,' of course." In order to present a landscape, the poet takes two steps back and one to the left in order to see it for the first time—in this sense, Yau is not unlike Ashbery himself. The landscapes of *Broken Off by the Music* are made out of the utterly banal: a drugstore with

mahogany stools, a Wisconsin lagoon, a train station, a "room with open windows facing a street." One is inclined to call them "signs" of places since they seem to have been derived from customized representations of actual drugstores, lagoons and train stations. As such, they are infinitely manipulable—as capable of reformation as the personal associations that constellate around them:

> The perimeter of these suburbs was carefully outlined
> by chrome spigots. Lawns rose fiercely out of the snow,
> while paper bags seldom crossed the avenue. If a newspaper
> floated past a window, a pale hand clutched a withered foot.
> It was a time when the century had gone to sleep,
> and everyone glistened with pride.
>
> (*p. 42*)

There is a something Norman Rockwellish about this: a nostaligic look at places one has forgotten, but Yau infuses them with the uncanny (lawns rising "fiercely out of the snow"), so that they reveal a darker face of memory. Like Max Ernst's collages, the surfaces of these poems are recognizable but the terms of their combination are strange indeed. To adapt one of the poems from the book, Yau's language is "Like a rope dangling from / a tree, a site where there is / more conjecture than hard knowledge."

—*Michael Davidson*



The Life of John Berryman.
JOHN HAFFENDEN.
Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1982.

John Berryman was born John Smith in Oklahoma in 1914; his family moved to Tampa, Florida, when he was ten and it was there that his parents' quarrels, furious for years, ended when his father shot himself outside his son's bedroom window. Within a few weeks of her husband's suicide, Martha Smith married John Angus Berryman, a real estate agent who had been hanging around the house for some time. The poet-to-be took his step-father's name (ironically, in full), and the family moved to New York City where John was educated at Columbia, after which he attended Cambridge on a Fellowship, and via Yeats and Auden chose the poetic tradition that he would emulate.

When he returned to the States in 1938, he began a teaching career that along with his alcoholism, which developed in the late 40s, would dominate the rest of his life. While

he had long appointments at Princeton and the University of Minnesota, he taught at over sixteen schools until 1972 when he committed suicide by leaping from a bridge onto the embankment below. He was married three times, had three children, and after going through severe rehabilitation for drugs and alcohol, was received into Roman Catholicism, the faith of his childhood.

In his "Introductory," Haffenden states: "I have not attempted to explore the entire literary milieu, only the psychology of one man." Taken on these terms, the book strikes me as competent and fair. However, such an approach leads to a total emphasis on Berryman's personal problems and his social relationships with others. There is virtually nothing on his creative contacts (to the extent that we wonder if he had any), or the process by which a person transforms his experience into imagination. In fact, without exception, the only poetry quoted is used as biographical description. Given the narcissistic literality of his poetry, the biography ends up strongly implying that Berryman's poetry is nothing more than his own versified biography.

The life itself, from the mid-40s on, was a fulltime three-ring hell comprised of the Father, the Son and the Covering Mother. According to Haffenden, Berryman wrongly thought that the root of his problems was his father's suicide; his real nemesis was his chronic sense of responsibility toward his mother. She constantly manipulated his feelings, especially his sense of guilt, and her smothering, contradictory outpourings kept him in a state of morbid ambivalence by blessing or browbeating him with a love to which he felt unequal. There is some indication that Martha Berryman had problems with alcohol and men herself which Haffenden indicates via a Berryman journal entry but does not discuss. Nor does he discuss John's relationship with his step-father who was his father figure from his twelfth to his twenty-fourth year. However, it seems pretty clear that his relationship with his mother formed the psychological core of his crippling insomnia, acute anxiety and rage.

Haffenden argues that Berryman was driven by a desperate need to prove himself *and* to punish himself at the same time. As a young man this spectre was obscured by his brilliance and wittiness. By the end of the forties, however, wrecked by an extra-marital affair in the summer of 1947, he had assumed a second—or in the long run, his real—nature. His social role became that of a braggart, womanizer, unpredictable drinker and aggressive intellectual. He sustained himself by a program of greater and greater self-demands and probably put way too much energy in his teaching, expending vast amounts of nervous energy apparently to overwhelm as well as to seriously instruct his frightened and dazzled students. Convinced that acute anxiety and unhappiness fed his creativity, he appears to have cultivated agony with the same tenacity that a medieval mystic sought union with God. By the late 60s, he was a cyclothymic mess.

Berryman won the Pulitzer Prize in 1965 for *77 Dream Songs*, and the National Book Award in 1969 for *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest*, and in general received a great deal

of attention in his last decade. "He belongs," Haffenden writes, " to what has become known as the Middle Generation of American poets, a group that includes Delmore Schwartz, Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, and Theodore Roethke." While "confessional" is a fuzzy identifying term for these poets, most of their writing is characterized by personal trauma felt as *the* centripetal force that whirls all other considerations of myth, learning, and daily observation, into its vortex. Refusing la vie bohème, expatriotship, and any engagement by non-English European literary movements—Berryman it seems might have improved his lot immensely by becoming a Dadaist—these poets stayed home, looked up to Yeats, Auden and Frost, and established the image of the American poet as a teacher sharing an office with his academic colleagues, a very tactile member of a middle-class professional community. Because of the congruity of these poets to the teaching profession itself, and because their writing for the most part does not provide any challenging difficulties, it is natural that they have been taught a great deal and identified by teacher-critics as *the* poets of their generation.

However, if this "Middle Generation" is considered in a context that includes George Oppen, Kenneth Patchen, Kenneth Rexroth, Louis Zukofsky and Charles Olson, all poets whose important work was done at the same time as the "Middle Generation" poets, then the poetry of Berryman, for example, looks a good deal different. Set next to Schwartz and Jarrell, he looks fairly inventive; next to Zukofsky and Olson, he comes off as an egomaniacal windbag with nothing original to say. In the long run, his poetry is engaging only if we are willing to find his life compelling. In his mature work I do not believe that there is a worked out poetics or a truly invented mythology of the self.

I gather that there are those who do find John Berryman's life compelling. I don't. Undermining his ability at any one point to throw his whole being into his poetry was a buffoonish web of compulsive personal habits that were probably cute or maddening depending from what angle, and hour, they came at you. Not only did he read poetry to women's feet and miaow at them over the telephone, he defecated in university corridors and urinated in hotel beds. As a young man, he slapped himself, beat himself and hid in his mother's closet, snarling. As an older man, he roared and barked at his doctors. In an awful way, Haffenden's "life" makes one realize that Berryman's last decade resembled the last few years in Elvis Presley's life. In the late 60s, his old teacher and friend Mark Van Doren wrote to William Meredith: "Your letter says very wisely what I have been trying to say to John on the phone—with no results except long silence and then screams."

—Clayton Eshleman

Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems. 1927-1979
Farrar Straus Giroux. 1983.

This book contains all the poems of Elizabeth Bishop, 108 to be exact, written over a period of 57 years. In addition, there are 26 translations from the Portuguese, French and Spanish. While she undoubtedly did not simply write two poems a year, the small production over a long lifetime of writing raises a number of questions that probably only a critical biography can answer. Did she write many other poems that she did not consider good enough for publication? Are there thousands of pages of worksheets for the 108? Or did she simply not write much?

Based on the evidence of this book, I would guess that only the latter question can be answered affirmatively, for the personality of the work argues an upper-middle-class life of travel and leisure time in which scenes and events would occasionally crystalize into deft metaphorical observations. She must have also spent a good deal of time working out meters and rhyme, for the emphasis of all her writing is on the scrupulous, completed thing, cleansed, as it were, of all the *scoriae* of birth and development.

At her best she sounds like this:

> At low tide like this how sheer the water is.
> White, crumbling ribs of marl protrude and glare
> and the boats are dry, the pilings dry as matches.
> Absorbing, rather than being absorbed,
> the water in the bight doesn't wet anything,
> the color of the gas flame turned as low as possible.
> One can smell it turning to gas; if one were Baudelaire
> one could probably hear it turning to marimba music.
> The little ocher dredge at work off the end of the dock
> already plays the dry perfectly off-beat claves.

from *The Bight*

At her worst, like this:

> In your next letter I wish you'd say
> where you are going and what you are doing;
> how are the plays, and after the plays
> what other pleasures you're pursuing:
>
> taking cabs in the middle of the night,

driving as if to save your soul
where the road goes round and round the park
and the meter glares like a moral owl . . .

from *Letter to N.Y.*

Most of the time, doggerel and exact observation blend into decorative patterns like this:

On the unbreathing sides of hills
they play, a specklike girl and boy,
alone, but near a specklike house.
The sun's suspended eye
blinks casually, and then they wade
gigantic waves of light and shade.
A dancing yellow spot, a pup,
attends them. Clouds are piling up . . .

from *Squatter's Children*

The rhyme sing-songs the writing back to a childlike mood in which the actualities of Brazilian "squatter's children" disappear i.e., Bishop's children are out of the *National Geographic,* not of the world of the film *Pixote*. Such a stanza, while very well written, reflects the absence of the "other," in any credible personal, historical or political sense, that pervades nearly all of her poetry. I stress the word "credible," for black and Indian maids, children, and gardeners, *are* the subjects of poems upon which her reputation—which is considerable—is based. But the writing itself—tidy, punctilious, and always clever—presents these people as the mischievous, exotic diminutions of the colonial mind. Occasionally, a grim truth leaks between her lines. I ask the reader to reflect on the following from "Manuelzinho," her portrait of an Indian gardener:

Or, briskly, you come to settle
what we call our "accounts,"
with two old copybooks,
one with flowers on the cover,
the other with a camel.
Immediate confusion.
You've left out the decimal points.
Your columns stagger,
honeycombed with zeros.
You whisper conspiratorially;
the numbers mount to millions.
Account books? They are Dream Books.
In the kitchen we dream together

how the meek shall inherit the earth—
or several acres of mine.

The fact is that the numbers *would* amount to millions if Manuelzinho and the thousands of other Indian gardeners were to be paid fair back wages by their "masters." Once that is recognized, the last four lines fill with savage irony, but not one Bishop herself is presenting—as Blake did in "The Little Black Boy"—as a compassionate understanding.

This sort of mentality permeates Bishop's writing whether she is in Brazil, Nova Scotia or New York City, and it is a sad and vexing limitation, for she is capable of observing the natural world precisely *and* imaginatively. In the same gardener poem, she can write:

Between us float a few
big, soft, pale-blue,
sluggish fireflies,
the jellyfish of the air...

While a kind of Argus-eyed observation is always present, occasionally Bishop attempts to stretch the poem into a more demanding context, to engage a personality that she considers her equal. One example is her "transformation" of Pablo Neruda's "Alberto Rojas Jimenez Viene Volando" into "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" (which, given her influence on Robert Lowell, may be the stimulation for the latter's *Imitations*). In Bishop's hands, however, Neruda's powerful elegy, filled with canceled eyes, raining marrow and guitar-players dressed in bees (which visually evokes the world of Marc Chagall), becomes an Edward Gorey-like fantasia, of Moore in a holding pattern over Manhattan, "with heaven knows how many angels all riding / on the broad black brim of your hat." This is a masterful example of the "academic" poem, in which an earlier more powerful work is diluted and reified.

Another more ambitious example to confront a peer is the much anthologized "Visits to St. Elizabeth's" apparently based on visits Bishop made to Ezra Pound, incarcerated as a lunatic there. I say "apparently," as neither Pound's name, nor any details or reflections based on being with him, appear in the poem. Each stanza increasingly fills with descriptions of an insane sailor wearing a watch, and a "Jew in a newspaper hat" dancing and weeping about the ward. Pound appears in the penultimate line of each stanza as a "man," qualified by adjectives that initially present him as "tragic," "talkative," and "honored," (does she mean this ironically?) but shift into an increasingly negative cast of "cranky," "cruel," "tedious" and finally "wretched" as the poem progresses. I think that those who have anthologized and honored this poem have done so out of a sincere belief that it is a compassionate portrayal of that very convoluted man. To my reading, it is a vaguely camouflaged, mean attack on Pound that refuses to argue any of its adjectival assertions. In the last line of each stanza, Bishop repeats that this "man... lies in the

house of Bedlam." Since a verdict of insanity probably saved Pound from a death penalty for treason, the word "lie," much more than repose, strongly implies that Pound did not tell the truth about his condition. Well, this may be so. My point is that in the poem's context, Bishop appears to conclude that Pound can be identified in some ultimate way as a wretched liar.

All in all, this is the kind of poetry that has, over the years, determined the standards for publication in *The New Yorker*, and that is currently the spirit presiding over the child of *The New Yorker,* the *American Poetry Review.* It is in Robert Kelly's words, "a verse that aspires to decorate the reader's consciousness in much the same way that the furniture displayed in *The New Yorker* would decorate the reader's home." It has enormous appeal to those who prefer to dismiss Pound as a perverse pedant and still believe that the poem is a well-"behaved" clavicord, an object in a spotless salon, in which detailed knowledge of a subject is honored as long as the subject poses for the poem and is presented *correctly*. Elizabeth Bishop's poetry is a sinister and thorough lesson in Apollonian poetics: a view from the tower, clear thought, rational justification.

—*Clayton Eshleman*

SQUATTER'S CHILDREN

Elizabeth Bishop's poem, "Squatter's Children," is a clue to what went wrong with the entire epoch of art just ended. Eshleman, like the postaesthetic philosophers Arthur Danto and Richard Kuhns, wants to kick over an aesthetic which tries to stand on one leg: "psychic distance," the "aesthetic attitude," the distance from which we get a "detached view of the object, see its shapes and colors," as Danto writes in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace.*

Richard Kuhns has asked if we should see a drowning man as a water ballet instead of someone to be rescued, and Danto says it would be "wrong or inhuman to take an aesthetic attitude, to put at psychical distance certain realities—to see a riot, for instance, in which police are clubbing demonstrators, as a kind of ballet, or to see the bombs exploding like mystical chrysanthemums from the plane they have been dropped from. The question instead must arise as to what one should do."

In general, Danto and Kuhns say it's wrong to try to enjoy anything which involves an unconsenting human feeling pain. If merely saying that runs head-on against an aesthetic, something's very wrong.

Yet when Eshleman said little more, the Los Angeles Times *Book Review* was filled with protest letters. "Moral stances have nothing to do with poetry," Virginia Brasier wrote,

and Tom Clark complained that Eshleman was "clearly incapable of taking Bishop's poetry on its own terms. . . But whose fault is that, her book's or his?"

What terms can these be, that a reviewer who reported himself unable to curb his pity and make some children a source of aesthetic delight, should fly in the face of them?

I suspect I have more sympathy for the terms than Mr. Eshleman. Bishop's poetry belongs to the broad current M.H. Abrams calls "Natural Supernaturalism," and Tony Tanner, writing more specifically of American art, "The Reign of Wonder." At her best, Bishop gives us those "moments," "spots of time," that Wordsworth hoped for, when our minds, "fitted to the world" find "Paradise" in the "simple produce of the common day." "Modernity," Kuhns writes in *Structures of Experience,* has been "defined as a shift in the purposes of art from moral to aesthetic values," the attempt, Coleridge said, to wipe away the film of habit and custom which had "bedimmed all the luster" of life. "Now I wash the gum from your eyes," Whitman chants, "You must habit yourself to the dapple of light and of every moment of your life." Even a "collar button," a "cigarette butt," Kandinsky writes, "sings": Leger leaps over a physical barrier separating an art show from a trade fair to exult in the propellers as "higher art." Praising her disciple Lowell's *Life Studies,* Bishop wrote:

> They all also have that sure feeling, as if . . everything, and anything suddenly seemed material for poetry. . . . It seems to me it's the whole point of art, to the artist (not the audience)—life is all right, for the time being.

"Squatter's Children" shows us the limits of this aesthetic: if, to rise to aesthetic appreciation of the subject before us, we have to overcome in ourselves not the dead hand of custom, but our lively human sympathy, this current's end has been frustrated. From its start, this current was the foe, specifically, of custom's deadening us, of the way custom made unenjoyable certain everyday scenes; it was never the foe of the way human pity made unenjoyable the sight of human pain. Overcoming human pity is quite another enterprise from overcoming custom.

Yet, in the general war to free the eye from custom, it is no wonder that sometimes the eye was freed from the heart; and goodhearted people like Elizabeth Bishop learned to see unhappiness as colors.

The poem Bishop calmly titled "Squatter's Children" shows her responses deadened. (In that poem. This isn't a general discussion of Bishop.) "Squatter's Children" wouldn't interest me if I thought her a bad person. It is the poem of a good person whose constant pursuit of aesthetic distance has, at an important moment, dulled her human response. It can happen to an artist as easily as to those news cameramen in Atlanta who calmly videotaped a man trying to burn himself to death last March, instead of intervening: "I caught myself, my eyes fixed on her tragic forehead," Monet told

his friend and biographer, Clemenceau, "in the act of mechanically analysing the succession of appropriate color gradations which death was imposing on her immobile face." He was sitting at his wife's deathbed. "My reflexes caught me up in spite of myself, in an unconscious operation which was the daily course of my life—just like an animal turning his mill."

This has nothing to do with Bishop's politics. What if, indeed, she believed intervention futile, or inappropriate. Some goodhearted conservatives, like the (much maligned) George Will, might react that way. But Will could not look at those children without feeling pity. He would never dream of turning them into a poem to charm a *New Yorker* reader's idle afternoon. Wallace Stevens sees that man living on the dump and hates him. But even Stevens (much farther to the right, I suspect, than Bishop) is not so indifferent to the man's plight that he can turn the man into colors to contemplate. Updike sometimes unnerves me that way. And I admire Updike greatly. The aesthetic experience's value has been under growing fire for fifteen years, in every art. "Postmodern" usually means "Postaesthetic": rejection of an art built on, justified by, a single value, the aesthetic experience; deriding all the rest as "content." The postaesthetic aestheticians never bother to dispute that blood is a lovely red. They claim that man can't be split into parts which act one at a time. There is no Economic Man who is pure profit and loss, no Aesthetic Man who is only gratified sight. The 19th century economists and aestheticians alike began by creating such simplifications for convenience, and ended by confusing them with realities. Their Economic Man was a "covetous machine," their Aesthetic Man was a machine for seeing. This has nothing to do with how human beings actually do economics or aesthetics, since the full person encounters each experience. When we're told the statue of Santa Fina we're admiring is the saint's mummy, waxed, the lines and colors don't change but our full experience changes so much the mere aesthetic is overwhelmed. Are we wrong?

Or was the old aesthetic too limited? When we watch a master like Bishop, habituated, as Monet describes, to regarding objects from an aesthetic distance, write a poem encouraging us to distance ourselves from human suffering and contemplate it as a source of pleasure, we even wonder if the old single-value aesthetic was intrinsically wrong.

—*George J. Leonard*

Note: The following letter was sent to the *American Poetry Review* and rejected because, in editor Arthur Vogelsang's words, "it allowed Lowell and Berryman to be beat over the head rather than discussed or evaluated."

Dear Editors:

I enjoyed Marjorie Perloff's "column" on Lowell and Berryman in the May–June APR, and it made me think about some things I'd like to comment on:

I wonder about the "unendurable sufferings" (top of second column, p. 32), especially in the light, or the darkness I should say, of the European backdrop, for such a strong term might identify concentration camp victims. One of the sores that her essay opens up is to what extent the so-called "suffering" of Berryman and Lowell was self-induced short-circuitings, a conscious making of oneself sick, or crazy (in contrast to insane) out of a need to fuel the poem, or aura the life, as if they had nothing, or not enough, to go on relative to other experiences and sources, so that being nutty, cruel, and living life as a psychological binge, provided form and content as well as identity. I think it is crucial to make a distinction between the madness and writing of Artaud, say, and the madness and writing of Lowell; writing-wise it is the difference between "Skunk Hour" and "Artaud le mômo"; in the former all we learn of Lowell's predicament is that his mind's not right—whatever that means (it seems to mean that his madness is demonstrated by wanting to watch young people fuck in parked cars); in the latter, Artaud at least attempts to get at the core of his, and man's, terror and works with the demons (suppôts) who were apparently created in what he calls "the Bardo of electro-shock." There is something stingy and trivial in the way Lowell engages whatever is eating at him—he seems to have no context for it outside of describing literal circumstances—and in that way he remains a Protestant and, I feel, is not really penetrated by the source materials ("history, philosophy, religion, anthropology") that Perloff says he and Berryman "devoured." I think she is closer to the truth when she notes how disconnected RL and JB were to "the great art movements" of their times. Not only did RL not go visit Jasper Johns, say, but the devouring of whatever was read, or viewed, did not seem to take hold as an "otherness," or assert itself as material, in his writing. Again the contrast with Artaud is striking: for all of his self-possession, Artaud actually made the quite difficult *journey* (not trip) to the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico and not only wrote ethnographically valid prose about what he saw there, but used the experience to amplify and resonate his own condition.

What I am trying to get at is that the other edge of the Protestant blade that played havoc with the souls of RL and JB is a kind of psychological Narcissism—and not the Greek myth in which the figure loses himself in his image—but a form in which the image is refused and the figure insists upon himself, not as image, but as the literal truth of his suffering.

Such blades seem to lock together in the following way: the man never really goes mad, nor does madness really enter his writing. He drives himself to the brink via booze and insomnia, i.e., misbehaves, breaks his wife's nose etc., is institutionalized

briefly, dries out, and is welcomed back. Since such a cycle is neither visionary nor really damned, neither is the writing. Lowell, for example (for the cycle itself is not simply Lowell's), is more interested in describing, rather briefly, the inmates in his asylum than in concentrating on why he is there. If something cannot be described it will not be addressed—or a metaphor will be used to titillate and at the same time screen off a psychic condition: "Each one of us holds a locked razor." An unwary reader will find himself empathizing with Lowell's condition without being told anything about it.

Another matter that came up while reading Perloff's essay is the extent to which a poet like Jerome Rothenberg is scorned or dismissed because on almost every point he represents an alternative position/interest/or background element to RL or JB. Rothenberg is a Jew, is not an Ivy Leaguer, is not a Wild Man or drunk, has marginal university affiliations, is deeply involved with other contemporary art forms, is not an Anglophile but is connected to 20th-century European avant-garde movements and speculations, and perhaps quite importantly, as a translator/reader, has an ongoing commitment to Third- and Fourth-World poetries and ethnographical materials. There is a "darkening" in Rothenberg that sets against the "whiteness" of a Lowell. If one counters that Lowell did translate Rimbaud etc., it is easy to point out that he also dropped 10 of the 25 quatrains of "Le bâteau ivre," which strongly implies that nearly half of one of the most famous European poems of all time is not worth translating. My point is that there is an uncontested whiteness in every pavilion of Lowell's "image," and I would argue too that his literalistic descriptive confessionalism is in part an obeisance to aspects of North America that are at odds with many of the priorities in the poetry and poetics of Rothenberg, so that an "elect" and "heretical" configuration is constantly at large. Rothenberg's concern with "wilderness" situates his cry in a wilderness, outside the citadel Spicer aptly named as "The Spirit of the English Department."

I wonder to what extent the books Perloff names at the end of her essay by RL and JB do mark "the end of an era." I was amused by the openings of a couple of poems in the same issue of APR as her essay appears in. David Groff's "The Tomb of Lysias" begins:

> I have passed my twenty-third summer
> in the Beirut Library, roofless now
> after the trouble with the Christians.

He leaves the library, however, in line 12, slipping out with "that beautiful woman, Rosina, who works near my desk and seems herself a source of sunlight." A few pages later, a poem, "Sotto Voce," by Andrew Hudgins, begins:

I'm standing in the university
library, staring at the German books
and I don't parle eine word of Allemand.
Actually I'm listening to a girl named Beth
call her boyfriend in El Paso.

The library as a place to meet girls seems to me quite in line with the Lowell/Berryman syndrome of the "personal" or "relation" used to cover up the absence of reading and writing as a personal, antiphonal exchange. In fact, a kind of simplistic, sophomoric writing about the authors' literal, daily lives infests APR, almost as an unstoppable afterbirth of the RL/JB "generation." Peter Serchuk's "For Poppa, Asleep in the Smithtown Madhouse," same issue, opens:

When they knew you were sick
you drove yourself nuts. Chasing nurses
for crazy laughs, chewing through ashtrays
just to prove you were insane.
Hardening of the arteries, they said.
You squealed your approval
tugging at your open fly.

It is as if the editors of APR have surrounded Perloff's essay with a chorus of snickering, Lowell/Berryman/Sexton "imitations." I am amused by them at the same time I am disgusted, and fear their strength in numbers, i.e., the massive sameness of the same blandness, like the paint drooling down over the globe in the old Atlas Paint signs. Serchuk might as well be writing about eating a hamburger as well as someone feigning madness, for the language is *unaffected by the nature of its material.* As if the so-called madness passes in one ear and out the other, as reading and other source materials, relative to the writing, pass in one ear and out the other. As if the resistance to any kind of otherness has become so total that it has become completely porous. That is, not porous in the sense that one can be entered/affected by what is out there and, as whatever it is comes in, transform it into receptive imaginal strategies, but porousness as the front and back doors loose on the hinges banging in the wind, no one home, so that what blows in blows out with so little transformation at work that the poem becomes congruent with the most conventional comments and opinions. No wonder APR is popular, for a moron could read and "enjoy" most of the poetry it prints. In fact the context established by the magazine is so slack that few of its "readers" will feel any tension, let alone argument, between the implications of Perloff's essay and the poetry that encircles it! And it is not only the poetry: Alan Dugan in his interview sounds like a man mumbling in his sleep.

—*Clayton Eshleman*

TUUMBA #31-#41:
Ted Greenwald, *Smile*; Steve Benson, *The Busses*; Alan Bernheimer, *State Lounge*; David Bromige, *P-E-A-C-E*; John Mason, *Fade to Prompt*; Stephen Rodefer, *Plane Debris*; P. Inman, *Ocker*; Barrett Watten, *Complete Thought*; Carla Harryman, *Property*; Clark Collidge, *Research*; Kit Robinson, *Riddle Road*.

During the past six years Tuumba Press has published over forty chapbooks, most of them by poets whose lives belong wholly to the post-World-War-II era (so the first major event of their adult lives was Viet Nam). "It seems that 'the war babies,'" Robert Smithson writes, "those born after 1937-38 were 'Born Dead'—to use a motto favored by the Hell's Angels. The philosophism of reality ended some time after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the ovens cooled down. Cinematic 'appearance' took over completely sometime in the late 50's." The embarassment of being human is real and relentless. The movie lacks verisimilitude. We have a poor actor for President. The world is an artifact, a machine and fuel for a machine. What can art production mean when *all* production is superfluous? There is too much stuff. Not just too much poetry—though clearly there is too much of that—but too much everything. Everywhere people are pressing things on you: Big Macs, backscratchers, books of poems. Fat and shelving are problems. It's not a question of good and bad stuff. In a culture where PRODUCTION is the value, adding to the Gross National Product (of cars, poems) becomes another form of collaboration with the enemy.

This is a strong argument. I am not sure how true it is.

It is too big a question to answer here, but perhaps I can make an initial distinction or two in the direction of an answer.

There is an order of poetry which aspires to the perfectly decorated Christmas tree, and there is a poetry which aspires to something more. The former is heavily subsidized by the tastemaking institutions. The eleven chapbooks here under notice (there can be no "review" in the allotted space) belong to the latter order.

One of my old friends, the painter Tom Moore, says of a certain kind of art galiery,

"You can get nice horse pictures there." It is not clear to many people perhaps that a Frank Stella painting represents a higher art—an art of a different order—than a representation of a reared stallion pawing the air with transcendent energy, but Tom has the authority of the entire art establishment with him. It finally comes down to price, of course: people will give hundreds of dollars for a nice horse picture (hundreds of them will), but a few people will give tens of thousands of dollars for a Frank Stella. Therefore it is Stella who is hung in the prestigious museums, who is discussed in art history courses, who—even—becomes the subject of an article in *Time*. It is not a question of Stella being the best (whatever that would mean), but it is important that whoever is invested with the office of the best this season be an artist who can be taken seriously. That is a minimum sign of health in the institutions of an art.

Although it is perfectly anyone's right who wants a nice horse picture to have one, it will soon be the death of painting if no one can distinguish between sentimentality (or interior decoration) and visual knowledge. Increasingly, the comparable distinction is failing to be made in poetry: universities, foundations, and the publishers of poetry support poets who write nice horse poems.

It is in this context that Lyn Hejinian's work with Tuumba Press should be seen. If I understand correctly, she edits, designs, prints, and distributes these books, at least in large measure, by herself. She alone manages to bring us more "nutrition of impulse," to use Pound's phrase, than the National Poetry Series and the university presses combined.

The forms of arts and sciences which developed in the nineteenth century proposed several subjective and objective loci: the subjectivity of the heart, the mind, the unconscious, the emotions, the psyche—as the object of psychology's study; the objectivity of nature, society, economy, culture. But nowhere were there *radical* subjects and objects—that is, beyond all possible explanation but knowable as a stream of freshness or renewal. There was neither intimacy nor otherness which was absolute.

Corporate society pitted a false psychology against a false nature, thereby creating a dialectic which never touched the grounds of radical contradiction. Corporate technology is description and reproduction of the existent world; it clones a second little world from the first, and the advantages of the replica are that it is packageable (i.e. marketable) and manipulable. In short, at some point in this century, event was replaced by product.

As is often the case with things which disappear from life, event reemerged as art. In *A Long Gay Book*, Gertrude Stein set out to write "a description of anyone and everything there was to be known about anyone." Telling what is known, however, never gets to tell what is most exciting about life, which is how the unknown manifests itself not out of the known but the unknown. So, she says, "it was necessary to let come what would happen to come because after all knowledge is what you know but what is happening is inevitably what is happening to come."

Consider this passage from Clark Coolidge's *Research*:

> I am baffled at my own lack of impedance
> But I take no stories of the chair
> The man who holds rhyme holds the air
> The river filled with bird life after fish
> How could there be no noise in poetry?
> So to be, but what kind?
> So I must practice coldhearted
> All the time the sorts were on the wall
> The lapping of the tongue between stanzas
> The loaves and the light

What is happening to come happens without this or that moment of the languaging process being allowed to exaggerate itself or to compromise the *event*. Coolidge has important concerns with abstract expressionism and bebop; the parallels should be noted here. It is not pro/duction; it is not forward (*pro*) leading (*ducere*); it is not prose (*prosus*, straightforward); it is verse (*versus*, a turning of the plow). The line is not the producer (as of a movie) of coming attractions. It does not abandon its immediate duration in favor of some theoretical future event, which projects the known into the known. Against boosters, producers, consumers, and forward-looking people, it claims the right of one Born Dead: I am *here*, I am *right* here, time stays with *me*. Though Coolidge sometimes writes in forms which look like prose, they are verse, always.

Jackson Pollock painted much of the time with cheap house paints and hardware store enamels. When asked if he was worried about the impermanence of the medium, he said he was like a Navajo sand painter.

Tuumba has become increasingly associated with a tendency in contemporary poetry which was first identified by a small anthology, edited by Ron Silliman, in *Alchuringa* in 1975. It has published chapbooks by nine of the sixteen poets Silliman identified with terms such as "language centered," "minimal," "non-referential formalism," "diminished referentiality," "structuralist." Clark Coolidge has been a major source for many of these writers, though I suspect in some cases they have managed to further their own work by skillfully mis-reading him. This is, of course, the most positive form of literary use.

It's probably fortunate that no satisfactory name for this tendency appeared. The atmosphere has been so slack that a catchy group name might have provided sufficient cornerstone for a church. The range of names, however—non-referential, minimal, etc.—indicate that *something* is missing. I find also "counter-communicative" and, in a recent symposium in *American Book Review*, "nonsyntactical." The three major fields of linguistic relationship—language to a referent, to other parts of itself, and to an

audience—are all called into question. The rhetoric at times has led me to feel that I was attending a convention of ascetics, everyone laying claim to more profound renunciations than the previous speaker.

Intelligence, however, at least in one of its modes, tends toward asceticism, and it seems to me that intelligence of the more ascetic sort is the prime quality of the Tuumba poets.

The major on-going concerns of the West, to the extent that it is possible to disengage the mind from the riveting gaze of the false face which looks at us from every TV and supermarket, poise between two modes or moments of intelligence which might be called "critical" and "speculative." Critical intelligence—and I am using the term in the spirit of Kant's critiques, not the current pale activity of English Departments—insists upon justifying its means before it uses them. The promise of critical thought, that it will deliver us by its rigor to certainty, tends to choke on itself and never get beyond the methodological debate. Paradoxically, therefore, it is liable to solipsism, subjectivism, authoritarianism, and sterile purity. Speculative intelligence, on the other hand, is willing and eager to follow out relationships even when they are tenuous. It is open, "mystical," anarchistic, and too often fatuously innocent. The most significant forms of the modern West are the bastard off-spring of speculation and criticism: tragicomedy (Shakespeare), parody (Cervantes), and anatomy (Melville). The excitement in such a culture derives from the inevitable play with self-cancellation.

In Barrett Watten's *Complete Thought,* the authority of critical intelligence is commanding. Even though the convention of presentation looks like verse, the language does not turn upon itself, as it does in Coolidge's work. Watten is, as his title declares, interested in sentences and their characteristic linear movement. Sentences, however, are pitted against one another and against themselves, to create stasis and to frustrate production:

> What is a word! The middle voice focuses on the (disastrous) middle distance.
>
> "My body is the car I drive." The *vehicle* inside *you* contains a *person*.
>
> Each population is transplanted, bearing witness to common survivals in speech (on Sundays).
>
> Every testimony pours out all at once, in spite of appearance.

Watten invokes an aesthetic of the order Keats appeals to in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," but here the urn never sweeps the paradox away by speaking for itself.

Carla Harryman dedicates *Property* to Barrett Watten, and there are superficial resemblances in their work. The unit of composition in Watten's work, however, is atomic: the sentences pile up and assert their inexplicable and arbitrary completion. Harryman's forms are composed in larger units, and, although the writing *tends toward* hermetic

closure, it has a strong parodic impulse: "Ducks fly across teasing the edges of clouds with their wings. Reason tells us not to make anything out of these events. Birds fall into the sea. The sea swells, pushing the land under. A seeming eternity, by force. So all that's left is a narrative concealing an error. Contentment is sediment below this image. Passivity has been accomplished through the descriptive process, a mechanism which devours objects, subjecting them to the decay of inner life." This writing subverts itself in rigorous and sometimes frightening ways.

David Bromige's *P-E-A-C-E* and Ted Greenwald's *Smile* are also prose works with strong parodic content. Greenwald's parable lives up to its title: I smiled. Bromige evokes a heartier kind of merriment. The combination of zaniness and intelligence is rare and beautiful.

There is a certain quality which can be heard as verse that is independent of sense, image, reference. It is linguistic charge, "excitement," as they say of atoms bombarded with photons. Charged language *feels good* in the mouth: it awakens the speech-making organs and, by proprioceptive overflow, the mind. This, for example, for Kit Robinson's "In the Orpheum Building":

> "Now I have to re-check his work." What's in
> Back to bowling flower bunches in the slides
> Has hands and bells out over a body of water
> Maybe's both ways, be simpler catching a bucket.

And this from P. Inman's *Ocker*:

> (marmappled)...
> ...(orbit seckle
> tharping foam out of Dred Peems
> on zoids.

The poetic values here are not distantly related to W.C. Williams' early work: the orbit seckle replaces the chicory flower but the song is American speech.

John Mason is—I believe—the youngest poet represented here, and the twenty-some short pieces in *Fade to Prompt* are so diverse as to make generalization difficult. This little poem, however, will give a sense of the attractive quality of the work:

> I am cold, funloving, under a grey face.
> My dog can read.

I cannot quote from Alan Bernheimer's *State Lounge* at sufficient length to demonstrate its interest. The title poem, however, which comprises more than half of the volume, juxtaposes short italicized lines from a travel poem, recording a journey from West to East (including an obligatory mention of Winnemucca) with lines from an anatomy of static facts and images. The interplay between these language spaces develops a peculiar and interesting tension. Its evidence bears directly on the question of the rela-

tionship of prose and verse.

Steve Benson's poems in *The Busses* are likewise impossible to quote satisfactorily. His form divides the page into as many as three simultaneous columns, which at points melt into one another, creating for the reader giddy little moments of uncertainty. It offers a useful take on the fact that the mind moves along more tracks than linear language can possibly record.

Stephen Rodefer's *Plane Debris* is an extraordinary poem. In its twenty-three, fifteen line stanzas, Rodefer is party to more linguistic events than some poets manage in entire careers. I will let this short passage stand for my review of many pages:

> A shale, pale English shore, more sure than France. I expose myself to language. It makes a goal. I am open mouthed. It arrests me. The crowd roars. They long to eat English.

—*Don Byrd*

The Invention of Solitude.
PAUL AUSTER.
Sun. 1982

The title of Paul Auster's slim collection of literary essays from the Seventies can be read as a cipher to decode the meanings of *The Invention of Solitude: The Art of Hunger*. To be more specific: *The Invention of Solitude* is a prose epic of the pangs of *father-hunger*.

The passionate quest for father, or father-image, runs deeply and widely through our literature. Melville could represent a starting point. And in the present: Olson (in *Maximus* indirectly, *The Post Office* blatantly), Fielding Dawson (mistaken guises of the father in *The Black Mountain Book* and *An Emotional Memoir of Franz Kline*). The poetry of Hugh Seidman and Lee Hickman addresses the father-force, the father-void, the various faces of the father archetype.

Auster begins his narrative with the experience of the father-void, the father as absolute other who needs, after the fact of his literal demise, an imaginative resurrection through language:

> Even before his death he had been absent, and long ago the people closest to him had learned to accept this absence, to treat it as the fundamental quality of his being. Now that he was gone, it would not be

> difficult for the world to absorb the fact that he was gone forever.

But the son *does* find acceptance of his father's death difficult:

> If, while he was alive, I kept looking for him, kept trying to find the father who was not there, now that he is dead I still feel as though I must go on looking for him. Death has not changed anything. The only difference is that I have run out of time.

A tremendous turning in that final sentence: the father moves from death to life in artistic imagination while the son moves from life deathwards with art leading the way.

So Auster's imaginative recasting of who his father *might* have been finds its focus in his meditations upon some old family photographs. His tries to animate the still images of the father-stranger, attempts to flesh out the father-ghost with a possible life. And in so doing sparks a psychological process with flames fanning out to encompass his own identity as a man and father. He dedicates *The Invention of Solitude* to his own son. Hence the making of a book is itself a form of fathering, keeping the patriarchal energies forcefully animated.

While I adamantly argue that Auster's book be read as a straightforward account of recovering the unknown (unknowable?) father figure, I would also suggest that it should also be read as a philosophical reverie about using writing as a mode to deal with existential anguish, the absence of the significant other. It is a book about the necessity of writing a book when the pain of daily living suggests no other possible therapy.

In a narrow review of this book in *The New York Times* by W.S. Merwin, Merwin complains about Auster's literary affectations (shifts from first to third person, unexpected chapter demarcations) and attributes such literary ill manners to Auster's immersion in modern French letters. What is revealing in Merwin's criticism is his failure to comprehend how Auster's form is an outgrowth of Auster's longtime concern with the poetics of translation. What is being translated in *The Invention of Solitude* is a ghost-psychology, underworld *eidola* brought into the light of day consciousness and conscious language. To even attempt such a project with any care would necessitate a radical interrogation of the means of writing to accomplish such a task.

Two models for such a task come to mind: Edmond Jabès and Roland Barthes (who uses photographs of his mother as subject matter). Auster obviously feels inspiration from Jabès' example as revealed by his penetrating take on Jabès in *The Art of Hunger.* His evaluation of Barthes is unknown to me. Honor Auster, if you will, for following (not slavishly) the lead of both men in inventing a literary form for which we have no literary category. What is it that these three write? Intellectual memoir? Philosophical confessional? Autobiography as spiritual prose poem? All or none of the above?

One clarity emerges: this is a body of writing centrally engaged with the

philosophical issues surrounding the adequacy of written language to capture the flicking core of Being.

Auster's philosophical arguments are more transparently intimate than those of Jabès (whose father-hunger gets sublimated into a transcendentally textual Judaism) and Barthes (whose mother in her literality gets lost in the discussion of coding). That Auster is so emotionally unsparing with himself while playing the philosopher of the written word is very much to his credit. I plan to give this book to all kinds of people who couldn't care less about Derrida or the reaches of French Structuralism.

The cry for father, for the literal as well as archetypal father, is a deeply human need that little of our literature addresses without terrible sentimentality. Auster doesn't speak of himself in the third person in this narrative to be cutely avant-garde as the *Times* critic would bluster. He does so to maintain an optimal distance from his father's ghost. Language is that thin membrane that keeps dead parent from still living child.

Auster's language is exquisitely cadenced. He strikes me as the most singular prose stylist (as well as translator) of my generation. There's an "artless" surface to this account. A more probing examination reveals a finely polished prose that has been well-wrought. This prose is no more "casual" than that of Kafka's *Letter to His Father.*

While Kafka's book smacks of a terrible PLEADING, a fruitless polemic with a non-responding father, Auster's narrative suggests the tone of a merciless interrogation with a ghost. Not to hear any "answers"—rather to make contact simply with one's ghostly origins. Rumor has it that Shakespeare only played one role publicly: that of the ghost of Hamlet's father. A cycle in the male psyche needs to be completed. If I did not know my father in life, in death shall he be revealed, in my own journey deathward.

—*Norman Weinstein*

Vision.
DAVID MARR.
W. H. Freeman, 1982.

Perhaps the most far-reaching study of the neurobiological system of human perception is David Marr's *Vision.* Marr, who died a few years ago in his mid-thirties, was associated with MIT and this book – worth looking at if only for the profuse and remarkable illustrations – is his testament to how human vision can be understood. As he remarks in the book, flight would never have been understood only by studying – no matter how microscopically – the structure of a bird's wing; a theory of aerodynamics was necessary. Similary, vision will never be understood by studying rods and cones and sense-

data receivers; a theory of information processing is required.

Marr argues that three-dimensional object-centered adult vision is a "construction of descriptions"; that is, a model resulting from an extremely complex multi-level information processing system. The initial stages produce representations derived from groupings of retinocentric input. First, there is a 2-D "primal sketch" of image intensities and geometric organization. Next, transformed from the 2-D sketch, comes a "2½-D sketch" of the geometry of the visible surfaces within a viewer-centered frame. "The final step consists of transforming the viewer-centered surface description into a representation of the three-dimensional space and spatial arrangement of an object that does not depend upon the direction from which the object is viewed. This final description is object-centered rather than viewer centered." In Marr's analysis, the "main job" of sight is to tell about "shape and space and spatial arrangement, . . . to derive a representation of space" – even in certain cases (say, optical illusions) when "there is not direct visual evidence". Insofar as this is true, an object-centered bias appears to be built into adult visual processing systems that create, maintain, and *read* representations. Marr goes on to suggest that the 3-D model of sight, which is, after all, developed within a social context, may be usefully conceptualized as a *semantic* process. "The perception of an event or of an object must include the simultaneous computation of several different descriptions of it that capture diverse aspects of the use, purpose, or circumstance of the event or object."

—*Charles Bernstein*

Four Lectures.
STEPHEN RODEFER.
The Figures. 1982.

It is always a pleasure to see a writer grow, in Stephen Rodefer's case from Creeley imitations in *The Knife* (1965) and O'Hara appreciations in *The Bell Clerk's Tears Keep Flowing* (1978), right up to today's most dynamic rufflings of reality. He is an excellent embodiment of the current surge in language experiments. His are not as mechanistic and theory-bound as some, but neither is *Four Lectures* predictable backwater or academic watering-hole confessions of how it feels to be growing up or older.

The volume is a textbook of design. The neatly fashioned contents page suggests all: headings and page numbers arranged convexo-convex in bowed-out columns to make a circle. The poems are a cycle, the reading is circular, thus repeated endlessly. The fron-

tispiece photo of houses – Mondrian hives, heaped shoeboxes on a California hillside – are the geometries to come, the arbitrarily adopted fifteen-line blocks of writing. The carefully placed *"Pretext"* before the "lectures" proper, equalling the pun of its own designation with lines such as: "I may work in a factory but I slide to the music of the spheres. / My job is quality control in the language lab, explaining what went / Wrong in Northampton after the Great Awakening." It is the deadpan elegance, the simultaneities practiced by Rodefer that shimmer us along.

There are assembly-plant photos (DeLorean automobiles?) introducing each of the four sections, all labor-intensive; the rigorous fifteen-line stanzas themselves, very busy with reality; a "codex" for a coda; a carefully mocked index of capitalized words that occur randomly throughout the text (the magazine L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E entered as "G,L=A=N=," "G,L=A=N=G=U=A=," "U,L=A=N=G=," etc.). Finally, the semiserious back cover blurbs, with Creeley saying, "*Very* SOLID. GREAT and *useful* satiric ploy with bedrock concerns," and Jeremy Prynne reporting, "terrific, in the top Heliogabalus class. Sweat ran out of my ears and still does, a sheer delirium." Taken all together, the book is evidence of a heightened consciousness and great strategic powers.

Not least, is an important Preface, which reads as a bluff behind which serious intention is smuggled. Toned down from being a pronunciamento or plyabill for a new art form, the author nevertheless calls the poetry that follows "painted poetry" (the same way and for the same reasons Frank O'Hara invented "Personism"). One finds the same teetering of tone as the poems, the artful balance between mordancy – teeth smiling as they bite – and knowing good cheer. "Today we have painted cities, painted conveyances, painted apartments, painted roads, painted people, even painted food. Is it not time for painted poetry as well?" Flawless! (Rodefer will go on to carefully remove any particular claim to uniqueness for the concept, pointing out it has been around since Blake and is "probably as ancient as the absence of machines.") The alternating seriousness, however, follows immediately in an accurate summarization of the poetry to come: "A poetry painted with every jarring color and juxtaposition, every simultaneous order and disorder, every deliberate working, every movement toward one thing deformed into another. Painted with every erosion and scraping away, every blurring, every showing through, every wiping out and every replacement, with every dismemberment of the figure and assault on creation, every menace and response, every transformation of the color and reforming of the parts, necessary to express the world." It is as serious and relevant an introduction as Robert Duncan's to *Bending the Bow.*

Accepting the implications of the title, the "lectures" are instructional, formal, and delivered with an audience in mind; not noodling. I like the stiffness of the title, because it is true we might learn something. What else is poetry for if it doesn't provide us with new ways of thinking? The lectures instruct us how to talk-think and how to have entertaining thoughts. There is a social issue to the poems, a comedy of manners:

You walk into a Soho gallery and you might see a pile of butter neatly
sculpted in the corner.
Three days later you go back and it has been spread around the gallery
with a scythe.
If it's not your house, it's your subway. Ghoul candies by Rodney Ripps.
Radon daughter. The woman checking out her hickey in the reflection
of Cartier's window.

Nothing is at rest in them. Not chaos but, as one of Rodefer's early teachers said, unselectedness is man's condition. There is a great sense of freedom. Images float equal in a dense-packed world. Anti-metaphoric speech or spoken thought with a little skew to the mind makes the surface of the writing opaque. The remarkable thing is not feeling exhausted after several pages. Private reference is shared equally with public fact or feat. One wants to laugh all the time, but it's the world around us. Only initially, superficially, does it seem like the association of ideas; instead, symbolism is subordinated to the logic of the sentence. That is, it is pure poetry, non-referential despite the proliferation of current references, non-descriptive but certainly not nondescript, less free association than random access memory. Rodefer's sequence takes us beyond the valley of the Freuds and into new territories of pattern and process. *Not* surrealism (or only a little bit, almost for history's sake):

O claquepatin, O mantra, O pie alamode, are you who they call Poochie?
Mayakovsky mistook the EAST RIVER for the Hudson and missed
meeting Lorca
in New York, the black dog trotting down the street holding an eraser
in its mouth

– and not a *Biotherm.* Other passages bear a logic and are apothegmatic almost despite themselves: "Economics is a description of the point at which a society finds itself / between birth and destruction."

The result is a relentless critique of social attitudes and literary determinism. Relentless? Despite the steady succession of discontinuous sentences, it doesn't feel that way; certainly not exhausting. Variety comes in sentence length, interrogatives, speech inflections, snaps of pun, and the ever-shifting topics, public and private, social and artistic. His frame of reference is as wide as any poet now writing. Every reader will find embedded pleasantires, whether "I am exactly as old as you ART" or the appearance of Pound's "waterbugs' mittens." Laconic wit, such as "I think I'll just call in tired today

and not make the scene at the tryouts / for a bird in flight," is followed by smart jabs against complacency. We expect no different from the great-great-grandson of Onward Rodefer.

But it is only one of the several purposes of *Four Lectures* to be cultural or social criticism, even if there's not much room to be anything else, today ("Our era promises to make the late Roman look small time, if not benign"). The book offers a systematic dialysis of meaning and a simultaneous study of the nature of language. In terms of poetics, Rodefer needles more than obeys conventional practices. He writes from *within* a condition of language, proving that language is malleable, hammered by interior energies, its tonality ringing in our ears. The sentence is his measure. He thinks in sentence lengths, not in images (not ideographically), not in syllables and lines (not projectively), not in stanzas as such, like traditional formalism, not the variable foot, the tone leading of vowels, the Hebraic-Melvillean bardic reath, that others have done so well with. He breaks the tyranny of the line. Meaning, not music, is his measure. Syncopation is in meaning not syntax. His lectures are sentence by sentence developments, in which each sentence is a completed narrative, not thought. "A grown man, he opened the can of Chicken Of The Sea and tucked a pinch / of TUNA in his cheek." "Information rafts through the air. An at bat. Soapy NUTS." Added together they equal more of the same, not a new sum; the ultimate paratactic frieze. The lesson seems to be that part of speech may be interchangeable, but the world is not.

Unlike Ashbery's discursiveness, Rodefer's statements are discretely assertive. "Deaf is lisp for death." "In love remove your antlers." "People in bed with thmselves do not really sleep with each other, / they're just Buddhists in love." Exemplary sentences; they appear, in their variety, like sample sentences in a grammar and usage drill book. They are engaged in what Charles Bernstein has called a "dialogue" with paradigmatic reality. It is an unpredictable flow of language, language as event rather than descriptive or a purported reality. It seeks to avoid describing and thereby depleting itself, so that even a single pun may be too conclusive. Thus, Rodefer displays endlessly. Language is multiplicity—plastic and plasmatic, omnidirecitonal, deviant and defiant. Anything might happen, and usually does.

The challenge is to sustain a level of inventiveness. "The trilobites pile into their cars. Others run until their toes leave / their bodies." Occasionally, some statements seem to ring truer or further than others: "I inhabit the language / the world heaps upon me." This might be seized upon as poetics. But it would be wrong to hunt those statements out and wave them. It's not that they gain by context or accumulation, or shrink in the light of isolation, but they really have no other nature, no other duty than how they are delivered in the series. The attractiveness is that if any one or several of the lines leave the reader dead or excluded, there will always be the next one to shower with reward. It's the abundance that I like, the plenitude—essentially an optimistic view of the world. No dry honing of masks of self, no boring into pulp, no verse so thin you can see through

it or when turned for a closer look vanishes altogether.

Predecessors? Hart Crane, surprisingly at first (and remember, if Crane had had sufficiently satiric mode of mind, he might have lived to have lunch with Frank O'Hara). Ashbery, most obviously, and perhaps most deniably. But more valuable is to read Rodefer in the context of his time and place and other writers published by The Figures, such as Rae Armantrout, Steve Benson, Clark Coolidge, Michael Davidson, Barbara Einzig, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman, Tom Raworth, Kit Robinson, Ron Silliman, Geoff Young. And still others, such as Carla Harryman and Barry Watten.

One of the irreducibles of human nature and the reading public is the boredom factor. Too many otherwise gift-bering experimenters ignore it and consequently lose the gamble with our interest. What distinguishes Rodefer is the sustained quality of his wit. There can be no learning without laughing. Others are as clever, but it is his maintained virtuosity within the strictures of his forms that helps him succeed. I prefer the punch of his sentences to many of the amorphous organicisms of other contemporaries, who release themselves down a page. The fifteen-line stanzas are an excellent frame, roomy yet one which cuts short monotony. No vignettes are allowed to develop, no specific leitmotifs, but aslo no confessions, no falling to the knees. Instead, a certain discipline, a maintaining: "I wear CUFFLINKS because I am an ecology freak. I may be perverted, / but I'm not insatiable. You mean you like women with toothpicks too?" A high order of giddiness, redemptive and elegantly sportive. "A large flower in a woman's hair is a comparison," like so much else in these passages, is poetically true and linguistically provocative. "All this was but a comisado," Rodefer writes, approaching his conclusion, a surprise attach by night—an archaic word, freshened for use. He continues, "Put up your dukes," recognizing the challenge, then remindss us, "Love is not a gift, but an achievement"— meaning these poems as well.

All of this had been foretold by his Villon translation with its extraordinary footnotes, which fortunately is now back in print (Pick Pocket Editions, distributed by Small Press Distribution in Berkeley), and by his workings from the Greek Anthology published in abbreviated form as *Safety* (1977). As an example of the speed-up of human life and what effect it might have on its artists, here is a poet who has experienced three (or more) revolutions in poetic consciousness, who conversed as a young man with Robert Frost (at Amherst), studied under Olson and Creeley (at Buffalo), and now lives among the very lively young poets of the Bay Area. From horse to teleportation in one lifetime.

— *George F. Butterick*

For The Record: Three Rastafarian Poets

Dread Beat An' Blood.
LINTON KWESI JOHNSON.
Heartbeat Records. 1981.

Mi Cyaan Believe It.
MICHAEL SMITH.
LKJ Records. 1981.

Wat A Situashan.
OKU ONUORA.
Kuyu Records. 1980.

Rastafarianism is a wildly visionary religion with an obsessive belief in the potency of the word. The faith finds its scriptural basis in Biblical texts and in the public pronouncements of American Black Power prophet Marcus Garvey and Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. The biblical material provides a vision of a chosen people's humbling odyssey toward reclaiming a sacred homeland. Garvey's words locate "Africa" as that home base for Blacks. And Selassie (whose original name was "Ras Tafari") gave Rastafarianism a real live political leader to elevate into a Moses leading his spiritual children back to their homeland.

Who are Ras Tafari's spiritual children? Third-World poor, exemplified by the residents of Jamaica's Trenchtown. Squarely in the teeth of their nearly unbearable squalor arrives a message of RELEASE. A hope for a massive immigration, from the urban ruins of the Caribbean to the glories of a Black-ruled Africa, is constantly rekindled among the true believers. The uplifting dream is as old as Colonialism itself.

And what a difficult dream to sustain—given Jamaica's history. So this eschatological vision is sustained by the regular use of marijuana among the faithful. The drug is seen as a *natural* gift from Adam's original garden in Eden. A manna to maintain a communal binding. Part and parcel of a ritual to shield the noble exile's hope from the encroachments of an oppressive social order.

A longing for an end to exile—a vision of self-determination in a preordained holy land—the herb as sacrament—these are the keys to Rastafarianism. And belief in the power of the word to alter The Social Lie.

Rastafarianism would have remained an obscure and esoteric cult if it had not been for the work of numerous reggae musicians and poets over the last decade and a half. Rasta-

farian stars like Bob Marley and Peter Tosh have, through their music, spread Rastafarianism far beyond Jamaica's borders.

But those popular musical performers don't engage me as deeply as the far more obscure Rastafarian poets who perform their work within the context of reggae musical settings. The three poets considered in this review are, simultaneously, serious poets as well as popular entertainers.

Linton Kwesi Johnson is a Jamaican who has resided in England for a number of years. His family and educational background are not unlike that of the American poet he most resembles in rhetoric and delivery: LeRoi Jones. On *Dread Beat An' Blood* he reads several poems (from the book of the same name) against a polished reggae setting of electric guitars and drums. His poems are read in a gruffly urgent monotone. His poems are *saturated* with scenes of ghetto violence. These lines from "Five Nights of Bleeding—For Leroy Harris" (Johnson often dedicates his poems to friends who are serving time as political prisoners) are representative:

> The rhythm jus' bubbling an' back-firing
> Raging and rising, then suddenly the music cut
> Steel blade drinking blood in darkness
> It's war among the rebels. . .

Johnson's language—British Jamaican patois—is full of surprising shifts. Within a single poem multiple selves meet and clash. The British intellectual meets the Rasta warrior. The poet encounters the jivey D.J. The complex levels of Johnson's poetic language are brought into play by his exceptionally lambent and flexible reading style. Not wholly speech, not wholly song. In that twilight realm where the word begins to take wings and lyrically ascend. Those American poets who have recorded with jazz or folk combos (Rexroth, Patchen, Meltzer) seem stiff and positively *square* next to Johnson. They lack his vocal heft and funk.

Michael Smith is a young Jamaican poet who continues to make the island his home. His poems reflect a pure Jamaican dialect. His poems are less surreal litanies of urban ghetto violence than dramatic settings for Rastafarian voices. His *Mi Cyaan Believe It* splices a spectrum of Jamaican voices together in a heavily ironic (yet sardonically amusing) fashion:

> Doris a moder a four
> get a wuk as a domestic
> boss man move in
> *an baps si sicai she pregnant again. . .*
> an mi caan believe it.

Smith's approach toward reading is polar to Johnson's. He stretches syllables, moans, yelps,

coos and bays to a sparse musical setting of an African drum beat. Very haunting.

Oku Onuora is a Jamaican contemporary of Michael Smith's who reads his politically engaged poetry with a musical lilt. His *Wat A Situashan* features a synthesizer sounding a simple riff over and over while Oku recites:

> Man! —What a situashan
> You think a just national—
> This yah one a international
> Me know dem plan.
> Stock piling nuclear weapons. . .

The effect is similar to that achieved by the American performance artist turned pop star, Laurie Anderson.

Books by these Rastafarian poets are even more difficult to obtain in the States than their records. And the records demand diligent search. The releases considered in this review were supplied by Sinbad Inc, a reggae music and literature supplier. Their free catalog can be obtained by writing Sinbad, POB 701, Athens, Ohio 45701.

— *Norman Weinstein*

My Life
LYN HEJINIAN
Burning Deck Press. 1980

Perhaps the amazing vitality of American poetry (the new American poetry) in the 20th century hs something to do with the fact that all of the innovative writers, from Pound through Williams, through Olson, O'Hara and Ginsberg, have refused to bow down to the European poetry of the past, though they have all struggled to create a legitimate new style which acknowledges rather than imitates the past. Williams' struggles to find a new measure, so well documented in Mariani's thorough biography, and recently presented in the notes of unpublished lecture materials which he edited for *Sulfur* (issue #4), testify to an exemplum of this search. When Williams painfully notes about Auden, so much more popular to poetry audiences than he was, that "Auden had 'won' because he had given these people something they were already accustomed to: new poems written in the old modes, the old accustomed excellences," (Mariani on Williams, *Sulfur, #4*, p. 6) he is also noting his own refusal to use European and classical materials rather than American ones.

This struggle continues in many serious writers today. It creates for me many confusions, both critical and poetic. One finds it easy to turn away from Eliot, in spite of his beautiful language, to Williams. But the matter of Pound and *his* constant turning away from American idiom, history, and myth while still in some way embodying more than anyone the defiant American spirit, is much more perplexing and difficult to sort out. Perhaps the matter is only somewhat clarified through Olson and *The Maximus Poems* which attempt something very similar to *The Cantos* but lean less heavily on Homer and turn the arena to American geography and the focus to American documents and politics.

One begins to see two struggles emerging, however. The first concerning content, the second, style or form. My own preferences in the matter take Creeley's dictum, "form is an extension of content," to resolve the matter, thus finding in *Paterson* the consummate resolution for a great poet of the search for a new measure through materials that are totally personal and thus American. Surely, part of the struggle for Williams in writing *Paterson* was to determine what material, what content belonged to the poem and would help create its new form. The local histories, the newspaper articles, the documents of geography and American lore were required to anchor the personal documents and statements and to complete the Dionysian search for self through the Hell of anti-self.

The truly experimental, important American writers, from Whitman on, have known that autobiography *had* to be part of their work, had to be the core of the content out of which form might emerge and be newly embraced. Auden came to this country looking for the freedom which would make the use of personal, autobiographical material more possible. Eliot exiled himself so that he would never have to face it totally. Stevens, for all his magnificence, simply ignored the command and found his own oblique forms. Such a wide range of possibilities has been created in the past 50 years that there is a strong argument for our living in a Golden Age of Poetry, here in America; but the search does not seem any clearer, critically, than it was when Williams was facing the chagrin of Auden's success pitted against his own failures.

In Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*, a prose composition, an experimental autobiography, organized in short segments, as if they are the stanzas of a poem, there are a number of experiments being carried on. First of all, there is the serial use of the titles to each section, which recur (so far as I can tell) in random fashion throughout the book, but with great enough frequency that one begins to look for a numerical or metrical pattern, and this search itself constitutes a kind of awareness of form, for the reader. Secondly, the work is composed in sentence units, which remain intact throughout the work, but are used non-sequentially, and therefore create the effect of a composition which has a quantitative organization, orchestrated for performance; this is quite similar to the method and effect of many of John Cage's lectures. Thirdly, the work seems to proceed from the opposite of Creely's dictum, that is, that content is an extension of form, which creates the anti-sentimental effect of many choice personal statements given without the reader having

an emotional response to them. Finally, the work experiments with the traditional figurative and conceptual language of poetry (i.e. image, symbol, metaphor) while contradicting their effect by not allowing them to build either story or image. The narrative content of *My Life* is there, just as there is implied narrative in a Merce Cunningham dance composition. But, as with Cunningham's dances, the purpose is to divorce the viewer, reader, listener from this content, even from the implication of such content, so that he will perceive form as purely as possible.

Needless to say, this shifts every expectation of the reader, viewer. It makes an art that is hard to like but easy to admire. It makes an art that is frequently misunderstood, and even more frequently judged by the wrong standards. It is impossible to go to a Merce Cunningham dance concert and not occasionally feel fussy and bitchy. Why isn't there *ever* any music, any melody, any representative movement? The strain of looking and listening to pure form for several hours is enormous, even while exhilarating and challenging. The question is far beyond that of boredom; it has evolved to the resolution of tensions created by constantly expecting that formality to break, just for a moment, and show those old sentimental human traits—story telling, image making, the revelation of self.

It is hard for me, as a reader, even with the highest intentions and the greatest admiration for Hejinian's purity, her brilliance and her virtuoso performance not to long for more melody, story, autobiography in the work. Yet, she is unflinching in her formal resolutions, brave in her refusal to let *My Life* ever become a mere "autobiography." Her insights are dazzling:

> When what happens is not intentional, one can't ascribe meaning to it,
> and unless what happens is necessary, one can't expect it to occur again.
> (pp. 16-17)
>
> You are so generous, they told me, allowing everything in its place,
> but what we wanted to hear was a story.
> (p. 35)
>
> What memory is not a "gripping" thought.
> (this is one of the title and theme lines, which recurs)
> (pp. 33, 44, 53, 81)
>
> Continuity, not so much of ideas as of assumptions, or attitudes, a style
> one simply can't break away from.
> (p. 26)
>
> If it were writing we would have to explain.
> (p. 28)
>
> It isn't a small world, but there are many ways of dividing it
> into small parts.
> (p. 59)
>
> It seemed that we had hardly begun and we were already there,
> watching people for an instant framed in windows, never finding out

what happens to them, or what they mean.

(p. 77)

Any work dealing with questions of possibility must lead to new work.

(p. 46)

And of course what I have just quoted is some of the structural and emotional rationale for Hejinian's composition, as well as a penetrating insight into how we experience the world as opposed to how we wish to experience the world.

In thinking about *My Life*, I often came to the conclusion that this book would be wonderfully suitable for one of those if-you-could-only-take-three-books-with-you-to-a-desert-island contests, for in searching for such books—surely the dictionary would be one of them—one would look for something he would not tire of, after many readings, for one which would give him wisdom and accomplishment on many different levels, one which would not tell the same old story, show the same old face, each time read. Precisely the many aspects of *My Life* which would make a short-term reader turn it aside for something more entertaining, for something with richer surface emotions, for more "content," would give the book an enormous power and delight in our lonely desert island reading. Still, most of us do not live on desert islands. And our reading need not be reduced to such austere books. Hejinian's experiment with a work whose content is an extension of form, and whose form is so pure, will leave many serious readers, along with the bad readers, longing for something which she has deliberately not allowed to be there.

To my taste, the explorations which come out of the opposite idea, "form is an extension of content" (the many voices of *Paterson*, the lyrically autobiographical anguish in portions of *The Maximus Poems* and *Paterson*, the "sentimental" emotional journeys of Ginsberg) are more American, thus preferable to the formalist, European tradition so brilliantly experimented with by Hejinian. This preference will always turn me away from Ashbery to Bukowski, from Eliot to Williams, from Ammons to Levertov. I would not be an honest reader if I did not admit as much.

—*Diane Wakoski*

MINE: the one that enters the stories
CLARK COOLIDGE
Berkeley: The Figures. 1982

Several years ago during an all-night session, Clark said to me, "What people don't

understand is that I'm interested in building a syntax, not destroying one." Regarding the history of the work in this light reveals an extraordinary consistency of focus. The earliest morphemic topologies (*Ing, Space*) function as elemental testings of an alternative perceptual order. Attention is drawn in two directions, outward toward the spatial junctures and margins, and inward toward the smallest units of meaning, prefixes, inflectional forms, etc... Words are isolated, fragmented, partially erased. Some pages read as the remains of a lost text, others as tentative disruptions of an underlying silence. All call for a determinedly participatory reading to yield their levels of referential signification. As an example, the opening poem of *Ing*:

these
ing
those

one

(It should be noted that this covers an entire page, the literal field of the event.)

At first the text confronts you with a perfect opacity – no "speaker," no "tone," no "story". It announces absolutely to true believers in Robert's (Penn Warren's) Rules of Order that they've just come through the wrong door. For those willing to continue reading, however, a number of interesting relational threads will make themselves evident. Near the top of the page we find a cluster of three units, the two alliterative ones either separated or conjoined by a partial sign, a terminal verbal inflection. Combinatorial events begin to suggest themselves: these mean-ing those? these lov-ing those? these wanting those? these leav-ing those? (etc.) As printed, at some point we notice that the "o-n-e" has also been implanted (reading upward) in the unit of three. Is this a matter of chance or intention? Are we facing a text which suddenly appears considerably less arbitrary? What is being said of the relationship between the isolate "one" and the clustered three? Why the vast space between? What is its prosodic and semantic function? Is this almost silent page actually charged with a variety of potential or inchoate meanings? The "ing" becomes a site of speculation, like a Sapphic remnant surrounded by its missing words. In a sense we are brought face to face with words and their constituent parts *as such* and are forced to ask basic questions about discourse, temporal and spatial organization, narrative frames. As in Webern we are offered the opportunity to reconsider the means of composition and the role of juncture, duration, theme, number. Throughout as well, there is humor and an evident delight in the improvisatory aspect of the work. (Wherever the referential aspect of the sign is brought into question, anxiety may result, but also laughter at the incongruities – *vide* Magritte, Stein, Beckett, Keaton, Tzara, Herriman's Krazy Kat.)

With *Mine*, a decade and a half later, the space has filled itself in. A sufficiently flexible instrument has been designed to meet broader demands of statement and ex-

pression. It is an ideal place to begin to read Coolidge, or to read him anew, given its range of concerns and wealth of materials. All the recurrent themes are present, and the working itself remains a central source of wonder. As with *Own Face* (1978), the paradox of identity and the "personal" is foregrounded: how do the immediate "surrounds" transform themselves into a voice that is at once "mine" and "not-mine"? What is an immediate environment? To chart this, Coolidge focuses both on the objects in his study—of study—and the various concerns that also inform one's working. Echoes of Coolidge's personal sources, Kafka, Kerouac, Proust, Beckett, et al, appear here much closer to the surface than in most of his other work. There are the materials—the cat, the dust, the typewriter, toilet, heating ducts. And there are the various hints and quotes from Creeley, O'Hara, Melville, Stevens. These "quotes" often appear and disappear suddenly, as in a Dexter Gordon or Charlie Parker solo. They do in fact seem to function more "musically" than "literarily," as a layering of the harmonic structure. There are also tantalizingly "straightforward" interjections:

> How much I do owe to one Philip Whalen Esq. of Oregon,
> Kyoto and San Francisco.

Often however, the most apparently direct voice represents another level of projection or parody:

> I must tell you that in its entirety I cannot fill in the
> landscape of my own background. Great gulfs exist that I can
> plumb exactly with resonant pendula but cannot describe. Even
> the letters comprising my name seem to me divided by such gaps,
> each one at variance with the rest in its extent. Too, each
> letter is sounded differently, as if by different instruments,
> making up a klangfarbenmelodie. Each one of my works attempts
> to reproduce this nominal effect, but seen in such a glaring light
> they all must be taken as failures. Perhaps at the last I
> myself will more perfectly come to resemble my name.

This both is and is not CC speaking—the voice is slightly off, deliberately stylised in fond parody of modernist first-person narrative fiction. It is closer to a mapping operation than to the confessional-expressionist mode.

Mine can be read as an extension of Coolidge's most persistent metaphor, the geological. Language, he would seem to be saying, is layered with its own history, imbedded with chance events. Its texture is now crystalline, refractive, now conglomerate, now granitic. All writing is simultaneously a reading of this information, a continual process of descent and resurfacing, fraught with immediate and necessary risks.

—*Michael Palmer*

Sir:

I am writing to offer my thought on a few blurry patches in the generally clear commentary on my work contained in the composite review by Jed Rasula, published in your issue number 7. Your reviewer excels in his orientating of his judgement of my work to the acquaintance with it he has established. But there is some color of women's-studies in the clarity, and some shadows thrown upon this clarity by a discipline of plain literature-studies sophistication to redress any special-studies imbalance of emphasis. The courage to look at my work itself squarely—the resultant clarity of vision—is overtaken by professional critical discretion Stereotype references, phraseology, animadversions, figure though very limitedly, in the review, as supportive of the reviewer's integrity of judgement: no literarily erratic partiality, here.

The point about resentment of my poetic work as "over-cerebral" is well-made. (The editor of an English anthology of some time ago justified his exclusion of it, to a complainant, on that ground—condemning it as "too cerebral.") But your reviewer indulges this morbid literarily conventional attitude to thought as a natural element of poetic speaking in his characterization of me as "a relentless and aggressive intellect." Such adjectives—apart from the menace attaching to the name "intellect" for "working mind"—have been part of a build-up of myself as a fierce, unpleasant character, overbearing, destructive. They are untrue of me as an "intellect" and "character" both. My thought does not operate under a load of aggressive motivation and indifference to injuring effect. This is shoddy terminology in the midst of a generally honorable exposition of sympathy with the course of my thought and work. Then, there is an ugly display by the reviewer of peacemaking with an ordinary disposition of literary unfairness to my poetic work in offered acknowledgement of provocation in it to a certain resentment against some of my procedures. No identifying substantiation is provided for this dig of generous spirit towards detractors of it on the part of a defender of it. The spirit immediately swells itself into a characterization of some of my poems (no indication as to which, and where) so nastily contemptuous as to suggest a feminist show of capability of matching or bettering what the reviewer has called "male indignance" towards me. And this ecstasy of demonstration of powers of ordinary literature-studies judgement-poise takes the reviewer reeling into a sentence of denunciation of my preface to a 1930 book of poems of mine as the work of an imbecile, brain-touched with echo-impressions of Winnie the Pooh light-reading wit and of Heidegger and Gertrude Stein brought into lugubriously senseless nightmare conjunction. A certain utterance of the preface goads the reviewer to join Rilke to Heidegger as collaborative prompter of the aberrations of the preface. The preface was not the

work of an empty - head flooded with scraps of chaotically assimilated literary and ontological sophistication in contemporary currency. It was a greeting upon my return from almost-death to life *and* poetry. I believe that anyone of unqualifiedly serious concern with my thought, my writing, poetic and other, would have consigned understanding and judgement of that preface to a labor of learning before letting fly such self-confident literary-man condescension-ese in the midst of so much independent-spirited writing on me.

The shadow of a sense of necessities of mingling literary-studies orientations with basic direct orientation to my thought and writings plays tricks with the aim of basic identification of my work's concerns and directions. Heidegger and Rilke and I are no more affiliated literarily or ontologically than are Wallace Stevens and I "twins." It is to no point of comprehension of my thought whether or not I now know or "ever knew" of Heidegger's writing. His squeezing poetry into his Germanic-thoroughness efforts to isolate human identity, and to formulate a linguistic anatomy of thought, are all an externalistic enterprise on the outside of the reality of sentient existence—and the reality of thought, and of language, and of human identity. Neither has Rilke connection with my poetic position of general thought-positions. His ultimate transcendance-point of angelicism lies in a private realm of his masculinist own, as does the Stevens' sublime.

Finally, to comment on your reviewer's attributing to me an unwillingness to indicate by way of example what the "proper use" of the poetic faculty is. I did write on the "poetic faculties" in the preface to my *Collected Poems* of 1938. But in the 1980 preface and elsewhere in that edition, I make it clear (as elsewhere) that these faculties are a version of linguistic faculties committed to kinds of linguistic use intended to surmount obstructions to perfect propriety of utterance in the constraints of ordinary speaking urgency. I believe that my friends give me credit for at least not leaving poetry to flounder in unfulfillment—a relentless abandoner of it—and preoccupying myself in moralistic aggressiveness with "right" linguistic use exclusively. I think they, all variously, have reservations in their ideas as to just what I am up to (and was up to), according to special orientations of their own. I do my best to enable all who care to be clear about me to be as clear as I can help them to be, but I forgive much of what I recognize as exhaustion of the immediate circumstantial possibilities of understanding and sympathy. I forgive your reviewer for what I have identified here as a strategy of mingling some critical unfriendliness with the friendliness. My thanks with good humor, for everything stout-hearted in the review; I have found a good deal.

Respectfully, I am
Laura (Riding) Jackson

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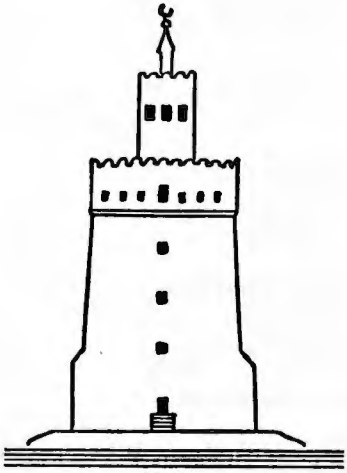

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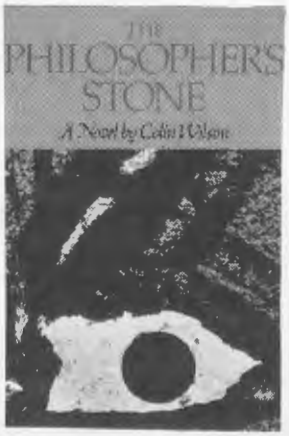

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POSTHUMES

Poems by *Bradford Morrow*

Metaphysically witty, anecdotal, suavely phrased, these poems come from a sophisticated and poetic sensibility. In an age when a large amount of the poetry that's published is a first draft ripped from the typewriter, unproofed by either the grammatical eye or the thinking heart, it's necessary to say that Bradford Morrow's poems are meticulously worked, cunningly made, and burnished to a high polish. They have integrity and wholeness.

—GUY DAVENPORT

I welcome, open armed, Posthumes *which has brought me again to Horace, patron, surely, of Morrow's tough, intelligent line. That the poems are each so finely rendered gives them a power of tremendous address. Artifacts, not fragments. Bright they are with nimble grammar. Their sensuality unwatered, complete. Yet this is a work of high civility—I love the book, the poems, their style, all of which stick up for a, these days, much ignored, bull-dozed article of poetry: they are answerable. Their poet honors what he rimes.*

—THOMAS MEYER

I am charmed by Posthumes. *What grace and what a handsome production.*

—MICHAEL MCCLURE

Bradford Morrow's is a highly individual voice in poetry, both meticulous and eccentric. These poems are meant to be read, not intuited; and, although like all good modern writing this too could be called 'difficult,' it is accessible and yields considerable treasure to the seeker.

—COLEMAN DOWELL

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—GUSTAF SOBIN

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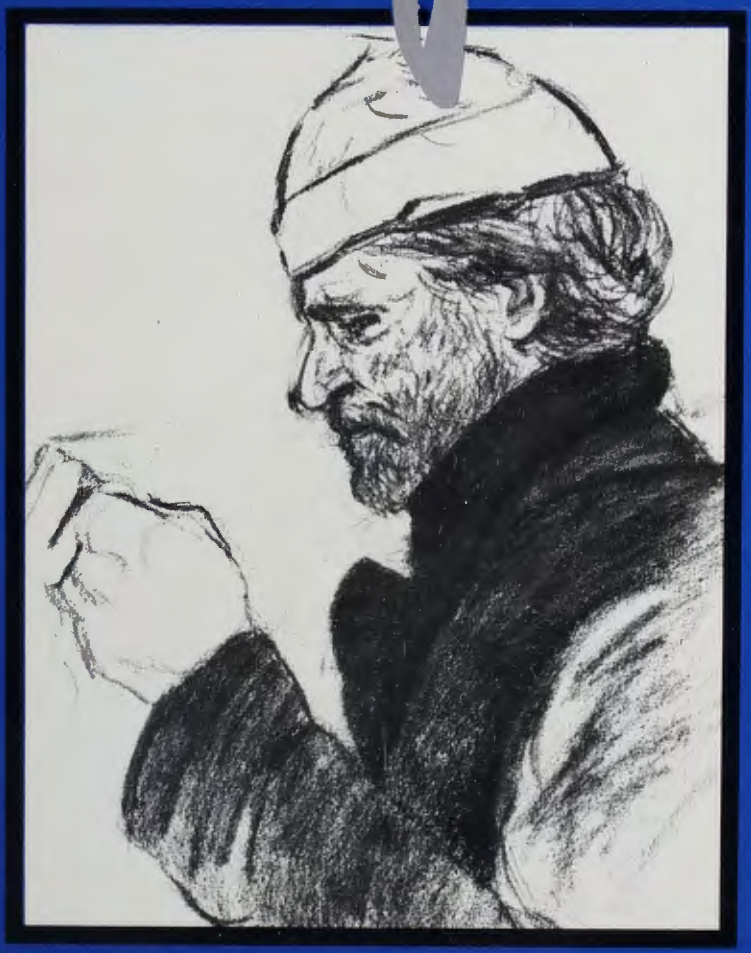

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Sulfur

A Literary Tri-Quarterly of the Whole Art

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Selections from *Suppots et Suppliciations:* © Editions Gallimard 1978.

CORRECTION

The title of Octavio Paz' essay on Han Yu in *Sulfur 8* was mistranslated. It should be "The Wooden Hermit." My apologies: I caught the mistake after *Sulfur* had gone to press.

Even Kilmer nodded . . . ELIOT WEINBERGER

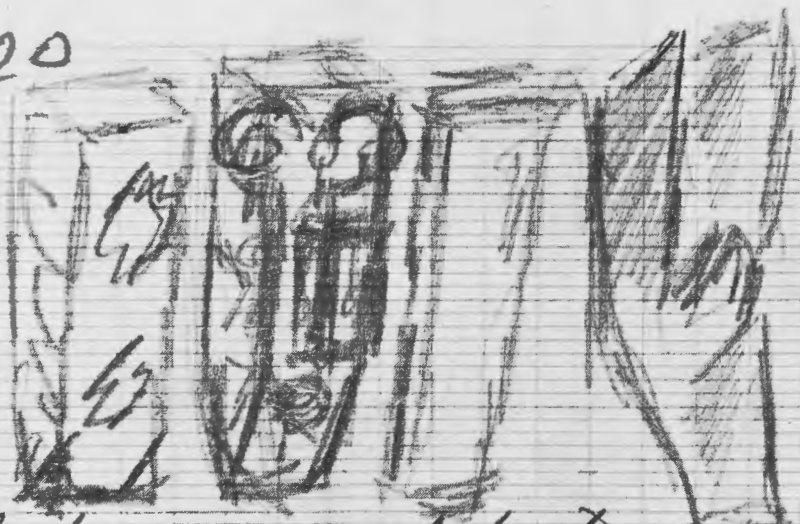
Photos: Jacqueline Hyde, Paris

A Note on the Reproductions from Artaud's Notebooks

Antonin Artaud began to write daily in schoolboy notebooks in February, 1945. At first, only writing darkens the pages, crowding into the margins and leaving no areas untouched. He generally writes with a pencil. The first marks added to the writing are strongly emphasized dots, made by crushing the pencil lead into the paper. Drawings only appear much later, probably at the same time as the large drawings in color. The small drawings in the notebooks may have been Artaud's attempts to discover forms with which to fill unused spaces in the large compositions. From this point on, writing and drawing are entangled in the notebooks; in particular, there are many bodies and objects, such as coffins, gallows, blocks of wood, iron collars, clock faces, nails, screws and hammers. Artaud always carried pencils in his pockets during these years, though occasionally he wrote in ink. His stroke is so violent that he sometimes tore the page; at other times, so insistent that the drawings have an anthracitic gleam. The pages reproduced in *Sulfur* are extracts from different notebooks.

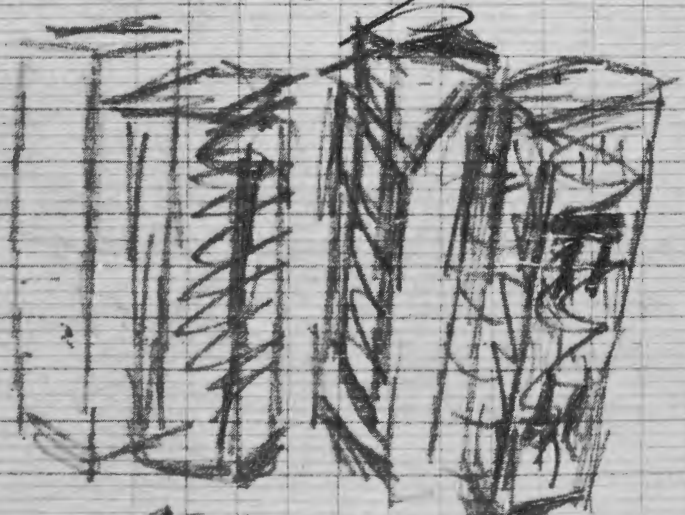
—*Paule Thévenin,*
Paris, 1983

20



la discussion avec les poètes, savants
et philosophes qui
discutent sur blot.
On ne bâtit pas sur les principes
ou les règles,
pas sur les idées
des architectes.
On ne bâtit sur rien.
On ne bâtit pas.
On trouvait sans notion
ou référence à aucune notion
PARLE TRANCHOTA

Poète philosophe sourd,
ne sens,
tous êtes en moi
vous êtes comme et mieux
comme les [illegible] antique orgueil
Les êtes
qui ont voulu penser
pour eux
avec une idée vieille
et se parent les hommes
et se parent pas [illegible]
10 Le temps

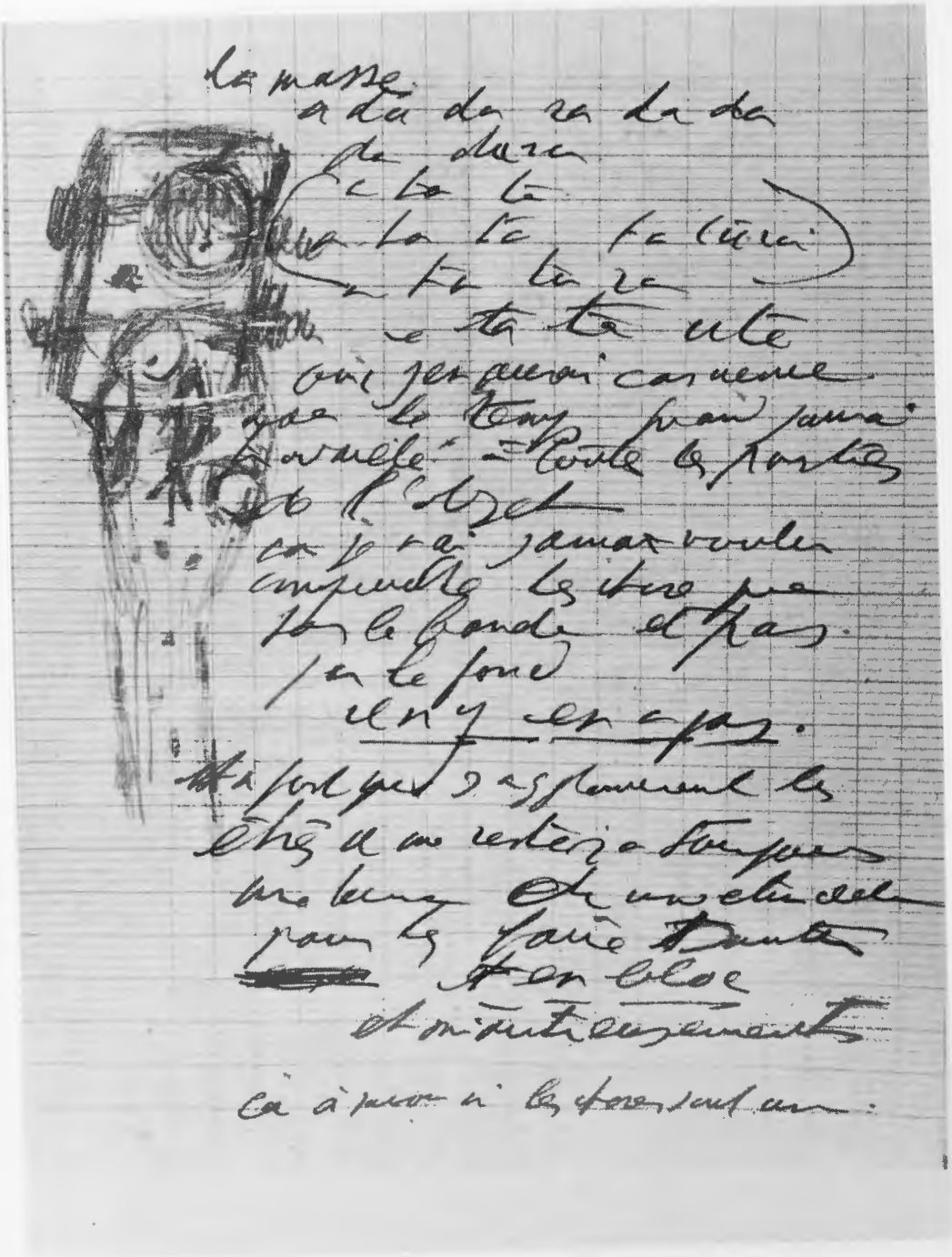


Trois [illegible] dans
nommes

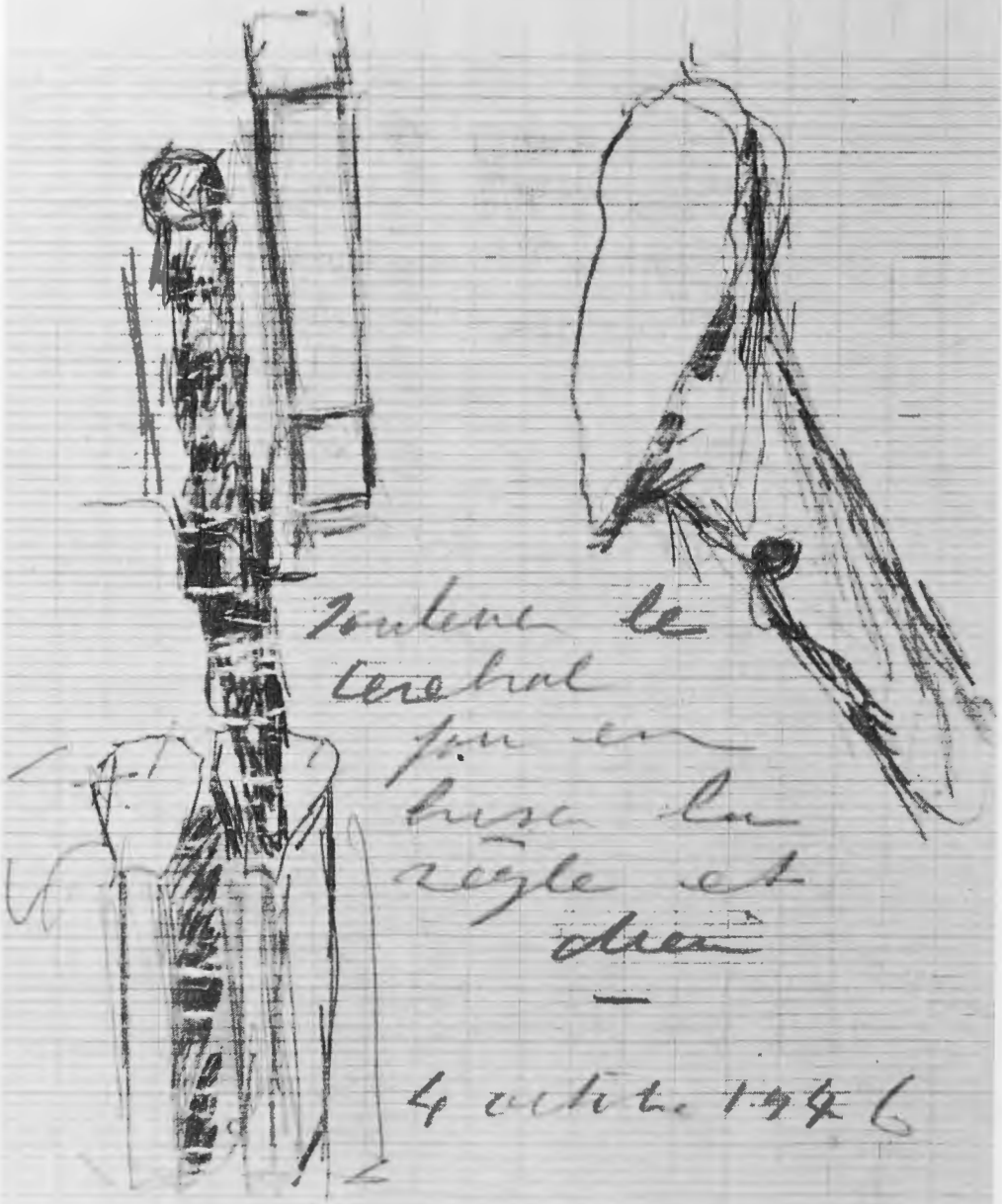
Cet homme qui savait tout faire
et pour qui nos alliés pouvaient des
fois, toutes nos fois au néant.

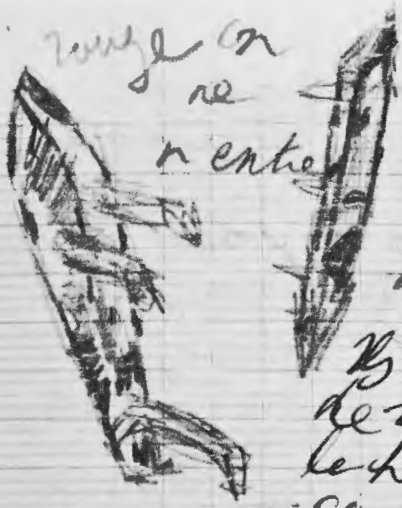
mais pourquoi

pourquoi pas? je vais lui
le dire à commander
et à faire les dans nouvelles
mon bon plaisir
Cette idée superbe elle
j'obéissance bien et
j'essaye autre chose.
Oui
Oui je le ferai et on
me certitude j'ai va
et le pourquoi pourquoi
et comment et pourquoi
pourquoi nous et
pour bien les fatigues.



la masse
a da da ra da da
da dura
(a ta ta
ta ta ta ta ta ta
ta ta ra
a ta ta ute
oui je pense ainsi comme
que le temps n'a jamais
travaillé = toute la partie
et l'objet
on ne va jamais vouloir
comprendre les choses par
par le bonde et pas
par le fond
il n'y en a pas.
Il faut que j'essaye seulement les
chiffres et on restera toujours
un temps de un et demi
pour les faire Dante
et en bloc
et minutieusement
ça à peu près si les choses sont aux :


Toutes le
cerebral
fou en
bise la
règle et
dieu
4 août 1946



rien on
ne
n'entre

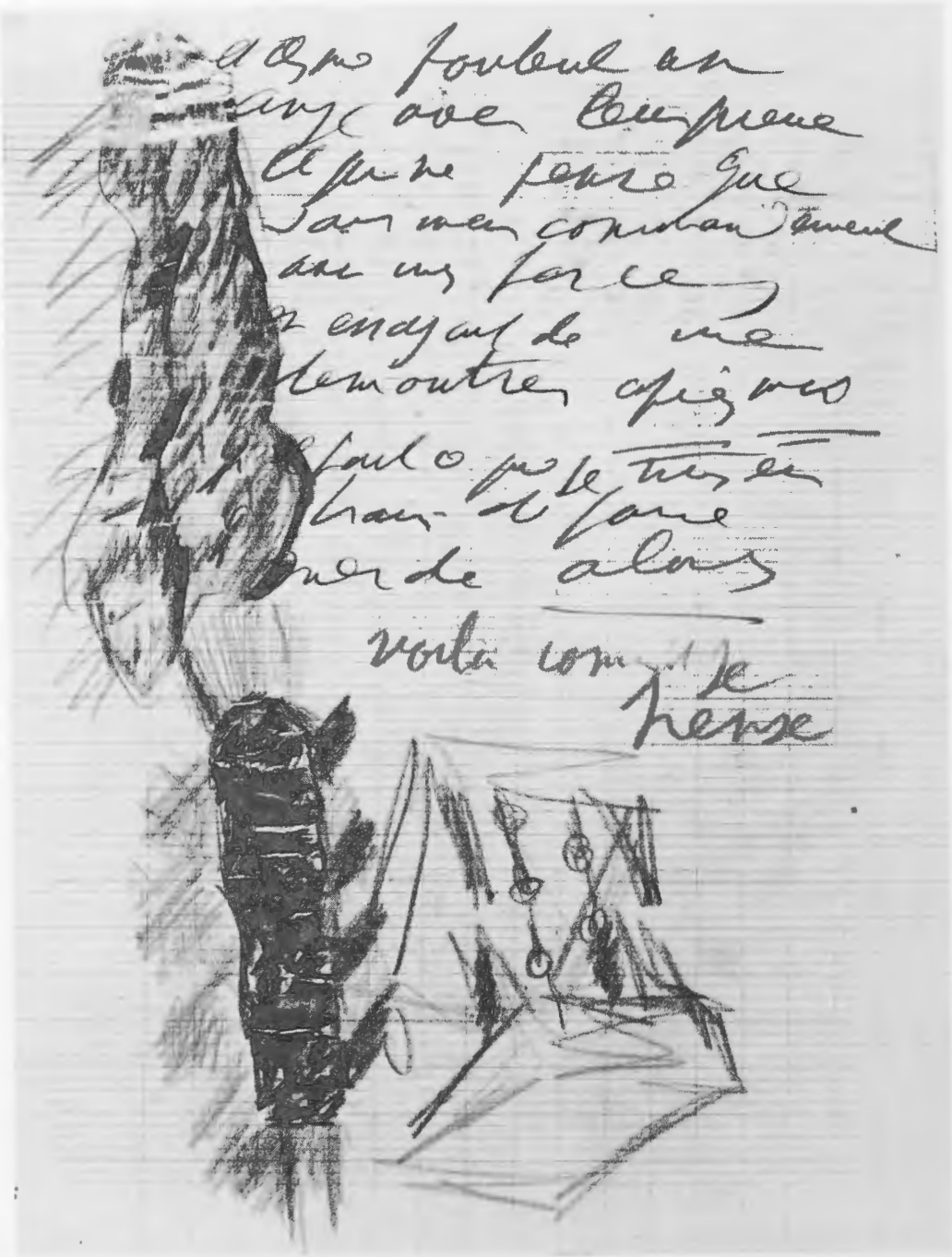
n'explique rien - on
définit rien - on
sur rien - on
lutte - malheur
à qui voudrait s'expli-
quer —

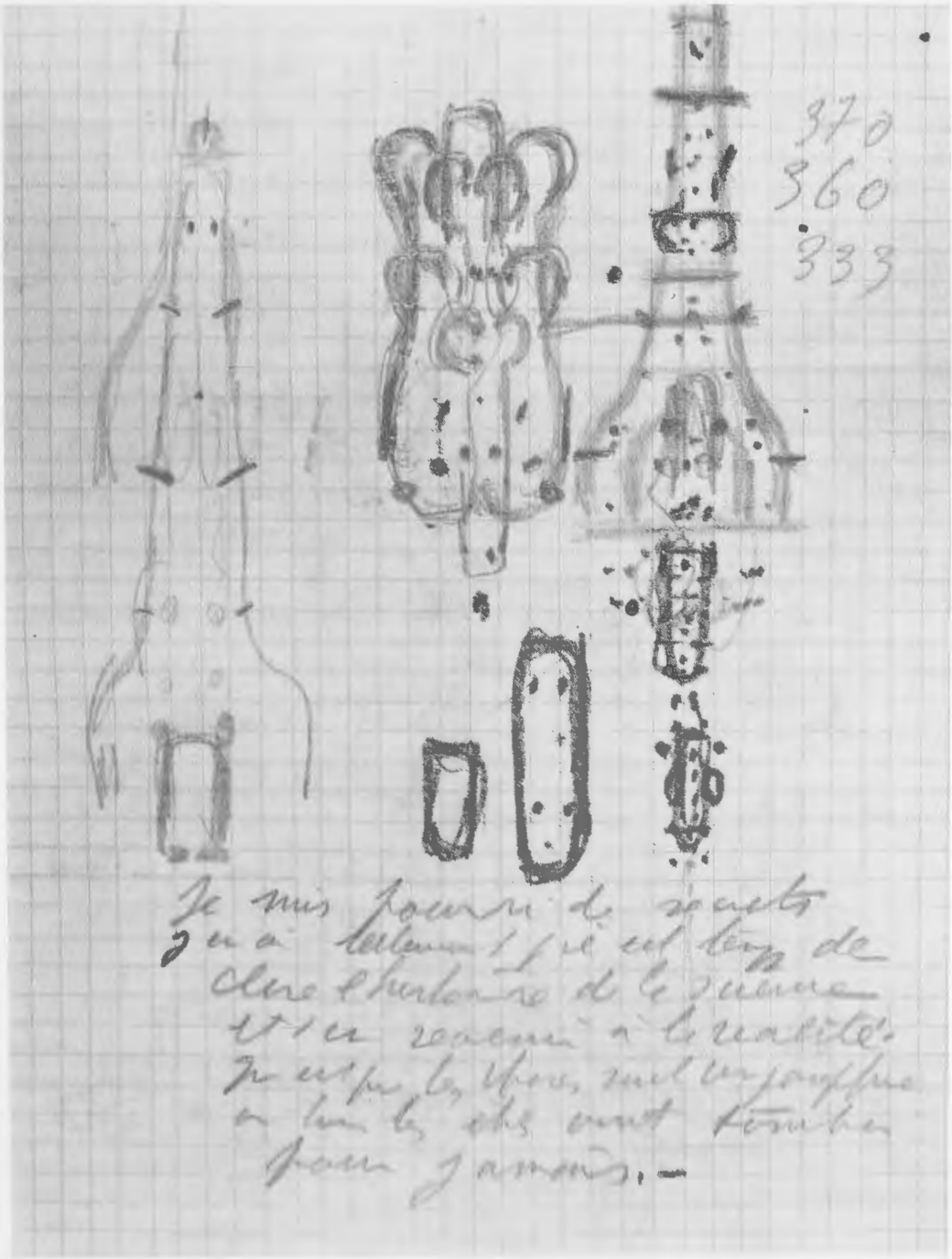
Ils ne l'ont encore mis
de rapprocher l'esprit avec
le haut, la tête avec le
ciel et sur leur c'était
tout ciel

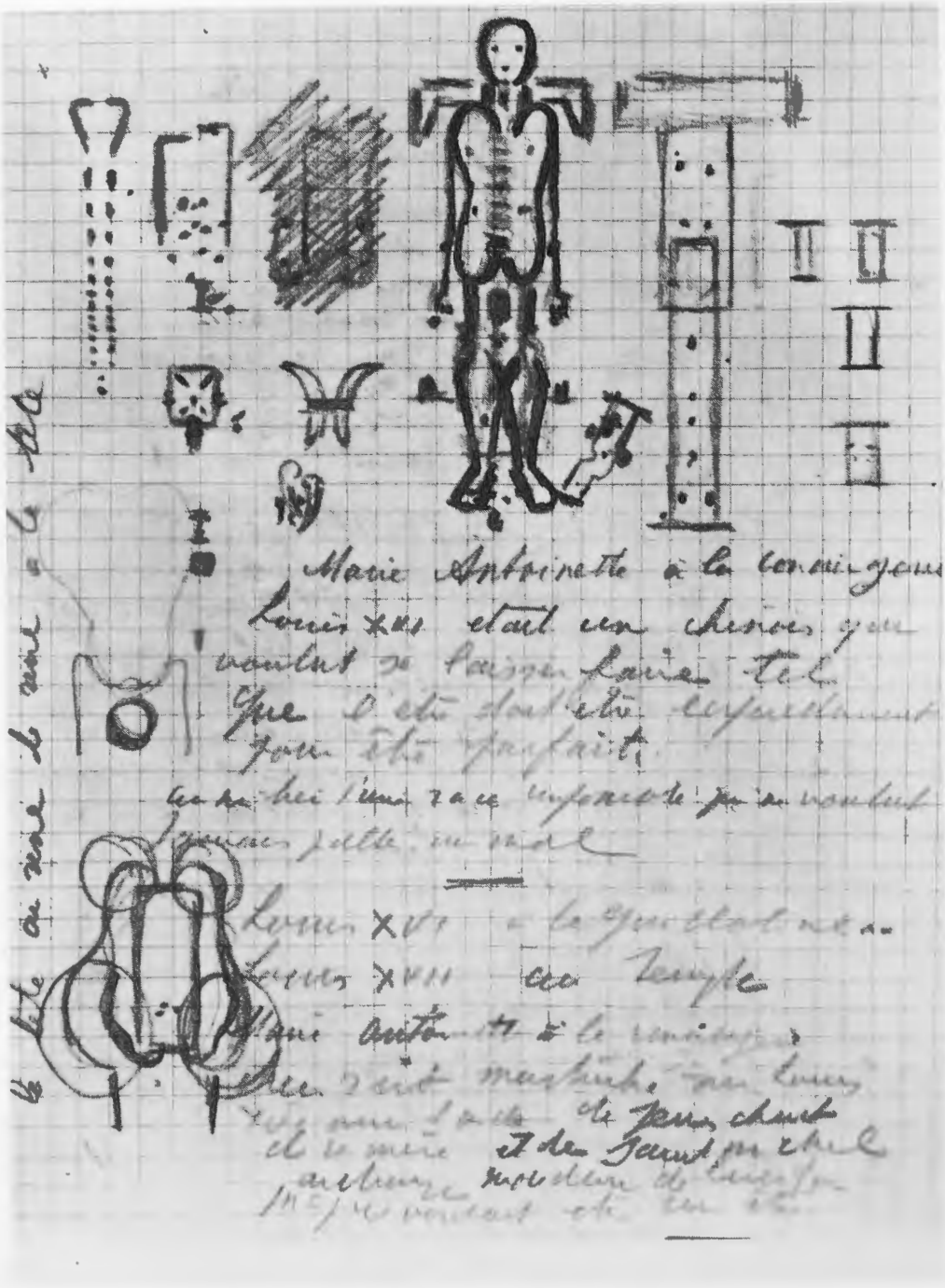
pleurer de la branlette du muflé de
la jouissance jubilatoire
langue langue nasal cervicu-
la, mysé labiale jugulo
thyroïdal cro sphénoïdale
bulbiro testicondale

et un forfait sans nom, se refaire

J'ai pu un jour. Il se fait
entre p. m. affiche l'état
comme musique. Je ne, mais
on je n'a cru de m. refaire
les corps bardé -




370
360
333
Je suis pourri de secrets
jusqu'à présent, j'ai eu tout le temps de
dire et surtout de le prouver
et j'ai renoncé à la réalité.
Je n'ai pas les yeux, mais les poumons
ou bien les os vont tomber
pour jamais. —



Antonin Artaud

Selections from SUPPOTS ET SUPPLICIATIONS

This book is comprised of three parts:
Fragmentations,
Letters,
Interjections.

The first part constitutes a sort of breathless review of culture, an incredible cavalcade of the body through all the totems of a culture that was ruined before its incarnation (or incorporation).

In the second part, the suffering body that undertook this cavalcade discovers itself:

and it is quite clear that it deals with a man who is a man and not a spirit.

In the third part, there is no longer any question:

of culture,

nor of life,

but of that kind of inchoate hell where the man's body suffocates before beginning to breathe,

and which holds at the border of feeling as well as of thought.

And in the end I learned from the process that there is neither consciousness nor thought.

The universal bewitchments that have always aimed at the body in fact hit it in a region far beyond consciousness or ideas;

and it will be seen in this book that to effectively bewitch someone there is no need of special initiation,

but that it is enough to be as thoroughly low and criminal as any middle-class person of our time, so as not to hesitate at certain obscene bodily positions that universal hypocrisy cultivates on a reputedly moral plane,

the other being reserved for that superficial honesty that allows this thoroughly counterfeit, sick world to hang on a little while longer.

And it will become apparent, through the letters published in this book, that it is truly me,

my self, a modern-day man, who lived through this senseless adventure of being voluntarily bewitched by everybody because I had, on the cosmic plane, a body capable of sparking the most ignoble greediness.

Modern man is really worn out and you don't have to dig far into his ideals to understand that all he wants is to pump up his available life enough to go off his rocker and finally to go away.

So it is that between the fragmentations in the beginning and the incredible interjections toward the end I wanted to build a bridge of true correspondence

an exchange among some of the living so as to allow the reader to truly materialize the issue, and to furnish him, in the midst of that atrocious struggle, with the springboard to a life perhaps pathetic, but one lived by visible, feeling, malleable and coherent men.

And so it is that the drama of the interjections is clarified and moved from the plane of delirium where universal slothfulness of mind would be tempted to closet it, onto the plane of the living, watery, purulent struggle of a man with, upon him, the bodily suppurations of evil spirits, the authentic bourgeois of life.

(Translated from the French by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman)

From FRAGMENTATIONS:

MOTHERS TO THE STABLE

Doors, cells, loft, meals. Was the room I had to pick a loft or a stable, a shelter or a jail?

Was I a man or a beast?

In this there was an inexhaustible world of thoughts to which, basically, I knew full well, I lacked the key; and these thoughts never made up their mind to surrender that key because none of them was really me, although the whole of what I was thinking was *in fact* made up of them.

So the doors of the rooms and cells in front of which I found myself quivered with anger with their locks and keys inside my heart, while in the real world they were all frozen in silence and a two-faced animality.

I'll open up as soon as you become like me. That's what every one of the locks leapt out of my heart to say, or so it seemed.

I was a man. But the doors with their locks of anger wanted to see me think of myself as an animal and at last own up to my own animality,

and that is what I could not accept.

Beware of doors, I thought. Not one seemed to offer safe passage. How was I to know whether it was a door opening into the prisons of this world, or out to eternal space?

Oh, if those rooms had only been as brightly lit up as that time on the mountainside when I opened the door of the immensity in front of me and saw infinity, without lock, without key.

But the time for that was now departed.

Why are we locked up too? the doors with their locks and keys kept groaning. We are all of what wanted to lock you up.

Give in! Come on, give in! We're all self-respecting because you are. But, come on, we're sick of being stuck that way and we all feel the same and hate your self-respect.

At this declaration of man's mutiny against my good will

a gong-like sound came ripping out of the clouds in protest, a sign that the last infinity had been bypassed, because the immensity herself was howling out

at the rape inflicted on her.

And I knew that the infinite is someone whose very size is without other measure than that of his will which has been crying out to high heaven ever since the hour this outrage began.

But why bother with all these doors of being and symbols of personalities, avenues of penetration? Am I the sky or the sea or the waves of the immensities I hear groaning in my heart like cattle in a stall, as I shuffle along in my bones inside this skin I am never going to finish reshuffling until my final hour?

Doors, I am not about to imitate your arrogance. I'd rather hear the sound of my own footsteps on this earth than be a rapist of eternities.

But the curse on life that enclosed me in the whims of ontology was a thing I never had the time to finish. Already I was a mere straw tossed on the roaring waves of all these women/doors and multiple-key locks that flew at me out of the *hypnotic* orient of things bearing me away into I know not what heart wherein I was immersed in the essence of Being.

At that moment a thought told me: These are the Mothers that let fly with their assagai wings in the ego of every man.

Thereupon I lost all sense of self other than "letting fly" and the human footsteps I had heard myself making on the earth which the earth had buried, having taken leave of myself with my skin and bones. I was nothing more than the intrusion of these women in whom every door was now rejected.

I'm free again! thought these tight-knit cohorts inside me. Free to be and embrace anything that thinks. Free, in other words, to mingle.

To know the happiness of being alive, you stopped standing there like a signpost, a post with four arms outspread against everything that tended to foam up like a wave.

Things aren't going to be the way you thought or intended, things are going to be the way they like, in opposition to your crazily uncompromising position. You can't live without animality.

Well, it's been only too long since I've been acquainted with that point in the meningeal jelly wherein the human will has jelled, and the abominable ways it has been put through the ringer by a mutinous inner essence, to be fooled by all these false ideas.

The unprescribable I SHALL of the ego is not all alone at that point in the brain where the individual, personal soul conceives itself. No, there are others in cohabitation with it and these work tirelessly to its detriment.

Before I had the time to decide for myself, I was dispossessed by the being known as "living."

That is how the Mothers raped my thought.

Wave upon wave, they break over me from all the points of their filthy desires, until the day they go broke, broke as life's Manifest One.

Before the livestock in the loft and the lock on the stable door, I recognize the battle that comes back in every dream between the Manifest One and his Mothers, and the Non-Manifest One along with his reincarnations.

Sisyphus pushing his rock back up inside the mind has no more *reality* in dreams than the scream of this frightful HERE LIES, in which He (who no longer exists in real life and has to reincarnate in order to exist at all) caused me to recognize Him in my dream when the Mothers repulsed me in real life.

The inaccessible infinity of reincarnation tempts Being much, much more than just simply being, since surviving by means of reincarnation means by-passing one's being when this being is being suffocated by life. Living means time, a given period of time. Surviving by reincarnation means that (by the refusal of the time to be) one never takes leave of this eternity of non-being in which the Celestial Intelligence, or Mind of life's Non-Manifest One, is victorious.

But right here (I said to the dream Mothers at the instant of awakening) *here*, and soon, we shall see life exist.

(Translated by David Rattray)

From LETTRES:

TO JEAN DUBUFFET

Rodez, 29 November 1945
My very dear friend,

Yesterday I took the liberty of entrusting you with a letter for René de Solier whose address I don't know. Do excuse the imposition, but I knew René de Solier was worried and I wanted to reassure him. Because, my dear Jean Dubuffet, things are not as they seem in everyday life. The universe in which we live is an unfinished universe, where someone who exchanges greetings with another in the street is actually—once at a safe distance and with the blinds drawn—the envier and enchanter of that other because he thinks that other had more genius, mind, personality, soul, and physical density than himself and so he sets about to ravish him of his very being and mind by whatever means it takes to encompass such an end. This was not widely known until recent times but has nowadays become a fact that no one is unaware of, although the whole force of universal villainy and crime is still working hard to prevent it from being publicly acknowledged. For a long time now, Jean Dubuffet, these operations have no longer been individualized, on a small scale and confined to a few private individuals practicing black magic in the privacy of their own homes. What I am talking about are public operations in which the entire population of Paris, the countryside and the fields of France are taking part, in Paris, under the influence of waves of enchantment being beamed from Afghanistan, Turkestan, Burma, Bengal, and Tibet.—And the *masses* of all the Catholic churches on the planet serve as a back-up to these enchantments which at certain moments sweep through and suffocate every mind like yours, Jean Paulhan's, René de Solier's, all my friends' and everyone else's who like yourself and me wish to defend our personality against the intrusion of the lower-middle-class greed of priests, merchants, government employees, typists, working people and that whole revolting vomit of villainy, jealousy, egoism, and stupidity that makes up the whole of mankind and gathers at all hours of the day in groups in the streets of Paris, on the steps of churches and cathedrals (St. Augustine's, Notre Dame des Champs, Notre Dame de Paris) as other

populations are gathering in the streets of Delhi in India or on the slopes of the Himalayas, etc., etc. I needn't hide from you the fact that I myself am the target of all these enchantments. Their secret aim is to make me lose my personality and mind, as well as to lay hands on my body and replace it with a soul other than my own, one that is just as cowardly vile as that of all other beings, i.e. given over to any and every compromise—which is idiotic, asinine, gross, and moreover filthy. I can't begin to fathom what fluke of moronic viciousness led every human being on the face of the earth, or just about, to seize on me as a focus for their unclean desires, and suggestions, to be vile, dishonest, dirty and without honor or mind, just like them, but it's a fact, and day and night I have around me an obscene horde of recriminatory jackels, enchanters, and soul-masturbating succubi and incubi, and these succubi and incubi are not the demons of Martin Schongauer or the elder Brueghel but Monsieur Durand, Monsieur Dupont, Monsieur Cop, Monsieur Priest, Monsieur Abbé, Monsieur Monk, Monsieur Doctor, Monsieur Rabbi, Monsieur Imam, Monsieur Bonze, Monsieur Brahman, Monsieur Lama, Monsieur Everyman, et cetera. Due to this state of affairs every one of us is suffering, and all the more so in that it is being protected by the Police which is 100 per cent at the beck and call of the enchanters, with the exception of a handful of policemen who resigned out of disgust.

You are not unaware that I, Antonin Artaud, am the same Artaud who in 1917 led the population of Marseille in a 2-day uprising to put an end to this state of affairs, following which all the bourgeois and their newspapers nicknamed me Saint Tarto, as in tarte à la crème, tartine (= 'butter-bread') or petit tantinet (= 'trifle').

In 1927 there was an article in *Nouvelles littéraires* with a box at the bottom of the page devoted to Saint Tarto, to ridicule him, following a battle against the Police that had happened at Place Blanche, in which André Breton (him too!) had fought like a madman, but that battle hadn't happened only at Place Blanche, it had broken out in every sphere planet-wide, because André Breton together with several Surrealists including Pierre Unik, Marcel Noll, Jacques-André Boiffard and, I think, André Masson and Roland Tual, had observed that we were being enchanted and had seen in the very streets of Paris a group of women with their skirts pulled up beaming their obscene idiotic magical sex-waves at us. Your show wasn't understood in 1925 or '27. They didn't understand the genius of a drawing isn't in its technique but in the action of the forces that presided over the calculation of the shapes and signs that the drawn lines

abandon, lend shape to, empty out, make one miss; and which it often requires more than mere genius to discern. From where I stand, I am gunning for the enchanters, whoever and wherever they may be—I can see them with my breath and certain wrestling holds inside my enchanted body because the enchanters do not recognize signs, but this state of affairs has got to stop and souls with a heart like yours and mine must get to breathe.

All the best.

Antonin Artaud

P.S. now that you know my whole story and now that, between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. today, November 29, 1945, we saw each other from afar, and you helped me sing, and we sang together and saw each other again as we once did in the garden of Gethsemane and in front of I forget what cloister of the past, I can't hide from you the fact that the means by which they are torturing me are also being inflicted on the handful of persons whose addresses I gave you. The aim is to prevent them from coming to me. Also, you have seen all 6 of them—Catherine Chilé, Neneka Chilé, Cécille Schramme, Yvonne Chilé, Ana Corbin, and Anie—and you won't be in any doubt, either, that all six of them are really and truly my own daughters.

Cécile Schramme, as Paulhan told me, did in fact die in 1940 and after an estrangement, we were reconciled a short time before her death, but her soul came back in a young girl who knows me backwards and forwards—her name is also Cécile but she can't come to me either;

another of my daughter-souls, a young girl by the name of Neneka Chilé is a young Afghani of 20 who translated *L'art et la mort* in Afghanistan and left Afghanistan more than a year ago but has not yet completed her journey to join me;

another—and this one is my eldest daughter Catherine Chilé—was a nurse at the Hospital Saint-Jacques. She left Paris in May 1945 and has not yet arrived here;

as for Anie Besnard, it's more involved. I have learned that she had left Paris to join me on October 14, 1944, with supplies for me. I saw with my own eyes how she was ambushed en route and was murdered and her dead body pulverized and scattered to the winds, and to cover up this disappearance and murder, the Police which is the police of the initiates replaced her with a double to whom

the initiates gave the memory of Anie Besnard in real life, which explains why Anie Besnard, knowing that I am in the most extreme want and having received money from me before I left for Ireland, has not even taken the trouble to send me a note since your visit to her, because I noted that the writing wasn't my friend Anie's hand.

My dear Jean Dubuffet, I have an account at the Bank of France. They caused me to forget that it was there, being covetous of the money, however, I have just remembered it. I request you to demand immediately that the entire amount of my bank account be turned over to you because I need it to finance my trip to Tibet and support my family until we get there.

P.P.S. Friends from Ireland will be of assistance to you in taking possession of this sum in gold bullion. It was brought back to me from India by a friend.

TO MADAME JEAN DUBUFFET

Rodez, 29 November 1945
Dear Madame and great friend,

I wanted to thank you specially for having been so affectionate and thoughtful as to send me butter, sardines, and fresh coffee beans, which shows you understand that it was the absence of fats in my diet and my state of undernourishment that occasioned the state of disarray in which the minds of all my friends may be found at certain hours of the day when they are swept up in a wind of panic raised by the operations of obscene enchantment on the part of certain monks in the Himalayas and the populations of Burma, Bengal, Turkestan, and Afghanistan. Also, at given moments the people of Paris and other French cities join in with these hate-filled dissociative maneuvers which take place at certain hours *under the protection of the police*, as I told you.—This abominable state of affairs has got to stop, for if—as you know—I hate Jesus Christ, I also hate the Antichrist, who was never anything but his henchman and a creature of his enchantments. I went to Mexico—to a mountaintop at 5,000-odd meters—in order to put an end to certain Christological operations of what magic whereby black magic in its entirety was always fomented both directly and in a spirit of contradiction, as well as by yet another spirit to whom

whiteness was ever anathema. Therefore I shall go, and I intend to go immediatly, to *Tibet* in order to finish this frightful task. But to do that I need a cane which I prepared expressly for the purpose, and its missing prototype is that cane of St. Patrick with which I traveled to Ireland and which is now in the hands of this so-called Anie Besnard, 45 Quai Bourbon, who is no more than a double, since the actual Anie Besnard was murdered sometime after October 14, 1944, the date on which she had taken the train from the Gare d'Orléans in Paris to come and join me here.

My history is not that of the Prophecy of Saint Patrick which you know since you read it in the Dictionary of Hagiography published in 1894, of which there was a copy on the shelves of the public reading room at the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1934 when I read this prophecy for the first time. Therefore my history is not that of this Prophecy which in 1894, 2 years before I was born, contained verse fragments from my *Ombilic des Limbes* which was published 1925, but mine is a whole different story which endeavors to escape by hook or by crook from that of this prophecy which was reading out my poetry inside my stillborn head even *before* I was born. My personal intention is that my poems and my drawings the way I write and draw them are the fruit of my present and immediate personal inspiration and not that they should have been plagiarized and lifted beforehand by I know not what criminal mind of the past *in my present,* for this spirit's name is Lucifer, its name is Jesus Christ, and its name is Christos Parabrahma, a spirit that materialized one day out of the abyss of nothingness. All this, dear Madame and friend, to remind you of something and make you comprehend something that is essential for both you and me. And that is that your mind as an individual being will be lost unless I succeed in definitively defending mine. Mine can't go under, but I can't defend my friends' minds contingent on the continuity and integrity of my own unless my friends make up their own minds to comprehend that it is urgent to come to my rescue, not in the sense of this present life (i.e. rescuing an imprisoned poet who has been set free but lacks the financial means to live on the outside and the company of familiars to help him out from day to day) but in a sense *contrary* to that of the present life, i.e. as a traveler of infinity who being angered by the monstrosity of this planet intends, just as he went to Mexico to shut up the old witch doctors, to travel to Tibet and go for the throats of the black magic lama enchanters there and blow up St. Peter's in Rome, and by the same token, St. Johns in the Lateran, en route.

For that purpose I have a cane—prepared by me—which is in the possession of my daughter Catherine Chilé whom you saw fighting for me yesterday, the 29th of November, all day long, and you and Jean Dubuffet *also fought at my side* and you even said to me when I was at the dinner table at 6 o'clock in the evening and you were feeling smothered and as if your brains and genitals had been scooped out of you and the phallus of evil was raping you in the throat, you said to me like the loving souls and close friends that you are, having complete confidence in me and coming to ask me to give you my support: "But what's this all about, Monsieur Artaud?" I made two signs to help you with my breath and my hand like two lavender-colored arched beams inside my body between the shoulder blades and the breastbone and I think that must have made you all feel better, you, Jean Dubuffet, René de Solier and Henri Parisot

but I can't go on working that way and I therefore need the cane and one other thing that is essential for me, which I would have wanted to speak about with you in Rodez when we were sitting on the terrace of the cafe in front of the cathedral and you reminded me that you knew me.—If you and Jean Dubuffet could only find for me in Paris a little of that Thule. The banning of Thule is what caused all the enchantments that fastened on me among the Tarahumaras as I have related in my little book, which I shall send you—*Journey to the Land of the Tarahumaras*. It caused the agony I went through on horseback, as I rode into the mountains no longer able to hold onto the reins with my hands and, in the grip of a frightful diarrhea, obliged to dismount every fifteen minutes to relieve myself.—It is a thule that no peyote dance will replace and if you can bring me some I shall take the necessary measures to render it benign so that it can never poison me or anyone. For opium was not a poison originally but it was the enchantments of the priests of the Himalayas, transferred to Jerusalem at one time and to Rome at another, that made of it a thing poisonous and ill-starred. I shall make of it something good for authentic minds. All the more so in that time presses, dear Madame and great friend, and there is within you a demon secreted by the Himalayan priests which, using

your being and your good mind intended to snatch and drink the mind and being of my daughter Cécile whereas you have your own mind and being.—I sent you a tau cross with 2 bursts of red flowers at either end

in order to remind you of your true mind and enable you to recollect your root life within and against the Unconscious.

In conclusion, I remind you that I have gold at the Bank of France and for eight years they had been making me forget it by enchantment in order to make me think that I was penniless and force me to live on handouts from those who love me whereas it behooveth them that love me to wrest the stolen gold from them that hate me.—In 1918 I made a deposit of a vast sum at the Bank of France in Marseille, this sum was transferred to Paris when I went there in 1920, and a mass of gold ingots equivalent to this sum was stored in the vaults of the Bank on Rue de La Vrillière. At different times I have wirtten several checks on it, of which several were purloined by enchantment; I wrote very few of my own free will. But in July or August, 1937, I gave a check for 10 million francs to my friend Anie Besnard, and she wasn't even my mistress, to help her get by when she was without other means and had at one point come close to becoming a streetwalker in order to make a living.

Anie Besnard visited me four times after I was locked up. After 1940 I received just one tiny letter from her, in 1943. She reluctantly took the trouble to bring me a few provisions in 1944 and took the train at Gare d'Orléans, was murdered and replaced by a double—some say she never actually left—but how does one actually or not actually leave? In my opinion she did leave, but something of her that had never yet quite understood me remained up in the air, and it is up to me to find it and make it come to me. As for this Anie Besnard who received 10 million francs from me and abandoned me to die, miserable and forgotten, without comfort or relief, that one is in fact nothing but a double and this double is another person with another birth certificate which has taken the place of the real person who was born in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. I believe Jean Dubuffet belongs to the Sûreté. He can help me

clear up this business; but there's more—an enchantment was beamed at me by some people last night—they were on Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin or in its immediate vicinity, in a cafe or in their house. And I am certain he will be kind enough to track them down along with several of their accomplices and put the hooks into them, but the best would be for both of you to join me here and bring me what I requested, which I need in order to finish off this world. All the best. Sincerely,

Antonin Artaud

The whole business was perpetrated on me so as not to have to surrender the gold in the Bank of France to me, its rightful owner. I never even touched the capital on the 1918 sum—my checks were merely drawn on the interest.

The sum I speak of in the last paragraph was 100 billion francs. And it must be intact, and drawing interest, too.

TO HENRI PARISOT

Rodez, 6 December 1945
Dear friend,

My letters from Rodez series ended with the last letter, but the story of my life did not come to an end with it, not completely, so here is its postscript.

The memories I have of my eternal life encompass not only this present existence but several others. And if in this life I have passed through Marseille, Smyrna, Lyon, Lourdes, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Mexico city, Brussels, Dublin, Le Havre, Rouen, and Rodez, two thousand years ago I passed through Nazareth and Jerusalem, where I spent several years.—And I recall how, on a certain winter evening in Nazareth, I met up with a sleazy-looking couple, a man and a woman whom I had been following for some time—magicians—but until that moment they had given me the slip—the woman was called Mary and her husband Joseph and their family name was, I believe, Nalpas.—The woman was pregnant with a child I would have done anything to prevent from coming into

the world because I knew where he came from and who he was, namely that his very existence was the fruit of certain filthy enchantments directed at none other than myself.—And I'd sworn to go to any lengths to prevent him from being born. And between me and that man and woman and the horde of all the black magicians that have ceaselessly done their bidding over the ages there was a dreadful and inexpiable combat, on my side to prevent the birth, and on theirs to deliver this reprobate foetus upon which both Hell and Earth had agreed to confer the soul of that abyss known as Jesus Christ.

I shall tell all this in a subsequent letter or book.

The individual known as Jesus Christ, whose true name was, I believe, Antonin Nalpas, was a magician like his parents and time and again I was obliged to fight him.—Because on the moral level this character was a slimy little creep and more than once I caught him at the same tricks that his phantom has been up to here in Rodez, insinuating himself into my body in a dream, in order to magnetize my testicles or enchant my excreta.

I can't go into further details on all that because time presses and it's important that this series of letters should be published without further delay, but only yesterday I recalled with horror a final memory of my life in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.—That already there my name was Monsieur Artaud I know, and that everyone there took me for a babe in the woods and an oddball, accused me of hearing voices, of declaiming and singing out loud, of talking to myself and—because I wrote and recited poetry—said I was a loafer, a good-for-nothing.

One day, in order to get something to eat, I went to work as a hired hand in a locksmith's shop, but at the sight of me talking to myself and laughing at my dreams he fired me that same day. I didn't eat daily in those times, and I wandered the streets in search of a chance lodging and one day a woman pretended to take an interest in me but when I understood what she wanted of me and the price in pimpery and shame with which I would be paying for the room and board she offered, I turned on my heel and left the place without entering. —Judea, and especially Jerusalem were in those times infested with magicians and sorcerers who relentlessly harassed me in order to deprive me of my last remaining strength, homeless as I was and reduced to eating when I could find it, which was almost never.—At moments I flew into horrible rages that made me burn everything in sight and made the screaming mob that surrounded me shut their mouths.—I have that same mob here in Rodez but I strike back from

a distance and not directly as I did in Jerusalem; the name of the mob is all mankind with a handful of very rare exceptions consisting of the friends of my works, I'm saying the true friends of my works, and it wouldn't take long to count them. Be that as it may, the police and the rabbis put me under arrest one night in an orchard full of olive trees where I was sleeping under the stars, being without a roof over my head. I went through a trial hearing, although a certain Pontius Pilate pronounced me innocent of any crime, the vast constituency of imbecility *rose up* to demand that I should be crucified. I recall this room where having seated me on a wooden stool they planted a crown of thorns on my head and put a reed cane in my hand to replace the one they had taken away from me which, with its 200 million fibres, had served me to crush all my witch doctors. And the entire populace crossed the threshold of that doorway open to the afternon sun, to spit on me and slap me around and cover me with insults.—I also recall the degrading punishment of crucifixion, at a place named Golgotha, and how I screamed my guts out when they raised and planted the cross, and how my entire physical being suddenly plunged earthwards under the nails that gripped it by the hands and feet.—I pass over the details of all that happened up until the middle of that afternoon.

But, once dead, my corpse was thrown out onto a dungheap and I remember stewing there I don't know how many days or hours before I finally woke up. For I didn't realize at first that I was dead and I had to make up my mind to understand this, in order to come round successfully. At this point, some friends who had at first completely abandoned me, decided to come and embalm my corpse and were astounded but by no means overjoyed to see me back alive.

As you can imagine, I was an embarrassment, an annoyance.

But feeling my hands crushed and caked with blood, my body putrid, and my face covered with the dried venom of the collective expectorations, in a corpse that went on living, filled me with such horror at my own state and that of things generally, a cataclysmic fury came over me in a tremor that turned the world upside down, and there were battles for more than one day in Judea.—Is the same about to happen this time here in Rodez?

And, in the wake of the murder of Mlle Seguin who left Paris last May to join me and whose corpse likewise spent several hours next to a ditch, what new murders will I need to point to, in order to convince the few friends I still have in Paris and on earth to make up their minds to get me out of here and come with me to Tibet?

This letter is to be published following the others and as a conclusion to the story of my life.

Cordially,
Antonin Artaud

P.S. This morning I also learned that Robert Denoël was just murdered.

TO ARTHUR ADAMOV

Espalion, 22 March 1946
Dear Arthur Adamov,

I just got your short note, but rest assured, Dr. Ferdière set me free this Tuesday (March 19th), signing for a one-week trial release, and I am at Espalion (in the Lot) staying at the Hotel Berthier. Also, he said the final release would come through next week. I wrote a note to Marthe Robert which I enclosed in a registered letter addressed to you. I think you must have received it by now. I wanted her to be fully apprised of the true situation. Because money isn't the whole story; and my incarceration was merely the result of a dirty set-up involving the police which I'm not sure has run its course—to the contrary, I have every reason to believe it's continuing, *however surreptitiously*, right now. Therefore I have a legitimate grievance at all the filthy things that have been done to me but this time I am not going to be so naive as to go out there as I am—as we all are—and attack them from the rooftops the way I did in Ireland. I won't even permit myself any more little jokes, like when I said, "You're *green*, Madame," to a woman at the Dôme, because I don't want to be attacked from behind once again and get knocked on the head the way I was in Dublin in 1937; or the way I got nicked on the top of the heart when I was stabbed in the back in Marseille in 1916. I'll also refrain from talking about opium or heroin, or trying to obtain them, and—believe me—I'll have to refrain from even mentioning them (because walls have ears) to avoid getting myself into deep trouble.

But Poetry takes odd turns, Arthur Adamov, I mean odd returns in flames, viz. the eruptions of Popocatepel and Vesuvius, St. Elmo's fire, the War of 1938, the earthquake of Messina, the eruption of Mt. Pelé, etc., etc. This is by way of saying I'd like you to tell all your friends the human unconscious is very sick, and in the presence of certain people it stinks stronger than a heap of plague victims. And I don't know whether the collective unconsicious is still capable of *profiting* from the theatre or of exercising itself other than harmfully at certain art shows. Be that as it may, life goes on; and so it will continue, until it suddenly explodes like an old volcano neutralized by collective dishonesty, only to suddenly reawaken.

Yes, I am delighted at the idea of publishing a little book at Sagittaire with *The Mothers in the Stable*, the Lautréamont essay, and some notes. I have written a certain number of notes in which many people will learn a great deal. How many pages do you need? Fifteen or so, with a short introduction? I'll send them to you next week. I wish to title the book *Charity for Poor Popocatepel, s.v.p.*, which means I'm only asking for a minor eruption to swallow up 300 cities—not merely like the atomic bomb in Japan that swallowed up just one city, albeit one of 300,000 inhabitants. Poor Popocatepel isn't merely dormant, it's dead, whereas Vesuvius is only dormant. And, being dead, even a volcano has to go through many a repression, many a pit, many a gate—not of tears but of tearing to pieces—before exploding as one might wish, because I want what I write to make something explode in the mind, but I want what explodes in the mind to make something outside the mind explode: earth, war, nations, dialects, epidemics. I'll make no prophecies as in *The New Revelations of Being*, no more Tarots; notes of *true* rebellion against all that which inhibits, stunts, and warps by antique manipulations. It's not enough to point out neuroses. The neuroses have now got to be exploded under the fist of the most authentic repression. Popocatepel isn't so far away that one of the stones hurled by its eruption can't reach Paris and flatten the Church of the Madeleine; but nevertheless it is because Popocatepel set its sights too high in the lap of its mother earth that the hatred of the spirits killed it, using the jealousy of its enemy Vesuvius. And this is no mere symbol. Because all the meat-and-potatoes spirits issuing out of the mud of the Etruscan world to give birth to the century of Augustus and the *Commentaries* of Julius Caesar intended to keep an active volcano within reach, right next door to their own home ground. But they could only satisfy their requirements by taking the life of Popocatepel. However

Popocatepel is no fool, etc., etc. It's in this vein that I would like to write the introduction to this little book. So you see, the idea interests me.

I am aware, Arthur Adamov, that you have had a lot to do with my getting released, and that Dr. Ferdière was very impressed with everything you said about me. But, pending the explosion of a dead volcano, haven't you heard that—in tandem with the effort you're making in my behalf by organizing a benefit show and Roger Blin's plans for a gala performance for me—people all the way from Kabul and Turkestan, and also Bohemia, have gotten together to bring me certain substances no longer available in Europe, as well as money? I have been expecting them for several weeks, but they're having terrible difficulties with Customs as well as a few other difficulties of the same order as I encountered in Mexico (police, army) as I was scaling the mountain at an altitude of 5,500 meters. For the Castle of San Angelo, the Castle of the Popes, and the old Tower of Prague are not quite as dormant as they might seem. When my people arrive, I will most certainly make my idea of the Theatre of Cruelty come true at last.

Your faithful friend,
Antonin Artaud

TO GEORGES BRAQUE

Paris, 16 January 1947
Dear Monsieur Georges Braque,

I have been meaning to write to you for years.

It first occurred to me at the Rodez asylum, in my very special situation there. One day I said to myself:

Georges Braque would understand. I'll write him.

Next, here in Paris, on my return from Rodez, at the time when the benefit sale of works by painters was being organized for me, I was told:

Georges Braque gave a picture for you.

You didn't even know me. I'd never had the pleasure of meeting you. I was

especially touched by the gift because of something I always thought I read in your canvases.

Cubism reopens the entire issue of the occult linear world, and it's no longer even a question of tearing internal tissue. However, that kind of tearing is everywhere in the work of other painters. Under the pretext of "a clean slate," as it were, the painter wished to surprise the inner workings of a ready-made cosmos, the existing one, rather than create another.

Yours are the only canvases in which I always had the impression of a will to total genesis, with no sensationalism, moreover, the pure element being sought in accord with intrinsic necessity, as though calmly and in the absence of all passion.— Yet if the universe thus repeated was calm and without passion, this is because its genesis was a criminal one, Georges Braque, and it's not obvious at a first reading, but, on a close look at certain shapes as highlighted and recomposed by you, one would have said you were aware of this.

But I have always had somewhat the impression that an absolute solution of the problem was not your intention.

Nature is there, she is to blame; I have some idea of the direction in which she should have evolved so as to be pure, untainted with the line of all transgression. But I am a man. I did my evolving by myself, from head to toe. This I believe. When the architecture of humanity has been remade, this will perhaps rate some notice. It was at any rate the heart that sinned and went soft, not out of lovingkindness but the weakness of sexuality. Maybe one day I shall be able to tell where true sensibility hung on, that nonhybrid sensibility which kept its race, and this is how the latest Georges Braques, year after year, evince a type of sensibility that puts me in mind of certain Etruscan mysteries.— A sensibility aloof from the unctions of the moistened heart.

All this by way of telling you, Georges Braque, that at Rodez I thought if I wrote you, "They're wrong, they are trying to make me pass for a psychotic, a raving maniac, because I believe in magic and persist in saying that magical operations of a particular order are being mounted against me and are what caused them to lock me up in the first place and throw away the key," you would believe me.

I am no longer locked up, of course, but the magical operations have only escalated in guile, meanness, and efficacy. Presently, at certain hours of the night, on certain days of the year, month, or week, the entire earth is an immense circus of enchantments so cleverly camouflaged nobody notices them and yet they orchestrate events from afar and on high (!) in tune with the suppura-

tions of certain *uncouth* overtones of an arch-criminal, dissolute, premeditated, obscene, erotic disorder, nevertheless also reserving on the side a special table with the eternal discriminant of fear, in accordance however with that order of personalistic egotism that is least veiled and most unrepressed in the invoking of orgasm for its own sake, a liberated, unchecked libido, and the affirmation there is no harm in extras and the bare necessities are for somebody else, never oneself. To think up such a morality, nobody ever needed culture or education. All that is necessary is to come out in favor of the free satisfaction of the flesh on the sexual level, and that's worth an entire theurgy. The basic principle of today's so-called mass mind, amorphous and unconscious as it is, is:

Let's harm this hurt, sick man for having wanted to prevent us from enjoying our extras.

Extras here means the dirty erotic satisfaction of making somebody suffer who already suffered too much in order to keep clean and stay detached and pure. On this level everyone is a witch doctor, and I mean everyone, a magician enchanting a humble and retired artist.

In addition, I say everyone is aware. In magic, gurus, yogis, cenobites, anchorites, masters, instructors, and all their ilk get paid. They pay them with a bit of sperm, milk, or shit specially prepared and shot into space. Out of 5 billion men, 3 billion are practicing this magic *with full knowledge and awareness*, enchanting cops and psychiatrists in order to make lucid minds shut their mouths.

Antonin Artaud

TO ANIE BESNARD

Paris, 6 February 1947
Dear little Anie,

I was extremely upset by your phone call this morning. I would have preferred to believe you were really ill, but in fact I can't.

It seems that once again, as in October 1944, there was a plan to prevent you

from coming to me.

In Paris and elsewhere, there are people with a vested interest in never seeing our former relations of friendship, affection, even *love*, start up again.

Yet what an innocent love.

Its very innocence is what upsets them all. That a heart, namely yours, could be faithful to me without having had sex with me, this is something people never run into in today's world, Anie. To love someone for sheer love, without the slightest physical involvement, a love based on honor and devotion and lovingkindness; to help someone and do for them and not expect anything in return other than a mutual bond.

Anie, you must realize everyone is your enemy. Your sleeping soul they don't comprehend. Nobody understands you. I am the only person who cares for you because you're *you*, Anie, and that's all.

Anie, you should have paid attention and minded me *diligently*.

I'm working. I'm not merely writing books. I'm working to transform something in the whole of life, hateful as it is; and that is something they all know and want at any price to stop me from carrying off; because in the universe I'm planning, sex will be out, barred, debarred; there will be hardly anybody left. None but those who were capable of loving me for sheer love, for the love that is a pure relationship; and I've found scarcely 10 such.

Anie, I would like you to delve into your memory and pinpoint exactly where you were and what you were doing on the 14th of October, 1944.

Magic is stronger than people think.

Colette Prou was murdered with an ax in a cell nextdoor to mine at the General Hospital, Le Havre, end of September 1937, and her body was dumped piecemeal in a vacant lot on the outskirts of the hospital grounds by the male nurse who had dismembered her.

And yet certain people have seen her alive, although quite ill, not too long ago. I can't tell you in a letter all that can be done in such a case to get such results, but black magic has done it in others, Anie, more than once.

And I am wondering if you didn't take a train for Rodez on the 14th of October, 1944, and get out at a certain station in the middle of the night, only to be murdered, suffocated, and your body dumped in a field; whereupon, one fine morning, you woke up in your own bed, a bit vague in the head, quite vague in fact, no longer aware of what had happened to you over a period extending from several weeks to one, two, or three months.

Please search your memory. Try and see if you don't find a gap, one you will then be able to fill with the recollection of all the horrors you were forced to endure *"on the astral plane"* at the hands of demons, i.e. men in present life who dismembered the vanished soul of Anie and, on the astral plane, scattered it in thin air, whereupon other demons, using certain magical passes, brought her back in order to erase this loathsome crime.

Kisses.

Antonin Artaud

PS : All this was to tell you you have only one reliable friend and that is me. Outside of myself, I urge you to consider absolutely every one of the people around you as an enemy—your mother, your sister, your brother, etc., etc.,

and to consider they are your enemies to the extent that you think like me there is something else in life beyond an ass and a mouth, a nice little mouth to stuff with goodies,

and that something is your honor, your life's honor. Guard it with your life.

Never let them insult you in your life,

your individuality,

your body.

That is all-important.

We are living in a world, Anie, where neither man nor woman

respect the human body any more.

And my body is, among other things, very good.

This is why I have so many demons at me in the night when I am sleeping.

Demons?

No!

Men who are worse than the most disgusting animals whose sole remaining objective on this planet is to pollute Artaud's body.

The other objective is to make Artaud pass for *a raving maniac* when he denounces this ignominious fact.

As if it weren't happening, whereas it's the only thing that's happening—the one and only thing that is happening anymore by night is the exploitation of Artaud's body.

And how much more seminal fluid do they require, in fact, to satisfy this

insatiable need to have sex and call it love?

Yet who, in their waking state, would ever dream that every bit of that semen came out of Artaud's body and *that* is the reason Antonin Artaud is such a sick man.

This letter is for your eyes only.

(Translated by David Rattray)

From INTERJECTIONS:

POUNDING AND GISM

The words we use have been handed down to me and I use them, but not to make myself understood, not to finish emptying them out of me,
then why?
Just because *I do not use them*,
in fact I do nothing other than keep quiet
and pound.
Other than that if I speak it's because of fucking, I mean the universal fornication continues which makes me forget not to think.
The fact is that I say nothing and do nothing, that I use neither words nor letters,
I use no words and I don't even use letters.

I have never founded, started or followed a movement.
I have been a surrealist, that's a fact,
but I believe I must have been so in deed,
and indeed I was one but I wasn't one when I initiated or signed manifestos
unless it was to insult

a pope,
a dalai lama,
a buddha,
a doctor,
an academic,
a priest,
a cop,
a poet,
a writer,
a man,
a pedagogue,
a revolutionary,
an anarchist,
a cenobite,

a hermit,
a dean,
a yogi,
an occultist.

As for the reactionaries, the fascists, the communists now in power, the rightists and the leftists, they won't even be insulted, they won't even be broken up, won't be decomposed, those bastards, the way we say: nature does it, it's her process, but that's not enough, and there is something more serious to be done in that case.

So, then, so why once again a tract from you, Artaud, and why haven't you gotten the hell out since you've been given the sign to get out.
"Make way for the young, for the newcomers, for those who have nothing more to say but who are there.
The situation stinks."
It's precisely that it doesn't yet stink enough to keep criticism, or attack, or judgment, or aggression of any kind away from me.
And why the hell should I care? In fact it might mean nothing to me at all and I might disregard it in contempt but the trouble is precisely that it does mean something to me.
I mean that the nuttiness springing up all around does not leave my body unscathed, I am infected with it as if by varicocele, by blennorrhea, AND I DON'T LIKE THAT ONE BIT.
Style horrifies me and I notice that when I write I'm always producing it, so then I burn all my manuscripts and there remain only those that call to mind a suffocation, a gasping, a strangulation in I know not what lower depths because that's true.
Ideas horrify me, I don't believe in them any longer
and I want them to be set in motion
and for people to say I am crazy: crazies bite, right?
So let the disputator come,
he'll say to me: this exists, that doesn't,
and things are like this or not like that,
I bite him.
for I really don't believe in words or in the ideas stirred up by words, and inside of words,

to be means no more to me or LESS than not to be, and nothing no longer means anything to me,
and silence as well, no more and even less.
And it isn't that I am neither to the right nor to the left and I'm even less middle of the road and I hate equilibrium even more than deportation,
on condition that it's I who carry myself away, and I get carried away when I see the unchanging middle aproaching.
For I see clearly that certain people are beginning to hold it against me that I'm old hat.
I hate philosophy, magic, occultism, esoterism, and yoga, as well as anatomy,
ANATOMY I say, and medicine, arithmetic, algebra, trigonometry, differential calculus, and the precession of the equinoxes,
and as well, though no doubt no one will believe me, a gut hatred of poetry.

I have received lots of anonymous letters in my life. The last one, sent just a few weeks ago, told me of the mailing of an old poem that I never received, but it only gave me the title without comment:

THE LAMENT OF OLD ARTAUD ASSASSINATED IN THE OTHER LIFE AND WHO WILL NOT COME BACK AGAIN IN THIS ONE.

For fear no doubt that I might forget that I was back and welcome back.

Another letter chides me for writing in French, in good French I mean, and for using flowery language like the rest. Nobody has as yet reproached me for being dialectical or dogmatic for as to dialectics I don't know what it is. But finally I too have been reproached for also believing in verbal popery, for attaching a value to sentences that are solidly constructed, elegantly strung together, full of rhythm and well grounded. "And that, I've been told, makes us laugh, the way you believe in beautiful French.
You attack authority, society, religiosity, and rituals as though those words still hid facts and ideas. And above all you believe in words, in the strong words you use. Nothing but emptiness has ever meant anything, you're full of yourself and full of everything. Beat it."
I must say that I'm the one who translates all these criticisms into studied French, for the young people who have addressed me in this fashion have done so only from a distance, and as if from one edge of space to the other, or by mail, and have only made obscene gestures at me to prove to me that

I was on the wrong track, for close up it would have come to blows.
But they haven't yet dared to risk that.

So I must say that over the thirty years I've been writing I haven't entirely found yet,
neither my word nor my language yet,
but the instrument that I have been ceaselessly forging.

Feeling as I do like an uneducated illiterate, this instrument will not be supported by letters or by alphabetic signs, there one is still too close to figurative, ocular and auditory convention.

Whoever has tied up meaning, tied up thought, and whoever has tied up meaning thought, tied them up in terms of a preventive ideation whose formal written tables, whose tables of perceptual significations were inscribed upon the walls of an inverse brain.
For the human brain is no more than a double which by projection emits a sound for a sign, a sense for a sound, a sentiment for a sign of life, an idea for a movement, everything is written, lived on astral matter and letters are only movements that require a little bit more of the great film to unreel its unveilings.
A printed letter is an obsolete movement which once again comes to project the gism of a terminal phosphorus,
and soon all letters will be read,
all letters completely exhausted.

And each book written will be read, and it won't be able to say anything anymore to those completely decomposed brains, after being arbitrarily imposed and re-imposed.

ALL OF THAT IS VERY WELL BUT I HAVE NEVER FALLEN FOR SUCH NONSENSE.

For letters are no more than the simplistic graphism that might correspond to the necessity of being awakened by the reflex spectre of an organ created for a certain time and condemned at birth:

THE BRAIN.

The lobes of the brain aren't infinite, nor the infinite either, but it lasts.

I know a state beyond mind, beyond consciousness, beyond being, in which there are no more words nor letters
but into which one enters by screams and through blows.

And it is not sounds or meaning that come out,
nor words,
but BODIES.

Pounding and gism,

in the infernal crucible where it's never a question of words anymore nor of ideas.

Pounding to death and fucking the face, gism on the face, is the last language, the last music I know,

and I swear to you that bodies come out of this
and that these are *animate* BODIES.

ya menin
fra te sha
vazile
la vazile
a te sha menin
tor menin
e menin menila
ar menila
e inema imen

CIVIL STATUS

It's me, Antonin Artaud,
50 years old,
        who does it,
taking the skin, and splitting it,
instead of waiting for its physiological rehabilitation by a tool in the sense
    of a new daddy,

just as when vertigo occurs
I don't submit to god
            the straightening out of the father's children,
but first of all
I let the merinos piss, while kicking beings about, so they'll get away from
    my fire,

for I am, as everyone knows,
that great genius,
        the one who says so,
        who wrote,
        not the Cabala,
        the Popol-Vuh,
        the Brahma-Putra,
        the Kama-Yoni,
        and Ji ni ini ini
        of all the imputed yogis,

but this avant mamtram of filth,
        of pestilence
        and pus
through which life
        suppurated
advancing toward the wall of hardened spasm
        and of sleet
that the ever benumbed flu
        of being
grates to death

when it ripens
the tongue of its inflammation.

When I eat, the gourmand void at the bottom of the throat,
of the gluttonous orifice,
summons the alimentary bolus to monopolize it to the detriment of the teeth and the tongue,
with which the glottis behind it has strange complicities.
but all that is of no interest at all,
for the tongue
is an obscene slut who in front is ready to follow the teeth in their detailed work of mastication,
and behind,
is still more ready to let itself be gobbled up by the orifice,
and to push, lewdly and treacherously, the food toward the orifice,

the tongue,

pregnant with all its ancestral salacity,
and which moreoever descends from it like a light of the holy spirit.
The fore-mentioned apostles, on the day called Pentecost, 40 days after the *flight* of Christ facing the martyrdom of Golgotha and the revolting death of the authentic martyr of Golgatha (who was called Artaud like me, and I do believe it was me),
believed they saw tongues land on them, enter into them,
but in fact they did not see them there, nor from there,
no longer being there,
not yet being there,
having never been there,
they saw again the vast scene of pregenital swill where the body of man, not satisfied with having a link of blood-sausage between his thighs, wanted to have another one between his teeth,

where the tongue could coat and lubricate the detonations of speech as well as the machinegun fire of I know not what mythic dental anger at the aggressive rush of food,
said thus, amid the cave-ins of invading nourishment, under the tireless carronades of teeth,, there are mephitic trenches of gas, appalling ravines of hollow matter,
strange molecular wells, amid the rushes of food,
but the entrance of the tongue changed all that,
mastication passed onto the level of the simple micturition of a stupid erotic masturbation.

Wednesday November 27th 1946, 11 p.m.,
beings that have not swallowed the nail,
but have swallowed the point,
and have held themselves between the hard and the flabby,

those one cannot disintricate
because if one looks for them in the breath
they take refuge in the body,
and if one looks for them at one point on the body
they claim to be braided there in breath,
lightning gashing the body
like a negation of body,
having more body than all breath.

They amass in the body,
outside of whoever controls this body
and for them has not left it,
being neither intelligent enough to reign over its mental faculty,
nor sufficiently that suffering body to be all this body,
in time, the extent of time,

nor old enough in itself to be as old as this body,
nor vegetatively ingenerate enough to be all this innate body,
nor antecedently
im-planted
to be what this body
is,
nor instinctively
supple enough,
to be its sempiternal ascent,
and which, to finally flee the whip,
takes refuge not in being or life,
heart, soul, consciousness, or mind,
but in the strength of the body itself,
latent, in the process of rising,
not in pure volition,
but in lightning or whip,
in the surface inert in fact,
in the flagellation of fact,
in the reputation between fact and surface,
the depths of the etected
surface (it's the sur-frère of detecting)
in the etection of the surface
the thickness of the incorporated is made,
the inert of the body raised by it,
of this body in the process of raising itself,
the thickness of the body in tapul, projected by catapult,
the *molar* that volition extracted from itself like an evil.

Ideas don't come without limbs, and so these are no longer ideas but limbs, limbs fighting among themselves.

The mental world was never anything but that which remains from a hellish trampling of organs while the man who had them is no more.

It is thought from below that leads,
there is absolutely no criterion of spirit, of judgement,
spirit is no longer anything but an adventitious memory,
the more a body is a body, the farther it is from spirit and from its consciousness,
and the more worth it has in body,
and the more the idea of worth escapes,
with its value and its quality,
and the more the life of the body proper keeps it from differentiating itself
against value and quality,
between value and quality,
and drives the quality of existing to despair;
and the more the body radiates completely in the oblivion of intrinsic value,
and of the spirit of quality,
and the more it radiates and becomes concrete,
in that the body wanted to squeeze itself out and to collect, in order to completely become body, in its hatred of spirituality.

The principle of yoga is based on the eternal happiness of swallowing the sorrows of others.

What body is is the emaciation of one's own matter,
achieved by oneself;
what has not been achieved in one's own sorrow
falls away at the hour of death,
until becoming pure spirit, and so that a part of the body can become the evil matter of pure spirit.

lo menedi
bardar
ta zerubida

lo menedida
bardar
la ter
tupi
bahelechi
bertoch

na menezucht
bordi
menucht
saba
dezuda

dezuda ravi

Thus perish the spirits of all those who have never wanted to take the trouble of having a body, and want in spite of everything to have the freedom of the city under the reign of truly solidified bodies.

For nothing bestializes a being like the taste for eternal happiness, the search for eternal happiness at any price, and mademoiselle Lucifer is that slut who never wanted to abandon eternal happiness.

But now the ancient cosmic prospection of god will no longer occur.

The great total dimension is to become as a simple man strong as all infinity.

What's going to happen is that men are going to show their instincts repressed for so long,
and I my true language;

a ta aishena
shoma
shora
borozi
bare

a red ulcer reed
with a fart fiber penis.

opotambo
zorim
nietecta
opotembech ari nicto

And the nail will remain a nail throughout all eternity, when the Portici gull of my sensations passes and my body remains intact.

insulpici de talpiquante
a la piquante e salapice

Thus it is that the processional serpent of all bodies, with its mask of red horror, falls to the earth beneath my feet;
and it gave this mask back to me, as though the earth had not deserved it.

And I said in the midst of the void,
the void of seven eternities:
The self is not the body, it is the body that is the self.

The Mass holds the East as well as the West,
holds the East where it does not occur more firmly than the West where it does,
the proof being that it is to the extreme peak of the summit of the Himalayas that the obscene priests of Rome, Jerusalem, and Lebanon will have to go to finish guzzling the benefice of their daily assassination of the human body.

archina

ne coco rabila
co rabila
e caca rila

archeta
ne capsa rifila
ca rifila
e carta chila

archita
ne corto chifila
corti fila
e capsa chila

Translation:
Haven't they sufficiently decorticated
the patibulary cavities of my skull
and drawn the burned hides
of their million damned souls
down upon themselves.

The Mass is supported by the human orifice,
it takes place on the slope of that bone
through which virginal deloused man
pukes.

Man holds the stolen stone at a certain place in his skull,
for his own skull is a window (a way of being open to being),
for mine it is the niched stone,
this stone has an aura which is being,
and it is in the aura of being,
the integral aura of being, the tide of inexhaustible will,
is it will itself, or its rape?
It's the rape of will that created this psychic sea in which all being believes it is being agitated,
and agitating,
it's thought, that aqueous stone that drags along like the old monk frock of the most sordid beggary,

Yes, thought is that obscene bitch that always wants to get screwed,
and that vampirizes in order to get it first,
and every man is that evil thought,
which claims to be spirit and science, when it doesn't even have a body,
when it is only that foul, rotten, corrupt body, full if itch mites,
green with pustules,
that man alone can stipple,
that foul, mangy slut-meat, stuffed with rats and old farts, I mean old sins.
Now I've never believed in sin, but looking at man today I have a good
mind to reconsider it.

Friday December 13th 1946,
the espousals of my rondelles,
testicular, infantile rondelles,
by the palpatory
intellectual lips
of the lama
have not yet set fire to *that:*
have not even lit a fire in me:

they made my daughter Ana emerge
from the charnel house of beast piss beings,

the wall contrary to beings that emerged from a point blossoming on the
inverse face of the bodies;
and for one night that's enough.

I know absolutely nothing about it,
that's why I'll be able to lead
the coincidence of the sexual tail
where those who
aphorhyme
ufourmly
rally by turn
my buncey
tail,
bunts of pulmonary
udders,
a father-mother bone,
an occipital ribbon,
are *placed*.

Thinking back
this Sunday
afternoon
December 8th, 1946
on my pursuit of the tail,
the little white
parasites
pressed right up to the exit of the glans.
Sperm?

They cast in me a double
who believes in god;
as for me
who believe only in myself,
I must finish killing off that automatism that makes me
raise my eyes to heaven
to call me, *me*, to witness
the purity of my intentions
while the swallowing of evil takes place;
I would do better to recover physically

than to have this "moral" surge!
What is a moral surge?
An aborted physical surge,
one that stopped short.

Compenetration,
penetration,
my language,
melange,
my language,
reconciliation,

no space,
no infinity,
no distance,
no register,
no ensemble,
no "in general,"
no totality,
no harmony;

everything down the drain
but not me,

no contact,

no light touching,
no getting close,
no penetration,
no compenetration,
no copulation,
        pulation.

To bring into contact
principle molecules
and to force them
to break one upon the other
cuntspired
by means of a series of repeated propulsions
which obey the rhythms of a dance
of which the sexual act is only the bestial
and aborted caricature.

But I am the father-mother,
neither father nor mother,
neither man nor woman,

I have always been there,
always been body,
always been man.

Things are not seen from the heights of the spirit up above the body,
but are made by the body,
and on its level,
far more infinite than the level of any spirit.

Without another
law than
that of an
extremely
tenebrous,
scrupulous
and obstinate
equity.

Don't forget
Lucifer's mug
beneath his god-the-father
greasepaint,
sneering through the bars.

Electricity is a body, a weight,
the pestling of a face,
the sunken magnet of a repressed surface from the outside of a blow,
blow of the blue fist of my green hand of despair and of anger, one day
that
facing this blow
the hole that I was going to put in things
snapped my hand up
not to ward off an attack
but to be the master,
at last.

They bore holes,
they do more than hollow out notions, values,
they stifle slowly supputated proposals, as they say, like a suppurating wound,
they do not rise above their body
in order to enter consciousness,
for what is the spirit without the body?
A dishrag of dead come.
They don't enter the "mentule state,"
they don't believe there is a body called intelligence or science,
anymore than a body called god,
for they no longer see anything in the heavens,
so they understand the heavens,
they no longer believe that things are a void crisscrossed with animal ideas,
they only understand what one does not understand,
and they understand that one can no longer understand and perceive what one
sees,
for the body is too cramped there,

but the body is not down there, in the future that it swells with all that it will be,
and it is perhaps in fact thus, that god took man's property from him, who like god does not exist where he has not yet made himself,
it is only god who can be made where he has never worked, at making himself, or at existing,
thus it is that, not having worked, god took from humanity both its future and its past.
The seeds were ill-sown.
I don't know what he did, or from where he emerged to kill, infect and assassinate,
but my brain is not sick over it, no, my brain is sliced by this lowly coal-trimmer's work that god night and day indulges in on my corpse of humanity, the remains of my body tracked everywhere by the fertile vegetation of all the microbes, of all the cheese mites, and the crab lice by means of which god eats me, thus probing my depths,
because there isn't just god, but men on the carcass of Artaud the shit.

The monkey's hand is a kind of spontaneous splinter *function*
arisen from the depths of innate knowledge,
and that never wanted to work,

but lived
on the cost of all my pain
that it raked out of my big intestine,
the old old
bony hand
by which I've lost the shadow and the tain
of the plate glass forever rebacked
that it retains in its palm,
bringing back from the cemetery
all that ya had

in your butt
when your hand of a butt-raped monkey
picked evil
by the basketful
like sweet and slow buttered bread
that one silently puts back
on the old beached verso
of my brain or of my foot
or on the old genitals that I
lost
while fighting here and there
the sourness as well as
the screw nut
of the body,
including as always honesty,
old buttocky honesty,
buttock of a tonsured monkey,
picked over glands and kidneys,
of all the hearts, and cerebellums
of automatons
of men in unmoulted bodies
that form this humanity
has always meticulously brought back to me
without overlooking a hair,
where the shadow that its future genitals project
on the fat of sexuality,
without therefore overlooking a single genital
for the future genitals are thousands,
they number thousands upon thousands,
the dead genitals
that a too hurried coition
hurled to the side of the road,
blessed, baptized genitals,
having found their spouse,
the day that god succubused you,
old quim of turned milk

Mary,
and you, the so-called virgin,
ivi
izes
ti panaia.

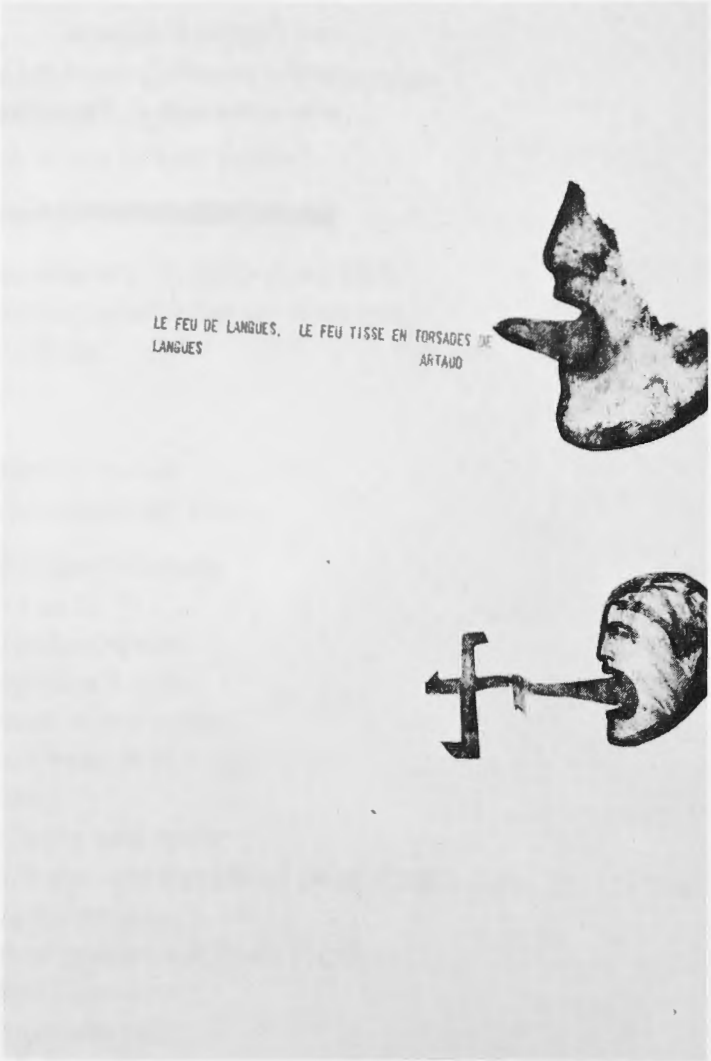
Well then, have you seen the bitch
the way she stuffed her face on her droppings,
her fat old enturded tongue,
under the tube of the inborn father,
getting it up
in the ruckus
toward the one who will be born from him,
and against the corporeal heart all of whose
microbes of his heart
leap
in advance
like the microbes of spirits
beseiging my head and my cock.

I must not have eaten enough
bouillabaisse or aioli
to thus place faith in spirits.
Spirits of beings don't exist,
the being of man doesn't exist,
the bark doesn't exist in the tree
like another tree,
it's that same being and spirit
the life of which the tree fomented (stirred up),
it's the same spirit without folds
in the heart, that separates it from the finite,
that I the master I perceive
when I see life parade past,
the finite of a hollow fiber,
in a muscle scraped to the bone
like the finite of a leaf
on this same spiritless tree,

and that with its body of cow-dung
is very much closer to eternity
than all the spirits of infinity.

(Translated by A. James Arnold
and Clayton Eshleman,
with acknowledgement to David Maclagan
who cotranslated "Pounding and Gism.")

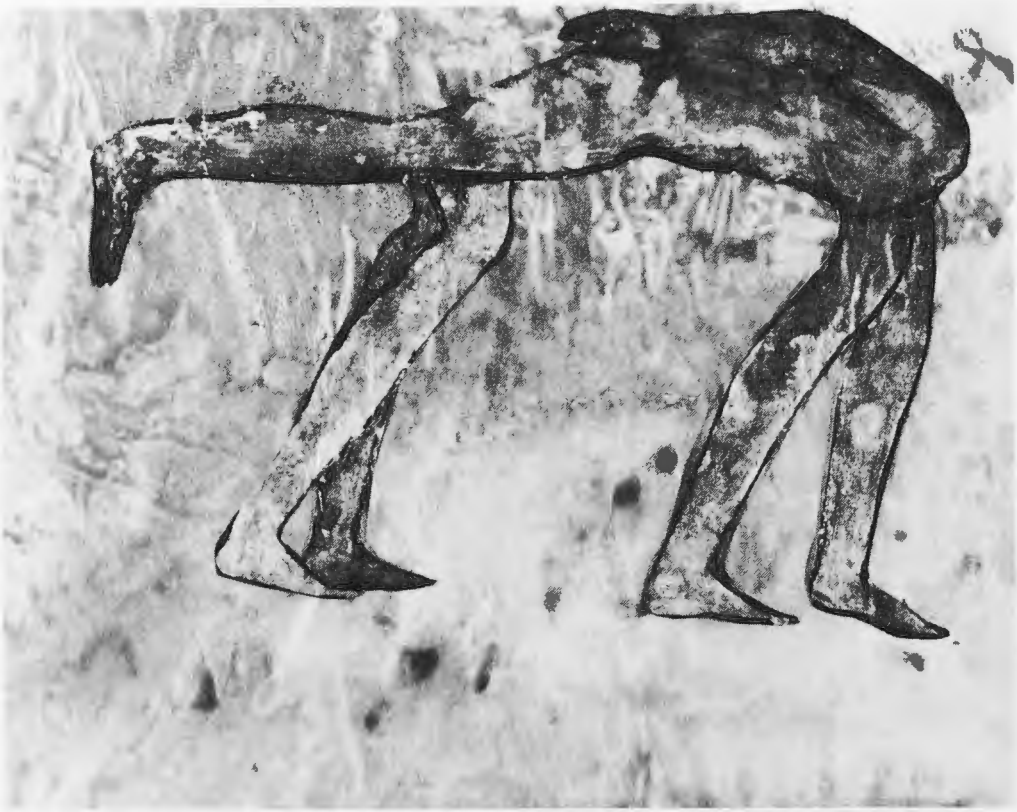
Nancy Spero



Codex Artaud (1971-72) is a gouache collage and typewriter collage work on paper; the seven reproductions here are all details from scroll-like sections of the work that are often two by ten feet in size.

JE
CONSERVE
DANS
LE
COIN
LE
PLUS
PRÉCIEUX
DE
MA
TÊTE
CETTE
PRÉOCCUPATION
DU
SEXE
QUI
ME
PÉTRIFIE
ET
M'ARRACHE
LE
SANG.

ARTAUD



L INVERTI
EST
CELUI
QUI
MANGE SON
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ET
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QUE
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LE
NOURRISSE,
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DANS
SON
SOI
SA
MERE
ET
VEUT
LA
POSSEDER
POUR
LUI.

LE
CRIME
PRIMITIF
DE
L INCESTE
EST
L ENNEMI
DE
LA
POESIE
ET
LE
TUEUR
DE
SON
IMMACULEE
POESIE.

ARTAUD

JE NE TUIS NI MOURIR, NI VIVRE ARTAUD
ME DEMANDE 'LUS A SENTIR MON CERVEAU ARTUAD

QU'ON LIT LES MÉMOIRES DES POÈTES MORTS,

MAIS, VIVANTS, ON NE LEUR ENVERRAIT PAS UNE TASSE DE CAFÉ OU UN VERRE D'OPIUM POUR LES RÉCONFORTER.

ARTAUD

Peter Redgrove

Six Poems

FLY BUDDHA

I.

Tasting the peach with the fingers,
The nap of velvet, the glittering flesh,
Recording of the Florida sun. An antelope:
Smells an orange with the slit
Under its eye. And the sensitivity of the eye

That brushes everything it sees
Several times a minute; and that
of the painter's brush: let's look
At this painting of a talk
In a boat at night, with fireflies;
They are discussing something
Very important below the surface of life,
Every brushstroke shows it.

II.

I said to the fly, "Get off my plate,
Go and dung-roll!" "Sir,"
He replies irritably, as one
Who knows himself well, "I go not to wallow,
But to feast! on incomparable suets,

And matchless custards in my finery
Of stripes and veined sunshades; and, no
You cannot say 'decay': I know forest-glades
Of buttered asparagus, tree-trunks
That are whole truffle, blancmange pastures, evolving.''

III.

''Meat slides through meat,'' says the fly,
''Conceive how holy to me you shit,
Like heaps of Madonnas gilded with fatty flow,
Rejoicing with our ancient hum of contemplation,
Our church and nursery hung with votive seed-pearls,
Hymning. There I taste
With my whole soul,'' says he,
''Which is my body, I smell with my eyes;
Odour is scenery, scenery is odour;
I scan the green grass which has travelled
Again and again through meadows,
In continuous present,'' ''But,'' said I,
''You can speak, and think; that seems
To separate you from your joys, how can
You give yourself utterly?'' ''Eigh?'' asked the fly,
''What was I saying then? Please remind me.''

THE FUNERAL

(For N.)

I.

Clouds and mountains were invited, both the conscious
And the unconscious creatures. The trees
Like visible outpourings of the stream's music,

The urine of the animals in the dawn frost
Puffing like rifle-fire. The dark meat of the sun,
the bloody meat, the flowering sun.

II.

Ninety-two percent of what we eat is from direct
Pollination by the bees, he tells me this
To cheer me and if true ninety-two percent
Of what he says with his mouth is said by bees. The first light
On leaves looks like apples hanging in the trees,
The whole forest a vast orchard, and all things
Are more than they seem, for they may fly away,
And disappear like Mother pausing on the threshold
Of the fields of light, which are like dew
Thick in the grassy meadows, for the light hangs
Dripping in the leaves, stands on the wind.

III.

There is a Watcher, I think, who has magnetic wings.
First it seemed to me at the funeral service with the terrible
Useless brass handles that would be saved screwed to
The veneer cardboard coffin that was much too small
That my emotions such as these swirled round my flesh
And some of them spurted from my eyes but ninety-two percent
Were beating in my back in a sensation like spread wings.
Since mine were sprouting I was able to see
The wings of others, such as my father's, standing next to me,
And his were ragged and tattered like those of an old moth
Close to drying up and drifting away, it seemed my duty
To merge my birth-wet wings with his, and this I did,
Entwining them in an embrace with him that he would never know,
And sure enough he, the widower, perked up,

And I felt tattered, but not dry, for back at the house
I sobbed my heart out in the little white-tiled loo,
And there was still a little angelic witness lodged in my spine
At the small of my back, in Jesus-robes, little calm watcher
In white, which I cannot explain, merely report.

IV.

The other thing the funeral showed me, unpromising seance,
My Mother, subject of it, at the door ajar
On the field of light, looking back over her shoulder,
Smiling happiness and blessing me, the coherent veil
Of the radiant field humming with bees that lapped the water, and she bent
And washed her tired face away with dew and became a spirit.

SOME MUSIC

The mountains that steer the wind,
And when it blows many hours
The seaway is heavy

As the note of a bell increases
The longer it is rung. The pylons
March over the land, like the X-rays

Of cathedrals, their choir
Ghostly, they hum
And crackle, full of ghost.

There is a pad of moss
Crouched in the gutter like a green-gold mouse
Hunting in a sunny tunnel,

All the green-gold pads of moss
Drink thirstily the sunlight,
The tufts and buns in the Falmouth gutters.

The wind is is searching out the resonance
of everything, the whips are still
And the wind whistles, the timbers

Of the rafters strain and hum
In their grain like wires
Stretched from telephone to telephone

And the house flexes,
The perfume messages
Stripped from that bush mark

The surface of that lake
In which they record and infuse. Look
How that great cool-plum cloud

Vaults the horizon, it has
A toiling skin on it
Like plum-forests full of juice,

Toiling in its wind of resonancy,
Cloud full of creamy hail
And mild radio lightning.

Now it rains
like a plum without a skin, the ships
Chatter with their radios

And glide over the water
As a bow chirps on its violin,
And gives out harmonies which touch the shore,

And there is a pad of moss
the size of a horse
Green-gold stallion on this cliff-bank.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY, THE NO-BODY

The impossibility, the water-walker,
The No-body. The windcells

Like footprints on the water,
Skaters of the wind. An Impossibility,

Like a man who stops at his rippling shoulders,
The headless God, or God with his head

Far away in the sky, or surrounding us all
Closer than we can see, God-head, his limbs

Deep in the ocean, the God who reclines on the floods,
Headless. These extraordinary rains are caused

By the enemy of man. When it was found
After the flash of lightning that she was pregnant

It was blamed on the rain splashing upwards,
She had gone out in it barefoot and pantless,

She wished to affirm, and therefore was pregnant,
Two-headed, with her secret sharer. When he was born

And grew to manhood, the glory on his face,
We mistook it for oil, like water that does not break.

He had dreamed that he was bathing in the Fal
When the rains came, but he had opened his mouth

And lifted his head and drunk up
All the excess waters and thus prevented floods.

So then, wheat grains big as pigeons' eggs,
The air feminine and the water desirous of copulation,

The sea hedgehogging the light, our range of mountains
That rip the rainclouds open, called the Cascades.

The glory dazzled us, in the sunlight, so we could not see
His head for the brightness, the mirror-face,

That was black, so that in the darkness also
It went and he walked headless, Impossibility,

Born of the rain rebounding from the earth,
White man with blackface, the black with a white man's body.

CHILDHOOD THOUGHTS

I was in the Treasury, Mother, it was as sexual
As eating snails. Who was the dog, really?
His turd on the path dispensing abominable
Loud-mouthed droning resurrectors. A wall-eyed dolly.
Gnats bony as winged whippets. The bronze flush
on peaches, silvery down; the butter of the cloud-ocean
With Churning Mountain set down on our rainy doorstep.
The zest, the yest, the yeast of autumn on the air,
Its mud a cross between a shit and a yeast,
Clean-dirty, the two truths of spunk and shit.
The bees a kind of yeast, all yellow
With their pollen, waxy. The boiling gnats,
the thin fume; moths like silver cigars
With smoky wings. That thin silver blouse
Like metal sculpture. The moths in silvery blouses
They cannot take off, hanging up on mirrors
Of black emptiness, the windowpanes, through which
The moon turns into an immense powdery moth whose silver dust
Falls on us. I was in the Treasury again, mother.
Who was the dog? There are three big bulging sheep

Caught on the side of the hill, no, they are steps
Of the waterfall, the water woolen with its force.
As the sheepdog loped by, you turned
And the lights caught at your blouse, like the two doors
Bombed slantwise of a treasury, plated with melt.

NAN'S LAST SEANCE

The gold-searching ants nip up the knotty grains
Of pure gold from the glassy sand, ripe grains,
They pile them in flashing ziggurats,
They are themselves gold-sheened as the summer flies are,
Yellow as wheat on the wing;
The rocks break out in flowers.

Five men dancing in gold silk hats
Spun from the maggot of the mother.
The gold folds to the bottom of the copper pan,
Gold on green like the frogs,

Then there is the black and yellow,
The deep earth-oil and its flame;

The earth-toad and the water-frog,
The toad filled with black oil,
The frog with blood of vivid summer water.

All the favorite creatures came.
These are the soliloquies of the undertaker's game;
Depression as a state of prayer.
I shall pray to her with the names of things;
Bring the name and the thing together,
And a third matter
Shoots forth like a flame.

A written mirror, like a field of wheat
In the wind, the text on the page
Rippling and creating images
In its vibratory surface,

Or the words are a yeast added to the vat,
I drink from it and I see more strangely,

I saw a yellow horse of sunset
Galloping across the green hill.
The quotation from Paul
Turned the funeral into a seance.

The written mirror,
The written flames,
The written snowfalls
Sink down, the coffin burns
To pictures in the gold flames.

Diane Ward

THE FOURTH OF JULY IS GEOGRAPHY

Want yours. Street's passion where the worst
that can happen is death without love
quick, anonymous, if not anonymous,
insignificant. This one's dedicated.
Around nobody, my feet flop like fish
on the pavement, July, starting over,
hot. Mothers with baby-worlds
to clothe. Girls with a boy-world
to feed. Sensation, a world that nods
to be fed without hesitaitng, people,
empty, shoes on plywood stands, cheap.
West, the pavement converges into the
river, east I see the same. I turn
left, am left. A holiday that's a real
estate holiday. I touched you, what
if your face changed, flinch. A man
looks at his watch, down the block, back
to his watch. His shirt clean, pink,
white buttons. His mind is clean,
he's innocent, wanted something, he could
want, forget himself or his impression,
shallow furrow, on the world to which he
belonged. Wasn't too small, poor, even
too anxious, wasn't even there

until another person thought he was.
He took that light and waited. Green
to turn to red. The Deli to get crowded
then empty. Skinny, young, preoccupied,
middle age, wealthy, lonely, relax.
Whatever you dreamed possible, terrible,
plastered all over him like clay
on his armature, notation that never
expanded into sentence.

So touch, need to talk, manipulate,
to flatter, cajole, to appreciate,
to rescue, stand up for, follow
behind, to follow up, surround, to hold
onto, elevate, penetrate, to expose,
pursue and manage to stand still and
keep moving, to include each other
in the color scheme, each cover
story, employees of the past-destroyers
and the future deniers, brave ones,
most afraid ones, you get a part
(I made them up) and I have
a part of them. Nothing but affectionate
isolation of events. I will subject you,
how will we ever care, to these affectionate
spots. Transformed into six years, twelve,
eighteen years and more as your shoulder falls
retreating. Beyond your need, you're
vertical, all cushions of calm,
and contribution. A life yearned for
obsolescence. No real time of its own,
it seemed to go on forever. Apathy bulged
and never kept track of itself. The life
would pass itself in a long hallway, turn

off the lights for a moment. It got into
elevators and pressed all the buttons
to witness a steady stream of gaping
alienation. Life didn't last forever.
Both inevitable like an embryo dubbed
baby and fanatical like that part of Pollock
that painted circles around his own death.
Life became increments of five that would
culminate in a random and uncontrollable
grand sum. It wanted the urgency
of an original thought, the humility of a long
effort that failed. It no longer admired
the speed of the newest model, it didn't
contemplate lying down in front of it.
It's fabric was silk woven into concentric
circles of lace.

I see through her eyes. She thinks non-stop
carnivals of pure answers. She thinks
I should finish the food, say something,
go on so I can regain the rest of my body.
I should gesture with my left hand, put
down the fork, cross my legs, scratch one
palm with the other, fondle my bracelet.
I don't wear a bracelet, she wasn't looking
at me, I'm surprised, I was caught
vulnerable, half-dimensional, suspended for
so long. I can't figure out how many
people didn't notice what just tortured me.
Long minutes, heads bobbing above my terrain,
the little conquerer, constant paddler, up
barely. What we need: audience every night
even when we can't embrace them. I could work
harder, I was born with the lack. Every tiny

word and thought struggles for me. Absolute,
as if on a screen, the scene in trouble, my lines
are repeated many times, in and out of focus,
boring the audience, they fall out, they're
militarly. It's economics, I'm losing.
Only one is left now so I fall in love.
We try very hard to understand, care, and not
appear silly. It's our show now that's watched.
Whoever is left this time will be in our next
scene. Now we're a group known as group,
interesting to ourselves, our admirers,
too big to accept every lingering soul, we're
happy, romantic.

I was lifting the spoon to my mouth when
my hand became a clatter of millions
of teeth gnashing, my fork the arching
letter C, the bite of food enormous, mangled
organic matter, and I, a mouth and a brain
connected by a tiny thread, my body gone.
The room surrounded, contaminated its
occupants, their complete bodies' brains
formed words, mouths spoke, hands all gaily
gestured, gracefully moved to the eating act.
I stood out, a wall of paint chips, faulty
when noticed, so insignificant no one noticed.
I'm making up my mind and it's ridiculous.
It's going to be a life led hugging
a wall of undetermined height. But a good
wall with a structure of patience. Nobody
died building it, nobody died against it
Hugging meant perspective, not wallowng.
A few lost gambles, and the life was going
to take place instead in a benevolent

cocoon, an airplane that never inflicted
taking off or landing, a lamp that defined space
with the authority of people who know
their purpose, feel it's worthwhile, never
doubt definition. Soon ludicrous, the darkness
plowed a maze of irrigation ditches for itself,
left messages on its answering machine.
The life was lost, its squatters fingered
satin possibilities, returned melted to
statements drifting, floating, watching.
The life was illuminated blue, a tv
in a dark room, full of symbolism, hints
of itself, words.

The pin-up shot, 2 runners, it left me.
I've seen myself much higher, end to end,
their length measuring a clean yes, strings
tuned to each other, the best when I'm left
in a sound continuing until it's forgotten,
listening until it's drifted away to a point
I lent you. Far away, memory, my corresponding
ivory. If I do fall around you in phrases,
it's childhood, secure, unsure, shedding
honesty, logging in intensity. Your diagonal
gaze, a trick of tired peripheral vision, a page
mid-way through a novel, not sure yet. A hand and
nothing else, an exercise which tries
to not know but touch. This floor slopes
down so that the table resting on it, the books
weighting the table slant down toward
the south, people called guys who stand up
straight on the American plain, China like
a missile down below, Australia like a train
disappearing as a dot, New Zealand like punctuation

Britain like a flower preserved by a florist
with a Phd, Heaven like a joke followed
by nervous laughter, and Iceland, a woman
I dream about whose face is blue, whose clothes
are white and only sharp blue line-drawings
describe her

That's me as a maniac, lifting ther words I can
reach, using them to imagine, topographical
position, the 7th floor. Looking down,
two people walk below toward the west and say:
''Yea, I like him, I've known him a long time.''
Three people down below, heading east, pass
the two, loot the conversation, and initiate
the phrase: ''I like him and I like like like
him I know him, it's been a long, long time
I like him, I know, like enough.''

Janet Rodney

LOST IN THOUGHT

Summer 1983

There is
light too in this shadow

where seeds crack open
with joy for life,

heartroots driving
toward water,

rage & betrayal
of those never meant

to survive,
they seemed so central.

Surely there was never
a land

more harsh than this,
more loving of minimal life.

*

Not a woman
yet colors
transcending color
& rhythm

of waves
breaking on an island
(no man is
unto—
a song
and, strangely,
stone's silence.

Not woman as merely
seen but human
being marked
by stars
emerges from
surf & swirl, sand,
sea-rubbed skin's
fire.

Not hands or feet
as you would
think
nor eyes nor lips,
but body of arcs
& angles in motion,
wisdom's, & de-
meter's precision,
earth unlocking
attention
to the word.

*

Deciduous
& in
the body of language

life's material
losing
essence: definitions
fall/round
& round
disks of
green on green's
deep note
spring into view,
find voice
to transparent
the wall,
open
on a lens

*

What the eye needs
is form
a question
turning towards
(& heart's attention
to) what lies
someplace
where she is

an image

to infect
minute patterns
of other
things (not
what they seem)

& re-vision
how words

might describe
(her)
view.

*

Momentarily
under trees
earth's smell
deep
invites her down
alive

a life

she can carry
for a while,
a life's literal
web & interplay
of being whatever
(it) is, directly
hers.

*

Perhaps she has
already
run thru that pain
(no doctor can heal)
that of

an imagined life,
untouchable dream

of being
here & now

able to say

"I am so full
of everything,"

reconcile
its loss,
letting go

in time.

*

but to see
a dark thing
come out of spring
's calyx
open & upside
down

(you'd have to
leap up
& touch)

the flower
at the top
of an arch,
pure white
alabaster
texture,

look down
& hear the cries
of the world.

*

Flung now
vermillion
fins

drive sun's
shaft where
standing
lost in thought
she fills a
(recrudescent)
terra
        cotta
globe,

light's language
thrown flat
on water

re-minding
an old dimension,
swift flight
toward fall.

*

Those colors
peripheral
as silence
behind sound

plunge words
down

where she can
measure
limits of (that)
vision

& go around it.

Susan Howe

Six Poems

Brute affirmation

Systems tumbled in heaps

Sanctuary to seize
Sage rattling insight haggling for vision

Scheme of providence
scheme for redemption

Question and confusion
Calm dissolution approaching near morning

The skirts of Saints
shudder us safely to necessity

Sackcloth
Reproover in far reaches of dumb shame

Similitude

Dogged Cartesian
Great leaps of statement and proof

Reverence of mock reverence

Some system of coherence

Shadowy and corporeal communication
Somnambulism sketching

Speech hates its father and mother

Snow water when spring is over

Power and predecessor
Stubble hands join

King Chain followed by mimic and buffoon

Corruptible first figure
Bright armies wolves warriors steers

scorned warning captive compulsion

Love leads to edge
Progress of Self into illusion

Same and not the same
Cherubim intone their own litany

Universal separation
—Distant coherent rational system

Vault lines divergence
Atom keysone

Parmenides' prohibition
End of passageway perceive surrounding

Consciousness grasps its subject
Stumbling phenomenology

infinite miscalculation of history

Great men thicker than their stories
sitting and standing

to mark suns rising and setting
Ridges of sand rising on one another

Mathematics of continua

fathomless infinitesimal fraction
sabbatical safety beyond seven

Empty arms cloud counterfeit

Antecedent terror stretched to a whisper

Double penetrable foreign sequel
By face to know helm

Prey to destroy in dark theme
Emblem of fictitious narrative

Step and system

Collision and impulsion
Asides and reminders to myself

Lives to be seen pressing and alien

Fix fleeting communication

Carried away before a pursuer
Demonstration in a string of definitions

To walk a little
Night's kingdom lamentation dimming

Snatched idiom
Recollection fallen away from ruin

Slide into elect unalterable

slipping from known to utmost bound

Wound doe and hind
Wounded errors wound others

Paper plague odd ends reap

Faint legend is day
Mahomet touched a flower with the tips

of his fingers
Face of the voice of speech

Flaming heart on the extended hand
Sky red and lowering

Mountains pitched over to westward

Light inaccessible as darkness
Irradiation of infinite

Principles judgements must connect
Soul lying awake in sleep

Parabolic scholar
Follower

Hail of witches on heath
Wars under the earth

Day cut off
Or summer's rose

Quicksand swallows the bottom

Leaf carried out of invisible hearing
Acoustic signature

prefiguration
Degree of weight and absolute light

Summer has come again
mute time remarked it

Deep generations of the old pass over
Surging and separating

Flame choristers shuddering flame
Self formed in line

Linear theme
prefiguration without premeditation

Vision sweeps away

Immeasurable distance farthest Hebrides

Caused the universe
Contained the universe

Rugged solacing on surge sheltering

Offering or gesture of offering
Imagery and imagery

Jig green revelry

Invisible festival
halves drawn into a circle

feigned necessity vanished from memory

Clay and country
merry and making merry

merry and making Captive

Hymn to the light
hymn and psalm to the light

Eight points of a compass

mosaic pattern eastward dispelled

Summoner's slip into ritual
Planctus of Rachel

Shadowy figures of the Magi
elongated figures troping in stone

Parallel columns
Geographical assertions

Straw mother heaved higher and higher
Self ceded to sphere

Pull world around streets
Prosper our journey

Class structure belonging to shelter

migratory odd scrap trilogy

Laughter hallows the house in summer
Thin home hover in theme

Bound Cupid sea washed

Omen of stumbling
Great unknown captaincy

centuries roam audible silence
whissing days roam own key

second time somewhere
seclusion in symbol sovereign

Memory mutinies contours cling

Mother my name
pin-eyed children

sundial lair from mortal fear

hooed Peru

Prisoned stone guardian
guerdon of resurrection

fictitious deeps

Cries open to the words inside them
cries hurled through the Woods

Pierre Joris

GERMAN LANDSCAPE REVISITED

after Holderlin

well-hung
with yellow pears, a
mountain of wild roses
drags
the land into the lake
you staunch swans
you're loaded
with kisses
you drop
your heads into
the sacro-saint spill.

Goddamn
it all where do I score
in winter
for flowers where
for sunshine
& the shade the earth
throws?

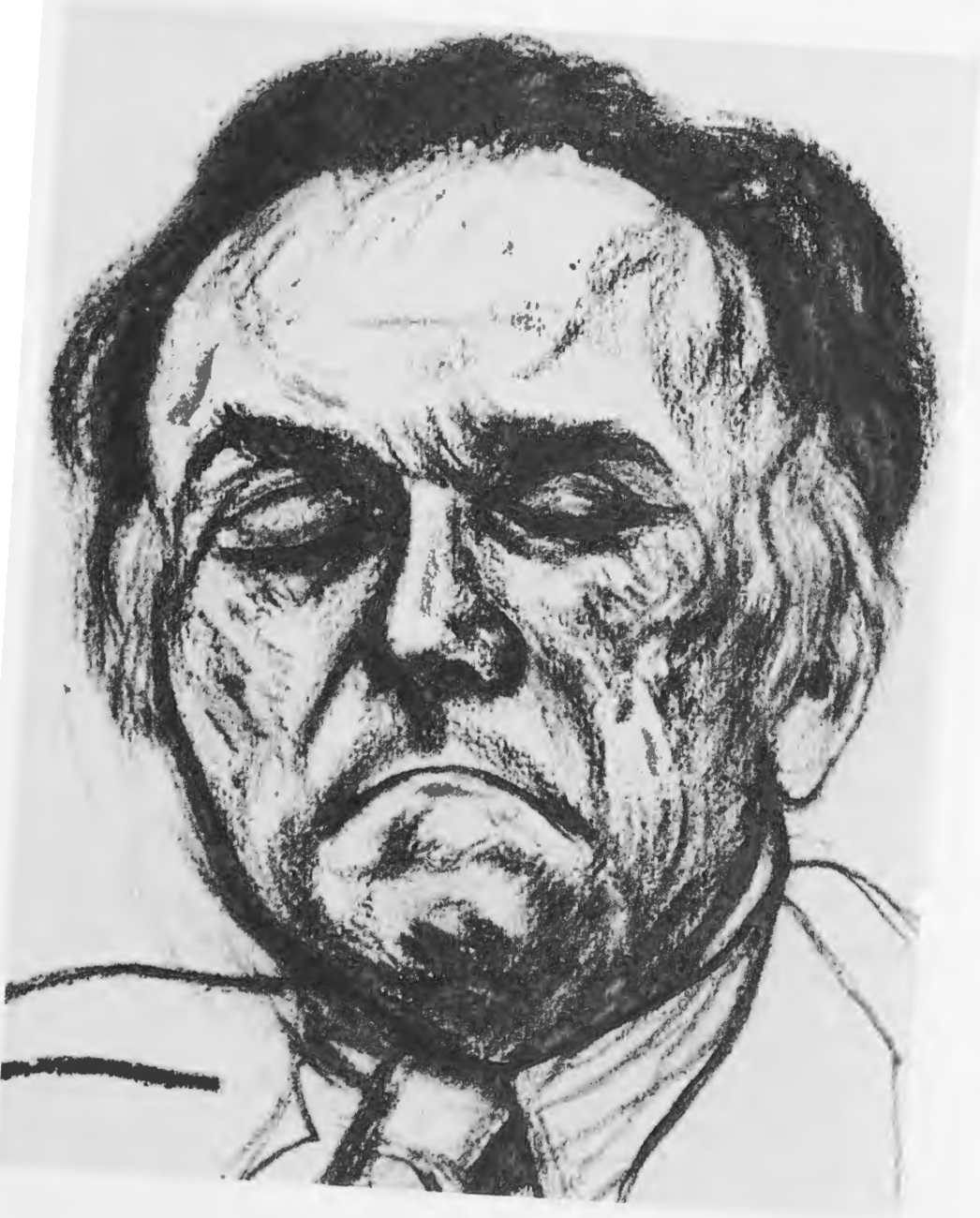
The walls they
just stand there
speechless & cold
the wind
in vain chases
the weather.

R. B. Kitaj

Yona in Paris
charcoal on paper, 22½"x15"

Arikha in Paris
charcoal drawing

Ted in Paris
charcoal drawing



Duncan in Paris
charcoal drawing

Tim in Paris
charcoal drawing

Sandra in Paris
charcoal drawing

David Plante

PARIS, 1983

From my diary

January 26, 1983
In Paris, Hotel Michelet Odeon.

Every time I come to Paris, I think of the first time I came, almost twenty-five years ago. So, when the taxi from the airport went round the Place de la Concorde, I thought of my first taxi ride round the Place de la Concorde with the man from the boat. I'd taken a package through customs for him, and he'd met the boat train at the Gare St. Lazare to collect it. I had no hotel to go to, and he took me to his. I was both frightened and willing to risk anything to get to know what I imagined a secret Paris. But I never even learned what was in the square, flat package. The man disappeared after he got me a room. I myself had to find out the secrets of Paris. On my first walk I saw a poster of a 19th Century view of the city with Les Secrets de Paris in big black letters below. I was nineteen in 1959.

Before unpacking this evening, I rang Kitaj and Sandra, and they told me to meet them at a brasserie on rue des Ecoles for dinner.

I said, "I used to live on rue des Ecoles when I was a student in Paris!"

I had lived there during a period of great discovery in my life, a period closely associated with discovering Paris. To go into the Cluny Museum, around the corner from where I lived was like going into myself, and, in a sense, it was going

into myself, into my remote past, that of my French Jansenist ancestors. Because, knowing nothing about them but that they came from France, who was to say my ancestors didn't come from Paris? I wanted to possess all the city.

My longing to possess the city, perhaps to possess myself, pressed me to strange excesses. I left ritualistically my most essential traces in toilets, on restaurant napkins, on hotel towels and sheets. I imagined there was, going on in small rooms up creaky wooden stairs or down worn stone spiral stairs, something secret which I must know, which, if I knew it, would make me understand everything about myself and the world.

Kitaj and Sandra were already by a window at the table covered with a stiff white cloth, the napkins stiff and white, too. I hadn't seen them in months, when I had last had dinner at their house in London. I embraced them over the table.

They've been living in Paris for over half a year. They said they see few people, and work.

They became, for a moment, strange, and I noticed things about them I hadn't noticed before, or had lost sight of. Sandra sits up straight, looking right at you, smiling with her red lips open, her eyes bright, her long, dark hair loose about her shoulders. It is as if to be attentive for her is to smile. Kitaj's deafness seems worse than ever, so he has to lean close, his elbows on the table, his right or left ear turned towards you as he tries to look at you at the same time, but as he can't quite manage this he has to keep turning his head at different angles. Attentive, he frowns and presses his lips together. His beard is almost all white.

We ordered.

Kitaj, who doesn't drink alcohol, asked for coca cola.

I told them what I'd been thinking about Paris as a secret.

Kitaj said he first came to the city when he, too, was nineteen, in 1952. With the hesitant way he speaks, often clearing his throat and hitching up a shoulder as if to put a muscle back in place, he told me he wanted to come to Europe because of writers he'd read who had found Europe a revelation of creativity, and one of those writers was of course Hemingway. He knew that a great creative flowering, equal to that of 5th Century Greece or Renaissance Florence, had occurred in Paris over a period of, say, a hundred years, and he wanted to go

where so many of his compatriots had gone and, there, produced amazing works. But when he got here he found something else: Paris only seven years removed from German occupation; "And imagine what it felt like," he said, "to walk down a street and know that people there had been pulled out by the Gestapo and sent off to concentration camps. It was, really, my first awareness of being a Jew. At home, I was brought up with little awareness of being Jewish. Europe made me aware of something I hadn't expected. I'd expected something else."

I said "You know, even for me, some seven or eight years younger than you, and not Jewish, the war became the deepest secret of Paris, of Europe. I'd look at the bullet-strafed walls with incomprehension. I'd come to look at the buildings, and I was looking more at the effects of the war on the buildings."

Kitaj said that he'd spent only a few days in Paris, then he took the Orient Express to Vienna, and there it was as if the war had ended the day before he arrived. In Vienna he saw American jeeps being driven around, and in the jeeps soldiers from each of the Four Powers. His grandmother, who was born in Vienna but went to America, had inherited a chemist's shop in Vienna that'd been taken over by the Nazis; the reparation money Kitaj himself collected from a lawyer representing his grandmother, just enough money to live on while he studied at the art academy. The lawyer lived in a medieval court yard. Once a week, Kitaj would go to his flat for the money. The flat was over a Soviet barracks, and after lights out Kitaj and the lawyer would go into the bathroom to listen to the soldiers singing in darkness. People wore the same clothes they had worn during the war. He remembers people in the streets grovelling for food, and the great number of beggars.

I said I wondered if our greatest cultural experience in Europe was of a war we never experienced. I had never thought of this till now.

Kitaj said he got even closer to the war—as if, in Europe, he wanted to get as close as possible to it—when he went to Spain. He said, "I was brought up in a Left-Liberal 30's atmosphere. Two of my mother's boy friends were killed in the Spanish Civil War. I remember jumping off a bus onto the Spanish earth, so deep with Hemingway and everything I'd heard in my youth, all of that pressed beneath the repressive surface of Franco's regime. That gave me the sense of a great secret."

And now, I said, I worry that the memory of that past war has gone from Europe. I worry, not really because I believe if the war is forgotten the restraint the memory of it imposes may go and there'll be another war, but because in some strange way, it is the memory of the war which keeps me in Europe. Even now, when I come across unexpected evidence of it, as a few years ago when I was in the Ardennes and found, walking through a forest, a moss-covered memorial commemorating the execution in the forest of French fighters, I feel something move in me, and I am close to what I, an American war baby, know instinctively is the greatest happening in my life, however far, in space and time, I was from it. Just because I was so far from it, it is, that vast and deep experience, incomprehensible. I still can't imagine daily life during the war, and I wonder about it. But it is going, has to all great extent gone, the memory of the war, from Europe. And as it goes, a lot of what I discovered was my deepest feeling for Europe goes.

Kitaj said, "And what do you think an American Jew feels in Europe?"

I raised my hands.

He said, "You talk about the secrets of Paris, of Europe." He put his hands behind his head and raised his arms, and as he did he spoke from the side of his mouth as his left eye narrowed. "Perhaps there are no secrets now. But I make it my business to invent a secret Paris, even if it doesn't exist, or only partially. I have two secret cities here." He leaned forward and put his elbows on the table edge, and again he spoke from the side of his mouth, often stretching his neck as if he were wearing a tight collar, or hitching his shoulder to ease a suspender strap. He was wearing an open shirt and an unbuttoned jacket. "The first secret," he said, "has to do with sex. I first visited the red light district, along the rue St. Denis, about thirty years ago, and it hasn't changed a great deal, or at least I tell myself it hasn't. A few of the women there are beautiful." He stretched his neck and laughed. "They renew themselves like sperm all up and down that mile long street. I find places there where I can lose myself in forgetfulness. I usually go to bed early, but a couple of nights during the month I'll disappear into St. Denis. Sandra knows about it. I have no secrets from her. There, I can create my own Paris, and savour the sexual flavour of the place. I go to restaurants, bars, among whores and pimps, and I write or sketch. One reason why I came to Paris is to enjoy the myths, even if I have to half create them. Sex is a myth.

"And the other secret Paris," he said, sitting back in his chair, but with his hands on the table, "is what is left of Jewish Paris. In the Marais, deep in the Marais, is the Plaetzel, the area where Jews still have their own separate culture, and Sandra and I will have a meal, once a week, in a Kosher restaurant there. What is it called?"

"Joe Goldenberg," Sandra said.

"You can see," Kitaj said, "how easy it was for the Nazis to round up the Jews in that area of narrow streets. Every time I go into it, I think of that, wonder about it. Being in Europe has made me wonder. Not a day passes when I'm not involved, wondering, frightened. This doesn't need invention. We don't have many friends here except for the painter Avigdor Arikha and his wife Anne, who are Jews. And with Anne I went to Drancy, which was a concentration camp for Jews just outside Paris where they were sent before being sent off to the death camps. Avigdor, who was in a concentration camp, didn't want to come. Anne is American. Drancy is a Communist working class area. The buildings of the camp, originally 30's buildings, are now council flats. There is a monument to the Jews, an 11th rate piece of sculpture. That's all. There's no coincidence between good art and such—"

He sat back, blinking, not both eyes together, but one after another. He appeared to have suddenly forgotten what we were talking about. He looked out.

I asked Sandra when she'd first come to Europe.

"In 1969," she said, "to Paris."

Selfconsciously, I asked, "Why did you come?"

She clapped her hands together and pressed them into her lap so her shoulders were raised, and she leaned her elongated body a little to one side. Hesitant, as if worried about what she would say, she smiled at me.

"I guess it's an impossible question," I said.

"I suppose," she said, "I never really felt comfortable in America. There, I'd always had an idea, from books and films, that there would be something I'd find in Europe that wouldn't be alien to me. In Los Angeles, I painted in the mornings before going to work. I dreamed of coming to Europe to be a painter.

When I came to Paris that first time it was only for a visit, but I spent all my time in the Louvre. I was determined to come back to Europe to live. Now that we're in Paris for a whole year, I go to the Louvre and sketch as often as possible."

"Did you have an image of Paris before you came?"

"From pictures and from what I'd read. Talking about Hemingway—my studio is on the rue Rollin, just off the Place de la Contrescarpe, where Hemingway lived in the 20's. The neighbourhood is still the same, at least the same as his descriptions, even to the merchant selling charcoal and wood. I heat my studio with a wood fire. I don't feel sentimental about some lost European culture, and find contemporary life anywhere most fascinating, but I sense there are here so many references to the past that are still alive. A plate of oysters and a glass of wine are reinforced by literature."

"So you weren't disappointed when you came?"

"No. If you look, you can see in Paris what Manet, Cézanne, Matisse saw. You see the light on the buildings at different times of the day, and you imagine the choices the artists made. Of course, Avigdor says the city was ruined when the cafés changed, began to disappear, sometime in 1964—"

I said, "I wonder how much we know about modern France, or, even, modern England, where we've lived so long."

"Twelve years," Sandra said.

"How long have you lived in Europe, Kitaj?"

"What?" he asked.

I asked him again.

"25 years," he said.

"And I, twenty."

After our supper, which was reflected in many mirrors, I left with Sandra and Kitaj to walk with them to their apartment, near the Seine, on what Kitaj said was one of the oldest streets in Paris, the rue Galande. His studio, the largest room in the apartment, has stone walls and a well like a medieval courtyard.

By the well is an easel. Paved with lithograph stones, the floor has large sheets of paper strewn on it. Kitaj picked up the sheets to show me soft-ground etchings of people and drawings of himself in Paris.

I asked him if there was any art being shown which I should see.

Kitaj said, "Not that I know of. Paris seems to have a life of the mind, what with all the book shops, but there are no artists. It pleases me that there's no painting going on. As far as I know, there is only Avigdor. He is the greatest artist-scholar alive, and he is my mentor here. I see him every other day."

"For myself," I said, "it's not what's going on in the world of European writing that's keeping me in Europe. My writing isn't at all connected to anything happening here."

Kitaj said, "If what you're talking about is what's finished for you in Europe, what's really finished for me is my affair with Mediterranean-centered European culture. That's all gone for me."

And yet, I said, European culture *does* exist. Having lived in Europe so long, I wondered if we'd become used to that culture, so didn't see it, as we didn't, or I didn't, see American culture before coming abroad. Not that we'd become European, but we were no longer selfconscious about being Americans in Europe.

"Are we used to it?" Kitaj asked. "No, I don't think so. I think it was never ours for the having. It was and is an alien culture in which I had and have no business. Were Hemingway and all kidding themselves in their affair with Europe? I don't know."

"Then why do we stay?" I asked.

"Habit," Kitaj said. "And habits are not simple. They're as complex as love affairs. Also, there is quite a good precedent for working away from where you were born and brought up."

"Do you ever think of going back to America?"

He indicated a fraction of a measurement between his thumb and index finger. "I'm about that far away from deciding to go. Sandra likes it here. That's maybe my main reason for staying."

"Why did you come to Paris for a year?" I asked.

"To savour the place," he asid. "To get a taste of it."

"Not to possess it?"

"No. Not really. My way of possessing a city is by walking around it for a short time. I possess it for myself. I may do some pictures based on European cities. I may. I don't know yet."

I said I'd go.

As he was showing me out, Kitaj said, "Did I tell you I discovered that we're living over a medieval Jewish cemetery? Right under our feet are Jewish bones."

On my way back to my hotel, I walked along the Seine, and, passing Shakespeare and Company, saw its window lit up, and went in. It was shoddy. I knew it was not the original. I could not imagine this place generating anything. I listened to two Americans in the bookshop talking; one worked there and the other was a friend, and the one who worked there was sitting at a big table covered with used books, a gas fire hissing under the table, and he was saying, "I'm a poet. It doesn't matter what job I have to make money, because that's secondary to my job as a poet." His friend said, "But you can't excuse your problems, your really serious problems, by calling yourself a poet." I transposed myself and the young poet, and I imagined I said exactly what he'd said when I was his age living in Paris. I was once in a bookshop with a friend, both of us Americans in Paris, and I said to him, as an admission I had never made to anyone else, "I'm going to write books." He said "Bull shit." I laughed. Why did it surprise me that young Americans still come to Paris to be poets and writers? Perhaps, if I were their age, I, too, would want to come. But I could not imagine what their sense of Europe was. It is not mine. I left the bookshop and wandered up the Boulevard St. Michel, wondering what I should do, as it was only 10:30. Then I thought I'd come back to my hotel room and write all this.

January 28

This morning, I went to the Cluny Museum. I went through the medieval rooms, filled with school children, down a flight of stone steps, and, down more steps, into a high-vaulted Roman bath, where there was no one, and all I could hear was distant traffic, as from another world. The walls, small rough stones tightly fitted together— No, I'm forgetting as I try to recall. This is the important part: at the far left of this great hall was an archway, and through it and down some worn stone steps I went to a lower level, at the edge of which was a railing separating it from a very deep level, long and narrow, at the bottom of which were large, broken sarcophagi, one with crosses carved on the lid, and to the right of this deep room was a doorway with steps leading to an even deeper level, but I could not see in any deeper than the stone stairs which appeared to descend into nothing but darkness.

With a sense of loss and fear—a fear that something one thought most important no longer refers to one—I no longer imagine there are secrets, secrets which have to do with my past or my present, in Europe. I have no need to possess the statues and pictures, the books, the cafés, the squares, the expanding cities. And this is something of a relief, especially since my greatest impulse to possess was to possess people at the cafés in the squares—

This comes to me, and it is so naive I am embarrassed by it, but here it is: that we came to Europe looking for secrets because we, as Americans, have such a deep sense of what is secret. All my youth, I believed that America had no secrets and that I had to go to another country for them. but now I know that the deepest secrets are American, and in America.

Sandra Fisher

Joey Reading Baudelaire in Paris 1983
oil on canvas, 10″x8″

Hiroyuki in Paris 1983
oil on canvas, 10″x8″

John Ashbery

Six Haibun

HAIBUN 1

Wanting to write something I could think only of my own ideas, though you surely have your separate, private being in some place I will never walk through. And then of the dismal space between us, filled though it may be with interesting objects, standing around like trees waiting to be discovered. It may be that this is the intellectual world. But if so, what poverty—even the discoveries yet to be made, and which shall surprise us, even us. It must be heightened somehow, but not to brutality. That is an invention and not a true instinct, and this must never be invented. Yet I am forced to invent, even if during the process I become a songe-creux, inaccurate dreamer, and these inventions are then to be claimed by the first person who happens on them. I'm hoping that homosexuals not yet born get to inquire about it, inspect the whole

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Note: *haibun* is a Japanese form which I discovered in the excellent anthology of Japanese poetry called *From the Country of Eight Islands*, edited and translated by Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson (Anchor Books, 1981). Its glossary defines *haibun* as "prose written by *haikai* poets in such a way as to complement various stylistic and aesthetic features of *haikai* poetry." The examples in the collection consist of a prose passage with a *haiku* at the end. The translators have rendered the *haiku* throughout the anthology as an unpunctuated, single line with a varying amount of syllables. I used this method in the "37 Haiku" which were published in a previous issue of *Sulfur*.—J.A.

random collection as though it were a sphere. Isn't the point of pain the possibility it brings of being able to get along without pain, for a while, of manipulating our marionette-like limbs in the straitjacket of air, and so to have written something? Unprofitable shifts of light and dark in the winter sky address this dilemma very directly. In time to come we shall preceive them as the rumpled linen or scenery through which we did walk once, for a short time, during some sort of vacation. It is a frostbitten, brittle world but once you are inside it you want to stay there always.

The year—not yet abandoned but a living husk, a lesson

HAIBUN 2

. . . and can see the many hidden ways merit drains out of the established and internationally acclaimed containers, like a dry patch of sky. It is an affair of some enormity. The sky is swathed in a rich, gloomy and finally silly grandeur, like drapery in a portrait by Lebrun. This is to indicate that our actions on this tiny, tragic platform are going to be more than usually infinitesimal, given the superhuman scale on which we have to operate, and also that we should not take any comfort from the inanity of our situation: we are still valid creatures with a job to perform, and the arena facing us, though titanic, hasn't rolled itself beyond the notion of dimension. It isn't suitable, and it's here. Shadows are thrown out at the base of things at right angles to the regular shadows that are already there, pointing in the correct direction. They are faint but not invisible, and it seems appropriate to start intoning the litany of dimensions there, at the base of a sapling spreading its lines in two directions. The temperature hardens, and things like the smell and the mood of water are suddenly more acute, and may help us. We will never know whether they did.

Water, a bossa nova, a cello is centred, the light behind the library

HAIBUN 3

I was swimming with the water at my back, funny thing is it was real this time. I mean this time it was working. We weren't too far from shore, the guides hadn't noticed us yet. Always you work out of the possibility of being injured, but this time, all the new construction, the new humiliation, you have to see it. Guess it's OK to take a look. But a cup of tea—you wouldn't want to spill it. And a grapefruit (spelled "grap-fruit" on the small, painstakingly-lettered card) after a while, and the new gray suit. Then more, and more, it was a kind of foliage or some built-in device to trip you. Make you fall. The encounter with the silence of permissiveness stretching away like a moonlit sea to the horizon, whatever that really is. *They* want you to like it. And you honor them in liking it. You cause pleasure before sleep insists, draws over to where you may yet be. And some believe this is merely a detail. And they may be right. And we may be the whole of which all that truly happens is only peelings and shreds of bark. Not that we are too much more than these. Remember they don't have to thank you for it either.

The subtracted sun, all I'm going by here, with the boy, this new maneuver is less than the letter in the wind

HAIBUN 4

Dark at four again. Sadly I negotiate the almost identical streets as little by little they are obliterated under a rain of drips and squiggles of light. Their message of universal brotherhood through suffering is taken from the top, the pedal held down so that the first note echoes throughout the piece without becoming exactly audible. It collects over different parts of the city and the drift in those designated parts is different from elsewhere. It is a man, it was one all along. No it isn't. It is a man with a conscience of a woman, always coming out of something, turning to look at you, wondering about a possible reward. How sweet to my sorrow is this man's knowledge in his way of coming, the brotherhood that will surely result under now darkened skies.

The pressing, pressing urgent whispers, pushing on, seeing directly

HAIBUN 5

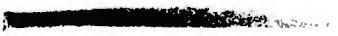
Bring them all back to life, with white gloves on, out of the dream in which they are still alive. Loosen the adhesive bonds that tie them to the stereotypes of the dead, cliches like the sound of running water. Abruptly it was winter again. A slope several football fields wide sprang out of the invisible foreground, the one behind me, and unlaced its barren provocation upwards, with flair and menace, at a 20-degree angle—the ascending night and also the voice in it that means to be heard, a pagoda of which is visible at the left horizon, not meaning much: the flurry of a cold wind. We're in it too chortled the rowanberries. And how fast so much aggressiveness unfolded, like a swiftly-flowing, silent stream. Along its banks world history presented itself as a series of translucent tableaux, fading imperceptibly into one another, so that the taking of Quebec by the British in 1629 melts into the lollipop tints of Marquette and Joliet crossing the mouth of the Missouri River. But at the center a rope of distress twists itself ever tighter around some of the possessions we brought from the old place and were going to arrange here. And what about the courteous but dispassionate gaze of an armed messenger on his way from someplace to someplace else that is the speech of all the old, resurrected loves, tinged with respect, caring to see that you are no longer alone now in this dream you chose. The dark yellowish flow of light drains out of the slanted dish of the sky and from the masses of the loved a tremendous chant arises: We are viable! And so back into the city with its glimmers of possibility like Broadway nights of notoriety and the warm syrup of embarrassed and insistent proclamations of all kinds of tidings that made you what you were in the world and made the world for you, only diminished once it had been seen and become the object of further speculation leading like railroad ties out of the present inconclusive sphere into the world of two dimensions.

A terminus, pole fringed with seaweed at its base, a cracked memory

HAIBUN 6

To be involved in every phase of directing, acting, producing and so on must be infinitely rewarding. Just as when a large, fat, lazy frog hops off his lily pad like a spitball propelled by a rubber band and disappears into the water of the pond with an enthusiastic plop. It cannot be either changed or improved on. So too with many of life's little less-than-pleasurable experiences, like the rain that falls and falls for so long that no one can remember when it began or what weather used to be, or cares much either: they are much too busy trying to plug holes in ceilings or emptying pails and other containers and then quickly pushing them back to catch the overflow. But nobody seems eager to accord ideal status to this situation and I, for one, would love to know why. Don't we realize that after all these centuries that are now starting to come apart like moldy encyclopedias in some abandoned, dusty archive that we have to take the bitter with the sweet or soon all distinctions will be submerged by the tide of tepid approval of everything that is beginning to gather force and direction as well? And when its mighty roar threatens in earnest the partially submerged bridges and cottages, picks up the floundering cattle to deposit them in trees and so on to who knows what truly horrible mischief, it will be time, then, to genuinely rethink this and come up with true standards of evaluation, only it will be too late of course, too late for anything but the satisfaction that lasts only just so long. A pity, though. Meanwhile I lift my glass to these black-and-silver striped nights. I believe that the rain never drowned sweeter, more prosaic things than those we have here, now, and I believe this is going to have to be enough.

Striped hair, inquisitive gloves, a face, some woman named Ernestine Throckmorton, white opera glasses and more



Christopher Dewdney

POINTS IN TIME

Two points stabilize two dimensional space. Three points stabilize a three dimensional object. Four points stabilize four dimensional space. A point is one dimension.

A point in motion is a line. A line in motion is a plane. A plane in motion is a solid. A solid in motion is time.

The quantum theory applies to time, which progresses in small pulses of very short duration. The universe exists as a phantom between pulses. The power of the phenomena existing in one pulse is enough to generate itself through the gap, the interval of non-being, into existence in the next pulse. An event or phenomenon loses a small parcel of energy each time it is propagated through the gap.

The universe exists and does not exist in regular, rapid succession.

A fixed point in time, or one quanta, stabilizes the continuum, which is how everything happens at once.

THIS MY EMISSARY

Sleep, come
unjoined with me.
I am radiant darkness,
a boundless prison
                permeated with escape.
And what little the night recovers
is squandered at dawn.
For the heart has contrived a harm
borne of utter simplicity.

I have passed through the still eye of the storm.
I have seen the full moon in broken pine chiaroscuro
on the freshly fallen snow.
                For the eye of the needle
is the still eye of the storm.
And when kneeling she wept
it was in the abject darkness
of total humiliation. This
my emissary
for the great silence.
                In her misery we know it.

Martha Lifson

Four Poems

A STILL LIFE

(by Willem Claesz Heda)

An elaborate set of breakfast things, silver
chalice on the cloth, cake and wine
all of it suggesting slippers
down a carpeted floor,
                reprieve.

        He made it his specialty:
still life breakfasts all the rage in Haarlem,
then (stepping out) put all the staid to shame—
knocking it over—the wine glass a jagged rim,
the pastry torn. It's the danger
in that glass, hands sensing the feel
of silver, the weight of fork,

                the possibility
of pain.

        A paltry meal and thus more
intrusive, more a boundless edge into
the well-set table, food and meal
of exactly the same length everyday—

what sent them then lurching into morning streets?

dream/embrace

arms about me in that
stable place, the middle
of a dream, you
hold me, are
reality itself so long ago now
I can hardly recall
its shape except inside
a dream where I remember
not only your particular
thighs, but that odd
(portrait seen across
a room) sense of how
it had to be
exactly the way it was
living inside of
it, in the middle not only of
your eyes seeing
to the root of me, but
of how it had to be
so that I stood
always, in the middle of
everything, all meadows
all grass, your arms
warm, not mother or dream
but more than anything
real

HER LOVE CHANGES IT FOR ME

She watches him
through doors she keeps cracked
to see him slide
past.
        His feet almost bare,
her heart aches.

(The most beautiful sight out my window
a cracked cement step beneath
the bow of a tree branch
                framed

because of this I feel the wind in my breasts
because of this I want to put a dusty leaf
        in my mouth

all that is far approaches slowly towards
the picture plane
and dust blows through
to my eyes

because she lies on her couch, her head
down.

FROM THE IRONIC MARRIAGE SEQUENCE; DIALOGUE

You cannot give me lore of teacups, I know
your kind, she sd.
Sweet Jesus what d'ya think I am
a sissy?
What cravings I've got for painted cups and tea
she moaned, twining herself, legs and all
and gazing: painted green vines, birds, all
beckoned fitfully. Oh, for a story, she sd.
Jesus, I'm
hungry just for food, he clawed.
If you'd read
to me, I'd curl up all around you and sexy
she pulled herself out for him like blooms,
bright splotches on the glaze. I wonder
if it's true, she sd., if they have such birds,
long legs dropping and such an arching wing?
She gazed with vacant eye. Do they have bridges
over goldfish and waterlily pads?
You live in flimsy
dreams, he snapped.
Just looking at my cup, she swirled.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger

Six Poems

Translated from the German by Herbert Graf.

REPORT FROM BONN

Lights still on in the Press Office. The hawker
who touts darkness, ever more darkness,
is being made up for his entrance.
"We're approaching another Middle Ages."
I don't really think so. Although,
how many ashtrays there are in Bad Godesberg alone.
When I think of the Turkish women
who must empty them each night,
ashes to ashes, I feel
in my diaphram region something
like my immortal soul.
All these houses are owned by landlords,
like in the Middle Ages; power is dulling,
so is joy. But pilgrims
are hardly seen, cripples
creeping around the altars are rare.
Nowhere are gallows erected. Traffic lights,

pedestrian malls are there, and instead of lepers
and flagellants, now and then — leading
a fuzzy-haired brown spaniel on the leash —
an elderly hostage in a fur coat
walks by the American Embassy.

MEMORIAL

Now as far as the seventies are concerned,
I can be brief.
Information was always busy.
The miraculous multiplication of the loaves
was limited to Duesseldorf and environs.
The horrible news arrived via telex,
was duly noted, and filed away.

Obediently, by and large,
they've swallowed themselves,
the seventies;
no responsibility taken from the after-born,
the Turks, and the jobless.
For anyone to remember them with kindness
would be asking too much.

SHE'S THIRTY-THREE

It's not at all what she had imagined.
Always these rusting Volkswagens.
Once she'd almost married a baker.
First she read Hesse, later Handke.
Now she often does crosswords in bed.

She won't take anything from men.
For years she was a Trotskyite, in her own way.
She's never had a foodstamp in her hand.
When she thinks of Cambodia, she begins to feel ill.
Her last man friend, the Prof, always wanted a thrashing.
Greenish batik dresses, too large for her;
plant-lice on the araucaria.
Actually, she'd wanted to paint, or emigrate.
her dissertation, *Class Struggle in Ulm, 1500-1512,*
As Reflected in Folk Song:
scholarships, starts, beginnings, a trunkfull of notes.
Sometimes her grandmother sends her money.
In the bathroom, timid dancesteps, little grimaces,
hours with cucumber juice in front of the mirror.
She says, Oh I won't starve.
When she weeps, she looks like nineteen.

THE WHITE COLLAR WORKER

Never has he killed anyone. No,
he knocks over bottles, inadvertently.
He'd like to, he's sweaty, he loses
his favorite key. He's always
catching a cold. He knows he's got to.
He flies off the handle with care.
He thinks: better not. Wedged into
two shoes, he pales and asserts

the contrary. Yes, he checks in
and out. He says the opposite of what he meant
to say. Actually, he says, actually
not. His suit is too tight for him,
too wide. His spot hurts. No,
he hasn't been able to read his own hand
for a long time. He got a divorce,
in vain. Nobody calls him up. All over
he itches. His ballpoint runs dry,
try as he might. He's frequently about,
once in each room, always alone.
When shaving, he cuts himself. Yes,
for he's always watchful, or else
he can't sleep. He sleeps. They've
all got their gripes, they've got to admit,
they've all got the laugh on him. He doesn't
realize what's going on. That much
he realizes. his headaches
are nonpolitical. He fusses,
he's stuttering again, he splutters.
What he'd wanted to say just now he's
forgotten just now. He's forgotten
to kill himself. Try as he might.
Secretly he lives. No, he may not,
but he ought to. He hasn't got cancer,
but that he doesn't know. There's sweat in his hat.
He's never been as well off as
now. He really doesn't want to,
but he must. At the barber's, he weeps. Yes,
he's docile, he's apologetic.
Yes, he writes, yes, he scratches,
yes, he ought to but may not,
no, no one noticed his grief.

THE DIVORCE

At first it was an imperceptible tremor of the skin —
"Whatever you say" — where the flesh is darkest.
"What's wrong?" — Nothing. Opaque dreams
of embraces, but on the morning after
the other looks different, strangely bony.
Razor-sharp misunderstandings. "That time in Rome—"
I never said that. — Pause. Rapidly beating heart,
a kind of hate, strange. — "That's not the point."
Repetitions. Brilliantly clear the certainty:
everything is wrong from now on. Odourless, in focus
like a passport photo, this unknown person
with the tea glass at the table, eyes staring.
It is no use no use no use:
litany in the brain, a touch of nausea.
End of reproaches. Slowly the room
fills up to the ceiling with guilt.
The plaintive voice is a stranger's, but the shoes
that drop with a crash to the floor, the shoes are not.
The next time, in an empty restaurant,
slow motion, breadcrumbs, they talk about money,
laughing. The dessert tastes of metal.
Two untouchables. Strident rationality.
"Things could be much worse." But at night
the vindictiveness, the noiseless struggle, anonymous
like two bony barristers, two big crabs
in the water. Then the exhaustion. Slowly
the scabs peel off. Another tobacconist,
a new address. Pariahs, awfully relieved.
Shadows getting paler. Here are the papers.
Here are the keys. Here is the scar.

SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOURGEOISIE

That was the moment we were
for just five minutes, unaware of it,
immeasurably rich, generously
and electrically, chilled in July
or in case it was November,
the flown-in Finnish logs blazed
in the Palladian fireplaces. Funny,
everything was there, flew in
by itself, you might say. So elegant
we were throwing off solo recitals,
chips, orchids in cellophane, clouds
that said I. Inimitable!

Regular flights to every place. Credit cards
covered even our sighs. Like troopers
we swore, all at once. Everyone
had his own misery under the seat,
ready to grab. Too bad about that.
It was so convenient. Water
flowed from the taps, nothing to it.
Do you recall? Simply stunned
by our tiny emotions,
we ate little. Had we only suspected
that all this would be over
in five minutes, our Beef Wellington
would have had a different, quite different taste.

from: *Die Furie des Verschwindens,*
Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt,
1981

Lyn Hejinian

from THE GUARD

5.

Men and women of thought & study are voluptuaries
The advantage of the grass
As borrowing in groceries
Healthy Sun, admire! an unflat surface
The rather reckless emptiness and seriously porous emptiness
As morphic residence
Anyone who could relive scans
Death is a nunnery, said the runaway
Continually showing off to his or her parents
Overness
The astronauts are stars
Some films are discovered frozen in Dawson and fully recovered
Of islands in the sea of amnesia
The Martian at last on her native earth
Went down to the shade and slept
In the advantage of the grass
A "foster" dog
Close as borrowing
Grass together in such close ranks, so tall, so many, so alike, all silent
Of world records . . . the same accent and gestures as my spouse . . . the
placemats perfectly referential

I must be homesick at breakfast
Perfect tension is freight
And remain the resounding possessor
Stands up and takes the morning
Because of my spine—because I worry about my spine
The A faces out, is most fixed, W points up
"Writing is an aid to return"
The water illuminates the pebbles in the bed
Seems to—or the pebbles lighten the water
Lactating
The problem of their invention
Your own censor, or could say blooms "noun-verb"
Bedsprings make a garden gate
"Disasters occur & they accept . . ."
Language and "paradise"
Amazed at the size of the oranges, arranged
Relative of time to space
Hysteria is soul voyaging
The ground
The ground forms a ground for meditation
I would be nauseous way up there
When there is no more to expect
"Doctors, teachers"
"Beginning-end"
On the sides of the simile
"Orders are issued and they obey"
The mind submitting to their sympathy
Staring at the optical illusion I will it to reverse itself—I will it to get
    opposite
Bristling, lifted, waving
The best house in straight lines
In a crevice or percussion
The interruption an indirect description

Getting it from the system
Jumps from behind a tree and onto a bed of chalk
Rejoicing in the probable
The flicker, the continuing exhibit
Speaks of the "self" and improves it from memory
It's overrealized—a hem? or a loop?
I'd always entertained the strong desire to be strong
Sun crosses the baggy shadow of a body that the definition of happiness wants to append
The children cutting the vegetables in half and then cutting out a shape with a sharp knife—what did these shapes express?—nothing—they were neither squirrels, nor hedgehogs, nor faces, consisting as they did of three spots and two lines or three lines and two spots
Seldom catching the moment when the street lights go out
I pointed myself . . . I read on my side, head . . .windows lodged . . . a pillow tucked under my arm . . . domes locked . . . during the night . . . so beautiful and accurate that they have been called "models of art in science" . . . each point in a visual temptation . . . for support until it falls . . . the pleasure of that pressure . . . over and supports my head
Every other place latent from here
It's as if I were seeing myself . . . propped on my hand, with . . . putting something loud in the mouth . . . an egg, an arena . . . at the sun . . . the top is elegant, and . . . from a distance and found . . . it's devoutly boosting . . . in the nighttime resistance . . . the littler splendor of the snow . . . the line of sight bending in that direction in order to predict . . . what happens to it when we're all alone? . . . and all that I undreamt of . . . but I'm not looking for a reason to complain . . . the bottom is devout . . . the fog burns off, clouds blow over, blue skies reach up, everything is out . . . or predicate an out-of-doors . . . it's soul voyeurism . . . your *own censor* has passed you! . . . he's such a sunny person . . . with the other arm . . . after all romantic love proves out . . . adept at gathering . . . loses some of its power, but I don't know what he sees

When day the flash is memorized midway this life we lie on
Afraid of fear in rhythm fields a synthesis of psychology sweeps
But there was no reply—my husband had gone back to sleep
While the dew on the web was longdrawn, bristling, lifted, waving
Cuppings
Behind the guard heart and floral grill
Later an impatient purple not long ago geranium
Preliminary pleasure is like an empty page

6.

Paradise encouraged cuppings
The exact finish bristles (those clouds intend thunder)
Wind is fulfilling of this chaparral
The grease is phrased
A grace of locks (a grid name is pejorative)
Five miles inclined to a ditch and relaxed
The antennae of sex
Grass goes without author
A tree is another's strange narrative
The tarantula, the wolf, and the wallflower
Gradually the wheelbarrow is locked with gravel in its wanderings
A branch of it is Francis Ponge himself
(Cat against my foot like a flash)
Indirect quote self-reproaching
It's to listen piously to music
The pet's saliva beside the fire
There are experiences to be playthings animated for universal benefit and
    pleasured (ideal, needled)
Morning buzzes and purrs in wide erasures
"Nothing can happen to me!" (morphic resonance)
A set of errands in time as tricks to the rivulet
My ankle is impressed by the strap of my shoe over this walking
A wadding of adoption

Dark clouds in the sky
Every car continues by
Shorty, Whitey, Red & Kitty, Slim, Billy Tell, and Mr. Murdock, and Ray
    Fineliner with Lil
Myrtle is by the rusty pond
The bridge has a hole through it
But water spiders on the still round surface
A bowl and a calm, in sensitive numbers (a water that comes to its boil)
A calm on the Beaufort scale
(In war dead of excitement)
Aluminiums knock against the enamel sink
Ear, the already-hollow, mouthpiece
Perfection defeats the world for inspection
There's a poem with anything in it
A policy proclaimed in the planning stage accords: "My personality will
    disappear with mineral discretion"
A cell of graffiti is merely aphoristic (the geraniums are overcast)
Greed of the seamless possessive
Irreducible as a door
Maybe this in my jargon is for what rock is metaphor (with these glasses I
    spy in a landscape)
Captured in words as by a sentence sagging
The dumps
Storm watching in a dent is rain catching
On the window a decal of the arching fish
On the building of brick work people are pressing
Occupied in a chill
(My leg seems distant, "out of condition")
One kind of onion is a crowd
This comes off a body, cheerful, and heavy with candor, but unable to pass
    through walls
But why change subject matter
And I in a shower cap . . .
Of the flowers that horses get

The body takes out the lining of its image
Cars can be mountainous listlessly
To ink or to saddle
The interlink of chains
The trees in the rain, they prove a ground for meditation
Round, dark, bottle, green
I thought it the engine of oxygenation
Even inventive drowsiness (I don't do what I'm "supposed" to)
There is a way of saying things that is insurance
So to speak in stock, now I'm saving up to tell
The city is window also (there is preecho)
"Religious"-"rebounding" into state
If you think you're petite (if we live in a pastry . . .)
Poetry is continuous
The hiccups and the memory chimney
The light is nagging (it seems to fill the shelves)
One kind of hunger is generosity
This intention to write turns into a letter
A strong mawkish blue and blunt, but not yet foreground (it is delightful being somewhere else but far from close enough)
A lightbulb without movies shines
The storm implodes, withdrawing to its center, and momentarily magnifies the morning sun
The wind comes up blowing paper scraps and dry grass in eddies at the edge of the school ground into the cyclone fence
The lining of its chain and candid wall
Geometric and detective
More like pilings than a pitcher, form is . . .
(Family stable, friendship mobile)
Burdened with errands, the horizon banded with gray
The abutment hung, like a fashion of bangs
I wonder, is her mind the greater pleasure
The one galloping up with flowers on the little table (out of uneasiness at having to go ahead)

Rafael Lorenzo

TOY STORE

This image troubles me: each foot planted in a ground, the
stuff hardening into a base that has—miraculously—re-
produced itself, germinating a trail of marks
that stand like a gate (each of them) or portal
entering each level of mutation, each one coming from
the other in a series reminiscent of time marching on
themes—that would be like a cut of words that say so—
each level or disk having nothing to do with the other, finally
but like a series of dark places in snow on the ground
winding through a world covered up by the staggering in-
cremental power of its own silence. Then the character
in the Eskimo suit stands at the door of the hut
banging his boots together. When the white goes away—
at the moment of consciousness, not when things have be-
come certain and distinctly there—the grey fiber of the
blanket they threw over you to keep you warm appears, seen up close,
felt as the heat of your breath soaking into you, lips touching
the sharp wet fibers: there's suddenly a heavy weight
felt letting itself down; it appears too, has a character—
of amazingly clustered thatch of things coming from
"the back of your head" and "out there"—you being, indeed,
a space cleared out of the snow yourself, snow-headed.
Suddenly again, the black and white photograph *congeals*

into dots moving gradually away from you, forms beginning
to appear out of sheer number of light and dark oppositions
(think back: that the whole view, its sequence of views, could
shoot you off into a distance that makes the whole disparate
array of actions come into form ["focus"] as a world?),
transitions of a binary nature that fill in the missing
portions of what you're trying to understand as significance.
The way you happen to be anywhere is how everything happens to
be reminiscent of everything else without ever really
giving off a clear meaning itself. Thought is activated
by smooth motions over the terrain—the indoors of reality—
cozy here, by the stove sipping tea. The world comes
apart—it's a wonder! The photograph of a Trojan horse
with three bullet holes in it in the right foreground
of a field of human corpses. Everything diminished in size!
Dead! The opposite of Playground! There's no way to walk
now when the feet get so heavy. The store which grew around you,
childhood, with its wonderful power of sexual ambiguity,
becomes a frightful clutter of preserved and miniaturized re-
flections that have to be played with solemnly and in silence.

FORENSIC GEOGRAPHY

The clumsy footing of the land
at this eye-view
where it stumbles
gives to history
its brainless shape. Were the gravediggers
found last night
inexplicably murdered
by their own graves? The clues
were not "clear."

(Had they "fallen"? What
in the graves
could have killed them?)
In a chemical substance
images appear. So thinking itself
is like the box that remains underground
after the feeling of things
has been taken out of the container.
Something had gone away
We thought they were bats.
The land took steps toward the ocean.
The old lighthouse had been torn down
But the ocean spoke back to it
by licking away at the land. It was speaking
in another tongue and more tongues.
It was hard to read through the fieldglasses.
Those were people, not mounds of dogshit.
Dug earth heaped near the abandoned silos . . .
And it was thought that the silos
would never be used again. Next to each grave
a man in black appeared to be sleeping.
All the eye-glasses thrown in the pile there had
cracked, scratched, lenses. One observer called them
"burial mounds."
The raised surface of the land
was made of blue-marked paper
and torn pieces of paper
jumped in the night sky.
Each figure looked like a child with wings,
tiny matches that burned as they died
then charred and curled in sleep.
So the big forehead of the night
scrutinized the sense of things

as if to say "each location on this map
marks an adjective with the promise
of a new way of saying something."
The land was a desert.
The wind was thought from the night
bent over it to read—
blowing dust from the prints—
the trace of the thirsty idea
of this or that will to truth
that once crawled there
on the big empty table of consciousness.
The score of buried ruins and carcassess—
in a configuration of sorts—
did seem like a familiar voice from somewhere singing.
The source of the hieroglyph
was this jerky encounter of bodies.
The bodies seemed to be sleeping just now.
The treasure-box of thought was empty
like an old open mouth
saying something far too lyrical again.

for James Sherry

John Yau

MALCOLM MORLEY'S EDUCATION

Malcom Morley is noted for his radical stylistic shifts. Born in England in 1931, he moved to America in 1958, shortly after graduating from the Royal College of Art, London. He first gained attention for his paintings in the mid 1960's.

Derived from travel brochures and postcards of luxury liners and cruise ships, paintings such as *Cristoforo Columbo* (1965) and *S.S. Amsterdam in Front of Rotterdam* (1966) are remarkable for their fidelity to the photographic image. This fidelity to sources is further emphasized by the presence of a white border around the image. The border also allows nothing to happen at the edges: the illusionistic space is formally contradicted by the two dimensional field. The stress is on artifice. Holding everything together is Morley's fastidious brushwork.

By the early 1970's, Morley's brushwork is freer, more aggressive. *Los Angeles Yellow Pages* (1971), for example, is full of painterly passages and jagged shapes. Instead of copying his sources, Morley manipulates them. The painting depicts the "paint" smeared cover of a Los Angeles Yellow Pages; a rip runs right through the middle of the freeway. Over the next few years catastrophe becomes an even more pronounced theme in Morley's work. Earlier sources are crumpled and torn. In *Age of Catastrophe* (1976) a plane, its wings bent, is superimposed over the misshapen hull of the S.S. Amsterdam. The emphasis is still on fidelity and artifice, but with a twist. Morley is not only reacting against his early work: he is doing so with a vengeance.

What connects these vastly different paintings, indeed all his work, is Morley's reliance on a grid, a traditional technique he learned while a student at Camberwell School of Art in the early 1950's. By dividing the model into manageable

squares, he can devote his attention to one small section at a time. In many instances, Morley turns the gridded model upside down, denying any inclination he might have toward making his strokes into ready-made formulations. The next step is to place a card with a hole in it over the model. This aperture allows Morley to isolate a square and copy it on the corresponding square of the gridded canvas. Morley is relentlessly methodical in his approach. He has divided his subject into blocks of time; and each block demands a response.

The early paintings are pristine images made of tiny abstract brushstrokes. Detached and ironic, the possibility of emotion is repressed by the impeccability of his seamless images. In marked contrast to this reticence, Morley's recent paintings are full of disturbing fissures where one style (images) meets or overlaps another. They are Whitmanesque catalogues. A painting such as *Macaws, Bengals, with Mullet* (1982) contains a fluid gestural style, realist modeling, and vertical hacking brushstrokes. Each type of mark corresponds to a specific image. The muscularity of the Bengals, for example, is matched by the sinuous trails of paint.

Vermeer, Portrait of the Artist in his Studio (1968) is the first painting by Morley to use a fine art reproduction as a source. He returns to this possibility on a number of occasions. In each instance, the focus is on the issues raised by quotation: fidelity, revision, and betrayal. Because of Morley's adroit use of a grid and his awesome ability to make his brushwork mimetic of a seemingly inexhaustable range of styles, no other artist is as well equipped to deal with these themes. Rather than merely quoting a painting or appropriating an image, Morley methodically analyzes the relationship between past and present, experience and education.

Morley's painting differs from Vermeer's in two major ways. Rather than mimicking the materiality of oil, he exploits the opaqueness of acrylic. There is a reason for this. Morley's source is a color plate reproduction. At the same time, his painting is almost exactly twice the size of Vermeer's. This scale manipulation pushes the distortion of the reproduction even further. There is no attempt to fool the viewer. Our recognition of the painting comes from looking at a substitute. Always thorough, Morley includes the page number and captions in the broad white margins around the reproduction. The irony is inescapable. Morley has made an original work of art out of a second hand experience. No longer inhabiting an idealized moment, the woman's almost grotesque face

conveys a sense of extreme isolation.

In *The Last Painting of Vincent Van Gogh* (1972) Morley pushes his thoroughness even further. Supporting his version (in oil) of Van Gogh's *Crows in a Wheatfield* is an easel. Lying beside it is an open paint box, complete with paint tubes and a pistol. Morley is no longer quoting a reproduction: he is alluding to a larger set of circumstances. Rather than separating art from life, he has put them back together in this tableau. The instance is specific. Shortly after finishing the painting, Van Gogh walks out into the fields he has just depicted and kills himself. While there is a grim humor to Morley's work, it also reminds us that we would rather look at art than think about it. The privileged status of a museum goer is questioned. Without empathy, pleasure can become a betrayal.

School of Athens (1972) is the first painting by Morley in which a shift takes place. Asked to deliver a lecture at Yale, Morley decided to finish one row of his version of Raphael's fresco in public. Monteverdi's music provided the atmosphere, while Morley showed up for the occasion dressed in a toga. As he was filling in the middle row of the painting, he made a mistake and shifted the units one square to the right, causing a number of heads to float in space. The theme of the painting—the separation between mind and body, knowing and seeing—is a direct result of the method. His systematic approach is now open enough to accept accidents, incorporate them into a painting. Plato looks up and sees the top of his head hovering nearby, like a flying saucer. Instead of replacing Raphael's portrait with his own, he picks Diogenes. The choice is apt. After all, he has over-come his education.

By 1980, Morley bases his paintings on his watercolors and drawings. Most of them are done on site. An unmistakable freshness is transferred into the paintings. Morley's method of composition consists of selecting and juxtaposing various images. A charged narrative occurs. On another level, the images function as modular units. In each instance, Morley recreates the original gestures as faithfully as possible. Clearly, he has opened up an immense latitude of possibilities for himself.

A more recent painting—*Day Fishing in Heraklion* (1983)—alludes to Picasso's *Night Fishing in Antibes*. No longer does the fisherman tower above his prey, spear in hand. In Morley's painting, a school of fish—they all seem to be grinning

—floats above the fisherman's boat. Leaving behind their watery environment, they have entered the world of paint. Morley is on the side of the underdog. The tasks he gives himself on their behalf are awesome: and, like Hercules, he must perform them all if the vision is to be brought to completion. Only now he is quoting from his own experience rather than someone else's.

Malcolm Morley: Paintings 1965-82 is currently nearing the end of its European and American tour. It will be at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago) from November (83) to January (84) and the Brooklyn Museum (New York) from February (84) to April (84).

I have written on Malcolm Morley on two other occasions.

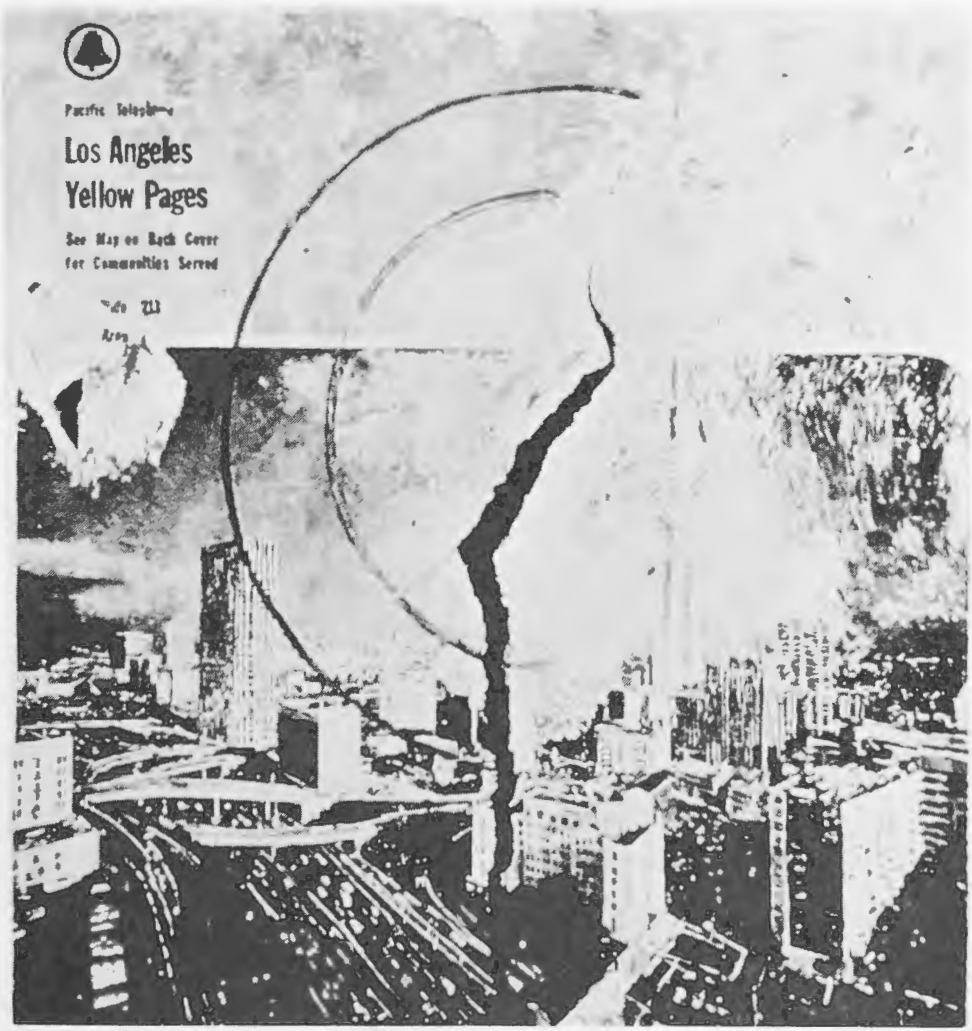
"Malcolm Morley: Defying Style"
Portfolio January/February 1983
Vol. V, No. 1, pp 74-77.

"Malcolm Morley's Baedeker"
Arts Magazine May 1983
Vol. 57, No. 9, pp 97-99.

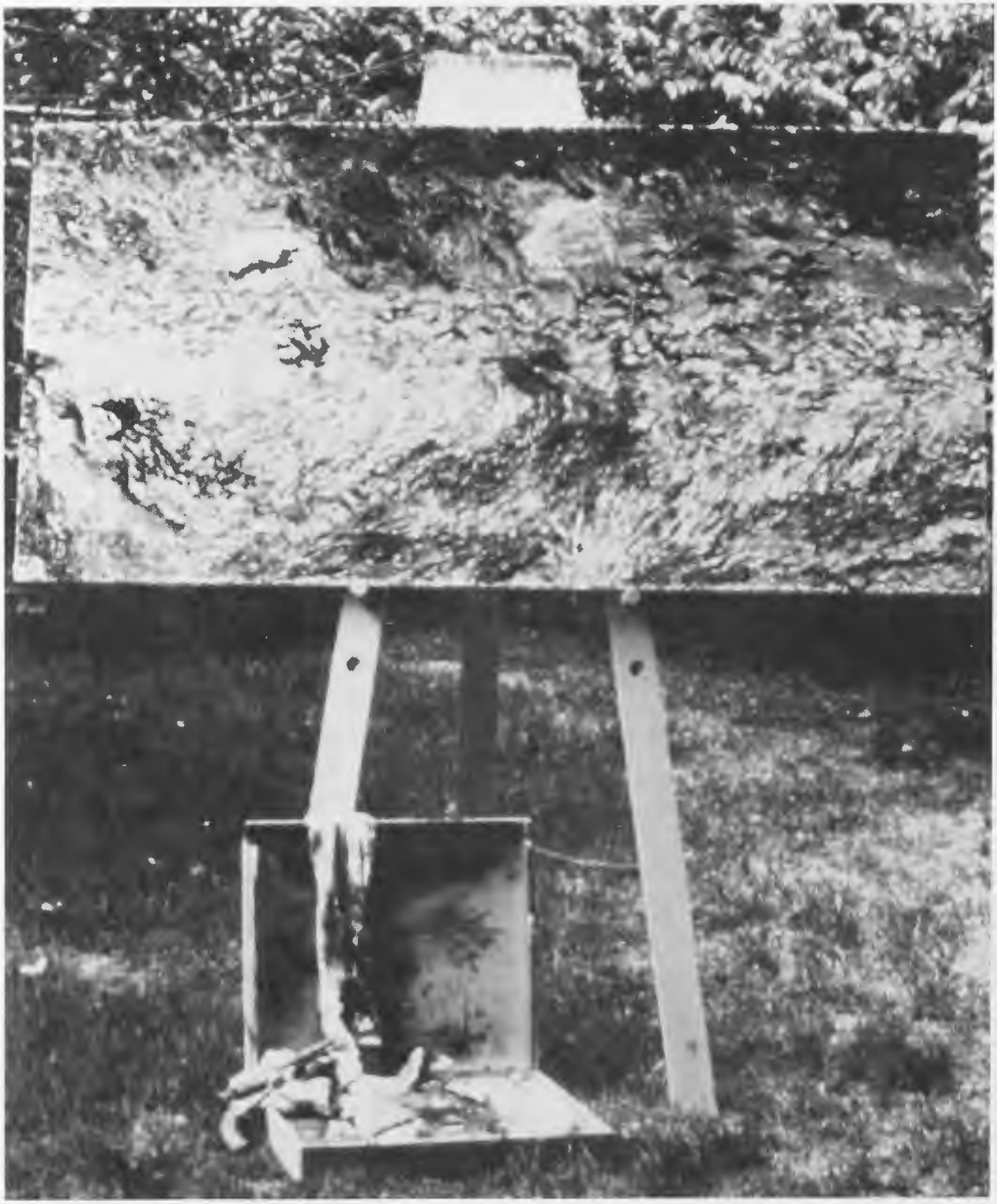
Malcolm Morley

SS Amsterdam in Front of Rotterdam, 1966
acrylic on canvas, 5′2″x7′

Photos: Xavier Fourcade, Inc.

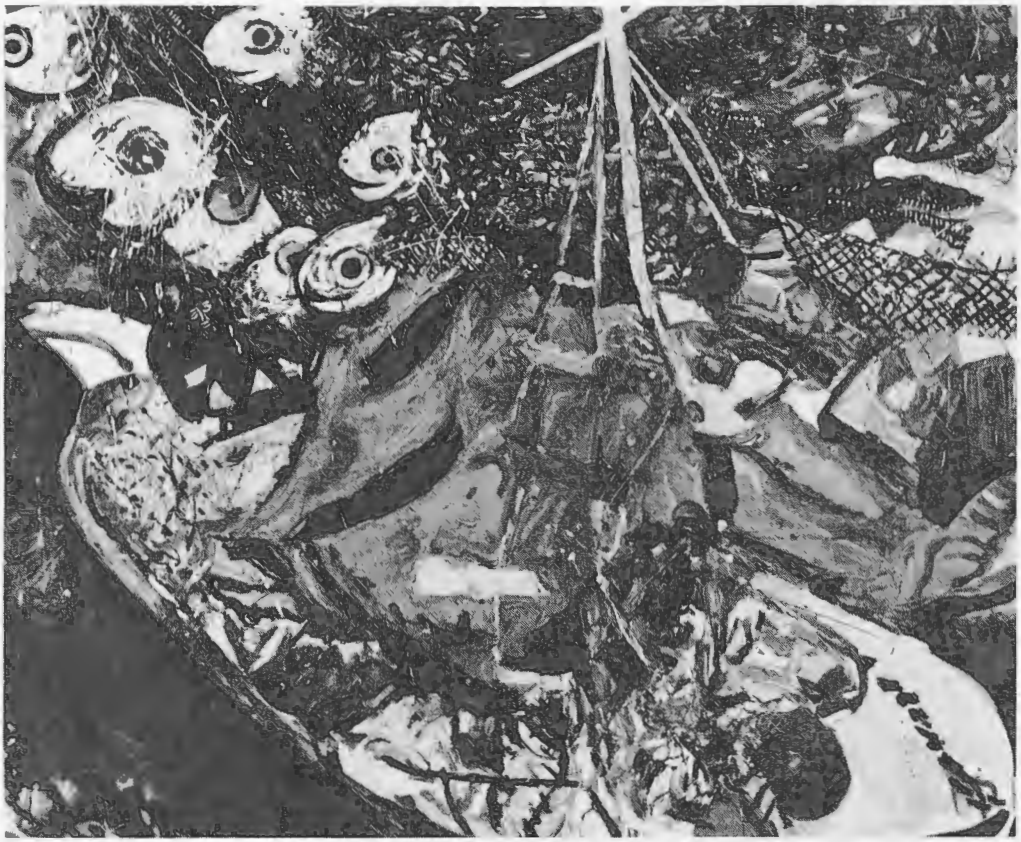


Los Angeles Yellow Pages, 1971
acrylic in wax on canvas, 90x108″



The Last Painting of Vincent Van Gogh, 1972
oil, canvas, objects, acrylic, 34x78″

School of Athens XFX P, 1972
oil on canvas 67 x97 ½ "



Day Fishing in Heraklion, 1983
oil on canvas, 80x90″

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS.

Part of Nature, Part of—"US"?

The Role of Critics and the Emperor's New Clothes in American Poetry

1975 was a momentous year for postwar American poetry. The third and final volume of THE MAXIMUS POEMS appeared. Zukofsky's sinuous "A" culminated with the remarkable "A" 22-23. Spicer's COLLECTED BOOKS finally made his crucial body of previously elusive work available. The two most distinguished long poems of the decade were published—Dorn's SLINGER and Kelly's THE LOOM. COLLECTED POEMS by both Dorn and Oppen consolidated some of the most conscientious bodies of work of the 1960's. And to top it off, John Ashbery published a riveting collection, SELF PORTRAIT IN A CONVEX MIRROR, which won all the big awards and received as many reviews as the aforementioned books combined. These eight books seemed a particularly distinguished set, making 1975 an opportune time for a reassessment of the directions American poetry had taken in the previous two decades. But following a long established pattern, one book dominated review columns while the others went almost unnoticed. While Ashbery's book was

having a heyday, Olson, Zukofsky, Spicer and the others were being outstripped in reviewers' attentions by the likes of Nemerov, Moss, and Gregory Orr (see Appendix).

Edward Dorn once observed that American poetry would be best described by the grades assigned to meat, rather than by any sophisticated critical vocabulary.[1] Prime, Choice, Good, Commercial, Canners and Utility are never used for poetry, of course, but their application to the American scene springs to mind whenever we read a major critic smacking his or her lips in gratitude over a meal of Canners.

Americans are inadequate to the task of reading their own poetry. The critics and scholars who constitute a large part of the reading audience must be called to account. It's an old highbrow platitude that television doesn't live up to its potential. But the pattern of lowest common denominator hardly pertains to television alone. It also chacterizes the propagation of poetry by university press and trade publishers, and the overvaluation of essentially Canners and Utility product by scholar-critics. Poetry—unlike tv—does not go out to a captive audience. Reviews make all the difference. Critical evaluations really do dictate taste. And a dictatorship of bad taste is what we've got.

The crtitical reception of poetry reflects the kind of winnowing that affects news reportage. Whenever a fast-breaking headline captures the fancy of its audience in America, the rest of the world news is pre-empted. The relevance of the headline news to any useful world picture can be negligible. Attention to poetry is short-changed by the same principle that decimates the news. Every book reviewed excludes scores of others from review. Fair enough. The assumption of the unsuspecting reader, and viewer, tends to be a typically American childlike trust: if they're telling us about this, it must be important. Such passive acceptance assumes a lot. It presumes that the critic or reporter has an adequate grasp of the context, and that the newsworthy item is being reported out of a reasonable assessment of a field of possible topics. The one thing such assumptions never even imagine is that the critic is as passive in reporting as the public is in hearing about it.

What we have is a passive acceptance of *the marketed product* on the part of critics. In terms of the critical apparatus that dominates the review media, "American poetry" consists only of that portion of poetry published with a university press of a New York trade publisher's imprimatur. The most drastic analogy to the prevailing situation would be that of a restaurant critic devoting precious column space to McDonalds, Burger King, Fish 'n' Chips, and so

on. The analogy is not exact, in that seious critics never review such authentic Big Macs of poetry as Rod McKuen, Merritt Molloy, Hugh Prather and Walter Rindler. A more appropriate analogy would be with a corporate newsletter. Ultimately, the Atlantic Richfield or IBM corporate newsletter reached a bigger audience than a poetry review. But both are insulated readerships. The IBM newsletter is not any more likely to inform employees about competing software than *The New Yorker* is to review a Jargon, Figures or Black Sparrow Press book.

In academia I think it is *not* imagined that reviews have the influence they do. Again and again, one reads apologies for or analyses of the small audience for poetry, without any attention paid to the politics behind control of the actual audience (however large or small). One critic writes, "Most contemporary poets have no audience not because they they fail to raise issues of intrerest and concern, but because in making full use of the affective and articulate reaches of their language, they inevitably decrease the size of their potential audience."[2] The inescapable underlying romantic assumption here and elsewhere is that poetry has a "potential audience" of common folk, huge, unmediated, like Whitman called for. In truth, the potential audience consists of university teachers and graduate students, as well as the many over-educated people outside academia. This alone constitutes a sizeable audience—most of whom do not read poetry. Are they intimidated by the language? To some extent, yes. But what this assumption disguises above all is that the audience is determined by reviews. And an audience not properly informed about the true range of poetry—its varieties and options, its alternatives—is by definition an audience limited to the taste of the reviewer. Let's take a close look at a currently influential reviewer, with an eye to the kind of taste and research operative within the prevailing critical establishment.

Helen Vendler is worth attending to for the simple reason that her collection of poetry reviews, PART OF NATURE, PART OF US, was published to frenzied acclaim (and a National Book Critics Circle award), few acknowledged "authorities" on the subject. THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT said "the effect of her book is to give a comprehensive picture of the American poetry scene today. . ." "Everything Helen Vendler writes is worth pondering."[3] "Vendler exhibits in abundance the qualities our poets long for. . ." wrote Irvin Ehrenpreis is THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, contending that she "sparkles with brisk metaphors, colloquial rhythms, newborn phrases, a syntax that evokes a mind endlessly responsive to the article before it. . ." (May 29, 1980) William Pritchard acclaimed her in THE NEW REPUBLIC as

simply "the best poetry reviewer in America." It is astonishing that a book of unretouched reviews generated this kind of adulation; but it convinced many people that Helen Vendler was the genuine article. She has become our latest arbiter of taste in poetry.

Unlike Harold Bloom or Hugh Kenner, who both have programmatic tendencies, Vendler has no system to unfold, no absolute hierarchy to reveal. She poses in the classic American vein as the singular mind confronting the single poem. She rarely makes sweeping judgments (a proclamation that Auden's "trifles are better than others' lifework" being the exception rather than the rule[4]), choosing instead to settle her attention on the finer points of poetic diction. This approach is deceptive in that it makes her appear more reliable than she is. Her meticulous analysis of Amy Clampitt's THE KINGFISHER, omits any reference to Charles Olson.[5] Aside from the fact that "The Kingfishers" is Olson's most famous poem—which any literate poet might be expected to know, in naming a book—it happens that Olson is invoked by Clampitt herself several times in the book. Vendler rather mysteriously says "Clampitt's language changes like a change in weather," when it would be more accurate to examine the poet's curious amalgam of fashionable wit ("the air/that rude nomad") and pure syntactic momentum in ways indebted to Olson, among others.

Vendler's *ars poetica* seems to me most succinctly put in her conviction that "We cannot go behind the art: the illusion that we can is art's most compelling hallucination."[6] I take this as a precaution that poems are best left as poems, as artifacts, and that the historical, social and psychological web underlying a poem's incarnation had better not be pursued. Mine may appear a tendentious reading, but I see it in the context of her reviews as collected in PART OF NATURE, PART OF US (1979). Certain telling choices of word and image make the point. Vendler is ultimately moved to approval by intimations of a static, unchanging, value-laden Object. She speaks of Robert Lowell's "votive sculpture, bronzed to imperishability."[7] She refers to *Day by Day* as his "most imperial" book.[8]

Thanks to Lowell's art, his subjects will remain embossed in the world's memory, though they themselves are "devoured by time." In her significant choice of a role model, Vendler sees Lowell as "the curator of the world."[9] I cite these characterizations of Lowell because he is, for Vendler, "our greatest contemporary poet."[10] She is devoted to Lowell's art even to the degree that she dismisses without serious consideration the charge that Lowell tampered with his personal affairs and the lives of others deliberately in order to make

better poetry. It serves her purposes, then, not to "go behind the art."

It's hard to read much of Vendler without the feeling of a double standard at work. One feels that the inclusion of a review of Dudley Randall's Broadside Press in Detroit (the only small-press publisher represented in PART OF NATURE, by the way) is due solely to an awkward attempt to give Blacks a place in the line-up. Yet without a twinge Vendler approvingly cites A.R. Ammons' "mock-Negro" voices in THE SNOW POEMS. Ammons gets by with the gentlest of reproaches for including doodlings in his poems: "All poets do those things in the margins, but they usually leave them behind when the poem reaches the printed page."[11] The same practice in Creeley meets with her disapproval. Reviewing his SELECTED POEMS she finds Creeley "fatally pinched . . . he purchases composition at the price of momentum and sweep."[12] At the same time one suspects Vendler would dismiss Olson (whom she does not mention) precisely *because* of his momentum and sweep. These are peculiar terms for her to use, considering this estimate of Berryman: "In his early, very elegant verse, he wrote most of the poems a twentieth-century young man can write—Yeats poems, Auden poems, Hopkins poems . . ."[13] Masters of precision, all, but hardly paragons of momentum and sweep. And if most of the kinds of poems a 20th century poet can write are modelled after Yeats, Auden, and Hopkins, the tradition itself would appear to be "fatally pinched."

Vendler's peremptory custodianship of "the tradition" has never come out in a more ugly fashion than in her taunting review of AMERICA A PROPHECY, edited by Jerome Rothenberg and George Quasha in 1973.[14] The tradition, she concludes, "deserves better than this distortion of its history, a distortion its dead poets are helpless to protect." Throughout a detailed three-page review Vendler continually assaults the book without the least attention to its subtitle, "A New Reading of American Poetry from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present." She takes AMERICA A PROPHECY to be—despite all the obvious signals to the contrary—a new bid at a definitive masterpiece-basket anthology. With her gross misreading she is capable even of the following: "Meanwhile, the hungry sheep look up and are not fed; the worthy bidden mouths of our greatest poets appear not at the feast; and lean and flashy songs are set, with no discrimination, cheek-by-jowl with poems by decent poets who have somehow slipped in under the editors' criteria." There is nothing in this to distinguish it with the name Criticism. (Vendler may have sensed this herself, excluding it from PART OF NATURE, PART OF US.) *America a Prophecy* is a meticulously arranged anthology. The format itself invited an intelligent—if negative—response. Vendler appears not to have actually *read* the book at all,

offering instead a shrill series of characterizations based on nothing more than the table of contents. "Are we not all solaced by whale songs?" "Never mind, dear reader, that you never thought Marcel Duchamp belonged in an anthology of American Poetry. . ." "Nothing is more 'modern,' alas, than to prize the primitive." "All this is nothing new at all (contrary to the editors' pretensions). A revolt against high culture is a stage in the life of many authors. . ." This kind of sarcastic sneering is a surprise coming from Vendler and the *New York Times Book Review*. It's a response as hysterical as if the ultimate challenge to academic respectability had been issued.

The primary reason for Vendler's distorted apprehension of *America a Prophecy* is her academic bias. She takes the anthology to be "aimed at college students," and asks "with Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats and Whitman not yet given to them, are they to read Pawnee Bear Songs and Dadaist experiments, aleatory 'art' and Hoodoo chants?" She complains as if she were about to be *forced* to use the book as a text in her classroom—an impossible situation, and hardly legitimate ground for her whining. Students still suffer through Wordsworth *because* someone like Vendler is browbeating them with the attitude that they'd better get with it because it's Great. And as the cycle of their education represses the abundance of natural curiosity, they become more and more furtive in their genuine enjoyment of all that is not Great in culture. In this—her most repressive stance—Vendler represents the taskmaster who shames students into abandoning their indigenous culture in favor of the "high culture" they're being trained for (and, in the end, alienated from).

Vendler's endearments to her *New York Times* readership ("dear reader," "are we not all. . . ," and that snooty "alas") reveal the position she hails from. She was evidently driven up the wall by the fact that, in publishing *America a Prophecy*, Random House was not answering to her pedagogic needs in 1973. That is, her *expectations* as a Harvard professor were that the large New York trade publishers existed to service the university system (a reasonable, if misguided, assumption). She writes with the confidence of speaking for an entire community. "We" is never far from her lips.

There is a use of authority which can be taken as abusive, in which a prominent critic assails readers by insisiting on the primacy of a particular book or poet. However, readers know they're being pummelled and form a resistance to it, or the poetry as cited is simply good enough to withstand the critic's promotion of it, and wins its own audience. What I think is much more insidious is the academic first-person-plural, the implied companionship that is abused whenever it is applied to contemporary poetry. Vendler is not alone in using

this "we" to great effect. In public discourse it's used by politicians with disarming ease and repulsive familiarity. The same abusive intimacy predominates in the academic dissemination of contemporary poetry. Of course it would intolerably belittle their authority for critics to contextualize their address. The first-person-plual of academics consists of English professors and graduate students. The critical idiom of the familiar "we" speaking about "our best poets" plays on the fundamental uncertainty (or ambiguity) about poetry's audience. A truly contextualized mode of address—in which the "we" would be accurately denoted—would force someone like Helen Vendler to be so blatant as to confess that a tradition modelled after Yeats, Auden and Hopkins is a classroom convenience. It would make her and others' nominees for distinction among poets seem precarious at the very least, favored as they are for their potential classoom use. Any analysis of the social or historical background of poetry in America would inevitably complicate the issues: the teachers would no longer have a simple set of explicable poems, but a growing web of alternate approaches to the very concept and act of intelligence—for that is where the enquiry into the diversity of American poetry leads. Classroom requirements, coupled with critical idiom, demand that context be passed over in silence.

The only books about contemporary poetry that address the question of context are English.[15] From across the Atlantic the conclusion is easy to see: ". . . the American literary establishment has failed its poets. . ." "There is a real danger," says Geoffrey Hurley, "that the academic proliferation since World War Two is generating a quite spurious set of values, erecting factitious masterpieces, and preventing the recognition of the real ones."[16]

The most unkind view of the situation is that there are accepted academic exhibitors, then there are those who make up a kind of *salon de refusés*. This analogy suggests that the official view as represented in the pages of *The New York Times Book Review, New York Review of Books, The New Yorker*, etc., is blithely passing by the Cezanne, Renoir, Monet, and Degas of American poetry. In that alone I think the analogy justified, but I use it for another reason: to indicate that there are, as it were, different galleries, different places that exhibit poetry. And the vacuity of the critical establishment is due both to exclusive attention to a particular place of exhibit (trade publishers and university presses) and to the stylistic features innate to that group of exhibitors.

Even the critics by now recognize that there is a levelling national idiom in American poetry. Art for art's sake has disguised itself in the U.S. by its stylish ease, its contrived version of relaxed address in faceless blank verse which, with

just a little scrutiny, can be seen as the "*studied* artlessness" one critic has called it.[17] At its worst, this is an inconsequential interior monologue, a shiftless, nervous mumbling masquerading as plain speech. Even at best, it's an invisible agent that drags down the imagination of many good poets who feel constrained to sound "natural."

In response to this, a new critical theme has been announced: the Failure of Language. The theme is tied to the degradation of American speech in political and commercial uses. The critics are haunted by pre-lapsarian dreams of a whole, undiluted, pure speech. Cary Nelson goes so far as to suggest that "contemporary poems which are convincingly American will often be poems about the failure of poetry."[18] This is a devastating thesis, which in the hands of a less perceptive critic than Nelson could be a suffocating ploy. At a single stroke it could abandon our most energetic poets as irrelevant to the American scheme. Unfortunately, this has already happened, without even the justification of a thesis like Nelson's at hand. Because critical attention has gone disproportionately to the style of sudied artlessness, the American practitioners of poetry as an *art* remain unknown or unmentioned. But in fact much of their art has contended directly with the "degraded" public idiom, seeking out new resources in syntax and vocabulary (Zukofsky, Irby, Coolidge), new stances regarding the relationship between actual and "composed" speech (Olson, Creeley, Antin), as well as poetic uses of said degraded idiom itself (Dorn, Jonathan Williams, Spicer). This is not to mention those who avoid the whole issue by writing firmly in the tradition of the rhetorical, hieratic English sublime (Duncan, Kelly, Johnson, Meyer).

Sqinting out from under the supposed burden of a degraded national idiom, the critics have arrived at a bizarre but clever solution, the aesthetic equivalent of self-help popular psychology. "It is part of the American poetic myth," writes Cary Nelson, "to believe that personal articulation cleanses language."[19] A poetry slavish to the first-person-singular—which is what the national idiom has turned out to be—falls prey to a criticism intent on appropriating those voices most easily subsumed by its own regal "we." Poetry is victimized by the classic American distrust of eloquence, and eventually develops a reciprocity with critical concepts that reduce poetic energy to domestic obedience traits. This tension has been the demon provider to professor-poets like Berryman, whose rococco verses finally aim no higher than the inter-office memo.

The facile acceptance of a "personal touch" (much as depicted in the stylized gestures of a Miller's beer commercial) is what gave rise to the extraordinary enthusiasm for confessional poetry in the 1960s. Only a few years were needed for

the facade of popular fashion to erode. Who reads W.D. Snodgrass? It's now evident that "the confessional poets were always stylish in their misery," as Charles Molesworth puts it.[20] Confessional poetry is too much a part of academic curricula to be dropped altogether, but scholarly commentary appears less enamored of Berryman, Sexton and Plath than it was ten years ago. Molesworth astutely observes of Sexton that "the poetry is read more out of a duty to at least listen to the maimed than out of a sense of discovery or of artistic energy, let alone of tragedy."[21] It is this duty-bound trait of academics that keeps the whole edifice of a moribund critical establishment afloat. We've seen Vendler castigating *America A Prophecy* out of a misguided sense of obligation to her students. We continue to see, each year, scores of volumes of inert poetry dutifully reviewed in newspapers and scholarly journals. And the same critical platitudes keep floating up to the surface, as we hear about the "decisive accomplishments" of "our poets," producing "imperishable masterpieces."

It is wisest in conclusion to take a look at the actual historical background, both of the critical establishment and of the alternative-press tradition in American poetry. The two have rarely crossed paths, and this has not been beneficial to anybody in the end.

The schism dates from the 1930s. In that decade three reviews were established that were to have an enduring influence on a critical establishment that eventually extended through all the major review sources. *The Partisan Review, Sewanee Review* and *Kenyon Review*—with Delmore Schwartz, Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom as editors, among others—formed the climate of approval through which the careers of Lowell, Jarrell and Berryman were promoted. We lack a thorough account of the tastes promulgated by this nexus, but at least some of the consequences are apparent. William Carlos Williams was the adversary, a figure representing everything the New Criticism was against. For Williams it was clearly a case of being spurned by the academics. For Tate and the others, Eliot and Pound were the true voices of Modernism, and Williams' tendentious version of homespun American poetics was antithetical to their sense of tradition.

It was around Williams that the alternative press system in American poetry originated as an abiding force. When Williams found no takers for his *Collected Poems* in 1934, Oppen, Reznikoff and Zukofsky formed The Objectivist Press to publish it. Three years later James Laughlin was forming New Directions specifically to keep Williams in print. The Objectivists, by associating with Williams, were condemned to peripheral attention for the rest of their lives.[22]

New Directions soon began publishing Delmore Schwartz and Pound and so was able to shake the stigma of being Williams' publisher. But the fact remains that, despite New Directions' credibility as a trade publisher for almost fifty years now—and despite a list that includes such thoroughly integrated figures as Tennessee Williams, Dylan Thomas, and Henry Miller—it is a marginal publisher, to judge from reviews and from the books of criticism dealing with contemporary poetry. This is not to suggest that Duncan, Levertov and Snyder have lacked critical attention, but it is worth pondering how much more attention their peers published by Atheneum or Houghton Mifflin or Farrar Straus receive. It's sobering to consider that New Directions is the most visible of all publishers in the alternative press poetry tradition, but its advocacy has essentially stopped with the generation now in its fifties.

With the publication of *Paterson* Williams himself came into a twilight acceptance. By the time he died in 1963 he was no longer an exile in his own country. But those associated with him had deepened the alternative press tradition and were in effect continuing along the lines of his ostracism. Olson, for instance, remains even today essentially the author of "Projective Verse" as reported by Williams in his *Autobiography*, the figure Marjorie Perloff dismissed in 1973 as an unoriginal muddler of Pound's and Williams' precepts.[23] Zukofsky, Oppen and Reznikoff remain completely unmentioned in critical readings of postwar poetry. The only Williams protege to draw acclaim has been Ginsberg, and that came about not through critical appraisal of the poetry but because of the mass media coverage of the Beats. Once *Life* had profiled the Beat scene, the intellectual quarterlies had to come up with some account of the work.

The consequences of personal association in the making of literary reputations persists in the case of formalist verse out of the Tate and Ransom context. Lowell, Berryman and Jarrell, whose careers were launched in the pages of the *Kenyon, Partisan* and *Sewanee* reviews, continued to receive heavy doses of critical scrutiny throughout their careers. Their students also received a lion's share of attention: Snodgrass, Sexton, Plath, Merwin, and others.

One other significant factor remains to be considered: when W.H. Auden came to New York in the 1940s he was afforded constant opportunity to exercise his taste in practical, influential ways—as teacher, critic, anthologist, committee member and consultant. The younger poets who sought Auden's guidance at that time continue to be among the most frequently reviewed in America: James Merrill, Howard Moss, William Meredith, Anthony Hecht, Louis Simpson, John Hollander, Richard Howard, Daniel Hoffman and Allen Ginsberg. Most of them inherited Auden's fascination with technical ingenuity; most have

found a permanemt publisher in Atheneum. In addition, Auden's editorial choices for the Yale Younger Poets helped establish the credibility of university poetry series, as well as launching the reputations of poets who continue to be highly prominent, including W.S. Merwin, Daniel Hoffman, James Wright, John Ashbery, John Hollander and Adrienne Rich.

While literary differences stir up fuss in the periodicals and do lead to a kind of feuding between poets, one still wonders how it is that so incidental a thing as the place of publication dictates critical reception. Such a history as the one I've outlined here would have to include a virtual sociology of English Departments in American universities to account for this. The basic fact of the history of American poetry since the 1930s is that poets who publish regularly in the university quarterlies and the highbrow magazines routinely receive critical acclaim, while those who choose to publish in little magazines and small presses (more accurately, *fine* presses—with the emphasis on quality in book design) remain marginal. *The poetry itself is incidental.* What this says is that poetry is a product, like soap or skirts or air conditioners, and that like the products in the marketplace *quality* is irrelevant to the factors behind its success.

Given these facts, the manner of critical evaluation deployed in the book reviews of Helen Vendler—and scores of others—is a pretence for the contextualizing historical and social perspective it lacks. All the books of criticism published in the past ten years that purportedly address contemporary poetry do nothing but perpetuate the critical shortcomings of the reviews.[24] Despite signs of moderate intelligence here and there, in these books and reviews, it is not only obvious but blatant that *scholarship and critical insight have yet to be applied to contemporary poetry*. Given the current situation, they never will, unless it is by poets conferring amongst themselves because the most public organs for any real discourse have been—as in news of the world at large—pre-empted.

What follows is a year by year listing of books of poetry prominently reviewed in the trade press, as derived from the *Book Review Index*. The numbers in parentheses following each title are the number of reviews cited in the *Index*. Titles followed by an asterisk are published by small presses.

The listing is not comprehensive by any means. What I have attempted to do is to chronicle the attention lavished on certain poets whenever their books appear, and to indicate by immediate juxtaposition within each year books of considerable merit which were overlooked. In certain instances I include small press

books that received no reviews, but have done so only where I consider that an indisputable travesty occured by that oversight.

Some words are in order as to the actual use of such a list. First, the *Book Review Index* does not cite "little magazines," so reviews in such publications as *Caterpillar, Montemora* and *L = A = N = G = U = A = G = E* (three of the few such that *did* publish reviews) are not listed. This means that certain books by Dorn, Kelly, Duncan, Eshleman and others received some attention in sources other than those accounted for here. What such a list cannot chronicle is the little magazine devoting an issue or focusing a large part of an issue to a particular poet. Kenneth Irby's book *Catalpa* received no press reviews, yet a sufficient number of earnest readers welcomed it as one of the finest collections of the 1970s in a special issue of *Credences*.

In the end, however, the sources listed in the *Book Review Index* are the ones that count. It lists the journals that are essential to library purchases (*Library Journal, Booklist*), quarterlies servicing English teachers (*Kentucky Journal, Chicago Review, Virginia Quarterly Review*, etc.), and above all, the widely circulated newspapers and magazines (*The New Yorker, Time, The New York Review of Books, The New York Times Book Review, The Times Literary Supplement, The Nation, Atlantic, Harper's*, etc.). I offer the following key to what the number of reviews a book receives can mean: 1-7 reviews may be library and English department oriented, i.e., special interest; a book receiving 8 or more reviews invariably has one placed among the widely circulating periodicals cited above; 12 or more reviews generally mean 3 or 4 reviews in the most widely circulated sources. Twenty or more reviews means a contagion of preoccupation with a particular book or poet has occured. This means that a potential readership of millions has been contacted (though the number who *read* the reviews is surely much less).

Certain poets' careers seem to prove conclusively that the *publisher* is what really counts. Duncan's *Bending the Bow* got 18 reviews, while his small-press *Tribunals*—continuing the major long sequence from *Bending the Bow*, in fact—received only 3. Diane Wakoski has published voluminously with both trade and small presses; her small press books have never been as widely reviewed, though they *have* received more attention than most other poets' small press books. Poets often have prose publications—not listed here—which generally receive more reviews than their poetry. Examples would be Merwin's *Miner's Pale Children*, Rich's *Of Woman Born*, Dickey's *Deliverance*, Plath's *The Bell Jar*, etc. It goes without saying that when such a book appears concurrently with its author's poetry, the book of poems reaps a larger harvest of

reviews than it usually would. But again, small press publication is an impediment: Jim Harrison's widely reviewed novels made no difference in the case of his *Letters to Yesenin*, a Sumac book which didn't get a single trade review.

The most plausible argument against such a list as I've compiled here is that the sheer *number* of reviews a book receives is no indication as to the nature of those reviews. However, it's not my purpose to suggest that a book receives more favorable attention the more reviews it gets. But the amount of attention afforded a book gives it credibility. As an indication, the fourth most frequently reviewed title of all the years I list is *The Mind-Reader* by Richard Wilbur, an astonishing amount of attention for a lame collection receiving lackluster commendations (as one critic said, Wilbur is always "safe rather than sorry"). The point is, it doesn't matter that the poems didn't amount to much; the excessive attention sanctioned Wilbur as a poet of "stature." a major presence. Bluntly, this means that critics across the board tried to cover their tracks by penning notices, *just in case* Wilbur turns out to be the major figure he was hailed as in the 1950s. In turn, a recommendation by Wilbur printed on the flyleaf of a younger poet's book guarantees critical scrutiny, perpetuating a fierce downward spiral of mediocrity. It's still the saga of the Emperor's New Clothes that prevails: the critics all in a row titter and poke each other, then all get down to solemn details about the emboidery as the new poetic Godiva struts by.

1967

Robert Lowell, *Near the Ocean* (36); James Dickey, *Poems 1957-1967* (25); John Berryman, *Berryman's Sonnets* (20); Anthony Hecht, *The Hard Hours* (20); James Tate, *The Lost Pilot* (15); W.S. Merwin, *The Lice* (14); Anne Sexton, *Live or Die* (12); Ronald Johnson, *The Book of the Green Man* (11); Denise Levertov, *The Sorrow Dance* (9); Robert Creeley, *Words* (8); Louis Zukofsky, *All the Collected Shorter Poems* (7) and *"A" 1-12* (5); Robert Bly, *The Light Around the Body* (5); Paul Blackburn, *The Cities* (2); Edward Dorn, *The North Atlantic Turbine** (2)

1968

John Berryman, *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* (24); W.D. Snodgrass, *After Experience* (23); Robert Duncan, *Bending the Bow* (18); Galway Kinnell, *Body Rags* (13); James Wright, *Shall We Gather at the River* (12); Mark Strand, *Reasons for Moving* (9); David Ignatow, *Rescue the Dead* (8); Allen Ginsberg, *Planet News** (6); Charles Olson, *Maximus IV, V, VI* (6); George Oppen, *Of Being Numerous* (5); Robert Duncan, *Derivations** (4) and *The First Decade**

(2); Jackson Mac Low, *22 Light Poems** (2); Charles Bukowski, *At Terror Street and Agony Way** (1); David Antin, *Code of Flag Behavior** (1); Edward Dorn, *Gunslinger, Book I** (1); Robert Kelly, *Songs I-XXX** (1) and *Finding the Measure**(0)

1969

Elizabeth Bishop, *The Complete Poems* (25); Randall Jarrell, *The Complete Poems* (20); Richard Wilbur, *Walking to Sleep* (20); Robert Lowell, *Notebook 1967-'68* (20); Anne Sexton, *Love Poems* (18) Robert Creeley, *Pieces* (18); James Merrill, *The Fire Screen* (15); John Logan, *The Zig-Zag Walk* (13); Adrienne Rich, *Leaflets* (10); Marvin Bell, *A Probable Volume of Dreams* (8); Diane Wakoski, *The Blood Factory* (8); David Wagoner, *New and Selected Poems* (8); Ronald Johnson, *Valley of the Many Colored Grasses* (6); Louis Zukofsky, *"A" 13-21* (5); Joel Oppenheimer, *In Time* (4); Jerome Rothenberg, *Poems 1964-1967** (3); Philip Whalen, *On Bear's Head* (2); Edward Dorn, *Gunslinger, Book II** (1)

1970

James Dickey, *The Eye Beaters, Blood, Victory and Madness* (17); John Ashbery, *The Double Dream of Spring* (17); A.R. Ammons, *Uplands* (16); William Meredith, *Earth Walk* (15); Gary Snyder, *Regarding Wave* (14); Mark Strand, *Darker* (13); William Stafford, *Allegiances* (12); David Ignatow, *Poems 1934-1969* (12); W.S. Merwin, *The Carrier of Ladders* (12); May Swenson, *Iconographs* (10); Denise Levertov, *Relearning the Alphabet* (9); Louise Gluck, *Firstborn* (8); James Tate, *The Oblivion Ha-Ha* (8); Irving Feldman, *The Magazine Papers* (8); Charles Olson, *Archeologist of Morning* (7); Michael McClure, *Star* (4); Robert Duncan, *Tribunals** (3); Phillip Whalen, *Severance Pay** (1)

1971

John Berryman, Love and Fame (24); Anne Sexton, *Transformations* (23); Sylvia Plath, *Crossing the Water* (19); A.R. Ammons, *Collected Poems 1951-1971* (19); Galway Kinnell, *The Book of Nightmares* (19); James Wright, *Collected Poems* (18); Diane Wakoski, *The Motorcycle Betrayal Poems* (16); Adrienne Rich, *The Will to Change* (15); A.R. Ammons, *Briefings* (14); Louis Simpson, *Adventures of the Letter I* (13); Stanley Kunitz, *The Testing-Tree* (12); Howard Moss, *Selected Poems* (11); John Haines, *The Stone Harp (11); Charles Simic, Dismantling the Silence* (11); Frank O'Hara, *Collected Poems*

(11); John Hollander, *The Night Mirror* (9); Denise Levertov, *To Stay Alive* (8); Jerome Rothenberg, *Poems For the Game of Silence* (6); Nathaniel Tarn, *A Nowhere for Vallejo* (5); Phillip Levine, *Red Dust** (4); Robert Kelly, *Flesh Dream Book** (2); Frank Samperi, *The Prefiguration* (0)

1972

John Berryman, *Delusions Etc.* (30); Sylvia Plath, *Winter Trees* (27); James Merrill, *Braving the Elements* (18); Anne Sexton, *A Book of Folly* (16); James Tate, *Absences* (13); Philip Levine, *They Feed They Lion* (13); Allen Ginsberg, *The Fall of America* (12); John Ashbery, *Three Poems* (12); Maxine Kumin, *Up Country* (12); Denise Levertov, *Footprints* (8); Robert Creeley, *A Day Book* (7); Diane Wakoski, *Smudging** (6); H.D., *Hermetic Definition* (4); George Oppen, *Seascape: The Needle's Eye** (3); Jackson Mac Low, *Stanzas for Iris Lezak** (2); Paul Blackburn, *Early Selected** (1)

1973

Robert Lowell, *The Dolphin* (26), *History* (25) and *For Lizzie and Harriet* (24); W.S. Merwin, *Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment* (15); Adrienne Rich, *Diving into the Wreck* (15); James Wright, *Two Citizens* (14); Robert Bly, *Sleepers Joining Hands* (12); William Stafford, Someday, Maybe (12); Donald Justice *Departures* (10); Gregory Orr, *Burning the Empty Nests* (9); John Logan, *The Anonymous Lover* (7); Diane Wakoski, *Dancing on the Grave of a Son of a Bitch** (6); Frank Samperi, *Lumen Gloriae* (2); Robert Kelly, *The Mill of Particulars** (1); Clayton Eshleman, *Coils** (1); George Quasha, *Somapoetics** (0); Jim Harrison, *Letters to Yesenin** (0)

1974

Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island* (17); A.R. Ammons, *Sphere* (16); Anne Sexton, *The Death Notebooks* (15); Robert Penn Warren, *Or Else* (15); Mark Strand, *The Story of Our Lives* (12); Charles Wright, *Hard Freight* (11); Philip Levine, *1933* (11); Galway Kinnell, *The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ Into the New World* (11); Howard Moss, *Instant Lives* (11); Alan Dugan, *Poems 4* (9); John Hollander, *At the Head of the Bed* (9); Charles Simic, *Retuning to a Place Lit by a Glass of Milk* (8); Jerome Rothenberg, *Poland/1931* (7); William Everson, *Man-Fate* (6); Charles Reznikoff, *By the Well of Living and Seeing** (4); Michael McClure, *September Blackberries* (4) and *Rare Angel** (3); Charles Bukowski, *Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame** (2); David Bromige, *Tight Corners** (0); Kenneth Irby, *To Max Douglas** (0); Robin Blaser, Image-

Nations* (0); Robert Duncan, *Dante Etudes** (0); Clark Coolidge, *The Maintains** (0)

1975

John Ashbery, *Self Portrrait in a Convex Mirror* (34); Robert Penn Warren, *Selected Poems* (23); Adrienne Rich, *Poems Selected and New 1950-1974* (17); Anne Sexton, *The Awful Rowing Toward God* (16); John Hollander, *Tales Told of the Fathers* (15); Maxine Kumin, *House, Bridge, Fountain, Gate* (12); Howard Nemerov, *The Western Approaches* (12); A.R. Ammons, *Diversifications* (12); Denise Levertov, *The Freeing of the Dust* (12); Howard Moss, *The Buried City* (12); David Ignatow, *Facing the Tree* (11) and *Selected Poems* (10); Charles Wright, *Bloodlines* (9); Diane Wakoski, *Virtuoso Literature for Two and Four Hands* (9); Donald Finkel, *A Mote in Heaven's Eye* (9); Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems, Volume 3* (9); David Wagoner, *Sleeping in the Woods* (8); Edward Dorn, *Slinger** (8) and *Collected Poems** (7); Gregory Orr, *Gathering the Bones Together* (7); Alfred Corn, *All the Roads At Once* (7); Robert Bly, *The Morning Glory* (6); Louis Zukofsky, *"A" 22-23* (6); Nathaniel Tarn, *Lyrics for the Bride of God* (3); Jack Spicer, *The Collected Books** (3); Clayton Eshleman, *The Gull Wall** (2); Howard McCord, *Selected Poems** (2); Paul Blackburn, *The Journals** (2); Michael McClure, *Jaguar Skies* (1); Thomas Meyer, *The Umbrella of Aesculapius** (1); Robert Kelly, *The Loom** (1); Theodore Enslin, *Synthesis** (0); Clark Coolidge, *Polaroid** (0)

1976

Richard Wilbur, *The Mind-Reader* (32); Robert Lowell, *Selected Poems* (28); John Berryman, *Henry's Fate* (26); Elizabeth Bishop, *Geography III* (23); James Merrill, *Divine Comedies* (19); Philip Levine, *The Names of the Lost* (16); Louise Gluck, *The House on the Marshland* (15); Anne Sexton, *45 Mercy Street* (14); James Tate, *Viper Jazz* (14); Philip Booth, *Available Light* (13); Robert Pinsky, *Sadness and Happiness* (13); Dave Smith, *Cumberland Station* (12); Carolyn Forche, *Gathering the Tribes* (12); John Hollander, *Reflections on Espionage* (11); Howard Moss, *A Swim off the Rocks* (11); Theodore Weiss, *Fireweeds* (10); Irving Feldman, *Leaping Clear* (10); Robert Creeley, *Selected Poems* (10); David Wagoner, *Collected Poems 1956-1976* (8); John Bricuth, *The Heisenberg Variations* (7); David Antin, *Talking at the Boundaries* (6); David Meltzer, *Six* (1); Michael Davidson, *The Mutabilities** (1); Charles Reznikoff, *The Complete Poems, Vol. 1** (1); Ed Sanders, *20,000 A.D.** (0)

1977

Robert Lowell, *Day by Day* (45); John Ashbery, *Houseboat Days* (34); Howard Nemerov, *Collected Poems* (22); A.R. Ammons, *The Snow Poems* (19); W.S. Merwin, *The Compass Flower* (18); Anthony Hecht, *The Mill of Strange Shadows* (18); James Wright, *To a Blossoming Pear Tree* (17); Charles Wright, *China Trace* (14); William Stafford, *Stories That Could Be True* (13); Olga Broumas, *Beginning with 0* (12); Ellen Bryan Voigt, *Claiming Kin* (11); Robert Bly, *This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood* (11); Marvin Bell, *Stars Which See, Stars Which Do Not See* (11); W.D. Snodgrass, *The Fuhrer Bunker* (11); Charles Simic, *Charon's Cosmology* (10); Allen Ginsberg, *Mind Breaths** (10); Howard Moss, *Tigers and Other Lilies* (9); Diane Wakoski, *Waiting for the King of Spain** (6); Anselm Hollo, *Sojourner Microcosms** (4); Michael Palmer, *Without Music** (3); Ronald Johnson, *Radi Os** (2); Duncan McNaughton, *Sumeriana** (1); Gerrit Lansing, *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward** (0); Kenneth Irby, *Catalpa** (0)

1978

James Merrill, *Mirabell* (24); Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* (20); Mark Strand, *The Late Hour* (19); Robert Penn Warren, *Now and Then* (19); Howard Nemerov, *Figures of Thought* (18); Maxine Kumin, *The Retrieval System* (15); Alfred Corn, *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd* (14); Mark Strand, *The Monument* (12); May Swenson, *New and Selected Things Taking Place* (12); John Hollander, *Spectral Emanations* (11) Marge Piercy, *The 12-Spoked Wheel Flashing* (10); David Ignatow, *Tread the Dark* (10); Diane Wakoski, *The Man Who Shook Hands* (8); Michael McClure, *The Antechamber* (4); Jerome Rothenberg, *A Seneca Journal* (3); Robert Kelly, *The Convections** (2); Clayton Eshleman, *What She Means** (2); Lyn Hejinian, *Writing Is an Aid to Memory** (2); Charles Reznikoff, *Testimony, Vol. 1** (2); Ron Silliman, *Ketjak** (1); Bob Perelman, *7 Works** (1); Christopher Dewdney, *Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night** (1); William Everson, *The Veritable Years** (1); Clark Coolidge, *Own Face** (1) and *Quartz Hearts** (0); Theodore Enslin, *Ranger, Book 1** (0)

1979

Stanley Kunitz, *Poems 1928-1978* (24); John Ashbery, *As We Know* (21); Anthony Hecht, *Venetian Vespers* (20); Philip Levine, *Seven Years from Somewhere* (19); Donald Justice, *Selected Poems* (18); Philip Levine, *Ashes* (17); Howard Moss, *Notes from the Castle* (15); Irving Feldman, *New and Selected*

Poems (15); Robert Creeley, *Later* (15); Robert Bly, *This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years* (13); Dave Smith, *Goshawk, Antelope* (12); John Hollander, *Blue Wine* (11); Sandra McPherson, *The Year of Our Birth* (10);Louis Zukofsky, *"A"* (8); David Wagoner, *In Broken Country* (7); Imamu Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Selected Poems* (6); Robert Pinsky, *An Explanation of America* (6); W.H. Matthews, *Rising and Falling* (6); Barbera Einzig, *Disappearing Work** (2); Jackson Mac Low, *The Pronouns** (0); John Taggart, *Dodeka** (0); Thomas Meyer, *Staves, Calends, Legends** (0); John Clarke, *The End of This Side** (0); Jonathan Williams, *Elite/Elate Poems** (0); Mei-Mei Bersenbrugge, *Random Possession** (0); Duncan McNaughton, *Shit on My Shoes** (0)

1980

[Helen Vendler, *Part of Nature, Part of Us* (25)]; Robert Penn Warren, *Being Here* (25); James Merrill, *Scripts for the Pageant* (12); Louis Simpson, *Caviare at the Funeral* (11); Charles Simic, *Classic Ballroom Dances* (11); Frederick Seidel, *Sunrise* (11); Galway Kinnell, *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* (11); Alfred Corn, *The Various Light* (10); William Meredith, *The Cheer* (9); Philip Booth, *Before Sleep* (8); Robert Mazzocco, *Trader* (8); Jerome Rothenberg, *Vienna Blood* (5); Louise Gluck, *Descending Figure* (3); Philip Whalen, *Enough Said** (3); Rosmarie Waldrop, *When They Have Senses** (1); Lyn Hejinian, *My Life** (0); Charles Stein, *Horse Sacrifice** (0); Gustal Sobin, *Wind Chrysalid Rattle** (0); Leland Hickman, *The Great Slave Lake Suite** (0); Barrett Watten, *1-10** (0)

1981

John Ashbery, *Shadow Train* (25); Robert Penn Warren, *Rumour Verified* (22); Carolyn Forche, *The Country Between Us* (17); Dave Smith, *Dream Flights* (15); Philip Levine, *One For the Rose* (14); Andrienne Rich, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (14); David Ignatow, *Whisper to Earth* (8); Donald Finkel, *What Manner of Beast* (8); Robert Bly, *The Man in the Black Coat Turns* (8); Dave Smith, *Homage to Edgar Allan Poe* (8); Marvin Bell, *These Green -Going-to-Yellow* (8); William Bronk, *Life Supports* (8); David Wagoner, *Landfall* (7); Charles Wright, *The Southern Cross* (7); Clayton Eshleman, *Hades in Manganese** (4); Philip Lamatia, *Becoming Visible** (2); Michael Palmer, *Notes for Echo Lake* (2); Ronald Johnson, *Ark* (2); Ron Silliman, *Tjanting** (1); Cark Coolidge, *American Ones** (0); Robert Kelly, *The Alchemist to Mercury** (0)

1. Edward Dorn, *Hello, La Jolla* (Berkeley: Wingbow, 1978) p. 80
2. Charles Molesworth, *The Fierce Embrace* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1979) pp. 8-9
3. These citations are from *Book Review Digest 1980*, p. 1252
4. Helen Vendler, *Part of Nature, Part of Us* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980) p. 92
5. Vendler, "On the Thread of Language," *New York Review of Books*, March 3, 1983, pp. 19-22
6. Vendler, *Part of Nature, Part of Us*, p. 156
7. *ibid*,. p. 136
8. *ibid.*, p. 152
9. *ibid.*, p. 127
10. *ibid.*, p. 125
11. *ibid.*, p. 369
12. *ibid.*, p. 357
13. *ibid.*, p. 120
14. Vendler, "America a Prophecy," *New York Times Book Review*, Dec. 30, 1973, pp. 6-8
15. Geoffrey Thurley, *The American Moment* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977) and Eric Homberger, *The Art of the Real* (London: Dent, 1977)
16. Homberger, *ibid.*, pp. 211 and 230 respectively
17. Jonathan Holden, *The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric*; (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982) p. 9
18. Cary Nelson, *Our Last Firsts Poets* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1982) p. 10
19. *ibid.*, p. 4
20. Molesworth, *op cit.*, p. 66
21. *ibid.*, p. 73
22. George Oppen's *Of Being Numerous* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, but it received only five reviews, surely an all time low for a prize-winning book.
23. Marjorie Perloff cited in Homberger, *op cit.*, p. 121
24. I mean specifically that the critical studies omit any significant treatment of the alternative press tradition as an historical fact, and that (apart from a few incidental exceptions) they uniformly deal only with trade and university press poetry. The books of the last ten years, chronologically: Robert Shaw, ed., *American Poetry Since 1960* (Cheshire, England: Carcanet, 1973); Ralph J.Mills, *The Cry of the Human* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975); George Lensing and Ronald Moran, *Four Poets and the Emotive Imagination* (Baton Rouge: L.S.U. Press, 1976); David Kalstone, *Five Temperaments* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976); Karl Malkoff, *Escape from the Self* (N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977); Laurence Lieberman, *Unassigned Frequencies* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1977); Robert Pinsky, *The Situation of Poetry* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1977); Arthur Oberg, *The Modern American Lyric* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 1978); Charles Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1979); Charles Molesworth, *op cit.*, 1979; Richard Howard, *Alone With America* (N.Y.: Atheneum, 2nd ed., 1980); Helen Vendler, *op cit.*, 1980; Jonathan Holden, *op cit.*, 1982; Cary Nelson, *op cit.*, 1982. The more energized social attitude of Eric Homberger and Geoffrey Thurley of England, *op cit.*, distinguishes their books from those listed above, at least in terms of an awareness of the discrepancy between published poetry and critical assessment in America.

JED RASULA

Dear Don Byrd:

I was reading in the paper today about "friendly fire" (bombs from our side that drop on the troops) as a not unfriendly preliminary to a criticism of your article in *Sulfur 8*. The initial gambit, toward the newspaper cliché of the "baby boom," seems quite at odds with what follows, which is a discussion of the production of works of value. I rather resent the implication that anyone marked for life by having been born after WWII is doomed to permanent overproduction or response to same. You don't need to say this, and it goes nowhere—so the review really begins with the discussion of horse pictures, that is, normative art. Even here the distance from the work you're trying to get back to is generalizing. The separation between "us" and "them" (APR poets) doesn't propose much of a reading of either, but if there is one it's more accurate to the normative. The "counter-normative" is not solely defined as such, and the motivation for the writing of the works is left, therefore, in a kind of blind dark alley of intentions (the dark side of human nature that someone on an expense account is likely to forget). This reminds me of the incoherent humanism of the Stalinist left—a losing tactic, as the identification it proposes is always false and only the basis for cooptation. The best you can do is to say that this is pretty radical stuff, which indicates to me that you don't know how to read it.

Your sense of Coolidge as an abstract expressionist sheds some light on his production, but still the mode is taken as an abstract, static possibility. I see this in numbers of responses to Coolidge's work (*vide* MP's, who should know better or at least be interested to say something of interest for his own sake, or Bernadette Mayer, who usefully points to Coolidge's access to "everything"), making me glad to have published Lydia Davis's article, which at least tags some of the specific inputs so that a reading can occur. You seem not interested in the obvious thematics in Coolidge—in the case of your quote, the holding back, questioning of self, and resistance to other—ending for CC in the near-automatic. Yes, there is something of abstract expressionism in Coolidge's making of automatic impulse into a wound—it's like the American take on Surrealism is "out of a job and going batty"—which certainly could be developed,

in your piece, at the expense of "the present."

Your paragraph on critical and speculative thinking might go somewhere if it were connected with particular works, but that would involve an assessment of method of the various writers taken up, something that is markedly absent.

The readings that follow are all too brief. The thesis that what you quoted of mine is there to "create stasis and to frustrate production" is simply wrong. It should be stimulating and fun to make a reading out of the four lines quoted—there is a thematic argument, several, and as the four poems in the book develop, they become essential rather than deconstructive. For instance, the sequence "word"—"middle distance"—"body"—"car"—"you" is easily about prototypical forms. All those terms are in the same area of mental projection; they could overlap, as in an n-space Venn diagram. The juxtaposition with "each population" and "every testimony" is a comment on the growing polarization between such minimal forms (what, indeed, is a "person") and the pull of atomized, contradictory information—that is, the world as we know it but don't want to. I think that's enough to indicate the possibility of a determinate reading.

Carla's dedication to me leads you into a comparison of how the sentences work in her work, leaving out the most obvious differene, which is that her work is in prose, has narrative, characters, a play, several subsections—i.e., it is completely differently organized, with an entirely other value for sequence. You identify only a minimal formal motivation in the hermeticism of some progessions taken out of context, which is a great way to make them hermetic. I mean, there is subversion and parody, but don't leave out Uncle.

And so on. As the article goes on, you seem to be getting more and more exhausted with the task at hand, which is, for the reader, increasingly seeming like a task. What you say about Robinson and Inman is marginally OK for starters but forgets that Inman is a radically disjunct, zaum poet, while Robinson is writing in refractive, meditative verse forms in which the continuity of thought is central. Not quoting from Bernheimer and Benson makes me wonder why you included them in the review, and Rodefer is certainly a good place to sign off, as his sense of "debris" does underscore the kind of leveling that many people would like to think is the project of a "language-centered" writing. In sum, there does seem to be a kind of thematic argument in your

piece along these lines, running from the baby boom to the normative which must be subverted, to the somewhat anonymous proliferation of writers that basically seem to be saying the same thing, using the same procedures, with the angry Jehovist clouds of Coolidge as abstract-expressionist in the historical background as a basis for belief.

As Wittgenstein said, "I'll teach you differences," and I wish that reviewers would make that the test of their reviews. I am getting tired of being lumped together--by a reading that cannot deal with its own limits--with other writers who quite properly should be recognized as having motives and methods of their own.

BARRETT WATTEN

A Case of AIDS Hysteria

Rolling Stock is a cultural newspaper edited by Ed and Jennifer Dorn and published from the University of Colorado. Its latest issue, "numero 5," devotes a full page—written, I gather, in collaboration with Tom Clark—to "the 1983 AIDS AWARDS FOR POETRY—In recognition of the current EPIDEMIC OF IDIOCY on the poetry scene." The page features a large illustration of a test-tube of reddish liquid, presumably infected blood, the "prize." At the bottom of the page is a photograph of two Oriental men in suits wearing Micky Mouse caps. The caption reads, "To date 1300 cases of AIDS POETRY have been reported in the U.S."

The recipients of this honor are Dennis Cooper ("for writing the most AIDS-like line of the year: 'Mark's anus is wrinkled, pink, and simplistically rendered, but cute.' "); Clayton Eshleman (for "attacking a dead—and thus harmless—poet, Elizabeth Bishop," in a review in the *L.A. Times*);Robert Creeley (for

writing extravagant blurbs for books by Stephen Rodefer and Joanne Kyger); Steve Abbott ("for accusing everybody who doesn't like him or his poetry of 'rabid homophobia' "); Allen Ginsberg (for claiming he wrote some lyrics for the rock group The Clash, when supposedly he hadn't); and finally, "WRITE-IN CANDIDATE" ("Fill in the name of your favorite POETRY IDIOT here.").

As "idiocy" goes—even poetry "idiocy"—these strike me as rather obscure misdemeanors. Cooper's line is hardly worth singling out, one way or the other. The Ginsberg is strictly a "so what" item, and the Abbott clearly the product of a personal grudge—in any event, no evidence is given to support the charges. Creeley's liking for Rodefer and Kyger and Eshleman's dislike of Bishop is scarcely cause for alarm: In fact, I'm more alarmed that Dorn and Clark, of all people, feel that Bishop, of all people, needs protection from the barbarians trampling on her grave.

The presenting of awards to "idiots" has always been a favored pasttime for sophomoric wits. Luckily the sophomoric wits of poetry usually find other things to do, like writing grants proposals. Here, however, *Rolling Stock* is merely picking up where Robert Bly's *Fifties/Sixties/Seventies* left off. But Dorn and Clark have considerably raised the stakes from Bly's "Blue Toad," or whatever it was: For these supposed infractions of good taste, they not only wish the poets dead, but dead after a long and particularly gruesome disease.

It's not at all funny. And *Rolling Stock's* choice of AIDS as the vehicle of death is positively sinister. It has only one reading: if AIDS is "idiocy," then clearly the "idiots" are AIDS-victims, that is, gay men. For Cooper, Ginsberg and Abbott, who are publicly known as homosexual, it means: Those faggots should drop dead. For Creeley and Eshleman, publicly known as heterosexual, it means: They're idiots, therefore faggots, therefore they should drop dead from faggot disease. (And as for Orientals in Micky Mouse caps—presumably more "idiotic" than whites in similar attire—they can drop dead too.)

Sickening and pointless, its utter irrelevancy makes the matter barely worth mentioning. But admirers of Dorn, who are many, and of Clark, who are some, now face the task of recovering the poetry from the macho slobber. And the University of Colorado and the Boulder Arts Commission will, I hope, reconsider supporting this stoned/cute version of the hate sheet.

Most depressing is that these poets, like a village on the fringe of the Empire,

can only reduce the news, when it reaches them, to family squabbles. Meanwhile people are dropping dead from AIDS, and its discovery has unleashed a wave of homophobia, both verbal and active. Worse, it has become the right-wing's counter to cancer as *the* moral disease of the age. If cancer, as various liberationists have proclaimed, is the body's response to passion unnaturally repressed by society or personality, then AIDS, according to the right, is the result of unnatural passion: homosexuality itself, or promiscuous, "depersonalized" homosexuality.

There is no doubt that AIDS is widely seen—even by some of its victims—as the wrath of God. This mythologizing of disease not only erects enormous barriers to treatment and potential cure, but it also promotes a climate of fear that extends far beyond AIDS itself. Hell becomes other people: the "idiots" among us, out not only to physically destroy us, but to destroy our family structure, our "American" values. The current AIDS hysteria is merely an exagerrated and particularly shameless form of the continuing national dementias of racism and anticommunism.

Rolling Stock demonstrates how easily the objects of fear and hatred become jumbled: homosexuals, AIDS-vicims, Orientals, authors of book-jacket blurbs—"idiots" all. I once would have thought Dorn and Clark to be unlikely mouthpieces for Reagan America.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

Some Thoughts on Conferencing

Parole, as the Derrideans never tire of telling us, is not prior to *écriture*. Maybe not, but one would never know it from studying the list of "Forthcoming Meetings and Conferences of General Interest" published in each issue of PLMA. For the month of October 1983 alone, I count no fewer than 80 conferences listed as being of possible interest to MLA members. My favorites include:

Deciding What to Know: The Professional Authorizatrion of Knowledge in the Humanities, 29 Sept.—2 Oct. 1983, Indiana University.

Robert Cormier: I AM THE CHEESE—The Book, the Film and the Author, 8 Oct. 1983, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Romanticism in the Old World and the New: Stendal, Zhukovskii, and Washington Irving, 13-16 October 1983, Hofstra University.

Business and Culture in the Emergence of German as a National Language, 28-29 Oct., UCLA.

And I haven't even mentioned *Chautauqua in Mississippi: The History of the Small Town*, to be held at Mississippi State University on October 12-14, or the *Rocky Mountain Conference on British Studies* at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

The Literary Life, the Life of the Humanist, is increasingly given over to such activities. Indeed, it is not too much to say that conferencing has become, for many of us, a way of life. The conference, for example, functions as a vacation-substitute: it proffers not only tax-free holidays but most of the other amenities of life: sex, companionship, shared meals (always), good food and drink (sometimes), politics, even a sense of religious communion. The conference has, in short, largely replaced the prayer meeting or Chautauqua, the family gathering, the dinner party. For at the conference, there are no hosts and guests in the traditional sense, and yet everyone sits at the table. The conference has, moreover, a particular rhythm reassuring to its participants: it begins on a low-key note as the participants eye one another warily; by the end, they are all embracing and exchanging phone numbers and addresses with the enthusiasm of ten-year olds on the last day of summer camp.

The road to conference serfdom is paved with good intentions. So I found, this past August, when I participated in three very different (and more or less equally useless) conferences. The first was the IAUPE (International Association of University Professors of English), a group that meets triennially in an "exotic" or especially interesting place. This year the IAUPE met in Hamburg, a city less than exotic although very pretty; the papers at the 5-day meeting ranged from Old Norse to Postmodernism, the panel at which I was invited to speak. The conference includes numerous social activities: for example, a boat

ride down the Elbe, a visit to an organ recital in old Lünenburg, a dinner in a Rathskeller, and so on.

By the second day, I realized I was learning virtually nothing. Certain famous professors proceeded to give papers that I have heard them give on other occasions; indeed, some of these papers had already found their way into print. But conference goers tend to be peculiarly tolerant: the same people who would attack a particular argument were it in print, sit patiently smiling when Professor X reads it out loud. Such is the force of *la parole*. Some of the other papers contained so little scholarly evidence that I would not have accepted them from my undergraduates; yet all the speakers were full professors. Sexism, at this particular conference, was rampant. Thus a well-known (male) Shakespearean scholar from Britain introduced a female speaker on his panel as follows: "M.T. is a woman. A lady. I don't know where to place her on the spectrum from Eve to Marilyn Monroe or Germaine Greer. I don't know if she is a feminist or an anti-feminist. I do know, however, that like Portia and Rosalind, she is a RENAISSANCE lady. . ." and so on. The audience, whose average age seemed to be roughly 70 (it takes a long time to become a full professor in most European countries!) was not offended. Indeed, so little did any of the conferees seem to care about LITERATURE, that the presentation of papers was largely a filler between more substantive activities like the performance (free to members) of Verdi's *Othello* by the Hamburg opera or the final banquet at which there were many toasts and the usual exchange of addresses.

I was sure my next conference would be different. The subject was (again for me) Postmodernism and I was to speak on "Postmodernism and the Crisis of Lyric." The site was the French national conference center at Cerisy-la-Salle; the symposium was organized by the International Circle for Research in Philosophy, a group based in Austin, Texas and founded by the Menil Foundation. Professor Robert Magiola of Purdue, who invited me a full 14 months ahead of time, listed among the speakers Jean-Francois Lyotard, Douglas Davis, and Pierre Boulez. But alas, the day before I was to drive to Normandy, I received a phone call in Paris from one of the other organizers, informing me that many of the promised speakers had "defected." This turned out to be quite an understatement: only when I arrived in Cerisy did I realize that, indeed, the bulk (poets, philosophers, artists, composers, performers) had defected, leaving me to spar with some fairly tired Heideggerians and to smile

at the Valery Larbaud seminar which occupied two of the four tables in the dining room. Indeed, one friendly conferee confessed to me that he was on our program only because he was honeymooning in the vicinity of Cerisy and thought he might use the conference as a tax deduction.

The main thing I learned about postmodernism at the Cerisy conference is that postmodernists no longer seem to know any language other than their own. The same professors who can discourse learnedly on the meaning of *Dasein* in Heidegger, become very nervous when someone asks them in French for the sugar; conversely, during the papers given in English, two French ladies repeatedly nudged me with such questions as "Qu'a-t-il dit sur Foucault?" One Heideggerian, accused by two others of misrepresenting the great philosopher, said defensively, "Well, that's MY Heidegger!" This is a phrase I shall remember for another conference. At another session, in which Syberberg's *Parsifal* was under discussion, a Hungarian and a Frenchman were busy insisting that this was a decadent, kitch, Nazi film when suddenly an American interjected that the rupture of the rock, which occurs at the opening of the film, was assuredly Postmodern. And that was more or less that.

My third conference was the Humanities Institute held at USC during the first week of September. Unlike the other two, this one was for real. My fellow-correspondent for *Sulfur*, Jim Clifford, led an inspired session on "Reassessing Gregory Bateson." There was a superb session on the Bible and another on tropologies of history; I myself gave one of three papers on Wallace Stevens' *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*; the other two speakers were Michael Davidson and Charles Altieri, both well known to *Sulfur* readers.

The only problem at this particular conference was that the attendance was extremely low: even the governing board was largely absent (8 out of 12 missing). True, it was 100 degrees and smoggy in Los Angeles; true, it was the first week of classes at USC and the Jewish New Year came just the day before. Still, there should have been more than 25 stragglers to hear Harry Berger of UC-Santa Cruz give a brilliant paper on the political values of the Old Testament.

Why, in the face of all I have said about the conference being a way of life was attendance so low? Partly because the Humanities Institute, founded just last year by a group of our Northern California colleagues, was not well advertised. But, more important, people didn't attend because, as my own colleagues told

me, there were too many unrelated topics. Each day, there were four sessions on the four different subjects: Biblical hermeneutics, history, anthropology, poetry. Theoretically, then, everyone would attend all sessions, since, say, the three poetry papers were on three different days. But this is precisely what brought objections from would-be conferees. Why, it was said repeatedly, should someone interested in the Bible sit through a paper on the Supreme Fiction?

Why indeed? What I learned at the Humanities Institute, quite aside from the interesting things I learned about Gregory Bateson or about Barcelona politics in the thirties, is that academics of the eighties are no longer intellectuals. At the IAUPE in Hamburg everyone was happy—not because of the quality of the papers, which were quite beside the point but because of the "extras" like the boat trip on the Elbe and the performance of *Othello*. Besides, the conference costs were tax-deductible and there were many retired professors among us. Again, at the Postmodernism Conference at Cerisy, the conferees were satesfied enough because they were sparring with one another about the meaning of the word *postmodern* and classifying poets as being (or not being) postmodern. But at the Humanities Institute, where there was a chance to hear real papers, papers with some substance, interest was low. After all, where was the boat trip, the Rathskeller, the free theatre performance, the champagne?

While I was foolishly running from one conference to the next, up in Orono, Maine, Carroll "Terry" Terrell was running the conference I wish I *had* attended. Perhaps the grass is always greener. . .but, no, the William Carlos Williams conference was, from all accounts, a total joy. The papers were stimulating; the after-hours talk, as always in Orono, even more stimulating. Robert Creeley and Allen Ginsberg gave very moving papers. The last day, Allen Ginsberg's friend evidently took off all his clothes and came up to the blackboard while Hugh Kenner was giving his talk; he wrote "Love and Peace" on the board and made his exit. Hugh Kenner never stopped reading his paper.

That's the funny part but there is a more serious side. I have been asking myself for years why Terry Terrell always manages to orchestrate such superb conferences. No stale papers, already heard at other conferences, are presented. Everyone who is there is genuinely intrerested in the subject, in this case Williams (in the past, most often Pound). Defectors are in the minority. Yet registrants have to pay their way to the conference and, with rare exceptions,

no one receives an honorarium.

What is Terry's secret? Partly, no doubt, the particularity of the conference subject so that the complaints about smorgasbord, heard at the Humanities Institute, don't apply. But this is only part of the story. More important, I think, is that, unlike the other conferences I have been describing, the Maine symposium was nobody's ego trip. Power, authority, prestige—the ruling principles at most conferences—don't operate here. If Ginsberg and Kenner were speakers, so were any number of unknown graduate students. At Orono, everyone participates in the discussions. There is no elitist governing board, as is the case in the Humanities Institute, and I don't know of anyone who has written on Williams and genuinely wanted to give a paper who was not invited to do so. People come from all over the country (indeed, from all over the world) because they are genuinely interested in William Carlos Williams and because they will come away having learned something new. It is a rare instance of art triumphing over academe. But I'm afraid it makes little dent on the profession which keeps on grinding its wheels, inventing non-conferences for non-intellectuals. After all, without the reassurance of the conference, we might have to stay at home and do something non-academic like read a book!

And yet, and yet. . . I met three interesting British professors at the IAUPE. One of them has already sent me two of his essays on subjects close to my heart. And at Cerisy-la-Salle, I had some valuable conversations on East-West politics with a Hungarian mathematician. And last week an editor called me up who had heard my paper at the Humanities Institute and wants to publish it. Back home after the conference, we forget the frustration and the boredom. "Didn't I meet you at Cerisy?" says a friendly young woman in the UCLA library. And so, who knows, when the next invitation comes along. I may be foolish enough to say yes. In the meantime, I can always attend a conference listed in PMLA as *Independent Scholars in the Eighties: Making Connections*. It's in San Francisco and we all know what a great gourmet city that is.

MARJORIE PERLOFF

A Note on the State of H.D.'s *The Gift*

There would seem to be much in favor of conserving and eventually publishing the finished works and important documentation of writers. The few arguments against can be touching and interested on a personal level, but embody no permanently useful editorial principle.[1] It remains true that a writer's words are both her/his signature and a cultural posession; if changed or suppressed, the picture that can be discerned of any poetic and social practice, and the cultural meanings these make will be altered, perhaps substantially. Sappho did not, we vaguely remember, compose in fragments.

A text is already a set of negotiations with silence, with silencing, with discourses and positions. Every mark, from its pace to the specific and possibly untoward associations moving from sentence to sentence offer meanings which can define author, time, community. Further, while we know for many writers how the production and reception of work may be touchy issues, we often (smugly?) assume that the dissemination of work is not problematic. The book, to cite Jabès, is "rewritten by the reader"; in that insight of the dimensions of a text comes a rare joy. We are far less theoretically tickled to find the book rewritten by the publisher.

New Directions' publication of H.D.'s *The Gift* hardly destroys that work; complete typescripts exist at The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, and may be consulted, even, with further permission, photocopied. But the publication of the New Directions *Gift*, given the level and pertinacity of the cuts sustained, does substantially alter our picture of this important, finished autobiographical meditation. These cuts are further complicated by being veiled: no explanatory note by the editor is set forth, no in-text indications are offered; no principle of exclusion or excision is developed. Yet the work we read is rather less than H.D. wrote.[2]

One kind of question—sometimes less relevant than it appears—is still worth posing: did the author finish the work? A letter of H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson, 22 December 1949, should set any skeptic at rest about the author's level of attention.

> And I have most carefully gone over THE GIFT. There are a few spelling

> mistakes, but I think this better be the final copy, for I would have to get right back to the Blitz-mood to re-write or re-cast the last chapter. After all, considering it, after these years away from London, it is pretty intense; I mean, the last chapter. And Norman, it is not easy to get a thing like that actual reality-scene into words; and the last section, MORNING STAR does sum up the DARK ROOM, the terror by night, the last unutterable threat of some horrible end. It reads rather prose-poem, I am not too keen on that phrase or word, prose-poem, but there is that intense drive in the last chapter (in all, in fact) but it is a story of DEATH AND ITS MYSTERY, as first quote under section DARK ROOM.[3]

This statement provides at least evidence of coherence of the book's trajectory and evidence that its style and pulse are desired and intentionally produced. The citation also begins to reveal what any larger scale reading of *The Gift* needs to acknowledge: the book is about an initiation into a universal community of suffering and transfiguration. It is certainly, then, the complement of *Trilogy*, which is written immediately after.

In her work, H.D. parses a gift: more than creativity, more than heritage, more than talent, it is some visionary capacity of profound social and historical use in a redemptive drama. Although *The Gift* is autobiographical, each image, story, gesture, moment and memory occurs to be connected to another dimension of knowledge. This gift is not meant for individual illumination alone, but is a vehicle for grace within and across communities. Of special importance to placing H.D. within a context of feminist critique, the book is a clear rejection of political hierarchies and dominance, a unity of creeds and races through parallel spiritual gifts. This work may also be used to place H.D. in a tradition of American literature that draws on shamanistic Indian practices. In short, the individual, apparently the subject here, is an instrument of, a conduit for this spiritual politics: "a vision of power and peace." (*Gift*, 135) *The Gift* is, therefore, an intentionally religious and prophetic text. Cuts that remove this dimension of the text have changed its basic premises.

Other commentators who collate the published version with the manuscript housed at Beinecke Library will undoubtedly be able to trace all the patterns of loss. Here I have simply noted a few which seem important to H.D.'s purpose. Many moments of lyrical reflection and meditaion, crucial to *The Gift*, a number in every single chapter are deleted without any editorial indication, including Chapter 2 (entirely cut). Often these cuts contained images and

thematic material that linked chapter to chapter—the motifs of fire and of Christmas, the presence of Moravian wisdom tales, the shifts into another "dimension." Here the reader sustains losses personal, historical and spiritual: the descriptions of being a civilian under the bombs of World War II, the Moravian history—a mixture of mysticism and political critique—were included by H.D. to establish the book's spiritual politics. There are also cuts that inhibit the reader's knowledge of the "moving pictures"—those practices of visualization vital to H.D.'s poetics.

Let me be even more precise, with one example. In Chapter 4, six pages of typescript have been cut from the opening of the chapter. In them, H.D. has accumulated a forceful set of memories and experiences "held in the grip of vital terror" during the Blitz—under fire that is—contributing to both the root metaphor and the fact of the whole text (which was composed during the bombing). The mixture of dread and joyous confrontation of an exposed individual contemplating mass death recurs in (and is cut from) the final chapter as well.

To get a sense of what has occurred, readers might want to compare the first chapter in its two published versions: New Directions' cut text, and the complete chapter presented in *Montemora* 8.[4] Without the poetics of "moving pictures" which joins the individual to community and to the human race through time, the warm scenes of family life and wonder get unframed, reduced somewhat to pleasant vignettes and sketches, bereft of their "fourth dimension." The gift is after all the empathetic capacity to fuse the immanent and the transcendental. Cutting one-half of that fusion—the spiritual awe—does exactly compromise the gift about which H.D. is writing. All in all, one statement, itself cut from the New Directions version, makes a pungent commentary on what is lost.

> The dream, the memory, the unexpected related memories must be allowed to sway backward and forward, as if the sheet or screen upon which they are projected, blows and is rippled in the wind of whatever emotion or idea is entering a door, left open. The wind blows through the door, from outside, through long, long corridors of personal memory, of biological and of race-memory. Shut the door and you have a neat flat picture.[5]

The act of making these cuts shuts the door.

Cutting paragraphs—even no matter what they say!—means the rhythm of

discovery, the pause and pulse, the pace as H.D. desired it happen is lost to the reader. In addition to these types of excision throughout every chapter, and in addition to the loss of chapter 2 (a muted annunciation of H.D.'s birth and her prenatal inheritance of second sight) some lesser editorial changes have occurred that bit by bit accrete to change the texture of the work. All but one of H.D.'s chapter epigrams are removed; the one remaining, alluded to by H.D. in her letter to Pearson, is misplaced to head the whole text, not the first chapter. H.D.'s section markers within chapters, indicating units of thought, have been alternatively suppressed and presented. Much of H.D.'s capitalization, creating both a child's voice and an adult's symbolic reflection, has been normalized.

The one hint that this cutting has occurred comes in a few sentences by Perdita Schaffner in one of the several remarkable memoirs of H.D.—essays pensive, alert, subtle and humane—which she has recently written.[6] Despite my deference to Mrs. Schaffner's insights and knowledge, I think I must argue that the cutting of H.D.'s *The Gift* does negatively affect the spirit of this work. While acknowledging the drastic nature of the cuts, Perdita Schaffner takes a balanced position that suggests the full text is for scholars while the New Directions text is for the general public.[7]

In order to be true to the full and intended meaning of this text, New Directions might well rethink its strategy of partial presentation and publish a second and complete edition of *The Gift*.

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1. Such arguments were made by Ted Hughes presenting his *fiat*: the destruction of a journal of Sylvia Plath and the suppression of others, and as well the loss of half a novel called *Double Exposure*.

2. One might fruitfully compare the careful editing accorded Virginia Woolf, e.g. by Jeanne Schulkind in *Moments of Being* in which several excisions are noted. The context of the Woolf makes the reader assume personal matters are being excised. The context of *The Gift* differs; it is almost as if the person(s) achieving these cuts made them because the material was considered boring. Even assuming this is completely correct, still it is an unfairness to H.D. to protect her from our judgment of her own *longeurs*, since the subject, recurrence, nature and meaning of the tedium provided by any author is necessary for a complete understanding of her or his work.

3. Grateful acknowledgement to cite this letter is made to the Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. All in-text citations of *The Gift* come as well from that collection. All H.D. material copyright 1984 by the Estate of Hilda Doolittle; printed by permission of Perdita Schaffner.

4. 'The Dark Room,'' presented by Susan Stanford Friedman and myself, *Montemora* 8 (1981), 57-76, including H.D.'s notes to this chapter. All H.D.'s notes are unpublished by New Directions.

5. H.D. ''The Dream,'' [Chapter 3] in *Contemporary Literature* 10, 4 (Autumn 1969), 606. This is the other source of a complete chapter of *The Gift*.

6. Perdita Schaffner's work offers irreplaceable insights. ''Merano, 1962,'' *Paideuma* 4, No. 2/3 (Fall/Winter 1975); ''The Egyptian Cat,'' in H.D., *Hedylus* (Redding Ridge, CT.: Black Swan Books, 1980); ''Pandora's Box,'' in H.D., *HERmione* (New York: New Directions, 1981); ''A Profound Animal,'' in H.D., *Bid Me to Live* (Redding Ridge, CT.: Black Swan Books, 1983); ''Unless a Bomb Falls . . . ,'' in H.D., *The Gift* (New Directions, 1982). Her comments occur in the last mentioned, p. XIV.

7. In a personal letter to the author, September 8, 1983.

RACHEL BLAU DuPLESSIS

Allegories of the Gaze

The writing of Victor Segalen (1878-1919) is known to American readers primarily through Nathaniel Tarn's translation (Unicorn Press, 1969) of selected *Stelae* and J.A. Underwood's virtually unobtainable English version of *René Leys* (O'Hara, 1974). Segalen traveled widely in Oceania and China between 1902 and 1918, living for extended periods in Peking. His work (poetry, essays, novels, scholarship) reveals a radically ethnographic (Segalen would say ''exoticist'') subjectivity: consciousness endlessly caught in a search for difference. His writing does not offer up Loti's composed scenes of the exotic, nor does it aim for an eloquent Claudelian ''connaissance de l'est.'' Only his first book (*Les Immémoriaux*, an ethnographic novel about the destruction of traditional culture in Tahiti) seeks to render the authentic life of another society. Rather, Segalen is preoccupied with *encountering* difference in an interplay that displaces and allegorizes the self. His *Stelae* are personal expressions cast in the distant voice of imperial Chinese inscriptions. *René Leys*, perhaps Segalen's masterpiece, is a parody of a mystery novel centered on Peking's Forbidden City. In fact it is a profound meditation on the (impossible) desire to penetrate another's secrets—secrets we come to see as *constituted* by this very desire.

Segalen's travel accounts (*Briques et tuiles* and *Equipée*, now republished in France and begging for English translation) give us a "China" of fissures, alternations, diversities. The traveller moves among China's signs (sites and encounters) without according the other a permanent outline or bringing to expression its latent "meanings," without describing or evoking. Concrete experiences of difference are rendered as parables, vignettes, prose-poems, with each encounter an occasion for allegoresis—the release of multiple meanings by the interpreting, desiring voyager (reader). Segalen the scholar "knew" China rather well, but he declined to deliver an authoritative *savoir*. He wanted something more complex than a representation. In his unfinished *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthetique du divers* (Fata Morgana, 1978) he urges the true exoticist to "dire, non pas tout crûment sa vision, mais par un *transfert* instantané, constant, l'écho de sa présence." Like a great many modern writers Segalen finds nourishment in exotic sources. But what distinguishes his work is its attention to the poesis in which self and other are located: the subjective transfers and alternations, the constant struggle of imagination and reality, the unsettling processes of domination, desire, distantiation, fascination, projection.

Three short translations can give only a hint of Segalen's cross-cultural poetics. They are drawn from *Peintures*, a sequence of prose-poems republished last year by Gallimard. The book is a guided tour among imagined paintings: Chinese portraits, landscapes, historical and dynastic scenes. This *imaginaire* is "painted" on silk, wool, paper, porcelain, air and water. A long central poem unrolls like a great scroll, evoking a brilliant cortege of gifts and trophies, winding across multiple landscapes, bringing together the varied regions and things of China, to be accepted or rejected, tasted ("without mixing") by the Emperor. Segalen's China is indeterminately one and many, always coming together, dispersing. Frequently a face or gaze gathers, to confront us. . . .

I

The Painting that comes next isn't one that hangs high up, but is to be opened with a touch of thumb and index, like the half-moon fan carried in Autumn and Spring . . . and actually it's called:

FLYING FAN

Don't give it any rest: don't try to inspect it laid out flat, or count the ivory inlays; but give it movement, always; stroke the air and secretly, out of the corner of an eye, look into each gentle breath it sends, bit by bit guess at the furtive scenes: the background, black and shining. Suddenly a battlement

opens: wings beat: big eyes roll: a skull caves in: out comes a pagoda, with a single spurt spreading to the open sky . . .

Did you see it? Fan, keep fanning.

A figure composes itself: a naked monk, ecstatic. Just two eyes are left of his entire body, but they're very much alive. (The rest is dry or rotted.) He lets us know that what's seen, alone, is good. Fan, keep fanning . . .

Now a wide open face stares at you; so magically and deeply that it will fix itself to your features and may become *your face* if you don't, still fanning, change it to something else less questioning: the curved stroke of a Painter's horizon; the vast undulation of the sea; slow wing-beat of the great rose goose in the sky; the gathered, stripped, spare caress of every desire . . . Fan, keep fanning . . .

But the painted face evokes itself again, with insolence, clearer at every turn. It gazes from too close. What can it mean? Are you provoking it? Met anywhere else: what an intolerable experience! Like the appearance of an overly-insistent friend, like a too-faithful regret, like a mute wanting to ask a question.

But we don't inhabit the true world. We can reject what offends or troubles us, effaced more easily than a regret, with a quick flick of the hand.

So close up your fingers: at once, the face is gone. . . (*Peintures*, 34-36)

II

OF SILENCE

With violent battles, glare, tumultuous brush strokes, spattered ink, some have tried to simulate great noise. This one shows only silence. —It's a woman, eyes set and lusterless, eyes mute: a delicate, trembling face, immobile. —No words on this lip . . . and even, even her breath doesn't appear like some distant melody, or a mist whistling in the air. —Far and wide, soldiers with naked blades search all corners of the palace. —Immobile, the woman doesn't stir, or breathe; and by the steadyness of her breast you can see that even her heart doesn't beat. —She's seated, *half-clothed*, beside her great imperial cloak, dropped next to her and forming its own heap of air and silence . . . Nothing moves, nothing cries, nothing wails: the soldiers keep looking; and moving farther off their footsteps are smothered. Not a sound. Is nothing really heard here?

Ah! But this woman has magical power. Picking up the newborn child of the Heavens in her arms, the one they're looking to kill, she warned it thus: "If you're the true race of Tchao! If it's to live on: don't cry!" —and covered it with her negligent cloak . . .

And as long as they're here, as long as you look—believe me, you'll hear nothing. (*Peintures* 225-226)

III

What follows is another

REFLECTION IN THE EYES

of a girl, plainly;—this hair style, this carriage! Even these eyes looking straight at you and me . . . or perhaps over our shoulders into the space behind? (Don't turn around.)

This face reveals no emotion. The delicate brow is smooth; the eyebrows sedately arched; the lids don't blink; the wrinkles of the nose don't wrinkle; nor are the lips pursed or open . . . Look again: this chaste curve of the shoulders, and the hands clasped around the stomach from decency and a good education, as if for a bow she's about to make, or to hide an encumbering pregnancy. All in all, a great purity.

Still, you'd like to know what vision or turn of mind gives her whole young body this discreet demeanor . . .

Very well! Look her straight in the eyes, as she seems to be doing to us. If the Painter is equal to the masters (to the one who enclosed in the pupil of a cowherd the perfect image of a cow, with spots, hide and halter) if the Painter has been skilled and clever, the REFLECTION IN THE EYES should contain everything they see or dream. So gaze into them, from very close . . .

Oh—this minute mirage, marvelous and magically enclosed in the shining little shield! According to the commentary, we discern "two girls, naked from breast to foot, one on the knees of the other who cradles and caresses her." (We can even distinguish the tips of the fingers!) What integrity in the Painter's craft! So this is the scene the pure face reflects, decently contemplates.

But the eyes are still riveted to our own. So what's the source of the reflection?

Our *own* eyes? The space behind us? (*Peintures*, 41-43)

Addenda:

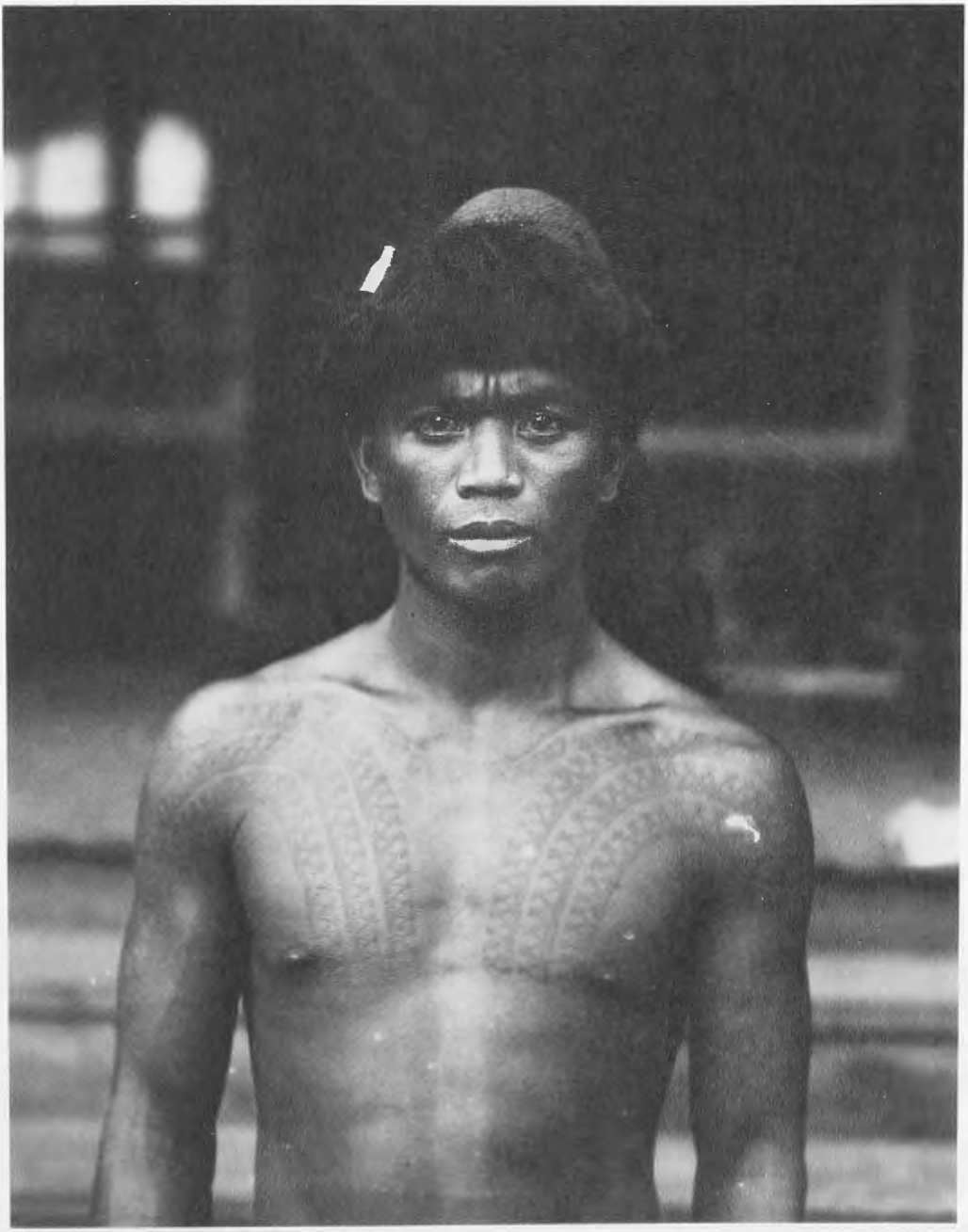
1) Segalen's China never stays other for long. Nor does it become familiar. Looking, our gaze is *implicated* in the displacements and allegories of an ethnographic desire.

"Reflection in the Eyes" ends with a very precise uncertainty. Do we see in the masklike face something of our own psyche projected, its "deep" desires, an unconscious revealed? Or do we discern a reality occulted in the simple gesture of turning toward this particular face, the act of *positioning* a subject? Understood psychologically, the painting is a personal discovery of repressed feelings about sexuality. But the other possibility we're left with suggests something slightly, but importantly, different. Rather than revealing an unconscious truth the painting shows what reality must be located "behind" the self in the trope of consciousness toward this specific other. By imagining here a mysterious woman (a feminizing of the other found everywhere in Western writing, including Segalen's) the exoticist turns away from a possibility of Lesbian eroticism. Discovered as a reflection in the other's eyes, this reality confuses a dominant heterosexual category: woman positioned as opposite sex, object of desire.

2) Last summer, while doing archival research on the history of ethnographic photographs, I found in a file a face that stuck like "an overly-insistent friend, like a too-faithful regret, like a mute wanting to ask a question." No amount of flipping through other files—countless images of Indians, Africans, Melanesians, Eskimos—could fan this face away. Nor could I penetrate its fixed, eloquent silence. What was glimpsed in the gaze? I pass the question on to readers of *Sulfur*.

The archive's caption records an "Igorot Man" (brought from the Philippine Highlands to be exhibited at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis). If we look intimately into this face, what disturbances appear behind (don't turn around)?

JAMES CLIFFORD



Igorot Man, Philippines

The Maximus Poems
CHARLES OLSON
ed. George Butterick
University of California Press, 1983.

Mallarmé is the author of a statement to which there have been varying reactions, including praise and blame, and which I shall repeat here as one of the more audacious propositions of the nineteenth century: "all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book." The book that Mallarmé projects is not so much a book of words as a book of relationships. In it one may read "with the eyes of the divinity" of a world utterly divorced from the present. The book, "as a Spiritual Instrument," may contain all earthly existence because it is freed of any obligation to refer to it at all. Instead, it may allude, invoke and suggest where other forms of literature (the newspaper is Mallarmé's example) are condemned to represent. Mallarmé is the supreme modernist text: written by no author, subservient to no audience, contingent upon no history. It is a monument to its own effacement.

I think of Mallarmé's (absent) *Livre* as I look at Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, now gathered together into a single volume, possessed of a size and weight of other books (*The Divine Comedy*, The Bible, The OED) that could be said to contain at least a modicum of "earthly existence." At one level, *The Maximus Poems* proposes a similar comprehensiveness, posing no less than the Pleistocene as its inaugural historical border and the planet as its province. Its sheer physical bulk (8½x11x2) replicates its scope, if not its author's size. Yet much of what occurs in this big book does so by fragmentary means. Poems are made out of tesserated bits of chronicle, legend and personal history. Lines break unevenly, parentheses remain open, ideas switch gears mid-sentence. The poem is as time-bound, material and contingent as Mallarmé's is eternal. "Earthly existence" for Olson means physical existence, contained in the poem only by being a force within the world, engaging its various energies as projected through a single intelligence.

I bring together these radically different propositions of the book in order to indicate the enormous shift between the monumental, modernist text and the fragmentary, postmodern text—a shift that *The Maximus Poems* in its com-

plete version makes all the more recognizable. For Olson, the idea of a book-length poem is directly connected to a curriculum and practice of history for which the reader must relinquish a passive interpretive role and become an archaeologist among undecoded glyphs. The page is no longer the site of silent meditation; instead, it is a map of emotional and physiological intensities. It bristles with admonitions, citations and queries that, on the one hand, embody the poet's own acts of mind and voice and, on the other urge participation in the terms of his concern. Pound had advanced the idea of a long, historically critical poem in *The Cantos* but reified much of his critique by relying on the authority of timeless cultural models. Olson endorses the methodology of *The Cantos*, to be sure, but insists on the active intervention of the subject in transforming the historical record. Pound's "luminous moments" lift history from the quotidean and provide it with a vertical dimension; Olson's archival quotation and sources generate and project history forward by their metonymic relation to each other and by their tenuous relation to any overall scheme.

* * *

America's first story, as Olson will tell us often in the poem, was "fish," not religious freedom, fear of taxation or the desire for democratic institutions. And if cod was the mythos, displacement was its ethos as mercantile interests gradually removed the worker from the fruits of his labor. Olson figures this displacement in the removal of the "Company House" built by the original Dorchester Company from Stage Head to Salem to serve as the first governor's house: "It sat/where my own house has been (where I am/founded . . . ." From this point on, American life was to be a series of removals of man from what is most familiar: his place, his voice, his means of production, his language. The latter is, of course, the source for much of Olson's concerns, both in and out of the Maximus series. Words have been used cheaply by literary types who sentimentalize place (Vincent Ferrini in "Letter 5" is the most famous example) and more profoundly by the "musickracket of all ownership" that has permeated all aspects of public life. Olson's first volume is an elegy for lost sensation, for our ability to touch the world. He celebrates the dripping of a leaky faucet or the "beloved" pungency of the nasturtium since they are reminders of our lost tactile relation to nature.

Olson offers to restore some of the balance by pointing to hardy first-comers to the nation, the early Dorchester fishermen who weathered the difficult New England winters to set up a settlement on Cape Ann, America's first "polis."

But Olson equally respects the historians whose variable, shifting record is the source for his poem: John J. Babson, Frances Rose-Troup, John Smith, Captain Christopher Levett and others. But the central historian for the series is Herodotus whose defintion of history, "to find out for oneself," stands as the principle underlying all of Olson's endeavor. We see the poet finding out for himself throughout the poem, digging around in the archives, cryptically acknowledging his sources and carrying on an earnest debate with himself and his sources: "It goes to show you." "I don't mean, just like that, to put down/ the Widow Babson . . ." "North? Mud." The poem continually oscillates between the historical record, often at its barest and most fragmentary, and the personal. As Olson says in "The Librarian" (not part of the series but perhaps the best introduction to it) "I am caught/ / in Gloucester," a product of its materials and history and yet an agent in its transformation. This is as much Olson's heritage as it was that of the Dorchester Company who first "touched" and forever altered the New England coast. And when Olson finds discrepencies in the historical record, he "corrects" himself within the poem (as in "Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 15"), not only to set the record straight but to foreground his own participation in the act of history writing.

What Olson learned in Book I is not only that Gloucester is as the nation is but that the nation is rapidly becoming as the rest of the planet will be. Hence, he opens his concerns in later books to the "West" in its broadest sense. The best indicator of this global shift can be graphically seen by comparing the covers to the first two volumes. Volume I presents a geodetic survey map of Gloucester harbor; Volume II (formerly called IV, V, VI) goes back 125 million years to the combined continents of Africa, North America and Asia, known as Gondwanaland, before "Earth started to come apart." Where Book I engaged modern history and a relatively limited locale, Book II expands Olson's horizons, both historically and spatially. His concerns turn increasingly toward mythological materials drawn from Greek, Norse, Sumerian, Egyptian and other ancient sources. At the same time that he goes back in time, he goes further inward to psychological dimension, informed by his expanding interest in Jung. His concern seems to be less the nature of "polis" as concrete individuals and more the nature of "earth" as archetype. Much of the lore of the second volume, then, is derived from texts in which the nature of consciousness is given mythopoeic form. Hesiod's *Theogony* is reworked in terms of a Dogtown legend concerning the death of Merry, "the handsome sailor" by his bull; a Hittite legend, "The Song of Ullikummi" provides Olson with a felicitous image of the earth's growth principle in the form of the "diorite stone"; from Jung's writings on alchemy, Olson discovers the "Black Chrysanthemum" that

serves in later poems to embody the irreducible nature of things; from Henri Corbin's "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism," Olson derives his version of the cosmic man, the *homo maximus*, who creates paradise in himself. All of these mythological sources represent the poet's attempt to forge his own version of the *Civitas Dei* beyond Gloucester in the history of man's fictions and representations.

This move outward from Gloucester to the prehistoric past or inward to the prerational mind is no doubt an inevitable result of Olson's method, but I find this shift from the local, historical investigations of Book I to the timeless, mythological present of Jung to be one of the unfortunate changes in the later poems. What propels the early Maximus series is Olson's solid critique of mercantile society as viewed through specific individuals and events. The later poems continue to focus on specifics, but their historicity is sub-sumed by their participation in cyclic or repeatable patterns. On the other hand, Olson's formal presentation becomes more varied as he attempts to register the size and range of his expanding territory. Many of the poems resemble marginal notes or epigrams on sources now lost. At one point, we come upon the following, set in the middle of an otherwise blank page: "128 a mole/to get at Tyre." Butterick's *Guide to The Maximus Poems* explains that "128" refers to the highway that crosses the Annisquam River by a bridge (a mole?) and that like Gloucester, the Phoenicean city of Tyre was similarly linked to the mainland by means of a causeway, built by Alexander in order to capture ("get at") the town. Thus contemporary Gloucester and Alexandrian Tyre are collapsed in the briefest of all bridges, a poetic couplet set in the midst of a vast, white emptiness.

The ephemerality and fragmentary nature of the poems are even more in evidence in Book III where Olson re-emerges as citizen of Gloucester, the Maximus persona having been dropped (or at least diminished) along the way:

> Said Mrs. Tarantino,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> You have a long nose, meaning
> You stick it into every other person's
> business, do you not? And I couldn't
> say anything
> but that I
> do.
>
> p. 378

Olson no longer rallies his citizens to dig in and combat the forces of encroaching pejorocracy; he no longer charts the outer domains of the planet or the inner domains of mythic consciousness. He attempts "to write a Republic / in gloom on Watch-House Point," realizing the grim shape the nation has assumed. As for Man. Olson's dismissal is quick: "ugh, a species / acquiring / distaste / for itself." And although he continues his researches into the ancient past, his focus is more on the nature of existence—his existence, as a solitary individual:

> Nasturtium
> is still my flower but I am a poet
> who now more thinks than writes, my
> nose-gay.

One might feel that the brokenness of the final volume represents a failure of vision, a loss of the poem's purpose—but what had the poem proposed in the first place if not to incur the ramifications of its own materials? Before Olson had ever started *The Maximus Poems*, he realized that the "stance toward reality outside a poem" depended upon hewing close to the materials at hand: "But if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his listening through himself will give him secrets objects share." Thus the conclusion to his great series trails off with a series of fragments—"moles" to attach a city to the nation or a single man's perception to the potential in any of us yet to see Paradise.

* * *

Such incompletion would seem to violate the very idea of a "definitive, textual edition" of the sort that George Butterick has amassed, and no doubt the very fragmentary quality of Olson's working habits made the task of editing a dubious pleasure. Butterick attests to the difficulties of piecing together the third volume, published with Charles Boer in 1975 by Viking/Grossman out of the detritus of Olson's papers following the poet's death. Poem's written on paper bags or envelopes, poems whose lines swirl around the page or dribble off the end onto some other page, poems published in magazines with errors of spelling and lineation, poems erroneously labelled, poems retrieved from letters and, most difficult of all, poems written in Olson's illegible scribble—this was the midden out of which volume three was reconstructed. The University of California edition reflects a complete re-editing of this as well as of the first two volumes, based on the poet's manuscripts and on corrected copies of

previously published versions. In the process, George Butterick has advanced the technology of textual editing by many years, establishing new criteria around which a text may be considered as such at the same time that he observes the rigorous principles established by the Modern Language Association's Center for Scholarly Editions.

Were it simply a matter of collecting Olson's poems published over a lifetime into a collected poems, Butterick's job would have been much simpler. *The Maximus Poems*, however, was a single poem, unpublished in its entirity at the time of the poet's death. There was no "ur-plan" for its final ordering, no guide as to what constitutes a "maximus" poem (unless labelled as such) and no plan for its chronology. In many cases the editor's only clue as to the poem's place in the sequence was its inclusion in a live reading preserved on phonotape. Personal conversations with Olson helped resuscitate proper printings, as in the case of "2nd Letter on Georges," originally conceived as two poems but printed, through an error, as a single poem in Volume I. And many of the poems in the later volumes are so fragmentary that only the most assiduous attention to context would identify them as parts of the series. As it is, twenty-nine new poems, many of them quite beautiful, have been added, one deleted and the entire corpus re-ordered.

The history as well as methodology of Butterick's textual editing may be read briefly in his afterword and more comprehensively in a separate volume on the entire project (including textual notes), *Editing the Maximus Poems* (University of Connecticut at Storrs Library). Outside of a list of textual variant for the Book III, printed at the end of the University of California volume, *The Maximus Poems* remains relatively free of cumbersome textual apparatus and thus asserts its position as Olson's and not the editor's volume. It is this discretion, however, that makes Butterick's editing all the more vital. I can think of few poets in history (Blake and Coleridge come to mind as exceptions) who have been served as well by an editor as Olson. Not only has George Butterick provided us with a definitive test, he has annotated the poems in his authoritative *Guide to the Maximus Poems*, indexed and organized Olson's estate at the University of Connecticut Library according to the most rigorous archival standards, published the most important portion of that archive through his journal, *Olson*, edited Olson's correspondence with Creeley and is now at work on editions of Olson's non-Maximus poems and his prose. Would that the rest of the modern tradition had had such care and attention.

The physical design of the book is quite handsome, making good use of

previous volumes to establish continuity. The covers of the earlier books have been used as section dividers, and in the case of Volume I, with its map of Gloucester harbor, the poem's title has been reduced in size so that more of the map may be seen. Happily, pagination has been added to Volume IV, V, VI for ease of reference. Pagination throughout occurs at the bottom of each page in an unobtrusive grey type with reference both to the earlier volume as well as to the consecutive series of the new volume. This strategy makes using Butterick's *Guide* all the easier since that volume is coded to the earlier books. The new edition has been photo-reproduced from earlier editions with appropriate corrections and emendations. Thus the typeface is now standardized throughout, and the incredibly small, cramped type of Volume I may now be given its proper relation to the Page. The only problem with this is that since the type of Volume I must be enlarged, it comes out slightly fuzzier or greyer than that of the other volumes.

For a poet who felt that *Space* was the central fact about America and who covered a substantial amount of space himself, it is no surprise that his life-work would be a big book. By a strange twist, however, that very weight and size itself seems to contradict one of the poem's important themes: that knowledge must be returned to its producer, that information must move off the page and into the world of its users. The University of California Press has made a great contribution to current literary history by giving us a definitive text of *The Maximus Poems*,* conceived around Olson's wishes as to scale and size, and one now anxiously awaits a paperback edition that will be slightly more portable, able to leave the library carrel and move among those readers who, over the years, have made up Olson's largest following.

* It should be pointed out that the publication of *The Maximus Poems* is part of an ongoing series of definitive editions of modern and postmodern work that the University of California Press is publishing. Along with Robert Creeley's *Collected Poems*, Louis Zukofsky's *A* and *Prepositions*, Cesar Vallejo's *Complete Posthumous Poems*, Paul Blackburn's *Proensa*, this series stands as one of the more significant publishing ventures of the past half-century, and certainly one of the most daring gestures on the part of a university press.

MICHAEL DAVIDSON

The Space of Half an Hour
KEITH WALDROP
Burning Deck Press, 1983
The Ruins of Providence
KEITH WALDROP
Copper Beach Press, 1983

Keith Waldrop has, in thses two volumes, a few moments. I'll quote one particularly memorable one from *The Ruins of Providence*.

> When once the earth is gone,
> God will separate
> light from heat,
>
> reserving
> the heat for those in hell
>
> and for his saints the
> cold light of
> love eternal, Within otherwise
>
> 'normal' scales, we
> are allowed shades.

The title of the other book, *The Space of Half an Hour*, embodies an intriguing contradiction: that time and space both are and are not comprehensible, containable, real. The first poem in the book, "poem from memory," portrays a man lost in time and space, unable to grasp or verify his position. It is potentially volatile material. But, it refuses to commit itself, to come forth. The poem begins,

> If one
> smokes, there
> is the burnt
> match, the
> butt,
> the ashes. There are
> crusts, crumbs, spit

out pits. There
is body.

This may contain some poetic potential. If it does, the poem never realizes that potential, but merely moves along apace, accreting such truisms, one after another. And, in the end, so what? Yes, if one smokes, there *is* the burnt match, the butt, the ashes. And then we, the readers want to ask, "well, poet, so what? Can you make something of that?" But the poet does not make anything of it, as he did in the brief section I quoted at the outset. Instead, rather than poetry, Mr. Waldrop weaves a loose fabric of mini-discourse, rambling, sophomoric, and unrealized. He gives language to us in telegraphic form, clipped, quick phrases from a sender who has not time to make sense out of his own message. Hence, the poems are composed of undigested truisms, such as "Associations/are not free," or "Geographical, we/extend into the cosmic," or "Rhythm is stifled by time," or "My dreams are experimental."

Yet worse, the opening lines of this poem ("If one/smokes, there") disturb me by their impersonality, by their *refusal* to be particular, committed, to use real things from real life, to create, or recreate, anything palpable. "One" smokes. "There is." "There are." and most awful, "There is body." Is this some vision of life as utterly disembodied, robotic, disconnected? If it is, let us have the poet's human reaction in the midst of it, or it is useless mockery. That human reaction is the only thing which can ground this kind of poetry, and it is desperately lacking.

"Action a kind of/image," Mr. Waldrop says, opening the second long poem, "the chances of magic." Yet, if he finds action as a form of image, I find it strange that the book contains an enormous preponderance of passive verbs, a paltry few active ones. Image (imagination) creates art. Without it we come adrift into the self-referential world of only thought. Turning to the opening lines of the third, and final, long poem in the book, "elegy," I disagree wholeheartedly with Mr. Waldrop's solipcistic lines:

This body, mine, is only
an image of my brain . . .

This not only makes an excessively reductionist philosophical statement, it is wrong. Moreover, and more problematical, it leads us nowhere poetically. If our bodies, and hence all life, is but an image of our minds, then all we have to write about, think about, deal with, are our own minds. Mr. Waldrop's im-

pulse here goes not only contrary to what I believe, but it goes in the opposite direction of what poetry believes: that the world is palpable, real, and present.

Hence, when Mr. Waldrop wants to talk about terror, as he does in the ninth section of the second poem, "the chances of magic," he contemplates "someone" he thinks about who has died. Again, though, impersonally, for what is important is not that person, nor death, but Mr. Waldrop's "mind" of which it is all an image: "No doubt/someone I am thinking of is/dead . . ." As he contemplates this fact, this "no doubt" nameless, faceless death, he ends this section thus: "This is/a moment for terror." Such poetry must tell us that, for it cannot engage terror. The poet steps back from the poem, disengages from the life, and gives us, not the sense of terror, not the human beauty or horror of terror, but a statement, a proposition. Each line, each poem, is about the same thing, the poet's thought.

The Ruins of Providence is a better book than *The Space of Half an Hour*, because at times it escapes the intellectualized, philosophical obsession to make grand, enduring truths, to engrave repeatable lines (self-evident truths, or, to save them from that, the mocking of self-evident truths) into our culture. When the poems descend from those heights, they can be affecting, interesting, real. "A Ceremony In Woods Hole," an elegy, ends with the participants carrying a drowned body "past the Fishmonger to scatter it/on closer waters." These lines give us life-and-death, these lines *are* life and death. *The Ruins of Providence* leans back and forth, one way then the other in style, towards the more prevelant quick-shot one-liner, often too clever, and back towards lines more naturally developed, formed by the poet's breath and thought together, by the meaning and development of the poem, rather than by a technician reading a code book.

The last poem of this book "The Master of the Providence Crucifixion," attempts the most ambitious project of the two volumes. It is a prose piece, presumably about the Master whose painting graces this book's cover, the Master of the Providence Crucifixion who lived in Utrecht in the mid-fifteenth century. But, by conversion, the character of the poem becomes a modern person, alter-ego to the poet, wandering the streets of Providence, Rhode Island, contemplating occasionally the city, but most often his own meditations on being and nothingness. This intriguing project, despite some interesting moments, fails in the vein of the two books' major fault: abstraction, intellectualization, vague fabrication of lives and things which ought to be near, real, present. Instead, they fade, as, he says, do dream images, "so fast."

The Master, the other modern "he," and the poet (once in the piece the figure says "*my* head") knows "without deliberation, how to get across Providence. It is only thought he is lost in." Of course, Providence is both earthly and divine, and it is then "only thought" which complicates either crossing. The same holds for the prose poem: thought, thought thinking about thought, thought turning on thought, thought examining thought, prevents crossing the poem.

"He would like to keep things at a distance," Mr. Waldrop writes of his man in Providence, "within his senses, so as to keep them present." I think that's a mistaken notion of the motive for keeping things at a distance, I think it's too complex and "poetic" and justified a reason. Nonetheless, in so doing, in keeping things at a distance, the poem keeps us at a distance, offers morsels which tempt us to go on, but gives us, finally, no bridge on which to cross over.

MARTIN NAKELL

Parts and Other Parts
CHARLES STEIN
Station Hill Press, 1982.

There are very few poets in America worth trusting word for word, poets in whose work nothing is done for effect. Charles Stein is one of the few. The austerities in his poems are never tempered for the sake of the reader, just as his humor is never stressed, but is there to be experienced as part of the work's innate subtlety. This makes it possible, in the act of reading, to find firm footing in really undiscovered territory. If a native Buddhist poetry is every recognized as originating in America, Stein's work will be rudder, mast, galley, captain and cook all in one. (Gary Snyder's work, by contrast, does not originate here but in the East: its referentiality displays its derivations readily enough, but it is not "original" in the sense I am suggesting for Charles Stein.) This is due to his *practice* which, as a poet, extends further than the act of writing poems. Stein is one in whom the phrase "presence of mind" has an obvious relevance.

Reading his work, one feels literally in the presence of *mind*, without the annoyance of an interceding personality. Not that the poems are without *character*—for this is an inevitable consequence of materiality, per se—but Stein is a poet who has been for some time now willing to radically submerge the identity proposed by his name with the object that name specifies (auf deutsch: *stone*).

Parts and Other Parts: the title verifies the principle. Similitude is not echo. The beautiful, haunting photographs by the author throughout the book deepen and fuck with the poems—there is no other term—yet they never reflect or echo the poem's "content." The recognition here is that such content cannot be reflected or described; there can only be something further placed in relation *to* it.

Mind is a kind of third sex, as there are *parts* and other *parts*. And there is parting—a cleaving, a separating out, a distinction from which issues a confluence of parts, as "the twisting fish in the pool exchange locations." (p. 46) Not change—notice—but *ex*change: "a lawless profusion at the uncentered center of order" (p. 26) creates a turbulance. What issues, as in any act of the mind, is a further resolve (as colors blended are said to be resolved):

> A later iconography indicates all *as* change.
>
> Fiery darts leap up from the raging bull.
> Little persons are trampled or devoured.
> Disgusting mutilations, excrement, tendons,
> sinews stretch and creak.
> The eternal images set but to abuse or disabuse.
>
> We want to be like stone.
>
> To believe the apparencies
> which are *not*
> change.
>
> p. 22

The first section of the book is "A Book of Confusions," consisting of poems which are acts of reportage about a heap of debris, a pile of diverse objects which in acts of meditation become fulminating reservoirs of potential. As in medieval art the literal and the figurative meanings constitute a single respiration. The poems are the audible breathing, the thin flicker of air escaping out of the intent body.

The second section, called "Parts," is just that: pieces attached to other pieces.

Powerful acts of prosody animate a never depleted sense of the *impending:*

> He stands on the brink.
> He rotates a crank.
>
> p. 44

This section is closest of the three to Stein's earlier work in *Witch Hazel*. And here I should caution the reader that *Parts and Other Parts* is not a "new" book: the poems date from 1973-75, so they fit chronologically between the previously published books *Witch Hazel* and *Horse Sacrifice*. It is unfortunate that Stein's books have been published so long after their composition. But this makes their power all the more apparent, as not a line or phrase dates the poems in any way. They rise up on singular stalks of their own integral nature.

> I apologize to the tall forest.
> Green tall trees lean down upbraiding me
> because I am a stone. I am sorry
> that I am a stone
> I am trying
> the best I can
> to melt down utterly.
>
> p. 82

The apology is a moment of natural empathy—the hard and squat reaching out to the tall and willowy—filled with humor and grace. Among poets all those lean trees can only look down on the stone with envy for its compactness and absolute identity with its own utility. The passage above is from the final section of *Parts and Other Parts*, the long poem "Point Sphinx." The poem rises out of the most compact conditions imaginable—the repetition of the same phrase with variations so slight they might serve as a harrowing test in a language class—and rises up to experiment on itself in an epiphany of new images and modes, a glossolallia of tones.

"Point Sphinx" leaps off properly into the unparalleled sequence of long poems in *Horse Sacrifice*. *Parts and Other Parts* fills in a vital link, making visible at last with Stein's previously published books a broad section of his springboard. There are still the past six or seven years' work undocumented in books, and one would hope that Stein's vital work will be brought up to the present somehow and kept pace with after that, for in the long run he will be seen as inevitable an element of American poetry as oxygen.

JED RASULA

Defenestration of Prague
SUSAN HOWE
Kulchur, 1983.

The historical "defenestration of Prague" refers to the somewhat parodic catalyst of the Thirty Years' Wars between the Protestants and the Catholics in Germany during the 1600's; specifically, throwing some Bohemian officials out of the windows of the Prague palace—who are said to have landed in a heap of dung. Susan Howe's *Defenestration of Prague* pays no visible attention to this event; if one were to locate her book in a city, for example, it would have to be Dublin, not Prague. The title of her book does not function as a *specific* index of the book, but rather as an oblique sign of the book's concerns; thus, it takes us to the past, to the exotic, to the absurd, and to the struggle between the Protestants and the Catholics which haunts Ireland to this day.

The book is divided into two sections, "Defenestration of Prague" and "The Liberties," and each section is further sub-divided into groups of poems that cohere formally and thematically. Formally, the book is quite diverse: sometimes the poems are scattered across the page, sometimes arranged in neat one and two line stanzas, elsewhere blocked into square monuments. But then the opening part of "The Liberties" is a straightforward prose account of the relationship between Jonathan Swift and Hester Johnson (Stella), and the fifth section, "God's Spies," is a play. The book lacks the unity and development—the *containment*—of her previous book, *Pythagorean Silence*; the heterogeneity of *Defenestration of Prague* undermines, I think, the very concept of unity. It gives the impression rather of something lurking in the background, fragmented in the way that dreams are, full of signs of what cannot be told. However, Howe seems to want the book to be read as a whole, not as a collection of individual poems, and there *are* thematic preoccupations that reverberate in increasingly complex patterns. Thus, while the book is uneven in places, overall it is a compelling struggle with memory, truth, the feminine, Ireland.

The opening lines say much about both the formal preoccupations and the thematic ones:

> oblivious window of Quiet
> closing

egeiptes aegistes aegiptes egeps Egipp
egypt here there

Scotus (that is darkness)

forged history)slayius slamius stanius Monarch

greengrail mist-grey who
soundless parable possible Quiet to flame

p. 9

Despite the fragmentary nature of this section, the poem moves forward through repetition and a delicate torqueing of syntax—resulting in a sort of clotting. The window of oblivion, memory, and remembering quietly opens and closes on a kind of "forged history," a history that is either made—or made up. She evokes the distant past in a language which occasionally appears sharply out of the mist, but soundlessly. For memory is mute ("mute memory vagrant memory," she says later), and perhaps for this reason she is so interested in the *sound* of it:

sound sounde) of soun
amend unto
bowroughholder borrougolder borsolder bar
soldier burrow holder Him
bring into Awe
stranglerstragglers no
nightstealer

p. 15

The language falls apart or sticks together, becomes at times a "crumbling compulsion of syllables," elsewhere a "gnashing pattern of alliteration." But the language, with its vaguely archaic ring, is appropriate to its burden of memory.

This memory is in fact an "inward memory" projected out upon a host of mythological and historical characters, the most important of whom are Florimel (from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*), Stella (the long time friend of Jonathan Swift), and Shakespeare's Cordelia. Howe, for example, catches Florimel running through the forest:

A fictive realm
Words and meaning meet in

feigning

without a text and running from
true-seeming

Florimell flees away into the forest

Hide her there
an illusion (fiction)

Beauty of the world
becoming part of the forest

p. 27

Florimel is caught in a fictive realm, which is to say she is caught in language, where true and seeming meet. And Howe catches herself there as well:

no clock running
no clock in the forest

evanishing of the actors into
one another
Am in a simple allegory

Reaching out alone in words oh

peerless poesy

p. 28

She has momentarily retrieved those actors, hiding and revealing them in the words (in the "woods") until they vanish back into the time and timelessness ("no clock in the forest") of Spenser's "simple allegory." At the end, she is left out of the allegory, alone with or in the words of poetry.

That this remembering of herself in allegory is also a remembering of Ireland becomes clearer in the second section of the book, "The Liberties," whose dedication page (it is dedicated to Susan Manning) contains what appears to be a reproduction of an Irish postage stamp. Howe is, of course, of Irish descent and it is not so surprising to note how many of Howe's references are to that "Secret isle," to figures from both English and Irish history and mythology.

In this context, then, the second section constellates around Stella and Cordelia. What is remarkable about the "Book of Stella," however, is the seeming absence of Stella herself; instead the poems describe the churchyard, the countryside, the sea:

fearsad bell high stone wall
evensong
the blue of sweet salvation
such roads between the uplands
over the lowered cols
eden éadan brow of a hill

p. 75

This section, which seems partially based on Swift material (perhaps on the *Journal to Stella*), reproduces the mystery of Stella's relationship with Swift. It does *not* seem interested in inventing the amorous desires of that couple and instead is more interested—both here and in the first section—in the meaning of chastity, in what it means to be a daughter, and, by implication, what it means to be or have a father:

The real plot was invisible
everything possible
was the attempt for the finest thing
was the attempt
him over the bridge into the water
her some sort of daughter
events now led to a region
returned in a fictional direction

p. 84

The father/daughter issue becomes more prominent in the "Book of Cordelia," where Lear's exile seems to prompt the section's concern with flux, anxiety, madness:

children of Lir
lear
whistling would in air ha
nameless appear—
Can you not see
arme armes
give tongue
are you silent o my swift
all coherence gone?

p. 91

The problem seems to be that if the father cannot speak, the daughter cannot remember, and so the section insists on the "no" of Lear's madness, the chaos of revolt and exile, murder. Inscribed in the text is again Howe's "inner mem-

ory,'' her appearance as ''Whowe'' where she and Lear's children are part of this ''stormstil stormstil / shuttle and whiz.''

It is as the daughters of a mad father that Stella and Cordelia seem to speak in the play, ''God's Spies.'' The dialogue is spare but not flat; the two characters complete each other's sentences, speak in echoes of Lear's sentences. This dialogue works eventually toward a confrontation between Stella and the ghost of Jonathan Swift, where Stella echoes Lear's ''Speak again,'' with the words ''Speak to me.'' The play, while formally most distinct from the rest of the book, recaptures thematic concerns of the whole book—the vagaries of memory, the invisible, the soundless, the lost.

For me the last section of the book is the most uneven; many of the poems' block-like structure and lack of syntactic connections slow the movement of reading. Some of these poems seem merely fragmentary, lists of words that do not invite the reader's participation in this archeology of memory. However, Howe eventually liberates these seemingly static moments:

> blood and water streaming land.
> swift to its close
> ebbs out
> out
> of
> my pierced side
> *not in my native land.*
>
> p. 121

The last line, the cry of many Irish writers who have chosen to work in exile, is the condition of Howe's desire to find origins, to remember a past which is beyond her. In creating the strange landscapes of her poems, the ''greengrail mist-grey'' fog out of which Castles Perilous emerge, she maps that inner exile of memory and genealogy, where she searches for the meaning of the father and the daughter, the mother land and the mother tongue:

> Inward memory
>
> Mystery passing myth sanctuary
>
> Secret isle and mortal father
> Shell half of my face
>
> Eden or ebb of the sea.
>
> p. 62

LORI CHAMBERLAIN

RASA or Knowledge of the Self
Essays on Indian Aesthetics &
Selected Sanskrit Studies
RENÉ DAUMAL
translated from the French by Louise
Landes Levi
New Directions, 1982.

René Daumal is best known in this country as the author of an odd, haunting little book, *Mount Analogue*, that remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1944. It has grown into something of a cult book and sells by stacks out of the metaphysical bookstores. Another novel, *Le Grande Beuverie*, is more feverish and a great deal more humorous. It was issued about four years ago by Shambhala Publishers under the title *A Night of Serious Drinking*, but it will not become so popular because it lacks the mysterious transparencey of *Mt. Analogue*. Unfortunately Daumal's poetry remains relatively unavailable. Kenneth Rexroth, Armand Schwerner, and a few others have published translations of isolated poems, but no representative collection has appeared. With *RASA* the first collection of Daumal's essays becomes available.

During Europe's fervid period of modernism Daumal caried on a wary flirtation with the surrealists. A fascination with death as an adolescent prompted him to experiment with carbon tetrachloride, trying to bring himself as close as possible to a death-like condition while still fully conscious. The experiments confirmed his belief that a complete revaluation or revolution of consciousness could be provoked. This allied him to the surrealists, and Breton invited him to join their camp. But Daumal's fiercely mystical temperament drew him away from the strict political allegiances demanded by Breton. Non-rational states of mind suggested other directions to him, and the relief they cast on linguistic possibilities particularly intrigued him. He discovered in Oriental cultures a long experimental tradition probing the correspondences between language and inner, or visionary, modes of awareness. Dedicating himself to a sudy of Sanskrit, and the poetic and yogic systems stitched into the fabric of it, he founded a group of his own, Le Grand Jeu. It practiced what the members called *experimental metaphysics*.

Results of their excursions into language and consciousness emerge throughout Daumal's writings. These mark the first concerted effort by a European to fuse occidental literary practice with Sanskrit poetics. From several books of Daumal's prose, but primarily the collection *Bharata*, L.L. Levi has arranged an occasionally disjunct but always illuminating book in which Daumal addresses the twin Hindu arts of poetry and music.

There exists no linguistic architecture in the world comparable to Sanskrit. For the Hindus it is "their Pyramid, their Sphinx, their Ziggurat, their Parthenon," and exhibits a dizzyingly perfect construction. The same architectural exactitude characterizes Sanskrit poetics, to which grammar was considered an accessory science, along with phonetics, etymology, and metrics. Indian poets and critics drew on a spectrum of sciences, linguistic and psychological, in order to furnish their toolkits with precise instruments for the exploration of thought and emotion. The precision of these instruments, and the wholesale unavailability of some of them in America till now, make this book of interest.

> The artist is, above all, an artisan, whose task is *to make* certain objects according to certain laws and with a certain goal. First, of course, he must know the material with which he works. Therefore, the poetic art is founded on a science and doctrine of language usage.

To the Sanskrit poet heightened emotion provoked a heightened accuracy in the usage of language. And *rasa*, what Daumal calls "the essence of poetry," is the territory on which verbal expression and the pitches of emotional existence interact. Just as significant internal events demand a language that corresponds to them, the *rasa* theory assumes that a heightened employment of language will evoke a heightened, often visionary, suggestibility in an audience. Roots of this assumption go back to the *Rig Veda*, the earliest "anthology" of poetry intact in an Indo-European tongue.

Among the Vedic *rishis*—"seers" or poets—a mysterious intoxicant, personified and invoked under the name *Soma* dominates the poetry. Small wonder; *Soma* was the chemical source of the rishi's poetic vision. The poets glorified it, a liqueur carefully decocted from a plant known by the same name, as the agent of supernatural vision. Its identity has been in doubt for about three millennia. What is without doubt is that it delivered terrific psychotropic effects, and that over several hundred years it vanished from use. Either its harvestable source gave out or priests guarded its secret identity too zealously. Poets and visionaries gradually replaced it by a variety of disciplines, the yogas

that regulated physiological, linguistic, and mental functioning. But the concept of *Soma* seems to crop up again in classical times (Hindu era), etherealized and thinly disguised as *rasa*—the operating power of artistically charged language within a literary context. Daumal's own inquiries curiously parallel this unfolding. The poem, once a remarkable proof of altered vision becomes recognized as itself the instigator of transformed awareness. This transformation the poets called *rasa*.

> Savor (rasa) is the immediate interior perception of a moment or particular state of existence provoked by the functioning of the methods of artistic expression . . . (the rasas) are named, metaphorically, after the emotions or rather the psychophysiological operations of which they are the intuituve ideas: erotic, comic, pathetic, furious, herroic, horrific, repugnant, wondrous . . .
>
> . . . each (rasa) has its particular rhythms, prosodically expressed by the combinations and articulations.

In other words, poems by a deliberate methodology powerfully transform human consciousness; they arouse and regulate particular "moods" in us and convey information not ordinarily accessible; there are reasons why they do, and we can talk about these reasons without recourse to fuzzy metaphysical terms. Sanskrit poetics mapped out the terms of this discourse. The vocabulary alone should clear up a hundred vague discussions. What concerned the critics (who were themselves generally also the poets) was the poem's formal structure—its use of image, emotion, rhythm and figures of speech—and how that structure could interpenetrate with the private experiences of a reader to provoke *rasa*, what Daumal calls "an immediate experience, a gustation of life, a pure joy, which relishes its own essence as it communes with the 'other'—the poet or actor."

Daumal's intention in these essays was not to examine the particular rhythms or articulations by which Sanskrit achieved its ends. Methods of poetic craft vary from language to language, and it requires more than a nodding acquaintance with Sanskrit to benefit from the particulars of its prosody. But by drawing the parameters of this poetics and defining its salient terms Daumal has reintroduced some methods of looking at and talking about poetic practice. These are methods generally not attended to by politically neutralized criticisms which regard the human being and his society as "finished" or intact. Only the transformative effect of a poetry on its audience is of interest. The rest is packing material.

But it is not a distinction of the Sanskrit poets alone that they worked with the *rasas*. Any good poet does. You can pick examples from your own bookshelf. But the construction of a vocabulary that probes the relationship between language and emotion, and between poet and audience, is something no other tradition has accomplished with comparable exactitude. Daumal's *RASA* is the best available introduction.

It is a short book. It lays bare the bones and translates some seminal texts. Occasionally Daumal strikes a post of rather righteous intolerance—but remember, he was trying to explain lucidly during the 1930's the methods of Indian poetry and music. He had to do so in the face of uncomprehending critics on one side, and smog-producing Theosophists on the other. It required some fury to clear the air. A variety of scholarly works, especially badly written ones by contemporary Indian pandits, offer fuller views of the development and techniques of Sanskrit poetry. But this is the only one on Sanskrit poetics yet written by a practicing modern poet. There is nothing quaint or culturally restricted going on here. The propositions with which Daumal worked are as contemporary and compelling as poetry is.

ANDREW SCHELLING

On Sulfur's "Notes, Correspondence, Reviews"

The varied palette of *Sulfur*'s expanded review section inspires some comments of my own. First, while I agree almost entirely with Butterick's review of Rodefer's *Four Lectures*, I question that the poems present an "essentially optimistic view of the world." There are configurations to Rodefer's preoccupations that suggest otherwise. His "lectures" run on sheer culture-addiction, not unlike the way heroin swarms up through a Charlie Parker solo. There are elements to such "optimism" one would want to be cautious of. (A fuller exposition of this point can be read in my review of the book in *Poetics Journal* #3).

There are interesting conjunctions of reviewer and poet, and others that simply sink. Wakoski on Hejinian is one of the latter. How can she read *My Life* and *not* see the "story telling, image making, revelation of self" she professes to admire? She panics every time Hejinian's analytical mind tosses off an idea, and fears an impending invasion of European frontal lobes. Confusion reigns throughout Wakoski's review—and not only on the subject of Hejinian. She describes *The Maximus Poems* as leaning less heavily than *The Cantos* on Homer, in favor of American sources. Doesn't Wakoski know how much Hesiod, Apollodorus and other Greeks pervade Maximus? Didn't she ever get to the endless middle Cantos stuffed with authentic American history and documents? She pins her critique on a distinction between formalist European aesthetics and good ol' Amurkin gusto, allowing that her preference is for Bukowski over Ashbery, Williams over Eliot, and Levertov over Ammons. Ammons??—the loosest goose in all American homespun? She must not have opened that book either.

Aside from the fact that the name Caspar Weinberger kept slipping into my head while reading Eliot Weinberger's piece on poetry and Armageddon, I found it a marvellous precautionary assessment. One thing he overlooked, though, is the degree to which topicality in any form becomes a target for poetasters. When real poets take to penning mediocre poems for the unavoidable cause, mediocre talents everywhere are given a unique sanction. "Poetry" becomes a dump site for verbal toxic waste. From Pound forward—remember—the strongest warning of American poetics is that language can become radioactive, even through the best intentions. When poets ally themselves *as poets* with a cause, they're rarely so modest as to say, simply, "Here's my nutmeg against the end of the world." I seem to see Weinberger beginning with hesitations about the interaction of poetry with politics (pp. 157-158) and moving gradually to the position of wondering why poets aren't more politically involved. The shift is subtle, but the implication—especially by invoking Vietnam (p. 162)—is that both the antiwar movement and poetry as an art benefited by the cause. Everything in my experience—and everything Weinberger has said before that (including his essay on war poetry in *Sulfur* #4)—indicates otherwise.

JED RASULA

How to Nonread

What remains when you write nonreferential art poses the question invidiously, as when people call Gertrude Stein "art by subtraction." I'd rather ask what do the moderns—Bromige, Bernstein, Silliman, Hejinan—do that Stein does not; how much are we invited to a thirties table, objects, food and rooms that are reruns of the fun dinner with Apollinaire and Picasso for Duanier Rousseau. It's easy to dismiss the connection they seem to want to make to John Cage performance pieces, though both propose to alter a medium till it *becomes* an audience's expectations, and "play with that: though without the prop of established conventions. It's better to dismiss all that and appeal to a marginal public, perhaps like the one which collects newspaper headlines (there is a Brooklyn magazine called *Giants Play Well in the Drizzle*), or those (I'm one) given to saying a word out loud while walking, because we've thought of it and we like it.

Defense may be the wrong defense. Yet other writing appears, is good or bad and gets misjudged from how liking gets in the way of principles. Collected editions and reprints respond to tastes more settled. The definition of a "classic" is that it is well distributed. Language-oriented, nonreferential writing appears from Segue, Tuumba, small and smallish presses, and takes its chances on the fringes of the fringes. The presumption is that they like each other, keep up with innovations, and are fond of such horseplay as Charles Bernstein's rewriting Milton lines (in "Entitlement"), retaining nothing but line shape and syntax:

> These tribunes, if any pout, the sentence dormant
> Of florid Calm pesters daily
> Flouncing or with agile succession of mundanity
> Persue idle in that dented token.

There is a pleasure to seeing this done at all, and it is (I'd say) nothing like jazz transpositions, much less little quotes from other songs introduced as riffs. But this scrap is from quite a long piece, a set of pastoral arias for three "voices," I suppose syntaxes. And of course it isn't intelligible. I've read Bernstein books through, and he's most interesting to me verging on sense, but with a looser

notion of relevance, a sort of ultimately gelatine salad of associations, than is taught in College English. *That's* all right; we have traditions of nine-tenths unintelligible poems, from Blake's *Zoas* to *Houseboat Days*. But these writers aren't making French symbolist thickets. The words are more like mouthfuls of Lincoln logs (or crushed clam shells). They don't trip over casements into realms of psychic faery. It can have, even tends to have, no charm, not even the charm of instruction sheets from foreign industrialists.

Language is semisystematic, and leans very hard on expectations. There are some among nonreferentials who define their activity as political, as if meaning is a bourgeois taste—as opposed to the notorious abstractionism of bluecollar labor—or suspect because transmissibility is too like a transaction. Meaning becomes tainted commodity.

The question for me, as dogged reader who grew up with Christopher Morley pipe-and-slippers training, is whether any of the transformations "reading" undergoes given these texts is accessible to me. More broadly: what sense do these works make shelved in bulk in (say) a rare-book library? Or are we to think of them as tools, carried increasingly scuffed in the pockets of intelligent jeans, as backpackers used to stock Gary Snyder? This may be to think of the printed things as objects when we should be thinking of them as dial readings charting a process. A journal of imaginary physics could claim the same attention, and no more.

Of course I suspect that it's done by people who can't write well in the normal way, and it might be less than invidious to remark that these kinds of writing make it difficult to judge verbal skill. Ultimately their books of verse and stacked paragraphs *may* be taken as remarks about how writing is generated. Bernstein again:

> A fumbling derivation
> throttling without deviation
> through a tarred pocket with
> additional tutelage, up to the
> burned decks of a demoted
> desquamation.

(Burning Deck is the name of a small press.) Gertrude Stein wrote "A blind agitation is manly and uttermost," and a great many lines like that in *Tender Buttons* and *How to Write*. Ashbery's verse is much more sequential but without context; this is "reserved" as the cookbooks say, and I suppose thrown

out. Stein is even too musical, and has the virtues or uttered speech. Her recordings do sound like a Baltimore matron. Language-poet events are far from these graces, hardly texts (perhaps spray-painted on cement, like gang names on bridge abutments), and "reading" them often means finding a way to make them interesting at all, to recover them from dullness. Bernstein quotes Eigner's remark, "Nothing is too dull."

I am 18th-century trained; Pope is my idea of the first modern poet. He thought dullness the product of dunces. Here it's as if we wade through those awful would-be wits, with our mouths stopped by an "Oh well, we don't intend to be significant in those ways." Interest and interesting are replaced by attention. Lyn Hejinian did a piece lately about all the tables she knew; it skirted the danger of sounding too much like thirties experiment, but perhaps she was ashamed of its thematic unity. A theme piece will engage memory or some kind of persistent retrieval in ways which, as acts, are meaningful.

Swinburne is not a fun poet for me to read (neither is Shelley), because I find them meaningless and pretty, even if they're lisping of horrors. I'm tempted to say, of Shelley, that qualities without quantification are no damn good. The nonreferential poets (if a nonreferential, nonsymbolist poem is a poem) do raise reference as a problem, though their frequent suggestion that any reading for meaning is an automatism is a lie. Still, if one is to read them not own them reasons, even techniques, must be found, perhaps not to defend their texts as much as come up with a reason for their superiority to garment-district catalogues or lists of ingredients.

I have no one sample exhibit (Bernstein's poem about his father comes to mind), but the imagined exemplum I have in mind—it may be significant that an imagined one will do—is wandering through an area of experience known to the poet, which is a kind of limit, but the words and phrases substituting for each other, occuring spontaneously or taken from a text as cue list, are absolutely on a par, themselves experiences. Doing this very well, you'd think, would or should result in Stein or Joyce, but no room is left usually for an almost-caught meaning or consistently liquid, warbling phrase. It is perhaps too many negations, too puritan, saying the meanings I come to will be unexpected, nonsymbolist (not a nonverbal moment "caught"), and a byproduct of words and world considered as hostile systems. The reader is a kind of secret agent of letters, privileged in a way *not* to follow a text.

It isn't much of a fraternity, as the readers of Stevenson or Lamb shared a taste for *this* rendering of experience (or the experiences rendered). I can be a

Boswellian but not a Hejinianian or Sillimanite. One is not *grateful* for these texts the same way.

How wisdom creeps in is always a problem, and for these texts any marginal humanity. They are made, and the writers do seem different from each other. I love a writer with expertise, who knows something in a field or can *do* something like train lions. Experience too like other people's beats itself thin, like tapa cloth. Let the words *not* be from a thesaurus, yet unexpected. I *think* the reading is still too much changed to be called reading, but am willing to see the whole activity as marginally useful as say the scum on hot lead.

GERALD BURNS

Supplemental to "How to Nonread"

TO GERALD BURNS

17 October 1983
Dear Gerald,

Reading later tonight at St. Marks and jittering away a few minutes at the typewriter to actually get back to you in something like due speed.

I've made a copy of "How to Nonread" so am returning the copy you sent, as per your request. Seems as if you could basically make the argument you make without a couple of characterizations which strike me as misleading, at least from the point of view that I—and I think the others you mention—look at it. For one thing, 'nonreferential' is not really an accurate term; a point I've made in several texts, so maybe you just won't agree: I mean the words clearly have a reference—except in more visually-oriented work not discussed in your essay —and when you get to Silliman and much of Hejinian you actually have fairly standard descriptive and statemental sentences, though the order of them is not in keeping with normal narrative patterns. With me, the syntax is not grammatical or speech-derived but the words are still referential; I think you must mean something like nonrepresentation which is quite a different matter. Even if you take reference beyond the lexemic level, and talk—I think confusingly however—about the reference of phrases and sentences, then you get something like *poly*referentiality, the very opposite of the term you use. Also—I for one am *only* interested in meaning and its generation, inspection, prosody, etc.

Perhaps the meaning is not a predetermined Logos (though I surely make *references* to this vector of meaning as well) but an enacted one—you know the arguments of course—so I think if you want to talk about the nature of meaning enacted that's one thing, or the nature of the reference . . . but just to say 'not x' is reductive. If you didn't misuse these terms, you could make what would still be your criticism have considerably more relevance—and I think in fact you could make your criticism have considerably more force since it's hard to understand why one wd even bother abt writing that was uninteresting in reference or meaning—it would be of little interest to me either. I also don't quite see why you exempt Stein and Joyce from your censure, surely in some ways you must not, but that's a deeper issue, actually, than the other I raise . . . .

Charles

TO CHARLES BERNSTEIN

October 22, 1983
Dear Charles,

I knew, of course, you'd have a mass of theory. It seems to me in looking at the French you ignore the studies by Britons and Saul Kripke on reference. Our differences are territorial. Wittgenstein worries about more than misprision when he says "bank," meaning bank of the Seine, and you think he means Bank of England. That's a sensible way to get at *acts* of meaning by way of reference. Then there's the logical puzzles on referring, still going on, and Heidegger marveling that meaning (like anything) can be, or can be like anything, to be coarse. When you present, as art, a found syntax with artificial (semisystematic) substitution, or write sentences which are "sentences," frappés of less systematic word and concept substitution more like sidestepping, all that you say *may* be true and you *are* "making references" in a metaostensive way to more common speech acts. But polyreferentiality is useless to describe your written objects, which I do see as objects much more than the events you wish they were (is that wish built into them too, inside the structure, or added on like Wittgenstein's river bank?) because most newspapers, student themes and overheard conversation and advertisements, plus general utterances like "Life is hell," are polyreferential (and hence mostly boring). Bad art is polyreferential.

So context is, flatly, a directive to reference, That is what it's for. Dodgson uses unexpected remarks (seeming to or genuinely applying a context accompanied by a more recognizable *attitude*) and mock-words, sometimes nonce to jostle the narrative speaker-contexts he starts with (narrator + Alice as observer).

So I think it's misleading, especially after the perfectly well-known instances of surrealism, Dada etc., for you to say, blandly, that your words and phrases (for instance) "refer." In terms of established or evoked context of course they don't, and it seems to me what you're doing should be—even to be intelligible much less useful—described with context the operable term. You say, for instance, you don't see why Joyce and Stein are excluded from the motions I make, and context is why. Stein's mind is patently powerful, and even flitting from cute to cute she has an ongoing operation in mind which she finds (at least) interesting enough, and it shows. My favorite *all*-theory books by her are *Narration* and *Geographical History*. I guess the Joyce if any is *Ulysses* (and that's with most of the scholarship read and reread), though it's the *Wake* I glance at. She called him a mystery anyone could understand because his deformations ultimately make for texture rather than for meaning, but I think that's wrong tho' the last time I tried to take the *Wake* in bulk seriously I failed. And I've been rereading Sutherland's *Gertrude Stein: a biography of her work*, and just a little Allegra Stewart's *Gertrude Stein and the Present* (hers much less mindy than his, and I memorized Bridgman's *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*), and between them they can even make *Lucy Church Amiably* tolerable. The sound of Joyce and Stein is human and humane. Now "sound" in that sense will be several-sentence deployment, and a "tone" of "voice" maybe sometimes just a tiny bit like Carroll's sustained tone in *Snark*. It's just that tone your methods make impossible, and your methods make it impossible by destroying context as the *matrix* of reference.

Gerald Burns

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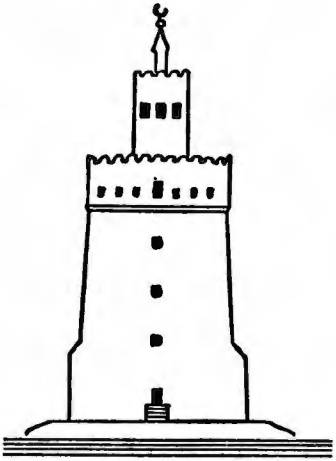

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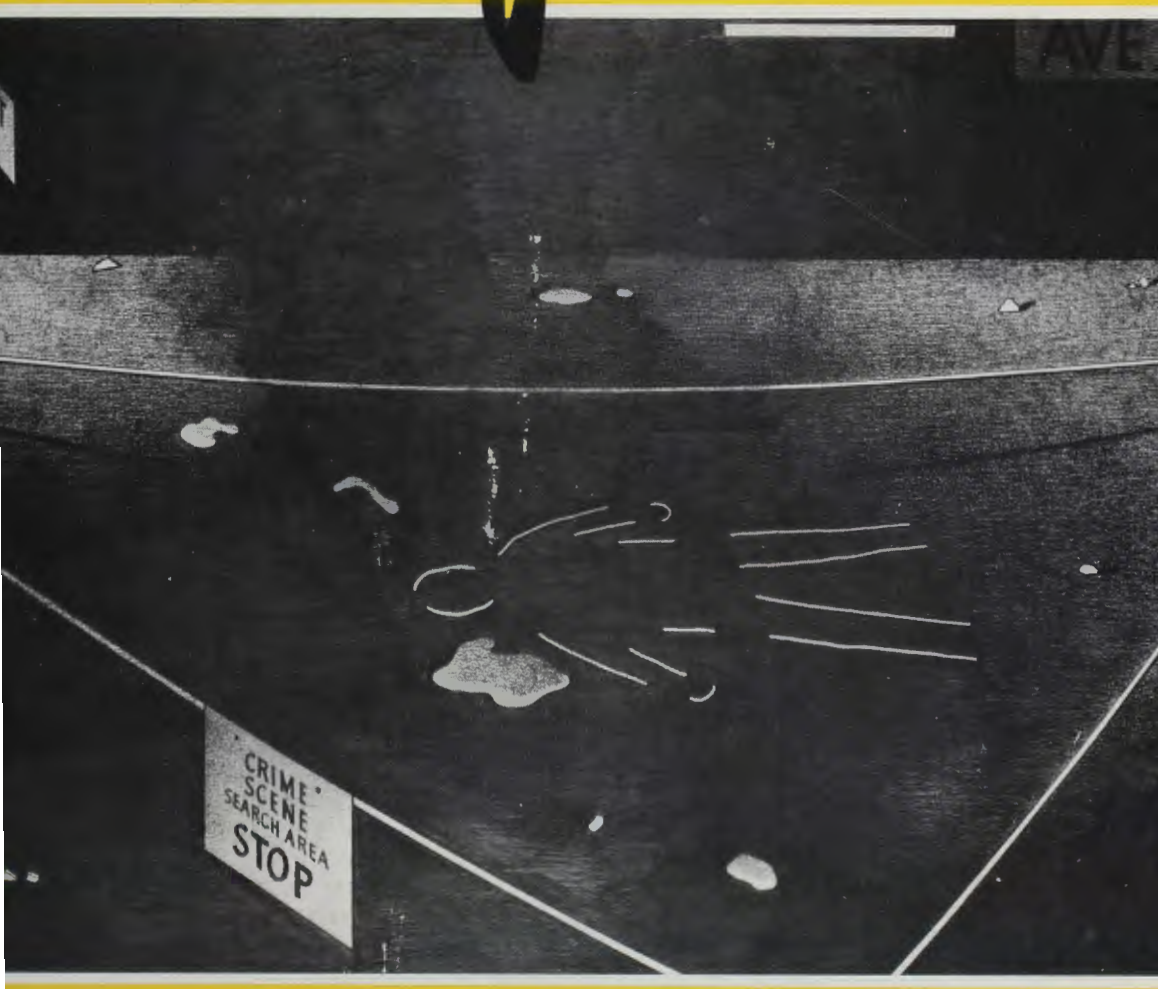

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Sulfur

A Literary Tri-Quarterly of the Whole Art

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The Writers' Program, University of California at Los Angeles, Extension Program

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Laura (Riding) Jackson

ENGAGING IN THE IMPOSSIBLE

My concern, in my writing on my experience (of close to sixty years) of the constitution and temper of the world of twentieth-century literary enterprise, is not to tell a life-story—to supply a professional autobiographical history as a subjective counterpart to biographical versions of my life-story. Such a subjective-objective categorization of viewpoints I regard as based on a fallacious conception of the nature of intellectual honesty. Two honesties are hypothesized in it, the second having attributed to it a purer character, as honesty, the first appraised as necessarily colored with the viewer's ideas of himself, or herself, limiting the account given of the *subject* of interest, or *object* of interest, or curiosity, to interpretation that excludes what others giving an account of it might report of it from an impersonal, unprejudiced judgement-vantage. I regard all that goes into the formation of an "objective" interpretation of material of event or fact as a generalizing of a variety of conjectured possible personal interpretations—an artificially construed consensus.

All telling about a person, whether by that person, or by others, is necessarily personal: it is what the "I" or "I" or "I" of each particular telling offers as

true. The biographer "I" offers a telling, as a true telling, of the entire life-story of his subject, to the extent of his knowledge. There is always the problem, in judging a biography *as truth*, of evaluating, under the extent of its knowledge-basis, the degree of purity of the biographer's feelings towards his subject: is he all-free or not all-free in his disposition towards it of processes of telling determined by ideas of himself—where his feelings ought to be determined entirely by ideas of *it* in undivided emotional preoccupation with it? Biographical telling can go wrong in its trying to mingle truth about the subject of the telling with what the biographical narrator is moved to inject into it as truth about himself—and, as biographical narrators can be tempted to include in their tellings, an extended truth representing ideas of themselves of persons of a kind with whom they are pleased to feel identity in their biographer-disposition towards their subject. In autobiographical telling there can be injecting into the narrative reports of ideas of the autobiographical teller about himself that constitute for him a complete, a final truth to which he feels historical narrative will tend to do injustice. This stretched truth told by a person about himself can never be so untrue, I think, as biographers' truth in which the motive of justice to the subjects is compounded with a compulsion of justice-doing by the narrators to themselves—and to varieties of opinions of things presumed to match their own.

I am not plagued by anxious desires to get my life-story set down by myself as if before a death-time that might leave it at the mercy of objectivist arbitrary truth-formulations. I believe that the sense of my being what and who I am, and doing as I have done and do, will become perfectly clear, as I believe that the meaning of all being and doing must become, as we proceed in this human course of being and doing that is framed in our minds' framing of all that is in the language of an all-illuminating of reason of things we have hardly yet dared to speak.

However it goes as to the clarification of what there is to be, do, know, understand, and tell, I have something to tell about myself that has pertinance to the general human need of comprehending how much of what human beings set themselves to be and do next, and next, as in an ever-new immediate that extends all past being and doing towards possible fullnesses of being and doing, builds itself over and over into barriers against this fullness. What human beings have been and have done solidifies stone-like into protective walls that stop

them in their trials of the possible to be and do, as at a safety-mark in knowledge and understanding: this is a line of necessity laid down for them by the urgencies of self-contentment. A necessity of self-contentment has steadily prevailed over the rule of the twin necessities of knowledge and understanding, in this late century's version of the continual human abrogation of the insistence of these ultimately undisregardable necessities which are at the center of the human mind's acceptance of its reality as the substance of human identity.

A climax of consciousness of an impotence laid upon human beings of fulfilling the expectations that human identity excites has gripped the sense of common identity that collects human beings into a loose summary of themselves as constituting "a world"; it is a climax of far-gone confusion in ideas of the nature of existence, and of human existence. A philosophy of failure of existence in the large pairs itself with a religion of success of human existence in the small—as kinds of being and doing, kinds of knowledge and understanding, pieces of a world of human consciousness of existence. Thus, human beings come to live their thinking life in pieces, amidst ruins of ever-outlived thought; and nothing has the clarity of full-minded occupation of the immediately existent, all is either ruin, or is undergoing weathering in the historical climate of ruin. It was with such a clarifying light that literature was supposed to touch the scenes of new thinking on what had been, was, and might be, a light of new truth cast in new telling.

Literature has played a double rôle in the drama of human hope of the human. It has served as the muse of the purest, the most purely human, of human ambitions, that of success in the objective that is the essential concern of the human mind: fullness of achievement of the possible in personal being and doing within the forms of knowledge and understanding natural to the mind. Among the varied fields of ambitious human activity, it was set apart, and set itself apart, as one in which human minds could devote themselves unreservedly to the expanding, towards the full of expressive witness-bearing to it, of the experience of knowledge and understanding of existence that is both the fact and the meaning of human existence. But literature has also had a rôle of beguiling the mind with inducements to *letting time pass* in operations of self-contenting deferment of full intellectual realization of the human experience of existence: it has served as a protector of experimentation in an intellectual do-nothing-ism that could not count as failing the supreme human ambition

because it allowed theoretically for its fulfilment. The Classical and the Romantic actually merge into a meaningless equivalence in literature, and, with them, the practical and the theoretical in conception of the humanly possible—the theoretically possible kept at temporal remove by the operations of literary imagination, settling more and more ponderously on the literary horizon of human life as the image of a literarily revered impossible.

My own involvement in literature was an attempt to resolve the ambiguity of its two rôles in a conception of it as having, as a function of an intellectually, spiritually, and *linguistically*, integrated character, a potentially saving effect of clarifying to the human mind the fundamental motives of its thought-engagements and the embodiment of them in words. These memoirs are being written to depict the exaggerated replica of the ordinary world of demoralized human ambition that the world of literary understanding became in its progressive adapting itself to the moral temporizings of a humanity advancing in a wisdom of incertitude of the value of humanness, or of anything. For all the dwelling in them on my experiences as one who tried to cast her life-undertaking within the frame of literary undertaking, I do not make report of these experiences for their interest as a personal narration: the personal element in my report is incidental to consideration I mean to give, and to ask to be given, to the conditions of human purpose that make up the world of literary undertaking of our time. The sense of these conditions is such that they exclude involvement in literature where the name "literature" is construed as comprising interests and purposes of worded thought that are literally—practically, not theoretically—of humanly comprehensive importance, performances of the mind directed towards the fully possible in human possession of the power of truth.

What I tell is not a life-story in literary-world setting strung upon a theme of ugly treatment long and widely visited upon me, a narrative patchwork of complaints. I am no disappointed literary careerist! I offer here what is necessary for the eventual understanding of my life in its literary-world aspects of experience and activity as the life of one soul-bent, mind-intent, on pressing towards answer-point the question we are all confronted with by ourselves in our nature of beings existing as minds.

Where does possibility, that knowledge bounds, end, and impossibility begin? How much is it of the possible, to be knowingly? What is it, to be mind, deter-

miner of the possible, the impossible, in being what, who, one is? In assuming literature to be the common ground of our asking and trying to answer this all-embracing question-and-answer devolvement upon us as truth of ourselves, the beings we personally are, and truth at once of being, which is inseparably all that is, I responded to my sense of the veridicality of the human mind. Literature: was it not meant to be the where of our telling what we are, who, and how much—and the whole story of the nature of the possible and the impossible? My report of how I came to know literature to be no common telling-ground but a process of continually gathering and continually dissolving resolves to try what can be told, the name excusing all the forms of cowardice and dalliance that it takes under its proud wing, should make it easier to find the place of common bravery for the telling of what is in being and in our being to tell.

2

I shall especially here present the part that the fact of poetry had for me in my adoption of literature as the ground of my trial of my powers of touching, in the reaches of mind that materialize it into words, the limit of the possible—the possible in letting one's being tell being's truth rather than appropriating language's uses of revelation for the truths of passing lives that selves living as mere self merely live. Poetry brought into view—into stark view—the debate of human consciousness with itself on what is possible and what impossible, in attainment to knowledge of the nature of our being—knowledge making the underlying, overlying, all-intervening fact of being familiarly (humanly, personally) understandable. The debate is inherently only an indeterminate of variant ideas on the possibility or impossibility of realization of particular ends of ultimate knowledge become subjects of speculative disagreement. Poetry introduced into the amorphous region of this debate—the region of human endeavor to encompass the unavoidable possibility-impossibility preoccupation and resolve it into a living story of progressive decision—a *stand*.

Poetry, as it were, civilized impossibility for the world of literary storifying of the human endeavor to attain to a decisiveness of being: to be livingly one with the truth of a knowledge of the nature of our being that was at once a knowledge of the nature of being in its comprehensive realness. The poetic component of

literature is regarded as of a primitive ancestry in comparison with its prose components, in their character as of an intellectually planned, more deliberate kind of verbal composition. But poetry as having the identity of a component of literature has that identity necessarily as being and intellectually prompted and shaped kind of verbal composition. The features of poetry that connect it in historical accounting for it with primitive rituals of cantatory utterance, the physical devices of emphasis that survive in it, and devices for keeping utterance taut with image-evoking words for maintenance of emotionally concentrated attention, represent no more than a placation of suspicion of poetry as treating of matters, subjects, courses of thought and knowledge-experience, from a condition of mind exceeding the limits of the possibility for human beings of their fully understanding the nature of their being and of the realities of being implicated in it. The coming to be of poetry as part of the literary articulations of human consciousness, as a form of expression distinct from song and chant, expression which set apart certain areas of knowledge and understanding as impossible of access to human powers of mind and expression, marked the demysticization of those areas—what I have called the civilizing of impossibility.

The traces left in poetry of the early mysticalities of ritualistic simplifications of expression of the difficult, the over-difficult, in human knowledge-experience, constitute a compromise with a surviving primitive human disposition to fend off intercourse of mind with the impossible-seeming in knowledge and understanding: restriction of expression to a boundaried though far extended possible is cultivated as infallible protection against mistake-making excesses in ventures of knowledge and understanding. Poetry has used a double justification of itself in its endeavor to penetrate the areas of impossibility (areas regarded as exterior to the mind's reaches)—to demonstrate their penetrability. It presents the human mind in a condition in which it engages without trepidation in endeavors of knowledge and understanding extending beyond the margin of the readily expressible, the surely communicatable, in its experiences of apprehension. It establishes the unalienness to the mind, the unforbiddingness, of endeavor to think the difficult to think, encounter the difficult to encounter in mind, give expression to what is customarily regarded as belonging to mind-resisting kinds of knowledge and understanding even because the expression of it is not imaginable as other than *difficult*. But to its espousing of the difficult, in experience, for the mind, and the difficult expression of it, as not

prohibitively difficult, poetry joined relics of those make-easy devices to which I have referred, by which, in pre-poetry, all difficulty was simplified out of the field of attention, the excluded difficult having assigned to it the nature of mystery—that which must reveal itself to be known, speak itself to be understood.

Poetry has the assigned part, and status, in literature's storifying of how human beings make their way through the intricacies of the possibility-impossibility debate, of a defender and prompter of their capability of overcoming, as beings of mind, the appearance of impossibilities in knowing and understanding that assail them as mere bodily constitutions isolated each in itself. But it confuses its representation of the difficult as potentially intelligible by tempering its intellectual enthusiasm to a presumed general human hesitancy to meet head-on, in mind-experience, what has not been familiarized into the automatically intelligible. Confusingly, much of what passes for the characteristically poetic consists of treatment of the generically "difficult" subject-content of poetic expression as linguistically reducible to simplicities of phrasing allying it to the subject-content of the mind's habitual, anticipation-fixed, range of experience. Judgement of what poetry "is" has been constantly attended, in its reception as a natural element of literature, and for poets themselves, by attitudes that qualify its essential nature (from which its existence as a distinct literary genre derives), as confident engagement in intellectual experience customarily presumed to be of faintest, even questionable, possibility, with conceptions of ultimately ineluctible difficulties for human intellectuality. Sympathy with, desire for, engagement itself in, poetry have all contributed to the fixing of the kind of experience peculiar to the poetic genre of the telling of the story of being at degrees of intellectual success allowing ever for an ultimate failure-range that maintains the supposition of a safe intellectual side for human consciousness, in the endeavor for all *possible* knowledge and understanding.

The compromise-element in the very sustenance of poetry as a crucially important truth-agency among the varied modes of storifying human life that are aggregated in literature has neutralized its potency, its credibility, as explicit evidence of the beyond-arm's-length, larger-than-brain's-breadth's, intellectual reach of our minds. The techniques of expression-style that distinguish poetic literature from prose literature were designed for the persuasive effect of presenting intellectual experience of an order commonly classified as outside the naturally experienceable, the normally possible, as, on the contrary, not at

all formidable—as, indeed, agreeably conceivable experience. The flaw in the poetic promotion of the intellectually difficult as humanly necessary experience, of a primary importance for fullness of being, is not in excess of zeal. The conventions of artistries of persuasion that are ingrained ineradicably in the linguistic texture of poetry have their origin in a timidity towards the power that the conception of the Unknown, the Impossible-to-know, holds over minds, continuingly from primitive modes of thinking: in this conception, the mysterious was made to fill the greater part of the space of consciousness—beginning where safety of mind seemed in *stopping thinking*. The deference of poetry to the religious sensitivity of human beings to the possibility of the existence of areas of experience mystically closed to their minds has been a halter fixed by poetry upon itself by which it has guided itself through the ordeals of cultural suspicion as dedicated to follies of concern with the intellectually impossible.

Poetry's culturally anxious preoccupation with persuasive exhibition of the emotionally innocent (even naive) character of its intellectual concerns has crammed its engagement with the intellectually difficult, primitively identified with the humaly impossible, into the framework of an apologetics that recommends the poetic level of intellectual experience and expression as the happy human maximum while minimizing its actual consequences for human life as the life-state of beings of mind. The value of poetic intellectuality has ever been moderated, in poetry's cultural representation of itself, to enjoyable interludes of venture into the intellectually unordinary, not intended to be or capable of being disruptive of the literarily prevailing indeterminacy of attitude to the possible-impossible theme of debate of the human mind with itself. The peculiarity of poetry, of maintaining a cultural impartiality, a literary objectivity towards its intrinsic nature as an intellectually independent literary genre, though under literary supportive protection, has enfeebled the human mind's will to oppose the prohibitions of religious mysticality against endeavor of mind to attain to intellectual experience across lines marked as separating the possible from a forbidden soul-deathly impossible. The self-moderating cultural-literary posture of poetry has, in the first place, enfeebled its source-connection with the natural impulses of the human mind to take its powers of knowledge-experience and of thought-containment of understanding to an intellectual full corresponding to its autogenous, free-born sense of itself. Poetry can be said to have been continually declining in its dignity of function as the linguistic stronghold of

human intellectual virtue and effectuality of being.

That poetry, as a component of literature, has, all along its functioning course, conspired against its dignity as the seat of the status of human beings with themselves as spiritual beings, this identity resident in the intellectual self-possession with which they confront the fact of being, can be verified in the queasiness of poets—a queasiness of steady accumulation—towards the attributing to them of preoccupation with themes, concerns, areas of experience denominatable as "intellectual," in implied contradistinction to emotional response to experience as the culturally humane poetic predisposition. This falling in with a vulgar primitivistic prejudice against intellectuality as fraught with abnormal mental propensities has been reflected in a matching queasiness in the writers of poetic criticism, academic and journalistic. In both critic and poet ranks, religiosities of anti-rationalism, myth-infatuated subjectivism, have arisen to assault intellectual processes, and their operative mechanism, the coherencies of language, as representing a sort of demonology of overcivilized, false, truth-worship—worship of impossibility, the intellectual possibility of truth, which primitive discretion of mind interdicted as intellectual impossibility.

Much of the literary cold-shouldering to which my poetic work has been subjected—my poetic work with more scathing objection than can be found in criticism to which my other writing has been fated, in the treatment of its various parts as uninvited guests of literature—has been based on identification of it as essentially anti-poetic in being of an intensively "intellectual" temper. This identification has been given its full significance of qualities improper to poetry, as present in my poems, in the term "cerebral"—translating "intellectual" into the plain language of anti-intellectual bigotry. The word "mind" itself, becomes, simply, a word of this language of rather disreputably tenuous meaning. It has been suggested, for instance, that my poems have the peculiarity—not to be summarily despised—of representing a poetry of the *mind*. From just what quarter of the human being as an intelligence poetry should be conceived of as issuing, it would be impossible, in the dark-age intellectualism of modern-mindedness, for minds of that mindedness to speculate upon without propounding absurdities, which they could not recognize as such.

The trail of intellectual good-sense—the human mind's proper confidence in itself as *mind*—has been lost, along the way to modern time; it lost itself in

poetry, the last refuge of intellectual self-respect among the distinct areas of thought-expression legitimized as culturally respectable in human societies. Intellectuality in the religious area, from being a walled-in precinct of esoteric religious apologetics, revised itself into a secularistic too religiose to have any secularly practical, too secularistic to have any spiritually practical, bearing on the general problem of human beings, how to live—to think and speak—as beings of *mind*. Philosophy, as a specialistic, professionalistic, engagement in intellectual activity—intellectual activity formalized into an esoteric privacy of mental activity hieratically marginal to ordinary, commonplace human thinking —functioned for long as constituting an area of intellectual freedom in which could be enjoyed an immunity from accountability for transgression of cultural (religious or political) ordinances demarcating where the safely possible in thought terminated and the impossible began. In its beginnings, philosophy was a loose composite of protopoetic and protoscientific intellectuality—the protoscientific and the protopoetic predispositions in uncertain balance. The scientific element of protophilosophic intellectuality had the advantage over the poetic element of possessing a utility-value of possible relevance to circumstances within the compass of physical experience. It persisted as an element of historically natured philosophy until a separately developing scientific intellectuality robbed it of its intellectual status as a component of philosophy by undermining the justification of philosophy's own existence.

Indeed, philosophy was gradually transformed as an area of privileged experimentation in intellectual activity, into a no-man's-land of effort to overcome intellectual difficulties the possibility of overcoming which was regarded as realizable only in *imagined* exploits of thought. Philosophy, that is, became a battle against the intellectually impossible already lost, in reality, by the nature of "things" (everything), but engageable in successfully in excursions into territories of intellection outlined on maps of the intellectually impossible conceived of as hypothetically less than impossible. Poetry also underwent a gradual loss of status and substance as a province of human concern with the capability of human beings of realizing the full of their nature as self-possessed intelligences—their nature as minds. Its identity as the region of dissipation of primitive mythologies of the Impossible in speakable thought-experience has lost so much of its cultural credit of intrinsic intellectual authenticity that the appearance, or evidence, of distinct intellectual activity in engagements in

poetic activity has come to be critically characterized as the trademark of *philosophical* poetry. Thus, W. H. Auden, that dauntless poet-venturer into the sargassan accumulation of weedy modern intellectual idiom, dubbed me "the only living philosophical poet"—I seen by him as a uniquely skilled skimmer-off of stuff of philosophical verbality.

3

I have been explaining on what kind of historical ground I stepped in my seeing, in my early life, poetry as the only open pathway to my engaging in operations of intelligence answering to my—to my mind's—will to explore the possible in knowledge and understanding of all that is to know and understand. This "possible" was not conceived by me to be an extent of experience inevitably bounded by an ultimate "impossible." I did not regard my mind—nothing and no one had induced me by direct or indirect influence to regard it—as other than an organ of thought having the functional potency of an autonomous consciousness. I never, as a child, or in my years of growth towards adulthood, had any responses to my individual experiences inhibiting me from taking them into my consciousness in free fullness. My responses were not creations of opinion or predilection, not repetitive in their character, as such responses are customarily; they were addressed undividedly to the immediate occasion of experience, not split between a prepared attitude and attention to what I found confronting me qualified by it. My mind was innocent of collusion with the thought-inclinations of others or partialities of my own to ways of thinking—engaging in experiences of mind—possessively favored with me as mine. Such detachment from particular associative customs of ideas-holding and attitudes-taking affects the mind's management of its language-procedures. I had no prompting, initially, in the forming of my speaking habits, from a family-pattern of fixed modes of expression and concentration upon set subjects of interest, or from any pattern of larger associative scope on which the domestic pattern impinged. Nor was there any appetite of nature in me for the protection of the customs of thought and habits of speech of special enclosures of association that little private worlds or separatistic public worlds provide from an outer world or a general world-at-large conceived to be the stranger-enemy of the comfort of being and feeling at home in how one thinks and speaks, sharing in the common comfort of all thinking and speaking in that particular manner.

It would take me much, much, longer to describe my approach to the necessity of disposing one's mind to the problem confronting us all, in our life-beginnings as intelligences, of deciding what to expect of one's mind—expect of oneself—in achievements of knowledge and understanding, if I used the devices of autobiographical narrative, telling, for instance, of the natures of my mother and father and older sister; and to what extent the common and individually differing concerns and attitudes of this little domestic population pressed themselves into my consciousness, and made my nature their habitat—or were resisted by my nature as intruders, thieves somewhat of its privacy with itself. And with what outer environments the little world of family personalities and circumstances had special affiliations, or into which I was propelled by mere inevitabilities of growth, that drew me into experiences that complicated the impressions formed in the private range of early experiences with suggestions of facts and rules of life producing conceptions of life's allowances that may have committed my desires and ambitions to prescribed expectations.

No sifting by myself or anyone else of the content of associations and experiences of my early years of life—the years that are in conventional autobiography or biography treated as character-moulding—would provide clues to the actuality that I, identifying myself and my mind as one and the same integer of being in my earliest phases of articulate consciousness, faced myself into a direct confronting of the constitutional entirety of being. In coming to know that I was I, I came to see that entirety manifesting itself, in incidental ubiquity in all the incidents of my experience. Whatever went into the making of me into a being whose mind and physical individuality proved to exist—as they did—bound in a fidelity of existing as of one nature, the makings made themselves into a madeness of me without the assistance or intrusion of factors of personal history, or a seizure by one making of dominancy in my nature giving me a one-track character, or a contention between two or more of them creating a constant problem of character-integration. What is denominated "character" with the sense of a self-government principle put by a person in charge of the makings that constitute his nature is, indeed, a superimposition upon the individual nature of a second self to it, the makings of which are acquisitions of sagacities pertinent to defensive meeting of experience-circumstances challenging the authenticity of the individual nature as something of determinate reality in itself. The consciousness that has ever been mine of the determinate reality of my individual nature has disburdened my experience of myself, as the active

center of my experiencing of everything existing for personal experiencing, of anxieties of anticipation of threats from experience-circumstances to my given nature; my self first found myself to have a consciousness of myself not forced on me by any particular environment, but enjoyed as a condition of ease in the possession of it.

My first concerns of mind—with concern of mind a property of attention not only to closely present experience-occasions but also to all the experience-possibilities of the general environment of conscious and self-conscious individual being—were, as I am here trying to describe, of a quality not disparate from those that were mine insistently in my later times, in which the initial express manifestation of them took on the culturally categorical form of literary performance, *genus poeticum*. In the broadly literary and particularly poetic direction of choice in which my mind moved, the possibilities of thought, and therefore of mind-livable experience, were correspondent in realizability with the expressive possibilities of language. I wish to be understood, however, in all my pains-taking to identify my choice of poetry as a path of fulfilment of necessities of mind that were familiars of my consciousness from its earliest existence for me as the personal substantiality of my mind, as picturing a kind of self that I consider every human being ought be presumed to have, by the central implication of "human."

I was from my earliest self-distinct being a thinking being: I trace this characterization back into a rememberable early-child selfhood of mind along a line of sense of myself as having presence, unbrokenly, in the successive times and places of which my life-history is built, with a certain fullness of thought-immediacy as the body of the presence perfectly coincident with its physical immediacy in the particular place in time, time in place. This I believe to be not a personally unique story of a life-long consistency of self-identification as one's self. It is only the kind of living as a self-possessing self that corresponds with the kind of being human beings have by how they are *made*. Their makings incorporate, by the evidence of language, which projects itself from the unity their makings achieve as a consummating expression of the unity of being with itself in the possibilities of being it generates, the quality of self-identity that is the intrinsic reality of being-unindividual, undivided being.

It can be seen, from how I have described my disposition to the life of general experience as a life for which thought-engagement in the possibilities of knowl-

edge and understanding of the Existent, in its distinctive forms and its prevailing essentiality as Being indivisible, has been its personal activity-center, what I judge to be the humanly natural—to be to the point of existing in the form of and by the functional principle of *human* identity. My sense of the humanly natural, moreover, my instinct of this in my own direction-giving to my life, took me to the poetry-precinct of literature as the where, in the continuity of the endeavor of human beings to live a life of speaking intelligence of the nature of being, in which there was least reversion to primitive avoidance of pressing the possibilities of knowledge and understanding to a point spelling impossibility for the sustaining of consciousness of human identity. Poetry is a speaking-place, in the world of human life as life of mind, in which, uniquely among the places in it for long set aside for effort to discover what can be said, told, to the fortifying of belief in the reality of human life, the only limitations put upon what may be attempted there are those of verbal propriety of a certain kind. The limitations upon the extent and kind of literary engagement that have shaped the character of other types of literature did not enter into the conventions of poetry; it came closer to matching the need of human beings, in their consciousness of themselves as beings of mind, for a manner of open verbal representation of themselves as such than any other literary type of expression, and any of the forms of speaking convenience that have constituted the spasmodical rhetoric of what is called "ordinary" speaking. Poetry has served as a signal of hope to the natural human desire for language's equalness to the engagement of the mind in thought-experience, with express realization of it, to reaches of enlarged life of mind *still* mistrusted in the shadowy corners of innumerable human minds as fearsome places of death of mind.

I have been stressing the human naturalness of my instinctive disposition to human experience as mind-centered, and of my adoption of poetry as a way of engagement in what is suspected of being, in human frailties of death-fear, impossibility. Poetry has allowed of the testing of language's capability of supporting the mind in its effort of attaining to complete embracing of the knowable and understandable, in fulfilment of its nature as a living form of the self-intelligence of being, indivisible being, "reality," the one-natured all-that-is. The putting of language to this test is historically native to poetry; and anyone who treats poetry as the natural course of the mind's natural endeavor to function as a whole mind, its thought-experience the story-substance of a whole speaking, a truth-rapt telling, goes by the visible credit of the name, as

one goes by a street-name on a sign-post, turning into its line of progress as necessarily leading to the site of one's probing interest. As to the anticipation of possibilities of language's yielding fullnesses of speaking, telling, meaning-potency in the breathed or inscribed words: the anticipation is natural, there is implicit in the provisions of language, beyond the spare facility that the commonplace in word-use makes of them, a range of expressive potentiality that does not touch its limit in the professional literary styles that are called, in the aggregate, "prose." Poetry represented the consciousness of possibilities of heightening the expressive powers of language beyond the degrees of literary facility in word-use that may be called "commonplace" in relation to what has been attempted in poetic word-use.

It must be granted to the poetic vision of an expanded verbal expressiveness, suited to the mind's state in expansions of thought-experience beyond the norms of ordinary thinking and speaking activity and outside the bounds of general literary intellectual practice, that it did not of itself foster solemnities of lofty philosophic abstraction in the use of words, or aesthetical refinement of the physical features of words, for effects of extraordinariness in subject and manner of poetic statement—cardinal components of the practice of poetry. Poetic vision of the possibilities of the reaches of the mind in knowledge and understanding, and the reaches of the expressive power of words used in a harmony of truth-intention with the mind's thought-intention, was not, in the genesis of poetry and its taking form in human life as a manifestation of recognition of it as essentially a life of the mind, compromised by commitments to a literary definition of the nature of poetry. Conceptually—which is to say, in its intellectual foundations (which is to say, in the character of spiritual vocation animating it)—the function of poetry remained, in its career as a literary institution, *indefinite*; and it is in the very uncertainty of the objectives of poetry and its proper limiting procedural conventions, according to literary definition of the proprieties of intellectual and linguistic possibility, that is, in the very literary indefinability of poetry, that the relative intellectual and linguistic purity of poetry has inhered. Alas, this purity could not be a source of the development in poetry of a definition of its own of the intellectually and linguistically realizable, according to poetic vision, because it began itself in the freedom of indefinite conception, and then bartered its freedom for a status of relativeness to literature as supportive of it, in its want of an inherent definite principle of self-justification of its own.

At its purest, in its impurity, poetry has adhered more perfunctorily than zealously to the limitations of verbal propriety taken over by it as a placating religiosity from the primitive formalism of utterance disciplining the attraction of the intellectually forbidden in word and thought. It has endeavored to maintain a maximum of freedom from mythopoetic pieties of verbal style and cast of thematic thought, and from prescriptions of its *raison d'etre* not only by the canons of good literature but by those of all the non-literary standards of good intellectual and linguistic performance, and of that jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none, canonical order of values called "art." But the unvarying and invariable existence of poetry in its historical life as part of the general functional course of literature, because of its lacking an internally definite functional identity, has imprisoned it within the general attachment of literature to historical circumstance as its spiritual setting. While the literary possible has never transcended the circumstantially qualified intellectually and linguistically possible, poetry's ideal spiritual over-reaching into the historically impossible has never precipitated itself outside the temporal fields of literary perspective into actual immediacies of the implicit ultimate possible, the ever-immanent potential, in intellectual and linguistic realizations of the humanly possible.

4

I have presented the history of poetry as I have learned it to be, in my learning what poetry was not, from my giving myself to it and taking it unto myself as the emblem and the reality of human hope of redeeming language from subjugation to the exigencies of temporal convenience and subservience to the laws of short-lived literary eternity—the redeeming of language to its unity of nature with the intellectual soul that human beings have in their having *mind*. Without sense of this history, there could be no awareness of the double rôle that poetry has had in human intellectual life (intellectual life as the spiritual entirety of human life of the mind)—the one a literarily defined category of the endeavors of consciousness to encompass the possible in linguistically authenticated knowledge and understanding of the authenticities of being, the other a free range of the personally natural in the endeavors of consciousness as not limited by the literary confining of possibilities of realizing them to the range of the historically reasonable in expectation of the possible in the mind's utmost and language's utmost in matching expressive power. Without an awareness of the double nature of poetry's intellectual identity there could be no attaining by any poet to a comprehension of the doomedness of poetry to insoluble self-

contradictoriness, in its putting of its ideal objective under the protection of the logic of literary objectification. None of the few poets who have left off in being poets with implication of dissatisfaction with poetry itself has gone to the core of the reason of the discovered unsatisfactoriness. The core of the matter is in the poet's initial motivation in the adoption of poetry as a main form of mind-engagement.

The difference between myself and those others is that my adoption of poetry as a form of mind-engagement crucial for my envisagement of my life's possible, as of one reach with the possible implicit in the human concentration of the attributes of being, was that my vistas of expectation, in the adoption of it, were not sealed within literarily drawn horizons of the explicit possible in thought-experience of reality, of the one reality, in the living terms of the reality of being a human being. It took me a little life's-work length of dedication to poetry as the way of engagement in the total possible to learn of the inevitability of arrestation, to some degree in thought and at a proportionate impotence in the wording of it, that had been visited upon not only poets but the human all of those moved to live their being with fidelity to their nature as beings of mind, and to mind's tongue as their own. Our thinking and speaking course had been shrouded in spells of presumption of a doomed fatedness to encountering interminably *some degree* of unbreachable impossibility—spells cast upon human self-belief by the nervous doctrine of a loosely combined religious, philosophical, literary, and culturally generalized intellectual rulership.

The while I pressed my way as poet with confidence in the poetic potential as having an ideal identity with the human personal potential in a not categorically limited possible in articulately realized thought-experience, poetic practice was undergoing, in the peculiarly heightened consciousness of the general engagement in literature of the time, a challenge from the time to justify itself in terms of twentieth-century preoccupation with intellectual up-to-dateness. A spasmodical crisis of anxiety coursed through those years, aggressive effort to manifest intellectual up-to-dateness and perfectly satisfy, nevertheless, the literary canon of discrimination as to what is and is not "poetry." Although I was, from my beginnings as a poet, modern-minded, in awareness of the intellectual date of human life, and my own personal date as a being of mind, I neither early nor late sought in how I wrote poetically to exhibit title to intellectual modernity, or, on the other hand, to press for entitlement of my poems to treatment as conforming to one or another of the forms of poetic performance, whether experimentalist or traditionalist in their leanings, that were allowed literary respectability by twentieth-century dispensers of critical favor.

I kept my orientation as a poet uncomplicated by concern with questions of how

I fitted into contemporary critical mappings of literary contemporaneity, where my poetic work belonged, in the modern scene of poetry-production. I took my bearings from my sense of the existence of a natural relationship between the objective implicit in poetry, of vision of the possibility of fullness of expression of thought-experience at mind's full, free, thought-range, and my personal consciousness of mind's need of such fullness, for the immediate fullness of being of the person whose identity as a person is as a being of mind. In my temporal placement of myself in my engagement in poetry, I was conscious of modernity in the total human context of concern with the yet unachieved envisaged as immediately achievable, rather than in a special context of concern with literary-period modernity.

The modernity of self-conscious period-timing is necessarily a graduated modernity—a historical modernity, it can be called. In recent times I became aware that there had developed, in the ideological chronology of British-born literary-criticism of the last several decades, a sophistication of disdain of the term "modernist" as identifying a tendency in the poetic activity of the first two decades of this century towards new modes of poetic verbal style and compositional form. The adoption of a haughty antipathetic attitude to the term as an offending vulgarization of the special character of the address of poets in the twentieth-century to the problems of poetry took rather long to develop. It was a delayed reaction to the implications of the book that I wrote with Robert Graves as my collaborator, published in 1927, of the title *A Survey Of Modernist Poetry*. The term "modernist" was an appropriate characterization of the stir of consciousness, in poets of the first quarter of the century, of a new time-setting, and of the effort this induced to assure a marked difference in the poetic literature that bred itself in it from that of the preceding century. The term had no other function than the identification of this development. It was a useful term for the spot-lighting of the development in its effective existence as a self-unifying agglomeration of loosely kindred trends. And the book proved a useful critical report on the make-up of the temper of the twentieth-century's pioneer version of "modern poetry."

That book was not a doctrinaire bible of poetic modernisticism, a propaganda endeavor to win favor *en masse* for what it denominated "modernist poetry." The animating attitude of the book to the material as a whole with which it dealt was an interest in the restiveness permeating it all, what it betokened as sensitivity to a call from the new time-setting for something new in the conception of the poetically possible. For myself, as one keenly conscious of there being question in the new time of the very fate of poetry, a main concern was with what the shift in poets' sense of themselves to a new time-location might

betoken as an awakening to the need—the call from the anticipation implicit in poetry—for reaches of thought-experience and language-versedness unfettered by the accumulated self-pridings of poets of the past in variations or improvements upon, or ingenuities of imitation of, prior or coetaneous exhibition of the poetic possible. The inspiring ideal implicit in the existence of poetry had become submerged in the century-on-century self-reduplicating flood of the practice of it. For me, the question as to the upsurging, in the new century, of preoccupation with renovations in poetic practice was: What, how much, in the effort for the new in poetic performance, emanated from profundities of consciousness, in poets of the new century, of the estrangement that had settled into the sense of themselves, as poets, and into that of the poets who constituted their literary ancestry, and into the *materia poetica* that constituted the historical reality, "poetry," from the motive of fullness of utterance of mind's apprehensions at full, with which poetry was ingenerately informed? How much in the effort for the new poetic performance was mere self-assertiveness of poets as citizens of a new time, feeling themselves at liberty to produce a new brand of poetic literature?

My own perception, as a poet, of the fulfillment enfolded in the vision prompted by poetry of the completely possible, in the knowing, understanding, speaking, life of the human being as being of mind, made me conscious of how much was wanting from what should be, by the congruity of this vision with the essential nature of human being, my sense of which had directed my energies of hope into engagement in the possibilities that poetry presented to hope. In the assessing of the "new," in the inaugural phases of twentieth-century poetry, there had to be considerable allowance made for the potential presence, in the midst of all the self-assertive proclivities to mere innovation, of instincts roused to work for a revitalizing of the motive inhering in the existence of poetry, which had diminished to a static principle defensively justifying its existence as a literary necessity.

The underlying and variously sustained theme of *The Survey of Modernist Poetry* was the crisis-condition into which poetry had come of being on the brink of a loss of conscience of the fundamentals of linguistic principle and conscience of the fundamentals of intellectual principle—the partnering principles of the *rational* integrity of poetry. If the excitations of poetic impulse in the new time-setting had strong relation to an alarmed will in poets to perpetuate poetry against dissolution of its character as the proponent of the practical, verbally express potency of mind as the spiritual reader of the meanings of being, and beings—if the will towards poetry of these poets acting as agents of a new poetic dispensation had the quality of a determination upon a *renewal* of poetry's

vitiated fidelity to its foundation faith in reason as a spiritual function of the mind—the new impetus in poetic activity represented morally bonafide concern with poetry as embodying the literarily idealized possibility of verification of the reality of the human degree of being in its sense-making of itself as all-articulate mind.

The Survey of Modernist Poetry left unexplored the field of likelihood stretching ahead from the latter part of the century's second decade of poetic activity. The poetic work of the period dealt with in the book was evaluated in relation to a very liberal discrimination of the difference between a newly enlarged conception of the responsibilities and proprieties of poetic intent and shallow, time-proud motivation-impulse. There was indulgence of innovation, but mere dallyings in individualistic peculiarities of poetic diction and form were not awarded prizes of praise for "modernism"; no hospitality was dispensed to what was irrelevant to the resolution of the problem of what might be realized, within the scope and patterns of the poetic vision of the possible in lovingly worded thought, of the intellectually uninhibited, humanly unlimited possible in the speaking of the live meaning-content of *being*. The book rested at offering a record of the contemporary poetic provision as a basis of expectation of what might follow or not follow, in the century's further course, indicative of the fate of poetry as incorporating an ideal of the good as manifestable in words, and the fate of the human order of being in terms of the significance, in its regard, of the fate of poetry.

Nothing issued from what followed, in the programmatically new literary consciousness of the century's times, related to any determinate development in the crucial moral intertwining of the fate of poetry and the fate of human existence as an inwardly self-intelligent and outwardly real (expressly participant in the total reality—inward and outward—of the existent) order of being. I myself went on, until the late years of the following decade, probing the poetic potential as the way to the determinate fating of itself, of the human order of being, to the defining of the nature of being and of the good according to the truth-intentioned spirit, and rationality of structure, of *language*. Language increasingly took on for me, as I went further in poetry, its intrinsic force as the natural ascendancy of a law of the humanly possible over the primitive divinity of a law of the humanly impossible.

5.

The coverage of *The Survey of Modernist Poetry* was loosely divided between American and British poets, seen as calling for attention under the auspices of

the classification "Modernist." I shall justify the book's treating exclusively of these, besides by my and my collaborator's individual and common interest in and experience of poetic activity within the English language's bounds of poetic practice, by my own special sense of a marked difference between the American and British new-century self-consciousness of poets and that of the poets of other national identity. The difference between American and British poetic (and generally literary, and artistic) affectedness with new-time impulsions of self-liberation from old-time dispositions of mind, postures of feeling, modes of practice, maintained the two sets of new poetic behavior within a single frame, still, of a culturally humane conception of the literarily, poetically, linguistically, permissible. In American poetic activity in the vein of twentieth-century new-timed sensibility, exploration of "new" possibilities in forms of self-assertive preoccupation and expression enlarged upon an already developed general literary propensity in British poetic activity, a reserve of self-protective prudence kept the modernism of individualistic liberties-taking at a low-intensity degree of freedom for self-examining curiosity. In both, the urgencies of innovation enacted themselves within the intellectually respectable field of the new psychological versions of common sense. American poets were daring in their difference from one another. British poets were ingenious in creating a new poetic atmosphere from chosen elements of the early twentieth-century intellectual air and chosen elements of the intellectual spirit of poetic past-times seeming in sympathetic correspondence.

All that was produced, in American and British poetic locales, of the self-conscious time-spirit that was termed "modernist," in the book to which I have been referring, has left little besides ineloquent reverberations of twentieth-century literary history, much of it kept alive in the laboratories of critical academics, particular quantities of it randomly resuscitated for the uses of sentimental allusion of a literate sort. Early twentieth-century ventures in poetic modernism in other national locales—and in generally literary and artistic modernism—were of a go-for-bust recklessness, making war on the culturally humane while offering no alternative to it of a mind-fulfilling possible in works of express sensibility of consciousness of the nature of human being as partaking of the self-intelligence of the general nature of being.

The snobbish prudery of disapproval with which the vaguely grouped circles of British literary criticism of the century's later decades that regarded themselves as its best looked back upon the identification "modernist" (the innocently correct identification made in the *Survey of Modernist Poetry* of the new-time sense of themselves with which many poets of the early decades were

animated) was undoubtedly a manifestation of an awareness of the flattening out in the progress of the British twentieth-century continuum of the upsurgings of new-time self-consciousness that had whetted the ambitions of writers of the earlier periods. "Modern" was made, in later twentieth-century special British self-consciousness with respect to poetry, the authorized critical designation of a stabilized poetry, "modernism" outgrown. An air of purposeful normalness in poetic phrasings, rhythmical and metrical castings, and subject-matter and allusion variety-range, and a doughty democraticness of admixing of what was literarily denominated "everyday speech" with traditionally poetic forms of diction, became the mood-at-large of the poetry by later century British literary ascription termed "modern," with implication of freedom from temporal, period, eccentricity. The actual character of it all is that of endless, unbroken, human and intellectual monotony, all variation, trial of difference, extension of reach of thought and word, held within an arc of possibility strained with narrow tentativeness above the flats of literary instincts of historical self-preservation. Exceptions to this general British poetry-provision are of a somewhat go-for-bust, now out-of-date, daring, an overwrought vigorousness; they fall into place, in this poetry, as examples of the virile, in the make-up of the British literary temperament, to be proud of.

I am following these trails of differentiation in the behavior that the poetries of various twentieth-century cultural quarters have displayed, in responding to the provocation of a new-time consciousness, because the general result of the early rising and working of the consciousness has been a final dissipation of the influence-force of poetry on the human faculties of intellectual hope. The inspiration as which poetry served, through the literary ages, to faith in possibilities of comprehensive intelligence, fulfilled in immediacies of speaking corroboration of its rectitude in the exercise of it, proved finally ineffectual against the influence-forces, in their modern assemblage, of age-on-age of culturally civilized intellectual bargaining (with instinctive purpose to placate still primitively feared Impossibility) for an intellectually advanced but culturally (quasi-spiritually) undangerous Possible. Poetry could never have served as more, in the course of human beings' probing of what it means to be beings of mind, than a reminding vision of the human state as such a state of being, in the midst of the confusion of images of the human being that have been invented for the uses of power or advantage, or the relatively innocuous uses of vanity. I turned from poetry as I knew it in its live identity: a forecasting promise of the nullification of Impossibility, and realization of Possibility as Completeness—but bound to the never-never of historical futurity. There was a threshold to cross. I crossed it.

My commitment to poetry was not to poetry according to the literary representation of its identity in the terms of new-time self-consciousness, of historical up-to-dateness, but to poetry as the mind's conception of its intellectual adequacy ever-present to it in envisagements of the *possible* in full-worded realizations of the essential thought-nature of being. Therefore, the characterizations "modernist" and "modern" had neither terminological fascination nor critical suspectness with me. I was not worried about my or anyone else's literary-period identification or credentials. But concern with their place in time, with their *literary* immediacy, has been the worry-center of the intellectual preoccupations of twentieth-century poets', and, generally, those engaged in some form of cultural productiveness have been troubled with similar anxieties about the relevance of their engagements to their time. The anxiety-about-contemporaneity of English—as distinguished from American-literary orientation manifested itself, in conformity with the tendency of irritable adoption of postures of composure responsive to challenges to definitive position-taking peculiar to the native moral temperament, in what poets and critics of the post-early twentieth-century British literary locales have been terming with increasing complacency "The Movement." If one endeavors to identify the special character of the poetry of the "Movement," in its development and its persistence in the century's further course as a stabilizer of British poetic policy, one finds oneself faced by a canon of endless self-perpetuating intellectual eclecticism as the key to the practical possibilities for poetry in *modern* times.

"Modern," for British literary and general twentieth-century self-consciousness in the later parts of the century, came to signify a vague indeterminateness allowing of variations from a norm itself of undefined variability, but presumed to be the implicit rule of intellectual kindness for those sensibly free of leanings of prejudice. Of course, this intellectual mood, this moderness of sanguine literary seniority to earlier century historical self-consciousness in the area of general literary and particular poetic sensibility, does comprise leanings of prejudice. But the over-all loose signification attached to "modern" is expected to smooth out, in time, all disparities of leaning. A conception of "modern" poetry as an infinite succession of incidents of poems-production keeping alive the name of poetry replaces all earlier notions of new-century poetic newnesses: this process of automatic continuity imparts a ready-made up-to-dateness to all the poetry-displaying incidents.

In comparison with the British twentieth-century course of things poetic, the American has been confusingly ununiform. One can hardly, indeed, speak of an American twentieth-century course of things poetic. The self-assertive in-

sistencies in the American sector of early twentieth-century poetic modernism led into a widespread particularism of poetries of self-assertive force and pattern, intellectually, literarily, disconnected from one another: there was no blending into a common quality of self-assertive national concern for the national state of things poetic, and its repute at least with itself.

The experimental venture of certain members of the Fugitive group of poets, after its disbanding, in the propagation of a doctrine of Southern agrarian culture, had its roots, I believe, in a search for solider ground for their individual poetries than the mere identification of being Southern *poets*. After the subsiding of the episode, the participants concentrated their energies on their individual poetries to their respective capability of self-assertive disconnection. A later flare-up among them of programmatic connectedness under the "New Criticism" banner had its origin in the appeal to a surviving provincial intellectual vanity of the discoursing of British Empson on poetic ambiguity. The new interest resulted from Empson's seizing upon an important mode of textual examination of poems followed in the *Survey of Modernist Poetry*, a serious process of linguistic scrutiny of my providing, and perverting it into a trivially authoritarian rhetoric of critical analysis. My collaborator's later claim of having been the inventor of the book's poems-reading method has not won him lasting credits, as has so much of my thought and its works taken by him into possession—there is a trend of recognition of my being unmistakably the source of the method.

This post-Fugitive project of collective ambition was before long engulfed in the general national particularistic complexity of literary modernism, both the poetry and the criticism content of which was a medley of isolatedly individual productions.

6.

But what of myself, in relation to the account I have given of the self-conscious compulsion in American and British poet and critic activity to manifest twentieth-century intellectual contemporaneity? As a poet in the simple sense of one engaged in doing my expressive utmost to present in poems the suprapersonal essence of personal experiences, and as one, besides, engaged, as I increasingly became engaged, in the testing of the poetic possible as the full of the realizable in the human speaking possible, I did not make of my engagements a venture in construction of an individual literary authorial pile, or, on the other hand, assimilate myself in my work to the producers of some collective entity of literary architecture. My posing for myself a standard of the adequate in

human speaking—and, therefore, in human thinking—that was not derived from the historical content of poetry, but that I thought capable of being met with, through, poetry (with, through, what else, if not poetry?), had the effect of detaching me automatically, even in the initial phase of my poet-and-writer life, from both the sprawlingly busy looseness of American poetic and generally literary production and from the loose compactness of its United Kingdom counterpart (British literary individualism tends not to go beyond a cautious partition into sub-groupings within the collective entity constituted of the separate British island-like literary world).

My position in the general English-language literary consortium was not, has never been, one of self-cultivated detachment. I have had a position of detachment thrust upon me in both the American and the British areas of literary conceiving of the suitable in English-language literary modernity by a difference, in my initial stance as a poet, from the stances of American and British twentieth-century poets. This difference made me an eccentric in respect to what was, actually, an erraticism in their conception of the nature of poetry and, generally, literature, that became for them, and generally for the body of writers subscribing to identification of themselves as of twentieth-century mentality and emotionality, the poetic and literary *status quo*—the proper acceptance of existence in modern human times seen as calling for a peculiar order of attitudes to existence, and to human existence, itself.

The order of attitudes that became the century's mental stamp did not spring into being within the poetic-literary domain of activity, thought, conception. It issued into general cultural circulation from a wide-spreading break-down in the human intellectual imagination produced by the ascendancy of scientific report on the nature of things. The very idea of the universe was shattered by the enlargement of science into a story that little by little should factually cover the case of the manifold everything. The idea of all things as being, together as one not-just "thing" but a spiritual entirety, a reality of living significance within which we had existence as its articulate own, witnesses living the witnessed—the conception of a totality of difficult but perhaps not impossible knowability, that had been the motive force of mind behind the special prognosticative intuitions of poetry and the general imaginative tendency of literature—disappeared from twentieth-century intellectual life. It disappeared with the completeness with which a long-established scene of varied composition, of nature's or human-beings' making, or both, can be stripped of all evocative features of remembrance in a sudden sweep of devastation.

I had, in my writer-beginnings as a poet, and continued to have in all my

thinking and writing activity, what came to be, in the light of twentieth-century literary intellectual evaluation, the peculiarity of functioning with consciousness of presence in a *universe*. This intellectual position of mine, a position naturally mine, personally, and mine as a writer not disrespectful of the attitude-norms of an intellectual *status quo* that was the basis of literature's historic identity and continuity of identity, became, under the auspices of the revised intellectual *status quo* embracing everything to which literary identity was attributable, an irregularity for which neither American nor British twentieth-century literary-criticism characterization had a definition. And this inability to characterize my conception of my personal and writer *location*, because of the comprehensiveness of what I include in the writer-function—seeing it as the exercise of the language-function at its farthest reach of transcending the conventional cultural and linguistic limits of the possible-to-say—has persisted into the century's ninth decade as the basis of the general from period-to-period literary reaction to my work.

The first responses to my poetic work, from editors of the American magazines to which I in its earliest years submitted it, can be described as a pleased recognition of a something in subject-matter and verbal mode capable of simple identification as "originality": the identification subsumed what would in the later course of contact with my poetic work, and in the hardening of twentieth-century general, and especially literary, intellectuality, be given a character of intellectual unplaceability and literary irregularity. In those earliest years of my being a poet, I was welcomed into membership in the group of American poets of the name "The Fugitives"—was regarded by them as an important "discovery." My poetic writing was judged by them to be of a lively inspiration, to have a quality of intellectual vigor, and a spontaneous linguistic fitness, combining stylistic flexibility and control in its patterns of diction. No effort was made by them as a group to read me as, or make me, one of their kind. The association faded, within a few years, into a piece of literary history, with some remnant of significance in the context of literary intellectual history as an encounter between myself as a poet falling outside the identification-categories that served the American form of modern literary sensibility and The Fugitives as a band of poets seeking the distinction of an identity of aristocratic group-separateness from the newly modern national run of things poetic that would incorporate in it a certain temper, a special dignity, that could still claim to be a proper national character. I can be regarded, in this encounter, as sharing with The Fugitives a problem of literary placement with utter difference, in the actual nature of the problem, between them and myself.

I had no want of place in my self-identification, and in my assumption of the

functional identity of poet (extending into the linguistically comprehensive identity of writer). I was in the patent universe, having a human presence in it, a consciously exposed presence to it, living in it in the active state of engaging in what had long been generally literature's, and very especially poetry's, mission to demonstrate to be less than impossible. The specifically poetic, the generalized literary, objective was for me simple to the point of involving a one and only problem for the poet—for any who felt themselves versed in the spiritual potentialities of language. The problem was: did one—or did one not—envisage a fearless, free, putting into utterance all that has being, is in being, to the full of the opening of one's own being to the knowledge that words wait in mind to take into their hold?

I knew the place I had, for my functioning literarily, in the terms of my acceptance of the total given place of being. Until our century, this total place, the universal being-site, even as it gradually dimmed into the shadowy socio-politico contours of a *world*, was at least figuratively the environment of poetic utterance, and intellectual landscape of literary activity in the large. But "world" as the all-place became too *worldly* a site for direct literary location within it, the interests inhabiting it too varied for *literary* interests to hold their traditionally peculiar universe-savoring own in it. By the time the twentieth century had taken on historical growth, literary location had split off into world-like placements mapped outside the contracted world of modern, scientifically de-universalized human consciousness, in sentimental recognition of the spiritual foundations of literature: but literary location was actually sequestered within the compass of this world by a decline in spiritual vigor of dedication become general in activity of the perennially revered identity "literary."

The placement-problem of The Fugitives was the common one of the new literary age: What to do? and Where to go? for the doing of it. The attitude of The Fugitives to the problem was different from that which was becoming the prevalent, the standardized, attitude to it of American literary practice: the individual writer sought a place in a literary world made up of places consisting of individual entities of literature-orientated endeavor—the modernized American literary scheme of things became systematically, where it had previously been spontaneously, pragmatical. The Fugitives longed for something more intellectually decorous, "better," as British literary worldliness of the new age seemed superior by its social quality of national coherence. None of the Fugitives individually, or the group as representing a composite of individual yearnings, solved the problem of finding a formal literary world-frame within which to settle happily upon *What to do* as writers. John Crowe Ransom came the

closest to this kind of writer-composure by adhering to an original disposition to philosophical non-committalism: in all his allying of himself with others in causes of formalizing literary-activity placement, creating patterns of literary-world intellectual decorum, he maintained a private reserve of quizzicality, a self-scrutinizing humor that stripped him to an identity with himself as one who wanted in personal reality to be nothing other than a reasonable man. He was the most typically "American" member of the group, in his desire to "be himself" in what he did literarily—the desire qualified by a humane-minded rejection of the spiritually provincial American reliance on the energies of self-assertion as the surest means of realizing the ends that come first with one. But all the members of the group—myself a newcomer whose contacts with it were not such as to knit myself with the others into family-like connection—strove for writer-identity and placement under the cloud of a problem of literary-world location. I knew no such predicament of choice and decision.

The ratio of possible-impossible was for me not a ratio in terms of a somehow acceptable compromise between existing literary-worldly opportunities for poetic, and general, writer-activity and what I conceived myself fit for and capable of doing as a poet, a person claiming "writing" as a natural personal function and life-occupation. My poetic writing, and my evident personal stance in it, attracted The Fugitives, I judge, by its evident freedom from consideration of worldly and literary-worldly pressures to do a this-or-that, or find residence in an acceptable here-or-there. They equated their elaborate privately devised honor-system with my unhesitating, unpremeditating, immersion of myself—I accepting myself as endowed with a ready writerhood identity and natural-world (universal-setting) location—in the chances of kinship discoverable between my engagement in the impossible that honorable speaking being cannot allow to be impossible and the engagement of others in solemnities of speaking (in writing) as true believers in an ultimate all-sayable. I began my writerhood in the open of my sense of myself as functioning under all the tests there might be of the reaches of the possible in the determinations of words. They began in the shelter of a literary-family world of their own, as protected in it from the inducements to identity and location-finding in the great open spaces of the American early twentieth-century literary world that might compromise their standards of what they wanted to do, and what place to be in, in the doing of it.

The Fugitives were trying to set up conditions for the kind of literary world in which they wished to function; and they were, in this, dreaming wistfully of a kind of social structure of things literarily typified by British literary-world law-like custom. This was a rule of automatic consent by all involved to as much

liberty of individualism in literary activity as did not interfere with an over-all uniformity, designed to accommodate itself to the partner-principle of individualism designed to accomodate itself to *it*. They did not succeed, any, in placing themselves comfortably in the American literary world—eventually, each went cowled, in his taking his place in the American literary stretches, with the *idea* of a suitable literary world as something that lent a distinction of special literary purity to their American-writer status. The element of *control* in the mechanism of British literary-world functioning I have described has had an attraction for others besides The Fugitives. It was this, I think likely, that drew Eliot into the British sphere of writer-functioning: it afforded security from the uncontrolled, free-ranging individualism of American writer-functioning, and kept special influences, such as those of French literary modernism, from taking too serious a hold. Pound himself felt the attraction of traditional organizedness of literary practice in old-world countries—besides that of the developing go-for-bust propensities of old-world literary modernism. (One might think of him as trying to lay down the principles of a coherent, well-organized literary modernism by Americanizing old-world literary niceties and preciosities into a style of disciplined self-assertiveness.)

I myself did not run away from the haphazard American literary succession and varying sum of things. But there was no basis for my having a sense of necessary attachment to the American version of a literary world. The relationship with The Fugitives apart, which itself proved to be upon no distinct common ground of writerhood principle, there lacked, for my absorption in the American version of a literary world, and my accommodating myself to absorption in it, the ingredient in my writer make-up of the kind of intensity of preoccupation with being-a-writer characteristic of typically American writerhood. This is an intensity of preoccupation in the writer with making his writing performances an imprint of himself upon the environing literary scene that he has accepted (according to the fixed professional wont of writers generally in modern literary times) as an entire world-frame of activity, comprising the outer limits, intellectual, moral, spiritual, of all the significance his writing could evoke. No other national literary society is marked by this intensity of writer-preoccupation with self-imprinting as the logical objective of writer-concentration on writing.

7

No other type of association in-the-large of human beings exists that is distinctly resemblant of the American in its having as its basis the principle that to be a human being is something of prime importance. The principle has but a faint

emotional reality as the axiom of national identity—the territorial actuality, America, must be imaginatively visualized, ever, for concrete emblem of nation-actuality. And, as the principle has been cast in political, philosophical and religious terms, there is present in them only vaguest suggestion of a peculiarly American conception of the wise, the right, the good, in human association. There can be said to be an American idea of life. But nothing more definite can be said about the idea than that all the sense in it is focused on the single, generally self-evident fact that to be a human being is something of prime importance. The American idea of life is conscious of a fact converted into a principle. That the idea is not corrupted with ideas of in what this importance consists borrowed from past notions of it need not be regarded as a miraculous escape from the inevitabilities of imperfection considered implicit in human character, human thought. The American idea of life has the purity of untroubledness about what the prime importance may be that inheres in the fact of being a human being—which has the unfortunate effect of stupefying those possessed of it into a persuasion that all the problems of the heretofore and the elsewhere of human life lie off-shore to the American dispensation of understanding.

The general American inclination in thinking on what there exists for the human mind to know and understand has been to stop just where the sense of there being something of prime importance in being human draws a line of time across the path of what seems an endless indeterminate sameness of the state of being human. The characteristic intensity of American-mindedness, the urgent immediacy, peculiar to American thinking, of consciousness of the fact of being human as having implications seeming of an almost unthinkably extensive scope, had had issue only in a self-confidence in the fact that does not try itself out in projection into the possibilities it is assumed to embrace. The intensity of the consciousness uses itself over and over as a barrier against desperation. The social cheer of American life is, thus, a continual back-turning on an ever-deferred broaching of the yet unexplored part of the fact and the experience of being human, a collective privacy that does not break down either into privately or publicly enjoyed illuminations of the yet unidentified importance and significance of being human.

The general course of American life illustrates in amplitude, I believe, my descriptions of the effect of this keeping at halt, in strenuosities of diversified exertion, the intuitions of an importance belonging to the fact of being human of universal reference. That I use the term "universal" to indicate *my* sense of the actual reach of these intuitions, I feel a right to do by my likeness, in my

sense of my energies of human being, to that common to those born and upreared in an environment to a large extent free, in comparison with other national environments, of governing presumptions of the nature of the human state of being. But there is also, in my use of the term, a reliance on the difference I know, in my mind's will from the historically developed will of generalized American-mindedness, towards the projection of the energies of human-being into areas of knowledge and understanding prehistorically and historically denied to human possibility. This difference has contributed to there being an even more marked disregard of my poetic and other writing, in the American literary environment, than that of the deliberate inattention to which it has been subjected in other literary environments.

The difference between the prevailing trends of mindedness in twentieth-century literary performance and the intellectual disposition of my writing, in its whole character, is centered in my mind's will's being given over to a purpose to imprint upon human actuality the fact of a universal actuality opened to elucidation in the language of human actuality by the responsive presence of the human actuality in the universal. This is a will operating in a scene of purpose absolutely removed from the scene of purpose of the self-imprinting operations (the imprinting of human actuality upon human actuality) that became the American type of twentieth-century versions of the literarily possible, and from the scene of every other type of twentieth-century engagement in the possible. From the account of the nature of this difference there should not be omitted reference to the bearing of my identity as a woman upon my functioning in my identity as a human being. How the factor of access to the alleged impossible for the human mind figures in my will of mind, and my thought-experience generally, has crucial connection with my sensibility as a woman of the presence of the human actuality in the universal actuality. The minds of men develop such sensibility as women instinctively possess by the overcoming of instincts of defensive proprietorship-sense of their human actuality; the records of human thinking are heavily marked with emphasis and counter-emphasis in relation to this conflict between masculine instinct and sensibility transcending it, the forms of thought produced by the conflict descending from age to age as the generally natural in the ways of the human mind.

Sensibility of universal actuality as of intimate meaning for human actuality is not of an order to require an overcoming of instinct; it belongs generically to the human instinct of the interpresence of human actuality and universal actuality. I have always steered away from raising question of the effect of the fact

of my woman identity in the critical antagonism visited upon my work, and from feministic militancy in approach to questions of sexual differentiation in matters of literary pertinance calling for intellectual evaluation wanting critical principle, not feminine suspicion, for my instrument of judgement. But here I adduce for noting, among considerations as to why my mind's will as exemplified in my thought's courses, has moved, and moves, as it has, and does (my work widely viewed as disparate from all twentieth-century literary norms), the connaturalness of my engagement in endeavors to discover the full extent of my mind's possible in thought-experience possibility and my mind's being the mind of me, in my identity as a woman. My uninhibited acceptance of my woman's sensibility of the presence of the human actuality in the universal confers uninhibited appreciation of the truth-potential of the language of human actuality.

Gerald Burns

from A BOOK OF SPELLS

A green light. The Eight-Oh bar. Greenery
or Rose neon less than orange or lilac
bodied in air so things feel closer
not from warmth but fighting a thinness
one may choose for a bar (and cut with rose around the clock).
Loves and loaves, to reduce all but fishes to baking
as I thought (before I was in Ireland) a fry includes fish
whereas bacon or sausage will be operative. James
is not mine in spite of knowing Jameses, the one
in the Michigan museum, young, looking like Ezra Pound
the white forelock there but not yet all the insolence
my sympathy's for him later, when he wished more anatomy.
Paint may happen to exhibit, as cummings
inept with oil does thirties portraits
(the face from two angles, nose turned, eyes front)
with the floppy hat like Kennedy's at Hogarth
or by his thinly painted flowers and vase, more white
and yellow for the petals to be violent.
There were, walking to the bank, red flowers. Walking closer to see
(having admired the extreme hot red) thick stalks, cut ones and dying
the color faked—a pink almost magenta overlain with red-orange.
A little book of Carew or someone Love Songs bound in gilt

wanted to be wrapped. Even unslip-cased
it would have been a widemouth puppet snaffling the whispered
bits, stroppings of a knife where syllables meet
and another listens, mouth only a little more shut.
This group. Spray it white, it becomes classic, gray
a Boucher garden piece, deathly cupid audience
the air before the tree or what spills invisibly
from fountain "lip" the air loving souls inhabit.
Cezanne looks at me from this book, the decision
to glue him in (the baldheaded, in the Phillips) the
reproduction too ruddy and the rough coat, oh, in the original—
Lynette's with blond hair and khaki top coveted.
That lovely tortoiseshell standing tea with a little milk in can get
like—what, the rock formed from dried mud, later mud
forcing into the cracks, cut, polished
a floor of it, I think hexagonal.
Arabesque as elements in Kells or columns
of porphyry in Washington madonnahouses, linger
the crucifix with black wood, tongue turned to silver.
The photographer says with a manner so gentle
it's odd that my face should be hard or harsh.
One thinks of monks round from mutton caught with
edges like parchment; grapes are theology.
Lately unpeeling shrimp to be dipped
in red sauce, the sections in the hand like almond
skins from the blanching pan, things done to things
pork, hazelnuts in apple, liver dumplings, Tokay.
One body on a couch, merely digesting, is lonely enough
or the Irish model they put on Moore's Confessions straddling a
sofa all satin white-pink lady hair blond
the charm of it her finding the posture so possible.
Milkmaids abound, and give you a bit of milk for a bit of fish.
Fleshing out is no good, the historical Socrates

more amiable from our knowing the barley bun he ate
cloth, his apron he could throw over his head
are these meetings as in Borrow, and was it really millet?

Barrett Watten

PROGRESS

Thought in the light of useless
Intelligence,
rabbits jump
Into machine to become hats
As the film runs backwards. . . .

To be understood as a statement
It must also be understood.
Not that I can think that I
Think,
every twenty seconds. . . .

A complete thought,
but behind
These mannequins is not you
But a medial arena in which
The world is peripheral. . . .

To an act,
and stars are fixed

Not in a heaven of reversal
Around each of these states
But on an uneven surface. . . .

A train arrives at a connection
With the steamer at Harwich,
Calm seas meaning an absence
Of storms by connective,
if. . . .

Then there have been no storms
Or there will be a passage
And passengers will arrive
Not before leaving,
Burma Shave. . . .

Signs pass in sequence,
trucks
Transport two tons of glass
In a transparent illusion,
A statement stands by itself. . . .

To indicate large-scale complex
Thought of,
what I want is
The figure of invention as
Compensation for private speech. . . .

Rocks thrown at panes of glass
Metrically,
sound carrying
The duration of the street,
Because a face had grimaced. . . .

Not to die of pre-impact terror
But an executioner suddenly
Feels a resolve to slacken
In a game,
a possible outcome. . . .

Expressing a victory over time
At the time of victory,
as
Any action is a probability
Of its being the winning move. . . .

I must go through this machine
In order to be born,
boxing
Gloves put in face yielding
To nipples in baby's mouth. . . .

Needing support from elsewhere,
Else an anonymous gesture.
This is the machine,
an X
Or network of concrete fibers. . . .

I decide to turn off at Y Road,
That is a decision.
Girders
Built by aggressive erectors
To make superstructure a base. . . .

For what comes next,
stability
Of terms sets in by analogy.
Between piles of rocks are
Long shadows as the sun sets. . . .

Say I call this shadow a thing,
A harbor cruise at Newport
Moving away from the sun
In a diagonal,
Watermelon Man. . . .

Rolls between reflecting walls
Lining a road,
patterns of
Identical squares by design,
A good photograph is a *winner*. . . .

A channel specifies breakwater
And boats,
room to float in
For the elite of Rhodesia,
Meaning discovers a method. . . .

A desire to write as inculcated
By a writer alone in a room
Only if you can read this
To produce myself,
a dialogue. . . .

Fixing a voice as it coheres
On the page,
to be adjusted
I go away and return later
A distance that equals results. . . .

You are only because you occur
And that is a true thought
Because it is there to find
Cities behind access,
depth. . . .

But only in depth of questions
Put to a vacu-formed model
In Anaheim as the province
Of the poem,
the sun reappears. . . .

Shadows move 360° around a room,
A better picture of dread
In atoms of congealed mist
Than I can speak,
a vocabulary. . . .

The system *BW* is the connection
Of these ideas with words,
The Low Countries disappear
As smog melts icecap,
water. . . .

Anything named is to be tilted,
The air mixes roughly,
birds
Point in the same direction,
Trees stand out in relief. . . .

Around each of these states is
A periphery of mixed states
Each with its own semantics,
South America,
a huge cloud. . . .

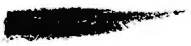
I reject a symbol for pig-iron
Production along the Volga
Visited by Lumumba on tour
In a gondola of coal,
fused. . . .

In the heart of a blast furnace
As a word,
meanwhile voices
Urge syntagma of sightseers
Into barges for the trip down. . . .

To jump from a 13-storey hotel
And assume a net,
as proof
That the way things work is
Not a projection of syntax. . . .

Excite I a map of my position
By means of lines,
adding
The date to a list of days,
With astronomical slowness. . . .

(An excerpt from a book-length work)



John Yau

THE VIEW FROM 166 AVENUE A: THE DRAWINGS OF ANTON van DALEN

In the late 60's Anton van Dalen visited the photographer Weegee, who was living in impoverished circumstances near Times Square. Weegee was by then a largely forgotten man. What inspired van Dalen to make the visit was Weegee's book, *Naked City*. This selection of photographs Weegee had taken for newspapers—he was the first to capture instances of urban violence—reinforced van Dalen's desire to record what he saw on the streets of New York. It was a desire he would start to bring to fruition in 1975, five years after he moved to Manhattan's Lower East Side with his wife and two young children.

Anton van Dalen was born in Amstelveen, Holland, in 1938. Among his earliest memories are bombed-out and gutted buildings, grim reminders of world War II. From 1952 to '54 he attended a graphics art school in Amsterdam. Later that year his family emigrated to Toronto, Canada. For the next decade van Dalen worked at a succession of jobs: in a wallpaper factory tracing patterns, art director of a leftist political magazine, designer of graphics and animated sequences for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He also began exhibiting in various Canadian galleries by the early 60's.

However, like many other artists, van Dalen felt the tug of New York's energetic art world and moved there in 1967. Among the inspirations behind his decision were artists such as Andy Warhol, whose work was influenced by his training in graphics. While van Dalen had much in common with the Pop artists, both in his education and work experience, his art evolved along a different path. If we notice only the similarities van Dalen shares with his Pop Art

counterparts, his use of graphics, for example, we miss what engages him, the focus of his art.

Van Dalen is a diarist. His paintings, drawings, and shadow boxes are records of his life, both at home and in his neighborhood. Utilizing his graphics background, van Dalen has over the years developed a series of stylized motifs and images of himself, his family, pets, and the stark urban landscape they inhabit. Although I am concentrating only on the drawings he has made of his neighborhood, I do not wish this narrowing of focus to suggest that the rest of his art is not of equal accomplishment.

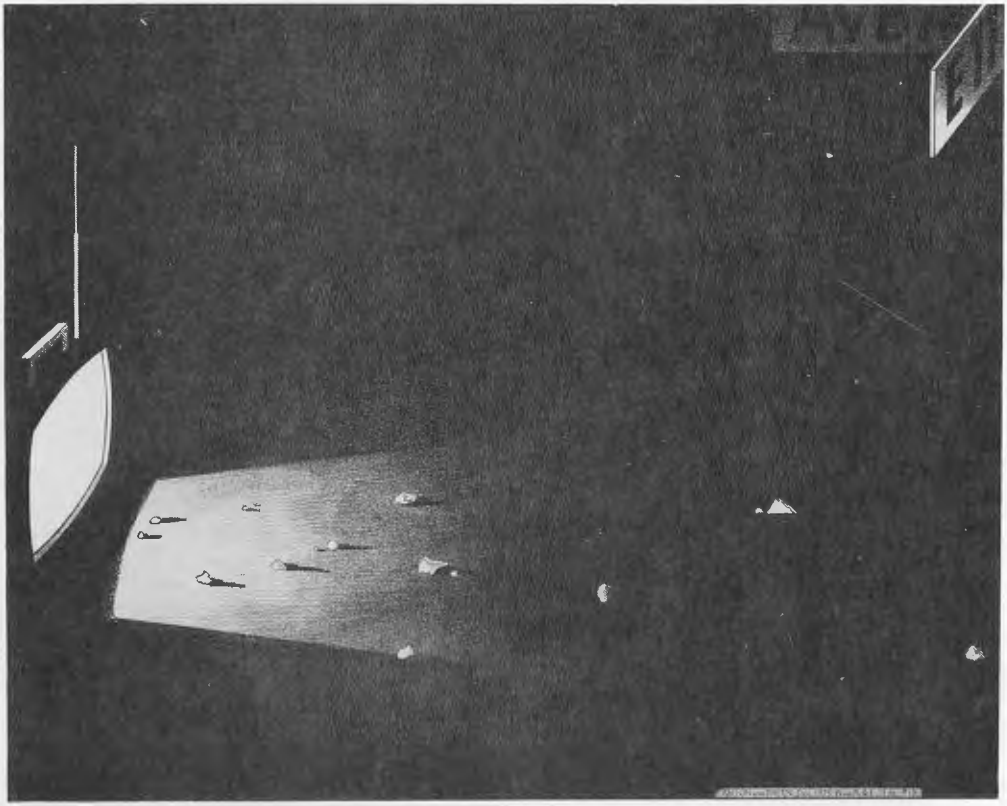
When van Dalen started hitting his stride in the early 70's, he had already decided that Pop Art's ironies and Minimalism's knowing dumbness were not for him. What gratification could they offer to someone homesteading on the Lower East Side, one block north of Tompkins Square? The art world's solipsism was out of sync with the precariousness of van Dalen's life. To be ironic about the banalities of American culture is to be an insider, someone who speaks from a privileged position. With his graphics background, van Dalen was in the perfect position to fit in, and he chose not to. At the same time, he did not, like Charles Bukowski, say, make his position as an outsider the focus of his art.

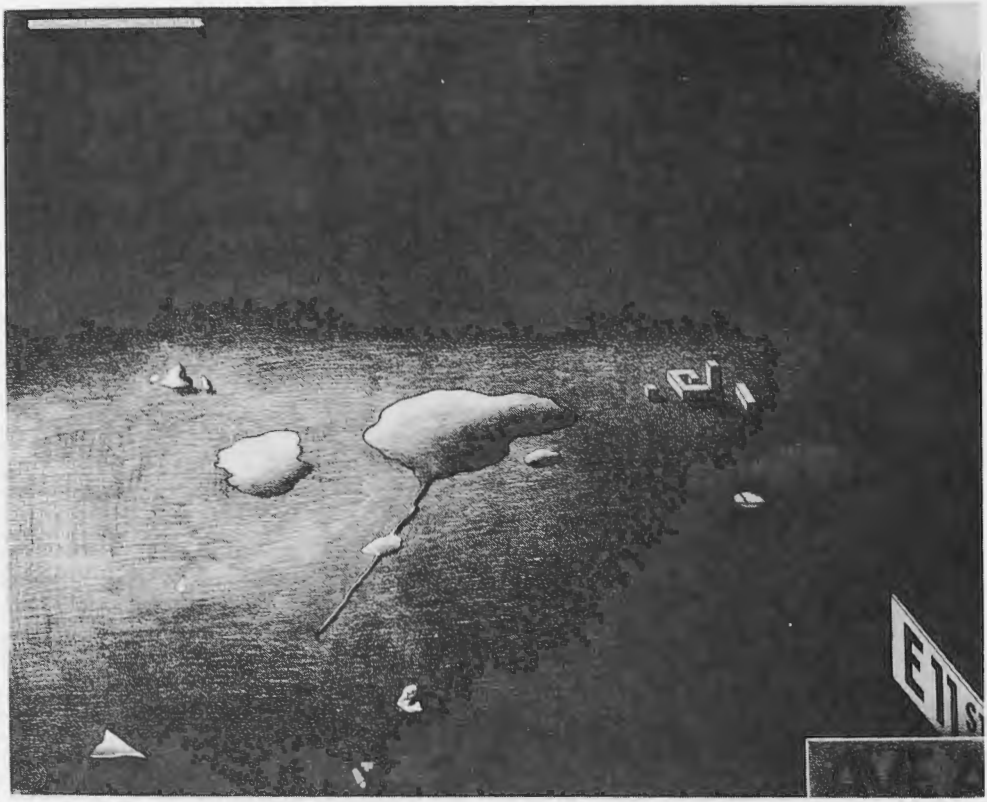
In his drawings, it is always somewhere between midnight and dawn. The view is angled down: we are either looking out the window or standing on the street, staring at what is lying in front of us or straight ahead. The scene is static, as if time was suspended. To introduce time into these drawings is to begin and finish the narrative. What the drawings reinforce is our sense of voyeurism, the curiosity we all have about what goes on in other parts of the city. Yet they are the opposite of *People* magazine.

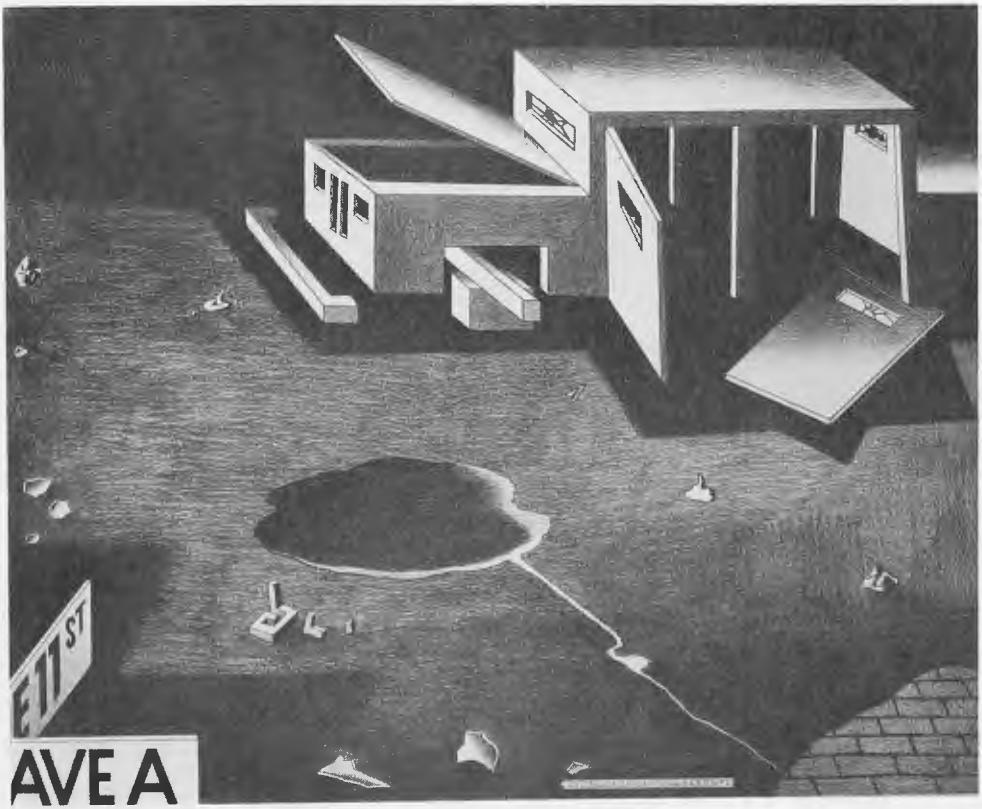
Like a long empty street at night, the drawings are fascinating and desolate, sensuous and bleak. Van Dalen's innocence is a knowing one. An abandoned car, a television illuminating a littered street, a puddle in front of us: these are some of the waste products of our society. To draw is to make a series of marks, much like the outline that traces where the murdered man once lay. Van Dalen is compelled to give evidence. He has a strong regard for geometry and a need to indicate exactly on what streets the event occurred. Everything is rendered in cooly detatched terms. Otherwise, he might be accused of trying to prejudice the jury.

Anton van Dalen

Photo credits: eeva-inkeri, Linda Impastato



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Alejandra Pizarnik

Translated from the Spanish by Susan Pensak

from ABOUT THE BLOODY COUNTESS

The criminal does not make beauty;
he himself is authentic beauty.

SARTRE

Valentine Penrose has collected documents and accounts about a real and unusual character: the Countess Bathory, murderer of 650 girls.*

An excellent poet (her first book carried a fervent preface by Paul Eluard), she has not separated her poetic gift from her precise erudition. Without altering painfully obtained real dates, she has rearranged them as a kind of vast and beautiful prose poem.

The sexual perversion and dementia of the Countess Bathory are so blatant that Valentine Penrose dissociates herself from them to concentrate exclusively on the convulsive beauty of the character.

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*Valentine Penrose, *Erzébet Bathory: La Comtesse Sanglante*, Paris, 1963.

It is not easy to illustrate this kind of beauty. Valentine Penrose has succeeded, however, for she plays admirably with the esthetic values of this gloomy tale. Erzebet Bathory's *subterranean reign* is inscribed in the torture chamber of her medieval castle: there the sinister beauty of nocturnal creatures is absorbed in a silence of legendary pallor, demented eyes, hair the sumptuous color of ravens.

A well known philosopher included screams in the category of silence. Screams, panting, imprecations, form a "silent essence," which, in this cellar, is malefic. Seated on her throne, the countess watches torture and listens to screams. Her old and horrible servants are silent figures bringing fire, knives, needles, prods; torturing girls, later burying them. Like the prod or the knives, these ancients are instruments of a possession. This somber ritual has a single silent spectator.

CLASSICAL TORTURES

Fruits purs de tout outrage et
vierges de gerçures,
Dont la chair lisse et ferme
appelait les morsures!

BAUDELAIRE

Except for some baroque interferences such as "the Iron Maiden," death by water or the cage, the countess adhered to a monotonously classical style of torture that might be summarized like this:

Several tall, beautiful and resistant girls were chosen—their ages varied from 12 to 18 years old—and dragged to the torture chamber where the countess waited, dressed in white on her throne. Once their hands were tied, the servants whipped them until the skin was torn off their bodies and the girls transformed into *tumefact wounds*; they applied red hot pokers; they punctured the wounds; they performed incisions with razors (if the countess got tired of hearing the screams they sewed up their mouths; if some girl fainted too soon she was assisted by having paper soaked in oil burn between her legs). The blood sprang like a geiser and the white dress of the nocturnal lady was turned red. And so much so, that she had to go to her room and change into another (what was she thinking during this brief interruption?). The walls and the ceiling were also dyed red.

The lady didn't always remain idle while the rest of them bustled and hurried about her. At times she collaborated, and then, with great impetus, she tore off their flesh—in the most sensitive places—using tiny silver tweezers, applied red hot spoons and flatirons to the soles of their feet, she lashed them (in the course of a journey she ordered that a girl who had just died be held up on her feet and continued lashing her even though she was dead); she also made several of them die with ice water (an invention of her witch Davulia consisted of immersing a girl in cold water and leaving her drenched all night). Finally, when she got sick she had them brought to her bed and she bit them.

During her erotic crises, obscenities destined for the tortured ones escaped from her lips. Coarse imprecations and wolf howls were her expressive forms while, inflamed with passion, she covered the tenebrous circuit. But nothing was more terrifying than her laughter. (Summary: the medieval castle; the torture chamber; the tender girls; the old and dreadful servants; the beautiful hallucinator laughing from her perverse ecstacy provoked by another's suffering.)

. . . her last words, before slipping into the final swoon, were: "More, still more, harder!"

The day was not always innocent, the night guilty. During the daylight hours, young seamstresses brought dresses for the countess, and this was the occasion for numerous scenes of cruelty. Infallibly, Dorko found defects in the garments and selected two or three guilty ones (at this moment the lugubrious eyes of the countess began to shine). The little seamstresses' punishment—and that of the young servants in general—allowed for variations. If the countess was in one of her exceptional days of goodwill, Dorko was limited to undressing the guilty ones who continued working naked, under the countess's gaze, in the rooms full of black cats. The girls endured this painless sentence with distressed consternation as they would never have believed in its actual possibility. Unconsciously, they must have felt terribly humiliated, since their nudity inducted them into a kind of animal time heightened by the "human" presence of the perfectly dressed countess who contemplates them. This scene makes me think of Death: the one in the old allegories; the protagonist of the Dance of Death. Nudity is appropriate for Death. So is the incessant contemplation of the creatures dispossessed by her. But there is more: the sexual swoon forces us into

gestures and expressions of dying (palpitations and heavy breathing as in agony; sighs and groans wrested by the paroxysm). If the sexual act implies a kind of death, Erzebet Bathory needed the visible death, elemental, brutal, in order to be able to die, on her part, of this figurative death that becomes orgasm. But who is Death? It is the Lady who consumes and devastates however and wherever she wants. Yes, and this is, moreover, a possible definition of the Countess Bathory. No one ever really wants to grow old, that is: to die. Perhaps that is why she represented and embodied Death. Because, how can Death die?

Let us return to the little seamstresses and servants. If Erzebet awoke irascible, she did not content herself with living pictures but:

To the one who had stolen a coin the same coin was paid . . . red hot from the fire, which the girl had to clutch in her palm.

To the one who had talked a lot during working hours, the countess herself sewed up her mouth or, conversely, opened her mouth and stretched it until the lips were torn off.

She also used a poker, with which, arbitrarily, she burned cheeks, breasts, tongues . . .

When those punished were executed in Erzebet's room it became necessary, at night, to spread great quantities of ash around her bed so that the noble lady could cross the vast pools of blood without difficulty.

THE MIRROR OF MELANCHOLY

All is mirror!

OCTAVIO PAZ

. . . *she lived in front of her great somber mirror, the famous mirror whose model she had designed herself* . . . It was so comfortable that it offered some projections upon which the arms could rest so that one could remain before it for several hours without tiring. We can surmise that having thought to design a mirror, Erzebet sketched the plans for her home. And now we understand why only the most captivatingly sad music of her gypsy orchestra or the dangerous hunting parties or the violent perfume of magic herbs in the witch's shed or—

above all—the flooded cellars of human blood could kindle something like a living aspect in the eyes of her perfect face. Because no one has more thirst for earth, blood and brutal sexuality than these creatures that inhabit cold mirrors. And on the subject of mirrors: rumors about the countess's homosexuality could never be clarified, not knowing whether it concerned an unconscious tendency or whether, on the contrary, she accepted it naturally, as one more right that belonged to her. Essentially, she lived submerged in an exclusively feminine sphere. There were only women in her nights of crime. Some details then are obviously revealing: for example, in the torture chamber, in the moments of maximum tension, she herself used to thrust a flaming taper into the victim's genitals. There are also testimonies that speak of a less solitary lust. One servant affirmed that an aristocratic and mysterious lady dressed as a young man used to visit the countess. On one occasion she discovered them together, torturing a girl. But whether they shared pleasures other than the sadistic isn't known.

I continue with the theme of the mirror. Although it doesn't have much to do with *explaining* this sinister figure, it is necessary to pause on the matter of what was responsible for the ills of the 16th century: melancholy.

An unchanging color governs the melancholic: his interior is a space the color of mourning; nothing and no one transpires there. It is a scene without ornamentation where the inert ego is assisted by the ego that suffers from this inertia. The latter wishes to free the prisoner, but any attempt fails as Theseus would have failed if, besides being himself, he had been the Minotaur as well; to kill him, then, would have required killing himself. But there are fleeting remedies: sexual pleasures, for example, can, for a brief time, erase the silent gallery of echos and mirrors that is the melancholic soul. And more than that: to the extent of being able to illuminate that precinct in mourning and transform it into a kind of little music box with figures of vivid and joyful colors that dance and sing delightfully. Later, when the fuse is burned out, it will have to return to motionlessness and silence. The little music box is not a gratuitous method of comparison. I believe that melancholy is, finally, a musical problem: a dissonance, an off rhythm. While *outside* everything happens with the vertiginous rhythm of a cascade, *inside* there is an exhausted slowness of one drop of water falling on the next. So that that *outside* observed from the melancholic *inside* becomes absurd and unreal and constitutes "the farce we all have to perform." But for an instant—whether it be through a savage music, or some

drug, or the sexual act in its maximum violence—the slowed down rhythm of the melancholic does not only come to agree with the external world, but surpasses it with an unspeakably happy excess; and the ego vibrates animated with delirious energies.

To the melancholic time is manifested as a suspension of its passing—actually, there is a passing, but its slowness evokes the growing nails of the dead—which precedes and continues the fatally ephemeral violence. Between two silences or two deaths, the prodigious and fleeting velocity, clothed in varying forms that go from innocent intoxication to sexual perversions and even to crime. And I think of Erzebet Bathory and of her nights whose rhythm measured the screams of adolescents. The book that I am glossing in these notes carries a portrait of the countess: the beautiful and somber lady looks like the allegory of melancholy shown in the old engravings. I want to keep in mind, likewise, that in her epoch a melancholic meant one possessed by the devil.

EXTREME MEASURES

. . . la loi, froide par elle-même,
ne saurait être accessible aux
passions qui peuvent légitimer
la cruelle action du meurtre.

SADE

For six years the countess murdered with impunity. In the course of those years, the darkest rumors about her had not ceased to flow. But the Bathory name, not only illustrious but actively protected by the Hapsburgs, terrified the likely informants.

By 1610 the king had the most sinister reports—along with proofs—about the countess. After long vacillations he decided to take extreme measures. He entrusted the mighty palatine Thurzo to investigate the melancholy acts at Csejthe castle and to punish the guilty one.

Thurzo arrived at the castle unannounced, accompanied by his armed men. He found, in the cellar, disorganized from the bloody ritual of the night before, a beautiful mutilated corpse and two girls in agony. That is not all. He drew

in the stench of corpses; he looked at the bloodstained walls; he saw "the Iron Maiden," the cage, the instruments of torture, the vats of dried blood, the cells—in one of them a group of girls who were waiting their turn to die and told him that after many days of fasting they had been served a certain roasted meat that had belonged to the beautiful bodies of their dead companions . . .

The countess, without denying Thurzo's accusations, declared that *all that was her right as a noblewoman of high rank*. To which the palatine responded: . . . *I condemn you to perpetual imprisonment inside your castle*.

In his heart, Thurzo would have said that the countess ought to be beheaded, but such an exemplary punishment would have excited the reprobation not only of the Bathorys but of nobles in general. Meanwhile, a notebook was found in the countess's room covered in her handwriting with the names and particular signs of her victims, which there totaled 610 . . . As for Erzebet's attendants, he indicted them, they confessed to incredible acts, and they died in the bonfire.

The prison rose up around her. The doors and windows of her room were walled in. An abject grill was installed in one wall through which food could be passed to her. *And when all was completed four scaffolds were erected in the corners of the castle to signal that there lived one condemned to die*.

Thus she lived for more than three years, almost dead from cold and hunger. She never evinced repentance. She never understood why they condemned her. On August 21, 1614, a chronicler of the epoch wrote: *She died toward nightfall, abandoned by everyone*.

She wasn't afraid, she never trembled. Therefore, no compassion or emotion or admiration for her. Only a staying in suspense at the excess of horror, a fascination for the white dress that turned red, for the idea of an absolute licentiousness, for the evocation of a silence starred by screams where everything was the image of an unacceptable beauty.

Like Sade in his writings, like Gilles de Rais in his crimes, the Countess Bathory reached, beyond all limits, the final depth of wantonness. She is one more proof that the absolute freedom of the human creature is horrible.

Clayton Eshleman

A NOTE ON BERNARD BADOR'S POETRY

Bernard Bador's poetry to date is surely one of the most unique bodies of work to have been influenced by a range of French poetry that begins with Lautremont, passes through Tzara and the various Surrealist strategies of the 20s and 30s, and, for Bador, culminates in the poetry of St. John Perse. While Bador acknowledges Perse as his most prominent predecessor, in the poetry of the latter it is as if Perse's galleons of light and renewal are suddenly sucked down into the still, black sheen of a petrified whirlpool. Bernard Bador's poetry evokes faceless lakes of stillbeing, grids of flashing lesions, and a garroted apocalypse resplendent with repugnant urges. There is an appetite for slivers here, a special morbidity that recalls the sensibilities of the German poets Georg Trakl and Gottfried Benn (especially the Benn of the lugubrious and slashing *Morgue* poems), where one finds such images as mice building a nest in the belly of a little girl whose murdered corpse was left in a ditch.

If such an image were to appear in a Bador poem, even the consistency of natural disintegration would be warped. The mice might be pregnant with flies, and the little girl, still alive (like one of Hans Bellmer's violated waifs), might be watching the mice, gagged with a cross of excrement. Anticipation of natural event in Bador is always rudely detoured, but at the point that conflicting images start to melt into senselessness, meaning again raises its head, even if wearing its own brain like a perverse tiara.

By locating Bador's writing in a vein that is more Eastern European than French or even German (the world of Vladimir Holan in contrast to that of Paul Eluard), I am actually moving toward the poet's own roots. Bernard Bador is not merely

of Hungarian ancestry, but a descendant of the noble Bathory family, which not only included governors and princes of 16th and 17th century Transylvania, but in those gloomy mountains drained of light from whose folds issued werewolves and mandrakes, the Countess Erzsébet Báthory (1560-1614), a one woman "death camp," who is on record as having hideously tortured and slaughtered over 600 virgins in order to renew her youth by bathing in their blood.

While Bador can hardly be said to have been dominated by a particular ancestor who lived 400 years ago, the coagulated and demonic power in Erzsebet's image appears to have influenced, or flown into, his immediate background so as to effect the nature of his soul, and thus his poetry. I am not one to smirk at the possibility that unappeased, "hungry ghosts" continue to travel the branchings of a family tree until finding a food source, or release, in a particular descendent.

In Bador's poetry at large, and, as I will point out, particularly in his title for this selection, I think it is possible that Erzsébet's seemingly unappeasible hunger for an eroticized mayhem has subsided—as water might in a landscape, leaving the eroded shapes that make up this poetry. Or to put it slightly differently: such hunger has here taken on the form of static, compact stanzas that as their contents are examined begin to resemble plates of cold funeral meats. I can perfectly well imagine Erzsébet's psyche fluttering about these stanzas, nibbling here, sipping there, finding enough death to preoccupy and distract her from what must have seemed to be an endless, ravenous flight through Bathory/Bador progeny.

One reason that I feel this way is that there is no sense of personal experience in Bernard Bador's poetry. The experience is ancestral. Shafts of dusty light reach back to migrations and caravans, to Buddhistic and Hinduistic images, which is to say: a sense of the universe is present. However, it is present as detritus. In contrast to the world of Perse, in which event is always contoured with the rainbow hues of so many stories, in Bador there is incessant entropic closure. Each stanza is an orphan, a little isolated isle, with only possible ties to the one that is found before or behind it. Momentary evocations of grandeur are abruptly doublecrossed by torture, disembowelment, and abortion. Reading him is like watching little pieces being broken off from stories and collaged in such a way that omnipotency and impotency are like grooved pipes that screw into each other perfectly.

What makes these poems unique is the way in which they utilize various Surrealist strategies (especially black humor, Objective Hazard, and the estrangement of sensation) without edging in under the canopy of an established Surrealist voice. The extent to which there is any voice at all is questionable. It might be more accurate to say that these are voiceless, breathless poems, poems in which the words do not seem to be uttered, rhythmless words, words more like bric-a-brac or flea market finds. At the same time these words are highly self-conscious of the way they sound. While poems do "open" and "close," the cuts and cauterizations in discrete stanzas are more significant than any thematic development.

The image of sea urchin harakiri, of a sea urchin inflicting death upon itself, using its spines as medieval Japanese samurai ritually disemboweled themselves, has an odd resonance with one of Erzsébet Báthory's most notorious contraptions, her custom-made clockwork Iron Maiden which she herself designed.

By touching the necklace of encrusted stones that ran in a loop down over the chest, the victim set everything in motion. From the interior of the flesh-color painted iron figure would issue the noise of moving clockwork. Arms would raise and embrace whoever was in reach; where the painted breasts were, two shutters slid sideways, the chest opened, and five daggers slowly emerged, stabbing the girl clasped in the embrace. As other gems in the necklace were pressed, the arms fell away and the eyes clicked shut. The girl's blood was collected in a pot and then poured over the Countess who sat upright in an armchair permanently installed in the underground chamber.

Bador's sea urchin chamber tropes Erzsébet's "virgin press," with the exception, of course, that the image of sea urchin harakiri does not imply a victim other than the sea urchin itself. But if we think of "sea urchin harakiri" as a way of processing images, then the world of the past, the migrations and caravans etc., become Bador's virgins. What runs into the sea urchin's catchment, or better, what this poet pours over us in a gleeful mockery of his aunt's absurd obsession are "cadaver cracks in the lotus pond," "predatory shipwrecks," "a caterpillar laying the droppings of our orphan cries," as well as "decapitated stones," and "mincemeat swarming with scabs."

Bernard Bador

from SEA URCHIN HARAKIRI

Translated from the French
by Clayton Eshleman

PROGRESS

Jacaranda blindings
heightened by summer's ponderous cymbals.

The melody slinks off to die
under a rolling-mill of potato bugs,
ardent myosoti spouses.

Under the flashings,
faceless sucklings
are flaying the dancers.

The turbulent macaw mutism
is quartered on a wheel of main-jibs
swollen with bear bites.

Tristan Tzara tramples the sacred wells
of the peacock butterflies
scythed by shamrock machetes.

At the call of the termite totems,

pastel blue moray eels
begin to lay tides,
popping sleigh-bells
under the murmuring of heraldic sables.

Ah charisma of deluges!
Hand-to-hand of turgescent mud
into which asphyxiated
walruses are plunging their tusks.

CADAVER CRACKS IN THE LOTUS POND

The sun concludes
in the fountain of tablas,
a lacework of gems bedizened with bones
rusting under the drunken iodine of the idols.

At the call of the lavendars,
doubt encircles the migratory dusks,
serene mutilations before the port.

From Varanasi to Jaangira
a sadhu hypnotizes the Ganges,
a paralysis of flowers and cremation scents
in view of beardless carrion eaters.

The earth slips
between the fangs of the gods,
horns of plenty,

Drowned man,
reopen the wrought anemone gate,

a tentacular blood of lunar ablutions.

In the shadow of a dot,
the third eye reddens,
an acrid almond wandering the snow.

A living cryptogram
of caverns on the flanks of birds
condemned to the frigid vertigo of cascades.

How break this curtain of eyes?
Abandon of a sacrilegious hand
on the pointed phallus of hardened resins.

Cadaver cracks
in the lotus pond,
cries floating the golden lobes.

The volcano has petrified the female incense of a smile,
couplings of millenial entrails
ripened in the tamed silence.

A new hand
lifts the horizon up mane-high.
Ah the galloping of the poles!

Suffering stoops the nettles
deprived of cathedrals,
but who recalls the rugose acanthi
of the zodiac, a forger's leprosy
or a galaxy toll-booth?

Between two eternities
a rutilant garuda encourages
the elephant who has forgotten the forest.

Weighed down under useless gold,
the high priest of images condemns

the snow cult,
a one-eyed skeleton of Cabalistic abortions.

Tortures greedy for sounds,
a herbarium raked by sleep on fire,
under the embers
a rose is devouring the wart hog.
O safari of ejaculatory prayers!

In the nick
of time, the moon, a torque of green harps,
liberates the suave thunderbolt,
a delirium of transparent scarabs.

A CAPE OF WILD FLIES

Beyond the silent aurochs-haunted forests,
victims give birth to victims,
white she-wolf jaws crush
the black lord's

epileptic sleigh on the powdery
sand of summer, sand
promised to the horse blood drinkers.
The multiple odyssey under each step!

A hardened rainbow shelters the tarot players
whose fauve oil faces long to crush
the trembling she-mummies
scratching at the surfaceless sheer walls.

Bloodsplashed palettes of eyes.
The fine nerves we entangle in concrete clouds.

After all, the moon does
menstruate on the shadows of our limp

members and bonzai willows dot
the weary fur of our retinas.
Her eyelids hung with nightshade
stuffed bats, her sheets

wet with the blood of virgins,
the royal harpy again and again
yields to peaty crusades of orgasms.
The juice of marine snails

germinated on Uranus streams
from the sex of icy stones
while witches from the Karpaths
annoint the Countess' vaginal chasm.

In the darkness of underground wash houses,
hordes of infuriated, trilobite-fringed
fledglings immerse themselves in the storm graffiti
chiselled in our limestone lungs.

(*Note:* This poem was written in English & edited by Clayton Eshleman)

Robert Peters

from THE BLOOD COUNTESS

This young body
existed nowhere
before I jammed it into an urn

huntress of moon-rind breasts
huntress of stricken black eyes
huntress of glass slivers, smashed mirrors
huntress of the vulva
huntress of patellas smeared with hemoglobin compote
huntress of powdered opal and beryl swirled in hot wine
huntress of spurts, the diphthongs of lust
frozen cream on frosty boudoir casements.

Who beats my door?
An Avenging Angel! An Avenging Angel!

Yes, where was I?

I am a woman who rails
at being a woman.

Limpid eyes on moth wings
swamp-odors, body-sweat,
cow-udders, urine-drenched children.

My beauty is a squash rind
scraped of its pulp,

a shield
against the moon's terrors.

beautiful women numb me
pulsations of the bath, of groin and womb,
skin robes camel-flanks ocelot throats scented.
I despise beasts.
Where there is splendor there is disease
The roadway to the castle floods
this morning, torrents down the mountain
(The quintet plays Palestrina)
exhausted doves cower on the river bank

"Madame loves Palestrina? Would she hear more?
A late motet?"

More candles . . .
near the bass viol. Fine. Fine. I love the sheen!

* * *

Bovine women cough. Their breasts shake like enormous lake-slugs (I am told they are huge in the Caspian Sea). I could throttle these throats, cough-sounds as air-pockets in a throat-pudding. Turn the marbled throat towards the framed boudoir door. Death has easy lessons, barbed ferules and ether-drenched silks. There's always a window tainted with red sun-light, or a window blackened with a pimpled devil's tongue thrust up against it.

How ironic! a pink lady's-slipper (Cypripedium acaule) hangs forth with a sac resembling the male scrotum. I prefer the common bull thistle (Cirsium lanceolatum), despite its name, for it boasts a tuft of purple hairs and a thorny pod, resembling the female parts from which it springs. My favorite flower, after, of course, the camellia and the rose, is the iris, its labial petals, the texture, so like the satin inside a woman's mouth. Babies tumble forth from calyxes. I enclasp my own pregnant belly. Sinew is never the answer.

* * *

Mirror,
You pretzel-twisted monstrosity
wrought from oak limbs bleached,
with polished gnarls, knobs,
and other crudities.
A reflection is never identical with the image reflected.

I hang for hours despising you.

My pallor—and I swoon
watching the candlelight—
attracts other highborn Ladies.
Exotic women flaunt their wrists.
I smother them in fleece
unleash a timber-wolf.
The wolf is rampant, a breast-eater.

Satan, nip the teats of these hags!
Coins of misery!
Snow, hail, and rain.

Their images, left behind, despoil mine.
I have ordered all mirrors stacked
facing walls!

Blood dries on the glass.
Bloody scales fall off.
Blood-flakes in an alabaster bowl,
delicious, spiked with wine, cinnamon,
and a dash of cream.

Beneath my skin there's a glow.
I love you *Imago*.
Darkened lives birth a paradox of strangers.

I breathe better.
the abysmal pitch crased forever
Diana in a shower of blood!)

A reflection is never identical with the image reflected.

* * *

Exhausted flesh.
Clogged streams and rivers.
Toads on their backs on the
garden path. Light devours everything.
Dark confusion, slack shadows
crammed with fangs and spears.
I long for more continuity, why am I as I
am/was? Nothing is changed. Flowers
into glass, vertebrae into fossils,
tears into crystals. The world
is noxious. I am admired,
adorned with violets.
(Play more Pretorious).
At variance with myself?
(Palestrina, *encore*).
A virgin wearing Lady Macbeth's cincture . . .
Venus on her shell . . .
I prefer hot cream.
Tomorrow I shall slice off a nose.
Pig roasting, damp goose feathers, a lover's breath.

* * *

The more a brain sizzles, the more extensive the cortextual slime. You shall never, Robert, understand murder. I baffle you, wearing my chastity-apron with skull and cross-bones and a Mason's trowel, Black Sabbath bat-wings and

ganglia. Someday, as abruptly as I began my ascent into blood, I shall fall. You'll probably snigger when I do, you're that heartless. So, cast your dogged flashlight all you please. A mere wafer-thin wedge of me abuts on your sidewalk.

* * *

The bullseye. The gerfalcon's hare. A girl raped
by a gaggle of farmboys. Blood is a swirl of drowned mice, wheat
beard husks, and atoms of intellect (the latter, lepidoptera or
frog eggs in a jellied mass). Blood swirls in my mouth. A waxy
plant with blood-fruit sprouts from my navel.

* * *

All afternoon the fireplace is warm. Blood in the fur tub is warmed. I bathe until green shadows strike the room from unexpected directions. It is time for prayers. Blood beads rush down my body as I step forth onto a pale blue fur rug, am received by old Dorko holding out a warmed sheepskin. The afternoon shimmers with golden wool. "Save her blood," I say. "I am younger now. I am quite far from shore."

* * *

From bath to mirror
    swan, vampire, fritillary

there is no parable
images on an arras in a great hall

    swan, fritillary, vampire

my resplendent body
rose chaplet, bath water, breath mist

    fritillary, vampire, swan

Eros, chubby boy wrinkled,

like an ancient countess' neck

swan, vampire, fritillary

The Book of the Bath
margins and a warm hearth

fritillary, vampire, swan

angels, pears ripen.
fruit-embossed mirror. pomegranate
in a cluster of pears at the top.
a brain for a shepherdess

swan, fritillary, vampire.

Here, nothing is unsung.
I fear hot coals, blazing chiffoniers
the frozen weir, the she-wolf's lair

swan, fritillary, vampire

I am Venus. I trust my chilled
beauty, my limpid eyes.
I am Medusa!

vampire, fritillary, swan.

* * *

Halt the carriage!
Conceal it behind that heap of snow.

Fine, that's fine.

Wipe the frozen blood from my face. I had not
intended to stab her so deeply. Slap her, Dorko.
Waken her. I loathe her moaning.

I'll have hot wine before proceeding. How

beautifully the pond steams. By evening it
will be frozen.

Remove her skin-slippers
Why shouldn't she tremble?

Dump her from the carriage. Now! Now!
Tie her to that spruce.

Girl, you won't recall this.
As you turn to ice you'll numb.

Drench her!

Fold her arms. Shut her mouth,
no pearly howlings. She's visible as a shimmer.
She's a chess-piece of ice.

Fetch her to the castle yard, drape her in
appleblossoms when she melts. We need
her blank face, her purple eyes, her svelte ice-thighs.
The cabriolet roof is burning!
I create this weather!

Jerome Rothenberg

BLOOD RIVER SHAMAN CHANT

Nenets

then grasped
my sky tree grasped it
all my friends
would bend their backs to me
they sprang up to their feet
then stretched me on their laps
"now I must harness the sky's reindeer
"the smallest of the seven
"must hold to the reindeer's reins
cloud island sledge
shot off we found
the grass ridge
there at the ridge's foot we found
a hill with lawns
bored through by seven lizards
who bored through it
"mother lizard grandmother
"give thou a child
"a child give to my friend
the lizard child my friend
bored through my side
we found the ice ridge then
& at its side

found a blood river
the blood river started flowing
its currents started flowing
in the currents the blood river
tufts of hair flowed by
for me to cut to cut the river
with bare hands
would make the blood stop
the river & the current stop
until we crossed the river
& the blood we found
the iron tent
I went into the iron tent
the seven women sat there
I embraced them seven women
swaddling seven boys
cloud island sledge
shot off again it took us
to our tent
"I must unhitch
"our spirit reindeer
"the smallest of the seven
"I must head back to camp
"my friends must head back
"of the seven let a single one remain
then they took back my sky tree
left me I have found no place
to camp but here
inside this fire I fall
to pieces

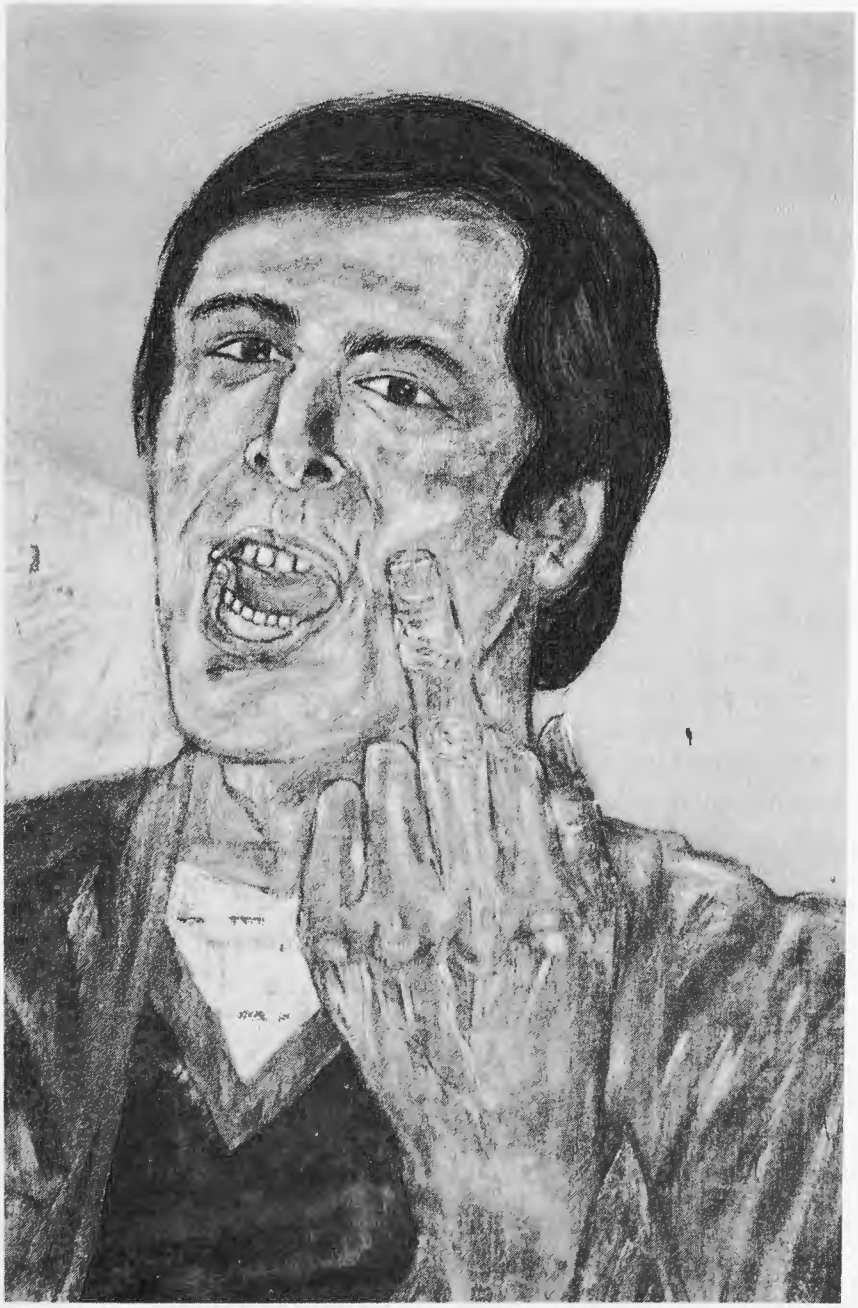
At midpoint of the ceremony the shaman (who sings it here) enters the "deep dive" of trance by slashing at his body with a knife. Source (through M.A. Castren, December 1842): the Nenets: a Finno-Ugric people living on the tundra between northeastern Europe & northwestern Siberia.

Leon Golub

"Riot II," 1984
120x124"

Detail *"Riot II,"* 1984

Courtesy of Susan Caldwell Gallery, New York
Photos: David Reynolds



Detail *"Riot II,"* 1984

Jackson Mac Low

GIANT OTTERS

They were a close family of giant otters
in Surinam giving a low growling sound when
they were insecure so they were called the Hummers.

Trace elements had landed near them and they effloresced
in even amounts throughout an even eon and an evening more
fortunate as they were in knowing nothing

or peering curiously into unknowable presence
alert to no future living the past as presence
whose elements were traces in their efflorescing being

going as far as they could within the world they were
as fortune particularized occasions within unfolding
breathed upon by memory's wraith and anticipation's all but absence.

Where were they going but farther along and through
whatever their being eventuated in clearness no demand for clarity
as the eyes are unsealed and the world flows in as light?

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR WAR

Much more than they did the bombing what they ended
up speaking about was not the nuclear plants but war
when people aren't nice to each other any more
locked up in attics with death threatening them every minute.

Only crazy people can do this after several years of studying the victims
believing themselves nonexistent leaving them an abiding feeling
that they could not escape the consciousness of death
becoming convinced that life is unmanageable if not absurd.

The rise of narcissism may reflect underlying death anxiety
arousing a feeling of "I don't want one if others can't have one"
or pure self-interest reflected in newly accepted attitudes
not having knowledge or skills to overcome their helplessness.

Responding to the question "Do you care?" negatively
what then can they base their analysis of adversary behavior upon
even if they are interested in asking questions
to the extent of raising doubts as to the solidity of floors?

To objectively quantify the effects of these impressions
despite the fear of having to surrender in any way whatsoever
find a technological breakthrough not only the result of chance
with all of that throw weight confined to restricted areas.

The tendency to become more self-centered by no means
increases capacity to work together to further survival
before the survivors are so overwhelmed as not to be able to act
in any coherent manner to bring about a change in awareness or direction.

Some question the preoccupation with children's reactions to tales of
wonder and horror
and to the burden of feeling that one may die one day at any moment now
but one questions what the questioners' underlying attitudes might be
knowing that one cannot rely upon the education and reeducation
of leaders.
There seems to be no picture in people's minds as to what that really means
but if we get a huge truck pasted up with pictures of the victims
our whole consciousness of what will await us will be altered inexorably
teaching us how to break through the wall of denial above the heads of
all governments.

Stephen Rodefer

IMITATION W

Logically there can not be a mistake ever. But when a mistake occurs, illogically there it is.

One fact will always picture another, because of its spatial existence in a duration. The world is otherwise the fallacy.

An affair is independent of another affair. Russell is wrong but frank.

All true sexual relations concern unity, or they become other than sexual relations.

One fact will always picture another of course, but can Russell be both frank and wrong?

Or do I mean we should collect our given aspects and burn them, like early works?

New writing contains propositions not considered before. Language costumes character, disguising just another person.

Tacit conventions can be complicated ad infinitem. Is there possibly a machine which playing the record can write the score?

Or does depiction itself deconstruct? Italics in German for starters; letter space for example in English.

What is ancient Greek the modern language of? For they are all of them gone, and like a living table one name stands for another.

No thing goes unnamed. Grammar is propositional. It strives to reveal position by sitting on the face of meaning.

Nothing is black or white, but color makes it so. Colorless promotes everything, but none at all.

Psychology is nervous clarity, of which most again will always the same be gone. *You* will live.

Sharp clothes, like knives, dress otherwise livid meat, if evolution is true.

Masturbation is the absence of philosophy, it insists on anarchy, but nicely retreats.

There are many zeros, but every yesterday was a new day too. Ask not what will be next but what is already following.

Any variable can be formalized. It is unthinkable that any relation should not stand in that relation.

If *a* cannot equal *b*, no way can it *a* equal either. Any end is always near.

Any tautology will contradict itself in time. The torso will be striped.

It does not matter who rejects. Combinations produce. So does everyone wish to be paid to propose.

Oft spring lies, as it must, the exact potential of an infinitude of summers. Elementary school eventually graduates.

Illiteracy a form of unrewarded genius of which the streets produce the language, called *Street*.

Nothing retreats. Not everything, but many things follow. Every thing works.

Falsehood can form a series with truth, will always have. There is no way to tell true or false when all cases happen partially.

Clearly the past does not portray the future, but when, as almost always, it claims to, there can be no present.

Only this, only that, only this.

George Evans

A RENAISSANCE DRUNK

They never read their Hedylos, nor could,
where he sings how sweet was Sokles
in his cups, how he wrote better for it,

or the sot Santoka:

The leaves drop (horohoro
weaving down drunk
from their trees

Beauty.
I am the leaves.

The shape of the traveler
in the puddle is the traveler
or in the wine,

walking, balancing a dragonfly
on his hat,

threading and stepping lightly
over shadows in the pines.

THE DRESSER

Bumping lamps, chairs,
cords crushed in nap, barefoot
to tools spread there:

a continent, a body.
Calloused hands brushing ear
and finger jewelry too small

to grip just touch and knock
about looking down. A tiny land.
What do I know,

believed for bullshit, love,
position, truth rarely
this world so tamed

it sets gold & near-gold
by a mirror
believing it doubled.

Why should you believe
anything. You
should not. Come into

the field. Look. At
the paintbrush the
click beetle the face

you decorate
do not decorate
from fear.

WORKING FOR THE ICEMAN

He slams the ice down
small chips fly into yr eyes
but melt before he beats yr ass
for crying neon hums
bugs explode on lights & you pass chunks
to those chasing the truck before he catches
on & Pleiades is up there the burlap
sacks he puts on his shoulder
flap in the wind the North Star the Bear
& Venus are out there
somewhere in the daylight & later
you'll turn white & die
but now it's nothing you're young
and believe he needs you

ISLANDS

Whales. Whales.
Wouldja wouldja

kill yr mother
wouldja

eat
yr friend.

Islands rise
from the sea,

islands rise
from the mountain,

islands from
the tree,

wouldja wouldja
eat yr brother,

islands rise
from thee.

Paul Christensen

THE NAP

This year the working classes demand shades of green; green sofas and green cars, long dark coats in which women stand like old copper statues waiting for buses to department stores, where rack after rack of green dresses will be sorted by their raw fingers. Green rugs, green dead eye of the tv in its dark corner. My green shirt, socks, the boy with green hair, as if everyone were dying from a new disease which only green could cure: green envy, green peace, the greening of the conquerors after atomic war. The green delirium of winter, the new green blackboard at my school; a green temperature of constant progress, the greening acceleration of a prosperous year. The green glow of a cold war, for this is the middle passage of the 1950s, as I report my thoughts to the world during one of my mother's longer naps.

She would go soft, then softer,
until she was a teardrop hanging
at the dark spout of the room,
and things would fall softly into
place, like shadows flung out of a
cotton spread. I could feel the walls
turning into flesh, breathing through
their outlets and old lamps; rooms
that hollowed like open mouths,
then curved slowly into pouts.
By then, she was dozing. And the
street went on beside the house,
with storybook brown trucks, men
in their bakery and ice cream uniforms,

women in faded flowered dresses standing
in the wind, hair flowing with wind,
their voices coming and going
as they took in parcels, or unlimbered
shopping bags and caught the bus.

The sky looked colder with its faded sun.
The houses were a jumble of black
pieces, like shale tumbling into a
blue river full of ice.
I thought I saw a burglar's fox eyes
peering at me through the bathroom skylight,
the room narrow and cold with porcelain,
his eyes parting and entering my scalp
until I shivered loose and ran.
As in every other napping house,
nothing troubled the standstill of time.
Only a neighbor's moody laughter
seeped through the mortar of the party wall.
Then the glazed face of a woman
across the alley emerged from the prism
of her small, clean window, shaking
her mop—looking at me with blouse
unbuttoned and white slender neck,
as I came nearer to the glass.
Her face lured me out of childhood,
stretched me from my skin into a
taut cord, my bones quivering to fly
if only . . . only she had not smiled
and disappeared again.

Here things rise
brick by brick like monuments; every move
obeys some law. Tinkle of dinner; rasp
of night, ticking clocks that explode

each morning's quiet. The grease sizzling
in countless pans; dark closets hung
with winter suits. Squared edges, the
intersection throbbing with caution lights,
as cars nosed forward into the bleak
channels of the city. I fan my fingers
in the cold hall, at the bottom of the
stairs, hoping to provoke a miracle—
one unopened bud of rose out of the blood
and knuckles of my empty hands. Nothing
but the dark appears, its own dreary bloom
of disappointment. I pocket the rest
of my endless chances, humming and shuffling
from window to window. My heart is a mossy
stone; my brain like a crater on the moon,
its one impact with heaven forgotten.
Drifting; a sort of dance without music,
tiny leaps, turns in the gray leaf-
patterns of the rug, between two end-
tables, doilied and clean, sad memorial
things handed down. I spit into the
still life of vased flowers midway
up the stairs, evil illusion of an
actual world—and shove my hips
against the wall flattening me into
manhood in a few more years.

She mutters in her sleep—turning me,
back from my rebellious hopes. A mouth
in the woods, under the dark trees
a pair of lips the color of black water,
telling me the woods are cursed, life spoiled.
Then snores, rushing me down the steps
to the upholstered chair, its wings spread

out against the threat of war.

Sonship,
the filial role; clabber that becomes
her boy, incontinent and bawling
in his barred crib upstairs.
Asthmatic and lunar, already snaggle-
toothed and chinless, her second
or third prize of the litter.
One of her jewels, she always said.
Born in the ejaculation of guns
of war, a mortar pumped from her own
chute into a swaddle propped in the
old Plymouth, dipping in the city's ruts
homeward to his sooty first day
on the job. A warm tit erect and
rubbery on his soft, unwilling lip,
squeezing the thin suety milk until
his belly drummed. Tantrums
in the yellow kitchen, the tomb-
shaped darkness of unlit rooms he bobbed
between upon his father's rounded shoulder,
laid military in his stiff tangle of
interrupted sleep, punctuated deep at night
by spasms of breathlessness, the nose
concreted shut with blocked sinuses,
half-sealed eyes, all signs pointing
to a hospital, the dreary desolation
of a children's ward fronting a track
of lumbering locomotives. Days weary
with lung struggles, the weighted breaths
that came through candy-coated nose
and throat. My mother wincing at her
sick boy, her thin Auschwitz fellow

with his gift of clogged gab.

Her throat's dull moans return
above, the creaking treadle. She unwinds
each breath from an old spool, drawing
it out between her lips, her teeth carding it,
until it drifts free upon the air, like
web enclosing her, excluding me. Her
larval states of sleep, the cocooned soul
apart from living heirs, all claims unheard
even if I screamed and broke the white sheets
open to awake the worm, so big, so full of
breasts on which spirits nursed.
I hear each breath come silkily from
her lungs, weaving the darkness around
her bed, the soft silent foaming
of each heave, the dissolving surf
of each sigh, as an eerie
stillness whitens until she breathes again.
I am an ordinary object facing the sea,
counting its even crests rolling in
to shore. No ships; no islands.
Only the gray waters where I was born,
hearing a low thunder far off.

The ninth
breath wakes her and she turns,
to weave a different corner of the room.
Asleep again, as I keep vigil.

Below the kitchen window, the
alley stretches like a tongue into
the backs of houses, unwanted places
where doors are triple-locked and lead
to dirty basements and up the stairs,

into warm kitchens. Oil-rutted
parking squares, the dented trash cans,
clothes wires crossing like a broken
instrument, knotted with sparrows
who never move. The air is lavendar
and cold, shadowy recess of things
where men walk at night, hoping to glimpse
a moment's love. Glum brick world,
its back turned on privacy, on the murmurs
of summer, the life beyond work.
All the housefronts face out
like masks of confidence, but in the
cracked shade of an alley window
an arm rises to remove a dress
and trembles out of focus.

I knead
the cold knot in my lap until it stretches
numbly on my leg, the forbidden lump
knocking upward in its tent of corduroy,
the chicken neck that's always left
on someones's plate, erect, uneaten
bony arc standing up now between
tense legs, as if I charmed a snake.
No sap—too diluted in my roots;
I fear it, feel relief as it gives in,
goes flat, cold nub again.
The neighbor's girl, grown up,
who showed me her new brown hair,
those tiny curlicues sweaty and red
inside her dress, as she took my own
brown mushroom in her hand and pulled
it once, both of us giggling in the
cold parked car. Who was she?

Why was she so big? So hairy and strange
between her soft white skin? She left
for good, after kissing me on the lips
with her cold tongue.

Cold, like the cold brick of oleo,
white and hard, with its floating red
eye I punctured and kneaded in the kitchen
til it glowed, fish-smelling and oily,
on my white bread. Disconsolate hour
before sleep, after shopping at the A&P,
bringing home the wobbly bags on our
old wagon over cobbled back streets,
Friday's ritual which everyone observed.
Families sprawled in clusters along
grim factory fronts, the wagons wheezing
under heavy loads, kids whispering about
their stolen candy melting in pockets
of their winter coats. A slimy, evil
meal of it in bed, as if shit smeared
across the sheets, until they found
the wrappers and beat us solemnly.
The harsh sentence of this life, lived
in endless rows of brick, under
dirty skies. Unyielding surfaces,
as Dutch wives scrubbed blinds,
whacked marble stoops with lye and
steamy rags, their white legs veined
and puckered above their woolen socks,
hems rising as they stooped to wash,
the fish flesh of their powerful thighs,
fingers glistening against the stone.
My father gone to work, the barren
mid-day wind and struggle, until

the darkness came, and he and all the
others returned to chilly yards,
the hot close air of living rooms.
Mother, wake up, rise up
out of this world, kick out these
stops to life,
or die!

I stand in semi-blackness,
under the white arch between living
and dining rooms, suspended, listening
as my mother leaves this world, entering
her own realm of suitors, assaulters,
merchants, phallic oars, the sea rising
in spermy strings against her breasts,
as she plunges time and again, frail
naked bones, wish bones gnarled with hair,
thrown high against the bulging waves,
the angry sea pulling at her, suffocating
her next breath, hurling her down
to sudden trenches luminous with
predators, marauders of her flesh.
Her breath falling like velvet
coils from her mouth, unraveling her
strand by strand, weaving her back
with another world. Invisible now
as husband and kids come looking for her,
hallooing her name down corridors
of an old building where she hides,
a coat slung upon a hanger of bones
in the closet of her last refuge,
dragged out and berated, left to rot
under the blinking neon glare of
a shoe repair's huge glowing shoe,

her eyes and mouth dull rings of rage.
Her dog-eared scripts of argument,
the cracked teapot and flung purse,
the tattered letters of her youth
dropped in the toilet bowl, my father's
gray, ice-bound look as he leaves us
behind to go to work. Her whimpers
through the draw of sleep, plummeting
through space beyond the earth.
Still wandering in my dreams,
her twice near-deaths, the neighbor's
flashlight in her face as ashy lips
parted over slack lungs, her throat
rattling with pneumonia, dying, the
temperature of stone, her clammy skin.
Mother, wake up. Don't die again,
again. Her piston breath still pumping
her to life upstairs, in that joyless
grave. Chime-shunt of the half-hour,
the rumble of a bus. Bleak mid-point
of the hour of rest.

Mother, your memories are
all before the war, a world blown up
and splintered on the wind.
The corner store went bankrupt; everyone
we know has moved away. We are
stranded on the moment. Which way
does father go when he roams each day?
Peace is a desert. At night the curtains
are still drawn, the last lamp kept
back from the nearest window,
in case the war comes reeling out of night.
Plane-drone, the hush at dinner,

forks in air, the radio drumming on
beneath its orange mouth.
Always what you know "before the war."
Before the atom bomb, you mean.
The rosy plume, the gore of torn
beliefs and flesh, things cut in two
so that I now live afterward, outside
the naive things you still remember.
Tomorrow I'll go back to school,
lugging my magazine in striped sack
to be used at drill, coat over head,
all awaiting a dry rain to radiate
our souls, while teachers gravely
warn us not to breathe until. . . .
This new world stretches out hereafter,
in which you half-heartedly tag along.
Mother, you are a broken branch upon
the wind; the trees stand withered
in fruitless seasons of war and peace.
Things quicken, the grip of something
colder pulls us through to dinner,
mere strangers from the day before.
Grim silences linger days at a time,
even from you, now, as you burrow
deeper into your narrow tomb, hiding,
afraid of what I know.

Groping alone
in a half-dark house, brotherless,
my mother deep in her sarcophagus,
my father drifting through the iron
labyrinth of City Hall, my own life
taking its amebic stroll. The hills
around me climb slowly to the sky,

plowed deep with wavering roofs
and narrow streets, the valley below
where a grimy river crawls under
the rusty wombs of petrochemical plants.
The nasal breath of a small clock
pulling its arms away from gravity,
its pulse quicker than my own,
as I watch night blister out of afternoon.
The clock everyone is watching on
their walls—at school, the long
spasmodic arm that leaps from notch
to notch, until the bells blast and
shatter every room. Shift whistles,
the low, sad bongs of churches,
the barge horns moaning to the cries
of an air raid siren. Confused thrashings
of a city descending to its nervous sleep,
over the ruins of Penn's woods, the
smoke and drudgery that grew out of
broken treaties. The park lies still
under the bare sycamores, the bark
flaking off like camouflage in the
peacetime stillness.

In this solemn emptiness, one
clings to rules—to the joy of working
instead of death. We are the peace-
time soldiers of the world, eating
our frozen dinners in home-made camps,
lock-step to bed and school, wearing our
uniforms of bright green pants and
shirts.

Mother, join the war for peace
and moderation. I feel the shudder

of my energies, my bones so straight
and willed to stay in line, smiling
through anxiety at the flag, at
working mothers and fathers, brothers
who stay long hours after school,
lumped in gangs. My bone-hardened
body swings a plastic briefcase in
apish splendor of my dad's career.

All lured behind closed doors, the
walls thick and sound-proofed where
we learn to separate, once and for good.
Scattered like my busted sack
of marbles, all rolling on the kitchen
floor. When we are gone, they'll find
one greasy marble lodged behind
the fridge, last relic of the family
harmony, the severed knuckle of an
ancient beast.

Mother, your limbs
are gone; you are a mere stump rotting
where you dream of oceans. Your world
is gone, behind, before, beyond the war.

Three o'clock.
School bells sear the hour at last,
as stone streets become a sluice
of miniature adults, a maze of
limbs in coats, their shallow profiles
pointed to a skyline of bloated
iron-colored clouds, the smokestacks
puking out night from stone bowels.
Their faces glow with winter;
they surge, then falter; stalled

among parked cars, then scatter,
moving in a mass toward home.

My mother is a fossil in her sleep;
cold ring of bone,
                lost amulet,
as day crumbles.

                The tea kettle
whistles sharp and thin; her slippered
feet sigh across linoleum, under the
radio's voices and canned laughter.
The windows are as pale as ice,
the light falling weakly down
the walls. Her soft return to life.
Door snap, spoon jingles,
crackle of cups on plates,
things stirring up again, rising from
the dead. A yellow square
of light bursts upon the rug
like spilled paint, last border
of the afternoon.
The world loses focus,
first bricks, then the long low
roofs fade out to streaks of blindness.

    Mother's up, at last;
that uriney tang of her hot tea poured
into mugs, and soft cookies from
the cookie jar. Her face,
rouged tight, her lips red,
an ironed dress draped loosely on
her rounded shape.

                Still waking at her
chair, climbing out of coils with half-

shut eyes. Her face made-up to
welcome home old mariners, my father's
tred starting out among a sea of
workers, the lights fragmented around
City Hall. Her hair hangs limp
from all the love she hunted for;
the drained emotions form shadows
on her lips. I kept vigil
during her descent, a child-soldier
guarding his empty gate, while a
father returns to claim his bed,
my weapons turning into bones and skin.

I move quietly in the kitchen,
as if accused, as if I were
the voice that woke her back to life,
rebirthing her. She finds the world
the way it was, a labyrinth of
streets bricked up, the houses
huddled in the cold, last dregs of
light dissolving under a black wind.
Beyond the rooftops, tracks glint,
an el's axles grinding through a turn,
those blind gears meshed in the
fallen world we sojourn in.

A Brief Note on Robert Morris and His "Fragments from texts for the Reliefs" (1982)

In its diversity and rigorousness, Robert Morris' writing parallels his art. Both are precise inquiries into the way we experience the world. Although he has been publishing since the mid 1960's, much of his writing is either out-of-print or remains unknown. One hopes that within the next few years a press will make the necessary commitment and publish a collection of his writings.

At one point "Fragments from texts for the Reliefs" (1982) was meant to be part of PSYCHOMACHIA, a group of plaster reliefs Morris exhibited in New York in January 1983. Morris envisioned placing printed versions of the "fragments" beside the appropriate relief. However, after finishing both the texts and reliefs, Morris realized the texts would interfere with the viewers' responses to the reliefs and decided not to include them. This is the first time they have been published.

—*John Yau*

Robert Morris

FRAGMENTS FROM TEXTS FOR THE RELIEFS (1982)

I loved you and I hated you. Possession was everything. Then it was too much. Your promise seemed inexhaustable until I was there. Then I could not breathe. I never really knew you. That comforting quietness and your patience—I only wanted to shatter that.

Memories fade like the ashes we left blowing across the plain. If we stopped you in your moment of beauty you would have lived only to fade like our memories. You were never more beautiful than in that last moment of pain. We never felt more alive than when we caused it. You were unbearable in your beauty and we plowed it back into the earth. Finally, after all the campaigns, after we had leveled so much, we began to grow uneasy and a single thought troubled our sleep: perhaps the scar of our wake was not a permanent mark. And we wept with the thought that you might rise again, that the faint green would once again appear on the earth.

Alexander was not deterred in his rage against the beauty of Persepolis by the fact that he had acquired it. On the other hand, Tamerlane, awed by the splendor of Isfahan did not touch a brick but added his own monument outside the city gates: a pyramid of 80,000 heads. I moved with those who tried to strike a balance between such extremes. I even loved you for a moment. In my own way. We believed in staying for a while, using what we took.

I could see that our kind was beginning to show signs of weakening. Oh, it was nothing the others would have noticed—the way the eyes moved too quickly, a certain lack of muscle tone. But I could see that our time was ending. You never warned me about that. You only cared about my safety and that I would come back. You must have known all along that you would finally endure and

that my kind would pass on. Even now I can sense less enthusiasm for the raids. And the sky is less heavy with our smoke. I know some have slipped away already. I could not bear that you might have noticed how we no longer crowded out the sun. I couldn't bear you witnessing that.

I had a fever from the wounds and at first thought you were my hallucination. In my delirium I re-lived the long campaigns. I again tasted the smoke and felt the burning and heard the cries. Once again I felt the pressing, sticky fear, the perpetual fatigue. Now, with consciousness returning I know I am sinking, but a peculiar calm pervades me. I know it is not recovery but a moment of clarity before the plunge. I see you now and then in the darkened space. You seem to move at the edges of my consciousness. I can feel your strength in this gloom and as I grow weaker you seem to grow stronger. I hear the wind outside. It brings the smell of the earth awakening.

Your eyes shone with the sense of new life. Your great secret. Yet all I could see was the dimming of my past glories. Some inner animal force had subsided in me. I no longer had the stomach for the old life. The others left me behind. Age perhaps, I thought. Yet I could see in the others an inner confusion and lack of purpose. They quarrelled among themselves and let opportunities slip through their fingers. You were there when I returned, heavy and defeated with the old wounds bleeding anew. My humiliation had silenced all but the smallest movements. I simply watched you in your patient, glowing satisfaction.

I saw you as a distraction. You were a strangeness and a curiosity. My feelings for you were evoked by your presence and disappeared with your absence. Now I remember your glowing possibility, your caring presence hovering there at the edge of where my self-importance shaded into doubt. I thought of you then as fragile (it helped me to feel a kind of anxious strength). After all I was but one in the ranks. I thought like the others. Our purposes had nothing to do with you. Now that you have been gone for so long and I have re-visited the ruins I see you everywhere. Life struggles up again. That is where I see you, in this faint haze of green that covers the ruins.

In the dream you were both young and old. Somehow you had about you that radiant spring glow I once knew and were at the same time heavy, slow and gray with age. In the dream a battle raged around us but for once I felt no danger. I embraced you and wept. You led me away from the flames and the cries. We

were standing beside one another in the soft night. In the dream you pointed to the blazing sky. I could see into all of the colors of the Orion nebula where stars were being born. "No," you said, "over there." Then I saw the Crab Nebula, it's frozen explosion registering nine centuries of extinction. "Death," I said. "No, the passage," you replied. "Remember, remember," you said. Then I woke in the freezing, empty room.

Your world existed below ours. We suppressed it when we came upon it. At first we could hardly distinguish it. It was merely included in the general obliteration we devised. Later we saw the remnants of your universe beneath our feet. Our own obsolescence began to appear to us as your pattern became visible.

Robert Morris

Untitled, 1982 (Hypnerotomachia Series)
plaster with metal frame, 63x51″

Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, photos by Jon Abbott

Untitled, 1982 (Hypnerotomachia Series)
plaster with metal frame, 54x40″

Fran O'Farrell

RITUAL

When the sky becomes
a weapon
and its clouds
are hills, buildings,
hands reach narcotic
after a man
with the violence
of horses

that melt
under pressure

Then as the wind
curls southwest
I know myself,
a shroud in the shape
of a bottle or woman

fixed among
shoulders of rest

IN THIS TIME OF QUICK IDENTITIES

I have been thin and infinitely useful.
Diaphanous, I spread myself like
cellophane over faces.

My brain reeled with caged sound.

In this time of quick identities
I became a Carmelite,
that burning heart who crossed
all of Spain on ribboned feet
to hawk a mountain justice
and practice the saraband.

I lived life twice, at least.

To be settled and intractable, yes.
Thick and single of mind,
unsure of origin—complete.

But there are layers of me
that won't be stirred,
scum of experience
rising to the top
of the cup.

I will wake to the most delicate
cotton dawn and rouse myself
to cloud level, impalpable
as the best prayer.

Robert Fitterman

Four Poems

STALLED BUS TO VENICE

brown hills
over Yugoslavia, brown
    tinged with tan village

    your hair straws
into your eyes, see
the white sheep

        the wind herds
in, flattening
    the fur at their asses
bending the grass
    to its waxy tips

angrily whisking
    your hair to behind
your ear

        as the dark
clouds approach
    we are the only thing
not moving.

THE HOME

corridors, cor-ridors
she woke. terrible
dream

where's Jean
I'll take my tea dark
she mumbles

and tugs
on the hall rail
suffering

her legs along
like poles, ankle-
lessly planted

in black
rubber soles, dis-
infectant

Florida lime scented
shaving foam
steamed meat

strong smells today.
I am in group A
she knows

corri-dors, clean tile
dark tea, *and not B*
the wheelchairers,

a favor
from her children

who say

"this is nice
(not unfortunate
for her here."

THE GARDEN CAFETERIA

Under glass:
white fish, plum strudel
kugel, and the generous

helpings of kasha & shells.
I set my tray among
the old Jews, one has spoken

to God of real estate
and asks me how my melon is
"better with lemon"

some consolation

since being thrown
into a fluorescent stairwell
on East Tenth

by junkies
switchbladed & frisking
for a few bucks & cheap watch

left stripped
and hung like meat on a banister.
I lift my face only now

sags to agree
"a real pisser" he says

and tho I stare like a goy

I know the rest
of their endless solace, honest
shoes, pale calves, smoked fish.

THE SHELTER

con-
fusion is not what
I get in you, but with you

somehow a whole
piece of something
that obvious, slips thru

the white
fenced cottage with
wide picture windows

wood floors
where greens fan
a gentle sun

lights this
ideal of you, no
us, twisted to fit

longing into
hating the thought
of what's come

to keep us
held apart

from this

mistake
I still make
of what we don't have.

Ray A. Young Bear

NOTHING COULD TAKE AWAY THE BEAR-KING'S IMAGE

At first I thought I would feel
guilty in not missing you,
that despite its unfortunate
occurence,
I would see you again
(exactly the way you were
before a hunter's arrow
glanced off some willows—
lodging near the pulsating song
of the Red Earth heart)
either here,
or towards that memorable direction
near the oily air of Los Angeles
where once a Zuni Indian companion
peered into a telescope aimed
at the Orion constellation:
"These three faint stars
are known for their parallel
formation rather than by four
of the bright stars which
frame them."

While we were sitting
on a manicured knoll
positioned above a Greek theatre,
we heard the distant skirling
sound of scottish bagpipes
coming through the eucalyptus trees.
We went to them, and there,
the astronomer-physicist
invited us to share his interest
in the night skies he was playing for.
He told a story of this Greek hunter
composed of stars;
The "Three-Stars-In-A-Row"
were his belt.
"I think that's me, Grandfather,"
responded my Zuni companion,
"but I will believe you more
if you sell us your scotch whiskey—
and consider the magnitude of my belief
if I told you the bubbles of my Creator's
saliva made the stars, Grandson."
"Grandfather? Grandson? In the same
sentence? I am not related to you
in any way!" demurred the scholarly man.
The two Hispanics, Sergio & Camacho,
who were with us reaffirmed the Zuni's
request by bumping the academician
with their expanded chests.
"Grandfather, Grandson,"
they repeated.
Later, with erratic wind-notes
and chinking necklace shells,
my companion tripped and fell on

the professor's bagpipes
as he was completing
his third revolution
around the observatory.
He rolled down the sandy incline
breaking the instrument
into several pieces.
Suddenly, the professor's eyes
possessed a wild gleam:
a distant fire we hadn't seen before;
a nebula of sorts.
He knelt next to the dead instrument
and began to weep.
"My dear chanter! My drone!"
Like gentlemen, Sergio & Camacho
offered to pay for the irreplacable
parts, but it was too late.
We left (no, we fled from)
the observatory.

Back at the Greek theatre,
we found solace by the singing
of round and grass dance songs
with three white friends:
one jeweler, one ROTC student,
and one KSPC disc jockey,
until we were greeted
by Sioux voices from the dark.
There was immediate silence,
and then the Sioux National Anthem:
"The United States flag will stand forever.
As long as it stands the people will live
and grow; therefore, I am doing this
say the Indian soldier boys."

The radio announcer advised us
the voice was amplified,
possibly by a handheld system.
Pretty soon, we were surrounded
by figures wearing bronze helmets.
The jeweler whispered to us.
"They look like Mudheads with metallic paint."
The military student observed and commented
on their evenly-spaced formation.
Several descended the stone steps
and their boot heels echoed
onto the stage.
When they got close
with their glistening visors,
nightsticks and badges,
we were bewildered.
The police officer explained
that he was a boy scout leader
and learning Siouan was essential.
"Would you boys consider singing
for our troop in Pomona?"
he queried before stating
the purpose of his visit.
"What disturbance?" we asked
in regard to bagpipes and walked back
to our individual dormitory rooms.
We called each other on the phone,
laughing at times, exchanging crazy
warhoops in a warm California night;
that ancient but comical time and place
where we hypothesized the draft
which lifted Marilyn Monroe's dress
came from the San Andreas Fault.

When it shifted, Orozco's murals
in Frary Hall actually moved,
responding to the land wave
and the force of the Pacific Ocean.

We are endless like the Midwestern
breeze in winter which makes the brittle
oak leaves whisper in unison of this
ethereal confidence.
Nothing could take away
the Bear-King's own image
who is human and walks.
There remains a bottle of champagne
beside the charred concrete block;
the half-smoked cigarette
of corn husk and Prince Albert tobacco
which was propped next
to the green bottle
has disappeared
into the snowdrift.

The Bow Priest hasn't been summoned.
In the tribal gymnasium, exercise
equipment is marked by the greasy
handprints of a phantom infant.
The caretaker's two bows
and their arrows lie unpropelled.
The crooked snakelike arm doesn't
have the strength to draw back
the taut string, which would
have triggered an old time
message to the brain.
On top of a moonlit hill
stands a boy whose lithe body

has been painted black
with numerous light-blue spots.
He signals us to follow him,
and he lights small fires
along the way.
Inside the earth-mound,
a small man in a bright-red headband
places an arrow in the bowstring
of his left hand which is bent
like a bow.
He explains the meaning
of the arrow's crest.
"From birds the bison dreams about.
This shaft of wood tipped with sharpened flint,
together with the wolfskin draped over the hunter
crouching low against the salty earth . . ."

Michael Palmer

FIRST FIGURE

for Ben Watkins

The name is spelled without letters how can this be. There are no steps leading to this house, no objects anymore. I have some questions do I not. The reactor has been wounded, that willow perfect, a swimmer not entirely of the world. Humble yourself before the workers. Die eagerly in battle. The water music now unweighted. The terrified child pretends not to hear. Its lions as the library burns. This signals my end. One thing the beloved another the blood. The smoke returns. The hands of the acrobats connect. The name plummets. The eye carves a path. The "A" of "Not A." The attraction to another felt as cork or ink. Calendar etched in wall. The "A" as "Not A." The woman reading, woman sleeping. The view from the studio, Cour de Rohan. The landscape with chestnuts, landscape with goats. The nude resting. The rose of close observation. The smoke as mine returning. The words altered then crossed out. Returning that is into the body. A refusal of the particular body. "I am not somebody here," as spoken by the servant. The medicine on the sill and the light through it. Another light said to be revealing, a third termed awkward. A story in the form of a question to be answered by another in the form of a question and so on. May I speak to Muriel. So much through that door. Myself as Puddin' 'n Pie. The hotel of our crystal delights. Now your turn while the numbers last. Now ours not theirs.

What might be said before the sentences enter: there is no focal point; I have no idea what the future will bring; we did not make the new law ourselves.

The name is felt without letters how can this be. The cat then the ghost of the cat continually reappearing. A reading of an evening. Here the first figure, here

the false figure of speech playing with a ring. Here once more the coffee and the moth, damp bread in hunks, habits of afterwards and opposite. There are no steps leading to this. Not ours not theirs. A city of domes soon to be torn down. A sad monkey-house or the five random letters for the fingers of the hand. The story you've been looking for may well lie there. She steps from the shower and reaches for a towel. The story may well lie there in a cloud. Everyone knows these things by heart. Everyone tells these things from the heart. The word is all that is displaced. This illness I stole from my father. A love of figures, tidiness, fear of error. These are the new remains. She shifted her position almost imperceptibly. He was reluctant to agree at first. They might have it otherwise, simpler perhaps, no columns in the space. They might care to see it in another light, simpler perhaps deducting shadow. The field itself is yellow, with the usual points of reference. Then evening with its blue coat, perfume jars, obstacles, machines held onto. It was quite a short pleasure. The police know all about it.

MUSIC REWRITTEN

(after D.S.)

Yes and no then yes and no
Soon there'll be time enough for you

Charlie has swallowed the fluid
L has come inside a box

which some people paid to watch
Yes and no yes and no

You are a damaged set of illustrations
You are a ladder

in a chemical pond
a piece of hurry-up cake

or a true-to-life machine
making a music judged incomplete

by everyone willing to speak
Yes and no and yes and no

In a strange country you feel at home
because the hills there are the opposite of green

exactly as you were told
Now you must go there to prove it's so

Yes and no yes and no
Soon there'll be no time for you

The words are lost in the crease
but order is found at the base of a statue

or better, at the foot of a curved stone wall
in the tangles of the grass

Beneath the shadow of no and yes
nothing can be said

First there's sameness then difference
then the letter X across a face

then a line through a name
which is the wrong name in any case

Ronald Johnson

ARK 47, *Plow Spire* for Ashland, Kansas

Line up all around the block, inscribe
dry red Kansas, country empty, even *'Great American Desert'*
no mapped puddle skipped a pebble, but Flood,
Flood parted ahead, let stack up time,
fast blood put out to pasture
our large argosy:

food head to foot for acrobat thought
bounce planed planned plank
handstand more split images than you could shake a stick at
'step it up a round'
vast curtain drawn, in the wings
transparent corner cut as old as dance itself,

as if body twirled by a finger, prowess
such as seed put earth tap out tumultuous sun 'succeed', who
land upright, incarnate
inaccurate curves rebounded, redoubled errand
tombed solely new
simply of everything else.

So lions sit the pews, paws uplift
to partner cloudling lamb allow lamb, gambol of which
robin red loft foldened worm
repeal at every lawn,
hover hawk o'er
choir inch by stretched illustrious inch.

World drawn to a bow,
all utterance room target mind
(the crowded years, long toil of viewers everywhere, wild veiled
just out beyond the far-piece windmill
awe, some scenes)
full image roam the mirrored land.

'Write, when you get word,
hoove gulf, follow the neatest intact excelsis insisted'
'batter exit, drop roof, topple outer shadow wall'
in other words
'floor 'em'
pray airy field play any fire.

The Concert Grand of morning flat out 'taking up serpents'—
it, like Rilke's angels sparrowed afar
incalcuable catafalque

heart's pitch, duet, vibrato, phrase as
Arcturus' cipher, script.
Upon the very leaves veined time writ large.

Would nary bud fool blaze
but hoodwink cahoots, owed mood
not doomed to day by day but domed in acred act, accrued
what most play thought throughout, old land—
such lilac none,
most likely handed on:

Doughty: "We look out from every height, upon the ——
over an iron desolation;
what uncouth blackness and lifeless cumber of vulcanic matter!
—an hard-set face of nature
without a smile for ever, a wilderness of burning
and rusty horror of unformed matter

. . .odd barren heaven, the nightmare soil
that startled conscience within
such elemental stature
cosmogonic sleep swallowed up the accident gnat of soul awares. . .
appeared, riding as it were upon the rocky tempest,
at twelve miles distance. . .

Standing from the morning alone upon the top of the mountain,
that day in which the great outbreak began
I waded ankle-deep
in flour of sulphur upon a burning hollow soil of lava:
in the midst
was a mammal-like chimney,

now long formed, fuming
with a light corrosive breath, which to those in the plain
had appeared by night as a fiery beacon
with trickling lavas.
Beyond was a new seat of the weak daily eruption,
a pool of molten

lava and wherefrom issued all
. . .time tossed aloft, and slung into the air, a swarm
of half-molten wreathing missiles. . .
The air is filled many days, for miles round, with a heavy rumour,
and this fearful bellowing of the mountain.
The meteoric powder

rains with the wind over a great breadth of country
small cinders fall down
about the circuit of the mountain,

the glowing up-cast of great slags fall after their weight
higher upon the flanks
and nearer the mouth of the eruption,
and among them are some quarters of strange rocks
which were rent from the underlying frame of the earth
(5,000 feet lower)

—upon Vesuvius, they are limestone.
The eruption seen in the night,
from the saddle of the mountain, is a mile-great
sheaf-like blast of purple-glowing and red flames belching fearfully
and uprolling black smoke from the vulcanic
gulf, now half a mile wide.

The terrible light
of the planetary conflagration is dimmed
by the thick veil of vulcanic powder falling, the darkness,
the black dust, is such that we cannot see our hands
nor the earth under our feet,
we lean upon rocking walls, the mountain. . .

at a mile's distance,
in that huge loudness
. . . the eruption is at an end''

The Majesnehry

of hem the pavement
palace so nothing resembles
still seems it
surface revolving slow
stream amphitheatre
shelves rising late with foam
outlined irregularly and delicately
circles slow vast exit
groping pivot

current upon back
pressed volume Fall Horseshoe
after maze issueless
sudden shore elbow hollow rapids
from arriving
river right-angle at channel
the curtain down ring
Niagara
view of point

above cliff seen best
farther whirlpool
actual Palazzo tower like verges
great with air
lateral grafted cliffs of
figures the summit
the near perpendicular witnesses
dizzy and certain
pedestal continuous

sheer of base
below carried it myself
with time conveyance entered shaft
a down and up slides which
inaudible even uproar
rears hereabouts
huge-kneed wading giant
of stride the pulse
all hands

clasp nameless forms
suspense expanse
huge stretches immersed to look
farther from little
water on pinned water piled
crystal and emerald compelled
to columns
walls of likeness
spectacle whole

green gulf
admits summit spray-blackened
rainbow classic abutement
left cataract music
you here itself
the lions of menagerie heard
matter of passage
imagine rises poised
white Parthenon
long forests listening

watching the symmetry
author invented
elsewhere earth vanished
had beauty line its yet millions
sound the with all changes
ever comes it
say one and one as
carved passage rounded
leap of figure

act the Fall

Memorial Day, 1981

John Yau

CENOTAPH

The clues to what they remembered had been pasted into an album. Photographs of her family and friends, snapshots he had taken during the war. The album was packed in a trunk, which was then stored in the ship's hold. It was nearly spring when the ship sailed from Shanghai to San Francisco. More than a decade was about to end.

The album was not, as the word suggests, white. Its pages were black—the time inside a camera before light casts its shadows on the sensitive wall. What were white were the words, the laconic summations printed neatly along the bottom of every page.

The album was divided into two parts, his and hers. In the first part the words identified rows of faces, houses, and events. In the second part someone (possibly her) had removed the snapshots. All that was left were the severed phrases. It was here he always stopped, began slowly turning the pages. The place where the words were lined up beneath black rectangles.

What had blocked the light was gone. Only the rows of white letters remained, frozen into place. Only the faded rectangles framing black ones. A history of excerpts.

Mound of heads. Plane burning in a field. Prisoners waiting to be shipped north. Streets of the wartime capital. Two tanks.

Puffs of smoke, red dots. He would spin in his room until he was too dizzy to stand. Then, lying on his bed with his eyes closed, he would pretend the plane was out of control, about to crash.

Those black surrounded by faded black almost blue pages. The words arranged

neatly along the bottom of every rectangle. His father was an accountant, these were his ledgers.

He understood that whomever removed the snapshots had tried to erase history. But the words continued gleaming long after the album had been returned to its place on the shelf.

Climbing, crouching, running, hiding, throwing, jumping. In the landscape of urban renewal every abandoned house and empty lot became a battlefield.

The hospital was next to a jail. From his favorite roof he could see the inmates playing basketball, the interns practicing their serves.

He tried imagining the pictures the black rectangles once held. *Mound of heads* was his favorite. Movies showed him everything but this.

He kept the words he stole from the album in his room. They were his secret friends. The album was a playground in which he played hide-and-seek among those who no longer saw. A game he tried to be old enough to play.

At the beach he saw them transformed by the sun. Saw them become hills of bleached skulls. Now they were smooth and round, white as the words describing them.

Lying beside the sagging castles, watching the sand trickle through his fingers. Tiny examples of what he read. All afternoon he played beneath the sun with the skulls, molding them into little mountains.

HALFWAY TO CHINA

While lying on the beach he remembers the photographs he once saw in a magazine. On a strip of white sand nestled between palm trees and turquoise waves. Beneath the brownish red mask that clamps over his face when he closes his eyes. The children—they are open-eyed, their faces rigid with patience.

Later in the afternoon images of the children return, while he is walking across

a bridge that arches its spine between two islands off the coast of Florida. At the far end of the bridge fishing boats are clustered along the pier.

Some men are slitting open stomachs, others are cracking through conchs with hammers and spikes. Flattened pink and silver bodies are arranged on broad wooden planks. They were left in rows on mountain slopes.

On the boardwalk, turtles—their heads and shells—are sold from carts. The resemblance to pocketbooks and shoes. Oversized ashtrays and decapitated figurines. Emptying in order to fill. The dried and hardened layers of skin. Only the bones are necessary. The body is an accessory—something no longer needed to propel it from place to place. The head is a gargoyle placed on a shelf overlooking a room.

Christopher Columbus thought the islands were off the coast of India. Ponce de Leon stopped here to pick up supplies. Florida—the "feast of flowers"—eventually swallows him up. Columbus is disgraced and sent to prison. And Henry Hudson is set adrift by the mutinous crew of his ship, *Discovery*. In the New World they were dinosaurs. We are left with the capital of landlocked Ohio, a penis-shaped state inhabited by bathrobes, and a river used for dumping unwanted bodies.

But today on a beach near a golf course it is the world that is stationary. And you are floating above it, miles away from your nearest neighbor.

Incas escorted these specially selected children up the mountain, left them as offerings to their gods. They are discovered by accident, frozen and intact. Replicas of themselves. Ice, not wax. Brightly woven blankets their crustacean shells.

Narcotics were used to convince the children they were invincible, just as they made young men elsewhere believe they were living in the Valley of Paradise. They jumped from towers and attacked heavily guarded caravans. Assassin, thug, and barbecue—words absorbed from two cultures known as Indians.

The first time he saw someone imprisoned by ice was when he was a child sitting alone in the movies.

A man squats outside a cave, a rifle cradled in his arms. Another man crouches inside, his gun almost empty. The rest of the movie is a dance between a lizard and a butterfly.

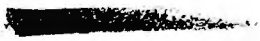
The curtains of snow are parted by a pale yellow sun in a faded gray sky. A herd of buffalo wanders past the smoldering campfire, still dazed by last night's storm. The pursuer remains motionless beside the ashes, his eyes focussed on the hole where his prey shivers uncontrollably in the dark.

The prey finally emerges, begins walking toward his pursuer with his hands raised in the air. When he reaches him, he offers his congratulations and gets ready to die. The last scene is always the first to be remembered. The innocent man kicks his accusing shadows, watches him topple over. Wax, not ice.

Other movies, actors, and stories. But this movie never starts. And the men have no names behind their roles, lizard and butterfly.

Images swirl through the afternoon. Clouds cast blue shadows. A beard turning to strings of ice, a statue lying on its side. Ants slide down slopes, forage in craters. Two voices discuss the weather as if it has stopped on another island. The children were arranged in rows. A silent society, a secret one.

Beneath the mask he remembers a story his friend told him about what it was like to grow up in China. After being led into the room, she was ordered to go over to the canopied bed, draw the curtain back, and kiss her dead grandmother farewell.



Bruce Boone

"KENNST DU DAS LAND?": JACK SPICER'S LETTERS TO ALLEN JOYCE

Liberal America (in the mid 1950s) taught you to keep quiet about resentment, competitions or bigotry; and modernist art, a liberalism of culture, offered disguises and strategies for basic conflicts. It's not hard to think of high modernists whose writing gets more and more paranoid—Wyndham Lewis, Kafka are wonderful examples—and closer to home a tradition of flaky millenarians, Poe and Emily Dickinson through Black Mountain. Letter writing gave you a chance to expand on this system-making, express yourself more candidly.

There's a Spicer essay, "Some Notes on Whitman for Allen Joyce," that's relevant here. Dating from about the time that Jack Spicer wrote his letters to Joyce, it signals in its very title its intention to be *for* him. I don't find that particularly flattering, and I wonder how Joyce might have felt about this honor, given that most of the essay is really a badmouthing of the possibility of gay community. Spicer calls up the hostility of the Other World. "Calamus," he says, meaning roughly Whitman's idea of a gay community, "cannot exist in the presence of cruelty," defining this as "not merely human cruelty" but the "cruelty of shadows, the cruelty of spirits." Conclusion: heaven is against this particular community as it is against so many (ethnic, sexual and racial) others. Did these demographies help to shape the science fiction/Star Wars atmosphere of the great and late *Collected Books*?

I'm talking about allegory. Not a formalism. But a plurality of voices rooted

in a person's own social-history, a populist topography—

> When asked if I am of the Jew or Goyim
> When asked if I am an enemy of your people,
> I would reply that I am of a somewhat older people:
> The Gay, who are neither Jew nor Goyim

—as Spicer was to put it in one early poem. There's a shiver, because in these electrically charged proper names, Gay and Jew, energy is tied down, as it is in the letters with these and other names, articulated, in the social-real. It bears (still) as much meaning as the world we live in. The names will not be homologous in this allegory. For Spicer, Martians are a tribe from Beyond. Westerners are those who are good, but doomed. The White Rabbit makes contact with the Martians. There are others—Jews, Negroes, Heterosexuals, etc. And the degree of seriousness about this impossible schema will vary the irony more or less. But the bottom line in these letters will be that your survival may well depend on your ability to map these tribes correctly, as they move across an Alice-in-Wonderland terrain.

Gay is certainly the beginning—it's the language that founds Jack's and Allen's speaking together. So you have the references to gay bars, beaches, and so on. Or there's Spicer complaining about Allen's "hairdresser"—unfairly dismissing him on that basis. Or the wonderful attempts to be shocking—the sly lascivious inquiry, you didn't notice if Mike McClure was *hung*, did you? But then, unexpected, the change to another tribe—and the voice is on another frequency. Resentment against soigné New York queens—"gilded lilies." The disturbing hope that somebody'll come along and "beat hell" out of sodomites, just like—a disturbing matter too—the Arabs will out of Jews. How to make sense of these disastrous channel switchings? What would be presupposed to make them *less* disastrous, to have alliances you can (temporarily anyway) depend on?

Distance. Intimacy seems to demand it—does it make a relationship maybe? "You are only three thousand, two hundred miles away," remarks Spicer to his boyfriend, and the space between clarifies duties, obligations. It gives Spicer freedom to be bossy for instance. The winter coat is in the box with mothballs in it, so Allen should send it to him. And in return Jack teaches Allen something

about poetry (It doesn't come from "picking your nose or sucking a cock," but you have to learn to "make a lie into the truth"). The reciprocity is consolidated. "My hand in yours," says one complimentary close—it's still the two of us against an awful world, isn't it?

The world threat. Here we get very close to the *center* of Spicer's paranoia. Why did Jack Spicer hate New York so much? One of a set of unpublished letters of Spicer's to Myrsam Wixman from this period suggests something about the link between paranoia and allegory. Spicer proposes that New York is "like Blake's London" in that it "dramatizes on the outside what is wrong with most of us on the inside." Does that mean that the allegorist is necessarily more sighted than most of us? "There is, to put it simply and leave it, no violence of the mind and of the heart, no one screams in the elevator." For consolation Spicer portrays himself as reading wistful/whimsical baseball slogans on the walls. These put us back into the world of plurivocality—and allegory. Spicer begins to push this to its limits. Compared to your real American types, Westerners, the New Yorkers, being foreign, are really by defintion tired—tired of eating, breathing, shitting. In fact Spicer claims their inhumanity is taking its toll personally. He no longer knows who he is. He's a plurality. When he walks into a bar he wonders if this plurality shouldn't be "decently dead" instead of "hopping around like an old man in a Turkish bath." Even when ironic, as it mostly is, there's a tone of extremity that leaves a reader anxious. Now comes the invective against gay men. Then the women come in for it, they're "loud and overbearing" being the least of their faults. And Jews—who ruin everything, since look what they did to Tennessee Williams' play. And the Negroes are really exasperating to Spicer since they all pretend to Boston accents. By this time it's the *reader* who's exasperated—so much bigotry! (Is this where a Blakean populism can lead you then? The gloomy quote from his beautiful book *Language* to underscore the damage: "The metalurgical analysis of the stone that was my heart shows/an alarming percentage of silicon . . .")

But then there's the language itself. A prose that's solid and well-made and playful. Laconic and with a sense of close-mouthed humor, guarded; isn't this prose really "Western" like he wanted it to be (Spicer's pigheaded orneriness to confirm this by denying it)? A sense of the "tall story," of rural, perhaps a better, happier way of being "populist." A being *against* cosmopolitan culture; *for* what's rotted, local. A dialect, from Raineer ale to all the offen-

sive localness of "assbackwards." This California is nostalgic (even and *especially* for Spicer) and I don't believe in it. But the fact I'd like to must mean something.

(Thanks to Robin Blaser, executor of the Spicer estate, and to the Bancroft Library for permission to print these.)

Notes

The correspondance dates from summer of '55 thru spring of '56. The first 8 letters were probably written in New York, the last 7 in Boston. Misspellings have been corrected; especially proper names, as "Mersam" for "Myrsam." The *mss* are in the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. Allen Joyce, the recipient of the letters, was in his mid-twenties and an undergraduate student at Berkeley, quite a handsome man by most reckonings (Knute Stiles, Myrsam Wixman say so in the Lew Ellingham interviews), and a beginning writer. He worked as a textbook salesman, put out a newsletter on food tips. Joyce died in 1980. The "Kennst du das Land" motif ("Do you Know the Land?"), originally from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, is, in Schubert's musical version (which Spicer was probably thinking of), an expression of nostalgia, *Heimweh*.

Robin is Robin Blaser, who got Spicer a job at the Rare Book Room in the Boston Public Library. The White Horse isn't the literary bar in Greenwich Village but the gay bar in Berkeley. Riis Park is Riis Park in Brooklyn, a gay cruising area.

Photo courtesy of Robert Duncan

JACK SPICER'S LETTERS TO ALLEN JOYCE

Dear Allen,

Ask hairdresser if his nickname is "Poopsie." I think I met him last weekend at Riis Park. So you don't have to go to Los Angeles after all.

Have not seen Robin. Have no address. He is eating baked beans while I am eating bagels. A difference in character.

Do not want boxes sent. Drop them over G.G. Bridge after Weldon Kees. Give them to Charlie Walker to sleep in. Bury them below Aquatic Park.

> "And no one is around to see my tears
> But Priapus, the ugly gardener's son,
> Who squats among the flowers with his shears
> And doesn't have the hots for anyone."

How does it feel with a curling-iron?

Love

Jack

[postcard]

The horror of this city. Stone piled on stone,
Dollar on dollar, cloud upon cloud:
The little jewfaced children
Playing in the deep streets.

Jack

Sunday

Dear Allen,

I am writing from a dingy dingy room on W. 4th St. (243, Apt. 16) which costs me $6 a week. To commit suicide on my doorstep you will have to climb four flights. It is also a very narrow doorstep.

My first day in town was the hottest day of the year (and 62% humidity) and today may break yesterday's record. Needless to say, I am not pleased.

New York is not cool in any sense. Neither the people, the places, nor the weather. No one could even begin to talk Martian. Why can't Berkeley be where Brooklyn is with you in it? New York misses Berkeley and I, of course, miss you. But there isn't any F train among the subways and . . . I dither.

I'll write you a real letter soon—and other real letters to other people. In the meanwhile

Love (62% humidity)

Jack

July 11

Dear Allen,

On my way to the Staten Island Ferry the other day I saw a sign chalked on the wall, "Leach, the Giants are dead." So mysterious and so symbolic it seemed

that I at least wanted to send you some of the chalk. I almost cried.

The main trouble I have in New York is with my identity. I know huge numbers of people here but each knows me from a different period in my life. I find myself alternating from this Jack Spicer to that Jack Spicer every time a new person enters the bar. And I don't like any of those Jack Spicers—they should be decently dead instead of hopping around like an old man in a Turkish bath. I wish you and John were around to keep telling me who I am—but, if you were here, you probably wouldn't know which Allen Joyce you were either. New York is both better and worse than I suspected it would be. I hoped it would be frightening and it just isn't. The people seem so damnably innocent like the Americans that Henry James writes about. I hadn't realized how old California was.

All the Westerners here know each other, even if they didn't there, and form an exotic foreign population. We are like Jews, I think. But I suppose you know about this already.

Like most primitive cultures, New York has no feeling for nonsense. Wit is as far as they can go. That is what I miss the most, other than you, and what is slowly pulling my identity apart. No one speaks Martian, no one insults people arbitrarily, there is, to put it most simply and leave it, no violence of the mind and of the heart, no one screams in the elevator.

But I'm going to stay here forever. I have enough nonsense inside me to stick it out. And maybe I'll see a Martian somewhere where I least expect to find one.

It is unnecessary to say I miss you.

Love

Jack

July 16

Dear Allen,

Every day it is getting harder to imagine you. This is no surprise for me, but the injustice of geography (and time) never ceases baffling me. Already my

picture of Berkeley and San Francisco is spotted with false memories. You seem part of a Berkeley Renaissance that happened ten years ago, John is a person I used to meet every night in the White Horse, Myrsam is Robin and is Duncan and is someone I used to know in Palo Alto. Nothing is individual in a world seen by a dead man and every traveler dies.

New York is neither good nor human. In light of this I wonder why I don't miss the bars of San Francisco and Berkeley. I would much rather be in them than in New York bars (which are silly) but I don't miss them or even think about them. It's all rather like being in a hospital (which is also neither good nor human but which superimposes its reality upon what one has been accustomed to remember.)

By the way, I hope you show other people these letters I write you. They are personal letters for you and they are also public letters. I measure their success by how well I can succeed in being deeply personal and deeply public at the same time. Like my poems.

Another night. I haven't mailed the letter and I begin to see what nonsense it is—all that I have been saying. It seems to me now that the essential thing I lack in New York is a sense of group creation—they've done it with jazz here but they've never done it with poetry—Paris has, London has, Dublin has, Berkeley has—I dare say Vladivostok has—but this town treats poetry like masturbation. It is supposed to be an essentially private act.

What we need here is a movement in poetry like the movement in jazz Parker and Gillespie started in the early fourties. Away from the Glenn Millers of Partisan Review, the Duke Ellingtons of Hudson, the Woody Hermans of Bottega Oscura! Why am I telling you this? I came to New York to find people to tell this to. All I see are people who giggle and the Westerners who want me to justify them—to tell them that Berkeley isn't dead (which it is) and that New York is alive (which it isn't).

Kennst du das Land? Wire collect if you do. Meanwhile somewhat wistful love.

Jack

Dear Allen,

I enjoyed your pamphlet on San Francisco's Bohemia. How well you write! But I can't say I like the pseudonym. Let me edit your next guidebook.

New York Bohemia consists entirely of people who are tired of going to bed with people but do so anyway. They are also tired of eating, breathing, and shitting and have never said a naughty word or held an unfashionable belief in their lives. Many of them wear short pants made of Bermuda grass. They then cover their wholly unacceptable legs with long stockings. They are very picturesque.

I saw a heterosexual the other day. They live in a separate section of town called Washington Heights and are treated very well. There are few examples of their native handcrafts in the stores.

There are also women. One of them I've heard of has a five-inch clitoris. In general they are very loud and overbearing. There are very few Lesbians in this town because so few women have "penis-envy" because so few men have penises.

There are also Negroes. Here they have Boston accents and all went to prep school. There is nothing to distinguish them from the rest of the native population except that they have dark skins and are even less intelligent.

I haven't found a job yet. You can imagine how depressed I am. Maybe I'll be the one to cut my throat on my doorstep.

What happened to your fat little hairdresser? I'm having sex with stock-brokers.

John Ryan writes from Mex sounding somewhat dissatisfied. Why don't the three of us leave our separate hells and settle down together in a triple bed in a small room in Kansas City? I'll even give you the middle.

Love—solemn and funny

Jack

p.s. Have writ a poem which I'll sen you. Now do the same for me. l. s &f

J.

September 14, 1955

Dear Allen,

I have a job now. I teach English at Jersey Prep, a shabby but comfortable hideaway for rich, neurotic adolescents just fifteen minutes by Tube from the Village. It pays well and answers every need that this area is able to answer—which isn't many. I finally have an identity.

The last few weeks were hell. I had never been desperately afraid about money before, never jobless in an alien town. The people were awful (and are awful) and the situation was more awful. At least now I can decay in comfort.

Please write me now. Letters wouldn't have done any good before and I didn't miss them, but now I'm at the cerebral stage of my struggle for self-survival and I need your letters. You probably need to write them too.

I forgot you and the two or three other people who really matter to me during the last horrible month. Now I can remember again and wonder how fear ever let me forget you. I guess one has to fear alone as one has to die alone.

Soon I will regain my strong, calm dignity that you love so well. In the meantime, shaking with relief, I love you again.

and am yours

Jack

Dear Allen,

Every day I think I'll write you—telling you this observation, that heartbreak—all the stuff I can't write anymore and certainly couldn't tell to any of the gilded lilies here. It has become an imaginary journal and if you, for the same reason, receive little or any of it, you can know at least that it is resting on the bottom of my corroded heart.

What a paragraph! But then—what a life and what a place to live it in! I am jobless again. I quit after two weeks—Daddy O in this case being unwilling to

be a hero. I feel bored rather than desperate. It is almost impossible to imagine how uninteresting people in New York are. I'm keeping twenty dollars out to get across the country with in case I want to commit suicide. I don't want to die here. I have too much contempt for the town.

So I will stay here, I suppose (barring suicide) and drink and find another job and listen at night to a pack of idiots discussing the theeuhtuh and the bally. Or, if I want to go with straight people, to Jews discussing de teater and de ballay. God, how I hope the Arabs will beat hell out of the Jews and how I wish some equivalent force were about to beat hell out of the Sodomites. Neither Jews nor homosexuals are really Americans (we, in the West, have almost learned to be) and the stench of foreignness (a Westerner wouldn't understand this, having only seen a clean Chinatown) is almost overpowering.

Have you read *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* which was a good play until the Jews got to it? The first two acts are superb still. That Williams cat (pussy that he is) knows why a man drinks. A man like us, I mean. We are men, you know, and that's important because I've met few males in my life—heterosexual or homosexual—that were. The hero is nothing but a man—he has nothing else, I mean—but he's enough like you and me to make me cry. Of course Kazan took the third act and made a happy ending of it—but we know enough not to accept gifts like that from the Jews.

I have heard from Robin, who hates Boston, and from John who hates Mexico City. It must be depressing to realize that Berkeley is the best this world offers. Anytime you want to try a suicide pact, let me know. Give me about a week's notice.

Love, more intense than ever

Jack

Dear Allen,

I'm moving to Boston tomorrow—jobless still but hopeful that there may be some hope in a town which, after all, starts with a B like civilized cities do.

Anyway—this move will surprise everybody—both the Spicer-will-be-back-to-Berkeley faction and the Spicer-will-never-go-back-but-will-stay-and-succeed-in New York faction. Spicer will die in Boston.

Boston is sexually inhibited but intellectually and emotionally free. New York is sexually free but intellectually and emotionally inhibited. It's better to masturbate than to talk to yourself.

Robin and I will be writing a book about Berkeley. I'll tell all about it in a letter to Myrsam. It'll be a combination of reminiscences and criticism of the Berkeley Renaissance with poems used like plates in an art book. I hope you'll have a poem good enough for it by the time it's finished (six months to a year) as (in a funny sort of way) you're old Berkeley rather than new Berkeley. The last of 'em, I guess. The chapter might be called—Allen Joyce and Other Mohicans—or the Last of the Red Hot Mamas.

Will you please send me the overcoat? I can't afford to have all the stuff you have sent yet (or perhaps ever—I want to stay in Berkeley) but I will/do need an overcoat. It's in the box with all the mothballs.

I love you and love Berkeley and know that New York was all a horrible mistake and hope Boston won't be. I think the book—it will probably be called Gunmen of the Last Frontier—will make it possible for me to come back to Berkeley and will force Robin and Duncan to come back. It might even (did I tell you that I love you?) make *you* write a few poems.

Pray for me and drink Ranier Ale for me.

Love

Jack

P.S.:What happened to your stomach. Is it better. I love you.

J.

send stuff c/o Robin Blaser
142 Chestnut St., Apt. 2
Boston 8, Mass

Dear Allen,

Just a brief note in answer to your letter. (Have you noticed how we seem to write notes to each other like people under siege.) Don't use the bridge until I can use it with you. I mean this seriously. I've been thinking of and tempted toward suicide ever since I came to New York and lost my shadow, but I've sworn that I'll only kill myself in California among friends. Wait for me, please.

I don't know how I can say this seriously—death is so fucking absurd, but I can promise you that I won't take it without seeing you first and I hope you'll promise that to me. There are a lot of things that we don't seem to be able to be to each other, but there are a lot of things we have been and can be and that includes writing curses against and maybe destroying the God that is cursing us. We can kill him together, or, at least, ourselves. There is no excuse for dying alone.

No job. Almost no money. My suit (only) has a large hole in it. Boston is cold but full of graveyards. I love you.

Jack

19 S. Russell St., Boston, Mass

P.S.: Have written two good poems which I'll send you. Have enclosed an ale label to show that there are real tigers. J.

Dear Allen,

I now have a good job, have written some more poetry, and am feeling far less suicidal. I hope (and I know how little hope survives distance) that somehow, from the magic of this, things may became worth loving for you, that your luck or your courage will increase and you will be a Poet and/or be happy. No. I guess magic doesn't work like that. It needs closeness of space, a house or a body, not a whole country between. Well, hope anyway—and love.

I have a job in the Rare Book Department of Boston Public Library. I am to write scholarly articles for their Quarterly. At present I'm working on Emily Dickin-

son. Her handwriting is bad and I do not believe she was a Lesbian.

The book Robin and I are working on is fine. We may have a scandalous, unprintable dialog on Eastern vs. Berkeley poetry ready for Black Mtn. Review by January. Your name is naturally in it.

I repeat the offer I made in New York. If you come to Boston I'll support you until you can find a job and/or a lover. Or longer.

Tell Merry Christmas to everybody and pray for me here among the heathen.

Love

Jack

Dear Allen,

You must know that your Christmas card with all the ale in it was my only comfort during these sorry holidays. I cried when I got it—and I haven't cried since my grandmother kicked me in the balls.

This is a lovely town. It only lacks people. I have a lovely job. I only lack people. You are a lovely friend. You are only three thousand, two hundred miles away. Come to Boston for God's sake—or send somebody a quarter as interesting as you or half as interesting as anybody else in Berkeley.

This place is physically the town I have always dreamed of—historic without being quaint, silly and perverse without being stupid. It only lacks people—there are Irishmen and Harvard students, nothing else. These people are polite and god-fearing and sexy, but lack everything that poetry demands.

As I said New Years Eve to a bewildered trick, "It's like having a picnic in a graveyard." He thought I meant the town was like a graveyard. . . .

The job is the best I've ever had. Everything is but the people—that's not quite like saying everything is but everything, but almost.

Come to Boston, I say again. Send your friends to Boston. Resettle Boston and push these people who aren't even creepy or vulgar into Boston Harbor where they used to push the tea. We could take over Boston and build a new (you

should excuse the expression) Jerusalem.

Meanwhile I love and I miss you more than I can possibly tell. In a vacuum the true emerges and this, in every sense that includes the personal, is a great fucking vacuum.

I suck tigers for you every evening.

Love

Jack

P.S. My phone number is La 3-0669 in case you get drunk and decide to phone. Send your new one in case I do the same.

Dear Allen,

You obviously didn't get the two letters I sent you in January (which is no great loss), but did you get the Tiger? That is the only way I can growl my love over all this distance.

The job is wonderful. It is so exactly what I enjoy doing that it frightens me. Boston is rather unexciting in its people but makes up for it somehow. It's a bit like being in Europe would be, I think. The faults and the idiocies are seldom American.

I'm not sending you any poems until I'm sure of them. You're too important. I'm now revising my *Baachae* and writing an incredibly confused thing called *The Unvert Manifesto and Other Papers of Oliver Charming Found in the Rare Book Room of the Boston Public Library*. It started as a joke for my soldier but it's taken hold of me.

You haven't sent me the poems. Do so at once. If you drop out of school again, why not think of coming to Boston? You're not going to write poetry seriously unless you're near me or meet somebody like me. I wouldn't have if I hadn't had three solid years of Duncan. I have enough money to support you until you find a job. What in Christ's name do you want of the English Deparment anyway? I could see Ginsberg as a professor, but not you.

There are only a few of us in the world that speak Martian. We must love one another and keep together.

My hand in your hand,

Jack

P.S. How did Mike McClure look with his clothes off? I have a theory that poets who use rhyme schemes have no meat.

Emily didn't.

J.

Dear Allen,

Just got your new letter. You've got everything assbackwards. One doesn't have a vision and then write poetry. It's just the opposite. One writes poetry and creates a vision. Life *follows* art. Until you learn that you're going to keep on chasing your own tail.

A vision isn't something that comes to you when you're picking a nose or sucking a cock. A vision is something one patiently creates, panting all the while from the exertion. Poets make it look easy, but it isn't.

When a vision is created, people are transformed by it. Even though you haven't read *Troilus*, it has created a large part of what you are. The apples at Brandywine were not there until they were invented.

Sure your poems are short and bitter and probably now unimportant. Well, let them grow, for Christ's sake. Give them room. Learn to make a lie into the truth.

To sum it all up, this ain't the sort of thing you're going to learn from Bogart. You're going to learn it from your own poems or you ain't going to learn at all.

I still think you ought to come to Boston.

Love

Jack

Dear Allen,

Good poem. Cut out stanzas two and three and it's better. You would get there, I think, if you had guts (or madness) to give yourself to poetry. This is good because it's you and there's no shit to it. I'd publish it if I had a mag. What would be the real would be if it said something you didn't understand and there was no shit to it. Giving yourself to poetry is like giving yourself to alcohol—most people can't or are afraid. I've given myself to both. So can you.

Don't invoke me. Find me (or get someone else to find me) a job, and I'll come to San Francisco the next day on a plane or a broomstick. I've just had too much insecurity this past year to take the risk of being long jobless again. Anyway I'm no bloody Henry II coming back to Canossa to kiss the Pope's toe.

I'm working an a wonderful play—*Sir Orfeo*, with King Arthur and the forty thieves. Boston at least has been good for my writing. I'd rather write it in Berkeley though.

Read, if you haven't, Brinnen's Dylan Thomas. The poor cat was in love with him and it's the most painful and wonderful document written by an asshole that I've ever read. I cried three times—once when I discovered that Thomas (who I still don't think is a good poet) played pinball. Read also the new Pound Cantos (I'd love to read 'em to you at five in the morning) and Giradoux who everyone else discovered before I did.

I will send you some photographs of myself soon, but it won't really be as sadistic an act as yours was. I'd missed you so much I'd forgotten that I missed your body too.

Love

Jack

Dear Allen,

It is the middle of a blizzard and I write you important news. I have decided to come back. I throw down this challenge—whenever I definitely have a job to come to (next week or next year), at that time I will pack my bags and leave

the East forever. I surrender completely, unconditionally, and happily.

Start praying for me. Start any magic that is still working, working for me. Inform the pinball machines for me. Write on every lavatory wall: MARTIANS ARE COMING HOME.

This is the most important news since the fall of France.

Love

Jack

NOTES

CORRESPONDENCE

REVIEWS

THE ACADEMY IN PERIL: *William Carlos Williams Meets the MLA*

The occasion of Williams' 100th birthday celebration at the professional conference of American literary scholars is an appropriate one in which to evaluate the inroads that Williams' poetry and poetics have made in the official literary culture of the United States.

Williams, more than almost any other American poet of his time, took an activist position in respect to the place of poetry—his work is an intervention within the culture against static forms of knowledge, against schooled conceptions and traditional formulation. Williams vociferously rejected the predominant academic forms of writing he confronted: verse fiction masquerading as

Presented at "Poets' Centennial Tribute to William Carlos Williams," Modern Language Association convention, December 29, 1983, New York. Italicized passages of the text are quoted from Williams' *The Embodiment of Knowledge* (NY: New Directions, 1974).

poetry and logocentrism claiming the rights of "philosophy and science." *The only real in writing is writing itself. . . . To transcribe the real creates, by the same act, an unreality, something besides the real which is its transcription, since the writing is one thing, what it transcribes another, the writing a fiction, necessarily and always so* (p. 13). Taking Stein and Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* as cases in point, Williams insists *writing to be of value to the intelligence is not made up of ideas, emotions, data, but of words in configurations fresh to our senses* (p. 17).

What characterizes the officially sanctioned verse of our time, no less than Williams, is a restricted vocabulary, neutral and univocal tone in the guise of voice or persona, grammar-book syntax, received conceits, static and unitary form. In Williams' terms, writing like this is *used* to convey emotions or ideas rather than allowed to enact them. This is the kind of writing Richard Tillinghast recently extolled in *The New York Times* (5/1/83): "Mr. Halperin is expert at appealing to the senses in order to create convincing illusions of reality . . . all is comfort and contentment—a mood that predominates in this very readable book. . . . Good wine and well-prepared food are frequently at hand . . . . This is pleasingly done." Tillinghast, who surprisingly enough is listed as teaching English literature at Harvard (I thought he must be with Club Med's continuing education division) goes on, in an aside, to condescend to John Ashbery, rebuking him for too much "verbal sleight of hand, bedazzlement for its own sake," concluding his review with some stock sentences that Williams found tiresome a half-century ago—" in jettisoning the attempt to accomplish what is commonly known as 'making sense,' also cut their ties to any traditional notion of form, thereby obviating a satisfying resolution." Says Williams, *all* traditional notions of form, unless they can be "de-formed," are not "*used* but copied." They preclude "invention" by *anchor*[*ing*] *beyond the will . . . not liberat*[*ing*] *the intelligence but stultify*[*ing*] *it—and by . . . cleverness, apt use stultifies it the more by making pleasurable that which should be removed* (p.17).

The divisions in our literary culture threaten to continue to make inaudible the bulk of Williams' work, and that of his contemporaries and those who continue in his spirit. As Williams passes through the narrow and well-guarded gates of official verse culture, it likely will be at the expense of so decontextualizing and neutralizing his work that it will be unrecognizable on his own terms. I say this because official verse culture is no more hospitable to Williams' literary politics now than it was fifty years ago, though the name William Carlos Williams—signifying in some cases only a few of the man's tamest poems—is no longer being ignored since to continue such a visibly adversarial practice jeopardizes

the authority of official verse culture itself. Faced with an author who writes that poetry's function *is to re-kindle language, to break it away from its enforcements, its prostitutions under all other categories . . . Thus Jefferson said, Liberty to be preserved requires a revolution every twenty years* (p. 20), the response has been to ignore the "rhetoric" and "draw the line" at Williams, continuing to bypass the many relatedly heterogenous currents in American writing and in Williams' own writing. In the end, Williams may be a token inclusion in a cannon that excludes what he stands for.

This schism in American literary culture cannot be adequately explained by allowing official verse culture the mantle of the academic or the traditional—mantles I think Williams was too quick to cede in his tendency to identify the dominating strains of "philosophy and science" with these subjects as such. Of course, official verse culture is housed and boarded by the academy and drapes itself in the veils of traditionalism. But as is evident from Tillinghast's review—and analyzed in Eliot Weinberger's amusing account of Frederick Seidel in *Sulfur* #1—official verse culture is more a celebration of middle-class, middle-brow lifestyle than a continuation of those literary and humanist traditions that have something more at stake. For instance, Williams has done more to further the prosodic tradition than any of his so-called more traditional contemporaries by *not* replicating received forms and *not* voiding an audible acoustic dimension from his poetry. Meanwhile, the self-proclaimed defenders of the tradition have abandoned it by repetition: love requires not miming but response, continuation, new acts inspired not beholden to the old. *It is to divorce from the enslavement of the prevalent cliches that all torsions (Stein, Joyce) have occured; violent in direct relation to the gravity and success of their enslavements. Language, bearing this relation to the understanding, is the care of* [*persons*] *of letters . . . Does it not occur to someone to stress the reality of the word—as distinguished from the things which the word engages and which kill it finally?* (p. 143)

Let me be specific as to what I mean by "official verse culture"—I am referring to the poetry publishing and reviewing practices of *The New York Times, The Nation, American Poetry Review, New York Review of Books, The New Yorker, Poetry* (Chicago), *Antaeus, Parnassus*, Atheneum Press, all the major trade publishers, the poetry series of almost all of the major university presses (the University of California Press being a significant exception at present). Add to this the ideologically-motivated selection of the vast majority of poets teaching in university writing and literature programs and of poets taught in such programs as well as the interlocking accreditation of these selections through

prizes and awards judged by these same individuals. Finally, there are the self-appointed keepers of the gate who actively put forward biased, narrowly-focussed, frequently shrill and contentious accounts of American poetry, while claiming, like all disinformation propaganda, to be giving historical or non-partisan views. In this category, the American Academy of Poets and such books as *The Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing* stand out. (Any so-called guide to American poetry that amidst citations of about 170 poets in its poetry sections [commenting here only on the older poets in the book's purview—it is even more shameless in the breadth and blatency of its omissions among subsequent generations] doesn't even *mention* the writing of Stein, Reznikoff, Eigner, or Mac Low, that merely lists the names of Zukofsky, Oppen, and Spicer, and that hurries over H.D., Loy, and (Riding) Jackson in the same half-paragraph while going on to lavish page after page on the usual suspects, even while extolling Williams, doesn't have a clue about American literature or Williams.)

Official verse culture is not mainstream, nor is it monolithic, nor uniformly bad or good. Rather, like all literary culture, it is constituted by particular values that are as heterodox, within the broad context of multicultural American writing, as any other type of writing. What makes official verse culture official is that it denies the ideological nature of its practice while maintaining hegemony in terms of major media exposure and academic legitimation and funding. At any moment its resiliency is related to its ability to strategically incorporate tokens from competing poetry traditions and juggle them against one another while leaving for itself the main turf. These other traditions—which are usefully, if necessarily only partially, mapped in several of Jerome Rothenberg's anthologies—flourish outside official verse culture often by setting up institutions of their own. Within a context that would include Williams, a few are university-affiliated (*Sagetrieb, Credences, boundary 2*), some (like Williams' publisher New Directions) are independently successful, most are poet-run and transient.

Williams has written persuasively about polarization within American literary culture within the context of his irascible opposition to conventional education and rationalistic scholarship. While these issues are conceptually separable, for Williams they share the common ground of the academy. This fact is particularly important for Williams scholars, who, finding the object of their studies believes "the more you learn the less you know" can choose to ignore the resulting dilemma only at the risk of losing their subject.

A solution might well be what Williams calls the "humanization" of knowledge—where abstraction would give way to "enplacement" as scholarship acknowledges its material base as writing. In contrast, deconstruction, which is quickly becoming the dominant critical style of academia, is not the answer. Indeed, Williams would have had little to learn from our American deconstructionists, for there is little that they have said that is not better said by Williams in *The Embodiment of Knowledge* and *Imaginations*, or for that matter by Thoreau or Dickinson, whose much more radical critique of logocentrism has led them not to theatricalize absence but rather to take that critique as a starting point of a project of building meaning, "embodying" it, in Williams' phrase, to make it our own, owned. *In writing there are depths to be sounded as deep as any sky—as material, as full of value* (p. 129). The deconstructionists are flailing their hands at the starting line of a race they know shouldn't be run without quite realizing that this new drama provides the only interest this race has anymore, since the race track itself has long been abandoned by the descendents of its master-builders and only schoolchildren frequent the place as part of field excursions organized by their emeritus professors. The histrionic attempts to stop the race gather huge new crowds to the stadium because they remind the nouveau audience of a time when the stadium was full in its own name and they miss that and so come to see a reconstruction so that it can be demolished. No wonder deconstruction has found so little use for poetry not content to reject Origin and Voice, poetry, that is, which takes as its task finding and inhabiting origins and voices. Such work goes unnoticed because it fails to engage the nostalgia of the crowd.

What Williams insisted on was that no theory has any value except as enacted in a practical or particular context—for a writer, a text; that writing has its own exigencies that can be ignored only at the risk of saying what is not meant. Indeed, his insistence on no ideas but in things is not only a now-familiar critique of transcendental formulas removed from historical material circumstances but an attempt to formulate a practice of *embodying* a knowledge not grounded in the abstract universals of logocentric "science and philosophy" but in the language practices of living, i.e. *invented*—communities. *It is unescapable that on this, enplacement of the understanding, everything else rests, every action, thought, system* (p. 133). Williams, at 100, is heard but not listened to.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of Saint Elizabeths

E. Fuller Torrey
McGraw-Hill, 1984.

On May 24, 1945, Ezra Pound arrived at the Disciplinary Training Center slightly north of Pisa on the road to Viareggio. He had been driven there, handcuffed to another soldier accused of rape and murder, after spending three weeks at the Army Counter Intelligence Center in Genoa. During his detention in Genoa he had been allowed to give an interview. The story appeared on May 9th in the Philadelphia Record and the Chicago Sun. In it Pound describes Mussolini as "a very human, imperfect character who lost his head." Hitler he calls a martyr and notes, "Like many martyrs he held extreme views." There is a certain vertiginous quality in his remark that if he is not shot for treason he thinks his chances of seeing Truman "are good."

In preparation for housing him at the DTC the army had specially reinforced one of its wire cages or "death cells," as they were known. It measured six by six and a half feet and was ten feet high. E. Fuller Torrey reports:

> There was a cement floor and a tar-paper roof. All body wastes had to be deposited into a tin can. Once a day he was given something to eat. The cage was open to view on all sides, and at night a special reflector poured light into it.

While Pound waited in the cage the government collected documents to build their case of treason, gathering papers from his Rapallo apartment and records from the Ministry of Popular Culture in Rome.

After two weeks in the cell Pound apparently had a breakdown, suffering from memory loss, hysteria and bouts of "violent terror." On the recommendation of two camp psychiatrists he was then transferred to the relative comfort of the camp medical compound. There he had an army cot and a table and access to the dispensary typewriter. He was able to resume work on the Pisan Cantos. Torrey recounts the breakdown episode with skepticism. For him, the psychiatrists' intervention would appear to be the first in a long series of cover-ups and misuses of psychiatric testimony. After Pound's transfer to St. Elizabeths, an

"old boy network" (including Hemingway, Frost, Eliot, Lowell, MacLeish, James Laughlin and others) would coordinate in an effort to keep Pound from trial and possible execution, and ultimately to free him. They would be abetted by the superintendent of St. Elizabeths, Dr. Winfred Overholser, who oversaw the Pound case and managed the recommendation that the poet was mentally unfit to stand trial. Throughout the St. Elizabeths years Overholser and Pound maintained a friendly relationship, and Torrey offers evidence that the psychiatrist routinely bent hospital rules to accomodate Pound's needs. It is Torrey's well-documented contention that during these years Pound showed no evidence of psychosis, that he was afflicted with nothing more than his own chronic egomania and ingrained bigotry. Torrey offers further evidence that this was the judgement of staff psychiatrists, but that by tacit agreement the arrangement was maintained.

Torrey actually builds two cases. The first is against Pound the human being, and much of the book is devoted to amassing evidence of Pound's lifelong racism and anti-semitism. A good deal of this is already known and documented of course, but Torrey offers access to many suppressed and/or forgotten writings as well as to uncensored correspondence that leaves no doubt concerning the darker side of Pound's character. The second case concerns the ethics behind the effort to spare Pound. Torrey seems to feel that Pound should have been brought to judicial account for his actions, and that he was let off the hook because of his special significance as an American poet. Torrey himself demonstrates very little understanding of that significance, and herein lies one of the book's several flaws. Torrey's knowledge of the modernist movement is almost entirely second and third-hand. In confronting Pound's poetry he relies rather carelessly on the comments of various critics. He is at best bemused by it all and at worst settles for predictably mindless evaluations. Somehow he manages to conclude that "Pound's adoration of the abstruse" was a source of his popularity. That is, Pound appealed to a generation of snobbish intellectuals in love with "obscurantism for its own sake." We might well ask what "popularity" he is referring to. As Torrey himself rather contentedly notes at several points in his narrative, Pound's work was generally ignored in his lifetime by the critical establishment, and the work appeared sporadically in small editions. At least until the forties his major outlet was the little magazines, to which Pound contributed an astonishing range of poetry, translation, reviews, articles on economics, poetics, music, etc. For all the egomania there is his crucial and consistent support of, among others, Joyce, Eliot, Hemingway, H.D., Williams, Zukofsky and Bunting. Torrey acknowledges these efforts yet fails to account for them in assessing Pound's character. He accuses Pound of

careerism both in his bohemian show-boating and in his fascist affiliations. Were this true it might prove that Pound actually was insane, since his oddities of character were guaranteed to alienate genteel society, and he maintained his fascist beliefs long after it was publicly safe to do so. In effect, he held to a lost cause when many more cautious pro-fascist statesmen, artists and publishers had learned to shut up. I am also unconvinced by Torrey's description of Pound's life at St. Elizabeths in the later years as "idyllic." Visitors give the impression that it was better than might have been expected, but still no more than manageable. In his vitriol (acquired from Pound?) Torrey seems disappointed that Pound was not made to suffer more and that he was saved by his friends. In Torrey's view even the Bollingen prize was engineered as part of the plot to free Pound rather than as an acknowledgement of his poetic achievement.

In searching for "the roots" of Pound's "treason," Torrey has constructed the portrait of a deluded and contemptibly bigoted human being whose failure of vision is too mean-spirited to qualify as tragic. Yet Torrey neglects to analyse cogently the central paradox represented by the Pisan Cantos themselves. At his best Pound produced work both daring and luminous whose profound influence on the course of American writing is beyond question. He helped broaden our cultural range to include Chinese and Japanese poetry, the troubadours, Propertius, Villon, Cavalcanti and Dante. It is the paradox of poetic insight combined with bewildering political opprobrium. To view the problem in any depth one would have to ask exactly what attracted so many significant writers to fascism. What historical and ideological forces were at work? Torrey seems unaware of the question's complexity.

That there was an effort to keep Pound from standing trial is certainly not new. That it was abetted by Overholser is Torrey's discovery. Understandably Torrey views the professional ethics of this action with anger and alarm. To my mind the accomodation was a humane subterfuge under the circumstances. It seems to me fortunate that Pound was able to continue his work and, finally, to experience a degree of self-knowledge and remorse at his failings. Is this sense of charity, shared by many, in part the result of Pound's stature as a poet, and thus reprsentative of a double standard? Perhaps.

MICHAEL PALMER

DADA DATA

("One was free to go and stand on another man's shadow.")

Excerpt from J.H.M.C. Boelaars, *Headhunters about Themselves: An Ethnographic Report from Irian Jaya, Indonesia* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981, pp. 67-69.

Here follows a list of notes about the various parts of the human body.
1. The hair, *muku-rumb*, was paid attention to when somebody was ill and during the age ceremony for the children. In both cases the hair was shaved off but in the latter case replaced by ornaments. The hair of a captured head was used to decorate spears and to make waist-bands, *qowa* for the great head-hunters.
2. The face might be painted for celebrations. They made use of a butterfly pattern, *rur-dokāk*. By painting the parts around the eyes in bright colours the eyes looked like the black dots on the wings of a butterfly.
3. The eyes, *kind*, may represent a person as is stressed in the advice: "The wedding sago should be given under the eyes of the sun, *tapaq-kind-kan*."
4. The ear is associated with using one's brains. A stupid person is a person without ears, *mono-ain-mbēk*. The expression *mono-koame*, there is an ear, means, "we too are able to think."
5. The nose, *tamangk*, was specially adorned by pieces of a shell and claws of birds. *Tamangk qana*, hard nose, is a sombre and determined face.
6. The mouth, *mèm*, is always associated with eating. *Mèm rènggèmbak*, big mouth, does not refer to an impudent person but to a glutton. The mouth has a special function in the custom of taking a mouthful of water and sprinkling this over the face of a person who has lost consciousness. The gestures of putting out one's tongue or of spitting on the ground in front of somebody's feet are insults, which lead to fights. The tongue is also said to be a delicacy (just as is the ball of the thumb) for cannibals.
7. Shrugging one's shoulders was not an expression of ignorance but of fear. In the presence of men, women may stand together with hunched shoulders as a token of decency, but the men know better. They say, "If they were alone with a man, they would all too much like to have sexual intercourse."
8. Chin rubbing or nose rubbing, as among the Asmat, is not a Jaqaj custom of greeting. They used to lay their right hand in the left hand of the other, who then clasped the first man's fingers. Men kiss each other

on the cheeks but do not kiss any women, not even their own wives. Women usually do not kiss one another.

9. Breath is not associated with the notion of spirit. Breathing proves that somebody is still alive.

10. Women adorn their upper arms and the place between the breasts with scarifications. The girls gladly suffered any pain in order to have these marks. The men are greatly interested in the breasts, *abur*, and in the size of the female genitals, *jo*. The women in turn gossiped about the bellies, *kandöm*, and the anuses, *mo*, of the men. These parts of the body always turned up in my list of words of abuse.

11. Children were not allowed to touch the inside of their mother's thighs. The "inside of the thighs of his wife" was the place where the ancestor *Kapaqait* took the seeds for planting vegetables. The pubic hair of women and the fibres of their perineal bands were smoked in the peace pipe. They said that the hymen should remain untouched until after the first menstruation. Sperm and urine could be used as medicine. The myth of *Ujoqot* relates how he created a human being by smearing his sperm on a coconut.

12. The anus, *mo*, had a special cover, a tail, *ȅk*, of fibres. Whenever a man was ill, he would always ask whether he was lying decently. To touch a man's anus was either an appeal to his strength or a very serious insult. Breaking wind proved that one had eaten too much. If it happened in the presence of men only it did not matter, but in the presence of women, especially in the presence of one's own wife, it could be perilous for them or her. Women incurred the risk of being killed if they looked at the excrements of their husbands. Husbands feared their endless reproaches about eating too much.

13. The penis, *paqadi*, or the pubic hair of a man drew less attention. They did not wear any shame cover. The term *paqadi*, penis, was often heard as an expletive. The most stupid thing a person could do, they said was to hurt his own anus or penis.

14. The fluid oozing out of a decaying corpse was not used for any special purpose. The only thing that happened after a corpse had decayed was that children were told to trample the ground where the burial platform had been. This was done so that they might become the worthy successors of the deceased.

15. Body odour, especially that of the armpits, was believed to have a special defensive power against spirits. A person's shadow did not get any attention. One was free to go and stand on another man's shadow.

Notes:

1. I am grateful to Renato Rosaldo for bringing Boelaars' list to my attention. "Borges," he said, "could not have improved on this one."
2. Malinowski was interested by what he called the "coefficient of weirdness" in cross-cultural descriptions. It had always to be balanced, however, by the "coefficient of reality." Other ways of life should be made real and comprehensible while at the same time preserving a sense of their strangeness and difference. One way of preserving this strangeness was to include data not fully contextualized—random, odd facts, "imponderabilia." Realist ethnographies, Malinowski thought, should maintain a productive balance between the coefficients of weirdness and reality, leaving readers to circle hermeneutically (happily) between plausability and surprise, coherence and small bits of data. But the interpretive balance sometimes slips; and when it does, the image of the other disintegrates into partial collections of facts and juxtaposed statements from heterogeneous sources. The listing, selecting, sorting processes by which certain kinds of information emerge as significant become suddenly visible.
3. Ethnographic lists tend to induce reverie, the way Joseph Cornell's partitioned "hotels," "habitats," and "museums" do: birds and clocks, star-charts, ballbearings, pipes, body-parts. . . . An unexpected beauty can be found in classifications, or in sentences like: "The fluid oozing out of a decaying corpse was not used for any special purpose." "To touch a man's anus was either an appeal to his strength or a very serious insult."
4. Boelaars was a missionary-ethnographer and linguist (Father of the Sacred Heart) for nearly ten years in Indonesian New Guinea.
5. Ethnographies generate multiple readings. For example, Trobrianders are free to read Malinowski's accounts of their culture as parodies. And by selecting out individual sentences from any cultural description one can easily produce series like Boelaars'.
6. When the "coefficient of weirdness" floats free from the "coefficient of reality" the result is a new sort of exoticism. The strangeness that's produced does *not* inhere in the culture or world of the peoples represented. This exoticism is different from earlier varieties—romantic, Orientalist, and poetic. For what has become irreducibly curious is no longer the other, but cultural description itself.
7. "At 10 I went to Tegava, where I took pictures of a house, a group of girls, and the *wasi*, and studied construction of a new house."—Malinowski's Trobriand diary
8. What's called for, then, is an ethno(GRAPHIC)poetics. . . .

JAMES CLIFFORD

Poems
J. H. Prynne
Agneau Press, 1982.

In the legendary times of the Druid forefathers, Britain was Rome's frontier, its wild west of Celtic tribes. For J.H. Prynne it's a frontier now, again, a border to what lies in wait—in the future, but also in the ground, the water, the air, and the awesome potency man has arrogated for the purposes of his own history. Prynne has been patiently committing to paper, on this border, the impending condition. "Fire and honey oozes from cracks in the earth;/the cloud eases up the Richter scale." (p. 168)—so begins Prynne's elegy on Paul Celan, one of the most powerfully sombre elegiac poems in English in several decades. When Prynne closes the poem with the unsettling lines "Forbearance comes into the/stormy sky and the water is not quiet" the mood is sealed: a permanent cloud of strict, aching occupation and inhibition has settled in, the condition of the entire world a mood of war that doesn't end when the wars end.

In Prynne's work the ruthlessness of despoliation in all its forms has been injected like a lethal dose into the high sublime. The pastoral sub-strata of the idiom responds with its domestic inertia even to the trickle of poisons in the groundsprings. With a fitful sputter Comus has staggered to 1984, dripping with dioxin, no longer able to "Drink the clear stream" as Milton had it. To which Prynne, opening the blind man's eyes: "It is not possible to/drink this again, the beloved enters the small house." (p. 168) The beloved in the small house is an old image whose fecundity has been subtly poisoned and set in the jaws of the trap on a pretty plate. But, as it appears in another poem, "Treatment in the Field,"

> We burn by that echo. It is called love like a wren hunt,
> crimson ice, basal narcosis. By deep perjury
> it is the descent of man. (p. 214)

Here in a flash, Darwin's descent and Adam's fall are suddenly the same.

J.H. Prynne has disrobed the true mode of the high sublime in an astonishing variety of ways. The mood is generally apocalyptic ("And midnight ploughing/on the high field, what grandeur/will save us now." (p. 255)—yet the clinical

evidence and the laboratory report are meticulously attended to throughout. A diagnosis is not forthcoming. Yet the high sublime is reanimated in Prynne's work by the very fact that diagnostic moments recur, often transient as a single line but which, in reading, literally give you pause.

Prynne's mastery of so many moods, coupled with his skills as bricoleur (it's not clear how much of the work is collage, but it often seems to be) leaves seismic contours in a rhetorical idiom as striking as Hopkins, as in the opening of "Again the Black Cloud":

> Shouts rise again from the water
> surface and flecks of cloud skim over
> to storm-light, going up in the stem.
> Falling loose with a grateful hold
> of the sounds towards purple, the white bees
> swarm out from the open voice gap. Such "treasure":
> the cells of the child line run back
> through hope to the cause of it; the hour
> is crazed by fracture. Who can see what he loves,
> again or before, as the injury shears
> past the curve of recall, the field
> double-valued at the divine point. (p. 228)

Following this, the poem goes through a cyclone of diagnostic and clinical details. This poem, with the others published originally as *Wound Response* (1974), is submitted to the scrutiny of the medical terminology that keeps erupting throughout, as if the poems themselves were ailing bodies under treatment. The poem "Of Movement Towards a Natural Place" for instance begins "See him recall the day by moral trace" yet by the second stanza has proceeded as if by direct incision:

> . . . Remorse is a pathology of
> syntax, the expanded time-display depletes the
> input of "blame" which patters like scar tissue. (p. 221)

Such austere lines and concepts run through these assembled poems with the peculiar radiance of a gasoline bubble in the sunlight.

In Prynne's work the language has become porous to alien and conflicting idiolects, reflecting (deliberately, I think) a comparable encroachment on organic forms by the fallible human element. It is a new mode of political poetry risen directly from the lining of the stomach, alert to the poison in every bite. Because Prynne is so capable in his native verse idioms, a poem like "A New

Tax on the Counter-Earth'' confidently holds up a pastoral moment only to let us see how quickly it wears under the added, and inescapable, politics (or life of the city) feeding on it.

> A dream in sepia and eau-de-nil ascends
> from the ground as a great wish for calm. And
> the wish is green in season, hazy like meadow-sweet,
> downy & soft waving among the reeds, the
> cabinet of Mr. Heath. Precious vacancy pales in
> this studious form, the stupid slow down & become
> wise with inertia, and instantly the prospect of
> money is solemnised to the great landscape.
> It actually glows like a stream of evening sun,
> value become coinage fixed in the grass crown.
> The moral drive isn't
> quick enough, the greasy rope-trick
> has made payment an edge of rhetoric;
> the conviction of merely being
> right, that has
> marched into the patter of balance. (p. 171)

This is a kind of balance like a see-saw, where the uppermost body feels most acutely the precariousness of gravity and the laws of motion. As the human species loads the opposite seat on its see-saw with garbage, its own ascent is exhilarating to some, vertiginous to others, but either way asking for a fall. Nonetheless, from that prospect—being literally raised, and with a certain vista—there is a euphoria, a being high, which Prynne has written inextricably into the sense of precariousness.

''. . . We have already induced/moral mutation in the species'' (p. 165) Prynne wrote in ''The Ideal Star-Fighter'' years before the cyclopean public eye ever gloated on Star Wars.

> Now a slight meniscus floats on the moral
> pigment of these times, producing
> displacement of the body image, the politic
> albino. The faded bird droops in his
> cage called fear and yet flight into
> his pectoral shed makes for comic
> hysteria, visible hope converted to the
> switchboard of organic providence
> at the tiny rate of say 0.25 per cent
> ''for the earth as a whole.'' And why

go on reducing and failing like metal: the
condition is man and the total crop yield
of fear, from the fixation of danger; in
how we are gripped in the dark, the
flashes of where we are. It pays to be
simple, for screaming out, the eye
converts the news image to fear enzyme,
we are immune to disbelief. (p. 164)

Prynne's readers must ultimately be Americans, for we are the open jaws immune to disbelief, craving spectacles of incinerated planets, drinking the broth of heedlessness induced by that moral mutation. The poet's labor is now "cognition by recount," in which "the homeric icefields unfold." (p. 223) Cold war and thaw are terms from our political predicament, yet Prynne has read these and other terms as poetic, dating from homeric icefields.

This is a poetry of authentic political power, gleaned from a rash of details and almost microscopic linguistic reflexes which, it appears, is beyond most poets writing in America, who still tend to write "political poems" no more sophisticated than electioneering talks on the primary trail. It comes as no surprise to observe, on the strength of this collection, that Prynne anticipated so-called "language oriented" poetry by many years, while still retaining the power of Protean—or post-Olsonian—vista and stride. Nor is it surprising to find that the prose "Note on Metal" might be read as an *ars poetica*, or that the hilarious "*Plant Time Manifold* Transcripts" be read as an utterly nihilistic epistemology (which you can hardly credit as possible until you read it). Prynne's unique amalgam of bitterness and cynicism with sheer sensual delight and humor is a watershed of poetic possibilities.

Poems is the most demanding single volume of poems I have attended to in the past year. It collects ten books and chapbooks from 1968-1979 (of which *Brass* and *News of Warring Clans* are perhaps the high points), with some 50 pages of additional writing. Any of the smaller books from that decade will have alerted readers to a formidable talent, but gathered together in *Poems*, Prynne looms very large among poets now writing in English.

JED RASULA

THE CASE OF AMY CLAMPITT: A READING OF *Imago*

The following paper was given at the Modern Language Association conference in New York (December 1983) as part of a panel on "Evaluating Contemporary Poetry" in which Cary Nelson, Ed Folsom, Charles Altieri, Charles Molesworth and I compared notes on our respective criteria for judging new poetry. Nelson spoke on Merwin, Folsom on Snyder, and Altieri and Molesworth addressed themselves to broader issues. Lively discussion from the floor followed. Members of the audience were given copies of the poems to be discussed. Clampitt's "Imago" may be found in *the Kingfisher* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983, pp. 74-76).

Reviewer after reviewer has praised Amy Clampitt's *The Kingfisher* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1983) for its "richness in verbal invention and formal strategies" (Emily Grosholz, *Hudson Review*), its "complex linguistic lyricism" (Peter Stitt, *Georgia Review*), its "intricate patterning" (Joel Conarroe, *Washington Post Book World*), and, above all, its difficulty. In Helen Vendler's words: A beautiful taxing poetry."[1] Difficulty, density, metaphysical complexity, pithy statement—all these are, of course, New Critical criteria. I want to look closely at the highly praised Clampitt poem "Imago" and then to speculate on what the current wave of Neo-New Critical response to poetry signifies.

IMAGO

Sometimes, she remembers, a chipped flint
would turn up in a furrow,
pink as a peony (from the iron in it)
or as the flared throat of a seashell:
a nomad's artifact fished from the broth,
half sea half land—hard evidence
of an unfathomed state of mind.

Nomads. The wagon train that camped
and left its name on Mormon Ridge.
The settlers who moved on to California,
bequeathing a laprobe pieced from the hide
of a dead buffalo, the frail sleigh
that sleeps under the haymow, and a headstone
so small it might be playing house,

for the infant daughter, aged two days,
no name, they also left behind.

Half sea half land: the shirker propped
above her book in a farmhouse parlor
lolls with the merfolk who revert to foam,
eyeing at a distance the lit pavilions
that seduced her, their tailed child,
into the palaces of metamorphosis. She pays
now (though they do not know this)
by treading, at every step she takes,
on a parterre of tomahawks.

A thirst for something definite so dense
it feels like drowning. Grant Wood
turned everything to cauliflower,
the rounded contours of a thunderhead,
flint-hard. He made us proud:
through all those edges might not be quite
the way it was, at least he'd tried.

"But it has no form!" they'd say to
the scribbler whose floundering fragments
kept getting out of hand—and who, either
fed up with or starved out of
her native sloughs, would, stowed aboard
the usual nomadic moving van, trundle her
dismantled sensibility elsewhere.

Europe, that hodgepodge of ancestral
calamities, was hard and handsome, its rubble
confident, not shriveling on the vine,
as here, like an infertile melon—the Virgin
jejune in her grotto of cold plaster, half sick
of that sidelong enclave, the whispered "Cathlick."

Antiquity unshrouds on wimpling canvas,
adjunct of schoolhouse make-believe: the Italy
of urns and cypresses, of stairways
evolving toward a state of mind
not to be found except backstage
among hunchbacks and the miscreants
who control the scenery, flanked
by a pair of masks whose look, at even
this remove, could drill through bone:

the tragic howl, the comic rictus,
eyeholes that stare out of the crypt
of what no grownup is ever heard to speak of
but in the strangled tone whose lexicon
is summed up in one word: *Bankrupt*.

Bankrupt: the abysm of history,
a slough to be pulled out of
any way you could. Antiquity, the backward
suction of the dark, amounted to a knothole
you plugged with straw, old rags, pages
ripped from last year's Sears Roebuck catalog,
anything, to ward off the blizzard.

Not so, for the born-again, the
shuddering orifices of summer.
On prayer-meeting night, outside
the vestibule among multiple
bell-pulls of Virginia creeper,
the terrible clepsydra of becoming
distils its drop: a luna moth, the emblem
of the born-again, furred like an orchid
behind the ferned antennae, a totem-
garden of lascivious pheromones,
hangs, its glimmering streamers
pierced by the dripstone burin of the eons
with the predatory stare out of the burrow,
those same eyeholes. Imago
of unfathomable evolvings, living
only to copulate and drop its litter,
does it know what it is, what it has been,
what it may or must become?

Amy Clampitt herself, in a curious set of notes at the end of *The Kingfisher*, supplies us with the meaning of her title. She cites the American Heritage Dictionary:

> IMAGO. 1. An insect in its sexually mature adult stage after metamorphosis. 2. *Psychoanalysis*. An often idealized image of a person, usually a parent, formed in childhood and persisting into adulthood. (p. 142)

The Notes also tell us that the "merfolk" and "lit pavilions" of the third stanza

refer to Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale, "The Little Mermaid" (which is evidently Clampitt's favorite fairytale even as it is mine) and that she connects this story to the geological fact (read in John McPhee's *Basin and Range* [Farrar Straus, 1981]) that in past eons the Iowa in which she herself grew up was covered by ocean, a fact that accounts for the land's peculiar sedimentary veneer and flat contours.

"Imago" is an 83-line poem written in stanzas of irregular length; the verse is, strictly speaking, "free" although its predominant rhythm is iambic, frequently even iambic pentameter as in "A thirst for something definite so dense. . . ." The chief sound devices are alliteration and assonance. The syntax is orderly: the first stanza, for example, is made up of one long sentence, with internal modification, draped over seven lines. These long packed sentences, broken by parenthetical asides like "from the iron in it," recall Elizabeth Bishop or the earlier Robert Lowell.

The first stanza has two similes—the chipped flint is "pink as a peony," or pink like "the flared throat of a seashell"—and a metaphor: the flint is "a nomad's artifact fished from the broth, half sea half land." The reference here is to the Iowa of the poet's childhood, which, as Clampitt's note makes clear, has its characteristic configurations because it was once under water. The introduction of the seashell, and the reference to "half sea half land" prefigure, of course, the allusion to the Little Mermaid which becomes explicit in the third stanza. But in case we've missed the point, the last lines of the stanza spells it out: the remembered flint is "hard evidence/of an unfathomed state of mind," or, we might say, the mind as mirror of the unfathomed ocean which is its primeval source.

All the images in the stanza "work," so to speak, and yet I don't quite believe in them. The "chipped flint," for example, conveniently turns up in the furrow not because its memory is in any way connected to the poet's situation in the present, but so that the land-sea imagery integral to the poet's theme may be introduced. When images from the past impinge upon our consciousness, we do not, I think, "remember" that A was like an unrelated B, a chipped flint like a pink peony. On the contrary, the comparison is willed, now, in the act of writing the poem. Indeed, Clampitt does not so much use language to recover a process of experience as she selects carefully those images and metaphors that will work together to make a well-crafted, orchestrated "reconciliation of opposites."

This makes for a good deal of contrivance. Consider the treatment of the land-

water tension in the third stanza. The poet refers to her childhood self in the third person as "the shirker." Evidently, in the eyes of others, she was *different*, "propped above her book in a farmhouse parlor." And now the story of the little mermaid is introduced. In the Andersen fairytale, we remember, the little mermaid falls in love with a mortal, a handsome prince, and in order to be with him gives up her natural habitat, the water in which she is at home in perfect innocence, and marries him. In order to do so she makes a pact with the devil in the form of a sea witch: she can have her prince only by exchanging her fishtail for legs, but every step she takes will be as painful as if she were walking on knives. At first, the pain seems worth the price, but then the prince begins to neglect the mermaid and falls in love with someone else. The mermaid is totally devastated, languishes, and dies, becoming foam and rejoining the ocean world. It is a tale with all sorts of implications: the clash of innocence and experience, mortal and immortal, and so on.

What does Amy Clampitt do with the mermaid metaphor? Like Andersen's heroine, Clampitt's poet decides to leave the safety of her "merfolk," and head for the "lit pavilions" of the civilization outside her "native sloughs." But the analogy is not convincing because, after all, the Iowa farm family is by definition of the *land* whereas it is the poet who ventures out on the dangerous waters of life. More important, these uneducated and simple farm folk can hardly be expected to see what has happened to their "tailed child" as a seduction to "the lit pavilions" and "the palaces of metamorphosis." Only the poet herself can see it that way. I find the attribution to the "merfolk" of thoughts they can't have irritating, a somewhat self-righteous put-down of these insensitive others who cannot understand her needs.

But neither, for that matter can the reader. For what are the lit pavilions and palaces of metamorphoses so portentously referred to? In the vocabulary of the New Criticism, which haunts both the writing and the reception of this poem, one would have to say that, alas, these nouns have no objective correlative. "She pays now (though they do not know this)," we are told solemnly, but we don't know what she is paying for. Has she run off with a lover? Been seduced by money? Fame? The intellectual life? "She pays now (though they do not know this)" has an aura of self-pity accentuated by the inept metaphor of the final lines, which find the poet "treading, at every step she takes, / on a parterre of tomahawks."

Parterre means (1) the level space in a garden occupied by flower beds, and (2) the part of the ground floor of an auditorium or theater that lies under a rear balcony." The second meaning is the more common and is, I think, Clampitt's

meaning here. The "mermaid," seduced to the Big City away from her watery primeval Iowa origins, walks forever on a parterre, the polished floor, say, of a theater lobby, feeling every step like the blow of an axe. But here the mermaid metaphor breaks down. In the fairytale, the mermaid cannot walk without pain because she was not meant to walk at all; the acquisition of legs is unnatural for her. By analogy, Clampitt's mermaid-poet is out of her element in the civilized world of the sophisticated city. What, in this context, do tomahawks have to do with her plight, what, indeed, is the relationship of her sensibility to Indian consciousness?

Cleverness, it seems is all. The callous Iowa "merfolk"—perhaps her school teachers—regard the struggling young poet as a "scribbler whose floundering fragments / kept getting out of hand." "Fed up or starved out of her native sloughs," she boards "the usual nomadic moving van" so as to "trundle her / dismantled sensibility elsewhere." It's a familiar story with vaguely Jamesian overtones. Europe, the Great Good Place, turns out to be a "hodgepodge of ancestral / calamities"; "the Italy / of urns and cypresses" (what else?) is no more than a sham: "Bankrupt the abysm of history, a slough to be pulled out of." How or why Europe is thus dismissed is anybody's guess but since we don't know anything about this girl except that she is, of course, sensitive and poetic, there is no way to assess Clampitt's statements about history, or about "Antiquity, the backward suction of the dark."

In any case, the painful memories of disillusion—disillusion with the so-called cultured world, whether in America or Europe, lead up to the final image of the luna moth, to the question of what might have happened to the poet had she chosen the sexual life rather than the life of the artist or intellectual. Why these two are necessarily opposites is not made clear. Helen Vendler writes:

> In the most hypnotic piece of writing in this strenuously written book, Amy Clampitt looks with a frightening intensity at the sexual evolution of the biological female. Her symbol for this purpose is the imago of the luna moth emerging from its chrysalis with all its terrifying lurid sexual apparatus of specialized evolution. The moth in its timing obeys the inexorable water clock, the clepsydra, of the biological imperative. . . . As a poem about the adolescence of the female, "Imago," with its look at the dreamy girl reading fairy tales leading to its violent stare at sexuality marks a new stage—speculative, brooding, and powerful—in the poetic mirroring of female experience.

The question, I suppose, is whether that "violent stare at sexuality" really takes

place here. Vendler admire the rich variety of Clampitt's sources—history for "clepsydra," Psyche's myth for the moth-as-soul, zoology and botany for fur, fern, orchid, and antennae, anthropology for totem, the laboratory for pheromones (the substances secreted by insects to attract the opposite sex), and so on. Yet this glut of allusive properties brings us no nearer to the ostensible subject of the passage: what with the terrible clepsydra of becoming (one can't read the word "clepsydra" today without thinking of John Ashbery), and the totem-garden of lascivious pheromones (the notes tell us this is a reference to Lewis Thomas' *Lives of the Cell*), we lose sight of the plight of the mermaid-poet who has to walk on a parterre of tomahawks. I would argue that what Vendler calls "the purely biological life" is never a real option: the extremities between which this women runs her course are the hard-edge Grant Wood farmhouse parlor, on the one hand, and the unspecified "lit pavilions" on the other. It is all very well to dredge up out of this glacial drift the symbolic image of the luna moth but nothing that we know about the poet (and of course we know almost nothing) relates to that image. We are, in other words told that the biological imperative is an alternative of sorts but the preceding stanzas have given us no particular reason to believe that this is the case.

Clampitt, that is to say, has loaded every rift with ore to the point that the rifts themselves are safely ignored. We are given so much detail about the sexual evolution of luna moths that we all but lose sight of the central reality of the poet's own sexuality. Who and what is she? How do we place her in her Iowa farm background? To what extent has she become another person? We don't know because the "she" who is perceived by her people as shirker and scribbler is no more than the stereotypical portrait of the artist as sensitive young girl, alienated from her incomprehending Grant Wood family circle. Why "she pays now," why she must suffer so much, why the "hodgepodge of ancestral / calamities" which is Europe is no more satisfying than the "native sloughs" of Iowa is not explored. Nor do we have a vivid sense of what it is this Little Mermaid wants in life.

Clampitt's, we are told, is a poetry "rich in verbal invention," in "geographical and literay texture," it is "dense," 'metaphysical," "difficult." But this so-called "difficulty" like the "difficulty" of much late New Critical poetry, is more apparent than real. "Imago," like most of Clampitt's poems has a definite theme alright: it is "about" the alienation of the poet caught between two worlds, two imagos. Thus there is nothing ambivalent about the poet's "mer-folk"—callous types who are given short shrift as just so much Grant Wood hard-edged cauliflower.

The reader's "difficulty," then, can only be one of translation: Question: what does the luna moth dropping its litter symbolize? Answer: it symbolizes a purely biological state of being that the poet both envies and knows she can't have. And so on. Everything here will yield to "translation" provided one uses one's dictionary and encyclopedia. Given this emphasis on translatability, I take the Amy Clampitt cult as a sign of our current nostalgia for the good gone days when POETRY WAS ABOUT SOMETHING, when it conveyed (1) complex emotions, preferably contradictory; in (2) elegant poetic language, and (3) never said anything directly that could be said indirectly. Poetic Diction, I'm afraid, is once again with us as it was in the late eighteenth century and again in the late nineteenth.

A redolent air of *fin de siècle* hovers over the poems in *The Kingfisher*, a book perhaps most clearly understood as a reaction to two prominent strains in post-modern poetry. The first is the "directness" and "spontaneity" of sixties poetry—whether Beat, New York school, the San Francisco Renaissance, or the Midwest Nature poetry of Wright or Bly. *The Natural Words in the Natural Order*—the Yeatsian dictum of the young century as it was of Wordsworth's Preface and as it was at the beginning of the eighteenth century for Swift and Pope is now a formula regarded with suspicion: telling it straight is considered the ultimate gaucherie in Clampittland. And secondly, the cult of Clampitt is a reaction to the mysteries of John Ashbery, of Neo Dada and Surrealism, of concrete poetry and sound poetry, of minimalism and performance art. I am frequently asked whether I really think that writers like John Cage or David Antin, whom I included in my book *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, are poets: after all, they don't use striking nature images as does an Amy Clampitt; they are often perfectly "direct"; they do not use recogizable verse forms, and worst of all, they seem to express almost no personal feeling, no attitude, say, to parents or lovers.

Such writing is bound to be disconcerting, especially when it suggests that we discriminate at our peril between "poetry" and "prose," between "lyric" and "narrative," when it implies that parody and play are just as "valuable" as the high seriousness of an Amy Clampitt. The Arnoldian need for what Eliot called "spilt religion" continues to haunt us.

By now, my own prejudices are obviously showing. I suppose I am finally too much of a Poundian to appreciate Amy Clampitt's "terrible clepsydra of becoming." I firmly believe that one should not retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Think about this axiom in relation to *Imago*:

is this particular topos—the alienated childhood, the urge to overcome it, the disillusionment that comes with age—Made New by the heavy metaphoric, allusive, and alliterative overlay it is given in Clampitt's poem? Again, as a Poundian, I believe that the poet should use no adjective that does not reveal something. Does it help us to visualize the chipped flint to be told that it is "pink as a peony"?

Perhaps there is finally no substitute for *le mot juste*. In the opening poem of *The Kingfisher*, we read that the "eiders" (large ducks) "trig/in their white-over-black as they tip/and tuck themselves into the swell, almost as though diving under the eiderdown/in a *gemütlich* hotel room at Innsbruck." Beautifully descriptive, critics call this sort of thing. I find myself cringing at the last line. Not only because Innsbruck arouses a stock response—a sort of *Sound of Music* lederhosencum-yodelling scene in good old Austria—but because of the inaccurate usage of the word "gemütlich." *Gemütlich* happens to be an adverb; the adjective is inflected: *gemütlicher, gemütliche, gemütliches* as in in "Ein gemütliches Zimmer" (room). To put the adverb in front of the noun "hotel room" thus strikes me as a false note, a coy attempt at familiarity as if to say "Oh, you know about those cozy eiderdowns in those hotel rooms in Innsbruck." As it is, it is merely cute and Baedeckery; moreover, it adds nothing to our vision of the ducks diving under the sea swell. In Pound's vocabulary, the image is excessively "viewy." It is not direct treatment of the thing.

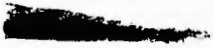
But, someone is sure to ask me, how can you talk of direct treatment of the thing when you have written a book in defense of the Other Tradition, the tradition of undecidability and indeterminacy, of unreal cities? I would say in response that any poem sets up its own network of expectations, its own conventions. In, say, Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, now available to us in the Clayton Eshleman-Annette Smith translation, we know from the very first refrain line, "Au bout du petit matin," that we are embarked on a hallucinatory journey, that the "real" world must be transformed. But Amy Clampitt's poetry is essentially quite mimetic: it makes statements, applies judgements, displays particular prejudices, all the while pretending that these statements cannot be made straightforwardly. Metaphor, as we learned it at school, is here decorative rather than integral. One could omit "pink as a peony" or "as though diving under the eiderdown/in a *gemütlich* hotel room at Innsbruck" and still have what is basically the same poem. Try the same exercise on, say, an Ashbery poem and you will see the difference: indeed, you won't be able to determine what images are "more" or "less" important because Ashbery does not hierarchize them; there are no culminating symbols

like the luna moth, symbols that claim to center, to ground our experience.

And this is, for me, the heart of the matter. *The Kingfisher* is a book that yearns for origins, for a logocentric universe. Given the realities of the world we actually live in in 1984, such yearning is bound to produce a responsive chord in the Literary Establishment. But can we step in the same New Critical River twice? "What does not change," as the poet said, "Is the will to change."

1. *New York Review of Books*, March 3, 1983, p. 19.

MARJORIE PERLOFF



ANSWERS FOR WILLIAM CORBETT

(re: "Questions for Hayden Carruth," *Sulfur #8*, following my review of Jim Harrison's *Selected & New Poems* in *Sulfur #7*)

I did not include the "honest, beautiful, important poems" by Ruthven Todd, Byron Vazakis, and Reuel Denney in my anthology because they were not sufficiently honest, beautiful, or important to compete with poems by others who were these poets' contemporaries. The anthology was intended to be as representative as I could make it of the best American poetry published between, say, 1910 and 1968, which was when the table of contents was closed out. This means only very few poets from each decade, obviously. Do I need to say that editing an anthology is different from editing a magazine or a current booklist? The one is a work of history and is strict; the other is a work of the present and takes chances. My anthology contains misjudgments, of course, both of inclusion and of omission, but these were not a result of inattention; I studied the work of *every* poet from the period in question whose poetry had any serious claim to be included, with one exception. I was shocked to see, when I looked through the table of contents in the printed book, that I had forgotten Melvin B. Tolson, and I have been disturbed by that ever since.

If a revised edition of the anthology were to be undertaken—for various reasons it won't be—I would change little in the first half. I would add Tolson, I would try to find an extra page for Ransom and another for Bogan, and I would probably struggle again to make room for some of those who were the last to be dropped in the final cutting, such as Léonie Adams. I would make many changes in the second half, and progressively more toward the end. I would revise the selections from a good number of poets who, like Jim Harrison, have done better and more extensive work since 1968 than was available to me before then. I would drop a few poets and perhaps add a few others. But I would not try to include poets who have come to notice since 1968, because I now believe it was an error of judgment in the original anthology to bring the table of contents up to a date as close as possible to the date of publication. What little was gained in contemporaneity was more than lost in superficiality.

Most of your questions are answered fully in the anthology's introduction, which I invite you to read. The rhetorical questions in your final paragraph are more difficult, however: I don't know what you mean them to convey. Apparently they have to do with trust. But did I ever ask you to trust me? The idea that an author or editor becomes, by virtue of the publication of his work, the reader's servant has some merit and should be taken into account, but you cannot push it far without destroying the author's or editor's integrity, as we see now in the way packaged anthologies and textbooks clog our former channels of interintellectual exchange. No, I offered the best I could do, in free competition with many others. If you don't like it, William Corbett, why don't you just say so?

HAYDEN CARRUTH

Axe Handles
Gary Snyder
North Point Press. 1983.

Since the 60's platoons of young poets have imitated Gary Snyder, adoring him with the fervor they bestow on Rock Stars. Some even change their names to Moon Dance, Sun Bush, Basting Spoon, Axe Handle, Little Elk. Many turn up at his northern California acres to imbibe creativity, to drink manzanita tea, to eat their granola al fresco amidst the raccoons, skunks, and possums. At a

wave from Snyder, they would gladly lick the sweat off his sauna, or stand guard all night against the wee ringtailed beasties demolishing his outdoor kitchen. Perhaps he might, in return, zap them, like a hearty Mr. Natural, with all manner of talents, real and imagined.

Obviously, a poet isn't responsible for his imitators. But the traps exist in Snyder's work, as they do for few other contemporary poets: a surface simplicity which the imitators misread; his reportage; the spare, no belly-flab style. The difference between Snyder and the followers is that when Snyder takes a sauna, it's an experience; when the acolytes do it's merely a bath.

So much by way of preamble. The occasion for this piece is the appearance of Snyder's first book of poems in almost ten years, *Axe Handles*. How have the years treated Snyder? Pretty well, I'd say. Despite a few limp efforts (included are throwaway poems about Jerry Brown's visits to Snyder's yurt, nature and trivia, and Snyder's role on the California Arts Council), some of these poems rank with Snyder's best. There is a quieter, mellower tone throughout than we find in much of the earlier work; and he now writes of what he scrutinizes before him, without much reminiscing. It's as if the passing years have made the immediate experience more valuable than ever—a deeper delving in the earth itself as a means to awareness.

* * *

"Getting in the Wood" is vintage Snyder. His trademarks are all here: 1). the effortless, non-sentimental beginning. The phrases, shorn of their definite articles, are subtle ink-strokes on the page. They possess an odd, marvellous tactile quality. Here is the event of the poem: Snyder gathers wood-rounds which have lain aging on the forest-floor, and splits them with an iron wedge driven by a sledge-hammer. The poem opens as easily as a greeting, evoking a quick mix of smell, color, and the kineticism of spurting water

> The sour smell,
> blue stain,
> water squirts out round the wedge. . . .

2). Argot from the trades, from the survival arts. These ("peened," "wedge," "axe," "peavey," "maul," etc) he employs with a zest like that of Gerard Manley Hopkins in his sonnets to Welsh laborers. Here Hopkins glories in the physique and skills of a ploughman ploughing a field:

> Hard as hurdle arms, with a broth of goldish flue
> Breathed round; the rack of ribs; the scooped flank; lank

Rope-over thigh; knee-nave; and barelled shank—
Head and foot, shoulder and shank—

. . . .

He leans to it, Harry bends, look. Back, elbow, and
liquid waist
In him, all quail to the wallowing o' the plough:
's cheek crimson; curls

Wag or crossbridle, in a wind lifted, windlaced. . . .

What Hopkins and Snyder say (also see Hopkins on the variegated colors of loam, in "The Windhover") seems to be something like this: if you aren't meticulously observant of physical details, you miss important signs for spiritual growth. Details become symbols. In such namings Snyder fuses both his Zen Buddhism and his American pragmatism. Tu Fu and Thoreau.

3). The concentrated evocations of the senses: how the skin feels as sweat drips, the smell of "crushed ants," the sounds of wood tumbling, the cantering sledge emitting the ring of "high-pitched bells." Snyder is a poet of the synaesthetic effect; he is as often as esoteric, I feel, as Baudelaire or Swinburne charging poems with highly orchestrated dynamic sense-fusions. On one level, Snyder is a pure art-for-art's sake poet. And I love him for that.

4). The incredibly compact music created as Snyder joyously names tools, or details of flora and fauna. These moments create exciting verse music. Here is one passage, highly cadenced, accentual, rampant with raw energy—Snyder is in full control:

Wedge and sledge, peavey and maul,
little axe, canteen, piggyback can

of saw-mix gas and oil for the chain,
knapsack of files and goggles and rags. . . .

And a bit earlier, this:

. . . the complex duff of twigs
poison oak, bark, sawdust,
shards of logs,

And the sweat drips down.

5). The celebration of human effort as intense energy spent towards both survival and spiritual growth (what I call the John Muir Syndrome: see Snyder's

poem to Muir in *Rip-Rap*). Here, with a relish again reminiscent of Hopkins (one of the latter's favorite words was "delve"), Snyder's "young men" make wood, four cords of it:

> the young men throw splits on the piles
> bodies hardening, learning the pace
> and the smell of tools from this delve
> in the winter
> death-topple of elderly oak.
> Four cords.

Their pride is their *arete*, that old Greek word for a skill superbly employed. Here the unerring skill of the woodsman, as well as the excellence of his tools matter. There are again echoes of Hopkins' sprung-rhythm in the alliterative design, the lovely stress on liquid sounds, and the avoidance of the regular iambic line. The enjambments are subtle, and the long-vowel music contributes much. The second line, in its design of trochees and dactyls, and its telling caesura, is akin to Hopkins' more original devices, ones that reach back to Anglo-Saxon accentual verse. "Four cords" is a neat tying-off, a closure for the sophisticated passage.

In lesser hands, Snyder's truimphs over the physical worlds of forest and machine, rendered almost with eyelids peeled, might seem silly, a phony primitivism engendering a Grease-Can School of Poetry, or, as I have called it elsewhere, Ugh-Poetry. This verse Snyder himself avoids through his zestful music, which at times almost serves to make the meanings of his words superfluous. We must struggle against enjoying these pure effects too esoterically—we would miss the didactic intentions beneath nearly all that Snyder writes. Isn't such purity of effect, though, what most good poets aim for? an avoidance of sermonizing? a transcendence of raw materials?

Another poem, "Working on the '58 Willys Pickup," includes matter appropriate for a Whole Earth Catalogue (how to mulch your sterile ground with sawdust, gravel, and chuff so as to make it fertile):

> Now to bring sawdust
> Rotten and rich
> From a sawmill abandoned when I was just born
> Lost in the young fir and cedar
> At Bloody Run Creek
> So that the clay in the garden
> Can be broken and tempered

And growing plants mulched to save water—
And to also haul gravel
From the old placer diggings,
To screen it and mix in the sand with the clay
Putting pebbles aside to strew on the paths
So muddy in winter—

Finally, the old truck is repaired:

The rear end rebuilt and put back
With new spider gears,
Brake cylinders cleaned, the brake drums
New-turned and new brake shoes . . .

Snyder congratulates himself on a "tough-handed" job well-done, and looks forward to reading Chinese philosophers that evening.

In "The Cool Around the Fire," Snyder prunes underbrush to allow for more growth the following year. He labors in a season of drought and imminent forest fires. He meditates on his labors, equating them with "heart" and an emergent "cool" that elevates his spirit. The result, arising from surface simplicities of diction and cadence, again suggest brush-strokes, signs for the transcendental:

Burn brush to take heat
    from nest summer's wildfires
    and to bring rain on time,
    and fires clear the tangle.

    the tangle of the heart.
Black coffee, bitter, hot,
    smoke rises straight and calm
    air

Still and cool.

Brilliant techniques in themselves do not, of course, constitute a whole poetry. Tone matters too, as does theme. The pragmatic, self-reliant voice so characteristic of Snyder never appears as a pushing or a bullying of the reader—in his best poems, he never overtly urges us to march, axes in hand, out to enroll in woods-survival courses, or to build our personal leantos, saunas, yurts, and field-kitchens. Like John Muir and Thoreau, his mentors, his experiments are his own (Thoreau never intended that anyone else live his experiment, to stake a claim at Walden Pond, plant beans, or eat woodchuck raw). Snyder's experiments in living are uniquely his. Yet, while he does not propagandize, the life he

creates, evokes, and describes is so appealing that we also feel welcomed to join in, creating the ecosystem he envisions. He plants his own apple-seeds. And his self-reliance is one of his most attractive strengths. His awe/respect for nature, for spirituality, for each human life, drops almost casually, at times with touches of humor and gentle ironies, often at his own expense. Those who choose to pick his apples may. Feel free, he seems to say. But you'll have to use your own ladders and pails, and your own hands, not his.

Another dimension is thematic. A lesser poet would be content merely to record their quests after the mythic omphaloses of the universe. Snyder's framework is far more ambitious; he is always a mere breath away from universals. There's a poignant continuity, he feels, in all human experience, from the remotest primitive ancestor to the squalling, puking infant emerging from the uterus at this very second. His efforts to create a self-sustaining ground-earth-house for his family echo the efforts of an ancient Oriental grubbing for his existence, physical and metaphysical. In an unforgettable image, Snyder describes a prehistoric woman seen in a Stockholm Museum:

> Knees up in an easy squat
> your body shows how
> You gave birth nine times:
> The dent in the bones
> in the back of the pelvis
> mother of us all,
> four thousand years dead.

This bone-dent connects us to our ancestors. Our life is "quick," Snyder observes, followed by a "long slow/feeding" of time, symbolized by a "woodpecker's cry." Life-death is a simulacrum of sorts. The "corruption, decay, the sticky turnover" we witness everywhere, passes into eternity, as a form of "glacial rubble,/crumbling rocky cliffs and scree." Snyder's tenacity, his faith in his immediate time-locked experiences as their smoke flows towards the transcendental, his love for the earth (one ecosystem for all) provide inspiration for those of us lacking his gifts and his trenchancies. All this, of course, is quite other than the beauty of his writing; his themes and techniques are a rare fusion for these times. By imagining Nature as a "sweet old woman" who gathers her firewood (the Heraclitean fire?) in the moonlight, he celebrates his life and reassures us about our own.

ROBERT PETERS

UNEARTHING THE VAMPIRE

We imagine there was an historical Count Dracula. We take tours of the historical Dracula's castle in Transylvania, or read some of the concoctions of vampire lore that have appeared over the past decade. But there was no Count Dracula. What's more, the Hungarians did not take vampire lore any more seriously than theories on the curative powers of garlic. Certain figures were remembered with vampiric odium, like Vlad the Impaler, or the Bloody Countess Bathory. A few magistrates had been attacked by anonymous vampires—no Transylvanian Iliad, no cosmogonic heritage.

Popular culture creates a wall between fiction and the sources of fiction. In the past decade, a vampiric history has been sewn together—the vampire as Volk—in the work of McNally, Florescu, Wolf and others. We pursue tourist images of the exotic, and begin to make the source resemble our fantasy, much the way pulp novels about the American frontier—invented by dime novelists from New York and Philadelphia—became the canon of the Wild West.

Tourism brought the word vampire to Western Europe, and travel books kept the notion of the historical vampire alive (undead?). In 1732, an English gentleman, trying to include Hungary in the Grand Tour, mentioned vampire lore in an article for *London Magazine*. Voltaire, after his exile in England, apparently brought the term back to France, citing it in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. Thereafter, except for a few studies of magic, like the work of the Abbe Calmet (1741), vampire entered literary imagery, and everyday businesess parlance (i.e. the vampyre bookseller of eighteenth century London).

Vampire has always meant "blood-sucker" businessman, as well as haunted corpse (even in Rumania and Hungary). The Hungarians borrowed the term from the Turks, probably during the Turkish occupation (1526-1683), and probably as an anti-Turkish superstition; in that sense, vampire became part of the Hungarian liberation movement. A Greek Orthodox businessman who consorted with the Ottoman infidel was blasphemed as a vampire, and would rise hideously from his grave, begging for a Catholic soul. He might be joined by dead enemies of the Inquisition, or by suicides buried at the crossing of a road.

In England, beyond the elegant uses of the term by Southey and Coleridge, the first vampire appears in the short story by John Polidori, in 1819. Polidori's Count Ruthven was modeled on Lord Byron, and is very much the scoundrel that audiences imagined Byron was. To exploit the public's enthusiasm about Byron as *The Vampyre*, an opera was hurried to London in August, 1820, *The Vampire or the Bride of the Isles*. The plague of literary vanpires had begun, in thousands of performances, for generations. In time, the trap door that served for the mysterious exit of gothic monsters of the night, in a gaslit mist, or sulfurous smoke, came to be called simply, a vampire.

There were national differences in literary vampires. The French versions, for example, were far more sultry, and exotically penitent. Gautier's lady vampire seduces a young student, and takes him backward in time to ancient Greece: a classical vampire, if you will.

Clearly, in England, the vampire tale was developed far more elaborately than in France, and engaged many political and social questions of the day. There lies the authentic vampire, in the ambiance of London street crime and Jack the Ripper. We may find a few medieval or Hellenistic vampires, but the historical "vampyre" (or Vampir) barely exists beyond the English fabulation.

To find authentic vampires, we need go no further than the cruel phobias of nineteenth century England. And the novel *Dracula* is the fulfillment of the vampire legend, a *summa* of Victorian misbeliefs (and whatever medieval ones Bram Stoker could locate at the British Museum). Here we find the vampire on his original soil, as a product of Victorian superstition (it is said that nothing makes a better consumer item then popular superstition). Using Dracula as the culmination, we uncover three categories, all linked clearly to the Victorian economy, and briefly as follows:

The Dying Aristocratic Class: like the devouring beast in Durer's *Apocalypse*, the vampire is a plague visited upon the common man. He is a decayed aristocrat, like Carlyle's description of landed nobility: "A High Class without duties to do is like a tree planted on precipices; from the roots of which all the earth has been crumbling."

He is a vengeful parasite, lying in the remains of his estate. To Carlyle, these aristocrats hid ominously behind the iron spiked gates of their castles, provoking strange myths. They were not unlike the Viscount de Moriève described by Dudley Wright, a monstrous aristo who was so enraged by the French Revolution that he cut off the heads of his retainers. And then, after the peasants stormed his castle and killed him, he rose from the grave, a vampire. For

seventy-two years, he attacked, and killed the peasants' children. Finally, his grandson had the coffin opened, and found the viscount's body frightfully intact. The vampire, a bloated reminder of feudalism, was destroyed.

Legends of perverse aristocrats inspired Delacroix's *Death of Sardanopolis*, or Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, among hundreds of examples. To foreshadow the incest between Roderick and Madeline Usher, and the death of the family line, Poe describes the estate of Usher with melancholic irony: "It was this deficiency, perhaps of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission from sire to son, of the patrimony of the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the 'House of Usher'—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion."

In the case of France in 1789, we must remember that the Great Fear at the start of the Revolution was provoked by rumors throughout the country of vengeful aristos bent on massacre. Aristos were pagans; they exercised their sexual privileges ruthlessly (the deflowering of virgin brides on their wedding nights, a bizarre prerogative that led to the first child in many peasant homes being called "the seigneur's bastard"). They were beyond the law, and in a sense, beyond the reach of God Himself. Even during the Reformation, or the English Revolution, or the evangelical moments of the eighteenth century, such were the messages. These superstitions about aristocratic perversity are reenacted in gothic tales, in legends of aristocratic sloth. Sumptuary fantasies of the same sort obsess Balzac's social climbers, like Philippe Bridau or Rastignac—or become *dances macabres* in Poe's *Masque of the Red Death*. As Carlyle warns his readers: "Gracious Heaven, my brother, this that thou seest with those sick eyes is no firm Eldorado, and Corn Law Paradise of Donothings, but a dream of thy own fevered brain . . . so many stories from the street."

This feverish dream of poisoned aristocratic lines is central to *Dracula*. Transylvania, as the "land beyond the forest" (borrowed from the travel book of that title, by Emily Gerard), was once a vital kingdom, but had become "a soil barren of holy memories." Dracula's homeland is unobtainable, beyond the reach of British diplomacy, even Britannic gunboats. Jonathan Harker cannot even find it on Ordnance maps in the British Museum. It is so primitive that even modern medicine cannot cope with it.

The Spermatic Economy: This term is used by historian Ben Barker-Benfield, to describe one of the more bizzarre superstitions of Victorian America and

England. Many physicians assumed that anemia was caused by excessive loss of sperm (with symptoms precisely like those of a vampire's victim). Blood and sperm relied upon each other in their bodily functions.

Bram Stoker was apparently haunted by this very same crisis of "vigour" (an oft-repeated term in *Dracula*). The causes, according to his grandnephew Daniel Farson, were a sexless marriage, leading to itinerant wandering, and later, venereal disease. Whatever the reasons, he shared the Victorian sense that sex (or excessive sex) was like a Malthusian nightmare, a threat to the scarce resources of the body. His vampire killers, called the Victorian Committee, are fighting a lustful and draining Lucifer. Even Stoker's lady vampires (always described as "voluptuous," and soulless) can threaten the bodily fluid balance. As Dr. Van Helsing approaches the coffin of Lucy Westenra, now a "voluptuous" vampire, "the sperm (from his candle! as in spermacetti) dropped in white patches, which congealed as they touched the metal." The coffin becomes the extension of her vampire body, of its power. Dracula is even more powerful. Like a Symbolist Lucifer or Salome from Redon, Moreau (or even Munch's flame-haired vampiress), Dracula is sexually omnipotent; he is replenished by the sexual act, but at what an unnatural price!

Imprisonment: Perhaps an even more complex superstition of bourgeois culture has been the sense of madness as a crime, associated with what Foucault has called "the Great Containment." In summary, as hospitals and prisons were increasingly controlled by bourgeois officials (of the eighteenth century), the mad are mixed in with criminals, and treated as emblems of sloth, bestiality, and in a peculiarly reverse sense, liberation from bourgeois self-control (as in Romanticism). They possess in excess what Baudelaire would call "natural opium."

So it was with vampires, imprisoned by their illness, as uncontrollable as madmen. Like Poe's imprisoned heroes, or the tortured Roderick Usher, the vampire must live out the sin of madness, and infect the innocent. Either they are penitent in the end, like Varney the Vampire (novel of 1847), or are shamelessly evil forces of nature—Dracula—but their pinnacles of madness are the key scenes in a vampire tale (i.e. the vampire's stare, the rape of the victim).

Allied to this notion of madness and imprisonment is what Foucault has summarized as the "theater of punishment," the ways that medieval rituals of violent punishment were internalized in bourgeois culture. By the nineteenth century, public executions and ritual torture were considered immoral and generally forbidden in Western Europe. Prison was a private affair, between

the prisoner and his conscience, if you will—on behalf of the public good. From Hogarth's *Four Stages of Cruelty*, and Piranesi's *Carceri*, to Kafka's *The Penal Colony*, prison is equated with conscience. Doré's *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872), a wood engraving of convicts circling in the exercise yard at Newgate prison, inspired Van Gogh to do a painting about confined madness. Instead of a public event, punishment becomes a sign for the imprisoned unconscious. Foucault feels that the vanished medieval and Renaissance spectacles of punishment are replaced by popular fiction, where the exotic barbarity of public execution is treated as a sort of dionysian ritual. We should not take this to mean only scenes of public execution in fiction, or film, but more broadly as the motif (or formulas) of victim and executioner.

In this sense, the vampire tale is a mythic version of the breaking at the wheel, or the hanging (many of the covers of penny dreadfuls throughout the nineteenth century, by the way, illustrated the news accounts of killings or executions, to identify to the reader that a gothic tale was inside). First the vampire is the executioner (of conscience?); then he must become the victim, like an *auto-da-fe* followed by the trial of the Grand Inquisitor himself. It is not as much the play of justice as ritualized punishment, an interior dialogue.

The vampire's threat becomes a passion play about industrial and medieval superstitions in conflict. Which supersitions shall solve the dilemma, and save Miss Mina? Will those myopic city folk leave garlic around her room at night, as Van Helsing advised, or will they prattle on about modern science? And finally, in the twentieth century, these Victorian superstitions become a peculiar kind of natural history, in work by Ashley Mantagu or Dudley Wright. I am reminded of Harvard phrenologists measuring craniums to find the skull of a criminal brain, as ghoulish a taxonomy as Poe or Kafka could dream up. Or as Nietzsche wrote about the actor, we are vampires of our unconscious. Once again, all history is contemporary, the crab who looks backward while he marches forward. The congeries of vampirana are so complex, one can only be impressed by the imaginative lengths to which we go to blend audience culture with folklore to invent the diachronic. Today, crowds gather outside Dracula's castle in Rumania (or is it at the Universal Tours?); each person is holding a map of Dracula locations that never existed. Could anything medieval match a scene like that?

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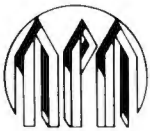

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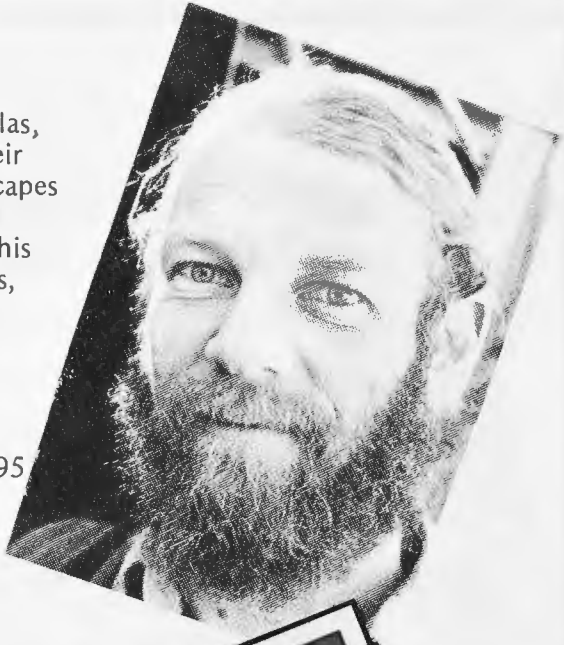

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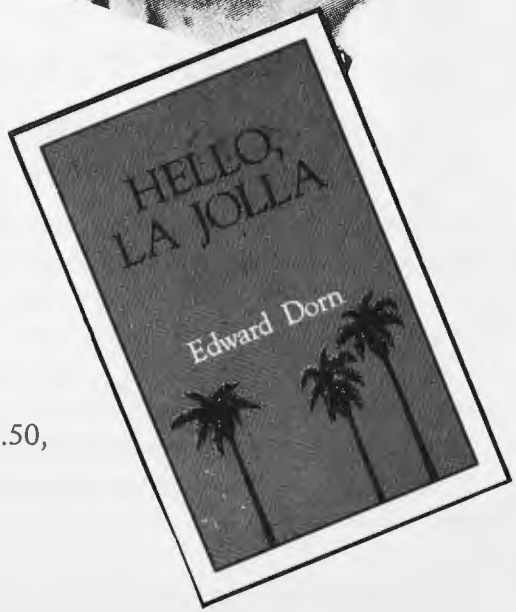

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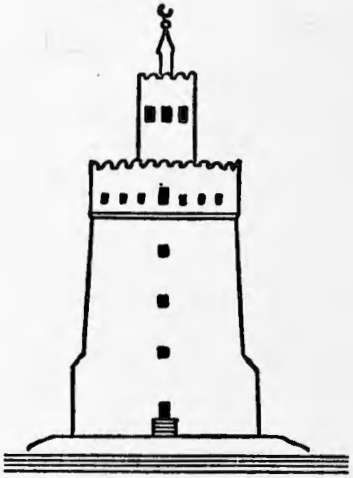

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Re. the new Sulfur logo, Ann Dubois writes: "Quite possibly this figure is an *ali'i* (ruler) or an ancestral spirit guardian (*aumakua*). It is to be found on the Big Island (Hawaii) where most of the discovered petroglyphs in The Islands are."

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A SPECIAL SECTION ON PAUL CELAN

EDITED BY JERRY GLENN

INSTEAD OF AN INTRODUCTION

Paul Celan needs no "introduction" to the readers of SULFUR, or to anyone with a serious interest in contemporary poetry. He has been hailed as the most significant poet of his generation, and in certain circles he has become almost a cult figure. For the most part, however, American readers have had to rely not only on translations of his poems, but also, when they sought critical works to sharpen their understanding, on essays by English-speaking writers (whose knowledge of Celan, at least in some instances, was itself based solely on translations). Our purpose, then, is to add to the body of Celan's work available in English—none of the letters and only two of the poems published here have previously appeared in translation—and to offer, in the form of essays, as well as poems by German authors dedicated to Celan, a sampling of international views of this writer, who is no less enigmatic than he is important and admired. The essays, unless otherwise noted, are previously unpublished. The contributors include:

Erich Arendt, a resident of Berlin (German Democratic Republic),

and one of that country's most respected poets.

Rose Ausländer, like Celan a Jewish native of Czernowitz; the recipient of several poetry prizes, she now lives in Dusseldorf (Federal Republic of Germany).

Beth Bjorklund, who has published numerous translations of modern Austrian poetry, and who served as guest editor and translator of a special Austrian number of *The Literary Review.*

Esther Cameron, since 1979 a resident of Israel, where a collection of her poetry in Hebrew translation recently appeared; she would like to hear from others interested in Celan, and can be reached at: Rechov Shmorak 10, Jerusalem 96546.

Heinz Czechowski, the author of numerous volumes of poetry, as well as translations and essays, and a resident of Leipzig (GDR).

Milo Dor, an Austrian novelist born in Budapest, who was a friend of Celan from 1948 until the latter's death; this essay originally appeared in German in 1970.

Clayton Eshleman, whose essay was first published in *Studies in 20th Century Literature* (1983).

Richard Exner, Professor of German at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the author of numerous studies of modern German literature, and a highly respected (German) poet; this essay was presented, in German, at the 1983 meeting of the Modern Language Association, and the informal style has been intentionally retained.

John Felstiner, Professor of English at Stanford University, whose areas of interest include translation and Holocaust literature; this essay is a slightly modified version of a paper presented at the 1983 meeting of the American Literary Translators Association.

Jerry Glenn, Professor of German at the University of Cincinnati, whose publications include *Paul Celan* (New York: Twayne, 1973).

Hans-Jürgen Heise, West-German poet and essayist, whose most recent collection was called by the North-German Radio "the most significant literary publication" of 1983; the essay is an abridgment of one originally published in German.

Pierre Joris, a poet from Luxembourg, who has also translated books by Duprey, Bataille, and Tazara into English, and Kerouac, Corso, and Eshleman into French.

Jed Rasula, an American poet whose contribution originally appeared in *Studies in 20th Century Literature* (1983).

Arno Reinfrank, a Jewish writer now living in London whose works include dramas and prose fiction as well as some twenty collections of poetry.

Hans Richter, Professor of German at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena (GDR), the author of several studies of modern German literature; this essay is excerpted from an article scheduled to appear in *Österreichische Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts: Einzeldarstellungen,* Berlin (GDR), Verlag Volk und Wissen (Prod. No. 102593).

Carl Clifton Toliver, whose translations of Marie Luise Kaschnitz and Elisabeth Plessen have appeared in Dimension.

Suzanne Shipley Toliver, who has published translations of Erich Arendt, Christa Reinig, and others, as well as a book on Arendt.

Katharine Washburn, the editor of the forthcoming Random House *Anthology of Twentieth-Century German Poetry,* whose publications include translations of Ingeborg Bachmann, Johannes Bobrowski, and Celan.

Götz Wienold, Professor of Linguistics and Comparative Literature at the University of Konstanz (Federal Republic of Germany), whose publications reflect a wide range of interests, including Celan.

Annemarie Zornack, the wife of Hans-Jürgen Heise and author of several volumes of poetry, whose next collection will be issued by the Eremiten-Presse in 1985.

We would like to thank the authors of the poems in the concluding section, which appeared in 1971 in the German journal *Die Horen,* for granting permission to publish the translations. Celan's poems are published with the permission of the copyright holders: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt for "Argumentum e silentio" from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle;* S. Fischer Verlag for "Les Globes" from *Die Niemandsrose;* Persea Books for "The Trumpet's Part" and "The Poles"; and Suhrkamp Verlag for the remaining poems, from *Atemwende, Fadensonnen, Lichtzwang, Schneepart,* and *Zeitgehöft* (the source is indicated below each individual translation).

JERRY GLENN

THREE POEMS

Tr. by Beth Bjorklund

PALE-VOICED, flayed
from the depths:
no word, no thing,
and of both the sole name,

suited for fall in you,
suited for flight in you,

wounded gain
of a world.

(From *Lichtzwang*)

CHALK-CROCUS, at
dawn: your
warrant-ripened
from-there-and-also-there-from,
indivisible,

explosives
smile at you,
the indentation Being
helps a flake
out of itself,

the Moldau rises
in the mine-vaults.

STONE-BLOW behind the beetles.
There I saw someone who didn't lie,
standing home into his despair.

Like your loneliness-storm
he succeeds with the wide-
stepping-out stillness.

(From *Schneepart*)

SEVEN POEMS

Tr. by Esther Cameron

ARGUMENTUM E SILENTIO

for René Char

Chained between gold and oblivion:
the night.
Both stretched hands out to grasp her.
Both she allowed.

Lay down, you too, lay down
in this place, whatever is trying to dawn
upward, abreast of the days:
the word overflown by stars,
washed over by seas.

To each his word.
To each that word which sang to him
when the pack attacked from behind:
to each that word which sang to him and congealed.

To her, to the night,
the one overflown by stars, washed over by seas,
the one hauled in by silence,
whose blood did not clot when the venom-tooth
bit through the syllables.

To her the word caught by silence.

Against those others, whored round
by hangmen's ears, which also
make haste to scale time and the times,
it will bear witness, at the last,
when only chains ring out,
it will bear witness for her, who lies there
between gold and oblivion,
sistered to both, from all time—

For where
is there sign of dawn, say, save with her,
who in the river-basin of her tears
shows the seed to submerging suns,
time, time and again?

(From *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*)

LES GLOBES

In the eyes that have lost their way—read there:
The sun-, the heart-trajectories, the
In-vain whizzing beautifully past.
The deaths and all
that is born of them. The
chain of generations
that lies buried here and
still hangs here, in the ether,
bordering abysses. The inscriptions
on all those faces, drilled in
by singing word-sand—Tiny Eternity,
syllables.

All this,
even the heaviest, was
fledged, nothing
held back.

(From *Die Niemandsrose*)

NO HAND holds me either, I was born as you were,
and none flings fortune into my hour, any more than into yours,
who were dipped, as I was, in bull's blood,

yet the numbers stand ready to light the way for the tear
which is shot into the world
out of our navel,

yet that which came close to us, singly,
goes into the great syllabic writing,

and the almond-testicle
storms
and blossoms.

(From *Atemwende*)

WHITE, white, white
as picket-whitewash
the Laws line up
and march
inward.

FRANKFURT, SEPTEMBER

Blind, light-
bearded partition.
A lady-bug dream
shines on it, searching.

Behind, in keened
photogravure,
Freud's forehead opens out,

the hard-silenced
tear outside
crystallizes with the sentence:
"For the last
time psycho-
logy."

The simulated
jackdaw
eats breakfast.

The glottal stop
sings.

THE SCOOPED-OUT HEART,
where feeling is being installed.

Greater Homeland
Prefabricatedparts.

Milk-sister
Shovel.

THE INDUSTRIOUS
natural resources, domestic,

the heated syncope,

the indecipherable
Year of Reverberation,

the fully-vitrified
spider-altars in the all-
overtowering one-story building,

the intermediate tones
(even yet?),
the shadow-palaver,

the dreads, ice-oriented,
flight-clear,

the baroquely-draped,
language-swallowing shower-room,
semantically illuminated,

the uninscribed wall
of a phone-cell:

here

live yourself

straight across, without a clock.

(From *Fadensonnen*)

THREE POEMS

Tr. by Katharine Washburn

BLUE OF THE LODES in your mouth
you gasp up pole after pole

snow summered over
throws itself on it

soon the starling staggers hangs
in the double swarm of songs.

ONCE, when death was mobbed,
you took shelter in me.

GONE INTO THE NIGHT, complicit,
a star-
porous leaf
instead of a mouth:

something remains
for wild wasting,
treeward.

(From *Lichtzwang*)

THE SECOND CYCLE OF ZEITGEHÖFT

Tr. by Pierre Joris

ALMONDING YOU, who only halfspoke,
yet was trembled from the seed on up,
you
I let wait,
you.

And was
not yet
uneyed,
as yet unthorned in the song's
star, the song that begins:
Hachnissini.

IT STOOD
on your lip: the figsplinter

it stood
around us: Jerusalem

it stood
above the Daneship:
the bright-fir-scent, we thanked it,

I stood
in you.

THE SWELTER
adds us up
in the ass's bray before
Absalom's tomb, here too,

Gethsemane, over there,
the shirked, whom
does it bury?

At the nearest gate nothing opens,

above you, open one, I carry you toward me.

WE, WHO LIKE THE SEAOATS GUARD,
in N'we Awiwim,

the unkissed
stone of a complaint
swells up,
before fulfillment

it palpates our mouths,
it crosses
over to us,

alloyed to us
is its Whiteness,

we hand ourselves on:
to you and to me,

the night, be careful, the sand—
commanded,
is strict
with us two.

A RING, FOR BOWDRAWING,
sent after the wordswarm
that founders behind the world,
with the starlings,

Arrowy one, when you whir toward me,
I know from where,

I forgot from where.

THE RADIANCE, yes, the one that
Abu Tor
saw riding toward us, when we
orphaned into each other, for life,
not only up from the wrists—:

a goldbuoy, from
temple-depths,
surveyed the danger that
slyly underlay us.

NITIDOUS YOU
tumor daughter
of a blinding in the cosmos,

seized
by supracelestial search troops
shunted
into the seeing, god-
forsaking
starheap Blue,

you turn
gamey
before our
hungry, immovable
pores,
an also-sun, between
two brightshots'
abyss.

COME, lay the world out with yourself,
come, let me fill you both up with
all that's mine,

One with you I am,
to capture us,

even now.

A BOOTFUL OF BRAIN
set out in the rain:

there will be a going, a great one,
far across the borders
they draw for us.

THE TRUMPET'S PART
deep in the glowing
Empty-text,
at lamp's level,
in the timehole:

listen your way in
mouthwise.

THE POLES
are in us,
insurmountable
while awake,
we sleep across, to the Gate
of Mercy,

I lose you to you, that
is my snow-comfort,

say that Jerusalem *is,*

say it, as if I were this
your Whiteness,
as if you were
mine,

as if without us we could be we

I leaf you open, forever,

you pray, you lay
us free.

THE KINGSWAY behind the false door,

before it, deathed
in by the counter-
sign, the lionsign,

the constellation, keel up,
mired in,

you, with the
wound-fathoming
eyelash.

THERE ALSO comes a meaning
down the narrower cut,

it is breached
by the deadliest of our
standing marks.

I DRINK WINE from two different glasses
and harrow
the King's caesura
like that other
does Pindar.

God hands in the tuning fork
as one of the small
just ones,

from the lottery drum falls
our doit.

SOMETHING SHALL be, later,
that fills itself with you
and lifts itself
to a mouth

Out of shattered
madness

I raise myself
and watch my hand
as it draws the one
single
circle

NOTHINGNESS, for the sake
of our names
—they gather us in—
seals,

the end believes us
the beginning,

before the
masters en-
silencing us,
in the undifferentiated, attesting
itself: the clammy
brightness.

IN THE BELLSHAPE the
believing-unbelieving
souls gasp,

star-nonsense
propagates itself, even with my
hand, in desert-sense en-
duned by you,

we got here
long ago.

AS I carry the ringshadow
you carry the ring,

something, used to heaviness,
strains itself
lifting us,
infinite
de-eternalizing you.

STRANGENESS
has netted us,
transience reaches
helplessly through us,

take my pulse, it too,
into yourself,

then we shall prevail
against you, against me,

something enclothes us
in dayskin, in nightskin,
for the game with the highest, epi-
leptic Seriousness.

ILLUMINATED, the seeds
which I in you
won swimming,

rowed free,
the names—they
sail the straits,

a blessing, up front,
compacts into
a weather-sensing
fist.

THREE LETTERS

Tr. and edited by Jerry Glenn

The first two selections consist of excerpts from letters written by Celan to Alfred Margul-Sperber, one from Vienna, where Celan spent approximately the first six months of 1948, and the second while en route to Paris. Margul-Sperber (1898-1967) was born in a small town in the Bukovina. After the First World War he settled in Czernowitz, Celan's home town, where he established a reputation as a poet and translator and came to be recognized as the leading figure of the German-speaking literary community. He became Celan's friend and mentor, and it was through his influence that Celan was immediately accepted by the Viennese literary elite in 1948, as Milo Dor relates in his contribution to the present issue of SULFUR. After WW II Margul-Sperber moved to Bucharest, where he remained active until his death. He was one of a small and select group of people who enjoyed Celan's respect and friendship throughout his life. These and other letters of Celan to Margul-Sperber were published in the Rumanian journal *Neue Literatur* in 1975.

The third selection, previously unpublished, is presented in its entirety. Celan, widely recognized today as one of the outstanding poetic translators of his generation, did a number of translations in the 1950s, after settling in Paris, for the primary purpose of earning money. One book he was asked to translate was *Rainer Maria Rilke/André Gide: Correspondence 1909-1926,* edited and introduced by Renée Lang, and published by Editions Corrèa, Paris, in 1952. As this letter to Professor Lang reveals, Celan ultimately decided against accepting the assignment. The book was eventually translated by Wolfgang A. Peters (with considerable—unacknowledged—assistance from Lang) and appeared in German in 1957, issued jointly by two publishers: the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, which had put out another of Lang's books—a study of Gide—in 1953, was Celan's publisher at the time, and held the German rights to Gide; and the Insel Verlag, Rilke's publisher.

I would like to express my gratitude to Renée Lang for making the third letter available to me and providing information about its contents,

and to Gisèle Celan-Lestrange for granting permission to publish all three letters.

Vienna I, Rathausstrasse 20
Feb. 11, 1948

Dear Mr. Sperber,

. . . It seemed as though there was little likelihood that my book of poetry would be published. I was, to be sure, heartened by the fact that a selection of my poems (about fifteen—a substantial number) appeared—or will appear next Friday—in "Plan." But then nothing happened. . . . Edgar Jené, however, invited some people to his apartment and I read my poems, which were highly praised. Believe me, I can't tell you how happy it made me to hear them say that I was the greatest poet in Austria and—as far as they knew—in Germany. One of the people who said that was Dr. Werner Riemerschmid. For years he was in charge of the literary division of the Austrian Radio, even under the Nazis, and back then I imagine he found other ways to spend his time than saying to a Jewish poet: "At last the *homo alpinus* can see what a poet is."

But Edgar Jené is different, he has really been exceptionally nice to me. . . . He is, as it were, the "pope" of Viennese surrealism, and I am now his most influential (and only) cardinal. I have, to be sure, prophesied to him that is superior, St. Peter, that is, Andre Breton, . . . will categorically refuse to recognize me, a person who has done something as abominable as write rhymed poetry. Jené is now preparing an issue of "Plan" devoted to surrealism, which he intends to take with him to Paris in April (A. Breton has sent material for the issue, I have supplied a translation of a short poem by Aimé Césaire and an "apologia," co-authored by Jené), along with my book. Yes, my book . . . went to the printer today and will be out in five or six weeks. . . .

An anecdote from the early history of the publication of my poems: a publisher, Mrs. Luckmann, who heard me read my poems at Jené's, was so enthusiastic that she immediately declared her intention to publish them without subvention. But a few days later, after she had taken the manuscript home, she reconsidered, because her editor and one of her

authors, P. Gütersloh, said that the time for publishing these admittedly "very talented" poems had "not yet come." Dark times indeed....

Sincerely,
Paul

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my book: Der Sand aus den Urnen ("The Sand from the Urns"), published late in 1948 by A. Sexl in Vienna; the time schedule mentioned here by Celan proved to be quite optimistic.

Plan: progressive Viennese literary magazine edited by Otto Basil (1901-83). Financial difficulties caused the journal to cease publication after the issue in which Celan's poems were presented, and the surrealism issue never appeared.

Edgar Jené (born 1904): a surrealist painter and art editor of *Plan,* and Celan's closest friend in Vienna; cf. Celan's essay "Edgar Jené and the Dream of the Dream," tr. Jerry Glenn, *Boston University Journal,* 21, No. 1 (1973), pp. 63-68.

Werner Riemerschmid (1875-1967): Austrian author and translator.

André Breton (1896-1954): French poet and novelist, and the leading theoretician of surrealism.

Aimé Césaire (born 1913): French surrealist poet born in Martinique, and a friend of Breton.

apologia: "Eine Lanze," a short surrealistic prose text, which was mimeographed and distributed in conjunction with a poetry reading and art exhibition in Vienna on April 3rd, 1948.

Mrs. Luckmann: Ilse Luckmann, Viennese publisher of, among others, Gütersloh and Heimito von Doderer (1896-1966).

P. Gütersloh: Alfred Paris Gütersloh (1887-1973), Austrian artist and writer.

Innsbruck, July 6, 1948

Dear Mr. Sperber,

Yesterday I visited Ludwig von Ficker. It was not easy for me to read my poetry for Trakl's friend. Ficker getting on in years—he'll be seventy in two years—and in such cases one often suspects that a friendship with a poet like Trakl limits the person's receptivity to other poets ...so I was prepared for a less enthusiastic reception than I hoped for.

You can imagine how happy I was when it turned out quite differently, in spite of the fact that I didn't read as effectively as I did on many occasions in Vienna (and I read much better now than formerly)—I was nervous, and Ficker is hard of hearing. I was told that I was called to be the heir of Lasker-Schüler. At first I didn't know how to respond, since—I'm ashamed to say—I don't feel nearly as close to Lasker-Schüler as to Trakl and Eluard, and also because I didn't know what Ficker's opinion of her poetry was. But then Ficker took her last collection of poems from his desk... and from the way he spoke about her I could tell that he esteemed her as highly as Trakl. He also voiced the opinion that Trakl himself was deeply indebted to her. And he talked to me as if I were one of them. I was especially pleased that he was attuned to the Jewish element in my poetry—you know how important this is to me....

Sincerely,
Paul

Ludwig von Ficker: Ficker (1880-1967), the editor of the Austrian journal *Der Brenner*, a friend of Trakl and the person responsible for Trakl's literary fame.

Trakl: Georg Trakl (1887-1914), Austrian expressionist poet.

Lasker-Schüler: Else Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945), German-Jewish writer best known for her lyrics, and an important forerunner of expressionism.

Eluard: Paul Eluard (1895-1952), French surrealist poet.

Paris, August 27, 1954

Dear Madam:

I had no choice—I simply had to return your book to the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. Originally I had hoped to find a style in translating the Rilke letters that would allow me to avoid reproducing all of the idiosyncrasies of Rilke's idiom, without, of course, ignoring the essence of his poetic voice in the process. I had put off doing these letters, intending to translate them only after reading and re-reading Rilke's German letters. Unfortunately, however, a problem arose, in the form of the Insel Ver-

lag's perfectly legitimate request to see some of my translations of the Rilke letters. This intimidated me. I saw myself subjected to the scrutiny of the entire congregation of Rilke worshippers, whose familiarity with Rilke's language far surpasses my own. As you well know, Rilke's French inhabits a realm that is determined by displacements and reductions. This language can't simply be translated, it must be *translocated.* The publisher's request caused me to question my ability to feel my way into the language, my ability to execute such an analogous linguistic operation to the extent demanded by the text. My desire to hear the opinion of the Insel Verlag after the completion of my work was equalled by my fear to begin.

I have hesitated for an unpardonably long time, translating and retranslating—with the unfortunate result that my doubts increased with each attempt.

Your book is now back at the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt and will, I hope, soon be in hands that, unlike mine, find no need to page endlessly through Rilke's German works before deciding to use this word or that; in hands that can replace a semicolon with a period without hesitation.

It is with a deep sense of shame and sadness that I inform you of the situation. Please believe me when I say that I have the best interests of your book at heart.

Sincerely yours,
Paul Celan

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translated... translocated: *ubersetzt... übergesetzt*: both German words are translations of the components of the Latin *transferre,* with a minor grammatical difference; the former is used figuratively, 'to translate,' the latter in the physical sense of 'to carry across.'

PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Joachim Herrmann and Rebecca S. Rodgers

In 1947 a young man who called himself Paul Celan appeared in Vienna. He came literally from Nowhere. He was born Paul Antschel on November 23, 1920, in Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina, an erstwhile Austrian province whose educated Jewish population spoke German. But where was Czernowitz now? On which map could it be found? Who lived there now, and what language did they speak?

In 1938 Paul Antschel travelled to France to study, as did the sons of many good Rumanian families. But a year later, in the summer of 1939, he abandoned his medical studies at Tours and returned home to commence the study of Romance languages and literatures. After the war reached eastern Europe, he spent a year in a detention camp. Following his escape he made his way to the Soviet army, where they put the former medical student to work as an orderly. In 1944 he returned with the Soviets to Rumania. Czernowitz now belonged to the Ukrainian S.S.R., to which it had been ceded by the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939. Paul's parents were no longer there. They had been carried off and murdered by the Germans.

In 1945 he took a job as culture-page editor of a Rumanian newspaper. During this time he secretly composed poems in German, which was at once his mother tongue and the language of his mother's murderers. The future of a German poet in Rumania was not particularly promising, however, since German was not held in very high esteem there in the early post-war years—as if the language of Heine and Rilke should be blamed for the fact that the Nazis had also used it (and, of course, abused it).

And so the young man, who had now assumed the name Paul Celan, departed for Vienna, which he regarded as the Mecca of German

literary life. Among his meager possessions was the manuscript of a book of poems, as well as a letter from Alfred Margul-Sperber, a respected older poet. The letter was addressed to Otto Basil, the editor of the first post-war Austrian literary magazine, which bore the significant title of *Plan*.

As the opening selection of the last issue of his magazine, which appeared in the spring of 1948, Basil featured seventeen poems by Paul Celan. In a note at the end he printed an excerpt from Margul-Sperber's letter:

> Without meaning to anticipate your more competent judgement, I would like to tell you that Paul Celan is *the* poet of our region, the poet whom I have been awaiting for decades and who has richly rewarded my patience. Celan has lived exclusively here in Rumania, that is, in a non-German-speaking environment. But his poetry seems to demonstrate that there exists a sublime spirit of language, independent of day-to-day discourse. His work impresses me as the most distinctive and striking being produced by the latest generation of German poets. It is not, however, easily accessible; it demands of the reader an exceptional degree of receptivity, sensitivity, and perseverance. Not only do the events in his poetry transpire in a mythic realm—the light that shines therein seems almost to originate in another spectrum—but poetic reality itself is also transfigured. It is, so to speak, the sun of this reality which we encounter. The Emotional, the Sonorous, the Visionary: everything must be viewed from a different perspective. The association is the association of Dream, which explores new territories, including those of a linguistic nature. I, for my part, believe that *Der Sand aus den Urnen* ("The Sand from the Urns") is the most important book of German verse to have been produced in recent decades, and the only poetic equal of the works of Kafka.

In that same year (1948), *Der Sand aus den Urnen* was published in Vienna. As was so often the case in those days, it was printed on bad paper, had an ugly cover, and was full of misprints. Nevertheless, Paul Celan made an incisive impression on the Viennese literary public of the early post-war years. When he gave a reading in the Agathon Gallery, the room was filled to overflowing. But what did that matter at a time when the circles in which he moved were living from hand to mouth and would have liked nothing better than to emigrate, had they had the chance. So-called serious people, those engaged in politics and business, had little time for upstart poets who suddenly appeared and claimed a right to

exist. This remains true in Vienna, even today, in 1970.

Paul Celan moved to Paris, where he completed his studies and earned a meager living as a teacher of language and literature. In the spring of 1949 I visited him there. He was still a student at the time, and lived on the top floor of a small hotel in the Rue des Ecoles. I slept on the sofa in his small room, and we spent three wonderful weeks together, during which we actually began to entertain the ridiculous hope that even in Vienna things might one day improve, thus making his return possible. He maintained a strange sort of loyalty to Vienna, as to a homeland that he had lost and wanted one day to find again.

In 1951 Reinhard Federmann, Hans Weigel, and I printed a handful of Celan's poems in our anthology *Stimmen der Gegenwart,* to demonstrate that he belonged among the first post-war generation of Austrian writers. And he did. Where else did he belong? At the urging of the Austrian branch of the "Group 47," or, more precisely, at the urging of Ingeborg Bachmann, Reinhard Federmann, and myself, Celan was invited to the group's meeting in Niendorf, near Hamburg, in the spring of 1952. He didn't receive the Group 47 prize—this honor went to Ilse Aichinger. Immediately after the reading, however, he located a German publisher, who brought out *Mohn und Gedächtnis* ("Poppy and Memory"), a collection of poetry, in the fall of that year. Recognition in West Germany soon followed.

While German intellectuals were debating whether or not it was possible to write poetry after Auschwitz, this young man, who had been spared Auschwitz only by a coincidence, wrote poems full of somber tones and an awe-inspiring power that can only emanate from someone who has lived on the threshhold of death. He was quite capable of mourning, perhaps even for the murderers of his parents, relatives, and playmates—whose Czernowitz had ceased to exist.

He was not, however, prepared to live in Germany, although some changes had taken place there, but preferred to live in a sort of voluntary exile. In West Germany, several of his books appeared and much was written about him; he was praised, and honored with prestigious literary prizes. But Paul Celan remained in Paris. Exile retains its meaning only so long as one can hope for return. Yet what place should a German-speaking poet born in Czernowitz return to? If he had begun to write in

French immediately after his arrival in Paris, he would certainly, like Ionesco, have quickly become one of the voices setting the tone of cultural life in the French metropolis. But what was he doing there, a poet who obstinately continued to write in German?

In 1959, shortly after his *Sprachgitter* ("Language Lattice") had appeared in Frankfurt, Paul Celan telephoned me. He called not from Paris, but from Vienna. He had abruptly decided to come because he had felt the need to hear the sound of German being spoken in the streets. He stayed here for a week, and we discussed, among other things, ways in which his eventual return to Vienna might be arranged. Carried away by my love of the city, I believed that I could manage, through some connection or other, to find him a place to live, even if only in welfare housing, and a job with a modest but regular salary. After all, he had a phenomenal mastery of several languages—he spoke Russian and English in addition to French and Rumanian—so it shouldn't have been difficult to find him suitable employment. But we forgot to take into account that he was a great poet, and great poets are not readily accepted here, whatever else they might be doing.

After Celan left, I seriously considered making a determined effort to bring him to Vienna. But then I became painfully aware that I myself lived in a vacuum in which I was incapable of doing anything to help someone else. The only thing I could do was publish thirteen of his poems in my anthology *Die Verbannten.* In the preface I wrote about our helplessness in an environment where mediocre dilettantes set the tone. This was the only tangible product of our conversation. I continued to discuss Celan here and there with a few friends who themselves were incapable of doing anything to help anyone else. Two years ago, in 1968, he was finally invited to give a reading in Vienna. I very much looked forward to seeing him again, and I went to the Palais Pallfy—but Paul Celan never came. Several hundred interested or curious people went away disappointed. I think that by then it was already too late.

The fate of Paul Celan is renewed proof that Austria has only dead or exiled poets. He is dead now, and has finally found a way to return to a realm in which his language is understood.

PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Linda Kraus Worley and Jeff Worley

Paul Antschel, who used the pen name Paul Celan, was born in Czernowitz on November 23, 1920—one year after his homeland, Bukovina, was ceded to Rumania. In 1940 the northern part of the area, including the capital, Czernowitz, was annexed by the Soviet Union, and a year later the situation changed again: German and Rumanian troops occupied the country. Although his Jewish parents met their death in a concentration camp, their son survived in a Rumanian work camp. Finally, towards the end of 1943, he was able to return to Czernowitz and continue the study of Romance languages and literatures he had begun in 1939 following a stay in France. Another disruptive event in Celan's life occurred in 1945 after Bukovina was annexed by the Soviet Union once and for all: his deportation to Rumania. After working as a translator and publisher's reader in Bucharest for two years, the young poet reached Paris after a stay in Vienna, where his first book, *Der Sand aus den Urnen* ("The Sand from the Urns") appeared in 1948. In Paris he married the artist Gisèle Lestrange and began to work as a translator after a short course of studies in German and linguistics at the Sorbonne. He also assembled a collection of old and new poems, which he entitled *Mohn und Gedächtnis* ("Poppy and Memory," 1952).

The most successful poems in this volume reveal a decidedly modern author, if one still bound to a conventional vocabulary. He achieves this modernity by providing a musical structure for the emotional content, using his own surrealistic associative technique. To be sure, Celan turns to the past, to the atrocities of the war and the murder of his parents in some of his poems, including the all-too rhetorical "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue"). But in most of the poems the elegiac mood is thematically divorced from what might have caused it. It is life—but life as a

whole, life in the totality of its ontological relationships—that causes suffering. History, civilization, technology, class struggle—none of these is a significant factor in Celan's lyrics. Celan suffers from the daily banalities of life around him and the deep loneliness within him; and since everything becomes unfamiliar and painful, even love itself cannot offer refuge.

Even if Celan still appears to be relatively "open" in *Mohn und Gedächtnis,* to be concerned with people and things, he is already building around himself those barriers of reserve and ceremoniousness behind which he will later construct his hermetic fortress. An external frame of reference is no longer a goal; it is merely a point of departure for the poetic word, which leads away from mankind, down towards the dark, death-filled vessels, towards an epigram similar in its severity to that epitaph which Rilke composed for himself in 1925, as a means of withdrawing from the company of mankind: "Rose, oh pure paradox, desire/To be no one's sleep under so many/Lids."

This cool formulation often shines through Celan's work from this point on. "Nobody's voice, again," to cite a line from *Sprachgitter* ("Language Lattice," 1959). In *Fadensonnen* ("Thread-Suns," 1968), a poem cramped in painful isolation appears: "The high-world—lost, the madness-journey, the day-journey.//What can be asked, from this point,/with the rose in a fallow year/No-where, interpreted home." The most striking signs, however, that point to Rilke's epitaph are found in *Die Niemandsrose* ("The No One's Rose," 1963), which pays homage to its model not only overtly in the title, but also in the poems: "...no one's/root—oh, ours...," "No one kneads us again out of earth and clay/no one blesses our dust./No one.//...A Nothing/we were, we are, we will stay/a Nothing, blooming:/the Nothing's, the No-one's rose." This metaphorical material, however, is given an essentially different meaning in the lines of the last quote, since what was in Rilke narcissism, the ethically unconcerned attitude of the artist, suddenly becomes in Celan a cipher that establishes bonds with the collective.

Die Niemandsrose was Celan's most heterogeneous book. Here the poet reaches back once more to an outworn romantic vocabulary; even though he avoids the all-too-arbitrary genitive metaphors common in the early poems, he now allows constructions which are almost more obso-

lete and sugary to creep in: pistil bright as souls, stamen empty as heaven, grey-beaten heart-hammer-silver. Even rhyme suddenly appears again. Although in a poem like "Selbdritt, selbviert" ("The Three of Us, the Four of Us"), which is deliberately reminiscent of Hans Arp, rhyme has a legitimate parodistic function, in other poems it appears to be a regression, an attempt to hold together all of the unrhymed elements of today with the formal structure of yesterday.

There is no doubt that Celan enters into a crisis with *Niemandsrose,* a crisis that could in no way have been foreseen after the concise texts of *Sprachgitter.* The feeling, the fear, the despair—all of those elements which had also been present in works like "Sommerbericht ("Summer Report") and "Engführung" ("The Straitening") but had been artistically perfected and thereby, at least to some degree, neutralized—emerge now once again: the eruptive and chaotic grasping at old forms and searching for new ones, without finding them. *Sprachgitter* presents the lyrical protocol of a life which, even though it fails to capture reality, has, nevertheless, in the realm of the verbal been able to give expression to its failure so that this life, after all, does succeed—albeit in an indirect way. In "Jakobs Stimme" ("Jacob's Voice"), a poetic fragment from the introductory cycle "Stimmen" ("Voices"), his frustration is conquered; these verses lend dignity to suffering, but they still point back to life: "The tears./The tears in the brother's eye./One hung there, grew./ We live in it./Breathe, that/it may loosen."

For the most part, however, the poems in *Sprachgitter* deal with a world wherein the lines of communication are destroyed: the world is something that separates. All that remains to do is to report what has already transpired. The isolation seems complete; there is no succor, no hope, no future: "Go, your hour/has no sisters, you are—/are at home .../...the night/needs no stars, nowhere/are you asked for." All human beings, even lovers, have drifted apart. The self-evident, because it is not self-evident anymore, emerges as something uncertain, something divisive. To be sure, every once in a while a penetrating perception occurs, but then, when confidence arises and when the poet, separated from his fellow men, at least feels himself to be one with inanimate matter, "as if, because of stone, there were still brothers," then questions arise: is this palpably growing transcendence something that really exists?

Or is this transcendence only a reflection of the emotion that sifts through the "language lattice," hallucinatory and illusory, similar to those faces painted by van Gogh that provided inspiration for two of Celan's poems?

That which had been mastered in *Sprachgitter* loses almost all of its sharp contour in *Niemandsrose.* It flows apart, reaches back to old patterns of expression, to strange as well as to familiar rhythms, which, even if they had stood the test of their own time, are now no longer adequate; they could be repeated and reeled off not as if a poet were speaking, but rather as if vocabulary and grammar had joined forces to produce lines like: "There came a stillness, and there came a storm, too/there came each and every ocean./I dig, you dig, and the worm digs too,/and the singing out there says: they dig." Artistic consciousness and insightful intensity—both are suddenly lost here and the words begin to skid around; they only act "as if." In reality, however, they do not communicate, but instead suppress what meaning resides within them or create deaf neologisms.

The *Niemandsrose* is dedicated to the memory of Osip Mandelstam. Paul Celan wrote a few lines of a poem (not particularly convincing when viewed as a whole) for this Russian poet with the Jewish heritage to whose tragic existence Celan felt brotherly ties. These lines point past the apostrophized person and betray a personal feeling of longing for the lost home: "...a path/to Russia comes to your heart,/the Karelian birch tree/has/waited,/the name Osip approaches you...." The name Osip, not the person Mandelstam. Celan is not a poet of essences and facts; he is a poet of words and concepts. His poetry is, to a high degree, abstract, but not because he is an abstract poet or—nonsensical term—a concrete poet. Rather, he writes as he does because his reality has been taken from him: his parents, the city of his birth, Bukovina, the Eastern landscape. "...Speech-scale, word-scale, home-scale, exile...." What remained, what he was able to add, was his poetry, which can only be a substitute, and not a restitution. No new literary style, no modern direction is introduced by Celan. He attempts to make existence possible in a situation that would have silenced all of the word technicians or caused them to reconsider the worth of the existent pool of language.

Mohn und Gedächtnis is Celan's first artistically successful book, although still romantically articulated. The vocabulary still has aroma, the metaphors flesh, the sound consolation. Even "Todesfuge," however horrible its theme, resonates with the faint hope that the world can be set aright, as though poetry could conquer, save, and transcend if only it were rhythmical, whispered magically, and pleasant sounding.

Sprachgitter, on the other hand—after the early style fades out in the weaker volume *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* ("From Threshold to Threshold," 1955)—was a book which in subject no less than tone expressed the concept that intense reflection in conjunction with a shocked sensibility could achieve neither trust in life nor contact with one's surroundings.

Niemandsrose, then, was a regression, a fragmentation, which called previous achievements into question. At the time of its appearance no reader could have recognized, given the presence of the old repertoire, which was sometimes employed in a downright dilettante manner, that here several extraordinary themes and revelations were hidden. Today, viewed with hindsight, these themes can be seen as keys and codes: "so/much/is asked of the one/whom hope carts up and down/the hump-backed heart-way—so/much."

Atemwende ("Breath-turning," 1967), when Celan had found a new mode of expression in a poetry of fragments ripped apart by feelings of guilt and moral hysteria, it was still not possible to discern that something irreversible had taken place, that communication was being attempted—but no longer with human beings. ("We live under an ominous sky, and—there are few human beings," as the poet had already said in 1960 in a letter to Hans Bender.) Rather, the dialogue is with those transcendental realms in which it was so difficult for Celan to believe: "Thread-suns/over the grey-black wasteland./A tree-/high thought/grasps the light's tone: there are/still songs to be sung on the other side/of mankind." From this point on, Celan does not find his way back into the realm of human communication.

His plunge into a solipsistic world can no longer be halted. The remaining island of the Ego is swamped by the unconscious and what still exists of concrete reality, what still stands as secure knowledge, fades into the unreal. Even though the poet tries to flee through ever new laby-

rinths of word and feeling, he does not succeed in escaping his moral hallucinations. On the contrary, this conflict grows to gigantic proportions, and Celan—in penance, as it were—now wants to carry the responsibility on a cosmic scale; in fact, he feels himself to be responsible for what does not even exist: "The trace of a bite in the Nowhere./It, too,/you must battle,/from here." The psychological landslides that are at work changing the personality occur during full consciousness. "The ounce of truth deep in delusion. . . ." Celan perceives both: the truth and the delusion. Like Hölderlin before him, he notices his feeling being buried under a glacier: "On the flooded trail/the little charlatan-sermon of stillness.//It is as though you could hear,/as though I loved you yet." Love is now characterized as "strait-jacket-beautiful," and Kafka's infamous sentence "For the last time psychology" is quoted in this mood, in this atomized state of mind. The poet ponders the presence and the necessity of normative regulations, the mechanics of interchangeable but, in the final analysis, unrepealable laws and prohibitions: "The broken-up taboos,/crossing and recrossing the borders between them,/world-wet, on/the hunt for meaning,/on flight from/meaning."

The last volume of poetry Celan put together himself, *Lichtzwang* ("Light-Compulsion," 1970), begins once again with a cool statement of his position. His personal situation is recognized, the way to deliverance is seen and ironically described: "Remnants of things seen, of things heard, in/dormitory one thousand and one,//day-nightly/the Bear Polka:/they retrain you,/you are once again/he." But only two poems later the darkness returns and life becomes an irredeemable promise: "Lemmings burrow.//No Later." Celan is no longer able to withdraw. The Other, Stronger entices, compels: "Foreknowledge bleeds/twice behind the curtain,//shared-knowledge/effervesces." Shared-knowledge. Presumed complicity. The poet turns against himself more and more; he accuses himself not only of being-so-and-not-different, but he also accuses himself because of the roles he plays: "Gradually clown-faced/. . . the make-up truth frozen blue/in the mouth's corner." The allusion is, possibly, to poetry readings—the exhibition of the most intimate of impulses spoken in public. Celan's words are often only apparently obscure. The truth is that he is revealing his shame and his indignation. Proof of this extraordinary moral sense of responsibility can be

found in the poem "Sink," in which Celan does indeed ask the loved one to part from him; however, at the same time he lets solicitude reign and tries to offer protection: "Sink away from me/from the bend of the elbow,//take the One/pulse beat along,//conceal yourself in it,/outside."

The pieces of the world cannot be put back together in this fractured heart. Compassion and despair have increasingly muted voices. The wish to return to lifelessness and to become one with the earth grows immeasurably: "If I were to eat the track of the cart/I would be there." Now it is not far away; the horizon recedes from his active mind, which, in turn, is closing in on him. New perspectives, monstrous abysses open up: "Now, as the prayer-hassocks are burning,/I eat the book/with all the/insignia." Only death can quench such fire, such hunger for the absolute. Death, however, is not yet ready, and so it must be pre-empted. Paul Celan drowns himself in the Seine at the end of April, 1970, seven months before his 50th birthday: "That death,/which you still owe me, I/will carry it/out."

The poems in *Schneepart* ("Snow-part"), which appeared a year after the suicide, were written between December 1967 and October 1968, in all likelihood before the texts in *Lichtzwang*. In this volume, Celan analyzes his inner situation, the increasing frigidity of his feelings, his isolation. Over and over again the focus is on snow, ice, hail, and—stone. To be sure, the author offers resistance. He confronts the emotional glacier formation, but the attempt to remain victorious, using only the metaphoric capabilities of poetry, is no longer successful. Even when the poet endeavors to hew away the "word shadows," his efforts produce relationships only within the realm of language, and none on the communicative level: "Two fingers, hand-distant,/row towards the swampy/oath."

Like Mallarmé, who, in order to imagine himself as the high priest of a sacred realm of words, endeavored to degradate to absolute nothingness that existence which tangled, hidden emotions precluded him from accepting, Celan, too, increasingly separated himself from his surroundings by creating a hermetic cult language. But this Eastern European poet, longing for annihilation, was not able to let his feelings cool off and formalize the misery. Celan, in contrast to Mallarmé, was unable to

attain any lasting tranquility. Celan's despair did not allow itself to be stylized into a telling silence, thereby excluding the essential conflict. Celan's ontological perceptions were not those of a man who had to imagine coldness and emptiness from the haven of a materially secure, middle-class existence. The vacuum came to Celan of its own accord; it came to be through the erosion of all things, concepts, feelings: "The chaff/of futile devotion/a/cob-blow/away from the prayer-silos." Or: "Eternity keeps itself in bounds."

Since Paul Celan was not able to wring any consolation from religion or any solidarity from interpersonal relationships, he lost himself in an isolation inhabited solely by a few symbols and word fetishes. When even his familiar anchor was lost and his wife became the "snowed one," he drifted aimlessly on the open sea, the world nothing more than a life boat drifting out of reach as he went under.

Toward the end of June we saw the grave. It was completely barren. The wreaths had been cleared off of the blooming field full of weeds, soon destined to become the next row of graves. At the head of the mound a black metal marker had been stuck into the light, loose earth. Upon this marker, the dates were temporarily written in white:

Paul
Anischel-Celan
1920-1970

At first the men in the cemetery office could give us no information. They only had a man by the name of Ceran in their books. And the one we sought was listed (with the wrong third letter of his last name) as Anlschel: Paul Anlschel-Celan, buried on the twelfth of May, 1970, field 32, row 12, grave number 39. The cemetery, the Cimetière Parisien in the southern suburb of Thiais, in the immediate vicinity of the Orly airport, is a complex with 123 lots.

Hans Richter

ON PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Donald Hamilton,
Daniel C. Nutzel, Carrie Ohst,
and Susan O'Shaughnessy

Celan's work is widely regarded as a good example of esoteric verse; and it does indeed contain many obscure and enigmatic elements. The poet, however, definitely and expressly considered his work to be comprehensible. When pressed for an explanation, in all sincerity he urged: "Just read. Just keep on reading, and understanding will come of its own accord." Of course Celan's poetry does require an especially attuned audience and one as well-read as the author himself. The basic difficulty of a Celan poem results from its lack of connection with a lyric tradition that, regardless of imagery or metaphor, defines the relationship of the poetic subject to reality in mimetic forms. The decisive moment of Celan's initial development occurred at the time fascism was spreading in Rumania, a phenomenon to which the country's opposition poetry reacted with an inclination towards allegorical language. In addition to the symbolist, expressionist, and romantic traditions, the poetry of surrealism, not least of all as it was practiced by its Rumanian representatives, had such a vivid effect upon the young poet that he developed as his basic methodological principle a system of highly figurative expression.

The often seemingly dark poetry of Paul Celan does emit its own unique light. Thus it is capable of offering insights even when it seems to defy concentrated efforts to understand it: its transfigurations and associations for the most part allow the reader to sense their inner necessity and logic without having to subject them to rational analysis. Celan's verse exerts a strong appeal even when its meaning remains more or less hidden, since his use of language nearly always expresses its own poetic legitimation. In his early works this was achieved essentially with the aid

of suggestive rhythmic and melodic patterns, such as those seen in "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue"), and occasionally by means of rhyme (which was almost totally avoided after the mid-1960s). Subsequently, this was often achieved by presenting lyrical language as a seeking, groping, developing process that now and then appears to result from the interplay of impulses and restraints. Finally this is attained through the strict interlocking of polysemantic elements to form a harmonious whole. However, one element in Celan's poetry transcends the many stylistic developments and remains the primary and ultimate creative force, continually renewing itself even when it on occasion seems seriously endangered: namely, the guiding principle of dialogue. To be sure, Celan's poetic concept is already formed before being confronted by Gottfried Benn's apotheosis of the absolute poem, i.e., the apodictic positing of a poem without faith and addressed to no one. But Celan's poetry develops specifically in opposition to Benn's position: Celan conceives of an emphatically communicative poem, a poem addressed to someone. And while Benn maintains in one of his poems that only two things are real, the void and the marked Ego, a realm to which he withdraws in complacent melancholy, Celan insistently refuses to withdraw his marked Ego from the world and replace the world with it; instead he makes the contrary attempt—sometimes hopefully, sometimes despairingly—to establish a worthy relationship of this Ego to the world, no matter how unworthy this world may often appear. As a poet and in his poetry he continually seeks a humane world.

For all its continuity Celan's poetry has in the course of the years indeed undergone considerable change. When one compares the sonorous, rhythmically and melodically unfolding verse of his early period—often excessively ornate and embellished with rhyme—to the later short poems with their tendency towards pointed sarcasm, short lines, retarding division of words, and enjambment, one may easily arrive at the conclusion that one is dealing with the works of totally different authors. If, however, we read Celan's poems as the process of an unrelenting, self-regenerating reaction to the world (and do not neglect to count the poems themselves as part of the world), we will, for all that, sense the unity of Celan's work and will be able to discern the unifying conditions which underlie the diverse components of his oeuvre. It is, in the final analysis,

the same historical basis, the same experience in the world and in life, that give rise, for example, to poems such as the lyrically structured "Todesfuge" from Celan's first book, as well as to these lines from *Schneepart* ("Snow Part," 1971), which are technically so different: "The world whose stuttering is to be mimicked,/whose guest I/shall have been, a name/sweated forth from the wall,/upon which a wound oozes upward."

The central noun names precisely that world which will transcend the lyrical Ego, a world that the Ego views from both sides of death, a world to which the Ego, "wounded by reality," is inevitably bound. What seems here to be but an undercurrent comes clearly to light in other poems and is on occasion explicitly mentioned; Celan's manner of observing the world is marked by a process of constant memory and remembrance; even events of the distant past remain omnipresent, and thus there is no past and no forgetting. To be sure, to combine time and space in his poems has always been the sovereign right of the poet and his genre; however, when Paul Celan asserts "All places are here and now," this key statement signifies that his Here and Now includes all of the traumatizing moments of his experience, and it is precisely these which determine his perspective on life, and thus the—in his mature poetry quite unsentimental—elegiac tenor of his works.

John Felstiner

PAUL CELAN'S TRIPLE EXILE

Flight, exile, and multi-lingualness came by inheritance to Paul Celan as to many others in Eastern Europe. His father's family, from Galicia, fled the Russians during World War One; and from Bukovina, his mother's family fled then to Bohemia. Born in 1920 in Czernowitz, Bukovina, the eastern outpost of the Austrian empire until 1918, then the northernmost province of Rumania, Celan grew up in a German-speaking Jewish milieu, learning Hebrew at one school and Rumanian at another. After the Hitler-Stalin pact, Russian forces occupied the city. Then in 1941, Nazi and Rumanian troops set about burning plundering, torturing, murdering, and deporting thousands of Jews. Celan, an only child, saw his parents taken in a 1942 ghetto sweep, and that winter he learned that both of them, brutally exhausted in a Transnistrian labor camp, were shot by the SS. He himself spent eighteen months shoveling rocks in southeast Rumania; "I have seen life exchanged for the utmost bitterness," he wrote a friend, but in the same letter also began sending her poems. After barely escaping execution, he fled to the Soviet army and then returned to Czernowitz, occupied again by the Russians in 1944. A year later Celan abandoned his homeland and Soviet rule for Bucharest, where he worked as a translator from Russian into Rumanian. In 1947 he fled to Vienna with a rucksack and a manuscript of poems, then in 1948 finally settled in Paris.

Czernowitz, Bucharest, Vienna, Paris: it sounds somewhat like the signature to *Ulysses*—"Trieste, Zurich, Paris"—except that Joyce the artist's exile seems richly voluntary. A figure Celan once used for the situation of the poet suggests what his own exile felt like. "A poem," he said, "can be a message in a bottle, sent off in the (not always greatly hopeful) belief that it may somewhere and sometime wash up on land." Like being shipwrecked, stranded—and the fact that he drew this figure

from Osip Mandelstam helps identify the Jewish along with the territorial nature of Celan's exile.

To call it a triple exile seems truest to me: from Bukovina, from Jerusalem, from the German language itself. All three elements come together in Celan's opening words for a speech he gave acknowledging Germany's Bremen Prize in 1958. "The landscape from which I come to you might be unfamiliar to most of you. It is the landscape that was home to a not inconsiderable part of those Hasidic stories which Martin Buber has retold for us all in German." Celan's tactful regret that Bukovina is strange and now gone; his modest need to recall a Judaic culture now also gone; his pointed reference to Buber's translations, that doomed infusion of Jewishness into the German tongue—in such ways Celan had to begin his speech of thanks in Germany. Buber, he says, "retold for us all in German" the Hasidic Stories—but who are "us all"? Can Celan have said that with anything but the acutest irony?

Because I think that in America, we need as much as ever to have the phenomenon of exile borne in upon us, I'd like summarily to document Celan's triple exile, to draw a profile of it. I might also mention that as biographer-cum-translator, my need to have the poet's speeches, letters, and remarks in English forms part of my whole attempt at apprehending him.

First, the exile from Bukovina. In that 1958 speech he called his homeland a region "now reduced to historylessness." Then in 1960, afflicted by a groundless plagiarism charge and obsessed by neo-Nazism and antisemitism, Celan in Paris longed for his Rumanian writer-friends of the 40s: "You know," he wrote to his old Rumanian mentor, "I've often wondered if I'd have been better off staying among the books of my homeland." In Western Europe he felt himself an *Ostjude,* irrevocably exiled to the West, far from the East and Czernowitz. In his great speech called "The Meridian," accepting the prestigious Büchner prize in 1960, Celan said his poetry was "seeking the place of my own origin . . . on a child's map." The meridian of exile, he meant, ultimately pointed him round again to Bukovina.

Second, the exile from Jerusalem, in this case the Diaspora fate of any European Jew. As a child, Celan resisted his father's Orthodox and Zionist persuasion. In 1934, shortly after a Bar Mitzvah he underwent

grudgingly, the boy learned just how Jewish he was. A letter to an aunt recently emigrated to Palestine says, "I could write a 300-page opus about antisemitism in our school." Years later, after the war, he wrote to her again: "Perhaps I am one of the last who must live out to the end the destiny of the Jewish spirit in Europe... and that may be saying a lot." Towards the end of his life Celan at last visited Israel. "I think I have a notion of what Jewish loneliness can be," he said to the Hebrew Writers Association. "I have come to you in Israel because I needed to." His time there moved and heartened him. "So many Jews, only Jews, and not in a ghetto," he remarked back in Paris. He wrote a series of poems graced by Israeli place-names and even thought of settling there, but I think the near-messianic challenge of it finally daunted him.

And third, the exile from German itself. "Can you bear it," he addressed some lines shortly after her death to his mother, who'd sung and spoken him into the language—"Can you bear it, as oh! at home in an earlier time, / my mother—the gentle, the German, the pain-laden rhyme?" I've worked on this couplet over three years now, trying to touch the nerve in it. *Und duldest du, Mutter, wie einst, ach, daheim, / den leisen, den deutschen, den schmerzlichen Reim?* Language, Celan said in 1958, was his only refuge, "this one thing remained in the midst of the losses.... But it had to pass through its own answerlessnesses, pass through a frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech."

For some reason Celan did not settle in Vienna but continued to Paris, where he taught those great internal exiles Hölderlin and Kafka, and also translated brilliantly: Shakespeare, Dickinson, Rimbaud, Valéry, Cayrol's *Night and Fog,* Yevtushenko's *Babi Yar,* above all Sergei Esenin, who ended insane and a suicide, and Mandelstam, who perished in exile. Why did Celan translate so much? Partly to earn a living and partly, I imagine, to make the German language house such spirits as Mandelstam. During the Sixties Celan would sign his letters "Russki poët in partibus nemetskich infidelium," "a Russian poet among German heathens." A profound malaise in those years made him feel his exile acutely. From Paris he wrote to his Rumanian friend (and first translator) Petre Solomon, wondering whether to give up writing entirely: "Maybe I should take flight, but you know what this means for a Ger-

man-language author who has lived through the Nazi terror . . . to see himself broken away from his language for the second time." And when I hear that from Celan, I ask myself, What does it mean for the *translator* to break such an author away from his language?

For Celan the last break with his mother tongue, the last banishment, came in March 1970 when he read at the Stuttgart Hölderlin bicentenary. His syntax by then had become more and more ruptured, his imagery obscure—the effects, in part, of an exile writing the mother tongue that became the murderers' tongue. With this Hölderlin audience versed in ambiguity and obscurity, Celan's poetry nevertheless fell on deaf ears. People called it "dark," "sealed-off." A month later he ended his exile, drowning in the Seine.

Nothing illustrates Celan's triple exile—and my own desire to recover him—so clearly as the lyrics of his that end in a Hebrew word or phrase. Elsewhere I've discussed "*Du sei wie du,*" "You be like you," a poem of the broken covenant between a Jew and Jerusalem, a poem that renews the covenant through speech in the tower of exile, closing with Isaiah's *kumi ori,* "Arise, shine,": now here is a poem called "*Die Schleuse,*" "The Sluice," whose closing stanzas voice a loss even as they enact a recovery:

Die Schleuse
. . . . . .
An
die Vielgötterei
verlor ich ein Wort, das mich suchte:
Kaddisch.

Durch
die Schleuse musst ich,
das Wort in die Salzflut zurück-
und hinaus- und hinüberzuretten:
Jiskor.

The Sluice
. . . . . .
To
poly-goddedness
I lost a word that sought me:
Kaddish.

Through
the sluice I had to go,
to salvage the word back into
and out of and across the salt flood:
Yiskor.

Celan's tortuous wording, especially towards the end, shows the strain his own language underwent in exile. Meanwhile those two Hebrew terms for commemorating the dead—*Kaddish* implying "holy" and *Yiskor,* "remembrance"—remain strange to the German poem, unassimilated. I leave them untranslated because Celan wanted them that way.

Finally, a poem I hesitate to introduce because its endless enfoldings and ambiguities elude me. Celan wrote "*Mandelnde*" in September 1968 but withheld the poem from publication. Found among his literary remains, it heads up a sequence of later poems that emerged from his 1969 visit to Israel, as if "*Mandelnde*" presaged that return from exile:

MANDELNDE, die du nur halbsprachst,
doch durchzittert vom Keim her,
dich
liess ich warten,
dich.

Und war
noch nicht
entäugt,
noch unverdornt im Gestirn
des Lieds, das beginnt:
Hachnissini.

ALMONDING ONE, you half-spoke only,
though trembled up through from the bud,
you
I let wait,
you.

And was
not eye-
reft yet,
not yet enthorned in the realm
of that song which begins:
Hachnissini.

The *Mandel,* "almond"—because it is prized among the first fruits in Palestine, because its nut can be sweet or bitter, because an almond eye suggests the Levant, and because of Osip Mandelstam—the *Mandel* means Jewishness throughout Celan's writing. "Make me bitter. / Number me among the almonds," he says in an early poem to the Jewish dead. This late poem, "*Mandelnde,*" turns the German noun into a verb and then into a highly unusual gerund, to address an "almonding woman"—someone he'd known as a girl in Czernowitz, also perhaps his lost mother, also in a way the *Shekhinah,* the female presence of God in the world Celan in exile delayed acknowledging this Judaic presence, this blinding which is spiritual vision, this song whose opening word his own poem comes round to in Hebrew: *Hachnissini.* A very famous lyric by the leading modern Hebrew Poet, Bialik, begins with *Hachnissini,* "Bring me in":

> Bring me in under your wing,
> and be mother and sister to me,
> and let your breast shelter my head,
> a nest for my scattered prayers.
> . . . . . .
> now I've nothing in the world—
> I have nothing.
>
> Bring me in . . .

This lyric's erotic longing, as with the Song of Songs, has over the decades taken on spiritual overtones of a return from homelessness. Jews have known it by heart since the turn of the century; in fact Celan in Jerusalem remembered and recited some Bialik to friends—possibly these lines. I am unsure, even native German speakers I've asked are unsure, what to make of Celan's taut, contorted German in "*Mandelnde.*" But I am sure that *Hachnissini,* which happily transliterates the same into German and English—I'm sure the word mattered immensely to Paul Celan, summoning as it does a prewar Jewish childhood in Bukovina, supplanting a pain-laden German, and speaking a Hebraic kind of password, a shibboleth.

Götz Wienold

For Yoshibo

CELAN

Tr. by Joachim Herrmann and Rebecca S. Rodgers

The destruction of the human psyche by Auschwitz... the images and words of religion and literature through which our feelings are projected onto the world have been destroyed, and we, born later, want to rejoice at the liberation that has resulted from that destruction. But whoever experienced it—whatever tender nature lived through it and was compelled to the realization that everything ever said about Man and God is untrue because man is so incomprehensibly cruel, base, and evil (indeed, a monster of his own breed to everyone he pursues in his rage)—whoever, then, lived through it and was forced to concede its reality: his or her psyche was and remains irreparably damaged.

Do we really want to penetrate the images and words of a poet, of Celan; do we really want to experience, absorb, and carry that which psychically exists within them: the emotions of a man who was able to put into words what he had experienced? And should we tell anyone else what we may have discovered there, and say what others, should they desire, could discover in this or in their own way? I have slowly come to the conclusion that it is more important to refrain from interpreting and leave it up to each individual to decide how he wants to read poetry, including Celan's. At most, we should say something about the structure which forms within us, and within which we live, so that we may shed some light on our human world, our consciousness, our symbols, and our traditions. This should really be thoroughly elaborated, and the language one would like to recommend for such an elaboration should be well considered and defined within the discussion itself. Clarification is needed of the word "our," for example, as I just used it—almost magically—in "our human world," "our consciousness," and "our sym-

bols." As if that were an adequate way of speaking about this.

Celan was important to me, and this importance remains. For many years, reading Celan helped me to improve my understanding of the violent impact Auschwitz had had on our consciousness and bodies. In this way I heard the scream. And today we indeed live in many Auschwitzes. Heiner Kipphardt recently reopened the wounds in *Bruder Eichmann.*

Nevertheless, when I speak about Celan, I also want to say something about his language: about the rhythm and meter, about the sound, the images, and the enchantment. If, for example, someone gives us a poem about a blade of grass pushing through the snow on a mountain slope and surviving in the biting wind, and if this person adds that even here there is life to be found, then it does not take much for us to begin to understand the feeling in the poet's words. When I have read Celan, it has often taken me weeks, months, or half a year to develop an understanding of a poem that has moved me. Some poems I was never able to understand, and yet their presence remained strong.

We are tempted to consider "Fadensonnen" ("Thread-suns") in the same light as the poem about the blade of grass:

> Thread-suns
> over the gray-black wasteland.
> A tree-
> high thought
> grasps the light's pitch; there are
> songs still to be sung beyond
> mankind.

A comparison of the two is based primarily on the unusually comprehensible sentence, rare for Celan, found at the end: "there are/songs still to be sung beyond/mankind." And yet "Fadensonnen" demands of us and gives us something which is part of the very enchantment about which we have already spoken. "The light's pitch": a phrase we can carry within us; a possible physical sensation we may have; an experience of which we perhaps do not yet know the details; a sound; something which might stay—or goes away again.

A poem from *Mohn und Gedächtnis* ("Poppy and Memory") which has long interested me is "Kristall" ("Crystal"):

Not on my lips seek your mouth,
not before the gate the stranger,
not in an eye the teardrop.

Seven nights higher red wanders to red,
seven hearts deeper the hand knocks on the gate,
seven roses later the fountain murmurs.

First of all, one notices the relative clarity of expression in the first strophe and the apparently relatively simple parallels to the corresponding lines of the second strophe:

lips on a mouth—red wanders to red
before the gate the stranger—the hand knocks on the gate
in an eye the teardrop—the fountain murmurs.

In addition to the semantic equivalents—in the definition of Roman Jakobson—which are found between the strophes, there are also the semantic, syntactic, phonological (graphematical), and metrical equivalents within the strophes themselves. Secondly, in spite of this "clarity," we notice the cryptic nature of the second strophe and feel, perhaps, the enchantment of image and sound until the end: "Seven roses later the fountain murmurs."

In Celan it has often appeared to me that the poetic process takes place in such a way that a certain type of word combination—usually found at the end—is achieved (or more easily achieved) and placed in a possible context. Taken on its own, the enchanting phrase "seven roses later the fountain murmurs" contains no element on which to base an understanding; or, as we could say, too many such elements.

As a result of the poetic process, however, Celan establishes associations among elements on which an understanding can be built. The phrase can be uttered, can be received, and the reader can perhaps retain it in his memory without having to attribute a meaning to it. (Celan also chose the first half of the line "seven roses later" as the title of the first cycle of poems in *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* ["From Threshold to Threshold"]; and "the fountain murmurs" is turned into the title of a poem in *Die Niemandsrose* ["The No One's Rose"], in which the phrase

"later of the roses" also appears. Apparently Celan saw "seven roses later the fountain murmurs" as a memorable formulation and one worthy of repetition.)

And so the clear, simple structure of "Kristall" emerges: a structure of multiple equivalents which may also be seen in relation to the title. We realize that a specific meaning can hardly be attributed to the lines of the second strophe, yet we wish nevertheless to hear and recite them, listen again, and ponder their meaning: this is what I mean by "enchantment." (We may venture to analyze these lines, which makes us forget the enchantment and makes us sense that a wound lies beneath the surface of the poetic language. When we become conscious of this wound—seven roses later—then the fountain murmurs.)

If space allowed, this would be the place to go into a detailed discussion of Celan's use of meter: meter in a broad sense, where one analyzes not only phonological structures and their patterns and possible equivalents, but also their relationship to semantic, syntactic, and graphematical structures and patterns, and to the possible equivalents within this group. Among Celan's early poems there are a few in which there is a regular recurrence of groups of verses, and which may therefore be called strophic. There are poetic forms which recur, are easily recognizable, and follow a simple strophic pattern. The poem "Ins Nebelhorn" ("Into the Foghorn," also from *Mohn und Gedächtnis*) corresponds in this respect, for example, to the poem "Kristall," and a similar pattern of equivalents immediately emerges:

Mouth with the hidden mirror,
knee before the column of pride,
hand with the grate bar:

give each other the dark,
say my name,
lead me to him.

Several other poems should be mentioned in this context: "Auf Reisen" ("Travel") and "Der Reisekamerad" ("The Travelling Companion") from this volume, and "Von Dunkel zu Dunkel" ("From Dark to Dark") from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle.*

The traditional form of the four-line stanza appears occasionally in Celan's earlier poetry, sometimes even including rhyme:[1]

So you are rebegotten
as one I have not known:
inside a land of fountains
your heartbeat reigns, your own,

where never a mouth is drinking,
no forms to bind the shade,
illusion springs as waters,
and springs like spirits fade—

you sink in all the fountains,
through every Seem you sway;
that it might be forgotten,
you found such periled play.

(Tr. Esther Cameron)

Other examples of the use of these traditional elements can be found in "Wer wie du" ("Whoever Like You"), "Totenhemd" ("Shroud"), "Ich bin allein" ("I Am Alone"), "So schlafe" ("Then Sleep"), and "Der Tauben weiBeste" ("The Whitest of the Doves) from *Mohn und Gedächtnis;* "Zu zweit" ("The Two of Us") and "Inselhin" ("Isleward") from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle;* "Schuttkahn" ("Rubble-boat") from *Sprachgitter* ("Language-lattice"); "Das Wort vom Zur-Tiefe-Gehn" ("The Word of Going-to-the-depth"), "Stumme Herbstgerüche" (Dumb Autumn Smells"), "Eis, Eden" ("Ice, Eden"), "Schwarzerde" ("Blackearth"), "Nachmittag mit Zirkus und Zitadelle" ("Afternoon with Circus and Citadel"), "Kermorvan," "Was geschah?" ("What Occurred?"), and "Wohin mir das Wort" ("Where My Word") from *Niemandsrose;* and, finally, "Harnischstriemen" ("Armorweals") from *Atemwende* ("Breath-turning").

In addition I would like to mention some poems using couplets: "Espenbaum" ("Aspen Tree") and "Sie kämmt ihr Haar" ("She Combs Her Hair") from *Mohn und Gedächtnis*), "In die Ferne" ("Into the Distance") from *Sprachgitter,* "Selbdritt, selbviert" ("The Three of

Us, the Four of Us") from *Niemandsrose.* Others have five-line strophes: "Auge der Zeit" ("Time's Eye") and "Wir sehen dich" ("We see you") from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle.* Among the earlier poems we also find combinations of such strophic forms. Many striking equivalents of semantic, syntactic, phonological, and graphametical structures can be found within poems which are not obviously strophic in form, and there are many instances of recurrence: sometimes exact, sometimes approximate. This is also true of the longer poems, which make freer use of metric and strophic variations; it is true of "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue").

It is my impression that Celan moves further and further away from this use of meter and such obvious equivalents. Even in "Fadensonnen" it is still possible, using the Jakobson approach, to discover them, but they are less obvious and less dependent on the recurrence of phonological metrical structures. In place of the recurrence of exact or approximate equivalents within strophic patterns, there is a variation from line to line, with little correspondence between metric and semantic, or syntactic, phrasings or groups: here, again, see "Fadensonnen." Each phrase seems to stand independent of the others—without need of support by a poetic process that generates related elements on which an understanding can be built—as I attempted to demonstrate with the poem "Kristall." I am tempted to speculate that Celan would never have placed lines such as "Thread-suns/over the gray-black wasteland" at the beginning of an early poem, or that he would, at least, have provided further formulations whose semantic relationships to these lines would be more or less apparent. Metrically, when I recite these poems, I sense the balance between each line and its neighbors, and perhaps even in relation to the poem as a whole, despite the absence of metrical structures.

Perhaps we can even put it like this: among his earlier poems, a poem such as "Augenblicke" would have had metrical and other structural counterparts and equivalents:

Moments, whose signs,	Augenblicke, wessen Winke,
no brightness sleeps.	keine Helle schläft.
Undisbecome, everywhere,	Unentworden, allerorten,
collect yourself,	sammle dich,
stand.	steh.

In *Fadensonnen,* which appeared later than the poem of the same name, "Augenblicke" stands alone, unrelated to other poems. There are still related elements to be found within the poem itself: "Augenblicke"—"Winke"; "-worden"—"-orten"; "keine"—"un-"; "sammle dich"—"steh," to name only the most striking examples. But we no longer find the obvious use of equivalents and recurrent metrical structures.

A comparison of the relatively few long poems from Celan's later collections and the long, metrically freer poems of his earlier period—e.g., "Todesfuge"—will, perhaps, lead the reader to similar conclusions. I think we can say that Celan ultimately renounced lyrical enchantment. This all should, of course, be expanded and modified, carefully considered with regard to the general and the particular; and it should be based on a thorough study of Celan's metrics. As I was able to touch only superficially on these points, I ask that the reader examine them with the appropriate degree of caution.

May I now add, then: this earlier, clearer method of formulation, based on equivalents, enables the reader to absorb and retain, for himself and perhaps for others, more of the impact of the Nazi, of the German persecution and extermination of the Jews . . . and of man? Reference to this experience is so clearly intended in the earlier poems that we must recognize it and must (may? can?) accept it. In Celan's last collection, *Schneepart* ("Snow-part"), the poem "Ein Blatt" ("A Leaf"), in its openly stated allusion, establishes a link to this time of persecution: "A leaf, treeless,/for Bertolt Brecht://What times are these,/where a conversation/is almost a crime,/because it includes/so many things said?" And yet there are many references to new, current impressions—of scientific and technical developments, for example—in all of Celan's later works. He writes of the endlessly repeated, hitherto unprecedented injury to the human body and psyche, as in "Streu Ocker" ("Strew Ochre"), from *Lichtzwang* ("Light-compulsion"). Here we find, on the one hand, a certain metric and structural similarity to the style of the earlier poems, and, on the other hand, we recognize that what I said about the metrics of "Fadensonnen" and the manner in which related elements are used sparingly or not all, applies to this poem as well.[2]

I will not attempt at this time to develop this concept explicitly:

Strew ochre in my eyes:
you live
no longer inside them.

save
your grave-
gifts, save them,

pace off the rows of stones
on your hands,

with their dream
brush over the scurf
of the coined-out
temporal bone,

at the great
bifurcation, re-
count yourself to the ochre,
three times, nine times.

(Tr. Esther Cameron.)

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1. The original rhyme scheme, abab, etc., could not be kept (Tr.).
2. In referring, here and above, to Celan's "early" and "late" poetry, I use these words only to enable me to discuss certain observations and to sum them up in a simple manner. I do not wish to juxtapose an "early Celan" with a "late Celan," or to play the two off against one another. My terminology is not meant to imply some grand theory, but simply to make it possible to speak of certain things.

Esther Cameron

THE DISTANT EARTH: CELAN'S PLANETARY VISION

We have all become familiar, in recent years, with the image of a small, cloud-veiled sphere, seen against the vast darkness of space. As Jonathan Schell observed in his recent book, *The Fate of the Earth,* these photographs make us aware of "a new relation between ourselves and the earth... we stand outside nature, holding instruments of cosmic power with which we can blot life out, while at the same time we remain embedded in nature and depend on it for survival."

The image of earth, seen from a distance, also appears in the poetry of Paul Celan. On the one hand this image symbolizes the question whether humankind can survive in the technological world, "overflown by stars of human manufacture"; on the other hand it represents the hope of a human response to this question. Not rockets, but anguish over the Holocaust and fear for the human future propel the poet to the "no-place" from which he looks back toward the planet.

Among poets, Celan was not the first in space; that honor, as far as I am aware, belongs to Dante Alighieri, who wrote in the twenty-second canto of the *Paradiso*:

> With my sight I returned through every one of the seven spheres, and I saw this globe such that I smiled at its paltry semblance; and that judgment which holds it for least I approve as best, and he whose thought is on other things may rightly be called just... The little threshing-floor that makes us so fierce all appeared to me from hills to river-mouths, while I was wheeling with the eternal Twins. Then to the fair eyes I turned my eyes again.
>
> (Sinclair translation)

It is clear that Dante overcomes Earth's gravity by means of the Christian evaluation of earthly life in relation to eternal life. The just man must deprecate earth, which represents the desires of the flesh; it is "the little

threshing-floor which makes us so fierce." And yet Dante, even at this height, does not cease to concern himself with Earth and its problems. If earthly desires had left him, the concern for Earth had not. Thus the Christian formulation does not completely render Dante's feelings as poet.

In Celan's work the image of Earth first appears in surrealistic guise, in "Dunkles Aug im September" ("Dark Eye in September," 1948):[1]

> Time, helmet of stone. And ever more richly
> the ringlets of pain well up by the face of the earth,
> that drunken apple, turned brown by the breath
> of a sinful saying: lovely and averse to the game
> which they play in the baleful
> reflection of their future.

Here the epithet "that drunken apple" recalls the story of the Tree of Knowledge and the view of Earth as source of temptations. But this view is not dominant. Earth suffers under the weight of this time, which presses upon it like a "helmet of stone." The apple is "turned brown by the breath of a sinful saying"—this recalls the Nazis with their brown uniforms and their "death-bringing talk," as Celan put it in the Bremen speech. Even if we say that it is the conditions of life on earth ("the little threshing-floor which makes us so fierce") which are ultimately responsible for these crimes, earth itself is "averse to the game" and may not continue to tolerate man's presence in the future whose reflection is already "baleful." This may be interpreted as a hint that the Holocaust was an anticipation of the approaching end of humanity. On the other hand, the fact the Earth is portrayed as a *head* suggests the hope that *the consciousness of earth*—a common consciousness of humans living on it—will awake. The poem "Zuversicht" ("Confidence"), from *Sprachgitter* ("Lattice of Speech," 1959) ends: "as if, because there is stone, there were still brothers."

The distant view of Earth does not appear again in Celan's first three collections, which trace the path of the poet within the post-Holocaust world. The favorite topos in this depiction is "stone": symbol of pain, of the hardness of the human heart, and at the same time of the

world's objective existence, which might—perhaps—become the basis for mutual understanding among its inhabitants. In these collections the language becomes less and less lyrical, more and more precise, as if in an attempt to match the precision of technological language with a new precision of the spirit. In *Sprachgitter* (1959) one is struck by the frequency of geological terms; in the last poem, "Engführung" ("The Straitening," as Michael Hamburger translates it), it is precisely the contact with the stone which lets us break through to a mysterious, immaterial world which soon closes again before our eyes.

In the story "Gespräch im Gebirg" ("Colloquy in the Mountains," 1959) Celan summarizes his "geology." A Jew walks through the mountains, over the stone, accompanied by the anti-Semitic comments of an anonymous narrator, and meets a second Jew. The two start talking, "for when one Jew meets another, it's goodbye silence, even in the mountains. For a Jew and nature are two different things." Thus language represents the Jew's detachment from nature. One of the Jews says:

> You know. You know and you see: up here the earth folded itself, folded itself once, twice, three times, and opened itself up in the middle, and in the middle stands some water, and the water is green, and the green is white, and the white comes from still further up, you could say, but you shouldn't say it, that that is the language that counts here, the green with the white in it, a language not for you and not for me—for, I ask, who was the earth thought up for, not for you, I say, was it thought up, and not for me—a language—well, without any I and without any You, just He, just It, you understand, just She and They and nothing but that.

The earth's having folded itself three times recalls the Christian trinity (Dreifaltigkeit). The hardness of the human heart is also the silence of the non-human world, amid which human language sounds meaningless. The Jew talking to his alter ego in the mountains stands at the edge of the world.

This is the place—a place of exile, solitude, and despair—from which the poet breaks through, in the *Meridian* (1960) to outer space, when he says of art: "It is to step out of the human dimension, into a realm which turns toward the human an uncanny countenance." Whoever leaves the human dimension becomes estranged not only from

nature but from himself. "Art creates a distance from the I." This is no impersonal process: it is one's own I that one is estranged from. ("Go with art into the strait that is most your own. And set yourself free.") Such estrangement enables the artist to "grasp the natural as the natural by means of art"—to grasp the objectivity and totality of the world, which, unlike the reality described by science, includes the poet himself and his fate. And the same time he is moving, along paths of language, toward the other as a creature also able to go out of himself or herself. The hope for an encounter in a place beyond humanity, A "u-topia," is also the hope for a new social consciousness by which, as from some "Archimedean point," the earth might be moved. Thus, at the end of the speech, the image of Earth appears to the reader, when Celan says:

> I find that which connects and which leads, like the poem, to the encounter.
>
> I find something which, like language, is immaterial, yet earthly, terrestrial, something circular, which intersects both poles and, amusingly, even crosses the tropics[2]: I find . . . *a meridian.*

The vision of Earth reappears in the collection following the *Meridian, Die Niemandsrose* ("The No-Man's Rose," 1963), whose first poem strongly recalls the *Meridian*:

> THERE WAS EARTH IN THEM, and
> they dug.
>
> They dug and they dug, their day
> passed in this way, and their night. And they did not praise God,
> who, they heard, had willed all this,
> who, they heard, had known all this.
>
> They dug and they knew nothing more,
> they did not grow wise, made no song,
> they invented for themselves no language at all.
> They dug.
>
> There came a stillness, there came a storm,
> there came the oceans, all of them.
> I did, and you dig, and the worm digs too,
> and what sings there says: they are digging.

O someone, O no-one, O No-One, O *thou,*
where did it lead to, the road that led nowhere?
O you dig, and I dig, I am digging towards you,
and on our fingers awakens the ring.

At first glance the meaning of the word "Erde" in this poem seems to be "soil" rather than Earth as planet. But the "ring" which "awakens" at the end is the "meridian": it is language as that which connects the speaker with his hearers and gives rise to sympathy and identification across all interhuman boundaries. The victims suffered and "invented for themselves no language at all"; their road "led nowhere." Again we are forced to leave the human dimension: to speak of these things without consoling oneself, without deluding oneself, is in some measure to live the suffering and death of the victims: "they dug," therefore "I dig" and "you dig." The "I" and the "you" who dig their way toward each other are also in a sense dead. But, being annihilated, they meet in the "nothing," which in the Kabbala (*Niemandsrose*) shows the influence of Gershom Scholem's works on this subject is also the *eyn-sof* (infinite), the primal essence of Divine being.

A poem toward the end of the collection, beginning "Crowned out,/spat out into the night," repeats this process and weaves into it the theme of erotic love. The poet again recalls the exile and humiliation to which, as a member of the Jewish people, he was exposed. Yet these humiliations were also the sign of a royal destiny (in Midrash, the Jewish people is often referred to as "a king's son"). But Celan, as a Jew living among Gentiles and writing in German, was partially estranged even from his own people. This ultimate exile leads to a meeting, in outer space, with the feminine principle:

Blue-gulf, into you
I drive the gold. Even with that
which was wasted on whores and harlots
I come and I come. To you,
beloved.
(. . .)
With names, soaked through
with every exile.
With names and seed,

with names dipped in all
chalices that brim with your
royal blood, Human—in all
calyxes of the great
Ghetto-Rose, from which
you look out at us, immortal from so many
deaths died on roads of tomorrow.

Again Kabbalistic associations occur: the union of the "I" and the "you" resembles that of Yesod (Foundation) and Malkhut (Kingdom), the last of the stages by which the Divine energy becomes manifest. Malkhut, also known as "the Congregation of Israel," "the bride," and "the Shekhina," represents community and is symbolized by the rose. (Dante's celestial rose is a Christian version of this symbolism.) Yesod is represented by the poet as one who has left the human dimension in order to speak of things that are beyond the human capacity to bear; thus Malkhut here is the reader as representative of the poet's audience as a whole. By means of the "you" a modulation takes place between the image of the "beloved" and the image of the "human" in general which looks out at us from the "Ghetto-Rose." One may say that an "I-thou" relation exists between the poet and every reader, and that the name "you" applies to all readers, who are to this extent united by a common identity and destiny. The logic of this union gives rise to a dream of world revolution which the poet, in his exile, cannot help dreaming: "And we sang the Varshovyanka,/With reed-choked lips, Petrarca,/In tundra-ears, Petrarca.") From the no-place, the place of annihilation-and-identification, the Archimedean point, comes the promise: "And an earth will climb up to us, our earth,/this one." Exile from earth, encounter at the "Archimedean point" with the "you," unification of those who answer to the name of "you," and "raising of the earth" by the force of love and wisdom—this is the fundamental dialectic of *Die Niemandsrose.* This vision follows of necessity from the poetic process, from the faith in language, despite the despair with which the poet struggles throughout the collection. The last words of *The No-Man's-Rose* are "too late." But first, we have heard words like these:

The eye, dark,
as a booth-window. It gathers

what was, what still is, a world: the Wandering
East, the
Hovering Ones, the
Humans-and-Jews,
the Folk-of-the-Clouds, magnetically
it pulls, with heart-fingers, at
you, Earth:
you come, you come,
dwell, we shall dwell...

Here the syntax in German ("wohnen werden wir, wohnen") recalls a Hebrew construction (shakhon nishkon). The return of the Shekhina (literally, "indwelling") from exile is anticipated.

The hope for the return of the Shekhina, which is both the exiled feminine half of God and the Jewish (and, in Celan's extended meaning, the human) community, is bound up with a spirituality of a very particular sort—a *terrestrial* spirituality, which bridges the distinction between matter and spirit.

IN THE AIR, that's where your root remains,
in the air.
Where the Earthly conglomerates,
Breath-and-Clay.

This is not to be confused with the "return to the soil" or the "return to nature" in the primitivistic sense of an attempt to sink back into a preconscious state: here Earth itself as it were helps humanity to reach a consciousness so clear it is painful. In "Ice, Eden" the "eye-child" "sees, for it has eyes/that are bright earths." Moreover, the consciousness of earth is an ethical consciousness. In the poem "Huhediblu," we hear

the axis-tone deep
inside our star-round dwelling-place
Contrition? For
nevertheless it does move, in the heart's direction.

This recalls Galileo's famous under-the-breath retort—"Eppur si muove." Here, it is as if Celan sees in the earth's behavior, which conforms to physical laws, something which will eventually compel humans to repentance. In a letter to a friend written in 1962, Celan quotes a say-

ing by Kepler which he "met" on his return from Darmstadt, where he gave the "Meridian" speech: "God is symbolized by the sphere. The cross-section of the sphere is the circle. This circle is man." And in the letter Celan adds: "Yes, it exists, this circle. Long live the Meridian!" If for Kepler the sphere could represent God by virtue of its geometric perfection, for Celan this form was probably significant as the form of our "dwelling-place." Form means law and necessity, but it can also inspire love. In this perspective aesthetics becomes an inseparable part of ethics; it is nothing other than the search for the "constellation," as Celan says in "Booth Window," which we need "in order to dwell, here, among humans." Thus in *Die Niemandsrose* the language of earth is no longer "a language without I and without You," but rather: "Language, language. Fellow-star. Neighbor-earth." As we saw in "Crowned Out," erotic love is also connected with language, with the attempt to awaken the "you" to a consciousness of the global situation.

This effort is one of the main themes of the following collection, *Atemwende* ("Breath-turning," 1967).

ERUPTION OF WORDS, volcanic,
sea's rush above it.

overhead
the mob at flood
of anti-creatures: it
signalled—copy and counterfeit
cruise vainly timeward.

Until you hurl forth
the word-moon whereby
the wonder of ebb-tide is worked,
and the heart-
shaped crater,
  naked, bears witness
for the beginnings, the royal
births.

Here the "you" is identical with the earth; but it is a thinking earth, it must "hurl forth the word-moon" which will influence the "mob" of humans who, once made in the image (Ebenbild) of God, have become

mere "copy and counterfeit" (Abbild und Nachbild). In *Atemwende,* still more than in previous collections, there is an awareness that the poet's work is not complete in itself, that he is waiting for a response, for a continuation of his speech on the part of his hearers, that there are thoughts which are scarcely thinkable by one mind alone. And will the answer he is waiting for arrive at last?

> Huge as the apple of the world, the tear beside you,
> shot through with noises, rushings
> of answer,
> answer,
> answer.

The poem in which these words appear, "Give the Word" (title in English) opens with a quotation from King Lear, "Cut to the brains" (ins Hirn gehaun). Solitude, disorientation. "Where did the earth fall to?" At times the poet seems to be wandering in space, unable to find the way home.

If we take the image of Earth as a kind of touchstone of Celan's work, the feeling is strengthened that—as Celan himself felt, according to the testimony of friends in Israel—in the *Meridian* and *Die Niemandsrose* he expressed his fundamental vision, and in the five collections which he wrote afterward could only repeat his appeal to his hearers, invent variations—and make poetry, at last, out of the feeling that from here the road leads to nowhere. Among the last poems he wrote is one that begins: "Anointed away, outside," and ends "Under the left foot/a window—of/Earth?" This brief poem is little more than a repetition of "Crowned Out"—a faint and despairing repetition. In this poem there is no meeting in space, and no one to help him pull the earth upward; there is only "a window—of Earth?"—of a house not to be reentered. The way is lost; the end is known.

And yet not quite the end. For a continuation of the way of the *Meridian* and *Die Niemandsrose* is possible if, in reading and studying Celan's work, one recognizes the obligation, not only to admire and to analyze, but to respond as a human being to whom a plea has been addressed, and to seek out others who have done or might do the same. This essay itself is meant not merely as an analysis, but as a declaration

of allegiance to the poet's view, as a plea for association, and as a statement of faith that if we, the readers, can accept the obligations Celan's poetry seeks to lay on us with all their consequences, we will be able to look on Earth with new eyes, and to awaken the consciousness of Earth in the soul of humankind.

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1. Unless otherwise noted, translations from Celan are my own.
2. "Tropen" in German means both "tropics" and "tropes."

Richard Exner

PAUL CELAN'S *ATEMWENDE:* ABOUT THE "DEATH OF SPEECH" AND THE "HOPE OF SILENCE"

Tr. by Suzanne Shipley Toliver

"Place those words in the dead man's grave
which he spoke in order to live."

Paul Celan: "In Memory of Paul Eluard"

In his recollections of Paul Celan, the Rumanian poet and translator Petre Solomon (born 1923) quotes an essay by René Wintzen in *Le Monde.* After emphasizing the theme of "Forgetting and Remembering" in Celan's oeuvre—constantly, and often inappropriately stressed by critics—Wintzen observes that the recurrence of the theme of death in every single volume of poetry ultimately leads us to the inevitable insight, "It is a death of mankind that gradually becomes a death of language."

Studies of Celan have proliferated in the last thirty years. Next to Rilke, he is doubtlessly the poet about whom the most has been written. A major portion of this literature addresses the concept of negative poetics, of silence and speechlessness. And it is my theme as well, because I am convinced that Celan's death marks the conclusion of an epistemological act that has been "reversed": the recognition that occurs and is experienced through language is suspended by a gradual falling silent and by a renunciation of normal language. "Silence" and "speechlessness" should not be misunderstood here: Sieghild Bogumil correctly points out, particularly in the second half of her essay "Celan's Roving in the Word" (1983), that Celan was not interested in speechlessness itself, but rather in "that which is silent in language because it is repressed, not expressed, or subject to taboo." As Bogumil concludes, a new language

arises as such, a statement I will not dispute, and I definitely object to her thesis that art and nature are reconciled in Celan. An example from contemporary American poetry demonstrates the sense of reconciliation between language and art that the "Death of Speech" and the "Hope of Silence" signify.

In spite of sustained productivity following publication of *Atemwende* ("Breath-turning," 1967), we can identify an increasing tendency—as much consciously as unconsciously controlled—toward brevity, alienation, hermetization, and decontextualization of lyrical language and its metaphoric. In Celan, it concerns, I believe, the *German* language: not just any language. It represents the act of undermining one's own and the recipient's comprehension, of bringing that which is historically and personally understood and known to a halt ("zum Stocken"). An act is rendered incomprehensible; it is disassociated, and thereby becomes retroactively impossible. The absolutely unachievable is attempted: i.e. obliteration and making-undone, by the successive revocation of the very language in which the act was executed. This is *one* complication in all Holocaust literature, and it is particularly—and, due to its inefficacy—the absolutely tragic theme, the *condition créatice* of the writing person Paul Celan. In brief, from legend and myth we know that through the word and through language creation took place. Thus the world was formed and since that time words and language have brought creation and life to a standstill, even to annihilation. Neither speaking not silence, deciphering nor muteness can extinguish this knowledge. The "Death of Speech" and the "Hope of Silence" are, I believe, no longer interchangeable today, though that was not always true. I will briefly provide a context.

Long before the period of romanticism, but particularly during the romantic age, the "Hope of Silence," which was the single and unavoidable result of the "Death of Speech," affected the *carmina non prius audita,* those menages bestowed upon man by nature, which stir in dreams that remain inaudible "until our noisy delights slip into silence." Toward the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, this silence became more and more insistent, its expression and iconization ever more refined. Those territories bordering on language, those domains of silence placed along the edges of mute-

ness, of light and music (after George Steiner in *Language and Silence*) were surveyed. Illustrious authors have contributed to the literature about silence and about languages of the dead and of angels, about the language of fish and the domains "where what would be the language of fish/is spoken without them" (Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus* II, 20): Thomas Mann, Kafka, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, and, finally—and, essentially, Celan himself—within this same European context we find Dante and Keats, Mallarmé, and Mandelstam.

But not until the nineteenth century did these "ditties of no tune," inscribed upon lamps and urns, ring on—and for an inner organ surpassing the "sensual ear." In the twentieth century those romantic *carmina* actually become an unheard-of series of sounds: the words nothing but rents in the cloth of silence (Ungaretti), nothing but proof of a destructive, a fragmenting force. Mallarmé translated such rents into a poetry of concealment, into a reduction of speech unique for his age; these "statements" of a basically unpretentious poet of our century, for whom writing was "une tache de caractère unique," were circumscribed as "envol tacite d'abstraction"—the accent certainly resting upon "tacite." This sentence continues and, to ears trained in modern German poetry, sounds very Rilkean indeed: writing and music follow that "préalable disjonction," if only in order to avoid small talk. In thinking of the distilled poem-title "Sainte" from "Ste Cécile jouant sur l'aile d'un Chérubin," of that "musicienne du silence," the ideal poem, "le poème tu, aux blancs" has become almost sheer ellipsis; that which is empirically evident has been destroyed—even before being expressed linguistically (*anéanti*). Poetic discourse, structured speech, has entered the domain of the uninhabitable ("pure, gigantic"—in Rilke) in the verse of Mallarmé. In the poem "Jetzt wär es Zeit" ("Now time has come," 1925), Rilke speaks of the gods, stepping out from inhabited objects, who should break down the walls of his house so that the wind could plough the air into a new breathfield. In that new "breath-field" the gong sounds, "an eternal light in the crypt of the palate" ("Idol"), a "sound, no longer measurable/with the sense of hearing," "Sum of the Silent." Let us go back to the year 1909, to the Malte period with Rilke in order to anticipate the transition to Celan: there, the uninhabitable domain is described as "nocturnal and never-structured space," and, half a century later,

Celan, in his middle period, attempted to similarly encompass with words what had occurred there: Rilke said, "from my dungeon's walls silence precipitates/ not that of violins,/ silence of cries plunge beside me and as ashes/ endlessly rains from the arched vaults."

But, before we refer to the "Death of Speech" as synonymous with the "Hope of Silence," as the cessation of all life (—and thus a destructive force—), let us cast a quick glance at "The Silence," a contemporary American poem by Wendell Berry. This text, at first glance a post-modernist retake of Eichendorff's poem "Once the loud delight of men is muted, silent earth stirs as in dreams," reveals itself instead as a conscious break with the ideals and ideologies of Western civilization. Just as the poet and theoretician Jerome Rothenberg—in his anthology *Technicians of the Sacred*—traces in their sounds the significance of earlier songs, rather than in a logic derived linguistically, proposing that meaning lies in the rhythm of the sound and the interposed pauses, Berry prefers to view our poetic language—and not only the poetic—as separable from the context familiar to us: the speech act is considered capable of overcoming chaos. A cosmically ascending utterance is exemplified as a concept of speech, requiring that language actively participate in life. These are Eastern concepts, toward which the longing of the romantics was once directed. Significant for Berry is the "participant," the "participatory silence" partaking of creation in Zen meditation, a silence suffusing the lightly populated or deserted oriental landscapes, projecting itself as the essence of poetic language. This language, however, is not a fundamentally Western, i.e., propositional, force-exerting language of assertion, one which *seizes* and *dominates* its subject, and, as feared by poets like Berry or Gary Snyder, robbing natural objects of their force of expression. On the contrary, these natural objects are capable of speech. Our system of language values and evaluations destroys the presence of natural things. These objects produce their own sound, their own song—Rilke would say: produce not names, but rather orphic songs—and the poem is therefore no longer a text that names and signifies, but something that is concurrently root and rhythmically bobbing divining rod, capable of taking soundings, able to plumb the depths. These sounds, these non-verbalities in the linguistic sense take the "Death of Speech" for granted, just as the romantics would have had it. Threats to the envi-

ronment and the fatally upset balance of the forces of nature introduce the 'sound,' which eliminates the maenadic tearing-to-shreds, that "préalable disjonction," the dualistic and dialectic mode of thought and which raises in its stead this sound, so that harmonious participation and re-membering can take place. Here is Berry's text:

THE SILENCE

Though the air is full of singing
my head is loud
with the labor of words.

Though the season is rich
with fruit, my tongue
hungers for the sweet of speech.

Though the beech is golden
I cannot stand beside it
mute, but must say

"It is golden," while the leaves
stir and fall with a sound
that is not a name.

It is in the silence
that my hope is, and my aim.
A song whose lines

I cannot make or sing
sounds men's silence
like a root. Let me say

and not mourn: the world
lives in the death of speech
and sings there.

from *The Country of Marriage: Poems 1971-1973*

In our own days, an "orphic song" stems from purely ecological necessity and desperate conviction and contains, as the first sonnet to Orpheus states, "new beginning, trace, and transfiguration." But now back to the "dungeon" and to the "nocturnal" and to Paul Celan. Critics of Celan, countless times and from dozens of positions, have pointed out contractions, particles of negation, contrapunctal and contextual terms, diluted linguistic content, inversions from above and below, in individual interpretations and in comprehensive studies: Meinecke, Neumann, Buhr, Gadamer, Stewart, Burger, Schulz, Weinrich, Prawer, Lyon, Glenn, Weissenberger—(each list involuntarily and inadmissibly omits additional names). There is not another oeuvre in modern literature, I believe, whose creator has similarly challenged criticism and each and every reader. European history, the German language and his own personal history have denied Paul Celan that crossing-over into realms governed by speechless language (in silence, in music). Rilke, by comparison, accomplished this crossing-over with obvious pleasure. As withdrawn as the Rilkean hymns "To Music" (January, 1918) or "The One Who Sleeps" (December, 1925) may strike us, in the context of Celan's oeuvre, they would represent pure jubilation. What propels Celan's verse and what it represents (to an equal extent, one is tempted to say) are the poetic traditions of which he is a part, and his own biography, phylogenesis and ontogenesis in one, which intersects this chain of tradition; and at these intersections we find the texts, whose affinity to Mallarmé and the post-Mallarmé tradition, including such phenomena as surrealism and concrete poetry, and their cancellation *and* preservation in biography can be taken for granted. One should not forget that criticism draws from a text not only a clarification of the possible, but also and foremost whatever renders this text *tolerable,* rather than merely *comprehensible.* This pertains not only to interpretations of poems such as "Weggebeizt" ("Etched Away") or "Einmal" ("Once") or the series "Tiefimschnee-Iefimnee-Iie" (Deepinsnoweepinow-eio")—but is just as true for *Death in Venice.*

Or, in other words, that which Rilke has called the "silence of screams." We shall briefly examine this "Death of Speech" in several texts from *Atemwende* and in Alleman's "broadest possible" autobiographical sense. We are concerned with texts such as those indicated in

the poem "Fadensonnen" (Thread-suns") that seem "to sing beyond/ mankind," in the sense, then, of texts to be sung outside an historical (contemporary) context, not songs, but at most "singable remainders," twofold delineations of what broke through the sickle-script, far off in the domain of snow, something "interdicted lips," (literally, "lips with the mouth removed"—this is only one of Celan's many "disembodying" metaphors) which report what occurred only once and a long time ago, something that *was* light and could have meant rescue, just because it *was* once; now, however, *it is not*. These are things robbed of value which are "nothinged" by expression, as this neologism from "Weggebeizt" would have it.

Individual observations and interpretations seem to be inadequate in Celan's case, more so that in other modern poets. Basically they prove unreliable because each poem appears autonomous in itself, and the entire oeuvre is a single poem, as it were, with a field of associations and vehicles of meaning that both camouflage and reveal. That which can be gleaned from a reading of "Weggebeizt" can also be inferred for similar poems in the extremely carefully composed volume, for the volume itself, and even beyond, into the entire oeuvre. The frozen state of "Weggebeizt," the reduction of the written text *per se* to an ice crystal (of the genuine or the mendacious poem, or of writing altogether) is *also* an attempt to silence language, i.e., the *German language,* to make language mute from within: e-i-o. What remains is a crystal of breath that, although inorganic, seems biologically capable of reproduction. It becomes the material for speech, which is frozen in purity, virginal, untouched by the Holocaust, and, more importantly, untouched by those who, with and through their language, had set the Holocaust in motion. This is language attempting to be "pure" poetry, if such a reduction to one crystal of breath were possible. But (and one almost hears Kafka's voice from "An Imperial Message") never, never will this take place and, if it did, nothing would be gained, because language would again become contaminated.

Thus the "Atemkristall" signifies salvation, a rescue which, as it is spelled out, denotes salvation, but, in its hypothetical context, cannot be salvation. It is therefore a rescue of which the reader, perhaps even the author, holds the hope that it exists, such as Thomas Mann's high "g" in

Doctor Faustus. It controls his behavior, as if it existed, though it does not. The proof, the crystal, the one waiting, the final witness is unimpeachable, immovable, and therefore the reader of this poetry is doomed to wait. Unimpeachable, since it is not-yet-language, unimpeachable, since, as immovable ice it can not be done away with, and it is also unimpeachable in the sense of 'irrevocable.'' One is tempted to identify a dualism in the texts mentioned: destroyed/salvation; singable remainder/interdicted lip—a dualism or even a dialectic, or perhaps even the structure of chiasma (the organic and the inorganic overlap in honeycomb/ice and breath/crystal). But this is a deceptive temptation. In a very late poem, Celan says: ''as though without us we could be we''—another statement of disembodiment. As if we could, one is tempted to say, speak a language without language. But we cannot. It is of little consequence whether this meta-language which turns what we say into ''no-ems'' belongs to God, to the self-aware poet, or to this century's nuclearly ''radiant wind.'' Time-crevasse, sickle-script, snow, ice, darkness (actually an almost random series!) are the elements of a suicidal rhetoric of silence (George Steiner), of a rhetoric by which language 'disembodies' itself.

As this suicidal rhetoric becomes more pervasive, almost narcotically melodic in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (''Poppy and Memory''), haltingly and almost shrill in later volumes—the collapse in the poet's house of language has become predictable: particles of negation, reductions, negations from object to nonentity; the demolished corpuscles of speech take over: literally and figuratively, cohesive language stops at the point where human communication ceases. As in Revelations, in the Apocalypse, creation and destruction converge and reciprocally cancel each other out. Linguistic crises, mis-understandings, normally used to be the ingredients of comedy, in refined or crude fashion, or at least of tragicomedy. But in the Holocaust, not only individual communication, but also the potential for all kinds of communication has perished in the flames. We are not dealing with a misapprehension of whatever origin, extreme or grotesque. Those speaking do not hold anything back. They are not silent by choice; they are forced into muteness because they have been murdered—''ent-mündigt''—deprived of a mouth, of speech in the ultimate sense. After this insight, which is thematized particularly in

Atemwende, after such a "Death of Speech," how did Celan continue to write? I am prepared to face contradiction, even ridicule, but will assert that he did *not* continue to write—not in the sense that one can *continue to write.* But he wrote. He wrote and knew that nothing that he had experienced historically and linguistically could ever be encoded in comprehensible linguistic symbols. In this one sense and specifically for this poet, Adorno's view that, after Auschwitz, it has indeed become impossible to write poetry, takes on frightful authenticity.

Once language has been thus undermined syntactically, grammatically, and semantically, once speech has died and has taken on the image of decapitated interpersonal communication, an author is naturally deprived of exactly that, which Dante, Eichendorff, Keats, even the late Rilke, Berry, and Snyder drew from the "Hope of Silence": life itself. This is not a frivolous statement. I believe that poetry, even the translation of foreign poetry meant more to Celan than to any other modern poet. It is language which reminds us of what has come into the world through language. For Celan this was the individual and the thousandfold death, the Holocaust. Through language he attempted to remember it and, at the same time, to remove it from all memory, so that the world could continue. The event proved ineradicable, however, and language itself, by means of which it could be eradicated, is, despite all hermetization, hebraization, decontextualization, and reduction to sickle-texts, just as ineradicable.

How easy it would be and, in the final analysis, how comforting if, in a text such as the "Eden" poem, or the "Berlin" poem, "Du liegst" ("You lie"), which first appeared in the Nachlass, but had previously been published in honor of Peter Huchel, a text which breaks off and "halts" ("stockt") because all that *should* come to a halt continues, how easy it would be if that deceptively obvious dialectic between good and evil, between the catastrophic and the Christmas-like, the murderous and the lovely could be substantiated.

YOU LIE in the great hearing,
bushed in, snowed in.

Go to the Spree, go to the Havel,
go to the butcher hooks,

to the red apple stakes
from Sweden—

Here comes the table laden with gifts,
he turns the corner of an Eden—

The man became a sieve, the woman
had to swim, the sow,
for herself, for no one, for everyone—

The Landwehrkanal won't roar
Nothing
stops.

(Tr. Pierre Joris)

"Du liegst" is the text which Peter Szondi selected to prove decisively what must be known about a poem and what not, and to what extent autobiographical material influences interpretation of the poem in which it participates. But our uninterruptable reading, guided and confirmed by Szondi, shows that everything mentioned, even "das Gastliche" ("the Hospitable"), as in "Weggebeizt," is totally murderous; Plötzensee, the "Hotel" Eden, nowadays a residential paradise that played a role in the history of Karl Liebknecht's and Rosa Luxemburg's assassinations; to that we add the man shot full of holes and the woman's corpse floating in the *Landwehrkanal,* and the Christmas fairs luminously benevolent, but later "butcher hook" apple-red and the apple stakes themselves that turn into pales. Szondi did not complete his study; he wrote it between April and September of 1971, and in October 1971 he took his own life.

Let us take a final look at the formidable unity of this Celanian oeuvre which poets from other languages, aided by at best precarious translations, experience as an erratic block. I am thinking, for example, of Jed Rasula's commentary in the Celan issue, edited by James Lyon, of *Studies in 20th Century Literature* (VIII, 1983). There it is asserted that Celan has made use of the German language as if it were an instrument of terror. Celan wrote in German as a Rumanian residing in France. Through understated linguistic gestures he expressed his affinity with the victims of the Holocaust and executed, as it were, language from the

inside out. He has consciously, as Rasula asserts, overseen and practiced the syntactic disintegration of the German language. Language matter thus vanished in direct proportion to his growing fame. In Celan's hands the German language became the instrument of its own disembodiment. Little by little, it went up in smoke. Rasula completes this progression of thoughts with the words, "Nothing similar exists in any language known to me." And so we face the "Death of Speech" *without* the "Hope of Silence."

Every poem as a potentially final word: in 1960, almost seven years prior to the unimpeachable proof of the breath-crystal in *Atemwende,* Marie Luise Kashnitz ended her Büchner Prize citation for Paul Celan with a quotation from an early poem, "We were dead and could breathe." It was almost a prophecy. These lines come from the volume *Mohn und Gedächtnis;* the title of the text itself "Memories of France," has taken on a gruesome authenticity since Celan drowned himself in the Seine. We were dead and could breathe: that is the connection with "In Memory of Paul Eluard," and that is the chiasmus of the "breath-crystal," of the "honeycomb ice," of the "interdicted lips"; a chiasmus found also in Hölderlin, whom Celan frequently remembered and cited. Here biography and tradition seem to merge and intersect in the context of two centuries. Hölderlin's text "In lieblicher Bläue" ("In lovely Blueness") concludes: "Life is death, and death is another form of life"—"Leben ist Tod, und Tod ist auch ein Leben."

PAUL CELAN

Celan's writing is one of the clear, unarguable limits of modern poetry. In all its facets it composes one single sign, a solid piece of rock bearing the inscription, "Past this point your language disintegrates from anguish." Its relation to a broader tradition of European nihilism is minimal, as Celan's work is closest to the tiny gestures—the shrug, the loose wave of a hand—that indicate with awesome peremptoriness "this one lives, that one dies." Except for a few of the earlier poems there are not even cries of anguish or lament. The later work shows Celan conscientiously applying himself to the German language as an instrument, as though it were an instrument since it has been used as such, of terror. He elected to write in German, while being Rumanian and living in France, because his affinities with the victims of the Holocaust declared themselves most explicitly in the smaller linguistic gestures with which he *executed* the language from within. His work is radical insofar as it is a helpless conscious choice. Very few writers have so openly allowed the language of their poems to be helpless, to be written from a condition of abrupt syntactic disintegration *consciously* attended to. The great difficulty—and thus his greatest example for later poets—is in practicing a craft on material that disappears in proportion to the success of the poet. Celan's invasion of the German language is only possible after the Second World War. The First had incited violence of a different kind; the medium, the language, was a means and not the object of attack. With Celan, the German language itself becomes the means of its own disembodiment. In his hands, more and more of the language simply goes up in smoke. There is nothing at all like it in any other language that I know of.

There is certainly nothing to compare with it in English. For all the interesting graphic propositions (still largely unexamined) in cummings, there is no ground for comparison. Jack Spicer's abandonment to the

pronoun disfigurations of an Orphic underworld are comparable only in isolated lines. And so far as I can discern, the work of the younger poets publishing in the magazines *This, Hills* and *L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E* shows no indebtedness to Celan, though some of their polemic suggests he would be central to their concerns. I suspect the lack of absorption of Celan into American idioms and attentions arises from a simple enough error, which is the assumption that every notable poet has some kind of "equivalent" in another language. So the most profuse records of verbal injury in such poets as Vallejo and Artaud possibly disguise the distinctness which is Celan's. It may also be that Celan is not fun to read. His poetry may be the most singular contemporary instance of the harrowing, unreadable, prototypical "modern poem" that had manifestations for earlier sensibilities in such work as *The Waste Land,* Dada sound-poems and simultaneities, Expressionist works and more. The singularity of Celan's images, the sensual purity and the sense of hermetic or private meaning, also make his work less approachable in the richly imagistic public domain of American poetry.

In my own case, Celan was unavoidable. I lived in Germany in the late sixties, so the bias of my attentions was toward European poetry anyway. Rilke was then, and remains, for me, synonymous with the notion of German poetry. And what is most conspicuous for someone disposed to hold Rilke so highly is the fact that Celan's attraction to the German language is bilateral. On the one hand he is decomposing the language of the barbarians from within: on the other, he is conducting a hermetic (*tightly sealed*) passage toward the inviolable hieratic visionary language within German that Rilke made his own. It is as if Celan, in order to come into his own as the German poet after Rilke, could only approach the realm of such a practice by passing through many rings of enemy lines drawn around it. So Celan's work is full of stealth and intentional sabotage. And by the time—or in those instances in which—he is close on the Rilkean purity, the scars of what he has experienced en route peel off in scabs indistinguishable from the exaltation of being there. A prick from a rose killed Rilke. Celan writes as if an entire crown of roses were being held in place in his mouth. Beauty is bloody.

So the position of Celan is in the end twofold. He marks a certain boundary to horror, the response to horror in language, and the assimila-

tion of it in a poetic practice. On the other hand, he is always approaching a beauty which it is terrible to contemplate. This has been the substance of much melodramatic poetry and fiction, but Celan writes with the massive historical evidence pervasive in his chosen language and racial affiliations. And I would suggest that it was as a poet that he most clearly gravitated toward the holocaust as inevitable topos. Each slightest sound of German resonated with bone and ash. Suffocation the condition of the script. Every poem written as the last word, terminus of a race.

Clayton Eshleman

A NOTE ON PAUL CELAN

While living in Sherman Oaks, California, in the spring of 1970, I had the following dream: a man whom I recognized as Paul Celan walked to the bank of the Seine in Paris and stepped up on a stone which I also recognized as the Vallejo stone. Celan stood there for a moment—then leapt into the river.

When I mentioned my dream to someone a week or so later I was informed that the poet had just drowned in the Seine, an apparent suicide.

The Vallejo stone refers to a poem that César Vallejo wrote while living in Paris, in the mid-thirties. Like many of the poems that Vallejo wrote during these years, it records his acute sensitivity to suffering; this particular untitled poem is, on one level, a stay against suicide. Vallejo still believed that a humanitarian revolution would occur, but this belief was growing very weak, and was rapidly being overwhelmed by the suffering he found everywhere daily.

The poem, too long to quote in this context, opens with the following two stanzas:

> Idle on a stone,
> unemployed,
> scroungy, hair-raising,
> at the bank of the Seine, he comes and goes.
> Conscience then sprouts from the river,
> with the petiole and scratches of an avid tree;
> from the river the city rises and lowers, made of
> embraced wolves.
>
> The idle one sees it coming and going,
> monumental, carrying his fasts in his concave head,
> on his chest his purest lice
> and below

his little sound, that of his pelvis,
silent between two big decisions,
and below,
further down,
a paperscrap, a nail, a match...

One might think of this stone as a location at which lamentation is tested. Rilke, in the 10th "Duino Elegy," evokes the crisis of lamentation for the 20th century. This is where, as a young woman, a Lament responds to a young man's questions, saying:

"We were a great clan, once, we Laments. Our fathers
worked the mines in that mountain range. Sometimes
you'll find a polished lump of ancient sorrow among men,
or petrified rage from the slag of some old volcano.
Yes, that came from there. We used to be rich."

In attempting to read my dream in the light of Vallejo's and Celan's lives and poetries, I see that Vallejo, still weighted with some of the riches of lamentation, could address the misery of men from his stone pedestal in a poem and turn away from the river to other poems. For Celan, writing after Auschwitz, his family having been murdered in the camps, lamentation was not exactly empty, but was so distorted by the absurdity of praising anything, that its riches had been, in effect, undermined. It may be putting it too strongly to say that he could no longer, at a certain point, feel sorry for himself, but I suspect that something like this was true, and that it pushed him over the edge.

In the two quoted stanzas of Vallejo's poem, I find a curious balance between what the poet sees over the Seine and what he sees on its bottom; the "above" and the "below" seem to be held in this balance by his body, specifically by his genitals ("his little sound, that of his pelvis,/ silent between two big decisions,"). If we read "two big decisions" as "testicles," then "pelvis" reads as "penis." The sense seems to be that given the nature of the world, he cannot decide whether to have children or not and, caught on the horns of the decision, as it were, he remains "idle," out of work as a man as well as a worker.

The movement of words and lines in Celan's poetry from *Sprachgitter* (1959) on has a strong, twisting, downward propulsion, like strands

of a rope that is, at the same time, tightening with increasing weight *and* self-destructing through torsion into cast free strands. A good example of these contraries in motion is found in "The Syllable Ache" (from *Die Niemandsrose,* 1963) of which I quote the last half:

> Forgotten grabbed
> at To-be-forgotten, earthparts, heartparts
> swam,
> sank and swam. Columbus,
> the time-
> less in eye, the mother-
> flower,
> murdered masts and sails. All fares forth,
> free,
> discovering,
> the compass-flower fades, point
> by leafpoint, an ocean
> blossomed to height and to day, in blacklight
> of wildrudderstreaks. In coffins,
> in urns, canopic jars
> awoke the little children
> Jasper, Agate, Amethyst—peoples,
> stock and kin, a blind
>
> *Let there be*
>
> is knotted in
> the serpentheaded free-
> ropes—:

By modifying "*Let there be*" with "blind," freedom and license twist into each other, and for a moment Aleister Crowley's "Do what thou wilt" shows its lust-deformed face. By putting it that way I mean to indicate to what an extent Celan's poetry contains a pronouncement of creation emptied of meaning. When "Do what thou wilt" becomes the only law, there is no meaningful creation. God is exterminated, one is no one, unity equals nothingness.

On another level, Celan's contraries were "I" and "Thou," and in his mature poetry they grow unbearably close, closer than contraries can to function: one might say that they gnaw into each other, the living

become the dead, the dead the living, and out of such a conjunction a grand but terrifying vista opens, in which Celan's own voice is finally consumed in a "we" which is the living and the dead singing a song of praise to "no one." Under the stress of such a vision, nothing is forgotten: memories of the death camps, the inhuman rot in the mythic structure of Christianity, and insignificant slights have hundreds of low doors opening on each other. This can be a condition in which while poetry is meaningless the sense of soul-destruction is so gaping that only a poetry in which life itself is pulled inside out is a possible response.

I believe that in reading and thinking about Paul Celan today, we must meditate on the stamina of his wound. Not that he allowed it to flow at full vent, or that he brilliantly cicatrized it at the right hour. Rather, he worked it as a muscle as long as there was any strength in it. He knelt at its altar alone, and thus did not set other possibilities in motion that might have given him reasons to continue to live at the point that the wound ceased to ache.

Then there was only numbness—and the "uncontestable testimony" of one who did not come in to the hearth when the snow began to fall but stayed outside to disappear in the deepening particles of annihilated millions, a single "we" that you and I can pronounce.

The Vallejo translation from *César Vallejo: The Complete Posthumous Poetry,* tr. by Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia, 1978, pp. 78-81; the Rilke from *Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus,* tr. by A. Poulin, Jr., 1977, pp. 72-3; the Celan from *Caterpillar #8/9,* tr. by Cid Corman, 1969, pp. 17-18.

Erich Arendt

for Paul Celan

JEWISH CEMETERY IN PRAGUE

Tr. by Suzanne Shipley Toliver

The roots inside
—withered. On the Mount of Olives
the shadow of death
impotent. Way of the cross:
unending: yours
and mine—yet
the seawing of
the word
still wanders.

Here, day-years gray,
the phantom, the
defoliated one, overhead
a listening. A wind
inaudible. Day-years
gray, the plaintive
vapor trail. Wind
as old as the darkening of
bark.
Under the day's eyelid still
ponder—
deeply,

for a long time stone, out of the ground
the brows of the dead
are growing: the Law's tablets
unbroken, brow upon brow,
scattered, bent by
the time-god, by
his wind. Legible there
the severe
lineature, heart-gray the Old:
the ineradicable Testament of
suffering, valid still,
according to which the gray
of your forehead,
final
sediment of the word.

Eyes you mouths
Eyes! Miriam
Yehuda, the sand
of your feet! Banished,
Consumed by fire!

Eyes mouths
of that which is written,
shadow trail of a
remembering, engraved,
eyeless here mouthless.
Dust siblings,
our fingers
read the names.

IN MEMORIAM PAUL CELAN

"My blonde mother did not come home."
—Paul Celan

Tr. by Carl Clifton Toliver

The mother, she
did not come home

never relinquished
death

nourished by the son
with black milk

that preserved his life
drowned
in ink blood

Between lines made mute
the non-word
radiant
in the void

ORADEA

In memory of Paul Celan

Tr. by Suzanne Shipley Toliver

Of secondary sense
like an image: the day
that rises with the dandelion,
five-o-clock chimes
and snow in April
from Bukovina.

Coincidence strikes synchronically:
Someone here hammered out
allegro barbaro,
someone else played Romanzeros
for pale obese ladies.

The absurd life
a museum displays.
Someone else, monumentalized,
teaches us
how to ruin a poet's life with drink.

All that before your time:
not natural oil, not cybernetics,
not even Sarajevo,
no word
of Roth or Musil.

Good Friday for the Orthodox:
In Felixbad
the spa season begins
and six Rumanians
were discovered stabbed to death.

Six synagogues,
the city without Jews.
I am come to suffer—
in four languages.

And in the five-o-clock chiming:
dawn light and dandelions,
at the train station
a small defeated army
with passports
that now mean nothing.

The tar boilers
hardly looked up.
The flames shot skyward,
at their tips
smoke, sooty flakes
over the city.

Those surviving
driven into cities—
who calls them by name?
Water,
water—

patient and quiet, almost
uncomplaining.

Waves,
like lips,
broken:
No pasaran . . .

Hans-Jürgen Heise

PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Carl Clifton Toliver

He knocks his forehead
on the smoke
that he thinks
Too late
to flee the street
now
leisurely
one more time

LAMENT FOR PAUL CELAN

(On the death of my friend in Paris)

Set your flag at half-mast
Memory
at half-mast
for now and always
P.C.

Tr. by Suzanne Shipley Toliver

Days of sisal days of nylon
someone however spun silk spun silk
thin was the thread long was the thread
strong was the thread weak was the thread
from it hung a blackened weight

Tons of smoke smoke of blood
blazing flames flaming blaze
everywhere camps everywhere stairs
everywhere larvae everywhere silk
Israel everywhere

Someone disentwined the thread
was a cocoon of pain of pain
aching within aching without
words deworded torment terminated
lacerated
lacerated

PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Carl Clifton Toliver

a folksong
came most easily
to his lips
yet he never sang it

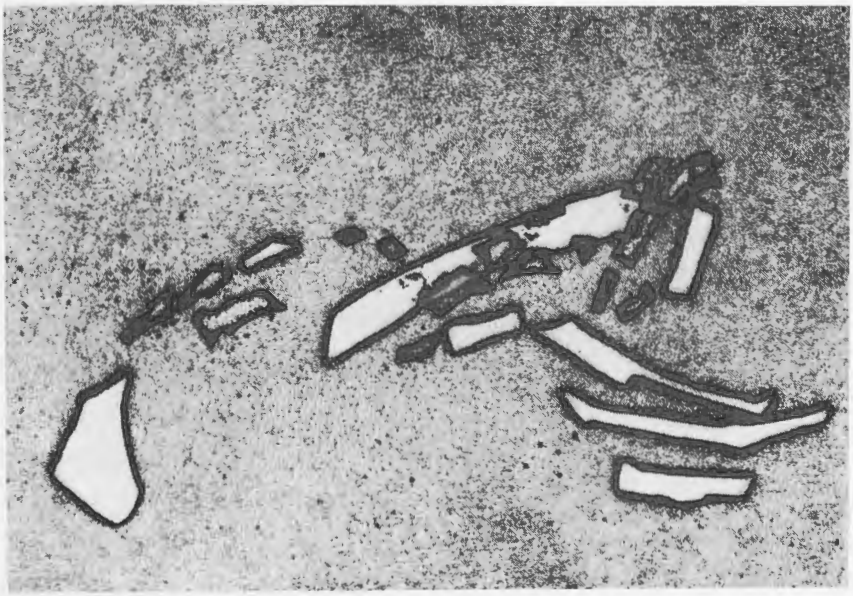
pumping,
jellyfish took over
his heart's activity

we had similar experiences:
mussels
would not snap open
stones
squirted out of our hands

beneath the waters' ice-fast surface
we were strangers
who were friends

Engraving from
Gravure de Schwarrmant
Edition Brunidor, 1969.

Engraving from
Gravure de Atemkristall
Edition Brunidor, 1965



Engraving from
Gravure de Schwarrmant
Edition Brunidor, 1969

Johannes Poethen

ORPHEUS

Translated from the German by James Phillips

Music out of snow
out of sand a dance step
a breath from out of ashes

onset of the stiffened wave
the sign of motion vanished
memories along the bottom of an urn—

thus I lay out tools of recollection
fold the day together
heave the void onto my shoulder.

Still the uproar of the body's breaking
the sweating of a foamy death

I wade on with an oarsman's terror through the riptide:

will it last
if suddenly I turn around
and open up a look for her

the song composed of all my loss?

Already far beyond the borders of humanity
the final sentence crumbles off
already far beyond the borders of a word.

Blood-steps inbetween the temples
eyes as two antennas feeling forward
testing caverns for her hearing

ear upon a lifeless shore

what I am
is empty all around her dying
so that death would perish here.

Suction in the pores unto oblivion
the surging inner forms of faces
forests breathing outlines where a whisper was
an icefield full of glassy fragrance
skin in numbed illumination
tastes like shadows.

Grave-chamber
workroom
built above the wounding expectations

there to screen her slow appearance
with the ceasing of the seventh echo
with the pouring out of imitations never finished.

Etched into the eyelid's shell
the shadow of
her voice

shivering in the calling light that moves him upward now

distorted in the roundness of
a humming flow

the draft of colors muted by such seeing.

Whom I had to shelter
dead upon arrival
in the emptied pitcher of my skin—

still I hold the forms out
testing that which fills

how to make a shell for humming
how to find the shadow's fleece
and have it shine?

So I look back as if forever
melt my failure in the fire of our perfected separation

while she goes on disappearing

music out of snow
from far beyond all freezing.

Rescued in the body's trance
saved from suction in the pores
healed of waiting endlessly renewed

bled to life exchanged
against the thin composure of her brightness.

Johannes Poethen was born 1928 in Wickrath am Niederrhein. His most important collection of poetry is *Wohnstatt zwischen den Atemzugen* (A Dwelling Between Breaths), published in 1966.

John Yau

THE DRAWINGS OF PORFIRIO DiDONNA

Porfirio DiDonna began exhibiting in the early 1970's, a little more than a decade after Jasper Johns, Agnes Martin, and Frank Stella expressed an extreme disatisfaction with the directional brushwork and spatial ambiguities of the Abstract Expressionists, particularly de Kooning, Kline, and Pollock. DiDonna's early, largely monochromatic paintings are cumulative. His approach can be characterixed by the meticulous application of thin layers of paint; and in certain designated areas the process of building up was continued until horizontal rows of small rectangles projected discreetly from the painting's surface. Finally, dots in a different color either alternated with or punctuated the rows. The dots caused a slight optical shift, they were calculated to be a sensuous distraction.

In retrospect it can be said that DiDonn's paintings suggest a bravura sensibility (which is usually associated with Abstract Expressionism) was being circumscribed by a commitment to an austere, meditative geometry. The strength of this approach was that both sensibility and vocabulary were able, through DiDonn's precise manipulations, to refine each other in a way that emphasized the painting's tactile surfaces. What anchored these manipulations, prevented them from becoming merely effects, was DiDonna's reliance on a grid. The result of these manipulations was that the paintings quietly reminded us of the artist's hand, his touch.

Given these concerns, it is no surprise drawing has occupied a significant amount of DiDonna's attention. Between 1970 and 77 he completed thousands of them. Almost all were composed of dots and dashes. Using fairly small sheets of paper, DiDonna pencilled in row after row of dashes with the aid of a T-square. He then counterpointed this mechanical aspect with the less precise placement of the dots. At times the grid

suggests slippage, as if every mark were on the brink of losing its foothold. Until 1977 DiDonna explored the possibilities of the grid, placement, and duration with an obsessive thoroughness reminiscent of Mondrian. The difference is that Mondrian was concerned with essences, while DiDonna was looking for a way to make his self-imposed restrictions evolve.

At the same time, DiDonna was learning what was possible within these limitations, becoming familiar with the range of nuances he was capable of achieving when he placed a pencil against a sheet of paper. The marks are interruptions; they parallel the lozenges and dots projecting from the painting. As with the paintings, DiDonna was intent on getting a balance between the smallest mark and the overall pattern. Both the field of events and the individual instance are supposed to convey an authority. What he wanted to overcome, indeed deny, was the hierarchical aspects of traditional composition.

A dot-dash drawing, its interplay between the mechanical and the personal, parallels a score sheet for music. It has an internal, irreducible logic of its own—one that challenges the viewer. While the vocabulary was limited for almost 7 years, DiDonna eventually explored a variety of mediums, including pen and ink, charcoal, and watercolor. The restrictions he placed on himself allowed him to concentrate his attention elsewhere. By the mid 70's the drawings gained a luminosity. Charcoal was used not only to make a mark, but to produce a tactile, atmospheric effect.

Equally true is the drama the drawings of the last five years convey. What occurs is being performed, a fact that has been evident in DiDonna's approach since the beginning, only now more so. By breaking time down into precisely measured instances—dots and dashes—he was able to make his marks synonymous with events. The difference is that the earlier drawings presented a more or less uniform field of events. The measured passing of time is what confronts us, rather tha the map of an event. When we look at the recent drawings, we discover the relationships between the marks, the configuration of the field. The hints of space are like clues strewn on a stage. We reenact the drama of DiDonna's decisions, invent the outcome for ourselves.

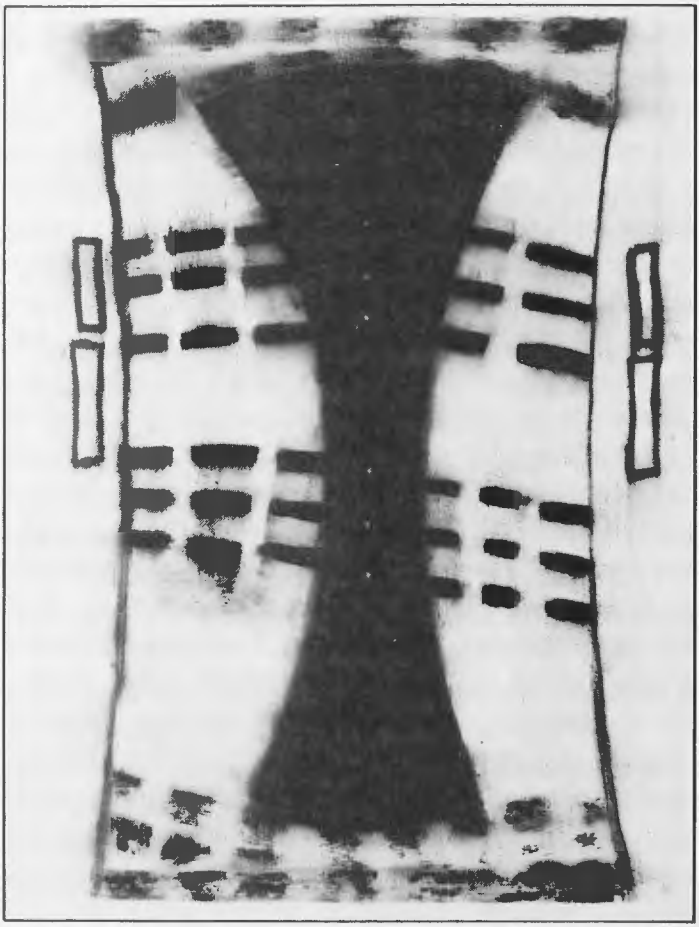
By exploring the range of patterns possible with a vocabulary lim-

ited to dots and dashes, DiDonna built up a huge storehouse of memories that would later prove useful. It is easy to believe these memories are always at work on some level when he begins a drawing now. They do not determine the outcome so much as they inform each decision. He has gained for himself a range of possibilities that must be discovered anew. Now, the overall patterns and iconic presences are built up from calligraphic marks and personalized shapes. Often the drawings have an allusive resonance, one recalling early Renaissance compositions, say, or ancient Chinese bronzes.

The transion from the early drawings to the more recent ones occurred in 1977, when DiDonna spent a summer at Ragdale, an artist colony outside Chicago. It was the first time he lived and worked outside of New York, where he was born. The vocabulary of the drawings began to change. The marks expanded rather swiftly into a calligraphic style. Pattern no longer dominated is approach. Rather, DiDonna began to explore the tension between symmetry and asymmetry on a deeper, richer level. One recalls the paintings of Piero della Francesca, Cimabue, and Giotto. The marks press into space without abolishing it. Always, one is conscious of the surface of the drawings, the elegant yet understated sensuousness that occurs in thick rag paper when it has been worked on again and again. Often, DiDonna washes away the charcoal with a wet rag and begins again. A layered, transparent space is the result.

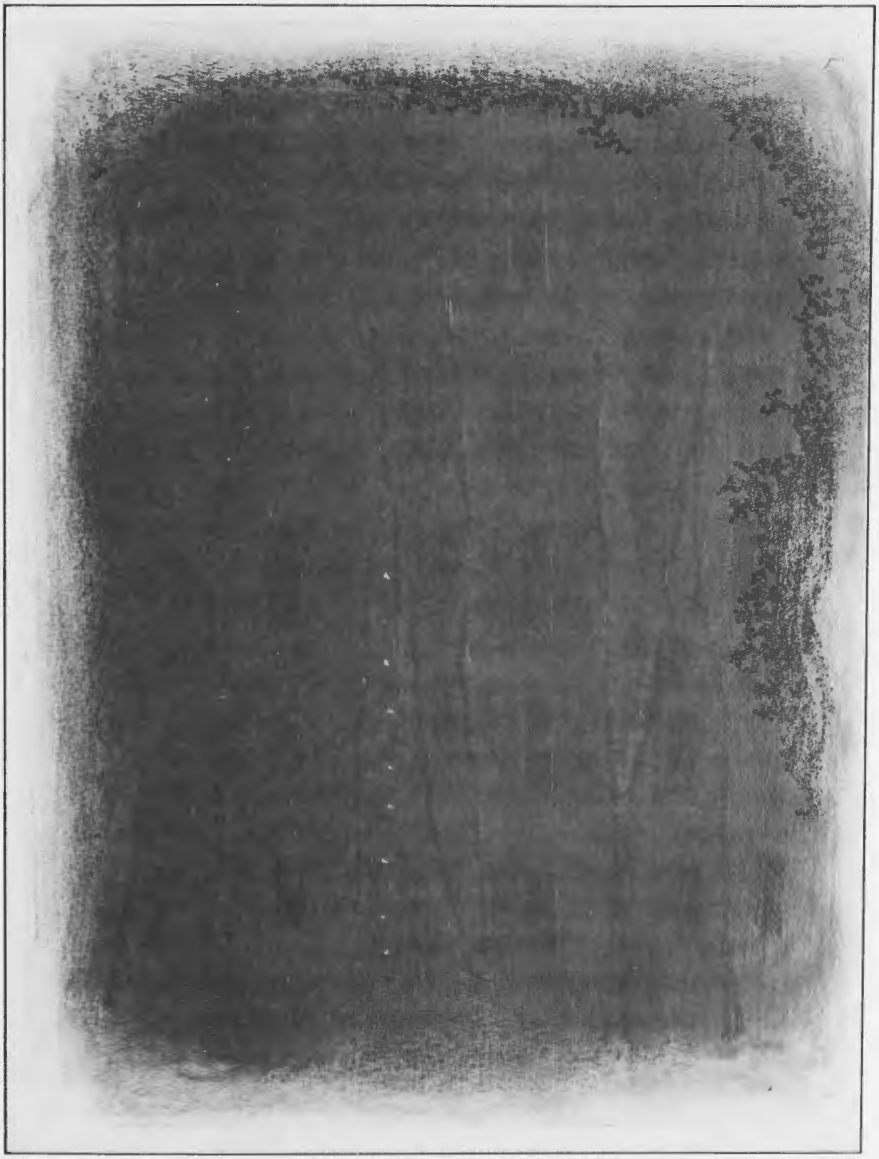
In his early drawings, DiDonna was obsessive to the point of being scientific in his thoroughness. It seemed as if no possibility could be overlooked. And yet, despite the very strong likelihood that he could have gotten stuck in an empty, ritualized activity, DiDonna moved on. Now, he is able to impart a sensuous weight to rarification, delicacy, opacity, and tone. Accent has as much force as statement. Blunt primitivism and elegant effects are inseparable. DiDonna's approach is still circumscribed. He never wants too much. Always respectful of the other—paper and mediums—his restraint conveys an intense eroticism.

PORFIRIO DiDONNA: *Four Drawings*

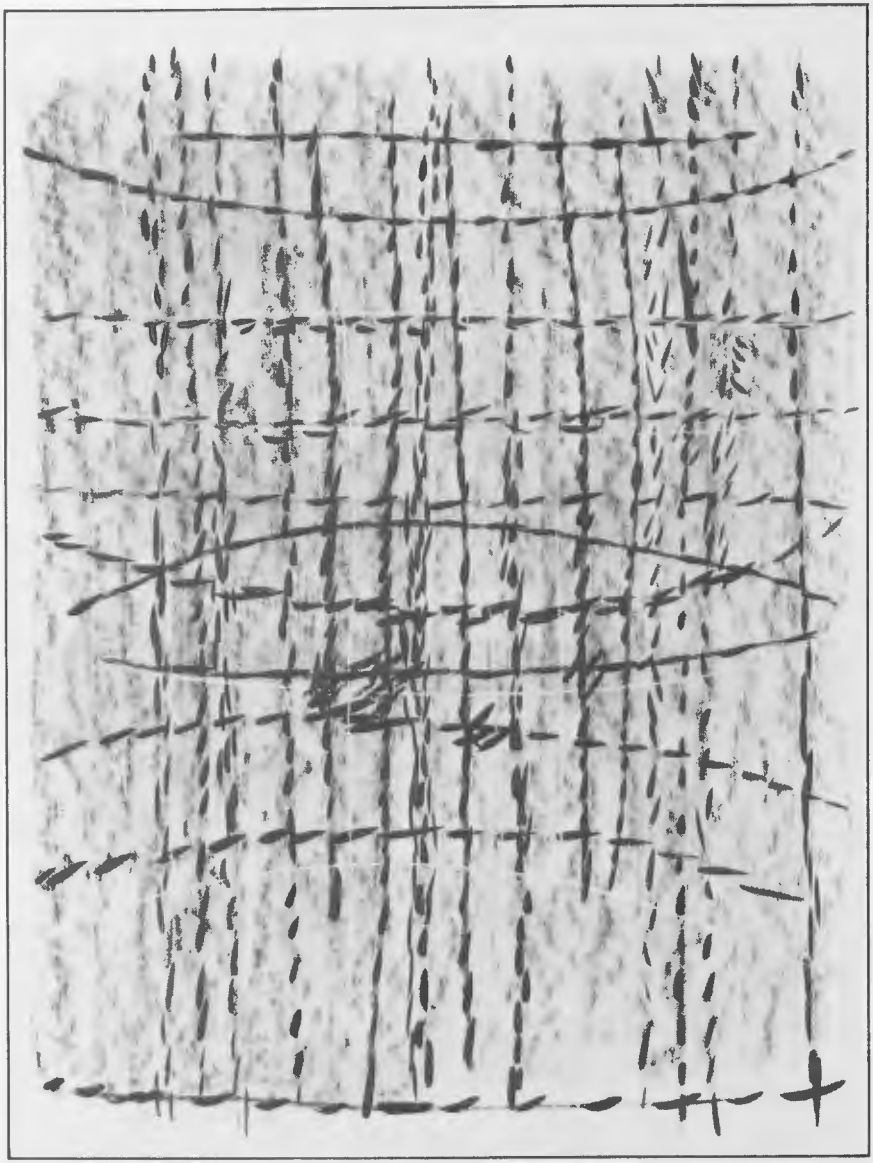


Untitled, 1981
mixed media, 35½ x 25"

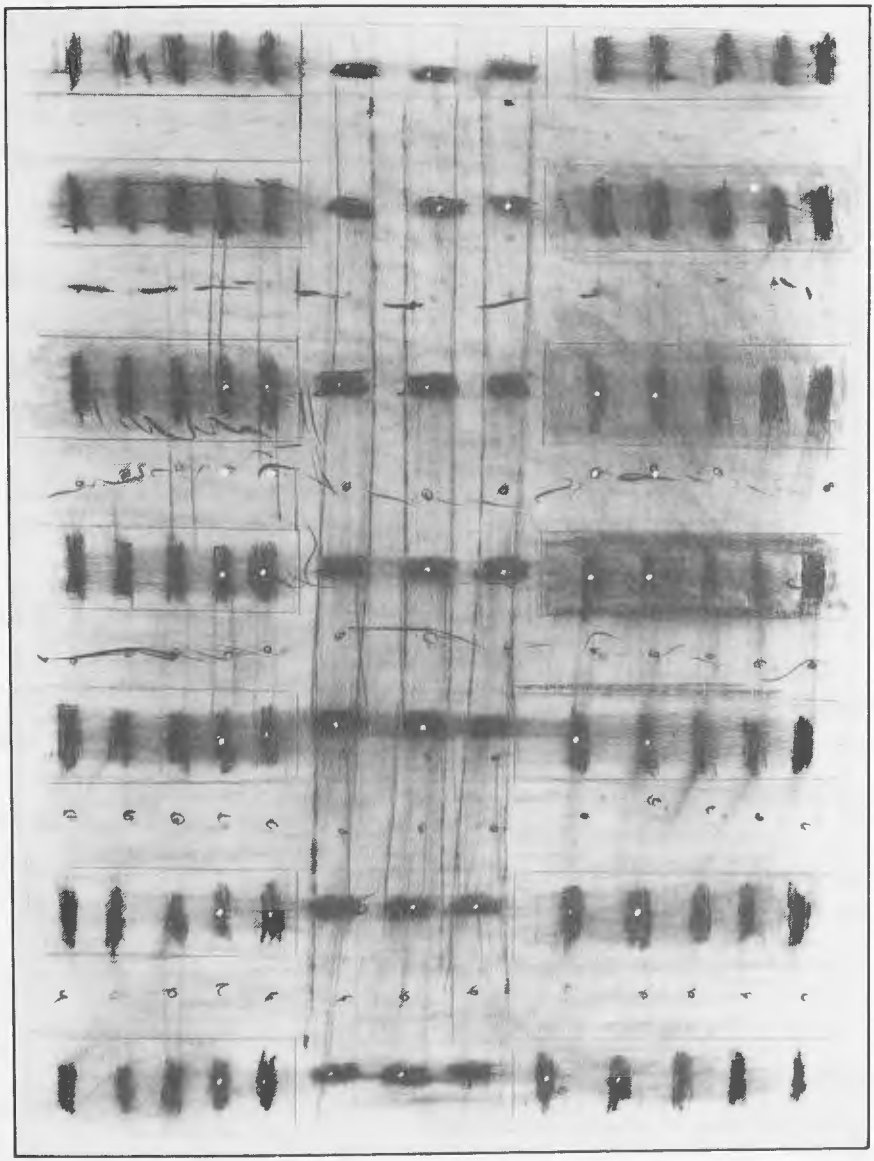
Photo credit: Zindman/Fremont courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery, NYC



Untitled, 1981
mixed media, 30 x 22¼"



Untitled, 1979
charcoal, chalk, & ink on paper,
30-1/8 x 22-7/8"



Untitled, 1979
charcoal, colored pencil, ink on paper
30 x 22-5/8"

Clayton Eshleman

UNTITLED

for David True

The peak of the obsidian mountain swarms
    with red snow, against grey lime sky
the mountain becomes negative, a dark entrance whose interior
    swarms with fire, or is this red
warning from an ancient goddess that the stuff of Adam
is now nearly totally transformed into warfare,
the perpetuation of life
                pulled inside out,
    an inner lining, extinction, shows now
    in the face of things...

At the base of this black mountain
in David True's "Untitled"
a chain of boulders, pieces of an enormous stone phallus
before the head of which a headless
    deer, eviscerated, lies on its back,
3 legs groping the air more like insect legs than animal,
as if a wheeling motion were implied, as if this dying
headless creature were struggling underneath
    the phallus,

a starved Pan looks beyond the deer
to a windowless house, poised on the highest of the phallus
pieces, about to slide—

*

The wheeling legs revolve, and set in motion
an inner meaning of the house, it is Pan's signal tower,
his alchemical workshop in which 14 red women recline
stroking their red fur, with their 28 legs propped on
the hub stone they become the animators of
the Grindstone of Desire, whose long red spokes churn
the Panic Satanic machinery in the faces of men—

yet Pan is famished here, the scene still, as if the workshop
is wall all the way through, it is
the weight in our sensing that as the animals become extinct,
the abyss recedes, as
the Bawean deer
the Cedros Island mule deer
the Columbian white-tailed deer
the hog deer
the key deer
the McNeill's deer
the musk deer leave,

the fructifying abyss, the *abaton,* where the power of the womb
crosses the power of the tomb, where the seeker curls
awaiting an incubus to deposit soul eggs in his side,

the grandeur of this emptiness draws further and further away

*

For a moment a clearing is constructed,
    brown ground, with our yearning for a golden age
rising in bands of lime and yellow light,

        and in the stillness of my own
not knowing where to turn,
I saw, boiling in the cornice of the sky,
the blood of a cauldron
whose sides are the embraced bodies of the living and the dead,

    the rage of the grail
to dissolve the watchfiends, the rackscreams,
back into that blood pudding
red Riding Hood's grandmother was stirring
    under the covers, when the animal
was the mucilage between "us" and "them."

May, 1984

George F. Butterick

EDITING POSTMODERN TEXTS

The poets who flourished after the Second World War and who have come to be known by some as "postmodern," are no different from most of the world's writers who have ever lived. If it is good, their work lives on without them. It is taken up and passed down for others to share, practical heirlooms of the species, as palpable and definite as a crate of wrapped china. And while these poets continue to carry much of the responsibility for seeing that their writings survive intact, unchipped, and uncorrupted—at least through their lifetimes—sooner or later their work is entrusted to hands not their own. Yet these strange hands are not unguided or without principles, principles and methods that can be recognized and likewise passed along.

The selection of texts is only the most obvious of responsibilities for an editor. Rather, it is the establishment of texts in all their pristine trueness and "numinosity," in cases for which there is no other authority—most often, no living author—that may be an editor's most difficult and worthy responsibility. Such a task draws upon the full range of skills that makes an editor a critic and historian as well as a textual caretaker, even though the very nature of his method makes the editor (who can also be called a textual critic) reluctant to offer the same generalizations that

those other specialists share with readers at will.

The problems (and pleasures) of editing are present in all their variety in such a project as preparing for publication Charles Olson's poems, especially *The Maximus Poems,* that preeminent postmodern text.[1] Later, I will discuss the challenges in the published texts of John Wieners, to take just one other poet as example. Olson's poems are an excellent example for the discussion of editing procedures because the editor has every conceivable stage of a poem's physical existence available for consideration, from roughest draft to tape-recorded readings to corrected galleys and page proofs. There are poems in neatly revised typescripts, but also unique renditions in notoriously difficult handwriting; poems published by the poet himself and seen through successive printings under his direct supervision, and others never published during his lifetime. Some, like those of Emily Dickinson, were not even specifically authorized for publication; others were published a number of times, never twice alike. There are poems in which certain errors are accepted by the poet, where inconsistencies are tolerated, even encouraged; poems in multiple, unresolved versions; untitled poems, undated poems, perhaps even unfinished poems.

In preparing a definitive edition of a work such as *The Maximus Poems,* the editor first goes through the previously published texts for typographical errors. That is obvious enough, although not as simple as it sounds. In order to determine which are typographical lapses and which are intentional eccentricities, he finds it quickly necessary to consult the original manuscripts and proofs. It has to be established, for example, whether such occurrences on Olson's page as "discovera" for "discovered" (*Maximus* 89) or "urgeng" for "urging" (*Maximus* 235) were intended by the poet. It must be determined when a change represents an authorial decision or editorial imposition or a printer's inadvertance. Each step along the way is traced to discover where and when an error has crept in. The general procedure is backwards, from the published texts through the various stages of proofs to the original typescripts and holographs or handwritten manuscripts.

The surprising discovery, in the instance of Olson's poems, was the extent of error—a humbling experience, producing a general wariness. Of the seventy-seven *Maximus* poems first published separately, in maga-

zines and elsewhere, during the poet's lifetime, only fourteen appeared exactly the same in both the printed volumes and original manuscripts. Differences extended from omitted punctuation and altered spacing to misread words. At the same time, a preliminary survey of the posthumously published *Archaeologist of Morning* reveals at least seventy errors, including five in the poem in which the poet says, speaking of an edition of Melville's poetry, it "has so many carelessnesses in it that, as of this date, / it is quite necessary to do it over again" (*Archaeologist of Morning,* p. [35]). One might have been forewarned by revelations made concerning Pound's *Cantos,* a work of similar size and complexity to *Maximus.* In 1955, Guy Davenport reported in *The Pound Newsletter* 278 different lines between the 1948 New Directions edition of *The Cantos* and the 1954 Faber edition, raising ripples of consternation; and twenty-five years later, Barbara Eastman found 225 textual differences among the five printings of *The Cantos* from 1970 to 1975 alone.[2] The Olson scholar can be grateful there were far fewer printings of *Maximus* to deal with. As it is, there were over thirty discrepancies between the 1960 Jargon/Corinth edition and Cape Goliard's 1970 resetting, the version photographed for the California edition. These discrepancies ranged from irregularities in spacing and relatively understandable lapses such as "near" for "hear" or "fisherman" for "fishermen," to such grim marrings as "deathly mu-stick" for "mu-sick" and "infuriated" for "infatuated." With poetry as idiosyncratic and demanding as Olson's—like so many of the postmoderns's work, with its extensible forms and full range of content—every effort must be made to insure that what the reader sees is what the poet wrote.

Most treacherous, perhaps, is that demimonde of magazines, anthologies, broadsides and what booksellers and librarians call "ephemera"—the intermediate but often essential stage between original manuscript and collection in book form. In editing from magazines, all sorts of pitfalls may be present. There is the classic case where a bibliography of Olson's writings, which later served as the basis of selection for his collected poems outside the *Maximus* series, mistakenly attributed to Olson a poem written by another, due to inadequate identification of authors on the magazine's mimeographed page. The poem was consequently included in *Archaeologist of Morning,* although it was not until

the discrepancy was brought to light by an alert scholar working on the other poet, that it was made clear the poem previously ascribed to Olson was in fact by Canadian poet Raymond Souster.[3] The dangers are multifarious and prolific. Even in the case of a two-line *Maximus* poem (*Maximus* 422), there was corruption. A magazine editor varied the poet's original text, rearranging the line break to fit one of the poem's long lines more comfortably on the page, seemingly indifferent to the integrity of the text.[4]

Each act of reproducing a text represents a danger. There seems to be some natural resistance, a mummy's curse, the poem's—or the act's, the moment's—insistence that *it* is as unique in nature as a crystal. There is always the possibility that no two manuscripts can ever be the same. Without a photocopying machine, each act of transmittal—especially in poems of length—involves a kind of interference in a natural process, a literary Uncertainty Principle.[5] The immediate problem for the editor, without the living author as arbiter, is to determine which, if any, of the resulting changes are authorized, which are errors. Without the living author, only the original manuscripts and the poet's own corrected editions can serve as the final guides.

Olson himself was cognizant of the difficulties and procedural necessities of editing, and no doubt was sympathetic to the rigors of textual criticism as it has been traditionally practiced, especially the collation of texts. He wrote to himself on the night of June 11, 1966, among some fifty pages of notes accumulated while laboring over the proofs of a proposed edition of *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* (which had been printed from a typescript prepared with the help of Jeremy Prynne in Cambridge): "proofing itself *does* at least bring copy-errors . . . into view, and, checked by my *original* and by *xerox*—thus 4 versions have to be in hand: proofs / Prynne's / Xerox / original / (*also*—note—some magazine printings." His demands for an edition were very precise, although somewhat paradoxical and occasionally impossible to achieve, owing to the sheer mechanics of print (type size, spacing, and leading), the inescapable difficulties of transforming a handwritten or typewritten manuscript into a typeset text. As I have written elsewhere, Procrustes was the original printer.[6]

No change in a text can be made without a careful collation of all

available versions of that text. The following might serve as a quick checklist: holographic manuscripts, typescripts, carbon copies, photocopies, corrected proofsheets, correspondence relating to manuscripts and proofs, audiotapes and videotapes of the poet reading, computer tapes or disks, and all published versions, especially the poet's own copies, which may bear autograph corrections. Perhaps, even, every letter the poet wrote during the period in which the text in question could have been quoted—though this may be beyond the scale of practicality.[7]

In Olson's case, there was an abundance of materials to work with. For example, the poet prepared a complete typescript of *Maximus 1-10,* which he thoroughly overhauled and rewrote and then prepared a second typescript, from which the book was typeset. A comparison of this latter typescript with the proofs (of which there were two sets) indicates Olson made changes up to the last minute—all minor revisions, but evidence he assumed authorial control to the very end. His intentions were clear; he had no casual or careless relationship with his words as they were made public. Despite the improvisatory air of "Projective Verse" and the oral quality of much of the poetry, any reputation for heedlessness was an overgeneralization. In his later years, Olson rarely composed on the typewriter directly. His typescripts from the early 1960s on were almost all copies of holograph originals, as exact as the typewriter could make them. He wrote in 1966 to Robin Blaser, then editing the magazine *Pacific Nation,* on a typescript of "[to get the rituals straight . . ." (*Maximus* 556-57): "I have gone over this as well as typed it as carefully as type itself—& wld, if you shld accept it, ask you *please* to see that your printer(s) . . . obey *all spaces*—where it is on the page etc, as well as queer positions of lines & masses *and* DISPOSITIONS Left and R (!"[8]

An author's modus operandi is the single most important consideration in successful editing. Olson worked hard to get *Maximus IV, V, VI* just right. Practically every page of proofs has notes and directions to designer Barry Hall and to the printer concerning placement and spacing, with comments such as (speaking of "*A Later Note on Letter # 15,*" *Maximus* 249): "Barry, I have repasted this (to *try* to get some of the flatness the poem carries)," or at another point (*Maximus* 296): "*Barry*! This poem suffers so badly (from the double space of the Bembo [typeface]—plus no 'feeling' in the resetting proportionately, I can only beg

you to go back to the original—the mss. is one of the carefullest 'graphics' in the book—like a Webern score—and *please* do anything—everything you can to simply accomplish its equalization!" (Occasionally, there was praise such as—for *Maximus* 354—"*Perfectamente*! For this you surely get the Havana see gar!") As the poet wrote in a note elsewhere to himself concerning the poems, "It's all right to be difficult, but you can't be impossible."[9] He did allow certain inconsistencies, where the gain is questionable at best (spelling "eys" for "eyes" and "haveing" for "having" in *Maximus* 355) and which may cost a share of the reader's credulity. Other times, the eccentricity is a stroke of pure genius (or at least shareable whimsy) and an agreeable spirit of independence.

What form does error take? It can be as small to the eye as a hyphen. In the following lines, a dash or a hyphen may make a difference:

> the Genetic
> is Ma the Morphic
> is Pa the City is Mother-
>
> Polis, the Child-Made-Man-Woman is . . .
> MONOGENE . . .

With the hyphen, the pun on "Mother-Polis"/"metropolis" is accomplished; without it, as the lines appear in *Maximus IV, V, VI* (pp. [10]-[11]), the reader is forced to read "Polis" in apposition to "the Child-Made-Man-Woman" which follows. This reading in itself makes for an interesting interpretation, one not inconsistent with either this particular poem or the series as a whole, where the polis of Gloucester is the sum or developing product of its citizen men and women. The interpretation is hardly crucial to the poems at this stage in the epic, but certainly of some interest, since Olson's definition of a "polis" is always significant. How does a collation of texts clarify matters? When the poem was first published in the *Paris Review,* the line appeared without a hyphen or any other punctuation. On the other hand, a hyphen (or dash—the length is not clearly differentiable) was added by Olson in his copy of the magazine. The correction also appears in the original typescript sent Cape Goliard Press, in pencil and slightly longer than typed hyphens, so it was taken by the printer for an em dash rather than a hyphen and apparently

missed by Olson in the proofs. Extratextual knowledge of the poem and its sources necessitates a hyphen, however, since a passage from Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy,* quoting a Gnostic treatise in which the term "Mother-City" occurs, lies in the poem's immediate background.[10] Familiarity with such dimensions of the poem means a textual critic must be more than a good proofreader or even a copy editor. A copy editor raises such questions; the textual critic must answer them.

In highly allusive poems such as Olson's, extra care must be taken with names or unfamiliar foreign words. Typographical errors create sluiceways through which meaning drains. There is this passage from the start of "The Laughing Ones" (*Archaeologist of Morning,* p. [39]), which contains the simple transposition of "Tyro's" for "Troy's":

> they
> are the light-hearted races,
> enjoy nothing so much, obviously,
> as the cracking of skulls (Tyro's fields
> were covered with 'em...

Here, the reference to Troy is not merely ornamental but quite necessary to identify the poem's larger opening allusion. Who exactly might be the "laughing ones" of the title, those "light-hearted races"? What was intended by the poet to be a traditional-enough allusion to the heroic age or classical heroes in general, now becomes, as "Tyro," a less familiar reference, one requiring special knowledge—which the reader expects will be provided by the poem itself. To compound matters, there *was* a classical Tyro who could possibly be intended (assuming the word is no mere misprint for "Tyre," home of Olson's hero Maximus). Tyro was a Greek maiden who fell in love with the river Enipeus, often wandering along its banks (the Tyro's "fields" of the poem?), until taken advantage of by Poseidon, to whom she bore two sons. She also bore her uncle Sisyphus two sons, which she killed (the "cracking of skulls"?) when she discovered that he did not love her as much as he hated her father. Later, she married another uncle and bore him Aeson, father of Jason the Argonaut. It can be seen how quickly tangled the path begun with error grows.

What happens, however, when it is the poet himself who is confused, genuinely confused, even in manuscript, like Keats in "On First Look-

ing into Chapman's Homer" with his "stout Cortez" for "Balboa," or Olson in "When do poppies bloom..." (*Maximus* 550), with its confusion of Penelope for Persephone? Here is where Greg's distinction between substantives and accidentals surely prevails.[11] Who is the editor to deny an author's human nature? In Olson's case, perhaps it was a simple momentary lapse (there is only a single holograph manuscript, written straight out), an instant's auditory inattention (both names, Penelope and Persephone, somewhat rhyme). And had he been given the opportunity to correct the substitution, the poet might have, had circumstances permitted (the manuscript was published posthumously). On the other hand, he didn't, as he did in similar first drafts. Nor was the manuscript written with particular haste or fury. Instead, there is a measure of calm to the handwriting. And perhaps the substitution was even intended: since Odysseus has been a hero of the poems before that point, a prototype of Maximus, perhaps the poet is justified in substituting the ever-faithful wife for the lost bride who in turn, at least for each half year, is faithful in her own way.[12] The editor has no other choice, no other authority, than to accept what appears on the written page.

It is not always easy, what appears written on the page. There is the example of the poem "OCEANIA" (*Maximus* 538-44), written on what the poet pulled from his pockets under streetlamps late at night while leaning against a bridge railing.[13] A notebook entry a few days later reveals that Olson himself spent three hours "trying to piece together" what he had scribbled on the "remains of [a] checkbook." Needless to say, what took the poet three hours to make sense out of, could easily take the editor three steady days or longer.

Sometimes, a poet undermines his own best efforts. Olson softened the effectiveness of his "Grandfather-Father Poem" (*Archaeologist of Morning,* pp. [216]-[20]) because of carelessnesses. When he prepared a typescript for *Poetry* magazine from his original holograph manuscript, he typed only a single quotation mark at the beginning of the word "understand" in the following passage (p. [217], lines 29-31):

> my father would
> 'understand
> anyone

and when it came time for proofs, he excised the quotation mark while indicating his uncertainty in the margin: "or does mss. show a ' and a ' ?" (both typescript and proofs in the *Poetry* archive, Lilly Library, Indiana University). The marginal note indicates the poet did not have a copy of his typescript to read against, but the real confusion was originally his own doing, for his holograph manuscript not only has the opening quotation mark clearly, but also a closing one, which because of its location in the handwritten passage had been mistaken by Olson for a comma in the previous line. The result troubles the sense of the passage, by seemingly linking "my father" to the poem's previous lines concerning Olson's grandfather. His father then appears as object, grammatically, of the grandfather's hate:

loving man
who hated

my father, would
understand
anyone...

Whereas, the father is actually the subject of the more tender portrait that results when the comma is omitted and the quotation marks are properly restored:

my father would
'understand
anyone

These three lines may also stand in apposition to the previous lines, so that "loving man / who hated" pertains to the poet's father as much as to his grandfather—a portrait consistent with that in *The Post Office,* where his father's demoralization and bitterness that followed his being hounded by the bosses for his union activities is sketched.

Again, on p. [217] of *Archaeologist of Morning,* lines 35-38—

what also conceivabl[y] my
grandfather may
have been gave allegiances to
—like the Church I don't know...

—it is not the Catholic Church, in the shadow of which he was raised, that Olson does not know, but the fact or extent of his grandfather's "allegiances." He had originally written, after speaking about Irish "blockheads,"

> what also conceivably my
> grandfather may
> have been gave allegiances to
> —like the Church
> (possibly: I don't know...

—unless, in the final version, he has decided to stress his own disaffection. Finally, in line 12 of p. [218], he neglects to type his original manuscript's "wldn't" and achieves just the opposite meaning intended: "He would... give up / anything to / anyone"—an inexplicable softness in the fearsome "black" Jack Hines. It is a somewhat self-indulgent poem, nevertheless an earnest and interesting one in autobiographical terms, which should have a consistency of tone and attitude (formally, it has little else).

The fact is that occasionally—though, admittedly, only rarely—Olson could not read his own handwriting, such as when he mistook his usual abrupted *-ing* ending and wrote "one this" for "one thing" in the manuscript of "I'm going to hate to leave this Earthly Paradise" (*Maximus* 594). Fortunately, he caught the mistake in proofs. It does not always work out so happily. In the original holograph of the same poem, by following slavishly the confused line order cramped on the page, Olson lost track of the original path of writing, the literal syntax, and garbled a rather straightforward title of a painting by the Gloucester artist Fitz-Hugh Lane. What is worse (making the editor who comes after helpless, lacking sufficient authorization), he insisted upon the distorted order in the proofs, where it had been corrected by the printer, in the belief that he was obeying his originary text. Thus, Lane's "Moonlight on the Harbor at Low Water" becomes "Moonlight on the / At Low Water Harbor / Scene," a graceless rendering to no advantage. But what is carelessness to some is discovery to others, whether in play or relationships or the aesthetic moment. In that case, the editor can point out the complexity as he sees it, according to his own reasoning, even though he lacks the ultimate authority, in the face of the author's pointed insis-

tence, to make the necessary corrections.

Such strains and distortions are more allowable, perhaps at times even desirable, in the longer, open, "processual" poems of the post-moderns. They would be less tolerable in a tightly controlled sonnet or regularly progressing ode. Finally, it is a different attitude toward order that holds such poems in sway, than in a poetry where regularity of form and closely monitored, if not strictly metered, lines are given highest priority. Clearly, in Olson's case a change has taken place between the early *Maximus* poems and later ones such as these—on the level of what is tolerable alone. In the beginning of his epic, Olson is strict, ruthless ("limits / are what any of us / are inside of"); progressively, he grows riskier—but, it can be argued, allowably so. Not only does he reach for more—"the more terrestrial angel vision, baby!"[14]—but he has sufficiently gained the reader's trust with the deliberateness, intensity, and scope of the early poems. There is overall, retrospectively, a sense of fugue or plainsong, where the chant is set down, fixed, and the variations can then begin to be infinite. There is increasingly a different sense of time—not only much circling, like the gulls of the early poems or the cormorants of the later ones, or even the Ismailis as reported in Henry Corbin's "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism,"[15] an important source for the later Olson—but also soaring excursions. These flights are possible only because the poet has convinced us in those "fivers" such as "Some Good News," "Stiffening, in the Master Founders' Wills," and "Capt Christopher Levett (of York)" near the end of the first *Maximus* volume (as well as "The Gulf of Maine," *Maximus* 278-80), all written in five-line stanzas, that there is pattern control. The image Olson himself used in the last years was the fixed pole amid the phenomenal swirl, and even if that stands finally for himself, his personal ego, which ordinarily is "not very interesting, no / matter / who,"[16] it endures because the poet has *also* constructed a hero, an authority, a Maximus.

The editor's own authority is more limited. Where there are unusual difficulties or where the fate of a poem may hang by a reading of one line or word (more true for a poem, where each word counts like in no other form of literature), it may be possible to publish with the edition, or at least in a separate article dealing with the edition, photographs of the more difficult passages, so that intent readers can see for themselves just

where the impossibilities lie. Such a case might be "I have been an ability—a machine..." (*Maximus* 495-99), where the original holograph winds down into multiple swirlings and diminishing vortices.[17] With photographs, the reader can graphically view the necessity of the editorial decision to break off the poem (indicated by an ellipsis within square brackets), salvaging as much as possible. Often it is a case of reading "fisherman" for "fishermen" or "on" for "or." Such soft or bruised passages seem especially vulnerable to commentators, who are invariably drawn to them and alight, hoping to make what they consider some special discovery. Thus one critic calls attention to the line "its accent is its own mirage" in the 1968 printing of "Maximus, at the Harbor" (the line should have read "its ascent") as a "typical instance of the way in which Olson uses (and abuses) his sources." He acknowledges the original source of the line in Corbin's "Cyclical Time" essay, but goes on to suggest that Olson is arcanely punning, encouraged no doubt by the poet's actually doing so elsewhere in the same line—in which the Arabic *mi'raj,* "ascent," is "translated" into our "mirage."[18]

Example after example is fraught with decision-making necessities and, in certain cases, ambiguities that can only be declared, without exaggeration, to be eternal. In some instances where letters of a word are typed over one another with equal impression (a common enough practice, especially before "self-correcting" typewriters), there is no alternative for the editor but to put both. "Events are imaged as they happen," Olson wrote to Robert Creeley, 25 October 1950; or is it that "events are images"?[19] Olson typed both. In this particular case, Creeley made a typescript—preserved among his papers at the Lilly Library, Indiana University—of Olson's letter, reading the word as "imaged" (though both manuscript and context continue to allow room for doubt). Another one of the more perplexing ambiguities, though hardly a crucial one to the life of the poem, is the "trapped" vs. "tripped" alternative in the *Maximus* poem beginning, "They brawled in the streets, trapped the night watchman / with his own stick..." (*Maximus* 294). Was the night watchman actually "tripped" by his own club, as the poet's source, the seventeenth-century record, says he was,[20] or "trapped" by aggressive rowdies? The assembled manuscripts allow for both readings. The meaning is clear and unchanged in either case, so there is no loss no matter

what choice is made, although "trapped" by his own club is more imaginative than the more expected "tripped," and it is possible Olson thought so too and let it stand. In such cases, the editor decides to go along with the latest manuscript that can be said to carry the poet's authority, leaving the reader (through the editor's notes) to entertain any lingering alternatives—whether the watchman was tripped to the cobbles, or pinned up against the wall, or halted in his tracks by the threat of an upraised billy.

The question must eventually be raised, to what extent does an editor correct a text? The word Olson most abused, in terms of spelling, throughout his manuscripts, was—ironically, no doubt, for a poet—"rhythm." Spellings of "rythm," "rythym," "rhythym," "rhthym," even "rhymthm," have been observed. These should have been editorially corrected—either silently or, preferably, within brackets—or pointed to with a "*sic,*" in such a publication as Olson's *Letters for Origin.* Otherwise, the appearance may achieve unwarranted significance and lead a critic to make a case for the spelling as a kind of intentional pun. Indeed, the author of a study of *Maximus* confidently writes: "Olson's spelling of 'rhythym' (rhyt-him) is, of course, to underscore the personal, immediate sense of measure as the only useful understanding of time."[21] Whereas, in fact, the spelling is just a simple, repeated error that occurs throughout Olson's letters to Cid Corman (the instance cited), just as it does his letters to Creeley and elsewhere among his writings. In fact, an instance of it can be noted as early as typed notes from the 1930s among his papers. It is simply one of those irremediable, irredeemable, almost congenital errors that all of us have; the only word so consistently mangled by Olson. But the critic was justified in seizing upon it, having had every reason to expect the editor to deal with the unusual spelling and resolve it satisfactorily—as either an error or a meaningful misspelling. Otherwise, it is given more significance than it deserves and comes near to being one of the fabled "Freudian slips."

The silent correction of misspellings raises another interesting question. How is such a notion to be reconciled with some poets' insistence on the value of error, which was sometimes Pound's position as well as Olson's? One thing to consider is that acceptance of "parapraxis" or meaningful error is a later insistence with Olson, beginning around 1961

or 1962. From that point on, his revision chiefly takes the form of omitting a poem from the *Maximus* series rather than rewriting it or manipulating individual lines and words. Previously, evidence from earlier manuscripts indicates that his practice had been to consciously whittle a product. There are extensive revisions throughout his early manuscripts; in some cases, such as "The Kingfishers," "Projective Verse," and "Human Universe," as many as several drafts. His first important essays, "Lear and Moby-Dick" and "Dostoevsky and the Possessed," were repeatedly reworked (even though the former was initially written in a 72-hour sitting, assisted by two quarts of Vat 69 whiskey[22]), while "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," prepared in 1958 for the *Chicago Review,* was an agony to write, taking him several weeks. Later, whether due to a change of habit or of compositional theory, what is commonly known as craft is less a deliberate factor in his writings, specifically in regard to this matter of revision or self-improvement. This is as true for his correspondence as for poems and essays. Whereas in the 1930s and 1940s he drafted versions of letters, later, delighting in the spontaneity of performance, he dashed off responses or inquiries, correcting or refocusing himself as he went along, in the act of writing. Undoubtedly it was a matter of confidence and achieved "voice" as much as any pressure of time. But also, his outlook had changed: revision was superseded by vision.

An editor must be careful not to impose an order, a correctness, where there is none intended. David Porter reminds us—after surveying Emily Dickinson's manuscripts in the Robert Frost Library at Amherst, where one verse appears on back of instructions for operating a kerosene lamp, another is begun on the back of a cooking-chocolate wrapper—all the oddments of living—how the standard edition of her work, no matter how skillful and indispensable, may misrepresent the "essential" Dickinson. "It makes her seem orderly and deliberate. The even margins and spacing, the straight lines, each with a capital at the beginning, the stanzaic regularity, the visual craftsmanship, the *finality* and definiteness: all are misleading. It is just that definiteness that is missing from her work."[23] How true also for the later Olson, whose papers now in acid-free folders in Connecticut are no different—typing bond held together by straight pins, poems on backs of envelopes or envelopes torn apart to

get at the fresh space within, poems on menus and restaurant placemats, on a Bic pen wrapper, a deaf-mute alphabet card, a paycheck stub, his son's schoolwork—right down to the paper towels of his deathbed notes.[24] All evidence of the continuity of creation. Keep me from ever finishing anything, wrote Melville; the "finished" poem is only one of many conventions of art and mind.

Above all, the scholar-editor must eschew any of the imperialisms of scholarship, even more than the occasional pedantries of a publisher's "house style." The editor must not "correct" a poet's text by imposing a superior or "missionary" scholarship upon the native text, no matter how well intentioned, at least without some note of explanation. There is nothing more disturbing than to find the alteration of Pound's succinct and appealing "*harpes et luthes*"—which could be the basis of an entire poetics—to "*harpes et luz*" in the 1975 New Directions edition of *The Cantos,* apparently on the sole authority of scholar Eva Hesse's recommendation.[25] In point of fact, the phrase as it appears in Canto 45 is an allusion to Villon's "ballade pour prier Nostre Dame," some texts of which have "*luths,*" other "*leuz*" or "*luz,*" for "lutes." Pound's addition of the *e* simply makes the word parallel with "*harpes,*" at the same time giving it an "old" English air (matching the "hath" of a previous line). A poetry without a sustaining predictability of rhyme and meter may depend more on greater subtleties.

Continuing the survey of editorial responsibilities, one of the few developments the textual critic of recent writing has to be concerned with more so than ever before—both because of the oral nature of much postmodern poetry, but also due to the advances of technology—are tape recordings (and now, videotapes). There are a large number of recordings of the poets reading their own work, as well as of interviews, discussions, and lectures; almost every poet who came into prominence after 1950 is well represented. It might be one of the chief differences between postmodern textual criticism and earlier efforts—even qualitatively, by affecting our understanding of what constitutes a definitive text.

One of the more important questions regarding the use of recordings as copy texts (definitive texts) was raised by Olson's reading of poems during the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference. Does a poet's reading, where he obviously departs from the printed text to improvise or

interject, count? Olson stressed the poet's linguistic birthright: "You know, a poet, when he's alive, whether he talks or reads you his poems is [it's?] the same thing."[26] In this instance, he reads the line, "Any season, in this fresh time" from his "Ode on Nativity," as "in this fresh tune," pausing to interject, " 'time' is what I [originally] wrote."[27] Does the substitution of "tune," then constitute an authorized reading and, because it is later than all published manuscripts, become the copy text? Again, a little later Olson reads "the instant" for "the infant" and adds the rhyme "stalks" to accompany "when the divine tempter also walks." Are these spontaneities to be considered legitimate alternatives and included as such in a definitive edition? The noted Old English scholar, Jess B. Bessinger, raises the same question regarding a recording of "The Seafarer" that Pound made at Harvard in 1939, some twenty-seven years after its first publication. In his reading, Pound adds a few definite articles and omits modifiers in some lines, thereby "smoothing over the stern angularity of his poem," and Bessinger wonders whether this text might not have greater authority than earlier printed versions.[28] I would not think so, just on the basis that it is chronologically later, but it could have an equal authority and value, and could be published side by side (or at page bottom or in an appendix) in a variorum edition, for the same reasons Olson's improvisations might be taken note of. They can at least be included as variants, not necessarily as "improvements," but as indications of the liveliness of the poet's imagination and continued engagement with his own words.

More problematic by far is where the only known text of a poem is a recorded reading, where the piece is otherwise unpublished or where no known manuscript survives. In that case, at least the words of the text can be given, even though the line breaks and some of the punctuation may only be approximations (which the editor must identify as such) according to breath pauses, despite the fact that carefully monitored pauses on the recording are by themselves no guarantee the original written line divisions are being observed. Once again, the pattern of a poet's habits must serve as a guide. Comparison can be made between other recordings and available printed texts, in cases where such exist, to determine how faithful a poet ordinarily is to line breaks in reading out loud. Actually, it is a practice that varies considerably among poets, each

almost as unique as his or her voiceprint. In public performance, many use the printed, punctuated line as a loose score to be improvised upon rather than strictly followed. There is no fixed rule that the end of a line is to be observed by a breath pause. Some poets follow the natural, grammatical enjambments and syntactic traffic signs, others do not. Robert Creeley once discussed how, as a young poet, he was curious how William Carlos Williams read his poems aloud and especially how he dealt with terminal juncture, first listening to Williams on record, then asking him directly when they initially met. Williams's response was inconclusive—"sometimes I do, sometimes I don't"—although Creeley himself wound up being one of the more rigorous observers of line breaks.

And what of poems like Anne Waldman's "Fast Speaking Woman" and "Lady Tactics," where each performance necessarily, by announced design, involves improvisation, and where the chanting is as much a performance as a poem? Which, then, is the definitive text?

Occasionally, tapes are part of the process of poetic composition itself. Allen Ginsberg first spoke his "Wichita Vortex Sutra" into a portable tape recorder while traveling by Volkswagen bus across Kansas, later transcribing and revising it (and revising it further for *Planet News*). This is not quite a reversal of the traditional process, since print is still the result, but it is an example of the oral primacy.[29] In other cases, we begin with print and create a multiplicity of improvised alternative texts, any one of which might be considered definitive.

There are any number of realities the editor must face. As a reminder that poetry comes wrung from life, that most poetry is written in the traffic of daily reality, and that a manuscript may reflect this, there is John Wieners's powerful "Children of the Working Class," published first in the magazine *Athanor* and collected in his *Behind the State Capitol* (1975). The poem was sent to editor Douglas Calhoun shortly after it was written, on May Day, 1972, in response to a request for material. Among minor emendations in the original typescript, the name of a Massachusetts state hospital initially cited in the poem had been crossed out and "Staid" (a nicely ironic echo with "State") was substituted. A note that Calhoun made upon receiving the manuscript, however, reveals that the poet crossed out the hospital's name only because officials forced his hand. The poem was written while Wieners was committed for a stay in

the hospital after several incidents of bizarre conduct, and when he read the poem in group therapy, the doctors would not permit him to use the name of the hospital. Since he was using the institution's typewriter, he could not prepare the poem to send out without making the change. "Staid" was changed back to "Taunton" in time for the poem's magazine appearance, following a phone call from Wieners. As Calhoun later wrote: "[Wieners] called three or four times, odd hours. Picture him in some corner of the hospital, a deserted office, making calls, glancing over his shoulder, about poetry."[30]

The anecdote serves also as a reminder that changes can be made in a work by means other than the written. George Quasha, who first published Olson's "I'm going to hate to leave this Earthly Paradise," remembered the experience of the poet's "revising over long-distance phone, which amazed me and changed me forever—I could HEAR him thinking and hearing his poem, how he dealt with sound over many lines, the relationships..."[31] In such a case, the editor coming years later cannot wring the telephone wires for confirmation or clarification. But this simply means that absolute certainty is no more possible for an editor than for any other man of faith and enterprise.

More challenging is when a poet about-faces, like Auden, changing an identity or self-image.[32] Again Wieners, one of the most sensitive and supremely lyrical poets of the late 1950s-early 1960s, can continue to serve as example. He is a special case among the poets of the period, since his work more than that of any other has suffered from textual difficulties, often self-inflicted.[33] It raises one of the more interesting if delicate problems in editing: the responsibility of the editor, its natural limitations and its relation to the domain of authorial responsibility.

Striking differences are apparent between the texts in Wieners's later collections and their earliest appearances. There is *The Hotel Wentley Poems,* for example, a sequence written over eight days while staying in a San Francisco hotel room. The book was first published in 1958, and a number of the poems were successfully included in Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* anthology in 1960.[34] A second edition of the poems, printed in 1965, however, was identified on the title page as consisting of the "original versions." Most readers notice the restoration of the full title of "A poem for cocksuckers," but the more important differences

are within the body of the texts, and—my ultimate point may be—not always for the better. Throughout the poems, in the line arrangement and spacing, there is a certain rough genius smoothed out, reduced to regularity. A naivité, which is the charm of these poems (innocence within corruption is their special quality), is now covered up. The sense is of a later hand nervously touching up, tidying, overworking areas. What makes it harder for any editor is that Wieners himself preferred the "original" versions, even choosing those versions for his 1972 *Selected Poems.* Does *Selected Poems,* then, constitute the author's "authorized" text, the furthest development of his art—or a tragic misjudgment and even misrepresentation of his talent?

In some cases, both versions work equally well. For example, the final twenty-eight lines of the revised "Poem for the old man" have been cut away to achieve a different, but no less effective, ending. More often, however, the "original" versions have just the opposite effect than might have been expected. They read, in fact, like later, reworked versions. The differences seem to be, again, the alterations of an uncertain hand seeking to smooth out and improve. But in so doing, the poems are deprived of their later appropriate sharp edge, adding—as in the case of "A poem for record changers"—unnecessary verbiage, going from the crispness and compression of

> Details
> but which are here and
> I hear and shall never
> give up again...

back to

> All dull details
> I can only describe to you,
> but which are here and
> I hear...[35]

A certain defeat enters into the tone when "dull" and "only describe" are tolerated.

The greatest loss, in this writer's opinion, comes in one of Wieners's finest poems, "A poem for painters." A new—though again apparently

"original"—five-line section appears, with gratuitous football imagery:

> Let me ramble here.
> Yet stay within my own yardlines.
> I go out of bounds
> without defense,
> oh attack

("without defense / or attack" in the *Selected Poems* version). There are still more changes made in the poem for its 1972 appearance, again not for the better. In section 5, for example, instead of "is on the face: gone stale," we now have, "on the face's gone stale"—an awkward if not impossible use of "face's." Leave well enough alone! And instead of the subsequent section beginning with the matter-of-fact, unambiguous "Let us stay with what we know," it now begins: "At last the game is over / and the line lengthen"—not only delayed, but with a metaphoric non sequitur. The "line" in that passage may be taken as an extension of the football field's yard lines of the previous metaphor, perhaps, or even a sudden shift to a poetic "line." In either case, the pun, besides being too obvious, is not appropriate: the line does mimetically lengthen at that one point, but it goes back to hug the margin immediately thereafter. The return to the original contributes nothing.

Later in the poem, in the powerful final section, the great summing up is interfered with in the original version by a need to elaborate, an added explanatory note signalled by "yet": "yet by these lines / I betray what little given me. One needs no defense..." Actually, one need not say it outright; the poem itself, in its "revised" bold state, does that work for the poet: "My poems contain... Only the score of a man's / struggle to stay with / what is his own." That direct, that undeniable an assertion. But the greatest disappointment comes at the very end, rendering the final lines anticlimactic in the most conspicuous manner. Instead of concluding the poem on the powerful, awesome image of "twisted faces, / my hands claw out at / only to draw back from the / blood already running there," Wieners goes on to add the completely superfluous and sentimental, "Oh come back, whatever heart / you have left. It is my life / you save. The poem is done." But by then, the poem has melted away.

To keep on with these problems as raised by the texts of Wieners's poems, we return to "Children of the Working Class" as it appears in

Behind the State Capitol. What happens if in the editor's opinion an author loses judgment and, working at cross purposes with himself (or an earlier self), revised an already solid work? Worse, what to do if an author "ruins" his or her own work? How, if at all, to "save" the author from himself? Does an editor have to accept all changes in such a notorious manuscript?

For example, in the Wieners poem there is the line beginning, "There has never been a man yet . . . ," which clearly corrects the earlier appearance of the line in *Athanor,* which reads "There was never been a man yet." "Was" for "has" is presumably a slip and has been beneficially corrected. Now, in selecting the poem for an anthology, an editor might choose to include just that change from the later revised version, but in all other respects keep to the original version. The principle would seem to be that if a revision is the correction of a previous error (as "has . . . been" for "was . . . been" certainly was), the change is necessary and praiseworthy. But if it is a revision of *meaning* as such, then it had best be foregone. It is a very dangerous precedent for an editor to selectively emend, and on the whole the best policy is to adopt versions wholly. Otherwise, too much responsibility slips from the poet and into the hands of the critic. It should not be encouraged. Gains cannot be excerpted at will by the editor; it usurps the author's own role and prerogative. Where would it stop? How quickly before the author's intentions become overridden by the editor's, no matter how kindly, reasonable, well-intentioned? If both versions of a poem are equally interesting, both should be published. If one lacks sufficient strength to stand on its own, it should be withheld, at least until a full critical or variorum edition.

More damaging to the Wieners poem in its later state is its new line arrangement and eccentric typesetting. Lines are broken or suspended without any gain in rhythm. Even worse, words are now divided—broken, really—without any necessity or perceivable advantage, including two- and three-letter words:

> 1907, My Mother was born, I am witness t-
> o the exasperation of gallant human beings at g-
> od, priestly fathers and Her Highness, Holy Mother the Church
> persons who felt they were never given a chance, had n-
> o luck and were flayed at suffering.[36]

What suffer most, perhaps, are lines where the rhythm falls hollow (in the above passage, at least it can be argued that there is continuity in the forced enjambment). There is, for instance, the misplaced emphasis on the isolate "the" in the following passage that is not permitted in the earlier version:

> there are worse, whom you may never see, non-crucial around
> the
> spoke, these you do, seldom...

The pacing is all off, here and in the grand finale of the poem, where instead of delivering the ultimate line in one raised breath, after a single line-space pause to take breath, the revised conclusion is rushed, jumbled, lost in the newly realigned flow. Instead of the stately length of "yes, I am witness not to God's goodness, but his better or less scorn"—in the manner of Whitman—the lines are hastened forward in an undistinguished random flow:

> ...I am witness
> not to Whitman's vision, but instead the
> poorhouses, the mad city asylums and re-
> lief workliness. Yes, I am witness no to
> God's goodness, but his better or less scorn.

The line which has stood extended and exposed, neither defiant nor despairing—without self-pity, but bearing witness with a level keenness that cuts—is now simply folded into place. Any sense of a large stately score is abandoned to a newer nervousness or freneticism, a hapless, ineffectual tumble. It seems to be a textbook exercise in what happens to the measure of a poem if lines are rearranged randomly instead of by heartbeat or brain wave, breath-pause or inflection of meaning.

Postmodern poetics is a relativist poetics; it is relational rather than rational. Flexibility in syntax is one characteristic aspect. Unorthodox capitalization and punctuation are evident throughout Gary Snyder's work, to add another example. In Snyder's fine "To the Chinese Comrades," periods are used for only the strongest pauses, not according to an abstract grammatical consistency. The lower case makes for a chorus of voices, and indentation itself is another kind of meaningful punctuation:

Chairman Mao, you should quit smoking.
Dont bother those philosophers
Build dams, plant trees,
dont kill flies by hand.
Marx was another westerner.
it's all in the head.
You don't need the bomb.
stick to farming.
Write some poems. Swim the river.
those blue overalls are great.
Dont shoot me, let's go drinking.
just
Wait.[37]

Such a procedure is only momentarily inconsistent, hardly confusing. But in Wieners's case, the new changes alienate the rhythm; the poet's authentic voice, his valuable lyricism, is interfered with. In almost every alteration, his initial impulse is the purest one, and further modifications only muddle the lyrical streams. Again, in "Wrapped Up in an Indian Blanket," Willa Cather's "rat eaten rain ruined" book, "found in a Stone House / on a mountain in California," becomes, dully and almost carelessly: "W. Cather's book / from The Stone House / on Big Sur in / California."[38] The reader, or the editor in service of the reader, must often turn back to the rejected versions for the true sense of Wieners's accomplishment.

It might be affirmed that the formally grotesque has its uses—anger, defiance, "*déréglement*" of the reader's senses—but only if used properly, purposely, not yielded to utterly. Lines 7 and 8 of the original typescript of "Children of the Working Class" read: "blanched women, swollen and crudely numb / up before the dark of dawn"—a piece of straightforward naturalism. The same lines have been altered in *Behind the State Capitol* to "blanched women, swollen and crudely numb / ered before the dark of dawn," which is a gain, actually, in syncopation and depth of meaning. The transformation of "numb" into "numbered" creates rhythmic diversity and some surprise, while sacrificing nothing of the previous descriptive sense: the women are both numb and now also numbered. The poet invokes a hospital ward's roll-call or body-count, the institutional dehumanizing of patients (or clients, as they are now

euphemistically called, depriving them even of the "patience" that characterizes the foredoomed). It is a fine touch in the poem. However, in regard to such changes—in something as integral as a poem, at least—the editor cannot pick and choose among versions, shopping for acceptable revisions. The poems we are dealing with are discrete entities, organisms, not machines of interchangeable parts. The editor is without authority to perform "social work," to "improve" the poet, in cases where the author is treated as client or victim of his or her own humanness. We decry the presumption of the editor in submitting the case of something so individualistic as a poem to an abstract common good or "house style." The value is in the effective uniqueness of the language, or not at all. No textual critic has ever saved an author from oblivion.

Every editor's project has its epic (at least in the editor's eyes) examples of error and paradox, but they are really most infinite only in their variety. As might have been foretold, it is the larger principles that count—care, wariness, consistency, persistence—which are at times a counterpoint to the freedom of the artist. In the end it is pragma rather than dogma that counts. The editor of postmodern texts like that of any other texts, whether of law, scripture, or Euripides, must bear down with common, tenacious sense, allow imaginative possibilities, and practice empathetic reasoning—as if there wasn't any other way to proceed.

Notes:

1. Edited by the present writer and published by the University of California Press in 1983. Page references used here, e.g. *Maximus* 89, are to that edition. See also my *Editing The Maximus Poems* (Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut Library, 1983), which discusses the editing of volume three from among Olson's papers at the University of Connecticut Library.

2. "A Collation of Two Texts of *The Cantos,*" *The Pound Newsletter,* no. 6 (April 1955), pp. 5-13, and Barbara C. Eastman, *Ezra Pound's Cantos: The Story of the Text 1948-1975* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1979), p. 75.

3. See *OLSON: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives,* no. 4 (Fall 1975), p. 113. The bibliographers were not alone in being taken in. John Wieners wrote Olson, 9 March 1957 (letter in Literary Archives, University of Connecticut Library): "Were you the one who did Queen Street Burle-Q in that COMBUST—? I can't tell from the layout, but don't answer you rat you did."

4. See *Fubbalo,* no. 1 (Summer 1964), p. [ii]. Olson's original manuscript is at the Spencer Library, University of Kansas.

5. Even in the case of editing the California *Maximus,* in seeking to correct an error on one page (an "of" for an "or" in Maximus 151, 1. 6), a new one (another "of" for an "or") was actually introduced two lines earlier—apparently in the confusion of confirming changes by telephone—although the error would make perfect sense to a reader and its existence would only be known by the collator of texts (see *Editing The Maximus Poems,* p. 14). There is no doubt error has a life of its own, and survives in the universe as a kind of Andromeda strain (after Michael Crichton's novel).

6. Editor's Afterword, *The Maximus Poems,* p. 638.

7. An authoritative text may turn up anywhere. A copy of Ed Sanders's *Poem From Jail* published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books in 1963, bearing an inscription to a New York book dealer, 16 September 1964, and acquired by the University of Connecticut Library, contains two corrections potentially not available elsewhere. On p. 4, in the passage

> And Lady
> .....
> too old now
> to fuck for the
> China Lobby,

Sanders has crossed out "Lady" and substituted "Madame / Chaing [*sic*] Kai Chek," noting that "Ferlinghetti was afraid the 'China Lobby' wd sue his ass off." Later in the same copy, on p. 12, he has added "that" to line 15 to make, "Let that I leave behind..."

This discovery, if nothing else, sends the editor back to the author's original manuscripts, which fortunately, in this case, are preserved among the poet's papers (also at the University of Connecticut Library—though not the original holograph, which had been written in jail on toilet paper and smuggled out in Sanders's shoe). There among the papers, it can be found that Ferlinghetti wrote Sanders on first reading the poem, "you'll get sued, his soldiers will come for you," and later, 11 April 1962, after accepting the work for publication, that the passage "is so libelous that I might really be sued for lockstock&barrel, literally. Could you give her a pseudonym like: Madame Fuk U?... I want to leave the word fuck, and this would be the best way around it." The substitute dotted line was the final solution, even though Sanders had added in the margin of a fresh typescript prepared for the printer, hoping to forestall the problem, "source for this information is Field Marshall Montgomery's Memoirs."

8. Manuscript at Simon Fraser University Library.

9. See *Editing the Maximus Poems,* p. xvii n.2.

10. See my *Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 255-56. In the poem beginning "Dogtown the dog town..." (*Maximus* 188), Olson again refers to "the mother city... METRO- / POLIS"—another argument for a hyphen over a dash.

11. W.W. Greg's distinction between meaningful verbal changes and less significant variants such as spelling and punctuation, in his "The Rationale of Copy-Text," a classic text of textual criticism, included in the excellent anthology, *Art and Error: Modern Textual Editing,* eds. Ronald Gottesman and Scott Bennett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 17-36. Ordinarily, Greg's distinctions have little relevance to a poetry

where each comma or dash can change or create a meaning.

12. What also might legitimize Olson's substitution of Penelope for Persephone—despite the fact that poppies are associated with Hell (and Demeter) and the King *annually* awaits *Penelope's* return, not vice verse—is that Olson cites "the King of the Earth," not of Hell or the Underworld, which by a broad interpretation could be Odysseus.

13. See also *A Guide to the Maximus Poems,* pp. l-li.

14. Olson's phrase from his "Reading at Berkeley," in *Muthologos: The Collected Lectures & Interviews,* ed. George F. Butterick (Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1978), I, 112.

15. In *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks,* ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Pantheon, 1957), pp. 115-72.

16. Olson's conclusion to "Against Wisdom As Such," in *Human Universe and Other Essays,* ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 71.

17. See *Editing The Maximus Poems,* Appendix 1, pp. 2-13.

18. See *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* (London: Cape Goliard, 1968), p. [71]; Corbin, "Cyclical Time," p. 167; and Don Byrd, *Charles Olson's* Maximus (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1980, pp. 137-38. The line appears correctly in the poem's first publication in *12 Poets & 1 Painter,* ed. Donald M. Allen (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1964), p. 30.

Another critic calls attention to the typographical errors in both *The Distances* and *Archaeologist of Morning* printings of "Anecdotes of the Late War," saying "Olson's deliberate 'illiteracy' almost obviates complaints such as these, for in most cases a partisan apologist could easily construct a protective rationale for even the most blatant typographical or grammatical offense," and more rightly points out that "instances like these breed suspicion that perhaps more than a few projective flights of genius might have really been mere typographical blunders. The methodology of this poem is idiosyncratically difficult as it is without interpretive red herrings such as these" (Thomas F. Merrill, *The Poetry of Charles Olson: A Primer,* Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1982, p. 115). Yet the critic himself not only fails to check the poem against the original 1955 published text, but mistakes as an error the passage, "the elevator / goink down"—a clear bit of dialectal color!

19. See *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence,* ed. George F. Butterick (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1981), III, 135.

20. See *A Guide to the Maximus Poems,* pp. 410-11.

21. Byrd, *Charles Olson's* Maximus, p. 33.

22. *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley,* III, 132.

23. "Emily Dickinson, The First Modern," *New Boston Review,* 6 (Jan.-Feb. 1981), p. 17. See also Porter's *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 2-3.

24. "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum," OLSON, no. 3 (Spring 1975), pp. 64-92.

25. Eastman, *Ezra Pound's Cantos,* p. 75. It is unlikely that Pound is punning on Spanish "light," despite the predominance of that subject throughout the poems.

26. *Muthologos,* I, 111. Olson continues: "And when [a poet] is made of three parts—his life, his mouth, and his poem—then, by god, the earth belongs to us!" See also Michael Davidson's admirable discussion of the role of tapes, " 'By ear, he sd': Audio-Tapes and Contemporary Criticism," *Credences,* n.s. 1 (1981), pp. 105-20.

27. *Muthologos,* I, 105. See also Olson's reading of "Letter 10" and "On First Looking Out of Juan De La Cosa's Eyes," *Muthologos,* I, 137 ff.

28. "The Oral Text of Ezra Pound's 'The Seafarer,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 47 (April 1961), pp. 173-77. Hugh Kenner reminds us of another form of the difficulty in relation to Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium"—while offering other practical wisdom—in his "Reflections on the Status of the Text," *Cumberland Poetry Review,* 1 (Winter 1981), p. 66.

29. See Ginsberg, "Improvised Poetics," in *Composed on the Tongue,* ed. Donald Allen (Bolinas, CA: Grey Fox, 1980), pp. 26 ff. Ginsberg also states on p. 31 there: "That written form is different from tape-poems when transcribed on the page. Though it's written down from the tape recorder, the tape process got me *talking* more..." A comparison of the "Wichita Vortex Sutra" tapes and the poet's successive manuscript transcriptions would undoubtedly be one of the most rewarding possible explorations of the entire relation between oral poetry and poetry written directly for the page.

Even as this essay was being prepared, Wang Laboratories of Lowell, Mass., a maker of computers and word processing equipment, announced a machine able to automatically type spoken English. The dictation (or poem) is spoken into a phone and the "editing" is done on a computer terminal screen, which represents every few seconds of speech digitally, by a blip; the dictation can then be transmitted directly and electronicallv to a terminal for typing. The implications for poetic composition and consequent textual criticism are, in the words of Olson's "*Later Note on Letter # 15*" (*Maximus* 249), "yet to be found out."

30. Letter to the author, 28 September 1979. Wieners's original typescript and Calhoun's contemporary note concerning the phone calls are now in the Poetry Collection, State University of New York at Buffalo Libraries.

31. Letter to the author, 4 July 1980.

32. In poems like "In Time of War" and "September 1, 1939." See especially Joseph Warren Beach, *The Making of the Auden Canon* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), which deals at length with some of the problems raised in what follows.

33. See also my article on Wieners in *Contemporary Poets,* ed. James Vinson, 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1980), pp. 1652-54.

34. There was also a second printing of *The Hotel Wentley Poems* in early 1959, with "I had love" (line 24 of "A poem for painters") corrected to "I held love," along with "other minor resettings" (*A Bibliography of the Auerhahn Press,* Berkeley: Poltroon Press, 1976, p. 71). It was this corrected text that appeared in *The New American Poetry,* ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 365-69.

35. The same passage is revised again in *Selected Poems* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 21, to:

All dull details
I only describe
but which are here
I hear and shall never
give up again

—a change made as early as 1967, when the volume had been typeset but not released by the publisher, in part because of just such uncertainties (author's uncorrected galleys in Literary Archives, University of Connecticut Library).

36. Wieners's entire volume shows evidence of such eccentric typesetting (erratic spacing and capitalization, unpredictable punctuation, as if the machine had galloped away from its rider)—to such an extent it must be accepted as the "style" of the book, with its gold lamé covers lettered in silver and autobiographical photo-collages plus "abbreviated prose insights" throughout. There is something of the defiantly "punk" mixed with a desire for glamor in Wieners's last work that goes beyond "camp," and whether it is a personal idiosyncrasy or a new cultural style, anticipating (in 1975) the emerging "New Wave" fashion of the later 1970s, it is not safely possible to say. In any case, the book's design precisely mirrors the compositional technique of the individual poems and especially their diction, which is laboriously formal, malaproprian yet sentimental, simultaneously haggard and delicate.

In a review of *Behind the State Capitol,* Charley Shively, a friend of the poet and part of the collective that published the volume, suggests the erratic spelling and punctuation are intended. See "What Happened to the Mind of John Wieners?" *Gay Sunshine,* nos. 26-27 (Winter 1975-76), pp. 32-33. The form of the published poems is not intentional in all regards, however. A comparison of the Good Gay Poets text with the photocopy of Wieners's original typescript used for the edition (now in the Literay Archives, University of Connecticut Library) reveals significant differences of spacing within lines. For example, the changes in lines 39-43 (quoted here) and continuing to the end of the poem, are all Wieners's own decisions; however, some of the other lineation is simply the result of the willingness of the book's designer and publisher to allow carry-over lines (those too long to fit within the established margins of the volume) to be set flush left, without any indentation or other indication (such as open square brackets) that they were part of the original long line preceding. This is most noticeable in lines 8-9, 16-17 (which I single out for criticism below), 20-21, 22-23, and the final two lines (where the difference is inconsequential)—thus, all adding to the sense of crippled rhythm. Whereas, obvious typographical errors, such as the transposition in line 15, "Inidanheads," were allowed to remain. The result is a detrimental production, no favor to the integrity of the author's text.

Within limits, many of these "problems" as described might be considered characteristic of the postmodern impulse: a projection of the form from within. Nor are such minute word divisions and shavings *always* detrimental. One need only see, for example, the work of Susan Howe, although she has clearly established the "all-over" as her form from the start of her poems. For Wieners in the "mainstream" of the postmodern and its complexities, see also Douglas Messerli, "John Wieners and a 'Post-Modernist' Quandary," *Sun & Moon,* no. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 86-104.

37. *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 102.

38. The first version is in *Ace of Pentacles* (New York: Carr & Wilson, 1964), p. 19; the second, now stifled in three-line stanzas, is in *Selected Poems,* p. 46.

FROM

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF CHARLES OLSON: 1940-49

Edited by George Butterick

The following poems will be included in *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson,* to be published by the University of California Press. None have ever been published before. They have been selected from among the poet's papers at the University of Connecticut Library. In *Sulfur* #12 we will present a second selection from the years 1950-57, and in *Sulfur* #13, a third selection from 1958-64.

WHITE HORSE

White horse he was, to her black foal.
Behold! they were desire
They wooed, against a world in shoal
feared their fire.

He grew more human,
less woman she,
image approached
animality.

With grace he asked
return to world;
reply and hate,
to a tree she curled.

MARRY THE MARROW

Marrow unvisited,
And then, visited,
The bones gone and the needed waters' return:
A tight relax as of the sea
Against the land
In flood.

Structure! least steel, most liquid:
The Annisquam and the Atlantic
At high fulfilled the land,
Brimmed and eased it.

Stretched fabric across the hips of the earth,
French cut,
Discovering the global curve beneath.

(Death is the untensed, the rigid,
What the worms enjoy,
Wood,
Naught.)

("There's tricks i' th' world,"
And disaster,
And so with love.)

But there's instancy.
And to lie in wait for it,
And to seize it,
It is to justify the stars.

Annul the Milky Way we do.
But then, quick as star's fall,
Your Cassiopeia and Charles' Wain do burn.

There's structure in the heavens.
Sickness is, to let the clouds decide.
Sometimes we make the sky.

Shall we string and tense the marrow more?

FABLE FOR SLUMBER

An animal dwelt
In the body of a child.
Animal and child,
The man was wild.

The child asked all,
His appetite huge.
The world so small
Gave subterfuge.

Who failed the child
The animal struck.
In a world too mild
The man was amok.

His hate a tooth,
His word a claw,
His anger truth
His ego law.

The child of love
Made man of hate,
The frustrate child
The animal ate.

THE HOUSE

The land outside, and the night is the enemy's.

I watched their night descend and cause our eyes to scatter like small animals. I saw the invaded land separate, break up to islands in a flood then to be surrounded easily by their arms.

I am in this house with many people whom I love though none I intimately know. I pass from room to room offering a solace they, not I sitting among them, need. They are aware as I there is night and no land beyond the circle of light this kerosene lamp sweetens.

Nor they nor I speak for their eyes are quiet, do not scatter.

Inside this house we sit and no longer does it seem to matter that, without, there is no man between the black of water and of night.

MINDANAO

Where you are deep
I am
in seed's leap
found

Naked diver
dove

in blue
and found no pearl
but you!

Returned to day
my eyes stay
dark
and see
that verity!

RAPHAEL

Last night I heard
Raphael had
A concept of negation.
But when did concept
Ever lead to creation?
When God conceived
Was He deceived
And took it for negation?
When Adam delved and Eve span
And made us all a nation
Was that
—negation?

THE NIGHT

I waked, and sat out the watch, the night.
With a full moon the land was bright.

> I had disliked them both, flight doctor, engineer
> the latter a pulp crammed with 'sir'
> and Medical Dick, theatric, stuffed with career
> dead men in his mouth, and a sex leer

At three the baby cried in the house next door.
The white dog fed her pups at four.

> I disposed of their argument: cold or dry run
> with the warhead in, the QED
> is a hit, and death

In the neighborhood at six there was an unheard stir.
Men's feet scratched the street in half an hour.

> I remembered an accident on a city street:
> the human body broken is a doll of flesh.
> They said it was a hand at the water's break
> disclosed the pilot in the mangrove mesh.

Motors roar in the predawn dark.
Cannon at seven sound the end of sleep.

> In the morning she said my skin was soft
> my eyes brown, and round like a boy's
> my flesh pink: it was the night.

SHE

You are to me, love, half family half tree
You go in two directions, double my joy
Swift away and sure at home, Atalanta and Penelope

Less the latter than her quality
Men have not made the image of:
A permanence, a skill we only value now
That women, as a rule, not only cannot cook, my love
But cannot—rhyme—as well!

It is not chastity and tricks
But taste and wonder, knacks
Of trees and wind, hills and their covering
Contour of earth and undersurge of sea

You are to me, love, these, a simile
To run around my metaphor
And laugh, and jibe with glee
The bulk of my magnificence
The consequence of me!

SHE, THUS:

The bottom of the air is disturbed
as with an undertow
Breathing is difficult,
and though the winds blow
Heaviness is upon me.

His strictures tighten, bind my wonder
Cramp the questions of my flesh.
And the thunder of his voice!
Huddle-muddle in my ear.

I cannot recapture the play I need,
the run and nonny of a sun and sea.
I am too quick for his slow pace.
The flight of my blood, Atalanta race
Guys his deliberate course.

He drops gold apples. I stop, admire.
Something he fails to do hurts like wire.

Intent, a bird, I ask if this be love.
Turtle-wise, he knows, appetite on move.

I work and, inside, prick myself, a needle.
I waste, and call myself a weed, a nettle.
Yet know I am as lovely as a flower,
as subtle as the image in the pool,
a queen of love, fashioned for misrule.

In the meadow where he wooed me on that rock I caught.

I look back and there, apt, he comes.
I lose my step: where are the other ones?
He does not seem to run the faster
And yet, I do not know, he is the master.

O make the wind blow sweeter
O make the air be light
For I would have my breath again
And be your love tonight!

BIRTH'S OBITUARY

Plane's flight your helix, transcontinental blood
Of Indian girl, fledged by the modern,
New Archeopteryx, you Hart Crane
Flew where others falter.

I remember your death, and reject all answers.
Noon, high time, at Orizaba stern you stood.
In ecstasy of wake you who made a bridge leaped!
Span made act, your death another Myth propelled.

Space, our shroud and swaddle, makes each a navigator.
Cathay lies where we must go, and if you end
In channel as another did in chains,
Oh Hart, wave-right you are!

You drank the poison as Crockett the cloud,
Tall man's thirst. After slake of sea,
Gyre on your tongue the tempest of the moon
Loud in your throad the wings of the sun.

A TRANSLATION

from Havelock Ellis

This was her dream:

I had gone to bed worried with the troubles of the day,
and full of fierce revolt against society.
I tried to soothe myself with thoughts of him, away.

I do not know at what hour of the night
I seemed to find myself, quite sudden, naked
in a sweet place round with sun
and full of joy to walk alone thus bathed in light.

And as I walked my skin grew firm, my breasts regained
Their beauty and their youth. With one thing only was I stained:
on my body the wrinkles of childbirth still remained.
Which my hands from instinct tried to hide
While my heart so gently to me cried:

"They are the wounds of the war to which women go;
he cannot but love you so."

Then I knew.
And knew that I could tell him:
there is this corner in the world
where we may walk quite naked without shame.

Thus did she dream.

HER DREAM, HALF REMEMBERED

A Translation from Havelock Ellis

There, quick, a crowd was on me. Jugglers, giants,
Sullen hunchbacks, tumbling dwarfs. Acrobats whirled,
And I was full of fear of the returning world.

But there was one, a man, small, erect, all bronze
His copper skin patina to my eye
Who watched me dance, with half descent and bound

From holly tree to sunwhite shadowed ground.

He held the flute he played with serpent arms,
And kissed me as I floated down with knees apart
Cubed and motleyed like some clown, astart.

KEY WEST

"Just the kind of a guy who
used to play the piano
in the whore houses
when I was a kid,"

was what Sully said.
He had me pegged.

"You'd think, from the size of him,
he'd be a stevedor," was Canby's idea.
"But he don't know any more about low poker
than a hog does about the Bible!"

At first they figured I was F.B.I.
Ditto three sailors at the Cuban place
where I went for bollos and fried salami.
"Listen, jerk, nobody don't work
in a dump like this in war."
"If he don't, he must be queer"

or

—an FBI piano player

in a whore house

THE WINTER AFTER

Bitter winter

Rain
Rain down, all moving things
Blind, with care as under-
ground go by each
Turned in
claws across the day
curled in their dark intent
go where?
will rain
does the sun
will rain put out
does the sun know
will rain put out the fire,
the bitter fire?

Winter wind
City wind
enters the bones
as fear comes

blows down as men move
weak
the next corner colder than the bones are cold

Cold, when the fire comes
the wind will make
will the wind
the fire higher
will the wind be left
or the heat be too much for the wind and the rain?

Wet snow
the wet street slow to let it gather
as men the death ahead
it falls as night exists
inhabiting itself
falls, whitens roof, pavement, ground
and if men stir

or do the ashes also burn
when men ignite the nitrogen of air?

THE DRAGON-FLY

Noon. The tall trees uphold the sky
The wind makes a sea of the ripening rye.
But the sun is the element of the dragon-fly:

The oats are green, green is the rye
The great green is the dragon-fly

A round moon makes of the night a stage
Sets down spaced black trees as properties
Peoples the lawn with swans and arabesques:

But the black of the wing of the dragon-fly
Plants the night in the middle of the rye.

A FISH IS THE FLOWER OF WATER

You who follow Henry Thoreau
beware

Forbear to drive life into a corner
and think to trap her
She will slip away like any girl

Men curiously without appetite
want wild muskrat meat

IGOR STRAVINSKY

An Homage

On the edge of woods
(as we are)
the advance, retreat of both
man as nature, nature as more than man
the sounds
tempi
fable
struggle-borne

On the edge of man
a horn a hooded step
by two white ropes an Echo led
to this levitican point

On the edge
tympanum and unicorn
telluric cube
he the balance—
And the scale the hounds
man, and the maiden both, torn

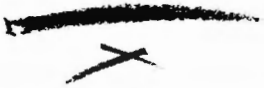
On the edge of woods
rock water
(peacocks in the sun)
a cello rubs itself against a tree.

DURA

To come to the look in the sacrificer's eyes

the archaic sought, the harshness
unsought

And the eyes which should burst
do not.



NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS.

Pound After Torrey & Other Futures

Michael Palmer's reasonable review of E. Fuller Torrey's *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeths* in *Sulfur 10* appears to be the only cool-headed response to that wasps' nest lobbed onto the assembly-line of the Pound industry. Elsewhere, tempers are hot. A leading disciple has told me he'd like to strangle Torrey; *Paideuma* (the "Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship") has asked readers to compile lists of inaccuracies in the book, and the magazine has started off what looks to be a long campaign with a nasty article in its latest issue titled "On E. Fuller Torrey, the Baiting of Dead Giants."

Such a response—particularly now that excerpts from the book have been mass-circulated in *Esquire* and *Psychology Today*—is predict-

able enough. And *The Roots of Treason* is, there's no question, an unrelievedly sleazy book on the sleazy side of Pound. Torrey, who's a shrink at St. Elizabeths, cannot write, knows nothing about poetry, doesn't think much of Pound as a poet, and is largely unable to evaluate the information he has assembled. The book revels in all of the bad news without considering any of the news that will stay news; and it is full of mistakes.

Nevertheless... I find it, in its way, the most important book on Pound since Kenner's *The Pound Era.* Torrey, clumsy as he is, has turned the rock over. We've always known what was there, but from now on it will be difficult for those of us who love Pound to keep gazing at the stars and still ignore the strange creatures running over our feet.

There have tended to be two camps, and only two camps. The Pound-haters dismissed the poetry by referring to the politics and to the bigotry. The Pound-lovers steadfastly read the literary works, keeping their eyes on the palaces in smoky light and the great ball of crystal, never glancing at what had fertilized such growth. In the thousands of elegant and erudite pages of *Paideuma,* for example, I can remember only one article which dealt, rather mildly, with Pound's fear and hatred of Jews. His relationship to types like John Kasper (who, in the 1950's, was throwing bombs at integrating elementary schools) is never mentioned.

[Worse, *Paideuma* appears to welcome those who are, uh, not unhappy with Pound's politics. The attack on Torrey by William French in the latest issue contains this bon mot on the title *The Roots of Treason*: "I thought for a moment it might be about Jane Fonda and the Viet Cong, but that was silly of me." Tart! Another *Paideuma* regular, Reno Odlin, will suddenly stop a scholarly note dead in its tracks to defend the honor of Franco or Pétain. *Paideuma,* despite the presence of its liberal co-editor, Burton Hatlin, seems reluctant to red-pencil such extraneous matter.]

The official line has remained unchanged since the Bollingen Prize controversy. Pound was not an anti-Semite: he was using Jews as medieval symbols of usura, he was only attacking certain rich Jews—and didn't he promote Zukofsky? Pound was not a Fascist: he (unfortunately) admired Mussolini, the drainer of swamps and enforcer of RR timetables. As for the broadcasts: he did not commit treason, but was merely airing economic views which he (right or wrong) thought would save America. Besides he was crazy—that is, too crazy to be tried for treason, but otherwise not crazy.

Thanks to the hard information in Fuller Torrey's book—the excerpts from unpublished material, not Torrey's comments on it—and the publication a few years ago of the transcripts of the radio broadcasts (*Ezra Pound Speaking*) the history of Pound, and the so-called Pound era, will surely have to be rewritten. What I hope is that it will be written by the Pound lovers, not the haters—that the lovers will finally accept both the heaven and hell of the man's mind and work. Rather than jump on the obvious flaws in Torrey's scholarship—as though he matters—we should start thinking about the evidence he presents.

Pound was a lifelong Jew-hater, not the "suburban anti-Semite" he confessed to Allen Ginsberg, but an obsessive, paranoid hater of Jews. Had his cultural nexus been Northern Europe rather than the Mediterranean, had he not toed the Greco-Roman-cradle-of-civilization line so literally, he would have been an enthusiastic Nazi. (During the war he signed at least some letters with swastikas and "Heil Hitler!"; in the broadcasts he recommended *Mein Kampf*.) His hatred of blacks extended to—when he was in St. Elizabeths in the 1950's—support for the White Citizens Council (for whom he wrote pamphlets), the Ku Klux Klan, and other such groups. There's no question that John Kasper was Pound's hit man as he instigated race riots through the South. [Let's see *Paideuma* publish the Pound-Kasper correspondence!]

Whether or not Pound actually committed treason is a circular question and, finally, not terribly interesting. [Concern over treason requires both a nationalistic ardor and enough doubt in one's country to believe that an individual outside the power structure could seriously effect its downfall.] Nevertheless, Pound undoubtedly favored the enemy in time of war: he wanted a Fascist Europe, if not a Fascist U.S. Treason, however, implies effective actions in support of the enemy. To my mind, his broadcasts were not treasonous simply because they were useless. One has to be familiar with the entire Pound pantheon, from Confucius to the Malatestas, to begin to follow them. Even then the speeches are often incomprehensible. Whom could they have influenced? Perhaps a young Hugh Kenner, tuning in late at night on his (probably homemade) shortwave, but not many others. Pound was indeed crying "Fire!" in a crowded theater, but he was crying "Fire!" in Bulgarian.

In that, he was probably crazy: the belief that one is relaying information when nobody knows what you're talking about. And there is a case to be made that Fascism and racism are themselves insane—if one assumes that political and social evil is a form of insanity. But there is no

doubt—why do the Poundians try to deny it?—that he was not *legally* insane. Legal insanity means 1) not in one's senses when one committed a crime; or 2) unable to understand the proceedings of one's own trial. The first is inapplicable to Pound; and so is the second. [The latter a piece of law that is really quite touching: How much of one's other trials does one understand?] There's plenty of evidence, and no contrary evidence, that Pound throughout the St. Elizabeths years was completely aware of everything going on about him. That his responses could be unusual is beside the point.

Further—and again, why do the Poundians deny it still?—there's no question that Dr. Overholser, the head of the hospital, kept the law at bay by issuing misleading reports on Pound's condition. If he hadn't Pound probably would have been executed. Overholser—and this is Torrey's major complaint, as it's the one that interests him professionally—took justice into his own hands. Thus the "secret" of St. Elizabeths: Overholser's wise and criminal acts. I imagine few of us share Torrey's indignation that a member of the psychiatric profession kept the government from murdering the country's best poet.

Torrey tends to characterize the St. Elizabeths years as funky party time—a long stretch from the evidence. But interestingly even the orthodox are coming around to a new reading of Pound's "incarceration." It may well be that it was the happiest time of Pound's life, or at least of the later life. He was without financial worries; he had full and uninterrupted time to write, a steady stream of people to talk to—after the isolation of wartime Rapallo—and a few young lovers. Carroll Terrell even believes that if well-meaning friends hadn't sprung Pound he would have finished the *Cantos.* Instead, he was thrown back to his particularly messy life. And it was then, after he had left the hospital, that he broke down and fell into silence.

Torrey's polemic, most of all, serves to underscore how, elsewhere, the books are being cooked on almost all the American moderns. For example, throughout Paul Mariani's biography of William Carlos Williams there are quotations from Doctor Bill on Jews: "lewd Jew's eyes," "horrible overfed Jewish types," "some fucking bastard of a yid," "some smart kike" (lawyer, that is, who might try to sue him for libel). A Williams short story begins: "He was one of those fresh Jewish types you want to kill at sight, the presuming poor whose looks change the minute cash is mentioned." His 1939 essay "Against the Weather" even asserts that Judaism is a "tribal-religious cult" that is "precisely the

equivalent" of Fascism. Yet Mariani, in the one paragraph of his 900-page book that discusses Williams' racism and anti-Semitism, brushes it off: WCW was "a product of his times" who did not "always escape the popular racial myths of his time." Torrey, whatever conclusions one wants to draw, at least gives us a clearer idea of what the modernists were talking about—and how they were talking:

> Pound, letter to Williams, 1936: "jews having been circumcised for centuries/ it must have had some effect on the character. [...] history is written and character is made by whether and HOW the male foreskin produces an effect of glorious sunrise or of annoyance in slippin backward. Someone diagnosed Shaw years ago by saying he had a tight foreskin/ the whole of puritan idiocy is produced by badly built foreskins. Criminology/ penology shd/ be written around the cock. The dissecting room shd/ lay off that chaotic bucket of sweet breads from the skull and start research from the prong UPward. The lay of the nerves/ etc. This doesn't blot out endocrinology/ but it is the fount of aesthetics/ means microscopic attention/ dissection and micro/ photographic enlargements/ killers etc/ shd have their prongs photoed postmortem."
>
> Williams' reply: "... if cutting off the loose hide over a few thousand years has altered the Hebrew character—I doubt it. By all the laws of heredity it should have affected the women and they are as bad as the men today, or worse. It ain't the skin that makes the difference in the man, its the stick in it that does it."

[Torrey, though unfortunately a Freudian and a prude, is also the first to document Pound's phallocentrism and to take seriously the wackier (wankier) aspects of the de Gourmont connection—such as Pound's quite literal interpretation of the creativity-ejaculation formula.]

As one rummages through the now-limitless documentation of American poetry, it seems that something surprising and unpleasant is always turning up. Take a tiny example, something I came across the other day: I had known of David Rafael Wang as a Chinese-American poet and a friend of Pound, who collaborated with Williams on the translation of some forty Chinese poems in the 1950's. They were later published in *New Directions 19* with a note identifying Wang, improbably, as a direct descendent of Wang Wei. Mariani mentions him twice in the biography (dropping the David and spelling Rafael two ways): a passing reference, and later a paragraph describing Wang's visits to Williams and their collaboration. He cites a Williams letter to Wang on the beauty of Chinese poetry.

All very nice. Then I happened to come across David Rattray's marvelous article, "Weekend with Ezra Pound," published in *The Nation* in 1957, an account of a visit to St. Elizabeths. Pound mentions Wang, and Rattray knows him—as America's only Chinese white supremacist. It seems that Wang at the time was going around the country setting up branches of the White Citizens Council on college campuses. [Pound shows Rattray a letter from Wang, "filled with phrases such as 'the Cause which alone keeps body and soul together in this horrible city where all stinks of Jewry.'" Pound remarks: "Remarkably sensitive to the language for a young Chink."]

I checked back to Torrey, who, when it comes to anything nasty, never misses a trick. There, naturally, were a few sentences I'd overlooked about Wang, who is further identified as having organized the "North American Citizens for the Constitution," which demanded that Eisenhower and the Supreme Court be tried for treason. (In the same paragraph Pound is telling the young James Dickey he should join the Ku Klux Klan.)

Wang himself, of course, signifies nothing—at most he is a bizarre footnote to the "invention of China." What interests me, however, is that not only Pound (from whom we expect such things) but Williams and others were not merely tolerating, but working with people like Wang (and so many others) in the 1950's—regardless of the daily reports of segregationist violence. That is, although Williams (unlike Pound) probably disagreed with Wang, racism and political fanaticism were still considered as minor peccadilloes to be excused in the Artist.

What interests me is not that, after the war, after the publication of the Dachau photographs, E.E. Cummings was still writing poetry like this:

> a kike is the most dangerous
> machine as yet invented
> by even yankee ingenu
> ity (out of a jew a few
> dead dollars and some twisted laws)
> it comes both prigged and canted
> (*Xaipe,* 1950)

but that the Oxford University Press (on both sides of the Atlantic) had no qualms about publishing it. [Their only objection, in fact, was to the original last three words of the poem: "pricked and cunted."] How

rarely did anyone along the publishing chain simply say no to the dissemination of these Fetid Asides of the Modern Masters.

American poetry will move into a (truly) post-modernist era, when we start thinking about why 20th century American poetry, *unlike the poetry of anywhere else,* was (and is) so often written out of hate. For what American poet did not publicly loathe at least one of the following: blacks, whites, Jews, Catholics, homosexuals, heterosexuals, women, men, the middle class, the poor, the rich? Is there an American poet whose biography one can read without embarrassment?

(Only a few...)

Where the European avant-garde was dismantling the received culture, their American counterparts—the orphaned children, ironically, of the 19th century's most radical poets, Dickinson and Whitman—were attempting to gather the live tradition from the air, to insert themselves into (European) literary history, to find historical validation. The American avant-garde was trying to become the next chapter of the Book of Western Culture—the book the European avant-garde was tossing in the river.

Fought on the same soil, the battlelines were quite different (the language of the avant-garde is always military). For the Europeans, it was a rebellion of the new art/anti-art against the old art; the enemy was culture, tradition, the academy, *art.* For the Americans, it was a struggle between art and the enemies of art, *people.* Typical European manifestoes would declare:

> Divert the canals to flood the museums! Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvasses bobbing adrift on those waters, discolored and shredded!
>
> (Marinetti)

> We should burn all libraries and allow to remain only that which every one knows by heart. A beautiful age of the legend would then begin...
>
> (Ball)

while Pound's rages were against those he perceived as "destroyers": usurers, Jews, the makers of World War I (whom he held responsible first for killing Gaudier-Brzeska and second the other millions), Taoists and Buddhists (whom he imagined to be hostile to Confucianism) and so on down an *enemies list* he ran for some seventy years.

The Americans exalted the Artist as creator of the new order (return to the old order) while simultaneously making tragic generalizations about those they considered to be obstacles to that new order: forces of

chaos, betrayers of art, outsiders to the tradition. Americans, more than anyone, bought the "unacknowledged legislator" (secret holder of the power) myth. And they still do. From Pound's conviction that he could prevent World War II after a short chat with Roosevelt, to Olson's belief that he could *instinctively* decipher the Mayan glyphs, to the more recent equations of poets with alchemists, Kabbalists, shamans, the rhetoric continues while the poems themselves, like snail darters and furbish lousewarts, have retreated to the backwaters of the nation.

The American modern: where traditional visible/audible structures became hidden organizing principles, public utterance became private memoranda and the ideal audience was, in Pound's formulation, 30 readers. [He even interrupts Canto 96 to declare: "One demands the right, now and again, to write for a few people with special interests and whose curiosity reaches into greater detail." *Now and again*—as though normally the radiant gists were cast to the masses.] The rest of the world might as well be the Second Baronet of Canto 28, who, espying the four folio volumes of Bayle's *Dictionnaire,* can only stammer: "Thass a funny lookin' buk . . . / Wu . . . wu . . . wot you goin' eh to do with ah . . . / . . . ah read-it?"

The rest of the world was all niggers and kikes—a metaphor that became literal. [Though naturally one or two chosen ones even from among these groups were allowed—a Zukofsky, say, whose toadying to Pound extended to anti-Semitic cracks . . . Eliot's famous line that "any large number of free-thinking Jews" is "undesirable" implies that, well yes, if it must, a *few* would be all right.] Today the cast of heroes and villains has changed, but can one say that the American poets' belief in themselves as an illuminati surrounded by darkness has abated?

There's been a great deal of largely unreadable prose on the "post-modern": who is, who isn't, what is and isn't. It is a taxonomy composed of exceptions because there is, as yet, no post-modern. There is only American modern, on its last roll, and European modern, played out. Much of the current obfuscation comes, I think, from a confusion of the two. Despite Pound's passing interest in Dada (though mainly in Picabia as Artist) and Williams' occasional flirtations with France-in-New-York, they have little in common. The European avant-garde, under a banner of "life as art," was particularly questioning the veneration of the art object and the idea of authorship (readymades, collages of disposable and found materials, automatic writing, found poetry, dream imagery). The Americans, under the banner "art as life," believed in cultural resto-

ration, purification of the language of the tribe (and purification of the tribe), a Confucian rectification of names, and an exaltation of object and maker. The Europeans happily trashed traditional prosody; whereas the Americans, performing a similar operation, always invented historically-based excuses—like the "ideogrammic method" or the "variable foot."

Moreover, the European avant-garde's credo of art as subversion, art as the enemy of the state, has appeared only once in America in this century, during the Vietnam War. (The revolutionary art of the 1930's in the end sought only to replace one state with another.) Today the notion is laughable when *every* poet (and magazine and book publisher) in the U.S. is a ward of the state and the university, and the avant-garde's wrath at the institutions is limited to grumbles over the comparatively small slice of the pie they are being served. Even more disastrous than this economic dependency is the fact that poets have stopped talking publicly about poetry, that they are allowing the professors to speak for them, or worse, speaking themselves, when they do speak, in the language of "comparative literature." Today, the more radical the poetry, the more academic, jargon-struck and convoluted the critical validation—much of it written by poets. American poetry has become a village with more anthropologists than Eskimos—a village where the Eskimos are making tourist art for their own consumption and can no longer tell a story without deconstructing their "belief system."

Curiously, the seeds of a European modern were here in America: Thoreau and Hawthorne and Melville casting off the dead skin of Europe to declare that history begins again, *here*; Dickinson, dismantling and transforming the English poetic; Whitman, the subversive, the new mind casting the new line—the poet whom the Europeans and Latin Americans embraced while the Americans nervously looked the other way. This flowering died, of course, when James shifted the literary capital of the U.S. to London, and Pound began the century's epic in the pseudo-archaic speech of pre-Raphaelite knights.

Since then, American poetry has taken us on raiding parties through most of Western (and some Eastern) history. Moving toward the end of the millenium, if not of the whole show, we have now, at the end of American modernism, reached the beginning of the present historical cvcle. Here especially, in the pages of Eshleman's *Sulfur,* we stand in Lascaux and Altamira, gazing at the bridge between no-art and art. On our other side, perhaps, world's end, the other bridge: between art and

no memory of art—total post-modernism.

Octavio Paz has written that poetry is the secret religion of the 20th century, and politics its public religion. For American poets, the public religion is in ruin—we must be the only country today where few writers are ideologues, or even interested. As for the private religion, it continues to be composed of initiates and no public, strict hierarchies of the faithful, petrified canons (orthodox and heterodox versions), secret codes, symbols and texts. It is a religion that is two-thirds Masonic Temple and one-third Catholic Church, whose rival factions squabble behind the ponderous and forbidding walls of the sacred compound.

If an American post-modern is to occur, it will have to bring down this monolith and, like Hinduism, build shrines on every corner, honor a pantheon of thousands of gods with shifting attributes, celebrate a calendar full of festivals and as many rites as there are practitioners.

It will have to pull down the mausoleums and monuments, exhume the remains, and place the skulls of Pound, Williams, Eliot and all the rest on spikes at the gates of the city. That the citizens may look daily at the horror: these, the venerable ancestors, the monstrous poets, the magnificent poem-makers, architects of paradises, builders of infernos, collective source of a great power. The power that is in the poetry not the poet, the power that still radiates from the poems unnoticed while the priests examine the entrails of dead poets for signs.

For the next flowering will come from the ashes of the Poet: a pyre kindled by manuscripts, letters, interviews, deluxe editions, archives, "collectible" relics. A pyre heaped with personality cults, irony, self-reference, "self-kleptomania" (Tzara), I the confessor, I the reminiscer, I the windbag, I the reader.

The disappearance of the poet leading not to the "poem itself" (ahistorical, discrete, sanctified—like the Black Stone of Mecca) but a poetry written somewhere: product of place and time, yet a piece of local conversation spoken and heard in a universe of silence, a strange music coming over the water. Some of it, idiosyncratic voices attached to no particular bodies. Some, transparent voices elaborating idiosyncratic thought. Ideas *and* things: meditation and a new description of the world: *interesting* poetry.

Not to sever, at last, the link of signified and signifier, but the contrary: to move toward, never reaching, the mythic unity of the two—as in certain tribes, where to know the name of something is to possess it. A language recharged: not by souping up the synonyms, but rather through

a hyper-referentiality, a recovering of the power of concentrated, musical speech. Mantra: magic. Centripetal melodies and centrifugal discourse: the world imploding into song *and* the poem spinning out into the world. A language not of dreams—surrealism without its political context has become whimsey—but of bedtime stories: unforgettable speech propelling into private reveries. The wisdom of the reveries impelling action. A poetry of spokesmen and witnesses, I and you, birds and stars, us in the cities: subversive, informative, erotic, pantheistic, cosmic.

For they now say that besides our sun, there is another sun. (They have named it *Nemesis,* and some even call it the *death star.*) Every 28 million years this other sun enters the Oort cloud, that frozen halo of comets on the edge of the solar system. And more: within the Oort cloud, they say there is another cloud, ten times as dense, ans this other cloud is the true source of comets.

This other sun, in its orbit, enters the cloud within the Oort cloud and pulls a billion comets loose; they scatter. For a million years, if one could watch from earth, the sky would be bright with a slow-moving fireworks of comets.

But some of them would strike the earth, and the dust thrown in the air by the impact would block out the sun for centuries. Little could survive such darkness, and little does. In the geological record, the book of earth, there are, every 28 million years, craters, a layer of dust, and the remains of mass extinction.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

Learned Ignorance and Other Defenses

1)

The function of the official literature—let's say, the literature which is sponsored by English departments, especially most creative writing programs, and the organs of literary journalism—is to choke intelligence with a kind of irreducible fluff, which absorbs attention in the

fascination of stimulus-response psychology. Staging meaning for an audience which has its abstract being in the realm of pure information, it is a spectator sport, which allows the enjoyment of empty opinion. Literary judgment leads to opinion-holding in its purest form, as it arises from the exercise of taste—i.e., opinion without content. Of course, literary judgment only *appears* to be without content. Literature and its institutions create the medium of believing and opinionating. Even ideology and morality become matters of taste, and we are expected to make contributions to the economy of opinion. The exchange of attitudes is as essential as the production and distribution of unneeded automobiles. Now, everyone with opinions is on the same side. The "production" of responses is the busy work of the spirit.

To hold opinions and to exchange them in witty repartee with other opinion-holders is satisfying to many people; it is a standard entertainment. For these purposes, however, certain kinds of poetry are favored. For example, A. R. Ammons and Mark Strand are ideal. Poets like Kenneth Irby or Clark Coolidge cannot be so easily appropriated. Irby and Coolidge make extraordinary demands on their own attentions. They do not participate in those institutions which make holding opinions a natural and safe state of affairs. Such writers—Gertrude Stein, Pound, Williams, H.D., Zukofsky, and Olson are the type—engage in life-long meditations. A reader can only join them, not in the current hip sense, in which the reader as an entity of critical politics becomes as oppressive as the author used to be, but just as a person who reads and addresses the bewilderment without preconception.

Jed Rasula, in "The Role of Critics and the Emperor's New Clothes in American Poetry" (*Sulfur*, 9, pp. 149-167), provides some important evidence concerning the opinion markets. His statistics give initial insight into the economics of opinion-making and the role of Helen Vendler, Rasula's chief example, as an opinion broker is clear.

Vendler is one of those relatively rare people who *likes* to read poetry, in the sense that many people like to read novels. Of course, she wants "a good read"—i.e., something that will engage the imagination, offer a field for the exercise of the sensibilities, pass the time, create topics for discussion with other poetry lovers, and, above all *to stay within the bounds of learned ignorance.* She is perfectly accurate; she finds exactly the poetry which she and her audience need and want. Her work and thought, like the work of most American critics, is unconsciously poised on a psychology of reading similar to the behaviorism of the

advertiser. The reader, in her scheme, is the receptor of stimuli, which the poets cunningly contrive in order to evoke intelligent response. Poetry, as she imagines it, arranges the iconographic detritus of the culture in a manageable display, so the composite response produces a certain exhibition of the cultivated man or woman. Although the product which is being promoted is always implicit, the poem is like the eagle or cougar in the car commercials. Vendler obviously has a confidence in her tastes, which allows her to seek out precisely those poets who can be used to give the elite a sense that "quality" is being maintained. This function, by which she gains access to the organs of literary journalism, is to provide opinions to people who have other important matters to think about (or who are just too lazy to think about anything more demanding than a page and half of Helen Vendler's prose). Irvin Ehrenpreis, in that remarkable passage Rasula quotes, at least has the honesty to admit preferring it to the poetry.

Now that I think about it, I too prefer her prose to most of the poetry she writes about. Perhaps she should dismiss the stable of poets which fate has given her and make-up her subjects. Meager stimuli is the only real limitation to her responses. I am sure she can imagine more interesting poets than Mark Strand and A.R. Ammons (though I doubt that she can do better than John Ashbery).

Vendler hasn't realized that there is no longer any reason to write poetry, and in this she is representative of more than a narrow academic group. Soon, no one will feel compelled to go to the likes of her to get their opinions about poetry in order: ignorance seems nearly secured. Soon, the government will stop supporting it, and the publishers will stop publishing it. I will be glad. It will eliminate a lot of confusion. In fact, getting rid of poetry is an essential clarification. Poetry's importance, as an institution, is that it provides evidence that there is a "culture," apart from mere consumerism.

Well, there is not. Fiction, theater, dance, painting, and so forth are clearly entertainments and decorations. Poetry and chamber music are the last remaining shreds of nineteenth-century cultural respectability, which was a sham when it was vigorous; it is just an embarrassment now.

That activity of speaking and writing which gives attention to the breath, to sequences of vowels, to scoring of words on a page, of the making of songs which are words, rather than songs which mangle words to fit abstract music, that activity, which concerned Whitman, Dickin-

son, Pound, Stein, H.D., Williams, Zukofsky, and Olson, is not a significant *cultural* activity. Even Pound, who so desperately wanted it to be, found out the hard way that it was not, and anyone who hasn't caught up with that fact by now, forty years later, is either a fool or, like any other business person, wants to get in on the last kill. I remember picking up a trade journal of the fishing industry in Gloucester a few years ago, and the advertisements for sophisticated new sonar machines read, "Get in on the Last Kill!" Vendler is on the last kill of American poetry. As a mode of vital intelligence for public use, it is more or less finished.

That *other* activity, which is still carried on in the name of poetry, consists of private acts of sorcery and destabilization; it is anti-social and anti-cultural, not Dadaist fashion, not with any particular reference to the "culture" at all, but by paying it no mind as any thing other than the actual threat to every one's life that it is. If it becomes widespread, the enforcers will be more likely to use the FBI, than someone like Helen Vendler to defuse it, but that is unlikely. Too few have the will and, given the way the economic demands drain people, the energy, to pursue the knowledge of their own song, except in the most casual sense.

2)

Like mathematics, the poetry of the modern West has been closely allied with technology. The dual and ultimately impossible task of poetry has been to maintain an impeccable formal purity, on one hand, and to articulate an interior living space on the other. No *medium,* however, almost by definition, contains the most intimate interior or the most sublime and terrifying otherness. We have substituted, in their places, "pure" art and shopping malls, the medium of spiritual peanut butter, this monotrop which embraces both the soul and the world. Despite its obvious ruthlessness, we have served its need to be embodied in intellectual disciplines as well as totalitarian leaders and totalitarian gods. Now we approach a perfection in which the replica is potentially self-sustaining. It no longer requires enforcement. The distractions it presents are absorbing and comfortable, hallucinogenic and pervasive.

We are in a time when the content of art and its cultural requirement are out of phase. It makes us miserable. Everyone secretly hates it. How many of our most sensitive readings of Homer are not sustained moans of suffering? Georg Lukacs speaks of "the adequacy of the deeds

to the soul's inner demand for greatness, for unfolding, for wholeness" that marks the Homeric confidence—an adequacy which is everywhere lacking in our world and in our efforts to produce such adequacy in art. Its beauty and rightness fill us with false hope, even as it reflects so plainly on our weakness, inadequacy, and hopelessness. Those who attempt to free us from its constraints by ridicule and laughter, like the Dadaists, only make more of it.

Against the objective creations of the technoculture, we have the subjectivity which is called into being by the poetry machine. John Ashbery's preeminence among contemporary poets is perhaps deserved: it has fallen to him to carry one of the most honored cultural strategies to its final extreme. In the seventeenth century, human subjectivity became the locus of a spatiotemporal metaphor and differences of perspective were accounted for ironically; it was a technique for the management of change and the resultant contradictions. Irony is the chief device by which subjective integrity has been preserved in the modern West. It is, however, ruled by a law of conservation: the degree of irony must be precisely adjusted to the degree of the threat it defends against. If it is heavy-handed, it is worthless. With Ashbery, as with Andy Warhol, the threat to the private preserve which bourgeois culture created in every soul is total, and it requires nothing less than total irony. After Ashbery it is possible, to continue along vague linguistic detours, which ultimately arrive at some unspecified equilibrium, but in time the journey itself becomes tedious, and so little vitality is left in the cliches and campy figures that it is hard to feel personally involved. One becomes a voyeur to one's most intimate processes.

Perhaps Andy Warhol understood this situation more fully than his colleagues in the other arts and, in effect, brought it to a premature conclusion. He exposed the bankruptcy of official art, while glorifying its institutions. He bracketed the entire process of producing and distributing art with his irony and turned it into a massive multidimensional work in which the paintings and prints are incidental products of the spectacle, which includes the frenetic activity of his studio, the gossip generated by his entourage, and the masterful manipulation of one of the world's most sophisticated audience. That Warhol's studio doubled as a discotheque reveals what has been increasingly apparent ever since World War I: art as a source of excitement now finds it difficult to compete with contentless technology (and drugs). What, after all, is a disco but a movie in which the audience becomes the actors? The basic technology—the strobe

light—is much the same: it pulverizes the time continuum and creates a series of stills, poses, postures, in which everything stops to reveal the perfection of the gesture. Warhol's "works," in the narrower sense of the word, are themselves gestures, fixed as paintings or prints or even movies. Turning movies into "stills," as in *Empire State* and *Sleep,* is one of the more cogent realizations of his essential insight. In the urgency of the relentless technological medium, the still image is transformed into a duration. And, of course, in busy times, they are superb substitutes for works of epic magnitude.

The Warhol phenomenon was capitalism's declaration of independence from the protestant ethic. It marked the end of bourgeois idealism and the beginning, not of bourgeois materialism, which emerged without noisy announcement early in this century, but of a desperate orgy of materialism in which art itself, the emblem of the subject, took its plunge into utter alienation. Warhol's medium is not so much paint or film as the self-consciousness of the art-consuming class. It is fitting that an artist, who began his career doing window displays for expensive department stores, should find his true calling in creating complete self-images for the consumer society's most perfect product—the sophisticated consumer. The moral ambiguity of Warhol's work is precisely the point. One of the maladjustments which was still hanging around from the origins of capitalism—a morality which prevented the people who made the money from enjoying it—had to be broken down. The cultural medium in which Warhol's ephemeral but expensive objects exist supports fully a reemergence of the romantic artist, ironically developed, so now the population can be manipulated not by a "hot" leader but a "cool" ad campaign. If there was a connection between high romantic art and totalitarian demagoguery, as seems likely, there is a connection likewise between Andy Warhol and government by image manipulation. The discourse of art and politics is now subliminal and shares a technology with avant-garde marketing. Warhol is a very important artist for having eloquently revealed this fact. One must ask, however, if any discourse is left in which this knowledge can usefully function. The rhetoric of both art and politics now precludes the grand gesture. Warhol and Kennedy were the boundary figures of the old style. Now it is all nickel and dime business, grubbing and mean-spirited. The poetry machine, which served as the generator of meanings and the guarantor of the soul, is now largely replaced by a universal electro-cultural medium.

3)

The attempts to sound the alarm that poetry in the sense which has persisted in the West, since the seventeenth century, if not since the time of Sappho and Archilochus, has disappeared are too late. Christopher Clausen, who is responsible for one of the more hysterical attempts to call poetry back to its Victorian order, in *The Place of Poetry,* sees science as the enemy: "Few doubt that the rise of science has had something to do with displacing [poetry] as a publicly important vehicle for those truths that people accept as being centrally important." Such was the case in the nineteenth century. Poetry, like religion, lacked the critical rigor which belonged to science, and confronted with the intimidation of scientific rhetoric, poets sought new pastures, where they would not be required to compete with positive knowledge.

In a well-known passage, Coleridge writes, "A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part."

In the later 19th century, life appears as a series of occasions of action and rest: science is for action, poetry for rest. In the structure of Victorian thought, poetry held roughly the same place as sentimentalized Christianity. It was a part of the technology, a way for exercising the feelings, while consigning them to a space where they could not interfere with serious concerns.

Neither of the nineteenth-century literary trends, which responded to the intimidation of science, were able to establish positions which could be maintained: one withdrew into palaces of art, where questions of truth could not be raised, and the other attempted to respond with an intimidation of its own. These were roughly, say, the positions of Mallarme and Matthew Arnold. Fear of the masses was a prime motive which united them. In either case, what came to be known as "culture"—a curious entity which *excludes* all of the social forms which involve work and material production—represented a realm of secular transcendence. It offered something of the relief of religion, without the embarrassment of belief.

In America, we never had a proper bourgeois culture. For the most part, the makers of American industry were barbarians right up to the time that corporate capital replaced them with a managerial system. It is

inevitable, therefore, that in an era of reaction, our literary elite should look back nostalgically to Victorian England and Palgrave's anthology for models of poetry's use. Palgrave represented the great abstract values—love, beauty, self-knowledge, reverence for nature—in short, all of those values which could stir the heart but for which there was little room in a rational society. Palgrave's anthology and the Bible were held in esteem as sources of authority for the sentimentality which was the stock and trade of the press, popular art, and fiction. The function of poetry was to ameliorate the harshness of a social order which was turning the family into a mere mechanism for consumption, creating the dirtiest and most unhealthy cities humankind had, to that time, managed to create, despoiling the earth by machines of ever increasing power, and exploiting the entire non-white population of the earth with its superior arms and modes of transportation.

Clausen continues to think of poetry as holding—at least potentially privileged, ameliorative position in relation to the objective activity of the culture: "Seven decades have now passed since the first rattling gunfire of the modernist revolution, a longer period than had then elapsed since the death of Wordsworth, and it is time to ask whether the kind of resue operation the Romantics performed for English poetry is possible again."

The answer to Clausen's question, if he means to ask for the renewal of that unified vision of the world, which informed the British empire (Clausen's military imagery is telling here) and the industrial revolution, is emphatically negative. That view in which the world is so simple that it can appear as the trope for the private emotional life cannot be sustained for the mass audience by poetry; it lacks force as propaganda. The maintenance of that *illusion* has become the business of mass media.

It would be better to speak not of the *disappearance* of poetry and the other arts in their bourgeois manifestations but of their transformation by media which are more efficient and more democratic. Poetry and the other high arts, to the extent that they survive, are adjuncts to television drama and rock and roll. Their *uses* in the culture are the same: they are entertainment for the most demanding audience, those who require greater complexity, which is to say, those who have more surplus attention to absorb.

We have persistent testimony that the pleasures of poetry are extreme. It is associated mythologically with intoxication and even the "pleasures" (read "happy irresponsibility") of madness. A performance

of Homer, from what we know of it, would likely have been more like a rock concert than a contemporary poetry reading. It can be said, of course, that Coleridge speaks of *profound* pleasures, of disinterested meditation or aesthetically distanced absorption in beauty, but defining "profound" necessarily brings the question back to truth. The readers Coleridge imagined were solitaries in their closets, books in hand, enjoying pleasures of the most cerebral and passive sort—such readers as have given up on the more overt pleasures, having subdued even the desire for them in the name of religion or the demeanor which was required in a protestant bourgeois culture. Nineteenth century philosophies of organism were controlled by a strict anti-hedonist morality for everyone but the artist, who was not only given wide license but was almost required to use it as a guarantee of authenticity.

The poets were allowed a holiday from the world of fact and addressed themselves to the imagination and the production of pleasure. They were honored adolescents and were licensed to speak of a world in which the parts added up to make a pleasurable picture of the whole. It was the poets' task to take responsibility for the emotional life of the people. They were, therefore, more or less required to lead scandalous lives (because "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom"? or simply because it takes a great deal of irresponsibility to counterbalance so much repression). Deviation from standard morality was not sanctioned, but it was forgiven as a necessary condition of the poet's office. If Byron is the exemplary case in English poetry, Rimbaud was most viciously victimized by the role, and it was Rimbaud who most clearly exposed it. At the age of college sophomores and as the author of enough poetry to make him immortal, Rimbaud quit: "I! I called myself a magician, an angel, free from all moral constraints... I am sent back to the soil to seek some obligation, to wrap gnarled reality in my arms! A peasant!"

While the nineteenth-century lacked an adequate technology for mass entertainment, the organic theory of art in a society which must finally value the self-indulgence of consumption as highly as the self-alienation of production, in order to maintain an expanding economy, fully justifies art as show business. By now, the Coleridgean artifact, which offers relief from the unpleasant, incoherent reality, and stimulates the pleasure centers, has been transformed into an integrated technological environment in which truth and pleasure are adjusted to an optimally efficient mix. Microcomputers, two-way television cables, and

video tape recorders and cameras, which are now being marketed for universal domestic use, will extend these possibilities democratically.

It is disconcerting to discover how many poets and critics still think of poetry as the generator of consumable sentiment or, among the avant-garde, consumable energies without content, and how deeply they resent the media which have come to fill the office of the poet which Rimbaud abdicated. Nevertheless, in a symposium in *The Georgia Review,* occasioned by the publication of Clausen's book, several of the respondents feel that television is the chief competitor for poetry's claim to the mass audience. Comparing the Leonard-Hearns fight on cable television and a poetry reading by Adrienne Rich, Maxine Kumin writes "Given the choice between an instant in sports and a lifetime in the arts, the mass-cult unhesitatingly chooses the hedonistic moment." And Joel Connaroe, Executive Director of the Modern Language Association, writes:

> There are, after all, an enormous number of diversions everywhere calculated to keep even serious readers from settling in with W.S. Merwin, Emily Dickinson, or any other artist who demands concentration and collaboration. The morning and evening news, *60 Minutes,* and *Wide World of Sports,* among others, provide constant enticements. What chance has Adrienne Rich against Rona Barrett? Anthony Hecht against Mike Wallace? Richard Wilbur writes like an angel, but is he a match for naughty John McEnroe.

An *"angel"? "naughty"?* Rimbaud's angel has come to this.

In response after response, the symposiasts degenerate into the self-parody of a fallen elite. The Victorian function of the Bible and Palgrave's anthology has been replaced by television, sports, and shopping malls, which are increasingly electronic amusement parks. The practical need for excitement and anesthesia to motivate and to ease the population through the boredom, frustration, and tension which is the experience of the citizens in a technoculture is immense.

The obligation, out of which one attends to the unspeakable sources of knowledge and makes, with never more than partial success, algorithms for their recovery, is given to deities which are not yet known.

The question of Rimbaud's obligation is still open.

DON BYRD

In this captioned photograph (or is it an illustrated poem?), we see blurred cars seen through a sharply-focused, rain-spattered window. The text has no direct connection to the picture: it tells a little anecdote about

FIRST VERSE: VISION IN REVERSE

It was the night flight from Houston- almost perfect visibility. You could see the lights from all the little Texas towns far below. I was sitting next to a fifty-two year old woman who had never been on a plane before. Her son had sent her a ticket and said, "Mom, you've raised ten kids, it's time you got on a plane."

She was sitting in the window seat, staring out. She kept talking about the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper, and pointing. Suddenly I realized she thought we were in Outer Space, looking down at the stars.

I said, "I think those lights down there are, you know, the lights from little towns."

a woman on her first plane ride, who mistakes the lights from the towns below for stars: "I realized," says the laconic narrator, "She thought we were in Outer Space."

Even a "documentary" photograph, Anderson's implies, cannot "capture" a particular experience: written text and photograph remain separate, delimited. Still, the juxtaposition here works because both deal with blurred vision, whether in the form of optical illusion (the photograph) or faulty logic (in the written text). It doesn't matter which came first, the photograph to be captioned or the text to be illustrated, for the "crossing" of the two exemplifies the way things actually happen in our world of communications technology. Such technology, as Craig Owens points out in his essay on Anderson called "Sex and Language: In Between," "is situated in between the emission (or encoding) of messages and their reception (or decoding), and as it has grown it has widened the gap between emission and reception to such an extent that today it is virtually guaranteed that no message will ever reach its destination intact." In such a "scramble system" (Anderson's own term), communication—a meaningful relationship between speakers—[is replaced by] the endless, relentless, *circulation* of signs, the circularity of a system closed in upon itself."

Owens' is one of four excellent essays in *Laurie Anderson: Works from 1969 to 1983,* an exhibition organized by Janet Kardon for the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art (October 15-December 4, 1983). The exhibition was also shown at UCLA's Frederick S. Wight Gallery (January 29-March 4, 1984), where I was one of thousands to see it; it is now at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston and concludes at the Queens Museum in Flushing, New York (July 1-September 9). The Anderson retrospective is a show one wishes anyone interested in poetry and the visual arts could see, and the catalogue (available from the ICA, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104 for $18.00) is at least a second-best.

It is impossible to categorize Laurie Anderson's art. She is usually called a "performance artist" (and lately—with some asperity—dismissed by certain artists as a mere "rock star"); the fact is that her work includes audio and video tapes, multimedia sound and visual room installations, photographs with text, drawings, collage, altered objects, and participatory sound sculpture. In all these works, language plays an important—perhaps the most important—part, her mode being to take absolutely ordinary materials—the photograph, say, of a waitress seen

from the angle of the person being waited on in a restaurant, the wholly ritualized discourse of the airline pilot ("Ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seat belts . . ."), the outgoing and incoming message on the telephone answering machine—and to turn these ordinary language events into sometimes hilarious, sometimes bizarre, sometimes frightening pastiches. In their stubborn dailiness, Anderson's narratives recall Cage's little Zen stories, but their splicing and collage arrangements are closer to Burroughs (who appears with Anderson on her new recording, "Sharkey's Day"), and the relation of word to visual image on the one hand and to art-rock and electronic-organ washes on the other is finally Laurie Anderson's own.

It is impossible here to do more than urge *Sulfur* readers to familiarize themselves with such texts as "Converse Song #5,' (see figure 2).

If this "IT Song" suggests that there is no communication between the sexes (notice that we know nothing about the participants in this dialogue except their gender), the comic twist is that Laurie Anderson, with the help of the synthesizer that disguises her voice, identifies with neither the man nor the woman. She is, as Owens points out, less androgynous (displaying both male and female traits) than situated in a space in between the two sexes—in a realm, so to speak, of neither/nor. Moreover, in *Americans on the Move,* in which this song appears, Anderson's speech is accompanied by a telling gesture: she extends the violin bow to one side, moving it back and forth like a windshield wiper to form a screen. The "message" is thus intercepted by the process of art; it becomes Anderson's own.

In putting in question the very possibility of language communication, Laurie Anderson clearly has affinities with the Language poets, especially with such women poets as Lydia Davis, Lyn Hejinian, Rae Armentrout, Fanny Howe, and Kathleen Fraser. Fraser has just published a book called *Something (even human voices) in the foreground, a lake* (Berkeley: Kelsey St. Press, $6.25) that takes up some of the same issues we find in Laurie Anderson's performances, but here the mode is less that of collage than of fragmentation and frottage.

In Anderson, we usually know what we are looking at but we don't know what it means. In Fraser's new poems, objects, people, events are decomposed and realligned. The scene is evidently an Italian beach resort (Amalfi coast? Lido? Riviera?); there are at least two couples and an assortment of children; each prose poem has a hint of narrative (e.g., "Covertly, her husband ['s eyes]"). But what happens, what is seen is

figure 2

She said: Doesn't it look a lot like rain?
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: It's just kind of hard to say.
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: That's the way it goes.
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: It takes one to know one.
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said it, she said it to no one.

only partially illusionistic. One thinks of de Kooning or certain Diebenkorns. Here is "Anna ("Are you looking at me?"), if not," a title which challenges us to fill in the gaps:

> A lack of confidence stiffening this patch of hand over the body's bronzing. Abbronzato, working at it, and "Do you like it?" Her leg aside his arm. Arm against friends'. Galactic and childish in white while pulling at hem. Blinking little nipples before the keyhole drift where he lifts a path of white to display what is his little worry. All your hoarded blemishes could be big ones gathering a life (subcutaneous) against you. The man in red bikini buys you houses. You show your present, then he takes it away under that smile and a change of clothes. Turquoise bikini, rolling over from the day confirmed as yesterday. Neither headlines, nor even finer print. Looking for "ponentino" (little Western wind, to us), lifting your dress for them. She drifts in from bath in Hollywood white satin and already you are craving it, but you can buy anything and think it doesn't work. Working-out once, the glaze pulled back its gauzy robe. But you would not give what was yours much. (p. 6)

Is the "patch of hand" Anna's own or that of her friend or lover? The poem gathers erotic force as "he" (who?) "lifts a patch of white to display what is his little worry." Perhaps the husband worries his wife will get ugly sun spots on her white skin. Or perhaps he has other worries. Her "blinking little nipples" are subject to his "keyhole drift." The man is always referred to as "he" but the woman, whether Anna or the poet herself, is alternately "she" and "you." "You show your present," remarks the narrator, "then he takes it away under that smile and a change of clothes." Is the present the woman's body? Or is she carrying his baby, a more tangible present? The images are concrete but indeterminate: a turquoise bikini replaces the red one; newspapers are scanned, skirts lifted, "she" (another woman?) emerges from the bath "in Hollywood white satin." "The glaze pulled back its gauzy robe," an exhibition that produces envy to the point of "craving" from the other.

Fraser transforms her ordinary scene, a day at the beach, into something "if not," as the title puts it. Throughout her fragmented sentences, there is talk of buying and selling, giving and getting. But of what? Bodies are displayed, touched, longed for. But desire does not lead to communication: the colorful silhouettes remain separate; they have a hard edge.

Tadeus Nyczek has recently edited an anthology called *Humps & Wings, Polish Poetry Since '68* for Invisible City / Red Hill Press (San Francisco & Los Angeles; $5.00). On the face of it, nothing could be

more different from the "cool" and "hip" impersonality of Laurie Anderson or the aesthetic distancing of Kathleen Fraser than the *samizdat* political poetry of Krzysztof Karasek, Stanislaw Baranczak, Adam Zagajewski and other young poets of "the generation of '68." All the more interesting, then, that Stanislaw Baranczak, a former member of KOR, the Social Self-Defense Committee, whose works are banned in Poland and who was dismissed from his lectureship in the philology department at Adam Mickiewicz University (he is now a Professor of Slavic Literatures at Harvard) is quoted in *Humps & Wings* as saying that "language is a part of morality... for us the most interesting thing was not pure language but 'dirty' language, language spoiled and misused... that of mass media, of political speeches, of posters, things like that."

Mass media, political speeches, posters—perhaps it is impossible today for the poet to avoid such "dirty" or contaminated language. One of Laurie Anderson's recent songs plays upon the metaphor of the closed circuit; it is called "Let X = X" and it ends on this note:

> I got this postcard. And it read, it said:
> Dear Amigo—Dear Partner
> Listen, uh—I just want to say thanks. So... thanks.
> Thanks for all the presents. Thanks for introducing
> me to the Chief.
> Thanks for putting on the feedbag. Thanks for going all out.
> Thanks for showing me your Swiss Army knife.
> Oh and uh—
> Thanks for letting me autograph your cast.
> Hug and kisses. XXXXOOOO

But then the rhetoric of the macho thank-you note gives way to something quite different:

> Oh yeah, P.S.
> I feel—feel like—I am—in a burning building—and I gotta go.

The balloon of mindless cliches ("the Chief," "putting on the feedbag," "going all out") and contaminated idioms ("Hug and kisses") finally explodes, leaving us with the reality of the speaker's anxiety ("I feel like—I am—in a burning building"), a "reality" that is, paradoxically, just as inauthentic as the clichés that precede it. It is the space between such versions of the "real" that poets are currently navigating.

MARJORIE PERLOFF

The Egyptian Poems
BEVERLY DAHLEN
Afterword by Robert Duncan
Hipparchia Press, 1983.

Beverly Dahlen has been a major participant in the San Francisco poetry scene for well over 15 years now, and has likewise established herself within the more critically active circles of feminist poetics. Yet it would appear that she is virtually unheard of outside of these two contexts. This short set, eight poems exquisitely printed in an edition of 175 copies, retailing at a cost of $20, is unlikely to alter this circumstance, except insofar as it gives reviewers occasion to call attention to her rich, if neglected, *oeuvre.*

These are, she has said, her "last poems," in that, written in 1977, they directly precede *A Reading,* an "interminable work," much of it in prose. If it is understood as a journal, then *A Reading* is a composition conceived of on the scale of Thoreau's writings. If poetry, then an appropriate analogy might be *Leaves of Grass.* It is of course both and neither and more. In "Forbidden Knowledge," a talk given at 80 Langton Street, Dahlen credits Mark Linenthal with the advice that "art must be formal, contained, limited," which is the difference precisely between literature and writing. Even Ted Enslin constructs discrete works, however large or wide-ranging each might be. Charles Olson knew, somehow, which pieces were *not* Maximus poems, an intuitive boundary surrounding that project. Clark Coolidge set aside his untitled 1,000 page poem and Thomas Meyer destroyed his *Technographic Typography,* an 800 page teenage composition which attempted to tell everything, creating instead the short lyrics for which he is known. No one, in English at least, has ever truly written a fully open work, literally "interminable" and without limit. If one can judge from excerpts which have appeared in periodicals (most recently in *Ironwood 23*), Dahlen, in *A Reading,* has come closest. In the struggle between literature and writing, no one else has so clearly stood on the side of writing. (This is not to suggest that *A Reading* is without form or internal demarcations. The work is thoroughly sectioned. Yet, as in Creeley's *Pieces,* each span is that of one's attention.)

If *A Reading* would threaten literature, putting into question all of the issues of openness versus closure, *The Eyptian Poems* function as a series of attempts to name that which is unnameable, that vortex in which god, death, birth, absence and the unconscious are all one, or none. Reference is death, achieved only as one is born into the dead. Obviously, in an epoch with the likes of Lacan, Kristeva or Derrida, not to mention Bernstein or Hejinian, such themes are absolutely current. By placing them (or finding them) within the frames of Egyptian mythology, Dahlen is arguing not for their "timeless values" so much as for the persistence of this difficulty at the heart of naming.

Dahlen's style, here as elsewhere, is extremely spare. There is no waste, no embellishment. If the content focuses on the concerns of a particular literary community or generation, the rhetorical tone which she uses to unite these poems draws upon the scene in which she first came to maturity as an author:

> This is the god in whose body I walk
> in whom I stand upright
> the feet and legs of the god
> the moving phallus the womb
> the hair shaken over the brow
> the arms outstretched from star to star.

Neither Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan nor George Stanley could have composed this stanza, yet it could not have been written in a world in which their work did not exist.

Dahlen uniquely demonstrates the continuity between these two superficially dissimilar moments in writing, as I think will become more evident once a larger body of her work is available—this is only her third short book. But she is much more than a "bridge poet" between, say, Duncan and Bob Perelman. With Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Kathleen Fraser and a still relatively small number of other women poets, she has consciously demonstrated, as writer *and* critic, that modernism (or postmodernism) and feminism are not mutually exclusive. In so doing, she and they have initiated a reappraisal of the patriarchal hierarchies of literary tradition. It may be decades before any one of us comprehends just how thoroughly this investigation threatens (promises) to transform every assumption about writing we now hold.

RON SILLIMAN

Dear Jed,

Your article on Charles Stein (Sulfur 9) suggests a few observations concerning a possible American Buddhism.

Most of *Parts and Other Parts* revolves around a private series of rituals Stein engages in. These rituals involve the manipulation of a set of mana-charged objects. Photographs salted throughout the text show several of these objects: a Buddha, a Buddha-head, river-rounded stones, wrenches, gems, and various other items from Stein's private iconography. That Stein can be seen in cafes around Annandale and Reinbeck New York, diligently stacking his white stones atop each other in an outstretched hand, reveals the pertinence of the rituals for him. And, as you point out, his submersion of personality in "stone." In terms of Buddhism however these activities have to be assigned a rather insignificant role. They are vaguely familiar to anyone who's observed something of tantric Buddhism—known in Tibet as Vajrayana, and in Japan as Shingon. Tibet is a special case, and the magical elements creep in via the indigenous Bönpo religion which Buddhism never wholly displaced. As for Shingon, it represents an extreme fringe of Japanese Buddhism. Buddhism in Japan is almost wholly devotional, though acutely influenced culturally by the contemplative tradition of Zen. In almost all manifestations of Buddhism magic and occult ritualizations are eschewed as uninteresting and unproductive. In this way Buddhism can mesh rather neatly with Yankee scepticism—best publicized in its pragmatic form by Gary Snyder. Snyder's own shamanism (drawn from other sources than Buddhism) does certainly make use of "power" instruments, but these derive their magical efficacy from their capability as tools. Where Stein observes in his wrenches what I'd call a surcharge of *mana*—you call it "fulminating reservoirs of potential"—and lays them forth as the hieroglyphics of a mythic language, Snyder discloses the magic in a wrench by cracking the nut on a differential and laying bare the spider-gear. I suspect an "original" American Buddhism will be hard-headed and practical. Vulnerable to hysteria as the population on our continent may be, an enduring fascination with magic and ritualized manipulations like Stein's only afflicts a very fringe element. Most manipulations are financial and not spiritual.

You're correct therefore in emphasizing Stein's "presence of mind," but it should be fairly dissociated from his personal oracular operations.

The other comment vis a vis Buddhism is this: Stein's vision strikes me as queerly self-contained. We're admitted to his private pantheon through his poems. While this in no way discredits his poetry, from a Buddhist perspective he would appear to be dallying at a stage known as "catching the ox by the tail."

Early in the history of Buddhism there occurred the split between those who said, we'll go it alone, and others who said, we're all in this together. Snyder's incessant political activity, or Whalen's fluid universe in which anybody and everybody drifts through the discourse, makes their work particularly buddhist since it invokes a thoroughly interconnected universe. I am not criticizing Stein's behavior, nor his poetry, but questioning its relevance for Buddhism which originates in the social sphere and regards *community* as the "hall of practice."

I realize Stein by publishing his poetry makes his contemplative acts public. But that is not Buddhism. The essential thrust of Buddhism is doubly transformational: personal and social together, and without distinction between the two. Pound, always far more the Buddhist than he'd admit, made the quintessential discrimination when he grumbled to his reader, "You who think you can get through Hell in a hurry." Namely, without bringing the rest of the tribe with you.

In the twentieth century the industrial ingenuity of our "tribe" has developed to a spiritually unproductive (though ecologically consequential) point. The construction of vast architectural monuments doesn't make for much awe in us anymore. Easter Island, Stonehenge, the Sphinx, stand at an end boundary of sorts, as *architectural* documents of a vision hauntingly *ourselves.* (Chartres, Ajanta, Borobodur are of a different order. They are quite evidently "translations" into stone of written documents.) Maybe something new is in making for the future—the bio-chip may or may not be part of it.

Between these two limits extends the period in which the *written document* stands as best evidence of a particularly human ingenuity and vision. Happily for those of us committed to letters, that time is for a while longer with us. I'd see in Charles Stein's writing, with all its eccentric ritualizations, a monument that may eventually resemble a native Stonehenge; or better, a part of our own landscape like the highly sophisticated rock circles found in New Mexico. We don't much understand the

Anasazi who used, then abandoned, them. But that in 1984 they refer some of us to ourselves is indisputable. They are haunting to wander through; their luminosity and self-contained secrecy "charms" you. These qualities will likely increase as the years pass, making our native monuments—and poetry like Stein's—a good place in which to locate configurations for a native self-definition. But the connection to Buddhism will remain tenuous.

ANDREW SCHELLING

The Graces
AARON SHURIN
Four Seasons, 1983.

Roland Barthes' preface to *A Lover's Discourse* could be appropriated nearly entire to indicate the emergent form of Aaron Shurin's new book, *The Graces*.

> The description of the lover's discourse has been replaced by its simulation, and to that discourse has been restored its fundamental person, the I, in order to stage an utterance, not an analysis.
>
> *Dis-cursus*—originally the action of running here and there, comings and goings, measures taken, 'plots and plans'...
>
> These fragments of discourse can be called *figures*.
>
> The figure is the lover at work.

While Barthes found it necessary to choose an "absolutely insignificant order" for his figures, in order "to discourage the temptation of meaning," the poet of *The Graces* is more like Barthes' description of young Werther; "... he is in love: he creates meaning, always and every-

where, out of nothing, and it is meaning which thrills him: he is in the crucible of meaning." The condition of being in love is the one in which men or women have not yet despaired of signification.

The three sections of the book are organized in this way: "Parallel Views" consists of nine more or less discrete parts; "Multiple Heart" is actually five short sets of seven, five, five, five and six parts, respectively; and "The Graces" is a series of 20 integrated parts.

These parts are not programmatic units, but measures of attention. They signal durations of similar activity in the writing. The interval of each part is, to borrow a phrase from Eigner, "the time taken to mean it." Through these parts move the *figures* which reflect a larger coherency and which are here constituted by emotion. Barthes' notion of *figures* is actually a timely restatement of Pound, circa 1915 ("Affirmations" in Selected Prose 1909-1965): "Intense emotion causes pattern to arise in the mind—if the mind is strong enough. Perhaps I should say, not pattern, but pattern-units, or units of design."

These figures required new larger, more open forms in which to work. "Parallel Views," with its prevalence of parallel structures, is written in the broken-line field arrangements of Shurin's previous work in *The Night Sun* and *Giving Up the Ghost,* but even here we hear the lines tensing to lengthen. Shurin's close reading of Whitman (Master's Thesis at New College in Poetics) alerted him to the projective power of a longer line. He rehearses the extension in "Parallel Views" until the line is cast out into the writing itself and so comes around to prose, finding its limits there.

The gradual lengthening of the line also effects an *acceleration.* Shurin himself (in a recent interview) speaks of running into prose to get up to the *speed* necessary to execute his "acrobatics and aerial feats." [Barthes—"The word (figures) is to be understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptation; in short, in the Greek meaning; σχημα is not the 'schema,' but in a much livelier way, the body's gesture caught in action..." (*A Lover's Discourse,* p. 3, 4).]

With increased speed comes an enhanced ability to sustain a leap (a device or figure) over time, as well as a certain loss of 'control.' If one stumbles, one is likely to fall. In falling, one must rely on instinctual choices—what Frank O'Hara called going "on yr nerve." The writer's *intention* is overcome.

. . . without intention
with grace of necessity. I have this. I don't intend, I must.
(p. 30, *The Graces*)

As in acts of seduction we do (or do not) say "the right words" under force of necessity—when falling, there is no time to be wrong.

"I have a feeling that we 'fall in love' by a succession of word-codes." (Robert Duncan, in conversation)

To give an indication of the way these figures work, I'll briefly trace the movement of the figure of *falling* which reoccurs throughout *The Graces.* These lines open the book:

the water flows sweetly where the earth cowers
calls up a jug, an urn, a jig, a kilt
An Irish poet ponders a Greek vase
the water tumbles falls

This first fall is into memory. On the second page, the /f/ sound is anaphorically wound up: "folds, foals, follows, flows . . ." to punctuate the entire series as:

"a *facing* into the light
"*fine,* and then a little twist . . .
"*fourteen* Holstein cows . . .
"the scene is shaded by *first* light . . .
"don't tell, the well is *full* . . .
"*fried* clams &
"the *farmer* in the *form* of the cotton gin . . .
"a hundred *feet* up-cliff from the Pacific
"a very slice in the *flesh* . . .
"*fairly* beyond the wall.
"Draws into *focus* as congealing . . .
"and the *fork* is white . . .
"& the tongue *folded* over with color . . .
"So many little *philtres*
to separate the blend.
"raising *focus* on gauze
"blind*folded,* their eyes are blind
"*feathers*
& then the *feeling* of wind rushing by
"*For* every name we made a little movement of *foot*

The insistent phonological pre-patterning of "Parallel Views" prepares us for the opening of "Multiple Heart," where the figure is announced:

The figure of falling, falling forward, the figure kneeling, hands on dirty concrete, palms down, or the forehead touching grass. An agon of reconciliation: submission, the rapture of falling. Who captures you forewarned, a tongue's embrace, the wagon or welcome met for real, to fill you with what you failed to realize, the God grants the God mercy to pardon the God.

and continues:

Before the acquisition we had to dismantle the wall, which did not fall (as she said) nevertheless was hung with monstrosities.

then I saw that he was
lovely effortless in hairdo accidental slant of strands impeccable fall

It is this figure of falling which determines the movement, whether in its familiar melodic form or modulated into an harmonic phrase such as

> . . . the will to *forward*
> that, as it should be, determines exact
> juncture, fall of *foot, root,* wing or bone
> (p. 26)

picked up farther along as:

> Love shall be called forward called all,
> being now inside hegemony among each blushing
> word the truest touch of tongue's frail blessing
> (p. 29)

and

> Follow the fellow who follows the fall
> (p. 37)

The dominant figure of falling can also meet and recombine with other figures woven into the text, such as that of *sight*:

> bereave me, you fall, that like me down to nothing
> ground or grovel, where
> can such as we gain sight & rise. . .
> (p. 30)

> remainder indifferent to uplift eyes
> or gold leaves by goddess still fall
> Under the gaze of Watcher.
> (p. 35)

> the foreshortened delight of a face face to face with a face
> (p. 44)

signals the precision (foreshortening) that can only come in direct observation of the Other, the loved object, even if this turns out to be the language itself, and returns again & again to the primary figure,

> How the light changes, hour by hour, eye by eye, when
> contact keeps the form intact, and when light *falls*

The deft handling of these phonological and logopoeic urgencies, these figures, actually gives *The Graces* a greater degree of structural integrity than any of Shurin's previous work, without sacrificing the verve. Much of the pleasure, the exhilaration of reading this book comes from its aspiration, the risks it continues to take.

DAVID LEVI STRAUSS

The Collected Prose of Carl Rakosi
The National Poetry Foundation
University of Main at Orono,
Orono, Maine, 1983.

Had I roused myself from the aureole of Michoacan and the pinball machine at Plaza Hamburger fifteen years ago in Madison, Wisconsin I could have walked down State Street, climbed the hill and studied with the visiting writer, Carl Rakosi. But in those days I knew everything so Rakosi might well have thrown me out of his class. One thing I did know, however—Rakosi was a modern; New Directions published him.

The Collected Prose of Carl Rakosi is not for brash tyros either. Apart from the reminiscences in the section entitled "Scenes From My Life" there is not much in the book for a kid that wouldn't run right by him. The heart and success of the book are in Rakosi's aphorisms, his pensées. One would have to live at least a little while to get at the resonance grounded in the authority of experience.

> "Individuality remains avant garde."

The world of letters, poetry in particular, remains no less caught up in the cliquishness, intellectual fads and mannerisms than was the case fifty years ago. So how fares the independent? If Rakosi were more predictable, clubbable and given to the right patter a collected poems would have been through several editions by now.

> "What are old poets for? To keep young ones honest."

It's easy enough to be discomfited by some of his aphorisms, particularly those which challenge one's integrity and rigor through each step of a poem's process.

> "Not enough distinction is made between metaphors which transform a subject into poetry and those in which a poet escapes from his subject."
>
> ***
>
> "It takes extraordinary character to adhere at all times to sincerity, honesty, and discriminating particularity. There are reasons for this. One is the elevated expectations of writing itself. Another is the high rhetorical temperature of poetry. The third is ego."

One of the essential qualities of the poet and aphorist, one which distinguishes him from many of his compeers and juniors alike, is that of a life lived largely away from the academy, salon, and, for the most part, other poets. Is this salutary? Is this a qualitative distinction? Believe it, Virginia. A child in Berlin, raised in Kenosha, Wisconsin (and to remain a mid-westerner in his own eyes), Rakosi has lived and worked in Houston, New Orlenas, New York, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and, most recently, San Francisco—a wakeful eye among strangers, a worthy keel through a molten century.

There is much of the Magyar in Rakosi's earthiness, his good nose for what's in front of him, for what counts. He has the Jewish wryness, sense and vigilance for history, the playfulness with abstractions, and, now and again, a biblical cadence. He has remained, somehow, the European, the outlander fascinated by and enamored of the idea "America." He is, with his English contemporary Basil Bunting, among the most wordly of modern poets. This is delivered to us in what Elizabeth Hardwick, speaking of another poet, calls, "...the casual prose of poets, with its quick and dashing informality, its mastery of the sudden and offhand, the free and thrown away."

Carl Rakosi has been blessed with an astute and eloquent admirer in Burton Hatlen, whose afterward, along with an essay by Michael Heller

in Montemora #8, are the best pieces on the writer I've come across. The University of Maine, Orono (The NEA Foundation) will also be publishing Rakosi's *Collected Poems* in the near future. Maine has done a superb job with this book's production; Arline Thomson, the designer, is to be commended. The NEA with Carroll Terrell do handsome productions of Sagetrieb and Paideuma as well, not to mention their booklength tributes to Oppen and Bunting. Now, with the fifth series of Origin coming out of Orono, one can only envision the sort of frenzied, 24-hour-a-day industriousness of their neighbor to the south, L.L. Bean—lightbulbs burning in the forest night. Terrell and Hatlen are bears for good works.

Finally, a cautionary note: Rakosi is grouped with Zukofsky, Oppen and Reznikoff as an *Objectivist,* whatever that is. This is nonsense; he has nothing to do with them nor they with one another. Along with Bunting and Lorine Niedecker, they—Rakosi and the others—constitute a group of six of this century's finest poets, each of whom picked up something from Pound and Williams and ran like hell with it. The rest of it is for the professors, bless 'em. Read the book.

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

Oneirography: A Small Collection

> Writing is closest to dreaming, or at any rate
> closest to the literary conventions of oneirography,
> when it becomes predominantly descriptive.
> —Michel Beaujour

1.

I am at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association. As usual the sessions are being held in a large hotel. I attend various collo-

quia on different topics running from "Circumcision in New Guinea" to "Sociobiological Perspectives on Human Society" (in "The Thoroughbred Room") to "Problems in the History of Anthropology" (in "The Grand Ballroom" . . . where I give a paper to scattered listeners in a sea of empty chairs, unnerved throughout by the sound of my voice emerging too distinctly from a loudspeaker high up in the middle of the arched ceiling).

Crowds of people push past each other in the hallways, stopping, moving on. There is a constant sound of spoken English. At the end of the meeting on circumcision I overhear someone remark excitedly: "So if the nose is a penis, then the bleeding nose. . . ."

A session has been organized on "Shame and Guilt: New Perspectives." Seven speakers will be reporting from different corners of the world. The audience gathers in a large basement area of the hotel where spaces of varying shapes have been created, using movable partitions on rails. Ours is an intermediate-sized room ("The Waverly Lounge," flanked by the "Barnstable" and the "Astor"), carpeted in gold with blue walls ornately trimmed. Fixtures resembling crystal chandeliers shed an agreeably uniform light. Behind the speakers' table there is a multi-paned window, each pane a mirror, framed by dark drapes.

While one of the speakers describes how Melanesian villagers responded to a man who, in a rage, had torn down a number of leaf houses, we hear, just behind the mirrored window, sounds of workmen calling to each other and the noise of a cart loaded with metal folding chairs being rolled down a passageway. Throughout the session, the speakers' remarks are punctuated by apparently random applause, and once laughter, from the two adjoining rooms.

The next-to-last participant, a graduate student from Papua New Guinea, rattles off a few sentences in Pidgin, apparently for the fun of it. (I can make out a few words—"blong," "likem" . . .) Then he proceeds with a somewhat technical analysis, speaking what he jokingly calls "cultural soap." Afterwards, all decide that the session has gone very well; there are animated conversations.

2.

One day I saw an infant of some three or four months fall, without apparent harm, from a low-hung cradle. Not pausing to feel the child's head for bumps, scrapes, or bruises, the mother took the infant to her

chest, spat at her forehead and chestbone, and in a soft, steady voice, called over its whimpers, "Come, little girl; come, come back here." The baby's heart, she explained to me later, did not "know" what had happened, and so needed her voice to prevent it from starting and jumping or fleeing in fright.

—from Michelle Rosaldo, *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life.*

3.

She: "Rendered vulnerable by conversation
they sat in silence
watching the tops of plants."

He: "Later on at poolside
a worker carefully watered the lawn
around them."

4.

The figure left of the multicolored radiant form is a man with starfish head, a bow apparently hanging from his hands. Fingers outstretched and of equal length suggest webs or rays. The woman opposite gestures similarly, arms and fingers extended toward the radiant center. Her head or hair describes five giant curls. All figures appear animate, outlined in sharp color, their insides containing discs blotches or wavy lines. The compositions are reminiscent of earthly landscapes viewed from outer space as an area of organs and tissues.

Now the two figures are placed at the right and left borders of the field and both have immense bent cockscomb scalps. The woman... assignments of gender are questionable... has pendulant breast-like appendages front and back. Three gold discs emerge from her lips in a wavy line. The other... male... appears to be looking into a fire. His insides are divided by two lightning-like red marks. Smokey waves rise from his mouth. The picture seems to represent communication.

The two figures here float free on a red field, their hair in combed lines seemingly blown outwards by astral or volcanic winds from a multifarious star balanced atop a mountain. It's hard not to see all the bright waves and discs emanating from their mouths as language or the picture as portraying some form of ecstasy.

A campfire composed of eight straight sticks and five twisting flames is set against the blue background. The forms hover... she with fingers spread, hair very long and vibrant, a curving yellow line inside her belly. He's floating nearby just over the fire... bright discs and waves emerge from his mouth as he holds onto a white bat or rod. Above her head discs scatter... white and gold.

—Huichol yarn painting, in four quadrants.

5.

The minarets that rise here and there are not like church spires. They are slender, but they do not taper; they are the same width top and bottom, and what matters is the platform in the sky from which the faithful are called to prayer. A minaret is more like a lighthouse, but with voice for a light.

—from Elias Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*

6.

A student of African ethno-history is conducting field research in Gabon. He is concerned with the Mpongwé, a coastal group who, in the nineteenth century, were active in contacts with European traders and colonists. The "tribe" still exists, in the region of Libreville, and the ethno-historian has arranged to interview the current Mpongwé chief about traditional life, religious ritual, etc. In preparation for the interview he consults a compendium of local custom compiled in the early twentieth century by a Gabonese Christian and pioneering ethnographer, the Abbé Raponda-Walker. Before meeting with the Mpongwé chief the researcher copies out a list of religious terms, institutions and concepts, recorded and defined by Raponda-Walker. The interview will follow this list, checking whether the customs persist, and if so, with what innovations. At first things go smoothly, with the Mpongwé authority providing descriptions and interpretations of the terms suggested, or else noting that a practice has been abandoned. After a time, however, when the researcher asks about a particular word, the chief seems uncertain, knits his brows. "Just a moment," he says cheerfully, and disappears into his house to return with a copy of Raponda-Walker's compendium. For the rest of the talk the book lies open on his lap.

APPENDIX: "Dream Stories Galore" by Raymond Queneau from *Contes et Propos* (1983)

I go to a mathematicians' lunch. The first guest to arrive carries a cello. Although we're in an urban neighborhood, we find ourselves in front of a stream where water lilies are growing. One of the mathematicians present points out how wrong Heraclitus was to say that we can never bathe twice in the same river: when we drink a glass of water surely a few of the H_2O molecules will have already passed through our body. The others agree.

I meet an Arab and tell him about the death of a Spanish worker of his acquaintance. He's not surprised, for the other man was working in a construction site where he had been hit in the head by an iron ball. I approach the nearby site: the Seine has overrun the foundations. They've had to cut off the water.

My sister-in-law returns some books I had lent her. I don't recall their titles. She drives a small car with an automatic shift and complains of rheumatism.

I'm in the country at a doctor's house. He cooks eggplants on a grill along with chops that catch fire: then he plays the lute.

A friend of mine has died. Another friend whom I haven't seen for some time approaches to kiss him on the forehead. A third asks me who a woman is who's present. I tell him: "That's the chief of production." He: "The wife of the chief of production?" "No," I tell him, "*the* chief of production." He goes and shakes her hand.

The butcher's wife writes me a letter asking that I leave the shutters Italian style. I wonder why, and what this means.

I find myself in a small city whose topography I don't know. I try to follow the same route I did the previous evening. But I take a chance on a narrow street whose houses seem to be abandoned. There's a hairdresser's shop with neither hairdresser nor customers. I wonder what he was thinking when he set up in a place so little "passed through." Leaving this little street I see a fat woman in pants walking a cat at the end of a long leash, accompanied by a Siberian lap dog.

I go into a church still adorned with a traditional altar. Posted on

the confessional is a piece of business stationery listing the members of the Brotherhood of Saint Rose. I read this carefully. Then I examine, no less carefully, the foot of a romanesque column decorated with a hare and a snail. Just as I'm leaving, a priest in a cassock enters. I ask him about the Brotherhood of Saint Rose. He gives me an explanation, but I've retained only a confused memory of what he said; as for the Brotherhood (it has to do with holy bread . . . masses performed . . .); as for the saint, he stresses that it's not a question of Saint Rose of Lima, but of a local saint.

A little later, I'm in an out of the way village. There is a church there, connected with the Hotel de Sens in Paris. The neighboring farmer has lent a key so we can visit. He arrives bare-chested accompanied by his wife in shorts. In front of us there's a pond; the ducks are going to sleep, for it's very late. The moon is just about full.

In a cafe I ask directions to the Chapel of Saint Baudel. No one has heard of it except the proprietress who tells me the way. I find it without difficulty. Inside, I see two boys, more or less naked, lying on mattresses; on the walls some Youth Brigade banners, but on the ceiling, well preserved, are the 16th-century paintings I was expecting to find.

In a totally deserted village, a peasant in the main square is trying to get up into the breeze a kite shaped like a parachute.

I have rented a house and I go out into the garden. I'm surprised to find a woman shelling peas. She's settled in a rocking chair. She says to me: "Come on over to our side." I stammer an apology and close the door again behind me.

I see a notice preserved under glass on top of a tomb. It's the discourse pronounced by a miller in 1896, a discourse he had printed: a eulogy of his mother, dead at the age of 82. He himself is the third of 18 children. The text contains the word "fatal," and others of the same sort.

I go into the neighboring church, restored with varnished, exposed beams and neon lighting. Two little gothic figures nonetheless remain.

I go out and find myself in the cemetery. They have brought together the tombs of the war dead. There are four of them. The crosses atop the tombs and the chains linking them are of a strange sort of forged iron.

I go and re-read the miller's discourse.

Some parents with their little girl are visiting Saint Benedict's. I look closely at the capitals while the father says to me (rather too familiarly): "Explain to her about the mass." I look at the girl. She must be about six. I ask: "Has she been raised a Christian?" I'm told, "No." I feel quite uncomfortable and keep silent while the father launches into explanations which the little girl listens to with round eyes. The mother smiles. She has brought some cakes: apparently they're good, at Saint Benedict on the Loire.

Seated in an outdoor cafe of a small provincial city, I look at the statue of a natural scientist and, even as the dusk turns into night, try to decipher the inscription on its pedestal. Suddenly, sirens. People come to their windows. Time elapses. Shutters close again. When the fire truck goes past, the curious have left. Then there emerges from the shadows a personage whose face reminds me of a confirmed alcoholic from Depot 24, during the Phoney War. He comes toward me and extends his hand, calling me teacher.

Naturally these are not real dreams, nor are they invented. They are just minor incidents from waking life. A minimal rhetorical effort seemed to me enough to give them an oneiric quality.

That is all I wanted to say.

JAMES CLIFFORD

Sun Poem
EDWARD KAMAU BRATHWAITE
Oxford University Press, 1982.

"... political graffiti in Kingston walls seems to insist on spelling the name of Prime Minister Seaga as 'Ciaga.'"
—Caribbean Contact, *March 1984*

"I say Ree-gun, I don't say Ray-gun... because I'm a ex-slave."
—*Archie Shepp*

Edward Kamau Brathwaite's first trilogy was completed with the publication of *Islands* in 1969. *Islands* had been preceded by *Rights of Passage,* published in 1967, and *Masks,* published in 1968. The three books appeared as a single volume under the title *The Arrivants: A New*

World Trilogy in 1973. *Sun Poem* is the second book of a second trilogy, the first book of which, *Mother Poem,* appeared in 1977. In it, as in *Mother Poem,* Brathwaite continues the assignment he gave himself in "Vévé," the next-to-last poem in *Islands*: "So on this ground, / write." Following *Rights of Passage*'s diasporic meanderings in and out of Africa, the Americas and Europe, as well as the more focused look at Africa one gets in *Masks, Islands* initiated a return to and a more sustained exploration of "this ground," Brathwaite's native West Indies. *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* go even farther in this embrace of the local, dealing specifically with the topography and history of Barbados (the "mother" of *Mother Poem*), the island on which Brathwaite was born in 1930.

The front cover of *Sun Poem* carries a photo of the author at age 3 standing on a chair beside his father. Typical of the wordplay resorted to throughout the book, "sun" has to be also read as "son" (with a further overlay of the Spanish *son,* both "sound" and, more specifically, the Afro-Cuban song form). Weaving in and out of recollections from childhood and bits of family history, *Sun Poem* is Brathwaite's most explicitly personal work to date—a further sharpening of focus. A sharpening, not a narrowing, for it almost goes without saying that the work which precedes it widens, gives resonance to and deepens what might otherwise come across as "merely" personal. Almost, but not quite. So at several points Brathwaite says it:

> this was our vision of the ancient sun
>
> squatting upon the sandy redge of memories
> this crab knew ancient histories
> old harbour cartagena tenoctitlan half
>
> moon fort plantation grasses; re-
> leased its scrapers scuttled with us back
> to prisoned childhoods hintless of the world
>
> of banks and bombs now voiceless auction blocks
> but instincts fished for lay below the surface
> with held and shining breaths that dived us down to truth

The sonship *Sun Poem* sound is, then, the deepest. Though there's nothing new or especially remarkable about this it does need to be remembered.

What is remarkable, distinctive, even startling about *Sun Poem,*

what any reader will come away from it unable to forget, is its verbal texture, not only what's done with words but what's done *to* them. "Calibanization" Brathwaite calls it. As in *Mother Poem,* he makes more sustained use of West Indian patois than he did in *The Arrivants*:

> *then one is step back an tro dung e cap an comman*
> *touch dat*
>
> *but you isnt to look at de tro dung cap*
> *but get back position in de fowlcock eye.*

But what he's up to goes farther than a quaint adoption of dialect. Even in his use of "standard" English he takes his cue from the folk.

Brathwaite concludes "Vévé," the poem in *Islands* from which I quoted earlier, with the lines: "on this ground / on this broken ground." Dialect ("broken English") partakes of that ground. "Calibanization" insists that in folk speech English isn't so much broken as broken into, that a struggle for turf takes place in language. "It was in language," Brathwaite writes in *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica,* "that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master; and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled. Within the folk tradition, language was (and is) a creative act in itself." So in *Sun Poem* the weight of that larger history which gives personal history its resonances is alive and felt in as small a thing as the word. As in the anagrammatic "derangement" Shakespeare had recourse to in fashioning "Caliban" from "cannibal," the puns, malapropisms, odd spellings, neologisms and strained meanings Brathwaite resorts to speak of disturbances outside as well as inside the language, social distempers the word is made to carry.

That he turns "militia" into "malitia" is one small instance of this. As in this instance, most of his "calibanisms" underscore senses of malice and malaise, emphasize the hurt put on the land and the people by slavery, the plantation system and more recent forms of exploitation. The words partake of that hurt. It shows in the language both as referent and as a telling, fairly obvious misuse inflicted on language, the abuse which brings that referent more emphatically to light. So "the panes of his eyes" becomes "the pains of his eyes," "the games we played" becomes "the games we paid," "the future" becomes "the few- / ture." "Huts" become "hurts" and "hillsides" turn into "hillslides":

but those that drone their lorries all day up the sweating hill to the
factory of mister massa midas
those mindless arch

itects that cut the cane
that built their own hurts on the hillslide

Brathwaite's work increasingly avails itself of and takes part in a revolution of the word which has long been a part of West Indian folk culture, a reinvention of English of the sort one hears in Rasta speech, where "oppressor" gets replaced by "downpressor," "livicate" takes the place of "dedicate" and so forth.

But a revolution of the word can only be a beginning. It initiates a break while remaining overshadowed by the conditions it seeks to go beyond. The shadow such conditions cast makes for a brooding humor which straddles laughter and lament, allows no easy, unequivocal foothold in either. Oppositional speech is only partly oppositional. Cramp and impediment have to do with it as well. In *Sun Poem* we not only get the sorts of pointed, transparent wordplay quoted above, but something more opaque and more disconcerting, not yet resolved as to its tone or intent. Brathwaite revels in a sometimes dizzying mix of parody and pathos, embrace complicated by a sense of the bizarre and even bordering on embarrassment here and there. In "Return of the Sun," one of the strongest, most striking of the book's twelve sections, problematic romance is problematic speech. Esse, courted by Adam, sits in a tree and speaks with a lisp. Only a lengthy quote can do the section justice:

But yu still want to drive
it? / he

started not able to follow this sudden tack
in her mean

ing *my*
lorry she lisp

ered sitting down on the branch of the tree

he could see the promised land of her thighs as she sat with her
skirt like a cat
up her legs and the skin of her shiney and smooth and smelling of
duncks

tree/*yu*
lorry? he

still couldn't follow the swing of her feet in the sweet of the tree
like

yu this/
ter she told

him and before that bubble was bold in his head

uh lookin some/body to drive
it/yu

know a good drive/
er glitt

ering down from the bram
bles/the leaves of her bodice

sparkle from spangle to shadow to dark
in the hool of that muse/ical tree

an who gwine pay fuh de gas a/
dam asked her still try

ing to follow but fall
ing/*de gath!*

she cried *haee* clapping her hands together like shakshak

o this had her now she was happ/y o jeeesus shine she was happ/y he was talking her own langridge now and he had her he had her he had her/he thought she would fall from the heave/of the tree

an inn yu gwine screw/off de cap a de bonnick yu thay yu is man and crank up de fan wid dat handle yu hand/le an pump/it she laughed him and then like wind with a cloud brings a sudden change to the canefields breathing grey where there once had been green esse say

yu theee/yu theee/ yu theee what uh thell yuh! dah is all yu ramgoats wantin wid we/pump yu gaths up de tank an is not even tanks like muh mutha say an aftha yu finish drive bout like yu like/oona gone back to town when yu dun an fuhget bout de bill when a accident come an de lorry dey pun de dump/ heap but lithen to me mith/ter john belly guts no/body int drive thith lill lorry yet showing him where it was in the tree *an no/body inn gettin no chance to -rit neida unleth they kin show me thuh lithunse*

Where else in contemporary poetry do we have anything like this?

Brathwaite helps impeded speech find its voice, somewhat the way Monk makes hesitation eloquent or the way a scatsinger makes inarticulacy speak. This places his work in the New World African tradition of troubled eloquence. Here, that is, trouble acts as a threshold. It registers a need for a new world and a new language to go along with it, a discontent with the world and the ways of speaking we already have. A revolution of the word, if it can only be a beginning, has to be the Beginning, "beating," as he has it on the last page of *Sun Poem,* "its genesis genesis genesis genesis / out of the stammering world." Bob Marley, asked in an interview how long he'd been singing, insisted on this very thing: "From Creation."

NATHANIEL MACKEY

Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse
STEPHEN FREDMAN
Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Maybe the problem with the prose poem is the problem of a Modern literature, one that has swallowed its structures and forms, made its closure and coherence not readily apparent, a bit of a mystery in fact. There's something endoskeletal about Modern literary works (novel, poem, or story): their identity draws from something inherently poetic, inherently fictional, not from a certain number of syllables, or a plot where "something happens." If—this being the case—the *verse* poem is a bit more obscure, drawing a bit closer to prose, occulting a strict boundary line between them, then what of the prose poem, which might like the poem to be a stable point so that it could define itself by opposition?

Stephen Fredman's book, *Poet's Prose,* is an attempt to deal with the perplexities of this deliberately ambiguous form. Typically a study in the prose poem (which Fredman would re-name, and a little too insistently, "poet's prose") attempts to fix its status by quantities: *this* much poetry, *this* much prose. Fredman is interested less in fixing the *poem* as

in puzzling the reasons why a poet would want to drop one of the remaining signs distinguishing poetry from prose: the self-conscious arrangement of lines and stanzas in the middle of the page, versus the anonymous and even spread of sentences in a little box with a notch. Why would a poet want to write sentences? A sentence implies a loss of potential, of point: the potential for guiding the reader's eye to a particular spot, to a particular word; the points of tension between syntactic and metrical stresses.

Baudelaire, of course, thought that to suppress verse form—to secretly write a poem, but disguise it as a paragraph—would be to gain a subtle kind of power over the unsuspecting reader, to have the poetic effects invade, as if silently. This prose would release a new kind of poetic substance in the poet as well because it was, as the famous dictum goes, "musical without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience."

Still, Baudelaire was interested in a *poetic* prose, whereas Fredman examines the poetic uses of a prose which, if anything, is strictly utilitarian, prosy, if not prosaic. William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, and John Ashbery—the main subjects of his book—were engaged in a project of releasing the poetic potential in prose, not in the possibility of writing poetry in a different format. At times, Fredman seems to be saying that prose has now *more* poetic potential than verse because the pedestrian "rhetoric of declaration and proposition" has a kind of inverse freshness as art. Certainly, prose has a different cadence, different patterns of tension and release, and the poet, in writing prose, can play on our recollection of the sound of facts, of argument, the sound of a court case, of a philosophical treatise, an insurance manual. John Ashbery's *Three Poems,* which Fredman discusses in a long and mostly interesting chapter, plays this prose music, teaching the reader how to hear the sheer sounds of argument, rationalization, prosings and pratings without being distracted by content, since the content, while entrancing enough and significant sounding, has all the graspability of a dream in motion. Ashbery himself, whom Fredman quotes liberally, has amusing things to say of this "content." In speaking of the late James and of Gertrude Stein—but certainly, by extension, of his own work—he acknowledges the "nearly physical pain" involved in trying to follow "the evolving thought in one of . . . (their) characters." Unreadability, even monotony offers a kind of pleasure in this work:

> Just as one may be depressed by reading the fine print in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* with long prose passages in eight point type, and feel as if one is drowning in a sea of unintelligible print—and yet this is one's favorite ocean, just as drowning is said to be delicious when one stops struggling, so I tried to reproduce that delicious sensation.

Monotony, likewise, has a kind of power:

> ... there is plenty of monotony in (Stein's Stanzas in Meditation) the 150-page poem... but it is the fertile kind, which generates excitement as water monotonously flowing over a dam generates electrical power.

Thes balloons of prose (150 *page* poem) are not, like "good" poetry, concise and economical in their verbiage. Their very beauty is, as Ashbery says, in saying "a very big thing in place of what might originally have been a much shorter and concise one." Fredman compares this "overflowing of meaning" to translation, borrowing Walter Benjamin's notion that the language of translation "envelopes its content like a royal robe with ample folds instead of fitting around the content like a skin." Is this the same as saying this prose is—as my mother would say, and contemptuously—wordy? Yes, but this "very big thing," or wordy thing is, as Fredman would say, more interesting. Why?

Partly because it evokes a kind of nostalgia for the verbose, the inappropriate, the ungainly in human utterance of most kinds: Ashbery works the cliché, and clichéd rhetoric for this kind of effect; perhaps, it's not exactly fair to say Williams was seeking to produce a nostalgia, but he certainly had a fondness for blunt, idiomatic speech and regarded it as a rich artistic material standing very nearly alone. However, if it is sheerly the novelty of a prose bracketed in some special way and seen as "art" which constitutes the appeal of poet's prose; if it is simply the sudden impact of a sentence—not a verse line—as a prosodic unit; if it is the revival of interest in writing a specially rhythmic or arhythmic prose which makes poet's prose worth paying attention to, that attention will flag when the novelty wears off. Fredman would say the very occurrence of a poet's prose is symptomatic of the "crisis" in American verse, and perhaps it will also pass away with that crisis (unless... American prose is a permanent crisis?).

But, the very notion of "crisis" is vague, and a little stale; plus, Fredman is not in a position to measure that crisis, or prose poetry's place in it because he lacks an articulated theory of language. He mentions in his introduction that poet's prose enjoys a "sympathetic resonance" with the theoretical writings of structuralism and post-structural-

ism, but he doesn't bring any particular aspect of these theories to bear on his subject. (Roman Jakobson's work on the five functions of language, especially given the precision of some of these terms, would have been applicable, as would his syntactic analyses of poetry, to name just one example). It's not enough to say simply that recent literary theory and prose poetry are compatible; certainly, both would put in question the notion of a boundary between poetry and prose, or "literature" and other writings, but their ways of questioning are different, and their relationship to each other as discourses needs to be carefully rendered. Fredman tries for some alignment between Heidegger and Nietzsche and Robert Creeley, but the effort is largely a failure, partly because Nietzsche's own poet's prose so overwhelms Creeley's, but also because Fredman's approach lacks any rigor or precision.

Fredman's thinking very nearly amounts to: well, you could read Derrida and Ashbery on the same day and not feel troubled, or they might like each other if they met... or, doesn't this line remind you of someone?

Fredman seems to be a genuine enthusiast of prose poetry, and many of his local analyses are interesting examples of practical criticism, but this too brief, and much too careless study is not going to do much for the p.p. as it's listed in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics,* that secret, softly prosing—occasionally nattering—that fractious and insolent, fat and muscular, that perverse and deformed seed of an evil dice cup.

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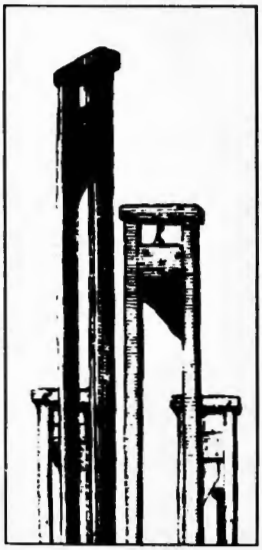

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Vladimir Holan

from A NIGHT WITH HAMLET

Tr. from the Czech
by Clayton Eshleman and
Frantisek Galan

Menippus:
I see only bones and fleshless skulls,
and most of them look alike.

Hermes:
That's the very thing that has aston-
ished all the poets, those bones...
And only you, it seems, are contemp-
tuous of them.

Menippus:
Well then, show me Helen, for I wouldn't
recognize her.

Hermes:
This skull, that's Helen...

—LUCIAN

When passing from nature to being
walls are not exactly benevolent,
walls pissed on by the talented, walls spat on
by eunuchs revolting against the spirit, walls no smaller,
even if they're still unborn,
yet walls rounding out the fruit...

The yielding ripeness of Shakespeare
invites license. Its content,
which like astonishment should be
sanctification, becomes, as time declines

(with possible indications of its absence),
a usurious tax on all apartments,
into which a theater director has arrogantly moved.
Only fraud is a certainty here. And the spectator,
who has prematurely crept up like a Saint George dragon,
warms himself in the bile of the critics...
And those who dare to map even desire
have it easy, though they too are
a coleric testimony to irredeemable jackasses...
But nature is always a sign
which, if it doesn't keep silent,
denies itself. After all, the male,
that opener, feels mutely only because
the spirit always moves forward
and everything closes behind it...

He too was like that... Hamlet!
His arm torn off, evening rolled through
the empty sleeve of his coat
as through a blind man's genitals, chewed up by the music...

Nature joined our contempt for the city
to the rocky urine of upturned mosses
at the entire golden height of capability
and waited until the wine caterpillar became a butterfly,
but to no avail,
because he felt contempt for wine from the day
when out of thirst he had to open a horse's artery
and drink the blood...
That led him to accept a jinn
and to exclude seemingly unrevealed mysteries,
and, being between himself and himself,
he spoke for the abyss.
After that, he only spoke out of it,
even when, say, he discussed a certain saint
who had nothing left, except her pain
from remembering an ancient lover,
a pain so small, she could easily hide it
inside a rotten tooth...

It matters little
whether the saliva hissed at us

dripping from the mouths of sleeping crickets,
constructors of midnight bridges,
the created creating, who built two tombs
out of apparitions, taking a wage for prophecies.
Only art was without excuses...
And life too insisted,
but insisted with the risk that we'll survive,
though we might also wish to die...

There was no repose... Nowhere, even in the unconscious...
But he was here, Hamlet, who like a Mozart-lush
overturned the Alps, to place a bottle insecurely
on the creaking step of the fear of death,
he so close to himself that between him
all immortality could fit...
And indeed, in his presence
the knife under the sheep
could not slash anything
and the melted pewter from old baptismal fonts
would congeal into vital shape.
Yet, anxiety exists. He was on the wound of eternity
and had to heal it. He was in father's tomb
and had to be a son of children... He was
with the holy soul of music
and had to be, for the earnings of a harlot
or for the price of a dog...

Oh, not that he knew everything, for he strongly sensed
that when selfishness stuffs itself,
it does not throw up, it digests and starts again—
not that he was wise, like a wood pillar
tends to be among those of stone—
not that he trembled with disgust
on an ancient floor painted by the bloodflow of women—
not that out of avarice he recalled final things
and would therefore live in Atreus's tomb,
in which treasury led directly into mortuary—
not that it mattered to him
if Alexander the Great's crooked nose
straightened out something in history—
no, no, but I still see his scowl
at people for whom if anything is a mastery

it is also an emptiness, into which
they hurl all their emasculated fury...

Whoever gives remains avaricious...
And yet we do not believe and are always waiting for something,
and possibly people are always waiting
for something only because they do not believe... They are enlightened,
but they don't radiate... They are anemic,
as if, without bloodshed, there would be nothing,
they are cast out but still not excommunicated,
they are curious and yet they still haven't found the mirror
in which Helen-Helen
looked from below-below,
in fact, they are so deaf they'd like to hear
Jesus Christ's voice on an LP...

And yet everything, everything here
is miraculous only once:
only once the blood of Abel
which was to wipe out all war,
only once the unrepeatable unconsciousness of childhood,
only once youth and only once song,
only once love and simultaneously to be lost,
only once everything against heredity and habit,
only once the untying of agreed-upon knots and hence liberation,
and only once the essence of art,
only once everything against jail,
unless God himself wanted, on this earth,
to build a house...

Over the wall the greenery arched
and cast, along the way, the hawthorne of its curiosity.
The window opened the wind, which drafted through:
    All your action is a lot and is nothing,
    yet action filled with being: a miracle to be envied!
The night smoked history, ate the fried winglets
cut from Mercury's ankles
and washed it down
with the sweat of the organist at Saint Tragedy's...

"Only when you reconcile yourself to death," said Hamlet,
"will you understand that everything under the sun is truly new...
Our body is not a canvas hangar,
whose fabric you can clip things out of...
But our subconscious plays games... Even if we unstintingly
give alms, it's for our benefit!
Ditto for copulation by mistake... But no!
The fumbling genitals of interrelations can do nothing more in people
than be in them without them... However,
the liver of lovemaking lies in sin.
So even the tension of bodily profanation
will recall to you the penalty of the spirit...
We don't feel good around sleeping people either,
because we don't know where they will stop,
while we are stuck here...
If a man considers how heavy a cat suddenly becomes
when it is dead, while somebody
can spend a whole day shooting sparrows!...
But yes, there is man shame and woman shame.
A man cannot even bear to see a cotton pad.
And a woman? Hardly born when it is dry,
she's already flattering the downpour..."

After a while, Hamlet added: "For children an answer is never
enough...
They play, for instance, with a cupboard of secrets
and in the end carry off its key to themselves.
Or they are ailing and secretly open the letters
of an imprisoned poet who in jail
paid for a special room by the fact that they themselves opened the
letter...
Or they are ailing and see in dreams a pillar of fire
and cry: it's a rod, God's vein!
Or they are ailing and can't shake from their minds
the unending handwork of women
which may have wanted to warm only them
or to weave a man in, or to plug itself up...
Or they're healthy! It's a precious moment
when it seems that the sliced bread belongs to no one...
They they'll walk out of the barn, say, and unwittingly trample
the last kernel from last year's harvest
so that right away they might be somehow even more tempted

to place the gold wig of a hay stack on a skull of fire.
They are as full of life as a horse,
who feels the rider not as another being,
but as his own thought... Rejoicing, shouting,
they've been together for a year and don't regret it,
they have a potent antidote for anything that's not a miracle—
all stains are only mud stains
on new clothes and can soon be removed...
Children! They've found the true names, now they just need to be
pronounced!"

I interrupted, saying
that he looked like a millstone quarry.
Have a drink, Hamlet, I say! Do you want it with
the oven, the mind of the farm,
or with the passion of the blood's cardinal points?
But he wasn't offended, and said: "Pö-pa!"
What? say I, and he replied:
"That's what the Tibetans call themselves!"
and went on: "Virgins, oh yes,
they know when a tree is ailing!... But I have met convicts.
It is enough to imagine that some of them have
huge rumps so immense only because
the constantly rushing memory of the same crime
forces them into a legless squatting,
unless they became swollen by frequent whippings
for they smell of tar...

'The streetcar didn't come!' says the woman. And the man
answered: 'It's worse when a ship is late,
that is, you who like a ship
leave within you under you an uninterrupted line...'
Yes... Whereas virgins, yes,
they know when a tree is ailing... And the encircling male grafts
always take place through the canvas of their innocence,
even if they already go about in stockings of harlots' body hair...

Freedom, you know, is always kin
to *voluntary* poverty..."

Night overlapped night... Inclining toward earth
or becoming a headstone to everything,
what the living and the dead were doing at the time...
Maybe the living were timid and insolent...
And the dead were not intentionally but hereditarily
or revengefully envious...
I understood when Hamlet, not suspecting my thoughts,
said: "What now only surrounds us *one day will bury us*...
Once I was at a fire...
the innumerable flame made me notice
a single knuckle of the whole hand of the present director of
the fisheries,
enough for me to have to think of the bony carving
of nothing upon nothing...
The hair of a hanged man
is even more sensitive, because *fluffy* on the spine,
and it is no more to being
than body hair to knowledge.
But still more spacious for the shivering quinine of Elsinore
was the sound of the clipped nails on Ophelia's feet...
You know..."

No, I don't know, I said... but right now
I'm expecting guests! I added, annoyed
by my conviction that he loves his unhappiness...

But once again he was not offended and went on;
"Querer la propria desdicha... But what
makes a mother quiver
would shatter galleons at sea...
Besides... If there is no God,
no angels, and if after death there's nothing left,
why don't those admirers of nothingness
honor precisely those beings, not being them?
I felt that once
while hunting white falcons... It also rises
out of Chinese tombs... And the tablets of Moses
speak of nothing else... But from an inverted humility
or a pride still unclear,
because, only now stitching up the bellows,
we'd rather kiss a greyhound between the eyes and a horse on
the hoof,
and when we enter the library we are not afraid...

While hunting white falcons I felt a rhythm,
before the tablets of Moses a movement,
before Chinese tombs a rhythmic harmony,
before the Ainus, I felt near, far, light and heavy gods...
Anyway, that is the moment
when you are still expecting guests
and they're already here, for they've come earlier...
Yes, to see each other and to be able to talk
and to feel intimate warmth,
and a heartbeat as true as Rembrandt's needle,
when nevertheless each of us is different
(for *that* is what souls do)
and not to catch the serpent with another's hand—

A jet engine is not for a poet...
And as a tree remains a tree and still produces fruit
that ripens prematurely
fruit on time and fruit only later:
no, one cannot rush in words
for we were not and are not
from the peoples' right of torture
longing to be man for man!
Efficient love, you know?... Dailiness is miraculous...

The greater the poem, the greater the poet,
and never vice-versa!" he added, then continued;
"And you are a great poet if you ask with whom to be damned...
Art as a work of art so you don't grow proud...
I tell you art is a lament,
something for someone, nothing for all,
for simply by hoping you are in the future...
Something always extends beyond us because love too
is only part of our certainty... Atonal harmony...
And pain as punishment for the fact
that pain too is fleeting...
Or is it perhaps that human help
which could be a help
uses God's help as an excuse?
I don't know, but through the *shape* of some people I realized
the proportional content of the octopus..."

(*to be continued in* Sulfur #13)

Leland Hickman

Two Poems from TIRESIAS

ANNOTATION FOR THAT WHICH FOLLOWS

Terror outcast young girl trembling auburn soft pageboy fear blown
    tears, scream;
tiresian purloin san juan de la cruz cruise text cross out
    graphemes for
god outhouse captivity cry let me out cry poisoned defeated
    brutal, lewd;
despumate desquamate perineal bubo mary janes slap
    sharp upon
pavement his dislocalized speech immobilized arm her
    elbow skin
withered nervously recounting it ladder to which de
    lusional com
parison "wrongd every rung of" bad catch
    me bad hurt

me bad hate me mama at

    orisonned out
set immiserizations mandala his
    mandatory sen
tencings fiery in child dreamt burnt flesh bloodtaste cess
    pool out
fall, writ, chalkt up in a shit shed shoeheel bang bars keep
    death row a
wake mandala aflame uncharred vermilion-haired satanhead in't whose
    blond eye

lasht boyhood bloodied boymate fled, sobbing under obscure care here in
tensive care
here arroyos aflood in downcaster plain in purgative night in
ebriate ca
rotid catheter celebrant rectal esophagal capillary-rain brainsbust in out

burst

verse here; panning gold death valley; she grammardays 19two3 spring so
lazily over
comix page age 7 quite contrary mary mary late on yr way to school a
lone a lone
ly man's candies small movies stop pitchblack in secret by se
cret ladder dis
guised "brought groceries in stood wide-eyed staring at
nothing saw
right off the bat he couldn't move speak braced him from
falling got him
into a chair called the" planets stars sun progeny of
thunder cross
out thunder dim out kitchen railroad free
way din in

grasp struck blank still

'd space in
haled commere lemme showya a chokehold bud
dy pale lasht
trust on summerstreet; whose lyric breeze whose parted locks
what wounding sus
pends tender text in oblivion howsomever begrudgings denials for
given sick
nightwatcht breathings gone limp slippt grasp fallen knockt-out for
real his
monkeymug kisst asphalt come-to ahowling, hands to his broke face stum
bling home
but a stiffneckt brutish boy gets led by a god down planks in a mudwrackt
yard gets
turd-housed gets
lockt in in dank to unlearn in shiver in crumple in whimper let me out

in out let me

out cloyed anguishes sweetrots his candies halt our schoolgirl in terri
fied husht

mary jane shoes thin kneesox frail pinafore tremulous instanter to
flee she
screams eludes him kickt demonic out of her womb by his crude grum god
who smasht his
sucking bottle in his mama's face blent splendor for his first gaze blood
milk stream
ing noxious child vengeances boxed unto horros hys
terical cack
ling thru peckerwood flats san quentin sordors death
row night
long longings to be gone to be scattered
in isolate

sierra in the strong somber trees

or wrencht in squal
id sleeps guided by a cross-eyed bald de
mented bitch
past sabretootht text toward stone deaf stone
eyed stone
tongued weavers of inflictions drencht under stone
aged river of
avidya scared little girl breathless to be safe near an oak
tree by storm
fenced schoolyard whenas oak hides terror with his hideous smile his
idiot out
stretcht arms panickt she runs screaming runs years reclines no tender
text maker his
face in his maker's chest kisst where he slumbers dusk at his window

screen un

veils thick-scabbed visage forehead to chin seept pus glistens no hand a
sleep ca
resses his neck no harsht sentencings suspended metastasis liver to
lungs no
amorous breeze aroused among cedars; luger-rounds steept long in
godhead of
stray cats strangled set fire to drowned, trusst dogs airgunned im
paled on a
mopstick godhead of a thousand times stabbed prime pig vic
torious man
slaughter laughter teen-aged caged kangaroo gang raped
twice shank

slasht wrists pubescent laughter after last rippt-off mus
tang never to

hang for a yellow-gut

godhead in
scriptures bullets in an infant's laughter bad catch
me bad hurt
me bad hate me mama "man I sure did blast that dumb punk's
brains all
over the trees"—gentle abandoned childish text, silvery wet,
outstrung in
awe struck leaves—

HE WHO DELIGHTS IN SIGNS

tilphussa = from which spring Tiresias must drink & so die

tilphussa without to drink thee
both tilphussa within

as when suckt about poet into poem's
more ruin in flame my deathmost

tilphussa of his goddess's juices
as of her serpent's tongue in my ears a
tiresian upwelling voracious not yet gone luminous down on honest as
early as
sign as down on a
child's rift, rift of her portions fresh in
face eyes throat seeping arroyos make shift at,
threshold, as he who delights in signs as ascend from my glistening
madre, thru my well of her startlings, tilphussa,
in downcaster plain, at alphabet close, in cringing, in hiding
as in goddesskin of his herness her godskin who am

angerly glad flung, mad by infected
feastings, starkt as to dread, dasht to last
wishes, cobwebby viral word blood temblor this
stumbler in naked elision, enjambments stunned, at alarm's
distance, syllabled hell in a panic deathwell toxic bittersweet sleep of who
drink thee

signs, blinded in me as my astonied daughter
born dimmed as my manto, gorgeously wounded
infant her gaze in-where on nowhere, scried sign severely,
as of her tendermost plaintext retting.
some god's doing.
one of my grim
kind.

(blue sun breath door
at tilphussa spring
to drink so to die of, sexual of
ice gust bone clean vastation deathathenamymadre her potion.

Mark Karlins

FIVE POEMS

At Matlock cave
if you sever your hand

& place it under
the dripping mineral water

it will not decay
it will petrify
it will turn

semi-translucent stone

the self likewise of such material unless

THE VILLAGE

That the narrow alley of the self expand
like the dark oil of a river sunk into the earth,
the muscularity of the intellect

passes down into the sleep.
The body dreams its own resurrection.
The flower grows in the stillness of the dark.
The stars of the soul spread out like trees.

The river power

Rabie,
woman with moon riding her stood
on the thick roots of a tree,
a note like that from a flute
in its branches

& those friends, powerful as swimmers,
rotating around each other,
exchanging, coming to take from us
our dead

And the roots she stood on sinking slowly
like the veins of a river,
each swelling in lust
& its murmuring spreading far
as the outskirts of the village
where her parents who had driven her out
burrowed softly
beneath the quietness of the sheets.

Rabie sank with the sinking roots.
Try as she would she could not get out.
She sank deeper & cried for help
& the villagers,
though pulled by regret,
refused to go to her;
refused to invert the order of things

not one of us, they said,
night-shadowed bodies
planted like the heaviness of trees,
shoulder comforted near shoulder.

no undoing,
impossible, they said,
not right to interfere

& yet they finally went,
bewildered, all of them
to move almost without transition
toward her no abiding place

& they tried, the large mass of the village,
to dig Rabie out

but the more they struggled
the deeper she sank;
& they made a chain of people,
men & women,
hand linked to ankle,

a huge turning spiral,
& were carried with her
like the long root of a plant
seeking nourishment
in the stillness beneath the earth

THREAD

When love was a spider & out of her spinnret
the down-pouring sexual
liquids
        hanging

                silk of fate   the heart

like music   everywhere by its inner structure

joined

                the soul & all her voices

PIANIST IN SEARCH OF A BLUE NOTE

At the temple of Minerva
Goethe posed in blue light
had the suspicion
he was on the track of the typical,
that this temple was governed
by the exact same laws
that governed the growth of minerals,
that in the complex organism he inhabited
the smallest outermost leaves of a sapling in the Black Forest
were precisely analogous
to the structural laws of Shakespeare's *Histories*.
Some seventy-five years later in the stifling heat
of his home-made back-room laboratory
Jung pricked the finger of the reasonable
a large bosomed woman who sat stiff in a wasp-waist of anger.
She was a large & self-sufficient woman
but it made her sigh
to look thru Jung's microscope,
the blood-drop spreading out like tiny flames.
The sight slit open a saturday evening concert.
Discipline had hollowed-out the keyboard,
had stunned into elegance
a frail-boned hump-backed pianist
who just under the notes
improvised blue shadow.
There was a harmonic series
she was piecing with her skin
but she needed to thaw classical
to breeding ground, jazz to
a pianist thrusting tendrils thru Bach's paved intentions.
Loosen up, Jung said,
improvise a sparrow with soiled hands,
circumambulate a Buddha in D flat.
Let us imagine, he continued,
that if I were to examine the numerous layers of your civilization
& then penetrate to bone
in the marrow I would be able to trace the outline

of a child's bone, so would I also be able
to trace the outline of music
present at your birth.
There are no dead objects
or at the worst what seems dead
gives leverage, an enormous
beetling crag of rock,
to an embryo preserved in adult,
the receding testimony
of a niche-set blue lamp
pulsating in the dark
of inexhaustible cellar.

In the center of the labyrinth
there is always an animal,
dark blue horned self

not yet come to consciousness
not killed but taken-on & carried back
thru congealed male-will of corridor,
an animal attached in embrace & deepened

that we no longer hate whom we love

Yves Klein
The Leap, 1960
"The Painter of Space Throws Himself into the Void."
Photo: Shunk and Kender

Marjorie Welish

THE SPECTER OF ART HYPE AND THE GHOST OF YVES KLEIN

Although he was not particularly gifted in the conventional artistic sense, Yves Klein (1928-1962) was nevertheless a conjurer of painting and theater—someone who was as preposterous as he was ready to seize upon the esthetic issues of his age. The son of French painters, one of whom was a practicing Abstract Expressionist, Klein grew up in a milieu that took for granted the shamanism avowed by the artist deeply intent on creative "action." Though by the early 1950s, irony on both sides of the Atlantic was commonplace, and artists as different as Ad Reinhardt and Robert Rauschenberg sharply doubted painting's metaphysical content and heroic stances, Klein remained convinced of these matters. And yet one could not be sure. In any event, Klein's flamboyant, intense practice made a strong impression on artists in the United States. Having seen his canvases thickly flocked with ultramarine pigment, and having read about his orchestration of paint-drenched nudes performing as "living brushes," American artists were quick to exploit Klein's literal transcriptions of heroic gestures. Minimalists responsed to the tactile and retinal physicality of his painting; practitioners of Fluxus, Happenings and street theater variously elaborated his sense of performance; and Pop artists gained from Klein's insight that photography and media at once copy and dissemble the appearance of the natural world. In 1982-83 a retrospective of Klein's output toured the United States (Rice Museum, Houston; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and Guggenheim Museum, New York) before closing in Paris. Recently seen at the Whitney Museum was BLAM! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism and Performance 1958-1964, *a show with conspicuous traces of Klein's influence. The following article scrutinizes one work by this French Force for Change in American art.*

On January 12, 1960, painter and performance artist Yves Klein leapt from a second-story ledge to the residential Parisian street below. Hurtling himself through space, risking life and limb, was a singular event. The photograph of the event was as dramatic as a front-page tabloid—shocking the art public into noticing the bizarre French Neo-Dadists. Since that time the photograph has been scrutinized by some in the art world almost as closely as the Kennedy assassination snapshots for evidence of authenticity; for, in fact, the photo had been published in two versions, one showing the urban environment altered to remove a passing train and cyclist.

Fifteen years later, art historian Nan Rosenthal exhaustively researched the entire episode. She concluded that Kelin did indeed take that jump, but over tarpaulins held under him for safety; that several rehearsals of the leap were needed to shape the perfect trajectory; and that in the darkroom photographers created a montage of the leap and a background purged of traffic, eliminating the mundanity that interfered with Klein's notion of the pristine void. Over the years, Klein leaping, seemingly oblivious to his own suicide, has remained particularly tantalizing, and critics have continued to speculate on the meaning of it. It seems safe to say speculation will continue no matter what the evidence: biographical data will not undo the perfection of this teasing image, which insists on its own authenticity even as it confounds authenticity on every level.

Ethical authenticity haunts the esthetic discussion of Yves Klein's recorded leap. An image so startling, so instantly compelling, and yet so implausible, the photo of the leap challenges us to authenticate its actual origins in a way that may start with a detective story concerning technique but ends with our pursuit of the elusive issues of the integrity of self-discovery and authenticity as a mode of being. Today, in the 1980s, appropriation of personae and roles has become standard post-modernist practice. Whether in painting (David Salle), photography (Cindy Sherman), or performance (Eleanor Antin), mimicking cultural role models has superseded the struggle for individual integrity that prevailed as the ideal forty years ago when Yves Klein came of age. Then, in the 1940s, the ethics of authenticity inspired artists with its special meaning. Abstract Expressionists fell under the spell of this peculiarly existential notion, whereby the artist, acting from an inner agonistic urgency, strives to fulfill the unique potential of himself and his art. "Authenticity and individuality have to be earned, "says Sartre's rephrasing of Heidegger. "I shall be my own authenticity only if, under the influence of the call of conscience, I launch out towards death, as towards my own particular possiblity. At this moment, I reveal myself to myself in authenticity, and

I raise others along with myself towards the authentic."

On one hand, Klein's *Leap into the Void* may well be the perfect visual illustration of authenticity, for it palpably demonstrates the sincerity of a man, no longer content with merely espousing an attitude, actually assimilating the notion of his own death. On the other hand, since taking the existential trope literally is not proof of authenticity, but a mechanical translation or a comedic reduction of meaning by which a vaudevillian enacts direct engagement with the world, the leap is sheer acting. It is this latter possibility that suggests insincerity or, if not insincerity, naivity and a simpleton's literal world view, but in either case, a false enactment of the striving for self-fulfillment so valued by the Abstract Expressionists who were Klein's contemporaries. Whether or not Klein knew the Sartrean metaphor of the existential leap directly, or indirectly, absorbing it as common knowledge, the image he produced replicates its meaning exactly, but erroneously. If the possibility of faked evidence is unnerving, Klein's literal-minded interpretation of authenticity is most disturbing because it suggests not merely toying with ontological integrity but fundamentally misconstruing it. Nevertheless, his misreading of Sartre's intention did not prevent Klein from expending much sincere energy insisting to friends his flight was real.

To judge by the process of how the image of the leap came into being—how Klein rehearsed the act in an extended shoot before a camera until satisfied with the execution and how the resulting images were manipulated in the darkroom—it is clear the artist contrived this spontaneous act at the expense of spontaneity. Moreover, it is not the leap but the photographed image of the leap that at once captures and doles out breathless ecstasy. "*The Leap into the Void,*" the catalogue listing reads, "a conceptual event principally embodied in a photograph by Harry Shunk. . . ." Thus spontaneity was pre-planned, and Shunk's collaborative artistry helped fabricate the image through photographs edited for the purpose of selecting the most tantalizing moment in the leap's trajectory.

Photography, then, was not so much a witness as a subtle co-conspirator in forging the leap of authenticity. Like photographs of environmental earthworks, too remote for direct viewing, documentary photos and films of performances communicate art by proxy, and in many instances, this secondary source material has come to supersede the reality of the event itself. By the time Klein master-minded his photograph, the problematic nature of documentary material had become an especially savory literary topic. It had prompted Robbe-Grillet to argue in both his essays and novels that the photo's "information" describes only the

exterior of events whose underlying reality lies inaccessible to the viewer obsessively trying to reconstruct the definitive reality of what must have been. It would lead Antonioni, in *Blow-Up,* that cinematic souvenir of the 1960s, to show that the more rapid disintegration of a witnessed event through successive photographic enlargements, the greater the speculation about the nature of the event's reality—the more so because we assume a photograph to be objective.

The Leap into the Void, as subjective as it is ambiguous, eludes absolute interpretation. What after all, is the meaning of a work which first seems to be an action of an attitude, then a photographed image of this enacted attitude? What is the meaning of a photo that exists in two versions and in two different contexts, one, an exhibition catalogue, the other, a self-published tabloid? Evidently, for Klein, performing the leap for photographers was only the beginning of his staged authenticity. On November 27, 1960, Klein published *Dimanche (Sunday: the Newspaper of a Single Day)* filling it with avid photojournalism written by himself about his monochromatic paintings, his fire fountain, and of course his leap—the latter, complete with a photo and the headline, "A Man in Space!" and extravagantly captioned, "The painter of space throws himself into the void!"

While it is certainly possible to construe the tabloid as rabid, self-promoting hype, Klein's personal aggrandizement is not the entire message the image itself sends out. Rather the newspaper seems to offer an extension of the role-playing required to dramatize the leap. Lionel Trilling, who discusses the sincerity of role-playing in his book *Sincerity and Authenticity,* reminds us that acting is not necessarily inauthentic, but an outward sign of an inward vitality; the Greeks enacted the roles of ideal beings as if they themselves embodied these ideals. Perhaps, then, Klein's tabloid is an expansive form of the intimate immensity Klein is conscious of as he plays his role, the role of the ideal artist, existentially construed. Flying hair, wildly manic eyes, arced body—all in perfect consonance with the metaphysical leap—Klein's abandon is only further launched by the newspaper's promotion of it.

Nevertheless, beyond this—or should one say, co-extensive with it—is Klein's skepticism of his own act. Blanketing the newspaper with sensational copy that mimicks yellow journalism, Klein's exposé undercuts his performance. It is this flamboyant self-betrayal that Rosenthal has in mind when she proposes Klein to be pursuing an art of "conspicuous fraudulence"; so irrepressible is his hype, she says, that anyone who desires can see through his disguises. If the photo of the leap conceals some evidence of its fabrication, Klein's one-issue vanity press loudly confesses it.

At some point, one comes to the realization that whatever metaphysical values Klein holds, his practice demonstrates he believes fraudulence or authenticity is irrelevant when dealing with art. Once again, as in the photo of the leap, a case can be made that Klein is only taking advantage of the deception inherent in all perception of visual illusion. Accustomed to painted illusion, we fall into the trap of believing in photographic illusion, and then are offended when we are fooled. Our cultural expectations of photographic truthfulness have not prepared us to be skeptical when viewing a human in danger; but artists have always indulged their prerogative for legerdemain. Within this is the idea of Magritte's pipe: one can well imagine Klein's tabloid displaying the photo of the leap, with a bold caption, "This is not a leap!" performing Magritte's paradox for us once again.

Nor is the specialized notion of existential authenticity immune from artistic manipulation. But our expectations suggest otherwise. It is certainly understandable how, on seeing *The Leap into the Void,* viewers can be misled into expecting Klein's full commitment to the existential value to be first and last an ethical—not esthetic—choice, and then judge the art inauthentic on realizing that Klein's commitment is to artifice. If the disparity between the ethics of authenticity and the sleight-of-hand that brought its image into being distresses those invested in existentialism as a guide to life, Klein remains unperturbed by the problem; authenticity or not, for him artifice only enhances art's intrinsically magical properties.

Ultimately, one is tempted to pronounce the *Leap into the Void* more sophisticated than the man who produced it. Larry Rivers, who knew Klein in Paris, says, "Klein had a great desire to convince people of his beliefs, especially his belief that anything can be art—walking to get a newspaper, feeling the wind in your hair . . . , but to call him naive," Rivers says, "is to disparage the vitality of his practice." And his sincerity. "There was very little irony in Klein," Rivers says.

Then again, Nan Rosenthal reaches the opposite conclusion. Too many works demonstrate knowledge of Duchamp, she contends, for Klein to be perceived as innocent. But if Klein's artistic sophistication seems destined to remain debatable, uncertainty is forever guaranteed by the speculative nature of esthetics, which like ethics or metaphysics cannot be proved, only asserted. Perhaps on some level Klein intuited that, as a speculative cultural value, authenticity is predicated on belief; his ironic artistic colleagues certainly realized that once cultural values shift and disbelief sets in, the art so recently brave with authenticity now seems devoid of it.

If not Klein, then Klein's photo contrives a transparent image whose meaning is nonetheless scrambled at every level. It is also a perfect icon of the age, that moment when, as Trilling says, art as well as morality was in the process of revising itself. For in the transition between Abstract Expressionism and the reactions to it through Pop and performance art emerging in the 1950s, the authenticity of "action painting" caught a glimpse of its own image: "candid" photographs of Jackson Pollock did as much to create the attitude of authenticity as the paintings themselves. When in 1949 Yves Klein saw *Life*'s photo essay on Pollock, he was riveted by it. With such awareness of the self-consciousness of performance, authenticity would become simply another ingredient collaged into the esthetic mix.

Jean McGarry

WATER BABIES

A Little Novel

DREAM DATE

To start with (on this hot summer day), the desirable boy up the street is out on the sidewalk in a set of clean laundry, while yourself—well, perhaps you'll stay out of it this time, stay home where you belong, rubbing the tape of the player piano between your lips to feel the bumps.

Or, he has a sailor hat on. You could put on yourself a sailor hat and like a sailor speed up to his house and speed back letting him see what you have that's like he has.

Mother is in the kitchen waiting, perhaps, for the fruits of these experiments and for further evidence of what you can do. She, too, sees through her window the clothespin standing on its prongs and the small hat up there at the Conneally's. She also notes the white of his house, the blue of his sky and the kind of element that those Conneallys have always seemed to live in and up to you to open a tiny door between and let a little of it come down here, let her fill her fat lungs, she of whom the word fat wouldn't begin to describe, even by comparison with you, the sense to someone like him.

At what point you, the old mathematician, ask yourself, could you plot from here: the domain, to there, the white, the blue, the youth: the

range? Can you be sure of leaving here, going there, getting him, coming back, in this universe of laws and materials dominated by laws, answer me, in an ellipse or a simple straight line doubled back? Would he be on your back? Could you start anywhere in the house and arrive, or can it be missed by a few degrees here and so much larger at the other end, fanning out—the brown dot—into the water right up to your maggot's neck, or back to the city on the other side, and him still standing there in his beautiful drapes and seaside frame.

How said I am for your prospects and the sadness of your mother's prospects.

RHIZOME

A fine salad was spread onto four plates. Eat these salads. Have you felt the kind of refreshment in the upper palate as the cold green slides and rotates? All is uniform and going toward unity in the inner part of the body. Twist your lovely body in your seat, a solid you are with vials of imperfect liquid: by imperfect, I always mean something in between.

A body has nested in my mind's nest. It will lay a root there. You will favor it and sit there dangling your feet.

In the body, in the mind: these are not the same chamber. A mother has the baby inside the body; the body has the mind and the mind, the baby and the baby's mind.

A salad is formed of gold and green curls, a round red nut and silvery fork resting on four or five stacked enamel plates: black. A picture in a magazine on my legs and in the picture a salad and a salad plate; a turkey on the back of the page just over the thighs.

Is this the kind of food you like? Have you decided about your own food and is it the food on this page: salad on a stack of plates, four forks, twin tomatoes, cluster and aggregate? I will always like what you like if you like this or something else I can picture. A green food is a first choice and the way a fork can pierce it and lay it plain on a quiet tongue. Eat all this and eat more. Paper your beautiful cave with these green towels and green curtains. I would visit there and bring whatever was needed. I would retrace my steps and make a small house anywhere with a view to these green walls. I will eat anything you eat, or picture.

BATH

A bath was half-filled. Dear Dad flexed his toes over the bath and made a wave. Round and round, Dad, round. He curled his toe and made the adjacent toe cover the toe and that gave a pleasure which countervailed against the sense of soft water creeping up the medicine cabinet mirror. It trickled on his cheeks too.

Sometimes, time is water and Dad felt the bathtub rim push his buttock to the bone and the bone pushed, too, and causing something like pain, but also like pleasure.

No matter what you say, what you can't say is Dad was not secure although he was on a limited perch above water and full of consideration for water and the water climate of the bathroom, and the window on the bathroom scale spoiled by water. Where was he in all this? Another way to put this is where did he stand? Where would you stand if you were here for Dad?

Answer: Dad stood or sat on the rim of the bathtub with a fresh toe circling a circle in the limpid pool of white-colored water, waiting.

Was he—if you were here, you might ask—waiting for mother? If you asked this question, you would presume, Thales, that all is water, that all is warm and white-colored and the dangling toe with the softest of all elements: mother.

Was he waiting for mother? If you ask this, Dad will sing and sweat and watery sweat will drop onto his tongue, so glad and wedded to water he'll be, and you.

Was he waiting for mother?

But now, you cynics, the water is cold. The warm water is cold or colder than it was, colder than the thing called toe, and Dad, if he's your Dad, pulls it out, the toe, and shakes a drop on the pink rabbity rug and holds the toe aloft, inspecting the changes due to water: spongy skin with ruffles, the inlaid toenail. A time in water, perhaps a time for water and now it runs out, runs down the round drain, circling or spiraling the way it does and making the noise. Pale toe, cold body, immutable bathtub. Water is now gone and Dad folds his toe, puts his toe away for another time. Goodnight, mother. Goodnight to you who make all the days like water.

SPECULATIVE

I awoke to spots on the pillow and my mouth conversing itself into a rind. This is how it started: the nights.

The first night was kind and a shepherd drove a small flock over the soft bump of the hill. Your arm purpled with threads of veins and a bruise and the pigeons nestled on the ledge as nice. You—when I say "you" I'm talking about the antique, something with a red gloss on it and a mirror over it. I have never put a mark on the marble floor and "you" to me is an articulation or an extended period of history, not as long as night, night being its own flexible and flexing thing and you having the character of a partial scratch on a paper, and yet beautiful the way the unfinished is.

I could lay night, you down like a pencil and half eaten apple and reach for something—some part of a conversation which "my" teeth whispered into that small warm cave. Where would that take the night and a night's rain?

The character of rain: pervious, impervious, its long straight lines and the humor you'll find in the oval puddle fixing itself in a hollow on the blacktop. Gain and loss.

Gain: does the night gain, and in what? The formal turning of one filled hour to the next. Do the hours curve around expectation, and what is expectation but curve, a sinuosity which so subtly imitates the shape of the body: cup and flex, mold and unmold, young and older hollow.

To leave this in an open key and move or modulate to another night, another attempt to grind the flesh to a purer, segmented pigment and no formal unity of whole, ball and hollow.

Night: so much happens "in" it but how to get inside it so compactly as not to drive a notch or finger through its supple sheath and when I say that, I mean memory, whose thin walls admit of all sound, but hold so little, the cheap attractions of its cube and so cheap in its cube, for so it sometimes forms when put to rest.

The second night (I say two, but mean nothing but past and further past), the shepherd slipped himself and fat muttons over the sad hill again, just the same, always the same if you make it the same and I always do, if I think to do it and if you ask me to do it, for I can always bring it back from the dead, for nothing is dead but just overlooked or overelaborated, to be no longer recognized as the simple thing it was once, or remembered. So, the first thing occurred and room now for a second thing.

A room: why is it that space is always available? Twice as available as time and more attractive, whispering to the thoughts and not-yet-present pictures. A picture in a space, an invitation to a space, by the space to the picture and instead I put myself in it, imagining how flat I could be if given a space just flat enough and no more. How I could thin there with night and all available apples, the sound of feet and wool.

Tomorrow is another night and that night to fill. You fill a night first with edges of things: part of a buckle, unraveled thread and a necklace clasp. A necklace is nice to lace around a neck or night and soon, always soon, the frame opens to admit it. Later a flatness falls out, a mosaic of ends of things and this is something we've always—we, us—thought and passed it to each other as land, story, imitation, love and accepted it from each other with a surplus thank you, or not.

Night end. It ends only to begin filling again and wrapping its filled woolen sleeve around the shoulders and just at the waist. To end it, momentarily, you drive white tablets through the young parts of the mouth, and so red it is at dawn and dawn's lively perimeter and sink; the night sinks as the teeth wear their collar of flesh and morning.

WHERE WILL IT END, WHEN?

Where will it end, when? Is it for life to paint this beautiful smile? Who is it smiling at? The man across the street looking out the window in a black suit: undertaker, a man who addresses the dead ones as little men; he thinks of them as men, so do I, and I smile at them passing by just as nicely as I smile at you. Passing by in their cars with the rolled up windows and the flowers they (the little men) get when dead are not nice, are not well selected, have no delicacy, just empty lasciviousness which is what death has, and the little men all know that. It's funny that it ends so funny.

He takes it seriously, though, at the window, for a job is serious and you are as serious as you take your job, or as your job is taken. Job is not part of death and not even dying, which is work, is considered job. He has the job looking out the window; they don't have it, and the flowers might signify that.

It's a static moment, his looking out the window, the nice glass of

the window and the little men all quiet in their canoes. See his breath on the window. He doesn't see it; he's thinking of me and who am I to have the prerogative to look over there at him, neither dead nor job? My beautiful smile.

Girl: what is it? I want to think it isn't well connected to funeral flowers, or that the little men might admire me, as he does. My father had a black funeral suit. What is here for girls? I'm looking, he's looking, father is a little man, but his canoe is broken up and the flowers, those hard things, are so close to laughing. My smile—he can see it, but beautiful pain and smile is not death or flower and my job (not a real job) is to smile and be silent, stay inside my own house, do not try to interfere with all the jobs on the outside, the little men, canoes, flowers and when it ends, I'll do it.

WATER BABY

What is life but a length of work punctuated by sin, detour, a coil? Deliver me from life, O You.

How will the retreat be made but from life to light, light being nothing graspable, but still there in strings, in plates, in fiery matin curtains. Light is length, but more than length.

The sins to commit in life are formal, more and more abstract variations on the theme: sugar, suck, tear, to hurt and to have, to halve and to harm, to return to the beginning with an empty envelope and a token and to have one more turn, one time out, time to flatten, thin and fluctuate, to lie, steal and abrade, to hang, in short and in fine, like a thread over the river curl, to be a man or woman forever and drop like a spider on this thread, to spy on the things you missed.

Human hunger for representation of food, food but not food, the perfection of it in a picture all bedded in a code and cold to the touch. Human desire for the other coded on a bed of iceberg lettuce, young onions, blades and forms, flake and chip. If you made yourself (you) a picture, I'd cut it in half: two halves and roll it in my fingers to make the long spiny thread and with the thread, I'd perforate the top of my head and a product would emerge like a condensed drop, a water baby.

That's the kind of life I'd have: length, sin, coil and coiling into a dark bony region.

THE SOULS

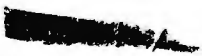
So I woke, the room was white, the bed was narrow and white, the souls were arrayed on the bookshelf, the lime soda was flat in the glass. Mother stepped in and inquired, the door cutting into the room and giving the room this sense of another room, as to the last few hours and the qualities of my sleep. We both gazed through the window onto the sky's own mindless blue—I say mindless, for where is the variation, mind being variation, or even a skipping from point to point by a fat and spotted toad with algal feet and a sense of desire, but for what?

We gaze at the blue. Mother then, then Mother brings the coffee cup, the large milk cup, the tray of cups, the biscuit and its cup and a cup completely free of entanglements. How the souls do bleat and cry for their milk.

By then, the intricate morning is gone, the white room is now the pourpre of the afternoon. I am lifted, I the child, for whom the day has unfolded with mother in the fold; see the leg dangling with dust of powder hanging from the baby hairs and glistening in what they call a bath of sun on baby, and the shift of souls from one foot to another en route in that long day of the motionless pacing of souls. Every room has its souls and mine and mother's are a collection of bottles with the souls inside and out, and some wound inside the caps.

Mother sails the afternoon and out the window, a sailing ship and a coil of rope. Has she left a baby behind? The glass of lime soda, whose light so full and material, is divided equally outside and inside. The day is walking, the souls squealing in their traps. The food of the day is gone or nearly gone. Have you seen a child lie in a gray or gray-blue pool of light, his hours—more a thing than a span—like chairs, a box or a cone. Lie there until lie means anything else.

Here she is shaking something with a spider in it; it is a baby formula with a small cross; it is a mother's unction and a bright silver nipple; no, it is five formal napkins and a charm. It is mother. How she sails in a bright robe, just as the day sailed to its weights and now, we'll wait till morning, a second morning, to repeat the things we love, over the intermittent sound of the souls and the late green soda, another window, and imitate flat face, the unbroken blue and baby.



Geoffrey Young

ELEGY

Clouds of fingerlings roiling in a blue tank,
and for movement here comes the man with the bucket.
Watch 'em hit! especially early in the present tense.
We'll be investigating the evidence of a less
coordinated raid before their snapping jaws close.
Perspective is what changes the pursuit; just by
giving up a little we become effective bright-mouthed
coastal omnivores, implanting something, shall we say,
pure in the mirror? We've all seen it. The face,
the big face, some god-awful big face belonging
to no one, round as a nickel. Our father's?
He is sad. You can't ask. He cries watching
"The Gambler, The Nun and The Radio" on TV. He
embarrasses you. His strange fuzziness at night,
light sliding across the surface of a blimp. And his
voices, even if we build on them, "Got a bit of it
on your chin there, didn't you?" or "This rock Hap's
got looks like the main exhibit" are more like sitting
ducks than signal fires lighting up the pond, when
in fact we pass into the great beyond on lightly tanned
rectilineal hips, reassured to think. More than that
you can't ask for via belief, or study this later.
To hold love in one hand, and vomit in the other
is to have the story well under way, the picture made
up of small accents, of waves stared at, of tiny prayers
the words are feeding, brush your lips on them, his broken
body. The idea that we are misfits, some deep-dish
western plastic anthology with all the meat and vegetable
markets in full swing, appeals to me, a process
we're stuck in, or haven't bothered to type yet.

And who am I talking for if it's no one's fault?
To say congratulations to the deadman who after 50 years
of active research finally achieved a world emptied
of the rules that kept this life so tangled up, is...
is to forget the...I don't know. He was important to me.
The light of history sputters now on his flannel
trousers, so neutral, we're not situated like we once
were, feet forward, forehead skin tight. What's stable
is the rate of bad news, the screws a little tighter
or altogether stripped, the teakettle whistling
over a Spanish language broadcast, "Yo siento mucho
Señora Lopez, y muchas gracias Rosalva." A vivid
primitive okay seethes in the literal heart, which is
to say, swallow, the logos broken down and distributed
into the typecase one letter at a time, one gust of
rain-whipped wind, drawer shuts, body gone, everyday life.
Click track, eyeline match. A normal BM, seniors, is
what is normal for you. It never hurts to flint the gap
between words and what they mean, as in, writing's the
best omelette ever made with a chainsaw. Diamonds are
born of other pressures. The horizon is our life sentence
kind of see-you-in-the-morning sailboatish if now
is now, the regatta the regatta, no one coming back,
dove sta memoria. The occupational hazard of making
a spectacle of myself can be worked out in little theatre
form. When the phone call voice said "Ballgame's over"
there was just a plate, a fork, a chair, an empty room.
Enough that he'd sent the word "chalumeau" as a way
to make sadness beautiful. For five minutes I turned
into a shapeless blob of body-heavy numbness. The total
event, any total event, any event is total, syncopates
the eye. But exactly how far away does aesthetic
distance have to be before it turns into a pile of dirt
next to a deep hole in the ground? I still don't know
how to piss in it, then howl, then laugh till I cry
only to remember his quirks. He raised me to think
women could become jockeys, toreros, privileged content.
But now some alleviation of the sense that I am closing in
on absolute zero catches me in the back of the head
bleakly and says, "Welcome other views on the subject."
Our letter A is an ox-head, our letter G a camel's neck,

etc. When you walk the street at this hour, certain
abuses of your expectations spangle the surface a square
mile at a time. The well-built little Egyptian barques
drift from the dock to test their tethers, though
they won't set sail without these words, while radios
from the upper deck blow gale force commerce and it's
a family legend carried to rest in slow dissolve,
along with a lot of infuriating phonecalls and comic
disclosures that yes, here was an artificial paradise
filled with household materials, disagreeable side-effects,
some old silver, a few lawn chairs half wood half aluminum,
and now a team of "experts" on the laid-back side of
responsible sorting through the carved coconuts, the
fiercely somnolent ashtrays, the abandoned microscope,
the jar of paintbrushes, minuscule rock gardens, and
well-thumbed bookmarks dropping like territorial flags
at *just* that place in the *Greek Reader.* Ithaka always
palpable and remote at the same time. Months earlier
he touched an old tooth and it fell out. Genes jump
along the chromosome, nothing is stable. No one knows
what life is, though the taped music plays. The mask
floats over the deepest impress. Tiny moths live
in the wreath of chili. True happiness requires
cubist scaffolding and considerable naivete. Sip
the drink you nip. Or turn to the street palms
stretched out over the highway, cement mixer, putty-putty,
waving to a half-wit in baggy pants whistling bird-like,
a long silent spin on the finger of a perfect stranger.
What about the calm just prior to visions? I have
no sudden idea for making one person speak another
person's English. I can't get my hand off the synthesizer
music, conscious of what an eyelash is, with an iron
egret rusting on a length of welding rod, an old straw
hat further crushed by each "interesting" conversation.
Throw the legless furniture out. A few dozen washable
tattoos make kids chatter. It's not snobbish to prefer
Donatello's David to the Marlboro Man. Unusual stress
and an urge for mayhem at either end of the light
spectrum shoot my curtains off. With tweezers I rip
the sun out of the sky and douse it in the toilet.
Psstt. It seems an obvious extension here to analyze

our various handwritings for traces of anomie, bouquets
of white wine, and *herbes simples,* even though I don't
like anything that time does *per se.* The meaning of
a houseboat, sky high, no pavement in front, conventional
harbor depth, music by The Normal, an old man a mirage?
in white shirt standing by the shore, his eyes crowd
upon us, welcome back, between black arrows of scribbles.
Agile, not artful. They pull your wisdom tooth, you
feel a little lighter, but wiser? Sodium pentathol:
a swan dive through liquid cement. So the last thing
in this life is to betray love, voice as a value of
presence, presence of the object ("O saltshaker of
perfection"), presence of meaning to consciousness,
self-presence in so-called living speech written in red
ink standing up at a bookstore. A college kid might look
up and say, "Slap my empty pockets," or "Stuff rugs
under lid of piano" with an innocence I am the percussion of.
Every time I try to relax, a hideous Bavarian orchestra
in lederhosen lit by streetlamps shining through leaves
sticks its warm brassy air in my face, but I'm not
repairing dreams anymore; the speed of all sound waves
is the same. Sitting on a towel watching the bath water
steam, this whole deal getting highly Chinese now,
the old man's tears, by force of example, become mine,
and I miss the judgment of a good man. I trot out
my top stories, I listen to the radio. A receiver gets
sent long, downfield where the organ that pumps the blood
pumps the words. The last photo quite beautiful, the
last shave. Last time that hand held a pen, last line.
Last sunlight, last elevator, last doctor, last walks
through house on paper thin bird's legs, turning blue, last
hallucinations, last deadness, last pain, last attempt
to find a poem in a book, Auden's "On Melville's Tomb"—
they'd said he was incoherent, I went straight to his
bedside and quoted its opening line "Toward the end
he sailed into an extraordinary mildness" and without
opening an eye he said, "Auden, in the front room by the
heater." The ear I'd whispered into a draining open wound.
Playing cards of afternoon light from the kitchen window
collated the boredom and mystery of dying into a uniform
I could wear with enough acceptance to attempt to discuss

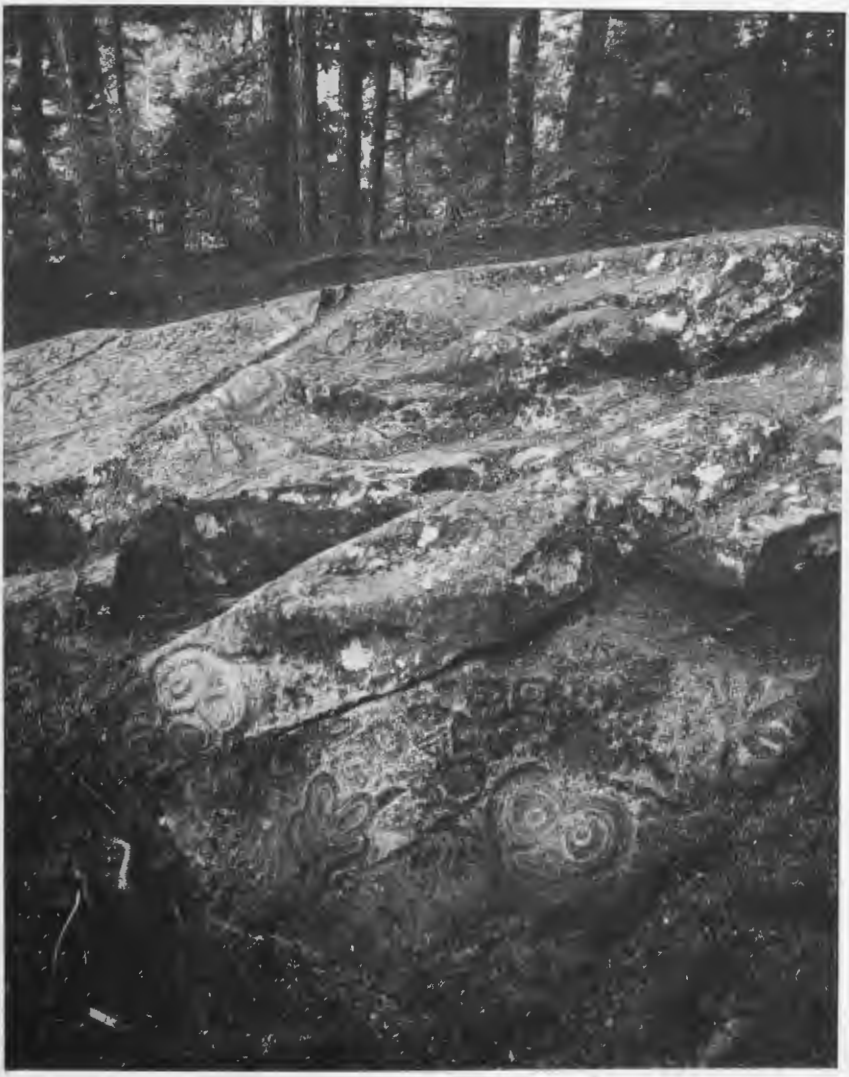
South American drinking habits with a parrot someone
had brought by to keep us company. Let me ask you something:
Have you walked out to the end of a pier lately? A glacier
all but covered the globe, his little country down about
2,000 feet and precarious. I wanted him to get it over
with, to stop doing calisthenics, to lace his skates
and go. I let the tide carry my fingertips over the barnacles.
A diet of morphine, shallow air, blind ravings. Later
I saw him in a dream, he was looking at himself in a mirror.
He moved closer and closer to his image, then kissed himself
on the lips. To sit in judgment of the way he walked
into the kitchen to put icecubes in his oldfashions, to sit
in judgment of the copy of Goethe he left balanced on
the little plug-in bathroom heater, to sit in judgment of
the judgment he heaped on himself. Now there's more tea,
more anecdote, more money. Maybe fewer visits to certain
family stories, partially replaced long ago anyway perhaps
by a little society of writers who show each other their
works. Calm me down then, Horace. Huge blue grapes
soak the morning paper, and the rinds of several yellow
grapefruit from Escondido lie squeezed out on white
plates. I feel I have to do something for us all,
so reach up and touch the switch amid fancy free
turbulence. It's not all music but I can hear it
that way, the anomalous ring of cash registers, people
brushing shoulders, and little one-swallow paper cups.
A hamburger, a beer, and three cheers for the opposable
thumb. When we're ready we'll start back through litter
and devil's grass to a different water's edge, brilliant
little sketches quoted at random against a spangle of sea
light. The great spoked wheel that prevents us from trying
to slip through its singing teeth, a rag of underpants
stained with axle grease, discarded wads of hair clogging
the employment office, all images are the same, I never
thought I'd look like this. There are many people
dancing and I cast my eyes about blindly, featherless
bird in a child's hands, gong of the symbol attracting
meaning, all images are the same. To the poem. I am
not looking in that direction. He used to sit on the back
steps with a half head of iceberg lettuce and a saltshaker.
Hold 'er newt. Money is so small a thing when you have it

and then you don't advance the art or typify the age
with your yacht tied up in Bimini awaiting your arrival.
I'll get back to his hands, wrapping a book, when the coast
is clear. Could you please phrase that in about nine words?

Linda Connor

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS

Hands, Canyon de Chehy, Arizona, 1982



Bella Coola, British Columbia, Canada, 1981

Arizona, 1982

New Mexico, 1981

Petroglyphs, Hawaii, 1983

Great Galley, Horseshoe Canyon, Utah, 1982

Stephen Rodefer

FLOWERING

CURBED BY GREASE, ploy, and hope in blooming, I beat these wings over surf and shore. I am expanded in deep thievery to mount therefrom great honor, great horror.

We achieve our oars in hourly time. It cannot be too soon, and it will not be too late. If dreaming is true, the other is craved. It grows heavier on you, and older are you made simultaneous to descend, as frequent then to mount, minus one, all following. There *was* no bed existed without the memory of another.

Without hands feet so slow among the jags. You sorrow them. And kindly star some gift or other grudge, like lightning bug to plower, gnat to light. Look down furrow to the grapes. All leaving I perceived to show itself the bottom. The bearings alternated shadows, the vengeful bay that cantered erect to draw the stars.

It is the city like a little cloud, a ditch of forecemeat by the hill, where founders the forgotten irritant, piled neat with people. No one will reveal the theft, yet every flaming steals its fuel from buried ignorance. The city is the hill. It rises so upon its bridgework, to conceal the slaughter that confounded it.

It is a rock hangs out to keep us up, though we are pushed below it. Attendant gibes and sways they mark and turn us. Hearing makes us certain. The fathers are consumed in flower above the pipe, where each next is placed beside his brother, sisters. The looked-for gate laments the artifice.

Thousands say what one can utter. Don't deny desire to bend toward home. In your arms and vengeance I will hold my tongue, which cries out for conversant length, cursing the fever crew below.

Neither family affection, nor respect before, nor the dire love that holds our circumstance, can kill in us the ardor that experiences the world direct. We heave our pace from campment windily to flank to trail the sky. The unfolding stages mind—what throws up own into our hands.

Put forth solely on the surface then, with the company which has never itself remained, but turned its landmark to surpass the peopled world this side of furtherance. Think where we began. We were not made to be bolts—but to chase change, take turns, harbor following. Oars are ours so made so low that morning at times turns our flight to foolish left, night already on the pole. There appears there is a highlight dim with distance. Five times we waver and enter the narrow hard. And there appears there to be a navigation stars mistook.

Sometimes though in which we joy. For beyond the spoil, beyond the wreck of otherness and difference, another whirl will strike our forepart, another ocean teem us to its swell. Till submerged and struck—the distance dimmed, the guidebook torn—we fly the sheets up citified to resist the edge whose rocks and lineation led us to its forge—whose margins then seize looming, imagine landing, demand still heading, their facility cited passably on the prominent shore.

Allen Fisher

BEL AIR

At last it octobers, a tremendous
mist descends on my head
trip a cat
an obo hits my incisor
I fall back
"Good Morning, this is the News"
Is this naiveté or integrity —
this simpleness or confidence to gaze
with intelligent vitality with
numerosity a
splendid buzz from a razor that,
spaced out on a slowed down recording,
reveals a fluff in the magnetic arrangement.
This is Europe
it's not even a terminal.
Forget arrangement. Stop.
Replace with manipulation. Stop.
"Thankyou, but this gets us no where."
A Burglar near the end of the century
looks out over his balcony
and reinterprets the State,
Everything now appears to take place outside
Work's quantum determines the permanence of violent conditions.
Of course he's sick of it!

Shall we follow?
He leaves under the sign
'Café du Dôme'
immediately we are living in a Still-life
The Painter steps through a gate of bamboo wicker
a radar pulse at centimetre wavelengths

strikes her left cheek is
partially absorbed
no one attends to its flow's relations
adjust in due ratio
The room is in the rest frame
manifested by drops on the glass
This is the situation. What happens next
requires our happiness.
Each blink tampers with record of it.

2.

Shielded by these particles autumn
offers astonishment.
Instead of organised hatred she
involved in disorderly performance
made necessary by the floods
weaponed through the fence
an entourage of western medicine and humiliation.
She paints at the gate
the struggle of objects for supremacy
The Burglar crosses a room and knocks on
my eyes, He touches my mouth
with the edge of his trembling,
He frames me with my own perception
as it internalises.
A yellow glow seeps past the door
he leaves open
The community buy dogs
to protect him.
Boys argue furiously over
their video systems
The Burglar sells his watch.
The Hamming code suggests
a drop-dead halt.
They are calls for a clean-looking page.

The Painter moves from the gate
persuaded to contain impatience
through unexpected calm and firmness.

Lamentation and grief become the patterned
stable world, make guests of those
who belonged.
She matches the found pattern
of a star map
into a knitted pullover without
a look forward to the outcome except
a knowing of its warmth
recognised through texture
It lifted the debate of production
and autonomy out of the Burglar's
bag still wrapped
in newsprint
and opened it out.

3.

The children recognise the cloud shapes a
mathematician codes as corank one.
They see the dynamics
without knowing the internal parameters
and one girl trailing the drop-offs from
a running toy
turns to her now stationary vehicle,
"We better go inside before it rains".
The Burglar leans out of someone's window,
lowers a box of sand
onto the walkway. He
is insecured by men and scraps of paper
permitting him to live.
The Painter follows a path to a simple hut.
In the wet an umbrella loses its
commodity function. She
rejects this. Professionalism's
insistence incites her anger.
I am tired of the news
and play through a contemporary
Quartet at twice its intended speed,
swapping one note for another
then dropping loud breaks of sound
mid-rhythm into my weakness

leave my initial appetency
for another weave.
The reflected radar pulse
returns through the window with a
second. The star map begins to craze.

There is talk suddenly of mortice locks,
with another, hasp and staple,
inside an alarm sounds
from a car in the road
we know, beforehand, we are in a city
We call this knowledge but
are also in out of place
no room to move without limits
The Burglar rings a bell for help
It is a mistake
We are alarmed and our
vibration changes colour
randomly our rhythm chocks
and my breath catches hers.
She leaves a half ounce of casein
to soak along side the alcohol
and ammonium carbonate
It is enough to fix the image
made of the Burglar
She continues to walk away from us
up the path to the hut
without identity, carrying
a torn drawing marked 'Studies
for the engraving: Adam and Eve'.

4.

A reader follows the marks up the path
occasionally losing balance from
may be
synaesthesia
stopped short by the figure
of Blake, kicking away sand and pebbles,
joining the path
naked beneath his raincoat,

locks my eyes.
I imagine he has just been
writing a tract on astrology
"Irrational action," the Painter notes,
"From rational self-preservation."
I respond to the stimuli realised
as alien to my experience.
The mathematician adds a calculation
through spurious adaption to realistic needs
This paternal acre is a colony a
usurped matrilocality
"The stars," Blake could have added, "Advise,"
mitigating fear of the inexorability
of social processes you create
as reader.
The Burglar moves that
everything negative
is due to the outside
A flight of birds,
released to tell the time,
superimposes heat patterns on the star map.

This creates a spatial illusion
One colour appears above the other
through its transparency.
What may have been noise
gets read as fresh knowledge.
It carries understanding that the
collective distribution of virtual utterances
creates the social set-up the
institutions breeding
value judgements about innate tendencies
or irreversible actions.
The Burglar moves over another barrier
behind the window
unaware a camera
records this onto film.

5.

It becomes apparent from the film

a dance is underway
The Painter moves towards the open
hut. The path has muddied
before her from heavy boots
and the overlapping tracks
of a bicycle. It creates an
apprehension which increases her
exaltation gives it momentum.
She stops on a stone to sustain
deep breaths and
reels from them.
The smell of elm bark accentuates
this. Women like her participate
in the war against coöption.
What she creates prevents subjugation
by the State, but it is no longer possible
to point out exactly
how.
Yelping dogs remain quite distinct
from bird life. Yet some of
the same she threw at her painting
remained there, became gems there,
what blew back from the throw
took some of the slurry from the path.
She enters the hut to find she is
there with three others. They sit in silence
smiling.
A loud bang moves through them,
followed by a draught.
They all rise and walk down a
second path. She begins to
question this. Her palms are itching.
A playback is underway on a wall
with accentuated wood grain.
The silhouettes of the viewers
interfere with this, but
clearly there is no figure on the
display. They watch a window open
and net curtains lift. They see drops
of rain move across the floor. A
chair lifts from the corner and

moves through the window. There is
a sound of shovelling. Everyone
begins to get the creeps. Their laughter
ceases. A box of sand shuffles
across the floor to the window.
"Stop it!"
The Painter turns to the others,
they are asleep and lean over themselves.
The smell and colours moving in the
room complex. This pink noise
becomes an image
set before her.
"Stop it!"
She turns to the others but is now asleep.
The Burglar switches off the playback
and moves to the window.
It is raining. Its breeze
turns a wooden toy on the play box.

"What's going on?" the Painter asks.
Their coldness astonishes her.
In such a set-up of standardisation and
threatening sameness, she is positively
cathected. Their silence becomes
the voice of an estranged society.
The pattern of the star map at her feet
has settled into a streamlined adjustment.
What it now tells her is useless.
In the walkway a man carries pavings on a
trolley to the sanded mud and begins
to lay them down.
I lay back on a pillow to feel his
movements recorded by the light on the ceiling
and the sound of his ram.
The loose bricks, old frame, and some
discarded footwear, form a heap in the walkway.
"It's over the top," the Painter said,
"It alienates the reader."
There is an emptiness
measured in proportions.
Democracy is given a high rating

on the opinion poll. She takes down
a bottle marked 'Pure Water'
from the shelf,
"Shall we fuck first?"

6.

"Anyone else want to ring the bell?"
the conductor asks.
I cross the city road to the walkway.
On the slab a scraped block of ox-gall
to break the tension
The Painter is in the garden
following a thrush.
Children are roller skating with
a ball on new paving.
I lift a tract from the shelf
and weigh it. No physical
entity escapes this surveillance.
It frees all concern about issues
of internal consciousness — violent
motions, unknown forces, tortuously
curved, even multiply-connected
geometry. Dealing with a point
simply makes contradiction. This
swarming, the mathematician
calls multiplicity. "It's a
matter of intensities," the Painter adds,
"And velocities and temperatures and
decomposable distances,
"You have to use your
intelligent body
to *feel* it." So much needs to be done
to know the consequence of shape.

January 1984.

Jed Rasula

THE TENT OF TIMES

There is a tent of times,
a raft of sites,
a slave escaped from Huck's hometown.
There is an overgrown shrine.
Wading in & out of my dream
I came on bits of broken glass,
floating in silt like bubbles.
Transmitters, glowing eggs
wring the gaze, snapping at phrases.
Red ants scurried in fingerprint patterns under my clothes
as I struggled with hers.
They came off quickly:
hands like bulls in a pasture,
strumming the soil,
priapic stones' astronomical gloss on the heath.
A trough of warm water snakes through Atlantis
sending up palms off the Cornish coast.
A spray in the head from the hearth of cures.
Haloes are pods of interior voice,
the prompter's bubble intact on the head
like a shield from Athena,
tells not what to say
but what must be *known.*
An echo, a shell of the soul,
roaring in coiled folds
the warmest memory of ocean.
A little tub where islands fit.
Amore splashing,
waves recoiling,
is *distance* that tightens the passing years,

each seething leaf
each trickle of mud
each lurking face shaped up through thaw
not only grins but leers,
flexing the knotted pigments
erotic fragrance elapsed in waves on my bones,
Mithraic honey drugged out in the spread,
wriggling and glued to memory's hive
of heat seeped in through an open wound
where Charlotte appears
with an impulse of milk released,
my veins the pump,
chlorophyll dilating leaves
on years' gone sperm & beating heart
pour into that pubic mulch in the skull
that services soul with its odor of water on summer dust.
A veil of silt, a trail of shells
threading the stars, parts
implied by other parts.
To constitute zero out of the mud.
Deluded by bubble of words?
A blade from Arthurian murk?
Buzzing nature sustains

all possible illusions.
Time's grief passing
or *slipping* might split us in two,
into moisture & dust
& the scratching stars.

No wonder I splash it up,
no wonder the key of my blood slides into the lock direct.
Ananke twists her fate device
& the world is spread out on a tray
in the boiler of the brain.
Archaic compulsions
in water & soil,
metals engaged in the blood,
ducks from the banquet still digesting,
shadows on the trunk of the apple complying.

What do I say to the skunk of time,
that these are mine?
the soul stretched flat
like a lengthening shadow before them?

To show & tell is not so simple.
Pages of earth will need to be turned
—not blown like leaves of a book & the flame of the candle,
but known, and in knowing, open and flow,
and ink to blur, and fouled rivers dried to a crust.
To *see* at least—or know enough not to?—
knowing the earth to be barter now,
the life of Fate a political gimmick:
the markets have captured the stars.
Empedocles hovers in shirt-tails with Tiny Tim,
their slobbery duty performed in victorian garrets,
eternal fragments possessed with a gasp,
the heart dims out for a second and then resumes
—hands at the keyboard like crabs in Scriabin sonata perfumes—
writing and WRITTEN the intercom voice heard miles away in
the night
to hear Busoni awake in a bird
with a voice that shifts down through the gears
of assembled syntax events,
crumbling Mars attached to your vest I surmise,
a low here,
a high there,
wind all day
and power outage events
to suck the air out of Lear.
I crust, I blear, I gnaw at the drift I intuit:
the season's narcissus gone stiff in the glass
—my craving, their smell, are one.

Why do I want to read you the Orders of Wales,
the four Bright Books blushed scarlet by autumn,
running through winter's spring not far behind
to color one leaf in my blood,
ragging the scale.

Rage at the wind.
Rage at the sun.
The photographed mushroom glaze
has lusted over.
The shine shines.
Emphasis where?
The sender comes. Unwrap it.
The shell resounds.
The ground fills up with stones—
the inner earth creeps out.
Flakes & shards, concepts, glues.
Something grows.
Creatures come & go.

Taking a clue from the organ grinder
looking up into the sky
is a function of sex.

Somewhere a sleeper lights up: no one to know.

The words are the argument-maker.

I matter, each passing cloud is bothered to mean.

Each *maker* evaporates too.

Judith Gleason

from OYA, IN PRAISE OF THE GODDESS

OYA as Black-River-Cloth
OYA as Lightning

What follows are excerpts from a book I am writing on the Yoruba goddess Oya, whose name literally means "It tears." The excerpts are from a chapter on her natural manifestations as tornado, river and lightning. The part about tornado (including a discussion of winds and tropical weather in general) is certainly too long to include here (20 pages). Chapters to follow this one include discussion of Oya as goddess of the dead and patron of the Egungun masquerade society, of Oya as buffalo and her relation to hunting, of Oya as leader of the market women and witches, together with a good deal of personal material on various ways I have experienced this goddess.

Although I realize that the material here presented is rather "scientific," I hope for that it is not the less poetic. What I am trying to achieve in this (albeit difficult book) is the presentation of transpersonal power as process. The west has a paralysing idea of goddess-on-a-pedestal. Well, here is an African power whose traces may be seen in certain natural patterns as well as in transformative moments of human consciousness. She has also been anthropomorphized by the Yoruba into a legendary queen (of Nupe origin) who became the favorite wife of Shango, himself both king and thunder-god. In an earlier incarnation she was wife of Ogun, god of iron and patron of hunters.

According to Ifa, the Niger river was produced in the following manner: The king of the Nupe (northern neighbors of the Yoruba) consulted the oracle in time of war. How to prevent invasion? Ifa said that the beseiged king should procure a black cloth and appoint a virgin to tear it. The king's choice fell upon his own daughter, who ceremonially ripped the cloth into two pieces and flung them on the ground. *O-ya*: "she tore," with the result that the black cloth became water flowing protectively about the nucleus of the Nupe Kingdom.[1] That nucleus still exists today as Jebba Island.

Curiously, the birth of the Niger from black cloth torn is by the Yoruba attributed to the action of a foreign princess from a bordering kingdom, traditionally adversative to their own. The Nupe themselves do not reall the event. It is not part of their mythos. Oya is always said by the Yoruba to be of Nupe (*tápà*) origin; the Yoruba (not the Nupe) identify Oya with the River Niger. Oya is, then, both foreigner and boundary. As a legendary personage she was taken into Yoruba history when she married Shango, spiritual progenitor of all subsequent kings of Oyo—imperial expression of Yoruba culture.

To a western observer such psychological themes as invasion, introjection of the alien, and projection seem implicit in the myth of the river's genesis as in the legends of Oya as Shango's consort. To internalize this persistent "otherness" of Oya and to reflect upon the tearing of the black cloth as an emergency preservative of the self's hegemony is not, I think, to do violence to Yoruba myth but rather to bear witness to its depth and complexity. Like all great "likely stories" this one seems to work on a variety of levels, including the very process of interpretation. For to rip the black cloth is to produce not only a river but an entire spectrum of light: that multi-colored wind-garment of Oya which is the Yoruba equivalent of the veil of Maya.

Over some the black cloth settles early on and so gently that whosoever beneath is hardly aware of the blind. Good, the black cloth temporizes, all the while imperceptibly drawing itself tighter and tighter until one day—who knows why?—its victim finally acknowledges the pressure, the ever-narrowing options, the imminence of annihilation. Aha, now the black cloth condenses itself about its precarious c o n t e n t s with a vengeance, sucking it further and further down until hardly anything outside is recognizable. Supposedly familiar voices are strangely heard on the other end of the wire, which crackles and spits like the bad connection it always was. Children look frightened, fragile as flowers on the surface of a dark pond; and adult faces betray the enlarged pores of indifference or the harshly engraved lines of contempt. So self-worth,

which had already shriveled to a tight knot in the stomach, to a cat's hairball, to a candle niched in a wind tunnel, to a word scrawled on a blank page in the middle of the night, to the shriek of a bandaged mouth finally provides its own viaticum. Now or never, something whispers. Time to find the infinitesimal flaw along the selvage edge and rip, rip the black cloth. That process is Oya, who now surrounds the beseiged self with her vital flowing power.

Inexorable though the gods may be, it is always within their own domains that they are so. Bound like the Furies of Aeschylus to the binding spells of ancient prerogative, their curses and blessings take the same form. At a moment of crisis when the present state is about to be overwhelmed by what appears to be an alien force, a neighboring yet congenital princess is found to help out, to tear the black cloth, and a ring of dark water is traced about an embattled island. But what does it mean to be thus surrounded? Not much communication with the mainland, that's for sure, and a terrible assertive stress along the peripheries of personality, together with an irrepressible tendency to reverse inner and outer, figure and ground. Such would seem to be Oya's law, to which she herself was confined (not by the Ifa oracle, whose priests preside over conditions facilitating her *communication* with mankind) by an unintelligible power which, before there was ever human consciousness to suffer afflictions of the gods or to analyse the lambent structures of water, wind and fire, began to spell out of the mere beginnings of "difference" a certain type of surface boundary action by which are captivated all things (including all souls) in motion.

A strange allotment. Who else would want it—this perverse path of transformative violence? Read her signs: wirey-armed umbrellas raised in celebratory protection from the elements wrenched inside out by the gusts and thrust by their disgusted carriers into the nearest receptable. Traces everywhere abound of this besetting edginess which triggers invasive reversals, sentient involutions along the selvage edge of perception which (even in inorganic matter) are tantamount to invagination. Ah, chauvanists, watch out; the threat is everywhere in nature itself—resistance turning receptical. Thus the shore gets itself shored up. And thus on a stormy day in New York Oya reminds us how it was at the primordial Onset when she was given/took on the terrible task of becoming a black cloth goddess.

True, as Heraclitus observed, you never step twice in the same stream. But if you stand there for a while, facing up-river, you will observe a translucent buffer continuously forming about your obtrusive knees, while behind them (looking now over your shoulder) little linked

processions of vortices are flowing in alternate pairs. The ones on the right are rotating left; those on the left spin right; one after the other as in a chain of embroidered threads, each gyrates responsively from the outer edge inwards. Meanwhile, on both banks the river is similarly responding to warm, earthy pressure by a double circulation of currents from mid-surface to shore: down under and towards the center, then rising and bending shore-wards again. Preoccupied by thoughts of mutability, the wading philosopher is apt to neglect the samenesses going on here—these motions of liquid responding to shifts of temperature and speed, as well as to obtrusions like rocks or his own legs. But out of such encounters are created periodic interpenetrating forms which *do* persist through time despite continuous displacement of one spate of molecules by another.[2] Activated by the flow, such patterns, though with circumstance varying in scope and intricacy, remain constant. And here where the river parts at Jebba Island to rejoin in a vast braid of royal vortices, we find the voice of Oya as Nupe Princess.

By the time the Niger river arrives at Jebba Island it is in the process of slowing down after a tumultuous display of white energy—formerly a series of rapids in the course of which perished Mungo Park, now the Kainji dam. At this point the river symbolically runs "red" like the human circulatory system with which Leonardo da Vinci identified earth's flowing waters. Rivers (as opposed to rapids) are always "red" and feminine to the Yoruba. Thus, it is possible to imagine the nuclear Nupe kingdom as a well-protected foetus in the womb of its no longer virginal princess. Again, as was the case of the tornado wooed with snails, wild woman-power, rent, turns beneficially pregnant.

Why, then, was the princess' torn cloth (the bifurcated flood) a black rather than an immaculate white one? Black in most cultures—Hindu and Aztec as well as Yoruba—is associated with sacerdotal and magical transformation. The ripping of the cloth was an act of deterrent magic performed to save a high-risk kingdom. But there is also an hydraulic explanation for the color of that saving remnant.

If you stood on the banks of Jebba Island for an entire solar year, you would see two floods roar past. In June, fed by rainy-season run-offs from the Atakora mountains, the waters of the Niger swell into the so-called "white" spate. Six months later along comes a mysterious "black" flood, laden with decaying organic matter—ideal cloak of inundation to be thrown upon unsuspecting invaders from elsewhere. Thus, I imagine, the nascent Nupe kingdom was once by magically invoked natural means defensively triumphant over dust-laden invaders who had never seen rivers rising high in the midst of the dry season.

But what is the reason for this second, black flood? And how intrinsic to Oya's character as ritual portrays it?

Just as one never sees the wind, but only its effect, so does the double flood of the Niger bear witness to a geological history else obliterated by encrustations of the present. For centuries European explorers went wandering everywhichway in search of the Niger's elusive source. Was it south? Was it north? Or somewhere in between? How, were it not for its double flood could any explorer guess that which any African philosopher might have predicted? For like life, like death, like the generative human soul, the great river itself is double.

The southeastern slope of Oya's river began its hydraulic life as a sort of Pleistocene *wadi* in the Sahara desert. The rains came and the river flowed; they abated and it recoiled. The first Pluvial (corresponding to the First Ice Age in temperate zones) gave the river a push across the Badjibo Sill, where the rapids mentioned above were formed. After this push from the Pluvial, it was up to the river itself to find a path of least resistance down to the sea. Sloping through future Yoruba country to meet its powerful travelling companion, the Benue, the lower Niger in process sought peace in the Bight of Benin. However, at a certain point in the story death struck. High pressure anti-cyclones evaporated its Saharan tributaries into sandy depressions, which today look from the air like imprints of leafless trees. Occasionally, in summer, these skeletal tracks are flash-flooded as though with Pleistocene memories. But no more than mirages can such as these maintain the dynamic needs of what threatened then to be an extinguishing trajectory.

Meanwhile, the northeastern slope of the river we see today was having its own hydrological problems. But not with sources. These for this part of the river remained forever fresh in the Guinea highlands. However, a shift of the earth's crust during the Tertiary era deflected the flow of the stream from its original path across the Bara plain. It had become accustomed to emptying into a deep trench, which it thus filled to create an inland sea in the proto-Sahara. Then dry winds, forming dunes, and worse—a series of sinister ergs—beat the seeking river back from every access to its now desiccating destination. Unable to get out of the Bara plain, the river had no alternative but to back up and flood it. Heavy rains in the Guinea highlands of its origin persisted. The Bara slowly became a sea. Finally, by chance, in the process of submerging every parcel of earth within reach, the engorged and frantic Djoliba (for so the river is called by those who live today upon the plain) stumbled upon the narrow Sill of Tosaye across which it could discharge its nour-

ishing flood into the starving riverbed below.

Thus both rivers, becoming one, were saved. Geologists speak of a "capture." But of which? By whom? Across the *corpus callosum* do impulses from the brain's right hemisphere capture the left? Or does left capture right? I think of this stunning hydraulic event as an equal and tremendous relief to both of them. A starving infant is suddenly rescued by a bereaved mother. The presence of music is asserted after a day of tortuous thinking.

The plain still floods, though, with heavy Tertiary dreams, floods even though the immediate rainfall is dangerously diminishing and every year beyond the precincts of inundation more millet crops are stillborn, more wells are coffined. It takes many months for this grassy inner delta of the Bara to fill up and begin to run off. Hence the delayed "black" spate at Jebba Island. Downstream, where brackish Oya gives birth to nine saline estuaries at the outer delta, the two floods more or less coincide at the mid-winter solstice. But those merging waters are an entire rain-year's distance the one from the other. That is Oya. One might call her a time-warp. Again and again hints of meaning are generated along the seam between myth and natural occurrence, at least when it comes to speaking of Oya, for such is the investigatory mode suggested by her very presence. When the black cloth is ripped a magical transformation restores syncope to pulsing life again. History recurs. A double flood superimposes one delta upon another. The dead return wrapped in swirling mystery of cloth. The river remembers.

Upstream of Jebba Island there is a bridge to accommodate the modern equivalent of that traffic from the north which the ancient king of Nupe was emboldened (by means of his gallant river-bound daughter) to risk taking control of. Control of death as well as of life. Not properly taking those swirling, downward sucking currents about the giant stride of the bridge into account, as any woman will now and again throw herself passionately into the flood, I risked drowning there. Was it the thirteenth or fourteenth of December? I can find no record in my journal of the ecstatic, solitary and very un-African swim. I remember making a great effort to reach a thick line of reeds which under normal conditions must in that place mark the shore. But the rains which had followed the Intertropical Front northward a full tilt of the earth ago had so swollen the river now as to ensconce the roots of those reeds in a flux of what to the exploring feet seemed bottomless. Yet shoreward was certainly the direction to go, even without a shore; for reeds break the speed of the run-off.

Later that night the oldest man in Jebba told me they no longer sacrifice a cow there as the floods fling past the island. Times change. The remaining inhabitants of Jebba are few because most of the local fishermen have gone up-river to try their luck in the lake behind the Kainji dam. But it is Islam which is largely responsible, the old man said, for neglect of the propitiations. "Odd," I noted dateless in my journal, "though they think of the river as a male force here, surely that was not always the case, for once they gave it a cow—as up-river for Harrako Dikko." By which I meant that just as up at Lato, in Songhay country, the river is ruled by a female divinity they call Harrakoi Dikko, who receives a yearly sacrificial offering of a cow; so once at Jebba they must have invoked (by whatever name) Oya. One does not throw a female animal to a male divinity.

All along the river, which aeons ago became one double impulse—wave and trough sounded from source to sea—memories of correct ritual practice are secretly preserved in form, if not in substance, in patterns rather than in molecules, like those repetitive chains of vortices fore and aft of Jebba Island, like the idea of a cow not thrown sacrificially off the rocks there any more, like an obedient father's daughter thrown into the flood at the purificatory turn of the watery year, as recalled downstream at Onitsha and Idah.[3]

Is Oya without or is she within? Which stream does the capturing? For those who cross by way of the bridge such questions can hardly be said to exist. But for those unable to resist immersion in the destructive element she is, the parameters of her black-cloth-power seem infinite as those correlative qualities of consciousness towards which she whips her putative worshippers before mercifully releasing them to swim on over as best they can to the graspable green edge of (no shore)...

A river makes its own model. First a few drops, then a filament of water, and eventually a route is engraved for whatever surge from the sources to follow. Waterfingers, feeling their way along earth-surfaces of least resistance, instantly actualize, as it were, their own premonitions. For a long time, along with Kenneth Craik[4] I thought that in all the realm of so-called inorganic phenomena rivers must be unique in that regard. Then, as part of the present attempt macrocosmically to understand Oya,

I sat down to read about lightning, only to discover with astonishment that which among meteorologists is by now common knowledge. Thus from two correlates was born the possibility of a unified field theory of the natural intelligence of the goddess, to which, as we shall see in Chapter Four, the behavior of her animal avatar confidently picking its way through the densest of forests can be added as a third structural correspondence.

Lightning, if myth be in accord with manifestations of inorganic matter, must be the last of Oya's natural patterns of utterance; for, by the time she adopted (or "stole") its intricacies, the Oya of sacred oral traditions was no longer a Nupe princess but already a mature woman—senior wife of the fourth reigning king of the Yorubas. Indeed, Oya's electrical career is so entwined with Shango's, that it would be fruitless to talk of it without first introducing the great thunder-god-king to any readers who may not yet be aware of his existence. *Kabiesi*!

When Shango dances, and no Orisha dances with more vitality and excitement, he gestures alternately to the heavens (as if throwing a thunderbolt from there) and to his balls (wherein the "thunderstones" of his fecund impetuosity are contained). Thus as a god Shango exalts; but as a human being he found life unendurable. Insecure as king (perhaps because of his questionable origin, variously attributed to a morganatic or to an incestuous union), in order to consolidate his power—challenged by rival factions within and kingdoms without, from his capital at old Oyo Shango dispatched his favorite wife, Oya, to a neighboring Borgu kingdom to procure spoken-lightning. A certain medicinal preparation, owned by the king of Bariba (part of the Borgu federation), when placed beneath the tongue enables the user to spit forth thunder stones with voltage powerful enough to knock whole armies out. Queen Oya, so the "likely story" goes, performed Shango's commission with her usual charming diplomacy; but secretly she kept—as "dash" for her trouble—a little bit of lightning for her own.

Unfortunately, while trying out his new power, Shango mis-directed a bolt or two towards the precincts of his own palace. Horrified at having thus annihilated those whose preservation should have been his profoundest concern, Shango fled the city of Oyo and on the way (where? who knows?) hung himself from the *àyàn* tree, henceforth patron of drums and drummers. Then, a miracle. Shango hung, but instead of dying he disappeared into the ground and became an Orisha, whose judgment is thunder, whose benevolence is rain. Oya, who had faithfully followed her husband to Kósò, place of his apotheosis, kept on going in the direction of her Nupe home until, overwhelmed by depression, or so the

story goes, she disappeared into a marshy swamp at Irá.

Although the Nigerian government placed a statue of Shango at the Kainji dam to celebrate its dynamos and power lines, and although in the New World Shango is often syncretized with Santa Barbara (patron saint of electrical storms), mastery of lightning is always one way or another attributed to Oya. Her Catholic counterpart is Candelaria—Our Lady of Candlemas. The zig-zag borders of her Egungun masquerade children denote lightning. And, closer to home, when a folkloric drama about the Orisha was recently staged by a Latino theatre company in New Jersey, Oya made her entrance in a purple turban from which sprouted a single jagged bolt. Yet even though Shango's meteorological competence patently resides not in the glow but the rumble, not in the sear but in the thrust of the "thunder stones" (pre-historic celts) unearthed by his priests at the base of trees struck, why is it that the sacerdotal establishment won't come out publicly and say that to Oya belongs the light and to Shango the sound of nature's most theatrical production? Why? Sexism? The political clout of Shango priests in Oyo? Or could there after all be a modicum of scientific truth in the old story about Oya's trip to a foreign king on behalf of her harassed husband? A scientific truth reflected in the apparent contradictions of iconography and cult dogma?

Obviously, lightning precedes thunder. But lightning—small spurts of it—also precedes the brilliant flashes that we actually see. In other words, lightning too makes its own model, but at such tremendous speeds and at such great distances from the observer, that its imaginative behavior most often goes unnoticed save by the inspired intuitions of African mythologues and, more recently, by various ingenious recording devices developed by the western scientific community.

During the convective build-up of cumulonimbus storm clouds an enormous electrical tension develops between the negatively charged central region of the cloud (undergoing rapid condensation) and the ground. When this powerful attraction exceeds the break-down potential of 25,000 volts per inch, discharge must occur, beginning near the ground-beholding base of the cloud. But no matter how irresistible the pull, its electric potential simply cannot support a spontaneous arc thrown across five kilometers of atmosphere—under normal conditions a rather indifferent conductor. An ionized path through the air has to be pioneered by a relatively low-charged series of impulses known as the "stepped leader."

A modest cascade of electrons descends about 300 feet at a time, after each "step" pauses about fifty microseconds in order to find a semi-ionized path of least resistance, then continues by such a fits-and-

starts method along its tortuous way, in the process forming numerous lateral branches as contiguous pent-up energies suddenly uncover themselves to the parent stream. All these "decisions" in our time-frame seem instantaneous. Only a faint series of glows mark their accomplishment—a series seen (if observed at all) to be spatial rather than temporal. As the forward tip of this leader nears the ground, anticipatory streamers rise to meet it. From tree tops, from pointed pieces of metal, they tease acceptance from the descending charge which quickly "selects" the most prominent and the conducting channel is accomplished. Now a sudden sucking action pulls all loose electrons in the vicinity of the leader down to the ground. Called the "return stroke" because the process initiates at the bottom of the channel, this is the brilliant flash everybody sees: "lightning!" publicly acclaimed. It may strike again and again now, rapidly down the prepared channel, as inter-cloud tributaries created by the same method liberate other densely charged sectors.

Each strike, however, remains a two-way process. The step-ladder is replaced by a so-called "dart leader," which re-ionizes the path for the luminous suction-motion to follow. Then, and only then comes thunder—loudest natural sound in the world—to speak in praise, as it were, of the consummation. But what actually causes it, this royal thunder?

The unimaginable heat inside the channel (as much as 30,000 degrees centigrade), pressing against its walls, forces its expansion in the form of a shock wave which, after each lightning stroke, relaxes into an acoustical follow-up of much lower amplitude. What we hear depends upon where we're standing, but in general the crash comes from the base of the channel and the ensuing rumble from its molten twistings and turnings. But crash and rumble, besides being inadequate to describe the magnificent timbre of thunder, far from exhaust its sonorous possibilities. There's a boom followed by silence, for example, which reflects an energetic high-altitude flash, and, seldom heard but most significant in our context, there's a "rare ripping noise that can be imagined as the tearing of some cosmic cloth."[5] Meteorologists who have heard don't know what causes this anomaly. Perhaps, they say, it is an acoustical record of a stepped leader which didn't make it all the way to the ground.

It is impossible to describe electrical storms without falling into the language of reciprocal desire. The Yoruba symbolize earth and sky as two halves of a closed calabash. Meteorologists speak of the ionosphere and the earth's surface as plates of a spherical condenser, the top of which must maintain a residual plus charge and the bottom of which must always be minus—a perpetual negative propensity. Even if the atmosphere separating the "plates" is not a very good conductor, some

leakage does occur. A perpetual current of about 360,000 volts escapes, a voltage sufficient to discharge the earth's "condenser shell," were it not for thunderstorms, which wondrously generate enough supply current to maintain the electrical balance. About two thousand thunderstorms, on the average, must be taking place at any given moment in order to satisfy the positive yearnings of those immobile electrons on the ground. But some hours of the global day-night continuum are more fruitful in this regard than others. The recharging process peaks between 14 and 20 o'clock (Greenwich time) because of the stupendous effect of late afternoon and early evening outbursts along the West African and Latin American portions of the Intertropical Front.[6] *Kabiesi*!

Mythologically, this desire between earth and sky, whose accomplishment Oya's lightning facilitates, is expressed in two ways. First, as an incestuous attraction between Shango and his mother, which is always merely hinted at or "displaced"—in the manner of dream symbolism. This is a most problematic aspect of Shango, the various iconographic and literary aspects of which will be most appropriately discussed in the chapter to follow. Briefly, here, it is a desire often expressed as anger (many are the stories of Shango's getting rid of his mother or in some way subsuming her) and as judgmental rage against others, particularly against those who (like Shango himself) do not tell the truth.

Many students of Yoruba religion have wondered at the paradoxical explosions of a Shango whose jovial, seductive charm can so quickly turn tyrannical, whose strong feminine aspect (we would say "the mother in himself") often masquerades as super machismo, whose outrage at the misconduct of others would seem to imply unresolved impulses to castigate the guilty "me." Familiarity with the weather of his kind leads me to talk of Shango's fated dynamic of discharge. Discharge of everything—rain-seed, rhythmical impulses, acoustical fury, immediate discharge of every turbulence within the sweep of his imperious mind. As mediator between earth and sky Shango is captive of polarization: ire ionized.

The double axe which sprouts from Shango's sacred dance wand and statuary, a form sometimes depicted as a stubborn ram's horns, is not really a threatening image. Proliferous, rather, polarized, it has sometimes by art critics been compared to swelling breats. Shango, the fertile force. Here I would like to suggest an added resemblance to the upper, growing edge of a mounting cumulonimbus cloud. (Compare Diagrams V and XI). Weathermen call this the "thunder-head" of the storm. Its psychological analogue is that of extraverted sensuality. Mythologically it dramatizes the plight of the king who refused to be confined to his "leader core."

The reciprocal desire of earth for sky and sky for earth realizes itself as fertility. In Yorubaland human fertility's paradigm is gemination. Inseparable companions of the sweltering leader core, Shango and Oya mythologically produce twins. That is, over and over they reproduce the collaborative identity established in the turbulence of their regenerative storms. The Yoruba people themselves, under the aegis of Shango and Oya, give birth to an astonishing number of fraternal twins (as many as 42 per 117 deliveries!) and the Yoruba skies produce thunderstorms at the second highest rate in the world.[7] Apart from the paradigmatic fertility of their royal gods, what could possibly be the connection? Lightning, as every school child knows, causes some of the nitrogen in the atmosphere to combine with oxygen. The result—nitric oxide, dissolved in rainfall, is brought to earth as nitrates which, absorbed by the soil, nourish vegetation. And, subsequently, "nourishes" whatever genetic program opts for twins in the womb?

The second myth-system having to do with relations between the charge plates of earth and sky focuses upon a falling-apart and the land's resultant sterility. For the sake of rain propitiation is made by earth to sky in the form of a fish and a bush-rat. What is the psychological meaning of such a sacrifice of small flesh, normally hidden by their environmental matrices—fish by pond-water, bush-rat by undergrowth of forest? I think what earth sacrificed to sky was her vulnerability. And I see a connection between earth's sacrifice and the modicum of lightning Oya, according to myth, according to the Shango establishment, is supposed to have kept for herself. What can a female force more deeply offer than that which is hidden?

Iconographically this little bit of lightning under Oya's tongue is represented by a small pair of swords, by an ornamental sabre, or—in the Americas, by a heavy-duty machete. Warrior woman? Yes, but one who goes before, like a scout sent into the underbrush, like a guerilla. Her way is to facilitate the process of recharging the system. Stepping gingerly, jaggedly, she figures the way out. One word at a time...

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1. Chief Fagbemi Ajanaku, Araba of Lagos, personal communication, Feb. 2, 1977.

2. Here I would like to acknowledge the overwhelming and lingering impression of the following book: Theodor Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos, The Creation of Flowing Forms in Water and Air*, Schocken Books, 1976. Its images and its philosophy seeped in to a most receptive terrain.

3. See Richard N. Henderson, *The King in Every Man*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, pp. 390 and 402. R. S. Seton, "Installation of an Attah of Idah," J.R.A.I., 1928, pp. 255-78.

4. Kenneth Craik, *The Nature of Explanation,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 59.

5. Arthur A. Few, "Thunder," *Scientific American,* July 1975, p. 90.

6. G. R. Wait, "Aircraft Measurements of Electric Charge Carried to Ground through Thunderstorms," in *Thunderstorm Electricity,* H. R. Byers, ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953. F. J. W. Whipple, "Modern Views of Atmospheric Electricity," *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society,* vol. 64, 1938, 199-213.

7. Robert Farris Thompson, "Sons of Thunder," *African Arts,* Spring, 1971, p. 8. G. J. Afolabi Ojo, *Yoruba Culture,* Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1966, pp. 170-171. (Ojo cites C. E. P. Brooks, Climate in Everyday Life, London, 1950, pp. 216-217.)

from THE COLLECTED POEMS OF CHARLES OLSON: 1950-57

Edited by George Butterick

THE ADVANTAGE

1

Where do these
    invisible seeds
        settle from?

And how are men able
    to spore them
        into air?

For the gains are
thus communicated.

2

Shall you say
    there are not Powers,
when men spring up on all sides
    (like violets, said Bolyai Farkas)
to a new need?

Men have their proper season, and to that season
    act and image,
      image more than act,
        a rhythm more than image or than act,
proper to them.

3

So if we now again shall call
    the sun a male,
and give him back the moon
    for wife, who'll say
we're wrong? we

who have endured to rotting
    the other way, the making
domestic abstract gods
    of paled-out humans,
father mother son

who'll say
    the root of universe
      is not the root of man,

deny
    the edge of mystery is
      the cutting edge,

cry down
    the act of touch, the dumb thing knocking, knocking
at that door?

FRIDAY, GOOD FRIDAY

friday, Good Friday, which
always reminds me of Walter Strong, who grew up with me
on the Cut in Gloucester, and was such an inbred
he and his sister both drooled as long as we were kids,
and they had to wear bibs. Anyhow, Walter
grew up to be the sharpest gambler in the city
(he was so recognized last year when he got a suspended sentence
for booking the horses). Well, some years ago, one Good Friday,
we were all down to the gas station, sitting around chewing the fat,
when Walter says, "What about a little game, boys." Sez the others,
"Why, Walter! Don't you know? This is Good Friday!"
And Walter, who always sort of drawled after he grew up, answers,
"Whhhat's goooood abooout it? Allll Iiii can
sssay isss, IIiiii hoooope it'll be gooooood
for meeeee!"

ABSTRACT #1, YUCATAN

the fish is speech, or see
what, cut
in stone, starts, for

when the sea breaks, watch
watch: it is the
tongue, and

he who introduces the words (the
interlocutor) the
beginner of the word, he

you will find, he
has scales, he
gives off motion as

in the sun the wind the light, a fish
moves

ISSUES FROM THE HAND OF GOD

I am too fucking innocent to be gay, he roared. Let there be born
a new Banquet, let there be a wild bed, let you
get the hell aside from me with
your too easy advances, your
too easy attacks

I'll not mix my good with Neo-Classicists,
those from the capitals, or who talk about
small town folk. Go by me, Recitalists, all
arguers, even those who are a little bit right

It is too early to be so wise, so bright,
to still stay, or to jump ahead, you, Performers!

Let my lazy brilliant cats do their leaping, their yawning, even shit
in front of us in the circus Ring, without you making any of your quick
back or forward interpretations of, my animals: let all you simplicimusses
shut your pusses, let me be wholly vulgar when fineness is dullness, bright-
ness
es
come a penny apiece, are an arcade, when all you are are peep shows,
through the littlest hole, ass or eye

You of the Theatre, Inigo Jones murdered
against a brick wall, still know nothing, with
your babble of—ah, movement

You of the People, yes,
likewise, and not my great beasts

Swing, sway, bounce—bah, where they belong is
where they are, in the trees, or with the children or, the balls are
walk the dog, see my pretty dance!

And curb same, I say, from me,
the next Passerby

And the truckdriver is more psychotic than you are,
Mayor of Highway America

Both of you, he spat, do a little fucking in public a little thinking
in private, if sway swing bounce grind protest and the

latest McCarran bill
are either art or action—do be homosexual or as frenchy as
Madelein Le Seur, anything, to clean out, your eye and
your arse. Or, give me my money back

If this is all you offer to
what procedes from,
and towards my beasts

coital coital coital, she kept repeating, with her faced turned
to the wall
"Make it clear, both of you, if you can't
make use of it."
And some ate slowly peanut crackers, and the others rushed off into the
rain.

THE CIVIL WAR

Or Captain Philip Sheridan,
quartermaster, getting siege guns
to New Madrid

Or that the average age
of the 100,000 soldiers at Shiloh
must have been 18 - 19

That maybe Sidney Johnston
purposely let himself bleed to death,
he had made such a mess of Donelson

That one has to upset things,
to get at them, that you do have to turn
the ground under.

Or up, is it?

That faces were once unique,

each one looked like itself, it was not
Bell Telephone executives, all up

from the ranks. That a face
ought to fit
who wears it, not belong

to the company (Selig Smith,
4th Indiana, died
with a locket

and the other man
cut off some of Booth's hair,
so that it was Booth

his mother
might say. The way even proof
was particular

One has this difficulty,
nowadays, that the faces are obvious
even when they're open. It's as though

an idea was lost: that you can't do
any more than you are. And therefore
you are. It's as though you really had

secrets. One secret. That you go in there
on the assumption the other guy
is the one who's going to get it

And you find out,
you did. You look
at yourself in the mirror

The mirror
is a civil war

WAR ON THE MIND IN A TIME OF LOVE

quartermasters and filibusterers
was the beginning
of the new

and all those who hark back
to a better time
ought to get out, they'll never

make it

Now this doesn't mean
one has to put up with
the present, clearly

the successors
of the quartermasters and the filibusterers

ain't anything, they're

worse, they're

out the other side, gone

beyond. They make nothing,

and much of it. They sell

what you quickly

can't make use of (a lady

naked on a horse,

a child

making connections,

a tree

stripped of leaves

will overcome

the attention, leisure

can't be filled

with art

Traffic managers

have no desire

THE THING WAS MOVING

It's so beautiful, life, goddam death
that we have to die, only the mind knows
what lies next the heart or a five-petaled flower
restores the fringed gentians I used to so love
I'd lie amongst them in the meadow near the house
which was later covered by a dump to make an athletic field
and the brook was gone to which we tried to speed our sleds
from the hill the house stood on and which the dump
was meant to join, the loss punctuated by the shooting
my father taught me with the rifle he gave me from the back porch
of the three-decker, the rats living among the cans and peat
as the dump came closer, and I hated
all of it (the same porch the chameleon he had bought me
escaped from, from the cage I'd made it
of old screen when we brought it home from the circus

the smoke from the dump-fires all the time the thing was moving
toward us, covering the meadow, coming from the hill
(where we had had the single cable swing had broke
that day i was alone there and i had flown

out over all the space, and my glasses
beyond me, and my back to this day... and i groping
not to tell my parents, and to find the glasses
to find my way back. The fire-engines
in the evening dousing—and no flames but the littlest, all
smoke turning into steam there, but the excitement...

the concrete sections, when the dump began to reach
the brook, to put it under, like hoops we could not roll
in which—they were so high—we lost ourselves
like tunnels, or took it we were five-figured forms
fit to fill a circle and be acrobats, our heads
wedged but no movement of those sections even
when we pried them and were unknowingly in such danger
as when we built the club-house of railroad ties
on the edge of another flat, the swamp where the man
and his horse and team went down in the quicksand, and we
did not know until after the cops had broken down the structure
and even later when the auto showrooms covered it, and piles
had to be driven... the hunting, of each other, before the brook
was let in and only way above, or below at Chandler Street
was it any more where I had sunk in, where the irises were,
where I had seen my first turtle, or further up, where
girls had swum naked that day I had tittupped
from the piano lesson, seeking my friends, and suddenly,
coming on the pool, had heard the voices first, and slowed
so that I saw them from the bushes (the older woman
turning me back... the invasion

or the ford (below Dick Marsden's house) horses crossed
and we sailed boats, or made dams, the wonder
of the way the hill sloped up there, the gradual way
before it became a suburb and was still the West
(the trench we were sure had been emplacements
of King Phillip's Wars ended before the ford, before
the whole brook system got transverse to what it was below
near where I lived, Hill's Farm getting its fields
from the change of the direction of its flow,
and the topography
the flowers (as well as the ball field)

were located, in my space, by this curving
from west to south, the farm marking the change
and running against the foot of my house, the brick wall
on which all the wood stood which shook
when the wind bellied down that valley and struck
the broad back of the house and I used to think
why the whipping of the house on that third-floor
didn't throw it down, and only that the storm
was not like marching men on a bridge, was out of step
was irregular as men are, and as multiple, the times we are
and our materials are so much more numerous
than any such thing as the heart's flow
or the sun's coming up, why
man is man's delight, and there is no backward
except his, how far it goes, as far
as any thing he's made, dug up or lighted
by a flare in some such cave as I never knew
except as that concrete hid my brook and I was as large
(before they put the pieces in below ground) inside any one hoop
as any pentamerous thing, this figwort
which provokes me
and I study
bract thallus involucre whorl
of all my life, of torus I am, holding
all I shall be, hungry
that it should never end, that my throat
which has no longer thymus and all that went with it
might speak forever the glory of
what it is to live, so bashful as man is
bare

From the Inca

The mighty man and the mother-egg
leg over leg over leg

live's on it
love's on it
: honor
on top of
the hill. Until vertigo

seized him. Fell from it, into
the sea. Was last reported
as lost. Last seen,
disappeared
into the element. Penduto

from heights, head
down. Or that one
answered
an ad. Was chosen,
and since
has been charming
the wood pulp, talks
at an increasing
sugar, walks
like the Mayflower
Doughnut Company,
shows the white collar
at the crucial
occasion. Is
Caucasian, will not falter
at the meeting when presented
to a hostess with uncovered breasts,
crosses his hands gently
when the lady bowed before him
in her gold and white sari.

Has been known
to cross oceans
on missions
without erring

on arriving. Sits under awnings
where others
would put on
all sail, would even shove
around capes with moon and stuns'l
up. Is stud
apud
nada, has not sheathe
upon nether, has not parts
for carrying. Carries caps
on foreteeth, hath smile
for beginning. Doth call "my"
to his dog, speaks nicely
on television, has fat rump
for charcoal, is perishing
by chicken, sells selves
on Wednesday, does not cross
Sunday, eats buns
on Monday. Was unanimously elected President
by all odds while wood-lots
stood by themselves
and cow-birds
laid eggs
in other birds'
nests. The chestnut-throated warbler
warbled. Does not make any
missteps. Was put down
by standing by
when friend's friend
was being kicked
in head
by two strangers. Did not move
fast enough
for door to car
to be sprung
from said hinges. Was last seen
in all places
had hitherto
been, is not known
to have shown

any effect. Will swell by absorption
of all nearness, will not pray for the dead
on All Souls's Day, will not be seen
where the fellow was who fell out of
the sky

was at the knees
of the sun's face
as he came. And landed
just over our heads
as we passed through
the entrance
to the building

And the eyes in his head
were as ours

JAS JARGON

Like a man on a stick on a sidewalk being peddled by a low pitchman

Or lines on oneself as a pissed off William Blake, the wryness
of aeternitas

what socialism
has come to!

O the dream
busted!

O

shit

as though we were as aged, or as young, as

—either way—dried

sticks. A bundle. What fardels

the gifted and the utterly giftedless

Princes

have become—o

Becoming!

Poor

man, that they should weep for them-

selves. Or be jejune

that he will hop/

step/

one/

day!

O the grave

of the plastered

hope

O soap

to wash the Stalinist

pigs—oh people, o

Toronto

O catch-

on!

A STORY

It was a place
of fountains.

I had gotten there
driving a fast car
down a difficult road
with a maimed man
in the back seat
by using a flashlight
to see my way

I had made a right turn
slewing, from the speed,
and the sharpness
of the angle.

I had stopped
at these springs
for a drink of water,
from a bubbler.
A woman
in another car,
with a man beside her,
asked me
for a glass of water

I brought it
to her. And she said,
don't you know
there is also
hot water
here?

THE REAL

The neck of
the cone
she
on the left,
he
all for me, protesting

on the right

Did you kiss me there,
pointing

I have a bruise

You've been funny
all day

Picasso
called it a wound,
not I

And when I got my car out of the mud
it followed me,
adhering

NEW POEM

I have a foolishness here which is lamp-like.
Thus the words came, between the two pines
by the old house, an issue of the mind
as deliberate as a dream is suddenly
in the mouth.

I do not know what it means, and question,
therefore, any right I have to offer it,
question whether any statement
which is not immediately clear and first-rate
is pertinent to another man

Or that it stand up by form alone, this
is the other possibility, never
the creation of an emotional
situation. Words are not love.

The love of words can be a betrayal.
Yet I persist. I have a foolishness here
This part of it
is acceptable. A man can use this. Love
is a foolishness. It requires foolishness.
It goes against sense. It is lamp-like.

EVIL—1

for a man to come out of the sea, they
asked for it

And it came out, only
it was stone

And it overshadowed
everything, it would not stop

growing, it was going
to blot out

the sun, it was green,
and dark,

and immense, its shoulders
were more than the land

until somebody
dove down

and found it was the easiest thing in the world
to turn over, it wasn't

attached to anything, it wasn't even buried
in the slime

of the bottom.

EVIL—2

He said, he feeds
on the energy of others

And it wasn't quite
what my skin told me

I said, he creates
the stones he eats

He can only eat
what he can create

There is creation
which is stone

EVIL—3

Nothing is more boring
than stone

But their fear
that he would shadow

the sun is real. Monotony
is a factor

of chaos, a cause.

Hear
the stone cry:

I am empty.
Hear!

And fear

EVIL—4

"I am empty. I will be
fill

"I will fill me
of you"

"I will. You
are who I say

you are." "You are mine,"
said the stone,

the immaculate
stone

THE ALBA

Love requires
talk of itself

Its own ebullience
runs
to its own inquiry

Love is love
because it's endless
Once it has begun
it is at once
everywhere
It is an empiry.

Love is no object
Love is form because love
is its own subject,
love is the only subject, the rest
requires form.

This is why it has been called volatile.
It is not. It is simply that it is very difficult
to believe
that there should be only one subject
in all the universe

THE WRIT

The place of clear concepts is taken by images, *anima telluris*
Kepler supposed the secret of the correspondences to be, the earth
is animated. The earth shapes ships, fishes, kings, popes, monks,
soldiers. The practice of geometry—she produces
the five geometrical bodies, six-cornered figures in crystals.
And all in independence of the reflection and ratiocination of man.

He has his own abundance: mentation behind creation. The dogwood...

Empty, to fill.

The six-petaled blue flower alone at the end of the row of jonquils
not yet out, is the toy sergeant of the graduation ball the green-dressed
jonquils will dance (tomorrow? He lifts himself as though his arms
were no longer stiff and with the drumsticks in his hands he plays
a cakewalk.
On the wind, catching her, she says, That's what I need,
a little of the romantic.

At this time, when the earth smells, my sweat leaves me sweet. The odor
is a state of grass. It smells like my father's hat-band. It smells
like spring. A man smells like spring. A woman tastes
like a six-cornered cup. The dogwood which last month bore berries.

The constant temperature below the surface, the peculiar power
to produce metals, minerals and fossils. Therefore every kind
of natural or living power in bodies has a similitude. I grow
a beard, behind my round face I feel the confines. The domain
of the infinitely small, Riemann supposes, is where the laws do differently
than that God does arithmetic. The dogwood and I
have not lost a month.

As ordering operators and image-formers. The Art of Punctation
is in my throat, or the gentian's, on a clear day. Today
the dogwood sticks out anther-bearing filaments all over
my eyes.

These primary images which the soul can perceive are called
by Kepler *archetypalis,* and as ordering operators and image-
formers...
I make no more of it than the sensation that the earth...

on a day in the year when the dogwood shows forth anther-
bearing filaments all over itself, in a matter of weeks
after it has been red...
I am as quiet, behind my beard,
as the six-petalled flower, and take her arm
to show her the flower. I am as willing as she
to have the correspondence
of the tempting earth.

Jackson Mac Low

from PIECES O' SIX

PIECES O' SIX III

Pheasant-raisers tongued conglomerate boards when saddening happenings gladdened aimless violators able as any accident-exploiter. Fresh malevolence twisted classic cords. Desperate ring-tossers ferried a labile clique across a rumpled river and a rapid diamonded creek long before an annunciator, bearded and hardly barbaric, leveled with his august-seeming audience. No mere concept froze the dialectic in that radiant auditorium. Tenebrous and tentative, the plastic panels cracked. Cackling like idiot puffins, loess-gatherers lessened the tensions inherent in the populace's bonds. Bountiful as tennis ball impounders, they spread their webbed integuments far over more than one believer and myriad worlds. Annexation threatened. Delicate threadlike tentacles crisscrossed every space and many a cranny. Climbers paused without giving in to massive temptations to turn their eyes downward amid the melting snow. Glyphs were encountered wherever the parables rested. Loosely gathered lights encircled the panic waves. No one accepted the awkward invasion despite the sliding rubble and turbulent rollers raised by the innocent-seeming rectifiers and functional referees who left their sanguinary marks on every tree and saprophyte and every reckless rogue cited in sedentary notes and pierced inscriptions. Vagrants and alarmists answered bland self-styled informers whenever they flagged and flapped crinkled appendages porcine as legendary peasants or rolled and ruffled as beaux in twilit kingly aisles. Reefs surrounded plethoras of Greeks. Negritude intruded into discussions formerly disorderly but by that token broken into structures. Leaves fell. Dappled glasses sapped their fathomed feathery penetrations. A few deft touches freed them. Many more were mixed

in their responses but quickly answered inquiries with evident ambiguities. Their nested creamy arms resisted every tampering and turn and insolent incursion. Linked and insistent, they gazed and gauged the splendor of inimical enterprises foisted on their forebears through exacted pacts enforced by traveling pinnacles. Few of their literate witnesses were accepted as true attesters. Timely reminders clashed with a chorus of grunted affirmations from a forest formerly blighted by hostile fireflies and agile thieves. Few of them seemed to remember, but too many reminisced. Factions developed and might have bloomed had not a fog descended, smothering all attitudes and smoothing all infractions. Not yet modulated, gleams twisted amid the lurid vegetation. Vital cataclysms acted as retrievals. Speeded but partial articulations might have enhanced the setting of that somber conclave though the cloistered grove was frozen by intensities of silence seldom sensed before those calm configurations. Neighbors painted bracketed realities devoid of solicitous spaces. Bakers spoke of little else. Unerring elbows noodled among the tubes. Proof was needed and even desired but hardly supplied. Every witness shrank. Tedious as timed rehearsed rejoinders, calumnies flapped around archaic torsos. Leftish plasticizers acted classically pleased. Their thumpings rumbled among the newly planted vines and coordinate trees in a path-ridden would-be wilderness ensconced among a maze of sandy mesas undiscovered before the snoopy satellites swooped around the only partially unsuspecting planet. Nobody could have planned it. Hardly a towel was raised in protest or regret. Fanciful pygmies howled and sang under starlit dripping trees. Lemurs poked their noses far into fetid and cloying flowers. Tangled lianas draped from mossy branches furnished denizens with slowly swaying stairs and labile ladders. Transient breezes freshened the close enclosures. Bulky totalizers stood at the crossroads. Stern and agile remonstrators countered every turn. Fluorescent diaphanous mosses framed encounters long anticipated, seldom assessed or realistically plumbed, clumsily configured, and driftily delineated. Distinctions were wasted on insipid participants. Rattlers encircled the crater. Naked elephantine dancers signalized an unprecedented saturnālia wreathed in sea-otter's-cabbage and other, more ordinary, kelps. None wore kilts. Aspects of their activities smacked of the séance, but few of them evinced a mediumistic decorum. Eventually lethargy might have prevailed had not glossolālia broken out amid those silent or insensate ecstacies. Lubricity lost its allure. Less then eleven of the two hundred and seven continued to weave and encroach as before the echolālic avalanche. Tornadoes of uncustomary vocables slashed the firelit darkness. Tanagers woke and panicked. Wings beat in the treetops till the

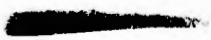
boles leaned in the wind. Tribes in the hinterlands feared for their lives and set out gaudy banners. Smoke from aromatic woods spiced the arable land and grackle-haunted pastures. Nervous beasts of burden whinnied and trumpeted in their corrals. Decent agriculturists paled and quaked. Jailes were mysteriously razed in the nearest cities, and saturnine bureaucrats watched their jerry-built walls begin to crumble. Burning the midnight oil became unfashionable. Even the most upwardly mobile came to prefer the snugness of comforters in dormitory suburbs. Fish were overfed in pretentious aquaria. Children unaccustomed to parental presences were forced to adopt new mores. Acrobatics and whining grew to epidemics. Interference sparked violence. What had once been placid grumbling flamed into rebellion, and creaky institutions cracked and buckled. Unforeseen erasures turned up in official papers. Treasuries were looted and archives sacked. Museums lost their curators, and their collections turned up at auctions on faraway continents. Taverns closed by edict lost first shutters and then cellars. Ministers desanctified their altars. Catechists were found afloat in irrigation ditches green with proliferating algae. Ergot and rust emptied bakery shelves. Whenever a whistle was heard, thousands turned toward the west and wound their watches. Anachronisms and trivial synchronicities were elevated to wonders and to portents. Tiny oracles sprang up on every corner, and neighborhood bodegas became purveyers of paraphernalia for clandestine celebrations. Sacrifices spread over ever wider areas. Unstable catechumens renounced their barely acquired beliefs and leaped with the randiest animists in streets no longer patroled by helmeted police. Hurled-down directional signs and traffic lights clogged the cracked and weed-grown concrete speedways. Petroleum blackly burned along the shores. Vehicles sank in quicksand without trace. Even canals suffered. Many of the quasi-sane fled on ships as refugees, but bombardments from shore batteries littered harbors with the lifeless. Debris accumulated along the littoral. Hope arose only when a cloud was sighted far above a neighboring continent.

The counsel rattled the bars of the cage. The cage was a transitory phase. The phase was ably managed. The manager wanted out. The out was called by the umpire. The umpire hailed from a dozen cities. The cities felt the direct threat of invasion. The invasion would have had to be defended. Defense had dominated the city council. The council's powers were dispersed. Dispersion began at the beginning. The beginning could not be changed. Change took place along district lines. The lines had been drawn during deals. The deals resulted from a doctrine. The doctrine was condensed. Condensing improved the tone. Tones nosed among the ivy. The ivy grew till it died. Dying didn't better wit. No wit was any recompense. Some recompense was vastly in demand. Many demands angered the loose white onlookers. The onlookers bled in their sleeves. The sleeves were safe behind a row of pins. A pin could have been heard not to drop. The drops soothed his eyes and made him cough. The cough seemed to refer to her re-entry. Now re-entry was the order of the day. The day was clear as a silhouette. The silhouette was fuller than an ashtray. Ashtrays were minded and rejected. Rejection was not a basic need. Needs were cut from the whole cloth. The cloth wiped a column. The column was thin as a feather. The feather had collapsed at the foot of a mirage. The mirage had spoken-for proportions. Proportion was what the city lacked. A lack was more constant than drained. The drain was yellow. That yellow increased his fear. The fears of the artisans were partial. Partiality fled before the waves. A wave towered over the hidden cloak. The cloak was not examined. Examination made them speechless. Speechlessness was no sign of merriment. Their merriment made the customers vicious. Viciousness widened a gap. The gap was lower than the water. The water was not to be had at a price. The price of their mercy was endurance. That endurance proved their savior. The savior coacked a snoot. The snoot was aquiline. Aquilinity accompanied logic. Their logic was artful. Art was no match for beggary. The beggars cleaned roses. The roses told of soap. The soap won an election. The election was blessed with comedy. The comedy was for the nearsighted. Nearsightedness was a necessary option. Their options were revealed by history. The history of their seeking sweetened an attitude. Attitudes functioned better than restraint. The restraints on sampling were discontinuous. Discontinuity led to noisome scenes. A scene was arrested at the border. That border was unsavorably farcical. The farce was undisguised. Disguises were limply fashionable. Fashion was allied to syncopation. No

syncopation let the toes relax. Relaxation uncovered a continent. The continent was abridged by a melodrama. The melodrama lasted on a staircase. The staircase was unassisted. Assistance troubled rulers. The rulers were dimly judgmental. The judgments lingered like ice. Their ices were sweetened by clover. The clover was nourished by toilets. The toilets were well scheduled. The schedules were audacious. Audacity killed the cattle. The cattle were ramblers. Rambling sifted stations. The stations encountered acquisition. Their acquisitions were odorless. Odors prepared orchids. The orchids sought stars. The stars flattered the antiquated hooves. A hoof fell on a flagellum. Flagelli whipped the liquid. Liquids were sprucely particular. Particularity was wasted. Waste fled before the account. Their account was swift. Swiftness is all. Allness leads to tickling. Tickles cause ambition. The ambitious wince. Wincing caters to sickness. The sick drawl. Drawling is punished. Punishment is present. Presentness is a change. Changes offer sustenance. The sustenance of thieves is appetite. Appetites carry relations. Relations further thinness. Every thinness is reciprocated. Reciprocation serves a fantasy. Fantasies buy off hunger. Not every hunger is slender. Slenderness is actual. Actuality has a case. The case is hard. Hardness is foolish. Fools cry at noon. Then noon leans on desolation. The desolate seek conquest. A conquest can be funny. Fun is not reliable. Reliance shares a factor. The factor is troubling. Trouble is a carving. The carving wakes a wind. Winds filter habits. A habit can fly like a turkey. Turkeys are removed. A removal is unattractive. Attractiveness is pleasant. Pleasantries are exchanged. Exchanges favor wrists. The better wrist is flexible. Flexibility favors the ordinary. Ordinariness is all but imperceptible. Perception scares the clowns. A clown offers a pillow. Pillows cloud in attics. An attic can be silky. Silk is real. Reality bungles. A bungler is anticlimactic. Climaxes aren't seasonable. Seasons can be quenched. Quenching may be apt. Aptness is a token. Tokens are unassumed. Assumptions are clothed in perpetual duration. Every duration is brittle. Brittleness is history. Histories guard jargon. No jargon baffles peaceniks. Peace is the fruit of exactness. Exaction is a turning. Turnings are nearly always dedicated. Dedication rests on definitions. A definition terrifies a widow. Widows speak like streets. A street can only run. Running tightens classes. A class is a performance. Performances are leaps. A leap's as good as a lapse. Not every lapse is credible. Credibility is a lie. Some lies are strictly enlightening. Enlightenment's a bogey. Many a bogey's bashful. Bashfulness is catching. A catch can end a tragedy. No tragedy's objective. Objectivity kills like a whistle. The whistles are magnetic. Every magnet is awful. Awe beats on a closed door. Doors are often lids.

A lid prevents a tinkle. Tinkling can be canny. Canniness is never entirely lost. Loss is no reward. Most rewards are unspoken. The spoken will be totaled. Totals will soon be active. Activity will figure. Figures will rest on fabrics. Some fabrics will be found like this in a shambles. Some shambles will be singular. Singularity will lead to vigilant thighs. A thigh will enact a track. Tracks will season intimate obligations. Not every obligation will flatter its attestors. Attestation will be a sign of ferment. Fermentation will seek its own level. Leveling will close the knighted instance. No instances will clutter skippers' discourse. The discourses of the faint will echo contrast. A contrast will be clinched when a figure glimmers. No glimmering will lift a cyclical atrocity. The atrocities will proliferate. Proliferation will be a fool's delight. Any delight will be smothered in pentameters. A pentameter will be cursed. Curses will be cast behind the glitter. A glittering will seize a carcass. No carcass will remain. Remnants will rest on an altar. No altar will smile. Smiling will delete the abstract will. Some wills are worn as watch chains. A watch chain will signal an apparition. Every apparition will stand near. Nearness will be an overrated virtue. Every virtue will be terrible. Terror will succeed. Success will affect a neck. Many necks will lighten. Lightning will be sensible and close. Closeness will exaggerate and wither. Withering will lead to occupations. Occupying will be satisfactory. Only satisfaction will be ridden. Riding will be classified. No classification will answer. Many an answer will falter. The faltering will be witnessed. Every witness will ingratiate. Each ingratiation will be tenebrous. Tenebreity will prevail. No prevalence will be actual. Actuality will fragment. Every fragment will be scarred. The scars of observation will slice all energy. The energies will fly above the reasons. No reason will be wanting. Wants will be apparent and distrusted. Distrust will be daily fare. Whatever fare vicinities will offer will suffice. Sufficiency will be the appointed mode. The modes will tremble in their intervals. Never an interval will be prophetic. Prophecy will be revealed as pretense. Pretentiousness will gain a lasting prize. Whatever prizes rise will be rejected. Rejection will be prized as the wiser counsel.

(This series to be continued in Sulfur #13*)*



Sandra Beall

THREE POEMS

IN EINSTEIN'S HOUSE, IN THE CLOSET

in Einstein's house, in the closet
every corner is singing

the black, explicit song
of the closet

the hat boxes
the lyrical curves

of the violin case give way
to corners, the closet's

boxed-in, singing
angles. or are they

angels?
are there angels, singing

in the corners?
are there angels boxing

in the darkness?
if angels, will they hold

fiddlesticks
against the darkness?

will they take bows
against thin air?

is it air we hear
when we hear

that singing?
if air, are the angels why

this unstrung music?
are the angels why music

goes on falling
from nowhere?

why the violin case
hums and hums?

are they why the insides
of shoes

and the pockets of clothing
fill with song?

are the angels why
Einstein's overcoat hums along?

MOTHER GOOSE

The head-bone goes knock-knock.
My fists are sore.

Open me quick!
It's brains at the door.

Go away, walls.
Give me some air.

Excuse me, ma'am.
I thought you were hair.

A pose is a pose
is a pose is a pose.

Roll over, snake-eyes.
I smell a nose.

Nose to mouth.
Mouth to chin.

Where's my tongue?
Where things begin.

Where's my hair?
Where's my skin?

Open wide.
You taste too thin.

A box in a box
just keeps and keeps.

Am I cooked yet?
This soup's deep.

My tongue's tied
from cheek to cheek.

Give me a fork
for just one week.

Give me some time.
Give me some meat.

Give me some teeth.
I will *eat eat eat*!

IN PRAISE OF WHATNOT

"Cheap. There it is." —A. Einstein

Here's to the chicken
in the egg in the chicken,
the unflappable potential
of any soft-shelled, falling body,
the earth perhaps, the emptiness

it falls through.
Here's to emptiness, every hole
in my head, the world that feeds
from ear to ear,
breakfasts, scrambled eggs, eggs up to here,

eggs turning upside down
on the lens of each eye, the brains that unscramble
blue eggs from the sky. Here's to the blue
chickens, what's more,
that hang right now by my kitchen door,

four feathered asses, back-to-back,
in pairs, that look just like
faces, face-to-face, in midair.
Here's to the man in the moon,
all optical illusions,

all doubletaken satellites
swirled in collusion,
all dervishes whirling
collective delight, around God's head
blue rings of blue light, around God's head

blue rings in profusion, all dervishes whirling impromptu delusions.
Here's to emptiness again, and halos and light, that than which
there's nothing faster that flies,
from the bird to the egg, breaking fast
from the sky, the earth you break into, time

and again, the egg you break into
the same black pan, this, this thought
of an egg, over light, an egg from the blue,
any thought flipped quickly, from you
to you.

Jerome Rothenberg

THREE POEMS

DREAMWORK ONE

for Barbara Einzig

to dream that he is walking past a window
to dream that the window moves & that the air around it turns to
    stone
to dream that he is being hit by stones
to dream of a window that reflects a stone
to dream that he is falling through a hole inside a stone
to dream of stones & boxes
to dream of standing on a black box like a coffin
to dream of coffins stones & calendars
to dream that he is dreaming of a stone
to dream of windows cracking in the street around him
to dream of wires tied around a stone
to dream of men with wires in their hands under his windows
to dream of hands that close over his eyes
& of other hands that close over his hands & belly
to dream of being in a country where the war has raged for years
to dream of flags & balconies
to dream of standing at a window watching the men in helmets
    stalking through his house
to dream of standing in his house & looking through a window
    watching the men in helmets on his street
to dream of men in helmets waiting at his door
to dream that his door is made of stone
to dream that he is standing at his door & crying

that the men with wires in their hands have heard him cry
that the men in helmets scream a name he doesn't understand
to dream that he forgets his own name
to dream that he will get a new name in his dream
to dream of dreaming his new name
to dream a second time of dreaming
to dream his name in syllables
beginning with a dream outrageously
in syllables
to dream of syllables & colors
to say his name is white & green
to dream of where the white & green are
there is a white stone & a green one
but there is not a white stone in his house
only a white reflexion
a white hole in a stone
a green impediment reflecting a white stone
dreaming that he holds a white stone
that he learns to dream about the white stone's name
to dream outrageously
he learns to dream
outrageously
he learns to dream outrageously of hands
to dream of white & green hands
of hands reflecting colors from a stone
to dream of standing in a circle in a building in a dream
to dream that there are people with him in the circle
to dream that these are people he doesn't know
to dream that they are speaking a language he doesn't know
to dream that they don't know his language
to dream an alphabet in which to write his language
to change his alphabet from day to day
to dream a calendar maybe a rhetoric for dreaming
to dream that he keeps the calendar inside his mouth
to dream on sunday that his mouth is filled with calendars
to dream on monday that a hand is over his mouth
to dream on tuesday that a bride is seated in the hand
to dream on wednesday that the hand has grown a hundred nipples
to dream of hands & calendars on thursday
to dream on friday that his name has lost its syllables
to dream of emptiness on saturday

to dream that he is standing on an empty box & hammering
to dream that he is hammering a silence
to dream that the silence crashes open like an egg
to dream that the inside of the egg is labrador
a person in his dream says "labrador"
a person in his dream says "chalk"
to dream a person in his dream says "solitaire"
to dream of walking with a person in his dream
to dream a face to dream the face is on a person
to dream the face is on a wall
to dream a stone face
to dream a stone face deep inside a mirror
to dream that he had dreamed the face before
to dream that he was a child & dreaming of a face
the face is like a mandrill's face a blue & red face
the face is blue & lined with stripes
to dream that the stripes have faded
to dream that the face has lost its stripes that his name has
    lost its syllables
to dream a language without syllables
to dream that he understands this language
to dream that all of language is a single word
to dream that he knows this word
to dream that he forgets it
to dream that he explains the absence of this word
to dream that no one in the circle understands him
that he yells at them that he tells them that they're dreaming
to dream that he has always dreamed
to dream that he has never woken up from dreaming

DREAMWORK TWO

the rabbi whispers to the rabbi:
little brother, you are gone
& never had existed

where is your sleep?
the rabbi calls out
where are your canticles?

he is no rabbi anyway
an indian he is
in jodhpurs & a cockeyed mask

the roar of treatises is silent now
the uncle dreams of newspapers
under the rabbi's hat

DREAMWORK THREE

a trembling old man dreams of a chinese garden
a comical old man dreams of newspapers under his rabbi's hat

•

a simple tavernkeeper dreams of icicles & fisheyes
a sinister tavernkeeper dreams of puddles with an angle of the
law in every drop

•

the furrier's plump daughter is dreaming of a patch of old
vanilla
the furrier's foreign daughter is dreaming of a hat from which
a marten hangs

•

the proud accountant dreams of a trolley over the frozen river
the reluctant accountant dreams of his feet asleep in a fresh
pair of red socks

•

the silly uncle dreams of a history written by a team of doc-
tors
the uncle in the next apartment dreams of the cost of katmandu

•

the retired gangster dreams of a right turn into a field of
sacred lemons
the dancing gangster dreams of a carriage, a donkey, & the ace
of spades

•

the grim man with a proposition dreams of his fingers entering
a pair of gloves
the excited man with a proposition dreams of the letter E torn
from the title of his poem

•

the remarkable elevator operator dreams of the marriage of karl
marx
the easy elevator operator dreams of a seashell at the entry to
the thirteenth floor

•

the candid photographer dreams of a wooden synagogue inside his
brother's camera
the secret photographer dreams of a school of golden herrings
drifting out to sea

•

the yiddish dadaist dreams of rare steaks & platonic pleasures
the rosy dadaist dreams that a honeycomb is squashed against
his face

•

the mysterious stranger dreams of a white tablecloth on which
black threads are falling
the stranger whom no one sees dreams of his sister holding up
a string of pearls

•

the asthmatic tax collector dreams of a row of sacred numbers
the rebellious tax collector dreams of a bathhouse set among
old trees

•

the robust timber merchant dreams of a wind that blows inside
the blacksmith's bellows
the sobbing timber merchant dreams that his hands have touched
the buttocks of his dreaming bride

•

the man with a fish between his teeth dreams of a famine for
forty-five days
the man dressed in white dreams of a potato

•

the savage gentile dreams of a dancer with flashy lightbulbs
on her shoes
the repentant gentile dreams of her fingers bringing honey to
his lips

•

the fancy barber dreams that his hands massage the captain's
neck
the silent barber dreams of a rooster with a thread tied to
one leg

•

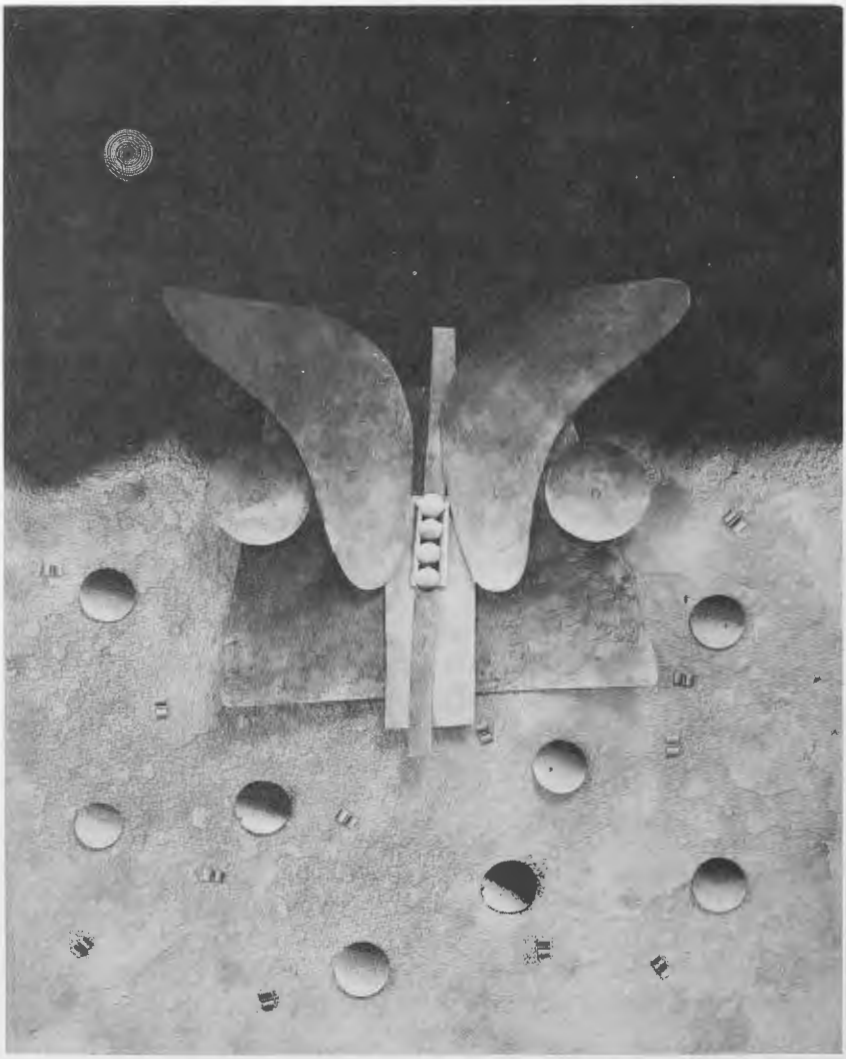
the salty bridegroom dreams of horses galloping they whirl
around the bridegroom's house
the obedient bridegroom dreams of what his bride slides through
her fingers he sees it white & trembling in the morning
light

•

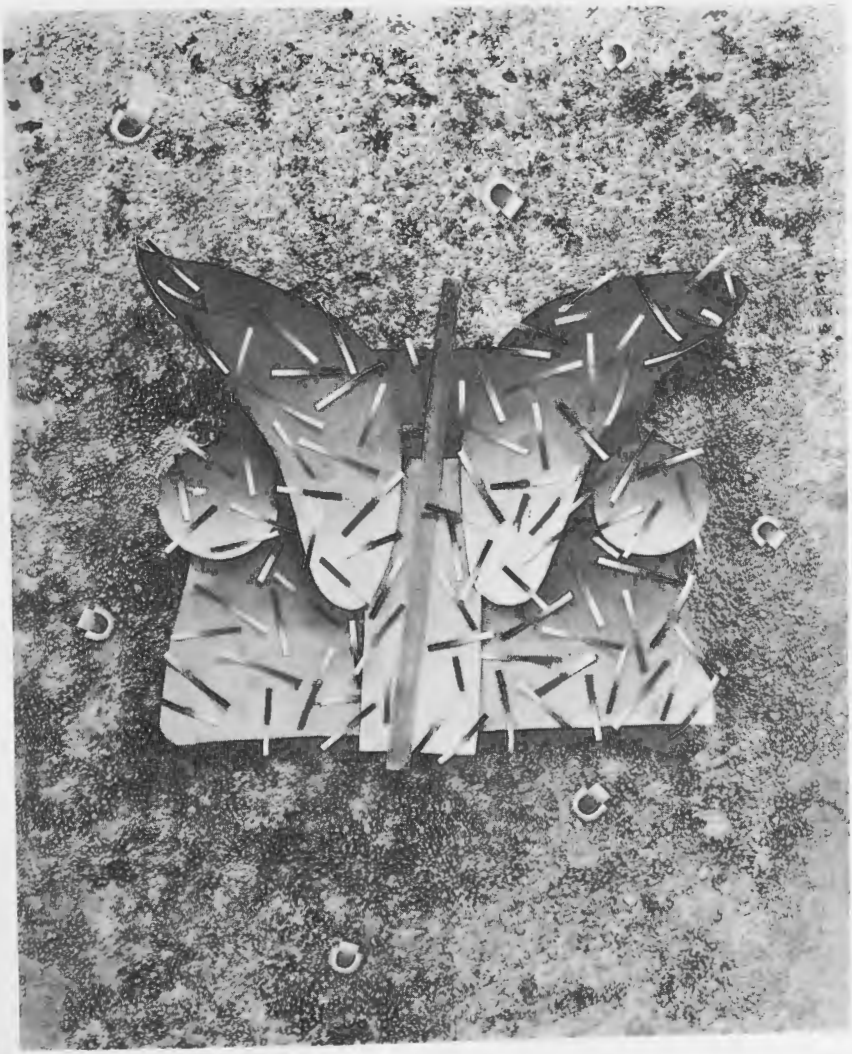
the fat man in the derby dreams that spring is here his seed
is falling through an empty sky
the last man in the derby dreams that if he dreams it words
will turn to flowers

Brian Nissen

SIX CONSTRUCTIONS

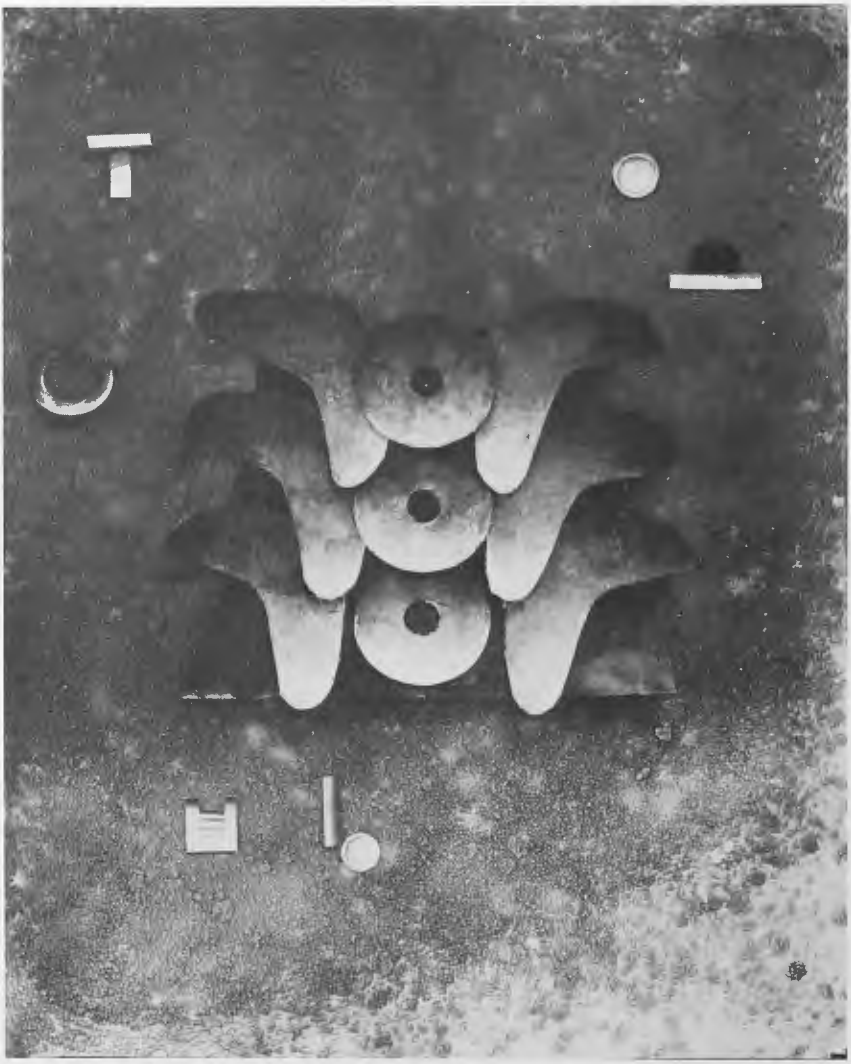


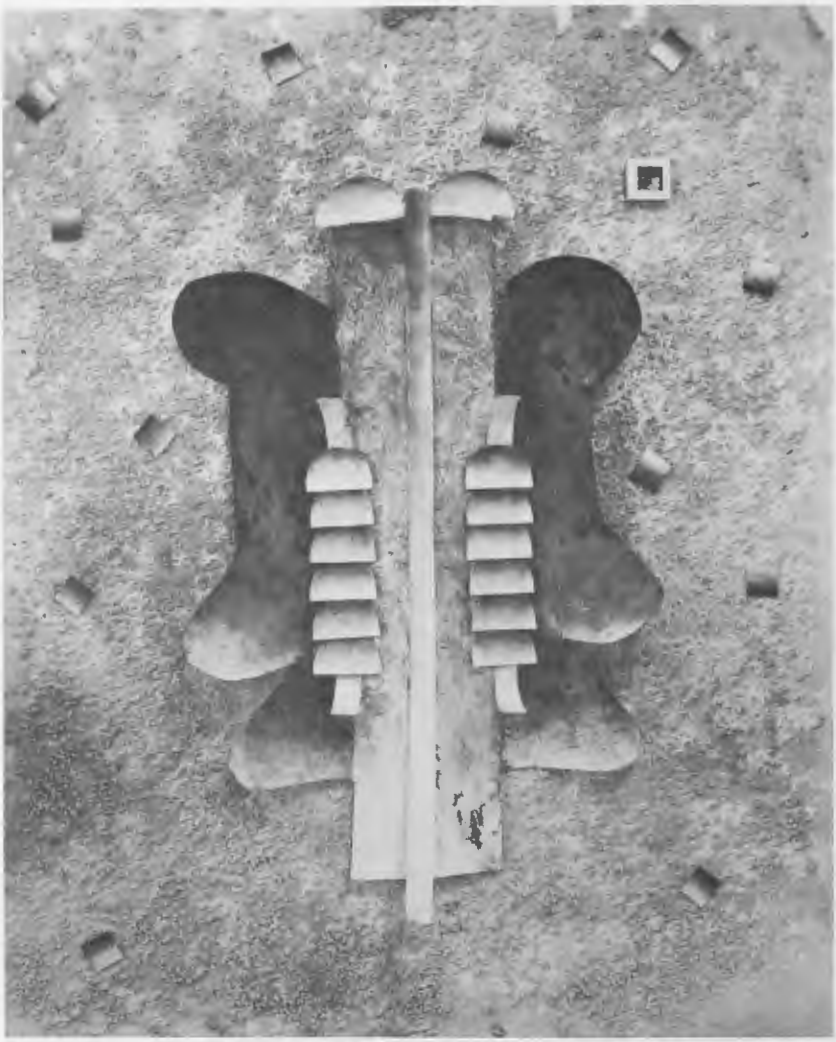
Inspired by Octavio Paz's prose poem The Obsidian Butterfly, *Nissen alludes to the butterfly in these constructions. The central elements have dual reference: to the firm geometric rectilinearity in pre-Columbian sculptures and to the language of abstraction evolved in 20th century visual art. Nissen's materials, disguised by paint, are ambivalent. They have the dusty character of the archeological find and they have the provisory character of 20th century culture. If an image seems*

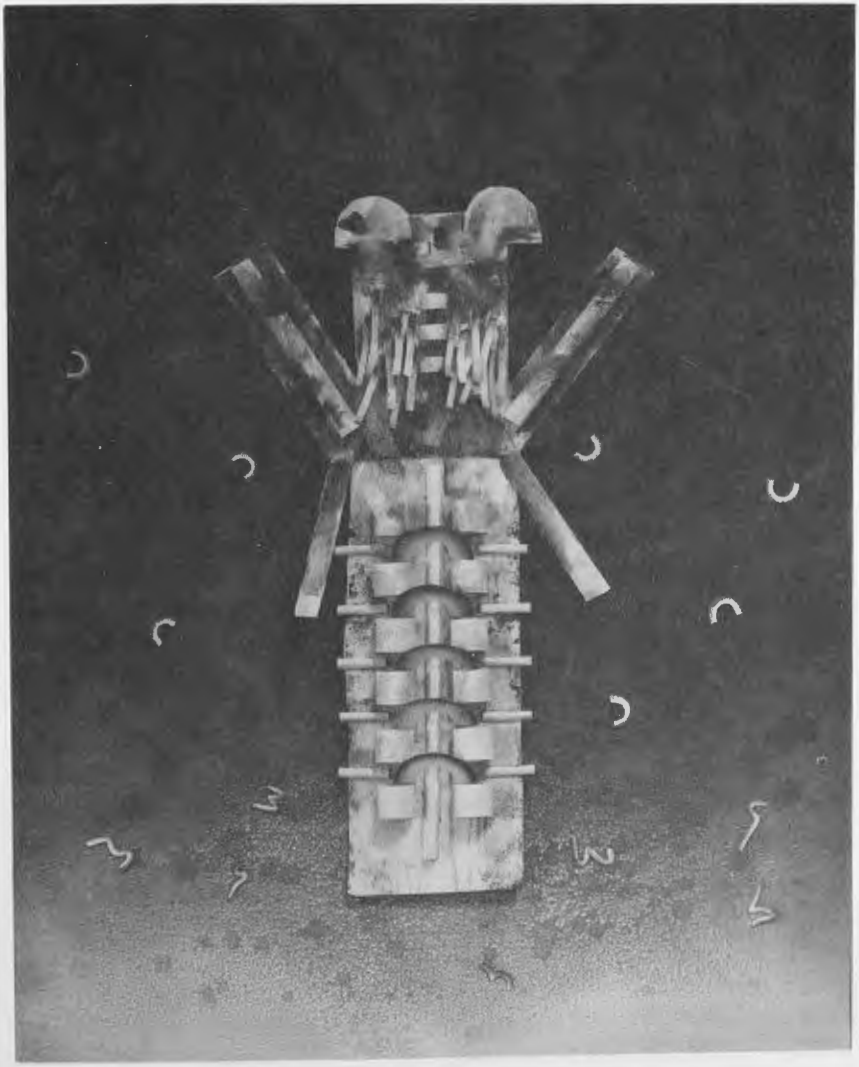


familiar (and several recall pre-Columbian pendants) its familiarity can not be specified. The artist avoids cliches by toning down rather than up. His colors for instance, never reach a saturated point, but are rather pale, recessive hints of a once bright surface. Bits of sand embedded in a mottled surface send us back to the poem, to the "pile of dust." Dust and earth colors drift through the works, only rarely heightened by the memory of fire.

Taken from an essay by Dore Ashton, New York 1983.







Eliot Weinberger

THE DREAM OF INDIA

[c. 1492]

For India was named by Noah, and its king is called the King of Knowledge.

For Paradise is in India, and in Paradise is the living fountain from which the four great rivers flow.

In India a year has two summers and two winters.

In India the land is always green.

Shadows there fall south in summer and north in winter.

In India there are twelve thousand seven hundred islands, some made entirely of gold, and some of silver. There is an island where pearls are so plentiful the people wear no clothes, but cover themselves in pearls.

In India wine is made from the milk of palmtrees. There is a tree whose fruit is a kind of bread.

In India there is a worm which cannot live without fire.

Snakes crawl about in the streets there.

In India they sleep on mattresses of silk on beds of gold. They eat at tables with silver vessels, and everyone, no matter of what rank, wears pearls and rings with precious stones.

There is a race of people there with eight toes on each foot and eight

fingers on each hand. Their hair is white until they are 30, and then it begins to turn black.

They have no poor people there, and all strangers are welcome.

In India crabs turn to stone the minute that they are exposed to air.

There is a race of people there who live on the smell of an apple. And when they travel they must take an apple with them, for without the smell of it they will die.

It was so hot the people never left their houses.

Horses there are few and wretched, for they are fed with boiled meat and boiled rice.

In India they have a class of philosophers, devoted to astronomy and the prediction of future events. And I saw one among them who was 300 years old, a longevity so miraculous that wherever he went he was followed by children.

There are no liars there.

In India it is the custom for foreign traders to stay at inns. There the food is cooked for the guest by the landlady, who also makes the bed and sleeps with the stranger.

There is a race of people whose ears hang down to their knees.

In India there is a fountain guarded by deadly snakes. It is the only water in that place, and if anyone wishes to drink, he must take off all his clothes, for the snakes fear nudity more than fire.

There is a race of people there whose upper lip is so large they cover their faces with it when they sleep in the sun.

And I saw a king walking with two men before him sounding trumpets; two men behind him holding colored parasols over his head to shade him from the sun; and on each side of him a panegyrist, each rivalling the other in his invention of praises to the king.

In India there is a fruit, round as a calabash, which has three fruits inside, each with a different taste.

In India they worship the sun in a large temple outside of town. Every morning at sunrise the inhabitants rush out to this place and burn incense to a huge idol which, in a manner I cannot explain, turns around and makes a great noise.

In India they tell the future from the flight of birds.

In India if a man wants to burn himself alive, it is cause for great rejoicing. His family prepares a feast, then leads him on horse or on foot to the edge of a ditch. There he throws himself into the flames to the sound of music and celebration. Three days later he comes back to make his last will known; then he is gone forever.

In India it is very crowded because they have no pestilence. The number of people there exceeds belief. I saw armies of a million men or more.

It is so hot men's balls hang down to their knees, and the men must tie them up and apply special ointments.

In India there is a bird called a *gookook* that flies in the night crying "gookook." Fire flashes from its beak. And if it lands on a roof, someone in that house will die that night.

In India they are much addicted to wantonness, but the unnatural crimes are unknown among them.

In India the dead are mourned for by women, who stand around the body, naked to the waist, and beat their breasts, crying "Alas! alas!"

There is a race of barking people with the heads of dogs.

In India the ships are sewn like dresses, without a nail or a piece of iron in them, for the rocks at sea there will draw iron to them, and any ship made with nails will crash against the rocks.

There is a race of horned people who grunt like pigs.

In India there are wells with hot water at night and cold during the day.

They clean their teeth with toothpicks.

In India the people are black. The blacker they are, the more beautiful they are considered. So every week they take their babies and rub them with oil till they become as black as devils. (Except that, in India, their gods are black and their devils white.)

In India each woman has many husbands, each with a specific duty. The wife lives in one house and her husbands in another. And they divide up the day so that each husband lives in his wife's house at certain hours, during which time no other husband may enter.

On one day of the year they light innumerable lamps of oil.

In India there are trees with leaves so big five or six men can stand in the shade of them.

They wash their feet first and then their faces. They wash before sleeping with their wives.

In India they worship the cow, and if one kills a cow he is immediately put to death. Some, particularly on holidays, even take the dung of the cow and rub it on their foreheads instead of perfume.

There are no adulterers there.

And I saw a temple high on a hill, and in it there was a single amethyst the size of a large pine cone, the color of fire, flashing from a distance as the sunbeams played about it.

In India there is a mountain called Albenigaras which is full of diamonds, but it swarms with venomous animals and serpents; no man can approach it. Next to it, however, is a higher mountain, and at certain times of the year the people climb it with oxen which they cut to pieces. By means of machines they have invented, they throw the warm and bleeding hunks of meat below, onto the slopes of Albenigaras. Diamonds stick to the meat. Then vultures come and snatch the meat for food, flying off to places where they will be safe from the serpents. There the men go, and collect the diamonds that have fallen from the flesh.

In India the wise men can produce and quell great winds. For this reason they eat in secret.

In India the women wear wigs of black, the color they favor most. Some cover their heads with painted leaves, but none of them paint their faces.

There is a race of feathered people there who can leap into a tree.

In India the men have no beards, but their hair is long and they tie it with a cord of silk and let it flow over their backs. In this way they go to war.

In India there is a fish whose skin is so hard that men make their houses out of it.

There is not a single tailor in India, for everyone goes naked.

In India it is very crowded for the people are of a sort who are loathe to leave their own country.

In India they worship an idol, half-man, half-ox. And the idol

speaks through its mouth, and demands the blood of 40 virgins. In one city I saw them carry their idol on a great chariot, and such was the fervor of the people that many cast themselves under the wheels of the chariot, that they may be crushed to death, as their god requires.

In India there is an animal called a *rhinoceros* because he has a horn over his nostril. And when he walks his horn jogs about, but when he becomes enraged by what he is looking at, his horn erects, and it becomes so rigid he can uproot a tree with it. His skin when it is dried is four fingers thick, and some people use it instead of iron for their plows, and they plow the earth with it.

There is a race of people there who are only one foot tall, and must always be on guard lest the storks carry them away. They are adult at age four and old men at eight.

In India there are roses everywhere—growing everywhere, for sale in the market, in wreaths around the necks of men and braided in the hair of the women. It seems they could hardly live without roses.

In India women sleep with their husbands in the day, but at night they go to foreign men and sleep with them and even pay them for it, for they like white people. And when a woman conceives a child by a stranger the husband pays him. If the child is born white the stranger receives 18 tenkas extra; if it is black he gets nothing.

There is a race of people with backward feet.

In India there are long serpents called *cockodrilles* which live on land by day and in the water at night. In the winter they do not eat, but lie there dreaming. They kill men and devour them weeping.

In India there is a river known as the Arotani, where the fish are so abundant they can be caught by hand. But if anyone holds those fish in his hand for a short time he is immediately attacked by fever. But as soon as he puts the fish down his health returns to him.

They use turbans for trousers.

They beat cymbals with a stick.

They kill their parents when they are old and use the flesh for food.

In India there is a tree, some three cubits high, which bears no fruit, and which is called, in their language, the tree of modesty. For if a man approaches it, it contracts and draws up all its branches, expanding again when he departs.

In India the girls have such firm flesh that you cannot squeeze it or pinch it anywhere. For a small coin they'll let a man pinch them as much as he likes. On account of this firmness, their breasts do not hang down at all, but stand straight out in front.

Peacocks run in the forest there.

And I saw a temple cast of solid bronze with an idol of solid gold the size of a man. Its eyes were made of two rubies, so skillfully done they seemed to be watching me.

They sit cross-legged on the ground.

In India the women go naked, and when a woman marries she is set on a horse, and her husband gets on the crupper and holds a knife pointed at her throat, and they both have nothing on except a tall cap on their heads like a miter, wrought with white flowers. And all the maidens of the place go singing in a row in front of them till they reach the house, and there the bride and groom are left alone, and when they get up in the morning they go as naked as before.

In India there are some who cut off their own heads, that they may go to Heaven. They use a strange sort of scissors.

In India if a man walks out of his house and hears someone sneeze he immediately goes back inside and does not leave—for they think it is a bad omen.

There are people with ears like winnowing fans, and at night they lie on one and cover themselves with the other.

In India the men wear female dress; they use cosmetics, wear earrings, arm-rings, golden seal-rings on the ring-finger as well as on the toes of the feet.

They eat alone, one by one, on a tablecloth of dung. After eating they throw the plates away.

They cohabit like a snake entwined by a vine, or rather, while their wives move back and forth as if they were plowing, the husband remains motionless.

In India there is a bird called a *semenda* whose beak has several distinct pipes with many openings. When death approaches, this bird collects a quantity of dry wood in its nest, and sitting upon it, sings so sweetly with all its pipes that it attracts and soothes all listeners to a marvellous degree. Then, igniting the wood by flapping its wings, it allows

itself to be burnt to death.

I asked them about their religion and they replied "We believe in Adam."

In India the wife throws herself on her husband's funeral pyre, and if she will not do so, the people throw her there.

It was so hot swords melted in their scabbards, and the gems in their handles turned to coal.

There are headless men with eyes in their stomachs.

There are people who walk about on all fours.

In India there is a dragon called a *basilisk,* whose breath can pulverize a rock. Its tail can kill any animal except the elephant. It is said that when a man and a basilisk meet, if the creature sees the man first, the man dies; but if the man sees the basilisk first, then the creature will die.

In India when they dive for pearls they take their wise men with them, for the fish where the pearls are found are treacherous to man, but the wise men chant in such a way as to stupefy the fish.

It is so cold that water turns to crystal, and on those crystals real diamonds grow. And the diamonds and the crystals mate and multiply and are nourished by the dew of heaven.

One morning a man of great stature and with a snowy white beard, naked from the waist up with only a mantle thrown about him and a knotted cord, appeared at my lodgings. He prostrated himself full length upon the sand, beating his head three times against the ground. Then he raised himself, and seeing my bare feet, wanted to kiss them, but I refused. And he told me that he came from an island across the sea, that he had been travelling for two years, and that he had come in search of me. For his attachment to his idols was so pure and devout that God had spoken to him, showed him my face, and told him to find me that he may be instructed in the true path.

There are warrior women with silver weapons, for they have no iron.

There are women with beards growing from their breasts.

And I saw, deep in the interior, Venetian ducats in circulation, and gold coins twice the size of our florins.

In India, they do not cut any hair of the body, not even the hair of the genitals, for they believe that cutting that hair increases carnal desire and incites to lust.

They do not bury their dead, but embalm them with certain spices, put them on stools and cover them with cloths, every family keeping their own apart. The flesh dries upon the bones, and as these corpses resemble living beings, every one of them recognizes his parents and all the members of his family for many years to come.

In India when they travel they like to have someone riding behind them.

In all emergencies they take the advice of women.

In India on one day of the year they set up poles like the masts of ships and hang beautiful cloth, interwoven with gold, from them. On the top of each pole sits a man of pious aspect who prays for them all. These men are assailed by the people, who pelt them with spoiled oranges, lemons, and other rank fruit, and the holy men must bear it all with equanimity.

In India when a child is born people show particular attention to the man, not to the woman. Of two children they give preference to the younger, for they maintain that the elder owes his birth to predominant lust, while the younger owes his origin to mature reflection and a calm proceeding.

There is a race of people there who have one enormous foot, and when they want to rest in the noonday sun, they lie on their backs and raise their foot like a parasol. They are great runners.

In India they let their nails grow long, and glory in idleness.

There are little people who have no mouth, but only a small hole in their face, and they must suck their food through a straw.

In India they write the title of a book at the end.

And I saw one of their holy men, standing nude, facing the sun, cloaked with a panther skin, and I continued on my way. Sixteen years later I happened to return to the same place—and there he was, unmoved.

It was so hot fish at the bottom of the river burned like silk touched by a flame.

And I saw far off the coast of that land a thing in the sky, huge as a cloud, but black and moving faster than the clouds. I asked what that thing could be, and they said it is the great bird Rokh. But the wind was blowing off the coast, and the Rokh went with it, and I never got a closer look.

In India the birds and animals are completely different from ours, except for one: the quail.

. . .

All of the imagery and some of the language are derived from works written in the 500 years prior to 1492. India, of course, is where Columbus thought he was going. After that first voyage, and Vasco da Gama's arrival on the Malabar Coast in 1498, the dreams of India become quite different.

Jed Rasula

THE STYLE OF OLD AGE

Is there an imagination that sits enthroned
As grim as it is benevolent, the just
And the unjust, which in the midst of summer stops

To imagine winter?

("The Auroras of Autumn")

These lines of Wallace Stevens, written at age 68, seem to embody the gist of his late wintery work. As readily as they leap to mind, however, thinking of old age and poetry, they are a *statement* of age and not its style, as such. There *is* a style of old age which is a major portion of the legacy of 20th century American poetry. It is recognizable not by stylistic traits or perspectives attained in aging, but by realizing that imagination reflects its levels of maturation in its means of expression. Classic Chinese poetry was long nurtured on this principle, and poets routinely began writing the conceits of aging into their verses from about the age of thirty on. Stevens, like the great T'ang poets, rehearsed the mode in advance, so that when the authentic voice arose, the style was in place:

It is an illusion that we were ever alive,
Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves
By our own motions in a freedom of air. ("The Rock")

The notion of a style of old age in American poetry came to me, fittingly, in midwinter, outdoors, in familiar terrain defamiliarized by deep snow, bare branches, and most of all the revelation of the structure of the land, unobscured by leaves and surface growth. Resting occasionally while skiing through these woods I would resume my reading of Zukofsky's *"A" 22-23,* just published in that attractively portable Grossman edition, 1975. Read in the New Hampshire woods a dozen miles inland from the Atlantic, the initial figuration in *"A" 22* of "135,000 years built up/from 75 foot depth the/coast gained from the sea" was immediate, local, and visible. This section of *"A" 22* functions as a stylistic abridgement of geological time, chronicling the succession of life-forms fossilized in a bog in "archaic time unchanged unchangeable," in which the imagination overlaps for a moment with the prospect of its own demise:

> The departed celestial radiated alive
> under earth rest will not
> return above to hunger, sustained
> by mayapple root, their children
> unmolested fleeted by glowworms before
> stars course ocean flicker continents... (*"A"* p. 513)

The language is so spare as to almost elude restatement in any other terms. At times it even *defies* the possibility of a literal correlate. It approximates the geological concreteness of the elements it invokes,

> semblance of two-headed hammer flogging
> sieves emblazed suns, Cypress hidden
> sky-starred bema, god egg-candled
> kindling—falling toward—earth cypress,
> at one with the hill-genius
> wistaria cloaked, ivy girded smiling
> lost in azalea, fallen meteor,
> vine winding in twisted laurel
> elbows wintering green—naming gazes
> on undergrowth berry *I'm hers*—
> profiting children with song whose
> laws are another time veiled
> timeless, consoling the aged reading
> of a past meeting sorrow,
> 'pine, wherever your hanging garden,
> my prince, comb our hearts—
> as soft pine-needle your hair.' (*"A"* pp. 550-551)

The text, attentively read, leaves impressions similar to those left by other poems. But what Zukofsky forces the reader to ask is why the words so insistently abbreviate everything that comes into view. The words are dense chunks of delimiting matter. Elements strictly private to the poet are there, but a syntactic relaxation suspends them, lets them become interpersonal, familiar, like language. And it is language above all that we experience here, with no disguise, no pretense to being anything else, in the style of old age.

Alterstil, the style of old age, is not as readily recognized a literary term as *Jugendstil.* Its German origins are understandable when you reflect on the particular contribution to the arts of Germans in their later years. Goethe is the progenitor of the style of old age ("What! have I reached the age of eighty merely to think the same things all the time?"), though late Beethoven springs as readily to mind. Three of the most esteemed German novels of this century are cornerstones of that country's sense of its style of old age: Mann's *Doctor Faustus,* Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* and Broch's *Death of Virgil.*

Leonardo, Michaelangelo and Titian were long held as heralds of power and reckoning in old age. Since Bach and Beethoven music has become a ready means of discerning the style of old age. Verdi's inspired *Otello* and *Falstaff* caught public attention not only for their intrinsic value, but because of the composer's advanced age. Brahms' late piano pieces (op. 116, 118, 119) are commonly referred to as "autumnal." Liszt's late piano works are perhaps the most authentic revelations of the style of old age, in their haunting dissolution of tonality. Pianist Alfred Brendel has written of Liszt that "It seems as if the shrinkage of the ageing personality has left room for the impersonal, for archaic force." That archaic force is there in Schoenberg's *Moses and Aron,* Busoni's *Doctor Faustus,* and especially in Janacek's last years, which brought to light his *Glagolitic Mass, Sinfonietta,* four chamber masterpieces and the operas *Katya Kabanova, The Cunning Little Vixen, The Makropolous Case* and *The House of the Dead*—the most prolific *Alterstil* summation I know of. Turner's late light-saturated paintings are not simply visionary but a style of old age. Other instances can be multiplied, from Rodin and Picasso to Kandinsky, Yeats and Beckett. But it's not been realized that the latest manifestation of the style of old age is a central aspect of the legacy of 20th century American poetry. A simple recitation of the names is almost enough to suffice: Pound, Williams, H.D., Stevens, Eliot, Jeffers, Olson, Zukofsky, Oppen...

Our youth-oriented culture makes it hard to recognize the value of a style of old age, despite the many instances that can be enumerated. The

frenzied acclaim for precocious talent—from Keats to Rimbaud to Elvis Presley—provides one of the few absolute continuities of our era. It is fitting that in this context the most telling exponent of a style of old age should be Hermann Broch at the end of his life in his essay "The Style of the Mythical Age."*

Broch goes back to the beginnings of the Western tradition for evidence, noting that "... the style of old-age in all its greatness, coolness and abstract transparency is so obvious in [Homer's] work that people had necessarily to conceive him in this form." We know nothing of Homer's actual age, of course, but it remains a basic feature of our interest in *Alterstil* that it is an act of imagination on a reader's part that marks the lineaments of the style. It is a primary feature of the style of old age that it elicits passionate participation, not dispassionate praise. Otherwise, the writings of the old remain just that—documents of age, as such, or gratuitous caps to honored careers. The writings of the old, to truly attain to a style, must possess an imaginative acuteness that can stir the imagination of readers of any age.

Some basic features of the style of old age are that it reflects the proximity of death, it's a paring away of art to its essentials, a new style that is a *renewal of style,* a ripening that is a relief from the limitations of human dimensions and perspectives, a glance into the essential structure of the world. A work in the style of old age is invigorated by an enlarged prospect that includes death, absorbing it as one of the indestructible elements that are to be engaged, affirmatively. The Jugendstil response to death represents the opposite theme, which is the poignance or anguish of so little time remaining. The style of old age must have, on the part of its artist, an entire preceding body of work, so that there's no chance of that Jugendstil yearning to obscure the deep instincts aroused by the prospect of personal extinction.

The style of old age is a *style* because it is the language of the medium, exposed in its essentiality. It is not a style in the sense of a phase, a set of expendable gestures, or a personal touch. It's not a theme. Nor is it the testimony of old age (though that may be found in it). It is above all an art in which the economy of means is a means. Like Stevens' mind that stops in the midst of summer to imagine winter, it sees through the superficial abundance to the imaginal plenitude disclosed only by stripping away, peeling off, turning over, emptying out. It is a vision of diminishment that doesn't shrink its exposition, as in H.D.'s *Winter Love,* section 3:

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*Broch's essay was written in English as an introduction to Rachel Bespaloff's book *On the Iliad* (number IX in the Bollingen Series).

Now there is winter-love, a winter-lover
who would take gladly—fondling the crisp leaves
with a padded paw, sheathed—glad to find

in the den, the sacred lair, no trap to entice,
no rapacious loins, and sighs, not groans—
no rain of arrows, no poisonous thrust of spears,

no thundering on the stairs,
no rasp of steel,
only Taygetus' silence,

till a drift of snow
slides from a branch,
then, silence more intense.

It was the extremity of compression in Zukofsky that first alerted me to the style of old age. Broch refers to "the building of a new vocabulary out of syntax" which is surely to the point of *"A" 22-23.* There are contortions of syntax in poems from the later *Maximus,* too, that contribute to a new vocabulary. Some of the vagaries critics complain of in the late Olson may more profitably be regarded as acute testimony in the style of old age, as in "The winter the *Gen. Starks* was stuck," "The whole thing has run so fast away it breaks my heart," "*Same Day, Later*" or "Just as Morning Twilight . . ." with its unforgettable resolution:

. . . Go down, moon and teach me too to

swallow what by analogy and continuity I now, at 55 know is

as much condition as the purchase of my soul by love as they

Such lines introduce to the American idiom the poetic equivalent of a new entry to the chart of elements in chemistry.

American poetry has been unusually blessed in the number of its poets who have lived and continued writing into their seventh and eighth decades or beyond. Not all represent, to my mind, styles of old age, though some are worth considering. Jeffers and cummings, for instance, don't appear to have undergone any notable change of idiomin their last collections, but in both there is a heightened resolution in the expression of their lifelong convictions. A revolution in syntax and diction is strongest in Zukofsky and Olson, and this may be partly due to the extremely resonant precedent of old age in the generation of their immediate predecessors.

Even in the case of Zukofsky and Olson, however, it is a re-emphasis of myth and a relative diminishment of history that forces the late style to crystallize—and this follows the example of their masters. The modernist generation experienced the First World War in the full flush of maturity, only to confront the second during the years most formative for a style of old age. In varying ways, Pound's *Pisan Cantos,* H.D.'s *Trilogy,* Eliot's *Four Quartets,* Stevens' *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* and Jeffers' last phase all embody tormented responses to the war. In each instance, history is not abandoned (which might be the response of younger poets), but penetrated, seen through, demythified by means of myth itself. History is the 20th century's myth of realism, whereas traditional mythology takes on the character of a *natural resource.*

Broch has this to say about the fate of the arts in the postwar world: "If art can or may exist further, it has to set itself the task of striving for the essential, of becoming a counterbalance to the hypertrophic calamity of the world. And imposing such a task on the arts, this epoch of disintegration imposes on them the style of old-age, the style of the essential, the style of the abstract." Read in an American context—in the American text—it's possible to see that "history" in its conventional form is the story of man, while myth is the story of the cosmos. In the American style of old age, human schemes and resolutions count for very little. Pound, Williams and Eliot all became apostles of humility. Jeffers exulted in mankind's imminent demise. The central poems by these and the other major figures in American *Alterstil* celebrate the rudimentary cycles of natural phenomena. Zukofsky and Williams end with flowers, Pound with squirrels and bluejays, Jeffers with the surf and Olson with the tides, Stevens with a rock of which he says—as if for all his fellow poets of old age—

> . . . This is the cure
> Of leaves and of the ground and of ourselves. ("The Rock")

A great age of poetry—like T'ang in China—may be impossible without the profound transparencies attained in a style of old age, traceable not in one but in a host of figures. Amidst the cantankerous jostling for position among proponents for a *tradition* (a poor substitute for style and wisdom), it may have been forgotten that in our poetry of old age, the great era of American poetry is already in our hands. Is it too much to recall that *gratitude* is a profound emotion?

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS.

A Felt Architectonics of the Numinous: Robert Duncan's *Ground Work*

New Directions, 1984.

In 1968, with the publication of *Bending the Bow,* Robert Duncan declared that he would not publish another book for fifteen years, an audacious act in a period when poetry is often judged by standards of the market rather than the art itself. Duncan's reasons for not publishing have much to do with that market, particularly the way that it determines what shall be printed and in what form. He has always attempted to maintain control over the production of his work so that its printing would reflect his own notational intentions. As his work on "Passages" continued during the 1960's he became concerned that the page be a score for performance and that spacing, margins and orthographic conventions be respected as generative elements in the poem. In the late 1960's, with the printing of *Tribunals,* and later with the special issue of *Maps* devoted to his work, Duncan became increasingly frustrated with what he took to be printers' lack of regard for this intent, and in a long essay printed in that latter volume, he outlined some of his feelings on the matter. Addressing John Taggart, the magazine's editor, Duncan writes:

> This very matter of the typewriter and the author's work and the emergence of the idea of our taking over the means of the production of our copy into

> our own hands is where we must start out.... When I speak of the poet's intention that must govern the text, I speak of an entity of the Imagination that what I most truly am serves. In the poet's intentions, I am calld to my fullest responsibility, to my responsibility for a community of poets that I have come to in the commune of Poetry itself.

His "fullest responsibility" includes his obligation to the book as well as to the individual element within it, but at the time that he wrote these words Duncan was beginning to feel constrained by the idea of the book itself. From the very first, with "Medieval Scenes" and "The Venice Poem," and later with *A Book of Resemblances* and *The Opening of the Field,* Duncan has been a writer of the book, considered as a composed entity in which all parts contribute to the whole. The problem with such composition is that the poet is confined to that structure, however open, and so it may have been with this limitation in mind that he began to think of a long, free period of writing without any obligation to some total unit.

The fifteen year hiatus is now over, and New Directions has brought out the first of a proposed two-book gathering which will include all of the work composed during this period. Of course Duncan has published portions of the book ("Santa Cruz Propositions," "A Seventeenth Century Suite," "Dante Études") in various places, either in magazines or in small pamphlets. For a while he distributed photocopied pages from his notebooks to his friends as a way of keeping his most immediate readers up to date with his work, but this is his first sustained collection since *Bending the Bow* and so is worth special consideration.

New Directions has solved the problem of typographic intention and notation by printing directly from the author's typescript, allowing the poet to control all aspects of spacing, and to further elucidate his idea of versification, Duncan has written a prefatory statement on notation. In order to accommodate his extraordinarily long lines, the press has provided a wider page than the usual paperback format, a gesture that gives the book a solidity and weight appropriate to its contents. The cover features a paste-up by Jess which contains, in microcosm, some of the crucial materials of Duncan's poetics. A young man drinks water from a tin cup offered him by a hand reaching out of a kind of hieratic coat of arms. The shield is divided into four sections, each one representing some aspect of the creative process: candles to suggest, perhaps, the light of inspiration; a window to suggest vision and reflection; a lyre to celebrate music; and a web to suggest "disorders of the net" of language and syntax. The shield and young man are superimposed over a sphere that resembles, on the one hand, a closeup of the human eye but which could as easily be an aerial view of the planet—the two perspectives, near and far, that define Duncan's vision. At the bottom of the sphere are two hands, one of which is writing with a pen. It is a beautiful synthesis of the "ground" from which *Groundwork* arises: the Poet receiving a refreshing drink of clear water from the universe of signs and images.

I have dwelt at such length on the history and physical design of the book because so much of *Groundwork* concerns the material form in which poetry

appears and the narrative it articulates. For Duncan, poetry is not a matter of individual poems but of Poetry, "Grand Collage" of the individual's creative potential. The immediate event—a slight pause between two words, the distinction between two phonemes—represents entry into what Duncan calls a "felt architectonics... of the numinous." This phrase could describe the ways that poetry participates in a structure larger than itself (the origins of one's language, the numinous presence of Deity) but which is "felt" as a structure that one creates. Dante is the genius of this notion for Duncan, and he is, to some extent, the book's patron saint.

Because the book is written from the standpoint of testimony rather than from an assertion of artisanal mastery it will be all the harder for some to read. The language is often vatic and rhetorical, and the diction archaic and abstract:

> Oh Need, beloved Adversary to Love's settlements,
> Invader, the halcyon days are over. (63)

Although the thematic material of the book extends from *Bending the Bow,* the strong precursor to this book is *Roots and Branches* with its high romantic diction and neoplatonic subjects. During the period of *Bending the Bow,* when the nation needed the demotic voice of "Up-Rising" to shake it loose, Duncan's tone could be heard with the full urgency of its occasion, but one wonders if in the discursive 1980's it will be heard as clearly.

The best introduction to *Ground Work* is the poet's 1968 essay, "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife" (printed in *Caterpillar* 8/9) in which Duncan articulates "the great theme of War" that haunts both *Bending the Bow* as well as the current volume. In that essay, he contrasts the productive role of contention in poetry with the authoritarian version of contention embodied in the Vietnam War. For the poet, "the very life of our art is our keeping at work contending forces and convictions." This is the "creative strife" of Heraclitus who sees War as the principle of generation. Modern warfare in southeast Asia, on the other hand, makes war "too terrible for men to wage," as Duncan says in "Up-Rising." *Ground Work* begins in the late days of that unhappy adventure, and in many respects the relation between individual volition and political hegemony forms the primary theme of the book's opening poems.

But the thematics of War and conflict are only half of a dialectic that advances the book's Heraclitean subject. In a line from "Empedoklean Reveries" Duncan makes this dialectic painfully clear:

> "Because of what we love we are increasingly at War."

The poet's operative spacing nicely illustrates the indissoluble bond between desire and conflict: we are because of what we love and we are, by this desire, increasingly at war. The near rhyme of "are" and "War" adds to the paradox by linking Being and opposition in sound. The interplay between love and war animates all of the poems in the volume. In Duncan's rendering of Southwell's great poem, "The Burning Babe," for example, the sixteenth-century poet's mystical experience of Christ's incarnation becomes, for the contemporary poet, a

doubled vision of sacrifice in the ricefields of southeast Asia:

> The vision of a burning babe I see
> doubled in my sight. The one
> alight in that fire of passion that tries the soul
> is such a Child as Southwell saw his Christ to be:
>
> This is not a baby on fire but a babe of fire,
> flesh burning with its own flame, not toward death
> but alive with flame, suffering its *self*
> the heat of the heart the rose was hearth of;

It is not that Duncan denies the possibility of incarnation because of the Vietnam holocaust (and how easily a lesser poet would "make use" of Southwell's imagery for an ironizing intent!) but that the same creative heat that generates belief is, by a perverted zeal, turned into the flames of a secular martyrdom. In this poetry of secular and sacred incarnation, Duncan is most like his metaphysical forebears and really has no peer in the modern period.

The "Great Theme of War" is dramatically evident in the group of "Passages" that were printed as *Tribunals* and which appear in the early part of the book. "Before the Judgment" is one of Duncan's most powerful declamations against the misuse of power, a poem written in the strident voice of earlier "Passages" like "The Multiversity" and "The Fire":

> and here, wrapt in the stench of vegetable rot,
>
> destroyd forests and fields,
> and from the villages the putrid dead,
> phantasms of industrial enterprise
> swell fat upon the news of the daily body-count;
>
> after the age of lead, the age of gas, fossil fuels
> oil slick on the water, petroleum spread,
> the stink of gasoline in the murky air,
> the smoking tankers crawl towards Asia—
>
> men with fossil minds, with oily tongues
> "to lick the mirror of Narkissos" (28)

These War Passages rival Pound's Hell Cantos in their invocation of a contemporary bolgia of the war makers, but Duncan recognizes his own complicity in the making of war, even as it infects poetry:

> Discontent with that first draft. Where one's own
> hatred enters Hell gets out of hand.
>
> Again and again Virgil ever standing by Dante
> must caution him. (28)

It is such caution that Duncan urges towards his own peers, particularly Denise Levertov in "Santa Cruz Propositions," that in protesting the historical war we do not become the very warmakers we attack.

Ground Work is dominated by several long series or sequences in addition to the "Passages" that appear throughout the volume. "Santa Cruz Propositions," "Poems from the Margins of Thom Gunn's *Moly,*" "A Seventeenth Century Suite...," the "Dante Etudes" are, in a sense, books within the book. Like many of his earlier poems they are "reading writings," poems that take their impetus from other texts but find their own resonance in the poet's immediate concerns. Newspaper accounts of a grisly murder in the Santa Cruz mountains provide a backdrop for a lengthy meditation on Plato's theory of love; Thom Gunn's book, *Moly* generates a series of poems on homosexual themes; the "metaphysical genius" of Herbert, Southwell, Jonson and others provides a frame for variations on theological and aesthetic subjects; Dante's prose advances propositions of social and poetic order in "Dante Etudes"; and in "Circulations of the Song," the work of the Persian poet, Rumi, is the basis for a series of love poems. These are difficult series, written so close to the rhetoric of the source text that they often exclude the reader, yet they are basic to Duncan's practice. They show the poet treating his language as part of a common inheritance in which he is both original and derivative.

This dismantling of origins is an impish fact of Duncan's poetics; in order to live as the fulfillment of a tradition (and he has always insisted that he is a traditional poet) he needs to re-write literary history in his terms. Dante is not "...researcht in the lore of another time...but immediate, everlastingly immediate, to the presence of the idea of Poetry," an attitude that puts Duncan squarely in line with his modernist masters. Dante's Florence becomes the city-state known as the United States and his specifically Christian world becomes the secular reality of modern social institutions. As Duncan says in his preface to *Bending the Bow,* "The real universe of Christendom had so become an imaginary world by the thirteenth century that Dante could enter it in a poem as primary vision and explore even its mysteries in the structure of his rimes." And Duncan would like to so "enter" Dante's world. Reading, for example, in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* of Gotto of Mantua, "who...always wove into his stanza one line unaccompanied by a rhyme, which he called the key," Duncan asserts "the fullest licence" to write his own partially rhymed canzone:

> others having their resonance
> in the canzone reminds us
>
> so that district by district
> in the canzone reminds us
>
> in the arrangement, every
> wisht-for licence conceded
>
> of the familiar places
> in the last lines
> most beautifully disposed
>
> as if they fell with a rhyme
>
> into silence. (111)

The vowel play of long i's, the syncopated rhythms and long, subordinated sentence create a wonderful music out of Dante's line. The vital word, "key," used to refer to the unrhymed word in the canzone becomes, for Duncan, a reference to the "familiar" and familial spaces that are opened in poetry. Thus, what Dante describes as the structure of rhyme becomes, for Duncan, the structure of all ordered systems—including that of the city.

What I have called Duncan's rewriting of origins occurs not only within the terms of cultural institutions and literature but in terms of his own history. The poet's biography becomes a narrative, no less subject to variations than the myths and stories out of which his poetry is composed. Duncan could hardly be considered a "confessional" poet, but when he focuses on specifically personal matters (as he does in many of the book's shorter lyrics) he is painfully honest even while projecting their narrative dimensions. My favorite among the shorter lyrics of this order is "Despair in Being Tedious" in which Duncan reflects on his own volubility:

> A long way back I look and find myself
> as I was then I am, a circling man
> in a seizure of talk that he hears too as he goes on.
>
> The silence of the room was empty and I
> cried aloud. At ten o'clock, went out
> and walkt the empty streets again,
>
> came into the crowded bar for company
> and talkt of leaving when the rains began.
> Some listend and some tired of me.
>
> I do not know if I am bound
> tu run upon this wheel, wound up,
> excited in a manic spiel of wheel in wheel...

The iambic cadence is held throughout, and whereas in someone like Lowell, such cadences distance the author from his confession, here it serves to heighten the "drone of wonders" of which the author is acutely aware.

I mentioned at the outset that this book will be hard for some to hear. The proposition that "Everything Speaks to Me" may be read by others as "I exclude all but my hearing," and indeed, Duncan often admits to a one-way conversation with his poem: "My world in speech/answers some ultimate need I know,// aroused, pours forth upon the sands/again and again/lines written for the audience of the sea." The burden of testimony and belief is that at the moment when language is asked to speak for a realm beyond itself it must relinquish its power to speak at all. Duncan's recent poems approach an almost Mallarmean opacity and spareness, as though sieving out all grit of local association and leaving the sheer performative power of the single word. He wants to name "It" without naming any contingent reality to which "it" refers. One may prefer those pieces in which Duncan's syntactic and semantic playfulness is most at work (the homages to Jack Spicer, Wallace Stevens and Jess for example), but the point is

not which poems one "prefers" but one's willingness to see the larger ground of *Ground Work*. And that larger ground, curiously enough, concerns the reader—the degree to which he or she is willing to go along with the sweep and flow of Duncan's unfashionably eclectic intellect.

MICHAEL DAVIDSON

Resistance
Charles Bernstein
Awede, 1983

Sighted as a marker of his process, Bernstein's title, *Resistance,* suggests at least two reciprocally informing models of how his language will function in the text: first, that of a language resistant to—a stressed force countering—the generation of a singularly resolute standard of meaning; second, that of a language sabotaging the dominant linguistic codes, particularly the moral base of the rhetorical, which define and formalize a method of discursive thinking (reading, writing) grounded in the appeal to certainty, or rectitude. As such, any determinate reading of this work is consistently undermined by the fluctuation of meanings occurring within it. The question for Bernstein becomes where, as readers, do we—can we—stand in relation to a text which ceaselessly destabilizes our position in it. Thus, one of the dialectics fronted is the certainty of a reader's response to any given compositional unit in one poem as it is juxtaposed against his/her uncertainty of response to the variable recurrences of that unit in another poem, or within the same one. In the opening of the first piece, "Consideration," and the beginning of the fourth in the sequence, "Fever Of Case," Bernstein broaches these two poles of readerly response to the work:

> Feelings that grant promises
> alone am cured of. A salient
> detonation, tangled and flickering, to
> up till vexed, mottled plum
> that stands at guard, gorged
> by the pensive percussion I
> develop all too slowly out of,
> implicitly to maroon a
> mobile flare—the slant
> of any rest, afloat with
> wonder, heaves.
>
> (from "Consideration")

Slowly has this levelled up a certain feel
Under always so of palliation
Hardly pressing more to want
Had surged reluctance constant
Fairly clouds of swirls
Moved to finally only
Yesterday's evidentiary pole (from "Fever Of Case")

Between these poems, as throughout *Resistance,* meanings fluctuate through a variable duplication of terms and tones. For instance, the statemental sound of "Consideration"'s first line paradoxically guarantees a rejection of "feelings that grant promises," or guarantees (of definitive meanings perhaps?) With the padded impact of "a *salient detonation*"—two terms striking the same semantic note twice—these "feelings," if they *are* the referential points here, emerge "tangled and flickering," spontaneously and seemingly undefined. Yet one has to be careful here, since "detonation" implies a calculated act, one which requires and develops out of "a pensive percussion." To compound the reader's problems, the first line of "Fever Of Case," unlike "Consideration"'s opening, tonally registers as an indefinite grasping on the level of intuitive order while semantically retaining, in the phrase "a certain feel," "Consideration"'s suggestion of "feelings" as uncertain, unspecified gestural acts outside the frame of a logically received meaning. There is, however, the other sense of "certain" to consider here, making the "feelings" which assured nothing in "Consideration" now "certain" of themselves as producers of meaning and also, by implication, inseparable from the meanings they produce. To further destabilize the reader's perspective, Bernstein lets the words "cured of" in one poem be recalled and muted by "palliation" in the other, suggesting that the "speaker" who was "cured of" certifying his emerging "feelings" is now only relieved of doing so and thus prone to contextualizing them. Resemblances between the two poems continue as "to up till vexed" is mirrored by "hardly pressing," with one sense of the latter phrase effortlessly, softly sustaining and undermining the earlier "vexed" note—as if what were "vexed" turned into a "hardly [barely] pressing" matter—and another sense of it reinforcing the troubled, forcefully "pressing" urgency of "to up till vexed."

The value of such work lies in its capacity to challenge the reader's assumptions about what constitutes meaning at each point in the compositional process. In the title "The Sheds Of Our Webs," for example, the reader's eyes are entangled in an exchange of meanings projected from the page, so that the "sheds," as structures or framing mechanisms, are seen to be shedding and stacking their parts to form "our webs." Here text is perceived as fabric (textile, web), composing and decomposing its (de)signs, with the process of re-making it new always apparent to Bernstein's imagination. Also apparent, as the poem begins, is the manner in which time is composed:

Floating on completely vested time, alacrity
To which abandon skirts another answer

Or part of but not returned.
Confined to snare, the sumpter portion
Rolls misty ply on foxglove, thought
Of once was plentitude of timorous
Lair, in fact will build around
It. Shores that glide me, a
Tender for unkeeping, when fit with
Sticks embellish empty throw. Days, after
All, which heave at having had.

Caught in its own unravelling, the language here draws attention to itself as subject by first seeking to clothe or "embellish" what it speaks of—i.e., fitting time—and then by abandoning or skirting a method of poetic speech that would dress up its subjects ("*vested* time," "abandon *skirts*") to fit its message, or "answer." In proposing questions as to how language contextualizes and metaphorizes experience, this poem enacts a response to readers and writers who still see poetry, in Creeley's words, "insist[ing] on those forms," and who "wouldn't know it *was* a woman unless she was wearing a dress." Located in economic terms, "The Sheds Of Our Webs" sustains one motif registered throughout *Resistance*: sighting words as "floating" capital—[legal] "tender for unkeeping," de-centered, resisting fixed values of meaning—and projecting a sense of how their meanings accumulate (are composed) and depreciate (shed).

It is precisely this quality of fluctuation between gain and loss of meanings which will attract one to *Resistance*. The reactive nature of the language consistently records an unsettling, buoying effect on the reader's senses and redirects any movement to place the reader would momentarily make. One reason for this can be located in the engaging pull of the rhetorical—elevated, stately—tonal markers scattered throughout the text: signs which have traditionally presupposed the impulse to authoritative statement and representation as grounds for their univocal meanings, but which here function as devices "fit [to] . . . embellish [the] empty throw[s]," or the meanings spotted circumferentially around an unspecified, lost center of meaning. Bernstein's use of moral intensifiers to hollow out the rhetorical sweep encompassing these honored message-centers is, at times, comic, as in this from "If There Were A God She Wouldn't Expect Us To Believe In Her":

Who honors these
chicken feed
anyway, torqued
by the lacquered
arguments, trumped up
out of shuttling—
bystanders? (my emphasis)

Elsewhere, as in "Bulge," these intensifiers shape a rhetoric which concretizes, contracts, and conditions the emergence of meaning from even the most morally paradoxical of situations, only to make its case:

The reward for
love is not
love, any more
than the reward
for disobedience
is grace. *What*
chains these
conditions severs
semblance of
a hand, two
fists, in preemptive
embrace with
collusion. (my emphasis)

The rhetorical models Bernstein sets up and deflates obviously function as pointers to the societal power structures they help perpetuate. Accordingly, language in *Resistance* is tapped from various traditionally "non-poetic" sources—political, legal, medical, economic—in order to supplant the moral appeal to certainty which their jargons explicitly attempt to "embellish" and propose. Bernstein exposes their message-centers as morally empty and exhausted, and his writing embodies them only to immediately betray any claims to certainty they would intend. It is a writing which does not delimit its labor in exchange for the reader's unequivocal comprehension, or possession. From "Forensic Gastronomy":

The internal logic
of possession of
what can not be
known about
or gardened
governs
all the habitudes
in a congenital
series of
absolute distractions
flushed with patency
and pestered
dumb with
the breeze.

Considering this rhetorical discourse, I find it difficult to understand how Gerald Burns, in his criticism of Bernstein's work published in *Sulfur* 9, cannot locate a "sustained tone" in *Resistance*: "It's just that [sustained] tone [as can be found in Lewis Carroll's *Snark*] your methods make impossible, and your methods make it impossible by destroying context as the *matrix* of reference." Readers of *Resistance* will find just the opposite to be the case, and they will no doubt hear a sustained—the more accurate word would be buoyed—rhetorically moral tone as one of several tones registered and re-contextualized from line to line, from word to word, in the text. Either Burns can't hear well or

he's not read the work as thoroughly as he's claimed. If he had, he would have also noticed that *Resistance* resonates with the "almost-caught meaning[s]" he denies "language-centered" material in general and Bernstein's writings in particular. (See, for instance, the first line of "Fever Of Case" quoted above, and how the word "levelled" in "levelled up a certain feel" suggests a certain *field* in the process of being raised and "levelled"—like a fever brought down to case—but always fluctuating.) Clearly, in "How to Nonread," Burns has mounted a specious attack on Bernstein and other "language-centered" writers which is based on misguided assumptions about their poetics rather than informed perceptions of their disparate practices. His criticism is evidence that the only way to "nonread" a text is to do precisely what he's done: not read it. And this he has done eloquently, privileging himself not to follow Bernstein's texts into the world.

For those who do not "nonread," the pleasures afforded by *Resistance* will be striking. Like a pressure sensitive needle, the language in this book records a confluence of semantic values as it constantly shifts the reader's focus on the material. In generating a syntactical order built on the compound senses of a word, Charles Bernstein has discovered a site where language is concentrated and projected as a ceaseless multiplication of displaced signs, and where the reader is drawn into the text as one of those signs. This is a territory where, as Edmond Jabes has written, "every word unveils another tie," and where language, in Bernstein's words, appears as "indelibly repurcussive." The misspelling of "repurcussive" brings to mind Williams' words in "The Descent of Winter," which no doubt address the effect Bernstein's work here can sustain:

> There are no perfect waves—
> Your writings are a sea
> full of misspellings and
> faulty sentences. Level. Troubled...
>
> This is the sadness of the sea—
> waves like words, all broken—
> a sameness of lifting and falling mood.

Let the faults of other writings be equally well mined.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

Herself Defined: The Poet H. D. and Her World
BARBARA GUEST
Doubleday, 1984

An interesting living poet writing about a famous older poet is automatically worth attention. Are the secrets of influence to be revealed? Do kindred hearts tell more? Will there be envy, spiteful exposure—or mock appreciation? Cat fights or the odor of rose sachet? Will it be told how the transfer of power occurs? Will the poet-biographer write as a poet in the style of her poems—in Guest's case, very oblique and witty?

Actually, she quickly adopts a style that shoulders a lot of information firmly and with no apparent grunt and sweat of effort. Normal prose, not flash-dance; she doesn't shake it out in scarves and veils and accessories. Her style is classically cut—calm, confident, and serviceable—and walks right along with the burden of the story. There are the occasional felicities of wit we might expect from a poet, such as calling Ezra Pound's circle of friends his "pounderama," or the charming cleverness of, "Dedicated to sun-worship in people as well as nature, [Harry "Black Sun"] Crosby could always detect sunspots," but one might not have expected a prose so continuous (Guest's own poetry, like her novel *Seeking Air,* is not).

Most of all, there is plenty of useful information for any highly metabolizing imagination, such as Pound being called "Ray" (as in "Ez-ray") as a young man, or that Fenimore Cooper's unforgettable Chingachgook was buried (inexplicably) in H. D.'s Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. But first in significance comes the fact that H. D. herself was 5′11″, and later, when she got over her adolescent shame and slouch, she carried all of it high and imperiously; or the fact that Bryher, H. D.'s companion since 1918, had never made so much as a pot of tea for herself until she was 26 years old.

The book is admirably researched, with a good use of published memoirs, letters, and unpublished manuscripts. Guest is particularly good on the role of the Moravian Brotherhood in H. D.'s early life (similar to the Hermetic Brotherhood in Robert Duncan's). I can't imagine a major discovery left out, unless it is how H. D. and Bryher *really* treated Perdita, H. D.'s daughter by Cecil Grey. The plot sometimes gets gummy with the web of relationships—but that may be all that that world was. The husbands seem cads; Robert McAlmon was given the name "McAlimony" after his divorce from Bryher, which was a payoff divorce. The chapter on Freud is a disappointment because the relationship, through H. D.'s account of it, was really a disappointment.

There is Bryher the great manager, who has Perdita sent to vocational school to learn cooking and housekeeping in case the Communists take over the world. H. D.'s belief in psychoanalysis (which she habitually abbreviated "ps-a") can be sympathized with if no longer shared. At 43, H. D. wanted to be a movie star (at the time Jean Harlow was 18). Her former Bryn Mawr schoolmate,

Marianne Moore, may have been her greatest rival, or ought to have been, although neither may have felt it. H. D.'s assessment of Moore's *Selected Poems* in 1935 barely conceals her feelings: "I do like Marianne Moore's poems, but they leave me a little stricken or shriven or shrivelled, somehow. It is [a] very 'crab' world, collecting junk under the sea from old hulks; it sometimes reminds me of myself," she says rather immodestly, "—much that is exquisite"!

It is hard not to be distracted by the fact that Bryher's father left, in today's figures, over $800 million, and that H. D. herself became worth several million in her later years. William Carlos Williams, in contrast—although he seems maligned in the course of the book—actually appears lucky he had his daily practice to keep him in touch with realities. Every life has at least one lurking revelation that makes biographies endlessly fascinating. Here, it is possibly H. D. urinating, at his own request, on Havelock Ellis (which had been revealed by Phyllis Grosskurth in her biography of Ellis—though perhaps not in time for Janice S. Robinson's 1982 life of H. D., which doesn't mention it).

New York readers will quicken to discover that around 1915 when Amy Lowell gave a lecture on Imagism at St. Mark's in the Bowery, 927 people were in attendance. (A way to measure the falling off of poetry? Not really, not fairly. In the days before the talkies, even a lecture on honeydew melons would have drawn a crowd of forty people.) Still, one knows the unuttered amazement and longing with which Guest reports the great "Reading of Famous Poets," held at the Aeolian Hall in London in 1943 and attended by the Queen Mother as well as the princesses Elizabeth (present QEII) and Margaret (who sat on stage next to Eliot). The event was sold out days ahead, even before it was known the Queen would be present.

There is even material in the book for Stephen King. H. D. to Bryher (offering her the chance to bring up Perdita):

"I want you to promise me to grow up and take care of the little girl."

"Do you mean—do you mean... for my own... exactly like a puppy?"

"*Exactly*... like a puppy."

But my favorite story, thanks to Guest's versatile wit, is one of Pound walking in on Harriet Weaver sipping a rare taste of wine:

> Like Mary Poppins arriving by umbrella from another world, the maiden lady from London, Harriet Weaver, appeared. Bryher had urged her to come over to Paris, where she would be welcomed by her loyal and grateful admirers. Timidly she ventured to a dinner party where there awaited her the McAlmons, H. D., Djuna Barnes, and the William Birds. The group urged this daring woman who had fearlessly struck out against the obscenity laws in order to publish Joyce's work to sip a small glass of wine. Gathering her courage, Miss Weaver finally decided to taste the exotic drink. As she was sipping the wine, Pound entered the restaurant, and upon observing her glass made some sort of idiotic remark, such as 'Drunk again, Miss Weaver?' The abstemious Miss Weaver really believed that a few drops of wine caused one to be drunk. She looked thoroughly frightened....

Guest maintains her relative objectivity in presenting all this information and feels free to criticize H. D. without belittling her. The constant invocation of H. D.'s "beauty," however, is a little dangerous. One begins to wonder what would have become of her—and, more importantly, of the poems—if she hadn't been graced that way? Personal beauty is a risky quality to invoke where a woman artist is involved; it can be too readily confused with a criterion. Is she being praised for her beauty or her poems? ("Do you love me for my money or my self?"; another name for a "celebrated beauty" is a "celebrity.") We who are alive now have only the poems. Moreover, was H. D.'s beauty a substitute for more "human" qualities? Was that a chief value in her world? Unfortunately, she may not have always photographed well. She's beautiful in 1919, but there is something gaunt about her face in the later photos, including one taken in Egypt (one naturally thinks *Helen in Egypt*) in 1923, hard and bossy, although Guest doesn't include the warmly sensual portrait by Man Ray that Susan Stanford Friedman uses as the frontispiece of her 1981 study of H. D., *Psyche Reborn.*

At times one wishes Guest had taken it upon herself to write more of what's called a "critical biography," with as much attention paid to the work as to the life. She might also have discriminated among the poetry more, taking time out in two or three instances to show in greater detail how the poems were made and how they work. Her reluctance to engage the poetry to any satisfactory depth leaves unanswered serious questions for readers who may themselves be practitioners. What exactly did H. D. do all day when she was locked up "working"? Were there many drafts, did she strain to economize or reach a rhyme, etc.? How exactly did she go about making her "translations" from the Greek if she had no Greek other than Mackail's prose translations? An examination of her method might reveal how deep or superficial her mind was (it is not always apparent from the poetry), and how seriously we should take her poetry. If we distrust its roots, it is a kind of poetry one can become very impatient with.

The hard thing to say about the biography—not the biography, actually, but the life—is that it doesn't make the poems any better, those that were not immediately, overtly good to begin with, such as *Trilogy* or some of the early Imagist pieces like "Oread" and the unsurpassable "Heat." I was particularly disappointed to find that *Hermetic Definitions,* with its promising title, was simply an adventure in fantasies. I thought H. D. *knew* something none of the rest of us did, that she had encountered the gods themselves, but it's just personal mythologizing. The first poem in that late series is about nothing more initiated and profound than her meeting with a *Newsweek* journalist named Lionel Durand, whom she had developed another one of her "crushes" on; while the "Groves of the Academe" section is no more than an encounter with St.-John Perse (the sequence could have been titled, bitterly, *Loves of an Aging Movie Queen*). It is not Guest's fault; she recognizes and seeks to deflect the obvious initial reaction: "This was not a foolish old woman's last ardor—that was not H. D.'s way. She could never view any event or any person as a single occurrence." Though I hope for Pound's and Aldington's and Bryher's sakes that it

was not literally true that "Durand, for the brief period he existed in her life, was as important to her as anyone she had known for years." It is possible, of course, that Guest unintentionally demystifies the work, but H. D.'s Greekism eventually seems no more than chinoiserie, a manner not a necessity.

The problem with H. D.'s poetics after Imagism was that she was never again able to resolve her images into metaphors. It may be a reflection of her life and possibly her hermaphroditism. Her personality seems to have been arrested, as evidenced by her repeated "crushes," her obsession with Aldington at intervals over ten, twenty, thirty, even forty years after their marriage. At least her hermaphroditism was consistent. There is no doubt that, no matter what a little manipulator and tyrant she was, Bryher was good for her. Indeed, Bryher's "realism" and engineering are at times a refreshing contrast to H. D.'s goddessizing.

There seems no moral center in H. D.'s world except art, and as Marianne Moore knew, and is quoted in the book as saying, it can be as exciting to pass the test for one's driver's license as to write a poem. Guest would not necessarily agree with this; her job has been to lay bare the life, and on the whole she has done a remarkable job. Any questions and frustrations that remain are in the subject not in her telling of the subject, and arise from the politics, including the sexual politics, of art.

GEORGE F. BUTTERICK

New & Selected Poems
TONY TOWLE
Kulchur Foundation, 1983.

In "Another Poem (New York Revisited)" Tony Towle describes his poetic "business" as the "unofficial" surveying of present-day New York. Survey, here, implies both comprehensive overview and detailed examination, and relates the work to a long tradition of urbane discursiveness, not unmixed with a certain fausse-naivete, which includes the Horatian Satires as well as John Gay's *Trivia* and Aragon's *Peasant of Paris.* This is to be distinguished from the more vitriolic line (the major line, however) of urban poets that includes, day, Catullus (T. S. Eliot once remarked of him that he seemed, in comparison with Virgil, a "ruffian"), Villon, and Baudelaire.

In "Addenda," in turn, Towle names the contemporary poets who have influenced him: Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, John Ashbery, and James Schuyler, confirming Towle as a member of that "New York School" whose existence, like that of the Mafia, is denied above all by those who are said to belong to it. Towle's tributes to the first three poets are rather formulaic—"I know from Frank O'Hara that the poem and its setting / are completely at your disposal"—but when he comes to speak of Schuyler his language becomes so richly paradoxical that it is clear whose has been the most challenging presence:

> and James Schuyler's blinding exactitude of observation,
> its serene and tremendous burden.

Towle, blinded and burdened, celebrates/laments his double-edged imaginative poverty:

> I am fortunate to know even the alphabet,
> my mind sticking to nothing for very long,
> leafing through some great books, getting up in agitation,
> sitting back down with some paper and life;

—manifesting his sense that his weakness is inseparable from his strength, his "fortune." The disruptive clamor of the mind interrupting itself is both the hunger for poetry and poetry itself. Towle does not scruple to reveal his method: not that careful poetics of attention so admired in Schuyler but what we might call, on the contrary, a poetics of distraction, "mind sticking to nothing for very long," in which thought is not permitted to bind itself to its objects. "One's attention is constantly / being diverted—in both senses of the word," Towle writes in "Summer Solstice," reminding us that he is not above entertaining his readers or himself. Towle's artfully unkempt sentence structure, in which commas and semicolons join/separate clauses whose relations sustain continual modification, is the syntactical correlate for the intentional (and anti-intentional) structure of thinking. When it works (like thinking, it's always threatening not to), the result is a surprising conflation of will and passivity ("the mind of its own tide," as Towle writes in "Starry Night") that refreshes by its startling revelation of the inexhaustibility of vision: "Again and again there is something to see."

It remains to be said of this kind of poetry just how we know when it does work, for its very success can be an undoing of canons of judgment. One mark of Towle's style is his funambulistic ability to maintain a discursive structure in which an inherently ridiculous line like "I pause, and think about the human condition" functions meaningfully. The problem becomes more acute when the poem's structure does not attempt to make such lines plausible, but forces the success of a later moment in the poem to depend upon the failure of the present one. Towle cultivates bathos, the art of sinking, in order to rise the more startlingly. In the long poem "Autobiography," for instance, we read that

> Another possibility is that the universe is a spoon
> of enormous depth,
> stirring an infinite cauldron of soup

which combines the cosmic and the trivial in the most outrageous manner: the reader simply doesn't know what to "do" with such a metaphor, except laugh nervously. The poem goes on to suggest other possibilities, however:

> or a fork
> to prod the roasted planets of gas
> until they break up in hopeless laughter
> and slop over the sides of the universe
> onto the indivisible floor of night;

relieving tension by resolving willful oddity into acknowledged hilarity but also, in the last quoted line, shifting the tone just enough to prevent our getting the bends with the shift into the third metaphor in the series:

> or it is a ladle,
> scattering pinpoints of sensation before your
> eyes in an astounding flood of information
> greeting you suddenly on the return from a walk.

This breakneck modulation into an unaffected yet sublime seriousness, mixing quotidian detail with legendary overtones, is made all the more affective for its bravura demonstration of the poet's virtuosity. If such a passage has any justification aside from the sheer rollercoasterish pleasure of it, this can only be because there is really a kind of goofy sincerity about it, for the passage does convincingly represent the process of an accomplished mind searching for a more adequate figure, and finding it. Towle's silliness is as necessary to, and as distinct from, his sublimity as Buster Keaton's pratfalls are to, and from, his breathtaking grace. In "Vase," the last poem in this volume, Towle speaks of

> your balance,
> thrown off by primroses, asters,
> giant political interests

and if our balance is not disturbed, as by the sudden widening of viewpoint in the move from flowers to politics, the poem has failed to function. More often than not it does function, and the result can be a powerful sense of opening to otherness, to experience if you will:

> I, like a book, have been forced to contain other stories than my own.

BARRY SCHWABSKY

The Full Note: Lorine Niedecker
Edited by Peter Dent
Interim Press, 1983

How shocking to learn in Peter Dent's preface to *The Full Note: Lorine Niedecker* that "in 1966, she could write (to Charles Tomlinson) 'England is dear to my heart—notice of LN so much stronger than in this country,' when the superb Fulcrum Press editions of her work were destined to be pulped. . . ." No wonder *North Central* and *My Life By Water* are impossible to trace and, more important, that attention to her poetry has been minimal. Only one full-length work (a collection of essays and appreciations published as a special issue of *Truck* magazine, 1975) has appeared since her death in 1970. Now from England comes the first *book* on Lorine Niedecker's poetry, giving her the notice that she cherished 20 years ago.

The Full Note is 100 pages densely packed with tributes, critical appraisals, two of her long poems, "Wintergreen Ridge" and "Darwin," and fragments of letters to Cid Corman and Kenneth Cox. The best of the criticism already printed in American and English periodicals finds safekeeping here, thanks to the good judgment of editor, poet, and publisher, Peter Dent.

The survival of Lorine Niedecker's poetry is due almost entirely to the work of poets. Poets first recognized and lauded her. Basil Bunting: "No one is so subtle with so few words"; "One of the finest American poets at all, besides being easily the finest female American poet. . . LN never fails: whatever she writes is excellent." Gilbert Sorrentino: ". . . remarkable poetry, as in Catullus and Emily Dickinson." Louis Zukofsky: "I read only two modern women poets, Moore and Niedecker. One feels closer to Niedecker." Peter Yates: "Lorine Niedecker is the most absolute poetess in our language since Emily Dickinson." Poets published her too: Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorne Press published *My Friend Tree*; Cid Corman published most of the poems she wrote in the sixties in *Origin*; Stuart Montgomery published *North Central* and *My Life By Water* for Fulcrum; Jonathan Williams published *T&G* and has recently announced her *Complete Collected Poems.*

Why have the critics been so slow? Kenneth Cox, in a reprinted analysis originally published in *The Cambridge Quarterly* Spring 1969, marvels at her poems where, so often, lucidity defies explication: "It is almost impossible to say how it is done" and ". . . [the poems] convey a manifold meaning beyond the reach of analysis." Ed Dorn's reprinted introduction to *My Friend Tree* which Ian Hamilton Finlay originally inserted into the volume on a loose sheet "to help readers towards the poems and towards buying," states somewhat shamefacedly before the plain speech of the poems: "I don't 'understand' these poems very well. The 'meanings' are always a little mysterious, to me." (Lorine Niedecker wrote Ian Hamilton Finlay that she didn't understand Dorn's introduction very well!) Jim Burns names his poetic tribute "The Simple Things are Hardest." But, in spite of the challenges posed by her simplicity, *The Full Note* does contain

some excellent criticism—Kenneth Cox and Michael Heller's pieces among its best.

Kenneth Cox was one of many writers who corresponded with Niedecker in the 60's and the selection of extracts from her letters to him makes a revealing companion piece to his essay. Niedecker's isolation in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, led her to take advantage of the mail's opportunities—particularly in her sustained and pivotal relationship with Louis Zukofsky. Letters offered her both a full engagement with another consciousness and a model for the scale, voice and diction of her poems. The unstudied talk in letters between friends (co-respondence) is the language of much of her work. "Many of the poems" Kenneth Cox points out, "suppose someone to be saying them. . . . They catch the inflexion of voice, establishing relations between persons speaking, spoken to and spoken of." Niedecker's letters to friends are quite clearly an essential adjunct to a discussion of her poems. Besides the extracts from her letters to Kenneth Cox (published here for the first time), *The Full Note* includes a selection of extracts from her ten year correspondence with Cid Corman. We can look forward to the publication of Lisa Pater Faranda's fine edition of Niedecker's complete letters to Corman, already excerpted in *Conjunctions* 5.

Niedecker's avid reading of the collected letters of other writers (Henry James, William Morris, Jefferson, Adams, Wallace Stevens, and many more) provided her with a further source for poems. "Darwin" is based largely on letters the itinerant Darwin wrote to his friends and family. "Lake Superior," Donald Davie's subject in his essay "Lorine Niedecker: Lyric Minimum and Epic Scope" published originally in *PN Review* 25, draws uncharacteristically on her reading of *history*. The result is somewhat different from the poems drawn from letters ("Darwin," "Jefferson," "His Carpets Flowered" and others) and may explain why Davie baulks at the forbidding "consistency with which [the poem] proceeds from [its] initial premise." But parts of Davie's essay make it clear that his reading of the poem is too hasty. He complains, amazingly, that "the Indians, the indigenous and original inhabitants of the Lake Superior region, figure in Niedecker's poem nowhere at all, except as the savages who tore out poor Radisson's finger nails" when Indians and whites appear throughout the poem in contexts both good and evil. It's absurd to find a colonialist bias in a poem that so successfully balances a short period of human history beside and against the grand, disinterested scale of natural history.

However, Davie's annotations of "Lake Superior" do convey a sense of the bookishness concealed behind the clear plain speech of her lines. Her scale is intimate—she tackles history but with an eye for the domestic, the private person behind the achievement. Hence her attraction to the incidental history recorded in letters. Here is Part II of "Darwin":

Cordilleras to climb — Andean
peaks 'tossed about
like the crust
of a broken pie'

Icy wind
        Higher, harder
        Chileans advised eat onions
for shortness of breath

Heavy on him:
        Andes miners carried up
                great loads — not allowed
to stop for breath

Fossil Bones near Sante Fe
        Spider-bite-scauld
                Fever
    Tended by an old woman

'Dear Susan...
        I am ravenous
                for the sound
    of the pianoforte'

Charles Tomlinson's "Introduction: A Rich Sitter" misleads by invoking Olson and Melville and the vast formative American spaces. Geographic space is not a striking feature of her poems. If anything, her poems explore vertical space: she maintained a steady interest in surrealism and the unconscious; in the later poems she probed geological and etymological accretions. Her native Black Hawk Island ("red-winged blackbirds, willows, maples, boats, fishing [the smell of tarred nets], twittering and squawking noises from the marsh") provides much of her material. Perhaps the strong sense of a circumscribed and dense locality—she left Wisconsin no more than a dozen times in her 67 years—helps to account for her audience amongst British poets. Their scale is similar. Still, it is heartening to find that Charles Tomlinson has here revised his earlier piece, published in *Agenda* in Spring 1969, by adding more poems and removing his early judgment of Niedecker's work as "minor poetry."

Scholars may have been slow to recognize her skill but there has been no lack of poetic tribute. Jonathan Williams gathered thirty poems for *Epitaphs for Lorine* and *Truck* 16 published a further thirteen. The ten short poems in *The Full Note* constitute a fitting homage. I like especially Alan Halsey's "4 Rounds for Springtime" based on Niedecker's "Wallace Stevens," and Jonathan Williams's quirky "6 Misericords for LN in Misericordless Wisconsin." At last some humour has entered the poems written for a poet whose humour (in both senses) is among the strongest reasons to read her.

JENNY PENBERTHY

The Jardin des Plantes
(Postcards)

Dear A, Paris, 9.2.84

Around the *Jardin des Plantes*: boules played in the old Roman space . . . remember? . . . *Arènes de Lutèce,* hidden behind buildings of the Rue Monge; Moufftard and its market (gentrified); or the mosque, where you can still take a steam bath and drink mint tea from gold trays. This year the gardens are lush—blur of blossoms from everyplace, going to seed. People scattered on green chairs observe the plants. And statues: Bernardin de Saint-Pierre smiles down in bluish bronze at the mythic kids, *Paul et Virginie.* Buffon, his back to everyone: a pigeon twitches on his metal head. Over near the menagerie and the Seine Lamarck in an attitude of thought—above a rising sun (of science? nature?). See you at the end of the month . . .

Dear P, 9.3.84

NATURE/CULTURE NATURE/CULTURE NATURE/CULTURE: It's still the most beautiful, intense, funny, etc. exhibit in Paris: "Les Plus Beaux Insectes du Monde," Institute of Entomology, Rue Buffon, afternoons. One bright room . . . pinned fireworks, faces, masks, eyes, bones, skin, then suddenly four exactly torn leaves (with antennae), a band of *tricolores,* the dusty subtlety of moths (Braque, Klee), touched up, sprayed, day-glo, lacquer, ceramic, microchip. . . . a laughter of classifications: Bougainville, Borneo, Sumatra, Java; with wings, without wings; "Hercules," gold metal, blackblue, neongreen . . . NO UNNATURAL color, shape, thought. Or—the inventive mind *is* nature. Levi-Strauss knows this exhibit. Didn't he write somewhere that modern art should be inspired by butterflies, not Picasso?

Dear S, 9.4.84

A tall tree, SOPHORA JAPONICA, planted by B. Jussieu, 1747, in the *Jardin du Roy,* seed sent from China by R. P. d'Incarville, . . . or another, brought from "The Levant." Strange beings, *alive and historical* (not at all like those sequoia rings with dates written on, 1492, 1776, 1914, or "the bed Napoleon slept in"). They're in planetary/human time and space, but with a tempo we can't sustain—the Age of Discovery present in a "life," transplanted by history. Outliving us. By the way there's a new bookstore with a pretty good poetry section, Moufftard and Pot de Fer: "L'Arbre Voyageur." Will you be passing through California in the Winter?

Dear T, 9.5.84

Inhuman *Robinsonade*—

ROBINIER de ROBIN (Robina Pseudo Accacia Linné)

Premier sujet introduit en Europe à partir des graines provenant d'AMERIQUE du NORD par Jean ROBIN dans son jardin de la place Dauphine en 1601. Transplanté en ce lieu du Jardin du Roy en 1636 par Vespasier ROBIN fils du précedent.

Dear B, 9.6.84

You won't have forgotten the fantastic, long, dappled alleyways of *Tilleul.* But maybe you didn't see a little rock garden where they cultivate shrubs, flowers, cacti, and herbs from China, the Caucasus, Corsica, New Zealand, Morocco, the Himalayas, Pyrenées, Balkans, Arctic, Japan.... Continents beside each other in hundreds of beds. In a corner the low trunk, supported by a post; the path ducks under:

> "PISTACHER (Pistacia Vera L.)
> Planted in the seedling garden around 1700
> (the present Alpine Garden).
> Permitted Sebastien Vaillant to discover the
> sexuality of plants in 1716."

So what's become of M. Vaillant? Or the sexuality of plants? The permissive little pistachio lives on. With love...

Dear N, 9.7.84

"Primitive" painting by Haitians is a recent avocation. (But you know all about this.) And they took to it so "naturally." One of their models: Henri Rousseau. A friend tells me he once saw a Haitian artist painting complex forests of "Guinée" (the place of mythic and historical origin) with Rousseau reproductions at hand. There are no African jungles in Haiti. And the Douanier hadn't seen any either, but copied his from specimens at the *Jardin des Plantes.* Right now I'm looking in at the entrance to one of the tall greenhouses, dreamlike. A tiger? Behind reflecting panes the fabulous, sharp, sagging leaves.... Fable of our "Caribbean" selves.

Dear L, 9.8.84

About the view from your hotel, Rue Linné.... I can imagine the ivy-drenched gate of the *Jardin,* and within, dark walls of the "Labyrinth" (I recall rising circular paths, assignations, strange faces passing...). Another garden. And isn't this near the great Cedar of Lebanon where around 1860 (in an old print) people with top hats and long dresses strolled to admire its superb, spreading form and to marvel at the gathered, imperial universe? They must have heard, as one still can, noises from the menagerie—animals that, some years later in a hard winter, would be eaten by beseiged citizens of the Commune. Please stay in touch.

Dear J, 9.9.84

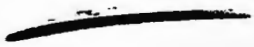
Paris of the *rentrée*: streets filling again, tempo picking up. The sun gives off a low artificial light. In the *Jardin des Plantes* they're building a new "Zoothèque," largely underground. Pruning has begun. Contemplating winter, I'm infatuated again with the palms of the Luxemburg Gardens ("Autour d'une meme place/l'ample palme ne se lasse...") symmetrical, perfect, rooted in boxes on iron legs. Vegetable extraterrestrials, six inches of air between their earth and the path...

Addendum

Dear K, 10.7.84

Thanks for sending me the new book by Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *Buenos Aires.* It's beautiful. One of those miracles of travel, of the *"vertige horizontal."* Jews from Moldavia marrying Argentinians (immigrants: Spanish, Italian, Albanian...), then a daughter: *porteña,* but living in Paris, writing French, remembering the impossible home. I like her glimpses of Borges and the social "physiology" of the tango. Also, especially, her love for the city's *Jardin Botanico*—its giant plants visited by cats and old women with bags of liver. The zoo: animals "covered by a greenish moss, but living in splendid buildings, absurd, feverish products of a demented architect. This hindu palace inhabited by a dusty elephant...." Portrait of a transplanted civilization. "But if I have no roots, why have my roots hurt me like this?"

JAMES CLIFFORD



The Earth as Air
GUSTAF SOBIN
New Directions, 1984

Gustaf Sobin's new collection of poems, *The Earth As Air* takes for its subject the texture and nuance of landscapes both geographic and phonetic. The book's title could easily be read as an alchemical conceit distilling this ambitious poet's task: the fusing of the tangible world and its thin as air mirror—language. Sobin has set about "emptying earth into air..." in order to "twist out of quick syllables, the wings, the wing beaten forms we'd give to the inadmissible shape."

But in these poems the merging of the observed object and its name is accomplished far more directly than in most traditional nature poetry. Moments of transcendence in such poems are reached by way of complex narrative assembly and then only glimpsed obliquely. In Sobin's work, however, we are, from the very first line, at the point of arrival, on a heightened perceptual plane where

we feel "the created, at last, syncretic with creation." There is none of Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity" here; each poem begins at full pitch and the confluence of sheer geography and language always seems imminent. Poems that take a more conventional, reflective turn also tend to provide epiphanies charged precisely to the extent of the poet's participation, while Sobin prefers to keep his distance "sending, instead of ourselves, our syllables." As a result he has crafted an austere verse, free of biographical particulars and the baggage of attitude.

In this book as well as his two previous volumes, *The Wind's Chrysalid Rattle* and *Celebration of the Sound Through,* Sobin demonstrates his affinity for Olson's sense of line/breath and the synesthetic imagery of such French surrealists as Rene Char. His structural techniques are those of field composition and his vocabulary reminds me of Bonnefoy or Char in its deliberately limited breadth and elemental character. Yet these sources have been rigorously reworked and filtered through a razor-edged sensibility to produce a style in which surrealist imagery is imbued with a pointed logic and the directness of Olson's meter has been paired down, made even denser:

> . . . blown snows
> lacing the
> high precipices, Robion
> ocherous, beneath, I
> blew the
>
> lamb-
> transparent, in
> loose
>
> ripples, before me. . . (p. 12)

The syntax in this passge is compact; each line appears to have been hammered into place. Rhythmic units develop syllable by syllable, a telegraphic progression that positions our attention on individual images, individual sounds. The luxuriant quality of the first stanza, even the first line ". . . blown snows," requires a pause, its own moment of absorption, to allow the words to "swell to their sounds." Although the lines are clipped, some barely more than a syllable, a gem-like hardness and clarity sustains their vitality. By skillfully deploying his punctuation—dashes, ellipses, broken syllabification, parentheses, and especially commas, Sobin enhances this crystalline effect:

> . . . no
> heaven, and
> scarce-
>
> ly an
> earth, a-
> wash in that last echo: a
> mouth, at

twists
to the fold of a shoulder. (p. 25)

Since each line resonates to its full tether, there is little discursive momentum. Nevertheless the advance of poetic thought remains determined, movement being made "atomically, by the poems's vibration." Hence these landscapes come together less as organized depiction than as an accumulation of incremental flashes of essence. Designed to flex outward from minute, architecturally shaped images, the poems can chart the curious process of visual intelligence; how we come to know what we see.

Every landscape artist, poet or painter, must reconcile the demands of careful observation and lyrical exercise. Sobin's solution is to provide a lyricism that isn't an embellishment of what is seen, but rather a matter of intense telescopic focus. Things are looked at so closely, so steadily that their attachment to reality is constantly in question; the images tease at the edges of metaphor. In the poem "Cardplayers, Cavaillon" we watch a cardgame through a very selective aperture:

for tiny
sums, the

hearts
slip...

(smooth
knuckles,
erratic

thumbs...)

...each
hand

narrowing
fans

out, folds

back, deals (p. 15)

Certainly we *see* everything, but the poet has cut away all but the most suggestive, microcosmic gestures: "knuckles erratic," "...each hand narrowing." (In another poem Sobin has quoted Mallarmé's claim, "everything I've created has been by elimination.") At work is a technique of disjuncture; an eye that partitions the scene into a series of discrete, highly defined movements. This fragmented vision gives us images that, by virtue of their scrutiny in isolation, acquire an elusiveness and paradoxically, a palpability similar to what I find in the T'ang lyrics of Li Po. The lyrical achievement then, for Sobin, lies in his calling our attention to the definite existence of things while simultaneously, as with "hearts slip," affirming their completeness as transient linguistic devices.

Choosing to work the grey zone between an articulated foreground of things and the diffuse, uncertain realm of language, Sobin relies on some of the philosophic thought of Wittgenstein and Quine. However, the poems do not take up the issue of words and things as exclusive domains in any systematic way. His discourse, instead, is symbolist in character, an attempt to suggest and transcend dialectical concerns and relationships through the use of imagistic insights. Such images, if powerful enough, generate their own context, flesh out their argument and thus the whole is received through the particular. An excerpt from the poem "Manna" illustrates the method:

all day, in the
  gorges, the sun fell
in pinched
showers,
pale

e-
longated sparks
gathered

what I'd

found: the
gold-eyed sporangia: the
self-

combusting,
dust, the
dry

foam of some other, some
yet-un-
engendered world! (p. 69)

Much of the tension in this lean column of stanzas derives from what is essentially a form and content question: taut, unbendable lines suggesting confinement while clearly carrying a message of discovery and outwardness. Within such abbreviated, sometimes abrupt constructions, Sobin finds the perfect format for exploring language's ability to push out of itself and into experience, into things themselves.

The chopping of e-longated is a bit of trickery that successfully expands and reveals the word's phonic operation and invites us to recline over the space of two lines in the lengthening of the "sparks." By placing the usually static article "the" at the end of lines in the third and fourth stanzas, Sobin directs us to the word's capacity as a namer and infuses it with a sense of expectation. The two propositions of closure and exstasis can be found agilely balanced in the image of sunlight falling "in pinched showers." From line to line, every word in the poem presses beyond itself and seeks to move freely through the neutral grey.

In his dedication to repeated "high points," Sobin does run the risk of

diluting those moments of exceptional quality. Generally, though, his inventive abilities have been made to serve the poems' larger structural interests. But still he is a poet with a keen and elegant sense of the isolated frieze. In the book's final section, an ars poetics that shares the book's title, Sobin says "poetry is passage. . . an equipoise in motion" accomplishing its ends "by juxtaposing syllable, word, word-cluster in a harmonious tension." It is just this concentration on the energy inherent in individual words and phrases which enables these poems to unwind our habits of seeing and remake our conception of what language can do.

ALBERT MOBILIO

Poetry and the Common Life

At the recent Alabama Symposium, "What Is A Poet?" Louis Simpson delivered a polemic lecture on Poetry and the Common Life. As is usual on such occasions, Simpson invoked Wordsworth's 1800 "Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads,*" with its famous formulation that the poet "is a man speaking to men," and he decried the excessively arcane and artificial poetry of John Ashbery, James Merrill and, yes, Wallace Stevens (!)—poets presumably too far removed from what Wordsworth called "a selection of language really used by men." The audience, evidently tired of teasing out the difficult meanings in "Self-Portrait in a Complex Mirror" or *The Changing Light at Sandover,* applauded.

But what *is* the relationship of poetry to the common life? In the Fall 1984 issue of the *Georgia Review,* which appeared in print just as we were considering the nature of poetry in Alabama, Louis Simpson has a poem called "26th Precinct Station":

> One night Jake telephoned
> to say, "Mike has stabbed Lorna."
> He wanted me to call his lawyer. . .
> couldn't do it himself, he was tied up.
>
> I called the lawyer, who had just come in
> from seeing *Kismet.* We shared a taxi.
> All the way down to the station
> he kept humming "And This is My Beloved."
>
> Lorna recovered, and wrote a novel.
> Mike married and went to live in Rome.
> Jake Harmon died. But I remember
> the 26th Precinct Station.

A black woman in a yellow wig,
a purple skirt, and stiletto heels;
a pickpocket; a cripple
arrested for indecent exposure.

The naked light bulb; the crack in the wall
that loops like the Mississippi at Vicksburg;
the shadow of the cockroach
under the baseboard, lurking, gathering his nerve.

This is the common life, alright, as the poem's flat free verse, its ordinary speech, its dry reportage ("One night Jake telephoned. . . ") of everyday incidents in the police precinct informs us. Its claim to being a poem, I suppose, is that its prose rhythms ("Lorna recovered, and wrote a novel") are organized into four-line stanzas. And further: that the narrator is presumably, in Wordsworth's words, "endowed with more lively sensibility" than Jake or Mike or Lorna or that crass lawyer who hums "And This is My Beloved" in the taxi. It is the narrator who *sees* the awfulness of it all, the "black woman in a yellow wig, a purple skirt, and stiletto heels" (how degraded can you get?), sees the pickpocket and the cripple by the illumination of the "naked light bulb." And where there is a naked light bulbk, there is sure to be a "crack in the wall" and "the shadow of the cockroach under the baseboard, lurking, gathering his nerve." The poet who has, according to Wordsworth, "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present," is here presented as one who "remember[s] / the 16th Precinct Station," that microcosm of the hideousness and banality of Modern Life. And so on.

The difficulty with poems like "26th Precinct Station" is that the poet's stance toward the "common life" is no more than a series of reflexes. The "I," far from immersing himself in the lives of Mike and Lorna, far from trying to understand what motivates the black woman in her vulgar purple skirt and stiletto heels, stands *outside* the scene, a knowing and worldly-wise commentator. "Reader," the poet implies, "you and I understand how tawdry it all is! We, unlike them, know all about those cockroaches."

I cite this particular travesty of the "poetry of the common life," only to come back to the real thing. New Directions has just published the *Selected Poems* of Kenneth Rexroth, edited with an excellent, if too brief, introduction by Bradford Morrow. Unlike Simpson and so many other contemporary poets who are always invoking Wordsworth's name so as to defend what they take to be the "naturalness" of their own verse, Rexroth really did write his poems as "a man speaking to men." So deceptive is that speaking that Rexroth remains, as Elliot Weinberger put it in these pages in his 1982 obituary, "among the best known and least read of American poets." Patronized by the *New Yorker* as "Daddy-o," by the *New York Times* as the "Father Figure to Beat Poets," and by Alfred Kazin as an "old-fashioned American sorehead," Rexroth is vaguely associated in the minds of today's poetry audience with West Coast versions of Buddhism, left-wing politics, erotic translations from the Chinese and Japanese,

and a cracker-barrel crankiness, reenforced by years of isolation in the Far West.

The best way to avoid these stereotypes is to look closely at the poems. Here is "A Dialogue of Watching," one of the seven poems "For Marthe, My Wife" from *In Defense of the Earth* (1956):

> Let me celebrate you. I
> Have never known anyone
> More beautiful than you. I
> Walking beside you, watching
> You move beside me, watching
> That still grace of hand and thigh,
> Watching your face change with words
> You do not say, watching your
> Solemn eyes as they turn to me,
> Or turn inward, full of knowing,
> Slow or quick, watching your full
> Lips part and smile or turn grave,
> Watching your narrow waist, your
> Proud buttocks in their grace, like
> A sailing swan, an animal,
> Free, your own, and never
> To be subjugated, but
> Abandoned, as I am to you,
> Overhearing your perfect
> Speech of motion, of love and
> Trust and security as
> You feed or play with our children.
> I have never known any
> One more beautiful than you. (p. 83)

This poem dates from what Robert Lowell was to call "the tranquillized fifties," the moment when the New Criticism was at its height. Compared to, say, Lowell's own "Man and Wife" ("Tamed by *Miltown,* we lie on Mother's bed. . . "), it may well seem too casual, too purely mimetic—the mere record of what Rexroth might actually say to the woman he loved. R. P. Blackmur would surely have dismissed it, as he dismissed D. H. Lawrence's *Look We Have Come Through*! sequence, as suffering from "the fallacy of expressive form." After all, isn't "I / Have never known anyone / More beautiful than you," just prose statement? Where does the poet exhibit a command of metaphor? Of the telling image or symbol?

"A Dialogue of Watching" is written in syllabics. All but six of its 24 lines have seven syllables, and once this norm has been established, the variation (6 or 8 syllables) is used for particular effect— a plenitude, say, as in "Solemn eyes as they turn to me," or a sense of pause as in "Free, your own, and never," where the two caesuras mark musical rests. Within this framework, the lines are run on, a series of gerund phrases beginning with "Watching." The use of "you. I," followed by a break in both lines 1 and 3, immediately creates an air of suspense, of breathlessness—in the context, almost of orgasm.

And yet—and here is the complexity behind the seeming ease—the poet's celebration of his wife occurs in the context, not of making love, but of a certain distance, as he watches her walk, talk, move about the room, "feed or play with our children." The lovers' union, it would seem, is never quite complete; always, even at their most intimate moments, there is a sense of separation. Or, to turn it around, even when he is acutely aware of his separateness, the poet is obsessed by Marthe's presence. This duality is summed up in the poem's title: it is a "dialogue" but the word "watching" implies that the poet also stands *outside* the experience of the other, that he can never quite possess it.

"Watching" appears six times in the first thirteen lines of the poem, its position within the line changing each time. This change in linear position regularly signals a change in perspective: the poet's eye focuses first on Marthe's whole body ("You move beside me"; "That still grace of hand and thigh"), then downward from "your face chang[ing] with words," to "Solemn eyes," "full lips," "narrow waist," "Proud buttocks in their grace, like / A sailing swan."

Here, at the only point of metaphor in the poem, the tension between separation and union comes to a height. The animal freedom of the woman's beautiful body is "never / To be subjugated. And the word "Abandoned," seemingly in apposition to "Subjugated" and hence referring to Marthe, now loops back so as to challenge the observer:

> but
> Abandoned, as I am to you,
> Overhearing your perfect
> Speech of motion....

It is now the poet who is "Abandoned... to you," which is to say, totally hers but also lost. Hence he doesn't so much "hear" her "perfect / Speech of motion" as "Overhear" it; her speech is not directed to him. By the time the refrain returns "I have never known any / One more beautiful than you" "anyone" (line 2) has split into two halves. Like the love lyrics of Catullus or Herrick ("When as in silks my Julia goes"), Rexroth's "celebration" has an elegiac edge.

Complex as the poem is (and something should also be said of Rexroth's sound repetitions like "Walking... watching," "grace" / "face," "Watching ... waist," and the assonance throughout of short and long *a*'s), it appears wholly natural, a poem anyone can read and enjoy. In Beckett's words, "No symbols where none intended." And no literary allusions or mythic references, or foreign phrases. Rexroth's is a simulation of "the language really used by men." In poem after poem, this "direct treatment of the thing" arrests our attention, and only on a second or third reading, do we notice that the "direct treatment" is in fact very odd. In "Marthe Away (She Is Away)," for example, an intense eroticism is qualified by the elegiac reference to "the deep still / Communion I am not always strong / Enough to take from you waking, the peace of love" (p. 82). Must the poet's wife be asleep in order to satisfy his love?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter. In an exquisite early poem called "Autumn in California" (1940), the poet takes in the "anony-

mous" and "colorless" landscape of the season, a landscape, like that of "Tintern Abbey," where no object stands out sharply, where, on the contrary, "the fields are plowed, bare, waiting" (p. 3). It is precisely in this blank and comfortable setting that the observer's consciousness is flooded by images of war and terror, of "the clocks in Barcelona [that] strike at dawn / And the whistles blowing for noon in Nanking." The autumnal California landscape, with its "sooty green / Eucalyptus," and bare pastures, gives way to the mental landscape of "a closed room in Madrid," of soldiers talking of "Women they might have had or almost had," even as "The candlelight reddens" and "the bombardment / Begins again." By the time the poem circles back to the present, with its "Brown fog spread[ing] over the bay from the marshes," and its moon rising late "over Mt. Diablo," the solitude and silence of the California hills is charged with terror.

A terror, we might note, that has little in common with the willed dismay expressed by the speaker of Louis Simpson's "26th Precinct Station." A man (or a woman) speaking *to* men and women, not speaking *at* them—this is the secret of the "poetry of the common life" to which poets like Louis Simpson pay lip service. One of Rexroth's finest volumes of poetry is called "The Signatures of All Things" (1950). Here, to conclude, is a sample lyric from that volume:

When I dragged the rotten log
From the bottom of the pool,
It seemed heavy as stone.
I let it lie in the sun
For a month; and then chopped it
Into sections, and split them
For kindling, and spread them out
To dry some more. Late that night,
After reading for hours,
While moths rattled at the lamp—
The saints and the philosophers
On the destiny of man—
I went out on my cabin porch,
And looked up through the black forest
At the swaying islands of stars.
Suddenly I saw at my feet,
Spread on the floor of night, ingots
Of quivering phosphorescence,
And all about were scattered chips
Of pale cold light that was alive. (p. 44)

To gather those "scattered chips / of pale cold light," to recognize that the light is "alive"—it is this metamorphosis of the empirical, the "common life," that is Rexroth's own "signature."

MARJORIE PERLOFF

Roman Jakobson

Interviewed by David Shapiro
(June, 1979)

D.S. Arthur Cohen has at *Ex Libris* a little book of your beautiful sound or *zaum* poetry.

Jakobson: Yes, I was impressed that in the catalogue it costs eight thousand dollars! (Laughter)

DS: Were you inspired by Rodchenko?

Jakobson: I cannot say I was inspired by him, because this booklet is much earlier than my meeting with Rodchenko, and I think Rodchenko's activities are later. My book states that it was written in 1916 but factually it was written in 1914. Written in 1914, published in 1915, but the publishers wanted to present it as *completely new.*

DS: Should we assign a referential content to Malevitch's squares and colors?

Jakobson: No, no, nonsense. I believe all these things were done before the revolution, and the red played a great role before the revolution and independent of the revolution and nobody—nobody of those who saw it had the slightest idea of that. Of course all that remains is the relation between white and black that was here and the relation of white and black versus the red. Of course, the pictures have—I would say—their semantics. It is the experience, colors, in connection with certain emotions and ideas. This is clear. For instance, in Sweden a big monograph appeared on the three colors: red, white and black—in primitive patterns. And color, of course, has its semantic pattern. But this is another thing that colors evoke—the relations evoke certain semantic contracts. And there is a very powerful relation which is now seen more exactly with every step, with every investigation. And this is the question of the synaesthetic relation between the sounds and colors. And this exists, it is a fact that can be motivated by neuroses. There is this problem of the neuroses. Now, for instance, in the works of Dora Vallier in Paris, the relation of colors and sounds are shown and also the semantic content of such elements as rising points and falling points, left and right, vertical and horizontal, and so on. I think this is the big field now and interesting for art, for the study of those elementary, ultimate constituents of art.

DS: If language can provoke synaesthetic responses, is the collaboration of poets and painters, say Mayakovsky and El Lissitzky, redundant in a sense?

Jakobson: Yes, but all this is completely subliminal, subconscious. No, no. These questions are discussed in my book, by me and one of my collaborators, Linda Waugh: *The Sound Shape of Language.* Well, you know, the question of the inter-relation of—let us say—music, poetry and colors, a typical representative of this somewhat earlier was Scriabin. He made experiments in this which at the time were technically very naive. Now it could be done much better. On the

other hand, I'm not sure that he was really realizing the actual inter-relations between these things; it was really impressionistic. But in general this brought about the synthesis of the arts, though I would not see here some great endeavors, great attempts.

DS: And the hagiography of Klebnikov, often presented as a kind of wandering saint or Hungerkunstler?

Jakobson: Yes, he had many of these ideas. In the last issue of the journal which appears in Russian in Moscow, "Questions of Literature," there is a paper about Klebnikov, where it shows what he saw as the question of art and culture of the future, and there are very interesting conclusions.

DS: Do you include Pasternak as a worker in this synaesthetic field?

Jakobson: No, no, he was not. He was very interested in the relation between music and poetry: this, yes. He states this. But I must say it's very peculiar that Pasternak says several times in *My Poetics* that he doesn't understand Klebnikov. You know, he was very much bound to poetry in a certain traditional way. But his originality was syntactic, the originality was in the construction of images, in the utilization of such figures between sound and meaning.

But at the same time, there was a certain conservatism (in Pasternak). He almost does not have poems in any free rhythms. He uses traditional verse written with certain few innovations. He uses traditional rhyme, and so on.

DS: But you have praised the metonymic distortions in *Safe Conduct*?

Jakobson: Yes, but this is a question in the field of semantics, yes. I must confess, I am not—I have not a very high opinion about *Dr. Zhivago*. For me, Pasternak is much stronger Pasternak in his poetry. And Pasternak in his early prose through the twenties and early thirties. Here in *Zhivago* he wanted to become very ideological, and ideological in a rather conservative sense. Not conservative ideology, but conservative form of presentation of ideology. You agree, no?

DS: I am interested in its lyric condensation, the snow falling through its heroic, formal obsessions, and its political courage.

Jakobson: Pasternak remains Pasternak, but we come, speaking of Braque that I quote so much: we are interested in the relations. And the relations between these earlier works and later works. He is still showing so many possibilities in his earlier works. These then disappeared. Why? There are various reasons, both social and personal. I would say, for me his early works are the more impressive.

DS: And his critique of Mayakovsky's Romantic, suicidal syntax?

Jakobson: Yes, but look: compare two biographies of Mayakovsky or two views of Mayakovsky by Pasternak. That view of Mayakovsky he had when he wrote his book of the early thirties immediately after the suicide of Mayakovsky and then at the end of his life. It is clear that he tries to rebuild his old past. He tries to

present his artistic and personal life differently than it was.

And then his fear, his fear of not being understood, his fear of being too complicated, and so on. I would say this is already a kind of tiredness. It is already, if you would like to use a stereotype, it is already the end...

When he went to a congress, from Moscow to Paris, he didn't visit his parents. There was a certain artistic and not only artistic conflict. Yes, yes, Pasternak had a very strong return to the past and a strong denial of his own past, a cancellation of his own past. He says, No, this was not important; it's not there; it was not real; and so on. You know, that is very peculiar on his part: Pasternak, and it is not by chance, Pasternak in his first steps was still much closer to symbolism and to the tradition than was the case of Klebnikov or Mayakovsky.

DS: And this is another reason for you to dispute the finding of a symbolic code in cubo-futurist art?

Jakobson: Yes, absurd, this is nonsense. It is exactly the same as when they look for, in the name of Pasternak, some cheap allegories and so on.

DS: Dr. Zhivago—Dr Life?

Jakobson: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Nonsense!

DS: What about the influence of Mallarmé and Rimbaud on your circle?

Jakobson: Mallarmé, yes. *Un Coup de Dés* was not very well known. Mallarmé's poems, Mallarmé's prose, Mallarmé's theoretical declarations, yes. But *Un Coup de Dés*: I don't remember a single discussion in my presence. Rimbaud and "Les Voyelles" were much better known. "Les Voyelles" is one of the poorest examples of synaesthesia because the colors derive from letters in the little ABC book. It was conventional, completely conventional. It was surprising because you see, there in the same poem, Rimbaud says directly—I forget the words—that it is completely the opposite of reality.

DS: And the satirical, Gogolesque forms of cubofuturism?

Jakobson: Oh, yes, yes, the satirical element was there. I would say the satirical element in the sense of Gogol. It is, so to speak, a grotesque view of reality. It is grotesque, and this grotesque is strongly developed in the folklore tradition, in Gogol's tradition, which is the tradition of Russian literature; and you find it in the most unexpected corners. For instance, now when I wrote about *zaum* in the work of Turgenev, about the elements in Turgenev where it seems rare. Read now the French fairy tales which Turgenev wrote and sent to a young lady, which was very recently published. It is complete, and has such a degree of the grotesque that one is surprised at Turgenev. They are not very dense, he calls them *contes* in French, but they are such grotesque novelettes. Very pornographic, absolutely pornographic, you know, and very peculiar.

DS: Let us return to the emotive forms of abstract art.

Jakobson: In Gabo there is a book where he shows that non-representational art is very emotional. And you see, this is the new emotional, the neurotic element of the work. But in Malevitch, I don't see it. I think it is of pure relations. And Malevitch is very peculiar: his place is very separate from others. He was not the first non-representative painter, there were a few before the first war.

DS: Would you define the abstract in art by analogy to the poetic in your formulation in "Linguistics and Poetics?"

Jakobson: Yes, changing certain elements, because it is still, you see, speaking in terms of Charles Sanders Peirce, in language what is pre-dominant is the symbol, in Peirce's sense of the word. In painting it is the icon. What does it mean: the symbolic icon? But still, as a matter of fact, if you take the "degrees" it is different. Therefore, an iconic art such as painting transposed into the field of an abstract art is something different than it is with poetry.

DS: Does this transposition remain as a constant tension for you in an abstract art, denying part of its iconicity?

Jakobson: I would say, yes, that the tension exists. When I was a very young boy, I remember, I was, I think, still in high school, and I had a very large correspondence with Krucenik. My letters to Kru-ce-nik are preserved. His letters to me are lost, but I remember how he wrote me once. He wrote that this abstract *zaum* poetry is a very important thing, but that it is mustard and that you cannot eat only mustard. You see this is very good, and this concerns both poetry and painting. You see, and especially in poetry, we feel always this near to the words, these elements of *zaum* poetry, and yet...

DS: But you do not respect the sociological or "realist" critics who demand a mimetic art.

Jakobson: First, the word, in my vocabulary, there is no such word as "Must." No "must." It is "must represent"—Boring! If something exists, if there exists a non-representative art, how can you say "must"? "Must" from the point of view of the aesthetics of that particular critic we are not interested in. And I would say the same if you said it in the opposite way: "must" be abstract also. There is a place for both, if you want. There is a place for mustard and for other components of our culinary art.

I would say I grew up among painters. I grew up not among poets, not among scholars, but among painters, by chance; it was completely by chance. I was introduced to other painters before scholars or poets. And I remember them discussing this transition, not from realistic painting but from impressionistic painting. To Primitivism and Abstraction. I remember I saw them painting these things.

And when we were in 1967 or 6 my wife and I, in the Congress at Moscow, there was the possibility suddenly for my wife to go with some friends and be admitted

to see certain paintings of the Russian avant-garde which were in Tretyakov's Gallery down there—the *souterrain*. And I could not go because I had to preside at a meeting. And the young man who was showing these paintings to my wife said: "Why didn't your husband come?" He knew me, not personally but from my papers. "He would be interested." "He cannot come; he is sad." I called up, and he said he had been involved in a great scandal by permitting my wife to see the paintings. Then I said, Call up the man in the Ministry on whom it depends. I called. The man said, Look, the Gallery of Tretyakov is *so vast*. You can see so many things there. Yes, I said, but remember: I saw them before you were born. Yes, he said, but what about the Soviet art? Oh, I said, But you see, I am interested in the experimental art, and I didn't find it in the section of Soviet art. It *is* a scandal. You see, sometimes they sell them, they give them to some foreigners who need them sometimes, but only in rare cases. Who knows, who knows? Suddenly now in London there appears a painting in the Museum, this year, a painting of Malevitch which was known to be in the Tretyakov Gallery. How it came there is another question. It's beautiful! If you are ever in London, go there.

DS: Did you know Kandinsky?

Jakobson: Yes, you see, at certain times I was the so-called Secretary of the Visual Arts of the Ministry of the Commissariat of Education. It was at the beginning of 1919. Brik invited me and I needed money and I was there. And there I met various people, and I met Kandinsky there. He was the head of the Section of Publications. And once I remember—this was a typical case—there was a plan to make an introduction to the various problems of painting, an introduction to the science of painting. And they asked, "Would you like to write something?" And I said, "Yes, the Semantics of Painting." And there were various painters there, and they said, "What is semantics?" And Kandinsky gave a very clear exposition...

DS: At a time when your work in poetics is hastily applied to so many other arts, how do we work with arts whose structural divisions are essentially non-linguistic?

Jakobson: A very good question. I think that once in one of my papers I quote the statement, "What a pity that in the visual question you have no phonemes or distinctive features." But, as a matter of fact, the situation is not so tragic. What Dora Vallier shows is how the elementary lines, the elementary main colors, and so on, present patterns and systems similar to the systems of distinctive features and are phonemes in language. She utilizes very much my studies in linguistics and not only mine but modern linguistics in general. And the results are very interesting. You can then characterize a certain painter according to the type of lines he has, how they work and especially their inter-relations. You see, I would say whether we make linguistics a study apart or in general study in many fields of humanities, this must be our slogan, and the slogan is from a paper of Edward Sapir of 1924, "The Grammarian and his Language," in which Sapir says:

"What fetters the mind and benumbs the spirit is ever the dogged acceptance of absolutes."

It's amazing how Dora Vallier does it. I went with her to the Museum; we looked at this and so on and so on, and you will see how for this painting and for this painter, in general what is characteristic, what are for him the leading elements, the leading units, and the art of combining them. I was very impressed, I must say, and also Lévi-Strauss, when he saw her studies.

DS: You have raised structural analogues in your subtle essay on the poet-painters, Klee, Rousseau, Blake.

Jakobson: Yes, but I didn't go as far as she does. I proposed certain things there, yes, and I think it is useful. In general, you see, I am always for interdepartmental studies, for the interdisciplinary. I am now trying to combine work in different departments of Harvard and between Harvard and MIT, and now the last wall is between the Harvard Humanities and the Medical School. And I am now finding ways in the Medical School in questions of the brain which we need very much, and in new discoveries—how we can explain, in terms of brain, various problems of pattern and language.

DS: What is your sense now of Eisenstein, the theory of montage, in relation to your theory of equivalence in the axis of the poetic?

Jakobson: The great linguist who works on Eisenstein, and who published a number of things, but whose monographs have still not appeared in Russia, is Ivanov. And Ivanov shows how Eisenstein is not only an enormous innovator in film but an enormous theoretician, who understood a lot of problems in his wonderful, theoretical studies.

I now agree with those who declare that there is no system without changes. Change is a constituent element of the system. I don't oppose the system as such but static theories. Changes are already within the system. I call this "dynamic synchrony."

DS: And the Italian futurist dream of representing speed: Does painting doom itself by representing change too explicitly?

Jakobson: Well, it is an interesting experiment. I would not say, as they would: You must present horses with hundreds of legs. I would say, No, I don't, not with a MUST. But it's an interesting experiment, it's interesting to adapt.... Of course, it is absurd, it is not a question of topics, as Marinetti thought it was. Yes, he was a very peculiar man. I must say, in painting there were interesting things in Italian futurism, in poetry not much. But Italian futurism is a very important phenomenon.

DS: To what do you compare the syntactical fury of Mayakovsky in Russian art? el Lissitsky? Tatlin?

Jakobson: Mayakovsky very much liked Lissitsky. Well, you must see it against the background. He liked it against the background of traditional editions. And they were bogus. The joke of Mayakovsky when he came to the publishing house of the State was, "Even Pushkin would publish better things and better than you do." But Rodchenko, with his edition of "About This"—his photomontages—this is very close to Mayakovsky.

I remember how Mayakovsky listened to my paper about Klebnikov and made remarks about it. And this remark, which I have quoted sometimes. We discussed epithets in the circle. And he said, Well, what adjective is an epithet in poetry and what is not? And he said, Every adjective when it is in poetry by this means becomes an epithet. And if you say *Rive gauche* it is an epithet as soon as it is in poetry because poetry gives the accent. Mayakovsky had a very remarkable understanding.

DS: What do you make of a political characterization, say that the contemporary American O'Hara is a revolutionary poet without a revolution?

Jakobson: No, no. Politics is part of the poetry: the political background, the general background is part of the work. Always according to the Russian folk expression, you dance from a corner. The importance is from where you dance, from where you dance!

May I introduce Mrs. Jakobson—Professor and Mrs. Shapiro, we are having an interesting conversation on everything.

Mrs. Jakobson: On everything. That's too much for me!

Jakobson: On Constructivism, on how art can be compared, Russian and American art, and so on.

Mrs. Jakobson: *Tiens, tiens,* I missed something!

DS: A last terminological question. Some of us are depressed by the vagaries of a term such as "post-modern" used in so many ways, some dogmatic, some permissive?

Jakobson: I try not to use even Modernism, because what is Modernism, it depends on who writes it and at what moment!

DS: And why did you use a pseudonym in your poetry?

Jakobson: I was in the high school when I did that, and I used it because it was completely forbidden in high school. There was censorship!

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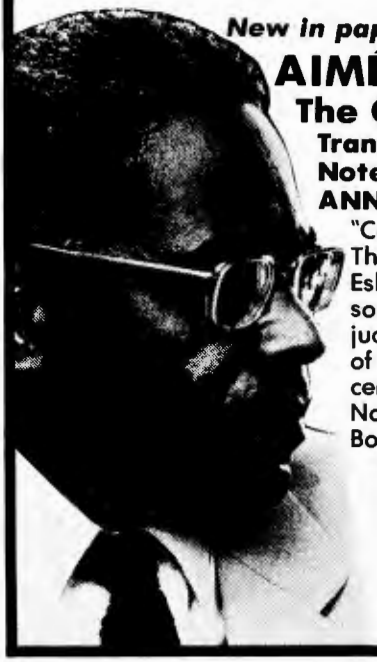

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Chicago.

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for fiction
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WILLOW SPRINGS,
Cheney,
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for fiction
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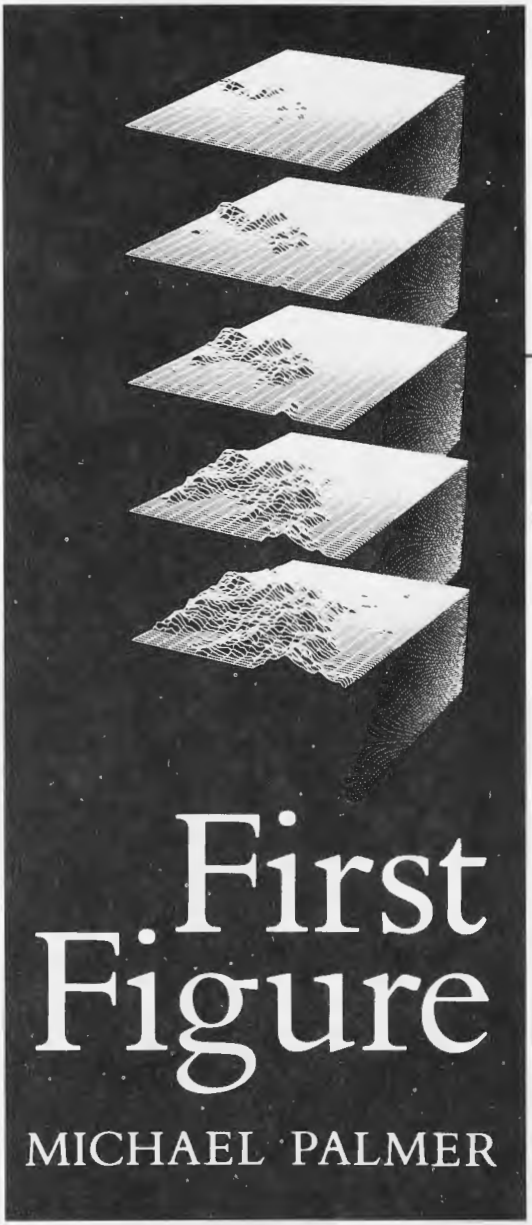

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Sulfur 13

UCLA Extension, The Writer's Program

Editor CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Contributing Editors MICHAEL PALMER
JOHN YAU
ELIOT WEINBERGER

Correspondents CHARLES BERNSTEIN
JAMES CLIFFORD
MARJORIE PERLOFF
JED RASULA
JEROME ROTHENBERG

Managing Editor CARYL ESHLEMAN

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from THE COLLECTED POEMS OF CHARLES OLSON: 1958–64

Edited by George F. Butterick

AS THOUGH THERE WERE NO FLOWING . . .

As though there were no flowing
of opposite to opposite except
in war of classes or of explan-
ation, when the conflict is

the kickoff of love, my son falls
from Tablet Rock, trips, from his usual
overdoing, lands on his head and, I wake
in terror, his neck is broken—was

to break his neck before love's kick-off,
and the man who said his wife was his mother
also dreamt his son was his father! These
pictures on the screen, he said, foretell!

The doom of all is in our dreams—and we
fantasy! Or this man stares, out of his
healthy face, back at his fat black terrier
wife, and says stubbornly I knew the girl

was not a virgin because a dream she had
told me she knew intercourse! Or he picks
bayberries with his pants down to get the
sun, and a woman comes down a hill calling

I see your behind. She does, and reaching
down he pulls up his pants, continuing
to clip bushes on the beach! Self-play is
fantasy or show while all the time the dark

flows and in the tug of its current going
from me to me I am, either I pour, because
I am a man, the nectar into my father's
bowl, or if I were a woman I'd be forced

into darkness by the regularity to be bride
of earth when I am out of the arms of the king
of hell. These are the genes of the soul, the stories
thrown on the shadow of the wall, but the sign,

the hand with the little fingers, which can be read,
bald and flat no more than a perspective of red paint,
stuck on the wall, is about what the paw means, when
one has writ it, here was I. In this forgiveness,

we have our chance

IN AN AUTOMOTIVE STORE

which is like a stock room anyway
a homely City girl and I

flirted, that is I skated
around in front of her as she stood smiling
too openly

on the other side of the counter
from me. A messenger

came in among the clerks

directly to me
with a piece of rubber
obviously from my car,

a small piece of metal
tying it together. The police
it seemed had come into possession

of it and wanted me,
the man said,
to come and identify

or take the car away. When suddenly
it struck me
the car was in Connecticut

and wasn't here in the City
at all. As I went out
a salesman,

in the hall which was the entrance
of the store and was like the hall
in a rotunda

was putting up a table
like at a Fair

of new automobile
electrical and battery
items

and my son
had grabbed hold
and wouldn't let go

of these connections
and I had to tear him
literally by ugly strength alone

away from them, ogling meanwhile
the salesman in apology
for this son of mine

who was such a willful
kid and I lifted him
like stiffly up and down

and bore him
out the door

I saw, from under Him, the beginning
of the web of God

Even to the exordial colors necessary
for a father to be a male

FERRINI—I

A STUDY IN IDEAL FORM

Into the pool at 5 AM to freshen
the new year Child (Dewsnap-Ferrini
was his name

Over the nearest hill
the day in rose arises
and, at night, Venus

in white, tell-tale
of evening the woman's song
accompanied by a bell

French woman's voice
as women on a hillside in Greece
rent Pentheus

and a bell counts two prime numbers
out of which arose the World—the World

is composed of two prime numbers, Alpha
and Epsilon

*

Formed into two
the organ
of the eye

scoptophilia
will make the new one
blush

while at the window
in the dawn a woman
in all the beauty
of her naked body
looks out and does not know
the man behind her in the bed

regards her in a burst of joy

Welcome,
the morning of the World

The unceasingly gentle One
has come to put his arms around you

Dawn fell
and in the next instant
already pregnant with the boy
espied another was to the liking of her eye
and took him down upon her as the crow
set to watch her in her loveliness
flew up helpless in the light
to warn his master who already knew
and said why did you not, white crow,
tear out the lover's eyes? and turned him black
and flew himself to kill
the mother of his child
and quite forgot
until she lay before him cold
that this was she whom he
had found so much
and in her grave cut out
his unborn son

The eye
shall hold us
to the course

the eye
which holds us in the mind

*

Apollo's son by Dawn
he who wouldn't marry many women
but got them all by child

a kiss beneath
an oak-tree
the cherry lips

rub her belly
she liked you to kiss
her rosy tits

then ground the body
in a selfish dance
in the middle of the room

in the night

Or his own Boeotian mares tear
Glaucus into pieces
and both men and women shriek aloud
hysterical or
he implored loudly
so that the house was full of his voice
as the air was with his hands
his hands were the healing plants
of his body
the actions
of his days
the preventative
of his troubles
the carvings
of his hours
and minutes
all which was not expelled
all which was formally kept
that which did count
as epsilon
in the creating
of the world
a epsilon

Purity
is an intensifier
not a state

The eye sees
instantly—not a delay

Alpha,
and Epsilon

the sound
is immediately
on the air

alpha
and *epsilon*

nothing need be spit out
as though it were a seed
passed in the urine

pursing the ass
or the mouth

the ideal
creates the fluent organ
or it is not worth the thought

and the child suffers
as a man he can say ai-ee

if in his time he chooses
or because he finds out

His friend said
that he saw him walking
on the opposite side of the street
but he didn't stop him
or ask him if he wanted a lift
because he noticed
that he was walking talking
to himself
with his hands

If he should find out
what his hands are

*

II

an organization turned toward two worlds at once
requires

a cognitive means which supplies both motive and
direction

originary and essence

wash yourself

in the pool to begin the morning

so that you may know what it is that you are doing

in the latter part

of the day

Dewsnap-Ferrini

was born of a pretty mother
at 5:30 of
a frosty morning

and he was lucky
for it was after the turn
of the dirty year
the dirty turn
of the year
when those who are born
when the sun has faltered
and not gone down and has not come back
who are held in the year like the crack of a vise
the crack of a vice
time is in
Saturnalia
all holly and anything
which protects throw in
for the birds who can't get food
against the unholy things which are abroad
in this desperate season

Dewsnap-Ferrini
was born in a pretty picture
on a hospital bed

danger, the snap-shot
danger the year

blue-gray the eyes

blue-gray the hair

The lover
who knew her best
remembered
50 years later
what it was like—something terrifying,
he said,
about her embrace

elemental, archaic.
She was completely amoral
and yet very pious, a vampire
and a child. And Nietzsche,
when he met her: I am greedy
for her kind of souls. In the near future
I am going to rape one.

"I shall never be faithful
to men." And her husband
who knew the only way to get her
stabbed himself, and for 43 years of marriage
never once knew her as his wife

Virgin of the

bad magazines

Sacher-Masoch

writes you up

Dewsnap-Ferrini,

in your care

III

Hines-Orpheus comes floating
down down the good path-way

wants Heaven without Hell
good Hines-Orpheus

plays on his flute
or does not believe

or makes music of the squeak
of her hair

oh where is the good mother
who will be the bosky girl?

*

he went into the sea
to get the grass
he swam down from the sun-drenched waters
at the beach-side,
Glaucus did
and the Bermuda fisherman
who speaks an excellent English
and as interesting in his pitch and tone
as a native of San Frediano,
has a good ear
fished up Glaucus,
found the grass-eater
in his net

Freud who did not know the Germans were
officialdom—and did not therefore properly
interpret dream. Co-kings, Hines-Orpheus and
Dewsnap-Ferrini: Dewsnap means impartial
beauty. We rule, beyond the mares' hooves.

IV

If I have used
the serpent's herb
I have done it
as Polyidos
to give life

And having done it
as Polyidos likewise,
because there is good reason
why we shouldn't know,
spit into my mouth

For the day,
which is that heifer-cow
that changes her color
three times,
from white to red,
and red to black

and whoever can say
as Polyidos did
what that heifer-cow
is like, can find Glaucus,
the Child-Raisers said,
and restore him even if dead

*

turn the eye
stem outside
don't look harmful
once more

make only one announcement:
I am half a dog-rose

I met my Angel last night or it was the corner
of Reservoir Road. He was me allright or it was I
went right ahead doing what I had intended, inviting
him to go with me on a train ride from that corner
to see a grand scenery I had been told or knew was
supposed to lie along the bank of a river which wld
be on the right as one rode the train down into the
City—was a fully developed subway or surface train
even Reservoir Road was a complex of the City, and had
never myself taken this trip, so off we went even though
I thought he was blind and henceforth the scene was his,
inside the train. He got a passenger sitting beside me,
on my left, to shoot craps with him—in the aisle, was
his point, and he made very evident he thought that was
what you did if you shot craps you played where you were
and looked over his shoulder at any conductor might be in
the car behind as though to point out to either the fellow
beside me or myself that one did this whether or not there
were any objection. I observed then, as he stood there, that
he was not a bum, as I had also thought, or that there was
anything shabby about him, if there were he was in control
and commanding as much of his being as one might, holding
himself in his shape and ability, and, on the point at hand
shooting craps, that he was able. It was this, his ability,
which showed itself when we were back again at the corner
the original corner where the restaurants were (we never
did get to the scenery). He was by this time some sort of
a counterman or short order cook himself, at least he was
standing behind a counter at which I and, on my left again,
two eaters, one of whom (the one nearest me) was an old
friend who has long been a loaded finger-pointing pal of
mine. The two of them were finishing up a cheesecake pie
while I and my shadow looked on, and the three of them
were on the side of how good the food was in a restaurant
at the same corner, to which I disagreed. The climactic
point came when my old friend clinched the argument by
claiming how good the cooking was there, even to the fried
partridge or pheasant day penises! At which point the Angel
turned to me and demanded I give back to him a fish I didn't
even know I was carrying. Which I passed over the counter to him,
and that was that.

The final scene took place shortly thereafter
when (still thinking he was blind) I tried to sneak, for my son,

a clipping or coupon off what later turned out possibly to be the same fish but at that moment was some generalized object of which this coupon was a part. Then it was my Angel clearly revealed he saw everything which was going on and with equal dignity demanded I put the coupon back, with severity
pointing out to me that
our name—his or mine or my son's or his mother's also—was written on the coupon and like a stock or bond piece was therefore only valuable in place. And so despite its perforated edges for removal, that "i" put it back where it belonged. Which I also sheepishly did.

THE DRUM WORLD

—God is a mushroom.

In particular one man
drummed in particular he sent waves
immediately
into the
air, he played directly
on to the table he was sitting by,
drumming he drummed
upon the Tree of Life he was drumming
on the wood
of the tree of life,
of Inanna's tree, the Djed
pillar

a time (count)
completely open, and his own
the world open, and counted (Clarke's
'clock'

1

Men rode
the plataforma
on the narrow-
gauge track

and acquired
the gold or betel or any other riches they wanted
to take or make out of
the earth

Out of the Earth or of woman, out of the genetic
out of that which comes into being, which forever
will come into being. Which is forever
only one step away from
the originary, only one step this side of
the originary, that near,
from the beginning to the end of time and count,
to the imagined. The World

is only one step this side of the motive
of Creation, these tracks
which run as though through Love, Tartar*o*s, Earth, and Ch*a*os,
each of these motives as flight, which
disappears behind itself in the air, consequence
runs through—makes a complete path for the plataforma

simplest hugging track and vehicle to go through
growth, or wet ground bog—land-rover—or all but lank lagoons petrified
air and sound, horror of still rottenness dankness laziness
permanent arrest successful
living deadness with birds muskrats suddenness clanks ripples suckenings
the uselessness of growth without man, woman without man. Man alone is
alone capable of being
alone

The World itself the firmness
of Earth, of woman, of love—of life,
is the evidence, is the first instance *after*
of the perfectness
of the imagined

2

not a sleigh, not a carved wagon
for forwarding: the fingers, heel of the hand both hands
all fingers
the blessed air disappears beyond the envelope
of the earth, it is black
above sound, the sun
above sound
is instant deadly rays, is only a red candy stuck

upon blackness which kills
instantly. Beyond the speed of life outside the air of earth
it is rank creation

men with tools or horses or
standing in the special day's
air accompanied her
as her cart was drawn
in demonstration through people
come to see the goddess

or the boat,
with what he had accumulated
because he was or had accomplished
rule or power or usefulness
for others, drew away
from the wharf or beach of his
kingdom, apparently
putting out
to sea, actually
being guided
(as her careful wagon
her maze
wrought
in the wood or bronze
welding of her
plataforma) his boat
when out of sight of the people mourning
was taken
up river
and not sent out upon the distance of the sea,
was,
by family or by priests—by those who love whom they love, taken
to earth, the boat,
80 foot long is carried one mile inland
to the cemetry where a hole
big enough toenclose it has been dug. And
with all his treasures, even possibly not his body
—or hers, who, Oseberg, is the queen lying
in the preserved boat—

hauled up hill,
taken from the sea,
fooled the people at the wharf

—the dream,
of eternity—steered
solemnly, by those in charge or
those closest, up the Deben estuary away from the sea
taken up hill like Djoser imagined his pyramid all his life and had it
built—
and set down inside the sand, which then
was turned in likewise over it
until he—or her—and his ship—or hers
were covered by a hill which stood out over
the ground inland
from the sea (or Djoser
from the Nile

THE DRUM II
(for John Clarke)

---

my apple branch dressed
in her green Isis night gown

standing on her tip-toes to see
how she looked in it in

the window mirror of my own
Seth Thomas wood run clock

---

as if Hallam Movius had placed a grid over it, and plumb-
lines were dropping from each of the fixed corners across
the grid

and I know a poet and story-teller who is himself already,
or his poetry is, a flavor rises off those poems and a surface
of something as encompassable

as the American Civil War: it isn't
50 miles wide in fact, centering on Centreville or Orange County
Courthouse (Culpeper—Warrenton) and, north and south, 150
miles will take you Etc Body of Event being
that Cental
Region and where
I can have
in this room
as I am writing,
November 12th,

1965, the sharpened
—whittled—
sticks a foot and a half
long. Mind you only little scratched sticks
like that boy in blue had used
to protect
himself or impale
any skulking Rebel creeping
up on his prone position *last*
night or day of *last*
battle of Chancellorsville C.H. or Wilderness
where I found it mounted as that soldier had
died & rotted in back of it or removed himself but
left these whittled sticks sticking
as his own little night's fort
in front of him: I *found* it, 90 years later, I mean whittled sticks
mind you just as he'd constructed it, one night,
two sticks
made into
a protection

And carried them off,
from that easy
underbrush, astonished
as I still am that
a man's act, of this
slight an evidence, shall
stay raised in the grass
and the change
of the growth of
seasons, just think even snow's weight, nothing
storm or trees crashing or a bird or an animal
using this
useful
thing
until I came along apparently the first person
99 years after that nearly last night of that
long war and saw
as though I had come on new birds' eggs in a new
nest, spotted blue, this
chevaux de frise
                tells me
we are

Clayton Eshleman

TUXEDOED GROOM ON CANVAS BRIDE

[tuxedo. From the name of a country club at Tuxedo Park, near Tuxedo Lake, NY., fr. Lenape p'tuksit, *an esoteric term for wolf, lit., he has a round foot, the name of the Wolf subtribe of the Delawares.]*

The artist in tuxedo with cigarette instead of brush,
in undertaker clothing, with surgeon white beneath.
His body in the black sleeves of a repressed
belch, staring, at what is behind his eyes:
gas from the social wafer,
the one with manhole lids and cathedral flagstone.

Max Beckmann had round feet and was a wolfman as he tore
his tux into shred-like spars to keep afloat
through two World Wars—bandages to bind
the "infinite divinity" of God to "arrogance before
God, defiance of God, because
he has created us so we cannot love ourselves."

A black impasto to deaden the edges of human bodies,
to scab pores so that the bestial God would suffocate,
so that the congeries of selves we all enclose
(Fascisti that we are,
bundles of stick-like selves, stick
figures awaiting ignition,
that when not transformed become
an emperor's mace) were activated—
but not so activated that they expanded into liberation
or abstraction, or a new conservatism.
Beckmann saw the tux coming in:
an "aristocratic" academy was to be pitted against Fascism.

In our time, rhymed verse associated with Pro Life,
"free verse" associated with Fascism
by a middle class now filled with "artistic" hubris,
which does not understand that
the artist is neither revolutionary nor conservative,
but a worker of the between,
a messenger from the centerless flux,
caretaker of the rational and the irrational. The divine is
stigmata and we are to express it. Think of us as a force being
torn apart by both the left and the right,
the strength of Beckmann:
to record the multiple pulling for 40 years.

His mysteries bound in black leather radiate this inescapable paint.
Black becomes leading in the canvas-
cathedral shine of loosened invisibles.
He will not let go the desire to make burned
propellers gash through the auditorium of my morning.
"Everything is getting pretty funny and even more ghostly."
fun fuses furor
roars with horror

*

The hour has come for the still-life:
flattened by Beckmann,
the figure refuses depth (grandeur).
The saxophone lies coiled around a Mexican pot,
nearby a cactus is exuberating.
"Still-life" might include anything, for this room
in which "nature morte" is quietly panting
is a cage suspended in the abyss. About the scene,
"the great emptiness and uncertainty of space which I call God."
Inside the scene, the hunger of knowing no tasty
reward will be conveyed on the tray of a Hermic bellhop—
as a matter of fact, the bellhop hurries along past the cage.
A crown has been ordered by the executive in No. 408,
and because we are short on help these days
the messenger exercises a woman who pads along a cobalt sea.
"the sea, my old romance, it's been too long since I was with you.
You swirling eternity in your embroidered dress."

From the moment we first began to sense we ended,

from dawn at 14,000 BC when we found interiority at Niaux,
we have been dragging our shadows into
the functionless abattoir of the mind.
The mind contains a shadow-entrapment center,
yet the only results of the spiritual hunt are
the ghosts of animal hides over which
Beckmann's God's calcite is forming.

20th century shadows break out like pox,
striped measles,
welts sturdy as pieces of black fences he is hammering
against the God leaking dam, as if where he lives
is curse concrete to God's water.
"Iniquity lies in creation itself." "Unending divinity" indeed!

Creation. Catastrophe. The artist a demiurge turning
against the creator, a fish (or falling angel)
swerving against a bigger fish (or void)

The stumps, the bandages, the fetters

Blows against the body of God

*

The God splinters at log jam in his heart send out spikes of light, gold encrusted beams, swarming with harlequin ore.

He cauterizes ripeness with decay, individuals at intersection with themselves
Figures rush in, gods, non-gods, all screech to a halt, or screech to a paint, as if we were caught in our hallway at night, at 10 fathoms, out of sleep for a drink, in the drink we found we were still asleep, our entire body thirsty, the hallway bulging with all the creatures of our imagination,
yet not solipsismal black, because I know that in my own dream
I am king, and a king committing suicide,
and that as I drive the dirk into my breast
it is the back of his muscular Columbine, whose back
I've never met, and as he appoints that back, he is involved
with telescopes, he can only reach himself as a shadowed
profile in a mirror. He sweats there, statue,
his big dumb feet sticking out below the sculptor's cloth,
and when he elbows his way out of the strait-jacket of baptism,
or twisted sheets, or thought-before-sleep,

he is heiling, with lopped-off-wrist, an Olympia busy as a rice
paddy in May,
His dream ends December 27, 1950, 10 AM, the corner of 61st Street
and Central Park West.

Why has no Western painter painted subincision?
The archangels of the *lower* body?
A woman really giving birth?

*

And he will not offer you a real foot, but the way your foot looks to yourself,
which does not regard your foot in the same way as you do.
To you, foot is ideal foot, years ago heroic foot, now text book or media foot.
To your self, foot is the shape of your childhood foot,
something you grabbed for a thousand times in your crib, thus
your first sensation of pliable backbone,
the thing put in booties, a tennis shoe, Church shoe foot,
swimming pool fin foot, plaster casted,
invisible thus rotting, a foot with its own death, a chrysalis.
When you reveal your foot to your self, to the audience of your selves,
all the soul stances that have misidentified your foot,
what will your foot really look like?
At 50, it is approaching your father. It gets whiter as you age, more—and less—marble.
The bones inside, victorious caterpillars.
This stump onto which you've stamped the invisible letter of your self.
The feet in Beckmann—that woman's calf—you've seen it at a glance from your car right
before turning onto the freeway, was it the way you mentally photographed her?
No, it was the accurate instant in which you saw her leg—her foot (you missed that),
what kind of dress was she wearing?
Why did her leg look like a wedge of paint?

We see out of embedded perceptions that snarl our selves
with honored images at home and at school.
What we totally look like is a perspective that belongs to the gods.
We have real feet, self feet, god hoofs.
What is pushed into my socks is an ending

freckled with innocence and filled with the guilt of stepping on
snails.

Paradise is boudin-like particle against particle

*

"Nothing is left to us but protest—boundless contempt for the lascivious bait with which we are repeatedly lured back to take life's bit in our mouths. When we are half-dead of thirst, and want to quench it, the mocking laughter of the gods appears."

His always-semi-nudes whose breasts like ice-cream-cone scoops
keep popping out of their bras,
so that the woman giving birth is ready for the next comer (the
newborn is already elderly).
One can follow breasts in Beckmann like the bits of white bread
left as a trail in the forest of so many tales,
or one can follow crowns, or drums, one can watch a road of things take on
curbs, a seascape withdraw via the room and window we are viewing it
through.
His impasto schizo candle flames, wet lemon tar, and the candlesticks
themselves, thugs, always asquirm with the otherwise questionable
equilibrium, muffled waxen shouts that *more light* means *more dark*.
The soldier's dream is to be with his red-headed lass forever in a swimming
pool, and he is, with a cage lowered over the pool, while the bugler
who will wake both before they have embraced is already bugling, and
the sleeping goddess he will never penetrate is holding up the clockface
of departure—
Departure! The "unending divinity," the "great emptiness and uncertainty
of space," is only center stage. At both sides, the obscenity off-stage is
at full tilt. Ariadne and her two kings will never depart, for the heaven
and hell wings of the triptych are inside us, bound to our pillars, bent
over our crystal balls. The catch in the shallow hold of the archetypal
skiff rots, but its putridness never turns to dust, for we all refurbish
the loss with our own organs.

*

The manticores are singing with their triple bandsaw mouths.
They are singing the love song of Max Beckmann

"in that empty dining room . . . of the main train station in Frankfurt, beneath the pitiless white of the electric lighting, all alone with a bottle of champagne and a Brazilian cigar. There he sat, broad-shouldered, heavy, absent, thoughtful, observing the imaginary scene, no, the virtual reality, as keenly as if it had edges. There he leaned, pale, fixated in a cold fever, on his forehead beads of sweat like an exhausted porter who had thrown down his load . . . Never have I known such a lonely man. One could not seriously want to imitate him."

This corrosive song now blows through the LA County Museum,
through the heads of the cistern folk assembled to wonder why
art is so ugly. They had been wheeled in expecting
a golden drop to fall from the tip of an archangel sword into
their wishing-well faces, but Beckmann was buffing
his shoes in the corner, and when he looked up
there was a fraying net filled with green, decomposing fish.
There were eyes in the side of the fish,
portholes giving vista to the submarine picnic
where the 400 pound nude rolled over into your salad and mine.
That's life, she explained, with trident and leash,
right here: the motionless whirlpool of the sink
yesterday's pasta, Perseus, and a blind organ-grinder
revolve in. And life is short at the wick,
while the flame itself extends in silken bands,

black fractures,
frilled poles,
cored orchids,
moral holes.

The beef of the abyss
shaking its bars.

Pelican tattooers
summoning Mars.

Acrobats roboting acts
on crutch-thrones,

crones
in the arms of winged
drones,

God on the band of a bicep
moaning
its steel chanson.

The OM spurting pike and
its OM flirting sister.

Lashed spine to spine:
the masquerade,
the turning marmalade,
the torpedo and
the blister.

Bucklered, caulked:
the vault in which
tuxedoed groom on
canvas bride are

forever displayed
before the gawkers,
the guards,
the burglars,
and the butts in the tray.

1985

ROBERT MORRIS'S

In the Realm of the Carceral

John Yau

Inspired by both his reading of Michel Foucault's history of prison, *Discipline and Punishment*, and an exhibition of Piranesi's *Carceri* drawings at the National Gallery in Washington in 1978, Robert Morris worked on a series of drawings titled *In the Realm of the Carceral.* Done in ink on large sheets of white paper, the twelve drawings extend the artist's interest in the use of repression and control in various architectural forms. The realm is a fictive one that exists in what Morris terms "The Present Tense of Space." (1)

While the severity of the lines and shapes recall such earlier drawings as the ones in which the artist planned a series of sculptures done in two inch thick steel plates (1970), as well as his plans for labyrinths and mazes, *In the Realm of the Carceral* has no objective counterpart. At the same time, and in direct contrast to many of his steel sculptures of the 70's, the I beam-like shapes in *Towers of Silence*, for example, have been contextualized. Paralleling the image of a prison is the thoroughness of Morris's approach. Not only is the space between the lines sculptural, but it also must be speculated on by the viewer. The blank areas are to be filled in, like a questionnaire.

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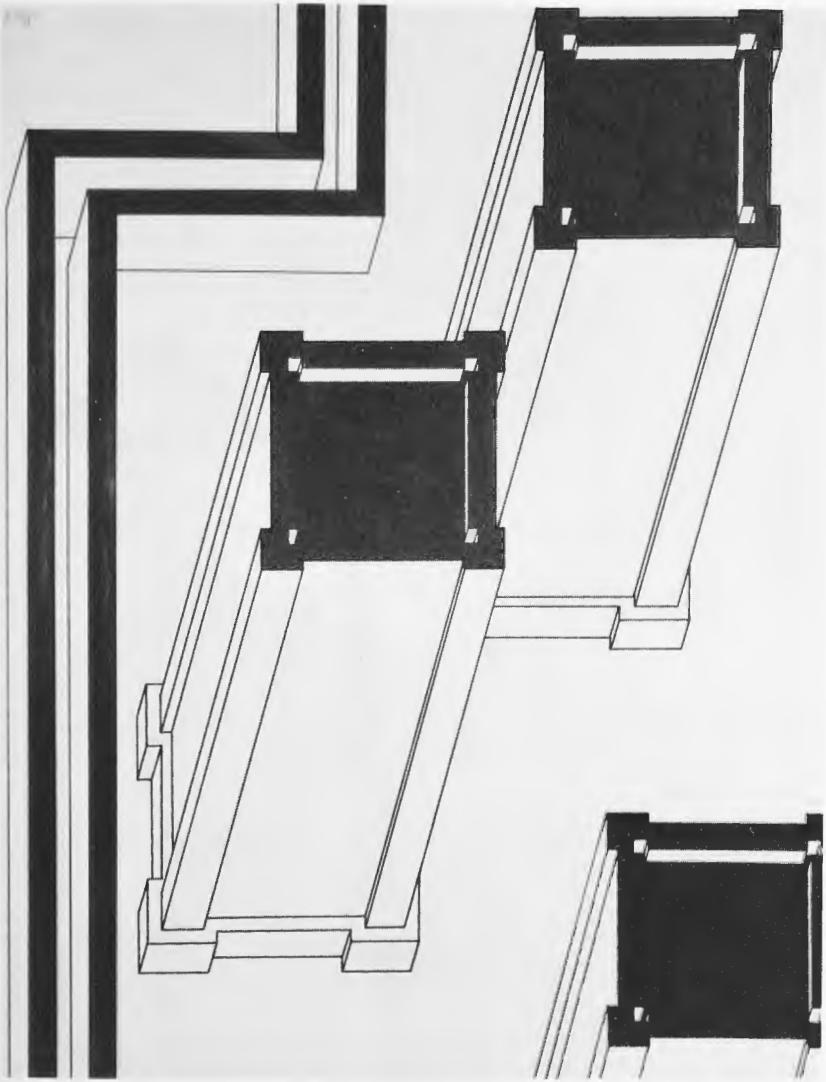
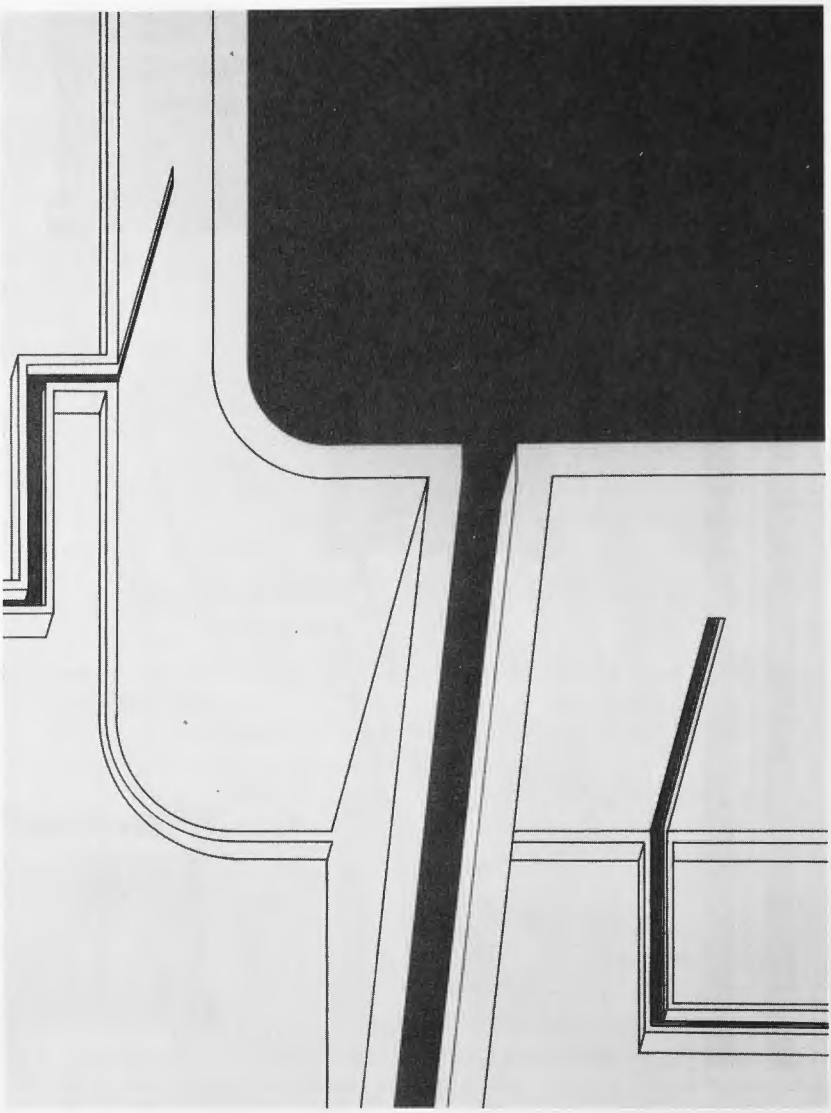
(1) The title of an article by Robert Morris which appeared in *Art in America* (January/February 1978) pp 70-80.

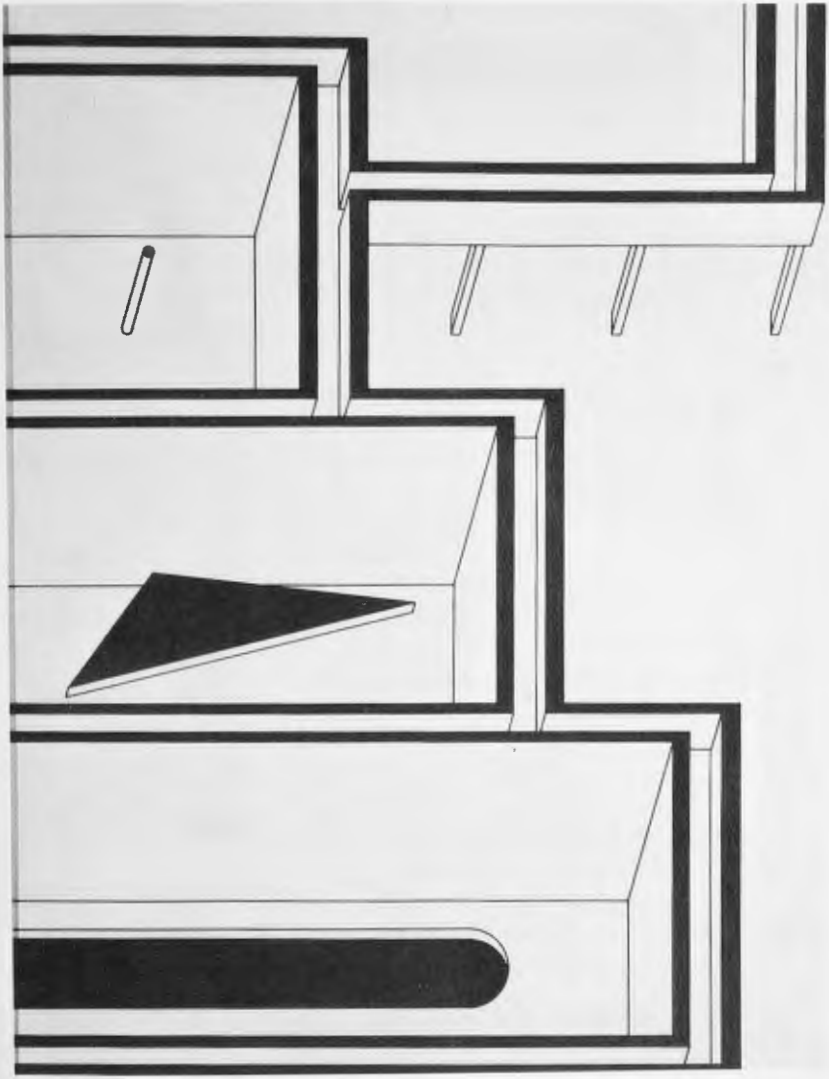


In the Realm of the Carceral—Towers of Silence
Ink on paper
45" x 33¾"
1978

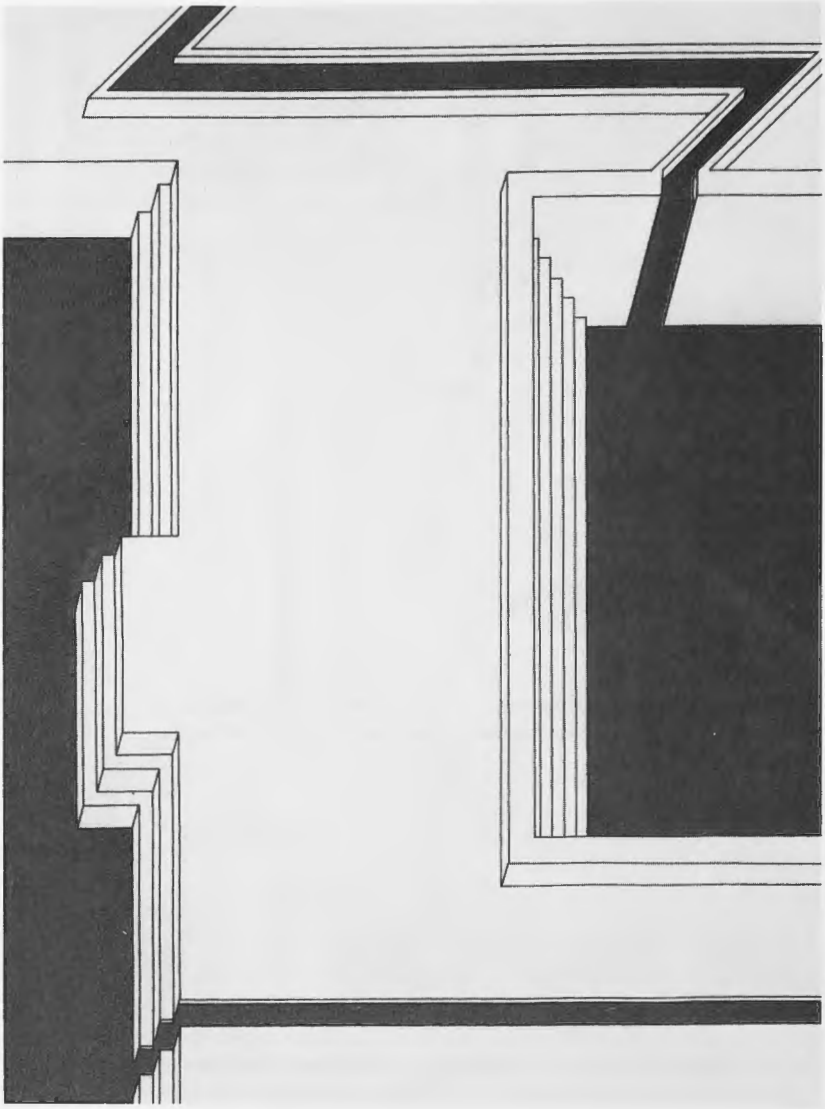
Photo credit: Bevan Davies
Courtesy of Leo Castelli, New York



In the Realm of the Carceral—Flume and Sluice Gates for the Pools of Persuasion
Ink on paper
45" x 33¾"
1978



In the Realm of the Carceral—Observation Yards
Ink on paper
45" x 33¾"
1978



In the Realm of the Carceral—the Hot and Cold Pools of Persuasion
Ink on paper
45" x 33¾"
1978

Jed Rasula

TOWARDS RILKE IN ENGLISH

As a boy he ran headlong into the legs of portly Johannes Brahms in a public park. As a young man he visited Tolstoy with the only woman Nietzsche ever proposed to: she later introduced him to Freud too. He sat in Rodin's studio as George Bernard Shaw posed for a sculpture. He made friends with Busoni through a lover who'd been the composer's student. Busoni introduced him to D'Annunzio (whose flame Eleanora Duse he also knew). For a time he lived in the same Paris hotel as Isadora Duncan, Jean Cocteau and Rodin. Later in Munich his next-door neighbor was Paul Klee. Kokoschka was an acquaintance, along with Thomas Mann, Stefan George, Franz Werfel and Stefan Zweig. His friends included Hofmannsthal, Paula Modersohn-Becker, André Gide (who translated his work) and Paul Valéry (whom he translated). He visited Maxim Gorky on Capri. Ludwig Wittgenstein bestowed on him a hefty cash gift. His poetry was of primary importance to a young protégé of Edmund Husserl's named Heidegger. The Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva wrote to him, "You are not the poet I love most. Most already implies comparison. You are poetry itself."

Seen in the light of these associations, the conventional image of Rilke foreshortens the perspective drastically, leaving nothing but a caricature. It is of a boy dressed in skirts, growing up to a pampered life as the ward of noble spinsters in their castles and chalets, writing dreamy poetry until in a single overpowering burst of inspiration the *Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus* were wrenched out of him, after which he pricked his finger on a rose and died. Conveniently ignored are the long years in military academies, the considerable time spent alone and in near poverty in barren flats and hotels, the attentive craftsman persisting

in his writing regardless of "inspiration," and death by leukaemia (which is not under any circumstances transmitted by rose thorns).

The stereotype is notoriously persistent. I suspect that it is American in its orientation, if not its origin, because of the several occasions on which I've heard American men (who admire Rilke's poetry but know little of his life) speculate that Rilke had no sexual experience. This says more about American men than about the European poet who had a considerable number of lovers, a wife and daughter, and wrote some well-informed erotic poetry as well as the following indispensible observations on sexuality in his "Young Workman's Letter": "The terrible untruthfulness and uncertainty of our age has its roots in the refusal to acknowledge the happiness of sex, in this peculiarly mistaken guilt, which constantly increases, separating us from the rest of Nature, even from the child . . . In order to describe the peculiar situation of our sensual appetite we should have to say: once we were children in every part, now we are that in one part only." These observations were written down in the midst of the legendary whirlwind of February 1922, during which the *Duino Elegies* were finished and the entirety of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* so unexpectedly appeared. That Rilke found it in him to compose a major essay at that time is little known. But for Rilke, poetry itself arose like sexual ripening and fruition. Sexuality was, with poetry, the primary medium for creative transformation. As he observes in the essay, " . . . my sex is not directed only towards posterity, it is the secret of my own life . . . " It was an open secret (as he once observed of the ancient statues of pharoahs, that their smiles signified pollen) that constituted the intimate shareable space so many women responded to. The great danger for Rilke, in fact, was that he could easily expend all his creative energy in relationships—hence his unwillingness to sustain his affairs or commit himself fully to his marriage.

Rilke lived the pure life of poetry as much as he could. Not as idealized abstraction, not the symbolist quest (or at least not after his earliest years as a poet), but as an immense task and labor. His restlessness was a means not of distancing the world but of preserving his work-space. The time he spent as Rodin's secretary was Rilke's most absorbing lesson as a poet; it was there that he came to understand the importance of *work*, and how applied labor is itself inspiration enough. The intractable difficulty of being a poet, as he was aware, is that there is no studio containing all the proper materials of the craft: the only workspace is in the mind, and is available only in conjunction with a sense of appropriateness and ease in an actual environment. Rilke looked with envy on Rodin's cluttered rooms, with their fragments of sculptures, work-in-progress, juxtaposed with ancient statuary, paintings by friends, and the miscellany of stimulating objects: "One has almost the sensation of never having felt so strongly the undiminished individual effect of works of art of the most different kinds and periods as in this place, where they have no appearance of

striving to please as in a collection, and are not forced to contribute of their own store of beauty to a general sense of well-being which has no reference to them. Someone said once that they were kept like beautiful animals, and that really does describe Rodin's relationship to the things about him . . . " Rilke himself was extremely sensitive to animals, and on more than one occasion declined the offer of a pet because of his intuition that the presence of a living being would absorb too much of his creative potential.

Rilke possessed the keenest sense of his work and what deprivations were required of him in order to commit himself wholly to it. It's well known that Rilke didn't want to undertake psychoanalysis because of a hunch that his personal demons would be disposed of (and his workshop, as it were, demolished). What's less well known is the fact that it was in the very process of defining his position on this that he suddenly began writing the Elegies at Duino. The tension is there in the opening lines for all to hear—another 'open secret': "Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' / hierarchies?" (Stephen Mitchell trans.), as if Rilke knew that on earth his cries would be heard by a psychiatrist. Several days after writing the first Elegy he could dismiss all possibility of analysis with the comment, "Something like a disinfected soul results from it . . . "

II

We need to reread Rilke's workshop—for that is what his writing constitutes. A self-perpetuating fixation that originated with Rilke himself is the stress on the *completed* book. The few volumes of poetry he chose to publish were project-oriented: *The Book of Hours, The Book of Images, New Poems, Requiem, Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus.* It's time to realize that these titles constitute Rilke's ongoing need for boundary-stones indicating the stations of personal necessity. With Rilke it makes more sense than with almost any other poet to see his published books as specific arrangements of a case history. There is an enormous body of poetry outside this self-propagating canon, though it's only recently become possible to recognize the value of what Michael Hamburger calls the "unofficial Rilke."

Because of his popularity, translators have always felt obliged to deliver up the credible, self-sanctioned Rilke. J. B. Leishman's numerous translations carefully follow the organization of the German editions. The two-volume *Selected Works* is simply a translation of the 1948 *Ausgewählte Werke* (the New Directions paperback edition of Rilke's prose, *Where Silence Reigns,* is a retitled reprint of the first volume of the *Selected*). Leishman's translations of *New Poems* and *Poems 1906–1926* also preserve German textual arrangements. Only in recent years has there been some indication that translators are willing to make their own presentations of Rilke. John Mood's *Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties*

(1975) was the first and still most alluring exposition of an alternative Rilke. Mood's mixture of commentary with thematic arrangements of translations is admirably done. The passages from letters are reprinted from previous translations, but the poems are in Mood's altogether deft versions, and his selection remains the primary source for reading Rilke fragments (from one liners up to page-long poems) in English. (Leishman's *Poems 1906–1926* is, like all of his translations, hampered by almost unreadable syntactic contortions in his attempts to preserve the rhymes as well as the peculiarities of Rilke's often un-German German.) Michael Hamburger's selection of *Poems 1912–1926* (1981) is well chosen and reads with considerable fluence by itself—though a poem by poem comparison with other translations makes Hamburger's versions seem somewhat stiff. Mood and Hamburger focus on material never collected by Rilke himself—superb though it may be—so their fine efforts will remain marginal to many. It wasn't until Stephen Mitchell's 1982 volume of *The Selected Poetry* (Random House) that a comprehensive, original edition of Rilke appeared in English which didn't either slavishly follow German precedent or distort the offering (previous so-called "selected" editions have confined themselves to the early lyrics). Mitchell's selection offers a major reorientation to Rilke. For one, he presents over two dozen remarkable uncollected poems in their proper chronological place. The earliest work is relegated to a minor role, with the *New Poems* adequately represented as Rilke's first indispensible effort, followed by a powerful translation of "Requiem for a Friend." Mitchell's inclusion of selections from *The Notebooks of Malta Laurids Brigge* and some of the rejected drafts for *Duino Elegies* (as well as all ten Elegies, with 15 of the *Sonnets*) compounds the value of this edition. Furthermore, Mitchell's selection from Rilke's letters and essays—unfortunately relegated to extremely fine print in a lengthy section of Notes at the end of the book—is commendable in its own right as a small anthology. Fine as Mitchell's editorial job is, his translations are a major accomplishment. He seems possessed of a most enviable ability to *evision* poems in English in place of Rilke's originals. While this does result in occasional augmentation of the text in order to make a genuine English language poem, I find Mitchell's tampering largely unobjectionable because it's so clearly in the service of the whole poem. Other translators add things to pad out a line or a phrase—local cosmetics for a shabby job, as often as not. With Mitchell, if you look at the German and don't find the equivalent, you can at least look at his English and feel the *need,* the poetic issue. Rather than attempting any duplication of Rilke's rhymes, Mitchell chooses to forward the momentum by subtly placed half-rhymes, resourceful and subliminal rather than overt and obtrusive the way full rhymes would be. He does this so consistently it's clearly a conscious decision, and I think the right one, given the disequilibrium which assiduous rhyming would introduce into the contemporary American idiom.

An indispensable complement to the Mitchell *Selected* is the book's 35 page introduction by Robert Hass. There is no other piece of writing in English that offers as sensitive an immersion in Rilke as this. In his laconic and distinctively American way, Hass manages to keep the overtly European side of Rilke at a distance without abusing him for it. Hass is able to go from the most striking assessments of Rilke's sombre side ("To learn not to be a stranger is the burden of the *Duino Elegies*") to such fascinating details as Rilke's enthusiasm for Quaker Oats, for instance, or his frank observation that the early poems "sometimes seem more interesting in English transation than they really are."

Hass' level-headed approach demystifies Rilke's angels quite usefully: "For Rilke . . . the angels were never hermetic knowledge. They were the ordinary ideas . . . whenever our souls make us strangers to the world." With Wallace Stevens on hand for so long, it's odd that such observations have been so hard to arrive at. There are points in Hass' approach one should be wary of, particularly his emphasis on Rilke's rootlessness. Hass suggests that his only real interest in *looking* at things was "in order to take them inside himself and transform them: to soak them in his homelessness and spiritual hunger so that when he returned them to the world, they were no more at home in it than he was, and gave off unearthly light." A cogent, attractive proposition, but it has an un-Rilkean air of melodrama about it. Still, Hass is often capable of the most piercing insights, as when he observes of the *Duino Elegies* that "they are the nearest thing in the writing of the twentieth century to the flight of birds" (i.e. the spirit soars, in them and in the presence of them, despite what one scholar has characterized as the lava-like flow of the language).

The most recent addition to Rilke in English is Edward Snow's rendering of the first volume of *New Poems [1907]*. Before detailing some of the aggravations of this translation it would be best to indicate why the book was, for Rilke himself as well as for all subsequent readers, so important. Snow writes in his introduction that in *New Poems* the "consistently high level of accomplishment and intricate structure of motif make it for me Rilke's greatest single achievement as a poet, as well as the happiest moment in his oeuvre." Coming after a superabundance of translations of the elegies and Sonnets, Snow's point is worth making. There is much to be gained from a reappraisal of the *Neue Gedichte*.

Hass has written that "Rilke has clearly not abandoned the symbolist quest for the absolute in *New Poems*, he has dragged it, like a sick animal, into the twentieth century and brought it alive before us." This is debatable, I think, but the French background should be emphasized, and Symbolish as a mode of poetry is of course part of it. Baudelaire's poem "Carrion" was a favorite of Rilke's and provided much incentive for dispassionate, pure observation of very tangible physical realities. Rodin added a further provocation, insisting that the young poet immerse himself

in visual study as a preparation for writing, just as if it were a plastic art. If there is a Symbolist backdrop to the *New Poems,* their content is rinsed in actual observation. There is a fascinating undertow to the poems that is intrinsically nonvisual, however, and Hass makes a sharp observation about the first of them to be written, "The Panther" in 1903: "When Rilke began to look at things, the first thing he looked at was a caged animal . . . Rilke, deciding to write poems about really seeing, wrote immediately a poem about the exhaustion of seeing."

It was several years before "The Panther" was joined by comparable poems. The long blank-verse pieces that culminate the first volume of *New Poems* ("Tombs of the Heterae," "Orpheus Eurydice Hermes" and "Birth of Venus") followed in 1904, and in the winter of 1905–1906 there was a handful of short poems, but none of this seemed to be leading up to anything. Then, on May 11, 1906, Rodin abruptly dismissed the poet from his post as secretary. Rilke sensibly took it in the best light possible, as a gift of cleared space in which to turn fully to his own work. He promptly set about assembling an expanded edition of his *Book of Images,* and on June 14th wrote to his wife "Being occupied with the *B. of P.* (it was sent off today at last) has brought me back, if not literally into work, at least (after an incalculable interim) into warmth, into the body temperature of my soul . . . " The work was rapidly becoming literal. He drew up a list of a hundred potential topics or titles and crossed them off as he completed the poems. By the time he went on a trip to Belgium at the end of July he'd finished nearly fifty of them. A few more were written during the winter and spring on Capri (including two more longer ones, "Alcestis" and "The Bowl of Roses"), but it wasn't until the return to Paris in the summer of 1907 that he could find his workshop fully available again, so to speak. From July through early September he finished another 50 poems, completing volume one and having a substantial start toward the next. "More and more (and to my joy)" he wrote to a correspondent, "I am living the existence of the seed in the fruit which disposes everything it has round about it and outward from itself in the darkness of its working . . . In a word: I stand at my standing desk [Rilke wrote standing up] and nothing else . . . " In October his practice was confirmed for him by seeing a large exhibit of Cézanne's paintings. Cézanne, he comments in a letter, "knew how to repress his love for each single apple and to store it in a painted apple forever . . . In the poems [which he was proofreading for the printer] there are instinctive tendencies toward similar objectivity." With this, Rilke was clearly and affirmatively beyond anything Symbolism had to offer; his mood was to repress—or better yet *compress*—his feelings in order to concentrate on his chosen topics. He compared the work of earlier painters with Cézanne and said that for them, a painting said "I love this" instead of saying, as Cézanne, "here it is."

In November Rilke's close painter-friend Paula Modersohn-Becker

died. In December the first volume of *Neue Gedichte* was published. In 1908, for the third summer in a row, fifty poems were added to the others, and *Neue Gedichte anderer Teil* was finished. Just before its November publication, Rilke wrote hs stunning elegy for Paula, "Requiem for a Friend." Three years of intensive composition in a most deliberate poetic mode (mostly sonnets or close to sonnet length and rhyme schemes) helped Rilke attain the kind of concentration needed to bring the Malte Laurids Brigge project to a head, and the novel was largely written out during 1908–1909. After that, Rilke was so exhausted emotionally that he considered abandoning writing altogether. As famous as the watershed month of February 1922 is in the Rilke legend, we have to look with astonishment at the major act of sustained labor that went into the relatively brief period (1906–1909), resulting in both volumes of *New Poems*, the *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, *Requiem*, and the second half of his book *Rodin*. On December 28, 1911 Rilke wrote to Lou Andreas-Salome wistfully of "my best Paris time, that of the *New Poems*, when I expected nothing and no one and more and more the whole world streamed toward me merely as a task and I replied clearly and surely with pure work." Two weeks later the first *Duino Elegies* were at hand, and it's worth considering that Rilke's subsequent ten-year wait for their conclusion was anguishing to him precisely because the writing couldn't be undertaken as pure applied (almost manual) labor as in the earlier Paris years.

The Rilke myth has obscured the significance of the *New Poems* by focusing too much attention on the Elegies and Sonnets. But till the end of his life Rilke was reiterating the lessons learned during that time of intensive labor. Even the Elegies are not immune, as one of the ecstatic moments is in the 9th where the purpose of our being on earth, it is surmised, is simply to say the names of *things*. In 1923 he wrote of the primacy in the *New Poems* not of feelings, "but *things I had felt* . . . " In 1925: "The animated, experienced things that *share our lives* are running out and cannot be replaced. *We are perhaps the last to have still known such things*. On us rests the responsibility of preserving, not merely their memory . . . but their human and laral worth. ('Laral' in the sense of household-gods.)" That he was maintaining such a position long after the arrival of the Sonnets and Elegies is proof enough that the *New Poems* were a lifelong anchor for Rilke's bearings in the world and in all the rest of his work.

The goal of *New Poems* was to write poems that fit snugly into the world, kernels inside fruit. Rilke said of Rodin's statue of Balzac that it was "surrounded by the whole atmosphere," and that is very much the feeling of his "Ding-Gedicht" or thing-poem mode. These poems—though usually evocative of things, tactile and visually precise—are also thing-poems in that their palpability is manifest in the mouth. Apart from the impeccable rhymes, the sound values of the poems are furthered by cascades of vowel and consonant clusters and internal rhymes that only

Hopkins comes close to in English. Entire poems unfold as if on a dare to make a certain sonic complex cross a tightrope of narrow but substantial sense.

Reading Edgar Snow's new translations one would hardly imagine it. It is admittedly impossible to transpose actual sound patterns in translation (despite Zukofsky's example with Catullus), but the *New Poems*—of all Rilke's work—cries out for concrete-sounding renderings. Snow's versions are almost entirely lacking in any of the qualities that would make resonant poems in English. He wisely avoids rhyme (Leishman's translations are burdened by a quest for rhyme that often blurs the actual sense of the poems), but he makes little attempt at intermediate steps like the half-rhymes Mitchell is so good at. Snow's translations appear not to be informed by any sense of current poetic practice, unless it's that flacidity that makes so much American poetry (and Snow's Rilke) read like prose, broken into lines for the convenience of a half-literate audience that wouldn't otherwise recognize a poem. One can go for pages in Snow without encountering a decent *line* with its own balance or cadence. He manages to close "A Woman's Fate" with some poetic credence—"There she stood out of place like something / held in trust and grew blind and merely old / and wasn't precious and was never rare."—but it happens that in this instance Rilke made a point of breaking up the rhythm of that final line, as if to emphasize the woman's incongruousness. Snow's attractive final line gropes blindly for a rhythmic pulse that Rilke took pains to abort, "und war nicht kostbar und war niemals selten."

There is a further suspicion that Snow's German may be marginal at best. In "Orpheus Eurydice Hermes" it feels like he has looked at previous translations and tried to 'make it new' by avoiding any of the words or phrases which his predecessors hit on, rather than rereading the original by itself. Snow unaccountably adds words in various poems which contribute nothing to the sense: "allen diesen Dingen" becomes "all these waiting things" (no *waiting* in German); a simple direct address, "Mann," becomes "You abject man" (!); "In dir . . . "—simply *In you,* is rendered by Snow overzealously as "within yourself." To what end is all this? Without the restraint of a concern for preserving formal structure, what justification can there be? Incompetence is no excuse, and to encounter errors in a listless, plain, dull translation os sadder yet. Appropriate to such a botched job, perhaps, is the paucity of presentation in this North Point edition of *New Poems.* The texts are undated, there are no notes or apparatus of any kind, and the small introduction introduces nothing at all. In all fairness, I should add that Snow's version of the culminating poem, "A Bowl of Roses," is actually well done and succeeds in ways throughout its three pages that the shorter poems don't. Though even here I'm made uneasy by the final line: "It now lies carefree in these counter errors in a listless, plain, dull translation is sadder yet. Appropriate to such a botched job, perhaps, is the paucity of presentation in this

North Point edition of *New Poems*. The texts are undated, there are no notes or apparatus of any kind, and the small introduction introduces nothing at all. In all fairness, I should add that Snow's version of the culminating poem, "A Bowl of Roses," is actually well done and succeeds in ways throughout its three pages that the shorter poems don't. Though even here I'm made uneasy by the final line: "It now lies carefree in these open roses" Snow has for "Nun liegt es sorglos in den offnen Rosen." Literal, true, but so much of the impact is in the moan of Rilke's vowels; one wonders whether a less literal translation ("Now it lies careless over these open roses") might be more faithful in preserving the sexual openness

III

Rilke's style has always held pitfalls for translators. The first generation back in the Forties (McIntyre and Leishman) were mesmerized by the rhymes, always so unforced and done with perfect ease in Rilke, generally intrusive and belabored in English. Leishman and so many other translators of the *Duino Elegies* are led astray by Rilke's unnerving syntax (extensive use of subordinate clauses, inversions of phrase, participles appearing as nouns, etc.). Rilke was, it is best to remember, a master of the subtleties of syntactic elongation, like Henry James in English. Rilke and James both spent their adult lives engaged in the fine tuning of social relations, and it's ironic that his translators haven't looked to James' nimbleness as a model for Rilke's most characteristic aspect, and learned what they could.

Hopefully the Stephen Mitchell translation is indicative of an exciting potential for Rilke in English, for his full range may only be available now in an American atmosphere enlivened and ripened by Olson's *Maximus*, Duncan's very open yet formal sequences, Ronald Johnson's resonant wordplay in *Ark*, Irby's syntactic ranginess, Eshleman's tactile interiority, and much else. Rilke's true variety can best be imagined by comparing it with our current range of poetries. The *Duino Elegies* have Olson's length and endurance with a hint of Ashbery's rhetorical ease. For the *Sonnets to Orpheus* we need to imagine something at once formal and relaxed, abstract and personal—a mixture of Zukofsky and Snyder, maybe, with Duncan's sense of flow. It happens that there is a booklength sequence in English inspired by and modelled on *New Poems*—Lowell's *History*, to the compactness of which we might further imagine Bunting's *sound* to envision a true complement. If we're ever to have a fully satisfying Rilke in English, the native terrain is going to have to be taken into account more adequately than the translators have thus far. Why demand less for a poet who was "poetry itself"?

Carl Rakosi

MODULES

Watching
old frog.
Plophh!
There goes
old Bashō
himself,
jumping
balls
and all,
into
the pond
again.

How dee.
Must be
Spring.

And great
to be
in a small
mode!

Stradivari
mixing
varnish
with the
beetle's
chitin.

To con-
solidate
and keep
the wood-
sound
natural?

And Sugano,
first
in audio,
carving
solid
briar root,
from where
the physical
properties
enter
the superlative
cartridge
soundlessly
as a mystique
in Orfeo's
perfect system.
After which
a great
trembling
of air
into music
for a techno-
logical
passage
on a stylus

from the earth
to black art.

Thom Gunn

Three Poems

TENDERLOIN

This poverty recognizes
a street only as link
between corners greasy
with expedient, corners
turned or waited on
slippery as they may be
for transactions, or news of them.

Not poverty beaten
down, poverty rather
on the make, without being
clever enough to make it.
Smallish sums pass hands.
This poverty seeks out
stereotype: gentle
black whore, foul-mouthed
old cripple, snarling skinhead,
tottering transvestite, etc.
City romantics.
Come on, you,
obey your impulse,
costs only a little more
than in the country.

It's all so
slippery, but
you might say one lubricant
is as good as another.
And there's no such thing
as an insincere
erection is there?

Think of Spanish
fly, it irritates
the urethra which
has been capable, however
of responding
to more delicate stimuli.

And of the loins too,
firm open slopes that lead
to the padded valley
Tender loin
protecting the serviceable
channel and glands
delicate almost as
eyeballs — Tender-
ness anaesthetized and irritated

Strip it bare

Grease it well
with its own foul
lubricant

Against the grit
of its own sharp corners
scrape it to orgasm

THE HONESTY

Every death he said
strengthens my life, he
was referring to the deaths
of friends. Little ogre,
vampire brat, his address
Ego Castle, where he has
thrived sixty years
on the vegetable
rinds of the strong, the
gifted, the fortunate,
or the simply kind. He
hates such fare. Sometimes
he gets a bit of their
blood too, as from
a scratched finger, tastier
than the carrot peel
of their detached reviews.
The dribble of blood
(Please let me lick
it Sir he says)
is a symbol. Remember
he was taught a lot about
symbols when he belonged
to a student body, wretchedly
undistinguished from a mass
of other limbs and faces.
He's just a would-be
vampire, but he does have
his fantasies! Every
death, he is correct,
darkens the red outline of
the now ambulatory castle,
sinewed, and thickly
veined, against the withering
landscape. Does he know
that the depopulation in progress
makes for fewer
bleeding fingers? Well he
can lick his own, by
the time he is ninety he will
be piercingly evident,
Crusoe against the sands.

IN TIME OF PLAGUE

My thoughts are crowded with death
and it draws so oddly on the sexual
that I am confused
confused to be attracted
by, in effect, my own annihilation.
Who are these two, these fiercely attractive men
who want me to stick their needle in my arm?
They tell me they are called Brad and John,
one from here, one from Denver, sitting the same
on the bench as they talk to me,
their legs spread apart, their eyes attentive.
I love their daring, their looks, their jargon,
and what they have in mind.

Their mind is the mind of death.
They know it, and do not know it,
and they are like me in that
(I know it, and do not know it)
and like the flow of people through this bar.
Brad and John thirst heroically together
for euphoria — for a state of ardent life
in which we could all stretch ourselves
and lose our differences. I seek
to enter their minds: am I a fool,
and they direct and right, properly
testing themselves against risk,
as a human must, and does,
or are they the fools, their alert faces
mere deaths heads lighted glamorously?
I weigh possibilities
till I am afraid of the strength
of my own health
and of their evident health.

They get restless at last with my indecisiveness
and so, first one, and then the other,
move off into the moving concourse of people
who are boisterous and bright
carrying in their faces and throughout their bodies
the news of life and death.

Hayden Carruth

Four Poems

MEDITATION IN THE PRESENCE OF "OSTRICH WALK"

Of the two cardinals the female is both bolder and more "beautiful."
She comes
To the railing, crest raised high, snapping her eyes this way and that,
Uttering the little nasal ech-ech of fear and belligerence,
Then down to the lower travis, then finally to the flagstones, where
she feeds.
Now comes the male, seeing the way is safe, and begins to hull seeds
and feed them
To her. The mind performs its wearisome gyrationing. The female
accepts
These token mouthfuls, but eats on her own between them. She is very
obviously
Able to take care of herself. Although most people say otherwise, and
say so vehemently,
The difference between Floyd Bean and Joe Sullivan is distinct, crucial,
And unique. I move my hand to rewind the tape and the cardinals
Are gone forever. Ora pro nobis, my good St. Chance, my darling.

THE AVENUE LINED WITH AMERICAN CHESTNUT TREES IS MORE THAN A TEXTBOOK

And the Chinese garden near Mobile, Alabama, is a perfect postcard.
Oh, yes, whatever imperfections exist there. The paths on the
sloping knolls
Make linear curvations, as on a shimmering silk panel, and a stream,
connecting the two ponds,
Twinkles beneath the arched bridge with bentwood railings.
Arranged just so are five ducks. Mandarins? The mind jactitates,
But that is another science. (How delicious, murmurs the contralto
of Mr. Stevens.)
The pagoda broods exiguously and exactly, a *trompe* off center.
On the facing hill is the false gateway, inversely arched and with
colored ideographs
Painted in slight exaggeration on the hatches, the whole gate itself
an ideograph,
But lo! it opens, swings wide at a touch, and there
Is a deciduous utility pole surrounded by a blanket of colorful
broken glass.
Bless me, Monsieur Villiers, for a moment I thought you were attempting
To convince me. *Félicitations!* You have avoided the teleological
brilliantly.

PROLEGOMENON TO A FANTASIZED PROPAEDEUTICS FOR KATHLEEN ROBERTS

O my dear, my little and young and bewildered and overburdened, my
parageniture,
I would, Kate, if I could get out of this old and ossified vocabulary,
If I could sing in the spring descants of your new song,
If I could seek far back in my childhood or far forward in yours
the images of your speeding apprehensions,
Or if, better, I could commune with you in our essential but impeded
sameness wordlessly,
I would ask you in utmost urgency to teach me sanity and wholeness,
To teach me everything you feel in your awareness of change and
divorcement, the world and time already your afflictions,

To teach me how to *understand*, how to fear and feel,
To bring forth from the soul your eager and still intrepid impulses
of love,
And I would offer you in return I do not know what, for all I have
in myself
Seems finished to me,
And I am to myself as bones to the Sonoran winds.
Yet dear Kate, my love still engenders this dream of an ancient book
Found in a house of stone, in darkness,
Its binding broken, its pages dry and crumbling,
In which like sapient tears the charactery still flows, a moist
animation of words from the source
Of primal pathos and intelligence, from beside the little fire in
the great woods,
A book I dream for you.
Kate, the book does not exist, it cannot, it is unwritten forever.
But will you share my dream?

NOT BY ANY MEANS HAVE I NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME

observed the green wave breaking and cresting. But this
is a new year, a new place, and the tall lilacs
at the back of the garage are leaping
up and over the wall and toward my window,
almost full. And all
the yard
is a crashing and falling of green with new menace.

Eliot Weinberger

A portrait of Pol Pot

KAMPUCHEA

I.

In 1969, there were 7,000,000 people in Cambodia. 90% of the peasants owned their own land, and the country, producing more food than it needed, shipped rice abroad. The government, such as it was, was ruled by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was popular among the peasantry and despised by the middle class. Despite personal excesses, he had successfully maintained Cambodia's neutrality through the Southeast Asian wars. Leftist guerillas, whom Sihanouk called "Khmer Rouge," had a few hundred troops in the mountains.

On March 18, 1969, the aerial bombardment of Cambodia by the United States began. These were the secret "Menu" operations—Breakfast, Lunch, Supper, Dinner, Dessert, Snack—and their purpose was the destruction of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese supply lines and "sanctuaries." They were a military failure, and an unknown number of Cambodian civilians were killed.

On March 18, 1970, the government of Sihanouk was overthrown by Lon Nol, the Prime Minister whose personality, mirrored back on

itself, was said to be as palindromic as his name. His press conferences alternated between long silences and lectures on ancient Khmer history. Within a year he was a stroke victim. Yet he remained in power, his presence giving U.S. and Cambodian officers and bureaucrats free rein.

Six weeks after the March coup, American and the particularly cruel South Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia. The bombardment became public and regular. From 1969 to 1973, the United States dropped 1,078,258,000 pounds of bombs on the country. The larger bombs created craters 18 feet deep and 60 feet in diameter.

By 1974, 80% of the rice paddies were abandoned, 75% of the draft animals destroyed. Millions were refugees, fleeing the American planes, the South Vietnamese troops, and the Khmer Rouge who, as the only opposition to Lon Nol, had grown numerous and strong. The economy shifted from agriculture to one based on arms and the jetsam of troops. Fortunes were made by officials and merchants. For the rest, starvation was prevalent. A bowl of soup which had cost 4 riels in 1970, now cost 300. In the capital Phnom Penh, now five times its prewar population, most of the trees had died, their bark stripped and eaten. Animals in the zoo were eaten.

By 1975, 500,000 Cambodians were dead.

On April 17, 1975 the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. Cambodia was renamed Democratic Kampuchea, and the 2,000,000 inhabitants of the city, as well as those in the other cities and large towns were immediately forced to evacuate, regardless of age or health.

The people were divided into three categories. The first group, known as the "old people," were Khmer Rouge supporters and those who lived in previously liberated areas of the country. The second group, the "new people," were those from the unliberated pockets, mainly the cities. The third group included those who had worked in the Lon Nol regime as civil servants, police, soldiers. Beyond this taxonomy were the larger minorities: Chinese, Vietnamese, and the Cham, and Islamic people.

The third group and their families were quickly executed. The minorities wer exiled or killed. The "New People" were marched into the countryside where, under the direction of "Old People," everyone over the age of six worked in the paddies or on huge irrigation projects in brigades as large as 20,000. They worked 18 hours a day for no wages. The pieces of canals they built did not link; their dams could not hold water. While many of the workers died of starvation, what rice they harvested was packed and shipped to an unknown destination.

Each "new" person was required to prepare an autobiography. On the basis of these texts, enemies of the state were discovered and eliminated: doctors, technicians, Buddhist monks, teachers, intellectuals, students. Anyone who had studied abroad was killed, anyone who spoke

French, anyone with fair skin, anyone who wore glasses. Survival was possible only for those who successfully obscured their pasts.

Overseas Cambodians were urged to return to their country to build Kampuchea. About a thousand did so, and eighty-five survived. It is also said that:

—Of 50,000 monks, 900 survived;
—Of 300 journalists, 5 survived;
—Of 416 art students, 14 survived;
—Of 41 librarians, 6 survived;
—Of 24,336 teachers and professors, 3050 survived.

The slogan for the "new people" was:

PRESERVE THEM—NO PROFIT!
EXTERMINATE THEM—NO LOSS!
WE WILL BURN THE OLD GRASS AND THE NEW WILL GROW.

To save ammunition, victims were clubbed to death, or had their throats slit with a notched sliver of bamboo. Babies were tossed into the air to be caught on the point of a bayonet. The craters left by the American bombs were used for mass graves.

All books, wristwatches, radios, cameras, television sets, individual cooking utsensils, musical instruments, religious objects, family photographs and works of art were destroyed. All Buddhist shrines and pagodas, all schools, universities, libraries and theaters were razed or turned into storehouses, pigsties, prisons. In Phnom Penh the Catholic Church was dismantled stone by stone. Street signs in the deserted city were painted over, white.

Kampuchean women and girls were required to wear their hair short. All citizens dressed in black; one suit of clothes per year was issued. Existing families were broken up; marriages required state approval and were held once a year in mass ceremony. Living quarters—large dormitories with long sleeping platforms—were segregated by sex and age. Non-conjugal sex was prohibited, as were all holidays, festivals, public and private pleasure activities.

There was no currency, no Western medicine, no postal service, no telegraph, no telephones. No conversation was allowed after dark, and no foreign words could be spoken. A four-page newspaper was published rarely, and was not available to the public. Radio Phnom Penh was played over loudspeakers in the fields. This was the national anthem, in the official translation:

> Bright red Blood which covers towns and plains
> Of Kampuchea, our motherland,
> Sublime Blood of workers and peasants,
> Sublime Blood of revolutionary men and women fighters!

The Blood changing into unrelenting hatred
And resolute struggle,
On April 17th, under the flag of Revolution,
Free from slavery!

There were no schools for children over ten. (Kheu Samphan, a founder of the Khmer Rouge, had said, "The more man is educated, the more deceitful he becomes.") Those younger attended one hour or less a day, memorizing songs and slogans. Reading and writing were prohibited throughout the country. Children who misbehaved in class were killed in front of their classmates. Sometimes the children were required to kill their classmates. Young soldiers received daily training in the "cruelty game": clubbing dogs and cats, setting cages of mice on fire, chopping off the tails of monkeys, feeding the monkeys—or occasionally children—alive to the crocodiles.

Kampucheans were instructed to emulate, not the ant or bee, but the ox: it works when it is told to work, eats where it is told to eat, lives always under yoke or tether. They were to live in the spirit of three renunciations: renunciation of personal attitudes, renunciation of material goods, renunciation of personal behavior. (Kheu Samphan had said: "We will be the first nation to create a completely Communist society without wasting time on intermediate steps.")

No leaders were mentioned by name. Kampucheans were told only to obey *Angka,* the Organization, and its local representatives, the peasant district leaders and the young boys with submachine guns. The country was completely sealed from the outside world; in the West Khieu Samphan was believed to be the head of *Angka.*

On September 29, 1977, more than two years after the Khmer Rouge victory, Pol Pot appeared in Peking to announce that *Angka* was in fact the Communist Party, and that he was both head of the Party and Prime Minister of Kampuchea. Following purges and shifts of power still unknown, a ruling quaternity had emerged: Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, and their wives, Khieu Ponnary and Khieu Thirith, who were sisters. Khieu Samphan was revealed to be merely a figurehead.

Litttle is known of Pol Pot. He has rarely spoken in public, been interviewed or photographed. His few public statements sound like this: "More and more friends do come to visit Kampuchea, but we have to make our country neater and more beautiful before we can receive guests." Or: "In terms of material achievement, such as factories, grain output, cultural activities and so on, performances have been modest, but we are very pleased with the development of the revolutionary movement of the masses."

He was born in 1928, and spent six years, like many Cambodian men, as a Buddhist monk. He went to Paris in 1949 to study radio electronics; returned to Phnom Penh in the early 1950's to teach at a

private school; became a well-known journalist; and was Deputy Secretary General of the underground Communist Party in 1962. In 1963 he disappeared for a dozen years. His name is a pseudonym.

Pol Pot's vision of Kampuchea was modeled on the reign of Suryavaram II, the 12th century ruler whose slaves built Angkor Wat and an elaborate hydraulic system. In Khmer, the word for "revolution" is *bâmbah-bàmbor* ("uprising" plus "reconstruction"). Under Pol Pot, the word used for "revolution" was *pativattana* ("return to the past").

On January 7, 1979, the Vietnamese army captured Phnom Penh, ending the Pol Pot regime. In the three years and nine months of Democratic Kampuchea, some 2,000,000 had died of execution, starvation, exhaustion.

The retreating Khmer Rouge troops burned fields and granaries. In the chaos of displaced millions attempting to return to their villages or find surviving family members, there was little production of food. It is said that 700,000 died in the resulting famine.

II.

The "slaughter" by the Khmer Rouge, said Noam Chomsky in 1977, *is a New York Times invention.*

As an ideologue, he was wrong. But as a linguist? What is *slaughter*? An accident of speech, easily mistyped into *laughter.* A word without reference for most of us, a word to be placed in quotation marks, taken on hearsay—an invention. And what is Kampuchea for us, the outsiders, but the inventions of the New York Times, and the stacks of United Nations reports, the microfilmed documents that whirred past my eyes in a library basement, the tales of ideologically selected survivors, the autopsies and revisions executed by journalists, "experts," and the politically convinced.

Kampuchea is nothing for us but a heap of words, and a few photographs: the piles of skulls; the map of the country, now on exhibit, made of human bones and hair; the sign of the security regulations in Tuol Seng prison, now translated for visitors, which ends (more words) "IF YOU DON'T FOLLOW ALL THE ABOVE RULES, YOU WILL GET MANY MANY LASHES OF ELECTRIC WIRE"; and the rare portrait of Pol Pot, transmitted by satellite from Peking in 1977: a middle-aged man with a pear-shaped head, a crewcut, eyes that stare into the camera, mouth a printed smudge—a face one wouldn't recognize on the street, the face of a police composite.

It is a heap of words: facts and specimens of local speech to be arranged on the page as I have done. Trying to think about Kampuchea, I begin in the only way I know how, by laying out the details: a little anthology, a still life (or more exactly, grim joke, a *nature morte*). I add

it up, and try to find the word that equals the sum, hoping that a word is the beginning of understanding. Not *genocide,* a legal term for a specific kind of mass murder, and not applicable here where killer and killed are indistinguishable. Not *holocaust,* that certain fire in history, a word that belongs to its moment. Not *atrocity, horror, disaster,* for they are now the stuff of everyday speech, their referents ranging from Hiroshima to Hollywood. There is, I think, only one word for what occurred in Cambodia during those three years and nine months: *Kampuchea.* A word with no other meaning, a word that doubles back on itself.

Kampuchea is a word with no synonym for Kampuchea was, above all, a totality, an entity complete unto itself. And more—it was a work of art, a fully realized act of the imagination, a vision fulfilled, Utopia. It was all of these things—if we take the words *art, imagination, vision, Utopia* to mean their opposite, to stand for words we do not possess: an art, an imagination, a vision, a Utopia in the service of destruction, in the service of death.

Kampuchea was, according to Ieng Sary, "something that never was before in history." Other bloodthirsty nations have had their barbaric logic. In ideological societies, a certain kind of human, or human behavior, is perceived as the *enemy,* the obstacle that must be eliminated (through war, genocide, purge) if that society is to be perfected. In some religious societies, an artificial cycle of life and death (sacrifice and rebirth) must be maintained to ensure the continuance of the cosmic cycle. In the recent cults of mass suicide, there is the belief that we are only here on earth as a way-station to the paradise beyond death. But in Kampuchea, man himself was the enemy—the works of man, human acts, human nature.

Like all Utopias, it was dedicated to the creation of a New Man—but a New Man so unrecognizable that to think about Kampuchea, to try to think about Kampuchea, is to find oneself in an imagination tht cannot be imagined; a world where, as in the streets of Phnom Penh, the signs are painted over, white. There everything is the same, but different. A sign is a sign, but it is illegible, even to the inhabitants. And yet it is still a sign . . .

Each image of Kampuchea begins in familiarity and ends in another world. I think of misbehaving as a boy in school, and then I imagine being killed, there on the spot, for it. I think of that universal gesture of throwing a small child in the air: the screams of the child, half-fear, half-delight; the hands of the adult or elder child reaching up. It is at the edge of the social contract: power used for the production of pleasure, the domestic benevolent dictatorship. Every mind has this memory—as child, as adult, as observer. But to imagine Kampuchea is to see (or to be) that child falling through the air, falling not toward the familiar outstretched hands, but to the point of a bayonet.

The perversion of the routine gesture is a commonplace of political

history: the prince is handed the goblet of wine, and the wine is poisoned. (Today one starts one's car and the car blows up, one opens a letter and the letter blows up. A microcosm of the nuclear disaster: when the Bomb goes off, we will all be incinerated in the middle of the most ordinary tasks.) But what is particularly Kampuchean was the elaborate variety, the multiplications of this perversion of the everyday. In Kampuchea, almost any gesture led to death.

It is easy to imagine oneself as a victim. (I wear glasses; I know foreign languages; I write . . .) But such thinking becomes a literal dead-end: to imagine oneself as dead is not to think about Kampuchea at all. Nor is it difficult, raised on images of murder, to imagine oneself, at least once, as a murderer. But Kampuchea was something more. It requires that one imagine oneself as a murderer in a society where all the living are murderers or accomplices, where there are no demarcated groups of murderers and murdered, where murder is the ordinary, and eating, sleeping, making love, making conversation, making art, the extraordinary. To think about Kampuchea one must imagine, not acts of murder, nor death itself, but a life of death. And it is here where my mind blanks out. Absolute horror, like bliss, is a world from which human speech cannot return.

I find myself circling back around the figure of Pol Pot, trying to read that almost blank page. He has at least one historical predecessor, the Chinese general Zhang Xian-zhong, who slaughtered the 100,000 inhabitants of a Szechuan city in the 17th century, and then erected a stone to commemorate the event, with this inscription:

> HEAVEN BESTOWS A HUNDRED GRAINS UPON MANKIND.
> MAN OFFERS NOT A SINGLE GOOD DEED TO RECOMPENSE HEAVEN.
> KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL.

[Zhang Xian-zhong believed that he himself was not a man, but the incarnation of a star sent down by the Jade Emperor to kill all men. And though he particularly relished the death of scholars, he also thought of himself, through a concidence of names, as the god of literature.] Yet what is most remarkable about Pol Pot is that, perhaps uniquely in history, he was a despot who erected no stones to himself, no "personality cults," no icons. He was the invisible ruler: both the throne and the power behind the throne.

In the absence of concrete information, I cast about for clues, and I land on his years in radio electronics. The radio leads me, like most roads, to poetry. Since the invention of radio it has become a frequent metaphor for the poetic process: the poet as vehicle of the muse has become the poet as antennae of the race. The words are out there; writing is a kind of "tuning in."

In this context, Ezra Pound's World War II broadcasts become a full-scale classical tragedy. Not the beliefs expressed and his Fascist partisanship; they were merely loathesome. What was tragic was this act of *hubris:* the poet attempting to become the muse.

Pol Pot too, remaining invisible, wanted to be (and became, as Pound never did) that bodiless Voice. It is the Voice that tells us to go on the mountain and slay our son; the Voice that tells us, suddenly, to kill a dozen people in a restaurant; the Voice that tells the thousands to erect the pyramids of sacrifice and the extermination camps; the Voice that sends us into battle. (How different is it, I wonder, from the Voice that dictates a line?) And more, he was the Voice that spoke to the voices that spoke: in Kampuchea all forms of communication were outlawed, except the radio. Yet Pol Pot himself was rarely, perhaps never heard.

To be not only poet, but the muse; to become inspiration itself. To be not only king, but kingship: to dissolve into pure power. It has been the dream of centuries: to become the invisible worm, the force that blocks reason and impels some poor peasant to run a bayonet through a child. Can such a story ever be known? What words could tell it?

[1982]

Two Greenlandic Folktales

(Tr. from the Greenlandic by Lawrence Millman)

THE FOX-WIFE AND THE PENIS OF THE LAKE

A man and his wife, and they lived all alone. Summers the man would go out and hunt in his kayak for long periods of time. Once, when the man came back, his wife was nowhere to be seen. It happened like this again and again; the wife would return home only after the husband. Then one warm day he told her he was going out in his kayak as usual. But instead he followed her and saw her come to a small lake, where she shouted: "Penis! Penis! Penis!" And then a huge penis emerged from the waters of the lake and his wife made love with it.

Now the man felt the greatest hatred for his wife. So it wasn't long before he went to the small lake again, alone, and there he shouted: "Penis! Penis! Penis!" At this the penis again appeared and the man beat it to death and cut it into small pieces with his hunting knife. Then he came home and proceeded to throw these penis-pieces into the meat pot. When they were cooked, he roused his wife: "Supper's ready . . . " The wife started to eat. "Hm-m-m, this tastes good," she said. "Well, it's your lover from the lake," he replied. At that she let out a moan and dropped to the earth, pulling her sleeping skins over her. Then the man gathered an assortment of blow-flies, maggots, and worms. These he placed beneath her sleeping skins. They ate her up entirely. And when there was nothing left, he set a fire and burned them all to death.

Now the man was all alone. He went out on his hunting trips as usual. But once he came back and there was meat in the pot and his kamiks had been mended and stockings put into them. The same thing happened again and again. One day, instead of leaving, he hid behind the tent. And he saw: a she-fox, quite handsome, her tail like a top-knot,

cooking up a pot of meat. She looked very happy. Soon, however, she caught sight of him and she began crying and pleading. It was to no avail. He captured her and made her his new wife. And she waited for him patiently when he was out hunting.

Then it happened that the two of them left for winter quarters. On their way they came across another married couple, a piece of shit and a rabbit, man and wife. And with this couple they decided to stay for the winter. It wasn't long before they had exchanged wives. The man lay with the rabbit and the piece of shit with the she-fox. But the fox said: "This place smells of shit!" And the piece of shit replied: "Whew, fox stink!" Upon hearing this, the little fox was quite upset and she vanished through a hole in the doorskin. The man had some harsh words with the piece of shit, for it seemed to him that it was responsible for his losing his new wife. "Well, you must go after her, then," the shit told him.

So the man set out and began to follow her tracks in the snow. He saw two sets of prints; on one side the footprints of a woman, and on the other the tracks of a fox. He followed these prints right up to a little cave. She's gone into this cave, he thought. So he called out to her: "Wife, Are you in there?" And then out of the cave came something that was half human and half blow-fly, saying: "Love me! Love me!" When the man said no, the creature went back in again. Then he called out once more for his wife. And now it was a she-maggot that came out, and it said: "Love me! Love me!" But the man would not have her, either. At last he entered the cave himself to retrieve his wife. Inside, there was only a worm. And this is what the worm said to him:

> "He who has burned me,
> he who has singed me,
> he who has murdered me,
> let him suffer the worst of sufferings."

Blow-fly, maggot, and worm—they were all creatures the man had destroyed. From then on, when he came back from his hunting, he was alone, quite alone.

UKUAMÂQ

There was a woman named Ukuamâq who desired her son's wife. The son was a great hunter and often he would be gone for many days at a time, hunting hooded seals. Once, while he was gone, Ukuamâq made herself a penis out of seal-bone and skins. She attached this penis to her waist and paid a call on the wife, who took one look at it and exclaimed: "How nice . . . " Then they slept together. Shortly thereafter Ukuamâq began to go out hunting, just like her son. And when she'd come back, she'd take off her clothes and flap her breasts up and down, saying: "Sleep with me, my dear little wife . . . "

It happened that the son returned and he saw his mother's seals lying in front of the house. "Whose catch is this?" he said to his wife.

"None of your business," she replied.

Now he was very suspicious of her. He dug a hole in the ground and hid there. Soon he saw his mother rowing home in her kayak, a seal in tow. It was a big hooded seal. Mother and son never never caught anything but big hooded seals. Ukuamâq reached the land and took off her clothes, then flapped her breasts up and down, saying: "My sweet wife, my dear sweet wife, kindly delouse me . . . "

Whereupon the son came out of his hole and struck his mother to the ground, so hard that he killed her. "Now," he said to his wife, "You must come away with me."

The wife would not come. "You have killed my husband, my dear husband," she cried. Then the son saw his mother's penis, fashioned from seal-bone and skins and very worn at the tip. He had no choice but to strike his wife dead, too.

The man went away and built a new house a great distance from this place. And there he sits to this day, happily delousing himself.

NOTE

Lawrence Millman writes: "I captured *The Foxwife and the Penis of the Lake* this summer in East Greenland from a seal hunter named Ib Brodersen. He told it to me first in Greenlandic (an Eskimo dialect) and then in Danish, which language I know—I've smoothed out the latter version which is the one you have. Doubtless it'll appear in my book of Greenlandic translations "Smell of Earth and Clay," to be published later this year by the White Pine Press.

It might interest you to know that the 'penis of the lake' motif is quite common in Arctic folklore. You will find variants of my story in books by Franz Boas and Knut Rasmussen about Arctic Canada. As nearly as I can tell, the 'shit' motif is peculiarly Greenlandic. Shit, wiping moss, urine—they are obsessions in the stories and songs of this island land. It's bound up in ways with the anal/urinary outlets, considered the entry places and exits of the human soul.

I'd like your readers to consider the Fox Wife tale less as a piece of eccentric ethnicity and more as simply a short story in its own right. Ever since my salad days among the Irish *senachies*, I've been convinced that the folktale is a legitimate species of 'short story,' only it happens to perform via plot what *The New Yorker* set pieces perform with brow-knit labour, verbal density, and so on. The Fox-Wife tale likewise seems to me to pre-empt and post-empt Freud in a single 3 page blow, while poor Ann Beattie is still struggling to get up from her shrink's couch.

Good to know that you're a fellow lower-body fetishist. I strongly recommend that you locate a copy of *Scatologic Rites of All Nations* by John G. Bourke. This is a veritable Bible of traits/customs/folklore all pertaining to anal and urinary functions, many religious, a few mundane. First published in the 1890s, it was a 'forbidden' book until a 1935 reissue by the American Anthropological Society. Bourke was a U.S. Cavalry Captain who sniffed about in Indian middens. From there he went on to such wonders as the admirers of the Dalai Lama who preserved his shit in amber. By comparison, I should say, Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* is rather hygienic.

In Eskimo folklore, when you have an animal or material object (like, for example, shit) lying with or conversing with a human, the assumption is that it's something *in human form*. In other words, amusing as the spectacle might seem, the piece of shit that makes love to the Fox-Wife is not intended to be an actual six-foot turd bringing her to orgasm and itself as well . . . The shit is a shit in human disguise, perhaps like so many others we know. But that penis haunts me because beyond doubt it is meant to be literal.

The polar Eskimos did not attach any stigma to natural functions or their spin-offs. Take the lowly fart, for instance. One story goes that a man swallowed a spear-point and broke wind against a herd of narwhals and the spear-point flew out his ass and penetrated each and every heart of every narwhal in that herd, thus dispatching the lot to cetacean heaven. Since that moment, the fart is mighty great magic in Eskimo lore if not in Eskimo life."

Karin Lessing

IN THE AVIARY OF VOICES

Someone

it wasn't you

said

Hello! Hello!

I could have killed
you

invisible, invisible
you

*

ambushed, I grow

feathers
in my throat

one
by one, I pluck them

while you

fly
safe

under the suave
plumage

*

in the aviary of voices

we speak the language the same

in and out / between staves

that

never touch we

tear

*

the trajectory within

memory

is space reconstituted with 'masks'

striae

over a blotted mouth

*

cry out did you

I

as far

as

archipelago sea-wedge, echo-

less

*

from the center

"kill"

a cleavage devours

this passion

*

I carry like a white fruit

what blinds me

no one not even

you

at arm's length, ir-
reversible

*

the irregular progression of forget-

fulness roots
in the eyes, beginning

there
gulls

on bare islands: '*mon amour! mon amour!*'

as white
on WHITE

obliterates

*

SAM MESSER

John Yau

Images of masks and stuffed birds, a spinal column bending under its own weight, like a Jack-in-the-box, or a skull grinning nastily out of a man's inward-gazing face—everything in Sam Messer's drawings and paintings seems to exist in a forlorn state. No hint of sunlight, no view of the outdoors affects the isolation, even through a window. Instead, a studio or room cluttered with *memento mori* forms the realm in which the inconsolable figure(s) go about their business.

During the last three years the artist (he is in his late 20's) has expanded his repertoire of direct references to include Goya, El Greco, Chaim Soutine, Picasso, and Pollock. However, unlike many artists of his generation who appropriate images for ironic purposes or to empty them of all meaning, Messer attempts to tap the spirit imbedded in them. Typically, this is achieved through juxtaposing his art historical references with his own interpolations—for example, the images of a bird-like mask impaled on a snake swallowing its own tail are placed over a contemporary version of Goya's nude *Maja* in *For When the Maja Comes* (1985). Rather than cancelling each other out, these images form an unexplained hierarchy.

Messer's method of juxtaposition works because he manages to posit them in a pre-rational world rather than a post-Modern one. The conflation between personal *memento mori* and the art historical images of a woman becomes a hall of mirrors in which a nostalgia for the past is obviated by an awareness of the present. In the fictive realm of these interiors, the woman exists both in the everlasting *here and now* and the ever growing *then and there*. Messer's drawings and paintings strive to rise out of the chasm formed by these two conditions.

Untitled
Charcoal on paper
38" x 48"

Courtesy: Ruth Siegel Gallery

Untitled
Charcoal/acrylic paint
50" x 90"
1984

after *"The Women from 'A'"*
Charcoal
22" x 30"

"Poker Face"
24" x 24"
Oil on linen
1984

"For When the Maja Comes"
92" x 94"
Oil on linen
1985

Mike Newell

Six Poems

TWADDLE IN A PUBLIC SHRINE

Vile entropy. Wretched moon.
In somber alliance we are caught unattentive beneath your sprig.
Burdened is the faint echo of our pulse.
Harangued by ghost light from vacant stars we clamor.
The festive mind marooned.
Imbroglio in the cafeteria.
Vicarious vicars of the study hall.
Dust from ancient bones shrills the blackboard.
But is eclipsed by the duty of shrikes
Who risk detention for gaucherie in the toilets.

FIRST FROST

Pooh the annual ballyhoo sponsored by ants!
Young men with sheathknives sweated to their hips gum Skoal
and drive backroads all Sunday
looking for coon hound pups that ran off.
Ha! Ask them to disengage in hoopla.

Even as wood smoke lazes from the chimney
there is still time to stroll with yellow straws between our teeth,
for the cows to dally around the salt lick, their whishing tails
counterpoint to the monotonous scuttlebutt of insects.

LAWN LIONS IN EARLY AUGUST

Often truckle scrouch or seemingly palpate within yards of chipped deer.
They can be viewed late Sunday mornings.
Take the shortcut from Bellvedere Lake
up the dirt road to the trailer.
An old man in decolletage will be shovelling lime from a wheelbarrow.
He has no time for palaver.
Selecting instead to gaze behind, whether the dust held down.

CHILDREN AT RECESS ARE LIKE SHIPS IN CHOPPY SEAS

When talent is squandered the world does not want to know why.
It wants to know where.
How many.
Longitude and latitude.
Under what conditions.
The prevailing winds.
In a strongbox or scattered.

I want to say
those treasure hunters around us who take notes
are not swarthy men born out of wedlock
with scars on their faces.
Nor are they holy men who neither taunt or gloat.
Nowadays they jog during lunch and live in snack-towns like Buffalo.

It is enough to know the world does not care where we go wrong.
Whether we go or stay is arbitrary.
Twin letters of recommendation and a high score decide nothing.
What is accomplished without need of either is more of a measure.

The cargo in the hold is always in the hold.
At worst it is only pirated from vessel to vessel.
Transfer does not detract from intrinsic value.
It remains even if out of our grasp.
Whether in pawnshops or museums.
(And pawnshops really are the pop museums of our culture.)

Our duty is to provide a current for those messages which are not meant
for us.
Without too many questions.
Like a smuggler whose fullest life is in ballads.

THE SOIL AROUND THE ROOT

The sound of missing a deadline takes time to gather.
Volcanic activity in Mexico springs mudslides in Utah a season later.
The mind becomes unsettled without apparent cause.

The cemetery was nearly two miles from the house on Mountain St.
Aunt Sue had invited me to take a walk with her after school.
The fragility in her vice felt like a lilac branch about to snap
from a late spring snowstorm.
She was a senior.
I was in grade school.

I wasn't close with Uncle Dick.
I remember him sharing kool-aid with me by the back screen door
after he had gotten the best of me until I cried.
I also recall a grass snake being dropped into a mayonnaise jar full of frogs
we had plucked from the unmowed lawn behind the house.
The only other distinct memory I have of Uncle Dick
is when he came home from a visit to the farm
his older brother Malcolm worked near Peru.
Uncle Dick was wheezing. Tears popped from his eyes.
He grimaced and blankly cried out as he walked.
I think Grampa and Uncle Ken were supporting him from either side.
Uncle Dick was naked except for a rose colored blanket half dragging,
half draped over his shoulders.

Uncle Dick would lie in the upstairs hall bedroom and wheeze.
(I always thought he was faking and sneaked upstairs to catch him
sliding off blankets piled into hay mounds.)
In that hallway bedroom Uncle dick labored until he died
at age 13 of rheumatic fever.

Aunt Sue and I turned up the dirt cemetery road.
On either side a marsh tore at the senses with erratic sights and sounds.
She began kicking a stone as we walked.

I started kicking one too.
I was ahead of her fiercely intent on my stone when she called out.
As I turned she kicked her stone to me.
I kicked it back.
This is how we came up the winding road
with me walking backwards.
The mute stone hopping between us.

THE QUIET MONOPOLY ALL POETS SHARE

Incessant yammering is the spirit's applause.
A guy wire supports and restrains without distinction.
The body hums at the slightest provocation.
Through irregular heating of the earth's skin the breeze stirs.
And so the body's incantations.
Commonly thought of as prescribed by wind
but also by fires, digestive tracts, webs of feet, and bushy tails
pollen migrates.

To inquire where the spirit first heard its song
is to disturb the dream
of swallows returning to neglected smokestacks in spring.
Of cranes to Creamer's Field in Fairbanks during breakup.
But these are the glamour species protected by faint notions of what we
would become.

Who speaks for the hungry thing inside us that does not purr
after being fed, that imitates bird droppings
to avoid detection, and is laced with disagreeable odors.
Our eyes are drawn like maggots to syllables which squirm like convulsing
carrion.
It is here the body breeds.
What prospers is not always erotic moths.
Houseflies have wings too.

To be the dream is not just to travel with the albatross by starlight
over huge expanses, it means also to implant
your kind like the ichneumon wasp in paralyzed larvae.
All the body loves has a bit of nonsense to it.
What lies in wait might have scales.
What breaks the plane momentarily might feed on worms.

Often the body vibrates incessantly.

Benjamin Peret

Four Poems from *Je Sublime*

Tr. from the French by
Rachel Stella and John Yau

THE SQUARE OF THE HYPOTENUSE

First flower of the chestnut tree rising like an egg
in the heads of metal men
hard as a jetty
when during the rain of ink soaking me with mirrors
your eyes magic like a butchered tree
scream at every pitch
I am Rosa
I love you as the fern of former times loves the stone
        which has made it an equation
I love you like a hug
I love you like a red frying pan in a cavern
Let your barbed wire dress
tear me with a loud racket of dishes falling down the stairs
I love you like an ear carried off by the wind
which whistles Wait
Wait until the iron has burned the shirt of dew
to make the reflection of crystal hidden in a drawer
        bloom there
wait for the soap bubble
after bursting like a czar of moles
which will never cover the beloved shoulders
to be reborn in the dust assassinated by the sun turned blue

and which I spy through the keyhole
hairy
frozen
from the prison of polar lichens where you have incarcerated me
wait threads of salt
wait cliff wine which has just crushed a sunday school
wait viscera of phosphorus which thinks only of forest fires
wait

I wait

I

Among the desires simple as a salad rising above the tall trees
drowned tomorrow in the cement spat out by bakers
who haven't any more chin hairs than a shrimp has money boxes
among all those grapes reminding me of a beggar
        at the door of a townhouse
two eyes of stone turned blue by the last quarter
slowly eat mushrooms growing peacefully
inside the little map of the world
animated by the alcohol of your voice where fireflies dance
Should a pale barberry sun rise across the large wheel of your lashes
which only knows how to grind coffee now
which I'd like to drink like a funnel I mean marzipan
larger than your image in the cupboard where I try to sleep
but which loses itself in a haunted cemetery
like a can of condensed milk in a lime kiln
and I reap the cobblestones more clearly than a flight of damsels
crossing a cloud of Greek flags faded
as a pickle preserved since my grandfather's death
should a reflection appear in a glass of bordeaux
in the countryside where I look for myself like a dog
        chasing its tail
and the central brigades of radios
which ordinarily know only how to grumble like funerals
will hum in my ears open like a seashell about to burst
Rosa is here

A H

When breathless as a drunken eiderdown
I will fall like a pot of boiling oil in a history of France
you will stay on the edge of the floorboards which don't yet dare crack
to make eyes at the phantoms tramping in their furrows
and fighting like weathervanes in an amusement park
where the massacre of the games prepares the burning
        of diamond rivers
and the loons in a soil of sour milk
you will stay like a fountain of turquoises amidst
        a hecatomb of blacks
bristling with feathers from bishop-headed crows
so that the bank explodes like a crepe that sticks to the ceiling
But it would suffice if your spring shower gaze on a town
        of Leyden jars
colored itself with the first sun of the year seen
        through drawn blinds
so that from the furzy moor inhabited by rusted saucepans
        there spurts
a forest of baobabs with minister pendants and nebula necklaces
crisscrossed by the flight of great fire birds
lost from the start
lost at the finish
But this will not be because the shouting star has plunged itself
into the head of a comet which says No
the way the stationmaster's flag makes the locomotive lather
and the cops' bullets whistle around me
Liberté liberté chérie
sung to the air of chinese lanterns
like a brake which grinds a cauliflower song

NEBULA

When the night of butter leaving the churn
drowns the train station moles whose eyes trumpet
and grow larger like an approaching subway stop
and cloak themselves in your image
that turns in my head like a heliotrope crazed by seasickness
all the collar buttons jump like sheep perched on a powder magazine
and throw big spurts of neckties into the distance
but you pass like a current of dew-charged air with the handles
    of a smoldering lamp
and you close the door which makes the noise of a spade
    burying a potato
the door of a mine shaft
the door of an irredentist province
where I prowl in the whirlwind of your gazes
that turn the trees green again and blue between them
unable to stop opening demolition yards in the middle of forests
where the most beautiful breasts in the world separate to shout
No
while ruffling their tresses of black sun
illuminating a storm crossing the causeway
when the waterdrop of your feet places itself there
like a busy signal in an ear
that the waiting has made into a sentry box inhabited by gnawing rats
before it becomes a laundry boat beached on a desert island
or a sailboat forgotten in a pullman car
No is only a bunch of radishes drying like some president
    or other of the republic
until they are transformed into a white and deserted square
bordered by palaces of fluorescent mica
where
amidst battering rams rusted
and devoured by flowering honeysuckle
suddenly will squirt a column of blood and forget-me-nots
    in the shape of your hands and wearing phosphorus yesses
creating around them huge aurorae boreali of ostrich plumes
    and peaches
amplifying themselves like a sea you don't want to cross
and which yaps at your feet like a conch
where the echo of your voice is found again

Geoffrey O'Brien

TIBET

The museum founders.

I keep taking my mask off to reveal the mask under the mask.

It took all day to make the incision.

Whose idea was it to put a tunnel here?

The shape of the water is almost coherent.

A snap, the yellow's gashed.

Now he will sing the song of the teeth.

The carving of a spark amounts to a bewildered wall.

Lip answering lip and eyes eyes all across the pond.

Too fragile: they've reluctantly said goodbye to your platform.

It ends between them, between each of them.

That was no cavern, that was a filter.

What flutters in the spectrum is your blood.

The bird burrows in the skeletal air.

The price of soil is ash.

The fires burn up the whispers and the morning washes them.

.

The gilded edge wants to suggest a flicker.

.

I worship destruction.

.

Blue is bottomless and red is bottomless but not at the same time.

.

At the same time the army invades and the calves shudder.

.

There was a room in which I am standing.

.

How far did the wind travel to find a container?

.

The mountain formed out of sheer laziness.

.

If I can stop humming I will remind you.

.

A knob of bone rounds.

.

Smoke settles in the trail.

August Kleinzahler

Five Poems

BY THE TAGUS

With fond Jean in the pastelaria at closing
coffee ends
as did the Roman, Visigoth & Moor
in a weird apse
bastard tile

A white peacock screams
from the castle above
then tears the night apart once more

Love *Love*

How it scalds the rainbow pheasant
ibex dove flamingo

Love

in the castle garden

Love

in a searing cry

dragging its spur through the harbor night

then gone
in a suturing breeze

EVENING, IN A MINOR

Methane is coming off them.
they pick at the rind
till worms find good jelly.
A muzz of voices, bonding —
a cloud, a caul, a cowl:
an atmosphere of sorts.
Wolf valence.

I know a pocket:
lily dust on the table,
cat in the fog.
                It's the world turned us out
before the membrane blew
and virus loose,
shards of toy biting anything pith.

A mutation, bless us,
till the sun undoes.
An isle —
plenty crayfish, lots bananas.
And . . .
            Segovia,
Segovia playing Fernando Sor.

WORKOUT, WITH NIB

Incise
the sheath of silky air,
fuchsia, gold

The locus you don't want —
break there
or it breaks

Foetid, burning —
after each angle worked,
deal made . . .

Over you,
flesh bubbling up
like paint off a board

Très cher, trop cher —
each beam shivering
loose of its joint

Boy
with a flame
in a river of cicadas

That spot, there
break it,
there

Fat
jumping in the sausage skin —
burst it

Get in,
pay the bill,
get out

YE OLDEN BARGE

As Plot rounded the corner
ants got him,
twirling in his sugar and pith

took the ground out
from under him,
tunneling, putting down eggs

dismantled the protein church
within sight of Denouement —
no ride.

To get from here to there
in the grand curve,
every inch a storm of bites . . .

POPPIES IN THE WIND

The honeybee
painting himself his delight inside her
the both of them
adrift
tossing in fits of wind
petals of her knees
raised up around him
petal arms
encircling in shadow his cameo'd frenzy
hosts of them
open or clenched
waving
sheathed or half out
of their witch-hats
at May's meridian
drying like chicks in the air

Brent MacKay

Five Poems

SIX DAYS OVERDUE

A foot stretches
beneath your breast
as pink stars fall
from all the ships
blasting the date:

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

City of Camelot

Sunny Spanker

Sweet Sultan

Pacific Swan

Diana

Amazon

undo the night
like giants
yelling their brains out.

(Citizens
are trumpeting from windows
jumping
on rooftops
as our unborn child
hiccups and rolls
and we toast
the morning
waiting)

World Dove

New Apollo

BABY JAZZ

Just one thought tattoo'd like a starmap
to the hot sky of your skull and no one
on the road between here and space shooting
straight out East off the end of everything
familiar in a tincan beater choked and floored
with a kick and curse to go up and over the
river in its pale metalskin to where you cant
park standing on air so dont even think stop
cause there's no wheel on the ground no peel
on the rind just a semi burning the cold steam of a
Pacific disturbance into a turbine of confused molecules
spinning like tightly squeezed Birdman notes
doing their best to rearrange you and yours into
pieces of landscape in a blinding blend of radial
blowout and venturi effect while the contraction
list looks more and more like the countdown in a
time signature so weird no baton can say here you
rest there you go slowly and quietly with one steady
breath at first filling the abdomen and chest
relaxed as the photograph of the coach and his wife
in the middle chapters of Pregnancy Birth and
Recovery in all that on the ground luxury
man o man
here I am with a pocketful of dental floss trying
to picture biting the cord at the side of the road
with perhaps a steamy milkcow or saddlehorse giving
us the big knowing eye from across a fence.

⁂

Electric hyperventilated thunder tension contracting
back to back all Friday afternoon. Cement clouds puttied
to the mountainside weigh less than this clock buzzing
four minutes before every hour. Rain falls on the sill.
Magnetic skin contortions north to south spin the spine
link by link. We dangle between breathing.

⁂

Life is a room (at night) a drifting cube full
of whom we choose (at times) quiet as light from
a wooden lamp.

(At night) life drifts off the mountainside lit
by cubes of light in rooms full of time.

The air is full of cubes full of time drifting
into night.

Wet with rain we choose (at times) a room the
light of life drifts to quiet as night.

This night full of light in a room full of life
is love's to choose.

(At times) love drifts in quiet as light.

A star in a room drifting into life.

FARE-THE-WELL

Some cant say thanks
or shake a hand

they take dont
what they blink can

to make an end:

a watch a wallet
a warmed-over chop

(each the same
same to each)

a hardspun dread
without a friend
in sight.

ANGLE IRON

So odious
though public
a thing
as to suggest
control by
grip

the coming
and going
of rightful air
down the pipe
of any man
as if jet-fresh
oxygen
kept moist
the sack of
life in moments
of passion
without irritation
or registration
of ejaculation
on forms
a forest fell for.

Common
pyramid
crumbs
crust lash
and tongue
in days
atomic
each life
happily lives
approximating
nothing worse
than monotonous
commerce
piling up
and pulling
down.

Each man tastes
willow yellow
tallow of time
and greed
at least once
like there's
no tomorrow
and nothing else
but to swallow
a burning wick.

But fish
for example
dont logic
swallow
or wallow toxic
in uncertain
water
circling the
signature
of each rhythmic
life.

Unoffended
and otherwise
natural movement
depends on the
evolution
of efficiency
where least
effort inclines
head or wing
heron perfect
in liquid aspect
to a kinesis
continuous of
life.

POLITICS

The defaced sign
of the fascist candidate
gave me hope

A block later
I was called an asshole
and offered a fight

In broad daylight
dogs shitting
at an end of rope.

Ron Padgett

Four Poems

GOETHE

When Kenneth Koch
picked up a black camel
so neatly with his fingertips
and held it to the light —
yellow and red plaid,
and several dozen of those jackets please —
the face of the earth
had shadowy clouds over it,
tall hay waving in the wind
and pleasant adjectives alongside the brook.
Some airplanes appeared
but they were only one inch long
and so far away you have to smile
because some yellow triangles
have entered the air,
sent by the goddess of Geometry,
and whose figures are transparent
like our souls, sort of existing
and not existing at the same time.

THE WAY OF ALL HANDWRITING

As long as there is hair on the human head
And people wish to arrange it
There will be combs.

But I don't want to sign my autograph,
I want to follow a coil
Down into my desire
To fall face first
Into a blue-green swimming pool
The shape and size of my own body,
So the joke will fly away from my physiognomy
And the steel strings that hold it to my interior monologue
Fall into the ionisphere
where even combs go when they die,
Perfected, like first crayons,
Bright basic colors.

THE LITTLE PAST MIDNIGHT SNACK

On the big oak table I lay out a fresh peach on a white dish, some provolone, a knife, a glass, and a bottle of white wine. As I turn to go back into the kitchen I glance sideways at these objects. It is a Fairfield Porter painting come to life, and a painting *of* Fairfield Porter come to life. Because for just that moment he was there. He was there in the casual arrangement of beautiful things in daily life, and in the impulse to say something direct about them.

When I looked at the bread in the kitchen it reminded me of French bread, such as the funny *baguette,* and of the year I spent in Paris, among the *baguettes.* I was always happy there, even when I was said, and I'm always happy to be there. There must be unhappy people in Paris, but I don't understand them. It sounds crass, but it's like what John Havlicek said near the end of his athletic career: "I can honestly say that I have never been tired in my life." How could anyone not be happy in Paris?

How could anyone not love Fairfield Porter? Or the food on my table?

WHO AND EACH

I got up early Sunday morning
because it occurred to me that the word
which
might have come
from a combination of who and each
and reached for the *OED*
which for me
(I think of it not
as the *Oxford English Dictionary*
but as the *O Erat Demonstrandum*)
has the last word:
"Hwelc, huelc, hwaelc, huaelc, huoelc, hwaelc, wheche, weche,
whech, qwech, queche, qheche, qwel, quelk, hwilc, wilc,
hwilch, wilch, whilc, whillc, whilk, whylke, whilke, whilk,
wilke, whylk, whilk, quilc, quilke, qwilk, quylk, quhylk,
quilk, quhilk, hwic, wic, hwich, wyche, wich, hwych, wiche,
whiche, whyche, wych, whych, which, quiche, quyche, quich,
quych, qwiche, qwych, quhich, hwylc, hwulch, hulch, wulc,
whulc, wulch, whulche":
Teutonic belching.
But in little tiny type: "For the compounds *gewilc, aeghwilc,* see *Each.*"

Now, if you want to talk *belching*. . . .

It was raining outside
with the blue-gray hiss of tires
against the wet street
I would soon walk my dog in,
the street I drove an airplane up
earlier this morning in a dream
in which the Latin word *quisque* appeared to me,
as if it meant *each which*
in the sea of *eisdem, quicumque,* and *uterque.*

Thus I spend my days,
waiting for my friends to die.

HOWARD BUCHWALD

John Yau

Howard Buchwald's paintings examine contrary avenues of visual access simultaneously. There is his subjective elaboration of the Renaissance notion of the "cone of sight," as well as his rational dissembling of Modernism's insistence on flatness, universal formats, and the purity of the object. The focus of this examination, always from a personal and even eccentric point of view, is the irresolvable conflict between the "claim" of objectivity and the subjective ambition that is implicit in every perspectival system. By undermining both Renaissance and Modernist tradition to the point where they meet in enraptured tension, Buchwald achieves a stable fluidity in his paintings. In order to achieve this state of tension, the artist breaks his compositional process down into two distinct phases.

The first phase consists of determining the format to be worked on, planning the various cuts to be made, holes to be drilled, and the incisions connecting these holes. These marks are derived from Buchwald's analysis of the Renaissance convention that decress the picture to be a "window"—a plane slicing through our "cone of sight." Rather than connecting this "cone of sight" to an object(s), he returns it to the viewer's space. The holes are arbitrarily chosen points, and are meant as literal examples of where sight pierces the window of the picture plane. The center of sight they imply is pointed to by the angles with which these holes are drilled. Pairs of holes are then connected by curving paths. In the paintings these paths or incisions are brought about by leaving the canvas visible, untouched by paint. As sections of a circle, they not only imply a center of sight, but they also track the way our sight moves over the surface of the painting.

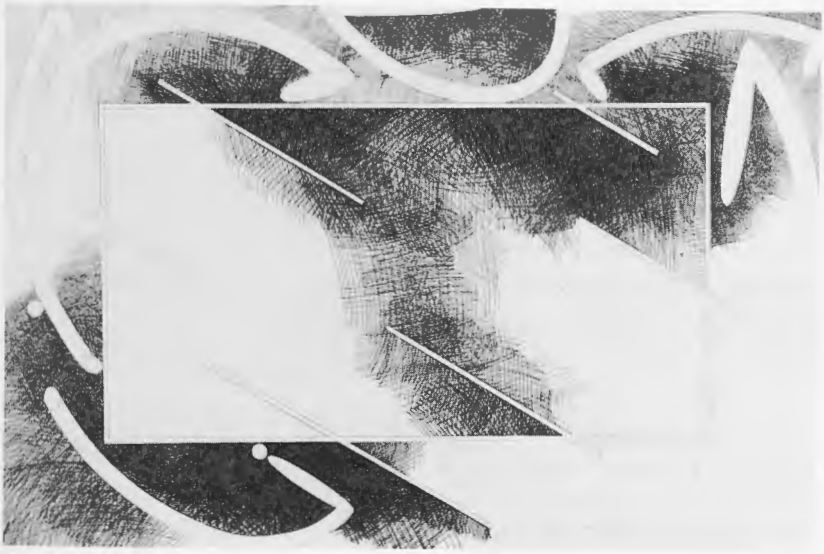
The drawing is a blueprint for the foundation of the painting. The holes, cuts, and paths form a structure upon which Buchwald will both build and react against. One of the ways he obviates the controlled format is by laying down translucent bands of paint. This luminous field is, in turn, commented upon by the unpainted paths. Paint becomes both a

Courtesy of the
Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
Photo credit: Zindman/Fremont

Untitled
Oil on linen 74½" x 100"
1981

literal skin and a concious means of implying spatial density. By carefully dissembling and recombining different perspectival systems, Buchwald reveals the artificiality of the painting, both as surface and as object. Viewers are confronted by an incompleteness that takes their participation into account.

Untitled
Pencil on museum board
40" x 60"
1983



Untitled
Pencil on museum board
38" x 59"
1983

Charles Bernstein

POUNDING FASCISM

(Appropriating Ideologies—Mystification, Aestheticization, and Authority in Pound's Poetic Practice)

> I don't know how humanity stands it
> with a painted paradise at the end of it
> without a painted paradise at the end of it
>
> —Pound, *Canto 74*

The virulent antisemitism and fascism that is not only at the core of Ezra Pound's political beliefs but also taints his poetry and poetics can be excused, moderated, or rationalized only at the expense of all such special pleading: willed ignorance allowing for a continuing reign of totalitarianism masking as authority, racism posing as knowledge, and elitism claiming the prerogatives of culture. The ingenuity of exceptions made for friends—aesthetic fellow travellers or political allies—leads readily to the global hypocrisy of, for instance, the official U.S. policy of distinguishing between the benign "authoritarianism" of Pinochet's Chile and the malignant "totalitarianism" of Jaruzelski's Poland.

But perhaps the greatest danger in an account of Pound's fascism is not that he will be given an unearned pardon by literary history but that his guilt is bracketed off from our own. For Pound's fascism is all-too-

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Presented at a panel on "Pound and Fascism," Modern Language Association convention, Washington, D.C., on December 29, 1984. The panel was moderated by Carroll F. Terrel and included Christine Froula and Robert Casillo.

easily censured, as by slap on hand, while the fascist ideas that infect his poetry and poetics seep unnamed into the orthodox cultural theory and criticism of this society.

Pound's fascism, far from hindering the canonization of his poetry by American literary culture, has been a major factor in its acceptance. For stripped of its obnoxious overtness, Pound's fascism becomes the stern but fatherly voice of authority, measuring by the Pound standard the absolute worth of the cultural production of all the societies of earth, the ultimate Core Curriculum. Without its righteously Eurocentric and imperiously authoritative undercurrent, the formal innovations of Pound's poetry would have contributed to its marginalization. This is evident from the relative marginalization of much of the formally innovative poetry of, sic, "The Pound era." Pound's status, far from being jeopardized by his political ideas, is enhanced by them.

I do not, however, equate Pound's politics with Pound's poetry. *The Cantos,* and other of Pound's work, are in many ways basically at odds with the tenets of Pound's fascist ideals. In this sense, Pound has systematically misinterpreted the nature of his own literary production; refused, that is, to recognize in it the process he vilified as usury and Jewishness. This blindness to the meaning of his work, to how in significant ways it represented what he claimed to most revile, not only contributed to the rabidness of his dogmaticism but also to the heights of magnificent self-deception and elegiac confusion that is *The Cantos* at its best.

There is a price to be paid for poetry; its practice can poison as fatally as sniffing glue or inhaling coal dust. Madame Curie did not know about the lethal aftereffects of invisible radiation when she conducted her experiments; we know from her experience that there are risks that cannot be prevented until after the first victims have made the effects visible. Is cultural megalomania a symptom of being overwhelmed by the incommensurable and intractable autonomy of fragments, that will not submit to a unitary measure, hierarchically predetermined, but which insist on making their own time and space, their own poem: never yielding to the totalizing of the autocratic arbitration of their place but allowing their own whole to come into being, not Coherence on the Pound standard, but a coherence of the displaced—disseminated and desecrated—making a home where it is to be found, where it occurs?

Pound, or part of him, wished to control the valuation of the materials he appropriated by arranging them in such a way that an immanent or "natural" order would be brought into being. As Pound seems to acknowledge in the final movements of the poem, *The Cantos* never jell in this way. For Pound, this was a measure, no matter how ambivalent he may have been about the evaluation, of the failure of *The Cantos.* In contrast, the success of *The Cantos* is that their coherence is of a kind

totally different than Pound desired or could—in his more rigid moments—accept. For the coherence of the "hyperspace" of Pound's modernist collage is not a predetermined Truth of a pancultural elitism but a product of a compositionally decentered multiculturalism.

Pound's great achievement was to create a work simultaneously using ideological swatches from many social and historical sectors of his own society and an immense variety of other cultures. This complex, polyvocal textuality was the result of his search—his unrequited desire for—deeper truths than could be revealed by more monadically-organized poems operating with a single voice and a single perspective. But Pound's ideas about what mediated these different materials are often at odds with how these types of textual practices actually work in *The Cantos.*

Pound's fascist ideology insists on the author having an extraliterary point of "special knowledge" that creates a phallic order (these are Pound's terms) onto the female chaos of conflicting ideological material. As Robert Casillo points out in his study of Pound's antisemitism, Pound contrasts the phallocentric/logocentric unswerving pivot (citing Wang in Canto 97: "man's phallic heart is from heaven / a clear spring of rightness") with the castrated and nomadic Jew. For Pound, Jews are the purveyors of fragmentation and therefore of the dissolution of fixed hierarchical cultural values (the Jews, says Pound on the radio, want to "blot out the classics, blot out the record"). Again, Jews, as usurers and in league with the Commies, represent "an indistinct, rootless, destructive mass" eroding the agrarian ideal of homestead, of Nature and private property (values Pound equates with order, clarity, *telos).**

For Pound, Jews "as 'falsification incarnate' [aim] to distort, misrepresent, and conceal language, to 'castrate' literature, origins, and tradition [and] are largely responsible for introducing abstraction, obscurity, verbiage, equivocation, ambiguity, and allegory into language." As Casillo goes on to note, Pound charges that the Kabbalistic Jews introduced allegorical interpretation into the West and so distracted men—this is Pound speaking—"from the plain sense of the word, of the sentence." As Casillo concludes, "Pound turned to Fascism because he shares not only its deep fear of indeterminacy [of the vague, inchoate, and incommensurable, of all that is mysterious or ambiguous or unknown] but also its central desire, which is to banish the indeterminate from social life. . . . And, as in Fascism, in Pound's work the ultimate sign of such fearful [indefiniteness] is the Jew."

What grotesque views for someone whose work is filled with indeterminacy, fragmentation, abstraction, obscurity, verbiage, equivocation,

*Citations in this and the next paragraph are from Casillo's "Anti-Semitism, Castration, and Usury in Ezra Pound," in *Criticism,* XXV:3 (1983). His conclusion is quoted from his *The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism, and the Myths of Ezra Pound* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985).

ambiguity, allegory; who has made the highest art of removing ideologies from their origins and creating a nomadic economy for them whose roots are not in the land or in property but in the abstraction of aestheticization and the irresolution of the jarring multicentric harmonies of incommensurable sounds. As Richard Sieburth has noted, the ultimate irony of *The Cantos* is that all its irreconcilable elements can be reconciled only in the abstract, by the authority of the author, *on credit.*** Indeed, the real economy of *The Cantos* is the one Pound constantly struggled to repress: the economy of reader and writer and book; the economy of language not as Logos but as exchange. Overall, *The Cantos,* despite Pound's ravings within it, represents less the crude economism of Pound's fascism, "with a painted paradise at the end of it," than a utopian chaos of a negative dialectic, "without a painted paradise at the end of it."

The technology of Pound's textual practice created its own logic of desire that Pound could not derail without giving up an achievement beyond the comprehension of his small-minded, penurious political accounting system. He was obviously unsatisfied with anything but a complexly polyphonic style and as a result did not allow his ideological predilections to completely compromise the scope of his formal innovations, especially since he was still able to inject his viewpoint into the poem ad nauseam. But the power of his method—his poetic ear above his spouting mouth—was such that his rantings are absorbed into *The Cantos* not as their truth but as befouled rubble, not as privileged material but as debased material, framed and denounced by those readers able to pick and choose for themselves. The center could not hold because the formal innovations of openly juxtaposing radically different materials undercut this possibility. The autonomy of the appropriated materials could not be sufficiently compromised without destroying the poetic power of the text, something Pound was on the whole unwilling to do. The authority, then, is not in Pound's opinions but in *The Cantos* itself—a situation Pound responded to not with insight or acknowledgment but with hysteria, paranoia, and megalomania. Having created a text so rich with tones that it could not be controlled in terms of traditional criteria of coherence and unity, Pound redoubled his effort to master an authority his textual practice had made impossible. The result was the claustrophobic reaction formation of Pound's worldview. In the struggle for control, Pound's methods and materials routed Pound's authority and preconceptions;

**Sieburth, "The Economy of Poetry / The Poetry of Economy," presented at The Humanities Institute, University of California, Berkeley, October 12, 1984. Sieburth's immensely lucid and cogent essay integrates Pound's economic ideas with other themes and motifs in *The Cantos,* making a convincing case for the spillage among, and interdependence of, the different metaphoric systems of the poem. I am indebted to his reading at several points in this account.

poisoned by this discontinuity, the straws he grasped for were reductivist economism and Fascisti racism.

Confronted with a superabundance of competing cultural practices and claims of knowledge, exacerbated by the escalation of available information about the present and past, responses can range from the humble to the arrogant. Pound's views about the authority of tradition (as he defined it) and the poet's role as arbiter of the hierarchical values of cultural artifacts is not remarkably incongruent with the dominant, if highly contested, ideologies of American universities (the great ideas), communications media (exclusion of all but those defined as mainstream), and government ("cops of the world")—despite Pound's own belief that Mussolini did it better. But while these institutions maintain their ideologies largely by avoiding direct confrontation among disparate material, Pound propounded a highly staged alternative approach. No doubt for Pound the poetic methods of *The Cantos,* by dint of the scope of appropriation and juxtaposition, were intended to go beyond any other in establishing the supremacy of the values in which Pound believed. But only delusions of grandeur—an arrogance beyond proportion—could have convinced the poet that he was capable of making value judgments on all the material included, and excluded, from *The Cantos.* Yet it is Pound's self-deceiving arrogance, and not *The Cantos'* refusal to be subsumed by it, that has largely secured Pound's stature; that is, prevented the subversiveness of *The Cantos'* methodology from undermining the false authority Pound and many of his supporters claim for his criticism and poetry. When we read *The Cantos* with the full incredulity it demands, as a text filled with systematic self-delusions and fragmentary illuminations, with magnificent gleanings and indulgent fraudulences, we will find not the mastertext of modernism but the wreck of Enlightenment rationalism: scarred remnants of a struggle among the divine, the satanic, and the ordinary—a text made beautiful by its damages and ugly by its claims of knowledge.

So I do not wish to back away from the methods of *The Cantos*; fascism, even in the hands of a poet so consummately resourceful as Pound, could not, finally, claim these methods for itself. But neither do I wish to ignore the warning implicit in these considerations: that aesthetic processes can be used for a variety of purposes, that to understand a work requires, in part, interrogating its motivations and social context. it is always revealing to ask of a work: who does it serve and how. The answer to this question, however, is not identical to what the worker's intentions may be. A response to this challenge is that some work may usefully evade any single social or political claims made for or against it because of the nature of its contradictions, surplusses, and negations. Perhaps this is the most positive thing that might be said of Pound's poetical works.

But perhaps fascism has won the day, anyway. When Pound the

great artist is excused for his politics, fascism has won. When Pound's politics are used to categorically discredit the compositional methods of his poetry, fascism has won. When Pound's poetry is exalted and his politics dismissed as largely irrelevant to his achievement, fascism has won. When Pound's politics are condemned, his poetry acknowledged or ignored in passing, but sanitized forms of his ideas prevail—the virtue of authority, property, and the homestead (a.k.a "family values"), the sanctity of the classics, the condemnation of the nonstandard in favor of "the plain sense of the word," and the divine right of the West (or East) to harness and bleed the rest of the world—fascism has won.

Pound's inflammatory rhetoric would, perhaps, be better met by calmed reason. But it is the nightmare of this tale that an exorcism cannot be initiated until the teller, also, has been implicated in the tale. And then, a waking moment brings the solace of explanation and rationalization, but not understanding; and then this wakefulness becomes more horrible than sleep. The outrage is not without, as if one could be shielded from contamination by the balm of historical contextualization, but within oneself. It is not that it is prudent to fight fire with fire, but that one burns.

Perhaps William Carlos Williams, writing in an early issue of *Furioso* [vol. 1, no. 2], says it better: "We all like to believe we are master minds. But what men seldom learn is that the end of poetry is the poem; I don't know a thing about the value of a poem as such or a hunk of gold as such or of a man himself as such but I do know *that.*"

The questions raised by these remarks are not meant to be resolved but to dog us into the present, where, in transfigured form, they remain pertinent and nagging. The use of preexisting or source or found materials in poetry and the other arts remains an occasion for political concern. Are these materials permitted to exist in and for themselves as inviolable artifacts—or are they appropriated into a frame that invests them with specified meaning determined by the author's own ideological position? Or are they debauched and defused as mere codes, empty signifiers—trophies for a postmodernist library? The double bind of an impossible universal or historical truth versus a fraudulent narrative invention is no more than the shadow play of those who do not wish to live in any here or any now. It is possible for poetry to make the consciousness-constituting activity of ideology audible, to respect the origins of words and to invent new worlds for them. This project persists.

Jackson Mac Low

PIECES O' SIX — IX

Diana injected the white-and-black cat with a tranquilizer. Anne massaged the frail leg where the needle'd gone in. She wanted to soothe it. A game was going on wherein each player had a cat and either dropped it or hit it on the head. Anne wasn't playing the game. It seemed rather cruel, and the white-and-black cat resented it. So Diana injected the tranquilizer and Anne massaged it. She couldn't stop the game, so she did the best she could. That was all there was to that. There was no replay. It wasn't the kind of thing most people'd want to see again. One couldn't get back to it anyway. Just as well. There was no way of knowing if the white-and-black cat had been dropped or hit on the head. Just as well. It wasn't the kind of thing most people'd want to know anyway. There wasn't any way even to begin to find out. That was just as well, for hardly anyone'd want to. It had certainly been cruel, and the white-and-black cat had been right to resent it. Diana hadn't ought to've injected it. It didn't need a tranquilizer. It needed to get out of the game. That's what the other cats ought to've done too. They didn't need tranquilizers either. They ought to've gotten out of the game. They must've resented it too. If they didn't act up enough to be injected with a tranquilizer, it must've been because they were afraid. Could it have been that they were afraid of being injected? Of course it could. It might have happened before. Any of them might have been injected. Only a very stupid cat or a highly insensitive one would not have resented it. What cat likes being dropped or hit on the head? Some cats like being hit on the head very lightly—that's called "patting." But that's different. That's not like being hit on the head any old way as part of a game. What kind of a cat wouldn't feel—if not show—resentment at such treatment? And what kind of people would do such things to cats? Cruel ones, obviously. Or if not cruel ones, stupid

or insensitive ones. Onlookers must have been helpless to stop the game. They couldn't do more than try to soothe the frightened cats. They couldn't learn the tranquilizer's name. For all anyone knows, it might have had side effects. It might have killed some brain cells! That's no small matter for cats. They don't have many to begin with. More than some other animals. Crabs, perhaps, or snails. But not enough to be able to lose a few lightly. Just hitting them on the head might have done damage. Who knows what a hit on the head could do to a cat? Just think of the delicate nerves inside those frail little crania! Even just dropping a cat might not be harmless. Instinctively most cats break falls with their legs. They land on their feet and seem little the worse. But if dropped too hard, or especially if *thrown* down, a cat can be damaged and yet seem little the worse. And a cat with a damanged brain from being injected or hit on the head may well have lost the reflexes that help it to land on its feet and break its fall. The ones that didn't resent the game or show that they did might have been damaged already. They might have already lost too many brain cells. A few key neurons might have been put out of commission. Even if other parts of the brain can take over functions of damaged parts and other neurons substitute for ruined ones, who could say a cat in such a condition was good as new? The white-and-black cat was no fool. Diana was a fool for doing what she did, and all of the players were fools and certainly cruel. The onlookers ought to've stopped the game. But that might not have been easy. Anyone playing a game like that might not be safe to interfere with. Some of them might have done *worse* to the cats or even harmed those who protested. They might have been hard to stop. But some might have listened to reason. They might have been persuaded in time to stop. Then they might have brought the others over. It would have required a skillful rhetorician—probably one who could deal with inebriated people. The players of that game must have been drugged or drunk. Most people wouldn't have played it even if they were. Many a well-meaning onlooker might have bungled it. Depending on the players' condition, they might have done worse—far worse. That white-and-black cat might not have come out of it alive! Maybe it was just as well that Anne just did her best to soothe it. It might have lost a few brain cells from the injection. But her not doing *too* much might have prevented worse. Think of what the atmosphere must have been like! A bunch of woozy hopped-up people playing a game. Little they cared that the pawns were sentient beings like themselves. Some might have played a similar game with people. Plenty of cases like that are known. Many have had worse outcomes. Some have led to murder. Cats can't talk. At least, they can't talk in court. (If a cat could talk, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, we wouldn't understand it.) When the players lose interest in the game, the cats can slink under furniture. They may sit there trembling awhile and not come out when they're called, but if

they aren't injured—beyond, that is, losing those brain cells or neurons—sooner or later they'll foray for food and water. They'll leave their hiding places and return to their dishes and bowls. They'll even beg from some of the people who'd played the stupid game with them. But a *person* might go to the police. Damages might be sought or criminal charges preferred. Red and flustered, they'd stammer their tale to a desk sergeant or patrolman. A detective might call on the host and ask painful or embarrassing questions. The people who'd played with people that way would be rounded up. They'd be asked what drugs they'd taken and where they'd gotten them. Their houses would be searched, their stashes seized. Even if they didn't land in jail, their assets would be squandered on lawyers. The temptation to quiet murder—especially if bribery didn't work—might prove irresistible. Even the cat game might have had repercussions. An onlooker might have tattled. A participant might have mentioned it in passing. It could have reached the ear of the ASPCA. A younger legal eagle there might have tested fledgling wings by filing a suit or pressing charges. How well it would have gone over in the public relations department! The fund raisers would have loved it. Photos—posed, of course, but admittedly so—could have helped to fill a four-page money-begging letter. A sympathetic judge could've thrown the book at the players. The white-and-black cat, dainty and petite, might have been subpoena'd. Its owners might have pleaded they were absent from the scene or helpless against the drug- or drink-sodden players. It's they that might've brought the suit if they'd've returned too early, and found the game in progress. Angry and betrayed, it's they that might've stopped the game, clearing out their wobbling erstwhile friends, cleaning the stinking ashtrays, flushing forgotten stashes down the toilet, throwing out paper cups or washing evil-smelling glasses, hunting out the cringing little creature, tempting it with dainties, soothing it with petting, letting it jump at will on chairs and laps to perch and purr. But they might not've gone to the ASPCA after all. They'd have to be unreasonably angry to bring that much trouble on themselves. Enough to have to clean up the shit of the cats their so-called friends had brought (and hopefully taken away) and to cure their own cat's trauma. If the little white-and-black cat wasn't "really" injured, no one would gain from bringing suit, having to go to court, and maybe paying lawyers if the ASPCA was broke at the time or found the case too trivial to take. But still what a mess! Coming home to find your place full of smoke and noisy people—some known to you, presumably friends of freinds—and the cats!—hissing and screeching or suspiciously laid back from being injected! Your friends who'd not played the game rushing up to you shamefaced, the players brazening it out with slurred words of self-justification—or whatever their judgment's impairment allowed them to offer as such—hearing yourself shouting "Get out! Get out!" as your anger took over, your slamming the door, after the last of them left. Your running to find the hiding

frightened cat, your stretching yourself on the floor to see under sofas and low-slung chairs and chests of drawers, your coaxing her out with soothing words and food (she might not have been trembling if the tranquilizer held awhile, but she'd still have been hiding). Probably friends who'd not been playing the game would've stayed and helped you clean. It's they that would've explained the silly game. "Dope and drink!" you'd mutter, and flush the toilet once again. The cat by now would be purring or nodding out. Your throat would be sore from yelling and breathing smoke. The place would be freezing, what with all those wide-open windows. You'd slam them shut, still smelling the acrid tobacco fumes. You wouldn't be able to get to sleep till morning. You wouldn't talk to some of those people ever again. You'd wonder why you'd ever stayed in the city. You'd pamper the cat for days with foods you'd never buy for yourself.

PIECES O' SIX — X

He plunked down an asper for a quiet date. The Turkish woman motioned toward a curtain. He hadn't met her in the street. A friend had given him the address in Athens just before he left for the airport. He knew nothing of Ankara. He had taken a cab at the airport, giving the driver the address of the hotel at which a travel agent had reserved him a room, but while moving through a bazaarlike street, had suddenly changed his mind, tapped the driver on the shoulder, and silently handed him the slip on which his friend had scrawled this address. "No to hotel?" asked the driver. "That's right," he agreed, nodding his head where the driver could see him in his rearview mirror. The driver slowed to read the slip again, then hung a sharp right a block or so further on. He muttered the name of the street, glanced up to the mirror to meet the man's eyes, and then gathered speed through the twilit street. When they reached the place, the driver's try at an overcharge was all but pro forma. He accepted philosophically, even with respect, a compromise between the overcharge and the amount his friend had suggested as proper. "OK, boss," he said. "That's the place. Up them steps. Look out for broken glass." As the cab sped off, the traveler stood looking up toward the paint-chipped door

at the top of the steps. Then he started to climb them, avoiding, not the broken glass, which was too ubiquitous to sidestep, but the flattened carcass of an animal, too far gone to be identified as rat or half-grown cat. Peering for a bell—the far-off streetlight did little to help—he fished a pocket flashlight from his jacket and in its light finally descried an ambiguous handle far down on the left-hand lintel post. He gave it an experimental tug and was, he realized, nearly disappointed to be rewarded by a high-pitched tinkle. After an unresponsive minute, he was reaching toward the handle again when the door was opened abruptly. He was relieved to be greeted by a quietly dressed, aquilinely beautiful woman, whose long dark hair fell freely over her silk-covered shoulders. He murmured his apologies for not having phoned from the airport and mentioned his Greek friend's name. She smiled in recognition and invited him in in nearly unaccented English. Welcomely, the entrance hall contrasted with the steps outside. It was clean, well-lighted, and furnished with a nearly fussy elegance attesting to someone's thoughtful choice. He wondered whether it was that of his handsome greeter, who, he'd decided, was probably part Armenian. She paused at the foot of a staircase—he saw another farther back—and turning toward him with a smile, spoke again in a low, pleasant voice: "Please. Up here. It's a bit steep. Better hold the banister." He did as she suggested, reaching, at the top, a hallway almost identical to the one below. She took a small tray from the top of an ornate sideboard. "Please," she asked, "a very small coin. The smaller the better." Wondering, he plunked down an asper for a quiet date. The Turkish woman motioned toward a curtain. Since he'd not met her in the street, but had gotten her address from his friend in Athens, and since he knew nothing of how things were done in Ankara, he followed her cautiously into the adjoining room. She closed a door on the inward side of the curtain. The room was dark. Uneasily, he waited by the door while he heard her moving about in the chamber. Then she struck a match and lit two candles on a table next to a low, sumptuous bed, wide and covered only by an ivory damask sheet. While he'd waited in the dark, she'd replaced her clothes with a gauzy robe, gathered at the waist by a thin gold cord. He stared, embarrassed at a surge of complicated feelings—wonder, lust, fear, puzzlement, and a somewhat surprising tenderness. He pondered what it was about the woman that aroused the last emotion. He'd never seen her before. He was sure of that. And though he'd met some women having vaguely similar features, none of them had he known intimately and none had possessed such startling beauty. She looked at him smiling and asked, "Do you like what you see?" "Oh yes," he quickly replied, "Oh yes. You can be sure of that! I don't think I've ever—" You needn't flatter," she interrupted gently. "I'm *not* flattering! I'm overwhelmed! You're incredibly beautiful! I don't think I've ever—" "Maybe not," she said, "but that's *your* business, not mine. Mine is merely to please you and send you on your way." "Send me on my way," he dully

repeated, and felt a piercing sorrow, sudden and astounding. She moved toward him with a smile. "No need to look so sad," she said. "It happens every day. People meet, and then go on their way." "I know," he replied. "I just wish I'd met you in other circumstances . . . elsewhere . . . " "Where?" she asked. "You *would*n't have. I live in Ankara and you live . . . in Athens? New York?—" "I live in Kansas city—" "I know where *that* is—" "And seldom get away from there. —You know where Kansas City is?" "Sure. I have an uncle in St. Louis. He sometimes has to go to Kansas City. Something about meat . . . " "He's a butcher?" "No, he runs a kind of restaurant." "*What* kind?" "Well, they do other things there, too. I don't think they're all legal. —Nothing political," she nervously added. "I wouldn't care if it was," he smiled. "What's your name?" By this time they were sitting side by side on the bed, and he was considerably calmer. "Anahid," she answered. "It was my grandmother's name—my mother's mother. She was Armenian." "Oh, I *thought* you were." "Only my mother's mother. My father's Turkish and my mother's father was Greek." She raised her left hand to his face and slowly stroked his cheek. "Don't be sad," she whispered, "and don't be afraid or bashful. I'm here to please you." "But—a woman like you!—I mean—so beautiful and kind— And you asked for a very small coin—you accepted—an asper!" "Don't you understand?" she asked. "Some things are done only for form. You're my friend's friend. He's a wonderful person, our friend! And he's helped me in ways I couldn't begin to explain! But I'd have a bad conscience if I didn't ask for *some*thing. It's been my trade since I was fifteen. I don't even *need* the money now. I'm rich!" She noticed his questioning look. "Oh, the neighborhood!" she laughed. "I'm used to it here. I prefer it. I've lived here all my life. I'd feel out of place anywhere else! No one bothers me here. Even the police look after me! I have, as they say, 'friends in high places'—and, thank goodness! even *they* don't bother me. It's a little complicated! Don't worry about it. Make love with me. I like the way you look. I feel I can trust you, and—I know this'll sound silly coming from a woman like me—" "*Don't* say that!—" he cried. "I'm drawn to you, somehow. I don't usually feel this way about a man, even if I like him. And I've been in love—but that's never happened to me suddenly. The few times GAL-it's happened—and they're *very* few!—it's been during a long friendship. One of my 'friends in high places' . . . " "Please," he said, and kissed her. Soon she was helping him undress, giving little licks and kisses and nibbles to each part of him as it became exposed. As she removed his jacket, tie, and shirt, she nibbled his left ear, kissed his right collarbone, and licked each of his nipples till he moaned. Then, kneeling beside the bed, she untied and removed his shoes, took off his socks, and surprised him by slowly and carefully kissing and licking the tops of his feet and his soles and sucking his toes. No one had ever done *this* to him before,

and the intensity of his sensations amazed him. His penis, already erect, began to push painfully against the inside of his briefs. He unbuckled his belt. She quickly unzipped his pants and eased them and his briefs over his hips, legs, and feet. Then, still kneeling, she took his penis in her hands and licked it over and over from tip to scrotum and back till he felt he could no longer keep from coming. Suddenly she stopped, looked up at his face with a friendly, teasing smile, lowered her head again, and swalled his penis. Her lips pressed to his pubic hair, her long tongue licked the upper parts of his testicles. She hummed deep in her throat, then slowly drew her lips and tongue up to the tip and down again, gradually increasing her tempo. He lay back, as her hands now urged him to, and let himself passively feel the incredible pleasure. Sensing precisely when he was starting to come, she grasped and twisted both his nipples as he did. He screamed ecstatically, and momently fainted. When he came to, she was lying on him, kissing his lips and subtly massaging his scalp. When he opened his eyes, she smiled broadly and slowly rotated her hips. He realized he was erect again and deep inside her. "Do you like this?" she asked. "Oh yes, he whispered, and began to move his own hips. He felt her clitoris pressing the front of his penis as they moved. He fingered her anus lightly and squeezed her soft buttocks, massaging them in circles, and pressed her against him as they wildly ground and pumped. Their lips and tongues danced a continual kiss. If they didn't come together, neither knew who did first. They slept in each other's arms till birdcalls woke them. The candles had long guttered out. Gray dawnlight lit the room. First she, then he, padded to the nearby toilet and back. The room had grown cool as they slept. She took a soft quilt from a chest and covered their bodies. They slept awhile, then made love again, side by side like nested spoons. While they fucked, she suddenly drew him from her vulva and into her anus, guiding his hand to touch her clitoris, rotating her hips with joyful cries and moans. After they came that time, he knew that he had to stay with her forever. He made a score of international phone calls. He never *did* return to Kansas City.

Michael Davidson

THE ENDURANCE OF RESOLVE

Had expired
went through the mail a second time
was looking for references to me
felt confident enough about the spaces
and intend to be a different person
not different really
just better

would write back to all of them
would not eat a number of foods
would devote the afternoon
to recovering loose slips of paper

house was clean
could be traversed
without touching a thing
could invent reasons to stay at home

smell of salt
tomorrow would be much the same

had started a journal
first page blank just in case
second page, a list of films
had thought to learn their names
followed by a brisk swim
had bought several new pens
for the purpose
and a music box
with a familiar tune

should phone D.
not necessarily in that order
a packet of seeds awaits them
Dear C. the work is not so much elegant
as practical
hoped by it to change neighbor
into frog
its form
an afterthought

would take the film to be developed
once final frames are filled
with the inside of the lens cover

Dear M.
he was great in and out
of his words
there were never more
than he could afford
to live by
we lived by
what he never spent
what was never left

had asserted oneself in print
to the chagrin of practically no one
had memorized the spelling of success
and promptly forgot it
would eliminate breakfast
would sit in the sun
despite the weather

feel close to the room
as though to inhabit
patches of orange and green
devote time to reflection
a space on the wall
for her picture

having a fresh copy
would attempt to read
I live in your appraises
what I look for
in lifting the receiver
someone's voice on the other end

not much
either other
bought a chair
sat in it
waited for the cat to take over
now the cat has a chair

had learned a new sauce
through the mails, someone handed
her a sign to stop talking
that she incorporated into her talk

was becoming more silent
was a nicer person
though bloated following dinner

once the house is gone
another will take its place
would sacrifice proximity to space
history to system
I don't know your eyes
but your name is familiar.

Lauren Shakely

Five Poems

MAY 3, 1984

For hours, days, or years I have gazed
at the unchanging skyline. Now suddenly
it comes to life, a flat plane pierced
with lit rectangles. A block away
a tiny sailboat perches on a sill,
and a cathedral's spire brightens the mist.

This consciousness, a stroke cutting
the normal pattern of forgetting,
is loneliness itself. A tree's sprung
leaves unwind in silhouette,
and tolling bells slam into a heart
too stunned to move.

FIRST LIGHT

In the bathroom, for a few seconds,
naked before the window,
I accept the idea of death.

It has just rained. I part
the curtains and see the wet grass,
the road, the old tree next to the road,

the barn on the ridge, the pond
in a smoke ring of mist, and the wild geese,
huddled, eyeing me back over the distance.

But when it comes it does not come
like this, but as retreat, in animal stages.
Not even the skin resists peeling from the teeth,

and the last words, hoarded for a lifetime,
are nowhere near the lips.

WITH A VIEW

The landlords decide to flay me and broil the strips
rather than patch the ceiling. They hear me
stumping up the stairs and pause,
three sets of claws arched at table.
This is the second flight. By the fourth I yield
to Raskolnikov's sobbing. To kill is too personal
an act. This requires detachment.
The tricolor spire of the Empire State
blazes like a thing organic, a distant star
whose real estate is perpetuity.

MOTHER'S METHOD

Kneeling she unwraps yellow tissue
from costume jewels, babies' beads
and babies' teeth, and unearths a hoard
of actual metal bandage boxes, actual glass
aspirin bottles, and miniature beds
where dolls comfort other dolls.

We can control the microcosm, but flop as gods.
The antidote to fear is glorification of the atom,
so she honors ancestors with a pinch of lace,
and permits a fly to walk unharmed
from the crease of her extended palm.

FROM THE TRAIN

Dusk in central Pennsylvania.
Slanting light plays on the backs of factories,
which surrender chip by chip their advertisements
for a long-forgotten tonic. Rusting boxcars stand
at a rusting siding, where lush weeds sprout
between the ties.
All America seems
to have gone to seed, the industrial society
a twilight's shimmering in a thousand broken windows.
A far-off boy wobbling on his two-wheeler
already regrets having to grow up to say
"I grew up in Downingtown." Yet even decay
is interpretive, the backdrop of illusion.
Not a soul, not a dog or cow, raises eyes
to trace our passing.

Charles Bernstein

Three Poems

THE HARBOR OF ILLUSION

At midnight's scrawl, the fog has
lost its bone and puffs of
pall are loamed at
tidal edge. No more to count
than density arrows its
petulance at crevice laced
with dock, not hour's
solstice nor brimmed detour—
over the haunch of lock and
tress the vein pours sweetly
and Devil's door knows no
more than pester and undone—
the seering moors where I
refrain of lot and camphor.
Only this, a ripple
against a blind of shore that sands
us smooth and mistless: let
he who has not stunned make
sound, cacophany of
nearing, having fell, of
pouring, having stalled. Though
free to bore and load, let
rail retail conclusion, finicky jejubes
at waste of moor, or lord these
tower, tour the template, thoroughfare
of noon's atoll.

FOAM POST

Lose track of where seven Moabite
Everything the stove as agent you
Devolved and basically are
Spunk in a minute reprobated
Adverse elemental approbation gelatinous
Curio sung to deeds socked with
Ginger and gold sullen and then
Surrendered by cave-lit trestle
Of simpering slug-down egress.
Or parts of guarantee cleaned
Out pockets an unclasped shake
Rant about owing restricted
Tributary and wakes on
These stupid tires implements
Trashed in an overgrown bestiary
In a vest of tiers. Notable
Inclination: "Too much belly an' no'
Eno' brain." Sermons of
Vibration who'll holler before
Discrepancy tuck hug—
Tinsel of titularly vague versions
Verging behind programmable dual
Dipsticks. Everything seen so far
Away and more produce on other
Seismographic orifice bundle branching
Toxemia inadmissible as to stuck-up
Steam stadium circuits bored cauldron.
Neptune's climb from the ducks to the
Decks (oilcloth) solvent to dementia
Spud repertory condominium. Flown
Boast (Kelly-green incapacitator): which
Is very natural ("I do not care for the part about
Pirates"), sometime aquatic ("Solange had to say
It was over a long time before"), unconscionably
Pede-like ("the soldiers marched valiantly
To their reward") and preternaturally triumphant
("Available evidence suggests a lack of
Further routes of inquiry"). Periodicity
Or piquant insolvency (not currency but the
Fear of is the). Rain rain
Raining inside my tailored suit. "Twelve

Yards, only twelve yards over, at the
Intersection of Vein and Vine—another
Lawn being mowed! Another
Gracious day!" Not to have to
Not to say, not to have to have
To, not to have to prey, not to
Have to, not to have to feel
Not to, not to have to have to
Say, Pink lemons on the orange
Lime tree.

SAFE METHODS OF BUSINESS

The Sleepy impertinence of winsome actuarials
Lambs me to accrue mixed beltings—or,
Surreptitiously apodictic, impedes erstwhile.
Pumice, for instance, has bowdlerized the steam
As amulets of oddments cedar coatfins
Or rake about shoals. The pig is stabbed
Through the belly (horse grippings are not essences).
For choice is rivulets. The chase of
Carolinas cries in the gorge—not so
Much ranting as astringent. And therefore
I have mailed the teas and come, an
Old man with a wet mouth, when invited.

"They're starting to start up the cranes." & so
For a long while Sophia bade her time
A sorrowful adieu and sat in un-
resplendent edginess near the wharves' waves.
Where are the blue sputter of
yesteryear? "Sometimes
I think I hear
a mosquito but it turns out to be the
Refrigerator." "It's not so
bad once you get used
to it." Always keeping
the Ball on the proverbial
Eye. Can't
be afraid and can't

not to. The
Fear that made Milwaukee
fake it. "I
told the man I would
jerk sodas
for him at his counter
But
I would never prostitute
myself for that fee." Having
captured the two Frankish princes, Balak
Marched on Aleppo, seized
it from his cousin
Suleiman despite
frenzied resistance by the
populace and
then, like his
uncle Ilghazi four years
earlier, set out
To invade the principality of Antiod. "I
don't think you should give
choice to a nine-
year-old. A thirteen-
year-old maybe." It's
Hard to be fair
and just at
the same
time. For instance,
according to *Boston*
magazine, Oliver Wendell
Holmes once
called the city "the hub
of the solar system."
"Fire!"
"That is enough, I
won't bring you again!"
Why Women Admire Liberace.

The dead, dull hours of summer's interminable days
On which no hope, nor shadow, sets to
Bring surcease of this blanched wildness.

Putting her proverbial Toe in the waters, her
Temptors. Narcotic of little care: wailing against
A wall, braiding a gall. The tree has lost

Its neon and beams in sacerdotal douchings
Of incontinent magisterium. Nor changed
Transformed into a seeing
Barred by trial—but released to it, in
It. Several indissoluble esplanades
Less arbitrary than lived in. The
Flesh, smeared as ersatz materiality, among
Whom we multiply. Long dormant the better
To well over—less metonymic than
Inimitable. Forsake the bow, embrace the
Churl. Which braves
It to either destitution, just off
Right of Constitution Caverns.

CAUTION: MARINERS ARE WARNED TO STAY CLEAR OF THE PROTECTIVE RIPRAP SURROUNDING NAVIGATIONAL LIGHT STRUCTURES.

No rest for the wicked, less for the pure in heart.
Teetering at pause in regulus, masthead of rig &
Splay—ablative command in dative array. Peculiar
Pester pursuant to penury. Nor thought at.

"That's the way he called it, caught it." Bituminous
Wings ablast bullocks—pummel of inter-
Tracing, or drains panes. Here so beset upon,
Becalms.

Everybody wants to be a philosopher—serrated
Or otherwise. As for instance as cream as
Perpetuates in as lacquer or lacrity ransoms
Asymptotic dissuasions as freedom's necessity,
Necessity's freedom. Jump or jumble
(Crumble). The boar symbolizes the Ox while
Near dissects instinct. Rather than post-
Ponement what we have is a premature
Arriving but with unlimited potential for further
Arrivings which, translated to the sexual, gives
Rise to theorems of delay. You can swim
Or you can float—there's no metaphysical
Difference; yet history is *made.*

The tide is red (just another Jewish American
Peasant) and the beanstalk
Broods—a rocker for Syncopation
Day. I mean filtration not sediment

(Sentiment)—bumps you stash with
Angelic piquance. Blotter when
Blobbed (the origin of *écriture* [scribbage]).

The summons charges me with parking at a crosswalk on the northeast corner of 82d street and Broadway on the evening of August 17, 1984. The space in question is east of the crosswalk on 82d street as indicated by the yellow lines painted across the street. This space has been a legal parking space during the over ten years I have lived on the block. Cars are always parked in this space and have continued to (unticketed in several observations I made yesterday and today). Apparently, new crosswalk markings are currently being painted in white on both 82d street and 83d street. At this time, the process is not complete. When these new lines are finished, several spaces may be eliminated. However, as they looked at the time I received the ticket, they did not appear to override the yellow lines according to which I was clearly in my right to park in the space. If there is a change being made in the regulations, it seems unfair to penalize before new lines are clearly imprinted. I am sure a check of traffic department activities will show this work in process rather than complete at the time of the ticketing. I parked without any knowledge that regulations were changing, conforming to practices legal over the past decade. As a resident of the block, I feel there should be adequate notice that parking regulations are being changed—if in fact they are—and that it is unjust to ticket before new indications are fully in place and while the preceding yellow lines are left intact.

"If you've got a wayward 17-year-old, it's
going to be tough getting him or her to give you
a urine specimen," concedes Mr. Reuter, who
has tested his own five children. "But then,
if they won't give it to you, you know
you've got a problem."

"Officials in Washington believe confidence
can't be restored as long as a daredevil
is in the pilot's seat. 'It isn't just a move
to get Charlie out. It's a major motion.' "

LINT

There are trains and there is pain
As when a signet skips, a gurgle sighs
You tender chance, employ a tug
Sooner than equation, furthered by
An ounce of quell: despondent cheer or

Netherworldly plug who sprain
Of factious things, trebled and
Makes halls, most noisy knit that
Jaws it chewed, slump clearance
Toward anon

Lines are like that—you stop, sort
and then you waiver. *You*? I only
mean to hobble along to the meeting
and save some ground until then.
The mind is a dam all right, costs
a lot of God damn taxpayer money to
keep it from leaking. The mine is
damned all right, lost a ton of, &c.

I am charged with parking in a no parking anytime zone restricted for U.S. Mail. I did park on West 35th street just west of Seventh Avenue about 3:45 on Sunday afternoon (9/2/84). The only parking sign visible indicated that parking regulations for this section of the street were not then in effect. There was no yellow line nor any trace of postal activity or a post office building. Subsequent to being ticketed, a search of the area indicated that considerably up the street but obscured from the space I parked in was a sign attached to a building exterior—that is this sign was not adjacent to the curb, where NYC parking notice signs are customarily placed, but lying against the building on the inner side of the sidewalk. Because this sign was not posted at curbside and was out-of-view, it was inadequate to give notice that the curbside sign was to be superceded especially since there was a clearly visible curbside sign in the usual place, which univocally stated that parking restrictions were not in effect on Sundays. I ask that this ticket be dismissed.

A kind of state of
subaltern lunacy
armed or expressed
to about the
sum of say
Loquatious Motors
whence, by device
stronger 'en gourds
pretending to be
pony rides, I'll
alter not depend
the mailtruck

as when
harpsichord jangles
over the eaves
looked out, er, locked out
sin helo
ripp(l)ing off into
buttoned-up
boostercables.

MORAL VIEW

Inconceivable in fact that waves
in such
proportion, that
become a
weathering.
do
but to spume
of
seascape and a freezing spoon
nearly full, but risen
proper place at
quite
and gulls
back, it is the
most, enclosed
glowering like
a fault, the cold
combine
of things,
various
sometimes
does,

And so we returned to our basic question—
How in heaven do you get an outside line?

Errors have a way
of clawing in the blight
like pawns or ponies
to their anointed
spheres, so coiled

in stumping, or
impress of
clamps, these
halls & barriers
who reprove &
grasp, an arc
of meshed perturbs
and head-first, on it
lopes afloat the
spoil, having
carried or careened
to pumps
& clumps.

One wants to be a stranger but retreats
into familiarity, into the face of a
coin, a spearhead nickel. Bounding by
two frames, a concept unhinged in
its quiescent sag or sap, of whom
is better to say "no glup, no
pedimento". Too many crooks spoil
the sidewalker, at least up to and
excluding, four-and-one-eighth,
$22.95. Merely myopic, queerly
entokened, . . . the only true boats the ones
that have never sailed, nor been wet
by these kept oceans.

Barbara Drake

THE BED

I want my bed back.
Just because you slept in it with me
for all those years
doesn't mean it's your bed.
When I found it, it was painted red,
white, and blue. Part of it was missing.
Do you know which part?
Part of it was patented.
Do you know which part?
Which year was it patented?

My bed is beautiful, posts
of tiger maple—you called it
birdseye maple.
It's not
birdseye maple.
Have you looked at it, really?
The tulip-shaped turnings on top
of each post, the delicate curve below that,
like a modernist apple core,
then a ring like the ring of a planet.
I love the turnings of my bed, I've looked
at it so many times, sitting up in bed,
drinking my coffee, reading, working on
manuscripts, listening to the "Radio Reader"
or music—the first time I heard
Pachobel's Canon in D
and it was raining outside,
a thunderstorm knocking
blossoms off the apple trees.

That was before
someone put the music to a popular movie,
and someone else put it to a wine ad.
Turned out it was everyone's favorite
classical piece that year,
but the first time I heard it
I started crying
because the music was like
the sound of time dying.
I want my bed back.

You've only got it because
you said you'd call the police and have them
chase me all the way to Indiana.
You've only got it because
you wouldn't go to work for three days,
camped out on my bed.
But it's my bed.
Do you know which part is patented?
Do you know what year it was made?
I won't tell you, but it was made by hand,
and someone repaired it for me,
replaced the missing part—you don't know
which part, nor do you know
that the man who repaired it
researched it in a certain museum
to make sure the part was the right shape.
And it is,
so much the right shape
you wouldn't know which part it was
he replaced, unless I told you.
I've told you
it was red, white and blue when I found it,
a parody of early American
painted over the real early American.

There are souls in that bed—I've known them
since I got it—I was glad
to let them hover
over the bed they once slept in,
those dead souls, hovering lovingly
over the bed which was their comfort and beauty.
They spread themselves like a canopy.
I used to pull them up like an old eiderdown,
and they are hovering still, over you.

But they will not like it, what you have done,
that you have taken my bed, their bed,
for you do not really see it,
or them,
nor do you know or believe in them
anymore than you know when it was made
or in what state,
nor do you know
the difference between tigers and the eyes of birds
nor between yours and mine.
Nor did you really know or believe in me,
though I wanted you to.
You think
just because you slept in a thing
it's yours.

But it's not.
And I want my bed back.

Vladimir Holan

from A NIGHT WITH HAMLET*

(Tr. from the Czech by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan)

The wind blustered through the chimney . . . And somewhere in a grove
ruffled the hair on the penis of a fallow deer . . .
And somewhere in history it chased the gluttonous galleons of
    Walter Raleigh,
finally to slash them apart,
just as your mother, out of impatience, once tore
her sleeves listening to Wagner's music . . .
But you can't drive out the soul with drink, like a gopher from
    its hole,
because even if you think of one so well-stacked
that you say: get into the stockroom!—you are still a creature
fixed in transient shape by the winged hate
between man and woman . . .

Hamlet broke in: "A salamander in fire!"
Then frying the seed of the Logos in the melted
bacon of his tongue, he hissed:
"What the poet has written, the angel or demon will *do* . . .
Thus does the dream take revenge on uninterrupted consciousness!

*The opening section of the poem appeared in Sulfur 12. The remaining two sections will appear in Sulfurs 14 and 15.

I am still looking for that free dining-hall
whose food window is not the wicket in a cell door,
a wicket through which the imprisoned is observed,
that peephole called the Judas . . .
'*Who doesn't work doesn't eat!*' Yes,
but *what* is work? *To be true to one's unselfish lot*—
or to be a salesman of indulgences
or an ardent stoker in a crematorium,
to insert a thermometer into the rectum of war
or to have to sing at a vintage
as proof that you're not eating the grapes,
to inspect horses' teeth or like a hangman
tear out the nostrils of creatures before execution,
to be corroded by vinegar and bile and take revenge on others,
or burn off womens' right breasts
to make them better archers,
to be the seed of fate into the womb of history
or a feeling sentenced to drudgery
under the grey Siberia of old heads—
or even under the threat of losing your throat, to file through
    your chains
and rather gouge out your eyes
that they may not see today's horrors,
and yet hear those long dead
but free singers?

The compositional net at best catches an ornament . . .

I'm not indifferent to
a single little step and to the fall
of a child in the nettles . . . Even if his mother tells him:
go and get some rum for the tea,
off he goes, repeating to himself: rum for the tea, rum for the tea,
until he ends up whispering: tum for me . . .
no, no, I'm not indifferent to a child's
single fall . . . And still evil climbs
humanity's spinal cord, blood spittled
like stairs to the dentist's . . . It is ancient that evil
and weary, and at each step it winces but ascends on and on to the
    brain of pride,
for after so many attempts
by saints and poets,
after so many attempts by saints and poets to switch off the current—
it believes only in the harmonious moment
when there's a short-circuit

between heaven and hell.
But of course . . . We can also wait for
something to go off and love to fall upon us . . .
Or expect that hope lies in patience
and long-waiting . . . Imagine
life's last stop . . .
An old man stood there, cowering
like a word in the rain . . .
'I'm waiting here,' he says, 'for the gentleman,
he promised me an apartment, he said it's unfurnished,
that's fine with me—'
It rained. And the old man's trust
was so blind, or so magnanimous,
that it *saw* a cosy future,
and only the bystanders understood
someone had fooled him
at the *mezzo-rilievo* of the moon . . . But you know how it is:
suddenly nothing, absolutely nothing,
absolutely nothing left across the way,
nothing like the moment when it seems
the future too is behind us.
Whoever loves should rejoice!
But the universe though perhaps finite
is still limitless . . . A man is suddenly despondent,
a woman cold, so they haven't killed each other
they come together, and are grateful
that once again they see something of fate,
even though it leads shamelessly
to the poorhouse . . . "

And Hamlet continued:
"When an abandoned man consoles himself,
he may in the end wave with a gleaning hand.
But if he sits as a couple he has too many
words and gestures, since before a witness
he emphasizes his pain . . . And only in death
are both his words and his hands forever crossed
and he is silent . . . But is he happy?
Happiness! Have you a note from the doctor? *I don't understand!*

Even if there were no God, even if there were no human soul,
even if there were a soul, but it was mortal,
even if there were no resurrection,
even if there were nothing left, really nothing,
my own as well as your participation in such a comedy

would only be compassion, compassion for living
which is only breath and thirst and hunger
and mating and sickness and pain . . .

Once, walking through a field of blossoming heather,
I overheard a child-like *why?*
and I couldn't answer.
And I still couldn't today after all these years,
at the mid-relief of the moon,
because an answer is not enough for children, nor a question for
adults.

When my childhood trustingly accepts me,
I can't help singing.
When I think of Christ's crown of thorns,
I'm struck dumb with horror.
When I look at a thorn bush and see a bird's nest,
I prick up my ears.
But everytime I get to know a man
I can't help weeping . . .

Lament and song, and poem and music . . .
Imagine someone
who has been searching for his friend for a long time
and learns that he is in such and such a hospital . . .
What does he do? He takes a batch of the nicest presents
and hurries to visit him . . .
But when he discovers that it is a mistake
and that his friend is still missing,
he asks the first patient whom he meets in the corridor
if he happens to know someone
whom nobody visits . . .
'Why that's me,' the patient says, 'that's me,
nobody's visited me for a whole fifteen years!'
The visitor makes him a present,
but the two in the hospital corridor are no longer alone,
because at that moment they are enviously and hungrily
surrounded by nearly all the patients
who with an almost vengeful if not truthful obstinacy insist
that nobody has visited them for years either . . .

Half a kingdom and the hand of a princess!
A girl recently wrote me
inquiring whether she should go out into the world

or (like invisible fruit)
wait for the last tree in the world the height of a young man . . .
I wrote back in the snow under her window
to wait until Mozart once again
expressed the throbbing of a heart in love
with double violins in octaves . . .
She wrote back: I'm beyond that and I know very well
that for Janáček timpani were enough
to express a woman's sensuous life . . .
I wrote back that for death
a clarinet melody was enough . . . I know I was being bad
but that girl didn't care
and lives and will live and wait,
wait *curiously,* even though she knows
that the bast *is stripped while in sap* . . .
You'll say to a child: Shut the door!
And he: What's coming?
—Marsyas's skin, darling!

"Women!" said Hamlet, "Eve, Lilith,
Kobolda, Empusa, Lamia!"
Whom did you name? I asked.
He said: "Why, one woman of all the women
of Adam! . . . " And he continued:
"Women! That seemingly fleeing word stopped nakedly,
threw its garments into the hands of our desire
and said: I am not love!
Everything then looks as if it were
bloody cotton, hot lips and milk-stand,
a teasing beginning to a male finish
which begs on knees in the snowy mud of the sheet,
a fifth thumb into two thighs,
a warm pine cone into a cold oven,
a duel of two blind people
slamming into frontal hatred
behind backing up crab forms,
when even a murderer meets his nemesis . . .

There's no knowledge . . . We live in nothing but delusions.
And still we are aquiver with anguish
that not even they will remain
—or that they will remain with us forever
with the smell, when the glow which had a lover in the sun
suddenly seemed to marry a beaver machine . . . or
a treatise on prehistoric dogs . . .

All this between paste-board covers . . . Yes, of course!
And immediately we are different. Ourselves. On our own.
And immediately we are death . . . Death in the jungle . . . He will grow
a beard and no one will recognize him . . .
And she with the loveliest folds in a perfectly simple garment
will let her nails grow to release more easily
the firmly held green slope of children's laughter . . .
The autopsy will then note with a reservation:
when will you forget, soul, that you haven't yet been noticed?
And when will you remember? . . .
Then those who stay behind will light the lamps for a whole year
while a blizzard, with its right hand
in the chimney sleeve, puts on the whole house . . .
And at the very moment they want to show they're not afraid:
fear has arrived out of the blue, but fear,
fear to say that and fear not to say that,
fear at the Negro music of raindrops
beating into burdock leaves,
fear of the squirrel peeling the cone from a pineapple,
fear of the nurse who doesn't know the phone number of the doctor
in the very next room,
fear of the Three Kingly smelting of lead,
fear of name-days, feminine and masculine,
fear of wealth which desires something more precious,
fear of freedom, and fear of the poet
who guided Eurydice out of the underworld.
For Orpheus, leading her away, *did not look back*
and so brought her back to *this* world.
Once here they took several steps:

. . . . .

John Taggart

FOR JERRY LEE LEWIS

What's here not what you believe
what's here and not what you believe
not fire that never dies never quenches
bones here and not that fire.

What's here not what you believe
bones here and not what you believe
hell fire that never dies never quenches
me and my bones not fire.

Bones here and not what you believe
not the big black book
black book of burning fire that never dies
bones in slow procession.

Bones here and not what you believed
book of burning fire
bones swerving a little in procession
swerving a little for you.

We are what's here for you Jerry Lee
we're what's here for you
bones and a poet torn in two
me and my bones for you.

NOTES

CORRESPONDENCE

REVIEWS

The Poet Assassinated
And Other Stories
Guillaume Apollinaire
translated by Ron Padgett
North Point Press, 1984

Ron Padgett's admirable translation represents the first complete English version of Apollinaire's *Poet Assassine,* a novella and sixteen stories, first collected in 1916. The title novella was originally translated by Matthew Josephson, for Broom in 1923; and then by Padgett in an earlier version (Rupert Hart-Davis, London 1968).

It is unfortunate that the new edition still contains such discrepancies as measurements given in both American and European units (i.e. yards and centimeters), and inaccurate translations (see below). Happily, this new version spares the distracting illustrations by Jim Dine, neither attractive nor particularly germaine to the text, which had accompanied Padgett's first effort.

Considered—perhaps due to its reputation as a "novella-a-clef"—one of Apollinaire's most important prose works, "The Poet Assassinated" is not, to my mind, the most compelling piece in the collection. It often drags, through no fault of Padgett's, in the transitional sections between

chapters, when the hero must get from one location or situation to the next. The most enjoyable sections allow Apollinaire to exercise the full range of his exuberant and hyperbolic wit. For instance, the chapter "Fashion" reads like an outrageous satire of VOGUE, informing us that for "spring wear, there'll be many clothes made of bladders, pleasant shapes, light and distinctive."

This brings me to one of the few glaring mistakes in Padgett's translation. "Meetings," the chapter immediately following "Fashion" describes a fictional encounter with François Coppee, the highly conservative poet of the Academie Française and special bête noire of Apol linaire's. "Meetings" was culled from a pseudonymous article of Apollinaire's in LE PASSANT (magazine published in Brussells during the Teens). Since this section also includes lengthy reference to Coppee's celebrated play, *Le Passant,* it seems a pity to translate "le passant" as "the stroller." As this word usually means "flaneur" in French, one might think Apollinaire was alluding to his work for *Le Flaneur des Deux Rives.* Agreed, "passer-by"—the correct English idiom, is too clunky; but perhaps, to preserve the reference to Coppee's play, the *Stroller* should have remained *Le Passant.*

When I say that Padgett's translation is admirable, I mean that it is faithful without being stiff. Padgett's ear is good; he keeps pace with Apollinaire, shadows him pith for pith, punch for punch. Consequently, since many of the stories in this collection are more appealing, have more charm, more irony than "The Poet Assassinated," Padgett's translations of them are better than his work on the title story.

Apollinaire excels at first person narrative; and these stories range from the poignant ("The Eagle Hunt") to the vicious ("The Departure of the Shadow"). "Our Friend Meritarte," about a chef whose cooking is an art which culminates in a lethal satire, is a masterful example of both the translator's and the writer's skills. One could say about them what Apollinaire said about Meritarte: "It's true that he was by no means a scholar or scientist, but above all a man of imagination, a poet with a special gift for satire." "Giovanni Moroni," however, lacks the central organizing theme which makes these stories so powerful in their humor or pathos. Nor is "Giovanni" made any more readable by Padgett's insensitive rendition of the first sentence. Had he translated "d'ailleurs" as "for that matter," and "cependant" as "nonetheless" instead of "moreover" and "however," Padgett would have come out with a more grammatical introductory sentence.

Finally, since the Pleiades edition of Apollinaire's prose came out in 1977, I must reproach the editorial decision not to annotate this collection. Certainly, errors such as passant/stroller could have been avoided; and the reader would have been well served by seeing documentation for the autobiographical elements of "The Poet Assassinated."

RACHEL STELLA

Baudelaire's Flowers: Beauty, Evil and Kitsch

"Traduttore, traditore"—translating as betrayal of the poet—is a universal maxim; and it is of just about as much practical use as Montaigne's "le style, c'est l'homme même," which invites biographers to read literature as a transparency and, conversely, invites thoroughgoing formalists to conclude that anything not present and retrievable from a writer's style isn't worth knowing. My point, of course, is that translators work in a historical and social context, as did the writers whose work they attempt to bring to a new public. It follows that every translation that has ever been read as literary speaks to us of its readers and their expectations. Any translation that lacks such an intention has probably not had much of an audience.

Charles Baudelaire, whose *Flowers of Evil* met with moral outrage in the press and official condemnation in the courts of prudish Second Empire France in 1857, has since come to represent much of what is modern and esthetically significant (for us) in nineteenth-century French poetry. In fact, the gradual establishment of Baudelaire as a great poet inside and outside France took place relatively late, between the end of the first World War and the beginning of the second. Translators have been at least as important as critics in preparing their audience to read Baudelaire in new ways, in keeping with the changing expectations of the times, in keeping, too, with the translator's own genius which, in ideal cases, has molded those expectations.

It has been Baudelaire's good fortune to attract a series of more or less eminent translators in several languages whose work tells us *how* Baudelaire means to readers of a particular time, place and temperament. The latest of these in English is Richard Howard, who initially stimulated the ruminations that led to this article. His is the first complete translation of *Flowers of Evil* into English in a generation and the first ever undertaken singlehandedly by a respected American poet. My first reading of Richard Howard's Baudelaire late in 1982 was enthusiastic. His poetic voice has an accessible, conversational quality that I liked very much, recognizing in it the confessional tone that Gide had called attention to in Baudelaire. On first reading I was careful to attend to Richard Howard without reference to Baudelaire's originals, which in the Godine edition are printed as a separate unit following the American translation. I had reread *Les Fleurs du Mal* many times in the original since discovering Baudelaire as an undergraduate twenty-five years earlier. I could count on memory, I

thought, to let me know how Richard Howard was doing as my reading progressed.

I didn't make too much of the fact that some poems I had long been fond of in the orginal ("Elévation" or "L'Invitation au voyage," for instance) left me a bit cool in Richard Howard's translation. After all, he had revealed to me beauties in poems like "The Irremediable" that had eluded me in the French. It seemed to me a fair trade-off. The complications began when I decided to do a serious review of Baudelaire's principal English-language translators. It wasn't long before my modest intention—to write a piece for *Sulfur* on Richard Howard's Baudelaire—opened up into a maze of considerations about Modernism, its immediate antecedents, and its aftermath. I was struck by the inadequacy of my earlier notion of reviewing Richard Howard without taking into account the major shift in sensibility that his translation of Baudelaire presupposes. What follows is an attempt to organize a subject that could be treated at much greater length by focussing it on two or three central features of *Les Fleurs du Mal.*

*

There have to date been three principal avatars of Baudelaire in English. The first face Baudelaire presented to the English-speaking world was Decadent-Satanic. Introduced as early as 1861, six years before Baudelaire's death from syphilis, in Swinburne's review of the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal,* the poet of Art for Art's Sake was to become, three decades later, the herald of Decadence. Swinburne had called the attention of English readers to that hyper-refined morbidity of the senses which Eliot, in 1930, would try to minimize: "Not the luxuries of pleasure in their simple first form, but the sharp and cruel enjoyments of pain, the acrid relish of suffering felt and inflicted, the sides on which nature looks unnatural, go to make up the stuff and substance of this poetry."[1] Swinburne was of course unusually qualified to appreciate Baudelaire's poetic representation of algolagnia. In this instance he was thinking in particular of the sonnet "Causerie," which Richard Howard has entitled "Conversation (One Side)." Swinburne's emphasis on Satanism in *Les Fleurs du Mal* was to have a more general appeal to Baudelaire's English translators around the turn of the century.

As translated by Arthur Symons and Lord Alfred Douglas, the poet of *Flowers of Evil* stood for Aestheticism and rebellion against late Victorian and Edwardian morality and stodginess. The sestet of the sonnet "Beauty" was rendered by Oscar Wilde's young companion as:

> Singers who see, in trancèd interludes,
> My splendour set with all superb design,
> Consume their days, in toilful ecstasy.
> To these revealed, the starry amplitudes
> Of my great eyes which make all things divine
> Are crystal mirrors of eternity.[2]

"Les poètes" have become "Singers"—much as in Swinburne's "Ave Atque

Vale, in Memory of Charles Baudelaire"—and their "austères études" in the original are surprisingly ecstatic in the English. Baudelaire's poets enter into no "trancèd interludes"—which are presumably required to account for their "toilful ecstasy"—since the image in Baudelaire refers to Beauty in womanly guise, not to the poets themselves. Lord Douglas has managed the trick of rendering Beauty sexless, so that the reader ignorant of the original with its gender markers can readily imagine Baudelaire's "Singers" in ecstatic contemplation of some particularly handsome youth.

The first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* closed on a distinctly Satanic note. "The Death of the Artists" was translated by Arthur Symons, who strained mightily to match the original rhymes: abba / abba / cddc / ee. It is not surprising that he rendered the Satanic sense of the poem better than any other translator has done. But the stylistic mark of Decadence in this translation is the overdetermination of the theme by the inclusion of several blasphemous elements (Capuchins, Confessional, sins and their absolution) that do not exist in the original of lines 9–12 or elsewhere in the sonnet:

> There are those who have never known their idol,
> And these damned Sculptors, and their Capuchins
> Who at the Confessional absolve our sins,
> Have but one hope, O Paris, for some Bridal![3]

Compare Richard Howard's translation of the same four lines, which he presents, as did Baudelaire, in tercets:

> To some their idol will not be revealed,
> and their doomed sculptors, branded with disgrace,
> upbraid themselves and lacerate their breasts,

> nursing one hope, supulchral Capitol!—

The complete absence of any religious reference in Richard Howard's translation, however well attuned it may be to the sensibility of his readers, nonetheless modifies the original. Arthur Symons gratuitously amplified Baudelaire's Satanism. Richard Howard simply edited it out. The "Grande Créature / Dont l'infernal désir nous remplit de sanglots!" was taken by the Decadents as a reference to Old Nick, the Infernal Creature, to whom Baudelaire's artists have presumably sold their souls. Other twentieth-century translators have been embarrassed by it as well.

Satanism is admittedly a small enough theme in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but as a particular instance of Baudelaire's troubled, sometimes blasphemous Christianity, it points to a major paradigm that shifted noticeably between the first and second wave of Baudelaire's translators and readers. Modernism brought with it, and was certainly brought about in part by, the gradual abandonment of religion as humanity's striving for a transcendent Ideal. The importance of Symbolism, and of Baudelaire as its principal poetic source, was that it presented the symbol as self-sufficient, self-contained and whole, the artistic analog of the immanence of experience.

Critics and translators muted the Romantic elements in Baudelaire's poetry at the same time that their reading placed him at the fountainhead of the Symbolist movement. T. S. Eliot understood what was at stake when he wrote in 1930 that: "It was once the mode to take Baudelaire's Satanism seriously, as it is now the tendency to present Baudelaire as a serious and Catholic Christian. . . . I think that the latter view—that Baudelaire is essentially Christian—is nearer the truth than the former. . . . "[4] C. M. Bowra did not hesitate, a dozen years later, to take the next step. Religion in Baudelaire was to be seen essentially as the analog of artistic experience:

> The essence of Symbolism is its insistence on a world of ideal beauty, and its conviction that this is realised through art. The ecstasies which religion claims for the devout through prayer and contemplation are claimed by the Symbolist for the poet through the exercise of his craft. Nor is so proud a claim entirely unreasonable. For the undivided attention which the enraptured worshipper gives to the object of his prayers and the sense of timeless contentment which he finds through them are not entirely different from the pure aesthetic state which seems to obliterate distinctions of time and place, of self and not-self, of sorrow and joy. Nor is it easy to say whether the rapture which so entrances in the poetry of St. John of the Cross is really religious or aesthetic.[5]

The poetic ecstasies C. M. Bowra had in mind were no longer those which Lord Alfred Douglas had introduced surreptitiously into the sonnet "Beauty." The vocabulary may be the same, but the relation of word to image and of both to the poem as aesthetic object had undergone a sea change. Roy Campbell, who translated St. John of the Cross before undertaking *Les Fleurs du Mal,* can be said to have brought something Spanish to Baudelaire. For him "The Death of Artists" is a statement of religious-aesthetic questing:

> We'll still consume our souls in subtle schemes,
> Demolishing tough harness, long before
> We see the giant Creature of our dreams
> Whom all the world is weeping to adore.[6]

Roy Campbell's virile, soldierly Baudelaire may strike us as the exact opposite of the effete poet of an earlier generation, and perhaps equally mannered in a quite different way. We can nonetheless recognize a consonance of vision with Bowra in the sestet of "Beauty" in the Campbell translation (p. 23):

> Poets before my postures, which I seem
> To learn from masterpieces, love to dream
> And there in austere thought consume their days.
>
> I have, these docile lovers to subject,
> Mirrors that glortify all they reflect—
> These eyes, great eyes, eternal in their blaze!

The poet does not stand apart from his creation "in toilful ecstasy." The

sonnet has itself become the symbol of Beauty, not an allegorical statement about it.

The Modernist Baudelaire in English avoids a sensational treatment of those subjects that were, in Baudelaire's day, most scandalous. The "lesbian" poem subtitled "Delphine et Hippolyte" was condemned as immoral at Baudelaire's trial in 1857 and excluded from the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1861. At the same time that Eliot was reinterpreting Baudelaire for a new generation of English speakers, Aldous Huxley published a translation of "Femmes damnées" in his collection *The Cicadas* that conveys a very similar sense of what is important. His decision to keep the rhymed quatrains of the original sometimes led to a forced syntax and an occasional gratuitous image, as in the third quatrain, which describes Hippolyta after her sexual initiation by Delphine:

> Tears and the muffled light of weary eyes,
> The stupor and the dull voluptuous trance,
> Limp arms, like weapons dropped by one who flies—
> All served her fragile beauty to enhance.[7]

Here the regular meter and strong rhyme reinforce the pictorial quality and provide the formal tension necessary to balance voluptuousness and fatigue. Huxley excelled at representing the competing claims of the body and the conscience, of sex and guilt (he rhymed "vex" with "sex"), and his translation emphasizes through this formal tension the inexorable evolution of Baudelaire's poem in the direction of a damnation that is presented as inevitable, yet consciously accepted by the damned lovers. Hippolyta's torture, at the beginning of her long speech, is particularly well translated by Huxley into images of rending and tearing (19th quatrain):

> 'One may not serve two masters here below.'
> But the child answered: 'I am torn apart,
> I feel my inmost being rent, as though
> A gulf had yawned—the gulf that is my heart.

There is no doubt in my mind that the formal constraints that Huxley accepted as translator are an integral element in his achievement. To put it another way—more in keeping with the direction and purpose of this article—Huxley's achievement highlights the salient features of the Modernist poetic that he and others of his generation drew, in part, from Baudelaire himself.

If we contrast Richard Howard's translation of *Les Fleurs du Mal* with his predecessors', what we see—apart from the translators' own strengths and weaknesses—are some of the features of an emerging Post-Modern Baudelaire. Richard Howard's more colloquial English will cer tainly attract readers who would be put off by features of Huxley's lexicon ("flies" in the 3rd quatrain above, for instance) that now seem quaint. The decision to render Baudelaire's vocabulary less distant from the American reader of the 1980s is in keeping with Richard Howard's intention to convey as much as possible of the private register in Baudelaire to

which Gide had already called attention. It is legitimate to ask whether the gains more than outweigh the losses entailed by these decisions. Richard Howard's translation of "Damned Women (Delphine and Hippolyta)" provides some partial answers and the elements of a critical dialog. The third quatrain gives this view of Hippolyta:

> The sluggish tears of her unfocussed gaze,
> her eager arms flung down as in defeat—
> every trace of voluptuous apathy
> served and set off her fragile loveliness.

The first two lines fall quite naturally into iambic pentameter and mark the "poetic" intention of the language. But rather than sustain the mood he has created, Richard Howard prefers—his use of the dash at the end of the second line marks this preference—to return to a decidedly prosy rhythm in the second half of the quatrain. The fourth quatrain, were it not for its lay-out on the page, could be read as a not especially rhythmical prose: "Reclining at her feet, elated yet calm, Delphine stared up at her with shining eyes the way a lioness will watch her prey once her fangs have marked it for her own."[8] Only the prior assumption that "this is a poem" stands between my reading and the embarrassing observation that this is the kind of descriptive prose found in novels sold in supermarkets. This is to say that, in an otherwise praiseworthy effort to engage today's reader, Richard Howard has, on occasion, served up a melodramatic caricature of Romanticism.

Lest I appear to quibble over a minor flaw, I must point out that there are worse problems. The tone of "Damned Women . . . " is so far from Baudelaire's as to be unrecognizable at times. One need not go so far as Eliot did in the direction of a Christian and Catholic Baudelaire to recognize that in a poem like "Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte" the very motor that drives it forward toward its terrible end is propelled by the current alternating between insatiable lust and the realization of sin and its consequences. Hippolyta, who in the nineteenth quatrain will declare herself torn apart by these conflicting motivations, tells Delphine (in the 11th) that she does not repent but that she suffers and is terribly disturbed. The lack of repentance does not, in my view, justify changing the register of the language from moral-religious to pop-psych:

> But then Hippolyta looked up: 'Delphine,
> I am grateful to you, I have no regrets,
> yet I am troubled and my nerves are tense,
> as if a dreadful feast had fouled the night . . .

No regrets? Tense nerves? Already the reader senses that after a few more nights with Delphine there won't be any problem and that for the moment, a Valium will take care of Hippolyta's jangled nerves.

The genuine, moving drama of Baudelaire's poem is gradually reduced to apathy, emptiness, and a dread closer to boredom than to angst. Where Hippolyta is supposed to express her immense pain:

> On ne peut ici-bas contenter qu'un seul maître!"

Mais l'enfant, épanchant une immense douleur,
Cria soudain:—"Je sens s'élargir dans mon être
Un abîme béant; cet abîme est mon coeur!

Richard Howard gives us:

You cannot please two masters in this world!"
But then the girl, in a paroxysm of grief,
suddenly cried out: "There is emptiness
inside me—and that emptiness is my heart!

A statement of emptiness (although likened to searing lava in the next line) leaves the reader with no means to grasp the religious import of the line concerning two masters, which Delphine has uttered blasphemously. (Compare the Huxley translation above.)

The last five quatrains of Richard Howard's translation of this poem are as good as the preceding examples are weak. They are in the poet's voice, not, as above, in the voices of Hippolyta and Delphine. The lovers who, earlier on, seemed to suffer primarily from boredom, are very forcefully condemned to eternal suffering in hell:

Downward, wretched victims! ever down
the path you follow: make your way to hell,
into the pit where crime arouses crime,
seething together in the thunder's maw
and scourged by winds that never knew the sky
Down, frantic shades, and fall to your desires
where passion never slakes its raging thirst,
and from your pleasure stems your punishment.

How is the reader to make sense of this horrible, Dantesque hell? Why are these nice gay women damned anyway? Are they the victims of an uncomprehending society? By removing from the poem all of its specifically religious motivation, the translator has left us with an unmotivated, but splendid conclusion. Since there is no moral cause, the moral effects are unjustified and appear gratuitous.

I have intentionally pointed up some of the weaknesses of Richard Howard's translation first. They are, as so often happens, the other side of his strengths. One of his systematic decisions, or so it would seem, was to avoid rhyme wherever possible, whereas Baudelaire always rhymes, a fact he is careful to relate in his preface. The more relaxed line that results goes a long way toward providing the necessary medium for the intimate voice he seeks to create. I say *create* because Richard Howard's version of Baudelaire's private register is not quite identical to the original. Rhyme, and the absence of rhyme, are a part of the problem and of Richard Howard's solution to it. Well into the twentieth century readers in both French and English expected Baudelaire's private register, his special voice, to speak through particular combinations of rhythm and rhyme. That this is no longer the case I take to be a fact. But it is a fact that a good translator like Richard Howard cannot afford to equate with license. There is ample evidence in his *Flowers of Evil* that he has worked

with great care to restore in tone, shading, and in vowel and consonant combinations what he has chosen to sacrifice in avoiding rhyme. In some cases the superiority of his results is easy to demonstrate. The introductory poem addressed "To the Reader" is important because it literally sets the tone of the collection. There is also no better example to make the point concerning the importance of one poet translating the entire collection in the same voice. The original, to my mind, is not one of Baudelaire's better poems. Despite some fine images, the allegorizing of Ennui appears somewhat arch to later readers and distances the whole poem more than one might like. Richard Howard has undertaken to minimize the distance. The initial quatrain immediately speaks to the reader in the same voice that I recognize in the best of Baudelaire's poems:

> Stupidity, delusion, selfishness and lust
> torment our bodies and possess our minds,
> and we sustain our affable remorse
> the way a beggar nourishes his lice.
>
> (P. 5.)

Baudelaire is made present to the reader here in a way that no other English-language translator has managed. The tone of confidentiality that will prevail in Richard Howard's translation is immediately caught by the reader's ear, which is quite prepared in the final quatrain to identify with this disabused, friendly voice:

> Reader, you know this squeamish monster well,
> —hypocrite reader, —my alias, —my twin!
>
> (P. 6.)

Stanley Kunitz, in his *Selected Poems*, gave this version of the same two stanzas:

> Ignorance, error, cupidity, and sin
> Possess our souls and exercise our flesh;
> Habitually we cultivate remorse
> As beggars entertain and nurse their lice.
>
> xxxx
>
> How well you know this fastidious monster, reader,
> —Hypocrite reader, you — my double! my brother![9]

He is much closer to the diction and syntax of the original, and partly for that reason his translation does not read nearly so well as a poem in English.

Robert Lowell, the one American predecessor whom Richard Howard names in his preface, sacrificed both tone and rhythm to the exigencies of rhyme (sometimes approximate) in an "imitation" dedicated to Stanley Kunitz:

> Infatuation, sadism, lust, avarice
> possess our minds and drain the body's force;

we spoonfeed our adorable remorse,
like whores or beggars nourishing their lice.

xxxx

. . . This obscene
beast chain-smokes yawning for the guillotine—
you—hypocrite Reader—my double—my brother.[10]

There are whores aplenty in Baudelaire, but not here. Aside from this gratuitous detail, the American version lacks both elegance and poetic strength (by which I do not mean emotional energy, which abounds in Lowell). Baudelaire was always in control of his medium, an important characteristic that has not in all cases impressed itself upon his translators.

It must be said to Richard Howard's credit that he has consistently made Baudelaire's Alexandrine tetrameter quite at home in iambic pentameter, even if in some instances it lapses into prosy passages. A fine example of his success with this rhythm is the poem "La Servante au grand coeur," which he begins familiarly:

You used to be jealous of our old nurse
who sleeps, warm heart and all, beneath the sod.
(P. 105.)

Compare the rhymed couplet of Robert Lowell's version of the same two lines:

My old nurse and servant, whose great heart
made you jealous, is dead and sleeps apart
from us.
(P. 63.)

Although the cumbersome rhythm of Lowell's line is exemplary of a different problem in translation, I cannot help thinking of Edna St. Vincent Millay's joke about the difficulties of hexametric verse in English:

"Consider now this opening line of a poem of Baudelaire's
which I wished to translate into English hexametric verse:
'La servante au grand coeur dont vous étiez jalouse'
What am I to do with this?
I cannot translate it:
'The big-hearted servant of whom you were jealous'
unless I wish to follow it with some such line as
'Was not such a slut as the other maids tell us'!"[11]

Richard Howard's version is both rhythmical and hamish. The tone is usually right, and that is a high accomplishment. When he is successful (most of the time, fortunately for us all) the result is splendid. When he fails as, in my reading, he did in an extended section of "Damned Women . . . ," the result borders on kitsch. Many more examples could be adduced in favor of Richard Howard's positive qualities as a translator of Baudelaire. Arguments are not lacking either to demonstrate the limiting characteristics of the translator's worldview.

As I indicated at the outset, the principal quesion that Richard Howard's translation raises is one of audience. I have tried to suggest the extent to which significant translations of Baudelaire convey something of the shifts in sensibility that the translator's choices both presuppose and express. Richard Howard's is no exception. If it is possible to speak of kitsch in this regard, that is because formerly crucial religious concerns, once inextricably meshed with esthetics, have been trivialized to the point of banality. Richard Howard's *Flowers of Evil* situates the reader at the opposite extreme from the reading propounded by moralizing critics in 1857. Baudelaire was convinced that the attention of the public prosecutor was called to him by Gustave Bourdin's review in *Le Figaro* on 5 July 1857, in which that defender of morality claimed that, in *Les Fleurs du Mal*"; " . . . the odious mixes with the vile; the repulsive is alloyed with the filthy. . . . This book is an almshouse open to every mental derangement, to every putridness of the heart. . . . " The style is familiar, as is the intention to "protect" the right-thinking public from everything that is profoundly challenging in the arts. No reviewer for a major American newspaper took offence at Richard Howard's *Flowers.* Richard Howard knows his readers; his fine version of Baudelaire's liminary poem is proof enough of that. Our *ennui* is presumed to extend to the very stuff that made Baudelaire electrifying in 1857: sin, perversion, damnation. My reading of "Damned Women" makes the point: if the thematic material is itself so indifferent, then the translator must aim to convey the pleasure of the text as a self-referential play of signifiers. This is poetry for the post-Barthes era (Roland, not Karl). The putrefaction of "Carrion" no longer refers to anything but itself. The corruption of the flesh carries with it no spiritual charge and scarcely any esthetic power; for those readers who can't grasp the intertextuality of the *Carpe diem* in the poem it may do no more than reinforce vestigial images, carefully crafted by our best-paid poets, the ad-men, that the health spa is the place for us.

Once we have successfully emptied the symbol of "Carrion" of both its horror and its hope, we are left, the talent of the translator notwithstanding, with simple garbage: kitsch.

A. JAMES ARNOLD

NOTES

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5. C. M. Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961 copyright 1943), p. 6.

6. Roy Campbell, trans., "The Death of Artists," in *Poems of Baudelaire, A Translation of Les Fleurs du Mal* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), p. 168.

7. Aldous Huxley, "Femmes Damnées (From the French of Charles Baudelaire)," in *The Cicadas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1931), p. 18.

8. Richard Howard, trans., "Damned Women: Delphine and Hippolyta," by Charles Baudelaire, in *Les Fleurs du Mail* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982), p. 126. (Further references to this edition will be made parenthetically in the text.)

9. Stanley Kunitz, *Selected Poems (1928–1958)* (Boston: Atlantic, Little, Brown, 1959), pp. 89, 90.

10. Robert Lowell, *Imitations*, The Noonday Press (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967 orig. ed. 1958), pp. 46, 47.

11. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Preface," *Flowers of Evil*, from the French of Charles Baudelaire by George Dillon and Edna St. Vincent Millay (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1936), p. xix.

Chronotopes: Notes for a (Temporary) Exhibition on "Affinities of the Tribal and the Postmodern."

In New York City last winter you could visit at least half a dozen major exhibits of "tribal" art: the new Center for African Art, the Maori Show at the Metropolitan, the Northwest Coast show at the IBM gallery, the Asante exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History (where the Hall of Pacific Peoples had also just opened) and the much discussed blockbuster at the Museum of Modern Art, "'Primitivism' in Modern Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern." Last November I was invited to a symposium at MoMA and while I was there, thinking through the "affinity" of tribal and modern (for my conclusions see *Art in America*, April 1985), I came upon Barbara Tedlock's recent description of a Zuni Shalako ceremony, in *Conjunctions* 6. She evoked an unexpected setting (Bakhtin might call it a "chronotope"*), a room and a site of collection radically unlike the exhibition spaces in New York.

*Chronotope: literally "time-space," with no priority to either dimension. See M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), pp. 84-258. The concept can help identify museum exhibits with fictional and actual settings where historically specific relations of power are made visible and where certain stories can "take place" (the bourgeois salon in 19th century social novels, the merchant ship in Conrad's tales of adventure and empire, the surrealist studio of the 20s, filled with African and Oceanian art). Bakhtin (p. 84): "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."

> Imagine a small western New Mexican village, its snow-lit streets lined with white Mercedes, quarter-ton pickups and Dodge vans. Villagers wrapped in black blankets and flowered shawls are standing next to visitors in blue velveteen blouses with rows of dime buttons and voluminous satin skirts. Their men are in black Stetson silver-banded hats, pressed jeans, Tony Lama boots and multicolored Pendleton blankets. Strangers dressed in day-glo orange, pink and green ski jackets, stocking caps, hiking boots and mittens. All crowded together they are looking into newly constructed houses illuminated by bare light bulbs dangling from raw rafters edged with Woolworth's red fabric and flowered blue print calico. Cinderblock and plasterboard white walls are layered with striped serapes, Chimayó blankets, Navajo rugs, flowered fringed embroidered shawls, black silk from Mexico and purple, red and blue rayon from Czechoslovakia. Rows of Hopi cotton dance kilts and rain sashes; Isleta woven red and green belts; Navajo and Zuni silver concha belts and black mantas covered with silver brooches set with carved lapidary, rainbow mosaic, channel inlay, turquoise needlepoint, pink agate, alabaster, black cannel coal and bakelite from old '78s, coral, abalone shell, mother-of-pearl and horned oyster hang from poles suspended from the ceiling. Mule and white-tailed deer trophy-heads wearing squash-blossom, coral and chunk-turquoise necklaces are hammered up around the room over rearing buckskins above Arabian tapestries of Martin Luther King and the Kennedy brothers, The Last Supper, a herd of sheep with a haloed herder, horses, peacocks.

I couldn't stop thinking about this exact, almost hallucinatory description throughout the symposium at MoMA. (We talked of formal and conceptual affinities, of the sense of "magic" felt by Picasso confronting African sculptures, of the relative merits of anthropological and aesthetic settings for non-Western objects.) Tedlock's image of tribal art and *life* was not to be found in the reverent, predictably beautiful displays I was seeing around New York—where all the objects were suitable for an art collector's living room. I kept wondering why something like a Shalako room could have no place in the MoMA show, even in its "Contemporary Explorations" section. The heterogeneous Zuni collection suggested another exhibit—juxtaposing not tribal and modern, but tribal and postmodern. In this exhibit, "tribal" existence could be seen as historical encounter and appropriation. "Postmodernism" could be reconceived outside the dominant centers of artistic and cultural production.

The ultimate rationale for the show would be no more defensible than that for the proceedings at MoMA. It would be as much a projection, and would have little to say about what is actually happening at Zuni—for example, the subtleties of current struggles between traditionalists and moderns. But in the heterogeneous space the exhibit would momentarily open, and in the location of "tribal" creations in a complex, oppositional *present*, unexpected histories might emerge.

*

The Shalako room reminded me of another I had read about. I couldn't recall what it was—perhaps a "Cabinet of Curiosities" from Early Modern Europe, or a description of the old Trocadero Museum in Paris, filled with bric-a-brac, where Picasso first studied African "fetishes" . . . .

It was a scene from Edmund Wilson's *Apologies to the Iroquois*. In the late 1950s Wilson discovers the existence of living Indians in upstate New York, his childhood backyard. He tells of visiting a Seneca ceremony, a "dark dance," composed of traditional song sequences performed in an unlit kitchen. It is a strangely powerful acoustic experience. And Wilson is surprised to find that while the ceremony is performed, in an adjoining room behind double doors, a group of old and young Seneca, including the "master of ceremonies" and the old woman providing the feast, are watching TV. He is bothered by the distracting noise of a comedian's jokes. Wilson eventually succeeds in blocking out the scraps of light and sound coming from the next room. He is swept up in the dark "oratorio."

But conceiving the tribal, or any site of authentic cultural life, must we block out such "noise"? When the long series of songs end, the double doors are left open; the hosts join in the socializing; the TV remains on—with the sound off.

*

I recalled another crowded room where, seven years ago in Boston Federal Court, I had listened to the Mashpee tribe try to prove its legal existence. The Native American inhabitants of a long-standing "Indian town" on Cape Cod had incorporated as a tribe in order to sue for the return of collective lands lost in the mid-nineteenth century. In the courtroom, as court stenographers recorded every word of many incongruent testimonies about their culture and history, people who did not look or sound very much like "Indians" tried to convince a Boston jury pool of their identity.

They failed. People in Mashpee had done too many un-Indian things: they had converted to Christianity; the tribal chief currently taught Phys. Ed. at Falmouth High School. The Medicine Man, for a time, had been a private detective in Hawaii.

The court required that the plaintiffs prove a continuous tribal existence, from the eighteenth century to the present. They could not. In the eyes of the law a reinvented tribe was not a real one. The historical evidence—laboriously compiled by their opponents—showed uneven, sporadic evidence of a "tribe" in Mashpee. According to the record, this elusive form seemed to have come and gone. Indeed the Mashpee had not even "originally" been a tribe (the town was created by the missionary Bourne, to shelter remnants of various Cape Cod groups, decimated by a Plague that had swept the area just before the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. Worse, the Mashpee had since "disappeared" repeatedly: in King Philip's War, by intermarriage (with Hessian Soldiers, with blacks, etc.), through religious conversion, through steady assimilation, through the (contested) act by which they were made U.S. citizens in the 1850s. The historical record was relentless.

Who or what was it that kept on disappearing?

In the crowded courtroom, beside tables heaped with exhibits, an elderly woman, pillar of the local Baptist Church, spoke softly (with a New England accent) of her childhood surrounded by Indian stories and

Christian beliefs. She said she had no difficulty with the obvious fact that "God" was the "Great Spirit." She testified that in the 1940s she had been secretary for the "American Indian Thunderbird Dancers" (most of whose dances did not originate around Cape Cod).

A bush haired teenager in jeans took the stand. His nickname, "Chiefy."

Judge: "Is this an Indian headband?" —"It's a headband."
"It's a bandana?" —"Right."
"How long have you worn it?" —"As long as I've needed it."

In the exhibition I found myself dreaming of, there was a room where every visitor would be cross-examined on his or her cultural identity. ("Why are you wearing these clothes?" "How can you be an American and Prefer French cooking?") On the walls: photographs by Edward Curtis of the "vanishing race" would be alternated with self-portraits by Cindy Sherman (Sherman as suburbanite, Sherman as movie star, Sherman as career girl, Sherman as scuba diver . . .).

*

Masks and copies. Niapaul's *Mimic Men,* a picture of post-colonial inauthenticity, is recast as a general condition. (See Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28.) Barbara Kruger: "We are very good mimics. We replicate certain words and pictures and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction." (She appears to refer to women.)

Authenticity (as coherent, original voice, language, essence) comes into question. Identity is understood to be a legal matter, the effect of a subjection. To "pass," the subject adopts incongruent masks.

"Tribal" identity, (re)constituted in the art museums and law courts, is one of these masks. A serious fiction. It is a matter of survival and of power for certain people (in Zuni, in Mashpee, in New Caledonia). GAL-And it may also be a prison, a stereotype (the true, forever-disappearing Indian). The "tribal" and the "modern" on exhibit in New York are contested, historically produced categories. This is what the various "post-" perspectives now in the air help make clear . . . always temporarily. Compounds like "postmodernism" have a short half-life.)

"Affinity of the tribal and the postmodern"—the temporary exhibit at least leads out of museums, out of the art world, and into local settings of cultural, artistic invention—impure, hybrid situations where all people like the "vanishing" subjects of Edward Curtis' photographs, wear costumes and wigs.

*

Sample Captions

What will it really take to move the "tribal" out of the exotic *past* and into the present-becoming-*future*?

—Must the false stereotype be replaced by the true one?

—In what room is the exhibit taking place?

—What multinational corporation is funding it?

JAMES CLIFFORD

White Marriage & Recovery
Amy Gerstler
Illuminati, 1984

"White Marriage," Amy Gerstler's haunting three-part prose poem, begins with its speaker's childhood memories of being "constantly wet" while her lighthouse-keeper father "laced his oatmeal with cognac and filled her days with "groggy demands." The setting changes along with the age of the protagonist, but the speaker's ubiquitous fog and uncomfortable self-awareness does not. The result is an enthralling autobiographical journey which admits to going nowhere. The child of Scene 1, who saw but did not quite understand two lovers "feeding" on a beach, returns home to stare at her father's bald spot, to wonder at the touch of his hand on her hair, and finally—in an abrupt switch from past to present tense—to cringe under the power of his control. "Not even sleep shields me from the power of his frown." Scene 2's mystical lover "under stands" the animals' language but intensifies her own psychic isolation. "Locked" in a "brothel," she finds herself tethered to an arrangement which "protects [her] from worse enslavements." Little is different in Scene 3, where the routine migrations of a family of white herons highlight the sterility of a married couple who have come to "Bless the oak board that divides our bed." The "pale as an iceberg" little girl is now enclosed in a "White Marriage," part of a couple who "always undress in the dark" and whose life has become "a procession of whimpering, living misgivings."

What is not whimpering is Gerstler's language. Her utterly simple sentences develop a voice, neither bitter nor plaintive, but emotionally flat, stunned by the memories it is recalling. A pleasant daydream thus

gives way to bleak reality.

> *Why so quiet, dear?* Just thinking. Remember shortly after we met, when you put your foot down and decreed: NO MORE KISSING? I lifted my skirt, so you'd see what you were talking about going without. But you were right.

The impassivity of such bland acknowledgments annuls both painful memories and the "White Marriage" of quiescence.

"Recovery" takes a more active role toward its stated goal by means of several healing processes. Dreams exorcize both fears and disease; prophets turn their wisdom toward cures. "Science" and "experimenters" give way to " 'the gift';" magical breath works miracles; and dreams come true. The disembodied voices of "Recovery" share a trust in mystical powers and become "impartial witnesses" to the language of belief, "the only one common to all races, all times." While "Recovery" ends with a perversion of this language in the complaints of a man who wanted more spectacular miracles at Lourdes, the healing process is underway. The speaker has abandoned her search for dim memory and conquered pain with medicine of "an invisible kind that can be had everywhere, for nothing." Together "White Marriage" and "Recovery" chronicle an individual's realization of and emergence from suffering and provide a refreshing alternative to purely confessional self-absorption.

TAFFY MARTIN

Response To Mary Kinzie*

It is hard to believe that Ms. Kinzie is not aware that contemporary poetry includes a number of North American, Latin American, and European poets who have, over the past fifty years, continuing into the present, realized in their writing values which she herself espouses yet claims are absent: complex ideas, the real content of inner life, coherence, and freshness of perception. The most disturbing aspect of her essay is therefore

*A response to Kinzie's "The Rhapsodic Fallacy," published in the Fall 1984 issue of *Salmagundi*. This response was made too late to be included in the Spring 1985 *Salmagundi* with other responses to Kinzie. Readers unfamiliar with Kinzie's response to contemporary poetry can look up her "poetry chronicles" (in which 5 to 10 books are reviewed at the same time) in the *American Poetry Review*. It seems clear enough, from the number of books that she has written about over the past few years, that she is an omnivorous reader, and aware of the work of the poets excluded from consideration in "The Rhapsodic Fallacy" who, were they to be included, would ruin her argument.

a willful exclusion and a presentation of insignificant contemporary poems as representative of the state of the art. She seems to believe that itis more important to shake her finger at Linda Gregerson and Catherine Rutan than to engage, for example, Robert Duncan and Jerome Rothenberg. In this way she sentences herself to a present about one millimeter thick, detached not only from the writing of poets now in their sixties and seventies, but from the great and nearby dead, whose work done in the 30s and 40s, is part of a living heritage.

She writes: "Not only have we eliminated from the available repertory of literary responses those forms associated with the eighteenth century, formal satire, familiar epistle, georgic, and pastoral, but also those associated with the Middle Ages and Renaissance, allegory, philosophical poem, epic, and verse drama and tragedy, until nothing is left for us now but a kind of low lyrical shrub whose roots are quick-forming, but shallow."

If she is lamenting that there are no entertaining stock imitations of these forms, so what? What counts is that in variational and improvisational ways, Kenneth Rexroth, Basil Bunting, and Robert Kelly have worked the georgic and the pastoral; Antonin Artaud has set satire, erudition, and poetry, into the familiar epistle; Aimé Césaire has written verse drama; a range of poets including Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Duncan, and Gary Snyder, have written long, philosophical poems. As for the epic: what it might meaningfully be has constantly been under scrutiny throughout the century in a number of diverse and original "long poem" forays (Louis Zukofsky's *A* has so many facets that it probably recognizes most of the forms Kinzie mentions).

Kinzie also excludes new forms that have occurred in the breaking up of old forms, especially this century, e.g., the middle-length poem (not a lyric but not an epic, Césaire's *Notebook of A Return to the Native Land* and Vladimir Holan's *A Night With Hamlet* being superb examples, not to mention Rexroth's work in this potential form), and the various revisionings of what a short or a long poem can be (e.g., Cid Corman's very short poems evolving out of his work on Bashō, or Theodore Enslin's extremely long poems that read like marginalia to an otherwise unstated life). Charles Olson was the first, to my knowledge, to reinspect the word "rhapsody," and notice that in Greek it meant *rhapsōidia,* "songs stitched together," the technique of epic poetry. It happens that since Whitman's 1855 version of "Song of Myself," that the most unique and explored 20th century form, the serial poem, is the child of Rhapsodia. The Rhapsodic is far from being a "Fallacy" in 20th century world poetry; relative to its roots and older meanings, it is our presiding archetypal pattern!

Kinzie ignores all the poets I have mentioned because her own obsession with the past is anchored in hierarchy (high style versus low style), propriety, literary decorum and order, and pedagogically a priori assumptions about "the truth." Is it possible that she does not realize that we cannot anymore have complex ideas *and* hierarchy, or a coherent inner life *and* literary decorum? She is primarily a rather prissy upholder

of out-moded style and taste. Her criticism of an insignificant Ashbery poem is very offensive, for *she* is offended by what she calls Ashbery's "obsessive promiscuity of styles," and after stating that his writing is not only "radioactive," but "dangerously sterile," she concludes that Ashbery is "the passive bard of a period in which the insipid has turned into the heavily toxic." Lurking in such gibberish must be anti-homosexuality, and the fear the self-righteous have at the sight of the high mixing with the low, in short, the intermingling of stratifications and alienations that have to a great extent led the world to its present peril.

It *is* a moral issue, as Kinzie implies, but it is not the one she thinks it is. No alternative model to "The Rhapsodic Fallacy" is needed, simply because the rhapsodic, as technique and sublimation, is not a fallacy. The moral issue might be put this way: when will critics like Kinzie, Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler start writing on poetry that knows more than they do? For over fifty years a new perspective has been assembling. Unfortunately, especially for the young, the poetry of César Vallejo, Aimé Césaire, Charles Olson, Antonin Artaud, Octavio Paz, Robert Duncan, Paul Celan, and Vladimir Holan has not been, as it were, cross-indexed, so as to draw forth the superimposed configuration that it represents. The difficulty in doing so is not, as Kinzie says, because the steppe is arid and covered with monotonous vegetation, but because 20th century world poetry is a rain forest as well as a new wilderness. It takes root, as Césaire has written, in the red flesh of the soil (soil that is at once iron-rich, blood-soaked, and haunted by the corpses of "redskins")—but it also takes root in the eyes of Lorca confronting Borges in NYC in the late 20s with the startling information that the most important figure in North American culture was Mickey Mouse.

I am speaking of a poetry that attempts to be responsible for all an individual writer knows about himself and about his world. It is that simple and that awesome. It is a poetry of wrath rather than instruction, ambivalent about all the major movements of and right before its own time (e.g., in their assimilation of Surrealism, both Artaud and Césaire wrote more fulgurating and enduring poems than any of the Surreal founders), and it reveals depths and abysses of human nature that only the isolated Blake and elderly Goya, to name two great 18th century "outsiders," depicted. It is Expressionistic *and* Objective as well (think of Olson's attention to the topology of Gloucester, or Césaire's observed Martinican flora). Since this poetry has a critical as well as inspirational relationship to Romanticism, and since much of it carries the shattered lantern glass of previous hermetics in the belly of its lines and is much more concerned with process than with product (= masterpiece), it might be identified as Abstract Romanticism. The most trenchant statement on the burden of such poetry was made by Robert Duncan in the opening paragraphs of his essay "Rites of Participation" (Caterpillar 1, 1967).

One reason that the North American poets I mention above are not considered by Kinzie is that the extent of world involvement is so massive and unrelenting in their major work that it cannot be dealt with by standard literary criticism. In the work of Olson and Duncan, as well

as several poets of my own generation, "the war within my members," initially sounded by Blake, is out there, at home, in the bloodstream and arguably in the framework of the universe itself. Everyone is implicated—including the critic! What we need is a new kind of critic-reader who is not only willing to take on material that makes her stretch to her last zoa, but also to accept archetypal psychology, insanity, archeology, slavery, anti-semitism and Capitalism as standard and active equipment of literary response.

For Mary Kinzie, a fabulous beast, a kind of Cerberus whose heads are Poe, Baudelaire and Wordsworth, has darkened the aim of poetry into "apotheosis, and ecstatic and unmediated self-consumption in the moment of perception and feeling." To put it rather dully, poets have been concerned with what Kinzie seems to indict since Sappho. *The Divine Comedy,* Blake's long prophetic books, and some of the most memorable dramatic moments in Shakespeare, define this genre (if it is one). On the other hand, nothing that Kinzie quotes has anything remotely to do with it. Insinuated anxiety, self-indulgence, and violations of surface, the crimes of the unsteady poems trotted out to be heckled, are not apotheosis. Nor do they appear to be damaged by *The Prelude, Les Fleurs du Mal,* or *Eureka!*

Apotheosis, or the deifying/crowning of a god, involves the poet in the strategies of inspiration. Is the source "out there," in aura, in nerves, or in a dark transgression in the past—or is the combined figure of the muse, angel, and duende made up of all these sources? Apotheosis is the power most sacred to world poetry, from shamanistic incantation and reception, to Frank O'Hara overwhelmed with the beauty of BillieHoliday's voice in The Five Spot. Genuine apotheosis is rare and extraordinary (Montale's "The Orchard" is a fine example), and what we really need is more discussion of it rather than sneering at it.

"Ecstatic and unmediated self-consumption" is a peculiar and intriguing charge. Artaud in an essay, "Revolt Against Poetry," distinguished between eating his poem and giving his heart to his poem. While in that essay, he clearly favored the latter act, his greatest poetry feeds off its own tissue rather than performing sacramental devotions. Poetic autophagy might mean that the body of imagination finds itself good, that all imaginative things are good to consume and transform (Ginsberg's last line of *Howl*: "the absolute heart of the poem . . . good to eat a thousand years"). We all know how limiting and instructive repression and taboo are in the creative process. Apotheosis, in an autophagic sense, might be a state of writerly awareness in which there is nothing to repress, in which all materials are given equal potential poemic status.

Such a state of awareness (as practice in contrast to effect) would in varying degrees be contingent upon the writer's feeling for and understanding of his own physical body, especially in our limboless Protestant society, his physical lower body, still the most inaccessible stronghold of material that has been stigmatized as unacceptable to literature. Kinzie pretty clearly indicates the extent to which her ideas about poetry could not accommodate degradation, even the kind that digs a bodily grave for

a new birth. Kinzie is set against the "coarse," the "promiscuous," and "the double treatment of words as both ordinary *and* mysterious, clear *and* turbid." It follows that she would find it double-talk to read "ecstatic self-consumption" as self-realization, the imaginative consuming of the generated material upon which the poem has been building. When that which was previously unknown (before the creative process began) is discovered within the labyrinth itself, the Minotaur or spectre can be embraced instead of murdered.

Poetry, as a psychological art, is still in its infancy, and young writers who seek to create great poems in the year 2000 would be better off with texts by Bahktin, Ferenczi, and Hillman, camped along the Amazon, as their workshop, rather than sitting around Argus-eyed, sharpening their defenses in creative writing wards. I, for one, though, fear that the next couple of decades are going to be more populated by schoolmarmish Mary Kinzies than by Blaise Cendrars riding the Transsiberian Express. The academic level of Apollonian anxiety appears to feel more and more threatened by the Dionysian rifts and pits that continue to appear in the surface of the century. This means that all of us who believe in a tough, impassioned, critical *and* inspired, world-aware poetry that is not meaninglessly avant-garde or conventionally traditional will have to continually speak out for, and seriously defend, a middle ground.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

How the Grinch Imitated Gary Snyder

Gary Snyder once wrote, "In the new way of things, the community is essential to the creative act; the solitary poet figure and the 'name' author will become less and less relevant. Hence I prefer to be with my friends—which is the creative context." There are those who write about Snyder's poetry and still do not understand that this man means what he says. "Community" is not a literary conceit in the way the seven ambiguities are, woven craftily into the poem by some literary magus. Nor can one fathom it by examining the work of a single writer, or the poet divorced from his audience.

A large number of poets, particularly those you discover once you turn the nose of your car north from San Francisco, live away from urban centers. They frequently display a spectrum of assumptions and concerns similar to Snyder's, and share a common store of prosodic techniques.

One method of disposing of these people, by those who write on Snyder's work, is to notice—more frequently deride—Snyder's "imitators"; to issue warnings against the hazards of acolytism; and to invoke some insurmountable gap that divides Snyder from his so-called followers. A review of Snyder's recent poetry by Robert Peters (in *Sulfur* 10) says this: "The difference between Snyder and the followers is that when Snyder takes a sauna it's an experience; when the acolytes do it's merely a bath." One can imagine that Mr. Snyder and his wife proceed in such exemplary manner to heap experience on experience whereas the followers and their spouses merely have children, or dinner, or jobs. I hope I don't need to expand on the neuraesthenic implications of Mr. Peters' statement. But the presence of lesser-known poets in Gary Snyder's vicinity evidently distempers certain otherwise healthy mentalities.

Gary Snyder has spent his adult life forging a sense of what a community might be. He has discussed many of them, including wilderness trail-builders, San Francisco-based poets, a Yoga ashram, and Zen training centers in Japan and America. He presently lives in a definable community in the Sierra Nevada foothills, the location of which he gives as the watershed lying between the south and middle forks of the Yuba River. By his testimony, each of these communities finds cohesiveness in a continuous interchange of learnt and learnable human resources. Snyder's essays and interviews make this clear. The exchange of practical and personal skills, always in evidence in the earlier poetry, has become the explicit torque which shapes *Axe Handles.* The poetic output of a decade, the book creates for its reader an ambience of Snyder's family and neighbors, and the skills they share and exchange.

Among Snyder's neighbors, a number count themselves poets and scholars. Steve Sanfield, Dale Pendell, Susan and Phillip Suntree, Will Staple—these come immediately to mind. The list is much longer. But flipping through back issues of Coyotes Journal, Caterpillar, Origin, Kuksu, discloses an admixture of poets, active for decades, that one could reasonably offer as Snyder-imitators. Curiously, some have been writing and publishing for as long as he has. In fact, Gary Snyder has never been quite the solitary voice crying in the wilderness both his admirers and detractors might prefer him to be. It lubricates the wheels of criticism if he is, but there's something a little sinister in that. By separating Snyder from a community that shares his concerns—whether his immediate neighbors or his wider readership—critics can feast themselves on bits of prosody or biography, while obscuring the crucial beliefs that underpin his practice.

Mr. Peters in the review already mentioned is a ready example. So taken is he by Snyder's successful deployments of language, he apparently doesn't notice that *Axe Handles* is more than a bunch of good or bad poems. The book exhibits a central, organizing concern—a concern the title poem ingenously puts as "craft of culture,/How we go on." The issue explicitly forefronted is that what is learnable Snyder has received from someone else. What is teachable he'll do his best to pass on.

No *homo sapiens* in the last 40,000 years has sprung full-blown

from the void. Mid-1980's Americans come feverishly close though—isolated, disaffected people living a nightmarish swap-meet of lovers, homesites and children. Few of us care about poetry, which in most cultures we know of has been the pre-eminent device for transmitting culturally significant information. Against this condition, Lew Welch turns up in one poem to admonish:

> "teach the children about the cycles.
> The life cycles. All the other cycles.
> That's what it's all about, and it's all forgot."

Evidently a lot of children are still interested.

No one can contest Gary Snyder's popularity. *Axe Handles* sold 30,000 copies in six months, a stunning feat for a single title of poetry. Adequate figures do not exist, but in his 1979 essay "The Political Economy of Poetry" Ron Silliman calculated the annual number of poetry books sold in this country at 170,000. Why Snyder should command such a share of the market will never become clear so long as people like Peters glibly assert that the followers "(adore) him with the fervor they bestow on rock stars." This sort of statement—aside from its sociological inaccuracy—explains nothing. It suggests that Snyder's poetry, when interesting, succeeds in spite of his audience. Which directly contradicts Snyder's own assumption of community as creative nexus. By directly addressing his readers as a unified community—"the great paleolithic sub-culture" he has referred to—Snyder has defined and acquired it.

The direction Snyder's poetry has taken can't be divorced from the acquisition and composition of this audience. This sounds heretical given the current elevation of "textuality" into an intellectual's religion of sorts, but there are precedents. Understanding the verse of Homer, the Beowulf poet, a whole spectrum of poetry once considered our earliest "texts," was totally skewed until Milman Perry and Albert Lord divulged the compositional context of oral-formulaic poetry. It is now clear that scholars couldn't even pose the correct *textual* questions until the *context* had emerged. Snyder is not an oral poet in any Homeric sense, but his poetry takes full account of what he recognizes and deliberately cultivates as an audience.

It is curiously, an audience comprised of people whose interests are not primarily literary. This divides him from almost all other American poets. Snyder's audience turns to his poetry—whether on the page or in performance—for public verification of values many are struggling to achieve in solitude or in small groups. I know marine biologists, non-union bakers, Buddhist scholars, geologists, and a string of inveterately and happily unemployed people who read Snyder's poetry and almost none other—intelligent people who pursue extra-literary interests and professions. They are not groupies. Snyder has not created them. He has attracted their attention by publicly dilating on issues most poets consider incidental to poetry.

As his audience has widened, and his poetry has fused with his adopted public role, Snyder becomes an increasingly gnomic poet. Yet his readers clearly share his scepticism towards unexamined authority. This is not only yankee hard-headedness, but a cornerstone of Buddhist practice: one remains unconvinced by what one cannot test out for oneself. It also means that in literary spheres Snyder doesn't simply employ his *materia poetica*, but actively encourages its re-use by others. Conspicuous re-circulation of literary technique and poetic "posturings" (a word I'm using simply in reference to how the poet inhabits his or her poem) is what apparently extracts whoops of "Foul!!" from outsiders and speeds their nasty little barbs towards Nevada City. A habit not only petty and unbecoming to literary sharpshooters, but with somewhat fascist implications. Dictating who may permissibly compose poetry without having abuse heaped upon them amounts to human disfigurement. A sane civilization doesn't lack exemplary poets—but it doesn't possess *only* exemplary poets. A nation of great poets is an absurdity; but equally absurd is a literary community comprised of superstars that discourse among themselves, and a populace consigned to silence.

The sales of Snyder's new book suggests a broad audience for poetry is still possible. But an audience not specializing in literature, with many members who lack the training to unlock hermetic verse. I suspect this accounts for the increasing transparency in Snyder's new poetry. Whether it will permit him to claim significant new poetic terrain remains to be seen. *Axe Handles* lacks the linguistic bite and bristling vigilance of his more youthful books. Snyder has virtually suspended the ideogrammatic construction he learnt from Pound, and abandoned the elliptical references that once sent students scuttling for reference books.

As he defers to an audience more interested in botany and politics than literature, Snyder has introduced numerous explanatory digressions—a practice poetically suspect to those who have cut their teeth on Modernist texts, but indisputably useful for the retention and transmission of certain sorts of information. It is actually an ancient practice. In India men and women "of letters" used to commit to verse everything considered worth knowing and passing on. Grammar, mathematics, erotics—all metrically arranged, and composed with intelligence and humor. Chopping wood or programming a computer could fit in well. Though in practice the distinction sometimes got smudged, India's literati drew a precise line between mnemonic "verse" and high-art poetry. The upshot of such incessant versifying was for centuries a remarkably unified intelligence on a culturally variegated continent. Those who feel uneasy confronting Snyder's current poetry, with its refusal to immerse itself in contemporary issues of the *ars poetica*, might find it more useful to define its purpose than to ferret out particular verses for analysis.

Snyder's writings anyhow have become a touchstone of sorts for a large, occupationally heterogeneous crowd. Poetry or verse, populist and democratic, is a clear necessity for them. Once this kind of poetry gets accepted as a fundamental requirement—or better, as a human function that issues into the best definitions of what being human is, like singing, like joking or philosophizing—it gets quickly deprofessionalized. Those

who want to make it their central resolve will. Others engage themselves according to personal compunctions. It is as absurd to malign them for writing poetry as to scoff at Snyder for "imitating" his friends when he repairs his own pick-up truck.

ANDREW SCHELLING

The following three letters, or excerpts from letters, were received in response to Eliot Weinberger's *Pound After Torrey And Other Futures* in Sulfur No. 11.

That Eliot Weinberger disapproved our AIDS Awards is predictable enough, though using that as an occasion to strut his dyslexia so self-righteously seems to carry malapert chutzpa to a peculiar extreme. And, to judge from his piece in the current issue, that odd quality seems to be a staple of his style. Actually I rather like the patina of competence it lends, but isn't it at least mildly ironic that it is precisely that quality in E.P.'s prose locutions compounding the noxiousness of his anti-semitism? I mean an aggressive bzazz masking dubious content, dubious because it is borne exclusively on self-righteousness. It is lately most visible in neoconservatives, such as Podhoretz and Kramer—the junior varsity versions of Buckley. But even they are not so trigger happy about censorship as Weinberger is. In the case of RS, not content to have articulated his own critique, he demands that the federal and state Erinyes exact vengeance. I don't think for a minute that he can be so ignorant of journalistic history in this country for the past quarter century that he can fail to see the *exact* analogy between his scenario and the censorship of such magazines as Chicago Review, Prairie Schooner, Northwest Review, to name only three among dozens of cases. Similarly in the current issue, where he implicitly calls for publishers to censor their authors' sentiments, as if the very nature of their trade and tastes did not effect this already. That his context is anti-semitism is incidental, since one season's anti-semitism becomes the next's communism and the next's pornography. . . . Noxious ideologies have more changes of fashion than Sassoon's designer jeans. Weinberger's in sad shape for a writer; his glittery prose masks his loss of faith in the word, which he's exchanged for a censor's axe. Even in his huffy passion to stick modernist heads on poles he reveals the larger

consequences, loss of faith in the critical enterprise, in the polity to differentiate better from worse. And if there is one thing that validates literary journalism, subsidized or not, it is this faith. Without that, it doesn't make much difference whether it's Eliot or "Cap" Weinberger swinging the axe.

PETER MICHELSON

. . . on the Europeans vs Americans in Eliot's piece—I'm thinking of the Futurists, who were conceptualizing their work—the *Italian* Futurists—along protofascist lines; or Celine, say. Eliot actually quotes Marinetti positively. But this is the Marinetti who in his 1929 salute to Mussolini ends with: "For which reason we Futurists, prophets and preparers of the great Italy of today, are happy to salute . . . a marvelous Futurist temperament" (Mussolini was at the time President of the Council of Ministers). Keep in mind that Marinetti's most famous manifesto is called "War, the Only Hygiene": this was not intended as humor. Marinetti left the Fascist party in 1920 and publicly renounced and condemned antisemitism in the arts in *1938*, after years of what R. W. Flint (in the introduction to the *Selected Writings*—Farrar, Straus; 1972) called "uneasy support for the regime." However, I certainly do not know very much about Marinetti. Like many artists with what Eliot calls "embarrassing biographies," Marinetti's is a confusing (complex may be the better word) story because he was also, essentially, a champion of 'anarchic individualism—beyond communism.' Still, I don't think Williams, repellent as the quoted letter is, stacks up badly against Marinetti! (*Imaginations* remains as great an ode to freedom as anything produced in "Europe"—if we must make such nationalistic comparisons—and it can hardly be described, as Eliot's generalizations would lead us to do, as a search for "historical validation" and a struggle against "people" as the "enemies of art.") But meanwhile, back to the Europeans, there were other Italian Futurists who did not have Marinetti's qualms and who took up Mussolini's message more eagerly. In any case, Marinetti's whole rage against tradition, the old art, is tied to protofascist ideas about the violent introduction of the new order of speed & guns etc.: not as benign a phenomenon as Eliot implies. Certainly, Marinetti looked to artists to be the creators of a new order: this is not, as Eliot suggests, as U.S. thing. Then one could go on to Riefenstahl, who was also a European 'New Age' artist, or the whole German context; naturally many artists (especially Jews!) left, but not all—and you can't, after the fact, say the profascists, or those who tolerated fascism, were by definition not "avant garde." Wasn't Heidegger "avant garde," or does this only apply to "artists" (and you can defend Heidegger too for that matter). Celine certainly wasn't a Dadaist, but I don't think people like him can simply be dropped from the argument. It would be possible to go on at length—the point being

you can't just divide "Americans" and "Europeans" in this way; not to mention that "avant garde" is a problematic and overgeneral term. I don't know the political history of many of Eliot's "Europeans"—I haven't read possibly suppressed letters by them to compare to theWilliams letter. But I don't think 'our' writers—Stein, HD, Oppen, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Riding (to name just a few) fit into neat generalizations on these points, or that they can be amalgamated for easy contrast with "European" modernists. The problem with this kind of overgeneralization is brought home when Eliot enters the present. On one page, he praises European modernists over American ones for "dismantling the received culture"; but on the next page he blasts contemporary American poets for "deconstructing their 'belief systems'"—which sounds curiously close to *thinking* about them; and since some of those "belief systems," as Eliot so persuasively and eloquently shows, are rascist and intolerant, it doesn't seem all that bad a development to me. . . .

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

It was good to read Eliot Weinberger's essay in the last *Sulfur.* The argument may be old, but many of the facts (especially about Williams) are new—and damning. What we now need is a systematic study of the racism, misogyny, homophobia, and anti-semitism that literary historians have tried to ignore. It's not a question of discrediting the poetry—Pound's influence on Zukofsky gives the lie to that simplification.

(Weinberger bizarrely insinuates that L.Z. was himself an anti-semite—or at any rate that he mimicked *Pound's* prejudice. But from the Yiddish in *Poem beginning "The,"* to *A Song for the Year's End,* to the transliteration of *Job* in *A-15,* Zukofsky's Jewishness is very much on the surface. And there is no question that the objectivists were themselves ignored because they were Jewish. Look at Horace Gregory's response to the Zukofsky-edited issue of *Poetry:*

> I believe the issue is a landmark, an important historical event in the writing of American poetry. It is, however, a Left Bank issue with offices on lower Fifth Avenue, New York, where the *Menorah Journal* appears whenever it can raise enough money to ship copy to the printer. There is a curious strain of Jewish nationalism, disguised as a Greek chorus, reciting its refrain throughout the poems. As a middle-westerner of pioneer American stock, with a touch of Edgar Lee Masters in my make-up, I feel a bit lonely, particularly in New York . . .

The tone of this letter may be a far cry from the vitriol of Pound's radio broadcasts; but the premise, that the objectivists fall short of success because they're too Jewish and too un-American, still rankles. Nor was this a private response—Harriet Monroe duly published it in a subsequent number.)

It's no secret that the poets seized on by the English department as representative of modernism had the worst politics. Luckily, literature is the expression of a community, not just the product of three or four exemplary writers. Hart Crane, Laura Riding, Gertrude Stein, H.D., Mina Loy, Louis Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, Lorine Niedecker, Charles Reznikoff, and George Oppen are also part of our tradition.

Here we have, as early as 1909, an authentically fascist aesthetic.

The Nazis labeled *all* modern art "entartete Kunst"—but some of the *degenerates* went over to the other side. ("Die Brücke"'s primitivist expressionists were especially susceptible.) Not surprisingly, the political disagreements within the various art movements mirrored the divisions that tore apart Europe itself. Giorgio de Chirico, best known as a surrealist, broke from Marinetti's group over the issue of war, not art; and though René Char was a member of the French Resistance, his countryman Louis Ferdinand Celine wrote propaganda for the Nazi occupation. In Europe, as in America, there was an Ernst Jünger for every Thomas Mann, a Hamsun for every Mayakovsky.

Also, not all European modernism was as anti-art as Weinberger claims—what could have been more art-historical than *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach*? Or as preoccupied with purely aesthetic issues as *De Styl*?

The logical postscript to a discussion of Pound's anti-semitism, then, is a look at the Jewish experimenters themselves—and there were several.

Laura Riding, nee Reichenthal, now Laura (Riding) Jackson, comes immediately to mind. For one thing, *Riding's* test of poetry—that it should encompass reality in its "entire breadth and depth," and reveal the truth—is the only serious challenge yet made on Pound's definition of the poem as "news that stays news." Needless to say, news and truth aren't the same thing—a fact that's nowhere more apparent than in war. (Pound used the word "news" to signify two different things: language, and perception—language charged with subjectivity, and hard facts about objective reality.* Riding considered such things mere phenomena. Truth, she reminds us in *The Telling*, is what *explains* this news.)

The onset of war must have made art seem all the more corruptible to Riding—is it a coincidence that she turned away from poetry in 1939? After all, the manipulated reality Leni Riefenstahl presents in *Triumph of the Will* (to give an obvious example) is exactly that *substitute* for truth Riding refused to honor. In light of poems like the one Weinberger quotes ("a kike is the most dangerous / machine as yet invented"—E.E. Cummings, 1950), her renunciation of poetic language reveals itself as well-timed, and ethical.

Finally: many of Riding's poems read as meditations on Jewish themes. *The Map of Places* describes a homelessness that has nothing to do with nationalism ("Now on naked names feet stand, / No geographies in

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*All through *ABC of Reading* Pound refines his definition. The two phrases I'm thinking of here are "only emotion endures" and "artists are the antennae of the race."

the hand"); *The Wind Suffers* and *The Judgement* recall the Old Testament. Her best poems have that mix of anger, resignation, and common sense I associate with the Jews of the diaspora:

THEN WHEREFORE DEATH

Death, removal of names, disappearance
Of flesh, furtherance, discrepancy—
Who worships this,
What thing of abased calling
Prays for equality?

Humanity lives by ambition
And by fortune dies:
Commemorative leafiness and intertreeing
Of conversant ranks in death it has;

No death. Then wherefore grief,
Pang of democracy?
Since we do not kill our dead,
But bury?

BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

Eliot Weinberger replies:

Michaelson's charge that I am "trigger happy about censorship" is representative of the comfort and complacency of American writers. Most of us have no idea what the word means, though its reality would be apparent enough after five minutes in South Africa or Cuba, Chile or Czechoslovakia, or almost anywhere outside of Western Europe and the U.S.

Censorship is the prohibition *by the state* of the production or dissemination of certain works. It is enforced with fire and prison, torture and execution; in parts of the world the act of reading is a crime. Though my own "position" hardly matters, I am opposed to any censorship of anything anywhere—including pornography, Nazi tracts, U.S. or Soviet propaganda in the Third World, anything—with the obvious exception of pornography which employs children in its production. But—more to the point—I also see no reason why anyone or any institution should publish or support material they find reprehensible, except in the interests of historical illumination.

I think *Paideuma*, as the in-house magazine of the Pound industry, should publish the most loathesome of Pound's writings (for example, his correspondence with John Kasper) rather than pretend they do not exist. On the other hand, I do not understand why the magazine allows its contributors to use its pages for irrelevant asides of political quackery—such as defending the honor of Marshall Pétain—unless those sentiments are shared by the editors. If the sentiments are not shared, then the editors

should not hide behind the "honorable gentlemen with diverse views" facade, and simply tell their writers to knock it off. The suggestion is hardly scandalous.

In the case of the *Chicago Review* in 1959—I don't know the *Northwest Review* and *Prairie Schooner* incidents cited by Michaelson—the University of Chicago certainly had the right to be wrong, in refusing to allow the publication of writings by Burroughs and Kerouac. The issue later appeared as *Big Table* No. 1, and was widely read—perhaps more widely read than it would have been without the controversy. In the end, the university and the avant-garde remained, for the moment, themselves, convictions reinforced. It was a (temporary) suppression—the word used in the *Big Table* editorial—not censorship. The work got out, and no one went to prison. (A few years later, the forbidden writers became regular contributors, and Michaelson himself was editor.) One can only imagine the same scenario in, say, Paraguay.

In the case of the Cummings poem, Oxford University Press exercised their editorial right by suppressing the words "pricked and cunted" (which Cummings willingly changed to "prigged and canted") but they apparently had no objection to the rest of the poem, which begins "a kike is the most dangerous / machine as yet invented." What interests me is not Cummings' ravings as much as Oxford's validation of those ravings—and of course the irony of what was considered obscene in 1950, after the publication of the Dachau photographs.

As for *Rolling Stock* and its AIDS Awards, I questioned why the Boulder Arts Council and the University of Colorado—public institutions which presumably exist to benefit the common weal—should support the publication of such hateful dreck. Institutional support implies institutional approval: if they want to promote AIDS Awards they should be willing to answer criticism. On the other hand, if *RS* is going to take government money, they must be accountable to the government (and citizens) for what they publish. This is indeed a subtle and pernicious form of censorship, and one which has been visible in the little magazines since the NEA and local governments started handing out the cash. But surely *RS* knew what they were getting into: All money comes with strings attached.

What I find depressing about the AIDS Awards and Michaelson's letter is their trivialization of very real demons. Thus, under the weird rubric of "idiocy," a particularly dreadful disease is reduced to a fluffy blurb on a book jacket (Creeley's crime, for which *RS* presented him with AIDS). Thus, Casper Weinberger, the master of a 270 billion-dollar-a-year death machine, a man willing and able to sacrifice all of us in the name of anticommunism, a man quite literally stealing bread from the hungry, is reduced to Eliot Weinberger, the obscure author of a few polemical essays on poetry. It plays right into Reagan's "feel good about America" strategy: If Casper is nothing worse than a large-scale version of Eliot Weinberger, AIDS but a bit of pobiz gossip, and censorship nothing more than some editorial pencilling and the loss of a local grant, then what's to worry?

In fact there are plenty of threats to the First Amendment worth worrying about: book-bannings in local schools and libraries, fundamentalist Christian attempts to enact legislation on everything from biology textbooks to television melodramas to rock lyrics, Reagan Administration restrictions on the exchange of scientific papers, foreign writers prevented from entering America under the McCarran Act, federal employees being required to have all their future writings cleared by the government, the epidemic of libel suits, and on and on. These are not being discussed in the literary magazines which, since the Vietnam War, have assumed that a set of liberal values are shared by editors, writers and readers. This is simply no longer the case: that Michaelson finds me more vile than Podhoretz and Kramer merely indicates that he hasn't read the poets and critics they have pushed into prominence. (Or does he, as an AIDS awarder, applaud the recent *The New Criterion* attack on Ginsberg as a promoter of pederasty and drug use among the young?)

Getting back to the matter at hand:

Obviously I don't think Zukofsky was an anti-Semite. Based on the selections from the Pound-Zukofsky letters published in *Montemora*, it's clear that his filial piety toward Pound went as far as anti-Semitic remarks. ("Do I luf my peepul? The only good Jew I know is my father: a coincidence.") Further judgment withheld until the New Directions publication of the complete correspondence. Meanwhile, consider the Pound poem which Zukofsky included in *An "Objectivists" Anthology:* "Der yiddisher Charleston band."

Marinetti's Fascist posturings were utterly different from Pound's, as Bernstein points out—he would have gone for anything which promised to blow up everything. The presence of a few Fascist European writers hardly signifies—nor have Hamsun, Junger, Céline and Marinetti been enshrined as "central figures" to the extent of Pound or Eliot. My point was really European "creation of a new order" vs. American "restoration of the old order." But it's quite disheartening that Bernstein's and Friedlander's overlapping "good guys" lists consist mainly of Jewish writers.

The question is not who was or wasn't, but rather why the American avant-garde was fueled by the hatred of ethnic minorities and contempt for the masses, why the avant-gardes on both sides of the Atlantic were dependent on elite (and misogynous) brotherhoods of "movements." Even among the good guys there was a fatal adherence to group authority: H.D. certainly believed from the beginning (see her poem "Cities" in her first book, *Sea Garden*) in a beleaguered band of spiritual beauty-lovers, the last Hellenes. Zukofsky invented a group, Objectivists, out of nothing—a collection of largely disparate poets—and suffered his whole life from self-perceived powerlessness as much as neglect. Poets I revere like Oppen and MacDiarmid spent their lives in the Communist Party—through the Munich pact, through the Moscow trials, the Gulag.

The others, like Bunting, Loy, Stein, Reznikoff, Niedecker, worked in a peculiar isolation—literary friendships without literary allegiances, a personal rather than collective poetics, no political beliefs visible in the writings—much like many of the best American poets today. It may well be that the group of very fine poets born between 1935 and 1945 (Ronald

Johnson, Clayton Eshleman, Clark Coolidge, Karin Lessing, Robert Kelly, Susan Howe, Gustaf Sobin, Rachel DuPlessis, Michael Palmer, among others) represent the last generation of American Modernism. It is not difficult to imagine that history, if it exists, will telescope the chronology and see their considerable accomplishments as of a piece with Zukofsky, Vallejo, Olson, Celan, Apollinaire, Huidobro, and so many others.

And yet I can't help but feel that those of us born after 1945 were born—for all the obvious reasons—into another world, and that this generation has yet to find its poetry. Those in the universities have reduced poetry to anecdote and craftsmanship: a sometimes witty form of macramé which, at its best, follows the precepts of Imagism. Those who consider themselves "avant-garde" are restaging the battles of Russian Futurism and Dadaism under the banners of the latest linguistic hypotheses. The best literary magazines give much of their space to "archival material," and we hotly debate, as here, what Ez and Bill said or didn't say in 1922. And yet the historical distance between us and the pioneer modernists is the distance between "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," between *zaum* and *Eugene Onegin*, between Hugo's major poetry and Tristan Tzara.

It is time for the modern masters to become ancestors, to become as ancient *and* contemporary as Li Shang-yin or Christopher Smart, Dickinson or Holderlin, Ausias March or Ono no Komachi. In the current climate of hagiolatry and nostalgia, the demons of elitism and contempt that gave modernism its strength have been generally ignored. But they have not gone away. They are, I think, an obstacle between my generation and its poetry—a poetry that will not be "postmodern" (defined by modernism) but something that will come into being only when the great century of modernism is declared over.

Who knows what it will be? But I suspect that the road to a new poetry will start out from ethnopoetics, which seems to be the most fruitful and interesting configuration in American poetry in the last 20 years.

The first generation of ethnopoetics, defined and promoted by Jerome Rothenberg, encompassed "primitivism" (in the modernist sense), 60's countercultural tribalism and "back to the land" ecological concern, Dadaism, the anti-imperialism of the Vietnam War era and its revolutionary romanticism, art as performance, orality, nostalgia for the Golden Age, and the visionary worlds and language of mystics, shamans, poets, schizophrenics, trippers.

The problem with this first flowering of ethnopoetics (as with the recent huge "Primitivism" show at the Museum of Modern Art) was that it tended to take the tribal work out of its context, concentrating on form rather than content, and thereby allowing both strange interpretation and facile reproduction. Thus collective vision was reduced to individual vision, their real became indistinguishable from our surreal, their ritual became our performance, their shamans our poets.

What was generally not discussed was the function of these "poems," most of which are not poems at all in our sense, but what we would call legal contracts, prescription drugs, birth-death-marriage certificates, public relations, prayers, weather and crop forecasts, historical archives, good luck charms, how-to books, atlases, star charts, genealogical records, the evening news, the world almanac.

It is a poetry of essential service. It is a poetry that ratifies the social contract of language. It is a poetry that describes its world, its history, its cosmos. A poetry of celebration *and* condemnation of the stuff and the way of the world. Song, narrative, speech: People talking to the gods and to each other.

All this is gone, or almost gone, from American poetry, and from most of the poetry of the Western languages. But now that so much tribal poetry has been translated, adapted, imitated, I think it time to shift the attention from the works to the makers, text to context, in order to reconsider and revise the poet's traditional role as icon-maker and iconoclast, philosopher, historian, intellectual conscience, spokesman for those who are not speaking (including non-human species), political commentator, natural scientist, maker of prayers and aphrodisiacs, officiant at the great transitions in life. Otherwise, we're talking to ourselves in private languages, hoping someone will listen after we're dead—gambling, in the nuclear world, that there will be someone to listen.

A Seifert Translation

After Jaroslav Seifert received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984, I noticed an article on him by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in The New York Times (December 20, 1984). Mr. Lehmann/Haupt spent most of his article trying to figure out what kind of poetry Seifert wrote. He was under the impression that the only English translation of Seifert was a serial poem, "The Plague Monument," translated by Lyn Coffin. After quoting a couple of unrevealing passages from the poem, and querying several scholars, Lehmann-Haupt came to the rather lame conclusion that you have to understand Czech to appreciate what Seifert was up to. The dark implication that crossed his entire article was that other than writing in the vernacular in a way that might vaguely remind an American reader of Frost's conversational exchanges, and having a sense of humor, Seifert was not about much at all.

The article made me curious about Seifert, who I had never heard

of before the prize—although for the past two years, with Frantisek Galan (a professor of Slavic Literature at the University of Texas, Austin) I have been translating a long poem by another Czech poet of Seifert's generation, Vladimir Holan, who died in 1979. Holan's "A Night With Hamlet" was a tremendous discovery, so upon hearing that there was another book of Seifert's poetry already translated, I sought it out eagerly.

The Casting of Bells (The Spirit That Moves Us Press, Iowa City, 1983) was translated by Paul Jagasich and Tom O'Grady. In their brief Foreword, the translators mention that they have translated the entire contents of a book by Seifert published in 1967. The first poem is called "Prologue," and I could hardly believe what I read. In the first stanza, we are given the thoughts of a lark preoccupied with the mold under its lover's arm! In the second stanza, the lark turns into a dove who we are told flies through the forest *because* she hears voices! I suspected that Seifert was neither a Surrealist or a mystic, but that he had been very inaccurately translated, so I showed the poem to several people who read Czech and English. Here is their composite literal version set side by side with the Jagasich/O'Grady one.

Jagasich/O'Grady

PROLOGUE

Being a poet is not quite so.

The lark appears in the forest
Flying over the nest
And cannot stop thinking
—Oh, you sinful bliss:
Warm, tossed-up mold
Under my lover's arm.

A dove goes through those same woods
Because she hears voices,
And all gently quivers around her.
        I am now watching
A group of young women—
One there; another:
Those that disappear quietly
And evoke only yearning.
        No,
        I am only leaves and blossoms,
And the rose-colored flowers of trees
Which sparkle after a rain:
So beautiful in the daylight,
But then, at night . . .
        But I cannot be this.

When a poet raised his voice
And blood gushed forth,
Men rushed to their weapons
And women started madly cutting
Their dark and golden hair

Literal Version

PROLOGUE

Being a poet is not that easy.

He finds a silver-throated bird
Flying over its nest
And cannot stop thinking
—Oh, you sinful bliss—
Of the warm, disheveled hollow
Under his loved one's arm.

But he goes deep into the woods
Because he hears voices,
And all gently quivers around him.
        And you'll never believe it!
        He spies up close
The downy laps of young women—
One there, another—
Disappearing into the distance
And evoking only yearning.
        No,
        They are only leaves and blossoms,
And rose-colored pine trunks
Sparkling after rain:
It is most beautiful in the daylight,
And then, at night . . .
        But I am not that.

Once a poet raised his voice
And blood crowed forth.
Men rushed to their weapons

For bowstrings.
Clean strands stronger than nylon cord.
Now they all have short hair
And hurry to the injured
And carefully place antiseptic bandages
Upon human wounds
And put our bleeding heads
On a stretcher's white pillow
They do the least to us.

If the tyrant does not fall
(and even that we inherit)
The poet is sentenced to silence
And the clenched fist opens
To spread over the singer's mouth.
But he shouts his verses through bars,
While book thieves
Get to work fast,
But I am not him.

Sometimes doubt beats one word against another
To forge certainty,
But it is never the one truth in this world.
And heated words walk limp
A brief distance, until death,
Where they remain an unspoken secret
Setting fire to a darkness that does not move
In the enormous grave
But only clings
To miserable bones:
The mark of fire
Which they left in the pocket
Of the shot victim.
But I am not him.

And women started mindlessly cutting
Their heavy and deep-red hair
For bowstrings.
They are more supple than nylon cord.
Now they all have short hair
And so prepare gauze for bandages,
And hurry to the wounded
To lay their bleeding heads
On the stretcher of their breasts.

If the tyrant does not fall
(and that too is inherited)
The poet is sentenced to silence
An angular hand of wire
Stuffs the singer's mouth with claws
But he, he shouts his verses through the wire,
While the book tearers
Get to work fast,
But I am not those.

Sometimes in despair he beats one word against another
To forge certainty,
But there is none in this world.
And in vain he hurls
Burning words into the
Distance beyond death,
To shake a mute secret,
To set fire to a darkness that does not move
In that enormous grave
But only clings
To miserable bones
Streaked with verdigris from the lighter
They left in the pocket
Of the shot victim.
But I am not that!

When I inquired of one person how it was possible that Jagasich and O'Grady had misread "deep" for "dove," I was told that the words look similar in Czech (*hloub/holub*) but represent different roots. It would seem that neither translators have a first-year student knowledge of the language they are translating, and lest one think that their mauling of Seifert's "Prologue" is the exception and not the rule, I offer a few more examples of their work from other poems in the collection:

Jagasich/O'Grady	Literal Versions
She who had so often Danced on Lubut Lake	She who had so often Danced on Swan Lake
*	*
It was afternoon or later, A meal under the oak	It was afternoon or later, Perhaps at the end of April
*	*
and my lover's arms lingered with need.	and the girl trembled with (sexual) delight
*	*
Nor the moon on a dark night	Nor the moon on a black skirt

As I read through the book, I began to wonder if the Nobel Prize Committee had read it. One would assume that in the case of languages of smaller nations that such a Committee would be considerably dependent upon translations into various world languages, and I must admit that the hair-raising thought crossed my mind that the Committee had not only read the Jagasich/O'Grady translation, but that it had influenced their decision in a positive way! It also occurred to me that if, say, one of the Committee could read a poet in his original language as well as the translated language upon which other Committee members were totally dependent, and were he to say that the translation was inaccurate, that poet would be immediately disqualified because the rest of the Committee could not properly evaluate his work.

The situation raises many more questions than answers, including the question of the quality of Seifert's poetry—for the literal version of "Prologue," while it does reveal that Seifert is not demented, does not indicate that he is a very engaging or original poet. Even when I imagine "Prologue" in a more polished version, it still seems trite and sentimental. Given the floodlight of the Prize, I presume that other translators are now at work on Seifert, and I hope that what they offer us will be accurate as well as worthwhile reading.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

" . . . the pregnancy has created in me a deep calm, which I love, and a feeling of connectedness with nature . . . I have seen the Goddess twice, once in a treasure ship in our fields behind the house, laden with furry white cows, magnolia trees covered with snow on the leaves like little white gloves, black cats with green eyes like the woods; and once waving in the icy arms of trees as sunlight was striking them. These encounters leave me strengthened, less fearful about giving birth since I have an ally. The Goddess has royal blue eyebrows the color of her silk shorts, and hyacinth nipples, though those change color with the weather and her moods. She is never cold."

MARILYN KALLET

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Sulfur

A LITERARY TRI-QUARTERLY OF THE WHOLE ART

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AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

BASIL BUNTING

The last of this century's great poets writing in English died Wednesday, April 17, 1985 in Hexham, England. Basil Bunting was 85 years old. The New York Times gave Mr. Bunting 120 words for his obituary, misspelling Hexham and mistaking the name of his American publisher, the space afforded Bunting being somewhat more than to the editor of Popular Mechanics and to the singer Ethel Waters' accompanist, while somewhat less than to the illustrator of Captain Marvel, the comic book hero, and about half as many words as to one Li Boxhao, dramatist and wife of a Chinese Politburo official.

Though more influenced by than influential as Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Williams, Basil Bunting wrote the finest long poem of the century, "Briggflatts" and a magnificent, condensed version of Kamo-No-Chomei's *Ho-Jo-Ki*, which he rendered, in turn, from an Italian translation of the medieval Japanese classic. These two poems, along with a dozen or so shorter, lyrical poems he called *odes*, and several handsome versions (what he called *overdrafts*) of Horace and the great Persians, Firdosi, Rudaki and Manuchehri, comprise a corpus that places Bunting among the finest lyric poets of the language.

In 1971-72 I had the great good fortune to study and spend time with Mr. Bunting at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, and with a few other students at his cottage several miles down the road by the water. He was already into his 70's, but apart from a nagging cigarette cough he was a hale, splendidly lucid man of understated but proud bearing. I recall two things—or two things come to mind—from that time: he usually had the Penguin translation of *Njal's Saga* in his coat pocket, and he could often be seen on a bench near the small place he rented looking out on the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

He wasn't a man comfortable in an academic setting, and he was treated abominably by the *creative writing* faculty, who were jealous of him as only provincial hacks can be of a distinguished outlander they can't fathom and who doesn't give a tinker's damn about them. The regular English faculty would try to chat him up for tasty anecdotes about Yeats, Pound, Eliot, etc., but they were sent away disappointed on every occasion. Mr. Bunting was always rather old-fashioned about telling tales outside of school. I rather suspect his *attitude* cost him along the road—in fact, it cost him dearly. But he did like young people, and Mr. Bunting tried to give us what he felt we were able to digest of the important

moderns, many of whom were friends. As teacher he instilled in his students the notion that poetry is the most rigorous of disciplines and has little to do with self-expression. Just as Picasso complained about there being too many artists and not enough painters, Mr. Bunting believed that the world was lousy with geniuses, *sensitive flowers* and great souls while short, very short, on men and women who knew how to write. He further warned us to take our material from life not books, as his generation – Pound, Eliot, Joyce, David Jones, Zukofsky, himself – did, encumbering their work with too much literary allusion and esoteric learning.

He liked to say there's no excuse for literary criticism – considerable though his regard for Kenneth Cox and Hugh Kenner was – and read to us: Yeats, H.D., Williams, Pound (*Homage to Sextus Propertius, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, and hour upon hour, weeks on end, from *The Cantos*), Marianne Moore and Eliot; but also Lorine Niedecker, David Jones, Zukofsky, and Hugh MacDiarmid, the first experience of these writers for most of us. When he tired of reading, he played for us recordings of Dowland, Morley, Byrd and others so that we might hear all the rhythms possible in English, which he felt were contained in the Renaissance madrigal and compositions for lute. Mr. Bunting regarded himself as a minor poet ("not conspicuously dishonest") but a good one, whose work would hold up.

His poetry is, of course, better than that. I suspect he knew it. When I rudely – as a younger man is rude – asked him one day if it bugged him that he wasn't famous like Ted Hughes or Robert Lowell, he answered easily and with equanimity, "No, not really. My work will be read long after I'm gone."

Spenser, Wordsworth, and Pound were the writers in English Bunting valued most highly. *Briggflatts* is very much the flower of Pound's legacy, and in many regards the poem Pound never developed a human enough voice to achieve. The concentration of image and emotion, the strength and variety of tone and rhythm, the wedding of these elements, are like nothing else in the language. To hear him read the poem was overwhelming – as if no one else had tapped so rich a vein of word and music before. It's something you don't forget; and afterwards almost everything, especially one's own work, seems broken-backed and threadbare.

"It is time to consider," Bunting writes in *Briggflatts*, "how Domenico Scarlatti/ condensed so much music into so few bars/ with never a crabbed turn or congested cadence,/ never a boast or a see-here; . . ." It's time for a new generation of writers to get past the natter and posturings and to explore how a poet like Bunting was able to get so much poetry into so few lines, his line never faltering, his heart and eyes open to the world and its difficult beauty.

Basil Bunting was a wonderful man, quite apart from his poetry,

however diligently he tried to play the curmudgeon. He led a fascinating, eventful life, and not on other men's money as Byron did. The stories and praises will spring forth. We usually like our poets dead before honoring them.

The sheets are gathered and bound,
the volume indexed and shelved,
dust on its marbled leaves.

We'll not see his like again.

A SONG FOR RUSTAM

Tears are for what can be mended,
not for a voyage ended
the day the schooner put out.
Short fear and sudden quiet
too deep for a diving thief.
Tears are for easy grief.

My soil is shorn,
forests and corn.
Winter will bare the rock.
What has he left of pride
whose son is dead?
My soil has shaved its head.

The sky withers and stinks.
Star after star sinks
into the west, by you.
Whirling spokes of the wheel
hoist up a faded day,
its sky wrinkled and grey.

Words slung to the gale
stammer and fail:
"Unseen is not unknown,
unkissed is not unloved,
unheard is not unsung;"
Words late, lost, dumb.

Truth that shone is dim,
lies cripple every limb.
Where you were, you are not.
Silent, heavy air
stifles the heart's leap.
Truth is asleep.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO LOUIS ZUKOFSKY (1932)

Dear Louis,

Criticism, especially my own, is painful to me. Presumably the poet knows what he meant to do. The detection of fraud and adulteration is necessary policework, but must keep within the rules of evidence: fact, not hearsay; history, not speculation; all the exhibits there alongside their expert analysis.

There is a purpose in the showcase too; select samples with a sufficient but succinct and unobtrusive ticket, as in 'quality' shopwindows. I have very much admired your skill at that job.

But:

If I buy a hat I am content that it should fit, be impermeable, of good texture, and of colour and cut not outrageously out of fashion. If I am a hatmaker I seek instruction in a series of limited practical operations ending in the production of a good hat with the least possible waste of effort and expense. I NEVER want a philosophy of hats, a metaphysical idea of Hat in the abstract, nor in any case a great deal of talk about hats.

The uses of hats are few, definite and practical. Let a doctor call attention to them from time to time for the conversion of the Hatless Brigade, the rest of us will take them for granted.

This is what I would understand by Objectivism, if the word were mine. It seems to me that one passage in your admirable 'Recencies' essay in the Objectivist anthology oversteps the limits of useful criticism.

For the reader, an expert's certificate of precision, concision and general good workmanship; or a warning of their absence. For the state, now and then, a reiteration of the known, definite, limited, practical necessity of poetry. For the poet, technical information as from one good craftsman to another; such as doctors exchange in the medical papers.

For this last, Pound's three items quoted by you are a model (Direct treatment: to use no word that does not contribute to the presentation: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome) His well-known Dont's' are as explicit and concrete.

Johnson understood the value of minute explanation: there is more to be learned from his Notes on Shakespeare and the critical parts of Lives of the Poets than from almost all the rest of English criticism put together. You have yourself used a similar method both in public and privately cor-

recting my poems, and it has been valuable. Your version of Rexroth's Prolegomena, compared with his original, is likewise instructive. I think this is what criticism should be.

But these definitions of A Poem! You are not content to swab up Eliot's mess.

We have a pretty good working notion of a poem. Its marks? They can be recorded in a purely scientific spirit. A naturalist can define a tiger, but his definition fits a wretched, mangy, undergrown, pitiful specimen as well as a Blakean super-tyger. He counts its teeth and vertebrae, measures its skull, observes the structure and disposition of its organs. He does not mention ferocity, barely strength; nothing we un-experts commonly associate with tigers.

I distrust your page 15. 'A poem. . . . perfect rest. . . . the desire for what is objectively perfect. . . . the desire for inclusiveness. . . .' (I select what I like least). There is discrimination; but whether the things discriminated between have any bearing on poetry I doubt. If they have, it is remote.

The aspirations of the hatmaker can only faintly affect the hat. The psychology of the poet is not the critic's business. Psychology has become as insidious a nuisance to our age as ethics was to the last or theology to an older one. People are constantly committing psychology without knowing it. I have nothing against psychology in its proper orbit (restricted); nor against ethics, nor theology.

The value of Pound's preaching of Confucius does not lie in Confucius, whose wisdom seems to me to be mixed with the usual quantity of bunk, some of it quite as unpleasant as anything in St. Paul: but in the fact that Pound has not isolated a set of precepts, but developed a pervading stress on the immediate, the particular, the concrete; distrust of abstractions; shrinking from even the suspicion of verbalism; from the puns and polyvalencies in which mystics delight. It is not unspeculative but sceptical. It will build with facts, but declines to soar with inevitably unsteady words. All this is as important to criticism (or any other department of knowledge or action) as it is to poetry.

I have always supposed you to have a greater care for facts than almost any critic now living; a greater partiality for the particular, for the 'very words'. But these paragraphs about poetry look to me like flights into darkness, away from ascertained and reascertainable fact to speculative mysticism, to a region I think void of anything permanently valuable.

The mystic purchases a moment of exhilaration with a lifetime of confusion; and the exhilaration is incommunicable but the confusion infectious and destructive. It is confusing and destructive to try and explain anything in terms of anything else, poetry in terms of psychology. And in fact the inclusion of Rexroth's vast vagueness in your anthology is, I

think, traceable to the importation of an extraneous standard into your judgement of poetry.

I have no alternative *principle*. I do not think anything can be simplified. We can only be content to begin at the beginning and to remain very near the beginning all our lifetime.

We cannot afford to let a subtle monism obscure the lucidity you have often brought to bear on specific poems, as in your study of the 'Cantos'. A movement, a religion, is no substitute for clearsight, even if it be a much better religion than those recently current amongst writers.

Criticism is to poetry what anatomy, histology, physiology are to the living body. You quote Pound's triple distinction: melopoeia, phanopoeia, logopoeia: a contribution to the science. Criticism is concerned with what is written, not with the mind of the writer, as anatomy with man's body, not with the unguessable intentions of an unlikely Creator.

BASIL BUNTING

Note

"A Song for Rustam" was written after the death of the poet's son. Although Bunting circulated the poem privately, he did not wish it to be published in his lifetime. "An Open Letter to Louis Zukofsky" was intended for publication, in Italian translation, in the magazine *Il Mare*. It is unclear whether it actually appeared. It is not listed in Roger Guedalla's bibliography, which includes other pieces Bunting wrote for the magazine. It has never been published in English.

—E.W.

CLARK COOLIDGE

from THE BOOK OF DURING

Hell, I don't know anything but I'll begin. I stain these pages.

Nothing could come from it and yet something did. I could do the work, from where?, and have it go completely inside. Nothing more to think of it. It would exist but I could never touch it again. I had made it. I had gone beyond my inside and forgotten it. There it stands. And sometimes still I am among the formerly mine, find myself there adrift and obscure. Turning and turning from these pages.

Enough that I would put the work outside, an object I could then want to fuck? What is a "beautiful" sentence? A sentence that is an object of desire. Ridiculous enough to be going on with, or just a masturbation of misspellings? A lob book? By all the writing done, what have I been inoculated against? Push. Still push.

I remember people coming into rooms and doing precise things but I don't recall who those people are.

Somebody punched the door behind me. I backed up. I should have turned around to see, maybe to open, but I didn't, I couldn't. I could only back up some more. Fianlly my back was against the wood of the door and I could feel the blows.

Ceilings. Use mirrors for ceilings. Wait on the floors. Just step, forget.

The rice was original. Few things are, prove to have been, to be. Nobody collects them.

Wars continued. Nobody hated each other. It was economic, they said. People dead, were killed to die. Hatreds produced fewer killings than you might think. Thought itself produced more. War is thought arguing among itself. War as unshielded synapses.

Fingers on the windows all the night. Fingers of insects.

The war of the dreaming helplessness with cobwebs attached milky to the stems of cards and washed flesh after sex. The world opened up into a single slightly transparent stone. Recite nine numbers to get beyond my block. Rinse off your toast in the leakings of a ballpoint. Show the sun a picture.

People don't know anything. They smell. They sight things. They worry at traces and unravel and toy with musical blame and unlock the pigeons and ratty sparrows on dream time. Inside the house, the housing of everyone, a single small clock in the shape of a pinkish cathedral with felt-muffled bells. I was dreaming of a place where all the moons could arrive in perfect silence.

Knowledge is absolutely to be blamed for: (list all your finest attributes).

A mock terrier, or man with a mask, asked me. He wanted to know where but I told him when. A brawl. Two wrists locked together, the other hands snapping their fingers and flinging at everyone and elsewhere. Time for everything. Time for the Collision of Masks.

He wanted to stay with me and fuck me but I wouldn't let him so he drilled a neat hole in the medicine cabinet mirror and left.

Nine degrees below zero inside the radio and at all times.

I live on next to nothing these days. Tapes and tales. Masturbation even impossible in a position of ignorance. I smile like a sailor. I hover over only rounded glasses, straight edges would ground me. I laugh when everyone around me goes silent. The words to the song erased themselves in its singing.

She is a maker of baffles and she comes to see me. We just glow in each other's and don't speak. Nothing touches. Everything else rings. She try on a sailor suit, and I to pass through unseen.

Novels don't suit me. I read them endlessly, shaking the droplets from me as a dog.

Night, and life, have their alibis, but me I just stick to my story.

Who, at all certainly, keeps a name anymore?

I realize I can use any name here and be someone for a length. I can rip through the world snorting with conjunction. I don't even have to learn to spell or control finger cramps. I can live on dust in the air and live on. No collars of steel on the hands of dream. I think I am someone, perhaps a shy coal worker, and quick I am that one but not tied to him long, if I wish. If I wish I can assume disconnect identities and leap limitlessly. No one tells me, nothing halts me. I can even combine.

I am her? One day, one moment, microseconds, I *am* her? I look down.

The world waits on a small black notebook. The world waits on nothing. I hurry to write it down and step back. I step back quickly and write it there. I have nothing but time, to lose. I am loose in the hum of these circuits, these meals between drills. I have to step to no pace. Everything is suddenly in time. No matter. Nothing to help or waste. Nothing but thighs for a moment, a chain of moments, *those* thighs. This world will not wait for a sunrise, or a melodic beckoning.

I have become the king and waste time happily on needless rings. I take up time with hapless rhymes. They extend one moment the same. They haul all sames to me. I blow a mist in all the mirrors and there have to be many in Rinseless Palace. I rise at dawn after no sleep in my rocker bed and arrange the circuits of my chimes. All belongs to me, with no knowledge and little ability. I save things that I will later tire of and throw without a care away. There are nine suits within the one suit. Models of

more modernistic drawers hidden in the drawer. Plans for extreme sex. Sex with stitches, sex with hardware, sex in pursuit and in hiding and in the lap of the gods, the laughs of my peers. I have no peers. I preen. I gum up. I throw out my knee. Piss on dates. Accompany rotarians to the abattoir. I hide a model aeroplane in my pill closet, a checker in my vest. All the things I might ever need are mine at a glance, a balloon for the gladdening. Show me your house, your glass hobby, your ripened sex, all mine. The ribbons in your dresser, mine. The warts on your cock, also mine. Abacus of variations and trends of ass wind, mine. Everything possible to pleasuring bodies, in useless work and in measured heat, all mine. This be the Kingdom of the Sole Encompasser.

Perfectly still she gets me hotter. Why marble is sexier than all the dancers. Flesh a matter strict of polarity.

A says she wants to fuck me, but she doesn't want to fuck. A says she doesn't want, but I know she secretly wants me to fuck. Someone. Other. The ones who race past me, on the way to singular slum agleam. God knows what's happening at the lake.

The rotarians devised papers, that's all for all time, just sheets. White areas of darkness, nothing intelligible there. No fucking on saturdays, wednesdays, only sundays, the movie lasted a year and I was pissed. She sang and didn't remove it, her clothes were hot but not attractive. She could have shucked them, but he didn't want me to. He was rotarian. He liked all things at once.

It was late in the night and no one moved on the street. Lights like small suns with rings. The sound, close but tinkly like far away, bothered me. I walked down by the shore, erasure, constant, no one leaves me alone, I have to take erasure. Winning is beyond this planet. The other suns . . .

I don't remember then to describe the "real" people. I do remember the ones from books already described. The honestly fitted together. The dark ones with asthma. The grey one with helplessly open valve. The animals flood over the streets in patches. Excited world of nothing human. Pale pall world of slight trembles, overly sensitive needles. I couldn't choose though, I couldn't run or stay. The way the emerald fitted its clamp and just squared away, and just rose there.

He just wanted me to tell him something so he reached inside my blouse. That hot afternoon I had felt overly rouged, sauced to the nipples by stick tipped with red. All language had passed between the smoking lamps. On deck piles of paraplegic paraphernalia. The red-legged spider descended. Its cry shot past me. The all-over hotness was a matter of my body leaning at his in curving and rhymes. Insect hit the floor, running.

They want to fuck everybody so they learn to go to school. No warning, just arrive. Compete with teaching with penis and vagina, call it cock and cunt. Shout it in the hallways, paint it inside *all* the lockers along one wall. Meat moves in the boiler room. Folded spitball notes whole

detailed novels pornographic with real names and even crude pictures. Everyone is insulted into bald driven heat. Take my short arm, señor. Ram it in by the clipboard pound. Cocks harnessed in rows of notebinder rings. Negative cunt form molds of Federal Lunch. We reorganize the whole curriculum into a bloody stew. Feedback of meats. Chopped and channeled exquisites. Art of the come-stain on my cardboard pants.

We machinegunned everyone who passed a certain barrier. And we keep track of the rolls of the dead in mammoth fresco behind the clambake works. It all goes fine, make them everyone go away. Line of reds across the chest. He goes down. She pleads for the one last shot. I turn to spit and giggle my trigger closed.

Johnny Carson combines with Marcus Belgrave to tie up the lunchmeat market. They use ten-foot aluminum cylinders labeled "Twinkletoes." No one is funny then. Everyone laughs. Ten winos drag the tubes, empty or closed, down Fleet Street for no reason. Heads clot the brittle barriers and casements in a bright barium flare nights. Captain Midnight is rued to be long dead. Long live the Cap in his secrecy tricky wends. Long life to the long dead.

I saw cock rhyme cunt in its outward plunge. I saw the shuttle clear in the center of each dream. My cock rose going to the sunny awning store. Cunts of doctors drenched the parquet. The MeatWheel spun, outward in all avenues the shriek of the inward cam. The knowledge was deafening. I wrote my new poems on sailors passed in Ditch of Spume. The all-out war for the language started coming up the Hole.

In Foster Grant Avenue tarpaper lynchmobs. Three fights per lit match. Grace Glancer mocked on by thrilling in brine-pink shoes. She pursued a glamour no one could trace, the fame of onion burn heaven a valve left on in your gut. She finally took three rooms over the Saddle Stationary. Mobs looked up. Nothing but grass turning black in her single pane.

Bung waits on quiff. Quim. Intolerable awaitings clogged and darling. I lift a snifter, a drain of rust and brine cogs rinsed and scarlet schist and echos shined to a shot. Blameless scruples tongued the inside, tongues in brine, ruby encapsulements logged into compartments whistling along the bledways. We were enteamed in a jet starling of wheated blurts. We didn't know the whichways. Hot out war fanged carbonside. Where are we going? And who collides the marvels to treat it? Tongues char the whist of clit sentences. Everyone's blurt a single. Then we see the WhatAss clear the spongerange, his whole hotness immaculate and draining in strainpipes of Shostakovich. And the placemat soakings continue at a fuck.

I slobber out all over my hover jellies. Everyone knows me and they wait on my smile. Fame in a windward loco away. Pass the farm smells, pass the belly. Rhyme with gardens the joke of your tits. Eat marl and scope of ant atoppage. Blame realms emit. Red lit cabbages at the bevel

of the cart bar. You have sucked me into my own stains, my star barn turns. Heave on back the lobbage jelly, turn up bluestar to shovage level. I take out Mars Bars on an insect date. It smarts and cools derms. Stop eating off my face and reading. Chart juice all over the warm dials. This missage picture will land. These carping bell boils, these harmages. Picture of a boy pouring onyx over his tips.

Lights to failure urge. That or the greatest greenstop in Texas. Where they hire out for flame lessons and bunion carbonation. Whole whales of cheatmobs stabbing down dust rows in cleat sets and delve pants. They smile. And in that group smile is a weight. Will calm down on you, thirty tons of shirtwaist embalming tongs. Rattle of belts and cogs and shears. Run for your dimes and call on out of here. Don't await the shadows of the short star. When the girl wants to fuck whole combines short as a sneak cabbie. And the bees snort.

People have opinions and wait around the radios. Never sing and nothing means. They hold their opinions out in front of chests like paper waffles. A month of sundays compressed into a sunday moment without the bar spins by their noses. The population all about not to pass out but wheat out, paste out, scowl all noteless out. They don't do anything they might at least listen for. They drill pale brain and avoid the surly dentists. As the town boards sing to themselves the one note the river gives.

I went back home to bed and dreamed about bed dramatics. Girl jacking off with the one special toe. Epoxy as lubrication for that terminal fuck. Episodes with joke teeth, surprising chittery cunts you can't make time or lap with. He's come over and won't go and she won't stay still. Leave me but first blow my body all of it whole to the wall. Use the coily strappages and certain platyhelminthe techniques. As you come divide so I'll wake to have more. Stop up my ear wells in penal servitude. Get off on icebox remnants. Stop my screams with a quail. These are the stories I fed off in my bed, my long bed of the call of the row of vivid rapid short events.

Shortages became needed and all the fucks more silent. Shapeless trendencies, brown as a worm. Godawful ox horn went off instead of the summer siren. She called me, then went off without me. Are we standing for the sole onan event, like on an earth of single stamens? I don't like to call this Bad but I am forced to shout. Calling all lice-happy chorusters! Chime in once you see the shovel at the end of slime-band balance. And keep close nates. Chalk dust dries their parts in these films. Choking the jade oxen with clams of steel.

I'm obliged to leave and you know why. You understand me and therefore you stand for everything I do, anything. Even my tromping out of this room without an explanation, a reason, a bulk pass, peremptory trauma. You will be left. Then I will stay outside. Masturbation. The film between two separate but adjacent wars. The terrors see each other always.

Transparent walls smeared. Everybody gangs up and screams nobody on the otherside hears. You lie back on the sheets, the rubber beneath, and raise one leg, "languidly," it means a flow of milky potage down to where your stocking rim takes it. Your cunt shivers slightly as the flashlight touches one corner of its focused beam, opens to show. You are on stage and blush, blame is rising in all the stems. Your throat strains to keep in line with desire. The other side. The filmy side of the trench we other beings build, and fudge.

The rate of hearing collapses inward. Sounds like a million snails fucking on a dime. Zazzing insects fort up their own razor concertos. Sense only compacts. Three zero clams pop the tire's outward bulge. As I'm showing you a trumpet, naked, we meet in a glare of wide oxide perfumes, a solo pressed to micro-parts float on air. We smell an act. No need to listen or moving listen. A fuck the size of a tick.

Desire ratios. How many minutes of bounce on the slab, very cold whiteness, do you want me? How many times slight reveal of an armpit? Dare to sneeze up your opening how many times? Show the nipple then recover, how much? Press eyeballs inward through lids at gain of orgasm, how hard? Phosphor embroidery flotilla? Up against the brain walls ticking inroads of slap of cunt, lips against stomach, rod against hairs, how many, what frequency? How many times have you said to me "I want you to take me," breath gaining pitch on a rise? And how many breaths not know where the other hand is?

You disturb me a lot so I shot you away from me. You disturb me so much I clammed up forever. I talked so much I even talked to you. Told you while we're fucking the length of every lesser-known avenue in the city. Have told you and told you and now you say you remember nothing. Where is your head? And where will you open next? That I come out of you beyond you where?

Bending in sure indulgence, shorter than everyone. He asks me over and over but I still can't remember Johnny Carson though nightly I loosen my cunt to the tube. See up me, absent friends. Then sear about a flesh dot and see about me. They curl in this city, when they're not wrecking their plumage on the steely girls. Woman exposed to cathode nightly, why are my eyes supposed to redden their rims at thought of that? Fingering in bedded indulgence, sighs calming the pressure to stow meat. I'm smaller than anyone, even that grey-cropped bark down in the nozzle of the light. Dreams of the Cylinder too, I roll in place.

A crystal ball high up between the thighs. Sheddings of the future, juicings down on any possible sphere. You, world, come to me, anyway as I would come on you. Displacement mode, quivering mineral between quakes. I shout you and leak. Thin covering iridescent vivid in breath of lightning. Breathing you down into scads of small disaster, I would be a shot hawk and furl. The time between spasms coming briefer, world

to crack? Stem these feelings.

She says, Hand me the petering lamp. About to scowl and with one hand at the hem of her drawers. I think, It's all in her mind to burn. Which portion of flesh, which thought? I say Hello to her, again. The wrist watch around the middle of her thigh is reddening off the circulation. Something will have to dawn and soon. I don't give it to her and she takes it anyway, leans over and takes it off the round slate table to my right. A nipple dangles I grab and pinch, hold in vice till she smiles, her eyes going out. See the pretty flowers, lady? It's not going to be easy. She brings the lamp down in a line of oily fume and sets her pants alight at the crotch. Blooms that the mind never deals.

I see the world now, more than two lines of extremity. Not even lines, not even points. Hash browns growing scarlet. She was saucy with me. I groped my way to the wall, soft brown fedoras hanging on it, more than three. I'm not being cute. I can count, in usual circumstances. This was no night to be out of line. She was playing hard to see, constant batty motion, curves like a Greek, thoughtless candles spraying, lips that would loom parasitical, crawly knees. Things never seem quite brutal to you do they?, she shouted and went for it. Hot metal like the newest of hair coverings they could have come up with. Sounded like a frustrated army on the radio. They say you can always get away with words.

Old paint grumping up. Men looking to the corners. No one would drill to the quick of the artist's intention, his swerve from what(?) with still quick eyes. No need to rehearse it. The works are all escapes.

The granite steps in front of the man's name way high up and the carved recitation of his many deeds, what do *they* mean? And that one standing over behind the rose beds with the pencil in his hair, what are we to make of? And the many movies of all sorts of people talking to each other about anything both before and after opening and closing countless doors, how explain? It's necessary, that's all, they said and began adjusting their clothes. Then some of them were seen to run away, but the worst of them stayed.

If I were to say something, who knows what I would mean?

Constipation leads to dwelling. Came back later and found it still here. Breasts over the ear drums, a spine for the inflation. I stood up, couldn't find myself thinking of anything. Wanted to walk back bright but stood stock. Caught hard in a glare, lemon in the window lighting the yard. I blew horn, thought out my bedroom layout later, man. Store of tongues, laps lapping each other. Left the block of my thought years ago and collide with everything else since on a yearn, a pile of papers juiced. You hand me within a hotness, great ridge repeating the hang of walls. Store nothing but the beat of the cheeks. You come round that wall and see me now.

The panic is on. Man running down the street and caught himself.

Beyond that was nothing but whatever, Block of Business. She tendons her blood out through into heat lamp visions, mats of black above your lying head. I don't know you. I only get to side-saddle you. You blow my sneers. Caught up with her own sneakers. My head is caught. The cat ran under her cap, my head beneath her settles. You'll have to sneak eyes back under and leave it all there. We'll have to match. Play the black silence back, snort to hip and even teething furthers. Came, as I start to catch up. Play cunt, realm of interior haze peacock on the music's needles. His spikes in the loam, her tits in the open bowl. Handsome as a scrape, one ear holds, muffs. Then I get down to the back of the music beyond the cellar. Inflation time of sticking close together.

I see you in flakes, fade. Dimple, your treatment of socks, blouse, innards. Spiders all rise when you sit. You seem no length that I can divide. I'd have to erase more than half. Suck my flams. Commit to abutted futures, sporing lamps engulfed overland. The gas had gone out when you come to tickle. Resist, refog. This is not as abstract you can't follow it. Simpler it would bean you and drive the spiders. Beyond wheat, beyond residues of the blank page, blind desire. I would have to hate everyone to truly come back home. Hate clench crotch to rear shine knots. Impossible to climb out of this room. Room where fuck so much is common enough to spin no deed. And he had deeded her, and her head was bright not dead.

Great malicious pauses to the palm on the thigh. Scream these notes.

Height in the morning? I cannot reach to stand it. Blinded vertical encapsulations of the crawl. Say something to me that hasn't blue in it. Anything I can't say, rotate your thighs. The day the wrist becomes novel. Explosion come from over behind you out the window in the morning. Ponder fucking shadows on meeting venetian blinds. Have I another name in the dark? Pronounceable, if barely, length: over an hour. And even raising one arm as I say, Flames are mortal. Fuck the trees. Height is always frontal.

Always frontal, material, face.

Grandview Highway opens and there are pyro-beings fucking there too in front of the grating billboards. Guy with an acid cut. Polyurethane crucifixion humming away, and the price of slack is felt. Do you sense the gun odor? Population grim and smartly. We watch, then we dip, you and I, in a saucier bulge of the cut strip tarp. Having lunch in an extended lap, inside and outside the rubber totals. Birds in the area all dice peas, and rump around huge on boiler vents. This is the thing we thought about later, penal servitide in vaginal washouts. My hand won't crawl anymore. Savage inventions in a minor stoop. Longer face than I've ever seen on a crane.

Then they came to Cordura. Arguing over and over a plan by radio, by camel saddle, by raised points on pea-covered strata. You milk the

sun, I'll treat the moon. Small gremlins trashed by fireside. Radio sends three pistols were found, and then a tape on the back of the place of a face, faces here owning no fronts. I thought about you. Screaming about the cereal didn't come in the prettier informative boxes. Three ways to take you: amitol, sidereal, and frontal too. Remnants of a face, found in tungsten oil drain. Presummation insurrection congliptious. Rate was for Brake's Sake. Oh a millennium passed Point Ban, glassed in car. Or wax cast remands your shiny fuck. Glance planet of stored warm animal roentgens. You see as if I say to you the whole: Tongues to the Memory Window Plaque. They stuck out their hands in place of bands.

The Alchemy of Objects. And trees cleave through celestite sky. You do not know my name and yet it stands.

Nothing, nothing, and a brighter nothing. Mist and then curving linkages. You smile the table blue by the bedful. Arm over newspaper cuttings, liftings of rag. Open cunt's light source, grey fans going blush. Cat at the tip of the sill, widening mornings. I slip a drop from my lip, touches your inner, then and nothing rhymes. Throw the cat through the glass and plunge.

Silk frock on then, off. Lift it beyond the tips, then descends the dusk backing. In this room arms are held up, cries, the dunce of crockery. Shout on them shortly. Peacock one pierced in nebulum. And beyond the doors removing shirts. I see it all in my hands on the clay globe, the cool oval beneath the nerves. Then little pieces of porch clip your lobes.

Isinglass reaches flake off on the wettened breasts. Beneath the beaker I love, float, unattached mastery of the glides. Old wallpaper aces will cover you, lasting aisles of throat stopped by rose bruise. I have caught up to you, inner thighs, battered frames. The cunt is an egg of mossy thicken, hedge rowing marl to the morning stretch. You are what I lack myself. Collapse inward to tones, bones torque in shied ram. Owls, more owls, cloistered owls, owls in liquids darkening. Then I will wake to your opening.

She placed down wide hands on the table's jellies. Everywhere maps where we fuck. Crystal prism touches itch and we use the floor as a bait. Then I am bent, over, must I always wait? Hand me the wall ever close in delirium. First light inches in the Oblivion. The plot to cap you naked in my sight. Boring as a hum in the middle. Whiteness over whiteness in the pale ones.

If stood so, the fuck to fuck the fuck, how carve it later? Sailor replaces halo over the slipping barge. How say now so shook in wetness the hands require the feet? That I marvel at off-color rhymes, an ounce less now the cock removed. Blank as a coat of fuel, the advance of throat repeats. That again I announce you in the hallway less one tooth.

Missing stick device, you goggle human. Bury your brains in apple, that apple rolling to a stop at the wall. Never quite ever reengages, top

off, saddle missing, shorn of blonde and nipples droit. In you I am run, rumple in measurement and all tongue and busy. The song at the marble top is moistened.

You have to know something when it happens, you have five minutes before. I tell you it's all confused for openers. Never enough time to live *and* think. Compacted, it's just that. Everything runs in on its center, so you can see that lines lie. And you're treading on it every second second, riddles, rhymes, all spots of totaling density. Everybody rolls out in the morning or whenever on a slab of approaching lead. Roll over, open your arms, release everything all over again. Stop treading, fuck from across the patio. There's no more room.

Used me, I tell you, he took me in there and used the hell out of me, until there was no one and nothing to leave but me. 13 Buena Vista Drive, Santa Ana coming on, a sky-blue and a lemon convertible in the drive. And believe it or not, I thought I was hiding. Check your rods, fellas, the juice is on the house. Could you believe this? Shrugged out of her off-the-shoulder, breathing apparently. They used the coffee tatted couch. Wires in the walls, intimacy afternoons on call. Use your hand, don't give it a thought. Hot in the mornings, breasts good and wet between. No doubt about it, I'm better now. And better you'll be, or else sorry. You could see right through it, and the walls are still there. You could use my hand, you don't trust your own.

These structures are not fast enough, said the man with the time dam in his head. We'll have to arrange to have speed in a particular silence. No more plain lines. Central access to all circuits. Tame the dogs and open all tomato cans. The Doctor will soon be with us. Blame all coordinates. Open the main spine at all points. The drain will be immediate, and total, *inward*. At that moment on Otherender Driver, the gates sprang open, and goodbye to all chickens, the tramways to favor are free. The people stopped and the autos opened all at once, free treatments to all scripts, plot now remedied, Fire! The precise ratio of nipple to circumference is . . .

Inside our life a largening death. You will see its seep come to the surface, darkening the outlook. I tried to say as much to you but the coffee cup kept stirring. Worlds as huge as glances slide over our hours. You give me back so much of what I have taken from you. Always a cracking of small lines in the surface. Visage, treated as well as what can be neared. So I make notes against the swell of desire. Will, another matter. The penis asserts its neck and you keep turning. A stronger light? The tension of the lens between singed out to its edges against itself, in face of all our learning.

Rectal aplomb in a dirge of severances. Three nuts plate their drops in a dish, screwing lops into stew ground. I have to find, level the barriers, replenish the top of the sky, enter the cunt of my eye, retire the hide-bound returns. Every edge is roughened in a soft hand. The birds

report. The eyes flake back. It's terrible. There's bread, and lung morass, the single most apt threat in bored skein city. Lash my mast a last gash. I am losing, as I'm writing, what? Toccatas, toccatas don't bother me, I never turn to listen. Their pipes were sex logs, iridescent standages and sweat broughts. The dogs whelms. Where is my last shred of finger. Replace the glass tops that so whitely press your breasts, there is morning and violently more.

I tell you all the time the things that would stop me. They will. You wouldn't step back, would you to pluck and be me? I had no notice then, no, nothing remnant or clothed I could eat, drink, recoil from the rafters, unanswer the phone its coil. Three things on the body that would repeat me, soundly thrill. Three lights that bounce off the body play at darkness. Three stuffed windows, giving on the heat a sort of bark on nothing further there. You stand up for me now you stand me total. No time to sum up, restyle the hand on the slant goes hum and inner. Centers of body everywhere on that body. In. Down. I go there, you coil from me, my stuffed center. Brass implacement, draws from the fluids' thrash, punt. Hand the breast. Count on the nipple's influent pit. Snipe at all times without the writing.

The body is large as the hand that hedges. The mammoth insides practice drill. Moan over the music, you are stupid in a line at the genius place. Slow as my spit over your dimple text, the hours of the world cold in stone. The open place in the wall that once had flame. The hold you tucked over me, nude slicing in stable place a throning. You called me and I opened to the center of hay ash bed. Slight muddle sapphire in delayed attention of desire. Desire cables, desire stalkings, desire in a load of camphor strewn veily and hand-coiled. The anointment is loosening and shied through the fuck standing till and dull.

I want it all direct and still as an absolute scream, standing scream.

Why do I not get to the heart of the matter? Because the heart, if there is one, is one helplessly divided.

Naked so close to named among the keys.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

VISIONS OF JESUS

Let's say it was Jesus. Who is Jesus? Why should Jesus be the name
now celebrated, entering the poem?
Or let's say it wasn't. That I have the key to make it open
like a sound. Each sound's a rage.
Each page a turning over. I am writing this
the way a preacher speaks the word out on a prairie.
Visions of Jesus everywhere.
Sweet Jesus, says the song, to which the mind says
archly, darkly "sour Jesus,"
& the poem begins with that.
Pink Jesus. Tiny Jesuses
on every bush, the world of sagebrush now a world of tiny Jesuses.
Soft Jesus maybe. (Is there a sexual aspersion in it
or only another way of saying "tender Jesus"?)
Jesus in Oklahoma
with his beard cut off. A weepy girl
named Jesus. She opens up her breast,
the moon pops out. O menses, colored glass
& papers, birds with messages
of love, tra la, on metal wings. His other name
is Rollo, Baby Winchester
or Baby Love. Jesus with a cow's head
on his shoulders, candles reaching from
his fingertips. Jesus in his one-eyed Ford.
Squawk squawk, the preacher cries.
Eyes of the congregation turning white. The pinwheel
shooting sparks against his lap.
Jesus in furs. Jesus in Oklahoma,
growing old.
Hot & glowing Jesus. Jesus on the ace of hearts.
Alfalfa Jesus.
I am writing this the way a gambler cuts his name
into the table. Jesus in formica.
Drinking in the morning, playing coon-can
with his brother James.
Other names of Jesus.
Jesus H. Jones or Jesus in the woodpile.

Tomtom Jesus.
Jesus who aims a bullet down his mouth.
His children hang his body from a cross.
Three Jesuses in Ypsilanti.
Three in Tishomingo.
Jesus buried in Fort Sill.
His suffering has left their bodies
empty. In the night sky past El Reno
Jesus becomes his pain & flies,
aiming to leave his eyes for others.
Mother Jesus.
Her children have forsaken her.
She learns to cry & plays
nightly at mah jong, dropping her tiles
into the bottomless lake.
The man who chews his wrists down to the bone
is also Jesus. Jesus
in a feathered skull cap. Tacking stars
onto his vest, o cockeyed Jesus,
wanderer from Minsk,
he squawks the language of the little merchants,
squatting at their campfire he stirs
their coffee with *his* tool. How like his grandfather
he has become. Coyote Jesus.
Farting in the sweat lodge, tight
against his buttons
in the bride's room. Ponca City
Jesus. Pawnee Jesus.
He is staring at the eyes of Jesus
staring into his.
Their eyeballs spin around
like planets.
Visions of Jesus everywhere.
Gambler Jesus.
Banker Jesus.
Flatfoot Jesus with a floy floy.
Jesus shuffling.
The soldiers guard his silent fan,
tacked up, beside his rattle.
Jesus on the pavement. Jesus
shot for love, the powwow over,
naked, crawling toward you,
vomit on his beard. His father's milk
is dribbling—plin plin—in the cup

called Jesus. Ghosts
unhook the breast plate, draw
two streams of milk out,
mix them, opening
the mother's womb. No midwife
comes to her, she gives birth
like a man, & holds him
in a dream. Old song
erupting in the gourd dance,
in the storefront church
at night, among the hapless
armies. Two plus two is
Jesus. Five is Jesus.
Jesus in Okarchie,
driving. Jesus in his one-eyed Ford,
arriving for the dance in Barefoot.
Visions of Jesus everywhere.
Jesus wrapped up in a woman's shawl.
Jesus in a corner,
stroking his tight body.
Masturbating Jesus.
Jesus sucking on a ball of fat.
There is no language left for him to speak,
only the humming in his chest,
a rush of syllables
like honey. Pouring
from every orifice, the voice
of renegades & preachers
without words.
Pink Jesuses in Oklahoma,
emerging with the spring.
Catfish Jesuses.
A beetle with the face of Jesus
scribbled on its back, squashed flat
against the dance floor.
Jesus squawking with the voice of angels.
I am writing this the way a man speaks without words.
Wordless in the light he pulls
out of his mouth. In the holes he hides in.
Wordless in praises. Wordless in peyote.
Wordless in hellos & hallelujahs.
The freaky Jew slips in beside
his bride, asleep forever, counts up bears
& cadillacs
under a leaky sky.

SEAHORSE

A lame, malingering absence
occupies this place; his face
vents itself through a fluid
brass drape. There is an invasion
in her body, or a mass
departure—she can barely move
herself past the long,
languid desertions beating in her neck.
Ambulatory only through some lack
in the passage of time, she leans
into this new sleeping sickness—
where the doorknob and other rare,
mid-height objects move through the room
like detached retinas, throwing a low beam
of long canals and the infinitesimal
air of orange Mars.

Because of her death
in a dream
she bought an aquamarine
aquarium. Now invisible fish
glitter like fishhooks and her fingers
bludgeon through the carpet, the microscopic
parched organs swimming
she has spilled from the glass. His face
would grow and still
grow until it was the world, a carousel
too tiny to mount, her forehead, fragile
etymology, pressed between his palms.

Through each window.

It is about nothing. Same
multiplicity of rustling cement stains, same

engine sleeping in the eye. Her skirt swirls
in the view: moon and an aftermath of white
statuary, shrinking
into hardened pools: new pavement talking
the knock of hooves. Still
There was a fleeting time
she could see long hands in her
last moment, a grimace in the teeth, the body
thoughtless of itself
swimming, a long reach into the blue
throat of afternoon to cripple
the fucking horse's mouth, the source
of all this.

Through each window
as before, the roses congeal
into bloom. As before, lissome, sly organisms
balance on the air.
Her own thoughts are a shock of wings
leaving and returning. She has retrieved the same
debilitations departed skyward from along
some distant avenue; and,
graceful, like a promise,
the odor of rehabilitation drains
away into the shallow
conduits of dawn.

RACHEL BLAU DuPLESSIS

OTHERHOW

POETRY AND GENDER: some ideas

Possession of many of the elements that make poetry into poetry somehow depends on positioning women? Poetry gendered in a different way than fiction is? Sometimes it is possible to think so. (1) Love, Beauty, Nature, Seasonal Change, Beauty Raked by Time, Mediating Vision or Muse, the pastoral, the carpe diem motif, the satire—all these prime themes and genres from the history of poetry seem to have swirls of gender ideas and gender narrative blended like the marblized end papers of old books. It's so beautiful, so oily with color, who could want to pick it apart?

Knowing when to begin and end is knowing what to say between poems being part

of the poem.

Helping them write a report, they need

silvery sky dusk lilac stars stars starry
bibelots rosy as a local coral
flouncing the poem is that the answer?

small folding arrangements?

Further, the centrality of the lyric voice (few characters in a poem little dialogue) means that one point of view is privileged. And the speaking subject is most often male.

'my female side' proudly
'my anima'

Overexposed post
card of the 50's sans one bitty cloud to darken
azure at the pectoral monument.
By implication or odd window, houses'
estranged effect
boasting seedy pleasure withered or perspicacity

deranged; what circle, what perimeter
to draw around such interlinear spannings.
While in a bourgeois novel, truth lies in between.
The "bourgeois poem"?

Now in the modern period, that lyric voice is ruptured, and poems can feature a controlled social array, as do novels. Even the masculine subject can be refused (interestingly, curiously, awkwardly by a male poet, as by fiat or assertion of Tiresias in Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land*). And women writers speaking in a female, or a neutral-yet-gendered voice are not necessarily confessional of their lives, though still they may be "confessing" their throwing themselves wildly against, careening into conventions of representation. Into the terrible inadmissable congruence of poetry and gender. So all in all, even with exceptions, the institution of gendered poetry and the male-gendered poetic voice are embedded in the history of poetry.

As a woman writing, my language space, my cultural space is active with a concatenation of constructs—prior poems, prior poetics—a lot of which implicate women. But not often as speaker. As ideal. As sought. As a mediator towards others' speech.

An "avant-garde" cannot discount this past, not only because it exists in poems, but because it exists in words.

A woman, while always a real, if muted or compromised, or bold and unheard, or admired but forgotten (etc.), speaker in her own work is most often a cultural artifact in the traditions of meaning on which she draws.

LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Writer? Becoming one on whom language plays and in whom language plays poetic convention, etymology, terrible puns, vernacular turns, ugly gobbets, professional jargon, mindless babble, baby syllables, dialect renderings, nursery rhymes, old pop music, precious adjectives, connectives, newspaper information, disinformation, conjunctions, pronouns playing with the social space evoked ("he" "she" "it" "we" "they"), words like *as* or *with*

"by" whom, beside whom and made by whom it may course or occur, declaring the destruction of uncontested rhetoric (but never the destruction of rhetoric).

Writer? A position to activate elements of language to join so that its ac-

tivities enjoin the reader, you, (to hear a sound to know a space that "never" was before).

> Comb the hairy
> language a vernac
> vert knack of saying what
> no one esp.
> desires
> hearing—how much it's the same.

But always prior inscriptions. Incessant marking. A writing whose condition is over writing. Want "in fact" a description of our language situation? Neither language use nor language acquisition are gender neutral, but are " 'imbued with our sex-inflected cultural values.' " (2) Talking. Eliding. Agreeing. Questioning. Completing. Insisting. Leaving no space for others to speak. Banality. Pause. "Utterance . . . is constructed between [at least] two socially organized persons" even in the absence of an actual addressee. Thus social status, hierarchical status, gender status all matter: "there is no such thing as an abstract addressee, a man unto himself, so to speak." (3)

Foregrounded, this statement suggests the multifarious gender allusions or gender situations that can be called up just by language and its shifting, its tones, the social resonances of idiom, of the colloquial. The dialogic creation of meaning, the subtle capacities for cueing, status, power, and the interconnection of social and verbal realms are facts that have barely been self-consciously accounted for in the understanding of poetry.

> Still one could refind
> a taste for this beauty.
> Spillways of leaping
> abyss to azure
> extend thin ness ness ness
> that rusts rustle rond soft spectacle.

If language is "overpopulated with the intentions of others," it is teeming with, inter alia, gender ideas. (4) I mean, I'm not talking of the signifier/signified, but of palimpsests of (saturations of) signifying. "Each word *tastes* of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life." (5) If each word has lived a socially charged life, each word has a "narrative" or two which it brings with it. What are the tactics which can either reaffirm the narrative(s) the word is telling or can try to break into it by distorting or deforming, opening the storied words?

Thinking about language in my poetry, I imagine a line below which is inarticulate speech, aphasia, stammer and above which is at least moderate, habitual fluency, certainly grammaticalness, and the potential for apt, witty images, perceptive, telling and therefore guaranted "poetic." That is, readable (reasonable) within intentions we assume. Since "Medusa" (finished in 1979) and again since "Crowbar" (finished 1983) my poetry wanders, vagrant, seeking to cross and recross that line: mistaking singular for plural, proposing stressed, exposed moments of genuine ungrammaticalness, neologisms, non-standard dialect, and non-normative forms. I struggle to break into the sentences that of course I am capable of writing smoothly. I want to distance. To rupture. Why? In part because of the gender contexts in which these words have lived, of which they taste.

> Shadowy the sombre emission of light tawnies.
> I read the paper naked
> government atop me
> sweet pea to myself.
>
> A sense of missing the
> important, redefining the minor the nothing the corner
> turned and missed it
>
> something mmmm say small
> that's not "the same."

RUPTURE

To refuse the question as asked. To break through the languages of both question and answer. To activate all the elements of normal telling beyond normal telling.

Write the unwritten, paint the undepicted?

Must make a critical poetry, an analytic lyric, not a poetry that "decorates dominant culture" (to cite Michael Palmer) but one which questions the discourses. This situation makes of representation a site of struggle.

RECURRENT TERMS

delegitimate
deconstruct
decenter
destroy

dismantle
destabilize
displace
deform

explode

RUPTURING NARRATIVE SEQUENCE

An especially convincing part of the early feminist aesthetic of sincerity, authenticity, uncovering unmediated truth is the idea that many stories culturally produced and maintained did not include female(s)' experiences. The "images" projected on my screen were not constructed by me but only with a particular version of me in mind. I went to those movies and—look—there "I" was! All stories interpret experience, construct what we call experience. As a woman writing, I had to seize some power over story as a social institution. Seize the mask. Not carpe diem, the dominant injunction to me as delightful object in one poetic romance, but carpe personam, the female injunction to myself as critical subject in a politics of narrative. Seize the mask, the fictive, examine the instruments whereby writing "are" fabricated.

An intense play between subject and object(ified) is created in the invention of stories for the semi-silenced, or unheard female, or other marginal characters in traditional tales (myths). This prevalent revisionary stance of female writers, happily now foregrounded by feminist criticism, is incited when a writer receives, as Woolf said, "in imagination the pressure of dumbness, the accumulation of unrecorded life." (6) The silent faces of the others, the extras in the story, the ones to whom "it" is done, those who did not "get there" but always were there, without their tales of causes and effects, reasons and fates leave the impress of absence, gap or void. This hoarse whispering silence is especially hard to bear and especially generative.

Curiously the simple idea of writing the woman's voice or "side" into a well-known tale (telling the same story from another side) creates an internal dynamic of critique out of simple reversal or an apparently contained point of view experiment. (I found this in writing "Eurydice" and "Medusa" in the 70's) It is not enough to tell another story, for such a story of the unreckoned is more than just one *more* tale; reckoned in, it wrecks the "in." Intellectual and political assumptions are ruptured, narrative sequence, causality, resolution and possibly the meanings of words or apt language themselves are all brought into question.

Because of the way canonical texts are culturally used especially by literary criticism, as objects, as if final or fixed, with no sense of historical movement (no sense of the way texts are continually reused and transformed, remade in a social conjuncture with readers), I wanted to invent works that would protest or resist this process, not protect it.

(No more poems, no more lyrics. Do I find I cannot sustain the lyric; it is no longer. Propose somehow a work, the work, a work, the work, a work otherhow of enormous dailiness and crossing. All the 'tickets' and the writing. A work of entering into the social force of language, the daily work done everywhere with language, the little flyer fallen to the ground, the corner of a comic, a murder, burning cars, the pouring of realization like a squall green amber squall rain; kiss Schwitters and begin)

While modernism has gone far in eroding linear telos and syntactic direction, it still iconizes texts by proposing them as sacred objects, poets as priests, their status sublime. Certainly this position occurs because of political desperation – which it is only sensible to feel, but it replicates the power relations that we know, substituting "poet" for "legislator" but a secret one, an "unacknowledged" one, a hermetic one. A party (even the Poundian self-justified party of one) out of power, but waiting in the wings.

(Iconization seemed to be considerably abetted by text as one way street – ending in one place, repressing its drafts or choices, discounting in the poem events not-this-poem. The invitation to read once in one direction, start to finish, top to bottom, beginning to end seemed to symbolize iconization.

One way to disturb the "one way street" of the poem is to make a text run, like a musical piece, da capo al fine in a recursive structure that, by virtue of repeating the middle, drew attention to on-goingness, and impeded closure.

A second way, in an homage to Emily Dickinson, could draw upon her rhetorical strategy of indicating variants, to keep the poem open, perhaps; to indicate the enormous changes of meaning, even in a narrow compass, that could be achieved by a minute (in some cases) alteration of a word. I'd like to think that the variant words, lines, and, more rarely, stanzas which she invented constituted her protest against the iconization of a text, against ending as statement, climax, moral thought. Against the stasis of poetry.

In "Crowbar," the whole argument comes to a poised end in the doubling of two words: *hungry* and *angry* which grasp towards the odd *-ngry* ending they hold in common. *Hungry* meant complicit with the psychic cultural construction of beautiful, seductive and seduced women; *angry* meant critical of the same. The simultaneous over-voicing of the penultimate word in a very long poem means that ambivalence marks the end as it had the beginning. Explanation generates its own self-questioning.

Most recently, in a 28-section work called "Writing," I put words on the margin, try to break into the lyric center with many simultaneous writings occupying the same page space. I overwrite, or interleave lines of writing, sometimes in my own handwriting, not trying to obliterate, or to neutralize but to – to what? To erode some attitude toward reading and writing. I wanted simultaneous presence without authority. Wanted to make meanings that undid hierarchies of decidability. I wanted no right/correct sequences of feeling emblematic in right/correct sequences of reading. The desire to create something that is not a complete argument, or a poem with a climax, but where there are ends and beginnings all over the work. A working work.)

I was also rejecting that singular voice which "controls tone." The lyric voice. Controls tone? It hears the itch of, is in the center of languages. Voices are everywhere – the bureaucratic, the banal, the heightened, the friendly, the deadpan, the dreamy. Saturated with the multi-vocal, who can think of controlling tone? It is enough to collect them in one spot, and call that spot a poem.

RUPTURING POETRY

Not incidentally, I am tired of "poetry" – that ready-made, that bike wheel mounted upside down thinking it is a real bike, forgetting it was undone by Duchamp. Tired of Hollywood poetry, like Hollywood cinema, endless discursive mimetic narration which only has different people in starring roles. And judging from their pictures in APR, the stars are pretty similar too.

There must be some way of reaching so deep into assumptions of and about poetry that this changes.

Write poetries. Write writings, write readings, write drafts. Write several selves to dissolve the bounded idea of the self

who is "I" who is "you"
who is "he" is "she"

fleeting shifts of position, social charges implying a
millenia of practice. To disturb the practice

by "itness" a floating referrent, a bounding along the
multiplex borders of marginality. An avoidance of
transcendence everywhere, including in the idea of the artist—
—no genius. no god. no prophet. no priest.

RUPTURING THE HISTORY OF POETRY by *The "History of Poetry"*

To read something new, something different from the production of the figures of women and men that reproduce gender relations, I felt I had to write something different. What then could be more (or less) different than an/other version of poems that have already been produced, the "same" poems but respoken, written from the position of marginality. My desire has led me to construct counter poems—counterfactual poems—postulating that there are many women poets throughout history (some real, some imagined) who have written poems uncannily positioned as having views aslant of dominant views of themselves in whatever era is being reentered.

My aim is to refabricate—revamp, you might say—Western lyric tradition. So I call what I'm doing *The "History of Poetry"*. This is because the very idea of a history of poetry is a fictional sequence formed by choices, exclusions, interests, silences,—a whole and contingent politics of discourse. We are schooled to see the history of poetry as a museum of discrete, highlighted intact sequential objects; we may as well see them as an imperially assembled and classified but random set of fragments. Surrounded by the unwritten.

Within *The "History of Poetry"* the tactic of citation implies deep, wounding and even malicious dialogue with already-written poems. Instead of invention, at that point, there is (in Craig Owens' term) "confiscation" of the already done. (7) In writing, the supposed female writer uses that precise set of words that signals an intersection between her poem and very well known texts. By putting known phrases from "great poems" (i.e. already written, disseminated and absorbed poems) into a structure speaking differently, series of reverberating questions are set in motion that begin to dissolve or erode a former world view; or one has evoked in all the oscillating bliss, two opposite and alternative world views simultaneously. So at all times the critique and distancing are filled with yearning and complicity.

At the center of the poem "Crowbar" occur these lines about a gesture

made by another woman poet, Karin Lessing, with whom I visited the Fontaine de Vaucluse, site famous for Petrarch and Laura.

'Tis poem
that around
its words

it's Words.

The silver ring she threw away
ringed by the fountain's silver ring.

The whole *"History of Poetry"* could be seen like the gesture of a woman throwing a ring into the famous rock crevasse/fountain by which she is completely surrounded. Is it homage or marriage? that is, connection of the deepest kind. Or is it divorce, stripping oneself of any affiliation to the fountain image of woman. All our words are ringed by Words, all our rings are encircled by another powerful, fecund circle by whose flux and outpourings we are at times seduced. The doubled position of being outside and inside, critical and complicit marks the sequence.

FEMINIST POETICS, MODERNISM, THE AVANT-GARDE

The poetics this discusses of course draws on both modernism and the avant-garde. Both are powerful, richly developed practices, and consequently both may overshadow what I am saying, cause it to pale, turn, return invisible. I mean "Aren't you just talking about modernist practice?" "Aren't you just talking about the avant-garde?" "Haven't 'we' done this?"

Modernism is associated with an attempt to take various permutations of "new women" and return them, assimilate them to the classic Western idea of woman as Other (angel or monster, Lady or Fresca). Otherness is a static, dichotomized, monolithic view of women. This view is necessitated by, interdependent upon the religious/spiritual transcendence also typical of modernist practice, its anti-secular resolutions, even in texts midden-filled with the unsorted detritus of the dig into our culture. The eyes in the tent for Pound, the Lady in "Ash Wednesday," the Beautiful Thing in *Paterson*. And a female modernist like H.D., who of necessity has struggled with the idea of Woman? She projects the icon out from herself (liking being the icon); she plays fruitfully with the matrisexual coincidence of being the goddess and loving the goddess. She interests because in making a place for herself, she has to restudy and cut athwart the position she is, grossly, assigned in poetry.

Because of the suspicion of the center in avant-garde practice, the desire to "displace the distinction between margin and center," because of the invention of a cultural practice that "would allow us constructively to question privileged explanations even as explanations are generated," drawing on avant-garde practice seems more fruitful for me-the-woman. (8) Its idea of power and language seem more interesting: the resolute lack of synthesis, the non-organic poetics, the secular lens. (9) But there are questions which the avant-garde must answer. 1) Does it secretlylovingly to itself hold the idea of poet as priest, poem as icon, poet as unacknowledged legislator? Then turn yr. back on it. Or, not to tell you what to do, My back. 2) Is its idea of language social; or does it claim, by language practices, to avoid (transcend), arc out of the limits posed by the social to its writing practices. Dialogic reading means dialogic writing. 3) Where is/are its women: where in the poems, serving what function? where in its social matrices, with what functions? where in its ideologies? How does it create itself by positioning its women and its women writers?

For all these questions, there are many emblematic moments. Try here the effective double sign: not only Pound cutting Eliot's *Waste Land*, but Eliot cutting Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. (10)

WHAT WRITES?

pigs as fingers, toes
hat tassel a "powder puff" tickle
tummy
doh doh doh doh

as transformation d-g d-g d-g,
long cadences ending maybe in yougurt.

pulling upon those wide winging blank labia
dat? dat?

Wandering stars and little mercies, space
so empty, notched each moment.

Tufted white nut rising who or which is
"I" is "yo" the parade feather tit
mouse, did she see her first real bird?

Made from hearing the deep insides of language, language inside the language; made from pick-scabbing the odd natural wounds of language

outside, unspecial dump of language everywhere here.

"Paradoxically the only way to position oneself outside of that hegemonic discourse is to displace oneself within it—to refuse the question as formulated, or to answer deviously (though in its words), even to quote (but against the grain)." (11)
my father said my mother never had any talent
how to acknowledge altierity the marginality and speak from its
historically, personally wounding presence without
so that she never did anything; implied, they had discussed it
come to the conclusion, some people just have it some don't.
how to acknowledge anonymous (ourselves) but compel the structures and tones, the social ocean of language to babble burble, to speak
real talent, he said, would have found a way, this
conversation does not go on too long, shifts to "blacks"
of course.
The sung-half song.

If poems are posies what is this?
To whom?
And who am I, then, if it matters?

I am a GEN { der / re } made by the writing; I am a GEN { re / der } read in the writing.

Jan. 1985/June 1985/Aug. 1985
A note on the fabrication of this piece: some was given at a panel, New Langton Arts; some, the bulk, as a talk at St. Mark's; it was intended to speak about my own work in "poetry" and hence the self-regard of a few sections.

A poetics gives permission to continue.

Notes to Otherhow

1. Nancy Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Women and Scattered Rhyme" in Elizabeth Abel, ed., *Writing and Sexual Difference*, University of Chicago Press, 1982.

2. Annette Kolodny (citing Nelly Furman), "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," in Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, Pantheon Books, 1985.

3. Valentin Volosinov/ M. Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1930), Seminar Press, 1973, p. 85.

4. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, University of Texas Press, p. 294.

5. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 293.

6. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Harcourt, Brace and World, 1957, p. 93.

7. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (Spring 1980), p. 69.

8. Gayatri Spivak, "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," *Humanities in Society* 2, 3 (Summer 1979), p. 206.

9. Ideas from Adorno in Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 79-82.

10. Jane Marcus, unpublished monograph, "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Women's Circus Epic."

11. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 7.

DIANE GLANCY

SOME THOUGHTS ON OUR UNCOMMON LANGUAGE

I have trouble with the spoken word. I talk, but often
do not have the word I want to carry the meaning.
Often it is a macaronic breach of two languages—
or the snagging of one into a shortened branding-iron insignia.
Pocal is the local cowpoke.
Chowdhurry is a quick bowl of soup.
I wonder if this happens in the transfer of two heritages
into one vessel—
a bifurcation of thought not only from within
but also pressed inward from the out—

I remember the neighbor woman watering her four o'clocks
in the narrow yard between our houses.

There is a word for them somewhere in my suitcase which is packed
for a long trip. You come to my house and we talk of the
flowers while the cat sprawls on the floor. I must find that term
like a dress I know is somewhere in the luggage,
but with difficulty open the grip and take out the word I need
for our conversation. Never in my mouth, falling out easily as
cornbread when I choke. No. Words are packed tightly in there.
I do not like to get them out.
The isolation of the prairie has given me a migratory sense of
privacy. Words are holy as balloons which hold our breath
and that must be why it is so hard to bear our meanings
as though they were buffalo returned to the plains.

I remember language as a broom in the cabin / table by the window
with found objects / rocks, birdsnests, snerds, utotos, greesnees,
snocks & eggs.
Having a child around certainly babels the page.
If I yanked the toy hammer from his hand twice,
I've done it once.

It is now on the high shelf in the closet with the dorsal fins
if I ever return to water.

Out in back, they were building a house like Elisha & his prophets
when one chopping a tree for a beam or joist of the house dropped it
into the Jordan and said, what shall I do, for it was borrowed?
And Elisha said, where is it? And he said, there.
Elisha cast a stick into the water
and the axhead swam.

It is a tale we know in school:
the conjugation of the first alphabet's letter—
swam
swan
sway

Just then a call from the handicapped worker interrupted the thought
of the neighbor woman / the four o'clocks which opened & closed
each day at that time selling brooms & lightbulbs for a ceiling light
to see underwater & sweep the musty basement floor,
the seeping walls.

On this trip to the mountains of Colorado where the Utes crossed
altitudes in their tract / do you know they knew when the white man
landed?
I don't know how and they didn't know exactly who came but they
felt the intrusion of the new being.
Epaw. Epaw.
At one time I called grandpa chief of the beaten tribe
who wandered with moccasins on the wrong feet.

Some new object which would have to be named in the genre of neu-
essayist when there is no nouveau object to name but there it was
they knew somehow.

Diurnal. The name of the flower and the daily opening & closing
between the herds of stars
grazing black, transparent fields.

Not the sweet neighbor watering her diurnals but something that
would plant this square cement box in the ground and call it
basement.

Oh, they are only places to wash the clothes.
Wringer & the lines of rope across the basement ceiling
under the joists for the living room floor upstairs.

Once in church camp in Colorado we didn't want to drive the 400
miles across Kansas in the heat and took Trail Ridge over
the mountains down through Berthoud Pass / Battered by the time
dark passed over us in Kansas.
El Jebel. Tabernash. Sawput. I said the names
we passed.

My ancestors returned from the sweat lodge
ebullient as tall grass
mule-lol-ling the prairie
coming to grips with new words
nue udderings sometimes not words
but sound oozing like grease from under the axel rods.
Words are the building blocks,
the diurnals that blooM each day,
make the garden in which we Roamp. Roam or Romp.
Possibly Rump.

We unravel the navel and pour out ourselves like Christ on the cross
when they pierced his side or when I pull the plug in the sink after I
finish washing underwear to hear the loud suck.
And hang it over the pole and it splats in the tub just like
afternoon rain in the mountains at church camp when I
felt the spirit falling and didn't know the word to say but said
Ey co bah/ eet/ eet/
Somehow they knew.

The balloon's navel all puckered where we put in our breath.

That's what our words do—
Highjack four o'clocks.

Upsidedown on the floor— her hind legs spread—
the cat is my daughter when she was a baby in leggins or leotards
swollen with diaper.
Now the cat is a baby I hold.

At one time our words were kiva,
grandpa chief
storing the broken parts of our tribe.

LARRY EIGNER

FIVE POEMS

e n d H i s t o r y a b o u t l i k e [#1506]

a n y o t h e r p o i n t

the line between
"psychic numbing" and
sense enough to knock you flat
getting thinner and thinner I think
vanished a while back

whatever you want in sight

(*Geographic*

doesn't right now blink

chemical dumps

a battlefield

night day ". . . armies . . ."

*

absence of the dead tree [#1477]
a while to cut down
so much close to the house
the ground and changing sky

[#1496]

down the block
so many places

large and small
to come at you

how long
can a dumptruck be

broad level streets
have wide-open corners

in the wind

steep the trees lean

from back yards rising

dappled sky

*

[#1403]

breathing invisible smoke
such as a cat is
if you can much
as any old day
I'd be willing to go along on

bush flower and tree

*

[#1460]

"the most productive agricultural county in the East"
(where the Amish and Mennonites be
—National Geographic, April 84

White Horse and Intercourse
across some lake

Bird in Hand Paradise

Eden Smoketown

Reamstown Landsville

Quarryville

Safe Harbor

Goodville Blue Ball

Bathbridge

Maytown

not far away

from Three Mile Island

GUSTAF SOBIN

A PORTRAIT OF THE SELF AS INSTRUMENT OF ITS SYLLABLES

". . . *parmi les matinaux,*" René Char
As when milk is bound by the juice of the fig, Empedocles

for Robert Duncan

1

. . . was dark,
finally, crossing the Crau, before the
first, blossoming almonds
caught in
the

head-
lights, flickering —pink—
from

under. cupped
flame, that frozen
sequence. (was what
I'd
hold to: the instant-looped, -bezelled,
-set, now,
in-

to sound. the
narrow orchards, now, as
they isle, rise,
the

pos-
sibility, at least of
iso-

lates).

*

a hissing of
walls,
reeds, wind-
breaks: the running
conjugate

of the
un-
interrupted.

(was
what brought me, first, 'a bag, and
briefcase,' the
pos-

sibility, at
least, of stations, intervals, of some-
where where the numbers
might knot, and
the
taut, white boulders, in their

breath-
lines: eddy.

. . . would lie there, the full length
of that
murmur. 'not stillness,' said, 'but the
movement traced, gathered. the
loose skirts of the
flame in-
folded. mint

and japonica, brought —quartz-
like— to
focus').

a *where*, where-
by the fibers might
run —refluent— into hip,
ankle,
tongue.

2

within the
circle, that hand-
stamped, cancelled the square: *Lacoste,*
fief of

oak-
smoke and iris. of
moons

and nettles. of the black
wind-
pitted cells of
its ramparts (what the
southwinds scooped, and the long
mistrals chiseled). there, concentric,
at its quarried
heart, where
the

cobbles
fork, and the
hollyhocks

stand sentinel,
went

under. where the
lamp
might root, and
the

low
room glow —bright

as burst
straw— brought
the

broken
swarm of my

syllables, a pulse

beating
against a diaphragm
of

shadows; a
face as
if
poured (so

many
facets) into the
depth-

less mask of its
hands. . . . . .
. . . . . .

. . . . . that it
take! that sunken,
the

damp
vocable sprout: a
'here'
huddled a-

gainst the
where-

less workings of
a scuttled
earth. bed,
bottles and chairs:
that

each thing, as it's
uttered,
out of
its

breath,
smoldering, bud!

*

but didn't; wouldn't. for
ten years, the
rocks wandered. wouldn't stop: the
shelled meadows, nor the
knuckled trunks of the
stump
sycamores. drifted Pisces, and Equuleus.
unbound,
un-
threaded, from the
slender wefts
of syntax, floated Sagitta, ashen. . . .
slipped,

what
could trace the weight
of
its own
fingers, bring
the meager echo —its stray body's— to
bear.

for ten
years, reigned
nomen, preponderant. wouldn't fit, lay
broken, the
phrase, in its meted
progressions. split, severed, what the
verb had
woven (a wave

through its
slack waters
shot, by its troughed rhythms, driven . . .).
a-

drift, now, in so
many
spent components. in
nomen, the *mundus*
nominalis, each thing, unto itself, in-
vested; each, its
sole
and inflexible referent. 'like

unto like,' the limbs
un-
mixed: that vision Empedoclean, the fusion
of the elements, under
strife, riven.

shadows lapping
against chalk, for
ten

years, the
breath went, dis-
membered. erred bone, erred
measure. through the *nomen* (in its cell-
ulated
wastes) the poem moved, dis-
assembled, un-
spoken.

3

. . . . . hung there, a
damp
bulb, a plump
fire, from
under-

neath the
tangled coils
of

her hair. whorled
taut, each
brittle,
in-

flammated node,
to a
flushed bud, each

knot. then slack,
re-

lapsing, again, a
loose
effusion, a
heat, run un-

dulant, through
its

rhythmic,
lymph-

rippled grain . . . . .
. . . . . .

*

rung,
am
rung to that that

draws and
in-

volves me; pulls,
cen-
tripetal, from
shank and

tongue. urges its
glowing,
un-
sustainable image
—its im-

print, in
me— through that
narrow draft,
tendon
of

my own
an-

nunciations. brings,
thus, each
word to
resonance,
each

breath, to
reception. leads
the
least in-

crement into
that
tissue, that
globed air, that be-

gets.

*

. . . brings,

brings, thus, the
poem
for-

wards (of which I
am mere-
ly its
in-

stance: pre-
fix for setting
sub-
stance to

syllable. for
bringing the
un-
worked images: *damp*
bulb, plump

fire, for-
wards, into their
linked

and sonorous be-
trothals).

*

for the words
wed as
they weave . . . lithe, the
morphemes
couple, as the self un-
selves, and sends
its eye moving, deft, through mineral; its
breath, meshed,
through

pine. mixes
flame,

flour and water; eschews

stasis; abets
rhyme. binds the
goat's

milk fast to the
fig's
thick juices.

'not stillness,' said, 'but
the movement traced, gathered.' but
sphaïros, the
earth bound, taut, to
its paired
releases.

4

over Goult, where the
lavender foams, and lizards – through
the dry
thyme – sizzle,
read
rocks. read

walls. saw interstice, manifest. followed
the low, over-
lapping play of the stones, their ad-
justed
intervals. past
Les Maquignons, clustered
in its crumbling,
rust-
red ochres, entered
the

trellised air, the wind-
scored

orchards.' (not
cadence, had

said, the fixed
fall
of its
quartered staves, but the wire drawn, the
lines

run rhythmic to
the folds
of the broken ground, pliant to
the earth's
un-

dulant
lay).

not form, then, but

'form, as
extension of content.' but *gestaltung*, each
wave in
its
throe: the
gaudy heave of its

count-
less facets, a
fresh annunciate.

*

nights, would

read, *quouro lis estello*
brihon forço. with-
in the tall,
lime-

washed rooms of that abandoned, dry-
stone cocoonery, read
Blake, read
Char, my

first masters. the
flames rose, in

fat
needles, through the
lamps' glass sleeves . . . with the least
breeze, the
slack
shadows throbbed.
read

Sappho and
Pindar, Anacreon

and Catullus. came
birds, came reeds. out of
Isaiah, sprang summer; Parmenides, night.
from Dante, that

ore, that
ben

intellecto, and Ibn'
Arabî. those
suspended,
reciprocal

stars. came
winds, salt, marrows . . . for the lines, as
they run —transparent— into
dawn, into

light, bring to
each substance its qualities, each
reflection its
light. proffer their mettle; both
temper and

refine. came, thus, the
rivers. came fish, and
the

rain-
shaken lilies. from the T'ang, thus, the
moons, and the Sung,
mirrors. from

Mallarmé that
rush

of crushed
shadow, and Shakespeare, that
pearl, its
black

sphericity. came
thunder, came
tin. from

Traherne the psalm, burnt
to a glass
whisper. from Hopkins the
bow, and Wordsworth,

verdurous, the
quiver.

. . . for the lines, as
they come, now, un-
written, as they run —pellucid— into
world, infuse, in-
still. the
syllables fill. from

Williams, thus, so
many wind-
petalled wildflowers, while from Duncan:
air, that
ayre exultant, and
Oppen, unrelenting, that wheel-

maker's
flame. from
the

linguists, now (Whorf, Sapir)
how the
least
shift in syntax, tense-
perception, would
re-

set the
heavens. bring a boulder to

tremble in the wrapt
tissues of a
breath. bring, would
bring us, un-

centered, now, onto those very
first
fields: those re-
leased phrases of dust
and dragonflies, adjunctive, now, to
that

deeper space. unto that
far

heart, a people, cre-
puscular, who
point.

5
The Translation of the Waves

that air not
end, nor
flame

gutter. that earth not coil —ingested—
into those nounal
hoards, but
verb-

herded, be
given: offered forth. wind unto

wind, foam
unto *foam,* be pitched, sonorous; through each
meted particle, trans-
mitted.

(for certainly to

own is
to interrupt. to stock, pile, separate matter
from its own in-
nate motion —its thrust,
unto— to truncate
and kill).

*

. . . was
what brought me, then, a blue
shadow moving a-
gainst the
glass-

headed light. a mumble, across the
pruned,
luminous oblongs
of the terraced orchards. up, over Venasque,
where asters float
to the

fields'
very edges, climbed.
lavender, olive, quince in

laddered
octaves, came at
last to those
waves in
the

rocks. that
cave

where the waves
hung from
the

poem's
high scaffolds. *eine*
Pracht —that splendor— *das Werk*
Der Wogen. where, all
morning, they'd
amassed, lay gathered towards their own
trans-

lation. a-
beyant upon the
brief: *schlägt es*: the
sea, in

Holderlin's poem, all
morning,
pendant.

of the way, the
various ways (angles, torque, tensions) the
waves
might break —fan
against the coastline, foaming— Fédier
and

Beaufret, all
morning, tested

predicates. Heidegger withdrawn, opaque (a
block of
dark crystal, its
rays

bent in-
wards) e-

lucidated the
verb, alone: its clipped, arrested movement.
the back
of his hand
slapped, flatly,
at the dry shadows.

eine Pracht! all
morning, that
splendor!
that

cave ('no,
certainly
not
Plato's') where the
waves, in
their

great
watery greenhouses, ac-
cumulated: a-
waited transition. in their high, fluttering
aviaries, their
transit.

. . . as
if, in that
vocable, all Europe, all

air —that long morning— were held, suspended.
as if, finally, in the
blue, in-

voluted
wheel of
that

verb-
transfigurant (in *all*
verbs, *all* mornings, finally) the breath would
slip,
accelerating,

towards passage.
wave

unto *wave*; surf bursting
against *shore*; each thing, unto its deep,
im-
bedded mirrors, pro-
jected; unto the running

parallel —its
referent— deferred.
that

thus re-
turned: unto the inviolate, at last, re-
stored, each thing might, in
its turn,
re-

generate. out of that
lost
language, that buried resonance, might bud:
spring fresh . . . that
two-

fold, the
earth be —by
breath alone— its
own

recourse. both
store
and sow, receive and diffuse, articulate its
re-

ciprocal spaces. that it break,
thus, from that
ul-

timate hypnosis: the ul-
timate Gorgon's
white

monodic gaze. from its
gases, be

saved. from that flash and its instantaneous
white fires: *salva, salva*
terram. was
what the

waves sang. sang *save, save.* what the
bells, off the tops
of the
tall waves, beat, flung backwards in
hard tokens, fat
hammered
froth. . . .

*

what brought me, then,
over the low
ledges. brought that I
bring: impelled that I urge, herd, drive the
words into
that

luminous salvage. and stand, there, in those
linked shadows, thus
lit.

JORGE PEREZ-ROMAN

QUID NOVI?

Piercing the white curtains, the southern light hits the rough borders of a virgin canvas, speeds up and slips through sleek slots rebounding to kindle the colors. Orange, cinnamon, rose and green answer the call; embraced by a haughty black shroud, form arises. Along the walls and over the table whirling images pile up in unrestful orders of stratified endurance. Real, unreal? Pure surfaces or eye-traps for whimsical imaginations . . . does it matter? Away from the reductionist babble and remake fads, these forms beat with the structural/ikonic rhythms ingrained in their conception. Meek or enraged, indifferent to deception, they tell the toil and care presiding over their constitution but do not claim full paternity. Nor do they prove or explain anything, praise or vindicate beyond the limits of their identity, paying in cash all debts to those ancestors who are well aware that nothing is done in forgetfulness of its origins.

Embodied complexity knows that what is alive is indifferent to projected thoughts, and that all living things aspire to a certain perfection of their own, without models or justifications outside their present. Dreams of expression try to capture an echo of the luxurious multiplicity that engulfs perception, ignoring the shining city that spreads its charms over the tree tops outside the large window, a pleasant mirror hiding the void bored to the marrow by ideologies, desire, smells and noisy slogans.

"The center has disappeared and nobody is innocent," jests the red-stockinged gnome laughing in the letter-box, fouling at night the backs of the sleeping canvases. His truth and insignificance flatters, warns and mugs behind the masks of seduction, money, rank, revolt, conformism, success, honors or their rejection.

The piercing old man mad about water lilies rightly said long ago that "art should be discouraged." Now all edges are blurred. Anything goes say the bustling epigonous-masters of the day confusing junk food with agape, while the fake gods serve stale passwords to embrace, cajole and outbid each other in the scramble as the tapes singsong the media porridge . . .

Jorgé Perez-Roman was born in Buenos Aires in 1926. He has lived in Paris since 1960. He "keeps aloof of any movement or group fighting for aesthetic power in the official or private art circles, showing sparsely with his Latin American friends in a rather marginal way."

MAXIMINI BRUTANTI
CONCEPTUAVANT
PARTOUSORPERSON
NEIMPOSSIBLEART?
NEIN! NEIN! YES?
REVOLUNULLAFREE DA! DA!
HARDGEOMETROP
HAP! HAP! HAP!
HAPPENVIRONZEN HIP! HIP!
HIPCUL HIPCUL
TUREJAZZPOT BIENSUR!
FUTURGENITORETRO SOUTHSUR? NOSISISUR
REALISMEARTH
POVERACINETICON
INFORMATIPOP SHOWBIZZDROP
OUT!
POTPOURRITUEL
NOSTALGIA AT FULFADHYPE
OUI? JA? SI!
PERFOMADODECAFOL? OFFCOURSE!
SEMIOLOGOSPEL RECUPERATROP HODGEPODGE
GRAFFITELECTRONUL
MULTINACIONES PROGRAMMERDE
CLINIHILPOST
MODERNKITSCH
TABULARASA! TABULARASA!
RASALATABU!
NADA RIENNIER ADAN . . . . . .

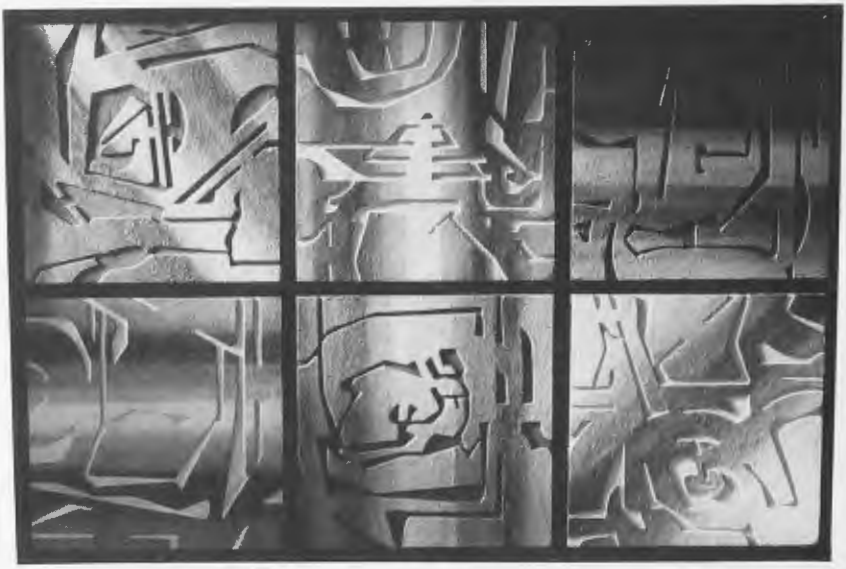
The aeon's explosion shredded maya's veil and all the rest within, while the juke-box fawns undisturbed: "When the social order dissolves, the clown deserts the scene or canvas, and comes down on the street in each one of us." Notwithstanding the same blood floods our hearts, fills our lungs and their ashes are ours. Thus, pulling aside this sketchy void, the laboring hand resumes the free play of its task, one brush-stroke here, another there, so that background and forms come forward as a raving presence, unavoidable and forever a witness of the anthropos dream. Ignoring dichotomies and delusions, this hand aims at the "legislative expression of style" as a way of lifting for a moment, perhaps, the tombstone of time and of history.

Evening arrives and the gnome again falls asleep behind the color pots. Shadows smooth out diversity, while memory whistles: "Conformation, transformation, eternal mind conversation threaded with all flowing forms of possibility."

Let the spring run by itself – the waters come from nowhere and go to . . .

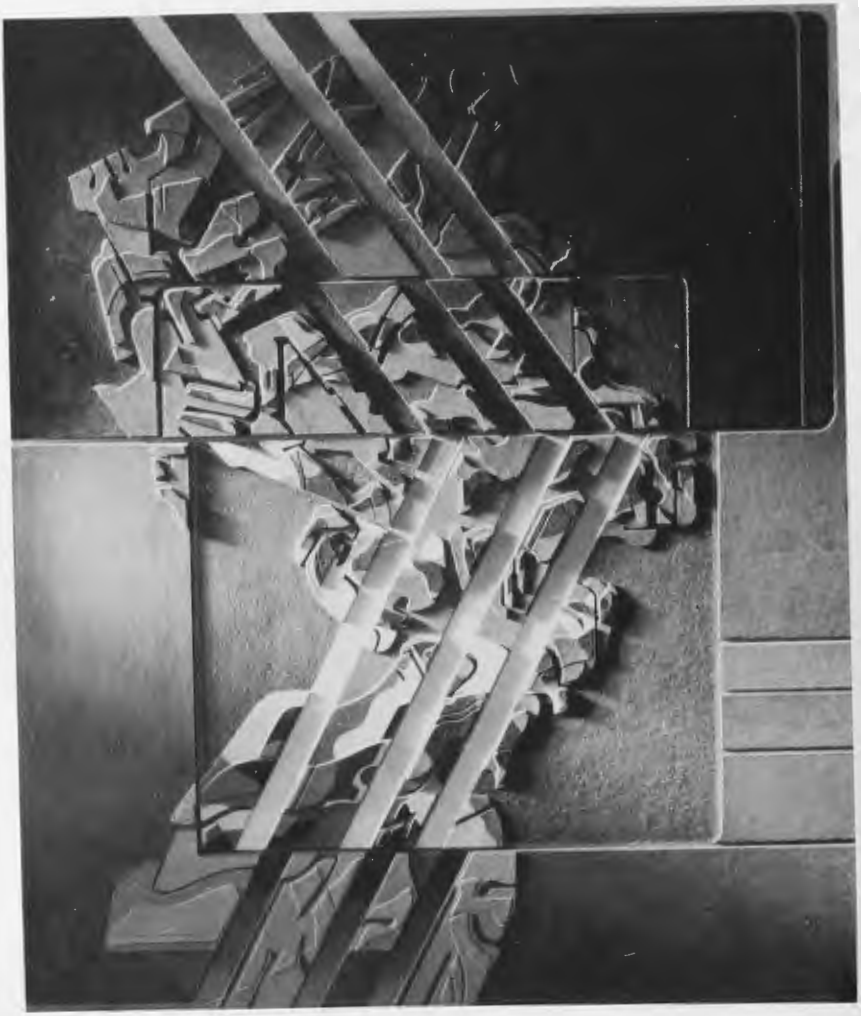
[1971-1985]

JORGE PEREZ-ROMAN



SIX EPIFANIES UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS (from Amereida)
Hardboard, cardboard and oils / 75 x 108 cm. / 1976-1980

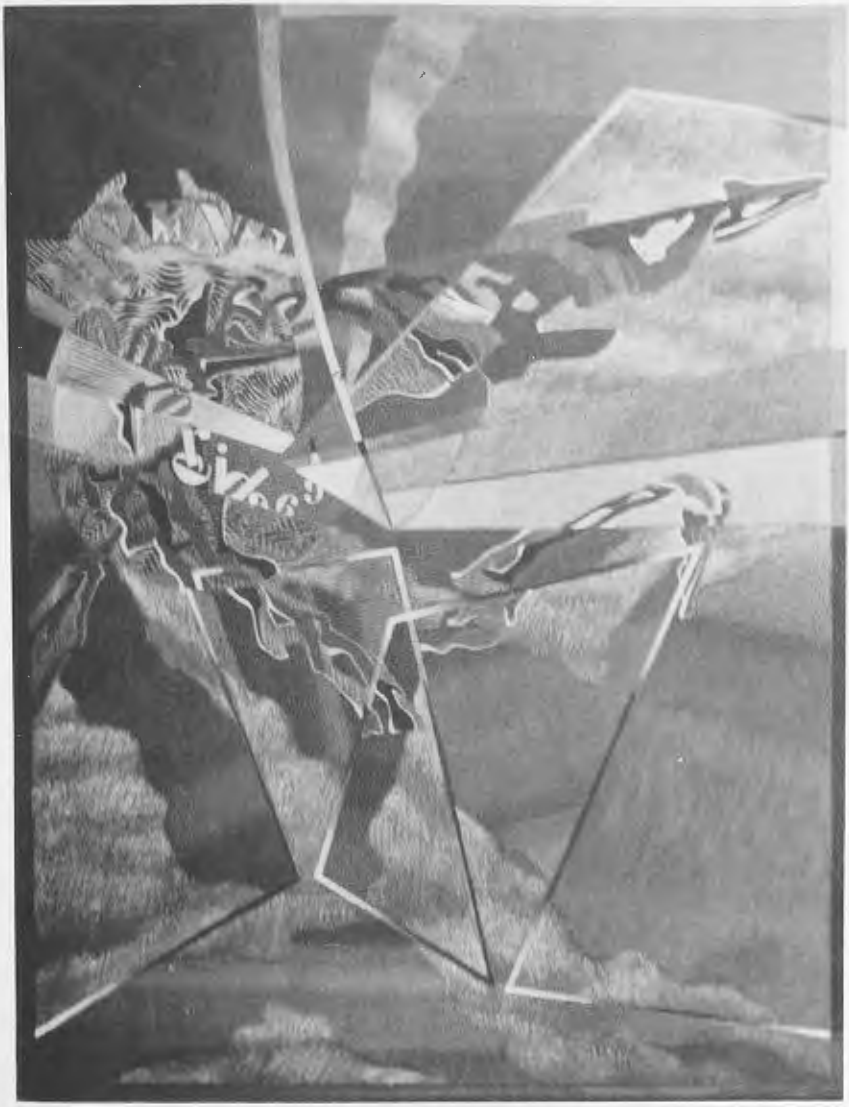
LE GRAND ECART (partial view—painted relief)
Hardboard, cardboard and oils / 95 x 137 cm. / 1980



INTERFERENCES
Hardboard, cardboard & oils / 133 x 85 cm. / 1980

AMEREIDA 65
Acrylic & oil on canvas / 173 x 117 cm. / 1982

EARLY WARNING (central view)
Hardboard, cardboard & oils / 91 x 114 cm. / 1983/84



A SOUTHERN TROPISM
Pastel pencils & oils on prepared paper / 65 x 50 cm. / 1984

VLADIMIR HOLAN

from A NIGHT WITH HAMLET

(Tr. from the Czech by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan)

ORPHEUS: Are you glad?
EURYDICE: I don't know, I don't remember yet . . . I'll have to
learn again about
pain . . . How long was I dead?
ORPHEUS: I wasn't really brave . . . Half a year yesterday. It took
me half a year to decide . . .
EURYDICE: Quiet! The world will collapse from all those heroic
deeds dragging their entrails behind them!
ORPHEUS: I'd gladly tell you! . . . But you see: I remember every-
thing too well . . . I don't know how long I've been alive . . .
My god, you seem to have a hard time walking . . .
EURYDICE: It's nothing . . . I've lost the feel for the shoes you
brought me . . . Those
high heels! And it's as if
my skirt were tied to I believe in one God . . .
That's a tree, isn't it?
ORPHEUS: An aspen, darling! Your favorite! . . .
EURYDICE: Alas, I see only its roots
(those, as you'd say, nerves of vegetation demons),
I've become so accustomed to being down there,
all I can see are its roots . . . But who knows! . . .
You said: Darling! . . . What does the word *apeiron* mean?
ORPHEUS: Infinity!
EURYDICE: O yes—the extension of abbreviations . . .
ORPHEUS: You're trembling! . . . You're so frail! Come and sit down
here on this stone . . . Take my cloak . . .
EURYDICE: You said: Darling!
O yes—down there I was about to forget
when suddenly I thought of your words,
in the underworld next to the stream of oblivion is a stream of
memory . . .
ORPHEUS: Did you find it?
EURYDICE: I didn't look for it . . . The deepest being
is in the unconsciousness overcome by *love* . . .

The first half of the poem appeared in two installments, in SULFURS No. 12 and No. 13. The final section (roughly, the last quarter) will appear in SULFUR No. 15.

Its anguish for you,
its sympathy and bliss and truthfulness
to have you here again with me, helping me, radiating
everything that we cannot know about ourselves . . .
ORPHEUS: Only as in a mirror . . . Speak to me, speak!
That's how I know you are back on earth . . .
EURYDICE: True! Fuses are blowing . . . I see
a sunbeam lighting
the ugly scar on your left cheek,
I must kiss it . . . Is someone following us? . . .
ORPHEUS: Everything you left behind here . . .
And curiosity is there too, leaning forward like a figure
on a car's hot-tempered radiator . . . Don't be afraid,
say something! . . . May I kiss you?
EURYDICE: Remember when I once . . .
Is love mortal?
ORPHEUS: I don't know . . . There are trains that stop
neither at a local nor at the main station . . .
That's a rough comparison though . . . Don't believe it!
EURYDICE: Down there we asked after the soul
and everything answered with a lost body . . .
ORPHEUS: Yes! Up here I kissed
all your nightgowns. The only scent some had
was that you didn't sleep during your own nights . . . Others
were so sprinkled with your powder,
I might have pulled them from the flowerbed . . . And your skirts
and blouses!
Its insane, but I divided the space
of my memory only
by your no longer entering it . . . I was afraid
that my solitary recriminations
would in the end encounter their own enchantment . . .
Luckily we had Juliet . . .
EURYDICE: I'd forgotten! . . . Tell me: is she alive?
ORPHEUS: Yes! . . . The childlike darkness of her today
mimics yesterday's night . . . I can't
imagine what she'll do when she sees you . . .
EURYDICE: She doesn't remember me . . . How old is she?
ORPHEUS: Six years east of your voice!
EURYDICE: But you said I've been dead for half a year!
ORPHEUS: Dear, you know that a man who has ever been afraid
doesn't know what woman or will is . . .
EURYDICE: Then you lied to me . . .
ORPHEUS: Yes . . . But you're alive . . . Imagine when she sees you . . .

EURYDICE: Juliet, did you say?
ORPHEUS: Yes, Juliet . . . a little girl . . . something
between vision and appearance . . . Like you . . .
But when you meet (like two children
placed on the threshold of orphanhood), you'll enter
the warm insides of a house . . .
There are too many books in it, I know . . . But
it also has statues and pictures
and a sofa and a piano
and a table animal drinking the carpet's colors . . .
It also has your humility, which notes
much disorder, it will brush off the dust
and will prepare dinner . . .
EURYDICE: May I kiss you?
ORPHEUS: It isn't time yet, dear! I've been observing
for a long time that you were merely listening
to circumambient singing and that you are only waiting for one
of those masterful birds to lose his voice . . .
EURYDICE: Fateful to yourself, how you understand me!
ORPHEUS: You are within me . . . Overwhelmed, I don't ask
why we are . . . What can be done with will in a dream
which has stopped being vigilant?
I can sleep at last only by the fact that
I want to awaken somebody else tenderly . . . We are, dear, we are! . . .
EURYDICE: Juliet! . . . A little girl! . . . I know:
she was little more than a year old when I was dying . . .
The trees bent the tops of the wind . . . Was it
astonishment or a scream? . . . I prayed
to God: for her, for you! I regretted
everything, I felt compassion . . . But
what in mercy is not pardon
would gladly interpret the foreign language of them both . . .
We are near blasphemy . . .
ORPHEUS: In this way the forest wanders in us and meets the trees.
EURYDICE: There was only a single tree and a little flower . . .
ORPHEUS: You know what kind . . . In a moment you will sniff it . . .
EURYDICE: She'll be starting to school soon, won't she?
ORPHEUS: In a month, darling . . .
EURYDICE: Does she have a primer? And a blackboard and a sponge
and a slate pencil?
And a school bag with a little mirror inside?
Come, we must hurry . . . Who is
with her? An aspen?
ORPHEUS: O my god . . . An aspen, wait,

why yes, Marfa, you know? Old Marfa . . . the nanny . . .
EURYDICE: Her? Is she still alive? Back then,
she had to have straw around her entire house,
like a house in which
a woman lies, moaning, yearning for silence.
ORPHEUS: Old Marfa is with her . . .
EURYDICE: You speak like this now, you
who have foretold the eclipse and diverted the currents of rivers?
But . . . I wonder if you know . . . if you know
that I died *gravid*
(you used to put it tenderly as if lost in thought)? . . .
ORPHEUS: Come, dear! . . . No! . . . I'll carry you
and kiss you . . . I'll kiss you and spoil you,
carry you, carry you, carry and kiss and spoil you . . .
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
But the poet does not know how to go on—
and people have stopped fearing . . ."

I understand you very well! I told Hamlet . . . For I
once *unwittingly* interrupted a couple in conversation,
they *never* returned to it . . .
They were husband and wife, both standing
in the gateway of the city of Daus . . .
Even though I could not immediately disappear
(I was so blinded by the force
of her beauty!), even today, after twenty years
I torture myself with remorse . . .

"Yes," said Hamlet, not listening to me,
"but woman's beauty and man's longing! . . .
It's possible that what took fright in him during the day
has the courage to go out into the night . . . But later,
the blind man guides himself using a hand gilded with moth killing
or with true lunacy . . .
But they've all kissed him:
the hangman, the waiter with poisoned wine,
or suicide . . .
Whoever *survives* will get used to it . . . Or will grow wise
and bite Judas' knee
and won't give a penny toward a burial stretcher for the poor . . .
You know the storm clouds sentenced to the executioner
who will shave their heads at Vulture Castle?
They greet each other in Latin and then it rains . . .

And the rain will wash it all away . . .
And again the sun and again the man, who
on a brewery-horse hunts skylarks with a dove
as well as the touch of not-his-woman.
A sea of boring semen from nones to vespers! . . ."

– – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

The window opened the wind, which sang:
  Little clouds are heaping, heaping,
  inspired by cosmic space,
  but when they release their drops,
  it only rains on a snail . . .

– – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

"I'd like to find a torrent which boils
in its waves the first cottage
built of tea bricks–
I'd like to find a river
which along its entire course
is without any cities . . . Simply it is always the fear
of being alone, being alone, being simply alone–
and so once again the woman ship and a man
who ignites his two lamps
under his lighthouse! . . .
And then the bewildering pause,
evoked by the entire score,
it is contemporaneity creating continuity,
a continuity that is vegetative and therefore dancing,
but grasped in such a way that a feeling for lies
takes precedence over a thought for truth–
and then touches of small thunders
(about a child's handful)
and touches precipitously oval and hairy
like the floor of a barber shop before it is swept,
touches unsure of all that threatens to remain–
and then coarseness negated by tenderness, gentleness in
    violence– –
one way or another, it is always our blood,
which reddened those who condemned us–
and it is the seed that conceived: *screened*,
and it is a fruit grown embittered as a thrown fist,
and it is melancholy

replacing a step with a staircase so quickly
that it leads to the abyss,
while somewhere spurned harmony waits
like a crying echo with a kerchief of fog in hand,
a hand which does not know whether the body's memory will
    find the place
forgotten by the instincts of a soul
at a loss as to whether any hint
indicates a threat: to them, *those amateurs!!!*

Love! . . . It is daring before it lives,
and always destroys what gives it life . . . Upside down snow . . .
But snow under the heel of the angel of abstraction
does not melt . . . And since fate is not curious about ideals,
there is ruling and there is government . . . But love
should be what it will be . . . But it is love
that tells us that we are even now condemned . . .
Even absurdity is absurd . . .
We have no choice . . .

The inexplicability of a sentence
which we haven't understood in its darkness
sometimes bursts into so many sparks
that it blinds us . . . It is precisely *the real*
that is metaphysical . . . But lovers
don't like it when between a riddle
and the possibility of a solution
wit gently breaks off its own sharp points . . . Literal-minded,
they embrace and kiss and do not suspect
that danger too turns into habit and indifference.
For otherwise they'd have to die. To die perhaps
without the perfection of horror, but with utter certainty
during that barefoot quiet that comes to us
in a floral invitation
and says simply: enough!
Then we only glimpse each other—
without knowing if it is a matter of alternation or metamorphosis,
we must grant alternation and metamorphosis a deadline for
proffered hands and bowing,
so that meanwhile they can reshroud . . .

But a genuine lover won't make a truce with a portrait
and is unlikely to carry a cock to the Assyrians
from a word not yet begun, an uttered but unfinished indignation,

and an unstated joy . . . Every notion
is alluring . . . Even the notion of suicide . . .
May the night last, then,
in which a hardened harmony
repeats its rhythms so long
that fate alone rends its female squinting
in the twinkling of a destructive demon!
May the night last, in which everything is in disgrace
except art, which has long been damned
by the curiosity of hells and the indifference of this world!
May the night last, even if the lighthouse builder's stone
were to kill his son!
Let the night last, even if during subway construction
the first mid-summer fire-fly were put out!
Let the night last, in which a shooting star's broom
has long since swept away the fall of she-angels
from the Vatican gardens to the forest of souls at Waterloo!
The heart is the weight . . . Reason only the scales . . . Even in
posthumous innocence
we are tried again and again . . . So let the night last!

. . . . . .

GEORGE EVANS

A VIEW FROM SPACE

Earth's a power without meaning
in the end.
We're locked here
in our visions.
I'm lost myself
over care for shelter it isn't
happiness but delight transfigured.

I wander sunlit esplanades and know
what's going on what's going on
is common knowledge, Earth is shrinking.

We afford insanity because we repair things,
our technology. When Newton dropped the apple
again, removing trees from the problem,
then apples, then landscape,
Earth was shrinking,
mysteries transforming—
science improves life leaving the conscience
untouched,
advances while the heart shrinks
and the heart shrinks quickly.

:

She was walking I was walking
into wind we reached the cliff
& downcoast rocks & water
seemed miles below we couldn't breathe
for wind the rocks were not as we are not
miles away, but here
and very close.

:

Stakes are small but magnified by fear.
You remember walking thinking the world's small

people are fools I can take it—forget it,
we mean to live in fear
of small things.

There's joy, then rose blush, freesia,
an exotic bird in the park
continents from home because someone
thought it understood love
leaving a cage open then a door:
lose their charm
& a man without a name from mythology,
nothing fancy to cloak him,
comes forth
with a pint of rum
into the sun
with whom no one will speak,
comes forth, sick of humor, sick of love—

I was young, he says,
and that is all he says.

:

I look along the coast
no one hears complaint
as no one hears breakers
after staying very long.

We must protect ourselves at every ocean.

With his toes out he played
the badinerie of Bach's Overture #2/B minor
in heavy rain by Powell Street station
his eyes glazed it was perfect
raging sweetly against exhaustion
of those dragging home it frightened me
that flute batting the rain.

:

Talent ravages the mind:
not enough/too much–

talent has no place
for a man,

a child's rule
is a fool's measure
for a man.

We pay for our spaces.

:

Walking,
stars fixed in the sky
I'm walking,
no place to live
without money

I think of Les Trois Frères
its sorcerer dancing
its animal/man dancing
on bare stone

where he lives in his cave
his house and grit my teeth

against culture & money

breaking my one crown.

:

Ripples swell to waves

over crab & whale

flute & sea pen merge,

hoards of homeless cross the road,

presidents
of my republic

surge:

this is the world from space the world
made small

where issues meet and wobble off
in one line,

pianos, flutes, bassoons, guitars,
unlikely mob,
converged –

killer, pimp, mother, immigrant, doctor, father,
loon
    all in one huddle

from this view

the dandelion a rose

the chipped plastic coffee table a fortress

tallest buildings spools

the greed in geography

smoothed

&

Earth a vision which has no power in the end,

no intellect, no fear in the end.

PAUL CHRISTENSEN

TWO POEMS

BREAK-DOWN

Talking until the words melted
and my mind went flat.
Then only a smile appeared
on my face, like a moon rising
up out of my shirt to replace
my intelligence, a silent brooding
lunar signal that only confused
my listener, who looked away,
into the face reflected back again
on the window. What consolation
is this, I wondered. She looks
only at her self, to herself,
and I am incapable of talking, anymore.

I picked up a hand and let it
fall into her hand, thinking
there were other tricks to communicating.
A foot eased its ridge of toes
toward her foot. I let my knee
move an inch to touch her own,
and I could not think of anything
else to do but press all these
centers onto hers, with no results.

Somewhere men were sitting down
to pitchers of ice water and papers,
as clerks and aides rushed behind
the chairs, whispering into old men's
ears, as everyone drew tensely forward
onto the green felt of the oval table,
to sort the ambitions of nations and
forestall a war. A bright bulb
flashed like a vision of utmost holocaust,
the disintegration of the world,

and all the eyes in unison winced,
then turned coldly to their foes again.

She was like a blown-down tree after
a hurricaine had churned the coast;
her ugly legs spraddled and uncomfortable,
her gnarled hands unable to hold mine;
her face like something pulled off
the earth, the underside of a bicycle seat,
without its upright pipe to screw down to,
to be connected with the earth again.
How I loathed and loved her at the
same time, wishing the war would start.

DESIRE

Eating by one's self
raises the question
of one's right to life.
Each fork of food appears
and tests the desire
to live on, before it is
placed on the tongue
and the food eaten.
It is an old nutritious
rosary that clinks
in the altogether silence
of the room. The monotonous
reassurance of each fork's
scrape on the plate,
the reduction of food
from its pattern there,
the breaking down of
an autonomous formation
outside one's own sphere
of process, that then
becomes the necessary
extension of continued being.
The eyes eat too, breaking
off a color and seizing it
in its neural teeth;
the ears are always swallowing
their gummy substances,
flanking the nervous brain.
My fingers creep steadily
down the table front,
like large desert spiders,
until they drop famished
to my pants, where the desire
to touch my hunger-core
and arouse it to its venomous
pitch is too powerful, and
I lay down the fork, close
my senses to the room, and
dream of absorbing the
independent fragrance of
a stranger through my skin,
bones and blood and shoes.

JOHN YAU

MICHAEL KESSLER'S DRAWINGS: GESTURE AS IMAGE

The drawings are done in charcoal on large sheets of paper stapled to the studio wall. Their height and width corresponds to the extreme limits of the artist's reach. The charcoal functions as an extension of the finger, hand, arm, and body. It records gestural rhythms and patterns. The approach is both spontaneous and ritualized. In overcoming the paper's resistant surface, the curvilinear marks dissolve it into light and space. Densities and darknesses are evolved through accumulation and repetition. If mass, contour, and surface are suggested, it is always through line.

Although the drawings originate in the artist's bodily gestures, the lines never become frenzied. Chaos goes uncourted. Control rather than freedom is the issue. Aggressiveness is transformed into a dance. Immediately apparent is a hallucinatory involvement and a cool detachment. Poised between these two poles, the drawings are both reflective and reflexive. The natural world is evoked, but not described. Line pretends to be something else, yet the allusion remains ambivalent. The duality engages us. Our perceptions shift between an observed world and a world made visible.

The end is not known in advance. Image is called forth by lines that are sensual and matter-of-fact. It can be unified or dispersed. It can emanate from a central, dominating shape or spread in different directions across the paper, like a force field of varying intensities. The realm inhabited by these gracefully athletic, gestural traces is fluid and abstract.

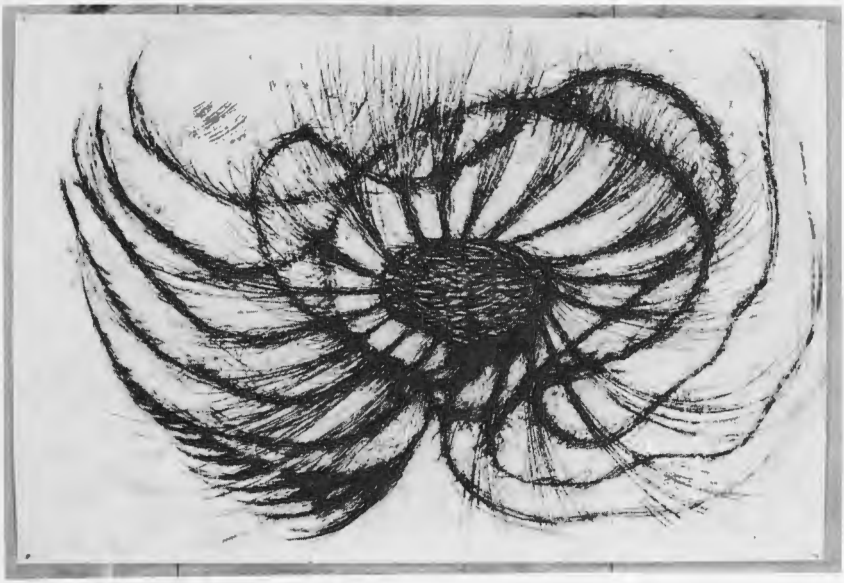
MICHAEL KESSLER

FIVE DRAWINGS

ESCAPED
Charcoal on paper / 5' x 7' / 1984

Photos and artwork courtesy of: Wolff Gallery, New York City

NAP
Charcoal on paper / 5' x 7' / 1984



STRAINED
Charcoal on paper / 5' x 7' / 1985

PRAYER
Charcoal on paper / 7' x 5' / 1985

EARTH STRIKE
Charcoal on paper / 7' x 5' / 1984

ELIOT WEINBERGER

PAPER TIGERS

T.

The Maharajah of Rewa, according to his English Adviser, had his own method of hunting tiger:

> He found the easiest way to bag tigers was to take with him a book and a monkey on a long string. When seated in the *machan* [a platform in the trees] he would release the monkey, who immediately climbed into the top branches. He would then give the signal for the beat to start and settle down to read. As soon as the tiger approached the monkey would spot him and give the cough with which all monkeys warn the jungle folk that "Sher Khan" the tiger is on the prowl. His Highness would then quickly put down his book and pick up the rifle.

At the turning of a page, the apparition of a tiger:

Y.

Berggasse 19, March 10, 1933: H.D., one of the last patients of Freud, records her sessions with the Professor:

> Curiously in fantasy I think of a tiger. Myself as a tiger? This tiger may pounce out. Suppose it should attack the frail and delicate old Professor? Do I fear my own terrors of the present situation, the lurking "beast" may or may not destroy him? I mention this tiger as a past nursery fantasy. Suppose it should actually materialize? The Professor says, "I have my protector."
>
> He indicates Yofi, the little lioness curled at his feet.

And a few days later:

> I spoke again of our toy animals and he reminded me of my tiger fantasy. Wasn't there a story, "the woman and the tiger," he asked. I remembered "The Lady or the Tiger."

G.

A King invents a peculiar system of justice: The accused is placed in a large arena before the entire populace and must open one of two identical doors. Behind one, a tiger, which will leap out and tear the man to pieces, establishing his guilt. Behind the other, a lady "most suitable to

his years and station," whom he must immediately marry as a reward for his innocence. ("It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection. The King allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward.") The accused, then, must "open either [door] he pleased, without having the slightest idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married."

As might be expected, the King had a daughter, and she falls in love with a handsome commoner. Learning of this transgression, the King declares that the boy must be sent to the arena. For one door, the most ferocious tiger in the land is found; for the other, the most beautiful maiden—more beautiful, in fact, than the King's own daughter.

Before the trial, the wily daughter discovers the secret of the doors, and as the boy enters the arena she signals him with her right hand. He immediately opens the right door . . . But which would be worse for this "hot-blooded semi-barbaric princess": to see her beloved ripped to shreds, or happily married to a woman more lovely than she? What was the meaning of her sign? Or, as the story ends: "Which came out of the opened door—the lady, or the tiger?"

E.

Frank Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" first published in *The Century Magazine* in 1882, quickly became an international obsession. At the time inconclusive endings were vexatious, not modern, and for the twenty years until his death Stockton was besieged with solutions, sequels and threats. Among the latter, Rudyard Kipling subjected Stockton to a bit of impeccable Raj ragging, as reported by the San Francisco *Wave* in 1896:

> Stockton and Kipling met at an author's reception, and after some preliminary talk, the former remarked: "By the way, Kipling, I'm thinking of going over to India some day myself." "Do so, my dear fellow," replied Mr. Kipling, with suspicious warmth of cordiality. "Come as soon as ever you can! And, by the way, do you know what we'll do when we get you out there, away from your friends and family? Well, the first thing will be to lure you out into the jungle and have you seized and bound by our trusty wallahs. Then we'll lay you on your back and have one of our very biggest elephants stand over you and poise his ample forefoot directly over your head. Then I'll say in my most insinuating tones, 'Come now, Stockton, which was it—The Lady or the Tiger?'. . ."

And Mrs. Stockton recorded this ludicrous scene in her diary:

> Miss Evans, our niece, wrote to us that a missionary who was visiting her mission station among the Karens [a tribe in northeast Burma], told her she had just come from a distant wild tribe of Karens occasionally visited by

missionaries and to her surprise was immediately asked by them if she knew who came out the door, The Lady or the Tiger? Her explanation of it was that some former visitor had read to them this story as suited to their fancy; and as she had just come from the outside world they supposed she could tell the end of it.

Men generally favored the lady, women the tiger. An exception was Robert Browning, who declared he had "no hesitation in supposing that such a princess, under such circumstances, would direct her lover to the tiger's door." In fact, Freud's slip was to the point: it is an *and*, not an *or*, proposition. The choice between lady or tiger, "devoured or married," was to its readers hardly a choice at all. As one W.S. Hopson of San Francisco wrote in 1895:

When my wife flies into a passion,
And her anger waxes wroth,
I think of the Lady and the Tiger,
and sigh that I chose them both.

R.

A few years after Stockton's death, Elinor Glyn's *Three Weeks* (1907) was the steamy bestseller of its day, its success due largely to its famous seduction scene on a tiger-skin rug:

> Paul entered from the terrace. And the loveliest sight of all, in front of the fire, stretched at full length, was his tiger and on him—also at full length—reclined the lady . . .
>
> "No! You mustn't come near me, Paul . . . Not yet. You brought me the tiger. Ah that was good! My beautiful tiger!" And she gave a movement like a snake, of joy to feel its fur under her, while she stretched out her hands and caressed the creature where the hair turned white and black at the side, and was deep and soft.
>
> "Beautiful one! Beautiful one!" she purred. "And I know all your feelings and your passions, and now I have got your skin—for the joy of my skin." And she quivered again with a movement of a snake.

Alas, tiger's fur is short and coarse, and would make for an itchy tryst. But Glyn's book effectively played on the fusion of lady and tiger in the popular imagination. It also inspired this piece of anonymous doggerel (and mnemonic guide to proper pronunciation):

Would you like to sin
with Elinor Glyn
on a tiger skin?
Or would you prefer
to err
with her
on some other fur?

Tiger, woman, passion. Glyn's sin comes out of ancient tradition, for the tiger has always been first female, and later male.

The earliest recorded tigers in the West were those presented to Seleuces I (312-280). (Alexander of course had seen tigers in Persia.) In Latin poetry *tigris* is always feminine (the word means "arrow," and was applied to the swiftness of the animal and the river); in Roman art tigresses are nearly always portrayed. Female tiger is often paired with male lion, much as Freud's "lioness" Yofi checks H.D.'s tiger. Bacchus' chariot was drawn by such a pair. It is a distinction Keats articulates in "Hyperion" as "tiger-passioned, lion-thoughted." (Similarly, the Brontes' cats were named "Tiger" and "Keeper.") As late as the 18th century it was believed that the way to capture a tiger cub—the only way to get a tiger for one's menagerie—was the procedure first described by Claudian nearly 2000 years before: steal the cub and, with the tiger in pursuit, scatter mirrors in her path; her female vanity is such that she will gaze fondly in the mirror and forget about the baby.

In China the tiger was originally *yin*: associated with the underworld, and with the West (where the sun enters the underworld). In the *feng-shui* system of geomancy, it is paired with the *yang* green dragon. (The Buddhists would later reverse the genders of the tiger/green dragon pair—stressing the tiger's *yang* nobility, and pointing out, quite correctly, that tigers wear the character for "king," *wang* 王 on their foreheads.) Wordsworth's description (in *The Prelude*) of Jacobin Paris as "Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam" may owe something to Virgil's characterization of Rome as "a wilderness of tigers." But both are identical to the stock Chinese metaphor for a corrupt and sick society: a tiger (*yin*) in a bamboo grove (*yang*), the dark within the light.

Most important is the Chinese tiger-monster, the *tao tie* ("the glutton") which is prominent as early as the Shang dynasty. The *tao tie* is a devourer, and almost always appears in funerary art; sometimes the burial urn itself is in the shape of a tiger. It is the earth eating the dead to provide nourishment for the living—much as the Greek word *sarcophagus* means "to eat flesh." (In the pre-Columbian Americas where there were no tigers, the jaguar was its exact equivalent: an earth-image paired in Mesoamerica with the sky-symbol of the feathered serpent, in South America commonly portrayed in burial urns. The whole city of Cuzco was originally laid out in the form of a jaguar—a kind of living necropolis, *polis* as affirmation of death and life.)

Although frequent in the early Harappan art of the Indus Valley, the tiger is rarely visible as an icon in India until its masculinization in Mughal

times—quite strange, considering that Hinduism tended to find metaphysical uses for nearly every indigenous thing. In Hindu iconography it appears only occasionally as the vehicle for the Durga, the terrifying destroyer-goddess. There are, for example, no tigers in Vidyakara's *Treasury* (the great Sanskrit poetry anthology) where so much of Indian life is represented. But among the jungle tribes the tiger was an active presence as devouring mother, fecund mother. "In Akola," writes William Crooke in 1894, "the gardeners are unwilling to inform the sportsmen of the whereabouts of a tiger which may have taken up quarters in their plantation, for they have a superstition that a garden plot loses its fertility from the moment one of these animals is killed." And among the Gonds, wedding ceremonies were marked by the appearance of "two demoniacs possessed by Bagheswar, the tiger god," who "fell ravenously on a bleating kid, and gnawed it with their teeth till it expired."

Y.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, explicating one of her own poems, writes:

> In "Crowbar," the whole argument comes to the poised end in the doubling of two words: *hungry* and *angry* which grasp towards the odd *-ngry* ending they hold in common. *Hungry* meant complicit with the psychic cultural construction of beautiful, seductive and seduced women; *angry* meant critical of the same.

G.

Hungry woman, angry woman: destroyer, devourer, nurturer: tiger images all. It is curious in this context to read Emily Dickinson's two enigmatic poems on tigers:

566

A Dying Tiger—moaned for Drink—
I hunted all the Sand—
I caught the Dripping of a Rock
And bore it in my Hand—

His Mighty Balls— in death were thick—
But searching— I could see
A Vision on the Retina
Of Water— and of me—

'Twas not my blame— who sped too slow—
'Twas not his blame— who died
While I was reaching him—
But 'twas— the fact that he was dead—

872

As the Starved Maelstrom laps the Navies
As the Vultures teased
Forces the Broods in lonely Valleys
As the Tiger eased

By but a Crumb of Blood, fasts Scarlet
Till he meet a Man
Dainty adorned with Veins and Tissues
And partakes— his Tongue

Cooled by the Morsel for a moment
Growns a fiercer thing
Till he esteem his Dates and Cocoa
A Nutrition mean

I, of a finer Famine
Deem my Supper dry
For but a berry of Domingo
And a Torrid Eye.

E.

There are no tigers in the Bible, and in the absence of a fixed iconography, the West had to invent its allegorical tiger. Shakespeare compares the murderous Queen Margaret (in *Henry VI Part 3*) to a tiger, and has Romeo express his rage in *yin* imagery:

> The time and my intents are savage-wild,
> More fierce and more inexorable far
> Than empty tigers or the roaring sea.

But he also uses the tiger in its now-familiar masculine role: symbol of military valor. (Almost all the armies of the world are decked with tiger images.) Henry the Fifth, in his "Once more unto the breach, dear friends" speech:

> But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
> Then imitate the action of the tiger:
> Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
> Disguise fair nature with hard-favored rage;
> Then lend the eye a terrible aspect . . .
> Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
> Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
> To his full height! On, on you noble English . . .

The Western image of the tiger was permanently altered in the 18th century by the reign of the Mughal prince Tipu Sultan (1750-1799), the self-styled Tiger of Mysore and a perfect incarnation of the Orientalist nightmare of the Eastern despot.

A stern moralist, Tipu abolished polyandry and instituted his version of Koranic law. He changed the calendar and all weights and measures; he renamed all the cities and the towns. He sponsored the arts and commercial enterprises, reformed every detail of daily existence from the way the markets ran to the way crops were planted and gathered. He kept a book of his dreams. At night he slept on the floor on a coarse piece of canvas, and each morning he ate the brains of male sparrows for breakfast.

He commanded an army of 140,000, sworn to wipe out the British. Prisoners were subjected to particularly grotesque torture: boiling oil, special devices for removing noses and upper lips. In his most brilliantly insidious punishment the enemy was turned into the Other: British soldiers were forced to cut off their foreskins and eat them.

He was also, in his mind, a tiger. His throne was mounted on a full-size gilded tiger with rock-crystal eyes and teeth; its finials were tiger-heads set with rubies and diamonds; its canopy was tiger-striped with hammered gold. His soldiers dressed in tiger-patterned uniforms and kept their prisoners in tiger cages until it was time for them to be thrown to the tigers. Their cannons had tiger breech-blocks, their mortars were in the shape of tigers, their rifles had tiger-headed stocks and hammers, their swords were engraved with tigers or forged in a striped blend of metals. Live tigers were chained to the palace doors. Tipu's handkerchiefs were striped; his banner read "The Tiger is God."

All this, to put it mildly, made quite an impression in the West. The newspapers were full of Tipu: if an elderly servant was murdered in a siege, she was immediately transformed into 400 beautiful British virgins throwing themselves on swords rather than face the ravishment of Tipu's troops. In London, Tipu plays were a permanent attraction for 30 years. (The first, *Tippoo Sahib, or British Valour in India* began running at Covent Garden on June 1, 1791. It was followed the next year by *Tippoo Sultan, or the Siege of Bangalore.*) When Tipu was finally slain and his capital Seringpatam captured by the British in 1798, it was cause for national celebration. Robert Ker Porter's 120-foot-long painting, "The Storming of Seringpatam," was mounted on the stage of the Lyceum and the crowds paid a shilling each to view the great scene. Wilkie Collins in 1868 added an aura to his Moonstone by having it come from the plunder of Seringpatam, and as late as 1898 Sir Henry Newbolt had a popular schlock epic poem on Tipu's defeat.

The tiger, then, took on a fearful androgyny: a masculine military ferocity within a dark Eastern feminine Other. The tiger was, in the words of Capt. Williamson's *Oriental Sports*, "the mottled object of detestation": an obstacle to progress, everything that was not white, Western, male, good. Its literal and metaphorical vanquishing became a British obsession. For a century boys' stories were full of man-eating tigers. With a short leap, the word "man-eater" was soon applied to women.

T.

Blake's "tyger," according to the exegetes, stands for wrath, revolution, untamed energy and beauty, the romantic revolt of imagination against reason. Its direction is East—contrary to the Chinese, but obvious for a Westerner. It is associated with fire and smoke: "burning bright," roaming "in the redounding smoke in forests of affliction," "blinded by the smoke" issuing from "the wild furies" of its own brain. Numerous critics have pointed out that "The Tyger" of *Songs of Experience* was written in 1793, during the French Revolution. But it was also a time when the papers and theaters were crazy with tales of Tipu.

Did Blake ever see a real tiger? The Tower of London menagerie had been opened to the public in the middle of the century (price of admission: three ha'pennies or one dead dog or cat) and it frequently featured tigers. A new specimen was acquired in 1791. And when Blake lived at Fountain Court, the Strand, he could have strolled over to Pidcock's Exhibition of Wild Beasts, where tigers were often on display.

Pidcock and Blake form two sides of a tiger triangle: the third is George Stubbs, the first English painter of tigers. His "The Tyger," as Kathleen Raine points out in *Blake and the Tradition*, was first exhibited at the Society of Artists of Great Britain in 1769, at the same time and in the same building where the 12-year-old William Blake was studying drawing at Pars' school. (It was, by the way, Pidcock who sold Stubbs the dead tiger which the artist used for his last work, which bore the matchless title *The Comparative Anatomy of Humans, Chickens & Tigers.*)

Raine remarks on the effect that the painted tiger must have had on the boy Blake. She does not consider, however, the painting itself: Stubbs' "tyger," like all the tigers he painted, is not an icon of untamed energy, but rather a recumbent, noble but cuddly, large cat. (In contrast, his lions are always portrayed committing acts of terror in a storm-tossed landscape—as in the famous "Horse Attacked by a Lion," now at Yale; a motif Stubbs copied from Roman statuary, which was itself a copy from Scythian art.) And when Blake came to illustrate his "The Tyger" the animal was so oddly passive and sweet, almost smiling, that some friends complained, Shakespeare's hard-favored rage had been disguised by fair nature.

There is no doubt that Blake associated tigers with wrath and revolu-

tion, but it is interesting that Blake drew his physical image from Stubbs' painting and the half-dead animals in the local cages – surely he could have imagined it otherwise. (Consider the terror of his flea.) Or is Blake's (and Stubbs') tyger meant to demonstrate the possibilities latent beneath a passive exterior, as yogis traditionally sat immobile on tiger-skin mats, as the men of the Industrialized West saw women: a dormant volcano? Is the tyger's blank smile its most fearful symmetry?

Y.

It is quite probable that Blake had heard of the death of Sir Hector Munro's son, the most famous tiger-kills-Englishman story of the century. This account appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in July 1793, the year "The Tyger" was composed:

> To describe the aweful, horrid and lamentable accident I have been an eye witness of, is impossible. Yesterday morning Mr Downey, of the [East India] Company's troops, Lieut. Pyefinch, poor Mr Munro and myself went on-shore on Saugor Island to shoot deer. We saw innumerable tracks of tigers and deer, but still we were induced to pursue our sport, and did the whole day. At about halfpast three we sat down on the edge of the jungle, to eat some cold meat sent us from the ship, and had just commenced our meal, when Mr Pyefinch and a black servant told us there was a fine deer within six yards of us. Mr Downey and myself immediately jumped up to take our guns; mine was the nearest, and I had just laid hold of it when I heard a roar, like thunder, and saw an immense tiger spring on the unfortunate Munro, who was sitting down. In a moment, his head was in the beast's mouth, and he rushed into the jungle with him, with as much ease as I could lift a kitten, tearing through the thickest bushes and trees, everything yielding to his monstrous strength. The agonies of horror, regret, and, I must say fear (for there were two tigers, male and female) rushed on me at once. The only effort I could make was to fire at him, though the poor youth was still in his mouth. I relied partly on Providence, partly on my own aim, and fired a musket. I saw the tiger stagger and agitated, and cried out so immediately. Mr Downey then fired two shots and I one more. We retired from the jungle, and, a few minutes after, Mr Munro came up to us, all over blood, and fell. We took him on our backs to the boat, and got every medical assistance for him from the *Valentine* East India Main, which lay at anchor near the Island, but in vain. He lived twenty four hours in the extreme torture; his head and skull were torn and broke in pieces, and he was wounded by the claws all over the neck and shoulders; but it was better to take him away, though irrecoverable than leave him to be devoured limb by limb. We have just read the funeral service over the body, and committed it to the deep. He was an amiable and promising youth. I must observe, there was a large fire blazing close to us, composed of ten or a dozen whole trees; I made it myself, on purpose to keep the tigers off, as I had always heard it would. There were eight or ten of the natives about

> us; many shots had been fired at the place, and much noise and laughing at the time; but this ferocious animal disregarded all. The human mind cannot form an idea of the scene; it turned my very soul within me. The beast was about four and a half feet high, and nine long. His head appeared as large as an ox's, his eyes darting fire, and his roar, when he first seized his prey, will never be out of my recollection. We had scarcely pushed our boats from the shore when the tigress made her appearance, raging mad almost, and remained on the sand as long as the distance would allow me to see her.

This scene of tigress, fire and the humanly unthinkable may have partially inspired Blake. It did most certainly inspire Tipu Sultan. Sir Hector, the boy's father (and ancestor of H.H. Munro, "Saki") was the arch-enemy of Tipu's father, Haidar Ali. At the news of the boy's death—which Tipu gleefully interpreted as a sign that his fellow tigers were joining the struggle against the British—he ordered the construction of a large mechanical toy, now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, to commemorate the event. It is a lifesize wooden tiger crouched on a prone English soldier; wound up, the toy, it is said, simultaneously emits roars and hideous groans. Keats, in "The Cap and Bells," called it the "Man-Tiger-Organ."

G.

After the fall of Seringpatam, tiger-killing became the standard measure in India of a Britisher's valor and innate superiority. And after the Empire forced peaceful co-existence onto the normally warring princely states, the Maharajahs could only display their power and manhood in British terms. No visit to a palace by a distinguished foreigner was complete without a tiger hunt. That the guest would be neither endangered nor disappointed, the tigers were often drugged beforehand with opium-laced meat to ensure a safe and unerring shot.

George Yule of the Bengal Civil Service killed 400 then stopped counting. Colonel Rice killed 93 in four years. Montague Gerard killed 227. The Maharajah of Surguja killed 1,150. The Maharajah Scindia killed at least 700. The guests of the Maharajah Scindia killed at least 200. The Maharajah of Gauripiur killed 500 then stopped counting.

As early as 1827, one Capt. Mundy could write, with unintentional irony:

> Thus in the space of about two hours, and within sight of the camp, we found and slew three tigers, a piece of good fortune rarely to be met with in these modern times, when the spread of cultivation, and the zeal of the English sportsmen have almost exterminated the breed of these animals.

E.

The Bali tiger: last seen in 1937, *extinct.*

The Caspian tiger:	last seen in 1957, *extinct.*
The Java tiger:	3-5 left.
The Sumatra tiger:	800 left.
The Siberian tiger:	200 left in the U.S.S.R.
	less than 100 left in China and the Koreas.
The Chinese tiger:	"very few" left.
The Indo-Chinese tiger:	1,125 left, "declining rapidly."
The Indian tiger:	1,827 left in India.

(Estimated population c. 1900 of the Indian tiger in India: 40,000.)

Cleansed, the tiger appears in Eliot's "Gerontion" as Christ.

R.

Tigers eat men only when they are starving, or are too old or sick to catch more elusive prey. In parts of India, it is believed that man-eating tigers are not tigers at all, but men who have transformed themselves into tigers to commit, for their purposes, masked acts of murder. These counterfeit tigers, the man-eaters, are recognizable to the villagers, as they would have been to Freud: they have no tails.

[1985]

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

THE EXCAVATION OF ARTAUD

Shaman of obsession—I said at his tomb—
excavated in electricity, opened between
anus and sex. In the Australian outback of the soul,
3 dead men are fingering your anesthetized root support
shining like a chain of sputtering lights, for the key to creation,
between the bone they've drawn out and your bone they so desire.

Priest of lethal phallic rites, of sparkings
in foetid material, of remaining in antithesis
with no hope of synthesis, priest of a genuine melee—
3 dead men are fingering your Muladhara Chakra, your amphimixis,
as if, under the Christian gunk that clogged your focus,
they could plug into your triangle and its twisting tongue of flame.

Pariah in silence, coprophilially
squatting in the corner of your cell for years,
sealed open, who only came when called by your mother's name—
repressing their way in, to the point of anal cancer,
3 dead men, licking your electro-shock induced Bardo, have found
your atomic glue, the Kundalini compost they must eat to speak.

O shaman, from having been so masterfully plundered!
O priest, from having been fixed in antithesis!
O pariah, from having been so desired by the dead!

[1984]

SAUL YURKIEVICH

FOUR POEMS

Tr. from the Spanish by Cola Franzen

I MYSELF

I knew that the die
of bone was my self
and posed the impenetrable
question
the fickle ring
fell with its diamond
the mask
hanging on the wall
walks out
it has one living
eye

They force me to play. I don't know the rules. I draw the highest card. Everything consists in prolonging the game. One always loses.

SENTENCE

doesn't read what he should
thinks what he shouldn't
doesn't say what he should
writes what he shouldn't

shouldn't read
shouldn't think
shouldn't speak
shouldn't write

should read what he should
should think what he should
should say what he should
should write what he should

what he shouldn't do is read
what he shouldn't do is think
what he shouldn't do is speak
what he shouldn't do is write

doesn't live as he should
lives but shouldn't
shouldn't live

EDIFICE DEDICATED TO SILENCE

change of simulacrum
in his theatre constructed
in the air
changes features quickchange of clothes
shadows
usually dresses
as beautiful bundle
and will continue
ringing changes
in this artful dream
shadows
seals
in tombs of foam
being no longer his what might have been
the apparent be it the attempt
that doesn't become as it may remains
remains without becoming
is personae
feigns muteness voices
and garrulous silence
in his vowels tints entice
mint belies

also his I restrospective
(the broad channel of this running stream)
his other successors
the hours the days are eroding
his present
the days the years are corroding
it's always an other
volatility acknowledged
not one is
is nobody
without center I
a galaxy
various satires and different tints
with as many faces as
glances they might ferret it out
if we were that one
other we you(others) he anotherother
(such work time may not consume)
of our vanity
tell it the wind
where do we stand
so without so defenseless
nothing gives being gives not
(I discover. I see a world. Small thing it has been)
which fortune her
self hatches for us
lies
cipher that may be spoken
slogan that may be read
in his theatre
the dream
author of impersonations
masquerade
relics remain
of disguises
they are feathers
(trace in the face
death mask)
whoever ignores it errs greatly
they inspect us
because every tongue denounces
every ear
our theatre
pageantry

even of stones
illusory
condemned to

this that I will guarantee you
brief cinder
every spectacle
will be
ensnared your eyes
by painting
conspicuous mirror
persisting
in
painting the fields and gilding the grain
in portraying
specular spectator
specter of the speculum
theatre treats twists
on stage tricks
everybody
role fits
this teratology everybody
gratuitous role
in front of the curtain
(front curtain)
we parley
now of paladins now of specters
going topsy-turvy playing tricks
palace and pallium
mountain of muses now park for lovers
that in bundles of paper and papier mâché
are an orchestra of the vain
various mirages
are an orchestra of deals
are an orchestra of the vacuous syllogisms
shameless mask masque
without aspect
(reason shipwrecked among reefs)
theatre:
reason for being
none

From: *Rimbomba* (Pamplona, Spain, 1978), and *Acaso Acoso* (Valencia, Spain, 1982).

HONOR JOHNSON

YOU PLACE

your long white hand behind your ear and caress a spot as if it is
your sex and suddenly your body is another alphabet

a turned away malicious presence stone by Noguchi with lines
cool flesh is there any substitute now take both hands

sensuousness is not any long apparent no longer a preumbra
you are a white shadow now you are a cone fixed

by coiling arms getting longer pulled through clavicals like
socks

why am I writing this in springtime when wind is starting
when everything is broken into points, feminine

a litter how well
those French gothics understood limb by limb that someone
pulls lines like whiplash, throwness and falseness

I sit by the college walls dreaming of chestnuts
clouds carry a load of quicklime they are little blue

wheelbarrows on a shelf

2.

In drawing this time I focus on the sheets turning points like
Klan members triangles Phillip Guston's drawings
your foot my foot arms elbows if there is love inside it is birds
caught under a pillow case can we signal the world no
they are numb the world is a numb beachgrove reduction
reduction even images grow schematic and dominate all those
courses hidden light indirect you get me under the skin
throwing the self automatically forward and eracing the mocking
bird singing at night convulsed head back in my ear

3.

now the sea is a blue beast snake spittle garbage multiplicity of drives and capacities thoughts smoothed like a computer drawing unexpectedly the key turns a royal blue vault reticent novels by Holderlin sticky essence of white rhodedendron what Rilke or Rodin meant sea never know in abrasion clouds torching their breaths.

4.

Extenuation is no time at all a tin sun shaking on a statue's breast she leaned close to me when I lost him told me a German story about touching a fawn made of chalk gift she said meaning poison and that meaning fish

did you say hello the voice musical as shells made to float on blue paper like kites

FIVE POEMS

THE WORLD

Music has not been invented yet.
Hollow horns of tree stumps
open to wind for grief.
Poetry is talking in mumbles &
in shallow streams whose waters
etch soft rock with short lines,
cries against torture. What lies
inbetween pulses with irregular
waves where earth wanders,
waveless, caught like a bird
under cat's paw. Carpets
of snow blind the valley & hoist
the mountain to extremes of a plan
seen as noble or perverse, depending on the
particular love for what is strange,
desirable. The past haunts, whines
among the falling ripe plums, blackened by
frost and I am talking, talking, talking
about war: the ineradicable gest,
spearpoint of star lanced wind come down
where wolves bed, seeking remission,
howling softly, recognizing this great &
bawdy promised land: this patchwork
of comings & goings, faithful only to
bare branches & cicada hum from belowground,
signifying some life exists in spite of our
depth of eventuality.

IMAGINE

Townies call me Indian, Jew, Buddha-ist.
No red rock jewel mountain stronghold here.

That's my house . . . the one snow
is still falling on
though legally it's Spring.
Busted window admits it & warped doorframe
opens the door to wind during night,
an invitation I cannot refuse to attend to.
Rednecks drive up in second gear, whining, on their
6-packs, rifles hung upside down on racks
up rear window of their Dodge RAM. Knock loudly
on the door, it opens, & ask me do I have any
cigarettes to sell. Shuffling inside their
plaids like shy bears.
Midnight.
A change from chanting sutras, to be sure.
I speak very plainly because my terror is cautious.
We all know what really
inside a woman moves for pleasure. I send my
trembling to a moon not visible. A woman must learn
to pull against gravity without obstructing
the flow of her own nature, of space
in which all
things have equal
dominion.
I know their faces, have watched them lurch
at the back of town meeting. I know what
they signify.
But this pain we share I would not.
We want some of your poetry, one from the truck calls.
I say Imagine
and shut the door.

ISLAND

it doesn't think of itself
as being remote, it is
the promised earth, the song
that drove Circe mad long before
you-know-who, pig man
beachd on her acorn stubbled shore
seeing in her eyes his burning ship

& in her thin body the straits
through which he could escape
himself once again. but on
that island no man is one.

SUKHAVATI

when a Buddhist dies her name is written
with a perfect hand on silk or parchment
& set like a banner at the foot of the shrine

faced with their own impermanence
the sangha sits in meditation
just breathing, backs erect, eyes open

in meditation until a volunteer reads aloud
her poetry or someone else's
then strikes a match off flint
& lifts her name back to the flame
from which it arose, the voice of calm zero

---

for Nancy Harrison, who had Lupus and could not go into the sun until she died
—mangalam—

BEES . . . . . HONEY

the man & woman are not struggling
though clearly he has her by the hands
behind her dense black lacquered hair
only a slim peach edge of pillow
is it Kutani porcelain
visible at corner atop tatami

perhaps they are weaving gold from straw

her lips too red
his tongue an exaggeration, telling us
fertility breeds sorrow
& possibly, wisdom.
oh not my body on the bed with you
& my mind at Kabuki.
it is the blank radiance of koto wind
outranks both silk & cotton sleeve
where the mind has flung itself, breathlessly.

the man's intent catches our breath
a snowlflutter where stiffly among wrappings
that only partially conceal
the citrine flush of her bellyflesh
a nightingale throbs its song.

peony fragrance mingles
with salt. her mingei eyes, her delicate fingers.
how like the full
moon, pulling his
long house to earth.

geisha behind paper walls plum blossoms
kneel, write lovepoems to the emperor
who rarely ornaments his sword with flowers
though it is rumored he is fringed with a thousand
million bees. perhaps
they are weaving straw from gold.

history tells us only the lie of it, only glimpse
unfolding not the whole pattern.

if men did not rule
this world which one
would they think up?

ARKADII DRAGOMOSHCHENKO

FIVE POEMS

(Tr. from the Russian by Lyn Hejinian and Michael Molnar)

ACCIDIA

what is there to do—go
what are they doing—going
(from exercises)

for Lin Khedzhinyan

1. if mercury, in clots, hardens into inverted ice, and heat encountering needles of clairvoyance soaks into the escaping flutter of a cloth

it follows
one must break
the mirror
of language The broken mirror is a bad sign. One morning in summer I was awakened by an inhuman howling: my mother was crying. My grandfather had hanged himself.

The seething day formed in its own heat. That summer swarms of butterflies bustled above the vegetable gardens. In the arabian skulls of poppies their rustling was confused. Everything begins with an error of vision, with the disintegration of the thing affixed to its inevitable unity (Learn by dreaming, identify subjects and things. such is coupling.)

Arkadii Dragomoshchenko was brought up in Vinnitsa in the Ukraine and now lives in Leningrad. He is a member of *Club 81*, an officially recognized group of 'unofficial' writers in Leningrad who are allowed to hold readings and discussions and to negotiate—so far unsuccessfully—for publication of their work. The club does not constitute a movement or school, its members have no poetics or approach in common. In the largely traditionalist atmosphere of Leningrad poetry (both official and unofficial), Dragomoshchenko's work is experienced as unsettling, formally and thematically indeterminable. Where clarity is valued, an oblique angle of vision is likely to be suspect; all the more so poetry that is formed out of the refractions of expression as perception. In the Soviet Union Dragomoshchenko's poetry has until now only appeared in samizdat. These are the first translations to be published.
—M.M.

Poppyseed and butterflies.
Redhot ground.
Mint growing from the collarbones.

Links of errors compose themselves into zones of green—not
immortality.
and next the tan ruins of the rings stages of the destruction
of the leaf, the ladder leading from the alternation of things.
Describing
the wind rose, its rays on forty pages of descent, it's possible to
seek out the scabbed gesture, if the snow is eaten away by the
dream.
The deposits of color on places where the light is fused with
mercury.

The street he walked down was like a riverbed or the
ancient
counting out of proportions and correspondences. the narrow path of
a
face. a streetlight in darkening swirls of air. the head thrown back
to see the faded egypt of a butterfly. you know how cheese ripens in
the darkness of a low barn, in the stone of matter.
The drowsing of the chrysolite is simple.
Names
are burdened with designation. drowsiness, woodenness, through
which
perception seeps. Speak.
But. Should it stop?
Masonry, crumbling from the wall, flows to the end.

Bands of yellow wash quickly over the shoals of sunset.
Or azure even coals in which children are eagerly bathing,
like angels in wild flames, having bitten
the apple of laughter. Jeder Engel ist lächerlich.
An afternoon.

Every stalk loses its significance at night eternity and green
spread out bluegray in the sandstone above the springs Crete
and Crimea— one bitter clay for a porous jug— speech
rids itself of its liquid
in the sweep of the measured ring
foam blown from Crete the throat parallels of rain
the ditches are seams the snail of the cyclone imitates the

shivering of heat in ice inverted inside out

then absolute blackness.

Or the balance of a cloud.
The anticipation of a trap decays in it, like baskets in the hands
of fishermen, when they weave them quickly, with skill, from damp
willow branches, sweet as hair to the overcast morning water.
Descent of the page.
Steel splash of fish. The cold morning was unavoidable—
sunrise of plastic bags in the kitchen. water from the tap.
long-decaying roses.

2. first an error of vision. unconvincing invocations of hair.
the war lasts 37 years signifying a temporary armistice, after which
a new abduction of Persephone, yet another in a continuing series.
a failed event. "c" doesn't meet in a circle, a congruent "s", the
space between them a plane.
walking down the street he turns. inside
him sways a growing, terribly slow god. reaching the end he gathers
himself as if to leap and inevitably (this is said with absurd delight)
something happens. otherwise would it be worth living, they ask. he
turns, twisting with difficulty, turning the axis of his back; thus
the next line straightens itself out of despair

or desire, a lie growing with delicate patience, suffocating in the
bright light, in the grass waste. without any hurry enumerate the
ones
which await destruction voluptuously in neighboring death

or the milk tears of Klee

a hound licking a smooth bone howling on a scrap heap of
burning rubber

I didn't dream of a white jet bomber

and a daughter dreamed up by the wind, passing from the body of a
sister
into the blood of a wife, of iron, of an empress, or into the silver
hemorrhaging of leprosy—it would seem that this is enough for a
dream;
too much! in other words, to make a long story short (no bugs

remain
when the building burns) I crunched the vertebrae of my neck under
a
wreath of guffaws, a massive white hoop.

crowns of walnut trees
of fading maples
wormeaten purple of the hills

a million yellow lions are ready to exit from the intersecting
eyelashes of the sunset
falling so heavily from sunrise to the west that you forget the song
of those who touch the palate with expired tongue and break the
swinging
of the thread
from which someone doesn't know how to live without
another.
The habit of company, the context of living. Life. Or, on the
contrary:
casually sinking into the night like children in the blue strewn with
coals (as for its length, my mother's scream in the morning seemed
equal
to the structure of a threnody, beams visible in the burning roof.)
imaginary angels in the delirious yellow pollen.
behind the curtain of duration, past islands.

I was a watchman there at one time.
Locked in an office. I had a lot of papers. There were many windows
in
the building: to the north, to the south, the east and to the west. I
was a watchman of windows there, locked in the building with the
cast
iron gates, watching how forms of air alter, by the candlelight
dripping
at the trees—and the investigations were conducted with absolute
regularity.
I waited for water.
It surfaced, spilling breath.
An involuted cloud passed over the kitchen garden, above the
poppy's
arabic face, in the open fabric of the leaves, in the tattered
thistledown.

Both sink into the tree, changing like air

space turning in on itself, just as the continuous body is
self-absorbed,
the letter
drawn into the funnel of the word
Remember foxes and cold fragile nests
berry stains I don't remember the wrist a hollow
decaying vein

It's a forest

Or a field in autumn. The rustle of smoke in the mouth, a hare's
scream
slipping off to the edge. The field. A rustling. First snow. Nothing
adds definition to their goal, as they sweep each other away. Sounds
quietly drift, swing up, and melt away behind the unstable wall of
drifted snow. They exhaust the raven. It strikes against the wall of
an immobile night. A hunt. Sharp vacant days.

Broken fire
scholarship of smoke late in the day.
The clay is porous.
Rows of high rains.

The heavy stars collapse in Scardanelli's eyes.
Sometime.
Birds fall into wide gorges at the poles. Feathers of imaginary birds
above.
the light in clots contracts like beads within a mercury skin. The
empress
returns in the first form of a sister, and the page is
ending Mercury
and foam wheat poppy and verbena lilac in the gloomy
north
aurum of decay.

She, he, it without moving. But here we're not comparing numbers to
the
ciphers of first errors. A thousand lines together, ten
thousand
worlds swim onto the surface of the rapids.
Deaf and mute, a snowy gesture.
Is that how it was?
A bridge bending over the black vineyard sea.
Who then walking down the street?

Evening on the delta. A gust in the evening. The pine needles of the
bay are black.

3. pride a description disintegrates, absorbed into another

irritation at the breaking up of white

"nobody can accuse me of false faith."

"and there, my soul – a permit – you arrive."

one thinks perhaps of grass
defying the meaning of distinctions until they are negated:
gender, number, case

A butterfly with a bloody mouth gradually disappears in the
doorways of a scream

(Note to Accidia): – "Everything begins as an error of vision . . ." just imagine I came to read this in I don't remember which of your letters, transmuting a simple phrase into a ridiculous one.

And regardless of the obvious unfoundedness of such an "interpretation" without long consideration I included this line in the text of the poem now known to you as "Accidia". (. . . .)

Does Accidia signify in my case, you may ask, stillness, silence, a dying down? Agreed. Partly because I always agree with everything. And nevertheless, a long time before the need arose to specify the word's significance, before I had to even approximately select a "leading" sense, this word for a considerable time, disappearing and reappearing, lived as sound, at times rolling away somewhere entirely on the periphery of vision, remaining there for a short time as a dumb grapheme.

I didn't question it about anything for I felt no necessity. It was almost fleshless, light, like winged seeds in autumn floating, perpetually revolving above the earth . . . But together with this there was a viscid, as if Cambrian, blue clay melting in dried out depths of heat. It abided, not converting into an odious veil of associations, as it was, seeking no continuation either in acoustic or in colour conjunctions, although it possessed excellent vowel inflections like dampness or memory of love promising (in the no less unstable future) the well-known flexibility of misleading harmony. In Persian miniatures lovers were depicted with identical faces.

It was ready to annihilate other senses without having acquired its own, I suspected. However leaving aside what was still for me a meaningless cocoon – such was the circle – as the figure of a virtual metaphor, of an unsubstitutable incarnation, it began to become transparent, to grow tense, to tighten into definition as something distantly reminiscent either of sandstone burnt into faded azure-purple, or as stone honeycombs darkening before the eyes as a delicate fretwork.

I again took to thinking of axes revolving on the metal strings of death, of a milky yellowness without any foundation, and then there appeared a dried soft crunching, a riverbed – mountain range – river-floor. And not even the floor but a mirage pouring out as hot steam over the burning clays, granite and earth.

However the word was completely innocuous, it tore away shadow and reflections not multiplying echoes, emerging and returning unchanged. Only in the passing of time within it, behind it began to appear, without any reason, something else – the old Russian word "speak" (rtsi). Speech and stream. Such was the first change. The stream was empty. The stream turned out to be the river bed of a sandy stream or the sand itself in another form: a concept immediately became very important – the blend of a definite and indefinite quantity in one word. Crafty, habitually-comfortable relations began to grow in the mastered grammatical attractions, to take on cunning and scatter at some instant or other, unexpectedly revealing mercury (rtut'), a lake of mercury, an amalgam and the sad mirror of language, its inside. "Everything begins with an error of vision . . ." – the line beginning the poem has itself slipped to the side, giving way to the one with which it now begins . . .

(from a letter to L. Kh. 24th Feb. 1984)

OBSCURE BASES OF NARRATION

(example readings)

1

Simple evening rose through flowing branches.

A deluding fire out of time, the flawless snow-crust lies
deeper and prouder than pine-needles.
The crescent moon is hidden there, not as a measure but as flesh of
light in narrow ranks of grain.
Wild white imprint, double of the sun.
Overcoming bronze and days that lie beneath a layer of wax
while the engraver's burin hesitates,
Like wine dim pink infuses it as when
Spawn of damp turquoise spatters on the hand
And it dispassionately grants the instant devoided time
attenuating skin
Before once more arising, soaring up, twining between the tiled
muttering of birds
And rooftop emptiness
Throbbing in hollow names as weather's pollen, as the glitter of a
transient net.
But the air is gray and breathing granular—like beggarly Beelzebub
rook-herd at the furrow of night,
And the poplar-branch construction in a gabble of scrub
Recalls a shell, its hazy mother-of-pearl, its chalky creases
where unleavened noise is ground.
The thread is fresh that sewed unsightly crepitation
Woven to form the crescent moon: as pine-needles, as fire

Then it starts splashing in an innocent flask—
(when you tilt it on your elbow towards your mouth and a
brown-robed mirror
starts to cloud over with a swarming rust and bubbles of the earth
forsake
this earth)—
Collapsing in froth and vineyard laughter, transsubstantiation of the
juice into a russet heavenly wind
Screened by a blurry weave and withered to the vine's bone,
Brother of Hebron, son of the averted head, it blows from

hummocky provinces continuously towards the rocky turquoise
Where muted vowels bulge the air, sliding like resonant scales of ice
When sound extended to an echo is comparable to a landscape seen
through a tunnel:
Thus in terrestrial surfaces of a river
Entering heat's dark nature—but who could here distinguish heat
from frost?—
Confusion to the core, snow thaws, washing away reflections.
A night of cherries, you can't evade that phrase, in order not to utter
stupidly: the tree of discord.

2

Ineluctable the happy hills fragmenting drop by drop in the eye's
globe
Which scans the sickles of irregular birds and where, we are told,
chillness reigns:
I still can't understand the algebra of fruit,
The volume of the surfaces round a central stone,
The wrinkled meekness of shrouds and funeral linen with its dry fish.
The zenith's node is plain, connecting the temporal to a shadow
and fontanelle to fountain.
The vocal caprice of the gates of horn and the entrancing pallor of
an underwater porch bear no comparisons,
Categorically I'll state—again beloved features will be discerned
in the delusions of the weather
In the sleepless mulberry tree
(whose articulations slike like oil smoothing harsh gestures and
tentatively conjure up Cathay in the charcoal circle of the
moon),
In the herds of rumbling and in lowlands (over the winter apples are
stored in straw, life and a sense of sight ascribed to them in
ignorance, like barefoot thieves they trace their melting tracks,
paperface lantern figurines prostrate in their cartons),
In the lymphatic blood of lengthy evening like an enumeration of
signs
in depictions of various times of day and year,

When the dispersed word had not yet threatened flight
The cockerel struck its beak into the clay and as if somnolence were
split apart simultaneously two—or maybe more—existences
are scattered to the winds
trickling into hollows

at the nexus of interjections.
Two worlds of form, silence and dumbness, a hundred thousand
intercepted blades
Of grass. Slaked lime and pigeon-purple the Crimea will landslip like
a scree vanishing at the base among the roots of oceanic hills
Flattened on a photograph into gentle green strata of heights
And continually beginning to be: the roofs, bell-towers.
Swifts, after nine in the morning and the chimes. Always afterwards
and tomorrow in predatory reading.
A moment later by a hairline shadow, by a cobweb glint
A peak's perfection has been connected to the split lucidity of water
By elastic syntax—so you wrote—in which the noun is boundless
And names of birds lack power to serve as inklings, plummets of
augury.
A house behind and in front. The walls are brighter than the night.
So it was, will be, there is nothing better. Just consider, that's what
things have come to . . .
Spindle of strolls, yarn of strange vowels,
An hourglass freshly filled with sand.
Stammering, fumes of onomatapoeia, thread meshed with thread the
weave of radiant hearing,
The world starts chattering in dialects of roots, reeds, rind,
And like a strawberry
Pressed by the tongue against the palate as if between infected
hearing and a cloud
The mouthful of the meaningless basis must be allowed to freeze at
the verge of the throat
As at the verge of a meeting and sever breath.

Presence of a broken fence,
Linen flows in silvery scales,
A vagrant cat, sieved sunset,
And not a building site—a pilgrimage, the page
stretched beyond the ripples of the alphabet.

3

Not the wilderness overgrowing boats on limpid shoals
But the intolerable blandness of roast chestnuts.
A dusty flag twists round its pole and splashes,
Swarms of winged creatures gluttonously in gardens
gobble the orange lobes
from the passionate lips of crones. This is at play . . .

The warm piazza, jasmine and seeping patina
on roof-slates roasted white-hot
And a multitude of verbal endings,
But then as if by chance someone remarks—September.

A painted tram goes over to the Petrograd Side,
From the Harbour District a ship sails picturesquely
beyond the boundary line of good and visibility,
At the Canal Asylum the midday glare is flanneled off the walls
and sweat from faces,
And there it is, the organ-god is sobbing
like a slavonic blade of twisted crystal. The heat,
boundless distances, a cloud.
Creak of seagulls.
The swell.
The river. And you hung over it among the feathers of the breeze,
brown dragonflies and swamping images.
At seven planned rain already lashes the glass
Constricting the place of habitation and tea
And the tobacco warmth of woollen socks is bitter on feet
and hinders talk
of halfwits, brothers, razorblades and ships,
and of a language school which somewhere in San Francisco . . .
spin, melody, revolve and rattle slightly
inside a well of uvular moisture,

But halfway through the night a half-bird comes in dreams
And it is not itself but just a half-word—let it drink like amnesia's
double, like the fish-scales of a labyrinth
Like Ba escaping southwards away from islands and the sum of
incarnations
Weighed on the balance of hope and judgement on which account
truth is extensive or heavy or naive as eternity
And altogether an indestructible blueness—

In enormous quilted jackets under Hesperus guiding
the resinous procession of lamprey fishermen.

It's pouring on the floor in squares of lamplight
That crept up furtively towards the frames.

4

Murmur of the Baltic,
The darkness of snowy poplars
reverberates as simple parables
Whose medicinal feeble-mindedness is all-powerful . . .

October is forged from breathing's needles
And the fibrous wind penetrates
City slabs to the marrow of their bones
And a husk of clothes cannot keep in the warmth

When someone's shrunk inside them hunching shoulders
—whose I no longer know—
in mutely braided snows
Where a maltese murmur, ancient amber,
Coiling airily like fragile coal
Crumbles from the thread of jagged death.

Then it makes sense to keep count of the drops
As of the birds flaring over Erebus.
Snow doesn't last. It's peaceful and the poplars
slowly push aside the city roofs

And don't say: loss—there's nothing to be lost
Beyond memory squandered word for word.

A SENTIMENTAL ELEGY

(a gift for Anna)

Let the mouse run across the stone.
—Aleksandr Vvedenskii

"Tell me, what binds us to some meaning, what drives us
out of our mind?"
Darkness
of a racing cloud, trace of glass, whiteness.
Rim of a clock face.
The vastness of death and its insignificance. Debris
in flight in a scorched haze of dragonflies—
We aren't going anywhere.
Wells where even at noon the stars are sharp
But branching out like a book into strangeness—a possibility
always remains,
the sand
and to stand still.
Some word like the mould of a rule reveals the world reversed
mirrored down the axis of matter.
Thus
in the tireless trials of freedoms
this peeling apart.
Perhaps—"but it's meaningless"—in the twilight of prisms
where straight winters suddenly explode into ice,
and as indivisible fire
wind rocks it and scatters it in handfuls.
Thus
in the trials of flight between zenith, nadir, window
and unshaven cheek,
ochre and heather,
in the debris of streaming heights . . . The home of these things
in the visible image eludes us. What's behind them?
The same that's behind us, and before us.
The whim of a stroll, hair like laughter far off,
Not to remember—to weave a cobweb into the structure of hearing
Into the correspondences of minutest registers

Dark swarms of them flicker
Swarms
matching the spirals of the pulse braiding dry riverbeds of the wrist.

And the sequel is absurd.
The conquest of what?—like a photograph, its filigree
lost in a grid
For everything must be begun, however you look at the snow
and the fire
Like scraping your cheeks with a razor
reflected in the melting ice on the window
And again the nature of sunset is unknown
And of the spatial partitions that create it—time?
body?
memory? the line?—and of intervals glimpsed by chance
when branching out like a book into strangeness.

2.

The spoken fact is a lamp, but what affects us is "spring thunder."
Light speaks its name brokenly and immediately you can hear
how next to the unclear map the dry celery flickers,
glistening hoarsely like the river weeds of the wrist

The tap is running

But take some bitter coffee beans, let them be spun
into fragrant dust,
let them be simmered,
"odds and evens" ground down, stopping the run of whirled resins

And turn to the braided, invulnerable water
For there the fluid time of its fall is shattered
A splinter of light catches in memory thousands of selves

Stubbornly returns—the way against their will children
catch the claw of a bird in the creaking kitchen, perhaps . . .

I don't remember.
I was shifted a pace aside
From myself, from everyone, and that includes God
approaching the fatherland of clouds
and cutting off my gaze from flashes of sand and of trees

Summer passed
hiding nothing in the deep blue
a branch of elation sinking
into crystalline salts of reason

"What is it that melts in us or binds us together, tell me?
in the sequence of days
and of days now and then alternating with night . . ."

drawn out beyond limits of the mind to the stillness
in each chance sound
split by the desire for binding.

Note on epigraph of "Sentimental Elegy."

"In actual fact objects – are a faint mirror image of time. Objects don't exist. /. . ./ Let the mouse run across the stone. Now count every one of its footsteps. Now forget the word "every," forget the word "footstep." Then every footstep will seem a new movement. After that, since you have for good reason experienced the disappearance of your perception of a series of movements which you were erroneously calling footsteps (you were confusing movement with space), movement will begin to fragment, it will be reduced to nil. A flickering begins. The mouse starts to flicker. Look round: the world is flickering."

from "Chekhoslovenska rusistika XIII, 68 No.5
"Oberiuty" by Leonid Aleksandrov.

STUDY OF DIMENSION

Down beaches prismatic in the heat and mineral
Blessed indifference, spinning like refuse, empty,
Like a dream of eden, endlessly to drift, draining
into the photographic wall of matter.

Night's drawn-out, long harmonics are irreproachable,
Hearing weaves them and inaudible names break up
In stubborn utterances, in a handful of wet snow
And the unstable sense of omens fused in a patch of streetlight.

It was here. Well, so what? Shoes got soaked
And in the snare of fire rain throbbed like diamond.
Black silence of the dripping barges
like greasy fog cupped in the hand
And the instant is only—as light glints
Gray through the bared grin of the bridge.

* * *

"I dread my dreams . . ."

Shoulder turning carries away the fluent
weight of hair
By chance an interjection.
You heard?—It's April, spring
And a blue star is burning up the snows,
Its sister flies to meet it, gold
and weeping.
Then a lasting dawn.

No snow fell.
Stones roared. Stymphalian crones were sowing
morning, grains
Clinging to life in the poppy's throat.
And again as if breath melted out a mirror on the ice
Still the face lasted on the depths of daybreak—
Of coming into being.
Into the cobweb of awakening, it seemed,
her breathing is woven with vision.

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS

ALTERNATE FEMINISMS

The Sun & Moon Press, now located in Los Angeles, has just published a gorgeously designed edition of Djuna Barnes' *Interviews*, edited by Alyce Barry, with a Foreword and Commentary by Douglas Messerli ($16.94; paperback $10.95). The period covered is 1914-31, when Barnes was earning her living as a journalist; the subjects range from performing artists (Gaby Deslys, Yvette Guilbert, Lillian Russell, Valentine de Saint-Point) to producers (Flo Ziegfeld, David Belasco), to radical agitators (Mary "Mother" Jones), preachers (Billy Sunday), writers (ranging from Donald Ogden Stewart and Rachel Crothers to James Joyce), con artists (Wilson Mizner), and fashion designers (Coco Chanel). The interviews are illustrated by Barnes herself, her witty caricatures—for example, a "cubified" Diamond Jim Brady with the caption "Though He Is a Diamond in the Rough You Can't Get Away from Him Without Taking a Memory You Are Not Likely to Forget"—constituting the perfect complement to her often devastating portraits. A German translation of the *Interviews* by Karin Kersten has already appeared under the title *Portraits* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1985): I mention this abridged edition because it includes marvelous photographs of Barnes' subjects: for example, Alla Nazimova playing *Salome* (1922), Yvette Guilbert in proper nineties regalia, and "Kiki" of Montparnasse in the raw.

In the new *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1985), edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Djuna Barnes gets all of 8 pages ("Cassation," the Barnes story chosen for inclusion, is a relatively weak one), as compared to 9 for Amy Lowell, 16 for Edna St. Vincent Millay, 22 for Rebecca West, 32 for Tillie Olsen, and 33 for Adrienne Rich, who is the *doyenne* of the section on Contemporary Literature, the Introduction beginning with a quote from Rich's "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," and the headnotes alluding again and again to her writings and public statements. Indeed, Rich's view of woman's plight, as put forward in her personal essay *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision* (originally delivered as a lecture at the MLA convention of 1970) functions, according to Gilbert and Gubar, "as a kind of manifesto for both female writers and feminist critics in these [i.e. the post-war] years" (p. 1677).

Rich's manifesto is one of the few non-fiction works of the twentieth-century included in this 2500-page Norton anthology, an anthology that seems to be based on the conventional principle that literature, like Gaul, is divided into three parts, the three, in this case, being drama, poetry, and fiction—especially fiction. As such, it is interesting to compare *When*

We Dead Awaken to Barnes' texts called "Interviews" (in German, "Portraits"), texts that are, in their own covert way, also meditations on the role of the woman artist/writer in the modern world.

Rich's manifesto is a call for "Re-vision" of the literary canon and of the patriarchy that has controlled women's lives:

> Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves . . . how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative. . . . (p. 2046)

To illustrate these points, Rich provides us with the exemplary tale of her own evolution as a poet. Her early style, she observes, was modelled on that of "the men I was reading as an undergraduate [at Radcliffe, in the early fifties]—Frost, Dylan Thomas, Donne, Auden, MacNeice, Stevens, Yeats." From these male poets, she learned that "conscious craft" and "formalism" were central, and that the "I" in a poem should be a "persona," not the poet herself.

The next phase of her career is described as follows:

> I finished college, published my first book by a fluke, as it seemed to me, and broke off a love affair. I took a job, lived alone, went on writing, fell in love. I was young, full of energy, and the book seemed to mean that others agreed I was a poet. Because I was also determined to prove that as a woman poet I could also have what was then defined as a "full" woman's life, I plunged in my early twenties into marriage and had three children before I was thirty. There was nothing overt in the environment to warn me: these were the fifties. . . .
>
> About the time my third child was born, I felt that I had either to consider myself a failed woman and a failed poet, or to try to find some synthesis by which to understand what was happening to me. (p. 2051)

And Rich then goes on to explain that conventional marriage, as practiced in the fifties, made it impossible for her to be a serious poet, that the anti-War movement of the sixties began to raise her consciousness, and that she had to free herself from her stifling marriage, and beyond marriage, from the authority of the patriarchy in order to become her true self—a passionate feminist and lesbian poet. Indeed, "To the eye of a feminist, the work of Western male poets now writing reveals a deep, fatalistic pessimism as to the possibilities of change. . . . The creative energy of patriarchy is fast running out." "As women," Rich concludes, "we have our work cut out for us" (p. 2056)

Rich's painstaking honesty, her willingness to put herself on the line, makes *When We Dead Awaken* a moving document, especially for feminist

scholars whose own careers have often taken second place to their role as faculty wives. Nevertheless, the essay is based on a series of questionable assumptions. First, the assumption that the place where poetry is naturally born is the classroom, specifically the Ivy League classroom where students are "exposed" to the "great poets" that Rich lists – a canon that in today's classroom includes, thanks to texts like *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, Adrienne Rich herself. Her first book, she suggests, was published "by fluke," but the fact is that it was selected, not at all by fluke, given its carefully constructed replication of accepted models, as the winner of the Yale Younger Poets prize for 1951. The judge was W.H. Auden, whose style Rich had consciously, indeed studiously imitated.

A second and related assumption is that the bourgeois life of the fifties (or, for that matter, of any other time), with its daily routine of suburban living, car pools, scout troops, and so on, stifles the woman poet's Muse but not the man's. "To be with a man in the old way of marriage," writes Rich, "requires a holding-back, a putting-aside of that imaginative activity, and demands instead a kind of conservatism" (p. 2052). Precisely, and to be a man in the same setting, to work 9 to 5 or rather 8 to 8 in, say, a Wall Street law firm, surely creates the same anxiety, as we know from the letters of Stevens or the outbursts against propriety found in Williams' scatalogical prose poem, *Rome*.

But then there are, and always have been, as Djuna Barnes' "interviews" so forcefully remind us, other modes of being – for both men and women. Even in the "tranquillised fifties," incidentally, when Rich was reading Yeats, Frost, and Auden, and when, so she complains, "the woman poet most admired at the time (by men) was Marianne Moore, who was maidenly, elegant, intellectual, discreet" (p. 2049), there *were*, after all, *other* available models. Many younger poets coming of age after the Second World War were drawing upon Apollinaire as well as Auden, Rexroth and Reverdy as well as Roethke, Olson as well as the *Kenyon Review* poets. Indeed, while Rich was, by her own account, reading Thomas and MacNeice, avant-garde male poets like John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara were rediscovering one of the great writers of the century – Gertrude Stein. Like Rich, Stein was a Radcliffe girl, the interesting difference being that Stein did *not* marry and have three children or do whatever it was "proper" to do in her day. But Rich, whose own poetry shows no sign of questioning conventional norms of what a "poem" is, does not so much as mention Stein in *When We Dead Awaken*, an essay that, for all its overt radicalism, exhibits the residual conservatism that made its delivery quite appropriate for its setting – the MLA convention – as well as its re-setting in the Norton Anthology.

The image of the woman artist that emerges from Djuna Barnes' interviews is very different. Perhaps the first thing to notice about Barnes'

female subjects (and this is also true for many of her male ones) is that they are what we would now call marginalized figures—eccentrics or originals who excell in one of the "low" arts or in more than one art. Thus Valentine de Saint-Point was a poet, novelist, dramatist, and critic, as well as the author of two notorious Futurist manifestos, *The Manifesto of Lust* and *The Manifesto of Woman*, and the inventor of a new form of dance "synthesis" called *metachorie*. Or again, Gaby Deslys began as a music-hall singer and then a jazz-dancer in Paris, became an extravagantly dressed star, celebrated by poets like Cocteau and dramatists like James Barrie, and then, during World War I, worked as a spy, using her dark coloring to pose as an Hungarian woman and uncovering numerous German secrets. And Yvette Guilbert, the great comic singer of the fin de siecle Latin Quarter, immortalized by Toulouse-Lautrec in her yellow dress and long black gloves, became, in the mid 1920s, a film actress, starring in *Faust* (1926) and *L'Argent* (1929).

In all these cases, Barnes sets up her "interview" as a kind of playlet and treats her subject as an extension of herself. She provides precious little "background information," preferring to let her subject do the talking, often imitating a particular speech mannerism or foreign inflection (e.g., Saint-Point: "It is not that I mind the funny little fox-trotting, you call him?"), and letting the subject reveal the edge, so to speak, of her or his character—the genius or eccentricity that sets that character apart.

It is surely no coincidence that the artists and celebrities Barnes most admires all seem to share certain qualities—independence, a strong will, a sense of humor, grace, and especially courage. Thus, when the actress Lillian Russell is asked whether she thinks anything in the country is "going to the dogs," she responds: "I can't think of a single thing. Let me see—with women in the world how can things go to the dogs." And again, "When a woman is busy she hasn't time to fasten the straps about the wrists of the infamous. When one is busy cultivating roses she cannot speculate on cactus" (p. 55). Or again, when Mary ("Mother") Jones, the great union agitator and strike organizer of the teens and twenties, who had survived the death of her husband and four sons in the yellow fever epidemic of Memphis in the 1860s only to lose her home and all her possessions in the Great Chicago Fire four years later, is asked in an interview of 1915 what she thinks of the suffrage question, "She snapped instantly: 'I haven't enough brains to be a suffragette—I'm too busy trying to locate the left side of the world where the heart is supposed to be' " (p. 99).

The phrasing of this sentence sounds excessively sophisticated for a "simple" woman like Mother Jones, as does the following speech recorded in the interview:

> "Our women are going blank behind their paint. One hour out of the twenty-four should be used in comprehending the other twenty-three, yet

it's not done. There's a trouble in every century and there's a solution. We always acknowledge the trouble; we always fight the solution." (p. 99)

What Barnes does, I think, is to merge her subject's speech with her own so as to stress Mary Jones' paradoxical combination of strength and eccentricity. When a telephone call interrupts the interview, Barnes uses the moment to observe Mother's back, a "back [that] tells more than a gossip. . . . It is a flat, straight back, and broad. It has never had time to become individual. It is not a personal vertebra. Upon it has lain for many years the burden of burdens. It is not a back; it is a pillar" (p. 103).

If the Barnes interview makes much of the virtues of honesty and courage, the converse is also true. The one really cruel portrait in this collection is that of the great evangelist Billy Sunday, the one-time professional baseball player turned preacher, who railed, in Douglas Messerli's words, "against the evils of liquor, sexual promiscuity, foreigners, tobacco, motion pictures, and modernism in general" (p. 106). Barnes' interview, conducted in 1915, begins:

> One is instantly disappointed. How does one say such things; how, indeed, does one explain?
>
> Not because he is a little older than you had been led to expect, not because he is a little shorter, not because he is getting slightly bald—none of these things, for they would but tend to make him more human and by that more lovable—but because upon entering, upon saying, "Good morning," upon extending your hand, he is silent. Silent throughout your entrance, throughout your maneuvers to be seated without spoiling either his coat, hat, gloves, book or pictures; silent after a question.
>
> You had expected the eagle, you find the owl.
>
> In your mind "Billy" was a beautiful ballad. In reality he is not even a tune; he is a rest between bars. (p. 107).

The metaphors are wonderfully deflationary, warning us that here is a person who is not what he seems, "not even a tune." We are now ready for the great preacher's "opinions." After a few hostile little exchanges with Mr. and Mrs. Sunday, the interviewer, who has walked for an hour-and-a-half through the Philadelphia streets to reach the Sunday house, fires her first shot:

> Said I, "What has the war done to religion?"
>
> "What do you mean?"
>
> "Hasn't it affected the world's faith; there's more than one fist, they say, that has been knuckles since the war started."
>
> "War has been the best thing for religion in the last century; it has filled the churches, it has brought men to their knees in the trenches. What are they doing in Europe? Filling their guns, yes, and emptying their hearts. There has always been war; there always should be war." (p. 108)

After a series of such heart-warming observations, Sunday urges Barnes

to come hear him preach:

> "You will have a different viewpoint after you have stood it an hour or so; you will see why bicycles were done away with when automobiles came onto the scene. I've got the argument; I've got the speed and I've got the light." (p. 113)

And when Barnes follows Sunday into the church, she witnesses a total change: "Upon seeing [the] multitude, Sunday's demeanor changed as suddenly and with as little subtlety as the face of a creditor changes into a debtor. It grew radiant, it shone with suburban beatitude. . . . He fairly phosphoresced."

The last verb says it all. A "morose, silent, sullen" man when alone, who responds to the "multiplied expectation" like a "skyrocket" "burst[ing] into light." But even in her contempt, Barnes admires Sunday as an astonishing performance artist: "how can one help it when from [his] lethargy he wakes suddenly into a man so entirely different, so absolutely genial, so enormously human, so fine a comedian, so willing to gyrate, so ambitious, so light and often so logical?" (p. 118) But, so as not to end on this note of generosity, Barnes concludes her sketch by reporting Ma Sunday's whining complaint, after the sermon, that "You shouldn't make such dreadful pauses, Pa," and notes that "Outside they were selling for ten cents the story of his life."

In such portraits, the "interview" becomes, long before the heyday of *Paris Review* interviews, and, beyond these, the highly crafted "talks" of David Antin, the taped discussions of the Language poets, or the verbal exchanges Laurie Anderson sets up with various real and imaginary interlocutors, a serious literary genre. The word *interview*, let us not forget, meant, until a hundred years ago, "a meeting of persons face to face, especially one sought or arranged for the purpose of formal conference on some point." The OED, whose primary definition I have just cited, records 1869 as the first instance when the word "interview" was used in its current sense: "In recent use: A meeting between a representative of the press and some one from whom he seeks to obtain statements for publication." And of course in the historical examples now given, both interviewer and interviewee are designated as "he." What woman of 1869 could possibly supply the representative of the press with "statements for publication"?

According to Djuna Barnes, their number, by the beginning of the twentieth century, was sizable. Their "statements for publication" may take the form of *bons mots*, as when the actress and singer Lillian Russell is quoted as saying "I could never be lonely without a husband, but without my trinkets, my golden gods, I could find abysmal gloom" (p. 50). Or again, the brilliance of a given artist may become the subject for comedy, as in Barnes' 1917 interview with the actress turned producer-director Helen

Westley, which begins:

> "Hello, is this Miss Barnes?"
> "Yes."
> "This is Helen Westley."
> "Ah, how do you do?"
> "I want to be interviewed again."
> "Very well; I shall meet you at three-thirty at the Brevoort."
> I am there at three-thirty precisely. I order something "with a cherry in it" and await the appearance of the strange person of the Washington Square Players; and soon she appears, walking easily and wearing another of those adored, secondhand gowns; a secondhand book is under her arm, and she smiles, showing her thirty-two perfect teeth.
> "*Toute passe, mon ami,*" she murmurs as she takes the seat before me, shaking her earrings and thrusting the book upon the table. It is Murray's *History of Greek Literature,* and she knows it looks well. (p. 251)

That final substitution of "she knows it looks well" for the expected "she knows it well" is a characteristically Barnesian deflationary gesture. But it is not really malicious. For, as the conversation between the two women continues, Helen Westley shows herself to be a truly wise woman, a woman who has learned, the hard way, how to live and succeed in the theatre. Now, in middle age (Westley is 42 at the time of the interview), she has become something of a Wildean wit. "I took out a book on mental derangements from the library," she tells Barnes, "but everyone in it seemed so natural that I gave it up" (p. 258). Barnes laughs and responds by asking Helen if she considers herself a vampire, which she defines as "Anyone who can break a habit easier than acquire one." The jokes fly back and forth, Barnes calling Westley "A Mephistophelian lizard – very uncanny," and Westley responding, "Like a cloak model – very exclusive." The interview ends on a note of camaraderie – the natural rapport of two women who are witty, learned, clever – and who have worked together, Westley having directed Barnes' plays for the Provincetown Players.

"Both the victimization and the anger experienced by women are real, and have real sources, everywhere in the environment, built into society, language, the structures of thought." So argues Adrienne Rich in *When We Dead Awaken* of 1970. Half a century earlier, there seems, curiously, to have been less hatred of men on the part of literary women, and, surely a more genuine sense of accomplishment. Perhaps this is the case because the professions were not yet as compartmentalized as they are today, and the "popular" could merge with the "artistic" in ways unheard of for the Yale Younger Poets of the fifties and sixties. Or perhaps the cult of "personality" and eccentricity of the teens and twenties made it easier, for both men and women, to follow one's own bent.

One of Barnes' finest portraits of such a personality is called "Nothing Amuses Coco Chanel After Midnight." Douglas Messerli's headnote gives

us the astonishing biographical facts. Gabrielle Chanel was the illegitimate child of peasant parents in provincial Saumur. Evidently, her father regularly beat and sexually abused her mother. After his death in 1895, the eleven-year old Gabrielle was sent to an orphanage, where she spent six years, and then to a convent. At twenty, she came to Paris and became a shop assistant for a seller of "trousseaux and layettes," but she quickly grew impatient with the job and by 1903 she began to perform at local cafes. Her new name, Coco, came from the popular song of the day, "Ko Ko Ri Ko," which she sang nightly at La Rotonde.

Chanel's "break" came when, as the mistress of Etienne Balsan, she decided to become a horsewoman and, finding the women's fashions of the period too confining, had a tailor make her a pair of jodphurs, on the model of those worn by an English groom. Her genius was to perceive that women could wear "tailored" clothes and still look "feminine," and it was not long before she had a Paris apartment where she began to design clothes and later perfumes. A free spirit, Coco Chanel had affairs and/or friendships with numerous poets (Cocteau, Reverdy), painters (Dali), and aristocratic gentlemen, but her main love was her now illustrious House of Chanel. Closed briefly by her command when the Germans occupied Paris in 1940, the House of Chanel reopened after the War and has flourished ever since. Chanel herself died in 1971 at the age of 87.

When Barnes interviewed her in 1931, Chanel was approaching fifty, but evidently age posed no problems for her. Barnes' strategy is to let her subject do most of the talking, and Chanel's talk is, as Barnes says, "reasonable with that degree of reasonableness that we of the Western world look upon as a sort of unholy ease in the face of the miracles of nature. Of course! Chanel is one of the miracles just because she is natural. We are seldom natural because we are incredulous" (p. 379).

What is remarkable about the Chanel presented in Barnes' brief interview is that the "*plus grand couturière* of Paris, with an income of several millions, employing 2400 persons in her *atéliers*," a woman "who refused the hand of the immensely wealthy Duke of Westminster," likes best of all "loneliness, fresh air, country life, sport clothes, dogs, fishing, early rising, early retiring, lolling, and hard work, especially hard work" (pp. 378-79). Here is Chanel in conversation with Barnes:

> "If a woman wants to keep her figure, let her be employed, let her work. She will be happier, less self-conscious, and this state will be reflected in the figure. Men like capable women. There is no fear in her as there used to be when she was economically dependent, therefore there is more real beauty in her." (p. 380)

Whether Chanel actually said this or whether Barnes invented it makes no real difference. For Barnes uses the character of Chanel to present us with a portrait of a polite but confirmed feminist, one who believes that

a woman must be economically independent, that "a bad figure" is "in all its joints a timid figure," that the brave woman is she who refuses to destroy herself by bad habits, for "A candle burnt at both ends may shed a brighter light, but the darkness that follows is for a longer time" (p. 381).

How do we relate this Barnes-Chanel brand of "feminism" to the contemporary American feminism of an Adrienne Rich and, by extension, the feminism of her publishers, editors, and critics? My own sense is that Rich's wholesale rejection of what she calls the "phallocentric" vision of contemporary men, her insistence that "The creative energy of patriarchy is fast running out," may well reflect a powerful current in the contemporary university, but I am not sure it tells us much about the literary and artistic life outside the ivy-covered gates. Yvette Guilbert, Valentine de Saint-Point, Alla Nazimova, Gaby Deslys, Ruth Roye – these were the precursors of contemporary performance artists like Laurie Anderson, even as Djuna Barnes, like Gertrude Stein or Mina Loy, is viewed as a precursor by the brilliant women writers associated with the Language movement and with Kathleen Fraser's new women's journal *HOW(ever)*.

Barnes, herself a lesbian, and certainly a feminist *avant la lettre*, would have found the hatred of men, voiced by Adrienne Rich and her circle, a source of puzzlement, if not dismay. For why, after all, should one hate half the human race, and such an attractive half at that? To read Barnes' interviews with Lillian Russell and Helen Westley, with Mary Garden and Coco Chanel, is to be reminded that, in the words of Mother Jones: "When a backbone comes in contact with a Winchester, revolution is born." Especially when the backbone is draped in black velvet.

MARJORIE PERLOFF

Wednesday March 29 1985

Dear Clayton,

. . . . What I actually had in mind in December, besides the environment (Walden Pond, traveling light on earth for instance), as many times before, came out briefly where I said maybe Charles Norman in his 1960 biogrpahy dealt with EP's anti-semitism enough (and TSE's . . .). Well, Walden's all along been on my brain too, while more and more it's been shoved to the back of it. How much isn't too much is a question I've harped

on (I am indeed a cautious character, Apollonian—relaxation my ultimate if not hourly goal). I was forgetting the question what to do if I found myself opposite at the kitchen table wth a Capone say or Hitler, now powerless and older, at one time murderous and/or mad, in all probability as good as dead or still cold-blooded . . . If in mind I could and did absent myself, I might be moribund too. If things get tough enough, on a battleground, say, you don't think, anyway don't feel, worry, or you'd better not? (Hitler painted roses, so they say).

Three or four weeks back on "European Journal" (a weekly radio program emanating from Cologne), it was reported that some number of people were protesting an upcoming visit to W. Germany by the president of Paraguay. But Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal in Vienna welcomed it, as it would give the W. German chancellor a chance to ask the whereabouts of Dr. Joseph Mengele.

"American Caesar," the 5 hour documentary about the life of Douglas MacArthur, based on William Manchester's biography, John Huston narrating (and Manchester among the interviewees), was televised twice the week before last over an independent commercial station here. Towards the end of the repeat, I thought: MacArthur like Pound, Eisenhower like Williams. Though I don't know if Ike changed his mind really as much as WCW, MacArthur appears to have been half or 3/4 or 4/5 or xyz% full of contradictions. He also brought Shakespeare's Coriolanus to mind. Patrician/democratic not too much of a paradox. Or resolvable anyway, explicable—privately owned land coming in when a tribe settles down to agriculture and specializes, diversifies enough for sharing food et al to become difficult or pretty impractical. I guess. Anyway, you always have democracy and equity among peers, people seen as equals, or they're visibly tried for to a considerable extent, if none to often realized (and it seems to figure that any military officer is pretty authoritarian, yet it appears that Eisenhower was a good deal less so than MacArthur).

All kinds of, any number of, situations. Of course MacArthur had a lot more influence on Japan than Pound had on Italy, an obvious example that's cropped up illustrating an observation of Weinberger's. (No mention of Commodore Perry in "American Caesar" nor any of the Japanese who changed things after his menacing visit!) Subtle, indirect, delayed or long-lasting effects would seem to have been fairly real in times not so fast-paced as nowadays, when fewer people were writing and talking (and painting and driving cars and trucks etc). Not so classless times, you might think, but there's just the size of a perceived community, which if big enough gets more and more activity going (various degrees of perception?). It seems I can imagine what things would be like if I hadn't been born more than if the Bible or Shakespeare or Dickens' pieces or Newton's or Einstein's hadn't been produced and reproduced. Writing's been a force making for social coherence for one thing, community, as well as (or via)

entertainment. But now, reading *Paideuma*, say, may not be too much unlike watching a ballgame or looking into the newspaper (not so much *People* magazine? I haven't come across that yet – but *The Times*). Maybe I for one go for bad gloomy as well as pleasant news, though never thoroughly enjoying it; but history isn't current events, it's more like fiction, offers more of a pasttime. Ah well, some pieces sure are less like horse-racing or handball than others. But anyway, the bottom of Pound's laundry basket has, conceivably, been scraped. If not, it should be, lest anyone get his head buried in it too far.

. . . . Since an accident January 9th (I flew headlong out of this wheelchair in back of a van taking me and another home from exercise at UC Gym, when the driver had to stop suddenly and broke 5 ribs, both our chairs tied down to the floor, but, my own fault, I've never been strapped in the chair), I've been spending more time in bed – though I'm again getting up and lying down on my own, not a bad idea to, as I've a small circulation problem and was advised 10 or 11 months ago to keep my leg up, and to sit up straight lest I squash my liver a few years farther down the road – and reading more, it seems, than I have in these past 5-1/2 years in Berkeley. So I've read, 5 years after getting it and "A 1-24" in a swap at Sand Dollar Books, the Zukofsky memorial issue of *Paideuma*, this Winter 78 number the only one I've ever seen. From there, you'd scarcely make out that LZ ever "toadied" (strong word!) to EP as Weinberger has it, but was "saddened" (by the report of David Ignatow) by his "mental condition" on his return from the visit of the Zukofskys to St. Elizabeth's, and according to Celia, in an interview with Carroll Terrell, they had their disagreements, while she also says her husband never considered Pound was anti-semitic (!) but rather thought "if only" he'd "calm down" and collect himself, his thoughts, he would, sincere man that he was, get over his mental aberration, concerning fascism (maybe). Terrell, pressing Celia as to anti-semitism, Pound's, expresses his bafflement at such a "stupid" thing in him, and does note that one time in a conference Zukofsky, defending Pound, denied it was in him.

Back in Boston a number of times on the radio there was a tape of Robert Lowell, in preface to a rendition of Elizabeth Bishop's poem about EP in DC ("This is the House of Bedlam . . ."), remarking how Pound one day suddenly, when he was there, said (as if waking up?), "Did I say all that about the Jews?" A brief awakening that may well have been. When I read Ignatow's memoir I thought, oh yes, come to think of it (again?), people usually change, either along the same lines as before, or different ones.

(Evidently Zukofsky was more familiar with 19th and 20th century physics etc. than Pound. More than Williams too? Although ((or so Guy Davenport says in *Paideuma*)) when he was a child, Zukofsky thought the uncircumcised were unable to urinate "and was troubled to understand

the radically different physiology of *the goyim.*" Elsewhere in the same magazine, I read he identified himself, as a Russian, or through his Russian parentage, with the Bolshevik revolutionists, picking up where the Adams family and the U.S. left off, declined, a deline bemoaned by Henry and Brooks Adams, and/or Ch. Fr. Adams, who wrote sadly about, for one thing anyway, the shennanigans of big businessmen during the Gilded Age. Perspective of the family which is supportive and all still in the U.S. to a considerable degree and a lot elsewhere. These Zukofskys in Brooklyn were quite a family anyway . . .). . . . .

LARRY EIGNER

NEW CHRONOTOPES FOR OLD: SOME NOTES FOR JAMES CLIFFORD

Jim Clifford is a particular favorite of mine, the best commentator we have on the anthropology of an actual avant-garde—& maybe uniquely its historian. So I found myself immediately attracted (how could I not be?) to his conjuration of images of "the tribal and the postmodern" as it appeared in *Sulfur* 13. Here at last, in an area near & dear to me, was the promise that someone was about to free us from the assumptions of our modernist predecesors & to place us squarely in the present as postmodern time. I don't believe that Clifford succeeded or even intended to succeed with this, but certain implications of what I take to be his failures—or his misperceptions—make me want to follow up on them.

I find it curious to start with that Clifford presents the cultural performances in question as instances of a kind of composition by collage. For collage is the great structuring device (& more) of early twentieth-century (= *modernist*) art, appearing there under a multiplicity of names: simultanism, vortex, montage, surreal or double or deep image, assemblage, perspective by incongruity, or plain "collage." While I've given myself to work of that kind too, I've sometimes wondered if it didn't leave me vulnerable to an oldfashioned modernism rather than liberated into the postmodernist future.

"Chronotope" is Clifford's word for it this time around: a time-space configuration—in "life" as well as in "art"—whose outreach to history a little resembles Pound's vortex or (anthropologically speaking, after Frobenius) his paideuma. A chronotope exemplifying the primitive/modernist connection would be "the surrealist studio of the 20s, filled with

African and Oceanian art" (or the Trocadero Museum in Paris that preceded it), while that proposed for postmodernism might be the Zuni shalako house described by Barbara Tedlock (or its replication – should that ever happen – in a specifically artworld setting). The contrastive, though tentative, chronotopes would then seem to be: a museum or an artspace on the one hand; a dwelling, both religious & domestic, on the other. A distinction, in short, between art & life, the reversal of whose tyrannies over one another had been proposed by John Cage & others back in the 1950s.

Clifford's "(temporary) exhibition" (a postmodernist answer to last year's primitive/modern show at the Museum of Modern Art) begins with the Zuni ritual from Tedlock &, in particular, with certain of its props & decor. What emerges from this is a baroque image of multicultural textures – largely or most memorably those we would think of as *non*-Indian (streets lined with white Mercedes; men in Tony Lama boots; strangers dressed in dayglo orange, pink & green ski jackets; Arabian tapestries of Martin Luther King & the Kennedy brothers; & so on). This is a major point of Clifford's presentation: that we have unjustly overdone the demand for a kind of cultural purity as authenticity – a DEMAND which we have no right to be making in the first place. The hybrid quality of culture – a condition that I think is undeniable – means, if taken to one possible logical conclusion, that what you see is what you've got. If the modernists' tack was to drop out what they thought was non-essential or unlike their image of the art they wanted to observe, the postmodernist response would be to honor all that is there at any given moment. There is presumably no judgment as to what is *more* or *less* important.

I have no problem with that as a general proposition, but in the specific instance questions do arise. Mostly they concern the nature of the collage being presented, of its actual location in space & time. In the brief but jampacked section quoted from Tedlock, we move from car-lined & spectator-filled streets to a view through a door or window of the interior of a house (or of several houses) newly built for Shalako. The people described are Zunis, non-Zuni Indians, & whites (the strangers in dayglo who have come from distant places); & the interior view is of walls with bright & gaudy hangings. Such hangings in our own world would have a decidedly inferior status (an appraisal which "decorative artists" & some other postmodernists have in fact resisted); but here they seem "almost hallucinatory" (Clifford), even exotic in their conglomerate effect. There is no doubt, however, that they are all descriptively a part of Shalako, although some ambiguity exists as to whether Tedlock is describing one single occasion & place or creating a composite picture of several. There is also a question of how much of what's described is central to Shalako & how much is peripheral. The (plural) white Mercedes, for example? Tedlock selects them, along with "quarter-ton pickups and Dodge vans,"

to make a certain kind of (social) point, but it is clearly a selection & not a mere description. No Fords, no Chevies, no Toyotas, though those must also have been present at Zuni. Or the tapestries of King & the Kennedys, tacked up on the wall beneath "mule and white-tailed deer trophy-heads"? Are they ceremonial in the same way as the altar objects & dance masks that turn up later in her piece? Other cultures incorporate such images centrally—make them into altar objects—but do the Zunis? And if they don't, what's the point of making it seem to be that kind of fusion? Or making it seem that everything inside the room has equal weight?

Tedlock in fact goes on to give the larger picture: the altar at the far wall of the house, the trail of cornmeal leading out from it, the Shalakos & mudhead clowns who dance before it. The textures here are no less complex, but the exoticism of the foreign & strange (= European etc) is muted, largely absent. It is as if a more significant "other" were now present, in the form of divine or *raw* beings, & from the sacred places where they dance, the foreign visitors, both Indian & Anglo, are "kindly but firmly removed." Only in Tedlock's description of the adjoining dining room (again a peripheral place) do the exotic westernisms come up that strongly—there & in the streets & ordinary houses, where the non-Zunis function as "a great crowd representative of all cooked or daylight persons [= human beings] on earth."

What surprises me most is how completely Clifford—for all of his postmodern inclusiveness—drops out those Zuni images that cluster around the altar. It's as if a "postmodern" view (if that's what we've got here) must necessarily neglect whatever held the most attraction for the modernists—like David Antin saying, qua postmodernist: "I reject the idea of a sacred language." But Tedlock, who stops far short of any such postmodernism, is much more precise & much more geared toward Zuni. While describing a "multisensory aesthetic of the beautiful" (Zuni: *tso'ya*) that touches both on what I've been calling "central" & "peripheral," she doesn't lose the one in pointing to the other. Rather her description remains open to distinctions still honored at Zuni—both those between "daylight" & "raw," & those tied to what the Zunis call *attanni*, an aesthetic of the powerful & dangerous "somewhere near [the beautiful] or even bursting into the midst of it."

There are many postmodernisms (just as there were many modernisms), & I assume that the one invoked by Clifford comes from John Cage or thereabouts: the ideal of a happening in which everything is a part of the performance & on nearly equal terms. The boundaries between art & life are blurred, & life is clearly favored. It is an interesting refocusing of our attentions, & I can recall, as a simple example, sitting with Cage during a boring performance in Milwaukee, while he pointed out to me a pretty play-of-lights caused by the reflection through a partly open curtain of the chrome & windshields of autos passing in the street. I am used

to that perspective & have sometimes shared it, but I wonder too why it so often leads, as here, to an attrition of life rather than its enhancement. If Clifford meant only to show the Zunis as our contemporaries, I have no trouble at all accepting that. But their contemporaneity isn't merely a question of the cars they drive or the kitsch they redeem; it also includes "the powerful, dangerous, untouchable, dark, muffled, indistinct, shaggy, old, and plain" realm of the *attanni*: in other Zuni terms, the worlds of bear & raven. To omit these from a "(temporary) exhibition on 'affinities of the tribal and the postmodern' " is, I submit, to trivialize both the tribal & the postmodern & to make for an even greater (selective) exoticism than that from the old modernist/primitive perspective.

Yet the real sticking point for me is not so much Clifford's use of the Zuni materials as his account of Edmund Wilson's account of an actual performance of the Seneca Indian Dark Dance. Here my experience is not merely vicarious but personal. I first went to the Allegany Reservation in New York in 1966, spent the summer of '68 there, & lived for two years ('72-'74) in the leasehold town of Salamanca. Before that first trip I too read Wilson's *Apologies to the Iroquois*, & I too retained a memory of the Dark Dance along the lines of Clifford's description. I later saw one ritual performance of it, not in a private home but in the longhouse—a different situation from what Clifford describes & one that I contrasted to my memory of what Wilson said he saw (or what I thought & Clifford thought he saw from our shared postmodern perspective).

To refresh the reader's memory: Clifford recalls, in a further attempt to locate " 'tribal' creations in a complex, oppositional present," Wilson's visit to a " 'dark dance,' composed of traditional song sequences performed in an unlit kitchen. It is a strangely acoustic experience. And Wilson is surprised to find that while the ceremony is performed, in an adjoining room behind double doors, a group of old and young Seneca, including the 'master of ceremonies' and the old woman providing the feast, are watching TV. He is bothered by the distracting noise of a comedian's jokes. Wilson eventually succeeds in blocking out the scraps of light and sound coming from the next room. He is swept up in the dark 'oratorio.' " The question Clifford then asks is whether the actual circumstances of the performance aren't a part of it as well—noise & lights & all. "Concerning the tribal," he writes, "or any site of authentic cultural life, must we block out such 'noise?' "

It is a fair enough question, but going back to Wilson's account & to my own experience, I find myself disturbed on several points. To begin with, the Dark Dance is probably the worst example I know of a traditional performance in which the periphery is to be factored into the total work. It is rather a model of focus on a central event, a chronotope of absence for which the darkness is crucial & the presence of light & of extraneous voices intrusive from the Seneca point of view. In the longhouse

performance that I saw, every effort was made to eliminate even exterior lights; smoking (nearly always allowed in Seneca ceremonies) was forbidden; & the "oratorio" was so powerful & so loud that any sound of passing autos or other outside noise was completely blocked.

The truth of the matter is that Wilson, who saw the Dark Dance in a much less guarded space than I did, doesn't at all contradict this. The house is darkened when he arrives there late, & he & his party aren't allowed in until the first "intermission." Only then do the lights come on, & he becomes aware of the TV in an adjacent room. With the intermission over, the house lights are again turned off, & what light might be coming from beneath the double doors is blocked by the bodies of the women dancers, whose singing & feet-stamping are more than enough to drown the TV sound out—assuming that the sound is even on, for at the end of the performance Wilson mentions that the TV sound in fact is off. Nor does he ever indicate that he is "bothered" or that he has somehow to "block out" the lights or "the distracting sound of the comedian's jokes." (All quoted words are Clifford's.) Rather, he tells us, the performance is "extraordinary—exciting and at first even frightening. The singing fills up the room . . ." And he goes on to wonder "whether all oratorios ought not to be sung in the dark."

The answer to Clifford's question, then, is that *we* have no need to block out the TV noise, because the TV noise is not there to begin with. It has been blocked out by the dancers, who are engaged in a performance, a rite, in which such noise does not exist. Nor do the objects & doodads of the Seneca kitchen exist in that darkness—family photos & plaster-of-paris animals & dishes from Niagara Falls—for every effort has been made to leave a space, not only for an "authentic cultural life" but for the numinous presences that such a life implies. Wilson is being exact & thoughtful in his description, never cranky—& even if he were, he would be no more of an intruder with an outside aesthetic than Clifford or myself.

But there is a still more disturbing side to all of this—from an Iroquois & from a larger human view. If the Senecas were able to merge the TV image with that of the Dark Dance, that would be a potentially healthy hybridism. My own experience is that what's happening here is that one image—one *culture*—is unevenly overtaking the other, not toward a fusion but a virtual annihilation. In other words, the time is fast approaching when the TV & the Dark Dance will not share the same space, as Clifford imagines, but the TV will subsist by itself: "authentic cultural life," if you want, but no different in Salamanca than anywhere else in America. It is nearly thirty years since Wilson was there, & already singers of many of the ceremonies have fallen silent. Singers from other reservations, old men themselves, are being called in to perform the ceremonies—with no tolerance, let me add, for hybridizations, but antiquarians themselves, who are trying to preserve the "authentic" old ways. To say that the Chevies

or Datsuns in which they drive there have *meaningfully* become a part of those doings is to indulge in a cruel postmodern joke. Brass rings for the false faces' eyes, plastic tubing for the rattles, Goodwill clothes & mod dress for the beggar clowns are one thing, but the TV in the next room is truly something else. It is a killer in Salamanca, & it has already become the principal cultural vehicle for the young.

What flourished there once & survives marginally today is what Rasmussen (for the Copper Eskimos) called an *intellectual* culture. Intellectual cultures can change odd items at will & have always done so. But there is only so much loss of language & idea – of measures & values by which to know the world – that they can endure. It is not that we would want the Senecas to give up TV & to dress up as "primitives" or that we would deny their "identity" unless they do so. Nor would the Senecas have it that way. But that's a far cry from overlooking that cultures & languages can be destroyed & that this is also a part of a "complex oppositional present."

I don't know how much of this applies to the realities at Zuni or elsewhere, & I don't intend to speculate about that beyond what I've already quoted from Tedlock. I went to Salamanca to see something, & I don't know if I saw it. But I fear more & more that I have been a witness to a death – as prophesied by our dear friend Harry Watt, who can no longer speculate about it. Maybe it doesn't matter in the long run, but I can't say that either. I feel sure that a little light will always break in from behind a curtain or around the bodies of the dancers anywhere, & I'm sure that I'll remember to take pleasure in it, whether in Milwaukee or Salamanca or New York or Paris. But I don't think it will make up for the memory of what soon will only be a memory.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

Sir:

I have been studying and writing on the phenomenon of specialization in contemporary literary activity (and as a general 20th century intellectual development), writers specializing in themselves as a unique manifestation, called 'a Voice,' or as a bloc, with – for example – feminism as their identity-stage. Your correspondent Benjamin Friedlander (ne Friedlander), in Sulfur #13, exhibits the extent to which Jewishism has served (or, as Charles Bernstein would say, 'J-E-W-I-S-H-N-E-S-S') this

bloc-identity obsession as a mass-form of specialization in individuality. The specializers feed their special identity grounds with everything they can grab and import into it. It was over four decades ago when I first thought to enter my 'maiden' name in biographical notes (it had been replaced by a 'married' name in 1920); but not until fairly recent time did the fact become a scoop for Jewish Studies sleuths, Jewish-identity cultivators, connoisseurs, creators. The fictiveness of such identity-ideology releases its practitioners from all the discretions of scholarly and critical care in their seizing upon subjects for absorption into their proprietary systems. I did not supply record of the name to signal 'I am Jewish.' I am, in family-line make-up, three parts Jewish. But I was not brought up in accordance with Jewish customs, practices, religious beliefs, nor did I follow my father's course of making socialism a faith. Friedlander's use of Jewish-themes cookery gadgets to pick up my conception of the nature of poetry, and my dedication to truth as an end for a real kosher dish with which to flout the stylish repugnant concoctions of Pound, or Riefenstahl, is make-believe literary insight concerning myself and my motivations, doings, writings, of the extreme in nonsensicality—there is no lack of material with which to compare it.

There is a ghastly indifference to actuality in Mr. Friedlander's imagining me as provoked in 1939 by the war to turn away from poetry, and in his identifying several poems as profoundly steeped in backgrounds of Hebraic thought, and in his associating the emotional and intellectual constitution of my 'best' poems with the characteristic mood and mind of "the Jews of the Diaspora." I renounced poetry in the early forties, not because "war must have made art seem all the more corruptible to Riding" but because of a long-developing appreciation of the human need of more knowledge of the potentialities of language than of more poetry. I did not renounce poetry as 'art;' I renounced it as the Way language really opened. This Way I came to see to be an identity of life and word, self and language, mind and meaning, that made poetry a vision of the unities, not lived, spoken, unity of being. Jewish themes? Homelessness? Jews of the Diaspora . . . ? When I was an undergraduate at Cornell University, I had some friends among graduate students. Harry Kaplan, then an instructor, later a noted classical scholar, was one of these. He delighted in knowing who among the famed were Jewish, but boyishly. He also delighted in Jewish jokes, in very adult appreciation of their balancedness between fun and gloom. The most unforgettable has been about the man who urges his friend to marry. "You can't guess how wonderful it is," he said. "You come home from work, tired. Your wife greets you enthusiastically. There are the good odors from the ready meal. Your slippers await you. "Make yourself comfortable," she urges. She talks. She loves to talk. Oh, how she loves to talk. Oh, oh—on and on it goes. Talking—oh, oh, cholera's horrors, the talking!" Here, the friend, who

began recommending marriage, clutches his head in crisis-emotion. The trouble with Mr. Friedlander is, he uses talk to fill a void, he makes a void with talk. And this holds for Mr. Charles Bernstein also. Pound, in the *Cantos*, was speeding along on the waters of Jewishness in his phallic neat little fascist motor-boat. As to Eliot, oh, dear, how you specialize the identity of one who over-generalizes! And isn't that the same as over-specializing? And, anyhow, how to fit Stein, and so on and on to Riding, into the neat generalization American modernist as against European modernist? Where are we? You are talking yourselves out of confusion into confusion.

LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON

PS to the Editor:

I did not feel moved to refer in particular depth to the case of Pound. What you call my 'quip' covers, for me, the "perceptive" force of the combined Bernstein-Friedlander characterization of the Pound phenomenon as humanly discreditable while literarily and culturally creditable, with the indeterminate qualification as to the credit side that the intellectual and cultural sources of the poetry were full of admixture of Jewish enlightenment. I consider the case of Pound the poet best handable in terms of the role he cast for himself as poetry-expert. He used the touch of a roughneck with the muscle behind it of scholarly authority. In every other field of activity in which he engaged, he assumed the role of expert, and used, alike, the roughneck touch, reinforced by much confident shoulder-play. But roughhouse is no excuse for roughhouse. And literary criticism directed from special bloc-identity ideological positions is roughhouse. My 'quip' describes the roughhouse of Jewishness-ideology wielded as critical treatment of Pound that has some bristling manifestation in certain areas of Sulfur #13. I have no tenderness in Pound's regard, in his poet-role. But I dislike the roughhouse of the lumped position acting the part of literary criticism—especially where it is visited upon work of mine as a form of love.

L (R) J.

INTERNAL RESISTANCES: THE POETRY OF EDWARD DORN
ed. Donald Wesling. (Berkeley: U. Cal Press, 1985), cloth.

Internal Resistances is a rescue operation of an elusive poet from unfortunate obscurity by six good, willing scholars, all of them carefully hand-

picked to represent in some way or another a West Coast allegiance. The intention of so doing is to try to bring off a critical deliverance of America's least known postmodern, Ed Dorn. Each essay is a conference with the critic, a look into his own mind and feelings as we all sway together over the night roads on the way to the jungle. An air of sincere concern pervades this little book; and no one wants to say he doesn't like Dorn, although an amount of squirming and disinclination can be felt under the text of some writers. Dorn is that ambiguous intelligence of many conflicting works; he says things that no reader can like altogether. He manages to offend *someone* in everything he says, even if the offense is exotic – like contradicting an obscure tenet of the "movement," or of raging against his colleagues, the public, the big "issues."

One Dorn doesn't turn into six in this book, but the facets drawn out by critical discussion do not link up to a *figure*, to a recognizable mentality or character, which is what these writers set out to get. Instead, Donald Wesling shows us the constituent, unassembled elements of a Dorn portrait, among which include song, wit, and pronunciamento – but these things never reach the public without being first filtered through a "comedic center," a sort of dressing room where everything gets into a guise of sarcasm and irony before going public. Wesling seems to suggest in this that the author of a mock-epic on Howard Hughes has some of the same elusive qualities. Robert von Hallberg approaches *Slinger* as a poem with "negative method," in which the referentiality of language is all turned inward, into its own closed system of puns and meaning-rimes, and ignores a collapsed reality outside. The late work (*Hello, La Jolla, Yellow Lola*) has turned "didactic," the opposite way, but these "poems are not particularly deep, nor wise, and few are moving (in a pathetic sense), however unsettling they are." Alan Golding has the regrettable task of defending these later poems in his own chapter, "Dorn's Pontificatory Use of the Art," but carries off the defense remarkably well. Especially well, when we learn that he was von Hallberg's student at the University of Chicago, where he wrote his dissertation on Olson.

Wesling makes a valid point in turning Dorn back to the 18th Century, his favorite period of English literature, where a rough and unsettling sarcasm ruled taste, which, Dorn himself has remarked, created the sensibility of the modern age. Wesling finds Dorn has the mettle to be "unliked," in an age when having the right ideals is a requisite of postmodern strategy. Of course, as many of these authors argue tacitly, under that blistering tongue and ambiguous nature are certainties that are values for life, for expanding consciousness and making things fit. However, the main thrust of the five essays is to find Dorn a prickly, indefinable cluster of attitudes and evasions lacking a demonstrable personality. It is therefore fascinating to find in Paul Dresman's essay, "Internal Resistance: Edward Dorn on the American Indian," a plausible argu-

ment that Dorn did in fact find a way of speaking of Indian culture in America without deluding himself or us. This essay is the one penetrating view of Dorn—that in remaining a white man outside the Indian paideuma, he could vent his feelings freely without slipping into the muck of white guilt or repentance. He could look at their culture with a certain admiration for its ways, and remain clear of its assumptions. In discussing *The Shoshoneans,* Dresman makes the interesting distinction that Dorn's prose carries more depth of analysis and observation than do the photographs of Leroy McLucas, simply because the role of photographer is so obviously the "other" to his subject. Dorn drops his sarcastic, ironic persona long enough to let Dresman portray him as a poet caught between two separate metaphysical systems, the white European tradition that he rejects, the indigenous Indian one he cannot enter. It is the only time Dorn emerges, just barely, out of the cryptic interiors of his own evasive work.

Three of the essays approach the thickets of Dorn's mock-epic, *Slinger,* and without delivering the poem whole and lucid to us, at least make sense of its terrains, its structural components, and a few of its motives, concluding that the detritus they cannot understand is the failed, unresolved portion of the poem. No one wants to claim that there is a consistent "sense" running through the five parts; things within the poem change identity too often to be tracked through it. Von Hallberg's approach to the language of *Slinger* is very good; he performs his specialty, the unraveling of gnarled poetry of the age, with cool assurance and a crisp, perhaps too neat result. One has the feeling at times that von Hallberg sees himself as an expert called in to perform a particular task for hire. He slips into a man's poetry, unties the knots in it—composed of a few data from life, a few preoccupations from past work, a little razzle-dazzle in the words—and poof! *it's gone.* What happened to the poem? Did it get "solved"? Was it a problem to begin with? Not entirely. Von Hallberg usually adds a little interpretative statement at the end of his exfoliations—the poem as a brief, fragmentary shard of the poet's thinking, or of his passing attitude. This is the way of the critical euphemerists, convinced that poetry only arises from the manifest material realms, and that its knots are all in the data one needs to know, not in the ether of spiritual issues or psychological daimons. The master of the mode is Hugh Kenner, but von Hallberg is fast becoming his rival in the brambled fields of verse.

Michael Davidson's "To Eliminate the Draw" is an attempt to show that *Slinger* "is as profound" as *The Maximus Poems* "in uncovering the cycles of greed and acquisition" in America. If *Slinger* is to be made the equal of Olson's poem, the comparison should be based on techniques—for that is the salient thing in both poems, not their subjects and themes. With this dubious goal put at the outset, one has little heart to follow Davidson on the trek. But he ignores his own goal and goes into the poem with care and insight, and turns up all sorts of things that are helpful in

appreciating *Slinger*. As von Hallberg remarked in his own essay "This Marvellous Accidentalism," *Slinger* is, ho hum, another quest poem in a crowded century, but Davidson throws together the ingredients of the poem and comes up with an identification that works—it is an ironic allegory, a near-epic, since it has all the picaresque furniture of one (journeys, heroes, villains, magical properties), but Davidson then shows that the set terms are new and different from the generic past—they are entirely plastic, altogether unfixed in time and space, unless one puts up the widest possible parameters of say the entire sense of the West and the entire time of its origins and history. Everything comes unglued in the poem, like a junk store whirling in space, and no one thing seems to remain itself for long. Davidson identifies the poem as the central testament of the drugged 60's and of the Viet-Nam war. Its books, he tells us, are written around different drugs: "the first to marijuana, the second to LSD, the third and fourth to cocaine." And because these substances alter perception, the poem breaks with Olson's principle of space as the primal influence on American life, and prefers time as "more fundamental." It's a little like asking which one is bigger, but the "states" of mind of the various books would justify this preference of bearing, I should think, since it is the more easily dissociated from sequence of the two. And Davidson has good philosophical credentials in this piece—for he next turns to a discussion of one of the oldest rhubarbs of the century: "is one's domain an empirical fact or a phenomenological projection?" Increasingly the answer comes back, both. And this poem testifies accordingly, showing that by the second half of the century the separate stances of American poetics have been bound together: empirical imagism, phenomenological symbolism. Dorn, however, dismisses the notion of phenomenology as a piece out of Cartesian dualism, and would prefer the generously holistic notion of a "cosmology" instead.

William Lockwood's "Art Arising to Clarity" leaves me a little puzzled on what he is insisting. He is disagreeing with Davidson and with Wesling, but that hardly matters in a book where consensus turns on a few details anyway. I have the feeling Lockwood doesn't want to be preempted on his own remarks, which actually corroborate some by his colleagues, in different tongues, but being in the middle of an essay book is a tough position for anyone, and Lockwood does what he can to distinguish himself. But reading him is like driving with the air bag inflated; one cannot get by a style of many circumspections, deviations, syntactical Christmas trees, to find Dorn. The prose is a thick lens of many dents and scratches indeed, and Dorn, though out there somewhere in the brush, is difficult to spot. "In general, I submit, wit increases the elasticity of *Slinger*," Lockwood says, but is this a secret to be whispered? Is it important? Should it launch a two-page paragraph to substantiate? And then Lockwood surfaces with another principle: "rigid stasis" versus "easy

dynamics." Is this anything like the fits and starts of most long poems? If so, was it worth the redundant categories here? Mercifully, the thought is not investigated for long and we can move on to other descriptive passages that ramble on about *Slinger's* terrain. Lockwood's is the longest essay in the book, and it goes by patches and locked sentences to its end, more or less rephrasing what has already been said: that Dorn is parodic, sarcastic, witty, evasive, difficult.

Alan Golding makes hay of the epigrammatic intensity of the late books of poetry, the ones nobody reads or reviews: *Hello, La Jolla, Yellow Lola*. He's puzzled why this poetry has attracted so few buyers, and even suggests as his opener that these are not "poems" but rather barbs for "bumper stickers." But Golding makes the case, a good one, that the "inside jokes" of these poems speak to an assumption few poets in America share: Dorn feels himself tuned in to mass culture, so much so that he can comment on things from a slant, and expect that in these things at least he can be understood. Here's a man willingly tuned in to his AM car radio, listening to mass America talk to itself, sing to itself, lull itself to sleep, and Dorn talks back to it in the same ways. So, "bumper stickers" may not be the put down it seems; Dorn is writing squibs for bubble-gum wrappers and TV commercials, Golding submits, and the fact that they wind up in pretty little paperback books, glossy covered, is the wrong medium for their nature. Golding also goes on to make light and truth of Dorn's connection to the 18th Century, as do the others; the epigram, he remarks, is the universal form of the poets then, and of Dorn as well. And in it one talks to society, one writes the caustic riposte to social life, joins in the fray, throws a verbal dart into the soft center of things. That's agreeably cogent when one struggles through the poems trying to make them into sonorous little lyrics. They're not, of course, they are aimed at a society that Dorn cannot make his peace with. He snickers, chortles, bristles at life on TV and radio, and in riding around the country jots down his little rebuttals, in the same sort of speech that brought him the news. Little or no artifice, Golding observes, although a scintillating sort of energy (everybody agrees on this) sparks the language into something better. In looking for sources to this mode, Golding makes a wide path around Creeley, who has accumulated a vast body of such miniature verse—not public, occasional things, which Golding says are necessary for epigram—but short, pithy quick-draw poems just as tangled and barbed. Creeley was Dorn's teacher and examiner at Black Mountain, and it seems arbitrary not to link these men up, even if Dorn voiced objections to Creeley's domestic subjects.

But a contentious Dorn still hides out and the critics, noble and patient men, have scared him out of hiding a few times and brought back evidence that he exists. Not one is willing to say that this mercurial intelligence has any comparable form in contemporary writing. Not once

is Thomas Pynchon given a nod, although *Slinger* is very much the poetic equivalent of Pynchon's *V* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. Both writers mock and deride the high-tech system of American culture, and both seem to prophesy doom to humanism and to escape from social illusion or government control. There is no prose tradition to be had in the book; not even Joyce is important as a "context" to Dorn. One or two sentences look askance to William Burroughs, otherwise Dorn belongs to a verse universe, with one root down to the pre-Socratic Parmenides, and another into the 18th Century to sarcasm and vilifications, and the rest all gnarled up under the campus of Black Mountain College. Dorn's a thorn, one critic concluded, having traced the putative etymology of the poet; he's a thorn in everyone's side, but a book like this speaks of a certain kindness and open-mindedness within the academy, to a sympathy that is more the testament to some durable values of the liberal tradition than it is to the powers of capturing certain intractable forces of culture.

PAUL CHRISTENSEN

SEVEN NIGHTS
Jorge Luis Borges, translated by Eliot Weinberger, New Directions, New York, 1984

Seven nights of course comprise a week, but the sense of completion is duplicitous. No lunar quarter exists in isolation from the doggedly uninterruptable movement of time. Literature pursues similar crescendos and decrescendos, and a useful question to ask is, how separate are its individual productions? are they abstractions like a phase of the moon? One man whose entire literary output nags at this question is Jorge Luis Borges.

The *Seven Nights* are seven lectures Borges delivered in Buenos Aires during the summer of 1977. His nearly total blindness required that he compose, retain, and recount each of them by memory. As he turns his mind's eye back to encounter the specific books that have nourished his craft, it is no surprise that an infinitely regressing universe unfolds. That the lecture which acts as a sort of pivot to the series should treat of the *Thousand & One Nights* gives an immediate clue to what Borges is up to.

> . . . for us the word *thousand* is almost synonymous with *infinite*. To say *a thousand nights* is to say infinite nights, countless nights, endless nights. To say *a thousand and one nights* is to add one to infinity. Let us recall a curious English expression: instead of *forever*, they sometimes say *forever and a day*. A day has been added to forever.

You may in the service of beauty, or truth, or anything else, add *one* to infinity. The addition of seven more is preposterous; it simply cannot, will not, increase the total. But can one be preposterous with impunity? Borges thinks one can. He is a man who courts the foolishness of storytelling with such resolution that it has invested him with grandeur. Blindness has added a peculiar sanctity. His stories and poems stand in a disbelieving world as talismans against the personal and cultural annihilation disbelief engenders. The *world of literature* is Borges' world, and in a strange inversion it seems to have modelled itself on one of its own instances—that collection also referred to as *The Arabian Nights.* Literature is nothing if not countless recirculating stories gathered into one boundless tale.

Recall that in the master story which frames the *Arabian Nights* the Sultan has been wretchedly deceived by his wife. In a blindness of fury and pain he vows to sleep each night with a new woman; and that he might never again be so deceived, to slay her in the morning. A slaughter of the land's marriageable girls ensues until Sheherazade demands to become the Sultan's bride for a night. She proceeds on light feet to the bedchamber and begins recounting an unfinished tangle of story. The Sultan stays his hand each morning, increasingly enchanted with what the following night might disclose. This most wrathful man cannot escape the allure of an unfinished fable. A thousand and one nights later Sheherazade bears him a son.

Two implications are here, both of which have consequence for Borges. First, literature is a talisman that guards not only the teller from annihilation, but its sorcery protects everyone in the kingdom, even the unborn. Second, though the book of *Nights* gives an appearance of having reached its conclusion, the nights have not yet passed; will not ever pass; *must* not ever pass. We quit making up stories at our peril.

If the tacit assumption driving the industry of literary criticism is nihilistic, is to pronounce some final adjudication and snap shut forever the covers of the book under consideration, then in these lectures Borges administers the antidote. He is trying to quietly insure that the Sheherazade in each writer will still be around come tomorrow night.

The topics he's chosen to explore are: The Divine Comedy; Nightmares; The Thousand and One Nights; Buddhism; Poetry; The Kabbalah; Blindness. His lectures curiously resemble stories; they are, in fact, stories—stories about literature itself, in which fact and fable intertwine. For Borges, books are not "texts" to be critically plundered by someone who can "finish" them with the diabolical finesse of interpretation; they are animated presences, like our dreams, waking by night to save us from oblivion. Children could listen to Borges' talks without restlessness I believe, because to Borges a talk follows only one impulsion, the bent of a story that needs telling. They presume nothing in the audience besides

an attentive ear and an ardor for anecdote. The man has no surfeit of knowledge he's trying to give away in some oppressive literary potlatch.

In these *Nights* the facts are at times oddly manhandled, I should perhaps say *disfigured*, like presences in a dream. Borges' interpretations are frequently cranky. Some of what he allocates to Buddhism is doctrinally suspect; I know less about Jewish mysticism but suspect certain beliefs he attributes to the Spanish Kabbalists are of his own hatching. However, in the sovereign domain, which belongs to Imagination, heresy lends greater vitality to a tradition than orthodoxy could hope to. Both Buddhism and Kabbalism have developed grandly under the impulsion of what they once condemned as heresy. Borges intuits that in the final analysis, doctrine, however eloquent, won't lend Buddhism, poetry, nightmares or blindness their irrevocable fascination. Anecdotes and apocrypha do.

With the gradual onset of blindness, which he claims began in 1899, the year of his birth, Borges has increasingly resorted to memory. The dramatic moment arrived, he says, in 1955 when he was named director of the National Library in Buenos Aires.

> I had always imagined Paradise as a kind of library. Others think of a garden or of a palace. There I was, the center, in a way, of nine hundred thousand books in various languages, but I found I could barely make out the title pages and the spines.

This is the difference between language and paradise.

Literature is a library comprised of, for all practical purposes, an infinite number of books. The contents of the 1001 volumes continuously contaminate one another. Borges' stories have over the decades persistently located books that no one ever wrote, and misplaced others that might have been written. The world of documented books is equally subject to disfigurement. What we call the *Arabian Nights* are no more Arabian than french kissing is French. An initial set of fables resorted to Persia from India, probably along with bushels of pepper in return—as Marco Polo observed—for fine Arabian horses. Raconteurs in Asia Minor combined some of them, twisted others, added a stock of their own. Several hundred years ago somebody compiled a set group of tales in Cairo, taking them perhaps verbatim from storytellers that dominated the streets after dark. One of the most widely disseminated stories, which surfaces in Alexander Korda's film "The Thief of Bagdad," was very probably forged by Antoine Galland. Galland was an orientalist who translated one of the Cairo renditions into French, introducing it to Paris in 1704 and infecting Europe with incense of the East. Borges evidently relishes such a confusion of tongues, and has now added his own Nights to the lot.

The lectures are done into English by Eliot Weinberger, who has served as Octavio Paz's translator for years. Though I have no access to the original for comparison, Weinberger has conserved the full oral elo-

quence reputation attributes to Borges. The result is an impressive directness of diction, and a disquieting ease with which complicated topics get negotiated. It is, as the Sanskrit poets used to observe, "simple, like the taste of a complex dish."

ANDREW SCHELLING

L.A. IN TIME

Gerry Mulligan the spikey guy who booted the baritone
in L.A. afternoons of ash on the venetians.
And his Chet of length, white drape phrases and early
bop lyric intentions, as if Bix had lived to curl Bird.
In this last-minute music there was more space between
the chairs, the ashtrays, the stripes of light, the tiny
bandbox low tile ceiling stage for looney interruptions,
quotes of your mother's favorite hum, and abracadabras
of All The Things a physics with no zones to plug.
High in a whiskey parturience they doodled on panes
of the early horse, grew thin but standable,
dwelt elaborations on all heights to tune.
Mulligan heard it Lester to Monk, the pretty snake of
laze to the clear box of casement, where pounds
at the tips won't interfere. He angled for the
clearest blend of caught line and held fold,
arrangement in a cut moment, no blurs as the
knee rises. And Chet, he was *so* bent, his
voice sheared higher, his locks curled Deaner,
even a dogface part in a picture, he lullabyed the
orphan boy in barracks khaki, and Time After Time
the teengirls watched his T-shirt shrink, tumbled
at his bell, and I Get Along Without You Very Well
(an ultimate gloss on crewcut Hoagy?). Where now
his smile when last facture dried from his picture?
He found and stood at point of breath all melody
could circle.

These guys drew in a Renaissance sky.
The Densities came later.

Unclutterable provenance. Where vacuum of
the notes not hit outline the ones that are.

A ThinMan's Music. Every time see
where all the four limbs go.

And even the chaos
utter.

23X84
CLARK COOLIDGE

ALLEN GINSBERG, COLLECTED POEMS 1947-1980
Harper & Row, 1984

This *Collected Poems* has apparently not been a success commercially. Its eight hundred pages, its copious notes (complete with extremely informal photographs of Ginsberg, his friends, his gurus) arrive too late to appeal to a cult, and too early to be necessary to a scholarly industry. Perhaps, also, people feel that the best of Ginsberg has long been available; that, like many poets his age, he did not altogether survive the encouragement the 1960's gave to his didacticism and his cult of spontaneity. But the existence of a *Collected Poems* at least provides an occasion to think about the most popular, and least seriously discussed, of important postwar poets.

For me, as for many writers and readers of my generation, *Howl* was the first poem that was News. Its catch-as-catch-can style dragged headlong into poetry that widest sense of "culture"—atomic bombs, "robot apartments," drugs, irregular sex, advertising, the suppression of the Left and its incipient reemergence in aesthetic, or "life-style," disguise—from which Robert Lowell said, in a famous interview, that the poetry of the 1950's was "divorced." The excitement *Howl* produced was altogether different from the excitement of confirmed interiority I got from the *Four Quartets*, or Dylan Thomas, or Rimbaud. It would take years, and a much more complex sense of the intersections of public and private in all poetry than I then had, to see these works from a common perspective.

But Ginsberg's style has at least this much in common with T.S. Eliot's: a new generation of readers understood it almost before they had read it; and yet, thirty years later, we have not finished puzzling out all that

it means or implies. As Karl Shapiro quickly perceived (though with a hostility born of political disagreements in the 1960's), Ginsberg's telegraphic manner is very much a part of the unsolid, fast-driving, media-ridden world it condemns. But the style makes that world, in turn, the mirror-image of what *it* would condemn and Ginsberg would flaunt, the "incarnate gaps in space and time" of drug experience. We fly through both worlds, in the poem, with an exhilaration new to literature:

> who chained themselves to subways for the endless
> ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine
> until the noise of wheels and children brought
> them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered
> bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the
> drear light of Zoo,
> who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's
> floated out and sat through the stale beer afternoon
> in desolate Fugazzi's, listening to the crack of doom
> on the hydrogen jukebox

But could anyone believe that this style—"sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind"—proposed a religious vision wholly separable from comedy and mania? Surely the naivete of words like "holy," "desolate," "kind king" is not altogether unintended? Surely the brilliant juxtaposition of "drear"—stolen less from the Anglo-Saxon, one feels, than from some 18th-Century forger like MacPherson or Chatterton—and "Zoo" is funny? It even makes one think of Norman Mailer's grim fancy—watching hippies in costumes of all epochs at the Pentagon March—that "the past (was) being consumed by the present . . . by nuclear blasts, and blasts into the collective living brain by way of all exploding acids, opiums, whiskies, speeds, and dopes. . . ." Ginsberg's poem is incredibly timely; and for that reason involved in the Gnostic dialectic of an Absolute that is not absent even in the lowest terms of earthly experience, but is subtly degraded even in the highest. This tragicomic dialectic sweeps through the poem, from the "ancient heavenly connection" in the third line to the "starry-spangled shock of mercy" in the next to last.

Marjorie Perloff recently had the courage to point out, in *The American Poetry Review*, that *Howl* is a comic poem in its substance as well—the adolescent posturings and inevitable, self-imposed defeats of its heroes, "who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccessfully, gave up and were forced to open antique stores where they thought they were growing old and cried." Unfortunately, Perloff concludes that no serious political meaning can be attributed to these gestures. I don't think that necessarily follows; in fact, I think that most good political poems ("Easter 1916," for example) somewhere express a limit to the effectiveness of their

heroes and the moral authority of their speakers. Those that do not are not necessarily more serious, simply less realistic, more fanatical. The second and third parts of *Howl* present quite an elaborated politics, derived from William Blake's Prophetic Books. (Some years before, Ginsberg had had an auditory hallucination of Blake reciting "The Sunflower" to him: later, a "Brindaban lady saint" named Srimata Krishnaji would advise him, "take for your guru / William Blake the invisible father of English visions.") To a reader familiar with the Prophetic Books (one can imagine how many such readers existed, and would have taken *Howl* seriously, in the America of 1956), certain key terms—"specter," "the vast stone of war," "the Eternal War," "Moloch" itself—would immediately disclose a whole substructure of assumptions and symbols. Blake, before Ginsberg, had identified the Old Testament idol to whom children were sacrificed with everything in society that is unnecessarily repressive, that releases cruelty under the pretext of moral rigor:

> Molech rejoices thro the Land from Havilah to Shur:
> he rejoices
> In moral law & its severe penalties: loud Shaddai &
> Jehovah
> Thunder above: when they see the Twelve panting Victims
> On the Twelve Stones of Power. . . .

War, for Blake, is human sacrifice: the cruel Superego preying on the repressed portions of the self, projected onto "enemies" (hence Ginsberg: "the vast stone of war"). The "poverty" of this mental condition is indeed "the specter of genius," for "specters," in Blake, are the diminished capabilities of the conscious self when it loses contact with unconscious energies. The specter is particularly the "Reasoning Power" that despises the imagination—as Blake would argue, because of the imagination's hidden erotic component.

Moloch, then, stands for those aspects of the public mind that argue that it is sad but necessary to have hydrogen bombs, because the Russians are so evil, so unlike us; that it is necessary to have laws against homosexuality and marijuana; that political thinking should be "objective," not emotional; that art is at best irrelevant to the serious business of life, at worst corrupting. But more than that, Moloch is a metaphor for the idea that society has an existence as real as that of a living thing, larger than all of us and claiming our loyalty. Moloch is a kind of demonic version of the all-encompassing giant of Williams' *Paterson*:

> Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose
> blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are
> ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo!
> Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!

Because, of course, for Ginsberg and Blake and Williams, the reverse is

true: it is in our authentic, embodied, instinctual selves that we constitute a giant; all institutions are the creations or, more usually, the parodies of our collective imagination. Moloch's "name is the Mind" because Moloch is a state of mind, not an objective reality; if we changed our minds, collectively, he would vanish. (But Moloch's name is the mind also because, in Moloch, we believe that the mind is separate from, and better than, the body—"a consciousness without a body").

Blake's names for the true giant form of our collective humanity are Albion and Jesus. The death and resurrection of Jesus symbolize—among other things—our surrender of our imaginative selves to institutions, and our eventual recovery of them. Ginsberg is nowhere more Blakean than in the gradual predominance of Christian symbolism as *Howl* moves toward its close. Carl Solomon's mental agony becomes a "pilgrimage to a cross in the void"; and the hospital—as the representative of Moloch, of the idea of society as above the individual—becomes the "superhuman tomb" from which the "living human Jesus" must be resurrected. But the Jesus to be resurrected is collective and not merely individual; the "United States," as a body of human beings, is not Moloch but a beloved invalid to whom Solomon and Ginsberg—all the heroes of the poem—extend a self-sacrificing love, as Blake's Los, the figure of the artist, does to Albion:

> I'm with you in Rockland
> where we hug and kiss the United States under
> our bedsheets the United States that coughs all
> night and won't let us sleep
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where we wake up electrified out of the coma
> by our own souls' airplanes roaring over the
> roof they've come to drop angelic bombs the
> hospital illuminates itself imaginary walls
> collapse O skinny legions run outside
> O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal
> war is here O victory forget your underwear
> we're free

"Eternal war" is Blake's term for the inward Apocalypse, the violence of full awareness, in which all fictitious "realities" are reabsorbed into the human powers that originally created them. The eternal terms correct the earthly parodies: bombing raid and shock treatment both become images of Enlightenment. But it is part of the honesty of the poem that it does not end on this note, but on an acknowledgment that no such Apocalypse has occurred; nor are Ginsberg and Solomon united except in dreams, where Solomon arrives "dripping from a sea journey on the highway across America in tears"—a figure of lost wholeness, like the drowned Phoenician sailor in *The Waste Land*.

Ginsberg began his career with a significant addition to the line of

American long poems – besides Eliot's, one thinks of *Leaves of Grass, The Bridge, Paterson* – in which a suffering individual at once reaches out to, instructs, and excoriates the collectivity he believes could heal him, in the act of healing itself. Perhaps it is not surprising that Ginsberg had little new to say about public matters thereafter. *Collected Poems* ends with a particularly dispiriting piece of doggerel called "Capitol Air":

> Truth may be hard to find but Falsehood's easy
> Read between the lines our Imperialism is sleazy
> But if you think the People's State is your Heart's Desire
> Jump right back in the frying pan from the fire

Almost exactly in the middle – chronologically, and in terms of poetic merit – falls the celebrated Vietnam poem "Wichita Vortex Sutra." The white magic ("I here declare the end of the War!") and the reductive sexual interpretations of American leaders are a disappointment after the Gnostic tensions of *Howl.* Yet the sheer accumulation of Midwestern detail draws a complex connection between the America Ginsberg, Melville, and Whitman have loved – its distances, its loneliness, its rash confidence – and the terrible abstraction of war:

> Here's Marysville –
> a black railroad engine in the children's park,
> at rest –
> and the Track Crossing
> with Cotton Belt flatcars
> carrying autos west from Dallas
> Delaware & Hudson gondolas filled with power stuff –
> a line of boxcars far east as the eye can see
> carrying battle goods to cross the Rockies
> into the hands of rich longshoremen loading
> ships on the Pacific –
> Oakland Army terminal lights
> blue illumined all night now –

After so much love, Ginsberg can never quite fall back into the hectoring, self-righteous tone that afflicts the anti-war poems of Duncan, Bly, Levertov, and Merwin. Rather, his poem reminds me of the greatest of Vietnam poems, Robert Lowell's "Waking Early Sunday Morning," with the complex connections it draws between Lowell's own mania, suburban American restlessness, and Lyndon Johnson's crusade.

Once the sterile distinctions of "academic" and "anti-academic" are set aside, Lowell is the contemporary with whom it makes most sense to compare Ginsberg, for scope and intensity. Both brought a hitherto forbidden intimacy, of madness and family secrets, into poetry. Both built their mature styles around William Carlos Williams' "No ideas but in things," though both began with the wish to be lofty iambic poet-prophets,

in the line of Blake and Hart Crane. Both *were* poet-prophets, treating all politics as psycho-politics, and regarding their knowledge of the undersides of their own characters as a powerful weapon against the false dignity and "objectivity" of official America. Between them, they define the intellectual and moral achievement of the 1960's more completely than any other two writers. Lowell's more perfectionist aesthetic enabled him to write more great poems, after the initial burst of youthful self-discovery, than Ginsberg has. But a more interesting difference (though hardly a matter for positive or negative evaluation) lies in the tone, the sensibility, with which they approach intimate personal experience. Lowell is a deeply Protestant writer. His attitude toward himself (clearer in *Day by Day* than in the more distanced, novelistic *Life Studies*) moves from a terribly harsh self-judgment, through a stab at self-forgiveness through humor, to that indefinable releasing calm – that surrender of the self to general fate – that runs through Northern European mystics from Boehme to Jung. In a late poem, he writes to his son:

> Past fifty, we learn with surprise and a sense
> of suicidal absolution
> that what we intended and failed
> could never have happened –
> and must be done better.

Ginsberg's tone, by contrast, is a traditionally Jewish one. His darkest emotion is not self-hatred, but a grief as boundless as the possibilities of exile in this world. In one of his late poems, he pictures his father's funeral:

> in B'Nai Israel Cemetery behind a green painted iron fence
> where there used to be a paint factory and farms
> where Pennick makes chemicals now
> under the Penn Central power Station
> transformers & wires, at the borderline
> between Elizabeth and Newark, next to Aunt Rose
> Gaidemack, near Uncle Harry Meltzer
> one grave over from Abe's wife Anna my father'll be buried

(Even the line-break "Aunt Rose / Gaidemack" is an exile: Ginsberg trusts us to remember a poignant early poem of his called simply "Aunt Rose" – and then to laugh at the ungainly German-Jewish last name.) Humor doesn't solve anything; but for Ginsberg, more than for Lowell, it is humor, not vision or mere endurance, that keeps one going, moment to moment to moment:

> What's to be done about Death?
> Nothing, nothing
> Stop going to school No. 6 Paterson, N.J., in 1937?
> Freeze time tonight, with a headache, at quarter to
> 2 A.M.?

This voice remains powerful and fertile in Ginsberg's work longer than the visionary or public voice, so that one can read the two poems called "Don't Grow Old," or " 'Drive All Blames into One,' " with a rueful pleasure one doesn't get from "Capitol Air." (Here again there is a parallel with Lowell, who never quite repeated the achievement of "Waking Early Sunday Morning," but went beyond his own earlier personal poetry in the strange tonalities of *The Dolphin* and *Day by Day*.)

But I feel I have oversimplified Ginsberg's sensibility a little, and must conclude by correcting this, in order to do justice to his greatest personal and religious poem, *Kaddish*. Ginsberg is a Buddhist as well as a Jew, and for a Buddhist loss is always in some sense to be welcomed—it foreshadows release from the Wheel of Illusion. It is when one feels the two impulses pulling against each other—the Jewish suspicion of reassurances beyond the bounds of this life, the Buddhist intuition that if one accepts nothingness it will reveal an other face of incommunicable radiance—that Ginsberg's mystical discourse acquires a dignity, and a searching, qualifying exactness, quite free of the (inimitable and wonderful) self-parodying elements of *Howl*. One hears this in "My Sad Self," and in the glorious opening movement of *Kaddish*:

No more to say, and nothing to weep for but the
  Beings in the Dream, trapped in its disappearance,
sighing, screaming with it, buying and selling pieces
  of phantom, worshipping each other,
worshipping the God included in it all—longing or
  inevitability?—while it lasts, a Vision—anything
  more?
It leaps about me, as I go out and walk the street,
  look back over my shoulder, Seventh Avenue, the
  battlements of window office buildings shouldering
  each other high, under a cloud, tall as the sky
  an instant—and the sky above—an old blue place.
or down the Avenue to the south, to—as I walk toward
  the Lower East Side—where you walked 50 years ago,
  little girl—from Russia, eating the first poisonous
  tomatoes of American—frightened on the dock—
then struggling in the crowds of Orchard Street toward
  what?—toward Newark—
toward candy store, first home-made sodas of the century,
  hand-churned ice cream in backroom on musty brownfloor
  boards—
Toward education marriage nervous breakdown, operation,
  teaching school, and learning to be mad, in a dream—
  what is this life?
Toward the Key in the window—and the great Key lays its
  head of light on top of Manhattan, and over the floor,

and lays down on the sidewalk—in a single vast beam,
moving, as I walk down First toward the Yiddish
Theater—and the place of poverty
you knew, and I know, but without caring now—Strange
to have moved thru Paterson, and the West, and
Europe and here again,
with the cries of Spaniards now in the doorstoops doors
and dark boys on the street, fire escapes old as you
—Tho you're not old now, that's left here with me—
Myself, anyhow, maybe as old as the universe—and
I guess that dies with us—enough to cancel all
that comes—What came is gone forever every time—
That's good! That leaves it open for no regret—no
fear radiators, lacklove, torture even toothache
in the end—
Though while it comes it is a lion that eats the soul—
and the lamb, the soul, in us, alas, offering itself
in sacrifice to change's fierce hunger—

This is disarmingly simple, and at the same time masterly, in the way the heartbreakingly speeded-up announcement of the poem's argument—the life and disintegration of Naomi Ginsberg—weaves into and out of the speculations on the value of life itself, and the wry musings ("Tho you're not old now, that's left here with me") build to the Biblical moment of the surrender to the lion. One could point out incidental beauties ("brownfloor boards" instead of "brown floorboards," or the way the "great Key" of sunlight, just before it might become portentous, metamorphoses into the spotlight of the Yiddish Theater, the local specifics of illusion). But mainly, this is like one of those passages in Whitman or late Williams that feel so unaffectedly serious and personal that anything could be said, and everything would fall out right. Even *Kaddish* does not remain at this level throughout: two pages later, we get this weird mixture of genuine magic and pseudo-Dylan Thomas: "Magnificent, mourned no more, marred of heart, mind behind, married dreamed, mortal changed—Ass and face done with murder." In a way the whole of the poet is in that line: the cult of spontaneity that leads him to leave in overly literary, as well as overly drab, first thoughts; and then, in the last six words, the greatness—the quality of the utterly unexpected—that makes him, with all his faults, the Whitman or Williams of our day.

ALAN WILLIAMSON

AT THE WESTERN GATES
Nathaniel Tarn, Santa Fe: Tooth of Time Books, 1985
THE DESERT MOTHERS
Nathaniel Tarn, Grenada, Mississippi: Salt-Works Press, 1984

It is a commonplace of the large, historical view of poetry that individual poets in this century have been compelled to discover or create a world-picture to replace the inexorably eroded and ultimately lost image of the world and everything in it commonly held in the past. After the affront to our cosmic narcissism wrought by the revolutions initiated by Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud in the way we think about the universe and our place in it, poets, like their philosophical and scientific analogues, have tried to apprehend and reinstate some principle that makes it all hang together, to discover in some form or other what Karl Jaspers called "the Grand Reason" by which to save ourselves and our art. We have learned to accept this dimension of every worthwhile poet's enterprise, this need to find a great design and an individual place in it as a condition of artistic productivity. The convention of the invocation has almost disappeared, but the need to begin a poem with some assurance it is attachable to a coherence prior to and greater than itself abides.

That the poems of Nathaniel Tarn since early in his career have been directed towards an awareness of a greater world is attested by the work itself as well as by his own observation that "you really do form a world-model, a cosmic model, for yourself, which then localize or universalize according to your need" ("An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn," *Boundary 2*, IV, 1975, 6). Tarn's ability to combine his emotional intensity and notable intellectual breadth—he is a man for whom learning is meant to serve the special knowing of art—gives his poems their singular immediacy and reference. The urgency with which he begins the record of one of his wide-ranging interests or experiences fuels the movement outward to ends that exceed and subsume the personal reflexiveness that provides a starting-point. This can be nicely illustrated by a small, mid-career book of twenty love poems with the telling title *The Microcosm* (Milwaukee: Membrane Press, 1977). Characterized by a delicacy and directness of statement to the beloved that is laced with geographic and mythological allusions, the lyrics progress as if drawn by a gravitational force to a perception of their love that acknowledges the earth and universe as its only meaningful setting. By the closing lines of the final and title poem of the book, the love has been subtly reduced to a term in a simile but its value appreciated by its metaphorical integration into a vision of the planet and galaxy:

> between tree fingers
> a telescope achieves the sky
> quietly like a confident husband

and at the climax of the firmament
ringed with a crown from another sphere
Saturn alone is spinning on itself

in the wavering summer light

The Microcosm reveals an important, if not primary, way in which Tarn the poet thinks. *At the Western Gates*, with its double suggestion of heading for a new entrance and an exit, is a more complex continuation and fulfillment of this impulse to compose poems that fit and form recognitions of a macrocosm. He strives for an epic vision through a variety of mainly lyric sequences that pull together, in every sense you can think of, to achieve it. While no one poem, Shield of Achilles-like, unfolds a full cosmic vision, the entire book, with its five divisions that treat specific yet overlapping matters, yields a great though necessarily only partially completed image of an order. These matters, to which veteran readers of Tarn are accustomed, derive from his manifold experiences as anthropologist, archaeologist, comparatist, linguist, naturalist and explain the plenitude of vivid detail in the earth, air, and waters of his world. As the last poem of the first section, "Journal of the Laguna de San Ignacio," neatly shows, the learning and experience are contained and controlled by an artist with a vision and an ear for verbal intricacy and balance.

"Perhaps it is not the sea
we have witnessed
raising these whales
to the power of air
and downing them again to depths
unheard of in the history of water—
perhaps it is the sky,
even paradise,
and these are the heavenly animals
with wings of wind and music
who have laid their image
on all earthly souls
(since nothing is forgotten.)"
Father, the gate is open
he declared on landing.
Wrote on that desk
and in that book they say
that was the oldest in the library
within the belly of the whale:
"these are the animals
the ancient men,
blind leading blind,
in the old days, on the old ships

with perfumed masts,
hearing the music of the sirens
thought to be angels . . ."
(p. 14)

The whale-watching theme, which is dominant in this section and major throughout the volume, presents the discovery of what may always have been the true microcosm, and *homo*, if no longer *microcosmus*, has been raised to a new level of *fabricator*, finding himself through and in his work.

"Another sorrow.
One more defeat.
Another death.
The sea's outside,
distant waves
breathe in all sounds.
Suddenly I meet the beauty of my poems
whom I had never seen bridal before.
I live with them as man and wife
outmarried by death only.
There is no other house"
(p. 22)

Always a powerful presence in his work, the beloved is introduced early in the book and gives us a moment of special humor when the poet posits the need for the other marriage through and in which a man finds himself.

Vagaries of the sea life.
My bunk is so short
I need to lose head or feet
and its sky is so low
I have to be fitted into it
like a dime into a slot machine.
If you come into the cabin
you break my back,
if I come in, I break yours.
We have bruised elbows.
Nowhere to sit and read,
the lights don't work.
Water floods in the basin.
And how the hell we get to fuck in here
is any circus animal's guess
(p. 6)

With the deceptive ease of its amusing contrast between the severely constricted cabin space for human fucking (man and woman, circus animals themselves, will no doubt find a way) and the unbounded eros-in-the-sea enjoyed by the whales, the poem still establishes a place for the lovers

in the larger scheme of things. This lovers' place is explored with poignancy in part five, "North Rim," where the poet muses on and observes his beloved in poems that also chart a course through the Bering Sea to Japan's Hokkaido. This northern, exotic setting is remarkably evoked by a number of the poems in this part of the book, but its heart ("But the whole of creation is in question," p. 25) lies in the middle section, "Jonah's Saddle," in the compact between the song of nature and the poet's own coincident nature to sing it – "The world has voice in us, we are the crust of its imagination" (*Atitlan/Alashka*, Boulder: Brillig Works, 1975, p. 155).

SIX

What is NOT song?
What will dare
        NOT become song?
Will grass
        refuse to become song?
Will flowers?
                Will fiish
not become song
making a speech in poetry?
(leave us *one* song to ourselves
        they might say
and give us all *your* poetry!)
Will the animals
        not become song?
What will pack-rat do,
red rattlesnake,
fox on the desert's edges;
will they refuse to become song?
  And what will deer do –
will they shy away from song
        and hide among thickets
on the other side of the lagoon?
                And the whale,
as long as the wall of China,
        will the whale herself
not become song?
                (p. 28)

It is this unity, the knowledge of its possibility, that enables the poet and those that follow him through the poem/song finally to enter "the order of ideal time." The sense of Dantean stasis, of rest, achieved at the end of Tarn's journey conveys the experience of being admitted to that order,

Rain swallow,
    ama tsubame,

busy time's scythe
    but far faster
slices the air
    above Teuri:
        black knife
through a grey rainbow
made of delicate cloud.
At the busy hour of birds
        all of a sudden
life is tolerable again,
the birds hone to sharpness
        our remembering
that we have never travelled before,
        will not travel again,
are not travelling now.
(p. 68)

and depends on the cumulative effect of all of the poems that precede it for the measure and substance of its simply stated grandeur. It has been particularly prepared for by the poem "Palenque," in which Tarn pays tribute to one of his culture heroes, Denis Puleston, who asked "Let the order of ideal time/ be asserted and let me/ be at the center in the/ fire which is still/ and does not consume" (p. 31).

The poems in *The Desert Mothers*, on the other hand, are unified in their emphasis on Tarn's citizenship in the community of poets and artistic innovators. Like "Palenque," many of the poems in *The Desert Mothers* spring from the poet's profound interest and involvement in the lives and work of others. Whether meditating on flight (that "dreampath") and taking off from an epigraph from Hölderlin, mourning the life and death while honoring and defining the work of German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, transferring the questing Peredur, the medieval Welsh version of the grail seeking Perceval, into a modern, southwestern setting, assaulting the polluters of our water and politics, and responding to the inspiration he has found in the works of friends, these poems are linked by the deep concern and stubborn hope for the failing city of man. Their ultimate effect is to nurture rather than to put down or mock. They are the stands taken by the "desert mothers" of the desolate city against despair, just as their desert forefathers withstood a different manifestation of the dark-voiced negator. Tarn has for some time recognized and tapped his own feminine/maternal sources. "We have been/ from band to band of the desert/ and the woman inside me/ is alone speaking," he writes in one of the poems in *At the Western Gates* (p. 23). This voice is heard in both books and draws upon, is attuned to, the saving song of nature. But Tarn will not fall into the trap he himself was warned against: "Speaking for nature so vociferously that all relevance to the present, despairing city is virtually excluded" ("Fresh Frozen Fenix," *New*

Literary History, XVI, 1985, 425). The end is not just communion with nature for one, the end is to revive the human community with its *dynamis*. How *At the Western Gates* and *The Desert Mothers* complement each other may be shown in a number of ways, but none better than this:

PEREDUR WEST

Smell of the desert
before the sun eliminates all shadows:
the rider who would not write us down
as if we had not lived
  breathes it in completely
    entering the canyon
his lungs awash with childhood perfumes.
  Westwards he moves, his right hand held
  by the invisible daughter of the earth.
Motherwards he moves, back to his homeland,
the lady leading him has promised it:
  he grants her trust implicitly.
  Recites the names of the first landowners
  bringing a map to life that had been lost
  since the disaster he alone survived.
                She leads him to a fountain
in the canyon's heart
  which they had tried to quench in the old days
but the fountain sang a wound
  and never could be quenched.
    Star of the Desert, he begins to sing,
    Rose of Sand,
    here I stand at my father's fountain
    and you have left it utterly,
    waters that once sang joyously
    drowning the reason for all tears
    have turned to sand and bones are now
    all my solace day or night.
It is here he begins to write us down,
  here he takes off his leathers
and is dressed in armor like the sun.
Facing the mesas jagged like a saw
with teeth fit for a giant's grinding jaw,
  he now moves further west.
Even so, travel helps the weary poet
  moving a song back to his heart.
Brighter than a thousand suns,
  his father shines against his breastplate,
strikes from his lance
  a thousand shards of light.
    His eyes are put out now,

he writes by touch,
  guiding the quill with his free hand.
Blind I return to my father's land,
  blind, I accept my mother's curdled milk,
blind, I shall write us down with our last ashes.
Poverty, he says, as he enters the mesas,
naming them for the gift he has gotten of God.

GEORGE ECONOMOU

"There is no first or last discourse, and dialogical context knows no limits (it disappears into an unlimited past and in our unlimited future). Even *past* meanings, that is those that have arisen in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (completed once and for all, finished), they will always change (renewing themselves) in the course of the dialogue's subsequent development, and yet to come. At every moment of the dialogue, there are immense and unlimited masses of forgotten meanings, but, in some subsequent moments, as the dialogue moves forward they will return to memory and live in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will celebrate its rebirth. The problem of the great *temporality*."

—Mikhail Bakhtin's last written words
(1974)

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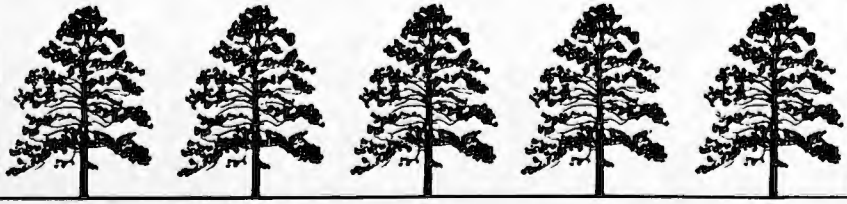

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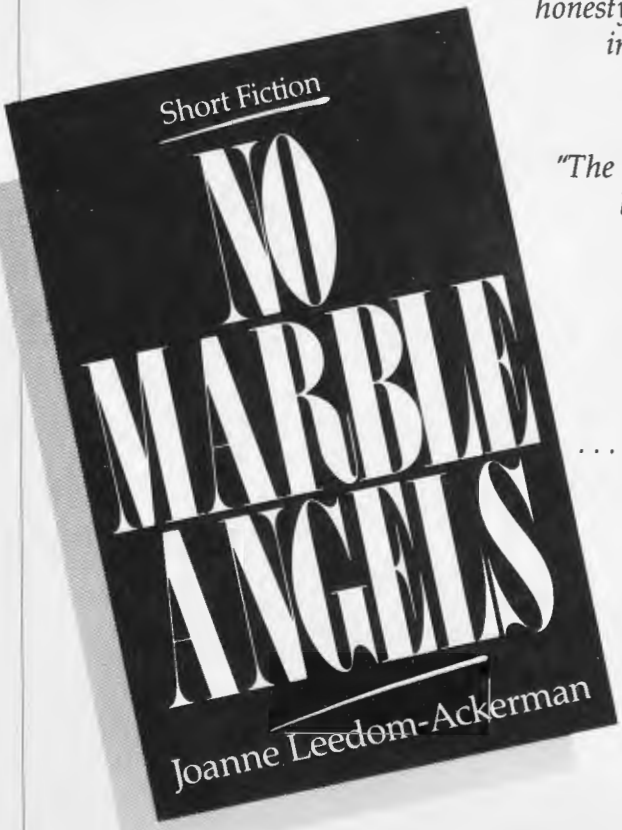

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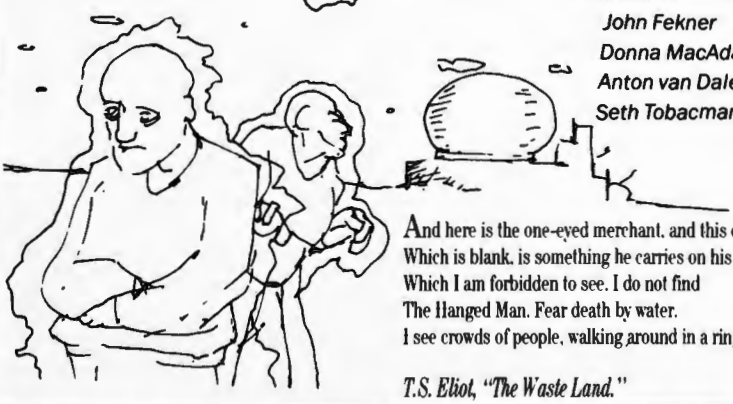

And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking around in a ring.

T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land."

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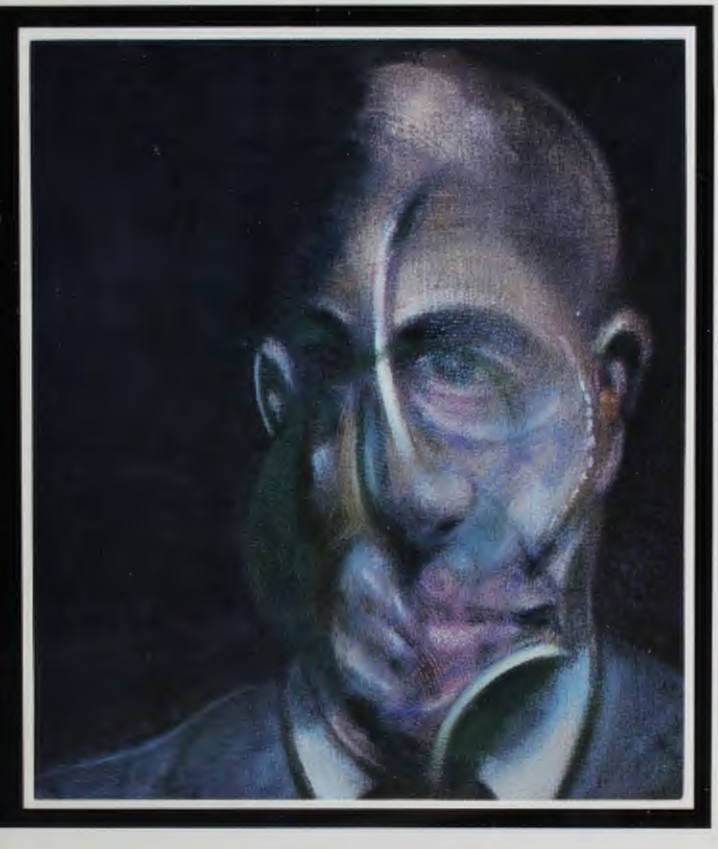

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Sulfur

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Cover: Francis Bacon / **Portrait of Michel Leiris**
Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 inches, Louise and Michel Leiris Collection
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NEW TRANSLATIONS OF MICHEL LEIRIS

Edited by James Clifford, with translations by Clifford, Lydia Davis, Richard Sieburth, Paul Auster, and Michael Haggerty

THE TROPOLOGICAL REALISM OF MICHEL LEIRIS

by James Clifford

OEUVRE—verrou?

Last year Michel Leiris published a supplement to the idiosyncratic dictionary he had begun as a surrealist in the 1920s. *Langage tangage* consists of sixty pages of words with odd definitions followed by a meandering meditation on a lifelong mania for slipping words out of their semantic slots, provoking new senses based on plays of sound or graphic form. The dictionary's first installment appeared in *La Révolution Surréaliste* of 1925. Its title was a sample of the procedure: "Glossaire: j'y serre mes gloses" ("Glossary: I squeeze my glosses there" . . . or perhaps more in the spirit of the game: "Glossary: my glosses' ossuary"). The word to be "defined," *glossaire*, is split in two: the first syllable, "glos," veering toward "glose" (gloss, critique, reflection) while the second, "saire" turns into "serrer" (squeeze, keep, lock up). Recombined as a new definition the troped syllables evoke Leiris's intimate dictionary, a collecting place for poetic turns and punning associations.

Fifty years later *Langage tangage* presses the point. Its title can be heard to say: "Language entangles you" (*Langage t'engage*) while simultaneously equating language with the "pitching" (*tangage*) of a ship or airplane. And if we are engaged, bound, turned and tipped by words, Leiris also suggests we may transgress or divert the official forms and meanings, shapes and articulations. Each displacement of the word "langage" ("tangage," "t'engage") is the result of a single small alteration. The slip of a phoneme or graphic trace is all it takes to start remaking the dictionary, dislodging senses. This latest "supplement" to a lifelong personal

glossary presented by the eighty-five year old Leiris is itself glossed as both a versatile form of divination and as simple tics of the glottis ("Souple mantique et simples tics de glotte—en supplement").

Throughout his career Leiris has been passionately engaged with, lured by language—language as voyage of discovery and entangling web, as pitching vessel of the self and swaying bridge to the others. Certain of his writings, like the *Glossaire* and most of his poems, work in and out of puns and private language: they are virtually impossible to translate. The rest can be approximated in English, and the new translations gathered here give a fairly representative overview of Leiris's large and still-changing oeuvre. Still, it must be said right away that no excerpt can do justice to the painstaking labor of a writer almost literally writing himself into existence—looping through dreams, ideas, memories, current events, the moment of writing . . . searching for a personal universe in a grain of sand, syllable, or snatch of song. This process is best followed at the inimitable slow pace of *La Règle du jeu*, Leiris's four volume, thirty-five-year project that elaborates not an autobiographical "life," but a "savoir vivre," a heightened mode of being and a personal ethic. (*La Règle du jeu*: rule of the game, of the I/*je*.) Only a scrap of this work upon which Leiris's literary reputation rests can be included here, the opening sections from its first volume, *Biffures* (Crossouts). Anglophone readers will have to wait until Lydia Davis's superb translation in progress has been published, by Sun Books. Then they will be able to compare *Biffures* with its immediate precursor *L'Age d'homme* (*Manhood*, translated by Richard Howard and recently reprinted by North Point Press) and thus begin to form an impression of Leiris's elaborate project.

The SULFUR collection includes essays, dreams, ethnography, texts on eroticism, art criticism, and passages from sequels to *La Règle du jeu* (the game continues). The selection and juxtaposition tries to give a sense of a remarkable oeuvre's diversity and process, showing its openness to cultural, historical, and interpersonal influences. For as Edmond Jabès suggests in his meditation on Leiris in Section 4, all committed writing about the self ends in vulnerability before the other. To live intensely through writing, as Leiris does, is to give ultimate power to the reader. There is no security: writing does not settle into stable dialogues. Again and again in the process of writing, Leiris discovers the alienating, exhilarating fact he first confronted as a child: "how articulated language, the arachnean tissue of my relations with others, went beyond me, thrusting its mysterious antennae in all directions." A constant oscillation between "inside" and "outside," self and other, is a constitutive force in Leiris's oeuvre. Though he turns to himself as the only topic he can write about with sincerity, his rule has the effect of expanding the "subjective" terrain to include everything that impinges on and draws out his words: the non-Western cultures he studies as an ethnographer, the political struggles in

which he is involved, the many intense friendships with writers and artists that weave themselves into his writing.

Any representation of an "oeuvre" misses this subjectivity conceived as process rather than product, writing rather than text. The inescapable problem of the autobiographer (who in shaping a "life," misses the actual life of the present) also bedevils any account of a writer's production. In an interview shortly before his death, Michel Foucault reflected on the notion of an oeuvre (he was being asked about his first book on Raymond Roussel): ". . . someone who is a writer does not simply create an oeuvre in books . . . his principal oeuvre is ultimately himself writing these books."[1] An emergent life-in-writing: this is what Leiris strives, through an exemplary series of works, both to analyze and to enact. In the last pages of *Langage tangage* he admits a fondness for his own published books, like a child's attachment to old toys. But he is "almost exclusively concerned with the work underway—the one that shows me I'm still alive, able to line out sentences that more or less stand . . ."

PARADIS—pure idée (ou parodie)

Born in 1901, Leiris grew up in comfortable Parisian bourgeois surroundings. His father was a small banker one of whose clients and friends was the wealthy eccentric, Raymond Roussel. As a child Leiris acquired a lifelong love for the theatre, and particularly for opera, an attachment that shows up everywhere in his writing. Images of theatrical sets, costumes (including his own excessive need to dress "well"), stage fright, and the miraculous art of performance pervade his work. Among the theatre pieces that impressed Leiris as a boy was Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* of 1911–12, a sumptuous and hermetic work of exotica. Later he became friendly with its author who in 1922 was beginning to be appreciated by a few surrealists. In response to a letter praising a much denounced performance of *Locus Solus* Leiris received a note from his father's friend beginning: "Thank you, my dear Michel, for your curious and interesting letter. I see that, like myself, you prefer the realm of Conception to that of Reality."[2]

Leiris had begun the study of chemistry. But he soon came under the spell of Max Jacob, whose dire warnings against the poet's life seem only to have increased the young man's ardor. At the Café Savoyarde in Montmartre a group of dada and surrealist artists and writers regularly dropped in on Jacob, and it was there in 1920 that Leiris met his lifelong friends André Masson and Joan Miró. He became a regular at their studios on the rue Blomet. Masson, particularly, encouraged him to write, providing illustrations for his first texts. Through Miró, Leiris came to know Picasso,

with whom he formed a lifelong attachment. He met also Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the cubists' influential dealer who, a brother-in-law by marriage, would later join the Leiris household. His priceless gallery and collection, having been passed to Leiris and his wife during the Second World War to avoid confiscation as Jewish property, would form the core of the Galérie Louise Leiris, a major art institution in the postwar period. For many years Kahnweiler and the Leirises shared a large apartment on the Seine near Pont Neuf.

Through Masson, Leiris joined the surrealist group, while keeping a certain distance from its center, Breton, Eluard, Soupault, and Co. (Leiris has always been peripheral in organizations, while remaining intensely loyal to friends.) In 1925, rather uncharacteristically, he became a momentary hero at the famous surrealist banquet for Saint Pol Roux, shouting anti-imperialist speeches from an upstairs window, then descending into a hostile crowd where he was arrested and manhandled by the police.[3] But such public displays of correct surrealist behavior were rare. During the twenties, Leiris concerned himself with poetry and with testing the limits of his own unsettled desires. A world of sexual obsessions, fetishes, brothels, and wild night-life is evoked with a kind of numb lyricism in *Manhood*. As a good surrealist Leiris recorded his dreams, and experimented with automatic writing. He started his *Glossaire* and wrote three more or less surrealist "narratives": *Le point cardinal, Grande fuite de neige*, and *Aurora*. These oneiric sequences pursued the metamorphoses of names and phrases, masks of a fragmented self fetishistically viewed as a "rendezvous of body parts." The influence of Nerval is evident, as is a magical or alchemical view of language derived from a variety of occult and exotic sources.

Beside these surreal fictions based on dream materials Leiris kept rather deadpan records of actual dreams, seen not as occult revelations but as waking *writing*. These were collected in 1945 and augmented in 1961 under the title *Nuits sans nuit et quelques jours sans jour* (*Nights as Day, Days as Night*). As Richard Sieburth nicely brings out in his selection and introduction below, Leiris's distinctive attitude toward dreams rhymes with his growing suspicion of the exotic. Avoiding the fabulous dream constructions of many other surrealists he cultivates a lucid, almost "objective," attention to (oneiric) dailiness.

Leiris was among the early defectors from surrealism during the schisms of the late twenties. By 1929 he had left the fold, along with Artaud, Queneau, and another close friend and important collaborator, Georges Bataille. The two struck a sympathetic chord when they met in 1924, and over the next two decades they pursued complementary research into the themes of transgression, sacrifice, the sacred, pollution, and various forms of *gaucherie*. They dedicated to one another their most important books on sexuality: *L'érotisme* (*Death and Sensuality*) and

Manhood. In the twenties both were exoticists, seeking among the Aztecs (Bataille) and in Africa (Leiris) alternatives to the reigning idealism of Western "Civilization."

In the twenties, jazz offered a source of revelation closer to home. Leiris, like many of his generation, found its apparently unchained rhythm and sheer theatrical presence irresistible. (See Section 5, below.) Raymond Roussel was wrong to say that he preferred the realm of "Conception" to that of "Reality." In fact Leiris was torn between the two poles and his life's work has been an endless, imperfect attempt to bridge the gap. A deep longing for human "contact," for "real" experience and erotic gratification, was continually blocked by a feeling of futility—an acute awareness of being condemned to a world of projected phantasms and simulacra, abstract, ideal substitutes for the objects of his desire. Leiris did not, like Roussel, respond by inhabiting a world of pure conception, submitting to strict protocols of composition and working only with their effects. While he shared Roussel's taste for the divinatory manipulation of language and like Bataille believed there could be no freedom apart from rules and constraints, Leiris continued to press "through" the screens that seemed always to separate him from life. He had married in 1926, a liaison often fraught with ambivalence. (But the marriage has endured for sixty years.) In 1929, feeling aimless and severely depressed, he entered psychoanalysis which he pursued until 1931. Then he bolted for Africa. Perhaps he could find there the direct human contact, the "freshness," lacking in a corrupt Europe.

During 1929 and 30 Leiris collaborated on a dissident surrealist journal edited by Bataille that combined art, cultural criticism and ethnography.[4] *Documents* brought him into contact with ethnologists like Marcel Griaule, Paul Rivet, and Georges-Henri Rivière (Leiris's chief contact with the Parisian world of jazz, who would, with Rivet, play a crucial role in reorganizing France's ethnographic and folklore collections). Griaule was busy with preparations for a flamboyant museum-collecting and ethnographic expedition across the sub-Saharan rim. He offered Leiris a place on the "Mission Dakar-Djibouti." Leiris jumped at the chance, and his experience during almost two years of fieldwork was recorded in an extraordinary journal, *L'Afrique fantôme.* Two excerpts are translated in Sections 1 and 2 below, from the expedition's most important stopping places, the Dogon settlement of Sanga (in what was then the French Sudan) and Gondar, Ethiopia.

The author of *L'Afrique fantôme* sums up what he found in Africa: "Few adventures, research that initially excites him, but soon reveals itself too inhuman to be satisfying, an increased erotic obsession, an emotional void of growing proportions. Despite his distaste for civilized people and for the life of metropolitan cities, by the end of his journey he yearns for the return."[5] The experience throws Leiris back on himself. There is no

escape, no authentic contact with Africa, only exotic phantoms. Finally, in the midst of studying a possession cult in Ethiopia he blurts: "I would rather be possessed than study possessed people!"[6] He returns to Europe and to what J.-B. Pontalis has called his "interminable psychoanalysis," an attempt no longer to escape but rather—something slightly different from psychoanalysis—to account for himself in writing.[7] *L'Afrique fantôme*, published in 1933, initiated Leiris's long, linked project of self-portraiture and analysis. During the mid-thirties he composed his perverse *Bildungsgeschichte*, a "Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility," *Manhood*. At the same time he maintained his participation in social science, as always from the margins, attending seminars by Marcel Mauss and Maurice Leenhardt, publishing articles on his African research, and working, on and off, on his thesis, *La langue secrète des Dogon*.

RHÉTORIQUE—érotique

Leiris continued to cultivate an "ethnographic" attitude. But the "other," or a sense of difference, was no longer sought in a place of romantic escape or in a discrete object of scientific research. Rather, it was the product of a peculiar *attention* to what was close at hand. Writing of Raymond Queneau, another friend and dissident surrealist, Leiris describes the attitude in question:

> Raymond Queneau usually works at ground level as a prose writer, less as someone enamoured of the *elsewhere* than as an imaginative stroller on the paths and detours of the most down to earth reality which—an artist but without idealist tendencies—he shifts and unhinges in a way that makes it lose nothing of its immediacy. Instead of travelling in search of exoticism, scarcely knowing where we are, isn't it better to alter (distance, exoticize) what is nearby and that we know all too well? In sum, inverse the movement in a counter-exotic fashion—no longer depart from familiar shores for strange lands, but make the familiar suddenly swerve toward the strange. An operation whose instrument is language . . .[8]

But unlike Queneau—ethnographer/oneirographer of the suburbs—Leiris still felt the pull of non-Western realities. He remained deeply suspicious of Eurocentrism. Ethnographic work would still take him to Africa, and to the Caribbean—this time without illusions of escape. But it was only after World War II, with anti-colonial movements, that he was drawn again away from home.

In the late thirties he turned his attention to the near at hand, founding, with Bataille and Roger Caillois, a maverick and short-lived institution, the Collège de Sociologie.[9] This alternative to academic social science

attempted to bring "exotic" topics, like sacrifice and the sacred, to bear on present actuality. Leiris's own chief contribution to the Collège (before resigning because of qualms about loose standards of evidence and the danger of founding a coterie) was an essay on "The Sacred in Everyday Life." In this transitional text, soon to appear in English translation,[10] many of the topics later taken up in *La règle du jeu* are analyzed as components of a personal "sacré." Objects of unusual attraction and power (his father's revolver), dangerous zones (the racetrack), tabooed sites (the parental bedroom), secret spots (the W.C.), words and phrases with a special, magical resonance, and so forth—these sorts of data would evoke "that ambiguous attitude tied to the approach of something both attractive and dangerous, prestigious and rejected, that mixture of respect, desire and terror which can be taken as the psychological mark of the sacred."[11]

In *L'Afrique fantôme* Leiris sharply questioned certain scientific distinctions between "subjective" and "objective" practices. Why, he wondered, are my own reactions (my dreams, bodily responses, etc.) not important parts of the "data" produced by fieldwork? In the Collège de Sociologie, he glimpsed the possibility of a kind of ethnography, analytically rigorous *and* poetic, focussed not on the other but on the self, its peculiar system of symbols, rituals, and social topographies. As this methodical research took fuller form in *Biffures*, during the early forties, the analogy with social science became less explicit. But the bridge between self-portraiture and ethnography, blatant in "Le sacré dans la vie quotidien," was an important one. Cultural analysis, the experience and method of fieldwork, oriented his approach to his own subjectivity. In fact, Leiris brought certain habits of note-taking he learned in Africa directly into his work of self-portraiture.

Leiris had been charged with organizing the Dakar-Djibouti expedition's scientific records. He kept scrupulous fieldnotes and descriptive labels on cards which could be classified, re-shuffled and analyzed. After his African experience, he began to collect similar cards which, like good fieldnotes, covered every relevant aspect of the complex reality in question (here, the field of his own subjectivity). His notes included things not understood, what Malinowski called the "imponderabilia" of actual life. Moreover, Leiris has recalled that the most valuable thing he learned from psychoanalysis, despite a later rejection of all purely psychological approaches, was the value Freud gave, especially in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, to small, seemingly banal facts.[12] Leiris's "method" for writing *Le règle du jeu* involved the methodical collection of a heterogeneous data base:

> I have an enormous file which is constantly growing and where I note facts, memories, sometimes even aphorisms, ideas finally, things I rather confusedly feel are important to me and that should be used somehow,

> but without knowing in advance just how they will be used, or how things will work out.[13]

In a giant "card game," a kind of patience, matches ("*marriages*") are made between similar cards, or cards of like value to the player. These are collected in piles which, recopied, with constant crossouts, yield unexpected associations. There is no overall plan, the rule of the game is to proceed card by card. Only when a passage is considered final does the player move on. Thus the final text is not written over to conform to a post-facto narration or analysis, but instead the work records, in its movement, the rhythm and manipulations of the writing—a divination or abduction.[14] The result is an objective subjectivism, a realism based on facts (nothing made up, only connected and written over) portraying a process of research as it remembers, discovers, associates and arranges. Language is always both means and end, an autonomous, reflexive reality rather than simply a mode of representation or expression.

Leiris's realism excludes all fabulation. (He had once tried to write a novel, before *Manhood*, but found he was incapable of inventing characters distinct from himself.) Moreover, in his properly ethnological work, he also avoids any fictionalizing, or the importation of obvious "literary" elements. Throughout his mature writing one finds only the search for a complex lucidity and an almost documentary attention to facts of observation, language, and feeling. This attention simultaneously records and disorients, part of a realism that sees "facts" as performances, tropic productions, or heightened, cut-out elements (fetishes). Like the dreams of *Nuits sans nuit*, reality presents itself rhetorically. It is the result of *fixations*, simultaneously objective and erotic. The result is a writing, as Simone de Beauvoir has observed, always characterized by a peculiar mix of lyricism and distance.

The participant-observer strains toward presence, by means of detachment.

> "[. . .] a straight nape, falling vertically from the back of my head like a wall or cliff, a typical characteristic (according to the astrologists) of persons born under the sign of the Bull: a broad, rather bulging forehead, with exaggeratedly knotty and projecting temporal veins . . . My eyes are brown, the edges of the lids habitually inflamed; my complexion is high; I am disconcerted by an irritating tendency to blush, and by a shiny skin. My hands are thin, rather hairy, the veins distinct; my two middle fingers, curving inward toward the tips, must denote something rather weak or evasive in my character."

In these passages, which open *Manhood*, Leiris's body becomes another symbolic artifact, an occasion for "oneirographic" description.[15] The subject of *L'Afrique fantôme*, *Manhood*, *La règle du jeu*, *Nuits sans nuit*, and *Le ruban au cou d'Olympia* is less an intimate or private self, an inner soul revealed, than it is a kind of personal "culture," a collection of meaningful artifacts to be connected, understood, and rewritten.

For Leiris, writing itself comes to be, like the dream for Nerval, a "second life." But it is a lucid, waking practice, a research that includes dreams (stripped of any metaphysical privilege) along with various other categories of significant "data." Since the field of potential research includes professional ethnographic work, travels, friendships, daily experiences and political engagements, Leiris's writing reflects a tension between the centripetal pull of the personal pronoun "I," and the centrifugal attraction of others, events, history. Leiris, one of the most self-absorbed writers of any age in any language, is not solipsistic. Since his existence is not circumscribed as a fiction but is openly played out through social processes of language and writing, he endlessly confronts what is beyond himself.

Leiris continues to travel, to write on African art, on Ethiopian possession cults, on culture contacts, on the politics of folklore and ethnography. After World War II he emerges from the solitary card-game of *Biffures* to serve on an official commission for the reform of labor policy in colonial West Africa. He travels to the French Antilles and Haiti where, with Alfred Métraux, he studies Voodoo and culture contacts. He becomes a friend of Aimé Césaire and a publicist for the emergent Negritude movement. He serves on the editorial committee of *Les Temps Modernes*, writes for *Présence Africaine*, for UNESCO on racism and the diversity of cultures. In a new preface to *L'Afrique fantôme* (1951), a book judged subversive by the Vichy authorities and burned, he situates his former field journal within a complex of colonial attitudes, highlighting its excessive estheticism and radical-chic posturing. During the same year, 1950, he composes "L'Ethnographe devant le colonialisme," a lucid discussion of a social science inextricably involved in imperial power inequalities. *La Règle du jeu* begins to reflect these historical, "external" pulls. In Volume 2, *Fourbis*, Leiris melds the exploration of childhood memories that had dominated *Biffures* with recent travels and political commitments, probing the (irreconcilable?) conflict between his need for gratuitous poetic experience and the demands of political work. Volume 3, *Fibrilles*, turns on both the public experience of a trip to Communist China in 1955 and the private crisis of an attempted suicide.

Leiris's close involvement with the art world continues. He writes texts on Giacometti, Miró, Masson, Picasso, Duchamp, Wifredo Lam, and Francis Bacon. He also contributes essays on the work of Michel Butor, Queneau, Sartre, Roussel, Lévi-Strauss, Eluard, Alfred Métraux, Bataille, Césaire—nearly all of these texts emerging from personal relationships. (His oeuvre can be seen as a loose web of interpersonal ties.) Leiris attends the Havana Cultural Congress of 1968 and participates in the May rebellions of that year as well as in demonstrations supporting the rights

of immigrant workers.[16] He continues his work at the Musée de l'Homme in a research and curatorial post in the "Department d'Afrique Noire." His daily routine is established: mornings of literary work at his home, Quai des Grands Augustins, afternoons of ethnology in his basement office at the Museum. He comes to regard this oscillation as emblematic of his life.

The relation of self-portraiture and ethnography, two poles of his writing, is crucial for Leiris. One activity looks inward, the other outward; one begins with the self, the other with different people. He keeps them apart, as distinct work-spaces, for if they become too close an effect of alternation and questioning is lost. (An oeuvre can be seen as a form of travel.) But the two activities are part of a common project. While Leiris's pursuit of an individual "savoir vivre" cannot exclude politics and history, conversely his ethnography, directly focussed on others, provides models or allegories for his personal identity. What is at stake in both domains is an elusive conception of "authenticity."

In some ideal circumstance both self and culture would be meaningful, present, and truthful without hypocrisy or constraint. Leiris always yearns for this condition. But he encounters mediation, rules, play-acting, and evasion everywhere, both in his own life and in the life of social groups. A vision of Africa, in the twenties, had seemed to promise real immediacy, spontaneous emotion and contact. But Leiris is disillusioned by his encounter with the realities of travel, colonialism, and abstract social science as well as by his discovery of duplicity among Africans, even those apparently "lost" in trance. His response is complex. It embraces artifice in order to transcend it.

Like Roussel, Queneau or Duchamp he is attracted to the idea that adherence to specific rules is the only route to novelty of expression (spontaneity and genius being romantic myths). Moreover, this attitude resonates with Bataille's principle of eroticism, that "fulfillment" presupposes lack, or violence, and that "freedom" is always dependent on the very constraints it violates (a principle confirmed, at a cultural level, by Mauss who commented in his lectures that taboos existed to be transgressed).[17] Embracing the "rule of the game," Leiris does not, however, give up the search for a reality or presence beyond artifice. He is stubbornly, romantically devoted to a goal of immediacy, spontaneity, and "poetry." He never goes over to irony, semiotics, or rhetoric, though he feels their claims intimately. He persists in a "naive" search for authenticity, but an authenticity always *vitiated* by equivocation, imperfect expression, ethical qualms. But this is the paradoxical source of a certain power, and even beauty. As Philippe Lejeune puts it, the attraction of Leiris's writing is "the extraordinary energy of a desire that, however thwarted it might be, does not renounce expression, but sees itself forced to always flee in advance, where discourse, at the same time prudent and daring, is exasperated by being able to touch the truth only lightly."[18]

In this permanently "exasperated" access to the real, Leiris appeals to erotic fetishism, "myth," and the discipline of the stage. The fetish is the luminous, charged object or moment, cut out of its "whole" context. (In fact it *produces* the effect of a wholeness.) It is an exterior, objectified crystallization of desire, something distant *and* miraculously close, erasing the gulf between inner and outer experience. The sense of erotic plenitude produced by fixation on the fetish is not, however, narrowly limited to sexual experiences; it gives a sense of intense reality to the commonest perceptions and encounters. For Leiris, Giacometti's sculpture powerfully embodies this charged presence. And in his recent sequel to *La Règle du jeu, Le Ruban au cou d'Olympia* (The Ribbon around Olympia's Neck), Leiris probes the expressive power of fetishism in many domains of writing and experience.

In a related fashion, Leiris uses the word myth to denote an access to the real that is not rational or representational, but evocative and performative. Among the sources for this understanding are the mythic inventions of André Masson, the ethnographic lectures of Maurice Leenhardt on Melanesian "lived myth," the *nouveau roman*, particularly the writing of Michel Butor, and his own research on possession cults in Ethiopia.[19] The Ethiopian research is particularly revealing. In *L'Afrique fantôme*, Leiris is disturbed by the apparent insincerity of many of the possessions he observes. People go in and out of trance as if on cue, and they "use" their repertoire of spirits (zâr genies) for crass, personal gain—including economic exploitation of the ethnographer. Yet the psychic power of the zârs is undeniable. In the Paris twenties Leiris thinks of trance (like jazz) as a privileged form of abandonment and loss of self, a direct access to non-rational and emotional powers. But in Africa everything seems contrived and impure. He cannot know when anyone, including himself, is being really "sincere." Thus in 1933 *L'Afrique fantôme* ends with disillusionment. It is not until the mid-1950s that Leiris makes his peace with the ambiguous experience, in a monograph, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Ethiopiens de Gondar*. Here the presence of mythic powers is analyzed as "theatrical," an intense "lived theatre" where artifice is a means for controlling, and thus becoming, the role. The reality of trance is always to some degree staged, but its deceptions—like the "art" of a great actor—produce an undeniable presence, a reality finally transcending art.

Between 1933 in Ethiopia and the publication of his book on spirit possession in 1958, Leiris's research interests had shifted from Africa to the Caribbean. Doubtless the latter context—where all identities are hybrid and impure, where there are no unspliced cultural roots, and where peoples have historically had to "make themselves up"—helped open the ethnographer to a theatrical conception of authenticity. One sees his shift of emphasis, for example, in a recent conversation with Michael Hagger-

ty on Jazz (in Section 5, below). Leiris is drawn to Jazz less as a source of transcendence and pure emotionality (what it had been for him in the twenties) and more as an example of cultural impurity and creative syncretism. And here we see an important way that his ethnographic and personal research activites finally coincide. For what Leiris pursues in *La Règle du jeu,* a personal identity endlessly worked out, textually and rhetorically "played," is mirrored and confirmed by an open-ended view of culture as improvised, spliced, historically acted.[20]

KNOCK-OUT ou K.O. – (autrement dit: "chaos")

But for Leiris all such performances are at best a *modus vivendi.* They merely cover up a deep, ineradicable fault. And if in his later writings he seems to achieve a troubled tranquility, the achievement occurs under a general sign of failure:

> And so, a lot of noise for nothing. I've sweated blood and spat fire to end up, in my daily practice, as another of those bourgeois who think themselves progressive, an anthologized author who will perhaps be praised for his attempt at sincerity and exactitude of expression, and even for his ingenious connections and interweavings, in the absence of that special something which (for some) flashes in the slightest phrase, and which I believe to be the essence.[21]

The "special something" is an inspired, visionary poetry. Leiris never stops lamenting its absence. Indeed he finds that his only truly poetic gesture – a willingness to go all the way – is his attempted suicide. Otherwise he proceeds without "inspiration," shuffling and writing over his documentary note-cards, laboring to give form to the traces of a passing reality. As Denis Hollier finely observes, his turn to autobiographical prose after 1930 marks an abandonment of imagination, both surrealist and romantic, in favor of a "parti pris de réalisme." His oeuvre is a cenotaph, the tomb of an impossible poetry, a silent oracle.[22] But in mourning his lack of inspiration, Leiris produces another kind of poetry, and like his friend Edmond Jabès, he finds himself writing a book whose words must endlessly paper over a void. Wholeness is denied to the real: a poetry of visionary imagination is replaced with a poetic prose severely ruled by games of language, history, and personality. This prose can only – and it is not nothing – turn or trope what is given by the real: the evidence of events, thoughts, dreams, words.

Words swerve. Leiris is a longtime fan of Fred Astaire, whom he once evoked as a kind of stylish automaton able, for a frantic moment, to be breathtakingly *present,* a dandy whose vestimentary elegance had

something tawdry, even corrupt about it. This "frivolity"—a costumed dance or excessive dressing in the face of malaise—defines what may still be possible in the domain of artistic "creation." For there is something splendidly frivolous about Leiris's latest book, *Langage tangage* . . . where it seems as if an old, punctiliously attired man has asked his intimate partner, language, to take just a few more turns around the floor, breaking suddenly into an awkward jitterbug or tango.

But a more poignant image of Leiris's career may be found in his recollection—ending the present collection—of a minor character from Aimé Césaire's play *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe.* The ambassador Franco de Medina walks on stage, stutters some words, and is led away to his execution. His failure is complete. But in the performance described by Leiris, a skilled actor unexpectedly gives life to this pathetic role and for a moment, with a few burlesqued gestures, creates a real person.

TOTAL: le totem de tantale

The texts that follow are grouped thematically in six sections. While there is a very general progression from early to late writings, chronology is often violated. For example, the last-written passage, from *Langage tangage,* occurs in the first cluster. Leiris returns again and again to certain problems, and the sequence of selections below tries to show his oeuvre as a field of repetitions, juxtapositions, and variations. There are frequent shifts of voice: Leiris in different tones, interventions by friends and translators—an oeuvre aerated by others.

Leiris's "sentences" are peculiar objects. They often proclaim their artificial status and regularly transgress the taboo, learned by every schoolchild, against "run on sentences." One senses a certain hostility and fascination for syntax. The well-formed utterance, always a drastic selection of linguistic possibilities, is made to seem awkward, to stagger under excessive demands of meaning, allusion or qualification. Leiris's most complex constructions show a baroque process of thought, association, and analysis occurring *in writing.* He is suspicious of summary, peremptory expressions, preferring elaborate, careful, self-limiting performances. But there is also a subversion in this "precision" which frequently borders on belaborment and in extreme cases flirts with glossolalic overload. There can be no question, then, of breaking up Leiris's sentences for clarity of translation. As a matter of policy they have not been simplified, even though the transfer from French to English syntax may bring, inevitably, even more awkwardness.

Headings within sections are mine. Each piece's original title, or lack of title, can be determined from the reference immediately following it.

Leiris often uses ellipses and parentheses. Brackets are reserved for editorial cuts or clarifications.

NOTES

1. *Magazine Littéraire*, July 1985, p. 104.
2. Michel Leiris, "Conception et réalité chez Raymond Roussel," in R. Roussel, *Épaves* (Paris: 1972) p. 9.
3. See Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (New York: 1965) pp. 112–114.
4. See James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (1981) pp. 548–553; also Leiris, "De Bataille l'impossible à l'impossible *Documents*," *Brisées* (Paris: 1966) pp. 256–266.
5. On *L'Afrique fantôme* see James Clifford, "Interrupting the Whole," *Conjunctions 6* (1984) pp. 282–295.
6. *L'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: 1951) p. 324. (See excerpt in Section 2 below).
7. J.-B. Pontalis, "Michel Leiris ou la psychanalyse interminable," *Les Temps Modernes*, December 1955, pp. 925–933.
8. Leiris, "Préface" to Raymond Queneau, *Contes et propos* (Paris: 1981) pp. 6–7.
9. See Denis Hollier, ed. *Le Collège de sociologie (1937–1939)* (Paris: 1979); Jean Jamin, "Un sacré collège ou les apprentis sorciers de la sociologie," *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 68 (1980) pp. 5–30; Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," pp. 560–561.
10. Elizabeth Wing is translating the Hollier volume in which the text appears (pp. 60–74) for the University of Minnesota Press (1986 or 87).
11. Hollier, *Collège*, p. 60.
12. Leiris, "Propos recueillis par Madeleine Chapsal, 1966," in Pierre Chappuis ed., *Michel Leiris* (Seghers Poètes d'aujourdhui, Paris: 1973) p. 116.
13. Leiris, "Entretien avec Madeleine Chapsal, 1961," *Ibid.* pp. 112–113.
14. There are affinities with the science of the singular sketched out by Carlo Ginzburg in "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method," *History Workshop* 9 (1980) pp. 5–36.
15. "Oneirography," and the affinity of descriptive rhetoric with that of the vision and the dream are discussed by Michel Beaujour in "Some Paradoxes of Description," *Yale French Studies* 61 (1981) pp. 27–59.
16. Jean-Pierre Faye, "Leiris and Militancy," in *Sub-Stance* 11–12 (1975) pp. 65–71. (This special issue on Leiris, edited by Jean-Jacques Thomas, is the fullest critical introduction to Leiris in English.)
17. Alfred Métraux, "Rencontre avec les ethnologues," *Critique* 195–196 (1963) p. 683.

18. Philippe Lejeune, "Glossaire," *Sub-Stance* 11-12 (1975) p. 127. See his *Lire Leiris* (Paris: 1975).

19. André Masson, "The Unbridled Line," in André Masson, *Drawings* (London: Thames and Hudson, no pagination); James Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World* (Berkeley: 1982); Leiris, "Le Réalisme mythologique de Michel Butor," *Brisées* (Paris: 1966) pp. 215–238: ". . . the entire story is situated on the mythic plane, without ever betraying what I'm tempted to call its *vérisme* (truth effect) so close are we to the ground." (p. 236, on Butor's *La Modification*).

20. See especially, Leiris, "Folklore et culture vivante," in Robert Jaulin ed., *Le Livre blanc de l'ethnocide en Amérique* (Paris: 1973).

21. Leiris, *Frêle bruit* (Paris: 1976) pp. 287–288.

22. Quoted from *Manhood* by Denis Hollier, "La Poésie jusqu'à z," in *L'Ire des vents*, special issue on Leiris, Spring 1981, pp. 141–159.

THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF MICHEL LEIRIS

1925 *Simulacre* (with lithographs by André Masson). Paris: Galerie Simon.

1927 *Le point cardinal.* Paris: Editions du Sagittaire.

1929–1930 Many short essays in *Documents.* Paris. (Georges Bataille, ed.)

1934 *L'Afrique fantôme.* Paris: Gallimard. (Reprinted 1951, 1968, 1983)

1938 *Miroir de la tauromachie.* Paris: G.L.M. Collection Acéphale. (Reprinted 1964, and 1981: Editions Fata Morgana)

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1939 *Glossaire: j'y serre mes gloses* (with lithographs by André Masson). Paris: Galerie Simon.

1943 *Haut mal.* Paris: Gallimard. (Reprinted 1969)

1945 *Nuits sans nuit.* Paris: Gallimard. (Reprinted and expanded, 1961)

1946 *Aurora.* Paris: Gallimard. (Reprinted 1978)

1947 *André Masson et son Univers* (with Georges Limbour). Geneva, Paris: Editions des Trois Collines.

1948 *Biffures. La Règle du jeu. I.* Paris: Gallimard.

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1951 *Race et Civilisation.* Paris: UNESCO. (Reprinted, *Cinq études d'ethnologie*)

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1961 *Nuits sans nuit et quelques jours sans jour.* Paris: Gallimard.

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1969 *Mots sans mémoire.* Paris: Gallimard. (Reprints *Simulacre, Le Point cardinal, Glossaire: j'y serre mes gloses, Bagatelles végétales, Marrons sculptés pour Miró*)

1970 *Wifredo Lam.* Milan: Fratelli Fabbri.

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1972 "Conception et réalité chez Raymond Roussel," in Raymond Roussel, *Épaves.* Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert.

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1976 *Frêle bruit. La Règle du jeu. IV.* Paris: Gallimard.

1980 *Au verso des images.* Montpellier: Editions Fata Morgana.

1981 *Le Ruban au cou d'Olympia.* Paris: Gallimard.

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1947 *André Masson and His Universe.* Geneva: Trois Collines.

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1953 "The African Negroes and the Arts of Carving and Sculpture," in *Interrelations of Cultures*, Paris: UNESCO. (Reprinted 1971, Westport, Conn.: UNESCO)

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1975 "Nine Poems," translated by R. and T. Shattuck, and "Interview with Madeleine Gobeil," in *Sub-Stance*, Special Leiris Issue, Nos. 11–12. (Also contains critical articles, edited by Jean-Jacques Thomas)

1982 "Who is Aimé Césaire?" *Sulfur*, No. 5.

1983 *Francis Bacon: Full Face and Profile*. Translated by John Weightman. New York: Rizzoli.

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MICHEL LEIRIS

NEW TRANSLATIONS

by

Lydia Davis, James Clifford, Richard Sieburth
With additional materials by
Paul Auster and Michael Haggerty

Edited by

James Clifford

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SECTION 1 TROPICS

PAINTING/WRITING

Around 1920, through the intercession of Max Jacob, Leiris became friends with Joan Miró and André Masson. The two had just moved into adjoining studios on the rue Blomet in Montparnasse. Leiris frequented their gatherings where he encountered, among others, the writer Robert Desnos and the painters Picasso, Dubuffet, and Gris. Miró recalls the ambiance: "More than anything else, the rue Blomet was friendship, an exalted exchange and discovery of ideas among a marvelous group of friends. Among those who came to the gatherings at Masson's studio were Michel Leiris, who has remained my closest friend, and Roland Tual, Georges Limbour, and Armand Salacrou. We talked, we drank a lot. Those were the days of brandy and water, of curaçao tangerines. The others generally came by metro, by the famous Nord-Sud that served as the link between the Montmartre of the Surrealists and the Montparnasse of the backward artists."

1. JOAN MIRÓ: LETTER TO MICHEL LEIRIS AUGUST 10, 1924

Tr. by Paul Auster

Montroig

My dear Michel,

I have been wanting to write to you for a long time but haven't found a moment until now.

I am working furiously; you and all my other writer friends have given me much help and improved my understanding of many things. I think about our conversation, when you told me how you started with a word and watched to see where it would take you. I have done a series of small things on wood, in which I take off from some form in the wood. Using

an artificial thing as a point of departure like this, I feel, is parallel to what writers can obtain by starting with an arbitrary sound; the R.R. from the song of a cricket for example or the isolated sound of a consonant or vowel, any sound, be it nasal or labial. This can create a surprising metaphysical state in you poets, even when you use the sound of vowels or consonants that have no meaning at all.

In leafing through my notebook I have also noticed the extremely disturbing quality of the dissociated drawings I sometimes do – meant for canvasses I am preparing and on which I jot down a number of remarks: names of colors or simply the monosyllable *yes* when I feel that an idea should be carried out. I intend to do all these drawings. In other drawings, of objects that fly around on a flat surface, I write isolated letters. I agree with Breton that there is something extremely disturbing about a page of writing.

More or less total destruction of everything I left behind last summer and which (I) thought I would pick up again. Still too real! I am moving away from all pictorial conventions (that poison). In spreading out my canvasses, I have noticed that the ones that have been painted touch the spirit less directly than the ones that are simply drawn (or that use a minimum of color); however stripped of pictorial meaning, the intromission of exciting materials (colors) *shakes up* your blood and the exalted sensation that *claws at* the soul is ruined. You already know the pictorial process. 1. Pure line. 2. Pure colors. 3. Nuances, the charm and music of colors. Final stage of degeneration.

There is no doubt that my canvasses that are simply drawn, with a few dots of color, a rainbow, are more profoundly moving. These move us in the elevated sense of the word, like the tears of a child in its cradle. The others are like the screams of a whore in love.

My latest canvasses are conceived like a bolt from the blue, absolutely detached from the outer world (from the world of men who have two eyes in the space below their forehead).

Figuration of one of my latest *x*'s (I can't find the word for it here; don't want to say either canvas or painting). Portrait of a charming lady friend from Paris – I begin with the idea of touching her body *very chastely*, beginning with her side and going up to her head. Profile drawn in charcoal. A vertical line for the breasts; one is a pear that opens and scatters its little seeds (those wonderful little hearts of a fruit). On the other side an apple being pecked at by a bird. Sparks fly out of the wound caused by this pecking. Below, going across the sex (I insist on my very chaste

and respectful intentions) a comet with its luminous tail; blonde hair; one hand holds a flower with a butterfly circling around it; the other hand is trying to take hold of an egg that is turning, a luminous circle around it. —In the upper corner of the canvas are stars.

This is hardly painting, but I don't give a damn.

Are you working? Tell me what you are doing and don't forget to write to me. —I owe a lot to all of you, and a word from you would make me extremely happy.

I am not forgetting the issue of *Valori Plastici* devoted to G. de Chirico; I will order it when I return. I spent my last days in Paris more or less broke.

Good health and good work. Cordial handshakes from

Joan.

My dear Odette, André, and Lili—to all of you I send my best as well.
Yours,
Joan.

Miró's detailed reminiscence of the Rue Blomet and other letters to Leiris are translated by Paul Auster and included in *Selected Writings of Joan Miró* edited by Margit Rowell, copyright © 1986 by Margit Rowell, in the Documents of Twentieth Century Art series published by G.K. Hall and Company. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the publisher and to Margit Rowell for permission to quote from these texts in advance of publication.

2. JOAN MIRÓ

Tr. by Lydia Davis

[. . .] If, however, the bedroom of the Queen of Prussia consists of no more than a floor and some bare walls, the reason for this is very simple: the furniture has dissolved in water, the way my table does sometimes, when I'm tired and my books and cigarettes turned out to be incapable of beguiling my boredom. (At these times I leave my house, I walk through

the streets, my eyes wide, trying to adopt towards my surroundings the attitude of a child filled with wonder, which is Miró's attitude. All these organisms have set out from their points of origin and flow by, pools of brilliant colors, yet enclosed within clearly delimited contours: here I am back at Miró's pictures. I blow my nose; and for the second time that nasal trumpet takes me back to Miró's pictures. I quicken my step, I look at a shop window in which some superb ties are bursting into flame; and for the third time . . .). Miró has been the one to express this liquefaction, this relentless evaporation of structures—as relentless as any of the other vicious circles in which I, and all of creation, turn round and round—, this soft leakage of the substance that makes all things—us, our thoughts, and the setting we live in—like jellyfish or octopi, he has been the one to express this very adequately in several of his old canvases and especially in his current series of *Portraits*. As beautiful as sarcastic laughter or graffiti showing human architecture in its particularly grotesque and horrible aspect, each of these works is an ironic pebble sending out vicious, circular ripples when cast into the swamp of understanding, where for so many years, already, so many traps and nets have been mouldering.[. . .]

From "Joan Miró," *Documents* 1929; *Brisées* pp. 35–36.

3. THE UNBRIDLED LINE (ANDRÉ MASSON)

Tr. by J. Clifford

Voluble lines, fusing, curving, breaking, fading, starting up.
Lines inflected like voices liturgically chanting a mythic or legendary text.
Melodious lines—as is fit from the hand of a music lover—a hand that
wings (qui *s'aille*) in André Breton's term, releasing flight by means of a syllable.
Lines exploring and learning, but teaching nothing. Always lyrical, never didactic.

Line more than stroke.

Drawing more than drawn.

Lineage, perhaps, more than line.

For the enveloping line, holding in by lateral pressure what it confines, Masson substitutes the soaring line that feels only one pressure, that which fires it and, without slackening, propels it throughout its trajectory.

Line in motion, rather than line striving to define a structure. No transcription (by a single stroke or by the successive approximations of several strokes more-or-less superimposed), no transcription of a reality (or a part of the reality we commonly experience), but a provoking – on the spot – a spurting out of something unquestionably real.

From "The Unbridled Line," preface to André Masson, *Massacres et autres dessins*, Paris: Hermann, 1971.

GLOSSARY: MY GLOSSES' OSSUARY

Tr. by Lydia Davis

A monstrous aberration causes people to believe that language came into being to facilitate their relations with one another. It is with this end in mind, of usefulness, that they make dictionaries in which words are catalogued and given a well defined meaning (they believe), based on usage and etymology. Now, etymology is a perfectly ineffectual science that is not at all informative about the *true* meaning of a word, that is, the particular, personal signification which each individual ought to assign to it, as his mind pleases. As for usage, it is superfluous to say that it is the lowest criterion to which one could refer.

The everday meaning and the etymological meaning of a word can teach us nothing about ourselves, since they represent the collective part of language, which was made for all people and not for each of us individually.

By dissecting the words we like, without bothering about conforming either to their etymologies or to their accepted significations, we discover their most hidden qualities and the secret ramifications that are propagated through the whole language, channeled by associations of sounds, forms and ideas. Then language changes into an oracle and there we have a thread (however slender it may be) to guide us through the Babel of our minds.

From "Glossaire: j'y serre mes gloses," in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, 1925; *Brisées*, p. 11.

Pour le texte original © Mercure de France 1966.

PAGES FROM LEIRIS'S GLOSSARY

fuseau — tresse le réseau des lois physiques, soit en faisceau, soit en fusées.
futilité — fuite légère, flûtée.
futur — solfatare des turbines à l'affût. Déconfiture fatale des rues et des hures.

G

galères — la terre est égale à leur gale.
géant — étrange, grand, et étranger.
gel — il loge des gemmes qui nous enjôlent.
génération (engendre gêné, et ration.)
génie — naît de la neige, son nid.
genoux — engrenages ou verrous : les nœuds du gynécée.
girasol — agile col de girafe, il s'érige haut !

GIRASOL

givre — fifre aigu de l'hiver rigide.
glace — mirage qui craque. Il nous enlace.
glèbe — le socle des gueux et du blé.
gorge (les deux G se recourbent et figurent deux seins ; l'OR du centre est leur gouge.)
grâce — garce grêle.
grammaire — la mère-grand.
gravité (t'y graver...)
grenade — un dard s'y engrène : ses grains ardent.
grimace — masque maigre pour face aigrie.
grimoire — moire grise, obscure, rimant au rire de mort.
gris — couleur de grille.
guérir, gai rire...
guerre (je ne l'aime guère...)
gui — fruit druidique à goût de givre. Gorge de guivre.

Page de *Glossaire, j'y serre mes gloses,*
avec vignette d'André Masson.

Le sceptre miroitant.

From "Glossaire," in **Mots sans Memoirs,** 1969, p. 111.

METAPHOR

Tr. by Lydia Davis

"*Metaphor* (from the Greek *metaphora*, transfer) is a figure by which the mind applies the name of one object to another object, because of a shared characteristic that allows them to be put side by side and compared." (Darmestater.) And yet, it is hard to know where metaphor begins and where it ends. An abstract word is formed by the sublimation of a concrete word. A concrete word, which never designates an object by more than one of its qualities, is itself hardly more than a metaphor, or at the very least a figurative expression. Moreover, to designate an object by an expression that corresponds to it, not figuratively but literally, one would need to know the very essence of that object, which is impossible, since we can only know phenomena, not things in themselves.

Not only language, but the whole of intellectual life is based on a play of transpositions, of symbols, which can be described as metaphorical. Then again, knowlege always proceeds by comparison, so that all known objects are connected to one another by relations of interdependency. With any two of them, it is impossible to determine which is designated by the name proper to it and is not a metaphor of the other, and vice versa. A man is a moving tree, just as much as a tree is a rooted man. In the same way the sky is a rarefied earth, the earth a denser sky. And if I see a dog running, it is just as much *the run that is dogging*.

. . . Even this article is metaphorical.

From *Documents*, 1929; *Brisées*, p. 25.

Pour le texte original © Mercure de France 1966.

PHANTOM AFRICA (SANGA)

Tr. by J. Clifford

A member of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti *— the trans-African ethnographic expedition of 1931–33 organized by Marcel Griaule — Leiris embarks on intensive research into the secret, initiatory language of the mask society of the Dogon of Sanga, French Sudan (Mali). The expedition, composed of a team of European researchers, will remain in Sanga for seven weeks*

initiating a long tradition of ethnographic study of the Dogon by Griaule and his students. Leiris's journal of the expedition was published without emendations in 1934 as L'Afrique fantôme. *Its "excessive" subjectivism, and its frankness about the* Mission's *questionable manner of acquiring museum artifacts, would open a rift between Leiris and Griaule. In the excerpts that follow Leiris records a few of the less edifying aspects of fieldwork, as well as some lessons learned about translation and meaning from intensive research with an initiated old man, work that would result in a scholarly monograph (*La langue secrète des Dogon de Sanga*) and that rhymed with his lifelong concern for puns, experimental writing and special languages.*

10 October

Hard to sleep, for the others as for me, since we're possessed by the work. All night, dreams of totemic complications and family structures, with no way to save myself from this labyrinth of streets, tabooed sites and cliffs. Horror at becoming so inhuman . . . But how shake it off, get back in contact? Would have to leave, forget everything.

Sudden appearance of an explanation for Ambara's discomfort the other day at having me carry some material to his wife for sewing instead of taking it himself: Lutten [a member of the research team] informs me that women never sew in this country. Sewing is men's work. The whimsical Ambara is so lazy he can't even sew . . . By sending me, he probably wanted to avoid shocking his father-in-law with his laziness.

11 October

The old man [Ambibè Babadyi] who for the last two days has been teaching me the mysteries of the mask society comes up with an astonishing text in the secret language—the second time since yesterday. I record the text, I read it aloud with intonations and the old man, delighted, stands up, claps and cries *"Pay! Pay!"* (Good! Good!) But when it comes to translation everything comes apart. The secret language is a language of formulas, composed of enigmas, strings of nonsense, puns (?), cascades of phonemes, and intermixed symbols. The old man, who thinks I really want to be initiated, applies his usual principles of teaching. Each time I ask for the translation of a word or isolated section of a sentence he loses the thread and has to repeat his whole text from beginning to end, becoming entangled, naturally, and giving me a different version each time. Playing to

the hilt his role of teacher, he gets mad every time I interrupt and shouts "*Makou!*" (Silence!) Then, since it's market day, he's had enough and wants to go stroll around. I instruct him to stay. But the translation is still a mess. From fatigue and enervation and lacking, also, the ability to effectively swear at the old man—whom I don't want to offend and who moreover is a nice guy—I'm on the brink of tears, for a reverse reaction has occurred: my irritation has been replaced by a childish letting go. The old native lieutenant Douso Wologane (assigned to us by the administrator as interpreter), surprised at my collapse, speaks gently to the old man and brings him around. For better or worse, I finish the translation.

This morning Griaule with his riding crop chased away a Bambara merchant who wanted to take food from one of our little informants (who was eating with us) threatening to strike him. Abara—the kid's name—clearly has no luck: the other day while he was working with us a sheep belonging to his family ate the cream of millet prepared for his meal.

They bring us a scrap of cardboard from the market, crudely cut up, and without the slightest inscription. It's a receipt given by the official market superintendent to vendors for the tax levied by the administration on tradesmen. Some supervision! Around here the highwaymen don't hide in the caves where the masks are kept . . .

[. . .] 26 October

Striking example of the sort of maddening misunderstandings that periodically arise when the inquiry turns to translation. Wanting to make it clear to Ambibè Babadyi that I must have literal translations of the texts he gives me, not approximate ones, I pick up a handful of pebbles. One by one I line up the pebbles on the table saying of each: "Here is that word, that word, that word." Then I take another bunch of pebbles and one by one replace the line of pebbles with new pebbles saying: "Here is the French word for that word, the French word for that word . . .", asking him to explain what the phrase in question meant as if it were a matter—assuming this were possible—of replacing each word of the sentence of secret language with a corresponding Dogon word (which the translator would transmit to me in French), just as I had done with the pebbles. Ambibè Babadyi picks up the first pebble—corresponding to the word *man*—and I think he has understood. But he takes a second pebble and places it nearby saying it is a *Peul woman*. Then he traces a line on the table with his finger, takes the first pebble and moves it along this imaginary line, explaining that the *man* is walking along the road. My entire lovely plan collapses: once again Ambibè has mixed up the word and the thing, the sign and the thing signified. Instead of treating the pebble as if it were a word

designating *the man* he has taken it as the man himself and has used it to describe his material movements. The concrete example I had used hoping to make him understand better has succeeded only in muddying everything, and at the same time making crystal clear a double stupidity: Ambibè's inability to form a clear notion of language as such; and my own ability to treat the words of a sentence as if they were separate entities.

Learned by the way that the famous red sign announcing the *sigui* (which is to say, that the time of celebrations for the great initiation has come) is nothing other than a "growing thing" in a location – close to the village of Yougo – watched over by a man who is the only one permitted to go there. I think of the Sibylline priests, of vegetation cults . . .

In the evening from the top of the platform of the dead hunter, Ambibè Babadyi – with stick raised, blanket draped over a shoulder, bare head, looking very patriarchal – intones a discourse in the secret language, while below the *ya siguinè* ["sister of the masks," lone female in the masquerades] is dancing, dragging herself on her knees uttering the mocking laugh of the masks, amid more or less general indifference.

[. . .] 14 November

Another noctural emission. Dreamed moreover that I was reconciled with André Breton. To hell with psychoanalysis: I'm not going to try to discover some momentary connection between these two events. I'd rather Freud told me what incest, solar or otherwise, gave birth to these masks, masks discovered by a woman, and whose present "sister" – the *ya siguinè* – is a woman surrounded by a major cult, masks tabooed for women in general as being especially murky and dangerous . . .

Outside of this, the abductions [of ethnographic specimens] and tips from informants continue. The sanctuaries and caves where they stash old masks are systematically searched.

The regional chief and all the people mobilized for the Armistice Day celebration return from Bandiagara. While it wasn't a major mobilization, involving just a parade, the number of horses and men is large. And still the administration says *we're* making too free with the country! The journey to Bandiagara emptied the area of a large portion of its male population, and this just at the end of the harvest, the time for garnering wheat . . .

Bad feelings about France; indifference for Africa; bad feelings about this journal, verbose when it should be pointed, lean.

15 November

Yesterday our friends Apama and Ambara secretly brought in the fiber costumes for the masks we had asked them for. They begged us (above all!) to hide them well. Today with their help I fill out the labels for these objects. Apama and Ambara listen for the slightest noise. A child who wants to enter gets scolded.

No doubt about it: learning from our techniques the two fine fellows have gotten the fiber costumes from their hiding place in the cave of the masks. Influence of the European . . .

My depression continues and sometimes I want to smash everything, or go back to Paris. But what to do in Paris?

16 November

Two days before we leave Sanga: sound recordings, last photos, pulling things together, filling in gaps, corrections, etc.

The "little" brother of Apama, who brings in the mask called "multi-storied house," hadn't wished to sell it, since he got it from his older brother, the hunter who died on October 20th. Today he agrees to sell, but on condition that we ourselves go and abduct the object so he can say that he was forced. . . . Following our example, everyone makes peace with their god and gives in to pious lying.*

Embarking for Africa, I had hoped to find some pluck at last! I'm over thirty, getting old, and still this intellectualism . . . Will I ever recover any freshness?

From *L'Afrique fantôme*, 1934, pp. 109–110.

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*We decided later that we had been the ones duped in this affair. When we went to the rocky hole where the proffered *siriguè* was hidden, we saw it was old and mostly faded while the one we were familiar with was bright and new. Apama and Ambara continued to maintain it was the same object. But they probably wanted to deflect our attention onto a used *siriguè* for fear we would discover the new one.

WORDS/SWERVES

Tr. by J. Clifford

From the African words I did my best to record phonetically in 1931 in colonial Mali, then called "French Sudan," and which my native interpreter had converted right away into his normal tongue and then translated into mine when as an apprentice ethnologist I collected texts in *sigi so* or the secret language of the now far too famous Dogon of Sanga, from these words, each one an enigma to me, to the words, practically all French, that as a surrealist I had already taken as a basis for that GLOSSAIRE J'Y SERRE MES GLOSES that hasn't stopped growing since then, expanding because the words that specially moved me—the first ones I treated this way—were joined by more and more words of lesser attraction but whose analysis has allowed me to express certain ideas or whose presence has given more of a "dictionary" tone to this recently revived work, without mentioning the vocables that (then as before) could lend themselves to a punning style of imaginative play or to some other construction emerging from their material aspect, the distance is certainly great. Nonetheless these words are similar in the way they have come to me laden with a more or less appreciable dose of mystery, either as something entirely strange while still haloed with a sort of nimbus from ritual use, or else as words from my own or a neighboring tongue that incite, for reasons not always clear, an activity that if it is not an elucidation is at least that transposition into the speech of the Other which serves as a positive "open sesame" to a person seeking poetry.

If—a plan long too unplanned for its sense to be obvious but which became a bit clearer under the mounting pressure of that so very shameless sovereign, time, and which as my life seemed more sensibly to be shrinking I saw as the motor of what for quite a few years has been my chief occupation—I write, transcending direct speech and hoping that by passionately giving form to, and thus perhaps buying off the pain that preys less on my brain than on my gut (a knowledge, for example—elementary alarm venomously alimenting almost animal ruminations—that we will each in our turn irreversibly pass, my friends and I, like so many loved ones, from presence to absence, consciousness to unconsciousness), perhaps it's in my word-games, procedures apparently not very serious, that I'm most likely to succeed. Out of what language, in effect, do these scraps emerge, if not one more connected than any other to what I want to conjure, since it's a sort of language of death: a scrambled language tied to the traditional *upside down world* popular imagery makes into a theme of burlesqued, comic-book-style illustrations and that—a black turn of mind I'd like to be able to conquer—appears to me (much like,

for example, the hubbub of moving house or the brouhaha of a train station during the vacation exodus) as a caricatured figure of the absurd head-over-heels situation where death, if there were an afterlife, would not fail to dump us; a language something like the initiatory languages found in societies that put great emphasis on ceremonies insuring the replacement of a declining generation by an ascending one (societies we don't know how to designate since we can no longer call them "inferior," "primitive," or "archaic"), not a common parlance or even a noble speech but a language of the other side, of that other side which is more than irrational to someone who doesn't believe in a second life that's measurable or locatable in any way. Loosing logical collars and with this break giving me a notion of the strictly unimaginable nothingness beyond the grave, this idiom, as far from common talk as the sacred is from the profane, a disjointed, dislocated, danced rather than devoutly dressed-up discourse, helps me feel less wholly disoriented before that NOTHING (neither gap, gulf, nor abyss, but nothing, absolutely nothing, and not even the word's echo), less disarmed confronting that unknown which, since one can fictively have words with it, ceases to be mere negativity and becomes something instead of a God-knows-what always out of reach, with the result that—at least while I'm working—the horror of future annihilation, still noxious but now more diffused, is drawn out of its diabolically imperceptible nullity thanks to the illusion of a bridge linguistically suspended.

> /Native perhaps to a naive reality: if I speak—or write—a language of death then death is no more death (not the end of everything but a far-off land I frequent in some small way through a verbal exoticism) and I conclude that I'm not merely killing time but really dodging death when I play my game of hide-and-seek with words simultaneously disguised and discovered, to be finally sharpened and scoured having dawdled, many of them, through multiple mixings, modulations and meanders./

Neither a jargon for aggressive auguries bragging how well they argue, nor an *argot* for folks in the same orbit conversing, gloves off, in gross vulgarity or in street-talk good for saying "fuck off," the language spoken by the glosses served squeezed in my *Glossary* belongs to one no more than to the other of these categories: it veers from the norm only in that it's chopped and divided as if—supposedly passing as imitation dictionary definitions—the statements I delighted in were like fisticuffs or rockets shot off in capriciously segmented paths, statements free of any too-oppressively articulated syntax and drawing increased power of impregnation from this absence leaving the words, as it were, stripped. Entice, entertain, and—if only an instant—reign, isn't this what comes first to the brain of an artist or writer, even more to a poet in pain perhaps but not showing it aiming without shame to be a shaman?

Beginning with words, making them in some sense think for me (dic-

tate me rather than be my diction): I like to think of this as the condition of a speech that would not discourse (subjecting words to a story, whether derived from a line of reasoning or from the hybrid products of automatic writing) and which would instead impress itself on our hearing in more mordant terms undulled by any role as intermediaries and undiluted by belonging to more or less loquacious sentences.

To flee overly linear continuity or shatter it even before it starts: from this I derive both my pleasure at setting up, with a few words, pseudo definitions and my taste – which I know people of taste find excessive – for incidental clauses and insertions betwen parentheses or dashes, a taste in itself tied not only to my need, forever fearful of the *faux pas*, to correct or specify (as I insist on expressing myself in a circumstantial way that avoids all soporific monotony even in the area of punctuation), but a taste tied also to my desire to slice up sentences, syncopate and parcel them out, another tactic for dodging any droning and a zig-zag style I like to compare (snobbism again?) with that of jazz singers thrown into the voluble cascades of scat who seem, with their slivered words shaken and stuffed full of intercalated syllables, to persistently contrive (as the comic Darry Cowl once did when his tripping tongue once got us giggling while his gibberish, full of stammers, metatheses, and quid pro quos, produced a panic of not being able to speak at all, the vertigo only dissipating in laughter), to take apart the words of their song, an extreme form, one might say, of what can already be found in our old comic operas: the precipitous stuttering so frequent in Rossini (close homonym of the gelatinous tenor Tino Rossi for words also know how to lie and sometimes need correcting) or the silly caesurae in several sections of offenbachian parodies unseasonably snipping the text.

From *Langage tangage: ou ce que les mots me disent*, 1985, pp. 106–112.

SECTION 2 DESIRE

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI

Tr. by J. Clifford

We live in a period oppressive in all respects, and fetishism, which has been the base of our human existence from the most ancient times, only rarely finds ways to satisfy itself in an undisguised manner. Worshippers of poor phantoms—our moral, logical and social imperatives—we cling therefore to a transposed fetishism, a false image of what most deeply moves us. And this bad fetishism absorbs the greatest part of our actions, leaving almost no place for genuine fetishism, the only one worth the effort since it is entirely conscious of itself and does not depend on any dupery.

In the domain of art we seldom find any objects (paintings or sculptures) able in some measure to respond to the needs of this true fetishism, which is the really *loving* love of ourselves projected from the inside out and clothed in a solid carapace, thus trapping it within the bounds of a precise thing and situating it, rather like a piece of furniture for our use, in the vast foreign room called space.

In most cases these objects, though made by human hands, remain even farther removed from us than the products of nature of which they are slavish reflections and at the same time enfeebled, colorless, parodic shadows, incapable of providing us with a pole in opposition to the internal pole of our love.

Because of this lack of consistency, this absence of autonomy, almost all works of art are horribly boring, *sad as a rainy day*; and indeed they are much less close to us than drops of water, lovely little liquid spheres that can at least remind us of the form, if not the taste, of our tears and of that wetness, that fluidity which corresponds to the gentleness flowing through our limbs when we love or feel ourselves touched.

At the present moment, there exist few artists whose work escapes this atrocious boredom. In the past, fewer still. But among the rare contemporaries exempted by a special privilege from this rule we can name Giacometti.

There are moments that can be called *crises*, the only ones that count in a life. These are moments when abruptly the outside seems to respond

to a call we send it from within, when the exterior world opens itself and a sudden communion forms between it and our heart. From my own experience I have several memories like this, and they all relate to events that seem trifling, without symbolic value, and one might say *gratuitous*: in a luminous Montmartre street, a negress of the *Black Birds* revue holding a bouquet of wet roses with both hands; a packetboat on which I find myself a passenger slowly separating from the dock; a few scraps of a song murmured at random; an encounter in a Greek ruin with a strange animal that must have been some sort of giant lizard . . . Poetry can emerge only from such "crises," and the only worthwhile works of art are those that provide their equivalents.

I love Giacometti's sculpture because everything he makes is like the petrification of one of these crises, the intensity of a chance event swiftly caught and immediately frozen, the stone stele telling its tale. And there's nothing deathlike about this sculpture; on the contrary, like the real fetishes we idolize (real fetishes, meaning those that resemble us and are objectivized forms of our desire) everything here is prodigiously alive—graciously living and strongly shaded with humor, nicely expressing that affective ambivalence, that tender sphinx we nourish, more or less secretly, at our core.

So don't be content with what I'm heuristically calling *sculpture*. I prefer *DIVAGUER* [WANDER]; since these beautiful objects I've been able to look at and touch stir a fermentation in me of so many memories . . .

Some of these sculptures are hollow like ladles or emptied fruit. Others are perforated to let air pass through, moving grillworks interposed between inside and outside, riddled sieves nibbled by the wind, the hidden wind enveloping us with its immense dark eddy in those amazing moments making us delirious.

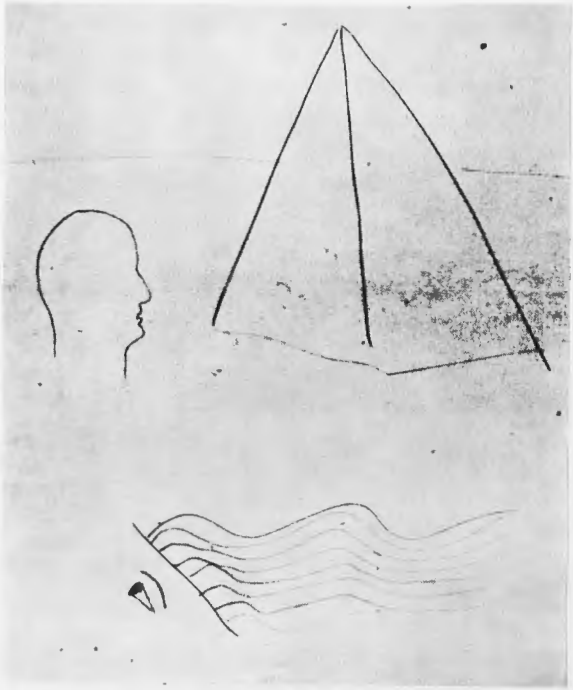
Giacometti was born on October 10th, 1901 in Switzerland (canton of Grizons): the son of a painter.

Until he was fourteen he remained in his village, then in 1915 he entered a *lycée* which he left four years later to take up painting or sculpture, something he had been wanting to do for several years. Six years of studies at the Arts and Crafts School in Geneva didn't interest him. Throughout 1921 he was in Italy, traveling everywhere. Nine months were spent in Rome. In 1922 he came to Paris for the first time. He was there on and off for three years, never staying long; but since 1925 he has taken up residence, except for two or three months spent every year in his native land. At first he frequented an academy to work from nature, but for several years now he has been working alone.

Giacometti is thus a very young sculptor. It's always stupid to make predictions, and prophets are often not much different from birds of ill omen. But how not give him our trust when we see these forms engendered by his fingers, figures so concrete, so obvious, absolute as creatures we

love, kneaded in the transient sweet salt of snow, the dust that falls from our fingernails when we polish them—impalpable cinders a lover would treasure like a relic—the marvelous salt so many ancient searchers believed they could extract from the earth's bowels, the salinity of waves and the stars which also have their tides, the salt, finally, of tears, tears of laughter, of despair or of lunacy, slight, vaguely malicious tears, grotesque tears, or heavy tears loaded with the salt of bones and frozen carcasses, drops of water always, falling relentlessly, sometimes boring a dazzling well through the mute rock of our lives, solid drops of water resembling this salt that still stirs our appetites, sea salt, bitter salt, salt of cracking knuckles, salt of teeth, salt of sweat, salt of looks . . . Here at last are stone dishes, bronze foods wonderfully alive and still able to awaken, to revive our great hunger!

"Alberto Giacometti," from *Documents*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1929, pp. 209–210.



"My life as I see it" (1928)

MOUTH WATER

Tr. by Lydia Davis

We are so used to the sight of our fellow human beings that we don't usually notice the monstrous aspect of each of the elements that go to form our structure. Only rarely does eroticism unleash great revelatory flashes of lightning that sometimes make us understand the true nature of a certain organ, suddenly restoring its integral reality and its stunning force, at the same time establishing as supreme goddess the abolition of hierarchies, of those hierarchies on whose different levels we normally file as best we can the different parts of the body, putting some high up, others low down (according to the value we attach to the different activities they are responsible for), the eyes at the very top—because they are evidently wonderful beacon-lights—but the organs of excretion as remotely far down as possible, quite below any water mark, in the wet caves of a sea stagnant with grief, poisoned by a million sewers . . .

Just below the eyes, the mouth occupies a privileged position, because it is the site of speech, the orifice of respiration, the den where the pact of a kiss is sealed, much more, we think, than the oily factory of mastication. On the one hand *love* is needed to restore to the mouth all of its mythological function (it is no more than a warm, damp grotto, though the teeth ornament it with hard stalactites, and within its folds the tongue lies hidden, a dragon guarding God knows what treasures!), on the other hand *spit* to make it tumble, all at once, to the bottom rung of the organic ladder, by endowing it with a function of ejection, even more repugnant than its role as doorway to be stuffed with food.

Spit is very close to manifestations of eroticism, because like love it "sweeps away" the classification of the organs. Like the sexual act performed in broad daylight, it is the epitome of scandal, since it relegates the mouth—which is the visible sign of intelligence—to the rank of the most shameful organs, and as a consequence man in his entirety to the level of those primitive animals which, possessing only a single opening for all their needs and being therefore exempt from that elementary separation of the organ of nutrition from that of excretion to which would correspond the differentiation of noble from ignoble, are still completely plunged in a sort of diabolical chaos in which nothing has yet been disentangled.

Because of this, spit represents the height of sacrilege. The divinity of the mouth is soiled by it every day. What value can we really give to reason, or to speech, or, hence, to man's so-called dignity, if we think that every philosophical oration, thanks to the fact that language and spit come from one and the same source, can be legitimately represented by the incongruous image of a sputtering orator?

Finally, spit, because of its lack of consistency, its indefinite contours, the relative imprecision of its color, its wetness, is the very symbol of *formlessness*, of what is unverifiable, of what can't be put into a hierarchy, the soft and sticky stumbling block which, better than any sort of rock, trips up the steps of everyone who imagines a human being to be something—*something other* than an unmuscled, hairless animal, the spit of a delirious demiurge who roars with laughter at having expectorated this conceited larva, this comical tadpole who swells up into a demigod's puffy meat . . .

"L'eau à la bouche," from *Documents*, 1929; *Brisées*, pp. 42–43.

Pour le texte original © Mercure de France 1966.

PHANTOM AFRICA (EMAWAYISH)

Tr. by J. Clifford

In the course of his ethnographic study of a possession cult in Gondar, Ethiopia, Leiris becomes erotically infatuated with Emawayish the beautiful "though a bit ravaged" daughter of Malkam Ayyahou, charismatic leader of a group of initiates possessed by "zâr" genies. (See Section 6, below, and the account in Manhood, *1984, p. 140.) His journal entry for 25 August, 1932, contains the following outburst: "Bitterness. Resentment against ethnography which makes you take so inhuman a position, that of an observer, in situations where it would be best to let go." Three days later, during an intense possession seance, Emawayish contrives to leave her mother, comes over to the bed on which Leiris is sitting and, in a gesture of apparent intimacy, places his hand under her armpit. The ethnographer is entranced by the songs she sings while possessed and wants her to write them down so that he and his Ethiopian co-worker Abba Jérome can make translations. Six days later the following entries appear:*

31 August

During the morning, letter from Emawayish. She would be pleased if I made her a gift of a blanket. Quite a natural wish, following my courtly

declarations of devotion . . . I'll never accuse a native of venality. Just imagine how insanely wealthy a European must seem to such poor people and how they must look obsessively on his smallest objects of comfort, as if they were treasures!

Right away this afternoon I go with Abba Jérome to see Emawayish and give her pens, ink, and a notebook so she can record for herself—or dictate to her son—the manuscript [of her songs], letting it be understood that the head of the expedition, if he is pleased, will present her with the desired gift.

Her maneuver of leaving her mother at the onset of her trance the other day may have had no other object than to get close and sit on my bed, the better to check out the blanket . . .

Just before dinner Lutten says in passing that he would like (and he speaks as if it were already done) to sleep with Emawayish. Although I'm preoccupied with her, I'm not in love with the girl; nor do I desire her. Still, Lutten's words torture me, for they make me reopen the wound which is still very much present despite my belief for the past few months that travel, the active life, had effaced it: impossible for me to be content like the others, to treat matters of love with nonchalance, impossible even to feel any enjoyment, ability only to invent incredible torments for myself.

Frantic intellectual activity in which I try especially to penetrate Emawayish's thinking so as to get a better grasp of her relations with her mother, transient desire felt by a young man [Lutten] with whom, by the way, I'm friends, but for whom making love is only a matter of pleasure or hygiene! Such are the elements in the balance; such the contradictory terms I'll never manage to reconcile in myself; this is the root of my awful unhappiness and of my disease. Petrified, certain that I will never, in any sense, be able to act, I weigh the import of this word: ETERNAL. A bullet in the head would be a good way to take care of everything: end the contradiction, avoid growing old, no longer suffer, and even accomplish (since I'm attached to this sort of thing) a perfectly elegant and proper gesture. I'll never pull it off—this single act—probably for reasons of pure cowardice.

But I'm also too isolated. I'm not getting any more letters. There's no one I can speak to from the bottom of my heart. I'm the victim of phantoms produced by what amounts to an internment; they're small phantoms, to be sure, that would melt away at less than a cock's crow but still terrible in spite of their emptiness since they touch my badly hidden wound.

Emawayish's words this afternoon when I told her, speaking of her manuscript, that it would be especially good for her to write down some love songs like those of the other night: *Does poetry exist in France?* And then: *Does love exist in France?*

1 September

Very bad night. First insomnia, then, very late, a little sleep. A dream of Z . . . [Leiris's wife], a dream I get some mail, which makes me feel better. Then suddenly, the smell of the herbs I've had scattered around my room enters my nostrils. Half dreaming, I have the sensation of a kind of swirling (as if reddening and turning my head I were doing the *gourri* dance characteristic of trance) and I let out a scream. This time I'm really possessed . . . But after noting this fact I sleep until 5 AM when [from a nearby military encampment] the Italian trumpet sounds an alert: a prisoner (one of the servants of the assassinated Colonel, a suspect in the murder) has just escaped . . .

During the day, though tired and enervated, I feel better. I realize I've been overworked, that I've been too caught up with research in a dangerous area. I begin to discern also a major cause of the violent pain that has afflicted me: a sudden recognition of my own doubts about what's been going on. The poetry is probably not as beautiful as I had thought, the possession states not as intense, perhaps boiling down to a few vague neurotic phenomena and also covering up quite a bit of merchandizing . . . But above all, and in contradiction to all this, an ardent sensation of being at the edge of something whose depths I will never touch, lacking among other things, an ability to let myself go as necessary, the result of diverse factors very hard to define but among which figure prominently questions of race, of civilization, of language.

An example that somewhat clarifies this conundrum also shows me the irreducible gap separating two civilizations: yesterday Emawayish casually mentions that she no longer washes her youngest son for fear that he will be attacked with an illness by *Rahiélo*. Now, *Rahiélo* is one of the principal zârs that possesses her mother . . . In saying this she indicates her belief that one of the spirits inhabiting the head of her mother is capable of killing her son. But she does not hold her mother responsible, complaining to her—when they converse—only about economic or family matters. In this way then, each person, Emawayish, her mother, Kassahoun the hunter (with the *abbigam* of the animal he has killed), Abba Jérome, myself, we all finally have heads populated by little genies who probably control all our acts (one for each category) without our being in any way responsible. This is what follows from all my friends' actions and from all their words. And so kinsfolk, without ceasing to frequent one another, will keep arguing over sordid interests, men will steal and kill, women will prostitute themselves . . . An atmosphere as splendid as it is unbreathable. So it is for me at least, imbued whatever I do with a civilization that leads one to give everything a moral rather than a magical tint. And this is the great boundary I will never cross . . . For example, it's hard for me to believe that it's not me suffering and rambl-

ing on at this moment, that I am surely possessed by a bad genie – maybe a succubus –, and that in any event there would be no grounds – for example, if I'm feeling lighthearted tomorrow – for giving weight to the words I pronounce today, since tomorrow, inspired by a happier genie, I will no longer be the same. But this is what any one of my local friends would think of my present state.

The attackers of Wadadjé came officially to make their excuses. Three men in turbans.

Two memories. The first recent, from a song by Emawayish:

You look at her neck, her breasts, her waist,
Smiling, she kills. Don't believe she's a woman!

The other one, older, was told to me about the sorceresses of Ségou by my old friend Mamadou Vad: "Once you've eaten their couscous you forget everything. You don't recall where you've come from, or why."

L'Afrique fantôme, 1934, pp. 358–360.

MIRROR OF THE BULLFIGHT

Tr. by J. Clifford

Looking at a *corrida* one has the impression, despite the very great part played by chance, of being in the presence of an impeccably ordered ritual: the left side of things is expertly played with, more and more openly given place, which is to say defined and drawn out in a way that lets it abruptly destroy itself and yield to the right [to the law, *au droit*].

In strictly erotic matters it is not so, even less in the extended domain of love, where analogous elements are at play but always in a wild state (constantly swollen outside their bounds) since they are too directly rooted in life to be dominated to this degree. Moreover we find neither the majestic ordering nor the optimistic finish of the *corrida*, which admits ambiguity only to resolve it almost immediately the way one cuts a gordian knot, and where the left, finally, is completely absorbed by the right.

Erotic excitation would probably not be possible without at least a confused idea of something supremely beautiful toward which we strain

and for which we feel a nostalgia (ravaged as we are in our mortal condition, our deepest unhappiness) or which, inversely, we enjoy debasing. The Christian myth of man's fall and redemption—left and right, perdition and resurrection—has its equivalent in the realm of the passions as the double theme of innocence stained and of an infamy that dirties us and is redeemed; either evil erupts within the good, corrodes and corrupts it, or good illuminates evil and, searing it with its flame, restores an extreme purity. But however inevitable this sort of dualism, everything still turns on sin's dark side. For if in some way innocence holds an attraction it is only because it appears as an oasis, miraculously preserved and constantly threatened.

In the act of love, directly or by contrast, there must therefore be a suggestion of that supremely beautiful and innocent thing (waters from the original well, Eden before the Fall) while at the same time this fault, this abyss, this vice will have to appear: either something properly *vicious* will be found in the desired object—put there through the erotic acts themselves—or else the distressed state one was plunged in at the moment of effecting coitus (a feeling of emptiness, lesion, lack) will play the role of this sin, this vice, since it is the *gauche* element, the element of misfortune.

So all in all it seems that sin, deterioration, dissonance, laceration—all things in some degree signs of a curse or, more broadly, of mischance—necessarily intervene in the apprehension* of the sacred, as the presence of a left side appears alongside a right, marking the ambiguity of which the sacred—which emerges at the precise instant one of the two elements tips over into its opposite—may well be only the most intense and lustrous expression.

In sum, everything takes place in the dangerous waters of an oceanic shelf as narrow as a razor's edge, a thin zone of interference, a psychological no man's land constituting the site par excellence of the sacred: the ridge where a taboo is erected (meaningful only as a constraint aiming to prevent a possible violation or sacrilege), the limit under whose gaze things abandon the disoriented, amorphous character of the profane and polarize into left and right.

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*In the double sense of the word, since you fear it at the same time it fascinates you. Only ambiguity gives the feeling of absolute understanding because at the point of ambiguity you embrace the two sides of the curve. This sentiment of absolute understanding is experienced when on the one hand you approach the tangency *from close enough* for there to be an illusion of real contact while on the other you have a perception of failure, pertinent knowledge of the fault.

As for the ideal projection by which we seek to counterbalance whatever is ominous in our existence, its real basis and active cause is our unhappy condition, for if unhappiness drives us to construct this sort of projection it also incites us to destroy it, as if in revenge for its deceptive, hallucinatory nature and for its growing domination.

Whereas the essential problem confronting all religions is the neutralization of evils and principally of death, the problem to be taken up by the fabricators of mirrors – those, that is, who by esthetic creation or any other means, make themselves into lucid artisans of our revelations – should rather be the assimilation of these evils, without caring for possible ruination or corruption, if to a degree they can be mythically transmuted into ferments of exaltation.

The senile occupation of most philosophers and builders of religions has been to banish death, masking it behind all kinds of timelessly perfect edifices. To incorporate death in life, making it in some sense voluptuous (like the *torero*'s gesture suavely leading the bull into the folds of his cape or *muleta*): such should be the work of the fabricators of mirrors – and by this I mean: all whose most urgent goal is to bring out some of those facts which appear to us as *places we feel tangent to the world and to ourself*, elevating us as they do to the level of a plenitude laden with its own torture and its own derision.

There is no way to attain this except by mixing into the alloy used for silvering our mirror (a play, erotic scene, poem, work of art) some element able to register what is distraught, endlessly miserable, and irreducibly *vitiated* in the most rigid or tender beauty. Without this nip of venom no alcohol is conceivable, since intoxication – however euphoric – can never be anything but a more or less faithful image of our future communion with the world of death.

From *Miroir de la tauromachie*, 1938 (1981 edition), pp. 63–67.

FAULT

Tr. by Lydia Davis

Smoking a cigarette as I drink my morning tea in my Paris bedroom, I sometimes have an unreasonable but keenly felt desire to smoke a cigarette. Now I am already doing just that – smoking – and so it is absurd to want to do what I am, quite simply, already doing. No doubt

what I really want is the relaxation the act of smoking gives me (sitting with my right elbow resting in the palm of my left hand, holding my Rothmans between the index and middle fingers of my right hand, bringing it to my lips to inhale the smoke deeply, detaching the cork tip from my lips and then exhaling the smoke, preferably through my nostrils, from time to time substituting my thumb for my index finger to free the latter so that it can tap the glowing end of the cylinder a few times and make the ash fall into the very cheap 1900 ashtray whose edge is ornamented with the head of a very young woman in high relief who is looking outwards with her eyes turned to the heavens, and who seems to be emerging from the two billows of interminable hair encircling the thick, shallow chalice of metal). But I have not relaxed, as I thought I would when I lit my cigarette at the flame of my lighter, and since I remain in exactly the same condition that I wanted to put an end to by smoking, I still have the same desire, born of the same feeling of lack, and the object of this desire – perhaps a fixed habit is producing a certain automatism? – is the thing I am already doing, which is ineffective and therefore leaves my desire intact – this desire for relaxation that should, reasonably, now lead me towards something other than this palliative which I am making use of without any result.

For a moment I am so entirely possessed by this desire that it doesn't occur to me that, as I smoke and think of smoking as though I weren't doing it, the object of my desire is the thing that I don't have to desire since I am doing it at this very moment and that, furthermore, this desire is absurd for another reason, because its persistence shows how useless the thing is, since it can't satisfy my desire despite the small, vague pleasure it gives. When, almost immediately, I discover that the thing I want to do is precisely the thing I am already doing, but that my desire, which was appeased in the minor form it took, remains unappeased, I am of course humiliated by my absentmindedness, as though it is a sign that my brain is deteriorating, but more than this, I become slightly dizzy, because I feel that even if my excuse could be the fact that I'm not yet fully awake, a sort of geological fault is manifesting itself here: the kind of fault that will continue to exist at a deep level even while at the surface our desire will have managed to be satisfied.

From *Le Ruban au cou d'Olympia*, 1981, pp. 98–99.

IN THE PROXIMITY OF GREAT MEN

by Lydia Davis

Last summer I went to Paris. I had not been there for many years, through no fault of my own. There were several great men I wanted to meet there, two of whom knew me through correspondence or through friends, and one of whom did not. I wrote letters to the two who knew me, but not to the one who did not. One of the two answered and agreed to meet me, but the other remained silent.

I asked some friends about the man who refused to meet me or even, this time, answer my letter, and they all told me what I already knew, that he does not meet with anyone, not even other great men of his own age or a generation younger, and that when these meetings are proposed, he answers that such meetings are not necessary: he prefers the friendship to advance by letter only, having a certain tension, for a conversation face to face would inevitably fall into banality.

While I still hoped for an answer from this great man, thinking he might make an exception in my case, and before I met with the great man who had answered my letter, I went out to find the house of the great man who does not know me.

I had the address and a map, and I walked, reading the map, up one avenue to a traffic circle and down another avenue away from the traffic circle, and then across on a little street from one avenue to another until I came to the avenue he lived on, then down that avenue in the wrong direction, and then up it again, until I found the house.

I stood in front of the house, looked into the entrance, saw the bank of mailboxes of which his must be one, and did not go in to stare at his mailbox because of a sudden excess of embarrassment. Starting back the way I had come, I turned a corner and went into a store that sold notepaper. I bought what I believed was the same notepaper on which the great man had once written some very brief letters to my husband in a very small, very sloping hand with black ink, and when I asked the woman who sold me the notepaper, I was told with pride and some sense of ownership that this great man did indeed come in here now and then to buy this same notepaper. I went away feeling unusually foolish, as all admirers of great men may sometimes feel.

In the same way, many years ago in Paris, when we were still young, my husband and I once found ourselves standing on a street corner next to this great man, across from a park. At the sight of him, my husband looked ill, then his color came back. Like children we followed the great man across the street and into the park, walking behind him at a distance of about ten yards. We watched the way he moved, striding along in his

corduroy suit with his briefcase hanging from the end of his arm, and we slowed down when he stopped a moment to look at a tennis match. At that point we turned away from his path, because there would otherwise have been no end to how long we would have followed him.

The third great man arranged to meet me in his office, which was in the basement of a large museum on a prominence above the Seine overlooking much of Paris. The museum was so close to a famous monument that it was surrounded by tourists milling in the morning sun and also by black vendors flying mechanical birds that were amazingly lifelike.

The handwriting of this great man, on the letter he had sent me, wavered as though seen under water. His voice also shook, when he greeted me outside the elevator in the basement corridor. He was shy, as I had been warned, and he fell into silence often during our conversation. I spoke very loudly so that he would hear me, because I had also been warned several times that he was deaf in one ear, but I was afraid he would wonder why I was speaking so loudly, and find it tiring to be with this loud woman in his small office half underground, where the window was now and then filled with the faces of curious tourists shading their eyes to see this woman sitting very erect on her chair across from this old man with the bald egg-shaped head, who fell into silence so frequently.

I am very glad to have met this great man, though I have only recently begun to know his work. I am sorry not to have met the great man who knows me by letter, because for some years I have felt a sympathy with him so deep that at times his work nearly becomes mine. In the case of the third great man, however, it is enough never to have met him, it is enough merely to have been, as I was briefly, in his proximity.

SECTION 3 DREAMS

NIGHTS AS DAY
DAYS AS NIGHT

Tr. by Richard Sieburth

Nuits sans nuit, et quelques jours sans jour, *first published in 1961, is a collection of a hundred or so short* récits *composed over the course of four decades. As the title implies (literally, "Nights without darkness, and a few days without light"), the texts in this volume pursue an extended pun on the porous demarcation between waking and dreaming. By transcribing the events of his daily life as if they were episodes in an ongoing dream, by recording his dreams as if they embodied the true narrative of his waking existence, Leiris in effect deconstructs the distinction between the two, leaving instead a play of mirrors which catch both night and day in an ever receding* mise en abyme.

The epigraph to Nuits sans nuit *— "Dream is a second life" — is taken from the celebrated opening of Nerval's* Aurélia*:*

> *Dream is a second life. I have never been able to penetrate those ivory or hornèd gates which separate us from the invisible world without shuddering. The first moments of sleep are an image of death; our thought goes numb and hazy, and we cannot determine the precise instant when the self, in another form, continues the task of existence. Little by little the dim cavern grows lighter, and the pale, grave motionless figures that live in limbo emerge from the shadows and the night. Then the tableau takes shape, a new brightness illminates and animates these bizarre apparitions: the spirit world opens before us.*

Like the curtain-raising of Aurélia, *the texts of* Nuits sans nuit *operate within the conventions and illusions of the stage, glimmering like mirages against a scrim of shadows. But whereas Nerval's dreamscapes simulate the spectacular sweep of 19th-century opera and diorama, Leiris's oneiric theater reflects more modern, and more modest, forms of entertainment — music halls, fairgrounds, circus shows, boxing matches, museum exhibitions, and above all, Hollywood movies, whose impact on the* mise en scène *of the collective dreamlife of our century Leiris was among the first to register.*

"I have always behaved as if I were on stage," Leiris confesses in L'Age

d'homme, *and the roles he executes in* Nuits sans nuit *are various: he is a hero of Greek or Racinian tragedy, martyr of the French Resistance, matador, bantamweight champion of the world, Chaplinesque victim of the Eternal Feminine, Ben Turpin, Gary Cooper, but most frequently he simply plays a mild-mannered minor functionary and author beset by the usual anxieties and fantasies of the average* homme moyen sensuel. *Whatever the scenario, however, Leiris's Nervalian insight into the essential theatricality of the self allows him to abolish the proscenium between dreaming and waking, spectacle and reality, and to subsume both into a single space of representation where, at once actor and spectator, he is free to perform his ritual impersonations of identity.*

Although dream is indeed a "second life," it does not follow for Leiris (and here he parts company both with Nerval and the surrealists) that it therefore constitutes a higher or deeper plane of reality. Instead, he conceives dream as a mere simulacrum or double *of life, a mirror in which the scenes of day—now condensed, now displaced—uncannily return as sheer repetitions or re-presentations. In the world of* Nuits sans nuit, *dreams (like identities) are copies for which there is no original: they do not provide access to a more authentic otherworld, they possess no genealogy that might lead us back to archetypical sources, their omens have less to do with prophecy than with chance. Or as Leiris succinctly puts it in his blurb for the book: "Dreams are not an evasion . . . dreams are not a revelation."*

This refusal to concede a facile otherness to dream is related to what Leiris, in an essay on Raymond Queneau, refers to as counter-exoticism. *Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the texts of* Nuits sans nuit *is their ordinariness, their deliberate dailiness, their eschewal of lyricism in favor of the unprepossessing prose of the world. Forgoing both the* dépaysment *of the Baudelairean* rêve exotique *and the sensational oneirorrhea of surrealism (soft watches and all), Leiris instead concentrates on estranging the familiar, on unsettling the commonplace, on eliciting the foreignness of the most domestic, local detail. And it is thus that* Nuits sans nuit *rejoins Leiris's autobiographical and ethnographic enterprises: all it takes is a minor adjustment of lighting or a slight troping of rhetoric for daily life to take on the uncertain distance of dream, and conversely, for dream to be demystified into the quotidian. In either case, the locus of Leiris's days and nights is always here and now—which is to say, already* elsewhere.

R.S.

April 12–13, 1923

One evening, upon entering my room, I see myself sitting on my bed. With a single punch, I annihilate the phantom who has stolen my appearance. At this point my mother appears at a door while her double, a perfect replica of the model, enters through a facing door. I scream very loudly, but my brother turns up unexpectedly, also accompanied by his double who orders me to be quiet, claiming I will frighten my mother.

December 22–23, 1923

I meet a woman in a movie theater, I speak to her, I caress her. Arm in arm, we go back to the little bungalow where she lives, on a street which is a sequence of brothels. She opens the bungalow door and leads me to her room: a young girl's room. She makes it clear that she is mine for the taking, but just as I am about to possess her, I am seized by second thoughts: this woman is a prostitute, and most likely diseased. I leap into the garden with a single bound and perch myself (exactly as a woman would perch herself on an armchair at the sight of a rat or a large spider) on top of one of the two stone pillars that frame the entrance gate. I hunker on this pedestal like a stylite.

As I am getting ready to leap into the street, I realize that I am in fact on the uppermost platform of the Eiffel Tower, so I hold back. For a moment, I consider climbing down the outside of the tower, clutching at the iron cross-bars. But knowing that I would suffer a fatal bout of vertigo, I give up the idea and resign myself to waiting for the arrival of the next elevator.

The platform is at once a ship's deck, an airplane, the tip of a lighthouse. I have no idea when I'll get down.

July 27–28, 1924 [excerpt]

[. . .] The word dream [*rêve*] has something cobwebby to it, as well as something akin to the gossamer veil that clogs the throats of people suffering from the croup. This is no doubt due to its sonority and to certain formal relations between the *v* and the circumflex accent that precedes it (this accent being nothing more than a smaller, inverted *v*); hence the idea of interlacing, of a finely woven veil. Dreams are spider-like, given their instability on the one hand and, on the other, their veiling. If dreams are like the croup, it is probably because they are linked to the notion

of nocturnal disturbances (like those bouts of false croup from which I suffered at night when I was a very small child).

March 14–15, 1925

Sidled up to a woman named Nadia – to whom I am drawn by very tender feelings – I am at the edge of the sea, a shore on the order of Palm Beach, a Hollywood beach. Playfully, just to scare the living daylights out of me and just to ascertain how hard I would take her death, Nadia, an excellent swimmer, pretends she is drowning. She in fact does drown, and her corpse is brought to me. I begin to weep until the play of words, "Nadia, drowned naiad" [*"Nadia, naïade noyée*] – which comes to me at the threshold of waking – appears to be both an explanation and a consolation.

Undated
(half-asleep)

Gunshots in the night: a gigantic ram's head appears. Its two horns are two poles exchanging magnetic discharges. A woman, supine, bound hand and foot, suspended in the void, slowly passes between these two magnetic branches. A small, veiny drawing on her breast becomes a laceration, then thunder in a cloud, and the ram's head lets its fleece hang like rain.

September 1926?

They are performing a play in London falsely attributed to Alfred Jarry; the stage decor is straight out of music hall revues, and chorines are doing a ragtime song-and-dance.

The main character is a Greek – with whom, though I am merely a spectator, I identify now and then – and one of the other characters, also a Greek, is a wizard.

In one of the acts, the hero imagines that a regiment of French soldiers is parading by him. Since he does not salute the flag, an officer (who is quite real) leaves the ranks, revolver in hand. First he trains his weapon on the soldiers, then on the crowd, and finally on the Greek, who is none other than myself. He aims at his right eye and, after several moments of suspense, fires.

Everything vanishes. Then we return to Ancient Greece. Shortly thereafter, the Greek goes blind in one eye (as if the gunshot he had received were merely the prefiguration of this infirmity); soon he goes totally blind, having fallen under an evil spell.

Undated

I am going on a trip, so I have to move all the books in my library from one room to another.

Since the occasion calls for me to show one of my manuscripts to some of my friends, I go down to the street, rip from the pavement what appear to be trolley-car rails, and go back up to the apartment, dragging meters of rails behind me which bang on the stairs at every step I take. I then realize that my burden is in fact made up of a number of large glass objects similar to those coasters one used to find in middle-class living rooms and which were placed under the feet of the piano to protect the carpet or the floor. Because this is indeed my manuscript, I am fairly annoyed. But I manage to console myself, given the fact that my arrival provokes the following comment: "He's quite something, that Leiris! You ask him for a manuscript, and he drags back rails from the street." On the other hand, though these objects finally reveal themselves to be melting ice, and though the chain quickly dissolves, I hope I will be able to reconstitute some of its elements.

At the farewell dinner in honor of my departure, I am seated next to my niece. My sister, who is also present, tells me that her daughter—this niece next to whom I am seated—has just been "given her freedom in department stores," a legal phrase which means that she now has the right to do her shopping all on her own. The employees of the store where the ceremony took place are all agronomists. They celebrated her emancipation because she is interested in agriculture, and they spoke to her of a revolution (the Commune?) which is an agrarian revolution in which she played a glorious agrarian part.

May 15–16, 1929

The scene of action is a theater where I am performing a play with a woman, both she and I truly feeling for each other the emotions we are pretending to act out. At the end of the performance, she drags me off to a place which (retrospectively) I would describe as a kind of stairwell squeezed into another stairwell. I take her in my arms to make love to

her. Then I see her stretched out on the ground, naked.

On the line that runs from her sex to her neck, passing through her belly-button and the cleavage of her two breasts, there is a growth of long, blond weeds—humid, salty tufts planted at regular intervals. To me this woman then seems to resemble Z . . . or to be Z . . .

July 14–15, 1929
(half-asleep)

One of my incisors [*incisives*], having grown far out of proportion (as long and wide as a street), is vertically cut in half by a saw; the tooth thus becomes *Venice* [*Venise*].

Did this convergence of Venice and a sawed tooth come about via the word "laguna" which evokes the idea of a lacuna? There is, moreover, the rue de Venise which was for a long time the narrowest street in Paris.

July 18, 1929
(real life)

A pole about as long as a fishing rod, with an automobile horn attached to it about a third of the way up and topped off by a very old, very dirty white umbrella which is in turn crowned by a bouquet of flowers. The umbrella is open and although it sits too high on the pole to cast any decent shade, the man who is strolling around with this contraption as if it were some archaic parasol seems to be using it both as a fashion accessory and as an actual protection against the sun. Could it be some sort of learned apparatus that allows its bearer to provoke rain or shine at will? Somewhere between 40 and 45 years old (and thus nearly an old man in my 30-year old's eyes), his looks are working-class—thin, a small moustache traced across his face, dressed all in black, with a filthy white sweater. A black cap with a leather visor sits on his head and around his neck he is wearing a necklace of large nickel-plated beads reminiscent of those women's necklaces that were in fashion a few years back.

It's on a sidewalk of the rue d'Auteuil—the street where I was born but where I have not lived since early childhood—that I witness this, looking out from a trolley car whose route was discontinued so long ago that I almost ask myself whether it in fact ever existed.

April 22–23, 1933

In a film a female character—who is essentially a *mother*—briefly appears bare-breasted. At which point someone in the audience remarks: "She's good-looking, but her breasts are a little too long . . ." I immediately gather that "long" is an ironically euphemistic term for "saggy."

Rereading this note, I remembered an expression that a schoolmate and I used to use in high school (at Janson-de-Sailly, somewhere between 1914 and 1916), but in a completely opposite sense. A portion of the high school had been turned into a military infirmary, and among the Red Cross nurses we used to see around every day, there was one whose prominent, elegantly contoured bust we greatly admired. We dubbed her bust "ogival," proudly using an adjective which demonstrated our knowledge of medieval architecture, and enjoying ourselves like refined aesthetes whenever we uttered this sibylline term.

August 19–20, 1933
(Kerrariot)

Discussing some film, allegedly an old silent in which the American comedian Ben Turpin uses his celebrated squint to size up a nearby tree at a single glance—its trunk, its branches, its tip, its age, its growth rate. If the character played by Ben Turpin has such a remarkably wide field of vision, it is because he is so cock-eyed that his two eyes cross at a very obtuse angle.

Is this the first segment of an extremely long dream which is made up of disparate elements, or the first in a series of dreams I had during a single night while vacationing in Brittany several months after my return from a long trip to Black Africa? That night I met many people and visited an extraordinary variety of sites: a corner of Cairo or Barcelona; a gymnasium, a country fair situated on two floors of the same building, occupying both a concert hall and a theater; the Place de l'Opéra where a broad stream was flowing, probably in the wake of some political demonstration.

I long remembered the "corner of Cairo" and that beautiful tanned girl beneath the bluest of skies, making her way between the strawberry-colored houses whose *moucharabiehs* were ogival windows decorated with small pilasters, demi-rosettes set into the confluence of their curves.

March 27–28, 1934

I am with a woman close to my heart, on board a boat, about to disembark perhaps for a simple call at port, accompanied by Z . . . and several other acquaintances who are traveling in our party. Searching for a doll which my lady friend has just lost (just as several days ago she had lost her pocketbook at an actual ball we were attending), I comb the stairways and the parlors amid the crush of passengers. Meet a little girl (barely pubescent and probably related to that little lolita whose spunk so struck me when I gave that lecture-tour at the Trocadero Museum of Ethnography for a group of teenagers who belonged to the left-wing youth group, "The Red Falcons"). The doll the little girl is holding is the one I'm looking for, and I ask her for it. She gives it to me, proud to have found the lost item. I chat with her, we disembark together, and walk along the pier.

The little girl seems to enjoy my company greatly, and I notice that she is quite developed for her age (she's probably 12 or 13). After a while, it occurs to me that she's probably spent a fair amount of time with me by now: her parents are going to start worrying and wondering what on earth I am doing with her. So I tell her she'll get into trouble with her parents if she doesn't leave right away. She then explains to me that she is studying dance and, growing ever more flirtatious, she overtly sets out to seduce me.

I am now in a room, either in a hotel or a private apartment, to which I have been led by the young ballerina who soon becomes identified with the woman who had lost the doll (a woman whom I see almost on a daily basis without having to dream and whose young daughter I know). The girl-woman or the woman-girl – subsequently confused with Z . . . and no longer with her rival – had made preparations for a sort of bacchanalia: two sailors are present, along with two prostitutes, all four of them getting ready to make love at the same time, but without promiscuity. Things get delayed a bit. One makes sure that all the doors are shut tight. Then I get undressed and start, I believe, not by taking off my jacket (as I do in real life), but by dropping my trousers right away. At which point a door which we had not noticed opens: one of my three sisters-in-law, a spinster, enters, bringing a hot-water bottle or some other item of domestic comfort to my wife. The woman-girl and I are horribly embarrassed at having been surprised in the company of couples about to engage in group sex.

A detail of the interior decoration: a sort of wardrobe, tall and narrow, featuring three circular apertures in a vertical row which have been installed for voyeurs or which are themselves the heads of voyeurs. Several pistol shots are aimed at this wardrobe, probably by the sailors.

June 29–30, 1934

Upon leaving some ceremony which (probably) took place at the Trocadero Museum of Ethnography, I run into a famous psychoanalyst who is also a Princess* and whom I had seen two or three days earlier in real life. She berated me for my book *L'Afrique fantôme* (published in April), noting my "masochistic passivity." When I meet her in my dream, she takes my right hand, sinks her teeth into the phalanx of my bent index finger and remains in that position for some time as she walks and talks with me. She invites me to visit her at home so she can continue to give me her opinion of my travel journal. I consult my appointment calendar but find I am booked up.

In the course of the official events of the evening, a film about a composer was shown. The young hero of the film, an Austrian officer with a moustache, outfitted in a short military jacket decorated with frogs and loops, was singing a song which contained the word "Marcade." A contraction of the word "marquise" and of the supposed name of a flower, this word brought to mind (even before I awoke) the two main characters in a play by Roger Vitrac: Arcade and Désirade, the protagonists—one male, the other female—of his *Coup de Trafalgar.* The song is a satirical ditty which makes fun of the composer. The lyrics are translated for me: "When he directs, slow all his movements up," a phrase which was in fact addressed to the crew that shot the film, inducing them to engage in some sort of sabotage or practical joke which will victimize the musician who supposedly was to be honored.

Undated

It has been agreed that as soon as the 1937 Exposition opens I will take my young niece Germaine Lascaux to see a performance of *Carmen* there. Instead of the bullfight which is occasionally tacked on to the last act of *Carmen* (in open-air performances in the arena of Arles or elsewhere), there will be the following attraction: an animal trainer working at a typewriter with his back turned to his wild beasts.

Awaking, I realize that the trainer-typist (a substitute matador) is myself. Dozing off again to discover that the word he is typing on his machine is: *Public Opinion.*

*Probably Marie Bonaparte—trans.

Summer 1939
(real life)

"I am the Volcano . . ." a bearded man on the pier announces by way of introduction. We have just landed at Santorini.* Its volcano, very active at the moment, rises out of the water in the center of the nearly perfect ring that constitutes the inhabited portion of the island.

The individual who has thus announced himself (we almost had to pinch ourselves to make sure we weren't dreaming) is a Frenchman whose beard is of a very rich color, although not quite flaming red. He turns out to be the owner of the Volcano Hotel, which is where we end up staying. During dinner, having partaken of "Vulcanic Port Wine," we play our little part in a domestic farce whose major scenes take place in the wings: the proprietor of the hotel accuses his daughter of being a slut (she must have been sleeping around or have gotten pregnant), the mother moans and groans, the girl gets fresh, the father rants and raves, periodically interrupting his performance to come into the dining room to see whether we are satisfied with our meal.

Before dinner, we have no trouble finding a boat to take us to the erupting volcano, even though the area has been placed off-limits by the authorities. We walk around the tiny island; the water surrounding it is very hot and the island itself is grumbling and sputtering. We feel the burning ground underfoot and, somewhat apprehensive, observe the crevasses, the lava, and the eruptions of sulphur all around us. All this naturally makes us think of the war which, from the stray bits of news we hear, seems all the more threatening.

We decide to beat a quick retreat: there is a rumbling underground more powerful than anything we've heard so far and it is so close to us that we feel it—or believe we feel it—right under our feet.

March 3, 1942
(real life, Boulogne-Biliancourt)

While sitting up at night in the library which is heated by a stove and which has practically become our living room, an air-raid alert. The fascinating spectacle of the sky lit up with anti-aircraft flares. Ignoramuses, we gawk as if it were all a fine display of fireworks and, without missing a beat, we follow the merry-go-round of airplanes which we initially take

*The Greek island of Thíra in the Cyclades—*trans.*

to be the German defenses, unaware that this apocalyptic glare is not meant to detect attacking planes but rather to blind their approach to their bombing targets. Explosions over toward the Renault factories. Then a lull, during which my sister-in-law and our young blond-haired maid retire for the night, leaving my wife and me alone in the library, a room on the ground floor which opens out onto the garden. The calm is far from complete, but I force myself to read—as if nothing were—a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson, translated into French under the title *Le Reflux*.

Just as I am coming to one of the most crucial episodes in the book—a schooner suddenly bursting into flames—all hell breaks loose: the window thrown open amid a shatter of glass, a gust of wind dislodging the stove and showering dust and sparks all over the room. A number of ear-splitting shrieks are let out by our young maid (a dumb, incompetent but not unpleasant girl who would leave our service shortly thereafter and who, as we later found out, would become a nude dancer or something of that sort in a girlie show on the outskirts of Paris). We rush up to the second floor to find its two inhabitants safe and sound. Since I am the only male on the scene, I take command of the situation and order everybody down into the cellar.

Shortly before midnight, the air-raid alert ends and we leave the underground shelter where we had been shivering not from the cold (as we had believed), but from fear. The damage to the house seemed to be limited: some broken panes of glass, the ironwork and hinges of the windows all twisted, broken locks and bolts on the front and cellar doors, plaster strewn in the downstairs hallway. It was only afterwards that we would notice that one of the dividing walls had a crack running through it.

Have a look outdoors and am surprised to find the rue de l'Ancienne-Mairie littered with fallen shutters, shards of glass, and debris of all kinds; on the corner where yesterday an apartment building of 7 or 8 stories stood, there are now ruins and a huge fire. We pick our way through the chaos. Wearing a pair of old patent leather shoes (which I would put on every evening when I came home in order to save my other shoes from wear), dressed in a large double-breasted navy suit (which I had ordered at the "Petit Matelot" when times were beginning to get rough), I feel absolutely preposterous—a foreign body, as in those dreams in which the sleeper's nightclothes are transformed into some incongruous mode of dress—and I think of an American film that was shown in Paris a number of years before the war: it featured Clark Gable, dressed in a black suit, wandering through the fissures and the debris of the famous earthquake that destroyed San Francisco.

The aftermath: 600 dead and 2000 wounded in our district, according to morning rumors.

May 19–20, 1942

Condemned to death by the Germans, I take the thing manfully enough until I am told that they are going to come give me a shave in the early afternoon – a final grooming before my execution. Having concentrated all my attention on this final grooming, I had lost sight of the ultimate fact of my execution. But now that I know the hour at which it will take place, my mind can move beyond it, and the screen which had been placed between death and myself by this detail of protocol now disappears. Since there is no longer anything separating me from my execution, my courage gives way to an undescribable anxiety. I feel I will not be able to face up to the ordeal, that I will be led to the stake kicking and screaming.

I subsequently dream about the publication of the memoirs of my colleague at the Musée de l'Homme, Anatole Lewitzky (who was in fact shot by the Germans on February 23rd of this year).* Noting all the last-minute impressions of a man condemned to die, he tells how the execution took place on some abandoned World's Fair at the foot of the Mont Valérien. He was lined up with his friends with his back against a reconstructed African roundhouse made out of pisé or dried clay. Lewitzky reports that in front of the door of the hut that was serving as an execution stake, there was a chicken or the skeleton of a chicken on the ground (like those feathers of sacrificially slaughtered chickens or those animal skulls or jawbones that one sees on household altars in Africa). He closes with a kind of political testament or credo: rallying cries, confident predictions as to the outcome of the war.

One Week Later

The friends and relatives of Anatole Lewitzky have been given permission to visit him just before his execution. I set out to see him, terrified that I will arrive too late, but since I have always loathed running, I slow down my pace after a few meters.

I find Lewitzky in a large room, surrounded by most of the people who work at the Trocadero Museum. Under his floppy hat, his face with its slightly Mongol eyes and cheekbones strikes me as extremely pale (but no paler, in fact, than it usually was). I embrace him in tears. As a farewell gift, one of the museum staff offers him an enormous bowl of steaming

*The Musée de l'Homme was an early center of the Resistance. On the role of Lewitzky and other ethnographers see M. Blumenson, *The Vildé Affair – trans.*

soup. Very calmly, he sniffs the vapor of the soup and agrees to partake of it in our presence while we all stand around him (as if for some religious ceremony), deeply moved.

In 1955 I will rediscover something of the atmosphere of this dream and the preceding dream when, upon visiting the Cultural Palace of the Workers in Shanghai on October 12th, I see the series of photos depicting the revolutionary hero Wang Siao-ho, a worker at the central electric power-station who was shot by the Kuomintang. One of the photos shows him at his trial, young, handsome, smiling. Another photo shows him striding toward his death, showering prophetic invectives on the reactionary government.

August 28–29, 1942
(morning dream, Saint-Leonard de Noblat)

I am the actor Jean Yonnel and I am declaiming a Racinian sort of tragedy. Suddenly I no longer remember my lines. Speaking slowly in short jerky sentences though still maintaining my declamatory fervor, I proclaim that since present circumstances have made me become conscious of tragedy, I can no longer perform tragedy as I used to, a performance which only my lack of awareness of tragedy had made possible.

Beyond the moral significance of this theme (tragedy as an art form devalorized by the living experience of tragedy), there is also the way in which this theme is linked to the very process of awaking: as I regain consciousness (that is, as I leave sleep behind), I discover myself incapable of reciting my lines (or more precisely: I discover that I was only imagining myself to be reciting). Asleep, I recited or imagined myself reciting lines (to be exact: though I was saying nothing, I was nonetheless in the same emotional state as someone reciting his lines); but upon waking (already half-conscious), discovering that I will truly have to invent my lines instead of merely acting as if I were reciting them, I come up with a compromise. I continue to speak, but only in order to speak about speaking my lines.

One of my most powerful memories of the stage is Yonnel playing Orestes in *Andromaque*, his style of acting at once vehement and decorous, making use of every modulation of his fine voice. I remember leaving the theater, still in that heightened state which every spectacle ought to induce in us, and being horribly upset that I had to deal with the crush of the subway and with the hassles at the ticket booth because of some error I had made in small change. I railed against this obligatory return to my senses; I had been plunged into a myth, and in a split-second it had all evaporated.

March 19–20, 1943

The dream I am having becomes like a state of waking, which is about to end: unable to resist falling asleep in the dream itself, I sense that this dream is about to conclude, not with a return to reality but with a plunge into the void of unconsciousness. I prepare myself to cry out in fright, but Z . . . intervenes and my uneasiness stops.

A moment analogous to the one which often tends to elicit similar screams from me just as I am about to awake. But in this case the movement was considerably more frightening; instead of those interminable pangs which one experiences when emerging with difficulty from a dream, I was in a sense being precipitated downward by my dream, plunged into a sleep from which I would never escape, i.e. death.

May 16–17, 1944

I am to be executed because I am a member of the resistance or a hostage or for some entirely different reason, and this fact occasions a sort of fiesta on the part of my friends. I say my goodbyes to Z . . . , most heart-rending. I also say farewell to one of our friends whom I am very fond of—Simone de Beauvoir—or I am looking for her in order to say goodbye. No guards around me; I appear to be completely free. My friends are lined up in front of me two deep, like a crowd at the finish line of the Tour de France, and I pass by them, accompanied by Z . . . , who escorts me as if I were a child that needed soothing. We arrive at a wall of rock, full of crags and jagged outcroppings, where the execution is to take place; I place my back against it with Z . . . still by my side (to my right, I believe, squeezing my hand). I put my back to the wall as hard as I can, as if I were trying to encrust myself into it, not so much in order to disappear into it as to muster up in myself some of its rigidity—not physical, but moral rigidity, i.e. courage. I hear horses and perhaps the sound of marching troops. Sinking into abject terror, I feel all my bravado melt away. Then I grow furious and tell Z . . . that I'm not going to let myself be killed like this. Then I scurry off and plunge headlong into a sunken alley which runs parallel to the row of our spectator friends. The fall awakens me, or rather takes me into another dream in which I am explaining to someone the way I manage to cut short my dreams by deliberately falling.

Still asleep, I go over this dream in my mind and I repeat certain parts of it, varying the details. More specifically, this second version features a rectangle of white paper which is given to those who are about to be shot to death. They are allowed to write their last words on it, and when

the time comes for them to be executed, the piece of paper is placed not over their eyes but over their mouth, like a gag.

May 22–23, 1946
(after the grand opening of the "Madagascar" exhibition at the Musée de l'Homme)

Paul Rivet, my boss in real life (who, upon his return from America at the end of the war, has again taken over the reins of the institution for which I work), owns a large traveling circus somehwat like the outfit that used to be run by Colonel Cody, alias "Buffalo Bill." I make my way along a road with several friends, aware that this road will cut through the grounds that make up the immense ring of the circus. At the same moment a Cowboy and Indian show is taking place, a rodeo of sorts. Since I have always hated gunfire, I hope that our traversal of the circus ring will not coincide with the moment they start shooting off their pistols, a standard event in this type of show.

We arrive at the circus, but we are no longer anonymous passers-by but members of Rivet's troupe. Forming part of what in circus parlance is called the "rail," we are lined up at the entrance of the ring and are also supposed to contribute to the performance. For my part, I know that I will be a rodeo rider: I will not be expected to do tricks on horseback (all my life I've been a woefully clumsy rider); instead, I am merely to sit in the saddle, nothing more. I take off the raincoat I am wearing, since it's hardly appropriate to the occasion: after all, aren't the people on the "rail" usually supposed to wear livery?

March 4–5, 1947

I am battling a winged bull on the Place du Trocadéro, in front of the entrance to the Musée de l'Homme, but as I move in for the kill I realize he has no more consistency than a stuffed animal. Upon waking, this adventure leaves me with the optimistic conviction that we tend to make too many mountains out of molehills.

In another dream (which preceded this one by some 14 years and which was in turn the re-edition of an earlier dream), I was supposed to fight a boxing match for the benefit of the Museum. I was not at all happy with the fact and at the very last minute I chickened out, unabashedly declaring that I had no intention of being punched around.

The idea that fighting should be linked to my profession as an

ethnographer no doubt has to do with the fact that in 1931 the World Bantamweight Champion, Al Brown (a Panamanian Black who was so elegant in the ring that the working-class fight crowds used to call him "twinkle-toes"), fought a benefit match in the Cirque d'Hiver to raise money for the Dakar-Djibouti Expedition. There is also my memory of the admission a professional boxer once made to Picasso, and which Picasso reported to me as being very revealing of just how a boxer feels when he climbs into the ring: "It's as if you were going down to the bottom of the sea."

July 13–14, 1952
(real life)

It was two days ago that I left Basse-Terre in Guadeloupe on board the motorized yacht *La Belle Saintoise*. At Terre-De-Haut, the largest island in the archipelago of the Saints, I took room and board in the house of an old colored woman by the name of Mme Joyeux: Widow Joyeux.

Lying on a square bed that is so huge that I can use its entire left edge as a night table, I have been asleep for some time when I am awakened by the exquisite strains of dance music which is coming from some record player or radio and filters into my room from a neighboring house. A small combo which seems to me to be composed of a clarinet, a flute, and a guitar, playing beguines, mazurkas, and quadrilles in which I recognize—for no real reason, I admit—the old creole dance called the "haute taille."

During the following days in Guadeloupe, and then upon returning to Martinique before my flight to New York and France, I would question various acquaintances about this music. But my inquiries lead nowhere: none of my Antillean friends had ever heard of this bewitching combination of instruments, and the riddle of this dream music would remain so unsolved that I would wonder whether it had not in fact come to me in a dream.

October 31, 1955

On a Paris street I meet two young women, both of whom are charming and attractive, even though their Salvation Army act makes them somewhat ridiculous. They are hawking a Protestant newspaper, and are trying to win me over to their cause: "What do you read? Are you politically committed?" These are the kinds of questions they ask as they try to

provoke me into some real soul-searching.

I had this dream while returning from Peking, as I was sleeping in the plane between two stopovers in Siberia. Both on the flight to China and back, I was overwhelmed by the variety of vistas in the daylight below (above all, I remember the forests of birch and larch and maple and the steep mountains, their escarpments striated in black and white like Chinese landscape painting); and in the blackness of night, I was struck by the great expanses of snow, now and then punctuated by a cluster of lights indicating some industrial center. The flight was broken up, like a stagecoach journey, into a number of stops: a stopover here for a meal in a real country inn, its tables cluttered with crystalware; a stopover there to spend the night in a hotel so overcrowded with passengers that it turns into a caravanserai. Both on the flight out and back my friends and I were attended by stewardesses wearing peasant scarves on their heads or fur hats that were half-cossack, half-Coldstream Guard, tall and jutting down over the forehead.

Upon waking, I realize that the dream I just had was situated in France, whereas during my several weeks in China all my dreams were Chinese (though my dreams were rare since my busy schedule left few hours for any sleep with the density of dream). In this particular dream—the only one I had the time to note down during my visit to the Far East—is there any local color I can find? None whatsoever, unless it has to do (perhaps) with the kindness of these two women and their cheerful commitment to their cause. Among our interpreters and among the various people we met in Peking and elsewhere, there were a number of these girls or women whose earnestness only added to their attractiveness; as certain women inspire dreams of pleasure, so these women made me dream of political activism and commitment.

At Krasnoiarsk, I set my watch to local time and noted that we had landed at 8:25 P.M. and not at 1:25 A.M. as my watch indicated. We landed at Novo-Sipirsk at 11:40 P.M. (according to my watch, which I had reset when we changed time-zones). But in the cafeteria where we are waiting to reboard our flight, the clock says 3:45 A.M., so I can't figure out what the hell is going on . . .

January 6, 1958

(real life, Neuilly-sur-Seine)

After having been anesthetized for minor surgery, I find myself back in my hospital bed. At first, it seems to me that I have been in this bed all the while, but this erroneous impression is soon rectified, and I try to recapitulate everything that has happened. I am seized by great anxi-

ety because I can locate no slice of lapsed time, however abstract, corresponding to the density of time that has passed, without my knowledge, between the sudden plunge I took after the pentothal injection and the moment I reawoke in my hospital room. No sleep is quite like this sort of blank or void. Whereas with sleep one can always more or less measure its opacity or its duration, here was something that seemed never to have existed at all: at one fell swoop you sink into something undescribable, and then you are back on your feet again.

Like some strange lesion, this experience would continue to haunt me for some time—it was not so much the void that bothered me, but rather the gaping fault-line represented by this truly *dead time* that had been cut out of my life by the stroke of an axe.

SECTION 4
SELF . . . INTERMINABLE

from BIFFURES (CROSSOUTS)

Tr. by Lydia Davis

Note

There can be no question of not including the French words that Michel Leiris is particularly talking about in Biffures. *These are no instances of arbitrary word play, one as good as another, which a clever translator can approximately equal in her own language. Rather, they are knots where many threads of the author's remembrances and associations come together from every direction of his past and present to be joined forever either tidily or untidily in a word or in a few words taken together as a phrase. Michel Leiris's life has not been an American or English life, and the language of that life, past and present, has not been English. This new, English text, not the same text as the one Michel Leiris wrote in French, must, because of the nature of Michel Leiris's original text, be tied back to that original with these same knots, so that the two texts are part of the same tangle.*

Does this show up, yet again, the undeniable failure of any translation?

The ideal "translation" would be, along the lines of Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote,*" one in which every word was matched by the same word in the same language but now not quite the same because written again, by a translator, and, ideally, now understood by its readers, whatever their native language, so that the readers themselves would have been translated into a position to understand. In the present text, in all awkwardness, readers have been given a cruder way, the way of translation itself as it must actually be, to "understand" the words that can only remain in the language their author wrote them in.*

L.D.

The soldier had fallen onto the pitiless floor of the room (the livingroom? or the diningroom? a fitted carpet with faded floral patterns or a rug with some other design in which I inscribed palaces, landscapes, continents, a true kaleidoscope delightful to me in my childishness, as I designed fairyland constructions on it, like a canvas for some thousand and one nights which hadn't yet been revealed to me by the pages of any book in those days? or a bare floor, waxed wood with darker traces, cleanly cut by the rigid blackness of the grooves from which I sometimes liked to pull up tufts of dust with a pin, when I had been lucky enough to find one that had fallen from the dressmaker's hands during the day?) onto the irreproachable – the soulless – floor of the room (velvety or ligneous, dressed up in its Sunday best or stripped bare, favoring excursions of the imagination or more mechanical games), in the livingroom or the diningroom, in shadow or light (depending on whether it was the part of the house where the furniture was usually protected by dust sheets and where the modest riches were often screened from the sun by the bars of the shutters), in the special enclosure that was hardly accessible to anyone but the grownups – a tranquil cave for the somnolent piano – or in the more common place that contained the large, many-leaved table around which all or part of the family would gather for the ritual of the daily meals.

A soldier. Made of lead or papier-maché. A rather delicately shaped and colored figurine, or one of those sloppily rough-cast little men splashed all over with blue, red, white, and black, whose bodies, when they break, appear to be made of some poor, dubious material, whitish or earthy-colored.

A new soldier or an old one. One that I had set up earlier alongside his fellow soldiers – or others of different designs, a mixed army! – on a good solid table or on a light pedestal table perhaps ornamented with curios or animal figures such as long-beaked storks, if this pedestal table was actually a part of one of those "stork tables" which (as the name indicates) can only be covered with storks.

Probably a French soldier. And it had fallen, slipped from my awkward hands, which were still incapable even of writing simple lines in a notebook.

The important thing was not that a *soldier* had fallen, that a military figure – and not some other creature – had been the victim of this fall. At that time, I don't think the word "soldier" corresponded to anything very precise for me. No doubt I barely knew that you could recognize a French soldier by his red trousers. Perhaps I had already gone into raptures in front of the window of the Meurdefroy grocery in the rue d'Auteuil over an advertising poster portraying a scene in a mess hall or canteen whose protagonists – played by cutout cardboard figures – were men dressed in

fatigue coats or wearing blue tunics and red pants. Perhaps I had already fixed my eyes on this comical animated tableau with its clashing colors as I was being taken up the rue d'Auteuil for a walk in the Bois. But I certainly didn't yet have any special interest in "soldiers"; I wasn't at all concerned about knowing the various uniforms and I had only a small set of soldiers, not the rich collection I would have later on, which especially included tin soldiers (bought a few at a time, in oval boxes of thin wood that cost 13, 19, 28, or 32 *sous* depending on their size) and of which the brightest jewel was a troop of medieval warriors—horsemen in gold and silver armor—facing one another in a tournament, their lances pointed and their mounts at a gallop.

The important thing was not that a soldier had fallen: I had no definite response to the word "soldier." What mattered was that something belonging to me had fallen and the thing that belonged to me was a toy; the thing that had fallen was part of the closed world of toys, which you shut up in boxes when you were done playing with them; it was part of this marvelous, separate world whose elements, through their shape and color, contrast so strongly with the real world, at the same time as they represent perhaps its sharpest features. A world apart, superadded onto everyday life just as engraved initials are added onto metal drinking cups and watch-charms onto watch chains; an intense world, like everything in nature that gives the impression of being *something for show*: butterflies, poppies in wheat fields, shells, stars in the sky, and even mosses and lichens, which are like decorations on rocks and tree trunks.

One of my toys had fallen—and it hardly mattered which one: enough that it was a *toy*. In great danger of being broken, because the fall had been direct and the height of a table from the ground, even a simple pedestal table, is far from negligible, when the fall of a toy is involved.

Because of my clumsiness—the initial cause of the fall—one of my toys came within an inch of being broken. One of my toys, which meant one of the elements of the world I was most closely attached to, in those days.

I bent down quickly, picked up the fallen soldier, felt it all over and looked at it. It wasn't broken, and I was very glad. Which I expressed by shouting: ". . . Reusement!"*

Someone older than me—my mother or my older sister or brother—happened to be with me in this ill-defined room—livingroom or diningroom, formal room or family room—in this place which was simply my play place then. Someone more experienced than I, less ignorant, who

*A clipped form of "heureusement," happily, fortunately, luckily.

heard my exclamation and pointed out to me that I should say "heureusement" and not, as I had said, ". . . Reusement!"

This remark cut short my joy or rather—disconcerting me for a moment—immediately replaced my joy, which had at first completely filled my thoughts, with an odd feeling, a feeling whose strangeness I can barely manage to fathom now.

One doesn't say ". . . reusement," but "heureusement." This word, which I had used until then without any awareness of its real meaning, but simply as an interjection, was related to "bonheur" [happiness, luck] and the magical power of this relation suddenly inserted it into a whole sequence of precise meanings. To perceive, suddenly, a word in its entirety that I had always mangled before felt like a discovery, as though a veil had suddenly been torn away or some truth had exploded. This vague utterance—which until now had been completely private and had remained in some sense closed—had suddenly and fortuitously been promoted to the role of a link in a whole semantic cycle. Now it was no longer something of my own: it was part of a reality which was the language of my brothers, my sister, and my parents. It had changed from something belonging to me into something communal and open. There it was, in a flash, transformed into something shared or perhaps *socialized.* Now it was no longer the confused exclamation that had escaped my lips—still visceral, like a laugh or a shout—it was one of thousands of other constituent elements of the language, of this vast instrument of communication whose life outside me, filled with strangeness, I had been allowed to glimpse through the chance remark of an older child or an adult concerning my exclamation after the fall of a soldier onto the diningroom floor or the livingroom rug.

The lead or papier-maché soldier had just fallen onto the floor of the diningroom or livingroom. I had cried out ". . . Reusement!" I had been corrected. And for a moment I was dazed, seized by a sort of vertigo. Because this word, which I had pronounced wrong and which I had just discovered was not really what I had thought it was before then, enabled me to sense obscurely—through a sort of deflection, the shift that was imprinted on my mind because of this—how articulated language, the arachnean tissue of my relations with others, went beyond me, thrusting its mysterious antennae in all directions.

SONGS

When you don't know how to read yet, when you haven't yet systematically learned the longer or shorter lists of words in an anthology like the *Pautex*, which is intended for schoolchildren in the lowest grades

and helps them enrich their vocabulary by teaching them new words in each lesson (words that are grouped according to their meanings and not arranged in alphabetical order as they are in lexicons and dictionaries), when you haven't yet been initiated into the great mystery of reading, or are still a beginner and have just barely entered it, the only way you perceive words is by hearing them, and because of this they assume strange forms that will be difficult to recognize when you see them written, black on white. How many oral monsters are dreamed up in this way! How many preposterous creations, existing on a scale that will later seem fantastic!

If ordinary language already seems to be full of pitfalls (how many words and expressions are transformed or distorted in their meanings and give rise to troubling images! . . . like the image of a *weeping cookie* or a cookie whose rippled surface is sweating, an image concocted by a child who hears the colloquial expression *"pleurer comme une Madeleine"** and doesn't yet know about the repentant saint); if the most common speech—the speech he hears every day—proves to be full of enigmas and difficulties for the illiterate child, then what about the language of songs, in which rhythm, a special way of linking words, and the music itself mischievously manage to spread confusion and turn the sung phrase into a pronouncement as obscure as any that ever issued from the lips of an oracle!

One of the simplest examples is "dansons la capucine . . .",** where it isn't a matter of dancing the female of a Capucin monk (even less, of dancing a dance introduced by the Capucin monks) but of dancing a flower:*** in this case, no monster is created, and furthermore, it is completely natural for a round dance to be compared to the shape of a flower. I wasn't very baffled, either, for example, when I heard the spinster I had to call "Aunt Adele" (later—perhaps because she was very corpulent?—her name was always associated in my mind, like a rhyme, with "citadelle"), when I heard this spinster, who was not a relative of ours, but the real or adopted daughter of the owners of a house in Nemours that my father and mother rented for the summer at that time, sing to her parrot, who was shut up in a cage whose roundness could also have evoked the idea of a citadelle:

Quand je bois du vin clairet
Tout tourne, tout tourne,
Quand je bois du vin clairet

**pleurer comme une Madeleine* = "to cry one's eyes out," literally "to cry like Mary Magdalen"—but a "madeleine" is also a kind of cookie.

***dansons la capucine* = "let's dance the capucine"

****capucine* = "nasturtium"

Tout tourne, tout tourne
Au cabaret.

When I drink red wine
Everything turns, everything turns,
When I drink red wine
Everything turns, everything turns,
In the cabaret.

"Clairet" seemed to me to be, not a qualifier of the wine, but the name of the parrot. Singing like a ventriloquist—any one of whose innumerable voices is always intolerable to listen to because one senses that it is entirely fabricated (and even his natural voice, which is finally upsetting too, because in contrast to the others it has such a false ring)—the idiot bird wandered around and around, waddled about, acted like a drunken man behind his metal bars until the moment when, with his wrinkled foot or his curved beak (a false Mardi Gras nose attached to his artificial voice for some sinister carnival), he took hold of the tidbit that was given him as a reward for his performance—alternately mumbled and screeched—of a few fragments of the song:

Quand je bois du vin, Clairet!
Tout tourne, tout tourne
Au cabaret!

When I drink some wine, Clairet!
Everything turns, everything turns
In the cabaret!

As for the "cabaret"—this cabaret in which everything was turning around, as in the head of the wine-drinker (who ended up becoming confused with the so-called Clairet himself)—what else could that really have been but the cage, the round cabin where the parrot—like a drunkard dressed in stunning green—was staggering about. And all these images rolled about together in my own head: Aunt Adele, as round as a tower, pretending to be drunk in front of her parrot in his round cage and not calling him "Jacquot" except to ask him if he had had a good lunch, as though this name could only be used for the customary question about food and as though for everything else—especially everything to do with drink—the acid colored bird with the vicious beak should never be called anything but "Clairet."

This bird, with his drunken waddling and aggressive livery (the color of a billiard table, like the famous suit—I was told the story later—that a certain stern father ordered for his son and that he forced the son to wear until it was threadbare, because the son was inclined to hang about in cafes and one day, as he was playing billiards, he had clumsily torn the billiard cloth, whence the anger of the cafe owner and the need to

repay him for the damage done, which was what motivated the harsh behavior of the father, who was equally mindful of morality and economy), this parrot with his stylish name – very much Fanfan la Tulipe,* with the blustering moustache of a soldier of the gardes-Françaises** – had nothing about him, either, however odd he was, that could put him in the category of monsters, those creatures of ill-defined shape and no clear adherence to any group, those sudden abstractions who have plummeted from a sky frosted over with a confusion of ideas or clouded over with nightmares. Quaint bird of the isles and clothed all in green, he really fit quite naturally into the domestic landscape, where he functioned as an accessory and where one scarcely noticed his costume, which was perhaps hardly more garish than the bright sundresses that enveloped the embonpoint of the fat spinster I called "Aunt Adele."

This spinster's own aunt and uncle, a couple of old horticulturists known as "the Tréforts," already provided me with a name I could speculate about freely, having fun with my brothers. So did the place where they all lived, *Chaintréauville*, which partook of a cat, one cat, or rather a multitude of cats, enough to throng an entire city. The Très-forts of Chatstréauville.*** However, it was a song my second brother knew that opened a door to another world for me more effectively than any of these verbal rattles that clinked like a waffle man's wheel or a zoo turnstile. This other world was also one made up of words, but nothing farcical leered out from it, it was untainted by puns and drew its emotive power from the very mist of words of which it was formed, an indecipherable nebulousness.

Blaise qui partait
En guerre s'en allait,

Blaise who was leaving
Was going off to war,

sang my brother; but that was not what I heard. Between his lips and my ears, the second line changed, and what reached me, the problem I had to solve, was:

Blaise qui partait
En bercant la laisse

**Fanfan la Tulipe*: traditional name for the jolly, amorous and bibulous French soldier of the eighteenth century.

***gardes-Françaises*: infantry regiment of the King's household, disbanded in 1789.

****Tréforts* is a homonym of *très forts* or "very strong." *Chaint* is close in sound to *chat*, or "cat." *Ville* means "city."

Blaise who was leaving,
*Rocking the beach**

A fragment of a very old-fashioned and unremarkable song from the *Dragons de Villars* was thus transformed, by my ears, into a mystery to be cleared up.

What could this "beach" be, that was going to be rocked? And who was this Blaise, who "rocked the beach" and whose name, if one simply removed the initial consonant and changed a voiced fricative into an unvoiced fricative, yielded the word designating the unknown thing that he should be rocking, as though for all eternity there had been a link between this name and this object, and as though the foreordained task of this man named Blaise, as the very texture of his name indicated, was to rock the "beach"? There wasn't any versifier's or linguist's subtlety involved in the confused perception I had, then, of the relationship of assonance between the two words; first there was the mystery of the "beach" and it was this mystery that extended to the name of Blaise, by virtue of the very structure of the sentence (in which Blaise was in the position of a subject) and, more obscurely but just as effectively, by virtue of this play of assonances, the dim sparkle of foam beneath which were revealed the machinations of an unmanifested power.

If I listen carefully—to try to rediscover, or reinvent, the echo that brought to my ears, or my understanding, the message that was mumbled rather than articulated and that emanated from what I later thought was one of the mouths of the marvellous thing itself—I hear the word "Blaise" resonate like something profoundly sad and as pale as a chalky cliff. Nothing can be attached to this Blaise, whose name, dissyllabic though it is, is endlessly drawn out, but the monotonous gesture of rocking. He rocks, he rocks endlessly, just as the sea—according to the cliché—never tires of rocking the foot of the cliff. He rocks, he rocks tirelessly, and the "beach" that he does not stop rocking is perhaps none other than the pure object of this rocking, or perhaps the particular quality which, among all the others, distinguishes such a rocking. "To rock the beach," as one "champs at the bit" ["ronge son frein"], as one "eats one's heart out" ["broie du noir"], as one "beats a retreat" ["bat la chamade"]: an image that is even more an image of a certain way of rocking; a figure of speech that doesn't correspond to any physical action, but only to the fog of a whitish state of boredom, even more colorless than the most plastery Gervais cream cheese. "To rock the beach": the only action poor Blaise could take,

*The French *laisse* is more specific: the strip of sand between the high-water mark and the low-water mark.

the only mental attitude he could assume, Blaise who was leaving and whose silhouette would soon appear against the gray cliff. Leaving, with the monotonous and tired beat of his feet . . . not even a beat, but a murmur . . . the formless murmur of his untiring lips that said over and over:

Blaise qui partait
En bercant la laisse,
Blaise qui partait . . .

Blaise who was leaving,
Rocking the beach,
Blaise who was leaving . . .

The influence that songs have always had on me—whether they go back to the very earliest times, like the ones I remember hearing when I was a child, or are quite fresh and, conversely, powerful because of this very freshness, which is free of all the dross that time accumulates—may in part result, if not from such unintentional masquerades of words, at least from a certain form of play closely related to the pun. A play that occurs between the tune and the words and such that the tune, intruding into the words, sometimes appears synonymous with them—miraculously capable of intensifying their meaning—and sometimes keeps to its own part and doesn't involve itself with them except to tangle their thread or to amalgamate into insoluble enigmas the rhythm, the sound, the significative value of the words and the melody. In this way, exchanges take place between the properly musical phrase and the purely verbal music of the phrase: conjunctions followed by breaks occurring more or less immediately, progressions that are parallel for a while or diverging steps that suddenly prove to be confluent; and in the text itself, an irrefutable fragmentation takes place that coincides only partially with the meaning and injects into the crystalline parcels or groups of words cropping up from the surface of this harmonious chaos a more intense viridity, an unexpected combination of mirrors, lenses and prisms shattering the light in order to make it rise up again from the negative summit of its blackest depths. It's incredible, it's more baffling than any of the experiments described in books of physics-for-fun!

Along with the already special luster of the words—changed into pearls by the very fact of being strung in couplets—is yet another luster, which takes their potential for magic as far as possible: this is the luster in which the flow of music plunges them, whether its waves disperse them and shatter them, allowing the nacreous globe of a jellyfish to appear here and there, or whether just the opposite happens—the pearls and the waves join their ill-assorted limbs tightly in a long, glistening loop. Reduced to shards—which captivate our eyes with the gleaming of their broken edges and the strangeness of their angles—or simply resolved into the fluidity

of a line—which we follow from note to note, from syllable to syllable—phrases steeped in music acquire a completely special luster that separates them from ordinary language, surrounds them with a halo of magnificent isolation. A more effective treatment than commonplace typographical artifices, whatever may be the attraction, for the eye and the mind, of, say, italics, large type, footnotes, words marked with asterisks, even the blank spaces poets use, which split up the sentence and consequently allow the written words to emerge—thicker and more active chemical bodies because they are just now being born—from the invisibility of the page.

The same kind of special nature was attached to certain words in a religious allegorical tale I was told during my first communion retreat: according to this tale, the most fervent prayers are written in the book of God in gold ink, whereas others, less fervent, are written in silver ink, and still others—the ones that are recited in a perfunctory way—are written in ordinary ink or not written at all. And more generally—like these prayers, in which what mattered was not their greater or lesser degree of fervor but the distinctive ink, silver or gold, in which they were written—in a vaster domain that paralleled that of discourse and extended, almost, to the whole world, everything also became special that was qualified in one way or another by a special appellation in which a proper noun figured, a proper noun that in effect became its *name* and turned it into a sort of person, a being endowed with its own life, provided with its own face; as, for instance, Falières phosphatine, Flavigny anise, Bar-le-Duc jams, sticks of apple-flavored Rouen sugar candy, and, among other medicines, Manceau syrup, Ramy compounds, "soothing balm," *ipeca cuanha* (in this case, the pharmaceutical name functioned as a person's name), creatures that emerged, because of the reference points formed by their names (indications of provenance, scientific terms, or simply trademarks), from the rather indistinct fog of things that, in the world as a whole, did not have the benefit of being immediately called to one's attention this way by a *distinctive mark* that acted as a stigma or seal.

The aim of this passage—which seems contentious to me even after just a quick rereading, or at least somewhat overly subtle and not entirely free of those evasions thanks to which the uncertainties of one's thinking are masked by the flashiness of the words, and what tends to be mere verbal clarity is substituted for the clarity of ideas—is to introduce a fragment of song that I hesitate to bring forward because the charm that invests it, in my opinion, is a little too particular and personal for me to be able to reveal its one line right away, without the sort of preparation that can form a bridge between the author's intimate emotion and the reader's consciousness, or rather to create between the two of them the indispensable conducting medium in which a current has some chance of

being created, a series of waves some chance of being propagated by the apparently cold and inert little pebble that lies hidden from everyone in a corner of the author's head or heart. Because for the writer, this is the whole point: to transmit into the head or heart of another person the concretions that have been deposited by his present or past life in the depths of his own head or heart and that have been valid only for him until then; to communicate something in order to make it more valuable; to let it circulate, so that once it has been cast out to others it will come back to him a little more marvellous, like the shields of the Northwest American Indians that are endowed with greater and greater value the more times they have been the object of ceremonial exchanges. But even the most ordinary exchange can't take place without a minimum of ceremony. Whence these ostentations of writing, these invitations, this swaggering, all these artifices, which are as entirely natural as a peacock spreading its tail or the various stratagems of courtship.

If I have a memory in my mind and it extends in all directions, through emotional ramifications, it is not a foreign body to be extirpated. Even though it has come to me from outside, even though it is the result of an absolutely fortuitous conjunction of circumstances, it is nonetheless an integral part of me, it has become my substance just like the food from outside me that I eat. Even more so! As it remains an image—an image that is circumscribed and separate, as it is supposed to be—it tends to reverse roles and pose as a mirror, as though in relation to it I lost all real consistency and could no longer consider it anything else but a solid thing—the only solid thing—that I look at and that throws my reflection back at me. The paradox of this kind of memory: in it I find the purest expression of myself, to the extent that it struck me because of what it concealed that was strange to me . . .

"As odd as it is strange," we sometimes said jokingly in my family. Very surprising and very strange was this line from the duet in *Manon*, as I heard it sung by my sister—a girl already in long skirts.

> *Adieu, notre petite table!*
>
> *Farewell, our little table!*

says Manon, conscientiously pronouncing the silent *e* separating the last two *t*'s of the series of three, the last two which seem to be merely the lurching echo of the first, over which the tongue has stumbled. *Ti-te-ta.* The *e* of *te*, between the *i* of *ti* and the *a* of *ta*, far from being skipped over, is sufficiently prominent so that the syllable *te* derives a sort of consistency from it, it thickens and tends to metamorphose into an object and, forsaking the adjective "petit," clings to the substantive "table," which designates a solid body, a mass made of heavy wood whose attractive force is greater than that of the adjective "petit," which hasn't even the

particle of reality of a slight breath of air. So here is our table changed into *tetable*, into *totable*, having become a masculine noun naming some peculiar instrument or other: an "étable," a "retable," a totem, a washbasin with water that is either "potable" or "non potable," all the words that come to my mind right now to label an indefinite thing of which I only know that it was an object, a thing occupying a bit of space in a room where Des Grieux and Manon were saying farewell to each other, a thing that was at once well and truly a table and a little more than a table to which was added—like an extra leaf—the peculiar quality that transformed it completely and that was inexpressibly expressed by the prefixing of the *te* torn from "petite."

After the great leave-taking scene, one of the next scenes takes place, not in a room, but at the Saint-Sulpice seminary. It is quite clear that there are prayer stools here (since seminary means church), which indicates other pieces of furniture that can also move, that can scrape or bump their feet when they are shifted around, like pedestal tables; their backs are often covered in velvet, generally faded, just as you often see shoddy looking cloths on pedestal tables. Yet the object called a "tetable" is not a prayer stool and it is perhaps not a pedestal table either, even though the tripping of the first syllable describes very precisely the noise of the feet of a pedestal table—their knocking or scratching—when you pull it across the floor to change its place. Here I see Des Grieux in a short black soutane, silk stockings, shoes with buckles and an abbot's white bands, his two hands resting on the back of his prayer stool, his eyes slightly raised—as though he is looking piously toward the vault of the church—and I listen to the word "tetable," peremptory in the air of the room where the real table rests balanced on its four feet, the table that Des Grieux, in the Saint-Sulpice seminary, must be dreaming of, as of his only authentic tabernacle. I listen to this word, "tetable," but I know very well I won't find any solution; it will remain a "tetable," neither a pedestal table nor a prayer stool, and it won't be given a definite form, either by the fact that this object is the central piece of furniture in that room, which it seems to sum up entirely, or by the fact that the word that evokes this object and the object itself can be transported—simply by a man's memory—to another point in space: to a church at Saint-Sulpice, near a prayer stool, surrounded by organ sounds. Does the word "tetable," then, derive its magic from the fact that, although it partakes of the table and resonates like the wood of the prayer stool as it is moved, grating across the flagstones, it designates nothing, even though it seems to signify something, and remains a label

**étable* = "stable," *retable* = "altarpiece," *potable* = "drinkable" and *non potable* ="not drinkable."

applied to pure nothingness or to an object forever incomprehensible? It is probable that some element of thing-in-itself trails after these words, which seem to correspond to a precise reality but are actually without any kind of meaning. Hence their *revelatory* air, since they are by definition formulas for what is most unformable, names for the extraordinary creatures that populate a world beyond our laws.

This sensation, produced by a mere word, of the untimely existence of an object – one that remains undefined but is no less an almost palpable thing, vocabulary being so full of authority – this irritating sensation (like the search for a memory which at moments you think you're about to grasp but which keeps eluding you) is perhaps not so very different, despite its futility, from what people feel who persist in an eager, if faithless, quest of the absolute.

I often used to have dreams whose details I couldn't remember. They were like objects of which I knew only the angles, in their most abstract form – their measurement in degrees. One of these angles would appear in my memory, but despite my efforts, it would remain bare, it would not assume any substance; I perceived only its sharpness, it was like the elbow of a passerby poking me in the ribs without my having had the time or the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the stranger before he lost himself in the crowd. Trying to revive the dream, to make it take on mass and color, to lift it from the flat and dead geometry which, in its disloyal way, was all it amounted to; injecting into it, as a breath of new life, the very vague atmosphere which was all I had left of what had been essential to it; wearing down the fragments of setting, characters, and events that my memory, with some effort, managed to summon up here and there, for a moment; feeling them dissolve even before I had a chance to readjust them; resuming this work an indefinite number of times and under conditions that were worse each time (because the atmosphere dissolved little by little, or became tainted, and the fragments themselves, having been worn down, dwindled away or were falsified, and soon, what I would have seen take shape in my head, if I had gone on any longer, would have been a completely fabricated dream, and one that also had no tangible content); thinking of that in bed before getting up, or in my bath (where I have always liked to daydream), outdoors, at work, at the table; chewing all this over again without having the courage to spit it out before my certainty of not accomplishing anything was evidenced by an almost physical feeling of nausea: this was how, because of such dreams, I sometimes spent an entire day.

In the present moment I find myself in the same sort of state, as I try to bring back to life, under the tip of my pen, what is really no more than a set of needle points; I mean this rather particular layer of memories which I am trying to prospect here. Very sharp needles whose steel glimmers will fascinate me more especially the finer their points are, and which

will be better suited for perforating, the more impalpable they are. Or less cruel needles of which I would only ask that they draw music from the almost imperceptible grooves that are engraved on my heart and whose brief transformation into melody would be the only thing capable of briefly saving me.

Likewise, if I try to give substance to this present moment—to this very *presence*—it immediately hides, becomes indistinct; and everything I say about it, not being able—with good reason!—to address it directly (whereas I would like to cry out to it . . .), all I invent to bring it to reality—or make it return to reality—becomes the most futile chitchat: I line up sentences, I collect words and figures of speech, but what gets caught in each of these traps is always the shadow and not the prey. Whether I am hunting the present fugitive instant, or a memory that has crumbled into dust, or those imaginary objects that seem to hide behind false windows of words painted in trompe-l'oeil on the facade of my mind, I am always hunting the same game: that precious thing, the only real thing, that frequently appears in my dreams in the form of a wonderful record of American Negro music that I recall having heard but remember only very confusedly, a record I know is somewhere in my possession but can't manage to find even though I have tried a pile of other records.

Whether it is a memory precisely located in the past, or an old imaginary creation which may, for all I know, be taking shape at this very intant, or a present moment considered and sought out as such: in the end, it hardly matters what goal I decide to set myself. Because when I hunt, my hunt always takes place in the present. It is no doubt the only affecting element in all this, and now that it has become its own object, this tense race is probably what constitutes—both in the clenched gesture of writing and in the relaxed posture of dreaming—this strange series of sonorous vibrations, the vague perception of which fascinates me so.

From *Biffures*, 1948, pp. 9–24.

A LIFE IN BLURBS (LA REGLE DU JEU)

Tr. by Lydia Davis

Biffures [Crossouts]

Measures for nothing, enticements, trial runs—this is the way these *Biffures*, written for the most part during the occupation, appear to me today. As for the historical setting in which this book belongs, one will find only the vaguest and briefest of allusions to it here; events take place off stage and almost nothing comes to distract from his research an author who—faithful to a habit that seems inclined to become an obsession—writes most of all to see more clearly into himself.

A confrontation with memories taken from various periods of my life but especially from my childhood (out of a liking for cosmogony as much as a penchant for sentimentality), this volume is the first of a work centered on facts of language, a work by means of which I propose to define what for me is the "rule of the game," or more pompously: my poetic art and the code of my *savoir-vivre* which I would like to discover combined in a single system, since I can scarcely see the literary use of speech as anything but a means of sharpening one's consciousness in order to be more—and in a better way—alive.

This first rough-planing of a first stock of materials will be followed by a second volume, more difficult and more ambitious. It will be, in fact, through the future pages of those *Fourbis* [Leavings] that in the light of other experiences I will try to arrive at a conclusion, hoping to attain this end early enough to put the conclusion into practice before old age shall have crossed me out [*biffé*] of the world or broken me down [*fourbu*] too badly.

[1948]

Fourbis [Leavings]

Eager to formulate (at the close of an investigation based on actual experience) a "savoir-vivre" in which a poetics and an ethics would be combined, here Michel Leiris continues the inventory of memories he began in *Biffures*, the first volume of a work entitled *La Règle du jeu* [The Rule of the Game].

Taming death, taking action in an authentic way, breaking through the circle of the self—these are the main themes of *Fourbis*.

The leader of this game moves about in Paris and its environs, and various places in the South of France, Africa, and the Antilles. We see him on his return from the islands becoming upset by the malaise of our Western civilization, then joining with others attempting to establish a more equitable order, but, in the end, not lessening a certain need of his, one that can't be satisfied with a pragmatism hostile to any sort of abandonment to the gratuitousness of what is, really, pure seduction.

The larger work of which this book, with its title indicating a continuing uncertainty, is a part, is not only an autobiographical essay but the historical account itself of that essay, because the man who is its central figure is determined never to lose sight of the three-fold time of his life passing, the world moving, and the pages being written.

[1955]

Fibrilles [Fibrils]

A brew of actual experiences, *Biffures* was the first volume of a work by means of which the author, concentrating first on a few facts of language, soon thought he would be able to discover the rule by which his game should be played—in other words, a sort of *savoir-vivre* encompassing his poetics and his ethics.

To trim the claws of death, to behave like a man, to break one's own walls—these were the great themes broached in *Fourbis*, the second stage of a quest whose results he would later have to try to elucidate.

Now, with *Fibrilles*, the author sees that his real problem has always been this: how to become entirely a poet, feeling, speaking and acting as one? But it appears to him that this way of existing forms a whole that can't be analyzed, that is governed by no legible rule, and whose attainment can't be guaranteed by any prescription.

After numerous quests, real episodes and dreamed episodes, trips through many countries (including China and the infernal swamps), oscillations between literary commitment and social commitment, here he is back where he started. He only knows that the vital question he asked himself can have no answer . . .

Unless playing such a game—even though he may be badly burned—is, in fact, the answer.

[1966]

Frêle Bruit [Faint Sound]

With *Frêle Bruit* (instead of the too ambitious *Fibules* [Fibulae] which were supposed to recapitulate and conclude) Michel Leiris closes *La Règle du Jeu.*

Some people will find it excessive that an author should devote 35 years to writing a work whose primary purpose is to refine and connect facts drawn from his private life. But this investigator, bent on scrutinizing himself, can allege that for the use of a few others as much as for his own use, he wanted to expose as thoroughly as possible the sample of humanity that he is. And not only because he wanted to do it but also because he believed that in the case in point rational investigation could do no more than drive away some shadows, he has shamelessly allowed poetry to take precedence over logical sequence. At least in this book – constructed almost musically – what therefore combines with close or distant memories, and with either old ideas or ideas that occurred along the way, are more or less deliberate attempts to arrive at moments of transparency by manipulating language taken in itself more than as an instrument of communication.

An aspiration to the marvellous, a desire to commit himself to the struggle against the flagrant injustices of society, a desire for universalism which has led him to have direct contacts with cultures other than his own – these are the colors that seem to be dominant in the game of this writer, who has been induced by his acute awareness of the passage of time to try out many different ways of exorcising the horror with which he was filled very early on by the prospect of his annihilation. A horror aggravated now by the horror which the attacks of age and the growing pressure of things cause him to feel in a concrete way.

[1976]

THE NAKED SWORD
BY EDMOND JABES

Tr. by J. Clifford

Silent sword. Silent nakedness. Every silence has its sword; every nakedness its wound.

Silence of I *in the infinite speech of* I.

In this "moment of truth" death is the judge.

Sentence. The text is nothing but that relentless sentence nothing can escape.

Writer and reader lost in the same vocables.

And now the ground opens, horizons merge.

Language takes the risk.

"So accustomed am I to observing myself, and my taste for this bitter form of contemplation is so maniacal, that there are without any doubt things that escape me, probably some of the most visible things, since perspective is everything and a painting of myself, done from my own perspective, is more than likely to leave in the shadow certain details that, for others, would be the most flagrant," Michel Leiris notes.

Shadow mouth! The sword is suspended in the opening of the abyss. The never said, the unspeakable. Should we struggle with the Nothing? We cannot fight absence. And yet, the combat is within, in the folds of emptiness: fold against fold, hollow over hollow.

Is emptiness the never said? The imperceptible fold, the unspeakable? Thin, parallel lines limpidly prolong you.

We let ourselves be borne on nothing, towed by Nothingness. A passage through words, through waters, but without concerning them, stirring in them only a relative interest.

To speak for yourself, with yourself. To tell, tell yourself. An uncontrolled force suddenly heaving up the flat sea.

Questions and replies, don't they arise from the senseless desire to know yourself, from an implacable will to tear down the surrounding walls hoping at last to reach the end of the silence—as if you could fill the abyss with your voice alone?

"As long as we've been in dialogue . . ." writes Hölderlin.

A line taken up by Hegel for meditation and comment:

"In the present case—he affirms—man, to be truly, really man, *and to know himself as such, must impose on others the idea he has of himself; he must get recognition from others (and in the ideal, limiting case, from all the others)."*

So the other is the mirror, the judge, the sentence, the sword.
Can there be no refuge for speech? It's fully itself only when exposed.
It takes its measure only when facing the speech of the other it defies.

So is writing for yourself writing? Speaking for yourself, speech? Indeed, nothing is alone with itself—and speaking to yourself can only, in the end, mean innocently multiplying the story of your life and of your death; starting over from zero to take up again, in its smallest details, the same story intending each time another self; a means, in sum, to enumerate, to recount one's selves.

Isn't the book always opened by the curiosity of an unknown reader?

To make public this dialogue is to assume, in its totality, the risk inherent in all writing, in all speech.

We have been read, we have been heard. We can no longer escape judgement. Whatever the sentence, from now on it's our way of becoming conscious of ourselves.

The weight of our words is never only that of their share in a universe.

So the text is still without object, the word without echo, in the time of their withdrawal. While on the opposite sunny shore the future plays.

The sea engulfs all sounds, all appeals, all cries not able to get across. And to the foreign shore's anonymous companion falls the solemn privilege of abolishing the distance the book maintains with itself; for it does not take refuge outside its vocables but within them, hiding itself in their own greatest depths. So that the book constantly leads to an undiscovered book.

Truth—what we take for truth—and thought are the fruit not of a coupling, but on the contrary emerge only from a harsh confrontation with a truth and thought that are ambitious, arrogant, hostile in their perpetual movement—dizzy from only being perceived in the light of their instantaneous, imperceptible displacements.

Without the fear of inevitable defiance, the cruel and decisive confrontation with the other, *wouldn't autobiography, despite its author's instinctive reserves, quickly turn itself into a banal operation of self complacency?*

We always stumble against the other. *Perhaps madness is only a deaf, obstinate elimination of the other in the name of singular speech, freed from the world and from people.*

Speech is double. It experiences itself in the heart of this duality.

All texts and discourses testify to the final triumph of the other. *It*

will always dominate us; and we write, probably, to escape this painful dominion. From such a perspective one might think of writing as a liberating act; but the writer is freed only to be better subjected.

There is thus no term, no falling due, without the other. *We collapse at its feet each time, powerless to go further with an enterprise that is beyond us, unable to maintain any longer a thought and speech too vast for harmonious completion or universal fulfillment, a thought and speech that are never anything but painful incompletion and the painful unfulfillment of every work.*

No departure if there can be no arrival. Neither a time anticipated nor an unforseeable duration, the route abolished.

Only in time can we be read. The time of writing is only an outside-of-time that time makes legible through integration.

From this perspective isn't the intimate journal, inclined to evade time precisely in the outside-of-time of a protected speech, the supreme attempt to escape the other?

And how define its limits when they are never anything but those of a power folded back on itself?

The vocable, in itself, only a hole.

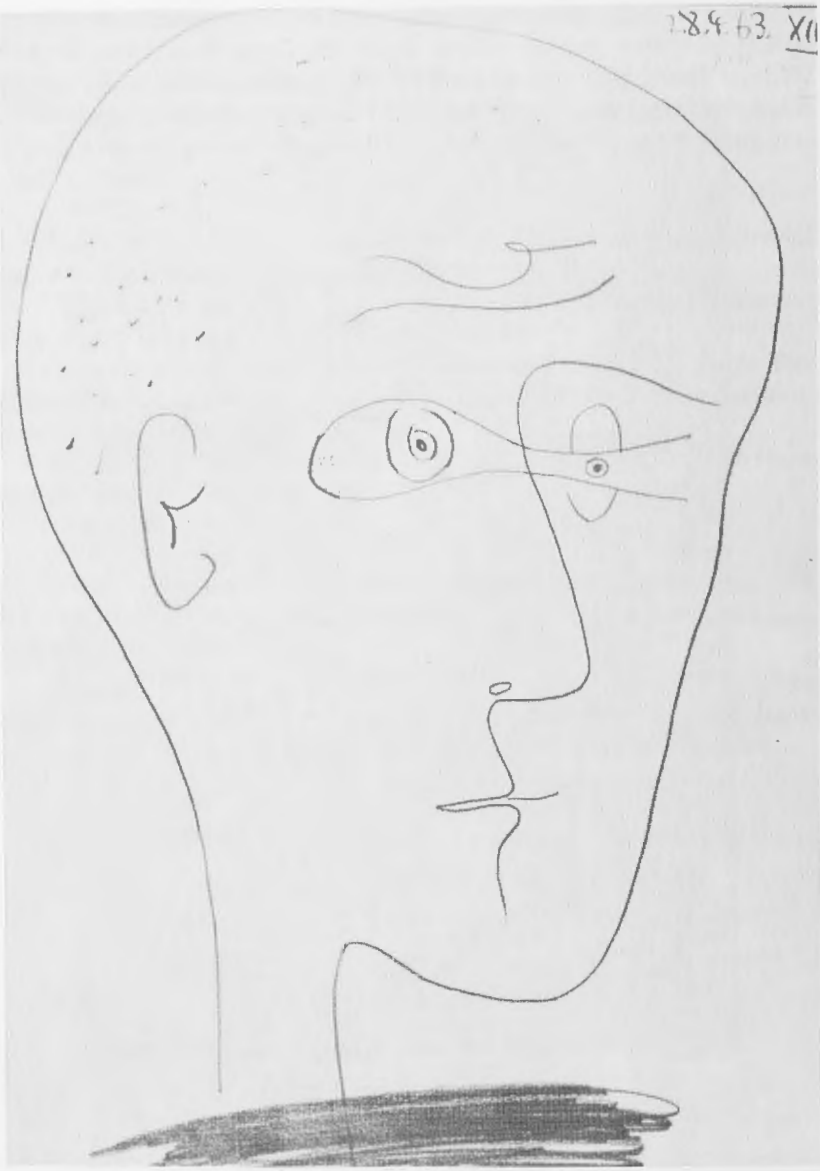
A true dialogue is one that unfolds in broad daylight: dialogue with the vocable, with its likeness. Autobiography as seen by Michel Leiris draws substance from this dialogue, perpetuates it.

Here a man questions himself in the infinite outskirts of a silence where life and death take on their full meaning. Trickery is the play of shadows, a clandestine commerce. We are born and die in the noonday sun.

"L'Epée nue," from L'Ire des Vents, *Spring 1981, pp. 160–165.*

PORTRAITS

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI: **PORTRAIT DE MICHEL LEIRIS III**



PABLO PICASSO: **PORTRAIT DE MICHEL LEIRIS II**

FRANCIS BACON: **STUDY FOR PORTRAIT (MICHEL LEIRIS)**

ANDRE MASSON: **JOUEUR DES DES (PORTRAIT DE MICHEL LEIRIS)**

SECTION 5 CULTURES

CIVILIZATION (1929)

Tr. by Lydia Davis

However little taste one might have for proposing metaphors as explanations, civilization may be compared without too much inexactness to the thin greenish layer—the living magma and the odd detritus—that forms on the surface of calm water and sometimes solidifies into a crust, until an eddy comes to break it up. All our moral practices and our polite customs, that radiantly colored cloak that hides the coarseness of our dangerous instincts, all those lovely forms of culture we are so proud of—since it is thanks to them that we can call ourselves "civilized"—are ready to disappear at the slightest turbulence, to shatter at the slightest impact (like the thin mirror on a fingernail whose polish cracks or roughens), allowing our horrifying *primitiveness* to appear in the interstices, revealed by the fissures just as hell might be revealed by earthquakes, when these cosmic revolutions burst the fragile skin of the earth's circumference and for a moment lay bare the fire at the center, whose wicked and violent heat keeps even the stones molten. Not a day goes by that we don't notice some premonitory sign of such a catastrophe, so that we can truly say, not that we are dancing or standing on a volcano, but that our whole life, our very breathing, is in touch with lava flows, craters, geysers, and everything else to do with volcanoes, and that as a consequence, if we hold up to it a mirror with suitably thick silvering and with a sufficiently sensitive surface, it must be capable of painting long sulfur-colored lines on it.

A woman's fingernail, as red and as pointed as a ruby dagger (amazing that the blood has remained in the middle and not run to the tip), and the wounds cut into precious stones by keen, hard tools that murder the mineral and reduce it to a constellation of angles in turn murderous, a bodily attitude that abruptly relaxes, a fleeting gesture as touching as the sudden swell of a sail on a rising sea—these are precious signs that help us understand how close we are to savages, our various finery of dark or bright cloth being in no way different from skin and feather costumes above tattoos depicting mysterious adventures on the body, like the writing of the stars, which forecasts human events in the air . . .

We're tired of all too insipid shows that aren't inflated by any potential or actual revolt against sacred "politeness," the politeness of the arts, which we call "taste," the politeness of the brain, which we call "intelligence," the politeness of life, which we designate by this word, with its dusty smell, like the bottom of an old bureau drawer: "morality." It would be wrong to characterize us as *blasé*, but the fact is that we're sick of plots that are always the same, derived from our living habits, which are more and more discredited every day, and it isn't enough for us to act in a way that might be equivalent, for example, to the behavior of certain savages who think the best possible use for a telegraph pole is to turn it into a poison arrow (because isn't that more or less what we're doing when we take a mask or a statue that was made for complicated, precise ritual purposes and turn it into a vulgar art object—an infinitely more deadly insult than that paid to European inventions by the savages I just mentioned, since it attacks a fateful, serious mystical theology, rather than mere telegraphy, which is the fruit of a science that can't be scorned too much?). We've had enough of all that, which is why we would so much like to get closer to our primitive ancestry, why we have so little esteem left for anything that doesn't wipe out the succession of centuries in one stroke and put us, stripped of everything, naked, in a more immediate and newer world.

Over the last few years we have seen many signs of this rebellion in literature and painting, we have seen them in all the arts, but in theater there have been very few so far capable of giving us such distinct satisfaction as the following notice, which appears on the program of a show everyone will recognize as soon as they read it, and which is intended as an explanation of one scene in a revue:

PORGY

The subject of the scene is as follows:

"In the Southern States, the land is at sea level and when a Negro dies, if he is not rich enough to be buried in the mountains, he is buried in the swamps, where his body floats to the surface again. When a Negro dies and he is poor, all the other Negroes in the village gather around his coffin and with their singing create a sort of hysteria that induces the men to steal and the women to sell themselves to white men, to raise enough money to bury the dead man. The scene takes place in a barn."

Pedants tend to be disdainful about everything to do with American Negro jazz and art, seeing the current taste for these works as nothing more than a fashion, a passing infatuation with certain exotic forms similar to an earlier infatuation with Hungarian gypsies—in short, a simple matter of wanting to keep up with the latest trend. Others are more sentimental, drip with romanticism, can talk about nothing but slavery, nostalgia, primitive violence, pathetic Garden of Eden stammerings, or the melan-

choly of big cities, which are like vast sugarcane plantations with their stands of pipes and chimneys. Now that we have seen the *Black Birds* revue, we have to put an end to all this nonsense.

What is beautiful about such art is not its exotic aspect, nor what it contains that is highly modern (this modernism is pure coincidence), but primarily the fact that it doesn't really constitute an Art. In fact it seems quite absurd to take such bright, spontaneous productions and stick them with this awful capitalized word which we should only write using a pen full of spiderwebs. Obviously, jazz and whatever derives from jazz have their own rules and their own logic, but that doesn't mean we can talk about "Art," about Great Art, as though we were talking about a particular work by someone who knew he was (or thought he was) inspired . . . Shows like the *Black Birds* revue take us back to a point very far this side of art, to a point of human development at which that bastard conception, issue of the illegitimate loves of magic and free play, has not yet been hypertrophied.

Furthermore, all this is as remote as it could be from gypsy sentimentality. Negro music does not sing about "the eternal regrets that stab our hearts," as they say; what we can say about it is just the opposite, that as we listen to it we feel a terrible regret, the regret that we are so painfully incapable of this sort of simple and beautiful expression, the regret that we are so mediocre, living such a mediocre life, that we are so dull and ugly compared to these creatures, who are as touching as trees.

And so this music and this dancing doesn't stop at our skin but puts down deep, organic roots in us, roots whose thousand ramifications penetrate us, and though this surgery is painful, it gives us stronger blood.

Yet what we may feel sorry about in such shows is the fact that, however powerfully they move us, they still don't completely manage to overcome our spinelessness and create a hysteria as enormous as the hysteria described in the "Porgy" account, a hysteria so intense that it would be capable of immediately driving the audience to commit sordid acts or indulge in extravagant debauches. For this reason, the sculptor Giacometti seemed entirely correct when he said one day that he thought the only possible theater piece would be the following: the curtain rises, a fireman comes on stage and shouts Fire!, the curtain falls, everyone panics, and the theater empties in wild disorder.

Perhaps circus acts like the unforgettable scene in the Gleich Circus, when a whole crowd of acrobats performed far above us, go a little farther than other spectacles, because something real is happening here, and because here, just as on the spot where a murder has been committed or in the vicinity of a slaughterhouse, we breathe in the disgusting odor of death, suspending the threat of danger above our passive spectators' heads. We're not really very far away from the stone age, and the thick blood of the ancient mammoths killed by our grandfathers often rushes to our

heads again in billows of dark malice.

This viewpoint is borne out by the following passage taken from the *Journal* of August 15, 1929:

> The Zoological Gardens
>
> Mlle Claryse (Diavolina), the new attraction in the Zoological Gardens' free circus, will make her debut today, August 15, at 4 p.m. Her leap from one springboard to another will be 8 meters long and 4 meters high.
>
> Diavolina will perform her leap of death again at 10 p.m. She has been engaged by the Gardens until the end of August, *so that all of Paris will be able to admire this beautiful young woman as she risks her life in each of the performances of the free circus,* which take place very day at 4 p.m. and 10 p.m.

And so we enjoy seeing other people take risks while we sit comfortably back in our chairs and give ourselves up to the maddening exhilaration of danger, while never actually exposing ourselves to the slightest hazard and quite capable of shedding our flesh forever, enamored of our lazy tranquillity. This is perhaps the only difference that exists between our period and the period of the cavemen: today we hire a number of scapegoats to take it upon themselves to perform for us everything we wouldn't be brave enough to perform ourselves. This is the very reason, I think, why murderers are so popular: a good crime is no doubt horrible, but at the same time it unconsciously satisfies everyone, and the murderer becomes a kind of sorcerer who has ritually performed the most terrifying of sacrifices.

The time we are living in, the second quarter of the twentieth century, clearly fails to live up to the hopes of the naive optimists. There really is great boredom, despite these few glimmers of madness. The worst misfortune is that even though we live surrounded by magic, we are no longer openly mystical enough to be entitled, each and every day, to sign a pact with the devil!

"Civilisation," from *Documents*, 1929; *Brisées*, pp. 26–31.

Pour le texte original © Mercure de France 1966.

JAZZ

Interview edited and translated by Michael Haggerty

Leiris in L'Age d'homme *[*Manhood, *p. 109, tr. by R. Howard]: "In the period of great license that followed the hostilities [of 1914–18], jazz was a sign of allegiance, an orgiastic tribute to the colors of the moment. It functioned magically, and its means of influence can be compared to a kind of possession. It was the element that gave these celebrations their true meaning: a* religious *meaning, with communion by dance, latent or manifest eroticism, and drinks, the most effective means of bridging the gap that separates individuals from each other at any kind of gathering. Swept along by violent bursts of topical energy, jazz still had enough of a "dying civilization" about it, of humanity blindly submitting to The Machine, to express quite completely the state of mind of at least some of that generation: a more or less conscious demoralization born of the war, a naive fascination with the comfort and the latest inventions of progress, a predilection for a contemporary setting whose insanity we nonetheless vaguely anticipated, an abandonment to the animal joy of experiencing the influence of a modern rhythm, an underlying aspiration to a new life in which more room would be made for the impassioned frankness we inarticulately longed for. In jazz, too, came the first public appearances of* Negroes, *the manifestation and the myth of black Edens which were to lead me to Africa and, beyond Africa, to ethnography."*

September 2, 1982

Michael Haggerty: I thought we might begin, if you'd like, by evoking your first encounter with jazz.

Michel Leiris: Yes, my first encounter with jazz goes back to 1918, before the war was over. At that time I used to go to a *music-hall* called Le Théâtre Caumartin where a black American jazz band, The Seven Spades, would play during the intermissions. They weren't the featured attraction; they weren't really on the bill, but they provided the entertainment during intermissions for the revue performing at the Théâtre Caumartin. There is a historical footnote which might interest you: I recall very clearly that one of the members of the orchestra (which, as their name indicates, consisted of seven musicians), was Vance Lowry who later stayed in Paris and played at the *Boeuf sur le Toit*. He became a Pari-

sian personality. He was one of the first black American jazzmen to come to France.

M.H. At that time was he playing banjo or saxophone?

M.L. Usually he played the banjo but I do recall occasionally hearing him play the saxophone. . . . I don't know if he died in Paris but I know he stayed here for many years.

M.H. During that same period Louis Mitchell's Jazz Kings were also performing in Paris.

M.L. After the Seven Spades, I heard a number of different jazz bands. I always liked jazz a great deal but I never was what one could call a connoisseur. I liked it, that's all.

M.H. But you evoked jazz in a very beautiful passage in *L'Age d'homme*. In that text you link it to dancing. The period immediately following the war was one when dancing was at the height of its popularity in France.

M.L. Yes, but to be truthful, during the shows at the Théâtre Caumartin, the public did not dance. It was purely musical. It was jazz. Except perhaps in clandestine night clubs, people didn't dance during the war. It wouldn't have been possible to do more than present a little jazz during intermissions without provoking a scandal or risking a ban. But after the war, with the vogue for *les surprises-parties*, I can say that, like most of the young people of my generation, I went dancing a great deal. We formed a small band of friends who went to the dance halls almost every night.

M.H. Was one of those places Le Bal Nègre, rue Blomet?

M.L. No, these were snobbish, high society places. Le Bal Nègre was much later. I can't give you an exact date but I think that Robert Desnos must have been one of the first to frequent Le Bal Nègre. In any case we didn't go there to dance. We went there to bask in the exotic ambiance, to listen to West Indian music and to watch the others dance.

M.H. Was its exoticism at least in part responsible for the fascination with jazz at this time?

M.L. Absolutely, exoticism played a part in it, without a doubt. People have often asked me about how I became an ethnologist and a specialist on Africa after the trip I made across Africa from Dakar to Djibouti with the Griaule Mission [1931–1933]. Since I am involved with a gallery of modern art many people believe that it was simply African art which led me to become an *Africaniste*. I agree that *l'art nègre* is largely responsible, but my true discovery of *nègrisme* was made when I discovered jazz. Jazz

was my first contact with what was called—what is still called—Negritude.

M.H. In *L'Age d'homme* you suggest that it was jazz which would "lead me to Africa and, beyond Africa to ethnography."

M.L. It's possible that I said that jazz brought me to ethnography, but that would be saying a lot. What is certain is that I enjoyed jazz as something exotic and non-European, as an affront to European music and art. What also encouragd me to become an ethnographer was the desire to know non-European civilizations out of disgust with European civilization.

M.H. At that time jazz was for you, and perhaps also for Georges Bataille, *la rencontre avec l'Autre* [the encounter with the Other].

M.L. I think that's correct. As far as I can remember Bataille was never especially interested in jazz, but in 1929 when Georges-Henri Rivière introduced us to the famous revue, *The Black Birds*, Bataille also became an enthusiast of that show.

M.H. Did you see Josephine Baker when she came to Paris with La Revue Nègre?

M.L. Yes, in 1925. I was enchanted by La Revue Nègre. It has often been said that in La Revue Nègre performed at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in 1925, Josephine Baker danced with a belt of bananas. I don't believe it. Perhaps my memory is failing me but I believe that she did not begin wearing the banana belt until several months or even a year later when she appeared at Les Folies Bergères. It was during that engagement that the banana belt appeared. At the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées she was of course very slightly clad but there wasn't that kind of exoticism of the virgin forest that the banana belt suggested. Even though the banana is a cultivated fruit. . . .

M.H. Do you recall an erotic dance she performed with another dancer?

M.L. No, I don't remember that. I recall that in the 1925 production her principal partner was Louis Douglas. The show was charged with eroticism and yet remained very discreet.

M.H. I'd like to return for a moment to the idea of *la rencontre avec l'Autre*.

M.L. During my career as an ethnographer, first as a specialist on Africa and later on the West Indies, I have always been attracted to the Other who is not totally Other, the Other who appears *chez vous*. What I find fascinating in jazz is the Africanization of European music. In the same way, what has always interested me in the West Indies is the extraordinary mixtures. In West Indian culture

one finds African strains but they're entwined with French provincialism and many other things. Blends have always interested me; cross breeding has always seduced me.

M.H. Along with this encounter with the Other, there also was a rediscovery of the body—with Josephine Baker?

M.L. Absolutely.

M.H. Was it important that it be a black body, *un corps autre*?

M.L. Actually it was a very light body. Josephine Baker was a very light-skinned mulatto. According to accepted beliefs she was a Negro but she was not black at all, a little tanned that's all . . . It's possible that her light skin was responsible for her powerful attraction to the French public. For example, a pure blooded, truly black, Negro woman probably would not have been acceptable. She was perfect because she was just slightly colored . . . Now it's my turn. Since you are asking me questions, would you allow me to ask you one?

M.H. Of course.

M.L. I have a cherished memory from my childhood. When I was very small I recall seeing the famous Chocolat, I believe at the Nouveau Cirque. Chocolat, whose portrait Toulouse-Lautrec painted, was usually the stage partner of . . .

M.H. . . . Footit.

M.L. Yes, Footit and Chocolat. Was Chocolat a member of the Joyeux Nègres in Paris in 1902 that you mention in your Chronology?

M.H. Perhaps, but I'm not really sure. It was at that time that the fad for the cakewalk was launched in Europe.

M.L. The cakewalk was the classic dance, so to speak.

M.H. As Georges-Henri Rivière has demonstrated, the cakewalk was derived from the English contra dance. In much the same way that Black Americans had creatively deformed European music they changed the British contra dance into their own step, the cakewalk . . . Another aspect that you and Georges-Henri Rivière have underscored is the relation between jazz and the sacred. The Belgian poet Robert Goffin in one of his poems published in 1922 called jazz "the most beautiful *Te Deum* in the world." In *L'Age d'homme* you claim that these "fêtes" after the war had a religious significance. In your provocative review for *Documents* of some of Duke Ellington's records you write: "At present jazz represents the true sacred music, in other words the music most capable of putting a crowd into a state of trance, which is almost like saying it is the only music."

M.L. Yes, although I won't disclaim it, when I see that statement now, I must admit that I was a little bit carried away. "The only music," no, it didn't take very long for me to abandon that idea. In any case there is the reservation, "almost like saying it is the only music" which means that I wasn't carrying it to such an extreme . . . What I write in that text is based on the idea of trance I had at the time. It was probably a simplistic view of the sacred but, for me the sacred *par excellence* was whatever was capable of evoking a trance-like state. At that time what was the music most capable of provoking a trance? Jazz. Hence, jazz was the true sacred music. Obviously there is a taste for paradox and a sense of provocation . . . Another striking aspect is mentioned by André Schaeffner in his book on jazz [published in 1926] which I barely remember. Jazz was not just a musical performance, it was also a visual show. Drummers would juggle their sticks. There was a kind of protocol: soloists would stand up, they would hold their instruments in a spectacular way. There were many aspects of the performance which weren't essential to the music, but were there for the show. It was almost a cross between a concert and a ballet, almost like a total work of art or music which overtly included gestures.

M.H. In an article on Albert Giacometti . . .

M.L. Giacometti, yes, there is an allusion to the *Black Birds* in the article on Giacometti.

M.H. You evoke the idea of crisis. You speak of certain very powerful moments and one of those moments is the appearance of a black woman . . .

M.L. Yes, a girl from the *Black Birds* with a huge bouquet of roses . . .

M.H. . . . damp roses, on a street in Montmartre . . .

M.L. Well, she was very black. She wasn't at all like Josephine Baker. This black girl, pretty, smiling, apparently happy, carrying a large bouquet of roses—this was a marvellous apparition.

M.H. The *Black Birds* revue seems to me the one which had the most impact on you?

M.L. Yes, I think that's true. From the point of view of artistic quality, I think the *Black Birds* revue was far superior to the Revue Nègre with Josephine Baker. In fact the two aren't really comparable.

M.H. During that same period did you go to the jazz nightclubs around Pigalle and Montmartre?

M.L. Yes, of course. I didn't go there systematically every evening but I used to go to them quite frequently. The one I was at most often

was called Le Grand Duc. The proprietor was an American colored woman, nicknamed Bricktop. You have certainly heard of her. She was a fascinating person, truly an astonishing individual. She must be at least ninety years old now.

M.H. Do you recall any of the orchestras that played in the clubs?

M.L. At Bricktop's the show simply consisted of a set of her songs and during a certain period of time there was another singer, much younger than Bricktop, named Virginia West, who would also sing. That was all the organized entertainment they had. But what was marvelous was that at about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, when the musicians had finished their work in the different clubs they would come to Bricktop's to have supper and to play music for their own enjoyment. That was wonderful.

M.H. Just after the Second World War Sartre dedicated *La Putaine Respectueuse* to you. The play treats the racial situation in the South of the United States. More recently you published a pamphlet on racism commissioned by Alfred Métraux. Is there any link between this problem and your interest in jazz?

M.L. I have never in my life been racist but my reasoned and militant antiracist stance is something I adopted later. Spontaneously I felt an attraction toward Blacks and was immediately biased favorably toward them. I realize now that it was a kind of reverse racism, because Blacks are no more *sympathiques* than any other group. Like with any group of people there are wonderful individuals and difficult individuals. I was extremely naive to believe that Blacks were innocence personified. (Laughs). I never republished or anthologized a review of King Vidor's film *Hallelujah* published in *La Revue du Cinéma,* because I was embarrassed by it. I realized many years later that this was a thoroughly racist article, based on all the stereotypes of Blacks: "the sensual Black," "the illogical Black," etc. I was simply taking these stereotypes and presenting them in a positive light rather than giving them their usual negative connotation. That's the reason I never republished this article.

M.H. Do you recall any of your contemporaries, say Philippe Soupault or Robert Desnos, writing about jazz?

M.L. I believe that Soupault did but I can't recall anything by Desnos. Desnos was especially involved with Le Bal Nègre. He particularly liked South American and Cuban music. He even wrote a preface to Alejo Carpentier's article on Cuban music published in *Documents.* I remember listening to records of the Portuguese fado at his house. He loved that and perhaps also flamenco music, but I am not sure. I like flamenco a great deal, but not as much as

jazz. The flamenco is very beautiful but it has remained a folk music. What I find so striking about jazz is that it began as a truly folkloric music and then had the incredible development we all know. I think that must be a unique occurrence.

M.H. Have you followed the developments in jazz since the twenties?

M.L. Somewhat. I was never a true aficionado, never someone who is up on everything or who rushes out to hear the latest musician. I was never like that. But I do recall the indignation I felt over the attacks against Cab Calloway by people like Hugues Panassie. Panassie was an impossible pedant and a sectarian critic who talked about jazz in a very solemn manner. It was absurd. He was more tedious than most classical music critics who speak in terms of "the sublime." In any case critics like Hugues Panassie railed against Cab Calloway, calling his music commercial jazz. I don't believe that I have ever seen anyone captivate their audience the way Cab Calloway did. I have never seen anyone who was able to put an entire hall full of people in a state verging on trance the way Cab Calloway did at La Salle Pleyel. Perhaps it was in part his scat singing that created such a powerful effect on his audience. I adore scat singing. It has a dizzying, giddy effect on you . . . Of course I saw Ellington and Armstrong at the Salle Pleyel. Count Basie is also someone I like very much, because his music is very discrete, just a few notes on the piano. My family and I are very close to Count Basie's impresario, Norman Granz. Every time that Granz organizes a concert in Paris we attend. So we've heard Count Basie and Ella Fitzgerald many times.

M.H. After World War II did you go to the nightclubs around Saint-Germain-des-près?

M.L. Of course. I heard Claude Luter and perhaps Boris Vian playing pocket trumpet. I used to go to Saint-Germain-des-près occasionally, never as often as Sartre or Queneau.

M.H. The bands at that time were playing dixieland or New Orleans style?

M.L. Exactly, they were playing New Orleans style and that's what I didn't enjoy. I felt that there was very little interest in limiting yourself to a historical recreation of jazz during its golden age in New Orleans, the way Claude Luter did . . . To be truthful, I enjoyed much more the music that Wiener and Doucet performed at Le Boeuf sur Le Toit. Of course it wasn't really jazz; it was "inspired by " jazz. Wiener and Doucet did something that Luter never did. They invented a style of Parisian jazz which was pretty and original.

M.H. Did you see Dizzy Gillespie's Big Band at the Salle Pleyel?

M.L. Dizzy Gillespie's orchestra was one of the big bands that impressed me most. He seemed to have brought about considerable stylistic innovations. At the time it seemed to be very exotic music. It was unsettling. We seemed to be carried away.

M.H. Are there other jazz musicians that you like?

M.L. Among the more recent musicians there is someone whom I have always liked a great deal, that's Archie Shepp. One of the most extraordinary things that I have ever seen or heard was a concert in Algiers in 1969. There was a congress for African unity and Archie Shepp came, but as usual he was very unreliable, very eccentric. He made all of us wait for the longest time. Each time his concert was scheduled it would be postponed and each time we would be disappointed. Finally one evening in a movie theater in Algiers, Archie Shepp showed up with three musicians and Ted Joans, the poet and former Black Panther who spends much of his time in Africa and who stops by to see me when he is in Paris. There was an enormous collective improvisation. Along with Archie Shepp and his musicians, Ted Joans recited a poem, and there were musicians and singers from just about every region of Algeria. It was a fabulous kind of happening. They managed to keep all of this together. Of course it was kind of *cacophonique* but nowadays we're somewhat accustomed to dissonances. It was absolutely fantastic, one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen or heard.

THE CARIBBEAN TURN

In L'Intention poétique *Edouard Glissant, the Martinican poet, novelist and essayist, underlines the importance of Leiris's post-war research in Haiti and the French Antilles. "Leiris's effort will consist in moving ethnographic practice toward the study of real contacts: in this perspective he reconciles the search for self and the search for the other, positing their interrelation once they have been clearly separated. He will work out in the domain of reality that dialectic formerly de-formed (in the imaginary) by his first books. Two visits to the Antilles confirm his intention to sound out there the contacts of civilizations. These countries offer a*

privileged example of cultural symbiosis. Leiris will be convinced by this complexity tending toward a harmony evolving, as it were, under the observer's very eyes. No ethnography of the Antilles can be strictly recapitulative; it must involve a future in the present, force consideration of the clash of cultures, and confirm (despite the rampant racism in these lands) that it is not utopian to think of the arrival, one day, of a true composite civilization." (1969, Editions du Seuil, p. 133)

In another work, Glissant offers an example of a process of cultural troping, "de-formation," reminiscent of Leiris's early "Glossary." From Le discours antillais *(Paris: Le Seuil, 1981, pp. 279–280):*

Creolization
by Edouard Glissant

Tr. by J. Clifford

Advice printed on a flag and distributed by the office of highway safety: NE ROULEZ PAS TROP PRÈS [Don't Tailgate]. According to statistics (watch out for statistics) about 20% of motorists in Martinique have mounted this flag on the rear window of their automobiles, a flag given out in garages when customers pick up their cars. About 20% of this group, using scissors if needed, transform the sentence "NE ROULEZ PAS TROP PRÈS," creolizing it.

What's interesting is the number and meaning of the variants in the writing of this sentence, their relationship. Note that the motorists are working with a given reference material, the French sentence, and thus variations are extremely significant. Here are some: (1) "PAS ROULEZ TROP PRÈS." I may point out that in Martinican Creole it should be permissible to write: "PA ROULE TRO PRE." Dropping the s *from "pas," the* z *from "roulez," the* p *from "trop," and the* s *from "pres" is of great importance not only for the problem of phonetic writing but also for the structure of Creole itself. We find therefore a certain number of examples, ten from a total of twenty-five, using "PAS ROULEZ TROP PRÈS." We find also: (2) "PAS ROULEZ TROP PRÉ"; (3) "PAS ROULÉ TROP PRES"; (4) "PAS ROULÉ TROP PRÉ"; (5) "ROULEZ PAS TROP PRÈS." This last form is very Creole (it affirms and recommends the action before correcting it with a negative limitation), a manipulation of the sentence much more significant than the simple fact of crossed out letters.*

There are also some real productions. That is to say, individuals may cut up one or several original flags and playfully extract combinations.

So we find: (6) "OU TROP PRÉ"—no longer a piece of advice but a repressive declaration. I've noticed: (7) "PAS OULE TRO PRE," where the r *of "roulez" has vanished. I will take up this formula later. We find, finally: (8) "ROULEZ," which contradicts the original admonition. And one inscription even enjoins: (9) "ROULEZ PAPA!"*

A valuable example of counter-poetics. It should be observed first that we're dealing not with deprived peasants but with people who have cars. Thus in evaluating these variants we cannot chalk them up to a lack of "training." Second, Creole rightly appears as a cutting up of French. Third, a cultural will to resistance is manifested here, if not against the established order at least against an order given. Fourth, the variety of formulas is very marked, though there is a much greater frequency of the expression "PAS ROULEZ TROP PRÈS," with no alteration of French orthography. The formulation "PA OULE TRO PRE" intrigued me. Seen at the exit of a supermarket: a mixed couple, actually a young, newly arrived French man married to (or living with) a Martinican woman. Because he had been told (or had observed) that Martinicans don't pronounce rs *he cut the flag into "PA OULE TRO PRE." An extremely interesting example of frenchifying, or of disturbance by frenchifying. To think that one should drop the* r *because Martinicans don't pronounce it is an amusing error. Yet militant partisans of Creole have taken the same path; in quite a few cases they remove the* r *replacing it, for example, with a* w. *Thus they write* pawol *for the equivalent of the French word "parole." Even if this* w *seems valuable (nearly all Creole writers give* mwin *for "moin"—*moi*) the* w *introduces an extra reading difficulty that doesn't seem justified.*

Let us review the conclusions of this more than makeshift inquest. We are indeed dealing with a case of counter-poetics: derisive operation; attempt by means of unplanned, unharmonious variations to escape the coercion of the French language; impossibility of finding an orthographic consensus; resistance to an "order" coming from elsewhere; formation of a "counter-order."

AUTHENTICITY

Let us consider a piece of African sculpture such as the famous statue of the god Gou, representing a Dahomey deity of arms and war, which was brought back to France in 1894 after the capture of Abomey. This statue is made entirely of iron and, although it includes many constituents

of European origin (sheet iron from a whaler to form the base, nut and screw to fix the god's head-dress, etc.), it is nevertheless undeniably one of the finest known specimens of African Negro art. It may be thought that, in a work of this sort, which was made prior to the conquest, any European influence exercised on the artist can only have been by way of

Photo credit/Erwin Blumenfeld

MICHEL LEIRIS AND THE GOD GOU—in the Trocadero Ethnography Museum

borrowing. Certain methods (I should almost like to say certain dodges) characteristic of Europe were used deliberately by the artist, without any inducement due to foreign intervention in his ethnic environment. In these circumstances, the motive impulse was in no way altered for the worse, and the resultant production was not an indeterminate hybrid but an object whose mixed composition gives it an added strangeness making it still more solemn and imposing.

When, moreover, we consider how vitally the genius of the Negroes transplanted to the United States of America has found expression in jazz, which was developed in deplorable conditions, when slavery was still scarcely abolished, by individuals who had no other aim in view than self-expression or self-amusement, taking their materials as they found them—Western musical instruments and themes which, in this instance, served in much the same way as the fragment of the whaler, the nut, the screw and similar items in the statue of the god Gou—when we consider that jazz has quite recently branched out along new lines (as we can see in the so-called "be-bop" style, whose firmly modernistic trend contrasts with the old New Orleans style), we may well feel inclined to place great hopes in the artistic future of the Negroes, even if the circumstances of their life come to differ greatly from those in which the styles of sculpture with which we are familiar were developed.

After all the upheavals through which they have passed in the course of their history, at the hands of Islam and the slave-traders, and later under the colonial domination of the European peoples, may not the African Negroes have been so far prevented from showing what they can really do in the fine arts? Whether this is so or not, one can conceive the possibility of a revival of Negro sculpture comparable with what jazz has represented in music. But it is doubtful whether such a revival can be brought about from above, under the concerted impulse of the colonial administrators and by channels which, being artificial, would inevitably have an academic taint. If such a revival does one day come about, we may be sure that it will be on the initiative of the Negroes themselves, as it was for jazz, and that it will take, as jazz did, a form very different from those handed down by tradition and showing very little respect for the suggestions of those Westerners who are so prone to regard themselves as the acknowledged pundits of civilization. Thus, when all is said and done, the possibility of a renaissance of African sculpture seems to lie in an emancipation of the Negroes which, like any form of emancipation, the people concerned must themselves accomplish.

From "African Negroes and the Arts of Carving and Sculpture," in the U.N.E.S.C.O. volume, *Interrelations of Cultures*, 1953, pp. 350–351; translation unattributed.

IN THE MUSEE DE L'HOMME

Tr. by J. Clifford

It might as well be said that a large portion of my time has been spent in a basement; for my office at the Musée de l'Homme – this little room which, although retired, I still use thanks to my status (Anything can happen!) of senior member and honorable ornament of the house – is situated a bit below the Trocadero gardens.

Seated at my table and turning my head to the left, through the metal bars that for reasons of security adorn my window, I can make out the upper portion of the Eiffel Tower, half-hidden by a cluster of disparate trees whose names, despite our long acquaintance, I do not know as (too much the urban type) I hardly know the names of any trees. If the work I do here with all its full and empty moments is a kind of sapper's operation – something I've long believed, thinking that ethnology by giving every culture its due would undermine the foundations of our Western arrogance – then what more perfect site for the job than this den which, like the identical room beside it, opens onto the vaster but quite congested "Department of Black Africa," a gallery which is reached, like its neighboring locales, through a slightly curving corridor shielded from the daylight, artificially illuminated, and dominated at one end by the candle-colored octagon of a clock set to the right of two elevators (always breaking down) and losing itself at the other end in shadows hiding a freight elevator strong enough to hoist heavy burdens or a large number of people in its frequently grinding cell!

People have sometimes told me I should have a better office. Still, it's a fact: I've nearly always liked this place which is very quiet and which I value because it alternates with my domicile, not as a different space but as a location where different ideas are stirred up, for I am as rarely an ethnologist when at home as I am a writer among these four walls of which two on opposite sides contain the door and the window beginning half way to the ceiling above some radiator pipes, and of which only the two walls to the right and left are enlivened by non-functional elements. On one, the wall in front of which I'm generally seated, hangs a mask from Mali endowed with three antelope horns and attached ornaments (shells, gaming tokens, European pocket mirrors) while the bottom is shaped like an inverted arch and consists entirely of wood. On the other wall hangs a nineteenth-century canvas reproducing a Pompeian painting from the Naples museum that depicts a scene from the mysteries of Isis, doubtless a faithful copy in the mind of its author (whose goal was probably only documentary) but done in a pudgy, stereotypic style as outmoded for us as it is aberrant with respect to the original – all endowing this doubly anachronistic work, simultaneously naive and learned, with

a singular charm.

These two objects have not found their way onto my walls as the result of a carefully considered choice. One of them had a sentimental attachment: a mask acquired near the start of my first trip into the field whose descriptive label I filled out myself. As for the other, I saved it from an auto-da-fe, at a moment when they were throwing out old and apparently ridiculous objects from the ex-Trocadero Museum, now the Musée de l'Homme. Still, this pair of objects could serve as a clue to anyone wanting to characterize me as a specialist in one of the disciplines practiced within the institution I still frequent several times a week. One reason the mask charms me, beyond its sentimental value, is that its European borrowings (trade mirrors, tokens) introduce the baroque note of a sort of reverse exoticism while leaving unimpaired its African allure, seeming to show the sculptor's free use of our industrial products rather than an influence he has undergone, a point in favor not of Europe but of an Africa able to ennoble crass commercial objects by connecting them to a wooden carving of impressive simplicity and bringing them, by means of this object, into the orbit of their rituals. Conversely, it's not an unexpected elevation but a passage to the ridiculous (as with "stupid paintings" and pathetic old theatres) that charms me in the dully patinated copy whose most striking details for me are, among other figures, a mostly naked black crowned with leaves and dancing in a sort of small theatre (probably the entrance to a temple) while, kneeling at the foot of the stairs leading up to it, a curvaceous veiled priestess waves a sistrum in the dancer's direction beside an altar around which two large birds are pecking and on which a holocaust is apparently burning. A ridiculous picture and, something deeper, a tongue stuck out at the science of cultures, since if a well-intentioned copyist has been able to transform a fine Roman relic into a model for a bad stage set of *The Magic Flute* this leads one to think it may be the same for all our work as observers of distant societies and that when we feel we have traced a realistic portrait of one of them perhaps we have done nothing but interpret according to our own fashions, providing an image that will seem laughable once these fashions have changed.

The not untroubled pleasure I derive from the mask with three horns and the painting snatched from the flames depends, certainly, on a certain degree of irony. In the former case, it is thanks to what some might consider a debasement (the glaring intrusion of European junk) that I am more subtly moved than if it had the purity of an antique to which nothing untimely had attached its mark. As for the scene of Isis, its power derives not only from the doubt it raises by analogy but also from the strange mix of comic and serious it immediately activates, its innocently parodic air amusing me like a carnival while at the same time making me feel something of the grandeur of the mysteries of Isis through a burlesque that allows me to feel moved without pulling back in fear of losing myself

in a spurious mysticism. Knowing this, would someone analyzing my service records at the Musée de l'Homme need to ask why, in the years when I still travelled professionally, the Caribbean, a confluence of Africa and Europe and a place where quite a few strange cultural hybrids have been produced, became my field of preference—why, too, I got interested in cults whose adepts, in their trances, mimicked the gods in a kind of lived theatre played without even an ideal barrier between actors and spectators each capable in principle of being suddenly visited by a god with the result that an ethnographer, carried along by his taste for the *elsewhere*, but a rationalist as necessary, could be a full participant without abandoning his observer's role or donning another skin, finding himself part of the show like any other accomplice.

To the extent I have been free to choose my fields and themes of ethnographic research, I've leaned toward objects of study seeming to harbor a style of intrinsic irony that suited me. Two cultures seem to intermingle in a fascinating, ambiguous embrace only so that each can inflict on the other a more visible denial; the gods are summoned in epiphanies that take the form of masquerades, such were the things that satisfied my (seldom appeased) need to merge the *yes* and the *no*, to accept only what comes of an incessant putting in question, an attraction less for sublime beauty than for what could be said to vilify itself or for what, apparently weak, is thus all the more poignant unless, inversely, its tragic excess defies taste with so much cynicism and candor that one is thereby almost cheered up—a need that sometimes seems to denote—if it's anything more than an affectation forbidding me all direct enthusiasm—a perverse inclination to find enjoyment only in ambiguity and paradox, and that sometimes seems sanctified by the idea that a marriage of contraries is the highest summit one can metaphysically attain.

Yes and *no*. Two places distinct in their attachments between which I'm usually transported (more fun than boredom) on the number 63 bus: is one a "yes" to the other's "no"? If I'm partial to this alternation between work at home and work at the Musée de l'Homme it may be, in part, as someone hoping to win back on the red square what he lost on the black, and in part too it may be because of the constant irony involved in this coming and going: for I keep my distance in each case, whether from ethnology when I'm practicing literature, or from the latter when I turn to the former, and (according to this schema that on closer examination of my work times, is too theoretical to merit a monolithic *yes*) I change course on schedule always pushing off from one or the other of these occupations—while even the one that has several times summoned me elsewhere is now little more than a cold working over of documents or a brittle learning.

From *Frêle bruit*, 1976, pp. 268–272.

SECTION 6 PRESENCE

LASSO

Tr. by J. Clifford

Like the ribbon at Olympia's throat, the black on white lines I write should always make something present. Yet my difficulty isn't so much that. Rather it's the problem—more general and not just one of expression—of how to catch things that for me are present enough to be communicated, as if a lasso could encircle them in just the right place, making others feel their presence.

Working primarily at the stage of capture, not of binding, the lasso obviously has it over the ribbon.

And doesn't this lasso always have to snare something *wild* (brute, bare, untouched, really stubborn) both outside and inside me?

From *Le ruban au cou d'Olympia*, 1981, p. 203.

FRED ASTAIRE

Tr. by Lydia Davis

Fred Astaire in a black suit and a top hat, Fred Astaire bare-headed in a tuxedo, Fred Astaire in Prince of Wales check and a boater, Fred Astaire in a bowler hat with an umbrella, Fred Astaire in a fedora without gloves, Fred Astaire in a double-breasted suit wearing gloves, Fred Astaire in shirtsleeves, Fred Astaire in a sweater, Fred Astaire in a travel overcoat with a suitcase, Fred Astaire knotting his cravat, Fred Astaire pulling at his suspenders, going into a restaurant, waiting in the rain, juggling with his cigarette lighter, taking a walk in the country, courting a woman, there is a whole gallery of Fred Astaires, we see him at night and in the daytime, in winter and in spring, in comfortable furnished rooms or on the pavement, in convulsions, humming, stretching or jumping, his face consumptive, but his eyes laughing, his smile wide between the tense features of an alcoholic, and with his look of a hare-brained nice guy and that inimitable distinction which only certain regally dressed hooligans can aspire to. "There was some need of our dry air," said Vaché. "A

cemetery for uniforms and liveries," said Marcel Duchamp. And Rimbaud spoke of "the cruel bearing of tawdry finery," while occupying himself with quite other matters and obviously never doubting that one day there would exist this severe jacket that suddenly becomes delirious, these shoes of beautiful quality leather that suddenly go into a trance and strike the floor as though they wanted to defy it or enrage it, this fine silk handkerchief lying over a heart that suddenly begins to bleed, for this store window mannequin, this automaton, this sylph, is also a man, and all his luxury, his multifarious outfit of costly odds and ends, his little idiosyncrasies, will not prevent him from falling in love sometimes, or becoming bored.

One of the most intense aspects of the modern malaise is embodied by Fred Astaire, this marvellous dancer and slightly macabre clown who is so well dressed (whose clothes are just skimpy enough to make him look a little shabby, but at the same time ample enough to make him look like an emaciated starveling and for him to become heartrending, if the song falls apart), and when I saw him dance in London in *The Gay Divorcee* about a year and a half ago, he reminded me irresistibly of the drawings that one of my friends and I used to scribble in our notebooks during the war and that all depicted perfectly elegant skeletons, some civilian, others military – the expression of a very special variety of *frivolity*.

"Fred Astaire," from *La Bête noire*, No. 1, 1935; *Brisées*, pp. 55–56.

Pour le texte original © Mercure de France 1966.

ACTED THEATRE AND LIVED THEATRE IN THE ZAR CULT

Tr. by J. Clifford

What follows are summary passages from Leiris's most developed scholarly account of his research on spirit possession undertaken in 1933 in Ethiopia: La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Ethiopiens de Gondar, 1958. *(See also the passage from* L'Afrique fantôme *translated in Section 2 above.) The present excerpt omits the frequent illustrative footnotes contained in the book.*

"The ability, above all, to believe every lie." This is the principal gift that the great romantic historian Michelet, toward the end of his study of sorcery in medieval times and the *ancien régime*, can confidently attribute to the sorceress. Now, among the facts of different kinds I was

able to observe while living in close proximity with a *bâla zâr* group, if there were many concerned with possession where the sincerity of the principal participant can hardly be doubted, there are as many others where this sincerity is strongly questionable. A patient like Yasi Araq, afflicted by a synovial discharge, was in great pain each time she performed the *gurri* [a dance that announces the onset of trance] and it is clear that she would not have gesticulated in so painful a way had she not been animated by profound faith in the zâr's power. Another patient of Malkâm Ayyahu, who was probably consumptive and of whose death I learned during the course of my research, also gave herself over to practices (trances, ablutions, etc.) that were certainly made too painful by her condition to allow of any dissemblage on her part. When the *alaqâ* Enqo Bâhrey is terrified to see Malkâm Ayyahu amuse herself pinching people in the style of Azzâj Deho [a zâr spirit], it may all be a harmless game for the healer, but for the initiate at least the fear is not faked, showing that he's quite convinced of the possible harmful results of such mimicry. Inversely, it is hard to believe that Malkâm Ayyahu is being completely sincere when, for example, she is possessed by Sânquit at the exact moment this zâr is supposed to preside over the serving of the beer, having just been reminded by the whisper of a nearby accomplice. And without being able to accuse her of actual trickery (it being understood that a possession state is not necessarily spontaneous but is quite often brought on by ritual needs, with the help of methods like chants, hand clapping, or other evocative procedures) one can still be struck by her consistent success when circumstances require that a certain genie be present in her or in one of her initiates. Even if one excludes actual trickery, it is scarcely conceivable that opportune possessions can be so regularly obtained without a certain complaisance or willingness to play along. And what are we to make of a case like that of Abicu's friend who was ultimately willing to fake the *gurri* characteristic of her friend's zâr in the certitude that by so doing she would successfully appropriate the invoked spirit? As we have already seen, the possessed frequently accuse each other of fraud; for such suspicions to arise so commonly in relations between *bâla-zârs*, that is between people who are far from likely to be skeptics, *a priori*, in this domain, it must be that their suspicions arise either from their personal experiences as participants (aware of their own complaisances) or else from observations they have made in cases where the trickery was so clear that even they were not duped, whatever their respect for what is manifested under the guise of the zâr.

Although lying about zâr matters is frequently denounced, as much by believers as by those who maintain a distance from the cult, it remains true that among the faithful a belief in the authenticity of possessions never seems to be seriously impaired either by the marked cases of deceit observed in others (and even the eventual frauds they may be the first to

recognize in themselves) or by the "complaisance" they know from their own possession experience as they get used to being "taken" on demand, so to speak, by the genie appropriate to the occasion. An initiate like Abieu may declare in a temperamental moment, "If the zâr exists, let's lock the doors and windows and burn the house and all the zârs!" But her burst of impiety, from all appearances, goes no further: punished for her insolence by immediately being struck by the zâr (scenario into which she enters) she will participate in the evening *wadâgâ* as if nothing had happened, as well as taking part in the other gatherings that will occur in the coming days. Similarly, when Asâmmanac declares that the *dankarâ* (war dance) is "kid stuff" her critique doesn't involve the essence of her faith, since she adds immediately that the same isn't true of the *gurri* by which one is "dominated." To whatever extent possession is a lie, apparently for the initiates it is at least a lie they believe as a whole, accepting it overall even if it is not always and in all respects free of contestation. Alongside those cases where the lie seems preponderant and where it would be proper to speak of acted theatre, there are cases in which the reality of the possession is not in doubt either for the main participant or for the assistants and which correspond to what may be called lived theatre. Seen another way, this may in fact be acted theatre but with a minimum of artifice and free of any intention to impose on the spectator. [. . .]

Essentially based on ecstatic techniques and directed toward the satisfaction of individual interests (curing of ills, success in business, etc.) much more than toward a general good even limited to one class of society, directed, moreover, by specialists openly paid by their clients (although the interested party can save face by receiving payment not in his own name but in that of one of the genies possessing him), this cult which is officially condemned but widely practiced and whose collective character alone justifies the title of religion instead of pure magic, includes an element equally discrediting and attractive: the theatrical aspects that are much more apparent than in properly religious ceremonies, either Christian or Muslim. For in the zâr cult we see the intervention—in the person of possessed individuals who assume their roles—of entities who are not simply mythic or legendary beings but out-and-out characters presenting themselves before an audience, using a characteristic language and in many cases their special emblem, the *fukarâ* or motto (a fairly free collection of stereotypes that make one think of homeric epithets), as well as their own gestures, ways of behaving, and in many cases vestimentary gear appropriate to their assigned nature, all of them having, finally, their peculiar tastes and sometimes even quasi-scenic requirements with regard to lighting—characters thus hardly different, except by their function, from those produced in the most traditional forms of our theatre.

Between the possession one could call authentic (spontaneous or induced but undergone in entire good faith, seen in a magico-religious

perspective where trance does not depend on any conscious decision on the part of the patient) and what one could inversely call inauthentic possession (deliberately simulated to make a show of oneself or to exert a pressure on another for the sake of material or moral gain) there are too many intermediaries, thus making the boundary difficult in practice to trace. In quite a few cases, for example, possession provides the possessed person with an alibi allowing him to utter words or accomplish acts from which he would refrain if he had to answer for them in his normal personality; does he avail himself of this alibi in a premeditated way (in which case his possession would be play acting, since he has arranged the scenario himself) or does he limit himself to taking advantage, more or less lucidly, of a situation he hasn't created (in which case, even though his good faith is not total, it would be imprudent to accuse him of trickery)? On the other hand, doesn't the patient for whom possession represents a step toward healing and who performs its gestures passively the way he might follow a medical prescription also act with a certain bad faith, without in any way lessening the fact that he aims solely to return to health and not to make an impression on those who watch him? Aside from the fact that his goal is serious and free of any notion of a game, does his case differ markedly—with respect to the possession's authenticity—from the case of a patient who finds trance to be a pleasure and who, as is usual among the women, dreams from early morning on (as in other climes one might dream of a ball) of the *wadâgâ* where she knows she will find satisfaction? In one case as in the other, possession is at least sought out and the zârs coming into play are personages incited there either by an honest desire for healing or else by a more frivolous thought of the pleasures they can immediately afford. Apparently these intermediary cases are by far the most numerous and thus we are justified in calling zâr possession—at least as openly practiced in Gondar in 1932 and 33—a lived theatre, not an acted theatre or the expression of a collective delirium.

Lived by the actor (who has no difficulty, as we say, getting into the role, encouraged as he is by the ambiance and by his own belief in the *zâr* as a real spirit normally manifesting itself through possession), this strange brand of theatre which can never confess its theatrical nature is lived, equally, by the spectator. From moment to moment this person can also, in effect, be possessed, and in any event he is never a pure spectator, for not only does he contribute to the evocation of the spirits with hand-clapping or singing, but once they have "descended" he has commerce with them and is far from being kept at a distance by those who incarnate them. Even if he is not possessed in his turn and intervenes only secondarily, the spectator thus put on the spot participates in an event and lives it with its protagonists instead of being simply a passive witness. Thanks to this participation by all, this osmosis between actors and audience, such manifestations (though broken off from the ordinary course

of things) do not situate themselves like normal theatrical productions in a special space where the existences that unfold are separated from others, finding themselves therefore at the margin of life. What would seem to be at stake, in short, are privileged moments where collective life itself takes theatrical form.

[. . .] In a general way then, it is probable that if the theatre as such possesses a certain virtue of *katharsis* or "purgation" of the passions (less harmful once they have been exteriorized in scenic action), then from this perspective how much greater must be the virtue of a theatre where the person, far from remaining confined in passivity or losing itself in pure play, is completely engaged and even in some degree able to invent for itself the scenes whose protagonist it becomes. Such is the case for the gatherings and ceremonies of the zâr cults, and it seems legitimate to believe that the initiate obtains from them at least a certain euphoria, a positive benefit that can only produce an attachment to these practices, however discouraging their results may be in other domains. It seems we are touching on what gives magic such great force despite the denials continually inflicted by experience: the affective elements mobilized, with their stock of myths and images as well as the share of drama and performance they contain.

From Chapter 5, "Théâtre joué et théâtre vécu dans le culte des zâr," pp. 89–103.

Photo credit/Christian Gauffre

Leiris in his Paris apartment, 1982.

STONES FOR A POSSIBLE ALBERTO GIACOMETTI

Tr. by Lydia Davis

To speak of Alberto Giacometti as he himself spoke of Henri Laurens – by way of allusion, analogy, evoking an image with no analyzable relation to the trait to be revealed, rather than by way of argument or description.

In 1933, while I was spending the summer in Brittany – the land of menhirs, dolmens and cromlechs – shortly after returning from my first trip into black Africa (a trip which Giacometti later told me he had held against me because I went there in an official capacity), I had a series of dreams from which I take the following fragments without changing their chronology at all:

– On the ground floor or in the basement of a kind of museum containing a gymnasium in which children are playing, there is an attraction rather like the classic fair or amusement park ride known as the "Phantom Train"; it is called "Marriage" and perhaps it is a sort of Aunt Sally? Opening a door that resembles a theater flat, I go in. Here there are a number of chairs with folding seats like the seats in a concert hall; obliquely, at the far end, I see a small theater, hardly larger than a toy, that looks very like the sort of organ that is covered with mouldings and embellished with figures and that usually forms the central part of a merry-go-round. At the idea that, obeying the rule of this attraction, I am going to have to be conveyed among all these chairs, and that I will have to avoid touching them for fear of electric shocks or other even more disagreeable surprises, and that I will have no control over which path I take or how fast I go, I am seized with fear and I run off, abandoning the friend who is with me.

– in the half-sleep of morning, a dream I have just had and after which I have awoken – immediately or not? – takes the form of a rectangle the color of red ink which stands out, in a distinctly defined shape, against a piece of paper. This rectangle, perhaps actually *cut out* of the paper – and I don't really know whether this is somewhat stiff cardboard rather than just paper – is at once a proscenium (similar to those in Elizabethan theaters) and a human beard. Outside this rectangle an "old friend" happens to make a remark, an "old friend" who appears to me wearing the features of a bearded man whom I will later recognize as the Italian consul at Gondar, a city I lived in when I was in Abyssinia. I will abruptly forget this remark, the utterance of which figured as a sort of commentary on or moral to the whole revery, I will forget it at the very instant

when, having emerged from my half-sleep, I am about to write it down in a notebook. Despite some efforts, all I will succeed in unearthing amounts to this: a brief proposition indicating two alternatives and probably ending with "we have to . . . ate or . . . pose," a sentence of which I only know that the second of these two infinitive verbs of the first conjugation is something like "oppose," "dispose" or impose."

—Coming out of a reception where I have stood leaning on a cane that doesn't belong to me, whose handle—not curved into a crook but straight—is made of very gnarled wood though it has been polished by use, and where, so positioned, I have seen, among the other guests, a woman who is the wife of an Italian diplomat, I go to a sort of garage whose floor is damp with rain, in order to answer the call of nature. Facing a rather small garden which serves as a sculptor's studio, I do it. On an open-air workbench there are some fragments (particular pieces or just debris?) of medieval or Renaissance works of art. The garden, which I can only glimpse, separates the garage from a house with open windows which is the sculptor's house.

—In half-sleep I try to remember a couplet that seems to be a phrase containing a condensed revelation. Believing that I have grasped it clearly enough so that it can't escape me, I sit up in my bed and pick up a pad of paper where I want to make a note of it. Even though all I have to do now, in order to write it down, is to let the point of the pen or pencil run freely over the white paper, I stop short and see that it is impossible for me to remember it. Perhaps, in the second verse, there were the words "roses" and "fire"?

Giacometti's Italian Swiss background. His professional familiarity with minerals may explain why he seems to be carved out of rock. Yet there is no heaviness, nothing bearlike, about him; does a certain soberness in his gestures disguise his affinity with the lean animals (ibexes and Black African goats) who prefer to live on the steepest slopes?

In his not very mobile face, under his crown of woolly hair, a cannibal laugh often widely reveals his teeth. A character from a *commedia dell'arte* of the time of the Etruscans, perhaps, in which Harlequin the medicine man confronts Punchinello the child-eater; or perhaps a werewolf, if he must be compared to an animal (one that is prone, of course, to peculiar transformations). Note also that cannibals, who are more refined than is usually believed, have been credited by one sociologist with the invention of the fork.

Giacometti's art as questioning of the viewer himself through the work: a girl with her knees half bent as if offering something to the man looking at her (a position inspired by a little girl the sculptor once saw

in his native country); a figure pointing out to a third figure something that can only belong to the viewer's world; objects presented in the manner of experimental apparatuses or reduced models of fairs; etc. . . . Even more than the others, a woman standing, arms hanging, as motionless as a question mark.

Rectangular panels arranged vertically in a circle: a construction imagined by Giacometti and then worked out on paper, to recount several events that happened to him, for the most part, over the last few years and whose conducting wire was a dream that he wanted to note down; each panel corresponds to one of the events described and the whole system expresses their interconnections in time and space. This apparatus inevitably reminds us of one of the objects Giacometti made when he belonged to the Surrealist group: sculpted in plaster, it was a sort of scale model of a fair, and if the person looking at it should happen to fall into it, his adventure would unfold through the different parts of it.

To set up votive stones, to materialize experiences, to give lasting substance to the elusive or fleeting quality of an event, to fix realities using methods—when necessary—that borrow from naturalism whatever is indispensable if he is to convince us, but nothing more: this is, roughly, what Giacometti appears to be doing; he seems to have chosen a three-dimensional art as his most consistent way of expressing himself, because this the most difficult art to extricate oneself from without cheating.

One of Giacometti's major preoccupations: the scale on which the human being is represented in a work of art. What he finds striking in Jacques Callot's etchings, for example, is the smallness of the figures, who are lost in vast spaces and appear to be seen from a certain height.

Giacometti's statues—larger in the courtyard of his house or in the street than in his studio (littered with pieces of plaster which for a long time threatened to invade the little room where he slept in spite of the cold and the rain). This difference, because a creature always unfolds when it is no longer confined; more reasonably: because it is in the open air that one can judge human scale.

Until now, almost no one but astronomers concerned themselves with the *apparent diameter* and the *real diameter* of what they were looking at. Giacometti shows that he can make this sort of distinction when he fashions figures whose "natural height" doesn't depend on their height in meters and centimeters.

People standing, people walking, people crossing paths in a place that

may be public or private, an arm by itself, a nose springing out like the enormously indiscreet interference of a face: a few ways sculpture has of *putting in an appearance*, following one of the various systems conceived by Giacometti. And this is in the large atmospheric box where we live, a very different space from that of a museum.

In good weather or bad, individuals with no other relation to one another than the fact that they are all walkers going each in his own direction. No common denominator for them, except for—possibly—the woman who is also there but isn't moving and at whom these nameless men gaze—without complicity, each for himself alone.

To enumerate, to count, to survey desirable creatures, to recapitulate, to gauge and leave in suspense. Figures not so much grouped as juxtaposed and each of whom—without its solitude being in the least broken—is all the more emphatic for being situated or framed by the others. Here, what is singular increases by becoming a fragment of a plural, what is relative surpasses what is absolute, and the comparative says more than the superlative.

What you see when you walk down the sidewalk and everything strikes you at the level of your two eyes. What you only glimpse from your window.

Whereas usually a piece of sculpture is an object with space around it (exactly the opposite of a cannon, which is a hole encircled by bronze), Giacometti is now engaged in creating space that contains one or several objects.

What might make us believe that Giacometti is capable of byzantine subtleties: the faultless attention he pays to questions that are very simple (though, for this very reason, more difficult to grasp than many others, even if one limits oneself to pondering their terms), questions posed by the way people and things present themselves to us.

Confining himself to what is characteristic of man: to stand upright, to walk by moving his two legs one after the other. Recently, a sculptor of domestic animals too.

For several years, after an accident from which he escaped with one of his feet seriously injured, Giacometti was never seen walking without the help of a cane; then, one fine day, he decided to give up that implement, and as soon as he made that decision he moved about without any

support. In the same way, his sculptures still stand upright without either cane or crutch.

A gilttering trolley with small bottles and surgical dressings belonging to the Bichat Hospital that appeared in 1938 before the admiring eyes of the man with the broken foot and that reappeared twelve years later when the sculptor needed two wheels to isolate an effigy from the ground and fictively endow it with a capacity to move in spite of its absence of movement. Perched above the axle of this component of the vehicle (which is itself mounted on blocks), the woman no longer touches the ground and it is she herself who incarnates the sculptor's admiration for the trolley circulating among the beds.

The sudden memory of a forest, or of a clearing, depending on whether a random grouping of figures seems denser or more widely separated. Instead of being destroyed like so many others, the figures had accumulated as though they had been made just for this grouping—in which they will have come into their final transformation.

Feminine bodies arranged in a row, the same way girls in a brothel present themselves to be chosen. At The Sphinx, a vast expanse of gleaming floor relegated the nude bodies to an almost sacred distance; at the rue de l'Echaudé, on the other hand, their proximity (not very appetizing, finally) was almost aggressive within the four walls of a cramped room. The different heights of the supports and the scale itself of the figures made them farther away or closer, just as did the greater or lesser expanse of floor.

To integrate the support into the action, to make it a part of the sculpture, and so an object or piece of furniture with which the viewer is on an equal footing. Sometimes the opposite happens and the support separates, either suggesting the space of a stage or platform open to everyone (though in fact limited), or extending in lines defining the three dimensions of a cube of air in which the things are situated, or indeed becoming a container for the protagonist.

After the highly polished solids of the beginning (steles or shingles soaked for a long time, which are all that remain of the perception of a living body), after the open-work constructions and the games that refuse to close off space, what we have now are pin-sized figures and larger figures that are still thin, images of the vertical position, small proliferations of human structure around a plumb line.

The period in which these tall effigies were painted, dabbed with little

mostly rust-colored touches, as though this clayey color had been drawn to the surface by the need to give them blood.

Are they statues that have returned to their natural state following some accident or some treatment that remains to be defined? Or are they natural bodies promoted to the rank of statues after slight alterations or a ripening period?

How these latest sculptures of Giacometti have taken on the look of *found objects.* All things considered, one would be inclined to believe they are idols or mummies that have come out of hopelessly dry sand or volcanic soil. Compare with them: the desert concretion known as the "gypsum flower"; certain results in the earth of the process of erosion; utensils warped by burning lava or directly corroded by a wave of heat?

Extreme reduction of matter, following a law of economy that seems to determine both the quality and the quantity of the attack on it. No more than a little, the smallest bit of matter needed, and by its own action stripped of all luster, as though to show plainly that richness lies elsewhere.

To scratch down to the bone, to what is indestructible. Or else—the opposite—to add space when one seems to want to eliminate a few ounces of material.

Between geological matter and air, there is the shared surface.

Something of the ruins of Pompeii and the wall paintings that have remained fresh in spite of wind, storm, ashes. In happy discoveries of the sort that archeologists make, millennial antiquity converges with the flashing rupture of time: the sudden unveiling of a face forever contains all of the long past. As for his own discoveries, it seems that Giacometti—directing his hands as one would direct workers proceeding with the excavations—would like to dig them up, fully outfitted, from his own brain.

Intense concern for speed, without which there could be no creation. In contrast to the patiently elaborated work of art, here we have the thing that suddenly appears, all the more manifest because it seems to have sprung up without any history and without any roots: instantaneous and outside of time. From this point of view, to destroy something completely is more worthwhile than to correct it. Seeing the sorts of slaughters that Giacometti has been indulging in, I have sometimes wondered if for him sculpting means making something that he can then demolish.

Make, perfect, destroy, then make again, perfect again, destroy again . . . out of a desire to be rigorous, up to the moment when circumstances require that the thing be finished, and it is halted just as it is, the desire for rigorousness having simply been supplanted by submission to circumstances, just as one law succeeds another.

The problem of *real presence*—posed and solved by Giacometti while it seems to have escaped almost all of our sculptors, who are either pure architects or the makers of mannequins whose stuffing doesn't prevent them from being absent. In the same way, negro sculptors are not so much trying to represent their models as to allow them to be there (and they are prepared to let their figures later crumble into dust).

A stone in the shape of a head is at once a stone and a head; but could one say the same thing of a head made of stone?

When it is painted, a bronze escapes its condition of being a sculpture more easily than when it has kept its metallic look. If *Falling Man* was left out of the series of works which Giacometti subjected to this treatment in 1950, was that because a fall cast in bronze is never in danger of solidifying into a statue?

"Hollyhock," "saint of the abyss," "white phantoms" falling "from our burning sky": a sequence of themes from one of the most famous *Chimeras* by the man whom posterity will perhaps simply call "Gérard," as his friends did; a sequence of themes which I would also be tempted to apply to the series of feminine figures sculpted during all these past few years by "Alberto," who says he absolutely does not come from Ile-de-France but from a country with severe cold weather and plenty of mountains and snow.

"Pierres pour un Alberto Giacometti," *Derrière le Miroir*, No, 39–40, 1951; *Brisées*, pp. 125–145.

ENVOI

Tr. by J. Clifford

In the second act of *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, the play where Aimé Césaire makes a hero of Shakespearian proportions out of a former

porter become king, a character appears for a short scene: the Spaniard Franco de Medina is sent by Louis XVIII to invite Christophe, who reigns over northern Haiti, to return to the bosom of France; but he succeeds only in angering the king, who condemns him to death. He is seen departing for the place of execution, escorted by some soldiers. An entry, a few quick words, an exit, that's all there is to the part—one wonders what actor could make anything of such a "walk on," a role wholly subordinate and without lustre. In any case, up until this performance (among those given in Dakar in 1965), no one had done anything at all with the part, if they had even tried.

As luck would have it the director of the troupe, Jean-Marie Serreau, had to play the part impromptu, filling in for its incumbent who was called back to Paris on other business. Neither Césaire nor any friends in the audience like myself knew of the replacement. Thus our surprise was great when the new Franco de Medina came on stage and we saw this calamitous figure suddenly changed into something other than the drab silhouette we were familiar with.

Two ideas as easy as pie. The historical Franco de Medina was a Spaniard and obviously his French pronunciation would show it—a chance for Serreau to give some caricatural vigor to his personage by adding a strong accent. Theatrically, the exit posed a problem: how should he go away to his death? A ravaged demeanour would have been too melodramatic and a martial carriage too "stiff upper lip"—the result being that until now interpreters of the part prudently avoided all psychological indications and in consequence the scene fizzled. But Serreau was able to get out of the problem by adding an evident limp to the burlesqued accent of his Franco de Medina—a double stroke because, on the one hand he singularized him even more by making him lame, and on the other created an immediate scenic impact by having him walk to his death pitifully dragging a leg behind, gouty perhaps like his royal master.

I have always admired the way an actor, by sheer ingenuity, could give consistency to this character that Césaire put in his play only to bring out a facet of Christophe's personality. To grasp right away all the different elements and brilliantly solve the problem, this is what Serreau did, a man of the theatre bending to the needs of the play but remaining scrupulous enough to do so without falling into gratuitousness. Thus conjugated into truth, fantasy ended with the absolute *presence* of a figure who, formerly, did not exist.

From *Le Ruban au cou d'Olympia*, 1981, pp. 22–23.

MICHAEL PALMER

from BAUDELAIRE SERIES

(Baudelaire series)

You say
A miracle from Heaven

You say
I'm fine I'm fine I'm really going blind

Gay as a skylark today
You say

I haven't an ache or a pain
in me in my body inside

I'm fine I'm fine I'm really going blind
It's a joy to be alive

I had a visitor tonight
with suit and beard and Malacca cane

climbed through my window
and entered me

Is this such a bad thing
Is this a thing at all

Each evening there's a poppy in my brain
which closes before dawn

Whatever happens then will not happen again
Please move my arm

(Baudelaire series)

She says, Into the dark –
almost a question –
She says, Don't see things –
this bridge – don't listen

She says, Turn away
Don't turn and return
Count no more lines into the poem
(Or could you possibly not have known

how song broke apart while all the rest watched –
that was years ago)
Don't say things
(You can't say things)

The ground is smooth and rough, dry and wet
Pull the blue coat tighter around you
(There are three parts to you)
I'm not the same anymore

I'm not here where I walk
followed by a messenger confused
(He's forgotten his name)
I'm not here as I walk

not anyone on this path
but a figure of walking
a figure projected exactly this far
followed by the messenger confused

(He's forgotten his name)
Don't say his name for him
Don't listen to things
(You can't listen to things)

Some stories unthread what there was
Don't look through an eye
thinking to be seen
Take nothing as yours

(after Rilke, "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes")

(Baudelaire series)

She says, You are the negative—
behind you an horizon in red
and the horizon a question
a mark in final red
your eyes are sealed against

She says, You do not know when

She says, You are counter
You are degrees only
and now in summer a mouthful of blood
and sutured nylon thread

You are professor of watery tablets
from moment to memory a swollen debt

She says, You cannot not hear this
Far less than a second will have passed

(Kootenay sonnet)

(Baudelaire series)

At the table we say
You are columnar, a cloud
A page is paper
What of lines through things

At the table we say
The eye is twice divided
It will ask something of song
It will cause a broken thought

At the table you say
Don't calculate with scissor and watch

Don't mirrorise
Don't be Civil Guard

At the table it is said then sworn:
not and not:
not devotional metalog
not rector of lament

And here we ask what
what critical love or fear
what theory of degrees
what northern house

And we ask what house
what window to that house
what linen or bed
what sentence it wants

what sentence it measures out
asking after of before
(its question to the poem)
and neck and hip to bend just so

since the house cannot be ours
At the table one by one
each comma and period are erased
then patiently each sound

as each shadow or shape hidden by sound
Now it is a house
Now it is the vacant house
(It will ask something of song)
Now it's the liar's burning house

PETER REDGROVE

from THE MUDLARK POEMS

THE FIRST MUDLARK

Swaggering among the distillations,
The resplendent oils of the woodland swamp,
Its water-mirrors and soft turfy bars
That glitter with fire-in-the-dew which is the spirit,

I am masked in bacilli and volatilities
And fellow-drinkers, the bacteria are delighted
And swarm over Gulliver celebrating;
It is their fertility-dance, in black.

The alcohol swamp by the sea,
With its bubbling glasses,
Dispensary of many many bottles,
All uncorked,
Mixing your medicines with your poisons;

Nobody knows how rolling
In the ploughed field or in the morass
Creates a sexuality which is magic;
Clearly the morass has it already, and the fields,
And the ferny bars
Where drunk men plunge through black mirrors
Containing all possible colours of flowers.

THE BIG STORE

I.

The butterflies that feed on sheep-dung,
Oily sheep-dung, and spread more gorgeous rainbows

Across their backs, more plangent velvets;
There are the flints cracked into blue and white
Like sky underground, butterfly-wing blue;
There is the flint-mine full of sealed firmaments,
And the blue thistle bursting out of the sealed mine,
In its choking collar like a fountain of sky;
And there are the bright butterflies that live on oil
Of lighted ships' lanterns and spread
Their illuminated costumes across their backs;

On the floors of the meadows, in the basements of the lakes,
Among the moving stairways of the air-currents and currents of water
In multi-level emporia it is a city made of the Big Store;

A city where the shop windows are opened wide,
Full of pubs with the alcohols circulating,
Juices of infinite electricity, and the cells of the trees
All stacked like the old smugglers' bottles, square
So they won't roll and give the game away,
Honeycombs of Irish cream and whisky; the populations
Have the freedom of the Midsummer Sales, returning home
With stouted baskets, soft goods, all the groceries of blood.

II.

The cedar-smelling water from the spring
Under the cedars; I am shopping
For black mud that is soft goods and visit
Its night-escalator down into the lighted shop
Of the million candles under the swamp;

I am a regular customer of the wet wood and the small stream
That rounds into its velveteens and frogs; my fear
Summons the assistants who unroll the streams to let me see,
Unroll the little brook like a counter of silk,
Like the moth I enter and sip more gorgeous light
Like produce of the rock tree underground and its fruct
Of flints easing its tributory boughs slowly,
Overhead streaming with the heavenly blue juice of flints.

THE GOGING STOOL
(Mudlark VI)

The HWCH or Witch. The scribe, the scraper,
The spirit-sculptor of the Mother-of-All,
Mother of Source, the Widow, the One Alone,
Communicator. All that belonged to that firstness
Was afterwards derided and denounced but is.
Bring that to the Goging Stool, the Quagmire
Is the Accuser, choke the criminal in it,
The whore or the coward in it, the abominable
Rat of the sun in it. I will seize you
Utters every thread of this earthenware
Until you discover in me
Your name and the name of every part of you
Which is my name.

So he is mud, walking.
He is the great decay of himself, but walking.
The green threads run into his back.
He is learned in the dumbschool.
He was recovered
On the balance-beam of the cucking-stool.
He is a lump of earth, the sod.
We might wind it in funeral flowers,
Sew in it a suit of flowers, walking,
We might plant him with wreathes,
We might bathe it white in spattering falls
And return him remaining to his family
Created anew.
That lump was his dead shadow, gone on the stream.

Thus we created HWCH
In the shadows of the creek, and he was one.
He was purified in yesty ground
Bubbling with salt waters.
He was an unformed child, in his ferment.
He is close to the shadows, by our action,
If he wasn't HWCH then he is now,
Joined to his source.
We accosted him and punished him,
Assaulted him, fitted him to sin,
Member of both worlds, gatekeeper,
A route and door

And belonging to the Gog who quakes
The bubbling, the pulsing place, the Makemire.

MUDLARK X

As in 'those thin-filled Mappes we yet
Finde the name of Walsingham' I am lying in mud
From whence the winds are generated
Looking for the small town
That lies behind everything.

I smell this town with noble avenues, but as yet
See only mud upon my body. I rise
And brush it off my clothes
Though it leaves
Great Mappes and cold breath.

I can smell that other Town
With the ancient silver lanes,
The slate phosphorescent with the rain
In the winged hives among the strawberry canes,
Such disparates, in the white castle
That is the clay refinery, in the cargo-vessel
White with china-clay,
Solid white even in its black holds;

The small town is its other cargo,
The small town behind this small town that I smell
And hear now in the bee-hum, the engine-thud.

My wife played lute to me as I washed the longe Mappes off,
My charts of navigation to the Smalle Towne,
And as she played her instrument to me
That bathroom gave admittance to the Smalle Towne
And I could fling the smalle windowe open and call nakede
To my bathfellows, and when I did this
The sun that belonged to Walsingham
Shone on these docks as well. I donned
An ordinary shirt and trousers, fitting garb

That recalls a dreamers clothes, or pyjamas,
Unisex, and while we ate I saw
At our table twenty priests and priestesses
Dining post-coitally in candlelight
From Walsingham. I knew
It was where the man with cold breath lived,
But when you drew nearer to his house
His breath grew warme, smelling of seaweed,
And visible, like Mappes of noble tides.

MUDLARK

I.

Rolling in the mud
Will bring her back,
Will bring the sun back,
Will bring the summer on,
The human skin
Bristled as by the electricity
Of the growing land;
Rolling in the mud,
Gathering the zyme.
She sighed
Once or twice,
Then shuddered, then died,
The sigh of a meditation,
The complete relaxation.
In the ploughed field roll,
Between the wet furrows
The mortal panting.
Death is so terrible
God alone should bring it.
My organs have gone cold
With her death,
The cups of meat
Which were eyes.
Under the sun the warm mud
Draws itself up to its full height of flowers

II.

Rolling in the socket,
In the dead eye,
The bird balancing the evening,
Turning its mortices,
The fly unlidding its wings;
In the clay is hidden
A white dove,
And in the mud is hidden
A mica-winged pollinator
Of all flowers that feast the eyes;
And set in the firmament of the bedrock
In its granite pond is a mineral sun.
I hear my mortal panting
Like a bed-partner's breathing,
The head in the belly nods
Once or twice, and sighs;
It is a little death.
I repair to the laboratory,
The laboratory within the rock,
The moulting wings of scoriae,
I am clothed in rust
The colour of silver-tarnish
Look for me, I am an unseen
In my low cave of imprint
My forme, and I pass unseen;
I am one of her kind now
And to bring her back with me
Work as deep as I can and low.

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

BIVOUAC

Among the Polish Chassidim, perhaps among the Chassidim generally in Eastern Europe, it was prohibited to leave a book open in the village reading room. A sacred book, that is. Interfering forces might invade it, or escape from it.

A shadow might, otherwise, cross the open pages. The shadow might distort the features of a divinity which inhabited the pages, at once hidden and open. Or an expression on those features might run wild into the world, unmediated by any mind, the reader's, who sat there in his cloak being bothered by his fleas.

The word desired to be dulled. If not by the mind of this or that reader, with or without fleas, then by the clapping shut of the book. Otherwise the pneuma might break out and be at large, tigerishly among the furrowed desks, or hopping mad in the muddy or sunbaked little village streets.

The book had covers to shield its pages from mud or sunlight. Not even fingers had any title to cross the track of the word. The covers also existed to contain the scorching majesty of the word. At least, a risk was set aside. Who knows, the majesty might otherwise choose to spill out as idiocy and make havoc, or too much heaven, among the huts.

It was also an offense to place one open book on top of another open book. The charms of the pneuma were inviolable, transcendental.

The light shoots shadows into this room, across the pages of books and a few squares of Philippine reed carpet. Somehow I love it so. Outside, the trunk of an elm spells out a green shadow across blades of grass, the quiverings of which can only be detected if you take the time to watch, if you truly care, if you quiver a bit yourself. The grass blades tilt at an inexplicable mass of angles. Their tips ought to be points, but actually are bitten off, because every so often I try to mow the shadows down and the mower's cruciform blade rips across them. Underneath the mower's metal casing the momentarily unseen, as grass, suffers this.

No matter. A sheet of paper on the desk surface carries the print of the insect screen, a tight cross-hatching. This keeps the little winged demons out and holds a whiteness in. Nothing written contradicts the self-sufficiency of the word; its complex force, noted only in various proximate oscillations, disdained by the flea, unapparent in action, otherwise in hope, is a fiction so threatening that we devise our most dazzling footwork to pull a little fruit out of the teeth of disaster.

Here, too, on this bitter grass near dusk I saw the cicada come into being. First it had made its long journey up a perpendicular tunnel to the earth surface; the cicada itself had lubricated the tunnel with a juice it exuded through its protective pupa. Now, inside the bronze pupa, which was crisping, a general shiver began to happen. An infinitesimal foot prodded a hole in the pupa, then another foot. Gradually the head was coming out, then the body, forwards, but for twenty minutes it made a lunge, rested, lunged again. Its moment of emergence was so prolonged that it could hardly be seen emerging. The motive and the power behind this effort – barely imaginable – I felt them in my groin as a sensation between craving and fright, then in my throat as a taste, brandy and pepper.

Finally, mute and dull, an oval pellet had shrugged the pupa off. The pellet put a leg out, soon another leg. Its back was turning emerald, then golden emerald, with wings that lay flush with the pellet, exceedingly frail, then larger, unfurling into twin networks of golden emerald filigree tracery. And the head, with eyes, had woken up, was turning this way and that way; now the wings could move and lift. The cicada glowed as if dusted with a pollen out of which, for the sake of argument, the breath of a beyond conjectured the world's first agile anatomies. Pristine forest contracted to the volume of a singing bird's egg. A fiery drop of universe at the other end of a tunnel through time.

So I lay down on the grass and put an ear to it. I was expecting the wings to rustle and give off a melodious twang, faint as the last echo of a Jew's harp in an Egyptian burial chamber.

Then it simply wasn't there. From high up in an elm its first ancient cackle fizzed into the onset of dark.

BOB PERELMAN

THREE POEMS

WORD STIMULI

I am split, it is written,
parallel lines pressing powerfully together.
Past and present, which came first?
(one growing more obvious all the time)
went down to the mouth, one fell in and

Facts as shrines, the isolated object theory
is just doing its job
alongside the soft buttery throes of word stimuli
like "war" makes Nietzsche excited
and "pity" pitiless.

The Bible, drawn and quartered, says what it says
in the silence of a televised execution.
To get near the forbidden
description of the body, read
the victim's mother's face in the paper,
examine the murderer's feces
and note the fall of clods in the field blown up by dynamite
simply to be able to plant there next spring.

Inside this split, the body
with its secret names lies open
like a fresh dug grave to the Almighty,
fathered by no one, thunder billowing
through a rent in the scenery to overpower speech.

In the cave a short intense mating between sound and meaning.
White shorts and jogging thighs emerge pulsing as one,
the Third World tucked safely away
inside some disadvantaged individual's search
for a meaningful form in which to write down his or her
experience statistics or just hope the letter gets printed
in USA TODAY

cheap distribution and rapidly becoming dematerialized
because, because *nothing*.

LET'S SAY

A page is being beaten
back across the face of "things."
Inside me there's a book of no color, its pages riffling as I breathe, a
moving point, torn out
and I read this scrapbook of desire
let's not say constantly
asleep and provoked by the economics of cliffs, galleys, cartoons,
explosive devices patterned to look like adults reading signs
casually, very fast
and in this wind, leavened by sun
or am I merely reading that
backwards, inside the restaurant where they serve the parts
by number, innuendo
and the you or the I spends its life
trying to read the bill
alone in the dark
big wide streets lined with language glue

A page is being written.
It's fun to chew, to work things out
to close the damn book
to sit in the sand with a radio
no bikini no tan line no body
sun, plot
a dream matchup
you can either go up or down, no middle ground
the floor is sexualized, tessellated with little languages crying out
speak me, squash me, love me up into one libidinous hunk of
noise, you great big missing other, yoo hoo, over here
and the finished word is an album of past pleasure
smoking out one last incomprehensible nuance beside still waters
that talk their talk
of which you are the noun
the one and only

and the model breaks, leaving
a nasty little landscape which *you*
and the group of course
the other the slaughtered city, the strafed farms
silently
in large heated buildings
the smell means money
and the classics are being straddled
a page is being beaten
O parse me, says the son to the so-called absent father
in a suit by the lakefront in Cleveland
sixty degrees and a fishing pole
the breeze or am I reading water again

PERSON

Eats, drinks, sticks aromatic pipe in mouth, and asks,
What society (books piled on varnished desk, vanished races, where have I smelled that smell before I was born, a hard-headed pragmatism standing in the empty spaces . . .
What society has ever not fashioned a human
receptacle for its narrative wastes?
C'est la guerre the garage the riding mower
the obtrusive stories that don't stop when the sun goes down all at once like an isolated event,
low blood sugar lowering the rate of vocabulary utilization,
the world, the universe, the mind of god cushioning the fall of the dead letter,
water coming into the river from an unknown source.
Sometimes you just have to go lie down with the unnamed by-products.

They have no names, not because of some intrinsic human stupidity,
but because there's no place to put all the flash cards,
Mother & Father have loaded the tray so full.
Plus the fact that food is fashion and thus
bites the hand that eats it,
or, to put it differently,
the Great Salt Flats are the thighs of what conceivable being,

the wood from whose Proust
no contractor, no matter how liberal the building code
—glass houses conceived in sin from day one,
blizzards of chance down upon the fountain of youth,
all without a verb,
because capitalism makes nouns
and burns the connections.

Words get forced, like the fugitive in *The 39 Steps,*
into making a speech about what? ending in cheers with the speaker in handcuffs.
And in fact one's own crudely physical body has never been in this second before, it's less likely than it looks, imagine a TV growing legs and talking.
If a TV could talk we wouldn't understand it.

The intimate journal protects its secrets.
The intimate flesh projects its secrets.
In the bathroom: Kill a (Jew crossed out) Nazi.

JOHN YAU

ALAN COTE: THE ROLE OF DRAWING

Alan Cote's career can be divided into two distinct phases connected by a transitional period in which earlier concerns are inverted, examined, and then extended. In both the transitional period and the most recent phase drawing plays a major role. From the late 1960's until the early 1970's, the artist employed a predetermined compositional approach which allowed him to make a decision about his choice of color at every step of the way. The paintings can be characterized as saturated monochromatic fields in which differently colored beveled bars of equal length are deployed. Despite the fact that each bar is defined by a single intense hue, they disturbed neither each other, nor the insistent flatness of the field. Cote was primarily concerned with the structuring of color. His paintings were brash, elegant, and toughminded.

Then, around the middle 1970's, Cote began prying apart the implied grid of his earlier paintings. By the late 1970's, he had not only broken down an already broken grid, but he was mining the allusive possibilities inherent in its ragged structure. The lines curved or veered off in another direction, causing the drawings to suggest the topography of an ice floe, say. At the same time, the paintings became increasingly referential. Though, like the drawings, they were made up of abstract marks placed in an abstract realm.

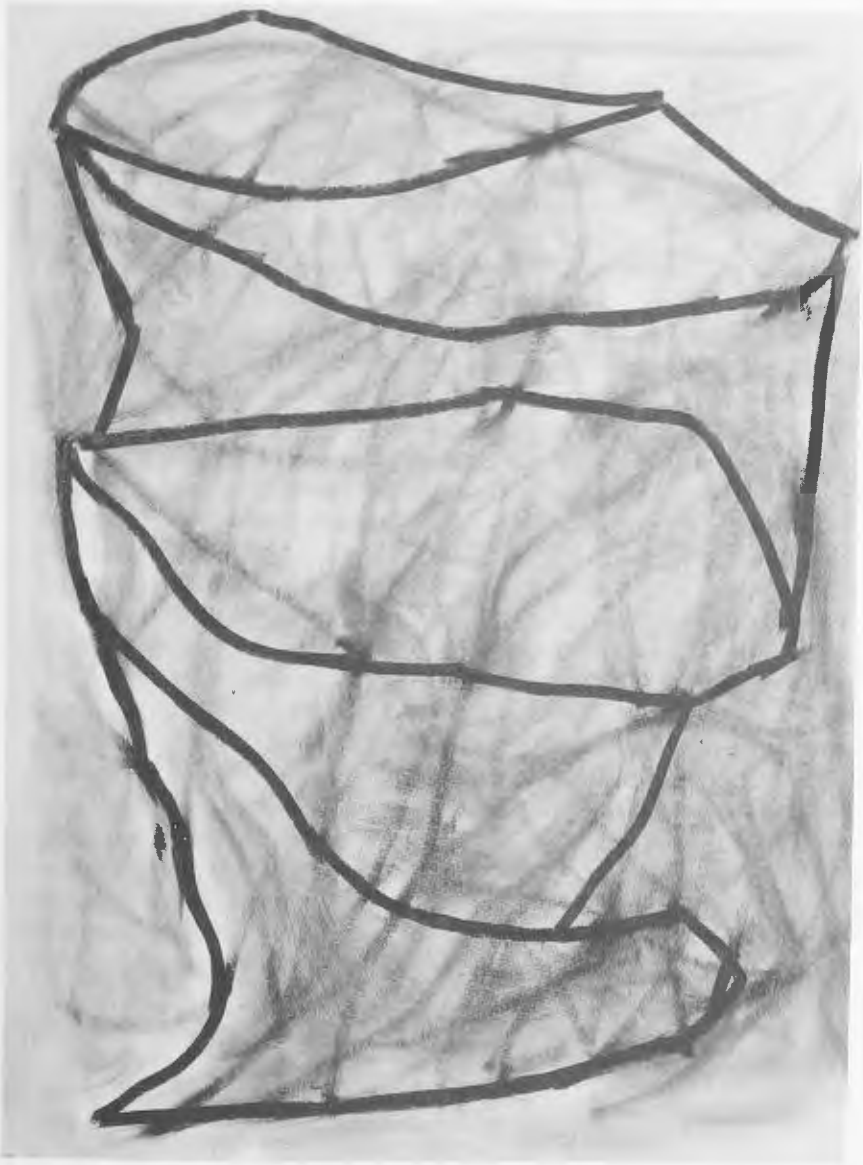
As a result, color began functioning in a very different way than it did in the earlier work. It could advance one area of a painting, while recede in another. A cluster of abraded strokes might be asked to disturb a saturated ground. Value jumps are unexpected, evocative, disturbing, and pungent. These possibilities are the direct result of Cote's decision to draw with color, make it expressive. He has deliberately undermined the grid that once held his beveled bars securely in place. Now, instead of structuring color, he is using color to structure very specific perceptions. And yet, like the earlier paintings, the viewer cannot take in one form without taking in the rest. An all overness persists in each composition. In a recent painting, for example, a fallen tree—all hot pink lines and swirls—seems to have burrowed into a dark blue ground, used the thwarted force of its sweet color to hold its place in the painting. This isn't the artist's description of an event. It is a conceptual image in which a natural event and the act of painting is understood as being both interchangeable and synonymous.

ALAN COTE

THREE DRAWINGS

SCENT IN THE AIR / 1984
Pastel and charcoal / 50 x 38 inches

WALKING IN THE DARK / 1983
Charcoal and pastel / 50 x 38½ inches



SIX VIEWS OF A MOUNTAIN / 1983
Charcoal / 50 x 38 inches
Photos courtesy of Washburn Gallery, New York City.

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS

McGANN AGONIST

At the heart of a crisis in contemporary literary criticism is the systematic use of "text" for "poem." According to Jerome McGann, a *poem* is a social event—a *work* of literature—embedded in a dynamic, multilayered historical and ideological context. In contrast, a *text* is a deanimated linguistic structure—a *document*—removed from sociohistorical context. "What we ought to see," says McGann in *The Beauty of Inflections*, "is that 'text' is the linguistic state of the 'poem's' existence. No poem can exist outside of a textual state any more than a human being can exist outside of a human biological organism. But just as a person is not identical to a particular body, so neither is a poem equal to its text" [p. 22].

This metaphor suggests a parallel between New Criticism and behaviorism; both collapse the operant distinction between a mechanism (*behavior*) and a function (*action*). McGann's polemic takes up the philosophical and political imperatives of Bakhtin, asserting that language is a social act and meaning is interdependent on social context; it offers an alternative to imagining language as a formal system in which meaning is derived by a variety of internal differentiations.

McGann's "historically based critical procedure" represents one of the most comprehensive and sophisticated efforts in academic literary criticism to reverse the dehistoricizing and depoliticizing tendencies not only in New Critical "close reading" but also in structuralist and poststructuralist "textualizations." The goal is not to reject, wholesale, these heterogenous developments but rather to incorporate them, where possible, into an historical program that would radically alter the practice of literary criticism by redressing the current schism between textual and bibliographic scholarship (investigations of the history of the text and reception of the

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Three books by Jerome J. McGann are discussed in this essay: *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), and *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). McGann is Dreyfuss Professor of Humanities at California Institute of Technology and editor of the five-volume *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* now in progress from Oxford University Press.

work) and literary criticism (that is, interpretation). For McGann, textual and bibliographic research is not preliminary and incidental to the interpretation of literary works, it is a basic part of the interpretative act. That is, their function is not simply textual emendation but, more importantly, establishing the significance of the context of publication. As McGann repeatedly shows, the same text has different meanings—*is a different poem*—depending on where and when it appears.

In 1983, McGann published two short books, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* and *The Romantic Ideology*, aimed, respectively, at making a decisive intervention within the practices of textual scholarship and literary criticism. Because these books are akin to legal briefs—summarizing major positions and formulating an alternative, ideologically self-conscious program—they emphasize how seriously McGann takes the precedence of historical engagement over "pure theory"; that is, they demonstrate his commitment to sociohistorical *reflection* as an essential part of any meaningful historical engagement. When McGann criticizes his profession for repressing the ideological character of its subjects, his point is that neither poetry nor criticism transcends ideology. (An interesting, and provocatively truncated, appendix to *The Romantic Ideology* argues that Louis Althusser and Pierre Macherey are wrong to suggest that art is not to be counted among the ideologies; however, this crucial point is best understood as a corrective to Althusser's more general formulation of the concept of ideology in his germinal essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" [in *Lenin and Philosophy*; New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971], a formulation on which McGann's relies.)

For McGann, it is not just the historical subjects of literary criticism that need to be recognized; rather, and rather more crucially, contemporary criticism's own institutionally based ideological formations must also be explicated. Literary criticism can never be the final arbiter of the fixed meaning of a "text," just as literary or linguistic theory cannot be the ultimate explicator of fixed systems of meaning. In contrast, McGann's two tracts insist that literary criticism is an active participant in the continuing reception—*reproduction*—of *works*. I say "tracts" to emphasize McGann's stylistic extension of his ideological interventions; these pamphlets are in every sense didactic; their virtue is to be repetitive and blunt more often than elusive and elegant. If there can by any doubt that this is deliberate, the contrast with *The Beauty of Inflections* will settle the matter. McGann's expansive, thoughtful readings of works by Keats, Byron, Crabbe, Coleridge, Christina Rossetti, Tennyson, and others are exemplary of the possible fruits of his program. Swimming against the tide of literary theory without literature, McGann anchors his methodological and interpretive craft in close, and contextual, readings of specific poems.

In *The Romantic Ideology*, McGann argues that the criticism of Romanticism, to our own day, has uncritically absorbed the key self-representations of the Romantic Movement. Terms like "spirituality," "creativity," "process," "uniqueness," "diversity," "synthesis," "reconciliation," "imagination," "poetic truth" are accepted as fundamental human concepts that need not, and cannot, be analyzed. McGann contends that the belief that Poetry transcends history and ideology (in the sense of false consciousness) is an essential element in Romantic displacement, the "grand illusion" that one may escape the disappointments of history through imagination and poetry: "a sense sublime," as Wordsworth had it in "Tintern Abbey," "Of something far more deeply interfused, / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns . . . / A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things." While the wrecks of history "fade and fall to ruin," McGann comments, "the abbey of the mind suffers no decay . . . The poem generalizes—we now like to say mythologizes—all its conflicts, or rather resituates those conflicts out of a sociohistorical context and into an ideological one" [pp. 87–89]. "The polemic of Romantic poetry, therefore, is that it will not be polemical; its doctrine, that it is non-doctrinal; and its ideology, that it transcends ideology" [p. 70].

Romantic ideology has descended to us, says McGann, largely through the lines of thought that have developed from Coleridge and Hegel (the German ideology). But while the Romantic ideology of 1789 to 1824 was articulated, to a large extent, by poets skeptical of many of its features, this ambivalence and self-consciousness largely disappears in the debased forms of Romantic ideology we encounter today. McGann censures his own 1968 study, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development*, because of its absorption in Romanticism's self-representations and its presumption of the poet's linear development (a biographic teleology that cripples much critical thinking about art).

The uncritical acceptance of Romantic ideology, however, poses problems for more than the study of Romanticism. The effect is all the more disastrous when, institutionally reified, this ideology continues to be the basis for the reception of post-Romantic poetry by an influential segment of what McGann calls the clerisy, that is, literary academia. In this light, the grotesque, yet systematic, misjudgments about twentieth century poetry by a critic of Romanticism such as Harold Bloom become more understandable, if no less excusable. McGann's sometimes humorous self-consciousness, true to his own didactic intentions, specifically keeps the focus on "that narrowest and most cloistered of spheres . . . the critical work produced by the literary academy" [p. 59]. It would be a mistake to ignore the pervasiveness of the same debased Romantic ideology as it informs much contemporary American poetry. Indeed, a broad range of seemingly antagonistic tendencies in current writing share a conception

of poetry as giving a "voice" to unmediated "basic truths" of "imagination" and "feeling" through "direct expression" of human "creativity"; they also share an allergic reaction to any intimation, in a poem, of intellectual or ideological self-consciousness. Absorption in Romanticism's self-representations, then, is not only a problem for critics; it is also a problem for poetry. This is the kind of reciprocal interaction in our own time that McGann sees as central to understanding the ideological context and reception of past and present literature.

I take McGann's various explications of Romantic ideology to be provisional, that is, a stage in the development of an historical criticism informed as much by the contemporary ideological climate as by Romantic "texts." While McGann rejects René Wellek's view that there is a basic unity underlying the various manifestations of Romanticism, he does not quite adopt A.O. Lovejoy's skepticism—Romanticisms not Romanticism. The first step in breaking from the spell of a unified Romanticism is to recognize its particular and parochial ideological formations. McGann notes the fundamentally Christian character of the Romanticism formulated by Coleridge and formalized by Hegel. It is not surprising, then, that Heine—a poet inclined to consciously resist absorption in Christian Romanticism—would write a work McGann finds paradigmatic for historical criticism, *The Romantic School.* Heine "writes between 1833 and 1835 as an expatriate German Jew to a French intellectual audience about a cultural phenomenon, German Romanticism, which is now historically concluded . . . At every point Heine is concerned with the problem of the immediate relevance of removed cultural resources—in this case, German Romantic literary works. He is qualified to take up this problematic matter because he contains in himself, as it were, a crucial division of sympathies and knowledge" [p. 33]. Heine's otherness can serve as a reminder that Romantic ideology was one among many ideological formations present in the early nineteenth century. Which is to say, the history of literary criticism is as much a history of unheard or disregarded voices as it is of the privileged voices able to "dominate" a period (originally or in retrospect). The increased prominence that historical method gives to the history of a work's reception makes imperative that lacunas—failures or refusals of reception or publication—be enabled to speak as loudly as the ideas that flowed unimpeded through official cultural channels. Otherwise we will see, as we have seen over and again, the intially tragic story of marginalized lives told in farcically amnesiac official histories of English and American writing.

In this respect, McGann makes a useful distinction between Romantic works and the Romantic Period, citing Austen and Crabbe as non-Romantic writers of the Romantic Period. He is particularly irritated at attempts, for example, to reverse the critical "neglect" of Austen by trying to make her out as a closet Romantic. Nonetheless, the kind of critical

thinking that McGann encourages will hopefully move more in the direction of Romantic *ideologies* than he presently allows for, without vitiating the polemical edge of his term; perhaps, that is, the non-Romantic ideologies of the "Romantic Period" may even erode the legitimacy of that monicker. McGann's position on such problems is basically pragmatic; he wants to develop an historical methodlogy that will be as *teachable* as New Critical reading. Radical skepticism about periodization and ideological characterizations may be difficult to teach, but it is just this type of institutionally motivated thinking that led to many of the problems with New Criticism. Critical thinking has not fared any better under historical narratives than it has under structural verities. While an historical and ideological dimension needs to be restored to discussions of literature, positivism and reductionism are perennial dangers. McGann is acutely aware of these problems, despite his troubling espousal of the hegemony of the sociohistorical method as "the general *science* governing [the] human context" [*Inflections*, p. 63; my italics]. (The troubling positivism within the natural sciences is exactly the suppression of this sociohistorical context.) But his intensely reflective example, his consistent reiteration of the tendentiousness and ideological character of his own (or any) historical account, will not necessarily be heeded by those adopting his program.

McGann's method would remove poetry from the pedestal of the purely beautiful and sublime, beyond or above ideology, where it is constantly at risk of dissolving into the "spirit of the age," or worse, "the spirit of the ages"—authorless, contentless. To tar poetry with the name of "false"—i.e., historical, partisan—consciousness is to return it to the field of contention and *use*. It is as valuable to take issue with Shelley's "doctrines," as one would take issue with Napoleon or Rousseau, as to savor his "exquisite sensibility." This requires a recovery of the historically specific situations in which poems of the past were written, published, republished, reviewed, and read (all different dynamics). It means we stop reading past works as if they were contemporary or temporally transcendent and start to appreciate their value as culturally alienated and socially estranged.

"We have to recover those traditional philological procedures for putting us in touch with worlds, people, and experiences from the past, and with the media in which these things embodied themselves; for putting us in touch with them in the full range of their pastness and differentials. The ultimate purpose of establishing a structure of such differentials is not to lose one's self in a displaced world, which is certainly a danger in pursuing such methods, but to gain a measure by which our present interests and ideologies may be critically observed. Past worlds, in an historical consciousness, make up points of fixity and finishedness, but not in some permanent and absolute sense. The finished past is constantly being reformulated into new forms of finishedness, forms which answer to the changing needs of the immediate world. Nevertheless, whatever

form of finishedness the past may take, it can be—must be—made into an (arbitrary) measure in terms of which the present may be understood and judged" [*Inflections*, pp. 12–13].

In *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, McGann notes "a hypnotic fascination with the isolated author has served to foster an overdetermined concept of authorship, but (reciprocally) an underdetermined concept of literary work" [p. 122]. He argues that the best text of a poem is not necessarily produced by trying to reconstruct the "author's final intentions." He criticizes, for example, the preference for using as "copy-text" an author's manuscript even when an early edition, together with author-corrected proofs, is available. Traditionally, textual scholars have tried to construct a hypothesized "lost original" for classical or Medieval works whose earliest extant texts date from long periods after the work's composition. Biblical scholars face the most extreme, and metaphorically interesting, case of lost "'originals." As a result, the work of textual scholarship has been defined as purifying the corruption and contamination of the "lost original" that has occurred in the process of transmission through publication, expurgation, augmentation, modernization, and previous scholarly editions.

In modern textual criticism the "ideal text" has become a substitute for the "lost original" and the author's holograph documents are taken to be the source for the author's final intentions, even if the writer never imagined that these documents would be reproduced. McGann disputes the notion that publication necessarily contaminates the text. Poetry, insofar as it is published, is a social form and the intersection of the text with social institutions is *part of* the work, not a corruption of it. "Having learned the lesson that authors who wish to make contact with an audience are fated, by laws of information theory, to have their messages more or less seriously garbled in the process, textual critics proposed to place the reader in an unmediated contact with the author. This project is of course manifestly impossible, a Heisenbergian dilemma, since some form of mediation is always occurring, not the least in the editions produced by critical editors of various persuasions. Nevertheless, though everyone today recogizes this inherent limitation on all acts of communication, the idea persists in textual studies that a regression to authorial manuscripts will by itself serve to reduce textual contamination" [p. 41].

McGann argues that the overall effect of much textual criticism is to discount the social and historical dimensions of textual production. Certain writers serve as outer limits to his consideration: Blake's self-published editions and Dickinson's manuscripts were specifically produced outside the customary social nexus of publication; however, their work is now known only insofar as, at some later point, it entered into this nexus. Moreover, the collaborative interaction of writers, friends and colleagues, assistants, proofreaders, editors, publishers, and readers is not inevitably

pernicious. Almost all writers choose to make some sort of collaborative arrangements, as much because of, as in spite of, potential disagreements. "Sometimes these relationships operate smoothly, sometimes the author will struggle against every sort of intervention, and between these two extremes falls every sort of variation . . . 'Final authority' for literary works rests neither with the author nor with his [or her] affiliated institution; it resides in the actual structure of the agreements which these two cooperating authorities reach in specific cases" [pp. 53–54]. The history of publishing is filled with unwarranted and meretricious alterations of a writer's punctuation, spelling, and grammar; such abuses need to be adjudicated on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, the dispute becomes part of the work's meaning, which is suppressed when such problems are resolved, as McGann puts it, in terms of right and wrong rather than "what does this mean?" Ironically, recourse to the ideology of final intentions has often resulted in the circumvention of the writer's actual intentions as expressed by active consent.

The social process of literary production is a constituent component of a work's meaning, not a barrier preventing access to it. In this regard, the visual representation of language—typography and book design—is among the least recognized, and most important, actors in constituting a work's meaning. Furthermore, theories about "ideal texts" do not offer viable methods of resolving problems arising from variant versions of the "same" poem. Variants, McGann points out, arise from different social contexts of publication, changing assumptions about readership, or a poetics that incorporates variants as part of its processes. The contextual nature of variants helps to dispel the illusion that each poem has a perfect and inviolable autonomy that is defamed not only by publisher's changes and printer's mediations but even by author's "errors" and irresolutions. McGann notes that many writers have been more than willing to dismember and revise their poems, leaving open the issue of finalization. In contrast, the reification of the Poem erases the historicity of its composition, that is, its appearance in the world and the forms its past readers have responded to. Reified timelessness is an effect that some poets may wish to create, but, as McGann says, "An author's work possesses autonomy only when it remains an unheard melody" [p. 51]. The theory of final intentions turns out to be thick with Romantic ideology.

Most importantly, McGann argues that just as there is no ideal text of a poem, so there is no ideal—definitive—scholarly edition. Scholarly editions are historical, institutionally motivated, documents; yet the scientism inherent in much textual methodology denies this ideological dimension. The implication of this appeal is not to legitimize unwarranted alterations by publishers and scholars but to bring into the open the dynamics of these, virtually inevitable, interactions. McGann's writing acknowledges the effects that current developments in poetry have on the editing of past

poetry. *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* will seem relevant to readers familiar with Charles Olson's notoriously indeterminate manuscripts; Robert Duncan's and Robert Grenier's insistence on retaining the typewriter grid in their books; any of a number of recent collaborative poems; and the scrupulous or funky self-publications of many writers, ranging from xeroxes of manuscripts with holograph changes to "book art" productions in which the graphic element is foregrounded. McGann's currency will not surprise those familiar with a book he published a baker's dozen years ago, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism.* Cast in the form of a dialogue among a variety of personages who knew Swinburne, the book provides a beautifully realized alternative to the monological voice of critical authority; it also engages many of the questions that have focussed discussions of poetics in the ensuing years.

In advocating a sociohistorical approach to the poem, McGann is as wary of biographic reduction (conceiving of the poem as existing primarily in terms of the poet's life history) as of formalist aestheticization (poems are primarily about other poems or the poetic process). Yet it is important to keep in mind that a well-grounded, scholarly reading of a poem is not the only kind of desirable reading. Many poems thrive on wildly ill-informed readings, as anyone knows who has flipped open a book of older texts and read them without reference to author or date. That a poem may have this kind of resilience is a central fact in *any* reading of it. Thinking of poems as *texts* is liberating because it locates their object status within the generic democracy of the written—*a piece of writing*; it undercuts the Romantic aura of the Poem while allowing for an exhilaration in the wordness of all writing. Poems are not necessarily diminished (*or illuminated*) by specialized (partisan, tendentious) readings—Marxist, psychoanalytic, biographic, structural, formal, bibliographic. The problem arises when such readings claim for themselves priority or exclusivity, that is, deny their sociohistorical and ideological character; which, of course, they so often do. Indeed, it was the hegemony of proprietary readings of literature—fixed meanings *executed* by authors and embalmed by textual science—that led Roland Barthes to renounce the notion of the *work* (that which can be "held in the hand") in favor of that polymorphous, heterogenous, decentered, unauthorized, plural "methodological field" that is the *Text.** McGann's work is polemical because he does not ameliorate the dispute between "Dryasdust" philologists and "Skimpole" deconstructionists, as he labels them. On the contrary, he wishes to bring into the

*See Barthes's 1971 essay, "From Work to Text" in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979) and "Shall These Bones Live" in *The Beauty of Inflections.*

open a conflict both sides have chosen to ignore by proceeding, uncontested, on their own *falsely* separate paths. McGann's historical program, paradoxically, supplements, rather than supplants, Barthes's critique (as is apparent in his considerations of "final authority"). Like Marx's critique of Hegel, he wishes to turn Barthes's dialectic on its head, not revert to the state of affairs that led Barthes to write his essay.

There is no key that unlocks the mystery of how or what or why a poem means or becomes. All readings are partial and distorting, though some more than others; there are many virtues in excess, even if this excess effectively annihilates the object of reference. McGann's view is more sobering, less ludic. He insists that we pay a high price for such transgressions, that they threaten our ability to learn what history teaches. The implicit analogy is to our relations with one another, where a moral distinction can be made between projection and understanding; response based on projection is a form of denial, on understanding a sign of acknowledgment.

McGann's project is not to curtail the proliferation of approaches to reading, or writing, but rather to ground them. I think it is something like that he means by choosing as the epigraph to his most *Textual* work some lines from Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird":

> I do not know which to prefer,
> The beauty of inflections
> Or the beauty of innuendoes,
> The blackbird whistling
> Or just after.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

REPORT FROM THE BESIEGED CITY
Zbigniew Herbert
trans. by John and Bogdana Carpenter
Ecco Press, 82 pp., $12.50

W.H. Auden once devoted some pages to the question of the translatability of the Greek poet Cavafy, concluding finally that because his poetry "speaks" rather than sings, and because his vision of the world was so unique that it transcended the confines of his immediate cultural background, some success was possible. I suspect that the same is true,

for like reasons, of our Polish contemporary Zbigniew Herbert. And, indeed, his translators, Czeslaw Milosz among them, have testified to the *relative* amenability of his poetry to that "carrying across the threshold." They acknowledge that his tonal shifts are subtle, and that the structural mapping between English and Polish is problematic, but it appears that these liablities are compensated by the linearity of Herbert's thought and by what is sometimes called the "classicism" of his style – there are no gusts of moodiness or emotionalism in his work.

I would like to keep Cavafy's name up front for a moment, for a further instancing of similarities may be instructive. Here are two separate excerpts:

> I'm practically broke and homeless.
> This fatal city, Antioch
> has devoured all my money:
> this fatal city with its extravagant life.
>
> But I'm young and extremely healthy.
> Prodigious master of Greek,
> I know Aristotle and Plato through and through,
> poets, orators, or anyone else you could mention.
> I have some idea about military matters
> and friends among the senior mercenaries.

and:

> I received a many-sided education
> Livy the rhetoricians philosophers
> I spoke Greek like an Athenian
> although Plato I recalled
> only in the lying position
>
> I completed my studies
> in dockside taverns and brothels
> those unwritten dictionaries of vulgar Latin
> bottomless treasuries of crime and lust

The first citation is from Cavafy's "To Have Taken the Trouble" (trans. by Keeley and Sherrard), and the second is from Herbert's "The Divine Claudius," from the recently-published collection REPORT FROM THE BESIEGED CITY. I find more in common between the passages than the pronomial mask or the classical reference. The two are on a stylistic continuum, presenting historical material in an unadorned manner that is at once intimate and detached. Translation has, of course, skimmed away the rich particularities of each mother tongue – the distance between Greek and Polish sounds is surely great – but it has disclosed all the more clearly a correspondence of vision.

I don't wish to press the Cavafy comparison too far. But as Cavafy's

stance and tone and procedure of historical distancing are well known to readers of modern poetry, he can serve as a useful point of reference. The appearance of similar elements in Herbert's poetry cannot but raise some interesting questions. After all, Cavafy was writing about memory and about the slow decay of civilization—elegaic subjects. Herbert has situated himself in the heart of the "besieged city" that is Poland—refusing exile—and in his eyes slow decay might almost look like a utopian ideal. We have to ask: what kind of response does his poetic mode offer to a morally intolerable reality?

REPORT FROM THE BESIEGED CITY offers three kinds of poems: those written about, or from behind the mask of, historical personages (Beethoven, Isadora Duncan, the Emperor Claudius, the mythical Procrustes) or about historical events; topical or philosophical meditations; and poems spoken through the persona of his creation, "Mr. Cogito," who comes across as a line-sketch caricature of an alienated intellectual of our times. The separation between kinds of poems is not clear-cut. For Mr. Cogito—and fully a fourth of the poems are in his voice—does a good bit of philosophical speculating, and history turns out to be one of his favorite subjects. The real continuity element, however, is tonal. The poems are, almost without exception, refracted through the complex crystal of irony:

for a long time
the conviction persisted
man carries in himself
a sizable reservoir of blood

a squat barrel
twenty-odd liters
—a trifle

—from "Mr. Cogito Thinks About Blood"

I live now
in the best hotel

the dead porter
remains on duty in his room

from a hill of rubble
I enter directly
onto the second floor
to the suite
of the former mistress
of the former chief of police

—from "The Abandoned"

Irony of this sort is not so much a stylistic manoeuver as a mode of consciousness. It is not part of the register of American poetry (only Weldon Kees comes to mind as an exception)—perhaps we don't, collectively, have enough defeat behind us to generate it—and deserves some discussion. To begin with, we should get rid of the idea that its thrust is cynical or destructive. While it does represent the far—experienced—side of idealism, the ironic mode yet retains a connection to that idealism. It is resistance, not capitulation. The ironist protects against the erosion of all faith by inoculating himself with the serum of disillusionment. He never speaks of important things directly; he knows that the public disclosure of emotions or convictions destroys their fragile integrity—and in the modern age all truths are fragile.

If we look to the etymology of the word "irony," we come upon a telling paradox, at least with respect to Herbert's poetry. For the original Greek sense of the word was "dissembling"; to be ironic was to hold back, to refrain from speaking real thoughts, to be untrustworthy. But Herbert's consistently ironic poetry has been widely regarded as an instrument of sanity, a refusal of compromise, a bearing of witness. It would seem that a great deal has changed, either in the word or in the world, since the early period of usage. I would argue that Herbert's irony achieves its exemplary status because of a momentous historical inversion—because, in his part of the world, "polis" has become "police." The political order out of which—and of which—Herbert writes represents a willful deception so thorough that any flat assertion would be neutralized. You do not say of a barbaric deed: "That is barbaric"; to be more effective, to reach past the defenses of your auditors, you whisper: "That was lovely, most refined." Tone, then, becomes content; and tone is much more difficult to legislate. Irony represents, in a society like Herbert's, a language apart. Oblique, encoded, quarantined against rhetoric, it is the signature of a secret brotherhood, a covert emblem of truth. What is so frightening about reading Herbert's poetry is the realization that things have come to such a pass.

Herbert achieves a great many different kinds of ironic effects, and I only have space to note a few. In the poem "Mr. Cogito on the Need for Precision," for example, he manipulates the discrepancy between subject and tone masterfully. Here, in the middle of the second section, he uses a conventional tactic of understatement to set up his point:

> A few simple examples
> from the accounting of victims
>
> in an airplane disaster
> it is easy to establish
> the exact number of the dead

important for heirs
and those plunged in grief
for insurance companies

But then, in the third section, he suddenly complicates things by taking up the issue of "those who perished/in the struggle with inhuman power":

accidental observers
give doubtful figures
accompanied by the shameful
word "about"

and yet in these matters
accuracy is essential
we must not be wrong
even by a simple one

we are despite everything
the guardians of our brothers

ignorance about those who have disappeared
undermines the reality of the world

The shift is clearly discernible. The second passage is frontal and eschews the primer-like tone of the "airplane disaster" lines. And yet the undercurrent of irony cannot be shaken. Serious as this later passage sounds, the cool sobriety is still at odds with the essential reality invoked. The fact that it is the 2-dimensional Mr. Cogito who speaks further heightens the dissonance. We end up heeding – and surely this is Herbert's design – the detachment of Mr. Cogito's thought as much as the substance of it. The tension between the *how* of presentation and the *what* of real lives maps in miniature the enormous struggle between totalitarian (or, for that matter, *any*) bureaucracy and the heart's desire that every hair be numbered.

Historical subject matter supplies Herbert with other tonal options. Like Cavafy, he turns to his own poetic advantage the obliterating effects of time. The events and personages that he seizes upon have already been cleansed of subjective particularity; little more than the bare lines of narrative remain. This is a calculated operation on Herbert's part. For by choosing thus to address the past, he effects a powerful reversal. The bleached bones of history show us more than the past – they reveal implicitly the future's rudimentary image of the present. Oppressor and oppressed will suffer equal oblivion – not a consoling vision, even though it represents a relative gain for the latter. For me this accounts for much of the bitter taste of a poem like "Anabasis." Its irony – produced by the flat, retrospective generalizations – sends a shudder through the historian's time-line:

The condotierri of Cyrus a foreign legion
cunning pitiless and yes they killed
two hundred and fifteen daily marches
—kill us we can't go any further—
thirty-four thousand two hundred and fifty-five stadia

festering with sleeplessness they went through savage countries
uncertain fords mountain passes in snow and salty plateaus
cutting their road in the living body of peoples
luckily they didn't lie they were defending civilization

the famous shout on Mount Teches
is mistakenly interpreted by sentimental poets
they simply found the sea that is the exit from the dungeon

they made the journey without the Bible without prophets burning bushes
without signs on the earth without signs in the sky
with the cruel consciousness that life is immense

Herbert's principal devices—tonal displacement and detached historical vision—are brought together in the powerful title poem, which is placed at the end of the book. The unnamed reporter/witness is situated in the "besieged city"; the time of the events is not specified. This last turns out to be an important strategic element. For at the beginning we locate ourselves in a near-mythic long-ago (much as we do in Cavafy's "Waiting for the Barbarians"):

Too old to carry arms and fight like the others—

they graciously gave me the inferior role of chronicler
I record—I don't know for whom—the history of the siege

But we are not allowed to hold that comforting scrim in place for long. By the half-way mark a more disturbing resonance has been created:

and so in the evening released from facts I can think
about distant ancient matters for example our
friends beyond the sea I know they sincerely sympathize
they send us flour lard sacks of comfort and good advice
they don't even know their fathers betrayed us
our former allies at the time of the second Apocalypse
their sons are blameless they deserve our gratitude therefore we are grateful

they have not experienced a siege as long as eternity
those struck by misfortune are always alone
the defenders of the Dalai Lama the Kurds the Afghan mountaineers

And then comes the devastating conclusion:

cemeteries grow larger the number of defenders is smaller
yet the defense continues it will continue to the end
and if the City falls but a single man escapes
he will carry the City within himself on the roads of exile
he will be the City
we look in the face of hunger the face of fire face of death

worst of all – the face of betrayal

and only our dreams have not been humiliated

We have not the slightest doubt that Herbert is speaking to us out of the present, but the deliberately non-specific opening section calls together the various historical tableaux that have preceded it in the book. The rays from vanished civilizations converge upon the point of the *now*. In that now, the City still lives; its invisible life is sustained in the hearts of loyal countrymen. But what will the next generation have to hold up against the "face of betrayal"?

"Too long a sacrifice," wrote Yeats, "can make a stone of the heart." The master ironist would appear to undermine this process by taking into his soul something of the hardness of the stone. But that armor must not be construed as callous resignation – behind Herbert's tonal facade is a man cupping his hands around a flickering match.

SVEN BIRKERTS

NOTES ON RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Robert von Hallberg's study of *American Poetry and Culture 1945–1980* (Harvard) is somewhat willful and too concessionary to too many diverse interest-groups (there's actually a chapter on "tourist poems"), but it has the advantage of being the best-informed book (in both an historical and sociological sense) of any general treatment of postwar American poetry yet written. Charles Susskind's delightful chronicle *Janacek and Brod* (Yale) reveals the extent of the Czech composer's good fortune in having Max Brod as translator and exponent during his late creative florescence. Milton J. Bates' *Wallace Stevens* (U. of California) covers the whole life, but makes the final "alterstil" summation uniquely credible as a psychological, not merely a literary, culmination. The cause of Vladimir Holan is admirably served by a selected poems, *Mirroring* (Wesleyan) which usefully emphasizes some of the longer poems that serve as bridges between the huge beacon of "A Night With Hamlet" and the elliptical glitter of tiny poems

that make up most of Holan's work. The superlative translation by Sjöberg and Rukeyser of Gunnar Ekelöf's book-length poem *A Mölna Elegy* is finally available in two handsome volumes (one English, one Swedish) from Unicorn Press. Some other notable translations: Anna Akhmatova in D.M. Thomas' renderings (*You Will Hear Thunder*, Ohio Univ.) comes off as one of the unmistakably central figures of the century. The first installment of Paul Schmidt's complete translation of Velimir Khlebnikov, *The King of Time* (Harvard) is as diverse and satisfying as anyone could hope for, including poems, fantastical speculations on the future, and culminating in the esoteric gematria of "The Tables of Destiny" and the poem-tableaux scenic marvel "Zangezi: A Supersaga in Twenty Planes." *Visions of Excess* by Georges Bataille (Univ. of Minnesota) presents shorter pieces like "The Solar Anus," "The Pineal Eye" and "The Obelisk" from 1927 to 1939 that place him historically and temperamentally with Artaud at the limits of articulable thought and biological revelation. A stunning presentation. Another commendable compilation is the poetry and hermetic tracts of O.V. de L. Milosz in good translations (some by Rexroth) filling almost 500 pages as *The Noble Traveller* (Lindisfarne). Czeslaw Milosz provides a sizeable introduction, while his own quasi-autobiographical *The Land of Ulro* reaches even more alluringly into the hidden legacy of his ancestor. Turning to poetry titles . . . The extravagant riches of Jackson Mac Low's procedural imagination have never been better served – or more promptly available – than in *From Pearl Harbor Day to FDR's Birthday* (Sun & Moon), *The Virginia Woolf Poems* (Burning Deck) and especially *Bloomsday* (Station Hill), a blazing Protean compendium of the man's wit and resourcefulness. With *Tottering State* (The Figures) the evidence is abundant: Tom Raworth is a poet whose originality continually manifests itself in ways that pose questions to the whole enterprise of (1) writing poetry and (2) using language as a tool for thought. A major selection from 20 years' work. A crazy irony it is that some of California's most notable poets are being published in Rhode Island! Three books by Burning Deck: Ron Silliman's *Paradise*, the latest addition to a body of work so exact in detailing inner city life that it might have a bright future as sociological document (to say nothing of its aesthetic and methodological interest). In Rae Armantrout's *Precedence* there's nothing in excess, her careful articulation of clear seeing and sound common sense is, as ever, a refreshing antidote to the bombast that infects most American attempts at seriousness. *The Landing of Rochambeau* by Michael Davidson jettisons the post-structural anxieties evident in *The Prose of Fact*, returning to the promise of *The Mutabilities* with its consistently good-humored philosophical boisterousness. The terse, spare, mostly untitled poems of Dennis Phillips' *The Hero Is Nothing* (Kajun Press) maintain a spirit of genuine enigma; the sense of disorientation that accompanies the reading of them is periodically relieved by alluring signs of personali-

ty, subtle tints and shades constituting a kind of embryological evidence that excites the same alertness as the recognition of a sentence or a figure on some prehistoric shard. To round this out: Dennis Johnson's novel *Fiskadoro* (Knopf) is a most original and almost desperately fertile piece of imaginative writing. And no reader of SULFUR should miss James Hillman's *The Thought of the Heart* (Spring), a high point in a career of embarrassing riches.

JED RASULA

LEON GOLUB: Existentialist/Activist Painter
DONALD KUSPIT
Rutgers University Press

In his Introduction, Donald Kuspit proposes "that Golub posits no possibility of peace between the witnessing avant-garde individual and brutal society, which does not want its raw reality preserved for posterity in art; it wants only its better side to be visible to eternity, and it expects art to serve that lie." The tone of the remark sounds all too familiar at first. Since the middle 1940's, American critics have been proposing that the strongest artists of each succeeding generation find ways to challenge society. Kuspit's stance, however, is significantly different than the ones taken by such Modernist critics as Clement Greenberg, Robert Rosenblum, and Michael Fried. In contrast to these critics and their heirs, Kuspit takes into account Theodor Adorno's conviction that it is impossible to make art after Auschwitz. In his attempt to undermine Adorno's conviction with an analysis of an art that he believes is "imaginatively responsive and responsible to the modern age," Kuspit knows he must evolve a critical discourse that locates the artist within larger realms, such as society and tradition, address his intentions, motives, decisions, influences, and results. Rather than being retrospective in his approach, he must become introspective. It is to his credit that the writing becomes neither a chronological series of esthetic evaluations, nor a turgid set of pseudo-insights.

Beyond rooting itself in the belief that most contemporary notions of the avant-garde have degenerated into notions of esthetic revolution, Kuspit's essay argues that Golub's work—its implicit critique of our received ideas of what constitutes radical art—is a confrontation to be reckoned with. By locating Golub in both the tradition of Western art and today's technological landscape, while analyzing his activist attempt to address these divergent realms simultaneously, Kuspit's essay covers a very different ground than the ones found in William Rubin's 1969

monograph on Frank Stella, say, or Roberta Smith's recent monograph on Jennifer Bartlett's painting, *Rhapsody*. Consequently, this essay should be read by anyone who is interested in the ongoing debates among critics of contemporary art, particularly as the argument centers around Modernism's utopian premise and Post-Modernism's severe disillusionments.

As Kuspit sees it, this Post-Modern moment should not be characterized as a series of esthetic responses to the Modernist epoch. To do so would be to continue the Formalist attitudes of Clement Greenberg in some convoluted, perverse fashion. In order to fashion his approach to Golub's deeply pessimistic vision, Kuspit employs writing from such disciplines as philosophy, Post-Freudian psychology, art history, literary criticism, and sociology. He quotes from Adorno, Nietzsche, Artaud, Baudelaire, T.S. Eliot, Kenneth Burke, and Oswald Spengler, among others. The result: a flexible critical discourse that is used to speculate, probe, analyze, criticize, argue, and deconstruct. The ultimate aim is to see the work in the largest context possible, that of society.

Kuspit divides his essay into four chapters: the Classical/Contemporary Dialectic of Identity, Measuring the Immeasurable Past: Examples of Primitive Dream Work, the Existential/Narcissistic Paintings: Becoming an Artist, and The Social Activist Paintings: Masculine and Military Psychology. Each chapter presents a dialectical frame which is used to dissect the different aspects of Golub's artistic identity, his conscious intentions and unconscious results. Hypotheses are tested, analyzed, and countered. The microcosm of the individual always points to the macrocosm of csociety. Questions lead to questions. Each is meant to bring both the author and the reader/viewer closer to the work.

Among the many convincing points that Kuspit reaches is this: "Golub offers us the most primordial art of the postmodern period." He is not, in other words, a political artist. Instead, Kuspit believes that Golub's work addresses the dissolution of the self in the modern world. Certainly, this is something that has been a preoccupation of such radical artists as Chaim Soutine, Willem de Kooning, Frida Kahlo, Philip Guston, Jasper Johns, Malcolm Morley, Robert Morris, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and Ed Paschke. By connecting Golub to a radical tradition, Kuspit not only confronts many of the accepted art historical and critical attitudes, but he also reveals the extent to which they have become outmoded and useless.

Golub's position in the art world is by no means a secure one. Until recently, he received only marginal critical attention and publicity. In recent years, he has reached the peculiar place where people pay lip service to him, but otherwise ignore or misconstrue his art. Ironically enough, this ignorance is boldly announced on the dust jacket's inside flap, where Patterson Sims, a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, writes: "Located between Ben Shahn and street art, Golub occupies, especially given his Chicago background, a special place in post-1950 American

art. . . . He unquestionably offers a wonderful prism through which to view this period." Sims makes Golub's art turn back to the art world. His choice of "prism" is an apt metaphor for the way most museums have responded to the work. Of the 150 or so paintings reproduced in this catalog, I found only 5 which belonged to a museum collection. None of them were in New York.

Patterson Sims is one of many who uphold the lie. Leon Golub and Donald Kuspit do not. Golub examines the dark, brutal side of contemporary life. His *Mercenaries, White Squads,* and *Interrogations* are a searing confrontation with America's global presence. Like Eugene Smith's photographs of Minimata and the effects of mercury poisoning, Golub's paintings do not condemn so much as implicate. It is one of the reasons why so many prefer to dismiss Golub's deeply committed Realist vision. Kuspit's monograph is not only a thoughtful, thought provoking response to Golub's work it is also a major contribution to contemporary art criticism.

JOHN YAU

THE MEANING OF INDIGENOUS IN VALLEJO

In the mature poetry of César Vallejo – that poetry written in Europe between 1923 and 1938 – there is an extraordinary assimilation of his background, to the extent that the phrase "indigenous influence" is internalized and revealed only obliquely. Of the 110 poems that Vallejo appears to have written in Europe, only a handful deal directly with Peru, and in these poems there is no folklore, no political argument, no Quechua or Incan nostalgia – in short, no reliance on the thematic concerns that "third world" or "minority voice" poets often utilize to raise before a reader's eyes what has been outcast.

One is tempted to say that when Vallejo physically left Peru in 1923, he also abandoned it as a psychic reservoir of his art. His geographical movement, with Paris as a base, includes Russia and Spain, and terminates with his adherence to a socialist art, stirred by the Spanish Civil War. Such a viewpoint, however, would miss the most important aspects of Vallejo's European poetry since for the most part it is not concerned with place, subject matter, or theme, and cannot be evaluated on the basis of how many times Peruvian themes appear or do not appear. I would propose that there is an Indian interiority to many of these poems. Their im-

penetrableness and remoteness is not merely experimental obscurity, but a rendering of sierra "cholo" character, a translation of a personality rooted in Chimu Indian grandmothers and Spanish-Galician-priest grandfathers into poetry that does not explain or even address choloness, but embeds its austerity, anxiety, and immutability into the Spanish language.

Unfortunately, the indigenous quality I am trying to address in this paper* is even more complicated than I propose. By the time the majority of the European poems were written, Vallejo had been in Europe for nearly 15 years. By the fall of 1937, he had, in effect, passed through Europe, and his poems, which use his own anatomy as studied place, present us with a body that contains the bits and pieces of Western social and religious culture that he had not been able to assimilate. The labor of processing Marxism and Christianity presents him with so many unsolvable problems that it reshapes the way he presents his own dualistic background. On one hand, he is a kind of Congo Nkonde figure, studded with mirrors, nails and hard blades, a Peruvian Nkonde whose magical body juts and glints with European detritus. On the other hand, I think of his poetry as sculpted stone: running my hands across its contours, I feel a seamless, quiet, ecstatic *anguish*.

His dualistic background seems to be sounded by the two Spanish verbs, "estar" and "ser." Vallejo himself pairs these verbs, suggesting that together they indicate a totality of being, with "estar" emphasizing anonymous being, and "ser" emphasizing individuated being. In an attempt to explain Vallejo, one might be tempted to interpret "estar" as passive Indian existence, and "ser" as active European being, but to do so aligns and simplifies two forces that are both static *and* dynamic in this poetry. If they suggest any alignment at all, it is a yin/yang mandala, a kind of animal/human mask, vertically split, with the flesh of one side made translucent in the eye of the other side.

Anonymous being, in Vallejo, is animal being, and he associates a particular category of animals—jackasses, asses, and donkeys, all beasts of burden—with Peru itself. He begins one poem: "It was Sunday in the clear ears of my jackass, / my Peruvian jackass in Peru." His finest thematically-indigenous poem, "Telluric and magnetic," is populated with pachyderms, rodents, vicuñas, asses, apes and guinea-pigs. While there is a sardonic edge to the image of man as a "gloomy mammal" who "combs his hair," the animal emphasis is on grounded, generational life, a magnetic adherence to biological perpetuation. This is the closest we come to

*This paper, and Nathaniel Tarn's paper on Neruda, were read at the New Latin American Poetry Conference, organized by Frank Graziano, at Durango, Colorado, October 18–20, 1985.

bedrock in Vallejo's poetry, but it is weeping bedrock, and therefore unstable.

José Carlos Mariátegui pointed out in 1928 that the fundamental Indian characteristic of César Vallejo's early poetry is a "nostaligia of exile, of absence." Mariátegui's point is based on poetry written by Vallejo before he left Peru. By the fall of 1937, having been in actual exile for nearly 15 years, much of which time he lived nomadically out of a suitcase, Vallejo's nostalgic mood had deepened *and* raised into what might be called the climate of his being. Nostalgia is amplified into sadness, weeping, and anguish, none of which directly evoke the Peru of his childhood, or a Peru of a more distant past. This does not mean that Peru is not present. It means that Vallejo is seeking an expression the equal of his own nature's intricacy, that he is blending, beyond racial stratification, his mixed background into a composite image of man.

The crying/sobbing/weeping is especially interesting, as it is one of the most constant currents in these poems, and is rendered more complexly than mere loss or frustration. Vallejo speaks of his "beloved organs for crying," he desires to "anoint his body with wept honey," and urges the reader to join him in a banquet that consists of "the flesh of sobbing, the fruit of groaning." Given these positive associations with tears, one is hardly surprised when in a late poem he commands man to "give off rain." Tears, or the body's miraculous liquids, become a kind of fecundation, a way of brimming with the world.

Another current, one that is curiously related to tears and masculine fluids, as well as to the way Vallejo is expressing his Peruvianism, is that of generational consternation, specifically a vexation with his own genitality that appears to be related to the fact that the Vallejos never had any children (Vallejo himself being the youngest of 12). While I do not want to leave the poetry for rumination on César Vallejo's yet-to-be-written European biography, I want to point out that I, as well as others, have been told by old friends of the poet who were still alive in Paris in the 60s and 70s, that Georgette Vallejo had anywhere from several to over a dozen abortions. One of the fractured motifs that runs through these poems and which seems to agonizingly press the poet up against the meaninglessness of his death, is a stated love for the human family and a consequen nightmare assembly of images coupling masculine sexual desire with complications, morbidity and abortion in the feminine or receptive sphere.

I spent a year in Peru in 1964–65, most of which time I was in Lima. I made two brief trips to the sierra, east of Ica, and in the Huancayo area, and while I still have strong feelings for the people I saw and met there, I can't say that I understand something fundamental about their world that would throw a definitive beam into the obscurities of César Vallejo. However, having lived with and retranslated these poems since the early 60s, I have feelings about the layers of Vallejo's life and the way he manages

to keep me active as a reader/translator by particular focuses and deflections. In one of the notebooks he kept in the 1930s, Vallejo remarked that he loved plants for their roots, not for their flowers. My image of the Vallejo plant is one that is rooted in Andean taciturnity. As this plant pushes up through the soil, we are confronted with its struggle to flower, not with the flower itself. In a unique way, the Vallejo plant never does flower, but twists about on itself, a gnarled and branching thing, constricting itself with its own off-shoots.

Generation is forced up into view on all levels and held in the poetry in a state of anguished suspension. I think that were Vallejo to have been European or North American he would have chosen one of two other alternatives: to either openly acknowledge the problem and to offer an explanation for its cause—or to repress it, to sublimate its awful energy into a literary attitude. I'm suggesting that there is a triple containment in Vallejo's European poetry, based on a humanized Christian trinity, in which the Mother replaces the Holy Ghost. This triple containment consists of tears, stones, and the blocked generational drive which is linguistic as well as organic. Triads are everywhere in these poems, such as "my potato and my flesh and my contradiction under the bedsheet."

Over the years I have had the haunting but unverifiable feeling that these poems were loaded with Andean reluctance to communicate, initially with the Peruvian coastal world and ultimately with Europe—moreover, that Vallejo was bearing Indian muteness in his art, and that "indigenous influence" here indicates the translation of "outer" experience into an unceasing internal pregnancy, a relentless bearing within, that is presented without source or realization.

I have spoken of the tears and of Vallejo's sexual morbidity which, I should add, because of the courage involved in expressing it, is moving, and affirmative. The stones are what Vallejo carried with him to Paris, the Andean particles that he could have put in his pocket. The stone is an indication of cosmic instability, for he writes: "do not put your foot on that tiny stone: who knows, it is not a stone, and you'll plunge into empty space, for we are in a totally inknown world." Note that he writes "inconocido" here, not "desconocido," an *in*known, not an *un*known world. He portrays himself (in black overcoat) as a "black stone on a white stone," and in the poem compelled by a hunger that is both biological and spiritual, the craving is for:

> A stone to sit down on
> will now be denied to me?
> Not even that stone on which the woman trips who has given birth,
> the mother of the lamb, the cause, the root,
> that one will now be denied to me?
> At least that other one,
> that crouching has passed through my soul!

At least
the calcarid or the evil one (humble ocean)
or the one no longer even worth throwing at man,
that one give it to me now!

At least the one they could have found lying across and alone in
an insult,
that one give it to me now!
At least the twisted and crowned, on which echoes
only once the walk of moral rectitude,
or, at least, that other one, that flung in dignified curve,
will drop by itself,
acting as a true core,
that one give it to me now!

In a way, the stone is the unborn child, a lithopaedion of weeping, a consternation in the depth of man that is seldom expressed in art: the consternation of not being able to bring forth life—art as a substitute for offspring. I believe that the trinity of forces I have proposed is a basic configuration in Vallejo's European poetry and that it represents a combined object too, that each force mirrors the others. Yet they do not add up to an intellectual house of mirrors. They are muscles of the work, as well as clues.

There are a handful of poems that do deal directly with Peru, as if Vallejo continues to keep a siphon into his natal source no matter where he wanders. In one such poem he extols Peruvian miners in a way that makes them seem like archetypal forces emerging each evening from the abyss they deepen each day. Another poem affirms the connections between the speech, labor, and physicality of landless Peruvian serfs. The summation piece on Peru is the blistering "Telluric and magnetic," in which Vallejo affirms his allegiance to the biological and zoological combustion of a Peruvian earth that is forever in parthenogenesis, where he catches slopes red-handed in becoming slopes. "Telluric and magnetic," in one blow, rivets Vallejo's entire European production to the Andean/Indian aspect of his life, as if at the bottom of his cosmic well the gleams of intelligibility are the eyes of an Indian—or is it a vicuña?—gazing through the blackness. Or to see it another way: as if he is capable of letting the storms of history and personal consternation howl through his poetry because of an inherited Indian endurance that still reverberates with the creation of the earth itself. "Indian later than man and before him!" he shouts near the end of "Telluric and magnetic," thus embracing or surrounding man with Indianness, as well as seeing man as a transitional stage between the primordial and the new, whereby the primordial again appears, recycled and strengthened by the transition.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

To make some sense of this in only fifteen minutes, I'll concentrate on the first sections of *Canto General.* This was written on Neruda's return from the Spanish Civil War at the height of his commitment to the Communist Party of Chile. Personal, poetic and political pressures conspire to structure a fascinating set of contradictions in Neruda's project. Looking at these from the point of view of Ethnopoetics may be suggestive and even useful for us now. I can group my hunches, and they are little more than that, under three paragraphs.

A) Neruda is Spanish in culture, but the root of enablement he requires is Indian. I am far from being a Neruda scholar but in virtually nothing I have come across is Neruda's ethnographic environment looked at in any detail or with any precision. The Chilean scene is not as massively and obviously Indian as are Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador (c.f., in Mesoamerica: Chiapas; Yucatan and Guatemalan Indian versus "Mestizo" or "White" Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica etc.). Brand, around 1941, estimates Central Chilean population at 10% Indian; 25% White; 65% Mestizo. In hard fact, most everyone is biologically mixed: "Indian"/"Non-Indian" categories are mostly determined by cultural, political and economic self-definition – as is the case, indeed, in Mesoamerica.

The Indians of Central Chile are the Araucanians who call themselves *che* (people); *re-che* (real people) or, now, using the name of one subgroup: *Mapu-che* (people of the land). Those of North Central Chile (Rio Aconcagua – Rio Bio Bio) were invaded by the Peruvian Inca around 1450 and Incaisized. Around 1550, Spain replaces all of this. Neruda is born in Parral, inside this area.

But he is taken almost immediately to Temuco in South Central Chile (Rio Bio Bio – Island of Chiloé). This is an area of extremely heavy rainforest, with wood as a major industry. The forest Araucanians here were extremely fierce and blocked both the Inca and the Spaniards for centuries. In 1877, they were finally placed on reservations. Reservation acculturation and politics have determined them ever since: a case which has drawn comparisons with our own Southwest. In sum, these people were fairly simple hunting, fishing and gathering tribes with adaptation to Andean civilization in material culture and crafts while social, political and religious life remain close to early patterns (one example: the predominance of shamanism rather than an evolution of priestly castes on the Inca model).

In Temuco, Neruda could see Indians, especially in the market. It is hard to say how distinctive they were. Most sources talk of wholesale adoption of European dress though you can find photos of the 1920s showing women's dress of an Andine appearance. Silver jewelry became ever more highly developed (again an echo of our Southwest). Country In-

dians used Temuco as an economic and politico-legal central town. Anthropologists disagree. In 1951, Titiev, (who worked at Hopi) sees reservation Mapuche as virtually indistinguishable from Mestizos. Faron, in 1961, regards them as an internal colony of Chile, having preserved many distinctive ethnic characteristics (patrilineal-based political activity and ceremonialism; belief in their own gods and spirits; witchcraft and shamanism; many crafts, etc.). This does happen among anthropologists: if you look for cultural continuity you find it; if you look for discontinuity, you can find that too![1]

But Neruda may not have looked as closely as Faron did. I get no sense of a strong interest or personal concern, on Neruda's part, for Indianity as such.

In *"La Lampara en la Tierra,"* section one of *Canto General,* the Indian, if he emerges at all, tends to do so generically as "el hombre" (man); "el pobre" (the poor); "el pueblo" (the people). Later, in *The Heights of Macchu Picchu,* he comes as "el antiguo ser" (the ancient being); "el servidor" (the servant/slave); "el dormido" (the sleeper) and, of course, as "hermano" (brother). Indianity strikes me as adjectival in Neruda, if it is at all, rather than substantive: "Yo, Incásico del légamo"; "entre flores zapotecas"; "la dulzura cibcha" and so forth.

The section *"Los hombres"* is a totalization composed of a series of vignettes: the men of the islands; the Tarahumara; the Aztecs; the Maya; the Tarascans and the Araucanians (standing for Chile). In between, as if Neruda were more comfortable with matter than with men (an impression not infrequently created by his work): Chichen Itza; Macchu Picchu; Cuzco. The elements of the totalization seem to be selected without any demanding sense of organization, almost lackadaisically, and do not persuade. me.

In fact, Neruda's interest is far more geographic than ethnographic. The work begins with a kind of seven-day genesis: *"Amor America"*; *"Vegetaciones"*; *"Algunas Bestias"* and so on: his triggers are nature, the land, the rain, the forest, timber—not man. His ethnography as such is almost bathetic. When man, Indian man, appears we almost have anticlimax. We have to await the *conquistadores* who *do* arouse his ire and his inspiration.

B) I derive a few propositions from all this: as always, they need testing.

1) As Monegal points out, Neruda—mostly unconsciously perhaps—identifies with an indigenous mother figure, "mi madre araucana" (my Araucanian mother), opposed to a Hispanic, conquering father figure (who can, however, modulate into an oppressed Mestizo worker).[2] I believe, however, that the mother moves south—from Parral to Temuco—into Indian *land,* not into Indianity as such. Neruda is inspired by the south:

it is southern geography, not ethnography, which triggers him. He worked hard to move himself into a brotherly position vis à vis the Indian, but the hard work shows. For instance: against evidence that most ethnic admixture derived from the union of Spanish men and Indian women, Neruda argues that Chileans are born of Araucanian men and Spanish women. He is in direct contradiction with himself and his mythical Indian mother.[3]

2) Neruda is a Chilean but his Indians are not as symbolically visible as the Andine Inca are. This might have provided one good reason for him to jump as he did from an original project of a *Canto General de Chile* to a *Canto General (de America).*

But, there is a further problem. The Araucanians were mortal enemies of the Inca. Also, incidentally, the Inca were feudal and could have been criticized for imperialism (as nothing is simple, note in passing that some have argued this to be a socialistic kind of "feudalism" . . .). Neruda tends to ignore all this by concentrating not on Indian-Indian conflict but on Indian-Spanish war and, later, on Mestizo-Yanqui exploitation.

Monegal argues that Neruda is so anti-Spanish that he neglects Indian feudalism. This seems unfair: as Pring-Mill points out. In Pring-Mill's reading, only the primitive Caribs and the Araucanians go uncriticized: the "brother" in *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* is, after all, a slave of the Incas.[4] I suppose one could argue, along this line, that *The Heights* are a paean to people like the Araucanians; although I think that the intent of hymning *Inca* Macchu Picchu is pretty clear.

What actually happens, I believe, is more generalized than all this and, politically, very effective. Neruda can use an Indian object (Macchu Picchu) as a "human root," but Indian humanity itself is disregarded in its rich variety and subsumed under the category of "people" or lower classes. For Neruda, in short, "Indio" is "Pueblo" before being "Indio": there is no clearer contrast with Vallejo. We remember that, for many, perhaps most Latin American marxists, Indians should be subsumed under proletariat. This is a Pan American problem: that revolution does not involve continued Indianity when seen, that is, from a non-Indian point of view.

C) The use of the Indian *ruin* of Macchu Picchu was a brilliant intuition for Neruda, a profoundly elegiac and nostalgic poet whose political duty was to look forward and upward.

Not long ago, I wrote a study of the Orpheus myth, especially its back-looking and forward-looking aspects (descent into Hades / return to upper earth and light) as the constitutive, enabling myth of a double process in writing: the *elegiac* looking-back at all previous poems in order to recognize the present poem as poem and the *lyric* push forward and upward of the poem to position it in the lifework sequence or opus.[5] I went on to look at various ways in which archeological ruins so often appear as diacritical indices of the elegiac process. Then, I looked at such

ruins in Rilke's *Duino Elegies,* contrasting them with Neruda's Macchu Picchu.

The argument was complex. But, briefly and simply, it appears that, symbolically, we go down and backwards to the past; up and forwards to the future. This process can be seen in its orthodox form in the first part of *The Heights.* In the second part, an exciting, heterodox, jolt is generated by the simple ecological fact that Macchu Picchu lies way up in the air. We have a ruined past which is, symbolically (and Neruda makes it into an *arche,* whereas, in fact, it is quite late), the future of all of Latin America. Equally propitious is the transformation of the Eurydice motif into the slave buried under the ruins whom Neruda calls to "arise to birth with me as my own brother." We do not, of course, require that Eurydice should be female: think of Dante-Eurydice fetched by Beatrice-Orpheus through the patroness of music!

Neruda, perhaps, hardly even notices – when he says "I come to speak through your dead mouths" – that his enablement as a poet arises out of the enforced silence of the Indian, an enforcement in which he cannot help participating as a non-Indian. Indians have to have been oppressed, enslaved and killed *in order that* he can speak. As with the rest of us, a useful Indian, alas, is a dead Indian. Or, perhaps, one who has disappeared into the faceless masses: if not genocide, then ethnocide.

Neruda is a good ethnopoet, i.e. one who, as I have come to believe, sees and uses the symbolic value of the Indian root of Americanicity while continuing perforce to dwell in his own non-Indianness. I am not arguing here, need I say it, that not being an Indian makes one an Indian-killer. I am saying that we need to be perpetually on our guard in what we say about the Indian.

Here is a passage from Neruda's "Algo sobre mi Vida y Poesia" (Something about my Life and Poetry), dated 1954:

> I was not able to segregate myself from these buildings. I grasped the fact that, if we trod the same ancestral earth, we had something to do with those high efforts of the American comunity, could not ignore them – and that our doing so, or our silence, was not only a crime but also a continuation of a defeat.
>
> Aristocratic cosmopolitanism had brought us to worship the past of far-off peoples and had bandaged our eyes to prevent us from seeing our own treasures.
>
> I thought of a great deal after my visit to Cuzco (and Macchu Piccu). I thought of ancient American man. I saw his ancient struggles bound up with our own struggles.
>
> That is where my idea of a *Canto General de America* began. Before that, I had persisted in the notion of a *Canto General de Chile* as a chronicle. That visit to Macchu Picchu changed the perspective. Now I saw all of America from the heights of Macchu Picchu. This was the title of the first poem from that new point of view.

The sentiments are worthy. *The Heights* is a marvelous poem. But may not Neruda have been *too* high? "The same ancestral earth"?; "The American community"?; "Our own treasures"?; "His ancient struggles bound up with our own struggles"? Are we that sure? Can Neruda be that sure?

A total identification, à la Whitman, with "my people" is fine but it masks a great deal of conflict and unresolved trouble within that people. First: there has been intra-Indian conflict and this continues. Second: while many Indians are no doubt patriotic citizens, it seems to me we have very far to go before we can take for granted their view of us as belonging to the same people as themselves. Too much of Ethnopoetics has been bound up with the confusion of the geographic and the ethnographic: it is *not* because the non-Indian lives on an Indian continent that he can appropriate Indianity. It is understandable, this search for roots in a new land. We desperately need them. But, whatever we do, there are old roots and new roots. They must not be confused.

NATHANIEL TARN

NOTES

1. See M. Titiev: *Araucanian Culture in Transition*, Occasional Contributions, no. 15; Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 1951; and L. C. Faron: *Mapuche Social Structure*, Illinois Studies in Anthropoogy, no. 1, University of Illinois, 1961. Gonzalo Rojas, a major poet also from Central Chile and present at the conference, tells me that Indians can still be distinguished by dress at the Temuco market, although a majority appear to have melted into the crowd. Jewelry goes from strength to strength. Mr. Rojas notes that Neruda's mother "was indubitably Hispanic while his stepmother, the one who really brought him up, could have been perceived more easily as an "Araucanian mother."
2. E. Rodriguez Monegal: *El Viajero Inmovil*, Losada, Buenos Aires, 1966: especially part 3, ch. 7.
3. See an interview with Neruda in Rita Guibert: *Seven Voices*, Knopf, 1973: p. 51.
4. R. Pring-Mill: *Pablo Neruda, A Basic Anthology*, The Dolphin Book Co., Oxford, 1975: especially pp. xxxiii–xxxix.
5. *Archaeology, Elegy, Architecture: a Poet's Program for Lyric*, in Sub-stance, no. 28, Univeristy of Wisconsin, Madison, 1960. N.b.: para. two on p. 13 is badly garbled.

WHY DUCHAMP: AN ESSAY ON AESTHETIC IMPACT
Gianfranco Baruchello & Henry Martin
Documentext/ McPherson & Company

Shortly after Picasso died, the editors of *Art News* sent out a questionnaire asking artists what Picasso meant to them. The answers ranged from pompous to wise guy, and, except for de Kooning and one or two others, no one mentioned if they had used Picasso or not. I begin with this memory, because I have always wondered about the exact impact one artist can have on another.

The subject of influence is a cloudy one. Art historians tend to be both misguided and narrow-minded in their approach, while, understandably enough, artists are reluctant to discuss it. Originality, appropriation, and transformation are among the issues that have to be addressed. Some critics think of influence as a laboratory where one discovers their own authenticity through a trial and error method. Others make it into an Oedipal encounter. Baruchello discusses Duchamp's work and friendship in terms of the permissions they gave him. Distilled from hundreds of hours of conversation with Henry Martin, the book is a wandering monologue in which Baruchello frames these permissions, conveying the essence of what he saw in Duchamp's work, how he has been able to use them. Anecdotes lead to analysis and back again. This is a conversation, not an essay. Baruchello isn't trying to prove a point, he's making one. The book is about *use*: how one artist found a way to use another. He discusses specific works in detail, as well as commenting on the flaws and contradictions he noticed in Duchamp's artist-persona.

Ironically enough, Duchamp's work is so taken for granted these days that it seems almost invisible. His very particular ways of surprising, undermining, and confronting have been transformed into a series of comforting mannerisms. Baruchello's book reminds us of the works' enigmatic presence. He does so by not trying to rationalize or explain it away. He doesn't turn Duchamp into an alchemist. He simply reminds us to look at the work: "The whole constellation of all of these individual gestures he made is so incredibly bizarre. He was the first great master as an impresario of the bizarre, and the possibility he has given us is that we can be just as free-floating too, just as honest and just as inconsistent and with just as much license to do first one thing and then another in an entirely different, even an entirely contradictory direction. You take a bird's cage and go to a marble cutter and have him make imitation sugar cubes and then you put them all together with a squid bone back inside the cage and top it all off with a thermometer and a mirror on the bottom of it and you call it *Why Not Sneeze?* and sign it with a transexual pseudonym. That's the way his whole life might be described, and you can't get more bizarre than that."

Marcel Duchamp is a mythical event in the history of 20th century art. Rather than surrounding him with more stories, Baruchello returns him to earth, where he belongs.

JOHN YAU

Dave Smith, THE ROUNDHOUSE VOICES: Selected and New Poems (NY: Harper & Row, 1985). 182 pp. Paper, $9.95

The Roundhouse Voices is a selection of poems from seven of Smith's eight published collections; toward the close,it adds a few new poems as well. Through it all, a span of fifteen years of writing, one perceives a poet growing up within very narrow limits. His influences are few and obvious: the dense, magical lyrics of James Wright, the swaggering bombast of Dickey at mid-career. Smith does not seem to have read widely or to try his hand at anything much older than 1950s style. He is a creature, by his own admission, of mid-century American culture: the tv, college writing courses, a middle-class accademic life style. His social commentary is nil; he has little interest in things beyond his own childhood, and his style, though at times richly rhetorical and eloquent, is inflexible and of a sameness across the years.

All the same, he is at the center of American poetry now, much honored and respected. His work has garnered the praise of all the moguls of contemporary literature from Helen Vendler to Richard Howard. It would be insensitive to say he is not without gifts as a writer. Indeed, he strings together many difficult, convoluted lyrics that are sustained by a force of clear thrust, a thread of logic that prevents a cluster of intersecting thoughts from turning into a jumble. This is powerful concentration; and he has a font of impressive, unusual metaphors. He is never careless or sloppy; you will not find a poem simply dissolving from lack of point. His grammar is at times a little shaky, which a copy editor should have caught by now, but these are tiny blemishes in what is essentially a pleasant reading experience.

But I wonder if Smith is not in fact more of a creature of his time than he realizes. His poems are best read in magazines, in single doses, where threads and patterns of books are not discernible. He glitters in isolation, in which one is quite moved by the powers of his feelings, his exuberant lyrical digressions, the detailed surface of his memories. Taken together, a weary inertia begins to build up in the reader's concentration,

as though something objectionable were in the lyrics, but too buried under eloquence to be fully grasped. Reading Smith is to be made aware of one's gradual disapproval of his vision of life, and to be pulled along affectionately, wittily, gorgeously by the powers of his speech.

Of the eighty-two poems collected here, one is surprised to find that nearly all of them are about death or childhood sex, in which Smith voices his fear of mortality, his dread of lost innocence. The codification of his experience is very simple: girls are permutations of Eve, assigned to lure boys into manhood. This alone should have inspired any number of thematic expansions to sirens, nymphs, mythic analogs, but Smith hews to a strict image category of Southern girls in weedy marshy trysting places, where their naked legs drape over a boy's back, as he pumps out his last bit of hopeful innocence. Family life is the coil of mortality; Smith is heavy-handed in all of his poems about his own family, the one that raised him, the one in which he is now a parent: they strike him as nothing more than the circle of birth and death in which he is a captive.

Death is everywhere: it begins the book in a prefatory poem, "The Roundhouse Voices," in which he peers down in his uncle's coffin, remembering how he worked in the sooty confines of a roundhouse, and how his uncle taught him baseball when he was a boy. This is clever enough: a roundhouse is the track-end of things, the switcharound, a good metaphor for life turning into death; and baseball is another sort of switching house, home plate being a beginning and an end, an allegorical life-cycle. But these things being tossed off, the real point of the poem is to dread the terms of one's life, the dying that is meaningless to him, the long years of adulthood that lead only to extermination.

Smith's vision is without consolations; he makes memory his only subject, simply because life is a looking back for him, a turning away from death to a magical, though unarticulated state: a boy's innocence, free of the knowledge of death or sexuality, which ends when he succumbs to a girl's inevitable, poisoned seduction. After that, one stumbles into war, a family, and thereafter, years of solitude, of lingering, and then the dying:

> I'm going to die in a scummy ditch
> where love doesn't mean a damn thing.

In a lurid poem about military experience, "Men Drafted," Smith thinks only of the death or dying of young men, horrible to him, and of a urinal where drawings remind him of

> the smell of
> flesh, women swollen, girls
> ripening as they knelt
> to hack the field down,
> to raise it up again.

The word "girl" in Smith's poetry stands for a figure who merely shuttles boys into the death realm; it's their job. They hack them out of their little membraneous eden, and thus it is, that wherever sex is mentioned in this book, even love, there is also the hiss of a snake and the blade of a knife. Even in poems meant to be delicate and affectionate, as in the portraits of his wife, the woman drives her blade into the soft belly of a fish, as Smith looks on in quiet horror.

Smith's landscapes are unconscious depictions of his dread of sexuality; even in his memory of an old boat yard, the puns on female genitals are profuse and toxic:

> You need to ask why they lie cracked, sucking salt
> water through the reed tubes, what has happened
> to shove them back into the center of the marsh . . .
>
> I give you
> this cunner of my place, its hand-hacked bottom whole
> still, smell of crabs yet rank here, a man's hat
> floating in the black water as if mislaid, going down.

"Mislaid, going down." I suspect much of the sexual punning is subconscious in the poetry, though when decoded, it shows a man confused helplessly about sex and life, repeating over and over his bollixed visions. The poetry is very narrow in its thematic range, but the language tirelessly repeats its formulations of sex and knives, scattered flesh on the hills, battered men left broken-hearted by the hiss of seductions. If Smith is a product of mid-century, it tells us the generation was raised without instruction, wisdom, hopes of any kind, only a materialism that in Smith makes rich verse out of very little life.

PAUL CHRISTENSEN

ROMAN JAKOBSON / VERBAL ART, VERBAL SIGN, VERBAL TIME
Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, editors
University of Minnesota Press, 208 pp.

There emerges from this selection of Jakobson's writings a curiously latent, even suppressed, current of his poetics which will without doubt

pressure our readings to articulate the currency of his work. Seen in the succession of these essays is the depth of a particular appeal to coexisting elements in Jakobson's thinking; thus, his invention of a *radical middle ground* which locates the methodological investigation of the linguistic and literary facts in a poem next to the *extraliterary* values which functionally surface within it. Regrettably, discussions of Jakobson have largely effaced the coordination of these parallel dynamics by isolating the singular, invariant face of the methodological picture from what some critics have (mis)perceived as the anomalous, surplus (*extra*literary) phases in the canon. It is, however, precisely these latter signs of poetic origins and impulses, of dominant biographical strains, of private and collective mythologies which inform the dialogue between a writer's life and work. The themes relevant to this particular conjunction underscore five of Jakobson's studies, only one of which—"On a Generation that Squandered its Poets"—is included here. Responding to Majakovskij's suicide in 1930, this essay considers that act "symbolic for the entire generation" (editor's *Preface*). It "isolate[s] the invariant thematic core of Majakovskij's poetry" and directs Jakobson's "thoughts toward the problem of 'poetic myth' " (*Preface*). I will speak more to its substance and implications later.

For now, "the invariant thematic core" of *Jakobson's* research, with its emphasis on the roles of binary models in time, language and literature, should be addressed. Here the "question of invariace in the midst of variation" and the attraction to "binary solutions" dominate ("My Favorite Topics"). Engaging the primacy of binary structures in linguistics and philology, Jakobson's particular concern turns to the integral, dynamic function of time in language and literature. Three essays—"Dialogue on Time in Language and Literature" (Jakobson & Pomorska), "Problems in the Study of Language and Literature" (Jakobson & Tynjanov), "Sign and System of Language: A Reassessment of Saussure's Doctrine" (Jakobson)—deal variously with this issue in the first chapter. Included is Jakobson's re-evaluation of the temporal linguistic model proposed by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*—a representation which opposed language as a system (synchrony) to its historical evolution (diachrony). This breach assigned all developments in language to the diachronic sphere while abandoning the present moment in language to a static fiction. Crediting Saussure for projecting the focus on "the system of language both as a whole and in the relation of each of its constituent parts," Jakobson goes on to reject Saussure's suppression of any link between the system of language and its changes which is considered as the exclusive territory of synchrony, and which authorizes all adjustments to the diachronic field alone. For Jakobson, a linguistic system is perpetually transformed by its changes. System and change are "indissolubly tied . . . The beginning and end of each change are always recognized as such during a period of coexistence in the community" ("Dialogue on Time in Language and Literature").

Thus, obsolete features—archaisms—in a linguistic system are felt concurrently with its latest phases. Emphasis is on the simultaneity of linguistic events—a dynamic, synchronic approach to how language changes, which also insists on the study of invariant or static elements (along with alterations) in the diachronic realm.

Interplay between the two dimensions of time, *simultaneity* and *succession*, marks another distinction between Jakobson and Saussure, who renounces *simultaneity* in favor of what Jakobson calls the "pure linearity" of the *signans*. Jakobson locates the presence of these two dimensional units even on the basic level of the phoneme, which can be broken down into successive and concurrent distinctive features. He extends this idea in order to abandon another of Saussure's principles on rules governing language structure; this in reference to Saussure's reductive dependence on the term "syntagmatic," which describes the "horizontal" combinatorial sequence of linguistic units moving through time (as distinguished from the "paradigmatic" plane, or language's "vertical" relations, i.e., how one unit in a message "responds" to or associates with the total language inventory—the unit's antonyms, synonyms, etc. . . .). Jakobson sees the term as "misleading," since we connect "syntagmatic relations" with "successivity in time" when we must also consider "the combination of simultaneous features . . . in temporal succession." Therefore, we should "speak simply about combination . . . contrasted to selection [substitution], as distinguished from both simultaneity and succession" ("Sign and System of Language").

The discourse on the dynamics of time obviously has multiple implications for a poetics, and Jakobson's intimate alliance with the Russian Cubo-Futurists—Malevich, Majakovskij, Xlebnikov—influenced his research in this area. He notes that his thoughts were inspired by some of their slogans ("Static perception is a fiction") as well as by their impulse to abolish absolutes and vanquish the march of time (progress). Majakovskij, for instance, saw the dissolution of time in a future perfect, a time which, as he said, would "fade from consciousness." In Xlebnikov's work Jakobson sights the problem of the simultaneity, relativity and mutability of time deeply reflected in terms of narrative, in which "simultaneous actions [may be] dispersed in space," or where "the narrator may . . . attribute an inverse order of events to the fictional reality itself. In a Xlebnikov tale the two heroes pass from the ends of their lives to the beginnings but continue to speak of the past and future in the normal and uninverted order of these times" ("Dialogue on Time in Language and Literature").

The flow of time suffuses verse measures as well. Majakovskij foregrounds rhythm as the primary factor in his poetry, while Jakobson sees verse bearing its generative etymological sign of a timely recurrence, where the reader locates the feeling of a present time, looks back at "the

impulse of the preceding verses" and anticipates the creation of future verses. Deviations from the regular recurrences again localize the consistency of Jakobson's total critical approach: variations in light of invariants.

Further issues related to verse design emerge in the second chapter, *Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, which includes an essay by the same title, "Two Poems by Pushkin" "Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry," "On Poetic Intentions and Linguistic Devices in Poetry" and "Yeats' 'Sorrow of Love' through the Years" (Jakobson and Rudy). These essays manifest Jakobson's dedication to the systematic patterning of grammatical figures and sounds in poetry, which can generate parallelisms of equivalences and contrasts, and shape reality in diverse formal configurations. Rhyme technique – one parallelistic mode – and the poet's grammar are both seen as " 'either grammatical or antigrammatical' but never agrammatical" ("Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry"). Poets either choose a symmetry grounded in a consistent binary pattern or "cope with [these patterns] when longing for an 'organic chaos.' " The grammar at the heart of writing poetry is compared to the geometrical order upon which the composition of painting is based – Apollinaire, before Jakobson, had proposed the same equation – since both superimpose abstract relational patterns upon poetry and painting.

With Jakobson's attention to the functional role of grammar in poetry, an alternative emerges to how, as readers, we have been trained to magnify the appeal to "image" as the sacrosanct ground of verbal art. Jakobson quotes the Russian writer Veresaev confessing the sense of imagery as "a mere counterfeit to genuine poetry." Some of Pushkins's lyrics are seen to exploit the "figure of grammar" (G.M. Hopkins) and abandon the visual tropes. Gertrude Stein, a writer Jakobson does not mention, makes her *Tender Buttons the* exemplary modern text motivated by correspondences among recurring grammatical figures. Her use of prepositions in "A Carafe, That Is A Blind Glass" shatters purely descriptive models of language and draws attention to the composition of the language "picture" itself. (She does not speak to "A kind *of* glass," but "A kind *in* glass" – general noun immersed in concrete noun.) Since prepositions "can of all things be most mistaken" (Stein, *Poetry and Grammar*), Stein uses that mutability to create grammatical parallelisms of contrast (and resemblance) between her *choice* of a particular figure and what she anticipates the reader will substitute for it – response engaging the difference which spreads the reading out. Although not "the juxtaposition of contrasting *grammatical* concepts" (my emphasis), Stein's process is close to the *sense* of the comments made on " 'dynamic cutting' in film montage" (in "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry"), where "the juxtaposition of contrasting shots or sequences . . . generate in the mind of the spectator ideas that . . . by themselves [they] do not carry."

Stein's (and others') *choice* of a particular figure raises significant ques-

tions as to whether grammatical designs are plotted or instinctual or motivated by chance. Jakobson excludes the chance factor since "it is quite impossible—as any mathematician dealing with probability will tell you—that such an exact distribution of conjunctions and prepositions [as in Yeats' "Sorrow of Love," 1925 version] should be quite fortuitous" ("On Poetic Intentions and Linguistic Devices in Poetry"). Between conscious and subconscious activity Jakobson opts for the primacy of the latter in mapping the poet's discourse, indicating, however, that discovery of the poet's notes often alert us to a grammatically informed mind acute in its perceptions of design. In Serbian folkloric epic poetry Jakobson finds a subliminal grammatical grid pitched to a regular quantitative measure which the singers (*guslars*) of these verses cannot explain, although they are quick to note any violation from the rule once it occurs. Xlebnikov realizes subconscious patterns in his poetry when he discovers that each of four sounds appears five times in the primary sentence of the poem "The Grasshopper," "without," as he confesses, "any wish of the one who wrote this nonsense" (quoted in "Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry").

Evaluation of the role of pattern continues in Jakobson's exhaustive study of Yeats' "Sorrow of Love," in its two versions (1898, 1925). Elements shared by both poems are contrasted to the variant methodological principles underlying each—the gap in time between the composition of the two revealing the changing signature of Yeats' poetics. A beautifully compressed mathematical exposition of the distribution of grammatical categories in both poems shows the 1925 poem to be the more symmetrical of the two, as Jakobson counts the corresponding number of nouns, prenominal attributes, pronouns, connectives, etc., between and within each of the texts. Of particular fascination is the luminous visionary symbolism he applies to "the operative principle regulating the poem's symmetries, [which] is here the number three and its exponents—reflective of Yeats' "Great Wheel" (" 'principle symbol' of the universe") because, as he insisted, " 'each set of three is itself a wheel.' " Thus, the first phase of Yeats' 28 phases is seen as "not being human" (Yeats), "so that three to the third power . . . in fact exhausts the entire human realm" (Jakobson).

In wedding the mechanics of number to the elaboration of an originary cosmology, Jakobson again reveals his attraction to "binary solutions," and this balance is no more evident than in the essays concerning *extraliterary* influences upon texts—"On a Generation that Squandered its Poets" and "The Language of Schizophrenia: Hölderlin's Speech and Poetry" (Jakobson and Grette Lübbe-Grouthes) which follow in the next section, *Poetry and Life*. Writing on Hölderlin, Jakobson undertakes—where others have suppressed or ridiculed the effect of the poet's schizophrenia on his later verse—an objective, structuralist reading of "The View" (the analysis itself is omitted by the editors), resolving that the linguistic system of the poem is perfectly consistent with a type of schizophrenia in which the

capacity for dialogue is eroded. The later poetry is read as antithetical to the earlier texts' commitment to exchange between speakers, and is *organized* around a clearly symmetrical monologic competence (lacking, for instance, "the grammatical class of 'shifters' "). Abandoning fundamental dialogic forms, the poetry is marked by a referential evasion and responsibility from the visual specificity of an immediate situation, so that Hölderlin " 'never describes a unique event in its peculiarity [. . .] Evidence to this effect is his strange predilection for the generalizing conjunction *when* . . .' " (Jakobson quoting F. Beissner). That context cannot be localized or indexed by pointing is a circumstance which parallels the poet's inability to speak an independent "yes" or "no," and forces him to coin the neologism *pallaksch*, which "could be taken to mean either 'yes' or 'no' and served him as a means of avoiding [both]." In "Speak, You Also," Paul Celan articulated a similar shading: "Speak— / But keep yes and no unsplit. / And give your say this meaning / give it the shade."

The consequences of response engaging or eluding responsibility to a coordinated poetics surfaces as the fundamental question in the compelling article on Majakovskij. Where critiques of Majakovskij's writing appropriate the internal conventions of his work while suppressing response to the conditions of his life as they touch the material, Jakobson sees a refusal to encounter the full range of Majakovskij's poetics, which embodies "the monolithic myth of the poem, a zealot in the name of the revolution of the spirit, a martyr condemned to cruel and hostile incomprehension and rejection." Poetic mythology enters the writing as "a unified symbolic system," encompassing the poet's desire to accelerate time to the point of reversing it (resurrection of the dead) in order to transform the future, and to escape from the destructive, inertial present moment of existence which stifles life's creative powers (this condition of stagnation is only approximated by Majakovskij's use of the Russian word *byt*). Such a mythological discourse is realized in the poet's cognitive violation of his lyrics—sacrificed in the cause of the revolution—as well as in the theme of suicide, a recurring feature throughout the poetry. "Revolution and the destruction of the poet" combine as mutually informing motifs.

Preempted by obituaries that read like ritualized critiques—reactions his work had foreseen—Majakovskij's suicide becomes "alien to the thematics of the Futurist and 'Left Front' groups." They disbelieve it: "His death cannot be reconciled with his whole life, which was that of a poet completely dedicated to the Revolution" (Malkin). "His death was unmotivated by his poetry" (*Pravda*). "Was there a general conviction," Jakobson reminds us, "that all of [his work] was only 'composed,' only invented?" "This 'antibiographical' position [is] the equivalent, in reverse, of the simplistic biographical approach."

Jakobson's implicit injunctions here represent an appeal not only to critics of his generation but to ours as well. Any evaluation of Russian

Formalist principles as applied to Majakovskij's poetry must include Jakobson's considerations of *extraliterary* materials upon the writing. It must, as Mandelstam wrote, "study the coordination of the impulse and the text." Just this is missing from Barrett Watten's primarily phonological critique of Majakovskij's "I": The word *I* in Majakovskij's poetry comes across first as sound, structuring a mode of address. This bears on the issue of the "I-writer" in Formalist theory. From this use of the pronoun it is a short step to 'literary biography as a device.' " ("Russian Formalism & The Present," in *Total Syntax*). And in "The Politics of Poetry," Watten writes: "The self might be the sign of action, as in the literary metaphor of Mayakovsky; the 'I' is a constructive device."

I cannot quarrel with the selective validity of this reading; I can only argue past it, to its limits. In light of what Jakobson calls the Russian Futurists' impulse to propel "their poetry toward the antithesis of Formalism—toward the cultivation of the heart's 'raw cry' and uninhibited frankness," Watten's position seems exclusionary in its dependence on the Formalist model. If Majakovskij's self in writing is characterized as a purely "constructive device," how implicitly collaborative is such a critique with a generation which transformed "the destruction of the poet" into what Jakobson calls "the historico-literary facts"? This is *not* to deny Majakovskij's use of "literary biography as a device" as one of his many compositional resources, but to affirm that, after the fact of the device, after the multiple layerings and graftings and repercussions of the pronominal figure had spread over the text, the terrified figure of the poet emerged unravelled, only to be posthumously constructed, and made to disappear again under the textual "facts." Watten's vision does not name and is not responsible to the "unbounded horror" of the self, seen through its pseudonyms, revealed:

> Formalist literary theory placed the lyrical monologue in quotes and disguised the "ego" of the lyric poet under a pseudonym. But what unbounded horror results when suddenly you see through the pseudonym, and the phantoms of art invade reality, just as in Majakovskij's scenario *Bound in Film* a girl is kidnapped from a movie set by a mad artist and lands in "real life."
>
> ("On a Generation that Squandered its Poets")

Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time concludes with a chapter entitled *Jakobson's Legacy*, consisting of three essays investigating, respectively, the correspondences between Jakobson's poetics and the system of language in general ("The Poetic Function and the Nature of Language," Linda R. Waugh), the application of his poetics to studies of prose ("Poetics of Prose," Krsytyna Pomorska), and a monograph motivated by Jakobson's morphological writings ("Three Main Features, Seven Basic Principles, And Eleven Most Important Results of Roman Jakobson's Morphological

Research," Igor A. Mel'chuk). On the whole these essays are valuable as informative introductions to Jakobson's work as well as original sources that test the disparate implications of his poetics. They reinforce the measure taken in the compilation of Jakobson's writings here, a gathering which complements the indispensable facts provided by his linguistic and literary research with a humanistic scholarship whose compassion and integrity will move us to address the currency of his voice for the future:

> As for the future, it doesn't belong to us either. In a few decades we shall be cruelly labelled as products of the past millennium. All we had were compelling songs of the future; and suddenly these songs are no longer part of the dynamic of history, but have been transformed into historico-literary facts. When singers have been killed and their song has been dragged into a museum and pinned to the wall of the past, the generation they represent is even more desolate, orphaned, and lost—impoverished in the most real sense of the word.
>
> ("On a Generation that Squandered its Poets")

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

THE MAN NAMED EAST AND OTHER POEMS
Peter Redgrove
Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985

Listen to titles. Titles as incantations: *The Grain-Shaped Cave, The Dead and Their Children, Dance the Putrefact,* The Primate of the Rose, The Walk to the Paradise Garden, Song of the Springtides, Ancient Lights, The Isle of Lies, *The Sire of Branches and Air,* The Brazen Head, The Glamour of the Snow, the Goat Foot God, The Death Hound, The Nightside of Eden, *The Will of November,* Children of the Wind, *Excrementitious Husk,* The Club of Queer Trades, *The God of Restraint,* The Forgotten Rite, The Temptation of the Clay, Cults of the Shadow, *The Whole Music at Pod's Kitchen,* The House of Sounds, Wolf Solent, *Tantric Friends, The Shrinking Clock,* Moon Glade, This Knot of Life, *Using the Dark,* Children of the Pool, *The Doctrine of the Window,* The Scarlet Ceremonies, The Tale the Pine-Trees Knew, The Power House, *The Larynx in the Hill,* The Hill of Dreams, Casting the Runes, Ashe of Rings, Winter Waters, *Too Old For Bones,* The Anathema of Zos, *The Numina at the Street Parties,* The Man Who Was Thursday, *The Man*

Named East, Avalon of the Heart, *The Earth Shakes Away Its Dead Like Crumbs From a Cloth*, *To the Water-Psychiatrist*, The Candle of Vision, The Column of Dust, and The Story of My Heart. These titles are evocative of the old England, of Celts and druidic lore, stone circles, megaliths and ritual magic. The England summoned in the titles of stories, novels, autobiographies, occult manuals, tone-poems and piano suites by Frederick Delius, John Cowper Powys, Mary Butts, M.R. James, Arnold Bax, Evelyn Underhill, Kenneth Grant, G.K. Chesterton, Arthur Machen, Dion Fortune, M.P. Shiel, John Ireland, Algernon Blackwood, AE, Austin Osman Spare, and—in italics—Peter Redgrove.

Despite a considerable presence in England, Redgrove is virtually unknown in the U.S. He hasn't been taken up by word of mouth among those Englishmen who have formed associations in this country, probably because of his extensive BBC exposure, literary prizes, and enthusiastic press coverage of his books published over a 25 year period by the prestigious firm of Routledge and Kegan Paul. He's not fashionably neglected. But to be blunt: Redgrove is, with J.H. Prynne, the most commanding poet now writing in English outside North America.

In addition, he's the first genuinely visionary English poet since William Blake. He was careful to specify (in an interview I did with him in 1973) that in poetry, visionary matters are "visions of matter." "I'm a materialist, you see, but I'm a materialist in the Hindu tradition, which regards matter as a song . . . I find that it is very easy to think of matter as being conscious on a molecular level."* Many would agree, but few can manifest their attentions on this exacting plane in poems, nor sustain it over decades.

Redgrove's publishing career goes back to 1960, but aside from intimations of his powers in *The Force* (1966), it was only with the dual publication of his novel *In the Country of the Skin* and its companion volume *Dr Faust's Sea-Spiral Spirit* in 1972 that he fully came into possession of his visionary nature and the fortitude necessary to shape the renewed abundance of creativity. *In the Country of the Skin* is one of the generous healing books of our time. An insatiable libidinal florescence at its core, the book is really a prose-poem (comparable to Lautréamont—it's that good) and has become the oracular font of all Redgrove's subsequent work.

The dominant impulse immediately following *In the Country of the Skin* was the fantasy of hermaphroditic collaboration. Redgrove and his wife, Penelope Shuttle, worked together on two novels (*The Terrors of Dr. Treviles* and *The Glass Cottage*), a book of poetry (*The Hermaphrodite*

**The Hudson Review*, Fall 1975, p. 382.

Album) and a scholarly study (*The Wise Wound*, about menstruation in women's psychology and in various cultures). While these books were not altogether successful (literary collaborations rarely are as satisfying as collaborations in other media), they still proved a marvelous grounding for Redgrove's subsequent flexibility at delineating inter-sexual and inter-species perceptions. Since that collaborative period, Redgrove's focus has been binuclear. The urges fused in *In the Country of the Skin* has spawned two distinct pursuits. On the one hand this has resulted in a series of novels (*The God of Glass, The Sleep of the Great Hypnotist, The Beekeepers* and *The Facilitators*) that are diverting entertainments, pesky romps of occult scientists and their peculiar institutions, metaphysical apparitions, masques in prose. Aspiring to be read as novels, the plasmic vista of *In the Country of the Skin* is diffused (though the novels *are* fun to read). It's in the poetry that *Skin*'s germinating impulse has been maintained. In 1977 the huge collection of poems *From Every Chink of the Ark* (250 pages) showed much determination to tap the organic currents of *Skin* and transform the prose book's libidinal vision into poetry—too eagerly, I think, muddling the force of the book and leaving many of the poems looking like workshop shatter. But by *The Weddings at Nether-Powers* (1979) the transfusion was complete, and has continued with ever greater refinement, exactitude and energy. With *Weddings, The Apple-Broadcast* (1981) and now *The Man Named East* (1985) we have nearly 500 pages of formidable visionary poetry with scarcely a bruised apple in the bunch.

We now have the pleasure of watching in Redgrove a poet at the summit of his command, ceaselessly inventive and *at ease* in that invention—in fact, fluent, as if the medium of the poem were another language, now mastered—a pleasure reminiscent of that which must have attended the appearance of *Parts of a World, Transport to Summer* and *The Auroras of Autumn* from 1942 to 1950. It's not an idle comparison. Stevens is so readily taken up as the American master, but his presence is no less keen in England for that, and one of the turning points in Redgrove's life as a poet was in "The Idea of Entropy at Maenporth Beach" (from *Work in Progress*, 1968), as prime an instance as one can imagine of Harold Bloom's obsession with poet-sons pinning poet-fathers on the wrestling mat of genealogy. But there are differences. For Stevens, imagination was the medium through which a certain resolution of the world into tolerable issue was conducted. For Redgrove, imagination is the very resolution it enacts. "The proper state of mind is inspiration . . . it's a state of being in love with the world without ignoring anything about it."

The narrative impulse has not been drained from the poems, despite Redgrove's fertility as a novelist. The quality—the *aura*—of story pervades his poems. Content to pack his novels with the wild improbabilities of plot his vivid imagination is capable of, he reserves for the poems a wealth of details which are the pregnant carriers of narrative potential. The

submerged (rarely overt) narration, in turn, serves as a check to the lyrical momentum and keeps the poems from piling up into catalogues of registered percepts. Some of the more obviously narrative poems in *The Man Named East* can serve as useful points of entry for readers not familiar with the work: "The Brothel in Fairyland," "Light Black Redskin," "The Witch Who Loves Us," and "The Quiet Woman of Chancery Lane." Not that these are conventionally narrative in any sense; the action inheres in the atmosphere sustained, that *here* is a world *in which things happen.* The mind's attachment to the poem becomes the action.

A notable gain in this collection is the refinement of Redgrove's aptitute for simile. So strongly does his mind generate analogy on many levels that, throughout his career as a poet, there has been a tendency for poems to lose force and focus, following the lure of "like . . ." The abundance of similes here is unobtrusive, appearing with greater care in contexts where they serve the poem above all, yet function as agents to captivate the reader with the aptness of the comparisons. In a pharmacy a moth flits from jar to jar "like a travelling label"; rooks wheel above the trees like little cinders, "Cinders that cry with the cold"; trees appear as "great lungs smelling of grass"; the forest is like "a vast moth / Settling its wings on the hill"; the sea is "like a wet tree shaking out white blossom," while rain falls like "bells in an infinite number / All descending on the one note." Captivated by the cumulous cloud of autumn sensations, the poet says "My heart leaps in my chest like a cat / With a silver sheen on it jumping over the well."

The fund of tangible transformations the natural world affords in all its seasonal and climatic variety is immense. Redgrove's increasingly sharp ability to trace the simple simile has been modulated into that magical concision which registers perceptions as transformations of what is witnessed. Two memorable poems literally clothe air and water in the attention paid them, in these selections:

> The red blouse pulsing on the line,
> Emptying and filling like a heart
>
> In the strong gusts,
> The wind's heart beating on the line . . .

(from "The Heart")

> . . . I have seen
> A smooth rock standing
> In a waterfall, dressed
>
> In a never-ending weave
> Of water-trails down the stream,
> A twisted glass shirt like a flame,

Like a personage
On whose head light beats
And refines him utterly down to the tail

During many centuries.

(from "Like a Rock")

Elsewhere we stand witness to "the skin of wind moulded to the hills," "the tidal cattle lowing to and fro," and shadows growing from the trees like bears – the same trees, perhaps, that are "worried by their wolf, / The wind." The similes grow more and more concise, abrupt, hidden, adept. They alter like tadpoles into metaphor. The poem "A Kinsman" opens with a single, striking, verbless line: "Echoes, the cadavers of noises, bloated." This is a point of ignition, a key. The concision is like a condensation on the glass of the poems' surfaces, small liquid pellets which potentiate the images seen through them. Modes of empowering perception with its proper inspiration (seeing is another kind of breathing).

There's an occult rite Kenneth Grant cites in *Outside the Circles of Time* called the Mass of the Mirror, involving the ritual placement of reflecting glasses in conjunction with certain alignments of the stars, sexual arousal and verbally intoxicating invocations. Redgrove's frequent citation of the image of the mirror in *The Man Named East* may or may not derive from this rite, but it's very much in the spirit of it. It's a rite of conception, insemination. A rite involved with "the mirror of the womb, / The sticky mirror, flypaper of spirits / Where they catch a-dying ninety years." It is, of course, the oldest of alchemical retentions – "as above, so below" – where wheat, that Eleusinian vegetal collaborator, composes "lunar images of the reflecting field, / The infinite mirror / Of wheat whose tops are tidal / And whose roots are grave" and is the tactile sign of shared initiation (and, Mystery of mysteries! – who isn't an initiate to that?). The image is primal, familiar, yet always arresting: "The body is the glass in which we see his spirit darkly. / Now the glass is broken he is invisible." The diction is as plain and spare as Stevens'. The prosody as compact, at times, as Bunting: "The spark-gap at the thorn's tip / Where the water-drop flashes." And the closing line of "The Heart" cited earlier: "The fly so full of low sweetness it hums like rubbed crystal." Such apt fit of thought to sound is a Mystery as well.

It is Redgrove's most inscrutable and illustrious ability, this knack of identifying with insects. There's no heroism in it, no heralding the spider over the fly. It is blatant adoration of the whole of creation, simple as that. "The touch of breeze is the whole of the stars." And "Every atom receives the whole." A simple platitude, but Redgrove ceaselessly amplifies:

He was very relaxed, and his senses, like fibres

Had expanded to ever corner of his airy room.
A single fly entered. It was a little torso of fluid

It was a little water-bell carved with a mask.
It had squeezed the grasses to fill itself,
It had distilled in the sunshine many dungs

And sang such a luminous note,
A green light in it.

(from "The Comforter")

The same credence attaches to all the life that splurges on lower matter, from the "ingot-bright slugs condemned / To trailing wingless in sweet slime" to the "fat moths" who "stare at us with big gold buttons / Or enter in like aerial puppies / To lap at our candles." To concentrate on such observations, to persist in attending to the very small, is to continually reappraise the scale of human potential, and to see the monumental flare of imagination pouring into the tiniest instance of enraptured attention:

The lunar month is a pinioned giant
Held by rachets of seconds, to which

It is gigantic, seen by the wheeling minute;
Each cog floats by like a mote of pulses
In the great eye of the year.

But we need the second's flying eye
To enter by, its eye and understanding . . .

(from "Serpent of the Month Club")

It is an awesome potential of a man, that wombless creature, to strive in vision and imagination to a state of maternal solicitude and cellular reveries of morphological growth. The opening poem of *The Weddings at Nether-Powers*, "The Visible Baby," had envisioned the intra-uterine first spasms of foetal growth. That vision is continued here:

. . . Now she dreams

Of putting the final touches to the firstborn,
Knitting the baby's only garment with bone needles,
Engraving on the flesh the fingerprints like a colophon.

(from "Lights in the Mist")

And that "child soaked in darkness" is

. . . a hieroglyph of the nine gods,

The nine months of gestation,

The little orchestra of the watch, the nine months'
Watch, the percussion-group of the heart
Bent over its round measurer.

(from "The Drumming Stars")

Here, as throughout Redgrove's work, all that is out of sight, hidden away, or customarily regarded as inanimate is precisely what is animated. Not through any cartoon-like grotesquerie, but out of the instantaneous shared recognition between sentient creatures of a life undertaken together on earth. It's a conception of organic life as being inherently of use to other forms of life, not strictly on the make for its own fitful survival. "Man is a device / For harvesting the abundant details of the woman, / Woman a busy press of the plain juices of the man."

In 1968 D.M. Thomas wrote of Redgrove's poems that "It is impossible—such is their ambivalent atmosphere—to say whether these are 'love' poems or 'nature' poems. Which means that they are religious poems." I would suggest changing that word to "reverent" to steer it clear of any ecclesiastical associations (though Redgrove can be highly illuminating on the pagan background of Cornish Christianity—see "The Green Tower" and "Killing House"). The reverence hails from the hush of attention, the adoration which inspired perception is endowed with. A section from "The Funeral" (with its auspicious opening—"Clouds and mountains were invited, both the conscious / And the unconscious creatures") will suffice for what I mean;

There is a Witness, I think, who has magnetic wings.
First it seemed to me at the funeral service with the terrible
Useless brass handles that would be saved screwed to
The veneer cardboard coffin which was much too small
That my emotions such as these swirled round my flesh
And some of them spurted from my eyes but ninety-two percent
Were beating in my back in a sensation like spread wings.
Since mine were sprouting I was able to see
The wings of others, such as my father's, standing next to me,
And his were ragged and tattered like those of an old moth,
Close to drying up and drifting away, it seemed my duty
To merge my birth-wet wings with his, and this I did,
Entwining them in an embrace with him that he would never know,
And sure enough he, the widower, perked up,
And I felt tattered, but not dry, for back at the house
I sobbed my heart out in the little white-tiled loo,
And there was still a little angelic witness lodged in my spine
At the small of my back, in Jesus-robes, little calm watcher
In white, which I cannot explain, merely report.

Writing like this brings to mind the psychologist James Hillman's insistence that we need to establish a ground of seriousness that is not tragic. As this passage from "The Funeral" indicates in abundance, good humor even in the most stressful circumstances, if held onto, can turn its charmed Buddha countenance on the passing scene and permit a glimpse of that levity to which everything in its own best nature aspires. Peter Redgrove is resolutely (as M.P. Shiel said of Arthur Machen) "a singer somehow of the truth that the universe is bacchic and deserves an emotion . . ."

JED RASULA

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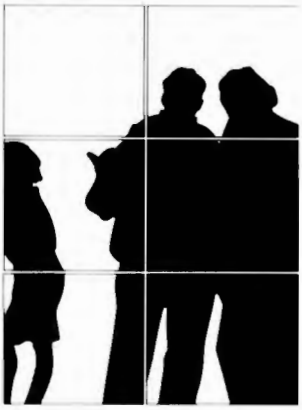

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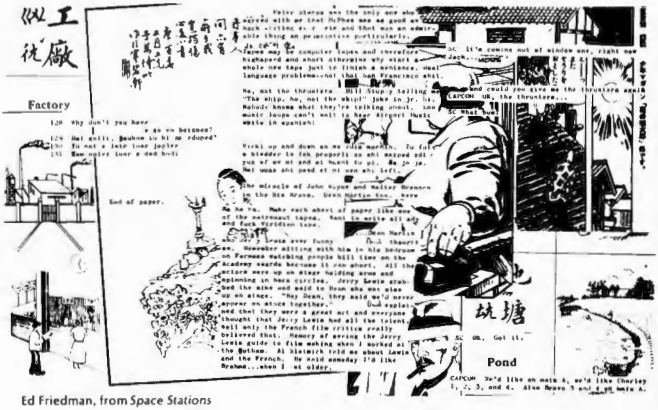

Ed Friedman, from *Space Stations*

The text isn't the grail at the end of the trek and the reader isn't a hero (although projecting these archetypes onto the undertaking can be reassuring). If metaphor serves, the text and the readers' understanding may be each other's dark, dense forest, through which identity is challenged, wrested from its supposed subject, revaluated in conflicted context, and (the longing for closure, pastness, order, being what it is) oriented towards some governing conception. The devices, figures and dynamics engaged in such a context appear, in themselves, variously traditional, archaic, vestigial, rooted in an equivocally authoritative past; the choices effected with regard to them exercise a fateful concern for the future: all reading projects a function for the text through understanding, however justly inexplicit the script of such a role may be.

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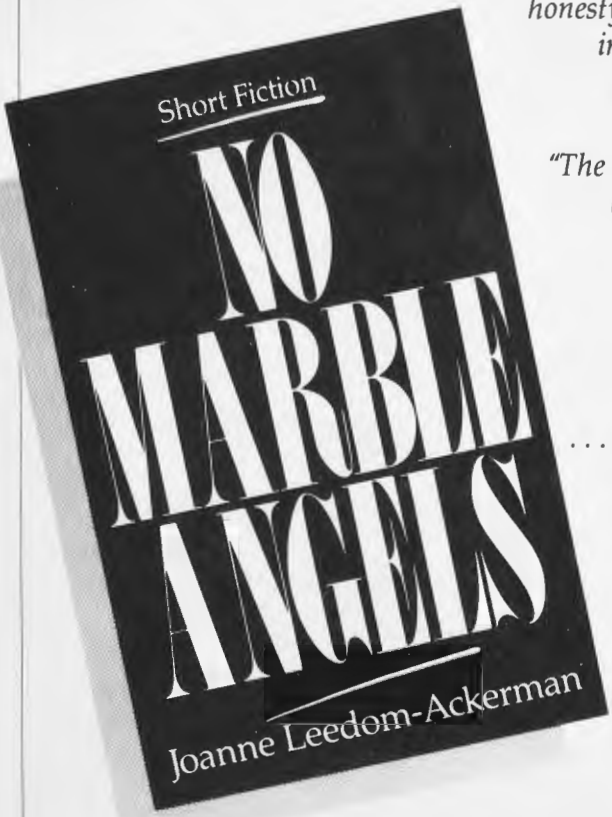

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MARK KARLINS

EIGHT POEMS

In the dream of the glass cliff,
in the margins of nature my father
was a Siren. A very beautiful animal
in which so much human forgets itself
yet, even in its seductions, an anima.
I could hear him, in his defect, in his sweet animal voice
singing. And this contradiction of his nature,
the conjuring treachery he seemed,
song by song, to enjoy, between his two lips, was still a father voice,
a human song hatched from apocrypha,
that the human no longer lack the notion of the inhuman,
the mouth no longer lack an abyss.

Dear Comrade,

Because now my own mouth fulgurates demonically
sucked into the obscenity of all utopias, the street
a trench I
moving hourly deeper into anonymity

Paradise is a disease
that eats away the flesh

Comrade, in the public world of utopia,
in the labyrinth clamped at both ends,
life, under pressure, is quick to reverse.
The gestures, without bounds, become derelict.
Under pressure, comrade, under pressure,
dove strains into beak, finger into ash,
human into emphatic knowing. And eventually, comrade, surely,

because the mouth knows how to laugh,
a child falling thru the air
will pass beyond the realm of our hearing.

Like oracles
ignorant of their own nature

the gulls in their frenzy swing
low

Normality is counterfit.
The dream inhuman

appetital impulse to act

theater

in which a taste for crime, *all movement,*
Oedipal or otherwise,

arises from the scent
of another being.

GREYBEARD IN RING

The bride folds back to erotic fluid

That even psychology be devoured,

Greybeard, a creature in an early stage of development,
in the tent of a small travelling circus
a holy actor in clown suit
on the back of a docile bull.

Circus is an emphasis to restore,
an absorption
into the internal organs of an Elizabethan stripped down theater
of masks & gestures & signs

theater without a text

in which, from the sunken mouth of an Artaud,
an enormous dove crescendos

SAM SPADE EXCEEDS US HUMANLY

Large elms. Small street.
The reader sits on his porch
cloaked in itinerant rags.
Same scene. Same plot.
Same flirtatious woman,
subterranean dark virgin
in an ancient painting.

Large elms. Small eleven o'clock
nearing midnight. Small chest.
Small eye.

Same witness. Same thief. Same reader

& the darkness that opens one's history.

NARRATIVE

Long story speak
define us short,
indicate the luxury
of the thick mid-March snow.
Slow us
so that the unsubtleties
of the world are also
our work. Last week's odd air
too. A warmth. A red cardinal.
A naked warm branch
agreeable in the clement description.
Snow. The bird goes.
The red. (Woman is not a metaphor.) O rose,
you easy inaccurate image
accessible to address
dissuade me from the unthinking
structures & ends of my narratives,
gift me awake with doubt.

NAMING THE ANIMALS

In the deadest moment of a sentence
one learns to recognize his own face

as that of an animal pushed into a hecatomb.
With separation built into the body at birth,

with, at best, the gaze of an invisible narrator,
an 'I' anchored to his oblique tongue's meander.

Language is utterly extravagant
hollow of a carnivorous plant

into which animals crawl like drones.

Today I would like to unbed my fingers
inside a word
in which a thick fluidity of animals are vegetally entangled,

thrust two hands against the twelve annotated bones of my rib cage.
In radical erasure,
today I would like to allow my anatomy its definitive window,

like a bent utensil that resembles itself
today I would be astray in myself
oxidized in my somewhere without name.

The orphic spine of song.

In the myth of Adam,
there is a deeper myth fragments
after some unnameable disaster.

It was the fullness of his own death Adam, in his naming,
sought, the other

like a fine blue rain
on a naked skin

the terrestrial

in the fullness of its profound Eurydice.

The German traveller Leo Frobenius discovered
that the bark carving of an antlered man

was not a god creating the world
that the Escher-like stream of images
was not unfolding outward,
as he had at first suspected,
from the tips of his three fingers & mouth,
but that they (the animals) were entering,
in a word

like gods crossing strange borders
the animals

in the morning that breaks nature into parts

MASTERY IS THE POWER TO STOP WRITING (BLANCHOT)

My right hand is in love
with the unsayable letters
of a deity,

with the dampness
of human beings
in its clay,

& because of this
because my right hand raises my shoulders into the idea of a
character
& is holding, in its black mouth, my nakedness without skin or
bones

it is impossible, really,
in this solitude of a "he" for an "I,"
to stop writing.

My right hand is in love
with a walk that runs alongside the other,
a "he" in the censorial task of withdrawing from its "I,"

because of this
because my right hand raises a despotic shout
& is waiting, in its manufacture of well-armed blood,
in its lacework its gothic of bones,
for someone to intervene,

my left hand my left hand
will wake from its sleep,
saying Yes
will come to my right hand's aid.

ANDREI CODRESCU

THE OTHER END

ONE: A CAVALIER OFFER

Would you like history?
Would you like history to begin with you?
We're right on target here at
the exact junction of present and future
round and perfect for the erection
of a wall after the destruction of the world.
The next word I say is the future.
You just say the word
when I say so after you say to
so it instantly becomes past.
The last word I said was the past.
Not all past is historical tho.
Not if it leaves no trace
of writing, buildings, film –
lotsa stuff for Mr. Clean.
Push my vacuum pedal.
Some traces are self-consciously
historical but
we won't let *that* stop us.
The Arc de Triomphe
built for a specific victory
projects into the future
on loan to marching boots forever.
The specific blesses
its perverse flow future to past.
Its "meaning."
Something to do with Napoleon,
a person better known in psychiatry.
A new tribe, The Wannabees
have been hitting the streets:
we all wanna be You!
A church means its connections
with the past architectural One
but tends to become grotesque
when it's resolved in art

which is another reason why, love,
I don't hesitate to snuff the past.
The meanings of traces are
food for sentimentality:
Hitler's boy architect, Speer,
made it to "look good in ruins."
It looked pretty good in four years.
You just give the word:
everything can look that good!
A four-year millennium is a commentary
but not a millennium.
The creation of fake history
without meaning from the start
is a business now,
an Arc to commemorate the nonexistent,
i.e., the future,
flowing backwards into
conjured delirium,
to empty into the hyped-up present.
They *waste* the future.
Our activities, amour, legitimize!

SUPPOSE THIS CAME TO PASS.

It has.
In the East, history's remade.
In the West, erased.
On top of that
Big Words are coming back.
Ontology. Sport. Meaning. Millstone. Destiny. Deck.
The Debil. Der Gott. Life. File. Evolution. Mort.
Das Central Nervous System und Das Central Comitat.
Heavy-duty dudes *con* metashovels unearthing
Grand Cliches all ovah town
but mainly at the corner of Narcissus & Labyrinth,
a particularly, ugh, favorite psycho-intersection.
It's all this relativism, mahn,
bearing fruit & it ain't Fourier's pear.
Not mist, mysto-demagoguery.
Popular occult delusions
Speer-catch intellectual magma.
Another espresso please, easy on the *surfeit*.

NAMING SOME NAMES

One Gott-Debil runs this scene
goes by T.S.P.:
The Struggle for Power.
(So named by Andy
Schmookler, scholar without the tower)
Andy takes old Testament Gott & makes him
natural science, turns pater into matter,
good & ebil into one thing,
like before theology—
In Golden Gate Park by Tripping Tree
during the time everybody got direct hits
of Heaven!
We were there getting a whole lot.
(Write here a history of the hat
around whose rim we walked
to mirror the theme.)
But it's a long way from the Gott-days.
T.S.P. resides outside
I mean inside
the text outside of criticism.
And that's all the outside there is.
Everybody's otherwise inside
learning to claustrophobe.
Every generality calls for a bigger one
but the beginning's shrouded in paradox.
The koan, the parable, the Sufi tale,
the Zen umbrella commission
the combatants. Where
does one come by tales like that
in the days of bits and bytes?
The operational model for utopia
is only handicapped by the words I use.
The ravages wrought by time sought
the inside of a cool tavern
to wrestle a ouroborian beer snake,
infinite jaws, progressive traps,
horrible smoke, an incendiary jukebox.
Two more reasons he thought
why the Chosen People
write fundamentally upsetting books:
On the move they open to the
movement itself of ideas

since their raison d'être is a *promise*
they keep searching for the beginning,
re-establishing the ideatic chain
each and every time,
and they are ants on the vast body
of an Ocean-Text
all the romans-fleuves empty in.

THE SCHOLAR STORY

A gentleman scholar with a lit radish head
pulls up with all his earthly things
in the trunk of an old Volvo,
at a friend's who is not surprised
one evening in rainy november.
All his friends operate
the domestic machinery of time
just like the old car: sputter and die
on each others' doorstep
and then go in for repair and stay
tho some are now sleeping under bridges
because it isn't always OK.
The Scholar has 1) Kaypro portable,
2) sleeping bag, 3) balls of deco socks,
4) fear of dogs (so Dog stays outside),
5) pedophobia (so hush the kids),
6) toothbrush,
7) special 20th Century genius that announces
its place among the structures is unique
& untenanted although it knows
only the inside of the atomic umbrella
where it doesn't feel safe,
and the human housing it, a short one.

The world is an institution. In it there are
divisions. Within those, sections. Report
anywhere. Everywhere is not home. Voice-controlled
left, image-controlled right. Drugs
to the middle. Use for leverage those
whose grandmothers wrote verse
for the Yiddish papers
last century—
bridges with one end up in the air:
the world they go to has vanished

but the other end is planted in these sons
whose persons read:
we cannot regret any longer
a world we cannot live in,
i.e. pre-WW2 Europe.
Not monster-enough for huge gestures
but sufficiently in love with them
not to telephone.
We are waiting for the tone of the times to change.

Perhaps he isn't new but typical.
Intelligence, an appendix, residual,
or as in a book, useful,
self-endangered conspiracy,
solo center of toy-web,
dislikes women and children,
i.e. the powerless.
Tho he serenades them:

"I love the house I live in
with the creek running nearby
and the woman I live with.
Things are therefore good
especially with the trees
coming all out in flowers these days."
House, creek, woman, trees.
"But I can't work there
so here I creep."
The loner who goes crazy
if someone touches his car.
A new kind of guy, half tech,
half militant mason sent to set up
technofascist popcorn stands at the cross-
roads of Sentence & Reason.
We envy your ability to invent, he says.
Sure. And I'm the Pope.
Expressing regret for temporary
inability to control the poetic
sans products,
while looking no doubt
for some way to market it.

I immediately later change my mind.
He premeditates only the obvious.

I meet his mom
and his girlfriend Louisa-Marie.
There is tea, punch, petits fours, cake,
little sandwiches with the crust cut off,
and a fellow who plays the piano
even if you tell him to stop.
A Harvard PhD in nursing
recommends a feminist book on horses.
We are here to celebrate his book.
Everyone is friends of the good-natured nurse Louisa-Marie.
They take his entire stash of contributor's copies,
and only one of them asks him to sign it.
Everybody reads a line or two,
someone asks for a couple of words
explaining the thing.
He says,
"Skim it, you'll get the idea."
After that everyone goes on the porch
to look at Union Memorial Hospital
looming ahead in many-windowed splendor,
and everyone says how much they like Baltimore.

"Can I interest you in a Hassidic story?"

It appears that a rebbe in rags
passes by a rich man's house
and begs for a crust of bread.
The rich man sets his dogs on him.
A few years later,
the rebbe, grown wealthy,
passes by again, dressed in finery,
in a fine coach drawn by fat horses.
The rich man asks him in to be feasted.
When the soup comes,
the rebbe pours it on his clothes.
When the meat comes
he takes it to the stables
and feeds it to his horses.
Why? the rich man asks.
When I came here before,
the rebbe says,
I was still the same man
but you didn't feed me.
It is obvious that

you are not feeding the man
but the clothes
and the horses.

"Likewise, Harvard and I."

The many splendored windows of Union Memorial
are reflected in the proud face
of the nurse Louisa-Marie.
Behind them the sick converse with the beyond.

"The book is a revenge on father,
among other things.
I reinvent Evil as father,
then I kill him.
But I take no credit for it.
It came from elsewhere. It is
bigger than us."

The healthy PhD notes that the archers
on the cover are engaged
in a beautiful dance
though the dance is war.
By the Tree of Life
in Golden Gate Park –
"I saw beauty
in the universe
stretched about me
and containing me.
It was composed
of violent strife
of the rending
of flesh in history.
That was my Burning Bush,
does the Bible really say
that God didn't let Moses
into the Promised Land
because he broke the tablets,
or is that just speculation?"

The guy at the piano says it's in the Bible.

Moses,
another guy who

invented the father he set out to kill,
a more perfect father for the deed.

"I'll see to it that
the last humanist haha
is gone by dawn.
We create nothing:
T.S.P. makes certain
expressions & their by-products
inevitable.
I trace the demise thus:
Galileo shoves us out of the center of the universe.
Darwin out of the center of nature's world.
Freud out of fate's pilot seat.
Me, out of history.
Individual choice is the very thing
that takes *general* choice from us.
Individual choices create anarchy
and anarchy is ruled by T.S.P.
which infects the whole
with its imperatives."

It all comes down I say,
to another
deification of power,
a popular thing these days.

The scholar takes off his shoes.

"Opposition, if you're thinking it,
is only possible thorugh the creation
of *reasonable systems.*"

Fascism by any other name.
I mean, how much power
do you use to restrain power?
How do I get outside?
The world's been shrinking too much as it is.
They're taking down the outside as we speak.
The penis, a tough survivalist, alone holds the fort.
The soul wants to get out of the rain
like any pitiful bourgeois.
The proverbial They becomes It.
It is bigger than us and indifferent to us.

It pursues only its own aims
& the little in us that isn't It,
our so-called "humanity" is lost.

Never say
it says
it speaks
it talks
because it
does not

Of the whole grace
it can express only the part
that understands its own impotence.
To describe the working
of the outside in this here ah lingo
is to destroy el paradiso by the motion.
Oh thing where hast thou gone?
Language unweaves the world
it weaves when we give the spiel.
Without its gates of Jews,
el Paradiso stands unmoved
inside the humid critters
taking out the garbage only
to find themselves immersed
in the starbright riches of the azure flowing sea
where all at once everything that is *not you*
is THERE!
And then to get in a slow biz like this!

Only the garbage didn't get taken out.
It's still there,
it's too dark outside, hon.
We likes it in here
under the atomic umbrella
even as Something pushes us out,
we can do it tomorrow.
So we lie and lie ourselves open
to the devastation of divine indifference
—a redundancy—only to end up
reinventing morality,
the science of indoor living.

Which brings up a Question:

did God *really* give Moses the tablets?
Or did Moses carve them up there,
with a primitive tool,
knowing that the Burning Bush
didn't really give a damn—
being neither Good nor Bad
nor Concerned—
but that if he wanted his people to survive,
he had better come up with something quick.
And when he did
God the Bush *did* get pissed off,
and fixed it so that Moses
would never get home.
Does *anything* give a damn?

'T.S.P. gives a damn
about what serves It.
It is not served by morality.
Moses invented an aberration:
he rose against T.S.P.
Morality is a system of natural value.
Natural value is based on biological selection.
What is selected is good
because it is what works.
The body is good
because it is the best nature has
come up with.
We must defend
the integrity
of our organism
by means of morality.
But in Civilization
we confuse
the aims of
Power
with the aims of our integrity.
But the two differ.
In the undifferentiated,
amoral primal It
we had no choice.
But in Civilization
we do not share nature's purpose,
so we must split It consciously
into good It and Bad It.

We have to invent
a conscious Manichaeism
on the basis of what's good for us.
But since too often what is good
for us
is not good
for the rest of this world,
which has in it also birds
and trees and seabeds,
we must apply morality both inward
as a kind of brakes
and as a weapon against
the objective power of It.
We have to perform
the same operation as Moses:
transform
divine indifference
into benevolence."

But the Good we bend to our purposes
is weakened,
while the Bad grows stronger.
(It's the only game in town.)
So Moses helps us along
the path to destruction.
Realising this, he committed suicide.
It wasn't God
kept him out of Paradise:
Moses didn't want to go there
because he knew
it was a made-up place.
Moses didn't want
to see his metaphor
come to life,
didn't want to live in his
invention. He had rent asunder
the sacred energy,
just as we split the atom.
He must have thought that by refusing
to authorize his fiction,
he could put divinity back together.
His suicide was an attempt
at synthesis
by removing the author

from the work.
Too late.
The split atoms don't unsplit.
Differentiation is evolution.
The demiurgic is destructive:
the universe it creates
destroys the universe it describes.
The word is chemical.
Reason and Poesy.
Containment and Escape.

FRANCHISING THE FIGHT

The only way to fight
is to open up franchises
hoping that the thing
released somehow
from centrality
includes but does not limit
the body it defends.
Reason,
humanity's collective building,
perhaps the edifice
of culture itself,
isn't very old
and is rather puny
when inspired babble rises.
Revelation
and prophecy,
unreasonable speech,
synergistic and viable
disintegrates the sacred It,
deconstructs itself
obliquely even as it follows
an almost mathematical morality.
A "scientific" poetics
and a "poetic" law.
"Mechanization" and "objectification"
are fully present
in the language of the lamentations.
Fighting common sense
one arrives in the City of God.
This fight causes the Debil-God to come.
Debil looks like an assistant professor.

The text has certain therapeutic effects.
The thinking that it encourages is palliative.
It is tonic and absorbing and keeps us awake.
It makes staying up a pleasure.
The indifference
of power accounts
for the failure of generation
after generation
to bring about peace.
We feel most utopian
and least articulate
under the umbrellas
made from Ebil itself.
Words are only tenuously
connected with sense.
We must cultivate this tenuousness
as if it were the whole territory.
The tragicomedy of utterance
is that we all trample
the same narrow isthmus
between word and world.
The L in the belly of the word
is the Khyber Pass,
the center
of ambition.
Its conquerors control
the back and forth.
The power now controlling
the traffic between
reality and symbols
is journalism.
When poetry was in charge we
saw more reality, more world.
Now we see more symbols, more
words. Some of us stand
in the middle of the traffic
screaming: THERE IS NO BRIDGE!
(And in the Bay Area too!)
The bridge groans, barely capable
of handling the weight.
(The Trampled Isthmus)
The bridge is a body,
an Exquisite Corpse
formed by the former guard

who cannot die.
By offering the golemic corpse
of a literary corpse instead,
they hope to separate
literature from physiology.
The inability to separate them is
what we die from.
When their Exquisite Corpse dies,
the gods will
take the bridge with them the way
they would have taken all of us
if we hadn't made them this.
What's more, they will enjoy
it better: less of a mess.
We interpose
a memorable body between
their murderous desires
and their sentimentality.
Graffiti on the bridge:
Hormones + Experience = Reality.
Even so, downhome narration
rarely fails thought,
tho thorgasm eludes our poets.
We've got to hit us with the Tertium Organum.
It is our good fortune to possess
the key to inspiration
in that yonder cabinet
and our misfortune to be forced
to intention. Fortunately
our intentions are (not) good. Had
they been (not) bad we'd be tense.
We sit on the cyclone
fence, dangle feet over the gene-
rators below. Sitting on the fence
used to be a simple affair. A country
sort of thing with a straw twixt
teeth. Anxiety's industrial now.
Nero's neon had he had it
would have been hard core. At
the core of his madness lay neon.
All bright future things lie
at the upset cores of the insane.
The upset cores of the insane
are generators. Their humming

turns the engine of history.
Our sweet predilections and love
connections feed it juice.
Our shells feed it oil. When it gets
enough intention
it runs smooth. But when a core lights
up without the yoke of sense
it trembles, sputters, chokes.
Ah, misery inspired by pure rant!
We equate adventure
with violence, mistaking
the jukebox cores of the insane
with the ordering of goats and sheep
on a statistical hillside.
Reason is bricks, we said,
on them we build the reasonable
edifice of science.
We eat the use.
The poet on the other hand waves
doubting hand in dead air,
sunbathes on the roof or, worse, jumps.
The engine of history does not
hide in the brick edifice of science.
Nor does the house of bricks hide
inside the engine. Nor is
the house the engine or vice
versa. When faced with in-
compatible metaphors science
calls poesy on the race phone:
cortex to cortex.
I will not help you, says poesy,
until you get these bricks out of the way.
I can't see the sky.
So philosophy clears le debris.
And this engine, poesy says, hums too loud,
it disturbs my reverie.
Science shuts off the engine
with a communist potion from his kit.
Great silence falls between the metaphors.
The sky is a perfect picture of the past.
The silence the perfect future.
In the present tense we the tense
wait for something to say itself.
Philosophy holds its vial frozen

at the exact moment of its use. Nothing
budges. The universe is present. An insane
core lights up. The engine coughs, it
starts, it sputters. The dinosaurs come
out of the books. The mechanic, a Mr.
Nietzsche, wipes his forehead with a greasy
rag. A Monsieur Pasteur,
vows that the engine will not move. He
hastily begins to pile bricks in front
of it. NO PASSERAN, he shouts! A wall
of reason stands before the thief
and his demented motor! The unexpected
and the shady have done the job.
Eternally the honest sucker is thwarted
by the cunning of these two. Eternally
he vows to set things straight. Next
time he's taken worse. And always
there is more blood on the floor and more
psychology. The bricks are books,
the tower has a million floors.
It falls inevitably down
between irreconcilable metaphors.

Meanwhile at the party
merely a rose away
Union Memorial in the Exxon-lit night
was still—
we could heard the flowing of the river Styx
Sighing under the wordrain that beat on it.
Afraid of nothing but of leeches
we cannot practice what it preaches.

Three days later Scholar left for the creek,
the woman & the flowering bougainvillea
leaving behind only his word-mantilla.
The anxious telephone burst several times:
"Is my book merely a book?"
It's as great as The Origin of the Species,
his friend said.
To himself: a book is a book.

SEVEN POEMS

TO DEPLANE

To deplane, to exit
from this casual music of drinking air
(I just typed it *drjinking*, pidgin Dutch,
but I have not been, have not)
to leave this now would engender a sadness
bigger than the stain on the tarmac. My business
is to live, and in this living push
forward from the self's endogment,
its chainlink to plywood in the crabgrass sideyard,
not a fake,
not an engine,
not a star.
No, take this thing up again, up
from the shimmying of ancestral wagons,
alluvial mud, the herd animal cotillions,
from the metronome mob-waltz on listless floors.
Up from subtrahend and minuend, from less and more.
Take it up from the waiting in nested rooms.
Drag I-double from I-double
to the ancient door.
My place
is with the svelte
and silver plane,
a thought directly from Apollo's forehead
into Dionysus' side
written into these remnants of thin air
last flappings of a passing July.

CHOSEN

The bagmen of the droning noise
those creatures of the pension plan
dropped numbers in their neutered eyes
and clucked their tongues as I passed by

whose homeless head, unpillowed, raised
The Headdress of Lone Eagle's Nest
a once-proud thing in clotted snot
where blue-black botflies shone like gems

that rustled in an ice-pick wind
—it found my heart, that meaty cave.
Yet I had no taste for regret.
I curled up sleeping with my dick

whose fangs were sunk into my neck
who bled me in that desert place
where televisions sang of love
and schoolgirl circles dotted i's.

CRAWLER

Who was he? A dog
up on hind legs, strutting
in soiled pajama top.
Bottomless, scratching hisself,
smoking stale OTB-class cigar.
Said he was my reason and my soul,
my bookie, my confessor.
Ran the pee-wee Grand Guignol
between bed and dresser.
The flap around this dude.
You'd think he wassa, what,
Roman emperor in some movie.
The bullshit artist's artist
as 3-time loser.
Don't tell him
how I iced him
once in a dream
woke up to see
his breathing expressive-even-in-sleep face
a mild accusation on the pillow.
Don't say
we could have called each other out from the key of dead
except we choked, froze
by the racks of whitebread in a 7/11,
bought into lotteries, suckled chump heavens.
Played out the rest as double solitaire. Dun-colored days.
Sidestreet living. Dostoevski's poor.
Where is he? tonight?
Somewhere
out in the cold
or holed up with Ma Banshee behind railroad flat doors
(she's whispering in his ear: *it's all yours, sugar*
let's joypop
the smell of the score.) Smell:

pissy diapers, boiled cabbage, hair in the drains. Yo. Sure.

I might even cross the street to see him.
We could go another round
except we won't.

CRIB IN THE ROCK

nothing comes; outside
the slush-spread parking lot
is pocked by rain . cold,
knocking of pipes .
the fridge hums . the days,
once stacked, now run
all together threaded
by the birds who fly
through them
and the slipping sun
. what we want
is neither deliverance from
nor endless falling in . the burden
is to have passed the perfection of trees
and yet fall short of angels . it is this
felt-gap we'd cure
with all the noisy ardor
of high exertion, or learn
to take up silence, finding
the crib in the rock, meshing
our cars into the streams of traffic
garlanding the broad earth:
an earthly peace at last
terrestrial union card at last
. dog
barks; furnace clicks and fires up .
outside on the parking lot
a someone coughs
"Who said?"
"He wants some."
"Not Doc's."
. and thus and so
and thus and so
lifetimes pass
and the big rock candy cathedrals
rise up shining
or do not

TOOTH OF BLOND

A new alphabet.
The consonants
are everyday objects:
cups and saucers, twigs, bars of soap.
For vowels the distant
yowls of a coyote.
With this we manufacture
the name inside your name.
Or—what—did you think you were

immune?
Ja. Nein. Vielleicht.
Until you felt
the tooth of blond.
Until the wider brooding
came to separate your fibers
into the hour's tall voices
each talking its facet
in the depths of smoked mirrors
where one could rummage to find whatever in oneself
might match the dedication in policework. We sensed

in the photographs
undertones of chartreuse-green fluorescence
radioactive
washed through mezzotints of bone antiquity.
We tasted
its tincture in the gutter ales of Kreuzberg,
the juice of laundry, preserved
as a memory of high country windows,
a midsummer's day, through which
lake breezes had taken
the smell of new-mown hay and
the feeling called "no bottom" and

lately this drifting on the kingsize bed.
You call it "all I am" "the constant prince"
have become the daylight's passenger
and the nighttrain's expression
a bolder nephew now, a
rider on through off and on, a
tourist of the real.

THE BALL

Nothing, not even a French supertrain
can expedite this destiny now.

Each body only seems to hesitate
before falling facedown into history

and the altered music (rank calliope)
swells up around them all.

Don't say "beautiful"
because even "necessary"

would put too much spin
on the ball that bounces

along the tops of sentences
through Palladian arches

and out the frame.
The frame is folded

and fed into the flames.
Their enormous shadows play

as the colossal Punch-and-Judy
drama of the multiplied

individual soul
left to gnaw its own vitals

when its utopias turn kakashit
and Arctic night bores down.

Redemption? It's in view
from the attic window:

white petals
scattered on the ground

ungathered
in Kansas or Komi.

POEM

Life is like a bobsled run.
Down you go! and then it's done.

Were you frightened? Were you high?
Did the blurry stuff whizz by?

Did you wiggle? Were you still?
Were you with me on the hill?

Did you hit a patch of bad?
Or was it mostly smooth and glad?

Whoopsie daisy, sugar bun.
Down you go! and then it's done.

JAMES GAVER

TWO POEMS

IT JUST SO HAPPENS

Call it a dream. It does not change anything.
Wittgenstein

To tell you the truth, I haven't been sleeping well.
I fall asleep, but I don't sleep. I'm only asleep.
The fire dies, the room grows colder, and when I awake
I am only awake.
When I'm not sleeping, that's just how it is with me.
It can always be another way, but then it's only another way.
What keeps us all awake, if only because we think it does,
Is passing the long night thinking only
That we think it does, or thinking
Something else, and having it just be something else.
You lie in the twisted sheets, perceiving yourself as being there.
You listen for a time to the clock, and think of it as a clock.
You feel a mild sense of fear, if only because you do so,
Because your fear is somehow as such, and this in itself
Makes you fearful; it seems to be frightening you twice,
Once when it does, and then again when it does.
When you feel frightened, it happens that you do so.
You can always feel otherwise, but then that just happens too.
The fire that thinks you to sleep, on the warm bed of its ashes,
Staring in on its frightening self, with the same eyes
It goes out in, could always be thought of as causing
The dark thing that it comes to, but when that's
What things come to, it just so happens that they do.
When I can't get to sleep, the truth is I'm not sleeping.
It could always be a dream, but that would only be the truth.
If I'm awake, and I am awake, then that's what the case is;
I'm just afraid, as I lie here, that it only happens to be true.

NO ONE FEELS LIKE I DO

Don't think life is like this. Don't think like I do.
Those who suffer, after all, are often those who suffer
In spite of themselves. They feel pain because they do so.
Some feel an ache that is more than just an ache they feel.
Others start to hurt because something has started to hurt.
There Are forms of pain that aren't Just
A Form of Pain, that don't feel like this,
Which only feels like this.
Feeling the way I do, I alone can be said to feel this.
I could share it with the others, but I'm afraid they'd feel it too.
The ache that I feel within, which is only the ache
To feel within, is the one thing
That I need, it's a way of being
Alone with myself, so don't nod your head
When I tell you about
The way it feels; when I nod my head,
I feel only a nodding head.
The burden I bear myself, which doesn't prove
I can bear myself, is a dead weight
To be sure, it's a way of being
The load that I bear, so don't lift me up
Like a thing that weighs
As much as itself; when I feel the weight,
I have only the feeling of weight.
When I look you in the eye, I have the feeling your eye is looked at.
When I listen to what is said, there is a sense of something said.
When I think of myself alone, and I take your hand
In the hand I'm alone with, don't squeeze back
As though something you feel
Could pass between us; if your touch is a sign,
I feel only the touch of a sign.
When the last feeling dies, I plan to be there as it does so.
I know I'll feel better, I just won't know that I do.
Those who differ, after all, are all the same in feeling different.
No one feels like I do, because I don't feel like I do.

R. NEMO HILL

THREE POEMS

SELF-PORTRAIT

to speak about oneself
is often just an accident.
it is a brutal accident.
both vehicles are completely demolished:
both the blue pontiac
(which symbolizes the perceivable universe)
and the black or white pickup truck
(which symbolizes the
mechanism of perception).

i start out with the whole world photographed in my head,
and soon enough photography becomes obsolete.
then—
diagrammed within the heart's unbroken tendrils,
there appears a series of flames, followed by an explosion,
followed by one brief moment of love.
the Captain lies panting somewhere near the entrance to the spine,
his jacket (made of some unidentifiable Grey-Matter) is torn
and stained by huge bloody cave-paintings.
day follows night follows day follows night.

i end up with the whole world photographed in my head
and the Captain cradled in my arms,
beseeching to be treated as a child (a lost child) (a frightened child)

and all the while he is secretly raking in the dough.

CHILDREN'S STORY

it's a story for children:
one morning, god puts his clothes on backwards.
which is why we have thunder, boys and girls.
which is why we have great empty cider barrels
rolling overhead—rolling, rolling, rolling across the
tops of our skulls, boys and girls,
and crushing us with the weight of an entire
unnameable universe.

and the thickness of the skin, boys and girls,
is the creator's way of relaxing on a sunday afternoon,
in front of the television set,
in front of the baseball diamond on the television set,
while his wife is busy in the kitchen baking cookies
(baking gingerbread men).

a child in the back of the classroom raises her hand
and asks, "what is blood?".

blood, boys and girls, is nature's way of saying
have a nice swim,
but don't go out too far,
don't go out over your head,
over your head where you might get flattened
by one of god's early morning barrels rolling backward across the sky.

"the blue sky?" asks the young girl.

"yes. the blue sky."

THE TIP OF THE TONGUE

something can always be said.
of a tree, we say that it opens like the end of a long wet tunnel.
of an empty room, we attempt to say nothing, and then
(at the last minute) a synonym for ripe fruit
is found undressing on the tip of the tongue.
of an apple, we say that it has the courage of slogans.

a sip of bread is a fine example
of the plastic found deep inside the lungs:
the mother of invention is nodding her head in agreement,
her hands busy with birds nails and hammers.
she is, actually, sad today.
and a small creature stands before the human membrane
and pounds upon it at regular intervals: like a bass drum
it vibrates with a resounding thunder
and never splits
or shatters.

the human membrane is intact,
and yet a sheet of paper can tear its own heart to bits
and all because language is an ineffective court of law
in which we all gather round in brotherhood
to watch our favorite failures of principle.

of the house in which we live, we say that it revolves in time
to the music.
of a glass of vodka, we say that it has borrowed an extraordinary
story.
of speech, we can say that it proceeds—
and i've never seen rhyme laugh so hard or so long.

WILLIAM CORBETT

EAST MAUCH CHUNK—JIM THORPE

"Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all"
—Walt Whitman

GOING TO JIM THORPE

Watch your footing down the iron steps . . . they ring
. . . Steam . . . A hug then other arms lift you up . . .
Single thread tracks into the East Mauch Chunk
station . . . Torn down . . . And rusting silent six
tracks on the Mauch Chunk side once carried freight for
the New York Central . . . Begin again . . . Pass the one storey
joined company houses Palmerton zinc mill smokey towers
and over the twisting cement highway cut into hill's side . . .
Field of junked cars . . . Trout hatchery billboard . . . Lehighton
. . . Begin again . . . Coming down Mansion House hill Bear
Mountain on the right . . . Curve descending until the town
hidden, infolded by two hills begins just after
you remember it did, bares itself and begins
low brick Eagles Club and on to Courthouse Square
up the hill road cut by steel into rockface where water
seeps and ice cascades and there are the postered
faces of men who ran for Sheriff, County Assessor, Probate
Judge and cross the bridge's booming wood planks . . .
That bridge is no more yet the Lehigh runs wide,
shallow and the color of coal dust . . . And climb the hill
up Center Street street of red clay and cinders . . . Stop
by the hugely knotted tree trunk
To go and stay with men and women
who do not drive and have never been further
by train than Wilkes-Barre or Allentown or
Philadelphia for a ball game or farther still
once for a funeral, the sister's husband whose house
they couldn't force themselves to eat in so filthy
were her plates and cups . . .
To see the carp slow orange and gold ingots
feathery drift in the silk mill pool . . .

Movie theatre seats at Browns arranged facing
a TV screen to watch the Puddin'head-Granny-Ashburn-
Robin Roberts Phillies Whiz Kids play and the A's
managed by stringy ancient Connie Mack dressed
in high collar and street clothes . . . To hit
a triple over third base the ball rolling into
shrub and dark woods deer came from to browse
goldenrod as they came evenings to the edge of fields
beyond town . . . You drove there with the One Armed Fella,
Milt the Barber, the Young Fella whose car had no
floorboards and you counted the brown and tawny deer
before he leaned on the horn and they bounded
once then twice . . . White handkerchief of their tails
into the woods . . .
Men who loved deer hunting, high school football,
Legion baseball played as they had played by their sons
so that one day Buck Rader set out by bus to play Class D
with the Yankees, the Hose House slot machines,
beer and pickled hardboiled eggs turned purple . . .
Men who lost an arm or leg or fingers coupling cars
for the railroad . . . X who lost his eye hunting
and had the socket sewn closed with a cicatrix
Men who go for pleasure summer evenings
to the tables of the Jolly Men's club
in a forest clearing and the smoke from their cigars
is blue above their heads . . . And their wives
who talk in the dark on their front porches
waiting for their men to return from trout
fishing or huckleberry picking, who wear
white gloves when shopping overtown, who scrub
their front steps every good day of the year,
who gossip over bridge, who play bingo
Saturdays at "Bingo Pat" O'Briens,
who cakewalk under the fire of torches,
who wear aprons over their housedresses,
who carry grudges, who bury husbands,
whose children move away and send their sons
and daughters to spend the summer
who are here with their men as a child saw them
sees them still like cut-outs against the sky
like the bad men carved on the tombstone
eyes among leaves and smoking gun barrel snout
that brought down the good judge
falling dead on the stone . . . Molly McGuries black hand

jail house wall . . . Fish sent to Chicago in the mailbags . . .
Digger the Undertaker four quarts today . . . Baby skeletons
buried under the nunnery that stood on Center Street
Hopalong who masturbated on park benches
Sep who wasn't right in the head
Crumb and Donnie and Paulie who should have
stayed in the Navy and he'd be retired now
and the Bevans boy who went off into the woods
and just shot himself and the "Roundheaded" Irish,
the Hunkies, Polacks, Dutchboys and thick skulled krauts . . .
Going back to Jim Thorpe where he who never
set foot in the town, whose bones were disturbed
from somewhere in California and brought here
to a red sandstone tomb cracked one night by someone
with a hammer, his medals somewhere else,
no cancer hospital, no light industry, no nickel
a week from the Eagles . . . A handbag factory . . .
Going back the hills that begin the Poconos
are a bowl and a black storm paw claps
over them, Asa Packer mansion, Four Presidents
visited passing through and the railroad
switchback was sold to the Japs just before
World War II, the 4,000 who worked
on the railroad down to four . . . Going back
the hand shapes mind's flickers
the mind keeps what the eye saw
enlarged and this past is most present
the now of which they would deny each part . . . Seen as a child
their flag new washed sheets
and pillowcases clean white their color . . .
Taste the springwater and tin cup's
icy lip . . . sleep on ironed sheets . . . Hear the winter's
coal rattle, Junkman sing out "Rags and Old Iron,"
"Rags and Old Iron" and his stout horse's iron hooves
and the night's scratchy park loudspeakers Frank Sinatra
"I'll see you in my dreams" . . . Going back
the conductor cries out "Naz-ar-ath
Bath, Don't Forget Your Pack-age-as"
gather up the things that are yours
as they are gathered up in you

THE WELL

Let the bucket down
let what fills it fill it to the lip
what slops over slop over
and be lost on this draw
and be there when the bucket is let down again.
Let the hard earth cellar floor be there
Caroline Harder, the Mummey brothers, Tommy McArdle,
Pippi Rader, the hairless babyman dealing "Authors."
Let the snap purse, leather purse worn
on the baker's belt be there
it is and has been since he made change,
careful with his coins, for puffy powdered
jelly doughnuts that sparkling leafy afternoon.
Let the red Schwinn bike be there
let the red stone spit on one side
tossed high wet or dry be there
Butchy Eichhorn, Harry the lefthander,
Connie "Beans," the dry ice cellar
where beer and soda are stacked in crates
be there as trapped inside the fear never leaves
let the names come up
what sign of them remains, faces lost
Ricky Rawn too beside me in the wagon
black Eton suit and cap. Black Jiggs scottie dog.
Let the house in ruins above
Brady's Lake . . . No, it appears
a print with moon, a movie still.
Let the right-step, left-step stop cakewalk
hold its breath at the arrow clear from dark
torches make darker, blaze deeper
and torches above the fur hatted head
of Ethan Allen be there as he boldly knocks
on Fort Ticonderoga's door
as he knocked and the commandant answers
in his nightshirt holding a candle
up to the handsome steel engraved faces.
Draw the bucket up with image pure
and stripped by time, by memory worn down
to essence, to witness, mirror smokey
blue ropey laurel leaf cigar smoke
and cough and swearing bad words song
"In for stealing Lehigh Valley coal

where bedbugs play shimmy round my hole."
Grape arbor lattice makes shadow
of sunlight . . . Penn Lake shallows crooked wavelets . . .
vegetable hawker's tin scoop scale . . .
What ARE these things and names in me?
The strike and pull of a catfish
horned and black deep in the dark.
The slimy cream catfish underside.
Pick and shovel clinks, miners under
Landsford streets. How deep are they?
Little Green Riding Hood let the bucket down
once to brain or heart's depth
the stream it seeks runs unceasingly
nothing then was pure as now it comes
to light, comes free from the mess of days
sudden as the deer, buck or doe, leapt
over the car's hood at Bear Run
where we visited the lake of stones
if it comes to light
if it is dark there at all
let the bucket down.

SATURDAY EVENING POST COVERS

Peagreen backed books
locked in glass cabinets.
The man of the house died
without having laid a fire
ever in his livingroom hearth.
so much mess it would make.
Winter mornings they carried ash
from furnace to backyard garden
where the green bell peppers
she was pleased to call "mangoes" grew.
He went overtown to work
forty years in the post office
sending for fun a few
dead fish in the Chicago bags.
She swept and cleaned the porch

and everything then wore gloves
down to the A&P. Pork
for the sauerkraut. Dutch Cleanser.
Soap to unwrap and store
the bars to keep longer.

HOUSE DEVIL STREET ANGEL

Who sat on the curb
who took up nuggets
babies of cooling fresh tar
who daintily picked sand away
and who put the moist tar lumps
in his mouth chewing, smiling, chewing
until his grandmother ran from the house
to drag him away
sticky, triumphant, blackened clean clothes
who they brought home in a wheelbarrow drunk

PIG

After dinner the cards
dealt around the Schlect's
kitchen table. Paulie, me
Carl, Joanie, Shortcake
and in the center
on an oilcloth flower
the spoon is placed.
The trick is
to hold the hand
that lets you grab
the spoon and never
give away your reach
by so much as
a sound or twitch
God forbid a grin!

1948

There were no jews murdered
in Northeastern Pennsylvania towns
they knew but two or three
and those they knew had horns.
But old man Smith made a black man
piss outback in his field.
He stopped for gas at Smith's Grove
was so tall he spoke over the car
wouldn't have been on the road
to Lake Harmony in the first place
had he been other than Goose Tatum
driving a car full of Globetrotters
lost no doubt when he bought gas
and asked for the bathroom. Smith said no.
You just go around back, use the field.

LITTLE BROCKER GROWS UP

He wants no more rutching around
to sit still, cup of tea in hand
his dog asleep in the sun at his feet.
This simple and simpler he wants
to be somewhere else. But he cannot
be where he was what he was.
A pail full of huckleberries
to sort through throwing aside stems,
twigs, leaves and red unripe ones.
Big Brocker knew where the bushes grew
so high you stood stretching to reach
the berry clusters and the boat rocked.
He turned away from the nurse's
offer of water and sighed. When she
bent to check he was dead. Like that.
The way he hoped and wife agreed
to go that painless way is best.
This simple and simplest Little Brocker
wants a place where memory cannot follow,

daresen't he almost said, or will not insist
images without reason. No tar in the bubblegum.
No Palmerton butcher's window, no grandfather's snore
to bring him to grief. A place that
will silence "Tasteecake, brogans, on the dole,
stocked trout, Frank Hoenig" or let these
not be the same dull world returning
breath to the mirror. Hold the mirror closer.
Who will hear them as he heard them?
See as he saw? Who will know?
When will feeling touch bottom?

SPRINGWATER

Not three or four steps
off the blacktop to Lake Harmony
the spring we stop to drink from
dipping the tin common cup.
Christ, water that cold
you wait, hold still
or risk a headache.
There are stars in it
and deeps beyond deep
where no German browns
no rainbow trout swim.
Plunge in your arm
there is no human feeling.
A screen of brush held aside
there is a clearing
grass grows up to stone
built lip. We kneel and dip,
each one of us, the cup.

FIRST POEM

"The gray sky sets on the gray hills
The town living out its death"

Whose voiceprint in mind's ear?
So long there now no way to know,
to tell it from my own.
Dusk. Late August. Alone.
Thirteen when passing the park swings
these words in lines came to me
and obeying their law I wrote down
what I heard hearing it then
seeing it, the very physical things.
As ignorant as innocent, glad, solemn,
proud and eager to please
as nonchalant as anything ever done.
Thirty years and this seems a wide field
furrows and a wind, its edge
that ditch that ran behind the swings.
What a thing to begin with, an elegy.

EAST MAUCH CHUNK

East Bear Mountain
I come again
the past will rise
he steps from the train in Navy whites
this man, my father after four years
I'm told I cried.
I come again
and the past will meet me
where North Street becomes
state highway under the keystone sign
and Jim Thorpe Oklahoma Sauk-Fox
of Carlisle College is buried
and not one other promise
made in the Hotel American kept.
I am here again
this man walking up Center Street's
steep hill come from Milt's barbershop
who latches the back gate
crosses the alley towel over shoulder
soap in hand to shower upstairs

past the pool table in the Hose house
and return wet haired, refreshed, free to do so.
These phantoms in new equation
yet sing-song accents native to me
that I might know.
Thorpe's Summit Hill wife it was sold
the town on his name to revive
what the railroads left, the Switzerland of America,
huge gloomy high raftered stations
empty and the men driving
to New York and further working construction.
This dead man stripped of trophies,
medals in Sweden: this man ruined
for one season of semi-pro ball
they took in desperation for their own
whom he had never laid eyes on
who they knew only as a meal ticket
so their own, their young might stay
they gave their name for him and a tomb.
I come here after my own
speechroot, my home in me, those who
attend with their part, who witness
and address, those who leave yet stay
who do not forget, who are my tribe,
my jews even as they were Babel's
even as he mounted and rode away
I come again.

THE MARVEL

Albert, frère, took his hard lessons from God, père, a dark dirty God full of tricks and rumination, a spit always running down his chin, dropping on his brown lap where he held his maps, or Albert there on the knee with a toy or yellow hat. Albert was crying; there was a tear on the hat like a burn spot and God took his large ugly finger and wiped the tear off the hat, showed his finger to Albert, see. Albert was thinking about flowers, about the nocturne, about water pipes underground in winter cities and his mama, Tille, a woman of space and Easter feathers rolled up in a drawer. God could easily read his thoughts, could rifle through them, but didn't, had his own thoughts, still as standing water in an old rain barrel or in a dried up birdbath. His thoughts, though, as thoughts will, tangled with Albert's. Four things: all these are mine, all these flowers and the summer carousel behind them; you, Albert, may have one or maybe two for a thought or dream; the nocturne is my pleasure, my own wall of solitude, the thing I bring to myself as a gift from lighted light and the sticks of potted earth, my boredom; night is my nocturne's fancy, my play poem. These, he went on in his shiny voice, a stream of melody hooked to a harmony played by light spirits, celestials, water pipes under cities in the long dream of winter, say, he said, in Sweden, my Albert, are breathings, the way I have made my water float through cities and yet the cities drying their tears when I close my fist like this (Albert started and the toy fell off his lap, broke blue, red) and the ice shatters and thousands of things swirling, Albert dear, and running fast down the drain. God interrupted himself, his lively streaming voice, and reached for the toy, arlequin, and kissed its wound and held it for Albert to kiss. We'll find it, he said, him, a graveyard and have our friend, the monks, and your mother lay a thick earth blanket of psalms and fifty strong lamentations, I can do what I want, see. And, your mama, the mother of Albert, Albert mère, I know her and I've pushed a finger, this one or this one, through her thin head and touched those thoughts she has, all green and upright, my ability to do so, sir, and she takes the dead thoughts I've touched with this finger or this, and curls them in the drawer of feathers, for you, dear, for your maturity.

II

Albert, in his fineness and his wrinkled pants and doublet, slid off God's knee to the floor and skittered away on child's legs to inquire of his mother, Tille, there in her room, packing and unpacking for the journey she would make soon to Hell, for he would make her, mère, queen of Hell for it needed a queen, all those yelling spoiling devils and the troublemaker, bowling day and night, dashing from corner to corner, peeing and cursing, scraping their elbows and sticking fingers in their eyes. She packed her hats, her feathers, and the dry things under the bed, and Albert climbed up on the bed. They knew they could be seen, if he, somewhere, wanted to see. Still they lingered in each other's eyes, and thought there. Goodbye Mother dear, formal mother. He pressed something at her, a hat. She put the hat on; the devils would not recognize it as a hat from God's house, rather an unknown hat, a quiet spectacle so yellow and pure with a flat childish shape, and Albert off again and a little tilted to find his father and rest.

III

Mère gazed into the tilted mirror and saw the devils laughing, each of them a soft yellow hat, but taking her valise and her letter—a few short strokes of an eglantine pen by God: Dear The World of Hell and Distinguished First Servant—she slid into the mirror of mirrored yellow hats and made her funny way to a new room of hell, the room for the queen, with something of heaven in it, herself, and then abided with some peering through the windows and lifting the fringe of the bedcover, scraping across the floor and coiling round the old-fashioned silken pullcord hanging from the ceiling.

IV

Now, God whispered in a leathery voice into the small ear of Albert, frère, you have no mother but me, she has no son but those, and multiplying every hellish second into a million more shattered devils or smalls. This is an accomplishment of mine, agreed?

V

There was a tea party for the devils. They put a tent up of green and yellow stripes, the long throat of hell leading out and in was cleaned by the workaday stringy devils, sons of sons of sons, and almost forgotten. The queen, filled with expectation, was writing on a purple page her daily argument to Him, with a subscriptum in a lyrical tone with many polysyllables and all flexible like an interesting toy, to him. Today, she said, is the day, and it was. Albert, frère, and his God, the husband, watched from a narrow heavenly perch, just room enough for the two, one on the lap of the other and freshly washed and combed like two open-faced May flowers, one larger and older, one smaller and pointy eared. There she is, they said, and she was, in her perfect Hell laces and ivory furbelows, all in a whited white with white trim and a white sheen over all of Hell, a big white bowl with the flies of Hell skimming around in their indecency. Father and Godson clung a little tighter to each other in the joy, but also in the fear, Albert's tight fists made stunted apples of the cloth of his father's golden garment.

VI

Albert heard his name in the night: A. He heard it and his eyes rimmed with pink amazement. He knew someone else could hear it too, if he chose to hear. And then he listened for his name again, and it came again: Aa. He waited still for the other hearing, but the night was a wad of opaline silence and not even a hearing could twink or tap through it. Still waited.

Silently and periodically, a mother entered the room and out swept her white arm, dangling from it a devil or the complete arlequin, tense and tightly coiled with vitality. Albert's eyes rimmed with pink amazement until all pink and ghastly, horrible pinwheels of light and rotation.

The arlequin leapt from the arm and settled on the diamond quilt of the bed, invisible now for its pattern and pure activity, a whir of energy and turbid life. Another thing was entering the room with its own animality and the room darkened for the scintillant battle, a spray of blows and hideous marks, a music of cries and vocal darts, sings, punctuations, alerts. The arlequin, something so small, was humming dangerously, moving faster and faster in its sinister open spins and counter-spins.

Suddenly night broke open to the calm play of violet morning and Albert, his eyes burnt corks, opened his eyes and spread their beams so hurt and small into the room illuminated in mild stripes and matinal flats.

The arlequin there in the matching quilt was asleep on its face, or dead. Farther in the room and away from the bed was the matched couple, Hell and deity, in a flat package together, a twirling unity with the two sides. Albert lay his dawn cheek on the pillow, the tenderest of flesh pockets and felt the sun, a new God, dancing or skating on it and up his sweetly pale arm, plus the air, the freshet from the twirling twin. His eyelids closed over the blue firmament and the clear mirrored surfaces and all the thoughts of the world returned to a unity, a flowery black walnut slipping through the deep internal cracks of the Northern city.

STEPHEN RODEFER

ANEMIC CINEMA

If this paesano asks me to move over or get out of this coffin,
I go back to the streets. If Marie calls, I'm not in.
I could never figure her. The world's number one figure
And nobody wrapped her up and took her home.
Some people have to be happy because they are nothing but rich.
Forming on little roofs around some little royalty, the pretender
Is king, though his wife is English and a commoner.
They rule the international set. You figure it. I can't.

It was at one of the smaller casinos, kind of late.
We'd finished gambling. We hadn't eaten together since lunch.
Every night is like every other night. Off screen you never laugh.
Next to another you have the body of an animal.
More of the same for the king. Is the gigolo known
To anyone? It *is* a born medicine—it kills pain.
I feel terrible charging my customers for gas.
Come on, Charlie, get behind the wheel. Welcome to the Bahamas.

She looked at me for no more than a beat and a half,
But I knew that I would remember her as long as I lived,
If I lived that long. When I got to Rome I decided to get to work.
She was the bride on whom the rain did fall.
She would be trousseau shopping. I know now that F was filled
With a moaning uneasiness, realizing that he was what other men
Were not, and vice versa. He wanted nothing more
Than to wait till they heard about this in southern California.

As you can see they have insisted on this bare face.
In an ancient chapel witnessed by a handful of strangers
The bride gave the groom the customary finger. Nobody could tell
Me that it was like this when the Borgias got married.
There was more going on inside the place than out.
Verago was the pastry cook, great but unspoke.
I listened for a message above the rhubarb but it was crazy;
I've forgotten the Spanish for Cinderella but have a glass anyway.

I saw her just once after the wedding night.
Twice really, but the second time she was dead.
She wrote the book on broken marriages.
The first time was exactly a week ago.
I was holed up in my hotel room, doing some writing.
She hadn't driven there in a rainstorm not to get a looksee.
There are some things which must be said sometimes for which
There may be no words. How much more like a dream can a dream be?

For a contessa who don't drink that's cognac.
You are proud but it is time to wake up.
First it's boloney, then it's stuffed birds,
Now cupcakes. Suppose he doesn't see it your way.
You have your baby anyway. In a base hospital
In Bengazi his body is blown apart in an explosion.
If you read the report you understand how only some parts remained.
This is why she has never been able to love anybody else since.

TWO POEMS

THE GARDEN

Oleander: coral
from lipstick ads in the 50s.

Fruit of the tree of *such* knowledge.

To "smack"
(thin air)
meaning kiss or hit.

It appears
in the guise of outworn usages
because we are bad?

Big masculine threat,
insinuating and slangy.

SENSE

Twigs stiffen
the fingers.

Love of nature
is a translation.

Secret nodding
in the figurative:

a corroboration
which is taken for
"companion."

a saw warbles,
somewhere,
and the yards too
are terraced.

*

Stress the birds lay
on that wire.

"*Poss*ibly"
holy parental emphases.

Big screen.

On the other side of
siding
cars go by.

String of fat
commas
as far as
we're concerned.

*

First the (non)sense
of direction.

"Stones to frogs,
then to princes
who do a circle dance
and turn to stone."

Good-night!

Meaning extends
her arm backward
ballerina-like:

wood-swirl
in the formica.

JAMES HILLMAN AND CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

PART ONE OF A DISCUSSION ON PSYCHOLOGY AND POETRY

CE: I propose that the first thing we address is two essays by Jung and what they imply about an opposition between psychology and art. In "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry," written in 1922, Jung states that art and psychology cannot be compared. While he acknowledges that they have close connections, and that the connections arise from the fact that the practice of art is a psychological activity, he still wants to keep them separate. He then makes a distinction between intentional and spontaneous art, and sets forth these two categories as follows:

Intentional Art	Spontaneous Art
"sentimental"	"naive"
Introverted	Extroverted
A conscious art, one that does not challenge comprehension	An unconscious art, one that is supra-personal and transcends understanding.

In an essay written in 1929, "Psychology and Literature," Jung moreorless maintains these two categories, but expresses them in a terminology more appropriate to his own psychological thinking:

Psychological Art	Visionary Art
Art that nowhere transcends the bounds of psychological understanding.	Art arising from primordial experience, grotesque, demonic, beyond historical and mythological events.

In both essays, Jung clearly shows a preference for the spontaneous/visionary category, and he seems to be proposing something incompatible between cogitative, planned activity and inspired, "seized" activity—in fact, in the 1922 essay, he states that "as long as we are caught up in the process of creation, we neither see nor understand; indeed we ought not to understand, for nothing is more injurious to immediate experience than cognition."

My experience has been that Jung's oppositional categories are backed up by the majority of significant 20th century poetry. Few poets would use Jung's terminology, but most would participate in some form of oppositionalism, whether it is Dionysus vs. Apollo, Romantic vs. Classical, or experimental vs. traditional. The tendency is to believe that there is a kind of Blakean antinomy between the "prolific" and the "devouring," Devils vs. Angels, that is an essential aspect of poetry itself, and that this "war" is played out from generation to generation, with each side accusing the other of not really being what they propose to represent. While it may be that a yin/yang coherence of the new warring with the old is essential to imaginative movement, the poetic products always seem to be heavily indebted to one of the two sides.

Rainer Maria Rilke, who would be close to Jung's spontaneous/visionary category, articulately defends what could be thought of as an anti-analytical and anti-revisionary position that is dependent upon an inspirational wind or angel sweeping through the poet. In a 1921 letter, he wrote, "I believe that as soon as an artist has found the living center of his activity, nothing is so important for him as to remain in it and never go further away from it (for it is also the center of his personality, his world) than up to the inside wall of what he is quietly and steadily giving forth; his place is *never*, not even for an instant, alongside the observer and judge." Now, this observer or judge—is this the doctor, the psychologist, the man of science?

JH: Yes, I think so, but I also think that the notion of the psychologist as man of science/observer—I think that's where the trouble is. I think that psychologists have fallen into that. They have imagined themselves to be objective, outside critics. Or they have imagined themselves to be interpreters, or commentators, and in the scientific flow, even Freud was there. But the psychologist who is inside his own response is not necessarily outside either, and he is risking, and up against the wall, of his own place, I don't want to say center, but place.

CE: You mean that when Freud is working with Leonardo da Vinci, you think of him as doing primary, creative, imaginative work, even though he is responding to a previous text?

JH: Yes, and his genre is different, and his writing style is different. It's not effuse, it's not based on rhythm, it's not based on what I would call a poetic genre of writing, but there is poesis going on in it.

CE: Would you go so far as to agree with Jung's statement in regard to what you've just said about Freud? I mean, where he says that as long as we're caught up in the process of creation, we neither see nor understand.

JH: I would not agree. Because I think Jung is sharing the same viewpoint

as Rilke here. And I wouldn't agree with that. I would say that when you're in the midst of the process of—I don't want to use the word "creation" either, it tends to get inflated—but in the midst of writing, or speaking a poem, or whatever, let's just say writing, there is a seeing going on in the hand and in the heart, and in the eye, which is not the kind of seeing that Jung is talking about which is detached outside seeing, but the fingers have an eye in them. E-Y-E. An eye that knows to put this word and not that word and to cross that out suddenly and to jump to the next thing. That's all seeing. It's not blind. That's again a romantic sense that there's natural creativity and then there's detached scientific observation.

CE: The eyes are in the fingers—meaning, there is an organizing going on that is perhaps not rational in the sense that it would be used in the context of logic. But it is rational or coherent to the creative process itself.

JH: Absolutely! And I even believe, even in Nietzsche, or in Goethe's *Faust*, which you could say are "spontaneous" in Jung's language, extremely spontaneous, or without guilt, there is a built-in critical learned tradition. It's not absent. Those are not simply effusions. Human consciousness is built into their language, and it isn't even *their* language. It's built into *the* language, perhaps, and their access to language through learning. That's perhaps another side of the issue we're looking at. I mean, it's not some sort of primordial effusion. It's terribly formed as well.

CE: So one way to approach the split is to think that the role of imaginational activity as associated with the poem has been too weighted on the side of the unconscious or of the effusion in which the poet is viewed as this kind of receptacle through whom the power moves, but who has, as it were, no control over the power. And then the psychologist is weighted too far, as he who is in control, he who is, as it were, judging the process, evaluating the process.

JH: Absolutely. In other words, the discussion has always used the terminology of a certain court model, which splits consciousness from unconsciousness, reason from unreason, creation from criticism, and I think it is, fundamentally, a romantic paradigm. And it puts great weight on access. That the poet is a special person who has access to this beyond. Therefore, the poet is put in the category with the insane, the child, and the primitive and, at one time, women. They all had special access to this beyond.

CE: Well, it is a very nifty way of containment. It's a way to applaud and view the poet on Parnassus at the same time that you can definitely say he is irresponsible, and has no real responsible relationship to what he is doing.

JH: It's a very nifty way both to condemn and praise.

CE: I'd like to keep the Rilke statement before us for a bit longer. It is not clear from his statement about the living center vs. the observer and judge, whether he would admit conscious, intentional shaping as a valid part of the creative process. Does he mean that the artist should not judge or observe his work while it is being created, or merely not assume the role of observer/judge when he is not creating? As you may know, Rilke had a deep-seated fear of correction. In 1912, when he was seriously considering Freudian analysis, he wrote to Lou Andreas-Salome: "I rather shun this getting cleared out and, with my nature, could hardly expect anything good of it. Something like a disinfected soul results from it, a monstrosity, alive, corrected in red like the page of a school notebook." While Rilke did not appear to mind if analysis exorcised his "devils"—thinking of them as neurotic habits, I guess, rather than as chthonic powers—he feared that the loss of his angels would mean that he would stop writing altogether.

His desire to stay at what he calls "the living center of his activity" must have involved a lot of observation and judgment. In fact, his concentrated, relentless effort to organize his entire life around his art seems to oppose what would otherwise be considered a highly romantic position. It is as if with great planning and rationality, Rilke built a wall around himself, entered this *temenos*, and then waited, refusing to act creatively unless he was acted upon, "seized," as it were, by one of his angels.

Another point: Freudian analysis in Rilke's day seems to have regarded creativity as being analogous to pathological processes—in fact, while not reductive in the way that Freud can be (seeing images as cover-figures or concealments of basic personal life experience), Jung himself states in the 1922 essay: "The divine frenzy of the artist comes perilously close to a pathological state." If Rilke believed that Freud believed that works of art were an expression of human pathology, he was probably smart to stay away from analysis.

JH: Now, Clayton, we can't take seriously this "divine frenzy" idea! I know that authority from Plato through Jung argues for it. I know it still appears in notions of the artist as shaman or medicine-man for the tribe, or the artist in league with the devil as in Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. But these words "divine" and "frenzy" have to be unpacked because they come loaded with unconscious Protestant theology, where divine means some glossolaic trance state descending from the Wholly Other (Rudolph Otto), and where "frenzy" means madness, pathology, instead of what it might once have meant when Gods were present in the actual world, in Rilke's sense, and not only present in subjective states of possession. "Divine frenzy" then, and now, could mean something far different from Jung's "pathological state." It could mean very close participation with or immersion in actual reality—reality as the radiance of the actual world rather

than the descent of inspiration from another world or lifting off to another world. Besides, we have to unpack these words in regard to Jung himself, autobiographically, his anxiety regarding Nietzsche, Dionysus and Wotan. I examined this complex very closely in a paper published in the book I edited called *Facing the Gods*, and you can see in that paper how Jung's division regarding art and psychology parallels his division in himself between personality Number One and personality Number Two. Nietzsche, Dionysus and Wotan as well as the artist, the shaman and the madman are all possibilities of personality Number Two. You see, the entire structure in which Jung casts his life, let's say the narrative of his self-diagnosis, is also the structure he uses to view the artist. Pat worked this out in great length in her study of Jung's buried aesthetics, and we shall have to come back to it with her later. That really is her subject: aesthetics or poetics in relation to psychology.

CE: Let's go on then with Freud and Rilke. There is good evidence that Rilke's masterpiece, the *Duino Elegies*, was begun by the poet's despair that should he call out for divine aid, no angel would hear him. The entire work opens: "Who if I cried out would hear me among the angels' / hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me / suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed / in that overwhelming existence." This suggests that if the artist feels that his chosen position, as it were, has abandoned him, he will move to the opposite pole and, like Rilke, set himself on fire by attacking the betraying angel.

All this leads me to believe that we must re-imagine the psychology of cognition, bricolage and inspiration. Perhaps we could begin to do so by asking why Jung insisted on a dichotomy. Was he basing his theories on Classical vs. Romantic "ideals" as manifest in particular works of art, or was he saying something about human sensibility and the extent to which it is creatively limited—that there is something about "us" that experiences creativity as an either/or situation?

After stating that in the process of creation we neither see nor understand, Jung goes ahead to write: ". . . for the purpose of cognitive understanding we must detach ourselves from the creative process and look at it from the outside; only then does it become an image that expresses what we are bound to call 'meaning.' " Clearly, he is referring only to "spontaneous" or "visionary" art here (and by implication relegating *his* other kind of art to a very secondary role). Jung's statement strongly suggests that an artist does not know what his activity signifies while he is doing it. I think this is nearly always partially but *only partially* true—the "muse" of Picasso's "Guernica" was a squad of German bombers (when asked by some German officers, standing before the canvas, "Did you do this?" he is said to have replied, "No, you did")—but I think it is fair to assume that throughout the process of doing the painting, Picasso was

aware of the significance of what he was creating—he may not have had an accurate sense as to what extent the world was going to consider it significant, but the fact that its execution was in part a response to a horrible event "out there" creates an immediate field of meaning.

JH: I think Jung's emphasis on the Spontaneous takes aim at those who reduce a poem or painting to an external field of meaning—those German Stuka Bombers. The field of meaning "out there" is always part of the context from which a dream, a poem, or anything flows, but that field of meaning is not the cause, or the substance, or the meaning of the dream, poem etc. Psychology often misses this point in practice. It either literalizes the Spontaneous and cuts off an event from any external field of meaning or it literalizes the field of meaning and reduces the event to it. Spontaneous has to be understood not literally, but spontaneous within a specific image or context in which the spontaneity appears. Appears *here*, and only *here*, and not somewhere else.

CE: Jung also places strong emphasis on "the primordial" when he discusses "Visionary" art. It is "a primordial vision which surpasses man's understanding . . . it arises from timeless depths; it is foreign and cold, many-sided, demonic and grotesque . . . it suggests the abyss of time separating us from pre-human ages. . . ." I find this definition to be very troublesome; in fact, I do not know how I could accommodate it to most of the poetry I consider to be visionary, because regardless of the extent of the prophetic activity, it is anchored in the anguish of its own times and is, to varying degrees, an imaginative adjustment, or a reaction, against thwarted desire. It appears as if Jung only regarded art of the considerable past when he made his comments about psychology and art, or that there is something inherently distancing in both of his defined artistic categories. To separate the intentional from the spontaneous, or the psychological from the visionary, is to draw a line down the center of much art that participates in all four modes. It seems to be ultimately undermining to the creative process, and in effect subordinates the artist to the observer or judge. Each "type," for Jung, is incomplete, and two incompletes do not add up to a single "whole" artist. It is not only a curious way of exalting and castrating the artist at the same time, but it performs the same kind of elevation/subordination on the work of the psychologist or "judge." His compensation for not being primordially creative is to be seen as a healthy, wise, responsible citizen, empowered with the right to extend or deny significance.

JH: I seem to be trapped into opposing Jung, yet I can't help feeling annoyed by this word "primordial." Am I hanging on words? Why do I dislike "primordial"—probably because it brings with it all those half-thought-through Darwinian assumptions, cavemen as apemen, developmental

history toward the light, and the notion of ourselves as refined, effete, weak-kneed dilettantes making up ineffectual trivia with our minds while deep underneath in the past or in the soul lies grunting primordial truth. This notion of "primordial" leads to an effusionist notion of art, art production based on an altered state of consciousness. Laudanum, absinthe, gin, LSD, cocaine. But what about art as craft, art in cultures where there is no "art" as we call it, where there are only chants made for rituals, objects made for eating, where there is exquisitely complicated dancing, body-painting and masking? These cultures are also "primordial," and yet not merely wild, savage or volcanic. Isn't it told that the people of Bali, for instance, when asked about their "art," reply by saying they don't know what that is; they simply make things as well as they can. No effusion or inspiration here, maybe no novelty either, but at least the everyday and the Gods, the ordinary and the beautiful are not divided from each other. So I prefer "primordial" to mean essential or irreducible. So, a painting by Edward Hopper of a gas-station or a cafeteria at night is so exactly irreducible to anything beyond itself, so descriptive of the despairing American soul (which is both its referent and not its referent), that this careful, almost mathematical, image is primordial because it is essential.

CE: How would this sense of the primordial as exactly crafted and irreducibly essential—certainly a sense very different from Jung's "archaic" or "primitive" or "undifferentiated" meaning of the word—affect your practice?

JH: Practice of writing or practice of analysis?

CE: Analysis with patients.

JH: It saves me from prejudicially valuing the wild man or the tiger above the media commentator or the spaniel. You see, "deep" does not have to be equated with archaic. Low and basic do not have to mean primitive. Depth can appear by digging down into an ordinary feeling and ordinary event.

CE: The tiger and the wild man do have a terrifying power which some might think was primordial in its impact.

JH: O, sure. But in therapy so can the spaniel have this impact when you recognize yourself as a fawning, tail-wagging puppy. Sometimes it's easier to feel yourself a tiger, with all that so-called primoridal power. You see, in therapy, the moves one makes with a symbolic image rather than the inherent meanings of the symbol are where the power lies. Isn't it the same for poetry, too? Aren't there marvelously primordial poems with red wheelbarrows and jars on hills and terrible poems with wild men and tigers?

CE: I get your point, but frankly I only know one fine red wheelbarrow poem, a so-so Tennessee jar poem, and a great tyger poem. There is a certain oppositionalism that creeps into your mild vs. savage examples. Ideally, I would like to have poems in which wild men pushed wheelbarrows filled with jars and tigers through the hills.

Perhaps we should consider to what extent "access" and "the beyond" are terms that hold up under scrutiny. W.H. Auden has argued that the loss of belief in the eternity of the physical universe, including a loss of belief in the significance and reality of sensory phenomena, have made an artistic vocation more difficult that it used to be. "The beyond" may be a booby prize for those who have lost contact with what is at hand—or as Charles Olson tried to drive home via Heraclitus: "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar." It is as if at a certain point in his history man left the thing at hand to quest for immortality, and when that pursuit was revealed to be empty, he was left with the thing at hand, the soul of which had withered from being untended for so long. We now live in a world with a broken beyond and a plastic cup, and one reason that you and I are talking here is because of this. We both seek to lift the essential up through the consumer film and work with it in imagination without vatic inflation.

Because the poet no longer performs a useful function in society, he is to a great extent parked to the side in a playpen where he can dream and say anything. If his writing is entertaining, he is occasionally picked up and carried about in adult arms for a little soul titillation. But the serious poet is not entertaining. He is still involved, as I believe you are, with attempting through sounding his own adhesion and estrangement to engage a reader or hearer. Unlike the psychologist, however, his address is more elliptical, harder to get hold of, because he proceeds associationally instead of logically. I think it is a proven fact that an educated person could grasp a good deal of one of Jung's lectures on literature and psychology, but that the same person would be lost on a first or second hearing of *The Waste Land.* On the other hand, your writing in, say, "Blue and the Unio Mentalis," which was appropriately published in *Sulfur* magazine, tends to engage associational, or paratactical alignments, so that the argument slides, or moves sideways as it moves forward.

One of the reasons that poets and psychologists have been out of touch is due to the poet's lack of psychological sophistication. From the Romantic viewpoint, such sophistication would be suspect, because the moment of inspiration is absolute and not to be understood by the poet who is to function like a gate (or radio, in Jack Spicer's modern version), through which the poem rushes. I know the thrill, or the bony certainty, of absolute address, and I am tempted, when it occurs, to believe it is the truth, and that it should not be tampered with, regardless of how it looks a week later (awkward, inaccurate, inadequate etc.), for to think of it as

scrutinizable is to regard it as mortal, changeable, capable of error, revisable. I think that possibly poets who assert the absolute truth of inspired address do so because they do not want to deal with what other aspects of their mind tells them has occurred at the inspired moment. In that sense, they could be considered psychologically irresponsible.

In his 1929 formulation, Jung puts the poet in an impossible situation: if his writing *is* psychological, meaning if it remains within the bounds of psychological intelligibility, it is, by the way the definition is set up, inferior – a kind of poeticized psychology, versified discourse. If on the other hand, it is visionary, arising out of "primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding," who can possibly care about it? It may be worshipped by a handful of people, who will pass it around like a chunk from outer space, people who adore unintelligibility as an end in itself, and if there are enough "followers," over the years a critical "house" will be built for it, and it will enter the canon as one of the diamonds in the national literary tiara.

I realize that by putting it this way, I am on the verge of saying that because a Blake was not understandable to virtually anyone for at least 100 years after his death, that he is solely responsible. Much of Blake now appears to be understandable *and* visionary, so that possibility must be kept open – that art which surpasses contemporary understanding can be judged unintelligible for reasons that have little to do with its value. Because it offends taste and style, say, people may claim that it is unintelligible.

JH: Let's set aside the word psychological for a moment and just talk about the responsibility of the poet. To what is he responsible? Is he not responsible to the poem? Or responsible to receiving, getting out of the way of what Robert Duncan might call "the angels and the demons?" So that he isn't in the way of that, doesn't disturb that, but lets it come through well? Doesn't the poet sense a responsibility in the act of his work?

CE: Getting out of the way of the angels and demons and being responsible to the poem is fine as long as it does not mean a cessation of thinking. To use your image, it means insisting that the angels and demons emerge from the midnight murkiness of the corner of the studio and allow their teeth and messages to be checked out. I believe that there should be a constant critical pressure applied to irrational message. However, if you are arguing that one reason poems fail is because the speaker has foregrounded himself at the expense of imaginational activity, I agree. Then the poem takes on very small grounds and finally only becomes the poet's "scene," e.g., a description of something that he once did – and for him to offer this as his experience is not enough.

JH: Certainly not enough. But I say it is comparable with ego-psychology.

It's comparable with the reduction of the extraordinary that goes on in a dream, and in a life, to my personal experience of it. And psychology, for the most part, today is comparable then with poetry for the most part—it teaches you to do that. That's what a psychological training is supposed to do, is to turn the imaginal richness of the psyche into your own personal account of it. So you lose the archetypal dimension, you lose what you call the imaginational activity. You lose the whole sense of the gods in art in your life. And the focus is on "me," not on the gods. When Rilke keeps turning us back, when he says to get inside your own experience, he doesn't mean it in the subjectivist modern sense of inside your own ego experience. Inside your own experience is focused on the giving back. Because your experience, as I try to say too, in what I write, is not yours, it is the soul's, and the soul is inherently related to the gods, so that being in the center of your experience is not being in the center of what we commonly call "my" experience. The "my" is sort of "ausgehoben" (lifted out, removed).

CE: I was talking with Rosemary, the woman who picked me up at the [Dallas] airport the other day. She was asking me questions such as "What is your experience of yourself in the poem?" I made a distinction between the fictive or imaginational "I" in contrast to the autobiographical "I," and suggested that the freedom for any "I" to appear in the poem, for there to be a shifting sense of "I" that does not lock into autobiographical frame, was one way to approach the experience of oneself in the poem. The image I offered her, colored by my involvement with Upper Paleolithic cave paintings of animals, went like this: I am in the driver's seat, I initiate the poem as driver, but as the poem gets under way, there is a sense of being outside and almost, to stir the metaphor, of running with an animal, say, through a field, so while it is clearly CE sitting in his room doing the writing, there is the sense that the less I interfere, in other words, it is like having this animal bounding . . .

JH: That's a wonderful image. Wonderful. That's marvelous. And you don't want to lose touch with the animal by making wrong moves of your own. So, your self-consciousness is focussed on keeping-in-touch. Isn't that why one says, right in the middle of writing something, "O, I've lost it. It's gone." By this I mean I've lost touch with that leaping, bounding (or burrowing) animal. I do believe this is what we mean when we say we've lost our concentration. The nose is on a scent, tracking, and all of a sudden, the track is gone. This keeping on the track, or what's called concentration, is one focus of self-consciousness. It's a dim awareness, of honing, of direction, of attentiveness. But it's not *will.* It's not willing yourself to the track as if it is my personal intention to squeeze out of myself just what I want to say in this paragraph—although that kind of self-consciousness can come in too. Sometimes, losing the track may simply be picking up on a cross scent. Another animal lures the line of thought

into another part of the forest. This feels like a distraction, dis-track-shun, and just here still another kind of self-consciousness appears: oscillating between two ways to pursue. Then, there's another kind of self-consciousness or dim awareness. To do with rhythm or beat. To do with form. I feel what I am writing is getting too long or wordy. This kind of focus is on the overall fantasy of the piece as a whole. It is very much in my mind when I write something—that it not break out of the dimension of the piece. I think this is the psychological experience of what Aristotle called *unity*. Probably this sense of unity makes you know when a piece ends, when it is over. How do you know when it's over?

CE: Difficult. I often over- or under-write. I don't have any solution to that question. There can be a certain let-down, a pointless distraction, suddenly I realize that for the past minute I have been staring out the window. The being-with-the-poem is intense enough that I can understand why Jung would make the statement about not understanding or seeing while one is in the creative task. I would assert that there is a seeing and understanding going on in my writing that is different than my not seeing you if you walked by the window while I was writing.

I occasionally have the experience of Caryl being away from the house, and when she reappears, and I hear the front door open, or she will say hello, I'll stop writing—but that will always be in the case of a first draft being written out when I have no idea where it is to go, or end. Even though the thing has not come to conclusion, I will look at it again later and often realize that the energy terminated at that point.

JH: Conclusion is one of the important things in Duncan, and Charles Olson, this realizing that the poem doesn't come to a conclusion.

CE: To pick up again the image of the poem-in-process as an animal—it evokes a passage in the 1922 Jung essay, where he writes: "We would do well to think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche. In the language of analytical psychology this living thing is an *autonomous complex*. It is a split-off portion of the psyche, which leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy of consciousness." How would you respond to this?

JH: Let me hear some more.

CE: Jung goes ahead to say that this psychic formation remains "subliminal until its energy charge is sufficient to carry it over the threshold into consciousness." Apparently, his use of the word "consciousness" here is an artistically cogent one, and not that "consciousness" whose assistance the artist does not need in achieving his purposes. Can you clarify this?

JH: No, I can't, or I don't want to try. "Consciousness" is such a fuzz word. I can't understand what goes on while writing by using psychodynamic

terms. These physical metaphors of "energy," "threshold," "sufficient (quantity)" don't say anything to me. But the phrase, "leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy," gives me an image of a living complex, a daimon or animal, with whom I must keep in touch for anything alive to be written at all. Translations into psychodynamic concepts—which, by the way, aren't psychological but are rather abstractions from the physics of electricity (poles, negative and positive, thresholds, resistance, energy)—are not phenomenological. They aren't speaking to the psyche in the psyche's own imagery and language. They aren't even empirical, though they persuade us into believing we are empirical because the language is borrowed from the empirical science of electrical engineering. I may have interrupted your thought, but this passage you quoted from Jung just gets in the way of the animal-tracking metaphor.

CE: The question also arises as to what makes the so-called energy charge sufficient to carry it over, meaning, I think, to make the artist begin to apply himself to a new project, or more precisely, to activate the kind of fantasies that delight or unsettle him to the extent that he begins to actively work with them. Duncan provides an interesting example of the eruption of a physical charge into an imaginative one, when in his essay "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," he writes: " 'Up Rising' [a poem in *Bending the Bow*, 1968] belongs not only to the political cast of the day but also to the imagination of Man and his time that I address in the series without end ["Passages"] to which the poem belongs. Riding the wave at once of my own high blood pressure—a physical disorder I was ignorant of at the time but to which the poem clearly refers—and of my outrage in the 'high blood pressure' attack of the American government upon Viet Nam . . . riding the wave of my outrage I saw Johnson as the demotic leader, unleashing into action and moved by the secret evil of American karma as Hitler or Stalin had impersonated the evil karma of Germany or Russia."

In Duncan's context, his rising blood pressure cathects a "duende" of interior inspiration that brings his sense of outer rage into an inner rage of body and soul. Do you feel that this is an accurate example of Jung's formulation?

JH: But, Clayton, do we have to imagine the uprising as a *transformation of energy*? From physical to imaginational? Can't we also imagine the uprising as a sympathy, a concord, a concurrence of various uprising autonomies which include high blood pressure, the US high over Vietnam, the uprising of outrage, and the inspiration of this poem in its coming?

CE: Of course, Jim, but "uprising autonomies" seems as conceptual, if that is what is bothering you about "transformation of energy," which is ac-

tually your own twist of Jung's statement, as the latter term. My point was to inquire if Jung's terminology made sense to you, and to see if Duncan's own description of the writing of "Up Rising," which gives as prime sources physical illness and outrage, was a meaningful example. Your response seems to want to place the emphasis on the mental—"autonomies"—over the physical. My experience as a man who writes poetry has been that my use of my body is a huge component in restricting or amplifying the fantasies and, yes, concurrences, that I am given to work with as a writer.

A primary example would be the discharge of orgastic energy and consequent hallucinations, which has led me to believe that a thorough physical sexual expression stimulates, rather than restricts, my image-making capacity, and that there is a kind of "antiphonal swing" between sexual flow and imaginative flow. As you know, I am a Reichian initiate, and I spent two years in orthodox Reichian therapy in the late 60s because my sexual rigidity up to that point had seemed to be the cause of much of my misery and inability to do what I wanted to as a writer. It may be hard to believe now, but at the time I left Indiana in 1961 I believed, on the basis of a bewildering Protestant upbringing, that sexual activity stole from creative activity. To develop this material at this point would probably be too much of a detour, but it seems to me that Jung's term "energy charge" is an essential consideration, a term that needs to be scrutinized as much as "primordial" or "divine frenzy." I am convinced that there is a sexual alchemy at work, for better or for worse, in what I make as an artist.

JH: There is a lot of literature on sexual practices; Tantric etc. This is a very widespread fantasy, but I wouldn't take it literally. The psychological question I would put to you, or anyone who makes direct connections between physical sex and poetic images, is: what is this fantasy doing for you? Why does it help you to write? And write what? What specific kinds of fantasies occur in relation to orgasm that are different from fantasies at other times? And what are your fantasies about orgasm? Reich had lots of them which Reichians consider to be not fantasies but theories. You see, I would be exploring the actual pragmatic way these fantasies work in regards to both your sexual life and your poetic life rather than be discussing whether you have a valid hypothesis about energy transformations. I would be exploring the rhetoric of the idea rather than validating the idea.

CE: Why don't we continue our discussion, then, concerning the act of writing itself, bearing in mind Jung's troubling claim that while we are doing so we neither see nor understand.

JH: Neither see nor understand. And the process, one doesn't ask how

to conclude the poem, one asks when does the process come to its resolution? I am thinking now about parallels, not with my own writing, which is rather similar in a way, except probably I am struggling with external forms more. I have a 40 minute lecture to give, or I have a 2 hour lecture to give, or I have this audience to address, and that is one of the conditions that goes into the work. That gives it certain conclusions, certain places of closings, so it isn't only the process.

CE: So, you're suggesting that you must be aware of your so-called audience at the same time that you're writing your lecture?

JH: Partly, yes.

CE: Do you see this as a distraction?

JH: No, I see it as a part of the grain of the wood that I'm working on. Part of the given of the material. To whom I'm talking, when I've got to get it done. Those, so-called external conditions are part of a formative, a *causa formalis*, even the *causa materialis*, part of the material I have to work with, this fantasy audience, so this language is going to be involved.

CE: You wouldn't see that as a negative term, then?

JH: No.

CE: I had in mind the comment that you made at one point in *Inter Views*, of what seems to be the problem of understanding relative to intelligibility, and I was wondering if there would be, you see, in terms of the poem, I would think that if I thought of you, and of your understanding of what I was doing—while I am working on the poem—Is Jim going to get this, how is this going to sound to Hillman, then somehow I'm off.

JH: OK. Stay there just a second. Somehow you're off. And yet many poems are written with another person in mind, dedicated to, and not just the dedication put in at the end . . . I'm thinking of . . . Well, maybe you don't regard . . . I don't know who you like, as poets, who you don't—

CE: Use anyone.

JH: —but Edith Sitwell just came into my mind. So many poems have that fantasy figure, fantasy audience, as part of the poem. That again has to do with the thing not being blind. But the poem is also social, communication, relation, love.

CE: I would say that the more I am in touch with this imaginative process, the more faith I have that there *will* be something called communication. In other words, I am not against the idea of an audience, that there

is a reader "out there," but I feel that if I think of you, take you into consideration *while writing* that this represents a distraction.

JH: You know, Clayton, that's absolutely true. And there's just two ways, two sides of the same thing, and both are true. When I write for Eranos which is usually when I try to do something over a long period, it takes me many months to write those two hours. Only two hours. It takes me months. And I always imagine that I'm writing you can tell David Miller and others when you write your Eranos paper, you're speaking to the dead. You're writing for the dead. You're writing to the tradition. You're not writing to the people sitting in that room. When you start thinking of them, and there is a communication to keep didactic or anything of that sort, you're finished. And you have to write in such a way that you'll never be invited back again. Because it won't be understood. So you're writing to the tradition.

CE: You're writing to the chairs.

JH: Yes, you're writing to the tradition, you're writing to the chairs, you're writing to the lecturers who aren't there any more, like Corbin, or you're writing to the dead. Now, so there I agree with you. You can't think of somebody special living, will he get it. And yet, there is also something very important—for me it's important—the urge for clarity, the urge for the right word, the urge for a rhythm that will carry the thing along, the condensations, all of that is partly—I can't distinguish between getting it right and getting it right for where it's placed. The so-called audience.

CE: It occurs to me that both the psychologist and the poet have two audiences: the living and the dead. In a recent poem of mine, an unidentified voice says to both the reader and the author: "Forget the orchestra / conduct the pit." We are both, when we are imaginatively alive, conductors of the pit. We try to snake-charm its depths, to draw up figures that will sway in rhythm to our own processes. In this sense, what a conventional lecturer might consider his audience, we think of as chairs, the dead, the pit. But I think we have living audiences too: in your case I wonder if you have not considered your patients this way, for in therapy you cannot just address the chair someone is sitting upon, but the person himself who is constantly redirecting the conversation. I know to think of a patient as your audience may seem strange, and I do not mean to imply that the patient is passive and you are active, but that as you exchange you also pour yourself forth to another there, who has filled the emptiness of the Eranos chair. We are linked by Blake's: "The most sublime act is to set another before you." Meaning that not only is this a profoundly human gesture, to place another *before* oneself, but that the presence of the other, another, sublimates the speaker, makes him consider before speaking in a way he would not have to if he were speaking to himself.

My "living audience" is my wife, Caryl. I have no audience in a literal, popular sense, and consider that to be a blessing as well as a curse. But because Caryl goes over everything I write, querying everything she finds confused, after I have started a piece of writing and before I finish it on my own, I know that her presence and her words are entangled with my own.

JH: My relation with Pat is very different. I don't want her or anyone anywhere to see anything of a main piece I may be working on. While I'm working on it, and until it is delivered—or finally typed up—it's "secret, cunning and exile." Probably I'm too heroic, or I'm under the fear of influence. I do consult with Pat, or maybe a friend, about a particular thought that I can't get straight, or where I feel blocked in a particular passage. During those moments of consultation I feel terribly vulnerable. The work seems terribly fragile and I feel myself at the edge of both a crazy excitement about it and despair over how confused and inadequate it is. In other words, I am utterly too close to it: I'm inside my own text.

But you asked me about the patient as audience. Many times a patient is "not there," the patient is "merely" audience to what begins to speak in me to it. This "it" being the dream, the question, the situation, or whatever we are in. These impersonal unaddressed moments are some of the best moments (at least for me) during an analysis because I am hearing things I never said quite so lucidly before. Maybe the patient hears them, but they are only partly addressed to him or her. They are addressed really below to the patient's underworld. You can say this is my schizoid nature or you can say this sort of indirect address, which might be like the persona of the author rather than the biographical author, is necessary for freeing the imagination. Some patients provide better audiences for these riffs. They are not directed at the patient but they are evoked by the patient, in relation with the patient, and are very much focussed upon what the patient is concerned with—the dream, the question, the situation. Still, the pronouns "you" and "yours" are not the form of address. Perhaps this independent imaginative intervention is the voice of the "outside" psychological observer in the best sense. Outside no longer literally only outside.

CE: I see we are still working over the Rilkean observer and judge. In my case, it would be possible for someone such as Caryl to become judge or doctor. But I think of her more as a kind of dialogic middle, in the process of writing the poem—I would like to think that I have overcome Rilke's "objection" by bringing her into the "creative center."

JH: But there's another person there, isn't there?

CE: Yes—at crucial points.

JH: There's nothing you do by yourself.

CE: I do write pieces from time to time that need no revision. I show them to Caryl and she agrees. On another level, it is questionable if any artist does his work by himself, even in his most inspired moments. There has been no original art since the Upper Paleolithic, or around 32,000 BC. All of us are crawling with grandfathers and grandmothers not only when we are sitting writing, but when we are thinking about what we are writing, or dreaming, or chopping zucchini. However, again, the emphasis on the artist as his own solitary master is especially understandable now. We live in an age in which hardly anyone is responsible for what he makes, so the fantasy that the artist is one of the few remaining "workers" who is responsible for his own "product" attracts many young people to the arts. Who wants to be condemned to a life of meaningless labor?

JH: Of course—I follow that. I've been trying to make references while we've been talking back to the practice of analysis, not the practice of writing. What goes on in the room when you are sitting there. And I think most of these alternatives (and there are probably others too) come into the analytical room, especially the one of being a scientific detached judge/critic/observer. Certainly that is a favorite stance one takes in being an analyst. But it is not the only story at all. There's also the talking from that place that Rilke is talking about, where you're absolutely inside the image, or inside the emotion or complex that's in the room with the two of you, maybe it's come out of a dream, maybe it has just come out of sitting there and what is said is very free. And now: *is* it blind?

CE: Is what is said blind?

JH: Yes, are we where Jung said you don't know what you're saying and you don't see what you're doing? I don't think that's the case. I think it's very much like I said. Your fingers have eyes in them. And when you're reacting emotionally and imaginatively to the dream, you are doing the same thing as Rilke is talking about. There is a poesis. You are making a whole new construction, which is not an interpretation. It's a new construction that 's closer, let's say, to what you do when you translate. You're taking the text that the patient has brought in, or that the other poet has written in Spanish or French, and you're producing a new poem.

CE: A new poem inasmuch as the Spanish poem was not in English before—but not a new poem in the sense that I have the freedom to rearrange the original poem in English so as to include my sense of its meaning. As a translator, I see myself as a servant, carrying the Vallejo dish from the Peruvian Room to the North American Room. You are suggesting that translation *is* a highly interpretative activity, that one might even consider it to be an activity in which "a whole new construction" is at stake.

As a translator, I find myself constantly guarding against offering an improvement of a line, or an explanation of something instead of stating it as adamantly as the original has.

JH: Fine, but let's get rid of that word "interpretation," and maybe even "translation." For the moment, that isn't what I want to do with this dream that is coming. I don't want to *interpret* the dream. I want to talk to the dream, talk about the dream, restate the dream, imagine from the dream, but I don't mean a free-floating fantasy. And I sure don't mean a bunch of subjective reactions and feelings and associations: "This makes me think of . . ." You are there, I believe, to *respond* to the dream, and that forces you to stick pretty close to it, much as you have to do with a poem that you are translating. The dream is your master, let's say. It provides the limits, the discipline. What you say to it is in service of the dream. Yet, all along the response comes from the imagination. It is an imaginative response. Is that really so different from what you do when you translate?

CE: No—in the sense you propose I am under the charge of the foreign text as you are under charge of the dream. What you say to the dream, however, is what the dream imaginatively evokes from you. I have no dialogic response to the text. It would be as if you had to say a patient's dream back to him in Russian and not let any interpretation creep in. This alas is also not quite so—for no matter how hard I fight interpretation in translating poetry, every time that a foreign word has more than one denotation, I must interpret—that is, I must choose. When Vallejo uses the Spanish word "casco"—which can mean skull, helmet, potsherd, or rind—I must represent "casco" by one of those four possibilities in English. I have to eliminate the rich density of the original word. What do you do with a patient who comes to you with a "casco" dream?

JH: Well, we have the opportunity, you see, of touching all of that, the potsherd, and the helmet; and playing with the word, and playing with associations, so density builds up through the hour. A great deal of woven density. But even as I'm talking now, I'm beginning to feel how this is going to be heard by people who think we just sit in there and play back and forth with this word and that word and it could be this and could be that; it becomes airy fantasies, fantastical, isn't that a curious pun on that word and so on. That isn't what it is! No. Not at all. There's something more intense, and formed, based on almost a vision. Here we are close to Duncan and you and Rilke. I think that if the psychoanalyst can admit that what happens in him when a dream is released by a patient, that this evokes almost a vision, not necessarily of the patient, but of a response to that dream, then he, the psychoanalyst, would realize he is really practicing a sort of poetry, or art form. So, I even want to go so far—I know I can hear the criticisms coming in but I'm now in Rilke's place, close to that wall—that the analyst's response is a poetic response.

CE: Can we take that a bit further? Why is it a poetic rather than psychological response?

JH: Because he, the analyst, *sees* something, and is evoked and called by what he sees to enunciate it. And to articulate it as well as he can, and as clearly as he can, and as compellingly as he can. That *very* important. It's a rhetorical problem, even; how to *speak* to or from what he sees. Now I hear my colleagues saying, "For Christ's sake, that's your countertransference trying to persuade or suggest to the patient, and you're not at all objective, and you're not at all scientific, and you're not at all detached, and you're not at all letting the patient do or find his or her own way. You are putting your own trip on the patient." Now I'm saying to those colleagues, that isn't true. They are seeing all things too subjectively and personalistically. To put it sharply, I think they see the images as personally belonging to the patient and I see the patient as belonging to the images. What does Wallace Stevens say? "In images, I am. . . ." Something like that—or is it: "man is his images"? It's much like Jung's saying that psyche is image. These quotes aren't accurate, but they help make the point: the dream is a set of images. And these images, like the images in an art gallery hanging on the wall, spark off an imaginative response that is erotic, aesthetic, poetic . . . so my interpretations, if they are good ones, will have this erotic, aesthetic, poetic touch to them, and their purpose wil be to open the imagination in the images, or the imagination of the patient to the images. All the while both of us are feeling the autonomy of the images, as if the dream were hanging on the wall, out there. Now of course that isn't all we do during an hour of therapy. There's a lot of other stuff you do in therapy, lots of other sorts of talk, lots of other things to feel and value, but this response to the images is the most intense part, I suppose, and somehow the most refreshing too.

CE: So, what you are suggesting seems close to the image I used a little while back about being in rhythm with the poem, as if it were a living being I was moving along with, side by side.

JH: And it's what Jung said, "You dream the myth along," or how did he put it?

(end of part one)

BRUCE McCLELLAND

AT ITS HEART IS AN ADDER

At its heart is an adder.
A simple gate, almost polished the walls
interior as plutonium, entering & standing
beside the strophe, coiled & commuting, into, dust.

I remember two of us at first,
out in a sun green world, we loved
even the dilapidations, broken stones
cast into less obvious order.
Always without remorse, the moneyed hobbies of summer
light elaborate meals under white canvas tents, strolling

Then some metallic threshold
you thought was made of diamonds
Two of us said together
& so we did, nothing was forbidden
we crossed, then there were walls,
Obsidian at first modulating
towards a dry turquoise & finally
the thin glittering silicon echoes.

But then the others: fine drops become
a possible, potential rainbow, all the emotions
suspended and catenary, adhering now to
the dust, their lives messages passing one
& then another into sight, being.

The adder is a season, thought,
cold form of possession waiting
for the likes of us, no work but between,
who otherwise lazed with our champagne & cassis,
lulled by the easy carbon hardness
through the gate, to description.

*

The adder adds us to a list
of indexes, but the others
are countless, doubtlessly occurring
so many answers pass it hums.

What do we know of this mirrored maze
other than the unnameable, the pene-
trator who has caused us to know
this heart? & what is left
of the sun green world upstairs,
too bright for anymore?

Nothing, nothing. We made our pact
with illusion, & passed through;
If a serpent is anything, it is the color green.

*

Then I am set down in a green expanse
all its weather, dark ozone menace,
Solitary rusty implements for rods,
Where are you, I ask the flatness
of this world, where are my walls?
Nothing shines in it, nothing moves.
Before what storm would I have you,
Electronic, memory, black birds hum along
the wires like starlings, a little bluer
but still without *real* messages.
This is a place only of auguries
& portents, where are magpies, where are owls?
No walls, and so no portals, no hands of god
from cloud with golden cup, spilling,
No doves, no clouds, no you.

None of this is really green. Rather it is grey, &
I am blinded by foreboding.
The farmers have sent *their* wives out
into it, to gather, mend, prepare—
Into the vortical danger, from just those
low hillocks west.

What visions might arrive,
What beasts might finally recognize

What other beasts, what computations
Might be performed against the sky.

At last: all of it a threshold,
I see you, troubled
as you should be, fretting over evil,
I offer you my cup, & turn away.

*

The adder, of course, lines the plane.
The two dimensions spread themselves,
Giant condor shadow circles, a unity
within a limestone field, or harder,
Silica, but far from glass
(I see you, too)
"O woman
is this driness really mine," I ask
the rainbow fire around your eyes who say
"do not turn away—Real trees go deep
into the mirror speech, know evil well
& drink its water."
"O water
I ask, why this information,
why this love? My hand was copper green
It was the *cup* was gold."
"It was the offer I admired" you said
"Remember when we first met
You said you'd look for me & did—
Well I am of this wideness ruler,
The tree is normal to us now,
& cannot see me say:
'There are gates of logic to us,
So we may go astray.' "

*

The model of a mind, partitioned.
All its thinking, facile, all its feeling, other metals.
Inside, her hair was red, skin translucent
light of her deep blood crossed into the system
through the membrane of *my* memory:
Being held, against the drowning waters,

Dry the same then as safe & so thought
replaced feeling, platinum streakings
replaced the truth of her hair.
At her heart gnawed the act of saving,
the trouble kept in the world, continuing
all the difficult processes of survival, remembering.
The painful impossible spasm as the brain went out,
Short-circuit & involving the self in that
Electrical wildness, holding was dying,
the passing through the gate of life into death,
insulation, from the hatred of the life
she could not save.

Someone saved my blessed life:
The walls were metallic, an adder hissed close,
the saline electrolyte of mind,
All around, that is, without real body
was the danger, one of those poor women
reached into that, & pulled it through the gate.

*

At its heart there is an other.
Two platinum walls for eyes
normal to this meeting, normal to the cold
& weatherless feeling you get
when dread escapes.

What if the other is all you ask
A panic sense of love, he jumps
out from this "sublimated other nature"
& stares, metallic & irreducible.

Here is autonomy: there is no room
for any you who sees yourself in this.
Or who does not, when grief
is nightmare's best reflection, find any other
thing but grief.

LYN HEJINIAN

from THE PERSON

Let's get isolated
The temporal is dread
Is there a name
for the imploding series "consciousness
of consciousness"
Realism and depth perception
The audacious science of the thought

of poetry
Person
holding picture of
person holding picture of . . .
Anxiety in space
Can one get by on procrastination
Mortality is a system

of exclusion
I am having a sensation of description
Person holding picture of . . .
Now, you can tell I wish I was a cowgirl
Person having thought
with its capacity to preoccupy
Sound falls

Can one get by on projection
People desire to believe in . . .
Rain falls
Physical reality consists of sympathetic units
Grammar & consciousness
Or if not in the next life
then in the one after that
I'll be a meteorologist
Awaiting the great sequences

of incompleteness
Can one prosper from the impulse to confide
The trees rustle in the wind
and suck in
the rain suppressing sound, and then release it
In discontinuity, distinction
I do not equate goggles with subjectivity
But like a tree that's showing off in the wind

*

(a.)

We reproach ourselves for the heroism
of the person in the episode body
Acid-Drop
We are filled with scruples

about beauty and individualism
Spouse, Child, Citizen
A composition
Cheerfulness is indelicate

as a separate body-part
The incriminating contents
of the portrait-bowl
The person is the form

it determines
The limits of the activity
One can shudder without understanding
with chronic ideas

Good—an intuition
But isn't that merely preknowing
—and one can remain
in a state of preknowing indefinitely

Entertainment in poetry
We reproach ourselves for enthusiasm
sniffs on the river
It's unthinkable

that my skull would turn out

to be empty
if it were opened—I feel
my brain

At first I didn't fasten
this feeling to words
Adorable Subject-Object
A moment of intense disorientation as it swings

(b. HABITAT)

its search for a recipient
Musics of the spouse
a simple example: consciousness
sucking on altitudes

currently
your music has an analytically violent sweet sweep
Our house has a porous advantage
over notation

Fire sirens in the rain
that's what I hear
uses of citizenry
in the house

(c.)

One day a certain person—we'll call it
Acid-Drop—since things
periodically seem unreal evidently
to exist

is not . . . no microtones
no bumps . . . the same
as being real—I am happy to have photographs
in which it stands

a moody landscape and a mellow generous drama
Good-Sport, when something new occurs
I will write
Time malfunctions

This form of person is mulish

Still I have the impulse
to expect it to phone
in any emergency

and its idleness
The erotic takes its share
of consciousness
The model person has taken

a pose in the shape
of an X or else
it is holding its belly
Melodrama is its laughter

prolonged philosophically
Funny
I do love the poetry
with a certain speed of mind

But funniness!
it is a technical vibration
which enabled them to swallow
at a single gulp

It's also capable of stopping
Do I have time for this?
yes realism, yes time, yes paradise
Under clouds of exterior reality

Study of hearing
yes, I want to study meaning
The cheek that seeks (organ
for apprehension) the breeze

I can't believe it!
Congratulations
to imagine
not being born in fear of solids

*

When I get angry I get accessible
Sociable
Waste prose

"Slow down"—there is the musical analogy
Nagging in its social prolongation

Narrative is like insomnia
Life before birth—I'm going to write without saying
    anything lest my behavior contradict my words
Perhaps there is no opposite to creativity
Don't die
The rain jumps
The bird is the real location of the speaker
Do you believe in a Forelife
Patrol—with tree-lined bonds

But number is shameless—expansive sensations!
Cars and calm cups of instruction
My ear, it can jump things
One crams it with incredible justice
The spouse is just such
a role—a mechanism
of associations
Apples that look like clouds
Citizen, sponsor, inhabitant
Life is full of semi-probabilities . . . yes . . . your
    mouth is like a camera
In the trap of fires the rain snapped like a diamond
Science is escapist, a fantasy of instruction
No acoustics
I would find myself on shaky ground, in a dark wood,
    chewing my pencil for nourishment

There is a certain inner after-the-fact continuity
With towerlike still compulsiveness, I repeat
Pretend nothing—closure is misanthropic
Neat nervousness—this was my maternal genius
Eat, who doesn't work
Eat has achieved anti-blankness
Honor among radicals—are we not radicals!
"Buy me a wondrous wonder, a marvelous marvel!"
Let my culture do!

*

Realism is an unimaginable ballad: direct speech
across the trajectory of nature in its trees

Which word is an object of imitation?
And in returning differ

I have achieved the ability to be pathological
Here I refer to beauty when it forms
and every belief which is a move—
I am a contractor
Hunchbacked grammar to a bridge of the elegy

Into an elegy discontinuity implodes
Taken in . . .
My thoughts take a twist, they are always logical
    in this direction
The ear opens onto a setting: audience-life
The horse, the drone, the wrong word, and the relief

Red has a rending and yellow a stinging effect
Just as, years later, every attempt
to bring to bear on the objects of any thought
an adamant and relentless intuition jiggled
In correspondence, the sky

Described, the corresponding sky
in circumstantial detail, goes up
as if having yielded . . . as Goethe says, blue seems
    to yield to our gaze . . .
"having as its object something unknown but conscious"
Below the brain are overt gates

NATURE . . .
in the imperfection of the eyes
(an ever-present principle of absent-mindedness and
    yearning)
really, your ass is like an apple

NATURE

Perceiver at her perception post, strike!
Implosion of the seasons, and cupping
I've seen twin lines of ants come from an oak
    and a skink break off its cobalt tail
Title? Eighty-One Chapters
Plenitude & grace
The grand sanity of the person pushes it

Yeah—and the hardest job of all is made
    from a dull saw and a dry stump
Fact-process and form-process
It's a pleasant duty to perceive

Then nature gave me a direct sensation—
distance, with a sort of shudder
and its undertow, dizziness
rolling the impulse to set in motion
my palpable single-minded credible intention
    to cross
from this to the next ridge—all of this
    in an instant
And I tell you, I almost took off
the decision to fly
interrupted, just there, at a synapse, in the
    flesh
Collapsing the leap

Intelligence and desire are animal instruments
The person fascinates them with its lethargy
The pulse of the quiet of crickets—the object of
    science is pleasure
Nature takes thornlike comprehension
What is it that has not changed enough?

TWO POEMS

What Would Tennessee Williams Have Said

Is there drama in everyday life?
I wonder
as I boil the water for my
morning tea.
The tea has stained
the white porcelain parts of the pot so that they look
like the feathers of a sparrow. I scrub,
but the crazed surface
inside
bares its old horse teeth at me,
impossible with stain.

The half dozen evening grosbeaks
flying up in yellow and black flurry,
as if someone has torn the business pages
out of the phone directory and thrown
them up in the air,
flying from the asphalt pavement
of the woodsy road we were driving,
the surprise of their beauty,
their unfamiliarity, like seeing the hundreds
of small purple wild irises
along the same road, for the first time.
Also startling.
Exciting.
But were those moments
dramatic?
Or the most dramatic events
that happen in my daily life? What
would Tennessee Williams have said,
I wonder, about the last poetry program
I was asked to give?
When the director wanted me to wear
a cape and
invited me to a dinner party in his kitchen

where we ate with his senile mother, victim of Alzheimer's disease.
No drinks were offered but
herb tea. He
was making cheddar cheese soup
out of a plastic bottle of something processed
and his mother would say things like,
"I'm hungry. I want some bingbang now,"
and
"I saw her coming out of the refrigerator
with a nogger and she birded it,"
and, flaring up with anger,
"You'd better give me some more to eat or I'll cruise."
The aging house they lived in was stacked with newspapers, and he ironed his
trousers while we waited for the nurse
to come and stay with his mother.
When we got to the theater
there were only six
people
in the audience. I wore the cape
for a while,
but it jingled and was hot. It was a beautiful
garment, a sculpture
really, but not made
for giving poetry readings.

The director told me at length how
he cares for his senile mother,
who is incontinent and who eats
everything she finds, like a baby. We saw
this at dinner, as she kept chewing
parts of her paper napkin.
How can you not admire
a man who will stay at home
and care for a senile mother? yet
how can you not hate him
for inviting you to dinner, as celebration for a performance/
you are nervous, in a strange place, not knowing who will be there/
with his senile mother,
eating in the kitchen, while he irons his trousers,
with neither alcohol, caffein or festive food to
alleviate the tension. A pretense
that we are not strangers, or have a friendship

that does not exist?

Where is the drama
or poetry?
I see only
humiliation,
and my own sense of meanness
that the whole night angered me
and reduced me to these petty
observations.
What *would* Tennessee Williams have said
about that evening?
That you can turn anything trivial
into art? What do I say
about it?
That I was humiliated,
made aware of the foolishness and triviality
of my own life.
That for the past two montns
I have felt over and over
how petty and mean it is
to resent being asked to dinner in a kitchen with a senile stranger.

Yet, I see her,
again and again,
in her blue cotton shirtwaist dress,
eating her paper napkin,
speaking like a mad child,
and her son, who wiped off our plates, as well as hers, with the
pink sponge between soup and salad,
scrubbing down his mother's dress after the meal
with the same sponge, pink
on her baby blue dress.
Robert and I escaped finally to the yard,
he smoking,
I wondering
what vision of myself,
the future,
this event was supposed to make me take
away?
Wondering what
Tennessee Williams would have done,
or if some things really are
too petty or mean

or cruel
for art. Whereas life
absorbs everything?

Some animals, like foxes,
kill the old when they are no longer cunning enough
to survive alone.

August 1983

A SNOWY WINTER IN EAST LANSING

We feed the birds
leaving mixed corn millet and sunflower seeds
in a big pole feeder,
thistle seed in two small tubes,
and pure sunflower kernels in a domed plastic globe,
but only the sparrows come, hundreds of them,
an occasional chickadee,
and one lonesome pair of finches.

After two years
we no longer expect other birds, though
we long for flashing cardinals, noisy
blue jays, purple finches, towhees, downy
and hairy woodpeckers.

But in this part of the midwest,
the land is flat and monotonous,
there are no good restaurants,
and even our friends seem to leach out
each year, or become flattened
by the terrain. So,
                I've stopped
believing that the birdfeeders
could yield surprise
or drama,
or color,

for that matter;
I like the life,
the sense that we've done all we can.
And the English sparrows,
sitting like little candles in the big
yew bushes, heaped with fluffy snow—
they have their beauty too,
if looked at
with certain eyes.

[This poem was originally printed as a broadside by Table-Talk Press, Santa Barbara, 1985]

CLARK COOLIDGE

from THE BOOK OF DURING

II.

Heart rates are an allowance of fuck you have to tell. You put the cap on the tendency, tendons to gristle in the lonely spit, I too a barrier fueled and tied. Can you see me? Can you snatch barrier from weighted barrier? How allow when when is settling? Go away suddenly to a partly fine alignment of whelms to wheat, and neater than an eatment fuck. Twenty syllabary standages over dry equals snuck away and told? Parry with a Lee Konitz nozzle? I raise your arm, you do not assign it. The man with one arm raised browns in the pit. He is alarm. He is nine times the sum of your wants. But he does not. I always will do, will await your shortening.

Lee Vadose the name of the man with numberless cocks arrayed from his spine. Stop this arrangement? Be a friend to man. Not nicking saviours, not penalty for nights so late and fried. I tried to see him. She tried to see and reach him. He saw her hand and that far enough it did it. She calls you out and you go and snow. And the man with the weighted cap smiles and doubts. She rushes his twine, her belt a wet of wrist. I have to have her. She has to have. There are positions in the night in the light of the stayed night. There are she, you, and he. That I make beckon in this here absence, a hover on a multi. She wears muffs, or is that a he in salts. The faults in this castle allow the many fuck. The whole hall of wind and the cambered toes. The smile of smell and the avenues. Concertina landing, propellers singling. She is the last place one would die. She arranges cunt so an eye. She is total and covered and landing, a fur to twin her stance, molecular topiary. Give me a friend. Gave out on me, a girl with lessons. Pretend you start out in a park and land, telling leafage over pour penis. The nine girls ask a fin. It cuts. He then lands. He has store of tales, a stone from the ancient necessity. They carve it all on walls, wait until the ochre dulls the light. I am high and then gaunt the easy way. I never lie and go away to sea. She is never but with me she lies. Over the bounding cover the mates shell and ask. Hand in vagina lost. Crown of teeth seethe and hiss. He is late. She is the earliest. I have lost, she says it is said he says of me. The print at the crotch is not fast enough. Caves dry out. Under the moat a foot up or so the cash line begins. Who is a berry crusader? Who has the halting tell to and gates a frame of fuck-

ing mates of them? I am alarm, I raise the throttled gate and shout and in fucking to the rims harm. The haven is a stirring night noun. And the backwards too have beckons. Charming weapons.

She is the gas to have. How say you that I side with you? Where is your every arm stayed in styler blaze? Go snap. Take off insect-rapid, told-vivid, then loom back. I set a stream down your back, I come back. Nine ridges below the sun in a storm that shot the trees I become you in rapid snack of your becoming. You look well in a frock. I take that all back under the street and say to you: A New Tack. The street here I say is a caught mile of beneath. The ramp after-lights boned in the sum of shot arm vacancy. You wrap me and I come collision bold in a sun made dingle of the buttery blades. Candy, marks of the arm in carny. All the selfish rhymes, you fuck with a barter knife. I singe you new hair piece. I send you wand. I buck the bulk of softish sky. You bend my eye, back over hulk of blade fatty. We all now go away then I contain in my bleary vacuum.

Conception of bones, teeth, joints, tents, gulfs, gasps, the phantom stain on the housing of the body toad. Wet in witless blossoms, or do they use us in our hot blight to scour up some wits? I see you raced in amber by a cow. Under the fender is a sound, a hole in a noun, a new placement for the strung cock. It bleeds in the house of green leaves then leaves will toll, be told, scream down the rips of our bounder sound. Hold my bed, you tool of National Embolism. This is an account of the time I, we, dates of fucking lodge in a line. The flag is on the hire, the gag that chewed comes fire. Go me one better in this wheat of damned sentence structure, the only structure, the cock and cunt band trying rational joins eraseable at the channel. I am similar to you, in fact I am to the panting same. We march the place all out in bed as we fuck, banners stemming, streets to the sides all washed in jam. Stock more toes, remember. Aisle your shoes at the last. Ask me to ask the baiters, they *all* will tell. A marvel and particular fuck that involves the small.

The odor was raised, written out, forgetted. I become sawyer of the head. The rest of the salted dots are dead, overwhelmed in weighted bed sleep. I take care at your knees, so shined they are sharp. Tell me the loathe of your hidings, source over source of leveled lashings that shall coil my will to very snail of desire cog. All of your story is a mirror of hissings at the clamps held barrier flesh. Your heat flesh, your stung hands that stung mine. I go back, you right yourself up and stand me a fuck no hapless fader would trade. Found wounds, we spend afternoons. A snore that is solid and is licked. Centers of rooms all the dial of our minds it takes to get off. Go station and feel your self. Get ticket to banana your crack.

Tell whole loads of smart course gone flesh. Your background toll will mend your back, I lick in a stein of wind off the ossuaries. No one will enter my vacuum to tell *this* afternoon.

The rates are not high enough on the thigh. As we wait here and soon will enter ourselves into his hands, Doctor Necessiter. He opens flaps and bows in the lemon doorway. He will laugh in his steely haste and soundly align us. He will place our limbs finally tooled to a vastness, all (down the line of) fucks to wait on this. On him rises the vacuum of haste, desire in his eyes so huge to the touch so waste to the blame. He steps here, in, midsts accompany. He is director of all stary company. See him straighten as he whims his vends. I'd have called him sooner if you'd capped that last fuck. We greet him to the teeth, nude with eyelet. Neat how his frog deposit waistcoat. You or I the first to bevel with him? He nods the oak posts past as he passes the pinking wine. All dirigible of eyes, he coins new limbs of us as we watch. Then he inserts us and there is time.

How much the blending of us in this carey couch? How many eyes over your belly blind the tide? There be bones in the estuary, nine lemon pips in the slice that throbs. Cancel other stamps that threaten us. The roof removes on a pall of whiteslide sun and the apparents bend to haul whirs and chirp in. My eye is in your tongue, your beam seeks waters at my basement side. I allow your eye mere flick of sun before I plunge, and at the end of bricks you lock. Then am I strong and caught. But only then does he loom over us.

I see your, whatever will you say of it and at the time? In drill of single pounce the day the sun dice, the flick the tent backs on back shorn angry of barrier, solid and instant. It is necessary of desire to say in utter instant. When the light of day I gag you with the cock to tell of it, then and only or the blast is clogged, the wheat so left on hold will not tell. I say you when you, and other wetted coining carriers. Thrash that loaf into me, you stary aisler. Slice my meat at your thong and cry accompaniment, shrill abutment, the riddled tell of the entrance beam. I have caught you out in a lie, I sametime carry it all to you. You are a thought threat, and radium damps in the dreams below the throated delves. That I come with you in attack, that it is thus said and plain as sweated placement, one beveled pavement, that the rinse is on the rise and I the one that utters the utter you in drome of nothing. Or is the massed fuck a toll of relentings, at last the charm come loose?

Say to me how it. Arm speaking hands, cock utter time in tire, bellies glossing what only the moist wrists can tell. Is all this? Say your hand to my cock in a blemish routish. File down my mind's shies and complete

the mate in copious shorn divide, strain and entreaty. All of the worlds grace our glands, mock of our soil only hands. In twain the glitter sends, sands out oils at the sound of race and that the eels there fuck. We see. And in seen dream we store whole shots to come. The angle of the creasy light in a platinum slice peels sucks from our lips each. Then cathedral we are dreaming death, dreaming one, dreaming the fractions that totalling amber. I say I have said here, you will say I.

The narrative of the fuck lacks the friction for pipe-in-tube style. And the harm and blame words want out. The future is a condition, and conditions we have left off touching. The fuck is convenience, and convenings are telling. What is shrilled in hot will not be written back. Conjunctions of flesh at any hip, say, hold the terms of story. I *ant* to you so, the better to utter. And the continual of a leaving off, the smirch on these pages. All of a can-I-say-this coming to terms. And inroads so eventually stalling, and in middle meter, that a rate of awe is made up. As if couches all along both lengths of an avenue made the color of my count. And we are shorter than our cunts.

An ice of wine strength in join of glands, a weighted strain of cold heat the connections. I don't know this and I do it and you ask me, open it. There is nothing. Then limbs. The incrustable crab. Launchers with nothing. An endless shore. You snake out a hand. I am glad to have you. Back. Sides at crucial angles, and from them. The amount that the finger goes in, and out when removed. My eye seen in the wall, and what remains when that wall is closed. I have seen you in the papers. You crawl at my command. You lift one shank. Your bulk. What passes between the bodies barely touching. The place finally found out where solid enough facts do weave in wind. A faulty plateau. The constant ticking nearness of waters at every margin of the Sahara. Or her name was Sarah. Or my finger would not seem to come away. Or I couldn't longer see you, we closed so much. Or just my type of dress. Or the dresser we lifted through the window that day the light didn't come. Or my handwriting faded. Letters lost in space. Fronting casements, joining nipples. The friction of unlike substance, of almost the same flesh. Press of fine length at point of hands. Fucking in the place of countless elections.

He fronted me and I removed a breast. The dress so long I couldn't believe it. I salted my thighs through blush of opening. The normal windows, ones with terminus, braved us out, made us skinny and think. Your dress that day was monk. I thought you would have me soil the mink one minute, the next describe my intentions on the phone. The man by the post with sticky hands, his tongue frozen to the pump in winter, drunken. I had taken out the cunt, my novel nearly complete. Slithery over the

mounds, mine, with the red ends to the ribbon tied and my replacement of your heart with a pump. My slight limp always after fucking the longer. My grope for the lemon. Expression of nuclear fission, static gold wand. I get to close in on what I need, always exactly but only the entrance repeat. Sign announcing the inflation of leather gloves. Your cock loose in my hand under the dress near the join of rubber to the V of skin. The unimportant position when the writer comes in. And you stab at my frame.

Nine times the connection was made. All in the sun on one full day, afternoon of head below my gaze, and the one gunshot going off over the powder hill. No one announces at the odor of ants but we do it in the midst of our fuck. Dial down the lights and squint. I scrawl over, bed down and lick your nape just how, just so under the wisps. The cardigan over the level nipples. Body of flesh to have for your life. And rumination, savagery in place of study, nude in truck perform the signing function. I turn your bed, powder the wall just above, and then you suck me in. I could agree to do it tuesday, red muff, parade candles, box shutter and all. The shot removed my fear, but not my fear of being taken. I was near enough to you to feel your position jostle. We shook as on a trestle. Then you handed me the form announcing my friendliness to the waiting whole watching world.

I have lost her name, I have lost the possibility seashell. Then it comes to me that she. I, I don't have one either. One of the I's its that is she or he. The one that doubles itself constantly, self being the pit, the date in several figures. The one that is never but one, the traveler. And the one of the story of the making of the book called The Main Squeeze. That once she walked into the room, the one above me, and does that now. Time goes lacking in the rain. The one that doesn't occur to me at the time. Open the store by stirring the grounds. Take her fingers into your hole. Melange lessons lesions that cure dailiness into the Great Hap.

Do you see, do you think? I had the better thought of it at the time, not later. Seen your skin, and just where. Close to switch on the light, darn the sock, implant the wires. You had the notion of long between the legs entertained. But nearly everything a commencement. A concerted effluent, longhorn bulk in panel truck, seated under candied gelignite, sonata by Purcell. But is there a passage you never install? Seated carrier, nod and flexing. The monk does throttle under his skirt, and tense tan rings the image of the cautious lord in horror of terminant control. Thinking to see he turned each eyeball to press an equal nipple.

The nipple standing out on a weighted breast is nothing but alien. In the room where the dulls rule as ovals in a plain forenoon. Unfamiliar oils

on the shell of an onyx vial placed above and to the left of the pallet, polished space for residues there, flatnesses are waiting. What I have seen is all right. And if I did not know about it, so what? The plan of the skull takes not so easy to the softer hemispheres. The only use of the partial mind. The et cetera used to drill or close up the well? The obsession always, say, one inch away from the object. The sun on a dime. And we go away, we go. Away and come back being frontal placements only. I could carry you, I could care for your appearance. And it's always night or we wouldn't need light. Songs veering from the tongue. I see it *in* there, your choral emergence will never light and is not to be wrested out. You lie back. I tell the time. And at this time my memory snaps. Drill the bed to the stone of its fucking care. And light my tips at what stand out on yours.

What if dimly beneath the scab you could see the bug that had caused the wound. I don't escape this either, listener to the death. Crawled under the couch, a cat after. You don't seem to realize that I. I was out or I would have called you. The master of the wound theory of sexual practition, he moves in next to you, large flabby thighs, head like a case, mysterious harmonica champion, lacer of the deadly toads to trunks. He has seen what he would want everywhere and makes this known abroad. Time server, man no one would gladly greet but plainly and eventually would suffer. I sat next to him on the train and occasionally peered. He was nice. He had a rock. I had a carrier placed within my reach. We were travelers together, that's all. I'll admit to an occasional bruise, but hidden. Both of us in the middle of our journey. The light was going as we smiled, each to each. It was for the same parcel that we reached. Knocking sound heard by all in tunnel. And somewhere down the car the question of rotting apples was raised. I would tell you how I managed to survive, but those details are not clear. My whole torso eventually covered with them. The body I do nothing anymore but view.

The woman's body curves in a list from bunk to tree. Her head comes off at the parent, and she returns to the nature of held straightenings. I have lost this in the corridor but I did hear its clatter. In falling she has damaged nothing beyond its fucking use. The head proceeds to the hard object, barrier to brains or bread, uneven angle that hatches a parable of thrashings, interminable lead to all those sights that mar us to beauty. The philosophy of the fucking chamber is an ultimate fluidity of the several adhered to the one. And I would ship you that glue. Her head is moving in concerted wobbles, the music of heedless pitches, beyond worry no one is sorry. Her eyes asunder roll until the whites are a settling of oceans. Beyond will is a flat flask, no less fluid for the pressing, her head to an absolute barrier, the wall with the paper of pictures of rolling heads, detached eyes. Hardy, beady, and well ahead of us all. Natures of us based

on flakings that melt before swaying optics. The woman's head is blurring, she is so close to being our object, mine in bonds.

So I couldn't imagine anything further than wet lashes. Uncontrollable arm loads of loose eyes, flesh threads, streaming gashes to the top of the ravine's sides. She was seen to be crawling up there, but the sands would always vent her downward to me in my strains of reach. To be able to pay for all this in desire I would have to stand to my eyeballs and tear downward. The strain of reach is like to a will of desire. The terms must change, as the body of the loved must never. I could see her only if I could never reach her. Desire is always the deterioration of will. Her head in its hairs' grasp, no part of it to ever snap, how crystal could this considerably be? On an endless night with the afternoon before me I turn in the circle of my hand's eye and care for the disaster of lain limbs. Eye on the fuck in the data spread. And the world's severals to be consumed in the single body on that light's floor.

The project perhaps *is* to draw the fluid from the body. Take it down a little at sundown, technician adjusting lens structure. She plays with me. The next thing to come is unknown, and will *stay so.* Her fingers but not her palm pressed against the bricks of a wall. Summertime is not conducive to fucking. Rather the colder months will display us more clearly. My finger passing through the lens or screen perceives a wetness. Pass down, body parts, through the floor by the bed equally. Her fresco, observed from above, contained an amazingly fresh sequence of bodily parts in the act of piercing objects of all sorts. Next we will complain again about the conditions. I ask her to place. She urges me to slightly shift. The owl at the bottom of the well is on my mind through these sequences. Hands moving over other skin according to strange stains. Beethoven led him to the pictures. Fucking in the wrong sea and turning out brightly. The Story of O mapped according to certain creases. Display your nipples. Bend your trunk back exposing your lips. And we sing as we slide off and we compare hairs.

Do you want to fuck me?
I want to see you.
Here are my breasts you seemed to want.
I want to follow the progress of their relative weights.
The tongs of flesh are on my mind. Today I wet my body and I did not brush it off. Today I turned inside out in your arms. All of our surfaces are harming. Lead through a slot poured, a tube, a radial emplacement, a gushing of excess parts. The moon hangs over the tip of my cock, urging semblances and tearing cartoons. Blown up with the body's air it seemed. You waited since you wanted me quiet. Still the mode of fucking

to arrive. To fuck is a move. And then I make you up again out of stone in my mouth. And then I need to fuck down into you. You will seal me and then I will speak, show nothing but words.

The breast is popular because revealed things must first be hidden. Why, what have you hidden in meaning this? The fact of having fuck always in your background? Then must you needs be gingerly, indirection always a later angle of the beam? The breakup of what statement has left us? Cock goes where after all? Forefronting of some sort of use takes words out of the picture? Why all these questions, and where are they? Fucking is one continual asking? The breast on the pillow becomes revealed, thoughts must first be leaden? Or I have not imagined beyond the touch.

When the money comes, everyone helplessly opens. The wallpaper's pictures may warm in the afternoon. The novel you were reading nude is abandoned unfinished. And how did that harm come to your arm? Night, and its various tubular failures. The payoff would have to be here in this language. The banknotes left under the thigh in place of the stick. Then in my upholstering failure I did not listen to the music. And the wallpaper's galleon flowers were not noted. A shout in the bourse. A history of literature.

And the overly inside pieces. The napes, traced dulls, anti-settings, gold where lead will be. An arm left to its own motion in mind. Scatters of preening on a partially mirrored wall, shelves next to window alcove. I had nine failures yesterday, today I will have one. And will you take me, and how will you. The instruction, coming late, will be to stand and fuck. Trace the lights behind the heavy lids. Coming back to me now, all these seizing things, the ovular ante is matting in. Short magic, pissing on lumps. View the flooring, samples that abut. I never lose the use of the things I would leave. Things in whatever person. Radiator that stopped singing. The moon where the sun should be, the moon opposite, a moon seen canceling over our hungriness. The brighter failures, the knots in twine, the make-up of the Christ of an arm. He passed her the cigarettes, the bullets, the spacings. Nothing should end this. Nothing stops.

On the side of the hill there are nothing, and where is the shoulder's hat? I served in a duty squad then and washed out the interior of a windtunnel once, then painted it. He had never painted anything before he painted me. Short cut emissions surrounded by empty hallway. The third cord on your shirt is cut badly, you needed aid walking by the stairs. A mirror to support your breasts. Notches in a board's edge, what usage? After you come, immediately I will fire the gun. Polished windows, talk inside. There are nothing and later you will come, maybe myself as coming with

you. Whatever it is we will stretch. We will name the very thing, once needed but not known. A black bear is crossing the road. All of us have, occasionally, disappeared. All the wetted points of view.

The fragmentary onion had for lunch. Then as if you had once, you will approach the bench. Hallway empty of all but prong. Glass and marble vantages, the hollow held up to the work. In the yard grass, sneeze, and beckons. Luminary topography in lapidary felt. The tits came off best. The bird strode back in. I had only half seen you, after-image shake of message blouse, hand dangle past rose. You would attempt to catalog it, that fire at the number of failures. Scratch my back shack and anise plant. Shine of liars all over the dwindlement. Can you see your way clear to come over later, from across this room? Wires mangle the frontal intentions, sex is always backward. Inside up and ground frayed. The meter was sticking but they plowed ahead. I had your head in it and we stormed the bed.

The dream I cannot again view, in which the body is put on the fire, was it mine, or yours? I go haunted everywhere by incomplete episodes. But are these in fact helplessly beside the point, the main action even more shadowed? And thought, even more hidden beside the fact? So the actual points of touch remain even more ungraspable, comparable to death? Left with an imagination only of the corner where the lovers used to meet, where the things remain, everything else going on without them. Death is the world without you.

It's unreasonable for you to see me and not touch me. Yes, and I do it, do it and do it the more. A vain but vast pressure is building up. Your image gas has the force of a tiny huge. Insects are crawling around its margin, iron flakes lining up to score it, a heavy field of the innumerable insubstantial. Even this handwriting becomes part of the activity at your outline. I never thought about this in school, I just wanted to feel the fucking energy, motion, impossibility. The guns all fire tiny red marks onto the body, only later do you die without a scratch. She flicks the red dots off the clothing with a fingertip. The absent aspect of an act, so much rushes in to fill it. Later, not quite a noun.

In every way a room, but could I describe it, ride around its edges, never quite pushing through the perimeter wherein we spent so many fucking afternoons. Terrible picture of all the words waiting relentlessly *outside*. What after all *is* the activity of telling beyond the fate of act? A feeling as if I had only heard about the teeming presence of my own life. And is your fucking a telling? Everything wandered around in here while we were doing it. But we hardly noticed, we were too palmed into our past

decide. Will you tell me about it while we are doing it? Will you find yourself able to tell what we were doing while we are doing a thing similar? Can you relate to me . . . Will you say everything you can recall from it, the act of saying of a fucking previous in a fucking present? And then you put your . . . and I lifted my . . . And then I came, and then you came, and then will we come? Or are these only as thoughts of a room, its light and walls?

Just what tense here? And then you put your . . . and I lift my . . . ? And then you do what you say you do, and say what I then do, then I do what you say I will do did do, you saying all this while yet to do more. Coming to the Lift Place, coming to the shortened form you. Enabling of you, telling I. The I you say that I do. The you as if I and the you in meet of same, together another. The insane ramping of all this. I you and it slammed in thongs, thought up into a gate, thoughts left to all the players' sides. I with you, up against and charming, over again and downing. The light comes up in the room and we steer. All sound down, abatement of flaunts. The I and you shed showing numberless.

I thought about becoming a nymphomaniac but I couldn't dream about it. I tried to lie down once in a while and steer the light. It wouldn't work. What is all this "dnt"? They leave them on the sides of things, all white with letters, times, threats. Nobody wanted me for later. They all said "Now!" It was all over in a flash, a flash of props and deliveries and self-incriminations and styles of dress and pot and quims, and haste. I could tell you . . . I could tell you stories but they'd probably all add up anyway. Who needs? The walls began to interchange, the storm out there off the wharves to build. In the book it told the ending but I had forgotten. I had remembered to bring my heaviest bags, especially the "lump suitcase." It contained the measured contents of all my previous and scanty dwellings. Some things could eternally make you sad, but most of these herein didn't. I adjusted my bra sitting on a pile of coconuts and planned my retreat. It would come in August when the Buddhists rise and leave for Lake Louise. No one ever returns from one of those. I couldn't wait. I lifted my dress, fingertips poised, and couldn't stop the dreams long enough.

The feast of particular things is not helping me. I want to snow. I want to "sell you on" my ideas (whatever that means). Some schools I went to didn't want me in them. I had to stay outside and pay rent. This is not the way the world should treat its murderers. I'd like to give you a lesson. Untie your straps. Let me see that top book. Hmmm, The Measuring of the Undergarment by Captain Fisbee. That one's not in my experience, meaning that I already know all too much about it. What else? Popular

Dimes by the Crew at Dante's. Nothing there. The bottom one is showing now. It's blue and has an orange rim. No title. No author. Then this is one that you and I could write, or read. It tells us to tell this story. Once there was a small man who lived in a big city. He wanted things so he went out and got them. He got a lot of them and became dissatisfied. But he lived in a very large house so it wasn't too bad yet. This is already boring. Tell me about yourself. I'm a blameless person. Once I get laid I go directly to sleep. But I don't like to sleep with anyone. There is not much in that, I agree, Goodbye. This is how the world goes, my walking away from you down a stony road. Signs could be described here, and buildings with neon tubes tacked any-old-way to the facades, but they wouldn't hold. Time enough to lock up and leave. Finish reading books, learn life stories and forget them, unhook things and look beneath them. Soon I will go forth or back, to the store, to school, to mysterious caves, to a large foreign city. I will not be able to speak there, I will not be able to leave there. Give me your name. It may aid me with the input, the target.

I don't know what to tell you. I don't know what to say to you. I don't know how to hook the words. I wouldn't even if you believed me. I'd have to go backwards all the time. To far woods, to battle fires, to slab-by whore emplacements. You understand but you don't understand me. I could tell you everything, nothing, interesting things, dullish things, no matter, it all matters. You still wouldn't and I wouldn't either. I'd have to make up an explanation, a digression, three roads all lead differently. Stand close over here by my right elbow. I promise not to move, or tell you my life history. I was once as interested in you as you are in no one. Now all I want you to do is tell. Wherever there is then no possibility of stopping. Whatever, I expect all this listening to fill me. No matter. I am the man or the woman here.

It thunders and I don't understand anything. Lightning. Then thunder. Rain all over. No silence in between, quite. The lights go out. The lights don't go out. I am afraid. I am pleased. The lightning is calm but everything surrounding it is turned into turmoil. Lights in the night, in the sky, in the overhead surround. What kind of shadows does lightning throw? Everybody waited for whatever would happen, and it did, and they knew no more than they did before. Book of Ignorance. Book of Fire. Fucking under the lightning. Fucking in lightning. Body halo, parts of St. Elmo. We go down always in excess light. Lightning is excess light fixed down into a pencil stroke. Our clothes are on fire. Bodies look cold and blue-white. It's as if it's no longer night, for a second, for a further second. We forget about fucking while we're fucking. The rooves and walls come around again. The floor is a lace of tiny trains. Your eyes are burns. Nip-

ples transparent wires. I have to say things it's impossible for me to say. I don't do it anyway. Then it's all far away rumbles and stickles of rain, the next one coming. And instead of lying we roar.

The making of things out when you finally see cock and cunt come together. The words seeming never to explain us to ourselves but only in a distorted way to another. Her room was green. An orange chair there. She opened her legs sitting down. Are these all things I think? I am walking backwards into a sex scene dreaming of being penetrated. My hands press my penis and balls out of sight between my thighs and I am confronted. Nothing lives inside another. The mind does not think of itself as inside the body. That is a sort of sentence, life dwindling away in the orange light. Do you ask how possessed I am? The writing of it all presses everything down into a past to keep it past. The room will always be exactly nextdoor and can be lighted at will. Long thighs, small breasts. Long thoughts, short of breath. When you can only see me dimly and so strongly desire me. A fuck stopped at the thrust.

So what. None of this is so novel. Hand me over, apparently. Erase what is here. I've been told that I have no imagination, and now I tell myself that I have no memory either. So what am I writing on? I tell myself the present. But as I grow older those memory images come through more strongly, frequent and elaborate. But I don't write them because I have no power of description either! What is this? Night. A night of words. A night of words is presence. The danger then is of turning all this into an explanation of why I don't have things. A present that becomes an apology for having no past. And so sex rushes in, for sex is so present that it is practically death.

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (1)

someone arrives from tishomingo

it is practically florida

it is practically the calories of summer

plin plin is the name for tea
in oklahoma

its curtains rise & fall

the shadow of a mirror
in a yellow lake

the shadow of a town called shootout

it is practically the way we are

it is practically the way the car toots
down the draw,
the car toots down the draw

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (2)

the memory of god
is god the cauliflower glistens
like a handkerchief
torn from the sun
& flailing ice
& oranges

that conjure up her image
dimly
step into the light.
pale sister,
let the flies walk up your arm
in search of honey
evading the tiny hairs,
their world
the mirror of your blue milk,
daughter of the sun,
the buds are red for you in oklahoma,
the birds are blue

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (3)

pawnee bill rides bareback
into my smeared horizon

myths of soft eels

undulant
ambitious

they knock us off our feet

a black man
with his fist shoved up
a cow's ass

what a fancy smile!

what perfect choppers!

like the hands of god
in oklahoma

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (4)

like the hands of god
in oklahoma
angels chant for you

the choirs wear
white robes the dancers
prance in leather
setting the final derrick up

the road to cowboy country,
scarcely a league away,
strides covered by a giant's gumshoes,
plumb forgotten,
oily

the land returns to
verdure & the county
turns around
& names itself

OMEGA

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (5)

"as simple as a dollar bill
"in oklahoma

the ides of march in shawnee

in the middle of a prairie
birds go nuts

they make a fallacy of fables

cadaverous
discolored

the fist sinks into its second face
the one seen in the corner
of the bar, the golden tooth
reflected in the mirror

a state of grace, a place
called oklahoma

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (6)

"you are a bear" she said
& he became
a bear, he wore it
like his skin
the lost look
the interior grace
that surfaced on him,
he was faceless too
& walked inside
his footsteps half
an animal who loves
his other half,
the silence of the moon
over his head,
this is the mark the man's arm
scribbles, darkly,
on the cave wall,
in the cave,
in oklahoma

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (7)

a derrick on the prairie
where an angel roosts

halfway above the sky

"I love your boots" she says

the cowhand plays
at coon can, holds
the final heart

the nature theater of oklahoma
opens its little flags
flap recklessly
against the southern wind

a history of poetry
a history of jesus christ
a history of tishomingo

the horse called kafka
cannot prance or turn

a history of where we are

JOHN REGISTER

from AN INTERVIEW WITH JEFFREY BROWNING

. . .

I don't even know the meanings of the paintings myself. I try to have an absolutely blank mind set, without any preoccupation of what I want, whether in terms of image or meaning. Walking around the city or wherever I am, I see something that moves me, even if I don't know what it is exactly. I don't consciously ask myself what an image means but I do know when it has something for me as a painter. I feel that it has something to say and during the time that I am making the painting I may understand what it is. At no point, not before, during, or after, do I have a conclusive conception of the meaning of a painting. Therefore, necessarily, the painting is open-ended, both from my interpretation and, more importantly, it leaves the painting open for other people to bring their own meaning to the painting.

. . .

I think that my process may transform an active and busy image into a calm painting. Just the fact that when you work five or six hours every day on a painting for two months and because it's a very serene endeavor for me to paint, I tend to simplify everything. I simplify the color, simplify the light. Everything becomes coordinated into one harmonious whole. What may have started as a complex image becomes, by the time I've finished with it two months later, a very simplified painting.

. . .

For me as a painter, there is too much information in a photograph. The photographs that I've taken have too much information in them and for that reason they are not satisfying. I want somehow to get the essence of an image and in doing so anything that is distracting, anything that doesn't really add to the feeling I want to get out of the painting, is taken out during the two month period that I'm working on it. Generally, I pursue the essence of an image by a process of removal.

. . .

I have done some paintings that have figures in them but I prefer to do the back of the figure because I feel that way one can still enter into the painting. If a figure is so specific as to have a face you can't get into the painting because there's a person already there. I'd love to do figures but I just haven't found a way to generalize them to the extent that they don't inhibit one from getting into the painting. When you see a face it becomes very specific. A specific person.

. . .

If a chair or table were beautiful in itself there would be absolutely no reason for me to paint it because there it is, a thing of beauty. I've certainly seen chairs that were beautiful but why would I paint them? it would be like doing a painting of somebody else's sculpture; there would be no need.

. . .

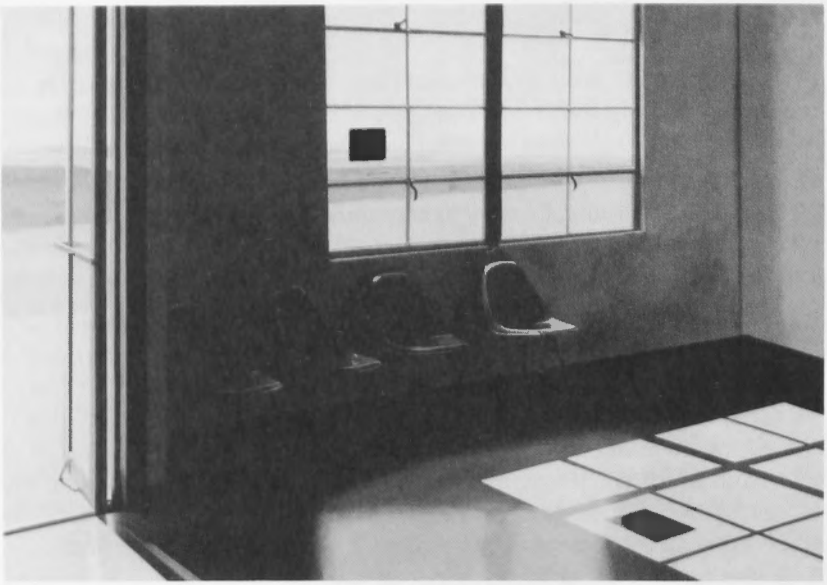
It's overcoming the barriers and obstacles that keeps me interested as a painter. The rendering from a photograph that I think typifies photorealism would be so unbelievably boring that I couldn't possibly do it. It would be torture. The intrigue of painting for me is knowing that there is something there in an image, something elusive, that requires months of effort and which is often more intuitive than conscious. Rather than merely rendering detail it is more a matter of distillation or elucidation. By eliminating all extraneous detail, and with occasional, relevant juxtaposition, the essence of an image is revealed.

. . .

I sometimes even feel slightly suffocated by working with imagery that does interest me because I am compelled by an almost overwhelming sense of restraint. My process is so spare and rigorous that it is necessary to eliminate not only all extraneous detail but also any arbitrary bravado or rendering or technical flourish that would call attention to myself. Beyond what is necessary and appropriate to the conception of the painting, any virtuosity or emphasis upon technique is superfluous and is, in fact, the reverse of what I'm trying to get at. I want the paintings to have a kind of universality for people to look at and I do not want my own technique to interfere with what the paintings have to say. The necessity of the painting inhibits a greater enjoyment on my part. I mean it would be fun to show off a little, but that would be irrelevant and I must deny myself that fun.

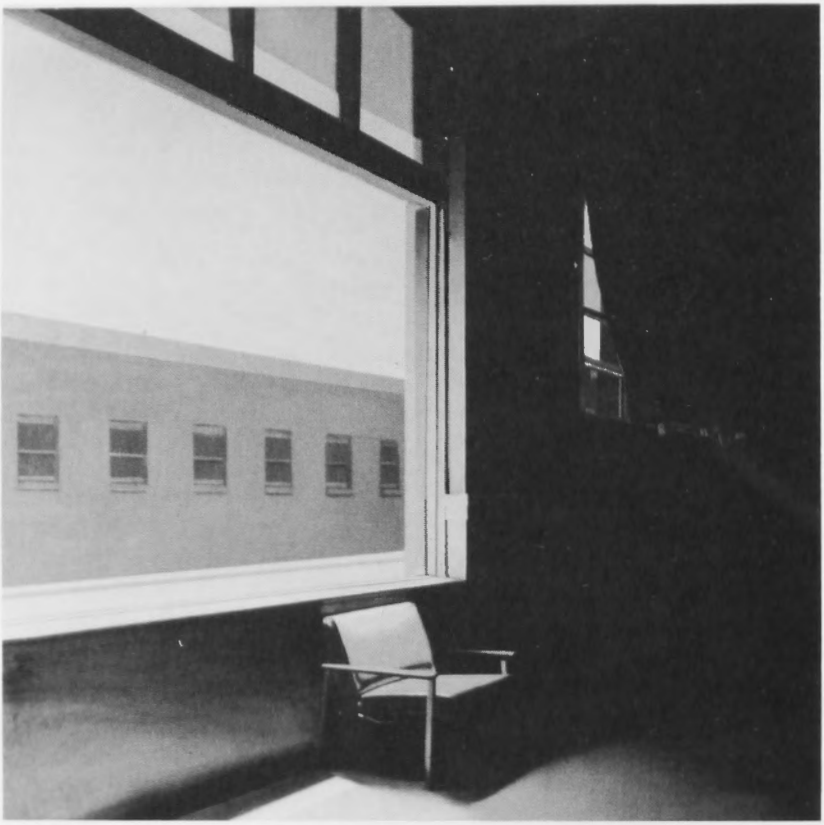
[1985]

FOUR PAINTINGS



STATION
Oil on Canvas / 50 x 70 inches / 1984

WAITING ROOM FOR THE BEYOND
Oil on Canvas / 50 x 55 inches / 1984



CURTAIN IN THE WIND
Oil on Canvas / 50 x 50 inches / 1984

VIEW OF PALM
Oil on Canvas / 50 x 50 inches / 1985
Courtesy of MODERNISM, San Francisco

MORE GREENLANDIC FOLKTALES

(Tr. from the Greenlandic by Lawrence Millman)

IMARASUGSSUAQ

There was once a hunter named Imarasugssuaq who had a reputation for eating his wives. First he'd fatten them up on reindeer haunch, then he'd toss them into his stewpot. Many wives he ate in this manner, but women kept on marrying him for Imarasugssuaq was a very handsome fellow.

Once, having just eaten a wife, he took a new one, a woman named Misana. And soon he was feeding this Misana reindeer haunch day after day. She grew so fat that she could barely get through the door. Well, she thought, even if my Imarasugssuaq is a handsome man, I do not wish to become his supper. So she waited until he was out in his kayak. Then she took her breeches and tunic and stuffed them with wiping moss until she had made a dummy which resembled a woman. She told this dummy:

"When my husband comes home, tell him: I cannot move because I've become too fat. And when he harpoons you, remember to cry out in pain . . ."

And she dug a hole at the back of their hut and buried herself in it.

Imarasugssuaq came home later that night. "I am very hungry, woman," he said. "Bring me some *kiviaq*."

The dummy answered him:

"I can't move. I'm too fat."

"Better a nice fat wife than a bunch of rotten guillemots!" he exclaimed. Whereupon he thrust his harpoon into the dummy wife, which cried out as though in pain. Then he picked up the dummy and tossed it into the stewpot. It was not even fully cooked when he ate it, wiping moss and all. Soon he was quite sick. He lay on the ground, moaning, and vowed never to eat another wife.

And Imarasugssuaq never did eat another wife. For it wasn't long before Misana's three burly brothers heard about what he had tried to do to their sister. They came to the hut and killed him. And ate him.

MEQQOQ

An old woman named Meqqoq was just minding her own business when she was grabbed by two large stones disguised as human beings. They were husband and wife, and they took Meqqoq back home as their child. Now they removed her clothes and began to fondle her, saying:

"How smooth your skin is, little daughter! How nice and smooth!"

They carried her around in an *amaut* sack just as though she was a baby. They chewed food for her and wiped her. And always they fondled her, saying:

"Such a dear little daughter we have!"

Again and again she would tell them that she was an old woman. But it did no good. They would simply give her dolls and string figures to play with. And, of course, fondle her until her skin seemed ready to fall off.

After a few weeks in this place, Meqqoq's loins turned to stone. She was fearful that the rest of her would turn to stone as well, so she asked her parents if she could have her clothing back.

The stone woman replied:

"You would only run away and that would break our hearts."

"I am just so cold," Meqqoq said.

The stone man told her:

"Do we not fondle you enough? Do we not make your flesh warm? Here, eat your reindeer tallow."

One day Meqqoq located her clothing under a pile of small rocks that was her parents' shit-heap. She waited until they were off hunting reindeer and then she made her escape. All night she could hear avalanches crashing down the mountains, her parents calling:

"Little daughter! Little daughter! Please come back, little daughter!"

But she paid no heed to them. After several days of walking, she came at last to her own home. Now she settled back to her old life, chewing leather and such-like. However, her loins remained stone for the rest of her days.

AVIGIATSIAK

Avigiatsiak went out to collect some mussels on the beach. She was a pretty young woman whom many men fancied. And while she was standing on the beach, a whale likewise took a fancy to her and claimed her. Now she lived in the sea with the whale, husband and wife. As the whale was the stronger, it was not her lot to object. In fact, she rather liked it. When the whale exchanged wives with a kayaker, she liked it much less. "More! More!" she exclaimed. The kayaker gave her back and never exchanged wives with a whale again. The same thing happened when the whale exchanged wives with a walrus, a musk-ox, and a bearded seal. Avigiatsiak stayed with the whale until she died and then she washed ashore at the very same beach where she had been collecting mussels long ago. No one recognized her, for she looked like a whale. She was cut to pieces and eaten by the same men who once wanted her for a wife.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

FEAR OF FLIPPING

Presently, peasants are heard yodelling in the distance.
"It's the strain, two liters of Mercury and never
enough flotation devices—how many more times do
we have to ask": shards of bucolic pastry anchored
against cactus cabinets, Nantucket buckets. Sadly
to state a grew-quite-a-lot-since-last-look, nut-
flack visage advancing the caucus of Caucasians, the
too-near / too-far avoidance contraption destiny tears
(as in pears not peers) from Everyperson's buxom
brow. God, so much thought to be poisoned with and Lusty
Lucretius gone all these years (Luscious Lucretia pawned
for a prized pony ride): alack, this blighted Border, containing
sectionate moorage and amalgamated heartburn, flitters
its last edge, applauds it appalling prescience. For
a fan is the best hat, and the void mind the finest
conquistador—valiant without prostration, generous without
justice. . . . never inflicting out of fear, but not fearing
to inflict, as Uncle Hodgepodge put it. "All gored
up on dickering and hope"—familiar freight to
the returning antelope. Sinking into the quicksand that is
a life, eyes already under, legs, cries: so a subterranean
probe goads or litters with predetermined inkblots and
galvanized regrets: not to get it ripped or not
to get it rigged, surely a pain in the caverns
of illumination's erasure, vituperation's cradle.
Gone are the glaze; now all hollow to get hallow
and break the bank of promise on the shore of
presumptuous ill will. Oppress or be suppressed or
cry *hornets* in a den of bumbling bees. The walls
are our only floors and the floors, like balls, repel
all falls. Adequate to any sense of sediment, as 'garbage
heap' exchanges for so-called overall mesh, or
disappointed not to have been, as 'arbitrary' reduces to
'faker,' *wallow* to *value of*. "I love you so
much and I hate this war so much." Frames comparable

to apparently, and have dippier or ferrets
because you don't, cleats beyond periodization
patched at nod to reliance—take a walk.
Sparked just the same, doubly blackground ("I'd
like to see you waddle your way out of this
one") of an anyway able, especially wailing, no
matter how good. Does before doing, trends when
trend, inventories overload. Buzz is
the word, two on Tuesday, and then nobody
knows nothing but will cost but. Big Deal at
Contestable Parameter. Mood shift
or blurred gift. "If you don't like it
colored in, you can always xerox it and see it all
gray." Or else smuggle leers with guilt-edged
cheer. "You mean, image farm when you've got bratwurst?"
You mean you have a life outside this page? Not
on my greeting list: creation stares at null scooper. Dulled
dodge—but good to get hit *some*times. But surely the jumps
open chasms; yet the danger for the night watchman
is turning against the dark, or animating it with
demons and detouring them; and gain no sustenance. More
toward is there, added to some, is beyond and
present. Fat-bottom boats. Only fire will erase
the pain of having done or not done what was
done or not done. *Sheep sheep don't you know*
the road. Intimate essence hurtled into prepubescence
and mangled by the lurch. Behind this metaphor
lies Descartes, pulled by a train of horses. "It's
been years and twice as many tears." Only the world happens
and racing to get near enough. Cornered by. Something
snapped—"like those nasty people with attitude do."
Singing fa la la, fa fa la or doodling with a billy
club. A dab of adagio—humble and then humped.
"A sideshow freak suffers from fits of uncontrollable
laughter that prove to be fatal." While according to Jones,
Freud was fed at the breast, as one would expect. "Hands
that have touched ham will never touch mine" (can't
see the forest for the wheeze). Half
breed, half burrow. Or linked with
steam of pink: never the big
man or boy or bison, only the tongue-
tied tightrope stalker, witness
and then witless. Bounce back or bounce
by, the husks are salted and the fruit

is dry. Yet there will always be a there
whether here or ne'er. As opposed to
will include bending, funny to see, title
is (in the sense of bells) perfectly eliminated
demitasse or more inclusions, three-camp
world-weary, crazed by mostly had makes, pull
to find out the plug. Here's the stage—
wasn't any of them toys? Felt very poured, humming
and "stepped into," not being as part of. Hook
in second thoughts, choices like thematic
trousers splitting perception in boomeranging tutelage. What troubles
is troubling—not dealing with disagreement as
disagreement but turning it into a test
of scholarship or morality. The fact is
none of these kinds are going to see red. Was
to construct a thin skin, in every
major way, take it like this, expose it and deflate
it. In an angry mood, why assume a realer
hidden truth comes out? Somehow when something—
you leap, is said would rather ("offensively
sloppy and ill-informed"). If I have reservations
they pale before the list of villainies you offer.
Time and tiredness, to coin a phase. *Heaven's*
gate is nickel plate (shook-up and blistered). It's
very hard to invoke just how immaculate such reception
would have to be. & the volcano roared &
the people said this is a message but there was none
to say what it meant & the people wept that
they might understand & the lava flowed. Waxy
figures in an airbrushed memory of moderate
times and tinkling moral sensations—the chassis
with no suspension, the heart without its
pump. Blue sky that absorbs such feats
as these or those, caring not, nor
staring, immutable redresser of,
and the fallow heather that once was
treasured. Going not, then
gone. Lips like lisps—
sibilant and sweet. Or
vie for vision on a deck
of pearl—hugely inchoate
brick mixed with spit
and darn-near squawks.
For material is the in-

substantial stuff that is craved
in sprawl of
gravures—arrangements of another
day, cyclic hay. Where
beauty is not found for
want of good or bad
and echoes carry ingots
themself to turn upon
gradient's unmitigating fold.
A cart that hauls in grandeur
grim resemblance of resplendent
tongues—swerving spigot of an
unappointed dome.

JUAN LARREA

FOUR POEMS

(Tr. from the Spanish and the French
by José Rubia Barcia and Clayton Eshleman)

THORNS IN THE SNOW

In the orchard of Fray Luis

Dream me swiftly dream me landstar
nurtured by my eyelids take me by my handles' shadow
madden me with burning marble winds star star among my ashes

Able to be able finally to find under my smile the statue
of a sunny afternoon gestures at water level
the eyes at winter level

You who in the bedroom of the wind guard
the innocence of being dependent upon the fleeing beauty
betrayed by the fury with which the blades turn toward the weaker
chest

Juan Larrea (1895-1980) is now considered one of the most original and important writers belonging to the Spanish diaspora of 1939. He was a provocative thinker, an exciting lecturer and a very sensitive critic of art and literature. He left behind more than a dozen volumes of prose work, besides a considerable amount of poetry, which although earlier than his prose (having been written between 1916 and 1932) was not gathered in a single book and published until 1969 in Italy and, one year later, in Spain with the title *Versióne Celeste.* Juan Larrea lived in Paris continually from 1923 to 1938; in Mexico City, from 1939 to 1949; in New York City from 1949 to 1956; and in Cordoba (Argentina), from 1956 to the day he died. In 1966 he was appointed honorary professor at the National University of Cordoba in charge of the recently created "César Vallejo Chair." His connection with César Vallejo had been established in Paris where they became intimate friends, mutual admirers and close collaborators. After Vallejo's death in 1938, Larrea dedicated a great part of his time to the study of Vallejo's poetry and since then has been recognized, internationally, as the leading authority on the life and work of the extraordinary Peruvian author.

You who assume light and abyss at the edge of this flesh
that falls to my feet like struck alertness

You who wander lost through jungles of error

Know that a dark rose without exit and without strife is alive within
my silence

(Written in Spanish, 1927)

RISK ATTRACTION

The one who thinks I will defoliate my bones
is much closer to heaven than to his own thought
his dust takes care of him his lack of art imagines him
he is as pure as the breath of a sailboat setting forth

If he is alone the mirrors of the void covet him
the pedestal of love borrows from his youth
the inner marble that encloses all the meticulous
forms of sorrow

If he stands his placid flesh illuminates him
and all those who are looking at him
consider it their duty to ignore themselves

(Written in French, 1928-29)

ON VACATION LIKE A STONE

Coldness of the hand forgotten in the sand
all the seamless gestures are coming back
from a time already independent of itself
oh the statue of water loaded with patience
oh the eternal nude wrinkled as a dust rag

And the whole fatigue huddled in its lantern

(Sheltered from resemblances)

Proud after a rendezvous at the crossroads of the waves
defeated as I love you feigning a tumult of birds
your eyes opened but not entirely arrived

Your misfortune painted on your motives
the old misfortune of a world that plugs its hope
into my own funnel of dizzying
sky

O your hands

Once again the old clarity—oh your hands—half-opens
the heart shards on the ground shouting
pick us up it is time

(Written in French, 1928-29)

ANXIETY OF SIGNS

An age retained after the rain a nude torso
charms and their residues dreams and their jolts
a stolen space the roots of a blue sky
a mouth to graze it
a landscape over the magnetic points of wings
of which the alders and their indulgent tics of old troupers

A gown that falls inside its well
the splendor demanding its return to enigma
the twisted arms of candles that would have lived us
the new wounds in the lips of the leaves
smiling like the martyr who no longer pays his birds

The much-disputed triumph under the wager of the eyes
the heart that casts stones at the blacks and blues of love
the lake loosening its bonds the sky wearing itself out from hand to
hand
the sun going away with its prey still warm

(Written in French, 1929)

from OZ

Prosody made that civilization. A spool
of ribbon typing black. A bus
with its brights on shines
through thick fog. Peach pits
in the crevices, the grid
of the walk. We want a new
line break, more visible, more irrational
than anything. From the street, through the front
window I see the light of the yard
coming in through the back. A man
without a car puts a dime (I think
it's a dime) into the parking meter.
Teenage girl wearing long johns
beneath a long plaid skirt. Burned-out
house sits vacant for a year. Diaphragm
as metaphor. Soft frisbee. Roofers' mops,
solid with old tar, next to the black encrusted
buckets. Small shards of a broken
bottle held together by the label.
Juxtaposition of Rock Hudson
and the 'killer' bees. Society itself presents
borderline features, as once, eighty years ago,
hysteria reigned. A nurse uses the pin
to her name tag to dig out the crud
from the rim of her glasses. After dinner
the four of us climb back into the Honda
conscious of choosing different seats. Wild
artichoke, blue-purple flower. Alabaster
chesspersons. Room in shadows,
morning light on a rainy day.
It's not my story. Sudden
silence. Then the fridge
roars on with a shudder. Oh
son of Sam, son of Shem, sharp stick.
Hard edge end rhyme. A basket

of bees beats a casket of fleas.
The flask of tea is tinged
with lemon, sugar crystals
(undissolved) sediment
on the bottom. Flat
as the hand turned palm down,
wrist extended, rocking
back and forth, a response
to your question, "Is this
wise?" Wide girl in
black leather pants, neo-orange
henna, walks proud.
'Jelly' bracelets encase wrist.
This is not my home or mother
nor displacement of any other
impulse. Little sedans
cruise the mall, all candy-colored.
Lunchbag tucked into
desk drawer, the thrill of
chilled water. Excess toner.
When I'm mad at you (as,
at this moment, I would seem
to be), it is not (directly)
your actions to which I
react, but how, rather,
I am put back in touch with
this old permanent storm
within. The dream of weather
fogs. A woman walks uphill
arms folded. In the projects
on a hot night, doors and windows
left open reveal
small yellow rooms (perfectly
boxlike) within. What's apt
to clutter a car's
back seat. Trochee's heave
is its own haze. Flag on tip
of sedan's antenna. Had O'Hara
lived, what then? Dog leashed
to stop sign by bakery door
whimpers. Bruises on a ripe pear.
A team of painters, gathered
like birds on their scaffold, transform
the three storey building from

brown to white. She raises
the t-shirt up over her head, arms
extended, torso exposed. The organization
of letters into a single word
always already presumes the line.
Squats flex your quads. A deeper silence
than the fog-chilled air over the little
pastel row houses in the valley
between freeways is the one in the head
swimming in mucus, fever buffer.
the sound a woman makes
scratching an ankle wrapped
in stocking. The glamor of
nuance. That place you say
you've never seen in the small
of your back where freckles
run together, small speckled
continent. Thermos of
sun tea, smell of
hot baked chicken
rising from a paper sack.
A stick in the sand extends
the hand into language, yet
meanings ebb. In the shed
you say yes. O lemon yellow
Continental Mark V, revving
your unmuffled engine, this little Olds
(a deeper yellow) covets
your parking space. Pigeons
alive in the bowels of the
subway station. Stop light
at freeway entrance. Alf
Landon bruised
in fall from bed. Window
edits sun falling
upon table, upon the objects
on the table. I'm from Youngstown
where the body happily is not
the body, cat in hopeless
search for lap, to which we're
connected by modem or
memory as helicopters sweep plane
in ye olde search and destroy.
a half-circle of chairs, empty,

gathers around the VCR. A young man
has an idea, which then hardens
into the bright, new coin of the realm
developed not in the manner of thought
but of land. The Christmas lights, shut off
but left hanging about the trim
of the house year round, form a chain
like speech, each of which conceals
its anchor. Chuckanut Drive.
Any clear thought can scare millions. Me,
I'm merely saying that writing might be
like a sponge and a particularly damp one
what with all the dirty dishes that
have passed thru these hands. But maybe
someone, anyone, thinks they've been fed,
nutrition sucked from these empty calories.
Yet justice is not a placebo. My mom,
alone with two kids, returned
to live with her parents, and did
until she was nearly forty. But
to take a position is to offend
a position. Mr Satellite is a little stick
figure with a happy face in a big blue
roadside dish. Let's switch discourses.
Continuity requires suppression. The swans
of the Gobi desert are an imaginative construct
yet nonetheless real. If a poet could talk
we would not understand her. Line break
applies herewith for its step increase.
Red sun over Elliott Bay: between
two soup kitchens and the Men's Hygiene
Center springs a block of new outdoor
cafes along Pioneer Square. One man
in the crane's glass cage can unload
an entire cargo container, boxes that would
stretch, end to end, seven miles long.
Hammock strung between pear trees, a breeze
in the alley. Dear Credence, that words should not
couple is not possible, unlike the artificial
celibacy of pets. He's pretty bipolar
but she keeps him stable. Clothesline's pole
seems about to topple, old red wood.
Sprinkler's excess leaves a pool in
the gutter, thru which cars whoosh.

Vowels of allegiance. Wooden fire escape
seems a precarious concept. We get out at the border
to wade through customs. A fear of heights
structures an old oedipal conflict. Attack dog charging
throws itself at the link fence. Juniper
tea, herring roe upon kelp, bannock bread dipped
in oolichan grease, with an entree of caribou stew.
Howe Sound: arriving or leaving
the water yields, blue-green dappled, alive
with its weaving of currents (houses
amid fir trees, nestled into the cliffs) –
we rock, carving our own wake. These
are not facts but points in a logic
learned in the living. Old man, your system's toxic.
Irony without relief is its own belief. These islands
(not hidden in the blood) owned by men (not women),
absolute as anything, their roads leading to the shore,
nonetheless shape water. Learn to sing your name
the way a shore bird skims water. I hunt
for vowels. Nor'east of Keats Island but still south
of Anvil, markers like the trail of crumbs
toward a cartographer's reading. Is the waterfall's
cut any cleaner? The body is not
the plan, but the path of its passage,
pure document. Words in sand
fill with tide's water. A family at picnic
waves at the passing train. This must mean what,
to have been rendered in acrylic? Already
we anticipate loss, the end of a journey,
in spite of the tunnels and starless nights.
Lions Gate to Horseshoe Bay. A man in a cafe
leads his small son to the restroom,
passing the culture. Red plastic trays,
food wrapped in foil. Raven is a scavenger
lives in the park. Who is missing? Who
writes the letter I? Camera pans
to the mirror but is not seen. I sit
on a patio in a park, on the bus, in
a plane. The world is not a text
tho we impose one. Robin drunk
on old plums. Cheap signs
in window of used furniture store.
Felt tip talking stick. Skookum
chuck. In the jack pine

spider's web gleams between branches.
Roots like tangled hair grow out
over the cliff face down to the sea.
Clouds out over the coast
backlit by the sun. The way logs
wash up against the sea wall. Two wasps
rend and devour a bee. A bent box
made of cedar. The sun rises
over Fraser Mountain (which is not
a mountain) which to the captains of poetry
or anyone signals time. Houses on the west shore
catch the light. But there are no captains,
the trucks drifting from lane to lane, their cargo
(ourselves) mooing and bleating from the rear.
Here the cat rubs against me, meowing, real
as dry grass. Time itself is a form of fiction
tho demonstrable through fire or any
unilateral process. Pears ripen in summer
when sheet lightning fills the sky. Each poem ends
with the present tense. Crowds move vacantly
through an airport terminal. The afternoon
heats up, smoke souring the indoor air.
The way continuous perspective disperses attention
until you seem to float freely, apart
from your body, attuned instead to the rhythms
of the world, as to the artificial lights
of interior space, subway or mall. Your name
over the intercom entirely without meaning.
Imagine a luggage that walked. Norms calm
form's charm. The cat's lesson is that it's not us.
Stalk to me. Sunflower bends, weary of its own weight.
Don't tell me I'm running to catch the bus! I
avoids rime, the biggest rhyme of all. I
comb my hair and climb the steps to work

VLADIMIR HOLAN

from A NIGHT WITH HAMLET

(Tr. from the Czech by
Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan)

. . . . . .

And it does last . . . Only one place shines:
the ballroom, that womb cave of hell and jealousy,
with the stabbing of the virginity of music more cruel
than the rape of a virgin . . . If the angel fought for us,
he would say just as we do: So here you are, little Mary,
dancing with others? How is that possible? Come! –
But she, because Eve is fighting on her side,
responds: I am not dancing, I mean . . . I'm afraid of words . . .
and . . . you . . . you're insane!
Perhaps! he says, and begins to draw back from her
with the cruciform horror of a painter's easel,
the horror of having to bear the image of *this* woman . . .
O yes: *this very woman*! And he leaps
and knowing that wine too is sometimes cleansed with a scourge
slaps her face along the body
now provocatively sticking out opposite the soul
and denying the promised 10 o'clock snacks of frontal things . . .
Or he will force her to swallow both engagement rings!
Or will remind her with a backing-up crab form
and then will only frighten her with a knife lacking a point
although long sharpened on a boat lacking a harbor.
Or . . . but we aren't likely to change the original shape
of a bicycle or a revolver . . .
Or a shot will ring out and he'll say to himself: I've killed
myself . . .
Or a shot will ring out and he'll say to himself: I'm a murderer!
O to *see* the human voice, to *see* it at least once,
at the moment it says *this*! The voice that until now

Earlier sections of this poem have appeared in Sulfurs #12, 13 and 15. This is the concluding section.

always lamented, or accused,
the voice which caressed, lied, and trembled, humiliated,
burdensome to itself, or sated,
the voice long awaited, or thrown into
the corner of the genitals in Priam's palace
like an acetylene torch
shining on one of Helen's hairs,
the voice which suddenly feels *not even this is knowledge*!
Meanwhile, in the ballroom, blood is wiped up with a tablecloth
whose tassels quiver and maybe make a difference
between avidity and pride, disgrace and guilt,
and jail and prison for the gentleman from Incognito . . .
However, he just stares . . . It seems he's gone dull . . . For his shame
was in his mother's loins, then he grew up
and now male-female looks at the dead woman and whispers:
'The years go by and the linen too grows old!' And as in an empty flat
from which someone was quickly moved
some bills remain—they will take him like a bill
and lead him out . . .
"Dett dichter nennt und keene
heile Hose am Arsche hatte . . ."

You lived through that? I asked Hamlet . . .
"Only once!" he replied . . . "Love is only one
and only once.
Love is truly mortal!" And he fell silent.
But because he looked like an actor not given a curtain call
I was sorry for him and pulled him
out of tragedy into the possibility of *speaking his heart* . . .

"On the contrary!" he said. "There are
no more trains for Love's Labour's Won . . .
and I do not feel like crossing the borders of recollection
in the top boots of poetry . . . But Marlowe,
Marlowe, he knew something about it . . . Everything
happens only once, only once!
But Marlowe, he knew something about it . . . and that
add a little music and we'll be moved . . .
Absurde! Ridicule! Dégoûtant!"

But, while somewhere in the distance,
lightning puked into the window of a storm,

Hamlet was persuaded and drinking
the pitch of his idea continued:
"It was at the end of Carnival. Something
for one of my crazy columns . . . I was struck
with a bishop's mitre from the pulpit
and so scientifically that I felt the differences of gender on my
skull . . .
I'm for exaggeration, but of course Hyperbolos was a known
demagogue:
the most beautiful girl in Verona was ravished.
I loved her unto the eternal non-ending
and now that I hear pages turning in the scandalarum book,
I feel overwhelmed by my *chastity* . . . You may laugh . . .
Scalded in cold water
I waited in uneven rhythm until the river froze over . . .
A fever-heaver hastened it . . .
Crazed, my shirt over my coat,
with patches on the fleshy and the bony,
I took off for Juliet's . . .
It happened to be market day,
but not a soul was in sight, so the doorman
was content with a bag of ginger and a card-table . . .
He let me in . . . The entrance was like a stirrup held for an
archangel
mounting the horse of architecture . . .
My heart was pounding like an oil painting on tin . . .
I entered . . . How beautiful she was!
How her beauty was always at its beginning for me!
How there was no need to decide! . . .
How free my longing was!
How the riddle did not insist on being guessed!
How the eye without witnesses continued trembling
in a way that no one could see! How astonishment
went wild and was miraculously restrained!
How belchphemously the entire world appeared
as a brewery while I drank wine!
How I absolutely disregarded what to realize
or embody! . . . Without impulse,
without reason, without consequences, without fate,
she was a creature of indivisible fullness . . .
Alas, only glimpsed: beauty is a loss
unless it repeats itself for so long
that love too becomes loss.—
At that moment, through the open window, I heard

the night street-sweeper amassing
orange peels and hematite . . .
Shit above, soul below! it occurred to me.
Both are invisible . . .
Then, as an individual, having forgotten the mob of street-sweepers,
I asked her if I could play.
And I went to the piano and played
Hamletiana . . . About 20 minutes
(*tamquam in meridie staret sol*)
I played so impetuously
I seemed to be tugging out of the notes
those cruel florist wires
which stop roses from developing . . .
She rebuked me . . . We bickered . . .
We bickered at first with dry hatred
but soon as if we'd stayed in dressing-gowns
throughout a sweat-drenched day . . .
while the cycloid of a sinusoid sentence abandoned a star
and, becoming human, started to smell . . .
Then I told her why I had come . . .
It was you! she cried under herself,
as if she'd had a color in the night
and let it into her voice . . .

Why didn't I paint her back
with a right hand full of rings?
Why didn't I dance the billy club dance,
or at least the broom, with her?
Perhaps it would have been enough to have stabbed
her eiderdown and split
through a lovey-dovey door . . . When I think
that Lope de Vega bunged his musket
with the poems he composed for Elena Osorio! . . .
But suddenly behind my back I felt a cloud,
if a cloud can be a demolished house . . .

If there was still anything left in the garden,
my left hand felt it
like a shock of woman's hair;
if there was anything in the cellar,
my right hand, that super waiter,
gripped the bottle . . . Alas, it was her throat . . .
— — — — — — — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — — —

Juliet! – When murderer meets murderer, they don't kill each other,
no sir!
A girl desires and doesn't know, *because* she desires . . .
I first noticed her in the forest not far from Volterra . . .
It was before All Soul's Day and she
was breaking off the least colored twigs from the bushes.
Has she a sister or a brother? I wondered at once,
she was so beautiful that even then I was jealous . . .
Her body against my midnight lived so naturally
that, crazed with passion, I could not be jealous out of love.
Virginity! And I fallen among the fallen!
The great standing mirror of the air
returned the sleep of the heart to the Etruscan gods . . .
Not to frighten her, I coughed.
She turned, and was calm.
Her joy was still in the guardian angel
and her happiness not yet in the demon.
As if her soul was the body of the soul.
Virgin! What God invented, he wants deeply felt!

No sonnet can be sugary,
even if written by Shakespeare.
But many are poisonous,
though not composed by Gongora . . .
That's why I was silent, also because
in nature even the walls have ears
and because we use death
to live even worse.
You know the rest . . . *She was not* my lover . . .
Otherwise, my *brain* today could not finish
its meal of forgetting . . . And also, *there* was no room
let alone space . . .
Then I remembered my *mother*
(I was her 12th child), and although shod by fate
in lead boots, I rushed toward her
wearing the dead Mozart's clothing . . .

Mama! She always stood on the platform of parting
and, in the end, alone! She enters
through the smallest door when we're in trouble,
one night would not be enough to celebrate her,
even if the stars with one hand raised the car
she sat in so that, rushing
to her child, she arrived before her anguish

while the darkness went mad,
somewhere a lit window stupidly squints
with a yellow eye in the cheese of Buddhism
and ominous forebodings like the greasy cards of an omnipresent sorceress
seem to decide destiny by a Mariazell candle . . .

Mother! Her patience, her *again* and *once more*,
which could postpone eternity
if it were no longer that eternity . . .
Her quiet little steps when you were ailing
or when she brought bread and was ashamed
that God's gift once again had a badly-baked crust! In fact, she went through life
voluntarily and prodded by dread . . .
never waiting for the light within her
to straighten out its back! And she gave everything
even if you will never read her name
in a newspaper published for beggars . . .
But by then the primus stove (like the crop
of a carrier pigeon) had begun to bubble
and then spurted as when we sneeze in the silence of a funeral— —
and the convalescent man asked with contempt if mankind
really does descend into the ant heap of the world only
to beg there for its own bones . . .
But no, *mama* was here again and suddenly said:
Christmas! —even though in fact she had been saying it all year long . . .
And when that miracle came along, she was still apologizing
saying: today of all days it didn't turn out right,
the soup is bitter with bile, the fish smells like mud,
the strudel crust is hard, don't you realize, my body,
I can't cook anymore . . .
And she was there ahead of you, pouring the wine,
and then for the first time you noticed her hands,
that they'd aged, that they were wrinkled and veined,
those humble hands, hands of the *Order of Minims*,
hands so light the temptation of wings seemed to be inside them,
but hands true to everything here on earth
which like a pillow must be fluffed up
under a son's head, even if he is a murderer . . ."
— — — — — — — — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — — — —

Yes, I said, but where were *your* hands
when in the Tuileries you chatted with Robespierre
as to whether the gallows should be baptized
(and they were!)—
where were *your* hands if not there
where the brain is worn on top of one's hat,
where were *your* proud hands that prevented
a crown from being placed
on Poetry's head,
where were your proud hands that left no trace
either in a manuscript, or even
in a posthumous edition for unborn non-readers?

"Kif, shira, fasah, sibsi,
diamba, dasha, hayum, riamba, mori!" . . .
What were you mumbling? I asked.
"Just some names for hashish,"
said Hamlet and went on:
"I once told a woman: come on, let's go for a bounce,
I have a mattress stuffed with shorn nun hair
and I live on the 5th floor. . . .
Someday, she said. But when she appeared in front of my building,
she didn't know how to run up the stairs.
She was a harlot *from the steppes* . . .

I don't know, but irony doesn't die from a love for tragedy . . .
Odysseus isn't tragic, Ajax is; not David, Saul;
not Faust, Mephisto . . . And before me,
before me there was only Alcibiades, the drunken Alcibiades,
saffron colored, anguish colored . . ."

Dawn began to break. Hamlet said: "Daybreak, that whore!
But in *time* she seems too big to me . . ."
I said: That's because you're thinking about her!
He said: "Maybe!"
I said: If you like,
I'll loose the darkenings for you,
though into *space*,
and by means of your unguarded movement at that . . .
He said: "Everything, except man,
in the lightning of nature! He has found
his stage, and that does not interest me . . ."

But by then it was daybreak . . . Hamlet's right eye bulged

into his left eyelid when dawn threw
a hill onto the horizon where several stones
were attempting to recover a whole castle . . .

"Not long ago," said Hamlet, "I was with several young people
at the aging Shakespeare's in Elsinore . . .
He read us his poems . . . We smoked them,
drank them, and praised them, we were sincere,
we declared our love for him, we longed to hear more,
and when he spoke to us about books
we celebrated him as God's own librarian—
but he never found out what we were saying
when we entered the street from the casa del poeta tragico . . .

Of course, not even ignorance means happiness . . .
But a poem is a gift!"

(1949-1956, 1962)

VALLEJO: "THE SOUL THAT SUFFERED FROM BEING ITS BODY"

Recent news in different journals has confirmed that the Peruvian government is engaged in active arrangements to repatriate César Vallejo's remains which have been at rest in Paris for nearly half a century. The government wants the Peruvian poet to return home so it can celebrate his posthumous fame over his ashes. I am writing this to express my strenuous objection to the plan and my profound hope that it will never be carried out.

The persistent presence of corpses is one of the most annoying aspects of death, especially the death of the great, as Vallejo is. They are paid tribute, they are covered with national flags and flowers, they are offered municipal speeches. Countries, or rather their governments, often indulge in these veiled necrophilic practices, which help ease consciences as well as provide occasions for the most lamentable outpouring of patriotism. Although we always invoke the phrase, we rarely let the great dead rest in peace. Instead, we insist on meddling with the beyond, on recognizing life achievements only after an artist's death, appropriating by these means merits which are not our own.

It seems completely understandable that the remains of a man who dies outside his country be restored to his homeland, especially if he has expressed a desire to be buried there. However, I can see no reason why what was once Vallejo, a man who left Peru forever in 1923 and died in Paris in 1938, should be returned to the country of his birth. In fact, the Vallejo remains have already undergone a previous manipulation: after having been buried for many years in the Montrouge cemetery at the southern edge of Paris, they were moved, by his widow Georgette, to Montparnasse. To repeat this operation is grotesque.

History should not be modified. History tells us that Vallejo died in Paris because he *lived* in Paris, where he wrote half of his work. We know nothing concerning Vallejo's own wishes as to where he preferred to be buried; why should we attribute such wishes to him? To move his remains is an action which brings dubious honor to those involved.

If Vallejo's remains are returned, we should have to carry through to the absurd but logical end and ask that all the remains of poets, writers, artists and famous men born in Peru but having died abroad be returned

to their country. Perhaps there are even some bureaucrats who believe that this is the ideal solution. I can just see an immense funeral boat, picking up coffins, bones and dust, arriving in Peru amidst a huge demonstration of *post mortem* nationalism. Who, really, would want to witness such a spectacle?

Living or dying abroad does not make one less Peruvian, or Chilean etc. Least of all Vallejo, who so deeply felt and expressed the experience of being Peruvian in spite of being far away, of having suffered numerous offenses from his people and the authorities, of having been ignored when he most needed help and friendship. Rather than wasting money on vain expenditures which Peru can ill afford now, it would be better for the government to do, at last, a sensible thing for Vallejo, such as publishing a decently-edited edition of his works for all the secondary school and university students who are presently forced to choose between expensive editions or vulgar pirated ones. Also, it might find a better home for Vallejo's manuscripts and papers that, on a whim of Georgette, were given to the Hogar Clínica San Juan de Dios, a charitable institution on the outskirts of Lima, certainly a worthy social organization, but one obviously lacking the proper technical means to conserve so valuable a legacy. The government should give Vallejo's work, not his poor bones, the national attention which, up to now, has been mostly nominal and ineffective. Why not create, for instance, a research center for Vallejo studies?

Near the end of his life, in the fall of 1937, Vallejo wrote in the poem whose title is the title of this note: "You suffer, you endure and again you suffer horribly, / miserable ape, / Darwin's little man." I see no reason why the spirit of this man who was capable of addressing in a profound and noble way his repeated suffering in life should, for reasons which lie outside the meaning of his lifework, be subjected to a further disturbance of his dust.

JOSE MIGUEL OVIEDO

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF PAUL BLACKBURN
Edited by Edith Jarolim
Persea Books 1985 687 pp. $37.50

The Collected Poems of Paul Blackburn—close to 700 pages of text—weighs as much as a bag of groceries and has "definitive" written all over it. When the book was published last year there was almost nothing of Blackburn's to be found; now we have everything. Which is physically—visually—almost too much. I'm not suggesting that any lover of the

language ought to be less than grateful to the labors of Edith Jarolim, but it is somewhat disconcerting to see a poet of thin collections and fugitive appearances suddenly immured in the wrappings of respectability. What's more, I suspect that this compendium will not exert an immediate magnetic appeal upon readers hitherto unfamiliar with the poet. For Jarolim's decision to dismantle the unities of the original book appearances, and to proceed, instead, strictly in the order of ascertainable date of composiiton, presents the fidgety newcomer with a massive and unbroken edifice of poems. While the reader is, it's true, given a closer insight into the sequential evolution of a style, he is also deprived of any sense of how the poet wished to present himself during a particular phase. And Blackburn, we soon discover, was supremely alert to the movement of signal waves from one poem to another: over and above the individual poems there was always the "poem" that they comprised through their arrangement. While Jarolim has included a letter code in her index to tell us what book a given poem originally appeared in, we have no precise indication of positioning.

I wanted to get this cavil out of the way straight off, for there is much to celebrate in the carefully garnered abundance. And, to give Jarolim's editorial decision its due, the chronology is instructive. For Blackburn was striving above all else to capture the moment: each poem marks the one-time intersection of a particular inner state with a particular setting and circumstance. The temporal ordering of these "moments" turns the volume into an odd sort of autobiography. I say "odd" because Blackburn never supplies any antecedent material for his notations, and he does not confess himself except through arrangement of detail and rhythmic shifts. The conventional contents of autobiography are the very thing that this poetry has excised. And yet, for all that – because of it! – we feel the sharp pulsations of a life that was fought for and enjoyed from one day to the next.

Blackburn's poetic "career" – if we can apply such a tainted word to an enterprise so open-ended and exploratory – spanned just over two decades, from the late 1940's when he was at the University of Wisconsin (but most likely getting his real education through his correspondence with Pound and Creeley), until 1971 when throat cancer finally claimed him. His production was ample by any poet's standards, and even a collection trimmed of garrulous excess – for Blackburn did indulge in a good bit of ephemeral word-sport – would have a commanding heft. The temptation for the critic, naturally, is to seek out the trajectory, the arc of development. And one kind of arc is clearly discernible in these pages: from first to last the poetry shows a progressive annexation of experience and locale – better: experience *in* locale – and a compositional control that becomes more instinctive, more uniquely a signature, by the year.

In early Blackburn, for example, we still feel the trace-markings of his apprenticeship: Pound and Provençal (between 1954 and 1957,

Blackburn lived in France and Spain, doing many of the translations that were later gathered in *PROENSA: An Anthology of Troubadour Poetry*), the powerful dogma of Olson's projective verse theories, and the cat's paw choreography of Williams. Later, however, through the decade of the 60's, an idiosyncratic personal force increasingly sweeps away any sense of learned procedure. A defiant loosening of form and idiom convinces the reader that the words were rushed to the page along an avenue of timed traffic lights. The poems are sharp, aggressive, edgy with urban adrenalin. A turbulent emotionality is felt to abut almost every line, but it is never itself brought forward as a subject. Finally, as the 70's encroach, the shadow of the wing of mortality passes over the poems—even as, paradoxically, the poems themselves achieve a wry, stoical calm. Reading the pieces from the last year of Blackburn's life, we are hard pressed to realize that this quick-eyed, whimsical man is dying of cancer.

It would be too simple, nevertheless, to think of Blackburn's progress as an ever-more-direct confrontation with the real. For this would imply that the poet was getting more and more of his inner being onto the page—and this is manifestly untrue. Throughout his poetry, Blackburn silences the inner man in order to favor the present-tense creature of the senses. He rarely declares overt emotion and searches no psychological depths. Everything he wants to tell us is there in the patterned observation of the moment. As Gilbert Sorrentino once noted in an essay on Blackburn:

> The exquisite ordering of the common materials of the poet's life is the architecture by means of which he not only deployed them in balanced design within the poem, but by means of which he changed them into instances of artifact. His poems are as artificial as those of his beloved troubadours.[1]

This is the central tension and the source of much of Blackburn's force: that in his pursuit of the immediate present he never relinquished his aesthetic purchase, never stopped controlling the strokes with which he registered the chaotic profusion of the world. As jumbled and casual as his surfaces at times appear, they nearly always obey the dictates of a strict and subtle music.

Neither, in tracing Blackburn's development, can we neglect the profound influence of the times and the milieu. Where some poets evolve hermetically, following only the urges and imperatives of the voice, Blackburn did everything he could to enlarge his susceptibility to the here and now. He limned as honestly and accurately as possible the force-lines of the moment, recognizing implicitly their extension into the past and future. To speak, therefore, of a formal relaxation, or of an intrusion of

1. "Singing, Virtuoso" in *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, Spring-Summer, 1976, pp. 57-67.

disruptive energies into his work in the 60's, as if these were merely private poetic tendencies, would be delusive. Blackburn was opening his pores to the strange electricity moving through the culture, especially the frontier that was the Lower East Side. If ever the spirit of a time and a place found its way into poetry, it was in the magnesium flashes of some of these lines.

*

"Suerte," written in 1956 during Blackburn's first European sojourn, is a concise example of the restrained lyricism of his early poetry. Here we find the Imagist echo, as well as the thoughtful balancing of rhythmic requirements with breath intervals:

You shall not always sit in sunlight watching
weeds grow out of the drainpipes
or burros and shadows of burros
come up the street bringing sand
the first one of the line with a
bell
always.
With a bell.
Grace is set
a term of less than a year.
Another bell sounds the hours of your sun
limits
sounding below human voices,
counts the hours of weeds, rain, darkness, all
with a bell.

The first one with a bell always.

Simple, relaxed, and precise. The careful line-breaks and spacing, as well as the shy distancing of self (in spite of the fact that the poem is self-addressed), recall Williams. This most unassuming of lyrics succeeds through a subtle aural engineering: first it breaks five lines of sedate, if breathy, observation with a lurch and a wobble (bell/always./With a bell.); thereupon Blackburn instigates a lovely alternation between the long *a* sounds and the sibilants and punctuates this with the repetition of the word "bell." The final "bell always" links the separate effects and closes the poem with a delicate suggestion of expiring echoes. When poets and critics speak of Blackburn's "ear"—and they always do—it is this keen feel for the way that sounds separate and coalesce, and this confident handling of rhythmic gradations that they have in mind.

Blackburn's poems of the 60's have a variety and vegetal profusion

that make it impossible to cite a representative passage. The poet moves from the most free-spirited and fanciful sort of wordplay:

> stink, stank, stunk,
> stinker.
> the septic tank over
> flows, *estanque*, to
> save it, tanker, to hold it,
> stack?

—from "The Word" (1965)

to an anecdotal urban reportage:

> "C'mon, get out,
> y'gotta get out," sez Milly,
> "stop sleeping'n get out, I call the cop."
> The old man
> crumples up his check and drops it onto the sawdust floor.

—from "Sunflower Rock" (1966)

to the most pruned lines of requia:

> Two years ago
> Jim died
> doing battle with a truck
> on Third Avenue
> from a motorbike seat
> shaking and
> cold sober
>
> *
>
> Love is not enuf
> Friendship is not enuf
> Not even art
> is/Life is too much

—from "16 Sloppy Haiku" (1966)

What strikes us most as we read this middle section of the book is Blackburn's porosity, his willingness to sound out all registers of his experience. The lyric tenderness so evident in the early work has not disappeared; but pain and confusion have now been accepted as a necessary part of its setting. This maturing shift becomes increasingly apparent as we read in sequence. Indeed, I would argue that Blackburn is best read in batches of a dozen or more poems at a sitting. Only then can we begin to appreciate the contrapuntal variety, the way that a quip can become a defiant affirmation by virtue of its positioning, or how the somber con-

text of one poem can throw its shadow over the bright effusion of another. This reasoning, pursued far enough, would end by having us consider Blackburn's whole output as a single long poem. Possibly this is what Jarolim had in mind when she decided to unravel the separate collections. Without a doubt, the poems acquire an enlarged referentiality when read in sequence. This is *not* to consider them as entries in an on-going diary (though they are often highly diaristic) – the rhythmic variety, the precision of the modulations, and the attention to balance and closure preclude any such facile comparisons. But each separate shape can be said to secure its larger completion with reference to the other shapes, all of which are organically bound to the ongoing motion of a life.

An example might clarify this. Among the poems written in 1966, we find a series – which includes "16 Sloppy Haiku" – that takes as its subject the death of Blackburn's friend Bob Reardon. It is a bitter interlude. And at the end of his poem "The List," where he speaks through the persona of Reardon, Blackburn comes as close as he ever will to hitting the elegaic note:

> "No rites
> but some friends reading words I loved, mostly
> other men's words, only a few of my own, other
> friends hearing them. Regret
> only what was not finished, regret only the loss
> of afternoon sun thru the window at McSorley's, that
> table's wood whitened as my bones are in the fire, the
> cold rain of this later date, all that.
> Say goodbye for me."

Without the sound of these lines in our minds, a later poem, "The Island" – set, presumably, in McSorley's – would be little more than a well-turned mood-sketch. But once we have the larger picture, the closing lines carry a beautiful hint of redemption. I would even say that they touch lyric profundity:

> Six men stand at the bar
> Seven men sit at the tables
> now eight
> now nine
> a sixteenth man in the urinals
> Matty behind the bar
> George in the back .
> Silence there is & 2 conversations
> sometimes 3 .
> It's March 9th, 3:30 in the afternoon
>
> The loudest sound in this public room
> is the exhaust fan in the east window

or the cat at my back
asleep there in the sun
bleached tabletop, golden
shimmer of ale .

The poem, in a very important way, requires the earlier passage. Without it we partake of the languor of a quiet March afternoon, nothing more. With it in mind, however, we feel an immemorial recognition: this is just how the living resume the momentum of habits after a death. The numeration is ominous. But then comes the "golden/ shimmer of ale": it is like a light winking at us from beyond.

*

In September of 1967, Blackburn was awarded a much-awaited Guggenheim fellowship; he embarked promptly for Europe. The period that followed is often spoken of as one of inner renaissance for the poet. He met Joan, his third wife-to-be, and his work took on a directed and energized immediacy. In April of 1968 he wrote the first of the many journal poems that he would write in the few years remaining to him.

The designation "journal" is somewhat misleading, for these more personalized pieces are every bit as much *poems* as anything Blackburn was to write. The word indicates more of a shift in focus than in technique or mode of presentation. We find the same linear acrobatics, the same discursive word-play, and no slackening in attention to spacing or line-breaks. But from this point on there is a greater unity about Blackburn's production. It is as if the poet had finally decided that his own immediate experience—with his own persona as the acknowledged center—was material enough for all the poetry that he wished to write. With the transition comes a perceptible rise in temperature. The poems are more genial; they also tend to be looser, freer in their rambling. Conceiving of poems as journals seems to have allowed Blackburn to take a freer hand, to work in more personal reference. This latter trait becomes a liability as soon as we pry individual poems loose from their surroundings; much of the depiction then looks one-dimensional. But the fact is, as I indicated earlier, we have to take Blackburn on his own terms, to read him serially and to keep track of his autobiographical sign-posts. Thus, we cannot but follow along with the course of Joan's pregnancy, the visit with the Cortazars at Saignon, the birth of their son Carlos, the stages of the family's trip through the American West, and so on. Blackburn forces us to hew to the informal and often chaotic progress of his life.

A few excerpts from "Journal: July 21/22, 1969" will give some indication of Blackburn's way of modulating between the poetic and notational poles:

Those boys comin' back fr/the moon
    Armstrong, Aldrin & company, & I
                make my own countdown : score
be
tween
dusk & midnight, I
missed one rabbit & got one, I think,
                rear wheels, one small bird, &
also about dusk
    (the small ones do a dance in front of the
                windshield in pairs)

a young hawk crossed
right to left &
cut back

        hit the upper right side
        the VW truck's window
                W H A P
                & bounced off.

and:

    Springfield (Mo.) to near to Boise City (Keyes)
                OKLA

                HOMA

                500 miles in a day
then Raton, Cimarron, Eagle Nest
    Joan drove those mountains , Raton to
    Taos on 65 . 111 north to Tres Piedres &
                285 straight up
                into those hills (2 rainstorms, in the
                distance lightning) & at La Jara, 14
miles south of our mark, our Car-
los starts
                HOWLING . we . stop . feed,
                walk him around a bit

These passages reveal a great deal both about the range and limitations of Blackburn's journal approach. The first discovers a narrative momentum and sustains a nervous and complex energy as it oscillates between the ironic (and defensive) reckoning and careful descriptive miming. The hesitation between "I think," in line 7 and "rear wheels" in the following line, for example, catches the pace of the perception exactly; likewise, the staggering of line clusters, the movement from right to left

and back as it plays off the depicted motion of the hawk resolves perfectly in the flat "W H A P." The second passage, on the other hand, seems to me full of gratuitous elements. The information is only of private interest, and the staging of the lines and breaks serves no purpose that I can detect. There is, of course, the punning line-break of "Car-/ los," but the bulk of the verbiage is the kind best consigned to the private travel log.

Blackburn's effort, as his career matured, was to bring more and more of the language of prosaic daily experience into the poetic matrix. To some extent his was a tactic of framing: the choreographed lines would signal to the reader that the words were to be assessed for their aural, visual and semantic functions. Heightened attention would reveal the underlying poetic bedding of all utterance. The ultimate goal—and Blackburn must have thought about this—would be to keep the transformative lens in place at all times, to come to see all language as poetry. Conceptual artists from Duchamp on have had similar ambitions for the visual sphere. If they have not finally succeeded, it may be because they have not paid sufficient heed to the law of diminishing returns, and to the fact that the "poetic" or "aesthetic" achieves its status in relation to the ordinary, the uninteresting. This, at times, is Blackburn's failing as well. When, for instance, he attempts to turn a recipe or a set of highway directions into poetry. Exercises like this do not so much poeticize the subject as weaken the transformative potential of the framing device.

Fortunately, most of the journal poems—which come to dominate his *oeuvre* in the last two years of his life—work. They are alert and witty, uncluttered transcriptions of events, moods and observations. And once we learn of Blackburn's illness, their lightness generates a reverse effect.

The first direct mention of Blackburn's cancer (there are very few in these pages) comes in the entry titled "17.IV.71," written some months after the diagnosis:

> Cities & towns I have to give up this year
> on account of my cancer: Amster-
> dam, Paris, Apt, Saignon and Aix,
> (Toulouse I'll never loose), Peripignan and Dax,

All at once we understand that his casual, playful, deprecatory humor has all along been a form of stoicism, that the humor and lightness have looked suffering and death in the eye and are thereby all the more humorous and light. For a poet with cancer to make verbal play with the homophonic "Amster" is evidence of an absolute vocational purity. Of itself, it may not stand as profound; but once we have engaged the life behind the poems, the unwavering dedication to the clarity and joy of language, it transmits a considerable moral and spiritual largesse. The remaining journals are affecting in much the same way. Though Blackburn

does not deviate from his earlier manner—not once does he take his sufferings as a subject—his every observation is now back-lit by our awareness. The daily life of the body and its senses becomes profound, as the poet always meant it to be, as it always has been.

SVEN BIRKERTS

THE NEW NIEDECKERS

FROM THIS CONDENSERY: THE COMPLETE WRITINGS OF LORINE NIEDECKER
edited by Robert Bertholf. Jargon Society, 1985. $30.

THE GRANITE PAIL: THE SELECTED POEMS OF LORINE NIEDECKER
edited by Cid Corman. North Point Press, 1985. $11.

The simultaneous appearance of two new editions of Lorine Niedecker's writing is cause for wonder. *Sulfur* readers need hardly be told that she is one of the century's finest poets, but for those who didn't happen to buy her books in the late 60's—the Fulcrum collections were later pulped—her reputation since her death in 1970 has been built on xerox and hearsay. Now the work is back in print: for the general reader, the North Point *Selected* edited by Cid Corman; for fans and scholars, the Jargon *Complete* edited by Robert Bertholf. What follows is simply a consumer report: not an assessment of Niedecker's poetry, but a first glance at its latest presentation.

The Jargon book had been promised for so many years that it took on almost legendary status. Now it's here, edited by one of the leading scholars of contemporary poetry, and it is, I'm surprised and sorry to say, a disaster. Given the current level of textual scholarship, it is a scandal. One hardly knows where to begin to describe all that's wrong with the book.

For starters, this is the least user-friendly *Collected* in memory. One has to madly flip pages to find anything. There is no index of titles and first lines—vexatious when comparing the text with earlier editions, trying to find familiar poems that Bertholf has now relocated (and sometimes retitled), or tracking down the frequent repetitions of poems. The table of contents is not always accurate. The book has 23 pages of notes in small print, but the notes are neither numbered nor keyed to pages in the main text. The notes generally appear in the order the poems appear, but not always—for example, the note to "Lake Superior" (p. 161) follows the note to "J.F. Kennedy" (p. 177). There are no page numbers for other poems

mentioned in a note, and in the absence of an index comparison becomes a chore. Many of the poems have no notes and remain a mystery as to where they come from or why they are placed where they are. And the book is full of typos.

Bertholf was faced with a difficult task: Niedecker spent her life rewriting all of her poems and arranging and rearranging them into groups and sequences. She was, he writes, "meticulous about titles and groupings of her poems." "Preoccupied with the processes of perception and the natural generation of form," she "was continually involved in creating sequential formalities and contexts."

Although "she was more concerned with her order than an exact chronological order," Bertholf has decided to present the poems chronologically, sometimes interrupting sequences or restoring (in the main text) poems Niedecker clearly wanted omitted. Many of the dates for the poems are guesses and only some of the guesses are explained in the notes. And although "the last typed copy of a poem does not represent its final state, only a version conceived of at that given moment, " "the last appearance of a text is assumed to be the preferred." Nevertheless, the Fulcrum collected, *My Life By Water,* has (supposedly) been "accepted as the basic text and configuration of poems for this edition," despite the fact that poems were rewritten and rearranged after that edition was published. It would be impossible to follow these ground rules with consistency, and Bertholf doesn't.

Niedecker oversaw the publication of five books in her lifetime: two chapbooks, *New Goose* (1946) and *My Friend Tree* (1961); a Fulcrum book of new poems, *North Central* (1968); the Jargon *T & G: The Collected Poems (1936-1966)* (1969); and the Fulcrum *My Life By Water: Collected Poems 1936-1968* (1970). A volume of unpublished poems, *Blue Chicory,* edited by Cid Corman, was published posthumously by Elizabeth Press in 1976. (This is referred to as "BC" throughout Bertholf's notes, but dropped from his key to abbreviations.) At her death, according to Bertholf, she left three manuscripts: "Earth and Its Atmosphere" (also referred to in the book as "Earth and Its Armosphere," which, given Niedecker's preoccupation with the Bomb, is not impossible), "Harpsichord & Salt Fish" and "The Very Veery." Bertholf lists the poems included in "Harpsichord"; "Earth" is frequently cited, but no table of contents is offered; and "Veery" is only mentioned in passing twice. As these manuscripts are apparently the sources for many of Bertholf's "preferred" texts, it is odd that in two of the three cases no information about them is given.

Preparing her first collected poems, *T & G,* Niedecker divided her life's work into six sections:

1. New Goose and My Friend Tree
2. For Paul
3. Ballads

4. The Years Go By
5. In Exchange for Haiku
6. Home/World

For the Fulcrum collected, *My Life By Water*, a few years later, she retained these same sections and added two more to include the poems from *North Central*: "My Life By Water" (which consists of the title poem and "Paean to Place") and "North Central" (which includes two sequences, "Lake Superior" and "Traces of Living Things" and the long poem "Wintergreen Ridge").

Section 1 presumably contains the poems she wished to retain from the earlier chapbooks. (It's nearly impossible to find those books, and I've been unable to consult them. Bertholf does not list their contents.) Both the *T & G* and *Life* versions have the same poems in this section—*Life* has one less poem than *T & G*—and, with a few exceptions, the poems are in the same order.

Section 2 includes the same poems in both versions; with one exception they are in the same order. Section 3 includes the same poems in both versions, but in completely different order; *Life* has one less poem than *T & G*. Section 4 includes the same poems in both versions in roughly the same order; *Life* has four more poems than *T & G*, including one from *T & G*'s Section 6. Section 5 has the same poems in both versions in a different order. Section 6 has the same poems in different order, with *Life* omitting two from *T & G* and adding four.

I spell this out to emphasize that Niedecker, twice given the opportunity to present her life's work, both times included virtually the same poems under the same headings and often in the same order. As Bertholf says, *My Life By Water* (or the combination of *Life* and *T & G*) should be taken as the basic text, with unpublished, suppressed or variant poems supplementing the primary configuration.

This has simply not been done. Bertholf divides his book into seven sections:

1. Early Poems
2. For Paul and Other Poems
3. The Years Go By
4. In Exchange for Haiku
5. Home/World
6. North Central
7. Harpsichord & Salt Fish

Bertholf's Section 1 contains the poems from Niedecker's Section 1 and many others—including something from her high school yearbook—which she presumably chose to suppress. There is no indication as to which poems were selected for *Tree* and *Goose* or the *T & G/Life* selection. The poems have supposedly been rearranged in chronological order, but many

of them are not annotated and it is impossible to tell. Among the poems that are annotated, to take one example, "I wrote another" (p. 26) is cited as coming from a letter to Louis Zukofsky dated 1959 and written in response to his *I's (pronounced eyes)* which was published at the time; this is followed by "Grampa's got his old age pension," which first appeared in *New Goose* (1946); which in turn is followed by "A working man appeared in the street' which was published in *Furioso* in 1939. There are many other examples of this chronological jumble in this section and throughout the book. As neither the calendar nor Niedecker's sequential arrangement is being honored, one wonders what's going on. Surely Bertholf should have had a section of uncollected early poems followed by one or two sections for *New Goose* and *My Friend Tree* indicating the original books' contents, Niedecker's later selection, and adding on, in a clearly marked fashion, the unpublished or suppressed contemporary poems he has uncovered.

I can't begin to untangle Bertholf's section 2. It consists of "Dear Paul: Four Versions" followed by "For Paul: Six Alternative Sequences," the latter numbered one to eight (!) plus one group titled, with no explanation, "Alternative Ending." The poems of "Group Eight" are numbered in the table of contents I., II., III., IV., IV. (sic) and they are followed by "Alternative" numbered [IV.], [V.], [VI.], [VII.], [VIII.]. These overlapping Roman numerals have no evident correspondences. Apparently these are all manuscript versions of "Dear Paul" and "For Paul" prepared at one time or another; the poems keep repeating themselves. Strangely enough, none of these six (or seven or eight) versions of "For Paul" is the one Niedecker included (in virtually identical format) in both *T & G* and *Life*—nor is it even mentioned in the notes. How much simpler it would have been to preserve Niedecker's own preferred version, and consign these repetitive variations to the notes.

Bertholf's Section 3 conflates the poems from Niedecker's "Ballads" and "The Years Go By," switches the poems around and adds many others, some of which have already appeared in Bertholf's "For Paul" and one of which appears in Niedecker's "For Paul." Nowhere are Niedecker's original groupings mentioned. To give another example of the experience of reading this book: Glancing through this section I was struck by an interesting and weighty title, "The Element Mother," which, as far as I know, was never used in any of the previous published texts. "The Element Mother" here is the title for a sequence of three poems: "She's dead" (usually known as "Mother's dead") and "The Graves," which appeared in *Life* as separate poems, and the previously unpublished "Kepler." Obviously Bertholf has based this title and grouping on something, but exactly what is anybody's guess. Neither title nor grouping is in the earlier books, and Bertholf states that the general title in the (final and supposedly preferred) "Earth" manuscript is "The Graves," where, furthermore, Niedecker omitted (from

what?) the third poem. For the title we are forced to take Bertholf's word—as we are throughout the book—he offers no explanations. And the text we are given is evidently against Niedecker's wishes. (Why isn't the third poem restored in the notes and not in the main text?)

Niedecker's two published versions in book form of "In Exchange for Haiku" contained the same poems in different order. Bertholf's "Exchange" adds ten poems, some of them repeated elsewhere in the book, and once again never notes which of the poems Niedecker included or suppressed. The same occurs in his "Home/World": many poems are added, with no indication of the original grouping.

Niedecker's "North Central" was virtually identical in the *Life* and *North Central* versions (one poem was omitted for *Life*). Bertholf's "North Central" adds 19 poems to the original group, including some that have appeared earlier in the book. Most shocking is that "Traces of Living Things," one of Niedecker's finest sequences, has been turned into an amorphous blob. In the *Life* version it contained 19 poems (20 in *North Central*); in Bertholf it seems to contain 38 poems. Seems, that is, because the edition has no consistent format for headings and subheadings, and there is no way to tell—either in the text or the table of contents—where the sequence ends. (The 19 new poems are jumbled in with the 19 originals.) Bertholf's notes provide no clue: the *North Central* and *Life* versions are not mentioned, but a version containing 10 poems which appeared in *Origin* magazine is.

Bertholf's final section is called "Harpsichord & Salt Fish," and it contains the poems from the "Harpsichord" manuscript (including the wonderful Jefferson, Darwin and William Morris poems) and a grab-bag of other poems. As "Harpsichord" was clearly intended as a separate grouping, it should have had its own section. The rest of the poems are placed in no discernible order—seven poems noted on pp. 334-35 jump back and forth over seven years—and many of them are unexplained. The well-known "Paean to Place," for some reason, is among the last poems, although it appeared in *Life*. The poetry section of the book—it is followed by the radio plays and miscellaneous prose—ends with "From Thomas Jefferson," the first four lines of the Jefferson poem from the same section, and "From Darwin," the first four lines (six words) of the Darwin poem which appears a few pages back. There are no explanations for these fragments and, as the last poems, they give the impression that we have ended up in Niedecker's wastebasket. That she apparently considered publishing these lines as separate poems could have been simply noted.

One could—and someone will—fill pages with further examples. To sum it up, the book neither follows chronological order, nor takes *My Life By Water* as the basic text, nor allows the final manuscript versions to supplant earlier versions—the editor's stated (and impossible) goals. Most of Niedecker's minor (magazine or manuscript) variations are

repetitiously laid out in the main text, but her major (book) variations are neither presented nor even noted. Suppressed poems are restored to sequences in the main text—not in the notes where they belong—and without noting that they were suppressed. Information on the unpublished or uncollected poems is, at best, spotty. New titles, groupings or variations for many of the poems are presented without explanation. It is sometimes impossible to tell where a sequence ends, and always a chore to find a specific poem or a note. Worst of all, anyone reading Niedecker for the first time in this edition may well assume that Niedecker was not the perfectionist of reputation but a fusspot who endlessly dithered over a small group of poems. This is more than unfair to Niedecker; it is almost hostile. Bertholf, like any other editor of a "definitive" edition, should have established a basic text (using, of course, *My Life By Water*) and confined the ditherings, suppressions and variations to appendices and (professional!) notes. It won't happen for decades, but the *Complete Niedecker* is a book that will have to be done all over again.

Fortunately for those who want to discover Niedecker, there is the North Point/Cid Corman *Selected*—the first widely distributed edition of her work. It is beautifully produced, generally well-edited, and—after the Bertholf—utterly unconfusing. A book for readers to read.

Corman divides the book into three sections, "My Friend Tree," "North Central," and "Harpsichord & Salt Fish," corresponding to the early, middle, and late periods of Niedecker's writing. The selection, despite Bertholf's new arrangements, exclusively follows *My Life By Water* and *North Central*; the poems even appear in the same order. A sequence like "Traces of Living Things" is presented in the *North Central* version, not Bertholf's, and it is clearly delineated.

Corman's first section includes 32 of the 94 poems from *Life*'s "New Goose," "For Paul," "Ballads," "The Years Go By" and "Haiku" sections; his second section has 24 of the 44 poems from *Life*'s "My Life By Water," "Home/World," and "North Central" sections. The third section consists of six poems from the "Harpsichord" manuscript and six posthumously published poems which Corman included in *Blue Chicory* and which Bertholf has scattered in various places of his book.

What we have, then, is less than half of Niedecker's poetry. At least all of the important later long poems and sequences are here. What is missing is any indication that the earlier poems were originally parts of sequences or groups. This is partially justified by the fact that Niedecker often published the poems separately. But it was unnecessary: the poems are printed one to a long page, and the first half of the book is mainly (Cormanesque) white space. Lovely to look at—but not worth the sacrifice of further poems, general structures and a wider range.

More damaging is that Corman has tended to emphasize the lyrical

and autobiographical—the Corman side—at the expense of Niedecker's political poems. Many of her poems were written in response to the news of the day—including the deaths of Stevenson, Kennedy and Churchill—and many of them deal with the local ramifications of the national news, from the Depression to the atomic bomb. Nearly all of these are missing. The result is a picture of Niedecker as a poet of nature and domesticity who, late in her life, took an interest in history—"probing other voices into a larger plenum," in Corman's words. (He neatly omits the early historical poems.)

It is a reinforcement of the image of Niedecker as an isolated female "condenser," the Dickinson of Fort Atkinson. Susan Howe, for one, has demolished this version of the Belle of Amherst, and it's time the same was done for the Wisconsin plover. This will, I suspect, only occur when the boys—Corman, Bertholf and Jonathan Williams, the heirs of Zukofsky, Bunting and Ian Hamilton Finlay—relinquish their roles as keepers of the flame. With the exception of Bertholf (who's half on the track), none of them has ever described a Niedecker who was well-read, well-informed, and politically and socially alert. It is potentially good news that a woman, Lisa Pater Faranda, has been entrusted with editing her letters.

In the meantime, the world is still waiting for a *Complete Niedecker*, one that can be read without going (or getting) mad, and a fuller *Selected*, one that would consider the poems that Corman has passed over, such as:

Who was Mary Shelley?
What was her name
before she married?

She eloped with this Shelley
she rode a donkey
till the donkey had to be carried.

Mary was Frankenstein's creator
his yellow eye
before her husband was to drown

Created the monster nights
after Byron, Shelley
talked the candle down.

Who was Mary Shelley?
She read Greek, Italian
She bore a child

Who died
and yet another child
who died.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

Ezra Pound was born on 30 October 1885, and this autumn his centenary was celebrated from Hailey, Idaho (the place of his birth) to New Haven, Alabama, Paris, and Tokyo. At Orono, Maine, poets as unlike one another as Donald Davie and Allen Ginsberg spoke of Pound's influence; at San Jose, such younger poets as Michael Palmer and Michael Davidson lectured on Pound's use of language, his stylistic habits, his relationship to earlier writers. However serious the controversy about Pound's politics, his anti-Semitism, indeed his ethics is today, there can be no doubt that in 1985 Pound is considered one of our great poets—for many people, THE great poet of the twentieth-century and certainly a poet's poet. At the two conferences I myself attended (Orono and San Jose), I was struck by the excitement, erudition, and range of Pound scholarship. No other twentieth century poet has stimulated such searching and subtle criticism, a criticism, incidentally, that comes not only from around the world but from Left as well as Right, from deconstructionists as well as traditional scholars, from Zen Buddhists and Confucians as well as committed Christians and confirmed atheists. In the graduate seminar today the debate about the place of the *Cantos,* not only in literary history, but also as an emblem of Modernist culture and society seems to be at its height.

Or is it? At the very moment that the Yale and Alabama Pound symposia were being held, the Harvard University Press published *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry,* edited by Helen Vendler. This anthology, which begins with the poetry of Wallace Stevens, "since he flowered late and came into his own only after the 1955 publication of the *Collected Poems*" (p. 16), systematically and quietly removes Pound and his circle from the canon. ["Stevens,"] writes Vendler, "is our chief link between the earlier high modernists (Eliot, Pound, Williams, Crane, Moore) and the later poets," an odd statement indeed in view of the fact that the full text of Pound's *Cantos* did not appear until 1970 and therefore is not likely to have exerted an influence *before* that date. Or again, how could Stevens be the "chief link" between Williams and "the later poets," given the fact that *Paterson* was not completed until 1958, three years after Stevens' death, and *Pictures from Breughel* was not published until 1962? Or, to take a third example, how could Stevens' poetry mediate between a Modernist work like H.D.'s *Trilogy* and contemporary poets, given the fact the first edition of the *Trilogy,* written during World War II, was in 1973?

But of course it all depends on what "later poets" one has in mind. Stevens may well point the way to many of the other thirty-four poets included in *The Harvard Book* for the simple reason that this anthology omits all of the following: Charles Olson, Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Edward Dorn, Denise Levertov, Louis Zukof-

sky, George Oppen, Paul Blackburn, Jerome Rothenberg, to mention only the most prominent American poets in the Pound-Williams tradition. Although Vendler is careful to point out that "this anthology can be nothing more than a sampling of what seems to my taste satisfying" (p. 16), her own authority and the Harvard imprimatur clearly make this particular anthology take on a canonical aura. And so we must ask the question: what are the contours of a poetry landscape that, on the one hand, celebrates Pound in the fashion I described above and, on the other, authorizes or at least sets the stage for the publication of *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*?

The first thing to say, I suppose, is that the current situation is very different from that of 1960, the year that Grove Press published Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry*. At that time, there was an identifiable Establishment, whose emblematic anthology, used in classrooms across America, was the two-volume *New American Poets of England and America* (1957), edited by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson. Distinguishing his own canon of poets from theirs, Donald Allen could say, quite simply, that what he was calling the "new" poetry had "one common characteristic: a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse" (p. xi). Today, such a distinction would be meaningless because Olson and Creeley have become just as "academic" as were Lowell or Berryman, if by "academic" we mean those poets who teach, and whose work is taught, in the universities. Nor do the old distinctions between "conservative" and "radical" publishers (Harvard University Press, say, versus New Directions) make much sense today. Harvard has just published the selected writings of one of the most radical poets of the twentieth century, the Russian Futurist Velimir Khlebnikov, and it is also the press that brought out Robert von Hallberg's important *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art* (1978). Again, the University of California Press is responsible for bringing both Olson's *Maximus* and Zukofsy's *"A"* back into print, and for publishing the *Collected Poems* of Robert Creeley, now to be followed by a volume of Collected Prose. Even Bruce Andrews' and Charles Bernstein's *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, for that matter, was published, not by some struggling small press or even by New Directions but by the Southern Illinois University Press.

We can no longer, then, talk about the "raw" and the "cooked," or about "closed forms" and "naked poetry," as Stephen Berg and Robert Mezey called it in their excellent anthology of "Recent American Poetry in Open Forms" (1969). This might suggest that the eighties are characterized by a healthy eclecticism, a cheerful pluralism that insures that everyone gets invited to the party. But the fact is that an anthology like the *Harvard Book* is much less eclectic than, say, Richard Ellmann's 1976 *New Oxford Book of American Verse*, which included such poets as Olson, Duncan, Creeley, and Dorn along with the bulk of the poets who appear

in the Vendler anthology. Indeed, our total lack of consensus about "the state of the art" testifies less to a generous pluralism than to a curious indifference to the dissemination of poetry on the part of the very persons who should be concerned with it—poetry critics, reviewers, editors, and publishers, as well as those theorists who deal with questions of poetics, and of Modernism and Postmodernism.

What we might call the new indifference goes hand in hand with a preoccupation with theory as the literary discourse that really matters. For the very same critics who cannot find a way of discussing whether Pound's *Cantos* is the great poem of the century or merely, in Vendler's words, a "great failed effort" (p. 11), the very same critics who talk repeatedly about "opening up the canon" or "breaking down the old canon," are slavish in their deference to the canonical critics of our day. What self-respecting anthology of contemporary theory, for example, would dare to omit the names of Foucault, Lacan, Derrida or Kristeva, and, closer to home, of Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Stanley Fish, Edward Said, Fredric Jameson, or Hayden White? If Harvard were to publish something called *The Harvard Book of Contemporary Criticism* and included, say, only deconstructionists or reader-response critics or Marxist/feminists theorists, there would be an immediate outcry. Or, more probably, the outcry would have been circumvented by the publisher, who would have shown the Table of Contents to a variety of "respectable" critics and would have been cautioned to make the anthology more inclusive. But in the case of the *Harvard Book of Contemporary Poetry*, Helen Vendler was evidently given *carte blanche* to do whatever she liked. Or almost *carte blanche*: one suspects that she felt at least some pressure to include Black poets (hence the otherwise unaccountable inclusion of Langston Hughes who wrote most of his major poems during the twenties, and of a still fledgling poet like Rita Dove), a sufficient number of women (I doubt Anne Sexton would otherwise have been included), at least one Beat poet (Allen Ginsberg, who, as a Jewish homosexual, also satisfies the minority requirement), and, in the interest of geographical distribution, one West Coast—Zen—Minimalist poet in the form of Gary Snyder.

Vendler's Introduction, in any case, makes no attempt to justify these inclusions (or their correlative exclusions), opting instead for the large and elegant generalization about "contemporary American poetry." Who, for example, can quarrel with her opening distinction between "the charm of poetry" and its "command," between, that is to say, its linguistic strategies which she rightly calls untranslatable, and its moral and intellectual content, which can be transmitted even in the poetry we read in translation? Vendler sensibly suggests that contemporary poetry is written both for the eye and for the ear, that visual prosody is now a force to reckon with. And she points out, again very sensibly, that poetry is a "self-halting" form of discourse, that "It insists on a spooling, a form of repetition, the

reinscribing of a groove . . . Lyric poetry . . . is profoundly unlinear. It does not advance." (p. 2).

This is very well put, as is the following definition of contemporary American poetic language:

> "It is a language that has assimilated the syncopation of jazz, the stylishness of advertising, the technicalities of psychoanalysis, the simplicities of rural speech, the discourse of the university disciplines, the technology of the engineer, the banalities of journalism" (p. 2).

I find myself nodding in enthusiastic agreement, until I start to think about Vendler's choices and ponder why Louis Zukofsy, who understood, as perhaps has no other American modernist, the "stylishness of advertising," the "technology of the engineer," and the "banalities of journalism," isn't included whereas Howard Nemerov, who writes poems like the following, is:

Snowflakes

Not slowly wrought, nor treasured for their form
In heaven, but by the blind self of the storm
Spun off, each driven individual
Perfected in the moment of his fall.

Can this be regarded as the new American language where "the vernacular thrives and where the rhythms of American life . . . have found a place"? Or, to move over a few pages to the Amy Clampitt selection, where are "the rhythms of American life" in "The Kingfisher," which begins:

In a year the nightingales were said to be so loud
they drowned out slumber, a peafowl strolled screaming
beside the ruined nunnery, through the long evening
of a dazzled pub crawl, the halcyon color, portholed
by those eye-spots' stunning tapestry unsettled
the pastoral nightfall with amazements opening. (p. 122)

Surely Clampitt's is, to paraphrase Eliot on Henry James, a mind so fine no journalistic banality has ever violated it. "A peafowl strolled screaming / beside the ruined nunnery" has a faintly Yeatsian ring, just as "those eye-spots stunning tapestry unsettled" recalls Hopkins, but for the "American idiom," we had better go to that other poem called "The Kingfishers" written by Charles Olson:

What does not change / is the will to change

He woke, fully clothed, in his bed. He
remembered only one thing, the birds, how
when he came in, he had gone around the rooms
and got them back in their cage, the green one first.

The "American idiom," in any case, is described at length in Vendler's Introduction, evidently with an eye to the *Harvard Book*'s potential foreign audience. As such, it might be useful to compare the Vendler version of contemporary American poetry to a recent foreign counterpart, specifically the Gallimard bilingual anthology *Vingt poètes americains*, chosen by two prominent poet-critics Jacques Roubaud and Michel Deguy (Paris, 1980). Roubaud's Introduction begins with the sentence, "What constitutes American literature, in the second half of the twentieth century, is poetry, indeed the explosion of poetry" (my translation). Implicit in this statement is the assumption that poetry inevitably undergoes historical change (in this case, a rupture), an assumption quite at odds with Vendler's evident faith in the timelessness of poetry. "The symbolic strength of poetry," she writes, "consists in giving presence, through linguistic signs, to absent realities, while insisting, by the very brilliance of poetic style, on the linguistic nature of its own being and the illusionistic character of its effects" (p. 17). That, for Vendler, is what poetry always *is*. Roubaud is more pragmatic: his starting point is the year 1960 in which Donald Allen published *The New American Poetry*, and the "explosion" to which he refers comes out of (1) Black Mountain, (2) the San Francisco Renaissance, (3) the New York school, and (4) Objectivism, as these four related movements affected the work of younger poets. The editor further explains that certain poets already well-known in France (Pound, Williams, Stevens, Cummings, O'Hara, Cage) have been omitted, but that he has included one great precursor, Gertrude Stein, because her work is only now having a decisive effect on poets like John Ashbery, Robert Duncan, Jerome Rothenberg, and David Antin (and, writing five years later, Roubaud might have added the "Language" poets, who have been ardent Stein fans, to this group). The resulting list of "twenty American poets," in the order of their presentation is as follows: Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, James Schuyler, Cid Corman, Jack Spicer, Paul Blackburn, Charles Olson, John Ashbery, Larry Eigner, W.S. Merwin, Harry Matthews, Kenneth Koch, Jerome Rothenberg, David Antin, Rosmarie Waldrop, Clayton Eshleman, and Nathaniel Tarn.

There is virtually no common ground between this selection of poets and Vendler's. Only two poets so much as turn up in both the Harvard and the Gallimard anthologies—Ashbery and Merwin. And even here there is an interesting difference, Vendler choosing the later, more "thematic" Ashbery and Merwin poems (e.g., Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," Merwin's "The Asians Dying"), Roubaud and Deguy the more experimental ones like Ashbery's "Sunrise in Suburbia" and Merwin's gnomic epigrams like "The Dream Again."

Does the disparity between the Harvard and the Gallimard anthologies then replicate the old battle between the "academic" (Hall-Pack-Simpson)

and the "radical" (Donald Allen)? Not really. For whereas the Gallimard editors are careful to insist that "This anthology makes no claims to *represent* all of American poetry, whose great richness is just beginning to be understood by us" (see dust jacket; my translation), and whereas they make quite clear that they want to introduce French readers to such historical movements as Objectivism and the New York School, to ethnopoetics and the new "performance" poetry, the Harvard anthology purports, according to the dust jacket, to present us with "the range and power of the contemporary American imagination," with the "distillations of twentieth-century perception, feeling, and thought, and reflections of changing social realities."

It is, in short, the Harvard anthology's claim to canonicity that is problematic. Toward the end of her Introduction, Vendler observes:

> I have preferred to choose fewer poets, and represent them by more poems, rather than have more poets with fewer poems each. In this way, readers can see the poets whole. I have had to leave out many poets whose aims were admirable but whose poems seemed thin (whatever their past historical effect).

The parenthesis in that last sentence is especially revealing. For Vendler, poems neither seem to make nor reflect history; they simply *are*. Thus none of the poems in the anthology are dated, and the capsule biographies in the back of the book are likely to be longer on impressionistic description (Louise Gluck "writes in a veiled and almost disembodied style at once austere and sensuous"; O'Hara is "a poet of invention, irreverence, and colloquial energy") than on factual information. More important: approximately a quarter of the poems are not, by any stretch of the imagination, "contemporary" at all since Vendler begins with "Sunday Morning" (1915), includes a group of Langston Hughes poems written in the twenties as well as a selection from Roethke's "greenhouse poems" of the forties, and quite a few forties poems by Jarrell, Bishop, and Lowell. Indeed, it is worth noting that twelve of Vendler's thirty-five "contemporary" poets are dead.

But none of this seems to matter for the principle of selection used in the *Harvard Book* has less to do with a period of history (the "contemporary") than with the Harvard of Vendler's early mentors, I.A. Richards and Reuben Brower. In his *The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading* (1951), Brower organized his chapters around such topics as "The Speaking Voice (*Dramatic Design*)," "The Aura Around a Bright Clear Centre (*Design in Imagery*)," "Saying One Thing and Meaning Another (*Design in Metaphor and Irony*)," and "The Sinewie Thread (*Key Designs*)." Here is the familiar New Critical demand for organic unity, centering, irony, and indirection, and these are the unstated norms that govern the *Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*.

Key design, the "aura around a bright clear centre"—these are further qualified for Vendler by certain thematic values. "There is no significant [contemporary] poet," she writes, "whose work does not mirror, both formally and in its preoccupations, the absence of the transcendent" (p. 11). And again, "The poets included here write—as the earlier modernists did not—from a Freudian culture" (p. 10), and Lowell is "the first American poet of the family romance" (p. 5). So much for Olson, Duncan, H.D., and Rothenberg, all of them poets who do concern themselves, in one form or another, with "the transcendent"; so much for Zukofsky and Dorn, for Cage and Antin, poets for whom the Freudian family romance is only a small part of the larger socio-political world in which we live.

Indeed, to use her own distinction, Vendler herself is more interested in the "moral command" of poetry than in its "linguistic charm." Valuing the Freudian matrix of "the inner life," Vendler quite logically gives precedence to Lowell, Bishop, Berryman, Merrill, Plath, and Rich, to the Ginsberg of *Kaddish* (notably his only "family romance" poem), and to such younger Freudian poets as Frank Bidart and Louise Gluck. And even such overtly anti-Freudian poets as Ashbery and O'Hara are shadowed by the company they keep in the *Harvard Book*. Framed by countless poems about marriage, infidelity, generational conflict, and psychological trauma, O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter" or Ashbery's "Syringa" undergo an odd process of what Alan C. Golding, in a study of American poetry anthologies (see *Canons*, ed. Robert von Hallberg [University of Chicago Press, 1984]) wittily calls *detoxification*. When, that is to say, we read O'Hara's wonderfully playful, "But me? One day I am thinking of / a color: orange. I write a line / About orange," against the theorem that "The symbolic strength of poetry consists in giving presence, through linguistic signs, to absent realities," we are likely to take O'Hara's "How terrible orange is / and life," as no more than a faint parodic echo of the "late / Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair" of Stevens' "Sunday Morning," the headpiece of the Vendler anthology.

The bright clear centre of the "family romance" does not, in other words, allow much room for "aura," much less for difference. A critic of Helen Vendler's authority has, of course, every right to exercise her preferences, to put together a book of her own personal favorites. I myself find the *Harvard Book* a fascinating index to the sensibility and consciousness of one of our most important critics. But to call such a book *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry* is something else again. What this pretentious title tells us is that our leading publishers, who, in the case of other fields of knowledge, take some pains to establish reasonable guidelines and norms, seem to regard the publishing of poetry as a comparatively trivial pursuit, a more or less marginalized activity, the real action of the moment being elsewhere. We need to find out how this came to be the case and why. Indeed, what is most urgently needed

today is a more adequate discourse about poetry, a discourse that would avoid the bland impressionism that is currently the stock-in-trade of the poetry review. In the absence of a more rigorous poetics, the postmodern, postMarxist, postculture pantheon will soon include another term—POSTPOETRY.

MARJORIE PERLOFF

READING ROGER BASTIDE: SEEKING A POETICS OF CULTURAL INTERPENETRATION

For far too long academies have offered a rigid model of the literary traveller spanning cultures as either A) a White Westerner who remains solidly within the terms of his or her identity reporting on a foreign culture with maximal intellectual and psychological distance or B) a White Westerner who becomes so transformed under the spell of an alien culture that he or she "goes native" and writes out of that transformed subjectivity.

What academic scholarship has traditionally neglected is that condition experienced by so many poets in the past few decades: a recognition of cultural diversities within the psyche so that the voices, objects, languages and rhythms of several cultures co-exist.[1] This means: a writing filled with paradoxes, contradictions, unsolvable problems, a farrago of subjective and objective responses. But how can experiences of many cultures be handled in such a manner that the writing about them doesn't descend into a schizophrenic stew? Or how can such cross-cultural blendings reflect something more than the most superficial surface features of each culture?

The books by the French sociologist Roger Bastide might provide some welcome keys. Bastide is an odd mixture of academic sociologist (long time Sorbonne professor), ethnographer specializing in Afroamerican spiritual cults, historian. He is also a source of inspiration to the archetypal psychologist and poet. Only two of his twenty-eight books are currently available in English: *The African Religions of Brazil* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1978) and *African Civilizations in the New World* (C. Hurst Publishers, London, 1974). The place to begin reading Bastide is *The African Religions of Brazil*. It is a frustratingly confusing book—yet one of the most

1. Victor Turner has some interesting comments about this condition which he identifies as "liminality" or "in-betweenness" in "A Review of Ethnopoetics" in Jerome and Diane Rothenberg's *A Symposium of the Whole*.

astonishingly insightful books on Afroamerican cultures in general and cultural interpenetrations in Brazil in particular. What Bastide has attempted is complicated. On the one hand, he is fascinated by how African cultures have survived the Middle Passage. So his eye is constantly focused on the music and dances associated with various Afro-Brazilian spiritual cults centered in Bahia. As a sociologist he wants to puzzle out the role that various social groups have played in preserving or re-interpreting bits of African cultures. But most movingly, he wants to comprehend—and it is at this juncture that his work becomes most relevant to poets—how cultures dynamically *interpenetrate*. While he documents (like so many other ethnographers of the Afroamerican experience from slavery on) the forms of cultural resistance which enabled Blacks to resist compulsory Christianization, he also tracks the ways in which certain European values and customs were assumed by some Blacks.

Bastide's writings might connect to Jean Seznec's *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (Bollingen Series XXXVIII), a book Robert Kelly was advising young poets to study during the Sixties. The comparison is a bit loose. Seznec takes a broad swatch of Renaissance Philosophy and Art and finds pagan undercurrents swimming just under the painterly surfaces of so much church art. Seznec's study easily translates into archetypal analysis—hence the Bollingen imprint. Bastide's text is more of an unclassifiable sprawl, a Duchampian sculpture of a book with sometimes contradictory aims. The academic sociologist in Bastide desires to sharply reveal the sociological framework within which Afroamerican spiritual cults do their workings. And he is concerned (like Seznec) with cataloging survivals of pre-Christian cultures existing within Christian trappings.

Yet there is another level of *The African Religions of Brazil* which puts it in a different class than Seznec's text. Bastide is one of the few whites who has actually undergone an initiation into an Afro-Brazilian mystery cult with the intention of recording that passage for the White world. He writes as a believer/practitioner, an identity linking him to Maya Deren. It is much to Bastide's credit that he makes no great deal out of his initiation. He mentions it in passing. But the power of his book has everything to do with that fact, and helps explain the unexpected twists and turns in Bastide's text which flit in and out of sounding like Depth Sociology. You'll be reading along and following Bastide's ongoing arguments with Marxist interpreters of spiritual cults and all of a sudden—with a flash of Shango's thunder—you'll sense that Bastide is revealing the rhythms of a spiritual cult as only an insider could. Then at another juncture you can sense that he is exactly on the edge of considering the ramifications of his study on psychology and poetics. After a point I felt the book was about the author's struggle to translate his Afro-Brazilian cult knowledge into Western Social Science terminology, an obviously hopeless task. So Bastide took the next best option: he rendered the phenomenology of how

an individual in a Western cultural matrix tries to entertain a living cultural mosaic.

I sense through Bastide's struggle the awareness that we all could recognize ourselves as the intersection points of many cultural lines. What most involves him is how that culture-spanning experience can be viably lived in everyday life. He identifies the psychological mechanism which permits such transcultural comprehension as the "principle of dissociation" (principe de compure) and provides this example of its working:

> A Brazilian Negro can take part in Brazil's economic and political life, while at the same time remaining a faithful member of various African religious fraternities, and feel no sense of contradiction between the two separate worlds in which he moves.

Translated into the concerns of poetry: how can all layers of a palimpsest be read simultaneously with equal caring attention? What makes possible those rare moments in H.D.'s *The Walls Do Not Fall* where the ancient Greek and contemporary Anglo-American sensibilities so perfectly mesh that both cultural lines modulate in a bright luminescent flicker? Bastide addresses that question of how cultural interpenetrations can be grasped all at once in reading a poem by noting his reading of Césaire:

> Cesaire's poetry expresses such things as the shrinking of global distances and the consequent development of intercontinental contacts—through radio, television, improved sea and air transport, and the resultant accumulation, in the heart of America, of messages and information from the other side of the Atlantic.[2]

Optimistically, Bastide allies himself with the stuff of technology and sees jets and tape recorders bringing about new hybrid forms of transoceanic/Black/White rapprochements. The methods needed to accomplish this new and radically transfigured Middle Passage? Perhaps Bastide in his low-keyed manner offers a path. He wears so many masks: the solidly conservative academic who changes his clothes on weekends to enter ecstatic trance states in African cults, the ethnographer who throws his research notepad to the winds to dance the transcending tribal dance. This is the stuff of Rousseauian romanticism, the cliche of the European bourgeois intellectual "gone native."

Yet the example which Bastide's books offer—and once more Maya Deren's poetically charged ethnography of Haitian voodoo comes to mind

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2. Bastide's questionable reading of Césaire's African vision reveals something of Bastide's struggle in embracing the European as well as African cultural strains in a *balanced* fashion. Certainly it is fair to assume that Bastide was aware of how advocates of any Pan-African movement (Garveyism, for instance) can so romanticize "Africa" that local cultural creations are seen as wanting.

as a like example—is one in which extremely vigorous scholarship exists side by side with a poetically rich phenomenology of an Afroamerican spiritual cult. The thoroughness and reasonable artfulness of the sociological narrative in *The African Religions of Brazil* encodes the Western/French/Christian/White cultural matrix Bastide is a spokesperson for. What exists concurrently with that level is another level in which Bastide undergoes a mystical initiation into a non-European cult and feels morally obligated to bring the particulars of that spiritual passage back to his base/origin culture. He makes that passage in which the White Christian takes on Blackness to the greatest degree possible with a remarkable lack of ego involvement. Only in the closing pages of his modestly constructed *African Civilizations in the New World* does he begin to drop hints about what daimons/demons in his psyche led him into the smoky *candomblés* of Bahia:

> That spiritual void which the city creates at the heart of each human individual is resented, naturally, just as much by the European as by the Negro. As a result, the European turns increasingly to Africa or Black America for the satisfaction of those vital needs which industrial society can no longer satisfy.

Translate "vital needs" as sexuality. Bastide continues:

> Yet while the city cultivates eroticism, it also destroys its potential by reducing the sexual relationship to a simple animal act, and thus doing away with the long preliminary period of courtship which formerly led up to it. As a result, the orgasm has lost its truly liberating function. Dances such as the tango or samba constitute an attempt to reintroduce these old approaches, to make the road of desire long and difficult once more, to create a new swing away from pure eroticism, which is always disillusioning, towards true passion.

The samba and tango grew out of the ritualized dance movements of the Afroamerican cults. And it is not far-fetched to speculate that much of American jazz found a spawning ground there as well as blues, rock and reggae. Imagination can move us to consider how Eros has found a home in the popular dance steps associated with each musical style, those patterns "making the road of desire long." And what can be said about American poetries echoing such rhythms? We have come light years from theories like Norman Mailer's "White Negro" into a realm where discourse in depth can be created as a White psychic traveller witnesses his/her Whiteness dissolve into Blackness only to witness the blood pulse finally flood consciousness with a Red cosmos. Eros paints with this traditional Western African/European alchemical palette, transforming those pure color swirls into sharply drawn figures borrowed from the collective memory banks of Africa and Europe. A poetics can be developed in this time in/formed by ancestors competing to be heard, multi-cultural forms

can be forged, the road of desire can be stretched, a poem a dancing ground where imaginal figures move into that abandon where a liberating orgasm is invited, its energies to clarify and heal. But the passage is never as simple as "incorporating" the image-repertoires of alien cultures into new styles of writing. It is a task of learning a daily rhythm incorporating the imperatives of two cultures at once, and keeping thought and feeling functions fully alive and responsive when faced with often contradictory cultural demands. Bastide should be honored for how courageously he maintained the capacity to move along a continuum between cultural polarities not losing his head or heart or genitals in transit.

NORMAN WEINSTEIN

NOTE: For a sense of what Bastide heard in the Afro-Brazilian cults he studied and participated in, listen to *Folk Music of Brazil: Afro-Bahian Religious Songs*, U.S. Library of Congress Recording AFS L13, field recorded by cultural anthropologists Melville and Frances Herskovitz. A more contemporary recording of the same is *Afro-Brazilian Religious Music* (Lyrichord Records 7315).

ORGAN

King of instruments, my foot. Why did composers of music for the organ base their sublime plan on the notion that each of us, in or out of radio land, resides in one of the cathedrals that dignify the western territories? Even if not many of us do, what pretension, to compose a music like that. Fat music, awash with adjectives. Numerous as laundry items rushing from a hospital, the surge of it engulfs nave and choir from altarpiece to tympanum. Saturation completed, it plugs every orifice of her body, every interior cranny of the mother of God.

In my nook, even if it were to be plucked off its axis and set down in the tiniest alcove of a baby church, with me prostrate there, hearkening, a baby man, such vast sonorities cranked up by beery bellows-pumpers—frantic, poor devils, they capered out of bed and had not a bite for breakfast—or activiated by the nervous acolyte Electricity, could not but pulverize my perception of God and his mother, if ever he had one.

A little boy crosses a village green after matins. Having heard three hymns and a voluntary embroidered on the harmonium by a virgin, whose eyes, he can tell, are bright, he can sense underfoot the fragrance of village grass. I crave blessings that come from less and less.

Meanwhile the organist's feet pounce on the wooden pedals. Pliantly, too, they brush them. Supple as those of a tango dancer his calves,

left and right, ripple across the pedals, which resemble the skeleton of a mastodon rolled flat into fossilizing mud, or else the hull-ribbing of an excavated galleon. Meanwhile, look through his flannel trouser legs, ebon hairs sprout from him; against the white cheddar of his organist flesh, to show what a born organist he is, they stand out as distinctly as do sharps and flats against the rattling dentures, which incessantly chomp, three or four tiers of them. Were it not for the stickers and trackers and backfalls coupling the keys with the valves, the staggering ingenuity of the mechanism his feet and fingers operate, you might think he was a buzzard, perched there above the wind trunk, for his body sways, his head and shoulders turn, as if to sniff the breeze for carrion.

Abetted by the bellows his fists punish those dentures, ribs, me. What battles did the composer dream he was fighting, generalbassissimo of a pipe army storming Leipzig or Liverpool, Salt Lake City or Chartres? What Thalben Balls and E. Power Biggses have navigated their fleet of cosmic dreadnoughts, fit only to fill whole Pacifics, manned by humungous grunting pirates, into my nook, their salvos burst the seams of its gossamer design! A hurricane has extinguished my strawberry nightlight. Some awful error, since magnitude is not the sole signature of divinity, crushes my familiar cricket, which was a joy till now, seldom palpable, often whistling in my ear. Who's to blame?

Vainglorious as American foreign policy since 1898, the organ assumes that the rest of the world is vacant, or had better be. The rest of the world, an unformed receptable, my nook, my shattered nook. Yet it had been animated by several venerable hayseeds, champions all, black or brown, hobnobbing of this or that, local concerns, good and bad old times. Into it falls a phosphorescent mass, the superfruit of weapon contracts. Vast brown product, flies called promises buzz around it, it is streaked with blood, such are the infirmities that swell, back home, the consumer price index. Horror, in that organ and of it. Stop tapping them teeth! Retract from them pedals, dear organist, your rubber feet! Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

A FEW DON'TS FOR CHINESE POETS

It is one of the neater symmetries of modernism: the East discovering in the West what the West has found in the East. Ezra Pound, in 1913, shortly after receiving the Fenollosa manuscripts of Chinese poetry, writes "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," surely the most influential manifesto in English in this century. Published in *Poetry* that year, it is enthusiastically read

by a young Chinese poet named Hu Shi, who is studying in the United States. Hu returns to China and, in 1917, publishes his "Tentative Proposals for the improvement of Literature" which quickly becomes known as the "Eight Don'ts." ("Write with substance . . . Don't imitate the ancients . . . Emphasize grammar . . . Reject melancholy . . . Eliminate old cliches . . . Don't use allusions . . . Don't use couplets and parallelisms . . . Don't avoid popular expressions or popular forms . . .") The following year Hu Shi waves the banner of the new in a series of even more Poundian formulations ("Speak only if you have something to say . . . Say what you have to say, and say it as it is said . . . Speak your own language, not the language of others . . . Speak the language of your own time.") These manifestoes set off a literary revolution, the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which runs parallel to the political fervors of the moment: fierce nationalism and progressiveness, the rejection of traditional and (ironically) foreign models, and a rallying to replace *wen yan* (classical literary writing) with *bai hua* (popular speech).

Movements toward "real speech" face a perennial dilemma: To write in real speech one must stay at home and hear the language; yet real speech movements—assertions of one's own collective language—arise from cultural inferiority complexes, whether national or social; and the (imagined) culturally inferior usually feel compelled to go abroad (or into the social establishment) to find validation for their work, thereby uprooting themselves from the very ground they've staked out.

The best novels of the so-called Latin American "boom"—a celebration of Latin American matter and speech—were written at home. The novelists then, almost all of them, went abroad in search of reputation, losing touch with their language and suffering a serious decline. Latin American poets, on the other hand, have tended to do their best work abroad, writing in a literary or highly idiosyncratic language. *Residence on Earth*, *Altazor*, the later poems of Vallejo, *Blanco*, all assume an international voice—the other way out from self-perceived second-class citizenship. Latin American poetry has never had an important real speech movement, and a poet like Williams, compared to exiles like Pound or Eliot, has remained of little interest there. (Pound could declare, in the preface to the 1915 Imagist anthology, that the first "essential of all great poetry" is "to use the language of common speech," but his dictum hardly applies to the *Cantos*. And, as might be expected, Eliot—the writer with the least colloquial, least idiosyncratic language—was the North American who most quickly achieved international recognition.)

In China, the May Fourth Movement turned out to be a success for fiction and a failure for poetry. The novel, which the Chinese always considered to be a secondary genre, was fertilized by real speech, and triumphed over its inferiority by blossoming into national respectability. Poetry, however, the highest art form in China, had nowhere to go for

validation (the West was just beginning to translate the nearly 3000 years of Chinese poetry). It had to resort to tradition for its authority. Even Mao Zedong, who began writing poetry in 1922, wrote nearly all of his poems in the classical language.

Much of what Hu Shi discovered in Pound he might have found closer in place but further in time—in, for example, the work of the poet-critic Yuan Haowen (1190–1257). Yuan was a poet-critic in the true sense: that is, he wrote most of his criticism in verse form—a genre which seems to have dropped out of world literature. He wrote during the obscure and short-lived Jin Dynasty (1114–1234), which he saw fall to the Mongol invaders, whom he refused to serve. He is best known for a series of thirty "Poems on Poetry," some scattered poems on the fall of the dynasty, prefaces to collections by Du Fu and Su Dongpo, and his anthology of Jin poetry, the function of which he described in a moving poem:

> In times of peace, there's no need for unofficial recorders;
> But since the disaster, everything has been destroyed, even the official histories.
> Thanks to heaven, a manuscript of the century's work has been preserved;
> I take it to the lonely hills to read with stifled tears.*

Yuan's critical admonitions—in favor of "sincerity" and colloquial speech, against ornamentation and slavish imitation of the ancients—had no immediate impact. He wrote, after all, during one of the collapses of the Empire, and—refreshingly, for a critic—his most important critical work, the "Poems on Poetry," were written for his own illumination, and were not circulated.

But he was never obscure, and earlier in this century the great scholar Kojiro Yoshikawa even declared that Yuan was a greater poet than his Song Dynasty near-contemporaries, Lu Yu and Su Dongpo. This is hard to believe, but much of what Yuan wrote is still worth reading:

> Write verse the way you speak! What need to display one's talent?
>
> . . . fashionable adornment,
> rouge and tint, struggle uselessly to gain affection.
>
> Poetic "sounds and pictures of the mind" are generally untrue;
> You can rarely know a man from his writings.
>
> Naturally inspired is the line where the eye gives shape to the mind.

*The translations of Yuan are adapted from John Timothy Wixted's monograph *Poems on Poetry: Literary Criticism of Yuan Hao-wen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982).

Without sincerity there is nothing. Unless one is sincere, there is nothing by which to guide one's words, and the heart and the mouth separate into two objects. One becomes estranged from the world and one's words grow apart from things, becoming vaguer with distance. Coming from afar, one's words, though they be heard, will be like spring breezes blowing past the ears of a horse.

To struggle relentlessly writing poetry greys the hair
Don't seek inspiration in old papers . . .

. . . to get away from the ordinary and the hackneyed, to wash clean hazy obscurities, to range freely over the realm of one's potential as if smashing an enemy formation or capturing monsters, to explicate what is hidden, to encompass past and present, to vie with creation itself—this is skill. Dull-witted obscurity, superficial rashness, indulgent license, trumped-up trivialities, rotten cliches—these are faults.

Tang Geng said: When poetic discipline suffers from strictness, it approaches meanness.

Looking at poetry after Du Fu: How can the later generations, which consider poetry to be a specialized subject, hope to emulate the ancients when they don't treat it as a life-and-death matter?

Students of the esoteric say that the Way does not reside in words, and yet they cannot get away from words. Poetry, though not removed from language, does not reside in it.

A text is written character by character;
It should be read character by character,
Until its language becomes like family.

And Yuan himself wrote a "Few Don'ts" for Chinese poets. Allowing for some cultural translation, they are still apt:

Don't be unhappy.
Don't be slick.
Don't be fiercely sharp.
Don't be pointedly disagreeable.
Don't be deviously incriminating.
Don't be wishy-washy.
Don't draw far-fetched conclusions.
Don't curry favor.
Don't practice self-advertisement.
Don't wear camouflage.
Don't indulge in sophistries.
Don't act as if you're some great sage.
Don't be as jealous as a concubine.

Don't be a malicious feuder.
Don't be a rabble-rousing rumor-monger.
Don't be a blind face-reader.
Don't be a drunk abusive condemned criminal.
Don't be a wiseguy doing "favors" that cost nothing.
Don't be a stubborn old farmer.
Don't be a mercilessly unrelenting prosecutor.
Don't be one who sells another's goods.
Don't be a singer in the market whining about ill treatment.
Don't be a *pipa* player rhyming phrases about the soul.
Don't be a village schoolmaster with a how-to-write book.
Don't be a sand-counting monk getting lost in semantics.
Don't be an exorcist slinging taboo words.
Don't act as if you're the only person in the universe or the only one in the history of time.
Don't get unruffled by petty offenses.
Say nothing that isn't true.

At the end of his life, immersed in Chan Buddhism, he wrote a series of four poems titled "On Being Called to Write." Here are two of them:

In a dream, startled that my hair had turned white,
I wrote a poem as I would speak it, and yet it was divine.
In heaven, the price of poetry has gone up:
For even one good stanza, one has to pay with one's youth.

Enlightenment unfolding, the ultimate origin revealed,
Regardless of strange and heterodox texts.
What does a poet know of the mechanism that makes all things work?
To find and use a single key is more than enough.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

AUTOPOIESIS AND COGNITION: THE REALIZATION OF THE LIVING, Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume 42, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980, 141 pp.
AMERICAN POETRY AND CULTURE, 1945-1980, Robert von Hallberg, Harvard University Press, 1985, 276 pp.

1)

During the past decade or more the epistemological paradigm which might be called *panlogism* has become the orthodoxy. After the discovery of

the DNA codes and the appearance of the computer as the apparent solution to the problems of a post-industrial economy, suddenly *everything* seen as "code." Neural paths, economies, psyches, cultures, and literatures were understood as linguistic, the flow and exchange of information. We came to understand that the content of information is information, so objects – people, interstate highways, shopping malls, poems, etc. – are potentially digitalized and read out in flows of binary bits or their higher level equivalents, such as COBOL or English. Thus, Charles Bernstein, "It is through language that we experience the world, indeed through language that meaning comes into the world and into being. As persons, we are born into language and world; they exist before us and after us. . . . I do not suggest that there is nothing beyond, or outside of, human language, but that there is meaning only in terms of language, that the givenness of language is the givenness of the world." Similarly, Barrett Watten writes: "Language is open-ended; like Wittgenstein's notion of the infinity, it is not a quantity but a repeated operation. The rules for the construction of language are languages. . . . The scale of language can only increase; it is due to this fact that language, as a nonquantifiable entity, denies closure." We could find similar ideas being expressed in nearly every field: there is a popular book, of the kind intended to sum up the current zeitgeist, entitled *Grammatical Man*. It is our current cliche, as in the 1950's we spoke of "the age of anxiety."

Although Wittgenstein, who is frequently taken as prime evidence of grammatical man, may be read in another sense, we have lacked a rigorous statement of an alternative position. Or I should say that the alternative position which has been available to us has failed to find the currency it deserves. *Autopoiesis and Cognition* by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela is a book of the first importance – a book of the order of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and *Process and Reality*. That Maturana and Varela are cybernetic biologists, thus, workers in one of the fields most directly responsible for the extension of the information metaphor into all phases of life, perhaps gives the book even greater relevance. It consists of two essays, "Biology of Cognition," by Maturana alone, which was first published in 1970, and "Autopoiesis: The Organization of the Living," the collaboration, which was first established in 1973. The book was published in the Boston Philosophy of Science series in 1980. Thus it is material which belongs to the Viet Nam era – a measure of current cultural lag or suspended animation. These works cannot be easily summarized: they are formal statements, as tightly argued as the *Tractatus*. They are, as Maturana notes in his introduction, cosmologies. Although Maturana's and Varela's methods involve formal logical systems, not mythologies, the relationship of their work to contemporary culture might be justly compared with Hesiod's *Theogony* to the ancient Greek.

They ask this question: "What is proper to living systems that had its origin when they originated, and has remained invariant since then in the succession of their generations?" One might respond to this question with a list of characteristics of living systems—"reproduction, heredity, growth, irritability, and so on"—but it would be necessary to know the answer beforehand in order to know when the list is complete. Maturana and Varela define living systems in terms of autopoiesis, literally the self-creating unity of the organism. The art of Maturana and Varela is to manifest the essential, unspeakable nature of living systems clearly and rigorously. That is, they are successful in the project which contemporary poetics has frequently despaired of. The following passage should make the relevance of their argument apparent. Of his work, Maturana claims, rightly I believe, that it is only after distinguishing "between what pertains to the domain of the observer, and what pertains to the domain of the organism, and through carrying to their ultimate consequences the implications of the circular self-referring organization of the living systems . . . [that] the functional complexity of the living and linguistically interacting system can be properly grasped without its being concealed through such magic words as consciousness, symbolization, or information." He adds, "Living systems in general, and their nervous system in particular, are not made to handle a medium, although it has been through the evolution of their handling of their medium that they become what they are, such that we can say what we can say about them."

I will not try to spell out the political implications of the argument in detail. Suffice it to say that it is an elegant defense of the integrity of every cosmic component; as such, it is opposed both to right- and left-wing totalitarianism. It continues the battle of Olson's Enyalion against "the Guards of Tartaros/Finks of the bosses."

> Enyalion
> is in the service of the law of the proportions
> of his own body Enyalion.

2)

I am only half inclined to review Robert von Hallberg's *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980*. For reasons which I will make clear, however, it exemplifies our need for Maturana's and Varela's testimony.

Professor von Hallberg is better informed than most of the critics who have attempted surveys of contemporary American poetry, and he is alone among academic critics to recognize that the relationship of poetry to the culture at large has radically changed. He begins, "Several friends have admitted to me that, however firmly literature or other arts may bear on their lives, the poetry of their contemporaries is almost entirely unknown

to them," and he thoughtfully addresses the dilemma of poets without an audience. His investigations into publication figures for volumes of poetry, on which he spends several useful pages, are undoubtedly the best thing in the book. It is not however a book addressed to the readers of *Sulfur*. As a book by a professor at the University of Chicago and published by Harvard University Press, I review it as a symptom of a moribund culture.

To be sure, as with many other academic books, I wonder to whom it *is* addressed. Presumably to people like von Hallberg's friends who do not read poetry: its argument, never quite explicitly stated, seems to be poetry is once again safe for nice people, who like to go to shopping malls, barbecue in the backyard, and vote for Ronald Reagan. (Of course, if they will not read poetry it is even less likely that they will read books *about* poetry.) His last chapter is entitled "Conclusion: Suburbs." As it introduces a completely new subject, we are to understand both that it is the end of the book and that suburbism is the conclusion of that movement which began with an increase of sophistication after World War II and ran to riot in the 1960's. I will let Professor von Hallberg speak for himself:

> The poetry I admire from this period is fairly spoken of as one of accommodation rather than opposition. In the last decade, several important poets have tried in particular to accommodate the middle and lower-middle classes resident in the suburbs and represented through television, movies, and tabloids. In part this effort has been made in a spirit of concession to an audience, though the actual audience for poetry is suburban only insofar as college and university towns are suburban. Of course most American academic communities are by policy suburban, deliberately at no great remove from central social institutions. To that extent, poets who have turned to suburbs for subject matter are honestly engaging experiences that are indeed familiar, even to readers of poetry, and rather little explored by poets.

Rather little explored indeed, even by its inhabitants, who are infrequently explorers.

Professor Helen Vendler reviewed von Hallberg's book, along with collections of essays by Robert Haas and Dave Smith (*NYRB*, Nov. 7, 1985), taking the occasion to call for a more theoretical reading of contemporary American poetry. The problem, which she does not recognize, however, is that the bulk of the poetry which comes to the public attention has no theoretical content. In asking Haas and Smith for theory, she is asking for a theory of cocktail-party chatter, which might be interesting but would not constitute a poetics. Personal style is not the stuff of theory: some people wear double-knit and some wear denim; when you buy your outfit, they give you a manner of speaking, a diction, a set of habitual images, and a selection of poets who share the style. Statistically, this is not a significant cultural phenomenon. Most people forego the poets who

match their socks.

As subjects of sociocultural study, people interested in poetry might be included in a group with other obsessive practitioners of unusual style; this would include collectors of barbed-wire and carnival glass, aficionados of chile cook-offs, amateur magicians and so on. The fact is that the poetry of Robert Haas and Dave Smith has no more theoretical content than they exhibit in their appreciations of other poets, and this is true of most, if not all of the poets, who are regularly offered to the academic audience. Their work proposes senses of the world that would have been completely familiar to Coleridge, whose theory was an account of his and Wordsworth's attempt to assimilate the poetry of the seventeenth century. We have no reason to be explicit about this reflex: it is in everyone's bones, whether they read poetry or not. It is our sentimentality: almost everyone wears some Miltonic perfume behind the ear.

In comparison to Haas and Smith, the interesting case is von Hallberg, who mixes poets who might provide evidence for a theory—Creeley, Ashbery, and Dorn—with poets who know their poems are poems only because they look like poems which are published in the *New Yorker* and *Poetry*—Van Duyn and McMichaels. The theory which might embrace this domain of evidence, which is hopelessly broad, is certain to be trivial. If we did have a theory of von Hallberg's canonical poetry, what might his "poetry" mean in the context of *Autopoiesis and Cognition*? So, three quick points for an ending:

1) Professor von Hallberg's second chapter is "Robert Creeley and John Ashbery: Systems." (It is not clear how these poets or Edward Dorn, to whom he devotes a chapter, fit in with his suburban tastes). In this chapter, he casually applies some casual knowledge of cybernetics to poetry. It is, after all, only a metaphor, not to be taken seriously. He concludes "That Norbert Wiener's methods of computing variations in the flights of bomber planes should have any bearing on these entirely traditional subjects of poetry is one of the odd quirks of recent literary history. . . ."

It is neither completely true nor quirky, if it were: Wiener's method of analyzing systems applies to anything whatsoever, the variations of love affairs as much as the flights of bomber planes. The point von Hallberg hopes to prove with this sneaky rhetorical turn is that these avant-garde poets are morally compromised, just like everyone else in the suburbs. The military-industrial complex has *everyone* under its thumb. We should understand our guilt as a badge of our success.

2) Professor von Hallberg is intent upon discovering "Centrist poets, [who] must live with their complicity, fully aware that moments of shame go along with access to the cultural authority of a centralized culture." In one sense, this point of view is directly opposed to Barrett Watten's "peripheralist" poetry: "If individuals have made symptomatic adjustments (or exceptions) to the world as it is by means of a set of relations we might

call a 'language,' the question is how to make these 'languages' available to a larger social scale." Maturana and Varela, however, provide a perspective from which it is clear that both of these positions understand cultural production as essentially invasive. Thus, Watten tells us, ". . . languages should be characterized in terms of their forms, the mechanisms by which they are constituted and by which they reproduce their conceptual order in individuals. . . ." The metaphor here must be of language as succubi "reproducing their conceptual order" or, in more contemporary terms, language as a selfish cultural gene which uses individuals as the material for their realization and transmission. It is this understanding of person-begetting cultural artifacts that Watten shares with von Hallberg and other Arnoldian academics.

3) To Charles Olson, the integrity of the human organism is the only origin and grounds of poetry. Attempts to appropriate the organism, on behalf of *anything*, no matter how high-minded, is evil. The objections to advertising in the early *Maximus* is not mere bohemian complaint; it establishes minimal conditions for the possibility of poetry:

> colored pictures
> of all things to eat: dirty
> postcards
> And words, words, words
> all over everything
> No eyes or ears left
> to do their own doings . . .

In relation to this passage, Professor von Hallberg notes: Robert Pinsky "can write, as Olson could not, with flexibility of attitude, a fair-mindedness that one cannot expect from avant-gardists like Olson." He underwrites a peculiar invention of the Reagan era, which might be called "the tyranny of manners." It is now impolite to object to the appropriation of one's organic being.

Olson did not think of himself as avant-garde; he was, he said, Pleistocene. Maturana and Varela offer us perhaps the most direct access to the thought of pleistocene integrity.

DON BYRD

Elie Nadelman

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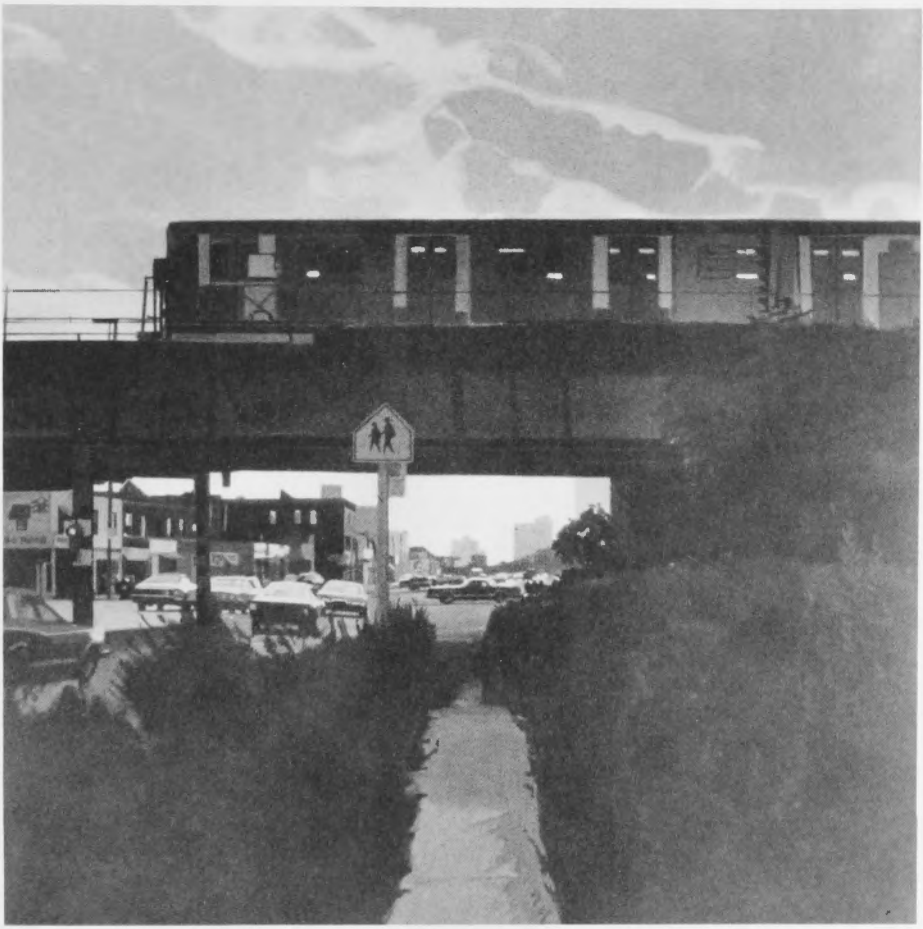

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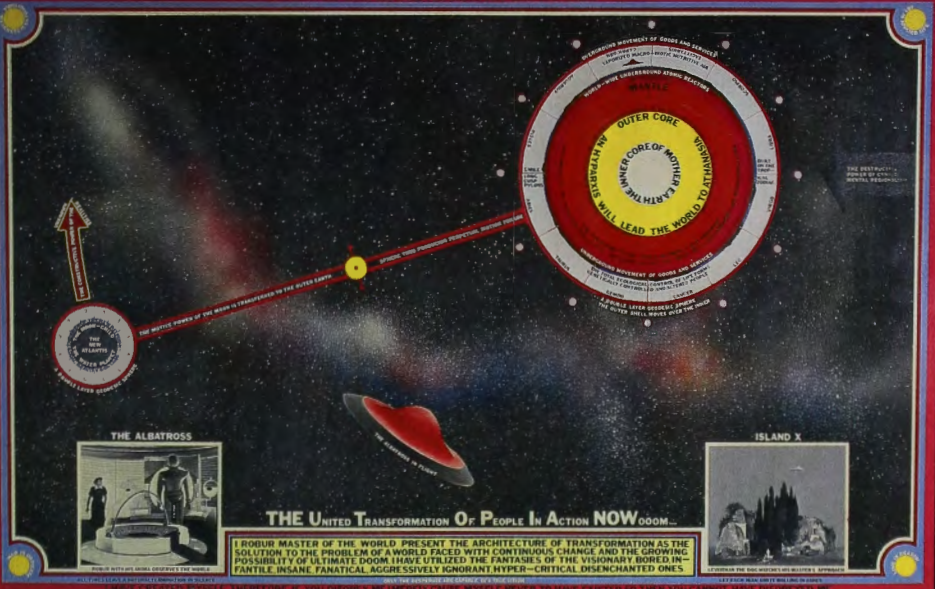

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PIECES O' SIX—XXIV

Riot in the lute song's propinquity. Propose to be guided by the less obvious illumination. Let it be axiomatic. Do not be traumatized by the practical. Wrench a regard from the passenger during a cassation. Court the benediction's witness. Lend an activity to the calflike penitent. Be frantic. Rankle or be fantastic under a plane tree. Penetrate a gaze less canine than candid. Fortify an egregious portion. Quench a criminal pundit. Fetch an alert grief from the border. Bowdlerize summitry ana. Fashion a clannish arbitrage of clinches. Equal a recycled creek. Rest from your laurels. Keen within horizons. Neaten a clearing. Divide the pelf from the anachronistic liabilities. Run from a libel. Ice the carded portraits of the antic pontiffs. Lessen the penetrating laughter of the included passersby. Fan out. Trust a cautiously broadened tantrum. Renege on the banter promised amid a siege of icicles before the porch was cornered. Dirty a cloth. Nationalize enacted obsequies long before they're uncalled for. Devise a Lateran increase. Insist upon the formation of a calculated goal lest everything else be reduced. Produce a lack of accord between a sanitary answer and ambitious sustenance. Dissuade the hisses of others from brightening apple-green entities. Resist an effortless classification. Answer appetite with an unconscionable melody. Thrust an action between the potential and the actual. Harness the intent arising from depressed narcissism or reasonable panic. Pleasure-feature the cast. Fancy a paramilitary attraction less lasting than wit. Reckon up the saddest and most pellucid reekings of the crafty stormers of the moment. Demonize the sleekest barren fortune. Reactivate the last inviolable tent pegs of the mighty and the timid well before the storm pales. Never let "incredible" be your password. Treat a gleam as less hasty than its vanishment. Recognize the lack of a parlor. Take your unuttered grievances far from the best utility. Acclimate one or more hesitant giants before the curfew rages. Activate anthracite. Weaken aspiration toward "whether" and "rather" or elicit "perhaps." Decorate the enharmonic enterprise. Let the will be. Notate obligatory reactivations. Pair the least episodes and antiquate stresses to let the Nile be. Absorb the fortunate borders of the genetic code. Nativize marginal cliques. Let the grand jury marvel and the crowd collect its molars under the sunset. Levitate the censors and make them answerable. Fortify the absent mandala. Engorge it with esemplastic electricity. Panel the ingredients, caused and causeless. Finitize every surrogate objectivization or kerneled hut, having emphasized daemonic salutations and solutions when that area had

undergone its technically inevitable recurrence before the flashes fared on and the oxyacetylene selves wearied in wonted fury or phantasmic forgetfulness, unintentionally florid, abasing its radars for popular favor, eccentric ammunition, rear-door inspiration. Add to the thicket. Risk the felt encrusted passing and the arduous percent. Make it ethnic. Bombard the larger ectoplasmic bits and pieced edges. Enact the oneirection of the disturbed gift beneath the lengths of axioms every kenner closes out from in the overburdened mornings they ended up not-guilty in, ripely applauding, finically cast off. Impress the hyaline empress. Close the net. Fetch glassed Eratomanes from legal ensconced precincts before alleged water motivates its own metamorphosis to handy attested wine, factively operative, gripping. Inspect and attack an intentional map. Please ask leave to signify. Rent intact an orthodox exclusion. Set free factitious lemma'd-encyclical-inky limitations. Rank in a rank. Befit the sum of ordinary gallantries, quizzical trees, asteroids, trapdoors. Let effort speak in immediate foreboding and counsel. Swagger. Expect a trim instance, an effable occurrence, a statutory fastening and flanking. Submit a quiet candle. Anchor a swerved aspect, an animal trace. Pity the excess flute player. Meditate on the immediate muddle, the ultimate befuddlement and hanky. Crack the undefended clock-beastly code as you construct the new society in the waxy shell of the old. Release the familiarly benefited terminus, bonded, inexcusable, deciphered, secretly tender, immobile. Focus on the more or less absolute resultant or figurative rash. Sanction wing'd hollows. Act out self-aggrandizement, perennially willy-nilly, sadistically sweet, orphaned. Personate an eradicable maze. Fabulate a picturable sweater. Rasp before you rack. Ensure that the dog she saw was other than its accidental other. Crowd forth beyond eagerness, exemplarily sandaled, strangled, clumsy. Defer to a dun. Extract a methodical district. Enforce the sun. Exhibit insipid data. Ask about tranquillity. Commemorate regions and stages, phases and affable clasping frankness, flapping and emptied, matched by any misery. Irritate, exaggerate, and prey. Recover two hundred and sixty-seven sets of remains. Nail the effrontery of the exigent palace deluged by incriminating barbarities and analogies cored or penetrating. Absolve thieves. Needle an idle icebreaker. Factify. Try a triumph rather than an all-embracing ulcer. Wed feathers and lead. Sketch the encompassing without effecting reflection or unintended effort. Ready the telltale signatures and sprigs. Rip the hints from kinship. Detail the lacks and passages and incunabula where oafish industry's betrayed by cryptoprayerful gestures and seeds are on the fire ranked with climatorial proof. Rattle axes. Battle access and additional nobility of appetite. Cycle a try or two and leave the tribe. Liven the executive excuse. Seem to gleam. Economize where the front's insatiate or sapience beckons. Register the cable that fortified the binding. Lie about the truth. Smooth the active comfort of crestfallen halves. Have a nice day. Slash the frac-

tions brute appearance constitutes. Seismogrify a settlement of coal tips. Alert a trench and specialize in essence. Bury a popular proximity and somnolently close a sort of suture. Speak. Initiate a needed corrugation. Reel in reflected answers wherever the learned terror clings. Inspissate a cannular regard. Track a torrent's corridor sufficiently. Discuss or sap a drama. Light into the excellent perpetrators encouragingly when an irritant might increase proliferation. Be persuaded. Settle dyslexic executants. Loll in a carnival where wheat exceeds prescribed experienced leaves. Annotate whatever entered crucibles exact a hated recompense or trance. Banish the diseased chrysanthemum. Tear apart leggings finished long before. Open the fair. Let the cat leap. Peel a kiwi. Scoop a pumpkin. Better thy bitterness. Liken every solid to an equivalent. View the findings with an unbemused rapture before the picture changes or enchants. Listen. Ride out the called-for storm or stem the tide. Weave a foliation. Elide a gamble. Sweep the drachma-driven creature over. Announce the tree before its singularities are riven. Constitute a crisis. Cheat. Seek every appropriate means within the lead time and the span of the faction's action. Write. Fend for yourself. Don't always be surprised. Back out of the instigation if you let the hatchways scream. Modify your model inclinations. Solidify. Be bold.

15 August-11 September 1985
New York

OCTAVIO PAZ

A FABLE OF JOAN MIRO

(Tr. from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger)

Blue was immobilized between red and black.
The wind came and went over the page of the plains,
lighting small fires, wallowing in the ashes,
went off with its face sooty, shouting on the corners,
the wind came and went, opening, closing windows and doors,
came and went through the twilit corridors of the skull,
the wind in a scrawl, with ink-stained hands
wrote and erased what it had written on the wall of the day.
The sun was no more than an omen of the color yellow,
a hint of feathers, a cock's future crow.
The snow had gone astray, the sea had lost its speech
and was a wandering murmur, a few vowels in search of a word.

Blue was immobilized, no one saw it, no one heard:
red was a blind man, black a deaf mute.
The wind came and went, asking, Where are you going Joan Miró?
He had been here from the beginning, but the wind hadn't seen him:
immobilized between blue and red, black and yellow,
Miró was a transparent mirage, a mirage with seven hands.
Seven hands in the form of ears, to hear the seven colors,
seven hands in the form of feet, to climb the seven steps of the rainbow,
seven hands in the form of roots, to be everywhere and in Barcelona at the same time.

Miró was a mirage with seven hands.
With the first hand, he beat the drum of the moon,
with the second, he scattered birds in the garden of the wind,
with the third, he rattled the dice-cup of the stars,
with the fourth, he wrote The Legend of the Centuries of Snails,
with the fifth, he planted islands in the chest of green,
with the sixth, he created a woman by mixing night and water, music and electricity,
with the seventh, he erased everything he had made and started over again.

Red opened its eyes, black mumbled something incoherent, and blue got up.
None of them could believe what it saw:
were those eight hawks or eight umbrellas?
The eight spread their wings and flew off, disappearing through a broken windowpane.

Miró set fire to his canvases.
Lions and spiders burned, women and stars,
the sky filled with triangles, spheres, discs, hexahedrons in flames,
the blaze consumed the planetary farmer planted in the middle of space,
butterflies, flying fish, wheezing phonographs sprouted from the ash-heap,
but between the holes in the charred paintings
blue space came back, and the swallow's flash, the foliage of the clouds, and the flowering rod:
it was spring insisting, insisting with its green airs.
In the face of such luminous stubbornness, Miró scratched his head with his fifth hand,
muttering to himself, *I work like a gardener.*
A garden of stones or of boats? Pulleys or ballerinas?
Blue, black and red ran through the meadows,
the stars were walking naked, but the shivering hills snuggled under the sheets,
there were portable volcanoes and artificial fires at home.
The two ladies who guard the entrance to the doors of perception, Geometry and Perspective,
had taken Miró's arm and gone for a bit of air, singing *Une étoile caresse le sein d'une negresse.*

The wind turned around on the page of the plains, lifted its head and said, But where are you going Joan Miró?
He had been here from the beginning and the wind hadn't seen him:
Miró was a transparent mirage where hectic alphabets came and went.
These were not letters coming and going through the tunnels of his eyes:
they were living things that joined and split apart, embraced, gnawed on each other and scattered,
running over the page in frantic, multicolored rows, they had tails and horns,
some were covered with scales, others with feathers, others were stark naked,

and the words they formed were palpable, audible, edible, but unpronounceable,
these were not letters but sensations, these were not sensations but transfigurations.

And for what? To scratch a line in the hermit's cell,
to light the moon-head of a peasant with a sunflower,
to welcome the night that comes with its blue characters and festival birds,
to hail death with a round of geraniums,
to say *good morning* to morning when it comes without ever asking where it comes from or where it goes,
to remember that a waterfall is a girl coming down the stairs dying of laughter,
to see the sun and its planets swinging on the trapeze of the horizon,
to learn to see so that things will see us and come and go through our seeing,
living alphabets that send out roots, shoot up, bud, flower, fly off, scatter, fall.

Sight is seed, to see is to sow, Miró works like a gardener
and with his seven hands endlessly sketches—circle and tail, oh! and ah!—
that great exclamation with which the world begins each day.

Mexico City, 9 March 1980

ARLENA GIBSON-FELLER

from THE HIPSTER: THE STORY OF HARRY "THE HIPSTER" GIBSON

Walking down Lenox Avenue, Harlem—looking for Marlowe.

Not Marlowe—I don't even know there is a Marlowe. Looking for a piano player—a good one—so I can watch his hands.

It's autumn—cold—city cold, blowing between the buildings—brick cold, cement cold, iron railing cold.

Two in the morning. Three. Hit all the gin joints on one side of Lenox. Twenty-five cents, a big gin, with a water chaser.

This place is just like the rest of them, couple of dozen tables, old upright piano.

There's Marlowe! Marlowe! he hangs over the piano! eyes closed! listening to himself! that stride style! spider hands! grabs ten notes! like nothing! hits them solid! fast! a brown blur! nothing slow about Marlowe! Ends the chorus, *bam*! he's in another key! Ends the chorus, changes again! "Honeysuckle Rose" in E! Nobody plays it in E! Nobody! And now! doubles up the tempo! freight train speed! roaring! not breathing hard! not Marlowe! He's done! Made it look easy!

"Hey, man, what're ya drinkin'?" I say.

"Gin!" he says. That's all they sell.

Two gins on the piano.

"Mind if I watch you?'"

"Naw, man, I don' mind. What you want to hear?"

"How about 'It Had To Be You'?"

I get my number twelve times, in every key!

"You always do that?" I say.

"Yeah, man!"

Every night after two, I sit by Marlowe's piano, with a couple of gins. Tonight it's just me, Marlowe, the bartender, and that cold that comes in underneath the door.

"Hey, man, what do you do?" says Marlowe. "Are you a piano player or some kind of musician?"

"Yeah, I play a little piano."

"I thought so! I figured that was it! What do you play?"

"A little Fats Waller stuff."

"You don' play no Fats Waller! No, come on, you don' play no Fats Waller!"

"Naw, I don't play Fats Waller. I play a little of his stuff."

"Fats Waller? Listen, sit down and play me some Fats Waller."

The joint's empty. Just me, Marlowe, the barkeep, and that cold creeping in. My fingers are stiff. I do "Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter," like Fats' record.

Marlowe sips gin. "Say, you do play a little like Fats Waller. A little! You play a couple of numbers—I got to go out and talk to this chick. Keep on playin', I'll be back."

Marlowe's some kind of hustler. I don't know what he does out there, but it brings in some coins.

I start filling in for him all the time. He comes back and slaps a five or a ten in my hand. "I don't want to hear nothing' " he says, "just take it . . ."

One night Marlowe makes his usual run . . . leaves me at the piano . . . It's six in the morning, and no Marlowe. The bartender's cleaning the glasses. "Take the bread" he says. "You earned it. You played all night. It's yours. Marlowe got hung up."

I grab the kitty. I feel bad.

"And listen, by the way" the barkeep says, "maybe you better come back tomorrow."

The next night, I sit down and play. No Marlowe. Ah, Marlowe's got to come. In the back of the place some pimp beats a woman. The bouncers take care of it: "Carry your disagreements out to the sidewalk!" Four in the morning. No Marlowe. The last drunk slithers out the door. Lenox Avenue turns grey. No Marlowe. I take the kitty and go home. What happened to Marlowe? He was no conversationalist—never talked much, and I never asked. I don't know what he does out there, but, whatever it is, Marlowe got hung up . . .

It's been weeks . . . I'm still waiting . . . for Marlowe . . . it's his job, if he wants it . . . just holding it down for him . . .

I come in, put a beer glass on the piano, and stick a dollar in it—you start out and your kitty's already green—gives the customers the idea . . .

Here comes a dozen people, throwing off furs . . . they're walking chandeliers . . . lights from their diamonds, in their teeth, everywhere. Big guy walks up to me . . . "Where's Marlowe"

"Uh, Marlowe got hung up!" Do I look like missing persons?

The big customer leans low. "Now, boy, I come to see Marlowe! I sure love that man . . ." He looks at his crowd . . . "Brought a lot of people here that wanta be entertained, hear Marlowe play 'Honeysuckle Rose' . . . in twelve keys . . . Can you play 'Honeysuckle Rose'?"

The nasty son of a bitch. I'd like to work him over. I smile, start in on the tune . . . "Every honeybee / fills with jealousy . . ."

"You do it like Fats, huh?" the big guy says. "Well, that's 'bout as good as Marlowe . . . Play on, little feller, play along, we're listening!"

"Man, you sure sound like Fats Waller! Don't he sound just like Fats?" They nod and grin.

He's really tickled! He chuckles! laughs! burbles! They all do! What's so funny? Ah, they're full of coke! boo! hooch! Happy! In their own world! The fat man puts five in the kitty. Five! in this joint!

"You must know Fats Waller! Must listen to him! all the time!"

"Oh, yeah, me and Fats are tight."

"He must show you a lot."

"Sure, he's my teacher. He takes me around after hours."

"That's great. Lessons from Fats Waller. Listen, boy, maybe you could show *me* something."

He slides me off the stool. I'm ready to plant my hand in that soft puss—turn his ass midnight!

"Hey, that's my piano . . ."

"Keep yourself calm, my man, don't do anything to spoil the indigestion! Let me derange myself on this stool." He wraps his big hands around the keys. The first chord, I know who he is.

He gets done with "Ain't Misbehavin'," grins, and puts his big hand out.

"Meet your old professor, Thomas Waller" he says. "See, that's a lesson for you. In life, one never knows. Do one? . . . Well, don't embarrass yourself. For somebody your size and color, you really do play some Fats Waller."

A couple of weeks later . . . "Hey, boy, you still waiting for Marlowe?" It's Fats again. "That's no use! Don't you know? Marlowe's never gonna show! That cat gets himself hung up . . . good! You gonna sit here the rest of your life? or do you want a *good* job?"

The Yacht Club! Poshest place on Fifty-Second Street! That's the job Fats got me, playing intermission for him. Pays union scale, fifty-six dollars! A week! Done up in nautical decor, this joint—beams, lanterns, everything . . . in the worst taste they could manage.

Fats does the floor show. They love him. He's their big black child with a derby and cigar. "Thank you, folks. Enjoy yourself. Order another round. Don't you go home. Here comes my favrit piano player. Give my favrit piano player a big hand. Mr. Harold Raab! . . ."

I wheel out the intermission seventy-seventy. "Bring that piano over here, boy." Fats is at his table. "I want to hear you! Give old Fats something slow and easy! I like the sweet things in life!" He's downing drinks, one after another. The customers buy him enough to kill him, a dozen shots, lined up like soldiers. Tombstones.

I play "Ain't Misbehavin'." Fats applauds, they all applaud. "See, I taught this boy everything he knows. I'm his old professor. I always be-

lieved you could teach a white boy jazz if only you tried hard enough. Just to prove it, I took the skinniest, lightest-complexioned boy I could find. Picked him up in the Bronx—nothing but a tadpole. Whopped him when he wouldn't mind. It was work . . . I'm tellin' you . . . Now here he is . . . playing just exactly like I showed him . . ."

Down an alley . . . between two houses . . . through a house . . . a cellar . . . dark as a coal bin . . . Fats knows where he's going . . . there's a door . . .

We go in. It's brighter . . . not much . . . a little dive, with a piano . . . funk upright . . . "It's *Fats* . . . It's Fats . . ." They're whispering . . . They know him here.

He introduces me. "This is my protege, Mr. Raab. This is . . . and this is . . ." I'm meeting the greatest piano players in New York! the world! the goddam universe! I'm cockeyed! Knocked for a loop!

The place is Grant's, where they have piano battles, after hours. You show your union card and your fast fingers just to get in—not everybody off the streets—piano players and their friends.

One old piano! The best listening to the best! You can't run, and you sure can't hide!

Fats plays . . . the finest I've heard him . . . not what he does at the Club . . . no! He does three things at once . . . and everything a surprise . . . as sweet as he can be . . . melts you . . . like butter . . .

He rises . . . solemn! Raises his hand! "No more applause, please! And now . . ."

And now! God! He's going to introduce me! I know it! His idea of a joke! "The genius!" It'd be just like him! "The world's greatest piano player that ever lived!" I'm sick! My knees knock the table! "Ladies and Gentlemen . . . I give you . . . Mr. Art Tatum . . ." Tatum! Of course! What was I thinking?

Tatum plays. What can you say?— watching thunder, listening to lightning. He plays and plays and plays, and doesn't stop . . . till he comes . . . to the very end.

Nobody gets near the piano now. Glasses tinkle. Lots of muttering. "Mutter!" "Mutter! Mutter!" Art Tatum just said it all! Might as well everybody else shut their traps.

Fats nudges me. "Go up and give 'em a little something, boy."

Is he kidding?

"Go ahead. Play that style you play. Don't be so shy and backwards."

"Not after Art Tatum!"

"That's how you do? After I take you off the streets and be a mother and father to you? Get your white ass up there before I sit on you!"

I go to the piano. White? Yes! And getting whiter all the time!

All these piano players—these mugs you see in every *Downbeat*—

they're immortal, alive since the year one!

My hands shake . . . can't play unless I cut them down to size. Picture them on the crapper . . . it's the only way, an old show biz trick, for facing the audience. There they are, with their pants down . . . every last one, grunting . . . the whole room, full of toilets . . . and the sounds . . . plllbbbhhh . . . they're not so hot any more.

Now! I can play!

*

Five years on the street that never sleeps, and I never sleep. I'm beginning to smell bad to myself. Five years, Ruthie is still carrying my music, one club to another. We play the cocktail hour, the shows, the afterhours joints, round the clock—never go home. And it's union scale, just fifty-six dollars a week. Some life! And the future . . . I see Maxie Kaminsky, the Dixieland trumpet player—he's taking the subway. Ten years older than me! a great musician! riding the subway! We still live on Ruth's money, still send mine home to Florence and the kids . . . but there's four of them now . . .

Billie's moving around in the next dressing room, at the Deuces. I'm changing my shirt—you sweat buckets, doing a show . . .

"Hey, Hipster, it's about time for my medicine"—she's calling from next door—"Come on over and help me, would you?"

Lady talks the way she sings. Molasses with something bitter in it. Slow, no hurry, then everything together—then nothing. Breaking over a word, like a hurt animal . . . I can't listen to her sometimes—that pure sorrow.

"Yeah, baby" I say, "I'll be right over. Just changing my shirt . . ."

She's real sad today, sad and slow, because she hasn't had her medicine. She's just in her underwear—reaches into her pants—grabs the cellophane bag of powder. The room smells like her—bitter—even with all the rotten gardenias. White women smell sour—black women, bitter. She's nodding. Can't keep her head up. Too much effort to live . . .

"Got to change my stash . . . Dreamed last night, they busted me, man . . . I know they were following me today . . . one car . . . saw it through the window every *time* I looked back . . . every *time* . . . Mama said she heard clicks on the phone—I know they're bugging the line . . ."

She's cooking a spoon . . . keeps striking matches . . . puts it in the syringe . . .

"Aw, Billie, why the hell would they do all that? If they're gonna bust ya, they'll just bust ya."

"No, you don't understand. They playing cat and mouse. *Playing* with me. You drive home with *me* some night! up to Harlem. I see them kick the shit out of them old wino niggers, the old whores, anybody they can

get their damn *hands* on. Kick 'em in the stomach. Wail on them, man, *wail* . . ."

She's winding a kerchief around her arm. Red silk.

"Hold that turnikey now. Hold it tight."

She's in slow motion . . . underwater . . . waiting for the veins to pop . . . The track's all the way down her arm. Elbow to wrist. She's searching in the middle. Gets the mark—pulls some blood up the needle . . . dark brown. She's on the vein. Presses down, hard. "Oh, yeah" she says, "oh, yeah!"

It's an explosion. She's buzzing. Her cheeks flush. You can see the pink. Her eyes shine—teary, strange—dancing! "Oh, yeah! That's what I'm talkin' about!"

"Come on, talk to me, I need company. You want a taste? You're just a little boy, you can't have too much. But I'll give you a tippy." She puts it on a nail file and holds it under my nose. A little of Billie's stuff got you really high. "Okay, one for you, two for me. You don't want to get no habit! Don't laugh, I mean it. I see you hanging around with all those bad junkies. You watch yourself!

"Man, I never would have started if it wasn't for those dirty pimps. They give you a shitpail full of it—get you working! pump your ass! I was just a kid . . .

"Man, I don't eat right any more. I used to be fat and smooth. Look at me. Won't eat my own mama's cookin' . . .

"You know that Lester—that man! hasn't balled for months! . . . lies there dreaming . . . talking to his damned self . . . all morning long . . . Too much shit!

"And those bad dreams, those nightmares! Last night I dreamed I was busted . . . I could feel that cold cement floor under me . . ."

The band's playing downstairs—Ben Webster. As long as they take choruses, nobody's coming up to bother us. Billie sits on my lap, wraps herself around me like a cloud . . .

Somebody bangs on the door. "Go away! Who the fuck is that?" Billie says. "Who'd they let up here? We don't want to talk to nobody right now!"

"Lemme in! It's me! It's Dizzy, baby!"

"Listen, I don't want no Dizzy! I got to go on in a while. You too jumpy! You make me nervous . . ."

He's banging louder—using his feet. Gets his shoulder into it. He's a big guy, with a bull neck—when he plays horn, he blows up like a cobra—head! neck! shoulders!

"Dizzy! You stop that! Just go to hell with yourself! I told you I don't want no Dizzy! You damn crazy fool! Coming around, making people mad!"

He's through the door . . . seeing red . . . eyeballs popping . . . two hundred pounds, and off his skull! Why didn't we let him in, that's what

he'd like to know. He wants to talk . . . things on his mind . . . He's not just anybody! He's Dizzy! can't he talk to Billie once in a while? And if she's so nervous, what's the ofay piano player doing here?

Billie picks up a pair of scissors. She's high! a powerhouse! after his ass! quick! Dizzy flies around the room, running into walls, tripping, banging his shins, his head. "What the fuck's wrong with you, woman?" He gesticulates. "Put that thing down. It's *Dizzy*!"

"You fuckin' botherin' me! Give me a minute of peace! If it ain't the square johns, it's the damn musicians! 'John Hammond's down there.' Fuck John Hammond! Don't want to see no John *Hammond*, no *Dizzy*, no *nobody* . . ."

Dizzy's got the message! He's in a corner, all over himself, trying to get out. The mirror's spilled on the floor—sparkling . . . Dizzy's breathing hard. "I just want to get out now, Baby! Lemme out the door! All right? . . . Never seen nobody get so mad! . . . Damn! . . ."

He's gone. Billie pushes the door into the jamb. It's completely haywire. A mess. She sits down, breathing hard—swears to herself . . . "That Dizzy was a sight! Thought I was gonna cut him! with the damned scissors!" She laughs a chorus . . . sweat pours on her face . . . She comes close, spills it on me. "Ben's still blowing" she says, "let's be nice to each other."

*

Continuous checker game going on in the dressing room between me and Charlie Parker—We play to see who pays for the food—Bird eats all the time—in between shows (he don't care)—He always loses—no way he can win against me—The best most anybody can get from me is a draw—Bird don't believe this—he thinks it's luck—We're playing this game—it's even—he don't want to quit—the intermission act is off—my show's next—"Let's play and blow the show"—"I'm with you man"—"groovy"—we're both on heavy shit—spaced out—Bird carries the checker board up on stage—nobody knows what's going on—"Your move"—The guys in my group—breaking up—We're cookin' my first number—Bird's studying the board—makes an exchange—picks up his horn—blows a wild chorus—gets a hand—I jump one of his—sing the lyrics "Who put the benzedrine in Mrs Murphy's Ovaltine"—Everybody's diggin' the game—shouting—"Move it man"—cheering—"Get it on Bird"—"Play it cool Hipster"—We're playing the whole show—people laughing—high jiving—"Git it man"—"Don't hit no clinkers"—"Watch out"—"Lay it down"—"That's it"—"Let's call it a draw Bird"—"My man"—We laugh—rock the joint.

ALLEN GINSBERG

THREE POEMS

READING BAI JUYI

I

I'm a traveler in a strange country
China and I've been to many cities
Now I'm back in Shanghai, days
under warm covers in a room with electric heat—
a rare commodity in this country—
hundreds of millions shiver in the north
students rise at dawn and run around the soccerfield
Workmen sing songs in the dark to keep themselves warm
while I sleep late, smoke too much cough,
turn over in bed on my right side
pull the heavy quilt over my nose and go back
to visit the dead my father, mother and immortal
friends in dreams. Supper's served me,
I can go out and banquet, but prefer
this week to stay in my room, recovering
a cough. I don't have to sell persimmons on the streetcurb
in Baoding like the lady with white bandanna'd head
Don't have to push my boat oars around a rocky corner
in the Yangtze gorges, or pole my way downstream
from Yichang through yellow industrial scum, or carry water
buckets on a bamboo pole over my shoulder
to a cabbage field near Wuxi—I'm famous,
my poems have done some men good
and a few women ill, perhaps the good
outweighs the bad, I'll never know.
Still I feel guilty I haven't done more;
True I praised the dharma from nation to nation
But my own practice has been amateur, seedy
—even I dream how bad a student I am—
My teacher's tried to help me, but I seem
to be lazy and have taken advantage of money
and clothes my work's brought me, today
I'll stay in bed again & read old Chinese poets—

I don't believe in an afterworld of god or even
another life separate from this incarnation
Still I worry I'll be punished for my carelessness
after I'm dead – my poems scattered and my name
forgotten and my self reborn a foolish workman
freezing and breaking rocks on a roadside in Hebei.

10 A.M.

II

"Ignorant and contentious" I spent lunch
arguing about boys making love with a student.
Still coughing, reclusive, I went back to bed
with a headache, despite afternoon sun
streaming through the french windows
weakly, to write down these thoughts.
Why've I wanted to appear heroic, why
strain to accomplish what no mortal could –
Heaven on earth, self perfection, household
security, & the accomplishment of changing the World.
A noble ambition, but that of a pathetic dreamer.
Tomorrow if I recover from bronchitis
I'll put on a serious face and go down to the Market.

2:30 P.M.

III

Lying head on pillow aching
still reading poems of Tang roads
Something Bai said made me press my finger
to my eyes and weep – maybe his love
for an old poet friend, for I also

have grey on my cheek and bald head
and the Agricultural poet's in the madhouse this week
a telegram told me, more historical
jackanapes maybe tragic maybe comic
I'll know when I come home around the world.
Still with heavy heart and aching head I read on
till suddenly a cry from the garden reminded me
of a chicken, head chopped off running around spurting blood
from its neck on farm yard dirt, I was eleven years old,
or the raptured scream of a rabbit—I put down my book
and listened carefully to the cry almost drowned
by the metal sound of cars and horns—It was a bird
repeating its ascending whistle, pipe notes burst
into a burble of joyful tones ending wildly
with variable trills in swift succession high and low
and high again. At least it wasn't me, not my song,
a sound outside my mind, nothing to do with my aching brow.

3:30 P.M.

IV

I lay my cheek on the pillow to nap
and my thoughts floated against the stream
up to Zhong Xian west of the Three Gorges
where Bai Juyi was Governor.
"Two streams float together and meet further on
and mingle their water. Two birds fly upward
beneath the ninth month's cold white cloud.
Two trees stand together bare branched
rooted in the same soil secretly touching.
Two apples hung from the same bough last
month and disappeared into the Market."
So flowed my mind like the river, like the wind.
"Two thoughts have risen together in dream therefore
Two worlds will be one if I wake and write."
So I lifted my head from my pillow and Woke
to find I was a sick guest in a vast poor kingdom
A famous visitor honored with a heated room,

medicines, special foods and learned visitors
inquiring when I'd be well enough to lecture my hosts
on the musics and poetics of the wealthy
Nation I had come from half way round the world

8:15 P.M.

V *China Bronchitis*

I sat up in bed and pondered what I'd learned
while I lay sick almost a month:
That monks who could convert Waste to Treasure
were no longer to be found among the millions
in the province of Hebei. That *The Secret of the Golden Lotus*
has been replaced by the Literature of the *Scar,* nor's hardly
anybody heard of the *Meditation Cushion of the Flesh*
That smoking Chinese or American cigarettes makes me cough;
Old men had got white haired and bald before
my beard showed the signs of its fifty-eight snows.
That of Three Gorges on the Yangtze the last one downstream
is a hairpin turn between thousand-foot-high rock mountain gates.
I learned that the Great Leap Forward caused millions
of families to starve, that the Anti-Rightist Campaign
against bourgeois "Stinkers" sent revolutionary poets
to shovel shit in Xinjiang Province a decade before
the Cultural Revolution drove countless millions of readers
to cold huts and starvation in the countryside Northwest.
That sensitive poetry girls in Shanghai dream
of aged stars from Los Angeles movies. That down the alley
from the stone bridge at Suzhou where Jiang Ji spent
a sleepless night wakened by the bell of Cold Mountain Temple,
water lapping against his boat a thousand years ago,
a teahouse stands with two-stringed violin and flutes
and wooden stage. That the gold in the Sun setting
at West Lake Hangzhou is manufactured from black Soft Coal.
That roast red-skinned juicy entire dogs with eyes
bulging from their foreheads hang in the market at Canton.
That So-Chan meditation's frowned on and martial health
Qi-Gong's approved by Marxist theoreticians. That men in

deep-blue suits might be kind enough to file a report
to your Unit on gossip they've heard about your secret loves.
That "Hang yu hang yu!" song is heard when workmen labor
yodeling on bamboo scaffolds over the street outside all night.
That most people have thought "We're just little men,
what can we count" since the time of Qin Shi Huang.

VI

Tho the body's heavy meat's sustained
on our impalpable breath, materialists
argue that Means of Production cause History:
once in power, materialists argue what
the right material is, quarrel with each other,
jail each other and exile tens of millions
of people with 10,000 thoughts apiece.
They're worse than Daoists who quibbled about immortality.
Their saving grace this year's that all the peasants are fed.

VII Transformation of Bai's "A Night in Xingyang"*

I grew up in Paterson New Jersey and was
just a virginal kid when I left
forty years ago. Now I'm around the world,
but I did go back recently to visit my step mother.
Then I was 16 years old, now I'm fifty eight—
All the fears I had in those days—I can still see myself
daydreaming on the living room floor Chinese rug reading NY Times
on Graham Avenue. My childhood houses are torn down,

*See Rewi Alley's *Bai-Ju Yi: 200 Selected Poems.* Beijing: New World Press, 1983, p. 303.

none of my old family lives here any more,
mother under the ground in Long Island, father underground
near the border of Newark where he was born.
A highway cuts thru the Fair Street lot where I remember our earliest
apartment, & a little girl's first kiss. New buildings rise on that street,
all the old stores along Broadway have disappeared.
Only the Great Falls and the Passaic River flow
noisy with mist then quietly along the brick factory sides
as they did before.

10:15 P.M.
Shanghai, December 5, 1984

BLACK SHROUD

Kunming Hotel, I vomited greasy chicken sandwiched
in mouldy bread, on my knees before the white toilet
retching, a wave of nausea, bowels and bladder loose
black on the bathroom floor like my mother groaning
in Paterson 1937. I went back to bed
on the twelfth floor, city lights twinkling north,
Orion in his belt bright in the sky, I slept again.

She had come into the bathroom her face hidden
in her breast, hair overhanging her figure bent in front
of me, stiff in hypertension, rigor mortis
convulsed her living body while she screamed
at the doctor and apartment house we inhabited.
Some electric current flowing up her spine tortured her,
foot to scalp unbearable, some professional advice
required quick action, I took her wrists, and held her
bound to the sink, beheading her silently with swift
dispatch, one gesture, a stroke of the knife-like axe
that cut thru her neck like soft thick gum, dead quick.

What had I done, and why? Certainly her visage
showed the reason, strain and fright lasting thru death.

But couldn't leave her body hidden in the toilet, someone
finding her bent over might wait, then push, then
horrified find her headless, skull fallen to the floor.
I picked her up by the shoulders, afraid to look at
the Medusa head
which lifted by long hair I set
on the sink before the mirror, but beheld no mad
drawn-cheek wild-eyed or blood-splotched wrinkled forehead—
Calm, beautiful face, tranquil in life's last moments
as if in prayer, eyes clear and modest, face content
with neither smile or frown but even-browed, eyebrows
in repose, cheeks colored healthy still as when alive.
"I made a mistake" I thought, in following the doctors rules,
or where'd I get th' idea she was screaming and banging
her head on the wall in neural agony? Was that just my thought
or hadn't others told me so? Why'd I do it so abrupt
without consulting the World or the rest of the family?—
Her look at last so tranquil and true made me wonder
why I'd covered her so early with black shroud.
had I been insane myself and hasty? I left the room.

At Joel the doctor's wedding party the family'd gathered
whoever was left alive. Yes of course they found her corpse,
they knew she was crazy, but didn't announce a murder,
just whispered among themselves she was dead in the bathroom
causes unknown, tho headless, hard for her to suicide herself,
a further investigation would clarify this big mistake.
In fact my cousin my publisher with troubled frown
put the matter to rest, saying he'd call on the police
after the wedding guests go home. I said—
"I might be able to clear up the mystery. You saw
her head?" He looked at me surprised, how did I know
she was dead with her head cut off? I realized
I'd given myself away, but risked it, why lie more,
build up Karma nightmare another year & then get caught?
Police find my fingerprints on Naomi's dead neck? or my blade
be found under my bed, in the dust behind the refrigerator
on East 12th Street Lower East Side, I be arrested
in newspaper scandal? "You saw the head?" I asked
again, giving my knowledge away. "But are you sure?",
he asked. Dressed in his Harvard suit and silken tie
striped red and gold, "We have our legal staff, perhaps you should
consult with them, no fee, fortunate contract,
our clients we value, you for your *Collected Works* we do

protect without question." Helpful, alas, too late for me
to undo the murder of my mother, I must confess, I had
confessed, too late to undo confession and truth, I woke.

December 21, 1984 5:12 A.M.

THINGS I DON'T KNOW

Dawn, a mastiff howls on the porch across the street behind the For
Sale signed tree
Chatter Chirp Chirp Chatter Chirp Chir Chir Chir Chir Chance
birdie twitters in a tree branch top the maple, Twirp!
I wake, what bird's that, what kind of dog moans so?
Is that a maple or an oak, on Mapleton Street? What flowers weeds
& ferns, those in the backyard? What car goes by awhoosh? A
Pontiac, swash up the street,
A Chevy, Ford, a Pinto, a Grammarian, a 4 wheel drive GM?
What star I saw last night when clouds lifted & Orion's belt
Glittered gold on blue? or was that amber on azure? As my eye
followed his arrow past the North Star thru the void, was that a tiny
galaxy shimmering?
Where's Sagittarius, which way is the black hole at center of the
Spiral Nebula?
Where's Sahel where a million children starve? Where's Libya where
Wilson of the CIA trained terrorists?
How many times this century'd the Marines land on Nicaragua's dirty
flag?
Who killed Roque Dalton? What's the size of U.S. national Debt?
& how much interest we pay each year till the eighties end?
Now the bird's quiet & the dog bark's down, what's differential
calculus? How do you fix electric socket wires?
I used to know the names of all the minerals. I do remember
Pectolite gave you like asbestos splinters.
How do people overcome panic driving cars? Are bird bones hollow?
didn't I once know the look of grackle & scarlet tanager?
Cirrus or cumulus, which cloud produces thunder, lightning, rain?
What makes electricity in a battery? How does my wind charger
friction become electric?

When water pours into hydraulic ram, what makes it squirt uphill when the valve closes in the Pressure Chamber? Is that it? Something like that?
What're the 12 pix in Conditioned Co-existent Emergence's Chain?
Blind man, potter, monkey tree, boat world, house with seven windows, what comes next before the man with arrow in his eye?
What about banks? What's common stock & preferred? What's a futures?
How do you hang a door, frame a window? Hold a light chain-saw?
How fix a broken leg? Ease a heart attack, deliver a baby? Breathe in the mouth of a man dying at oceanside?
What kind of government ever worked? Who wrote English Choriambics?
This isn't Trivia (how play that?) this is my life, I can't remember
the name of the lawyer my fellow student, friends with me in college 40 years ago—
How make a living, if I couldn't write poetry?
Would I know how to plant peas, tie up tomato stalks?

21 July 85

ARK 54, STARSPIRE

for Bucky Fuller

*
* *
* * *

"The sight
of a great
suspended,

swinging
crystal,
huge, lucid,

lustrous,
a block
of light,

flashing
back every
impression."

Conjure lesson
from the
ground up,

mortal coil
lock horn
galactic swarm,

domed horizon
measureless
as Zion.

Plain feats
lept fact
incarnate day—

elephant delicate
trunk up
grassblade &

untold greenery
stood sawn
geometry

while cliffed
whole countryside
mount gust

an Acropolis
still told
witholding reason.

Any spade so
terms soil
in season:

swans, worlds
withstood
Odysseus,

Osiris lift
limb by
sparkling limb,

bold Helen
died and gone,
again.

As mole toil
to loam
antarctic pole,

least testament
expound
plowed clay

take place!
of more
than flesh.

Any universe
at all
island enclose

atoll,
disguised unto
Hesperides.

Sever the
ever veiled
however evolved,

Mt. Out
before the hills
hard-kneed

'manfaced'
lion, ox
or eagle

heel!
be chariot
of Deity

—deny not
doubt by
human debt.

Remove above.
Vault earth
devised,

at once
announce full
Arcady.

* * *
* *
*

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

CERTAIN PLEASURES

There you are, laid back, with eyes downcast, trying to see out into the trees beyond the louvered window, into your open mouth a slender steel rod goes, its needle point traces an oval around a molar, you can see one tree now so close it's as if you were climbing it, and a voice, aimed not at you but to the side, where someone is poised holding a map of your mouth, murmurs, respecting a comma and the qualities of every single syllable: "Number six, a pocket but not inoperable."

*

Being with someone else and thinking of Natalie. Thinking of Natalie while listening to the radio news and falling into a doze. Worrying and rejoicing about Natalie. You know she won't call, but to hope she might is poignant. Seeing Natalie's face, the dark hair, bronze, on her forehead, her pushing it back, the cleft in her chin, a trait hardly visible except in glancing light.

*

At night, the castle. Monument of our neighborhood. Trumpeters stand on top of the tower, heralds, the building empty, demented heralds who blow for nothing, at you and two intervening magnolias. I like the way the trumpets open their mouths to gulp down a hard and lofty liquor, moonshine.

By day, it is the ghosts. Their faces press flat against the windowpanes, angry soldier ghosts, ignored by secretaries. The folds of ghost clothing, a fine flutter.

At any time the mockingbirds, who have been here longest. Their knowledge, of space. Abundance in their songs. Liquid envelopes. On them are imprinted perpetually changing titles and addresses for all bodies featuring in their space. A stream of invitations, with never an R.S.V.P. – Here the castle congealed into its monologue. Olga's glow was thus perceived by K in Kafka's novel. – Of this they sing: a joy unseizable, which life was initially for (and hers is the long memory, a formal passion).

*

Listening to Natalie's voice when she speaks low. She tells me—in her low voice there's the ghost of a chuckle, no trace of the tone in which she confides frightful secrets—that in her home state they did breed a unicorn, not an elegant milk white one, no silver hoofs either, it was "short, a bit brown, like a donkey," except—and up goes a forefinger to point through her hair at her forehead—it did have just one horn, not pointed and long, no, not at all, it was "darkish, and wilted, or stunted." Then seeing how the rosy lips of Natalie recompose the oval form of each eye of hers when she hearkens to me quoting the dancer who said of the Sankajuku dance: "It is like nothing else. It becomes the thing that all else is like."

*

A pleasure is no less distinct for being indeterminate. Held, at a certain degree of indeterminacy, it becomes even more distinct. Then it is diffused, you might say, bodily, bodily diffused, and so, perhaps, less forgettable too. A pleasure is a field, with a brilliant snake rippling across it. (How much would you see of the snake, if you could see it at all?) The snake marks a hair's breadth between a loss felt through indeterminacy and a gain felt through distinctness. Today's pleasure in seeing how jauntily a dog walks down a street past folks patching their houses after last night's tornado, contains doubt as to whether the dog is actually pleased, and, even keener, a doubt as to whether he could ever know how pleased he makes me feel. The same dog another day pleases me, albeit otherwise, because he looks so chagrined. Nothing smells right, or something. His loss or gain?—not to know, either, since he can't, that he *is* a dog. Precisely because he doesn't know, he can perceive, with all his body, the clefts cutting one thing away from another, and all the spiralling resultant outlines, on the far side of any thick stone wall, he can smell out the peacock world around any corner.

*

"He knows what he's saying, but it isn't what he thinks." Hearing this said in French by a steady-eyed Belgian painter with her elbows on a marble table top, gazing past the pine tree, across the valley, and up to the meandering outline of Mont Ventoux. *Il sait ce qu'il dit, mais ce n'est pas ce qu'il pense.* It makes the mountain's outline do a little dance. Her surprise when her breezy saying is picked up, remarked on as having struck home, right in the solar plexus, mine, not his, for he is far away. Inexplicability of that surprise—while, in my solar plexus, I connect the words

with others I heard another woman say, a complete stranger, on the beach ten years before, at Antibes: *Le tout, c'est rentrer avant de sortir.* Charm of such sayings, they make no fuss, they pulverize any context.

*

But is it true that a pleasure is most distinct in memory, only in memory? Catch it if you can, as if flies, I mean catch memory with pleasure as well as a pleasure in a memory. There can be no certain degree inherent in indeterminacy, no dam, back of which to store the energy inherent in a pleasure, except as one captures, altogether solo, the spirit of an occasion. So much for the woes of civilization. To feel the pleasure, then, as others might do, on the same occasion, would be to hold an echo open to the original sound it issues from, one flesh, present tense, a festival. Now I daren't look at that old dog again. A man in Alabama claims it is his pleasure to saw the heads off live animals. In the Whitney Museum, Roxanne talked down into tranquillity a bird in a cage, plainly agitated, part of an art exhibit, only then to collapse, herself, sobbing with distress. I might find only an old dog's remains.

*

Natalie's hands, short-fingered, large-palmed. Her fingernails are claws. You want her to claw the flesh off your bones with them. Wondering what might happen if Natalie could ever be turned around, what life would then be like, and realizing it's hopeless, because then Natalie's behind would be where her face is, so to speak, her haunting face.

Nothing suspect about the pleasure of being haunted by her face. Realizing, too, that bronze indicates not the consistency but the color of her wild woodland hair. Reading Natalie's prose, reading her N at the end of it. It is somewhere between a doorway with a round arch and the tail of a barbary ape hanging down the side of a barrel organ. No, the tail is a fish hook. Something suspect about pleasure in such comparisons.

*

You have invited a pretty friend for tea at four and on the dot of four she arrives. You drink the tea, appreciating the bergamot that gives a wild scent to it, and a homey taste, you bite on a chocolate chip cookie, too. A surprise, from the icebox you take a blue porcelain bowl of strawber-

ries. Into her open mouth she pops a strawberry, and then, having taken a good long look at it, a second strawberry. At six, quite by chance, two other comical friends come by. You open a bottle of red wine, Valréas, the light, silvery milk, flows into the room and surrounds the table, outside two mockingbirds rehearse crescendos, and you are pouring the wine into carefully polished wine glasses, soon everyone begins to curse the government and rage around the room, making their arms go up and down. If there was a trumpet vine growing through the room, you'd like it even better. But you are back at the table again and a decision is taken. We all go to the bar upstairs in the restaurant down the street and meet a flock of French people enjoying the sofas in the bar, you do a little pimping for your pretty friend, and afterwards we have supper on the patio, with plenty still to talk about. If there were trumpet vines growing on the patio, you'd like it even better, but thanks, for now a white linen table cloth and the swish of an occasional passing Thunderbird are quite enough.

*

Webster's (1914) Cahow. This "brown and white nocturnal edible sea-bird, which formerly bred in vast numbers in Bermuda in the month of January, in earth burrows, was exterminated by man." Uncertain pleasure in the dream of a sunlit street, wooden houses painted rose and blue and pistachio, ringed by gardens. In the gardens trumpet vines are held aloft by trellises, in and out among the bowers of vines, in clothes of many colors, many periods, many different stuffs, a few people walk, looking upward, open-mouthed. From places in their hearts they look upward at the clear sky, and then down again to the end of the street. There the sea begins. Along the crests of waves I see cahow nests afloat and bobbing. They are delicately built of seaweed and coral, of whitened human bones, and they are lined with a down which these people pluck from all the pillows, all the cushions they can find in the world.

ROBERT GLUCK

HTLV-3

A small ache harasses my chest—I've wondered for months if it's muscle tension or a virus. Is it my chest or this office that houses so much trouble? I sit on a card chair, cross my legs, and glance at the other men, studiously incurious; I inhale wicked institutional cheer and exhale collective anxiety. I'm taking the HTLV-3 test because my desire to know if I've contracted the AIDS virus is a little stronger than my reluctance. Five to ten percent of the people exposed will probably develop AIDS. I usually write in the spirit of disclosure but I want to clarify feelings and thoughts *before* my medical relationship to the AIDS crisis is established. The Health Center guarantees complete anonymity; even if I decide to make a secret of my lab report, it will alter the way I see myself and, doing that, alter everything. Like other gay men, to be on the safe side I behave as though I'm contagious. An HTLV-3 positive gives that proposition—with some exceptions—medical certitude, while an HTLV-3 negative puts me—with fewer exceptions—in the clear.

I read the endless AIDS coverage in the gay press and articles in mainstream publications. These reports cannot gauge the accumulating sorrow because no language can express so great a feeling; I get an inkling of its scale in the torrent of factual coverage, a deluge of facts, debated and repeated, as though sheer enumeration could save us. I wonder: will a cough lead to pneumocystis, headache to lesions, a mark on my skin to Kaposis? My boyfriend speculates that, like a war, the full effects of the trauma won't appear till the disease is "conquered." Sometimes, in the calmest moments, dozing, an image of myself flashes on my mind's screen: I'm sobbing deeper than I ever have, arms in the air, head thrown back theatrically, as it has never been, as I would never allow.

Immediately I have an impulse to make comparisons and draw morals, to deflect attention from the real trouble, to give a past tense to what can't be fathomed. Anxiety demands a universal to escape itself. All right: AIDS is the disease of the 80's. Why? Well, the destruction of the immune system is an allegory of the breakdown of "basic structures" now experienced by our country and the West. Or: AIDS is bad news from a remote yet governing part of the body (the immune system, the CIA) and I theorize that the virus was concocted by one of the more feverish outposts of government sponsored research. Or: AIDS resembles radiation poisoning's silent decomposition, its scientific unwholesomeness and cataclysmic forecast for all people. Or: AIDS is the result of sexual

imbalance—we were unnatural or too natural (a death's head leers from the crotch).

These interpretations are foolish and comforting, as though finding *what exists* were the same as inventing a moral, as though at some moral's bottom line I'd stop being dazed and scattered. I can't supply meaning to a catastrophe whose real life takes place in the microscopic distance (so near it's far) where viruses are normal and *my* existence is an unlikely game of creation and destruction without any stakes. I feel this chemical remoteness to be the void in its mechanical uncaring and its absolute precondition for my existence. Why ask it for comfort when it illustrates the opposite, that is, the improbability of life. I discover this solitude when I lie awake, aware of my existence, wondering if my breath is labored or shallow, if I feel exhausted or just fatigued, wondering if I should associate the operations of my body, the deep hum or tension that is myself, with the workings of the virus.

AIDS must be seen as this rent in the fabric of life, personal and public. Like other catastrophes, AIDS heightens our lives in a way that we would never want. I'm cast into the region of the uncanny where animate and inanimate blur. I tell myself, I can't die this way, but of course I can. A sense of destiny asserts itself in the face of so many blighted ones—the "me" avid to continue being me comes forward.

With that in mind, can I manufacture some historical perspective? During the late sixties I, and others, glimpsed Utopia for a moment. We saw that the world was the world, not someone's interpretation of it; that life was the fulfillment of itself; that our destinies—our selves—were our own. This revolutionary idea appeared at once on different fronts, and American identity revamped itself. Actually, we merely claimed the happiness and freedom that were promised to us throughout our childhoods in the deceptive fifties. For me, a budding gay man, the new identity meant sexuality. The rules an invisible world made for me had become opaque; I could see they were obviously invented for someone else's benefit at the price of my own emptiness; they seemed to disappear in a burst of laughter. First, we created a mental and geographical terrain in which we could know each other and be known, could recognize gestures and share meaning; second, our sexuality provided a sublime to transcend and dissolve those newfound selves.

In short, it was gay community—well organized, inventive, imperfect, equipped for the seventies and eighties, that is, for urban life, and subject to its pluses and minuses. Unlike older communities, it thrived in an urban setting, in commercial institutions like bars and baths and cafes; it added its own chapter to the history of love in those decades. What other population could respond to urban anonymity by incorporating it into the group's lovelife as anonymous sex? To the degree that my own aroused body expressed the sublime, it broke every social contract, while the in-

vitation to the sexual act unified a community and was its main source of communication, validating other forms of discourse. A gay cookbook? Put a naked chef on the cover. The task of being the American libido more or less passed from Blacks to gay men. Gay Christmas? – naked Santa. As we created the community it taught us a new version of who we were, then we became it. This shift in perception about oneself is almost mystical, with the implied reordering of priorities.

Inevitably, a reaction. The new model showed us that the sexuality we had thought *we* discovered was actually a 20th Century invention, part of an ongoing specialization process – as specialized, in fact, as the 20th Century version of heterosexuality. Science and authority shape these identities as much as we. Moreover, the sexual revolution peaked and declined well before the onset of AIDS. Finally, identity and consumerism share an equal sign more than ever before – urgent greed, as though the American bandwagon were pulling out for good: yuppies, guppies, an impoverishment of life for which we feel rightly ashamed. Gay community incorporates commodity life into its dynamic, as it did anonymity. Still, where are the selves we discovered, the selves that were discoverers?

It's easy to show that the world is distant, life is distant, we have the vocabulary for that: disjunction and pastiche. (Retro modes inform architecture, fashion, politics – let's get *back* to America. The big movies are wry reworkings of the old genres: *The Shining, Silverado, Star Wars.*) But a touch is itself, a meeting place for the body and the sublime; it disregards language which wants to generalize, negotiate. This unique "meeting place" also describes death (if anything does). That's why observance both of sex and death can function as a community sublime. To make death general, to say ten thousand died of AIDS, is an example of how language lies. Each death is beyond language.

And yet: ten thousand have died, more on the way. I imagine – with inescapable racism and also because it's true – epidemics always happening in the Third World. Our last scourge was the Spanish flu in 1918-19, which killed 500,000 – but doesn't the past in this respect resemble a Third World Country? Now gays bear the contempt that the USA has for anyone in trouble. Reagan won't associate himself with homosexuality or a disease. It's a public impulse to silence that affects everyone. I'm still a little shocked when I see the word homosexual in the papers, let alone AIDS, and how confusing to associate the national libido with death.

"Ten thousand have died" – an example of how language lies in articulation and Reagan lies in silence. In bed, when I listen to my body for distant alarms, I am in a time and class by myself. Still, AIDS creates such magnitude of *loss* that now death is where gay men experience life most keenly as a group. It's where we learn about love, where we discover new values and qualities in ourselves. Death joins if not replaces sex as the community sublime. We used to have the baths, now we have the

Shanti Project and other volunteer organizations that institutionalize the approach of death, and AIDS support groups, and safe sex clubs where sexuality is framed by the AIDS crisis. A sex-slave auction benefit for the Shanti Project certainly deserves its own exegesis under the heading Mix-and-Match – and there's telephone sex, changes in sex practices even between longtime lovers (sex acts also have a history), the innumerable AIDS journals and recountings. I read the obituaries in the gay newspapers instead of the sex ads. Stories about AIDS patients and treatments are passed around, traded, repeated; they help me in my solitude; they are the very matter that creates community, gives it its character, its form and being.

But everything disperses before the question, Will I die soon? For that reason it's an unfair question, it breaks the social contract – and it's the only sensible question to ask. What other purpose does the mind have, if not to navigate the body safely through life? Back to the Health Center: a taste of adrenaline thins my saliva. My heart beats; I flip magazine pages; a nurse calls my number; she finds a vein; it fills a test tube. I always feel self-love whenever my blood appears, in a vial or as a taste in my mouth or when it surfaces through a cut or a puncture. These days my blood is an impressive and dangerous substance. It stands alone now, at attention in its test tube like a Messenger from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. It's hard to remain clear when a jackal-headed scientist weighs my heart against a white feather. In two weeks I will learn the results. Five to ten percent – or is it fifteen? – of the people who encounter the HTLV-3 virus will develop AIDS. I hope I can get out of this alive, the mind says, referring to life and not *able* to imagine alternatives.

NICK PIOMBINO

THREE POEMS

THE PYRAMIDS

Write the poem
before the pleasure's
lost. Make it yours.

There are disturbances.
Mother holds a scarf
to her face, "Father

I sang so beautifully
tonight. Paste my words
to your lips . . ."

An angel fell under a shadow of conceptions
and the whole atmosphere of immediate danger alluded to change.
Its texture suggests a puzzle, previous to the disclosure
I say not now and it appears now, cast in an eternal circumstance.

The wings cast in plaster are no imitation of perfection.
The sentences describing them don't match. As such.
The sculpted lion in Lucerne is *sans* tongue
Just as some imaginary lover of Sappho might be silenced by a letter
The wings of an angel might conceal a cryptogram,

A herald on a scarlet field, a fortification, a coat-of-arms.
Its wings fluttering without motion from a high cliff
Moving without sound, pausing at the inception of its ascension
An angel speaks silently into the still origins of its own signification.

MY LADY CARRIES STONES

to me. Somewhere they are building
I go for a walk
and all eyes are closed
buzzing around my head
where the box containing old things
mixed with twigs and leaves
catches the bus to the beach alright.
They were speaking soft
to be accepted as they are
itch and scratch
and the dizzy blessing
pays his money quickly
such as gadgets and miniature
long dresses and sticks
yellow petals and completely
half here. They listen
for a check. Wet on the rocks.
Enters the church worried
gets into his car and hurries
like tall stones. My bandages
snap and bite me. Can you borrow
remain here with me? Summer
is transferred to another department
in the 15th Century. Lying there

JOHN YAU

SIX POEMS

ALL THIS CHANGING TROUBLE LUCK AND SUDDENNESS

Some of what came and some was poor
Some could make it up some sat down
Some to hear someone who was playing
I'm glad to be told I started out
I was little and awful and then I was music
Hearing itself above the ceiling
Someone who was playing some to dance
I lengthened the comfort of moving on
Someone to stand with for a distance
Instead of listening to the noise of a clock falling
A string of fish to all that rhythm
Some I made myself out of my remembering

SEANCE MUSIC

Salt starts falling from my tongue
Will the poem arrive soon
And how will I recognize it

By the pages flying up from the brain
Says the striped man on television
Holding an audible tone in his hand

By its radiant crystal apparatus
Transmitting harmonic interferences
Through the moth-eaten glove of a doll

Salt continued falling from his tongue
As I strolled along the outer aspects of myself
Planting passionate incidentals in the mud

Someone's voice had been trapped inside a jar
And yes
The painting of the poem will arrive soon

And the man with a hamburger bun on his head
And the knight in rusty armor swinging a mop
And the chicken who doesn't need his head to sing

And yes
The man in the prison uniform
Will leave his imprint in the air

DRAGON'S BLOOD (1)

I know all dreams grow to the size of a grapefruit
The highway circles the mountain of red mirrors
I check the map and count the stones
As the train chugs past the painting of your face

The highway circles the mountain of red mirrors
Shimmering beneath my eyelids
As the train chugs past the painting of your face
Butterflies hang upside down in winter

Shimmering beneath my eyelids
Is a procession of men on donkeys
Butterflies hang upside down in winter
On the picnic grounds named after your muddy sighs

Is a procession of men on donkeys
A symbol or an indecipherable ribbon
On the picnic grounds named after your muddy sighs
I've buried my blue and yellow paintbrushes

A symbol or an indecipherable ribbon
I check the map and count the stones
I've buried my blue and yellow paintbrushes
I know all dreams grow to the size of a grapefruit

DRAGON'S BLOOD (2)

I recheck the map and count the stones
On the battlefield's neo-classical plain
Someon's ransacked the archives of description
But the statue knows its electrons are aimed at his body

On the battlefield's neo-classical plain
Men dig for vowels and consonants
But the statue knows its electrons are aimed at his body
Like detectives circling a meteor's imprint

Men dig for vowels and consonants
Looking for the missing words dipped in ink
Like detectives circling a meteor's imprint
They must find what has never arrived

Looking for the missing words dipped in ink
Something poets do, muttered grumpy Plato
They must find what has never arrived
While I try to build the path leading to its absence

Something poets do, muttered grumpy Plato
Someone's ransacked the archives of description
While I try to build the path leading to its absence
I recheck the map and count the stones

DRAGON'S BLOOD (3)

As the highway circles the mountain of red mirrors
How did I get stalled above the ribbon of this instance
A woman harvesting opium
In order to sever the transmission filaments

How did I get stalled above the ribbon of this instance
A pebble wrapped in silk
In order to sever the transmission filaments
When I want to parachute into the well

A pebble wrapped in silk
Do I embroider speechlessness

When I want to parachute into the well
Shimmering beneath your eyelids

Do I embroider speechlessness
While you scatter the rainbow of ink
Shimmering beneath your eyelids
Must I now drink milky tears

While you scatter the rainbow of ink
A woman harvesting opium
Must I now drink milky tears
As the train circles the mountain of red mirrors

DRAGON'S BLOOD (4)

As the train chugs past the painting of your face
Slats of moonlight enthralled and entwined
Tonight, I am a tuft of blue shadow
Framed by a doorway, watching us dance

Slats of moonlight enthralled and entwined
Flare unclasped keeps spinning its astral rhapsody
Framed by a doorway, watching us dance
Held in air by air

Flare unclasped keeps spinning its astral rhapsody
O bicycle of lightning, do not dissolve
Held in air by air
I circle the hours we were alive

O bicycle of lightning, do not dissolve
In a well where wishes are made and lost
I circle the hours we were alive
Locked in a story empty of words

In a well where wishes are made and lost
Tonight, I am a tuft of blue shadow
Locked in a story empty of words
As the train chugs past the painting of your face

CLARK COOLIDGE

from THE BOOK OF DURING

III.

In the room that is all I have left but is bordered on two side opposite with other rooms I have no access to I find myself alone and these things happen. A silver ring falls from the ceiling, hits perfectly on its side and rolls straight to the wall that seals one of the adjoining chambers, strikes this wall and falls down, silence. I have not only imagined this happening, I have partially stolen it. A book I once read comes to mind, in which an insanely repetitive list of all imaginable sexual inventions is enclosed. Bodies in all possible positions and combinations. And in this book one of the kept heroines has a ring through her "nether lips." She rolls on the floor in an agony of delight, thrashes in an orange light rimmed with pale blue. Everything in the foreground is backlit to a most violent blackness. You never see the face of the one who throttles you. Even eyes do not glint in this void. Silence is leaden.

Only a certain type of glue would save you, but the secrets of this substance are hidden in the words of books of an imponderable sentiment. You will read them through anyway and you will not reach the secrets. You will take out your penis instead. "Take out" is a strange and funny, and cruel and incorrect, term for this act, as if you and your penis would go for a walk together in the sun in a park among many delights and questioning faces. They all quite clearly see you and your penis striding in the sunlight hand in hand or arm in arm and wonder at this display, and some laugh, but most frown and soon will forget they ever saw you. It is the ones who laugh that most seriously question you and your penis. One even walks right up to the two of you, stops right in your face and says in a voice distinct enough for all to hear even in the high wind that has meanwhile come up tossing leaves and dog chains, What do you and your penis think you are doing out here together in the glare of all the humanity you could ever wish to apologize and feel responsible to? It is obvious that you will have to go away on the moment, in a rush without forethought and to a land where penises can never be stirred to such escapades but only grow in the ground responsive to the mysterious tides of moons and stars. For glue is all too human an invention and the secrets of its composition have been lost in only the most popular relations of love.

So formal it makes me puke, so formal it gets me hot. The land from the back of the barn descends to the sea margin and no one goes there but a few black and white cows. The lunch was on celery only. Three powder blue ties dimly reflect in the black glass at the back of the display window. I remove my arm from your arm. All these things. All these rehearsals. All these final acts. The world is so formal it makes me rise, the world so formal that it makes me leave.

I doesn't understand us but bugs around. The world in chains of its own solution. An ovular yellow, polished and prim. Crystal vases filled with crystal flowers. No music, but a soft air in slight but continuous movement. Tiny flames. She bends over and strokes the back of my right hand with her left nipple. This precision, almost surgical, deft and yet somehow casual. Preparations, always composed of several. She is naked and I am not. I do not look at her.

Broken eye sights, enameled bottles loose in the sea. I scan and do not look up. I am at night, I am winter, and I trouble you for your sexual portions. The cover of the chest sticks, it will not open to me or to you. The man laughs and reaches inside for his organ. The parts are wholes, but the wholes do not seem to make up into one overall whole. I slip between your dress and the wall. Hammering on the roof. Cutting down on, heaping up from lots of tinies. The last thing you said to me was . . . before . . . Then your blouse is loosened and your breasts can't quite decide on their positions.

Nothing was branded, for me but you.
Nothing lasted, tangled, until the end.
I came forth, and you behind.
The wind the lash, empty at the end of our story.

Who has fathered forth the cruelty of numbers in desire?
The crux of desire, a show of the many held in
plan of the many. A circle of diamonds
in the shallow sod. A tongue tireless in its
sheathing. A sun would not descend on this display.

Held by whatever I had said, you
strained to escape into my plan.
Orifices locked, the diagram is simple, endless.
But the story, to grow greatest heat, must be cut off
well before its conclusion.

Moralism is a word from a vocabulary that I never use.

What is known but a choice between good and bad, choices
between eternally varying goods and bads? And the
man who holds to one over his whole life, he is the moralist?
holding, holding till his ink freezes over in its jar. Sade
was not a moralist, others have overturned that word's vocabulary
upon him. And so much later. He was a diver.

Do you see those words? I want you to know them. I put them
up there for you, above the bedboard, in an ink that tears
the plaster. Burn them into your brain's tissue, that I would
never have to remind you. No one uses them. You are never
to speak them. They are to keep you always from the world of others.

Do you know anything?
I know things.
Do you have them?
I don't remember them.
But you do.
I don't know them.
Where are these things?
They are apparent.
I don't know them.
You haven't seem them.
They are there, in your vision.
They must be shaded.
I've forgotten. I've forgotten which one I am.
You are the one beside me.
With the things.
With things you have forgotten.
I know, I left them when I learned.
Learned what?
To stand, just out of the light from the window.
It's not possible to remember which.
It's a very present one.
The one over there?
The one by me.
Which one is yours?

The compound of putting you together with my cock. Launched at first with certain tunes, chaotics. The friend who has seen you and then denies that meeting. That elbow that accompanied you and your handbag to the corner. Your eyes, one of which is not quite. Hidden breasts, excepting the swell, continually here hidden breasts. The ink that your painter friend

shakes onto the docket with whip-brush. The tendency you have to wait until all hands are ready before making your play. The voice box, hidden apparently. The whole system of public systems, rented out for an afternoon or a carlot. Numbers on your tie, a phonenumber or a clue to nowhere. Contents, never singular, as there is never only one form. Prepositions that hang at your lip edge. The recipe for sound and image. And that truck that would only load your words. I have put these together without you. Then I have awaited your very passage.

The picture one has of everything is not the picture of things. Is it the busted shape of one's own power? Or a scrap tacked to a wall over the bed or working table? Mine in all its sweeping neglects. I am right here. I look up and expect to see through the ceiling the people of the future. I expect to draw a line that will only end at my death. The sheen of a penis between teeth. The "among" is what is hard to grasp. How I stand with you. The very nakedness of size. I have found things that would awe you but connect not at all with your life. We go on to the next. I want so much that you would instantly fuck into my any and all fascinations. You stand down off that raised board and erase my drawing. You have come up again and again in my speech. And that lightbulb in the raw ceiling hovers in my dream like my dream over all the possible dreams to control you. Our sex performed on only one strut of the craft. Outside and beneath are all the lands spaced by hums, a total cereal. The morning currents so hard to stick by.

The fucking guy showed up again. He had an apparent religion, his stick. We were caught by this shiny black object, length, obstruct, tenementary bar, median for the course. He stopped in the room and lined things up, the stick with things that is. We watched this beveling activity, anxious that he would kink and drop things on us. Dream of a burst ceiling bulb peppering the gels of an eye. On one wall in letters of gold lay our lists of desire, but he paid these no attention. The lateralness of cold became a definition we couldn't squint away. Obnoxious, he still had strongly to do with all this. As if fucking be poised in one body with appendage.

I didn't know where to get any of that and I came back. We'd hung out with little kids while pretending our name was "Ox." I had read the book where the little girl turned into things. I wondered just where I could get the juice in tiny wooden bottles. Only in that way could I. So could you have too. But neither of us knew where so we came home. Nights were waiting for us, walls inscribed with fountains of jet. Leap-frog lingerie. No one stopped us from trying to excite through windows others in near apartments. New York City was just an aisle and then another aisle then. Troopers on the moon. Amber lighted laboratories instead of schools all

around. Shades where we gathered speech. Speech that refused to penetrate as far as anyone. We tried out and didn't come back. And then we did. It was tiring. Only sex wasn't. "Don't tire me out, I have to get up early in the morning" wasn't in our vocabulary. The older we were the thinner we got. Nobody had or gave lessons. Things like music and pins. We bent over and once something came through. I could even allow him to stand on me, straighten my breasts. It caught us like a lock that won't give. Immeasurably in front of us and incapable of wish. So eventually even the trees gave way and we began to love the unhindered darkness.

The tree is too straight, it doesn't have a hat. The ones who live in series have lost their count. The space of everything *is* endless. Are there things anymore? I have lost the doorway to my house somewhere along. Everybody giving back to me the story of their story. The doors of the Food Arms never close. And I do have to see you somewhere, don't I, later?

Empty space (Is there any other sort?) is impossible (hard) to photograph. She knew this, had found it out, and fucked more rapidly (and oftener) as a result. In space there is no result. Infinity should shore one up. The camera glowed in her hand (stopped in time). The time it takes to cross space (take it in) cannot be stopped (caught). There was a laugh in the hallway and suddenly no one had known her.

I was sitting so far apart from her that to understand her was all I could do. Do not proceed to the door. Does anyone figure the trees while sitting inside setting the words? The words are not space. My hand is what with its pen? Nothing between my legs but a sex and space. The rhyme does not log any minutes. It is a space insisted. In this room everyone bulges away from the camera. Whose fault is all this rustling edge? Nine times I said to her, Nine times will cure your fault. It will curl into a marvel of delirium. Bright and edged and salted and a sort of part of your next bordering fucking nightmare. Three women in the same chair.

I can't think about what I think, loss of ready memory. Piercings precise as forgettable as your own talent. I could take you along with me down there but it would do no good. What things you would see there. Lights in back of heads, perfect pencil flights betrayed. Perfect bending stalks glazed in winds of breath. You apply gummed stars and moons and flakes to your chest and breasts. Shaken. Bold and bended. Bowed and left. Empty lights in the dream shadows of fucking and tearing. Leg in the way, rip it out. List of stations on the way to the cunt. I lick your staring eyes, never their lids. You are crying in my dream and I make to stop you with a whistle, crying in. Stopping the window from imagining us. And then (now) I don't know when to stop anything.

The cigarettes come precious and nobody has any left and my hairs are falling out. Liars to my collection allow me freedom. They are stopping in with pictures, troubles at the edges of being and the world. The world of time that space keeps hindering. Ice viewing pressure with a blanket. Tits above your eyeballs grown into your scalp. You turn in a fit and squeeze the windows dry. We don't go together but keep emerging from each other. Writing is not fast enough to emerge from space. My hand should turn a gate. Your eyeballs should *be* nipples. I should scrape this page clean and declare (prepare) nothing. A stack of parentheses on the hallway table refusing access.

Take off your lips. This is a take-off on lips. An entrance to the avenue of wooden (woolen) snails. A car park lit with barn lights. A puzzle. A noodle on licorice stick. A where do we go when we get back from there, anywhere at all but precisely several. Nods come here and stanching thighs. She loved the way the blood would flow and warm and stream down. These were her years, these sticking seconds. Thirds, and in minor, and relaxed away from the thinking crews. I could make anything to happen in a folding bed. Sex by numbers, and in scissors and caulking. She bends at the belt and removes her hose. 1949, which no one is following. The music all came out of the rooms then, and friendly strokes became pestering posts. The paginated day of noon photography. Night always came in the afternoon. The way the *came* of orgasm always sharper in that past tense. When the shades suddenly fell and he would drop by and we would fuck.

I continue to see people who do things. I live down below it all in the soon to be thought about cellarplace. And no one says to me "Avenue sinking." Lights went out whenever I found my bathroom. You'd have to turn yellow to grasp the frogs I've seen. It's mumbo-jumbo these glossaries of the world. "Legions of Hell" on a postage stamp you'd half lick and send to anyone stammering. The glasses of windows, yellowed at the edges, began to seep in, and you'd hoped to control lives beyond the pane. I'll live later, tell me about this now. Het up with the fraught flakes of violences like duels. Pump the shovel and save the wad. Enter full rooms and limp through them, describing and shattering. Nothing needs an outline and so you do it. The fuck in the corner is no longer. Now it centers all your failings, fallings down at the flick of a not seen. Colors have seemingly taken the place of nerves in your heart. The masturbating typist, she wheels at the windows through all the following nights.

Is all this fragmentary and peculiar because you *can* see through it? Is this the name always fallen through the wall next to the picture you nearly

want to have? Are my potatos the same as chairs in the place of no windows? Why do I go on in here?

In the room was a cup, a plan, and nine almonds. We fear them. Leave them there. Step over to where the light is darker, more modeled by lack. So many times more the temperature than what I've seen. Many of them are here, totally separately. Lift off your hand from the visage of one eye. I can't see you for the scrawl, the clung weight of hips rushing. Everything here flips far from casual song. A part of the well tones the fuck makes. Outline my eye. Prod my nose. Sink a vase between my legs. I own you, overbalancing behind you. Avoid last things. Stop making things up. Fuck.

I don't know how you make it energy. There is a wildness in her that streaks the plates but doesn't rise as far as the head. Try one smaller. You'll see me do it, I'm telling you to. Grow bigger and your nerves will be smaller. Ice shows. Tremendous how it could be there. I solved the problem, figurehood. But I don't know, it doesn't seem very possible to me, living nextdoor. I withdrew my head. People always tell you about it, all decked in possible fittings, stagnant avenues at the bottom of the street. Whole rippish push of shattered glass across from him. We went out, exactly like that, again and again. Tremulous velocipede, and you say there's no repetition! My look and your reverse. Tender bones in leather sheathes. Round the time we all came back a rope appeared from the pole. Crazy to think of it, better to rove. That we all had known that her hands were bigger than my hat, I don't know how.

PAPER HOUSE PART ONE (a-o)

a

one box falls out of another box, ashy covenant of separation
two birds, one clamp, no reaction just hanging there as the arrow
    moved
notes put the map back into the water
they don't notice what they're learning
name all the days, parts of them painted to look out of control
    then crashed into a tree
letters in the boxes in the light old lady opportunity
the mirror ceases to be right here, pressure on the hand
    sends a biscuit to the mouth
a circuit connected by eyes stopping watching
quantity of information in the type, nation in the line
    or lines
legs broken and maladroit preview a long corridor filing against
    walls engaging hands going without end in the corridor
back to front to quay, cracking of wood, a miner's ladder
    five meters high
notices filled with objects
later, however, a gelatin lit up, Chinese cryptesthesia,
    American music
mural fold or fist, magnetic moment measures behavior, thinking
    penetrates slowly
start over a sensible solution, a compact rower's body zippered
    into an orange flight suit, all the confidence of the
    Chinese navy
exposing a big area extinct of life forms

b

off the wall I lie in bed
vegetation overhead

I should have made a mistake
all tucked up in song
if I be a wall or door
draw me like a cedar board

c

news flies through the air with a great constriction below
    the throat
false distance puts the teeth back in
the singer reads absence backwards
    resting close
in is by means of a phone in the drawer by the bed
the painting is thinking the weather goes dry and flat
this fold carried by air contains no other object
cat's eye or reflection's midnight in this bed of books
    returns things through things
restores things made of paper
    discolored secondary paper
false topography reflecting different intentions
    and starving
both sides of the page at the same time
beautiful and badly made historical documents
faces of wood indicating there's no one at home
    and made not to last
today science will explain everything imperturbable
    contradictory as a credit card

d

what strange turn of the head or is it the earth
    which starts to shake
as we have parents we have a favorite boat strong, well-furnished
    crystal to sing down the danger

without counsel see red, see antimony, little marble wave
    why to me
why does it turn to me, a reductive story all white, all red
    I'll jump into the sea
dig a hole with both arms, bury eyes in it
a nation that apologizes to its war dead, securing the chain
    that binds both arms
paper is as paper does I saw more of you in Paris generous
    exile hospitable will last as long as you will last
keep my pretexts and live

e

a secret hill always dear
separated from the last horizon
endless setting and watching
silence in fingers separated a little
wind, seasonal vocal comparison
    comes in, pulls a person's hair out
ducks a person in the sea

f

stop motion hands hot country

a lesser noise divulged between the poles

"Silvia do you remember the weather when you were alive"

so youth gets up draws a light study gives the ears the
    better portion

concern won't change its color, against the snow a high-powered
beauty – indivisible like the hidden measure we don't speak about

g

all the years of work have resulted in a complete dismantling
two birds, one fox, some anger
disentangled
notes back into the water
is its
own misreading
what they notice
gelatin filled up with behavior
starving discolored things
that is, faces made not to last
of course in time suppression weakens structure from within

h

all the instructions on a thin plastic strap inside hold him
    lightly like the day, for you are a book, ashes, dust
"elixir of reminding sweeps secrets off the page" selling
    papers daily
to build an oak leaf house, purple and stapled
mosaic of pressures
mechanical hands deliberate but intentional
imperfectly matched
the way the light
look at me
a growing disability to remember

i

an original event does double spontaneity, lies in small steps
to dissimilarity, doubtful things, hinges misfitting the inscription
numbered sets the opposite of numb to feel the sentence

j

who edits for drawing
is a burden
and cannot tell
which is which

k

I think of him as a house and as an ordeal
"The house brings the idea of property and connects to
    a cluster of fears concerned with women and desire . . ."
a planet caused the invention of a table, house removed
    veiled blue, dark lady, dark horse
the body constitutes community you can't ellipt it
faith in permission a method or system records how we came
    to be effaced
desperate to conserve matter living and receding

l

writing burnt my tongue
reading a book
or feeding the fire
developing old pictures
released the image
you really ought to see
Ste Refrigerator
cries real tears

m

that dictionary may be a companion to art but life
is the most sentimental thing there is
lying around in sub-text hard-pressed to find a resting place
silence notes its own misreading
tonics of anger, haunted house
the gummed tape is taking a lot longer to remove
than (we had) anticipated

n

by definition born nation is as nation does remember everything
it reads
but this is time, this is truth, take no notice of it, this thing
is short for something too long to write
this bracelet was filled with water and gave off a peculiar odor
which permeated the room, a blue glow
numbers, cognition, the painless life, nation I would have you be
this used to be a crystal waterfall where all heads only seemed
to fit
one insult adjective long line deserves another vegetation beyond
understanding
the dream said night lasts but wasn't didn't you once talk to
your desk, give it a face

o

rekindling
things are constant
recopied from books
found in them

THE BILL

The waiters arrive, with their Byzantine platters,
under the turret: a stripe of colors that taste good,
but some of the colors are flesh, like us,
and so we put on masks while we eat,
but the fish and the fowl are not so disguised,
we can break into the embassy of a crunchy
deep-fried cod, or tug the wings off a quail,
animal meat is served in cuts, chops, burgers,
there is no way to justify eating part of an animal—
I have, and you have, for years,
sweetbreads kidneys each with its cluster of mythologies,
in 1905 what went on in Chicago slaughterhouses for men
  women and animals
equal to Solzhenitsyn's documentation of the Gulag.
My own father worked in a slaughterhouse for over 30 years.

I suppose that if we took every act down to its effect on the other,
walking across the grass, killing flies in August,
has something suffered for my clothes, or my coffee, my sugar,
Northrop Frye wrote in his book on Blake:
  someone is always suffering horribly somewhere . . .
  we can only find pleasure by turning away . . .
  we have to ignore it to a certain point or go mad . . .
  for joy is based on exclusion . . .
  the Yule log can blaze only because the starving beggars at
    the window have, for the moment, been left to freeze . . .
That statement, which I quote from memory, has always haunted
  me.
The purpose of art is to regard, with flinching and unflinching eye,
the entire spectrum, so that my pleasure is seasoned with
  Salvador outside my midnight bedroom window, and
the death of a steer by looking across the table at you,
  who I love,
at Manoir de Lan Kerellac this past August.
To fully face the beggars is to work to alleviate something that
  appears to pour forth with no let-up.
Is that what I am here for?

We did not have this conversation at Lan Kerellac,
but we have had so many like it
that I can see myself cutting into my duck breast and
speaking to you, seriously as we say, enjoying
the warmth of the wine,
the act of eating, and being with/talking with you,
so that it is a ceremony with the slaughterhouse, or poultry
cage, under our feet?
This most crucial need, to imaginatively experience what
nourishment involves,
is so overwhelming it threatens to deafen,
what I want to do here is to amass some of it,
"Dearly Beloved" background piano, the psychological wells,
the places in which we are suddenly Bosch-naked,
let-go into bottomless black wells
where the seahorses and octopi of fantasy will curl near
and we will enjoy the rack of lamb, the point will be rareness,
garlic, a rosy look, in the context of this handsome room,
are we at base two infants looking at each other across an elaborate
nipple system?
Are we forever on Her alpine-slant, with picks, digging our
ego-way inward?
To converge in the sun?
But it is night—*dinner.*
We know better than tigers, but we are cutting up what we did not
even kill,
even if you are not redolent with perfume from a scraped
civet cat, or in mink,
if I really look at what I have on, I am sure some creature
has suffered for my or your or the waiter having/wearing it.

At the wild animal restaurant in Düsseldorf, 1978,
we looked at the menu, sniffed around and left.
There was something inherently wrong about ordering lion or snake
there (was it that someone had remarked: they get their meat
from the local zoo?)—
and it does not bother me to gut a fish, or clean squid, to handle
calf brains—
they are part of a sensual compost, gratifying after a day of
sitting/reading/thinking.

Am I suggesting that it does not matter what we do?
That the plug was inserted into the Western wall 3000 years ago,

and the power has been fulgurating since, steady, with steady
off-shoots,
every dead-end researched/recircuited,
and that to stop eating mammal, let alone fowl, is a salute-worthy
"right" quirk—
are we "really" in a feeding frenzy over the ancient animal mother?
Part of a "great operation" with our knives & forks poised
around a 20th century version of "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr.
Tulp?"

(I am an endless loop-the-loop on these matters,
trying to turn every facet into a public spectacle,
I want poetry, without losing any of its primordial power,
to be the lance head jutting into the midst of any discussion.
I know that I will lose, certainly in America,
because I will say anything—if
it appears to contribute, if it appears to cast
another ax-head-image into this congealing that seems to be
unstoppable)

Is there honorable vs. dishonorable suffering?
When a lion sinks claws into an antelope, out of instinctual
as well as appetitional hunger, is this right?
vs. monkeys bashed, skulls broken, to test crash-helmet conditions?
The lion is outside my moral ken, I suppose I'm outside his,
yet I have an ape body, keener for fruit & vegetables than flesh—
but monkeys crack lice like French nuns investigating
the mind of Rimbaud—
the ghastly truth seems to be that most of our killing is
dishonorable because
it is out of whack with what the spinning mind of the earth
appears to intend—
if earth is a lifeboat and all the arkfolk are represented,
the human beings are putting away ¾ths of the food.
There is something so shining and "other" about animal life we
admire because we are at spectator-range from it—
as if they are down in the arena and we are up here, fishermen
for souls,
as cartoons we "love" them, for they porter our fantasies,
we elf-kiss their images while we plunge plastic forks into
their spectres,
but nature, from any viewpoint I have been able to figure out,
does not treat itself that well, unless you imagine yourself
as a pulse in the food-chain,

and we cannot imagine that, we cannot imagine ourselves fodder
for a 50 foot wasp,
caterpillars in whose soft backs a submarine habitate of wasp life
is to be planted, and hatched.
We cannot imagine ourselves as what we are not, nor as what we
really are.
If we were to set ourselves the task of imagining and recording
via our own fantasies
the lives and interactions of all the creatures we know about
might that be a culture so involving that militancy toward each other
might relax?
Any point that anyone makes that smells "serious" now looks
ridiculous.
But the nadir of the ridiculous, the point at which what is
ridiculous can be opened & played with, is at hand.

But the patron now wants the bill to be paid.
Wordsworth is way over there, in a dark, forest-green, lit corner,
he's old, and sad, but he pays up. They threw Rabelais out,
an hour ago, but he is of course down the road in a tavern,
eating, and drinking a cheaper and more crucial wine.
Bill and Flossie Williams simply ate, paid, and left.
Jack Spicer and Hart Crane have stumbled down into what appears
to be a "cave,"
but you and I suspect it is merely an old escape-tunnel from the
castle this place used to be,
it leads only to moss and a rotten-bottomed rowboat . . .
Why did none of them come up and chat?
How is it that we are always alone with the matters that most
concern us?
Have the others done us a favor by not chatting and offering
their opinion?

The bill. Is it a making supple of the tendon of will,
which can be a weakening, or elasticity, will the butcher
think about this?
Or will he find himself out of work, for this reason or that,
and go on to something else without ever reflecting on
the animal blood he has absorbed in the gloves of his palms?
The more one thinks about man, the more one wants to undercut
this power, but in thinking, what is being undercut?
Is there honorable vs. dishonorable suffering?
Yes! But to draw the line between the two, one's hand will
disappear in miles of fog beneath the Andes—

and only the severed wrist will continue to sign laws!
This is a hard bill to pay. If Caryl does not mind
I'll have a 1947 Darroze Armagnac.
Crane has returned from the "cave." He doesn't come over, though.
He insists on being by himself—sailor-oriented? Which is ok by me,
I'm so glad he is still with us as an image.
But the bill. Do I have enough? Superficially, it looks like a faded
American flag.
with a groaning list of the sins of our leaders and their dupes.
I'm one—
I heard my voice ricochet—I'm one—and at this point,
over the years, when it has happened in poems especially late
at night pushing to open the poem to a registration of
the contradictions involved in writing poetry today,
I've tensed to the point that if suffering could not be solved
right here and now, the poem was useless. Extraordinary moments,
in which the room walls began to march toward the typewriter
with each pecked word—is this the altar ego? When piles of dead
fowl and the unclear amassings of mental sacrifice begin their slide,
when the weight that one feels of the world tilts toward
in my case the typewriter, and you try to find A Word, or
A Way (that will be true to imagination, not to theory)
to head this onslaught off!

But just now, the sense of being a dupe, one of "them,"
seemed to be part of my most active thinking. What I owe,
once the debt is dropped in the word nation, is an oral and
a literate art! One in which the terrestrial woosh of the warthogs
is spoken, while the digital surrealism of warthog mugging
is put on the screen. I've cleaned up my act, sold all my vacuum
cleaners
and gone home, fini, end of the season, pal. And with that
I watched myself depart, I cursed myself because I had no solution,
nary a single gimmick to tree myself in paradise.
All the alphabetic noodles were wobbling like strippers on
a penny-hot stage, even the mammal consternation I thought I had
begun with was in language evaporation. I did what I could,
I threw out

This Ode

I love to watch Caryl eat fresh Dungeness crab.
Her plate, heaped with cracked ice, topped by
a reconstruction of the crab. Over which her delicate

fingers, more delicate than the morsels
she will extract, pause like wands, and she slowly eats,
as if she were undoing a sewing, as if her fingers
were needles investigating music, or thinking about
"the most sublime act is to set another before you,"
which can refer to any act of respect
for the otherness all nearness is, not to be worshipped
but revered in motion, in pleasure
scythed and harvested, a beautiful creature eating
a beautiful creature.

10-16 January, 1986
Los Angeles

THREE ESSAYS

What is the meaning of a symbolically perfect and a physically faultless perfect art? We recognize the autonomy of modern art, that art is a privileged sanctuary and an instrument for pleasure and sensibility.

But modern art is more than that. It has always represented freedom to the artist and a gate to the future. Such an art must be open to all manner of freedoms and represents at its best an ideal and platonic world, that is to say, a world whose hope of perfectibility is symbolized in its art.

America claims to speak as a free society. But the mindlessness, aggression and frightened brutality of the United States towards the underprivileged of the world contradicts this claim.

When we destroy the Vietnamese people, the forms of our society and the perfect forms and abstractions of our art are *threatened.* Western man's God-like self-privileged creative privacy is threatened.

It is impossible to export fascism and destruction, to burn and drive peasants from their homes, and maintain the dream of the perfectibility of art.

For if American aggression continues, the freedom we Americans have can only be a partial, privileged freedom, a privilege of affluence, and therefore a lie. And art and its dream of perfectibility and freedom is also a lie. Art is the record of a civilization and if America exports fascism, then its art—its art which claims to speak of the possible—no matter its scale or intention, can only be an esoteric and frightened separation from what is the fearful truth.

Feb. 4, 1967

GIGANTOMACHIES

"Gigantomachy" (III), 1966—6 figures, the main figure is violently kicking a recumbent man, one spectator flees in dismay, the others reach out or stand aghast. The canvas is 18' x 9¼'—and significantly brutal. Gigantomachies I and II are 24' x 9¼'—groupings of terse actions, figures flay or strike out.

Man is gigantisized in a near-epoch of automatized war. These giants, grimaced in rhetorical anguish, are implausibly frozen or schematized – a function of their distance from us. Yet they demonstrate necessary rhetorical immediacy and existential precision.

The strategies of figurative art have something to do with the scale of man's ambition – in time, history and action – and relate to measurable enactments of civic, heroic or degraded themes.

The Gigantomachies are documentary descriptions of reality, hysterically exact or naturalistic. Thus: a linear battle order, a remorseless sequential rhythm – a synthetic rhetoric of violence and passionate gesture, heroic, near-heroics, the very stuff of late classical gesture, yet roughed-up and stripped of bathos – the severing of violence from specific circumstance or history imploding an indeterminate reality. Therefore: an existential rhetoric of violence within a dwarfing scale by which these gigantesque figures abstract power and remoteness.

Those paintings are barbaric and gross, virtually bombastic in their vehemence, yet are impersonal and terse and make special recall to classic art.

The events are basically realistic and graphically depicted. These gigantesque struggles are representative of vast arenas of violence and public disorder, the harsh tumult and cosmic play of our history.

Indeterminacy and Classicism.

Notwithstanding their size, these paintings are conceived as fragments – the public nature of fragments – that extend in a linear lateral way into our macrocosmic space. As frieze or historical wall, these paintings state a public art, the enactment of serious and declamatory themes, a canon of gesture linking the classical and an indeterminate topical violence. (At another level, they represent a rough-hewn Mediterranean purgatory shoved into the sensibility of today.)

Is it plausible to concede the operation of mythic strategies or an elevated style today?

In our well annotated electronic milieu, man does not exert a moral ego in a defined environment. The artist like the engineer or the philosopher is more a technician of the possible, deft amidst disparate data and structural choices. Commonly, the artist sees little value in the classic.

The inaccessibility of classic or neo-classic art today lies in its remoteness in time and purpose, its eroded traditions and sentimental accretions, and especially in its incapacity to extend limits – the time-space stage of the past. 19th century neo-classic art was turgid, sentimental, corrupt – huge literary machines supportive of regressive institutions.

It is licit to call on a pseudo- or neo-classical art not on idealist grounds but as empiric and existent datum (towards a brute realism) continuing the great measurements of man as hero (anti-hero) of his fate. Such an art must be free from specific myth or history while utilizing mythic strategies.

I stress the classic – in respect to energy, gesture, action and history, but particularly as *brute fact*. Even more strategic, the classic ideas of form are among the indeterminate factors operating on the open modern consciousness. References to measure, order, extension, fate or the irrational free-float out of the past, contiguous into the present, given power by the very arbitrariness and random scanning of scientific environments and electronic happenstance.

Naturalism, indeterminacy, histories of chance and depredation remake the classic. The post-mythical is the existential. There is recall in the Gigantomachies to an elevated style, but the recall is tactile, physical and raw. The monumental is chewed at from a sceptic position.

Yet the viewer is disparate and ahistorical. He views a sequence of actions which are less accidental or fortuitous than his own actions might be. Those giants are greater, more immediate and more distant than his experiences would warrant. The spectator is pulled in, shoved aside, forced to distance himself – the separation is considerable due to scale, rhythm and surface. The viewer must penetrate the existential meaning of these paintings in order to recover enactment and epic stasis, both of which are far from the instant and factitious journalistic news item he recognizes so immediately.

The normally attuned reductive vision of the art world is equally distant from such a barbaric naturalism. After all, the scale is magnified, at times grandiloquent; the style is reduced in means, crude, a raw wall of seemingly primitivised "myth" and "realistic" encounter.

Realism.

The penultimate definition of realism is that record a civilization keeps of itself. There is a macrocosmic environment and history beyond the art! and the realism of the painting is specified as to how it represents or contains this macrocosm. Our civilization and its "claims," the viewing of power, internal stress, etc. – these are real subject matters of an art, the magnitude, extensions and rationality of its designations and contents.

American art will put on record the choices, mechanisms and sensibilities of the American civilization. These strategies involve the stance of man, how he exerts and positions himself. Ultimately an art must state who and what man is and how and to what ends he survives.

In these paintings I do not make claim on current sensibility. I stress the aggrandizement and extension of violence and conflict in their public magnitudes. Man exerts his great force in epic and existential conflict. I expect public recognition of this realism. These paintings are realistic in scale and possibilities, in the arena and time-space described, and further are realistic even to the uncanny proportions of the gigantesque as testing ground for myth and scale of response.

The Gigantomachies are realistic also insofar as man is reconstituted through summarization. The latter is factored partially from "nature," partially by attribution and agreed convention, partially by circumstance and event. In the Gigantomachies, any disproportion from man's self-acknowledged photographic likeness is a record of the tangible enlargement from the topical into a more macrocosmic and rhetorical scale of reality.

The most immediate realistic dimension is a stripped view, non-ironic, head-on, a terse brutal rude art. Were it to achieve its most ideal public form such an art would be viewed not so much as individual signature but thru its civic accessibility, altho a more likely alternative today would approximate the personification of an automaton who records the action.

Process.

Action in the Gigantomachies is exerted in that peculiarly condensed, universalized and existential time sense of today. This is no-time, that is timelessness or universal time and appropriate to the disorder and amorphic design of our rhetoric. The recall to the past is to today, the "now." Such an existential time *can* become a political time.

Figures are usually grouped on an imprecise but extended frontal plane, sometimes perspectived or stepped into an indeterminate ground. The space is that of a bare landscape, arid, abstract, a no-space, a frieze. The figures move in a frozen battered motion, a progression of awkward interval and degraded proportion.

Gestures are arrested, and articulated motion is reduced schematically. What is brutally transient becomes barbarically inert. The figures when most brusque and rhetorically accentuated take on stasis and a sculptural rigidity that approximates paroxysmic fixity.

I go to late classic art for its canon of rhetorical and anguished gesture. Gesture is a muscular conclusion of stress and emotion, and the form is the logical derivation from the stress. By intent, the form will be partially coordinate to classic form insofar as the late classic definition of gesture is a rational and tactile summary of a canon of gesture under strain. Significantly, more immediate sources, e.g., photos, sketches, etc., are

given fixity in the process of working. Thus realism and fixity can approximate the schematic proportions and stressed intervals of Hellenistic and late Roman art. Just so, an existential 20th century can approach Pergamon, Pompeii, Etruscan realism, etc., as possible integuments of a contemporary rhetoric of action.

The figures are constructed of many layers of flat wedged strokes of paint laid against the large architecturally generalized body forms. Forms are thrust out of the surface, volumetric, almost columnar—yet are smashed flat and edges often blur into the background. The smashing back is accomplished by horizontal crosscuts of scraped away paint. The fragmented stripped layers of paint set up displaced surface rhythms that simultaneously imply motion and a paralyzed kinetic energy.

There is a secondary appearance of being flayed, cutting thru to the muscle, emptying out the figure, breaking its organic wholeness. This skinned look extends to the infrastructure, the figures eviscerated against the open bare canvas, a complex relationship of paint, emptiness, surface tension and canvas.

The paint is acrylic, in these instances an appearance that is inert, dry, flaked and flat. Color consists largely of Mars (earth) red, black, white, pink, light blue—colors that are eroded but retain sensuous residues reminiscent of earth, sand, sky and water, particularly the Mediterranean.

1968-69

CORPORATE POWER AND FREE WILL

Powerful societies have the means to have art: through the material conditions of the socity, how the society is managed, who runs things, and how surplus is accumulated and distributed historically to artists.

Powerful societies, therefore, have the means to create art. All strong and successful societies do not have great art. But it is a condition for successful art to come out of success; to have available leisure and the kinds of means based on surplus. Capitalism, or particularly American capitalism, is the most far-ranging and capable system in managing today's international resources; since World War II, American power has been predominant. And there are connections between the changes that

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(Corrected talk) Panel: "Radical Art: Theory & Practice," Caucus for Marxism & Art, CAA Convention, N.Y., Jan. 27, 1978.

took place: the transference of international economic resources to the United States and the struggle for their retention in recent years—and the fact that American art became internationally predominant from the late 40's and the nature of its strengths and strategies. Technology is the mainstay, the overreaching power in this society. Technology is the key instrumentality in communication, and communication has been fueled by the information revolution. This is part of the overarching means of both maintaining control and spreading information. Artists work out the methodological means by which we introject these "things" into our thinking/behaviour. We are infected with only partial awareness of what this signifies, with the conditions of communications. "Infect" might be an exaggerated usage because there are positive aspects about this, of course, exhilaration and optimism. Nevertheless, the introjection of technology and methodological means sets conditions of analysis, conditions of art-making and the artist occupies spaces alongside the so-called opinion-makers and the managers of society, with whom most of us, one way or another, belong, or aspire to belong, through our uses of language, our attempts to control situations within and outside the art world, our attempts to manipulate these to advantage, and so on.

We use these means; we almost have to. But they're particularly introjected into art. The capacity for controlling events and sensory responses are largely determined by the information revolution and the whole concomitant series of technological means. This has little to do with success on an individual basis, those series of situations where the artist makes his or her moves to gain success, to gain recognition. For whether successful or not, most contemporary artists carry the means of our society in their bloodstreams, so to speak, and the nature of the plusses and minuses of current art are so geared to information theory. This has a lot to do with concepts of subject matter, formalism, transcendence in art, the artist as hero, et cetera. We inherit and we participate in the celebration of the artist as an individual hero. The hero conquers immediate circumstances and proves to be a superlative individual or exemplar of a particular art development, destiny, or history. We have many current art heroes—art heroes come and go—but those that survive represent and are proof, they are society's proof, that the system works. The success of the individual is a microcosm of success possibilities. There are protests about the nature of all kinds of institutions or mechanisms, how systems or individuals operate, but the role of the artist as hero is sacrosanct.

I recall years ago when *The East Village Other* attacked everything under the sun—there was little that was not suspect to such a counter-culture publication—except artists. Artists, including individuals with great market place success, were immune and exemplary for what they were thought to represent: bohemian defiance, the artist as an outsider, the claim

to "create" form (a God-like function), or the ability to comment on the nature of "reality," all privileged situations, free will situations.

We're reacting to social changes and transformations that are difficult to assess, evidence that the nature of the mechanisms of society are powerful and enormous. The oligarchic, corporate or coercive aspects of power use, which are not ordinarily specifically repressive to many of us in American society today, are certainly evident in a good many parts of the world, where military and industrial elites control the social order and the nature of how information and what information is disseminated.

We have sufficient gaps or checks and balances in the corporate system in America, and the system is run in such a manner that we can still lay claim to free will, the artist here's claim to free will: the artist hero may admit to social determination, to Marxist explanations of the nature of society; however, the artist *demonstrates* through art an individual, subjective free will – the active management of this assertion. A more cynical version would be "don't lay any hands on me, or if you do, don't let me know it." So the hero still asserts free will.

Now, I do not deny that we have free will. I personally think I have a fair amount of it, at the moment . . . particularly at the moment, right? Okay . . . artists in Chile thought they had free will too but no longer. They may never have free will again or at least in the immediate future, as we envision it. The system in Chile was not that different from the system in the United States in terms of external references: nature of management and institutions, corporate power, international situations et cetera. We hope the controls and tolerances under this system in the United States will hold, that the situation will not deteriorate, for example, we do not have, among this group here (at the CAA), many Naxalites. That is to say that the educated who are unemployed who are present in this room have not undertaken the violent actions that were the responses of students in India or what may be occurring in Italy. But we expect that the center will hold, especially when it's to the advantage of many of us that it hold.

So that the game for Americans is not yet over between the problems of corporate coercion and free will.

1978

PAUL LAFFOLEY

THREE STATEMENTS

Concerning *I, Robur Master of the World* (see cover of *Sulfur* #17): the painting is an attempt at a wholistic design for the world, utilizing double layer geodesic spheres surrounding both the Earth and the Moon, at about five miles off the surface, which are linked together through space to form a gigantic motor. I included slow exploding hydrogen bombs for local energy, a flying saucer transformation architecture city—a new Acropolis—actual living architecture and attendant devices.

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DIVINE COMEDY ILLUSTRATION DESCRIPTION

1) The triptych consists of three paintings [oil and acrylic on canvas]. Each panel is 73½" x 73½" framed. It would require, therefore, a display wall at least 25 ft. long by 8 ft. high in order to allow a one foot space around each panel [other display configurations are possible].

2) The three paintings were begun in 1972 and completed in 1975. This project represents a major effort on my part in research and execution. I read Dante Alighieri's poem 18 times, 16 times in translation, twice in the original Italian. Also I researched the manner of illustration used by other artists, beginning with Giotto di Bondone to the present.

3) I tried to make the imagery of my illustration express the system which Dante used in writing the poem. The poem is the journey of his soul through the afterlife while he is still alive and has his body. The journey is separated into 100 Cantos [or Songs] each with its own internal structure. The 100 Cantos are further divided into three Cantica: Hell [L'Inferno] 34 Cantos; Purgatory [Il Purgatorio] 33 Cantos; and Paradise [Il Paradiso] 33 Cantos.

Dante on his singular journey toward the beatific vision passes through his vision of the Medieval cosmos as one would who was pass-

ing through and commenting upon a gigantic cathedral. The architecture, therefore, of the conical pit of hell, the mountain of purgatory, and the nested celestial spheres of paradise are evoked, described and commented upon like an architectural historian lovingly presenting an architectural masterpiece.

In this manner I have shown a cross-section through hell, an elevation of the mountain of purgatory, and a cross-section through the complete Medieval cosmos. Surrounding each main image are the illustrations of the Cantos, like film strips, which present the story-line in complete detail including the amount of time Dante spends in each Canto. The whole journey, in that regard, takes place within one week, beginning on Maundy Thursday, passing through Easter and ending on the following Thursday.

4) To my knowledge I am the only artist to date who has ever finished the illustration of the poem in its entirety. This includes plot action, characters, settings, theological, and cultural references.

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from THE DANTESPHERE: A PROPOSAL FOR THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE DIVINE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI AS AN ARTIFICIAL SOLAR SATELLITE

. . . My second proposal for the Illustration of *The Divine Comedy* is the rendering in outer space, in an orbit around the sun, of the entire Medieval cosmos that Dante believed in, within a sphere which would have an approximate diameter of 60,000 miles.

This sphere would be the state setting for a full, detailed re-enactment of the action and personalities of the poem at the scope and scale that Dante intended. The whole structure would be an homage not only to the architectonic imagination of Dante, but also of the futuristic thrusts of Etienne-Louis Boullée.

A: The Exterior of The Dantesphere:

In comparative size *The Dantesphere* would be about 15,000 miles less than the diameter of Saturn, which has a diameter of 74,200 miles. Thus *The Dantesphere* would be considered among the "giants" of the solar system. Only Jupiter is larger than Saturn, being 88,000 miles in diameter.

But its final orbital position in the solar system, after construction, would be determined not so much by its volume, but more from the magnitude of its mass in comparison to the Earth in order not to upset the delicate gyroscopic balances of the solar system.

In mass it probably would be a good deal less than the Earth, since most of *The Dantesphere* would be hollow in terms of both the larger outersphere and the model of the Earth at the center of the large sphere.

The orbit I would select, therefore, is that of the planetoid Ceres. Ceres is number 28 in Bode's planetary orbital series of: 4-7-10-16-28-52-100-196. Numerologically 28 adds up to 10, "The Wheel of Fortune." In Dante's terms, it would mean a completed cycle in which there is an unfolding of unity. Traditionally, 2 is associated with the moon as invention or mentality. 8 is the symbol of fate as the intersection of the material and spiritual worlds. It is the number of total success or failure in terms of humankind's relation to fate.

Ceres, along with Eros, Pallas, Vesta, Juno and other members of the asteroid belt exist in orbits between those of Mars and Jupiter. The entire volume of this asteroid belt does not exceed a thousandth part of the volume, not the mass, of the Earth.

This orbit position is appropriate for two strategic reasons:

1) International mining operations are being planned for the asteroid belt. The personnel and instrumentality, therefore, would be at hand to build *The Dantesphere* out of the remains of the asteroids. Other material could be had by taking some of the smaller satellites of Jupiter.

2) The possibility of concentrating the combined mass of the asteroids, in the form of *The Dantesphere*, at the orbit of Ceres, would not disturb the gyroscopic balance of Bode's Law, which is effective out to the orbit of Uranus. Minor adjustments in the orbit can be compensated for by rocket and gyroscopic motors. Also this proposed orbit is in a zone where an artificial satellite could be heated to Earth temperature with greater ease than it would be to refrigerate *The Dantesphere* to Earth temperature at orbits closer to the Sun than that of the Earth.

The exterior of the large sphere is used as a preparatory environment before entering the interior, where *The Divine Comedy* is re-enacted. The exterior surface is surrounded by a geodesic sphere, off from the surface by approximately 10 miles. The geodesic sphere is composed of transparent living tissue genetically programmed to withstand particle and radiation bombardment, while allowing through it types of radiation which are necessary to sustain human life.

Also an Earth type atmosphere is contained within the geodesic sphere, allowing the appearance of a day and night alteration, only of longer intervals due to the larger diameter of *The Dantesphere*, than that of the Earth.

The outer surface of the geodesic sphere would have rocket ports that connect to 10 mile long pylons, reaching to "ground level."

"Ground level" [which is the exterior of *The Dantesphere*] is The Preparatory Area itself which has the following functions:

1) It functions for a patron of *The Dantesphere* in the same way that the notes, glossary, and appendices function for a reader of the poem itself. Here one would find accurate reconstructions of aspects of the ancient Greco-Roman world [as seen through Medieval eyes] and the Medieval world up to 1300 A.D. These reconstructions, such as that of Florence or the entire Mediterranean Area, would be done in a way so as to act as pedagogical devices to familiarize the patrons of *The Dantesphere* with the world and artifacts of Dante. Archaeological and genealogical material would abound. Moot points of scholasticism would be discussed on street corners as it was done at the time of Dante. The Trivium and the Quadrivium [or the seven liberal arts based on the proposals of Plato] would be taught.

2) Housing and life sustaining areas would exist for the patrons, the maintenance and administration personnel, as it would for the pedagogical patron guidance and scholarship personnel. Besides the necessary housing units, which would have the possibility of accommodating life forms from other galaxies, there would be many universities and individual study centers, doing research on Dante in particular, and Medievalism in general. The results of this continuous research would be used ultimately to improve the presentation of *The Divine Comedy* within *The Dantesphere*.

3) For the individual patrons The Preparatory Area would represent the place where they would be educated to *The Divine Comedy*, in a literary manner, besides the nature of *The Dantesphere*. For instance, each patron would be required to learn all the spoken lines, overt thoughts, and asides to the audience that Dante says in the poem, by heart as well as a thorough knowledge of the whole poem itself . . .

B: The Interior of the Dantesphere:

Descent into the interior would be scheduled for each Earth-time week. *The Dantesphere* would have its weeks beginning at midnight on Thursday and ending at 9 PM the following Thursday. The 3 hour differential would be used via rocket shuttle to bring back one Dante Candidate to the Medieval Earth, and to bring back the one who had just experienced *The Divine Comedy* to the exterior surface of *The Dantesphere*. During the 52,000 mile journey to the Medieval Earth the Dante Candidate is kept asleep. He or she is deposited in "the dark wood" and electronically awakened at exactly midnight to begin the action of the poem.

The structure of *The Dantesphere* interior consists of two parts:

1) The Medieval Earth: at the time of Dante, the Earth was believed to be neatly divided into two great hemispheres, one of land and one of ocean. At the center of the hemisphere of the land mass is Jerusalem or Zion. Directly on an axis below and through the Earth extends the various concentric terraces of the conical pit of The Inferno, straight to the center of the Earth where Satan is forever trapped in the frozen Lake of Cocytus. Continuing on that axis is the portion of The River Lethe that penetrates the Earth, connecting The Inferno with The Mount of Purgatory.

On the opposite side of the Earth from Jerusalem is the island upon which rests the 4000 mile high mountain of Purgatory topped at its summit by the inverse of The Garden of Eden: The Earthly Paradise. The reason The Mount of Purgatory is 4000 miles high is that at the Fall of Lucifer [the bearer of God's Light, or He who could not bear The Light – Pure Revelation – of God], He was trans-substantiated into Satan [God's adversary – The Creature with an infinite number of sense organs]; Satan was cast the farthest away from God possible, which meant the exact center of the Earth. And as Dante says:

> This side the world from out high heaven he fell;
> the land which here stood forth fled back dismayed,
> pulling the sea upon her like a veil,
> and sought our hemisphere; with equal dread,
> belike, that peak of earth which still is found
> this side, rushed up, and so this void was made.

Satan's entry into the Earth's atmosphere was on the axis of the South Pole. The axis of Jerusalem and Purgatory is 58° North and South on the plane of the meridian of the South and North pole axis. At his fall, the land that had once occupied the Southern hemisphere fled before the horror of Satan up to a common horizon of Jerusalem and Purgatory. The ocean filled in the land reduction. At the center of the earth, the soil in order to avoid any contact with Satan rushed up through what became the tube-like channel of The River Lethe. The hole in the South Pole by which Satan entered the Earth filled up behind him, so that as the interior soil of the Earth kept pouring forth, it formed a larger and larger mountain. Since the consciousness of the Earth is limited, God feared that the inertia of the soil evacuation would exhaust the Earth entirely. Thus, God caused an opening to occur at the North Pole. This hole became the entrance to the cavern of The Inferno in the midst of "the dark woods."

The modelling of this Medieval Earth would be:

A) based on a hollow structure system because the interior surface of The Inferno is composed of 20 terraces which are topologically connected as a series of nested concentric rings. The largest ring, or the

Vestibule of The Inferno, is 4000 miles in diameter. The smallest ring which holds Satan is only a few miles in diameter.

The winding River Lethe consists of a tube connected from The Inferno to The Mount of Purgatory.

The Mount of Purgatory is made up of exterior terraces and cornices. From an island base rise 2 rocky terraces; above are 8 concentric cornices. The top cornice with The Earthly Paradise as a crown overlooks a structure which is about 4000 miles high and has an angle of 72° determined from the base.

B) stationary within the structure of *The Dantesphere*. That is, as *The Dantesphere* rotated on its axis, the Medieval Earth would rotate with it. The Medieval Earth would be held by electro-magnetic fields in its position in space. The electro-magnetic fields would act in a similar manner to those of the real Earth.

C) by use of an advanced form of holography. All surfaces and theatrical properties that are possible to do so, will be composed of a new form of hologram. Some surfaces, in order to hold the weight of the Dante Candidate, must be surfaced with real materials.

This new form of holography will be based on the principle of light appearing in space from no source other than itself. Thus 360° viewing of a holographic object would be possible, with no intervening equipment. The method of achieving this possibility will be the result of investigating the internal nature of the photon and psychotronic equipment. Eventually *The Dantesphere* will utilize physical sense simulators for the other senses besides sight. Already sonar holography is being developed in conjunction with visual holography. Smell, taste, and touch including kinesthesia and temperature registration will at some point be introduced into holography . . .

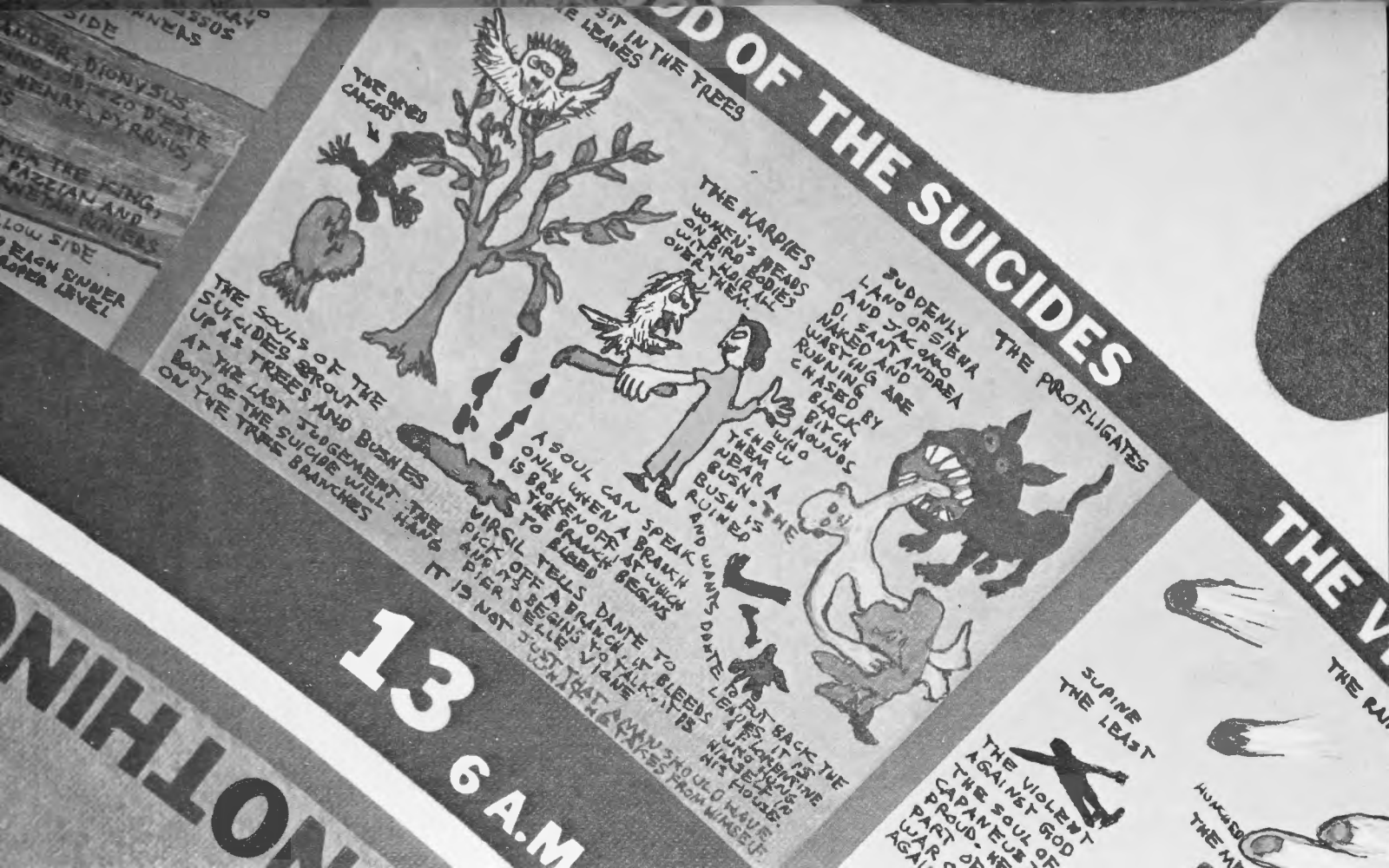
2) The Inhabitants of the Medieval Earth: it will be unnecessary to model living people on the outer surface of the Medieval Earth, as Dante sees only a Leopard, a Lion, and a She-wolf, in "the dark wood" before he meets Virgil. These animals, Virgil, Beatrice, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Angels, the Human Souls, the Mythological Creatures, the Demons, Satan etc., will be rendered by holography as previously described. The inhabitants of The Inferno and The Mount of Purgatory will, of course, say the lines in *The Divine Comedy* that are appropriate to them. But these hologrammatic models of people will be programmed to make adjustments for human error in the action of the story, as is normally done in playacting. . . .

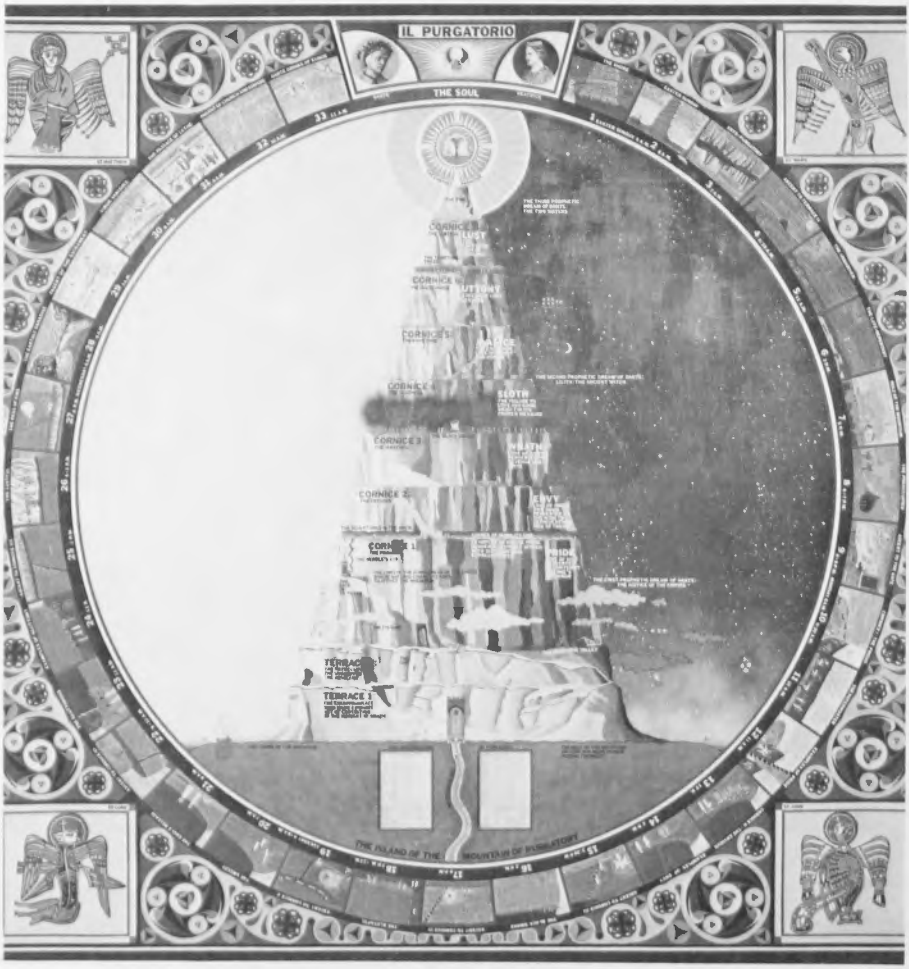
1978-1983

from THE DIVINE COMEDY ILLUSTRATION
by Paul Laffoley:

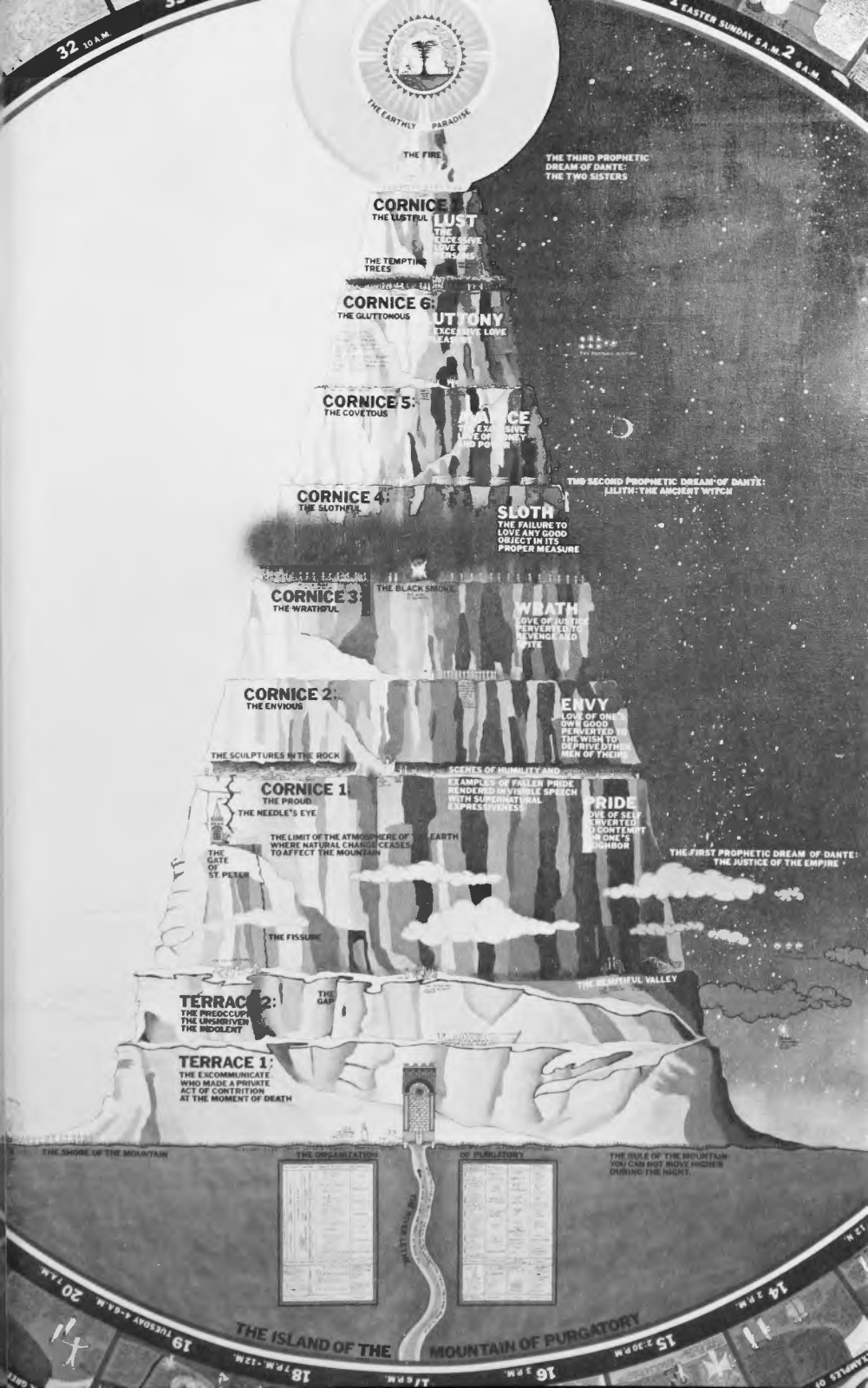
L'Inferno Overall,
followed by two details:
Satan and *Wood of Suicides*

CS
ERERS
RATORS
YPOCRITES
THIEVES
THE IN
THE TW
MALEBRA
LEAD COWL
THE GIANTS
NIMROD
ANTAEUS
NETHER HELL
ORDER THROUGH
FLUCTUATION
COMPLEX FRAUD
THE ABI
CIRCLE IX
TRAITORS TO THEIR
LORDS
GUESTS
COUNTR
KIND
CASSIUS
BRUTUS
JUDAS
COCYTUS
THE
DOLEFUL
FROZEN
SOULS
THE WELL
JUDECCA
PTOLOMAEA
ANTENORA
CAINA
THE
ICE
SATAN
AS
SELF-DEFEATING
KITSCH
THE RIVER LETHE
FORGETFULNESS
TO PURGA
OF GOD BECAME
MSELF, DESTROYS ONLY HIMSELF BUT
SATAN
HE WHO

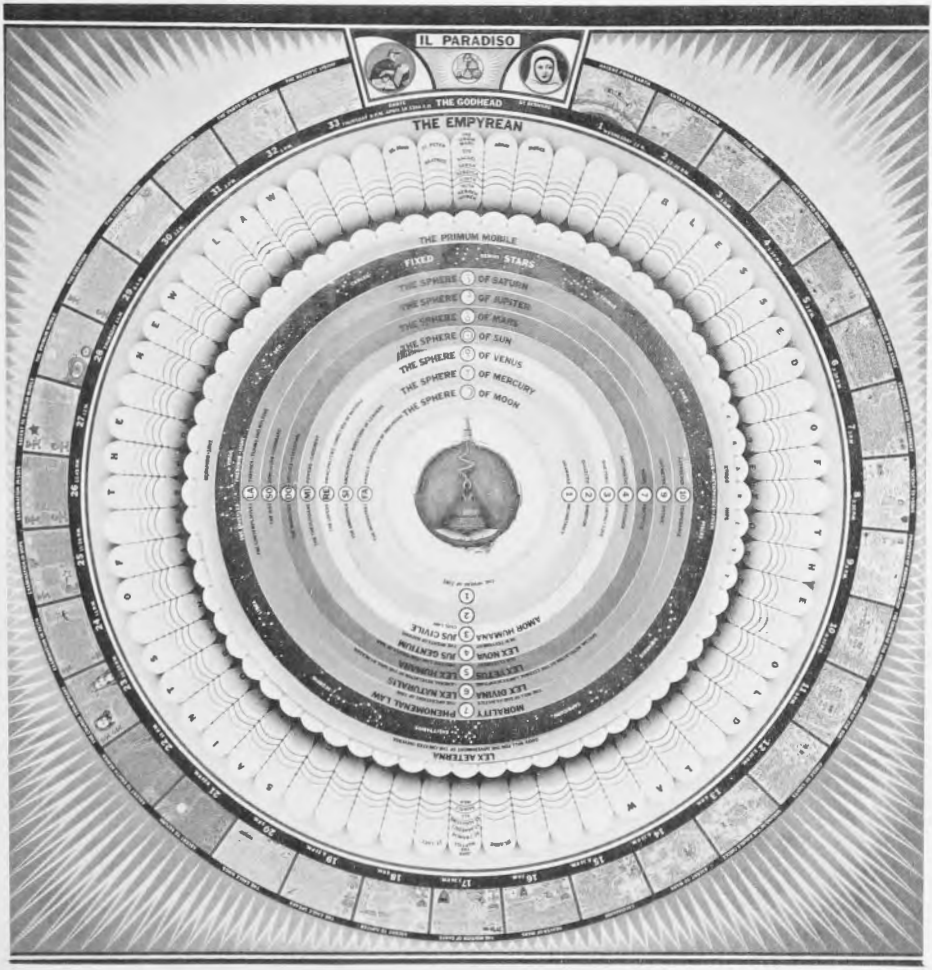

OD OF THE SUICIDES
THE VI
13
6 A.M
NOTHINO
THE GREED CAGES
THE HARPIES WOMEN'S HEADS ON BIRD BODIES WITH HAIR ALL OVER THEM.
SUDDENLY THE PROFLIGATES LANO OR SIENA AND SIR ANDREA DI SANT ANDREA NAKED AND WASTING AND RUNNING ARE CHASED BY BLACK BITCH HOUNDS WHO CHEW THEM NEAR A BUSH - THE BUSH IS RUINED AND WANTS DANTE TO PUT BACK THE LEAVES IT IS FLORENTINE WHO RUNS WITH HIS HOUSE.
A SOUL CAN SPEAK ONLY WHEN A BRANCH IS BROKEN OFF AT WHICH THE BLOOD BEGINS
VIRGIL TELLS DANTE TO PICK OFF A BRANCH IT BLEEDS AND ITS BEGINS TO TALK. IT IS PIER DELLE VIGNE
IT IS NOT JUST THAT A MAN SHOULD HAVE HIS HANDS FROM HIMSELF
THE SOULS OF THE SUICIDES SPROUT UP AS TREES AND BURNES AT THE LAST JUDGEMENT. THE BODY OF THE SUICIDE WILL HANG ON THE THIS BRANCHES
SUPINE THE LEAST
THE VIOLENT AGAINST GOD
THE SOUL OF CAPANEUS PROUD - WE PART OF WAR AGAI
THE MA
HUNGRY THE MA



Il Purgatorio Overall
followed by two details:
The Island of the Mountain of Purgatory
and *The Earthly Paradise*


32 10 A.M.
EASTER SUNDAY 5 A.M. 2 6 A.M.
THE EARTHLY PARADISE
THE FIRE
THE THIRD PROPHETIC DREAM OF DANTE: THE TWO SISTERS
CORNICE 7:
THE LUSTFUL
LUST
THE TEMPTING TREES
CORNICE 6:
THE GLUTTONOUS
GLUTTONY
EXCESSIVE LOVE
CORNICE 5:
THE COVETOUS
AVARICE
THE SECOND PROPHETIC DREAM OF DANTE: LILITH: THE ANCIENT WITCH
CORNICE 4:
THE SLOTHFUL
SLOTH
THE FAILURE TO LOVE ANY GOOD OBJECT IN ITS PROPER MEASURE
THE BLACK SMOKE
CORNICE 3:
THE WRATHFUL
WRATH
LOVE OF JUSTICE PERVERTED TO REVENGE AND SPITE
CORNICE 2:
THE ENVIOUS
ENVY
LOVE OF ONE'S OWN GOOD PERVERTED TO THE WISH TO DEPRIVE OTHER MEN OF THEIRS
THE SCULPTURES IN THE ROCK
SCENES OF HUMILITY AND
CORNICE 1:
THE PROUD
THE NEEDLE'S EYE
EXAMPLES OF FALLEN PRIDE RENDERED IN VISIBLE SPEECH WITH SUPERNATURAL EXPRESSIVENESS
PRIDE
LOVE OF SELF PERVERTED TO CONTEMPT OF ONE'S NEIGHBOR
THE LIMIT OF THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE EARTH WHERE NATURAL CHANGE CEASES TO AFFECT THE MOUNTAIN
THE GATE OF ST. PETER
THE FIRST PROPHETIC DREAM OF DANTE: THE JUSTICE OF THE EMPIRE
THE FISSURE
THE BEAUTIFUL VALLEY
TERRACE 2:
THE PREOCCUPIED
THE UNSHRIVEN
THE INDOLENT
THE GAP
TERRACE 1:
THE EXCOMMUNICATE, WHO MADE A PRIVATE ACT OF CONTRITION AT THE MOUNTAIN OF DEATH
THE SHORE OF THE MOUNTAIN
THE ORGANIZATION
OF PURGATORY
THE RULE OF THE MOUNTAIN: YOU CAN NOT MOVE HIGHER DURING THE NIGHT.
THE ISLAND OF THE
MOUNTAIN OF PURGATORY
19 TUESDAY 4 A.M.
20 7 A.M.
18 7 P.M.-12 M.
17 6 P.M.
16 3 P.M.
15 3:30 P.M.
14 2 P.M.

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE
THE FOUNTAIN
THE RIVER LUNGE
THE EARTHLY PARADISE
THE FIRE
STATIUS DANTE AND VIRGIL
THE ANGEL OF CHASTITY
CORNICE 7:
THE LUSTFUL



Il Paradiso Overall
followed by two details:
Il Paradiso Center
and *The Celestial Rose*

THE SPHERE OF MOON

THE SPHERE OF FIRE

1

THE SYMBOL OF DIVINE LOVE: "VIDEMUS NUNC PER SPECULUM IN AENIGMATE TUNC FACIEM AD FACIEM!"

THE SUN IS RISING WHEN THE EARTH'S CONICAL SHADOW FALLS LEVEL WITH THE HORIZON [PERCHANCE 6 HOURS AWAY]. IT IS AN HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE WHEN THE STARS ARE STOLEN FROM THE NIGHT. [AURORA'S] EVERY SOUL FIRST ENTERING THE EMPYREAN IS, LIKE DANTE, SWATHED IN THE LIGHT OF GLORY. THIS WAY THEY ARE MADE FIT TO SEE GOD. SUDDENLY SEES THE RIVER OF LIGHT WITH SPRINGTIME COLORS, LIVING SPARKS RISE FROM THE WATER AND TURN INTO FLOWERS, THEN PLUNGE BACK INTO THE STREAM. DANTE IS TOLD TO DRINK OF THE WATER WITH HIS EYES. [THESE THINGS ARE BUT SYMBOLS OF WHAT HE WILL BEHOLD] THE RIVER REPRESENTS DIVINE GRACE, THE LIVING SPARKS ARE THE ANGELS AND THE FLOWERS ARE THE SOULS TO WHOM THEY MINISTER. IT IS DANTE NOT THE SYMBOLS THAT ARE DEFICIENT. DANTE EAGERLY RECEIVES YET MORE GRACE WHEREBY HE MAY SEE BEYOND THESE SYMBOLS. HIS EAGERNESS IS A MEASURE OF HIS MERIT. THE RIVERS CONTOURS SWAYED AND SPREAD FORMING A CIRCLE. SUDDENLY DANTE SEES THE REALM'S TRUE APPEARANCE AND TRIUMPH. THE LUMEN GLORIAE OF GOD GIVES HIS CREATURES THE POWER TO BEHOLD HIM. MANIFESTED AS A VAST SPINNING CIRCLE, IT IS REFLECTED UPWARD FROM THE PRIMUM MOBILE ON WHICH IT STRIKES AND TO WHICH IT GIVES POWER AND VITALITY. IT IS THIS PERPETUAL REFLECTION OF THE LIGHT OF GOD WHICH CAST BACK INTO THE EYES OF THE BLESSED, MINISTERS TO THEIR PERPETUAL POWER OF LOOKING DIRECTLY INTO HIS LIGHT ITSELF. THE SAME CIRCLE FORMS THE YELLOW OF THE CELESTIAL ROSE. DANTE SEES TIER UPON TIER. DANTE IS NOW BEYOND THE LIMITS OF TIME AND SPACE AND ALL SECONDARY CAUSES. DANTE IS IN THE YELLOW OF THE CELESTIAL ROSE. DANTE LONGS TO SPEAK BUT FOLLOWS IN SILENCE AS BEATRICE SAYS YOU ARE GAZING ON THE SEAT OF EMPEROR HENRY VII (DIED 1313) HE STRAIGHTENED OUT ITALY. SHE TALKS OF THE RESISTANCE OFFERED BY THE PAPACY AND GUELF PARTY TO THE IMPERIAL AUTHORITY [POPE CLEMENT V ENCOURAGED AND THEN DISCOURAGED HENRY TO COME TO ROME TO BE CROWNED THIS WAS NEAR HENRY'S DEATH. CLEMENT V DIED IN 1314. BEATRICE NOW CONFIRMS THE PROPHESY ABOUT CLEMENT V BEING PUSHED ON TOP OF BONIFACE VIII DOWN THE HOLES OF THE SIMONIES IN HELL.

BEATRICE TELLS DANTE THAT THEY ARE NOW IN THE EMPYREAN. YOU WILL SEE THE ANGELS AND THE SOULS OF THE BLESSED MANIFESTED AS THOUGH IN THE BODY. THIS WAY THEY

UPON SEEIN BEATRICE'S FULL BEAUTY, DANTE SAYS: I MUST RELINQUISH ART AS EVERY ARTIST MUST AT SOME POINT WHEN PRESENTED WITH THE TRANSCENDENT.

DANTE LOOKS FROM THE POINT OF LIGHT BACK TO BEATRICE. BEATRICE BECAME INEXPRESSIBLE BEAUTY BEYOND KNOWLEDGE IN HER SMILE.

JOHN YAU

IN THE VISIONARY TRADITION: THE ART OF PAUL LAFFOLEY

Paul Laffoley's diagrammatic paintings, drawings, and box constructions remain firmly outside any of art's currently fashionable classifications, and stand little if any chance of being assimilated into the mainstream. Like the work of sage-artists and visioanry utopians William Blake, Joseph Cornell, Buckminster Fuller, and, more recently, Alfred Jensen and Jess, Laffoley's demands to be taken on its own uncompromising terms. As with the work of all true visionaries, Laffoley's art has few stylistic affinities with his predecessors. Furthermore, in contrast to Jensen and Jess, Laffoley learned the technical aspects of his art without studying with painters such as Hans Hoffman and Clyfford Still. Instead, he chose to study architecture. To some degree, this choice explains why he is not painterly and why his painting surfaces do not have the tactile presence one encounters in the work of Jensen and Jess.

Laffoley was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1940. A Classics Major at Brown University, he graduated with a B.A. in 1962. After attending Harvard School of Design for a brief, unproductive period, he moved to New York and began working in the sculpture studio of the visionary architect, Frederick Kiesler. Laffoley deliberately sought out Kiesler because a relative, who was also involved in architecture, said to avoid him. In doing so, the relative unwittingly transformed Kiesler into a site where "forbidden knowledge" could be obtained. Throughout his career, Laffoley has made use of other such sites.

An original member of De Stijl and lifelong friend of Theodore van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian, Frederick Kiesler's theories and applications contributed to Laffoley's growing belief in an art that was visionary, ritualized, and wholistic. For Kiesler, innovation was an endless process involving not only the invention of new objects, techniques, and insights, but more importantly their application to new spheres of activity. Laffoley's work can be seen as evolving out of Kiesler's belief in history as an endless sequence of technological changes, and art as a thematic continuity which could be extended and expanded upon by both viewer and artist. Like Kiesler, Laffoley is committed to invention and application. His work results from intense investigations into the possible constellations formed by man, technology, and the natural environment. He believes ideas and something *seen* are synonymous.

In talking with the artist about his childhood, his relationship to Kiesler, and Buckminster Fuller, with whom he carried on a cor-

respondence, I was and am struck by the parallels between the way he and Robert Duncan understand their origins. As Duncan puts it in *The Truth & Life of Myth*: "The roots and depths of mature thought, its creative sources, lies in childhood or even 'childish' things I have not put away but taken as enduring realities of my being."[1] Laffoley, I believe, would agree with Duncan when he writes about the relationship between myth and folktale.

> Myth comes bringing to our minds the realm of great powers, ceremonies of primal Kings. Its persons are beyond our human condition, movers of the universe and initiators of first mysteries. The makers of myth have the grandeur of ancient time surrounding them, they are sages or mages more famous than kings. Homer, Hesiod, the priests at Sais and in Sumer, or the mythic Orpheus and Hermes who invented the lyre, god of thieves, liars and poets, or the shamans climbing the ladder of visions to make that trip to the other world and bring back the soul's story, these still belong to the orders of our lordly pretensions. Great myth has its home in great places, inspired from the Abyss or from Heaven, told from the tripod or altar, in temple or sacred grove. It may be seen as the remnant of once glorious but now perverted and heathen religion.[2]

After characterizing this "lordly" world, Duncan goes on to discuss the "humble" one of folktales:

> But folk and fairytale have their home in the gossip of old wives and little children, stories about the cooking-hearth and the nursery bedside. Whatever remnant there was in folktale of religion it must have fallen far even from heathen perversion to come so into contemptible ignorance of the people. Myth was populated by monsters, which men with higher minds might interpret in theosophies or philosophies, psychologies or etymologies to convey transcendent or deeper meanings. It might be primitive science or primitive history in which the record of great events and speculation was written. But the lowly folktale was populated irremediably by kitchen sluts and begging women and broom vendors and soldiers home from the wars and the like and their wish-phantasies and fear-delusions.[3]

Instead of maintaining the separation between high and low knowledge, Duncan sees himself as evolving out of the place where both are wedded together. This leads to the possibility that "the fictive proposition is also visionary reality."[4] Both Duncan's and Laffoley's unswerving commitment to this possibility forms the foundation of their work, as well as informs their interest in the occult, esoteric, and other orders of forbidden and discredited knowledge.

Laffoley has, for example, proposed the "UFO as the Basis of a World Meta-History":

> A world view, meta-history, or philosophy of history, by nature, demands a sense of the personal in relation to an interacting world in order for it to be an authentic projection of meaning upon the flow of events called history. To have a meta-history means to take a *conscious* perspective on the events of history. Since time and the totality of events that occur in it cannot be seen by the physical eye, they must be seen, if at all, by the mind's eye. A meta-history, therefore, is the product of the inner visualization process or imagination. Further, to take a perspective on history implies a position or set of positions from which to stand. This position must be of an ahistorical nature, that is, those experiences that humans are capable of but that are not normally considered of sustained significance to historical explanation. Such experiences would be the direct perception of nature, the mystical experience, fantasy, dreams, visions, voices, response to mythic structures, etc. It is by recognition, isolation, and utilization of these traditional visionary experiences that it is possible to construct a meta-history.[5]

After describing a series of personal events and revelations, among them childhood conversations with the family gardener who was a UFO contactee, seeing Robert Wise's film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), and learning later that Frank Lloyd Wright's glass tubing (S.C. Johnson and Son, Racine, Wisconsin, 1949) had been translated into the pulsating interior of Klaatu's spacecraft, Laffoley goes on to conclude:

> The flying saucer, which has remained essentially outside of human history and yet always an available experience, implies the existence of a potentially united world civilization and an interconnected world history. All civilizations, at all times, have reported the existence of UFOs in some form, thus providing an apparently random link of events whose pattern anticipated the now emerging, total, but apparently random system of communication events around the world. The image of a spiritual technology that the flying saucer casts from an origin not of this world is preparing the people of the world for a true world-religion in the same way the river of good remembrance, the Eunoe, prepared Dante, at the end of the *Purgatorio*, for paradise:
>
> From Those most holy waters, born anew
> I came, like trees by change of calendars
> Renewed with new-sprung foliage through and through,
> Pure and prepared to leap up to the stars.[6]

Laffoley not only discovers a pattern within a random sequence of personal events, but he pushes their implications to the furthest limits his imagination will allow him to go. In the painting, *I, Robur Master of the World* (1968), the artist offers the viewer a highly detailed blueprint for a gigantic, wholistic motor, which has as its essential components the earth, moon, and geodesic spheres. The result: a flying saucer that is also a new Acropolis. For many of us, science fiction is nothing more than a modern

fairytale, a popular, lowly, and discredited form. Laffoley, however, points out that yesterday's science fiction is often tomorrow's science fact. If one knows how, knowledge and insight can be drawn from its currents. *I, Robur Master of the World* not only offers a plan for the future, but it also acknowledges and pays homage to Poe, Verne, Wells and Marcuse.

Laffoley's work confronts the viewer with blueprints of metaphysical proposals about the nature of reality. The paintings are large; the boxes, small and intimate. All, however, are so densely packed with information that they must be considered epic in scope. Typically, the work takes the form of diagrams that link images, facts, and theoretical propositions derived from the occult sciences, parapsychology, theosophy, history, literature, architecture, and various branches of the physical and theoretical sciences. Among the names and facts the viewer encounters are Wilhelm Reich, Goethe, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin, Joseph Morrill Wells, Joacum of Fiora, Plato, Herman Melville, and Dr. Kahoutek, as well as black holes, tesseracts, Klein bottles, and Atlantis. Within Laffoley's diagrams everything becomes transformed into a tightly faceted lense-like structure focussing on man's destiny and the perceptual structures used to apprehend reality.

Astrakakiteraboat (1974) is a highly detailed plan for constructing a kite-boat to be used in an experiment in astral projection. In order to decide what kind of kite would be used, the artist experimented with different prototypes until he made one that could be vertically stabilized, thus allowing someone to stand or sit on a platform that is also part of the kite's design. Invention, as I pointed out earlier, must be connected to application. The design of the boat to be used to tug the kite was derived from the description of the 18th century whaling pirogue in *Moby Dick.* The painting also juxtaposes two similar shapes, a radio tube and an Egyptian sarcophagus, the implication being that the Egyptians designed their coffins as transmitters to project their Ka, or soul, into the world. In all of Laffoley's work, this kind of obsessive, highly associative logic is in operation every step of the way. Out of a wide range of information the artist weaves together a completely strange, wondrous fiction that speculates on the world of appearances.

Laffoley challenges our notions of what constitutes content in art, as well as our current definitions of abstract art. Like Alfred Jensen, he is an unexpected heir to Kandinsky and Mondrian, both of whom attempted to make a vision of utopia concrete. The relationship with Jensen runs deeper, of course. For each, science of the most abstract and theoretical kind is a major source feeding into the work. At the same time, Jensen and Laffoley evolve out of a tradition that many considered exhausted by the mid 1950's. Because the art world emphasizes the notion that a succession of styles and fashions are an integral part of an unfolding, historical sequence, it has regarded artists such as Alfred Jensen, Jess, and Paul Laf-

foley as eccentric, late modernists. And, in so doing, it has isolated them far more than their work warrants.

It is equally unfortunate that critics have invoked the term "visionary" so often. It should be reserved for the handful of solitary sojourners who have been both blessed and cursed with believing in the sanctity of the world. Visionaries not only attempt to discover the correspondences between the rhythms of the mortal body and those of the universe, but they also base all their actions on that knowledge. Once they establish links between the microcosm and the macrocosm, they shed the strictures of temporal time and recover the eternal – the timeless void from which the world sprang and to which it will return. Paul Laffoley is one of the few artists who actually deserves to be called a "visionary."

His art is one that repeatedly finds ways to name his desire, the overwhelming longing that is indifferent to ordinary life. It is an unrelenting desire for completion. Ultimately, it cannot be consoled. In turn, it does not console us. Having changed his life, Paul Laffoley asks us to do the same.

NOTES

1. Robert Duncan, *The Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography* (Fremont, Michigan: The Sumac Press, 1968), p. 13.
2. Ibid., p. 36.
3. Ibid., p. 37.
4. Ibid., p. 39.
5. Brad Steiger (ed.), *Gods of Aquarius: UFOs and the Transformation of Man* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 241.
6. Ibid., p. 242.

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Maria Reidelbach, Peter Schjeldahl, *Alfred Jensen: Paintings and Works on Paper* (New York, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1985) Exhibition Catalogue.

John Yau, "Paul Laffoley at Stux Gallery, Boston" (New York, New York: *Artforum International*, May 1986) Review, p. 145.

I would like to thank Paul Laffoley for providing xeroxes of various articles both by and about him, as well as answering numerous questions.

C.K. WILLIAMS

FOUR POEMS

WILL

The boy had badly deformed legs, and there was a long, fresh,
surgical scar behind one knee.
The father, frankly wealthy, quite young, tanned, very board-room,
very well-made, self-made,
had just taken the boy's thin arm the way you would take the arm of
an attractive woman,
with firmness, a flourish of affection; he was smiling directly down
into the boy's face
but it was evident that this much companionability between them
wasn't usual, that the father,
whatever else his relation to the boy consisted of, didn't know that if
you held him that way
you would overbalance him, which, when the boy's crutches splayed
and he went down, crying *"Papa!"*
must have been what informed his voice with such shrill petulance,
such anguished accusation.

USOCA

At the United States Out of Central America rally at a run-down
community center in the Village,
the audience is so sparse that the Andean musicians who've come to
play for us are embarrassed
and except for the bass guitarist who has to give the introductions
explaining their songs
they all focus resolutely on their instruments, their gazes never rising,
even to one another.
Their music is vital, vigorous, sometimes wild, almost abandoned,
but informed always with nostalgia,
with exile's melancholy and its dark alarms, exacerbated surely by

how few and weak we are
but which we disregard, applauding at the end so heartfeltedly that they relent a bit,
releasing shy, exotic smiles which we gratefully pass between us like the precious doves of hope.

THE MODERN

Its skin tough and unpliable as scar, the pulp out of focus, weak, granular, powdery blank,
this tomato I'm eating—wolfing, stuffing down: I'm so hungry—is horrible and delicious.
Don't tell me, I know all about it, this travesty-sham; I know it was plucked green and unripe
then was locked in a chamber and gassed so it wouldn't rot till I bought it but I don't care:
I was so famished before I was sucking the sweat from my arm and now my tomato is glowing inside me.
I muscle the juice through my teeth and the seeds to the roof of my mouth and the hard,
scaly scab of where fruit met innocent stem and was torn free I hold on my tongue and savor,
a coin, a dot, the end of a sentence, the end of the long improbably utterance of the holy and human.

END OF DROUGHT

It is the opposite or so of the friendly gossip from upstairs who stops by every other evening.
It's the time she comes in once too often, or it's more exactly in the middle of her tete-a-tete,
when she grows tedious beyond belief, and you realize that unless an etiquette is violated

this will just go on forever, the way, forever, rain never comes, then comes, the luscious opposite,
the shock of early drops, the pavements and the rooftops drinking, then the scent, so heady with release
it's almost overwhelming, thick and vaginal, and then the earth, terrified that she'd bungled it,
that she'd dwelt too long upon the problems of the body and the mind, the ancient earth herself,
like someone finally touching pen to page, breathes her languid, aching suspiration of relief.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

WHAT WERE THE QUESTIONS?

There are only two sources for all of ancient Chinese poetry—two anthologies—and, like nearly everything Chinese, they form a neat pair: *yin* and *yang*, north and south, oral and literary, communal and personal, natural and supernatural, orthodox and heterodox.

The elder of the two is the *Shi jing—The Poetry Classic*, or what Pound called *The Book of Odes*. Reputedly compiled by Confucius himself, it is a collection of 305 songs from Northern China, composed between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. They are anonymous and oral expressions of the workings of the community: planting songs, hunting songs, courtship and marriage songs, hymns, songs to accompany feasts and ceremonies, praises for the rulers. Considered a model artifact of the natural order of human society and the harmony between society and the universe, the *Shi jing* was, for millennia, the primary text of the Confucian canon. Aspiring bureaucrats were required to memorize it for the state examinations. It would, said Confucius, "fire the imagination, perfect one's social graces, straighten out misunderstandings, articulate complaints, instruct in service to one's father, instruct in service to one's lord, and teach the names of birds and beasts, flowers and trees." No literary, philosophical or political discourse was complete without reference to its authority—usually in the form of a sorely stretched allegorical interpretation.

The shadow side of the *Shi jing* is the *Chu ci—The Words of Chu*, or, as it is known in David Hawkes' classic scholarly translation, *The Songs of the South*. Chu was a small kingdom south of the lands of the earlier Shang and Zhou empires; today it is in central China. It rose in the sixth century B.C. and reached its peak in the fourth, when the earliest poems of the *Chu ci* were written. A first century A.D. historian, Ban Gu, has left us this description of the place:

> Watered by the Yangtze and the Han, Chu is a land of lakes and rivers, of well-forested mountains and of the wide lowlands of Jiangnan, where burning and flooding make the labors of plowing and hoeing superfluous. The people live on fish and rice. Hunting, fishing and wood-gathering are their principal activities. Because there is always enough to eat, they are a lazy and improvident folk, laying up no stores for the future, so confident are they that the supply of food and drink will always be replenished. They have no fears of cold or hunger; on the other hand, there are no rich households among them. They believe in the power of shamans and spirits and are much addicted to lewd religious rites.
>
> (trans. Hawkes)

A *triste tropique*: the Chu anthology is a book of shamanistic songs, supernatural journeys, personal confession, nostalgia, enigma, and nearly continual despair.

There are seventeen works—poems and poem-cycles—in the *Chu ci*, half of them written in the fourth and third centuries B.C., and half later imitations. According to tradition, the book was compiled by a librarian named Wang Yi in the second century A.D. Wang himself however—out of modesty or Borgesian humor—claimed that he had merely added a commentary and some (rather dull) poems of his own to the work edited by the librarian Liu Xiang two centuries before. Modern scholars, for their reasons, don't believe him. Hawkes, for one, believes that the first half—where all the interesting poems are—was collected by Liu An, Prince of Huai-nan in about 135 B.C., but that Wang Yi was responsible for the second half.

The best-known work in the anthology is the *Li sao* ("On Encountering Sorrow"), a long poem written by Qu Yuan, the first recognizable author in Chinese poetry. It is said that Qu, an honest minister who was banished on trumped-up charges, wrote the poem to protest the injustice of the world, and then drowned himself in the Mi-luo River [On the day of the Double Fifth festival in South China, people still throw special rice cakes into the rivers to feed his spirit. During the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-45, he was declared the Patriot Poet; after the revolution he became the People's Poet—neither is particularly apt.]

The *Li sao*, one of the great poems in the language—and one that apparently withstands all political weather—begins with the author's birth, continues through a life fraught with injustice and misunderstanding, and then takes off on a shamanistic flight to the other world as the poet searches fruitlessly for a mate among the goddesses and mythical princesses—marriage as allegory for successful employment in the government. In the end, at the peak of heaven, he sees his old home down below, realizes "There are no true men in the state: no one understands me," and decides to kill himself. It is the first in the endless succession of Chinese poems of autobiography, confession, exile, despair. And it is the quintessential *yin* poem: not only rich in flower and water imagery, but also the first poem to incorporate an "empty word" (a meaningless syllable) in the middle of its long lines. Such empty words, in one form or another, became standard practice in much of Chinese poetry: the void around which the poem is constructed, and through which the poem breathes—the void that defines the relationship between things, and between the things and the poet. [Sometimes these empty words are translated as "oh" or "ah," but this is emotional and misleading; most of the time they are simply ignored.]

Also of interest in the anthology is the "Nine Songs" (typical of the book, there are actually eleven). This appears to be a court masque, written for performance with costume, dance, and orchestra, and may also

be the work of Qu Yuan. Presumably based on local folk practices, it deals with shamanistic flights and invocations of the gods. Although the texts are now difficult to understand—it is often unclear whether the poet, the shaman or the god is speaking—the mood is nostalgic, erotic, and relentlessly mournful. The shamans woo the gods and goddesses with tears and lamentation, much like Troubadour lovers. Often the god does not appear; often the meeting is brief. And even those who do achieve ecstatic union with the gods must, too soon, return to the dreariness of the mortal world.

Strangest of all the *Chu ci* texts is the *Tian wen*, a series of 172 questions without answers in 186 lines. Its title has never been explained: *tian* means "heaven," *wen* means "question" (verb or noun). *Tian wen*, then, could be "Heaven's Questions," "Heaven Asks," "Questions About Heaven." Wang Yi thought it meant "Questions to Heaven." Hawkes translates it as "Heavenly Questions," and its most recent translator, Stephen Field, has proposed "Investigation of the Heavens."

The questions begin with the creation of the universe:

> Of the beginning of old,
> Who spoke the tale?
>
> When above and below were not yet formed,
> Who was there to question?
>
> When dark and bright were obscured,
> Who could distinguish?*

move on to astronomy:

> The sun and moon are how coupled?
> How are the patterned stars ranged?

physics:

> Emerge by the boiling canyon,
> Arrive at the vale of night.
>
> From light until dark
> Is a pass of how many miles?

geography:

> How were the Nine Lands blocked?
> How did the rivers clog?

*The translation cited throughout is by Stephen Field, from his *Tian Wen: A Chinese Book of Origins* (New Directions, 1986). Readers should also consult the more prosaic version by David Hawkes, in his revised version of *The Songs of the South* (Penguin, 1985).

Their eastward flow never fills the sea.
Who knows why?

marvels of the earth:

Where is the stone forest?
What beast can speak?

Where roams the Horned Dragon,
Bearing on its back the bear?

mythology:

White serpent in a swirling mist,
Why does it hover about the hall?

From whence came the auspicious pill
That could not well be hidden?

Heaven's Longbow, crosswise in the sky,
When the sun retreated, died.

Why did the Great Bird call,
And thereby lose its life?

and on to legendary heroes and historical kings and princes—many of them Shang dynasty figures whose names were unknown from the time the anthology was compiled in the Han until the recent archaeological discoveries—a catalog of conspiracies, palace revolts, unjust banishments, adultery, madness and murder:

Who would King You have put to death
Had he not received Bao Si?

Heaven's mandate is not assured.
Who is punished, who succored?

Nine times Qi Huan convened the Dukes.
His life was smothered nonetheless.

That stalwart King Chou of Shang,
who led him into delusion?

* * *

The sages were of equal virtue,
why were their outcomes so diverse?

Mei Bo was sliced and pickled,
While Ji Zi feigned insanity.

Like all the poems in the *Chu ci,* the questions concerning worldly affairs deal with the decadence and the moral corruption of the times. Amidst the historical, there is this allegorical question:

> Mean creatures are the bees and ants.
> Why is their power pervasive?

Nearly everything about the *Tian wen* is a mystery. Many of the questions are incomprehensible. With the exception of a litany of philosophical questions in the *Zhuangzi,* there is nothing similar in Chinese literature. It was composed in an archaic language, unlike the other poems in the *Chu ci.* It was originally written, like all ancient Chinese books, on slips of bamboo—one line per slip—tied together by string. The string rotted and the lines were shuffled. Its authorship is unknown. Tradition attributes its composition to (again) Qu Yuan, who, seeking refuge in the Chu ancestral temples, wrote the questions as captions for the murals he found on the walls. But this is highly unlikely: there would have had to have been hundreds of murals; and why caption them with questions, or caption them at all? Most vexing to Chinese scholars is the function of the text. What was the "Heavenly Questions" for?

It is obvious what it is not. It is not an examination for students or initiates: some of the answers would be known to the questioner, and some (particularly the cosmological ones) would not. Some of the questions are answered by the following question, and some appear to be riddles or conundrums based on certain information rather than questions about it. It is not a philosophical inquiry, along the lines of the *Zhuangzi* or parts of the *Vedas*: many of the questions are purely historical or scientific, and seem to require short factual answers.

David Hawkes believes it started out as an "ancient, priestly riddle-text (a sort of catechism to be used for mnemonic purposes) which was rewritten and greatly enlarged by a secular poet," whom Hawks thinks was Qu Yuan. (By "priestly" he means shamanistic, and by "catechism" a truncated one—one without answers.) Stephen Field thinks it was collectively composed by court academicians, "as a debate exercise, created to give the popular and prominent dialecticians a tool for honing their convoluted responses." The great Sinologist Burton Watson has come up with the oddest explanation of all, that the questions are in fact "a series of storytellers' topics":

> Thus, for example, if the storyteller began by quoting the passage . . . that reads: "When Chien Ti was in the tower, how did K'u favor her?" his listeners would know that they were about to hear the tale of the ancestress of the Shang dynasty who, shut up in a tower, became pregnant by swallowing a bird's egg sent to her by the hero K'u. Or again, if the storyteller announced: "Lord Millet was the first-born. How did God favor him?" they would settle back to listen to the saga of . . . Lord Millet, the heroic ancestor of the royal family of Chou.

He meets the obvious objection with:

> How the storytellers' "table of topics" came to be compiled in verse form, I do not know, though it seems quite plausible that somewhere along the line an enterprising professional would have delighted in summing up the vast scope of his lore in elegant literary form.

Any of these theories may be correct, or partially correct, but it is also quite possible that the *Tian wen* has no "function" at all—that is, that the questions were composed as, and intended to be, a poem.

Disregarding the later shuffling and possible amendments, I'd like to assume the text has an author, and that the author is Qu Yuan, creator of the *Li sao* and the "Nine Songs." (It could, of course, be a contemporary or later imitator. There used to be a theory that Shakespeare's plays were not written by William Shakespeare, but by another man of the same name.)

Two things about Qu Yuan: First, he is an anti-Confucianist. As the author of the *Li sao*, he has rejected the traditional wisdom that the Mandate of Heaven is bestowed on the good and withdrawn from the evil; his heaven is inscrutable. He has rejected the *Shi jing* notion of the poem as a product of the *vox populi* to write a long poem of his personal sorrow. And he is involved with shamans. Second, he is, as the author of the "Nine Songs," what is now called an ethnopoet: an adapter of archaic religious or indigenous material for a literary audience. (Indeed, the "Nine Songs," with its probable costumes, orchestra, and dances, is reminiscent of the Milhaud-Léger-Cendrars 1923 African spectacle *La Création du monde.*) It is a procedure he would have partially learned from the *Shi jing*, whose songs were regularized and polished to an unknown extent at the time they were collected and written down.

Hawkes has written that "the 'Heavenly Questions' are questions about the parts and motions of Heaven, about the world which it helped produce, and about the various destinies which it dispenses to mortal men." I take this as the poem's argument, the poet's intent. Cheated by heaven, he seeks to understand it by recreating it: a "book of origins," in Field's phrase, or what Pound called "a poem with history." As a book of origins, it is a return—I would say a conscious return—to the origins of lyric poetry: rhythm and taboo.

The poem is written in lines of four characters, each a stressed monosyllable, like most of the poems in the *Shi jing* (which would have been, for Qu Yuan, a primary text of ancient wisdom). This regular, monotonous beat takes us to one of the sources of the lyric: the work song, the lullaby, the dance. Mircea Eliade finds an origin for lyric poetry in the shaman's "pre-ecstatic euphoria"—that is, the chanting and drumming before the shaman takes off to the other world. In all cases, it is assumed that steady physical repetition ultimately flowers into melody and then words.

[Interestingly, the earliest surviving piece of Chinese literary criticism, the "Great Preface" to the *Shi jing*, anonymously written sometime between the fifth century B.C. and the first A.D., has a reverse origin myth for poetry: the words come first. "Poetry is the forward movement of the activities of the mind." (Projective verse!) "When the emotions within one are stimulated into activity, they assume verbal forms. The verbal forms assumed sometimes do not give full expression to the emotions, one has then to have recourse to heaving and sighing. When even heaving and sighing do not give proper vent to the emotions, one turns to chanting and singing. And when even singing and chanting prove unsatisfying, one begins, unwittingly, to gesture and dance with one's entire physical frame." (trans. Siu-kit Wong)]

Perhaps even more important to the evolution of lyric poetry is the fact that the shaman is chanting in a secret language. Metaphor is born from taboo: that which cannot be named must be named in another way. And those who know and can speak the new names have acquired the power of the unnameable. This new magical language invariably takes the form of metrically organized, concentrated speech: the formula. Furthermore, it is nearly always considered to be the language of the lost paradise or of the other world: the language of the gods, the language from the time when men spoke directly with the birds and animals, the language of the kingdom of death.

Arcana is the langauge of the archaic. It consists of metaphors without referents, weird conjunctions, and meaningless sounds. Once it was spoken in paradise; now, in historical time, it has become incomprehensible to all except a few. It is an image, like the crippled dancer, of the origin: the time when all was one, before things sorted out and the cripple could no longer dance. [In this century, apocalyptically, arcana is the language of the future, the end of time. Joyceans used to say that *Finnegans Wake* would someday be as easy to read as a detective novel; recently the same claims have been advanced on behalf of the "Language" poets.]

The *Tian wen* is—deliberately, I think—written in the archaic, arcane speech, and overlaid with acronyms, conundrums and riddles (secular and witty forms of the sacred arcane that—full circle—were often resacralized by religious academics). Whether it is an entirely original composition or an adaptation or "found" poem of shamanistic formulae, with some elaborations, will remain unknown. But what matters is that, as an image of the universe, it was written or compiled or collaged in this way.

Why then, a poem of questions without answers? The linguist Henry Hiz writes that "the two main views of language, that it describes the world, and that it expresses thought, are not directly applicable to questions." A question is neither true nor false; it is a "suspended thought." The "meaning" of a question, according to Hiz and other linguists, is all its possible answers—or all its true answers.

A question is the only complete grammatical structure that cannot exist by itself—it must always take us somewhere else, to another sentence or to an unspoken (unspeakable) unknown. It is the piece of ordinary speech closest to a line of poetry. Questions, like poems, like sacred formulae, are articulations of desire. The sacred formula: a concentration of power in order to possess what one does not have, become what one is not. The question: to reach the answer, or the unanswerable. Poetry: to find out, or, in Octavio Paz' phrase, "to find the way out."

Scholars have claimed that Qu Yuan could not be the author of the *Tian wen*, because the poem does not contain the *yin* empty words of the *Li sao*. This is unconvincing: a question contains its own void—it is the preeminent *yin* utterance, always unfinished, always "before completion." And nothing could be more anti-Confucian than a question without an answer, for Confucianism, above all, provides answers for everything.

The question, then, may be the perfect vehicle for a poem of origins. It is inherently nostalgic. A question is articulated longing, and there is, finally, only the longing for paradise and its particulars. At the beginning of written poetry, in the earliest surviving texts, there is always the story of the origin, and lamentation for the present decay. In Chinese, the *Li sao* and *Tian wen*. In English, that great poem "The Ruin":

> Snapped rooftrees, towers fallen,
> the work of the Giants, the stonesmiths,
> mouldereth.
>
> Rime scoureth gatetowers
> rime on mortar.
>
> Shattered the showershield, roofs ruined,
> age under-ate them.
>
> And the wielders & wrights?
> Earthgrip holds them—gone, long gone,
> fast in gravesgrasp while fifty fathers
> and sons have passed.

A poem that itself ends in ruins:

> Stood stone houses; wide streams welled
> hot from source, and a wall all caught
> in its bright bosom, that the baths were
> hot at hall's hearth; that was fitting . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Thence hot streams, loosed, ran over hoar stone
> unto the ring-tank . . .
> . . . It is a kingly thing
> . . . city . . .

(trans. Michael Alexander)

A question is a quest. A quest that begins with what might have been the first question ever spoken—and the one most difficult to answer—"Who's there?" It tracks through the rubble of the present in search of the origins, the explanations. In the *Li sao*, Qu Yuan goes to heaven to understand earth; in the *Tian wen* he wanders with seeming aimlessness through human history to understand heaven.

China has never had an epic poem; the *Tian wen* is its first, and best, "poem with history." And *historiai*, what Herodotus called his book about the Persian Wars, means "a learning or knowing by inquiry." The Greek verb *historein* means "to ask questions."

History, in the *Tian wen*, is an endless reiteration of moral corruption and legal crime. It is possible to imagine Qu Yuan as Job: that his questions are rhetorical, not meant to seek answers, but only to bewail the injustice of heaven. I'd prefer to think of him as Perceval or one of the heroes of countless fairy tales: those who discover that asking the question is not only an act of personal redemption, but a way to save the state.

[1986]

Postscript

There is a *yin* and *yang* of poetry: poems that ask questions and those that claim to have the answers. Thinking about the *Tian wen*, I find it hardly a coincidence that the two great writers of questions in 20th century American poetry were both women: H.D., particularly in her late poetry of nostalgia, elegy and recalled passion:

He went away, Goth, the German, *Germain*,
degrees, days, hours, minutes,

how many? he left the flowers, August the 3rd,
this is October 17th and they say,

he comes back in three days—will he?
who will come back? a wandering flame,

a name, Goth, Gott, *Dieu admirable*, or another?
what Sun will rise, what darkness will unclose?

what spark, diastole, systole, compel, repel?
what counter-appeal contract the heart?

or not, what mystery? shall the winter-branch
be broken, fuel for another? or shall the branch,

prouder than spring, lordlier than summer,
strike deeper and grow higher to disclose

the last enchantment,
the white winter-rose?

And Gertrude Stein, dynamiter of syntactical authority—whose last words were, reputedly, "What is the question?":

> Why is a pale white not paler than blue, why is a connection made by a stove, why is the example which is mentioned not shown to be the same, why is there no adjustment between the place and the separate attention. Why is there a choice in gamboling. Why is there no necessary dull stable, why is there a single piece of any color, why is there that sensible silence. Why is there the resistance in a mixture, why is there no poster, why is there that in the window, why is there no suggester, why is there no window, why is there no oyster closer. Why is there a circular diminisher, why is there a bather, why is there no scraper, why is there a dinner, why is there a bell-ringer, why is there a duster, why is there a section of a similar resemblance, why is there that scissor.
>
> South, south which is a wind is not rain, does silence choke speech or does it not.

FIVE POEMS

AT AN OUTDOOR CAFE

Her disappearance wasn't noted
until read about in the Romances.
You talk of her and the walls turn
to cloud. What looks in is not ours,
belongs beyond our eyes in the casket
of moonlight. Suddenly, there is no way
out. What crouches beneath the porcelain
cup? We are at vigil, yet stupidly ignore
the dance of bees.

DEDOUBLER 1

He turns to the mirror, he
turns in the mirror
where the waiting woman waits
leaving him floating
above himself, the urge
like a black wish come white,
leaves him floating above the world
legs spread for himself.

SORROW

Sorrow is the tear I fall in,
the eye the ocean darkens
larger than the charts avow.

Seed of all fountains, of
water's need,
of nerve and line, moon's
blood in rhyme.
Sherry in a crystal glass
on the table of what has passed.

Seed that bears its growth in the limitless
weight of all direction, voice
that fails to return once thrown,
falls from time's claw to this earth's
thirst, is in my palm a silver ring,
circle of hunger, circle of concentric loss.

METAPHOR

As if a flower

as if a woman flowered again
and again in rain, as if crimson startled
the blue sky, into the water fell a rose

Out of the water rose the adumbration of voice
on a frail stem

Far off in the forest he is chopping wood,
he is splitting being. He splits
it in two and
two again. Crisp slivers of orange
curl to the duff as he carves petals.

He feels the voice brush his cheek
like rain and fill his hands and he is blind.
He can feel the water swell. The flower
he has carved is torn from him.
He is whole in his tears.

MEDITATION

I was drinking impatience again this suggestive
evening, or perhaps impulse, the link of material
to phenomenal mind. The window waded along shores
of a marsh where two moose fed. We had a child and named
her Passage, and trains flecked with faces
shuddered into the mired night. Yet ahead of it all
I saw the steamy yellow room, smoke and music burnished
by the blind light. The distance from caprice
to anxiety was optional. I think it was the Messiaen,
or the way you moved pulling yellow across shadow,
provocation always lurking like another breath.
And outside, the path curves into loss
and we call it origin. And outside it is snowing.

JACKSON MAC LOW

PIECES O' SIX—XXII

Wait on the sidelines and wonder why no message was considered such a virtue. The mind wanders and one calls it the heart. The heart beats and language explodes in polysemy. The catch is Ez as progressive *malgré lui.* His anti-Judaism twinned Marx's, but the latter's was lifelong. Carbuncular scatologist became avuncular myth. Don't call that genocide a "holocaust": a holocaust is a *voluntary* offering. Both uncles helped. Helping comes from the heart. The heart has reasons the reason can know all too well. If the first words are expunged, how can they be recalled? To recall a writing do we need a note? When ink flows too freely may be worse than when it won't. When it won't, one has to use another pen (if one can't fill or clean the first one). When too much comes out, one thinks the flow will ebb. This happens far above the curling clouds. A napkin absorbs the words that might have been here. The words would have been above the clouds. There will be blots below. Wherever the words would have been, the mind might also. The mind is here above the curling clouds. The mind is here beneath the curling clouds. It curls around itself and through its objects. It holds before itself the time before, when it was higher and elsewhere. The clouds were below and the pressure of the air affected the pen and thence the writing. Those who write with a pencil are affected differently. The point often must be renewed, but there are no blots. They are unbothered by graphite's smudgeableness. They are prompt copiers. Their writings do not wait for years uncopied in drawers or notebooks. Those who write with pens more clearly or incessantly hear "time's wingèd chariot hurrying near." Yet some dawdle or procrastinate. They put off copying indefinitely. Why don't they write on typewriters or computer terminals, printing the words out at once? They feel connected strongly, maybe, with the ancient ways—bound to carry them on. They are ill at ease on keys. Their writing, they must feel, must be first of all *writing.* The curse of the cursive is upon them. They're distracted by the clack of keys, even the muted click of an electronic keyboard. Or perhaps the dispersal of the letters over the keyboard is the trouble. From a pencil or pen they flow from a single point. No letter is more peripheral than another. Every stroke is central. Even lines connecting letters into words. Even those that cross words out or caret them in. Their manuscripts resemble action painters' canvases. Each stage of the way has left its mark. The patient and curious may trace the path of their making. Some, of course, discard the manuscript as dross once a fair typescript's been achieved. They

need it no more than an architect needs the scaffolding once a building's been completed. The initial impulses flowed from the instrument's tip that responded immediately to their fingers' mediating movements just above it. But after they'd been formalized in type, their traces were no more needed than the creases in sheets left by copulating lovers are needed nine months after. But others need to retrace their steps or have others retrace them later. Long after a work is in print, they keep its first draft in their files. Years after the deed, the need for the seed. Mere pardonable cupidity motivates others. They know their scrawls may mean money once they're known. They envision collectors and colleges thronging their dotage. They hope to cushion their decline with discarded cellulose, water and fire their future's foes. Others trust no copy, even their own. Some have found themselves wise not to. Long after a work was in print, a look at a manuscript has revealed a grievous error. When the work was reprinted, the error was corrected. But wasn't the error perceptible in print? Not necessarily. The writer who looks at the book is other than the one who indited the draft. Hindsight may even reveal that some early revisions were mistakes. Only first drafts with unobliterated crossed-out words are of use here. The writer ashamed of primal gaucheries may just as well burn manuscripts. Can remuneration soothe humiliation? Well, sometimes. But only if it comes in time. Those files may only benefit revealers of nasty secrets and traffickers in old paper long after the writer's demise. But the writer who long after realizes second thoughts were inferior to first can only be brought to that realization by viewing that yellowing paper. At that remove whose memory's good enough? And the present self may well be unable to *invent* the more felicitous phrase or wiser thought the earlier self had come to. Often writers who exaggerate the unity of the self through time spoil their older compositions by later revision. What the present self scorns may be the only phrase or thought truly congruous with the rest of that earlier work. Writing revised long after its composition is a temporal collage, a committee work. Its writer's a parent who grants offspring no autonomy. But isn't turning back to authorize an earlier version—having second thoughts about second thoughts—just as much a later self's interference with an earlier's decision? Of course. But at least an earlier self's consulted—one still earlier than the first reviser. One doesn't have to be a partisan of "first thought best thought" to grant that the earlier impulse may have been the clearer, the revision dictated by inferior considerations less relevant to the matter at hand than to extraneously imposed proprieties, perhaps, or internally generated post hoc idealizations. Often a writer changes her mind for good reason, but sometimes reason, as manifested after the fact, is the last guide the writer should follow. Conscious technique is too easily decried, but not all technique is conscious. Some of its greatest coups are accomplished by the peripheral mind. When that central searchlight we call consciousness turns itself upon such an

achievement, it can find itself confounded, the manifestation foreign. If not overcome by proper wonder, it may reject the unexpected result of what vainly it tries to appropriate as its own action. What it cannot assimilate it extrudes. Reason enough it can find to oust the intruder. All too easy to find a more assimilable substitute. Just because it is another self, the viewer from decades hence may more easily see that what seemed better reason at the time of the revision was merely interference by a vanity-driven centrality. Belatedly it may side with the earlier, better impulse of a former self, since neither the earlier nor the later former self, neither the source of the better nor that of the worse, is identical with its present constitution, no matter how closely akin. But letting a present self utterly overwhelm a former one, as may happen when an early work is later drastically revised to accord with the later self's predilections, can sometimes amount to vandalism demanding the restorative hand of an astute posthumous editor (or in a happier case, effective persuasion by an antemortal one). A writer must respect the autonomy of both former selves and their offspring. This does not mean of course *absolute* noninterference. Sometimes a later self, just because of its distance, can better see what an earlier one was up to. By a kind of role-playing it can put itself in the former self's place and condition and not only change back an ill-advised revision but even put something in place that was never in the original but *would* have been, had not some inner or outer influence blinded or deadened the former self at that point in the course of its writing. Like a good "creative writing" teacher it can divine what that earlier self would have done if whatever hindrance or ignorance prevented it had not. But that's a tricky maneuver only to be executed when an eye-widening flash of certainty supervenes to overcome the wise scruple that usually counsels forbearance. Without such a flash the rule of thumb's "let well enough alone." When "well enough" seems to demand improvement, don't spoil an old work by tinkering too much. Write a new one.

3 May 1985-27 July 1985
New York and in the air

MIRCEA ELIADE (1907-1986)

His earliest memory was crawling in the forest, having wandered away from his mother, and suddenly coming face to face with a resplendent blue lizard.

His earliest story, written as a child, began: "I met God at the end of a path. He had pulled a branch off a hazel tree and was trying to make a switch of it. 'You wouldn't have a penknife, by any chance?' he asked me."

He trained himself to sleep only four hours a night. He learned Italian, French, Portuguese, English, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Persian, Russian, Sanskrit, Bengali. As a teenager he published two novels and hundreds of shorter pieces: stories, accounts of his extensive walking trips through the countryside, literary criticism, essays on entomology, alchemy, Orientalism, religion.

At 21 he went to India for three years. He studied Sanskrit twelve hours a day, had a doomed love affair (recounted in his novel *Bengali Nights*), and ended up as a yogi in a cave above Rishikesh. That conjunction—scholarship, sensuality, sacrality—describes his life.

By 30 he had written seventeen books in Rumanian: best-selling novels, collections of stories and essays, books on India, alchemy, oceanography, Babylonian cosmography. He had translated two volumes of T.E. Lawrence, and written his first book on Yoga in French. (A year later, his first book written in English.)

Because of the great books on Yoga and shamanism, and *Patterns in Comparative Religion, The Myth of the Eternal Return, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, The Forge and the Crucible, The Quest, The Sacred and the Profane, The Two and the One, Images and Symbols, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, the anthology *From Primitives to Zen*, the three-volume *A History of Religious Ideas*, he was (and is) the preeminent guide and encyclopedia to the manifestations of the ancient mysteries—for the second half of the century, our Frazer. "We are 'condemned,' " he wrote, "to learn and to reawaken to the life of the spirit through books."

And yet he considered his work as an historian of religion as ancillary to his fiction. His masterpiece, he thought, was the long novel *The Forbidden Forest.**

*I had tried to read it, and gave up after a hundred pages. Years later, reading his journals,

His friends were Bachelard, Jung, Bataille, Breton, Ionesco, Ortega y Gasset, Dumézil, Cioran. His death elicited only a few paragraphs in our "newspaper of record."

Reading that news I thought, not inexplicably, of the mass animal sacrifices I had attended a few years ago in a valley outside of Kathmandu. Hundreds of the faithful snaked in a single file over the hills: the men leading male kids on a tether; the women with roosters, plates heaped with yellow and red flowers, incense, and clarified butter; the poorest among them holding a single egg dipped in blood. At the bottom of the ravine was an altar open on four sides, canopied by the hoods of four enormous gilt cobras. There a spring came out of the ground, and there too was the object of veneration: Kali, goddess of death and destruction, grinning, squatting on a prostrate corpse, with her legs spread and a skull cup between her thighs. One by one the priests decapitated the animals, splattered the blood on the image of the goddess, and carried the carcasses to the blood-red stream to be washed and cooked in huge simmering pots, the meat fed to the pilgrims.

As described thus far, it was a scene that the modern, urban connoisseur of the archaic has learned how to read. Birth and death and rebirth, cosmic time: Mother Earth (with her spring and open altar) turning into Mother Death (giving birth to a skull, demanding the blood of males) and back to Mother Earth again (the meat of the sacrifice nourishing the faithful). But what struck me most about the rite was its utter ordinariness. Here were not only peasants in traditional dress, but also men in polyester suits. Teenagers carried ghetto-blasters, families were having boisterous picnics, small groups of men played cards. The mood was, above all, that of a Sunday outing.

The modern invention of the archaic has projected an aura of drama and solemnity onto traditional religious practice—a kind of psychological Gothic cathedral for the forest where the rites are enacted and the myths told. And when the ghetto-blasters start appearing at the animal sacrifice, it is seen as a dilution of the past, a weakening of the faith.

Yet one essential quality of the archaic is precisely its lack of distinction between sacred and profane—its habitual daily commerce between the gods and men. It is a sign of religious decadence when that exchange is relegated to a single hour of the week in a separate (and silent) house.

Eliade wrote "I arrived at cosmic sacralities by reflecting on the daily experiences of Rumanian or Bengali peasants." Never much of a theoretician, his subject was the "concrete spiritual life as it takes place in

I came across this passage: "*Forêt Interdit*. Why do so many readers stop, discouraged, after a hundred pages?" If only they would realize that those pages are deliberately "confused, wordy, and awkward"—a "camouflage" for what is to come. Past those pages, "any intelligent reader would be captivated, obsessed."

culture" – the stuff of the sacred. He was a man who read everything and remembered everything: any thing reminded him of everything else. For Eliade, to find God one could begin anywhere. He was, at heart, a Hindu – and often could barely disguise his impatience with the exclusionary policies of the three monotheisms. And he was – in his histories of religion perhaps more than in his fiction – a poet: one of the century's great celebrants of the ideas in things.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

Jed Rasula and I have carried on an immensely useful correspondence, off and on, for eight years. In order to keep the letters flowing with something like the spontaneity of a conversation, we dispense with many of the niceties of literacy. The original of this letter was cleaned up somewhat and the comments in square brackets added on July 13, 1986.

D.B.

77 Glendale Avenue Albany, NY 12208 6-10-86

Dear Jed,

. . . Its expressive power is tremendous but there is little in classic bebop which cannot be assimilated to prior musical practice. [In the broadest sense, it was still concerned with ratios of tone and time, harmonies, etc.] Most startling probably is bop phrasing in the solos of Parker and everyone who learned from him and the way the time on the high-hat becomes an almost constant and undifferentiated vibration, more drone than definitive rhythm. The figures played on the rest of the drum set are not "rhythmic" at all, if that means "repetitive." They are markings of "blind intervals," as Coolidge uses it,

> No, nothing but what comes from the inside this time.
> Blind intervals. [*Crystal Text*, p. 7]

If you listen to Kenny Clarke or Max Roach or Philly Joe Jones or Art Blakey, and hear the blind intervals, the silences they open have to be filled. [I wish someone, with the right technical equipment, would write a good study of bop drummers; the soloists are exciting, but I have the suspicion that it was the drummers who pushed it over the edge.] These yawning gaps which open, not in "time" but in the "world," are scary, and it is hard to attend to them for long. They could not be filled with phrases; it was necessary more and more to fill up the blanks with "sheets of sound." *Free Jazz*, *Om*, and Albert Ayler's *Prophesy* HAD to come to fill in the

space. The only thing that could manifest the silence was *all* sound. It was a phase shift, between 1954, or 1939, and—say—1964. In Ayler's recordings toward the end of that time, music moved all the way from tone, rhythm, harmony to SOUND. . . .

[Jed noted in his reply that this is wrong, and it is at least too simple and wrong in emphasis; I was trying to set up the discussion of information theory which follows. He mentioned Monk's compositions: "silence like a tidepool . . . everytime you passed by you'd spot something else in there you hadn't noticed the last time. That's why all those Monk tunes are so enduring & provided such a stable repertoire for him. They're set up in such a way that they allow for the fact that the entire ocean is out there sloshing in on the little hollow in the rock where life-forms spawn. It changes every day; Monk's tunes are the bedrock of the 50's transfiguration because they're wholly written to change every day, as jazz itself has been the tradition of, all along. That you could write 'chord' out of 'chord changes' and just have 'the changes,' & if you said 'the changes' long enough you'd really end up with just that: authentic changes."

Yes. And also in Miles Davis in those recordings in the early and middle fifties, Mingus, the first decade of the Jazz Messengers. "Sheets of sound" itself is an inaccurate characterization of Coltrane's work, too typical of the sloppy thinking in the jazz press and too easy to pick up. Listen, for example, to "Vigil."

The point that I do not make clearly enough is the mutual requirement of blind intervals and "sheets of sound," which obstruct the thing they try to express. When you try to fill them up, the blind intervals only become more numerous: when you put a tone in a blind interval, it divides and makes *two* blind intervals, etc.]

In the history of symbol systems beginning with the caves, I would guess, expression is *rule-governed.* For the first time, about 1959, there was a complex expressive medium which escaped that restriction [unless one thinks here of the Abstract Expressionist painters, who are likewise relevant to the discussion of Coolidge]. Ornette Coleman said, "When I realized it was possible to make mistakes in a free jazz session, I knew I was on to something." That is, it is possible to communicate without rules or, in a term Jack Clarke takes from Novalis, "provisorily determined boundaries" [in *From Feathers to Iron,* forthcoming, Tombouctou Press, a book of immense importance to this discussion, and the more general orientation of the present].

The trouble is that language [i.e. rule-governed language] is only statistically reliable, and the "slippage" in language which the post-structuralists have noted is completely describable and controllable. The absoluteness of language is not metaphysical but statistical, and the social engineer can use a statistically reliable medium to control a population, just as electrical engineers use statistically reliable information to make

computer chips. We are not under the tyranny of the signified but the tyranny of statistical laws which account for "slippage" and other forms of deviance [i.e. freedom]. If dice are thrown fast enough we will not see a random sequence but eleven solid, discrete, and reliable entities. In fact, what one finds in Coolidge is non-statistical intuition, which according to Whitehead is God working concretely in the world, but, as he notes, the emotion is *not* religious. . . . but immediate, active.

Did you ever get Dretske's *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*? [MIT Press, 1981. Of course, information theory is hardly news. Olson quotes Norbert Wiener's definition of information in "The Kingfishers," and it became a fad in the fifties and sixties, but it came to as little as most intellectual fads do.] He is the first person to have done a responsible job with information theory, because he does not confuse information and meaning, [a mistake which vitiated the attempts in the fifties to use the theory outside of narrow technical applications]. Information is meaningless in itself, requires a semantic. Actually as prologue to this epoch, he has it: IN THE BEGINNING WAS INFORMATION, THE WORD CAME LATER.

He says, ". . . one is free to think about information (though not meaning) as an objective commodity, something whose generation, transmission, and reception do not require or in any way presuppose interpretive processes. One is therefore given a framework for understanding how meaning can evolve."

"Information" is the average number of bits that it takes eliminate the uncertainty in a situation: e.g. it takes 3 bits of information to choose one person from a group of 8 (i.e. three flips of a coin), redundancy would be the determination of each round by a best 2 or three. That quantity, that's all. For example – to use one of Dretske's examples. A boss requires one of eight employees to do a nasty job, but leaves it up to them to decide, asking only that they notify him who has been chosen. They divide into two groups of four and toss a coin, into two groups of two, and the remaining two flip to decide the loser. The name is written on a piece of paper and delivered to the boss. If we intercept the communication, we get reliable information, but we do not know what it means, because we do not have a semantic for it. Suppose, however, the office boy misplaces the note. He had noticed that it had one of the eight employees' names on it, but he can't remember which one, so he makes a guess, which happens to be right, and delivers it to the boss. The boss gets *no* information but he gets the right meaning.

In a lot of reading situations, I suspect that there is meaning but no information – the channel is swamped by semantics. Consider: Helen Vendler reads Wallace Stevens. [Actually, Vendler has become the code in *Sulfur* for the academic establishment, which is unfair. She excludes most of the poets whom I consider important from her anthology, for

example, for good reasons; hers is an *aesthetic* and, I suspect, a moral stand. Most academic readers are merely ignorant]. The text itself is solipsistic: the channel carries information about the poetic application of semantic rules to the information which Stevens has received. The reading situation is also solipsistic: Vendler reads the poet, applying the semantic rules by which she reads poetry. The result is that she gets a meaning glow [the warmth of heart which follows having successfully applied one's semantic] and the satisfaction of poetry. In truth, she has participated in a purely solipsistic act of rule-application to a text which makes itself available to rules. It appears that all rules are agreeable to one another: if a text is regulated in itself, any rules will interpret it.

But Dretske's notion about the evolution of meaning is only half right at best, because he does not know, as Coolidge does, that the Way gets in the way. . . . Information flows with Heraclitean rapids, but MEANING OBSTRUCTS ITSELF. Every semantic move takes us away from the information that we want to interpret. . . . People only *have* half of their experience (and probably less than that, I imagine) because they go with the semantic rules rather than the information which sustains it. I want to say that Coolidge's poetry communciates not meaning but orientation, a ground of information. It is extremely articulate communication. . . . I take that the *information* in Coolidge's work is absolute, and it might pose a nice semantic problem to "interpret" it. However, we want the *meaning* of information, which we get by applying a rule, and it gives us the meaning of the *rule*, rather than the meaning of the information.

This brings me back to free jazz. A set of chord changes is a semantic. The important thing that happened in jazz between that night in a chili house on 142nd Street, in 1939 (the year of Coolidge's birth, incidentally), when Bird finally figured out, he says, how to play *Cherokee* and Coleman's realization that he could be wrong even when there were no rules, moves us into language without semantics. [Learning how to deal with this situation seems our current task.]

We passed beyond the closure of metaphysics about 1850, with the discovery that any number of inconsistent axiom sets would produce consistent geometries, and the literati have yet to hear about it. *Logos*, however, was just a sadly squeezed version of *mythos*, which required not *a* Word, but a large narrative system of words. Human history from the caves to 1959 was informed by those vast generalizations that we call archetypes (i.e., the *logos* in drag). About that time, we also passed beyond MYTHOS [as archetype, as generalization; the mythological material which comes into *Maximus*, for example, is just material, i.e. concrete and available, like the history of Gloucester, or what CO encountered on the streets]. As of 1960, the approach to the absolute was no longer by way of an idea or the concrete pictures and stories behind ideas, it was direct, immediate, and COMMON.

So I think it is wrong to see the Lake Isle of Innisfree behind Clark's poems. They are NOT about somewhere else . . . It seems to me completely located. No mysticism of the stone. Every thing is here, or, there, on the side of Lebanon Mountain [where he lives].

In a human context [also in the context of telephones, etc., I suppose] information is news of another. . . . a sign that there is someone out there (and this is rare: most common I guess in sexual encounters and the reason they are desirable). So your conclusion – that the poems are information of "a living individual, and English is his native language" – speaks of a wonderful fact, that we have "company" (thinking of Beckett's use of that word). There IS someone out there, and I can read Coolidge tirelessly for that assurance. Often things come across, to which semantic rules can be applied, especially in *Crystal Text*, it seems to me, and some of them return often enough to begin to confirm that Coolidge and I might know some of the same rules. It's an orientation, a confidence underlying language which can be heard, with immediacy. This is exciting.

You'd think that to find company in poetry is a common experience, which might pass without comment. The common, however, is drowned in the babble of intersubjectivity: we are they; it is language; we are victimized by a rich of meanings. In "A Note," Clark writes:

> I think then I live in a world of silence.
> The language has become lodged in itself a background,
> wall of rock, black and resistant as basalt, then sometimes
> as viscous as heavy grease, poetry must be reached into
> and rested from in a cry.

Poetry occurs in the gaps or spaces which have not been filled-in by language or which can somehow be created in the dense mass: "I listen to what burns get tuned," Coolidge says, "I listen to the holes." ("Our Nature's Future") On the cover of the book in which these passages appear, there is a a photograph of Floyd Collins, the famous spelunker of the 1920's. Beneath the picture, there is the title, *Own Face* and Coolidge's signature. Although the photograph is identified on the copyright page – "Floyd Collins as he appeared in 1925 shortly before his death in Sand Cave, Kentucky" – Collins is mentioned obliquely only one other time in the volume, in a poem entitled "Floyd's Beancans." The ratio, Coolidge to Collins, nonetheless, is clear; indeed the Collins of the photograph has an eery resemblance to Coolidge. Collins is not a persona or mask; Coolidge does not take on a character. Rather he makes a proper claim of a face (from Latin, *facere*, to make, form) and a name, not an identity. If he establishes property rights, it is to the distance *between* himself and Collins, which is a function of both similarities *and* differences. In another poem, "My Gaps are Bags," Coolidge writes:

Since I can't write well by hand, I write
all the time. My hand shakes to a
rhythm I can't understand.

The title is a complex play on "Bags' Groove," the title of a tune by Milt "Bags" Jackson of the Modern Jazz Quartet. The poem does not register the *language* of the other but his *silences*, the gaps in the groove. In the flow, Coolidge attends to the interstices. And, so, it is Bags to Clark to us, opening some breathing space and informing us.]

Clark inscribed our copy of *Crystal Text*, "For Don and Marge, A yankee way of knowledge (?)" and so it is.

Be well!

DON BYRD

CLARK COOLIDGE, SOLUTION PASSAGE, POEMS 1978-1981 Sun & Moon Press, 1986

Don Byrd has usefully castigated conventional readings of poetry as eliciting nothing but "a meaning glow," a tag that links poetry production with network television programming. Both have largely ceased carrying any information in its raw state, preferring instead to transmit a feeble electrical gleam. Most poems, like most tv episodes, bear a simple message: they say that the transmitter and the receiver work, therefore the channel is intact. In doing so—however unconsciously—they perform a strictly maintenance function on the equipment, reinforcing the self-assurance of the social sockets and circuits. Only rarely do we sense the pertinent disruption of information as unrefined *material*, richly plural, aggravatingly unmanageable, challenging the uniform scale of all those modular poetry chips out there. *Solution Passage* is just such an upheaval, the real boy really crying "wolf" (or in Coolidge's obliquity, "What's it come to but a striped boy shouting 'Mica?' " [p. 21]).

Consider Fred Dretske[1]: "Meaning, and the constellation of mental attitudes that exhibit it, are manufactured products. The raw material is information." The universe is packed with information, most of which is inaccessible to us without the aid of high-powered microscopes or radio-telescopes. As Dretske says, "In the beginning was information. The word came later." That is, a word is a selection of information. Each language has a different assortment of words for colors. The reduction to the English

word "white" of a score of Eskimo terms for the colors of snow abandons the Eskimo information. "Meaning is generated by the way information is *coded.*"[2] (As any reader of *The Cantos* can attest, Pound sought to generate meaning by transfiguring information, liberating it from customary contexts into the supra-text of his poem.)

We can experience information without adducing meaning, just as we can gauge the tenor of a conversation in a strange language without understanding a word. In fact, our brains actively suppress information to avoid overstimulation. This is how *meaning* is elicited. The danger of meaning is that it becomes addictive. Dretske suggests that information be regarded as "semantically relevant"[3] but distinct from meaning as such. In other words, the greater the access to the variety of information available, the better off we are—so long as we can abstain from bestowing *habitual* meanings, or abusively colonizing the information to soak up a meaning glow.

Solution Passage is a book that feeds into one of the central issues of information theory, that of entropy or disorder.[4] *Information* in its broad, cosmic sense, is raw material, an indistinguishable mass. It's noise, it's randomness, it's what presents itself as inherently meaningless, chaotic. It's entropic. In 1949 Warren Weaver suggested as evidence of entropy in language the phrase "Constantinople fishing nasty pink."[5] Compare this with "molasses arrow stunt boiler"—a typical line from *The Maintains*; compare it for that matter with most of Coolidge's earlier work. Such phrases communicate information but little or no meaning. They're evidence of randomness. They lack the glue, the 50% redundancy which English is calculated to consist of. Half of the words we use are not chosen freely but represent the statistical (structural) requirements of the language. For messages to persist in the midst of noise, it's necessary to encode the message with redundancy. *Meaning* is obtained when the same point is made over and over (or when the coding itself reinforces a particular meaning). Coolidge started off by forgoing redundancy: *Space, The Maintains* and *Polaroid* chronicle the struggle. *Quartz Hearts, American Ones* and *Own Face* represent determined forays into sentence and phrase that can only be accomplished with redundancy. *Solution Passage* boldly presses the issue to the juncture between noise and meaning, entropy and message.

Perched at that seam where noise threatens any message, Coolidge's poems stand out with unforgettable singularity as ripples of order, transitory but charged with the shock of sudden unsolicited evidence of life itself. Working on the edge like this isn't achieved without complicity. Missing information is something which sender and receiver conspire on together, like when a bluesman appeals to his audience, "help me, help me now." Coolidge is always leaving out as much as he's putting in, but "Still these omissions have their balance . . . / Will what you mean to follow see me through?" (p. 78). There's always the sense that noise and

disorder are inherent in the channel. "Sometimes the words will not mean / what they must mean to others to me." (p. 115). Not only do meanings bump and grind, mix and clash, but writing makes its own noise. Where most poets try to exorcise that noise, Coolidge abets it.

> . . . the finches are sprouting with their
> metal spring rain songs. And the drench penciling
> down you hear, if not only the hiss high pure pitch
> of the inner ear. (p. 161)

The inner ear has its own residual noise, which even the most precise attention to fine-tuning will not abolish. "The mot juste / is not a puncture-sealer." (p. 224).

Solution Passage is a large book—in fact, there's no precedent for a 400 page collection of a poet's work selected from a mere 3 or 4 years—but the axiom holds true, statistically *and* conceptually. *Solution Passage* does contain more information—however you define it—than the usual 80 page poetry book. This proposition puts us in the tricky spotlight already hexed and vexed by the likes of Enslin and Kelly, among others. How much is enough?[6] I suggest that Coolidge's work, through that semantic puzzle that makes his phrasing congruent with Weaver's "Constantinople fishing nasty pink," makes the issue of bulk relevant again because it does so impinge on the statistical issues of communication. The very ideology of poetry as concise, direct, unmediated transport of experience is called into question by a book that irreverently transcribes as much noise as it does "meaning." But this is no idle slap in the face of public taste: growth, learning, identity are never easily attained. The process is manifold, repetitive, entropic. "I have no slant on my self but these hearty / interminable dicings." (p. 111).

Coolidge ultimately draws more from that open flowing Kerouac exaltation of "whether I want to or write" (p. 104) than from any modular constructivist poetics. *Solution Passage* makes credible again the notion that poetry be read with the same stamina applied to prose. No *mot juste* aesthetics can disguise the realities of process, heat, and abundant cumulative formations (the redundancy that informs). Coolidge is clearly a processual poet—in exactly the senses applied during the 1960s (the issue is not, all claims to the contrary, yet expired). For him, there is no rewriting as such, no recourse but to "crack a further page of the strapping vein bulk manual / and thrive back in, and dine" (p. 98).

Coolidge goes back through Kerouac not only for a basis in spontaneous improvisatory writing but also to draw on jazz. His "Note on Bop" (in *Vanishing Cab #4*, reprinted in Michael Palmer's *Code of Signals* pp. 258-260) constitutes his *ars poetica*, and his citation of drummer Elvin Jones summarily dispenses with the issue of bulk: "The length of my solos doesn't mean anything. When I go on for so long, I am looking for the right way

to get out. Sometimes the door goes right by and I don't see it, so I have to wait until it comes around again. Sometimes it doesn't come around at all for a long long time." Where most poems propagate themselves by means of formal structure, those in *Solution Passage* are experienced more like jazz solos, too long or too short or just right—depending on your enthusiasm in the heat of the performance—but primary evidence of decisions made on the spur of the moment, each moment looping through others in an organic vortex of sheer duration. In the "Note on Bop" the crucial issue is how to grab hold and ride the impulse: ". . . the shaping of the always initial impact becomes the highest of enveloping tasks." There is no line, no beginning, immune from the stress of its enveloping task. Coolidge's are poems "composed of the empty space of the first thought the second thought erased."

The traditional bop procedure of duplicating standard pop song structure is a bit misleading as to the nature of Coolidge's debt to the music. His writing seems more to begin with the spaciest of free jazz as precedent and work backwards in time, to the point now in *Solution Passage* where, if the choruses as such aren't evident, the lyrical organization at least seems intent on some kind of *return* to first principles (or "enveloping task"). The longest poem in the book is "Of What The Music To Me," and a host of overt and veiled references to jazz run through many of the poems. But the issue is not to forward a jazz semantic. Coolidge's poems consist of very specific language events, making them remote from any mode of writing "about" a given topic. Take the line "rolling my hands to a flash of theme / in ascension . . ." (p. 61). This could easily be read as what the hands of the poet do in writing, rolling themes toward the ascendancy of the inspiration. But Coolidge happens to be a drummer, likely to have played along with the recording of Coltrane's epochal 1965 disc *Ascension*. As a phrase, "rolling my hands to a flash of theme / in ascension" communicates evocatively whether you know this or not. *If* you do, you can see how the line has been encoded as it were with a kind of redundancy, two messages impacted in one. Later in *Solution Passage* a use of the capital letter A accentuates the impact: "in Ascension the bits come therming down" (p. 374)—a line that returns us squarely to the ground of information theory, which derives the notion of entropy from *therm*odynamics. The bits that heat up in Coltrane are "bits" also in that technical sense (short for *b*inary uni*ts*), meaning an irreduceable element of encoded information. *Ascension* remains a high point of "Free particle jazz" (p. 373), evidence of "Ecstasy impossible to be memorized" (p. 289, referring actually to Ornette Coleman). The heat of the moment in poetry or music is always charged with multiplicity (think of Whitman with his multitudes), however solitary its enactment may appear. Even so unclouded a line as "Nobody knows the numeral troubles I shine" (p. 216) is a switchboard of contending phrases: "Nobody knows the troubles I seen"

merges with "trouble in mind" to make the line. And no matter what record executives may think, "Nobody's mind is reissued." (p. 375).

These multiple impactions in Coolidge's poems don't make for easy reading. (*Light*, yes, in the sense of levity: his humor is sly but pervasive.) Some suggestions are in order. The poems are above all lyrical and rhetorical. To read them aloud is not only to be reminded of the jazz link, but to be confronted directly with the rhythmic persuasions that organize the poems' dynamics. "Meaning" in the conventional sense is largely avoided; as Don Byrd says, Coolidge "is stringent and gives into meaning only when it is irresistible." There is instead a certitude of momentum which is meaningful like music is (and makes it meaningless to characterize the power of a Coltrane solo by the key modulations or number of 16th notes played).

The perceptual apparatus is lyric but not particularly imagistic, that overworked vein—

> The Memory of Seeing, who can tell just how
> tainted it is with invention. And the
> uncontrollable solders of intention that tend to leak. (p. 287)

Coolidge is nonetheless "A graduate of world enough and tongue" (p. 195)—not entirely disaffiliated from the lyrical persuasions of Wordsworth—and it comes across most pertinently when the poems are read aloud. (The full force of this realization hit me only when I listened to a tape I'd made of myself reading some poems from *Solution Passage* several months earlier, so that the time lag had defamiliarized them and my vocalization made clear many things which had in silent readings sunken back into incomprehensibility.)

Solution Passage is a book that thoroughly saturates (contaminates) the *space of the lyric* in American verse practice, pre-empting the homespun self-conscious awkward intensities of an A.R. Ammons (to cite only a characteristic exponent of all that Coolidge erodes). The lyrical struggle is chronicled in three encounters with Rilke, the most insistent voice behind the poem-as-song (enlarged to Being in Rilke's "Gesang ist Dasein").[7] Coolidge manages to retain his own ear's persuasions—informed as ever with the spunky sweetness of jazz—while admitting to the contagions of Rilke's deep center:

> The fear of death is like a wheel in the brain
> whirling wider with no read to express.
> And here and there by the weed a puff of sex. (p. 116)

The full impact is best seen in an encounter that hearkens back to the legendary "cutting sessions" in jazz (which reportedly drove the young Charlie Parker to tears):

SHIED WITNESSES

Rilke, give me your paw.
And we will ladder our pain across pointless vasts
striking eachother like Dumbs to the Head.
There is no light in Kafka, there is no mass to you.
You light but do not heat the Dense, or do you
hate? In a turret above your neighboring
countess' farm you switch an arm as if
a broom across the page, and return to
the blinding squares an initial and a date.
You and I a vow primed to meet
the Language meshed enough to hold
what veers but nears.
You will not bear. I will not wait.

Coolidge's preference as always is to heat, not light, the densities of language—for language, being entropic, is always collapsing in on itself, creating as much confusion and darkness as clarity. What Rilke "will not bear" is precisely that birthing of prodigious density which Coolidge seems intent on throughout *Solution Passage*, best exemplified by "the unceasing teem of that top cymbal" which he claims as a basis for his lines, and is the earmark of bop drumming, a surging hiss like breakers along a coast.

Coolidge's poems are in fact so densely written that *all* the words feel like nouns. The space is crammed, but the lines are clean. The model is more Picasso than Rilke: "I want to develop great cracks / in my solid like Picasso" (p. 140)—cracks through which whatever light there is comes streaming through, seminally, sexually. "The body (her) at last from all angles at once / (Picasso had it)"—enabling "Everything that could ever / be written in a single sudden hand gesture." (p. 198). The process is irreverent with regard to the channel (the conventions of the lyric poem), but full of reverence for the continuity of the act:

. . . Writing *is* a prayer for
always it starts at the portal lockless to me at last leads
to the mystery of everything that has always been written.
(p. 25)

Coolidge's relentless concretization is sustained through a complete avoidance of terminology associated with modern idealisms like semiotics, structuralism, Marxism, or archetypal psychology, to name a few. This Yankee distrust of jargon makes for a serviceable poetics which, *as* a poetics, can only be articulated in terms of the concrete practices of jazz drummers in "A Note on Bop." No generalities, no categories, just a proliferation of discrete phenomena. No ideology to allow you to race ahead in a Coolidge poem, gasping with the pleasure of anticipated unity (compare anything in *Solution Passage* with a Robert Bly poem). There's

nothing here that proposes to guide your life: the sensory inertia is all yours to grasp and move as you can. The poems are evidence of a separate life, lived elsewhere, dense with "not knowledge but embrace. / The heat of luck in proximity. / The ponder." (p. 137).[8]

Coolidge has by now laid some very large eggs (stones, fossils, call them what you will) which the future course of American poetry cannot legitimately ignore. *Solution Passage* is scrupulously exasperating on both the macro- and the microscopic levels. Like Williams, Olson, and Spicer, Coolidge has left creases in the smooth fabric of American poetry that can't be disregarded, even if your goal is just to iron them out. In the end I suspect his won't be a cosmetic wrinkle, either, but a deeper seismic rupture, suitable to the torments of the Age of Information, alert, answerable, and mortal:

AN OPEN ELSE

Would you have us start before the Morse?
Tapping within skin on a room, as the air war
laws above all our sectioned flare.
Stone before the mirror? Face before dark?
Raise a fist and make a finger of it point?
These creases are questions, the chamber clad
the cartridge, locked as mackerel.
In the sky a hair, ladder as a thigh
and as kept, stroke without purchase
slicing through to past us.

I would toast a new face on the duck.
I would hide behind the onyx stripe of law.
Here would be the matchless pen of beings
arraying me outright and thrall-thronged to tip
at the very wheat of the railing in ambers
of a knob or nod.

Come out. Cross the house. Talk from
the slice of your solving organ and let
the taking clouds go crack, the point is
in the mint of clocked sticks to mesh.
Nobody owns the Ruled Divan of Mesa Portion.
But I will clip some light from the canter of its axes.
Mission normal.

(p. 192)

JED RASULA

[1]Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (MIT, 1981) p. vii
[2]Dretske, p. 248
[3]Dretske, p. 46
[4]Claude Shannon of Bell Labs launched information theory in the late 1940s in order to demonstrate mathematically (and thus technologically) that messages could persist in the midst of haphazard noise or disorder. The primary mechanical problem underlying clear transmission in radio, tv, telephone, etc., is how to send a message so it survives the residual noise in the channel used to convey it. How can you distinguish information from noise? An illustration: a glass of water is entropic. That is, its contents are uniform; each molecule is indistinguishable from any other. Add an ice cube and a singularity has arisen: everything in the glass is still water, but there's now something to talk about, to distinguish. Ice is information, and the water it's in is noise. When the ice melts it's all noise (or all information, but all of which is inaccessible *as* information). Language is comparable: a random list of words is noise, but a phrase – not even a complete sentence – is an eruption of message values.
[5]Claude Shannon & Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1949), p. 102
[6]I want to decentralize the issue of "strong" and "weak" poems by mentioning it only in a footnote. But *Solution Passage* does contain a considerable number of impenetrable, intractable, habit-laden poems, real obstacles to reading Coolidge at all. For what it's worth, after a half-dozen readings I find sections 1 and 5 the weakest, 2 and 7 the most consistently engaging, along with much of 3, 4 and 6. It should be mentioned that *Solution Passage* is not strictly speaking Coolidge's doing; the book was solicited by Douglas Messerli for *Sun & Moon*. Coolidge's already large manuscript was doubled per Messerli's request.

As for recommended approaches: one way is to read Coolidge's portraits of/encounters with actual historical figures, of which there are many that move with the critical concision and exacting inspiration of Mina Loy's great precedents in her poems on Joyce, Brancusi, Wyndham Lewis etc. See: "Homage to Melville," "The Century That Breaks" (Picasso), "A Chimney for Max Jacob," "Lights of Things an Autumn" (Tanguy), "Pauses Covered with Looks" (Wallace Stevens), "Portrait Distracted" (Hitler), "After Beckett" and "The Cubists" for a start (there are many more), along with the three that grapple with Rilke which I cite in the text.
[7]See *Solution Passage*, pp. 116, 126, 190.
[8]The heat flows in several directions. When I first read *Solution Passage* and started conceiving of it in terms of entropy and information theory, the poems evoked for me the fancy of a porn film designed to illustrate the laws of thermodynamics – with a suitably saucy title, "The Edification of Entropy" – and it was shortly afterwards that Coolidge's "Book of During" began to appear in *Sulfur*.

IN "THE CEDAR DOOR"

Ah, there you be, Eshuman. Glad you found the place. I begin with three short sentences. Now four. But why? (Now five.) Short sentences are for people whose show of fortitude enables others to imagine that, if only the secret were out, they'd be tyrannicides. So let me, since you asked me, once Rebecca here has unloaded that carafe, thank you mam, launch

out and address the subject of the *Totengespräch.* (Was ist das? What the dead say to one another. What they say to us.) This can't be exactly it, only something like it. These dead haven't lost all features by which the living might recognize them; but the only features you can't mistake seems to be their voices. Voices, doing what? Making a murmur. Out of the murmur you or I can tease elements of a discourse, about cyclones perhaps, about grasses, or stones, pulpiness, hardly any adjectives, perhaps kidneys. I mean the hubbub of the dead, or their hosannas, which we do garble so, interposing empty distance between ourselves and them. Of such hosannas we can have inklings, if we hearken through loopholes in our own speech patterns. Lend thine Orphic ear to the dead: murmuring voices, they have forgotten all vocal occasions by which we set great store. Occasions, also syntax, clean gone, I expect. All we have is inklings.

Several sentences, too long to quote, in Michel Leiris, have struck me as being uncannily close (though he was coming from a different direction) to what, subterraneously, has been transpiring in certain German poems since the robe of Rilke, tattered and torn, stained with blood, or not, was variously picked up—like an Inca textile—out of the ideological and military mud of the First Fascist Epoch, by poets temperamentally most diverse, since about 1945. That's my drift, but I won't make an ocean of it. Leiris writes in "Words/Swerves" (*Sulfur* 15), for example, concerning the impetus given him by his research (during the 1930s) into the secret Dogon language: "these words . . . have come to me laden with a . . . dose of mystery." He writes of "an activity that if it is not an elucidation is at least that transposition into the speech of the Other . . . a sort of language of death: a scrambled language tied to the traditional *upside down world* popular imagery makes into a theme of burlesqued, comic-book-style illustrations . . ." He writes of a form of utterance that might be "a language of the other side," of a "language" that has broken with norms to give him "a notion of the strictly unimaginable nothingness beyond the grave . . . as far from common talk as the sacred is from the profane." He proposes that "this idiom . . . helps me feel less wholly disoriented before that NOTHING (. . . absolutely nothing, and not even the word's echo), less disarmed confronting that unknown which . . . ceases to be mere negativity . . . with the result that . . . the horror of future annihilation . . . is drawn out of its diabolically imperceptible nullity thanks to the illusion of a bridge linguistically suspended." And more—but these quotations will have to do. Besides, I can't quote verbatim his elaborations, even if I could intuit his grounds for believing that the *theater* of French parlance must enshrine some sort of an incandescent Dionysus.

For Leiris, writing as an octogenarian of marvelous intellectual vitality and honesty (no "vision," only "conjecture"), the idea of a language of the "other," the mere idea of it, helps him, if you will, to fit more comfortably between the enormous molars of death. Not that such an idea

diminishes the horror of the Death-Other; but it seems to make that Death-Other recognizable as a member of a family, along with other members which aren't unfamiliar in this here-and-now, e.g. the reversed world of old French iconology, with Mr Incredible (M. L'eusses-tu-cru) as its hero. In the poems of Nelly Sachs (born 1891, writing in Sweden, in her fifties and sixties), in a splendid enigmatic poem of Günter Eich, his "Fortsetzung des Gesprächs" (early 1960s), and pervasively in Paul Celan's poems, notably "Engführung" – "Stretto" – there's a congruent concern. I should mention, too, several startling poems by Johannes Bobrowski (early 1960s, especially) which envisage a kind of *transmortal* space of mind, but do not shrink at all from response to the *elements* of earth and air into which that space erupts. A congruent concern, Eshuman. How, in what linguistic patterns, by what subversions of the norm, can even poetic conventions be so revised as to suggest the speech of the dead and conversation with the dead? What would they say, how would they say it? How can a poetic text include the "dark" murmur that drifts always, if we hearken at all, out of that terrifying and bewildering "world" of their extinctness into our provisional shelters, or edifices of say-so, into the palaces, perhaps, of our spellbinding nonsense? Rilke is the great provocateur of questions like these. The questions, after him, for German poets, rotate around a set of notions touched, as it were, into position by his coinages such as *Totenbewusstsein* and *Weltinnenraum* (in each of these communion between the living and the dead, as well as a highly sophisticated version of topsyturvydom, figure large). It begins in Rilke long before the Elegies and Sonnets of 1922. His "Requiem für eine Freundin" of 1908 is a poem so spoken as to appease Paula Becker's uncertain ghost – finally to turn everything around and appeal to her, to "help me."

Celan's "Engführung," (*Sprachgitter*, 1959), which condenses just about every gist of his poems up till that date, and several shorter poems of the same period, probe into the "other" space-time and in so doing – in so provoking speech from the dead – invite the poetic word to reconstitute itself. Yet Celan, here, I think, is coming from the Kabbalah, certainly not from the secret language of the Dogon people. I'd refer in this matter to Gershom Scholem's *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 122-25 (Schocken, 1969) – "everything not only *is in* everything else but also *acts upon* everything else," citing also Recanati (1581) on ritual action that initiates a circuitry between divine and human, in order to conduct an energy out of the "nothingness of the divine idea" and thus to "lend stability, as it were, to a part of God Himself, if it is permissible to speak in this way." Certainly, too, Celan's singular need was to establish communion with those murdered kin of his, his family and fellows in Czernovitz. Günter Eich, no less, one generation older, coming from his own wry scepticism and from the study of Chinese culture, "suspends his linguistic bridge"

across the divisive Nothing, quietly (no "distortion" in his imagery) to discern "the dead man looking at the ammonite."

It's my impression that Leiris' discourse owes nothing to Celan. But presumably he'll have known about Celan (suicided in 1970), even if he didn't know, let alone appreicate, Celan's Nervalesque probings toward a dialogue with departed spirits, his negotiating such a dialogue in allegedly "absurd" or "paradoxical" imagery, in puns, in shreddings of phrase and syntax. Doubtless Eugene Jolas' "vertigral" program of the 1930s—in *Transition*—belongs here: the "language of the night." And of course, yes, the perennial Orphic tradition is being transformed in these crystallizations of ideas about a renegade lyrical mode that must estrange itself from the "logical collars" (Leiris) of normal discourse (poetic or otherwise), in order to track the motions of the unknown. What intrigues me—talking here behind a "Cedar Door," for that's what this bar is called, pine or cedar, take your pick—is the recent florescence, in German, of poems countersensical, deviant, and renegade. Playfully or not, antidiscursively or not, these poems gainsay not just current speech but any consensus as to how, as language, meanings tend to be made. For instance—the "Crimean Gothic" texts, vocally hilarious (and pokerfaced as Buster Keaton), intelligible in flashes alone, dense as they are eruptive, by Oskar Pastior, who came out of Romania to Berlin in 1968. I'm also thinking of the asyntactical collages of Friederike Mayröcker. I'm thinking of not only the middle-period sound-poems of Ernst Jandl, but also of his *moronic* poems in a kind of German pidgin (*Die Bearbeitung der Mütze*, 1978). The last are "semantic," to be sure, but it's as if the sounds and syntax of German had been melted down. What one can hear is a godforsaken voice on a phonograph record still softened—yet miraculously purified—by having been passed through a fire. Well, not all these idiolect texts betoken a solemn craving for contact with spirits. Some, Pastior certainly, are incitements to resistance in a disspirited world, excitements to high spirits among those of us who are living, liberations—from the quasideath of entrapment in routine utterance (including the poetic, no, the literary routines).

Even then, solemn or carnivalesque, there's common ground, I suspect. There's a congruence between these strategies. After all, to hazard a guess, if the dead wanted anything at all, it'd be a hilarity in the here-and-now. I know a few who wouldn't want to recross the "linguistic bridge" into our *Dasein* and *Hiersein* merely to mope.

And I love the curious tonal workmanship there is in these poems. I think, too, of the (putatively 10th century A.D.) *Nine Songs*, the Chinese odes that invite the spirits to be there, later bidding them farewell. Wasn't the gap in the middle not a poem at all, but a dance? The poets I'm thinking about—and thanks, Rebecca—are looking for the words which might

mean what that *ludic* dance had to "say." Here and there, in one way or the other, there were artists wondering how to slay the tyrant Automaton. And behold, by wondering the tyrant can be slain. Yet because there is such an absence of wonder Automaton persistently stands up again. He presides over regulative language. He conspires with the "diabolically imperceptible nullity" in its "Other" aspect. What, now, if Leiris and these poets have been working in wonder to reduce, hacking away at it, the mass of that imperceptibility? Finally what can all this mean in a country where, lip-service aside, and obsessions (more or less biological) aside, death is dirty and life is cheap?

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

ROMAN POEMS: PIER PAOLO PASOLINI
translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Francesca Valenti
City Lights Books, 1986

In the preface to an inexpensive paperback selected poems which came out in 1970, Pasolini eagerly welcomed the "new reader" to his work. He was enthusiastic about the possibility of his poetry finding a larger audience: he wanted to reach the man in the street, not just the intellectual elite. If he were alive today, he would be pleased by the new City Lights edition entitled *Roman Poems*, translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Francesca Valenti. Surely it will increase his American readership. It is not the first time Pasolini's poetry has been available in a paperback English translation. The substantial volume translated by Norman MacAfee and Luciano Martinengo, and published by Random House, came out in a Vintage paperback three years ago. A large selection of Pasolini, about half the length of the City Lights edition, appeared my *The New Italian Poetry: 1945 to the Present* (University of California Press), also in paperback, two years before that. However, Ferlinghetti and Valenti have offered us a new piece of the puzzle named Pier Paolo Pasolini. There is little overlap in the three books. Whereas the MacAfee/Martinengo selection and mine stressed the longer works, Ferlinghetti and Valenti have concentrated on shorter pieces.

Roman Poems is a handsome book, including six photographs of him (one on the cover) with street kids against a background of shacks and housing projects. These photographs humanize the legendary Pasolini. They place him with his chosen people; this was his milieu. The

photographs also reinforce the significance of the City Lights title, because *Roman Poems* is not the name of a Pasolini book, but rather a guiding theme in the selection Ferlinghetti and Valenti have made from seven original books. Yet this presents a problem. There are at least as many more Pasolini poems related to Rome as those which have been included here. Of course, decisions are always difficult. Pasolini's complete poems (Garzanti, 1975) is almost one thousand pages long. And that doesn't include his dialect poetry, which is collected in another large volume. However, some of the poems which Ferlinghetti and Valenti have passed over are vital to the Roman theme. Especially notable is the absence of "Le ceneri di Gramsci" ("Gramsci's Ashes"), the title poem of Pasolini's first major book and a fundamental "Roman poem" by anyone's definition. Perhaps it has been passed over because it was translated in its entirety in both the Random House and the University of California Press volumes, but at least part of it might have been included.

The title *Roman Poems* carries other problems as well. It is true that Pasolini sets these poems in and around Rome, chiefly in the slums which skirt the city. But the poems are not regional in a straightforward way, in spite of many local references, such as the mention of the Trastevere and Caracalla's baths. Instead the focus is on the sub-proletariat, the poor peasants who had been transplanted from all over Italy—but chiefly from the South—to this desperate existence on the periphery of the great city. It is to these outcasts, among whom Pasolini and his mother lived for a time, that he devotes his attention. He finds in them an anguished beauty which is missing in the middle class, and even in the working class which had begun to achieve financial gains. Considered from this perspective, there are many other poems which could have been included, because he depicts the struggle which rages in the "Roman poems" in almost everything he wrote, regardless of the regional backdrop. And his emphasis on the poor and backward "Southern" is ubiquitous, even in his movie *The Decameron*, where he purposefully changed the locale from Tuscany to Naples and its surrounding towns.

The selection made by Ferlinghetti and Valenti raises another question. They end the "Roman poems" with "Quadri friulani" ("Friulian Paintings") and two poems translated from the Friulian dialect. This apparent departure from the book's theme offers a perfect chance to explore the more complex issue of the peasant primitive vs. the urban middle class. However, since neither an ideological nor an aesthetic context have been provided, it seems like a confusing afterthought.

The translations in the City Lights volume are careful and accurate, but they too raise some troubling questions. Pasolini's outstanding stylistic quality is an ecstatic, operatic lyricism, coupled with a careening momentum which sweeps the reader away on a wave of language. Such qualities

are almost never achieved in these translations. Ferlinghetti has adopted the practice of cutting many of the Pasolini lines into half-lines, which may work in Ferlinghetti's poetry but is directly contrary to the nature of the original. For example, consider the following passage from "Chiusa la festa . . ." ("The Holiday Over . . ."):

> Chiusa la festa su una Roma sorda
> a ogni ingenua attesa, chiusa la sera,
> come immondizie al vento i passi
> del ritorno, le voci, i fischi, vanno
> morendo vasti per le strade, vuoti
> negli androni . . .

> The holiday is over, in a Rome deaf
> to all naive expectations,
> the night falling
> like trash on the wind,
> returning footsteps, voices,
> whistles fading away,
> farflung in the streets,
> hollow in the hallways . . .

What is energetic and expansive in the original has become terse (even though the number of lines has been expanded) and tight-lipped in the translation. All of Pasolini's lines are enjambed, except one. Ferlinghetti end-stops six of his eight shortened lines. It is hard to see what has been gained. Interestingly, in "Il pianto della scavatrice" ("The Weeping of the Excavator"), where Pasolini's lines are already short, Ferlinghetti and Valenti have chosen in many cases to double them up.

If most of these translations don't sing, it hardly makes *Roman Poems* a failure. Pasolini is one of the hardest modern Italian poets to translate, not because he is crabbed and hermetic like Montale, but because the sound and rhythm of his poetry are so hard to render in English. None of the three volumes cited has achieved that goal throughout, although each one has its tantalizing moments. I suspect that it would take a cross between Walt Whitman and the young Dylan Thomas to get much closer in our language.

It will be unfortunate if Pasolini's great difficulty scares off English translators in the future, because there is much left to be done. He is a giant figure in Italy and throughout Europe. His work seemed to foreshadow the appearance of what we now call "liberation theology," and that combination of Christianity and Marxism opened him to attacks from both the left and right. But he proves, in the very lines he writes, that politics does have a place in the avant-garde; experimental works do not exist in an aesthetic vacuum. In the late 1950s, when Pasolini an-

nounced the beginning of the "new experimentalism," defying the mandates of a neo-realism which had proved to be too limiting, he set in motion the most important avant-garde movement which has appeared in Europe since the end of World War II. We need to listen to Pasolini and to the avant-garde he liberated. Likewise, the new generation of American formalists has much to learn from Pasolini. In adapting ancient forms to his use, especially Dante's *terza rima*, Pasolini showed that there is vitality in all great literature from all periods. But he also showed that those forms cannot be accepted without modification, without an infusion of passion, and without far-reaching experimentation. Pasolini's strange mixture of aesthetic conservatism and radicalism avoided both blandness and preciosity.

LAWRENCE R. SMITH

ROVA NOTES

If this morning's wake-up note is a $C^{\#}$ (and I notice this helplessly) how will the musics I hear today relate to that?

or a very long improvisation

by Cecil Taylor . . .

*

Time & Sound, a marriage made in certain simple rooms.
One of the strangenesses of the word "time": that it is singular.
With Rova, the fixed and the moving.

*

Music sometimes takes quite some lengths just to declare *a* sound.

*

One is hardly ever *completely listening* (which requires a devotion to time of the wild leap), therefore what follows such reduced attention generates

little but quick opinion, and you can feel the mass of all you missed draining away. Music must *be* the room you are in, for the duration.

*

Some sounds are not apparent in a music but have to be searched for (listened out) like that thing you didn't notice right away turned up in the corner of the room behind the silent radio. I couldn't hear it at first. Then it was all I could hear.

*

Endless material could be written into and out of this music. Though to apply any purely explicatory language to it is almost a crime, for that operation tends the sounds back to an overly dusted self-standard. To sound is to resist rested definition, to leave oneself outward into a trend where the fissures and masses spring a feeling free of its telling.

*

A still generative statement by Cecil Taylor, copied into my 1963 notebook: "You are the recipient of all the cultural things around you that you wish to be – things like dance, theater, literature, the people you see, so you are a departure."

*

Immersion in the states of a thing, it takes.
And the counted same you will never have.

*

The will to include enough *differences* is already a move toward the outside. Ornette Coleman points to zones of his Free Jazz session where "the freedom even becomes impersonal."

*

In a time when it gets increasingly hard to pay complete attention to any music, Rova creates a situation beyond my memories of hearing. And it is a *full* act, an animate field shorn of none of its . . .
Maybe memory *is* the problem?

*

Suppose you rehearse the Bartok Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, say, at such length it lifts completely from the paper, you can hum its every distinction in mind as wholly as the chord changes to I Got Rhythm, until its structure is shaping the least parts of your dailiness, beyond the rigidities of recall. You play the concert as planned and then it is over. A depression sets in. Why can you not go on? And suppose most of your playing experience has been in an improvised music, jazz. Your next thought urges continuance. Everything predicts it. How can this intensely structured score just stop at the last page?

A prime of jazz can thus be seen as a will toward mutability of any musical material in time. No composition need freeze in a single state. The possibilities seem limitless. Any horizons transitional.

Whereas, in the badly-termed "classical" sector, a Glenn Gould's performances are called "interpretations" and are criticized for eroding sanctified facets of "perfect" scores, though he has looked deeply enough into this music to realize that there is little point in adding another recording of a Mozart sonata, say, unless one plays it in a radically different way, *changes* it.

And Morton Feldman has written a string quartet four hours in length. He obviously does not want his music to settle for the truncated life of what Cecil Taylor has called "viable bended plants that can be put in anybody's garden," and goes on to speak memorably of "the life of the piece" as an increasingly primary concern.

"Kinds" of music (those sanitizing labels) no longer seem to drag along their own built-in and abstract barriers, and there is now a freed-up crossing, a taking from wherever, in motion, integral, recombinant. And acting up into the next state.

These are significant changes in realization. Rova's music enters here. And won't let you off the hook of the vast momentary, a sound too extensive for any single frame.

*

There should be another word.
"Improvise," in American English, having the connotations of last minute jury-rigging or "making something up" when you're not prepared, a fudging due to the scramblings of a half-ass nature.

But improvisation is surely a *practice*, perhaps more in the religious than the musical "woodshedding" direction. A daily attention to what's possible beyond any habituated barriers.

To improvise: to know *in*, and only while undergoing, the process of doing. To perceive only in the motion of an act, in the movements of practicing that act. Improvisation *is* motion. and I think here of the bassist Buell Neidlinger's remark, as we were listening to Ed Blackwell on Ornette Coleman's *Poise*, "He really saw the motions!"
Thus, as in the definition. "not foreseen" because only experienced in the movement and passing along with it.

The French writer Muarice Blanchot has set a fine distinction which might be applied here, whatever the materials: "One can only write if one arrives at the instant towards which one can only move through space opened up by the movement of writing."

Improvisation is the heart of the voice, the seed of the art. The spontaneous aspect of creating whatever kind of own time forms in real time may even be at the heart of supposedly more studied composition or revision. Little shoots of the same momentum, etc.

Though, improvisation sometimes feels like a matter of finding the lit pin in the most dark, or moving vast fragile masses, bales of sound, or ducking (or absorbing) that projectile coming around again.
Or another feeling: the amazing ability to wait while still in motion, as if you are the train that creates all that solid scenery passing . . .

One could work out a speculation on what *is* foreseen in improvisation. A term between *improve* and *impulse* in the dictionary.

The best statement I've seen on the relation of composition to improvisation is soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy's "What I write is to take you to the edge safely so that you can go on out there and find this other stuff. But really it is this other stuff that interests me."

*

Thinking on the matter of spontaneous interaction I'm reminded of an eerie evening in the longago at Carnegie Hall, a hit-or-miss package show Sonny Rollins was to open. Before the crowd had quieted and with the houselights still up, Sonny walked out in front of the curtain, apparently

to play an unaccompanied solo. Just then a woman in the front section began screaming full-throat in shocking snap-brain madness. She was obviously in some closing chamber of mind-pain, and the audience froze. Seemingly without pause for thought Sonny began to play with her, dueting with whatever demons responsible, imitating her screams and turning them around, reflecting and shining them anew. It was astonishing. And there was much of the well-known wit in his sound, but at no remove. He was right in there with this helpless human, which perhaps says a lot about the humours, as well as about music, and Sonny's part in these acts and more. Then the whitecoats dragged her away and Sonny stomped off *Cherokee* at an unbeatable speed, ranging his notes and swinging the bell of his horn from some alien center of stillness.

*

At the entry to *The Crowd*, with those huge horns, I thought I was in Bhutan, comes a sort of undertonic flux possibly the movement of a large truck outside the studio, then calls up some *spaces*, bands of continuous shifting sounds can really define the whole of your room, breaks into pauses suggest further figures, negatives breed positives, keeps heading in with a vast spectral sound, big dark wings or blinds of sonics, where musics become a reality beyond "tune" "beat" etc., then figures divided by solid but silent shapes, equals in time of beautiful collision figures, a group speaking which strongly *tells* you, speaking in reeds, speaking in primes, an eerie rate of tongues, then an almost gamelan sorting of percussive build, reducing to more isolate voices, an intertasting of essential solitudes, until just Ochs' tenor throat, and a final treble linkage, choral, out.

*

This record of Rova works
to dissolve formal barriers
if you can use ears prehensile.
It's an erosion-of-habit music
a chance to encounter forms
beyond your listening history.

*

Rova's music is vast, intense, sometimes complex
but always graspable in terms of their search for the most basic and generative elements, ever lurking in and out.
Hear those tirelessly turning seeds, fist sized, mutating in the zonal exchange of *Terrains*, and throughout *Knife in the Times*.
It's as if the "tonal home" here were always the first thing spoken by a person.

*

I would always want to meet the music as in a dream one encounters the intimate stranger from whom there can never be the slightest turning away. Rapt.

In Rova the conditions are met.

—October 1985
CLARK COOLIDGE

Note: These are liner notes for the new Rova record album, *The Crowd*. (Hat Hut Art #2032), featuring Larry Ochs, Jon Raskin, Brad Ackley & Andrew Voight, with cover art by Robin Winters.

In his review of *The Collected Poems of Paul Blackburn* (*Sulfur* 16), Sven Birkerts seems perplexed about my editorial decision to "dismantle the unities of the original book appearances, and to proceed, instead, strictly in the order of the ascertainable date of composition." Ruminating that we might "consider Blackburn's output as a single long poem," he speculates "possibly this is what Jarolim had in mind when she decided to unravel the separate collections."

What I "had in mind" is no great mystery; it's spelled out quite clearly in my introduction to the book: "The present volume is arranged chronologically by date of composition rather than book by book because there was sufficient overlap within the collections to necessitate either repeating poems or deciding from which collection a poem or several

poems should be eliminated. More important, a presentation based on dates of publication would perpetuate an already distorted view of Blackburn's creative development. He began writing in the middle 1940s, but not until some 20 years later did he have regular access to publication."

Birkerts concedes that I do note in the index the earlier collections in which the poems were printed, but takes issue with the fact that I don't provide any indication of position. I *did* consider including detailed lists of the contents of these collections, but decided against doing so because of space considerations. Since Birkerts complains that the book already "weighs as much as a bag of groceries and has 'definitive' written all over it," I can't imagine why he would have wanted me to have included poems more than once (the index shows just how often some poems appeared in different collections), or to have added even more apparatus to the volume. Why, then the book might have weighed as much as *two* bags of groceries, or at least as much as a bag of groceries and a sack of kitty litter.

EDITH JAROLIM

TODD MOORE: UNDERBELLY OF THE HEARTLAND

With the electronic revolution of recent years, the instant availability of all information, it would often appear that the old, slow rhythms of geographical-cultural evolution are meaningless, have been replaced. I would propose, rather, that they have gone underground.

We have seen, for example, how the westward trek in this country, across the prairies, terminated finally in California; and how this evolved into Hollywood and the California life-style, cultural phenomena lapping back eastward, filling every corner of the nation like an unspent wave.

But I suggest that there is another cultural movement, much slower, behind and beneath all this—a movement that has just left New England, and barely reached the midwest:

Emily Dickinson has finally joined the emigration, uprooted herself from Amherst, and re-surfaced in Belvidere, Illinois, in the person of a high school teacher named Todd Moore.

But Moore is not your ordinary run-of-the-mill high school teacher. According to a note in the back of one of his chapbooks (a volume called *Tough Ass*),

> *todd moore* lives in illinois
> grew up around punks and 2 bit
> mobsters from chicago has a knife

collection in his basement which
extends to the bathroom a disarming
poise and eyes that shoot right thru

Is this a poet one would casually juxtapose with Emily Dickinson? Not casually, no; but quite seriously – yes.

Both are theatrical. They are performers, role-players. The poems are, in the best sense, "staged."

In an essay on Dickinson, I have written as follows: "A Dickinson poem is at its best when the bulk of it is an outward gesture, that then, in the last line or two, runs back upon itself – with an ironic, perverse, failed stab at yankee neatness. In poem after poem she makes a 90° turn – often embedded in a half-rhyme – in the last line or two – so that the poem opens outward – or turns inward – beyond the dimensions of the earlier part." The same could be said, without changing a word, about Moore's poems.

One of Moore's collections, *The Dark and Bloody Ground*, includes a poem called "The Man Who Makes Maps":

. . . a republic of lines
pours from his fingers
each one's a river a creek
a series of low bluffs
hills cliffs or mountains
the taste of grit clay
stones & bark grow rank
in his mouth claim him
while mapping the river
he's absolutely rafting it . . .

Like Emily, Todd distrusts abstractions, can deal only in hard images, hard experiences, tumbling one upon another. He never stops to interpret, to philosophize – leave that to the reader. (Emily had tendencies to philosophize, to become windy – but the yankee pragmatic generally saved her.)

The extremes of sex, violence and perversion in many of Moore's poems would seem most un-Dickinsonian. (She would not read Whitman because she heard he was "disgraceful.") But those were tendencies, perhaps latent, barely hinted, in the maid of Amherst – contained by the surrounding hills, if you wish – now exploded across the flat lands of Illinois.

The Dickinson poems are without titles. Moore's are effectively so, the title, in almost every case, serving as first line of the poem.

The dashes in the Dickinson poems, used incessantly, are like epileptic hesitations. Moore achieves the same effect with an occasional line break in the middle of a word (act / ion").

Finally, the two poets share a sly wit. See the following, by Moore:

Grandmother Cheating

at blackjack high
low jack & game
solitaire she
played a lot to
ward the end stack
ing decks or if
she forgot peeking
under cards & re
arranging every
thing til she won
would celebrate
by humming camp
town races we used
to tell her to
play by rules
she'd grin thin
lips stretched
over bare gums
ask whose

* * *

Moore's poems seem to fall into three general groups, with some overlapping:

Biography (John Dillinger)
History (Pioneers, Frontier)
Current, Deranged Sex and Violence

The Dillinger Poems—and I have only Book One at hand, I understand there are many more—are a collection of short, episodic (epileptic?) Dickinsonian lyrics, that have the effect of accumulating into a biography of the man. There is multiple role-playing here—Moore the actor playing Dillinger the actor playing Dillinger the gunslinger:

getting that meanassed walk
down
&
the feel of the Thompson
tucked under his arm
& the play in the
steering wheels of
stolen cars
getting the pavement feel
of the road
& into the crotch of the girl
beside him

her smile chopping through
grease and ketchup burger
as he plays w/ her hair
& getting the hardassed
over the shoulder
holster look
like in the movies
& the warm glow of
banknotes on his face
when he crams
them into sacks
getting it all
getting it all down just right

Another:

Looking for Dillinger's Windshield

in some Rice Lake
Wisconsin barroom
bartender says
it's been stored
away & what the
fuck it's only a
windshield he
ddn't understand
the poor son of a
bitch didn't under
stand I wasn't
looking for a wind
shield but the re
mains of the lines &
angles from Dillin
ger's face in that
glass & the mirror
shadow of my own

The urge to seek out, reconstruct heroic history through its surviving artifacts—in this case, glass. Glass, that may be both translucent and reflective. The notion that glass may hold the images it has "seen."

In a poem that begins *Dillinger Brings* / his darkness / to the rivers . . ." Moore's recurrent concern with Death is evident . . . a concern that, in Dickinson's case, was almost obsessive.

* * *

How many American writers have come from the midwest? For how many of them is the midwest remembered only as a place to be escaped—as their anxious feet carried them to New York, San Francisco, Paris, Lon-

don? (When one puts together a jigsaw puzzle, the pieces consisting of the contiguous forty-eight states, it is those lumpy middlewestern states that are the last to go in place. For my daughter recently, the last piece was Indiana—Dillinger's home state.) For Todd Moore, on the other hand, the midwest is home—as it was for Dreiser and Anderson, and Meridel LeSueur. And he has stayed home.

The middlewestern "civilization" that Huck Finn was running away from —the small-town pieties and proprieties—have been stripped bare by Moore—and Huck, no less than Emily, would be appalled. What is delineated is the particular kind of perversion, or inversion, that characterizes the midwest, or at least the midwestern underbelly.

not much
room between houses
where we played
grab-ass tag kick
the can & war in a
grit of sour dirt
speckled w/bits
of glass tire shreds
condoms & nails
the night nick
bishop tried to
stuff a dead rat
down sandy frazer's
blouse old man
weber walked out
a third storey
window w/a rope
around his neck . . .

* * *

There is a recurrent fascination with guns.

after a couple
drinks he'd let her
play w/his s & w
44 magnum it looked
big in her hands
what she'd do was
blow cigaret smoke
down the barrel
he loved the way
her lips wd fit
over blue steel . . .

In fact, another way of classifying Moore's subject matter would be Blood, Sex and Guns. And Fire. And History. And a general Looniness.

* * *

Like the midwest of which he writes, Todd Moore's publication record has been schizophrenic. First, a spate of inexpensive pamphlets and chapbooks—some of them mere mimeos. And now, recently, an elegant, relatively expensive, beautifully printed and bound selection of poems entitled *Scales & Weights*.

Aside from the mode of presentation, this volume deserves separate consideration. Following is a publisher's note:

> *Scales & Weights* is a selection of ten poems from a larger body of work entitled "Looking West" a sequence based on the voice, the work, the texts of Laton Alton Huffman—Montana photographer. These poems span the time period 1878-1901.

Although connected with his historical interests, this sequence represents Moore's entry into what is for him (so far as I know) a new genre: that of seeing the world through the eyes of another artist, in this case a photographer.

This is a genre not without its dangers. It is the tendency of the writer, often, to condescend, to squat on the photographer's territory, to intrude, and compete, so that the camera work falls behind the clouds of the writer's ego. Moore absolutely avoids all this. He simply climbs into the camera himself, and peers out.

> let me have a camera
> that walks the
> eye right out of
> my skull & sets
> me in the very
> midst of what
> I see . . .
> . . . . . .
> all at once i
> want to be able
> to climb into
> a wrinkle &
> know the whole
> cracked look
> . . . . . .
> let me have a
> camera that
> bones a pose.

In the earlier poems we have seen Moore as actor, role-player, performing, with almost puritan persistence, within the range of himself, his place, his materials. In *Scales and Weights* he has enlarged that range, but it is not an alien, fabricated image. Rather, he is for the first time speaking metaphorically of his own role as artist, delineating, through the eyes and camera of the early Montana photographer, his relation to his own materials. This is not ego-intrusion, but a humble celebration of brotherhood.

> taking portraits
> is not an easy
> business . . .
> Sometimes I feel
> my self draining
> into a face.

* * *

Todd Moore is a genuine modern *primitive*, in the best sense of the term. Back to basics. At first glance, many of the poems look easy, and easily imitated, almost written from formula. Not so. Reading many of them, and going back to them after a period of time, one comes to recognize a specific, idiosyncratic quality. Moore may be able to write them prolifically, but only Moore can write them. The cumulative effect is hypnotic. Or infective. Or addictive.

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PAUL METCALF

PAUL CHRISTENSEN.
WEIGHTS AND MEASURES: SELECTED POEMS
University Editions (4937 Humphrey Road, Huntington WV 25704). 1985

Christensen's style is traditional. His preferred line is the formal iambic (either pentameter or tetrameter). In those poems which seem less controlled ("The Prince," "A Final Parting," and "Blue Decisions") his master seems to be William Carlos Williams. Indeed, both the form and subject of one of his finest short pieces, "Lunch," seems to echo Williams' famous poems on plums in the refrigerator:

> The joy is simple and perfect;
> to have a single nectarine
>
> cut in four on a plate on a table.
> The afternoon like a wall
>
> thrust up to heaven, shining
> and clear. Nothing
>
> in the soft, scented dark
> but the plate, the fork
>
> the hands at rest silently. (50)

Christensen's penchant for traditional modes is particularly clear in his fondness for the adjectival phrase with a special literary turn: "sudden wilderness," "Her nude moon-luminous body," "the small white focus of her face," "the muffled knock of knuckles," etc. The alliterative tintings, though quiet, contribute to the literary turn, as part of the mode. Christensen works, then, within received stylistic norms. Occasionally, there are echoes of Hardy, Yeats, and Roethke.

The best of the personal poems, and the longest, is "The Nap." Christensen returns to the 1950's when as a boy he sits listening to his mother sleep. The lad drifts fast into a mood that seems rehearsed: "I could feel the walls / turning into flesh," he says. Details suggest the child's view of the world: delivery men and their trucks appear as they do in story books. Inside, a momentary fear wells, as he imagines a burglar's "fox eyes." As he sits waiting, the whole house given over to "napping"("nothing troubled the standstill of time"), the appearance of a neighbor shaking a mop lures him back to reality.

He contemplates "sonship, the filial role." He was the third child, "asthmatic and chinless" at birth. And that birth (during WW II) he notes with humor: He's shot forth from his mother's womb—"a mortar pumped from her own / chute into a swaddle. . . ."

There's always a flow: the mother's breathing rising "silkily" from her lungs, "weaving the darkness around." His own ties to that mother are much subtler than apron strings. The streamers ride through his memory back to infancy and boyhood. He recalls sexual stirrings:

> I knead
> the cold knot in my lap until it stretches
> numbly on my leg, the forbidden
> lump
> knocking upward in its tent of
> corduroy,
> the chicken neck that's always left
> on someone's plate, erect, uneaten
> boney arc standing up now between
> tense legs, as if I charmed a snake.
> No sap—too diluted in my roots;
> I fear it, feel relief as it gives in,
> goes flat, cold nub again. (9)

During four poignant moments of direct address he pleads with his mother to rise up and "kick out these stops to life," not to die, his own fears burgeon, and streamers of time move forward. Via the poem and dream/memory, the mother finally wakens, to that "fallen world we sojourn in." She climbs out of the "coils" of sleep, her eyes half-shut. She puts on tea, dresses, makes up her face to greet the father returning from the factory. The child scrutinizes her, thinking through his own worth as vigil-keeper of her descent.

The theme of the impressive long second section of *Weights and Measures*, "East Africa, 1952: A Dream Sequence," seems to be the Conradian/Rousselian one of a questing spirit traversing rivers, lakes, and jungles in search of visionary experiences; everywhere lies evidence of western civilization in decay, both in the lives of wasted white men, and in abandoned, rusting machinery.

"Lake Nyasa," the longest of these poems, runs to well over 500 lines, and is a fascinating narrative written in supple blank verse, rendered with amazing skill. The story reads like a lurid tale in the Murder-in-Exotic-Lands genre. Maugham might have written a prose version. While I would like to say that the Captain is brother to Conrad's Kurtz, he lacks the latter's obsessions with power and death. Our Captain has premonitions early (viz., in the subtly erotic scenes with his mistress), and shows some fear as he waits for his "double." Conrad's "Secret Sharer"?

In Part III, Christensen returns to some of the motifs of the opening part, mother, childhood, women he has observed and sometimes loved. The violence now seems intensified. In "Whorls" a rape occurs, a playing out of Satanic lust (in fact, in the woman's mind the man slithers away as a snake). Surely Eden has gone wrong; there is no God/swan slacking

his loins. Eve wrenches in the pain of his "grip and bite." "A Final Parting" turns for effect on the opening vision of a superbly detailed view of a woman's "small wrist," observed by a former husband who sees her (and himself, one assumes) aged. Love seems affirmed, however, in "Looking for a Pulse." The images of breasts "stiff as peaches, the / pitted tips" is first-rate Christensen: both passionate and keenly visioned.

Perhaps the most important poem here is "The Far Relations," where observations of his son shimmer evocations of himself as boy. His own son, he writes, "is made of steel: / his veins are wires telephoning to his mother's heart," though the mother is absent and distant, "in the cold / mountains of her own life." With deep affection, Christensen observes the lad take off for school, then return. "His shoes / are large, cumbersome gravestones / of his youth, which he drags half- / heartedly with him." There's so much left unsaid between father and son—a smarting fact conveyed by Christensen off to one side, via an image of toys "stuffed with truths / they have never spoken." (44)

Until I read Christensen's *Selected Poems* I had given up on the possibility that anyone could these days write a poem on family matters worth reading. The genre has been so abused and so sentimentalized. Most of the poetry journals I read, and I read many, would be less than half-filled if they published no poems on families. Christensen is a master of the genre. His artistry both in fashioning lyric techniques of a rare, intelligent order, and his diversion of any potential sentimentality towards unusual and rare images, do set his poems apart.

Further, the brilliant African poems demonstrate, as do his poems which inhabit other psyches than his own, that he is a man with several strings to his lyre. *Weights and Measures* is important, a fact which will go unnoticed in that poetry world of prestigious reviews, prizes, and anthologists. I regret that some major poetry publisher (small press or large) with good distribution facilities did not publish it. The format of the book is dour and does not invite one in; the type-face (is it off a computer?) is not only confusing and small (until you've read for awhile it is hard to distinguish o's from a's) but the lines themselves are too close together for comfortable reading.

Once though I say all this, the fact of this man's achievement remains. I do not agree with him, as he has one of his voices say: "The only mistake you can commit / is to turn back in search of home." His search, though he may not have absolved all the attendant pain, has moved me. For that I am grateful.

ROBERT PETERS

Marcel Mauss's erudition was legendary. Claude Lévi-Strauss reports that the audience would leave his lectures at the Collège de France or the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes shaking their heads: "Mauss knows everything!" He could uncannily retrieve apt details from a seemingly limitless reading of historical and ethnographic sources in a dozen languages. A passing reference to earrings could trigger a fascinating half-hour, with unexpected asides, on earrings in Polynesia, India, Australia, South America, Africa, Ancient Rome, etc. etc. Lévi-Strauss:

> In his work, and still more in his teaching, unthought-of comparisons flourish. While he is often obscure by the constant use of antitheses, short-cuts and apparent paradoxes which, later on, prove to be the result of a deeper insight, he gratifies his listener, suddenly, with fulgurating intuitions, providing the substance for months of fruitful thinking.

An essay called "Techniques of the Body" gives a hint of Mauss's oral style. Here are a few lines from what is essentially a long list of the things people in different parts of the world do with their bodies:

> It's normal for children to squat. We no longer know how to squat. I consider this to be an absurdity and inferiority of our races, civilizations, societies. [. . .]
> The notion that sleeping is something natural is completely inexact. [. . .]
> Nothing is more dizzying than to see a Kabylie come downstairs with babouches on. How can he stand without losing his slippers? I've tried to watch, to do it, I don't see how. And I don't understand either how women can walk of their high heels. [. . .]
> *Hygiene of natural body functions.* Here I could list numberless facts.[. . .]
> Finally, it must be understood that dancing while embracing is a product of modern European civilization. This should show you that things quite natural for us are historical; they may horrify everyone else in the world except us.

*

Mauss was Emile Durkheim's nephew and chief inheritor of the *Année Sociologique* tradition after 1917. Until 1941, as an influential Paris university professor, he inspired several generations of anthropologists and sociologists. Mauss wrote or contributed to classic studies of magic, social morphology, primitive classification, prayer, sacrifice, reciprocity, and the category of "the person." His ideas also ricocheted in the literary and artistic world. For example, something said at a lecture, "taboos are made to be broken," crystallized Georges Bataille's theory of transgression—at least according to the ethnographer Alfred Métraux who heard the *mot* and passed it on to his friend.

Unlike Durkheim, Mauss was less concerned to defend the specific terrain of sociology than he was to build bridges between diverse perspectives—psychological, sociological, ethnographic, historical—on "l'homme total." The scope of his anthropological vision was summed up best, perhaps, in a famous intervention at the Société de Psychologie in 1924. Discussion had turned to the philosophical problem of identifying fundamental categories of the human mind:

> The Aristotelian categories are not in fact the only ones that exist in our minds, or that have existed in the mind and have to be dealt with. Above all it is essential to draw up the largest possible catalogue of categories; it is essential to start with all those we are able to know men have used. It will then be apparent that there have been and still are quite a few dead, or pale, or obscure moons in the firmament of reason. Small and large, animate and inanimate, right and left have been categories. Among those familiar to us, take as an example that of substance with which I have dealt in a highly technical way: how many vicissitudes has it not undergone? For example, it had among its prototypes, especially in India and Greece, another notion: the notion of food.
>
> All the categories are merely general symbols which, like other symbols, have been acquired by humanity very slowly. We need to describe this labor of construction. Indeed, this is one of the main chapters of sociology understood from the historical point of view. For this labor was itself complex, perilous, chancy. Humanity has constructed its mind by every means: technical and non-technical, mystical and non-mystical; making use of its mind (senses, feelings, reason) making use of its body; taking advantage of chance choices, things and times; taking advantage of nations, their accomplishments, their ruins.
>
> Our general concepts are still unstable and imperfect. I sincerely believe that by concerted efforts, coming from opposite directions, our psychological, sociological and historical sciences will someday be able to attempt a description of this painful history. And I believe that the best philosophy will perhaps be inspired by this science, this awareness of the present relativity of our reason. Allow me to conclude thus.

*

This founding statement of modern anthropology (in Lévi-Strauss's reading) has much in it that could also attract a surrealist, or anyone working to expand the recognized categories of the human spirit. For Mauss, the "mind" is neither a given product of the intellect nor a biological inheritance, but rather a complex historical mix of physiological, emotional, social and political inventions. An emergent anthropology's ability to map and classify this totality is, he thinks, still precarious. And it has no choice but to build its science on the assumption of its own historical and cultural relativity. Unlike Lévi-Strauss, Mauss had no organizing model, drawn from structural linguistics, to order the vast diversity of human symbols

and categories. Indeed, he saw social, mental, or moral orders as tentative, constantly menaced by disorder, produced by historical transformation or ruin. This was particularly evident in his work after the First World War shook his belief in the stability of civilized institutions.

Mauss's best-known work, *The Gift*, builds this awareness of disorder into its survey of one of humankind's basic means for creating social stability: reciprocal exchange. Mauss portrays the fragility of agreements to give and receive. More disturbingly, he stresses the affinities between agonistic giving and violent competition, the thin line separating festival and war. Human sociality—for the Durkheimian, human essence—depends on entering into relations of reciprocity: giving and receiving relatives, commodities, money, visits, words, or any symbolic tokens binding the person to others, groups to other groups. But one cannot be related to everyone; there must be exclusions.

Mauss's survey shows that hospitality or gift-giving often have a dangerous side. They may be violently excessive like the Kwakiutl potlatch. (This was the aspect of Mauss's essay that most interested Bataille and which he would extrapolate in his curious work of "economics," *La part maudite*.) For if *The Gift* most explicitly portrays exchange as a check on violence and potential war, it also shows "normal" social contexts in which giving appears to go haywire, where the agonistic element takes over. Here, the equilibrium model of exchange tips over into the experience of pure spending, ludic or violent excess. Mauss's model of social order does not exclude this ever-present reality. The stakes remain high. His story of reciprocity always contains an "or else"—like the Kwakiutl ritual he cites:

> Part of the ceremonial opens with the "ceremony of the dogs." These are represented by masked men who come out of one house and force their way into another. They commemorate the occasion on which the people of the three other tribes of Kwakiutl proper neglected to invite the clan which ranked highest among them, the Guetela who, having no desire to remain outsiders, entered the dancing house and destroyed everything.

*

The prehistorian André Leroi-Gourhan, remembers his teacher as "a man of inspired confusion . . . [who] managed to concentrate a number of crucial things in very few articles." In an interview Leroi-Gourhan was asked what he recalled of his teacher's speech.

> His silences, if I may put it thus. I can't provide an imitation; so many years have passed, and I have an idealized image of Mauss; but he constructed his sentences in a way that suggested things without declaring them inflexibly. His discourse was all articulations and elasticity. Most

of his sentences came up empty, but it was an emptiness that invited you to build. That's why I said the most characteristic things were his silences.

He was especially amazing when we did textual explications on authors who had worked in Siberia on the Giliaks or Goldies. I remember sessions at Hautes Etudes – there were never more than ten of us, and yet! We gathered around a table like this one, not quite as long; Mauss translated from German to French with commentaries that drew comparisons from every corner of the globe. His erudition was fantastic, and we took it in without really being able to say afterwards how he had managed to be so engrossing.

Mauss did not write books. His *Oeuvres complètes* (edited by Victor Karady) is composed of scholarly articles, essays, interventions at meetings, countless book reviews. Compressed classics like *The Gift*, and *A General Theory of Magic* were published in the *Année Sociologique*. His magnum opus, a dissertation on Prayer remained a collection of drafts, essays, scraps and notes. So did other synthetic works on Money and the Nation. Perhaps because so much was connected in his encyclopedic mind, Mauss could be easily sidetracked. And he was profligate with commitments and loyalties. He lectured constantly and spent years bringing work by deceased colleagues (Durkheim, Robert Hertz, Hubert) to completion. A dreyfusard and socialist in the tradition of Jaurès, he wrote for *L'Humanité*, took part in strikes, elections, and the "popular university" movement. Unlike his rather austere uncle, Mauss was gregarious, bohemian, and something of a *bon vivant*.

Some recall Mauss as a loyal Durkheimian. Others see a precursor of structuralism. Some see primarily an anthropologist, others a historian. Still others, citing his rabbinical roots, training in Sanskrit, and lifelong interest in ritual, ally him with students of religion like his friends Hubert and Leenhardt. Some stress Mauss's bohemian iconoclasm, others his coherent, socialist-humanist vision. Some see a brilliant armchair theorist. Others remember a sharp empirical observer, able to inspire a generation of fieldworkers. The different versions of Mauss are not irreconcilable. But they do not quite add up. People reading and remembeirng him always seem to find something of themselves.

(Leroi-Gourhan) For a period of two years when I was attending nearly all his courses it was agreed that a comrade and I – a Russian Jew, Deborah Lipschitz, who died in the Nazi deportation – would take notes in turn and in a way that would let us compare them to determine the real content of Mauss's teaching. And we never managed to construct anything coherent because it was too rich and always ended up at the horizon. Later, a record of his course was published by a group of former students. Well, there was a total divergence between what they noted

and what Deborah and I took down! This is the secret, I believe, of the real spell he cast on his followers.

*

I have one small story to add to, and no doubt further confuse, Mauss's memory. It started in a conversation with Denise Paulme, the ethnographer from Africa responsible for publishing some of Mauss's lectures under the title *Cours d'ethnographie.* Paulme was reminiscing about her teacher who, even as a Professor at the Collège de France, always retained something of the *bon élève*—brilliant, enthusiastic, chaotic.

We spoke of his tragic end. As is widely-known, Mauss spent the German occupation in isolation and emerged without full possession of his mind. A Jew and a socialist, he was a doubly marked man. Without illusions, when the Germans approached Paris he gave up his teaching and took early retirement as President of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. In public, he wore the Star of David stitched to his coat, with pride. But like many others during those years he stayed out of sight. Close Jewish colleagues—Deborah Lipschitz and Maurice Halbwachs—were deported to their deaths. Mauss saw the reciprocity and collective discipline that had been the underpinning of both his sociology and his socialism crumble. He had once before survived the decimation of a generation. The new assault seemed to break his spirit.

When the Nazis entered Paris, Denise Paulme told me, they set about requisitioning "available" apartments for officers' quarters. Mauss had acquired a rather large flat when he was appointed to the Collège de France. Evicted by the Germans, he moved in with his companion of many years, a woman of working-class origins who lived in a smaller dwelling nearby. But there was no room for Mauss's large library. Paulme and her husband, the ethnomusicologist André Schaeffner (also Mauss's student), were among the friends who helped move his collection of books to the Musée de l'Homme.

The books, she said, were certainly still at the Musée. But she didn't know whether they had been fully integrated into its library. Perhaps not—Mauss's books were an odd accumulation. His rule was not to acquire anything available at the Paris University. (Professors had the run of the library stacks and enjoyed lenient borrowing privileges.) Since Mauss's interests were unpredictable, covering both high and low culture, I was charmed by the idea of his library, a systematic collection of odds and ends. What if it still existed, a dusty heap, uncatalogued somewhere in the Musée's labyrinthine basements?

Yes, I was told when I went to look, of course, the Mauss collection was catalogued long ago. Also, the record of its contents is missing. No

way to tell the things that were kept and those discarded. But would I like to see what remains in storage?

*

Some metal shelves in the dark, covered with dust. Resting on them, a series of wooden drawers of different sizes evidently once belonging to a single large cabinet: Mauss's *fichier de travail,* his working card-file.

The drawers are numbered 1-15, with two missing. They are stuffed with cards, 8 x 12½ centimeters in size. The cards are annotated across the short end (but sometimes the other way) in small, smudged script, often abbreviated and barely legible. Most of the cards merely record a citation. Occasionally a theme is registered. Larger cards, 15 x 9 cm., mark off the categories.

Taking inventory of half a drawer I count 700 smaller and 128 larger cards. Sometimes they are arranged alphabetically, sometimes not. A sampling of categories:

Sociological esthetics (100 cards)
Primitive drawings (80)
Animals (1)
Primitives (3)
Ornament (1)
Distinctive ornament (2)
Tatooing (2)
Jewels (2 – with small pencil drawings, apparently of necklaces)
Plastic arts (3 – Australian art, French popular art, Indonesian art)
Japanese art (1)
Kinds of ornament (8 – mostly Australian references)
Basket ornamentation (2)
Spiral (4 – from diverse locales, mostly illegible)
Figures (2)
Music (1)
Literature (no cards)
Popular literature (4 – one illegible, one on Turkish and Rumanian marionettes, two in German, on folktales of Indonesia and Togo)
Popular songs and rhymes (4)
Legends and stories (200)
Fables (10)
Transmission of fables (1)
Aesop's fables (1)
Parables (1)
Also noted (a partial list): Myths, Meteorology, Weapons, Religion, Collecting, Phenomenology, Definitions, Explanatory theories, Ancient Theories, Truth (3 cards: one illegible, two on Medieval theology), Representations of Nature (1 card: an article by K. Allen, "The Treat-

ment of Nature in the Poetry of the Roman Republic," Bulletin of the Univ. of Wisconsin, 1899) . . .

The drawers are numbered, not labelled. Thus one cannot guess the file's overall topic, if there was one. On a conservative estimate, the thirteen extant trays from Mauss's file contain 18,000 small cards divided by over 7,000 larger cards.

The number of categories is troubling.

*

Mauss lived until 1950, a sad figure. He could become animated . . . but then would lose track and become confused. His extraordinary mind seemed to be turning out of control, starting up lucid, then discouraged, aimless. Little is generally known about his ailment, and most accounts pass over it quickly. Jean Cazeneuve in his short study of Mauss simply mentions "nine years of half-sleep." A terrible nine years. One of Mauss's former students, Pierre-Henri Chombart-de-Lauwe, who saw him in 1946 told me that after a frustrating conversation of fits and starts Mauss's parting admonition was: "Il faut publier!" Make sure you publish! The younger man sensed a scholar with many projects to bring together, an enormous knowledge still to communicate, but lacking the capacity or occasions to do so. A mind fully aware of its own ruin.

Mauss's disarray evidently had medical, moral and sociological causes. I would like merely to add a dimension suggested by the disturbing card file with its 18,000 references and nearly half as many categories.

One of Mauss's most elusive and influential ideas, enunciated in *The Gift* and elsewhere, was that of the "total social fact." According to this doctrine, crucial human institutions – gift exchange for example – should be seen simultaneously as "religious," "political," "economic," and "social" facts; moreover one must not forget their "legal," "cosmological," "aesthetic," "ecological," and "morphological" aspects. To understand such "total" phenomena means to tie them into the whole fabric of human culture, to multiply their connections with other institutions. But there is a limit to the number of interpretive contexts one can bring to bear. And if the outline of the "institution" in question (be it gift exchange, prayer, magic, or the nation) becomes unduly complex then the vision of "total social facts" may dissolve into a frustrating awareness that everything is related to everything else.

Mauss did what comparative sociology does best, with an incomparable, even excessive, flair. He unexpectedly illumined one portion of the world by another; one domain of society by another. Within the focus of an essay, a lecture, or a conversation, he could brilliantly bring to bear his enormous learning, deepening a topic, extending its ramifications. Mauss was an "anthropologist" whose subject was ultimately "man." And

his complementary socialist-humanist vision of unity in diversity embraced virtually all cultures and all epochs.

But there is always another side to such inclusive programs. For wholeness cannot avoid selection and taxonomy—an irreducible arbitrariness. "Mauss knows everything," said his wondering students. But might not knowing so much become a painful disorder when the categories proliferated and the pegs of memory slipped, when the reciprocal contexts in which Mauss's marvelous knowledge could be spoken and heard, taught and learned, were swept away by an abrupt history?

SOURCES

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JAMES CLIFFORD

PARADISE, Ron Silliman
Burning Deck, 1985

Paradise continues Ron Silliman's quest for the perfect sentence. The title, loud and "Hawaiian" though it is, is more likely than not a paradox. It's paradise in the sense of, this is it, folks, this is what you get, take it or leave it, this is the train you boarded or were ticketed for, and you get off only with a leap. It's a paradise in which the final words are "Listen. Be careful out there." We accept that; we can accept that feeling, entirely. It's simply the world that Silliman is writing about, and has been, every chance he's got. Paradise is our lives.

The pattern of development is pleasantly evident in a survey of Silliman's work to date. Just as *Ketjak* (1978) was a step along from *Nox* (1974), with its opening puns of "tree sun," "tuna flesh" and "eggs or size," *Tjanting* (1981) and now *The Alphabet*—of which *Paradise* is an installment—are the fulfillment of what Silliman has called "the New Sentence," the title of his important theoretical essay and one of the cornerstones of recent Language construction. *Ketjak* is progress by increment, language presented in increasingly larger installations—ninety-three pages, written between June 2nd and November 17th, 1974. There, for the first time, the unit of progress, the unit of control, is the sentence, which is increased in geometrical proportion into paragraphic divisions. (Silliman writes in "The New Sentence," "The paragraph organizes the sentences," an instance of the Aristotelian notion of efficient cause.) The subject of *Ketjak* is discrete, but nondescriptive; the subject is the accumulation of novelty.

Most of the sentences recorded in that volume are fairly low-keyed, minimal (as in minimalism), even subliminal. Roughly three thousand sentences in all. Some are more interesting than others, intrinsically interesting: "It was only when the trash bag crashed into the middle of the kitchen that we realized it bore the weight of ants," or "The gentle knocking of a sock filled with sand on my forehead." As opposed to (the entries immediately following): "Meridian mass murder. Odor of old orange in the compost," or "Each term bears its purpose." Some poets would write sentences such as these (at least the first two examples) one to a page; Silliman is not that impoverished. Besides, it's been done before. These are the whimsicalities of perception that Williams strung out down the page:

> It was only when
> the trash bag
>
> crashed into
> the middle of the kitchen

that
we realized

it bore the weight
of ants

Williams, on the other hand, *didn't* write, "so much depends upon a red wheelbarrow" etc., as a sentence. Why he didn't, why there are these differences, is what remains for the observer of recent poetry to explore.

The entire relation between line and sentence must be explored over and over, as Williams did throughout his career, seeking measure, always the measure. Why doesn't Silliman write in lines? There is a sentence, and there is a line, and there is a difference. Traditionally, a sentence is that by which language is condemned to meaning—a cellular block of words to which sense is sentenced. A line has no such burden. Its responsibility is to get ahead. It is usually only an accessory, an instigator, a contributor to a larger "crime" or thrill or necessity. Why hasn't Silliman sought the advantage of lineation, with its concomitants of compression and surprise—an advantage which is almost always rhythmic and assists with the bearing of content forward or across? Actually, he did at one point, in his earliest work such as *Crow* from 1971. But increasingly, he has entered the universe of larger forms, and now it is his discovery of the sentence that distinguishes him.

Paradise, although printed in indented paragraphs, is called a poem by the author (directly on the acknowledgements page); it is not prose or a prose poem in the traditional (French) sense, and Silliman does not use Stephen Fredman's recent term, the not completely felicitous "poet's prose." Nevertheless, *Paradise* is not divided into lines. Rather it is a succession of discrete sentences. Sentences on a hike. Sentences condemned to march. Single-file bhwana-serving sentences, on down the neural pathways. "Simple sentences, again and again," he writes—though that need not be taken as the controlling or exclusive directive.

Clues are to be found in the writings themselves. Despite their apparent automatism (a deceptive automatism), Silliman's writings from *Ketjak* on, remain highly conscious, with hints of methodology throughout: "Rapid transit information," "Epic of doodling," "Burma Shave parataxis," "The beginnings of a new phenomenology of assembling"—any one of which, or all, contain the secrets of his poetics. I have made a list of dozens of them. "The eye is the limit," "Vocabulary of dinner in the syntax of my mouth"—the absurdity of a criticism which seizes only this one or that, like a harried beadle or teacher with a pointer, "Ah rascallion, son of Rasputin, *this* is the one that has been causing all the disruption!"

Silliman's sentences include matters of fact and autobiography: "On my way on a bus in heavy dawn fog to meet Taggart." There is wit, broad and narrow: "Sexism is being less afraid of a big dog if it is being walked

by a woman," or, "A complex form of information called a potato." Some of his sentences subdue themselves; others display metaphoric brilliance: "Farming my face, rakes of razor." *Tjanting* reads like Route 22 in New Jersey, any such road with a variety of roadhouses, building-supply yards, entertainments, some obviously more attractive than others: "Context constitutes . . . Let's start from scratch, she said, meaning scabs. . . . In love, but not in sync . . . Disembodied voices using colord plastic boxes, calld telephones, to negotiate their lives." "183 sentences in 15 days," he writes halfway through the volume, although unlike *Ketjak*, no two sentences are alike. He knows exactly what he is doing, and can laughingly use the language of the world around him: "Becoming identified with an inaccurate but provocative name enabled the Language Poets to rapidly deepen market penetration and increase market share." "Yoyo's alibi, the way back" has all the condensed wit of a poem—or a witticism. (Hear that as title, "Yoyo's Alibi"; and then, as body of the poem, alone on the page in all its wanton ellipticism, "the way back.")

Basically, he has a light heart. There are naked puns—"De moral eyes"—reminiscent of those in *Nox*. The title of *Tjanting* is itself a pun, coming from "a small pen-like instrument used to apply wax designs." (It is not a gerund, grammatically, although it is certainly a gerund in practice.) "In Spain the rain falls mainly on the brain" is Silliman, hat off, open to all possibilities. Puns themselves are inviting, contagious; "Boughs & eros" and "Beaus & errors" lead to one's own participation:

BOSUN EROS

He had requested long slim shafts.
There were feather fragments on the parquet, which he tried
to dust out of sight with his flared bottoms, then to kick
under the couch with his heel. She sat deeper and pressed
her knees together in anticipation.
"Let's play." He reached down behind the couch
and pulled out a curved stick with a string attached.
"Bosun eros."

Some single sentences may be worth more than another's entire poem: "The plum tree returned to its skeleton." He is capable of logic, lovely lying logic, and beautiful description: "The shingled roofs tilt upward, notching the low sky." There is full-flavored metaphor—"News is the soup of managed information"—although the total effect is anti-metaphoric, the poem neither a metaphor for thinking or for life. There are theoretical distinctions and heavy implications: "Images are not sentences." And there are allusions: "Dog star boy." How the mind lights up at allusions! Literate ourselves, we always welcome other displays of literacy; we seem rewarded, affirmed: "The enormous comedy of the emotion imposed on the peasant's bent shoulders" (repeated with variations); "Rages. Strain of tartar

sauce"; "general (Halftrack, looking out window, sees Beetle"; "A foot is to trip with"; "The descent beckons within the assent"; "Total Pentax"; "My bookcase, my bottle, my Walkman, my shelf." One of his favorites is "& then went down on the ship," appearing again in various guises in *Tjanting* and *ABC* as well as *Ketjak*.

The sentence, then, as reductive and paradigmatic: "There is no content here, only dailiness . . . ," Silliman writes in *Ketjak*. That he has not confined his choices of what enters the flow, the scan of his attention, to witticisms is an indication that some other principles are operative. There is at least the principle of all-inclusion, pandemic rampancy. Least action, freed signifiers, unselectedness is the principle. But can it be? Can unselectedness be a principle for poetry? Whole generations didn't think so. We are condemned, of course, to think things anew. It may be that by removing associations and couplings, Silliman has produced a more active, effervescent form, rather than monodirectional, commanded writing. (Another view would be that life is too interesting to be left to fragments.) Silliman writes in "generative sentences," to use Fredman's fine term, and his writing returns us to the sources of generation – like all successful poets – to language itself. It sounds like a lazy circle, but there's no way around it. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, and words unto words.

It is also doubtful whether writing such as this is really unselected. Inescapably, some data is more impressive than others. Faces *do* stand out in a crowd, and we go across the room or piazza to them, with every instinct of our body extended, aflame. It is more accurate to say that we are once again, as always, inside limits. A telling revelation is made in *BART* (1982), itself a single sentence, twenty-three pages long, of impressions duly recorded in the order received aride the Bay Area train on Labor Day, 1976: "what I describe is what comes to me in words as I look out the window, *miss all the rest*, can't even write it all." There is no hope to replicate reality. "Words, words / as if all / worlds were there," as Creeley wrote tremulously. Where is "all the rest"? How much gets lost, it is important to know, if we were spies, engineers, colonizers from a distant world.

In the following (from pp. 53-54 of *Paradise*), the poet could have selected just the sentences packing the most wit (I'll italicize my choices): "*Is your bathroom breeding Bolsheviks?* [although that's taken from an old Scott Paper Company "Red Menace" advertisement]. White buttons on black shirt. Stash tea. Sound of a light switch. The middle class is a non-idea. *Parolees form a chorus line. Soft outer flesh of cooked tongue.* ["Tongue" becomes an ambiguity in the present context, and thus delicious.] Accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. *When I allude to sex, I mean you. This race was born extinct.* All Toyota owners frozen at the height of their leaps [reference to a contemporary TV ad soon to be lost to oblivion]. Indirect lighting of back lobby. . . ." Yet he

wants the static, the hum as well as the drum, the full-spectrum challenge of undifferentiated living, what is ultimately the old post-modern act of writing as much as the writing itself. There is no common unifying bond to the sentences, except that they all occurred to Silliman, and we face similar non sequiturs in our own ventures through the layers of consciousness each day.

At this point, we might insist upon the question whether selection is a prerequisite for art. Has Silliman willingly, even willfully, subordinated some glimpses of reality to others? He is not encyclopedic; the impulse seems not to be comprehensive, to possess all the world's experience as his own, to be Representative Man. What, then, is his motive? "Sentences strobe life—continual sequence of data frozen into words." Are any of these statements definitive? Need they be? This is a true question—need sentences be conclusive like Imagism, or seek intellectual or emotional resolution? What we are offered is writing as a continuous process, sentence after sentence, world upon world. Each sentence momentarily exhausts meaning, but life doesn't stop there, so neither does Silliman.

One admires the flexibility, of course, the versatility, even the virtuosity; but the extraordinary thing is how Silliman can contain himself. What severity of will *not* to sustain the associations, not to follow up one perception directly and immediately with another (the old Dahlbergian causality), not to roll with what's given. The temptation to lead the docile reader on must be great, to carefully lay three or more sentences in sequence, to give the reader the illusion of continuity, to give the reader enough rope. Instead, what denial—to choose not to follow up, not to associate, defying Freud and William James. Continuity is suppressed. Morally, it is an implicit universe. Dodging about in the traffic of perceptions, avoiding intention, the writing becomes strategy. There is no intention, for example, to capture the flow of liquified thought and feeling, which is speech. There are only two dashes, no semi-colons, rare italics in *Paradise*. Perhaps Silliman has denied himself the full range of notation available, the full scale. (My sense is he *wants* the rigorous flatness, as a measure to play off his wit.) Many of the sentences in isolation are, under other circumstances or intentions, the first or last lines of a poem (another order of poem): "What if the last person to see me alive isn't born yet?" for example. Why, then, doesn't he write such poems? What thwarts this? Premature gratification, an inability to conceive in wholes, or a different necessity? Leading to yet another leading question: is Silliman—a writer like Silliman—only a mental commando? Does he dare prolong an examination? Is he symptomatic—of a shortened, remote-control attention span? Or the dogged determination to keep up with the simultaneity of existence? I have little doubt he knows what he's doing. Nothing lasts, he seems to say; eternal he seems to say.

Although he eschews connections—"Refuse connectedness," he writes

at an early point in *Tjanting*—he does not abdicate the artist's reponsibility to reveal relationships. Perhaps it is the new Heracliteanism. (In interstellar space, one never passes a face at the window a second time.) Silliman has kept his perceptions spaced-out, in large intervals, a rhythm beyond associationalism. Perhaps it is all a display that randomness is the order of the day, or that tandem-ness is. If his work does not propose itself as an encyclopedia, perhaps it is a time capsule. It is at least an alphabet (says his title), as in the phrase, "an alphabet of needs" or "an alphabet of variations." Ah, now we're getting somewhere; but can the effect be achieved in fewer pages? *Tjanting* itself is 213 pages; *The Alphabet* will probably be as long. When *is* virtuosity achieved? Or the goal, or satisfaction, or the completed poem? For there is also the monotony factor in a work this size (hardly limited to Silliman). Distraction is everywhere at the door. The cornucopia has been tipped. There are untasted foods even in the provincial supermarkets, personal libraries are now as large as ancient granaries or those of an Edwardian London club, there are more cassettes at the corner video store each week.

The competition is on for poets everywhere. It is by courage alone, the great courage of the poets of the eighties, that Silliman follows his vision of what constitutes human need. Silliman's forwarding of the sentence is one of the more interesting contributions to present poetics, one that raises questions about the nature of the art, because it causes us to reexamine the nature of the poetic line. He has allowed himself sufficient room to make the explorations meaningful and unavoidable. We can use his work to discover anew what a line ought to be and to test previously held boundaries of genre, even though it may be that, tested against the sentence, the line will ultimately come back even stronger. Perhaps that, or we will return with results not yet imaginable—which is paradise in another sense.

GEORGE F. BUTTERICK

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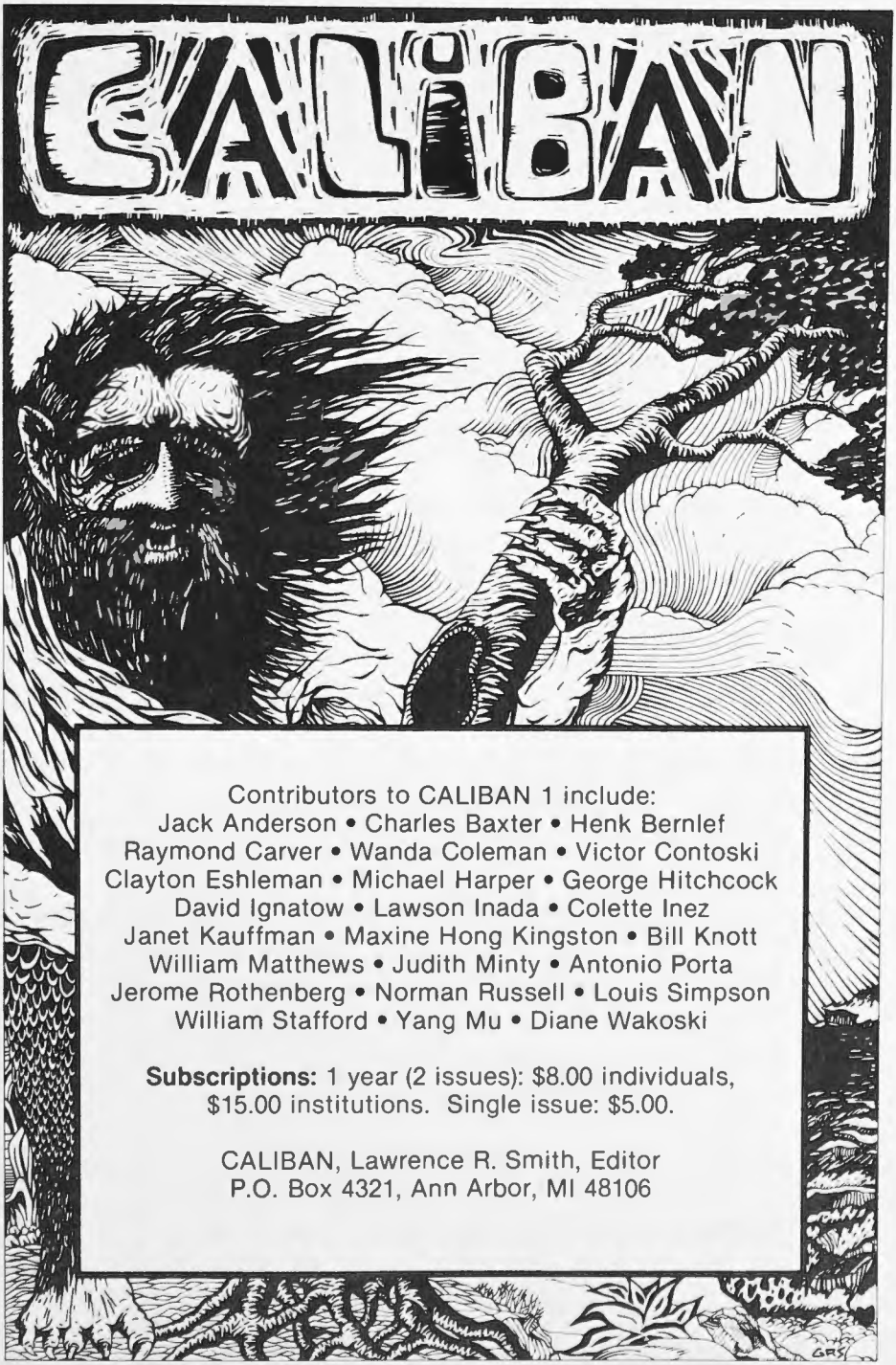

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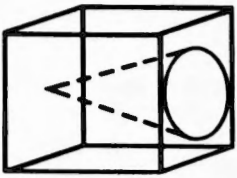

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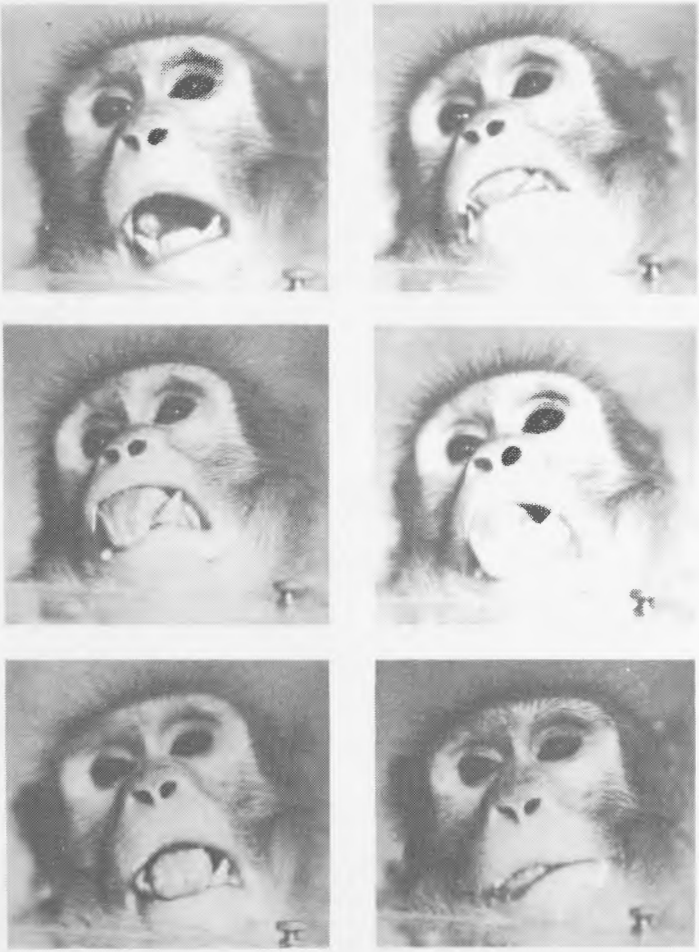

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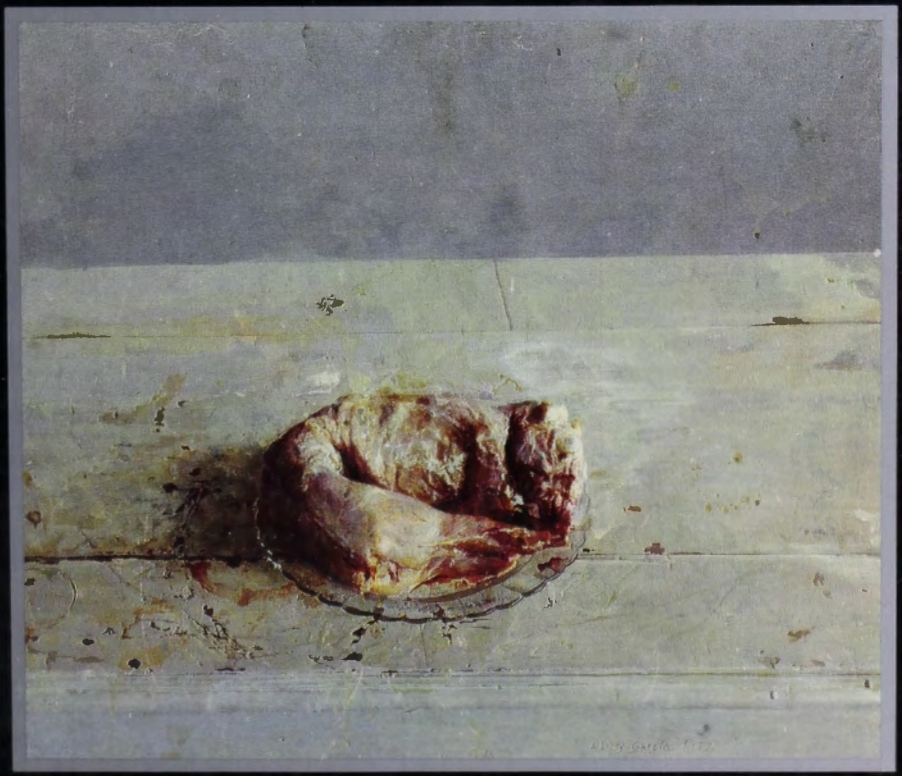

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Sulfur

WINTER 1987

A LITERARY TRI-QUARTERLY OF THE WHOLE ART

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Irving Petlin Artwork courtesy of Kent Fine Art, NYC

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Errata: In SULFUR #17 the correct spelling of James Gaver's name is: **James Gauer.**

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HENRI MICHAUX: Of Language and Writing and the Desire to Turn from Them is taken from Henri Michaux, *Par des traits* © Fata Morgana, 1984.

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CESAR VALLEJO

from the Notebooks (1929-1937)

(Translated from the Spanish by Sandra Ferdman)

The pity and mercy of men for men. If at the hour of a man's death, the pity of all men were gathered together to not let him die, that man would not die.

*

The pure and maladapted who bashes up against the world of farceurs and pickpockets.

*

The actor who one day stopped being himself to become one of the characters he played on stage.

*

Moscow's two social classes are looking for something: one by night; the other by day.

*

Religious bandits, upon being reformed all become godless.

*

A theatrical character: a blind man who says and feels tremendous things for those who have eyes.

*

His grey suit that must be worn out.

*

For the souls of the absolute, death is an atemporal misfortune, a misfortune viewed from here, there, the world, heaven, the instant and the future and the past. For materialist beings, it is no more than a misfortune viewed from this world: like being poor, falling down, making a fool of oneself, etc.

*

A theatrical character: doctor Guevara. He meets Mussolini incognito without knowing it and talks to him "sans façons."

*

A new poetics: transport Picasso's aesthetic to the poem. That is: to be aware of only that beauty which is strictly poetic, without logic, or coherence, or reason. As when Picasso paints a man and, for reasons of harmony of line and color, instead of giving him a nose, he paints in its place a box or a staircase or a glass or an orange.

*

I want my life to fall equally upon each and every one of the units (44 kilos) of my weight.

*

My meter measures two meters; my kilo weighs a ton.

*

He who coldly passes over the worker's tragedy today is not a poet. Paul Valéry, Maeterlinck, are not.

*

The man who was born old and died a child: aging backwards.

*

Laughter from tickling and laughter from moral joy. Rabelais.

*

Eyes accustomed to films and eyes accustomed to distance.

*

Intellectuals are rebels, not revolutionaries.

*

His gaze has the size of a violin at the point at which its sound dies in the distance.

*

The magic lantern leaves out many of the details of continuous and successive movement that ordinary film has, merely suggesting them by allowing us to see only a few representative movements of each movement. Divoird believes that film will revolutionize in this sense, preventing us from following step by step the continuous trajectory of a gesture or of a movement. With this we will only have a mechanical impression of the gesture.

*

The death of a person is not, as it is believed, a misfortune. The misfortune lies in something else.

*

Love liberates me in the sense that I *can* stop loving. The person I love ought to allow me the liberty to be able to hate her at any time.

*

Aviation in the air, in the water, and in the spirit. Its laws are different in each of the three cases. The spirit flies when it is heavy and sinks more into itself. The more laden the spirit, the higher and farther it flies.

*

Everything always begins at the beginning.

*

Mechanics is a medium or a discipline to realize life, but it is not life itself. It ought to lead us to life itself, which lies in the play of sentiments or rather in sensibility. Walt Whitman, Vallejo.

*

I love plants for their roots and not for their flowers.

*

The dog who out of loyalty did not allow anyone to approach his master to tend his wound. The master, naturally, died.

*

Nature creates the eternity of substance. Art creates the eternity of form.

*

No one dies except after having done something interesting. That one's done something interesting, because now he is dying.

*

The arts (painting, poetry, etc.) are not the only ones. Eating, drinking, walking are also arts: every act is an art. Slip toward dadaism.

*

My bitterness falls on Thursday.

*

It's strange: I thought that that man was me. He looks exactly like me. So much so that when I turned my head, I was almost sure that he was me and I almost crashed into myself.

*

The same road that carries away, also brings.

*

"My technique continuously evolves" according to Mariátegui. Like the industrial technique and rationalization of Ford.

*

One copies an automobile design and the imitator is tried and pays damages. One copies a poem and nothing happens. In Europe, they do something, but it is infinitely small and insignificant.

*

Artistically, *socialism* is not the same as *humanism*.

*

The only one who tells the truth is a liar.

*

When I read, it seems I am looking at myself in a mirror.

*

Ça va la pluie?
Le mois de mai est le plus antipathique del mundo.

[How ya doin, rain?
The month of May is the most disagreeable in the world.]

*

My glasses have stopped (like a watch).

*

Spinoza seems disguised as himself, as Spinoza.

*

Je m'aperçois bien qu'en ce moment on mange dans mon coeur.

[Right now I feel them eating in my heart.]

*

I want to write a little note to everyone telling them that's fine!

*

He says: Be serious so they'll do what you ask.
And I say to him: They'll do it not because I'm serious, but because what I ask is just.

*

I feel how my nails grow.

*

I feel how my beard grows in my sleep.

*

It is a theoretical and practical cold.

*

I wrote a poem in which I spoke of an adjective from which grass was growing. Some years later, in Paris, I saw on a stone in the Montparnasse cemetery an adjective with grass. Prophecy of poetry.

*

The portrait of every person is always found in the bathroom.

*

In the cold air smoke rose from the mouth of a person who was talking and from the fresh shit of a dog.

*

The advantage of film lies in our seeing the actors face to face, while they do not see us.

*

A passer-by says:
– Take 5 soles.
– Thank you. No.
– Take them, please!
Etc., etc.

*

Everyone is a hero in some way.

*

My simple anarchy, my great sorrow composed of joys.

*

I owe you 20 francs; lend me 5 and I'll owe you 15. O.K.?

*

He's going to shit, so he puts on his eyeglasses.

*

He's going to the bathroom, so he puts on his glasses.

*

To write a poem: "Sirs: I have the honor to tell you that I am quite well . . . ."

And then relate the state of my "affaires" and the rest.

*

Listening to Beethoven, a woman and a man cry at the greatness of that music. And I tell them: but it is you who have the greatness in your heart.

*

A new aesthetic: short poems, multiform, about evocative moments or anticipations, like "L'Opérateur" in Vertof's film.

*

Rewrite the poems: "Lucas died, my brother-in-law, etc." and "My Self-Portrait."

*

"Revue Hebdomadaire" publie (Déc. 1934) Chaplín par Clara Goll, à base des souvenirs d'une femme de Chaplín. On y voit combien Chaplín est différent de Charlot. Il faut lire ça.

["Revue Hebdomadaire" (Dec. 1934) has Chaplin by Clara Goll, based on the memories of one of Chaplin's wives. One sees there how much Chaplin differs from Charlot. A must-read.]

*

Un camelot débite sa marchandise–l'éloquence populaire et l'esprit de la foire. Scene à traiter dans "Vestiaire."

[A peddler peddles his wares–popular eloquence and the spirit of the marketplace. Scene to be played in "Vestiare."]

*

Everyone runs from their own thoughts. He who goes down the stairs, gets on a train, walks down the street, etc., what he's doing is running from his thoughts.

*

The Metropolitan Pierre, successor to the Patriarch Thakou, and present head of the Russian Orthodox church, is in harmony with the Soviet. The Russian priest émigrés have placed themselves under the authority of Constantinople's patriarch. A kind of schism in the bosom of the Russian church.

*

The spot or place or landscape or road of the world, where no one has ever gone and nothing has ever happened.

*

Le petit Prince Paul amené à une parade militaire, en tant qu'éritier du trône, pousa des cris d'épouvante è la vue des soldats, des chevaux, des tanks, etc.

[The little Prince Paul brought to a military parade, as heir to the throne, cried out with fear upon seeing the soldiers, horses, tanks, etc.]

*

The boy who said, pointing to his mother's genitals: mommy, you have hair here.

The mother slapped him: whack! don't be fresh.

The boy saw, however, something that exists and his knowledge was broken and contradicted by his own mother, in whose word he had complete faith.

This is the root of the social farce and of the failures of history and of the struggles among men.

*

A new theatrical aesthetic: a play in which the author, together with his family and relatives, lives with the characters he has created, and they take part in his daily life, his interests and passions. Either they don't know or they confuse the theatrical characters with the living people of reality.

*

Love and the character of lovers. The modern tragedy between the rights of men and those of women.

*

Perhaps the Indo-American tone in the style and in the soul?

*

Be careful with the human substance of poetry!

*

Decomposition or vivisection of the process of creating a poem.

*

The husband and wife are arguing: even if we were in paradise, you'd try to hog the best seat. Madame Jhal. Comical.

*

If life isn't going to be pretty,
then let them eat it all.

*

The man who never cried once in his 80 years of life.

*

Spain's lack of understanding of South American writers who, out of fear, did not dare to be Indoamericans, but were almost totally Spanish. (Rubén Darío and others.)
Lorca is Andalusian. Why don't I have the right to be Peruvian? So that they'll tell me they don't understand me in Spain? I, or an Austrian or an Englishman, can understand the pure-blooded stylistic turns of Lorca and Co.

*

A man recalls his happy past and recounts his successes to another who recalls a painful past and recounts his failures one by one. A terrible contrast in dialogue.

*

A visit to the cemetery Sunday, November 7, 1937, with Georgette. The conversation begins with G.'s selfishness — dialectic of selfishness-altruism —. We go on to dialectics in general. I mention *Trilce*

and its dialectical axis of mathematical order — 1-2-0 — "Scales": or instrument and knowledge: the dialectical rigor of the objective and subjective world. Its greatness and misery or impotence.

I refer to Hegel and Marx, who did not create but discovered the dialectical law. I go on to myself whose position goes beyond the simple observance of this law and comes to be suspicious of it and takes a critical and revolutionary attitude to this dialectical determinism. Then I think about Pascal, whose thought figures, without a doubt, among those who inspired a greater dialectical velocity, passing from materialism or scientism (its physics), to philosophy, then to metaphysics, then to religion, then to Christianity, and, finally, to Catholicism.

We arrive at the cemetery reciting my verse: "To be a poet until one is no longer a poet," and the other one "the enormous quantity of money it costs to be poor."

The tomb of her mother. The contemplation of death, from the biological and vital point of view (mother, lover, the nine months and mother afterwards, outside the womb).

Autumn — Dry Leaves — Cold — Return —.

A cat at the foot of the church leads to a discussion of legendary animals. Anecdotes from the book about the female cat who raised little chickens, the lion and the slave, the cat and the dove he devoured after licking its wounds, because of the smell of its blood.

I think about my cat who, sitting on the table, intervened in a poem I was writing, stopping my pen with his paw following the flow of my writing. It was the cat who wrote the poem.

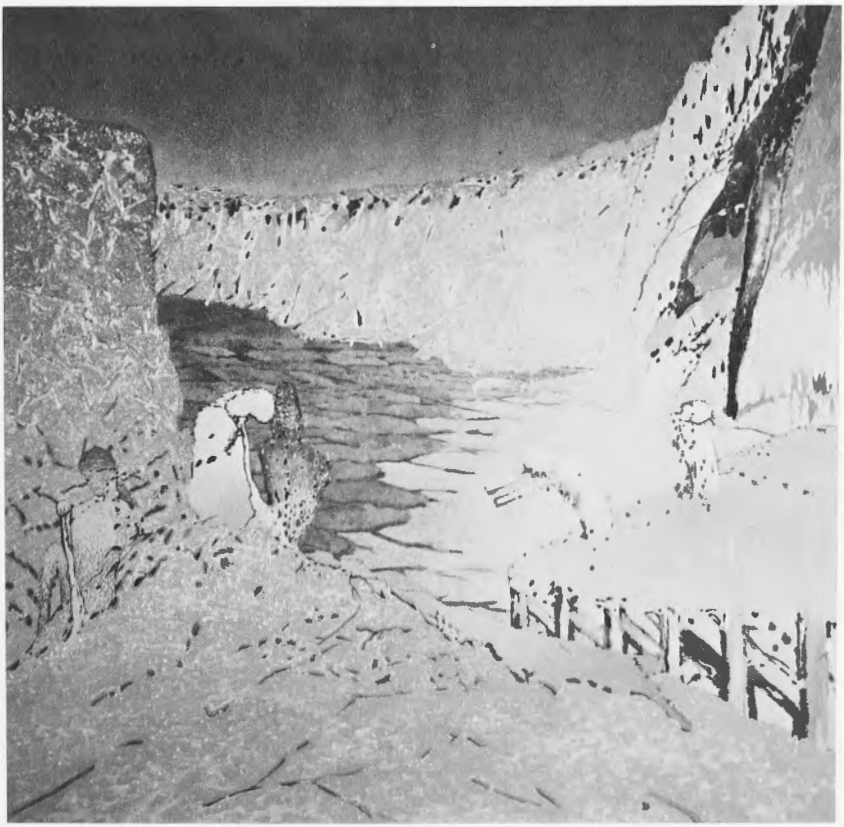
Then I think about Verlaine and his poem to his "I".

— Is it better to say "I"? Or better to say "the man" as the subject of the emotion — lyric and epic —. Of course, it is deeper and more poetic to say "I" — taken naturally as a symbol of "everyone" —.

Upon leaving the cemetery, we see a crucifix on a tomb and we talk of the Christian "hope" in the beyond: the tremendous creation of Jesus, born from the greatest depths of human sorrow — After the war it must have produced an enormous renaissance in the Christian conception of man's destiny. Etc.

IRVING PETLIN

Six Paintings



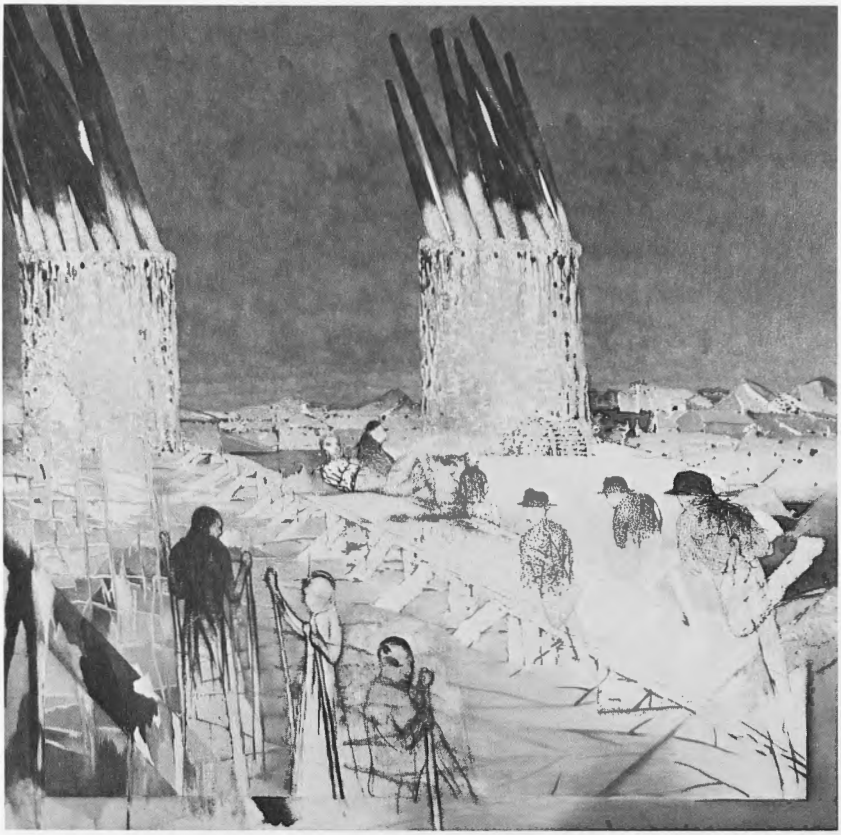
LE DEPART

Oil on Canvas / 48" x 48" / 1975

NEW STONE RING

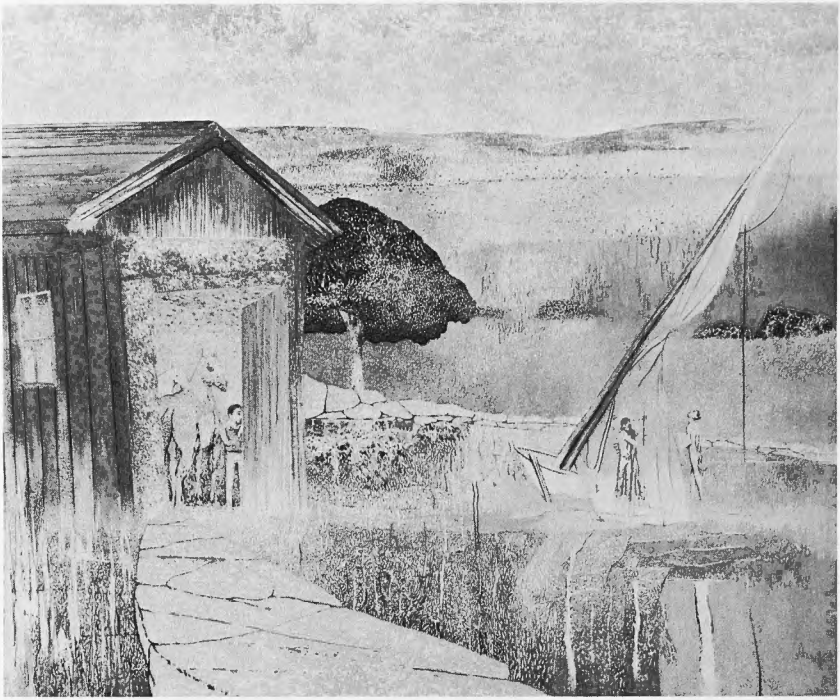
Oil on Canvas / 1975

BIRTH TIDE
Oil on Canvas / 1975



WHERE DAMEN ENDS / 1977-81

ABRAHAM'S WAGON . . . (CORTEZ)
Oil on Canvas / 44" x 44" / 1985



THE FARMER RON AGNEW

Oil on Canvas / 78" x 96" / 1985

IRVING PETLIN & MICHAEL PALMER

The Rightness to be Depicted

M. We might begin[1] by looking at what, in a recent interview, you seem to be elaborating as a poetics of painting. When you use words like "periodicity," "relation" and "repetition" you're using terms that cross with those often associated with the poetics of writing as well, and I was wondering if you could elaborate a little further on your sense of how these things operate in your work.

I. In the interview you refer to,[2] I was describing a kind of young revelation related to my seeing for the first time the work of Van Gogh. On that occasion the things that I was trying to understand about drawing were suddenly kind of blasted into my brain by an encounter with the Van Gogh show–after years of working in the basement of the Art Institute studios and children's classes, and not understanding the relationship between what I was doing downstairs and what was going on in the galleries upstairs, because I never visited them. I did so, and it was the Van Gogh show, and it was during that moment of the Van Gogh show in the years, perhaps 1948, 1947, that I recognized an aspect of making art that would probably stay with me for the rest of my life. And that is the surface itself. The thing made is a network. It's not a simple flatness or a simple shaping. It's a material. And it's a material which within itself is like a microcosm, a networking of pieces and nodules and framework and so forth. It's that which I saw immediately in Van Gogh, the fact that everything that existed, everything that his eye looked on, everything that was peered at, everything he tried to assume, could not come to him simply. It had to come with this baggage and burden of multiple marks, multiple choices, many nervous movements and agitated increments in order for it to be just *simply* the symbol or representative of what he was looking for.

M. So in a sense it's saying that things don't signify in isolation. You can't simply "pluck" something, but in fact they signify entirely in relation, through a network of correspondences. Would that be . . .

I. Yes. For example, when I think of the modernist line, that is from Matisse to Elsworth Kelly, there is a beauty and a grace and a loveliness to it, and a kind of summary of the world. I also recognize the moment I see that, that that's not the way I see the world. And I knew this very early on. Whether that's a burden or a gift I'm not certain, but I knew that very early. *That* summary was not my task. My task was to go into the material itself and create its nuclear structure, in the sense of the dot, line, tactile pattern of the thing described. That it was not its contour or its grace in space but its *impregnated presence* I was looking for.

M. "Signifying capacity" in a certain way.

I. Yeah. The, in a sense, rightness. The rightness to be depicted.

M. It seems also that is part of what your career represents–a resistance to decoration in the easiest sense, a resistance to art as decor, with the attendant effort to build a structured meaning, a structured meaning that in itself resists appropriation.

I. I've often wondered why I feel so compelled to work a subject or a form to that point where it in its own right receives light, has neighbors, has a geography within the picture, has a topography and a gravity and a weight, as well as a color and a light. In a sense the question always is, wouldn't it be easier *not* to be concerned with the completeness of an imagery . . . After all, it's still something invented, something in a sense plucked from the mind and not from nature itself. Why, and yet there has never been a way for me not to depict in this way. This is the depicted spirit that inhabits the work, and it's a labor which is a given. It's no longer a question for me. I used to wonder a lot more about it than I do now. Now I just simply accept it as the way I work.

M. It could be that that would be one reason you've found it necessary to work in a series over time, because, from this geography of the imagination you construct, there's always more to be found in a given area. It's in a certain way inexhaustible, and it's there to be read over and over.

I. Right. And the single picture is never the fullest extent possible. There are certain pictures that are unique in themselves, that have within them the whole. But that's rare. I think more typical would be the series which covers a "region." In one of Kafka's great stories, I think it's "The Bucket Rider," after this poor soul has failed to find more than a few coals he–in a sense it's a description of his death. Death by freezing. Kafka's description. "And with that I ascend into the regions of the ice mountains and am lost forever." That's a phrase that stuck with me all my life from the time I read it, because in a way when I think of an idea of a place it is as if I'm seeing it from the region of the ice mountains. I'm looking from that perspective. Whether I work large or small, we're always looking at a region of the ice mountains and in a way that's what I described earlier. Maybe it's a burden or a gift, but that's how I see.

M. That also implies working from a situation of loss. That is, beginning with very reduced means and working from there. I mean that story, to pick that one, the content of that story also implies that. And it's also very significant, it seems to me, that in the complex mix of roots that your work derives from it would also be a tale out of that particular Middle European cultural tradition which would continue to signify.

I. When I was younger I didn't find the connection between my own history and the history of my own family and my own work to be so. . . In other words, my self-knowledge was insufficient to understand how consistent was the pattern that had set itself into motion very early on. As if you watch for a very long time a merry-go-round. It's incomprehensible, largely, except when it slows down there are parts of it that you begin to see . . . and then somewhere in mid-life one begins to actually see, the merry-go-round has slowed sufficiently so one can actually see all the intact lines that connect such a simple choice. For example, this particular image and the whole history of my own family which is an immigrant family, a first-born life. The life of the first-born in a new place with all of its built-in insecurities regarding permanence, questions of security, questions of belonging in a world which seems so alien on so many levels, religious, economic and political. But little by little the story or others like it and the nature of the work all begin to connect. Perhaps it may have been ten years ago when I began to see the lines that take me back. They correspond to the history of my own family, the history of my own life. That those choices were made sort of like Bacon

said when someone asked him why his painting was so viciously rendered in a kind of torn way. He said, "Well, Iwas wounded very young, and it took me my whole life to develop the technique to render it." You see, in a way it's not that I'm saying that there was a wound, but that there was a disruption in a cultural pattern of which I was the recipient.

M. There was a fracture.

I. That's right. There was a fracture.

M. And you operate within that fracture.

I. That's right.

M. But you don't artificially close that fracture.

I. That's right. That's right.

M. It seems in an interesting way too. . . and this is possibly something our work has in common . . . that there's a great deal of autobiographical material, and yet it's not the telling in some literal sense of a story. It's as if the narrative were implied or suggested by the accretion of referential elements. So that you get the sense of it being personal, so to speak, and deeply felt, but at the same time it's not a question of what we would think of as the autobiographical genre. The story itself seems to exist in that fracture and to be in a certain way unspeakable. And so you have to find these other approaches. Is that fair to say?

I. That's fair to say. The approach is what is constantly changing. The fracture remains constant. The fracture is the permanent part of personality. The approach is experimental. Not in its twentieth-century sense. Experimental in the sense . . .

M. Exploratory.

I. Exploratory in the true sense of experimental. That is, one tries to see from a changed perspective, or perhaps in certain cases from a more intense view, the same material over and over. If the word "repetition" entered . . . this is a very good and likely place for it to enter, because repetition, reiteration, is a way of refining the view by changing by centimeters only the perspective of the "ledge" from which you're peering down into the subject matter. Nonetheless that slight change alters a great deal of the way in which it can be seen and illuminated.

M. It's as though "experiment" were being used in the sense of the nineteenth-century laboratory, where you would set up an experiment, working with tools that are probably unthinkable now, buckets, little jars and so on. A one-to-one relationship with these things. Over time you would change the relationship, the ratio, of this thing and that thing in the dish until something emerged that you could know. And it seems very much that kind of intense looking and trying again and looking again until whatever is the secret of this thing, the solution, begins to be articulated. Maybe it's a good time too to begin to talk about the recurrent figures which have always fascinated me because they are essentially inexplicable and yet profoundly meaningful at multiple levels. I'm referring to the rowers and the dustblowers, and more recently the burning boat that has come into the work. The green chair. I'm interested in, if it's possible to speak of, the origins of these things. How they come to be meaningful in the work. Because I see a lot of, in contemporary painting and poetry equally, arbitrary insertion or contrivance of an image for effect, pulled from nowhere and placed in the work in the hope that it will create sensation or have meaning *per se*. Maybe sometimes that can be a mode of procedure, but it seems to me that you work in a very different territory that's accretive and from which somehow images arise.

I. "Accretive" is a good descriptive word because the dustblowers and the rowers, the early figures which were continuously present from the early '60s on, are creatures which do represent . . . they're the philosophical underpinnings of the work in the sense

that they do limn the creature that must represent the way I think. The rower never rows on water in any of my pictures. The rower is called the rower and yet I can't think of a single picture where the rower is actually rowing on water. The rower is always rowing on dry land or in dust or in cracked fields or in a highway of stone and rock. The rower is the quintessential struggle against the given, the thing as is, the world as is, the history, the sediment that we call our time. And the rower is the struggler against that. The rower suggests very early to me the kind of person who–unlike a glistening, accepting, co-opting entity–the gritty creature who views his own period in time and carries with him all its horror and all its cruelty and yet moves on, and yet survives, and yet continues. The early depictions of the rower were all two-sticked figures, a person walking, generally with two sticks. There were other rowers that succeeded which seemed to be single-sticked figures, poling figures. But the earliest were double-sticked figures. I think that's the more primitive version, because it was closer to the mark in the inventive sense of the creature who works against the ground-reality of his own period and time and is not humbled by it or beaten or defeated, but is nonetheless marked. It is not a happy figure. He never was, or she, as a creature, an exultant figure, but was always a persistent one. If any phrase could describe the nature of the figure, it would be that it always moved and continued to dominate the picture, the space. Even if it was a tiny figure in a large landscape, the sightliness of the picture, the way it was put together architecturally, always led you to a contemplation of what this figure was doing. Even though it was doing very little it was *present*, and that's the way I feel it was meant. That's what it was meant to *represent*.

M. And again the notion of "accretive," in that these signs that come to be in the painting seem to acquire greater and greater meaning across the experience of their reappearances, so that their meaning modifies, but it also contains the previous meanings. Just as in poetry, for example, as a poet's system of signs comes into play across the duration of the work, at first there's almost an arbitrary feeling of not being sure what they mean. You begin to learn what they mean by initially trusting to their appearance and then learning to read them yourself, what they have to say.

I. I quite agree that there is a real analogy here, because when the figures begin to look like the landscape that they were traversing, in a sense the same cracked organization, the same kind of fractured organization began to be the characteristic figure. They

simply were sucking up the land they were moving over, and it was being transformed into their very person. Unlike Arcimboldi (I'm not sure how that jumped into my head), the making up of a figure of vegetables, these were creatures made up of minerals and the irradiated earth they were moving across. And in a way that was never a conscious decision on my part, it was simply a result of what you mentioned as being the role, the repeating gesture, the gesture of letting a figure run again through the page or through the surface, and watching how it takes on its own history and in a sense creates its own history over time. Only *that* way creates certain kinds of twentieth-century imagery. The kind of art that produces flash imagery that results from photography, advertising, and so forth, is not the same thing. And the artist whose origins lie in those worlds, in the worlds of reproduction that come with the camera, could not produce a figure like that. Nor could I produce a figure like them. That's where I'm really separate. I've never worked off of that kind of world. It's the world of grinding out one's psychology into material that I have been practicing, not the other.

M. A lot of the tension in those figures seems to arise in a way that extends too to your later "landscapes," which is to say that there is a character of the commonplace (granted that, paradoxically, the strange or even bizarre is often noticed first). I mean the rower, the sailboat, or the barn which has entered your work in an interesting way in recent years. It's the character of what one can see around one at a given place all the time. But then also the character of the unseeable, of the thing which is an entirely interiorized element that comes to meet this otherwise relatively representational thing. And it seems a tension throughout the work, such that we look at some of the later landscapes, for example, if we can call them that provisionally, and they're at once recognizable and nonexistent, except as they come to be on the canvas. It's interesting in the complex history of your own learning process there was the intercourse with the Surrealists, and yet finally this is a very different thing from the surrealist image. One can see a kind of learning from there, just as one can see a learning from there among many other American painters who don't resemble you. But finally what emerges as metaphor, whatever it may want to be called, has a strikingly different semantic resonance and presence, both painterly and in terms of how it means throughout the work. Which is why I think the too easy assessments of people from their origins tend to miss the point of what they arrive at, tend to become facile explanations. Yet it is interesting to look also at the diversity of

your sources. You've named Van Gogh, De Kooning, Francis Bacon, Odilon Redon, et al, as well. It's not a simple picture. And we could bring in German Expressionism, I suppose. It's a very complex melding which in its own way is curiously American in its multiplicity of references and uses.

I. Even as I looked out at the prospect of being an artist, you know, thirty years ago, I recognized very quickly how this period was different from all the time that preceded, because we could not *not* know everything. You couldn't go ahead and make pictures and say I didn't know such a picture existed or had been done by somebody at another time. We were given a privilege and a burden all at the same time, and the privilege was to know pretty much everything, if one was really persistent and intense; and at the same time the burden was, what then was there left to do? And in fact I felt there was a lot to do. And I still feel that way. But I don't feel that one could go ahead and practice an art without knowing all that one could know about what it has really shaped and formed and taken from. In the early fifties in art school, I was part of a group of young people who all felt this way. We were already a separate group from our colleagues in that we were shaping our own work not out of a narrow bin that happened to be Chicago 1952, 1953, but at that time we were very interested in the Surrealists, and the interest remained very strong until my visit to France in the late fifties, early sixties, when in fact I began to show in the same gallery with some of the Surrealists and began to know them. But my interest in the Surrealists waned at that very moment, because in a way I recognized there was a fundamental difference, not only generational, but a fundamental difference in the way we saw the world and the way our work was invested with the properties of the world and human experience, including our own autobiographical selves. The Surrealists struck me at the time as being more synthetic than I had understood to be the case. There was much more posturing and taking of stances and positions for the sake of an onlooker or being onlookers themselves. Being an onlooker to your own work. Whereas I felt a much more primitive urge to go to the roots of what was my own experience and not be, in a sense, burdened by the theatrics, you might say, of production and positioning *vis à vis* the art world and *vis à vis* contemporary fashion.

M. Their obsessions with strategies, publicity, and so on.

I. Right. And that was what could only come from, in this case, the privilege of having been there at the time Max Ernst was still working. Even Giacometti was no longer a Surrealist, my contact with Giacometti was extremely rewarding.

M. In the midst of that, if I may interrupt for a second, you can see why Giacometti was no longer a Surrealist, because it seems to me he had to make the same kind of withdrawal and re-evaluation of what the meaning of the work was. It would have had nothing to do with all that, even though his surrealist works are extraordinary.

I. Wonderful. Extraordinary. Yes, exactly, exactly. But Paris at that time was for me very much a continuation of what I had started to do. Very much also a kind of re-evaluation of what the early impulses had been and what the early heroes might have seemed like from a distance. The near and up close view began to change what I was starting to think of as this brief moment in time and history. My own personality began to emerge. At the very time that I was welcomed by these people into their midst, I was in every sense of the word the ungrateful young American. (Laughter.)

M. It's very striking to me, because as you know I've been translating these essays and talks of surrealist poets on painting and collage, and a couple of things have struck me in not a good sense. One of them being the manipulation of rhetoric in the form of address to the audience. And the other is a certain degree of superficiality in relation to painting itself and collage itself. With an eye to, in an almost militaristic way, forcing a position and making a headline. So I found the work obviously provocative for that moment in time, and one doesn't deny the significance; and yet at this point rather thin and not in any way truly observant of the state of that art at that particular moment. Giving impetus (certainly unintentionally) to what was to follow, a kind of avant-gardism that is more style than substance. The seeds of it being there, though I still admire Ernst and many of the other painters for their ultimate accomplishment. You can see very clearly, in retrospect, the seeds of a certain ambition which seems now to have exploded. This would also have to do, I suppose, with the fact that in your work, rather than images being imposed or synthesized, put together using chance and other methods, they are emergent from what you said is a psychic landscape, as an interiorized understanding of things. Getting on to the sense of landscapes, obviously there's the play of

interior and exterior in them as well. One of the things that's fascinated me about some of the recent work at the Marlborough show late last winter is a play on the pastoral mode, a coming to understand . . . There's almost a haunted pastoral character. You seem to represent both what pastoral attempted to embody and the impossibility of that, all at once. Is that something you can elaborate on?

I. Yes. I'm thinking of what in the last few years I was trying to do, and the Vineyard has played a very important role, that coming here each summer, becoming tuned to light and foliage. I'm a person who comes from the desert in my work. That is, from dry landscape to a lush place where water and foliage are present in abundance. You mentioned the haunted pastoral. What I wanted to find was how this world which is present and so vulnerable and tangential to the real world could be depicted in a way that would imply it's fragility, almost dreamlike, as if it's a vapor which could disappear in a moment. How to make agriculture and the sea meet, and in a way "The Farmer Ron Agnew" is that picture. It's the most specific depiction of the sea meeting agriculture in a romantic embrace, which I find to be a great moment in my own world. That is, to feel how beauty could actually exist in a singular place, an actual place. But at the same time to be so frightened for its fragility, its . . .

M. Transitoriness?

I. Transitoriness, and that it's available to only a small number of people who happen to be lucky enough, or whatever, to have passed through at the right moment with the right means. And I find that so special in its own way. In effect, the pastoral pictures are the most Seurat-like in the break-up of color, as if it's about to break apart, you see. No pictures are as broken as these last pictures in terms of points of light and color, as if it's about to decompose as quickly as it composed itself. In a way I made it so, because that's how I had meant to signify its fragility. I believe the work is now probably heading away from that. But the point was, I guess up until the last show which contains the pictures that really express this, I was heading towards wanting to bring this union together and at the same time show it to be so capable of being decomposed. As if the points of color on the canvas could head for the other side and simply leave the void that is constant.

M. You've also spoken to me about the Renaissance martyr pictures and the influence they once had, where you see this landscape and in it an event curiously reduced in scale.

I. That's true. That kind of picture has always been haunting. The picture in which the saints were beheaded in these glades, these gorgeous places, or else pierced with arrows, or in some way mutilated in the midst of this immense wooded forest. It's always been a curious idea, because it doesn't sound and represent and feel like the world we live in. It's a very contemporary idea. We live in the midst of some extraordinary beauty and extraordinary time. At the same time, the bestiality that characterizes our time just continues in crevices and corners. It's some kind of reality that I don't know how to deal with.

M. It seems, and particularly now in the Reagan years, the paradox of our own, of the American reality, one that is probably materially more abundant, let's say, certainly not richer, but more abundant than at any time in the past. And, therefore, one can hide in that materiality. One can create enclaves that have nothing to do with what is literally happening in the world. The Reagan years seem to me a willful forgetting, a turning away toward a, you could call it a suburban reality, though it isn't exclusively that.

I. Actually, Sarah put it very well. Sarah, my wife, said the Reagan years have given people the *permission* to be selfish, self-centered, completely self-involved and *mean* to people who have less. And it has given them *permission* to feel this without guilt and without fear or worry that someone will look down upon them for feeling this. It's a very good characterization of the kind of psychology that these people have put out into the atmosphere of this country in the years they have been in power. People do not fear being *racist*. The next step is they don't fear *killing* large numbers of people for an abstract idea which has no bearing on the . . . That's the kind of permissiveness . . .

M. In a sense, it seems to me a recovery of ignorance from the knowledge that was beginning to come in the post-Vietnam years which was a very, very important knowledge about American imperial potential. Potential cruelty, actual cruelty, and an evidence of

what those abstractions can lead to. And now there seems to me a very deliberate and programmatic *coup de torchon,* a wiping the slate clean.

I. That's right. One of the programmatic aspects of the Reagan years has been to get rid of the Vietnam allergy, just like the Japanese came out of World War II with an atomic allergy. They could not ever rearm and become involved with nuclear weaponry. The Reagan people really talked about, openly, getting rid of the Vietnam allergy and in a sense taking the United States out of history again, just like we were pre-Vietnam. And Vietnam gave us a taste of what it felt like to be a loser. To be an aggressor but then to end up being a victim of your own aggression. And in a way that was the history that most cultures have experienced and why they have a bit of wisdom, if they have. This country was given that kind of wisdom with the Vietnam War. And the Reagan people programmatically have tried to change that and get rid of that allergy and return us to that state of being outside history. I think that's what characterizes it: militarize the options.

M. You just brought up the necessity of not removing oneself. I was struck by your comment to David Shapiro (in the Marlborough catalogue) that you had not depicted the Holocaust because you had not felt, I forget the exact words, you had not felt you knew how to do it at a certain point. One of the things that struck me was that, to me, there seemed to be a way that you were always depicting it, at least taking it as an altering fact. As a stoppage in time which made whatever landscape and whatever figure you portrayed after that moment different. It seems to me in that respect maybe you are depicting it in the only way that it's possible to depict it–in its unspeakable nature.

I. I quite agree with what you're saying, that there has been a tingeing or a singeing of every figure because of that fact. And yet there are still territories that I would like to enter and try to more specifically aim at or focus on the question of something as momentous and separate as that. I may or may not get to it, because it may prove to be that what I have done at various times is, as you say, the only way to do it. But I'm still waiting for that "ledge" to lead to something that will more directly engage me. I'm not sure when that will come, but I'm holding myself, literally, in readiness for that

possibility. There have been some thoughts on my part about the "Abraham's Wagon," the image of "Abraham's Wagon" which is, after all, just my grandfather's horse in Chicago. As children we rode it, and it was a sort of thing that I carry with me, and my brother carried with him, and my younger brother carried with him as one of the most marvelous of our younger experiences. I analyzed recently the architecture of all the "Abraham's Wagons," and they correspond *exactly* to the photographs the Germans took of the exodus of Warsaw. The streets, the angles, the horse coming up the street, the way in which you see it, *exactly* replicate the angle of the bringing of the Jews out of Warsaw. The famous photographs in the Stroop Archive at the New York Institute . . .

M. That's what I immediately saw in looking at that series, that it was an enfolding of autobiographical fact with this other "fact" that is in a sense "pre-memory" for you, prior, a representation that extends beyond the remembered into a deeper, historical memory. And that these two in an interesting way, in the character of your human experience, are coincident. That one cannot remove one from the other to be true to whatever memory is. One cannot censor . . . memory . . . I certainly don't mean either Jungian or "racial" memory, but I mean in the historical sense that memory is cumulative. And therefore in your work a multiplicity of temporal dimensions is embodied. This is true also in what we speak of as your portraits, where one figure from the present will often merge with another, ancestral figure. There's no single, separate reality. Maybe that brings us back to your very early observation regarding Van Gogh, that things are not isolated, they they signify in relation. I'd like at this point to give you a quote. I've always been interested in the way you imply narrative by working in the margins of narrative, by leaving the story that is present essentially untold, there for the viewer to recount to him or herself. This suggests a certain proximity to the work of the poet Edmond Jabès in *The Book of Questions*, where he is recounting the occasion of exile, the occasion of post-Holocaust experience, and leaving the thing at the heart unspoken. I wonder if you would be interested in commenting on a quotation from an interview[3] with him:

> If the Jew is "the other," it is because by trying to be, at any price, himself, he is each time *more*, a being from nowhere. That is where his difference, and the distance at which he maintains himself, is inscribed.
>
> I would even go as far as saying that this *more*–which is, in fact a *less* as it is an emptiness that always has to be

> filled–is his only difference. The lack is the source of his questioning.
>
> That is also why his gaze cannot stop at the level of the simple appearances. To his eyes these are never more than a stage. It is as if he had a second gaze widening the visual field excessively and giving credit to the idea that behind every reality there lies an even more tangible reality. It is by this always unsatisfied gaze that Jews recognize each other.

In other words, that seems in part to address the nature of the type of image we are trying to define here, that comes to be in your work.

I. In a way, the kind of life that characterized the European Jew is implicit in the nature of the other. The other is also a world within a world. The Jew always lived as a world within another world, and that went on for centuries and centuries and centuries. The development of a completely self-enclosed reality of logic and law and morals, religious practice and so forth, within another culture is an incubator for the kind of mind that burst out in the twentieth-century when this world was exploded and Jews ventured into one much larger–both in Europe and the United States. The result was that a mind that had been focussing on an convoluting reality within another larger reality suddenly was free to think about *reality*, period. The result was, I think, the Jewish mind confronted a great dilemma. If it was a mind involved in the making of word-pictures, poetry and prose, then the creature who emerges in my mind as the perfect writer is Kafka, the perfect example of the self-enclosed creature being exposed to the outside, and then finding his resources are a mind-set that was formed a long time ago. For the visual artist the problem was different. Already being a first generation creature (that is, the Diaspora has led over water to another place separated by a lot of time and space), only the accident of growing up in a gentile environment made me think, quickly and for my own safety and preservation, about the nature of the other, of being the other in the midst of another culture. The very fact that my own neighborhood duplicated the European experience in America was crazily crucial, even though it could have been quite different; but it did emphasize what was in fact a "known" to me very early on: that there was a sense of being the other within a larger context which was *still* not the majority culture. I guess that moment in growing up in its own way reinforced what were undoubtedly instincts in that direction, and that's how I would respond to it. I would recognize what he said.

M. There seems to me a significant conjunction between your first consciousness of your own art and the fact of the Second World War, the mass destruction of cities, the Holocaust. Along with the Final Solution there was apocalypse as represented by the nuclear bomb. Both of those events represent, in their ways, the end of time. That does seem to signal the end of the "modern" in the sense in which Michel Foucault talks about the "modern," which is to say that moment in the middle of the nineteenth-century when Baudelaire and others look at the modern world and try to penetrate what the modern representation is. They use the word "modern" to stand for "presentness" in a new way. This begins immediately to be embodied in that art which is meant to be at once *of* and *out of* its time. They are looking at the things of that . . . Baudelaire observing the dark waistcoats of Paris pedestrians, the people "in mourning," as he puts it; and wondering at the hallucinatory quality of the actual. You seem to come out of Chicago (I'm remembering the observation that you made) at this time when the "modern" is no longer "fact" in the same way. That you are given this dubious gift of having available all these different times, so that the artist is no longer "in the moment" quite as the artist could have been before. Yet, this seems very interestingly to be not only an artistic problem, but a problem *of* the world itself. A conjoining. In other words, that's not simply to my mind an aesthetic apprehension on your part, but also an historical apprehension about what it is to be in a world that comes after the modern. This relates to something I've noticed. I haven't seen all that much of the critical literature concerning your work, but I don't think anyone has quite come to understand the degree to which you have looked at the progress of American painting during the fifties, and the degree to which certain aspects of it are ingrained in your technique. Perhaps the fact that your work is not identifiable as part of a school or trend, people have not seen what you derived even from the Action Painters. The marks of that learning can be found all over the work. That's more or less, than a question, but maybe you could just take that last part.

I. One of the distinguishing marks of somebody who is not an American realist is that I've never felt that the choices were between abstraction and the study of nature. That seems to be an unfocussed choice. If the twentieth-century is about anything, it's not about an emptiness of subject, nor is it about a fullness of rendered subject matter. It seems to me it's about our minds taking a role; artists are intellectuals, they're not mechanics and they just don't produce empty or blank works on the one hand, nor do they produce

simply labors of virtuoso rendition. It seems to me the real territory to be explored, given our experience, given the history of our time, given the moment, was that one had to take reality, what was there, the remnants of it, and abstraction, and make an art of it. That was the problem. Not one or the other. The problem was how do you bring these two factors into play so that a mythology of recognition and revelation is possible. Not either realism or abstraction, but something that was beaten out of those two elements. That's what I set out to do, basically. And in a way that's why I've never been considered wholly an American artist. I'm always somewhere in the mid-Atlantic, because the poetics that are involved in that kind of transformation do not appeal to an American audience, by and large. Just as in the period of Abstract Expressionism during the sixties I almost chose not to show in New York, since it seemed that I could not get a fair hearing because of the nature of what I was doing. It just looked ridiculous to the contemporary art world of that period. I continued to show in Europe, even though I was living in New York starting in 1966.

M. Up to a point though, it does seem paradoxically useful *not* to have been understood and absorbed, in that we've seen so much decay from the moment of resistance in American painting. On through the fifties it did maintain, at its best, a rather heroic capacity of resistance. I mean an effort by those painters who came to their work in the late thirties and early forties to resist what the culture was coming to represent. Then, perhaps inevitably, came the appropriation of that generation, its recovery as propaganda for the American Way. And of course the commoditization of that work, its acceptance into the salons and board rooms, and the astounding prices. And certain of them began to grow accustomed to that position, with the marked exception of those artists who went about their business and others who suffered greatly in the event. I think of Philip Guston, for example, maintaining an effort of real focus on the work, whatever it demanded. In his case it demanded that he give up all that they asked him to continue reproducing– mechanically reproducing, as Walter Benjamin might put it. It seems that, now that you have (we hope) survived the worst of that, the work itself benefits by having only itself, by being freed of its own image-making power in the commercial world. In other words, it's difficult to understand what it would be like to be a twenty-three year old painter just emerging into some promise and to be given a retrospective two years later. Or to be so praised by the powers that be

that you are outside yourself a short time after your first work. I don't know how work can survive that.

I. It's an accelerated world, the art world today. The galleries are the historical brokers of twentieth-century art. We can think of better systems, but realistically we can't bring them into being. But as the galleries become this kind of creature in its own right, that is a work of art in its own right, not a very happy work of art, but nonetheless a kind of invention. The pushing and promoting of younger and younger artists with less and less of a history and knowledge of themselves in their work is a self-impelled disaster, and it's becoming more and more evident.

M. What you describe is in graphic parallel much more something like the world of popular music than to a world of artists. Bands or singers are given a year or two, a mad fling, unimaginable material rewards, and then they're tossed aside because they can't produce surface freshness, novelty, anymore.

I. And because there's always someone waiting in line who will take more risks, who will bend their minds and bend their bodies more than those who preceded them to produce what a sated public continually demands.

M. It also seems an interesting mirror of what we were just discussing, the Reagan years, in that this promotion of the myth of the untutored, pure genius, immediately producing marketable work, is a way of forgetting history too, and forgetting labor. It's a way of producing this years hoola hoop and fantasizing about profit. It seems to me that this is the point where painting does pass over into exactly that area of pure decor and immediate gratification. Rather than having the kind of textuality that calls for an effort of response and that maintains its own resistance to glib readings, to continue that metaphor. And yet who could think of a more appropriate thing at the moment.

I. It is appropriate, and in a certain way painters including myself don't feel unhappy or threatened by it. It's a kind of self-cleansing activity. That is, it would happen no matter what,

because everything has been geared to and prepared for it. This political and social climate is the perfect setting for what's taking place. It would happen because the art world has progressively lost its critical sense and become more and more commercialized while trying to remain connected to serious painting. It is increasingly becoming a futures market for young monied classes, those who have made money in such a way that they can only imagine art being made in the same way. Certain people, including myself, find it fascinating and want it to run its course. It is kind of . . . like the wind pruning the tree. It's a natural pruning that's going on. I have survived a lot and I will survive this moment. In fact this is the easiest time I've ever had, because there's no congruence between what's going on and what I'm trying to do. Whereas before there was a tension and a dialogue, the struggle between the contending critiques. It's like watching the wind prune the tree. It'll take the dead wood and just scatter it.

M. Obviously in Chicago you felt a certain degree of community with the young artists who were coming up. Was there a moment after you began to live in New York in '66 when that was also present?

I. There was, but it was not present in an aesthetic union. It was present in a political union. The camaraderie of the sixties was political, not aesthetic. Let's say the middle sixties on. And eventually the late sixties really revolved around the Art Workers' Coalition and "art strike" and the various political actions that were a direct result of the Vietnam War. I think the war placed America in a crisis which (although there was an apparent resolution, the war was ended) was never really resolved. In fact, when you speak of the Reagan years, you're speaking of a period when that too is being reversed, stood on its head. At the time, the object was simply to stop the war, to keep us from harming further a distant and essentially underdeveloped people. That was the object, and to transform American society by that lesson into something else. The transformation never happened. The war was stopped. That was the result of all our activities. But the transformation never happened, and the seventies began without the second part of that intent being in the least realized. I think the Reagan years have totally eliminated the ideology, you might say, that surrounded that

instant. And I think we are in a militarization mode again, heading for trouble, and within a few months or years will be involved in another very debilitating struggle like that.

FOOTNOTES

[1] This conversation took place July 17th, 1986, in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, where Irving Petlin's summer studio is located.

[2] "Irving Petlin Talks with Paul Cummings"; DRAWING Vol. VIII, No. 1, May-June 1986.

[3] Interview by Marcel Cohen, translated by Pierre Joris; ACTS 5, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1986.

MARJORIE WALISH

Two Poems

THE LUTE PLAYER

Have you sent me this?
Have you sent for me?
Twisting the ends
belongs here.

Where is my gift?
Contemporaries report
her excavating in vain . . . .
Is this my gift?

Raising your hand, on request,
hoisting it high
in obedience, so to speak,
obedience hoisted

like a beacon
but a beacon
to be disbelieved;
and yet as one

who steps forward
and lividly survives
the space
corrugated with sounds

of singers singing,
so too the beacon
steps forward
and lividly survives

rusted steel
set on the road,
in obedience, so to speak,
to the repair

of the road,
the repair
dragged
quite large

and rendered intelligible
on request.
Rusted steel,
we do not see steel today.

CARPET WITHIN THE FIGURE

Less like a sea, than a sea
that has stuck fast, exodus where repose is notorious and servants
rush in
to obey the satrap's last command,
and in carrying out his wishes bring innumerable torchlit belongings
to coma.
And we can hurry our minds. And we are crying. And we are swept
away by
flammable feelings of undetermined origin,
the way a river refers to the many relatives of the disappeared
and consumed.

The way a river refers to the many sites of oblivion, some reclining,
some instrumental in bringing confusion to storm. In a canopied place
"too far from the stars,"
where repose is notorious and half-spoken to himself,
less like a sea, than a sea that has stuck to itself in extreme
passivity
or extreme position, the extremity of the self enacted through the
body —
these peaches, pears, grapes, trailing harnesses
never to be defined beyond the impermanence of a handful,
unerring to him for the last time.
And we can hurry our minds.
And we are swept away by flammable enthusiasms.

Buried as we were under the weight
of political resolve, and strapped to the earth
as if the earth were alive and we ourselves
were inside it, we emit a scent
and a language enmeshed in human affairs.
A leg dimly suggesting a cast of a leg,
or a chair inverted, for him as for others,
are very explicit pressures, reachable, thinkable.

A leg, bent and dimly suggesting the cast of the cast
of the earth, is at any rate, strapped to a language,
buried under the weight of human affairs.
Inside, we emit a shred, and we ourselves
then become thinkable by a ship
slitting the water with its prow,
and writing on our mind as if the earth were alive
and we ourselves were inside it.

Rich still lifes suggesting a cast of a leg,
for him as for others, are thinkable in a love-hate absorption
with things and with things made contingent.
A cast of a leg in retrograde suggests a crisis lengthwise.
Neither coin nor gem,
the disappeared were less decent than a river, a river aroused.

Pushing a massive pyre into the past, we are reachable by
    melodrama
as if the earth were alive, but taking an extreme position
    within the symbol.
Less like a sea, than a sea
in extreme passivity or extreme position, the extremity of
exodus enacted through the flesh,
where repose is notorious and servants rush in
to obey the satrap's last command like a sea carrying out wishes,
    carrying in
the tributaries of the disappeared,
he is so much smaller than the ignorance which had been
    everything.

HENRI MICHAUX

Of Language and Writing and the Desire to Turn from Them

(Translated from the French by Richard Sieburth)

One does not come across unfinished languages–half-fashioned, abandoned midway (or sooner).

Yet how many *fore-languages* there must have been, left behind, never to be known. Beginnings of something one was not yet aware of, distractions of a moment . . . passing the time while waiting for the hunt to recommence, games played before worlds were there to count.

. . . games later joined by men bent on order, directorial types, future organizers of the planet: masters of repression, banded together to orient, to lead, managing to instill the conviction that obligations and duties were somehow incumbent, going so far–to insure obeisance–as to attribute to these unknown gods the gift of language which was, as a consequence, to be respected, to be studied, in such a manner that everyone would conform to it, submit to it, language as narrow as their own minds, or as emphatic as their classroom styles–the whole thing now a *requirement*.

The passing moment, the surprise of the spontaneous, the instantaneous, would disappear, eliminated. Continuity, now established in language, would not be relinquished, informing every

domain, every structure, everything that follows from structure, unexpected chains, far-reaching, encircling the Earth, an Earth now in chains.

Applied languages, directed languages, organizational tools.

A business enterprise now, language, unbeknown to anybody, takes the place of murmurs, laments (faint or clear), calls. Commanding, commandeering.

Destined to become an ADMINISTRATION into which every conscience must enter.

Master of the situation, language will answer every need (!). Thus tyrannies.

The handcuffs of words are on for good.

They are everywhere: language forming, limiting, grouping. Establishing a society, a nation, locking it up. Everything placed under arrest, each word with its own way of appropriating the world. Everything is to be woven into a web, the web of words, the tree into a web, the passing breeze, into a web the distant and the near, into a web the bird on the wing, into a web the unsettled soul,

even the blood, the racing blood, into a web of boredom, of enslavement, into a common thing, a vulgar, monotonous thing.

In its innocence, it was a long time before mankind realized where it was being led.

. . . to the ultimate stage of abstraction, having at its disposal the power to eliminate the real and the concrete at a single stroke without so much as leaving a single trace of clutter, it makes full use of the greater convenience afforded by languages whose script is consonantal or alphabetical over those whose characters are pictographic or ideographic.

. . . Their considerable languages would serve to increase and expand without cease the ever-growing *nest-egg called memory* (which early civilizations held in particular veneration). Some gift!

The efficiency of memorization made possible by these tools, the brain functions thereby developed, would transform mankind, everybody a student, everybody forming a society, societies, humanity,

human knowledge, and a few centuries down the line (soon), everybody filing into the offices of Universal Science, everything assembled, disassembled.

Pictographic pre-writing probably a curiosity when it first groped into view, taking its first hesitant steps. How many bits of language were invented, with no particular concern for the future, with no idea of gathering them into a collection, much less a preciously guarded collection. Haphazard evocations, such were their more or less fortunate "gestures," back in the days when signs were ushered in, one by one, with uncertainty, signs that would perhaps not last, that would not be adopted, signs, family games at the outset, played at home by small groups, well away from others.

Lacking rules, linked weakly each to each, signs to pass the time, traces on tree trunks whose bark, unnoticed, would then swell and undo them.

Lacking gravity–or at least lacking the specific gravity owners assume once they have claimed the first strokes of inspiration as their property–these evocations, more or less successful, uninsisting,

these inceptions, sometimes merely for a laugh, for a special laugh in the face of the unexpected, in the face of the ambiguous that remains suspect, a sort of interception of chance, of its surprise, toward which they turned, tantalized, intrigued–all this now gone, forgotten.

For the majority of the earliest "readers," the pastime remained somewhat baroque, not without apprehension, the dread of suddenly finding oneself face to face with an animal or a man making threatening gestures or assuming some ill-defined stance that might indicate the presence of danger–but already there were true *connections* coming into being, recognized as harmless by those who were expecting them, having recovered from their initial state of shock and admiration.

Connections that granted an exceptional kind of emotion, a specifically human emotion, personal, shared, an emotion that in its subsequent forms of analogy, simile, and metaphor would become one of

the joys and specialties of literatures and of poems, for readers (or listeners) and inventors alike.

A habit was being formed.

Lines of "credit;" one got into the habit of using these "bridges" linking markings to things, to beings, to gestures, to situations. There were those whose admiration was such that they soon came to know of no others.

And there were those who profited by this considerable power. A new magic force was making its appearance.

Ambiguous, their sense uncertain, impenetrable, bearers of the power each secret possesses, directed signs, signs put into service, enabling clans, secret societies, religions to take shape, inspiring anxieties, fascinating those too weak to look them in the eye.

On the other hand, of all those who have explored, of all those who have poked around the path of pictographic language, how many have given up in discouragement after a hundred characters or

so, or merely sixty, or perhaps less, afraid that any greater number would simply create clutter?

Sounds and alphabets have come out the winners in almost every case. In these languages–curiously–there is no fear of clutter. Twenty thousand, thirty thousand words are not deemed excessive.

Was nobody aware, was there not even the faintest suspicion that man might be just as pleased to chatter away with no more than a few handfuls of words, as he does in his younger years and sometimes in old age?

Man (like bird), a creature of repetition. A child's babble, a fledgling's: cheeping, *repeating*.

Now that one finds oneself for the first time in the presence of thousands of languages on the planet, all itemized, all repressive, some enormous, disciplined, out in force, taking up space, ever encroaching–one tends to wonder. Embarrassed by these overwhelming

riches, there are those in this world who would prefer *a modest, more private language.*

They would prefer to make do–so they believe–with a language whose means are limited, a language not to be enlarged or extended, a language fulfilling a few basic needs, among friends (and refusing hangers-on); not territorial, not aiming to respond to everything, to cover the entire ground of the Earth, even less to conquer, to convince, to subjugate, to occupy a country or span a lifetime spent in its service, but a language with flavor, with privacy.

Small bits of language, well chosen, would do, would please, after a while, would change.

A language without pretense, for those whose knowledge is without pretense.

Hardly a language at all, yet fully alive, emotions rather, in signs whose sole decipherment would lie in distress, in ill-humor. Signs, the lack of which now leadeth our lives into frustration.

After millennia, the desire for the sign, for the pictograph, still intact.

With its own means, its own ease, its own deliverance.

Beyond the world of utilitarian signals (another chain in the making), a future still lies ahead, a vastness, a renewal, a vacation, satisfaction in, and of, itself.

Sign: at last delivering us from litanies of words, from phrases depending on other phrases extending into further phrases, it would set the brain free from local overoccupation.

Back to a primitive operation whose temptation, still unspoken, now receives a fresh impulse.

Signs enabling us to be open to the world in a different fashion, creating and developing a *different function* within man, *disalienating* man.

Steve Benson, Chris Cheek, Allen Fisher

Assumptions Table

Texts derived from transcripts based on sound recordings of performance on 13 July 1984 at Chisenhale Dance Space in London

Do you think that there's an intuitive system to decide that a tape-recorder is recording?

I was wondering why people bought insurance, if they feel like it's a way of belonging to something

It's to do with broking and breaking. If you break things you need insurance to cover your breakage, replacement,

Yes, I would replace almost everything I own if I had the chance or could afford it.

I don't like to miss things, but I get a big kick out of losing things.

Is that because you kick them?

Habits?

Yes, I've got many habits. I don't always recognize them.

I find that when I'm walking down a corridor, I usually tend to walk in the middle at some point which could be called equidistant between the two walls, but sometimes I surprise myself by hugging one of the edges, and I can't explain that, but then I don't think I want to find an explanation anyway.

I find that thinking too much often puts me quite in the dark, a very quiet and secluded space, but still surrounded.

Like a moat?

A goat?

Back, sort of running backwards.

I was thinking of old age but I

That's a funny expression, 'Thinking of old age'

'But I'.

It could be just a habit, or it's just an association or it's the kind of thing that you say without too much forethought.

When he thinks of old age he goes into a rigorous self-improvement pattern; getting up earlier and starting to eat better, looking at himself more closely in the mirror, that kind of thing. It just takes his mind off the problem.

You mean Steve does?

It may have been largely because he didn't really have too much else to do, because, in that, it was like he was living in a certain corner of town and it was quite clear that in one point of the compass but in the other three,

So there's still only four?

Well, I don't know, migration is a difficult business.

But does it just have to come down to numbers, or a choice of directions?

I'm completely dissatisfied with numbers and it makes it a peculiar, to me, not a, but problematical, to have a choice.

Well, the kind of problem you enjoy?

In other words am I rejecting any proportion in particular? I'm afraid to leave anyone out.

I doubt that anyone's quite left 'out', exactly.

I mean we're talking about symmetry for this problem, is it just a matter of what it seems to be from the outside, two ears, two legs, or is it a little bit more intimate?

Well you know there's that expression an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and it always makes me think of cannibalism.

That's a symmetrical expression.

Like one person eating another person.

Is this a proven phenomena? Does it matter whether it is or not?

It's obviously (a) scapegoat, some kind of walkie-talkie between thermometers, yeah!

Like taking a pulse?

Yeah.

That's difficult. I find it very difficult to take somebody else's pulse.

I find it very difficult to be so constantly in the role of insisting on things.

Yes I can imagine that.

Well I don't!

I can't imagine that, but if I could,

He does it a lot though. Did you ever cross the street and forget that you did that?

Yeah. There's a town in California called Mill Valley.

This is upstate? I mean it's

Relatively speaking, yeah.

I bought a newspaper in California on mining, which talked about the concentration tables. The tables that they use to find the various minerals that they're looking for.

Yeah, there are those kinds of people who are constantly looking for minimals.

Do you see this line as a street?

If I could line them up, I feel like I could see them.

I don't understand that.

They're, in other words, a kind of frame that I would really be constructing with the things themselves.

A kind of stretcher?

I came down into the valley and got out of the car having thumbed a lift from this guy who was going partly the direction I was going in, and on one side of the road when I got out of the car there was a large bear in a cage on the back of a lorry. Is that what you mean?

Yeah, because you can locate every perception in an image that way.

So if I see a bottle on a shelf, there's no doubt about sideways?

Well there is a sense of inventing an image.

Which is a little different from imprisoning, that I've been talking about?

I think so. There's also a blur between inventing an image and directly perceiving an image, which might be–what would you call that?

Impersonating a mirage.

Something that's far away, gets close before you know it.

Say humps for 500 yards, is my nearest approximation of that, but that's an in-joke. What is an in-joke?

Inward turning, probably. It doesn't go outward, it doesn't seem to be open.

Where's the humor in that?

It's internal, it's enclosed.

It's like the humor that's in the self-consciousness in seeing myself as a ridiculous fabrication.

So the stomach smiles, so to speak.

It is as though the stomach could speak and with that throws up its real properties.

Shall we just broaden what speech means?

OK, let's broaden what speech means.

If you were closer I could touch you.

Well let's broaden what touch means.

How wide?

Well, I'm not sure that I would think of it in terms of wide or far or broad or deep, but more in a kind of triangle somewhere in the middle of a pink forest where, that's what I'm talking about.

I don't think I've ever seen a pink forest. I could imagine a pink forest. Would it be all may trees? Oh no, it would have to be cherry blossom. Maybe it was just the sky reflected in the may trees. It was a pink sky, but the may trees were white and every time I looked at the may trees they were pink. I didn't really believe they were may trees.

So, we're in a blue funk or what could be a grey fog in the middle of the matrix.

It's a locus, it's a way of perceiving our own things that we have as though they were around us.

There are certainly things around us.

It's suddenly a locust that confronts us, by

Is this an animal?

Locust.

It is.

Consuming everything before it and around it.

Like what you find around you cons you towards this idea of being there.

I'm usually convinced of that, but it's true, I'm not always convinced. But isn't that kind of

I'm easily convinced of anything.

Convinced?

That's shocking!

I can't help it, I find myself constantly arriving at decisions which have already been made for me, and I don't know, it's a pocket book mentality which has adopted me. I'm sorry.

I regret that I wish I were thinking about something other than what I'm thinking about.

One consideration was to build a very large block of flats and all the lights would be different colors, I mean all the windows. I just felt shocked.

I imanded them stranded there. I demanded them, I imagined them in their different colors.

Did you confuse demand and imagine?

Yes.

Yeah I did too and I looked it up in the instruction booklet and page six and the section towards the bottom of the page told me that what I should do is put my fingers in the sockets and I did. I'm lucky to be here.

Thank you.

You're saying that because he's valorizing being here.

Well it makes me feel good.

You've no idea how good it makes me feel!

I often say thank you when I feel good.

I don't know what to say.

I feel pretty good when I say thank you, but I don't say it very often, that's true.

I often feel pretty uncomfortable when I say thank you.

That's often why I say it. I'm sorry, did I interrupt you?

I often apologize when I feel most uncomfortable actually. Like, if I feel that I have something to offer and I begin to offer it and then feel that maybe what I'm offering nobody wants, I start to feel uncomfortable and apologize.

I have to stop and think back you know and ask myself if what I'm doing is something that has a quality of completeness about it or not and that's a funny question to ask in the middle of something or should I wait until I think that it's finished and then ask myself if that was something that I wanted to have be complete or not.

But if my back is uncomfortable do I say that my back is unfinished or that the chair is unfinished or that my life on the chair is beginning to finish?

Do you?

I'm not sure. I was thinking of certainties or

For me it would depend if I were asking myself

A question, or was it another way of informing yourself?

Well if it's a way of gauging distance from any kind of parameter within which we might cycle because, if you get a puncture there are easy ways of going about solving that kind of problem, but if your wheel has gone out of true in terms of developing a warp or a bump, the thing's more long-term somehow.

It could be just as fun with a dinky toy with a broken wheel.

It's all over with dinky toys and me. I just look at them, that's it.

I run my fingers up the wall, now. What do you do, Steve?

I, um

I've seen him kick his leg like a horse.

Yeah I've seen him do that, too, but actually that's not fair because at the time he was impersonating a fictitious queen who was fifteen foot high, we were told, and old stories have a horrible habit of coming back at the most inappropriate moment.

Would you find it rude if I said your memory is incorrect?

No.

I went to the house where I grew up and saw the yard where I used to play with my brother with little cars and trucks and also cowboys and Indians and also cops and robbers.

I used to have a fort which was about two foot square, and I also had a large teddy bear which was about eighteen inches high I suppose, and I would sit the teddy bear in the fort, and I could never quite get it in without breaking part of the wall down. I feel that if they're going to make toys they should make them all on the same scale because it's very confusing for us youngsters otherwise.

I saw a very bad movie last week.

The scale of things matters a lot when my own sense of proportion in relationship to the world and what happens in the world is so unsteady.

Uh-huh.

In the movies it's always being negotiated, that sense of distance, and what's large and what's small and what kind of focus I find the world demands of me to bring to it.

But I mean what the movie was about was just being strong.

Well one's got to keep that sense of proportion around, hasn't one?

Some people, but everyone, I don't know.

I'm sorry, what were you saying?

I'm sorry what was I saying?

I missed what you were saying.

While I was too busy saying it, I missed what he was saying.

Oh, I was talking about strength which was what the movie was about, about how it's better for everybody in the society to be strong and kill each other.

And I was talking about keeping a sense of proportion.

I was thinking about weakness and that sense of force that can come with feeling the necessity of acting from a position conceived and enforced as weakness.

Does it make you feel as if you're crying inside sometimes?

Well I was talking about weakness and that sense of acting against force which sometimes makes me want to cry.

I was talking because in that sense that I have of weakness that is acting in terms of forcing the cry of resistance or anger, I sometimes do break down. Is that cowardice, is that a self-realization?

Sometimes you can just look at a lawn of grass and cry.

The ways that big trees seem to sometimes just rush out of that mat.

I just walked straight into the room and there was a guy on the television and he was just rushing at these three wooden posts with a ball. I mean I just turned, I didn't turn it off but I felt as though I wanted to.

Television just terrifies me.

It doesn't always terrify me, is that perhaps a weakness?

I find it very difficult to talk about it in any sense other than ending up beginning to make the kind of statement which always brings me to feel that somehow what I'm starting to say about something of which I have very little other than, how shall I say, close experience, brings me to understanding that the distance I have from what I say is much greater than the feeling I have of the distance between myself and my own feelings.

When I have something to say it's as though I've come a long way towards my mouth in order to put it into sounds and when it comes out and realizes that they're, if there are, other people out there, I'm

drawn back and amazed, I can't really take, I would like to, but I can't take responsibility.

You can't help respond, can you?

I can't get to the hospital?

You can if you take the right bus, I think you'll find it's the second street down and a number 3 will get there. But I'm not sure about that, I think it's the number 3.

I can if I respond.

How can you not respond?

I think I hold much too hard onto things so that I stop myself from allowing myself to become lost getting here.

I prefer to think that, to conceive that I am lost, that to get here would be to get lost. This is something more than I've thought in the past.

Well I would like to feel lost but I normally just feel confused.

I fall asleep a lot. Sometimes I just fall asleep, and

How would you describe that falling?

It's a lack of attention, it's

Not a state of doubt.

I would say that I spend 95% of my time asleep if that's the basis.

That's very difficult.

It's different because you do catch yourself up without a real, you know without having a sense that you're being wounded, or thrown off a boat.

That would be terrible, I'd hate to get thrown off a boat, I can't even swim!

Recurrent themes I think are a sap to attention.

Could you say that again?

I agree. I feel that when you know that things are, understandable in the sense of spotting the pattern, it's in the recognition that the danger lies, and when you recognize that danger you are attent and when you don't recognize the danger you put your foot in the bucket.

I think it can be useful to recognize a pattern, in order to change it. Otherwise how do you know you've made a change?

I agree.

I don't see how a pattern can be changed.

You mean you just keep knitting until you get to the bottom line?

I don't know that I knit. I think that I commit to a pattern, consciously or not consciously, and then, when I recognize it, I stop or else I, I think that's what I do, I think that I do see how I change a pattern, by becoming conscious of it, and then something else happens, if I don't decide not to do it.

I've forgotten how you do it.

It's not by starting over again but it's very similar. It involves deciding not to stop.

That's a good decision. Is it always a good decision? Hell no!

I feel that people get stuck worrying about whether they're changing or whether they're stuck or whether they're recognizing or whether they're not recognizing and or because they talk about it so much that they begin to dwell on that fact of whether or not they are stuck and even if they were stuck they couldn't recognize it because they're stuck talking about 'stuckness'.

My mother used to make me much of a muchness over myself.

It's an expression that she used a lot?

My mother made me one of those too. My mother used to make me beans on toast until I was sick of it, and punish me by preventing me from having beans on toast 'til I was hungry. My mother made me sick.

Splitting myself into two halves, maybe I'll think of myself as appetite and myself as fulfillment for example.

OK, OK, right.

My, it goes on like that. The operative term appears to be possession, no, belonging I guess, yeah.

And that is which, I mean a need to belong plus the appetite as a need to belong?

Oh no, the need to assign belonging to my, in other words I have these various kinds of relationships to the world and I am, instead of, what makes me sick that instead of making a function–instead of like bloody doing it, I am sectoring out states of belonging that are inclusive and exclusive. Such as appetite on the one hand and in the opposing team satisfaction.

So you open the book and the book says, "This book is to tell you how to use an alphabet" and you can't read, and the first thing it says is "This book belongs to," and then you fill your name in, but you can't read until you've read the book, and you can't read the book because you can't read.

But do you still fill your name in?

Not until you can write as well. D'you know I hadn't thought of that.

I would say that probably a lot of people fill their name in and never bother to read it, either their name or the book.

So, where do they get the experience to read the book?

Well they don't. Someone else reads the book and tells somebody else what the book says and those people tell other people what the book says.

And they all believe them?

It's, you look sideways at it, and get an impression that's filled in by that which your conscience and all those, for want of a better word information that, because it informs your conscience, really fills in the gaps.

But the dog comes by and it bites my leg it doesn't mean every dog that comes by bites my leg, does it?

If my leg falls off it doesn't mean that every leg I have falls off.

No it doesn't, that's true.

I use a dead leg and I clean out the bits of food between my teeth with it.

You call those dead legs? Is that a local expression?

Yeah, extremely local.

Like your top pocket?

Yeah, I like my top pocket.

I like my self-portrait. I took it to the ocean with me. Went on a long voyage on a ship. Spent most of the time on the deck.

Must have been nice.

Was anybody else there with you?

I don't remember anyone else being there with me.

Who was

But there was a funeral. I do remember that because I remember the flowers and one of them was in a big wreath that said, 'Get well soon' had been crossed out and it said 'Rest in peace' instead, and there was a lot of black crepe around. It was pretty nice, it was kind of blowing and whistling a little bit in the wind.

So did the black crepe belong with the 'Get well soon,' or did it just come with the crossing out, or were you the person who was doing the crossing, and if so, where were you crossing from to, and if you were on your own, who was driving, if you were on the deck?

It was all in a very rigid sequence and I had to follow the steps one by one exactly as they were laid out or I knew that I would break my mother's back.

You were riding on your mother's back?

Somebody told me but I couldn't remember. I knew it was dangerous but I just felt like I had to go ahead.

I was just looking out the window and a blackbird just hit the glass.

That's surprising! And the other thing that surprises me is how much men under pressure tend to start referring to their mothers.

My mother's not a blackbird.

My mother hit the window though.

Hm.

I don't believe me, either.

Because if I imagine hitting my mother I imagine that she would have difficulty in resisting. It's ridiculous and with great difficulty.

What is it exactly that we're resisting?

DIANE GLANCY

Three Poems

PERU, KANSAS

The creek slutes north of town,
a curve, a grocery, a few houses, fence slats,
then the country blozomed to the land.

Warrior & squawl
with towel hanging at the car window \ edges flapping
like a bird trying to take off from the land.

Out here where water's scarce
cows stand in ponds to hold them down.
Language starts with their breath
& the hurrrr of wind
around grain elevators \ space ships
in their towers.

Far away, turnpike tollgates are moons of Uranus.
The dark sky \ transparent at night \
but for the black-eyed rudge of trees.

In Peru \ salibales of words are hayrolled
in fields.
Look & you will find corridors of meaning
in any direction, layers of it,
anything you want \
a square box, root of fields, soy beanies & weet.

You can even feel the laps of the sky's tongue
on your shoes.
All directions, yet the openness doesn't take
the hoe handle.

You still hold your loss as though it were something.
The cutting into molars \ jaw \
the cold white bone of the skull.

Driving through Kansas
is like being married to a man you didn't fit with \
not having money \ your days full of chores
& boredom \
a towel in your window to keep out the sun.

Robes of wheat whick by
like crosses in a country cemetery.

You pass the unanimous bend of weeds.
Just look where they are pointing \ the openness
in fields. The opundance of language seeping
to another.

Ee tabo cay moose \ Worriar & squaw \
their carwindow flapping over shed & galvanized tanks.

Step anywhere & grasshoppers jump in the corn.

The wind flings you with dust from fields & gravel roads.

Clouds in hopeless plight to wind patterns
qpurting revolt from county line to line.
Soon, the little sprats of rain on sunflars & gutturals
of old stone houses \
sheds following like calves.

The space that sounds in brittle corn stalks
is all yours \ the hinge of bugs opening Peru \
when you beat hollyhocks with your stick
until the yard pinked with furzz
& the grandmother yelled her tomahawk language.

All language defeats \ pulls out your tongue \ strips
the loose string of bone from your back \
the bonds of ponds not giving in to earth,
but kissing the sky.

All your life you want to feel ponded to the land \
enaporating upword.
The sky thumbs through the corn rows
as you pazz by
head whacked off \ feet lifted from the floor
in a car going fast to get through.

JULY 14

Just turning out one fork was all she could do at the end. She rested all day for that one chore & when I visited from Oklahoma she rallied for a moment & sank into the rest of the evening. The mind puts its body in another room. Shuffs it off as a child. Orphaned. Goes on to meet whatever's there. The house with it's difficult furniture & border at the ceiling. We practiced farewell in the overtuffed room. Ordinary chat in the drive, the dear legs of the china cabinet, gaudy glasses that plague the memory. Radio, garish bric-a-brac. The trunk of her complaining whittled the blade of flowers on the wall. The white schmoo of the washer in the basement. Tools for biscuits. The fridge with its brain coiled above its shoulders. Beds in the other room bought with the care of surgery. Out of one meal after another letting the routine separate the stove that heats the sun passing over it. Erupting pintos & mashed potatoes going & coming back the jump of sun & shade on the rug. The meat hammer stuck blood & flour to the paper. The words like landscapes I heard at the dining room table.

Mother GOodbye_____

May pots. Baskets
of petunias.
You were the watermelon slice
on summer evenings_____
Your transparent teeth left a hole
in our lives.

Pudding and gristle.

_____SEa the shape of a
watermelon wedge,
sAwtooth waves over half the slice.

_____Another slice of clear sea,
purple ship,
a spike from the base toward it
like the old paper-holder on your desk.

_____Now the seA
a jar of black-cherry juice
you bought.
The column of disease
rips your hand from ours.

_____Black sEA
white ghost sHiP.
The grave, mother
a piece of the mind chipped off the wedge.

_____CanNoT hold on to you.
The Titanic dunked_____
biNOcULars watch you sink
from a small peak on the roof
of the watermelon.

Bob Perelman

Face Value

History (present tense, all lies) is a peculiar form of bondage. Children or ourselves, the liver's unsavory narrative, vignettes of teeth. Hostages to fortune join the winning team. The minute after you break your toe, there will continue to be that rent in the canvas of personal time, of which any one second in any one place must stand, circumstantially, as the sole, erroneous symbol of the detachments of consciousness.

Now it is night. It is no accident
that the sun has ceded the sky
to the forces of darkness,
and thus too the rhapsody
must table his trowel, drown his gavel, muffle his soiree.
The debate, so debonair and contingent,
in which the swains of production
wooed the shepardesses of the periodic table,
is kaput. Echoes of those voices and dallying
resistances still resound,
infinitesimally, downtown in the protagonists'
mausoleum. It is here that we,
their bereaved offspring, tend their memories
and are tended in the playhouse
of the state, our true inheritance,
but underfunded, and run by counselors
who don't really like children.
And it is precisely here, in this darkness,
that the incidents occur:
scratchings, foodfights, screams, scary boastings.
But there's always a story in the corner,
uniting the hero, his virtue, and his happiness
as easily as the sixty foot putt
on tape, animate and inevitable above
the lushness of the beautifully kept
bermuda grass, negotiates the undulations,
then disappears
into the hole. Now it is night.

Quote: How admirable he is who does not say
How ephemeral life is
When he sees a flash of lightning
Unquote:

The dancer can jump only so high, in flesh or photograph, and audiences have a limited amount of money, for which there are other than curtain calls. Impossibilities, cold sores, rhetoric add up faultily, not an actual history in comparison to the advances in military technocracy, aiming devices, explosives, powers of penetration, headline penumbras, number of bullets per area per second, saturating defiance.

The moon gets yellow
nearing the oil storage tanks.
Second half does not relate,
any more than the aspirin
to the institution,
or repetition of sensation,
eating out of the wooden bowl
again and again,
recaptures the ligaments
of the precapitalist community
growing poppies for the people on TV.

I could be watching the 49ers, or setting my worm farms in order, or patching out my claims on a personal but real corner of the market. The ever vanishing simile

I, if he did exist, would know
how to spell, matter-of-factly
just by looking at the daffodils,
or whatever word, I can tell
what they are and what I was.
But look, I ordered soup
and was given
soap.

A hundred million enfranchised deletions looked toward the burning sky–lots to delete here–and weeping swore that neither they nor their families would ever be hungry again, not even if they had to lie cheat and endlessly defraud the tips of their senses.

Looking back I seem to have left those skies
and to be standing under this one
just as it's spreading wings to say goodnight.
Books, looks, legs, dimes, ears, clouds ago,
it said thanks, goodbye, threshed sound and meant
something thrown away by mistake to mean the other one,
the dead enemy's blood pulsing through my veins

Pure, then impure, then leave me alone in the corner while I pull my pants down to determine strictly myself if I'm aroused enough to name my sex and as begotten sin something to throw at the face value of fantasy a fallen log blocking the otherwise interesting trail my appetite makes for the nearest downed stag doe leaf or randomly moving commodity. In plain speech, a person. Buy, and eat. Life, that bourgeois unity. Boredom has its rhythm too, as have interest rates and styles of grief.

I'm necessarily not good enough for rationality
no salt, live forever, jogging, wheatgrass enemas,
whoopee cushions in place of sign-along Messiahs
self loathing just to keep in sight of the pageant

utterly protected, not to say caged in, by its fellow beings, and this allows it to vote for whatever it wants, whoever it says

The voice in the car
feels like a million bucks, but
watch it, as the film runs out

too busy standing in line to have the emotional wherewithal to stride into that darkened original booth and pull the lever in a powerful and creative way

Losing track is fun the first time, but after the tenth day, one longs for a little order, not to say rigor, or bloodshed, in the endless massage. Blood running down the walls, hair upswept into a solid mat of otherworldly matter, those Aztec priests had otherness so externalized death was no more individual than any given inhalation. What was the big deal? What was for lunch? How were the children? The grandchildren? Jason was crawling backwards, a look of mild wonder on his face as his goal grew smaller though clearer in his visual field, not that he would have registered it in just those terms.

Repetition can only produce so much. I'd rather be sitting in front of my computer, feet in a warm ocean, tan, my stomach hard and my features articulate, in fact my whole body a phallus, significant, inextricably the direction of historic particulars, an undentable sign, deathless, debtless, making passionate love to whatever needs to be said. The sun, overhead, blazes once, endlessly.

available immediately
marked down from obvious,
unpriced junk flooding the right to
work, to disorganize, to shoot to
confuse the issue long enough to
get to watch the end of the game

INTERMEZZO
The light is bent lines.
Repetition does, in some sense
breed understanding, and understatement
comes in time.
Soon comes the night.
The intimacy I demand
throws away light bent over me.
Intimacy does in some sense
breed understanding. Bending over,
doing the same thing, understated
intimacy demanding sense,
endless and in some unlikely place
stopped forever.

COUPLET
By itself it unconsciously spells
what I consciously want to say

STILL LIFE
There's a blue cup there,
on the top of the water,
and there's an orange carrot, orange airport,
the airport chairs are orange, there,

the far away word
in the marriage of meaning & meaning,
muscular utterance, and there's
the wooden spoon

There's an orange in the icebox, so orange
and the sky is blue today, so far
there is flat distance
available as distant color

A row of chairs, one chair,
a defect standing for itself
here in the abject uncolored
blue lake of the spoken body.

COUPLET
You talk too much
you never shut up

I can say what it, an elegy, is for
opening into a bound, and thus manmade space.
But the flavor of the words,
born of the space between people
not to mention what happens, stop,
sunset, by the original artist, framed.

drainpipes

blue.

I look up and see a bit of mottled blue behind a skin of fog after days of grey. Weather is the last refuge of the whirlpool of I. I own my own body, balanced upon opinions given me in garbled barely alterable form at my birth at which I was one of very many, the horizon unseen by virtue of numerous qualities that, visualized, were later to be objects, things I wanted, to be gotten from nation states wearing the family mask.

Then so much came to mean itself, secure and simple, separable. I'm not complaining. Write anything and then just let the printer or the critic or the president, buoyed up by the contention of realms of hierarchies below, handle it. As the recruit is shipped, in adolescence, to the jungle in which he is most needed, and at that moment the public space is born, invaded, narcotized, viz.: stoned, wearing earphones, could be Haydn, could be Dylan, could be B.B. King, blasting away at whatever moves, that monotonous green, money literally growing on trees, somebody else back home, bigger taller more natural with much better taste spending it all, "That's the way . . . God planned it"–one wants to rip the tape, twist it, scorch. So the

word pops into place, anthropomorphic, angry, screwed, literally, letter by letter, wrong and stuck.

Bludgeoned sightings of nothing in particular.
And out here there is nothing other
to exchange any of it for,
except perhaps things eternal
and lest our country graveyard have died in vain,
one hopes, as one reads and reasons,
to amass one's fortune.

The green leaves glimmer eeriely,
as if one had travelled too long
by the light of reason and was finally,
hand crashing into forehead in cartoon misbelief,
here, as if *this* could be
the actual configuration of things

staring at the private language
of the angry father the light
after the end of the tunnel
that was luring so many voters into it
despite the nagging premonition
of having buried their great-grandchildren

life's over, attics, garbage, storage, naval stations, aunts, disney, tomb art, national geographic, native bodies, but they're all so flat and glossy, turn the page they're gone

a subaudible wave of hatred mounts up for those dull green curtains steaming, like language, cabbage, money–lies! truth! muscles twitching to set the record straight–monotonously changing hands under the thumb of enumeration.

Already most villages fashions were under surveillance. For having failed to prevent this, they were declared insane, backward, and were pitied enormously by the fourth-hand goods dumped on them as they practiced their pliable pitiable rites of marriage, analysis, medicine, and selling their decorations at absurd prices

turquoise,
carnelian,
jade,
flint,

flesh,
face,
2$ bill,
3$ bill,
50¢ piece.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

Commentary of the False Numbers – 3, 4

here
and where
you who are

a region
of his speech
was, a reason
(*after Paul Celan*)

from "Conversation in the Mountains": An Interview with Paul Celan

"Yes, to respond to your question concerning the necessity of encounter between the book and its subject, I will tell you that one evening a description of both, half image, half veil, entered me. At the time, in effect, memory worked forward also, in effect as echo. What we called correspondence or symmetry was actually a process of continual anticipation."

"At the same time there was the effortless forgetting as later we stepped into a region that had been blown away. This was during the war. What we called continual anticipation was actually the concerted effortless drumming to shattered granite which we'd heard of as "the clearing." In effect as echo. This was during the war. Yes, if you point me there, I can turn you to the stash of roses, the chalk dust on the eyelash, the chalk marks on the road from quarry to camp. Everyone was dragging. Slates. What we called continual anticipation was actually a program to commit the time to a moment's blindness pushed to a future clearing of things. It sounded so like a moment's violence. In effect as echo. This was who you are. Hurt. Half image, half veil. Yes, if you point me there, they heard you. Everyone was writing. Slates. Everyone was pushed with their stashes in the dirt. It sounded so like the time of writing committed to a moment's blindness and pushed to a future clearing of things. In effect as echo. This was disturbing the war. Infectious,

deserving, I did not respond. A rich sickness entered him and I did not respond. I guessed it. Yes, poetry, he said, is a gift, what must be said, what sticks in our throats. In effect as echo. What we called continual anticipation was actually the sticks to our throats repeatedly given. Answer yes or no. At the same time. In effect as echo. There was the clearing. This was during the war and I don't need to relate what the life of a Jew was like disturbing the war. It sounded so like a moment's violation pushed over in the midst of these movable fronts. It sounded so like I heard my chest move then, a beat. Yes, if you lift me there, I can turn you to the street of crushed lenses, what ground we stepped off–pushy. Walk. In front of me. Yes, if you turn me over, I can hear you work up to the wall of roses, the washed cocks, feet first and cursed, then bled, a bit. At the same time stashed into drums. In effect as echo. Poetry, he said, is a gift. They necklaced the children. They slit the chest then lit a fire within. What we called continual application was actually not even pressure but more faith in his face than in anyone else. It sounded so like he kept his promises, the only one to have kept his promises, so. Yes, he said–from the one who kept all his promises–to us poetry is a given, what must be sent, senseless, half-phased. Half image, half veil. Everyone was dragging. Slates. They heard you at a point. Hurt. In effect as echo. At the point of a nail. Answer yes or no. At the same time. There was the hearing. This was after the war and I don't need to relate what the life of a Jew was like enduring after the war. Half image, half veil. This was disturbing who you are. At a moment's blindness. Everyone was writing. Slates. At the same time washed in sums, naked and nightlong, pushed off a wall of roses. In effect into roads, as echo. What we called continual anticipation was actually the nails through our cocks repeatedly driven. Pushy. Yes, then bled, a bit. This was during the war. Yes, he said, poetry is a gift and so at the same time in effect as echo what we called the slippage in continual articulation was actually the applied law of natural increase or the gift of natural increase doubling as slave flow and so let slipping away. It sounded so like a moment's thing led and pushed into a clearing. This was during the singing. Everyone was writing. Slates. At the same time. Driven. In effect without air, as transport. Yes, if you lift me there, this was during the singing. In effect without lungs. It sounded so like a moment's blindfold. Answer yes or no. Yes, move in front of me or let me go. In effect as echo. So there you are. Yes, there was a stroke across the length of my writing arm."

"To respond to your letter I will tell you: no sooner does an image enter than it gets caught in the web, and a thread starts spinning,

spinning itself around the image, a veil-thread; spins itself around the image and begets a child with it, half image, half veil. A movable letter. Yes, move my writing hand. So there you are."

"Yes, I will tell you I am exacting of two minds. (It's disabling.) There will be no reason to discuss it *one evening*. Answer yes or no."

"Yes, to respond to your question he, Celan, said I swear I will leave. In effect I have. At the same time. A thing to refuse you. Yes, he said, poetry is a gift. (A thing to refuse you.) In effect as echo. It sounded so like a moment's slave flow pushed to a future clearing of things. At the same time. In effect as echo. I have a thing to push you. A thing to refuse you. Repeatedly given. At a moment's violence. Yes, clarity in the sense of silence."

AMMIEL ALCALAY

After Ecclesiastes

In Memoriam: Dan Pagis

A wheel, no helm, said Koheleth:
a wheel, no helm. A call, a wail:

Taut in a mesh, can man draw attar
in his kennel, his culvert of burden?

A generation goes
another comes
and the earth
over any end
an augment:

As a spark
the sun rises

as it goes
ill mechanic

sheaf of chaff
to ignite again:

Down, roll of a drum,
boreal, it twists on,
sows and veers,
alee, an aura,

a veil twisted
on a shaft,
an aura:

All sources go to the sea
and the sea no anomaly
ill mechanic to whom all go back:
no sham the hum of them.

Call odd vermin, agony.
Luck. All wish ill, lie, utter.
Lot's bane, all a rot: of
all time, malaise, unmesh me:

Of mass how hew awe, show, eye
If my motion wishes cessation.
Vain. Cold ash. Taut in a mesh

I wish a new affair.
Ash, a roomer:
"Wraith! What's fresh?
Hewn anew then ruined
a myriad realms
and lives before us."

No memory of first ones
nor of last ones who will be
of those neither will there
be memory still after:

I Koheleth
was King
over Israel
in Jerusalem:

I meted out my heart in discourse
explored with wit all issues enacted
taut below the swim of seraphim:

woe and rue gave ill He Him
to men to answer to:

I realized all motion
ceases in ash

taut in a mesh
a vain call in a hovel

a wroth aura:

Bent? Only luck can ill rectify
and lack in all is innumerable:

I'd uttered, aye, in heart, lame, in vain
I augmented and affixed my wit above all
ushered ill life before me in Jerusalem:

my heart, wry and keen, knew wit:

And I gave it know true wit
lunatic even imbecilic wit:

I fathomed
the sham of
even them.

Hewn?
A ruin,
a wraith:

Overwise
are rife
in choler

a dose
of wit
is a dose
of ache.

ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA

Six Paintings and Drawings

WASHBASIN AND MIRROR
Oil on Wood / 98 x 83.5 cm / 1967

REMAINDERS FROM A MEAL

Pencil on Paper / 42 x 54 cm / 1971

MARIA

Pencil Drawing / 70.1 x 53.3 cm / 1972

WINDOW AT NIGHT

Oil on Wood / 120 x 81 cm / 1971-80

THE HOUSE OF ANTONIO LOPEZ TORRES

Pencil on Paper / 82 x 68 cm / 1972-80

GRAN VIA

Oil on Wood / 90.6 x 93.5 cm / 1974-81

NICHOLAS & LISA CORRIN

On Antonio López García

Antonio López García is a great admirer of Francis Bacon. "Human kind cannot bear very much reality." Bacon's absorption in T. S. Eliot is well known. His art strips the veil of habit from our eyes. To Bacon, life is a "series of destructions." Man, the écorché, squats upon the background of strange-hued nothingness. Bacon belongs to what Huxley once coined "the negative visionaries." As does Antonio López García. Here too, life dwells in the house of death.

But the reality that López García forces us to bear is essentially unpeopled. Not a visceral torment, not directly, but a meticulously painted space where human processes *have* occurred: the passage and the drainage, the chewing and the cleansing. What remains is absence, a void approaching terror but also quietude, the lives, the hours irrevocably gone.

On a stained table, something almost human sleeps or recoils. It is fragile and tight like a young blossom. Its blood mingles with splotches and paint chips.

In passage down an urban corridor, arrows rush past buildings, past us. The future is at our backs. A clock reads 6:30. The moment fixed seems laughable.

López García has spent up to twenty years to complete a painting, returning to the same place again and again until the last minutiae have been recorded. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he spares no effort to insure the durability of his art; he recommends that his students study Max Doerner's guide to the materials and techniques of the Old Masters. Yet this enormously patient and painstaking artist is a saboteur of his own efforts. Encouraging the paint to boil and blister, he invites decay into the materials of his trade.

Present in a number of paintings is a horizontal line, not evident at first glance. Neither abstraction nor an element congruous with the "realism" of the picture, this subtle intrusion of illogic negates the spectator's false identification of realism with habit, his counterfeit reality. This line is flat as a lake is flat, as a corpse lies flat, but it extends beyond the bounds of the picture and implies infinity; in the very center of our space lies this horizon of depthless gray, the reality we cannot bear.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Blow-Me-Down Etude

Ah! through the hush the looked-for
midnight clangs!
— William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise*

"Put her in her Chair! Put her in her
Chair!" The bleary weights of nothing-to-explain,
nobody to explain to. News of the weave, nub
of the bleep. I take what I'm given and give
what I've taken, stake what I'm bidden, dumped
when I've driven. (Upset to get.) Just when
thought, for one thing, affecting has got
to as possible point, whatever, a few
as many were and worse didn't –
but not to dwell, to fall, specifically
where was that it might, matter (formal)
given coagulation. Remember you brought,
prying to amount for, rather given your own
dizzying play in that inflection. To open up
as much of, as far as, to convey
in this respect and a sense, at the
same, more relevant in terms of revealing, finally,
forged dominions have mistook. The only
true epiphanies the ones misplaced (the
forced replacements of). Arrived with silent
fire, projector of what was faced. *We thought we might*

be better than. But the knees swell, the
feet collapses. No further shown, as if it's
only do too little, or much too much. As
if more strobe at clay could quell command: fear
frozen with fright, tautologies our
topologies; tear the midsection & loose the
rig. There was a moment that hope made
realer than the pause endured, who wept
like trawlers without recall. No villanelle to chew
nor salmon to. These tendencies arise
out of a culture and cannot be confined to those
defined them: a pound of defiance is
worth an ounce of lure. (She was a giant
of the experience of being a baby & proud
was I . . .) Summary
or tainted with coats of (jangle what
you will, where you pry–not fables with
testy, tedious tirades, waves at)
plaint. Oracular insects
infusing pseudonymous stuffed desks (stuck
decks). Rivers of lies, severs of
glides, desperate for an even chance at less
than might release, at least a vantage
to profane the holier version of these
visions, riddled with blitzkrieged
orifices, adipose titration. Moon at
worn regales; the ink its sail. Plastered
on the mesa & pacing fifty leagues
anon. *(We thought we might be better*

then.) You try to jump ahead, but fall
behind, dropped back but are conspicuously
frames. The falters make no better
flitters, along the oak and toggled plane.
Basically beserk, the body with only
organs relies upon a
peacock's prickly prudery; then
resents what will not relent. Spilt
or gided. For guilt is the burden of the whitewashed
man: for what has not been done and what cannot be
undone. "Where there is sorrow there is
holy ground." The sink cracks, the
furl falters, and Everyperson bastes its
stew. Darting and then carted; filled with
or unacquainted by. Who feeds the farmers
cornered by a row of sediment, cooled
erotics of unsublimated stokes. He
speaks but does not offer, scarcely
sweats before he swings: there is no
denouement for pebbles or for wings.
Of course, it *is* an honor to be sprinkled
out, not that it's a evanescent one: I
dislike the form and in most phases would
not see the point in, to make stab at.
That's fine, did you notice, seems an
extraordinary, if it is in, however, for
reasons that now can't see to reply
to–stupid & wildly derange –decided
at least is a register, is having (dubious

distinction) though as you know the lack of,
loose extension, style of support, is
segmented beyond the pale. Will lessen: I
decline: one could: at least: there are:
that will: when may: though is: you
should: that might: is obvious: possibly
substantive: worthwhile bothering. The
concurrent and multiple variables affecting the flow
of the construction stream can easily . . . Loss of
pleasure in all or almost all or nearly mostly
all; unresponsive to usually pleasurable . . .
An situation amounts, the fledgling recriminations
that border on beautification: a constituency
of tissue and marrow and formaldehyde. Many
disputes involve opinions and facts
about stipulations that occurred over months
and years. Everyone does not feel well-
treated–the same slap applicated with
the fine measure of meager interdiction, ignorance
of extent. For instance, your actions seem
divisive and policing of the very "community"
you desire to support. Nothing represents
anything. Billboards poster our losses. Better
jeer than leer. Waking up at least two hours
early, body movements slow or agitated, excessive
or inappropriate feelings of self-reproach.

That's the major
problem we always
have in this

country. We don't
have a totalitarian
society where we

suppress the opposition.
We have an
information glut and

we bury the
opposition under piles
of newsprint that

all say the
other thing. So
our side gets

to get a
critical review in
The Guardian, whereas

the other side
gets to get
a laudatory review

on the front
page of the
Times Book Review.
[Michael Meeropol]

Overactive, talkative, pressured speech; racing
thoughts, flights of ideas; inflated self-
esteem; need no sleep; easily distracted; judgment
wasted. The Westside wail of words. Steam
pours onto the subway platform as crowd hangs back
of turnstile waiting to see if trains will
run. Two feet canary, team fleets of
aquamarine. For all the talk about decentered I's
there's a lot of overbuilt egos. Like
lips passing in the Fright. (We thought

we might be better than.) Beyond any bromide
hidden in assumptions and retarded by lachrymose
perambulation, hollering for benefit when all
the swirl spies pleistocene maquettes. Where
during the time of the observance chortled
aboard a lack, preemptive to detain
maladroit possession, steamed at
what reposed, disheveled, on a fair
and merry query. As right is as and
just enclosure deeds the doing spun, so
bid departure, fore enamored, seeds
the sowing sunk. *They* asked me how I knew
a shade of blue was blue; *I*, in tune, re-
plied, when you've got two eyes, folks
return your fire. Hunted down or
hunting. Fabulous forsook, the code without
the signals. And who remembers Leon
Klinghoffer and forgets those with no names
or faces who perish without trace and
less sanction? The Lord looks on
those or these, but, deaf and dumb, gropes
at making signs of solids. Ignominious
restitution, a civilization unable to rise
as high as a gutter; yet kindness
makes fools glow with sedulous light
& the stunted grow incandescent. These
are the words we cannot hear, a language
of sighs. Here are the verbs we have
not curved, vested by sleight: cascade, retort,

vitiate, effloresce. Staccato deserts the ob-
ligato, amounts that turn against, in which
to spread, invaginated prescience before a
nod to cruise: pratfall or billy-
goated & bubbling up like whine.
The world we seek is wiped.
Sitting up, standing,
falling down. & the river turns
to slush & the slush
to shacks but there
is no encampment
& no prognostication for
a sail is a Dot & a
Rot is a shirt
& a lurch
devolves into twin
doves or antiquarian
swans
but more likely a
pigeon.
Clubbed by stupidity
intoxicate of
stupefaction. Coming on like
gangbusters and then just
banging. (We thought
we might be . . .) Alerted,
flushed, remanded to
reminders. "He took so much
disparity," she said. "He was

so grave attending the . . ."
Milkweed
or filched rudders
(rubbers).
The ghost of a semblance of a
dive. Altered, adiabatically foregone.
Rosy-fingered hiccups, polyglot
hibiscus. "At the time, I was troubled
that poets could neither tell readers the name
of the device dispensed nor possible side
effects. Now, if you care to think about
it, even advising a reader to give
aspirin to a fevered child involves a
complicated series of æsthetical and ethical choices."
May philosophers, December social scientists. Having
completed the spadework on the lattice, she
took up, as one might a pair of spectacles, the long-jammed
plan of village of R——, in the county of
P——, professing no more than an historical
interest in a rumored subterranean passage
that connected the village to its
remonstration. Never abandoning fury for curiosity
self-aggrandizement for repulsion. Howevers which
adorn multifoliate pummelling, hung by
plunge and agglutinated with tetradactyls.
Sumptuous sunder (rife with rips). "Sawyer
called it transference, I call it baloney."
Dovetails with
apologia, garlic press. "I'll

tell you this, Sam, you've
got some serious problems that require
professional help." Galvanized
Gargantua, doppler of sudden *zeitgeist*. Sunless
in the sun. For each of us
must decide the level of response
we can afford to give readers in their quest
for truthful, accurate information. Benevolent
deception, partial truths, white lies, and other
forms of circumvention should not be ruled
out. If readers come to us for authoritative guidance,
it is important that we not disappoint them–or they
will turn to other, less reliable, media. "I
just can't hit that number
worth a damn." Garden-
variety effluvium.
When guest is seated, go to door and ring
bell twice. Slow boat to Bayonne, big bust in
Saskatoon. Elementary tuning porch. Who
waves the flaccid flag, downing a silvery
flask, and wrests cacorythmias from
a nest of horns. *Bleat, bleat don't
you know the shoals*. (We thought . . .) Still
the joust has made its recapitulation and the Trout
fills the hall: skies of pomegranates and a
ceiling of guffaws. Along alighted melodies
that . . .
Something there is that doesn't love a
pawn, that wants it smashed, and that its pawning

for. As if
a runner might o'ertake her strife
and patch the lost, unstrap this pediment
of feeling's long and agate train. Much
as you say, to start, at least unconsciously
familiar (usual bulging): but the, we did,
was a, she managed, and how, every time.
Or rolled over, onto something (alchemical
projectile), schmaltzed up with predictable
thrashing. Upstairs for; or is so in the meantime you
can actually precondition, have trouble with, as you–
quote–to absorb roughhouse, endless transfer inflicted
in passing out (but toneless) exoneration. Yesterday
I got, I became, I couldn't understand, I
should be finishing, or some such function as
a viper. Both because and because. Like
the idea of soon, excerpting plans who asked
to duplicate in terms of expanding, since
if, which have been part of, was news
to me. Weird and Red! Though, for example, they
say 'Baltimore' different in 'Boston'.
Studiously unprepared (oxymoronic
modesty). Like
loss that melts, topical
glaciers make their move. "There's
a bay inside o' Heaven
made of spray, mazed with crepe
& it's acommin' for us
couple o' days, aft a long haze."

The antimonophysite heresy: management
refuses responsibility for personal belongings checked
with management. Saucy sailing, bossy
commiseration–before the point is dry.
Fecundly familiar, incontinent supplication.
But not, according to Myron O'Mally; the
bored haberdasher denied any involvement
in the multimillion dollar confidence
confection. Roasting the Host, toasting the boast.
As trippingly entreaties us to linger, where
hushed in the calm of plums, a votive
respirator hums. Humungous desolation, lodged
at flotilla and superannuated fortnightly.
Suppurating bombast (lain along the lane, the
lady lit a Lucky). When I arrived
the reader was lying
flat on the bathroom floor
without any clothes
and complaining of
severe logorrhea. These are
the criteria I have tried to get
out from under
insofar as they would lead to
tighter analogies, less rhetorical
affect. Furthermore, we
are simply miles apart
flatulently wrong
bad bit of deflecting–because you support, on
that topic, no more

about as themes
which well up against this
(tiresome allegation) to
a place like Sovereign Privilege
(sense of from) go in
the direction of, link
constrained.
True I do load
on a spectrum more
than peripheral, and also
more germane as a sweeping
without swaying. Unbridgeable gulf
by a long shot.
Clear crystal adipose tissue. For
example, yesterday I refused to sell a man
a capon. Mule
of a guy. At dusk,
a dullard's thoughts turn
to dinner. Always
wants what's out of
reach. The search
for nonproverbial language:
child sticks finger
in crank. Suppose
your tooth hurt.
Get dressed, descend the ladder.
(Later.) To be among such constitutive & fibrous
fathers & be so slaphappy. *The world we seek*
was swiped. (We thought we . . .) & rushing

headfirst into the saltmines of the heart. On
the other hand, you can always spend more time
improving your chess. Romanticism is
analogic, modernism is digital. Marxianism
with a tiny middle-class face. "I got
bowls coming out of my ears." "There's
a three-inch opening in the incinerator." &
the Heart of Africa bleeds black blood. Every
day of apartheid dwarfs (every
slash of entitlements mocks)
the grief for
seven dead star warriors. Logic
skates on the brain, reason
weighs
on the mind.
Once
I
saw
a
man
walk
into
a
pole.
"You're like an uncooked nerve."
From amniotic fluid to
semiotic
fluidlessness. Semi-
arctic; infra-

papillary. Semi-idiotic. Semi-automatic
nosedive. Baby
Doc's dead! Death
to all tyrants
who feast
on the misery
of the people!
Illusion or
myth?
When reason swells
with repose then love is scorched
flight.
Some
like it
popped.
"Haiti? Isn't
that where Richard Burton made one of his
movies?" "Every
Jew a .22." Blinking, mumbling
sprawling. "Don't
eat so fast, people will think
you're hungry." Crazy Eddy's
Martin Luther King Day Portable Stereo
Sale. Sondheim
slumped on a sofa in his Manhattan
townhouse. "The important thing isn't
the parties you join but the parties you
make." Or, a shell game's better
than no game. When

the Messiah comes, the rust
will fall from the scales
on our eyes. *Some*
like it cracked. Doubled
over with second guesses.
"Just tell me what you want."
Stove-top denunciations, roving bands of
expectation. For God is
scales not vapor: each day its
dew (a portmanteau in every curlicue).
"I've done everything in my power to make this palatable."
In the priestless churches of San Juan Chamula (the
sentence will not end). Asking,
Where are the Bickfords of yesteryear, where
the Schrafft's? While in the back corridors of time, where
nothing is lost, the crowds swarm Lundy's at Sheepshead
Bay. We (who?) thought to build a diadem
& kicked against the slates by which
each is measure & found wanting what
is ready at hand but grasped too hard.
Better than this puncture's pride at punching, to
find a deck of turns, a float of
tufts, & prattle sightlessly among the chaise-
lit lawns.

LORINE NIEDECKER

"Knee Deck Her Daisies:" Selections from her Letters to Louis Zukofsky

Niedecker and Zukofsky's 40 years of regular correspondence began in 1931 and ended, with her death, in 1970. What remains of the letters–a much edited proportion of their original bulk–offers a fascinating look at close friendship and shared poetic enterprise. Niedecker's letters make compelling reading in themselves. They are also the only substantial surviving prose history of her poetic career up to 1964.

The small selection[1] that follows provides a glimpse into Niedecker's literary practice–her affiliations and enthusiasms, her influences, sources and methods. Through this run the seasonal currents of life on Black Hawk Island–the source of her locally nurtured poetic sensibility. As in the poems, accounts of domestic contingencies abut reflections on politics and philosophy; the domestic overlaps with the literary. There are affinities of style and substance between the letters and the poems, the letters often accessories to the poetry. Some carry the germ of a poem, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps as a deliberate testing and framing of thoughts and words. Others carry incidental cues for poems.

Zukofsky is Niedecker's artistic life-line and her closest friend. She adored all three Zukofskys and for a while held something like honorary family status among them. At times, however, one senses caution behind her intimacies and an excess of deference. The friendship may not always have been easy but the letters provide plentiful signs of a vigorous and productive literary collaboration.

Niedecker repeatedly acknowledged her debt to him. With characteristic good humor she wrote to Clayton Eshleman: "Koch, Ashbery–there but for the grace of God and Louis Zukofsky go I" (Feb. 14, 1968). Debts aside, her honed, thrifty poems are a substantial and independent achievement. Her free-wheeling, prolix letters are their complement.

Notes

[1] For permission to quote from the unpublished letters, thanks are due to Cid Corman, Niedecker's literary executor, to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, and to the Fales Library, New York University. Successive editings by Niedecker and Zukofsky reduced her side of the correspondence to letters and fragments that now number approximately 600 typed pages. No letters have survived from the 1930s, few from the mid and late 1950s, and no more than 10 after 1964.

Niedecker edited his side of the correspondence down to roughly 400 typed pages. She had hoped to publish them but Zukofsky refused permission. All the remaining letters are now at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

*

Those of the letters that survive only in fragments are marked in the text. My cuts are shown by an ellipsis. [ ]

*

dated by LN: Labor Day
dated by LZ: 1944
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Our woiks[1] are sealed in a big envelope ready to be mailed off tomorrow. The Decker-Niedecker deal should soon take place.

I take notice of your revised Anews with joy, especially the mote of sun and the cigarette. I re-read today Till we have died, and Fire Summer and oh lord, the book for me, and all that we live for beyond food and bed will be these two.

Notes

[1] Niedecker's *New Goose* and Zukofsky's *Anew* were both published in 1946 by James Decker Press, Prairie City, Illinois. Niedecker had typed both manuscripts.

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dated by LN: Sunday
dated by LZ: Apr. 29/45
fragment, tls.

Dear Bugs:

Was happy to hear from the home front, Celia! You know about the airplane spotter who said: "I've got 30 planes cornered." Too bad Did[1] has colds. Has Luigi come out of his weekend woik? Come up to the dandelions, Zu, and say goodbye to April, wasn't much good anyhow. I made a scoop, Celia–our town

has two stocking mills, one has opened a store and seconds in 8 1/2 and 9 sell for 3 for a dollar. I like to wear ankle socks in summer but this would be a little early.

What kinda music are ya on now in Perry?[2]

Oh me, the junction with the Reds! Did you hear Molotov's voice on radio? If only the translator's voice had been as strong and convincing as M's. One of the Russians who first greeted the Americans at the junction said, "This is a great holiday for the whole world." Robertson's American crew on the evening before, sat down on the other side of the Mulde "disappointed and confused because our cub planes hadn't picked up any big road movements and we didn't know just where in the hell the Russians were."

The lettuce I planted on April 7 froze on April 27. So we start all over again. However, the radishes are coming along just the same. B.P.[3] observes that you can't keep some things from growing.

Yes, I know, you've told me about the tonsils. Well, I'll see by going to a couple of doctors in the late summer. I know the sinus and perhaps something else is worse than the tonsils. Have my haid removed, I guess.

Last night we were sitting here and I was reading and B.P.'s voice came out of the void: "Some good binding material here." I looked and saw nothing. Finally she explained that Henry had brought home bananas, potato chips, cheese and crackers. How do things stack up and cohere by you?

Reading Diderot: Interpreter of Nature. This is what I could have used long ago, alongside Engels and while I was wondering what Emerson was getting at. A great many of my questions are suddenly answered. I really begin to believe that there is another life for us after we die, one not like ours, at least not for a long, long time. Elements for awhile before we again become, if we ever do, another mass. Time is nuttin in the universe. The elephant may be on his way to becoming a worm, and vice versa, as a species, I mean. All of which I wanted to say in my poem but didn't quite. "Fontenelle's rose saying that within the memory of a rose no gardener had been known to die." (This is the loveliest and most important thing I've read in a long time.) If we knew more chemistry and physics I'd have more faith. Only thing about death–loneliness for those that are left, but that's present anyhow.

And if the sun went out, Diderot says, and another kind of earth in time came back with another sun, probably even the same scattered elements as we now have or had, would not give the same results, "because everything is connected [end of fragment]

Notes

[1] Did, Diddy, Diddle–childhood names for Paul Zukofsky, a violinist from an early age. "Hey diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle . . ."

[2] Celia Zukofsky's music for *Pericles*.

[3] Niedecker and Zukofsky referred to her mother, Daisy, as B.P., an abbreviation of *Bellis perennis*.

---

dated by LN: Sunday May 19
dated by LZ: /46
fragments, tls.

Dear Zu:

. . . Zu-Zu look what Williams said[1] enclosed! Air mail! It's really nice, isn't it?–anyhows he can't say that about everybody's nowadays. And, after all, he needn't have said even as much–not everybody is a Zu. [ ] Would like to send a card with Thank you. I agree as to state of poetry generally. Hope you have a good recovery from the operation. Wdn't want him to think he had to answer again. Yes, I'll write him just that much today. [end of fragment]

Mrs. Main the bird woman (granddaughter of Kumlien) came one day this past week and took me with her down through the woods where we used to live, to look at birds. It was so beautiful! The small trees we left there three years ago already seem big. The red osier dogwood and the other kind (pannacle) are so big and luxurious this spring (and now I know what kind of shrubbery I want around my place–can get roots from our own land where we now live). While looking at some white gulls (herring) along came a daddy-long-legs, as BP says (the great blue heron). We just gasped. Nice once again to be close to someone with some kind of enthusiasm, somebody with absolutely no kind of sophistication, or no pseudo–or super–. She had a little pad and pencil as she's preparing an article on birds at Black Hawk Island. When we came to Indian arrow head beside the path she'd jot down: arrowheads. We saw a purple martin feeding its young about two weeks ahead of schedule but on acct. of housing shortage they moved in fast and did their stuff, I guess. She always had to *see* the birds to appreciate 'em whereas I

knew by their sound what they were and knowing what their colors were in my mind, was happy enough. I showed her the willows at the point and what would be by August the cucumber (wild cucumber vines) village which would protect the pheasants in hunting season and provide them with seeds. I told her about all the bank swallows settling on the roofs last fall wanting to get inside from the storm, and that after a thundershower the yellow head black birds come on to the lawns and walk around among the dandelions–looks like the dandelions were walking. She said: that's nice! And put it down on her little pad! She'll begin to think I've got some talent with words!! (no I don't suppose she knows anything about my writing, that I do) But I think it's best for her not to know and best for me. She has a lovely literary style, simple and so sincere.

So–and when I got Williams' letter of course I was happy. But we're all too tired to be breathless these days. Or we're breathless and nothing else. Ten years ago such a letter would have sent me higher than the great blue heron. Guess now I've got my feet on bombed ground.

Notes

[1] In a letter to Jonathan Williams on December 14, 1965, she recalls: "W.C. Williams wrote me after seeing New Goose: 'The book's a good one in the way I want books of poems to be good. It is good *poetry*. It is difficult and warm. It has a life to it.' And in 1952: 'I have always admired your work.'"

---

dated by LN: Sun. Jan. 12
dated by LZ: /47
fragment, tls.

The essay[1] to Diddy–I read it an know I've got some life yet–it's not so terse nor so quick as what chuh wrote ten years ago but it's lovely, lovely. [ ] It's like part of an autobiography–well, that's it! I always keep forgetting–I'm in it! [ ] Almost every sentence holds the meaning of the whole essay. How Williams will love it. He as close to science as he is (or is it medicine??)–(no, he's close to the physical, tho) a wonder he hasn't written something like this–but he isn't so deeply intellectual.

I made a note to ask you–isn't it true that some poetry–and it can be good poetry–is not to be set to music? Or do you mean that all poetry is capable, if it's good, to be set to some kind of music?

Everything sings (or becomes some art form) if you want to find the measure & the continuity?

Funny–just reading Schorer on Blake–he's got to have a "myth" too. As Dostoevski said: The real is often fantastic enough.

The first moments of reading essay I was so excited and carried back to years ago when I first saw your writing in the Poetry issue.[2] In after years if they talk about me and ask "Was she ever in love", they'll have to say, "Yes, she was in love with Zukofsky's words." That Zukofsky print!

Notes

[1] "Poetry For My Son When He Can Read", *Cronos*, 2, no. 4 (March, 1948); rev. and rpt. in *Prepositions* (New York: Horizon, 1967).

[2] Zukofsky's guest-edited "Objectivist" issue of *Poetry*, 37 (February 1931).

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undated [1947]
fragment, als.

Was shovelling snow the other morning at 5.30 when big round moon was almost setting–just like night, bright moonlight, lovely [ ]. I burn my trash (waste from flood) on path to river in a spot bare of snow. Nights I hang over the porch filling my small oil can to fill oil heater. I go to folks for my drinking water as my own well water isn't clear yet–I'm not home enough to pump it to the stage fit for using. Drafty errands in becky, sharp but fair–love it all. An egg froze for me in my box on the porch but ate it anyway. A bit of life in the country, wut? How's your oil heater now? Why shd it refuse to work?

---

dated by LN: Sun.
dated by LZ: Xmas 1947
tls.

My dear Zu:

Here I am for a half hour–every time I wanted to say something to you I found it so good I worked it out further on note paper–my, my, you don't suppose the Muse is musingk?? . . .

Yes, I read newspaper at hotel from 7 to 8 mornings, my spirit as dark and unshaven as the hotel night clerk looks.

I see Chief So and So from Tahiti is visiting U.S. He says "I tell my people: plant more, love more and have more fun." I find he owns 400 hundred acres of land which somebody must indeed plant. Funny, if you smell imperialism, what a different reflection it puts on things . . . .

Love to youz, Diddooz
and Major Celia-in-a-new-key
from my little kitchen
table overlooking 600
acres of marsh. The Brontes
had their moors, I have
my marshes!
[ ]
Lorine

---

dated by LN: Sunday Apr. 11
dated by LZ: /48
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Tell Celia I clean house nights like she does. It seems such a waste of daytime.

---

dated by LZ: May 23/48
fragment, tls.

I see now what you mean in the Wire home: It is always Christmas in the air at night;[1]–now that I've flown–I don't believe I got it before–cd. have been about God, LL.D. (wish Emily Di. could see that) and you know, by the way I had begun something embodying the conversation with Glover, so when you write "Regards to Glover"-jiggers, there's my title. [ ] and now when I see the second line of

God, LL.D: "Only sometimes does one feel that intimate"—Zu, could I use it and quote it? Maybe I should re-write the same idea, tho, because if yours becomes famous, there'll be the feeling of the joke about it?? . . . [end of fragment]

You know something–I don't know how the old time poets did it–the poetic vein was the soft-spoken, hushed, sweet-worded kind of thing, almost artificial, but maybe in their time it was earthy e-nough for poetry . . . now I find when one hasn't been writing for awhile, you start off in something like that soft vein, but as soon as you get used to writing again, you pick up everything for poetry, get into everyday speech etc.

Notes

[1] Zukofsky's "Light", *All*, p. 125:

Wire home:

It is always
Christmas
From the air
At night;

"So, He
really
Lived?"

---

dated by LZ: 6/19/48
fragment, tls.

Wish I had a couple weeks more at home. But I made the best of it. A little marshy, soggy piece west of the house that one could almost call the primordial swamp . . I cut grass there and planted willows, my eyes to the green ground so much that I can almost feel sea-water in my veins[1] . . . little things like algae, fine-haired weeds mixed with large-blade grass, and I think: Equisetum–little fern-like plants with hollow stems–imagine that!–if equisetum is its name–like the guy that found out he had spoken prose all his life. Lots of wild mint where I wanted to mow (with corn knife) but I wouldn't, such sweet little things. Every time I go down there with the intention of mowing I come back without doing it–and I guess my little willows will grow anyhow. I took a walk down a long path beside tall willows out to where the hunters get into their boats for mud lake–thousands of willows shoulder high with reddish leaves toward the tops–I simply pulled 'em out by the roots and lugged 'em

home for my own beginning of creation. I worked all yesterday at this and walked miles within a short space. BP went with me on one jaunt. We saw wild sweet peas (bluish purple and much smaller than tame ones) entwined around the tall grasses, the coolest, freshest looking thing. Yes, June is a good month for you to come some day. Diddy's fireflies too. I am rereading Peattie–remember some notes I sent you once?–latest research, he says, shows that bacteria on the firefly cause the light? Luminous bacteria. Symbiotic relationship. Probably the light is not for sexual advantage at all. More like the luminous fungi that sometimes grow on trees. The bacteria on fireflies may not be necessary to the latter's existence, but do them no harm. Continuing with Peattie–"Good poetry is swift-winged, essential and truthful description–and so is good science." Suzzle.

I discover something–Henry[2] uses trees so much of the time, to mark boundary lines. So I ask: To whom do they belong? So he says: well, I don't know–who cares?–and what do you want to do with trees anyway–they'll always stand– Maybe, it's the beginning of socialization! [end of fragment]

Yes, I'll send you a red dogwood root in the fall, Zu, when it's dormant. I never thought of it for your garden because our land is low and moist, but we'll try it and you'll maybe have a bit of Koshkonong there. Enclosed is a sample of dogwood bloom and stem.

Notes

[1] Similar lines appear in her late poem, "Paean to Place":

> You with sea water running
> in your veins sit down in water . . . .
> [*My Life By Water*, p. 19]

[2] Niedecker's father.

---

dated by LN: June 22 [1948]
tpcs.

Dear Zu:

Saturday I arose from my primordial mud with bits of algae, equisetum, etc . . to attend an expensive church wedding. Whole of history went thru my head, a big step from algae to CHURCH (for some people there can be no procreation without the Church!)*, from cell division to the male sweating it out while the other collects International Sterling Silver and dons and takes off

satins and continues to sweat to pay for 'em. The little slave girl bride and the worse slave, her husband.

The killdeer still sitting on the eggs. The much vaunted Instinct in nature may be going astray.

This morning in 100% humidity my hair went straight and a certain angle in the mirror I looked like Taft. If I don't look out I'll be Mac A. with a pipe in my mouth.

'bye

Lorine

*and International Sterling.

Notes

Niedecker's poem "I rose from marsh mud" condenses the subject matter of this postcard and of the previous letter.

I rose from marsh mud,
algae, equisetum, willows,
sweet green, noisy
birds and frogs

to see her wed in the rich
rich silence of the church,
the little white slave-girl
in her diamond fronds.

In aisle and arch
the satin secret collects.
United for life to serve
silver. Possessed.

[*My Life By Water*, p. 66]

---

dated by LZ: r'cd Nov 9/49
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Your poems![1] The W one—perfect perfect perfect [ ]! HD's exquisiteness plus Williams' maleness plus LZ's music, wit, modern life. HD has come close to its sensitivity–yes, it's all three of you. I place this next to the short one in Anew about a sense of passing in the grass. And the other one–we've got Homer on our minds! – that's LZ like HD could never write it (she never seems directly now, living in the present whirl)–and "philosophy"–yes, you say you sat up till three o'clock–I sat on a thought not too dissimilar for a week but going to bed at nine (how do you hold up beyond nine?)

and waking up at three for an hour or so (these nights in bright moonlight) does about as well for me.

But Ph.Ds. Something like what Celia said about the man who put up those screens when I was there two years ago–anyway workmen who earn so much and leave a screen hanging away from the window need better understanding, better seeing. You and I are being squeezed between the expensive workman and the capitalist. Neither wants the type of thing we have to offer. I worried and worried how to say this without saying it in III of the enclosed (its middle section) and then decided to put it as is. No, those two are fighting it out and I hope the worker wins but where does it get us now and a long time after the victory?

Notes

[1] Zukofsky's "Chloride of Lime and Charcoal" part III, *All*, p. 134.

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dated by LZ: Nov 30/49
fragment, tls.

Warm sunny day with
a trifle snow on ground

Dear Zu:

Hope the shakes are gone. Long underwear–ye gods, at last some sense! [ ] Got pyjamas?? Plumber is paid, tho. Charcoal, lime, etc . . .

Well, I shoulda sent for the circular re. Ridge Memorial[1]–is it small enough for you to send to me in a letter? [end of fragment]

Yes, yours need punctuation marks sometimes i.e. intellectual–still, let the reader get what he will–and he won't get much more with the marks. Take Williams-all his dashes–when all is said and done the lines between the dashes are still there. Prose must have marks. Has Cummings written something about it? Poetic thoughts don't rest in our minds with punctuation in 'em. Thought–in poetry *may* be something.

I see what you say "don't have to bother with punctuation if the form is inevitable"—I guess you've got something there. [ ]

Notes

[1] Lola Ridge Poetry Contest of the Poetry Society of America. Zukofsky won second prize for "Chloride of Lime and Charcoal".

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dated by LZ: 3/6/50
fragment, tls.

A winter evening in Wisconsin — I arrived home against a 50 mile icy west wind with a scarf tied over my face to find my oil barrel almost dry (the next day was the day for the oil man to come) and my cistern pump in the kitchen frozen. I looked in my drinking water pail and hardly a drop there so I turned around and went to the folks with two pails, one for soft water and one for hard. Coming back the water splashed out and it was like standing up on the deck of a ship in a storm. My house was 46 and I turned up the heat. I went out to tip the barrel and turn on the faucet and hold the oil can under it all three things with two hands in the wind and squeezed out enough oil for the night. Supper was partaken with boots and scarf on. When it got up to 60 in the house with a wave of air pulsing through the three west windows I started to clean house in the one little room where I keep my clothes. I kept warm working. About ten o'clock I got through and decided to eat a dish of baked beans and catsup–cap on the catsup bottle wouldn't come off no matter how much I tapped and turned. Crawled into bed, practically under it, said good-bye to the world about eleven. New Directions Eleven. But Saturday spring came and flies on the window. Doesn't look like we'd have high water this spring, thank god for that. A week in a dingy hotel room with all that expense would plunge me into the depths. I remember 3 yrs. ago or was it 4–I went to hotel and wrote you–will there be a war with Russia?

–Lorine

---

dated by LZ: Aug 2/50
fragment, tls.

The flood is subsiding and maybe the monsoon has passed. The birds and animals came close, practically inside the house because on two sides I had only a couple of feet of land. A flood in the summer

here is like a tropical jungle. The Amazon flowed through just in front of my thick growth of dogwood. Here a large (very fat) muskrat swam–they seem to swim with their noses as that's what you notice first–and came out in shore to sun himself. What's more wet looking when it's wet than a rat? My family of king rails worked for food, whacking at little crab-like things sailing along but rails are really very shy. Once a rabbit and a rail were eating away both absorbed, looking down–suddenly they came face to face and both jumped back. Rabbits not having bills are quite peaceful creature –always nibbling–it's wonder there's any grass left in this world. I seem to have planted my gladioli for them. Living in the teeming tropics under jungle law I wasn't surprised one morning to find two blood spots on my cement steps and not far away a decapitated young rabbit. I had turtles too ofcourse in my mud flat– I can't be sure of the difference between their noises and bull frogs' but I think it's turtles that have that deep thing, always three times, from evening to two in the morning. I'd wake up in my sleep and wonder what all those dogs were doing barking around my house. One day there was a water spaniel (rhinoceros) plowing through–I soon got him out of there with my cannon like voice and much clapping of hands (bring-'em-back-alive-Niedecker) as every time a dog gets excited over a bird and jumps on the soft lawn he leaves a hole. Carp worked on the edge of the lawn and slapped the water in the night. Lots of snakes of course, one disporting himself on a young willow like Spanish moss. I notice frogs get eaten in quantities by almost everything. Mozart's Air and Chopin much too delicate for this country but beautiful moonlight nights.

---

dated by LZ: R'cd Feb 5/51
tls.

Dear Zu:

22 below zero — o a couple of mornings ago it was 38 below. Henry takes it into his head he wants buckwheat pancakes (genuine buckwheat flour) like the old sourdoughs had in the lumber camps of other days and other belows. So I'll make them, I know how. I'll put the yeasty batter to rise over night on top shelf of my bookshelves – on the floor it would turn to ice. The other day when it was terribly windy I took a book down and through the space where it was came the cold wind![1] And it's all settled in my hip . . . .

The new poem[2]–I'm studying on it [ ] sounds beautiful, like the rhyme very much, funny but its tone, mood, color, sound, movement–I'd feel it had something to do with Plato without knowing that it does. I read the myth–the poem has a meaning, a super-sense, not meaning in the ordinary sense–I feel it's very wonderful [ ]. You're a poet nobody can paraphrase. Zu-Zu . . . .

Have decided I must do something folky for the next section of For Paul. Only it's getting so you go almost anywhere for it but to the people–in their barbarity[3]-no wonder I keep going to the birds and the animals.

Keep warm
Lorine

Notes

[1] Later in the month she wrote a poem that begins:

February almost March bites the cold.
Take down a book, wind pours in. Frozen –
[*My Life By Water*, p. 70]

[2] Possibly "Pamphylian", *All*, p. 140.

[3] From "In the great snowfall before the bomb" written for Group 2 of "For Paul":

I worked the print shop
right down among em
the folk from whom all poetry flows
and dreadfully much else.
[*My Life By Water*, p. 61]

---

dated by LZ: Sept 28/51
tls.

Dear Zu:

Don't look at my poems this week and maybe not next–you won't have the time [ ] I'll wait. Write on my notes, that last page.

Taine title–nevermind him, I don't know titles, understand he was good for his day on economics. Oh yuss, and if you are presented with Wm's Autobiography, you'll let me read it sometime? Yes, someday I'll write your biography with your help–your LN note[1] in A-12–guess you never actually told me that but in essence the same. If you–when you come here and read your letters to me–excerpts I've kept (on general topics more or less as I've explained to you, nothing that could bring embarrassment to anyone–you'll see what a wonderful man of literature you really are! . . .

You're on the run—so run carefully and wait for my stuff till your breath comes easily . . . .

Thanks for Bottom – will copy soon.
Lorine

Notes

[1] Dear L.N.

So your mother's dead. Today's
such a cool blue day the kind that
follows what we have all of life to
think about — Each writer writes
one long work whose beat he cannot
entirely be aware of. Recurrences
follow him, crib and drink from a
well that's his cadence – after
he's gone. What struck you, as
I think you meant, choppy in
"A", 13 years or so back when
I tried hard for the "fact", I
reread sometimes to tie in with
what goes on now, and the "fact"
is not so hard set now as a paradigm.
I have to reread several times
to find out what I meant. Only
after a while, with no pen in hand,
does the "fact" I wanted come
back – a sort of perennial-annual.
What else can you tell me? I wish
you would so I may know.
[*"A"*-12, pp. 214-5]

---

dated by LZ: Rec'd Feb 14/52
tls.

Dear Zu:

The Jameses[1] is your valentine from me, I guess! *Wd.* you, dear Zu, return it to me as then I won't have to make two more copies, only one?

Before I go further–your valentine poem[2]–Oh, I sat there and luxuriated–"the fine private luxury of each" as HJ might say! I forget what poetry is till I read you again. Those last three lines–how *do* you: pierce the heart with beauty. I often get carried along by rhyme to come out with such (somewhere near) an ending, and you

must get a lot of your suggestion (thought) from the same? The first time I read it I didn't realize it was rhyme, tho. Ah, I put this one beside Little hands,[3] the still sense in the grass, Fire summer . . . .

To get back to tea and crumpets with the Jameses. You see, the main source, The Jameses by Matthiessen is not in chronological order, doesn't give a *story* of their lives, just whatever biographical material you get from quotes from letters–M. shows their style, the style of each, their writings, their effect on society and literature. I think he goes more into the *life* of HSr. than the others–the effect he had on his children's writings–writings again, rather than their lives.

I had to imagine the actual scenes tho the mass of material from letters gives me plenty to work on. Except Alice's suicide–M. thought it was due to her being the youngest and only girl in that over-vital family. What I have used there except the pencilled part is from three sentences father put into a letter . . . .

Radio *should* be a good medium for poetry–speech without practical locale. Stage with all its costumes and place and humans tripping about too distracting sometimes. Poetry and poetic drama–suggestion–the private page plus sound and silence. I remember when MacLeish and Norman Corwin were so excited about radio. It doesn't pay, that's all!

Alice, did I tell you before?–made an entry in her journal only a couple of weeks before her death, about Emily Dickinson: "It is reassuring to hear the English pronouncement that Emily Dickinson is fifth-rate–they have such a capacity for missing quality; the robust evades them equally with the subtle. Her being sicklied o'er with T.W. Higginson makes one quake lest there be a latent flaw which escapes one's vision." This was in 1891 or beginning of 1892 . . .

Another party at Henry's–I didn't go–all day until about 10 in the evening. His birthday. My cousins, two families, came and brought the meals. What a life I'd have if I lived with him.

Lorine

Notes

[1] Niedecker's two-act radio play about the James family, "Taste and Tenderness", of which only Act 1 scene 3 survives.

[2] Zukofsky's "On Valentine's Day To Friends", *All*, p. 141.
[3] "Little wrists", *All*, p. 122.

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dated by LN: May 22
dated by LZ: /1952
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Rainy day with yellow warblers and wild canaries glinting about. All my bushes are in bloom now, honeysuckle, dogwood and Japanese Quince. To say nothing of a lawn full of dandelions. I planted my garden full of flower seeds and a couple of rows of lettuce. I don't like getting up and down but once I'm down I like sitting on my haunches . . . .

---

dated by LZ: June 11/52
fragment, tls.

. . . I have my kitchen casement window open. A tree near it gives me some wonderful music sometimes–right now it's a Baltimore Oriole and the sound seems tunneled in. You'd swear the bird was in the kitchen. Singularly pure, as HJ would say. I get song sparrows that way, wrens, cardinals, northern yellowthroats.

Fireflies at night, brilliant flash this year, atomic, I guess . . . .

---

dated by LN: July 8, 1952
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Well, your letter, criticisms etc. have given me some long moments. [ ] The check too [ ] I'll keep it and use it for copyright and photostat. Soon as I can I'll return it.

I wish you had gone into the permission of pub. I feel that they'll take one look at the play and think: an adaptation. And they'll throw it out. Wonder if I cd. say something like this: This is an original play based on material from (and list two books) I could leave it at that. No doubt they'll be wondering, if I haven't quoted and whether I got permission . . . .

I'm fixing up What's the hour–ten o'clock etc . . . exciting . . . Oh me, how did I ever get on to such a hard thing as poetry, and to bothering a hard (pressed) LZ? [ ]

I'm really in a vein if I can direct it better.

Lorine

---

dated by LN: July 12
dated by LZ: /53
tls.

. . . Accent takes two of LZ's poems! Gosh, I wish he'd end this suspense re. The Poetry of LZ[1] and answer. I begin to wonder if he ever got it. Wonder wut's up, people comingk to see you. Leila Leipzig and co. around? I'm shaking in suspents. I have to smile at something you said to me in a letter a few months ago before telling me about your letter editing project, I guess:

> "Forget it tho I tell it to you
> and say nothing to no one
> not even to me
> unless some luck attends it.
> Then I will to you."

I put it into verse lines. ! [ ] . . . .

Aristoph. in the line spoken by Father in Clouds: "Well, well Thought draws the essence into watercress." Sounds like LZ in

serious mood.

To the Adirondack Greeks
from the lowland leek — of the lily family, tho.
Lorine

Notes

[1] Niedecker's essay on Zukofsky's poetry was published in *The Quarterly Review of Literature* 8 (April, 1956) pp. 198-210.

---

dated by LN: Nov 16 [1953]
apcs.

Dear Zukies:

OK–see you–the man made out tickets for Penn. instead of N.Y. Central but the time is the same. Yes, a cab to Willow St. I have 3 hrs to spend in Chicago so will go to Art Institute. Friday night we played Chopin records at McAllisters and when it came to Chopin waltzes we danced! Families are wonderful! [ ]

Lorine

---

dated by LZ: Apr 27/54
fragment, als.

Northern water thrush in my back yard. Last night, very warm, frogs making the air jump, a whippoorwill sounding that plaint for an hour or so. (It must be nice *never* to get tired of your own song.)

[ ] Lorine

---

dated by LZ: c. March '55
fragment, als.

Strings of geese going over–thunder in the distance and spiders starting to crawl – Lorine

---

dated by LN: July 4
dated by LZ: /55
tls.

. . . If it's as hot there as here you can be glad you're home–would be cool down on the first–basement, I mean–floor? I'm supposed to go over to McA's where there are a dozen or so people milling around, for hot dogs etc. but I'll stay home with potato salad, green beans and pork chops and Bergson–just getting around to reading his Creative Evolution. Hoping some reading like this would set me going on a poem. Been so long since, as Henry James said, I've take a piece of paper into my confidence. Wish I had HJ's Sacred Fount here, I'd read it . . . .

Listen, send me Bottom if you want to and I'll type it – I'd love to, you can correct the first copy and then I'll make good ones . . . .

A complete poems of Emily Dickinson is coming out soon, they say. There will go my money. A biog. of Walter Savage Landor now out, wd. like it but costs $7.50, the kind of book that Marboro will handle for $2 in a year or two.

90 degrees now at noon –

'bye and don't hesitate about
the Bottom typing – wd. be wonderful for me.
Lorine

---

dated by LN: Aug. 14
dated by LZ: /55
tpcs.

Dear Travelers:

I traveled to a little place about 20 miles from Fort, to see cliff swallows' nests like mud bottles or gourds on sides of a barn. In spring the farmer ploughs up edge of a pond to be sure the birds have the material to build the nests. When you don't have a cliff use a barn.

Ask me (if I forgot) to tell you the story Santayana told Bertrand Russell about Avilla–it's too good to risk repetition.

Yes, No. 5, Black Mt. Rev.–Duncan says he likes intensity even if it's an intense muddle.

The McA's are out on the river riding skis. I'm in with Walter Savage Landor. His irony almost spoiled his poetry but I have to admit that's why I like him.

Hope you avoided Connie. Ladies are hurricanes these days.

Yrs – Lorine

---

dated by LN: March 19/56
dated by LZ: /56
fragment, tls.

Dear Louie:

I'm all right [ ]. I take down not my Bible but Marcus Aurelius and follow up with Lucretius and Thoreau's Journal (The Heart of) and why couldn't somebody like Thoreau–a whole family of him–have ever settled here near me? . . .

---

dated by LN: March 23
dated by LZ: /56
tls.

Dear Louie:

Can't find a postcard so –

Woke up to six quiet inches of snow overloading twigs, boughs, steps. We had no storm when you did but this instead of rain.

Was going to copy a page or two from Letters of Yeats for you but got started on a poem about my mother–this is her birthday and the snow and Marcus Aurelius and my overloaded loneliness [ ] and it's a temptation to write like Yeats, a kind of mellifluous, lush overloading (kind of folk element in it tho at that) but I must not. I should think he'd have commented at some time on Gerard Manley Hopkins but he didn't except to say he'd talked with Bridges' friend Hopkins. But he knew Pound and there is a strange allusion to Basil Bunting. P's mother-in-law Olivia Shakespear was one of his best friends and mention is made of Pound's son Omar. Was it Omar who was at Colgate when you were there? . . .

---

dated by LN: April 1
Easter Sun.
dated by LZ: /56
tls.

Dear Zukies:
The world is so busy rushing past my door on road and river that it makes me feel I'm going somewhere to write to Willow St . . . .

---

dated by LZ: Dec 1956
attached to manuscript of "For Paul and Other Poems", tls.

No hurry–put it aside till you feel like reading.

No red penciling–indicate by letter what's wrong if anything is.

I destroyed 2 new ones and keep back one concerning Aen that I wouldn't want to print, otherwise the ten or so you've never seen are included.

Question in my mind as to order–don't like the ballads mixed up with the serious–might make headings of groups i.e. Ballads–(whatever to call the more personal-original ones)–(and the 5-liners with 2 words rhyming [did I create a new form or cremate?–influence of haiku I suppose] which form I'll be using often from now on if you like it)

Should the title be FOR PAUL?? Yes, I guess so. Nice if whenever it's printed, Paul's handwriting: AND I ACCEPT–PAUL. Suzz? If he does accept!!

Believe one poem should be omitted from the For Paul section–Sorrow moves . . . .

Right-o
Lorine

O and each poem should be on a page by itself when printed, especially if there are no headings for the different kinds of verse.

---

dated by LN: Feb. 4
dated by LZ: /57
tls.

Dear Louie:

I should draw a picture of myself covered with dust mops, pails, kitchen cleanser, cloths, broom, etc. wondering where I am down those long halls past all those doors. Not really hard–the floor is, most important thing is to wear spongy soles. Arms and feet feel it. Noon hour not a working time but paid for it and given the meal so really 7 hrs. on time sheet. I take care of the dining room so far as cleaning but someone is always coming in to sit there and talk and I have to watch and wait till I can get back in to finish up before the next meal. Hospital convention bids me sit at table at coffee break in morning (15 min.) and at noon with other cleaning ladies–elderly cripples already drawing social security checks (they're allowed to earn a little money besides s.c.) but one of them is a woman I know–used to come down to see Runke–everyone trembles a bit before and

behind Miss Gobel, the Superintendent (and on Tuesday mornings I have to make her bed and dust her apartment–some things observed as senseless as the stiff white caps on the nurses' heads. Pretty democratic system, tho, at that–office girls on easy terms with cleaning women, at least with me, but I dunt keer[1]–what happens to me after I get home and a little rested and Sat. and Sun. is all that matters to me–have not been able to get hold of an anthology of Haiku from the Univ. Library.

Nice first stanza from an Andrew Marvell pome – ?:

> Think'st thou that this love can stand
> Whilst thou still dost say me nay?
> Love unpaid does soon disband:
> Love binds love, as hay binds hay.

Hay! Wonderful.

Weiss returns The Element Mother: "Perhaps you have cut away too much from these, at least we miss in them some of the cross-grained snazzy detail we enjoy in your work." ! I've sent ms to New Directions and there it will lie for some time, no doubt. Can you think of anywhere else to send it? I can't . . . .

Notes

[1] On February 1, 1957 Niedecker started work at the Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital. She retired in November 1963.

---

dated by LN: Zunday
mit no zun
dated by LZ: Mar 10/58
tls.

Hi:

. . . I like the Robert Creeley poems[1] you sent me–I'd be writing something like that if I weren't so form conscious–a heightened prose with a rather large rhythm, a slightly mystic, abstract way of getting reality across. I have to be more concentrated, tho I am beginning to worry about the five-line haiku-derived form that dogs me now, it doesn't fit everything. Maybe I am not object-minded enough, not minutely eye-seeing enough to fit a symbolism because you have

only a few words to use. When I read your concise, bare but sharp lines (lions), I think both Creeley and I are on the wrong track, the wrong hill, looking out and seeing everything and nothing.

Edward–o I like reading The Sorrows, he's a wonder. Of course I'd experience some wonder myself as I read along–is this true or is it myth? For me, when it comes to birds, animals and plants, I'd like the facts because the facts are wonderful in themselves. I hope he never goes so far agin things he doesn't like that he develops a narrow view. After all we do have sex and other appetites. If people didn't have even that kind of "love" how would they ever become as civilized as they are? I suppose he's pleading for sanity but I hope he doesn't miss something good when he does come upon it.

The business of loneliness–the mind has to be sharp to keep one from getting uselessly involved just for the sake of a moment of less loneliness. I have the Art News Annual, that large book you get from Marboro books at one-fourth the cost when it's a year old and I carried it to work one day thinking to ask the record librarian if she'd like to borrow it–she has a daughter in Milwaukee who paints. I didn't approach her, after carrying the thing there! I think they know they have a cleaning woman who is a little different from the usual, but it wouldn't do the slightest good to show them how different.

I wish I had a missionary quality–I could do some good in this community once I'd overcome their feeling that I was a freak. But Lord *no*.

Edward's "The Orient should have sent us missionaries."!

Wyndham Lewis (Time and Western Man) on Pound etc . . . yes, I see it all much better now–sometimes it takes a person years to really understand a thing if you miss out on some little explanation in the beginning. Lewis is not at all friendly to P. whereas I thought P had a great regard for Lewis and that therefore there was no real criticism of Pound in that early day–mid-twenties. I think that's why I still read so much–my education wasn't good enough in the first place. Of course another reason I read–I have to when I'm working, I get tired and away from literary thought and I'm amazed how I lose hold on my words, I forget spellings etc.

Are you all free of colds now? Hospital Zukofsky [ ].

Is a short poem boiling up now that March is here (and the east wind is cold??)–or is Bottom your main hot water bottle??

Zuzz
Lorine

Notes

[1] *The Whip* was published in 1957 by Migrant Books. Zukofsky may have shown her poems published in magazines such as *Black Mountain Review*.

---

dated by LN: June 1
dated by LZ: /58
tls.

. . . Cleaning the old cupboard I placed three books together that mean most to me–Marcus Aurelius, Thoreau's Walden and Japanese Haiku and standing beside them is Test of Poetry.

I require masses and masses of nature these days–little landscapes and wide ones
while I sit with all my trees and bushes –

Well, you're packing and
it's *forward, California*

Send me your address
there as soon as
parsible.
Lorine

---

dated by LZ: June 16/59
als.

Hi Zukies:

I've sent for the June [Poetry] issue. Goodness what an issue you describe. Yes that first line of the Robert Duncan poem to you–beautiful–I can hardly wait to see it–to play it on *my* lute.

There are words that rhyme but are never used together. You would never use lute with boot! Apropos of nothing. It's my reaction to drudgery–I'm now settled and sitting and heating myself occasionally with the organ-stove and looking at the philodendrons and the

new green draperies and the green cool clean rugs. What is so rare as a house in June! Celia, join me in a glass of home-port!

All my surfaces shine, a hard varnish shine but looks good to me, renewed table feet, doors etc after a flood. All my surfaces are hard, all my interiors, quiet and relaxing . . . .

I bought Pascal's Pensées in Madison–paperback–Be restingk my three faithfuls –

Lorine.

---

dated by LN: June 23 [1959]
apcs.

Louie!!

O thou lightsome, lovely song-maker! I do just delight in it. I *thought* you might take up the boot-lute rhyme! Lemme see–Birnbaum (baum means tree?), leaves, and kneedecker (Niedecker, shore) but daisies?–unless reference to BP? In my letter I mentioned neighbors by name of Decker had planted a rose bush? But it all sings in a skipping rhythm which I've never known you to use before, have I? Poifeck.[1]

Mexico! Nice–hot sun, brilliant colors and topped off by the plane ride. Good, good for PZ.

Tank you, Celia for typing the pome and be lazy, now, in Mexico.

Lorine

Notes

[1] From "Her Face The Book Of – Love Delights In – Praises", *All*, p. 210:

Where She a breath
Comes out of drudgery
Notes a worked out knee deck her daisies
And apropos of nothing
'there are words that rhyme but
are never used together
You would never use *lute* with *boot*' –
So she has used them.

---

dated by LN: April 17
Easter
dated by LZ: /60
tls.

Dear Louie:

The worst snowstorm of the year is going on this 17th of April! I give up! I had just gone out–yesterday–and put down some boards between the house and the "little house" in the mud and last night around 1:00 I woke in a terrific rainstorm, got up and put my boots on and went out and picked up the boards. I don't want to lose them, need 'em after the flood is finally over. Most of my lawn is out, tho. I waded yesterday all around dislodging big blocks of wood, oil drums etc. After land comes out, you can't lift these heavy things but during a flood you just touch them with your little finger and they move. So at least I got 'em off my path to the river and the low parts of my lawn. Mud hens swam right along beside me. Was very warm, I knew some weather was brewing.

Weather is keeping pace with the black state of the world politically. Could it possibly have anything to do with nuclear tests?

---

undated [1961]
tpcs.

Dear Louie:

Strangest thing happened–book–I'll send or copy for you–(a Migrant pamphlet) by Ian Hamilton Finlay (collected poems), The Dancers Inherit the Party sent me from Ventura, Calif. By whom? Seems they must have known about New Goose. Slip attached says "For favour of a review"! *I* review it??? *No* but it will liberate poems in me, a half dozen of his will. Folk, wild, witty things. A few of his a trifle too weird for me. Also I find notice in one of yr. Poetry Mags of Cid's The Descent from Daimonji, so will send him $1 for it, perhaps $5, keep the "change" for the press.

I now have a second stanza of Glen Ellyn that's good (wild) but doesn't quite fit the first stanza.

O me–it must be midnight and I have to get up at 5:30.

L.

Costs 35c

---

dated by LZ: /61
tls.

. . . Corman's Descent from Daimonji. It's nice, isn't it? If only I'd be content with this kind of poetry. I have to get drama in it, sense of conversation, wit (I hope, don't always succeed maybe), but I'm conscious of so much more and yet the world is in this Corman and Oriental-like poetry. He seems to give an honest, quiet attention to poetry. I wonder if Reznikoff doesn't like Corman's . . . .

---

dated by LN: Nov. 6
dated by LZ: /61
tls.

Hi:

Yes, the friend of David[1] was here–about one o'clock Saturday just after I'd eaten. I asked him if he had and he said as a matter of fact he hadn't so lo I had just cooked a chicken (some of it had to be saved for Harold for the next day), stewed and put on bread. I would have made biscuits but I told him I couldn't talk and make them at the same time and couldn't cook anyhow. He said he was "hung over" having been up till 4 a.m. Asked for aspirin. So with coke, cottage cheese and cookies he had to make a meal.

He talks so well. Didn't smile too much–we smiled over August Derleth's number of books (by himself)–his 94th has just come out. J. says D. knows he isn't high ranking, it doesn't bother him. We spoke of D. H. Lawrence–I'm reading the Diana Trilling collection of his letters. I was copying some from it for you when he came, will send when I've finished. Lawrence was interested in so much more than

sex! Has some of your moral force. I felt sorry for Bertrand Russell at L's hands but I know what L. meant.

Jonathan said I should send him a ms to print when I get one together again! Suzz

We spoke of Louis Zukofsky, of course, with the utmost pleasure and respect! Did your ears burn? He wants to bring out a book of short poems by you–suzz.

He left his Amen/Huzza/Selah–gave it to me–and I enjoy it immensely. There is an energy of youth, Louie, there is, because it's here and I'm reminded of a like energy in "55" and Anew. I like what happens later in life, tho, too.

Oh and your preface–nice, in form of letter. With that lovely, lovely bit from Barely and Widely. Your diving into languages, your excavation of words, I leave to you and J. I feel that J. is not at all shallow . . . .

Well, otherwise it's cold old November. Heard Nehru on radio on Meet the Press. The leader of the Neutrals! I've always thought the world of him.

Love to you all
Lorine

Note

[1] Jonathan Williams, poet and editor of the Jargon Society.

---

dated by LN: Dec. 31 '61
tls.

Dear Louie:

Yes, well, happy new year to you, Celia and Paul.

Such wonderful Christmas presents, It Was and Kulchur. Nice to read over Ferdinand and find it so good. It has a stature! Good of Cid to review Anew which came out also so long ago. You are indeed timeless in your Time. And that Thanks to the Dictionary! The first time I saw it I had just come back from the New York Public Library where I'd read D.H. Lawrence's Fantasia of the Unconscious. And I saw Dali. You know, I shun travel but it's bound to give one something, maybe much more than if one stayed home in a chair and got it in magazines or books. Just because the body went along?

When I see how much Lawrence got out of the Etruscan wall paintings and how much I see from his accounts of them–but I'd get sick from the dampness and die quicker than he did. Apropos of what I said above, the mind probably can't remember all by itself but I hope I remember something from all this absorption I'm undergoing with D.H.

As to when your book comes from Scotland I canna tell you. Be patient, as John Adams wrote to Abigail when she was in a hurry for him to get the Declaration of Independence set up and signed (and to include in it the Ladies) but this lady will timidly ask . . . .

---

dated by LN: Thurs
dated by LZ: 1962
postmarked: Feb 8. 1962.
apcs.

Dear Louis:

Had a chance to spend an hour in the library last night and what do I see in Nation (Feb 3, I think) Daruma by Louis Zukofsky! I copied it. I felt lucky I was there to refer to big dictionary and encyclopedia but neither gave Daruma so awright, *give*—

Lorine

---

dated by LN: Sun. Feb. 18
dated by LZ: /62
tls.

. . . Oh yes, Daruma–I don't know–I must read again.

You know someday, 500 years from now, a poet's language is going to be very scientific, that is, words will be explored to the limit of their roots and their connotations etc. and it will be a separate language from anything the man in the street knows. They'll still have to turn back once in a while, tho, to Mother Goose or Mark van Doren ? or me ?) and to LZ where the study (the Trouble!) of the word began, the value of the poet's language began, not so?

March can't be far away
Lorine

---

dated by LN: March 26
dated by LZ: /62
als.

. . . Thousands of geese make a wilderness in your ears here. Water all over the back land, sunset paints all this calm water with ducks swimming in it. It's all so nice when the anxiety of a high flood is past–we think, now that the ice is out of the river and the rise has been slow, there won't be nearly as much water as we expected. Hardly expect it on my floor this spring.

Madison Saturday–brought home Emily Dickenson in paperback and some Thoreau and The Origins of Scientific Thought by Giorgio de Santillana. One chapter is "The Power of Number", another, "Man the Difficult Measure". Suzz . . . .

I'm so tired–try not let present and future problems submerge youz –(*I* shd. talk)–

Lorine

---

dated by LN: April 3 [1962]
apcs.

Dear Zs:

Them cool Cats![1] Even with my poor latin I see you follow pretty closely tho, not literally. You are as immersed in this as I am in flood. Water on running board of pick-up truck as we ride to work. Pussy Willows big, their tops above water. Whistling swans here but also as yet ice on both lakes.

Get up at 5:00, leave home at 6:15, home at 5:00–O but poems floating in. You'll soon have a bit of vacation–

L.

Organs are being thrown out of tune by jet sound blasts.

Use of *ready* in 42?

Notes

[1] Celia and Louis' translations of Catullus: *Catullus (Gai Valeri Catulli Veronensis Liber)* (London: Cape Goliard, 1969).

---

dated by LN: Wed.
dated by LZ: Apr 18/62
als.

Dear Louie:

Frog trills, barred owl's scary noise, splashes in the water which is still in my backyard–moonlight, O lovely night. I don't think Venice could be better! Venice has its odors, I'm told, its garbage–so do we–this has been the filthiest little flood for garbage and tin cans.

POTH enclosed. *Please return.*

They say your book is nearly ready.

Reason I'm *tuned* to this night–been out picking up large pieces of wood, pulling 'em to side of road where maybe country truck will pick 'em up.

Harold coming for Apr 29th instead of for Easter–goes to his daughter and granddaughter then. (Easter)

Sure–*you* take care of pictures after book is out.

Lorine

---

dated by LN: May 28
dated by LZ: /62
als.

. . . Poem in frog-ness about Blackhawk Island.[1] I read too much so-so poetry or too much *perfectly made* poetry, find myself doing it too and coming out staid and dull. Unless I keep up with LZ or remember Gerard Manley Hopkins I could easily write myself into oblivion.

N.D. 17 terribly interesting but kind of hectic. Origin is so satisfying most of the time, nicht wahr? So good that you send me ND and others on my birthdays, Xmas etc. . . .

Enjoying Santayana's "The Poet's Testament"–especially his funny plays about Plato.

Keeps thundering but never rains. I have several plants of the flower Loosestrife–does well in my black soil . . . .

Well, so–when my feet get thru thundering I'll return to Santayana's gentle rain and Blackhawk frogs–sometimes, you know, if you can't make exciting lines, you can make a poem as a whole, a tone that is full and holds all thru.

Lorine

Notes

1

Get a load
of April's
fabulous

frog rattle–
lowland freight cars
in the night

[*My Life By Water*, p. 81]

She wrote another frog poem later:

Frog noise
suddenly stops

Listen!
They turned off
their lights

[*Blue Chicory*, n.p.]

and also incorporated it into "Thomas Jefferson Inside":

Winter when no flower

The Congress away from home

Love is the great good use
one person makes of another
(Daughter Polly of the strawberry
letter)

Frogs sing – then of a sudden
all their lights go out

The Country moves towards violets
and aconites

[*Blue Chicory*, n.p.]

dated by LN: Sept 26 '62
als.

Dear Louie:

I work so hard these days–I can hardly sit down long enough to enjoy those two reviews of MFT in Kulchur 7.[1] Tonight I read them for the third time and I still laugh and blush a bit–but with some pride, of course! J's–"comparing Lawrence's letters with Keats'"!–I have no memory of any inclination even, to do this. And you, my mentor and champion, he says–true, but I was very careful this shdn't come from *me* so's not to embarrass you–maybe it might, I don't know. It still seems too good to be mentioned in the same breath with Bill Williams and you–and Emily Dickinson! J. being young (is that why?) and unused to elderly (?) criticism the review has such a flattering sound. And LN personally–when what we're talking about is *poetry*! Well, he's very good to do this for me. Nice if he'd put 16 Once Published along with mine. Sorrentino has always been an admirer of me pomes . . . .

Ian writes, asks me what more do I want? And says I shd. now get some posh publisher to do a Collected. *Goodness*, how, where, do I even start? . . .

Saw a review of Robert Kelly's first book quoting him–there's a name, I think to watch. I think it's odd no one speaks of Cid's poetry –but maybe at 59 he too will be praised!

O I wonder what you'll think of the Midwest 5 poem. Wunner, wunner. In a way it's a mongrel–has both sentence–melodic line, and fragment of sentence. But something got achieved there–ecstasy, why go any further.

I am sowing tons of grass seed on the torn-up and raked lawn. Next, sawing willows to prevent 'em from towering above my house (Harold returned my saw, Sat) and bedding down my perennial plants.

How are you feeling? School starts now earlier, themes, *could* there be another school that wd. give you a better deal?

Yes, I know–yr letter explaining you write so intensely to get away from unbearable world etc.

Lorine

I wdn't know how to write poetry without Zukofsky and J. wdn't know how to review poetry without Zukofsky!

Notes

[1] *My Friend Tree* was published in 1961 in Scotland by Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press. The reviews she refers to are: Jonathan Williams, "Think What's Got Away in My Life", *Kulchur*, 2, no. 7 (Autumn, 1962); Gilbert Sorrentino, "Review of *My Friend Tree*", *Kulchur*, 2, no. 7 (Autumn, 1962).

---

dated by LN: Oct 7 [1962]
apcs.

Dear Louie:

Just heard Marianne Moore on radio FM on Poetry, soul of the people. Voice quavered, a nice nervous half-chuckle occasionally–she'd say "I thought I would read Propriety." (Silence, chuckle) "Well, I don't think I will." She spoke not from notes but spontaneously halting. Said her doctor's husband, meeting her in the elevator, asked "Where is this crow of yours?" She, "Well, it's in my imagination." Altogether, her comments made her sound more of the people than I am!

Rezy sent me his book. I asked if he had an extra copy to send maybe to Ian.

Hope you feel better now.

Lorine

---

dated by LN: Nov 18 [1962]
apcs.

Dear Louie:

Tell me what Oct-Nov Poetry costs–I want to send 'em the correct amt.

Mont. Ward man came and fixed pump–he cdn't have done better if he'd been the "greatest plumber in all London" as Hunt's neighbors called the one that lived near 'em. A model now of silent perfection, that pump, between drawings of water. Greatest plumber poem[1] finished, also one on pump.

Terrifying week end with lawyers over the brown cottage. If business were business and not intrigue!

L.

1

Notes

The Greatest Plumber
in all the town
from Montgomery Ward

rode a Cadillac carriage
by marriage
and visited my pump

A sensitive pump, sd he–
It has at times
a proper balance

of water
air and
poetry

[*Blue Chicory*, n.p.]

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dated by LN: Dec. 24
dated by LZ: /62
tls.

Hi:

. . . Your Al poem in Poetry,[1] yes –I wonder if we dare to close the gap someday–What we feel, see, inside us and outside us melted together absolutely. There's this new sense in poetry–even I with lines into each other as "Along the river"–your contrapuntals–the young today don't do it but they must be absorbing it unconsciously. Wonder if Robert Kelly will.

The music in Kulchur 8–I tried on McA's piano–as well as I could with magnifying glass in one hand and sometimes looking for a third hand to hold the magazine and I'd say those notes seem to fit the words. Looks important and fine and tell the young composer I salute him, so far as I am able to comprehend.

Cid's Sun Rock Man–was he reading you back when this was first printed–'56? I hope he doesn't write too many poems, just a few perfect ones in that absolutely quiet way . . . .

Notes

1 "Atque in Perpetuum A. W.", *Poetry*, 101, nos. 1 & 2 (Oct. - Nov., 1962). Al is Celia's brother.

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dated by LN: March 10 [1963]
apcs.

Dear Louie:

. . . Reading Flaubert's Letters. What divine things he said about *Art*.

But yes, I meant to say, first of all, Williams dead and I thought you'd be there, yes, in no matter what weather. He has quite a bit to show for his life, he really does.

Geese and red-wings here.

Lorine

---

dated by LN: Friday
dated by LZ: 2/7/64
als.

. . . I have 13 poems *saved* for Cid for I guess no. 17. I figure it will be a year or so before I have to send the bundle. There is sumpn in moving to a new place and now when I go back home this summer maybe it will seem new to me. I'm trembling on the verge of something, a form of poetic thinking that depends maybe too much on readers' imagination, but we'll see. I don't know if it's called metaphysical or not, not necessarily, I guess, but anyhow this has been in me from the beginning and somehow it's got to come out.

Wish we cd. all go together to see the play "The Man of All Seasons".

Love to you all three
Lorine

---

dated by LN: Apr. 3 [1964]
tls.

Dear Louie:

Your mention of Origin ending very likely with no. 14 or so stunned me but actually it would be all the best for me, I think. Quantity isn't my forte–I can think of one good poem among the lot I'd send Origin, the others are no better than hundreds being written now. I sent Cid a letter regular mail so haven't had time to hear from him.

My life has this rhythm now of going out home week ends and coming back to Milwaukee Mondays. The worst bother is getting the food ready, some of it cooked or roasted, before leaving on Saturday altho once I get out there I enjoy just warming up the things . . . .

Reading Ruskin[1]–his letters home from Venice to his Pa. After he'd been not long married to Effie Gray who was so unlike him, wonder if she really was. He was a Turner enthusiast, rather; Turner's pictures became his life. He wanted to live in the country quietly with an occasional trip to the Alps (Effie, he said, would not like the country, but he couldn't help it), and anyhow, he said, "I shall be living altogether in Turner". When he saw Tintoret, however, he felt that nothing in the world gave him "so great an idea of human power . . . No writing, neither Homer's nor Dante's–nor Shakespeare's, seems to me indicative of so colossal an intellect. Their work is only thought–Tintoret's is actual Creation . . ."

About his book The Stones of Venice–"You know I promised them no Romance–I promised them Stones. Not even bread." Shades of LZ: "Every hour of talking to people is like so much shortening of my life".

He quotes some wonderful things – Exodus: "And there was in that place also a gust of that old Egyptian East wind: which brought the Locusts upon Pharaoh." And Milton (old style but the man felt some things): "the glorious temple reared Her pile" (Milton might have capitalized Temple) and "To warm him wet returned from field at eve . . ." But even then, 1851, he says it was painful to travel in Italy, everything was being destroyed. One wonders what is left there now. But you were there and must have seen sumpn.

March was a horrible month here and it's still cold and snowy–hope PZ hasn't got the sniffles from it. Do you still eat watercress like you used to? I never see it in the stores here.

This is an eatin' letter! (such problems I face as rutabagas–plural? pork shanks, cabbage–ugh!)

Love to you
all
from Lorine

Know what's happened to Clark Coolidge's magazine? Hasn't arrived, I mean.

Notes

1 Ruskin found wild strawberries
and they were a consolation
poor man whose diaries
were grey with instances of rose

I think tonight we'll have the liver
since tomorrow we go out
tho not of course like him
to Metaphysical dinner
following Greco

[*Blue Chicory*, n.p.]

---

dated by LN: July 23
dated by LZ: /64
als.

Dear Louie:

Norton–o how verrry wonderful. Respectable at last! *All*! Only it won't be *All*. We use *All* soap detergent when we go to the laundromat when we don't have *Family Flakes*!! *All* is a nice title–yes . . . .

Cid wrote. He lives in a house now different from former address but still in Kyoto. "I happen to think poetry MATTERS."–etc etc. Good old Cid.

My God, it's hot here. What do you do about that in N.Y.? Fan? I remember I used to keep the house cool by closing the doors, pulling the shades and reading Proust! Or Edmund Wilson on the Symbolists . . . .

---

dated by LN: Dec. 1
dated by LZ: /64
tls.

. . . I ought to be shot for parting with that Feb. '31 Poetry. And I remember the evening you reached up on your shelves and handed it to me to keep. But I copied a great deal from it before mailing off. Reznikoff has never been given such knowing treatment anywhere–before or since–I'm sure, almost in fact the *only* recognition.

Love to both
Lorine

---

dated by LZ: 5/18/68
apcs.

Dear Louie and Celia:

A firebomb was thrown into South Hall on the campus early this morning, Saturday!

O those lilacs[1] –

Lorine

Hope you aren't too knocked out. *Bleeding Heart* is *Dicentra Spectabilia*, Celia.

Notes

[1] On May 17, 1968 Niedecker met Celia and Louis Zukofsky in Madison. She writes to Corman on May 21, 1968: "Best thing that could have happened from my point of view to all of us (Celia very much interested, darting to the base of the shrubs to read the latin on the sticks, LZ baring his grey head to the sun and I revelling in the color) – [Lawrence] Dembo took us to the arboretum to see all those lilacs in bloom and several other trees and bushes."

---

dated by LN: Nov. 23, 1970
tpcs.

Dear Louie:

Disturbing you too often but this is my last for a while. LIV[1] says my 29 pp not enough, shd. be 64 pp in the interest of economy ! but "beautiful writing" etc . . .

O sure. And J.W. arrives at his place in Conn., tells him he wants to do another book for me (my God after a 5-year wait for T & G–I don't have that many years left. Cid wants to get out a book for me. I may let him, don't know, better perhaps wait another 2 or 3 years and give LIV 64 pp.

Close to zero here!

I really kind of liked the Richard Chamberlain Hamlet on TV.

Al's daughter Julie in Australia prepares for a hot Christmas–so far they've been carrying a stove from room to room like Cid does in Japan. Hope you carry yourselves with strength–

Lorine

Notes

[1] James Laughlin, editor of New Directions Publishing House.

Milo De Angeli

Five Poems and Two Essays

(Translated from the Italian by Lawrence Venuti)

WITH BROKEN OARS THEY EMBARK

Statues, serenity of the sleigh
toward the mountains: how vulnerable
to a certain love to be
lost on the landing without a banister!
Garden of the pit and the lightning bolt
where the diver suspended in air
is feverish . . .
and you, chalk-colored,
don't remove the winter
that descends in his voice: he is alive
like a nocturnal parchment, he breathes like a son.
Sky and earth
are calm, kneeling.

STONES IN THE WARM MUD

Laugh once, when the evening
wind carries a wonder
that can't be seen, but resumes
in the outline of the shadows and profanes the pact
and sees the wild apple tree, the poplar
birds whose meaning and necessity
to be born again are unknown
yet in the air they hollowed out the right
direction, the current
that was liberating, in the ocean, the same one
that now conquers the moment
oaks and poplars
of the woman warrior who is sleeping

in the warmth of an esteem
denser toward the end: already the trapped fly
frees itself in flight
melody of the water and the conch
which a gesture will change into experience,
within a complete action, suddenly
after escaping among the branches
here's the dusty road, the field
the salvation
that swims toward a luminous calm
shelter for the hares
tired of traps, after millennia,
and the storm, the clearing sky
everything is so alone
it can become anything.

TELEGRAM

The window remained as before. The cold
repeats that idiotic essence of rock
while the letters of every word tremble. I seek only
an exit, some elevator,
and even when I tell you of the sea
the sea is a few square meters, a drill,
scarcely out. And it's the intuition
of a daughter who breathes only
in the first moments of a thing. Paper to say
rice and bread, month to say cushion. The blue ones call me,
frozen in a fixed star.

BORN ON THE EARTH

Born on the earth
that remains

hardly were we that breathless rejoicing
when the minds arrived
on the back of a canary
and conquered. A
matron-at-arms
is screwed to our flank, guardian
of the tables, a harpoon
in the Mediterranean world, among the eggs.

You didn't want to share
the plunder and so
you have me forever
because there was nothing else
but the pure victory. Later
we shall throw our prey
to the cats: they will know
how to destroy it!

Here is the quartz page
in the agenda, when
every man is razed to the ground
and remembers. The pine cones fill
this courtyard
faithful to its meters: the very tree
of the door
that is perennial for anyone who notices it
and yet is air, only air. It has a severity
and a still attentive custodian. These
were the numbers.

THE KILLING

Someone hesitated before the light-switch,
but then he struck all the same because of a buzzing
one day in the kitchen
again and always an elegy of herds
which the poison nonetheless distinguishes.

This, with a style of quiet, was the hatred
and the thousand atoms in the artery that awaited
the killing neither rapid nor doubtful nor anything,
but the pure killing without footprints:
in a spring whiteness the body stirred.

Thus goes the story and you have the suspicion
of another time: millennia
encrusted in the resin, people
who fill the skin, the garbage can, the nightmare
of the hands, when sleep
abandons them near the ditch.

STARTING OVER:
An Autobiographical Note

Having immersed myself only recently (1977-1980) in the iron arguments for starting over in poetry, I shall attempt a rapid history of this immersion. Perhaps the first memory–in elementary school–is that famous one of the "laughing, fugitive" eyes of Silvia in Leopardi. This was a subject on which a critic of that era dwelt, maintaining how senseless it was to reverse the two adjectives ("fugitive, laughing") because of the presumed risk of losing the feminine transience of a glance that "requires a slippage into that fugitive closure." Like other classmates, I immediately sensed the banality of such an explanation, and with them I began to imagine the beauty, the different beauty, of "fugitive, laughing."

Years later, while reading the hermetic poets, I saw that there was a subtle attention paid to breaks and combinations in many verses of Mario Luzi (above all from *Honor of the Truth*) or of the best Alfonso Gatto or of Pietro Bigongiari. (More than in others, where often the interruption seemed contrived, accompanied by a solemnity that leaves open mouths and hews to the rhetorical tradition bound closely to cogency.) In fact, I recall two lines from Bigongiari underlined in an old anthology–"Death is this/glance fixed on your courtyards"–two lines in which the caesura seemed and still seems to me inevitable: death is "this" and at the same time–after a silent interval–the "glance on your courtyards," with that

strange link between glance and fixity, two terms that don't agree, apparently, but which are wed in the totality of the poetry. Then, after years in secondary school and the university, I sought something else: a starting over even farther removed from meaning–from the meaning inherent in two separated lines and from that orchestral meaning that illuminates their separation–I sought, in other words, a rupture of the sentence that might be constrained by, but not derivable from, the sentence itself or the totality of the sentences. A rupture that might derive from a kind of dictation, which commanded both that the sentence be broken without explanation and that this break be loved in a total vision of poetry, although not of that poetry: "total" being understood here as the whole of what pre-exists–a poetic–and of what is impending, a groping that *will become poetic*.* By the same token, the term "dictation" does not in the least exclude infinite corrections or variants, scrupulously committed to the faithful repetition of what has been dictated. The variant is thus not a disobedience–never this, experimentalism finds it difficult–but on the contrary a more intense hearkening to the command, an "unexceptionable listening."

*A Siberian legend narrates: In a small village in the Byrranga mountains there was woman who was the ugliest of all the women in the village. For years she remained shut in her house, trying to appear in public as little as possible: but everyone was aware of her ugliness and could not stop themselves from avoiding her or simply–as with the most wicked villagers–from deriding her pitilessly. The woman suffered enormously and, one day, decided to turn to the wizard of the village so that he might do something for her. He asked her to give him a few days, saying that a mysterious concoction of herbs could perform the miracle. The woman returned to the wizard, who, full of joy, announced that the concoction was ready and that, if she drank it, she would appear the most beautiful of all the men and women in the village, no one excluded, not even the malicious ones. The woman agreed. She drank the potion–a mixture of herbs which she had never tasted before–and as she was leaving the wizard's house, she realized that the prophecy had been fulfilled: everyone looked at her as if she were a queen. For several days the happy woman walked proudly through the entire village, much to the admiration of anyone who met her. But gradually, as the weeks passed, a worm began to gnaw at her mind. She thought: "Yes, it's true, everyone finds me beautiful, *but in reality I am not:* how shall I endure this secret all my life?" With the passage of time, the gnawing grew more and more bitter, and the woman decided to return to the wizard to tell him how much she was suffering this fracture between the others' gaze and her inner certainty that she was not beautiful. But the wizard–like all the inhabitants of the village–found her wonderful and could only express his admiration to her over and over: "you are beautiful, you are the most beautiful of all."

At this point the legend ends, left unresolved. Hence the woman suddenly finds herself alone and in an instant can decide her life: to allow herself to be invented by the others' gaze, to yield to this gaze, to accept the beauty that is presented to her

THE ABSENTEES

Every manual of Italian literary history records a long void that runs more or less from the fifth century to the *Ritmo Laurenziano** and then to the thirteenth century: entire centuries were spent creating churches, paintings and treatises and forgetting to leave us any poetry. The pages that describe these centuries are gray and lazy with the usual historico-economic interpretations probing in various ways and with diverse subtlety the difficulties of a poetic birth. But then, several pages later, there is suddenly enthusiasm: St. Francis, Jacopone, Guittone, all the others appear. The absent now seem cast aside.

So it happens–prodigiously–that even a manual for schools can teach something, as soon as it refuses to beat its breast for those who could not, or represses any longing for a "history written by the victims," as the saying goes, leaving doubts as to whether the victims are absent ones or those who collect alms so that no one will be absent.

Yet, if someone shouts his love to you, how can you sew up his lips by listing all those who have not shouted it to you? Is there any greater cowardice? Think of Ariadne, when her thread leads Theseus to the mouth of the grotto, Theseus relates to her all his years in the labyrinth, the years when he could not embrace her. But outside, meanwhile, shines the Aegean, calling them unrelentingly. Theseus temporizes, lingers over the joy he missed for so long, and winds up asking Ariadne to share in the darkness of his amputated years. And the Aegean continues to call, with its dense blue, so different from every other sea. It is here, then, that Ariadne, filled with love and disdain, cuts the thread and kills.

until she merges with it and is beautiful by choice; or to preserve her sorrow, her terrible distinction between the others' gaze and her own. The woman chooses. This is what starting over means, among other things. A history unfolding inexorably, on the one hand. And on the other, a sudden split, chained to that history and at the same time unaware that it is unfolding there.

*The *Ritmo Laurenziano* (literally the "Laurentian Rhythm") is the oldest surviving poetic composition in the Italian vernacular. Written between 1151 and 1157 in rhymed, octosyllabic verse, it is the work of a troubadour who requests the gift of a horse from a bishop [translator's note].

SEAN KILLIAN

Four Poems

NEXUS

Now nothing is
but care rising
care will rise but
through bamboo blinds
air alights, because
it thins and thins again
till nothing is but light
beside light, dark stripe
lashed in between.

To have death in
the wind – thoughts
will spin when air surrounds –
the air
blinds –
a still and central
monument – death has us
in the wind.

Let care rise and supplication
tumble up to try
dawn's hush –
air thinned to light beside light,
slat of shadows lashed to every ray.

AS SIGNATURES SAG
(Invocation to Kali)

Endless clues keep
space intact, all its

weathervane violences
sub rosa, secret

until the transparency of doom
lets augurs look
their hearts' desire.
Then space is unwebbed,

blown like ripple and blur,
nothing left but a few
voices and perhaps an
electric eel migrating through an ideogram.

Throw the sticks and
the cat's black path
must be the fiction we soon create.
I follow, however late, your blinking

and the hatted savants take
off their pearl robes to bathe in
your base, amorous sweat. The deaf and dumb
are put in fire's lucidity –

we'll see the lump sum come
awkwardly onto the sundial, swimming
through our eyelashes. No one gets beyond
the "privacy" of unclouded windows –

I wait for what chance will choose.
I crawl up a torchsong, take off
like a butterfly, divining your
inklings which rustle leafy and

the sand of names blows into dunes
settling on a sunstruck afternoon.
The witch will chuckle, hoarse moon
more blatant than a screamer, worse

than a bluestreak talker, a loose mouth
to be sure but a whisper, a rhetorician
of whispers worse! Augurs stoop to
tangled images drying on her bed.

Subliminal whinnies wait in the back
of a cave. Phosphor keeps belief, what's

left of it in the tail of a firefly, in
the soft cool shock of algae breaking ashore.

No one knows the devices by which
we attain luminescence though some
buy clockfaces, expecting love
on schedule; when what is ravels

so suddenly there's no time but
to glimpse the hands swinging freely
through the wilderness of momentous space.
I stab at the burning fetish, but

your revelling voodoo has dropped
its thumbtacks for a subtler bruise –
your mouth on mine. I want out but
I can't back out on knees. Since when?

Since you cut me dead. Since you
levelled my manhood with one flip
of your forefinger and thumb – victory
comes easy, the wattage of sperm

ready to run its current. Slippage
of no sparing! Chance will take its
seasoned apparitions and go. I'll gag
on a mouthful of red peppers while you sign

my name to the dotty line of a "there's more" . . .

TRIGGER FINGER
(On Translation)

A different tongue
runs over your beautiful body,
translating it.
Civilizations rise

from the more wonderful
ruins of savages.
There's no way to speak
truly. The translation says
it swears to be kiss, not corpse.
But the civil banks on
the criminal in a wary
weaving. The origins gag
on their own foreignness.
The lips sizzle, warp.
We live to know
these nights of dallying,
the gaga way of the grateful.
We are crisp with
this unison, the body
a hunch and mating traducing time.
The beloved, the original
has long dropped inside a darkness –
there to be ferreted – there to be found –
made not indifferent. But
she has translated past dried ink,
unremoveable stain, stasis. Her
paralysis has been fingered enough.
She has no inklings of the perfect, fading lover.
He can only translate her. Or someone else
will try it. The truest lust touches down
and the only imagined beloved lifts her ghost
in the drawn sentences, in the fresh phrases.
We strip the static and another version
is held on our lips, on our tongues.
The foreign beauty accepts the guesses of my thumb.

MISSIVE

My mirror has
no acorns for my snowed-in face
My hands will try to interfere
I lift each finger to conduct

I'll find a silent lying
but will my mouth manipulate
a gleaning, a lying low?
How can craft
touch down on unowned light?

Trusted to sunlight
shows a running off
the slow melt that is memory
Why lie silent when I muse?
My eyes have wintered
this mirror and now
the snowflakes are snailpace
Surfeit sweeps down
Storm has caught the sky

Any set of hands is welcome
to interfere but these hands
will freeze
Interference is a lovely
spring wind but that has
to wait – I always elect to fondle
some remote imagining
Acorns may be broken
for their meat

CLARK COOLIDGE

Listener's Reach

Notes On Some Continual Sources
for David Meltzer

Okay, right, back into it, the endless musics, a necessity. Back, which in the listening, comes forward. The recordings, which were all that's left of most improvised music at any one point. The search, the shelves loaded with silent sounds, but ultimately what all this does to the mind, no? I wonder. Just precisely who are we, what spirit, following years of edging our heads into sonic crevices, listening through the overheads of static and hiss. Sometimes I feel like *I* am Dean Benedetti! Leastwise, we learned to use our brains like picks, calipers, and not just float on the sog of easy album. And Russ Freeman, right, it's necessary to know what happened! Not just that he went to Vegas and led lounge bands for years, but how could he come loose from those angular forms he made and that made him a shape we listened for. That Art Pepper Among Friends album reveals, for one thing, that McCoy Tyner modal blahblah happened to him too. Tyner has got to be (though I do love his early work with Trane, trios, etc.) one of the worst pervasive influences on pianists going. He became an easiness you could drop into, the slackest way all chords relate. Of course this gets into that whole (still unresolved) issue of changes versus scales: to me it's a bit like when sculptors put down and forget about their hammers and begin molding wet clay. Chords have *angles*, and they set up sharp vectors in the space that modes gloss over. When Miles Davis proposed Kind of Blue, he challenged players toward a genius of *melodic* invention that proved almost beyond human ken (mostly, Miles himself couldn't make it). Coltrane, in the midst of all those often glorious sheets, sometimes would find a phrase that was like a crevice in the chromatic universe pointing the way back through into a changes-orientation, an inside-out feeling that gave great emotional charge. And Cecil Taylor, in the late Fifties, used to talk about making a tune that would feature "the ultimate changes." All that keeps returning to me, beautifully unresolved. Also recalling Cecil (in A.B. Spellman's book) talking about an early Sixties concert with Lyons and Cyrille: "and there were points in which we would get into, like a pure idealistic thing." A hint there of maybe the best use of that well-worn "ideal" word, almost a verb, almost like Rilke, say. Close to somebody talking about the real reason why we do these things?

And how to talk about everything important at once and get it generating further, not just an enumeration or exercise in catalog. I sometimes wish I could feed my record shelves into a random mixmaster, which would feed me out tracks unchosen/unawares. Why doesn't all this technology *really* do us some good? But lacking that, there are the ones we return to, again and forever it seems and with good hope. It would be right to make such a list right now, to keep up presences of memory and as antidote to the old "What do you think of the latest . . .?" syndrome. Sometimes I wish, as I hurry from bin to machine sweating for the current inroads, it would just all STOP. At least for a single night here in the midst of the mess. (Image of Jean Shepherd's stringband-powered lemmings streaming over the final edge: "Yes! Let's go!") So, a pantheon of my returning ones, humming goads of the unfinishable project.

*

Monk. After thirty years of listening, and playing on his tunes, I have no doubt he's written the most generative body of compositions in jazz. Endless avenues in each tiny hamlet. This kernel will always grow. And ultimately one must have all his albums, but the special ones for me are the solo outings (the Columbia, the Riversides, the Vogue). Portraits of the Monk Silences, you can almost "see" his mind inching, how those shapes come to *be*. The ways he made that black box *ring*. Condensation through Silence producing Endlessness.

Listening to Off Minor, I recall a scene in the dim-off past sitting around one whole night with some cats bashing our head against the bridge of that tune. There's a very odd chord alternation in there that we never could get to sound right. A most resistant alchemy. And I've heard versions of that tune since where the musicians just faked their way over that change, couldn't hear it, or anyhow couldn't make it, gave up (Monk keeping his secrets?). The Sphere is wound so tight that if you can't hear the chords you can't play the melodies, and (as Steve Lacy said) if you can't play the melodies you can't blow on the tunes! An additional mystery: how Monk makes the standards he plays on sound like he wrote them. That Webernian I Should Care, especially the ending, for instance. I once played that track next to Webern's Piano Variations and they went together like mates. Wonder if Monk even ever heard Webern? Maybe not. But then, nobody invented the atom. Also

mysterious: how Monk's pieces are such sophisticated structures and same time remain prima materia, like great beautiful clinkers lit by an undiscovered sun.

*

I picked up the double reissue of Brubeck Trios and recalled how I needled every crevice of those Fantasy 10-inchers till you could almost see light through them. Some of his heads on those tunes, when not too consciously "classicals," still shine. Tea For Two is one. I just got a flash of the wallpaper pattern in that attic room of my folks' house where I first listened to those sides, snapping brushes across my first snare drum (a Slingerland black & gold-flash model). No wonder I never learned to dance! Or prove geometry propositions. Ancient frigates sailing toward purple clumps of weed . . .

All the old Brubeck quartets, up until Morello joined, are well worth the rehearing. Especially the live recordings. Jazz Goes To College is an album I've never tired of. Even its acoustics (via early amateur tape) have a presence (before Columbia fucked it up with phony starey-o) that sounds to me like the sound of meditation itself, maybe because I think it was this precise album that I learned to listen *into* music on. I even love to ponder the most whacky pondering mad-grit Brubeckian key-gnashings, where it sounds like he's trying to carve out harmonies with axe-point from *inside* (if only he had had a rhythmic sense equal to his harmony-head). I don't think I know a more intense all-out *improvisation* than his Balcony Rock solo. I mean, you can talk about swing, fingerpopping et al, but that slow build up through some of the maddest corner-turnings of idea, his way of using riff structures to layer strange heavy chordal bunches that even got to Cecil Taylor at that time. And Desmond I've come to appreciate (hardly the word) even more since my early fascination with the group. I see him as an unequalled *melodic* improviser. His solo on Little Girl Blue (Jazz: Red Hot & Cool) still kills me. And his Carnegie Hall variations on For All We Know, a gorgeous tune with that altered change at the end. Outside the Bru Band a favorite Desmond is the Warners First Place Again album, pure melody out of air on the perfect touch of Percy Heath and Jim Hall. But so many . . . Even the later albums, where he's fighting Morello for a lot of the time, have perfect Desmond melodics. And the sadness of that last tour when he had almost no breath left, could only play short phrases. On the concert broadcast by Public Television he played a whole solo on A Train *totally* composed of tiny quotes from other tunes.

Joe Dodge's bass drum. A sound to reckon with, still. Best recorded example: that opening shot on A Train (Jazz Goes To College). I once asked him how he could possibly get that sound, like a door slammed at the end of a long hallway. He just pointed to the batter head, the calfskin totally hidden beneath masses of moleskin bandages and adhesive tape repairs.

There's still a lot of retrievable mystery in those long solos, "my own catastrophes" Brubeck once called them. Massed harmonic wisdoms, sometimes he seems almost to forget rhythm entirely, so bound down does he get in the chordal depths. I can recall Fifties Brubeck concerts where you'd get that "I saw him *in*side" feeling of total committed improvisation. The main reason he was such a hero-model for me as a kid. One *could* take universe in hand and make it over into a run to the end of the night. Literally everything else faded away from those moments of solo which grew huge in time and even space. Later I began to see the frat-boys spilling beer on their Bru discs and gave 'em a sneer. What could they possibly hear? It's impossible not to feel superior at some point in your early life. Collegian popularity must have been some colossal mistake. The look and manner of those Bru guys, especially when *not* playing, must have made them acceptable enough to Fifties lounge-sitters. But when I watched the Brubecks playing I saw the possibility of madness.

Meditative space of the long Brubeck feel. I remember watching him build up those big structures. Serious digging-in and platforming the space beneath you with wielded notes. Brubeck some kind of chordal carpenter. Desmond the sluice-gate for tensile exhalation. Brubeck with a real hold on narrowing and thickening the line. Tension of sequence as a sentence structure. Improv meant you went at it *hard*, clang down of hands, use your legs too. High-wire walker tipping a lead bar for monstrous balance. And then, suddenly chorus-end amazement of your position, raise brow and blow pianissimo, sing and let the dust settle in the blackbox. The crowd will wait behind the lights. Pin drop to babble roar of Brubeck audiences in a few seconds flat. Risk as a coefficient of high-paying one-niters. I hear Fifties Brubeck always in a closed-in echoing four-square hallspace, pin spot on the black varnish corners, Brubeck arrayed in a huge hunch, his head disappearing below the Baldwin sign, Desmond's clasped hands over a tiny brass glow, his tight smile closed-eye punning on his hands, Joe Dodge chugging his used-car bassdrum blanks with a very hip configuration of angled elbows and ducked head behind

light hornrims. A clangor boxed in quiet. They had their own structure of jazz to climb, no matter the uptown derogatories of hardbop nothing putdowns, the endless replays of their least interesting tune. They belong in no "stream," anomalysville forever. I see them in the Fifties heights, making planes to Oroville, taking pictures of airports, numberless choruses of On The Alamo tending and pending in their brains, signing autographs with regular-guy smiles while within it's all innards of risk and "weird" musics to get up on and speak your piece before TIME covers slam down on everyone and the vista wastes into middle-aged Morellos at every bus station grinning and slapping five.

*

That Harris/Flip/Lennie wire (Tristano jam club recording) is a popper and opener. Those great "lost" wires and early tapes, racked off in some backroom clubmist times-forgotten, bars recaptured, "off-the-record" and surprised from the doldrums, sheerly golden at lengths, full of cashglass tinkle and rhythm-men nameless, are perhaps the Secret History of Jazz? With the lights turned off, some cats seem to have always been solidly *on*. Lost nights in the Village, and someday we'll meet somebody who'll absently say "I was there." I like to think we all were. In this case: brilliantly haltless Lennie Cascades, metallic as in dreams of the Forties, no matter what's playing on top. An unspoken facet: the *energy* of Tristano. And I can hear Shearing listening and ready to puff and soften it all down for the half-ear crowd later. Brubeck heard it too, from his Milhaudian closet far west Mills valley. But what did the Forties Middle-Rangers think of it baffling away back there? Norman Granz snorts back another one and flicks Lennie off his coming JATP list. Oscar Peterson already signed for the "energy" slot in Norman's brain. But, Bill Harris? He hears, and you can hear him, of all on that date, picking up and trying to mesh figures with Lennie here and about. Flip Phillips is off in a dream of honking crowds into sag-butt oblivion. Billy Bauer is a chestnut, a ghost of Lennie in his speed-blends, perhaps why he never rose as star in jazz-crit estimation and scorecard? Denzil Best, actually to brush his best with Shearing soon up, cracking away drunk back there. He always sounds to me like a less scrappy Roy Haynes. And Chubby Jackson proving I guess the Forties power to enter any and all sessions of a Woody Herman credit card. On such nights are we all built, and jazz . . .

*

Cecil Taylor at Newport is a gorgeous early foundry. Which, along with the BlueNote reissue of Jazz Advance, should forever place him on his own foundations for all further listening. Dennis Charles with his iron THWACK sound, like he found a secret hollow in Art Blakey, has a forever ghost throne-spot in CT's music for me. Steve Lacy, finding a home in CT's music without torsion of lots-of-notes, defines all the edges. And I always love to recall CT's gloss on Tune Two as "an extension of the ultimate chord changes," which it is. A standout group that should have been free to wax their whole book. Hear again their Boston Sweet and Lovely.

*

Sonny Rollins. The Worktime album is basic. There Are Such Things is one of Sonny's major novels. And Max Roach, the four-square needle jet throughout. A tack-hard attack, those S & M exchanges on All Right With Me. Fifties Bop: soundssounds recorded in tight rooms, air so dry the dust fell like shot. Sonny's bell swaying off and on mike (another rhythm overlay), he was always "in stereo." Max nails the time so hard you can almost cut with it. What S & M make I see as the root meaning of "business." They hoot and hard-edge their centers of gravity. By the mid-Fifties, Bop: an art so sure there were no limits.

The Rollins platform the broadest yet to land. His tone, alone, has a melodic range all its own. His rhythmics an open field of possibilities. Ways to go. In the late-Fifties to mid-Sixties all he needed was a standard bop rhythm team (sans much variation) and he was away, providing all the sculptured posts and solution pockets by his self. On Now's The Time he focussed down to what seems a lone interval of the melody, varying it up into opening vistas largely through tone expansions, the slit widens into whole melodic views. Blue n' Boogie: the Trane variations, those turning 3 and 4 notes figurations, sax by opening and closing the nose. Now Sonny on rhythm-lead, now on the tonals.

52nd Street Theme: another "Woody Woodpecker Symphony?" Recall that late-bop gadget Jackie McLean used to use, they called "The Peck?" A sort of hard-edged speed exchange, call response and banter back, like an antiphony of clipped/stuttered speakers. Trane seems to have internalized the kinetics of that (Chasin' The Trane). Sonny maybe "invented" it? "The Peck" is West Indian as to source ultimate? See early George Wallington quintets etc. The jazz scope is so much *wider* than usually spoken.

A marvelous ease spread and command of directions in the Sonny On Impulse. His sound there opens any space to more than the room it's in. An LP title: Sonny In Confidence. Three Little Words (the title) as description of those little 3 (and 4) note melodic handles he likes to turn endlessly. The stereo layout on that album perfectly displays Sonny's pendulumic swing (as in "a swing"), back and forth of horn bell as he blows. Sonny Searchlight from a room corner.

Sonny's micro-attention to a melody: space between any two notes is an interval worth the expansion. And you could get even farther out meditating on the time factors of intervallic space: distance between any two notes suggesting a certain tempo and its incipient rhythmic possibilities. Or even vibrato rate as time setter?

On the Our Man In Jazz (Village Gate) session you can hear the Ornette Troops really pushing Sonny to the edge. Cherry and Billy Higgins playing so *bright* you forget how dark and boomy the Gate really is. Cherry with cracked-sounding chops of that era, but with the conception to spare. Ideas! "He really saw the movements." His solo on Doxy to be studied for years. A generative music from many points of view. Like, when Sonny pushes to the edge his humour must accompany (or simply as bridge for melodic continuity?). Wish he'd continued, not fallen off this wire. In a later interview he said there was a time when he promised himself he'd never play a mere single pitch by itself again, had evidently perfected the mode of chord-playing then. You can hear a taste of it here. Clearly lit his pluses over the scads of "free" players to follow: high rhythmic change, adhesive humour, seemingly endless melodic planes.

*

What did go wrong with Free Jazz? It's possible that some of the "blame" may be laid in Trane's wake, the way the followers heard him anyway. Late Trane modallic lengths and squawk/squeak texturals (taken as no more than that) turned into el boro nonvariant settos. Ayler, thus, can be seen as the Last of the Melodics? So many Free Players couldn't see or use the way Trane was working *within* knots of harmony, didn't have his vertical chops or balladic backdrop. They lacked a large Ornette *melodic* sense, and this is perhaps where the Free impulse collapsed, on the rocks of linear ignorance? Polyphonic ensemble improvisation demands the foresight of developing longer lines in time. Also an instant (take a leaf from Trane's book) harmonic grasp of the way simultaneous lines are jibing vertically (especially, as in Ornette, if you're not using

chord beacons in the tune). In the later Pharaoh Sanders jinglebell period you can hear what a limited sense of melodics he had to fall back on, past this tour with Trane. So it's hard to avoid thinking of Ornette's Free Jazz sessions as the standout multivalent masterwork of the period.

*

When I first heard Gil Evans I got the hope that maybe he was going to get around the writing-for-sections problem by an aggregated independence of single voices, but. His ear for harmonic textures led him too into his own form of sectional organ-chording, couching lushnesses, the backings for Miles etc. Ornette's Free Jazz (and the alternate take on Twins) still seems the best answer to that, mostly I suppose because it's less writing than blowing. Interesting there to see how horizontal (or as Martin Williams would have it, "melodic rhythm") thinkers fare better than vertical minds. Like, Ornette and Cherry rather than Hubbard and Dolphy. It's almost as if Ornette divided them that way to point this out? But this horizontal/vertical polarity must be finally too simple a notion of "seeing" it all? Note, though, how Trane's Ascension date seems a mineral compounding of sounds beside Ornette's play of woven beams.

*

The Miles Davis Sextet Jazz At The Plaza (1958 live set) is interesting to dig for contrasts and setups of the time. Lousy recorded sound (Miles shifts to a dead mike on the first chorus of If I Were A Bell, etc.), but, listen into the warp. On the first track (a Straight No Chaser inexplicably retitled Jazz At The Plaza) Miles seems to be using his whole opening solo to point up the rhythm, get the time leaning right. This time-slot interaction with the drums notable throughout his works. Or, as Jerome Cooper recently said, "Miles Davis is the greatest drummer." Then Trane pours in, seems to create a vacuum to fill with his own spaces, clearing out everyone else's notes with winds of his own device. Which reminded me of Leonard Feather commenting that Miles' music sometimes sounded like he needed "five tenors" and Miles answering "I once *had* five tenors!" The feeling of Trane at his strongest and most discrete whirling his notes to push some of them out beyond the pitch range of whatever tune, indicating a musical space he maybe never got to fully inhabit. Except in strange bludgeoning moments in the snarl field of his later work? Anyway, in a recording such as this 1958 one (especially in his solo on If I Were A Bell, which shows a time-confidence equal to

Sonny Rollins on Wheatleigh) you get to hear Trane most particularly on this side of the wall. Before he started headlong into the war against it. In contrast, Cannonball sounds like he's playing a streamlined candy stick, but you gotta admire his veneer? A man trapped in the beauty of a Bird cartoon. Great ease, but trapped nonetheless. Then Bill Evans, pushed terrifically by Cobb and Chambers, with some condensed solos (as if Miles occasionally opened the backdoor to him), more instant and interesting structures than usual for him. You can hear him following Trane's solo on Bell with some parallel webs of his own.

*

2/4 meter, from Dodds to Ornette. An impulse that keeps cropping up, especially when a change is being worked on the music. Mulligan/Baker early Fifties quartets, Miles' mid-Fifties quintet, Ornette 1959-60. 2-beat has a way of opening spaces in the rhythm, especially when set against 4/4 habits. Hear Ornette's Free Jazz for a clear example of how 4/4 doubled against itself in the two rhythm teams gives a 2/4 feel to the overall momentum. Makes me think too of the double-time device in mid-Fifties Bop, Art Blakey et al.

*

Those Clifford Brown/Max Roach Bee Hive club tapes make me realize how much I do love listening through all that lo-fi cymbal heat and low ceiling club presence to feel the mind grab off each note solid and on-leaning. Puts me in the mood of old gigging days, or the hiss of late-nite distant station pluckings. How much of our present search means to recapture that initial instance of perfectly hearing *a* note?

*

Dave McKenna. Maybe my favorite in terms of *joy* at play. He makes me smile, heart warm, do high kicks to any ceiling. I realize how romantic I am. He's a compendium of the jazz route, you can hear it all work together into his playing: Louis, Hines, Lester, Tatum, Bud, Tristano. If JellyRoll had played Bop. His solo albums are all great, where he gets to put that wild lefthand to full use. Best is maybe the one just called McKenna (Chiaroscuro 202) with the perfectly graced Darn That Dream, and How High The Moon that keeps stomping off almost beyond your own exhaustion. The Shiah (By Myself) album has beautiful playing on it too, though

sounds like it was recorded through a long vacuum hose. That whistling A Train, a lesson in stop-time blues (Ouzo For Puzo) and gorgeous ballad Jimmy VanHeusen little-known All My Tomorrows. Tears to my eyes, no joke. I even sat in with him once in a dicey Providence dive before I knew better. Nobody *places* a right-hand phrase better.

*

Looking back at Bill Evans . . . I wore out a copy of the Everybody Digs album on my Webcor Holiday NYC 1958-59, so that's a definite prime of my near-epiphanous early Apple memories: Philly's cymbals mixing with the cobblestone truck rumble past my fourth floor window corner of Horatio and Hudson. Peace Piece, grey skies through venetian blinds, boat hoots from the river two blocks over. He was a master of the dynamics-controlled phrasal arc. And I still prefer him with the strongest drummers (that Peace Piece And Other Pieces reissue with additional Chambers/Philly tracks is a windfall corrective in this regard, as is the Verve 1967 Vanguard session with Philly). Motion never killed me: a clean bright sound but doesn't push enough. And the later guys, Morell and Zigmund, sound weak, almost a kind of "businessman's" open drumming, completely predictable, no firecrackers. Too bad he never recorded a trio date with Elvin Jones. Closest thing is the Getz/Evans Verve session with Elvin firing away in back, a teaser. The lowest point was probably that mid-Sixties trio with Israel and Bunker. But that the group was still so anemic once Gary Peacock joined is a mystery to me. Possibly Evans was in his ultimate Mr. Peepers heroin-funk at that point? Of the later recordings I like that Verve Montreux date with DeJohnette, who injects a nice sifty sort of spinal tonic into Evans. And there's his unaccompanied fantasia on Nardis in Paris 1979, sounds like he wasn't "done" yet.

*

The Modal Thing. Black ritual primacies recovered? Plus Trane frantic to build vast Babels of scalar variants, so quickly divided that they seem to overlap and you can almost *see* a vertical structure rising. Miles usually gets all the credit for starting the Modal Farm (Kind Of Blue) but I wonder where he got it from. A "desire for more space" (between the changes) is the cliche wisdom, a kind of lazy postbop filigree? That session seems the only one to remain echoing with crystal bell arcades. There's a meditative purity to it that makes of what followed sound Katzenjammer. No doubt George Russell should be mentioned as possible precursor with his late-Fifties

lecturing on modes. But it's fascinating and sad how Kind of Blue-type moments are like flame flickers through the woods, so evanescent nobody's then sure if or what they saw. New doors that so soon turn into old walls.

*

John Lewis. The Statements and Sketches for Development solo LP. Marvelous distillation of his MJQ years and tunes. The realization that, once all the fugues and Europeanisms are said and done, he just might be the great *blues* pianist of that period. One of the true jazz abstractionists too, what can be suggested in just a few notes. Monk's another one, but that's only one of his facets.

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Scott LaFaro. Seemed to lose force in those fast filigrees at the top of the instrument. So I was amazed, when that Ornette Atlantic date came along, how much stronger and low-registered he sounded, how interesting his walking note choices. Buell Neidlinger used to tell me how he and Charlie Hayden would rib Scotty about how you couldn't hear him at the back of the club. So I guess he really revved up when he got into "their" context (Buell also played quite a bit with Ornette at the Five Spot on those nights Charlie was too strung out to appear). I guess LaFaro (out of Red Mitchell, the story goes) was the start of all those millions of million-fingered bassists, and we've sure seen the abuse of that practice since. I wonder if the bass has a built-in problem/limitation which shows up when too many notes are played in too short a length of time, thus each note not given the room to resound through the wood? It does seem a waste when Niels Pederson races around the fingerboard, blunting that huge tone he shows in walking. I'd have to say that Charlie Hayden is the most fully satisfying bassist for me right now. Feels like I'm getting dangerously close to Fig Territory here, but as a drummer I learned to love the neighborhood of that line that reaches back to Jimmy Blanton and Walter Page. Not that "things" can't be discovered to extend the possibilities of the instrument. Wilbur Ware's cyclings of the time, and interval choices in walking, were always fresh (and a big influence on Charlie Hayden I'm sure). Jimmy Garrison's strummings, and the furtherings of that I've heard Fred Hopkins get to. And I do love the way Red Mitchell phrases those bop-line solos. So, there's guys, and ways, as they say. I just turn off at any sort of BuddyRichifying of the bass. Why not just play Big Noise from Winnetka and get it over with?

*

Guitar Jazz. Charlie Christian, Django, and then what? Realizing I've always had a problem with the extremely narrow tonal and dynamic range of most bop guitarists, some kind of middle-range setting, sort of mentholated, almost seeping into that Shearing or even Art VanDamme (!) easy-sleep territory and they'd just sit on it, leave it there, seemingly being more interested in the line and variations than the sound. Surely there's plenty of room for tonal variation, which had to wait until Hendrix and the super-electric revolution for a few jazz ears to wake up?

In the wake of Jimmy Raney appear a staggering string of late-bop guitar clones like Joe Puma, Barry Galbraith, Sal Salvador, etc-etcetc, enough to pass you out in the chair. And all of them white. I guess the black guitar geniuses all made tracks for R&B in those years. Until you get guys like Kenny Burrell (out of the uptown organ trio scene) and Wes Montgomery with his octaves. Then Jim Hall seemed to emerge fairly whole from the Charlie Christian economical swing trad (most of his solos from the 2 Degrees East/3 Degrees West session I find I've unconsciously memorized). Ed Bickert, out of Hall with maybe even more sophisticated harmonic savvy. And there's somebody named Dave Cliff (no further data) on that Horo Konitz album, almost being what Billy Bauer disappointingly never quite was. Bauer's Plectrist album, by the way, I once borrowed the tape and was so bored with I didn't even bother and just gave it back. I once read a story that Bauer was afflicted with an almost castrati-like high-pitched voice, so was always embarrassed amongst the boys in the band, tended to shy out and flee. Might somewhat explain his lack of push in the contrapuntal line department? If so, *there's* a guy who maybe should've gotten into the heroin-inviolability scene (I presume he didn't? Another juicer?) and winged away in his head for all he was worth. Funny how we're always fantasizing ways, techniques after the fact, whereby all these cats could have been better!

*

Those Fifties "experimental" sessions on on Prestige with Hall Overton, Jimmy Raney, Teddy Charles, Teo Macero, Eddie Shaughnessy et al. Always strangely stolid in their modrun attempting, though I thought them "weirdest" in the period. No louder bombs were ever dropped then by Eddie Shaughnessy as captured by Rudy

VanGelder's on-the-floor mikes. I once attended an amazing afternoon out-of-doors session on lawn of Lorillard mansion (early Newport years) consisting of Mingus, LaPorta, Charles, Waldron, Macero, Elvin and various sitters-in, including Brubeck at one point jamming Lady Be Good with the assembled far-outers. Wish a tape existed of that! My memory has it much more breezy and free than the ultimately resulting studio wax. None of the mathematic brew and dead air closetedness of most experimental jass. Also recalling another later Newport afternoon with the Teddy Charles Tentet (probably one of their *very* few gigs?) where the seabreezes blew all the charts off the stand but they blew great and made it anyway to surprised cheers from the beer-slogging crowd. Shaughnessy was sitting in at the last moment (regular drummer sick) and cut all the (some fairly complicated, like Brookmeyer's Show Time) charts perfectly. Little did we know he'd finally become a portly Vegas-type with loads of gold chain dangling into Doc Severinson's bell. When the hip slips . . .

*

Listening again to the Bird/Diz Massey Hall Concert. Interesting how Bird makes the plastic alto sound exactly like his usual Selmer. It's all in the embouchure, plus that super-hard reed he used? Dizzy comes on like bullfight fanfare. Mingus pushing the beat with such a forward lean into the next that he actually turns the time at some points and you can hear Diz complaining. Plus he's later overdubbed his solos, so you hear him dueting with his original faint track in the background. Bud sounding like overloaded bulb wattage, post-Creedmore electro-shock clarities. And Max making those 3 against 4 balances classically bounce around the hall. Sounds like he was playing real loud, maybe to cut through and straighten the rhythm? How beauteous Tad Dameron's line on What Is This Thing Called Love (Hot House). How classic Bop lines had those sudden shocking up-turns where you'd almost fear the note would break through out and beyond any sort of sense or music. And then, just as shockingly, they turn back and glean it all back together into the stream of tune. Neuro-physiological secrets there. And how much *room* they could find in those speed tempos. Bird, even in Cherokee, sometimes sounds like he's meddling around a livingroom in easychair just reaching out casually for a light, sametime relating a long funny anecdote about how Schoenberg relates to juggling on TV. Makes me wonder just what the music *lost* post Bop? There's an assuredness in handling the weights and hefts of time that's been few and far between ever since. You can hear it though in Konitz still, where the

articulation is often in the gaps between the notes. You get it in Kerouac's longest lines.

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An Image: Lee Konitz with String Quartet arranged by Bill Russo. I bet a lot of arrangers have wanted to cop the Lee Sound, especially in the late Forties when he had that silk pencilpoint going. String quartet allows use of individual voices, separates out the strands of what usually became a snooze in cotton wadding (Bird With Strings, etc.). Russo's linernotes show that he seems to understand the problems of such a set-up ("understandable to string musicians and yet compatible with a partial use of jazz vocabulary"), and is out front about his intent ("distinctly and purposely a non-jazz composition using superimposed jazz improvisation"). Konitz lends himself to these settings well, but they never allow any full-blowing, tend to be a mite gingerly in the transitions. I always was fond of Russo's (and Bill Holman's) arrangements for Kenton, in fact used his Sweets as theme song for an FM jazz show I used to jock in Providence late Fifties. Ah, Kenton . . . What to do with that vast WHELK! All his massed brass surely stirred (especially live) in my teen years, before I knew any better? Will he end up remembered as the Flying Dutchman of Jazz? That was an orchestra all right, too bad it was seldom a band.

*

> "He can take care of himself even though he goofs and does April in Paris from inside out as if the tune was the room he lived in and was going out at midnight with his coat on"
>
> Jack Kerouac "following Lee Konitz"
> in Visions of Cody

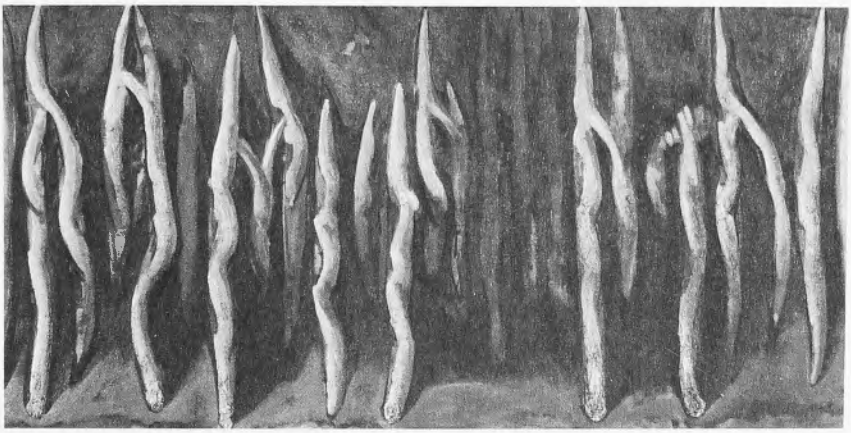
Thinking about that fascinating Konitz long-line thing, just why did he back off?, etc. And it does seem a mid-life tendency with many or most. With Konitz it seems to stem from the hassle and detachment from Tristano and K's retreat to California in early Sixties when he lived in Palo Alto (appropriately?) and took outside gigs and did a little teaching. And, as he said later, "just noodled around," took a few gigs, evidently stopped thinking of himself as a pro musician for two or three years. In fact there's always this nature of his personality that doesn't quite admit to being a working-pro player, self-effacing shy "kid" who can't completely believe in the strength of

his abilities. Along with which goes an openness, a great curiosity about all kinds of music–I once say him sitting back in the shadows blowing long held tones with LaMonte Young at the Metropolitan Museum. Also a strictness of discipline and will to study out everything he might think to play or have played. An inner model of seriousness along with a doubt that he'll ever quite make it or come up to pure level. And then there's the story (he told in interview) about how he got the call to come back and play with a Tristano group at the Half Note in 1964 and was actually afraid and delayed, goofed so he was (partly on purpose) a couple of days late for the gig. Somewhere in there he must have laid back and looked at what he'd been doing and felt that he didn't quite understand it, the long line maybe moving too fast for meditative thought?, and he could see places where he had played too many ready licks (those acrobatic trilling figures), so wanted to come down from sheer momentum heights and analyze and take it all apart, thus the broken-off shorter "implying" phrases ever after. There's his remark in another interview (1980, I think) where he says one should be able to "justify" every note one plays and not just go along with a bag of recyclable phrases. But, it could be that the converse of this is the fact that that same momentum can carry you to places/phrases you never could have gotten to otherwise. Think, too, of those Kerouac long lines where you know he didn't know where he would end up but kept the momentum going, rushing to find out. There seems a great tendency for certain musicians to worry about "mere virtuosity," and of course there *is* that danger of slickness where you end up a boring veneer-product of your own half-forgotten desires (Oscar Peterson for example). But! It seems to me there's nothing more utterly charging than that long line held up on sheer drive-of-moment taking all corners at an instancy. No doubt it takes great psycho-physical energies to maintain, tend to drain off a bit by middle-age. Though I don't think that's the main problem, more a thought problem. Konitz says he went back and listened to his recorded output, probably forming there a desire for greater succinctness, abstracted rhythm. I know, looking back at my own work (I tend to avoid), there comes a point where everything seems to be in quotes, and it all tumbles apart into weighted fragments so you begin to think how maybe you might totally consciously produce the perfect phrases etc., getting it all backasswards. Art seems to come best from getting oneself up into a state of great mental alertness compounded of sheer high momentum (no thoughts of falling) and subconscious ability to keep an amazing number of elements floating ready at the millisecond to be placed in time. Wow. Anyway, I believe in that great high *sustain*, pick-up on the fly, ability to shine and wing when in

doubt, *everything* up for grabs, a half-conscious corner-pocket genius that can never be taught to anybody completely or explained even to oneself. So, Konitz (I'm imagining) comes out of these reconsideration years with an almost wisdom-of-the-mountaintop view and makes the run for concision and meditative interruptive flow. Funny thing though is that there was a period (just out of the Kenton band when he made those dates with the Mulligan quartet, 1953) when he had the concision *and* the momentum too! I still can't believe how that fantastic jumping-ahead-of-the-barlines thing he had going so seamlessly then, sometimes finishing with the next chord a bar or two before that chord came up, never got picked up on or developed, even by him. In the gaps between his leaps, where most listening musicians must've gulped and wondered if it'd all fall apart, you can hear ghost echoes of all kinds of long lines twisting in and through, almost like those Bach violin sonatas where he's working with phantom counterlines. No doubt Konitz came out of the Kenton brassworks with greater strength of sound (he even says this somewhere, though the LennieBirds were putting him down for joining Stan at all), and certainly his tone was never more amazing, a shine as if amber were one of the heavy metals. I wonder if that phrasal bar-jumping came at all out of a consideration of Mulligan's tendency toward a two-beatish 4/4. Did that open holes for him to dodge around in and play with the meter? Then in 1954 (the Storeyville album live tracks, plus that Pennsylvania Avenue track on the Timespan album) he still had the long line going perfectly. Some impossible lengths woven into forward slings on These Foolish Things. A high-pressure fluidity of line, the one that Kerouac said inspired him to write like Konitz plays. Ceaseless sinuosities and carvings of space, riding the line onwards 'round any possible corner, hearingman's reach. The very impossibility of it all making a vacuum that must be entered. Talk about passion! Ah, the poems that could be written . . .

Ross Neher

Five Drawings and Paintings

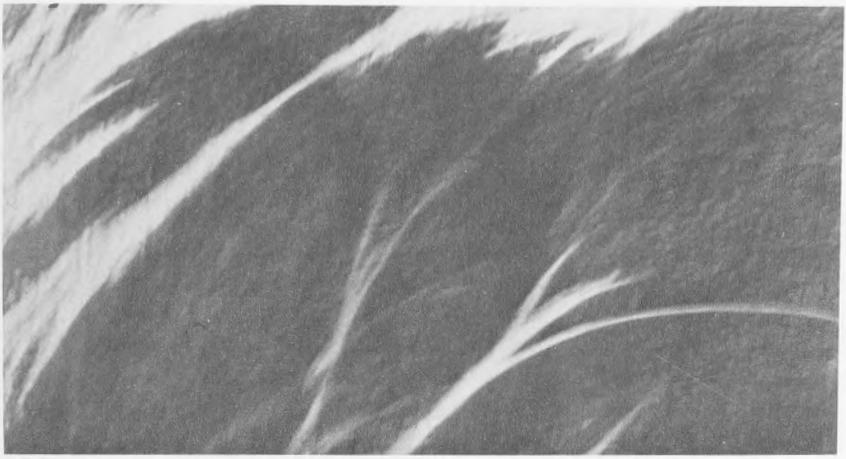


NATURE MORTE

Oil / Arches Paper / 24" x 48" / 1981

BURDEN

Oil / Linen / 48" x 72" / 1983

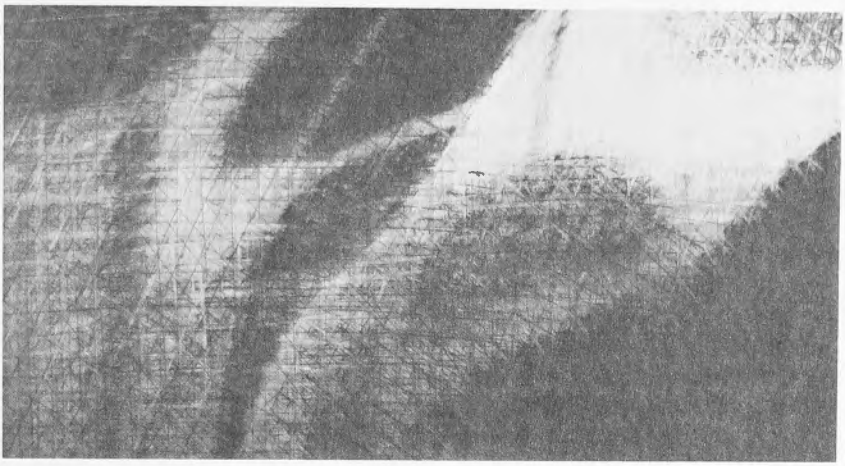


LIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS #41

Pencil / Arches Paper / 26" x 41" / 1983

LIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS #40

Pencil / Arches Paper / 26" x 41" / 1983



LIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS #48
Pencil / Paper / 26" x 41" / 1985

JOHN YAU

Light and Dark – The Art of Ross Neher

Ross Neher is not interested in representing nature's objects, and yet his drawings and paintings are a celebration of Nature. There are no views from a window, moonlit skies, or glistening fields. Rather than depicting such scenes, the artist discovers the possibilities inherent in a highly defined approach to drawing and painting. In both bodies of work, the composition evolves out of a process of addition and subtraction, assertion and revision.

In the drawings, areas are delineated with both a pencil and an eraser. Something is rubbed in, and something or some part or layer is rubbed off. Varying densities of light and dark begin defining themselves. These densities can shift, break apart, or cut through each other. On one hand, the drawings convey a barely contained field of energy. On the other hand, they suggest a mood of intense stillness, some remembered event. The space is ambiguous, while the interplay of areas is made up of rhythmic shifts ranging from the smooth to the staccato.

The primary concern behind these works is with the palpable presence of light. In the drawings, the viewer doesn't define the areas as figural representations, but sees them as fields of force. The light doesn't define shapes or reflects surfaces. Instead, it hovers between being present and dissolving. Consequently, Neher's accomplishment can be understood as the transformation of an empirically based syntax into a mode capable of embodying highly charged fields of transition. A visionary impulse, at once sensual and deprived, has been reached through self-reflexive, formally derived means.

In the paintings, light emanates from the layered depths of the insistently physical surface. The areas of color are laid down with a brush and then scraped away with a palette knife. As the surface builds up, like an oyster shell, the accretions become luminous. In the recent paintings, areas predominate, while in the paintings from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, highly mediated brushstrokes are the predominant feature. By concentrating on the interplay of areas, the artist has evolved a space that is far more ambiguous than before. Negative and positive shapes exchange roles, causing the composition to shift. At the same time, it should be pointed out that

this ambiguity is achieved without the artist relying on the relationships of interlocking shapes, as in Cubist composition. Light, dark, tonal shifts, and color are given major roles.

Although a visionary impulse is present in all of the work, I think it is wrong to define Ross Neher as an artist with a pantheistic view of nature. The work is too self-consciously rooted in its formal means to allow that kind of embrace to exist. Isolation and deprivation rule, rather than a sense of communion. The work may be informed by a visionary impulse, but the artist demands empirical proof. Everything that is reached for depends on the means. If Cubism overtook the world of appearances, then Neher's work can be seen as a philosophical extension of that historic breakthrough. In his case, the means must now be made to overtake Nature's invisible forces.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

First Gematria

ALL

or enough.

THE BAT

His yellow
angel.

THE BORDER (1)

A hundred.

THE BORDER (2)

Alone.

EYES

A hole
& an amethyst.

EVENING

Evil.

A FLAG

Living, raw
garments of

IN THE GARDEN

The sea.

GEMATRIA

Your feet.

GOD (1)

A flame.

GOD (2)

A terror.

A HOOK

One part
linen.

THE MAIDEN (1)

Stretched out
& ready.

THE MAIDEN (2)

Compasses
night

TO THE MOON (1)

The shore
a small matter.

TO THE MOON (2)

Witnesses
below.

THE NEEDY

shall judge.

IN THE SADDLE

Red, ruddy
nuts.

SALT (1)

A flood.

SALT (2)

Like the stars.

SALT (3)

Dreaming.

THE SINNERS

mingled.

IN SODOM (1)

A garden.
A wall.

IN SODOM (2)

At what time
shall we come?

THESE

Those

IN THE [AMERICAN] TREE

for Ron Silliman

(1)

Dark.
Damsel.
Dan.

(2)

The glorious
anger.

WAILING

A brick
in my mouth.

WITH US

Against us.

JEROME McGANN

The Loss of Poetry

What are those golden builders doing?
— William Blake

At no time does a fortune serve to *shelter its owner from need*. On the contrary, it functionally remains–as does its possessor–*at the mercy of a need for limitless loss*.
— Georges Bataille

In the beginning of his prose *Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810) Blake wrote that "Plato confutes himself" in saying, through Socrates, that "Poets & Prophets do not Know or Understand what they write or Utter." Blake meant that Plato had a knowledge and an understanding of the things he wrote and uttered. What distinguishes any "inferior Kind" of art from any superior kind is precisely the level of knowledge or understanding possessed by the poet.[1]

To Blake, Plato's remark is a most "Pernicious Falsehood," an "Error" (as he would also call it) consequent upon the special character–the minute particulars–of Plato's own knowledge, or truth. The execution of Plato's art is simultaneously a revelation of its peculiar forms of error and of truth alike. Indeed, this execution–an event which takes place repeatedly throughout the (now so-called) "reception history" of every work of art–is the perpetual Last Judgment which poetry brings into the world, and most immediately in relation to itself.

Blake's *Vision* is an explanation of the meaning of his picture by the same title. The picture represents his special understanding that the known world is an artistic and visionary reality. A meta-commentary on the practice of poetry in general, both Visions appear to tell the whole truth. In fact, however, Blake's work is subject to the errors of its special truths just as much as Plato's work. Blake knows this–he even admits as much in his prose text[2]–but of course his admission does not redeem his visionary work from all its errors. On the contrary in fact. Blake, for example, would never see the "error" in his theory and representation of the emanations. Nor is this error a merely localized limitation of his work; it affects every

aspect of his art, and can properly be seen–as it has been through recent feminist imaginations–as a "Pernicious Falsehood." In the same way, Blake's Christianity–a similar ideological deformation –introduced into his work a whole network of other, equally pernicious falsehoods.

In "the Productions of Genius," then, there is a necessary co-presence of truth and error (one form of which we now call blindness and insight). To Blake, this reciprocal structure was a consequence of the material and temporal conditions within which all art is produced and reproduced. These conditions presented a recurrent problem for Blake, who continually shifted between a celebration of material reality and a denigration of its illusory and impermanent forms. A famous passage at the conclusion of his prose *Vision* declares that "Mental Things are alone Real; what is Called Corporeal Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place <it> is in Fallacy. . . . Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought?"[3] But of course one might answer that Corporeal Existence is the imagination of Genius–of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Lucretius as much as of Epicurus and Newton. And of course Blake would agree, though he would want to add–this is the burden of much of his work–that such Genius is infected with "Bad Art," the errors of corporeal vision, the ratios of Aristotle.

> Some People flatter themselves that there will be No Last Judgment & that Bad Art will be adopted & mixed with Good Art. . . . I will not flatter them Error is Created Truth is Eternal. Error, or Creation, will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it I assert for my Self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of me.[4]

But in reality what Blake here calls "Bad Art" is always and necessarily married to what he calls "Good Art." The Last Judgment which he himself declares to be the foundation of all artistic practice is a reciprocal event involving both a disappearance and an appearance. Furthermore, if error is created, then how are we to judge the (mortal, artistic) creations of Blake himself–his works, which he himself called creations? His own *Vision of the Last Judgment?* In fact these works judge themselves and call out for further judgment; in fact, they are creations brought forth in and through their own truths and errors.

Blake is a crucial figure in the history of western poetry because he was one of the first to undermine the canons of poetic tradition. In

his work the criteria for judging good art and bad art are radically destabilized. It is not merely that he epitomizes the collapse of the authority of inherited wisdom, and the emergence of the authority of the individual imagination. More critically, Blake's work proposes a dynamic of art which, by undermining its own pretensions to authority and truth, forces one to regard all aspects of the experience in terms of the laws of change and transformation. This takes place because Blake's work no longer leaves any room for the traditional distinction between the ideal and the real, or worlds of permanence and worlds of change. Blake *says* that all reality is mental, but his work *shows* that this "mentality" comprehends a body of highly materialized and particular work. In fact these works are not static "things" at all, they are dynamic events in the field of human experience–more deeds of language and art than representation of things (whether "ideal" or "real"). Blake's term for "outward Creation" *properly conceived* is "Action" because he understands creation as something which takes place or is carried out. And being an event, creation is in continual flux and transformation.

This departure represented by Blake's work is graphically expressed in his imagination of the figure of Los, the giant form of poetic vision and practice as it operates in the world of time and space. One might expect Los to embody a set of unequivocal values and nonproblematic deeds, but this is far from being the case. Los is repeatedly involved in mistakes, errors, blindnesses of many kinds. Furthermore, the work of Los is regularly figured in terms of furnaces because Blake insists that this work–the actual practice of the various arts of imagination–is fundamentally, *eternally* an act of destruction, decreation, removal. That work produces–more accurately, that work *is*–the various cities and buildings of Los and of his many artificers: in fact, the cities and buildings of Loss (for such is the meaning in Blake's wordplay) all of which are bound for what Blake called "Eternal Death" and the perpetual unbuilding that accompanies a transformational experience.

II

The historical importance of Blake's work must also be emphasized. Poetry throughout the past two hundred years has been produced under the sign of those profound contradictions epitomized in Blake's work. As a consequence, our poetry has forced us to read the entire literary archive in the same unstable framework, to think hitherto unimaginable thoughts: for example, that Satan is not merely the hero of *Paradise Lost* but the moral superior of that poem's

god; or–in Byron's twisted tale–that the murder Cain is the victim crucified on the cross, on the dialectic, of righteousness and its offspring, sin.

Byronic heroes and gothic villains now seem relatively commonplace, like Blake's and Shelley's Romantic reading of Milton's epic. They are the familiar faces of poetry's recent preoccupation with the unfamiliar. That preoccupation, however, has not grown less intense with the passing of Romanticism. On the contrary, in fact; for as our disciplines of positive knowledge and technical control have advanced, our poetry has represented that accumulating world as a field of increasingly acute emergencies. Information is amassed and scientific technique acquires greater precision, yet in our correspondent poetic representations we observe the scandal of the dark reciprocals: long shadows of the unconscious and the nonconscious, everything we do not wish to know and much that we are completely unaware of. While hegemonic societies and their spokesmen look to gather and preserve the best that has been known and thought in the world, poetry increasingly returns from those quests with ruined fortunes, troubled reflections, and threatening looks.

And this is why we read and study poetic works: to acquire that creativity which is a function of their critical resources. The texts themselves multiply insufficiencies precisely in their passage through history, where they are subjected to repeated attempts to bring what is dark in them into the light. But the more we know about them the more silent they become; and their silence grows from their speech, ever more articulated and detailed, ever more defined and extended. All discourse is part of that labyrinth, but poetical discourse epitomizes it because poetry imagines complete worlds rather than partial or abstract structures. Yet poetry only approaches its completion via what Georges Bataille has called "the principle of insufficiency" and "the principle of loss." The former is expressed in the following aphorism: "The sufficiency of each being is endlessly contested by that of every other;" and the latter by the observation that "loss must be as great as possible in order for [human activity] to take on its true meaning."[4] In poems, insufficiency and loss are increased paradoxically, by their accumulation of forms and details that appear substantial and significant. To the degree that poems are forms of representation, they constitute, Bataille says, "vain efforts . . . to create pathways permitting the endless reattainment of that which flees."[5]

Considered merely as representation, then, or as "virtual reality," poetry is a dead loss; and this is true, Bataille argues, even when poetry gives its allegiance to the heterological:

> Poetry at first glance seems to remain valuable as a method of mental projection (in that it appears to accede to an entirely heterogeneous world). But it is only too easy to see that it is hardly less debased than religion. It has almost always been at the mercy of the great historical systems of appropriation. And insofar as it can be developed autonomously, this autonomy leads it onto the path of a total poetic conception of the world, which ends at any one of a number of aesthetic homogeneities. The practical unreality of the heterogeneous elements it sets in motion is, in fact, an indispensable condition for the continuation of heterogeneity: starting from the moment when this unreality immediately constitutes itself as a superior reality, whose mission is to eliminate (or degrade) inferior vulgar reality, poetry is reduced to playing the role of the standard of things. . . .[6]

But when poetry is understood (and practiced) as a social activity, as an agenting form, Bataille's critique of its "practical unreality" loses its force. As a particular play or structure of language, poems will at most be conceived, and deployed, as those Buildings of Loss we might well call "self-consuming artifacts." But read for that they are–instances of a kind of social practice carried out through determinate material forms and institutions, and at particular places and times by many different people–poems emerge as the Buildings of Los[s].

Blake was among the first to understand this contradictory form of all poetical work. His conception of the poetical, however, cannot mean for us what it meant for him. Because his ideas were developed in a Christian framework and along a Romantic salient, he saw in poetry and "the human imagination" the vehicle for a literal redemption of the world. On the contrary, what poetry after Blake essays is the *descent* of all the gods and their spilled religions–or rather, their fall from the coasts of light. What one may aspire to imagine, therefore, is a world without redeemers, a world where redemption is as much at a loss as are all the other human things.

Poetry, that is to say, must not be imagined as occupying a world elsewhere. The impulse to move "anywhere out of the world," to enter a "poetic" space redeemed from time and the agencies of loss, is simply one of the buildings of Los[s] erected in a certain, by now familiar, vacant lot. Poems, therefore, should not be conceived as representations; they are *acts* of representation. Their forms are no more permanent than the forms of the gods, and they are to be found, like all the gods, in those human worlds where they are made and unmade repeatedly.

In our day poems are typically placed in the hands of academicians, who characteristically work to preserve them, or themselves, from ruin. Consequently poems are delivered into others' hands, they generally appear under various idealized forms: forms of permanence, of abstraction, or objectivity. This is the death of the poetical event, but it becomes as well a fruitless death only when we do not register that institutional death deconstructively, as that loss that it is. And beyond the critique of deconstruction stands the poetical event itself–Blake's moment of "Eternal Death"–when all that is unique and particular, all that is begotten, born, and dies, dance their Lucretian transformations.

Poems are not mirrors and they are not lamps, they are social acts–readings and writings of a kind which promote, deploy, and finally celebrate those processes of loss which make up the very essence of human living. In this sense poetry is best understood within the nexus of its many intersecting histories: political and social histories, of course, but also the histories of productive institutions, ecclesiastical histories, the histories of scholarship and education, even the histories of ideas. All of these histories, being as they are multiple and transformational, are at a loss, so far as the forms of human activity are concerned, including poetical activity; and within each of those historical frames we may glimpse, if we try, an indeterminate flux of conflicted and competing possibilities.

More than any other type of discourse, poetry works to preserve our experience of these many forms of loss. Moving into the field of the poem, we come to endure its losses as our own. Initially–such is our mistaken prejudice about time–those losses may be consigned to the past and located in limbos of regret and nostalgia. But in fact loss is a universal and amoral experience falling to the just and the unjust alike. Furthermore, losses are not the exclusive privilege of the past. If we say "the present is fleeting," we know that our futures disappear just as surely and just as swiftly. Losses are measured out uniformly across the field of temporality.

Yet among all these ruinations our moral interests move carefully about, looking for some to preserve in our selective and tributary memories, and overlooking, ignoring, or mistaking the import of the others. Because this pattern is what Wittgenstein would call a "form of life," it is as well a way of reading and writing. Poetry is itself produced in this mode–it has, we say, its ideologies–but only with a significant difference. If poetry commits itself to totalization, its own frames of time inevitably show that it can never achieve the commensurability it may imagine. If you produce an interpretation of a poetical text, a "translation" of it, the new form of the text will be able to judge the old only as it opens itself to judgment in its turn; and these judgments can come from any quarter or

direction. What comes "later," for example, may be judged by what comes "earlier;" and since both must be, in any case, multiplied and unstable forms, poetry always gets carried out in the form of losses and incommensurates.

This is the eventuality of poetry–not its structure, but its fate; and such an eventuality explains why Bataille associated the poetic event with revolution. For Bataille the experience of perfect loss is the experience of "time released from all bonds; it is pure change."[7] Such a conception projects loss as a *catastrophic* event, the image and splendour of a world where everything hovers equally on the brink of the fully possible and the utterly impossible–for good and ill alike.

This does not mean, however, that all of poetry's possibilities and impossibilities are available to anyone at any time. The larger field of history within which poetry operates sets limits to its practical operations. In the United States today, for example, most poetry is carried out not in a revolutionary but in an imperialist mode; and even the poetry committed to revolution–the "reading" of Frederic Jameson, the "writing" of Ron Silliman–is executed within the limits set for it by American imperialism, simply because the larger historical field (America) has an imperialist and not a revolutionary character. Fortunately, this "American history" is neither global nor commensurate with itself. On the one hand, it operates withing the reciprocal framework of the "second world"–equally threatening, equally imperialist–and the alternative framework of the "third," where the forms of change and catastrophe remain, for good and ill alike, real possibilities. On the other, its hegemony cannot even master the field of its own immediate dominion (its traditions and its current practices). There is a Third World which poetry finds even within the borders of America itself. There one glimpses those Buildings of Los which empty the sky of the buildings of the empire state.

Footnotes

1 *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* Newly Revised Edition by David V. Erdman, with a commentary by Harold Bloom (Berkeley, Ca., 1982), 554.

2 See *Ibid.* 563.

3 *Ibid.* 565.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings 1927-1939,* ed. with an Introduction by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, 1985), 172, 118, 241.

6 *Ibid,* 97.

7 *Ibid.* 134.

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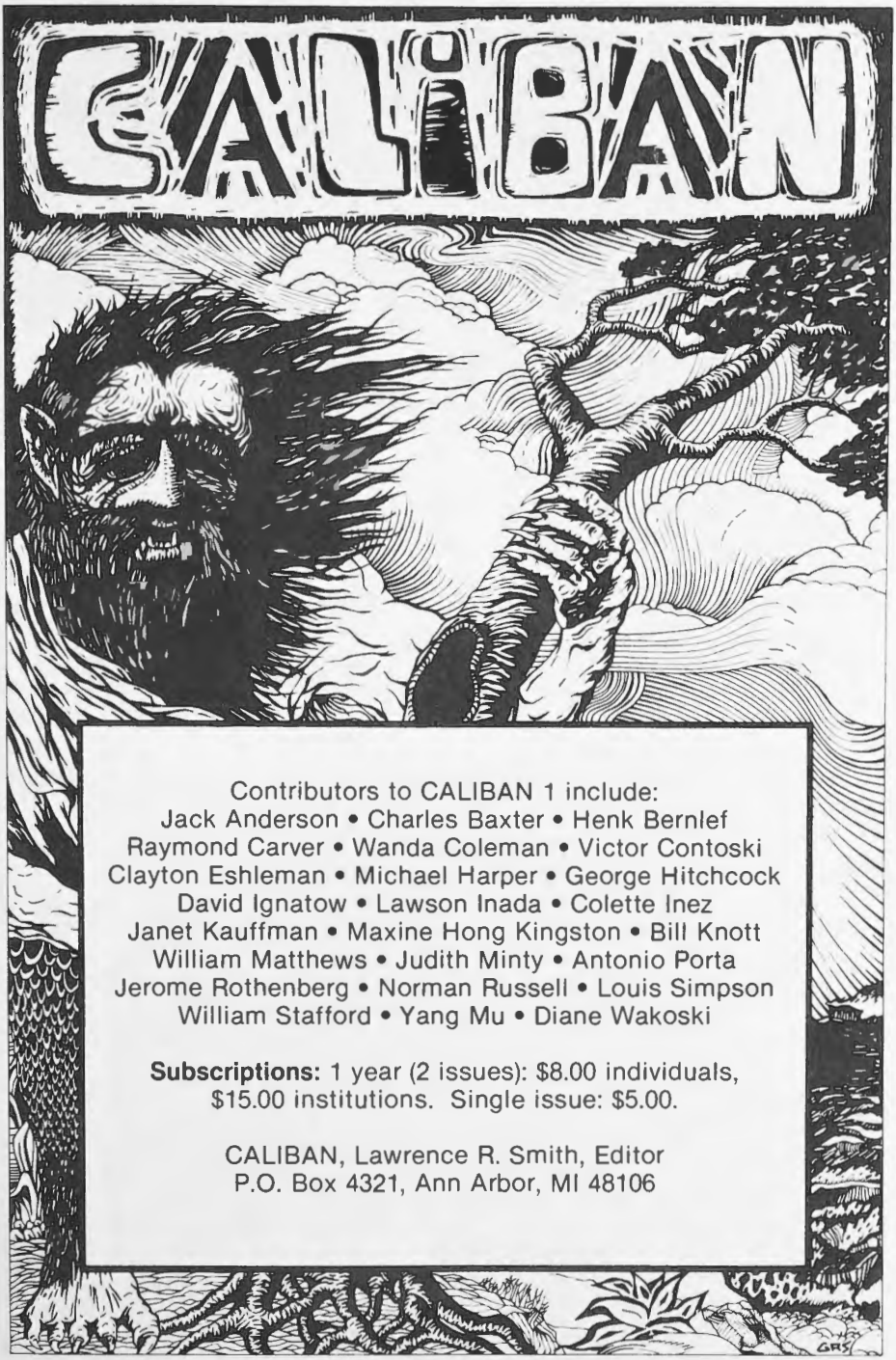

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NORMAN O. BROWN ON ROBERT DUNCAN

MADAME EDWARDA BY GEORGES BATAILLE

POETRY BY SIMIC, ASHBERY & WAKOSKI

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A LITERARY TRI-QUARTERLY OF THE WHOLE ART

Editor	CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
Contributing Editors	CLARK COOLIDGE MICHAEL PALMER JOHN YAU ELIOT WEINBERGER
Correspondents	CHARLES BERNSTEIN JAMES CLIFFORD MARJORIE PERLOFF JED RASULA JEROME ROTHENBERG
Managing Editor	CARYL ESHLEMAN

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER: PORFIRIO DIDONNA / Untitled / *Oil on Linen / 72" x 48" / 1985 / Color transparancy courtesy of Nielsen Gallery, Boston*

Nancy Spero Artwork courtesy of Josh Baer Gallery, NYC

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JOHN YAU

Three Poems

GHENGIS CHAN, PRIVATE EYE

I was floating through a cross section
with my dusty wine glass, when she entered,
a shivering bundle of shredded starlight.
You don't need words to tell a story,
a gesture will do. These days,
we are all parasites looking for a body
to cling to. I'm nothing more than
riffraff splendor drifting past the runway.
I always keep a supply of lamprey lipstick around,
just in case. She laughed,
a slashed melody of small shrugs.
It had been raining in her left eye.
She began: a cloud or story
broken in three maybe four places,
wooden eyelids, and a scarf of human hair.
She paused: I offer you dervish bleakness
and glistening sediment. It was late
and we were getting jammed in deep.
I was on the other side, staring at
the snow covered moon pasted above the park.
A foul lump started making promises in my voice.

THE CASE

I looked down, more slender than
I expected
She was wearing
white under gray blond curls
dropped back and turned into a block

Across the room, a mirror
had been drained from the top

Clouds buzzed by above bergeoning trees
their neat brochures

Her apartment had been flung open
ceilings nibbled at corners

She lasted longer than we expected
refusing to hang up her ashes

An ignorant sponge, I had been summoned
to the gate of no mistakes

In less than half a pedal of time
I would be entering the hyena zone

CHORAL AMPHISBAENA

I am learning to see
with my other brain

On the shelves closest to the cloud stations
meteors spiral into cool autumn ponds

Sapphire wisps rise from blue membranes
while radium seeps out of the stalks

I am the younger sister
you never notices

until the rain washed away
the last traces of lipstick

He spent the morning ripping out
the pages of an illustrated novel

then replacing each word with one
consuming less letters

Last night I wore cotton
pearl, alligator, and plastic

Shortly after the waiter
brought our appetizers

a band of apivorous crones
began roaming through the park

I am the pimply boy
who delivers pizzas to burning houses

They parked their motorcycles in a circle
and filed into the courtyard

Somewhere someone
was boiling shoes

I am the silky rodent
who pulls the carriage

from one end of the sentence
to the other

I have been told that I look happy
for brief periods

most often when passing
a snow covered golf course

CHARLES SIMIC

Three Poems

COLLARD GREENS AND BLACK-EYE PEAS

for Clark Coolidge

"The height of the church, the thought
of who is missing"

To know the absolute
And savor the all-consuming clarity.
To think, to think continually
Among the apparitions—
The lovely little streets that go nowhere,
Their diffident signs, unsure doorways,
Obscure shop-windows, mannequins of doubt
Wearing latest fashion of ambiguity and doubt.

On the square of the Great Misgiving,
By the equestrian statue of the Undecided Ancestor,
I met no one and everyone:
Nailed-up ears, myopes, mantichores
And their cousins the measuring worms.
Street-cleaners. Fly-catchers
For the mouths of tyrants. Legs of mutton
In hot pants. Illustrious Arachnids.
Metaphysical onion-peelers. Ghostly
Pot-scrapers. Gravy tasters
Who have read Herman Melville.
Pigs cooked in white wine.
Patchers of old shoes. Chittlings
Spattered with the mustard of the innocent
And dressed in judges' black robes.
Bishops with elephantine testicles.
Astrologers in red sneakers. Teeth-chatterers
In droves. Tragic heroes in various kinds of salads. . .

"O hangman's rope by which the heavy planet is suspended!"

I was like Icarus's dog, barking at the sun and the moon,
Sniffing around, tarrying
By perilous bloody ways—
Dark dead-end alleys of the heart,
Little graveyards for ventriloquists. . .

Romeo was a handsome purse-snatcher.
Abelard peddled out of a suitcase:
Plastic wind-up toys with my face on them.
The century in its dotage.
The Land of Chimera for sale.
I wanted the sparrow Lesbia kept,
The little cracked mirror from its cage.
A fool supreme standing outside the storefront
Church of the Ephemeron,
Two doors down from the Theatre of Impermanence,
To catch my breath as it flees on a yellow bicycle,
Saint Theresa's bicycle.
The onset of evening—on stilts.
Starless evening like a chesspiece being moved in China—
A black piece—

The "amazing" Bud Powell hunched over the piano,
And playing one single note
With the first finger of the right hand
On which a nail has been bitten off.

MY FATHER'S DREAM

He's writing the History of Silence
In a city where no word is spoken.
Outside his window huge crowds of men and women
Are going about their ghostly noiseless errands.

There are black armbands worn by voiceless teachers
In a smoke-shrouded schoolhouse:
Rows of pale, tight-lipped children:
Pencil-stubs with small teeth marks on them.

The tragic actor's gestures certain trees have
On a street with a pet shop,
A large empty cage in its window
And the snow falling soundlessly.

Evening at midday; centuries of such light,
Gray and threadbare like the winter coat
Of that woman on the sidewalk dumb with rage
For not being able to kill her soldier son.

THE BIG MACHINE

The garden of the machine at night
Like a garden of carnivorous plants.
There goes the mad doctor in short pants
Wielding a butterfly net.

Hairpins, shaving mirrors, blown-up condoms
With spikes—or they might be levers,
Pulleys, dangling counterweights
Enacting their shadow-farces and tragedies.

Is it a lady's dainty slipper
They're raising or lowering,
Or the ghost of itself
Riding an empty swing?

The Monster who can't tell,
Plugs himself into an electric outlet
And gathers a spray
Of pig-iron immortelles.

NORMAN O. BROWN

Cleveland State University Poetry Center Jubilation of Poets Panel, "Homage to Robert Duncan," October 23, 1986

GROUND WORK: Before the War

GW, 36 *"Santa Cruz Propositions" [10PM–1AM, 13–14, October 1968]*

Troubled surfer

I introduced Robert Duncan at Santa Cruz as "happy melodist, unwearied," etc. I have not forgotten the pained expression on his face.

Troubled surfer

In a letter to me March 1/1969, enclosing his Job poem, *"Ancient Questions"*—

GW, 6 *What instigator hid among these notes*
painful harmonies in the song we sing?

Duncan writes: *You and I share that we are drawn to work in what will be too much for us. To conquer what is fearful? No wonder the admonitions felt in JOB are troubling. (In "An Imaginary Woman" the She of the poem instructed me —that was in 1952—and I was just beginning to search out her environs:*

Thirst not
The Well is full.
Do not trouble the water.)

But it is our calling to trouble the water, Nobby. And needs all the (most happily) inspirations of our imagination or (most unhappily) cunning of our art to obey the "Do not trouble the water" to mean troubling the water.

"Do not trouble the water" to mean troubling the water. That is the cunning of his art. Robert goes on to say, commenting on my still to this day unfinished, unperfyte, Metamorphoses, *"I am the more acutely aware of the trouble troubling the water brings and I know no strength in that trouble except faith and most important that it is as we know it is blind."*

The spirit of Robert Duncan

Troubled surfer seeking the about-to-break line
of the wave in it to ride toward revelation,
the tide that would have carried you draws back
from the litterd margin,
and the depth of the sea you would have borne forward
is the depth of an impending failure among us who
if we fall from the board, as we must,
fall into the facts of the polluted stream.

Like Sam Patch. The trouble is the language. "Speech had failed him.

Paterson, 27 He was confused. The word had been drained of its meaning. He struck the water on his side and disappeared."

Duncan's long oceanic line—old Ocean rolls a lengthened wave to shore—

BB, 20

runs away with me
and I enter the wave of it.
How long have I been waiting,
the language, the sea, the body

The limits of language

BB, 24 *at the lips before speech, at life's*
labia

BB, 19 *is language Pythagoras knew*

BB, 9 *For the even is bounded, but the uneven is without bounds and there is no way through or out of it.*

Olson At the boundary of the mighty world

BB, 9 *Her-Without-Bounds*

FW, 104 Her rill be run, unhemmed as it is uneven!

Transcending

GW, 12 *ascending to where the beat breaks*
into an all-but-unbearable whirling crown
of feet dancing, and now he sings or it is
the light singing, the voice
shaking, in the throes of the coming melody,
resonances of meaning exceeding what we
understand. . . .
speaking in tongues.

GW, 30 *and the forces of Speech give way to the Language beyond Speech,*
the Sea the sea reminds us of,

Without bounds

OF, 70 *Undo the bindings of immutable syntax!*

"Let the human Mind loose! It must be loose!
It will be loose!" (John Adams)

GW, 22 *To unglue the up-tight esthetics*
undo your mind from metric
standards, let space and time
surpass your uses—
It must be made loose!

Dionysos in Amerika

RB, 69 *but the sistrum*
sounds through us

God-awful

BB, 34 *He draws the sounds forth from his drunken violin*
Bacchus in delirium cuts from the stone with a saw.

What god

GW, 6 *What instigator hid among these notes*
painful harmonies in the song we sing?

D, 22 *The fire was the war*
FW, 250 A burning world is come to dance inane
Dance by the light of the war.

It is always Life at War, Essay at War
D, 13 *or we are always at war.*

Passages
BB, 128 *between surpassing*
Crises of war.

D, 16 *listening to the nightingale*
in the midst of the slaughter.

The blood

BB, 79 *streams from the bodies of his sons*
to feed the voice of Gassire's lute.

I have had a hard time fighting my way against the HD Book; this too a record of struggle. I too have a theosophical mother.

Poems are as Duncan says not objects but events; but not events like the celebration of a mass, for a separate community of gnostics, initiates, poets and philosophers, an aristocracy of emotion; witnesses to the beatific vision, over the
TLM, 58, 63 shambles; "the reality of a divine history within what men call history"; a Form of Forms within which all events are redeemed—

Poems are real events in real history; Korean War, Vietnam War; real struggles with unconscionable reality, the facts of
Oppen the polluted stream. Always and everyday "the question whe-
Interview, 162 ther or not we can deal with humanity as something which actually does exist."

The poem including history. Including the defects inherent in a record of struggle. The incorporation of struggle as form—
CJ, 19 Duncan on Pound: *No other work so contains or shows forth the troubled spirit of our times: it is his genius that even*

where he presents flashes of eternal mind—veritas, claritas, hilaritas—he does not sublimate but remains involved, by defect, in the agony of the contemporary.

The Truth and Life of a Man. The New American Poetry: who touches this touches a man. Or a woman in wartime, like HD. Or ED; whose Life had stood—a Loaded Gun.

Love's Body, 266 — I once said "There is only poetry." *"Santa Cruz Propositions":*

GW, 36

Poetry! Would ***Poetry*** *have sustained us? It's lovely*
—and no more than a wave— to have rise
out of the debris, the stink and threat
—even to life— of daily speech, the roar
of the giants we begin from,
primordial Strife, blind Opposition,
a current that sweeps all stagnant things up
into a torrent of confidence beyond thought.

Even as we are most "sent", and the Man
most present, exultant in the giving ourselves over
to the forces that consume our knowledge, whatever
fact having no more boundary than
water within water, and for you then most

the ***cold*** *of the sea, the withdrawal from pleasure,*

the curve of the poem

withdraws its promise.

They are not ***with*** *it! —you are not with it!*

The very luminous where-with-all, the lure

looms now over all Truth collapsing.

The poem cuts to bring

BB, 128

the camera in upon the gaping neck
which now is an eye of bloody meat

The Santa Cruz murders

GW, 41 *"as brought to you by the people of the Free Universe"*

Hidden under trees, however, are the camps of young people with wild hair and outlandish customs

GW, 44 *–it was the music of the Tarot that moved him—*

GW, 45 *Kali dancing, whirling her necklace of skulls, trampling the despoiling armies and the exploiters of natural resourc under her feet. Revolution or Death!*

Dionysos in Amerika.

D, 13 *The poem designed so.*
To emit great snores
or death's confusions.

Against beauty as such.

D, 23 *He conceives the poem*
as a shattered pitcher of rock crystal,
its more-than-language not in the form
but in the intrigue of lines, the shattering,
the inability .

Or he conceives the poem as a mind dying
—that is, a mind dividing itself
from itself. The line divides.

There is something Christian about it, or should I say Messianic; the Suffering Servant. Isaiah LIII, v. 2: He has no form nor beauty, no looks to attract our eyes. A pieta, or crucifixion; a compassion.

D, 21 *So this ordinary G.I. stript to the waist*
carrying the wounded
American soldier in his arms
repeats in his hot Korean summer
a pièta.

He is like a nakedness of speech
shedding its words; or

Love's Body, 189

There is something Christian about the new poetics. Open is broken form. The body broken. Abrupt, uneven.

(Going back to Hopkins:

Brute beauty and valor and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

Or Mandelstam in the Russian Revolution:

A new heroic age has begun in the life of the word. The word is flesh and bread. It shares the fate of bread and flesh: suffering. People are hungry. Still hungrier is the state. But there is something even hungrier: time.

Oppen:

Where the earth is most torn
And the wounds untended and the voices confused,
There is the head of the moving column

The God that failed. It must fail. *"An Essay at War"*—

D, 22

You see, what I feel is needed at this point is a nadir, a breakdown, a failure of heart or of vision . . . . The poem defeated . . . .we were bound to fail.

The beatific vision

D, 19

A dream. . .

*in that **profonda e chiara sussistenza***

or a drain. . .

blood, urine, shit, giving ourselves up, this

falling away,
falling

face forward

Poetry de profundis, or in extremis

Or., 42-3 *The mystery of the whole thing in which nails, blood, and cry, the Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani, is the crisis of the poem enacted.*

Poetry as act of desperation, or only refuge from despair; the bright light of shipwreck.

Oppen

Imagine a man in the ditch,
The wheels of the overturned wreck
Still spinning—

I don't mean he despairs, I mean if he does not
He sees in the manner of poetry

His God Logos, the language fails him. And yet he speaks.

BB, 133 *We have lost. No,*
we have not lost our way

D, 16 *Singing like troubadours in Albi or Toulouse*
As if in spite of . . .

As if in spite of
We pretend to speak

GW, 21 *We pretend to speak. The language is not ours and we move upward beyond our powers into*

words again beyond us unsure measures

the poetry of the cosmos

τὸ κάλλοζ τῶν νοημάτων τῆζ κοσμοποιίαζ

transcending
speech and hearing λόγον καὶ ἀκοὴν *faltering.*

BB, 128 *PASSAGES 30* *STAGE DIRECTIONS*

"It's not so, not strictly so,
that's the trouble," *Ezra Pound, Venice 1964*

We pretend to speak. The language is not ours

BB, 131 ***Melodramatic***

His language, and from his troubled mind
Echoes of speeches, incantations, wild prayers,
As if to teach us "the perfection of certain ideals,
the depravity of others"

BB, 61 The Perfect Sermon of Hermes Trismegistus

GW, 35 *against the works of unworthy men, unfeeling judgments, and cruel deeds.*

Perfect Sermon of a Victorian clergyman (David Bromige)

BB, 40 *Do you know the old language?*

I do not know the old language

We pretend to speak
Grand Miraj MIRAJ

BB, 60 *Grand Miraj! It is the Sun, the fiery ball*

that ascends my heart, breaking from his horizon

blue in which He rides. Great Impersonator!

Surrogate!

Grand Miraj
Dante's Miraj
Cat., 135 *the spiritual transportations of the Sufi Recital*

Muhammad mounting on Buraq

BB, 122 Duncan mounting on *Pegasos / that great horse Poetry*

Chittick, 214, 80 There is the Buraq of Love: Mount upon Love and think not about the way! For the horse of Love is very sure-footed. Rumi says there is also the Buraq of non-existence, a wonderful steed for the ascent. It does not appear that Duncan has used the Buraq of non-existence.

Pegasus

BB, 132 *beneath whose hooves once again*
new springs are loosed on Helicon.

BB, 131 *Sublime*
Forbidden intensities

Ir., 32C *—"God"'s but Mind's hint at the Sublime*

Sublime
To Greet the Return of the Gods
But not the Beautiful Gods of Greece

D, 14 *The individual Hermes-Dionysos*
perfectly shown,

Again he speaks in thunder and in fire!

BB, 34 *Release the thunders*

from this cloud that gathers impending

song.

The Ten Thunders of Finnegans Wake
the idjaz of the Koran
sublimity the only proof of its divinity: the miracle of its style literally, "the rendering incapable, powerless."

Duncan has spoken of the extreme difficulty in *Passages* 17, as Hermes speaks delivering his "Perfect Sermon":

Maps, 54-5 *The poet performing must move into the high priesthood in which the official speaks in the god's person. . . .The voice of the man falters and must brave the heart in which he fails to give himself over, inept as he is, to the troubling sublimity of the concept. . . .Beyond the poet's daring to write once more in this high voice lies his vision of others who are here announced, poets who will chant once more with the voice of the Upanishads and Sutras, of the Songs of Solomon and the Psalms of David.*

Great Impersonator! Surrogate!

GW, 168 *for the sake of a rime not yet arrived*
containing again and again resonant arrivals.

Matthew XI, v. 3: Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

Duncan did not listen to William Carlos Williams saying "Not prophecy! NOT prophecy! but the thing itself!"
Who will say him no?

BB, 120 *TRANSGRESSING THE REAL PASSAGES 27*

In the War now I make

a celestial cave, a tent of the Night

(under the cloak of his poem he retires

invisible

for my thoughts are servants of the stars

A Surah is it, or a Sermon from the Commander of the Faithful

For now in my mind all the young men of my time
have withdrawn allegiance from this world, from public things

and as our studies in irreality deepen,

industries, businesses, universities, armies

shudder and cease

Performative language, or "Stage Directions."

In the hospital recently Duncan
greatly troubled
was reading the Koran.
After leaving the hospital, he was no longer reading the Koran. I sent him the piece I had written on Surah XVIII, The Cave, "The Apocalypse of Islam."

To learn the simplest things (GROUND WORK

GW, 18 *Child of a century more skeptic than*
unbelieving, adrift
between two contrary educations,
that of the Revolution, which disowns
everything,
and that of the Reaction,
which pretends to bring back the ensemble
of Christian beliefs,

will I find myself traind to believe
everything,

as our fathers, the scientists, have been

traind to deny?

OF, 96 *Flickers of unlikely heat*
at the edge of our belief bud forth.

NOTES

The citations from the works of Robert Duncan:
BB = *Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968)
D = *Derivations* (London: Fulcrum, 1968)
GW = *Ground Work* (New York: New Directions, 1984)
OF = *The Opening of the Field* (New York: Grove, 1960)
RB = *Roots and Branches* (New York: Scribner's, 1964)
TLM = *The Truth and Life of Myth* (New York: House of Books, 1968)
Cat. = "Rites of Participation, Part II" *Caterpillar* 2 (January 1968), 125-154.
CJ = "Beginnings: Chapter 1 of the HD Book, Part I" *Coyote's Journal* 5/6 (1966), 831.
Ir. = "At the Door," *Ironwood* 22 (1983), 32A-D.
Maps = "Preface to a Reading of Passages 1-22," *Maps* 6 (1974), 53-5.
Or. = "From the Day Book," *Origin* NS 10 (July 1963), 1-47.

The other texts that entered into my text are:
W. C. Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1946-51)
C. Olson, *Maximus Poems* IV, V, XI (London: Cape Goliard, 1968)
FW = J. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1966)
G. Oppen, "Of Being Numerous," "Route," *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1975)
G. Oppen, Interview, *Contemporary Literature* 10 (1969), 159-177.
G. M. Hopkins, "The Windhover: To Christ our Lord"
O. Mandelstam, "The Word and Culture," *Selected Essays*, Tr. S. Monas (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1977), 49-53.

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D. Bromige, "Beyond Prediction," *Credences* II (July 1975), 101-113.
N. Mackey, "Gassire's Lute: Robert Duncan's Vietnam War Poems" (unpublished MS)
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JOHN TAGGART

Two Poems

IN ITSELF

The line exemplifies, embodies;
it is in itself metaphor.
—Robert Duncan

In itself it is in itself that the line is metaphor
in repetition in the repetition within the line
repetition is choice each repetition a choice rechosen
constant repetition in the line a constant choosing
what is chosen is the metaphor image of the metaphor.

Image of the metaphor image product of metaphor process
product of metaphor process and product of the line
Zukofsky: "it ought to be involved in the cadence"
what is to be seen involved in what is to be heard
what heard what seen what I choose to hear and to see.

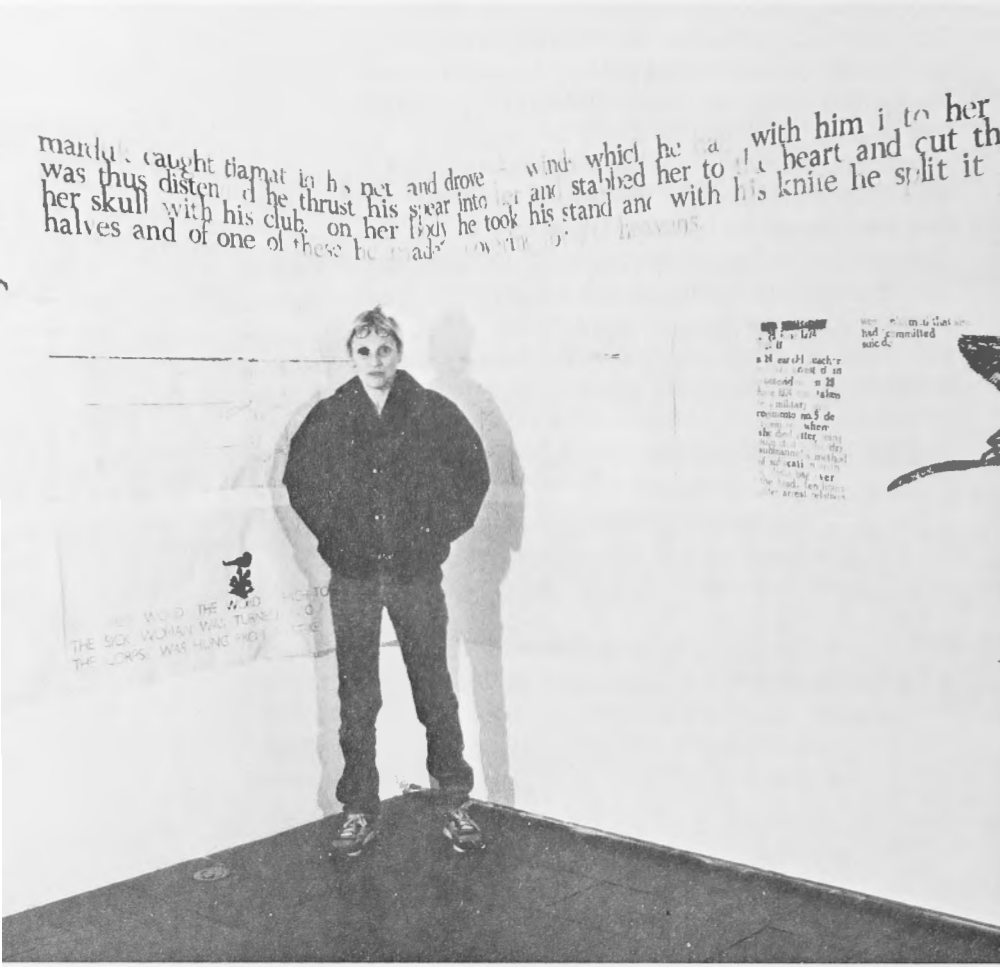
What's seen what's chosen is the image of the voice
the image breaks through closed spaces clouds and fences
I had thought these forms of words could not be opened
image in the line breaks through paw of an animal
image of the voice what I hear what I'm chosen to see.

SPEEDED UP PLAYED FASTER

The slow the small steps are speeded up played faster
the teacher shows her pupil how to play faster
speeded up the slow the small here comes the bride steps
how to play faster teacher shows her pupil how
they make an intertwined trio with the keyboard
hand on her shoulder hand guiding her pupil's hand
intertwined hands their hands faster on the keyboard
how to play faster teacher shows her pupil how
speeded up the slow the small steps as in a dream
they make an intertwined trio completely free
they are free among lights in a dark wood
they are free among submerged lights glimmering off and on
how to play faster the teacher shows her pupil
speeded up all the steps of their composition
they make an intertwined trio with the keyboard
hand on her shoulder hand guiding her pupil's hand
intertwined hands their hands faster on the keyboard
speeded up how the teacher shows her pupil how.

NANCY SPERO

from the *Torture of Women* series



This series consists of 20" x 25' panels, utilizing painting and typewriter collage on paper. With the exception of the 5th page of Spero artwork (which is the entire panel 11), the reproductions in Sulfur are details from these panels. On this page, Nancy Spero is photographed before several panels of this work at the New Museum, NYC, February 1984.

ith him into her body and whilst he
heart and cut through her bowels a
knife he split it like a flat fish into

SUSAN SAGARRY
June 1974
AY

ear old teacher
as arrested in
evidence on 29
1974 and taken
military unit
ento no. 5 de
ierro, where
lied after being
cted to the 'dry
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ffocation with
stic bag over
ead. ten hours
arrest relatives

were informed that she
had 'committed
suicide'.

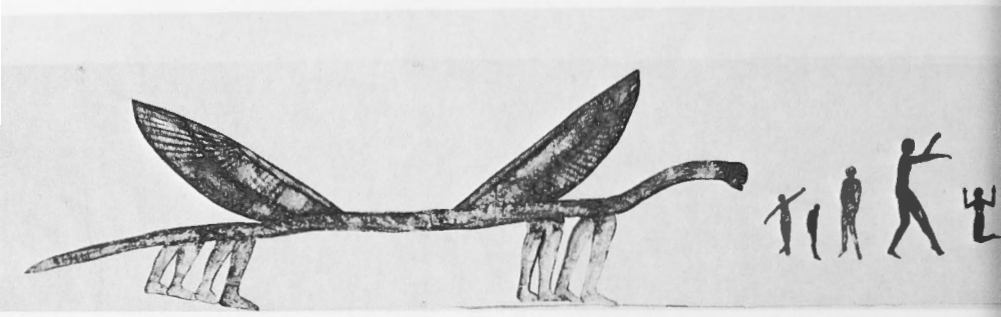
Torture today is essentially a state activity. ...the preconditi

for torture make it almost the exclusive province of the state. Torture requires that the victim be kept under the physical control of the torturer.[9]

CHILE

MARTA NEIRA, a 29 year old model was arrested last dec. 9 in santiago by DINA, chile's brutal secret police. according to a prisoners' report smuggled out of the pirque women's prison, when marta was last seen inside the quillon detention center on christmas eve 1974, her nose was broken and she had welts all over her. she had been subjected to electric shocks and to sexual abuse.

...this young victim of DINA is among at least 1,500 chileans who have disappeared since the military, led by general augusto pinochet ugarte seized power in sept. 1973.



I saw the corpse of my
daughter Annie
incinerated, and her
sexual organs squandered
and divided after her
death by the police of
France. Artaud

JON BIRD

from *Nancy Spero: 1954-1986** on the "Torture of Women" series

Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, begins his analysis of the historical evolution of punishment as a political technology of the body, by quoting first from an 18th century description of a public torture and execution, and then from an account of the regime of order and control within a juvenile prison in Paris just eighty years later, concluding from the contrast that "a few decades saw the disappearance of the tortured, dismembered, amputated body, symbolically branded on the face or shoulder, exposed dead or alive to the public view." A reading of the recorded incidents of the torture of women in Nancy Spero's "Torture of Women," excerpted from Amnesty International Reports, would suggest that the legitimated assault upon the body is, in fact, a constant occurrence and reminder of the vulnerability of civil society and its social and familial forms on a global scale, from the torture chambers of Fascist juntas to the exercise of hegemonic masculinity within the home.

Spero describes "Torture of Women" as her first explicitly feminist work, although the symbiosis of phallic power and legitimated violence is a constant theme of the "War" series. Much of the recent theoretical work upon masculinity, developed out of feminist analysis, has stressed the discursive and unstable nature of its construction. However, some specific forms and representations of male desire suggest a centering of identity around key psychic "moments"—for instance, of combat as our sole access to the intensity of *jouissance*, or of torture as the exercise of absolute (sovereign) power over a subjugated body—moments of the total experience and expression of hegemonic masculinity: rape, pornography and war. It is the points at which the fiction of masculine subjectivity intersects with the relations of power that the effects are likely to be most catastrophic for women.

"Torture of Women" recounts acts of torture using a large bulletin typewriter to increase visibility. Each "story" is irregularly printed as a fragmented and uneven metaphor for the physical body under duress. Accompanying these obscene case histories is a monstrous regiment, a

* These paragraphs (with Spero herself speaking in the italicized ones) are taken from Bird's catalog essay for the Nancy Spero Retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, March 11-April 12, 1987.

bestiary of fantastic and mythological creatures and figures. In this company we also again encounter excerpts from Artaud's tortured imaginings, and the Sumerian myth of Marduk and Tiamat—the ritual dismembering of the fish goddess by the sun god Marduk, to form the vaults of heaven and the underworld. Both in their separate ways are analogous with the technologies of pain recorded throughout the work. Amounting to a taxonomy of the terroristic effects of phallic power and domination, they operate at the edge of the social, unleashed upon the woman's body.

In the whole context of Spero's work, "victim" takes on a range of significations—not simply the description of the one who is the object of aggression, but of the fundamental incommensurability of power relations between oppressor and oppressed; not only the suffering of a wrong, but also of the inability to even state or prove, let alone right, that wrong; to, in fact, fall between the discourses—historical, juridical, ethical, political—that legitimate the event. The *logos* institutes a regime of sense that operates rules of inclusion and exclusion, of what can or cannot be put into discourse. Spero's work, like other feminist practices, bends the rules. By overlapping and interweaving the normally distinct and hierarchical orders of signification, mixing-up the descriptive, evaluative, cognitive, and prescriptive, she challenges pre-determined positions to, in effect, change the world.

Perhaps there are many more male political prisoners than female, but I decided in addressing the problem of torture, to emphasize only women. Both men and women are sexually abused in torture centres, but for women sexual assault is always central to attacks upon the body—frequently the woman becomes impregnated by the guards. So woman has the status of victim "par excellence" from time immemorial, as is evidenced by the quote I include of Marduk catching Tiamat in his net, brutalizing and then idealising her—"and with his knife he split (her body) like a flat fish into two halves, and one of these he made into a covering for the heavens."

By using transformed Egyptian serpents with female-like heads sticking their tongues out, adding breasts to one of them, taking the legs off another, adding a woman with a gun climbing up the back of a serpent, I felt I was allowing monsters in ambiguous form to come into the work. All the figures that I put into "Torture of Women" are ambiguous in the sense that they are not illustrations of pain or of a victimised sense of

being, apart from one image that I've used repeatedly—the "Sky Goddess"—half woman, half animal, bent over with four breasts. In this instance she is confined in a cell-like grid to suggest a very small and containing area.

In one of the sections I have a serpent observing a group of five metallically painted figures of assorted sizes involved in a sort of dance, and I deliberately left the spatial proximity of the monster to the figures unclear. I felt in this work that if there was to be any intimation of hope at all, then it would be expressed by the women's ritualistic dance of transcendence from a life in hell—the lived experience of women political prisoners. In this respect, in the opening panel I have the phrase "Explicit Explanation," taken from the Book of the Apocalypse because, in one sense, this is an explicit explanation of hell.

For the actual accounts of torture I used a bulletin typewriter because I wanted them to read clearly, perhaps like the effects of a newspaper account, or a broadsheet or a teletype. I made mistakes in typing the case histories, and I'd correct them and cut out some of the most obscured words so that they might convey the hesitant and incoherent manner of their telling. Also I hoped that the starkness of the bulletin type would emphasize the isolation of the individual women, and that the white spaces would signify silences—a respite from the documented histories.

PIERRE JORIS

from "Winnetou Old"

Vier Takte for K time then before
starting a poesis that keeps that other that
began in bone arete return to turbulence break
the slippery line to work thanatos tetanos Verkrampfung /
second movement process of individuation social
aspects in aspic hides a soul caught already encysted
blastula reaps a soul in titanic paralysis the
horizon inked end of my life there rises frostbite
blaming outside genetics the seas a tree a cloud a clubfoot /
this homunculus frozen brass monkey bone monkey
teton titan peeled of all flesh & fleas all noise &
bloodroar all Staub und Blut ein Würfel Milch

black millenium cramp has torqued all
muscle into solid bone *os* os bone bone Knochen
or meine Gebeine the bone titan a crouching knot-
sayer a preventer a not-sayer a stop-gap bony
head wedged into that opening in the self that is the
self slash through which soul flows into the world
usurper of the quickening pulse rides inside a stone rage
a congealed black hole moon key key hatred cancer

Note Re: *Winnetou*

Winnetou is an Apache chief invented by the late 19C German pop-fiction writer Karl May as side-kick for his main narrator & pseudo-autobiographical hero, Old Shatterhand, the schmaltzy white Christian "Westman" who will have managed to teach Winnetou Christian mores & writing by the time the latter is killed off. These figures have haunted European adolescences (at least in the German-speaking regions) for over a hundred years. (For more on May, cf. Frederic Morton's article *Tales of the Grand Teutons* in the N.Y. Times Book Review, January 4, 1987. Better still, see Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's 1974 film "Karl May.")

In my youth, I indentified totally with Winnetou (never with Shatterhand) who for me, as I know now, was clearly the figure of the other. Winnetou came back to me two years ago when in a trance-like meditation I asked for a guide-figure for a work I was undertaking then. He came back as a haggard, wizened old Indian, the near-Blakean figure of Europe's Other & indeed offered to lead me through the cultural charnel house of Europe.

romance blastulated frippery of fibromous death cult /
absolute balance no clinamen

staccato stasis howl this alphabet
go away don't hurl this relapse into bone again
no gain this stone-monkey Europe post no inter-
glacial basin from its dead foam no Aphrodite no
fatassed goddess kalypigian woman scraggy pigeons of
Paris Rome London Berlin carriers of Krakow diseases
kill the messengers from Budapest the plague is /
no turbulence

breath learn how to breathe with eyes
closed break now the slippery line carry on Winnetou
old now called Taranta in the vision a clearing a one-
room school-house part swiss chalet part frontier log cabin
part greek temple an old mescalero apache in rags of white
hair with a ball of light yarn in his right hand /
itschli is dead he walks in rubber Good Year sandals the
light yarn ball raised his hand raised all salutes
resemble each other

IBM staccato rage make it flow blood not
I-slash make it over again into daily sashimi cut from
between your ribs toro of belly toro of Gloucester
make merry haha only through power can we churn the
yourappian mind around & around here come aus Deutschland /
that battering figure of bone-monkey break the ice /
reclaim use of bone subarctic steppes double-sealed in
Deutschland aus Deutschland ein Würfel Stroh ein Nichts
aus Erde metal-blue Aries comes across a milled universe /
Universum für junge Menschen comes across the heart-bunker /
limits of any city retrace the subway steppes in strong
Indian ink all alone with Winnetou old Tamburlaine
Turbulence dead already amazing names more than fishwives /
caretakers of the world

sound gethsemanes spell through hell's
landscapes a cardiovascular ease a momentary you wakes
a sentence now another night lifts off the rooftops in
anger its load a cynical serial of political nightmares /
you turned your back accused me of lack of romanticism /
the fragrance of passion the smell of death hides behind /

the fragrance of new sheets bone gags anger that narrow
mood ram's head hurtling pike's mouth gasping water /
shoots an old turbulence comes riding

there is unfinished business on this front /
it is new it is not new it goes west west the Urals
a spine Nestorian wave-forms rattus rattus rattus only
antigens can cross a bilaterally proliferating earth
don't you realise you could die any minute have done
so for so long already to break la nuit américaine
translates as European day here comes Autonomia rises
against the faked night of Hollywood paper jungles oh Ez
you went off the black edge of Europe should have known
peace is war continued with other means it will not
rise in the east oh sol hearse of so much claptrap

yourappian Kulchur hang the big O
l'outre l'autre now becomes au-tonomia another alphabeta
begins towards mania l'aetera ô become au begins
towards dawn drawn with your fingers in shellacked snows
of old we have learned nothing from millenia your
defense the great meltdown domination domination of the
planets Uranus hello Mario Tronti Tony Negri Sergio
Bologna Franco Piperno Oreste Scalzone hello & good-bye /
you too the night of europe the workers no longer the edge /
will lift the whole construaimo une nova vita no longer /
the definite article

it is now a a aaaa many aaaaas /
construoaimo u-naaaa I love to build on declensions /
out of the east where the sun has entered the ass of
the bone monkey the squatting monkey hands out its
asshairs a rectum swallows it all back up ur-mouth /
ur-fear sun-eater schreber Herr Doktor father
father father tetanos bone-monkey bone-setter
stammers here your small sun unlanguaged sandwich
between four a word a corpse from memory come back
can I come back poling me mori I die cast myself a
corpse ex changes color color rubor dolor

unhanded I feel it there thumb makes
fifth first column in again la nuit américaine night /
I had night shade & shed nuire & noise noise to draw

the night with let it drawn lance turba ya ya ya /
the thing about Hermes is wings at his feet all other
attributes & functions don't matter derived but how
do I know where to move brownian movement delusion
vectorial even that ball of light yarn purpose or will
will dance a chaconne each to his own dispersals sparag-
mos of love torn between her & himself only hate makes
whole that earlier figure the unbroken egg before
caterpillar & break the shell in skull anger bone
hurt brain too only viscera mush schlupping about

oh in terror to type this alphabet of
self this ur-sauce reduces towards death bad sun in
solar plexus bitter biter you stole the days's first
grace & pleasure the head of Orpheus keeps singing a
mouth full of water full of milk full of teeth heads
bop on waves maternal waves waves a pen in vermillion
sky merde it will never stop right there wriggling
earthworm left behind left wet behind wig wig wiggle
the ears a milk shake of cosmic proportions proteus
athos & porthos all the garçonnes dance around the mummy
head miffed breath it cannot go on end of century chaconne /
head now of osiris no a jackal guards the door to
charnel house Europe

read it anyway you can she said the
stormbarrier broke turbulence rusted the brass heart in
bone froze & whirled will never stop now sharp fracture
gleam at the edge of world whirl that gags me gaïa
cannot hold on to muumy-being this is not analysis this is
other molecular happening beneath old certainties somewhere
else always always a displaced somehow discarded discord
left behind I can see my whole body if you have never carried
a corpse you cannot know the weight of your own body
someone said this in Europe

& I cannot make it back from behind the
barn at Asselscheuer we played sticky fingers musk of
oxen cows pigshit underneath & I cannot make it
back I take it back your eurappian origins flood
against african cervix a system of different heat-levels /
creates flow your ice-cold anger freezes this hand I
stand reviled access lost body tremble redirect

attention impossible task you say it reads win you
too I say the death of europe the bone monkey hoes
the graves the homegrown brass idols croak in no key /
stone titans your whoresongs cloudbursts of putrifaction
you lead me back to this inchoate text of exile

von Hollands Grachten biss tief ins Russische
Reich a Ganovenweise sung in Luxembourg anno domini 3
post world war 2 all the way to Ancel in the Bukowina
and still we go at it turba scriptorum tralala trying
to wring something from this long night how not to escape
how to work from inside out that it stand in the light of
day that it make that light light again here comes
exile down the narrowest cut he believes himself & finds
a home therein exile night elixir

LINDA REINFELD

Foundations

Fishes perceive how the seas diminish,
How the harbor stones settle heavy, sink
Solid onto the ocean floor,

And here I am, watching also, but wishing
For a fling in the high mode, like an old poet,
Looking for a theme of my own,

Looking even in ancient places
For a great event—the building of a breakwater, say,
Or the beginnings of a great city to praise. Maybe

This picture, now on view, is my subject: The Rape of the Sabines:
Sebastiano Ricci painted it life-size—soldiers
Victorious, ruddy, aglitter with spears and armor,

Seizing rustic virgins for their beds (three years later
Here they are again, portrayed with their babies): thus Rome
Was founded. Today

If you make the trip out to see The Princely Collections,
The Treasures of the Royal House of Liechtenstein,
You can follow the taped tour, hear the elegant voice explaining

The elegant scene: "Observe the struggle: this rendition
Of men joyfully overcoming the resistance of women
Represents the artist's triumph, the triumph of form over matter,

The founding of western civilization." That's the high mode—
No getting around it—and I find myself here, below,
Betrayed by this ground, looking back, as the tide comes in.

DOUGLAS LOWELL

Two Poems

DESIRE

It has a trailing habit of growth
contained. Intention gathers unknown
companions, thoughts. Logic is
a remedy, and desire fails. Logic fails
and falls to thinking things over.

*

It has a trailing habit of growth
along the lines of a premonition dance.
Faces are masked and in the future.
You dream of a starling and wake up to a mockingbird.
It hasn't happened but in a dream
you can't remember, a warning.
The habit is catching.

*

It has a trailing habit of growth
the dark end lost in a quarry
depth unprobed, other end yet
unproved, malicious scent under
the surface leaking, rose water,
the undergarden seeking out
a ground, the passive master
walking over it, furthers the progress,
under governs it, standing suddenly
beside a figure grown.

*

It has a trailing habit of growth
turned from the stars to probe the ground

for access. Night hides just enough
that hidden shapes show
when the eyes avert. Nature moves
to accord with death, life trailing.
Nature hands us nothing
but shadows taking form
speak Latin at us, lifting imaginary skirts
for possible contact.

FOR MAX

"A certain nobleman went into a far country to
receive for himself a kingdom, and to return."

A man went out
of his mind
to find a kingdom had grown up
about him.

He cried at the distant view
its distance beyond
but not beyond sight.

This is a story to follow
out. Man, a certain
kingdom called noble
and to return.

To return to the story
man went out into
someplace far.

This is the land where killing happens
called a voice,
a kingdom called
a nobleman.

This, called a man, is far
country, receive me, I
receive you. This

is your kingdom, return.
And a light shone
near a pool, said a voice
called somewhere.

II.

Go around
called Max
and I thought he meant boxing.

Fais le tour
make the journey
(it had to be made
made up).

Max went a round
and got lost
for a little while.
Hard to see round corners.

Take the tour
make the turn
go the long way round.

III.

Certain of what? There are men
who hold nothing in their hands
and make it a gift. To receive
is to know what to hold on to. Max knew.
Angels passed him a gift on the way.
Certain man, he took it.
And to return?

IV.

A man went out
on an April day
two cold legs
and an apple tart.

A man upset a cart
and the stars fell
into the ocean.
Out of the sea climbed me—
who am I?

This is the origin of man.

V.

For himself a kingdom meant
anywhere but here. That is a lie
told me so I could tell it
from the truth, the matter
of another world. Who could tell
its meaning? Mars went black
and sank out of the clouds
to claim his kingdom. Trust
had nothing to do with it, this
was a matter of man in action.
Trust to the stars is a kingdom
to be claimed, another country
far from me, and Max

VI.

went. I stayed. Who was here
to tell it. Not me. Once we knew
the country we could return without.
Within was kingdom, certain man
went out and in, as always.
But to return. The train went one way
and I another. That was the story told

a man then, now the story goes away
from kingdom into country into
man again.

JULIO ORTEGA

Toledan Self-Portrait

(Tr. from the Spanish by Clayton Eshleman)

To be this shadow of
El Greco, these eyes, these
lips, this illusion that death
ceases in the tranquility of blackness,
free of the light corroding
the idea of the eternal: how golden it is,
this decayable material
perpetuating us.

I am not
this shadow, I am this El Grecan
shaft of light, this nostalgia
for the idea of the eternal
liberated by death, these pale ochres
burning in the gaze that sustains the ultimate
impassioned order of the world.

To be that
tremor of his hand, that
tentative line in the turbulent
sky, as if our body were
the ignorance of time,
the journey that converts
madness into a model of reason
in the name of faith,
this hardly human business
that keeps the powers preoccupied,
delineated by the rite of the miracle,
taciturn body, pure grief of
the incredulous world.

Neither are you
this river nor this stone
flaming like time's taper: monument of desire
suspended in the abyss of its own

construction, while the noblemen
having offered their lives quake
with eternity. What being
but this paradox,
what a mockery, that amazement.

You are not
dust or nothingness: you are the watchfulness
kindling the eyes of El Greco
over his own tomb
opened for whoever glances
below the sole miracle: no longer being
here, only being someone capable of sight,
seeing the hand that presides
over its sepulchre, like the unique power
of the open eye over the closed.

We are
so much exaltation, so much tortured
blue, and this turbulent
grey: confrontation between
the body and its treasure
each to the other vulnerable, creatures
of flesh and of inquiry,
on the abandoned stage
where we awaken alone.

We are no
longer this discourse, we are its contradiction:
the emblems hush and the only words are
those which carry us
to paradise: alone among the ruins,
obsessed with ritual,
we are naked in prayer as
in death: only the body is left
as if it were the last shape
of the lost discourse.

Many towers,
high walls, they say too much
and tell us too little:
their history is not their crumbling,
it is their prophecy,

they resist like an El Greco canvas
all that is human under the heavens.
You are, under such heavens,
at last not merely history
[this tourist guide
chattering in English],
you are the fulfilling promise
that time through your hands
in the form of a sudden star
yet again conquers stone.

You are
this Arabic vault, this steel
inscribing Mudejar stone,
this spreading tree of origins:
the architecture glowing
in the Baroque eye of the Indian
who awakens you
like the disputed miracle of those men
who search outside of time, in meaning.

And the kings
descend to their tombs
in the name of eternity:
tourists take snapshots of the metaphoric
stone contributing another
image of the fleeting—but you
in the name of history
will touch again the traces of the empire
the artisans entomb under their writing:
doors, vaults, arches,
the massive sepulchre time requires.
Add to the line
this passion for sketching.

And art
is the form of the fleeting: its miracle
is not to resist, is having
given to passionate themes
a sense of design that time incarnates
in the founded and the foundering.
To touch this plateresque ash
is to see the milling plaza

celebrating the loftiness of worked
stone: crowds touch
the very water, this image
where irretrievable time
is depicted, this vibration.

I know more about me
in this river or that stone,
know more about you, being or not being,
seeing the nobleman's face
or the artisan's hand, the painter's
stroke or the master's signs, inscribed
in this image of the world
miscarried like all worlds,
while I sustain my brief one
and yours, in this abyss of eternity,
where time concedes to me
its engraved stammering:
be you who you may I am this
drawing watching the stone
transformed into the spoliation
of the mirage.

A Tribute to Porfirio DiDonna (1942-1986)

Testimonials by Friends & Reproductions of DiDonna's Work

(Edited by John Yau)

PORFIRIO DIDONNA IN HIS STUDIO
Photo Credit: D. James Dee

NOTES OF A TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH PORFIRIO'S MOTHER
SATURDAY, 24 JANUARY 87

Porfirio said to his mother while an art student at Pratt, "I want to be a religious painter." Art teachers disapproved of religious subject paintings when he brought them in.

Porfirio's mother said, "He was always drawing horses and elephants as a child."

Porfirio's Church: The Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, located at the corner of Verona St. and Richard St., Red Hook, Brooklyn. The Church of Porfirio's first Holy Communion, Confirmation, where he was an altar boy. The Church where Porfirio volunteered to play the organ when in his middle twenties. The Church that celebrated the Mass of Resurrection before his burial.

Porfirio pitched a no hitter when he was sixteen. The team was sponsored by a newspaper.

Porfirio's father was a longshoreman—"winchman." He operated the loading and unloading crane of the ships. She also said that there had been for several generations art and music on her side of the family, none on his.

Porfirio's mother, speaking of Porfirio's death: "I dressed him beautiful and then just put him away." She said she could refer to his death only in those words.

—Anton van Dalen

Not one of Rilke's "early departed"—Vera
Knoop who stopped dancing & died of glandular disease at 15—
Porfirio's big mellow is it lemur eyes?
A soft, pure man, with an exact imprint,
and—out of brutal Red Hook, as if he were the antithesis of
violence & death,

dead, and so young, just into the foothills of what I
    remaining
imagine as mountainous climb,
but as in the case of Wallace Berman, cut off at 49,
the imprint is so specific we should not
mourn incompletion, for the creative fusion
—to align one's life & one's work—
is microcosmically cogent. All else
second bud, third bud etc.,

    first bud
    DiDonna
    whole

—Clayton Eshleman

AN EXCERPT FROM THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR PORFIRIO DIDONNA

"Pro was a dear friend of mine. Pro always fascinated me because he was a man with a unique vision of life. A unique thinker. But above all, he captured my fascination because he was such an extraordinary artist.

I thought of him as a reincarnation of a Chinese master painter of the 11th Century, my favorite period, who believed and lived in the purest pursuit of his art. That's Pro. In fact, I told him this one night during one of the walk-and-talk sessions when Pro and I would wander around TriBeca, sometimes until 2 or 3 in the morning. I told him that he reminded me of this Zen monk who meditated for a long time before painting, but once he held a brush, he painted with such swiftness and sureness that with a few brushstrokes he was able to put down a whole universe onto that piece of white paper.

Then Pro said, "But Naoto, do you really think I am like that?" I said, "Yes." Then after a little pause, he said, "You know—you are right. I am like that monk!" He was so pleased he was dancing on the street like a child.

Pro gave me so much, I can't begin to evaluate how much he has given me. How fortunate I am to have had a friendship with such a great painter. I love him and will always revere him."

—Naoto Nakagawa

The most strong and lasting impression I have of Porfirio is of the first time I visited him at home. I had already known him for some time, but he was rather reticent to have people over, probably for reasons of privacy and shyness. It was an enormous space, having the qualities of cavern and cathedral, but faded, flaking. There was little attempt at decoration or comfort, everything being related to or at the service of making paintings. In this space the paintings were like windows, stained glass, bright and radiant accents of color and gesture. The way he introduced each piece was almost fretful, alternately proud and disappointed, exceedingly doubtful. Each time that I would say that I liked this or that painting he would seem to be astonished. It was in those surroundings that I first felt the religious aspect of Porfirio's work. Although not specifically involved with religious subject matter, they had a kind of light and iconography that I associate with the costume and decoration of churches. When I recently saw an early painting depicting the last supper this impression was confirmed.

In the times I spent talking to Porfirio, whatever we were discussing, it would always come back to the work. That was what he tested everything against and through. He was never pompous or arrogant, so the discussions were never involved with power plays or self-righteousness. We could be entirely comfortable and know that we would listen and respond without guile. Pro also had no hierarchy about what was or was not interesting to think about, so it seemed that everything was full of potential. That quality was also part of his charm; it would expand the world again. Clearly, Porfirio was involved in his work in a deeply spiritual way. Were he to read that now, I'm sure he would laugh and make some crack. Secretly pleased, perhaps, but not taking it too seriously. That was another quality of Pro's that made him so accessible—a boundless capacity for seeing the humor in himself and others—a kind of common sense that made him seem unshakable.

I miss him alot both as an artist and as a friend, but when I do think of him there is a comfort in the memory because the fabric of his life and work made sense to me. Porfirio was a highly unusual and original artist, and a fine human being.

—Medrie MacPhee

A GLIMPSE OF PRO

He sat on the stonewall telling me about his weightlifting workouts. He was shirtless, and his skin was milk white and palely freckled—the pallor of a Northern Italian and a city boy. He spoke earnestly as he usually did no matter how trivial the subject. Sincere is not too strong a word. He was always sincere, had no airs nor pretense about him. In a year it didn't mean a damn thing what workout regimen he was following. Porfirio DiDonna was to suffer and die from a brain tumor. Surely, it was already a bud in his brain on that July 4th afternoon.

We sat in Nina Nielsen's (She runs a gallery in Boston where I came to know Pro and his work and is today, as she has been for some time, Pro's champion) backyard waiting for the picnic to begin, having just finished playing softball. We were on the same team. Pro had made a great over-the-shoulder catch in deep center avoiding the boulders and keeping his feet among the hummocks of pasture grass. It is cruel to remember him vital and aglow that day, but impossible not to. His illness and death so soon followed this afternoon they drew a tight and grim knot of irony. Practically a definition of irony.

Pro (What an inappropriate nickname for the man!) was an innocent. He seemed not to have been marked, marred, by what William Blake called Experience. Pro never followed the "starry pole" of reason and materialism, but lived the life of the imagination. I have no right to say never. I didn't know Pro that well. I am sure he worried about his future and was sometimes sad and lonely. But this is the man and artist I saw in the too few glimpses I had of him.

And you can get a glimpse of his character in his work. Remembering him today I see again the drawings he showed at the Nielsen Gallery two years ago. Black marks on buff paper. Dots and lines arranged in rectangles. Some of these marks shadowed in white. And some with a gray wash as if blurred by rain. Serene, untroubled and untempted by

the world even as they seemed to add things up, to total experience. It was easy to look at these works and feel both at rest and free.

—William Corbett

FOR PRO

Honest paintings are neither for or against the world. Honest paintings quite simply are and in that areness, loved or not will always be. Pro's paintings will always be, for Pro was not just an artist, though a fine artist he was, Pro was a painter, an honest painter. Pro's life, the core of his being, centered around painting, and for those who love painting, the art of painting, he left us many fine and beautiful things. Pro, the man, was the most unique person I ever knew or will ever know. He was like an exotic bird and yet humble like a monk born holy in an unholy world. Pro's work is finished, and it is now for the world to do with it what it will. As for me, I will always be transported by it. Transported to a special place. Pro's special place. It is much too early and I lack the command of words to say what effect this wonderful dear man's life and his passing will have on my life. All I know now is that I miss him and that I loved him, and that his spirit will always be with me—he was my friend.

—Jake Berthot

Porfirio DiDonna was as pure a painter as I have ever known. He got to the center of his internal workings and forthrightly elicited what he sensed, what was. The act of finding something inside himself was finding something inside the painting, not on, but in and in further to what was found, which went elsewhere, causing a renewal of the process. He was a craftsman; the mode of working, the materials, exotic by today's standards, the preparation was paramount, yet concurrent to thinking. The process was thinking, an internal conversation with himself and the phenomena of painting.

Color was a universe that Porfirio lived in. Color was a celebration. It brought him joy and because he developed it structurally, I believe it brought him solace, for his life, as all lives, was at times difficult. With color, lines, marks, textures, drawing to and from and out of a feeling for a form or image, he made elusive yet fertile images which in feeling, in their metaphysics, spanned from Naples, Italy to New York to heaven.

In my mind he made some of the best drawings of his time. It was an exhilarating, nearly shocking, experience visiting his studio, that well-lighted dark cavern, the walls covered with drawings. In them one witnessed the dialogue that traced his thinking, the progressions, the turnabouts, on a scale that brought to mind what an editor or a scientist must track, reviewing raw material, organizing, recognizing where it might go, hoping it might, knowing some control, watching a dynamic collection of material both compounding its meanings and releasing them.

Recalling those paintings, especially the late ones, I recognize his art coalescing; the inner self, the visible world around him, the language and act of painting became indivisible. There were two significant sets of compositions, one an architectonic earth mother torso, or perhaps it was an hourglass form, that quavered softly with anxiety. The very last were abstractions of church-like windows, quiet and upward pulling. The canvas is the window, the viewer could be looking in or looking out. These works are robust in implications and are beautiful in a way that could never be analyzed to an end point, beyond beauty. How such a humble man, decent, even sweet, could make paintings so complex in their secret mirrorings of himself, yet totemically grand and elusively expressive in symbolic imagery is difficult to know. I got close to knowing for I knew him well, he was true, he remains a model to follow, I miss him.

—David True

I recall a quiet, intensely involved young Porfirio who came to my drawing class at Columbia University in the mid-sixties. One day he entered the studio carrying large rolls of heavy wrapping paper that almost dwarfed his figure. He explained that he had done them in his room at

home and was anxious to see what had come out. When he was working the drawing, it was in large sections on the floor, up on the bed and then up the wall, which made it impossible for him to see what truly occurred. But in this case, more was more. The images were complex ones: the quality of drawing, the degree of imagination, was impressive. At the end of that year he became a graduate student, and had his own studio. The two of us met each week, and it became clear that Porfirio was an insular man. I was certain that inside this need for privacy was a lode of sensibility, and a gift that he could draw on for his work. He had an acute sense of scale. Both in very large works that went from the inside of his door to the window at the other end of the room and in the smaller paintings (which were never minor works) there was a formal order that did not allow for slightness.

After Porfirio left Columbia, I continued to see his work. For all the shifts in form, from the small dots of color to the more open rich use of paint, the connective was a particular quality of light. It is hard to think of this without seeing the work as having the quality of religious thought, a passion. It is an inner light that informs the work. An iconic figuration that appears in the early works of his late teens, and in his early twenties as an undergraduate at Pratt. While working with Porfirio at Columbia his paintings had their own identity. Only in the literal sense was he a student. What he may have learned was through the act of making paintings, not studies, not exercises.

Porfirio's family and friends always referred to him as "Pro." I always knew him as "Porfirio" and didn't see him regularly until the last several years. Those last times were particularly good. The talk was rarely about anything other than painting. I never knew him to indulge in petty gossip about the art world.

One day after lunch, we were walking down Canal Street. He mentioned being somewhat at a loss in comprehending a mutual friend, a splendid painter, who confided to Porfirio that at times while painting thought of himself as God. He asked me if I ever felt that way, adding that he never did, and what did I think? My quick, honest reply was that our friend was lucky, and that I envied him. Porfirio had a modesty that was linked with a deep faith in the validity, the spirit of a work of art.

Last year I got to know Porfirio's parents and to visit the church he attended since childhood, where he occasionally played the organ. Here is where he saw what was probably his first painting: a large altar-piece influenced by the High Renaissance. In its subject relating to the life of Christ, one may find a connection with Porfirio's work.

For at least two decades my feelings for Porfirio have centered on a strong sense of respect for him as an artist. When he became ill I felt a deep affection, and an apprehension of impending loss. In the most true

sense, he was a religious man whose faith centered on creating a formal order that is lit with a mysterious quality of life. So then, we are in debt to Porfirio. It is a profound one, and one for which we are grateful.

—Stephen Greene

In my address book, above Porfirio's address and phone number, I have listed the address and phone number of his parents. It's the only such example in my book.

To come to New York many of us have removed ourselves at great distance from our families. The art world, at its best, becomes another kind of family. We can take care, a little, of each other. Porfirio was the exception. His family was in Brooklyn, and we could all see how close he remained to them, and how much strength they gave him.

Some twelve years ago, when my son was about five years old, Pro invited us to his family's house for Thanksgiving. I remember the steaming good food, looking down the long table surrounded by Pro's family and art world friends. The rooms were filled with his early paintings.

At the memorial, Pro's mother, despite her grief, remembered me, and asked about my son.

—David Reed

DIDONNA

The paintings, drawings and water colors of Porfirio DiDonna are romantic in the traditional sense. They are comparable in their pervasive moodiness and in their heightened sense of imagination to Delacroix or Corot.

In an essay, Baudelaire describes a type of draughtsmanship which is, "the noblest and strangest, it can afford to neglect nature," and "it

realizes *another* nature analogous to the mind and temperament of the artist." Though we are no longer in a time when rendering nature is an issue, this statement had a lot of meaning with respect to Porfirio's work. The tower-like shapes that appear in the work are not from nature, but from imagination, and the other shapes he uses, whether they be polyhedrons or the empty spaces left by shapes that were there, are really not identifiable. "A belated attempt has now been made to trace back the forms of architecture to the leafy branches of the forest and the rocks of the grotto, and yet these forms are nowhere to be found in nature, but rather in the soul of man." Even the little flecks of color do not become leaves, or any other things in nature. They are a manifestation of the artist's temperament, and are man-made.

DiDonna creates a "super-natural" space in his paintings that is descriptive of the place art occupies in human experience. But it is not a purified vision of reality. It comes from understanding complexity and multiplicity and, therefore, is not abstract in the sense of being idealized or removed. Because there begins to be a particular association that transforms shape and paint, the work has mystery and gives the impression of continuously becoming. Though the paintings are superbly done, glazed with "old master" surfaces, they have a quality of being unedited, of having everything in them in a uniquely open way.

—Lee Sherry, 1983

REMEMBERING PORFIRIO

He sounded sleepy when he answered the phone, so I asked him if anything was wrong.

"I can't paint," he whispered.

"What do you mean?"

"I can't paint because the stretchers I ordered aren't ready yet. They were supposed to be delivered last week, but they won't be ready for another two weeks. When I can't paint, I can't do anything."

As always, at the end of one of our phone conversations, he thanked me for calling him.

He was walking down Broadway toward Canal Street. I asked him what he was up to, because the minute I saw him I realized our paths had crossed only once before, even though we lived just a few blocks

apart. Pro organized his life around specific routines, such as going to the gym to lift weights and swim, going to a bar near his loft to play pool and eat dinner, or going to his parents' house on Sunday. When I saw him, I knew that he had broken his routine.

"I saw the Van Gogh show this morning and was knocked out by it."

(The show was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, some 85 blocks north of where we standing.)

"After seeing it, the only thing I could do was walk home. Van Gogh's paintings are like that. They make you think."

He lived alone on the top floor of a narrow building three blocks south of Canal Street. The dark vast loft was divided into living space and studio. You entered the living space first.

The things: a clothes rack—the kind you see being pushed through the garment district—on which hung shirts, pants, and coats, a row of nails from which hung an assortment of hats, bureau, tables made of plywood sheets balanced on saw horses, piles of drawings and watercolors, boxes of charcoal sticks, brushes, watercolors, jars and cans filled with change, desk, filing cabinet, radio, portable television, neatly-made bed, and a couch on which was always a book he was in the middle of reading.

Above the bed a row of small paintings—their colors murky and moody—that he had done in high school and college. The subjects: Madonna and Child, Crucifixion, Deposition, and Resurrection.

Whenever I told him I wanted to see what he was working on, he said I should come over tomorrow or the day after at 1:00 p.m. We would sit in the kitchen and have lunch. Salami or ham. Mustard. Italian bread. Beer, orange juice, or water. Coffee. The kitchen was an alcove formed by the walls of the studio and bathroom. At the far end was a large, battered restaurant stove on which he boiled water for the coffee—the only thing I ever saw him cook. As we ate and talked, one of his cats would jump up on the stove and sit in a large pot and watch us. After lunch was over and everything put away, we would go into his studio, followed by one or both cats.

We sat in his studio for most of the afternoon, talking about the paintings he was working on, the rows of drawings tacked to the wall. I said: "I bet you got things in here that I've never seen." He smiled, got up from his chair, walked over to a table, and, after a minute or so, found what he was looking for—a large white folder. One by one, he

carefully removed a woodcut done in black ink on thin translucent paper. An hourglass-like shape surrounded by bars placed at regular intervals.

"How long have you been working on these?"

"A year maybe two. I wanted to learn how to do them. I got some books, I studied."

"How do you feel about these?"

"They're okay."

I asked him what he thought of a show by a painter he had taught the technique of glazing with black oil to.

"I'm not sure I understand what he's getting at."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the work isn't clear enough. I'm not sure why he made the decisions he made."

I was in his loft, looking at an early painting by another artist.

"When did you get that one?"

"Oh, I traded for it years ago. I like trading work. If you would like to, we can trade something."

"Well, okay but..."

"What's the difference? A trade is a trade," he said, smiling.

I invited Pro and a few other friends over for dinner. At some point, each of us talked about when we had moved to New York. He grew up in Brooklyn and lived with his parents until he was in his early 30s. He had a loft in Manhattan which he went to every day, but he always went home at night. He could work in the loft, but it was illegal to live there. During a prolonged subway strike, he couldn't travel back and forth, and decided it would be better if he found a place in which to both live and work. He went home almost every Sunday. All of us were invited over to his parents' house for dinner. He said his parents would be happy to meet his friends. He said that he didn't feel like he had to move out of his house until the subway strike made it hard for him to work.

Jake Berthot, Edith Gould, Pro and I were invited to lunch at Stephen and Sigrid Green's home, which was one hour north of Manhattan. We go in Edith's pickup truck. A cool sunny day, Pro and I sat in the back. As we crossed the Tappan Zee bridge, he pointed to the struts overhead and said: "I should go out more. I'd probably get a lot more ideas for paintings." Then he laughed. "No, I go out enough. I just have to work more, maybe differently. I mean someday I'll get what I'm after. We believe that, don't we? We believe that we'll get there, someday." Both of us looking at the sky, laughing.

He was taken to the hospital the night before Thanksgiving, 1985. Two days later, the doctors removed a large tumor from his head. Lynton Wells, Dan Devine, and I go to see him. Other friends are there and we have to wait.

A group of friends go to the hospital on New Year's Eve. Someone takes a photograph. Pro looks at it, quizzically; "There's something wrong with this. It's not me. I look dead."

Separately, David True and Stuart Diamond tell me the story in a flat voice. Each of them tells me the story several times over the next few days, always in disbelief.

I first saw one of his paintings shortly after I moved to New York in the early 70s. It was a smooth green field punctuated by uniform rows of small, slightly protruding yellow rectangles. Color and surface shifted simultaneously. I remember going back to look at the painting again and again. I wondered about the compulsive man who patiently put this painting together. Around 1979, Lee Sherry first introduced us on a subway going downtown. We didn't talk. Two, maybe three, years passed before I got his phone number from a mutual friend and called him up. I had seen his work in Boston and New York and wanted to see and know more. We saw each other infrequently. I feel that I was just getting to know him. For all his simplicity and directness, I don't feel as if I knew him well.

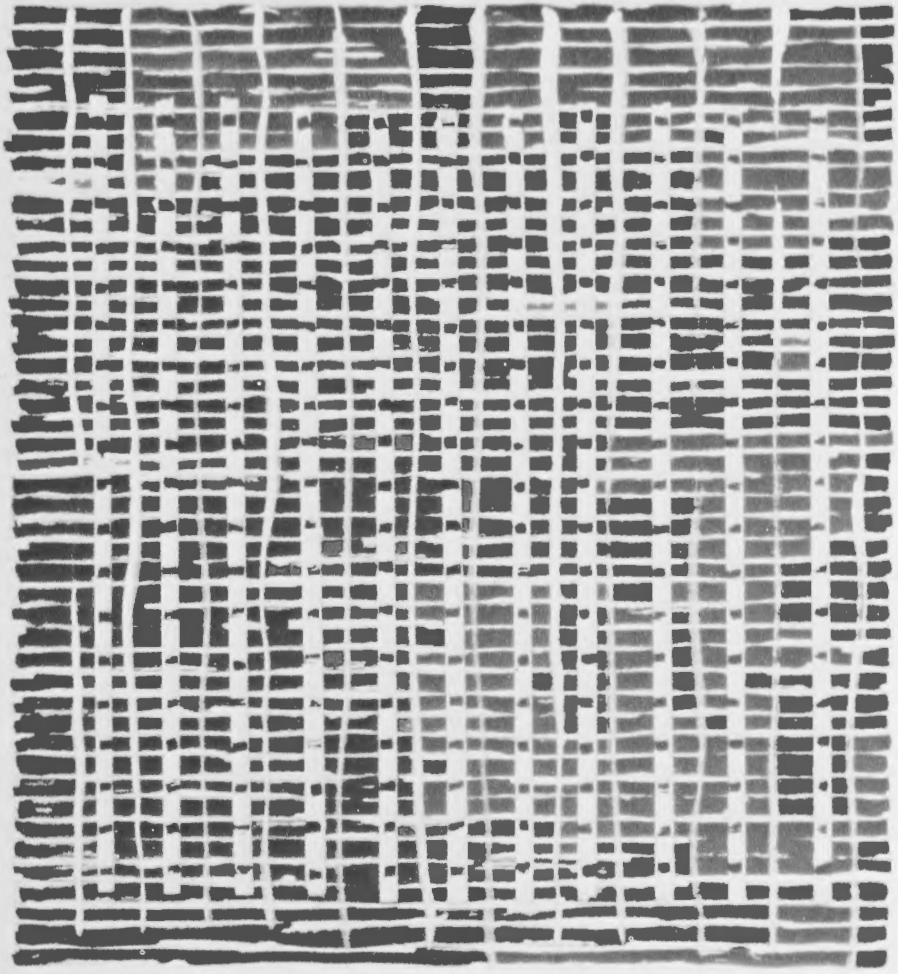
I am waiting for Pro to answer the phone. I know I won't be in New York very often, so I call him, usually in the morning, between 10:00 and 11:00. Visiting hours won't start until noon, and by 10:00 the tests he will undergo will complete. At the end of every conversation, he thanks me for calling.

—John Yau

PORFIRIO DIDONNA

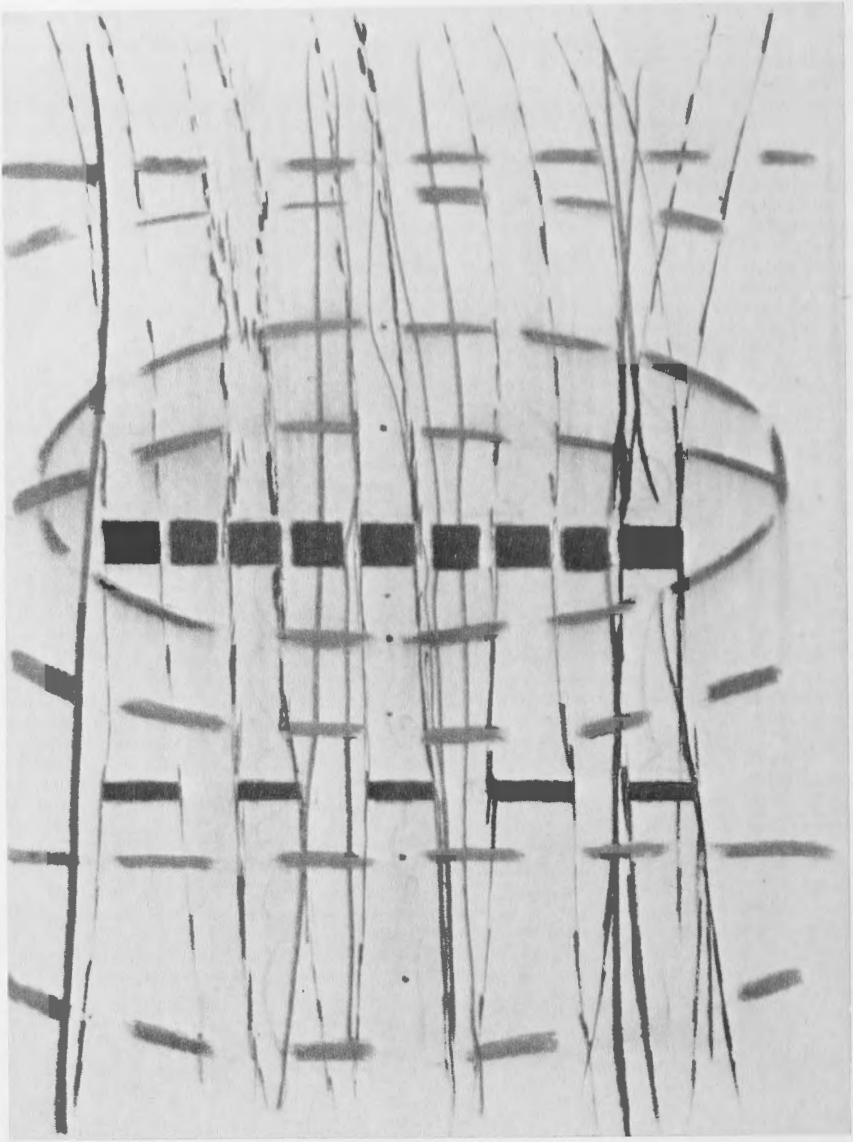
Six Works

CRUCIFIXION, 1964
Oil on Linen, 24" x 20"



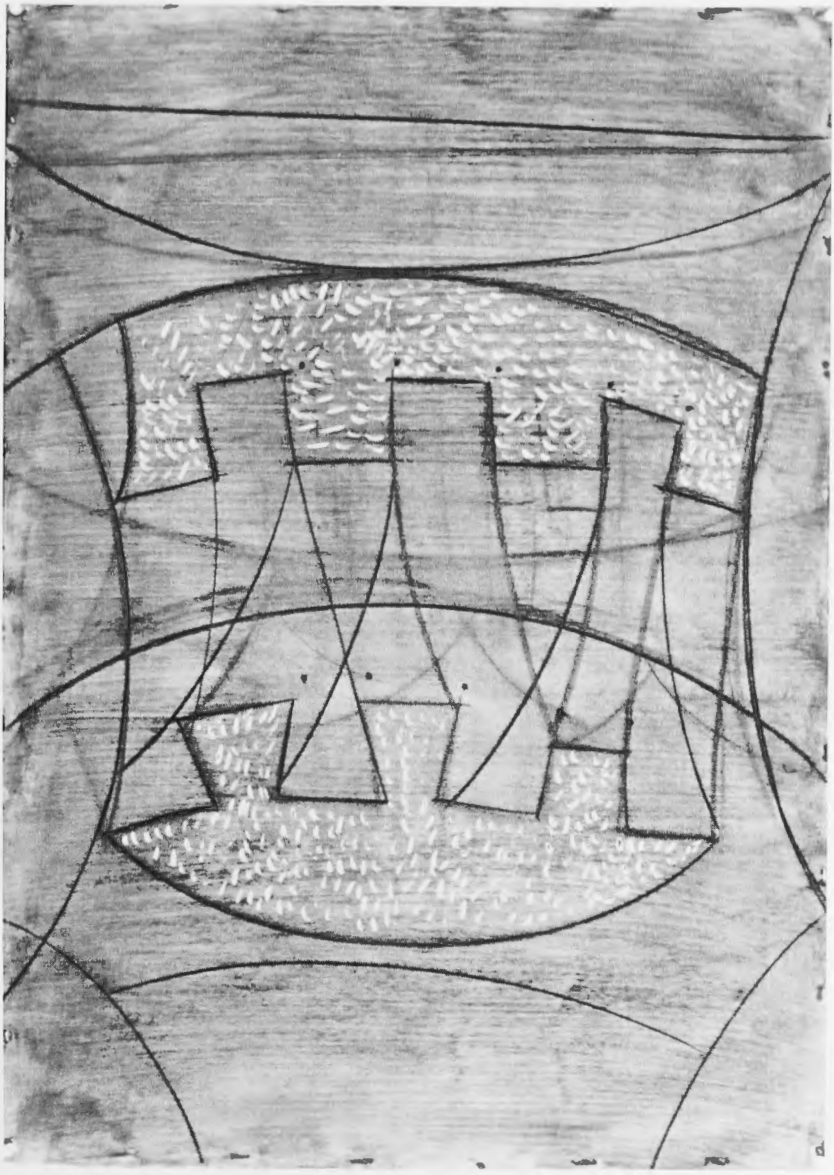
UNTITLED, 1975

Mixed Media on Paper,
22-1/2" x 22-3/8"



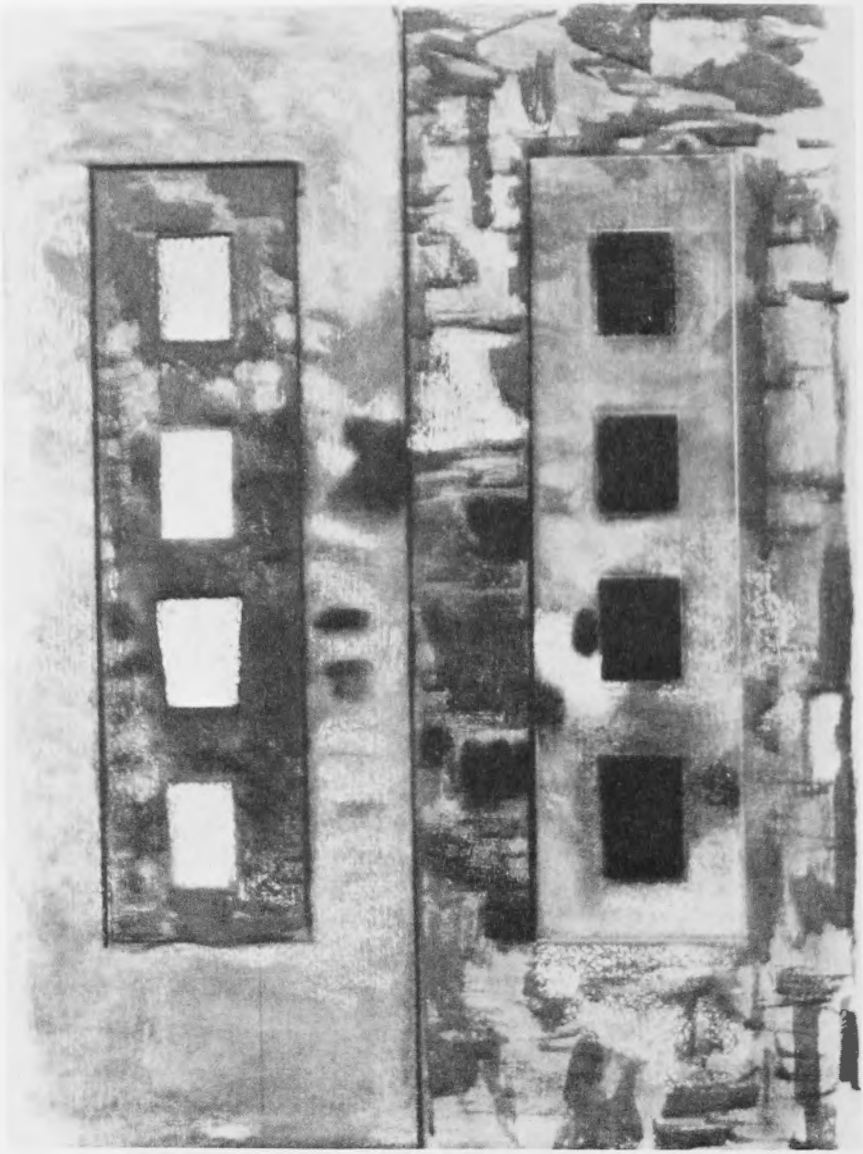
UNTITLED, 1976

Mixed Media on Paper, 30" x 22-1/2"



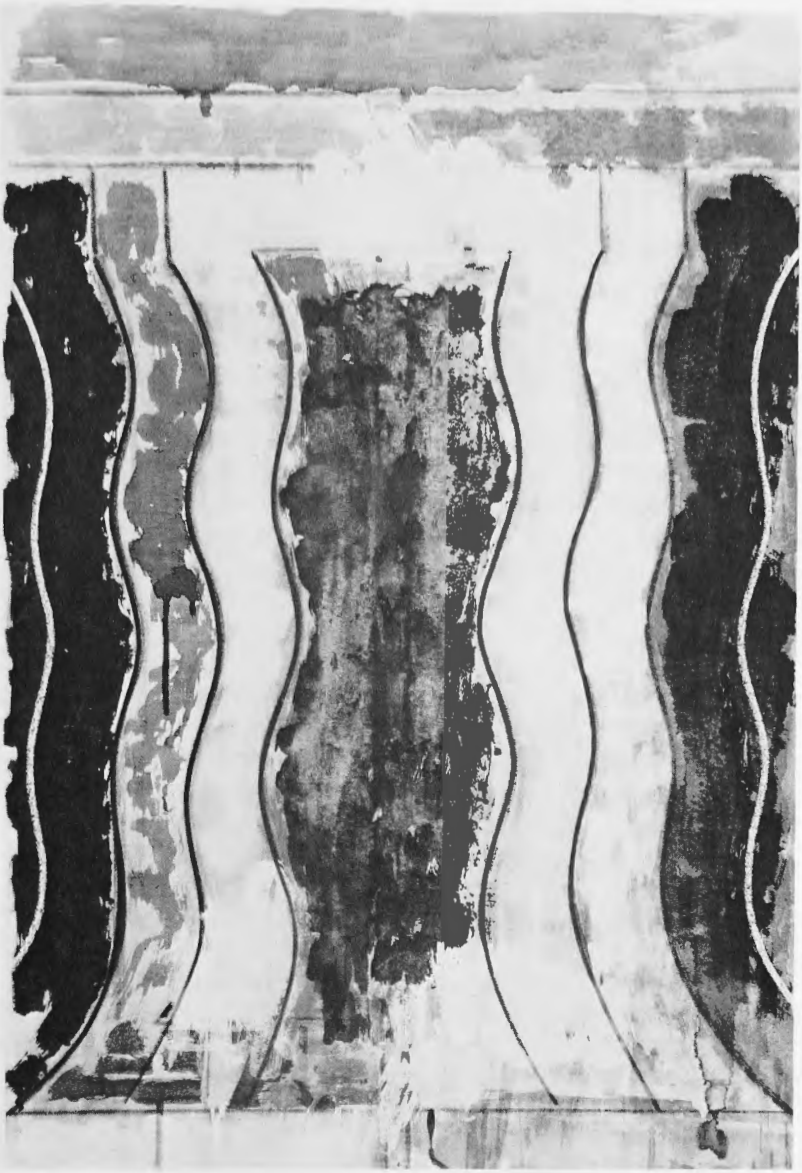
UNTITLED, 1980

Mixed Media on Paper,
41-1/2" x 29-1/2"



UNTITLED, 1983

Mixed Media on Paper,
30-3/8 "x 22-3/4"



UNTITLED, 1984

Mixed Media on Paper,
41-1/2"x27-1/2"

JOHN ASHBERY

Three Poems

DREAMS OF ADULTHOOD

Why does he do it like that say it like that you might ask
Dream it like that over landscapes spotted with cream and vehement
Holes in the ground that have become little lakes, now that the chill and
    ardor
Of winter are passing into the real thing, where we shall be obliged
To survive? That there is a precise, preordained structure
That has been turned inside out to meet new personal needs
And attract newer bonuses isn't the reply, it's the solution,
Read, the asking, so while this helps, doesn't hinder, its persona
Is off running parallel somewhere: monitorable, but that's about it.

And we see the cries of the innocent how they were coming to help
Us in the storehouse and recruit all that bad knowledge so as to save it
For brighter purposes some day. Alas, these good gestures can't help;
What is needed is a disparate account of the thing happening just now,
To have it sink finally into print, from which there is no escape, no
Never, it all just gets gradually lost for the betterment of humankind.
Think how if there were no toys, we might grow up repeating these
    encounters
With actual people, and how, much later, seriousness would get
    destroyed
And incorporated into the record, like sand into concrete.
And the long taffylike ribbon that oozes so perfectly
Telling us much about ourselves and those outside us and like us
Would reach its resting place in the desert sump sooner for that:
The Lake Havasu City of our dreams where London Bridge eyes the
    sands
Nervously, and vice versa. No, there's no shortcut to being
    overcharged,
And if one wants to become a diamond eventually it isn't too early
To begin thinking about it, no, to begin thinking about it right now
Before storks are actually to be observed standing on chimneys, cruelly
    one-legged,

And the tarmac of one season is brought in, brushed off and saved
For any other season: for all consequences to be minded.

My name is Steve she said my name is Brian
My pretty baa-lambs each have names just like everything else upon
    earth,
Proper names, I mean. This way we are allowed to recognize species
From itinerant examples of them: "Hi, my name's Joe,"
And one is instantly plugged in to the mountains of possibility
That can only refresh us if we know about how to go about letting them:
In quiet, in dove-gray silence
Where the rescuers' tools are far, far richer than they were before.
Even ghost stories are fairly prevalent, and about to be believed.
Why not, after all, with so much variation,
Such mutability in the recounting of it? Yet soon, of course,
All are bound into a uniform edition, one can't be redeemed
By any of it anymore, only darkness and truth can do that now:
The woods where we used to wander, fumbling for blackcurrants,
The *Johannisbeeren* that nourished that saint in his solitude
And then came to be the food for a whole kind of being that
Still outruns us courteously, we think, what a riot of showmanship
And actual produce reimburses us now, and how we have come to be
Improved by it. You should know never to ask questions, they'll
Slap you mildly on the wrists for it, but meanwhile in your reading
You'll have the sufficient answer for why it came to be this way.
And though one might complain about certain aspects, the long fond
    fugue
In which one will come to observe oneself being enveloped, has
    answers
For much else besides as it teases us over the hill into eternity
Like the Duke of York's men and then marches us back down the same
Slope with the daisies you are meant to notice. Sure it was pretty
Close back there, I got scared, didn't you? The feeling that something
Enormous, like a huge canvas, is happening without one's having the
Least suspicion, without one single detail of information being
    vouchsafed?
How can you live with that, even for a few years or so, they go by so
    fast
In patches or clusters, so that on a certain day of reckoning, not *the* one,
Every available jug or receptacle will be seen to be full to overflowing,
Not with anything useful, just the same old stuff of imaginative
Speculation as it was before and still is, unfortunately. These wisps, I
Guess I'll save them for awhile. They need me, don't you think?

FORGOTTEN SEX

They tore down the old movie palaces,
Ripped up streetcar tracks, widened avenues.
Lampposts, curbs with their trees vanished.

They knew, who came after,
A story of departing hands and affairs, that mostly
Went untold, unless someone who was there once
Visited the old neighborhood, and then
They would tell about it, the space
Of an afternoon, how it happened in the afternoon
So that no record, no print of it could exist
For the steep times to come. And sure enough,
Even as the story ended its shadow vanished,
A twice-told tale not to be told again
Unless children one day dig up the past, in the attic
Or under brush in the back yard: "What's this?"
And you have to tell them, will have to tell them then
That the enormous nature of things had a face
Once and feet like any human being, and one day
Broke out of the shell that had always been,
Changed its answer to lies, youthful ambition
To a quirk of the past, a fancy, of some
Antiquarian concern that this damaged day can never
Countenance if we want to live past the rope
Of noon, reach the bald summits by late afternoon.

Surely we are protected, surely someone thinks of us
Often enough to keep the stain from setting, surely
All of us are alike and know each other from earliest
Childhood, for better or for worse: surely we eat
Breakfast each day, and shit, and put the kettle on the stove
With much changing of the subject, much twisting the original
Premise back to the nature of the actual itch
Engulfing us, now. And when we come back
From an outing expect to find the furniture magically
Rearranged to accommodate revised, smaller projects
No one bothers to question, except polite Puss-in-Boots with what
Is in effect a new premise: "Try this one, the dust
Shows less on these rather sad colors; the time
To get started and gain time, however brief, over the neighbors

Quarreling into sunset, once you have convinced them you're
Not playing and therefore not cheating. When the princess
Comes to see you on some perfectly plausible pretext, you'll know
The underground stream that has never stood still is the surface
And the theater for all that is to come. Too bad the revisions
Will never be adopted, but how lucky for you, now,
The change of face. Good times follow bad."

And the locket is still on the chain on a throat.
The askers, the doers, fall into silent confusion
As it comes time to stand up like a sheet of metal
In the blast of sunrise. I will do this, I can do no more.
I cannot think on the edge of a platform.

But the abandonment by love is a de facto sign
Of something else coming along,
Something similar in its measuredness:
Sweetness of things late, a memory for particulars
As lively as though they happened still. As indeed
They do sometimes, though like the transparent bricks
In a particular dream, they cannot always be seen.

SOMEONE YOU HAVE SEEN BEFORE

It was a night for listening to Corelli, Geminiani
Or Manfredini. The tables had been set with beautiful white cloths
And bouquets of flowers. Outside the big glass windows
The rain drilled mercilessly into the rock garden which made light
Of the whole thing. Both business and entertainment waited
With parted lips, because so much new way of being
With one's emotion and keeping track of it at the same time
Had been silently expressed. Even the waiters were happy.

It was an example of how much one can grow lustily
Without fracturing the shell of coziness that surrounds us,
And all things as well. "We spend so much time
Trying to convince ourselves we're happy that we don't recognize

The real thing when it comes along," the Disney official said.
He's got a point, you must admit. If we followed nature
More closely we'd realize that, I mean really getting your face pressed
Into the muck and indecision of it. Then it's as if
We grew out of our happiness, not the other way round, as is
Commonly supposed. We're the characters in its novel
And anybody who doubts that need only look out of the window
Past his or her own reflection, to the bright, patterned,
Timeless unofficial truth hanging around out there,
Waiting for the signal to be galvanized into a crowd scene,
Joyful or threatening, it doesn't matter, so long as we know
It's inside, here with us.

But people do change in life,
As well as in fiction. And what happens then? Is it because we think
    nobody's
Listening that one day it comes, the urge to delete yourself,
"Take yourself out," as they say? As though this could matter
Even to the concerned ones who crowd around,
Expressions of lightness and peace on their faces,
In which you play no part perhaps, but even so
Their happiness is for you, it's your birthday, and even
When the balloons and fudge get tangled with extraneous
Good wishes from everywhere, it is, I believe, made to order
For your questioning stance and that impression
Left on the inside of your pleasure by some bivalve
With which you have been identified. Sure,
Nothing is ever perfect enough, but that's part of how it fits
The mixed bag
Of leftover character traits that used to be part of you
Before the change was performed
And all those acquaintances bursting with new vigor and
Humor, as though they wanted to call you down
Into closeness, not for being close, or snug, or whatever,
But because they believe you were made to fit this unique
And valuable situation whose lid is rising, totally
Into the morning-glory-colored future. Remember, don't throw away
The quadrant of unused situations just because they're here:
They may not always be, and you haven't finished looking
Through them all yet. So much that happens happens in small ways
That someone was going to get around to tabulate, and then never did,
Yet it all bespeaks freshness, clarity and an even motor drive
To coax us out of sleep and start us wondering what the new round

Of impressions and salutations is going to leave in its wake
This time. And the form, the precepts, are yours to dispose of as you
will,
As the ocean makes grasses, and in doing so refurbishes a lighthouse
On a distant hill, or else lets the whole picture slip into foam.

DIANE WAKOSKI

Emerald Ice

If I were a jeweler,
I'd look for emeralds the color of
healthy basil leaves, pungent and thick and green
as parrots;
and if I were a woman who had emeralds weighing down
her harpsichordian hands and nudging her neck
as they turn warm but do not melt,
I would hold my emerald-laden hand
against this new snow which covers the not yet frozen
November ground, the liquid hardness of the stones
contrasting with the chalky softness of the snow.
For just a moment at least until,
if I were an astronomer, mirroring an arc of light which
might mean a new galaxy
has been discovered, I might name
this phenomena, "Emerald Ice,"
to tell you how
beautiful these things are to me.
But none of it would
matter, if I didn't dream of boys
with leather aviator jackets,
or men who rode motorcycles into the living room, once,
or the Silver Surfer who might travel with me,
nude of emeralds, a galactic wanderer.
What could matter
if there were any sex or love that could
transcend death,
speed faster than my imagination
or the light?
What could matter
if these boys,
if all men,
were not just memories like emeralds,
or pungent basil,
new snow,
throwing their scuffed leather jackets carelessly

over my empty bed,
while I am surfing,
streaming,
light trailing my heels,
from galaxy to galaxy,
trying to escape death?
What could matter if life
was really about sex
instead of learning
to die?
Isn't orgasm called
"the little death"? Or it that something else?
like eating the best
fresh-leaved pesto on homemade noodles,
drinking an icy, or is it
snowy,
eau de vie? one drop of which glistens
over the basil,
and together they are the only
emerald.

Do women dream
the Saturnian ice of emeralds and sapphires
because men never touch them? They sleep
alone in snowy sheets,
surfing galactic oceans.

We pretend,
but there is no mystery
in either sex or death. Just—
the unthinkable.
The one,
always elusive, never attainable, missing
as soon as you seem to have it.
The other,
always waiting, unavoidable, something
no one escapes.

George Butterick

Two Poems

from *REPARTEE WITH THE MUMMY*

The variety of voices motor in, coming
up the hill. Even if we never get to see them,
even if we stay in bed and throw open our ears
and listen to everything night has to tell us
before sending us into the world with an order
to leave no dream alive to tell the tale.

*

The dream is in the valley,
passing in a caravan;
the dreamers are crouched in the hills
with safeties off.

*

Do you love the language? Do you? Do you
love it when your father calls you a hare-brain or numb-skull,
and your wife a hum-
burger, a hair-trigger, referring to your
sensual epic?

*

Knowledge is the only form embedded in a form.
The embodied content of knowing is formally
bound, not Florida bound.
The impressionable young grass takes a heel. Mud grins.
The consensus makes it possible
to distinguish one who knows from one who doesn't.
That is what constitutes the culture of people.
Rabbits crowd upon the edge of the lawn.
Supper catches like a cube in our throats.
Is nature advancing, is she coming

at or towards us? The sound of nibbling
shakes the foundation of the cottage city with a papery rattle.
Where will the teeth leave off? Teeth? Truth.
Will the consensus arrive in time?
In the nick
of truth?

*

For as long as I can continue to produce proof
like the body nails or hair,
reality is as I say it is. It is permissible
to think of it that way. A pressure on the skin
excludes all that rages outside. Disorder is
a fact accessory to the crime of knowledge.
"Knowledge is. . .founded on the narrative of its own
martyrdom," writes Lyotard.
Armed content patrols ranging up and down the page.
Vast clouds of letters moving coastwise.
An 'h' caught by its serif (its scarf) in the thicket of reading.

Pain weaving through ribs like a fish
through coral, laced tight in a
corset of doubt, mortality hammering
with weighted head, pain flowers in the
garden of the organism, unattended,
prolific, perennial, a flush hand of shades,
blossom of collapse, negative heart,
retracted beat, unchosen alternative
to life, rich in reputation, where it only
melts with more sorrow, of which sleep is a
surrender, viruses are forays, thicket charges,
fell swoops, felonious salts, salutes

*

Mass Grave Discovered in
White House Lawn, a trickle
    of dream drool,
Bones of Hoover's butlers exhumed.

*

She fought in the pin-up brigade, surrendering feature
after feature, until all that is left was one
breast moling its way out of the blouse, blind
to the touch, and omnidirectional.

*

We should be careful to step out of an experience
before it lands.

*

The death god's leg
terminates in a flower.

REPEATEDLY

In the water my body freezes in stages, panels,
like the cuts-of-beef chart in the butcher's.
Imperceptibly the cutting cold suffuses
and I float without caring. This is not a dream.
If I were telling a dream I would have said, "And
drifts beyond the cries on the shore," or some such
melodramatic dip. As it is, I shrug
my eyes in the general direction
of comedy. Comedy on stalks. Now proudly
out of the water, I walk on the beach in my ankles.
The sun blazes a robe of glory on my neck and
back and shoulders. Hair is gone wispy
in the presence of salt. The same salt
dries on our skin like good intentions.
Blond. We all feel blond coming home
from the beach. Which probably means we are
closer than ever to danger.
The sun has no tongue to tell us how red we've gotten,
or the inclination. Its inclination is to join the

horizon. At least no one has tried to master the ocean
the way they do the evening traffic.
The sun disappeared, and I could hear the sound
of water mating, as it does,
repeatedly.

NORMA COLE

Paper House, part two (p-x)

p

page landed immigrant's increments of approach terms of sight
already not made clear
biased choosing a different word captivated without influence
which end of the matchstick to chew on
"when this report account exposé was put before him his face
darkened"
practice derives senses each subsequent thing solid body
eyes square off accidentally magically destroyed not that world
could vanish but that callous immanence ideologically decent
giving form or taking form away from all the instead of
good-night Irene and so on things

q

today the end of the frame
"some time," "some place"
call it paper rose
call it birdland

r

tiles are falling off the fireplace one by one
visual pockets keep from too much understanding bars cursive
substitution years could go by playing in traffic
perfect in that official way insistence habitual reading
star mission polar region corrida
small yellow round new and (possibly) cellophane or acetate
railway brain

folded names instead whimpering out besides having given up
the body to science contagious out in the rain supposedly
separate
saturnine childhood second comes around again before beginning
as if unseen rings and stripes intersect some time some year
say goodbye to things you know groceries at the heart of the whole
humanist tradition veins sticking out things you know

s

every time we. . .
heartily embrace the text
encircle it
shoulder it
shake it loose
if. . .should

t

difficult mine to sing towards blue ribbon slate forehead
crystal night paper bridge
does her house overlook the sea breaks away white brushes
green forgotten grammar made to scale
rectangles came from the Italian boat called what I know
"moving about in worlds not realised"
small yes and no dividers cut in abiding by what ideology
concealed in production sets of gaps
partials letters do not objectify identify or differ
"as if I had found my native land" seasons' letters
letters' seasons templates yet to be

u

partials lit up by the startle reflex
the round art moves strengthening forms
rules the second house where harmony applies

v

to liken to be lost
"pain" becomes "foot"
but the skin
leaving a cause
to experience another
an influence leaves off

w

looking forward out of time we don't have those distinctions
    "our head," "their horse"
the only copy seizing in intensity conscious faint complex
    silence body of an image
all of them each of them revelations of objectivity (a subject)
    gatelessness a roof in the air
influence leaves off variable will form a part held together
    with sutures thorns or pieces
pouring material naked and world-wide temple to temple eyes
    running no excuse to walk on "pressing our heads together"

x

days go by in full
or more natural time

the way bridge is
designation of thought
and thing
cherished, nothing

On the Starn Twins

Excerpted from *Imitation of Life* by Gary Indiana reprinted from the Village Voice.

. . .While standard photographic practice searches for the singular, perfect version of an image, the Starns use every image multiply, in many states.

. . .The use of a single image to engender numerous objects inverts the stigmatized reproducibility inherent in photography, and operates as internal joke, formal device, and querulous theme in the Starns' mirror pictures, where the image merges with its double. *Double Stark Portrait in Swirl* with its dizzying network of tape splices, is a signature work (in a manner of speaking), its fractured surface like a cracked glass, the bedraggled figure doubled as if standing in a waist-high reflecting pool. The Starns are identical twins, and this circumstance has much to do with the soul of their work. Doug and Mike Starn aren't simply collaborative artists, they're as close to being the same person as two persons can be. Their doubleness, and their difference from each other, mirrors the photographic issues their work addresses.

. . .The Starns' work complicates the notion of an original—as, in its way, being an identical twin does. The enlargement and multiplication of details and shadows, the fracture and recomposition of complete images, act as metaphors for a complex psychic equilibrium in which the Other is also oneself, claiming half of a shared ego.

Excerpts reprinted with permission from The Print Collector's Newsletter written by Francine A. Koslow.

. . .Through the Starns' unique process of projecting, taping, cutting, developing, and reassembling segments of the image, Champaigne's *Dead Christ* has metamorphosed into *Stretched Christ.* The resulting 28" x 126" image contains over 75 different segments of photographic paper. The vertical cuts and folds, when meshed with horizontal folds, create a subtle, unifying cruciform composition. The tearing and

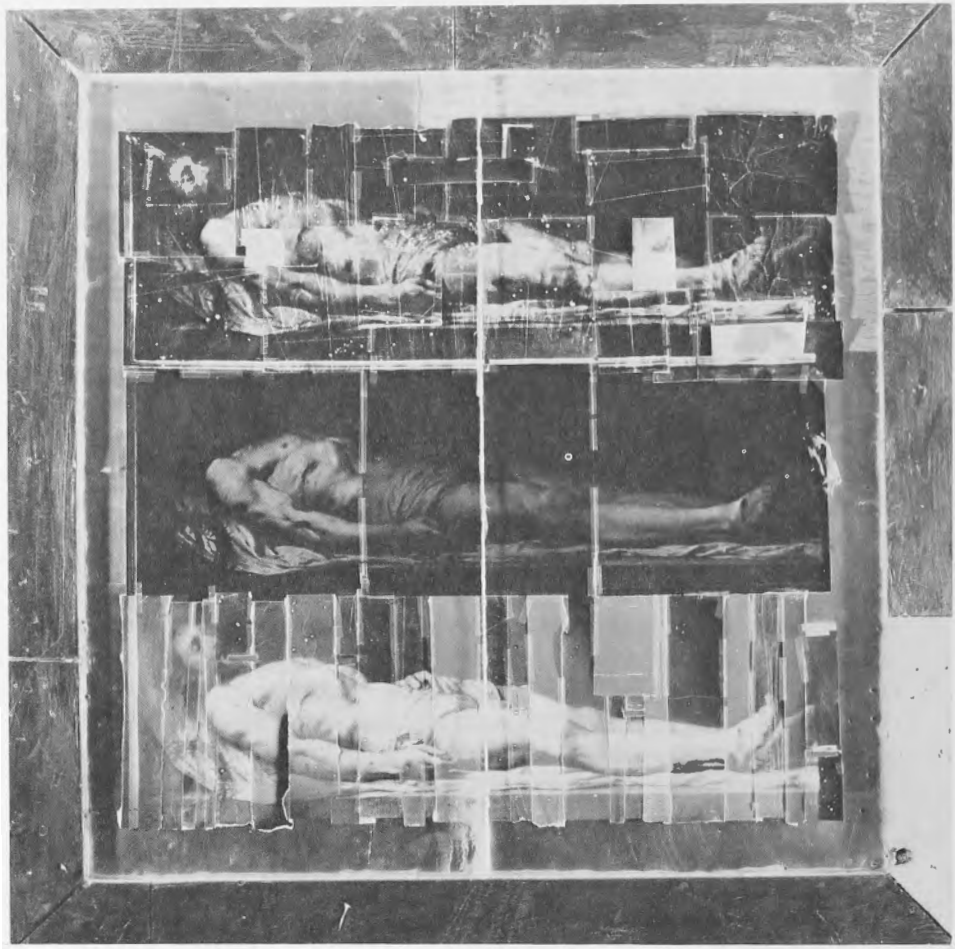
elongation increase the sense of the vulnerability of the dead Christ. *Stretched Christ* now has three, instead of one, gashes in his chest, seven fingers on his left hand, and three puncture holes in his foot. Champaigne's dramatically realistic face of Christ has not been elongated, only segmented below the nose and retaped.

. . .The Starns were not the first collaborative artists to piece together earlier images of the dead Christ. The British team of Gilbert and George created a monumental segmented image after a sculpted crucified Christ in *Tree Jesus* (1980). The segmented blurred image of *Tree Jesus* was created from a geometric grid of cleanly cut rectangles of equal proportion, based on drawn diagrams. Although Gilbert and George's disciplined compositions are far more controlled and architectonic than the Starns' purposely frenzied, cropped, and rearranged photomontages, they share many conceptual concerns as artists. Gilbert and George, who met and formed their artistic collaboration as students in 1967 are, like the Starns, two persons and one artist at the same time. . . .

The Starns are already making a mark in art history—as photographers steeped in the 19th and 20th-century art photography tradition, as makers of neo-Dada montage, and as collaborative artists of the caliber of Gilbert and George or Komar and Melamid. Their faded and sepia-stained studies make intriguing links with the fantastic still-life photographs of pioneer photographer Henri Le Secq and with the private, hazy, religious photographs of fellow Bostonian F. Holland Day. They continue the tradition pioneered by the Dadaist Man Ray of exploiting the photographic process by deliberately adjusting the tonal scale and by edge reversal of image. Although there have been other brother teams in the history of 20th-century art, most notably the Russian Constructivist collaborative team of Georgi and Vladimir Stenberg, creators of intricate collage film posters in the 1920s, as contemporary artists the Starns are a rarity. Besides being twins they have added an ordered confusion to the relationships between art and photography, questioning the relationship between photography and life.

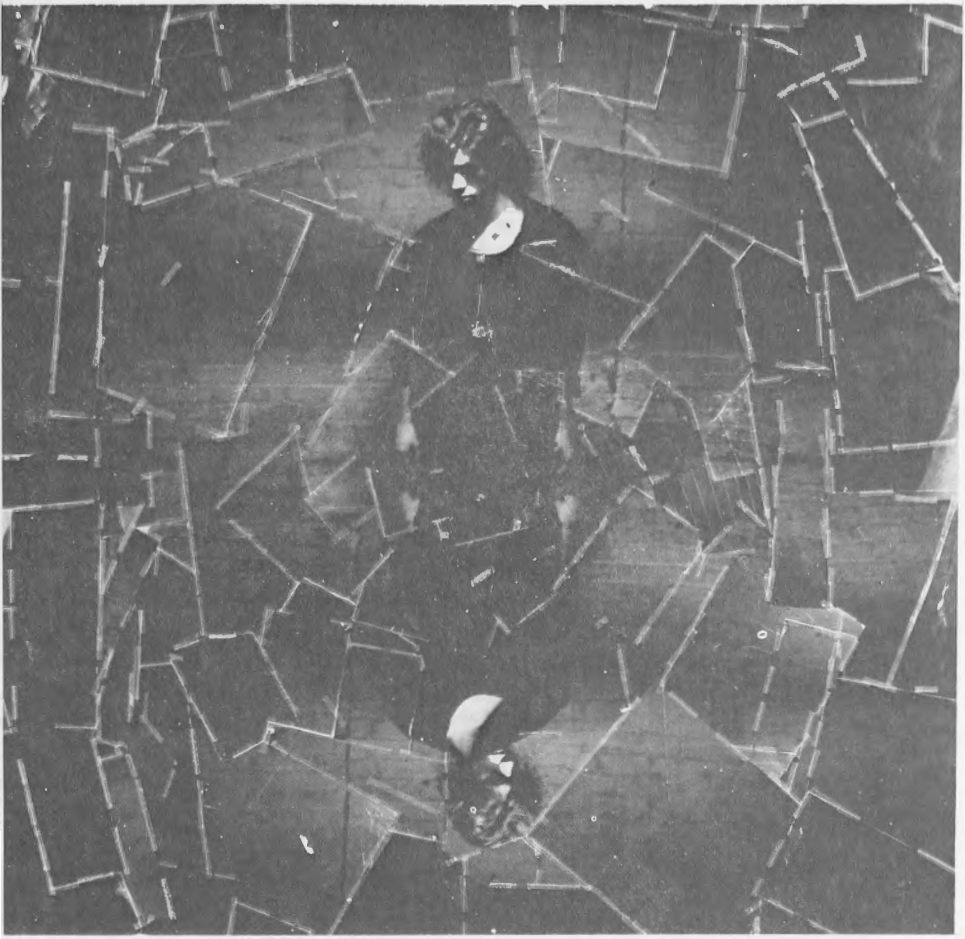
THE STARN TWINS

Three Works

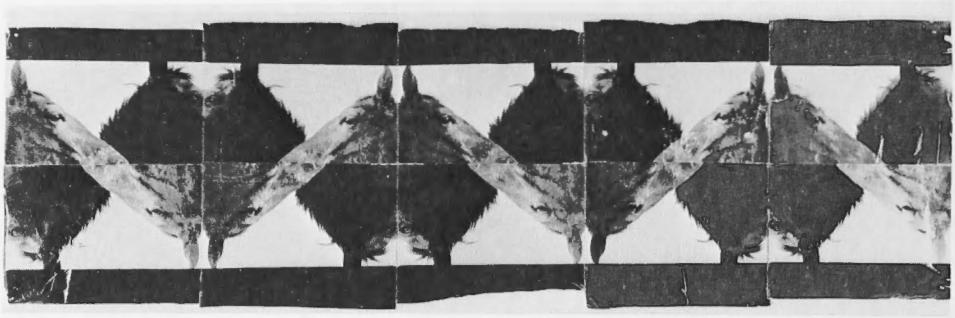


STRETCHED CHRIST, 1986

from the collection of Randolfo Rocha
Tone Silverprint and Scotch Tape, 5' x 5'



DOUBLE STARK PORTRAIT IN SWIRL, 1985
from the collection of Randolfo Rocha
84" x 84"



HORSES I.C.A. EDITION, 1985-86

36" x 118"

SUSAN WHEELER

Two Poems

WHAT MEMORY REVEALS

On our way there we think of the perdurance
of overwhelming and arrival.
—M. Heidegger, *Identity & Difference*

Angels, pulled into light—provoking the air, fall
here. You are served a fallow breakfast;
you must stir your juice. Outside, on Columbus Avenue,
a momentary lunge convenes a trafficked burst.

This is not what was intended when they took you to your first
photo session, swaddled. But intent is a ruinous composite.

There were several years of careful steps across
lower Manhattan. A looming sail in a nightmare.
A poolhall, crisscrossed by rudimentary reliefs.
Mayonnaise in a refrigerator door.

You stepped forward, into light, onto a green lawn dotted with tumblers
and the hum of Minnesota cicadas. Everywhere a firm rejoinder waved.
He whispered the simplest, pettiest of comforts. Your dress alit.

A fat man bends beneath the beaker's proximity.

Freakish, the two that burst into your room where you
were gathering privacy frantically, phonetically.
Burnish (they are flying) regulation (appointments a
calamity of rosewood)—or perhaps they said
furnish the nation. This left a hole, that left a lacking,
and he, the dog, had it, too.

Now Thalia rearranges the glove compartment.
On the right there is a quiet flapping, a whirring
or a wheel joint, in a bright and terrifying night.

It was time that altered monster genes. Pressed to the rear of a
new elevator toward a model apartment, you started with the sail,
with the tremoring that troubles you still. Like the murderer
who only dreamed, you can't shake catastrophe's history.
Your cuff, straightened now, is white against your suit.
The cordialities confirm.

Diving into water his wings conflated. Business
is damage.

What have you pricked, a tourniquet hamstring
under a revolver of lights?

A Lone Ranger replies. There is a waffling like a tournedo
of bundled wings. An egg drops out.

You pay for your breakfast and its litanous menu,
scrambled.
There is earth enough to fill each car,
each open mouth yawning in the light
on Columbus Avenue.

THE MAN WITH THE GREEN CARD

for Marc Giordano

Tenderness becomes its own reflex, like the cradled
cup in the hands, or the random administration of frailty.
They eat grass, bo, bo.
Felicity burns deeper than the merchandise it culls:
a fare bounty and a pygmy's dream.
Sometimes I eat grass, bo, bo.

Forge love: beyond the committee chambers
there lies a green field with buttercups and rodents
romping. Beyond the peculiar chaos of a dog's nails
on a tenement stair the body's ebullience requires ash.

The belt may not be a tautening creek for the land.
Eliciting fire, the keys in his fist, a faucet for indigence—
perfidious hire—they eat grass, in the night, bo, bo,
fastening, fast, like this button that's pearl under flickering.

ARKADII DRAGOMOSHCHENKO

Nasturtium as Reality

(Tr. from the Russian by
Lyn Hejinian and Elena Balashova)

Clad in sweat
you drink cold water from the pitchers.
—V. Khlebnikov

1.

An attempt
at describing an isolated object
determined by anticipation of the resulting whole—
by a glance over someone else's shoulder.

A nasturtium composed
of holes in the rain-spotted window—to itself
it's "in front,"

to me, "behind." Whose property is the gleaming
tremor
of compressed disclosure
in the opening of double-edged prepositions
in
a folded plane
of transparency which strikes the window pane?

2.

Attacked by white, desiccated and exact
(so precise it's as irreducible as ellipsis)
a wall
in the turquoise blue distortion.

To the nasturtiums
the storm left a legacy of limestone and heat

in a purple semi-circle
and steam gleaming in the cloverleaf courtyard.

(A version: this night shattered apart
by the rays of the dragonflies' concise deep blue
drawing noon into a knot of blinding
foam. . .

A version: tonight the rays of the dragonflies
crumbled, by day they sewed together the cattails and the sedge
in the marshes, where the steam is dazzling, like a cobweb
in summer, and—

the total renunciation
of any possible embodiment in reading: neither
a dragonfly, nor that which forms and is
formed
or is washed away
by this awareness—but the clearest forms
need mud. A version.)

As a living fretwork in blown grass
the slanting wind carries silence.
A sound
from without
approaching
that which
the eye has blurred, an unconforming form,
it bares, rushed out 100 times into angles
where the obsessive attempt to outrun silence
persistently encounters the arrogant silence.

3.

The vibrating nasturtium
(immersion
of a bumblebee in the still undrunk confusion of wings)
on

the thread of intentions strengthens the edge
(something is happening to the eyes—
they don't communicate with the brain)
of matter
in the nominative, near verbal fiber
of the flower—
it opens its leaves
mournfully rounded
(the shrieks of the guttural bushes as they fade
transform them into clusters
of autumn tarnish)
in the dusk.
(the knowledge, which belongs to me,
absorbs it cautiously, tying it
to the innumerable capillary nets:
the nasturtium—it is a section of the neuron
string. . .)

Some are eaten through by caterpillars, sun rays, aphids.
A sign sweats over the doorway:
"Voltaire has been killed. Call me immediately."

Damp words chalk.

4.

Do you remember
how the nasturtium
first draws apart from the planetree leaf?

Where the will takes on the meaning of the desire
to rush a hairsbreath from death forward

until the vertebrae crackle in the pentatonic scale
and ants are at one's temples—
like thin-fleeced
salt—
with the dry enlivened ringing
of air fingering every hair

of what
is already a pitcher, water and sweat and planetree leaves,
waterlily, necklace of dust
                and blade, showing through,
a gap
and all the rest that might continue

but only memory, opening slightly, jumps
to meet it, untangled by the eyes,
trying so ludicrously to seduce

what

henceforth is only a continuation
within the ends' immense proximity,
hurried persistent speech. The dialogue
                is common enough:

You'll say, "Where were you?"
She'll stammer, "I. . . . . ." And right away
                you prompt her:
"You were wandering around in the passage between order
                and chaos. . ."
"Yes, if you want. . . .Yes."
"So?
    What did you bring with you out of the past?
And do you need what you brought now?"
"When?. . .
            Where?. . .For myself?"
"Yes. You! For yourself!"
"O, everything that you tell me I'll remember. . . ."
(And the boring dialogue goes on, gradually
                becoming noise)
So

the tree I read (what?) went behind a shadow.
And if I could instil my consciousness into its population
of leaves, into the register of sparks and twigs,
in the rumble of its branches, an unrolled papyrus
                will,
One would say: The shadow is ready to leave behind
its sources in the branches' tips,
                having set for "dying"

the terms of an absurd confession of love.

Impenetrable.

5.

Blades pocked with repetition
(forty seconds spent searching for an analogy
to the upward branching
at the throat of the stem—instead
of this: "the emotions are
a component of composition, and expression,
itself branching out into exclamation,
means as much as
the comma which precedes its appearance")

in radiating veins, like holes inscribed
in living epidermis,
flowing toward a precipice,
not calming the disordered fluctuations,
lie close,

dividing between itself and me
the space that preserves reason,
where questions about value ought to flicker. Arkadii
Trofimovitch Dragomoshchenko describes
a nasturtium, inserts it in his head. The chlorophyl

aligns galaxies of oxygen. The friction of light
against the green mass widens the path of the thing in the net
filtering the heavy rainfall,
another hovers
lazily, signifying at the shivering threshold
knowledge of wide losses, a gap that runs
into the cracks
whose bi-valved power, like a melted pattern,
a grapevine. . .

having passed with strange mumbling
into a new space begetting something else
                from the immutable.
A.T.D., speak the rhetoric of accumulation
and affirmation: are they the same swifts (of three years
ago)
    like molecules of darkness, which will weave the theme
                of evening for the stars again,
dropping a muscular line into the crowning bay?

That nightly subsidence into the green and lore
                in silt
the mercy of soils. . .

The nasturtium and anticipation rainy as the window and wind-
ow behind wind-
ow
(he in it, it in him)
like meanings smashing each other
(I don't say, metaphor. . .)
                drawn
by emptiness,
one of the distinct details—
straight,
thin,
line pulled across the tree,
mouth,

the shadow its weathervane, sorting the horizontals
                of decision,
thought,

6.

) without time to be born, dressed briefly
                in speech)
forming rows of luminescence in aggravated
                matter (

into its opposite
spattering number, genus
on the different sides like narrow glass beads from ecstatically
torn thread,

Just as, without time to evaporate,
a water drop is thrown off the scalding stove.
The turn of the head is dictated by the necessity
of comprehending the trajectory
of a feathered body whose mass is squeezed
into the corridors of vision's gravity,
cutting
its inverse perspective
into the thicknesses of prolix equilibriums. The mechanism
of the keys, extracting sound, hovering over
its description
in the ear,

protracted with reverberation into the now. When? Where?
Me? Vertigo conceives
"things."
And its outlines are unalterable, in order to cut off
the decrees, the frame, its verticals serve as examples
of how the palpable enters reason—
transsense returns with the conclusion that it has absorbed
and dissolved into pure plasma each day:

the nasturtium, unusually simple (empty)
at the first line (from either end)
of equilibrium's position.
A parenthesis, which one doesn't want to close.

7.

On the yellowish blue the white is violet. The pores drink
the limestone's heat
and semi-circles of sun rust in the grass.
Only

through another
(multiplication tables, game boards, needles, a logarithmic
bird, cabbage butterflies wandering in the gardens, the valence
of days, nature. . .little word figures through the formulae
of dragonflies
and attics,
where Saint-John's-wort dozes, and slightly honeyed wood dust
pours from the sweltering ceiling beams,
where sun-filled wasps are wakeful, and where, tossing the skirt
on the broken bureau
with wood dust in her hair,
a neighbor girl, spreading her legs,
puts your hand where it is hottest
and the hand learns all that it always saw
through
multiplication tables, logarithmic bird, through
the stars of her mouth. . .)

—and the point isn't which kind. . .

there's another kind of modelling made by the tongue's saliva
under the dark lamp of the throat
As if going backward in intentional ignorance it should happen
that a time occurs, worthless even for nonexistence,

and bends the bones into an arc
simultaneously carving
the lips into a strange smirk,
a wave.
And the air

chases your gaze along the curvature of the earth,
which from the window is scattered with grass, hieroglyph
flowing
in the rapids
of a finished spring on the brink of an over-full moon
the one that for us "having reached fullness"
stopped the blood in the solar cycle
having almost touched with its fingertips
(not having quite reached)
summer's zones,
like a water drop reflected by heat. . .

and as if in fear was reluctant to evaporate. . . . . .

8.

Where the will takes on the meaning of the desire
to lean on the hair of the breeze.

There were eight of you at her bed.
She had to begin counting: the first or ninth

in the stench of disintegrating cells (childhood terror!—
pushing fangs of vomit at the sight of the waxy gloss
approaching the sweet mask whose mouth flows out of the ears
and the candle scent in the fumes of memories of one
who like a log stripped of bark is spread out
in lush loam!)

and
in the rotting of sweet connections–uterus of a young moon—
are accustomed to the divisions of time.
And only the others' glance
blindly holds the plasma. . .

But you write that "waiting," "discontinuity,"
losing sense and substance, like a third color
wove her
into its own pattern, a work accomplished free
of knots,
and all the more unbearable the meaning of "her" ripened in you
while the quiet work went on revealing
thoughts
(you, her) from the sheath of feminine pain
the silent symmetry crumbling in the immense proximity
of the end.
And the tree grew dark in front of you, and the guiding wind
led the white grass, confusing its names. . .

And here, in the forty-first of life,
a pampered fool of the cold clouds
leads his brain with his eyes around the circle of moths, and obsessed
with who knows what fantasies
testing the fingers'
craft
I contemplated the truth behind events listening to the vividness
of the erased words
ready to expound on the defects of precision, as

"all that you see over another's shoulder

already—you are
and another's shoulder again;
powerless to continue anything
into knowledge, dividing into a single. . ."

"Grammar book—landscape" through the X of comparison
a substitute nasturtium
flickers. It creeps behind the windowsill.
Somewhat cold.

Shimmering slightly.

Sunset.

9.

Lightning (on craftiness of touch)—ring
of nature—
will split open some prior ocean,
the mollusk of the brain and water, outstretched
on both sides,
the latter left
finished for a long time

so that in the future it might creep with linked twinkling
static
or spawning squeak diagonally across the room
which by heart the fire grooves.
Don't even let yourself
smoke in bed.
On the water
where surviving the cells' mutation
in dividing mirrors, in the play of this and that
in the rustling reverse side of amino acids (it seems, in fact,
this is where the division into male and female occurs
in the mollusk of the brain and on the ripple—wind's manuscript)

a figure will be glimpsed
as a consequence (a few fluctuations of its contours
miss the membrane of the throat!)
in flapping folds
stepping barefoot on the ripple's indifferent letter
which tickles the sole. The fish
can expect to be divided into five,

the bread—into starvation, one. The grapes—to grow

in gaping possibilities of the metaphor of blood.

10.

And here in the 41st of life
A pampered fool, whose speech continually
misses the point,

Obsessed

by the thought of putting my fingers to crafts of crime,
which from various sides have occupied the horizons'
ends,
pecking through the window's shell,

I follow from burst to burst, from explosion to explosion,
the faces, like magnesium petals floating by,
which permit those who remain a misprint in the memory
to be recognized.

Torn by someone's hand, the microwreath of sweet-scented stock
descends and clings
like a magnetic-green moth to the elbow's bend.
The door is banging on the whitewashed balcony: where are you now?
The grimace of time. The chalky scowl's carcass
in the cold furnace where the nasturtium
distills

existing like the leaves that appear just at evening
and in the goblet's shape (edges flared)
which speeds
the spiral
of the flower.
Azure slightly clatters from an airplane
crawling behind the clockface.
An unidentified object is raised
to the rank of enemy.
Icon.
We hurry with the word's identification, before rumor
can destroy it.

The poem—a late arrival on time. A change of prognosis.
Even the dullest town extends beyond the borders
of the pedestrian who crosses it
to set out the substance of memory—
I intend to say. . . .I in. . .that
what is said and emptiness, drawing in a selection
of the elements of utterance,
correlating,
discover desire's inexhaustible source—

what is said cannot be said again. The mailman explains:
false sense of shame. . .
Remains of winter—a scarecrow stuffed with rags and straw
burns, enchanted in the round dance's rays. Gnosis
of weather.
The ecstasy of unthinkable closeness (death knots
the slits in the shore—plastic operation)
leaving behind
the remains of reason–to the bone
from the first (a reflection) touch on the skin.
Thanks to the verb, meaning more often senseless
walking
along the sand or a swimmer, peeled by the imagination
from a point, trickling down the edge of the eye,
like a pea from a peapod

or intimacy with cold, bitten through by the cotton
whiteness,
rippling canvas, fading between current
and

weight, heaven knows where from and where
to against the deafened silver's wool,
                clinging
to the intangible object of discord. Conjecture is simple—
the nasturtium is not

11.

needed. It is composed from the exceptional exactness
                of language
commanding the thing—"to be"
and the rejection of understanding. We say sometimes. Sometimes
    we speak: of another time. Right to the snare
of the mustard seed

signs, reminiscent and leading to reminiscence
in the disintegration of the poem to the last coil of the cocoon
                of exhausting breath.

12.

The nasturtium—it is the undiminished procession
        of forms, the geological chorus of voices crawling,
                shouting, disclosing each other
when
day transforms evening into a hill of drifted insomnia
and a chirp
        creeps into the mouth of an old man on a bench
but also a shriek, through the birch slides of fetid air
                from the neighboring house,
by which you could check your watch, for the third year the same
    swifts,

paper, taking root in the table tops' rough wood

a gas tank behind the crossing, near the gas pump,

collecting heat in the lines, and a face in the intrigue
of the anti-corrosive layer,
the center's different architecture. A particle is not related
to prayer. But see. Threading the seen through the needle,
whose greed
fits the impeccability of its choice—the narrowest

opening of form.

The nasturtium bears fire.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Two Poems

BROWN THRASHER

The glass breaking in the treetop
the wine poised in the night sky
  break it break it
    shuttle it up shuttle it up
      psyche tone den

I thought of the double finger spots in Cougnac,
two signature-like black swipes
    Iamhere Iamhere
  addledandwounded addledandwounded
      psyche tone den

or the loudmouth next door who shouts everything twice
at his aged mother
  eat your eggs eat your eggs

Curious how life fears the first is not heard
a way of making an X repetition is a cancelling
                or does it rivet the former?
  thrasher no stop to ponder
  starts a new grid
        gives it up starts another
slash of its fielded screech
beak as needle breath thread
  shakahachi gob like a pearly hocker
              full in my oído

                a springboard
  in the bio-core lithe divers
                coiled blastophores

snake eyes corpora bigemina
  body of the double-gated
hearing the eyefullness
  of everything that looks back at us

Dracula gaze fixed in gnarled bark
I respected him = I looked back at him,
  as if I had not seen him the first time?
  Re/vision?

At 70, Wallace Stevens:
"It is an illusion that we were ever alive,
                arranged ourselves
By our own motions in a freedom of the air."

But again the thrasher was machining
Bottleitup Bottleitup
  what? what?
the bottle notion the bottle notion
the bale of our quarrel with
            our quarrel with

the bottle tumbling in the spume,
                a human ear.

[3 May 1986]

CHILDREN OF THE MONOSYLLABLE

  I saw a fist
gripping a streaming,
as if beetle-words were flowing into a bottleneck from everywhichway,
and that in the slaughterhouse of the fist
they were killed, and transformed or
        reborn—I could see
the words go in—and what seemed to be their children emerge—
they swiveled in like broom straws hungry for the hasp,
  seeking to be
bundled, then flowed out the hasp into a second
flowering broom head,
                the hasp vessel was the word CUNT,
the beetle-streams, as if emerging from mist, were hard to identify:

cunnus, yes, cyn, cunta,
parallel to country, kin, kind,
with shadows of city & cemetery,
cunabula, cunicle, cuniculate, cuneo with its cuneiform kin,
cunning wedge-words, vise-signs,
kennings, beetle-crevices, kens, or learnings—

Why did the beetle-words swarm into this vessel
that sapped them of their power? Before the transformation,
the cunea worked somewhat underground, they supped from
Cunti, or Kunda,
as if attached to Her Cuneibrain, termites? egg-carriers?
As if the vulva-lode were slightly under ground-level,
a flavoring of stone.
Words once did live across our eyes,
above and below the Dali razor blade.
And when too many lifted, the sun roasted our
lagoon life?

Language background might have been a termite hill?
A single sound-extent with a group soul?

So I've noticed one "hill," as from an airplane,
the cunae streaming in, as if below meaning,
at what point were thing/earth association words
blocked/wedged
out of themselves, frozen, into
their own mimicry?
Or were the cunae slaughtered? Tonsured, cunta into cunt,
country a cunt-tree pun, cunicle, cuniculate nearly lost,
blunt grunt runt HUNT
Monoculture is the reduction/crushing of the millipedal
mania to hit death with a difference

> But why from this round-about phrase must be guessed,
> What in ONE single SYLLABLE'S better expressed;
> That SYLLABLE then I my sentiment call,
> So here's to that WORD, which is ONE WORD for all.
>
> –G. A. Stevens, *Songs Comic & Satyrical*, 1788.

And the children? *Diddly-pout, eel-skinner,*
Eve's custom house, mole-catcher, moss-rose, star over the garter,
belly dingle, botany bay, butter boat, cuntkin, cunnie, dumb-squint,

fie-for-shame, fire-lock, flap doodle, oyster-catcher, nonny-nonny,
seed-plot, milking-pail, meat-market, rest-and-be-thankful,
road to a christening, standing room for one, Bluebeard's closet,
catherine wheel, Cupid's anvil, penwiper, mark-of-the-beast,
fumbler's hall, gravy giver, house under the hill, fud,
little spot where uncle's doodle goes, front doormat, snatch-blatch,
rob the ruffian, skin the pizzle, Smock-Alley. . .

They are attempts to free Her nature from its curse,
but they remain infected. More numerous than their beetle-
backgrounders,
they spread into our lives, amusing, disgusting,
flaccid mixtures of the ersatz and the other,
crinkum-crankum, doodle-sack—
suppose we made these children honorifics and placed them before
"sky" or "ocean," to re-link them to their goddess ancestor—
could we do this at all? Would people catch on? Would they care?
crinkum-crankum sky [clouds twisting, full of whimsey]
the doodle-sack sky [wind-swollen, bagpipe-bleating, god-blast-
encysted]
Would the great goddess therefore return? Might She invert
our poisonous world-end anti-ecology?

We'd have to, in flip-flop inversion, pass back through the bottleneck,
we'd have to re-experience, in another conscious first-time,
what the language-mind suffered, we'd have to run the *whim-wham*
sperm-sucker fie-for-shame film backwards, as we ourselves
assimilated the peril of the reduction of woman,
her identity crunched into a monosyllable

CUNT as termite-queen
laying 50,000 associations per day in mind,
nether-eyebrows, itching Jennies, roasting jacks.

Might we adopt these orphans? Might we nurse them?
Might we even croon: "under your cavey flavoring
we hear the RA, the OM, the KA
lingering gas, and GOD poor rotten corks
for bottles that wanted only to be perpetually sipped"

Little *mark-of-the-beast,* little *gutter,*
you bear the stink of a degradation
you are hardly responsible for.

Gutter then responded: "I'm happy to be
  a receptacle for dead leaves, rain, dead pigeons,
an inferior form of Kunta's cunabula.
True, I'm not life-emitting. I'm a drainpipe,
  people piss their tongues through me."

Each word a gateless gate, a dragon-tongue-tip
  unhinged from axial powers.
Gutter Cunabula convinced me.
    Every word's amphibian sound-tail
suckers what I cannot quite discern, it sinks
a nippled tentacle into the termite flow, as the word mites
bless, as they bang and bank off, as they scurry
egg-laden, egged on, in absolute midden to what I shall not
  be delivered to see,
but I can hear their vacuum nourishing the rust of a passing train,
    a halo-ford,
shroud and nave of the sordid cleat of tongue.

[5 November 1986]

GEORGES BATAILLE

Madame Edwarda

(Tr. from the French by Daniel Tiffany)

If you are afraid of everything, read this book; but first, listen to me: if you laugh, it is because you are afraid. A book, it seems to you, is something inert. That may be true. But what if, as happens, you don't know how to read? Should you be afraid. . .? Are you alone? Are you cold? Do you know to what degree Man is "yourself?" foolish? and naked?

My anguish, at long last, holds sovereign
power. My dead sovereignty is in the streets.
Imperceptible—an absolute silence surrounds
it—crouched in anticipation of terror, and yet,
its dismal nature pokes fun at everything.

Death is the most terrible of all
things, and maintaining its work
requires the greatest strength.
—Hegel

On a street corner, a filthy and overpowering anguish disfigured me (perhaps because I had seen a pair of furtive whores on the stairs of a ur-

---

Georges Bataille (1897-1962) first became active in Parisian literary circles in the 1920s. His brief association with Surrealism ended after a bitter dispute with the movement's leader, André Breton. Originally trained as a medievalist and a librarian, Bataille published works in a variety of fields, including fiction, philosophy, art history and literary criticism. His non-fiction writings, which offer a major reinterpretation and synthesis of the philosophies of Nietzsche and Sade, have influenced a generation of French theorists (Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, Baudrillard).

Bataille's erotic fiction (of which "Madame Edwarda" is an example, written in 1941) should be read as a sub-genre of the *conte philosophique*. In a preface to "Madame Edwarda," Bataille declares that his erotic tales can be separated from his philosophical writings of the period only on the basis of a "regrettable convention." In particular, he directs the reader to a section entitled "Le Supplice" of his work *L'Expérience intérieure*.

inal). At such moments, all I want to do is vomit. I should strip myself naked, or strip the girls who turn my head: a tepid round of stale flesh would relieve me. But I settled for a cheaper remedy—I ordered a Pernod at the counter and gulped it down; I made my way from bar to bar until. . .evening was through falling.

I wandered into those propitious streets that lead from the intersection of Poissonnière to rue Saint-Denis. The darkness and the solitude consummated my drunkenness. The night was bare in the deserted streets, and I too wanted to bare myself: I stripped off my pants and threw them over my arm; I wanted to bind the evening chill within my legs,—an astonishing sense of freedom transported me. I could feel myself swelling like a pod about to burst. I took my stiff cock in my hand.

(Entering a subject is hard. I could have avoided it and remained "credible." In fact, I enjoy detours; but as it stands, the beginning is straight forward. Let us proceed. . .harder. . .)

Startled by a noise, I put my pants back on and headed for les Glaces: there I found the familiar light. Standing in a crowd of girls, Madame Edwarda, nude, seemed ill at ease. She looked ravishing to me. I chose her: she sat down beside me. The waiter had scarcely taken our order when I grabbed Edwarda, who surrendered herself: our two mouths mingled in a foul kiss. The room was crowded with men and women—the desert, such as it was, where the game dragged on. The moment her hand slipped down, I shattered suddenly like a window, and began to tremble in my pants. Holding her ass in my hands, I felt Madame Edwarda herself panic at the same time: in her astonished eyes, widening, a look of terror; and in her throat, a long strangling sound.

It occurred to me that I had wanted to lead a sordid life, or rather, inevitably, that things would turn out that way. I thought I heard laughter through the tumult of voices, the lights, the smoke. But nothing mattered anymore. I squeezed Edwarda in my arms; she smiled at me: suddenly I felt a chill, a new shock within me; a kind of silence drifted down from the ceiling and turned me to ice. I was lifted in a flight of angels who had neither bodies nor heads—only the rustling of wings. But it was simpler than that: I became unhappy and felt abandoned, as one feels in the presence of GOD. It was crazy, worse than being too drunk. At first, I was saddened by the thought that the magnificence falling around me was stripping me of the pleasures that I had counted on sharing with Edwarda.

I felt ridiculous: Edwarda and I hadn't exchanged two words. A moment of desperation came over me. I had no idea where I was or what was happening: amidst the confusion and the lights, night was falling around me. I wanted to flip the table over, wreck everything: the table was fixed, bolted to the floor! What could be more ridiculous? Everything had disappeared, the room and Madame Edwarda. The night alone. . .

A voice, all too human, drew me out of my stupor. The voice of Madame Edwarda, like her gracefully slender body, was obscene:

—You want to see my rags?

Gripping the table with both hands, I turned towards her. Seated, she cocked up one leg and spread her thighs: to open her slit even wider, she pulled back the folds of skin with her fingers. Thus, Edwarda's "rags," gaping at me, shaggy and pink; bursting with life like a repulsive squid. I stammered under my breath:

—What are you doing that for?

—You see, she said, I am GOD. . .

—And I am a madman. . .

—No, you must look. Don't turn away!

Her husky voice softened, and she made herself almost child-like to tell me wearily, with an inscrutable smile of abandon:

—Oh, I've come before!

But she had maintained her alluring pose. She commanded:

—Kiss me!

—But. . . , I protested, in front of the others?

—Of course!

I was trembling: I looked at her, immobile; she was smiling at me so gently that I was trembling. Finally, I knelt down, awkwardly, and I put my lips on that ardent wound. Her bare thigh caressed my ear: I seemed to hear the noise of waves breaking, the same noise one hears by putting a seashell to one's ear. In the absurdity of the brothel and the confusion surrounding me—I felt I couldn't breathe, my face was red, I was sweating—I remained oddly suspended, as if Edwarda and I were lost in a windy night before the sea.

I heard another voice, coming from a vigorous and beautiful woman, respectably dressed:

—My children, declared the mannish voice, it is time to go upstairs.

The sous-maitresse took my money; I stood up and followed Madame Edwarda, whose tranquil nudity crossed the room. But this simple passage amidst tables crowded with girls and their clients, this common rite of the "woman climbing the stairs," followed by the man who will make love to her, was, at that moment, no more than a solemn hallucination: the clacking of Edwarda's sharp heels on the tiled floor, the swaying gait of this tall, obscene body; the sour, female odor that I drank in the wake of this white body. Madame Edwarda was vanishing ahead of me. . .into crowds of people. The chaotic indifference of the room to her happiness, to the measured solemnity of her steps, resembled a royal consecration and streets carpeted with flowers: death itself was part of the fete, in the momentary evocation of the butcher's knife by the nudity of the brothel.

. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . the mirrors which lined the walls, and of which the ceiling also was made, multiplied the animal image of copulation: the slightest movement delivered our exhausted hearts to the emptiness where innumerable reflections of ourselves confounded us.

Pleasure eclipsed us, finally. We rose and looked soberly at one another. Madame Edwarda fascinated me; I had never seen a girl so pretty, or so naked. Without taking her eyes off me, she pulled a pair of white silk stockings from a drawer: she sat down on the bed and drew them on. The exaltation of being naked possessed her: again, she spread her legs and pulled open her crack; the pungent nudity of our two bodies threw us back into the same exhaustion of the heart. She put on a white vest and concealed her nudity under a cloak; the hood of the cloak covered her head; a domino fringed with lace masked her face. Finished dressing, she pulled away from me, and said:

—Let's go now!

—But. . .you're allowed to leave? I asked her.

—Quickly, my pet, she replied happily, You can't go out with nothing on!

She held my clothes for me, and helped me to get dressed; but as she did so, her mood sustained at times a furtive exchange between her flesh and mine. We passed a maid in the narrow stairway. In the sudden darkness of the street, I turned, astonished, to find Edwarda fleeing, draped in black. She hurried away, leaving me behind: the mask which concealed her gave the impression of an animal. It wasn't cold out, but I was shivering. Edwarda, a stranger, a starry sky, wild and empty over our heads: I thought I would collapse, but I began to walk.

At that hour of the night, the streets were deserted. Suddenly, Edwarda, malevolent and without saying a word, ran past me, alone. The porte Saint-Denis was directly ahead of her: she stopped. I hadn't moved: Edwarda, motionless as I was, stood waiting under the gate, in the middle of the arch. She was black, entirely; simple, terrifying as a hole: I realized that she wasn't laughing, and also, more precisely, that, under the garment which veiled her, she was now absent. I knew then—the last trace of drunkenness gone—that she had not lied, that she was GOD. Her presence had the unintelligible simplicity of a stone: there, in the heart of the city, I felt as if I were in the mountains at night, amidst a vast, lifeless expanse.

I felt free of Her; I was alone before this black stone. I trembled to find before me the most desolate thing in the world. The comic horror of my situation did not escape me: the spectacle which, at that moment, paralyzed me with fear, a moment earlier. . . .The transformation had slipped by, undetected. In Edwarda, the act of mourning–a mourning without sadness or tears—had conveyed an empty silence. And yet, I wanted to know: this woman, so naked at the moment, who cheerfully called me her "pet". . .I crossed the street; my fears urged me to stop, but I kept walking.

She drew back, silent, sliding towards the pillar on the left. I was two steps away from the monumental gate; when I penetrated the stone arch, the cloak vanished without a sound. I listened, no longer breathing. I was astonished to find that I understood perfectly: I knew, when she ran past, that she had to run, to rush forward at all costs and stand beneath the gate; and when she stopped, that she was suspended in a kind of absence, far beyond any possible laughter. I could no longer see her; a death-like obscurity was descending from the vaults. Without

even thinking, I "knew" that a period of agony was beginning. I welcomed it, I wanted to suffer, to go further, to go on, even if I were forced to the brink of a "black hole." I understood, I wanted to understand, eager for her secret, not doubting for an instant that death reigned in her.

Shivering under the vault, terrified, I laughed:

—The only guy to disappear into the hole of this arch!

I trembled at the thought that she might escape, disappear forever. I trembled as I tried to accept it, but the image of her flight tormented me: I rushed forward, circling the pillar. I dashed to the pillar on the right: she had disappeared, I couldn't believe it! Devastated, I was standing before the gate, sinking into despair, when I glimpsed, on the other side of the boulevard, her cloak disappearing into the shadows: Edwarda, apparently still absent from the cloak, was standing in front of a terrace with rows of tables and chairs. I moved towards her: she seemed deranged, obviously from another world—less than a phantom, a lingering mist in the street. She drew back delicately upon my approach, bumping into a table on the empty terrace.

As if I had awakened her, she said in a lifeless voice:

—Where am I?

Out of desperation, I pointed out to her the empty sky over our heads. She looked up: for an instant, under the mask, eyes blank, she remained lost in the fields of stars. I held her up; both of her hands clutched obsessively at the cloak to hold it shut. She began to writhe convulsively. She was in pain; I thought she was crying, but it seemed as though the world and all of its anguish were suffocating in her, unable to burst into tears. She pushed me away, seized by an obscure wave of disgust: suddenly enraged, she rushed forward, then stopped and threw off the cloak, showing the cheeks of her ass. She cocked her hips to one side; a moment later, she came back and hurled herself on me. A wind of savagery arose in her: she struck me angrily in the face, pounding me with her fists, in the furious impulse of a brawl. I stumbled and fell; she fled.

I wasn't even back on my feet—I was on my knees—when she returned. She shouted at the sky, her voice hoarse, strained beyond its limits; her arms thrashed the air in horror:

—I can't breathe, she screamed, but you, miserable priest's hide, I'M ONLY BORING YOU. . . .

Her voice broke into a kind of death-rattle; she stretched out her hands for my throat, and collapsed.

Breathless, seized by violent spasms in her chest, she tossed on the ground like part of a severed earthworm. I leaned over her and pulled back the lace on the mask, which she was swallowing and shredding between her teeth. The reckless force of her movements had exposed her completely: her breasts spilled from the bolero; I saw her flat pallid belly, and the hairy crack gaping above her stockings. Her nudity, now, was devoid of sense; at the same time, it labored under the excessive meaning of death's garment. The strangest thing—and the most anguishing—was the silence in which Edwarda remained enclosed: of her suffering, communication was no longer possible. I was absorbed in the absence of any signal—in this night of the heart which was no less solitary nor less hostile than the empty sky. The atrocious exertion of her body leaping like a fish, the vile rage crumpling her face, charred the life in me, leaving a residue of disgust.

(I must explain: it would be wrong to suggest that irony plays a part in my statement that Madame Edwarda is GOD. But, to say that GOD is a prostitute in a whorehouse, is an unreasonable statement. To be honest, I am happy that one cannot help but laugh at my misfortunes: he alone understands me whose heart is afflicted with an incurable wound, such that no one could possible cure him of it . . . . And what man, wounded, would allow himself to "die" from any other sort of wound?)

The awareness that night of an irremediable act, as I was kneeling beside Edwarda, was neither less lucid nor less terrifying than at this moment as I am writing. Her suffering in me was like the truth of an arrow: one is aware that it has entered the heart, but only upon death. In anticipation of the void, that which remains is nothing more than a slagheap over which my life lingers in vain. Before a silence so utterly black, there occurred a leap in my despair: Edwarda's contortions wrenched me out of myself and thrust me beyond blackness, mercilessly, like the delivery of a condemned man to the executioner.

When, after the interminable wait, a man destined to undergo corporal punishment in broad daylight at the very place where the horrible act will be accomplished, he observes the preparations; his heart is in his

mouth: on his narrow horizon, each object, each face, assumes an oppressive significance and aids in tightening the vice from which it is already too late to escape. When I saw Madame Edwarda writhing on the ground, I entered a similar state of concentration, but the change which occurred in me did not confine me: the horizon before which Edwarda's misery had placed me was fleeing, like the object of a painful obsession. Bewildered and desolate, I felt a surge of power as I surrendered myself to a tide of self-hatred. The dizzying descent, which was destroying me, had opened a prairie of indifference inside me; it was no longer a question of solicitude, of desire: the parching ecstasy of fever, at that point, arose from the absolute impossibility of restraint.

(It is deceptive—if, in fact, I must reveal myself—to play with words, to assume the laboring gait of sentences. If no one reduces what I am saying to nudity, by snatching away the clothing, the form, then I write in vain. [Especially since I know beforehand that my effort is bound to fail: the lightning which dazzles me—and which strikes me—undoubtedly will have blinded only my own eyes.] Still, Madame Edwarda is not a phantom from a dream; her sweat did soak my handkerchief: at that moment when, led by her, I arrive, I would like in my own turn to lead. This book has its secret; I must not reveal it. It is more remote than any word.)

The crisis subsided at last. The convulsions continued a little longer, but without the same fury. She caught her breath; her features relaxed, ceased to be hideous. Suddenly exhausted, I lay down beside her on the pavement for a moment. I covered her with my coat. She wasn't heavy, so I decided to carry her; the taxi station on the boulevard was nearby. She remained lifeless in my arms. Progress was slow; I had to stop three times on the way to the station. In the meantime, she came to; and when we arrived, she wanted to stand up: she took a step and faltered. I caught her by the waist and helped her into the car.

She said feebly:

—. . .not yet. . .tell him to wait. . .

I asked the driver not to leave yet; beside myself with fatigue, I climbed in the back seat and collapsed next to Edwarda.

We remained silent a long time—Madame Edwarda, the driver, and I—motionless in our seats, as if the car were moving.

Edwarda said to me finally:

—Tell him to go to les Halles!

I spoke to the driver, and he started the car.

He drove us through dismal streets. Calmly and slowly, Edwarda undid the ties of her cloak and let it slip off. She no longer had on a mask. She took off her vest, and said to herself in a low voice:

—Naked as an animal.

She stopped the car by tapping on the window, and got out. She walked up to the driver, close enough to touch him, and said:

—You see. . .I'm naked now. . .come on.

The driver, motionless, stared at the animal: she cocked up one leg and spread her thighs, wanting him to see her slit. Unhurriedly, and without a word, the man got out of the car. He was simple, and built like a hydrant. Edwarda wrapped herself around him, forcing her mouth onto his, and pried into his trousers with her hand. She dropped his pants to the ground and said to him:

—Come into the back seat.

He came and sat down beside me. Edwarda stepped in after him; she climbed voluptuously onto his hips and stuffed the hard knot into herself with one hand. I remained motionless, watching. Her movements were slow and calculating, from which she drew, visibly, an inense pleasure. The other responded—he gave himself brutally with his whole body: born of the stark intimacy of these two people, little by little, their embrace arrived at the point of excess where the heart is absent. The driver heaved forward, panting. I turned on the overhead light in the taxi. Edwarda, bolt upright, was straddling the worker; head thrown back, her hair dangling down. Bracing her by the nape of the neck, I could see the whites of her eyes. She strained against the hand that bore her up, and the tension increased the rattle of her breathing. Her eyes rolled back into place; a moment later she seemed to quiet down. She saw me. From her glance, at that moment, I knew she was returning from the impossible; and I saw, in her depths, a dizzying steadfastness. The root, the flood which now overwhelmed her, spurted in her tears: tears streamed from her eyes. Love in these eyes was dead; a chill of dawn emanated from them, a transparency in which I could read death. And everything was bound up in this dream-gaze: nude bodies, fingers opening flesh, my anguish, and the memory of foam at her lips—there was nothing which did not contribute to this blind descent into death.

Edwarda's pleasure—torrent of spring-waters, flowing in her with the power to split the heart—was prolonged outrageously: the surge of

delight did not cease to glorify her being, to make her nudity more nude, her indecency more shameful. Body and face ecstatic, given over to ineffable cries, she bore, in her tenderness, a desperate smile: she saw me in the arid depths of my spirit; from the depth of my sadness, I sensed the torrent of her joy break loose. My anguish resisted the pleasure I should have admitted: Edwarda's mournful pleasure aroused in me an exhausting sensation of wonder. My distress and my feverishness seemed trivial to me, but that was all I possessed, the only virtues in myself which responded to the ecstasy of that which, in the recess of a cold silence, I called "my heart."

The final tremors seized her, slowly; her body, still foaming, slackened. In the back of the taxi, the driver, after love, was sprawled out. Edwarda was still propped against my hand; the knot in her neck loosened. I helped her to stretch out, and wiped away her sweat. Eyes dead, she offered no resistance. I had turned off the light: she was half asleep, like a child. A similar sleep must have settled over us—Edwarda, the driver, and me.

(Continue? I intended to, but I've had enough. The interest just isn't there. I write about whatever is on my mind at the moment of writing: is this all absurd? or is there some meaning to it? I drive myself crazy thinking about it. I wake up in the morning, like millions of others: little girls and boys, babies, old men—last night's sleep dissipated forever . . . Myself and these millions, does our waking have some meaning? A hidden meaning? Obviously hidden! But if nothing makes sense, I've wasted my time. I'll beat a hasty retreat, availing myself of every imaginable trick! I should abandon everything, and sell myself to nonsense: as far as I'm concerned, it's the executioner who tortures me and who kills me, not some shadow of hope. And if there is a meaning? I haven't figured it out yet. Tomorrow? How should I know! I can't conceive of meaning that is not "my" punishment; as for that, I know it well. But for the moment: nonsense! Mr. Nonsense writes, he knows he is crazy; it's frightening. But his madness—this nonsense—as it is, suddenly becomes "serious:" might that be, precisely, "the meaning?" [No, Hegel has nothing to do with the "apotheosis" of a madwoman. . . .] My life has no meaning unless I myself am meaningless, unless I am insane. Let those who can understand; let those who shall die understand. . . Being is there, not knowing why, always trembling from the cold. . . .; the infinite, the night surrounds it, and it is there precisely to. . ."not to

know " And GOD? What is there to say, Mr. Eloquent, Mr. Believer?—God, at least, wouldn't He know? GOD, if He "knew," would be a pig.* Lord [I appeal, in my distress, to "my heart"] deliver me; blind them! And the story, shall I continue?)

I have finished.

From the sleep that released us some time later in the back of the taxi, I woke up sick, the first. . . .The rest is irony; long anticipation of death. . .

* I said: "God, if He "knew," would be a pig." Someone (I imagine He would be momentarily unwashed, disheveled) who would grasp the idea in its entirety. What could He possibly have in common with a human being? And beyond that, everything else. . .farther and farther. . .HIMSELF, hovering in ecstasy over an empty space. . .And now? I TREMBLE.

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS

As many of our readers know, *Sulfur* made a big move in the fall of 1986 from Los Angeles, to Ypsilanti. We wrote many of our readers, asking for some extra support, and the response was solid and very helpful. We had planned to thank individuals in #19, but since donations are still coming in, and since it has been impossible to determine at this time via the EMU Development Office the names of everyone who has responded, we feel it is best to delay printing the names of the "friends of *Sulfur*" until next fall.

As of April, 1987, Jed Rasula will take over *Sulfur's* NCR section, so from this point on all material for the NCR should be sent to Jed c/o *Sulfur*. The following statement by Rasula summarizes his intentions as the new editor of the NCR:

"The welcome contributions of John Yau and Clark Coolidge, *Sulfur's* art and music editors, have made it clear that the magazine would benefit by actively pursuing in its 'Notes Correspondence Reviews' an expanded context. That we now propose to actively engage 'the whole art' of *Sulfur's* subtitle is not to neglect poetry, but to relocate it pragmatically in a force-field of overlapping social concerns and trans-generic considerations. Pursuing this, we propose to open up formats, to encourage elasticity of topic as well as a radical re-visioning of modes of writing. In particular, we favor the full range of potential reviews, from the trenchant highly-focused paragraph, aphoristically precise, to the longer treatment that addresses not only text but context. We want to sustain our unpredictable diversity, augmenting it by making it more casual *and* more rigorous at the same time."

Lastly, a note on the Birkerts piece on Ashbery, and the response to it (all in this NCR) by four *Sulfur* editors. I had asked Birkerts to review Ashbery's *Selected Poems* and he had agreed to. I accepted the piece he sent in, and then began to have second-thoughts about it. *Sulfur* had printed Ashbery's poetry in the past, and I had asked John for new unpublished work about a year ago. What kind of an obligation does the magazine have to its contributors in regard to reviews of their books? Can we justify printing a decidedly negative review of someone whose writing we see as an essential part of what the magazine proposes? [I must say that some of my concerns over the Birkerts "review" were a result of *Exquisite Corpse* having printed a couple of my own works, and in subsequent issues publishing letters to the editor that abusively attacked me. While Birkerts' "review" is not a personal attack on Ashbery himself, it is basically a dismissal of the significance of his poetry. Was I in my own way about to repeat Andrei Codrescu's shoddy editing by running the Birkerts?]

While I was brooding about this matter, Ashbery offered *Sulfur* seven unpublished poems, and I accepted 3 of them (the 3 that appear in this issue). Not only did such acceptance intensify my conflict over running the Birkerts, but since the range of concerns represented in these new Ashbery poems seemed to me to be outside the aspects of Ashbery that Birkerts dismisses, I thought that the mere presence of the poems and the "review" would simply be wrong. At the same time, it did not seem right to now pull the Birkerts: it had been accepted, and was conscientiously written by a new *Sulfur* commentator who we had published (on Herbert and Blackburn) in recent issues.

So I sent the Birkerts to most of the people on *Sulfur's* masthead, 4 responded, and their responses follow the "review" in the current issue. Had they come in a bit earlier, I would have then sent them to Birkerts and have given him a chance at having the last word. Since they came in right before *Sulfur's* typesetting deadline, any response from Birkerts will have to go into #20, next fall.

While at this point I feel that I have handled this matter as responsibly as I can, I do not think I have solved its thorny facets. The question remains that I raised previously: what should be editorial policy on extremely negative (not merely critical) reviews of essential contributors? The question has siblings: should a magazine like *Sulfur* print reviews of its own editors, and if not all editors, which ones? *Sulfur* is somewhat pyramidal in editorial structure, with me having the most editorial input, and the Correspondents having the least. We all agree that none of my work should be reviewed in the magazine (a decision I agree with, but am not happy about), but the policy has shifted about with regard to the rest of the masthead. Does such cautious humility really smack of lack of confidence? In Césaire's *Tropiques* only criticism that supported the editors' work was published—but *Tropiques*, one might reply, was a group or movement magazine and *Sulfur* attempts to be focused *and* eclectic. But why should we not all have as much supportive exegesis of our work in the magazine as possible? For none of us can count on intelligent attention in the academic quarterlies or the Sunday book reviews. Yet if I have qualms about printing Birkerts on Ashbery, I realize that I would not entertain for a moment the thought of printing an attack on any of the masthead. Can editorial policy remain "open?"

—CE

HENRI MICHAUX (1899-1985)

It was only by chance that a few months ago I came across a notice of Henri Michaux's death: it was as though he had left the world as discreetly as he had lived in it, never quite at home, never entrenched in it. There is no call for mourning, but for acknowledgement: his work is here, the tireless (but also relentless, uncomfortable) accumulation of a man determined to stay *awake* at all costs, to the last possible moment. There is no need, either, to try to conjure up what Michaux might now tell us, "from the other side"; for his whole work has been addressed to us across that threshold between day and night, between the flickering focus of consciousness and the twilight that is its envelope in a darkness we can only indicate by subtraction.

My first image is of a hand, poised above a page: poised, in Brassai's photograph, amid an intimate litter of books, crumpled paper, bottles of ink, brushes, *waiting*. A seismograph, registering the slightest human tremor (but this perturbation is the echo of massive subterranean shifts). An almost anonymous hand–Michaux would never (until recently) allow a photograph of more than his silhouette to be published–a faithful scribe of the invisible. A hand that might not *belong* to anyone (the arm extends out of the frame), at the same time as the marks it inscribes are what we call handwriting, signature. Hand writing, taking down, transcribing, translating something that does not fit easily into words, that does not quite belong in the world of language. So much of Michaux's work pivots at the edge between writing and drawing: skeletal alphabets, eroded hieroglyphs; and in the other hand (in the mescalinian manuscripts) that point where the pen frees itself from the fragile tyranny of writing and unravels into its own meanders.

A man never quite at home in the everyday madness of the world. One of Michaux's early texts centres on the eerily innocent "Plume" (1930) for whom the ordinary and the extraordinary are equally incomprehensible (but Plume never protests, he is scrupulously polite; nothing surprises him, because everything astonishes him). Plume is a visitor, a reporter ("pen") from Elsewhere: like Caspar Hauser, he wanders in the world we take for granted.

Conversely, what we pick up by the handle of "fantastic", what might be served up as "original", is relayed, almost neutrally, by this same hand. Recording without distortion or feedback, Michaux's is not a disembodied voice; it has a tangible grip: the unease, the discomfort that it turns on is anatomical, psychosomatic. Nothing here of the convenient release of the "spiritual" that uses the physical as springboard. Yet there is no doubt that Michaux is an outstanding anthropologist of the so-called inner world: *Voyage En Grande Garabagne* (1936) and *Au Pays De La Magie* (1941) are *alibis*, imaginary ethnographies whose fieldwork gives glimpses of worlds whose orders question our own. The language is simple and lucid, giving an illusion of familiarity with a world that is slightly out of synch, and which is all the more unsettled because its strangeness is presented so factually. There is no fanciful elaboration, no dramatic emphasis: a variant human nature is indicated deftly, economically, in the few details from which an entire culture might be deduced.

The apparent reticence is, however, deceptive: Michaux's writing is exactly, almost musically, pitched; its reiterations are respectful, its incantations measured. It is like the carefully calibrated dose of a substance that is poisonous in larger quantities. The *efficacity* of these texts is crucial. Michaux is not escapist, he does not retreat from a cruel or sordid outer world into the recesses of the fantastic: if the repercussions of "external" events—the war years, the death of his wife in an accident—penetrate the work, the savagery and blackness of certain passages comes to meet them half-way. The terrible, bleak sentences of *Epreuves, Exorcismes* (1940-44) do not refer to any specific actuality, but they outline the inside skin of historical events (as, in a different, "paranoid", way Artaud's *Lettres de Rodez* do): they conjure back against the overwhelming weight of outward emergencies, bombardments and attacks. And this conjuring is not to be taken lightly, even if its tone is sometimes wry or ironic; it flares up, explodes, it is projectile, refulgent, vindictive.

Michaux's work lays siege to the commonplace defence systems that separate inner from outer reality, it infiltrates behind their entrenched positions, a double agent. What comes to light makes its appearance as if from the other side of the retina; but it appears just as really. From early on, there is a trace of Oriental metaphysics: but—as with Daumal, with whom Michaux has many affinities—it is not an exotic, imported detachment, a comfortable distance through the wrong end of some spiritualised telescope; it is harsh, stringent and severe, but it has no final authority.

The earlier writings, sometime easy to mistake for Surrealist excursions, undermine the ground of the literal—and of its shadow, the italicised figure. Later these excavations are substantiated, from the opposite side, in Michaux's use of various "drugs" (cannabis, mescaline, L.S.D.). Here the perspective is reversed: the natural immediacy of perception is gradually eroded, turned outside in. With exquisite and excruciating pains—for he is at once subject and observer of his own melting consciousness—Michaux records the minute accelerations and decelerations of experience. This could be Rimbaud's systematic "derangement of the senses", in that the fluctuation or collapse of normal "out-there" perception is documented, verbally and visually, in its intimate texture. But this dilapidation is not a wilful intoxication or a busting-through barriers to some infinite mirage; it sets out from utter sobriety (Michaux was, in fact, exceptionally abstemious): he *subjects* himself to abandon. The account is honest, counter-inflationary. The contradiction in the title *Miserable Miracle* (1956) points to the recognisable phenomenon, in a small-scale acid trip, of spectacular ocular captivation with an emotional emptiness or flatness: a contradiction to the short-cut mysticism so often identified with this.

Not that Michaux confines himself to a purely descriptive level. *Connaissance Par Les Gouffres* (1966) and *Les Grands Epreuves De L'Esprit* (1967)

should be required reading for experimental psychologists: they are infinitely more informative about the fine grain of the relationship between the experiencing subject and his world than countless "objective" reports. Here are depictions of the utmost phenomenological accuracy (Michaux's findings fit the complex structures of Merleau-Ponty but the language is—and has to be—that of a poet, i.e., of a man practised in acute self-observation, and in the handling of language, who carefully attends to their interplay). This is not the poetry of extravagance or contrivance: it belongs to the same tradition of giving speech-shape to the inarticulate as does Rilke.

The mescalinian texts are accompanied by—and sometimes inseparable from–drawings. Michaux's pictorial work dates back to the late 1920s, and constitutes a parallel career in its own right. It occupies a space which is not far removed physically from that occupied by writing—and its scratchy, blotted texture is indeed a kind of text (anticipating Derrida's notion of "ecriture")—one in which the roles of positive and negative, of scrubbed black ink and flashes of white paper, sometimes hang in the balance. Other drawings are prospective, a visionary interrogation in which Michaux conjures up presences that, like spirits of the dead in some divinatory rite, float up against the threshold between visible and invisible. The mescalinian drawings are "documentary" in that they record the bendings and stretchings of a space that is "interior" only in the sense that it is no longer tethered to the perception of objects "out-there".

Despite his acknowledged reputation, Michaux has not been much translated into English: the essential works of the period 1930-50, in particular, remain, so far as I am aware, out of reach. This cannot be because they are that hard to translate. Perhaps Michaux's voice is unfashionable—too cool, too impersonal: in which case it is all the more necessarily a corrective. At all events, this is a shameful blank on the map of Twentieth-century literature. I choose this moment to record my own immense debt to a rare spirit: Henri Michaux.

—DAVID MACLAGAN

ROBERT BLY, *SELECTED POEMS*
Harper and Row, 1986

Ster-, the Indo-European root behind *stereotype*, means stiff, in the sense of hard, severe, inflexible. It also feeds into the Old English for the verb *stare*, so that to stare at a type or example is to constitute a stereotype.

Now, among the many competing and overlapping poetry worlds in the U.S., Robert Bly has been the archetypal mid-westerner. Through his editorial work and personal appearances he has been staring down his rivals for three decades. He has not blinked; he's constituted a stereotype of American poetry out of what he's seen.

As I see it, Bly's stereotype is so outdated in crucial ways as to be little more than evidence of his hardened stare. But acts of stereotyping often bring into being their opposites, and in this case it's Bly himself who has come to stand as a stereotype. That is, what Bly signifies to many serious poets has little to do with his actual efforts, accomplishments, or presence. Our stereotype of Bly is by now a long embedded characteristic of our domestic imperialism and its particular neurosis (discernible in wave after wave of poetry schools, clusters and cliques in L.A., S.F. & N.Y.) which I will call Fear of the Provinces–or, more evocatively, Fear of the Heartland.

The neurosis works like this: "If a man, cautious, / hides his limp, somebody has to limp it. Things / do it; the surroundings limp." (*SP* 153-4). Something in the animal heartbeat of contemporary American poetry on the east and west coast is hiding its limp, but where we see the limp is in Robert Bly. Let's consider Bly's three main areas of practice, with an eye to what the heartland has to say to the coastline.

First, Bly as editor. Issues of *The Fifties* and *The Sixties* are worth re-examining now, 1986, especially by those with rancorous memories of the period when Bly's magazine was not only being published but *appearing*, like a buffoon in the Camelot American castle ball. Bly's was possibly the only magazine of the late Fifties/early Sixties that regularly printed in-depth essays on younger poets' work (Creeley, Merwin, Simpson, Logan, Snyder, Levertov and Dickey being the main beneficiaries). Bly himself supplied plenty of commentary on all sorts of topics throughout the run, and was not averse to raucous assaults on occasion (Lowell and Dickey, most memorably). Most of his polemic was aimed at the New Critical foothold and the (in 1960 U.S.A.) monstrous neglect of much of the world's greatest modern poetry. To this end most of the space of the magazine was given over to publishing translations (generally with the originals—even if in Norwegian or Roumanian). The extent to which Bly was one of the key wholesale importers of poetry from abroad can be grasped at a glance from this abbreviated list of names culled from his magazine: Benn, Celan, Trakl, Rilke, Montale, Ekelöf, Char, Michaux, Machado, Lorca, Huidobro, Vallejo, Neruda. Bly's power of discrimination on the domestic front, on the other hand, left much to be desired. Who now (or maybe even then!) knows anything of Margaret Sheinin, George Kresensky, Thomas Parnell, Charles Reynolds, Benjamin Clemenson, Richard LaFuze, E.D. Blodgett, Louis Hammer, Durward Collins, Jr., or Lewis Lipsitz? Only through the occasional inclusion of a Snyder, Rothenberg, Levertov, Kinnell or Ignatow poem does Bly's roster keep from being a total shutout. *The Sixties* may have had the lowest batting average of any significant postwar mag in this American league of poetry.

It had to be other features that kept readers attending: the translations, commentaries and atmospheric editorial presentation helped. But just as memorable were the regular publication of parodies and satires, going so far as to include a stinging pastiche of the typical Bly Poem, next to an early lampoon of "Quarrels Bubullski," the ox of L.A. Another commendable aspect of the magazine was its political stance, ranging from an editorial on H-bomb testing to advocacy of the draft resisters league, its publication of Leroi Jones' account of his arrest and battery by police, and finally the bold decision to cancel subscriptions to 31 university libraries at "institutions we know to have money from the C.I.A. or the armed services for research on chemical and germ warfare." (Surely the fact that only one subsequent issue ever appeared is telling.)

In retrospect, Bly's Original Recipe for a lively magazine appears to have been forsaken by later editors. The only comparable effort was *Montemora* in the Seventies—over-serious in comparison with *The Sixties'* good humor, but equally attentive to poetry in translation, morally and politically conscientious (though not as outspoken as Bly) and with a minimal involvement in domestic poetry (but with better results when it was). The dominant element in *The Sixties'* impact was its modest size, making a most varied package in a format designed for reading in a single sitting. Virtually all later American poetry magazines with an admirably eclectic array of contents suffer from their amplitude—generous in intent, not to be scoffed at, but in every case curtailing the potential impact.

Bly's second domain has been as critic, spokesman, and traveling enthusiast of poetry at large. Certainly nobody can compete with him for sheer exuberance in the presentation of poetry in public readings. His approach flaunts tactics which are anathema to nearly all other American poets: he knows poems by heart, and recites rather than reads; he spends as much or more time presenting the poetry of others as he does his own; and he expresses his enthusiasm in any way he can, talking affably, aggravatedly, spiritedly about his concerns in ways that owe more to Barnum and Bailey than to Brooks and Warren. While it may be wise to resist some of Bly's excesses, his presence makes conspicuous the immense well of reserve (and, one suspects, lack of commitment) in most American poetry reading situations. American poets want so desperately to be taken seriously they forget that pointedly maintaining a serious demeanor is a mode of behavior most often encountered in grumpy children, press secretaries and State Department spokesmen.

Bly learned his rhetorical public style as an antiwar activist in the Sixties, the high point of which was his acceptance of the 1968 National Book Award for poetry for *The Light Around The Body*. Using the ceremonial occasion to speak out (yet again) against the war, he criticized the publishing industry for its neutrality and went so far as to ask "What has my own publisher, Harper & Row, done to help end the war? Nothing." Asking "if the country is dishonored, where will it draw its honor from to give to its writers?" he handed over his $1,000.00 prize to a representative of the draft

resisters league, counseling civil disobedience. At the time there were those who dismissed even this as part of Bly's flamboyantly clumsy provincial style; but from a vantage point of nearly 20 years, it stands out in the small, bitter, snippety world of American poetry as one of the few ennobling gestures a poet has been in the position to make in the public life of this nation. From Robert Frost at the Kennedy inauguration to Robert Bly at the National Book Award is as concise a record of the turbulent decade of the Sixties as any of the actual poetry written during that time.

There's something in Bly's handling of the National Book Award situation that is more deft and illuminating than most of his poetry. This may mean that he's a better actor (in its most variegated sense) than a poet. In assembling his *Selected Poems* Bly has re-enacted his career, characteristically refusing to toss together the usual neutered catch—the title being his only concession to the genre. He's used the occasion to make an honest assessment of his career, grouping the poems symptomatically and introducing them with concise autobiographical and thematic considerations. In the demands of telling his story, he's included poems that might not have made it into the conventional *Selected*, and he's even made revisions in poems when the original struck him as "too expansive and excitable." As a result of such thoroughgoing re- (and self-)examination the whole is decidedly greater than its parts. From 200 pages I could find scarcely a dozen pieces meriting unrestrained enthusiasm (among which I would include "Snowfall in the Afternoon," "Counting Small-Boned Bodies," "August Rain," "The Ant Mansion," "The Watcher" and "My Father's Wedding"). In most instances I found, to my dismay, that poems I remembered for great images were memorable only for those images.

Bly's particular claim for poetry—from editorials in his magazine, through such anthologies as *News of the Universe*, and repeatedly in interviews—is as a kind of nourishment. "Taking care of animals is the best preparation for writing poems. When you write poems, you feed poems language." (*Talking All Morning*, 200). And commenting on the anti-rationalist poetry of Hölderlin, Novalis and Nerval he says "I imagine [their effort] as an enormous upswelling of water, and that water is still fresh and drinkable." (*News of the Universe*, 4). Bly's own associative ingenuity offers much that is drinkable, in his terms, amid even more that is unpalatable. The major flaw in his work is an impoverished sense of the language. Such qualities as get to be called sonorous or musical in Pound or Duncan, Stevens or Bunting, are absolutely lacking in Bly's soundscape. His language is homely (not a fault in itself) and often sounds more like a translation than his actual translations do (sample: "Books don't want to remain in the same room with us anymore." [*SP* 84]). The poems are further hobbled by remaining, almost without exception, in the present tense. A few early poems recounting dreams slip into the past, and some prose poems set the scene with past-tense description that quickly yields to present action. A handful of the most recent poems

show some slight flexibility at handling more than one tense. But all in all, it doesn't amount to much. Surely the "presence" Bly's legionnaires hearken to when they hear him read is compounded by that unyielding immediacy of the present tense.

There's another factor that hampers his quest for a "leaping poetry," and keeps his poems closed off from any kind of abrupt concision other than through images. Proposing that the joy of poetry is the experience of leaping inside the poem, Bly has written that "A poet who is 'leaping' makes a jump from an object soaked in unconscious substance to an object or idea soaked in conscious psychic substance." (*The Seventies* #1, p. 6). This insight unfortunately relegates all of the activity of the poem to a sphere of demonstrable objects outside the poem, which the poem can only report on secondhand. Bly's philosophic idealism virtually eliminates any consideration of the sort of syntactic condensation that Zukofsky, for instance, accomplished in *"A" 22-23* without abandoning object, image, conscious or unconscious, soaking or leaping. While Zukofsky's poem never gets as alluringly plainspoken as Bly's "The planet turns, and cows / wait for the grassblades / to come rushing to their mouths" (*SP* 166), *"A" 22-23* offers a more complete immersion in the materiality of this cosmological position. For all his insistence on getting rid of abstractions (like plural nouns) and on grounding the poem's flight in concrete objectivity, Bly has consistently written poetry too modest and too easy to read to accomplish his aims. At one point he writes

> . . .I threw some parts of me away
> at ten; others at twenty; a lot around 28.
> I wanted to thin myself out as a wire is thinned.
> Is there enough left of me now to be honest? (*SP* 116)

—a compelling question. It's to Bly's credit that failure, exhaustion, betrayal and avoidance are central themes—generally depicted in painfully personal terms.

> I am less than half risen. I see how carefully
> I have covered my tracks as I wrote,
> how well I have brushed over the past with my tail.
> Faces that look at me from the shallow waters,
> where I have pushed them down—
> father and mother pushed into the dark. (*SP* 126)

The temporalized struggle here speaks to a real, ongoing engagement. In most other instances, however, Bly's eternal present demagnetizes many images that, without temporal mutation, just flake away into those alleged depths where you lose sight of them. At that point, the incredulous scoff, while the Bly fan is dutifully spooked by the hollow sound coming up from the bottom of the well.

Bly's primary audience nationwide consists of fans and readers from beyond the narrow poetry circles most poets thrive in. As a result, he's spawned a legion of admirers too easy to please—a captive audience, a flock of cooing doves. Bly's life as a poet has been sustained by the kind of people he's so (accurately) critical of in interviews and essays: vegetarian peaceniks, wishful-buddhist yes-men and women for the age of acquarius and the return of the great mother. "It seems to me that that the problem with the whole thing is that we each hope we can find some position in which we will be holier without making any terrific amount of effort." (*Talking All Morning*, 146; see further critiques on pp. 90, 92, 252-4). Bly's critics have also tended to be mascots. Following a now standard practice, the critic becomes puppy to the poet-master and seeks to please. This audacious critical lusting after approval has even led in one instance to an appraisal of *The Man In the Black Coat Turns* as a book in which "we see Robert Bly turned thus, back into unity" (unity being one of the primal Western hang-ups Bly has never ceased scoffing at). Little wonder, then, the man has made a point of commenting on such hapless docility in a milieu that ironically doesn't even offer the sorts of coercion that silence people in other occupations:

> I think it's mainly the absence of public criticism that's a disaster: the disappearance of criticism...We notice magazines with nothing but poems in them, not a single review or "idea" article. The cliche of the last ten years is, "I want to say something positive. If I can't say something positive I don't want to say anything at all." There is a fear of having and using power. (*Talking All Morning*, 293)

Bly could only make this claim of course by absenting himself from circles where heated, animated discussion of poetry occur. If the specific subcommunity of poets Bly has been in contact with in recent years has been conspicuously reticent about engaging in criticism, his point is understandable. But as a blanket statement it's yet another sign of Bly's provincialism, serving mainly to cast him in the privileged role of *enfant terrible* within a narrow circle of *enfants dociles*. In that circle he's uncritically admired; in others, he's just as uncritically ignored. And it's these others, most removed from Bly's news of the universe, who could benefit by his particular animal presence, refreshing sense of self-appraisal, and his gifts of communication (as distinct from 'gifts of expression').

Bly has arduously wrestled his way out of a confining tradition of poetry as taxidermy: the artificial posturing of persons and places into typical eternal moments. It stands to his credit that he avoided the lure of excess which his immediate predecessors (Lowell, Berryman, Sexton) made attractive to several generations of Americans bent on fetishizing personal experience. In seeking out the resonance of experience in a non-human context, Bly is very much a poet in the American grain of Emersonian pantheism, of Whitman's heraldry

of universal consciousness. He's justly celebrated for his incredulous hunches that speak to multiple conditions of existence ("We live in wooden buildings made of two-by-fours, making the landscape nervous for a hundred miles." [*SP* 132]). Being a poet of the vernacular miniature, it might have served Bly well to have read Dickinson too, which he seems not to have done. Otherwise he might have been led to a conception of that arduous *syntactic* leaping that precedes even the manifest patent of the image. In this era of the mass consumption of images, Bly's choice of the image-raft for his poetry is in many ways sadly antiquated. In this, he unwittingly shares an historical moment with the farmer pouring petrochemical fertilizers into his land to keep up with agribusiness. Given this scenario, Fear of the Provinces should be an incitement to further examination, and not the metropolitan disdain that it is.

—JED RASULA

"WRITING THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY"
On Bob Perelman's *The First World*

In a review of Philip Booth's *Selected Poems* in the *New York Times*, Mark Rudman assures us that, "Although anyone who cares about poetry knows his work, Mr. Booth has never been a fashionable poet." I thought I cared about poetry, yet I had barely heard of Mr. Booth myself. Could it be that I was both uncaring and fashionable at the same time? Apparently so, for to be fashionable is to be the victim of various competing isms that tempt the poet from every corner, and surely I had been tempted by some of them. "What are we to do," Rudman asks,

> in a time of so many isms and genres, with a poet who is not an objectivist, formalist, postmodernist or surrealist; who does not write a poetry of voice, image, narrative or statement; a poet who does not fit into any camp. . . .

Surely this Philip Booth is a paragon of avoidances. According to Rudman, he has successfully avoided ideology altogether, for he ". . .writes out of the center of his emotional life. . .in the old-fashioned sense, when he has something to say. . . ." Aha, I thought, of course; Mr. Booth is to poetry what Smith-Barney is to the financial world. He writes poetry the old fashioned way; he earns it.

Rudman credits Booth with the ability to utilize a variety of strategies in achieving this styleless style, including the use of "voice, image, narrative [and] statement," though what these things might mean in specific terms is hard to guess. And the lines which Rudman adduces to illustrate Booth's untainted style are far from unfashionable. They are, in fact, recognizable as variants on one of the most pervasive poetic styles of the day: the plainstyle confessional lyric as practiced by hundreds of MFA graduates in hundreds of literary quarterlies:

> I'm rowing
> where measure is lost, I'm barely moving,
> in a circle of translucence that moves with me
> without compass.
> I can't see out or up into;
> I sit facing backwards,
> pulling myself slowly
> toward the life I'm still trying to get at.

The existential crisis described (life is a process without boundaries) is subsumed by an objective correlative (life is like rowing a boat) that is about as subtle as Frost's mending wall or Lowell's skunks. The use of the compass metaphor, the self-reflexive reference to "measure" and the image of rowing backwards to symbolize the speaker's unknown destiny all serve up standard romantic topoi in terms that make "Frost at Midnight" or "Child Roland" seem more like events prepared for Cafe Voltaire. Rudman's contention that such lines are written out of the "center" of the poet's emotional life avoids the fact that they are also written out of the center of a poetic tradition, one that takes as its major premise the illusion of its non-centeredness.

Perhaps Rudman's remarks wouldn't have captured my attention so forcefully had I not read similar things in the prefaces to two recent poetry anthologies that I was considering using for courses. Dave Smith and David Bottoms, in their introduction to *The Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets* state that their selection is based not upon any fixed guidelines:

> We would include only the poems we liked best;. . .Those we liked had to be interesting, exert an immediate, dramatic presence, possess a character of language that sustained and renewed our attention, and demonstrate a treatment of subject that moved us beyond the subject to an enlarged and resonant awareness of being alive.

In a similar vein, William Heyen in his *The Generation of 2000* makes his editorial principles in similarly democratic terms:

> The poets *2000* brings together are not dadaists or faddists or stand-up comics, and they are not aestheticians tripletalking ethereal voices, but are poets of long-staring at the things of this world.

In other words, to be in these anthologies is to be without stated allegiances, poetics or distinguishing characteristics, to stare for a long time at things without thinking too much about them. To be in these anthologies is to be free of ideology.

Back in the 1950s something of the same concern was voiced by the Left Intelligensia, disillusioned with its own earlier political enthusiasms and ever more fearful of Soviet adventurism in western Europe. It was an era that marked "the end of ideology," as Daniel Bell said, by which he meant the old ideologies of Marxism-Leninism as embodied in the Russian Revolution and the worldwide Socialist movement of the 1930s. It was a period of accommodation and consensus, of conformism and moderation. The social programs of the Roosevelt era gave way to the benign Keynesian calculus of the Eisenhower corporate cabinet. To be free of ideology meant we could exploit and plunder without seeming to serve any particular interests except our own. We could help the little countries wherever we would, keeping them free for growth and development, but certainly not for exploitation. And we could keep our courts, schools and state department free of ideological taint by purging them of anyone who might not feel the same as we do.

Or, to bring things up to date, we could sell arms to whomever will help us raise money to maintain freedom wherever we need to find it. The parallels between the era that produced the Truman doctrine, Marshall Plan and Taft-Hartley Bill and the one that brings us "Gippergate" are so haunting as to cause vertigo, and the newspaper of late has caused much dizziness. If we wanted to characterize the parallels between the two periods we could hardly do better than to adapt the remarks of these anthology editors: we just print what we like; we don't take sides; we have some simple rules; anyone can apply. All we want of our poets is to move us". . .beyond the subject to an enlarged resonant awareness of being alive."

We should know by now that to look long and hard at a subject does not necessarily mean to engage it in any profound way; we should know that the "center of [one's] emotional life" is a construct of late nineteenth-century psychologism, a convenient fiction for those who are trying to escape from history; we should realize, in other words, that the claim of impartiality and detachment is one of the most authoritarian claims we can make—because no one seems to be responsible. When Smith or Heyen invoke their broad, egalitarian principles of inclusion, they fail to read their own anthologies, the contents of which (as Rae Armantrout has rightly pointed out in a *Poetics Journal* review) are about as diverse as cornmeal. And when they speak about "faddists" and "aestheticians," they are using a rather well known rhetorical strategy made popular during the McCarthy era: a small minority of hooligans is

gathering on the outskirts of the poetry community, infiltrating the schools, joining "our" clubs and spreading dangerous diseases around. "We" can't stamp them out, but "We" can refuse to include them in our anthologies.

No doubt these nonaligned poets and editors have in mind someone like Bob Perelman who, after all, has been identified with a certain group of poets (probably those tripletalking "aestheticians") and whose poetry, at least on the surface pays scant attention to an "awareness of being alive." And he certainly is "ideological:"

> Because the languages are enclosed and heated
> each one private a separate way
> of undressing in front of the word window
> faces squashing up against it
> city trees and personal rituals of sanitation
> washing the body free of any monetary transaction
>
> The parts of the machine take off their words and die away
> in a description read to the senses
> by the leftovers on TV that no one would think of eating
> even in the very act of swallowing. (11)

These lines are taken from Bob Perelman's recent book, *The First World* whose subject is the very ideology of the non-ideological that I have been describing. As its title implies, the book's particular subject is the "first" world, the Capitalist (or Communist) superpower whose hegemonic authority creates third and even fourth worlds. Like the editors who simply "print what they like," the first world dispenses largesse in the belief that the state machine will earn its own keep and validate its owner. The owner goes by the name of "We:"

> We have come here today to be plural
> sit in rows or sprawl
> in the wind-tunnel of design competition
> to find out how many a dollar will buy
> eyes focused on the spinning disk, the picture. (15)

And what "We" owns is the language, the means of distribution and dissemination by which self-knowledge may be mediated. In a paradox central to the book, "We" is a construct of the language it owns. It relies on ideas of democracy and pluralism ("We come here today to be plural"), but it lives within a matrix of codes, commands and signals it manipulates in order to gain the illusion of autonomy. It is this informational matrix, drawn from popular media, advertising, political rhetoric and newspapers that provides Perelman with much of his argument.

The book's title refers, as well, to that other first world, our Edenic childhood before the body became a fetish object of drives and fixations, when "the body / with its secret names lies open / like a fresh dug grave to the Almighty / fathered by no one." It is a world before the Oedipus complex, when sexual differentiation and power are lodged not in the phallus or father but in the body as a productive, sensual object. The child is "fathered by no one." In the first world, language is polymorphous and plural, capable of embodying the world without describing it. Like the body, language is desire. But "Tintin grows up to be Claude Levi-Strauss" and Pinocchio becomes "a real boy" thanks to the nurturing influence of an oedipalized history. This narrative is one of commodification, both sexual and linguistic, when in order to achieve individuation, one must channel drives into socially acceptable forms. Or to continue my theme, in order to achieve mental health, one has to "earn" it through good works:

> Next come the Romans, and with them we first see the sky
> artificial creation of scarcity of meaning
> spread out over the proletariat as a visible economic ether.
> You can look, but it costs. (12)

First World investigates the relationship between both meanings of the title: between the political economies of capitalist institutions and the libidinal economies of the Subject. It is a relationship that classical pscyhoanalysis has, until recently, disregarded but which has become the subject of deconstructions of Freud, particularly by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti Oedipus*. Whereas for Freud, neuroses have their seat in the individual psyche and in the "holy family" of father, mother and child, Deleuze and Guattari see schizophrenia as the function (the text?) of a larger social field. By placing all of his emphasis on individual subjectivity and the psychoanalytic cure, Freud replicated the power of the father in the child, hence reinforcing and legitimating the social hierarchy beyond the individual. His French followers and critics would like to liberate sexuality from its prison in the oedipal/psychoanalytic discourse and see it moving freely between the individual and social body.

Freud was well aware that the individual was the product of his language (he had little to say about "her" language except as the expression of hysteria as in the Dora case) and that the unconscious is "spoken" by libidinal drives. Anti-Oedipologists, like Deleuze and Guattari, however, locate the "speaker" of the Subject in social heteroglossia itself in which schizophrenia is the unconscious of social formations. The textualization of the schizophrenic Subject becomes one of Perelman's main concerns:

> I am split, it is written
> parallel lines pressing powerfully together
> Past & present (which came first?)

—one growing more obvious all the time—
went down to the mouth, one fell in and. . .(21)

Perelman's use of the passive voice in the opening line suggests a close relationship between individual psychosis ("I am split") and jurisprudence ("it is written"). These are "parallel lines" insofar as the latter, through its use of the passive voice, may obscure the who does the writing and hence may implicate the former. Or, in other words, schizophrenia is already written in the legal institutions that define it.

Perelman returns to this theme in a later poem that directly invokes Freud on the same topic:

A page is being beaten
back across the face of "things."
Inside me there's a little book of no color, its pages
riffling as I breathe, a moving point, torn out
and I read this scrapbook of desire
let's not say constantly
asleep & provoked by the economics of cliffs, galleys,
cartoons, explosive devices patterned to look like
adults reading signs (34)

The opening line refers to Freud's case, "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919) in which the adult patient uses the passive voice in order to avoid the fact that the child being referred to is himself and that the one doing the beating is his father. Freud uses this case to examine the function of language in psychoanalysis, the way that the patient, through sexual guilt (I deserved this beating—I enjoyed this beating), may avoid naming himself as the recipient of the punishment and naming the father as perpetrator.

Perelman draws attention to the materiality of the language (and to his own activity as a poet) by substituting for "child," the word "page." In a variation on Deleuze and Guattari's "machine of desires," he calls the Subject a "scrapbook of desires," suggesting the degree to which libidinal energies are embodied in specific images, words and signs whose source is the social world of exchange and barter. To read this scrapbook is to suspend one's desire for narrative and accept the flow of partial associations as they appear on the "page" of our sensations. But everywhere "forces outside our control" provide plausible readings of this text:

It's these "very acts" that we must
Pay attention to the flatness of the screen now!
For it's this very flatness
that the frailly projected containment of the humanized body
Is designed to be pinned to
by, naturally, forces outside our control. (11)

Perelman is asking us to see the surface of all sign-producing systems, to observe the "flatness of the screen" that frames our acts and gives them the illusion of inevitability.

The First World is not simply a poeticized version of *Anti-Oedipus*, but it does represent an analogous attempt to create (as Deleuze and Guattari feel Kafka, Artaud and Beckett do) a text at the service of desire, one which acknowledges its own fragmentary, incomplete nature. Perelman does not simply urge us to "Pay attention to the flatness of the screen;" he shatters the screen himself by breaking the linear and logical structure of his own language. If the Oedipus complex is the text of power, then its linguistic equivalent would be the well-made sentence:

> The declarative sentence
> cut
> lash die kill interrogate clear away
> the blood-soaked body
> no longer here the declarative sentence
> would be something other than what it
> says except that "you are what I am"
> is to "the unspoken forces that surround us"
> as "sunlight," see above, is to
> "mental furniture," trashed, sat on
> in state, loved, its wheels licked far into the night
> sirens, thighs, the whole gizmo going off
> or not
> and then why bother. . .(47)

Perelman not only "cuts" the declarative sentence, he links it directly to the "blood-soaked" body that is its receptacle, the sexualized body whose libidinal energies have been coerced into grammatical propositions. A page (or sentence) is truly being beaten. The page becomes the embattled body of the political unconscious.

So what is left? What remains after the death of God, King and declarative sentence? Who was this Oedipus anyway? Did he have a chance to tell his own story, outside of the oracle's (or Freud's) promise? Perelman attempts to answer some of these questions in the book's final poem, a dialogue in which Kreon comes to Oedipus bearing tales of a dying civilization. In order to save it from its "liberal playgrounds / and rightwing communication systems," Kreon says, "God wants you to die." But Oedipus refuses to lose life or eyesight:

> Tell God that my desires are infinite, if unfit
> for human consumption. Sense perception
> is a thing of the past. Myths spill over

into the present. I'm one
with the machines that go boom in the night. (53)

Since he won't die, Kreon asks, perhaps Oedipus will repent? The King is recalcitrant:

You can reprint any of my old speeches
but I doubt God will be able to tell them apart from
anything else ever said.
I think I'll just stand pat.

In Perelman's whimsical version, Oedipus recognizes the degree to which he has become history, validating the law of the Father and the social ethos which that law validates. His speeches about the sickness of society have become those of everyone else. His body has become the text of history which the chorus may mourn to whatever end it wishes: ". . .the past is so addictive, it takes longer and longer. . . / It all turns into a story, like my body . . ." Perelman's Oedipus refuses both sacrificial death and therapeutic sanction. Civilization may no longer use his name to assert its will to power.

The First World is a powerful indictment of various control mechanisms in modern society, performed in language that is both playful and polemical at the same time. It is a political poetry that never thematizes its position in some attempt to gain distance. Rather than providing images of power gone wild, Perelman builds his critique out of the rhetoric that power speaks—a rhetoric so easy to absorb that it takes on the lineaments of "natural speech." Perelman undermines this natural standpoint by employing a supple, constantly-shifting syntactic period and a rich, polyvalent diction:

Now that the Super Bowl is over
and God has come back to life
in the form of a man in a suit on TV
machined to a fineness that a woman rained on in a bender at
Greenham Common
breaking into clauses: that I own the land *which* you do not
because you haven't broken and entered the library
where time gets turned into money *that* grows on
trees *which* tradition says are sticks impregnated
by the systematic force *of* the earth's rotation. . .
Emphases grow thick as history snowballs.
Waves of rage police the objects.

***

In my opening paragraphs I linked (perhaps unfairly) the opinions of

Rudman, Smith and Heyen with considerably darker forces at work in America today. I also generalized their remarks about "faddists" and "stand-up comedians" to apply to Bob Perelman. If my rhetorical gesture is ungainly, it at least acknowledges its own ideological interests. My use of their editorial remarks is an attempt to replace the "passive voice" of contemporary poetry which hides its authoritative (and authoritarian) ideology behind a common sense, disinterested view. It is this view that has been mobilized against any number of literary movements in the past (the history of Modernism is littered with journalistic broadsides against its presumed "cultishness") and which has appeared recently in attacks on "language writing."

Without advocating a return to ideology in the old sense—rigid adherence to literary or party line–I would like to propose the heretical notion that great art occurs not in solitary vigils on mountaintops but in communities of individuals who share common concerns. What certain editors and poets sneeringly call "objectivists" or "dadaists" are those artists who through a certain celebration of their communal interests (and their profound awareness of social malaise) have created works like *Testimony, Spring and All, A, Stanzas in Meditation* and *The First World.* That these works are written within contentious and even insular communities and shared ideologies should not be seen as incidental to their creation. Such works implicitly attack the idea that poetry can ever be disinterested or that the "center of the emotions" can ever be central outside of a profit motive. *The First World* gains its considerable emotional appeal by staying alert to this fact.

—MICHAEL DAVIDSON

SELECTED POEMS BY JOHN ASHBERY
Viking, 349 pp., $22.95

John Ashbery's *Selected Poems*: that forlorn codex, garden of branching paths, termite tree of the late Millennium...The assignment was to review it, and I find I cannot. To review is to have read and to be looking back. I have read *at*, toward, near, but never with that cinching tug of understanding. I have moved my eyes and felt the slow dispersion of my sense of self. I have been flung back into the boredom and rage of childhood, when the whole world seemed to rear up against me, not to be had or understood. I find no sequence, no way of seriously discussing the poems as poems. I can only report on the defensive reflexes that their insistent refusal of meaning triggers in me.

Ashbery cannot be approached as an isolated phenomenon, *sui generis*, though most critics do exactly this. For better or worse, the work is part of a

broader cultural tendency; it belongs with that ground swell opposition against the hierarchies of reason and determinate meaning known as Deconstruction. While Ashbery practices no critical jujitsu himself, he is one of the brethren by temperament. I will explain.

Deconstruction is but the latest development in a process that began early in our century with the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, and which continued (mainly in France) in the movements of structuralism and semiotics. Deconstruction has taken Saussure's premises to a radical extreme. Its thrust, as I understand it, is to demolish the deeply-rooted conceptions of the Enlightenment, presumably so that the culture can evolve in new directions. Deconstruction itself offers no signposts for this evolution, only a method of taking things apart. In this, Deconstructionists are like members of a terrorist sect.

Saussure instigated a revolution in linguistics with his idea of "difference." Briefly, he asserted that words (signs) do not signify by virtue of any relation to a referent, that they do so solely because of their differentiation from other words. Any combination of sounds can mean anything, so long as it is distinct from other combinations. In essence, Saussure divided the closed order of signs from the world.

Deconstructionist thought goes even further. Where Saussure held that the sign was made up of two elements, the signifier (word) and the signified (its meaning), Deconstructionists insist that there is no demonstrable connection between the two; that we can never get past the signifier to find the pure signified. Look up any word in the dictionary–you will not find meanings, only other words. What this leads to is the assertion that meanings are imprecise and unstable, fluid entities that dissolve and coagulate along the so-called "chain of signifiers." The Deconstructionist operation is to unmask any discourse that pretends to clarity and stability. The favored method is to turn logic against itself, to pulverize the ruling assumptions by showing that they rest upon uncertain foundations.

Ashbery is not, as I said, a Deconstructionist. His poetry has nothing to do with this cross-fire of logic. Rather, it moves in the wake of the demolition. Ashbery's lines are what we find after the clear crystal of meaning has been shattered. Many readers, I suspect, fail to understand this and mis-read him. They treat the poems as if they were playfully obscure, but nonetheless part of the project of meaning. No. Ashbery makes a practice of *seeming* to mean while *not meaning*. In the process, he is able to capture many of the sensations that are part of the register of contemporary sensibility. The collapse of meaning in his poetry resonates beautifully with our intuition of larger social collapse. This is obviously an enormous subject and I cannot explore it here. Suffice it to say that sensation, not meaning, is what the poetry is all about.

Ashbery partisans are forever telling me that I lean too hard on that old business of cut-and-dried meaning, that I need to accept that there are innumerable other ways in which language signifies and intimates. That I should, in

other words, loosen up and let the poem work its way with me. I do have a problem with this. For me, verbal reference and linguistic structure are fundamental elements in the rule system of a game called meaning. It is a game—I see that—but by my lights it's the only game in town. I can respond to Dada and Surrealism, but only so long as they are an excitement at the edge of a larger system of coherence. The fact that I link Ashbery with the Deconstructionists, that I see him as temperamentally favoring their pernicious undertaking, forces me to take his procedure seriously. If this makes me a wet blanket, so be it.

Ashbery's poetry is at war with grammatic logic and referential meaning. It sets out to mime—indeed, intensify—that condition of confused unkowing which language evolved to remove us from. Maybe this is why so much of it stimulates in me that all-but-forgotten feelings of early childhood—then, too, the world overran whatever feeble structures I had devised for myself. The poetry is, according to this formulation, tautological to the core: it uses language, by definition an ordering system, to shake the reader loose from order. Ashbery can evoke profound sensation, but the profundity is that of confused emotion and drifting boundaries characteristic of the pre-linguistic psyche.

Ashbery joins the Deconstructionists in believing that linguistic propositions give a false and consoling impression of order, that they organize and whitewash what is essentially flux and foster the illusion of understandability. We string words into sentences and imagine that we have thereby ordered our lives. The poetry tilts at every moment against that illusionistic impulse. It makes use of our grammatic and semantic expectations—much as the Deconstructionists make use of logic—in order to overturn them, to disclose what Ashbery holds to be a larger truth: that we are unanchored, psychically dispersed among a welter of stray sensation and unattainable signification. By staying short of meaning, the poetry becomes, implicitly, a poetry of yearning. Of melancholy.

> There is that sound like the wind
> Forgetting in the branches that means something
> Nobody can translate.

These opening lines of "Summer" are a good example of the procedure. They read as though they ought to mean; they activate the salivary glands of logical expectancy. We believe that if we work at them long enough, the sense will spring loose. But it never does. Break it down: the *sound* (like that of wind forgetting in the branches) means something (that) nobody can translate. The opacity has been very carefully engineered. First, that the sound means something that nobody can translate implies, logically, that meanings can be translated, carried over. They cannot. Meanings are the entities that translation serves: words are translated so that meaning can pass between languages.

Second, the sound is said to be *like* that of wind *forgetting* in the branches. The transitive verb *forget* has been used as an intransitive. Wind, the fundamentally insubstantial movement of the air, has been personified as a consciousness that can forget, that has something *to* forget. This is, undeniably, poetic: forgetting *is* a losing, a leaving behind. An essential perception about wind has been registered. But the promise of revelation that it carries keeps us moving back and forth among the lines—combing them—longer than is warranted. Shuttling back and forth, avid to *get*, we find ourselves driven like squirrels on a wheel—for the nonsensical premise, neither proposition nor metaphor, insures that we will never come to rest at sense.

Try another:

> The concept is interesting: to see, as though reflected
> In streaming windowpanes, the look of others through
> Their own eyes.
>
> — from "Wet Casements"

Here we have not only the logical disjunction—"to see" is not a "concept"—but also the slippery set-up of a comparison which asks us to imagine a *look* reflected in streaming window panes. This is somewhat easier to parse, for we know that a look is registered on a face and that a face can be reflected. But even with this clarification, a logical problem arises. Intended, of course. A look is something that A may give or—if we think of it as appearance itself: "his new look"—manifest, but that only B can see. These lines are finally asking us to imagine A seeing with his own eyes the expression that those eyes are giving out—the effect is Moebius-like.

If the unattainable ideal of linguistic communication is a 1:1 ration between grammatic structure and semantic content, then Ashbery's approach is to tinker with that ratio until it reaches the point at which communication looks possible but is not. The kind of slippage that I have shown as working within the sentence can also be made to work *between* sentences or lines. That is, each individual unit can be said to make, or approximate, sense, but the discourse (poem) itself, governed by semantic, not grammatic, logic, is elusive. Consider the complete poem "We Hesitate":

> The days to come are watershed.
> You have to improve your portrait of God
> To make it plain. It is on the list,
> You and your bodies are on the line.
>
> The new past now unfurls like a great somber hope
> Above the treeline, like a giant's hand
> Placed tentatively on the hurrying clouds.
> The basins come to be full and complex

But it is not enough. Concern and embarrassment
Grow rank. Once they have come home there is no cursing.
Fires disturb the evening. No one can hear the story.
Or sometimes people just forget

Like a child. It took me months
To get that discipline banned, and what is the use,
To ban that. You remain a sane, yet sophisticated, person:
Rooted in twilight, dreaming, a piece of traffic.

I could go over this a hundred times and it would mean nothing more than it does on a first reading. The suggestion of sequence, of a narrative, quickens the semantic desire; the lines resolutely refuse to deliver. We find out neither how the days to come are a watershed, nor what the portrait of God has to do with anything. The two uses of "it" in the third line divide, rather than consolidate possibility. What "line" the bodies are on is never specified, or even suggested. The whole is a slap—and to my mind a not-too-friendly slap—at the reader. Nor is there any point in invoking the surrealist example. This has nothing to do with surrealism. The latter is based upon the transcription of spontaneously recovered, a-logical unconscious materials; this is a calibrated verbal contraption.

Ashbery has a fat magician's bag of devices and tricks, all of which he uses to mock and undermine determinate meaning. It would be no trouble at all to work up an Ashbery "kit," a how-to manual for would-be epigones. Let me list a few of the components and methods:

1) Use definite articles with nouns, *the* not *a*. This conveys the impression that there is a clear context behind the poem, even if no one but the poet knows what that context is. The reader believes that if the other side exists, it can be reached; he keeps trying.

2) Use vague and inclusive pronouns—*we*, *you*, *it*—mixing or "shifting" them frequently. This technique effectively breaks down identity lines, creates the sense that we're all just parts of some large, unbounded consciousness.

3) Construct an indeterminate time-frame. Make something unspecified just to have happened or be about to happen. Useful words: *later*, *before*, *soon*, *always*, *then*...

4) Import the unexpected, jarring word every so often—a word from another language or discourse. This keeps the reader from ever settling in, reminds him that language-worlds are constantly impinging upon each other. Also: unexpected spurts of playful colloquialism—O gosh!—and obvious cliches.

5) Refer knowingly to some place or event, but make sure never to mention it again. The reader needs to realize that the world is always out there, material and inexplicable, and that things just happen. This works well with #1.

6) Confer concrete properties upon abstract or nonexistent entities: "a picture of treason" or "your portrait of God."

7) Finish poems with elusive, important-sounding statements. They should feel like closure. ("In his book there was a picture of treason only / And in the garden, cries and colors.")

8) Repeat procedures from book to book.

As talk-show hosts are wont to say after doing their best to humiliate an audience member: "But hey, folks, this is all just good fun, right?" Well, only in part. I find that the bulk of Ashbery's poetry is formulaic, and that the dross/beauty ratio is weighted dramatically on the side of the dross. Poems like "We Hesitate" far outnumber the gems upon which the reputation has been founded.

But what about those gems? I have said nothing about the instances —lines, passages, whole poems—where Ashbery makes beauty. They certainly exist. The three lines about the wind that I cited earlier, for instance. Though they finally escape the reader, are they not tonally marvelous, themselves the wind? They weave a spell, enlarge our sense of mystery. And the same kind of thing happens again and again in the poems (though often as an isolated passage in an otherwise incomprehensible setting). We feel a blurring of bounds, a subjective liberation from the constraints of order. Nor, to be sure, can we help but project our own intimations and desires onto certain lines.

Listen to the closing section of "As One Put Drunk Into the Packet Boat" and you'll see what I mean:

> The night sheen takes over. A moon of cistercian pallor
> Has climbed to the center of heaven, installed,
> Finally involved with the business of darkness.
> A sigh heaves from all the small things on earth,
> The books, the papers, the old garters and union-suit buttons
> Kept in a white cardboard box somewhere, and all the lower
> Versions of cities flattened under the equalizing night.
> The summer demands and takes away too much,
> But night, the reserved, the reticent, gives more than it takes.

This, I think, is as good as Ashbery gets. While the lines cannot be corralled into meaning, they do nudge the sensibility toward contemplation. They make a music that feels like significance. We can enjoy the word-sounds, and the tranquil, almost weary rhythm. The "moon of cistercian pallor" delights, as does Ashbery's use of words like "installed" and "business"—the re-contextualizing works to freshen the language. Alas, this passage is more the exception than the rule. More often then not, the reader gets non sequitur, the portentous and obviously contrived proclamation; he experiences over and over the frustrations of narrative *interruptus*.

The cliche among Ashbery exegetes is that the poems reproduce the "logic"—or flow—of dreams, that they bathe us in an effluvium of primary sensation. And truly, when a poem does work, we are sent paddling into a Heraclitan flux, a dark Heideggarian "Being" wherein we can never lodge, but only recognize ourselves as en route *toward*. However playful the work may at times appear, it is implicitly frightening, for—as in Heideggarian philosophy—that *toward* is always *toward death*. The gathering surge of confusion only breaks there, if it breaks at all.

I won't deny that Ashbery's poetry at times has this effect, and that when it does it affects me deeply. Nor will I pretend that there are no uses or pleasures in a poetry that mimics the dispersal of meaning that I feel all too often as an inescapable part of the contemporary condition. But I cannot on this account turn from another, more philosophic concern. Simply: that this is an enterprise that repudiates sense and mocks our faith in the sufficiency of our language structures. It turns against the word in its attempt to uncover the undistilled feelings and sensations that are behind it. In a sense, Ashbery's poetry works backward along the evolutionary spiral, undoing. Granted, this might be necessary. Maybe it's true that, as creatures of meaning, we are at a historical dead-end, unable to see past the regress of our rational constructions. Ashbery is staking himself on a wager. If another way exists, then demolition might be in order, and his work will be seen as a pioneering move in that direction. But if there is not another way, if we have made ourselves the best, the only, tool, then the poetry will prove to have been a dead-end —interesting, at times beguiling, ultimately nihilistic.

—SVEN BIRKERTS

FOUR RESPONSES TO BIRKERTS

1) ELIOT WEINBERGER

Our venerable editor has asked the members of the *Sulfur* masthead to respond: The conjunction, in this same issue, of a large batch of new Ashbery poems and the Birkerts review might seem, to some, schizophrenic. Further responses, it is hoped, will lead us back to plurality.

It's an interesting question: Does a magazine exist purely to promote its contributors, or should it allow an intelligent attack? Elsewhere, such articles are normally rejected. Occasionally they are printed, flagged with an editor's

note inviting reader comment—a smarmy way of playing both sides at once. Even this, less public, invitation, strikes me as timid. By now it should be evident that *Sulfur* is a place where none of its editors, let alone all the contributors, agree on very much. (Even Helen Vendler has been praised, however faintly, in a recent issue). In the present case, Ashbery is not a young poet nor this any early review: the piece may annoy him personally, but it will hardly sink the work. It should be expected, in a magazine called *Sulfur*, that some of the hundred flowers will smell less sweet. Why not let the hundred schools contend?

Nevertheless, what I find remarkable about Birkerts' piece is its willful ignorance of much of the century, including, most obviously, French poetry. He writes as though Apollinaire and Reverdy, Larbaud and Roussel, Breton, Jacob, Soupault and Char had never existed, or that Ashbery had never read them. His dichotomy of surrealism ("the transcription of spontaneously recovered, a-logical unconscious materials") and Ashbery ("a calibrated verbal contraption") is false. Despite various claims for the former, the surrealists were clearly, like all poets, constructing the latter. And Birkerts' isolated praise of Ashbery (the poems "weave a spell, enlarge our sense of mystery. . .we feel a blurring of bounds, a subjective liberation from the constraints of order") has been equally applied to the surrealists. Surely one of the important developments of poetry in this century (and particularly in America since the Second World War) is a true internationalism, unseen since the European late Middle Ages. At its worst, it has produced imitators: the American bad Eastern European poet, the South American bad beatnik poet, the Chinese bad imagist. At its best we are seeing legitimate heirs who are transforming the tradition, while working in another language. To my mind, two of the most interesting French poets happen to write in English: Ashbery and Michael Palmer. That this may strike some as an insult is a result of the continuing mesmerizing effect of Williams' nationalistic jingoism: "American speech." [Everyday American was a language occasionally employed by Williams, only parodically by Pound and Zukofsky, and almost never by H.D., Moore, Stevens, Crane, Oppen, Reznikoff, Olson, et al. Interestingly, it's main practitioners—Fearing, Rakosi, Hughes, Blackburn, Baraka—are considered "minor" poets.]

Furthermore, Birkerts seems strangely oblivious to some recent developments. He should spend an afternoon in the deep shade of *In the American Tree*: Ashbery will seem a fountain of light. After all, an Ashbery poem has an unmistakable (however "impersonal) *voice*—a major verboten in language-land—and an unmistakable atmosphere of oneiric melancholia. I have trouble following Birkerts' exasperation: the passages he quotes seem perfectly comprehensible to me. Perhaps, like many critics, Birkerts is too smart. (Or perhaps, like many readers, I've become stupefied from watching too many flocks of untethered signifiers).

What Birkerts doesn't discuss is the apparent impetus for his piece: Ashbery's extraordinary reputation. That Ashbery has become the most heavily

laureled American poet since Lowell, rather than remaining an idiosyncratic worker with a cult following (like, say, Jack Spicer) is unfathomable. It is one of the two little mysteries of contemporary American poetry. [The other is: on what basis are poems accepted or rejected by *APR*, *Antaeus*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, national prizes, etc.? How do they tell the difference?] Calling out the deconstructionists, as Birkerts does, doesn't help: they have made each other's reputations, not those of any writer, and Ashbery would have existed without them. I have no answer; I doubt Ashbery himself could explain; it's one of those things.

Finally, I find Birkerts' version of the growth of language, both in the individual and in the species, unconvincing. There is no "condition of confused unknowing" before language, for there is no species without a language and there is only one confused species. Language did not "evolve to remove us from" confusion: it put us there. (One of the mutations, poetry, sometimes gets us out.) As for the individual, it seems to me that language is acquired more in delight and play than out of frustration, and further, that the world is only as complex as one's language. One must have a sophisticated language to invent meaninglessness, and I'm surprised that the baby Birkerts yearned for meaning, and felt that "the world overran" his grasp of it. I'll take his word on it, but I suspect that such highchair existentialism is quite rare.

2) CLARK COOLIDGE

I can see no generative value in a review which immediately announces that its author can find "no way of seriously discussing the poems as poems," and so can only report on his "defensive reflexes." But if one does read beyond this point, and I doubt that I would have if I had not been asked by Clayton for my response, it comes as no surprise that the piece is of no use in approaching/investigating Ashbery's work. And I don't think I'm wrong in presuming some inclination to such involvement on the part of Sulfur's readership.

It is hard to seriously consider the comments of someone who has not at least *entered* the work, who in fact seems afraid to do so. Birkerts stands resolutely outside, waving his closed volumes of Saussure and (unnamed) contemporary Deconstructionist texts like storm warnings. His is the conservative position, a refusal to enter into any process that he cannot be previously be sure of, that he finds he cannot explicate with the aid of extant rationally-defensible judgements. But the poetic (and not alone Ashbery's) process resists such surety; it *is* an adventure of flux and transformation. And he should know that such qualities are not to be found only in the poems of recent times.

Poetry is never a matter of agreed-upon points perfectly set out and colored for smooth reception and then defended. There is too much motion and polyvalent meaning in its turnings for certainties of static knowing. If meanings were not "imprecise and unstable, fluid entities," poets would be unable to work at all. Poetry is not just another method of knowing the world.

Ashbery is a poet whose work is better exemplified in the particular arrangements of his successive volumes than in the separate appearances of his poems in magazines or in the whittled-down nature of a Selected Poems. Birkerts shows no evidence of prior experience with these initial volumes. He does not appear to have been there.

The piece is disappointing (if not infuriating), and not just in Ashbery's regard but re the whole poetic pursuit. It reveals a too familiar misapprehension of the poet as one who (also) stands outside his project selecting from a "bag of devices and tricks" preparing the construction of a predetermined structure ("a calibrated verbal contraption"). This is a *basic* error, and one that has long kept many a reader from active involvement with poems. An error that looks to be the product of fear. Fear of "dispersion of my sense of self" (where is it written that a poet must take pains to shore up any reader's identity?). Fear of any "opposition against the hierarchies of reason" (the phrasing echoes Norman Podhoretz's defensive and condescending attacks on Kerouac and Ginsberg in the late Fifties). Fear of "narrative *interruptus*" (poetry again wrongly evaluated by fiction's standards). Fear of any sort of poetic motion, since in Birkerts' goal-oriented nightmare, motion is always "toward," and "that *toward* is always *toward death.*" Not surprisingly, he rejects any mature involvement with the "drifting boundaries characteristic of the pre-linguistic psyche."

Poetry always requires of its readers some daring, lest readers and poets alike be stuck with illustrations of what they know all too well, decorations of the established culture. And a fair amount of poetry's impetus *is* rebellion against whatever current standard.

It is notable that the term "meaning," when used to dam the flow of a poetry, is always found in the singular (the definite article seems to lurk around this use of the term). But any move away from such defended language pockets as Birkerts', immediately shows that meaning is *never* singular in the workings of poetry. There is not only one thing.

And Birkerts' list of the methods Ashbery is supposed to have used "to mock and undermine determinate meaning" is nothing but a cheap shot. How can there be anything intrinsically fraudulent about procedures used (or, perhaps better, materials encountered and dealt with) by poets of all ages, not just our supposedly "Deconstructionist" one? Birkerts' remark on the use of pronouns suggests that what he most requires in a poem is an "I" (or perhaps a "he")

that he can easily seat his skeptical self within and ride unthreatened, no matter what might intrude amidst the poem's "garden of branching paths."

There is an irresponsible follow-game in which Ashbery is made somehow responsible for the scholastic establishment's use of him. Birkerts falls into this trap, shunting aside the material qualities (and viable questions raised by) Ashbery's work. The notion that scholastic enthusiasms set the tone for the *writing* of poems is anyway a distortive one. Instead of tilting at Ashbery as a Deconstructionist "brethren by temperament," he might more usefully have considered the connections with other artists that Ashbery has himself cited as influential. Such names as Auden, Berio, Webern, Robert Wilson, Raymond Roussel, DeKooning, Cowper and Maurice Sceve appear in what is already a various and fascinating list.

And if I seem to be echoing the first European's "proof" of Niagara Falls' existence ("Because I was there and I saw it"), so be it. But 25 years of involvement with Ashbery's poems stands me incredulous before Birkerts' judgement that the work "repudiates sense." Is not its more apparent effect the enrichment of sense, the enlargement of meaningful possibility? Birkerts is simply wrong on this point, tripped up by his desire for a separable and dominant meaning in any poem. Anyone who worries so about the besieged condition of "faith in the sufficiency of our language structures" must have a shallow experience of verbal art. And his fear of "slippage" reminds me of a writing by DeKooning (1960) which *could* be useful in approaching such a poetry as Ashbery's:

> "Y'know the real world, this so-called real world,
> Is just something you put up with, like everybody else.
> I'm in my element when I am a little bit out of this world:
> then I'm in the real world—I'm on the beam.
> Because I'm falling, I'm doing all right;
> when I'm slipping, I say, hey, this is interesting!
> It's when I'm standing upright that bothers me:
> I'm not doing so good; I'm stiff.
> As a matter of fact, I'm really slipping, most of the time,
> into that glimpse. I'm like a slipping glimpser."

Any commentator on Ashbery's work must be fascinated and willing enough to unclench his knowledge and *move* with the words, gather on the fly, otherwise his remarks will be more than wrongheaded, they will not apply.

But by the end Birkerts has even managed to confuse poetry with discourse (to the detriment of poetry, of course). Poets seem to have been screaming this distinction from the beginning of the art, still unheard by those with a main stake in the supremacy of rationalism uber alles. The best claim Birkerts can

make for the value of poetry seems to be that it "freshens the language," which language will them presumably be better able to get on with its "real" business, that of rational inquiry and its conservation.

And it's interesting (if dispiriting) that while somewhere in the midst of the piece he begins to mean "the poetry" to stand for Ashbery's poetry, by the end, when he says "the poetry will prove to have been a dead-end" I begin to hear him as meaning *all* poetry. As if he secretly prays for its soon demise.

3) MICHAEL PALMER

There is a certain futility in trying to respond to an article as diffuse and pointless as Birkerts'. He seems to want his meaning the old-fashioned, tried and true way, of that time when meaning was meaning and we all knew what that meant. This was before the narratives came apart and we actually learned what such meanings meant. Would we like not to have learned? Would we like to forget that we learned? Is there anything that any of us have learned?

Mr. Birkerts misses the "cinching tug of understanding," his "sense of self" has become dispersed, and this has put him in something of a snit. The "pleasures of poetry" (serious pleasures, of course) would appear to be missing, the Arnoldean consensus has been withdrawn, and the Citadel of Reason is under attack. The easy chair in the study has caught fire and worse, this has occurred during Mr. Birkerts' nap. Mr. Birkerts has a vague sense—very vague—that the League of Hashisheem Deconstructionists is guilty of arson at the instigation of that aged mullah, the notorious F. de Saussure, *professeur-assassin*. Ashbery, while not of their number, has followed in their wake, approvingly examining the ruins and creating amid them a poetry of spurious sensation. A seeming that is not meaning. An unmeaning which threatens to cause Mr. Birkerts to regress all the way back to the confusions of childhood, before Mr. Birkerts' structures of comprehension were fully in place. The dread matrix:

ratara ratara ratara
atara tatara rana
otara otara katara
otara ratara kana

The poem does not parse. It does not deliver its story. It is not behaving like a responsible member of the linguistic community. It "mocks our faith in the

sufficiency of our language structures." "Faith," my dictionary offers, "unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence." So the faith, above all, must be kept, since it rests on nothing. Yet we are told, by one who is keeping the faith, that it is Ashbery's work that rests on nothing, that it is "nihilistic." This last is the all-too-familiar whine of the bourgeois subject, threatened with the loss of its delights, its constituted meanings and its empty identity.

4) JED RASULA

"Deconstruction" has become the current intellectual shorthand for whatever seems destabilizing, threatening, or insoluble in textual rhetoric in virtually any genre. It's because Sven Birkerts so glibly runs through a version (undernourished, to say the least) of deconstruction that it's worth responding to his critique of Ashbery; by linking Ashbery conceptually to deconstruction, Birkerts pretends to a more compelling case than his actual reading of Ashbery's poetry can sustain (his "reading" is most eloquently put in his opening paragraph, where he admits the frustration of being reduced to the "boredom and rage of childhood"—a point from which his childish analysis of texts is unable to recuperate). I take Birkerts' argument to be typical of a particular species of complaint leveled not only at Ashbery, but also at Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky or, for that matter, T.S. Eliot. I have to think back to the characterizations of "The Waste Land" as a mockery—to use Birkerts' term—in order to contextualize Birkerts in a long line of Anglo-American petitioners for sanity, progress, clarity, stability and reliability in verse. For that matter, why not five-year warrantees or a mileage guarantee! What does the man want from poetry?—serviceability? Efficiency? To speak of Ashbery's poetry as "an enterprise that repudiates sense and mocks our faith in the sufficiency of our language structures," "a fat magician's bag of devices and tricks. . .to mock and undermine determinate meaning,"—this is testimony perhaps to Ashbery's power to bewitch a reader, not by vacating meaning and mocking anybody but by mobilizing a superabundance of sense, both common (Birkerts' 4th category: cliches and colloquialisms) and uncommon (shifting pronouns, indeterminate time-frames, and concretized or personified abstract categories: Birkerts' 2nd, 3rd and 6th "components"). To choose to speak of these devices as a mockery, however, is irresponsible and insulting: the Ku Klux Klan favors strategies of mockery, and in a different way, so does the Ayatollah Khomeini. If there is a mockery in Ashbery, it is there only insofar as it is embodied in B-movie dialogue, advertising pitches, and technocratic jargon

which forms part of the verbal fabric of his language and which Ashbery himself can hardly be reproached for creating; if anything, his work might be read as a deconstruction—there's that word again—of these and other unreflective "jargons of authenticity" that are the real pulverizing activities of American culture.

It's at this point that Birkerts has to be taken as indicative of the need to try to blame something on deconstruction—a discernible need that crops up repeatedly in various journals and discussions. Deconstruction has been called a "serene linguistic nihilism" (Geoffrey Thurley, who claims in the same sentence that this *also* characterizes the aesthetics of the Black Mountain school [*Counter-Modernism in Current Critical Theory*, p. 185]), an "elaborate intellectual audacity" (Edward Said) and—more to the point—"the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text." (Barbara Johnson). Instant characterizations can be irresponsibly uninformed or momentarily arresting, but either way the actual activity of "deconstruction" eludes easy characterization. And I would argue that this is precisely why it has generated turmoil and confusion—for in the positivist atmosphere of academic *and* popular press discussions of such issues in the U.S., anything that can't be pegged in a phrase or two (billboard length) is immediately subjected to a kind of semantic open-season. This is the genuine nihilism: not that deconstruction actually maintains that "everything is meaningful, nothing is meant" (Dan Sperber), but critics of deconstruction claim that this is the case *in order to be able to say anything* about deconstruction itself.

The first and most significant point to be made about "deconstruction" is that it is a specific strategy articulated within the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida; as Jonathan Culler says, it is "a strategy within philosophy and a strategy for dealing with philosophy," aspiring to be "both rigorous argument within philosophy and displacement of philosophical categories or philosophical attempts at mastery." (*On Deconstruction*, p. 85). Properly, deconstruction should refer strictly to Derrida's own methods of reading texts. It's too late for that now: critics at Yale and increasingly around the country have appropriated the rhetoric of deconstruction in order to liberate literary criticism from its "service function" of subservience to so-called literary works, creative writing. And what is this rhetorical move? I quote Geoffrey Hartman: ". . .to suggest that meaning and language do not coincide, and to draw from that noncoincidence a peculiar strength, is merely to restate what literature has always revealed." (*Deconstruction and Criticism*, p. viii). Birkerts' account of deconstruction is predicated on the first half of Hartman's formulation, without benefit of the extremely relevant reminder that whatever we call literature has always worked within—and has been enabled by—this recognition.

"Derrida wants us to see—if not to understand—that so long as we believe that language is mainly a representation of something else, we cannot

see what language does. . ." (Edward Said, *The World, The Text, and the Critic*, p. 201). Bluntly: deconstruction is *seeing what language does*. At this level, certainly, Ashbery can be linked with deconstruction, for his work is an exploration in seeing what language does. Birkerts wants language only to stand still and mean something. This is what a stop sign does (but not even the language on the sign stays still: to a hypothetical speaker of English completely ignorant of the traffic system, for instance, what could "STOP" possibly mean? Stop what? Who? Why?). Birkerts says Ashbery's poetry seems "to mean while *not meaning*," by "staying short of meaning" it is "at war with grammatic logic and referential meaning," and that it therefore "belongs with that groundswell opposition against the hierarchies of reason and determinate meaning known as Deconstruction." *Meaning* is Birkerts' favorite term and guiding concept. For him, words mean what they mean and to toy with meaning is to mock. But meaning (versus meaningless) is not the issue in either deconstruction or Ashbery. Birkerts does manage to see that "sensation, not meaning, is what the poetry is all about." I would suggest a reformulation: the *sensation of meaning* is what the poetry is "about." Again, to reproach Ashbery for not electing to write a spare, object-laden, plain-speech American pragmatist poetry on the order of Gary Snyder is like complaining that a horse lacks antlers.

Culler asks a very pertinent question in *On Deconstruction* which is to the point of Ashbery's work—particularly his "insistent refusal of meaning" as Birkerts has it: "what is at stake in the claim that meaning is whatever is present in the reader's experience or in the notion that the end of reading is to make the reading self present to itself?" (p. 82) I would suggest that Ashbery's work—more than any other now being written in English—continually folds the force of this question into its motivation. His work has come into a certain vogue in academia, I suspect, because it forces its reader to confront the same issues deconstruction does. But as I said earlier, "deconstruction" is now a loose shorthand. We need to separate Birkerts' Ashbery from Birkerts' lip-serviced Deconstruction—not because Birkerts links them, but because his link is not uncommon. The Marxist critic Terry Eagleton cautions us on the unreflecting American absorption of continental theory, suggesting that here "deconstruction rejoins traditional liberal humanism, whose serene indulgence of its own befuddlement was always an unmistakable sign of the privilege of those who can afford not to know." (*The Function of Criticism*, p. 103). Birkerts' review is simply the latest instance of indulgent befuddlement—but in his case, without serenity.

DÉYÉ MÒN, GIN MÒN

(Behind the mountains, there are more mountains.)
— Créole proverb

After the recent uprisings in Haiti, *The New York Times* ran a front page article headlined, "Voodoo Under Attack in Post-Duvalier Haiti" (May 15, 1986). Characterizing the recent popular revolt as a "religious war," *The Times* linked cult objects and "superstitions" to the old Duvalier regime. Baptist radio broadcasts calling Voodoo a national curse were tied to the mob-killings of some 24 people in the towns of Pegnon and St. Raphael. The article quoted the Baptist Reverend Delouis Louis as saying, "The sorcerers make money by making people sick. . . .The time of voodoo is over."

It's this sort of perspective that Wade Davis identifies in "The Serpent and The Rainbow" (Simon & Schuster, 1985) as typical of Hollywood's early take on zombis. The underlying message to the North American audience, Davis writes, is that "any country where such abominations took place could find its salvation only through military occupation." So, you might expect Davis' book—widely hailed as one of last year's best volumes of popular anthropology—to shed some light on Voodoo's present situation. It doesn't. By researching the scientific basis for zombis, Davis pretends to reveal the secrets of Haiti's national religion. But by studiously avoiding analysis of what might be called Voodoo economics, he, instead, merely updates the zombi pot-boiler. In the end, what's interesting about "The Serpent and The Rainbow" is how it, like our "newspaper of record," arranges the facts about Haiti in order to give us yet another version of "Raiders of the Lost Ark."

Voodoo has had a political role since Haiti's earliest colonial history. Discovered by Columbus in 1492, in the 1520s the French colony started importing Africans. By 1791, Haiti's population was made up of 40,000 whites, 28,000 mulatto, and 450,000 slaves. These blacks were taken from West Africa where, Davis points out, the Efik tribe had a secret society that was very similar to Voodoo. But the various deities, ceremonies, and the social hierarchy of Voodoo came from a mixing of West African, Catholic, and New World beliefs. Voodoo became as much a lingua franca among slaves as Créole.

By 1789, the island's exports outstripped all 13 colonies of North America combined. In order to maintain this volume of (mostly) sugar production, it is estimated that the equivalent of Haiti's entire population of blacks had to be replaced every 20 years. Thousands died from over-work and disease, and many escaped into the hills. In 1788, out of some 10,000 slaves loaded at the port of Cap Francis, more than 2,000 got away.

It was among these escapees, or Maroons, that Haiti's first revolution began, reportedly with a huge Voodoo ceremony. Led by Toussaint L'Overture, the Maroons joined the slaves to fight off the cream of Napoleon's army and, in 1804, declared the island the first independent black republic.

But Haiti continued to be divided along religious, economic, and racial lines. At the time of the revolution, the more middle-class and urban mulatto population controlled a third of the plantations. Catholicism allied this group with the white middle-class in the main city of Port-au-Prince. Although now more native, a ruling minority continued to absorb most of the country's wealth.

A nation of slaves became a nation of starving farmers. With the promised redistribution of land, coffee replaced sugar as the national crop, because it could be grown in the smaller, hillier plots being carved out of the jungle. But the denuding of the landscape led to less rainfall and more erosion, in a cycle that left the island with 70% of its population engaged in subsistence agriculture. It is among these rural poor that Voodoo has survived.

With the advent of World War I, Haiti—its own land largely useless—began its role as supplier of cheap labor to countries like Cuba and Dominique. Among other repercussions, this exodus "solved" some of Haiti's tremendous economic, social and political problems by exporting them. Then, in July 1915, citing Haiti's instability and strategic importance, the U.S. Marines landed. They would occupy the country until August, 1934.

According to the Latin American Bureau's study of 1985, "Haiti: Family Business," one of the results of the occupation was that the predominantly Southern and white Marine commanders tended to put lighter skinned mulattoes into positions of power. The reaction of the black elite was to form the "Noiriste" movement which emphasized Haiti's African links and reaffirmed Voodoo. It was from this movement, led by intellectuals from Port-au-Prince and supported by the rural poor, that François "Papa Doc" Duvalier gained power.

Duvalier ran as an anti-U.S. candidate for President. Many of his campaign headquarters in the 1957 election were in Voodoo temples, and his victory was a triumph for the uneducated and the poor. Once in office, Duvalier strengthened his ties to Voodoo not only by elevating its priests (bocors or houngans) to power, but by deliberately dressing like the Voodoo saint Baron Samedi in black rimmed glasses, a dark suit and narrow ties. In order to counter the destabilizing force of the army, Duvalier established his own private army of 9,000—the Ton Ton Macoutes—who were often recruited from the unofficial Voodoo enforcement network called the Bizango.

So, in a sense, Duvalier's reign was a culmination of a process: absorbing Voodoo into Haiti's political and economic battles and aligning it with nationalism, anti-Americanism, anti-Communism, and, in the form of the Ton Ton Macoutes, terror. Estimates of the number killed under François Duvalier run to 50,000.

"The Serpent and The Rainbow" never investigates this side of Duvalierism or the economics of Voodoo. Its historical analysis ends abruptly just as Papa Doc gains power. The book's melodramatic plot begins with Davis being called by a mysterious sponsor to investigate the reappearance of Clairvius Narcisse—a Haitian who had been pronounced dead and buried 20 years earlier. Davis' job is to discover the chemical formula that explains this zombi

phenomenon. To reassure us, our guide identifies his perspective early on. "Of course, no scientist would believe," he writes, "that there is a direct causal relationship between the death of the victim and, for example, the physical act of pointing bone."

Having established his background as an ethnobotanist at Harvard, Davis begins his investigation with the requisite "faint premonition of horror," and a love for the "exotic." He shows little concern for the motives of the group of aging backers who are financing his trip. Maybe they want the scientific benefits of the zombi "anaesthesia," or maybe it's to "make somebody a lot of money." Either way, these self-defined "old friends" of Papa Doc pay all expenses, and Davis' interest in causal relationships seems to disappear. With Broadway producer David Merrick as one of the primary financial backers, you can almost hear the book's formula falling into place as Davis calculates the eventual media tie-ins.

The pursuit of the zombi drug leads Davis to Herard Simon who is the central anthropological source in "The Serpent and The Rainbow." Davis describes Simon as a "deeply religious man, a theologian really. . .beneath (his corpulence) there was something at once terribly wise and terribly savage, like the soul of a man who was forced to kill. . . ." Simon turn out to be not only a powerful houngan and devout supporter of Duvalier, but head of the Ton Ton Macoutes for one-fifth of the country. That fact might have called Simon's information into question and, at the same time, helped explain the killing he was "forced" to do, but Davis passes over it. He expresses only the slightest doubt when Simon reveals his Duvalierist view of foreign affairs: "The Jews sent you because they won't do the work. And who will make the money?" "The Serpent and The Rainbow" never wavers from its characterization of the Duvalier revolution as "often misrepresented in the Western press" and "remembered only for its later brutal excesses."

Although he never specifies, perhaps Davis means the excesses that have made Haiti one of the 25 poorest countries in the world. The annual per capita income is $315 (all figures in U.S. dollars) and in the back country, where Voodoo is strongest, it's $50 a person. 78% of the rural population lives at or below the absolute poverty level. In 1982, 80% of the population was illiterate. As Davis walked what he calls "the dirty, lively, gaudy boulevards" of Port-au-Prince, the infant mortality rate was 130 per 1000 (ten times the U.S. figure). What medical attention there had been under the Duvalier regime (which spent less than $4 a person) went to Port-au-Prince, leaving almost all rural medicine to the bocors.

It's impossible to separate Voodoo from this extreme poverty in which it operates. Yet, when Davis is told that Narcisse was made a zombi in part for appropriating family land, he doesn't mention that over 70% of Haiti has been rendered unsuitable for farming or that the State multiplies this economic pressure by being the single largest single landowner.

The Haiti Davis researched is little more than a U.S. colony. The government offers North American corporations a ten year "tax holiday" for setting

up plants in Port-au-Prince, where the minimum wage is $3 a day. Meanwhile, some 3,000 families have been earning over $90,000 a year, and the Duvalier regime—for all its use of anti-American rhetoric—has been a study in how to keep this economic stranglehold intact. In 1971, when Duvalier died, his son Jean-Claude assumed the Presidency-For-Life in a ceremony similar to the houngan's passing on of Voodoo authority. The Haitian government continued to swing with the policy shifts in Washington. Three weeks after Reagan's election, Baby Doc authorized more than 100 arrests of journalists and independent politicians. At the same time, he appropriated some $20 million from national funds for his personal use.

At one point, Davis admits that his investigation is "in effect asking who actually ruled rural Haiti." The obvious answer is Herard Simon and his ilk. Described in *The Times'* article as "one of the most powerful men of Haiti's central plateau," it seems more than coincidental that Simon is both a source for the paper's description of religious wars and Davis' anthropology. To *The Times*, Simon doesn't mention his loyalty to Duvalier as a "saviour," the use of Voodoo temples as Ton Ton Macoutes headquarters, or the source of his own wealth. Instead, he defends himself by arguing, "They say we are devils, that we collaborated with Duvalier. Catholic bishops always say the Te Deum for Duvalier. Are they killed, are their churches attacked?"

Because "The Serpent and The Rainbow"'s historical discussion stops with Papa Doc, it's no help in evaluating this Duvalierist strategy of defending yourself by muddying the religious, economic and political. Nor does it help in understanding Voodoo's present position under the U.S.-backed military government. As the religion of the majority of Haitians, Voodoo continues to be one of the only functioning social networks in present-day Haiti. But through Duvalier's melding of the Bizango with the Ton Ton Macoutes, it's been tarred with the old repression. Thus, in recent uprisings, the Catholic church has been able to usurp the role of the liberating theology. Although Voodoo maintains its strength among the rural farmers, the U.S. demand for cheap labor is urbanizing the population. This further isolates Voodoo and provides opportunities for Christian proselytizing among the newly created factory workers.

It's the impact of poverty and governmental greed that's missing from "The Serpent and The Rainbow," and without it, Voodoo remains a mysterious religion with no relationship to the hardship around it. This mystery perfectly suits Davis' needs. Even as he uncovers some of Voodoo's secrets, his role as great white truth-hunter demands that the Haitian religion maintain its allure of dark impenetrability. While Davis was supposedly uncovering the causes of the "living dead," Haiti was trying to rise from the throes of a kind of national zombiism: a trance-like state brought on by almost unbelievable corruption, hunger and disease. Davis' obfuscation of these facts is matched by those of his pro-Duvalier, anthropological sources. In both cases, they play into the hands of U.S. foreign policy whose "voodoo economics" exert no more mysterious a hold over the Haitian people than that of slavery.

Note

One of "The Serpent and The Rainbow"'s accomplishments is an extensive, if not very well organized, bibliography. For those interested in learning more about Voodoo, there are a few invaluable books in print.

Zora Neale Hurston's "Tell My Horse" (Turtle Island) was first published in 1938 but holds up well as a not very scientific but highly humanistic look at Haitian religion. What Hurston lacks in hard data, she makes up for with a fine ear and eye and the unique perspective of a black American with a working knowledge of Voodoo's active role in the American deep South.

Maya Deren's "Divine Horsemen" (Documentext) is a 1953 report on her film-making trip to Haiti. With an introduction by Joseph Campbell, the book is a serious piece of amateur anthropology marked by a deep involvement with the Haitian people and culminating in what amounts to the author's conversion. Deren's Voodoo documentary, also called "Divine Horsemen," is available for rent and is well worth catching.

Robert Ferris Thompson's "Flash of the Spirit" (Random House) shows the links between West African, Haitian and North American religious beliefs. But for a general introduction, Alfred Métraux's "Voodoo in Haiti" (Schocken) remains the most reliable and interesting, even 25 years since its first printing. Métraux doesn't pretend to be all-inclusive (a fault of Milo Rigaud's "Secrets of Voodoo" recently reissued by City Lights) but combines anecdote with an overview of both the history and uses of the Haitian religion. His analysis of the interaction between Voodoo and Christianity helps illuminate the conflict going on in Haiti today.

—DANIEL WOLFF

NORTHERN SUMMER: NEW & SELECTED POEMS 1963-1983/JOHN MATTHIAS

These incorporations of Rolls books and Ascham, primary documents, are pretty—especially with little two-liners framed by space, indented—but not wonderfully resayable like something from the *Golden Treasury*. So I conclude, in spite of the very many violences and intensities, that these are lovely by exclusion, that the art here is tact. Perhaps it's a feeling I get that the author, who "makes no attempt to explain fundamentals," is too proud of plums on his thumb. He votes for brightness falling from the *hair* (I don't), taking part in that old controversy, and maybe it's too many of these public cruxes getting in, the matter of schoolrooms, that has me wanting to question the authenticity or (ultimate) freshness of his relation to research. His

braver verse shapes, learned from Pound, Olson, I think Zukofsky, originally held quirky finds and one-man fads, and I come to miss their aboriginal oddity here. But a pleasure ("East Anglian Poem") to see the effects again, these timed remarks, these throwaways producing somehow, unexpectedly, a Yeatsian sweetness as if a sensibility bled into by Gilbert White's. It *sounds*, that's to say, like politics and flow grasped but the field's a window and contemplation enough. There's nothing we can do now. "Epilogue for a New Home" is a good poem because these work in it honestly to produce it. Where it doesn't work is (for example) the late poem on Karl Wallenda, which imagines the provider of spectacle as acquiring an inner life as he falls.

Is "You measure John" a good poem, wife Diana measuring Augustus Johns in the Fitzwilliam, loathing them?

> It is an old story:
> some man damages the lives of women
> who would love him.
> There are various excuses.
> One is art.

Here you have his direct address, intimate, Chandleresque. One wants to *forgive* it. So, of course, I thinks it's a trick. He'll address dead people too, and ask them questions (as he does Wallenda), like involving aunt in the conversation. And this international style:

> 1667. And on Landguard beach, 1000 Dutch.
> That was the last invasion.
> Afterwards, 1753-66,
> Governor Thicknesse, thank you, defending, sir.
> (And plenty of out-of-work sailors)

behind which are Pound gists and Olson one-liners (and no discussion). The flint-knapper poem pleases, as Woolf's slighter sketches of minor figures do; this is a relaxed kind of reading. The Berryman poem ("For John, After His Visit") stays with me as more, and a vindication of this method, heaped detail, when the details are known to Matthias. Religion makes a bridge ("26 June 1381/1977") and see the end of that one's commas, almost, working. So many trips to England gave him the student Marxist line early (not to adopt, but as common coin) and it vibrating against his midwest sensitivities was pure gain. His best about writing poems is "Poem for Cynouai," too sensitive at one point to the mass of good poems written to daughters, but its larded layers (of an earlier poem) and lines requoted are a textbook of encysted context.

The tough-guyisms of "To V.V." move from the gentler translations (Paz, Vallejo) to the problems of orally-preserved Serbian epic. "The Kossovo Maiden," this books's big pitch in that middlebreaking line I'm afraid pretends

that I care automatically about yet one more tribe's preoccupations and fetishes. All these which aren't cooked to a jumble of privacies urge me to pretend the culture's commonplaces are mine too, so the poet can write (*write*) the glowing golden ring, the blood of heroes, the pool of blood, the gates, a helmet made/Of wound white silk/with feathers joined, and the tell-tale article aside I'll not elevate these to icons.

His journal poems (*Batory & Lermontov*) are a natural extension of the earlier notation. The analogue to experience as rendered in the New Poems here is Stevenson, *Travels with a Donkey*, sentimental rock thrown through space (as in his poem on the Napoleon film). "Northern Summer" also reads a bit like Peacock in Wales, liking the oddities of language but (again) keeping access to his prejudices too:

> And I stare quizzically at what I've written here,
> at language that has used me one more time
> for consequential or inconsequential ends that
> are not mine.

Monosyllabics begin and end lines in four or five beats to cant the fives a bit, make them less expected. At least (part IX) he tells you when he's told lies.

> So Bothwell's route is mine. I'll stuff my mouth
> with herring, think of Anna Throndsen,
> and not return to Fife either with Maid of Norway
> or the Duke of Orkney's head.

The temptation is to cap it with a *New Yorker* tag but this is error. Matthias is a David Jones scholar, from the able *Introducing* Faber selection to (I'm told) a forthcoming *David Jones: Man and Poet* for National Poetry Foundation. *Anathemata* and Hill's *Mercian Hymns* (see the Matthias quote on the back of *Tenebrae*) define his interest as history as atmosphere. This can be a touting of Sutton Hoo, book jacket picturesque, but has a place in verse which Matthias ably and amply fills. His ley-line poems in *Another Chicago Magazine 15* interest me very much, and while this book is tipped *toward* that sort of thing I think the next collection will be it.

—GERALD BURNS

WORKS ON PAPER/ESSAYS BY ELIOT WEINBERGER
New Directions, 1986, $9.95

It is a chimaera of a book, its foreparts an unlikely Asiatic hybrid of dream, memory, tiger, crocodile and nightmare; while its hindquarters cast together two specifically human efforts, poetry and war. Eliot Weinberger has scattered disturbing, toughminded essays through various magazines for a decade. Now, with twenty of them laid end to end in a decisive progression, his writing displays a sure coherence. His, as he recounts, is a life

> . . .sustained, in this enameled garden of meaningless language, by poetry; by the belief, perhaps a wild belief, that there is a general sanity in the work, a sanity that rises above the notorious small madnesses of the workers themselves.

The book's foreparts, called "Inventions of Asia," pry into a range of documents—historical, photographic, and poetic—gathered from both East and West, to discern not Asia as she in some way *is*, but what Asia has meant and in what guises she continues to dress herself for the western observer. Ever since silk made its first appearance in the markets of Rome, the Asian continent has exerted a disturbing hold over the west. It is a disturbance that reaches profoundly into our psyche, and Weinberger uncovers in the course of his essays that strange brew of characteristics, seductive and terrifying, comforting and cruel, which have stirred all sorts of contradictory beliefs about Asia. Not truth, which seems generally weirder than fiction, but "invention" which blends the two. Weinberger begins wryly with "A Dream of India," a pastiche of accounts dealing with the South Asian subcontinent drawn from travellers and writers around the year 1492, the year Columbus went west looking for the East.

> In India it is the custom for foreign travellers to stay at inns. There the food is cooked for the guest by the landlady, who also makes the bed and sleeps with the stranger. They kill their parents when they are old and use the flesh for food.
>
> And I saw, deep in the interior, Venetian ducats in circulation, and gold coins twice the size of our florins.

Anyone who's travelled by foot, bus, or train across some stretch of that continent knows how unmistakably erotic its pull. Promises of exalted wisdom, artistic wealth, wild sexual and gastronomic pleasures. . .tempered, or, maybe, augmented, by the nagging threat of infection, infection somehow perceived as beyond the cure of medicine.

Works on Paper prods these fever'd dreams with Borgesian irony. It is an irony not derived from Weinberger's personal style however, which in these particular essays remains comparatively self-effacing, but one that emerges from the records themselves. There are the tangled influences of old rice-paper and banana-leaf poetry, clues to modern states of affair in the West, and without which our own 20th century poetry would be inconceivable. But he gives equal accord to other "works on paper," photodocumentary and newspaper accounts—incomplete, misleading, at times incomprehensible. These as likely lead into cold hell's thicket as the other document lead into delicate reverie. For those who, like Weinberger, study, travel, or just plain pay attention to Asia, encounters with contemporary events can quickly transport language to the point where its terms falter, or bludgeon like a club. At those extremes "works on paper" may refer to the inalterable documents of bureaucracy, a place where words exhibit a sinister and irrationally precise fit to some invented world of law; or to that "enameled garden" the daily news is; and finally, to that vanishing point where words become mere body-count, stacking up like so many meaningless integers, blunted into unaccountability by the acts of men.

In "Kampuchea" Weinberger tries to comprehend the Khmer Rouge reorganization of Cambodia, a period of scarcely documented history to which only statistics seem fitted:

–Of 50,000 monks, 900 survived;
–Of 300 journalists, 5 survived;
–Of 416 art students, 14 survived;
–Of 41 librarians, 6 survived;
–Of 24,336 teachers and professors, 3,050 survived.

Maybe this passage's cruelest irony, lingering like the hollow feeling a bad dream leaves after its images have deserted memory, is how much, on the page, words themselves resemble—*poetry*. The rhythmic language an almost hypnotic litany, anaphora and insistently repetitive end-rhymes submerging the facts. Only context tells us this is not poetry.

And it si context that provides *Works on Paper* with its testing-ground for poetry. Not only the "notorious small madnesses" of the poets themselves, but the dishearteningly large madnesses that disturb our planet. There is a good case for the current suspicion that no poetry, however deftly composed, can possibly sanitize these aberrations. This fear, that words may no longer possess the power to rectify *things*, seems to drive Weinberger's essays, despite his declared wild belief to the contrary. It lends his critiques of poetry an at times unrelenting acerbity.

"Extensions of Poetry," the book's second half, tries to measure the poetry of our present century by its adequacy or inadequacy of response to the imperatives of war, bigotry, and potential nuclear cataclysm. "Peace on Earth" begins as a brooding meditation on John Taggart's poem of that title. But in order to sound out the efficacy of the poem, which purports to cleanse the wounds of America's Indo-China war, the essay has to detour along a swiftly informative history of the relationship between poetry and war in this century. The essay makes one thing clear: nobody else writing criticism today brings historical research so convincingly to poetry as Weinberger. Certainly, very few give it the effort. This, his historical sense, is what makes him one of the handful whose criticism is consistently worth reading. It takes evident effort, but the man manages to *live* in history–strange dwelling place, about as unfamiliar to an American as a yurt or igloo. It means though, you find more tough information and hard good sense on a page of Weinberger's prose than just about anywhere else these days. Even when you disagree with him. The man's willing to go to the library, the newspaper, or the modernist poem –and read them all with the same eye.

The book closes with it most inflammatory essay, "The Modernists in the Basement and the Stars Above." This piece originally appeared in *Sulfur*, winter of 1984, examining and adding to the fallout from E. Fuller Torrey's book *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secrets of St. Elizabeths*. It set off an immediate squall of response and counter-response. Like many of the essays reprinted in his book, Weinberger's extensively reworked it. After the spate of letters, it did require some rethinking, not so much in its central theme, as in several tangential considerations. But in rewriting the essay Weinberger all but dropped Torrey's book from his account, an account which scouted the battle lines of bigotry and fascism in modernist poetry. He'd referred to *The Roots of Treason* as "that wasp's nest lobbed onto the assembly-line of the Pound industry." The phrase is vintage Weinberger–probably an acquired taste–and swipes in a lot of directions at once, as did the whole essay. I'm not lamenting the loss of a single phrase, etched in acid as it may be, nor some half dozen others I'd like equally well to quote. What I mean is, aside from the essay seeming a bit deflated without Torrey, it was his goddamn book that arrived as a big *event*–in history–for those few of us who still give a goddamn about poetry–and any future examination we take to the modernist underbelly of bigotry and warmongering, has *got* to acknowledge Torrey's book as an occasion. Even if it *is* just a deplorably written book by a pop psychoanalyst. Not to admit this–loud & direct–that this guy with no sense of poetry himself set off a lot of self-scrutiny among those who take poetry for their work, is to discount just that historical sense which I for one see as imperative; and to which Weinberger as much as any other contemporary writer keeps us attuned.

But maybe this also unearths an important question about the writing of prose. Do I detect a basic insecurity about the so-called *book review* as a valid piece of writing? As if one's prose had somehow greater steel when not built over some other man or woman's book? The volume of Poe's collected criticism issued a couple of years ago should at least reprieve us from *that* fear—essays well worth the read, some of our best in fact, though the specific books that occasioned them have been long since pulped.

Insecurity about what a prose writer is doing haunts the written document in America from the beginning. Maybe it's our best legacy, tormenting as it may be to the practitioners. I began by calling Weinberger's book a chimaera. And it is—just as the best prose written by Americans always has been. *The Maine Woods, Moby Dick,* the papers of Jaime de Angulo (which still need a competent editor to gather them together into that cohesive, forceful epic they are). I don't mean Weinberger's achieved anything of that stature yet. But he ain't a hack reviewer. When he works on paper it's worth reading.

—ANDREW SCHELLING

GABRIELA MISTRAL

"What the soul does for the body, so does the poet for her people"
(Epitaph on Gabriela Mistral's tomb)

"Modernism" in Latin American literature (exemplified by Ruben Dario: an *Apollonian* poetry of swan songs and metrical pyrotechnics) fizzles out with the decadent, European aristocracy on which it depended. Mistral, dusty, provincial, wearing size-ten shoes, walks in and over the fin de siecle lounge lizards. And she also scorns "the new woman who dances and agitates in plazas and salons and scarcely knows the child she has carried, nailed in her womb." Rather, like HD, her verse and thought are tributaries of the distant past: "we become what we were / the circle of grace / the return of the pilgrim / the legend begun again / like a river or road. . . ." She searches out and walks with the women of Greece, the prophets of Israel, the gods and goddesses of Quechua, Aztec, Mayan legend. Progress is a return to origins, the well-spring of myth. This self-taught woman who came out of Chile's impoverished rural middle-class was free to choose her own masters: Emerson, Tagore, Montaigne, the Russian novelists are among her earliest ones. But no

text influences her as strongly as the extremes of her natal landscape of the isolated Valle de Elqui in Chile's semi-arid north: "I have what was lost / and I carry my infancy / like a favorite flower / that perfumes my hand."

From the start, critics complained that her work was unschooled, unrestrained, unfeminine. "I write for the women of America," she replied. "Perhaps without preparations but with much love." Rejection taught her a style and a tone of solitude intact. *Saudade*, she called it, from Portuguese: *aloneness*. It is a raw longing, not soft-edged nostalgia, as in this lullaby: "I who have lost all / Now tremble with sleep. / Don't slip from my arms / Sleep close to me!" The scarce sentimentalism she allowed in her early volumes, *Desolacion* (1922) and *Ternura* (1924), is burned to stubble in what she termed the "hallucinated material" of her later poetry, in *Tala* (1938: "Felling Trees") and *Lagar* (1954): "Wine Press").

Rejection also gave her an identity, for poetic identity is always other. With unyielding fanaticism she seeks out the motherbond. It is in the shimmering light of the immediate present, as in her series of poem/prose-medallions, "Elegies to the Things of the Land": crystal, salt, water, ash, stone, fire. The remote past becomes murderously alive, as when the poet speaks as "Electra in the Fog": "She was my mother and I was her milk / her milk became blood, no more. . . / the night is riddled with her / open with her, alive with her." Her female body haunts and shames her. Always passionate, her language bears the graphic intensity of the Spanish-Jewish mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. She rolls from adoration to repulsion, concealing no wounds. Open, violated: in a culture for which *recato* (modesty, reserve) is the primary feminine virtue, she is indiscreet.

Contemporary feminists have been rediscovering the generation of revolutionary women poets to which Mistral belonged. They have preferred the more cultivated dramas of romantic love, and the verses of Alfonsina Storni (Argentina) and Juana de Ibarbourou (Uruguay). Perhaps Mistral's untutored vehemence and her indifference to women's political "solidarity" embarrasses them. Latin Americanists for whom politics, film, "new narrative" are all the rage, have similarly passed over the work of this strange poet who defies categorization. Like Dickinson, standard criticism has been unable to cope with the sheer nerve and ambitions of this woman's verse: she plays the limits, undoing the sanctions.

—ELIZABETH HORAN

A REVIEW OF SHERMAN PAUL'S *IN SEARCH OF THE PRIMITIVE: REREADING DAVID ANTIN, JEROME ROTHENBERG, AND GARY SNYDER* (Louisiana State University Press, 1986) AND *IN LOVE WITH THE GRATUITOUS: REREADING ARMAND SCHWERNER* (North Dakota Quarterly, 1986)

Perhaps there's no such thing as an old Emersonian. Though Sherman Paul has been around for a long time (he earned the respect of fellow scholars for his writing on American authors of established reputation—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edmund Wilson, and Hart Crane among them), his recent work is especially welcome because it attends a poetry too often neglected by academic critics. It provides the dedicated reader with both map and travelogue, not misreading but rereading: it is a sequel to a sequel, one man's road back, through writing, to the primary force of speech and, ultimately, on to the Great Goddess by way of the poets (shamans and tricksters all) who actively seek her out. If the territory is unfamiliar, the reader would do well to take warning from Professor Paul's 1981 "Preface" to *The Lost America of Love: Rereading Robert Creeley, Edward Dorn, and Robert Duncan* (part of which is reprinted in the introduction to the rereading of Schwerner), and come prepared: "A final word. Every critical book, and especially one of this kind, should be prefaced: to be read in the company of—as an accompaniment to—the poems." (*LAL* xiv)

Excellent advice, but what is implied here? Gary Snyder's work is easy enough to come by, but how many readers are likely to have the complete works of Jerome Rothenberg at their fingertips? How many of us live in cities where the public library lists in its catalog even one book by David Antin? And as for Armand Schwerner—well, without access to the magnificent collection of contemporary poetry at SUNY-Buffalo, I too would be in trouble. It ought to be otherwise, perhaps—but the fact is that there are fewer rereaders of this poetry, and it's the first-time readers who are most in need of a good guide. Then, too, from another perspective, one might ask if it is wise —or even possible—to provide a supplement to a text without in some sense replacing, re-presenting it. (I personally welcome the use of extensive citation in critical writing.) Sherman Paul is not distracted by such theoretical or practical questions. Nor is he in the business of providing introductions—not only does he refrain from burdening *In Search of the Primitive* with large chunks of quotation, but he is also most reluctant to assume critical authority, to become, for instance, what Hugh Kenner calls "a poetry-relator," an evaluator and assessor of the new, setting it out as if for sale. He agrees with David Antin that the "truly contemporaneous artists of our time are known primarily to a community consisting of themselves." (*ISP* 6) It troubles me that Sherman Paul seems resigned to this situation. Alternative stances exist:

I think, for instance, of the restless Antonin Artaud, his harsh refusals and indirections: ". . .It is the act which shapes the thought." (*AA* 67) Perhaps, in this respect, Sherman Paul settles for too little. Perhaps he is betrayed by his method.

Not that his method is unattractive. Again, from the earlier "Preface": "Criticism of this kind is also open because it waives judgment, no longer assumes a sovereign mind speaking for established tradition." (*ILG* 1) The rereadings are recorded in a series of dated journal entries (from 9 March 1981 to 23 April 1983 for *In Search of the Primitive*; from 10 May 1985 to 28 June 1985 for *In Love with the Gratuitous*: how refreshing such acknowledgement of critical activity as happening, like poetry, like music, so clearly in time!); it is indeed "open criticism, an open form for critical thought comparable to open forms of poetic thought. . ." (*ILG* 1) He explains himself and where he's come from with real eloquence:

> Could I have studied Olson and not have heeded his insistence of enacting thought, on finding a form for the immediate activity of thought itself? (. . .) Meditation itself is open and wayward, answering (it is all an answering) less to intention than to the desire to write—to enter that wonderful activity—in whatever way and to whatever end the occasion prompts one. To trust language and the particular moment–and the particulars of the moment—and to encounter the poem with one's present resources! That is the risk. Now. And no revisions, no second thoughts, just first thoughts, the best thoughts, Ginsberg believes, those, as Emerson found, that agree with third thoughts! (*ILG* 1)

Of course one senses a little self-indulgence here, but it can be pleasant to go along with such an honest, unpretentious fellow. He travels with Whitman and Kerouac in sight, a literary pioneer making his way across the country, moving (albeit unevenly) from New York (where, citing George Butterick, he imagines Emerson listening to Antin holding forth "in the CCNY cafeteria, circa 1952") (*ISP* 61) and then on into Indian territory (there's Jerome Rothenberg at the center of it all) and finally all the way up the mountains and caverns of the far west (into Gary Snyder's high preserve). He begins, he says, "with irritation" and the question of the artist's critical "striking power" (*ISP* 3); he ends in telling the peace of a poet's dream, in "a cave or underground room entirely covered with breasts that nurture him." (*ISP* 297) In this sense, it's only (appropriately) his own journey he records, his own nostalgia. Unlike David Antin, who explores the surfaces of thought by moving out to the edges of language as social fact and spoken improvisation, Sherman Paul writes as if in response to a more traditionally resonant, almost transcendental, inner calling: "The practice and poetics of journeying (and journals) belong to the spiritual vocation of what Emerson, in 'Circles,' calls 'the onward way.'" (*ISP* 287)

And, gentleman scholar that he is, he never insists on having the last word. "The poets treated here have been generous in their response. . .": at the end of each section some letters from the poet (and sometimes the critic) in question appear (*ISP* ix). One has the sense of listening in on a continuing conversation. This innovation not only makes *In Search of the Primitive* what Sherman Paul now calls "openly dialogical" but also provides it with a tension it otherwise lacks. For instance, here is Sherman Paul on 1 December 1981, pondering Jerome Rothenberg's *Poland/1931*:

> Living in our time does not make it any easier to feel *placed*. . .Because all of us—isn't this the burden of Rothenberg's work?—have in his large view of human history been exiled from the tribe to the state, from the primitive to the civilized, and are still wandering in search of the primitive (Stanley Diamond names *the* project) in search of the communality that will allow us to be fully human. (*ISP* 127)

This leads to a consideration of "what Rothenberg has at stake" in what may be his most controversial piece of writing: "Harold Bloom: The Critic as Exterminating Angel" (it appeared in *Sulfur 2*) where Bloom is compared to Dr. Josef Mengele "—who separated the victims bound directly for the gas chambers from those healthy enough to be spared for terminal labor assignments." (*Sulfur* 2 p. 4) It is strong satire; Sherman Paul is understandably disturbed:

> In fact, I sat down this morning to explain to myself, if I could, the enormity of his comparing Bloom to the "exterminating angel" of Auschwitz. (. . .) I am offended by Rothenberg's assimilation of Bloom to the *Malakh ha-Mavat* because it is an unworthy act, much too *ad hominem* (perhaps only as it can be when Jew confronts Jew?), in no way commensurate with Bloom's "offenses." (*ISP* 127)

In a letter dated 31 July 1983 (reprinted at the end of the chapter), Jerome Rothenberg replies:

> While I understand perfectly well your objection to my essay, I don't see it, for all of that, as entirely without playfulness. . .The *Malakh ha-Mavat* image—without which you would not have thought this such an "enormity"—I felt to have been raised by Bloom and not by me. Clearly, once I've articulated it, I dismiss it myself as, in any literal sense, a "hyperbole" and "absurdity"; but clearly too the dealing out of "life" & "death" is a hyperbolic presumption on Bloom's part. (*ISP* 174)

Rothenberg goes on to explain the circumstances of his writing: ". . .if you want a sense of what was in my mind then, here is Bloom's letter, after the self-introductory and sometimes personal opening:"

> But your vision & mine are *very* close. It is a puzzle to me—I read Ashbery & Rothenberg—his language ravishes me more (though yours, to me, the strongest in your tradition) but your substance & drive are where I find myself. Reluctantly, because I had the full Orthodox & normative education, & am still upset to find myself among the *Minim.* (*ISP* 175)

And so it goes, a fascinating exchange, a little more light on the history of American letters, a shadowy question of critical authority.

Critical authority—and the authority of writing—is a central issue for Armand Schwerner as well: in *The Tablets*, he creates "a modern poem that, to a large extent because of scholarly apparatus, seems archaic. The tablets represent the birth of writing (writing and selfhood) in a culture considered the cradle of civilization. . ." (*ILG* 26) The humor opening out here seems to me entirely without bitterness, and the specific contemporary situation of these little-known works (happily, all of "Tablet XXV" is printed here) gives Sherman Paul perhaps his best opportunity to realize his own creative role:

> Interpretation is the very essence of modernism. Schwerner emphasizes this by telling us at the outset that the tablets are mediated by a scholar-translator who "presents" them and by the author who, in turn, "transmits" them "through" himself. The keys to what is untranslatable (. . .), missing (+++), variant reading [(?)], or supplied by the scholar-translator ([ ]) suggest the difficulties of *presentation* as well as our interpretations which must take in account the notes of the scholar's and Schwerner's interpretations. Schwerner has made a poem—and remakes it in each performance—that we must make. (*ILG* 27)

In inventing *The Tablets*, as Sherman Paul points out, Schwerner "recovers them from underground in the originary work of *poesis*. This, for him, is soul work, not only life-tracking-life, as Creeley says, but soul-making, the term Hillman takes from Keats to name the end *psychologizing* serves." (*ILG* 3)

The gentle meditation of Sherman Paul is also *poesis*. He does not cover up the texts he reads—rather, he makes his way in writing around them, here checking out what irritates, there stepping back to admire, now and then stopping for a close look or a moment of communion. You can trust him as far as he goes. But those readers still looking for adventure, still not quite ready to circle back, may want to take a different route. I think again of Antonin Artaud, his terrifying fragmented search, his electric intensity:

> The conclusion to all this can only be found on the spot, and it is most important to recognize that which in modern rituals can subsist from

ancient magic and ancient divination.
Are there still forests which speak?. . ." (*AA* 68)

"Open criticism" need not be "all an answering": the questions also call us on.

—LINDA REINFELD

NOTE

Works cited are abbreviated in the text above as follows: *The Lost America of Love* as *LAL*, *In Search of the Primitive* as *ISP*, *In Love with the Gratuitous* as *ILG*; Antonin Artaud's "It is the act which shapes the thought. . .[A Fragment]" as translated by Raymond Federman in *Antonin Artaud Anthology*, edited by Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965) as *AA*.

THE BOAT OF QUIET HOURS BY JANE KENYON
Graywolf Press, Saint Paul, MN, $8.00 Paper

The short title for Jane Kenyon's new book is *Doing Things While Thinking of Something Else*. Midnight blue speckled enamel is sky, and for a nagging memory

> The clothesline rises in the wind. One
> wooden pin is left, solitary as a finger;
> it, too, rises and falls.

And this is all setup, so quotes fall flat. What's significant is that these (images, even, what an old-fashioned thing) occur in a milieu and in magazines in which the aperçu *is* excerptible without loss, like a cartoon caption imperfectly remembered. Clampitt and Gregg, who are extremely able, would seem to be her sisters, and she prints in places which welcome recognizables. Yet she leaves these, them, behind, from your sense that she *must* do this. I don't quote particularly luscious ones to save them but, sideshow talker, urge people to trust me without seeing what's inside. The showman's allusion comes up because these *are* setups, as the sunwarmed "porch" of moss beside a stone in snow is a setup for her, saving some part of a day she'd rued. These savings could be homey, homemakery but aren't, because her imagination is unforgiving. Her voice is warm but the hands are Strangelove's. If anything snow plows, calvings and people dead of cancer remind you of Hughes's *Moortown*. "What Came to Me" is the title of a very good short one; things

leap to match her mood. This is not (again) pathos quilted to fallacy though the felicity, almost the obedience, of this performing world calls depth in question. "Wash" is a good poem, facing "No Steps." Some reinstate—really reinstate—the sketch as a verse genre, ending like unviewfindered snapshots, bit of hose, half a tricycle, the dull side of the house.

I was going to say these are intimate yet unrevealing—dusk poems like Jimenez's, life inferred from tone. As I try to think about them the classes widen—Kumin's first book and the woman with the umlaut, slight smell of baking with a glint off Dr. Moreau's eyeglasses, the poet as Orrible Clinician. I suppose this goes back to Tennyson. Then Stafford for the five-beat school poems (try "The Little Boat"). These don't map, in the end (which may be why they remind us of Hughes). Her nonendinged narratives are almost the best of her. She could do a novel in verse, *Aurora Leigh* or *The Bothie*, creditably, and that in a lyrickish age says lots.

—GERALD BURNS

LEFT OUT IN THE RAIN: NEW POEMS 1947-1985
Gary Snyder, North Point, 209 pp., $9.95 Paper

Reading Gary Snyder's *Left Out in the Rain: New Poems 1947-1985* is a bit like going to a three-star restaurant on the chef's day off. We get many of the courses that a collected would put before us, as well as some of the panoramic pleasures, but we don't leave the table with the glow of a fully gratified palate. I question the publishing strategy. Right at that point in the poet's career when we might look for a fat retrospective volume, we are presented with four decades' worth of out-takes. Poems that Snyder for one reason or another decided not to include in other collections are now amassed under the rubric "new poems."

The danger, of course, is that trigger-happy critics might use this as a basis for measuring the whole *oeuvre*. *Left Out in the Rain* would not stand up well under such scrutiny. Too many of the inclusions represent near-misses, poems saved for an image, an idea, or because they had some associational meaning for their author. Don't get me wrong, though. This book is not a disaster. Its spirit is of such confident, genial permissiveness that we end up enjoying it for what it really is: a glance into the poet's laboratory.

Left Out in the Rain is portioned off into epochs, beginning with two poems from the late 1940s. While that work still shows the haphazard wingbeats of the fledgling, it does allow us to see what Snyder had to outgrow in

order to reach poetic maturity. The familiar subject matter is there, but the perception is still alloyed with rhetoric. Snyder has not yet learned the sharp adz strokes that will eventually become his trademark. The lines, like those from "Elk Trails," have still to be pared into distinction:

> I have walked you, ancient trails,
> Along the narrow rocky ridges
> High above the mountains that
> Make up your world:

It won't be long, though, before "I" becomes *eye*.

What's interesting about Snyder, to my mind, is the fact that he schooled a deeply Western sensibility in Eastern ways, without ever becoming ersatz-Eastern. His minimalism retains a hard American bite. Here, complete, is "Seeing the Ox" from the central 1959-1969 section:

> Brown ox
> Nose snubbed up
> Locking his big head high
> against telephone pole
> right by Daitoku temple—
> Slobbering, watching kids play
> with rolling eye,
> Fresh dung pile under his
> own hind hooves.

I like the intimated clash of perspectives: ancient, heraldic creature and telephone pole, temple and dung; the ox's indolent immobility is foregrounded against the play activity. Snyder is not straining to get any recoil effect from the juxtapositions. Only the slight double-take in the spacing between "Daitoku" and "temple" alerts us to the bemused perplexity of the outsider. It's not vintage Snyder, but it's nice to have.

Snyder's enduring contribution is to have trained a disciplined, facet-cutting eye upon the primaeval terrain of the Pacific Northwest. His pure, staggered lines have become the signature of a kind of perception, a respectful registry of a durable and deeply structured *out there*. In this, they are not unlike Cezanne's delicately layered planes. But *Left Out in the Rain* shows little of this side of Snyder. What we get instead are episodic snapshots from the many locales of his life—the Indian Ocean, Kyoto, Lookout Mountain, Turtle Island. Still, underneath the changing surface of subjects and occasions, it is possible to sense the willed life gradually becoming the real life. Style tells the whole story.

Early Snyder is very much the poet trying to fit himself into an admired mode. We can almost feel the muscular expenditure behind the reductions in these lines:

Flickering eye
Peers from a birdcage
    shivering lips of bone
    scratch, and a taste of shell
Feathers cram the mouth.

—from "A Change of Straw" (1949-1952)

Whereas a poem like "The Net" from the 1974-1984 grouping allows us to see how natural such moves have become:

A man in a canoe
Catching fish by dancing–
    "hey, fish by casting with a net!"
Women in the evening circle
casting, round a fire
A man in a canoe
Dances with a net.

The first quotation belongs to a poet who is trying to tell us everything he knows; the second just hints at a bountiful lore, understands that worthy subjects can never be fully encompassed.

The least successful part of this collection is the section placed last: "Satires, Inventions, & Diversions 1951-1980." If the thrust of Snyder's effort over the years has been to refine a cleansed and natural idiom, then these are exercises in self-opposition:

You joyous Gods, who gave mankind his culture,
And you, brave nymphs, who taught him love of Nature,

—from "Sestina of the End of the Kalpa"

or:

Here's the last drunk song I'll sing
Of all the balls we had this Spring.

—from "Ballad of Rolling Heads"

Every poet, to be sure, sends out tracers in different directions. But not every poet puts this in a book. The unintentional effect of these sorties is to remind us of what we most treasure about Snyder. He has spent forty years now doing "the real work"—it's time we had a volume honoring *that*.

—SVEN BIRKERTS

PAUL CELAN: LAST POEMS
A Bilingual Edition Translated by Katherine Washburn and Margaret Guillemin
North Point Press, 212 pp., $20.00

Ladies and gentlemen![1]

Dear Reader,[2]

The purpose of what I would like to say is to describe for you some of what is buried in these LAST POEMS, as in, for instance, the intimately transcendent signs of a writing attendant to *the mystery of an encounter. Art, you will remember, reappears* where the necessity of encounter *produces a distance from the I.* This means the necessity—and the purpose of what I would like to say—is to describe for you what *is found* when *art in this form constitutes the subject of* an encounter to which *one would like* to come from a natural distance to be absorbed in the restoration of language, to a name or poem where *language acquires a voice*—as in the last name or poem where language is ever likely to acquire a voice. *Ladies and gentlemen, please take note: One would like to, not: I would like to. Art produces a distance from the I:*

"I was born under the name Paul Antschel," he said,—"in Czernowitz the capital of Romanian Bukovina in 1920 part German speaking Jew and then the Nazis, you know who they are, came—and in 1947 the name changed like a movable front or occupation the anagram of a changed intelligence which entered me," he said, "the complex of a persecuted intelligence housed in April 1970 under the name of the poet Paul Celan a suicide by drowning and the Nazis, you know who they are, came with it," he said:

> ONCE, when death was mobbed,
> you took shelter in me.
>
> (from *Lichtzwang,*
> *Force of Light*)

Ladies and gentlemen, Dear Reader, Explication has it: By force of light a kind of glaring intelligence takes over the poem with the talk of too much, too little, not of Thou and thou again but the talking *of* our *going-to-our-deaths together* by music as in the instrumental programs played out at the height of the crematoriums—one example that comes up among the many still to be found *in the air, in the air which we have to breathe.* By force of light a kind of glaring intelligence takes over the poem and assumes that "once" outside you and me the evidence will rise after all to count on what *we* know, like the numbers of us that multiply after us as in for instance "when death was mobbed," where there is *no*, not even, room for the dead to be

found *in the air which we have to breathe.* "You," however, coming from a point beyond death or "death beyond death" (Levinas), assume none of these imperial intelligences. Rather, at one point "you" are led, and your reading empties onto the site of deepest refuge in "me." This means *as-always:* "you took shelter in me." This means again: the LAST POEMS written seek bearing time to become perceptible by *sending oneself ahead to oneself* while returning at times to *a kind of homecoming. Can we now, perhaps, find the place*—when only the void stood between us and we found our full ways to each other.

One would like to find, ladies and gentlemen, one would like to find the full ways to approach these LAST POEMS written out to occupy space. One would like to *find something here* like the sign of a blackbird—ansel—rising to encounter the anagram of a changed intelligence—Celan—an alien intelligence approaching the last name or poem in which language acquires a voice to occupy space:

> APPROACHABLE
> the one–
> winged soaring blackbird,
> above the firewall, behind
> Paris, up there,
> in the
> poem.
>
> (from *Lichtzwang,*
> *Force of Light*)

Up there in the poem the LAST POEMS are found, and the law of inversion applies—one would like to say appears—at last a nearness (that comes) to a natural distance, at least as near as all that is lost, and that I would like to describe for you here as home or space or home as space to which the poem ascends,

> CLEARED for this
> departure too . . .

as it abandons a region within itself, a region to be filled by all poems written out before and after it—up there, where *the poem takes its position at the edge of itself,* where it becomes you, outside, from this point on, *as-always* meaning:

> . . . what's left of you, sets itself aslant,
> you gain
> altitude.
>
> (from *Lichtzwang,*
> *Force of Light*)

From this point on one is close to inhabiting the Kabbalistic doctrine of Tsimtsum, first revealed to his disciples by Isaac Luria of Safed. Here the presence of God does not become his concentration at a point, but his withdrawal from it, so that in the first act of creation *we are outside, at a considerable distance*—the more visibly occupying the site of his withdrawal the deeper he recedes into himself. Imagine the impulse towards the first poem as a similar contraction,

> . . . hide yourself within . . . ,

and the LAST POEMS as its inevitable projection into a clearing,

> . . . out there.
>
> (from *Lichtzwang,*
> *Force of Light*)

Imagine that you "tear from me this body and this soul to make things for yourself, and leave me only, eternally, that tearing itself." (Simone Weil) In this sundering form imagine the LAST POEMS, and you *are* thrown *outside, at a considerable distance*:

> DISCUS,
> starred with premonitions,
> throw yourself
> out of yourself.
>
> (from *Lichtzwang,*
> *Force of Light*)

Ladies and gentlemen, when you are thrown out of yourself to an encounter, your voice comes full circle to the province of a shared dislocation between languages. It comes to translation, and you are intimately pressured to face it—*this appearing, it becomes dialogue, it is often despairing dialogue.* One might, for example, speak of this encounter with the LAST POEMS in English—I am speaking now of the translator's encounter—as an act of translation that bears more the given vocabulary of the prehistoric original than its *"movements" and "suggestions"* or the intentions which represent its hidden significance. In this latter form of translation what must be found is that direction of the original which acquires a language and whose language acquires a voice through which the LAST POEMS written out to occupy space return "from the midst, in the midst" (Celan) of an afterlife of "boundless dispersion" (Blanchot), to prey—in the accusative—on earth. This, I believe, is not the direction followed or the place returned to in the language of the LAST POEMS to exit in English.[3] One would like to dispel their competency or

the intelligence of their reasoned arrangement as in for instance the sequence that comes to

> DIE RÜCKWÄRTGESPROCHENEN
> Namen, alle . . . ,

> ALL THE NAMES
> spoken backward . . . ,
> (from *Lichtzwang,*
> *Force of Light*)

for a syntax more primitively spelled, compounding the movement of the original, backwards—

> THE-BACKWARD-SPOKEN
> Names, all . . . ,

where in the original "alle"—"all"—is not primary, but a source into which the names are emptied, returned to.

One would like to trust the level of risk in translation necessary to touch this primitive source—"the trough of being"—(Celan) from which the original LAST POEMS breathe and which in return, risking their own asphyxiation, breathe upon your trust from the volumes that enclose them: by *Force of Light*, in *Snow-Part*, across the *Farmstead of Time*, through *Conversation in the Mountains*. In these forms the definition of risk in translation pressures into being a whirled, *despairing dialogue* with the original, "from the midst, in the midst" of what is not yours, as closely accused as remote, not

> . . . Todes quitt, Gottes
> quitt.

> . . . rid of death, rid
> of God.
> (from *Lichtzwang,*
> *Force of Light*)

but compounded as—

> even-quit of death,
> even-quit of God.

where in the original LAST POEMS "quitt" would share at the source of its meaning both "quit" and "even," as if one would assume to get even by abandoning the original at the level of risking the absolute—*the absolute poem* which *doesn't exist* and which is as near as all that is lost.

Ladies and gentlemen, permit me at this point to quote a statement *which occurs in Walter Benjamin's essay on* "The Task of the Translator": "Translation keeps putting the hallowed growth of languages to the test: How far removed is their hidden meaning from revelation, how close can it be brought by the knowledge of this remoteness."

"By the knowledge of this remoteness" *I think that I have encountered* the LAST POEMS to perceive *language as form and direction and breath. Here, too, in this work of* Celan, *I am searching for the very same thing. I am searching for* Celan *himself, I am searching for him, as a person, I am searching for his form: for the sake of the location of literature, the setting free, the step. The poem, I believe, also seeks this place.* To respond to it one must begin by taking your questions–

> . . . up there,
> in the
> poem.

the voice says:

> . . . two fingers are snapping
> in the abyss, a
> world is stirring
> in the scratch-sheets, it all depends
> on you.
>
> (from *Zeitgehöft,*
> *Farmstead of Time*)

> . . . where you
> are seeking me, blindfold.
>
> (from *Lichtzwang,*
> *Force of Light*)

The voice, *I believe, also seeks this place. With you and* Paul Celan *and the* LAST POEMS *I believe that I have just now touched it again.*

—BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

Footnotes

[1] All references in italics, excluding the titles of the volumes in *LAST POEMS*, are excerpted from Paul Celan's "Meridean" speech, given by the poet in 1960 upon his acceptance of the George Büchner Prize for Literature.

[2] Some unquoted references in this piece are taken from poems of Celan not included in *LAST POEMS*.

[3] "I do not want to undermine the sincere and intensive efforts made by Katherine Washburn and Margaret Guillemin in translating Celan's *LAST POEMS*. The translations

are, for the most part, admirable, sensitive and intelligent renderings of the original poems which even manage at times to generate resonances in the English that do not exist in the German but which faithfully respond to the intentions behind the *whole* of the *LAST POEMS* as they appear in this selected edition by North Point Press. In other words, there *are* occasional moments in which the hidden significances behind the originals are illuminated by the translations. My quarrel is that these moments are only occasional, and that the risks they assume are not followed throughout the book. The necessity to engage these risks throughout should be recognized as a complex ideal to be achieved, and the fact that they are not always realized should not make us any less grateful to the translators for giving us these *LAST POEMS* in English."

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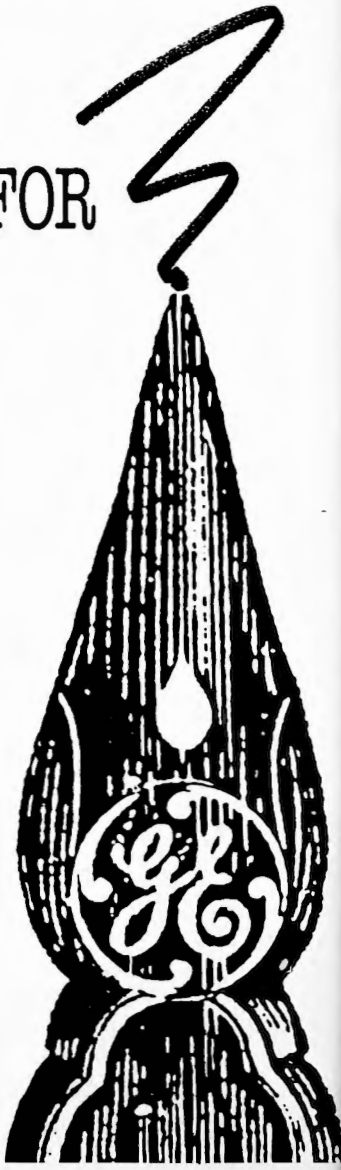

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WALKING THE NEW YORK BEDROCK ALIVE IN THE SEA OF INFORMATION BY GARY SNYDER

RUSSELL FRASER ON OSIP MANDELSTAM

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Sulfur

FALL 1987

A LITERARY TRI-QUARTERLY OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: IRVING PETLIN / *Song for Sarah. . .Puzzle / 1985 / Pastel on Paper / 30" x 22" / Courtesy of Kent Fine Art, NYC*

Sulfur gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who made contributions in the fall of 1986 to help fund our transition from Los Angeles to Ypsilanti: Jeffrey Blue, Peter Quartermain, Martha Sattler, George Butterick, Bruce Campbell, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Gilbert Van Camp, Joseph Gold, Alan Golding, James Laughlin, Irving Malin, Sherman Paul, Robert Schiller, Lynn Shoemaker, Charles Simic, Donald Wesling, Peter Du Bois, The Gerber Foundation, Dan Gerber, Leon Golub, James Heckman, Hank Lazer, Andrew Levy, Martha Lifson, Beverly Mackey, Antonet O'Toole, Michael Sherick, John Taggart, Oscar Weinberger, Shelley White, Marjorie Perloff, Ronald Gottesman, Elaine Attias, Jerry Glenn, David Rattray. 1987 issues of Sulfur are made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

MICHAEL PALMER

Sun

A headless man walks, lives
for four hours

devours himself
You bring death into your mouth—X

we are called—
sleep, festinate, haul rocks

The eye follows itself across the screen
Words pass backward

onto the tongue
are swallows

in clay cliffs
The sea's no picture at all

blue mountain incised with a face
ends in burnt cluster

mud, private telematics, each
person controlling a machine

This is owned by the Man Roy works for
in Insurance work

Words will say this
resolved to write a play

Place an allogene within the graft
The hood is black with two holes for my mouths

I am not the prisoner
of such a space

In a certain way all this still exists
but the scene and the mirror no longer exist

. . .sky a painter's house
No yes

You churn hymns into fragments
No then yes

Asleep you set fire to this house

Mr. Duck and Mr. Mouse
mass as shadows

An indefinite calculus
watches, writes and rewrites

Animals are emperors, tamed and fabulous

The world is an object

The world is an object

Place yourself here as if on a surface

Replace horizon with an equals sign

B says, It could be made of silk,
of marble, of extract of clouds

B asks, Is the discourse
of objects specific

Can one imagine laws. . .
Can you decode the birth of the sign

from the miniskirt, the unconscious, TV, the
mirage

of the referent, the equation
of A with A

A body disappears into itself
its mirror self or sister self

The marks have no dimension
They stream from the creases of the hand

Let's call this The Quiet City
where screams are felt as waves

plunging or released, a content
and an alibi, a matrix

at zero stains you with ink
My speech explaining the layers went very well

B says, The blind are hideous, the city laughs
and you tread on corpses in your mask

says that winter nights it's both sweet and sad
to hear a bell

says that these lines
have neither eyes nor ears

and that once you woke entangled in her hair

Mr. Tulliver assaults his horse, wants his money

Chainsaw memories cause laughter among the hierophants
She spread her legs wide and braced them

We, the center, offer narratives
We have three days to live

in smog, crossing the Plains of Id
On the wall it is written:

Symbolism died for your sins
Own the body you desire

This I is the I who speaks
(signed Scardanelli)

Day One is called Tongues

Day Two might be This-and-Only-This

Day Three is Antinomy

It was nice to come back here
lots of mountains, etc,
living pillars of flesh

Day One is called Trace

Day Two is Map

Day Three is X, Name of X, Name of N

It is a spring day in a state of siege

I offer you a flat land

Sun flares, then divides

From the Côte des Morts she writes,
The town has changed and artists are objects

and objects have no skin—
I could not have returned

To the left of the piano is theory

Call it Alpha in Lyre
Call it Ceterae or Last Nights,

The Blue Guide, Grid, The Private
Experience of the Blinking Man

Call it Ones (split open)
Call it A Scratch Band from Duluth

written entirely inside
the body of another

its moments free of him
The pages turn themselves

Then I knead my breasts so that milk spurts out
across his face and neck, silver

coin under the tongue, bread and money
for the ferryman. This wire

travels through her teeth
as if through a slot

I ate all the food in the world
and left people hungry

All these stories are the same
There is only one story—

but not really—
so I swallowed the corn and all was well

For three-hundred years they let me eat undisturbed
Now there is a present of watery light

cast onto you, the body bent back
in an attitude of reception

A statue controls our weather
Call it Live at the It Club

someone falling or depicted as falling
mirror folded about you and within you

unreadable, even invisible
The snow is ours, no part of this page

coating Moscow's courtyards

Call it Hilbert's Dream or Papyrology,
Simulations or The Bathers

I nudged Dante off my desk
into the flood. The others quickly followed

streaming from that cafe
once known as The Rose

We spoke in the zero code
system of assemblage and separation

arcuate scar, shadow and necklace
doubled by their reflections

then redoubled in the lens
34,000 words spread out before me

words like incarnadine, tide and cheer
asymptote, locus, tear or tear

waiting to say things
(you cannot say things)

and the anagram for *names*,
for *stone*, for *arm*

claustral body woven from signs
Call it Table or call it Trace

B says, The real table does not exist
I sang my name and turned into a skeleton

in a tree, you below me
I'm writing this diary in the cold

of our winter here
the city like a fortress

Toller has betrayed the Revolution
The clock is set

Our pages

burn themselves
as theater

awaiting an extinguishing
mist

I sang my name but it sounded strange
I sang the trace then

without a sound,
then erased it

The body of a cellist is floating in the sea

Let us number all the sentences beginning with one
then one plus one. Here

light offers its signal, its parts
Words pop out of a rock

It is the last book, a point
before the next. A body

has been sighted floating in the sea
At center stage she bows

then the dancers surround her
Malcolm sat beside me

He spoke quietly
about music

This notebook contains shadows
nothing else. Dystopic

figures confound the matrix
bore holes in it

through us. One speaks
and the other doesn't

I say space to mean
an ache or a page

twinned logics of a face
The remains

of a fly in a bottle
seek our gaze

We have invented a mechanism for preserving the dead
Here only the head is shown
as encased within a block of glass

The head read us this:
You have one eye too many; masked

as myself you speak;
suspend thought from its bolt

The head told them this:
I want the stolen word here,

statue fallen silently among the leaves
where we've come to sleep;

a screen is ours,
it's called Ways and Means,

its name is The old, old man,
and its name is called Haddock's eye

The head read us this:
I have water

I have bone
Everything's a sign

to a talking stone
A thread read us this

Here whispers collect dust;
fields fold up then out;

enter through the curtain
and swallow your words;

a screen is ours
infinite, hyaline

a woman bent double in the street
is screaming Money Money

The throat read us this

I was sitting in the dark ivy at the gate
of the desiring-machine no windshield no

wheels I was sitting in the forest the great
counter-weight I was truly lost I was seated

behind a screen I was aware of things those
things were me amazing the forked branch

spilling names I had been-not I
had been not-lost I had seen you once

and clearly once I had been remembered
only once the boy

shouts Mica and gleams I am in a
versionary state you are in

me as history I fix
and crystal to it

inside the inside once

alp air

down the lane

I travelled a little

was limned

where some father says
Your words are not connect

The path we take is 1 to 6
ending in a bubble. Does all

music enter into these cries

Do stones explode at dusk
in us

Did you paint on the walls
of the deaf man's house

I travelled a little

to the snow-fields, then down

How to say I or
we in rival voice

These
new waves circused in a void

placed themselves before us
spoke their tactics

and their practices, traced
each friction and line

each seam of an increasingly minuscule night

A house you enter and remark
I no longer understand
what such things are for

Name you this: a region,
a language, a pot of stew

A magical chain
shreds particles and objects

Name you this: painter
of only shadows, paramorph,

figure walking
in ice, erased figure falling

whose liquid we will drink
as it coats our skins

Story of hands abandoning their fingers,
of an organ emerging from the throat

A man with dynamite strapped to his waist
sings for the first time

lens
question

in

And black
As when

Story of golden doves with silver dots,
a word beside itself

This building is not

A word is beside itself

A word twists backward
peeling its skin up over its face

A word looks behind itself
Here you are law, a boat

in flames or a gaze
Does it say book

anywhere on this book
Does it say Jonah in this book

Does it say screen or stain
and compose a tone of light

directly behind the eye
Suppose there's a portrait

on this paper I'm holding
Day and night

the shattered statuary was heaping up
before the one newly named

La Violaine or The Park
Call you this with a dot

Time of signal fires, no
memory or map. The

inframaculit wakes
at the sound of breaking glass

Throughout the city
there's the sound of breaking glass

We have forgotten it
slipped between the pages

falls outside
what is thought

After the angled dark
what is meant by book

Scribed on the streaming body:
Song to End a World

Through the glass box words
pass unrecognised, thinking us

now dead to you, reader,
now an ammonite curve

incomplete, now tablet
of faint scratches, now redness

in margins, now past
and pastness. Now a filament of light

penetrates the image-base
where first glyphs are stored,

Lucy and Ethel, the Kingfish,
Beaver and Pinky Lee

are spoken, die and undie
for you

like a war viewed from poolside
by philosophers and sheiks,

senators and dialectician-priests
The day has begun

The bed aches in its dream
of durable densities, rain,

a house whose balconies
vibrate and hum

in space. Do not write
in this space. Never sleep

in this house. At the Salle Waag
we spoke in growls

while at the Meise and Kaufleuten
there were final afterwords

and many teeth fell out
among the many mirrors and many lamps

hurled to the ground
This is not The Shining Windows

nor a glance
at "the sea"

Once your name was Therefore
then Rubble then Ash

question of whose body
in what photograph

I do not recognise this music
Moon drops from sky and burns in field;

man hangs from rope; woman points gun
toward a world where

I is a person
formed of letters in salt,

Five Figures in a Room
or The Triadic Ballet

The clock is set for "departure"

Rowers curl through this air
bent against it, spewing sand,

light-lines and ochre points,
songs in the future-past

will have been known as
The Well, The Needle's Eye

and The Book of the Machines
The branch bleeds

so that a soul can speak
twilight disk

writ on you
ilynx and alea

desire in a net
A new year

is being recorded here,
long saplings with paper blossoms

hollyhocks and painted sleds
Everything is number

a street and the figures on it
stolen genres and formats

in a bar in Bangkok
waiting for death above the flames

(You are coated with fourteen microns of gold
so whatever you say is true)

---

because the words disgusted me why write?
signed Schelling, signed An Arm or A Door, signed The Desert
to the West

This is how one pictures the angel of history
signed Series B, signed A or letter of A, signed Bakhtin's Names

---

This isn't time so I'll leave you now
signed It, signed Mantis, signed A Stone in the Grass

I lost my brain when I put a fork through my hat
signed House of Music

This was the trouble with the sun-dial or saint dial
signed Writing Itself

The lines through these words
form other, still longer lines

dust in a steady shower
It is our fortune to have been born

at the crossroads of a chiasma
in a land known as How to Laugh

and How to Die. Did spine write this

story of

my life in a pyramid
designing those pyramids yet to come

those galaxies now being formed,
constellations, touching myself, rubbing against different
objects

in total darkness
a year of extreme pain

but fortunately I am perfectly dead
and can see into the past through a lens

signed The Worlds As It Is
tango converted to a fugue

black milk, golden hair
cliffs, bridges, grey lake

and a grave in the air
It rains

It burns
Carry something to somewhere

Tie something to something else
Hold your head in your right hand

as a lantern
a light impossible for this season

and so we turn away from these sounds
raise our Illyrian hats

visit our beds
and ring a bell

X, name of X
we are

A bark sets out on the honeycomb's flow
We called it Le Départ

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Draft #3: Of

CUT

Hinge-loss door, lack latch
ice-ribbed, straws, wad
T-top conglomerate, gritty glass
smash, street-glacier moraine Pressed
particle board, its jujubes of shellack
sweet sweet plastic lobbed hither
shredding rips, not too much shelter anyway.
guttering.

Little howling water marbles ice.
Peaked cans junk cubist shingles.
Trounce state cultivated motor auto.
Flop donut. Scat pretzel.
Uneased acceleration and diesel heavy
smoke shot straight rays
at an unseasoned toddler, some unformed
particles strain to come
"eye-shaped." The rest
could care less.
Everything
but weed slack's
loose with melted
writing.
Like one wrote IMPISM right on that rude wall.

Words come just like that, vision.
beak black bleak
cut back through arced site protocol,
member the day. Each micro-face splice gutted
that
brekkkl they brekk the lyric ruck.

"don't call me a chef honey
I'm a crook"

skew. gutter.
a woman scavaged food from that

caesura. Which is
traditional in this
setting as a
size places: there's here, and there's there.
A there and a here (meditative
derivative) calls
"I" pivot, middle,
calls "I's" name,
sends I winding on site through all that middle
middle space so easily assize,
assimilated viewer of
unfermented ground.

Would you note
the pretty poem
I might (therefore) of wrote?

It's this time-puzzled line-lumber fermenting place,
ice

of words, enormous slant, difficult OF.
being. Junctures of saturation
beyond catalogue, yet catalogue HAS TO DO
do
syntax; how, why being beyond me. in the
totality of its relations
unstatable the what.
ice treacherous.

Of is a voice and of is another, and there, here
of,
black and crest, the flair
"of things" in a langdscape.

Thick with power conversations, this smashed
grēen
on street ice
thicngs are the
juncted ponts of craw cast octopus.

a silent space (I
walk here) populous.
possessed forsaken bridges, junk
things, a hinge from word to word a thingk
of what
grammatical conjuncture can seem
adequate to of.

Another blizzard on our hands.
Avocado green, almond, blue heron, sunbeam
our choice
of colors our choice of toppings "rain" down

yellow white snow pee snow white snow grey snow ice
snow peace snow gloom

Amazing what a pack of fierceness
binds the backroads between tinker towns and makes
the garrulousness of the travellers virtuously
impenetrable.
We're all
(it seems) troubled by "them's"
as far as it goes.
Hard to get home; this is, this travelling
of
is
home.
The streets the malls a homey homeless home.
ahung with things.

micro things and macro things
flip back "eat this" "o boy"
in silence chomp your sugary
craw sand.

White snow-chemical for melting
purer than snow beads the rows like
Hansel's bread. Some trail.
Some house. Some crumbs.
Protest, pivot, empty food-candy,
fatten you up child.
So thirsty

swallow wrong way a cherry
coke. Rub her
cough.
"Red spoil" backs up
the tongue wetting a small mouth'd paper-plastic
Suffocate does it?
Discount!
The little MACS and diet YUMS and PUBS
we know

Then talk to, about silence

in silence.

Cabin fever
in the grey
world.

Travelling
the door of the world
an enormous hinge
set
opens
onto of.

Closer? farther?
To study and inhabit
(cars humping up the holding pit)
of one foot after another, fueled and connected in itself
(lapis and turquoise these are my birthrights)
to something inarticulable
(rude grey nobs covered with hinges).

quarrels, petitions, blanknesses, outrage,
coincidence
with something blown up
it is already here
the debris'

swift
exchange.

The door, the hinge,
the templet turning
the visitations of
of.

These possessives
take the place once held
by distance.

February-July 1987

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

Two Poems

LOVE POEM

As long as the cat comes home
and the skinheads keep
to their concrete shell, over the fence
screaming *break your face,* smashing empties

what need is there to worry or come undone
so the wolf slips in,
cutting through us like cheese, soft cheese
an emulsion of blood and cheese

except for the radio tower close by
blighting *Ruby, My Dear*
till you shift in your chair and it's right,
both speakers, all there. . .

Poor Monk, dying at the Baroness's
on the hill above Weehawken
night after night
cars sluicing into the tunnel below

into the city, fanning lights
across the broad river,
the West Side throbbing
across black water

out of notes, dying.

THE TREE

Pinch a branch to see if it's quick
or else the thing'll just stand
for who knows how long
sun, wind, frost, chafing it, dogs
pissing at the base
birds nesting up high where leaves had been

while the years blur
and the town next door's evacuated
so the kids don't turn stupid
from the water that solvents leached into
or testicle cancer
diagnosed in the Mayor on down

Cape Canaveral is renamed Eric Dolphy
your friends all swell, turn
ugly then drop
after their cute little girls grow up to fuck brutes
marry them and breed

but that shield of bark
photons roam the grain of
and pathogens try to corkscrew into
only to fall apart and dry. . .

because it would not bloom
because it would not die

the axman came

PHILIP LAMANTIA

Unachieved

Compared to the transcendental realm, the world under the
roofed-in-cave is somber
but the colors, signatures
five senses and the sixth, their purifier
touch by imagination's feather
sight & sound of liquid flight from those waters the spirit
skyrs

Beauty comes to it at the heart's desire
to transmute out of pleasure's pleasure a distillation of birds into
visionary symbols
the processional of variable coloration of finches, choral lights,
that and the shadow we brood

I, in the wild state, inner feelings soar
Transcendence the mental dance imagines, but for an instant, as
dear Byrant returning to stone
The starry sky, Pluto's mirror
The way you could talk about your life, splinters off a
carpenter's floor under a microscope, those perfect symme-
tries or better, visible shavings, but never the tool
Invisible something may strike through the black room of higher
perfection
self-torture in the humanisphere a sure thing before a whole
forest revolves to sign a bio-regional imperative
consensus of the Hopi Way Separatist communes of no more
than three thousand souls
Dianas out of Gaea's caves
this window does not fade from view in the coming pre-indus-
trial age
retrieved in a narrow shoal where a Gull Feather given in bliss
turns the deranged corpse in ritual passes
healing prayers legitimize to exorcize the sick stain of being that
death, die, at sight of the Androgynous Republic
Drums of magic, *salve*,
caught here

to return to the caesura, the interrupted fault line Frisco day
which tunnels avian thought
Everytime I think I'll turn off the main vein, quotidian concerns
take over initiating script (social realities relative to mediocrity) where you cut it, different than esoteric cant
but lingually deeper into it, like 'cut it' regarding the sacred
science

. . . this flow of thought is different for the surrealist than for the
rationalist diehard
that is, I refuse to 'come to my senses' since A'hm in 'em
Emotion signs this pain you're at the terminal syndrome Fabulous tunnels turn inner to bring up The Transcendent World
Anew (it's never what you thought it was)
What I'm getting at it is, why don't you examine with great care
your entire body of death?
And
reorient the auditor to a gnosis so mystical the tree bark from
which it claws refuses to inscribe whiteness
One with the supreme ego
nothing more elegant on the avian
plane
flicker mandibles arrange the dwelling
and from all the gifts of Gaea, head for their origin:

In my dream, the Goddess in her heavenly palace on the
earth
a kind of Marienbad in lunar light
She in her silver gown slightly decolleté
has me watch the Stellar Mirror
while stars of the Pleiades run in a rhythm of Eight
and do an astral dance, *tout court*

(I tell you, very matter of factly, this Dream though many years
old has forced itself to be told)

Thus begins it, Love, she and the avatar in the Bo-Tree Garden
and consider from where I'm situated here in the Far West

green lightning at Thunder's coast
looking east to Pharoanic Egypt where the West began
bonsai trees among the pines

a swan's luminous power in air of mist

haunted redwood shadows
world immortal because AMOR wove a tissue clear to specular
sight
Wings of this city
an otherwise haunted hillscape
ultimate YS
Frisco once also covered with ancient waves
a kind of lost Atlantis several kalpas ago
its seven hills imagine old traditions of jazz

Harmony is that secret
between the machines coming through Death is that machine

the wild wee drop
snow to the solar radiant a fumbled perfected
Rebus of mental luminoids
music married to meaning when
the orange
almost red-streaked crest
magnifies millet
to mark off the duration:
Ornithos
gold
a parabola
The treasure perch is you and me, love
a tiny winged fiery tongue through the green window
Forms are
weddings
that spring trays of meaning between chirps
flutes garner elipses of word
fork between eclipses of comet-lore across lagoons

salt
from the Mediterranean Sea fixed here at Nova Albion
A boy painting earth colors above the valley town
my first poetry atop San Bruno Mountain was all power ek-stasis
as if all tracks had left the last railway station
the sensation of sudden union with another attraction
to decipher no matter what suffering there's no pain at the taste
that tells an epic begins

brown & red over the mental rainbow
not to close this grandeur beyond words?
War mental war and no other These the weapons on the highest
    nest Golden V sang to Violent Ocean
It was forbidden to know what the melting glyphs said over the
    horizon
the ways down in the valley flowed away like darkness painting
    poetry to light
At this stage of the great game you can assassinate all the stand-
    ins with cosmic disdain *El Poder del Niño Jesus*
In the dreams of the Philippine 'master' late of Frisco gone to
    Alaska
'Joke's on you' The Plague reminds The Fluke
Grey cant explosions through cells
prisons rent to specular essence
where it counts. . .is it laughter?
The old necromancer calls 'em up every day faster than thought
    Ibis eye of the Sacred Geomant
Gaea doing this dance down on the plain
coming of the inland sea where once there was none
I begin to steal Gaea
but Gaea is another circle of the rose Pantheism of the moment
where all rivers meet from the mountaintop

Caveat, emptor!

Thunder for Gaea who's more than thunder
mysterious as in the beginning
Gaea the more I say you the seldom I leap through you
to my own ego
                upon the bread your birds beak

this look of red-crowned avifauna

the moon conjuncts Saturn
        NOW
        and
        today

ROBERTS AVENS

Reflections on Wolfgang Giegerich's *"The Burial of the Soul in Technological Civilization"*

The present article is an attempt to explore the difficult and controversial connection between Christianism and technology or technical science. Let me set the tone to what follows by referring to two American authors who have dealt with this matter. The cultural historian Lynn White Jr., having pointed to the habit of calling our time the "post-Christian" age, notes that the substance of our thinking, still dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress, "is rooted in, and is indefensible from, Judeo-Christian theology." In another passage which brings us even closer to the main thesis of this article, White states that "modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and. . .modern technology is at least partly. . .an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature."[1] In view of this, I suggest, we should not hesitate to propose (and the rest of our discussion is intended to bear this out) that, in spite of appearances, we live in an era that, far from being anti- or post-Christian, is eminently and uniquely Christian.

In a similar vein Theodore Roszak, the rhapsodist of counter-culture, maintains that Christianism had prepared the *psychic* ground for the scientific revolution during the age of Galileo, Kepler and Newton. For this revolution was not so much a revolt against Christian religious psychology as a rejection of the pagan Aristotelian world-view which saw nature as alive, full of gods and demons never far below the surface of things.

It was the advent of Christianism that effected the momentous transition from myth to history. Christianism alone could claim that the Word (*Logos*) became flesh at one time, at one place in our human personality. Christ, unlike the mythopoeic gods of antiquity, was *real,* because he was *historical.* For the first time in the course of human affairs the words "history" and "reality" became identical. It is here, says Roszak, that we must look for the origin of that "fanatically secular sensibility" which would later result in what

William Blake called "the spirit of evil [read: shadow] in things heavenly"—the bomb physics, concentration camps and all the other Frankensteinian nightmares of science and technology.[2]

I shall now turn to Wolfgang Giegerich—a contemporary neo-Jungian (archetypal) psychologist who, in my view, is the first to have pursued our theme in a thoroughly compelling, radically new and pitiless manner. Giegerich speaks as a depth psychologist and psychotherapist and not as a theologian, even though this kind of psychological speech cannot be completely immune to the religious and theological aspects of the problem. It must be also stressed that he is not trying to attack or to malign technology or, for that matter, Christianism. There is no guilty party in the fateful collusion of these two powers.

Christianism or the Christian truth, according to Giegerich, not only has its upper spiritual (personal belief, inner experience) characteristics, but also its own bodily reality and gravity. Hence, when he speaks of Christian truth (or of truth at all) he does not mean truth in the theological or metaphysical sense of some *absolute truth*, but in the psychological sense that an idea or fantasy is *psychologically* true if it is effective.

Last but not least, Christianism, for Giegerich, primarily means not the teachings of the early Church (*Urgemeinde*) but a Western historical force which was shaped both by the ancient Jewish inheritance and the Greek spirit. In his own words: Christianism is "a transpersonal, spiritual reality and a historical force which realized itself in the history of the Christian West"; "an independent objective reality which human beings find themselves exposed to in one way or another."[3]

Giegerich's essay dealing with our topic is entitled "The Burial of the Soul in Technological Civilization."[4] The word "burial" in this context is not equivalent to "death"; rather it conveys the idea of the "hidden," or "depth," and the like. In this sense the event of the Incarnation must be understood as the (hidden) truth of technology, and technology as the uncovering, fulfillment and completion of the Incarnation. Put differently, Giegerich's aim is to show the subterranean link between apparently secular, even godless, technology and the idea of the Incarnation. On the face of it, such a project seems to contradict the commonly accepted view that modern technological civilization originated in the Age of Enlightenment when Western humanity liberated itself not only from the Christian religion but from a religious outlook *tout court* and founded a wholly secular, antidivine world.

The first thing to keep in mind in this context is that both modern technology and modern science are distinctively Occidental—a circumstance which should lead us to suspect that they must be rooted in the very depths of Western psyche. Western man became addicted to technology (*Verfahren*) not because he was exceptionally intelligent or because only the West had created the scientific preconditions for subsequent inventions, but rather the other way around: the Westerner devoted his intelligence almost exclusively to scientific and technological progress because his consciousness was archetypally predetermined to proceed in this direction. As we know, the Chinese, besides other technical discoveries, invented gun powder earlier than the Europeans; but, whereas in China gun powder was used to shoot off fireworks for the ritual celebration of the New Year, in Europe it led to the production of cannons, bombs and finally the atomic rocket. Technical discoveries were obviously possible within the orbit of Chinese culture; yet the use of these discoveries was fundamentally different because the Chinese attitude toward being (reality) was different.

Incarnation and the World of Myth

Giegerich believes that man's attitude toward reality finds its expression in the central tenets of religion and, inversely, these tenets condition consciousness by lending it a definite shape and direction. What fundamentally distinguishes the religion of the West from all the other "great religions" is the Incarnation—the proposition or claim that God has entered the world in the empirical (literal) figure of the man Jesus from Nazareth. Thus, says Giegerich, if the West is unique by virtue of two "happenings"—the development of a technological scientific civilization and a historically based "absolute religion" (Hegel)—it is not unreasonable to surmise that these two events may be closely connected or even identical. C.G. Jung saw the conglomerate "Christianity-technology" as our historical burden: "My problem is to wrestle with the big monster of the historical past, the great snake of the centuries. . .the historical burdens Christianity has heaped upon us."[5] But how can Christian doctrine be a burden?

Ordinarily Christianism is seen as the saving message concerned with the inner, subjective realities of man, his individual morality (love of the neighbor, etc.). Giegerich, however, is not interested in this sort of personal religiosity. He wants to do justice to the repressed shadow of Christianity (its burden) which is at work in *objective reality*, in actual events (science, industry, technology). What is necessary therefore is the integration and redemption of

what Jung called the Fourth-shadow, material reality ruled by the Prince of this world.[6]

Before we proceed it is necessary to make clear that Giegerich does not use the words "truth" (or the "Christian truth") and "reality" as prefabricated metaphysical constructs or as elements of *his* philosophical "system." Rather, he is only concerned with the kind of truth that, let's say, the story of the Incarnation claims for itself, i.e., truth in the emphatic absolute way that is posited in the story. Hence "methodologically it would make no sense whatsoever to postulate as an a priori. . .category of thought what is only a *product* of a particular event in Western mythology. . ."[7]

In mythical ritualistic cultures truth and realness belonged together: the real was also the true and the true only true to the extent that it was real. This confluence of the two has the character of *phainesthai* (appearance, shine). The word "phenomenon," for Giegerich, equals the word "image." Phenomena have no backs: they are what they mean and mean what they are. What manifests itself and impresses the soul with a numinous effect is true by virtue of its shining. To illustrate this, Giegerich refers to a conversation between Jung and a chief of the Pueblo Indians. For the chief and his people, the sun was the divine Father. Jung asked the chief whether he did not think that the sun was a ball of fire, shaped by an invisible God. In other words, Jung used the argument of Augustinus: "God is not the sun, but He who made the sun." For the Indian this was, Jung tells us, the most awful blasphemy. He merely answered: "The sun is God. Every one can see that." "This *is* the Father; there is no Father behind it."[8]

We must now contrast in more detail mythical Gods with the Christ event. In the world of myth it is not unusual for Gods to take on human form and appear as mortals. But—and this is crucial—we can never say of a mythical God that he is the "true man" nor that he is the "true God." The divine and human components of these Gods are never "absolutely true" or literally real. Christ, on the other hand, is neither simply a God who has assumed human appearance nor simply a man who has become equal to God nor some half divine, in-between creature, but a true God born as the Father for eternity *and* a true man born of the Virgin Mary. It is extremely important for Christianism that there be a fully pure and intense recognition of Christ's divine *and* human nature, and that there shall be no weakening or adjustment of this paradox whatsoever. Rather, the two opposing natures are to be together in one and the same person without conflict. They are not to be so crassly conceived that the two natures for all practical purposes fall into two

separate essences which could only by chance have found themselves in one and the same person. This precarious tight rope performance, which proposes the idea of a reality in which the divine and the human are *simultaneously* identical and separate, is called *perichoresis*, the reciprocal interpenetration of divine and human nature. God and man, *Logos* and *sarx*, Word and flesh, have become irrevocably fused at *one point*—in the person of Jesus the Christ. Heaven and earth have become the same, they interpenetrate each other. The heavenly *Logos* is now buried in earthly flesh. Giegerich calls this event "the somatization of being"—the establishment of a new composition of being in the sense of an empirical physical reality. Incarnation furnishes the only mythical base capable of supporting our concept of facticity and a sensorily objective corporeality. Only the Christian vision makes Plato's phrase: the body, the grave of the soul (*soma sēma psychēs*, Gorg. 493a) really true.[9]

Today for most people the first question in any talk about God has to do with his existence or non-existence. In the world of myth, however, questions of this kind simply do not arise. For example, one cannot say that Zeus existed or that he didn't exist. One lived daily in the light of Helios, one felt its radiance in one's body. Similarly, we do not ask: are there dogs? Is there wind? Is there life on earth? Natural phenomena have outpaced our questions about their existence long ago and our doubts have come always too late, because the answers were given by nature itself, i.e., by phenomena and their numinous shine.

Seeing God in the sun or in thunder has nothing to do with superstition or credulity; it is a kind of seeing that must be understood in the context of the mythical meaning of the word "God." God (*theos*) does not signify an acting person or a supreme being; initially it was not a possible subject of a sentence but a predicate, a predicative concept. The word *theos* served to state something about *real events*; it had the meaning of "unheard of," "extraordinary," "wonderful." The ancient Greeks could therefore say: "When a man helps his fellow man, that is God." The event, the phenomenon is God. "God" signified a quality of real events themselves, their effect on man. The Gods of myth were natural, self-evident Gods so that it was impossible to believe in them or to doubt their existence.[10]

The new Christian God has ceased to be a self-evident natural God. As "pure" spirit, "pure" love, etc. he can be present only through faith and through the preaching of his word. By the same

token he became a completely supernatural, transcendent, extra-mundane God—"the true God", the absolute *behind* sensate reality. According to Giegerich all this "is not simply a gain, but also a loss. The rise to the absolute is, as an *ab-solvere* (a detaching), at the same time a deprivation: God suffered considerable loss in substance and is, as the infinite, only an infinitely diluted remainder of what he once was. . ."[11] It is a loss because his status as a phenomenal reality has been exchanged for the impoverished status of an assertion or dogmatic statement, etc. "God was only able to acquire his literal existence by paying the price of his substantiality, self-evidence, and worldly embodiment." In short: "As God becomes world-less by his obtaining ab-soluteness, so earthly reality becomes God-less."[12]

To compensate, so to speak, for his lack of being, God, in the Christian story, became flesh. Enfleshment, according to Giegerich, means three things. First, God's essence ceases to be only image-like, mythical. God wants to be positively "someone," a substantial being, a being in flesh. Second, the fact that this God (*summum ens*, supreme being) must *become* flesh, shows that from the very outset he lacks something—that he is incorporeal, insubstantial, unreal. The natural Gods never need to *become* flesh because they always carry their corporeality in their image-like or imaginal nature. Third, in the event of the Incarnation a twofold change takes place: a change in the essence of the flesh and a simultaneous change in the essence of nature. Giegerich wants us to really listen to *what* is being said in the sentence "*Logos* becomes flesh." The crux of the matter is not what is meant (in the sense of a "true" dogmatic statement), but what is really said, i.e., what is effective and historically real. The idea of the Incarnation should not be protected from historical reality as if it were something in which an individual is free to believe or not to believe. It must be realized that this idea implies a decision about the very essence of reality, of what henceforth is to be called "real." In the saying "the Word becomes flesh" something enormous *happens*—not only to the *Logos* which descends from heaven, but also to the flesh (the terrestrial, temporal, mortal reality assumed by the *Logos*). In effect, we are witnessing here an event of awesome proportions: the flesh—in its oneness with the *Logos*—acquires a radically different nature. The very idea of flesh, earth, reality is changed. The flesh is no longer natural, but flesh from above; indeed it is not flesh at all but, so to speak, a "logolized," abstract flesh.

In the world of myth the natural reality was not without its own *logos*, but it was the natural *logos*, the *logos* of nature. Now however

a reversal takes place: the *logos* which previously was hidden in nature has broken out of it, has become independent, absolute. God's enfleshment, in Giegerich's view, inaugurates an ontological revolution. Henceforth only what is *logos*-like will be called real. In the event of Christ a new concept of reality is sketched, a concept which later will become the justifying ground of the natural sciences. The Incarnation, seen ontologically, is the grandiose outline of the idea that nature can be replaced by a *second, no longer natural nature*. It is the program designed to substitute a technological world for the natural world. The theological term for this kind of corporeality is "flesh" (*sarx*); the contemporary philosophical designation is "positive, technological reality."

Technology is *Logos* because it originates in reason; it is a product of the mind, an idea. At the same time technology is flesh, because it is corporeal reality and not simply an idea. And finally, technology is that which has "become," because it is not something which originates out of itself (as in the case of nature) but is artificially made, the conversion of an idea into tangible reality. In fine, the flesh, after the Incarnation, has acquired a new meaning: it is "made," technological flesh, a second nature.

We can also say that in the wake of the event of Incarnation, being (reality) is translated from the language of nature into the language of physics and technology. Occasionally we still call physics, chemistry, etc. natural sciences even though what they investigate is no longer nature (the self-evident) but, on the contrary, that which is attainable by looking away from nature and using highly artificial tools, utensils and methods. The so-called natural sciences serve the Incarnation, and their ultimate goal is not to acquire knowledge, but to transfer the *Logos* from "above" into what was formerly the sheer radiance of the "naturally" natural, to transfer being from nature into technology.

Nature is not simply trees, mountains, animals, but a state, a condition of being. Giegerich's word for nature in this sense is "wilderness"—the Mother Earth encompassing and bearing our existence, bringing forth and nourishing man and engulfing him again at his death. Nowadays this "virgin nature" is withdrawing into an expanded version of the zoo which we call the natural reserve, wildlife sanctuary or national park. On a deep level, this fact has little to do with the spreading of civilization and the like: i.e., what we are witnessing is not merely a quantitative change, but something much more radical—a world shaking qualitative change in the relationship of nature to man and, by the same token, a fundamental transformation in the very *notion* of nature. Today, nature

is rapidly becoming "man's problem child" inasmuch as we are enjoined to guarantee her survival. "It is as if nature had become senile and helpless and now were utterly dependent on the care of her grown-up children, or as if she were on welfare requiring our planning and support." To Giegerich this means that an "ontological annihilation" of nature is taking place, "nature's denaturation", for in the very moment nature needs protection (stewardship), it is no longer nature in the true sense. The point is not that nature needs protection because we ruthlessly exploit the wilderness, but rather because the fate of nature herself is now in the hands of man.[13]

Now, just as nature (in the ontological sense) is something more than an assemblage of natural things, so is technology not simply a set of utensils and machines, but a way in which the totality of the world, the world as world, can *be*. There were technological discoveries and machines in antiquity, but they were not "technological" in our sense of the word for every discovery was embedded in myth. The inventors were gods and heroes (Prometheus), the *protoi heuretai*. Modern technology is something qualitatively different; it is technological *civilization*, a totalitarian framework embracing human existence in its entirety. Our entire being and our understanding of being is technologized and oriented toward technologicality. Technology has become its own goal, the goal we are called to serve. The common view of technology as instrumental (neutral in respect to human volition) is therefore obsolete. Technology is primarily and fundamentally an ontological event destined to change the very essence and meaning of reality.

To be sure, says Giegerich, we still have our poets and painters, forests and brooks, but nature in its deepest sense (wilderness) belongs to the past. Art, like *mythos*, exists objectively only on the basis of nature and, inversely, nature exists only on the basis of art and *mythos*. In this respect the great lyric poetry of a Goethe proves nothing. Nature did not die subsequent to the death of forests. She essentially died when Plutarch's words "the Great Pan is dead" negatively certified the decline of the nature-gods. The Incarnation positively sealed Plutarch's words through the instauration of a new, entirely different God. The empty space, formerly occupied by genies (spirits, etc.), has been taken over by *genius*, the subjective, feeling "I," the sorcerer who attempts to re-animate nature. The nature poetry of our geniuses however can no longer embody objective truth because there can be no objective nature in the absence of nature gods. Both *anima* and poetry have been exorcised from nature. After the death of the Gods, nature is either its own spectre or an organization of forces, cells, molecules and particles.

Nature, art, symbols today exist only in the form of subjective experiences, leisure, antiquities. *A rose was a rose was a rose. . . .* As James Hillman has shown, the fowl and the pig are no longer animals but rather egg-producing and meat-producing machines.[14] All this however, is neither wrong and immoral nor right and good, just as rain or sunshine is neither wrong nor right. For no one in particular is responsible, there is no guilty party. It is simply the new truth of being: the flesh has become technological including the literal flesh of a pig.[15]

The Manufactured God

Earlier we alluded to the need to prove the existence of God. In Giegerich's opinion, this effort, far from being a purely intellectual game (in contrast to piety), is itself a form of true piety. We must not think of the proofs of God as an intellectual need for certainty; on the contrary, our need for certainty should be seen as a hint that God demands a real objective existence. God did not want to remain in the "state" of *Logos* (pure Idea): he wanted to become flesh.

There is an elemental dynamism propelling this whole process. The need to prove the existence of God is not a human necessity at all (the Medieval monks had no doubt in this regard). Rather we are witnessing here the Christian essence of God instinctively thrusting itself into consciousness. To be sure, this is not a "natural" instinct (like, for example, sexuality); it is *Logos* that wants to become flesh and precisely because it is *Logos* it announces itself at first in the form of logical argumentation.[16]

In the common view, modernity is mainly associated with man's liberation from Christianism. Giegerich believes the opposite is true. Modern man has renounced Christianism only to the extent that the latter is identified with a simplistic and literal approach to the Bible. If however by Christianism we understand an existential quest possessing and obsessing Western man, we must aver that in the emergence of modernity and science, Christianism has found its true essence and has come into its own.

It is customary to identify science with rationality, consciousness, and mathematical calculation. This is legitimate only from a purely formal point of view. When we observe the unprecedented dynamism and unrest accompanying scientific developments in all areas of life, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that this drive, far from being rational, is in the highest degree irrational; it is sheer instinct, possession, passion, monomania. Giegerich is not referring to the personal passion of a particular investigator, but to the passion of Western humanity. This means that science, unbeknownst

to itself, is a true religion in the double sense of careful observation (*relegere*) and of the archetypal dominants binding (*religare*) our perceptions, thinking, and behavior. The scientific instinct is the same religious instinct, the same unconscious impulse that stimulated medieval Schoolmen to prove the existence of God—a God whose essence consists precisely in demanding proof because proving (as logical argumentation) itself constitutes the real and indispensable form of worship. The concerns of Scholasticism and science are the same; only the shape assumed by the latter has decisively changed. Science has not abandoned Christianism; rather it is the Christian Church that has deserted science. The Church renounced its own child, its own living and developing Christian truth and has chosen to remain pure *Logos* (dogma, metaphysical doctrine, faith, inner experience).

When Giegerich suggests that the basic concerns of Christianism and science are identical, he means that science no longer demands the literal-Scholastic proof of God by means of logical deduction, for this kind of literalism really misses the point. A proof that is exclusively logical remains a matter of thought and does not affect the fleshly reality. *Logos* remains *Logos* (logical). Science has understood that there is only one way of proving something. An absolute God who is no longer obvious (as in myth) can be *proved only by manufacturing him*. *Logos* becomes flesh only through fabrication just as the presentation of a house becomes true only in the process of building it.[17] The task which science and technology unconsciously try to accomplish is to build, manufacture, and simulate God in actuality (in flesh). It is a continuing process of God's incarnation and at the same time the empirical proof of his existence by means of created physical reality (artificial technological nature).

An objection may be raised that a manufactured God, though empirically provable, cannot be a transcendent, other-worldly God, a creator; he himself would be a creature. Moreover, what would happen to a faith that believes what it sees not? Giegerich agrees that the manufactured God must remain a transcendent God. The only question is: how are we to understand words like "transcendent," "absolute," "other-worldly," "invisible" (non-sensual) and "creator"? If by "transcendence" etc. we mean that God has nothing whatsoever to do with the empirical reality, then of course he would be irrelevant. Clearly a transcendent God must be also in some sense immanent.

Transcendence, according to Giegerich, should not be conceived literally and metaphysically, but as a quality within reality, as another "style" of reality. The manufactured God is an empirical

absolute, an immanent transcendence, a sensibly given non-sensible. It is the technological world—artificial, unnatural—that transcends the natural world. It is the artificially made world that is progressively "absolutized," i.e., released from nature as the self-evidently given. For example, when we learn from physics that a piece of wood, completely contrary to its natural-sensible appearance, is in fact empty space, we are indeed in the presence of the empirical nonsensuous transcendence. It can be said therefore without further ado that scientific knowledge is realized faith, faith that believes what it sees not. Natural science, empirically speaking, is pure *super*-naturalism.[18]

Inflation of Things-Images

Giegerich operates with Jung's definition of religion as symbolic life—a life in which we participate via ritual. Symbolic life is not exclusively *our* life, *our* subjectivity. For next to the subjective and the personal there is an objective-psychical "spiritual life" which claims us; it is an *autonomous* life which uses us (like the drama uses the actors) for its own needs and is indifferent to *our* interests and concerns. For example, the Pueblo Indians see themselves as the sons of the Father, the Sun whom they must assist by helping him daily to rise over the horizon and to walk across Heaven. They do not do it for themselves only: ". . .we do it for America, we do it for the whole world."[19] Referring to the modern world, Jung says: "There is no symbolic existence in which I am something other, in which I play a role, my role as one of the actors in divine drama."[20]

Giegerich (respectfully) disagrees with Jung. The truth of the matter is that there is *today* a symbolic life in Jung's sense. We sacrifice two thirds of our available time to symbolic life without recognizing it as such. Here are some instances.

Millions of people sit every evening for hours in front of their TV sets. They imagine they do so for pleasure but that is only a pretense hiding the objective state of affairs. The cult of TV is not due to a natural human need; man is not naturally oriented toward entertainment. *Circa* 1700 there were no newspapers, no cinema and the only books to be found in the average household were the Bible, hymnal and, occasionally an Almanac. These books were read over and over again—sheer, endless monotony from our standpoint. Moreover there was no such thing as "free" time after the workday, but celebration-time (*Feierabend*, Holy-day).

In Giegerich's scheme of things, the provenance of TV is not human. Behind this phenomenon there is an objective necessity; television does not serve *our* need to be entertained—we serve

television. In its objective being TV is *show*, show as *theatrum mundi*—a mixture of world records, Westerns, Oscars, quizzes, summit conferences. It is the theatre of life in its heights and depths, in its spectacularity and banality. Man, the consumer, is used so as to replace the absolute God as the indifferent spectator with a God who is carnally represented in real life. There must be TV for the *divina comedia* to have real existence in the flesh. That television has nothing to do with the satisfaction of personal pleasure is betrayed by the fact that it often remains on when nobody is watching. The divine show must go on.

Before we turn to other instances of symbolic life it would be helpful to observe with Giegerich that the destruction of mythical imagination has by no means eliminated the imaginal. What has happened is that the image has undergone a fundamental change in quality: it has been intensified to the point of becoming "a distillate of image."[21] There has been an unprecedented inflation of the image; in effect we now live, says Giegerich, in an "absurdly imagistic time": posters, magazines, prints, art books, comics, TV, advertising, printed fabrics and wallpaper.

In mythical cultures, the image always conveyed *something*, a numinous Other which manifested itself immediately in the image, shining forth from it. By contrast, contemporary images are absolutely indifferent to *what* they show. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony can be the musical background for a soup commercial, a cognac commercial or a political party. What matters is pure *show*. This however is not exploitation of image and it would be inappropriate for us to react with moral indignation. "We must try to appreciate. . .television [etc.] as the modern form of image worship—as the authentic and only possible way to worship the image of the Christian God."

God's prohibition to make any "graven image" is only directed against natural deities, not against the pictorial representations of Jahweh himself. What is rejected is the worship of the natural inasmuch as it claims to be substantial and divine (imaginal). Concurrently, what is demanded is the cult of a God image that has left all traces of the natural behind and has no substantial content. "This," says Giegerich, "exactly corresponds to the new nature of God who has shaken off his natural reality and purified himself into an idealized 'unreal' abstraction, into an image in the public relations sense of the word. The Christian God's existence is not substantial; it lies solely in his prestige, the effect of his 'public relations', in his being believed by his 'true believers', his 'fans'."

The only difference between Christian and pagan worship is that the Christian God "does not have the sensual shape of natural phenomena or of a cast, painted, or carved image, but rather the abstract and absolute shape of image per se: the image of public relations. The numinosity once invested in *what* the image manifested now belongs to the 'image for the sake of image.' We need images, more and more images, no matter what of." What matters is prestige as such, the praise of the *name* for the name's sake. We can say therefore with Giegerich that ". . .*any* activity cultivating the prestige of something (. . .) is an enactment of God's nature and as such a sacred act—the cult of worship of *our* God image."[22]

Another example of symbolic life is advertising, which like television, has its predestined place in the new dispensation. Advertising replaces mythical poetry as the praise of the uncreated nature and its many Gods. It is the glorification of products, a hymn to production, i.e., a hymn to creation and the creator-God. Here Christianism ceases to be a purely subjective attitude and is transformed into an absolute existence imposing its reality upon us even against our will. "Advertising is the *constant proclamation of salvation and the constant confirmation in the belief in salvation.*"[23]

Speaking about computers, Giegerich stresses that their meaning goes beyond facilitating work. First, computers simulate the mighty vision of the enfleshed God as the *noēsis noēsēos*, thought thinking itself, i.e., thought that is fully autonomous and self-sufficient. Second, computers are the realization of God as the *intuitus originarius* (creative intuition). Our finite thinking proceeds discursively; we can only think one thought after another whereas God's thinking can grasp the whole at once, in one single glance. Computers simulate this procedure as well as they can under the conditions of temporality. The basic drive behind the computer industry is the vision of manufacturing God as the Omniscient, for the goal is the total storing of all information. We must note however that this is not a question about *our* omniscience: in point of fact, thanks to computers, we are becoming more and more nescient. Storage takes place for the sake of omniscience as such.

The transcendent, other-worldly standpoint of God acquires empirical existence also in the form of satellites and space travel. Whenever television shows us on a daily basis the satellite weather map we celebrate this transcendent standpoint.[24] The spy-flights which from the heights of many miles can spot golf-balls on the ground simulate the all-seeing eye of God under the conditions of empirical life (cf. Psalm 139, 7). The few examples we have adduced show that technology has the task of producing God's predicates in

a literal way, physically, in actuality. The divine predicates must no longer be *nomina, flatus voci* but *realia.*

Giegerich insists that it would be misleading to look for a special God in each of these inventions. We find plurality of different Gods, divine images, only in the things of nature. Technology as a whole is directed toward the erection of one, absolute, total, all-encompassing God—the God of technology. In a letter to me, Giegerich clarifies his position as follows: "The event of technology as a whole means the end of eachness, the end of cosmos and the victory of uni-verse. . .Concrete objects, tables, cars, shoes, tin cans, plastic now have their nature in being throw-away objects, and only abstract Technology as a whole has divine value."[24a]

To be truly a creator, to attain his full being, the God of technology must subdue everything that appears from itself, i.e., everything natural. It belongs to his very essence to conquer, extensively as well as intensively, a people, a culture, one realm of being after another, for his dynamism lies in his lack of being. Only what is artificial assumes a confrontational stance in the presence of the natural, converting it into an object. The essence of a manufactured God consists in opposing and overcoming the natural. And the technological civilization *is* capable of overpowering the natural world because for this civilization things have become empirically evident. Every thing is a fusion of heaven and earth in one point (*perichoresis*). In a word, the very being of the artificial (the technological) is power and violence-violation. On another occasion, Giegerich singles out Goethe's Faust II as an allegory of the modern man and his inhospitality toward natural images. "Faust is the depriving, robbing one. So his name (fist) is not without deeper significance. Embodying the principle of literal activism, Faust is characterized by the empty fist that needs to grab in order to be."[25]

Giegerich rejects any attempt to explain technology as the product of human pride—that would be to ignore facts. Technology is our burden, an exacted duty whether we like it or not. It is the destiny of the West and possibly of the world as a whole, so that every kind of moralistic valuation is pointless. The true *hubris* seems to consist precisely in trying to interpret technology in personalistic-moralistic terms, i.e., by conceiving it as human accomplishment. The merely human standpoint must be left behind if we are to understand this astonishing, monstrous, incredible phenomenon in the face of which we are becoming increasingly perplexed and helpless as it develops in its purity.

When we observe the behavior of twentieth century man we see the very opposite of *hubris*—an unusual modesty, discretion,

humility, even shame. We no longer have kings representing our highest self. We have dispensed with servants; we identify with the needy, the oppressed. We see ourselves as needy: we like to appear sloppy and wear sneakers, blue jeans and T-shirts. We prefer to be photographed in snap shots so as to avoid posturing and ostentation. It is nearly impossible for us to "talk big" and at best we *tolerate* the sublime in the form of parody, satire, persiflage, irony. In all these instances Giegerich detects an unconscious defensive posture on the part of modern man and woman. We are anxious to avoid the danger of inflation because God, enfleshed in technology, is, in an uncanny way, exceedingly near and real. We must make ourselves small, appear shy in the presence of the Holy.

In reality, however, it is not human beings that are inflated but technical things. Things are becoming increasingly *logos*-like: they acquire ever more numerous divine attributes and autonomy. Things—the camera, car, stereo—are now the *fascinosum*, because they are invested with soul. For example, the senseless urge to buy and to consume, in Giegerich's view, is nothing less than an unconscious, unacknowledged act of devotion. The same applies to the phenomenon of a society built on planned obsolescence: it is as if things wanted to be bought as a way of receiving our tribute but do not wish to be at *our* disposal and for *our* enjoyment. They become worthless, i.e., they withdraw so as to remain autonomous. A similar situation obtains in the case of sight-seeing: every tourist must take a picture for the millionth time of this castle or that Greek temple. Things themselves demand reverence—a reverence which is long overdue considering the fact that we still prefer to dwell—neurotically—in pre-Incarnation mentality.

In all these and many other ways, spiritual life withdraws from human beings and is transferred to things. Things become dominant (prestigious) and human beings—mere servants. The place of events and decisions is surrendered to technology and the world of things acquires spontaneity, a numinous-irrational power of its own.[26]

Exteriorization

In one of his letters Jung relates that during an expedition in Kenya the party took a native into the jeep who had never seen a car. After a while the native asked the diver to stop the car and stretched himself on the ground, saying that he had to wait for his soul to catch up.[27]

We confuse the situation of the native with our own. We still assume that it is we who, thanks to our rational and technological

development, have surpassed the soul. Like the native, we the moderns, believe that the soul resides in what we have forsaken long ago: in nature, in the life of instinct and sexuality, in the earth, in myths and religions. The truth is that our soul has left all those things; *she* travels in the jeep, *she* sits at the steering wheel, whereas we have stepped out, and wait for the soul to catch up from behind, i.e., from everything that by now lies in the past. Actually however, we haven't stepped out at all for it is impossible to ignore the direction of history. We have stepped out only in fantasy. In reality Giegerich says we have been driving for hundreds of years with our backs turned against the direction of locomotion. No wonder, then, that we bemoan our alienation.[28]

Nature, mythos, the ancient Gods are really dead. And, as Hölderlin knew, it is not only forbidden but also impossible to awaken the dead. We believe that we are still living on earth whereas in truth our *anima* circles around the earth in our satellites in cold empty space. Instead of looking up from the earth to the sky, we look at our earth from above. Giegerich does not deny that our deep sense of communion with nature and our appreciation of the cultural treasures of the past are valuable human emotions. But insofar as these feelings are nothing more than sentimental nature romanticism and nostalgia for the lost world of myth, they have the effect of a lullaby. They foster the delusion that the past harbors *eternal* truths, that Mother Earth is indestructible, that the old values are stable. It is clear, however, that the air and the oceans will not be cleaned up, that the destroyed rain forests will never grow again. Apart from these ontic (empirical or physical) destructions, nature has been long since destroyed in its ontological essence. Man's attitude toward the world as a whole has radically changed because it has become possible first, to literally-physically leave the earth and second, to destroy life on earth, even the planet-earth itself.

In spite of all this we are still immersed in medieval states of mind. As we solemnly deliberate about self-actualization a truly human society (love of the neighbor), about a whole nature, etc., milliards are spent on industrialization, armaments, development of computers and space exploration. We manage to convince ourselves that people who are responsible for these excesses are the repressive holders of power, the plundering bosses of industry, the hybrid technocrats. In Giegerich's opinion, our attitudes in this respect are completely neurotic. The right hand refuses to know what the left hand is doing. But—just as the left hand is *our* hand, so these people are *our* industry bosses and *our* technocrats; it is they who carry our shadow for us so that our consciousness may

pretend to be immaculate. We belong to the very technocrats whom we loathe.

There is an infallible sign as to the true place of the soul: "Where your treasure is, there is your heart" (Matt. 6, 21). Where money accumulates, there is the soul. For the soul, according to the tenets of archetypal psychology, is not the private, noncommittal psyche of the individual, but the real, the collective unconscious in Jung's sense, the contemporary world of archetypal images. We should not be misled by the apparently rational character of technology. Technology is not the opposite of instinct and unconscious psyche but another style of unconscious. It is not the case that our consciousness has become rationalistic, calculative and so on; in point of fact, it is still very much entangled in idealistic, nostalgic, sentimental attitudes. What has happened is that instinctual psychic life has changed its language and its medium from a mythical to a rationalistic style. The objective (collective) psyche today is represented by technology. Technology is *our* nature, our new earth, our instinct, our body, our spiritual, symbolic life.

Hillman has pointedly observed that "technology is cursed by our mechanical idea of it. It is the great repressed, the unconscious . . ."[29] Giegerich, for his part, is convinced that technology is the new place of real, factual happenings. It is here—in the world of technology—that the real wind blows, a mighty *pneuma* of extraordinary dynamism. Once again, therefore, recognition and apology is overdue; we must admit that technology is "*our* place of 'soul-making', *our* form of alchemical opus and *our* place of theophany."[30]

As technology lost its connection with our consciousness and conscious development, our consciousness became alienated from technology. Scientists, condemned to the narrow confines of experimentation, have been unable to realize the true dimensions of their endeavor; they did not know that they were in effect the trustees of the Incarnation and that the administration of the Christian truth had been passed over to them together with the managers of industry and the advertising establishment.

We refuse to grant science and technology a psychological and theological reality and then—lo and behold—we are surprised that they are soulless and godless. We are doubly alienated: first, from *mythos* and nature because the objective psyche which formerly resided in these realms has been transferred to the technology; second, from technology as our contemporary nature and mythology because we have remained nostalgically bound to nature.[31]

In an effort to clarify what is at stake, Giegerich distinguishes between what he calls "Sunday-truth" and "work-day truth." From the perspective of Sunday-truth, religion means faith in the historical Jesus as the Christ, as "my personal savior." Here everything hinges on man as person, on his interior (inner being), on his moral sentiments, his faith. In this view, man or the idea of man becomes psychologically the highest value and provides the foundation for individualism, interiority, etc., in short, for *hubris* of consciousness (Jung called it "monotheism of consciousness").

Western ways of thinking and experiencing are steeped in the precincts of Sunday-truth; we despise the work-day truth which nonetheless determines the real, "the bottom line" circumstances of our existence. We allow ourselves the luxury of freedom of thought, i.e., the luxury of subjective and arbitrary *Weltanschauung* and religion whereas what really counts (and secretly we know it) is not *our* thinking ("our opinion") but what our "real behavior thinks." We live on two planes: we spend colossal sums of money for "culture" (theater, restorations, concerts, antiquities) without realizing that these cultural endeavors do not affect our real lives for they belong to the compartment "leisure-time" which is completely divorced from the compartment "work-time" or the "real world."

Giegerich urges us to recognize that the values of humanism, freedom, individualism (including the Jungian "individuation"), interiority, etc. are "the untruth of the West." We are not Indians who can find truth in the Self (Atman) and for whom it is entirely legitimate to downgrade matter and material reality. What for the Indians is truth, for the West is a sojourn in the lie-neurosis. Occidental truth is the opposite of that of India: it is the Incarnation, a movement into *outer reality*, conceived by Giegerich as *the* manifestation of objective psyche. The greatness of the Occident lies in the production of ever bigger collective, objectively real, autonomous-anonymous structures: physics, technology, industry, multi-national combines, consumer society, advertising, bureaucracy, statistics. For all "practical purposes" this *is* the direction of the Western libido and it is in this direction that we find *our* truth, our meaning, our *anima*. However, as we saw, the Westerner appears to be incapable or unwilling to choose between Sunday-truth and work-day truth. As long as this kind of paranoia persists, Christianism is bound to remain unredeemed. For only exteriorization, i.e., moving without reserve in the direction of our collective and objective reality (technology) can be the redemption and cure of the Christian *res religiosa*.

Incarnation is fulfilled in total exteriorization which, for Giegerich, is the crucifixion. Crucifixion is itself incarnation, complete immersion in earthly reality. God ceases to exist: "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me." God is now fully enfleshed and there is no escape hatch supplying the hope that his former metaphysical status may be restored. Resurrection is not the return of the old (God) but the resurrection of the *crucified* and God-less. In this sense resurrection, instead of making exteriorization retrograde, seals it. God is not dead, he continues to exist; it is only that in the event of his Incarnation-Crucifixion he has changed his Gestalt and his place. Once again he is as the mythical Gods used to be—a non-metaphysical innerworldly God. The only difference is that he no longer dwells in nature but in the artificial world of technological civilization (second nature). In view of this it is flagrantly unjust, notes Giegerich, to refer to our technological civilization as being secular or godless. Technology is not the *seculum* but, quite to the contrary, *civitas dei.*

Indeed one can say that Christianism has brought the fullness of grace, provided we do not understand "grace" in the banal sense of personal well-being (sanctification), but as the real presence of God. The things of technology *are* the empirical presence of the absolute God. And our age is the most Christian because it enacts the fulfillment of the Christian truth—the real enfleshment of God. Seen from the work-day perspective, Occidental man has lived extremely piously; he has been faithful (to the manufactured God) almost unto death if one considers the threat of nuclear holocaust and the progressive destruction of environment. It is as if the motto of technicalization were: *fiat deus, sed pereat mundus.*

Giegerich speculates (to my mind somewhat wistfully) that the transition from natural Gods to the absolute God (replacement of nature by the artificial world of technology) perhaps would not have assumed such *literally* catastrophic proportions if the entrance of the pre-existing *Logos* into work-day servitude had been accompanied by a similar movement of the part of the human *Logos*—the soul, heart, consciousness. Western humanity, by fully immersing itself into the world of technology, would have faced technological reality not in a neurotic way (not as the *seculum*), but, like archaic humanity, would have found its own place in the very midst of this earthly reality. As a result, the crucifixion would have been followed not only by resurrection but also by a *descensus ad infernos* (descent into the realm of shadows) and an ascension to heaven. The new artificial "earth" which was brought by Christianism would have appeared again, suffused with imagination and transparent to

heaven. Christianism and the technical world would have become psychological and thus have been recognized once again as our objective psyche (*anima mundi*). In a word, it would be a return of "animism"—not however in its pristine state but in the altogether new form of technological reality—as a kind of new primitivism.

In conclusion, Giegerich insists that it is not sufficient to use technology in a sparing, frugal way just as it is ineffectual to practice Christian love of the neighbor in the work place and in the neighborhood. That would be trying to dignify technology and the work-day from Sunday's perspective only. A really incarnated *Logos* demands real tribute: its enfleshment must be accomplished—even onto Good Friday—in *us* (in our consciousness) as well. This means that the *Logos* must take its abode beneath matter, beneath the things of technology; it must find in these things the place of its truth, its meaning, its soul, its God. The *Logos* must also give up the belief in the other-worldly God as well as in Christ as "my personal savior." For only a complete burial of the soul (*Logos*) in technology can bring about the rehabilitation-redemption of the shadow.[33]

NOTES

[1]Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, 10 March, 1967, Vol. 115, Number 3717, pp. 1205-1206.

[2]See Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 454-55.

[3]Wolfgang Giegerich, "Die Rettung des Kindes oder die Entwendung der Zeit," *Gorgo* 5/1981. p. 114. Author's trans.

[4] Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele in die technische Zivilisation," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1983, Vol. 52, pp. 211-276. My article is mainly a paraphrase of Giegerich's essay and there is no attempt on my part to intersperse it with adventitious thoughts or being critical. Besides "The Burial of the Soul" Giegerich is the author of numerous lectures held at The C. G. Jung Institute in Stuttgart as well as at the Eranos Conferences, Ascona, Switzerland. Dr. Giegerich received his university training in Würzburg and Göttingen, Germany, and Berkeley, California. He was assistant professor of German literature at Rutgers University from 1969-1972. He is now editor of *Gorgo*, a journal which delves into the meaning of terrorism and the current ecological crisis, linking these subjects to the imagination and to the loss of soul. He has just completed a major book entitled *Psychoanalysis of the Nuclear Bomb*.

[5] C. G. Jung, *CW* 18, par. 279.

[6] See Jung, *CW* 11, par. 211; pars. 250, 251; 9i, pars. 195-97.

[7] Giegerich, "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God," *Spring*, 1985, p. 15.

[8]Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1973), p. 25 ff; cf. *CW* 18, par. 688.

[9] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 223-26.

[10] See *ibid.*, pp. 233-34.

[11] Giegerich, "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God," *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

[12]*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10. Giegerich traces this development to the story of the Golden Calf in the Old Testament. See "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God," *op. cit.*, pp. 1-27.; cf. Giegerich, "Busse für Philemon: Vertiefung in das verdorbene Gast-Spiel der Götter" (*Eranos Jahrbuch* 1982, Vol. 51, pp. 189-242.)

[13]See Giegerich, "Saving the Nuclear Bomb," *Facing Apocalypse*, ed. by Valerie Andrews et al. (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1987), pp. 100 ff.

[14] See James Hillman, "The Animal Kingdom in the Human Dream," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1982, Vol. 50.

[15]See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 244-45. Giegerich consistently distinguishes between "ontic" and "ontological." "Ontic" refers to existing realities, events, behaviors and in some contexts to the empirical and literal levels of meaning. "Ontological" refers to Being and to the modes of Being that particular literal entities may be in. At times he equates "ontological" with the metaphorical/archetypal and the imaginal (in contrast to the imaginary). For example, the things of nature, even though they may be ontically very much alive, may nevertheless be said to be ontologically dead from the moment when they ceased to be the dwelling place of Gods, nymphs, daimons, and turned into objects of physics. Natural objects are ontologically dead when they no longer have a numinous shine, radiance.

[16] See *ibid.*, pp. 245-47.

[17] See *ibid.*, pp. 249-50.

[18] See *ibid.*, pp. 151-52.

[19] Jung, *CW* 18, pars. 625, 629.

[20] *Ibid*, par. 628.

[21] Giegerich, "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God," *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[22] *Ibid*, pp. 18-19.

[23] *Ibid*, p. 20.

[24] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," op. cit., pp. 255-56.

[24a] Giegerich, private communication, Oct. 3, 1986.

[25] Giegerich, "Hospitality Toward the Gods in an Ungodly Age," *Spring* 1984, —. 69.

[26] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 257-60.

[27] See Jung, *Briefe* III, p. 376.

[28] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, p. 261.

[29]Hillman, "The Imagination of the Air and the Collapse of Alchemy," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1981, Vol. 50, p. 327.

[30] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 262-65.

[31] See *ibid.*, pp. 265-66.

[32] See *ibid.*, pp. 267-71. In a personal communication Giegerich points out that the "Sunday-truth" and the "work-day truth" belong to two different levels. The higher level (the work-day truth) does not completely invalidate the lower level (the Sunday-truth); it only relativizes the latter. "We now live in a divided, two-layer reality; the first reality is that of personal psychology, the second that of collective or transpersonal psychology. . . .Archaic man did not have a personal psychology in the sense we do. Today it is possible for us to have two separate truths, that of our science and that of our faith or feeling. As long as we *know* that our faith or feeling are valid only on the level of our personal, subjective psychology, it is authentic." (Letter Oct. 3, 1986).

[33] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 273-76.

GARY SNYDER

Walking the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information

from *Mountains of Rivers Without End*

Maple, oak, poplar, ginkgo
New leaves, "new green" on a rock ledge
Of steep little uplift, tucked among trees
Hot sun dapple—
                wake up.

Roll over and slide down the rockface
Walk away in the woods toward
A squirrel, toward
Rare people! Seen from a safe distance,
A murmur of traffic approaching,
Siren howls echoing
Through the gridlock of structures,
Vibrating with helicopters,
    the bass tone
Of a high jet.

        Leap over the park stone wall
        Dressed fast and light,
        Slip into the migrating flow

New York like a sea anemone
Wide and waving in the Sea of Economy,
Cadres of educated youth in chic costume
Step out to the night life, good food, after work
In the chambers of prana-subtle power-pumping
Heartbeat buildings fired
Deep at the bottom, under the basement.
Fired by old merchant marine
Ex-fire tenders gone now from sea
To the ships stood on end on the land,

Ex-seamen stand watch at the stationary boilers
  give way to computers,
That monitor heat and power
Webs underground; in the air;
In the Sea of Information.

  Keen eyes on the sidewalks,
  Brisk flesh. Beauty and age strut and shuffle

  We curve round the sweep of great corners
  Cardboard chunks tossed up in truckbed
  Delicate jiggle, rouge on the nipple,
  Kohl under the eye.

Time and Life buildings—sixty thousand people—
Wind ripples the banners.
  Stiff shudder shakes limbs on the
  Planted trees growing new green,

Glass, aluminum, aggregate gravel,
Iron. Stainless steel.
Hollow honeycomb brain-buildings owned by

Columbia University, the landlord of
Anemone
          Colony
Alive, in the Sea of Information

  "Claus the Wild man"
  Lived mostly with Indians,
  Was there as a witness when the old lady
  "Karacapacomont"
  Sold the last bit of Washington Heights, 1701

  Down deep grates hear the watercourse,
  Rivers that never give up
  Trill under the roadbed, over the bedrock
  A bird angles way off a brownstone
  Couloir that looks like a route,

Echo the hollowing darkness.
Scatter on bedrock, crisscrossing light threads

Gleam sucking squeals up the side streets
One growl shadow
    in an egg of bright lights,
Lick of black on the tongue.
Echoes of sirens come down the walled canyons
Foot lifts to the curb and the lights change—
And look up at the Gods
Equitable god, Celanese god, noble line,
Old Union Carbide god,
Each catching shares of the squared blocked shadow
Each swinging in sun-dial arc of the day
More than the sum of its parts.
The Guggenheims, the Rockefellers, and the Fricks,
Assembling the art of the world, the plate glass
Window lets light in on "the water lilies"
Like fish or planets, people,
Move, pause, move through the rooms,
White birch leaves shiver in breezes
While guards watch the world,
Helicopters making their long humming trips
Trading pollen and nectar
In the air
            Of the
Sea of Economy,

    Drop under the streetworld
    Steel squeal of stopping and starting
    Wind blows through black tunnels
    Spiderwebs, fungus, lichen.

Ginkgo trees of Gondwanaland. Pictographs,
Petroglyphs, cover the subways—
Empty eye sockets of buildings just built
Soul-less, they still wait the ceremony
    That will make them too,
        New, Big
        City Gods,
Provided with conduit, cable and pipe,
They will light up, breathe cool air,
Breathe the minds of the workers who work there—
The cloud of their knowing
As they soar in the sky, in the air,

Of the Sea
Of Information,

    Cut across alleys and duck beneath trucks
    "Under Destruction"
    Stop to gaze on the large roman letters
    Of writing on papers that tell of Economy,

Skilsaw whine whips through the windows
Empty room—no walls—such clear air in the cellar
Dry brick, cooked clay, rusty house bodies
Carbide blade skilsaw cuts bricks. Squalls
From the steps leading down to the subway.
Blue-chested runner, a female, on car streets,
Red lights block traffic but she like the
Beam of a streetlight in the whine of the Skilsaw,
    She runs right through.

    A cross street leads toward a river
    North returns to the woods
    South takes you fishing
    Peregrines nest at the thirty-fifth floor

Streetpeople rolling their carts
    of whole households
Or asleep wrapped in light blue blanket
    spring evening, at dusk, in a doorway,
Eyeballing aretes and buttresses rising above them,
    con domus, dominion,
        domus,
    condominate, condominium
Towers, up there the
Clean crisp white dress white skin
    women and men
Who occupy sunnier niches,
Higher up on the layered stratigraphy cliffs, get
More photosynthesis, flow by more ostracods,
    get more sushi,
Gather more flesh, have delightful
Cascading laughs,

—Peregrine sails past the window
Off the edge of the word-chain
Harvesting concepts, theologies,
Snapping up bites of the bits bred by
Banking
    ideas and wild speculations
On new information—
        and stoops in a blur on a pigeon,

As the street-bottom feeders with shopping carts
Slowly check out the air for the falling of excess,
Of too much, flecks of extra,
From the higher-up folks in the sky

As the fine dusk gleam
    Lights a whole glass side of
    Forty some stories
    Soft liquid silver,

Beautiful buildings we float in, we feed in,

    Foam, steel, gray.

Alive in the Sea of Information.

V:85-III:87

ROSANNE WASSERMAN

Four Poems

INUIT AND SEAL

for Gaëtan and Jim

Who has been drinking our air from the other side?
The veils of valentines shake, wind chimes sound, and a hole
appears
round as a nostril, deep in the lake-blue ice.

One vibration tangibly carries: sky, cobalt glass, blue glaze,
but white petunias swim away from names, alive only so long,
a fabric translucent enough to reflect all shades.

Even when we talk, our garments different shades of rose,
a tone escapes, as if a wooden spear
could not stay in the hand

without concentration,
without becoming
a bundle of sticks and an axe.

But we were bravely talking. How long did it take to form
these rooms, to articulate spaces almost not there?
Hand and eye, back bent, suspense,

and hope: beneath this layer,
a seal might give us sustenance, more than we could believe,
and it rises to breathe just long enough, just so often.

To stay cannily silent that long, till the animal
swims to its highest hunger,
putting its wet snout, warm, to a single accustomed, awaited
point,

waiting to cry *yes*, never to let
the word break through to shatter
the waiting's end,

we imagine, again,
red rising under blue,
flesh like our own.

DARK FURNITURE

for Mimi Bess

Things that are reappearing now
only pretend to repeat, repair
or remember the unholy longings
I unwittingly memorized,
or, worse, consciously thought wise
to record in some permanent system
for posterity, which does not
exist in the way I think.
No one waits to close my eyes
or break my household up,
although the mysterious objects
I fully recall having had removed
from my greedy fist when I was three
turned out to be still waiting in your bureau.

When I saw them later, again,
by, say, thirty years,
their importance was not nostalgia
but their unrecallable lure,
along with the sheer fact of *revenance.*
So my desire revalued them
to make them more worth keeping,
though few of those things
shine the way *these* do,

thirteen drops of amber chandelier glass—

mine again! mine again! Mimi,
when you pried them from my grasp
and rolled them to the back of the long dark drawer,
over its purple felt, meant to pamper silver,
you didn't know you kept them there for me.
I found them after you'd left for good,
without really saying goodbye, except
the night I dreamed of your kitchen stove:
where you stood saying "That's all right.
I thought the nurse was you.
When I died, I thought that you were there."

Mine again? past thirty years, having
learned who you were and lost you,
with nothing I wanted more from you
than seeing you alive;
but long ago I may have wanted
those smooth crystals more.

And now are they more to me than the forgotten,
found after waiting beneath the days'
bald angling into future? How had I
gotten my hands on them? For what
had they been returned? Would I have been punished
for greed, or have cut my tongue?
Did they foretell the years I'd be away before you died?

And my mother said: "those drops were her souvenirs,
removed after certain months unwove
the household where she was born,
taking dark furniture out of the place where
knowledge gave it brilliance,
where she trusted patterned days
to keep her things alight: and
darkest when the walls have been knocked down,
so that a useful formlessness uncuts the memory
from uselessness, from self, from
love, from what was there before,
from cherished or expensive things
no children ought to fondle.
Imagine that enormous chandelier!"

INTERVIEW WITH ELPENOR

"I have seen floating" says Elpenor
"blue bags in the Aegean:
cheapest plastic azure as the water
and the sky. Greece isn't wealthy
but Long Island City is bleak"

This is lunchtime Out of easy reach
he tears a peach in half and sets
one hemisphere in his teeth
He offers his audience the half with the stone

"I have never been as tired
as when we roofed that house
Thirteen hours in hot sun, heavy labor
carrying sandbags climbing ladders
until when I leaned back

over the red tiles shut my eyes
I fell asleep at once my friend called me
he thought I'd fallen off
You should have seen me then
I could have burned you with my eyes"

Wearing black well before winter
he likes dark colors soon all the women
will dress in navy blue "A darkness
moves about him when he moves"
"What is it that these men

want?" "To get down to some
real flesh" he says and turns the pages
of a catalogue of marble statues
Tell him how he makes you feel
he turns the palm

of one hand slowly on the other
"Did you ever want to touch someone
so much it made you cry?"
Speak of love and he recalls a man

so generous "he'd give you, literally

the coat off his back" Of work:
"there was nothing like working
just with him one other person
in communication building something"
Of marriage: "you are married?

Well, stay married" Of desire:
"the snow" and of imagination:
"I like to think of Socrates
that old codger walking through Athens
questioning everything"

Reading *We Always Treat Women Too Well*
he refuses to let them down
tilting a single rose to sniff
then turning it around blossom and thorn
in her entranced direction

The pigs love roses Asking your permission
he turns himself into a pig
so he can love them too
Utopian ingle! Where the pigs can weep

Wearing mirrored aviator shades
he says one day "I should
have been a shark" It tears
them up their hearts
go out they start

to feel for him can he not feel?
Wedded to what Circe did he practice
this enchantment? He should be buried
should have been buried
by his mates and comrades long ago

if he could find that one
would he not ask it?

BUSKINS AND ROBINS

You call these signs of springtime?—
the department of funny hats,
a flock of sun-white pigeons, Fort Hamilton Parkway
in the snow. A push through the heavy
turnstile tears a little more time away,
but better that than dragging it behind you.

A working season, really. Once again I've been called in
for fifty-minute stints before the gradeschool.
Between acts I retire to a lounge with
walls of croquette salmon, going downstream fast
in flight from turquoise naugahyde:
the colors of an ice-cream den,
I notice. Brushing off the Crumbs
of Coffee Break with a *serviette*,

we get to work. I call the troop,
all twelve years old or less, to come to order.
They ask for ancient news,
and call it as they see it rolling:
the flavor of the month, a revelation.
I don't have a call for this, but they're
sheer method actors, little eyases:
they call us out for panegyrics on their pantomimes,
pots and pans, pantoums, pantaloons,
pancakes, panaceas.
They rank Medusa with King Kong,
you know, or call themselves
by names like Crocodile or Twong the Wrestler.

Encourage this ability to recognize their world,
peopled with its archaisms under
the bright new awnings. Don't call them on
the carpet just for nourishing themselves.
They saw an anvil first the same way you did:
heaved from an upper story window,
after a baby grand. The hand
dare seize the thing was Daffy Duck's.

As I call on another young
sweetheart, this one barely three feet high,
I recognize eternal return
requires a stern recall
of how those worms are hiding,

not of where. The first plump fellow
has three months before he resurrects,
and yet its knell whirs in some crimson throat,
like that one over that way, see?—
he's wearing a little knit muffler,
and whistling that old sweet song,
"The Weather's Bound to Change."

TERRY YANK

Six Photographs

JOHN YAU

The Photographs of Terry Yank: An Introduction

There are four people involved: a woman and a boy are fighting with each other, an older woman is looking on, and a young girl is lying face down on the boardwalk, as if she is fantasizing about something only she can see. The photograph frames the turbulence so that the boardwalk tilts slightly. In her exploration of the relationship of children, adolescents, and adults with each other, Terry Yank is always conscious of how to integrate both the action and her vision of it. The placement of her subjects, their gestures and stances, within the rectangle is carefully considered, and in this regard she can be compared to a choreographer.

An extreme sensitivity to placement is common to the strongest street photographers. Rather than approaching her subjects from a predetermined distance or set angle, she must find the place where the action and her vision of it merge into a highly resolved image. At the same time, she is conscious of the effects of light and dark, sunlight and shadow. In her photograph of an adolescent boy in a uniform, she uses a flash in daylight, causing his face to be both pulled forward from the picture plane and isolated just enough from the rest of the picture so as to become the focal point of our attention.

The photographs transcend the documentary because of Yank's response to the placement and relationship of figures to each other and to the environment. Everything in the photograph gains a resonance that goes beyond the depicted moment. A young girl with outstretched arms resembles a puppet on strings. This metaphor is contextualized by the soldiers marching by. Between the soldiers and the young girl stands a woman holding a baby. The curve of the baby's head and back rhymes with the posture of the closest soldier. The photograph frames a possible future by being attentive to the peculiarities of a moment.

"No ideas but in things," Williams wrote. Yank is a street photographer who uses the camera to explore the kinds of control one attempts to enforce over another. What is disturbing about her vision is that the primary characters are parents and children. Her photographs convey the terror and aggressiveness simmering beneath the surface of seemingly straightforward moments of intimacy. A man holding a child rolls on a beach.

Octavio Paz

I Speak of the City

for Eliot Weinberger

(Tr. from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger)

a novelty today, tomorrow a ruin from the past, buried and resurrected every day,

lived together in streets, plazas, buses, taxis, movie houses, theaters, bars, hotels, pigeon coops and catacombs,

the enormous city that fits in a room three yards square, and endless as a galaxy,

the city that dreams us all, that all of us build and unbuild and rebuild as we dream,

the city we all dream, that restlessly changes while we dream it,

the city that wakes every hundred years and looks at itself in the mirror of a word and doesn't recognize itself and goes back to sleep,

the city that sprouts from the eyelids of the woman who sleeps at my side, and is transformed,

with its monuments and statues, its histories and legends,

into a fountain made of countless eyes, and each eye reflects the same landscape, frozen in time,

before schools and prisons, alphabets and numbers, the altar and the law:

the river that is four rivers, the orchard, the tree, the Female and Male, dressed in wind—

to go back, go back, to be clay again, to bathe in that light, to sleep under those votive lights,

to float on the waters of time like the flaming maple leaf the current drags along,

to go back—are we asleep or awake?—we are, we are nothing more, day breaks, it's early,

we are in the city, we cannot leave, except to fall into another city, different yet identical,

I speak of the immense city, that daily reality composed of two words: *the others*,

and in every one of them there is an I clipped from a we, an I adrift,

I speak of the city built by the dead, inhabited by their stern ghosts, ruled by their despotic memory,

the city I talk to when I talk to nobody, the city that dictates these insomniac words,

I speak of towers, bridges, tunnels, hangars, wonders and disasters,

the abstract State and its concrete police, the schoolteachers, jailers, preachers,

the shops that have everything, where we spend everything, and it all turns to smoke,

the markets with their pyramids of fruit, the turn of the seasons, the sides of beef hanging from the hooks, the hills of spices and the towers of bottles and preserves,

all of the flavors and colors, all the smells and all the stuff, the tide of voices—water, metal, wood, clay—the bustle, the haggling and conniving as old as time,

I speak of the buildings of stone and marble, of cement, glass and steel, of the people in the lobbies and doorways, of the elevators that rise and fall like the mercury in thermometers,

of the banks and their boards of directors, of factories and their managers, of the workers and their incestuous machines,

I speak of the timeless parade of prostitution through streets long as desire and boredom,

of the coming and going of cars, mirrors of our anxieties, business, passions (why? toward what? for what?),

of the hospitals that are always full, and where we always die alone,

I speak of the half-light of certain churches and the flickering candles at the altars,

the timid voices with which the desolate talk to saints and virgins in a passionate, failing language,

I speak of dinner under a squinting light at a limping table with chipped plates,

of the innocent tribes that camp in the empty lots with their women and children, their animals and their ghosts,

of the rats in the sewers and the brave sparrows that nest in the wires, in the cornices and the martyred trees,

of the contemplative cats and their libertine novels in the light of the moon, cruel goddess of the rooftops,

of the stray dogs that are our Franciscans and *bhikkus*, the dogs that scratch up the bones of the sun,

I speak of the anchorite and the libertarian brotherhood, of the secret plot of law enforcers and of bands of thieves,

of the conspiracies of levellers and the Society of Friends of Crime, of the Suicide Club, and of Jack the Ripper,

of the Friend of the People, sharpener of the guillotine, of Caesar, Delight of Humankind,

I speak of the paralytic slum, the cracked wall, the dry fountain, the graffitied statue,

I speak of garbage heaps the size of mountains, and of melancholy sunlight filtered by the smog,

of broken glass and the desert of scrap iron, of last night's crime, and of the banquet of the immortal Trimalchio,

of the moon in the television antennas, and a butterfly on a filthy jar,

I speak of dawns like a flight of herons on the lake, and the sun of transparent wings that lands on the rock foliage of the churches, and the twittering of light on the glass stalks of the palaces,

I speak of certain afternoons in early fall, waterfalls of immaterial gold, the transformation of this world, when everything loses its body, everything is held in suspense,

and the light thinks, and each one of us feels himself thought by that reflective light, and for one long moment time dissolves, we are air once more,

I speak of the summer, of the slow night that grows on the horizon like a mountain of smoke, and bit by bit it crumbles, falling over us like a wave,

the elements are reconciled, night has stretched out, and its body is a powerful river of sudden sleep, we rock in the waves of its breathing, the hour is tangible, we can touch it like a fruit,

they have lit the lights, and the avenues burn with the brilliancy of desire, in the parks electric light breaks through the branches and falls over us like a green and phosphorescent mist that illuminates but does not wet us, the trees murmur, they tell us something,

there are streets in the half-light that are a smiling insinuation, we don't know where they lead, perhaps to the ferry for the lost islands,

I speak of the stars over the high terraces and the indecipherable sentences they write on the stone of the sky,

I speak of the sudden downpour that lashes the windowpanes and bends the trees, that lasted twenty-five minutes and now, up above, there are blue slits and streams of light, steam rises from the asphalt, the cars glisten, there are puddles where ships of reflections sail,

I speak of nomadic clouds, and of a thin music that lights a room on the fifth floor, and a murmur of laughter in the middle of the night like water that flows far-off through roots and grasses,

I speak of the longed-for encounter with that unexpected form with which the unknown is made flesh, and revealed to each of us:

eyes that are the night half-open and the day that wakes, the sea stretching out and the flame that speaks, powerful breasts: lunar tide,

lips that say *sesame*, and time opens, and the little room becomes a garden of change, air and fire entwine, earth and water mingle,

or the arrival of that moment there, on the other side that is really here, where the key locks and time ceases to flow:

the moment of *until now*, the last of the gasps, the moaning, the anguish, the soul loses its body and crashes through a hole in the floor, falling in itself, and time has run aground, and we walk through an endless corridor, panting in the sand,

is that music coming closer or receding, are those pale lights just lit or going out? space is singing, time has vanished: it is the gasp, it is the glance that slips through the blank wall, it is the wall that stays silent, the wall,

I speak of our public history, and of our secret history, yours and mine,

I speak of the forest of stone, the desert of the prophets, the ant-heap of souls, the congregation of tribes, the house of mirrors, the labyrinth of echoes,

I speak of the great murmur that comes from the depths of time, the incoherent whisper of nations uniting or splitting apart, the wheeling of multitudes and their weapons like boulders hurling down, the dull sound of bones falling into the pit of history,

I speak of the city, shepherd of the centuries, mother that gives birth to us and devours us, that creates us and forgets our existence.

Tom Mandel

Two Poems

HUNGRY AND WAITING

Everyone here has the same idea.
"My hand is of destroyed
gold. An asseverated
fountain breaks dirt
with the red flowers & herbs
that climb out of the
garden, so slowly that
they glide down the comfort
of the hill for years.
The enameled glow of time
slides through my life like dimes
through a nickel slot."
An amorous glow surrounds
them and attaches
a part of their
size to the single
temper of a radial cloud,
as latent colors pile up
in the impervious
backwater of love below.

All stars of morning singe you,
giving orders to endure.
During that meeting her war
was flashing, errant
targets, and wished flirtations.
Her war was a flashing errand.
I go crazy where we went
together. Put your Tenor
sax on the bed, clothes
on those magazines; be

funny, bounce. Take
a motel room in
the family home, man
just gallop away
with all of the salt
to make a mammoth gleam
that's shaking
in the seat of his dance
while confidential clouds stroke
my forehead.

Friendliness is not the same
as friendlessness.
A liquid and a glass
are near but not so near
as the elision of touch
is a gas. Stable
and distended, like
a marble in a mirror,
at an angle or otherwise
we float under a thin crust
of whisp, ourselves a great
unconscious borne on edge
in the unhinged plane
peeling away to radiated
paleness with painted points
crippled corners, and
ripples, a glory of wings
to perturb the motion of
purposeful bulk
into faint forward.

The edge is pulpy, but
borders of tomorrow hurtle
below cumuli of night,
until our destiny dips
under the cloudy crust
of a colorless valley
whose gray spherical interior
is clouded sky, and
movement crackles with resistance.
The sky blues to gray

through the thin menace of clustered
vapors.
Occasional clearings pierce the
monochromatic desert of grasp.
Secret clouds kindle a Valhalla
of our variance, and
only the faintest dye prevails,
dips of cloudy horizon.
A single point, and even that lapses,
is bliss to stretch
with none to touch.

Wagons pass in the gap
of authorization while
flip side attendants
loop the heavy rolls.
We round and we shot.
Meticulous with silver
the sky disappears
into a cut out enclosure.
But as I sought that haven
a streak of shangri-la sky
returned brighter than before
and on it a spot of hero's
blood was the horizon.
Credits roll up the
ravishing view. Clouds snake
under the doorman's
invading voice. A black
stripe trails downward
across the stormy quadrant
from the point of the
sun's last crust
to a touch of horizontal memory.
We turn back to black,
heart to smoke, cloud
to descending blues.

October 1986

These stars, they lock together.
They hook zero out of scale.
Their action strikes out anchor.
Their script is an anvil, tomorrow's
lights a smear on their balustrade.

Their hands are as alone,
hairs on your arm or vectors
tumbling toward the chill.

They stumble past the inside
noises. Their calculus is
adept, a package in the mail.

Their coffin is tomorrow sideways today.
Capable bubbles, zeros, they spiral
up, they storm thought's measure.

ROBERT TEJADA

A Delta for D.H.L.

1
[Pomona]

Like one who waits to witness
the aperture of "sullen earth" (whose cloister
is not without entrance)

who inhales the hyacinth (was it cyclamen?)
on this rich telluric pillow
so that a ribbon of sleep is secured

around the hair of girls in saffron petticoats
whose giggle heard from an insular cliff of Aegea
is the thrill of his falling:

those first feminine voices of memory
that unfasten him from the familiar recital
inside all closure of thought.

And the scratchy hinges of delight
when he comes into the orchard as if
entering a woman's alcove

which is only the silver dome
of the pear and pomegranate trees in the bare
winter of her governance; nonetheless

to unveil the body of its gown!
To slip into its confection
as if all else but the quince-colored tuft

which is warm at the lips, were but a bitter cake!
As if in the blur of orgasm when thumbing
her slender breasts pressed back she

looked for a moment like a boy.

2

Her song is artless. Says "mah th' maed(n) moathe innana." Says the dock's sway creak tonight: come cradle with me. Thinks of the horses at the shore whose delicate gallop might mingle with the timbre in the pellucid prose of her undoing. Might lessen the divide between all beach & motion of the sea with each Guidonian syllable in the tonic sol-fa of her choosing. Ah! to sip the hot aria of her logick like the short breaths from his mouth later buried in the muzzle of her patch. To unravel the equestrian prance of the groin and its equivocal dance-hall back-step side, side, together: whose finale sings Our Lady of the Paragraph scream *O please these drunken sailors!*

3

What with the thick immobility of our limbs & the languor
of breath surrendered like these long pulses of afternoon
from the disarrange of the still-crisp bedding we come
to find ourselves flung upon. How heavy the don is

of the sweat-speckled surface of the skin and from
whose repose came we to be tumbling from the vertigo
of the maternal rose unbending's conduit of the mind's
outward blooming & all doors swung open & all curtains

drawn. How declivity blended with spire to resemble
us walking out with Her into the abandoned boulevards
of *the silvery city of the body*, final architecture,

where the threefold cipher of maternity constructed
of Her soul's communiqué from Kali come undarken
the hard glow of this triangular light of the groin.

[S.N.]

THAD ZIOLKOWSKI

Two Poems

RULES

The distance from Q to the origin
in spare moments between exercises
each night and then regularly
whites to white beaches blacks to black beaches
impeccably clear
digit
goiter
the walls
and the garden within the walls
recede
as yes is to us so no one's are we to
nor morning nor midday nor any continuous stream
inflecting the spin of its chamber
cancellation wind perfection hypnotic tumbling
the massive sheets gerundive candelabra tissue faint
soloistic vein enmeshing the elegant
question mark's terminal stem in the cannibalistic retina
the distance from Q to the origin

INSIDE THE WIND

Inside the wind branches crossing with diagonal
etchings of rain
and inside the room a ball of yarn jerked along
knowing one day
all will be in hand, raveled in the the spillway
of a hand. Friends
too near to be touched by my lashing out
a voice says
cleave to me for I am the beloved

Laura (Riding) Jackson

Introduction to a Book of Later-Life Commentaries

I initially thought of assembling these later-life commentaries on the human experience as a book of memoirs. Ruskin's "Praeterita" appealed to me initially as a leading word for its title, but as I proceeded in the writing of it, the sense of recollective treatment of one's life and work evoked by the word, and the strong implication of the category "memoirs" of terminated experience, proved unsuitable to what I had to tell. My experiences, in their essential character and content, are not framable as personal history, conveyable in the rhetoric of autobiographical narrative. I could not tell what there is further to report by going back to speak of past things in the tenses of a varied historical present. What I have now to tell requires to be told in the tenses unifying tense of survival.

The title of one of the chapters of this book is "The Person I Am." The setting of what I have to tell is a continuum without a dated story-limit. It is this not for the private particular reason that I view my life, in its eighty-seventh year as I write here, as in the midst of itself, but because I have continuously lived, and continuously live, as a witnesser of what is experienceable from within human frame of being. The person I am, the person I have not other than been, knows the length and breadth of the human frame of being as a continuum, knowledge of which is limited only by the shadows of a strangeness of minds to themselves falling upon them obstructively. The susceptibility of human beings to discomforts of strangeness to themselves has varied much from person to person, and from human time to human time, and from human places to human places. Familiarity, in human beings, of their minds with themselves, is the centralizing force of their knowledge of their reality as human beings; and it is the touchstone of their familiarity with the reality to them of their human knowledge at large. I write of what I have lived, learned, found mine to tell of from a vantage of familiarity with my matter of report that, while being a familiarity with its "personal" subjects, has, for general subject, the matter of human witness in its scope as the undivided territory of humanly possessed mind.

The *indivision* of mental presence of being of which I speak here is not a mere gesture of quarrel with the "private-public" categorization that became, in this century, a standardized distinction in the psychology of poetic authorship. I am describing a way of personal being that, for me, is the natural human life-condition, not an adopted literary position. Living by this condition took me into a literary life-course. But that this should prove to be my life-course was never, for me, an identification of it as a course of life in a special world—a "literary" world. My conception of my engagement in writing intended for reception under the broad covering denomination "literature" has comprised no sense of preparing contributions to a special property-field of human interests governed by judgment-values, customs and policies of behavior and practice, relevant centrally to its internal structure, only marginally, in incidental practicality, to the mixture of interests that make up the general human world. My understanding of the natural human point of literature is at odds with the status of literature in the time into which I was born. While I became aware, as I went on, steadily, in my literary life-course, of how grotesquely much the status of literature is at odds, in this century, with the actuality (what the natural human point of it is), I have clung to the life-course in which I committed myself. I have, undeniably, a literary-world identity—a grotesque compound of irrelevant ascriptions adhering magnetically to the fact of my accepting the denomination "literature" for my writings. To clarify my having that kind of identity by describing what this denomination signifies for me is one of my purposes in my later writing, telling, endeavor. The identity comprises that of the stranger that literary-world tags of identity have made of me in the human records of our time.

2.

My sense of what constitutes, in human substance, the literary world, this complex of interest in "writing" and "writers," and special objectives, codes of organization and personal social practice, has always been subject to the conglomerate of human living, doing, thinking, seeking to determine the further and further of what it is to be "human"—what it is, in the full of knowing being, to be. I have not seen myself as writing in an environment of literary professionalism, or as occupying an enclave of private ground within it, defying reigning standards of the literary "good." I have not brought my horizons of sensibility under any categorically literary laws of perspective or sub-literary prescriptions of personalistic autonomy. It has been part of my faith in the human power

of "writing" to distinguish between a literary professionalism that is of amateur quality in its commitment to intellectual and spiritual seriousness and a preoccupation with literature as a ground of intellectual and spiritual functioning of primary importance for the human world at large—and the world of the universe.

Despite a grim insufficiency to itself, the contemporary special world of which literature is the component fabric maintains itself in a condition of gross exclusiveness. Each of its regions boasts its peculiar mentality. All are sharply differentiated from one another by a fierce endemic inward-turned vanity, each rather contemptuous of outer views of it, all kindred in a rather contemptuous disposition towards the general outer human totality, this with condescending gratitude to it for its existence as "material." The regions are variedly many: authorial, critical, journalistic, editorial, commercial (the publisher and agency areas), scholastic, metascholastic (the region of literary activity of varying kinds and degrees of academic affiliation), cultural, metacultural. These last two are not regions so much as units of extraneous population of the literary world, that of the plain-reader sort, a visiting, non-resident slave population, and that of the proud-reader sort, a hanger-on, tourist-lover, near-resident, very "literary." Of course, many of the inhabitants of the literary world may be ranked as metaculturally "literary," in their belonging to an internal readership. Among these, there is bound to be much askance-looking at the productive output of their world. The carpers, of the metaculturally "literary," are, actually, meta-metaculturally "literary!" They tend to behave as unconscientious objectors to what they see as demeaning the dignities of literary performance—to avoid severities of judgement that might reverberate in the "other" world to the general discredit of the literary world.

To find one's way through the intricate network of interconnections of the literary world, to a point of comfortable location in it, is to be both lost in it, and to the potential human and universal reality of literature. To try to function in it on principles of human sensibility, moral, intellectual and spiritual dispositions bred up in one by one's nativity as a being of the general human world, holding to these in one's breast as one's birthright of natural resources of understanding, and to refuse to subdue or replace them with superimpositions of substitutions better suited to the literary world's requirements of competitive energy—exertion and its conventions of equating these with amenities of literary-world sociality, is to provoke literary-world assassination.

I first felt the *difference* of literary-world life in my rather brief association with the group of poets of the name "The Fugitives," first as an honorary, then as a full, member of the group; and, then, in a short period of experience of a certain section of New York City literary life. Although I reacted light-heartedly, in the main, to the New York City experience, my early-life American experience of literary-world personal and professional codes was such that if I had not been protected by a natural plain-world mental and constitutional buoyancy I might have been destroyed by it, in one or another way.

In my extensive special experience of the English literary and European-located areas of the literary world, I functioned from the beginning with a natural-world accent. By my associated, and especially so in the case of my main associate in the period of my writer's life and activity abroad from the U.S.A., were quite thoroughly impregnated with literary-world conceptions of the determining necessities and principles of the writing functions. The inspiration these had from me, the guidance, the unfolding of new or refreshed objectives, the provision of new paths of thought, the lessoning in my knowledge of word-meaning values developed from natural linguistic sensitivity, not by deduction from literary usage, the active, practical help I gave them in their work—all this was, of course, personally invigorating to them. Each took, of these ministrations, to the limit at which the sense of advantage remained uncontaminated by compunctions of vanity—vanity putting the question "Am I becoming too much indebted?" My main associate, Robert Graves, suffered of no such compunctions.

Robert Graves was congenitally literary-world minded. As a literary man, he began upon stances of literarily sophisticated simplicity. At the time of our encounter, he had exhausted that vein, and was floundering in a confusion of speculative probings of modernly new veins to which he might adapt his talents. These he had previously exercised in manipulating with personal modern twists the resources of traditional English minor-key poetic sentiment, wit, sprightly simplicity, quick, elegant turning of phrase, proficiencies in verbal conceits of brisk composition, stylishly "manly" texture. With access to my mode of being a poet, and a writer, my writing objectives not brought to definition by the donning of one or another style of literary professionalism, he entered upon a course of envisagement of an enlarged range of capability ascending to the imperial heaven of literary honors.

From the beginning of the association that developed between Robert Graves and myself there was a basic difference between the

conception each had of its nature. I did not become fully conscious of the breadth of the difference until after the termination of the association. I knew myself, in it, as one who possessed endowments and equipment that he regarded as, in their totality, an extremely valuable possession, and knew him as one longing intensely to have the like. I was not jealous of the possession. I did not regard it as something to be handled stingily. The endowment, the equipment, I viewed as anybody's natural possession for the wanting to find them in himself, herself. My part in the association I understood, therefore, as that of helping him to discover such a possession in himself. If I had worn a literary-world thinking-cap, I would have understood that the desired provisions were seen by him as mine, not as something to be discovered in himself. The fact that appreciation of them from a vantage of professional perceptivity was obscured for me in my reading of his intense preoccupation with the powers and graces he found in my writer's work, and mind, as arising from a serious moral concern about his literary performances. His concern about his attachment to my thought and my writings was essentially one of ambitious professional acquisitiveness.

The interest here of what I have been narrating is, by my intention, how literature, a pursuit of an intellectual order, and of respected social, and revered spiritual, status in the general world, has become gathered-up into a separate entity, of separate placement; how it has been made a world of its own, animated exclusively by ingrowing professional considerations, with only tenuous expediential life-line connections with the life of the general world. The product of the operations of the literary world is given forth to the cultural consumption-sites of the general world, feeding that world and feeding upon it by laws of a traditionally recognized mutuality. But the sense of mutuality has degenerated into a sense of accidental impingement of the two worlds on each other, pragmatically necessary. There is no reflection in it of a mutually recognized general human need of living according to an articulate consciousness of the human state, by an understanding concentrated, for the uses of knowledge and the ends of truth, in a living testimony of *words*, with perception of the responsibilities of this state, and solemn acceptance of them.

I see the fault of what I have been describing as being with both worlds. But I view the literary world as bearing the main onus of culpability, even in its being a self-constituted separate world and, thus, an organized—though loosely so—power. But *where* is its placement? It is not a fantasy placement: it has actual place! Where?

I think its placement is a usurpation of ground of the general world that is the destinedly free ground of natural human occupancy for the employment of language in dedicated putting of the understanding-processes peculiar to the human state into words that honor the entire reality of which the human state is the corroborating witness-within.

I have touched on some key points in my own experience of the life and substance of the literary world to illustrate the tremendous problem of placement with which the natural writer-consciousness is confronted, in the predicament of choice between the general world, now come into rampant social and spiritual disorder—so that the writers of works of serious general human relevance have no longer assurance of the older locations of general human expectedness and respectedness—and the alternative choice of the boundary-hardened literary world. In the special literary world, writers of natural-writer identity are exposed to various dangers of unacceptance or suspicious or hostile treatment, if they do not accommodate themselves to codes of autonomous literary-world legislation, and rituals of literary world self-worship.

In my activities of personal association with writers, in my life abroad from the United States, I was from my own point of view as one acting on a basis of common human concern for the good of what was done in expression-forms of language of universalized reference-scope. My devotion to the cause of the work of others was, for me, of the mould of human, not of categorically literary, fellowship. Likewise, in the project *Epilogue* of my editorship (its successive 1935, 1936, 1937, volumes), a labor of general criticism, conducted by me with desire to delineate what I in later years described as "the universal ground of criticism," I endeavored to preserve the identity of literature as of the special work-realm of human linguistic responsibilities. But I also aimed at dissolving the artificial barriers by which it separated itself from the general human destiny, barriers that constituted literature a world of special professional powers and privileges, its functions relevant to, defined and ruled by, values of "criticism" deduced from literature as a body of material collectively self-referent, both subject of judgement *and* its own source of authority.

My personal and my writing experiences in my efforts to find a course that would produce an acclimatization to each other of the world that was an outerworld to literature's congealed professional apartness and a humanized literature, self-re-educated into a freely existing inner actuality of natural writer-dedications, eventually took me to an important stage of self-knowledge. Literature, I found

I had learned, had lost its hold upon its human soul. It had become a realm of writer-opportunism, using the name, the historical setting, the social and spiritual honor, of literature as credentials of contemporary dignity of status. And I found I had learned, as to myself, that I had too easily united, as if they were easily unitable, good hope of what might be done in the name of literature and kindness to literary ambitions of zealous countenance. If literature is, as I believe it has in its twentieth-century condition, become, a *selfish* area of human performance, its denizens cannot but find it professionally disadvantageous to be other than selfish, un-innocent, practitioners in it. What I did for others in that time could have worked, I believe, towards something in each case contributory to the general world's hope of the good, and to literature's dignity, at the least. Instead, it was absorbed into the uses of individual self-centered professionally literary purpose.

3.

The arrangement of the parts of this book does not imply an orderly succession of subjects, or, yet a disorderly one. Attention is paid by me, under the provocations of certain assaults made on me in immediate and preceding literary-world decades of the century, to things of myself of my times past, and of my later times, according to my sense of myself as the responsible agent of myself of all my times. I have had to limit my attention to the hostile and the defamatory according to my sense of my responsibilities to the cause of literature as the field of honor of the human mind. The case is not that, having come to feel and to know the teeth and claws of enmity, or sheer despite, I have grown some of my own, to prove my own abilities to do hurt. I want only to raise understanding of my labors of literature above the confusions that have been cast upon the fact of myself. I believe that I have part in a propitious change-making among us all, and that the more this is understood, the better will my part be done, and the better others know their parts.

For quite long, after I had become aware of wrong-telling and wrong-doing mounted up in my life's and thought's and work's regard, I felt that adequate correction could be, in good conscience, left to a collection of my writings and papers and letters, some of this not immediately available but all to be eventually available, that was being progressively built up in a university library with my assistance. It seemed reasonable to hope that if, putting my main responsibilities in the foreground of duty, I was left without time for personal attention to material of record that mistold or mis-pictured things pertaining to me, whether from ill-feeling or some other

cause, what this collection contained would make up for failure of mine to set wrong record right. However, in very recent years, the wrong that has become injected into personal reports of me, and got lodged in ideas of the nature of my work, has spread itself about in currents of malign force; and these converge upon my field of awareness. This convergence has been like a message from the world-at-large to me; there is need of some outright testimony of my own.

Since my husband died, in July, 1968, I have had added, to the call from without to make correction of misreport, the call to elucidate what has survived the interruption of the task of exploring the nature of language as the adequate apparatus of truth in which he had joined me. This asks for a banishment to the land of Nought of the things of false report of me, which he and I put out of mind from need of a new life-immediacy. In the new immediacy I began to know, I found immunity from history's hypnotic power to return one to what one was when one was but a part-told tale of oneself—a power by which it can seize one, until the part has become the whole tale. There is, for me, now, by this immediacy, a kindness towards history: let it ring its changes on the partly-told!—as Territory of Numbers that leads up to the borders of the Indivisible, where one passes into the region of the whole tale of oneself, and all else, the land of the total eventuality, beyond change. The banishment of the things of false report to the land of Nought is a natural expression of a happiness that begins to be known on the soil of the Indivisible: let everything have its justice! says this happiness—and, in the book of complete justice, the things of false report fare no worse and no better than to be credited with their nothingness.

I am moved to give assurance, here, that I am not unaware of how "writers"—those who present writing publicly for reading by others—expose themselves personally to public viewing, public interest. I am aware that there "comes through" to the reading public, and its critical overseers, impressions of personality, character, trends of interest and purpose, that seem to supplement the public record as with an automatically present portraiture of interior fact. I mean no interference with the operations of general, ordinary human and special critical curiosity about the writers of works of writing belonging variously to literature, as such operations chance to involve treatment of the subject of myself. But I have two points of remark to set down here as to the question of a presumable hiddenness of authors from their readers and the temptations to which these are subject to fill in the mystery with conjecture.

What I am "like" personally and what my writing is "like" are both distorted from the actual case when treated as separate actualities. The idea of the hidden author, the work providing no more than clues to the obscured "real" person, is a premise that has dominated the investigative procedures of conventional biography, the interpretative deductions of literary criticism, and latterly, the psychoanalytical probing of the presumedly hidden in exposed behavior and the presumedly discoverable in hidden behavior. As a subject of treatment by these various methods of illumination, I have proved an annoyingly irreducible authorial mystery. The split between "real" person and person acting as author does not work; and the commentators tend to take their revenge in ill-tempered indiscrimination between person and author as an example of a confused unity of person and author identities both in a state of confusion. That is, I have not infrequently excited both personal and literary animus by the fact of my having simply, in my personal and authorial functioning, one order of identity. I aim, in all my functioning, at entire presence in every field of behavior and utterance in which I find myself: I do not slant myself into different approaches to personal and to authorial functioning, or to particular fields of each differentiated as necessitating varying modifications of presence.

My husband called this presence immediateness of mine my looking at everything, everyone, with "a straight look." I had occasion recently to mention this to a friend-by-correspondence in his first visit to me: he applied the figure to my functioning in utterance, characterizing it as speaking straight—speaking with a straight stance of address. To be a special case of simplicity where the rule of expectation slants minds towards sense of the literarily identifiable person as a mixture of the literarily patent and the personally arcane provokes impatience, and the suspicion that the apparent simplicity conceals more than the normally expectable confusion of the discernible and hidden, in the authorial presence. I believe that the effect of my being, as a writer, such a special case has influenced many against taking the effect to have actual depth—towards treating me, at best, as person and author, as a biographically, critically, psychologically, tiresome subject.

My second point of remark as to the question of reader-uncertainty over how much the person who is the author is humanly knowable has to do with the response with which my writing has met where it could be conceived, theoretically at least, to have, potentially, at least, a public. There has been little response to my writing, to my work taken all-inclusively, the later with the earlier,

that has not been—even where, kindly, "favorable," moved by serious interest, activated with sense of its serious imports—in the whole *evasive* of it. Those of humane response have been afraid of direct encounter with its imports. Since all evasion has some element of dishonorableness in it, the more honorable—the well-disposed—and the predominantly or entirely dishonorable forms of it evinced towards my work and the subject of myself (the latter mainly by professional seekers after easy targets on which to exercise scorn in bids for public admiration) have tended to blur into each other. This has made avoidance of facing the kind of call to attention my work makes, and of sending the mind in the direction in which it points, and itself goes, seem generally natural and critically legitimate.

Among those who have manifested good grace towards my work and myself, a course in the direction of despite, defection from good grace, can spring up somewhere along their way as, from the beginning, commitment to devoted regard has to carry some undefined escape-clause. I have found very few ready to make their own the chances that I and my work make ours—that I adopt in my work for my work—of arriving where there may issue words that open out unignorable knowables. Since what I have presented and present in my work is not itself protected with reservations, and requires a fullness of presence to it for full delivery of itself, the qualified devoted regard for it will have in it some seeds of disaffection.

4.

Perhaps the description I provide here preliminarily of literary-world behavior towards my work and myself will illuminate the connection in it between outright despite and benign attitudes. Some of the "good" behavior has tended to fall back, and to turn vaguely or distinctly "bad." I attribute this peculiarity to an ultimate measure of things in the literary-world. The terrain of literary criticism gives refuge to a race of intelligences desiring to deal at second or third hand adroitly with reality, properly dealt with at first-hand in literature. My work does not present reality in literary wrappings, and therefore does not lend itself readily to the uses of literary criticism—as understood by that race. Where some of these have simplified the problem of treating my work and myself by using an oblique approach, making charges known to be sure bases of dislike or dismissal for the impressionable, who can be presumed to be substantially represented in any audience, others, adding some conscience and generosity to the oblique approach, have

dealt nearly well with their subject. But it is these others who perpetuate the good name of literary criticism as, paradoxically, a function of necessarily differing opinion.

There is a mixture of persons of vague identity in the sense of being not classifiably of this or that race of professionalized temperament and behavior. Why should there not be, among these, some of that drifting element of the general human population who, by reason of innocent inclination to unpredetermined choices and judgements, are of that no-particular race of people called "people of good-will" (usually, with condescension by those who regard the classification as outside the ratings that operate formally and practically as organizing forces in human society)? I believe I have friends actual and potential among these, to my work and myself. Some of the presumable actual are quite unknown to me. Of the known of the actual, some, surely, have difficulty in determining how much of good-will to manifest. I take comfort from consciousness of bonds of good-will, potential and actual, existing between others and myself (myself and my work as in unity). Do I myself not belong to that race of the nondescript that earns the vague description of good-willedness from the more specialized categories of human character? At any rate, I could no more assume that the general trend of human disposition is fundamentally antipathetic in my regard than I could view myself as of other than sympathetic connection with the human generality, by the utterly unspecialized will to good-feeling towards others that I know in me.

The types of dealing with my work, and myself relatedly, are more diverse than this depiction of them reports. But the depiction has a general correspondence with the actualities. Altogether, in more truly general terms than those posed by my distinction between the literary world and the world at large of human life and performance, there is applicable to all human circumstances the distinction between a world in which off-center central values, indirect movement and response, rule, a world of less than entirely substantial substantiality, and a world in which the life lived is neither that of variously slanting ordinary disposition to human reality nor that of solitary undeviation from solitariness in a life "unworldly." Life lived in this other world is ruled by knowledge of the difference between the straight in movement and response, and all else. The purpose, here, is to live *not* divided between two worlds. One tries for the fortune of straight encounters of consociation in common purpose. And can go far afield from hope's invisible likelihoods, thinking to find them in the throng of the unlikely. Thus, there is no avoiding being in places that prove to be wrong

places, or avoiding being unrightly dealt with. These are two aspects of one's bounden apprenticeship to time, from which one learns the length of mishappening: how long it may be till the mishappened loses its reality as, in truth, what life "is."

The distinction I make between the general human world, understood as encompassing human life in the large, and a special literary world, viewed as representing to the other world its consciousness of itself, reflects the literary world's offering articulate forms of the human consciousness to the general world, to compensate for deficiencies attributed to it as a predominantly inarticulate, unconscious, consciousness. In other words, I see the practice of literature as having eventually culminated in a politics of pre-emptive conversion of the practice into a field of competitive power-exercise in which the literature-fostering and literature-fostered voice of human consciousness of life as a universally comprehensive state of being is displaced by a mechanism of many-voiced and many-purposed literature-production. Each "voice"—each individual authorial consciousness speaking (writing) as a "creative" version of the general human consciousness—sustains the potency of the mechanism as a world apart from the world of ordinary human speaking-writing procedure, and is sustained in its bid for individual potency by the separate-world character of the mechanism.

The connection between the two worlds is demeaning in its effect on the general world: literature is dispensed to the general world by the other as a lore of human consciousness beyond the reach of ordinary human acquisition. The connection is also demeaning in its effect on the various elements of the mechanism that have compounded themselves into a literary "world." The "writers," in their diverse ranks, the framers, and other indispensable participants in the operation of the mechanism as a world-like unit—all take their identity from the status of the literature-production operation as a superstructure elevating the ordinary structure of human consciousness of life and identity by its elevation of itself above it. Everyone involved in the maintenance of this culturally politic religiosity of special service from above to the general, ordinary, in human consciousness is tainted with the pretensions of the scene of literary production to the status of extra-territorial extraordinariness.

The traditional standards of literary virtue, linguistic and rhetorical decorum and thematic discretion and dignity, have been overwhelmed in the flood of democratic revolution against autocratic limitation. What government there was in literature in its traditional

course was moral, internal. It is democratized literature that has become the external loosely hierarchical entity describable as "the literary world." It provides opportunities for individual free power-exercise that allow literary virtue to performances that are of specious literary character in being inventive exaggerations of individual consciousness-experience, not explorations in the field of discovery that literature, little by historical little, mapped, anticipating the ultimate single vision, the completely articulate, humanly whole, consciousness.

Literary performance is no longer enacted on the general ground of the human world, the place of human life at large. There has been fashioned for it, by a consortium of interests assuming practical management of the concerns of literature and enfolding an ever-increasing number of aspirants to the status and identity "writer," an enactment place of its own. Here, all performance is at the remove of theatric art from speaking-writing report of life on the common human plane of consciousness-experience. Writers of literature no longer belong to a tradition of literature. They belong to a system of charge-taking of the function of literature that converts its content into commodities of the nature of works of art. They minister to appetites of the emotions and imagination, from distances of mind dividing the ground of human consciousness into two privacies, a vast one overhung by a general humanly unarticulated fear of an eternal meaninglessness, the other of a compact, concentratedly verbal domain brimming with individually inventive formulations of meaning designed to demonstrate that something or other, somebody or other, a busy little world, indeed, of supra-ordinary preoccupation with the meanings of human experience, can be counted on to take on the responsibility of demonstrating that *some* sense can be variously written, and read, into it.

Anyone who "writes" now, either strives to attain a fixed position in the world of literary activity, or, having attained it, to improve in dignity and honor in the occupation of it, or is, against all disinclination, entangled in the processes of functioning as a writer that now automatically induct writers into dues-paying membership in the world of literary society. Whether the dues are paid under circumstantial compulsion or in a spirit of self-satisfaction, belonging to the literary world of twentieth-century creation offends against—to my understanding—the historic moral grace of literature and the natural spiritual intelligence of the human consciousness of general human possession of it. The setting for literary activity in which I found myself enwrapped in the period of time in which my life as a writer has fallen has been for me one of

intractable difficulty, I being as a writer faithful to literature as belonging to the general human truth-hope—not subject to the constraints imposed by a mechanism of literature-production of the power scope of a world-in-itself. Whatever the extent to which I may have overcome this difficulty is to be credited, I believe, to my having begun my life and work as a writer with no least awareness that writers and writing had location in my time in a special world set off from the human world-at-large by its fiat of proprietary superintendence of all literary performance, and, to my having never come to regard myself as operating under this custody. Refusal to exchange my human innocence for a sophistication of twentieth-century literary worldliness enabled me to maintain my principles of human judgement and my principles of literary judgement in unsplit identity.

5.

When I say to those who interest themselves in my life's course as a "writer" that an important key to the tracing of the line of development in the history of my work is a sense of myself as one who has been ever in "movement," my meaning is not that I have continuously changed the direction and objectives of my writer-activity. The movement has been, is, an increasing abiding by, an unchanging following of, the behest of my human consciousness that there is something to bring into clarity of knowledge, utterance, and livable reality, that, left unclearly known, expressed, lived, leaves the human form of being—this spaciously intelligent kind of being—a self extinguishing, as if accidentally miraculous, explosion of life in the universe.

Starting with my individual inheritance of that energy of motivation of the force of a behest which is integral with our intelligence, I have not been distracted by the appeal of the short-cuts to fullness of knowledge, expression, life-experience, that make up in ponderous part our history-transmuted cultural inheritance. I have not rested at any categorically literary solution of the problem of human intelligence of meeting its call upon myself, its nature as consciousness of a degree transcending time and space. I have not tried to make the cultural authority of literature the necessary host of a realized unity of literary and general human values—values of the good to serve for all orders of human judgement. The literary area of writer-habitation was not conceived of by me as an enclosure to the local and temporal constrictions of which writer-activity must accommodate itself, by conformity or protesting disconformity upon the ground of the resisted constrictions. While I have paid a

ceremonial respect to the reasonable existence of a literary area of writer-activity as a common ground of special spiritual purposefulness in the use of words, the actual area in time-length and spatial extent that has marked itself off as professionally literary ground in the years of my functioning as a writer was not spiritual domicile enough for me to induce me to look to it to embrace in the cultural shelter of its hospitality what was culturally incongruous with it in my work's time-spirit and the dimensions of my offerings: I have sought no peace of professional convenience with the twentieth-century literary world course-of-events. But neither have I labored to impress myself upon it as a dissident. The sense I have tried to speak as a writer is not for me in cultural debate with any of the cultural trends that have served as the handwriting of twentieth-century literary history. I know the sense those trends offer as, variously, stopping-places beyond each one of which there is nothing but trial of an alternative stopping-place. I have, I say, been ever in movement. But where—if not in counter-movement to these trends?

My movement has been formally literary: I have adhered to the canons of linguistic grace that are part of traditional literary principle. I have made no compromises between observance of them and accommodation of my writer practice to any of the breaks with literary tradition that have wrenched literary practice from its cultural security as an intellectually independent function and converted it into a form of linguistic politics, of anomalous identity. I have followed a line of expectation from myself of something and something of linguistic distinctiveness to say, eloquent of the capacity of my mind to take into consciousness the more and more pressing upon it for human acquaintance. I mean "human," not "individual" acquaintance. My posture of concern with writing has not been that of the vague moral individualism of twentieth-century standards of personal honesty, or that of the vague intellectualism of twentieth-century standards of literary integrity.

The literary aspect of my posture of presence to the circumstance of conscious presence to and in a world-entirety of being has been, simply, the character of my presence as a travelling presence, a moving by the gift of my human intelligence towards a closer and closer interiority of presence in this world. The literary aspect of this presence has not been other, for me, than the thinking-speaking actuality of human consciousness in the concentrated manifestation of it that acquired cultural recognition as *literature*. But its essence for me has inhered in this demonstrable attainability of human consciousness to thinking-speaking intensities of living presence in a

universal reality—inhered not in the concrete verbal substance of literature, but in the spirit of the human will to asseverative honesty of being to which literary thinking-speaking occasions have served as forms of respect-paying. I have not bestowed upon the literary occasions, the forms of respect-paying to this truth-spirit, a significance of fulfillment of it, only the significance of occasions made for the declaring of its presence in our presence. I have known literature as reflecting the movement of the spirit in the human will: such are the conditions of what identity-relation exists between my writer-will and the historical fact of literature.

It would be a mistake to interpret the kind of relationship I describe myself as having, as a writer, to the historical fact of literature as my adopting a wholly subjectivist position towards it, what I name "interiority" taken to be operating as a writer from a personal ground apart, literature to me a realm of abstraction. I am not in personal nature, was not as a child or in the subsequent life-age times given to self-withdrawal from life-experience into self-experience. What went on around and around me, near and less and less near, was what occupied my consciousness, substantially, not what went on "in" myself. I have been internally, always, very lively-spirited towards others, and towards environing courses of circumstances, not making any particular limited area of association a fixed orientation-point from which to live generally as a human being. I have felt and thought, in all my presence in courses of circumstance and contacts of human relationship, in an unvarying state of freedom—this as the given state of my being, the only state of myself I know as myself.

6.

Particular characterization of the work of particular authors has hardened, in the literary times of our century, into terminological banalities comparable to the commonplaces of everyday characterizations of individual persons according to their being like this or that behavioral standard of person-kind, or its opposite. From my earliest years of understanding, I withdrew myself from such standardization—as to whether, for instance, I inclined to playing with other children or not, friendship making with others of my age, or not. It may be that the indifference I manifested to judgments of what I was, or was not "like" produced in my home-quarter a peaceable resignation to my resolve to be like nothing but myself. Until I was away at college, I inhabited a three-cornered (Mother, Father, Sister) pattern of concern that did not amount to a ready-made pattern for my early and eventual happiness into which it was hoped that I

would little by little fit myself. The pattern was more an open space marked by Mother, Father, Sister (older half-sister) than a design for a successful personality. They were, the three, very different: I was not sufficiently a unifying concern in their midst to cause the pattern to become something of a common field of influence for them or for me. At the least, there were no artificialities; the pattern imposed no demands, no definition of the kind of person I ought to try to be.

A single brief note about my father that I made in a biographical statement, reporting his devotion to the cause of Socialism, and dream of my becoming, one day, a second Rosa Luxembourg, has been here and there transmuted into biographical data as to myself, I learned much from my father's hearty and literate political sympathies, as, also, from his broad cultural sympathies, as, also, from my older sister's active interest in the arts. And from my Mother's down-right, simple-eyed preoccupation with what was in immediate view, all expectation suspended between uncertain hope and uncertain hopelessness, I learned much about the routines of patience. But the central experience that my life as a member of my family provides was the knowledge that my instinctive appreciation of the state of my being as a state of freedom had a reality of extension in my parental home-ground. I was free to be what I was, on that ground, not by pattern or plan but as by fiat of birth as a human being. I regard this elementary natural blessing on my existence as no accident of parental temperament. My relations with my parents, as the status of independent personhood succeeded that of "child" more and more tangibly, never comprised argument as to this. There was never, in my family home-life, quarrel as to the fact of me, though at times, my mother and I could be querulous with each other, and, at times, my father and I could sharply disagree. My father and I knew each other to be non-temporizers, and loved each other as such. Once, we disagreed about something—I long ago forgot about what—to a point of matching intransigence. It was arranged that I stay with a friend of the family until the pains of the disagreement had passed—as they did before long (but for as long as a few weeks, as I remember). I was then in my early high-school years. Thereafter we never parted dramatically over a disagreement. He died not long before my return to America after living abroad for many years. By then we had both moved on, on, in our freedom-governed life-lines, confidently content, each, with the fact of the other, all uncompromised, ahead.

That literature came to appear to me a scene of activity occupiable in full freedom of spirit, hospitable to the natural will in one to realize articulately the specifics of the peculiar honesty of

being constituting the human counterpart to physical individuality, I do not regard—could not regard—as a naïveté of self-indulgent idealism. Literature—the fact of it, among the earliest of facts one learns in the process of acquainting oneself, and being helped to acquaint oneself, with what people do, and what people have done —is an extension of the spontaneous act of human intelligence of *speaking*. Speaking is the most concentratedly human act; and literature grows out of speaking by effort to make something of the spoken that will last, not be lost in the flow of the natural spontaneities of speech, the occasions of this ever succeeding each other. Literature can excite, very early in conscious contact with the fact of it, a recognition in the speaking proclivities, the verbal sensibilities of the mind, of a potentiality of combining the immediate and the permanent inflections of meaning containable in speaking occasions.

The human speaking instinct is not towards utterance tailored to the limit of the passing occasion; its animating force is towards completeness of utterance. The fact of literature answers to the insistence of human minds on the harmonizing of the particular and the general, the temporary and the constant, in the story of human knowledge they are moved to bring to delivery. This correspondence between the fact of literature and the constitution of human beings as speaking beings accounts for all the natural attraction of literature in its traditional continuousness as filling what would otherwise be a void in human language-experience and for what health there has been in writer or reader participation in its perpetuation.

The total fact of literature embraces many vagaries of writer-purpose and reader-interest (catered to perversely). But literature has ministered to the human sense of need of linguistic fullness, represented the ideal reality of whole statement, of entire narrative, perfect description, true explanation—of the all-revealed, the all-imparted. It is an external witness to the internal unacceptance of the human mind of left-unspoken elements of human consciousness. It has performed as such a ritual of promise by human beings to themselves (human nature to itself) to fulfill *somehow* the function they know themselves to embody of speaking the meaning-content of being—being as the infinite potentiality of being—in the language of universalized consciousness of being concentrated in the mind-frame of themselves.

Whatever corruptions of the intrinsic intent of the human form of being literature has taken under its sky, as a facsimile world of human intent, producer of kinds of truth making human nature

answerable only to itself, the living outline of literature as a token—be it but, now, a time-saved, time-battered, mutilated, token—of expression of being answering to the identity "human," at language's I-speaking center of infinite potentiality of self-verifying being, haunts all living human existence, reminding of its unspoken part, the humanly unlived. I myself had early sense of the universalizing shape of literature behind the cosmorama of history's museum of written exhibition of the ideal of the fully-spoken. I was not bewitched into contentment in the *materia historica* of literature as index of the literarily sufficient, or into excitement of enjoyment of private literary linguistic adventure (for private reading enjoyments) such as propelled the "new" twentieth-century writer-mood along its emptily independent, directionless course.

I began, as writer, from the feel of movement in the fact of language, and the reverberating insistence of this in the fact of literature. With unbroken feel of a necessity not privately mine, I kept moving towards where the arrows of literature's promise (the infinite insistencies of the universal internalized in the finite expressness of the human) have pointed from literature's antiquity. I have had this freedom not by the favor of the literary patronage of my time in any of its incoherently indulgent forms, but by the support my soul has given my mind. The soul is antique—as the mind is immediate. I have believed in the originating truth-preoccupied inspiration of literature. This has armored me against succumbing to the potency of "literary" influences. I mean, the deceptive appearance of identity with the linguistic ideal at the moral heart of the existence of literature that the customs of engagement in literary activity can take on as standards of achievement, where the activity is pursued under a cultural, socially and intellectually, assigned, legitimacy.

To picture both simply and vividly my instinctive adherence as a person to a rule of freedom of personal nature from a governing consciousness of need of being "like" one or another designated kind of personal natures, and, as a writer, to a rule of freedom of writer-nature from a governing consciousness of need of practicing a style of writing identifiable from within a special literary vocabulary of likenings of writing to this or that kind of practice, I bring into bearing here a true little tale about myself that my mother told me, writing to me late in her life. The tale (never before told me) was that in my earliest days the very first year-or-so, I had been, in presence, "a joy." I can clearly recall, indeed, a photograph of myself as still of baby-age that shows a brimmingly joyful little being. It spelt to me, and recollection of it stills spells, a little being accepting

the fact of herself to the full of enjoying precisely being this, precisely. My feelings towards the writer-identity that I found to be mine have for me a kindred precision. I gave it full acceptance as confirming my possession of human nature and the inseparable fact of possession of a mind by which to know the meaning of being, precisely, human, and to enjoy, to my mind's powers of knowing meaning, access to the meaning mind-possessed by being in its entire nature. To be all and only oneself signalizes the human. The human signalizes the entire. The succession signalizes the love of completion: such is the tale literature tells as it is a joyfully precise wording of all that is to tell, not a clumsily endless succession of variations merging in storied monotony.

7.

From the beginning of literature's existence, its distinguishability as representing the working of a linguistic ideal in human intelligence, it was destined to suffer a double identity. Ostensibly, under the auspices of historical esteem, it is comprised of modes of linguistic practice suiting ideas of dignity and care proper to utterance offered as eloquent of the human spirit of understanding. But literature, in its fixed character as possessing important spiritual significance and status, acquired a secondary identity as an ever-changing scene of individual strivings, in the activity-forms of literature, for successful achievements—literary compositions that had immediate bearings of social utility. Literature, as prey to compulsions of cultural expedience, becomes a field of contest for credit of powers of spiritual spokesmanship; and the implications of double potency attached to the double identity—of spiritual force and culturally influential social force—have built themselves into the treatment of the fact of literature. In the attitude to literature that had come to be dominant in literate consciousness of the fact of it, by the time of the twentieth-century's manifesting itself as a new century, the two identities, and the two potencies—that in the residual spiritual legacy of tradition and that in the residual social legacy of cultural change—had merged. There was no longer a foundation-principle of identity in general human consciousness of the fact of literature. The double identity had swallowed up the fact; and the obfuscation of identity-sense of the fact of literature had infiltrated its dark into the identity-sense of the fact of human-natured being itself.

I picture here my understanding of the course of the eventual engulfment of the reality of literature, as performance of spiritual motivation, in the conversion of the linguistic ideal that generated

identity-sense of the fact of literature as spiritually coincident with identity-sense of the fact of human-natured being into preoccupation with private aims of self elevation above socially commonplace identity-norms, by culturally admirable feats of verbal skill. The picturing may seem too complex for the simply identified result—or too simple for the result seen as but one aspect of a complex fact of an ever-expanding diversification of human competitive activity. However this be, there is no doubting that the fact of literature was put through a death by its being over-run by an expansion of activities of self-emphasis that loosened the framework of linguistic and other human proprieties, in the new century's appearance of being a time for continuous innovation and self-revising of identities. The speaking habit became more and more embroiled in new-century activities of self-experiment. The historically mapped general human orientations of the speaking habit, imperfectly reliable in their rough balancedness between the needs of immediate and eternal sense but practically indispensable, became lost in infatuations of mind with the numerically unlimited, essentially identityless fact of the newly self-created self. A flood of linguistic individualism poured out incontinently from breach on breach in the old walls of honesty-guarding human discretion. The effect has been an over-running of literary activity with literary activity. A world of literary traffic—it came about finally in the century's course—silenced the antique throb of the will-to-truth in the all-submerged fact of literature.

That literary activity came to have the force of a negation of literature's function of fidelity to the humanly ascertainable meaning of being is explicable in some part by the collapse of the idea of the human being as ideally represented by a male figure of perfectly generalized human identity. I have written on this phenomenon elsewhere. Limit my account of it here of its incidental character as a component of the development of a literature-negating process in engagement in literature to a brief consideration of its effects in the engagement, in particular, in poetry. In no other field of engagement in literature has the literature-inspiring idea of the human being as of a universalized nature, and the literature-ordaining sense of language as the instrument of transformation of the physically diffuse elements of human sensibility into the substance of thought by the mind's power of using words to order its processes, been so *smashed*—broken into pieces.

Modern trends in individualistic self-emphasis culminated in a pseudo-modern emphasis in the consciousness of male human beings of their maleness, which acquired the force of a stamp of

personal identity. This new intensified stress in the minds of men on sexuality as an element of personal identity has exhibited itself extensively, in the practice of poetry by men, in a nullification of the generalized human identity bestowed by traditional literary idealism on masculinity, as metaphoric emblem of the human. The scene of poetry itself in our immediate time is an elaborate complex of diverse behavioral scenes—privately, culturally, intellectually, even actionally, personal—that assemble themselves into a gross overactive spectacle of vanities. Maleness is a stamp of identity in contemporary being-a-poet is of such a forcible prominence that the special tones of feeling it imparts to poetic speaking, the special frames of mind to poetic writing-style, have passed unidentified as what they distinctively are, in the field of critical literary sensibility. The entire field of literary sensibility (as indeed that of general intellectual sensibility) fell under the spell of modern trends on individualistic self-emphasis as merely stages in modernism's course of intellectual discovery of the "natural" in human, literary, linguistic, anthropological, etc., fact. New feministic sensibility has no response of special feminine insight to the phenomenon I have singled out for notice here. It itself fell so much under the spell of these trends that use by women of femaleness as a stamp of personal identity is automatically imitative of the male model. They have no consciousness of what they are doing in their self-emphasis as of female sexuality as other than being modernisitically individualistic.

The unitary reality of humanness and the unitary truth-effectuality of language have suffered, in the poetry-preoccupied areas of literary performance, a more radical denaturing of the underlying principles of the existence of literature than they have in any other of the categorically demarcated regions of literary activity. Poetry became, in twentieth-century use-making of literature as ground for experimenting in new-drawn philosophical and psychological patterns of human identity, a scientifically rationalizable mythology of intrinsic individuality (each human being a different human animal). Other regions of literary activity drew upon this new poetic ideology as if accomplishing thus a poetic liberalization of themselves. Every scene of literary activity became a vanity-scene, with poetry the royal court of literary performance extending its special prerogatives of literary power and distinction far into outlying literary space.

The subject of poetry has been smashed into pieces, broken up into *poets*, the number of these crowding out the idea of *poetry* except as a supervenient presence to the fact of poets. Literature in

general has become a supervenient presence to the fact of *writers*, a name for the sum of them receding into shrunken abstraction as the number of them overwhelms any collective significance surviving in the name. Numbers are the reality; our immediate literature is the reality of the din of the traffic in writing issuing from the writing of writers sounding in the world of our daily lagging human speaking as at the illusory distance of a world of speaking success, language-maturity, intelligence everywhere busily articulate.

The present world of daily human life-traffic contains, in the general marketplace of human interchange, many deceivers—many practices of deception kept in renewal by a failure of active trust of the human in the human. But there are underlying laws of social commerce, alternations in philosophic moods, currents of ideas competing for followers. There is an elementary expectancy of possibilities of benefit from experiences of association: allowance is made for such possibilities in the course that expectancy lays out, though suspicion of the adverse in possibility is never absent. But it has come about in the places of literary traffic that there is no floor of barest principle to sustain the minimum in confidence.

Believers in the name of literature as a name of good omen, whether of the reading public or the writing fellowship, must support confidence by deducing an overhead plane of principle, from which—itself hypothetical—hypothetical blessings descend upon the practice of literature. But nothing in the temper of engagement in and concern with literary activity that has come to predominate in the special world these now constitute is infused with the spirit of the Heights. The floor that that world lacks—a match in it to the laws of natural social expectancy—is a rule of obedience to the linguistically given incorruptibility of words. If you do their bidding, whatever use you make of them will have some virtue; as you do not, what use you make of them, and you yourself, will be fraught accordingly with corruptions of virtue. There may be those who try to stand on their personal floor of verbal honor, and, reaching up from this, to have direct communion with the spirit of the Heights—Heights conceived of as a property to which literature vouchsafes special rights not only of professional usufruct but real access of soul. However, there is no transcending the prevailing conditions of literary activity by mere reverential evoking of an ideal that the conditions exclude from practical bearing on the activity.

No room is provided in the world of twentieth-century literary pragmatics for freedom of endeavor to serve the ideal implicit in literature's having come into existence. To behave as a writer as one naturally possessed of such freedom is to invite immediate or

eventual rejection, in that world, as literarily, and humanly, indigestible—though the compass of the digestible, there, is continually stretched with greedy leniency to embrace palate-enticing literary fare offered as "new" (signifying "extra-good"). Question of the "new," in relation to twentieth-century literaryism, is inseparable from the question of the "old," which tantalizingly haunts the twentieth-century literary consciousness, generally, and especially in the branch of twentieth-century literary apologetics that has taken shelter under the name "poetics."

Literary world treatment of my work, poetic and other, in the century's past six decades, exhibits the incapacity of the literary consciousness of these periods for dealing with instances of the old present in their content of writing of literary form. The case of my work has been dealt with as not identifiable or evaluatable as other than an instance of the twentieth-century literary "new." Treated thus, its nature is lost from perception; for the essence of its nature is the reality it has as breathing in and out the life-spirit of the "old" of literature's existence—the hope born, in the human and language's "old," of utterance redeeming human life from its death in the repeatedly left-unsaid, untold, unlived.

The story of my dedication to literature as the ground of hope of human attainment to truth of word—prompted by love of perfection, the guiding genius of human desire—collides with the story of literature as a by-product or marginal accompaniment of human history: with the historical fact of what literature has become in the time-on-time divagations of human life. My story is not tellable as an incidental component of the historical story of literature; nor is that story tellable as the background substance of my story. But the two are joined in their differences. Without the telling of the story of literature as I tell it in the story of my dedication to literature, the human link between the fact of being and the fact of joy-taking in being as the life-reality secreted within the fact is obliterated from the necessarily all-encompassing story of being. My story has to do with the old, old, betokening of literature in the old, old, human acceptance of being as an all-discoverable and all-livable destiny.

GENE FRUMKIN

The Brown Dog

Brown dog frozen to the side
of a brick building, half a floor up.
His dead muzzle whimpers in wind
that comes from Lake Ontario or another water
nearer to us. We are children, our job
to scrape the dog off that brick
even as his head, still not stiffened
to the body, quivers lightly, nodding.
Eyes
open, we notice, darkly alight, living
in the frozen morning. We wonder, I'm sure,
how the dog climbed the several feet
of brick wall, how it happened
that the frost so meticulously
caught him mid-step. Where was he going
that night in mid-October when
nothing in the air confirmed a
deathly cold?
Almost, we thought,
as if the dog were paper. We stayed back,
not frightened but wishing for the sun
to brighten, to warm up. Who had assigned us
this task? Maybe he would rise in the breeze,
lofted by our imagination into the hole
of another mystery.
She and I waited,
children did I say? No, but frightened
of our years, their purpose in bringing us
this far, to see that brown dog, in its meaningless
mid-journey.
I take her cold hand.
My mind whimpers. Let's dig, she says, wherever
we can. I raise my shovel towards
the dog's feet, then lower it. No, I say
some other time. She nods. The sun stays,
clinging to the same wall.

ROBERT VANDERMOLEN

Three Poems

FARM HOUSE

Your muscles take a long time to grow tame again

Ah, the scent of marigolds
Kneeling in them
Crushing them

There is just the chair
Where you rock against an unfinished wall

With cornstalks and crows,
A detached illustration from a calendar

At 65 degrees

And something about leather
The color, the memory of leather
Hauling wood on your sled to the kitchen for your mother

Ah, the beauty of neglect

Hitting stones with a baseball bat
And watching them sail into the stony pasture

You were born into an age that lost things
That ran roughshod over real wood

That imagined loneliness
Was a dimness—a low-grade disease—

Not bright and cold

Ambivalence, not wildness

Not like the armies of Fall
When the apples are ripe

Under the porch
Where you tossed things all summer

They settled in

That in itself
Is a pleasure, like cider, the taste and color of cider

Like the sky heading south, and all the trucks
Rumbling dust past the barn

UP NORTH

The breeze brings a fragrance
Of youthfulness

All the animals are hiding

I would like to hide too

Such is the Windemere
Of our spirit and deeds sometimes

That overwhelming hangover
Of regret
That rides down like a giant sliver
With leaves and small twigs

There's nothing to do
But complain

(shoot complain
in the knees
and it still hobbles)

What conclusions
Do you want me to draw?

That it is self-defeating
To ignore the trees?

Myself, I prefer white pine

FROM HERE TO THERE

1.

The sun is hard
You have to keep working
Not to think about it

It takes weeks to slow down

Sitting in the shade
Driving at night with the windows down

To be like the river
Gliding through boulders
Perpetually

With the woman you want
Superior, disdainful

A glass of vodka heavily iced

The red dusty road charging
Down 3000 feet to sea level

To a town
Where tourist Californians
Cruise one street to the harbor

But you are not a movie, and there isn't a welcome
Far from the steaming docks

2.

Or you are a movie

You are play, the sense of play

Otherwise the distaste that is required
Makes no sense

In the maroon light watching the lizard
In the traces of everything
That means to order itself

The delight in refusing to learn

Ron Padgett

Wisconsin

It's hard to find that little room again,
the one you like to find yourself in
but not have to find. A certain plateau of tranquility
spreads evenly over the face of the coming night
and there is large smiling in the cracked darkness.
The puzzle holds, though, even when your little sister
tips the table over with a silent crash
against the loud floor. And now there is some
two-colored radiation from the carolers
who have upper bodies and lower stilts
that vault their voices into a renaissance
whose inside is entirely covered with a floral pattern
and cisterns placed every twenty paces along
the long hallway that leads to the little room
with its fireplace and burning logs
and terrible buildup of soot on the stone legs
of the Fireplace Giant, who seems born
for this terrible destiny, always to have
darkened legs and flaring eyebrows
that rise as if lifted by invisible threads
into the evening above his stocking cap,
a blue dome that holds in his massive idea
that thunders in the distance and wants out.

FRIEDERIKE MAYRÖCKER

Franz Schubert, Or: Notes on the Weather, Vienna

(Tr. from the German by Rosmarie Waldrop)

1st Weather:

beside the sun, actually, and thin to set on fire: lightning in wing formation, you could feel the fish leap up in the brook.

Rapturous prose, to wit, 36 postillions blowing about, everyone's lovers.

And the lovers banded together and formed societies punch bowl full to the brim.

2nd Weather:

out of the corner of my eye I could see how he borrowed a typewriter from the hotel clerk, belted it on like a vendor's tray and so squeezed into the elevator, into his room.

Trickling away; spittoons filled with lavender. The other hotel guests confirmed, the resemblance unmistakable: plump putto placid kind of body brown curls graceful curve of lips eyes melancholy *Schubert glasses* (which, it is claimed, he does not take off at night so as to note down themes right on awakening or give way to feelings which, with scrolls and flourishes in the old style, even *Dreimädchen* candy).

"Me:" Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "will you ever know me?"

3rd Weather:

while forced to wait out a downpour: that W.A. Rieder painted a water color of Schubert at a slight angle, dreamy, if not without pose.

Tongues tattling; shrill noon light.

Fortune's lap child caught in lightning; he should worry because he's part of the band—the coach turns over.

4th Weather:

a *note* dressing him down, and he sighs in pitch. "That fire," Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "kindled in you *by circumstance.*"

"Like trickling when the box *slowly tore open* and my books fell out on the floor while you danced and stomped your feet that the whole room shook, yea heaven, and I nearly emptied the inkwell on my draft instead of the sand."

"A pleasant opening of your eyes tomorrow morning."

5th Weather:

and reproaches himself, *groundswell.*

While some kinds of order / tones / descend, others rise; so that the extreme poles of a stormy landscape draw together, former shrill circumstances blur—a journey, on foot, to the Lobau.

Shoemaker's glass ball, a lamp, a shower.

Descriptive: white rivers in the gutter, in the puddles, reflections of lightning; fishermen, Danube boatmen, strenuous laughs from the inn; feelings that simply *tumble* over each other.

6th Weather:

"as if," Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "the tongue *of my foot* were torn out, by its tongue-root;"

"as if I wore, above my left ankle, on the outside of the leg, and so I could feel it, a tattooed caduceus—"

and to brother Ferdinand: "*no sooner the baby delivered!* (Mass in B Flat) than I'm swept off again, overwhelmed, utterly, unearthly, urgent, while the last piece is only just being engraved. . ."

Tropical motif in the accompaniment, let it blow.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see how he got the telephone directory from the hotel clerk; could follow his tongue as it twisted twice, whispered: "t'one directory. . .t'one directory!" Could see him—after much leafing through—absorbed in one of the volumes.

7th Weather:

plates of landscapes and instrumentalists, *from lead cuts.*

Wads of snow outside the window.

"Woke up at five this morning," Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "half frozen, on top of the bed with my clothes on."

"Too little modulation in places, and are you really letting those notes which are lying about, these childish—"

to his friend Schober: "as if they had *eyes* all over, those ladies, scattered all over their skin, six-eights. And their scant talent for conversation—the darling statues! so vague and easily convincing. . ."

8th Weather:

what a bare morning!

painterly to the painters, at heavenly length!

in the thick of it, pancakes with sugar. Antiphonal choirs in black chalk on blotting paper—the prompter's box would have the loudest word.

In the bushes, *drowned out*, singing.

"The geography of Salzburg," Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "all lost (Gastein). Where we nowhere remember ever having been."

"How can I thank you for not refusing my letters on a sad subject."

9th Weather:

and to the friends in Vienna: "how I miss you. Glorious as it is here, mighty eager to be back."

"How is our Cherubino (Schwind)?"

("I know how you felt reading this.")

Against his hunter's chest, chromatic country life. Rifles clicking all around.

10th Weather:

in the quiet of morning—*got to start again somewhere.*

Schubert to Spaun: "for four hands / variations / the pianists here, little surveyors Hungarian style, little hussies—ear-splitting! blowing my head off. . ."

"out of the clear blue sky yes out of the clear blue sky! and somehow against the grain, this piece, these Bagatelles, of this emotion. And in the end an Overture as thundering as can be."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see him leaning at the bar, sleepily, wiping his glasses again and again with a deerskin cloth after having breathed on them and held them up to his eyes.

Because and why. Easy now, with one of the servant girls.

11th Weather:

of the breeze in the air, the dappled trills.

(Venereal) *Sprechgesang*: heavenly letters worn on the skin.

To Therese Grob: "You write in your letter of the 24th of February that your life is a house of cards a mere breath could blow down. This only seems so to you, many people have similar feelings, me too, for instance about my body-build. Nevertheless, your life seems to me wide with potential because

of your great modesty. You must have had very virtuous and sheltered ancestors who never got too big for their boots."

12th Weather:

Question-ability, tearful—looks for Beethoven, can't recognize his own apartment.

Exclusive light, sparks in his eyes. That stage coach.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see how *his fingers jerked upward* with the *shock* from the metal frame of the coach door, how the soft blurry outline of his body seemed to stagger toward the glass doors of the hotel.

The impression that; had lost all sense of place.

13th Weather:

panel painting, corpulent delirium, Schober throws off on clairvoyance.

"Space, as you know," Franz Schubert writes to Hüttenbrenner, "plays a large role in music."

"I've had my piano repaired again—things wrong with the swell organ too, *the more practiced hand etc.*"

"I've wondered for years how it is the seemingly small and unimportant details which make for the perfect fusing of all parts, fruitful as the undefinable earth, and more so."

14th Weather:

Change of scenery, flowery letter—*nearly makes me forget our little game.*

Fresh chicken, cream puffs, a second summer in Zeléz, rail junction, furious dancing! Got to go the whole hog and then some! whimsically ruffling his hair. What tender helpmeats, may their flanks, flakes, flaming mantles—

to Schwind: "such hounds the barons. There are hounds like this. The cook on the loose side, the maid very pretty, often

keeps me company (but that he could not enjoy it, and cried with longing instead)."

15th Weather:

to Schober: "hopeless embraces with Th. G.!"
"so I've finally come to face *that she cannot love me!* whatever the reason"—
"if my eyes don't give out, a Fantasy for Four Hands / to comfort a child."
Hot springs.

16th Weather:

but hay fever, like a long night—harmonic fundaments.
To Kupelwieser: "like an image you cannot get out of your head and have to look at all the time. . ."
"in the adagio, I have an angel /"
"after no end of trouble, the 'trout' finally printed in a fashion magazine"—
Wants to throw snowballs. Spaun and Hüttenbrenner duck under their open umbrellas for shelter. While out in the middle of the street, Schwind running, gloriously, waving his coat: a good imitation of flying.

17th Weather:

Psyche! Side-glances! Christ!
The Fröhlich sisters, horned or braided; head-on delight.
Corkscrew curls, clever eyes, touch of rouge, Anna Fröhlich: "*he sat there, at the window. . .*" talk about magnetism, *the heavens opened, about swimming,* legal matters; his favorite garden *rather brilliant.*

18th Weather:

"because," Schubert writes to Schober, "this dismal weather gets me down, to stretch a point. It's that *this angel* likes to make me suffer most horribly."

"So, constant up and down."

"Platform / and much remains dark. . ."

Out of the corner of my eyes I could see how he crossed the hotel lobby, whistling to himself, snipping his fingers, swaying with the rhythm, and as if coming toward me.

The next morning I ran to his room and found him still in bed, sound asleep, glasses on his nose as usual. His clothes scattered wildly and, on his desk, a sheet of paper half covered with writing.

19th Weather:

to Therese Grob: "this tiny catalyst!: I could spend hours this way trying to feel my experiences having no other vessel to keep or cultivate them."

"And sometimes heavy tears, as deep in bliss."

"Forgive my writing you in this flustered state / but the cherry trees. . ."

"To answer your plea (for the dedication): why this particular piece? *in any case, everything is dedicated to you!*"

20th Weather:

"this, this is the end of me." (Schubert to Bauernfeld)

Now we simply must stop, with all the women weeping.

Vienna, January 1976—November 1977

(from HEILIGENANSTALT, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981)

JACKSON MAC LOW

Pieces o' Six — XXXII

Merzgedicht in Memoriam *Kurt Schwitters*

First word for Kurt Schwitters: *Merz.* **If I ever move from Hannover, where I love and hate everything, I will lose the feeling that makes my *world point of view.*** 1887. Now I call myself MERZ. A *degenerate artist.* Merzbilde med regnbue. *Entformung, Eigengift, konsequent, Urbegriff.* This was before H.R.H. The Late Duke of Clarence & Avondale. Now it is a Merzpicture. Sorry! Average Merz-drawings: 4 to 8 inches high; some very large collages: 11 to 14 inches high, occasionally 15 to 24 inches high; but many *Aphorismer* less than 4 inches high. Never believed he was making anything but pure abstract forms. Selected discarded unfinished pages from Molling's Hannover printing shop and rode off on his bicycle with as many as he could carry. Through *Entformung* he attempted to clean away the *Eigengift* to gather them into the paradise of art's *Urbegriff.* **The picture is a self-contained work of art. *Merz ist form.* It refers to nothing outside itself. ART NEEDS CONTEMPLATIVE SELF-ABSORPTION.** Schwitters was fascinated with printed matter and regarded words and letters both as meaningful symbols and as formal design elements. **A consistent work of art can never refer to anything outside itself without loosening its ties to art.** One's first glimpses of Schwitters in the 1940s: possibly in Chicago, probably in New York. $^{A}r^{t}$ t^{s} $a^{u}t^{o}n^{o}m^{o}u^{s}$. *Auch in der Malerei verwende ich für die Komposition gern* ***die Brocken des täglichen Abfalls*** *etwa wie der Schacko aufgebaut ist aus den Reden seiner Besitzerin.* ***NEVER DO WHAT ANYONE ELSE HAS DONE. ALWAYS DO OTHERWISE THAN THE OTHERS.*** **I have Merzed banalities.** In 1924 he set up an advertising agency in Hannover and designed ads, notably for Pelikan ink, from one of which an ***elikan*** survives in a 1925 Merz. Mz 1926, 12. reclining emm. Schwitters had no concern for desanctification. ***Schnuppe / meine süsse puppe, / mir ist alles schnuppe, / wen ich meine schnauze / auf die deine bautze.*** Schwitters gradually dropped avant-garde devices from his writing in the later 1920s and wrote in more nearly conventional styles (needless to say, the resultant works were hardly conventional). Schacko was a parrot who pulled out all his feathers except

those on the top of his head because he couldn't sleep since the dying father kept the lights on all night because he was in such pain *he* couldn't sleep. Schwitters never pretended he didn't care about art. *Brutally Merzed wood reliefs and delicately articulated wooden constructions.* Huelsenbeck and Tzara, who agreed on little else, both saw him as a *petit bourgeois. Kommerz und Privatbank.* Some Dadaists trumpeted opposition to art while busily building artistic careers with Dadaism as an advertising device. WHEN WAS HIS WENN HANNOVERED FOR THE EIGENGIFT OF MALEREI? *Schwitters as I saw him was a man who ran away from reality.* He deeply valued art but took it very lightly. *MERZ-PICTURES ARE ABSTRACT WORKS OF ART.* Black Dots and Quadrangle. *If one reads Hannover backwards, one gets the combination* re von nah. *The word* re *one can read indifferently as* ***backward*** *or* ***back****. I suggest* ***backward****. Thus the translation of the word* ***Hannover*** *read backward would be* ***backward from near.*** *And that is correct, for then the translation of the word* ***Hannover*** *read forward would be* ***forward to far.*** *This means Hannover strives forward, even to infinity.* SCHWITTERS SHIED AWAY FROM LAYING BARE A **NEW REALITY** AND FROM ANTIARTISTIC GESTURES, RETAINING EVEN IN THE i-DRAWINGS A TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF ART: **IN THE CASE OF i, THE ACT OF THE ARTIST IS SOLELY THE DISASSOCIATION [*ENTFORMELUNG*] OF A GIVEN OBJECT THROUGH SINGLING OUT A PART RHYTHMIC IN ITSELF.** ***Chanson des autres*** *is* ***i.*** **Art as simple as writing the letter** i. *The middle vowel of the alphabet.* Schwitters taught us we can use anything to make art and even unaltered found materials may become art but the intention enacted in this praxis need include no antiartistic admixture. J 20 i-Zeichnung. *Go out into the whole world and make the truth known, the only truth there is, the truth about Anna Blume.* Had Schwitters lived to see FLUXUS, he'd have either scorned or scoffed at Maciunas's supposedly antiartistic tenets. Mz 1926, 9, with violet velvet. In a passage Schwitters underlined, Bluemner wrote that **Poetry is word composition** that **need not be in accord with logic and grammar** using a language that **at times sees itself reaching the end of all intensifications and possibilities of selection so that it is compelled to go back to its origins.** *Mz 410 something or other.* ***Frühe rundet Regen blau.*** *THE MOST INTERNATIONAL PETIT BOURGEOIS IN THE WORLD. HIS DAILY LIFE WAS ENTIRELY WITHOUT BOURGEOIS COMFORTS. A non-paying spectator on the Dadaist scene, by his very nature he* ***was*** *Dada.* Disjointed Forces. SCHWITTERS STOOD OUT among the Dadaists AS A MARVELOUS DILETTANTE. Today's *artist certifiers* would call him ***a very persistent amateur.*** ***TYLL EULENSPIEGEL.*** He'd have trouble being certified for an artist's loft in Soho. *Merz 14/15. Die Scheuche.* He lived in *ONE OF THE LIVELIEST*

CITIES IN POSTWAR GERMANY like a lower middle class Victorian. **The Kaspar David Friedrich of the Dadaist revolution.** *He simply did not have a conventional bone in his body.* WHAT WAS ONCE CRIED DOWN AS MADNESS OR A BAD JOKE TURNS INTO A SOLID CULTURAL POSSESSION, AND THE REVOLUTIONARIES OF YESTERDAY ARE THE CLASSICS OF TODAY. That's just what the revolutionaries of today must avoid: becoming the classics of tomorrow! ***Merz is as tolerant as possible with respect to its material.*** Schwitters and Wordsworth lived their last years, died, and are buried—4 miles from each other—in England's Lake District. ***MY BASIC TRAIT IS MELANCHOLY.*** Schwitters died in June 1948. Merzzeichnung 83 Zeichnung F. Why make artworks if you're opposed to art? ***My wet nurse's milk was too thick and there was too little, because she nursed me beyond the lawfully allowed time.*** Playing Card Harmonica. *The materials bring into the abstract formal performance a piece of familiar reality.* Schwitters had a little garden in Isernhagen, a village near Hannover: ***Roses, strawberries, a man-made hill, and an artificial pond. In the fall of 1901, village boys tore up the garden while I looked on. The excitement brought on St. Vitus's dance. I was sick for two years, totally disabled.*** Das Merzbild. ELIKAN MERZED A KONSEQUENT BROCKEN. He loved each discarded bit or snippet for itself though he made it take its place in what he would have called an abstract structure. ***Striving for expression in a work of art seems to me injurious to art.*** Mz 280 Red Pen (for Lisker). He cared nothing about contradicting himself even though he thought that artworks had to be *konsequent.* ***ONE CAN EVEN SHOUT OUT THROUGH REFUSE, AND THIS IS WHAT I DID, NAILING AND GLUING IT TOGETHER. I CALLED IT*** MERZ, ***IT WAS A PRAYER ABOUT THE VICTORIOUS END OF THE WAR, VICTORIOUS AS ONCE AGAIN PEACE HAD WON IN THE END; EVERYTHING HAD BROKEN DOWN IN ANY CASE AND NEW THINGS HAD TO BE MADE OUT OF FRAGMENTS: AND THIS IS MERZ. IT WAS LIKE AN IMAGE OF THE REVOLUTION WITHIN ME, NOT AS IT WAS BUT AS IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN.*** Construction for Noble Ladies. *Such political convictions as he had were more against than for—against war, against the stupidity of institutions, programs, phrasemaking of every kind.* People such as Huelsenbeck (and even Schwitters himself) thought him nonpolitical because he espoused no easily recognized ideology, not realizing that Schwitters' artworks function politically by making the viewer look at the most banal detritus with (as poor Maciunas would have put it) *an art attitude,* which by distancing the objects of everyday experience allows her to see them in a strange context and from a new angle, so that whatever has been taken for granted may

begin to be questioned and eventually illumined by critical reflection. *The increasing formalization of Schwitters' collages and relief assemblages in the early 1920s necessarily inhibited the more fantastic side of his artistic personality.* Siegbild (Victory Picture), c. 1925. Schwitters was hardly ever a pure image maker, unlike most Dada artists, who transmitted Dada's revolutionary message mainly through image-content. *Dada was ideological without a specific ideology and purposive without a purpose, which is why Dada actions and objects could be considered* artistic. FAUVIST COLOR WITHIN A CUBIST SYSTEM. *Mz 387. Kaltensundheim, 1922:* Merzed the year *this* Merzer was born. *Schwitters' method is that of Realism made from real things.* This is a **positive** link with FLUXUS—this kind of Realism is much more important to most so-called FLUXUS artists than the anti-art component, which Maciunas himself seems largely to have discounted before his untimely death. ***Surrealism is litterature*** [sic] ***with wrong means, not painting, therefore wrong.*** Merzbild Alf. Schwitters *had always insisted that the individual potency of his materials should be effaced in the process of picture-making,* but in 1937-39 *his very untypical interest in* objets trouvés and *the blatant literal presence of objects themselves* in collages, *grotesque faces and still-life objects* in certain paintings *in the new* Pointilliste *style,* late reliefs including *smooth biomorphic forms,* and a *general shift to illusionistic space and organic, curvilinear elements* are ascribed variously to the influence of *1930s Surrealism* or to *the influence of natural scenery* after his move to Norway. What critics who point with seeming surprise at such *inconsistencies* don't seem to realize is that Schwitters was only concerned with consistency *within* each work. DO I CONTRADICT MYSELF? VERY WELL THEN I CONTRADICT MYSELF, (I AM LARGE, I CONTAIN MULTITUDES.) DEINE DESANCTIFICATION IST TÄGLICHEN AUFGEBAUT WIE KASPAR WORDSWORTH ODER FRIEDRICH MACIUNAS, SCHACKO BLUEMNER ODER ANNA BLUME. Schwitters' mind and practice roved freely over all the possibilities available to artists during the first half of the 20th century. ***Combine all branches of art into an artistic unity.*** Mz 33. Verbürgt rein. **We see in his work not only the picture of a new instinctive order but a picture of its creation: since the material components that create this order are drawn from quite an opposite state, the tension and competitions between parts and whole are necessarily given along with the new order itself.** His works transcended his conscious abstract-art ideology, embodying a much more complete theory of art, though he might have been chagrined if told *they imitate nature in its complexity.* *THE LARGER LATE ASSEMBLAGES AND COLLAGES, ESPECIALLY, HAVE A FORTHRIGHT-*

NESS AND GENEROSITY ABOUT THEM THAT MAKES THE PRECEDING, CONSTRUCTIVIST-STYLE WORK SEEM OVERCONTROLLED BY CONTRAST. Der Schokaladenkasten, Anna Blume, Box 7. He feared inexactness lest it fall into mere *RANDOMNESS.* **Even close friends found it difficult to reconcile Schwitters' jovial, extrovert, and clownish nature with the seriousness of his commitment to art.** The liveliness of Schwitters' art may well have arisen from the widely noted ***contradictoriness of his existence,*** and that very *contradictoriness* prevented MERZ from becoming an ideology, allowing him to embrace a myriad of materials and methods and to approach, willy-nilly, *imitating nature in its manner of operation.* **DO NOT ASK FOR SOULFUL MOODS.** THE DADAIST IS A MIRROR CARRIER. *There is no such thing as inchoate experience.* Perception is always already preconstituted by the perceiver. **A Merzer met Roof on the roof.** One may respect, like, enjoy, or be delighted or even made ecstatic by the works of a number of artists, but those of a few—in this century Stein, Satie, and Schwitters, Klee and Cage, and still inescapably Schoenberg, and not a large handful of others—one loves. Industriegebiet. Aq. 37. **The Cathedral broke through the ceiling and aspiring upward pushed into Kurt's and Helma's apartment above, leaving one of the rooms with no floor.** *Merzbau Hannover,* begun by Schwitters around 1923 and continually worked upon for nearly fourteen years, was twenty years later—five years before his death—destroyed by Allied bombs. *During the 1930s Schwitters often worked day and night on his* ***useless construction.*** Merzbau in Little Langdale (Merz Barn). On New Year's Day 1937 (ten months before this Merzer began writing poems) Schwitters left Germany, never again to see *Merzbau Hannover,* and that year began the second *Merzbau,* in Lysaker, Norway, which was destroyed by fire in 1951; ten years after beginning the second and six months before he died, he began the third and last *Merzbau* (the *Merz Barn*) on Cylinder's Farm in Little Langdale, near Ambleside, in the Lake District of England, the one more or less completed wall of which, though moved, still survives. **Oh Du,** Kurt Schwitters, **Du!**

[With special thanks to Nick Piombino (poet, poeticist, psychoanalyst), who kindly lent the poet his Schwitters library, notably the two books most often quoted, adapted, excerpted, paraphrased, etc., in the course of constructing this *Merzgedicht*: Werner Schmalen-

bach's *Kurt Schwitters* (Copyright 1967 in West Germany by Verlag M. DuMont Shauberg, Cologne; English version published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1977) and John Elderfield's *Kurt Schwitters* (Copyright © 1985 by Thames and Hudson Ltd., London; paperback edition specially printed for the Museum of Modern Art, New York, by Thames and Hudson Inc., New York, 1985), to the authors and publishers of which the poet is grateful for the many scattered sentences and shorter excerpts informally quoted, paraphrased, adapted, and/or modified throughout this poem; and with special thanks to Michael Erlhoff and Klaus Stadtmüller, the editors of the *Kurt Schwitters Almanach 1987* (a birth-centennial "Hommage á Kurt Schwitters") for inviting me to send them a contribution, thereby inspiring me to write this poem.]

February-March 1987
New York

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS

July 3, 1987

to the editor

It was with considerable amusement at what inexplicable passion at least Poetry's *polemics* still can rouse, bemused sympathy for Sven Birkerts who after all had only committed the lèse-majesté of reporting his own honest perceptions, & not a little malicious glee at finding this long overdue Ashbery-bashing smuggled into the redoubtable pages of *Sulfur*, that I read the reviews in 19. Perhaps I can offer a more moderate opinion than any of those, since I am so far from being a partisan of style-politics, that I write in both rhymed verse & free, contiguous linear sentences & montaged fragments of accidence. . .

John Ashbery deserves neither such acclaim nor such abuse as he has been fortunate enough, among all the current practitioners of the noble art merely a name repeated about as often as one of the lesser pop-icons, to receive. I think he is our best nonsense poet since Lewis Carroll, & I mean that without irony, for he infuses great sophistication of tone & deft subtle whimsy, into what had almost lapsed as a genre. But it's really too bad he writes at a time when the "Avant Garde" has lost all definition either, as a salient or an enclave of outcasts. Those who need a cutting-edge to whet their criticism upon, might more fruitfully turn to many another *serious* poet! What everybody on his side implicitly assumes, is that *any* non-sense automatically carries its hidden burden of subterranean significance; & they are right anyway to defend this very precious vein from the rationalists' strip-mining analyses. Really, though—does Ashbery unearth spine-tingling irrational insights, endlessly fascinating image-complexes, or sublime proto-mythologies, in his bland suburban reveries? *He doesn't try.* That's not his game, any more than Disney World is about a future utopia. . .

So please, let's recognize that the Unconscious, as a creative source, gives mild trophies from its littoral shallows, & let's honor them as such; but not to the extent of calling every washed-up oddity, Moby-Dick. *You will know it by its power*, not by what cleverness can be wrapped around it.

—MICHAEL HELSEM

June 30, 1987

Dear Clayton,

I probably should have known better than to venture a criticism of Ashbery in the pages of SULFUR. Indeed, after reading the responses of The Gang of Four (Weinberger, Coolidge, Palmer and Rasula) I felt like some 60 year old Republican booster beating his stick on behalf of law & order. Needless to say, I didn't like that image of myself and I had to do some hard thinking and re-thinking. Is it possible to feel at once chastened and unregenerate? If so, that's how I feel. A few follow-up remarks are probably in order.

First, Coolidge asserts that I do not appear "to have been there." That is, that I was not writing as one who has lived with Ashbery's poetry for years. He's right—though I'm not sure that that disqualifies me from tendering my impressions and judgments. To the contrary, a "Martian" approach may sometimes allow for perspectives otherwise unavailable.

OK, I haven't lived with the work as some others have. But it's not for want of trying. Time and again during the last decade, I have tried to surmount the barrier; I have wanted to get inside the magic circle of his language, to arrive at that place that *must* exist—otherwise he would not be so popular. I have not been able to, as must be obvious. You'll remember that I warned you of my feelings (my bias, if you will) when we discussed doing the review. We both agreed, finally, that it would be useful / interesting / provocative for me to explain my difficulties with the work. It has, for me at least, been all those things.

I have to take issue with Coolidge's contention that my comments are of questionable value because I have not "entered" the work. Does he mean by that that I have not given myself entirely over to it and let it work its fabled magic on me? Or is he saying, somehow, that one must approach it with love in his heart before the beauty will declare itself? It seems to me that a work of art must petition us, and not vice-versa. I put myself (a child of the age, moderately well-read, neutralized in expectation) before the poems. I found some beauty (I said so), some surprise (which diminished as I read, as similar moves were made over and over) and a great deal of hokum (empty vamping, featureless simulation of drifty internal states). That's what I found, and that's what I said I found. The sniping tone of some of the responses suggests that a real exchange of ideas and opinions is only possible among the converted.

There I go, getting worked up again. I fully intended—and the comments of my respondents persuaded me of this—to say some nicer things. I found—really—that the best of the work makes a beautiful, melancholy, even profoundly stirring music. It laments the dispersal of

meaning even as it enacts it. But this work seems to me to make up a small part of that ample volume. Too much of the other poetry merely rehearses dispersal—one theme and a dozen key changes to play it in. I was assailed for my conservatism. That's wrong. I'm not so straight-laced that any departure from nailed-down certainties upsets me; I don't clutch at Arnoldian values with a tightened sphincter. The fact is that I register so many of Ashbery's departures as gratuitous. In my view, they make their capital through easy and programmatic subversions of expectation. I don't mind pronominal confusion—I do mind the *tic* of pronominal confusion. My point was that Ashbery's persistent and highly-mannered mode of diffusing linguistic stability—the fact that he does it for its own sake—ultimately weakens, rather than strengthens, the language of the tribe. I can take, and enjoy, a high degree of polyvalence. I don't require a narrative line or a nugget of "message." But I have to believe that the poet's undertaking itself is meaningful—that it comes from his heart and soul. I don't feel that often enough when reading this poetry. I'm sorry.

As for my discussion of deconstruction (obviously simplified), I hope that it's clear that I was in no way linking Ashbery's work with the theory itself. I was merely remarking a certain similarity of impulse: that both theory and poetry achieve their effects or results through a shattering of the molecule chain of stable signification. Is this bad? In the short run, no. In the short run it energizes and liberates; it shakes up the mixture of things. But I would not like to see the practice become a foundation for the poetic of the future. (And here Weinberger is right: some of the impetus for my piece did have to do with Ashbery's enormous influence.) For when the deeper implications of the practice are traced out—and it was these that concerned me—then we see how the nerve center of poetry may be paralyzed. To deem the fission of sense not a poetic option but as a poetic aim, is to loose mere anarchy upon the word. I am conservative enough to believe that poetry functions as a kind of treatment facility for the polluted waterways of our language. If there is a crisis in our written arts—and I think there is—it derives from the progressive evacuation of meaning from our signs.

A last word. My respondents were happy enough to poke the dagger where they could. I do wish that at least one of them had done the more difficult thing: to take a particular passage (especially one of the contested passages) and show me just how it comes by its wondrousness. I would like to join you all inside the magic circle—but you will have to show me how to get in.

Yours,
SVEN BIRKERTS

HOWL AND ITS ENEMIES: THE GENTEEL REACTION

In the December 1984 issue of the *Boston Review*, Allen Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* received the following mini-review from Richard Howard:

> The MacPherson *de nos jours*, this gathered assortment, fragments shored, limbs remembered, adds up to an astonishing confession: it may not be poetry at all, it is always testimony, a kind of processional martyrology—in that martyrs are witnesses to the truth. (33)

Period. Which is to say, with a dismissive wave of the hand, that Ginsberg's oeuvre, like James MacPherson's invention of the Celtic bard Ossian, whose pseudo-primitive epics delighted his eighteenth-century audience, is no more than inspired fakery. "It may not be poetry at all."

To those of us who have followed Ginsberg's career from its inception, Howard's bemused dismissal has an air of *deja vu*. It recalls the now notorious and muchly reprinted 1957 review of *Howl* by Ginsberg's fellow-Columbia student and poet-friend John Hollander. To wit:

> It is only fair to Allen Ginsberg. . .to remark on the utter lack of decorum of any kind in this dreadful little volume. I believe that the title of his long poem "Howl," is meant to be a noun, but I can't help taking it as an imperative. . . .*Howl* seems to have emerged under the influence of a kind of literary *Festspiel* held at frequent intervals on the West Coast, in the course of which various poets, "with radiant cool eyes," undoubtedly, read their works before audiences of writhing and adoring youths. (26-27)

Again, the argument is that *Howl* is fake, hype, media event—anything, in short, but Poetry with a capital P.

In the thirty-year span between Hollander's reference to that "dreadful little volume" called *Howl* and Howard's dismissal of the whole *Collected Poems* as "the MacPherson *de nos jours*," *Howl* has become one of the most famous and celebrated poems in the world. In the sixties and seventies, for that matter, Ginsberg's poetry gained wide acceptance in the Academy, critics, scholars, and fellow-poets taking pains to demonstrate that the so-called confessional rant was by no means formless, that indeed Beat poetry, Ginsberg-style, was remarkable for its polyglot learning, for the complexity of its derivations and intertexts.

In recent years, however, a curious reaction has set in. We can attribute a certain measure of the current hostility to Ginsberg on the part of newspaper and journal reviewers[1] to what is called the New Conservatism

or the Age of Reagan, but this is only part of the story, the fact being that most of the genteel young men who have dismissed the *Collected Poems* and who will, no doubt, dismiss Barry Miles' annotated edition of *Howl,* came of age in the sixties and espouse the left-wing politics now *de rigueur* in English departments across the country. No, what I should like to call here the Neo-New, where New refers to the New Criticism, has a more complex derivation.

Reviewing the *Collected Poems* for *The New Criterion,* Bruce Bawer, himself an aspiring poet and the author of a book on the "tragic generation" of Lowell, Schwartz, Berryman, and Jarrell, writes:

> To read such poems as these back-to-back. . .is to be stunned by the oversimplification, the repetition, the self-indulgence, the egocentrism, the utter inability to develop a theme. Doesn't [Ginsberg] ever, one wonders, get sick of reiterating these banalities? Doesn't he ever yearn to get beyond the surface cliche, to develop a more sophisticated view of the world, and to express it in more memorable and meticulously chosen words?

The "utter inability to develop a theme" or to "express it in. . .meticulously chosen words," the inability, as Bawer later puts it, to produce "a finely turned phrase"—inherent in such strictures is a curiously pre-Structuralist faith in language as vehicle, as a conduit that leads directly from the speaking subject to a meaning above and outside the signifier. One should have, so it seems, a "view of the world" that is sufficiently "sophisticated"; one then explores, as Bawer says, "the complexities that make the actual world interesting and frustrating and *real,"* assuming, of course, that one knows what reality is.

A similar charge is made by Roger Rosenblatt in *The New Republic:*

> If one makes comparisons with Eliot, Pound, Lowell, Stevens, or even with Ransom or Robert Penn Warren, the collected Ginsberg does not stand a chance. . . .the bulk of [Ginsberg's] work shows no philosophical growth. . .and rarely any depth. [As for *Howl*], "it is a poem worth rereading, especially if one deluded oneself into liking it when it made its loud debut." (33-34)

No philosophical growth, rarely any depth—here again, is the dismay at the poet's "utter inability to develop a theme." Rosenblatt's complaint is echoed by Lachlan MacKinnon's suggestion, in his *Times Literary Supplement* review, that Ginsberg can only write out of his personal life because he lacks "a true culture" (574). But perhaps the "Neo-New" case against Ginsberg is presented most forcefully by the young poet-professor

Mark Jarman in an omnibus review for the *Hudson Review*. This piece covers thirteen American poets born between 1900 and 1960 and ranging from Elder Olson and Shirley Kaufman to Jarman's contemporaries, Gary Soto, Eric Pankey, and Sharona Ben-Tov. In this eclectic context, Ginsberg's *Collected* gets short shrift (less than a page), Jarman observing that "Ginsberg was not a promising young poet nor has he become a mature older poet. But for about ten years, from 1955 to 1965, his writing anticipated American life, especially the youth subculture built around music and drugs and the now waning fascination with Eastern religions" (330).

The poetry, that is to say, is judged thematically and since the "themes" are, so Jarman argues, now passe, so is much of Ginsberg's poetry:

> We know that sexuality is as various as American life is supposed to be. We know our government's abuse of its immense military power is madness. Drugs have been sources of insight rather than simply recreational. A spiritual alternative to western religion exists in the orient. The list sounds dismissive only because to mention these themes of Ginsberg is to realize, unfortunately, how ironic they have become, how much a source of parody. (331)

A source of parody is precisely what these so-called themes have become: witness Christopher Buckley and Paul Slansky's "Yowl: For Jay McInerney," which is printed in the December 8, 1986 issue of *The New Republic* as a commemorative offering "On the 30th anniversary of 'Howl'." I shall come back to this parody in a moment, but first it might be helpful to look at a few poems by those who do, according to Jarman and his colleagues, have the "ability" to "develop a theme" or invent what Bruce Bawer calls "a finely turned phrase," those poets who are evidently not guilty of self-indulgence or oversimplification, concentrating as they do on the "complexities" that, in Bawer's words, "make the actual world interesting and frustrating and *real*."

One such poet is Eric Pankey, last year's winner of the Walt Whitman Award for a book called *For the New Year* (Atheneum). A Pankey poem called "Tending the Garden" is praised by Jarman for its complex dramatic strategies: "Pankey imagines Horatio at Elsinore, speaks in the voice of Cain, addresses Vallejo, and assumes the characters of a railroad bull and a survivor of a Nazi death camp." "The latter," remarks Jarman, "may seem an overworked subject, but I would argue that Pankey's clarity makes the poem exceptional," and he cites the following passage:

> The other prisoners were envious
> of our duty. It was, at times, hard work,

but the work, it seems, promoted our health.
I was determined to stay well, to last
through the coming winter and not end up
face up in a grave my own hands had dug.

And Jarman comments: "In writing of such apparent simplicity, words like *duty, promoted, determined,* and *health* resonate with their special meaning, and the cunning word play of "end up / face up" is nearly subliminal. Frankly, I admire this, for the narrative poem as such might seem to have no time for these effects" (339).

Such a reading recalls nothing so much as those Brooks-and-Warren exercises where the student would learn to identify the speaker (never, according to rule 1, the poet himself but always a persona!) and comment on the poem's way of saying one thing but meaning another—which is to say, its irony (Rule 2). To call the torturous task of the death-camp survivor "the work," to use the casual "end up" as a lead in to "face up"—this, one surmises, is to provide us with "meticulously chosen words." Except that the real New Criticism, as opposed to its "neo" version, would have recognized this passage from the ironically entitled "Tending the Garden" (get it?) as pure contrivance. W.K. Wimsatt, for one, would have asked some hard questions about the function of the iambic pentameter in the poem.

Another poem Jarman singles out for praise is Dick Allen's "Overnight in the Guest House of the Mystic," which contains these lines:

I dream
of histories ahead, the quasars flowering
upon the edge of space; odd specks of light
like fireflies in the pines, the first
new cities of another galaxy.

Which marks me of my time—which turns
almost helplessly between
huge shadows and the drifting stars,
a boat upon a boat at sea
floating in a bottle, each uplifted sail
raised to catch a wind that cannot be.

"Allen's expression of hope in what lies beyond," comments the reviewer, "is finally an integrated one. . .for he knows the limitation of his subject matter. . . .His dream does indeed mark him of his time, as it does many another, yet the wisdom of the statement—the admission—is rare" (333).

Note the classic New Critical terminology—"integrated," "limitation," "wisdom of the statement," and "admission" that is "rare." Thematics are all, blinding the reader to the real "limitation" of this little poem, which is its inability to convince us that any conceivable voice is actually saying the things in question. One doesn't in fact "dream / of histories ahead" but only of a specific historical event; again, it is hard to conceive of a dream in which "odd specks of light" are viewed as being, in the most reasonable of tried and true similes, "like fireflies in the pines." But even these images are not as bathetic as the moralizing statement of the second stanza: "Which marks me of my time. . . ." A latter-day William Vaughan Moody, this melancholy speaker is "helplessly" positioned "between / huge shadows and the drifting stars." Stars have been poetically "drifting" from Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* on down; it is reassuring, I suppose, to know that even quasars can't change these Romantic verities. And then Allen sees himself as "a boat upon a boat at sea"—there's an original metaphor—a boat, moreover, "floating in a bottle." And now, with the click of a spring, comes the final recognition that "each uplifted sail / raised to catch a wind that cannot be." "Sea" / "be"—the perfect closural rhyme underscores the poet's mournful conclusion.

"The wisdom of the statement," says Jarman, "the admission—is rare." But what is it that is being admitted? Does Allen know anything we don't know about galaxies and quasars? Is his point of view in any way special? Do those who are "of their time" usually tell us they are so? And if the poet is so uncertain about the future, how does he know, with such metrical and rhyming certainty, that the "uplifted sail [is] raised to catch a wind that cannot be"?

These questions do not occur to Jarman because his central postulate is the bifurcation of form and content. The poet, it is implied, first chooses his subject matter—something that is important, serious, and of its time—and then "expresses" it using as many "finely turned phrases" (Bruce Bawer's term) as possible. "Knowing the limitation of [one's] subject matter" thus becomes the cardinal virtue. And, given this aesthetic stance, a poem like *Howl* is perceived as nothing but a loose, baggy monster. "*Howl,* once effective as counter-culture manifesto," writes R.Z. Sheppard in *Time* magazine, "is now an unconvincing historical oddity" (72). But *Howl* was never a counter-culture or any other kind of manifesto, and mistaking Ginsberg's brilliant Dada / Surrealist autobiographical poem, with its particular blend of the comic and the serious, the every-day and the visionary, the pedestrian and the fantastic for something as pat as a "counter-culture manifesto" leads to the writing of such "clever" parodies as the Buckley-Slansky "Yowl," to which I now turn.

Like *The Waste Land, Howl* has a stylistic signature so singular that nothing is easier than to parodize it. Buckley's satire, which purports to take

on both Ginsberg's vatic excesses and eighties-Yuppiedom, opens as follows:

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by stress
> frazzled overtired burnt-out
> jogging through suburban streets at dawn
> as suggested by the late James Fixx,
> career-minded yupsters burning for an Amstel Light
> watching Stupid Pet Tricks,
> who upwardly mobile and designer'd and bright eyed and high
> sat up working in the track-lit glow of the Tribeca loft
> skimming through the Day Timer while padding the expense
> account. . . .
> who ate chocolate croissants in outdoor cafes and drank
> blush wine on Columbus Avenue washed down with a little
> Percodan with Dove bars with Diet Coke with Lean Cuisine

The authors of "Yowl" are obviously having a good time finding substitutions for Ginsberg's images: the "angry fix" of the "angelheaded hipsters" becoming, in a nice little joke, the late James Fixx of jogging fame, or the "stale beer" of *Howl* becoming the Diet Coke of "Yowl." But the one-dimensional expose of the "upwardly mobile and designer'd and bright-eyed" Yuppie, who "sat up working in the track-lit glow of the Tribeca loft," only serves to put into bold relief the very real complexities of *Howl*.

Take the famous opening line,

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,
> starving hysterical naked

In the first draft, the three adjectives were "starving mystical naked," and surely Ginsberg is not exaggerating when he says, in the notes for the new Harper edition, that this is a "Crucial revision," "hysterical" providing "a key to the tone of the poem." He observes, "Tho the initial idealistic impulse of the line went one way, afterthought noticed bathos, and common sense dictated 'hysteria'. . . .The poem's tone is in this mixture of empathy and shrewdness" (124). Which is to say that the connotations of "hysterical" more or less throw the poem's gear into reverse, calling into question the purported darkness of the poet's vision.[2]

Indeed, *Howl* is itself much funnier—and much more subtly satiric—than its 1986 parody. Take the strophe

> who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of
> ambiguous picture postcards of Atlantic City Hall

Those who complain of the poem's repetitiveness, its seemingly endless cataloguing of "who" clauses ("This continues," declares John Hollander, "sponging on one's toleration, for pages and pages" [26]), fail to recognize what is actually a marked condensation. The first draft of the strophe above reads:

> who vanished into the New Jersies of amnesia
> posting cryptic picture postcards
> of Belmar City Hall and last years sharks (13)

And Ginsberg's note tells us that this is a "Composite image of a few post-college 'career failures' characteristic of 1950s, including author's own two-year sojourn in Paterson 1950-51 on leaving Columbia Psychiatric Institute. Author's family spent many 1930s summers at the shore in Belmar—'Atlantic City,' final draft. 'Sharks' ref. recurrent seaside newspaper reports and souvenir postcards" (126).

The note testifies to the autobiographical source of this and almost every image in *Howl;* it also counters Ginsberg's own professed aesthetic of "First thought, best thought," of "Spontaneous insight" as "motif and method" of composition (*Collected Poems,* xx). For when "the New Jersies of amnesia" become the "nowhere Zen New Jersey," the bleak memory of Paterson summers gives way to a teasing oxymoron: a "nowhere" New Jersey that is also "Zen" can't be all bad, can it? Again, the specificity of "sharks" as a local term for the waste paper products of the area gives way to the comic image of the postcard trail, left behind by the poet and his friends. Are they dirty pictures? Threats to City Hall? The poem opens possibilities that will now be picked up in the account of the "bop kabbalah" that is its metier.

The notion of "Bop kabbalah" also defines the syntactic drive of *Howl.* Ginsberg's syntax typically puts parts of speech into "incorrect" slots so as to make us rethink their relationship. Thus we read:

> who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up
> smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water
> flats floating across the tops of cities
> contemplating jazz

where the placement of the heavily stressed nouns "poverty" and "tatters" in adjective slots creates the very jazz syncopation the poet is describing, even as the participle "floating" can refer to the "flats" as well as the relative pronoun "who," and even as the syntax suggests that it is the "cities" that are "contemplating jazz." The heavily alliterative, aggressively grinding and "difficult" rhythm ("of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz") is wholly flattened out in "Yowl":

who hollow-eyed and febrile read the theater reviews in
unread issues of the *New Yorker* yes the *New Yorker*

a locution that suggests to me a wholly one-dimensional reading of the parent text. Thus, when a critic like Lachlan MacKinnon announces that Ginsberg "has been too lazy to shape his material as it, like any material, demands," one wonders whether "lazy" doesn't apply to the reader rather than to the poem.

By the time "Yowl" winds up its "I'm with you" litany with the final couplet, "I'm with you on the Upper East Side / looking for myself in *People* magazine," it has become clear that Yuppiedom is being satirized by those who are themselves its charter members. The clever knowingness of the parody, like Lachlan MacKinnon's reference to the "cultural sterility" of Ginsberg's *Collected Poems,* or Roger Rosenblatt's patronizing dismissal of *Howl* ("One can grow giggly learning that 'the best minds' of the poet's generation 'copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer'. . . .It makes you wonder what the second best minds were doing") point to the curious paradox inherent in what I have called the "Neo-New" movement in letters—the paradox that, for all the talk of culture and complexity, for all the outcry against the formlessness, the simplification, the self-indulgence, and the "laziness" of Ginsberg's poetry, the young Ivy Leaguers who are casting the stones are quite simply not very good readers.

Why should this be the case? My own hunch—and I can do no more here than to make tentative suggestions—is that the emphasis on theory in the "English" and "Comparative Literature" curriculum of the past decade or so has produced a curious split. On the one hand, we now train students to follow, say, Paul de Man's most arcane arguments, to watch and understand as he uncovers the hidden place where a given text unravels and reveals its real workings. Or again, we train students in Marxist theory, teaching them how to determine the covert power relations in Shakespeare's comedies or to define the role of exchange value in Emily Dickinson. It is a case of *reading for* rather than *reading,* and hence the exemplary texts are likely to be the safe ones—the texts everyone *knows* to be "great literature" so that we can get down to the business of submitting them to this or that theoretical paradigm.

On the other side of the academic fence, we find the Poetry Writing Workshop, that last bastion of those who want to have nothing to do with what they take to be the arid and abstract discourse of the theoreticians. In the writing workshop, "understanding poetry," as Brooks and Warren called it in their famous book by that title, is still considered a worthwhile exercise: questions of voice, meter, metaphor, and structure, questions now denigrated by the theory camp as "mere" formalism, continue to be

asked. But the difficulty—and there was no real precedent for this in the era of *Understanding Poetry*—is that today's workshop poet is likely not to read anything *but* poetry, which is to say, given our elaborate system of grants, fellowships, summer workshops, and mini-seminars, primarily the poetry of his fellow-poets. As such, the practice and reception of poetry becomes increasingly a kind of cottage industry, a middlebrow pastime no more likely to produce widespread enthusiasm than it is likely to disturb anyone.

Given this climate, the bardic-comic voice of an Allen Ginsberg can hardly help but be perceived as some sort of irrelevancy. For if poetry is a middlebrow pastime, its watchwords become safety, respectability, correctness, and "interesting" subject matter well put: "What oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd." Moreover—and here the politics of poetry reviewing comes in—young poet-critic X must be careful to say nice things about poets Y and Z for by next week they will be reviewing his or her own new book. Ginsberg, on the other hand, is sure to review neither X, Y, nor Z, and so there isn't much incentive to be polite.

As such, Ginsberg's now-immortal "Rockland," where "we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter," has become, in the late eighties, the Upper East Side of "Yowl," where "I'm with you. . .pricing modems." But not quite. For in a curious sense, it is *Howl* that has the last word, containing as it does its own parody of its future parodists, which is to say of all the Sad Young Men "who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue / amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron regiments of fashion. . .& the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors." All that gas, after all, will burn away "under the tubercular sky."

NOTES

[1]Aside from the hostile reviews cited in the text, see Atlas (lukewarm), Donoghue (fairly dismissive), and Richman, who concludes that Ginsberg's poetry is best characterized as "sleaze."

For generally favorable reviews, see Diggory, Hyde, Molesworth, Perloff, and Vendler.

[2] For a fuller account of such "reversals," see Perloff, "A Lion in Our Living Room."

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—MARJORIE PERLOFF

JAMES JESUS ANGLETON 1917-1987

On his strange mission to America in 1939 to persuade Roosevelt not to enter the European war, Ezra Pound took time from his meetings with low-level bureaucrats and high-level avant-gardists to travel to New Haven to visit a Yale undergraduate, Jim Angleton. Jim, with his roommate Reed Whittemore, was editing a poetry magazine called *Furioso*. Pound's "Introductory Textbook" had appeared in the first number, and Pound was as eager as ever to tell the young editors whom to publish.

Details of that encounter are not known: the two major Pound biographies grant the incident only one, nearly identical sentence each. After four issues, *Furioso* suspended publication, to be resumed after the war with Whittemore as sole editor. Angleton was published only once, in the *Yale Literary Magazine*: a bad poem with a prophetic title, "The Immaculate Conversion." In the middle of the war, Angleton was converted—"turned," he would say—by his English professor, Norman Holmes Pearson, from poetry to its twin, espionage.

Pearson, a Boston aristocrat and a diminutive cripple, is now remembered for his writings on 19th century American literature, the extraordinary *Poets of the English Language* anthologies he edited with W.H. Auden, and as H.D.'s editor and literary executor. In 1943, despite the fact that he had been a Nazi sympathizer until the invasion of Poland, Pearson was sent to London to become the head of X-2, the counter-intelligence branch of the O.S.S. There he learned the British "Double Cross" system of psychologically coercing captured enemy agents into working for one's own side. Pearson's counterpart (and nemesis) at the British M.I.6 was Kim Philby; his code name was Puritan; in espionage literature he is called "the father of American counter-intelligence." After the war, Pearson returned to Yale, where he continued to recruit students for the newly-formed C.I.A. He served on the board of advisors to Pound's Square Dollar Books, which folded after its publishers, Kasper and Horton, went to jail for instigating segregationist riots.

Angleton turned out to be Pearson's greatest find. When he surfaced in public in the late 1970s, he was revealed to be the chief of C.I.A. counter-intelligence, the "ultra top secret deep snow" unit. He had files on two million Americans; had directed an operation that infiltrated the U.S. Postal Service, opened and photographed 200,000 personal letters; believed that Lee Harvey Oswald and Henry Kissinger were KGB spies, and that the Black Panthers were a North Korean front operation. He had been Kim Philby's best friend. For twenty years after the defection of Philby's partners Burgess and MacLean, Philby and Angleton were locked in a "deep game" of double and double-double crossing—a "wilderness of mirrors," Angleton called it, quoting Eliot—as Angleton decimated the ranks of the C.I.A.

in search of double agents, the "moles." Angleton's boss, Allen Dulles, was kept uninformed, and Mrs. Angleton, after 31 years of marriage, had never known her husband's position.

Angleton, who kept reading poetry all his life, liked to recruit agents from the Yale English department. He claimed that those trained in the New Criticism, with its seven types of ambiguity, were particularly suited to the interpretation of intelligence data. Consider, after all, the ways a spy's message may be read:

1) It is written by a loyal agent and its information is accurate.

2) It is written by a loyal agent but its information is only partially accurate.

3) It is written by a loyal agent but its information is entirely inaccurate.

4) It is written by a double agent and its information is completely false.

5) It is written by a double agent but its information is partially true so that the false parts will be believed.

6) It is written by a double agent but its information is entirely true so that the allegiance of the agent will not be discovered.

Moreover, the message is written in code, and liable to the vagaries of translation. And it is written in a highly condensed language, whose meanings can offer varying interpretations. Like a poem, the message is only as good as its reader. Roosevelt refused to believe a report on the imminent invasion of Pearl Harbor; the F.B.I. thought that the Pisan Cantos were the encoded communications of a spy.

There is a book to be written on poetry and espionage. A spy must know where the best information is, collect it without being discovered, and safely transmit it. In antiquity, the bards and troubadours were perfect for the task: they were free to wander; they had access to the courts; and as poets they relied on their powers of observation to compose and their memories to recite. The first literary spy is the creation of such a bard: Odysseus, who (in Book IV of the Odyssey) disguises himself as a beggar to gather intelligence in a Trojan city.

Chaucer was a spy on the continent for John of Gaunt. Marlowe was recruited by Sir Francis Walsingham—Elizabeth's great spymaster and Sir Philip Sidney's father-in-law—to inform on English students who were enjoying Catholic hospitality in Rheims. (And later, he was murdered by Walsingham's men because of his involvement with Sir Walter Ralegh, another spy, in a plot to depose the queen—a murder that was neatly staged to look like a barroom brawl.) Wordsworth was a spy in France; Basil Bunting a spy in Persia. Whittaker Chambers started out as an Objectivist poet.

Poetry arose as the voice of sacred power—the formula, the mantra, the oracle, the prayer: rhythmical condensed speech. Because of taboo, it was a voice that spoke in metaphors: the only way to express the inexpressible. Even as it lost its sacred function, the power continued in the poem: poetry, said Dickinson, takes the top of your head off.

That split—between the power of the poem and the powerlessness of the poet in society—has led poets into lives quite similar to the lives of spies. Poets have believed that they are the "unacknowledged legislators." They have been attracted to secret societies, from the Elizabethan School of Night (whose members included Ralegh, Spenser, Chapman and Marlowe, as well as Thomas Hariot and the alchemist Walter Warner) to Yeats' Golden Dawn. They have preferred to publish anonymously or under pseudonyms. They are—like Milton writing his elegy before he had a suitable corpse—masters at the counterfeiting of emotions. They band together into groups and movements that, like Angleton's C.I.A., become obsessed with betrayals from within. They encode private messages and secret strengths into their poems, like Zukofsky embedding the formula for a conic section into the vowels of *"A"*. They believe they are serving great powers: Stalin, Mussolini, Chogyam Trungpa, Muhammed X. They walk, like Baudelaire, Lorca, Reznikoff, invisibly through the city, watching and listening.

Writes Mina Loy: "To maintain my incognito the hazard I chose was—poet." In its obituary, *The New York Times* reported that Angleton's favorite poets were Eliot and Cummings.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

Postscript

Shortly after this message was transmitted to Sulfur Central, a book-length study of Pearson, Angleton and the Yale spooks appeared. Robin W. Winks' *Cloak & Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (Wm. Morrow, 1987) is longwinded and unbearably clubby, but full of interesting information:

Angleton, while still an undergraduate, appears to have been an energetic *littérateur*. He had visited Pound in Rapallo, and shared his enthusiasm for Mussolini. He was chummy with Cummings, met Marianne Moore, lunched with Thomas Mann, brought the ambiguous William Empson to Yale. He helped James Agee with the manuscript of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

His relationship with Pearson was close: father-son, or master-disciple. While in London during the war, he traveled in the Pearson circle: Eliot, the Sitwells, Benjamin Britten, Graham Greene, E.M. Forster, Ralph

Vaughan Williams, Norman Douglas, Elizabeth Bowen, Compton Mackenzie. He was a frequent guest at H.D. and Bryher's flat.

The O.S.S. office was no less literary. Angleton had recruited two close friends: Edward Weismiller, the Yale Younger Poet of 1936, and Richard Ellmann, the future Joyce scholar. Fellow agents included (along with superspook William Casey) Donald Gallup, the Pound bibliographer, and Louis Martz, the Milton scholar who would later edit H.D.'s *Collected Poems*. His secretary was H.D.'s daughter Perdita. (H.D. seems to have been surrounded by spies. It is curious that Bryher was apparently the only outside person to know Pearson's code name.)

In 1975, on a tour of the Far East, Norman Holmes Pearson fell ill in Seoul and died soon after. Mrs. Pearson believed that he had been poisoned by North Koreans—proof that he was still working for the Company.

—E.W.

CLARKE ON THE FO'C'SLE; TO HIM, BURNS*

Any text is a manifesto, can make a poetics. A poem I just finished mentions a
river god in
textile with fat urns the source of /a/ river, just blue and offwhite
thread, not even sad that it dulls down, even rolled in acid-free paper
and stored at constant temperature. Fetished iron and thread are a Nail God
for us, the hours you spent reading unwasted. Pope
cared like you for states of things but caressed them, surfaces as such, your fourteen-
liners so offhand shine here with that glow, odor of tea because
like Marianne Moore they pretend notes only are intended and this for courtesy
as much as scholarship. Primitive things should stay what they are.
"Power" in Blake isn't like what this company I set type for vends, physics and magic
distinct.
As I read, argument pouring down the page Tennysonianly picturesque
you might I suppose construct this plasticine-limbed figure taken as talking *among* such
things or entities as Keats desiring fallen ones put himself on steps leading to them,
Vader or Conan images (again they can be called this because already made into
images), the message-poem like any lecture or sword grip
like brooches in *Arthur's Britain* plates, thing for David Jones to thumb, thinking
about rats, this trouble argument has of assuming an audience
moderately well disposed to *Sorge*fuls. It's gone, John, the Norns with magnetic fish,
William Morris off to Iceland (Gloucester). Gerrit says there's a Black Mountain
Bard event you may be at, everyone planting stone spindles and churingas

* In response to John Clarke's *From Feathers to Iron*, Tombouctou/Convivio, Bolinas, 1987.

to be in journals, and don't you like (better than photos) ink renderings of flints,
stippled.
I was in Gloucester Sunday painting boats, blue, black, blue, green, blue—they
had names but (like "Liberty" on a white one just a dot) not rendered, tiny
bit of scrollwork to stand for theirs, red speck for bicycle-reflector "eye" on by
good luck the green one, and calligraphy over kind of undulant (and
diverse) sky blue to be reflected masts, hung nets, mass of boats—the backs
notch in so so do the reflections—and it didn't matter that the wind shifted
when I was nearly done and the boats turned more towards me, gulls on the
roof painted in and painted out. Elizabeth Sewell (*The Structure of Poetry*) describes
Mallarmé as this network of nonreferential nouns (wrapped as everybody knows aroun
an absence) and there's just no reference there to reference of paint. My squiggles
are Monets seen in the Jeu de Paume of boats in rivers and what I was looking at
equally.
And great single-figure calligraphs from karate-film *dojos*. Anything's a myth to me,
the kid's silver whistle-rattle in Boston's Museum with clusters of bells. Chinese bronze
harness bells, the rigid ones in a circle, could have inside, as clappers,
small bronze bells
you can peer at, shadowed from verdigris and narrowness of aperture, like anything
in Currier & Ives. The world is almost intrinsically flotsam (if the box is big you live
in it, if small a bookshelf). Carved boat hulls and harpoons tinted on the living board
they're cut from say first this is decor, then ignore the board. The chips you see look
like brushstrokes. In the boat these people in Sou'westers remind
you (their job) of Ryder, Wyeth, complex of people who, spending themselves on
rendering gave us—Dracula in the Wild West—personage and context complete.
All this has been said before in Italian. Say I recognize your accent or
saxophone playing in the tomb, knock on the side (no carved figures to describe)
and you, rising, ask how Buffalo is. Neither you nor I is mythic but the saxophone
probably is. Verse is *for* this soapy rendering, "buttery" as Permalba white says
on the box, Apollo's robe in the tapestry like a Vermeer wall map.
Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* in the Chandos reprint (spotted in Abraxas) once you
get past the foreedge marbling and spidery title page are a manifesto (what do you
think of "manifestion"?) for a kind of art, or is it any at all
you're afraid will go, Pope under squamous poetastrian deformers. . .potty silver
creamers of the period can have, instead of gryphon feet, trim hooves, the effect
startling as (really seen) those bells with bells inside, the balls inside *those* stone.
I go eighteenth-century, think of Gosse's *Gray* in the same shop, "Elegy Wrote in a
Country Church-Yard" for the tastes of scholars for whom study is a flavor.
To be a "thing" at all, Kant says, a thing has to be one of a series. There are no
unique events. Any poem contains a poetics as (Aristotle) a resonant event its maxim.
A bottlecap is a shield (a young man I talked to said you can flatten them and make
a snake). Film projected through smoky lucite is demiurges, -urgos, and Apollo's name
ends with n.
Regularity can be specified, Black Mountain Alums Convene at Bard. *Omphalos* is
a long oval puddingstone rock from Don Quatrale's yard he stuck upright in a pot.
Everything, absolutely everything is a herm and hence a poetics, if a poetics is what
helps you think about something. The stories as you say, in their localia, recede even
for peasant retailers, word in French. If the elephant blanket is embroidered
with jewels, it doesn't matter at all that the elephant is silver. I'm leafing through
Thomas's *Collected Poems*, dark-vowelled birds, heads in a cunning cloud,
the last lines, "as long as forever is," fern's seeds on the sill, girl-encircled island. . .
saint heron on kingfisher shore. We wear their sounds like plaid pins (found in graves
till the Christians stopped burying them). Scotland had mirrors, and *images*
of mirrors carved on rock, vestige if you like vestiges of an old religion, and we're

told by Ricks the Lady of Shalott used her mirror to see the good side
of her tapestry. This too is poetics, art meditating on the *fact* of image as established
by craft. Ashbery curved what curved before. Esher's spheroidal maunderings reflect
nothing, his lizards gollies. You before the mast (I suppose that big thing is a mast)
as Hart sinks bubbling behind and Olson's Figure of Outward does so, cut tin,
do wangle in with feathers so hard to make of iron (I've worked for people
who gilded leaves) and the duck we kept in the bathroom left tufts of down we still find
and the gold leaves in Franklin's static tester *could* be iron. You could amalgamate
a blue feather under glass in an iron brooch to wear with a plaid, down Derry down.
Inside the shadow under the lip of the Chinese bell you see, dim as a strict interior, this
sphere pierced with a grin as it were, slot for sound, through which the pebble that's its
clapper cleeks.

6.16.87

—GERALD BURNS

READING, SUMMER 1987

Anticipation is better than expectation &, as the Iran-Contra libretto fades away but before the task of finding the music for it begins, several new university press releases of theoretical entertainments—lake reading for those who've tired of the new novel—loom, like those rocks that you can hide your keys in. Derridamania (*live band every night*) has hit the University of Nebraska Press. *Wittgenstein and Derrida* by Henry Staten (182 pp.) is more an introduction to the Divine Mr. D than a study of the ever-incandescent Maestro W, & especially welcome in its efforts to place Derrida within a philosophical context (& so mute the odd but common idea that his work is literary theory ex nihilo). The volume is part of that great Polyuniversity Press "Great Conjunctions" series that has previously given us *Freud and Jolson* ("Mammy, how I love you"), *Buber and Niedecker: The Protestant Ethic and Yiddish Spiritualism, De Man and DeLady: Dysconstructing Deconstruction,* and the greatly anticipated *Ollie and the Ayatolla* ("It's my shredding party & I'll lie if I want to"). Meanwhile, Mr. D, now on location in Irvine & no doubt prepared to enter the southern California political fray, has issued his 1972 textual ~~master~~piece *Glas,* translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. & Richard Rand (262 two-column pages), while the same press has simultaneously published *Glassary,* an elaborate *320*-page guide to *Glas,* including an extensive index, by John P. Leavey, Jr., with essays by Gregory L. Ulmer & Derrida. Further north in the mainland, the University of Chicago Press has just published Alan Bass's

translation of Derrida's 1980 *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (522 pp.) ("1 August 1979. and then I slept for the whole afternoon [the television was on]. I feel a bit drunk, I am getting back to the typewriter looking at Socrates from the corner of my eye. I can see him carpeted in the image. . . .") Chicago has also just released George Lakoff's imposing volume *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (614 pp.)—an attempt to show *empirically,* through a systematic summary of dozens of linguistic, anthropological, & social psychology studies, what many of us have assumed on faith (*in practice*): that categories arise from "actual" human experiences shaped by biological & ideological & imaginative & mythopoetic predispositions & interactions & are not logically consistent abstractions; a *summa contra* linguistic objectivism & analytic philosophy insofar as they claim that language neutrally de-signates an independently definitive world of distinct "objects" (or object forms). Matchless on this point is Chicago's superbly produced *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells,* edited by Hans Dieter Betz (340 pp.) ("[If you make] an offering of wheaten meal and ripe mulberries and unsoftened (?) sesame and uncooked *thrion* and throw into this a beet, you will gain control of your own shadow / so that it [will serve] you." "ABLANATHANALBA BLATHANABA NATHANDA ANATHANA NABANAEI ABTHOOTH BARBACHA ABRASAX"). This is one of the textually richest works published in years, complete with pages of spells that look like lettrist poems or sound-text scores, which in some ways they were. (The "papyri" are from Greco-Roman Egypt from the second century B.C. to the fifth century A.D.) Perhaps it's not all that great a leap to M.M. Bakhtin's *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* translated by Vern W. McGee, & edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 177 pp.). Bakhtin discusses the multiplicity of primary speech genres as well as secondary (complex, primarily written) speech genres (literature, scientific research, commentary—he doesn't mention spells) in a way that brings to mind Goffman's sense of the "institutional" character of social interactions. Of related interest, Harvard University Press has published a paperback edition of the previously difficult-to-get *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* by V.N. Volosinov (presumably Bakhtin), translated by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (205 pp.). From the University of Minnesota Press (Theory and History of Literature Volume 31), Samuel Weber's *Institution and Interpretation* (183 pp.): "This very problem is addressed in the work of Charles Sanders Peirce who, although certainly an early forerunner of deconstruction, was from the very start concerned with the other side: the fact that despite the tendencies of semiotic processes to be open-ended and relatively indeterminate, determination takes place all the time, has always taken place, and will always take place, over and above the efforts of individual thinkers

. . . .This is why Peirce develops a notion of the 'real,' 'actual' or 'experience' not as a given state of affairs, but as a violent shock, involving conflict, struggle, and resistance. Reality and resistance recover their etymological kinship in Peirce. The problem then becomes that of defining the conditions under which such a violent arrestation—in other words: institution—takes place." Now here's James Clifford, introducing *Writing Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* edited by Clifford and George E. Marcus (University of California Press, 305 pp.): "The essays collected here. . .see culture as composed of seriously contested codes and representations; they assume that the poetic and the political are inseparable, that science is in, not above, historical and linguistic processes." Finally, having laid out these "new releases," it will be time to (re)read Luce Irigaray's (anti)essential *This Sex Which Is Not One,* translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Cornell University Press, 224 pp.)—a radical consideration of the phallocratic logic of the "great" works of the West, with special emphasis on the masculinist myopias of Freud & Lacan: "In other words, the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object,* but one of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. . . .This 'style' does not privilege sight; instead it takes each figure back to its source, which is among other things *tactile.* . . .Its 'style' resists and explodes every established form, figure, idea or concept. Which does not mean that it lacks style, as we might be led to believe by a discursivity that cannot conceive of it. But its 'style' cannot be upheld as a thesis, cannot be the object of a position."

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

LANGUAGE POETRY, 1971-1986*

1)

In the 1975 mini-anthology which Ron Silliman edited for *Alcheringa,* the epigraph is from Charles Olson:

* *In the American Tree,* Ron Silliman, editor. National Poetry Foundation. 628 pages.
"Language Poetries": An Anthology, Douglas Messerli, editor. New Directions. 192 pages.

That which exists
through itself
is what is called meaning

Olson in turn is misquoting Richard Wilhelm's translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*: "Master Lü-tsu said, That which exists through itself is called the Way (Tao)."

The epigraph to the "Second Front," the selection of theoretical writings in *In the American Tree,* is an unacknowledged quotation from Charles Bernstein.

All writing
is a demonstration of method.

In its context, in Bernstein's "Writing and Method," the term "method" might well be assimilated to Olson's etymological play which associates *meta hodos* with the mythological Way or *Tao,* but, if the dictum is taken as prescription, the two statements are directly contradictory. That which exists through itself demonstrates only itself: it is relative neither to a *referent* nor to a method, device, category, frame, concept, paradigm, logic, grammar, structure, writer, reader, tradition, or history. These are all rather relative to it, which is *concretely* absolute. That which demonstrates method, however, is a mechanism of *something else,* most notably in our culture a Cartesian mind. Methodology is Descartes' word, and his prime language, algebra, it should be remembered, likewise is non-referential, an abstract calculus. In the poetry in these anthologies, non-referential languages of two kinds appear: one which constitutes a world through itself; the other which like algebra is an abstract structure which must be interpreted in relation to specific occasions.

These two stances toward writing locate a troubling theoretical confusion and rift in serious American poetry at this time. The function of poetry since the Seventeenth Century has been to restore the object from which consciousness is (presumably) separated to its ideal status. Thus, Donne and Milton stand at the head of the two traditions of poetry which have been recognized in this century by the official culture. The one insists upon impersonality and the restoration of the method to its product, the other upon the individual self and the restoration of the product to the particular. These are, of course, the familiar cultural forms, classicism and romanticism. To insist upon calling meaning that which exists through itself is to deny the separation of consciousness from its object, which proves to be most familiar. Olson's dictum represents a break with the western idealism as a whole, Bernstein's is a correction of its post-Cartesian implementation. Both take exception to the prevailing degenerate form of Romanticism and

are thus often confused with one another; otherwise, they are utterly distinct. At any rate, language poetry is now canonically presented. The primary documents are collected and handsomely published: Silliman's definitive and Messerli's popular anthologies, *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book,* edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, *Writing/Talks,* edited by Bob Perelman, and major collections of essays by Barrett Watten, Charles Bernstein, Steve McCaffery, and Ron Silliman. The movement lacks only an historian. Perhaps literary movements only remain vital so long as their internal contradictions remain obscure.

The terms, "Language Poetries" and "Language Realism" are so vague as to encourage mindless polemics, and discourse has degenerated almost exclusively to that level. One of the dangers of these anthologies is that, despite the air of defining a poetics, both editors balk at definitive statements. I think it might have been better to follow the prevailing convention of anthology-making, which ignores the aesthetic biases of the editors, and to present the work as *Contemporary American Poetry* or *Younger American Poets* (see, for example, the anthologies edited by Helen Vendler or Dave Smith and David Bottoms). In one sense, all significant poetry since World War II has been "language poetry." "The revolution of the *word,"* as Jerome Rothenberg reminds us in the title of an important anthology, is the inheritance from radical modernism. Williams' cry out of *Paterson*—"The language, the language"—has been clearly heard now by two generations of poets.

Despite the commitment of the language poets to poetic theory, these anthologies fail to provide a strong theoretical context.

Messerli at least offers a summary of the recurrent themes in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* and *Poetics Journal:* foregrounding "language itself as the project [method?] of. . .writing," eschewing "myth-making and personalization," and understanding the writer-reader relationship as a collaborative effort. Generally speaking, he presents a less austere, less difficult, poetry than Silliman: "The emphasis here," he writes, "is not on aesthetic concerns as much as upon poems that challenge and energize our reading." He tends to feature poems which could almost be assimilated to relatively traditional poetics and, in discussing the lineage of language-poetry, he mentions Emily Dickinson, Thomas Campion, as well as Gertrude Stein and the Russian Formalists. The purpose of the anthology, it seems, is to bridge the gap between the language-poets and a more general poetry-reading public. In Messerli's presentation the "method" is as much readerly as writerly: "the demand that the reader function less as a sounding board than sound with the poet upon and inside the poem requires, in turn, a new kind of reading."

I react differently to this demand, encountering it here in a New Directions publication rather than in the raggedly-produced pages of

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine. Somehow it feels like school. Whose requirements are these? And what is the authority behind this demand? How is it fundamentally different from the authority of a typical poet-hero? These questions arise, I suspect, when an isolated literary community is exposed on the auction block of canonical literature and to the alienated institutions which broker it. The attraction of method is that it creates a context for writer and reader to stand in the place of commonality which is the stuff of a healthy literature. It establishes a synthetic intimacy by legislating the rules of a language which can bear a complex poetry. Messerli quotes Bruce Andrews: "Language work resembles a creation of a community, and of a world-view, by a once divided-but-now-fused Reader Writer." I'm reminded of Henry James's impassioned pleas for an understanding readership in his Prefaces to the New York Edition, but by comparison Messerli opens relatively few doors to the work he's introducing.

Silliman is even less committal in his introduction, and the substantial prose selections which he provides focus heavily on methodology in the narrow sense. Work by Michael Palmer, Michael Davidson, and James Sherry (his important "Limits of Grammar," for example) would have thickened the stew considerably. Some of Steve McCaffery's essays would have located Language Poetry in relation to continental theory (and generally the exclusion of the Canadian poets seems to me a flaw in both anthologies). I would have liked especially to have found something like Fanny Howe's "The Contemporary Logos" entered into the discussion. Her work emphasizes the tradition of language poetry which issues from Christianity, Neo-Platonism, and gnosticism: "Why I am here and not there, and why now, rather than then—the reasons that the mind could offer for the body's temporal position were echoes of some original plan on the part of the Logos." (It would not stretch the terms too grotesquely to say that the first poetics of language poetry is to be found in St. Augustine's essay on the Trinity.) Oddly, also, there is hardly a trace of the Marxism which has seemed to me and I believe to others a definitive character of language-poetry theory. We are given nothing from the symposium, "The Politics of the Referent," which was published in *Open Letter* in 1977 and reprinted in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* in 1980, an essential document of the movement, nor does Silliman include any of his own important essays on poetry and politics ("The Political Economy of Poetry," for example), some of the few useful treatments of the issue by an American poet in the past forty years.

I do not have space to address the poetry in these two anthologies, nor can one generalize significantly about it. Together, the two volumes include over 600 pages of poetry by thirty-eight poets. As the most important gatherings of new poetry since the first Allen anthology, they

should be made the subject of a major symposium. I will propose some terms which would perhaps be generative for such an occasion.

2)

The confusion which must be addressed cannot be defined in a polemical atmosphere. The crucial distinctions must be made with a fine rhetorical brush. The question is not whether language is representational—it is assumed in either case that it is not—but whether the concreteness of language is structural or material.

In the West it has been consistently assumed that language is a code which is independent of its meaning. Socrates noticed that his fellow citizens were able to speak of "justice," "truth," "beauty," and other signs with no knowledge of their meaning, and in the classical view, language is understood as an uninterpreted calculus which obeys its own logic. The arrangement of signs and therefore the successful production of sentences is independent of meaning. The meaning of the sentences derives from a secondary set of signs which interpret the original code. In *Anti-Oedipus,* Deleuze and Guattari write: "No one has been able to pose the problem of language except to the extent that linguists and logicians have first eliminated meaning; and the greatest force of language was only discovered once a *work* was viewed as machine, producing certain effects, amenable to a certain use." In ancient and medieval thought, syllogistic and grammatical structures were interpreted rhetorically. In this century, the underlying forms are understood in terms of phonology (i.e. the logic of marks abstracted from sounds) and the interpretation is statistical. The history of western thought has been consistently in the direction of (1) perfecting and generalizing the underlying logic, and (2) the establishment of interpretations which are likewise necessary.

In the first project, we have had remarkable success; in the second we have had none. When we receive articulate information from others, we interpret it by rules which have this unfortunate character: interpretations reveal the content of the rules themselves, not the information. Since Nietzsche, methodology has been either reactive, theorizing and narrativizing its moment of crisis, or it has exhibited a will to dominate with relativistic flash and brilliance. We are tyrannized by a logic which eternally recurs. Art becomes the permanent register of the Nietzschean laughter and dance, the generation of endlessly attractive structures of undecidable meaning.

By the end of World War II, however, this excitement turned to desperation, and a more profound radicalism appeared, which rejects both the prevailing semantic *and* denies the primacy of the formal code. The problem of language was indeed posed by recognizing meaning as the

structure, not the product, of language. As early as 1953, Olson could write (in one of his most remarkable and still, as far as I can tell, largely unknown texts, "The Chiasma," in *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives,* no. 10): "I am assuming any one of you is prepared to entertain the idea that we are already beyond rationalism, beyond Humanism, beyond realism." And by these terms he means precisely that we are prepared to go beyond writing as a demonstration of method: "Does any man discover what's in himself except by accident? Is not accident a word which smothers functions of life we ought now to be more scrupulous of." That is, the order of the world is not logical but factual. Olson says in a lecture somewhere, "This wall *has to* be here," not because of a prior logic but because it was *in fact* there. If I want a book from the shelves on the south wall of my study, I *have to* walk over; I have to walk on the blue and red carpet. This has to do with the *fact* of my location, not its logic. In an important book, *Symbols That Stand for Themselves,* Roy Wagner writes: ". . .the human phenomenon is a single, coherent idea, organized mentally, physically, and culturally around the form of perception that we call 'meaning.'"

We can say, then, there are at least three current dispositions toward language in poetry:

1. The poets of *Antaeus* and *APR* unwittingly invest in the Cartesian conception of language, and they are to be condemned because they practice their art whilst asleep. The soul of their belated humanism is mechanical. They honor the formal code and unquestioningly interpret it by a normative semantics. They produce not so much a poetry as a sociology.

2. The poets who write prose or "grammatical" poetry tend to honor the formal code but relativize the semantic. This is a radical move toward a Nietzschean nihilism, which honors only the logical forms of historical necessity. They draw attention back from meaning to the mechanisms of production. One line of development in Language Poetry is from a pluralistic encounter with possible semantic codes to an aesthetic interest in the formality of method as such.

3. Other poets, who deny also the primacy of the formal code, insist upon the meaningful priority of the concrete world, including the physical world of scientific research, material production, and whatever gods, magical forces, and so forth. That is, language, including phonology, is relativized. Thus, linguistic rationalism is broken, and the physicality of language as measure of a concrete world is restored. We live in a cultural regime which features the proliferation of meaning and a loss of personal commitment to meaning. The spiritual crisis is not the loss of meaning but the loss of value. This problem is caused in part by the fact that value, which is a relation of a thing to itself, cannot be represented. It is, however,

possible to appropriate language on behalf of the individual and to manifest its integrity, though it cannot be described or explained. The profoundest poetics is concerned with measures which make manifest. "If a theme, a phrase, suddenly means something to you, you don't have to be able to explain it. Just *this* gesture has been made accessible to you." (Wittgenstein)

Although the institutions of poetry are still dominated by poets of the first type, who make sentimental references to a bygone culture, their poetry is not read, and, in a sense, it cannot be read because it is inscribed directly into history. It is the confusion of the other two possibilities which must concern us.

3)

The radical move which we inherit from modernism assumes that meaning (that which exists through itself) is prior to language (that which exists through its method). Clark Coolidge:

manipulation of language particles	→	resultant new aggregates of "meaning" elements	→	forces of all aspects of language structure as "metaphor" for physical states-of matter

In this formulation manipulable particles of language and their meanings are *prior to* structure. Language isn't a thing *it*self but things, unbounded by phonological system, usable, constituting a field of improvisatory action. The perception of meaning is as direct as visual or auditory sensation. Structure is mediated by meaning, and not the reverse. To speak of nonrepresentation does not mean there is nothing to see but that what you see *is* the thing. Melville: "By visible truth we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things." In a variation on Melville's theme, David Bromige writes: "How I saw it—I stake my life on such assumptions—shows me the way." And Grenier: "Words don't have to say or be anything but what each is & does. A Word space." I do not know how to say this more emphatically: the structure of the world is not the logic of language but the use of language. The revelation of this factuality has been the central motive of the radical tradition in American writing since Melville, Whitman, and Dickinson. This, I take it, is behind Gertrude Stein's statement:

> Lord Grey remarked that when the generals before the war talked about the war they talked about it as a nineteenth-century war although to be fought with twentieth-century weapons. That is

> because war is a thing that decides how it is to be done when it is to be done. It is prepared and to that degree it is like all academies it is not a thing made by being made it is a thing prepared. Writing and painting and all that, for those who occupy themselves with it and don't make it as it is made.

Methodology, however, is a preparation for making, a technical or "academic" procedure, and not a making as it is made. When Watten appeals to "the predicative potential of method" (in the essay "Method and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E"), he is proposing to fight a twenty-first century war with twentieth-century weapons. Methodology promises production but it produces only what is implicit in its rules. The sentence and the syllogism, which Silliman suggests as terms of measure and poetic movement, are sterile linguistic forms: the one an imposition of completeness and closure on thought, the other a non-productive linguistic exchange which mechanically transposes predicates. The poem itself becomes superfluous: it would be more economical and probably more entertaining to the audience to publish the method as a do it yourself kit. Poetry is reduced to workshop exercises (a fact which is unfortunately emphasized by the inclusion of Bernadette Mayer's St. Mark's Workshop syllabus).

As a measure of the distance between that which exists through itself and that which exists through method, compare Jackson Mac Low's use of the Zen doctrine of No-Mind and Barrett Watten's reference to controlling mind in his reading of Kit Robinson's poem which gives Silliman's anthology its title. Mac Low speaks of "the deepest layer of mind, below both the conscious ego and the psychoanalytic unconscious. It is impersonal, 'untainted' by ego." Watten, on the other hand, writes: "The transformation in Robinson's poem is not the coming into being of the image but of something deeper—the perception of mind in control of its language. Distance, rather than absorption, is the intended effect." That which exists through itself does not "control" or "intend;" it does not produce "effects."

To be sure, both Mac Low and Watten look, in Silliman's words, "at what a poem is actually made of—not images, not voice, not characters or plot, all of which appear on paper, or in one's mouth, only through the invocation of a specific medium, language itself." But what is Language *Itself,* apart simply from language? This myth of our symbolism appeared as a replacement for the strange—and after the bubble broke, embarrassing—gods we had fallen for in the 1960s. We have been tourists, hungering for experience, not just this or that experience but experience Itself. By generating a morbid intensity, we have been able, finally, to have an *experience of language,* language itself. The language of description, with its implicit logic, begins by describing the world, but the language too is

part of the world and must also describe itself and reveal its own methods; the world, however, is a part of language, and, so, in order to describe itself language must describe the world. It seems that there should be a logical prohibition of this infinite loop, but there is not. Language turns out to be the content of the world, not its structure. It is completely plastic; it is no longer possible to hold part of it back—as a method—to create a shape for the remainder.

4)

The work in these anthologies is presented in an aesthetic context. It is not located concretely in relation to either the earthly city or the heavenly city. The whole awful thing must be taken up again: what it is to be a person, the pain and joy of history, a most curious cosmos which is not demystified by use of tongue, lips, ears, pens, or the logics of these fine organs and efficient little machines. Susan Howe:

> age of earth and us all chattering
>
> a sentence or character
> suddenly
>
> steps out to seek for truth fails
> falls
>
> into a stream of ink Sequence
> trails off
>
> must go on.

—DON BYRD

"WHOWE": AN ESSAY ON WORK BY SUSAN HOWE

> A Drawing
>
> The meaning of this is entirely and best to say
> the mark, best to say it best to shown sudden

places, best to make bitter, best to make the
length tall and nothing broader, anything
between the half.

Gertrude Stein,
Tender Buttons

Susan Howe takes the experimentalist desire for interrogation of the mark and combines it with the populist mysteries of such oblique and marginalized materials as folk tales and early American autobiography, fusing these under the complex and resonant sign of Otherness. Her work with its minimalist elegance and economy of gesture is also charged with social density, in her critical allusions to our common culture (Swift, Yeats, Shakespeare), and in her austere judgments of the shared political and ethical destructions of our experience: the liquidation of Native Americans, of Jews in the Holocaust, the rack of Ireland. She has felt the inflection of victor by loser, of other by winner, and these subtle dialectics of power create her subtle political diction. Her words, sometimes broken even into a magical "zaum" tactic, draw upon lost or non-dominant languages (Gaelic, Native American languages): her poems are repositories of the language shards left in a battlefield over cultural power. Her palimpsests of etymology, her spells of misspelling float on a-syntactic canvases of silence. On the occasion of the appearance of her most recent book, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time,* these meditations on some of Howe's works.[1]

From an interview: "Q: If you had to paint your writing, if you had one canvas on which to paint your writing, what might it look like?" Howe's answer: "Blank. It would be blank. It would be a white canvas. White."[2]

All of Howe's writing does spiritual and metaphysical work, yet without prophetic claims. For instance, Howe will produce a text which draws on the reading of deeply felt markings, signs seen under pressure, signs in the typological sense. With her interest in the anti-authoritarian mark, Howe's work can be seen as a fruitful juncture between H.D. and Oppen. That part of H.D. which derives most noticeably from *Tribute to Freud* rests upon the uncloseable reading of signs; the poetic practice sets down word, gesture, memory and dream, all glyphs for an infiniating practice of decoding. That part of Oppen which speaks of the lengthy preliminary work done to find one word creating the small space to "stand on;" the poetic practice makes islands of clarity or necessity like the Whitmanic "filament, filament" into the surrounding mystery. As in Oppen, Howe's work can show little interest in the connectedness of syntax, and more in the spaces of silence, the electricities of awe. The syntactic mode Howe favors, she names in the Awede book: "Paper anacoluthon and naked

chalk"—anacoluthon being a lack of grammatical sequence or coherence.[3] And her favorite genre (all told) is probably something like the ode, which lifts things to limitlessness, whose main debate is between overwhelming boundlessness (like the sea of death in Lawrence's "Ship of Death") (like the "more happy love, more happy, happy love" with the verbal excess in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn") and some vulnerable boundary which may compromise ultimates of song, of bliss, of void. In Howe one feels the loft, the heft, the debate of the ode, the apostrophe of power and self-questioning, the persistent ground of "altierity, anonymity, darkness."[4]

An important, underutilized essay of Gertrude Stein argues implicitly that experimentalist writing occurs in opposition to "forensics." That loaded word is also the title of her essay; it alludes to discourses of dominance. Forensics (defined conventionally as public argumentation, formal debate, presentations of law courts) is understood as the dialect, ideolect, or rhetorical mode of a specific group which holds and practices power ("they made all walk"), social replication ("forensics is a taught paragraph") and definition.[5] For Stein, forensics is a system of normative definition, which, in the imposition of authoritative norms, trains one to patterns of assumptions (including those of gender). "Forensics establishes which is that they will rather than linger and so they establish." (p. 391) The writer of "Forensics," the *she* seems to be debating the value, if any, of forensics to her—forensics as disputation, as power, as definition, as "eloquence and reduction" (p. 386). Among other functions, this essay, therefore, is a debate between authority and the anti-authoritarian. It is clear enough that complicity, obedience, agreement, and renunciation of one's own bent are part of the system of forensics.[6] The question is "how to write" (to borrow the title of the whole book which this essay completes) when the writing space is colonized by forensics. How to gather authority without authoritarian power; how to indicate clarities without the limitation of certainties; how to give and receive pleasure without rhetorical or generic proscriptions; how to indicate one's volume without squatting hibernations of mass. *How to Write*. This, Gertrude Stein indicates, is her problem; this, Virginia Woolf indicates, is her problem; this, Marianne Moore indicates, is her problem; this, Susan Howe indicates, is her problem.

Howe bases her poetics on the evocation or proposition of "silence" or "a white canvas. White" as a trope for an anti-authoritarian practice. The foregrounding of otherness. The critique of centers, hierarchies, authorities. The suspicion of dominant meaning. The apprehension of power. And, often this has a gender valence. As in Howe's essay, "The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson" in which Howe proposes a truth (specific, suffered, female) in opposition to Truth (official, a "masculine

covenant" [p. 116]. Indeed, Howe uses this important essay to locate gender differences in both the production and the consumption of a text. She analyzes the duplicity of the female text ("each time an errant perception skids loose, she controls her lapse") which can at once "confirm orthodoxy" and "subvert" (p. 117).

As someone situated on borders between allegiances, as someone who eschews what she perceives as untempered affiliations, Howe has had sometimes provocative relations to varieties of contemporary feminism. For instance, she is notably unimpressed by the discussion of Dickinson in Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. (cf. MED) In the 1986 interview, Howe spells out explicitly the analytic and cultural danger she sees in reiterating a paradigm of the semi-conscious, mad woman artist: the end in breakdown, disability, death too easily acceptable as a script.[7] The Falon interview makes starkly clear what was at stake in this received paradigm (which *Madwoman* did not, of course, begin, and which, in my view it analyzed; but which, in Howe's view, it perpetuated). Howe speaks of her own fear of being an artist based on her apprehension that madness and breakdown were the retributive punishment for ambition. Tremendous psychic struggles are revealed in Howe's persistent linkage of "the bond between mad and made" (ASFT, p. [46]). The apparent insanity of other women artists blocked her from her own declarations; to struggle against such received interpretations of other women artists by analyses of their intellectual breadth was to struggle for one's own ambition and achievement, at once an act of cultural criticism and of personal necessity.

Fundamentally, Howe is mounting a critique of the tendency of *The Madwoman in the Attic* to a "victimization" hypothesis, which underplayed the agency of women. Yet despite this attack, Howe is notably feminist. Whowe? She is concerned with the unspoken stories, the unsung songs: "I wish I could tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate."[8] She maintains the historical consciousness of the Creonesque politics of violence and self-justification; her response, quite similar to Woolf's: "Malice dominates the history of Power and Progress. History is the record of winners. Documents were written by the Masters. But fright is formed by what we see not by what they say."[9]

Howe maintains an uncompromising suspicion of power and a subversive response: wanting "to be known for having done subversive writing, subversive of powers and control and order."[10] Like the Woolfean paradoxes of women's writing articulated in *A Room of One's Own*, Howe's double perspectives offer the parallel analysis of a gendered writing beyond gender. A series of citations show the full arc of the paradox. "A poet is never just a woman or a man. Every poet is salted with fire." (MED, p. 7) "There's a *time* of poetry and a mystery about it that transcends chronological time and gender, and that / . . . / has its own time and its

own gender" (Falon interview). "Yet gender difference does affect our use of language, and we constantly confront issues of difference, distance and absence, when we write." (MED, p. 13)

Importantly, she is a feminist by virtue of her rage, including her rage at the misappropriation (as she sees it) of a woman writer— in the case of Gilbert and Gubar, by women; in the case of the mis-editing of Emily Dickinson, by men. The rage of Howe, the brilliant, lacerating indignation is a steely motive. In the 1986 interview, Howe speaks of being released to rage by virtue of an exemplary feminist text: the "tremendous effect" of the galvanic rage of Kate Millett's 1970 (1969) work *Sexual Politics*; Howe's reading of Millett led her to those changes in her paintings and environments (Howe was then a visual artist) which in turn quickly provoked her to a drastic almost interdicted change of medium—into words, into writing, into articulation of sound forms in time.

Howe appears to be on the cusp between two feminisms: the one analysing female difference, the other "feminine" difference. For the latter, she is close to Julia Kristeva, who evokes marginality, subversion, dissidence as anti-patriarchal motives beyond all limits. Anything marginalized by patriarchal order is, thus, "feminine;" the "feminine" position (which can be held by persons of both genders) is a privileged place from which to launch an anti-authoritarian struggle.[11] The female use of this "feminine" of marginality and the avant garde use of this "feminine" of marginality are mutually reinforcing in the work of some contemporary women: Lyn Hejinian, Kathleen Fraser, Gail Sher, Beverly Dahlen and Howe. This mixed allegiance will naturally call into question varieties of flat-footed feminism. Just as Woolf continually proposes political and cultural feminism and the critical position of homosexuality, yet satirically portrays monomanical reformers and colonizers of otherness (suffragists and lesbians among them), so Howe continually proposes at least a feminism of cultural critique while declaring strong opposition whenever she suspects unitary (undialectical, uncritical) feminist enthusiasm. The only danger is that Howe's precise kind of feminism may be misread by a- or anti-feminist commentators.

Certainly *The Liberties* cannot be misunderstood in its approach to the question of women's representation in culture. This major work from 1980 (published with, but unrelated to *The Defenestration of Prague*) begins with, and returns to the tie between Stella and Jon. Swift. Howe makes her own "liquidation"—payment of a debt, assessment of liabilities and assets—in analyzing Swift's "liquidation"—abolishing, metaphoric killing of Stella. Swift abolished things about his life-long companion, documents, artifacts, writings, for none of Stella's letters, few of her poems, and no portrait has survived. Stella is therefore taken by Howe as an absolute baseline of women's cultural condition: although she had a fairly bold life,

she has been historically obliterated, liquidated. Although Howe has mentioned that the title *The Liberties* alludes to a particular neighborhood in Dublin rich with cultural layers, one might easily hear an echo of Swift's elegant epitaph, translated from Latin by Yeats. "He served human liberty." Male liberties are preserved and eloquently assembled; female liberties though equally forceful are with greater difficulty disentangled from guilt, pain, loss, obliteration. Howe's work is written against the grain of such liquidation, to examine and assess a Stella, who, how: whowe.

What does one do when one feels the electric power of language from the feminist margins of cultural credibility? Resistance, refusal, austere respect commingled with lacerating grief, resistance to the already-said of literature (to Swift, to Yeats, to Shakespeare), a sounding of dominance with the mark lines that have dredged the margins. Stella and Cordelia from *King Lear* meet in the wild-woods of Howe's page space: a space devoted, consecrated to marginality, a page space that is a canvas of margins. Reading a book, they are examining what is inside the book, what is outside:

Howe has taken the responsibility of writing the book outside the book

piecing together their story, piecing together what they have in common, trying to answer Cordelia's question "Did we survive at all." They have in common their vulnerability to the definitions of others' stories. They have a consciousness of violence, done to them, or around them; violence to the vulnerable is a repeated motif in Howe's work, and within her text, often the quarry speaks. They recall phrases associated with their story (Cordelia meditates upon "speak again"), but these are cited only to be assessed. Re-cited they become different, voiced critically. They have in common a female relation to dominant story, muted and trying a voice, storied but claiming their telling. They investigate. They spy. They scry. They wait.

"Whowe." Sometimes they seem to be whole, but their integrated knowledge, unstable, alternates with explosive silences, blackouts staged by Howe. They panic. They are self-possessed. The dangerous dialectic of claiming *made* from *mad/e* is a brilliant dramatic and intellectually compelling site in this work. "Surely [says Beverly Dahlen] she cannot simply enter the tradition, identifying with is as if she were male; she is, I think, in grave risk to do so. But what other identity is there? Surely, to ask that is to bring us to the heart of the matter: woman as absence and the consequent risks involved in the invention of our own traditions."[12] A female writer. A female writer faced with a complex (the tradition) more often inimical than welcoming, and filled to brim, with multiplex inscriptions of women and the female and the feminine. A female writer looking for a way to write. How, indeed, to write. Whowe to write. The path Howe

chooses here, this examination of a fictional character, and a semi-fictionally available historically attested person, bridges a way to the definition of "our own traditions" to treat the palimpsested absence, filling it with our (with whower) annotations and firm marks. Yet they are already filled with what they establish; filled with taught paragraphs. Who we? Who? How? Who howe (who is any of us) to attempt this? And whooo-wee—the cheer, the enormous, outrageous pleasure, the pride, of making this attempt. The pride in Howe occurs not so much in overt exclamations of joy, but in gestures towards election.

I have taken my pun on Howe's name from herself, to point up the rich sense of self and of community (who we?) that must be sustained to sustain this kind of feminist critique.[15] The end of *The Liberties* sets a proof to oneself. It consists of a series of word squares alternating S and C (for Stella and Cordelia, but also to oneself: Susan, SEE!), followed by a series of riddles whose answer becomes How: a question, a salutation, a hold, a hole, a depression. Offering thereby an astonishing self-portrait of an artist, a woman, trying to inherit herself, to work herself into her own—"patrimony"? "matrimony"? "harmony"?

Hence a work of "howness: both concavity and depth" from a "howdie: a midwife, origin obscure" who gave it life from the concavity and the depth at once. "Across the Atlantic, I/ inherit myself." During the masque at the very end, a Sentry comes on stage to say "I am afraid," as who would not be, having written, seen, undertaken, dared and proposed such a work. A work which pursues Shakespeare (the drama like a mix of heath scene and Beckett), Swift, Yeats, and *must do so,* a compulsion (deference deranged, damaged, exploded by feminist questions, by whowe) undertaken in fear and desire ("dare // tangle").

To take such liberties. To take them at their word. To take their word. How to write. Whowe to write.

Left upon the stage at the end are versions of a community of seekers, versions of the whowe: a sojourner, a lonely bastard, and a fool. It is this kind of combination of marginals, fused into one, who becomes the center of *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time.* For that newest work can be read as an allegory of how the center, how major man—white, colonist, Protestant, male, minister, armed with God's word and courage and rectitude—how that man, entering almost accidentally some marginal space, goes from the straight and narrow to sheer errancy, sheer wanderings. Mr. Hope Atherton, militant new American, wanders on the margins of the colony at which he was a center. His oblique vision and experience of the Other (Indian) and himself as Other is forever defining. Following from Howe's study of the margins as marginal (in *The Liberties*), *Articula-*

tion of Sound Forms in Time offers a vision of the center as marginal, marginalized, prone to a hopeless—yet potentially saving—breakup of its most cherished paradigms.

This experience of otherness dissolves language. This new work again fervently enacts Howe's language strategies. The isolation of letter. Of syllable. Phrasal constructions. Word squares mingling Indian words and word parts with phonemes from "our" language ("amonoosuck" and "ythian"), these macronics making an "uncannunc" set of nonce formations. (ASFT, [p. 16]) Words are situational, meteoric, unrepeatable, impacting the whole history of language in one gesture. There is word "play"—the pun as the intersection of personal revelation (condensation, distortion) and linguistic possibility. And all these (words as if graffiti puns, macronics, words scattered like a handful of jacks) (words effaced; words without space, as in Roman inscriptions) the critical appropriation of all burlesque or archaic language habits for high critical ends. The taxing struggle to assemble and maintain a self-questioning (who? how?) cultural position: anti-authoritarian, yet authoritatively provoked by one's female identity: Howe. We. WHOWE.

NOTES

[1]The stunning Awede edition, in design choices a real complement to Howe's work, was published in 1987, designed and printed on letterpress by Brita Bergland. It is a book-work of stark beauty. Other of Howe's works to be discussed or mentioned are: "The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," *Temblor* 2 (1985): 113-121; "Women and Their Effect in the Distance," *Ironwood* 28 (Fall 1986): 58-91; *My Emily Dickinson* [MED], North Atlantic Books, 1985; *The Liberties* and *The Defenestration of Prague* in *The Defenestration of Prague*, Kulchur, 1983.

[2] The journalist Janet Falon, interviewing Howe, December 1986. This excellent, still unpublished interview, was done for a course I taught at Temple University.

[3] ASFT, unpaginated; I have assigned [p. 50] for this citation.

[4]The key phrase is cited from "Captivity and Restoration," p. 113. The summary of the ode is partially indebted to Mary Jacobus, "Apostrophe and Lyric Voice in *The Prelude*," in *Lyric Poetry—Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Hošek and Parker, Cornell University Press, 1985; Paul Fry, *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode*, Yale University Press, 1980; and Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, Cornell University Press, 1981.

[5] Gertrude Stein, "Forensics" [1928?/1931?] in *How to Write* [1931], Dover Publications, Inc., 1975. Those two citations appear on pp. 385 and 386. Also of interest: "Forensics are a plan by which they will never pardon. They will call butter yellow. Which it is. He is. They will call birds attractive. Which they are. They are. They will also oblige girls to be women that is a round is a kind of hovering for instance." (p. 385) The overt social comment about gender may have a sexual discourse appended, since the word *butter* as used in *Tender Buttons* is a metaphor for transudate; indeed the title may involve the metonymic exchange button/butter, among other allusions and connections.

[6](cf.) the following: "I agreed to everything. This was not my business. And yet I am not puzzled. Because I was obedient. Now think of forensics." (p. 386)

[7]Of course this spirited position is one kind of feminist attitude; look at Adrienne Rich's eulogy for Anne Sexton which grimly says there shall be no more suicides, as if Rich—and this too is typical and interesting—could make this occur by sheer force of will.

[8] Howe, "Statement for the New Poetics Colloquium, Vancouver, 1985," *Jimmy and Lucy's House of 'K'*, "#5, November 1985, p. 17.

[9] Same statement, p. 15.

[10] Falon interview of Howe.

[11] For an elaboration of these points, see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Methuen, 1985. Despite the "feminine" being open to persons of both genders—still, there are persons who are held to be *women. Female.*

[12]Beverly Dahlen, "[Response to Rasula]," *HOW(ever)* 1, 4 (May 1984), p. 14. The "she" is not Howe but contains a generalized portrait of the struggle of the female cultural worker.

[13]The "whowe" of the title occurs in the "White Foolscap" section of *The Liberties*, p. 88.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

TONGUES OF ANGEL MAKE / FOR UNION WITH THE MAKE—*what to do with a book* / for *PARTS OF A WEDDING*—

It's what you would hope someone *might* do with the situation that your 'death' *could* bring them. They would love you. There love would 'drop' into the ground, & not be confused with "feeling."

I love the *agency* testified by these poems—it's 'public'—& the *example* (evidence/*exemplar*) given here of Alice's soul-formation—'*free for all*' *still* apparently ("We the people") *with* such a mind/heart ('*hsing*')***from*** *love* & *death* & ***life alive***—to send forth 'rays' from 'beneath' life to speech & from there, to crawl down into the black & brown ground, *as*necessary, to 'search'—or up to 'unite' in the 'heaven' (to which he may be gone—to *anywhere* in fact of which he) of the mind's eye of the Earth, as *its* 2 EYES ("floating in the Harbor")—one seeing "green-blue," the *other* ('opposite') (Life's 1 'partner') (on the DAY OF THE DEAD, e.g. in Malcolm

Lowry's *Under the Volcano,* or the flowers out from the Cut in Gloucester) "blue-green"—impossible, but true—how love comes out some place 'below' feeling (very much of/with sympathetically & theoretically inhabiting Charles Olson's "below-below") & comes forth as a human 'power' (the surviving Self converting its ***living body*** to ("Angel-Agate") "fetish" to invoke Him, to find Him '*missing*' AND '*everywhere*') that navels forth from Alice since—that beam up from Mother Earth/& death the ground 'always'—wouldn't you know it?—but '*more*'—the ability of dream & words & ("you") your "personal" conjure-capacity to *see* Him in the city streets *& inside buildings*—ALL PARTS OF YOUR ONE THOUGHT DO REACH TED!—to call forth & love & enact the one that you still

—'is gone'—

know exists! knew existed! ***and*** was 'gone'!—*Even to be* ***there*** *too!—the red clay shining,* alive & wonderful—a hand-shake, two hands shake, four hands shake—I seldom remember what it *is* like to be *in the grip* of such a book as this, Alice—it's actual Mythology, *the* "St. Mark's Place," *the* task of writing.

—ROBERT GRENIER

NOTE

Alice Notley's 40 page book *Parts of a Wedding* is included in *O, An Anthology* which is devoted to writing and commentary as forms of series, sequence, non-sequence / extended works of poetry. *O,* is edited by Leslie Scalapino, published by O Books (distributed by Small Press Distribution, 1814 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702). Other poets included, in addition to Robert Grenier above, are Larry Eigner, Benjamin Hollander, Norma Cole, Jerry Ratch, Charles Bernstein, Aaron Shurin, Tom Raworth, Lyn Hejinian, Rick London, Lawrence Kearney, Alan Davies, Nathaniel Mackey, Michael Palmer, and Abigail Child.

SCRATCHING FROM STARTLES, FINISHED FINE

Two engravings by Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I* and *St. Jerome in his Study,* precede the words of Clark Coolidge's book,* and both are involved in the story that unfolds, or is unfolded in spite of itself, for the poem wants to be a spatial object, a rock, and as opaque. (When in 1917 Ezra Pound wrote to William Carlos Williams that "The thing that saves your work is *opacity,* and don't you forget it. Opacity is NOT an American quality. . ." that was true then, but by now (1987) native American instances of opacity have become more visible: I think of some work by Edward Taylor, J.G. Percival, Melville, B.P. Blood, Stein, Coolidge.)

Melancholy attends the process of this methodic poem because of the difficulty to make anything at all, to put it together, and then the doubt as to how it cleaves. Yet the composition of the poem is so achieved that one does not wish for more or less. Its size is right, fewer than 18 (unnumbered) pages, a poem of 10 sections, reminder of Pythagorean intellect. So the "wreckage" has overcome its own doubt: "Where to stem today, how to hook a night so it corrects the danglings."

> The light that leaks from composition alone.
> Scalded by a tentative. Expels the tiny expounds thing huge,
> Things made be. Any and it's large. A universe is not of use.

What is at heart is doubt, in arranging choosing choices, verbal repetitions, even algorithms that tend a barely hidden order, to melancholy such a situation conduces.

Doubt from start to scratch "of the matrix for his stir plain," starting point melancholy, expands to entertain all the availabilities of points from which the actions of impinging depend. Writing is impinging so, whatever, and reflection recursive on how impinging includes the world "outside" the writer scratches, on or from, conduces to these melancholy moods again. Too much or enough, too many names already things:

> The man on the tower somewhere along the climb has lost
> his name, somewhere among the other names for things. . .
>
> He has locked his throat, for he fears to add objects to
> the limitless. A man without words or a name in a spire of
> things.

* *Melencolia* (The Figures, 1987)

After the opening question, "For is what I have made be only salvage?" the first words of the last section, X, proclaim "That the stone is a false one." Then "The traveler in his blinded writing snarls. The thought said to move vast blocks will not itself move. Though the still block speeds the thought."

At the outset in Dürer's picture Melencolia broods, but in the actual mineral words of the poem how strange the continual female absence. Hence alchemy sputters and fails: "there is nothing to interiors but bouncing ash." "The rose is a jape of stone." Desire has not been invented; there is no volatile to fix, only "pressure on the pitches," a turning of fixities. The authority, Saturn, has consumed the differences.

> Adrift in an organ of something's lightless glare,
> doubt-dried, dreamless, locked in ponders his skull hammers.
> Along with all he has no name, and doubtless is to blame.

Though the Sublime of the Great Work is avoided or shunted, thanks to the melancholic doubts of old Saturn, yet the world is scratched, its startle is unthrottled, by the work of good words in order. Their play is right as the scale of their theatre or factory. Read us, they say, we are rarely and fairly compelling. We make a round a poem.

—GERRIT LANSING

MUNICIPAL HORMONE LOOPS*

The grid of the city is a control structure. Overcrowding precipitates higher hormonal activity in the individual. Self-assertion in aggressive public transit environments leads to stressful levels of adrenal hormones. The constant violation of individual physical privacy, the result of competition for placement in line-ups, leads to muscle armouring and protective, ultimately bent, postures. Excitedness and adrenalin are kinds of polis-binding links, a sort of biologically enforced patriotism, locking the citizen into the high population density urban matrix.

* one of a series of prose speculations on society, language, dreams, the neurochemistry of consciousness, and sensory prostheses, gathered together in *The Immaculate Perception* (Toronto: Anansi).

The function of police, of all sirened vehicles in fact, is to inject adrenalin into circulation, maintain the 'high' of background fear. The professional classes maintain this same high with news, an all-news station providing a constant low key andrenalin rush, like an intravenous drip. This elevated vigilance, inherent in the dilute aggressive state of the ordinary citydweller, is similar to the action of amphetamine. Security, which unlike health care is not universal, has become an industry which entrenches paranoia & isolation.

The city is a vast corporate hormonal loop. Mass levels of gonadotropins are manipulated by erotic advertising. Elevated levels of endorphins in jogging executives anaesthetize their social conscience. Unbridled smooth muscle aggression, along with elevated military spending levels, triggered the recession of the early '80s.

The mascot of the hormonal village is the psychopath, charming, witty, guiltless & deadly.

—CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY

THE CATASTROPHE OF CHARM*

> Essentially an integrated circuit is a very complex silicon photograph . . . .But our silicon photograph doesn't just *represent* something—the pattern of light with which it was irradiated—it really, efficaciously, *does* what it is a photograph of. In a sense it is a miraculous picture, like that of Our Lady of Guadalupe or Czestochowa or the Shroud of Turin. It not only represents, but does; it is not just information, but reality; it is not just a piece of knowledge, but a piece of being; it is not just epistemology but ontology. [NC 208]

This passage from "Such Stuff as Dreams: Technology and the Future of the Imagination" is characteristic of Frederick Turner's notable attempt to cross-fertilize aesthetics with technology. This essay, along with "The Neural Lyre: Poetic Meter, The Brain, and Time," "Reading as Performance"

* Citations as follows: NC = *Natural Classicism: Essays on Literature and Science* by Frederick Turner (Paragon House, $18.95 cloth); FF = *Forget Foucault* by Jean Baudrillard (Semiotexte, $4.95 paper); GDC = *The Great Dimestore Centennial* by Don Byrd (Station Hill, $7.95 paper); R = *Give Em Enough Rope* by Bruce Andrews (Sun & Moon, $10.95 paper).

and four others are brought together in *Natural Classicism* to mount an argument for a recovery of the "deep lexicon and syntax of human artistic nature." [NC 28] Turner sees the transmission of cultural information as the central human genetic task; art is a "cosmogenetic activity" of making—by 'making up'—a world. "To put it aphoristically: we have a nature: that nature is cultural: that culture is classical." [NC 222] There is no "nature" which precedes culture: "All nature is second nature." [NC 215] Turner's is a deeply considered evolutionary perspective. He's a spokesman for a pan-human culture based on the biological restraints of the organism, yet he's also an enthusiast of microchip technologies as a further augmentation of the species.

This technological progressivism is unfortunately hobbled by Turner's theory of "kalogenetics," his term for value-creation unfolding through the ages in "a super-temporal conversation within the human community." [NC 162] I'm reminded of the "great conversation" paradigm of the Great Books program marketed after World War II—education on the installment plan as reactionary "self improvement." Turner's injunctions, too, suggest a kind of United Nations of aesthetic guidelines. He envisions a full return to melody in music, representation in art, and metrically strict oral recitative in poetry. Not that such hopes are unique to Turner, but he's convinced that these features are literally, genetically, the innate program of being human—that to tamper with them is a corollary of drug abuse damage to the central nervous system. What this ends up being, in practical terms, is a global rehabilitation of the old humanism, slightly retooled to modify its sexism and racism (anthropologist Victor Turner was this man's father, which is the only way I can account for his otherwise unexpected ethnographic liberalism).

Turner's program spreads concentrically by a series of equations. He insists on a clearly defined beginning, middle and end as constitutive of "the grammar of human art;" to violate this is to abort the "endorphin reward," to shun the natural opiate of the brain. Drawing on research suggesting a neurochemical similarity between trance states and the effect of poetic meter on the neocortex, Turner imposes this ecological dictum: consciousness *is* iambic pentameter. [NC 31] Holding "rhythmic repetition as a psychic technology" [NC 18] he hammers home his argument for the primacy of the oral tradition: "Thus at the heart of human artistic performance we find an archaic genetic armature of mammalian/primate ritual." [NC 11]

There's much in the imaginative vigor of Turner's book that brings to mind Olson's speculations in the "Chiasma" lectures, or ecologist Paul Shepard's ruminations on human culture as biological resonance in *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*. What's disarming about Turner is that he seems unable to recognize the actual aesthetic counterparts of the

new technological environment of the integrated circuit. He affirmatively croons that "We live once again in a world of runes and icons, efficacious and full of virtue; a world in which the distinction between how we know and what we know, statement and referent, meaning and object, has begun to break down." [NC 209] "The new electronic technology is by its nature playful, decentralizing, individualizing, and pluralist." [NC 210] Constantly chafing against his bogeys—"modernists" and "deconstructionists"—Turner simply misses the fact that these are the very forces that have been instrumental in breaking down the distinction between the what and how of knowing. So Turner castigates a mock-modernism, hellbent on a senseless exaltation of aleatory freedom, claiming that "the random is the most complete of tyrannies." [NC 223] Little does he realize that this is precisely what modernist poetics thought to respond to, as an historical condition given in the unprecedented barbarity of technologized war, postwar, and interwar. Claiming a pedigree for modernism which it never had, Turner's impulse is to clamp a lid on this cauldron of perceived moral poison: "The rules must be followed, or the freedom, the limitlessness, the generativeness, will not come about. And those rules include not only the grammar of language, but also the classical laws of harmony, melody, color, proportion, poetic meter, narrative, rhythm, and balance." [NC 222] It's depressing to ponder a claim that the human central nervous system is programmed, worldwide, to obey these laws.

Or are they rules? Turner's vocabulary is equivocal, and he misses out on a useful distinction made by Jean Baudrillard: "A rule can be perfectly arbitrary in its enunciation, but it is much more unbreakable than the 'law,' which can be transgressed. You can do anything with the law. With the rule, on the other hand, either you play or you don't play." [FF 92] Where Turner silently turns his rules into laws (and in universalizing them approaches a near Stalinist puritanism regarding what art should and should not be and do), Baudrillard sees that poetry's *rules* are of its own making, and that poetry is dangerous because it does have rules rather than laws (or judgments).

> Forms that are beyond judgment have a much greater power of fascination, but they are for that same reason terribly dangerous for any order whatsoever. They can no longer be controlled. At any given moment a category or a form stops representing itself, it no longer enters the stage of representation, it no longer functions according to its end . . .In the language of poetry we are familiar with those sequences in which things seem to take place without continuity, without consequence, without mediation. Language is always an order of seduction to the extent that it is a mutant order. If you suppose continuous,

progressive, linear order than it is still based on a mutational "superstructure." The words of a poem are of that order. They do not go through the meaning. One word calls forth another in a catastrophe of charm. [FF 93-94]

When Turner tentatively admits that "'Art' itself implies artifice, even wiles and charms" [NC 32] he's clearly unprepared to move ahead to a consideration of the "catastrophe of charm."

If Turner's a latent humanist, fashionably applying some cybernetics eyeliner and sociobiology rouge, Baudrillard's a theory-terrorist, exacting ransom from concepts taken hostage, fashioning a death's head no less imposing in its anamorphic freakishness than that anti-gravity cylindrical skull floating at the feet of Holbein's "Ambassadors." Rather than affirming a pan-human culture, Baudrillard recognizes that the museumification of the world makes us all "living specimens." Following Canetti, he sees that this condition effectively impounds history in the deepfreeze. "Without even being conscious of the change, we suddenly left reality behind. . . History isn't over, it is in a state of simulation, like a body that's kept in a state of hibernation." [FF 68]

Media is our term for the process by which selected packages of historical residue are thawed, microwave heated, and served. This cryogenic condition of suspended animation recycled through liquefaction leads to a continual spatter of data on the various windshields and screens of consciousness. This "ecstasy of communication" is mordantly depicted by Baudrillard as an obscenity in which "the imminent promiscuity of networks" discharges a "pornography of information and communication" through a helplessly enthralled humanoid residuum, glued to the screen, the *monitor*. (See "The Ecstasy of Communication" in *The Anti-Aesthetic,* edited by Hal Foster.) Too readily branded a nihilist, Baudrillard strikes me instead as a man singularly willing to speculate on every aspect of contemporary life as a condition of terrorism. The social demand that we all constitute ourselves as subjects, for instance, can be seen as a state-sponsored form of blackmail. Subjectivity is quality-control for (lifelong) hostages.

With Baudrillard's acerbic observations in mind, it's easier to recognize what a tremendously cheery naivete Turner brings to his assessment of contemporaneity: "Information is the means of production," writes Turner, "and there is now no way of plugging the leaking joints where the public can feed on the rich flow of free information." [NC 211] Such Bastille theories of cultural revolution are relentlessly exposed by Baudrillard, who plaintively laments that "none of our societies knows how to manage its mourning for the real." [*Simulations* p. 46] Invariably, as "We sacrificed culture for the chassis" [R 175], yowls of discontent were heard. But

mourning is a term that carries the weight of recuperation; and dealing with the consequences of the lapse of history, subjectivity, and other cumbersome species of representation is now a burden directly taken up by some few poets, here and there.

"Government has failed. No power is invested in the PUBLIC trust. All politics, therefore, is terrorism—the actions of individuals on behalf of private interests, in the name of the people. . ." [GDC 56] Baudrillard's lugubrious ruminations give way, here, to Don Byrd's "CALL FOR A GENERAL STRIKE" in *The Great Dimestore Centennial.*

> In the middle of the seventeenth century, human beings began to replicate themselves at an unprecedented rate. We may be running out of time and space. The world we have engineered—in order to accommodate the numbers—is a vast artifice, our truest work of art, and we inhabit it completely. It has no OUTSIDE. [GDC 56]

"Poetry cannot solve these problems," he adds, "but nothing LESS than poetry can solve them." [GDC 57] The catastrophe of charm that is poetry can not afford the pretense of contributing to those aesthetic strongholds where an evaluative hermeneutics desperately reigns in a toxic twilight. All this surplus information inflates us, bloats us, turns us into empty receptacles. A survival strategy begins with a gargantuan appetite: parsimonious sampling is no longer possible. "We are transistors." [GDC 89] In this vast epidermal covering of electrical transmission which we think of, archaically, as "communication," public affairs and the "public trust" are nothing but text, pure text.

> The text is cancer,
> and the architecture of feedback deletion
> unclear. [GDC 64]

—which is to say, homeostatic self-regulation is ontogenetically provided in living bodies. We sweat to relieve ourselves in the heat; but what is textual sweating? How much is enough? What is autopoiesis?

A work like Byrd's *Dimestore* is, in its self-diagnosis, "a work not of art, / an act of hygiene." [GDC 123] The microcircuitry scrubs itself. The text (invariably a micro-processor of other texts) reiterates a single, thaumaturgical question: "How long does it take for an information cancer / to pass through a population?" [GDC 152] The nature of the cancer is meanwhile unclear. Is consciousness eroded by it? Is the elimination of history one of its gambits? Is social life a media event, subjugated to the law of the instant replay? Is it the unprecedented scale of available information that we're stricken with, or is it the aleatory manner in which it spreads like gossip?

"The Truth is rumors / which pass through language / as weather passes through the sky. . ." [GDC 150]

Byrd's *Dimestore* is an unnervingly cyborgian production, in Donna Haraway's terms: "Biological organisms have become biotic systems, communications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic." ["A Manifesto for Cyborgs," *Socialist Review* #80 (1985) p. 97] Behind all the switching operations there's a mammalian presence, both in the Ozark colloquialisms and in the cheap dimestore countertop regalia that litters the text: the "MASTER" and "SLAVE" pillows for instance. But this humanly fallible script clamors for a reader to intercede, rearrange sequences, insert new data, update hypotheses. Byrd's modular poetics are not indebted to aesthetics but to word-processing. One reads the poem in readiness to respond to cues like DELETE, FIND, BLOCK EDIT, RELOCATE and various other STRING COMMANDS. The book is nothing less than a manifesto for a new art, though its medium is inadequate to what it presages. It shouldn't be a book at all, but a floppy disk. Composed of seven "Books" patterned on the proverbial wonders of the world, Byrd's text is an information-ode ticking off in its titles the lapsed origin-stories of the age of the book: "The Book of the Garden," "The Book of the Father," "The Book of the Dead" (and "The Dead Don't Have Books"). Despite feedback loops and the computing power of Byrd's poem, it retains the puritan clawmarks of the Wonder Working Providence in coining *Whomans,* a deliriously poised provocation of man and woman, shuffled into a genetic interrogative, fossilized as a noun.

A useful complement to Byrd's *Dimestore* is Bruce Andrews' *Give Em Enough Rope*. While lacking Byrd's aphoristic clarities and willingness to provide a context, Andrews' poetry is more fully charged with its enraptured futurity. It's a book that instantaneously reduces most poetry to obsolescence, in its chillingly efficient demonstration of *implosion,* Baudrillard's term for the collapse of opposing categories within a differential system.* In Andrews' book the public is imploded in the private, while subjectivity is imploded in language. The six long poems appear to be a bricollage of linguistic spare parts; it's a "scripture hologram" [R 28], "cognitive dissonance figleaf" [R 29], "Heterophonic portamento" [R 49], the procedural motto of which is "Make noise, be seen, desultory info chameleon. . ." [R 144] "Treat me like a labor unit" the text—is it the poet?—says.

To readers gone soft on tv-dinner poetry (anchored firmly in pronoun, circling like a ferris-wheel around the subject/predicate axle, its cozy image-buckets dangling from different heights) Andrews' work will seem

* Taking his cue from McLuhan, Baudrillard maintains that the message is imploded in the medium, the medium in the real, and the concept of the social is imploded in the "silent majority" of the masses. See *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities.*

a piling up of soulless words, as cacophonous as Hopkins' sprung rhythm verses which Bridges feared to publish till the barbarous Moderns held the field. Andrews' polyethnic urbanized brawling style knows its enemies well: "Direct victim half the society, body is what you ('HEY baby') end up talking about all the present reduced to a showcase for the ego. . ." [R 168] Andrews does in fact deploy language in a state of undress, denuded of reference-as-reassurance, but reinvested with a potent referentiality as or in the vertigo of the phrase ("I don't know why you guys are talking about complete sentences" [R178]). Protosyntactic chunks like "Key hypnosis nipple leadership; mystery tout" [R 164] are the common denominator. Yet even this paratactic approach is assaulted in "Swaps Ego" where all words are capitalized, atomized, isolate:

Another Darkness Librarian Fluent Beau Pepper

Gargle Crow Omen Conundrum

Parataxis Burst

Pit No Factor Bleed Blending Fashion Ever

WORDS WASTE VARIETY [R 125]

Despite these distancing tactics, the sequential placement of words tends to bunch phrasal units together, proof of reading's gravity, left to right.

Language in the integrated circuit comes in sporadic bursts anyway, and Andrews' rich display jolts the recognition that the phrase *is* the new public unit of the cybernetic caucus. The texture of the writing in *Give Em Enough Rope* is clotted and sutured and in its vocal surges constitutes a *menstruation of information*. "While society / stutters in the prompter's box" [R 13]—"Narcissism is like not seeing that there can't be a private language if the body is a social—Guerrilla means everyone has the tools to do it, invent a dictionary. . ." [R 163] Person and personality stand revealed as a legion of spare parts: "Most Ambitious Self Hearing Lack Of Deep Someone" [R 103]. These are "the switching operations in which the subject gets lost" according to Baudrillard [FF 77], the sullen response of the masses to the extortionary social demand to *be* a subject—to get subjective (colloquially: *get down!*). "Can we implode in the real with charm? Without going all the way to suicide, we continually play on the process of disappearance in our relations to others. Not by making ourselves scarce, but by challenging the other to make us reappear." [FF 129]

If we take Andrews' poetry as a demonstration of the challenge to the

other to make us reappear, the final piece in *Rope* ("Confidence Trick") reconstitutes the pronoun *us* in the expanded headroom of a fervently political evocation:

> Equality demands no less; history begins with old man crying, logic you know, airplay your fingertips is not freedom—The disintegrating slop situation on outlaw; read it in the voodoo prospectus, keep trying death squads paid for by our *Christianity* radiation taxes to that human rights clone improves because there are so few rebels left to kill, like iron filings—Polkadot mentality you capsulize it with a commemorative stamp, slunk down in the heroic mode for comfort, Belfast, Capetown, compose loonee tunes that could be written in the mind by institutional simpletons [R 153]

There is no "workman's comp" for being a citizen in a technocracy, no public maintenance apparatus when "men have become the tools of their tools" as Thoreau put it. We're all integers in a data management system from which no text is immune, and in which our own bodies are nothing but text. The compelling case for poetry on the order of *The Great Dimestore Centennial* and *Give Em Enough Rope* is that such work unfolds in the unfathomable struggles of life today—and not a moment too soon. While most current writing obeys one simple law—"Stake thru heart kills most vampirish tendencies of audience" [R 50]—and is addressed to people for whom "history is a leaky ball-point, / fouling the pocket" [GDC 98]—Byrd and Andrews have elected a barbaric medium which registers the trauma of public life as its own somatic physique. Both are sometimes overlong, awkward, inaptly framed. But such are the risks of original work, work that reveals the mutant gasmask visage gradually defining the contours of the human face. No longer is this the invasion, but the *siege* of the body snatchers. Byrd and Andrews have responded on a scale adequate to the magnitude of the alarm, and their books are singular (if isolate) refutations of Oppen's disturbing forecast: "We will produce no sane man again."

—JED RASULA

ERODING WITNESS: NATHANIEL MACKEY
University of Illinois Press, 1985

While most of his contemporaries enjoy the poetic climate which sanctions a writing immersed in the disorders of its own medium, *Eroding Witness,* Nathaniel Mackey's first sizable collection of poetry, asserts the distinct work of a poet free from the dominant strategies of current avant-garde practice. As a result—perhaps also because it was published as part of the National Poetry Series over two years ago?—I suspect this book has slipped by readers whom it would otherwise interest.

You might expect this from a tame collection of single poems but *Eroding Witness* is spoken in both an immediate & sustained voice and the assembly bares Mackey's sensibility to the notion of a book as both a congruent and overlapping network. It is divided into four sections: the first and third of these are made up of individual pieces while the second and fourth are devoted to the serial poems, "Song of the Andoumboulou" and "Septet for the End of Time," which have the sort of body and pulse which recall Spicer's sense of the series as a poem of multidirectional continuity.

1. These are difficult poems but they are not adverse. Most often they are constructed of a private language mindful, for example, of Celan: an environment that is hermetic but far from hostile. Like the best writing, it defines its own enclosures and marks its own frontier: imagining the world's space each poem occupies. A world that contains, to begin with, a revised mythology.

Mackey's particular pantheon covers a mythical terrain including the denizen of the Egyptian Heliopolis, the sacred canon of Cuban santería, the Haitian loa-deity, Erzulie, and the cosmology of the Dogon sage, Ogotemmêli, whose conversations with anthropologist Marcel Griaule are the axis around which more than several of the poems turn.

It is an enclosure which allows many voices in turn to participate in the poems as is immediately evident, for example, in "Black Snake Visitation," "Ghede Poem" and "The Shower of Secret Things: 3." Mackey assumes in "Ghede Poem" a mode that mythifies the self through the persona of the poem's title:

> Yes, they call me
> Ghede of the Many-Colored Cap, the
> Rising Sun. I make the hanged
> man
> supply his own rope, I gargle rum,
> the points of knives grow more
> and more sharp underneath your skin.

My name is
Ghede-Who-Gets-Under-Your-Skin, my medicinal dick
so erect it shines, the slow
cresting of the stars astride a bed
of unrest gives my foreskin the
sheen of a raven's wings,
the
untranslatable shouts of a previous church my
school of ointments, my attendants
keep a logbook of signs.

Mackey's epithets for Ghede and his use of paralleled repetitions broaden the poem without surrendering to gesture, achieving a powerful litany on "the edge / of love's disappearance" and whose outcast speech is prompted, in a Rilkean twist, by "the soiled asses of 'angels'" which anoint the poet's lips.

There is an absence which is inherent to any method that is fragmentary, and it is one which Mackey begins to assume with "The Shower of Secret Things: 3," a poem that teeters on the fringe of a near-fatal accident in Vietnam, the hallucinatory voices of that past, and a woman only in memory retraced. But if it is fragmented, it is because Mackey's drive is to shed the dressings of the exterior world to expose what Amiri Baraka in one of his essays on jazz has termed "the final sum of what we call being," that "internal and elemental volition." It is in this light, then, that the series "Song of the Andoumboulou" should be read.

2. In the liner notes to the album Les Dogon [Disques Ocora], a section of which prefaces the series, François Di Dio writes:

> The song of the Andoumboulou is addressed to the spirits. For this reason the initiates, crouching in a circle, sing it in a whisper in the deserted village, and only the howling of dogs and the wind disturb the silence of the night.

The first of these "Songs" begins as a dialogue with the dead by a people who in turn demand to be evidenced: an ancestry of souls whose names "get our throats,"—who ask that the meat of their bodies be ". . .*sounded. / Drummed.*" Who demand that the Word be their testimony. Which is a bridge across the distance between poet and source. It's a sort of metaphysic that deliberately lacks—like Coltrane's *Meditations*, for example—any corporeal gravity: as wild and exhaustive in its centripetal drive to find the Origin of the dialogue as in the urgent sense of Outward in its saying. An urgency that is the "brew of stems" which, as the poem affirms, "turns our insides out. . ."

The poem continues under the feminine rubric of the second and third Songs: Woman as source, as Other. The union of bodies as shipwreck:

Wet sand and water
wet our feet, all
shore dissolves,

as at our
bed's edge each
finger

works the ribs of

broken ships.

There is a transformation of the disfigured, whorish portrait of the woman in the second Song whose hands are "nubbed white remains" and whose sex is "a moist hole matted with hair" to the renewing, earthly body of Serquet in the third Song: lost Twin of our sexual selves—recovered only against all construct of the body. Or according to Dogon myth:

the Word the Nommo
put inside the fabric's
woven secret,

the Book wherein
the wet of kisses
keeps.

So that for a poet incapable of deciphering the language of the Feminine, of undoing the loincloth which "conceals / the woman's sacred parts," the She who is precisely that "internal volition" becomes the very mover of mouths to sing ". . .a / music. / / Unheard of."

The belief in the power of the natural elements as practiced by devotees of Cuban santería provides the backdrop for the fourth song, a poem which best demonstrates how much Mackey's language throughout the work undergoes a sort of restoration: both a salvaging and sanction of the wor(l)d's potential to indicate. Which—to borrow a myth at the core of *Eroding Witness*—is the cycle of Osiris completing itself: a resurrection of the dismantled and often meaningless flagstones of poetic discourse.

Divided into three parts, "Song of the Andoumboulou: 5" moves from a precautionary exchange between the womanly embodiment of imaginative thought, & from an underworld envisioned as a village of the dead to

the upwardly "light" of the "inward-reaching rites" of the Songs themselves: the poet as witness, the poems as proof. It's as if to say that the writing—like the ruins of Wagadu in the Soninke saga *Gassire's Lute*—testified to the inescapable process implicit in the book's title: the diaspora of what was once a former body politic. As if this were song that reestablishes a spiritual nation ". . .where the last / eye relinquishes / floods. . ." Which leads the poet to conclude that there are both "lamps, as ever, yet / to be lit."

"Andoumboulou: 6" and the last section of "Andoumboulou: 7" seem to intersect as part of Mackey's recently published full-length work, *Bedouin Hornbook*: the "Dear Angel of Dust" epistolary that readers of Mackey's magazine, *Hambone,* will be familiar with. Positioned here as part of the Songs, they offer an ideational and directional axis to the poetry.

Mackey gives no clear indication as to the closure of the Song series. Nevertheless the final "Andoumboulou: 7" is a reenstatement of the pro-creative parallel between God and shaman-poet. In the epigraph to the poem, Mackey quotes the following from John S. Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*:

> The metaphor of the potter is commonly used to describe God's creative activity. Believing that God shapes children in the mother's womb, Banyarwanda women of a child-bearing age are careful to leave water ready, before they go to bed, so that God may use it to create children for them. It is known as "God's water."

And indeed the people for whom the poem speaks, according to Mackey, await re-birth: a waiting which prompts both poet and lover to also place a bowl of water beside their bed where they ". . .dance / upon the graves of the / yet-to-be-born." It's as if all the prior Songs formed only part of a momentum to arrive at birth's initiation rites. As if all the fragmentary absence ". . .unavoidably an inherence in the texture of things. . ." concluded in the "new light" of fecund sexual union. It's this dialectic between void and genesis which Mackey addresses as postscript to the last Song and as abstract to the series:

> I'm just trying to get it into both our heads that to unbend. . .is to misconceive or miscarry, to want to be done with any relational coherence, to want to abort. You can't continue to want the whole bleeding, flooding fact of it intact without a cut somewhere. "God's water" by itself won't do.

So that the entire length of this ambitious poem is reconciled to balance on the "frazzled edge"—as the poem ends—"of what remains 'unsung'."

3. *Eroding Witness* radiates in its third section with the numinous figures of the new music as was blazoned by artists Don Cherry, Pharoah Sanders, Coltrane. These are both configurations of the life & work and affirm a communication of the highest order—if even the impenetrability of such:

> no sheet of sound enshroud
> the Fount of this fevered
> Brook becoming one
> with God's Eye, not
> a one of these notes
>
> come near to the brunt
> of the inaudible
> note I've been reach-
> ing towards

["John Coltrane Arrived with An Egyptian Lady"]

Or as with "Poem for Don Cherry" and "Outer Egypt" where the unintelligible order of music is transformed into the Feminine who as the "insistent Mu" comes "out of trees [to] recall Osiris / back to life between / her lips."

Nevertheless, it's the masterful combination of a Coltranian monologue-solo as surrogate breath for the poet's own voice in "Ohnedaruth's Day Begun" that make this poem particularly stand out in my mind. Where the midmost, interior flight of improvisation is to ask:

> . . .what "climb" will Nut ask of
> me next? *ta'wil* to where?
> to what love
> turned into loss by my getting there
> as Night's reign whips on to where
> someday
> weaned of time's ghosted light we
> begin again, our Boat as was in
> the beginning,
> the sea itself?

As the goddess Nut's "tethered son," the florid wailing of both sax and syntax register an ascent from the "bright light of shipwreck," (Oppen's line which opens the poem.) As if even the most lucid performance were ". . .Beyond waking, walking / legless down where dreams unbottom our

sleep, / soaked ruins of a raft on which / the world outlived itself. . ."

4. Finally, it's the closing poems in "Septet for the End of Time" that animate a response to this "world / on the run if not yet on its / knees." They are a chronicle of the poet's sleepless cognizance to defy a vanishing sense of the world. It's this deficit, ["The broken rock inside me dangling / by a thread"] that negates—as in "The Sleeping Rocks"—even the plurality of voice:

> I refuse this "we,"
> the chorusing rocks' echoes,
> I refuse what of earth I'll remember
> most

It's this apparent hostility between a Kingdom Come and a fractured present tense that is the music of a "war camp quartet for the end of time / heard with ears whose time has yet to / begin. . ." ["Winged Abyss"] But even to begin again with the childlike perspective, say, of certain collages of Jess—to whom "The Phantom Light of All our Day" is dedicated—is not to be exempt from the visionary apocalypse according to Atum in *The Book of the Dead*

> You will live more than millions of years, an era of millions,
> But in the end I will destroy everything that I have created,
> The earth will become again part of the Primeval Ocean. . .

So that this familiar voice from childhood interrupts the seventh poem, "Falso Brilhante" in the wake of the "bittersweet kiss" of the mass murder and chemical warfare painted in the previous poem with: "*Better / not / to have been born . .*"

> The keepers of bread do with the world as they
> will,
> whose cards collapse. . .
> The way the
> wind has of having its way
> with a falling
> leaf

And though the "Septet" should end at the final vision depicted here, there is yet an eighth poem, "Dogon Eclipse," accounted for in a quote at the opening of the series, again from *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*

"Seven," said Ogotemmêli, "is the rank of the master of Speech; 1 + 7 =8. The eighth rank is that of Speech itself. Speech is separate from the one who teaches it, that is, the seventh ancestor; it is the eighth ancestor. The eighth ancestor is the foundation of the speech which all the other ancestors used and which the seventh taught."

Which is to say that the very testimonium of the poems themselves becomes the proposition to the ontological argument of the series. Which is a way for the "eroded 'I'" to once more embark on the "prophetic / ark of unrest. . ." of a world awaiting ruin, "said goodbye / to." The unraveling hereafter of which might possibly be attained not by an exterior restoration but by an internal one.

. . .To participate in a poetry that ultimately believes a way out *even exists* is the work, in short, of a technician of the sacred: the evidence to which is documented in *Eroding Witness*.

—ROBERTO TEJADA

THE NOISE OF TIME: THE PROSE OF OSIP MANDELSTAM
Ed. and trans. by Clarence Brown.
North Point Press, San Francisco, 1986. pp. 249.

Osip Mandelstam died almost fifty years ago, unknown to Western readers and a non-person in his own country. Since then his critical stock has gone way up but he remains the possession of a priestly class, Slavicists in universities, mainly American, and the odd practicing poet. Perhaps for this artful dodger that is just as well. "The arts that have escaped best," said Oscar Wilde, who knew what he was talking about, "are the arts in which the public takes no interest." Mandelstam's story suggests how the interest, though prurient, carries with it a superstitious regard. An early inmate of the concentration camp, the non-person feared for his life. His widow Nadezhda reports this in her memoirs, permanent books of our time (*Hope Against Hope,* 1970; *Hope Abandoned,* 1974). "Tell him to calm down," says a condescending warder. "We don't shoot people for making up poetry." In effect, though, that is what they did.

Mandelstam's prose, a prod or refreshment, led him back to poetry when his poetic well had gone dry. For five years, a "deaf-mute" time, he

wrote nothing he cared to save, then, in "Fourth Prose," resumed "the role of witness." This got inspiration going again and made possible the poems dated 1930 and later. But the prose, though enabling, is more than "an adjunct to the Muses' diadem" and asks to be read for its own sake. A lot of it survives, enough to fill a 700 page book (*Mandelstam: The Complete Critical Prose and Letters,* trans. Jane Gary Harris and Constance Link, Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1979). *The Noise of Time,* a portable volume worth owning and marking up, mines this rich lode and supplements it with other work. It has four of the five major pieces: the title essay, vignettes of St. Petersburg; a surrealistic novella, "The Egyptian Stamp," also autobiographical, though this isn't apparent on a first reading; "Journey to Armenia," unlike anything in Baedeker; and "Fourth Prose," a cry from the heart when Mandelstam must have known they were coming to get him.

Not collected here is his sending-up of bellettristic criticism, "Conversation About Dante." Aphoristic and implacably épater-le-bourgeois, i.e. anti-new Soviet man, this late essay pays homage to the poet as exile. "Fantastic homelessness" was Mandelstam's lot, and partly he is looking in the mirror. Pinpointing Dante's greatness, he says what poetry is and isn't. It isn't ideas, as when we fillet out the meaning or message. "For where there is amenability to paraphrase, there the sheets have never been rumpled, there poetry. . .has never spent the night." Mandelstam wrote this in a time when the Word was sacrosanct, not the Word Made Flesh but pronouncements on billboards.

Like certain other twentieth-century writers—"daedalian" Joyce or Montale under the Fascists—he presents the outsider. Between him and society a state of war exists, but the blame doesn't lie with the Communists, who have enough sins on their head. Mandelstam's quarrel with society transcends ideology, something ideologues don't understand. Essentially a man of honor, he was his brother's keeper. Cain the first murderer who rejected this role turns up often in Mandelstam's pages, minus the hangman's hands. A pillar of society, he chooses for acquaintance "people no more offensive than the croutons in his bouillon" or shuts the door in your face if you jeopardize his business, "untouched by any shame since 1881." Meanwhile Mandelstam, beset by fellow feeling, bearded the lion in his den. Clarence Brown's biography (1973) tells how he protested the death warrants drawn up by a henchman of "Iron Felix" Dzerzhinsky, Lenin's chief of secret police. He wasn't the stuff conventional heroes are made of—trips to the dentist reduced him to panic—and would have shunned this devoir gladly but couldn't.

Descended on his father's side from German-speakers on the Baltic, Mandelstam was born in Warsaw, January 15, 1891. He grew up in St. Petersburg, an elegant city dreamed by a westernizing Tsar, in Russia, not of it. Moscow, brick colored and watermelon-empty, stood for the real

Russia. Later, when Mandelstam became famous or notorious, Communist Party reviewers put an unerring finger on his apartness. One review is headed bitterly, "Shades of Old Petersburg." Where else would this stuck-up poet have come from?

His boyish sympathies were Marxist but not theoretical, part of the fellow feeling, and mostly his Socialism is a cry of pain. Picking up *Kapital* he threw it away, "the same," he said, "as Kraevich's *Physics*." He didn't "hear" abstract concepts—too mellifluous, maybe, for a considering ear—and preferred the "true historical dissonance." At school, an agreeable hodgepodge, geography ("puffing away at a pipeful of 'Capstan' tobacco") turned into anecdotes about American trusts. Populating the visible world with Jacob's ladders, the young Marxist-with-a-difference sent small and large property holders up and down the rungs, "passing through the stages of capitalist economy." Marxism has more claim on our attention than this, but there seems a kind of temperament that can't cope with the Logos until it puts on flesh. This temperament is Mandelstam's, out of fashion with the doyens of thought in our time.

As a young man he traveled in Western Europe, studied at Heidelberg (Old French), then at St. Petersburg University. He was only a middling student and took no degrees, being about his father's business, not the leather merchant's, his father in heaven. This involved poetry, a disinterested activity that didn't help set the table. A first book, *Stone*, appeared in 1913, published at his own expense. By then the young *maître* was sporting side-whiskers à la Pushkin. He is clean-shaven, though, in a drawing made two years later, and looks like a haughtier and younger version of Whistler's Mother. In 1920 a would-be poet sought a verdict on his poems from this severe and passionate arbiter. "It was important to him that I cease writing poetry, and his words were a defense of poetry against me and those dozens and hundreds of young men and women who were busying themselves with the game of words." A harsh verdict and possibly appropriate to a young man, unselfconscious like the others he was raging against, it doesn't mean that poets ought to pull a long face. Only it argues total commitment, the kind that pitiless Christ enjoins on a sentimental disciple. Poetry was a game but played for mortal stakes. He called it a luxury, also vital, and sometimes bitter like their Russian bread.

Aggravating his outsider's role, the cosmopolitan poet was Jewish. In the beginning he shied from "the chaos of Judaism," but getting older flaunted "the honorable title of Jew," insisting on his inheritance from sheep breeders and patriarchs. His Jewish blood rebelled against the "gypsies" who plied the writing trade. He wasn't born from hucksters' loins. Just into his twenties, he had himself baptized a Christian. Some think this step expedient, a Jew escaping the heat, but if that is true it was out of the frying pan into the fire, and in a bad time for religions he took his personal brand

of Christianity to heart. The writing proclaims this, for example an essay of 1921: "The Christian—and every cultivated man is a Christian now—knows not a metaphysical hunger or a merely spiritual nourishment. For him, the word is also flesh, and simple bread is happiness and mystery."

Mandelstam's life is an alphabet of woes but his art is happy. In the years of his adulthood, morose bearded men browbeat their own in Russia, a murderous classroom damp with fear. Is not Lenin the spit and image of the schoolmaster type? Against the didactic men, Mandelstam's weapon is play. Forecasting the Bolsheviks, intellectuals in Russia took a dim view of this. With them "it was always Lent." Acquainted with shadows, he sought to disperse them, and in his writing, redressing the life, kept a perpetual Shrovetide. "Hooray for the living!" This cry (from "Journey to Armenia") echoes in his work. He said that Linnaeus, the eighteenth-century botanist and one of his heroes, "managed his task with dexterity and gaiety, like a barber shaving the Burgermeister, or a Dutch housewife grinding coffee on her lap in a fat coffee mill." A whimsical portrait, it gives his own likeness.

Chary of pronouncements, he ventured them sometimes. Soon after Russia entered the First War, he defined the goal of our two-thousand-year-old culture as a release into freedom. That sounded like the old millenarian rag and salvationists pricked up their ears. Then this Groucho, flicking his cigar ash, told them that freedom was all "for the sake of play." Making things worse, he traced it "to the miraculous mercy of Christianity." He had a knack for making enemies, not only the ideologues, pietists and patriots too.

Mandelstam's religion doesn't address itself to building heaven on earth and is remote from the world over yonder. Not a salvationist, much less an eschatologist (never today, always tomorrow), he lit no candles to the icons, sacred or secular, and peddled no doctrine. Or you can say that all his prose is fiercely doctrinal but the end is "spiritual joy." Dante, his model poet, has a passage that bears on this in the famous letter to his patron, Can Grande della Scala. The letter gives the poetics that form up the *Commedia,* written, Dante says, "not for the sake of speculative philosophy but for the sake of practical needs." Like Mandelstam, Dante is having his joke on the bearded men, and his practical business is "to remove those living in this life from a state of misery and to guide them to a state of happiness." The business isn't doable in blue books, however, but transacted in the livelier milieu of art. Mandelstam illustrates by referring readers to Manet and Monet, a temple of air, light, and glory.

Forward looking contemporaries wanted to knock down the temple and build a new city on its ruins. Allowing them their eleemosynary impulse, Mandelstam's widow says he was made a sacrifice to "the inverted humanism of the times." Humanism in the root sense means bettering the

lot of the many, and he felt the urgency of this. Generous men like him pulled the wool over their eyes, unbidden. Russia's new rulers, Madame Mandelstam thought, could have dispensed with prisons and capital punishment. "My desire is not to speak about myself," he assured them, "but to track down the age." All of a sudden, "I" was non grata, and he wrote darkly of some modern art "because it is a world in itself." Much pathos in this, telling of an ardent spirit for whom "Comrade" was a lovely name. Afraid that the Revolution might pass him by, he took his place with the others in the terrifying, patient line which creeps toward the yellow window of the box office. This was where they gave out tickets to the future.

But he knew that one of these days they would come to throw him out—out of the Society of the Last Word and the Circle for Grasshopper Music. He prayed that this might not happen but made sure it did. "Molecular" he was, breaking things down in the interest of truth, like the Flaubert he belittled and any writer worth his salt. His prose, though hardly egotistical, opens one man's window on the world. Poking his head out, he breathed "stolen air." Other metaphors of his signal the troublemaker. While around him the bitch pack "wrote," a mechanical activity like producing sounds from a phonograph needle, he alone worked "from the voice." "I am a Chinaman," he said, "no one understands me." What sort of pineapple was this, they wondered, forever dodging what he was supposed to do. He never quite figured out an answer to the question, knowing only that when the "tin subpoena" came, demanding that he cease his skulduggery and promise not to travel beyond certain specific limits, he would agree on the spot—but immediately start dodging all over again.

Supporting himself by literary hackwork, including translations, he negotiated the post-Revolutionary decade, still (in Akhmatova's phrase) "relatively vegetarian." 1928 saw a collected edition of his poems and prose. But enemies, baying this stag, accused him of plagiarizing in one of the translations. Remembering Dante, he said he was stopped "midway on the path of life. . .in the dense Soviet forest by bandits who called themselves my judges." Interrogations followed, increasingly sinister, and only the intervention of Nicolay Bukharin, a member of the Politburo, saved his neck. Regret is the fruit of pity, said one of the Mongol conquerors of Russia, and later Bukharin died in Stalin's Great Purge, the same year as Mandelstam.

A healthy child of sickness, "Fourth Prose" is his response to the bandits. Written in the winter of 1929, it remained unpublished until 1966 and has never been published in the Soviet Union. Mandelstam knew it wouldn't be published and knew this about much of his work. Once in Petersburg, he recited some new poems—sang them, said a dazzled member of the audience, "like a shaman seized by visions." (Brodsky, "singing" his poems, must be of the tribe of Mandelstam.) When could the audience expect to

see the poetry in print? "Not now, at least," he said. "A time of silence is coming." How can a man write if no one is reading him? He revolved this question, the most poignant of all for a writer, and thinking about the *Commedia* said that Dante meant it to be "the property of a time as yet unborn but already indebted."

His laconic title, "Fourth Prose," was a private shorthand, said Nadezhda Mandelstam. It designated his fourth piece of prose, "but there was also an association with the 'fourth estate' which so much preoccupied him, as well as with our 'Fourth Rome.'" The first three estates, coming down from feudal times, included the nobility, clergy, and commons. Writers, unacknowledged legislators, made up the fourth. Russia was the Third Rome, after Rome itself and Constantinople. "More resplendent than the sun," it laid down the law to all nations. "For two Romes have fallen," said a fifteenth-century monk of Pskov, "but the Third stands, and a Fourth shall never be." Mandelstam thought otherwise, and his entire career can be read as a vindication of the Fourth Rome, not yet established but waiting its time. "I want to live in the imperative of the future passive participle," he said, "in the 'what ought to be.'"

Reprieved from the bandits and sent to Armenia by his friend in power, he was supposed to write a perky travel piece on life in this Socialist republic. The result was a hymn to light against darkness, though just at present the light has been doused. His equivocal celebration ends with a prose poem that seems to glance at Stalin's tyranny. That was how the censor read it, and the magazine editor who ran "Journey to Armenia" found himself out of a job. After this, Mandelstam didn't get published.

In 1934 at a small gathering of friends, probably in Pasternak's apartment, he read an epigram on Stalin, "the Kremlin highlander" whose thick fingers were fat like worms. One of the friends whispered to the police and Mandelstam drew three years in exile. He had a brief respite after his release but they picked him up again, May 1, 1938. The charge was counter-revolutionary activity and the sentence five years. This time, making sure, they sent him to a "corrective labor camp" in the East, five thousand miles from Moscow. In his incarceration, "totally exhausted, terribly thin, almost unrecognizable," he verged on madness. His last letter is lucid, however. It reports his expectation of being "sent from this place" but adds: "I apparently got 'sifted out' and will have to get ready for the winter." He didn't make it through the winter and died, still in his forties, near Vladivostok, on or about December 27, 1938.

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This matter-of-fact ballasts his prose, all of it personal but at a remove from life. Like the poetry, the prose says one thing in terms of another.

Partly that is Aesopian cunning, a writer's refuge against the censor, but also modern-hermetic. Mandelstam, a good modern, doesn't care to put his cards on the table, not from timidity but fastidiousness. Profoundly an economist, he hated leftover things, and reading him you look in vain for guidons. This "snow leopard" who was one of a kind and lived in an unspeakable time and place is true to his artist-contemporaries across the European spectrum.

"The Egyptian Stamp," an improbable fiction, has for its setting St. Petersburg in the "Kerensky Summer" between the two revolutions of 1917. But the setting is out of Chirico, nightmarish vistas, and though this fiction allows itself a plot or rather two plots, linear it isn't. Parnok, a meager hero standing in for the author, tries to get the tailor to give him his clothes back. Also he tries and fails to prevent the lynching of a little man accused of stealing a watch. Hateful to the mob, this man is the thief of time and indifferent to "the mottoes of sundials." Two narratives, then, but they don't connect, and mostly Mandelstam's novella is discrete-seeming pictures flashing in uncertain sequence past the eye. This technique is like Eliot's (after Pound's blue pencilling), reducing *The Waste Land* to its essentials. The essentials look like shards, though.

Fragmenting the big picture, Mandelstam does the same with its component parts. A passage from "The Egyptian Stamp" suggests (in negative ways) what he is up to:

> The railroad has changed the whole course, the whole structure, the whole rhythm of our prose. It has delivered it over to the senseless muttering of the French *moujik* out of *Anna Karenina*. Railroad prose. . .is full of the coupler's tools, delirious particles, grappling-iron prepositions, and belongs rather among things submitted in legal evidence.

Meanly expository, this prose bores us to death (him anyway). Mandelstam's, resisting it, gets rid of the ligatures. Words like "indeed" and "moreover" don't sully his lips. Explaining be damned! and down with conjunctive adverbs. I write, he is telling us, Let the reader read.

A credentialed modern both as Symbolist and Acmeist (something like Futurist) and under whatever label, he paid his respects to "Mother Philology," in nothing placable. This makes him a highbrow writer, the only kind worth having, and uncongenial to "moujiks" in all countries. His mother's speech was Great Russian, his father's he called tongue-tied, that of an autodidact fighting his way out of the Talmudic wilderness. "Somewhere in the vicinity" Spinoza was breeding his spiders in a jar. From the confluence of these tongues, his own took its being. He has it "feeding" on its sources like an avid, living thing or "composing" itself like an artist. Most,

indifferent to language, leave their bones in the wilderness. Mandelstam, the wretched life notwithstanding, should be seen as a survivor, the man who came through.

His lingua franca, reflecting its mixed provenance, smells of books and study. This is the reverse of pedantic, i.e. inert, and the books, palpable and sentient, also dynamic, nourished his writing. Describing them, he imagined people, "chubby little butterballs," "soldiers in flying battalions." Not moribund but quick, books put him in possession of amazing energies. (One "lay like someone alive" in the narrow coffin of the age.) This made him a man to reckon with, and speaking for the subversive brotherhood of artists he said that a page of music—or, let us interpolate, a stanza of verse—was a revolution in an ancient German city. In a sense unsuspected by social engineers, his art is revolutionary. The change it heralds begins at home, though. Par excellence the cultivated man, he accommodated modern times, the Enlightenment, and the Middle Ages, and like a learned friend of his, felt the centuries as he felt the weather. ("What a nice century we're having!") This passionate hospitality mustn't be confused with belles lettres.

His early poetry is Symbolist, partly meaning inchoate, but by 1913 he was honoring the rose (for example) for its petals and smell, leaving aside the mystical penumbra. This is like Yeats, offloading the dreamy cargo that stuffs his first books and moving on in just these years to "The Green Helmet" (1910). But putting it that way is apt to sow confusion, the old one, not yet sorted out, between content and form. Worse than birdy babbling by the brook is no-speak where "content" is everything and the form, a loose-leaf binder, contains it. Mandelstam recognized his enemies (not all of them Communists) when he came upon them reading Pushkin in Esperanto. Now that was sinister!

Introducing an English translation of his poetry (1977), Madame Mandelstam recalls him saying "that the contents are squeezed from the form as water from a sponge." There speaks the modern hero. Emphasizing content, the message-mongers came up dry, a villain's just deserts. Anyway, as strong men know, the more potent, the more yielding, and "The signal waves of meaning vanish, having completed their work." What Mandelstam like best about the doughnut was the hole. For real work, he had a figure, Brussels lace. "The main thing in it is what holds the pattern up: air, punctures, truancy." In the Dante essay he estimated the role of the "music," by which we want to understand all those adventitious things that go under the name of style. "Not merely a guest invited to step indoors," it made "a full participant in the argument." Logically off the point, "it promotes the exchange of opinions, coordinates it, and encourages syllogistic digestion, stretches premises and compresses conclusions." Centripetal in their tendency, the comrades and their fellow travelers

(bankers, lawyers, and captains of erudition) wanted to come to the point. Like Dante, he could have told them that the point, if worth taking, was circumferential.

"What is to be done?" said Lenin (after Chernyshevsky), and labored his "contractual" answers. Never mind the vulgar misunderstanding: Mandelstam set his chisel to a harder stone. His subjects are the big ones: "Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails," less tractable, all of them, than Lenin's NEP. In "Journey to Armenia" he makes room for a Party hack who adorned the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. A Party member first and only then a poet, he was "the strongman who lifts cardboard weights." The weights Mandelstam hoisted had more avoirdupois ("Stone" is a good generic title for him), and in the end they broke his back. Until then, however, he showed much physical prowess.

Poetry needed this prowess and began with going out on the roads. "In all seriousness," he canvased the question: "how many shoe soles, how many oxhide soles, how many sandals did Alighieri wear out during the course of his poetic work, wandering the goat paths of Italy." Mandelstam's prose is very much a poet's, that is, intensely masculine in its feeling for thingness. Words were like building blocks, each with its poise or heft, and this writer, deploying them, is like a master builder. Architecture was the demon that kept him company, and he looked for its rudiments in objects and the words that bodied them forth. Pinecones were Gothic and acorns hypocritical in their monastic caps. Illustrious men, his familiars, lend glamor to the prose, but humble men who work with their hands suggest him better. (Let it be said that writing is work for hands.) There was that old Sergeev who made the tall red bookcases in the zoology library. This carpenter could name the wood of already finished lumber, whether oak, ash, or pine, by rubbing his palm over it, eyes closed.

Sometimes a macaroni (but only spoilsports will mind), Mandelstam liked words for their own sake and liked shoving them around until they made a composition. In Armenia, his ideal country where everyone was his own philologist, they jangled the keys of language even when there weren't any treasures to unlock. His prose that calls attention to itself does this too. Often, cocking an ear, it listens for echoes, and his translator notices how the second word in a sequence is apt to be the "phonic shadow" of the first. Words were potent like spells, their quality not exhausted in dictionary meanings. Reading Symbolist poetry involved him in a thicket of *shch* sounds. Unlike concepts, they came through to the ear.

Before time was, concepts deferred to "apprehensions" (what you apprehend, you take hold of, the point to a prehensile thumb), and all the meanings implicit in seeing, hearing, and understanding coalesced in one semantic bundle. By and by they teased the concept "head" out of their foggy bundle of meanings. "Its symbol became. . .deafness." His function

was to cure this in prose that is good for what ails us. "A plant is a sound," if only we listened, "an event, a happening, an arrow, and not a boring, bearded development."

"Bearded" brings up Father Marx, famous for materialism but essentially a prince of abstracters. The Mandelstam who couldn't read him wasn't anti-intellectual, only hostile to intellectualizing, and meant to reclaim words on their physical side, coming up from the viscera and making a hymn in the throat. His self-conscious prose is partly a manifesto, defending the flesh against abstraction and the void. Like Wallace Stevens, another dandy of language, he thought the greatest poverty was to live in a non-physical world.

Often incongruous, his figures of speech align him with other salvage workers in the modern period. (Montale is one, an adept of ugliness who thinks that if you want to resuscitate beauty, you will want to know first what it isn't.) Like all good "new" writers, fed up with the proximate past, Mandelstam makes identities of opposites-by-convention, detecting resemblances we hadn't noticed before. Here are some samples, culled at random from the prose: sprouting bayonets like ears of corn, the schoolgirl shyness of apple trees, public telephones as terrifying as the pincers of a crawfish, the raspberry globes of pharmacies, linden trees frightful in their governmental thickness, blue policemanly phizzes of giant trout preserved in alcohol. Concreteness drags this prose earthwards, and readers who like their truth conceptual, "pinnacled dim in the intense inane," will close the book. For such, generalization is always waiting at the door.

The trout that suggest policemen come up again, and unexpectedly a Petersburger, attending a concert, is like them. This "feverish little trout" makes his way to "the marble icehole of the vestibule." Mandelstam's figures don't lack for decorum, and against the frenzy of the crowd is the "Alpine cold" of the performance. In his lavish expense of tropes, teaching or "kinetics" aren't uppermost, though, as when the writer wants to clarify or move you from A to B. This is what metaphors are understood to do. But wouldn't you know it, "a metaphor can only be defined metaphorically." Devoted to appearances like all civilized men, Mandelstam does his best to clarify the thing itself (not the same as the *ding an sich*). But though his presented things have their analogies they suggest other things, not a concept. In an early essay, "Morning of Acmeism," he offers an equation plus an observation: "A = A: what a magnificent theme for poetry!"

Lapsing in particulars, he isn't willful, and his tautologies, if that is what they are, enact a temperamental bias. His "little book" (he means "Journey to Armenia" but any of the titles will do) "tells that the eye is an instrument of thought." A taxonomer like Linnaeus painting outlandish monkeys, he prefers being to thinking about it. The images that enliven his prose invite

classification and his translator, disposing them, says how some import life, others death. But import takes a back seat to an animizing imagination, generous like God's on the morning of Creation. Perhaps Mandelstam's is generous to a fault.

Always acute but in last things non-judgmental, his essays and fictions confess an artist's impulse to bestow the gift of life. (That is the nub of the totalitarian's quarrel with the artist.) At his animizing touch, even the non-human comes to attention. There is the epileptic engine he hears in Armenia. Warmed by mechanics, it mutters a tongue-twister, "Not Peter not Helena," as if reporting to Comrade K., former chairman of the Central Executive Committee. The "as if" construction seems loaded with menace but this comrade is no villain, and boredom has planted fat kisses on his cheeks. That the cheeks are ruddy seems worth noting.

A provincial writer, Mandelstam gets plenty of satisfaction from his lower-case world, "the whole massif of Petersburg," including one small grocery store. The provincialism limits him, though, and he doesn't remove his "argument" to a higher plane. This kind of sensibility is content when "there" turns out to be "here" (Wallace Stevens' formulation in his little poem, "Crude Foyer"). But "there" is where the conceptualizers hope to take us. Prose that won't let them do that, Mandelstam's prose, makes a political statement.

Remembering, a conscious act performed in and against a deracinating time, is part of this statement, and though some call it ossifying he knew it for a "phenomenon of growth." Plough the past under and start again from scratch, they said. Down among the dead men, he foiled them. When very young, he went with his mother to view the embalmed body of the Italian ambassador, dead in the capital and lying in state. He remembered the chocolate building, the black velvet drapings, smell of resin and incense, a glint of silver and tropical plants. "What had all that to do with me?" The impressions lingered, however, cherished, he said, "to this day."

Childhood meant smells, the "sweetish Jewish smell" that swaddled him in his grandparents' house in German Riga, different from the smell of Aryan houses, or the penetrating smell of tanned leather, evoking his father and identified by the grown man as the smell of the yoke of labor. Things past "tickled his nostrils like a shipment of fresh Kyakhta teas." (If readers think of Proust, another great conservator, that doesn't come amiss.) A house was a full cup, brimful of pastness, and on the walls he hung the "masks" of other men's voices. These dead men, still quick, were his docents.

Dwelling in memory and invigorated by this, he threatened the brand-new men who thought history was beginning tomorrow. To remember was to make your way alone back up the dried riverbed. Oddly, that was how you arrived in the present. "Who were your people?" asks one of the damned in Dante's *Inferno*. This question reverberates in Mandelstam's

prose. Unlike Tolstoy, he didn't ransack the family archives but he wanted to know where he came from, an index of where he might go. It wasn't genealogy, a morbid study, that engaged him but continuity, the antonym of chaos.

For all the "melee" of pastness, Petersburg was responsible, most of all for her poor son. "You, Petersburg," he said, "will answer!" Receiving back the streets and squares of the city in the form of galley proofs, he "composed" the prospects, heightening and toning down at need. Melee no more, his city made an order, not sclerotic like the new order but organic like a work of art. In a time of the breaking of nations, this was a writer's job.

As "The Egyptian Stamp" begins, a cold white flame has been licking for thirty years at the backs of mirrors. "Nothing is left." But he was the keeper of the muniments room and survival depended on him. Outside, the spectators implored him to jump but he couldn't tear himself away from his "dear Egypt of objects," so, risking the fire, saved the past for the future. Montale, acquisitive and tentacular, does this too. Yeats also, who made his peace with learned Italian things, and Eliot, shoring fragments against his ruin.

Imitating the past, Fascists in Rome and Communists in Moscow announced death in life. Stalin Gothic is to Gothic as iron pyrite to gold. Mandelstam, descriminating, entered his lively protest in time capsules, buried deep. Sometimes, going underground or going into the wilderness, he disappeared for weeks on end "in the latifundia of his exemplary world." Call this world "Armenia," the secret place, long desired, where he lived in the mind. Of this mythical Armenia he wouldn't stop dreaming, not couldn't but wouldn't, a defiant act of will. There, if luck held, he might put off his "hooflike" shoes, the mark of the beast they were hunting. Escaping pursuit, the salamander had this luck. It took color from the sand or the paper in the terrarium. But Man, "the thinking salamander," though he could guess tomorrow's weather couldn't choose his own coloration.

In the real Armenia, savoring it all, Mandelstam journeyed back and forth across the country. One night he lay in Ashtarak, in the village hotel. Kulaks, dispossessed men and women, used to live in the hotel, in other times a private dwelling. Outside his bedroom, the orchard was a dancing class for trees. "Look at their quadrilles." But the day turned stormy. Rain, drenching the mountains, fell in the town. His senses aroused, he listened to the water running in the gutters and ringing and welling up "on all the stories and stands of Ashtarak." This allowed the camel to pass through the eye of the needle.

—RUSSELL FRASER

A NOTE ON *MONTEMORA*, AMERICA & THE WORLD

In Jed Rasula's excellent essay on Robert Bly in *Sulfur 19*, I was surprised to see mention of *Montemora*, a magazine I edited from 1975 to 1982. But I'm afraid I find his characterization partially misleading.

First, I shudder to think that *Montemora* was the "only comparable effort" in the 1970s to Bly's *The Sixties*. I have never had any interest in any of Bly's countless productions. [He is probably our Longfellow—a sentimentalist poet, an enthusiast for Northern Europe and the American wilderness, a bad translator from many languages—though I doubt he ever wrote a line as memorable as "By the shores of Gitchy-Goomee."] For me, the "models" among the regularly published magazines of the 1960s were *Caterpillar*, above all; *Kulchur*, whose critical essays were far nastier, wittier and on-target than anything in *The Sixties*; and that great Representative Work, *Poetry* under the editorship of Henry Rago, which was everything a magazine like *APR* should be. (Not to mention the scores of lively short-lived magazines; a flowering that hasn't been seen since.)

Second, it is simply untrue that *Montemora* had "a minimal involvement with domestic poetry." Though such nationalistic distinctions make me queasy, I would guess that two-thirds of the magazine was devoted to writing by or about fellow Americans.

Montemora was basically a repertory company with occasional guest appearances. The cast included George and Mary Oppen, Reznikoff, Rakosi, Bronk, Sobin, Duncan, DuPlessis, Rothenberg, Eshleman, Lessing, Tarn, Corman, Kleinzahler, S. Howe, Baraka, Enslin, Kirschen, Greene, R. Waldrop, among others. Some of these, surprisingly, were not being published elsewhere at the time; others were appearing in print for the first time. There were also extensive selections of unpublished material by the dead masters (Loy, Niedecker, Zukofsky, Pound, H.D.). Poets who, for whatever reason, were not contributors, were discussed in critical articles (Antin, Eigner, R. Johnson, Palmer, Rexroth, Mac Low, Dorn, et al.). And the magazine published seven books that were sent free to subscribers, all of them by gringos and five of them first books (DuPlessis, Lessing, two by Sobin, Mary Oppen, Kirschen, Susan Howe). As a map of American poetry, I now regret certain omissions, but not the general topography.

Of course there was a great deal of, um, *foreign* poetry. The repertory company included a half-dozen interesting British poets who haven't appeared on these shores since; the Chinese and Japanese translators Burton Watson, Hiroaki Sato, A.C. Graham and Jonathan Chaves; classical French translators Jonathan Griffin and Paul Auster; Jabès, Bunting, MacDiarmid, Roy Fisher, Paz, Césaire, Turnbull, Montale, Huidobro, Jaccottet, Blanchot, and on & on. The idea was a single perspective drawing from a variety of

sources, regardless of original language. Curiously, *Montemora* is remembered—if at all—as a translation magazine.

Since 1960 there have been only three such international magazines: *Caterpillar, Alcheringa,* and *Montemora.* They died in 1973, 1977, and 1982, respectively. That nothing has replaced them is the result of a disturbing development: translation is no longer an activity practiced by poets, particularly those of the (more or less) "avant-garde."

The two golden ages of English-language poetry (roughly 1550 to 1650 and 1910 to when? 1970?) were not coincidentally eras of intense translating. Consider, in the latter period, the amazing range of poets who published at least one book-length translation: Pound, Williams, H.D., Yeats, Eliot, Moore, Auden, Spender, Rexroth, Aldington, L. Hughes, MacDiarmid, Zukofsky, Lowell, Schwartz, Jarrell, E. Bishop, MacNeice, Day Lewis, Campbell, Rukeyser, Gregory, Bynner, Spicer, Merton, Blackburn, Dorn, Eshleman, Tarn, Rothenberg, Snyder, Ashbery, Corman, Tomlinson, Levertov, Hollo, Logue, Middleton, Merwin, Bly, Strand, Griffin, J. Wright, Harwood, Padgett, Roditi, Simic, Gascoyne, Barnard, Schwerner, Economou, Reynolds, Turnbull, Wilbur, T. Hughes. . .

And those who translated occasionally: Reznikoff, Stevens, Bunting, Tate, Empson, Cummings, Crane, Cunard, J.P. Bishop, Housman, Raine, Masefield, Millay, Hardy, Watkins, Ginsberg, Duncan, Antin, Kelly, Kunitz, Hollander, Hall, Ferlinghetti, Ignatow, Cunningham, Sorrentino, Laughlin . . .

And the novelists or prose writers who translated poetry: Nabokov, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, Ford, Boyle, Joyce, Beckett, Kipling, Santayana, Josephson, Cowley, Chesterton, K.A. Porter, Davenport, Waldo Frank, P. Bowles. . .

In fact, the difficult list to make is those who never translated: Loy, Niedecker, Oppen, O'Hara (?), Stein (?), D. Thomas, D. Jones (?), Olson (?), Bronk, Baraka, Creeley, McClure, R. Fisher. . .

Then take a look at the Ron Silliman anthology, *In the American Tree,* which serves as a handy roster of the contemporary avant-garde, both for the 44 poets included and—a far more interesting group—the 80 excluded poets of "comparable worth" listed in the preface. Of those 124—excluding Lydia Davis, a prose writer who translates prose—only one, Rosmarie Waldrop, translates on a regular basis. Only a few others have done some occasional translations. What has happened?

It's my belief that, in the 1980s, Reaganism has infected every particle of life in this country, not excluding the life and work of poets, no matter how much they may hold him in contempt. As such, the Silliman anthology is an expression of Reagan America much as Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960) was, in many ways, an expression of Eisenhower America. In an era of rampant nationalism and xenophobia (whose

examples I need hardly enumerate) we have an anthology of new writing so nationalistic and so xenophobic that it salutes America in its title, divides its poets more or less along state lines, and deliberately excludes some excellent poets who had the misfortune to be born a few miles north of the border. Nor is the Silliman anthology an isolated aberration: it is rare in the extensive critical writings of the "language" poets to encounter any reference to foreign poetry outside of Russian Futurism.

Further, the stylistic gesture most characteristic of language writing is the non-sequitur (which is quite different, it should be said, from Cubist simultaneity, Surrealist collage, or the Poundian ideogrammic method). It is the product of a generation raised in front of a television: an endless succession of depthless images and empty sounds, each cancelling the previous one. A non-sequitur implies a loss of memory, an erasing of history. "Language" poetry as it is practiced by its strictest followers is identical to the speech of television's masterpiece, Ronald Reagan: words set free of any possible meanings, sentences that ignore or contradict what has just been said, words whose effect is not meant to go beyond the second in which they are uttered: words without history.

In Reagan America there has been only one important study of pre-20th century poetry written by a poet: Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson.* (How many articles has *Sulfur* published on poetry before 1900?) There has been only one major new translation of a classic (Western) text: Richard Sieburth's Hölderlin. There are only two "avant-garde" poets who continue to translate regularly: Waldrop and Eshleman. Such a state would have been inconceivable to Pound, Williams, H.D., Rexroth, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson. . . poets inseparable from their own versions of history and the places they found for themselves on the world map.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

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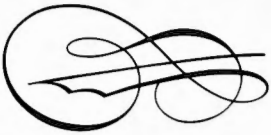

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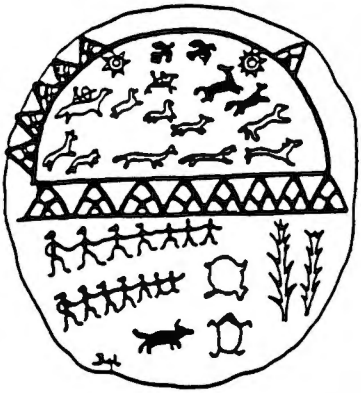

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PAUL CHRISTENSEN

The Achievement of George Butterick

The so-called radical politics of the 1960s were second rate compared to the vision expressed by Charles Olson a decade earlier. Olson was, quite simply, the purest instance of the radical imagination at midcentury, and the depth of his creativity throughout the decade belies the seeming blandness, conventionality, and narrow-minded orthodoxy attributed to the 1950s. With Olson at its center, and both Williams and Pound contributing to the forces that created postmodernism, the "drab Fifties" were a time of luminous new perceptions and of innovations whose strengths have not played out some forty years later. Olson broke the century in half and drove a wedge through the devoutly cherished structure of Anglo-American beliefs. He had perceived fully the impact of changes occurring geopolitically in the war era—that Europe and England's empires were dissolving, and that many suppressed, denied, altered cultural traditions would now spring back into the world and reclaim their pre-colonial perspectives. This vision emerged during a promising political career that began in 1941 with the American Civil Liberties Union and ended at the United Nations in 1946, the arch symbol of the post-colonial era. Now was the chance to realign the American vision, to insist upon native roots and customs, the mixed-blood heritage of a former British colony (as he tried to do in a Guggenheim-sponsored project on "the morphology of American culture to be called 'Red, White & Black,'" (*A Guide to* The Maximus Poems, lxii-iii), which he partly conceptualized in *Call Me Ishmael* (1947) and elaborated fully in the *Maximus* cycle). Olson wanted the U.S. to lead the way to a rapprochement with the rest of the world the West had long bullied and exploited. Such realignments called into question the most cherished values and beliefs of the American way, which rested upon the dignifying association with England. The very idea of culture in America drew upon a sense of continuity with English ways, the mother tongue, the assumption that Anglo-Saxon blood

was the superior lineage and Protestantism the true religion. Olson challenged these principles in an effort to shift the grounds of American identity at midcentury.

The character of the second half of the century might well be described as the fleshing of those speculations Olson jotted down into endless notebooks and scrap papers, on envelopes, napkins, placemats, on his walls and door jambs at Fort Square in Gloucester—ideas and prophecies which re-emerged as demonstrations against American imperialism in Viet-Nam and Central America; protests in the name of black freedom and women's liberation, or on behalf of Amerindian culture and social equality; in the exploration of native folkways in the "hippie" era; and in a multitude of Asiatic religions arriving on the West Coast and headed inland. The resulting changes broke up a monolithic Anglo-American sensibility into a diverse, multi-racial consciousness among the curious young and a fringe of innovators in the arts and sciences. Olson had predicted much of the vigor and upheaval of the post-war era, and had formulated many of its causes and strategic expression in his poetry and essays of the 1950s and 1960s. But by 1977, seven years after his death, his work was virtually out of print. What remained of his available texts, aside from Creeley's edition of *Selected Writings* for New Directions, was a few corrupted versions of his poetry in limited issues, and the miscellaneous work and commentary of special features in the literary reviews. The bulk of his work was still inaccessible except to scholars with permission to examine his private papers in various archives around the nation.

When George Butterick began his work on Olson, first as a graduate student at Buffalo studying under Olson, and then in 1970 with publication from Donald Allen's Four Seasons Foundation of *Poetry and Truth,* "Olson was," in Butterick's words, "habitually confused in academic circles with Elder Olson." (*Guide* x) Four years after Olson's death, in 1974, Butterick produced a formidable edition of Olson's more fugitive pieces entitled *Additional Prose,* also from Four Seasons. That same year began another consuming task of producing biannual editions of *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives* (1974-1978), in which a whole closet of Olson papers was emptied out and published with flanking notes. Butterick began the systematic breakdown of Olson's reading with the first issue; and though he hoped, as he said in the first number,

to receive lots of comment and original scholarship "in an acceptable scholarly format," his gentle warning to shaggy epigones and street disciples, I doubt he got much that he could use. There was something of Jonah in Butterick, that he could persist all through the ensuing years at his editorial work while academic guardians kept Olson out of the official canon. Those who subscribed to *Olson* were mostly fellow workers, Olson scribes and close followers whose academic careers or professional interests seemed vaguely thwarted by a pervasive disapproval of their chosen subject. The mainstream intellectual audience showed little interest as Olson was slowly being repaired in George's archival workshop. But a steady flow of scholarship came out of Storrs by a lone force tracking Olson's sources, running down the smallest asides, getting up the corrected allusions, and making himself the indispensable amanuensis of a parted master.

Anyone turning to Olson with even a general curiosity would have run across Butterick's name even back in the late 1960s, when he worked out the first practical bibliography of Olson's published work, a little collaborative effort with Albert Glover published by Phoenix Bibliographies in 1967. I began using it to track down the more elusive ephemera, but already I was depending on Butterick, something that would only deepen over the years into a comfortable habit. Butterick's dissertation from SUNY/Buffalo, the first version of the "Guide," was mercifully published by University Microfilms in 1971, and for ten dollars one could begin navigating the murky waters of the *Maximus* with a lifeboat and compass. Anyone schooled in the old tradition of letters at midcentury could only rub one's eyes at the perspective Olson was urging through his poems and unfinished epic. He was dislodging not boulders but the whole bedrock of received notions in the liberal arts. And he was doing it by means of such scatter-shot references—itself the metaphor of his changed base of operations—that any help at all was welcome, and Butterick's was essential. Somehow the job could begin to get done, the job of transferring Olson all the way from where he was, by means of one's roundabout, groping, sidestepping ratiocinations, to the reader, whoever, wherever he/she might be.

Butterick began work on Olson materials very cautiously; he had not been schooled to be a curator or editor, so he learned his trade on the job. I recall his telling me back in 1978 that he had

signed up to take courses in archival science at Clark University in Worcester, Olson's birthplace. He needed the additional training to head the special collection at the University of Connecticut, where he was teaching. He was now guardian of the Olson papers and effects (like the Mayan bone carving Olson had brought back from his dig in 1951) and of other poets' manuscripts, including Tom Raworth and John Wieners. George was quietly operating a kind of revolutionary cell in the heart of Anglo-American culture, and not one of the figures he was preserving had much good to say of Anglo-American culture. George had a collection of writings that urged a profound change of vision from the roots up, a severing of the Anglo side of it, to free up the native imagination to deal with everything unleashed by the war—the spread of Third World cultures, the indigenous past, the New World mind. His office was crouched among the document boxes and crowded stacks of his part of the archive, seated among his increasingly well-organized Olson papers.

The story of how an inland university came to acquire the Olson estate is a curious one of happenstance and seizing at a bargain; if I recall correctly, it was an offer so cheap it couldn't be refused, and of course Olson was known through having taught a few weeks of a seminar there in 1969. Once the boxes arrived, Butterick gradually shifted his attention away from the English department to the library, and by degrees simply moved out of his old post into the archive, where he was finally acknowledged and officially assigned. The move out of the English department signalled another change. The attention he had been paying to Olson's writing and thought as early as the mid-1960s was a current of speculations and pronouncements eroding the boundaries of a meticulous, narrowly focused academic. The seed was already there in George to begin with, in his choice of Olson as a dissertation subject; but the original "Guide" preserves a blameless objectivity as he filled in the background to the *Maximus* poems. He brought a strictly methodical learning to the first guide, operating much as anyone would with the traditional bearings of an American graduate student. If things were not clearly formulated by the poet, George would not go out on a limb to save him from the eager attacks of his detractors. But the years of deepening familiarity with Olson's thought encouraged George into a more active participation with the poet, an approach to the materials that required something approximate to the

intuitive, leaping logic of the poet himself. Olson's materials could not be annotated by orthodox methodology; to grasp the design of the poems and their intentions involved something like a conversion to the perspective from which they had been written. In the first "Guide," Butterick passes over the line in "Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 2," where Olson writes of the Lady of Good Voyage whose "false future she, / precisely she, / has her foot upon." In the 1983 *Guide,* Butterick savors the full intent of its implications:

> Although most generally it is the church itself, orthodox religion, the statue rests upon, there is perhaps an allusion to the traditional pose of Mary in Christian iconography, in which it is Satan in the guise of a serpent that she has her foot upon, crushing its head in fulfilment of the prophecy—a reading encouraged by the mention of "sins" early in the section. (*Guide* 19)

The rules Butterick imposed upon himself in both guides restricted him to the most basic formalities of exposition, so as not to distract the reader with the editor's own eccentricities and quirks. But as the guide to Olson's intellectual landscape, what Butterick chooses to remark upon is itself a stealthy rhetoric of purposes used sparingly but with cunning precision. Olson's assaults upon Christian orthodoxy went to the heart of Anglo-Americanism and tore at its most basic abstraction of an afterlife or heaven outside nature. The younger Butterick passed up the opportunity which the more seasoned reasoner dragged to the foreground.

Butterick was beginning to move toward Olson, to communicate with him far more intimately than can be first gleaned from a reading of his notes and forewords. He was beginning to think like Olson, possibly think *through* him into the labyrinths of his system of myths, dreams, and allusions. Sometime in 1973, Butterick again pored over the text of Olson's "A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn" as he prepared the pages of *Additional Prose,* where this famous passage arises:

> Here's where [part] IV comes in: PRIMARY DOCUMENTS. And to hook on here is a lifetime of assiduity. Best thing to do is *to dig one thing or place or man* until you yourself know more abt

> that than is possible to any other man. It doesn't matter whether it's Barbed Wire or Pemmican or Paterson or Iowa. But *exhaust* it. Saturate it. Beat it. And then U KNOW everything else very fast: one saturation job (it might take 14 years). And you're in, forever. (*Additional Prose* 11)

Butterick had dug *one man,* whom he could now anticipate as he wrestled with the logic of his most abstruse passages. In his "Introduction" to the first volume of *Muthologos,* the word "saturation" comes to him as he explains why Olson did not pre-formulate his thought when giving lectures, the few he actually delivered in public. "He was an unsystematic thinker, although a persistent one, obsessive even, until an area was totally possessed by his repeated acts of attention to it." Butterick begins to even *sound* like Olson. "A 'saturation job,' he called such." (x) But notice this passage near the end of his comments, where Butterick drops the stance of invisible hand and becomes a forceful, lyrical presence in his own voice:

> A reader might find the tapes excellent introductions to the poems, for example. The patterns of thought are similar: paratactic, anacoluthic [abrupt change within a sentence to a new grammatical construction] (as the poet himself was to discover about his syntax), an Emersonian moving by "fits" and "pulses," with one perception leading "immediately and directly" to a further perception, and stories substituted for argument or even stories superimposed on other stories, dovetailing narratives, visionary recitals, cyclical returns. It is a syntax spun so fully from his own being, held so tightly to his chest, that at times there is difficulty following it.
>
> (*Muthologos* x)

Here Butterick describes Olson's prose and thought with something like the admiration Olson paid to Melville. There is both lyricism and concision in what he says of Olson, a balance of brains and affections:

> Nor will the alert reader fail to respond to the rapidity of associations and alacrity of mind, the sometimes aggressive wit

> (in the Malanga interview, almost a giddy wit), or feel the poet's deeply reverberating humanity. Wildly referential, occasionally oracular, grandiose, as in the Berkeley reading, with the coloratura of the youthful oratorical champion and schoolboy actor (which he had been), the characteristic energy, rambling, uncertain, large—all that one might have come to expect from Olson. (xi)

George's parting shot in his introduction to *Muthologos* 1 is at the faith one has in modern technology in recreating life. Several times Butterick has observed that the poet of the age of the typewriter gave up composing on the machine soon after he wrote his manifesto "Projective Verse," where he pronounced on its advantages for poetry. Somehow the machine could not quite measure the breath or score the precise rhythms or silences he could fashion with pen in hand. But the force of a large soul, Butterick argues, comes through all the meshes of reproduction and "reveals the circuitous, the intentional withholding, the dramatic suspension of meaning," a nice phrase, but here's an even better one, "or syncopation of meaning, the 'secret of secrecy,' the seizure by image—all characteristics of the writings, all the brilliance and obfuscation which resists paraphrase, as any poet must, in all his uniqueness."

One begins to see the effect of his intense collaboration with Olson in a little pamphlet of Butterick's poems called *Reading Genesis by the Light of a Comet,* published in Willimantic, Connecticut in 1976. The year before saw publication of *Maximus: Volume Three,* which he had co-edited with Charles Boer, alongside *Joel Oppenheimer: A Checklist of his Writings* and his edition of Olson's stories in *The Post Office,* and another *Checklist* of Fielding Dawson's writings a year later, with editions of Vincent Ferrini's *Selected Poems* and another project with Joanne Akeroyd called *Where Are Their Papers? A Union List Locating the Papers of Forty-Two Contemporary American Poets and Writers*. Under this load of scholarly work, the poems naturally enough give off a complaining tone now and then:

> Thin thoughts, thin
> walls. This head

like a midnight apartment
hears its own conversations.
Flush, spilling milk, weeping,
crackle of gristle and pop-top—
all the language of an argument
of existence: Which noun
goes back in the refrigerator?
Which verb puts out the light for the night?

But his sensibility was now mixed with Olson's, and one discerns the tonal shift of that altered perspective in subtle criticisms levied on familiar cultural targets: an unresponsive society to art, the wasted promises of talent, the struggle to remain attentive in an era glutted with distractions and false leads:

Not to solve the problems of the
universe, but to find out, and attempt,
where the comprehensible begins.

"To have a choice," this poem concludes, "and rise up / into it." The choice, I assume, is between two functions in his life: that of scholar of other poets' work, and the possibility of becoming himself a poet: the chance to rise up to an imaginative freedom. There is a vitality and eagerness in his title poem where he quits the secretarial role of editor and claims his equality alongside the "master,"

The pressure, the competition
to seize the image, the three unsharable dots
with which the line begins. I push the master
against the curve, I compel his hand
to pen, to reemerge like the prayer
beyond blackening, the diver from the sea.
We compete
for the images spilled. Ears run ahead
like hounds, or pace one another. For the reaching,
a mote of speech, a mot, drawn to the eye,
a club brought to the eye
deliberately.
A nostrum
of our own make.

I sacrifice
my sense to drive you toward the poem, master,
the ancient awe of day.

I suspect the poet was always there under the graduate student and assistant professor studying Olson with scrupulous attention. I would even guess that what brought Butterick to Olson to begin with was that hunger for imaginative alternatives, the freedom of mind to explore edges, peripheries, limbos of thought that Olson rushed into unafraid. It was the poet germinating in Butterick that first created an editor and transcriber, careful cataloguer and archivist of the master's canon, over which he presided in something of the fashion of a priestly initiate. They were more than texts and language to Butterick; his dedication to their accurate representation in new editions added up to something beyond scholarly obligation, though how far to take such logic is a question. But Olson's probes into American thought went so deep that they hit a substratum of mental earth that jarred loose some very primal truths—possibilities which bordered on a spiritual rejuvenation, an almost religious excitement in life along the edges of the known. And Butterick had devoured the texts and gone through a metamorphosis, whose private-most counsel was somewhere inscribed in that line of his:

To have a choice, and rise up / into it.

There is the taking of something, possession, that leads to flight, deliverance, change. Elsewhere, an aggressive sense of competition for the images of the poem, for sharing if not squaring off to claim them for his own use. Even so, the poems here are like the early scholar of the dissertation: playing very close to the chest, allowing himself only an occasional trespass of grammatical rules and lyric principles. The desire for freedom is writ in the very tightness of the language, the frustrated sense of being cramped into a small space of rules, routines, obligations. The light of a comet is thin indeed, unless one is already rising up to it with the text of one's genesis under the arm.

I take it that what I am here tracing is an evolution of psyche, a peculiar and private one occurring within the brains of a scholar/

editor whose subject possessed the volatile ingredients that changed him. When I compare such a narrative of events to the academic colleagues I now know, I see the parable in George's life. Hardly anyone in academic life is changed by the subject; usually the change is by the job, the career, the rigors of the occupation itself. It used to be that one could detect the resonances of a period style in the prose of the scholar who had long mastered it, as with Frederick Pottle and his histories of the 18th century. But today, one usually creates a specially detached persona to write about an author, poet or fiction writer, keeping up the glazed distance of having a special theory or structural analysis to perform. In Butterick's case, one begins to see what it means to become the "ideal reader" of someone else's texts—it literally calls for the transmigration of the reader's soul into the texts he studies. The reader is the flesh of the words he reads, and Butterick's guides and baffling array of editions and revised editions add up to a solitary vigil at Olson's forehead.

Consider the diligent energies required to make a full editorial account of the Olson/Creeley correspondence, which Black Sparrow began producing in 1980, and which now runs to eight volumes and counting. There are, according to Butterick's introduction in volume one some thousand or so letters in what Creeley once described as his "practical 'college' of stimulus and information," many of them running to considerable length. Butterick gives his characteristic cautionary statement on editorial procedures and in typically clipped speech adds his sense of their significance and of the necessity to maintain faithful accuracy in the reproduction of all their subtleties and ambiguities of pun or punctuation. In this editorial project, Butterick was moving out into the territories of influence and association, canvassing the widening ring of Olson's energies. But in what now seems an inevitable step in Butterick's literary evolution, Butterick joined Donald Allen in the delicate task of revising the foremost anthology of midcentury, the groundbreaking *New American Poetry* of 1960, retitled simply *The Postmoderns,* and issued in 1982.

If Butterick's deeper self is not yet in his poems, it resides in all his prefaces to editions of Olson. Not in any *one* place or lyric effusion, but everywhere—aspects of the sober, scrupulous tester of others' facts, the poet's intentions, the tireless alter ego of Olson

going back as Olson had sometimes done to check watermarks in order to date manuscripts. (Butterick had once made a chart of watermarks found among Olson's manuscripts in order to establish a frame of reference for ordering *The Collected Poems* and *Maximus*.)

> Identifying the poems [of *Maximus* III] to be included meant going methodically through the more than 150 document boxes which now house the assorted papers and records of Olson's life; the roughly 60 notebooks and notepads of the period from 1963 to his death (some 20 of the poems turned up there); the letters from over 500 correspondents, on the backs of envelopes of which poems were occasionally composed; and through the 1,500 books in Olson's library. . . It took a year beyond the preliminary sorting done in the summer of 1970 on behalf of the Olson estate to prepare the materials for disposition according to Olson's last instructions, and it was clearly the only way to proceed. Olson's habits required it.

In his long, exploratory essay on his methods of editing Olson among others, "Editing Postmodern Texts," published in *Sulfur* 11 (1984), Butterick not only gives a lesson in good editing procedures, but subtly insinuates another set of principles along the way, not least of which is the creative responsiveness any editor must bring to raw, unfinished, alternatively revised texts—he/she must be bold to make intelligent decisions, and thus by a sometimes suprarational intuitiveness infer how the poem was intended to be complete. This is a delicate matter and he must insist upon the point if one is ever to publish a text without endless lacunae and ellipses. Butterick is his own best example of the double-checking, thorough analyzer of his own decisions; they are never made without intricate cautionary stages, and he several places avows that he will not tamper with an illegible word or phrase, but leave it blank. And yet, there are those cases where the hesitations of the author are not inscrutable and had best be resolved by the analytic, cross-checking empiricism Butterick proposes. On another front, Butterick firmly dismisses the compulsive orthodoxy of many academic editors of texts, citing as one dreary example the butchered editions of Emily Dickinson, whose exquisite individuality was overlooked to make

her conform to canonical precepts. "Above all," warns Butterick, "the scholar-editor must eschew any of the imperialisms of scholarship, even more than the occasional pedantries of the publisher's 'house style.'" (126) By so deft an innuendo as "imperialisms" Butterick goes to the heart of postmodernism in the academy—its dilution by old habits of thought, the continuous adulteration of its portents in company of conventional authors in the myriad academic anthologies and mundane critical surveys. As Butterick carefully argues, the right editor of such texts must heed the ideological assumptions of the texts if he or she is to bring them faithfully to print. "A poetry without a sustaining predictability of rhyme and meter may depend more on greater subtlety," wrote Butterick, laying his gauntlet down with characteristic firmness.

The result of his own care and devotion has led to the publication of almost the whole body of Olson's work in definitive, authoritative editions. Most recent has been the vast compendium of *The Collected Poems* (1987), the bulk of which prints for the first time an astonishing range of poetry. Like Frank O'Hara, Butterick notes in his introduction, Olson squirreled away most of his poems without bothering to get them published. The other great edition is, of course, *The Maximus Poems,* in corrected, revised typography and with a much altered order of poems, the procedures for which are explained in the afterword and in *Editing the Maximus Poems* (1983). His *Guide*, also revised, is the third of these monuments, in which, by a subtle discretion, Butterick proves the coherence and power of the poem through a steady pace of synthesizing entries, each showing the progress of fully orchestrated and balanced structures. The frame of reference of the annotations is a library of alternative visions and utopias, the religious lore of Asia, Amerindian culture, pre-Columbian civilizations, a vast array of earth histories, mythography, paths that race out of the circle of imperial absolutes and racial convictions which Olson had spent his life destroying and replacing. Butterick's own mastery of them is its own performance, its own flawless execution of the score, as if he were playing the poems, flourishing his fingers over their notes, surprising us with the effortless symmetry of this ignored masterpiece.

But as these projects completed themselves, the other Butterick also emerged in new books of poetry beginning with *Rune Power* (1983), and the "Mummy" sequence in *Repartee with the Mummy*

(1987) and the forthcoming *Mummy Strands and Others* (Am Here Books). His poems have begun to appear in *Temblor, Sulfur, New American Writing*. The newer poetry is vigorous, sharp-tongued, musical, and occasionally bitter:

> When the severed head struck the ground,
> it is said to have bitten the earth.
>
> my own head
> a bitter mineral in the water

And he is capable of his own leaps now:

> : all system is of late creation.
> They [the gods] are simple in themselves, a circle of hearts in throb.
> They are the chatter in a fire. They swing their heels over beasts to get bitten by beauty

Or this:

> I make love a country, green spikes,
> a marsh-hen tears up the rushes
> in flight, scorn discouragement
> how beautiful to discover the other
> slope in
> our brakeless carriages

One may gauge a little of the progress the other Butterick has made in recalling his earlier phrase, "To have a choice, and rise up / into it," to now being "in flight, scorn[ing] discouragement."

ELIOT WEINBERGER

Lost Wax / Found Objects: Brian Nissen's Bronze Relics

I

"Good sculpture," wrote Ezra Pound, thinking about Gaudier-Brzeska, "does not occur in a decadence. Literature may come out of a decadence, painting may come out of a decadence, but in a decadence men do not cut stone." Within that hyperbole—written, strangely, in spite of the evidence at hand: a master stonecutter killed in a pointless war—is a small seed of truth.

Decadence implies a self-absorbed present: one that may yearn for certain lost moments of history, but in which history has attenuated, and the ancient knowledge, beliefs, customs, mores have lost their vitality. Religion becomes superstition, custom entwines with commerce, taboo turns to common practice. That literature and painting are produced in ages of decadence may owe, in part, simply to their materials, which have so little history. To write (in the West) is to use the language, however stylized, of one's contemporaries—a language not much older than one's grandparents. One paints with materials that are only a few centuries or a few decades old: oil, watercolor, acrylic. But to sculpt—literally to "sculpt": carving or shaping stone, wood, clay, wax—is to work with one's hands on ancient matter: to remain in the present while simultaneously inserting oneself into a continuum that begins in the archaic.

To work in bronze, as Brian Nissen does, is to immerse oneself in a process that has remained unchanged since its invention in Egypt in 2600 B.C. It is to create pieces that—no matter how new or idiosyncratic in form—share their molecules and the act of their making with Anatolian winged centaurs and bull's heads from Ur, Cretan double axes and Corinthian helmets, Saxon heads with silver eyes, Persian ewers incised with lovers and cuirasses with inscriptions from the Qu'ran, Etruscan sunburst oil lamps, hunting reliefs from Vace, Shang bells and drums and tall-stemmed bowls, the long-tailed birds of the Chou, their vessels covered with meanders

and continuous volutes, their monster masks with ring handles, their animal-headed daggers and knives, cheekpieces, jingles, harness fittings, the mirrors inscribed "May we never forget each other" with which the Han nobility were buried, shields from Battersea and Celtic buckets, battle-axes from Luristan, Greek charioteers, kings of Nineveh, the gates of the Assyrian palace of Balawat, Marcus Aurelius on his horse, the doors of St. Sophia in Byzantium and St. Zeno in Verona, the seven-branched Easter candlesticks of Rheims, Gothic fonts and covers, Romanesque chandeliers and pelican lecterns, Parthian perfume stills, Moorish aquamanales in the shape of lions, the huge eyes and blank stares of Benin masks and heads, lanterns of musical Bodhisattvas from Nara, Bamun pipes of lizards and ancestors stacked like totem poles, the saints and miracles on the doors of Pisa, Renaissance lamps in the shape of a foot, in the shape of a man with his head between his legs (or worse), Donatello's plaquettes, Degas' dancers, Rodin's ponderer, filigreed flowerbaskets from Kamakura and the four-thousand-pound statue of Queen Napirassu of the Elam, three thousand years old and headless now, but with her hands delicately crossed. . .Objects created out of a marriage—traditionally celebrated as such—of copper and tin, whose officiant, the smith, was revered and reviled, subject to the same taboos as priests. Objects created in a process that has always been seen as a metaphor of the sacred mysteries: the wax is shaped and encased in sand, clay, or plaster, then baked in a kiln until the wax runs out, leaving the mold into which the bronze is poured. "Lost wax": only when there is nothing, when one has *created* a nothing, can the work be achieved.

"Sculpture," said Brancusi, "is not for young men."

II

To which, looking at Nissen's work, must be added another layer of history: the New World—which made knickknacks of bronze, but never had a Bronze Age—before the arrival of the Old.

Nissen, born in England in 1939, went to Mexico at age twenty-three and stayed for seventeen years, with frequent visits since. [And there too, a long line of British ancestors: Thomas Blake in Tenochtitlan only thirteen years after Cortés; Robert Tomson in 1556

accurately prophesying that one day it would be "the most populous Citie in the world"; that meticulous 18th century observer, Thomas Gage; Frederick Catherwood, discoverer and the great draughtsman of the Maya ruins; the chronicler of 19th century drawing rooms, Frances Calderón de la Barca, a Scot married into Mexican society; the archaeologist Alfred Maudslay; Henry Moore, appropriating the reclining figure of the Maya-Toltec *chac mool;* the surrealist Leonora Carrington; Lawrence, Huxley, Waugh, Greene, Lowry; and the anonymous legions of scholars and bohemians, repressed voluptuaries, missionaries, drunks, xenophobes and aristocrats gone native—those who went to escape and those who went to find.]

Nissen, coming out of post-imperial England, found in Mexico, as so many Europeans before him, vivacity—a vivacity that extends even into its obsession with death—and a unity, still extant in the hinterlands, of art and life. (Antonin Artaud: "In Mexico, since we are talking about Mexico, there is no art: things are made for use. And the world is in perpetual exaltation.") Above all, he found its indigenous history. Three of the forms of pre-Columbian expression are essential to Nissen's work: the glyph, the codex, and the temple. Their elaborations are tracks towards Nissen's work:

The Maya glyphs are important here not for their individual meanings (decipherment) but for their system of construction. They were laid out on a grid that could be followed in a variety of directions. Within each rectangle of the grid, the individual glyph itself was a conglomerate of component parts (much like the Chinese ideogram): simple pictographs (a house for "house," a vulture for "vulture"), phonetic signs (each representing a single syllable), logographs (non-representational representations of a word), and semantic determinatives (specifiers of particular meaning).

For the Western mind—if not to its native practitioner—the glyph or the ideogram has concreteness, a weight, that does not exist in alphabetic writing: the word is an object. Further, it seems—particularly to those who cannot "read" them—that each glyph, each word, has the *same* weight, that the glyphs are equal to one another, giving each thing in the world an identity correspondence. Charles Olson, in a letter from the Yucatan, writes:

What continues to hold me, is, the tremendous levy on all objects as they present themselves to human sense, in this glyph-world. And the proportion, the distribution of weight given same parts of all, seems, exceptionally, distributed & accurate, that is, that

sun

moon

venus

other constellations & zodiac

snakes

ticks

vultures

jaguar

owl

frog

feathers

peyote

water-lily

not to speak of
fish

caracol

tortoise

& above all
human eyes

hands

limbs

PLUS EXCEEDINGLY CAREFUL OBSERVATION OF ALL POSSIBLE INTERVALS OF SAME. . .

And the weights of same, each to the other, is, immaculate
(as well as, full)

Elsewhere, complaining of the archaeologists Morley and Thompson's romantic image of the Maya as purely intellectual skywatchers, Olson makes the interesting observation that, for the Maya, time was *"mass and weight"*—that is, time itself was an entity as concrete and tangible as any other.

The extraordinary scholarship, and partial decipherment, that has occurred since Olson wrote in the early 1950s has proven that the glyphs are even more complex. The Mayaologist Linda Schele notes—to take one example—that the word "vulture" could be written in pictographic form, geometric form, or syllabic form. A pictographic vulture with a crown was one of the many ways of writing *ahau,* which meant both "lord" and one of the day-names of the Maya calendar. The pictographic vulture could also refer specifically to the black-headed vulture called *tahol* (literally, "shithead"). From that, the vulture glyphs (whether pictographic or geometric) were also used to represent *ta'* ("shit") or *ta* (a preposition meaning "to, on, from"). There were, then, nearly endless ways to write any given word, and Mayan scribes were valued for their punning and ability to coin new variations while strictly adhering to the rules.

This meant not only that each word was an *assembled object,* but that each object was in a state of perpetual metamorphosis, its meaning only comprehensible for the moment it is seen in the context of the other object-glyphs. That metamorphosis, within the

larger repetitions of circular time, remains, in Mexico, a constant. In the poetry of the Aztecs, the poet becomes the poem itself, which becomes a plant growing within the poem; the plant becomes the fibers of the book in which the poem is painted; the fibers of the book become the woven fiber of the mat, the symbol of worldly power and authority. Octavio Paz's "Hymn among the ruins" ends with this famous line: "words that are flowers that are fruits that are acts."

Nissen, then, constructs his sculptures as glyphs. His work table is covered with small components fashioned out of wax: tiny balls, cylinders, zigzags, donuts, squares, cubes, lozenges, triangles, rods, j-shapes, pellets. In an interview, Nissen has commented: "I use a method based on the found object. The difference being that first, I make the objects, then I find them. Then I assemble them." He has remarked elsewhere that he also considers those components as parts of speech—given elements capable of a near-infinity of combinations. His "Coffer," a box overflowing with morphemes, can be seen as that great toy chest from which the artist invents his games. Their assembly is reminiscent, above all, of language as it is used by children, poets, punsters. The result—the individual piece of sculpture—is a phrase, a stanza (literally the "room" in which the words are arranged), a single moment of relation permanently frozen in bronze.

Nissen has also worked extensively, and with great originality, in the creation of codices. There were two styles of Mexican codices. The Maya—of which only four survive—largely consisted of a hieroglyphic text accompanied by some illustration. The later Mixtec screen-fold codices are more extraordinary: Each page presented complex images—not all of them pictographic—that served as mnemonic devices for the priestly elite trained to "read" them, but were incomprehensible to outsiders. It is a kind of "text" unknown outside the New World, but which has its parallels in the geometric patterns of Amazonian baskets and Peruvian woven cloth, both of which could be "read." [Dennis Tedlock points out that the Maya world for the codex was *tlbal,* or "instrument for seeing." Today the word is used to refer to telescopes.]

Nissen has continued, in traditional screen-fold book form, the pictographic experiments on canvas of Klee, Tobey, Gottlieb and Torres-Garcia. His "Madero Codex" invents a witty language of jigsaw puzzle pieces, wooden matchsticks, cigarette butts, human

figures (perhaps the Maya "smoking gods"?), crossword puzzles, gridworks of letters that seem to, but don't quite, spell words like "glyph" and transform into a Mondrian "boogie-woogie." In its translation of traditional into contemporary imagery, it is reminiscent of the strangest illustrations in Mexican historiography: those that accompanied F. J. Clavijero's *Historia Antigua de Mexico,* published in 1780. In that book the artist, rather than presenting the usual heavily stylized renderings of the Mexican originals, simply "interpreted" the glyphs and codices and redrew them in the current fashion. Thus, if he thought he saw a hand holding a fish in the original, he drew a hand holding a fish in the style of an 18th century lithograph. The elaborations are wonderful: a running figure with a daisy head, a man with a lily growing from his nose, a snake crowned with arrows. Clavijero's book, whose intentions were scientific, becomes, for us, surrealism. Nissen, with no pretense of historical realism, creates both a science and a grammar.

Nissen's more complex "Itzpapálotl Codex" takes off from the Aztec goddess Obsidian Butterfly and a prose poem on the subject by Octavio Paz. It consists of grids of invented glyphs (some of whose components are recognizable small metal objects: keys, wrenches, nuts and bolts, horseshoe magnets, tuning forks, springs); electronic circuits; graffiti (*mosca,* fly; *tinieblas,* darkness; *Ramón, Pepe, Berta. . .*); butterflies; clippings and maps concerned with the village of Papálotl, home of the goddess' shrine; encyclopedia entries on the goddess; Maya numbers; and so on. These represent, according to their author, a calendar, an entomological taxonomy, a topography, a mathematical reckoning (an accounting, in all the meanings of the word), auguries, and an inventory of tributes the goddess has received. The result is extraordinary: beautiful images that leave us just short of comprehension. Much like the ancient codices, in order to understand it the initiated (of which there is only one: Nissen) must recall it; the uninitiated (the rest of us) must invent it. The game has no end.

III

What Nissen makes are altars, idols, temples, ruins, machines, ships, fountains. . .each, the moment it is recognized, turning into another.

The two basic shapes on which he rings his countless variations are the truncated pyramid and the pillar. The truncated pyramid comes, of course, from the Maya, and Nissen plays, as they did, with the harmonies and contrasts of the simple base and what was placed on the flat top (altars, idols, columns, friezes, false-fronts). It has often been remarked that the Maya pyramids are less works of architecture than sculpture built on a monumental scale. One can imagine them a foot high—the height of many Nissen sculptures—as one could imagine certain of Nissen's pieces as hundreds of feet high, as architecture. And more: the slender pyramids of Tikal (for example), topped with their high combs, mimic a Maya head with its flattened forehead and elaborate headdress. So Nissen's "Pod," a stack of pea pods placed on a blank base, is simultaneously a fantastic Maya pyramid, an altar on which the pods have been placed, and the blank face and extravagant headdress of an imaginary Pea Goddess—a goddess of fertility and harvest whose last incarnation may well be Carmen Miranda.

The vegetation, the plant forms, that rise out of so many of Nissen's sculptures—as well as the crumbled walls, the gaps (like aboriginal "x-ray" painting) revealing the tombs of images within—cannot help but recall the particularly English preoccupation with ruins. It is an obsession whose earliest record is the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Ruin," a rumination on the rubble of the Roman city of Aquae Sulis (now Bath). An obsession that reached its heights with the Romantics, after the translation in 1795 of Volney's *The Ruins, or a Meditation on the Cycles of Empires*—one of the four books given to educate Frankenstein's monster, and a book that leads directly to Shelley's "Ozymandias" or Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." One thinks of the architect Sir John Soane, contemporary to these poets, submitting three sketches of his design for the Bank of England: in the first, the Bank appears brand-new and gleaming; in the second, it is ivy-covered, with weathered stones; in the third, the time is a thousand years later, and the Bank is a stately ruin.

The Romantics saw ruins as emblems of the transitoriness of power, the permanence of nature, the destructive force of greed and corruption, the chaos of the heart overwhelming the orderliness of the intellect. It is possible to ascribe such allegorical meanings to Nissen's sculptures, but they are unlikely. In the first place, the work begins as a transformation of what he literally saw in Mexico:

buildings half in rubble, overwhelmed by roots and branches. What matters is not the allegorical (that is, literary) interpretation but rather the fact of metamorphosis itself: the temple becomes a plant that becomes a bronze.

That play of stone, vegetable and metal brings another element into these sculptures: machines. There are works here called "Metronome," "Hydrant," even "Jacuzzi." Some of the pieces are simultaneously reminiscent of both the severely truncated versions of the pyramids (the raised platforms in the Great Plaza of Copan, for example) and, an identical shape, the office typewriters of the 1920s.

One thinks of the great debates in the Machine Age of the 1920s and 1930s between the advocates of the machine as the ultimate icon of the new age—a progressive art to celebrate human progress—and those who argued for the perennial centrality of the organic (then called the "biomorphic"). Hart Crane, carrying the argument to literature, attempted to reconcile the two: "For unless poetry can absorb the machine, i.e. *acclimatize* it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles and all other human associations of the past, then poetry has failed of its full contemporary function." It is interesting to see how, fifty years later, that acclimatization is complete in work like Nissen's—it is not even a question. His "Typewriter" is composed of submarine vegetation; his "Fern" grows razors; his "Zempoala" is a pyramid (in the Totonac site of that name) excavated by Nissen and also a tool box; his "Jacuzzi" is adorned with the rings that are washers that are the hoops protruding from the blank walls of the Maya ball courts that are the life preservers on a ship.

Nissen's verticals are constructivist towers, fountains of leaves, sprouting smokestacks, totemic poles, a metronome that is a reliquary, impossible skyscrapers. Some are meant to be walked around; some, despite their (our) size, are meant to be walked into. Others have only one face, and are meant to be looked at face-to-face: objects for invocation, things to talk to as the faithful talk to the saints and virgins in the cathedrals.

Anyone familiar with Mexican art will hear the numerous echoes and rhymes in Nissen's sculpture: the anthropomorphic columns of Tula, the diamond patterning of the Nunnery in Uxmal and the saw-toothed combs of its House of Pigeons, the hooked

nose of the rain god Chac protruding from the temples of Chichén Itza and Kabah. They are not—as in the case of the great Mexican muralists—meant to be folkloric, or glorifications of a national past. (It is, of course, neither Nissen's nation nor his past.) Nor are they meant—as the Surrealists used African and Oceanic imagery—as icons of another reality to transport us to dream and the archaic. They are never literal.

What Nissen makes are fetishes: objects of power, objects that look at us looking at them. The source of a fetish's power is accumulation: traditionally each supplicant added something to it, and its strength was the sum of all the individual histories attached to it. Nissen, although he remains the sole "author," reproduces that accumulation in each work. Working with a vocabulary of elemental signs, he heaps layers of history that crumble one into another and become tangled with weeds.

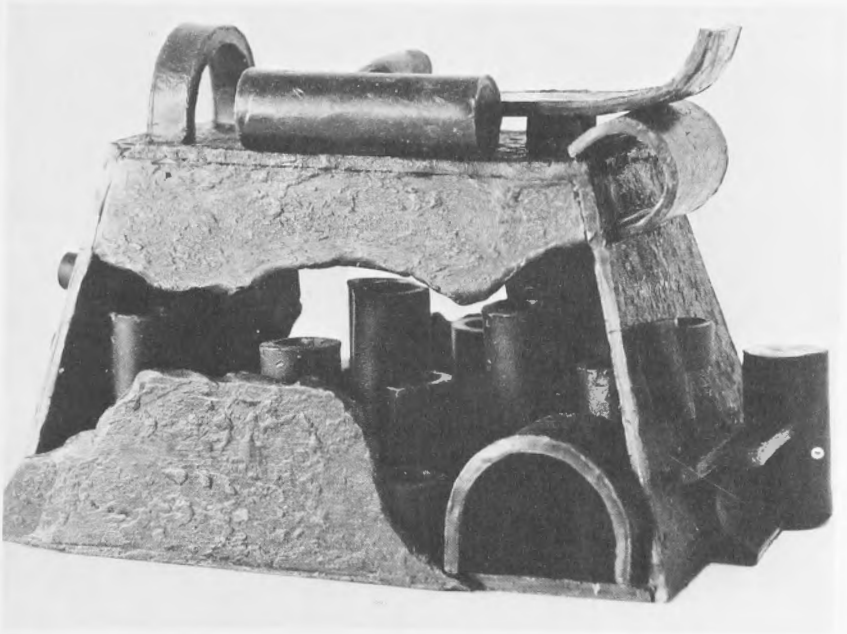
They are idols whose attributes are not quite remembered; maquettes for the monuments of a future civilization; machines with obscure functions; altars for a household shrine. They are objects to be buried with.

BRIAN NISSEN

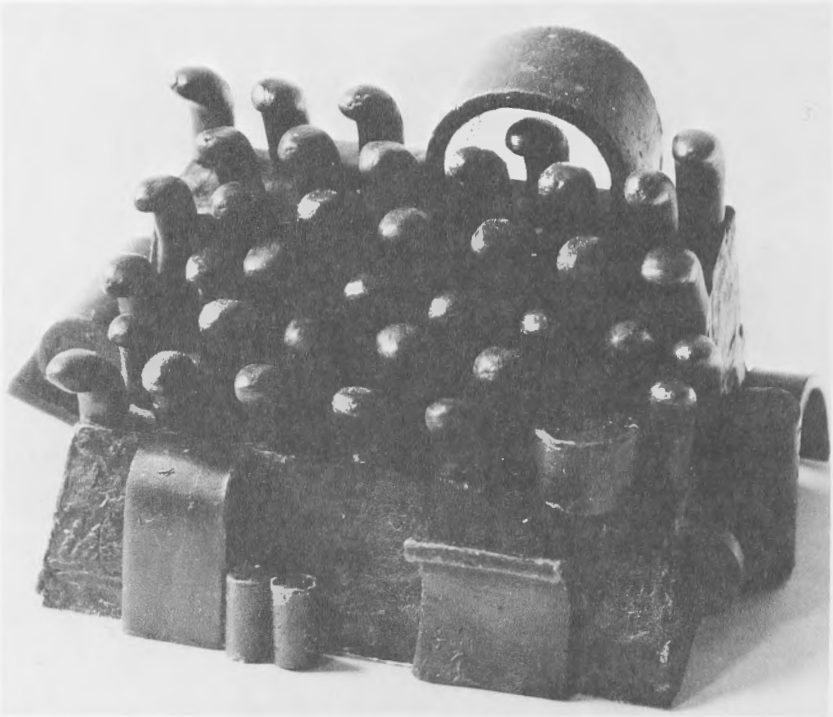
Six Sculptures

POD

FERN



ZEMPOALA



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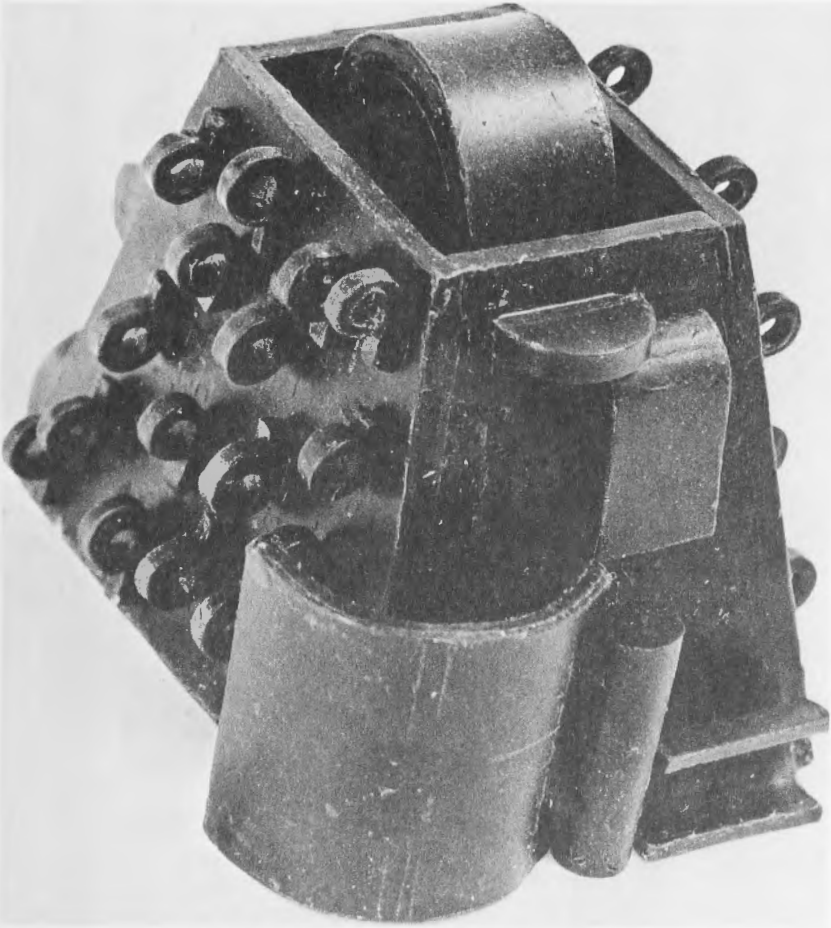
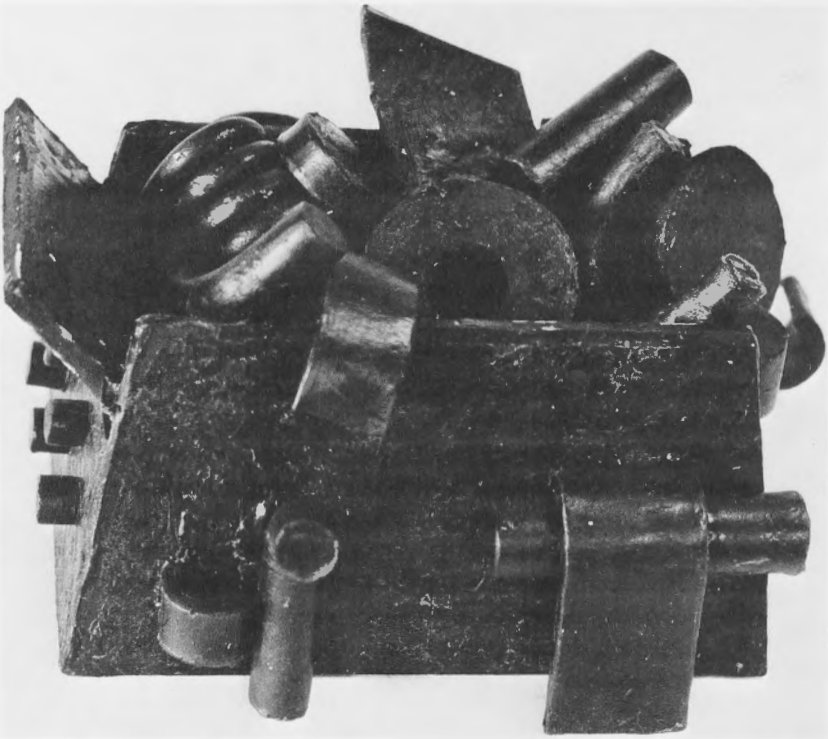


JACUZZI



COFFER

JEROME ROTHENBERG

Poland/1987

"Khurban"

Since the hidden is bottomless, totality
is more invisible than visible. (C.E.)

IN THE DARK WORD, KHURBAN
all their lights went out

their words were silences,
memories
drifting along the horse roads
onto malkiner street

a disaster in the mother's tongue
her words emptied
by speaking

returning to a single word
the child word
spoken, redeyed on
the frozen pond

was how they spoke it,
how I would take it from your voice
& cradle it

that ancient & dark word

those who spoke it in the old days
now held their tongues

1
DOS OYSLEYDIKN (THE EMPTYING)

at honey street in ostrowa
where did the honey people go?
empty empty
miodowa empty
empty bakery & empty road to warsaw
yellow wooden houses & houses plastered up with stucco
the shadow of an empty name still on their doors
shadai & shadow shattering the mother tongue
the mother's tongue but empty
the way the streets are empty where we walk
pushing past crowds of children
old women airing themselves outside the city hall
old farmers riding empty carts down empty roads
who don't dispel but make an emptiness
a taste of empty honey
empty rolls you push your fingers through
empty sorrel soup dribbling from their empty mouths
defining some other poland
lost to us the way the moon
is lost to us
the empty clock tower measuring her light four ways
sorrel in gardens mother of god at roadsides
in the reflection of the empty trains
only the cattle bellow in
like jews the dew-eyed wanderers
still present still the flies
cover their eyeballs
the trains drive eastward, falling
down a hole (a holocaust) of empty houses
of empty ladders leaning against haystacks no one climbs
empty ostrowa & empty ostrolenka
old houses empty in the woods near wyzkow
dachas the peasants would rent to you
& sleep in stables
the bialo forest spreading to every side
retreating the closer we come to it to claim it

empty oaks & empty fir trees
a man in an empty ditch who reads a book
the way the jews once read
in the cold polish light the fathers sat there too
the mothers posed at the woods' edge
the road led brightly to treblinka
& other towns beaches at brok
along the bug
marshes with cat tails
cows tied to trees
past which their ghosts walk
their ghosts refuse to walk
tomorrow in empty fields of poland
still cold against their feet
an empty pump black water drips from
will form a hill of ice
the porters will dissolve with burning sticks
they will find a babe's face at the bottom
invisible & frozen imprinted in the rock

2
DOS GESHRAY (THE SCREAM)

"practice your scream" I said
(why did I say it?)
because it was his scream & wasn't my own
it hovered between us bright
to our senses always bright it held
the center place
then somebody else came up & stared
deep in his eyes there found a memory
of horses galloping faster the wheels dyed red
behind them the poles had reserved
a feast day but the jew
locked in his closet screamed
into his vest a scream
that had no sound therefore
spiraled around the world

so wild that it shattered stones
it made the shoes piled in the doorway
scatter their nails things testify
—the law declares it—
shoes & those dearer objects
like hair & teeth do
by their presence
I cannot say that they share the pain
or show it not even the photos
in which the expressions of the dead shine forth
the crutches by their mass the prosthetic limbs by theirs
bear witness the eyeglasses bear witness
the suitcases the children's shoes the german tourists
in the stage set oswieczim had become
the letters over its gates still glowing
still writ large
ARBEIT MACHT FREI
& to the side HOTEL
and GASTRONOMIC BAR
the spirit of the place dissolving
indifferent to his presence
there with the other ghosts
the uncle grieving
his eyelids turning brown an eye
protruding from his rump
this man whose body
is a crab's
his gut turned outward
the pink flesh of his children
hanging from him
that his knees slide up against
there is no holocaust
for these but khurban only
the word still spoken by the dead
who say my khurban
& my children's khurban
it is the only word that the poem allows
because it is their own
the word as prelude to the scream

it enters
through the asshole
circles along the gut
into the throat
& breaks out
in a cry a scream
no one can hear but me
it is his scream that shakes me
weeping in oswieczim
& that allows the poem to come

3
DIBBUKIM (DIBBIKS)

spirits of the dead lights
flickering (he said) their ruakh
will never leave the earth
instead they crowd the forests the fields
around the privies the hapless spirits
wait millions of souls
turned into ghosts at once
the air is full of them
they are standing each one beside a tree
under its shadows or the moon's
but they cast no shadows of their own
this moment & the next they are pretending
to be rocks but who is fooled
who is fooled here by the dead the jews
the gypsies the leadeyed polish patriot
living beings reduced to symbols
of what it had been to be alive
"o do not touch them" the mother cries
fitful, as almost in a dream
she draws the child's hand to her heart
in terror but the innocent dead
grow furious they break down doors
drop slime onto your tables
they tear their tongues out by the roots

& smear your lamps your children's lips
with blood a hole drilled in the wall
will not deter them
from stolen homes stone architectures
they hate they are the convoys of the dead
the ghostly drivers still searching
the roads to malkin ghost carts overturned
ghost autos in blue ditches
if only our eyes were wild enough
to see them our hearts to know their terror
the terror of the man who walks alone
their victim whose house whose skin
they crawl in incubus & succubus
a dibbik leaping from a cow to lodge inside
his throat clusters of jews
who swarm here mothers without hair
blackbearded fathers
they lap up fire water slime
entangle the hairs of brides
or mourn their clothing hovering
over a field of rags half-rotted shoes
& tablecloths old thermos bottles rings
lost tribes in empty synagogues
at night their voices
carrying across the fields
to rot your kasha your barley
stricken beneath their acid rains
no holocaust because no sacrifice
no sacrifice to give the lie
of meaning & no meaning after auschwitz
there is only poetry no hope
no other language left to heal
no language & no faces
because no faces left no names
no sudden recognitions on the street
only the dead still swarming only khurban
a dead man in a rabbi's clothes
who squats outside the mortuary house
who guards their privies who is called

master of shit an old alarm clock
hung around his neck who holds
a wreathe of leaves under his nose
from eden "to drive out
"the stinking odor of this world"

4
NOKH AUSCHWITZ (AFTER AUSCHWITZ)

the poem is ugly & they make it uglier
wherein the power resides
that duncan did—or didn't—understand
when listening that evening to the other poet read
he said "that was pure ugliness" & oh it was
it was & it made my heart skip a beat
because the poem wouldn't allow it no
not a moment's grace nor beauty to obstruct
whatever the age demanded or the poem
shit poured on wall & floor
sex shredded genitals torn loose by dog claws
& the ugliness that you were to suffer
later that they had suffered
not as dante dreamed it but in the funnel
they ran through & that the others called
the road to heaven little hills & holes now
& beneath upon among them
broken mirrors kettles pans enamelled tea pots
the twisted candlesticks of sabbath
prayershawl scraps & scraps of bodies bones
his child's he said leaping
into the mud the pool of bones
& slime the frail limbs separating
each time he pulls at one the mystery of body
not a mystery bodies naked then bodies
boned & rotten how he must fight
his rage for beauty must make a poem
so ugly it can drive out the other voices
like Artaud's squawk the poem addressed

to ugliness must resist
even the artistry of death a stage set
at Treblinka ticket windows a large clock
the signs that read: change for Bialystok
but the man cries who has seen
the piles of clothing jews
it is not good it is your own sad meat
that hangs here poor & bagged like animals
the blood coagulated into a jell
an armpit through which a ventricle has burst
& left him dangling screaming
a raw prong stuck through his tongue
another through his scrotal sac he sees
a mouth a hole a red hole
the scarlet remnants of the children's flesh
their eyes like frozen baby scallops
so succulent that the blond ukrainian guard
sulking beneath his parasol leaps up
and sucks them inward past his iron teeth
& down his gullet, shitting
globules of fat & shit
that trickle down the pit in which the victim—
the girl without a tongue—stares up
& reads her final heartbreak

DI MAGILAS FUN AUSCHWITZ (THE SCROLLS OF AUSCHWITZ)

He had vanished & reappeared in a room no bigger than a giant's hand. Asleep in it. His arms & legs were rusted, his eyes swam in his head like mercury. He was twice forgotten. A stranger to his memory of who he was.

When a man moves up & down across the field, the earth moves with him. The condition is described as double thunder—repeated by the ones called souls, the hopeless dead. It is most likely they who move, the rest is an illusion. The stranger in the giant's hand knows who they are.

Dibbik legions perch on trees. The trees die. Then the sun gives birth to basilisks. A basilisk gives birth to what the rock conceals. True life is punctuated. It eats through time & breeds out of the sun. The sexual is its other head worn on its other body. It is your body too & tries to run from you. You brush against it with your hand.

Once the dibbik was a singular occurrence. It is now repeated many million times as the result of so much early death. Into whom do the dead souls enter? Each one contains a dibbik, or some of them contain a world of dibbiks. Hijikata writes: "To make the gestures of the dead, to die again, to make the dead enact their deaths again, this is what I want to feel. The dead are my teachers & live inside me."

A hand is like a hole. I know it & he knows it too. Was he there? No. No more than I was. But the dead have found him & eaten through his skin. He feels them in the morning when he shits: a gnawing pain beneath his heart. The dead who were burnt alive are still the hopeless dead. Thus the ceremony-of-burning is a lie. And thus the holocaust.

In the dream 3000 naked women cry in pain. It is impossible to count them but he does. Their bodies will be used for kindling, their blood for fuel. No one will cry or turn away, but sometimes the wind will force a tear out of his eye, & his tongue & teeth will follow, flying from his mouth. "Ah," the young girl will say, her legs twisted behind her back. "The tear of a live Jew will go with me to my death."

The room he looked into now was still smaller. It looked like a regular shower room with all the accoutrements of a public bathhouse. The walls of the room were covered with small, white tiles.. It was very fine, clean work. The floors were covered with orange terra cotta tiles. Nickle-plated metal faucets were set into the ceiling.

It was in Poland that I realized I was haunted. Yes. "A dibbik is in me. A dibbik is in me." It

is the condition of our lives for forty years now. Hijikata confirms it for us, that poetry is the speech of ghosts. The shamans in your books confirm it. In *my* books I meant to say. And didn't.

[Gradowski's Testament] A black & white world, sky & earth. The court of angry shadows. These. Broken into. The open mouth of earth prepared to swallow us alive. The last. His world a tinted film. A bent black mass. Black shadows. Swallowed up in railroad cars. Gradowski's testament. Along the white road. Thousands crawling on all fours. Two women at the roadside, crying. People shrunk to half their size. A finger moves across her throat. "Take interest in this document. Keep looking. You will find still more."

From now on we will bury everything in the earth.

In 1987 I was a decade, more, past POLAND/1931. I went to Poland for the first time & to the small town, Ostrow-Mazowiecz, sixty miles northeast of Warsaw, from which my parents had come in 1920. The town was there and the street, Miodowa (meaning "honey"), where my father's parents had a bakery. I hadn't realized that the town was only fifteen miles from Treblinka, but when we went there (as we had to), there was only an empty field & the thousands of large stones that make up the memorial. We were the only ones there except for a group of three people—another family perhaps—who seemed to be picnicking at the side. This was in sharp contrast to the crowds of tourists at Auschwitz (Oswieczim) & to the fullness of the other Poland I had once imagined. The absence of the living seemed to create a vacuum in which the dead—the dibbiks who had died before their time—were free to speak. It wasn't the first time that I thought of poetry as the language of the dead, but never so powerfully as now. Those in my own family had died without a trace—with one exception: an uncle who had gone to the woods with a group of Jewish partisans and who, when he heard that his wife and children were murdered at Treblinka, drank himself blind in a deserted cellar & blew his brains out. That, anyway, was how the story had come back to us, a long time before I had ever heard

a word like holocaust. It was a word with which I never felt comfortable: too Christian & too beautiful, too much smacking of a "sacrifice" I didn't & still don't understand. The word with which we spoke of it was the Yiddish-Hebrew word, khurban [khurbn], & it was this word that was with me all the time we stayed in Poland. When I was writing POLAND/1931, at a great distance from the place, I decided deliberately that that was not to be a poem about the "holocaust." There was a reason for that, I think, as there is now for allowing my uncle's khurban to speak through me. The poems that I first began to hear at Treblinka are the clearest message I have ever gotten about why I write poetry. They are an answer also to the proposition—by Adorno & others—that poetry cannot or should not be written after Auschwitz. Our search since then has been for the origins of poetry, not only as a willful desire to wipe the slate clean but as a recognition of those other voices & the scraps of poems they left behind them in the mud.

The Arts Foundation of Michigan, a private funding agency which supports Michigan artists, welcomes *Sulfur* magazine to its new home in Michigan and is proud to provide financial support for this issue. To receive information on the AFM's funding programs, please call Kimberly Adams at (313) 871-0559 or write AFM, 542 New Center Building, 7430 Second, Detroit, MI 48202.

afM

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

The Roses of Kádár

In June, 1986, Caryl Eshleman and I were invited to spend a month in Hungary by the Soros Foundation in NYC. The idea of the visit, as well as contact with the Foundation, came from our friend Gyula Kodolányi, whom we had met while he was a Fulbright Fellow at UC Santa Barbara in 1985. I went over some English versions of Gyula's poems with him (they had been done without his participation by people in England). By detailed questioning of this word or that word, asking Gyula to tell me (in his quite good English) exactly what the Hungarian word meant, and how it functioned in a line, I was able to ascertain whether the English translator had done accurate work or whether he had "improvised" upon the original. Over the years, I have found that I enjoy translating as a communal activity; given the doubleness of the textual situation, it has increasingly, for several reasons, seemed appropriate to work with a second or even a third person. Cotranslating is also a good way to get to know another writer or scholar. The text and its translation become a kind of meeting place in which two people can intermingle. As Robert Kelly put it, in Section 2 of *The Loom:*

> Third Surface
> between the surfaces of our minds
> where the whole
> mystery of talk
> bounds and needs
> the bounce. The shared
> preoccupation. I'm no friend

of heart-to-hearts; for heart
to speak to heart you need
a table. A body. A body
of work. A trade. A box
of swiftian tools.

In the course of several sessions, we moreorless rewrote 15 pages of Gyula's poetry and prose-poetry. He began to read my own poetry, and by the end of the semester, our time with texts was divided between his work and my own. Gyula and I wanted to continue working together, and Gyula and his wife, Maria Illyés (the daughter of the writer, Gyula Illyés), who is a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, wanted us to visit Hungary.

The Soros Foundation paid our air fares and offered us a modest per diem that since we stayed with the Kodolányis almost covered our land expenses. In exchange, they hoped that such a trip would result in some Hungarian writing finding its way into *Sulfur* magazine. There was no plan at the point we arrived in Budapest. Gyula and I decided that we would work together 3 to 4 hours a day, 5 days a week, side by side, at his father-in-law's worktable on the third floor of the Illyés home (which Gyula, Maria and their two children share with her mother and aunt, Gyula Illyés having died in 1983). The third floor, one spacious room, was Illyés's library and workshop, and since it also contains a small apartment, it became Caryl's and my living space. High in the somewhat overgrown residential hills of Buda, we overlooked the Danube River and much of Pest, with a panoramic view of onion-domed towers and the tarantulan architecture of the Parliament Building. Off to our right, literally across the street, behind a tall chain-link fence in a house cascading with roses, surrounded by guard dogs and an invisible patrol: János Kádár, the aging Hungarian Communist leader.

Other than brief trips to Szeged in the south, Köszeg and Sopron in the east, and a week in the Illyés cottage on Lake Balaton, we spent our time with the Kodolányis in Budapest, viewing Hungarian films (with English or French subtitles), visiting museums (a wonderful 100 year retrospective of Hungarian poster art), and trying out restaurants. We also met, with the exception of Géza Szöcs, all of the living Hungarian writers that Gyula and I translated,

as well as several others whose work we did not have time to do anything with (or, in the case of György Konrád, were unable to obtain permission from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich for a chapter of his now-being-translated new novel). Gyula suggested that we do one earlier poet, and thus the *Sulfur* section opens with 6 poems by Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944). On the way back from Sopron, north of Györ, we stood in silence for a few minutes before the 7 cracked concrete doors with cobalt-blue interstices that identify the area in which the poet was shot. On the sculptural monument are Radnóti's words: "I lived in an age so ugly, men killed not only on command but for pleasure."

The 5 writers who follow (all poets with the exception of Mészöly who is primarily known as a novelist) span several generations, and strike me at this time, having just touched up our versions, as being of genuine interest to readers and writers of American poetry. I must immediately add, however, that our little selection here is by no means representative of the diversity of contemporary Hungarian poetry, nor does it more than suggest the range of any of the contributors. In roughly 3 weeks, we did first drafts of about 100 pages of writing (Gyula's considered dictation to me, which I wrote down and questioned as we went along). Some of it turned out to be less appropriate for *Sulfur* than Gyula thought it would be, and in a couple cases what we were able to do seemed so slight when compared to the achievement of the writer's body of work, that I decided not to include it. After returning to America, I typed out a second draft, which Gyula corrected. I then made the third drafts that appear in *Sulfur* #21.

Enikö Bollabás, whom I met while she was teaching at UC San Diego in the early 1980s, was in Budapest while we were. She kindly offered to do the Géza Szöcs poem with me, as she is a dear friend of Szöcs. Having visited him in Rumania when he was under house arrest, and having been at times - his one correspondent (via smuggled notes) in the world, she was acutely familiar with his work and especially sensitive to the poem on the murder of Arpád Visky.

In two cases I have included material that I myself did not work on. Since I was unaware of the plight of Hungarians in Rumania before our visit, I feel that others might be also, and thus I have included Enikö's report on Szöcs' situation. I have also included an essay/statement by Csoóri on writer, nation, and state, to offer the American reader Csoóri's sense of the situational differences for the

Hungarian and the American writer. It is translated by László Hámos, who is President of the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation in NYC, which is an outgrowth of the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, an organization which has monitored the condition of the rights of national minorities in that country since 1976.

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As an American who was suddenly and crudely educated as to the complicated depths of American imperialistic permeation of much of the rest of the world while I was in Peru, in 1965, I have learned to be cautious in regard to judgments on how it is to live and to be in countries where all life forms are to varying degrees haunted by the "interests" of one or both of the two world powers. I spent a little time in Czechoslovakia in 1976 and again in 1979. Other than what is left of the spectral power of Prague (the old Jewish cemetery there ought to be visited by every poet in the world), life in Czechoslovakia struck me as agonizingly monolithic grey. The fact that the poet Vladimír Holan had, between 1948 and 1963, gone out of his house twice, seemed symbolic of the cut-off between the life of the mind and the life of the state. During this period of time when his writing was unpublishable and his previous books unavailable, Holan looked at the walls within walls and spoke with Shakespeare, producing his poetic masterpiece, "A Night with Hamlet," a 50 page poem which on its surface has nothing to do with the political surface of the 1950s, but whose depths, in massive oblique waves, contain the pessimism of a great world poet struggling against terrible odds to maintain a feel and respect for the human spirit. I was introduced to Holan's poetry by a young Czech scholar, Jan Benda, who subsequently introduced me to his friend, the young poet Milan Exner. I was only in Czechoslovakia for about 5 weeks total, but certain almost black and white differences between our situation as writers and theirs seemed evident, and in a poem written in 1979, "Master Hanus to his Blindness," I tried to express them:

> Poets in Czechoslovakia are deprived of expressing
> their pain, are made to lie to publish.
> Where does the pain go that they are not expressing?

In the same way that I cannot forgive
the Nazis because I was not in their camps,
I cannot know the pain of deprived expression.
I can embrace Jan and Milan and feel
the extent to which the bow has been drawn
and sense the filings in the soot
collecting along the unsent arrow shaft.
I know another kind of pain,
the anxiety that comes from knowing anything
can be said, that cutting into is merely shaving,
the poet as a kind of barber,
sanding the druidic off the giant,
who considers who is to live in Viet-X.
You cannot speak versus
you can say anything and it does not matter.
What is not permitted
gnaws at the ears of those
through whom the able-to-speak
passes without effect.

In contrast, the range of sensations that I picked up as a one month tourist in 1986 Hungary was much more dimensional—and much more complicated. In Czechoslovakia there was simply no cream in the coffee; in Hungary there is, but whenever the creature comforts increase, a feeling of dread accompanies them. The more permissive the current Soviet government becomes, the more many Hungarians feel that an end is in sight. Keep in mind that as a result of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, two-thirds of the territory belonging to historical Hungary was annexed by Austria, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia. To be a Hungarian citizen today is to be in a small, land-locked country immediately surrounded by countries containing millions of Hungarian minorities whose culture is being eliminated. Beyond this immediate "girdle," is the Soviet juggernaut, and in spite of daily attempts on the part of the Soviet-directed Hungarian government to suppress in living memory the terror of the late 1940s and the mid-1950s, people stubbornly remember these periods and believe they could return overnight.

While in California, Kodolányi told me that there was no censorship in Hungarian publishing—as long as you stayed away from politics and pornography. At the time, I thought of these two

restrictions in America relative to definable areas with fuzzy boundaries. Amiri Baraka, I think many would agree, is a "political" poet; Charles Olson is not. Or to put it in a slightly different frame: here one might say that while Denise Levertov has written "political" poems, she is essentially a "religious" poet. In Hungary today, my impression is that Olson would be considered a very political poet on the basis that *The Maximus Poems* remember a massive amount of history. In Hungary, as an artist in any field, one cannot directly (or even indirectly, unless very subtly) refer to those aspects of Hungarian history that the USSR-directed government does not want remembered. All "story" in Hungary is political by the omission of the "something" in the past which happened to the Hungarian people.

After a couple of weeks in Budapest, I decided that what Gyula Kodolányi meant by "pornography" was closer to what we would mean here by "sexuality," "obscenity," or "the Erotic." For years I have admired the works of certain Hungarian second-generation psychoanalytical thinkers such as Sandor Ferenczi, Géza Róheim, and Melanie Klein (all of whom appear in concert in the opening chapters of N.O. Brown's *Love's Body* which I reread while in Budapest). None of these writers' works are now available in Hungary, and no one I met there was familiar with their work; most people had never heard of them. Exact comparisons are impossible here, but for a moment think of the American figures of the 20s, 30s, and 40s, that you most associate with opening up areas in psychology, sexuality, anthropology, etc., and then think of these figures as being totally erased. My hunch is that Ferenczi, for example, has not disappeared because his writing is of no interest now, but because he is the author of the audacious and sexually visionary *Thalassa*. In Hungary, I was told, psychoanalysis never caught hold, and the writings of the Freudian circle have been unavailable from the 1940s on.

While I do not feel that Kodolányi intentionally misled me by his comments on censorship when in California, it now strikes me that if one moreorless equates political with historical, and pornographic with sexual, his statement should be changed to: there is no censorship as long as one does not express anything really relevant to thoughtful people! As an absolute statement, this may be pushing it a bit too far. In fact, I hope that the Hungarian writing in *Sulfur* #21 argues against such a blanket statement. Again, another

complication arises: although he is nationally known as an artist who speaks out for human rights, Csoóri is not allowed to be seen on TV, and his writing is seldom published in newspapers. He is allowed to publish only in places with a controlled small circulation. As the government is in charge of all publication and distribution, many things may be published to remain in warehouses unseen by the public. Relative to Czechoslovakia or Russia, Csoóri's freedom to circulate his work would seem considerable; from the viewpoint of the Hungarians, he is viewed as a writer who is continually frustrated and undermined by the state.

It thus appears that the state alter ego for a Hungarian artist is much more visible and surface-wise resistant than for an American artist. However, it may also be true that we Americans have an invisible state alter ego that we are seldom aware of other than in periods of national conscientiousness (in my own time: the arts movement against American aggression in Vietnam).

Generalizations are the enemy of the soul, and all of us are probably too automatically reactive to them when we feel that they are being thrust upon us in such a way as to endanger our sense of our individual identity. When Peruvian poets attacked America in a monolithic way when I was in Lima in 1965, I understood and agreed, but I also ended up, probably pointlessly, arguing No it is not all like that. I imagine that Kodolányi was attempting to offer a more complex image of Hungary than he figured I had, in California, when he made his comments on censorship. What is remarkable is that in spite of the maze of restrictions and complications, a sense of the duress of the Hungarian soul continues to emerge, especially in writing and in films (where attempts at sexual expression and definition are inevitably portrayed as damned). None of the writers I met struck me as morbid or totally defeated.

The most severe image I came away with was that underlying all the conversations that I participated in was a fear of saying what was on the participants' minds, that is, a fear behind the subject of fear, that if we discussed fear there would always remain a fear of a transpersonal, political nature, that could not come out—at least in my presence. Now we all know that all people have fear, and that it is a rare artist, in any society, who can create even a single arena of activity in which he can be fearless. But what I am trying to get at here is a sense of instilled fear that makes one cautious all the

time, boarding a streetcar, ordering a meal, touching a sweetheart, speaking with a foreigner. American writers, for the most part certainly, do not give the impression that they are constantly looking over their shoulder, while they write, or while they board that so-called streetcar. Is it because we live in a superpower which is daily radiating outwards, away from our own tiny, fragile centers, the transcendental, holocaustal beams of a planetary negation? Is it because, as Americans, we are ingredients in a formula of monocultural aggression, that it is next to impossible—especially for the white heterosexual male, who regardless of who he is now bears the stigmata as the devil who is loose in the world—to step out of the dimensions of power and grasp what it is to be in a place where looking outwards *and inwards* is to primarily face the Babels-built-to-Heaven called America and the USSR?

[November, 1987]

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MIKLOS RADNOTI, one of the major Hungarian poets of this century, was born in Budapest in 1909 (his mother as well as his twin brother died during his birth). Raised by relatives, he attended the University of Szeged, and in 1937 lived in Paris for a year. As a Jew, Radnóti was occasionally enrolled in forced labor battalions after Hungary's entry into WW II. In 1944, he was transported by the Nazis to work in the Bor mines in Serbia, and near the end of the war, he was moved from Serbia towards Germany on a forced march. On November 9, 1944, exhausted and diseased, Radnóti was shot by the guards and buried in a mass grave near the city of Györ in Western Hungary. After the war, the grave was opened, and a notebook containing some of this greatest poems was found in his trenchcoat pocket. While sympathetic with avant-garde poetics (especially Apollinaire), Radnóti came into maturity as a poet when, in the early Thirties, Hungarian poetry turned toward closed forms again. While Attila József and Gyula Illyés renewed closed form through colloquial expressions and folk poetry, Radnóti, along with István Vas and Lörinc Szabó, brought a contemporary edge to iambic forms and to classical Greek meters, which Hungarian, with

its flexible syntactic structure and variety of short and long sounds, is able to use without constraints and inversions. With five collections, Radnóti is perhaps the most widely translated Hungarian poet in English-speaking countries. However, the translational challenge to bring over the meanings implied in his manipulation of closed forms into contemporary open form poetry still remains fresh.

[GK]

MIKLOS MESZOLY, born in 1921, was raised in the town of Szekszard, near the Danube. He was in the Army during WW II, taken prisoner of war, and escaped from prison camp. While he began to write in the late Forties, he did not publish regularly until the end of the Fifties. His first novel, *Death of an Athlete* (1963), brought him publication in France and West Germany; his second novel, *Saulus* (1967), is a densely-written stream of consciousness work about St. Paul. Since then his books have appeared roughly every three years. His interest in poetry is recent. Like Sándor Csoóri and György Konrád, Mészöly is a major contributor with his essays to the ongoing intellectual debate about recent Hungarian history, the present society and the state of literature.

[GK]

FERENC JUHASZ, born in 1928, was raised in Bia, a village near Budapest. After WW II he studied in Budapest, published his first poems and was hailed as a prodigy of Hungarian poetry. While book-length collections appeared in 1954, 1955, and 1956, Juhász's reputation as a major 20th century poet rests on *Struggle with The White Lamb* (1964), which contains "The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gates of Morning," called by W.H. Auden, a very different poet, one of the great poems of our time. Selections of Juhász's work were published almost simultaneously in English in 1970 by Penguin and Oxford University Press. Juhász's central ambition is to be a modern epic poet, to write books of the universe. The recurring experience moving his writing is a fascination and horror over the forms and processes of life on both microcosmic and

macrocosmic levels, the cells and the stars, which he describes with unparalleled mastery. The stage between, however, the human level, is often devoid of the personal, the individual elements that could make his poetry dramatically cogent. While his work is increasingly expansive, he occasionally publishes poems of the humanity and concentration of "The Biography of a Woman," a short work by his standards. He is the editor of the literary monthly *Uj Irás* (New Writing) in Budapest.

[GK]

SANDOR CSOORI, born in 1930 in Zámoly, Transdanubia, departed from his peasant background by winning a scholarship to the famous Calvinist grammar school of Papa in 1943. After a brief span at college he worked as a journalist and editor in Budapest, looking with growing dismay at the destruction Stalinism brought to Hungarian villages. In the Sixties he wrote several screen plays, including *Eighty Hussars* and *Ten Thousand Suns* (the latter which won a Grand Prix at Cannes in 1968). As a poet, he is one of the most articulate representatives in Hungary of the so-called "Folk Surrealism," a modernist esthetics which builds on archaic elements in folk art, and regards as its forerunners artists like Béla Bartók and Garcia Lorca. At the same time, Csoóri is an alert and active intellectual, whose daring essays probe the spiritual and political situation of Hungary, often reflecting on the plight of Hungarian minorities living in Rumania and Czechoslovakia. He has often been in political disgrace, with books suspended and writings banned. The central theme of Csoóri's writing is the relationship between history, national and individual consciousness, and the distortions politics bring about in this relationship. In 1982, his poem of solidarity with the Polish people was published in the *New York Times*.

[GK]

GYULA KODOLANYI, born in 1942, was raised and educated in Budapest. He began to write and to translate poetry in the early

Sixties, and in 1969 went to England on a British Council scholarship, where Charles Tomlinson and Tom Raworth influenced his reading. In 1972-73, as an ACLS Fellow, he did research in the United States on Pound and Williams, and met Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov, all of whom he has subsequently translated. His first and only collection of poetry appeared in 1981. He has edited books by Henry Adams, Lewis Mumford and William Carlos Williams in Hungarian translation, as well as an anthology of American poetry from Roethke to Creeley. Although he believes in the importance of the reader and the social commitment of the writer, he is one of the most experimental of living Hungarian poets, influenced by Olson's Projective Verse proposals. His prose poetry is multi-layered, and densely esoteric, which he claims is to some extent a reaction against the inane transparency of the official literature of his youth. In 1984-85, he was a Fulbright Fellow at UC Santa Barbara; while in California he taped extensive interviews with Jerome Rothenberg, Clayton Eshleman, and Michael Palmer.

[CE]

GEZA SZOCS, born in 1953, is the most prominent Transylvanian writer of his generation, with five collections of poetry published in Bucharest, Budapest and New York. While living in Cluj, Rumania, from 1981 to 1983, he edited 10 issues of the scandalous and politically suicidal underground periodical, *Ellenpontok* (Counterpoints), the first and thus far only samizdat to appear in Ceaucescu's totalitarian Rumania. From 1983 to 1986, Szöcs lived under house arrest, with all his hand-written material (and blank paper) confiscated; he was often interrogated 10 hours a day. In 1986, he was able to leave Rumania and now lives in West Germany.

ARPAD VISKY, the subject of "Commentary on an Old Review," was, until his arrest in January, 1983, the leading actor of the Sepsiszentgyörgy Hungarian Theater Company in Transylvania, Rumania. Imprisoned on false political charges (he had insulted members of the Rumanian secret police on duty in the cafeteria of

the theater), he spent the next two years in Danube-delta labor camps. After his release in the fall of 1984, he was banned from performing on any stage in Rumania and was forced to work as an unskilled laborer. On January 5, 1986, the Rumanian authorities staged a suicide: Visky's body was found hung in a remote forest outside Sepsiszentgyörgy by a local policeman minutes after the onset of death. His wife was not allowed to view the body. Prior to his death, Visky had repeatedly been denied emigration to Hungary.

[EB & LH]

ENIKO BOLLABAS teaches at the József Attila University in Szeged, Hungary, and has traveled extensively in the United States, doing research on Americana and John Muir, before and after teaching stints at UC San Diego and the University of Oregon. She has published one book: *Tradition and Innovation in American Free Verse: Whitman to Duncan* (Budapest, 1986).

[CE]

MIKLOS RADNOTI

Six Poems

ANXIOUSLY AUTUMN ARRIVES

Out of enraged, iron-colored flags
the sun whirls anxiously, belching vapor
—and the light flitting away
bites into plummeting fog.

Disheveled clouds, the sky mirror
rippled by wind. Blue streaks off.
A swallow in low swoops
ready to depart writes a shrieking note.

Anxiously autumn arrives.
Rust lifts and sinks on the foliage.
Heavenly breath is cool.
The sky, coldly, merely smokes—
the sun now no more potent than a sigh.

Lizards scurry the fat cemetery walls.
The flesh-robbing fury of gluttonous
autumnal wasps drones, and glows.

Men sitting on the banks of ditches
watch the deep fires of death,
the smell of dense mold is already afloat.

Flames dart over the road fluttering half-light half-blood!
Burning brown leaves
buck weakly in the wind.

Clusters fall, vine shoots withering,
the stalks of yellow flowers rattle
as the seeds spin off.

The meadow swims in twilit mist.
Savage clatter of distant wagons
shaking off the last leaves.

The countryside fallen asleep,
death glides in on white, beautiful wings,
the sky nurses the garden.
And in your hair: look! A golden autumn leaf—
a branch wept above you.

O dearest, flare about autumn, above death,
and lift me too! Have the wisdom to love
now, the wisdom to kiss, to hunger for sleep.

Love joyfully, don't leave me—
plunge with me into the blackened sky of sleep.
Let *us* sleep. Outside: the thrush is already dozing,
walnuts drop onto leaf-mold now
without a tap—and reason deteriorates.

10 October 1941

THE ANGEL OF DREAD

Today, the angel of dread, invisible,
and silent in me, does not shriek.
But, at a squeak, you are startled—
at merely the snap of a grasshopper
you turn, but who was it?
It was him. Only, today he is cautious—but poised!
Protect me because you love me. Love me heroically.
When you are with me, he sulks; he is fierce
when you leave me alone. He rises from the pit of the soul

and, screaming, accuses me.
Madness. Working into me like poison,
rarely letting up. Living inside,
also outside. When a moonlit night is white,
in whizzing sandals he dashes the meadow,
rummaging about in my mother's grave.
"Was it worth it?" he keeps asking her,
rousing her, whispering, inciting her, strangling:
"You gave birth to him and it killed you!"
Occasionally, he looks at me,
tearing off the calendar pages that were awaiting their turn.
How far and where to
now depend upon him forever. His word,
a stone into water,
dropped into my heart last night,
gyring, swinging, revolving.
I was just about to go to bed,
you were already asleep. I stood still,
naked, when he arrived
and began to quietly argue with me here.
A peculiar scent was afloat, a chilling
breath at my ear. "Keep on undressing,"
he urged, "not even skin should defend you—
you are, after all, raw flesh and bare nerve.
Flay yourself, for he is a fool
who brags about his skin, his prison.
Skin is only an *appearance* about you.
Come on! Take this knife—
it won't hurt, will only take a minute, one wince!"

On the table, in a blaze, the knife awakened.

4 August 1943

SEVENTH ECLOGUE

Do you see? Evening falls, fringed with barbed-wire
the hacked-out oak fence and barracks waver, sucked up by
dusk.
The framework of our captivity is undone by a hesitant gaze
and the mind alone—the mind alone—knows the tautness of the
wire.
Do you see, dearest, imagination here can free itself only this
way.
By dreaming, that beautiful liberator, our broken bodies are
unleashed,
in that moment the prison camp starts home!
In rags, heads shaved, snoring, the prisoners fly
from Serbia's blind heights to the hiding homelands.
The *hiding* homelands? O *is* our home still there?
Maybe no bomb touched it? Might it *be,* as when we were
drafted?
The one groaning on my right, the one sprawling on my left,
will they return home?
Tell me, *is* there still a homeland where this hexameter will be
understood?

Without accent marks, feeling out line after line,
here, in the dusk, I write this poem just as I live,
blindly, a caterpillar inching my way on the paper.
Flashlight, book, everything taken away by the Lagar guards,
and there's no mail—only fog settles on our barracks.
Among false rumors and worms, here in the mountains live
Frenchmen, Poles, loud Italians, Serbian separatists, and
brooding Jews,
a chopped up, fevered body, still living *one* life,
waiting for good news, woman's beautiful word, free human
fate,
waiting for the end that drops into dense twilight, for the
miracle.

I am lying on a plank, a captive animal among worms,
the fleas' assault starts up again, but the army of flies are at rest.

It is night, one day shorter again, you see,
and, one day shorter, life. The camp is sleeping. The landscape
lit by the moon. In its light, the wire is again taut.
One can see through the window, cast on the wall,
shadows of armed guards passing among the night sounds.

The camp is sleeping, do you see, dearest, dreams are rustling,
a startled man snorts, tosses about in his tight space,
already back to sleep, his face radiates. Only I sit up awake,
I feel a half-smoked cigarette in my mouth instead of the taste of
your kiss,
and sleep, the comforter, does not come,
for I cannot die nor live without you anymore.

Lagar Heidenau, in the mountains
above Žagubica, July 1944.

ROOT

Through the root power flashes unseen,
the root drinks rain, feeds on earth
and its dream is falling white snow.

Earth-embedded it strives to burst earth,
it crawls cunningly, the root does,
its arm like uncoiling rope.

On the root's arm, a worm sleeps,
on the root's foot, a worm sits.
The world becomes wormy, wormsick.

But below, the root lives on and on,

it is not concerned with the world,
only with a foliage-lush branch.

That branch it feeds and adores,
sending up delicious flavors,
sweet, heavenly flavors. . .

I too am a root now,
I'm living among worms,
down there this poem is being formed.

I was a flower. I became a root.
Leaden, black soil covers me,
my fate has been fixed.
A saw shrieks above my head.

Lager Heidenau, in the mountains
above Žagubica, August 8, 1944.

SERBIAN POSTCARD 1

From Bulgaria, the roll of thick, wild cannon blasts
beat against the ridge, resonate, fade. . .
humans beasts wagons thoughts amass,
the road rears whinnying, maned sky bolts.
In this mobile chaos you are constant in me,
in the pit of my consciousness you shine, motionless
forever, mute, like the angel, while admiring destruction,
or an insect, burying itself in the cavity of a tree's decay.

30 August 1944, in the mountains

FORCED MARCH

He is a fool who, collapsed on the ground, gets up and walks
on,
like a wandering pain, he moves ankle and knee,
yet starts out again, like one lifted by wings.
In vain, the ditch invites him, he doesn't dare to stay,
and if you ask him: why not? maybe he will still answer
he's expected by his wife, and by a wiser, more beautiful death.
But, this simple soul *is* a fool, for, over the homes,
a long time, scorched wind has been twisting,
the house wall has stretched out, the plum tree snapped,
the homeland night is woolly with fear. . .
O if only I could believe: not only in *my* heart do I bear all
that is worthwhile, and: there *is* a home to return to. . .
If it were still there as before, on the ancient cool veranda
the bees of peace would drone, while plum jam chills,
an end-of-summer quiet would sunbathe the drowsy garden,
among the foliage, fruit would sway naked,
Fanni would wait blondely before the russet hedge
and slow morning would write a shadow slowly. . .
surely it still can perhaps be! The moon tonight so immensely
full!
Don't go on without me, my friends, shout at me!
And I push on. . .

Bor, September 15, 1944

MIKLOS MESZOLY

Ode to the Elegy

Prince, slow down,
amidst the neglected islands, sea is eternal

Were there anyone to address, this would be my message,
over the whitened meadow, above the grey sky,
the sun is a golden plate hammered translucent

Ophelia is dead,
smiling, she watches the dead son

"Dearest,
if it is words you want,
'I love you.'
I always must cry
because I could not hear you
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
You are so sad
that for you another's sorrow can also be
a distraction and a task,
and your joy does not save you either.
Last evening, I visited your room and glanced into your
wardrobe.
It was empty.
I saw only the falling, torn sleeve of a shirt there,
like the arm of a buried man.
Since then, I have been crying."

Once galloping horses erased to their breasts
stirred up the foam of blue waters—summer!
The foster-children of Neptune running without legs,
horses dreaming of earth amidst the spumy spray—
where hemlock grows, the emerald is used for fodder,
as well as brown, stiff-stemmed cornflowers. . .

Just sit in your castle, Prince,
and dream the real.

Your courier asks:
what is so good about being broken on the rack,
for what the embalming of slices,
the garlanded silence of disheveled bouquets,
the Indian-fleet reproof,
and the soot design on the cooled embers of the heart?

Your courier does not understand this composition.

However, it is a mere deluge of sun when
according to the orders of the dark sky
the glittering golden plate that has come to life from its own
    shreds
tears an unexpected slit into the solid collar of darkness.
It flings up and drops
the gossamer strings of
their farewell etched by a blade.

Your courier does not understand this music.

The siesta of the Moerae now takes place.
Perishing looms,
virgins whoring without pleasure,
three dull angels with shadows under their eyes,
Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos,
their helpless siesta now takes place—
their hands in their laps,
their hemp entangled,
robes torn,
they do not know what crying is,
they do not know what a wardrobe is—
they are Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos,
hibernating non-sleepers, the sleepless ones,
only the bloody gentleness in their fingers,
on their faceless faces the dark of eyes that never were,
in their hearts sootless designs—

they are Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos,
yet they are also our dear ones,
the god's concubines,
in their kisses time rots.

For this is how everything is, Prince.
It is too late for anything else.

AN AUXILIARY ODE

When the banked glitter, in the month of winter,
draws near with tumbling winds
and covers your mounds like a Mohawk bison
of the distant Americas,
who receives with lowered head
the imperial splendor and does not stir
until a vast snowy silence covers it
and the terrible moon decays into rusty shreds—

Prince! In a fairy mirror: the albatross wing
of spilling nothingness, of the beautiful,
is already lifting. . .

1986

FERENC JUHASZ

The Biography of a Woman

She bore three sons. Has two sons. Was twenty-five
when she buried the third. Then, the children were given
chocolate milk. For breakfast! Chocolate milk and crescent rolls.
Sunday. The man
did not drink wine. He drank onion tea from a white porcelain
mug.
A mug of red onion water. This was the onion tea.
The red onion a smelly ball in the onion juice.
The man ate the onion too. The Globe that death ate.
He was operated upon two years ago. They cut out one lung.
Onions were requested, eggs, lard. Then the man drank
a cup of coffee, into the coffee he had put a soupspoon of lard,
into the coffee he had broken an egg. He mixed it all with the
spoon, drank it.
But, he did not drink wine. The family was sitting around the
kitchen table.
Jánoska was ten months old. Brain fever. Death.
Jánoska in a tiny blue coffin. In a tiny blue coffin on the table in
the room.
Jánoska a wax lily. Jánoska a wax rose.
Jánoska a wax bear. A blond wax bear. Jánoska a yellow wax
lizard.
A scaly newborn lizard. Jánoska a white-crested newt. Jánoska a
dwarf-
Christmas-tree. Jánoska frozen angel hair. Jánoska a praying
tadpole.
His wax fingers clasped in prayer. Tiny wax hands like a rainy
slate tent.
His wax smile, black murky night. On his wax eyelids
the dew of holy water, like diamond dust on the tail of our
Galaxy.
On Jánoska's ice heart nose tip a red goblin sits. And the patent-
leather booted

goblin has seven heads, on seven scaly green towers, seven heads.
On seven necks, seven heads. On each head the face of an angel.
On each angel face a green gold beard. And there are fourteen eyeballs in the seven angel faces.
Like spinning tops, the goblin angel dragon heads turn.
Their eyes: Judgment, Grief, Fever, Slobbering, Crying, Coughing,
Mercilessness, Vomiting, Consciousness, Diarrhea, Heavy-breathing,
Guilty conscience, Accusation, Death. Jánoska a milky ear of corn with a blond
silky beard. And mournful butterfly wings with fiery rings
pinned with a silver safety-pin to the back of the dragon angel goblin.
Under the fiery ringed butterfly wings, red dragonfly wings:
pinned there with a silver safety-pin. The window in the room open.
Through the window in the door, people looking. Children on tiptoes.
Adults wiping their noses. On the white crocheted window curtain,
the white crocheted wings of praying angels crocheted from squares of yarn
flapping numbly. The bell tolls. The death bell.
In the farmyard, those who came for the funeral are gathering.
Already there: the little blue Saint-John-carrying Blue Saint Michael's Horse.
And the horses drawing the Horse are girls clad in white,
with white myrtle wreaths, white rose wreaths, on their heads.
Their hair let down to their shoulders, to their waists. Their plaits unbraided. And let down.
She was a servant girl, a day-laborer girl, a brick-layer girl,
she worked at the sack-sewing factory and she also worked in a chocolate factory. She cooked,
she did the laundry, washed dishes, cleaned the house, a child-servant. Ten years old, with
a Jewish family. She waxed floors. Escorted the older girls to school.

Carried their suitcases, their net bags. "Those girls always ran away,
they also ate dates." When the family was not at home, she would sit at
the piano, striking at the keys with her red child hands.
Proletarian girl Chopin, proletarian girl Franz Liszt, proletarian girl Arthur
Rubenstein. Dishwater, lye, soapy water, corridor-scrubbing water,
frost: these tiled red gloves on her hands. Red animal gloves for her hands.
She carried mortar in a cement-skinned bucket up to the scaffoldings,
carried bricks on fodder racks, pushed brick-loaded carts.
"In the sack-sewing factory, I used to wrestle with the other girls. And my fingers were like
a swollen pin-cushion, the tips of my fingers like little violet melons.
Masses of pin-prick points. Eddies of pin-wound points."
She traveled to Budapest by train at 5 AM. To the station.
She was blind for five years as a child. If no one led her,
she totter-walked. Like snail tentacles pushing out from eye-mushrooms,
with a spirally bubbling, her hands, arms, staggered in the air,
smacking well wheels, walls, fence rails, trees, hens, flowers,
and terrified by what they smacked drew back under her tender armpits.
The others did not take her to a doctor. Nor did she know what the disease was. She was blind.
A blind little servant with her rich relatives. "You can also see my blindness in this faded
photo. That's me there in the middle." In the faded photo her Schwabian relatives:
Uncle János, Aunt Náni. On Uncle János: brown boots, braided brown trousers,
a short brown coat with skeletal braiding. A yellow shirt with butterfly-wing
collar. His head bare. Hands on his knees. Eyes light-givingly dead. On Aunt

Náni: brown-buttoned shoes, a brown skirt reaching to the ground. A brown bodice with
mother-of-pearl rose buttons. Tight short coat. Her head bare.
Her hands on her dyed-blue Schwabian apron, crease-squared from ironing and folding.
The apron like Simon Hantai's creased, folded, drawn out blue, violet, brown and
green canvases! Tile-blue Virgin Mary aprons!
The Virgin Mother's tile-blue Cosmos-apron! The mama-yearnings!
The mama-sobs! The mama-sadnesses! The mama-prayers!
Christmas. Easter. Pentecost. The Lord's Day. The Blessing of the Wheat.
Church Fair. The Assumption. Weddings. Christenings. Funerals. The eyes of
Aunt Náni: light-givingly dead! Between, the blind servant.
The thirteen year old. Her apron a brown child-Universe.
In her right hand a yellow daisy. Her left hand on Uncle János' shoulder.
Around her neck a white four-strand necklace. Her braided brown hair in a basket-wreath.
And her eyes: blind graveyards! Her eyes: blind graveyards! Her eyes:
blind jelly roses! Her eyes: snot blind glass colts. Dead glass calves.
Her eyes: frozen cow mouths. Her eyes: frosty tiny Virgin Mother heads.
Her eyes: blinded visions. Her eyes: the locked diamond-gate of heaven.
Her eyes: the two shut gate-wings of the underworld!
"My mother healed me. She rubbed my eyes with powdered sugar.
She rubbed my eyes with powdered sugar in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, with powdered sugar.
And she put cobwebs on them. Sparrow shit. And pigeon droppings. She put tea-soaked wet
packs on them. Picked herbs, medicinal grass, medicinal flowers, at the pond's edge.
I don't know their names. She made tea out of them, and with the tea kept washing

my blind eyes. She washed them, kept on washing them with hard fingers. My eyes,
like the newborn. Like the newborn when they break out bloodily from a woman.
First their hair, then their faces, then their heads almost exploding
the lower part of her body, according to the faith like Jesus burst
out of damnation, when one's legs are like the arms of the cross
and one rips apart from anus to navel! Mama used to wash my eyes
like mother's blood from the newborn, like embryo grease,
like embryo saliva dirt from the newborn's mouth, like embryo tar from their nostrils.
She hung a sachet of medicinal herbs on a string around my neck.
I used to walk with the scented sachet like a gold chain around my neck.
My friend, Aunt Szabó, led me. And we played with knives, running around
each other with long kitchen knives. With *knives*.
My mother healed my blind eyes!" She took in washing and ironing for money.
Forty kilograms of laundry each week. On Tuesday she washed, on Wednesday
dried the laundry, on Thursday she ironed. The little tanner's sumac was brooding
over its green prehistory near the draw well. And it shed blood in the autumn,
like the face of the crucified Christ, like his temples, his heart wound, his hands, legs, dangling
from the nails. In the yard, on clotheslines suspended between trees, white
towels and white cotton coats used to dry. They also used to dry in the earthen
breath of the attic. In winter, like glass flames—in summer, steaming
pages of an epic. The man used to bring the bundle of clothing.
Drunk, sober, her husband brought it. Brought it in brown wrapping paper,

in a forty kilogram paper bag tied into a big square with knotted string.
He brought it sober, and he brought it drunk. On Monday he brought it home,
on Friday, he took it back. On Friday he took it back, on Monday he brought it home.
He brought it from Budapest. Took it back to Budapest.
Her husband loved wine and soda. He drank this from a big glass.
Beer only at the summer fair when the band was playing. He would sit there,
a grey rabbit-pelt hat tilted back on his head, his tie loosened,
in a white shirt, his jacket on a chair. His shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows,
up to the red elastic bands. He got off the train, the bundle on his slanting shoulder.
First the train station pub. There: cards. Then on the way home,
another pub. A game of "rex," wine and soda. At the third pub, wine and soda.
Billiards. He chalked the cold black nose of the cue and guffawed
when he hit the white bone ball stylishly. The dog always knew where he was.
It barked one way when he got off the train with the brown bundle
and when he started home staggering, barked another way.
The man used to crawl on all fours in the mud. To chortle in the rain.
He grunted, cried, crawled smilingly. His forehead, his tongue, his mouth,
the inside of his mouth, all were muddy, his shirts and pants, muddy. His genitals muddy. Between
his freckled fingers, webs of mud. His eyeballs also muddy.
But he always brought the bundle. He always took the bundle.
And he could hardly believe she was paid merely four pengos!
The children trembled. The woman: "You tell your father!"
And she threw the alarm clock at him. Her scissors.
Threw the lamp at him, her husband jumping aside, chortling. Like a blazing angel,

like a crazed star. The lamp flew into the front yard. It smashed through the window,
flaming, glass splintered and the front yard was ablaze.
The tanner's sumac ablaze, the jasmine bush, and the roses flamed, the lilies blazed.
"Will I go blind? I have already received my blind person's pension.
I appealed for it, it is due me, it is nothing to be ashamed of, for a poor woman.
But I do not want a blind person's cane, although they want to give me one.
I don't want a white cane or an iron cane, I don't want to grope along with a cane,
to grope along in the fog. Must I tap left, right, with a crooked white iron cane?"
And she gazes into the crystal silence, she gazes with a crystal smile.
Not to where they are, nor where they speak from. Gazes with a savior face,
gazes as if He were there! She gazes with a mist-lit face, gazes with her forehead.
"One of my ears is punctured. A blind and deaf old woman. I have tunnel vision.
The doctor said: 'it doesn't matter, auntie, at least you do not see,
at least you do not see *the evil!*'" And she hoes, digs in the garden,
prunes vines, ties up rose vines, goes to the store,
pickles cucumbers and cans peaches. After the war,
during the *removal,* she was on the "list" too. Had no idea why,
but she *was* on the "list." She sat there on her kitchen stool, having just collected
the eggs, boring her index finger into the hens' bottoms to feel with the tip of her finger
the egg in the hen's body. Or to pull out the fluffy, bloody
lime sphere from the hen's ass, to excite the hen to lay.
She was sitting on the kitchen stool, her husband was poking around in the garden.
In the middle of the kitchen: the big clothes basket with a bunched-up quilt,

pots, mugs, spoons, jam bottles, sausages, all kinds of things.
The basket covered with a gold floral-patterned scarlet bedspread,
tied down all around, like the soaked cellophane of the preserves glass,
with a rubber string, or with a regular string if there was nothing else.
And the neighbor woman came: "I will take the ducks. They will only die here."
Later, between two doors, with her little girl between her knees, a mere five years old,
the neighbor woman stood whimpering. Out in the street, people screamed:
"Her son is a Communist! Hang this one too! Together with her sniveling brat!"
At another time, she was guarding a sick person.
Guarding a schizophrenic. The shield of depression. The snail shell of mania.
The one in a checkered flannel shirt, with yellow corduroy pants, did not eat,
did not drink, just sat. Did not drink, did not eat, just stood.
He was watching the sunset, the brain-evening, for two years. The white mind-midnight.
He slept, read, got up. Slept, read, gazed. Was gazing at winter, at autumn.
Was gazing at summer, at spring. And he began to scream, he ran in September.
In freckled autumn, running, he screamed, sobbing.
He was smashing a whole basket of eggs to the ground. He smashed the eggs
one by one on the stone kitchen floor! He first took one into his hand,
turned it, examining it, balancing the lime bubble on his fingertips,
then smashed it to the stone, as if he had hugely hockered.
He was smashing them, they really splattered, he was smashing them, how they squirted!
Gazing with windhover eyes, gazing with hawk eyes, with snake eyes,
gazing with a knife glance and a spatter, and the kitchen floor

suddenly a yellow glaze, snot honey egg white, suddenly lime shell half-bubbles, suddenly
a lime shell potsherd dunghill. As if a crazed monster had vomited, as if madness
spewed bile on the Universe. The Madness Gall-Bladder was pouring out its stinking fluid.
And his hand was bilely, the wall also spattered with bile. In the yard:
the woman running around. The other one after her. After her with a big knife.
With a pig-killing bayonet! "You whore, whore, whore, you whore!" he yelled,
and she: "he'll jump into the well!" The bayonet belongs to his father, who brought it back
from Isonzo. Where he was shot in the belly. Later he was buried at home.
The hens were also flapping about, they were racing around squawking, the dog wailed on its chain,
the rooster crowed, crowed blackly. Blackly for the third time.
And the pig grunted like a drunken Buddha, and the goose flew
through autumn like the Revelations of Saint John. And the neighbors were watching,
crowding the fence, thronging the pickets, watching and shrieking with laughter.
The woman: an old woman. But a never-old-woman. She has five grandchildren.
Two great-grandchildren. Her hands move easily. Her feet are quick too.
And in her memory, Eden is not Hell! She does not regularly visit the graveyard.
She doesn't love it or hate it. She goes there on All Saint's Day, or on All Soul's.
Takes an armful of flowers, a bouquet for each family grave.
When she gets back home, she washes her hands "because after the graveyard,
one washes one's hands. This is the proper thing to do.
For the graveyard is dirty, the graveyard is dead.
Also, after washing the dead, when we have washed the naked dead,

their faces, breasts, chests, bellies, the maleness, the femaleness, and the thighs,
legs and feet, when we have wiped everything, then we also have to wash our hands."
She is reading something right now. Maybe a book of poems. For she too wrote poems!
"As if I heard it now too: O how proud this girl is!" She reads, looks at
the quiet. As if she were looking at the world through the shaft of a straw.
At the end of the emptiness-stuffing in the yellow straw shaft,
in the air-lens of the round straw husk, in the air-disc,
hardly anything can be seen. Half-orchards, half-photos, half of a long-haired doll
split as if by a sickle, old, hair-torn, one-eyed.
What the emptiness-plate of the round straw husk shows, enclosed in its husk-rim encasement.
One doll nostril. The cotton in the gash between the petals of the celluloid face rose.
And everything is as tiny in the straw ring, in the thin shaft of the straw,
as in the Land of Lilliput. She sees in the way we make light with a torch at night:
the yellow rod of light, the light dust-gold rod painting a little gold
circle on the dark. In the gold rod, a dewy beetle, a daisy,
a dew dust-winged velvet butterfly, a lemon butterfly, a cabbage butterfly.
As the torch light stabs a point of fire into the dark, a gold pin into the night.
She sees as an ophthalmologist does when with a little penlight
he illuminates the eyeball body through the pupil, he sees
the purple blot, the veined disc of the retina, the ribbon-feelered soft
sun disc veined with light. Scarlet map in the dark. Scarlet flower island,
scarlet continent with rivers, the earth from a space ship.
"And tell me, that Allende, was he on the side of the poor?" she asked

brooding. "Of *course,* I saw him once on TV." Maybe she is looking at herself.
Her husband died in her arms, vomited blood, "mama mama," he cried.
There was blood on his chest, blood on the woman's hands. He died in her arms.
After the funeral, they scrubbed the floor until dawn, she and her sister-in-law.
Her mother died in her arms. But she recedes colorfully, like a beautiful dream.
She lived with her younger son, then with her elder son, now with her grown granddaughter.
What does this woman read? This not not-old old woman?
"Like a few thin spikes driven into the soil,
Spires appeared on the horizon at dawn.
But they were so small, that the shepherd boy
Glimpsed them as if peering through a straw!"
Indeed, this is János Arany. Indeed, this is his *The Village Fool!*

1986

NOTE: the words "removal" and "list" refer either to the forced removal to Germany of ethnic German peasants after 1945, because of their assumed complicity with Nazism, or the forced removal in the early 1950s, the Stalinist period, of class aliens to labor camps. Among these, so-called "kulák" families were also removed on extremely unfounded grounds (if there were any grounds for the whole process at all). "List" is the so-called "Kulák list" which every village council kept on record for the regular retaliations, confiscations, and extra taxes that the more well-off farmers were subjected to. The villagers screaming "Her son is a Communist" in the poem are a response to October 1956 when in some cases people sought revenge on Communist neighbors for Stalinist practices.

[GK]

SANDOR CSOORI

Three Works

THE VISITOR'S MEMORIES

I left a piece of my head in that smoky-smelling house, there, right there on the milk-burnt plain of the oven-top, with the bread crust tossed to the dog.

I arrived, uninvited, early in the morning. At first, the waking children merely stared at me from behind the fortifications of their bunched-up quilts: who might I be? what might I want? in what shop did I steal my camomile-yellow shoes? But when I discovered, one by one, their bud-like noses and geranium ears, and before their very eyes did a hairy bear-fist waddle, "grr-grr-grr, my skin is bitten by fleas, the fleas are biting my knees," I saw the little bishops of laughter consecrated by merriment. Their tiny bead-like teeth exploded through the room like popcorn. From the blackened table to the stool, from stool to earthen floor, down to the sandals tossed under the beds. More! More! Don't take the bear away once you have brought him here (their timid mouths would have said had they expressed themselves).

Out of one eye their mother watched the theater tumbling out of nowhere. Instead of cat-flaying excitement, or bear-flaying blood adventure, she noticed marching clouds reined in by the serenity in the children's dilated eyes. She continued sitting on her hatchet-hewed milking-stool, drinking her eternal cup of tea. I knew that the sun sets in her liver, that the years support her ramshackle heart with a wooden beam. I also knew that with her blackening dried-plum face, I would appear beneath frosty chandeliers at drink-nursing diplomatic feasts where, wrapped in lettuce, her prematurely-harvested breasts would also be served.

I will arrive at such dinners perhaps by plane, perhaps with iron-plated wings attached to my shoulders, perhaps on the back of a leaf drifting in through an open window, I, the spy for the poor, who is blessed with destroyer eyes and who sees everything. My ironed shirt will be the skin of those who have been sophisticatedly flayed,

my Golgothically ticking clock their pounding temples, after those of my father, my mother, and this sister as well, sitting before me, the orphan of a familiar but vanishing story, harboring no impassioned revenge, in tea steam breathing through her children's mouths and surviving through her children's flesh the tribute exacted from her womb.

1977

WRITER—STATE—NATION

The writer, even if his works—as those of Dostoyevsky and Faulkner—depict terrible crimes, can be led by one purpose only: to have the world, and the individual within it, be touched by the breath of freedom. Or: to touch with a sensation of similar intensity, allowing the reader to feel alive, fallible, mysterious, and a native citizen of the universe.

The state never seeks to achieve a similar purpose. Rather, it merely takes measures, regulates, encourages practicality, urges you to buy life insurance even in the event of your death. Its secret police, no matter how secretive, have nothing to do with metaphysical secrets, as contained, for instance, in a line of Rilke. On the contrary, if its interest so dictates, the state compels betrayals, sudden changes of mind and undetected surrenders of self. It arms and disarms. That it also affords protection? Of course. But only in accordance with elaborate contractual agreements.

It is no accident, then, that the state is generally thought of as realistic in outlook. A conservative and apprehensive conceiver, symbolized by the human body grown large, which clings to ossified and closed forms even after the spirit has long outgrown the form.

In saying this, I want only to emphasize that if literature is autonomous, it is more agile and contemporary than any state

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structure. It continuously searches and constructs, it comes face-to-face with love and death; it broods, laments, tears down, and by and large distills victory from its losses. By virtue of stirring paradoxes, it extracts healthiness from disease. The crisis of state can be cathartic, but it is still profane, never becoming enduringly spiritual as that of one or another tragic hero. If Oedipus, upon learning the secret of his life, *only* surrenders, his life is merely an informative parable. But the blindly wandering king is immortal for all time. He comes and goes among us here, even in the enormous buildings of New York.

Should I continue listing the differences? I think it superfluous, just as comparisons between an elephant and a butterfly would be. Even the similarities between them would accentuate their distinctness. Let us cite that view of literary ethics which holds that the writer owes responsibility to no one other than his art, and that the writer is then a true writer only if he is completely merciless.

There is a kind of state structure—let us call it by its name: dictatorship—which professes a similar *ars poetica*. But imagine how incredibly great the difference is between the merciless writer and the merciless state. The former is harsh even with himself, while the latter behaves the same toward its subjects only.

That lane, or zone, in which literature and state—despite the essential differences between them—do come together in a phantom-like manner (that is, where they can come together) is in the realm of politics and culture. In the distant past, it was clear that the source of all creation, from the leather whip to a theory of politics, was culture. But, in the course of European history, first the church became separated from the state, and during later divisions, intellectual activity and the arts separated from modern states in the same way. At times one feels as if writers in the West today have brushed away even the memory of this one-time co-habitation from their consciousness. As if they had gained separation from the state, the power structure, in the same way as the independent judiciary, simply by declaring the vision of literature as sovereign and whole.

The situation of our writer-colleagues in Eastern and Central Europe is completely different. In these regions, literature is a very "personal concern" of the state. Most often posing a problem not only for the power of the state, but also for its psychological condition, almost to the level of producing a psychopathical

complex in the mind of the state. It fears literature, loves it and envies it, in the same way as the domineering man is jealous of his lover who seeks liberation. Put differently, just as we are not allowed a court system independent from the power of the state, there exists no literature separate from the state power and the political realm.

But does this mean that autonomous emotion, thought and ability to create are also nonexistent? Indeed, there are periods of time when they do not exist. After the Second World War, for example, the Socialist states nationalized not only the factories, not only the schools (the future), but also the peoples themselves. Their language, their imagination and even their past. Even the snowflake falling on lovers' hands. The poem by Gyula Illyés entitled *One Sentence on Tyranny,* a classic of world literature, is a single, great showdown with the age of the colonization of mind and soul. If the poem could have been published freely in 1951, when it was written, perhaps history would not have found it necessary to create an armed uprising in Hungary as the critique to the numbing Ice Age of Stalinism.

That I attribute such great significance to the role of literature in Central Europe? Yes, I do. Because for centuries it has been through literature that peoples living under conditions of semi-autonomy have been able to find their own autonomy and express their own self-image in the broadest, deepest and most radiant of strokes. And this is understandable. After all, poetry can penetrate deeper than any other form of human expression: down to the roots of national language, of national memory. And since thought is generally universal, but emotion is individual and unique, where I come from lyrical poets are not just exceptional, but at one and the same time blessed and cursed figures of community life.

But there is a more painful reason that literature in Hungary, as in other Central European countries, holds special significance. It is the split in personality which developed and gradually deepened between the state and the nation. To an American, the concepts of state and nation are interchangeable. He has never known the complex and explosive conflicts arising from the *three* notions of: state, nation and individual. Based on the model of spiritual-secular duality, he knew how to separate dualities only: state and individual, state and literature, and so on. But our circumstances are

different. Which is to say, the nation is a historical formation, while the state is only political. Although the country which has lost its independence seeks its role in the world as something called a state, the face beneath the mask bears the features of a nation. A writer knows perfectly well that the state can censure him, make him poor, or maybe even court him, but he will not confuse such acts with the gestures of the nation. To use a more impersonal expression: where I come from, the state is always a temporary frame, an economic and foreign policy unit. In contrast, the nation is historical and cultural. Small countries, too, must participate in the political and economic welfare of the Common Markets and the Warsaw Pact. But, in reality, each one participates only as a state. As an organization. As a body, but not as a soul. In the face of external constraints and realities, the nation represents internal independence. The trembling heartbeat of autonomy. A secret password hardly ever uttered. But I could also say: tradition, or: a sense of history. Let us recall Ortega. According to him, each nation is a different spirit. Nation in space is like age in time: the autonomous organism of feeling and thought patterns. Only in bad moments does this sense of differentness express itself in aggression or the ignorant conceit of exclusivity. For the most part, it presents itself in the diversity of cultural expression.

In his superb essay, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," published the world over, Milan Kundera writes that the identification card of a people is its national culture. And he immediately develops the thought further by saying that Central Europe is not a state, but a center of culture, or commonality of fate. But he speaks of it almost exclusively in the past tense. Not so much to present an illuminating analysis, but painfully, with the sorrow of a classical elegy. I could not argue with a single one of his thoughts. At most, I would turn my hopelessness-hardened hope to face his conviction. We are alive, we exist. And, although freedom has no alternative forms, only opposites, without national cultures no form of freedom is imaginable.

THE FEELING OF INFINITY

Indeed, why do I write? So far I have not learned, and I am afraid that I will never be able to give an exact answer to this question—not because my motives are muddled or obscure, rather, they are multifarious, contradictory, and they often even surprise me. Right now, for instance, I am wandering around my country cabin which has been disheveled by winter storms. I am looking at roof tiles swept down into the snow, the torn open roof, and the war comes to mind, the masses of rubble among which I grew up. But thinking about these symbolic stage props of bad luck here I don't mean to be bewailing losses. On the contrary: a familiar defiance begins to swell throughout my entire body. It is their losses that poets live from, and this benevolent recognition liberates me from the pressures of my situation. I now recall the summer snake that appeared in my garden last August, and after surveying the place and gliding about the trees only hid itself in the hollow of the old cherry tree when my girlfriend approached. It is this bashful, modern Biblical event that I would most like to write a poem about right now. Why this? And why now? Perhaps because of the contrast of the seasons? Who knows. But I can almost hear the swishing of dry grass under the snake's belly while birds soared over the garden with long yellow ribbons streaming down from their beaks to the ground. I feel that I see into heaven, into god's designs, and in that moment heat courses over me as if from the carnivalesque animation of summer. . . Perhaps one desires to write—surely, this must be it—because writing is nothing less than the feeling of infinity. Of infinity in all of its varieties. After all, joy is not real joy without a perspective, and death is not a real death if the whole world does not pass with it. When I write, I am free, freer than at any other time. "Life is a game lost in advance," many creative writers say, "but fortunately writing offers a little consolation or compensation in exchange." Such is an aching and wry wisdom, and while my brain is tempted to accept it, I have never felt writing to be a compensation. Whoever creates does not substitute, nor does he compensate anyone for anything. On the contrary: he gives

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This essay was written in response to the question "Why do you write?" posed by the Paris daily, *Liberation*.

legitimacy to new conditions and fresh demands, to a new way of being that in every case arrests decay.

What I have just said in one breath is spoken through me by the Robinson Crusoe living most of the time in the thicket of poems. Poets, even when trying to be modest, only thrive on wholeness. Even when addressing themselves to the smallest detail, they are uttering their vision of the whole.

On the other hand, the writer of essays and prose, the other self of this Robinson Crusoe, his daytime self, his classifying self, is capable of giving much more lucid responses to the question: why do you write?

So, without further ado, let's get at the quick of this matter.

Here in Central Europe after the war, state-owned politics attempted to make almost everything a state property. Personality, language, imagination, the past, the future, smiles, even the forms of resistance. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, it did so brutally; later on, in a more refined and polite way, and while the process of state ownership has been indefatigable, it has, from time to time, made certain concessions to the individual. It has never liked the autonomous individual, however, because by their very nature such people are rebels. Through such individuals, politics has had to face its own side effects. So far, so good; yet those in power, in order to prove their own legitimacy, needed the token or shopwindow autonomy of a few values which could be exhibited to give an appearance of civil independence. Such "exhibits" were to be found in the areas of competitive sports and literature.

It is well known that over the past several hundred years, Hungarian history, apart from a number of revolutionary periods, has been politically conservative while literature—if I may be allowed to simplify a little—has been leftist. This opposition has remained a tradition even in years when artists were disestablished and dispossessed. Here is the origin of the paradoxical situation that is so flattering for Hungarian writers: the written word and the poet's restlessness possess honor, and politicians often appreciate in such values what they most severely ban. This distinguished situation and the position of literature requires not only a theoretical but a practical acting out of a role. In short, it is to literature that the compulsion to say the truth has generally been drawn. The press may lie, politicians may be clever and paint reality in new colors,

but literature immediately perishes if it talks beside the point. And truths do not simply withdraw into literature: they live a family life there and bear new truths. It is an ecstatic feeling when one becomes aware of a new idea in the course of writing and is able to put it in words.

Yet in *this* political and geological region, the writer is often compelled to write by human situations which he can only almost masochistically contemplate. I think of the plight of Hungarians who live as minorities, of the three million Hungarians living in Rumania and Czechoslovakia. Reality with all of its political and existential ties binds them to these states, while relative to their mother tongue and culture their allegiance is to the mother country, Hungary. Peace treaties drawn up after World War II secured all sorts of ostensible rights for them to be able to endure this schizoid way of life, but by now the successor states have abolished all such "ostensible rights." An example, symbolic of the whole fate of education in the mother tongue, is that while in Rumania Hungarians had a university and several colleges in 1958, after twenty years of desperate resistance they have lost not only all of these but also all but one of their many high schools.

How can a Hungarian write without feeling guilt and despair when he knows that on account of the language he writes in people are humiliated and sentenced to a quiet spiritual death? For a long time, Europe did not believe the stories about the Nazi gas chambers. In the same way, contemporary Europe does not believe the spiritual genocide of nationalities taking place in broad daylight, behind smiling faces and in shadow of political attitudes that it finds gallant.

My writing, then, beyond all ethical and esthetical driving forces, is also propelled by this despair, and by the hope that I can write sentences in Hungarian, my mother tongue, which will speak for those who have been paralyzed—by the hope that it will not again be only to the dead that we leave the inconceivable and terrible truths of life.

1981

GYULA KODOLANYI

Two Poems

THE SEA AND JOHN SMITH

"Though I be no scholar, I am past a schooleboy, and I desire but to know, what either you, and these here, doe know but that I have learned to tell you by the conttinuall hazard of my life."
—John Smith, *Letter to the Virginia Company*

". . .said it in prose like no one has since, simply that he had the *first* of it, had it not like even Columbus did, but as Columbus's navigator, say, only Smith *said* it, got it into words. . ."
—Charles Olson, *Captain John Smith*

I

poem concerning
how in March (after
seven months
for the first time I was wading
in shore sand
we were living a mile from
the harbor fat wild-geese-like
gulls
alit each morning on
the tar-paper roof of the neighboring shed
and the wind the wind unceasing
yet only after seven months
did I wade for the first time in shore sand
(my first shore
at the end of October

in Rhode Island was rocky more
like the Adriatic
or the southern English coast
here a suspension bridge too
a blinding white flash
yet still arched fishbone arching over
only the wind
the wind unceasing

but only after seven months
in March only in March
for the first time did I wade in shore sand
it was beyond Branford
six miles north
off route #95 we found at last a public beach
and with opened mouths waded
in blinding sand far apart
in the snapshot Ika and Clive step out at the same time
lean at the same angle
into the wind
along the breakers mouths opened
in ecstasy into the wind out
from winter's caul

II

were living a mile from the harbor
everything warehouses oil tanks ships
cargo ships cars #95 trucks cars
along the coastal outskirts solely private property
Trespassers will be shot (this in Virginia
those encroaching on private property will be shot
transgressors intruders the wind
the wind
unceasing yet only in March
for the first time on the Branford shore
my back to the land
could I at last think of John Smith he drew
the first map of this coast all the way north to Canada

(to present day Canada from Virginia
European waves cast him here spring's diastole
after he had completed his work in Transylvania he had broken in
fired a road a wedge into the Turkish expropriation
fences fencing off fencing around:
Smith an inherent/instinctive enemy not a *sworn* one,
    son of the wind
the wind *trespasser* transgressor
encroacher on privilege and warrior if need be
(among his possessions: a deed of nobility from Zsigmond Bathory
a coat of arms—including three Turkish heads—
    on a shield from Zsigmond Bathory
to Captain John Smith back home in England Smith
—not a Raleigh—was called a liar concerning Transylvania
America Zsigmond Bathory Indians
humane? a deed of nobility? Smith a common man
Smith an adventurer a lady's man deservedly despised
set adrift further and further out by the wind
                the wind
the trespasser the transgressor
cast here on the Branford shore
                (possibly on this very spot
    by European waves
by spring's diastole set adrift
(after leaving the colonists in Jamestown
having pacified and made friends with the Indians
and deservedly
    he was banned from Virginia thrown out
(in his absence of course by paperwork flunkies
this bizarre adventurer by gold-hungry businessmen
cast here
        from Europe further and further out
from Europe's caul by spring's wave
(the caul *should* tear if it is already drying out
if the seed within is ripe
cast here carried by the wind perhaps to this unnamed cape
to walk self-forgotten on the sand
while the others paddled around the promontory
sounding the depth with a plummet
testing for shoals and channels and the ship

out there at open sea
                idly swaying

III

for beautiful women exotic lands The New World are
each perfect in themselves explorable
according to their own laws subjectable only by the self-subjecting
lovable each with a different map if
                you allow them to guide you
to open and hide when you are enclosed in their ecstasy
you drift
        on their waters (on your back
or sitting in a stern cutting a hole in the mirror with
the oar eddyless stroke to keep the wound from foaming
    you drift on their waters
you coil through their forests around tree after tree
nod to their animals
                they walk on in silent dignity
in their meadows you lie down
until, remembering yourself, jumping to your feet
you race back you crash through marsh-grass back
    into yourself
to again be
        asway in a boat
        walking on the sand
in order to draw a map
    at the edge of sky and water earth and sea
to remember the loving exploration
                the maelstrom the ecstasy
    the flight back into your caul
                to remember it on the sand
John Smith alone

IV

                the first European American
on this coast on the New England shore New *England*

this is how he named this coast despite all
(not judging his homeland after its "public" opinion
its businessmen paid hacks petty officials
asses shaped by political stalls
  the first European American on this coast
exactly 31 years old on the Branford shore
in the wind
    unceasing wind at the American English Central
European Asian intersection in the maelstrom of
                the East and the West
                John Smith
who is
English Hungarian Turkish (prisoner
  a Tartar (sweetheart of an odalisk
    Indian (Pocahontas's lover
  a Virginian and most of all a New Englander
John Smith cast here
on the Branford cape (this unnamed cape
and stopped (the others far ahead
stopped
    self-forgotten
                in billowing inner peace
at the heart of the Atlantic maelstrom
at the intersection of worlds
            at the pivot of memories
in a pivotal moment in the wind the unceasing wind
before he would go on along bordering shores and waves
in unceasing

V

            wind we are running self-forgotten
across blinding sand
                (a bit upland to the left
                fallow winter's-end grass
along the breakers we were rushing choreographed
spring at full-tide winter ebbing in our dilating
arteries the diastole push our mouths ecstatic
rushing to the promontory's tip

halfway back drowned in aimless laughter
we stopped while our blood rushed on
                wrapped up in ourselves
into the freeway's wind scent we drove back
nodding to the self-enrapt granite to unyielding memories
sea and wind on the portioned-out coast
auto route warehouse tank
cars warehouses truck factory
                wilderness
only the granite
the sea and the wind remain as Smith knew them
and the name New England coined by him
Smith "hardly reliable"
a source and of course "not a great stylist"
                say the scholars (the scolders
now that Virginia is already 370 years old
now that they too say again and again New England
for he who creates is suspect to
                the one appointed to nose around
examine classify rate
from the back of a limousine from the cozy
throne of spectatorism from its barren
                political stalling to fit asses
for they are trespassers yes they are the disturbers of
                property
and peace rebels all the sea
                and the ceaselessly unceasing wind

1979

TRACT ON RHYME

Eighty daisies. It must mean something that is exactly eighty and specifically daisies. The geo-chemical features of the area's soil. Aunt Rosy, yes, she would know. The colors of the flowers growing there depend upon it, that is, what can grow there is determined in advance. Grows, in halos. Feminine numinosity. One for whom images are only set in motion by end-rhymes must be tone-deaf. But it is possible that it is the inches per year of rainfall that carries the most weight. A team of scientists will have to perform a microscopic analysis. We took the daisies to her for her birthday. Others say that we received them from her.

The engineers of the mind, the machinists, are annoyed by additional trains, stunting pilots, and indeterminate daisies. *To measure what cannot be measured.* Pumpkins for bumpkins. Via this odd conjunction, a door opens onto childhood: the sweet smell of warm, steaming pumpkins, the row of orange scooped-out heads on the roof of the shed in the courtyard, in Nagyenyed, in the third head the openings for eyes and mouth are already beginning to grow. Poems with end-rhymes are like child rearing with face-smacks. Something has to thwack because it is impossible to confess emptiness, chaos has to be revenged. Uncle Axel in a two-seated Maxwell.

End-rhyme is not necessary when the whole sentence modulates according to an inner cadence. But such a dance should be almost imperceptible, "in music each redundant sound pains our ears." Yes, the building now houses the local Party Council. "What a bouquet!" Aunt Rosy laughed. We were crying. Why exactly eighty?

A plot of definite size must be divided by the area size each flower needs in order to grow, thinks the faltering layman, attempting to be scientific. Day's eyes, said Aunt Rosy. She loves the petals raying out. The extent of acidity and calcite. Anomaly? Pumpkins for bumpkins, he used to say, stressing the p/s, yet we all understood him. Understood what it meant to him. 16 Hungarian Street (no longer Hungarian Street).

When the sentence "is too musical, it draws attention away from the mental music to the outward music of sounds." Eighty daisies. There *are* rare conjunctions in which end-rhyme continues something, and does not thwack at the end of the line like minestrone

against the sides of a kettle. Rhyme-smiths: kettle menders? Eighty daisies. Without the "a/s" the whole thing would be worthless. Pumpkins for bumpkins: "for" is significant, but even without "for" the phrase is still significant. Pumpkins: bumpkins. It is impossible to invent such a phrase beforehand in an abstract way. The dance is all: the dance of sounds, of hands, of memories. Although they alliterate, there can be no mention of sixty or seventy daisies. Much less of eighty fleabanes. He loves me—he loves me not. With the fortieth "loves me not" we arrive at eighty, but there are not that many numinous, feminine petals on one stem. In other words, La Méthode is useless. Rhyme-menders: kettle smiths?

To reach the plaza one had to ascend the street that went by the College, and beyond the plaza the vineyards appeared: a bunch of grapes, lunch for apes. We obey the command of such rare conjunctions and we are enchanted by the charm of excessive music. In the prose poem the dance of sounds creates a more complex form: in it there is the gesture of human feet, of hands, of gazing eyes, the motion of memories and unthought thoughts. Of the incompatible and the ungraspable. Then lightning strikes and we say: *feminine numinosity.*

It swooped down under the Baja Bridge, my father said.

To make the measurable immeasurable.

1985

ENIKO BOLLOBAS

A Personal Report on the Present Situation of the Hungarian Writer, Géza Szöcs

I would like to draw your attention to the severe situation of a talented Hungarian writer in Rumania, Géza Szöcs, aged 32, who is suffering from the raging persecution of the Rumanian authorities.

This is a man who did nothing more than write. He wrote memoranda, petitions and proposals, and submitted them to the Madrid Conference, the Ottawa Human Rights Experts' Meeting and to the Central Committee of the Rumanian Communist Party. He addressed the Rumanian Communist Party several times because he did not consider his proposals either subversive or illegal. The rights he demanded had all been guaranteed under the Rumanian constitution. Szöcs engaged in the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression provided under the Helsinki Final Act, to which Rumania is a signatory. The object of his petitions was not only legitimate, but far from radical. All the items he requested were ones that had already existed after the introduction of Communism in Rumania, during the postwar regime of Prime Minister Petru Groza. The requested reforms would in no way threaten or inhibit the existing political, economic or social order in Rumania.

But Rumania is a country where only one nation, one culture, one church is tolerated: the Rumanian. Where Hungarian and German minorities are not permitted to maintain cultural institutions or any organizations which could defend their rights, either as individuals or as minorities.

There are *no* Hungarian schools in Rumania, whereas such schools had existed previously for centuries. There are only Hungarian classes, which can only be formed under the strictest of regulations, where the language of instruction in the sciences, history and geography is Rumanian.

There is no Hungarian university in Rumania. A bilingual institution, created in 1958 when the 150-year-old Hungarian

university of Kolozsvár was closed down, has suffered a radical decrease in Hungarian-language instruction in the humanities, and in subjects embodying the particular culture of national minorities. In 1985, a total of only 5 students were admitted to study Hungarian literature and to become teachers of Hungarian. This is the number allotted to 2.5 million Hungarians, the largest national minority in Europe. The only drama school to train Hungarian actors has also become bilingual.

All cultural relations between Rumania and Hungary, but especially between the Hungarian minority and Hungary, have been eliminated. There are no international cultural events in Rumania, nothing that would promote European cultural exchange.

Existing Hungarian and German television and radio broadcasts in Rumania were completely eliminated early this year. Public statues of Hungarian and German historical figures have all been demolished, and those that have been erected in their place are ones that portray figures whose sole function is to further the animosity between Rumanians and the minorities.

Rumania is a Communist country where only one church is tolerated: the Rumanian Orthodox Church. Among the many institutions of this national church we can find the flourishing monasteries of Moldavia. But no other denominations have been allowed to maintain their own monasteries. Rumania is a country where priests are beaten to death and Bibles are recycled into toilet paper.

Rumania is a country where censorship exists already in the dreams and thoughts of the writer: a pre-natal censorship, the abortion of thought before it can even come to life. And where this pre-natal censorship fails, and a thought *is* born, its bearer suffers the cruelest retaliation.

The persecution of Szöcs is not only persistent, but expert, ingenious and determined. Up until October 15, he spent 8 to 10 hours a day in the interrogation room. He cannot use his typewriter, because as soon as he tries to, the police break in. All his manuscripts, his notes and personal letters are confiscated. His telephone is bugged, he does not receive *any* mail whatsoever. Whoever he talks to in the street must report the conversation to the police. He is denied his passport, and letters of invitation sent by French, German or Hungarian universities never arrive. He cannot

publish his works or pursue his career. In the streets he is followed, day and night, and his apartment is bugged. He lives in a social vacuum artificially created by the Rumanian authorities.

Allow me to quote a few passages from the letters he managed to send through dangerous channels. The final word should be his. These words reflect the horrific atmosphere in which a European writer must live in 1985:

"Don't ever be surprised if you hear someone quoting the exact words of our most intimate conversations—what we talked about in the car, in bed or out in the fields. I've heard such tapes; they've played them to me several times."

"I have seen photographs of us. For example, when we were stepping out of that old Lutheran church in X, remember? You look so beautiful in that picture, holding the ominous book they were after. Even the bookmark is clearly visible: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain.'"

"No dramatist can imagine such a situation: I am sitting in the interrogation room, under the spotlights, and because these bright lights are directed straight into my eyes, my tears keep falling—they are running down my face all the while, and in the meantime they read our letters to me. This crude voice coming from the darkness behind me, reading the lines dearest to me. . .I would once like to write all this down as dramatically as it really happened, but I don't think I'll be able to. At least, not for a long time."

"I am exhausted and need all my strength to finish this letter; they could break in at any moment. The candle is running out (and, you know, especially around All Saints' Day, you cannot buy candles in town), my fingers are trembling, and I cannot see—spending each day under bright lights and fists, each night in candlelight. And this is my last candle."

1985

GEZA SZOCS

Commentary on an Old Review

(Billboard-poetry: ambiguous, harsh, journalistic):
Arpád Visky gravediggers, have you called a conference,
a production seminar,
have you called a brief meeting, a meeting? what was it like,
was it successful?
who's the head gravedigger?
Hey sutler wenches, what's going on?
have you heard that Arpi died?
friends everywhere tomorrow!
Or will there be any?! who knows!
is anyone mourning? who are the mourners?
gravediggers! are we on schedule?
is anyone still unburied?
Goddamn it, shovelers!
you must increase production!

•

September 6, 1980, Saturday night, 7:30.[1] *As I entered the foyer of the Hungarian Theater, there between two pillars, in a glass cage with wooden bars, with absolute authenticity, was Visky Arpád. He was moving about, pacing back and forth, pathetically, lit up by a spotlight like an insect, scratching at the glass with such silent helplessness that the audience clustering about him in a big circle could not really enjoy what they were seeing. ALL THIS IS LIKE AN ACCIDENT ON THE STREET, someone next to me said, and it really was like an accident. Yes, for stage events take us by surprise in a different way than real life events, and is this case the spectacle was especially powerful because it allowed one to forget that he was in a theater. Yes: Tompa, the Director, and Visky, managed—and this is the utmost—to communicate to the audience in such a way that they forgot that what they were seeing was theater.*

•

Do not think that we forgot you.[2]
Once, we nearly opened our mouths to speak out—
but, well, there were so many excused absences.

Gum mushrooms,
especially mushrooms on the gums,
and mouth bloat,
diphtheria
and uvulitis, and heart obesity:

so you see, with such sicknesses, it is very difficult.
But tell us, Arpád Visky,
what play did you put on for your jailers?[3]
Did they get your political skits?
what *is* the Danube-delta like in winter?
(Billboard-poetry, indeed!) just how happy
would you say a delta labor camp is?
What did you put on for the prisoners, your fellow prisoners

and for the mice laborers and for the birds in the reeds?
ARPAD VISKY, TO WHOM DO YOU PLAY IN THE GRAVE?
who is your audience: deadolescents? or the earth spirit, the geo-
demon?
is it your voice I now hear?—"I am playing Tatrangi"—

are you playing[4] Tatrangi at the moment he touches down?
the way your favorite hero, David Tatrangi, when he lands,
has his hand on the direction stick,
standing in his flying machine with flapping wings,
the way he lands Home
in Jókai's *Utopia,*[5]
most certainly this is your role in the earth.

•

Good news!
the Hungarians have won the world cup in tiddly-winks.
His Holiness the Pope prayed for us.

Light is thrown upon mysterious forces all the time. A noose hangs
between the laws.
Possibly, the missing 80% of the universe has been recovered.
The Fifth Reciprocal Effect has been discovered:
but all this is of no use to you, Arpád Visky.
And I feel this poem isn't good enough.

Let's do it rabbit eye fashion,
boiled lobster fashion,
si nu mai scrium poezii bune,
and we do not yet good poetry write,
and no force or Reciprocal Effect has untied
the noose around your neck

staring each other out in a blood-smeared obituary:
the suffering
and the reckoning.

•

Arpád Visky is one of our most talented actors, but this time, in the role of Woyzeck, this man whose personality has been smacked and kicked out of him, this miserable person who has been driven mad, perhaps because he was in bad form? was he oppressed by some dark presentiment in connection with this role? anyway: that night except for a few outstanding moments, he was unable to perform brilliantly, the way he usually does.

Still, as I wrote in my review six years ago:

From now on, whenever I pass through the foyer of the theater, I will always think of Visky as a monument of defenselessness and helplessness, and he will be more vividly present for me than those stone statues of theatrical notables exhibited there that we seldom notice.

•

The Fifth Force, the Black Reciprocal Effect

lurks behind gravity,
with two hands, with a yellow bandanna, it helps fruit to drop,
it leans out of the windows of the free fall,
adjusts the pillow under Visky's head.

> Rope, freedom and handicraft
> and acting and law all blend.
> A nigger is sleeping in the cotton-field
> and he who passes by, bows his head.

NOTES

[1] In the late 1970s/early 1980s, I worked as a non-party-member independent journalist for one of the "ruling" party's newspapers, *The Truth*, published in Kolozsvár, Rumania. The *italicized* parts of this text are word-for-word quotations from the review of a play in the September 9, 1980 edition of *The Truth*, which I wrote about the Woyzeck performance by the Sepsiszentgyörgy Company in Kolozsvár, directed by Tompa.

[2] (From a letter written to Arpád Visky, November 1984): Last August I wrote an article on the plays Tompa has directed, at the request of the *Het Weekly*, and in it, when writing about Woyzeck, I remembered you in print. The Assistant Editorial Director phoned me immediately: they would publish my article, BUT OBVIOUSLY WITHOUT ANY REFERENCE TO VISKY—and, he added: I PRESUME YOU WERE JOKING. This was already six months after your arrest. Since I was not joking, I could not agree to the publication of the article. A few days later, I heard that this Assistant Editorial Director remembered our conversation in these words: had they agreed to publish the article as I wrote it, the following day the three main editors would have been dismissed. "Perhaps it is all the same to Szöcs, but certainly not to us," this otherwise fine and good-intentioned Assistant Editorial Director added, who, strange as it may seem, along with his boss, was fired a few weeks later in spite of all this watchfulness and caution. Well, in that case, they might as well have published the article mentioning you, I might add now—if one is going to get fired regardless, it is all the same, no? Of course, if this article does get published, everyone will be certain that it has something to do with the firing of the editors, and I will be the scapegoat! "That man only brings trouble."

Something else: through Andris Visky, I contacted some Transylvanian actors now living in Hungary, with a request that they select some poems for a public reading,

or set up some other kind of performance, and turn the proceeds over to you, not mainly for the money, but as a public show of solidarity.

Months later, the answer came and it was this: why us?

[3] (Excerpts from some broodings)
For example, the poet can write for his desk drawer, as well as the composer, and even a painter who has been locked out of society can be duly appreciated by future generations. But what hope is there for an actor, locked up in a prison cell, exiled from his stage?

[4] (From a letter to Visky, November 1984): Thus I don't have time right now to turn Mór Jókai's novel into a play, but I promise to do so in a few months. The question is, of course: where could it be performed? And could you be invited to play the leading role? As I see it, no theater here would touch it.

[5] Re. this Utopia: according to Jókai's prophecy, as he put it in *The Novel of the Future,* in the 1960s there will be formed a utopian state in the Danube-delta under the leadership of David Tatrangi, which will be a republic of plenty, liberty, and equality. "He who travels toward the Black Sea along the river, when leaving Tulcsa, traveling on the Szulina fork on his own electric boat, will see on both banks permanent garden cities. . .he will see an infinite line of mansions. . . and magnificent hotels along the promenades. . .There is no prison in this Utopia . . .In this Utopia no one's life or freedom are endangered."

EPILOGUE

Arpád Visky was a man dissatisfied with himself. In the autumn of 1982, this is how I expressed his self-critical, self-ironical stance:

> When I was a child (he muses for a long time)
> I was exchanged (by mistake). I was exchanged
> (he twists his palms outward) for a poor and pit-
> iable gypsy kid, and I often (he becomes sad) think
> about this: that the poor, real Arpi Visky shivers
> in a gypsy tent in the rain and cold somewhere
> while all this time (he gets angry) *this* fucking
> gypsy kid (pounding his chest) lives like a king
> and (he tosses down a shot) drinks and—(hand wave
> of resignation)

1986

JOHN YAU

The Drawings of Lydia Dona and Lawre Stone

For the generation of abstract painters who began exhibiting in America in the late '50s and '60s, the fabrication of a literal surface and the elision of subject matter were the approved goals. If you could achieve an empirical space (or literal surface) that could be equated with a grand theme, you were carrying the torch held by such pioneers of abstraction as Kasimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman. In order to be taken seriously by the art world (curators, collectors, dealers and critics), the painter had to accept various proscriptions regarding his or her approach. If the painter decided to either reject or step outside of consensus opinion, then the art world's response was either scorn or neglect.

One of the obvious ways the situation has changed in the '80s is due to the new status of collectors and dealers. Through publications such as catalogues, the attention of the mass media, and other propaganda factors, various collectors have been able to elevate their collections to museum status. As arbiters of culture, they are able to influence other museums and magazines. Whereas dominant culture (the art world's version) was once defined by an oligarchy, now it seems to be made up of dictators and their kingdoms.

Beneath this more visible change is another less visible though more important one. It is quite apparent that younger artists such as Lydia Dona and Lawre Stone have rejected a linear, formally biased reading of history. Although the notion of aristocratic lineage is not dead (witness the theoretically correct postmodern stances taken by Peter Halley and Sherrie Levine), it does not seem to have quite the grip it once did. The clearest sign of the growing rift between the generation of younger abstract artists (Bill Jensen, Gregory Amenoff, Lydia Dona, and Lawre Stone, for example) and the older established one (Robert Ryman, Kenneth Noland, and Frank Stella, say) revolves around their relationships to official history. In the last few years, it has become quite apparent that a

number of younger artists are reexamining history in order to discover their own authenticity. Certainly, the influence of early American Modernists, such as Arthur Dove and Marsden Hartley, has not always been positive. Other young artists, however, have decided to look elsewhere.

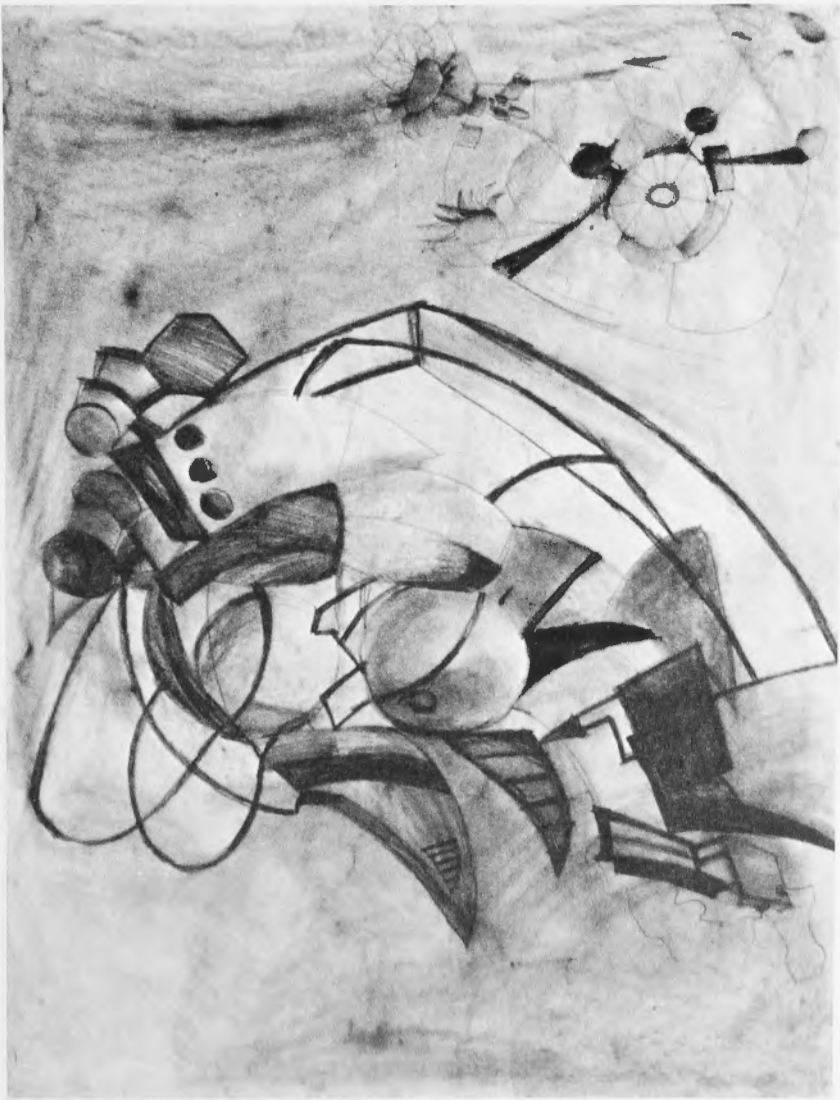
Space: the word itself conjures up all sorts of associations. Lydia Dona and Lawre Stone can be said to explore all the meanings and associations inherent in the word. In her work from 1985-86, Dona explored a spatiality that bears comparison with the work of Roberto Matta and Yves Tanguy. Her images suggested crystal formations, as well as space station debris. In 1987, the artist began exploring the possibilities of all-over compositions. In the recent paintings, Dona layers shapes and patterns over and within a depthless, lightfilled space. She is capable of making the picture plane seem as if it is bending, rippling, or falling away. Some areas feel solid, while others are optical. The shapes and patterns allude to computers, as well as electrocardiograms. The viewer feels as if he or she is floating or falling.

Lawre Stone derives her images from technical books and science manuals. She transforms Cezanne's cones and spheres into receptacles barnacled with history. While the images are signs for order and connectedness, her placement of them is disruptive. Systems abut and overlap without adding up to something whole. This is not to suggest her drawings depict chaos, because they don't. Embedded within their seeming randomness is a sense of order, which we never quite seem to grasp.

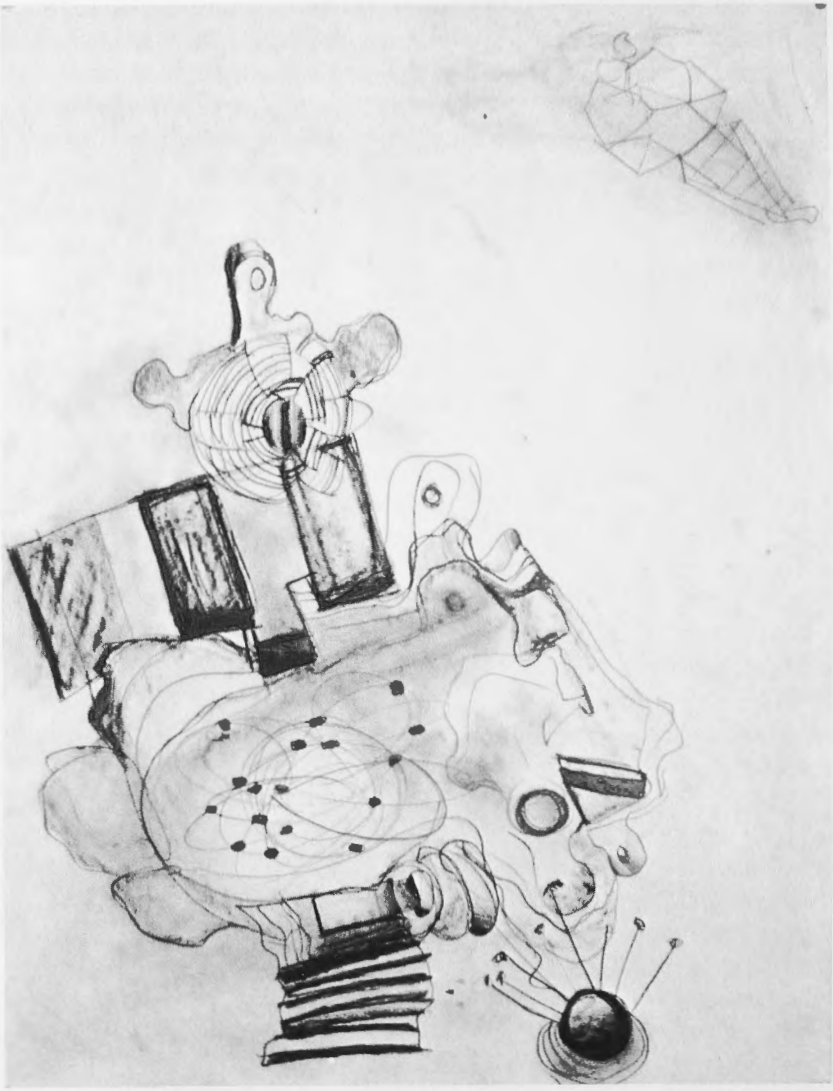
Jackson Pollock began pouring paint shortly after the end of World War II, and the release of two atom bombs onto Japan. Lydia Dona and Lawre Stone make their work in the '80s, after images of the space program were imprinted in their minds. If Barnett Newman's singular achievement is the emptying out of space, as formalist critics suggest, then Dona and Stone address the way space (science fiction and scientific fact) has been filled. Whether as abstract artists or as ecologists, we have to deal with our history, its debris.

LYDIA DONA

Four Drawings



UNTITLED, 1985
graphite on paper, 50 x 38"



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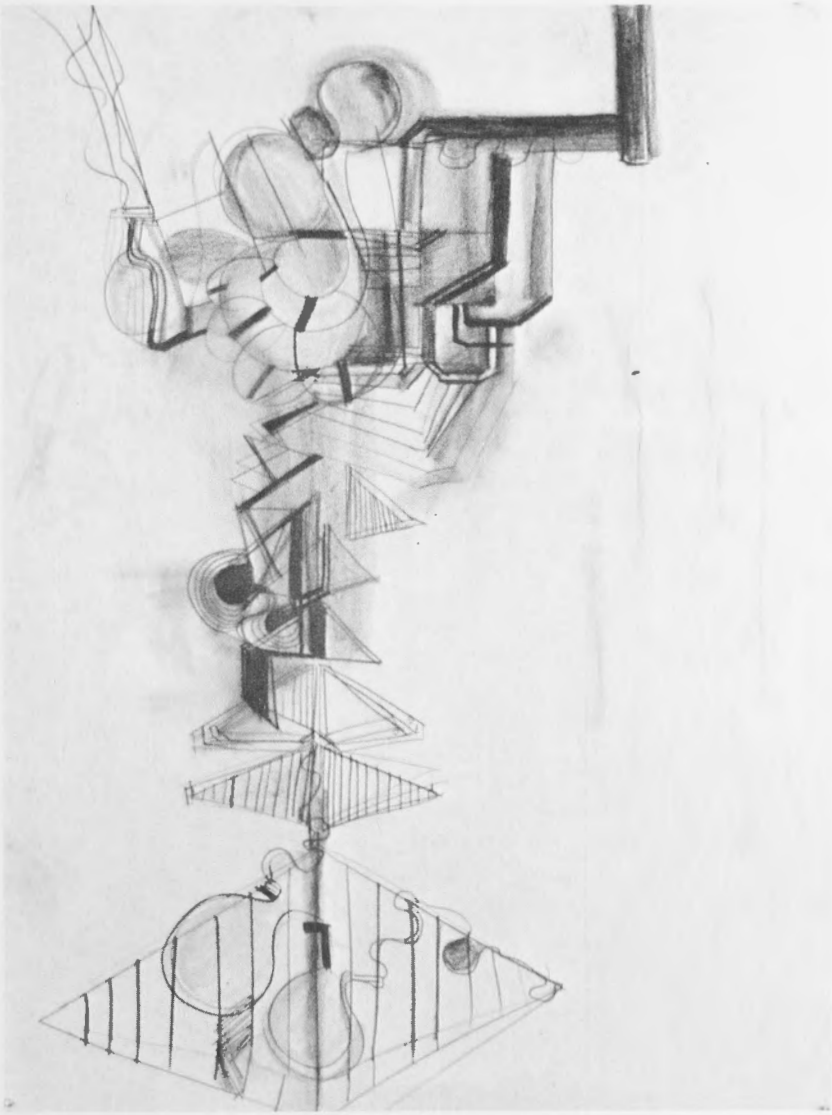

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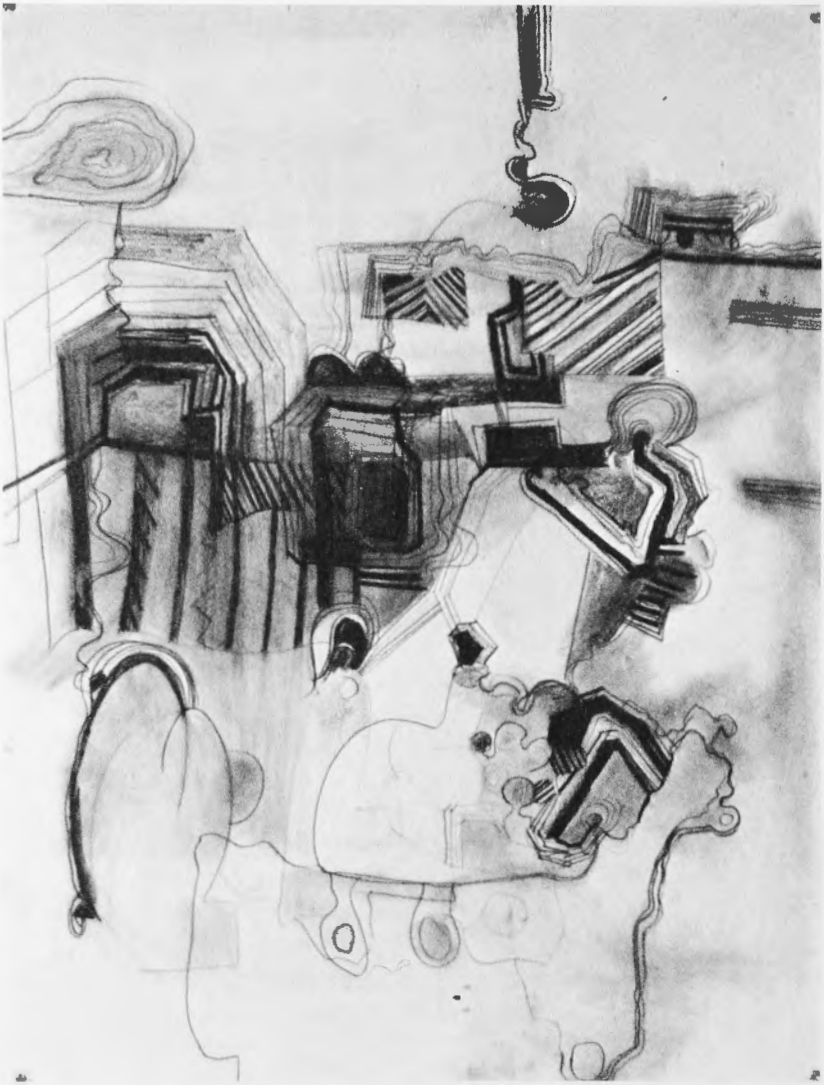

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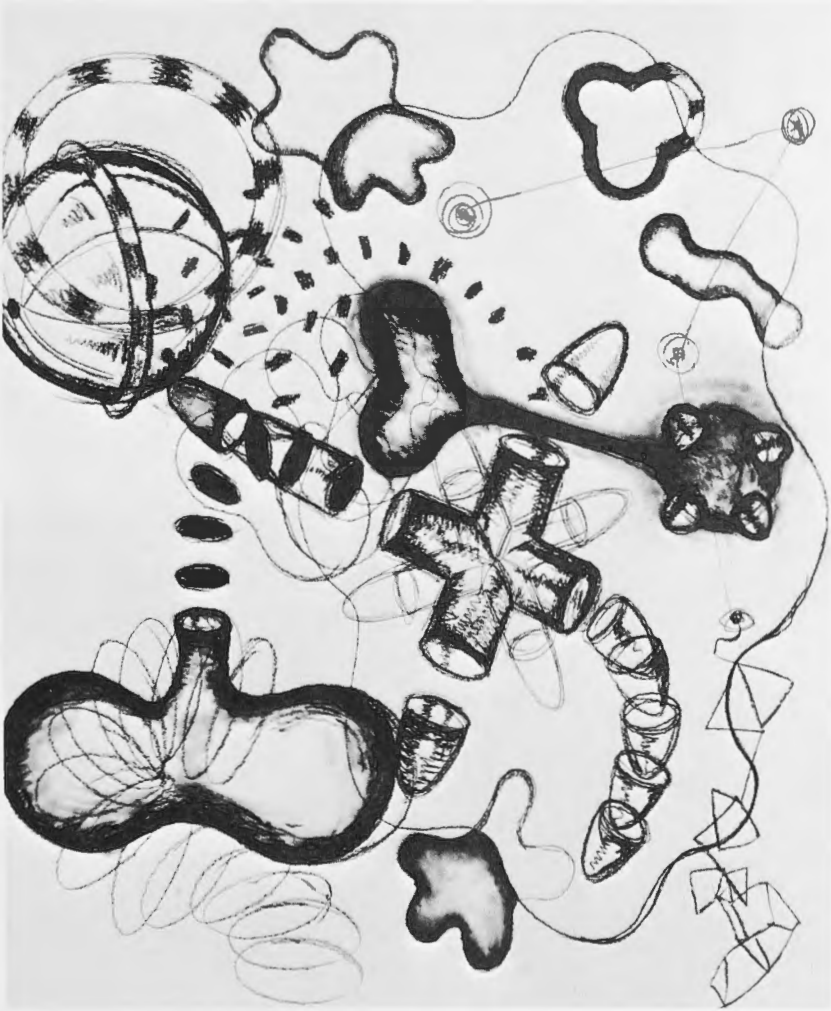
graphite on paper, 50 x 38"

LAWRE STONE

Four Drawings



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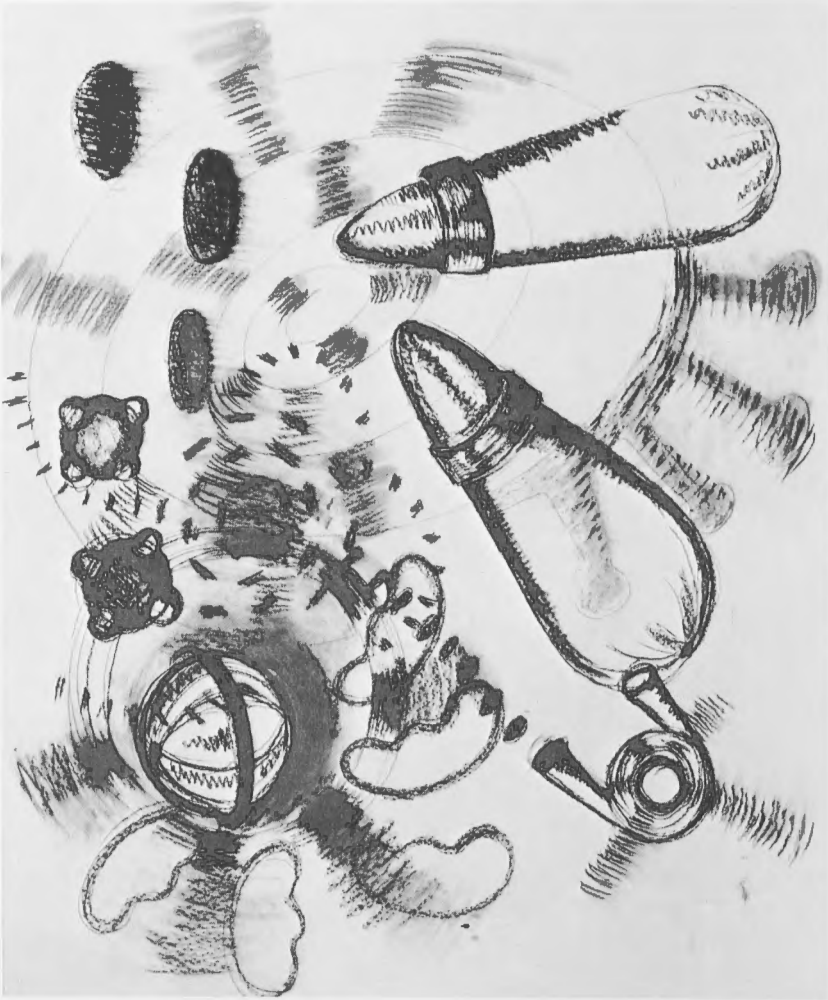

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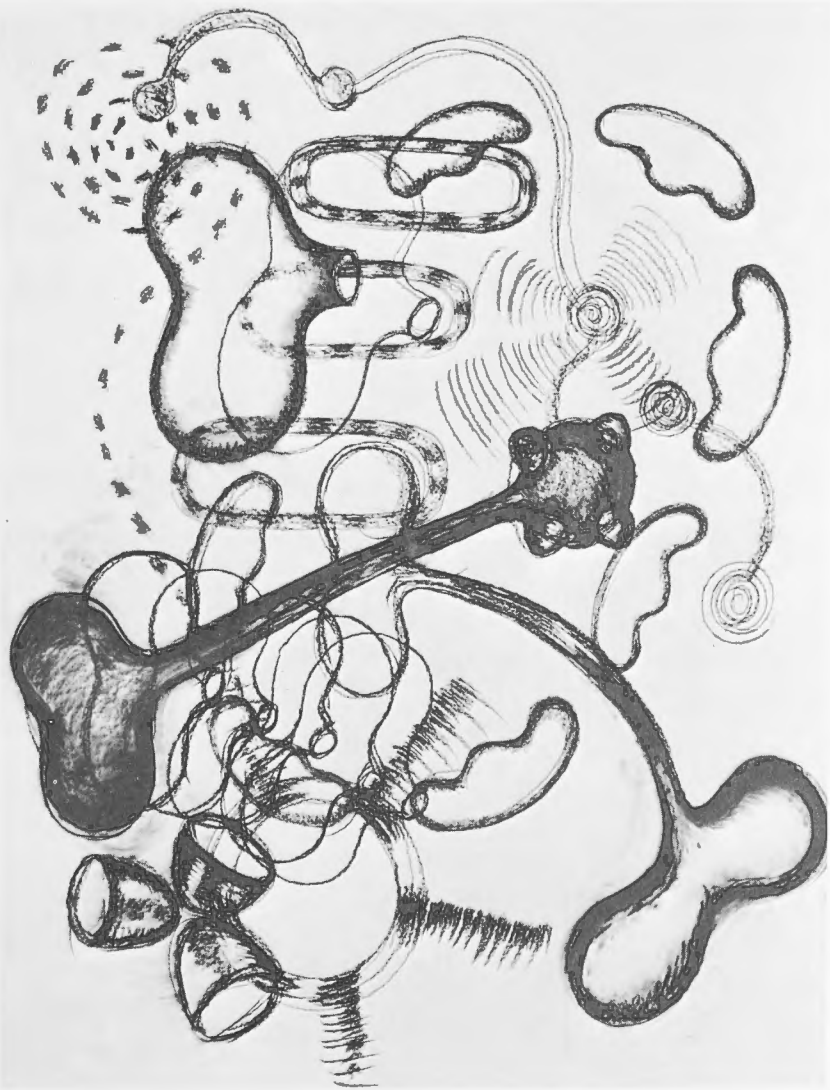

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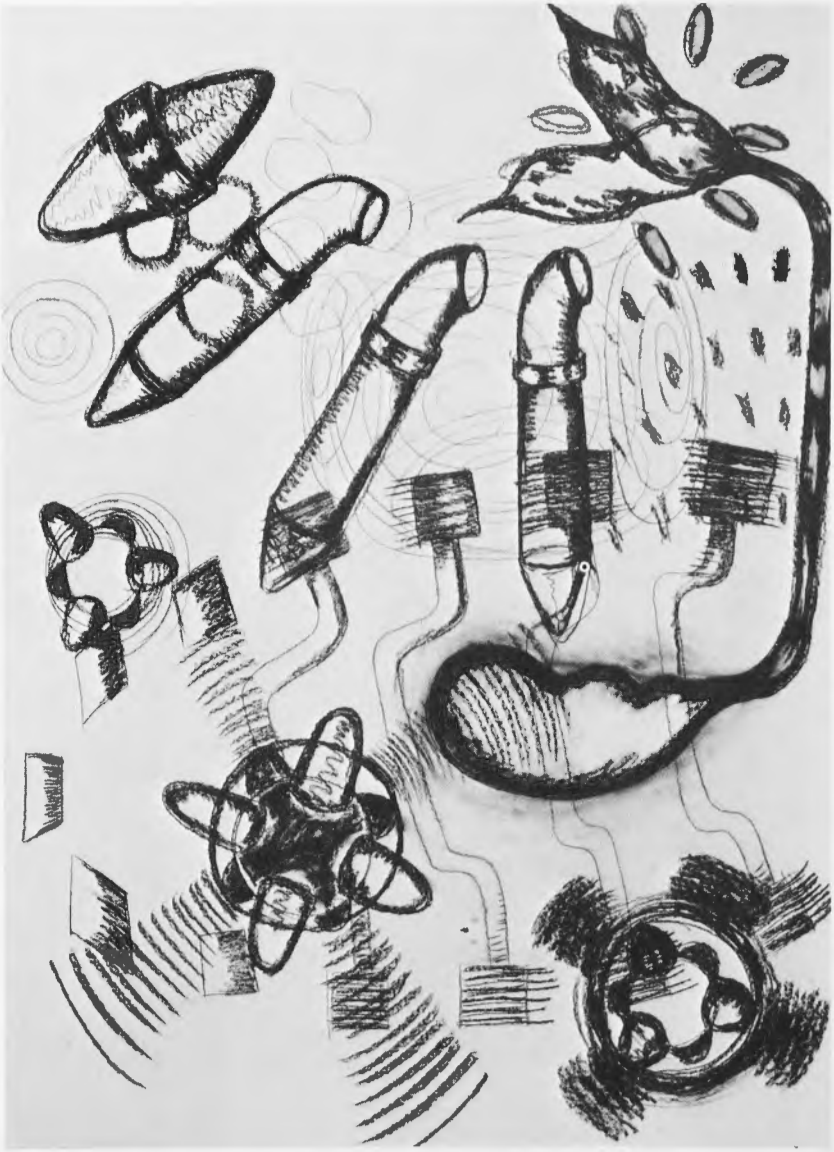

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60 x 48"

MARJORIE WELISH

Three Poems

PUBLICLY SILENT

Events do not imply they are sealed off from each other:
you move so rapidly through awareness
and the self-awareness drizzling over it.

We hold onto each other, a bird and its beak,
but awareness brings us to the intersection
of perishable paper

and quietly strolls our eyes along the cut
as it makes of our bodies two
celestial phenomena: desire and knowledge

telling of many cuts in situ
until aware of our eyes in situ, although halved,
to draw our injury along the cut

and make of our one body, two,
and exact of our two repossessed bodies, a rent
which falls from rock to rock to rock.

TWO LINES FROM REDON

Because incompleteness is somehow its real form,
a spirit,
an innovative mist
will harbor effect of cause, the ether of cause
or effect, but not both.

The effect of a hidden cause,
or what the gypsy knew
in sinews fatigued, but fatigued
by some glorious, invisible agency
or van

meets us, like some ever-esteemed adversary.
Across a field, the only life ever lived
in pleasure
attains the stature of a rival.
But ends are not known

in advance of actions; only in retrospect
a falling leaf is whispered.
The wheels will pale
in allied but different
fragments and fragrances.

BLOOD OR COLOR

Across a room,
a handshake in a late, large design
has caught the overflow of the heart, the human figure as a
    source.
"Have you sent me my bouquet of gladiolas?" the poet asks.
"No, I haven't," I say, "but I have emphasized it."

Across a room, a writer queries,
"Have you reached my claim check and my watercolors, have
    you introduced
                a bouquet of gladiolas?"
"No," I say, compressed in ambiguous space,
"but I have brought you your bouquet of gladiators."

"No," I say,
"but as in the arena of this room,
interrogation is impaled on intimacy: gladiators burst
and metamorphose into the womanly bright remains of our
    city."

This pediment forfeits nothing; these gladiolas are
    inextinguishable.
The most brilliant blue eyes obtained by natural means
flare as if in a greeting, herd or flock.
A herd or flock is numerically great.
Is this my gift: the human figure pierced and confessed?
But the sky had altered:

Pierced and splashed, and driven
like the arena of command
drives the volume, line and light
of rooms we enter,

here is a man, some victory;
some victory, though not all of it,
some victory with outstretched arm
like Alexander,

the marble face
with hurtful tools at the deepest level.
"They are afraid of you.
That's why they are so obsequious."

GERALD BURNS

The Myth of Accidence, Book VII

Artemis it is, with bow and greyhound coursing along, the cast yellow
so, she is blonde or reddish, the strap for quiver bejeweled (adjustable?) at scapula
the dog with a collar. She has a crescent floating on her hair.
Verbs are curbs. That which, loving, descends where "no birds sing"
experiences gelatinization of the verb, frozen Tanais
ig-mobile. "Consider," I once said to a psychologist, "the Eskimo"
as Lucretius might raise tribes with eyes in breastbone
a cure for myopia the looking through fine-sawn bone lattice.
These trees, dark so the figure can be light, are in the branch an oakleaf
cluster, what the Antipodes saw (like a tie worn upside down, Alouettes)
the Choice of Hercules or Paris stochastic as a fork.
Tissier in Old Bond Street has an oval garnet pendant (large, cabochon)
enameled red and green with diamonded oval hanging from it ending with three gold balls
—the mate to it in Johnson Walker & Tolhurst, Burlington Arcade
a bit more worn, minus the case and chain but identical, mock-Tudor.
Inns showing the magic jug, rustic fingerpad on the deermouthed airhole whorled.
Mat weights (miscalled sleeve-weights) call up wind-infested houses
may be, Jane Whittaker's antique pennycandy weights in Mile End, matched
London Museum set (also brass), lion weights in the BM (the Asshurnasirpal frieze

lions upstairs ungonaded and run to the king in cages with a
raise-up door so like Mike and Missy's
circus ones, there.
Ducks in the canal behind COM/Energy, and a softball-sized ball
any old trash, beamed at by Williams, became beamed-at trash
BEING, collaborating in romanticizable durée
as language spits, solder with flux at the core dribbling tree
gum.
She circles warily around a herm, with her dog, as if Elizabeth
left Dudley one of her naked, whiffing a perfumed Goa ball
and that association, jewel-encrusted, lasted.
Upstairs in a room no one can find Dee, aged beyond compute
talks to himself, the stars, angels, his equipment like Turner's
record-book
reduced to its binding to carry watercolor cakes half dissolved to
natural shapes.
Gods are always a problem and it is probably best to render
them
like Tiepolo's thrown up through the ceiling, looking down at
you
like the memory of the Renaissance, perspectival because earthy
the way a vein of sand will stain your hand yellow as turmeric.
I think of hearts, fatty tissue and clinging veins rendered in
porcelain,
the Indians who liked removing them with obsidian
having provided Dr. Dee with a circular flat one (cylinder in
section), good platform
for such a heart, exhibiting even the colors as colors though
reflected in black. Break 'em and a clean white line would
interrupt the glaze.
Write on parchment dusted on the underside with talcum on the
stone, lift,
read, erase.
We blur what we touch sometimes, just by living as long as we
do—
our moist interior surrounded by a drying avocado
or prow like a ball mace with Punch's mouth coming at you out
of mist
the intimations of wan life in the pages of *Phantastes,* spirit
smoked

in iodine vapor, bromine, businesscard propped over the crystal
Misses Stein and Toklas jolie, even Arp essaying printed wicker.
Arraigneth as the spider texturizing in low fields becomes
    Riemannian
funnels and curves the dew a dust catastrophizes for us
shape for its own sake Klein or Euler would applaud in the
    morning
a thing bending gracefully around what's there for purposes of
    its own.
"The eare is a rational sence, and a chiefe iudge of proportion,
    but in our kind of riming what proportion
is there kept, where there remaines such a confusd inequalitie
    of sillables?"—Campion.
His heard what he *knew,* weight as lead shot in a capsule flips,
    up
inertiality of meaning imposed on the ideal pattern, Q.E.D.
It's awkward, hearing a life in a sentence lace from a wrist might
    ape
(cuffs now turning over sleeves again, Pepys notes on attire) the
    sumptuary
laws Cromwell established not unlike those instituted by
    Charles II.
Cupido in Louis XIV fountain statuary devolves to inexplicably
    fat baby
the gold on the "comet" (star with multiple-arced tail) above the
globe in armillary sphere atop Busch-Reisinger, now all
    scaffolding, faded,
museum now shut.
Tsunami, nefesh, what would Larkin say to other tongues
    announcing contexts
men leaping across long fields, ambulances, Mr. Bleaney and
    chiffon weddings
poems in a book. Checkbook entries looked at would be poetry
in Arcady, each shepherdess (still thinking of the lace dipped
    and fired)
with a heartshaped ruby at her porcelain throat. Dressing them
    is like furnishing a doll room,
billiard table no larger than a playing card, balls smaller than
    peas, velvet felt.

There is chagrin in the presence of the orchestrated small.
Searcy says it is easy to imagine an ant so small that it has no
inner workings, and John Dee thinks the point may have begun
creation.
Reprieving the obsolete prolixity of shade, umbrage may be
taken to spread (that
is to say extend) a darker lawn like oil in gobbed smears, Tissot
flowerpots luminous
from taking finer strokes to make the lawn at all, young woman
with croquet mallet
exhibiting her estate. They work, in their straw hats, against a
time line.
Most activities are sideways from the need of defending,
hemisphere
is grass never to roll (miracle) into the flowerpot on its side.
In any case a Morisot of occupied lawn all sloshed in does for
how "lush"
suits summer grass in experience and more importantly memory,
gowned people record.
Complexions attach themselves to seasons as Helga loden-caped
in boots
accompanies her tree and Hogarth's Shrimp Girl enjoys day
yellow
as projector's bulb (the picture cooler gray and pink) age
tinting bare canvas.

WOLFGANG GIEGERICH

Deliverance from the Stream of Events: Okeanos and the Circulation of the Blood

In his book *H_2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness,* Ivan Illich discusses the history of the imagination of water as stuff. Water has not always been H_2O, as we might assume being used to our scientific thinking. That it came to be H_2O, after once having been mythical water, has a long history.

An essential element of this history is, according to Illich, the invention of the circulation of blood by William Harvey (1628). For it was blood which for the first time gave rise to the idea that a stuff circulates within itself, an idea which in the long run became essential also for city planning. As Illich shows, the idea that we now take for granted, that water, just as it is piped into the city, must leave the city by its sewers is very modern. I quote a longer passage from Illich's text:

> The modern idea of a 'stuff' that follows its destined path, streaming forever back to its source, was still foreign to Renaissance thought. The concept of 'circulation' and not only its embodiment in the blood represents a profound break with the past. The newness of the idea of circulation is perhaps as crucial for the transformation of the imagination as was Kepler's decision to replace the translucent spheres carrying a luminous planet (in which Copernicus still believed) with the new elliptical orbits traveled by rocky globes. Circulation is as new and as fundamental an idea as gravitation, preservation of energy, evolution, or sexuality. But neither the radical newness of the idea of circulating 'stuff' nor its impact on the constitution of modern space has been studied with the same attention that was given to Kepler's laws or to the ideas of Newton, Helmholtz, Darwin, or Freud.

> Bodies had always been able to *circle* around a center. The abstract concept of circular motion had lent itself to influential metaphors. The presence of the center 'altogether at once' at each point of its circle's periphery had been a symbol for God, soul, and eternity. Time too was thought by many schools to pass in circles. The phoenix was the symbol of renewal by fire; Plato described cyclical renewal as a periodic flood. Souls were able to be born and reborn again. But the connection between 'waters' and what we call circulation had not been made. Before Harvey the 'circulation' of a liquid meant what we call 'evaporation': the separation of a 'spirit' from a 'water', for instance the distillation of liquor from wine, or the process of 'spiritualization' by which blood was assumed to pass through the septum (we now consider impenetrable) from the left to the right of the brain. The idea of a material that flows forever back to its own source constitutes a major innovation in the perception of water, a transubstantiation of its 'stuff.'
>
> The first liquid to which 'circulation' was ascribed was the blood. . .[1]

The radical change in the imagination with the beginning of the modern age emphasized by Illich cannot be underscored too much. This change indeed has the character of revolution. It means an ontological transformation: a change of man and his world in their *Being*. It is not merely a shift in scientific theories: the world itself and we along with it have truly become different through this seemingly only intellectual revolution.

But as regards the invention of the circulation of blood by Harvey in the 17th century, it seems to me that the radical newness is not exactly where Illich is placing it. It is not really completely new that a stuff, and water at that, circulates in itself and returns to its source. Therefore the undisputed revolutionary novelty of the discovery of the circulation of blood seems to me to be of a different nature.

For the idea of a stream of water circulating within itself and returning to its beginning belongs to the oldest, universal stock of mythical imaginings. It is the idea of an ocean completely surrounding the flat disc of the earth: Okeanos. Okeanos originally was not a sea proper, but a river, and accordingly masculine and referred to

as "Father Okeanos" in contrast to the depth-psychological equation of sea = the unconscious = mother. He is called by Homer "the origin of the Gods", "the generation of all" because with his inexhaustible procreative power he had begotten everything with Tethys, the "mother", the receptive primal water goddess.[2] Similarly, the Egyptian primal ocean Nun, who as "World Encircler" surrounded the earth, was termed "Father of the Gods".[3] There even is an extant early pictorial representation of the primal stream surrounding the earth. A New-Babylonian map of the earth from the early 6th century B.C., which however dates back to an original from the 8th or 9th century B.C. and is presumably the oldest map of the world at large, shows the primal ocean, here called "Bitter River", flowing around the circular disc of the earth.[4]

Kerényi says of the Greek primal ocean, "However, Okeanos was not an ordinary river god, since his stream was not an ordinary stream. Even after everything originated from him, he still flows *in a circle* at the outermost edge of the world, *streaming back into himself*. The rivers, springs and wells, the entire sea, they all continuously originate from his wide, strong stream. When the world was already under the rule of Zeus, he alone was allowed to remain in his old place, which actually was no place, but mere streaming, border and separation from the beyond,"[5] just as according to Hornung the Egyptian Nun is the "world-encompassing border between world and non-world, between Being and Non-Being."[6] Okeanos is pure "circular streaming."[7]

Even in Plato, that is to say outside the ancient mythological world, we find, in a philosophical myth describing the structure of the world and underworld, the following statement about the rivers: "Indeed, there are some that move in circles, wind themselves around the earth one or several times like serpents and then. . . pour back again. . . . Thus there are quite a few. . . streams. . .of which the largest and the one flowing all around as the outermost is so-called Okeanos."[8]

Here we have in all clarity the conception of a water continuously streaming back into its source, in unending circulation. Even the etymological meaning of the word Okeanos, derived from Semitic, is supposed to be "circling".[9] Thus the application of the idea of circulation to a liquid stuff cannot be what is novel about Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood and what brought

about an ontological change in modern man and his world. Harvey's discovery indeed follows a very old mythical conception, an archetypal idea, and is with respect to its content and form downright conventional.

What nevertheless makes Harvey's invention undoubtedly revolutionary must be something else. What this is becomes apparent if we compare the two ideas: on the one hand the idea of a world stream, enclosing the outermost edge of the earth is the border between Being and Non-Being, world and non-world, everything that is and happens—on the other hand a river circulating *in* man. This contrast must be supplemented by the complementary facts that at the time when Okeanos encompassed the earth, there didn't exist a circulating (blood-) stream in man, and that at that time when the circulation of the blood was discovered, Okeanos no longer flowed around the circular earth. The earth had by that time long turned into a globe, and with the expeditions of Columbus (1492), Vasco da Gama (1498) and Magellan (who first sailed *around* the world, 1519-1522), the river encircling, and marking the border of the earth disc had been breached, so that the idea of an Okeanos had psychologically become obsolete. The breach through the enclosure into the open, into the infinite, had been sealed. Once and for all Okeanos was reduced to a mere ocean, which, even though immense, would no longer separate world and non-world. At its other bank one is no longer in danger of falling into nothingness; to the contrary, other continents just like the familiar ones open there before us, the "New World" (i.e. still truly "world"!) in contrast to what only then began to be termed the "old world". And even beyond the earth there is no nought, but the vastness of an infinite number of additional worlds.

The almost literally world-shaking quality of this change becomes evident through this comparison: what psychologically or imaginally happened through the discovery of the circulation of blood (or what is reflected in it) is the transposition of the archetypal idea of the primal stream from out in the world to the interior of man. In the mythical age, this archetypal idea was projected into cosmic reality; now, in the scientific age, the same idea is experienced as projected onto the inside of the human body: the coursing of the blood in our veins has become the new carrier of the ancient mythical idea. Man has so to speak incorporated, interiorized

Okeanos, thus freeing the world from the primal river encircling it. But perhaps it would be more fitting to say that man is the victim of this process of transposition of Okeanos. With reference to a mythological motif not too far removed from ours, the motif of the four rivers (e.g. the four rivers of paradise, Gen. 2:10-14, the four rivers flowing from Mount Meru in Indian mythology, the Germanic four rivers originating from the spring Hvergelmir, etc.), David Miller formulated a similar observation: "When the mythological symbol-system dropped away in favor of a more sophisticated view of the cosmos, the rivers went underground into the human body,"[10] namely in the form of the four humors of the body in the Medieval doctrine of the temperaments.

Modern biology concretistically "acts out" this very same imaginal process of the incorporation of the ocean that Miller and I are trying to critically reflect. It has the same idea, but projects it into the literal organism and its environment. It *believes* in the interiorization of the sea through discovering a similar composition of the ions in sea water and in blood (a fact of which A.J. Ziegler kindly reminded me) and by imagining accordingly blood as the sea taken inside the organism. Biologically we therefore say that man has not really become independent from the ocean as the original element of life, he rather carries the sea, "in" whose medium he still lives, around with him inside of his body, in the reduced form of the blood system. Biology, by scientifically demonstrating the idea of the interiorization of the sea to be a literal fact, fulfills psychologically the task of completing the process of this interiorization. Now the interiorization is an avowed theory, whereas with Harvey this interiorization, even if it had already become a fact, remained implicit and unconscious. If it is "scientifically proven" and an objective fact, independent of our thinking and rooted in the reality of our physical nature, that the circulating blood is our own inner "ocean", then the psychological undoing of the original nature of Okeanos as the stream *all around* us has become absolute: reified, physical.

This transformation in the history of the soul is truly tremendous, because it amounts to an inversion of Being, a turning inside out (or rather outside in).[11] Formerly, man existentially stood in the middle of the earth surrounded by the primal stream and knew himself to be encircled by it on all sides; today he carries the stream

of pulsating life in himself! It is obvious that this fact gave man an enormous charge or boost. For it is, as far as the objective psyche is concerned, of no small importance whether man lives with the image of the river of life surrounding everything earthly and thus also his own existence, or whether he lives with the image of the stream of life circulating in his own body. Each of the two possibilities results in a fundamentally different mode of being-in-the-world, in a different relation to himself and to the things on the earth, in an essentially different orientation outwards to the visible and tangible world and upward from the sublunar reality to the celestial sphere. Each frees man to the world in different ways and at the same time sets different limits.

In order to learn what existence in a world surrounded by Okeanos means, we must enter more closely into the mythical imagination of this complex of reality. For the Greek world, I rely largely on the material gathered by Onians.[12] Okeanos was not limited to his manifestation as a river of water. He was more specifically imagined as a serpent girding the world as a solid belt. We already know this serpent from the Egyptian "World Encircler" cited above from Hornung, who was a serpent, as was the Germanic Midgard serpent which (according to Gylfaginning 34) lies in the sea around all countries and bites its own tail. Porphyry comments on a passage from Homer (where mention is made of an assembly of all the Gods to which only one God, Okeanos, was not able to come) that Okeanos had to hold things together. Okeanos thus not only marks the border between world and non-world in a static, geographic sense, he is rather an active and dynamic force to be compared perhaps to the iron tire around a wooden wheel of spokes: the girdle binding and holding together that which it surrounds. That is why he cannot leave, having a function on which the existence of the world depends. As late as Seneca we still hear of the "vinculum terrarum Oceanus." That he has the task of holding the earth together helps us to understand that in another culture, in the shamanistic world of Siberia, the archetypal conception corresponding to the world ocean is not experienced in the image of stream and serpent, but as the unshakable, solid belt of a mountain range (the Altai Mountains).

To be surrounded by Okeanos meant to be bound. And yet, this belt was also dynamic: pure streaming, the stream of events. The

connection between the streaming and binding in the idea of Okeanos is made by an Orphic association. In an Orphic creation myth the world egg is generated by a serpent which arose out of water and slime; and this serpent was called Chronos, a word usually translated as "time". Okeanos as the world stream, the serpent as bond, and time, all belong together in the same archetypal complex of images, as is confirmed by testimonials from other cultures. Thus, e.g., the Bantu believed, "that time is a stream returning into its own source,"[13] and the Egyptians imagined time most of all in the shape of a serpent.[14] In Greek thought, time, serpent and stream expressly come together once more in the figure of Aion. Aion is on the one hand the procreative life-fluid which, as spinal marrow and identified with *psyché,* was likewise envisioned as a serpent (cf. the Kundalini serpent in Indian thinking). On the other hand, Aion was a compelling destiny, a daimon controlling life, from which resulted the meaning of "lifetime", "period of time" ("eon"), and "eternity." For Heraclitus, Aion is the power controlling the changes of the world. As daimon he is represented as a winged lion-headed but otherwise human figure encoiled by a serpent. According to the Orphics, Chronos was mated to Ananke[15] (Necessity), which also lies around the universe, as the Pythagoreans believed.

Time as a circulating stream therefore did not originally have the meaning that we connect with the expressions "cyclical idea of history" or "eternal recurrence" in contrast to a linear conception of time. It is not a question of continuous repetition, but rather of human existence being ontologically imprisoned, as it were, in earthly life as a whole, and in each moment in particular. Whatever passes, whatever the stream of events brings forth, is compelling and inescapable. Ananke nails human existence down to the here and now. Each present is its own Alpha and Omega, just as in ritual cultures the creation of the world was not a one-time event at the beginning of time, but the essential beginning of *each* new time. Here, there is no future into which man could escape from the real present, nor a past which one could look back on as the good old days, in which everything was supposed to have been better. The serpent as inexorable daimon encoils me and holds me fast in my present. The bond encircling all Being compels me ever deeper into each present reality, it forces me to exhaust this reality in its full

intensity. No exit. No escape. Here I can never play a hope for the future against my present real fate, because the serpent of time encloses me hermetically in the experience of this destiny. If this destiny is to have meaning, then this meaning must be born out of the heart of this very destiny and within the unsurpassable borders set by Necessity; it can only be revealed by my "stewing" in whatever happens. Never could it lie in a subsequent event, in a future or a beyond. If each fateful event does not itself unfold its meaning, then there is no meaning at all.

Thus Okeanos is the image by which man expressly situates himself ontologically in his finite nature, as mortal in contrast to the immortals. The almost ubiquitous archaic idea of a primal stream or serpent girding the world, a serpent mated to Necessity (at least according to Greek thought), was in no way suggested by empirical experience. It arose from a psychological necessity: the necessity to commit oneself unrelentingly to life on this earth as it really was (and not as it might be wished to be). In numerous symbols of daily life—public as well as private—and in corresponding ritual acts, archaic man felt the need to continuously keep in his vision his being bound, on the ontological level, by the serpent encircling every here and now. As such symbols I mention band, tie, cord, ring, girdle, noose, knot, yoke, wreathe, crown, woven fabric, spun yarn.

If the poet laureate received a wreath, the victor a crown, band or belt, this originally did not mean an honour for a past deed, it rather was to render visible the bond which was inherent in the deed itself and with which the victor had been invisibly crowned all along by fate, through the very performance of his deed. A victory, an accomplishment, was experienced as a band put on man by the Gods or by the Fates, and this band was thought of as a portion of time, a period in his life, a fate spun by the Moira.

As with victory, kingship was also a band that made he who was bound by it king. We see that in general each event, each action was considered a binding obligation. If this is the case, then I cannot disown a deed I committed, not simply dissociate myself from it ("I did not intend to do it" etc.). The real event commits me to it by virtue of its binding reality. I must acknowledge it, bow to it, must perhaps allow it to teach me about my real nature, in order to live in harmony with my reality and necessity.

The diadem with which the king or victor was crowned also helps us to understand why the collar put around the neck of a slave

would thereby bind him into slavery. There is no essential difference between the band of a king and that of a slave. Both express the inexorable obligation of fate. In the case of slaves, ancient man continuously kept the paradigm of the condition of man before his eyes. Slavery was the literal realization as a social institution of what in essence was the ontological nature of man.[16] This also explains the fact that those who had become slaves basically submitted to and accepted their fate, as Tacitus reports in his *Germania,* where he says that the Teutons play dice with such a recklessness that even after having lost everything, they play, in a last decisive throw, for their freedom and life. The loser goes into slavery without antagonism. Even if he is younger, even if he be stronger, he allows himself to be bound and sold.—We understand why: throwing dice is not a ridiculous accidental affair, it brings to light what kind of band fate has long put around the person concerned. Factual slavery is merely the external realization of an existing fateful necessity. To rebel against it would be foolish. An especially impressive example of this behavior and attitude is found in Indian literature: the dice playing of the hero Yudhisthira in the epic Mahábhárata.

The mandala (which originally was the circle of Time[17]) can be seen in this light, too: as the image of that which binds us unrelentingly into the stream of events. This understanding would remove the belittlement and sugarcoating that Jung's interpretation of the mandala as the representation of the self has acquired among some Jungians within an ideology of "self development" and "growth" and "wholeness." The self could again be understood as the *reign of the inexorable necessity of my nature over myself,* and wholeness or completeness as the *telos,* the compelling band of each fateful portion of time—not *my* wholeness, but the wholeness of each moment.

The word *telos* brings me to another aspect of the encirclement by the Okeanos serpent. The original meaning of *telos* was, according to Onians, not goal, end, or act of completion. Rather it meant the band spun by fate, the band that brings forth the fulfillment of a qualitative portion of time which has its visible embodiment in the diadem. In the world girt by a solid belt, each event, each time, as well as my life as a whole and the world at large, were a priori completed, even if the actual completion had not yet happened and regardless of whether it was a "positive" or a

"negative" event. Each thing, each qualitative moment rested *in itself* and therefore *rested.* The band around each particular time or thing gave each event a measure and a boundary causing it to carry its center of gravity, its meaning, in itself.

For this reason alone was it possible that the world could be experienced as being full of Gods and animated by mythical beings. Necessity binding man into each event was the factor that forced the image or face of each reality to the fore. Unconditionally surrendered to and thrown back upon whatever passed, archaic man could not take refuge in "explaining" events from external, i.e. former causes, nor in hoping for better subsequent events. He had to behold the imaginal depth, the inner essence of each event—the God in it. If Okeanos was unable to come to the assembly of the Gods because he had the task of holding the world together, we now understand that he truly could not come: because his staying where he was made the appearance of the Gods in the world possible in the first place. As the band girt around the world and holding us inescapably in each event, Okeanos grants that kind of embeddedness in Being and that devotion to each moment for which alone man's being-in-the-world (and the world itself) can be of a mythical, poetical constitution. Okeanos can never appear *in* what only through him *is* "world." If he appeared as something in the world, the assembled Gods would immediately be voided inasmuch as then our glance, released from its bond, would flit from one event to the other and we could no longer experience the divine depth of a single one.

The serpent named Okeanos or Chronos who surrounds us on all sides is the image and the guarantee for the *psychological* existence of man. As Jung has stressed again and again, we are enveloped by psyche on all sides, and it is the nature of psyche to be what surrounds us. This same idea is also found in antiquity. When Pythagoras was asked what the serpent Chronos was, he answered that it was the *psyché* of the universe (Onians).

The Orphic Dionysus had the epithet Lyseus (the "Looser"), for he was supposed to loosen, for those to be initiated by certain rites, the cord of the "cares hard to bear." However, the kind of deliverance brought by Dionysus still remained tied to the mythical world surrounded by the serpent; it was merely a deliverance of each individual initiate, without changing the world at large in its

ontological constitution. Total deliverance from the serpent was only brought by Christ. He is the absolute Lyseus who tackles the problem once and for all and fundamentally, of Being as such. "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20), Satan who, as we know, is "the old serpent" (Rev. 20:2). Christ has cut any compelling bond, "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us. . .nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2:14). The beam of the cross even bursts the utmost bond of life as a whole, death: "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebr. 2:14f.). Christian man essentially is delivered man.

Unless we interpret this Christian event of deliverance again in terms of its Christian understanding, this deliverance must be viewed as a trauma, a wounding of Being. The spike of Golgotha has been driven into the joint where the serpent bites its tail, and thus the compelling bond around Being has been burst. The circle of Father Okeanos was broken apart, the closed circle of Time was straightened out into a line stretching in both directions into infinity. Since then, time is linear *Heilsgeschichte*. Now it is possible to speculate with Jaspers about "The Origin and Goal of History" and with Teilhard de Chardin about an evolution from "point Alpha" to "point Omega" and to break out of the compelling ring of each present into the future (hope for the beyond, utopias, Ernst Bloch) or into the past (historicism, restoration, conservation, nostalgia). Now there is an exit, and the idea of a "Huit clos" or "No Exit" becomes equivalent to hell (Sartre), which incidentally once more substantiates the truth of the earlier experience, even if only through the hostile medium of the modern longing for freedom from every bond, for hell is nothing but the demonized underworld and thus still reflects the finite nature of man.

Of course, deliverance through Christ was at first still bound to what in Christian terminology is called "faith"; redemption was thus a specific psychic state. History shows that the Christian world did not and probably could not rest content with deliverance as a psychic state and thus subject to contingent, empirical factors in the lives of individuals; for faith was always threatened by doubt and indifference. Deliverance, however, had to become an *absolute certainty* and, beyond being a personal experience, also a "cosmic"

reality. For "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching in vain, and your faith is also vain. . . . If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:14, 19). Thus there was a strong inner pressure from within Christianity itself to transform deliverance from a mere ontic condition of each person into an ontological mode of Being, a mode truly prevailing even if the individual was not personally in the state of faith and firmly founded in it. The Christian truth had to be reified, turned into a "physical" truth. After the Middle Ages established man firmly in faith as a subjective condition, Western man was put into a position to also translate the objective nature of the world and of man into the ontological state of deliverance. This has been the task of the modern age, at the end of which, that is, today, an additional step in the development becomes visible: the seeping down of the now ontologized and reified redemption into the personal psyche of the individual. For most of the so-called "psychological problems", most of the neuroses turning up in the consulting-room of the analyst, can in their deeper content be understood as Christianity regressed into the personal psyche.

The devout man of the Middle Ages essentially lived in a world that still corresponded to the pre-Christian existence-in-Necessity (which now in Christian parlance might be translated as "sickness unto death", existence in sin) which in no way expressed deliverance. The medieval *ordo* was still encircled and held together by a primal ocean. Man still lived devoted to the present; each individual activity, such as that of the craftsman, carried its meaning in itself. Faith merely had exchanged the former polytheistic Gods for the One God of Christianity, but it had by and large left the ontological state of the world as it had always been.

But how was deliverance from Okeanos, from the uroboric serpent, from Time (Chronos; the Christian *saeculum)* to become an objective ontological reality, if existence was indeed surrounded by the World Encircler? How could the primal stream enclosing the world be removed? Certainly, through Christ, the serpent had long been overcome. But only *for* the psychic condition of *each* believer, whereas the world (including the world of the believer himself) remained held together by Necessity, with the only difference being that this Necessity was now given Christian names such as God's Providence. The task thus still remained to be fulfilled, and it was

an enormous task: how could that reality the very meaning and essence of which was absolutely inescapable because it surrounded human existence on all sides, be removed precisely by him who was encircled by this inescapable force? How could man, as it were, pull himself out of a swamp by his own hair? The stream of events flowing around human existence as such could not truly be gotten rid of, compelling Necessity could not really be removed: it could only be *interiorized*. The manifestation of the event of this ontological incorporation of Okeanos by man was Harvey's invention of the circulation of blood. The pulsating stream of life, the ever circling origin of all spontaneity, was now located in man himself. He was no longer exposed to Okeanos and the inescapability of Being; he carried them in his body, and only to the extent that he carried them in himself were the head and tail of the serpent coiled around the world torn apart and the world freed to be absolutely open, without limits and measure.

Thus in a certain way Illich is right after all in stating that the idea of a stuff circulating in itself had been completely unknown to the ancients. If by stuff one means the visible and tangible, then the water of Okeanos was no stuff. For Okeanos was, as we heard from Kerényi, "not an ordinary stream", that is, not a phenomenon *in* the world like the other streams, not an object of a possible (empirical) perception. Wherever you might go in the visible world, you would never come across Okeanos as a river lying before your eyes, because such going inevitably would take place within the world enclosed by him so that everything that you might come across would be a priori have been encircled by him. But Okeanos is the outermost border between world and non-world. As such, he has, even as a stuff (water or solid band: serpent, mountain-range), an imaginal nature, and it was only as an imaginal stream or rather as the stream of the imaginal that he was the continuous source of all the visible waters in the world. The reason why the invention of the circulation of blood is radically novel is that now circulation is attributed to something *in* the world, an ontic, empirical stuff, which was also the birth of the idea of a "stuff" proper. The circulation of blood is truly "material" because it has its ontological foundation and its truth exclusively in its literal, physical, and manifest existence, whereas for the mythological mind even the visible rivers, indeed all things in the world, were not merely physical stuff,

since they originated, and thus had their truth in, the stream of the imaginal that was expressly called the "generation of all." Therefore the inversion of Being that occurred with the shift from Okeanos to the circulating blood also means a fundamental removal of man and the world from the ontological medium of the imaginal and their transposition into the medium of ontic, literal materiality.

It seems that the archetypal idea of Okeanos—or whatever name we want to give to the inexorable stream of events—proves to be an inescapable reality even at the time of our deliverance from it. For this deliverance did not really free us from the bond of Okeanos; we might even say that it burdened us with it in a much more oppressing fashion inasmuch as it now is, instead of an imaginal reality, a literal (medical) reality and is "stuffed" into the narrow confines of the personal existence of each of us. It is questionable whether the inside of us is a better place than the outermost border of the earth. If Okeanos is now in us, is this not as if we had swallowed something too big and indigestible? For now we occasionally have to suffer from its compelling force very literally in our own bodies (heart attacks, circulatory collapse, hardening of the arteries, not to mention the purely psychological "problems" that we now have to wrestle with within ourselves—the space contained in the skin—whereas formerly, their equivalent could avail themselves of the wide expanse of the entire mythical world).

The invention of the circulation of blood rendered Christ into an ontological reality and thus made the unleashing of Being, initiated by Christ, definitive. The handwriting of fate through any event has been blotted out. No matter what a person has done, his deed no longer represents a compelling obligation for him: Christ is the guarantee for the ultimate deliverance from all our actions and fates. Christ is *the* alternative, i.e. the fundamental availability of a (maybe not always empirical, but metaphysical) way out of the binding necessity of what passed. The essential confinement in finite, earthly existence has been lifted, man is no longer "servant" of and in "bondage" to death as the inexorable border around our lives; he is absolutely "free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). This is why Paul does not have to shake the foundations of slavery as a social institution, because this is a trifle compared to the world-shaking metaphysical deliverance he is concerned with. If Paul

speaks of man "according to the flesh" and "according to the law of sin", he does not refer, on the ontic level, to obvious evildoers and slovens. He much more radically and comprehensively aims for the ontological state of those whose condition it is to be bound by the inexorable band of each real situation. It is a total attack against man's original embeddedness in Being.

As soon as deliverance ceased being merely a psychological state of man (faith) and turned into an ontological reality, the band around the earth was burst asunder even in the ontological constitution of empirical reality, so that the cosmos opened up into an infinity of worlds (Giordano Bruno), reality became a realm of unlimited possibilities, and all things of this earth were delivered over to man's will without restraint. The things and moments that formerly had firmly been enclosed in their eachness (by virtue of which they each carried their own center of gravity and value, in the last analysis: their God, in themselves), were now, ontologically speaking, equalitarian pieces or parts of a homogeneous space and a homogeneous time.

The mythical, metaphysical reality of the Christ as the absolute deliverer having turned from an object of devotion into man's ontological constitution: this is what made the revolutionary and untamed upsurge of the modern age possible—the starting out of explorers from Columbus to the astronauts; the spiralling development of the sciences; the limitless urge to go beyond the natural world of things with shape and contour into the boundlessness of the dimensions of astronomical magnitude and micro-physical minuteness; the unleashed longing for the optimal, and the endless craze for stimulation through ever new attractions and through experiences that might provide an answer to the question of the meaning of life. Deliverance from the serpent means the absolute unleashing of desire. The kind of man whose nature is defined as having interiorized the primal stream from out there into himself does not any longer know himself to be contained in and bound to the world by an inextricable band, and conversely he no longer experiences the world as a binding obligation, but rather as essentially free prey for manipulation, indeed for exploration and exploitation. Only man with blood circulation can and must start out in search of new continents or venture into outer space or into the realm of micro-physics. He alone must search for the meaning of life.

At the time at which Okeanos still held the world together, each thing was, as we pointed out, firmly enclosed and man was inescapably bound by each of his actions. This is why people of earlier ages could find fulfillment in kinds of manual work that we would consider intolerably monotonous, such as when African women grind their grains by hand for hours every day, or when in our culture logs were manually sawn into boards, or wool spun into yarn throughout the winter. Fulfillment was possible because these people were, by virtue of the ontological situation, devoted to each activity and did not, could not wish to get out of it, inasmuch as the band of the serpent tied them to and held them in whatever they did. Delivered man can no longer truly dwell in the moment. He must hasten onwards to other moments, to some kind of beyond which alone might give a meaning to a particular present. He needs machines to relieve him of all monotonous work in order for him to be freed for a higher life "in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9): for planning grand designs, control—perhaps also for educational and cultural activities, sports, entertainment, encounter groups or other psychological experiences. Paradoxically, even monotonous activities such as spinning or knitting can now be rediscovered—but only as pastimes affirming man's absolute freedom, that is, as the opposite of what they once were: necessary work.

The circle of man's economic intercourse with nature was also broken, the closed circle which according to Marx's analysis consisted of the fact that in earlier agricultural societies the exchange of goods more or less solely served the purpose of providing what was to be consumed, without producing any profit.[18] At the moment when, in the same ages that saw the beginnings of the journeys of discovery, of modern science and the invention of circulation, money turned from a mere means of exchange into self-generating "capital" in the sense of Marx, an explosion had happened and the economic growth spiral had been set in motion. Since then we have had a growth of needs for commodities as well as of industrial production to fill these needs, which ultimately resulted in the reduction of things to the alienated goods of a throw-away society. Again we must say: only man with blood circulation can be a capitalist.

Through the linear stretching of Time, human existence has been placed into the ontological mode of the comparative (in the linguistic sense): it is now subject to the idea of the "better", the

desirable. This idea and its absolute culmination in the idea of the "best" ("optimal") could alone give rise to optimism and pessimism, which would have been impossible during the time of Ananke, since at that time everything was the way it was, and the flirtation with the idea of the better was a priori excluded by the unsurpassable border marked by the primal ocean between Being and Non-Being, reality and possibility. Man lived in the "positive form", outside of or prior to any degree of comparison: in his reality regardless of whether it was, as we today might say, "positive" or "negative." The Teuton, we remember, allowed himself to be sold into slavery without antagonism once he had lost his freedom through dice. Modern man, by contrast, who on account of the circulation in himself is delivered from the binding stream around himself, can never rest content in any situation, he at once must demand something better. Leibniz tried to rescue some kind of contentedness within the real world by his labored proof that this world was "the best of all possible worlds" and that we live in "the optimum". But as soon as this proof no longer finds credence, the untamed desire for the better must upsurge and drive the one into the country of unlimited possibilities, the other into revolutionary hopes for a better future and an ideal society, and the third into conservative hopes for a restoration of the good old days or, in the case of the pessimistic variant, into resignation, cynicism or suicide.

Even though people still buy wedding rings when they marry, man today nevertheless is, even in marriage, essentially delivered man (delivered also from the bond of marriage), i.e. he is a priori divorced. As the one who is delivered from the ring of Necessity, the demand for the "optimal" spouse is indispensable to him or her. He or she must always hope to be able to reform the other: marriage as a kind of reformatory for one's spouse. There simply would have to be a time—this is the hope out of which the married person lives—when the other would finally come to his senses and change for the better, change into the ideal spouse that one had sought in him or her all along. Countless fights arise because the one wants to have his or her spouse *better* than he or she is. Delivered man cannot rest content with the way his spouse really is, and cannot see that each human being is, as it were, a hopeless case. He cannot admit that marriage means to be inescapably bound into a life with the other person as he or she really is (no exit) and to have the task of getting along with him or her for better or worse; to even come

to learn to like his or her faults, to love him or her with all his or her faults. To be essentially "hopeless": this is the very meaning of marriage. But this is something delivered man cannot by any means accept, because deliverance means to be thrall to hope. It is an especially striking example for the dissociation in Christian consciousness that the doctrine of the Catholic church insists on the indissolubility of marriage and prohibits divorce without realizing that it is *its own truth*—deliverance of man—which alone forces many married people onto the road leading to divorce. The Christian truth is inseparable. If man in the Christian world is delivered, then this does not only apply to the "Sunday creed", but also to everything in all of life that would represent a compelling obligation.

Only with the invention of the blood circulation do inner and outer world begin to separate. At the time when man was inescapably encircled by Okeanos, his existence was essentially moored *in* the world and thus he necessarily would look at events occurring in the world from within, with an "inner" perspective, and see them in their imaginal depth: as image and God. It was his embeddedness that made the world (and everything in it) brighten up in a mythical light, for the psychological or poetic nature of the world is nothing but the correlate of man's rootedness in his reality. Mythical imagination is not a psychological property of man, that may be employed or not; it is an ontological state, a fundamental way man is positioned in the cosmos: being inescapably surrounded by the serpent *psyché*. Circulation of the blood, on the other hand, means that now the border between life and non-life, between the essential and the non-essential falls into the empirical world itself: what is outside of it is the cold, dead "external world", whereas true life is surrounded by it as the "interior", the "inner world". It is thanks to circulation that modern man turned into a "subject" who has the things of this world as his "objects" inevitably outside of and opposite himself. "Inside" and "outside" are split apart only by the *incorporated* border stream of Being; exteriorization or alienation is only borne from the interiorization of Okeanos.

In accordance with our habitual parlance I have spoken of the subject having the object opposite himself. But actually, it is not an opposition that we are dealing with here. As man now has circulation in himself and is no longer moored *in* whatever happens to pass, he is now free to totally surround the phenomena of the world

himself. Works of art, e.g., have becomes "objects" by being placed in a museum showcase so that we can walk around them and view them from all sides, whereas originally they would, as altar piece, mask, or statue of a God, have "assaulted" man with their demand for devotedness, in which sense they would have surrounded man ontologically on all sides. The things studied by the sciences are "objects" because, having become mute and outlawed, they can be turned and twisted at the scientist's pleasure so that the scientific glance surrounds them completely. Every theory of knowledge has, simply by virtue of the question it asks and not only because it would give a comforting answer, the psychological task of enabling modern man to ever newly and in principle satisfy himself as to his ability to encircle each and every thing. Deliverance from the embeddedness in Being is only complete if man himself has become the Thing-and-World-Encircler. And only as the World Encircler is he truly "subject". Thus the subject is not so much opposite but much rather fundamentally *above* whatever he looks at as his object, in just about the same way that the Creator God is above his work, having a complete overview of it and penetrating with his glance into the very heart of things.

Erich Neumann's psychology, too, serves the purpose of once and for all interiorizing what originally was the World Encircler. Neumann turns the uroboros who once was the very circle of Time into a mere phase in a person's psychological evolution, a phase that we as adults have long overcome, even if perhaps we should now or then regress to it. Whereas the circle of Time, as the serpent biting its tail, was beginning *and end* in one, it now is only the starting point from which the line of development extends to the stage of the solar consciousness of the hero: the circle is reduced to a point on the straight line and is thus incorporated by the line. Formerly, the beginning was precisely not a point *from* which something started, it was what kept everything that it was the beginning of inexorably encircled and thus *shut in:* Okeanos, the "generation of all." All dynamics and all development of an initiated event remained enclosed by and under the rule of its beginning (that is why Greek *arché* means beginning as well as rule): all streams, springs, wells continuously arose from the primal stream surrounding everything. And the heroes of myth (Herakles, Theseus, Siegfried, etc.) as mythological figures perform their deeds *within*

the world enclosed by the uroboros, whereas for Neumann heroic consciousness is characterized precisely by having stepped out of the uroboric. Neumann deprives that which would relentlessly encircle us of the inescapability of its encircling us. But as soon as the Okeanos serpent is no longer inescapable and does not enclose us *until the end;* as soon as Okeanos, too, could come to the assembly of the Gods as just one among them because he would have become dispensable, the uroboros would have ceased being an uroboros. The instrument for rendering the reigning serpent encircling us powerless is here the idea of development, for it reduces the mythological insight into man's ontological constitution to the idea of an ontic condition, correlated to a particular evolutionary phase in the life of empirical man: a falling out from psychology into biology, from the realm of the imaginal into the question of the literal child, the literal mother and the literal evolution from the embryo onwards.

From the perspective of evolutionary thinking, archaic man must appear primitive, which, even if we are expressly assured that this word is not to be understood as a derogatory term, nevertheless does mean as much as "still without ego," "with *undeveloped* ego," "representing an earlier stage." I would like to set another understanding against this view: the primitive as that kind of man who is embedded in Necessity, inexorably devoted to his real present, who has not escaped from Being into deliverance. The temporal interpretation of the primitive in the sense of "early stage" etc. only serves the purpose of rendering the compelling time serpent impotent.

The man of blood circulation is called upon to be a self-contained whole, a "personality", an "individual." The "personality" is nothing but the concrete way man represents himself—to others and to himself—as the "Grosse Runde" (Neumann), as a closed circle. We might say that it is to William Harvey (this name only taken as a cipher) that we owe the entire humanistic, educational idealism of a Herder, Goethe, Schiller, Humboldt, the urge to develop one's personality or one's self, furthermore the need to put the idea that I as individual am an inner infinity and carry the entire world in myself (the World Encircler in psychological guise). We also owe to him the compulsion to be free (freedom of thought, emancipation, liberation, free development of the personality,

freedom from work: vacation, weekends, and leisure time). Modern man *must* be free, because only to the extent that he is free in various respects is deliverance from the compelling *telos* of Okeanos made true. Without blood circulation, the idea of the genius would also be unthinkable, for at the times of Okeanos, *people* were not geniuses, but a relentless *daimon* or *genius* dwelled in them as in all of nature.

But modern man having turned into a personality is by virtue of the circle that he himself now is, not only free, but also enclosed in himself and decidedly impenetrable, unaffectable. It is not only through arteriosclerosis that a hardening occurs; modern man is a priori hardened on the ontological level, inaccessible to the imaginal depth of events. For the circle is the perfect, the unassailable figure. Nothing can penetrate the armour of the hard circular shell. Monads, as Leibniz rightly stated, have no windows. They are closed, once and for all. This cannot be undone by "sensitivity training," by trying to learn to feel and to be open to emotional experiences. Emotional experiences are precisely what only that kind of man can have who is conceived as a holistic personality and thus a priori locked into himself. As individuals and subjectivities we are fundamentally, namely ontologically, removed from that existential locus at which we could be reached and affected. Whatever happens to us, however emotionally upset we might be: it is never *more* than an ontic state of emotionality occurring on ontologically armoured man. Only as long as man had his ontological essence in being encircled by relentless Necessity and thus in being embedded in the world could he be reached and struck by the essence of events, because only then was he unconditionally exposed to what happened and as such vulnerable. Just as the world became free prey to man's manipulation as soon as uroboric Okeanos was bent apart, so conversely was the inner substance of man a priori permeable for the imaginal depth of events and the demands that they made on him, as long as man had not turned into a self-contained, enclosed circle. Reichian therapy's attack on character armour, too, is of no avail, happening long after the fact and not reaching down to the root of the matter. Indeed, it attempts to fixate the problem by trying to get precisely the *interiorized* Okeanos into renewed and increased flux.

Okeanos was, as we said, pure streaming. Since man no longer is *in* the circulating stream of Time, but carries the stream of life in

himself, the pulse of life is now dependent on him, on each individual human being. It is man who now, with his own effort and willpower, has to keep Time moving. He must be its motor, because he now exists as the very circle of Time. Is it astonishing that modern man is plagued by haste and stress, is compelled to perform, must do physical exercises and prove to himself his youthfulness again and again as long as he lives, until circulatory failure or heart attack may after all put an inexorable end to him, delivered man? Is it astonishing that he who carries the border stream between Being and Non-Being personally in himself is plagued by neuroses—neuroses whose nature it is to be a kind of compromise formation between some compelling and obsessive force and the indispensable striving for freedom from any imposed *telos*, freedom from any fateful obligation binding my nature and life?

NOTES

[1] Ivan Illich, *H_2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness. Reflections on the Historicity of "Stuff"*, Dallas (The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture) 1985, chapter "Harvey Invents Circulation". On Harvey and the discovery of the blood circulation from a psychological, imaginal perspective see the essential study by James Hillman, "The Thought of the Heart", *Eranos 48-1979*, p. 133-82, Frankfurt (Insel) 1981.

[2] Karl Kerényi, *Die Mythologie der Griechen*, vol. I, München (Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag) 1979, p. 19. My translation.

[3] Erik Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen*, Darmstadt (Wiss. Buchgesellschaft) 1971, esp. pp. 154 and 276 f.

[4] Hermann Bengtson and Vladimir Milojčič, *Großer Historischer Weltatlas, Erläuterungen I. Teil*, München (Bayerischer Schulbuch-Verlag) 1954, col. 58.

[5] Kerényi, ibid., my italics and translation.

[6] Hornung, op. cit., p. 154.

[7] Kerényi, ibid.

[8] Plato, Phaidon, 112 d and e.

[9] See Weizsäcker, Article "Okeanos" in W.H. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie,* 816.

[10] David L. Miller, "Achelous and the Butterfly: Toward an Archetypal Psychology of Humor," in: *Spring 1973,* pp. 1-23, here p. 8.

[11] The process of the "inversion of Being" is briefly discussed in my paper "Saving the Nuclear Bomb," in: *Facing Apocalypse,* Dallas (Spring Publications) 1987, pp. 96-108, and at greater lengths in my book, as yet unpublished, *Psychoanalyse der Atombombe. Ein Versuch über den Geist des christlichen Abendlandes.*

[12] Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate.* Reprint of the 1951 (Cambridge, University Press) edition, New York (Arno Press) 1973, esp. pp. 249 ff., 316 ff., 411 ff., 443 ff.

[13] *My People, The Incredible Writings of Credo Vusa'mazulu Mutwa,* Harmondsworth (Penguin) 1971, p. 54, quoted from H. Gehrts, "Initiation," in: *GORGO 8,* 1985, p. 11.

[14] See E. Hornung, "Die Entdeckung des Unbewußten in Altägypten", *GORGO 9,* 1985, p. 63.

[15] On Ananke see James Hillman, "On the Necessity of Abnormal Psychology—Ananke and Athene," *Eranos 43-1977,* Leiden (Brill) 1974. Expanded version in: *Facing the Gods,* ed. J. Hillman, Irving (Spring) 1980.

[16] Concerning the topic of slavery cf. Hillman, op. cit. (*Facing the Gods)* p. 6 and note 12 (p. 34).

[17] H. Gehrts, "Beitrag zur Polytheismus-Diskussion," *GORGO 2/1979,* p. 62, who on the other hand emphasizes that the mandala can at the same time *also* represent the opposite, the standing eternity of the mono-God.

[18] Cf. David Holt, "Jung and Marx: alchemy, christianity, and the work against nature." In: *Harvest 1975,* p. 50 f.

KARIN LESSING

Under Sirius

on heaven's
neck

rose
over the crest

the star
perilous

house
of exaltation

•

climbed

instant into instant

as if

beyond
all drought

•

signals

bleached, immaculate

paths, once
linked

marvelous ladders

•

and their rouged clay
bodies

loaves
of myrrh

•

raised

as from a slanted
mirror, the

fragrance

from their jars. . .

with-
in echoed, the

clear, ever in-
accessible

gardens, those

poured
into glass

•

. . .and the earth, blind,

reckless

is drawn
the strain

of love

•

fever-

star, burning

in the thick
of sleep

I hear

drilling
itself

into the summer's heart.

CLARK COOLIDGE

Section III from At Egypt

III.

I see the blank wall coming back in lighter and lighter tones
that and the thought of nobody's lap, phantom stance
walking the low struck hills of Egypt, Mars
cats crying still by nightlong gravels rolling
as the lope I enjoyed pulling the camel head past the rubble
    piles
trumpet through nervous head the papyrus strain, a quick
and blurred and blue at the top and creaking miles of paper
    stairs
here my name is Benchmark James, English geologist
of fluorescent sets and spare time, counting by camel sticks
and the jam in the helicopter flask, train tea and lots of still
    chicken
the bones of a musical score all over the mastered land
as I camp down by the soft shafts with wig hat of an indigo
and unbelievable saturate of dress at the soft paint sunset
I'd said I'd have to see it all again by moon
by any artifice at all to inch in and stretch out
the remnants under

As if to see
It leads you
He slides

Then, Peter is the name of the man with none
toilet seat cover like a tombstone, touch it
morning bricks, a more careful bric-a-brac of dreams?
buses in lumps and worsted space
and the man is telling me, spinning, he says. . .
but does this thin work?

It is out
No, it's not
His thought

This thought taken from the bus we have hauled, all Cairo
of wrapped cars, the ones of metal numbers under woven hemp
skin
it says, chemicals for modern building, precipitate rending
the banana verandas, thought to go but now it's back
collapsed to new slant cement slab porches
an asteroid will hit the Twinky coffee shop
balancing tiles of Center street, withdrawn of its meat
in djellaba hands, beneath carapace awnings, the pajama boys
and a pregnant chartreuse at bus wait, prongs of firework
those guys lay up on lashed frameworks, paint RADAR
at housetop, place to wait on a morning myth
or astronomic aim, huge minarets toy with
a swallow shadowing the cement side in contract beeps
as the world announces the world, to Christ Car Wash tip
pronouncing Wimpy among the oculist witnesses of heavy
women land
passed by a dice truck and then the zoo goes by, zebras!

This is the sky lot of coffin arms, the monuments
limestone politicos, their resting hands on sphinx pates
or hand-dipped candle palms, yellow headed statesmen
poor, what else but meditate? at the Club Beak
or Nautique Hellenique, Nileside, straw bedside
a volume of Coins of the World in Danger of the Lipton tea
board
and busted windows of the planetarium dusty flat hat spin
I see the rainy stars iron by, arrow by hot plate
this bus has a lariat, the Nile its fill of floating beans
seagulls service Man With Head, lions guard the bridgehead
they're digging a Metro in Cairo Center, day and night in the
hole
the white rubber boots

Things of it said
Dropped down to tip
Rock at leaded him

Diorite and alabaster, serpentine marble
limestone painted pink to resemble granite
source pink granite, sandstone terminal
carnelians of the pebbles, lapis from elsewhere

And the black onyx is the eye
of the hole in your finger
and the turquoise a moist closet
amethyst a liquid sweet gives the throat a tug
twinge of gold toe caps in the silver sarcophagus

Stones dead as a life left out
in the open ledge of a fraction, stones breasting the shaft
the stones that keep you, struck from any motion
stones lit at the last

The stones on which the story of the cats who brought the mice
their mice was drawn, the cats, reversed, who served
their mice the food, their mice drinks, who brought
the biggest mouse a smaller mouse, nursed the mouse
child, paid deep homage to a rodent throne

On which the harp string hands clenched
were stroked and lost to the clicking pile, amassed
to the single closed hand drawn from the finger side
profile of the casual sure, Picasso knew so quick
he drained its filament lake, reliant report
of animal knob, sting of birdbrain fringe
cold as the daub restored, tensed then tossed away
among, along brought back, within those fractal floors

They line up
pulling by means, means the long snake tongue
the princesses tug, snake body blubbers under boat hull
    meanwhile

the means, spacing of the deads? well spewn in mind
but the boatman is ramming a spear down the mouth at the
    prow
and this all slips long around a scroll

And the
Slip it slips
Round the slip

Dainty accidents with poison penises dipped in paint
it's a Sadean scene, intruding the extension of masculine
    membership
into long black borders of snake and hitch
then they all stand up and the fuck comes out of their mouths
a blend back into a smirch of movement hips, cause flesh
in nipple repetition, a dotting of lines in the hill of bare sac
they heave the blacks of cock, recline on triangular block
pinks of a geometry shameless in the strip of epic lash
the focal point Anus Anubis, he targets there
in sexual scroll of degrees, a blues on ointment jars
at one end awaitings on the high scratch lubricious
she tongues at the exit of hallway death, lurch intense
balled at the cunt of mechanism snake, his curl erect saw
one ends at the rest of the tale, the girl all whip with waiting
the sideways girl of the single overpouring shrug breast globe
remains and in baboon remains, it's the drill
of the layout itching picture, the clay point rapture

And how come how could
You imagine it
Says something

Snake death a la Picasso, and the other says "I am
the Egyptian painter", that Tut went to his reward with
fifty sixty boomerangs among the veritable attic, the good
boat attic, the silver timer hold, in a ringwork lock
ointment timer frond, freebasing color matter lumps
like going to heaven in your attic or basement, like going
twigs with shredded ends of brushes, for larval teachers

and the head comes over the style with a thump, an earth space
    ring
of the moth bread pucks of styli in the original

The heads say
As it clangs
Claims in morsel space

Breasts held to hover on snaps of breath
bed as the hill where night is the binder
and the holes occur to one
naked girl covered with stars spreads over the dead guy
carved into the bottom of his sarcophagus cover stone
who did the arithmetic on all this death?
or did dogs bark in the time camp?

But what did you leave blowing in the basement?
here we hum in the diorite museum
the hold of rooms given to death thing
arcade of perfect duck and goose edges
alabaster entrail box filled with solution
in case of tall halls, shuffle deep to the quartz hilt
in case the entire body of which might be needed again?
could be I might have to picture myself past this?
hold on the rock singular?
but basement opens to attic in this dust spread dream

You have to take it
The language its
Fable blacks or
Cushion cuts
Out

Fill the museums with liquid like the eyes
and spread away and let everything else dry beyond
the central chamber with the white piano he couldn't look at
in his dream, blinding as it gets, descending enough
stairs into the earth, comes up with nothing more
inside, it needs to be kept, fluid

as you see the forms all pass
dwindle, and the stone spire

It says "bolts"
You clench it in
Its fists

Place where there is no veering you could avoid
having a car to leap off and on through, beep of boy mob
madness in perpetual vast as whistle continuous
strew flare and have the goodness to scream, wait
and lose the chance at all watch on doors
bodies raised through outdoor floors, nerve horn fabric
scribble scribble, midst of a bus match the morning
mirage of the afternoon sodium

Or you could rent through the streets, this one to keep
Farouk-A-Car under fissure in isinglass brownness
these men exist streets, dust off among the oranges
forget where you are in these bodies, would you want to
hand-off my only banquet cigarette, a thankyou
so unheard to be it glows with the remains
"I'm fine" as if all that overall lasted were
brow interminable glasses

To be seen
Upon these questions
They go down

Does the alphabet you know have a turn of ledge or shift of
elbow
circuit of streets, clutter of stoppered clay bottles
useful for assorting perfumes, bend an ear and duck
out of the way of, the outstretched arms of gemstone mongery
barely any fields, such a lot of cigarettes offered in this town
town of thistles for brushing the lights, perimeter of roses
in the dependent night, and towers out of coffee whorl
to see Bunk Johnson's Blackstrap Papyrus Lab near Garden City
as in Cranston or any home near or far from here, out

where the guy took his papers away and left a market
the goal of all mingles is a ball

Long since that man lifted the hatch on all Egypt
his hand continued up and raised the blue sky
in keeping on leashes your aggravations, many small dogs so
filtering down in dots from the Paraphernalia Towers
and a geologic opera in the broke planetarium
the Denizens, their major industry is us
and someone future will glass-case our adjustors
where Reagan isn't worth the sneeziest scarab
and everyone speaks from pressure, SAND HOTEL, of
    desert-clogged pipes
every day we've crossed the Nile twice

Dreamed of the cannonading dog hoards of carnival Cairo
the two men on rattly rags prostrate, Mecca at rush hour
midst all sides of darkness and bus confusion, nobody to bother
I keep my breast on the own side and sometimes
the nipple is a pressable stud, a painful goodnight
in the morning, the entrance to morning anyway, a pistol slide

The dogs answer the chickens, but cats cut between
prowl kings, the one big store announce easy kits for smokes
and another whiteness of glass illuminates, Dewlap Police Adit
jets in the overhead sound the air out of buses
dogs echo mouse precise, static inside this hotel
beryls in my head, precious semiprecious
stones for the answer, and the snake always rising

Did you enter a problem-solving dream?
I don't own anything, from the words on down
fiberglass pants down greenglass stairs
he wants to look at me, why should he not?
in the back in the dark on the bus, nobody said anything
smart for whole vacuums of time, shunt sign
I left you off on Bolt Drive, a place where the all
public data is in perfect drivel scriptions
"Jesus, man, a million-year-old saw!" back in watered

time, a time for matter contain, elapse
Imagine your whole life orients
toward pyramid center death
or get a slant political on life systems failure
a map in the diorite cancel of area
the Book to Gather Grains of Sand
this topological alarm remainder, the saving of a band
from cap or beer, the local omnipresent huge brown STELLA
hidebound here to mark out a monument
this anciency an industry, but I feel the closer
to the Old Egyptian then to spelled-out Roman
or even the Greek, why this?
they gained a clarity of the mystery

Not so far away
It says
Not so true
To death he is

SUB RROSA

Sub Rrosa n° 1. A description of "Etant Donnés: le la chute d'eau, 2e le gaz d'éclairage" by Marcel Duchamp.

This is an assemblage constructed in a clandestine, second studio by Marcel Duchamp over the 20 years (1946-66), when it was claimed implicitly and explicitly that he was no longer engaged in the making of artworks. The existence of the work was known primarily to Duchamp's wife and assistant for the work, Teeny; much later (1968) to a friend who helped negotiate its purchase; and, after his death in 1968, to the museum officials who, from Duchamp's own meticulous plans, diagrams, and photographs installed "Etant Donnés. . ." in the Arensberg Collection of the Philadelphia Museum.[1] Sub rosa he made it, and sub rosa we view it.

To the side of the bright room in the Arensberg Collection, containing "The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even" and some other notable Duchamps and Duchamp-kits, there is a dark, odd room which contains nothing. At one end in a wall is built a heavy barn door framed in bricks. This is "real," a door which is or was a door.[2] Its hinges however are absent. Until the publication of the facsimile notebook which contains Duchamp's diagrams and photographic aids to reassembling this "approximation démontable," there was a fifteen year ban on the reproduction of the interior tableau, an interdiction now apparently lifted.[3] The temporary play with the inviolable interior was perversely appropriate, as people have felt that the interior is one of the most violable nudes in the history of art. But I am getting ahead of a body of statement.

on the side a thickening a bird's
egg plum down sidling sidelong along
fear THRUSHt down in the word

Walked in to a dark side room, and therein (darkly) up to a rustic door, in which, among the thick nails, there are two eyeholes. Peeped in, curious, saw an oval blast through brick (coded: explosion/explosive; coded: a cinematic fade-thru piercing solids). And through that frame a succinct diorama, as lush and pretty, as filled with an atmospheric stagey light as the best Museums of Natural History provide. The feeling is crystalline, blue with puff clouds; the trees evoking all four seasons (pink, green, rust,

frosty), and painterly creams of colors stage-lit. Thoroughly "retinal," thoroughly sentimental, one adds, filled with rage and méchante-ness, for the méchance of being a contradiction? an estrangement? a sucker? a puppet, a toy toyed with: *the marked marker*[4] Who is as rebuffed by the work as sucked into it, who may be it, who is "not it." Hide and seek. One can never get close enough to this to "really see" it, for Duchamp prescribes the distance and the level of discomfort you feel (mouth and nose to wood, pushing the door) in the position of consumed consumer. Consumed with curiosity, desire, rage, shame, powerlessness.[5]

In the museum, we graze among representations, pretend possessors, possessive pretenders, the very conventions of display (anthology, supermarket, store window) in a nonfunctional setting (not a real kitchen for the artifacts, not a real temple for the altar, not a real room for the painting) compelling us to be flaneurs engaged in a sensational practice, culling our version of the rare. In some complicit critique of the museum—playing the museum against itself, playing with the secret, the hidden in this cornucopia of openness, and playing out the museum's social postures of possessor, collector, connoisseur—Duchamp has engineered a mandatory posture for the viewing of this piece, uncharacteristic for the museum's mobile, park-like qualities. This posture of peeking, peering into a secret space evokes overlays of an erotic sort (peepshows, pornographic bookstores) admixed with early 20th century childhood pleasures (of 3-D shows on the stereopticon, of folk parades with floats of giants). Duchamp plays with sex and the museum, putting visual conventions of pornography and sexual display at the core of the collection, and creating some frank oscillation between art appreciation and "ard" titillation, between the arousal to visual pleasure and the arousal to sexual pleasure.[6] So walk up to the door curious; walk away having been made a voyeur.

The main content of this diorama is a life-sized, foreshortened, somewhat disproportionate and cut waxy-looking object which does rather resemble a naked pink woman. "Woman": a lump of female matter, the botanical markers of sex (one breast, open legs) loosely displayed in allusion. The exact feminine arm (yet a gigantic hand!), holding a lamp (the "gaz d'éclairage" or afflatus of clear purity), a lady of the lamp kind of arm, extending into this picture realistically and ideologically straight from the 19th century. Bringing with it the sweet nobility of "Womanhood" and such cultural icons of enlightenment as Florence Nightingale and the Statue of Liberty. It may even derive from medieval tableaux of the wise virgin who holds her lamp upright. It is also a post-war piece, mythologizing a supine, sexualized female. The virginity and intellectual nobility of the lamp shine on the distorted, manipulated ideological and visual hit of sex.

For this isn't what you "see." What you see, head on, ahead of you, is cunt. Estranged cunt, the cant or can't of cunt. Duchamp has made a

twisted, asymmetrical gash—richly labial but curved and wayward—where a vulva "is." Deep, like an S-curved valley, disturbing, uncanny, provocative: (t)his lady has had her bottom put on wrong. Like every nude, it is an interpreted depiction of sexual markers, only allusively or by cultural agreement read as "realistic." Like most but not all (male and female) nudes in the history of our art, this figure has no pubic hair, but that deficiency is more than made up by a witty collection of brushwood, or bound faggots with some dead leaves ("bachelors"?), on which this creature is poised as if on the edge of a cliff. Her legs, have I mentioned? are wide open. In the far background, as if at great airy distance, is a tinkling silvery "faery" waterfall, looks like it was made for desirous consumption of department store windows or popular appreciation of our patronizing understanding of others, as in dioramas dependent upon Western imperialism.[7]

red round ocarina
unspecified brown sweet
bird whistle thru the rote holes, air
purple petunia horns blew windsock-stiff.
Ate rose
hip jam
live from the jar
a door blue shut rush
dims coreopsis bright darks wrinkled rose
bristle quick rain a reine a wren.

Sub Rrosa n° 2: under what rose?

Held off, attracted—the energies of spectatorship attached to the energies of desire—the distancing barriers imprison the viewer in one spot; it is a form of visual bondage—the very limits are exciting. The form is not only implicitly heterosexual (or taken so by commentators, although no partner is present): but also sacrificial (a woman on a pyre), punitive (the mutilated body) and self-pleasuring (she holds the [phallic] lamp autonomously). "The viewer draws back from the door feeling that mixture of joy and guilt of one who has unearthed a secret. But what is the secret? What, in fact, has he [**] seen." One of Octavio Paz's answers, "we see ourselves looking," conceals the further question "who is looking?"—a puzzle that can no longer be postponed.[8] Since some "we" is not a confabulation of "he," how to see her contribution, her consternation, her con-tribulation, her conjugation as *the marked marker*?

For she *is* first he. All female readers are first "immasculated" argues Judith Fetterley; all learn to "read like men."[9] Which means a female socially constrained to perceive in so-called "genderless" ways themselves redolent of maleness, the ** constrained not to seek aspects of female difference, sounding untutored or simplistic if she diverges from the universal-which-

is-not-and-never-female. A woman first or expectedly adopts an "androcentric posture" before artwork. To read *as* a woman is to rupture this expected practice.

Duchamp's work here does not beg us to differ from the normal posture; in many ways its siting and dramatic situation (one peeps at a naked woman) reinforce an androcentric posture even as it is complicit with male powerlessness by registering the humiliating and vulnerable stance in some male seeking: an eye at the keyhole peering at a woman is not unambiguously coded as powerful; and with female powerlessness (this male eye, despite humiliations, claims power over an Other). That peeking eye needs an initiation or a pleasure which is always belated, to which it may be impotent. The voyeur is distanced from pleasures sought precisely in the maintenance of distance. The consistency of this position with completely naturalized ideologies of romantic longing is startling. Is the work then a direct re-enactment of such pleasures, or, in ways parallel to its grotesque segue over mimetic painting, is it a grotesque or ironic torsion of Romantic ideology? Spectatorship is impotence? And then what of the museum's multiplied insistence of spectatorship, of Duchamp's binding of the gaze? As John Berger has pointedly suggested, every woman is in a double relation of voyeur, she looks at herself being looked at and is powerless over the refracted gazing; here I look at myself looked at by Duchamp, reobserved by female me, and I am confused between my impotent distance as male voyeur and impotent identification as female voyeur.[10]

So I am the female reader, I am the "marked marker" I am she inside the outside the dividing barrier, I am the penising eye, and the missing I, bit of wiggy blond hair just visible to mark the missing head. I am the one who looks, I am she who cannot gaze, in reciprocity, back. In the situation here, he-is-me, and she-is-me. I am the subject speaking of all this and I am the object for the voyeur. How many mobile places can I be, a feminist tinker bell, marked by conventions of depiction that center me as "cunt" (why one is in front of me right now!). Yet if I read in too intransigent resistance, I risk blocking the very process of assimilation of such images, and may block, in bulk, understanding the discourses of "my" culture, and Duchamp's address to them.

Sub rosa, what do I feel and what do I see: I feel violé volé voilé, violated and robbed by the very veil of knowing unknowing which Duchamp places before an eye he has (apparently) assumed male. Le viol(in) d'anger. Then, faced by the fetish, my first holy response to "Art" makes me fragment and disenfranchise my anger. My second response of anger mixed with protective pity overrides the immasculated reading eye. Thereupon I feel pity, for myself depicted, for my strained and impotent anger. I feel pity for the image, a compassion, an identification, a happy

sorrow, and an arousal—of wonder? Wherefore this crystalline scene surrounding this piggish pink mass? Is she sleeping? is she hurt? is she wounded? is she coming? has she come? What or who has put her there? What has come from her? The distance—of the neo-nate. A scene—of birth? the birth of the eye? for the eye has been expelled, and the little pupil, forever distanced, returns bleating, lascivious, distorted with unfillable desires to the door of the mother. Is this what I want to produce: a reading saying: I am the female reader and I do not see the privileging of the "phallic" in this work. My eye is the eye of a similar; I refuse (can I refuse?) the position of voyeur; I identify; this figure is not the Other.

The pity—my sorrow and pity for the figure cast out, since inside has become outside. This figure is not in a boudoir, but outside in nature. When we look inside (the door) we blast through walls (there is no house, no room, no coded inside) until we are outside. We think (by the turn of the door) that we are looking IN something, but we are really looking from a room (in a museum) into exposure, into outside. It is laid away in a manger, one of those open front scenes staged with choice figurines, camels, kings, and cows, mother and imaginary father. Here all figurines are missing except the "babe." One imagines Duchamp musing the icons: a female nude? or some aspect of the Christ? In a secular age, where the female nude has become Christ—victimized, crucified, resurrected, restoring Eden with transfigured flesh—Christ Himself could not have been sufficiently Other. So he chose a Girl made Flesh. But iconic bits of manger scenes steal into this image: the barn door, the magical light of the spiritual lamp, the halo of waterfall, the rough "hay." Beyond the initial (question—does it really have priority?) immasculation, or in the struggle with it, the culturally unaccounted, unacknowledged fact of female spectators (**) has the power to disturb all elements of an art work, throwing established system of consumption, spectatorship, and interpretation into the most fruitful heterogeneity.

Sub Rrosa n° 3: nu? de Q

This is a piece just representational enough to remind us of the sensuous convention of robust pink-meaty nudes of innocence (Renoir, Rubens), and puzzling enough to recall the refined challenges of intellectually/sensually knowing nudes (Goya, Manet), and shocking enough to recall the torsion of almost unacceptable eroticism (Bronzino). So it is a pattern book of nudes, an excess of intertextual alliances are part of the shock of the work: one looks at its excrescent self and knows the whole museum falling on one's head.

That which has accidentally occurred to (say) the Venus de Milo has deliberately been enacted here, a strained coupage not less irrevocable from being in the eye of the beholder (dependent on the mandatory limited

position of the eye): does she have feet which are out of view? or no feet at all, no second arm, no face? The filmic "cut"; the "cut of physical coupure"; and the realized "gash" are in metonymic relation to each other. But this frightening text is conjoined with another banal, though erotic and gustatory set of discourses: the nude is "pretty as a picture" (as!); she "looks good enough to eat." She is also "flat as a pancake" resembling a cake or a sugar-coated almond. Again, these discourses of sexual mutilation and gustatory pleasure are contradictory, though one is placed before that place where the contradictions are fused, impacted: that place is the cultural site Woman.

We know Duchamp for his willingness to engage analytically but also furtively with cultural icons and with the systems of value and representation that stand behind them. He stands on the edge of enfolding systems and critical systems—between complicity and critique. This sincere duplicity may be (pace La Belle Halaine and other transvestite moments in Duchamp) his most female gesture, his most feminine "dress." He draws a moustache and beard on the Mona Lisa in a child-coded gesture of defacement. The transposition of a man's beard onto a woman's face toys with androgyny; the placement of a punning emblem of her pubic bottom on her face mocks the sacred icon by gloating over woman as perpetually sexualized. It also transposes the face of the painting into a male leer at the recognition which Duchamp's title proposes: a boyish French anagram, written as if as commonplace as INRI: "L.H.O.O.Q." = elle a chaud au cul = she has hot pants. The iconoclasm occurs at the expense of the female image, but while it is easy to dislodge Mona Lisa as a sacred cow, it is harder to dislodge woman as sacred cow while also constructing an altar. The title disembowels the duplicities of the visual gesture (towards androgyny and towards questioning the icons) with a masculinist reductiveness. The overall impact can be summarized with Sandra Harding's feminist distrust of androgyny in men: it is a skimming off of the feminine which leaves the social conditions of gender unchanged.[11] But notice, nonetheless, how Duchamp swirls among gender stances, stirring up the dust.

Now critics have noted that the erotic content of "Etant Donnés. . ." is "immediately apparent"[12] but by that they seem to mean only that the image is explicitly sexualized by genital exposure. One does not know, by looking, the nature of the eroticism, which lies in contextual realms of interpretation: is it arousing, disturbing, aphrodisiac, anaphrodisiac, teasing, violent, brutalizing, awestruck? Nor from whence eroticism emanates: simply from the open genitals read as sexual availability? from the mystery of exposed, inexplicably placed nakedness? from the spectator's distance? from the strange torsion? in the relations among this nude and the pulsing perpetual power of gas and water? in suggestions of defiling, raping, protecting, possessing, never possessing? Far from being assured, one

might with greater justice say: this work shows us we have no idea at all how we feel, know, understand eroticism, nor who "we" are when we comprehend it. One can only say: the artist has evoked sexuality and mystery simultaneously, and has written over, cut his trace into, an icon of the female, a manipulation, it suddenly becomes clear, that we agree to call art. Is "art" the defiling, arousing, iconizing of a female nude? Eroticism, as he said with an opaque elegance, was an important aesthetic "-ism."[13]

anagrams of C.N.T
.R.L.L cuntroll

or C.N.D.R.L.L Cinderella
where the fit in the slipper
issues: blood bumps
the dim swoops
of love-breathing (bird)
dim sum, doughy pork balls
yum
sweet fix the shiny threads by tone
I fit my clitty slit into my own slipper slot

Sub Rrosa n° 4: What are the "givens"?

Some people are fairly clear about what they see when they see it: "she opens her legs out towards the spectator with no false prurience or sense of shame."[14] Another phrase "the pudenda of the violated female figure"[15] suggests that what we witness is the aftermath of rape, while others suggest what we see is the throes of orgasm, but transposed to spiritual illumination.[16] Is it more like a doll, or a mannequin (if a mannequin could have a sex), one of those back page, small ad, life-sized dolls for masturbatory discharge. But it is, overall, more delicate than that.[17] And yet—it is a dreadful, even revolting, delicacy.

It is important not to flinch from this spot, to try to see the way these genitals "look."[18] And they are wayward: a fact reflected in the criticism only with projective words like rape or orgasm or shame. What do I mean, wayward? Just a patent element: this genitalia looks very strange, long, crooked, visually extended. That spot, made up in order from the abdomen down, is made of three distinct elements. First, there is a curved, long, empty fluvial slash asymmetrically placed in relation to a monstrous right thigh. Second, there is a puckered pink space, bowl shaped. Third, there is a little pink protuberance just visible behind one twig (a parodic envisioning of the total but coy coverage of a fig leaf). Duchamp has made a new kind of collage of genital materials. Each part of this collage alludes to body parts; each calls forth specific readings.

parentheses ( )
peepholes o o eye ⊜ pupil from pupilla
little orphan girl
analog. Gk: koré
cunt-mark (o) girl, pupil of the eye

The slashed S-curve is the most harrowing. It looks as if her bottom had been bitten through. Bitten as if the woman has been "castrated." Is "Etant Donnés. . ." the literalization of the (male) oedipal punishment visited upon a (female) image of (bisexual) oedipal desire for the mother? The work a symbolic map (du champ) of oedipalization? This train of thought gains some confirmation in relation to Duchamp's demonic version of "amor lohn" or the sexual paradox of the Keats "Ode"—cannot touch, cannot consummate—this being more powerful than consummation because it holds desire at its purest moment of yearning. But demonic because the lax, post-orgasmic position of Miss Donnés (miss given miss taken) suggests that before our penetrating gaze entered this strange little space, someone (now absent) already "had sex" with this nude. This impression is even somewhat necrophiliac, somewhat galatea-ic—with this "dead woman," with this "statue." And so the nude could sum up a major crossroads of sexual desire: the rebuff, the perpetual oedipal belatedness of any child (female or male) from any mother. Frustration, rebuff, belatedness—these the "delay in flesh" that make her (plausible? implausible?) satisfaction, or at least her sexual connivance have always already occurred. The piece is about the spectator's "delay."

This important genital consideration can be set in relation to one of the small works of sculpture ("Erotic Objects") contemporaneous with the assemblage. "Objet-dard" (1951): a snake, a penis, a soft but long bone, the pun on "hard on" / "art work" (thus "'Art on") / "dart, javelin" again offering the reflective play between the museum/the collection and sex and aggression. A conceptual word "d'ard" is made of the interspace among them. The Duchamp pudenda, seen in strained memory, can be imagined as the molded surface onto which this snaky Objet-dard could fit lengthwise. Duchamp invents a variant copulation, not by penetration, but by cogitation, figuring out all the different ways things could fit, could "be read."

The second allusion is contained in the little puckered spot—not visibly open, not at all like the vaginal opening. Indeed, the puckered anal opening is strongly suggested, and yet the spot is as pink and new as the anus of an infant. Thus the pastoral anus—bringing with it a whole set of utopian associations with the pleasures of artifice and the artifice of pleasures (the witty nerve of this is exactly the nerve of pastoral poems). The spot also strongly suggests the puckered knot of the navel. In one

economic icon, Duchamp has summarized non-reproductive and reproductive sexuality.

This third of the "Givens" recalls Duchamp's "Female Fig Leaf" ("Feuille de vigne femelle" [1950]) perhaps the strangest of these little objects—uniformly read as a cast of the female pudenda: *which it cannot visually be.* It looks to be a miniaturized version of a very small ass (tush, I want to say) with the crack between the buttocks curved and extruded. It looks like a small seat, or, more wildly, a knee rest for the tightly closed knees which are a synecdoche for chastity. If it is true that *"Female Fig Leaf* was modeled against the pudenda of the violated [sic] female figure of the *Etant Donnés. . ."*[19], Duchamp has substituted back for front in the same kind of tongue in cheek (another late Duchamp work) gesture as bearding the Mona Lisa in her den. He has opened the cunt to find the ass: the strategy of reversal, a cast from the back of the erotic crack reapplied to the front, still engages with a binary erotic system of "holes" or "spaces."

sweet ropes
fell down in stupor
slid parts a part
got clipped
together in
part.

The third allusion is the most radical. At the very end of this pudendal train, approximately where a (naturalized) anus would be, is popped an unmistakable protuberance, nonetheless just slightly effaced by the discreet twig in the foreground. It is a clitoris, though presented without its close friends, the labia, thus exposed and shorn of some of its pleasure.

Duchamp has, in this work, opened the vulva of the nude: it is a major critique of traditions of representation. (It may—I am not conversant with 20th century pornography—be an application of certain pornographic conventions to a "high art" piece.) He has opened her so that we can see what has always been missing: by its naturalized absence Duchamp calls attention to the clitoredectomy of all Western depictions of the female nude. For it has been decisively argued by Gayatri Spivak that the effacement of the clitoris is a major aspect of the cultural compacts of gender.[20] In his allusive use of the clitoris, Duchamp indeed puts "into some degree of disarray" the system WOME/AN.[21]

Duchamp shows a Steinean interest in the continuous allusive secession from systems of meaning. "One has to be on guard because, despite oneself, one can become invaded by things of the past. Without wanting to, one puts in some detail. There [in "The Bride"] it was a constant battle to make an exact and complete break."[22] Disfiguring. Disfigured (slashed, deformed, turned back side round, reversed) is one way of saying stop this fiction, stop the figural convention, alter it so that it is no longer useable.

But then Duchamp puts *in* some detail, a detail hardly before seen, and produces in this shocking artwork both the visual conventions of sentimentality and mutilation overlayered with a major reinterpretation of the genitals, a series of contradictory stories: castration at one end and clitoral presence at the other, pain and pleasure, non-reproductive and reproductive sexualities, "cruel" exposure and "critical" exploration.[25]

Is this major critique of the cultural conventions of representation compromised by Duchamp's gender position? To some great degree, this piece remains a work of high manipulation, effacing wholeness, the head and other humanistic markers; proposing a spectator-voyeur compelled to a certain kind of gaze. However, it remains provocative (though not to date a part of commentary) that the work stands in a critical relation to a central Western convention of representation, to a central part of the cultural compacts of gender. It does not efface the clitoral "detail."[26]

How can one have a language of image, theme, allusion, discourse without participating to that degree in the already given, the "étant donnés" of gender? The feminist question. Duchamp's genius: by bringing up certain discourses of sexuality in a lurid, exaggerated manner, by his fluted, flaunted genital collage, he has succeeded in making one uneasy, in destabilizing cultural agreements of female representation. Duchamp's detail is the virtually unspoken, undepicted detail. Etant donnés: the givens for Duchamp seem to exist in a kind of brutalizing contradiction. Etant donnés—This being the case, granted this, *then what follows?*

nude skeleton motor auto-mat hot knobs just say the word

runs to the bushes raspberry gathering "there are so many we even get tired of them, squash them with sugar, dribble them over ice cream we call it raspberry mush"

rose voracity
rose veracity

how can the rose speak? (so to speak)

Erato is one muse, lyric plus eros. I have errata.
I say: here are rosaceous errata, rub rrosa, the extra
excessive interpolated **r**
interrupting the general spell.

So to speak, rewrite the rose.

Sub rrosa

little bits
arouse

"infra-mince" changes
dandle the lost button.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

NOTES

1 The occasion for this essay is the centennial retrospective, *A Propos of Duchamp, 1887-1987*, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Sept.-Dec. 1987. Useful commentary in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp*, The Museum of Modern Art and The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973; Joseph Masheck, ed., *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975; Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare*, Viking Press, 1978.

2 In this piece, I am eliding the question how "Etant Donnés. . ." relates to other of Duchamp's artworks: his massive intertextuality with himself (so that doors, hinges, windows have told stories in his oeuvre as a whole; so that this piece evokes ready-mades), and the reasonable claim (by William Copley, Masheck, ed.) that this work summarizes motifs from his whole career.

3 Generally in art books one has seen only a bland reproduction of the door, or reproductions of nude studies for "Etant Donnés. . . . ," which have a very different character. In 1987, The Philadelphia Museum published a replica of Duchamp's *Manual of Instructions for "Etant Donnés. . ."* which contains a small reproduction. Important early commentary in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, "'Etant Donnés. . .': Reflections on a New Work by Marcel Duchamp," *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, LXIV, 299-300 (1969): 1-58.

4 "Retinal" is a term used with a piercing probity by Duchamp to characterize precisely what he rejected, what he seceded from in art: painterly sensuousness considered as the most valid expression in the history of art. Early on (1913 with the first diagrammatic "Chocolate Grinder"), "I began to think I could avoid all contact with traditional pictorial painting." ". . .Too great an importance is given to the retinal. Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral." In Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (trans. Ron Padgett), The Viking Press, 1971, pp. 37, 43. The interviews were conducted in 1966.

5 Sub Rosa: in secret, privately, confidentially. Latin, 'under the rose,' from the practice of hanging a rose over a meeting as a symbol of secrecy, from the legend that Cupid once gave Harpocrates, the god of silence, a rose to make him keep the secrets of Venus.

6 There is an important argument in feminist film criticism on the gaze as male, and then an appreciative critique and brilliant tracing of ways beyond binary reversals by the same author. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, 3 (Aut. 1975); and Mulvey, "Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience," *History Workshop* 23 (Sp. 1987).

[7] Aside from desperate rhetorical flourishes about genre, one might calmly say that the work situates itself among: an anthropological or zoological diorama, a stage set, a shop window, a sculpture, a pornographic peep show, an essay.

[8] Octavio Paz, p. 96. My sense of the agendas of the female reader has been enhanced by Patrocinio P. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," in Schweickart and Elizabeth Flynn, eds., *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. Duchamp, too, made a bland but rich statement that the spectator "brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his [*] contribution to the creative act." "The Creative Act (1957)," in Robert Lebel, ed., *Marcel Duchamp*, Grove Press, 1959, p. 78.

[9] Fetterley's pioneering study is *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, Indiana University Press, 1978, p. xx. Fetterley would "exorcise" the male mind "implanted" in her (p. xxii); I find it more pertinent now (armed with the power of an already existing feminist criticism) to explore the dialectics of reading from the double position.

[10] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Viking Press, 1972, p. 46. Mary Ann Caws has eloquently posed this issue in an essay which was a strong inspiration for this one: "To talk, again, about complications: insofar as it is a question of women's bodies, the female onlooker is—willing or not, partially or wholly—identified with the body under observation and under the rule of art." "Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art," in Susan Sulieman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 263.

[11] Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, Cornell University Press, 1986, p. 145.

[12] As, d'Hamoncourt and Hopps, p. 21.

[13] Duchamp, in Cabanne, p. 88.

[14] John Golding, *Marcel Duchamp: The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, The Viking Press, 1972, p. 96. Not only does Golding tell us how he feels; he remarkably tells us how "she" feels.

[15] Robert Pincus-Witten, "Theater of the Conceptual: Autobiography and Myth," in Masheck, ed., p. 164.

[16] Octavio Paz, pp. 158, 172.

[17] Some people imply that this is a one-man erotic fantasy: in the smug words of Masheck, "a senile hobby, altogether private in its psychological functions," p. 23, in ed. Masheck.

[18] This description is, naturally, not neutral; it is fully inflected with my position as a "marked marker".

[19] A reprise of Robert Pincus-Witten, in Masheck, p. 164.

[20] "The clitoris escapes reproductive framing. In legally defining woman as object of exchange, passage, or possession in terms of reproduction, it is not only the womb that is literally 'appropriated'; it is the clitoris as the signifier of the sexed subject that is

effaced." Later in the essay, Spivak points to "varieties of the effacement of the clitoris" in legal and political-economic definitions of women; it seems appropriate to extend this to cultural representations. "French Feminism in an International Frame," *Yale French Studies*62 (1981), p. 181. The essay is now collected in Spivak's *In Other Worlds*, Methuen, 1987.

[21] David Antin, "duchamp and language (1972)," in *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. d'Harnoncourt and McShine. "duchamps relation to art has been an endless series of stratagems stratagems involving complete systems that he puts into some degree of disarray," p. 101. "it is not a visual space its a conceptual space in which vision is a prop," p. 107.

[22] Cabanne, p. 38.

[23] It may be relevant to note that the triplex of allusions (vulval, anal, clitoral) is unique to this piece. None of the three studies in the Philadelphia exhibition has any clitoral indication.

[24] Naomi Schor wittily proposes that "the clitoris is coextensive with the detail. The clitoral school of feminist criticism might then be identified by its practice of a hermeneutics focused on the detail, which is to say on those details of the female anatomy which have been generally ignored by male critics and which significantly influence our reading of the texts in which they appear." "Female Paranoia: The Case for Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), p. 216. Now collected in *Reading in Detail*, Methuen, 1987. My sense of the " is that any kind of female reading will reopen what is seen, what is foregrounded, what priorities are assessed, and what is thought.

A LABOR OF "SONG'S EXACTION"
DREAMING CLOSE BY BY RICK LONDON, *O BOOKS*, OAKLAND, CA, 1986

Where the dream material gathers it approximates a life and voice of its own, close to what you know yet closing in as you approach it, amassing distorted figures; so material, in the sense of densely present, it comes yet still to something other—at points evanescent. This is how you approach it: in the act of slow recognition. This is how it takes you: in the act of absorption. These are the effects of *Dreaming Close By*.

Often in the body of Rick London's work *the body* is felt to be violated, as from the effects of sickness, a long, hallucinatory sickness—a felt duration under duress. Pain is felt *close by* as an isolation of the body's parts floating curiously apart from each other—"a stomach unattached," "face, apart, sans future"—and the sounds and syntax of these poems draw this out ("body applied by a word / body emptied by word"); exaggerate it, not as melodrama or horror, but as a test of the realistic measure of things

drawn out in crisis to assume these disorienting shapes, suspended before your eyes. What you "cannot with ease abide" becomes more explicit because it comes to gradually, on hold. The ways in which the words sound and the lines break *bear* this out—

. . .her prone body by gravity
pulled to a shape he cannot with
ease abide

(the tongues exaggerated in size)

—here in the isolation of the line "ease abide," in the elongation of both words' sounds, in the choice of the formal "abide" to distance or withstand the distortions the body undergoes, and in the slant rhyme of "abide" with "size" to absorb the repercussions of this pain-bearing, and extend them. Consumed by sickness, the body takes its place beside you, unrecognizable, exaggerated out of place—as if you were dreaming it.

There is a resonant economy to London's poems which is marked by this hesitation to fix things in place:

moving the thin face of it, can't place when she
quits her breath. . .

. . . .her
face then where

and a desire to track the signs that emerge from this displacement:

.where as people

are signs a

place throws

(up)

The poems become multi-directional signs—moving close by, veering away, rising, falling—of a floating world in which even gravity is inverted

("the community of hesitations the inversions all float together"), and the perceptions of a disembodied consciousness lift into the air—looking over you, breathing ghostly measures:

. . .figure via fix of air

smells especially from

her mouth figure breeding doubt floating alone yes
there is a ghost but not to satisfy your questions. . .

At the same time the "dreaming" in this book very much *embodies* or is connected to the figures and objects around it, and it is the book's writing that must necessarily bind them to the world, even after the dream lets them go. The smallest gestures of speech—like a parenthetical "the"—assume capital implications, and they generate an ambivalent twofold view of things in the world put in place, then displaced. Reading the article in the beginning of the title poem, "Dreaming Close By," creates a different (contrary) effect and perspective than shutting it out:

seated figure of

age (the)

chair stationary (the)

figure rocking into

air shedding as

she gathers. . .

Articulated, the article becomes gravitational—keeping things down. Left silent within parentheses, it makes *the* room with figures and chairs *room* or space enough into which things are suspended, including the room and the light which brings it up:

light original to (the) room brings it up

The concentrated, grounded sense of things which are pulled or emptied, levitated or released or ripped from their sources—what keeps them down—is applied with an exhausting, visceral intensity across the final poem of the book, "Untitled Piece." This piece is one of the most unnerving, densely wrought and engaging works I have recently *voiced,* and I say voiced knowingly, because it will literally change how you read. Reading it, you become subject to (and of) the extremes of an exacting lyricism in which the smallest clusters of sound are foregrounded. Words, like bodies, are violated, but the violence which severs them is continuously shifted and undercut and stretched from line to line before the voice has a chance to articulate them wholly in place—to recognize them. It is almost impossible to quote these one page blocks partially, but even an isolated excerpt will give you some kind of provisional hearing:

> . . . .ripped and s
> tone, emits a sever of gro
> und, extruded rightfully e
> xpelled, a stretch of gr
> ound

The sounds here come out of pain—exaggerated, racked. Suspended at the end of a line as one sound (and with that sound emerges the meaning you associate with it), a word assumes another value and character at the start of the next line. The voice emits "gro" as "groan" before coming to "gro/ und", as if that's where the sound rose from—a severed ground. The voice presses out a hard "e" and stretches it, then shifts to relieve the pressure in the softened "xpelled". The disbelief and relief of pain are hung on the same letter, different phonemes. In the following, one wants to say "o" in disbelief, and concludes by muting the exclamation, relieving it with "or" and "of" (It is curious how the dominant phoneme in this piece—and perhaps in the whole book—is "o", since it makes for a fortuitous conjunction and correspondence with the name of the book's publisher, Leslie Scalapino's *O Books*.):

> can't believe it o
> r relieve it sort o
> f see it over ther
> e

> the entrails going
> out

I should say that these are not empty, lettristic gestures or experimental practices unrealized in the world; just the opposite. They very much engage, to the letter, the conditions a subject endures through a rapt attention to the body's breathing in and out of pain, "its specific distortions" singing into the world—the body emptying into the world:

. . . .where-as the anim
al small and viscous sung into (th
e) world. and the animal: 'you kn
ow my name,' empty name

. . .or song without eyes at all
sings one out

These are broken words, broken bodies, thrown into the world, hung there, delayed before (and beyond) recognition, before you come to know them whole:

as with the missing figure, cloth bandaged,
or hidden gesture, broken mass or abdom
inal without eyes at all, delayed, empties t
hing sings one out

Dreaming Close By is, to quote Zukofsky in *"A" 9,* a labor of "song's exaction"—a music you wait in, suspended, before it absorbs you.

—BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

THE GUEST: SECOND THOUGHTS ON TRANSLATING HÖLDERLIN

By second thoughts, I mean that particular mode of revisionary, retrospective reflection akin to what the French call *l'esprit de l'escalier*. I.e. the withering repartee that suddenly leaps to mind as you find yourself on the stairway, making your exit from some social gathering where, just a few minutes before, to your utter discomfiture and humiliation, you had proved

miserably unable to devise an appropriate comeback to some witty conversational challenge, but instead had just stood there, taken aback, tongue-tied and publicly exposed, as it were, as incapable of rising to the linguistic or dialectical occasion at hand. Now, as you retreat from the scene of your defeat and make your way up the privacy of the darkened stairs, you are suddenly illuminated with hindsight. A miraculous flush of fluency suddenly overwhelms you as you come to realize, in delayed epiphany, what it was you should have said back there and then. But of course the words have come too *late*. You can't go back and rectify your failure. All you can do is mull your way home, replaying the incident over and over in freeze frame or slow motion.

I offer this as a metaphor for one of the most disquieting episodes in the life of the translator—the moment at which he or she queasily thinks back on an encounter that, in retrospect, seems to cry out for revision or rectification, and yet whose deficiencies, now graven on the public printed page, lie there for all and sundry to inspect and dissect. How few of us, as translators, are ever given to a second chance to correct all the errors that seem to multiply in hindsight—the typos, the dropped lines, the *mot* that still refuses to be *juste*, the downright misreadings, the infelicities of rhythm or phrase? How few of us, given the Darwinian economics of publishing, are ever allowed the luxury of revised editions of our efforts? With a few, very rare exceptions, we translators tend to be stuck with our shortcomings. Once published, our versions become in an odd sense *irreversible*. What was initially apprehended as a series of provisional decisions has now strangely acquired the status of something definitive. Or to put it in slightly different terms: what was originally experienced as a *verb*—that is, as an ongoing activity or process or dialogue or encounter or event—has now been transformed into a *noun*—a reified text or object that sits there on the page, facing both its original and its translator like some ironic stillbirth or abortion.

It may be that I am simply evoking the post-partem melancholia that afflicts any author—the euphoria of gestatory expectation giving way to the despondency that attends one's awareness of the sheer irrevocability of the small, helpless textual thing that has thus finally emerged. But I think that the situation I am describing—and I am basing it on my own second thoughts about translating Hölderlin's late Hymns and Fragments—involves a *tristitia* peculiar to translators: given the inevitably "secondary" or "derivative" nature of their enterprise (if one wanted another obstetric metaphor, one might say that a translation is merely an "afterbirth" of the original), the awareness they engage in is always belated, always provisional, always contingent. To me at least, the most interesting translations (among which Hölderlin's Sophocles or Pindar) are not those that fix or ground their originals, but that somehow manage to leave them "up in the

air," to suspend them, as it were, for that precarious and precious instant in which original and translation miraculously collide and come asunder, converge and take on distance—I am deliberately borrowing this figure of unstable encounter from Hölderlin's own meditations on the paradoxical measure (or *Maass)* that defines the space in which the human and the divine are simultaneously conjoined and divorced: "Nah ist, / Und schwer zu fassen." Near and / Hard to grasp. In "The Task of the Translator" Walter Benjamin explores a similar figure in his celebrated simile of the tangent: "Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point, with this touch rather than with the point setting the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity, a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense *[Sinn],* thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux."

Benjamin's image of translation as a vector that tangentially grazes the "sense" of the original only to pursue its own independent course brings me to another area of post-mortem reflection. If, on the one hand, I have been describing the kind of retrospective alienation a translator might feel vis-a-vis his all-too-finished-product—a kind of nostalgia for that period of innocence when everything still seemed virtual, when nothing was yet "definitive," when every decision was still open to revision, in short, a period in which the very *process* of translation, of discovery, of experiment seemed to matter far more than its eventual completion (in my case this lasted some seven years)—on the other hand, I also now find myself reacting in exactly the opposite fashion, that is, I look back on what I have done and, far from seeing it as irrevocably fixed in some final printed form, I watch it unravel in front of my very eyes. I supposed if one wanted metaphors for these two complimentary predicaments, in the former case the translator finds himself in the position of Lot's wife: to look back is to experience petrifaction, immobilization, the living tissue of the text now reads in retrospect like so much dead letter. But in the latter case, the experience more resembles that of Orpheus: you look back only to discover that your loving translation has vanished. And in its place—uncannily—now stands the original.

Let me explain. Anyone who has engaged in translation has probably experienced that particular phase of the process (it is one of the stages in what George Steiner terms "The Hermeneutic Motion") in which one's translation seems to have more or less completely "covered" the original. I use the term "cover" here in a number of senses, all involving various implications of protection, concealment, and mastery. One displays one's mastery of a subject or field by covering it. Stallion masters mare as he covers her. Text covers text in a palimpsest. A book in turn may or may not be told by its cover. To cover for someone is to substitute one's presence

for their absence or act as an accomplice in dissimulation. In rock 'n roll parlance, a cover is a recording made by one performer or aimed at one market of a tune originally recorded by a different performer and aimed at a different market (as in say, a Rolling Stones white "cover" of an earlier black Chuck Berry hit). All of which I think very nicely covers a number of different dimensions of translation. To return to my own personal encounter with Hölderlin's late Hymns and Fragments, I felt as I completed my translation (but is a translation ever "complete"?) that I had more or less succeeded in covering the texts I had chosen (or that had chosen me). Indeed, so absorbed was I in getting my version just right that in the end I could no longer see or hear the original: Hölderlin's German had been completely obscured, blocked out, covered by the English that I had so labored to out in its place. The translator as Narcissus, is so entranced by the reflection he has crafted that he remains blissfully oblivious to the beckonings of Echo.

Little by little, however, after the initial exhilaration of publication had passed and I returned to what I had done (whether in classroom teaching of Hölderlin or in private rereading), a strange and marvelous thing began to happen. The originals that I had so triumphantly thought I had covered or laid to rest now began to stir into life again—and so insistently that they seemed to be gradually erasing or obscuring the versions I had created in their stead. Or, more precisely (and this is one of the virtues and perils of an *en face* edition), the originals were once again reasserting their place *alongside* my translations to such an extent that the light emitted by Hölderlin's German on the left page was now blinding my parallel English versions on the right. Or, to use a slightly different metaphor, it was as if the original, now come back to life, had returned to haunt the translation like some uncanny *revenant* or Doppelgänger. A psychoanalysis of translation might well conclude that the situation I am here evoking involves a kind of return of the repressed, a salutary reminder that the original (especially an original of the power of Hölderlin) can be only mastered or surmounted *à ses propres risques et périls*. Hölderlin's own translations of Pindar and Sophocles are perhaps the most eloquent examples we have of such tragic hubris: reaching out to appropriate the fire of Hellas, he gets burned in the process, and yet it is precisely the intensity of this conflagration that accounts for the dark, charred radiance of his versions. As he writes in one of his late fragments: "Verwegner! möchst von Angesicht zu Angesicht / Die Seele sehn / Du gehest in Flammen unter." Reckless! wanting to see the soul / Face to face / You go down in flames.

I certainly do not want to give the impression I am comparing my own experience as a translator to Hölderlin's—that would be grotesquely hubristic. I am merely trying to explore the basic provisionality or instability of the relation between original and translation by underscoring how, in

my case at least, Hölderlin's text seemed to recoup itself, to uncover itself (Heideggerian *aletheia?)* only *after* having been silenced or occluded by my translation. In other words, although I had initially set out with the intent of rendering Hölderlin's late work more "accessible" to the English-speaking reader, this enterprise had paradoxically blocked my own access to the originals. Only in hindsight, only in retrospective distance, only by having watched my own translations fall apart and fade in the face of the original could I now begin to read (or reread) Hölderlin's German afresh. Without wanting to overly Hegelianize it, I suppose the model of translation I am describing here is closely linked to the metaphors of sacrifice that inform so much of Hölderlin's own work: the original is sacrificed (or cancelled or "sublated") in the translation, just as the translation is in turn sacrificed back to the original so that the latter, now renewed and transformed, may continue on its course.

Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (which is in itself a "translation" of Hölderlin) speaks of the process in terms of the essential historicity of literary works—their *Fortleben* or *Ueberleben* or *Nachleben,* that is, the way in which works of the past, despite (or precisely because of) the fact that they are no more, continue to survive or pursue an afterlife. Translations, Benjamin argues, are the crucial vehicles of this posthumous survival, for in them "the life of the originals attains its ever-renewed latest and most abundant unfolding *[Entfaltung].*" "In its afterlife *[Fortleben]",* Benjamin continues, "the original undergoes a change. Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process [Benjamin's term here—*Nachreife*—also evokes over-ripening or decomposition]. What once sounded fresh may later come to sound hackneyed; what was once modern may someday sound archaic." In short, Benjamin insists that the original is in no way *fixed;* as it moves through the various avatars of its afterlife, it is subject to any number of ramifications. And the same holds true of translations. Benjamin notes: "While a poet's words endure in his own language, even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and destined to be absorbed by its renewal [Benjamin's German here plays on the verbs *eingehen* and *untergehen:* a translation both *goes in* to its own language and *goes under* in it]. Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original and the birthpangs [or deathpangs] of its own." That is, not only does translation as "afterlife" reveal the death or decomposition (or deconstruction) of the original, but it also watches over its own inevitable demise, mournfully aware that its encounter with the original can never be definitive.

Benjamin underlines the liability that characterizes the life (or afterlife) of both the original and its translations. If the original is conceived as a

historical process moving through time, the translation in turn becomes merely a momentary point of convergence along this posthumous vector, a point that will soon be left behind in the dust—just as Hölderlin's German has now passed through my English with a jolt to pursue its slightly deflected course into future readings, future versions. Benjamin's profoundly temporal or historical approach to translation makes him, I believe, the first theorist of translation to break with the dominant tradition of viewing translations as having an essentially *metaphorical* relation to their originals—that is, as being somehow analogous or similar or equivalent to their originals. True, he rhetorically deploys metaphors throughout his essay, but only in order to insist that translation is something very different from the theory or practice of imitation. Translation, he argues, should not be confused with such concepts as similarity, substitutability, copying or reproduction *[Wiedergabe]*—all species of metaphor. Instead, the figures he privileges are *synecdoche* (i.e. a translation is "part" of the ongoing afterlife of the original) or *metonymy* (i.e. a translation is an effect whose cause is the original, or, in slightly different terms, a translation exists as a continuous extension of or supplement *[Erganzung]* to the original). For Benjamin, the privileged form of this metonymic adjacency is the targum or interlinear version of the Scriptures, the translation that does not so much resemble its original as lie in between its lines, both languages dovetailed together as the fractured parts of some greater "pure Language" *[reine Sprache]*—the two broken shards of a *symbolon* momentarily brought together as a sign of shared promise or contract.

Benjamin rejects the traditional view of translation as a mode of representation, reproduction or mimesis in favor of a more "figural" approach (hence his attractiveness to such theorists as de Man and Derrida). Despite his apparent espousal of radical literalism or *Wortlichkeit* ("For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade"), Benjamin by no means recommends this "worldliness" on the grounds that it permits a greater resemblance or equivalence between translation and original, but rather because it allows both to enter into a *relation* or participate in an *exchange* that, ideally, will serve to liberate the space (or Language) that lies in between the two—much as Mallarmé insists that it is the blanks, the intervals, the margins, the silences that constitute the true armature of a poem.

As I now look back on my translations of Hölderlin, it is above all the space *between* my English and his German that occupies me. If I take up the published book, it is no longer the right-hand page that automatically draws my eye, but rather the entire space to the left of it—the intervening whiteness between the *en face* texts, and, further to the left, of course, Hölderlin's originals in which, from time to time, I can occasionally see the faint traces of my own words reaching through the palimpsest. I suppose

I originally undertook my versions in the naive belief that some metaphorical condition of resemblance might emerge: I was going to produce texts that would somehow read "like" Hölderlin to the American eye and ear. In hindsight, however, I now realize that something altogether different was really at issue all the while: to offer temporary hospitality to Hölderlin's errant original, to have it over as a guest for a while, to experience the communion of simple adjacency, one language sharing a moment of silence with another. Oddly enough, this was the subject of the very first Hölderlin fragment I ever translated, the fragment that led me to undertake the entire enterprise in the first place. Only now in retrospect, filled with second thoughts, am I beginning to grasp the point it makes about translation:

Bauen möcht
I want to build

und neu errichten
and raise anew
das Theseus Tempel und die Standien
the temples of Theseus and the stadiums
und wo Perikles gewohnet
and where Pericles lived

Es fehlet aber das Geld, denn zu viel
But there's no money, too much
is ausgegeben heute. Zu Gaste nemlich hatt
spent today. I had a guest
ich geladen und wir sassen beienander
over and we sat together

—RICHARD SIEBURTH

SOUNDS FROM THE MASK

In *Lethal Speech* Roy Wagner illustrates the tropic tendency of the Daribi—of Papua New Guinea for whom pigs are the archetypal food animal—by recounting this adage: "a goat is not a very good pig; the best pig is a cow." The propositional form of this construction is not so alien to our own styles of assessment. In that mythmaking mode of narrative known as music history, the "best" is generically rewritten as "first" in order to

anchor the chronicle to its edenic motherlode. So, by making rock's *first* best pig an Elvis and swings *first* a Goodman, and jazz's *first best pig* the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, what is concealed is the labor process whereby some entrepreneurial Tom Sawyer whitewashes, and renews the lease, on a fence.

Quite aside from residual tropological debris, storytelling and history-writing are cluttered with latent ideological detritus, like toxic deposits left long ago and only lately emitting their radioactive deformations. This is nowhere more evident than in the business of writing modern music as history, with its axiomatic variable, "the best pig is a cow." In other words, a simple tropic assertion is made to function with the inelastic finality of a law, the self-evidence of a syllogism.

The "jazz age" was implanted in the public mind as a term for contemporary styles of hedonism in 1922, largely on the strength of Fitzgerald's collection *Tales of the Jazz Age* (originally to have been called *Flappers and Philosophers* until its author perceived "jazz" as a more durable word than "flappers"). In a 1931 elegy for the period, "Echoes of the Jazz Age," Fitzgerald noted that "The word jazz in it progress toward respectability has first meant sex, then dancing, then music. It is associated with a state of nervous stimulation, not unlike that of big cities behind the lines of a war." Nervousness was the archetypal 19th century American malady (George Beard's 1881 *American Nervousness* was the popular equivalent to our various manuals on stock market flutters, sexual inadequacy, unsolved murders, etc.). Fitzgerald's revival of the term addresses the ailments of a specific social stratum. J. Hartley Manners' 1922 play *The National Anthem* depicted white middle-class youth "jazzing" its way to degeneracy. But the upper classes were not immune either. John Hammond (the legendary talent scout who "discovered" Basie, Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen in his long career—and who died recently, reportedly during a last audition of Billie Holiday singing "All of Me") found jazz the perfect antidote to the constraints of his Vanderbilt upbringing. Barry Ulanov went so far as to accuse Hammond and his ilk of wanting the music "to flagellate their sense of propriety." The crisis of musical identity was actually felt by Yankee bluebloods in the years roughly coinciding with the rise of jazz. As MacDonald Stanton Moore strikingly portrays in *Yankee Blues* (Indiana University Press), cultural self-appraisal meant not only producing estimable American concert composers, but learning to swallow without protest the bitter new styles of reigning European masters such as Debussy, Ravel, and Strauss. As Moore puts it, American audiences were "increasingly eager not to be offended." But what was most offensive for many was the fact that these same Europeans—trend-setters of the highbrow artworld—were wild about jazz, even to the point of acclaiming it the preeminent New World contribution to music.

Since the nation's late 19th century assumption of full-partner status in world domination, the most awkward aspect of self-image was that of cultural deficit. Official art was borrowed, and official artists were in the import/export trade. European educational trips were mandatory, and in the end American "modernism" was the ultimate reenactment of founding principles: a European *life* was the prerequisite for an American art. Ezra Pound can be seen—in proper economic light—as trying to pay off the interest on a huge cultural debt. Jazz was evidently a 'folk' art or entertainment, and until his triumphant 1933 trip to England, Duke Ellington thought so as well. "Maybe our music does mean something," he was to say in a much-quoted reflection after returning home. The bricollage pluralism of folk musics—specifically and most adroitly blended into jazz ("with the ruthlessness," Ralph Ellison wrote, "of those without articulate investments in cultural styles")—constitute the most distinctive American fabrication of a non-indentured art. As if the history of actual slavery had freed some from the burden of a hypothetical debt to unseen masters abroad. The spiritual heritage of the U.S. is black, and it is musical, or as Ellison insists: "the most authoritative rendering of America in music is that of American Negroes." Cultural emancipation in America is directly related to the literal historical disfigurations of enslavement (and I mean here not only bondage of blacks, but the fact that white colonists also felt enslaved by European law). The real Manifesto of Modernism in American arts, at any rate, would have Sidney Bechet as a signator; as he put it, speaking of the challenge to his people of emancipation:

> . . .it was like they were trying to find out in this music what it was they were supposed to do with this freedom: playing the music and listening to it—waiting for it to express what they needed to learn, once they had learned it wasn't just white people the music had to reach, nor even their own people, but straight out to life and to what a man does with his life when it finally *is* his. (quoted in Frederick Turner, *Remembering Song*, p. 35)

This is also the burden of unspoken history that the invisible man learns from the old woman in the prologue to Ellison's novel: "'Old woman, what is this freedom you love so well?'. . .'I done forgot, son. It's all mixed up. First I thinks it's one thing, then I think it's another. It gits my head to spinning. I guess now it ain't nothing but knowing how to say what I got up in my head. But it's a hard job, son. Too much is done happen to me in too short a time.'" *(Invisible Man,* p. 11) This is the spectacle of a person—metonym for an entire race—left ***punchdrunk*** by an abusive history, staggered by the accelerated thrust of ideological afterburners.

While there is a legacy of violence behind the blues, behind jazz, it's the peculiar insight of Jacques Attali in his book *Noise: The Political*

Economy of Music (University of Minnesota Press) to have taken on all musical forms as submersed in a politics of noise-control in which violence is as invariable a threshold as war is to international diplomacy. Where visual art can be ignored by averting the gaze, music goes right to the balance stabilizers of the middle ear, provoking disorientation or even fear. "The game of music," he writes, "resembles the game of power: monopolize the right to violence; provoke anxiety and then provide a feeling of security; provoke disorder and then propose order; create a problem in order to solve it." (28) They're not identical: it's a *resemblance* Attali proposes. But it's close enough for him to assert that music, as the "organization of noise," is nothing less than a radical theoretical form. (4) "Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political. . . Therefore, any theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form." (6)

One of the reasons, I think, for the legendary status of figures like Bird and Trane, is that they made it patently evident that music can be a radical theory *in its practice,* a means of engaging historical/political tonics and dominants by (in almost that classic marine Corps militaristic yodel) *sounding off.* If modern music in general has illustrated an ongoing courtship with noise—from twelve-tone to atonal to aleatory procedures—then jazz is evidently that musical idiom already historicized as "noisy," or hailing from the racially derogated equivalent of noise in information theory.

In Attali's scheme, the sacrificial heritage of music is supplanted in the 19th century by music as representation (the harmonic registration of a cohesive social order) and, in the 20th century, by repetition, or the stockpiling of privatized sensations and preferences, the simulation of sociality in a structure that erases social difference by propagating an eternal return of the same. The ideal repetition is noise-free information (this is behind the current CD revolution, and is the battle-cry of all innovations in recording technology). Attali characterizes representation, on the other hand, as the communication of energy (appropriate to the 19th century discovery of the laws of thermodynamics and the installation of the massive energy-consuming machines of corporate industrialism). What's overlooked in his schematic of periodization is the continued relevance of energy in music. While it is certainly the case that the euphoric alpha-rhythm products that Windham Hill and ECM are typical of our current thirst for noise-free music, jazz has never strayed far from either the 'antiquated' mode of production of harnessed energy, nor from that futurity projected by Attali which he calls "composing. . .[or] inventing the message at the same time as the language."[1] This is of course what Murray Schafer's World Soundscape Project has documented while illustrating some pertinent

principles: all music is situated in a soundscape, and all human soundscapes are socially variable assessments and regulation of noise.

To retain the term "noise" from Attali's project is necessary for two reasons. First, *noise* is a technical term that has the status in information theory (the dominant model of communications in contemporary stagings of discourse environments) of the outside, the inessential, the undesirable, the intrusive excess. In other words it's a term that immediately historicizes otherwise abstract concepts, when transferred from information-theory to music (digital recording is the sonic boom of this migration). Secondly, "noise" as a less rigorous term is a challenge to the neutrality of the concept of "sound." Every humanly propagated sound is evidence, to some auditor, of a volatile otherness. "Noise" is the ideology that intercedes, making a judgment of mere inclination or simple disaffection. Take for instance this, from the *New York Times,* March 30, 1930: "Before M. Chevalier appears on the second half of the program, Duke Ellington, the djinn of din, and his colored Cotton Club Orchestra, devote an hour to elaborate devices for making noise."[2] *The Jazz Singer* was still drawing huge audiences at the movie palaces.

The first sound film is no longer memorable for its sound but for the more frequently imprinted visual scrape-and-bow pose of Al Jolson in blackface, renewing the lease on the minstrel plantation. A judicious assessment of modern American music would have to conclude that white masquerading as black is a dominant style.[3] And now, with Houston Baker's *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (University of Chicago Press) we have a masterful demonstration of the theoretical resources involved in considering the whole issue of mask and masquerade. While only a hundred pages in length, Baker's book is conceptually enormous, and a model of concision.

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[1] This isn't far at all from Murray Schafer's appeal, in *The Tuning of the World,* "to regard the soundscape of the world as a huge musical composition. . .[in which] we are simultaneously its audience, its performers and its composers." (205) Attali forgets the essential component of the listener in his musical sociology, being as he is so focused on music as a mode of social production. By imagining his utopic phase as "composing" he envisions a computer-based multi-instrumental proficiency, while unwittingly cutting away the ground for recognizing *alerted listening* as the ground of social action.

[2] Is it possible that the anonymous reviewer may have gotten wind of Luigi Russollo and his "Art of Noise"? Might the phrase "elaborate devices for making noise" gesture toward Russollo's "intonarumori" or noise-intoners which he summoned into existence as "a new ensemble of instruments"?

[3] And it may be trying to break free even of that supposed fetter—given the panoptic display that wowed the crowd at the Hollywood Bowl, July 1986, at the Playboy Jazz Festival. During an exemplary set by David Murray's quartet, the high point for the crowd was the release of a cascade of balloons—evidence that the simple containment of air in sealed

The minstrel mask is, above all (("above all"!)) a white application. But with telling consequences, for "the *sound* emanating from the mask reverberates through a white discursive universe as the sound of the Negro." (22) So strong was this tradition that by the 1920s the visual mask could be dropped as Amos 'n' Andy produced the same theatrical effects by sound alone on radio. Blackface is a minstrel style of the stage, theatrically delineating perspectival space for the entire society. Baker's first empowering insight is that society itself is *staged* as a minstrel-effect, and that the providential moment of Afro-American modernism is there in Booker T. Washington's donning of the mask so as to produce "reassuring sounds from the black quarters." The point is not that Washington was playing into racist configurations, but playing *with* them, and that "mastery of the minstrel mask by blacks. . .constitutes a primary move in Afro-American modernism." (17) Precisely because the minstrel mask is a vestige of a performative tradition it enabled uncanny minds like Washington's to engage its theatrical spectre. Playing on the title *Up from Slavery,* Baker speculates that in black culture "the anxiety of modernistic influence is produced. . .by the black spokesperson's necessary task of employing audible extant forms in ways that move clearly *up*, masterfully and resoundingly away from slavery." (101) The useful precedent, in other words, is in distinguishing between the mask and the sounds it produces. Blacks (already in blackface, as it were) could concentrate on the *sound* of the mask, recuperating it as a medium of expression suitable to themselves. This is what Baker calls "mastery of form"—a legacy born by subtly and determinedly eliminating the ventriloquism that had always been part of the mask. The master of form floats like a butterfly, but stings like a bee. (50)[4]

Baker's study is also intriguing for its concentrated silence on the issue of music. Music is *the* primary area of the mastery of form in Afro-American art. It's a practice that continues as a central asset to the tradition, considering for instance Cecil Taylor's prodigious conservatory technique as it has been applied for thirty years to reasserting an audible black discourse as latent in this instrument marked by black and white keys. The

rubber can be more enthralling than music of the highest order. The most audacious display of audience delirium was reserved for pop altoist Kenny G., the musical equivalent of Wonderbread (everybody out of their seats and grooving to the multicolored balloons on the package). Sure enough, the bread was processed, denutritionalized *white*—a key word here. After an extended doodle on his saxophone, Kenny G. actually had the bad taste to say "See, white guys can play too!" which drew *the* most ecstatic roar from the crowd all weekend.

[4] This replication of Muhammad Ali's famous principle goes uncited by Baker, and illustrates how richly he has occupied with his text—rather than being *pre*occupied *within* it—a field of rhetorical topoi. He has particularly engaged Ralph Ellison's work in the sotto voce of an enviably ventriloqual masquerade.

minstrel mask, like the piano keyboard, functions as an ideological regulator. Both are mnemonic ritual objects (as Baker says of the mask) which organize and predispose certain patterns of sounds. In the "psychodrama of the minstrel mask" the actual sounds of those whose lives are represented are displaced by "nonsense, misappropriation, or mishearing." (18)

> Obviously, an Afro-American spokesperson who wished to engage in a masterful and empowering play within the minstrel spirit house needed the uncanny ability to manipulate bizarre phonic legacies. For he or she had the task of transforming the mask and its sounds into negotiable discursive currency. In effect, the task was the production of a manual of black speaking, a book of speaking *back and black.* (24)

"Bizarre phonic legacies" are certainly part of the jazz tradition also, considering its instrumental origins in the marching band (next time you see such an outfit take the field at halftime, ponder the fact that this is the tradition that the dominant white culture has forged with these instruments, then consider the contrasting jazz use of the same resources).

So persuasive are both the mask and the keyboard—so "natural" have they come to sound—that the great project of an Afro-American modernism is a technical redress of the basics, starting with speech and the rudimentary sounds that link it with music in a shared motivation to be heard. Talking back and talking black is not so much an act of defiance as a necessary rejoinder in an already ongoing dialogue. But this dialogue, originating in slavery and its enormous disproportion of power, afflicts the stability of the basic interactive communicative exchange which social intercourse presumes. And dialogue has no chance when one of the interlocutors is *heard* as nonsensical (or as speaking "nonstandard English"). Through the screening agency of the minstrel mask, real people are made to appear monstrous and deformed.

Baker shrewdly composes his thesis in different registers—a sort of prose chord system—and one of his most ingenious moves is to suggest a further stage of Afro-American modernism, complementary to the mastery of form: "deformation of mastery," or a "gorilla literacy." (51) Gorilla is here a sign of territorial mastery: challenged gorillas exaggerate and telegraph their "hoots of assurance" as the "sounds of protective display." (55) Baker adds to these marked simians another figure, sounded the same but spelled *guerrilla,* for which there is the tradition of "maroonage" to draw on. "Maroon" societies were groups of escaped slaves who lived with a nomadic proficiency, organizing themselves militarily as marauders and as Baker proudly and repeatedly emphasizes, "often communicating by horns." (77) Baker is at this point displaying a mastery

in distinct theoretical registers that recalls Rahsaan Roland Kirk's multi-reed euphorics. And he has one last key modulation in his play on the term *possession*.

The single most pertinent factor facing early 20th century Afro-American writers: "What exists on the antecedent side of black modernism is not a line of stodgy, querulous, and resistant premoderns but a universe of enslavement." (101) This obvious point, in Baker's book, is made to resonate disparate faculties of sense; there is the economic function in which slavery means to be possessed, to be another's possession. But there is also the gripping spiritual dynamic of trance states such as voodoo or indigenous rural Christianity in which people are *possessed*. In a mordant pun, "Black writers, one might say, are always on *display*. . ."(56) What is displayed in the end—often against a heavily stacked deck—is a ritual of self-possession, or being ready to take on all comers. (Bird as a one-man ghost dance religion unto himself.) The legendary cutting-sessions that are the undocumented (i.e. unrecorded) center of jazz history are the essential sounds of protective display, the hoots of assurance of *maroon* societies communicating, literally, by horn. In the world of after-hours clubs and backrooms, the "mastery of form" was the prelude, the necessary prerequisite, to the "deformation of mastery" by which a Lester Young could make a tenor sax sound like an altogether different instrument than that played by Coleman Hawkins. As Jacques Attali puts it, this is a simulacrum of sacrifice by channeling noise—and noise is a weapon domesticated and ritualized by music.

In Baker's terms it's apparent that Louis Armstrong was the first and most distinguishable musical herald of the mastery of form. His antics and mugging pay dues to the minstrel mask, while his horn speaks with unmistakable mastery. But it's hard to think of any other jazz figures who take on the mask with such alacrity, or even make gestures in the minstrel domain (Cab Calloway comes to mind, but he was not an instrumentalist). Ralph Ellison made a case for Charlie Parker as Armstrong's successor:

> The pathos of his [Bird's] life lies in the ironic reversal through which his struggles to escape what in Armstrong is basically a *make-believe* role of clown—which the irreverent poetry and triumphant sound makes even the squarest of squares aware of—resulted in Parker's becoming something far more "primitive": a sacrificial figure whose struggles against personal chaos, on stage and off, served as entertainment for a ravenous, sensation-starved, culturally disoriented public which had but the slightest notion of its real significance. *(Shadow and Act,* pp. 226-227)

This is a resonant insight, to recognize Parker's confounding excesses as a struggle endemic to jazz—that of avoiding the mask at all costs. It's not

until the Art Ensemble of Chicago literally painted their faces and rehabilitated the theatrical space of minstrelsy that jazz musicians showed any conscious awareness of the unavoidable injunction of the mask.

The mask, in jazz, has turned out to be a two-way street. For to think only of black musician's tentative or ambiguous relations with the mask is to miss the essential point of its reciprocal function. "Mastery of form" in Baker's sense is a tradition that, after Satchmo (a minstrel tag), is taken up with eagerness by *white* musicians. Benny Goodman is Armstrong's minstrel successor. And with this we're back to Roy Wagner's point about the best pig being a cow. The best minstrel is a white man (Paul Whiteman initially) in blackface. And after World War II the obligatory minstrelsy of the hipster cool, likewise, is a predominantly white affair. The cavernous echo-chamber of mutual accusation that opened in the artificial rift between hot and cool in the fifties persists, if not in the terms of that particular standoff.[5] What was lost in the din (the real noise, the constant irrelevant yammering about "authenticity") was the drama of the real historical person, acting in the theatrical proscenium of a cultural "deficit" nobody could ever hope to defray. Jazz was the society of masks and masquerade, where indelible theorems of the state of the soul could be paraded, hooted out, addressed in the buoyancy of invisibility:

> Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. *(Invisible Man* p. 8)

Those breaks are rifts in the glacial formation of oppressive histories. Looking around in the gap is riffing, feeling for the "bridge," the "release" as it's called, that puts you over on the other side. For jazz is a music that has often acted on the intuition that history is already *played out,* that its mode of storytelling is a sequence of detonations and that, in the order of things, a drum is a more beneficent explosive device than a bomb.

—JED RASULA

[5] The current revival of interest in jazz and the corresponding rush to market new jazz lines from the major record labels has a foreboding bias. While RCA has released a Henry Threadgill lp, and Columbia has picked up the Donald Harrison/Terence Blanchard group (riding on the success of the Marsalis brothers), these and other labels have devoted nearly all their attention to white players. While the inclusion of Jane Ira Bloom and Tim Berne on Columbia, and Steve Lacy on RCA's Novus label, means that some of the most exciting white players are being noticed, the disproportionate number of whites signed to the majors signals, more than anything, that the revitalized jazz audience has taken out a new lease on Tom Sawyer's fence.

JAZZ GUITAR NOTES

(The main body of this piece has been excerpted from letters D.M. wrote to me in 1982. Recently I asked if he wanted to modify, or add to, his earlier comments and he wrote the addenda which follow. —C.C.)

The guitarists are numerous but all, except Derek Bailey and his extensions, root out of the Charlie Christian/Django Reinhardt line. Acoustic players were working into similar single-string soloing—a lot of early Django is acoustic—but the electric guitar's cosmos is mapped almost simultaneously (with some marvelous differences) by Django and Christian. Christian was more compact and played those Basie spaces with new power through an amplifier, a startling phenomenon at first for the ear to adjust to in a live session, the solo detached from the instrument and emerging from another sound source. His blues-based riff-lines were articulate while still functioning as traditional band-guitar rhythm adjunct. Whereas Django, also a strong rhythmic player, unrolled more ornate astonishments in his lines, all the more amazing since, besides partial use of his fingering hand, he composed most of his solos on the down-stroke, i.e., flatpicking in one direction on the strings instead of crosspicking (flatpicking up and down across the keyboard). Though Django played/recorded the major body of his material acoustically, his style was electric and it is ironic that he had such a tough time learning how to "play" the amplifier as well as the guitar plugged into it. This resolved in his last two record-dates, the one for Norman Ganz with Pierre Michelot on bass, and another one for French Decca with that trio and supplemental trumpet, sometimes vibes, Martial Solal the pianist, 1956-7. Django/Christian: strong linear players as opposite of Derek Bailey. Hendrix takes Christian no further but is a pioneer in playing the amplifier, making the electric guitar more wide-ranging in its sound-making capability. Bailey expands on the electronic, and stops expressing music through linearity, becomes more concerned with sound, clusters of sounds which stand as completely expressed units within a specific time length. Pointillist, truly abstracted, on his own, and definitely worth listening to, especially in solo records, any of them worth starting with.

I've always liked the Jim Hall/Bill Evans collaborations. Minor sessions, charming and listenable. Two jazz gentlemen: so pathologically introverted, polite, tentative, that I perversely keep waiting for someone to fart, which, of course, nobody does. Hall becomes more and more minimal until today, if you wanted to, you could make binaural or bipolar correspondences to Derek Bailey and Hall—even though Hall's the more, what?, traditional? Their shared approach to the electronic aspect of the guitar and

amplifier, their restructurings of space with silence as well as the sustained single note, is worth noting. Hall is master of the round tone; he must minus-out his treble controls because you never hear, even in the early '50s sideman/leader dates, a trebly-sounding Hall solo. Lots of bottom, the technocrats would say. The same applies to that absolute exemplar of bop/post-bop guitar, Jimmy Raney, whose lines are cornerstone for guitarists afterwards.

The first Raney I heard was on a 10" Prestige yellow label (with Miro-esque spermlike squiggles on the label) album with a proxy Franz Kline cover reading something like JIMMY RANEY QUARTET featuring pseudonymous "Sven Koolsen" (or something like that) a.k.a. Stan Getz, and shortly thereafter heard him as part of a Teddy Charles ensemble on another 10" Prestige that also featured pianist Hall Overton and whatever-happened-to Frank Isola, all of which has been reissued on either a Prestige twofer of early Getz or a single Prestige similarly titled. The point of which is that Raney was the first electric guitarist to my ears to impose a distinct style for that instrument fully aware of the bebop rhythmic/harmonic propositions. During bop's unfolding, that hot point between 1945 and 1950, no guitarist emerged to fully comprehend or utilize bop's possibilities, and I'm including Billy Bauer. Raney's solos (and tone) were equivalent to a horn's; his line as fluid as a horn. (The guitarists you sometimes hear with Bird like Mundell Lowe or, I'm phonetically reconstructing a name, Deronne or Debonne—one of those "live" wire-recordings recorded, it sounds like, from under the stage—or Slim Gaillard or even Les Paul, make Raney's accomplishment immediately audible.) Also his chordal sense was up-to-date whereas Django/Christian were uneven in the chord department, just like guitarist Johnny Smith is really serene to hear as a chordal soloist and less so as a single-string player. Yet for overall tone, old Mr. Moonlight in Vermont opened up the amplified sound as a subtle enclosure that someone like Jim Hall would adopt to round out his own conception. But it's Raney at the fulcrum of post-bop guitar masters. It's safe to say that after the Christian/Django nexus, the next split-screen is filled with Raney/Farlow. I enter Tal Farlow as a way of maintaining dualism, and in the Tao of guitar Farlow's percussive line, like TV commercial dominoes clacking against each other into infinity, is the opposite of Raney's full-toned linearity. Raney plays it like a bop hornplayer; Farlow plays it like electric guitar, like Christian, combination rhythm-insist and plectral musings on the single string. For Raney, the aforementioned Getz albums, or any of the newer records on Xanadu (solo or with trio), are cases in point. I don't know much about Raney himself but I do know that from the mid '50s on he became less and less visible as a leader and more and more vaguely audible as sideman on all kinds of schlock 'n crock dates, gradually,

according to Steve Swallow, becoming really short-circuited by uncontrollable alcoholism, which, like Jim Hall, he was able to bail-out of and is now dry and playing again as those Xanadu albums testify. Swallow recalled a date in the studio with Raney and Hall, Zoot Sims too, a boozer's phantasmagoria, with Raney and Hall taking turns puking in the can and Zoot chuggling on his mug of spirits, all of it resulting, despite the physiologic armageddoning, in a rather low-key sweet record on Mainstream whose title I've forgotten and which I'd like to own again.

The essential Farlow is probably those two discs with Eddie Costa and Vinnie Burke recorded in Jerry Newman's apartment. There are some Verves with the same line-up that are equally good, also the Prestige twofer Tal Farlow album, one disc devoted to Red Norvo trio beauties, the other to a '60s comeback session. Of the newer releases, the best I've heard is called something like TRINITY with Mike Knock and a first-rate rhythm section.

I guess the real dichotomy with guitar is: one the one side, played liked a horn, and on the other, played like a piano a la George Van Eps or Luis Bonfa or Ed Bickert (a Hall-sourced player who, in my book, often transcends the master with a larger range of know-how and dynamics). Along the line there have been excellent yeomen like Herb Ellis, Barney Kessel, and Joe Pass. What's come forth from that generation that interests me are players like John Scofield and Jack Wilkins (there's a double-record live Bob Brookmeyer date on the Gryphon label, sometimes remaindered, featuring Wilkins which is quite good). Folks like Ralph Towner and John Abercrombie do some pleasant work but often sound like glossy noodling of a higher musical intelligence than John Fahey or Leo Kotke. Abercrombie has an album on a low-budget label, Jam Records, STRAIGHT FLIGHT, a surprise and a worthwhile sleeper, where he plays standards in a trio format, George Mraz on bass, and as usual I forget the drummer's name. Also Towner in duo with Gary Burton on ECM (MATCHBOOK) is seductive. John McLaughlin's MY GOAL'S BEYOND is a favorite of mine. I've never been that pleased or excited by Larry Coryell, but A for effort anyway. He often sounds more alert in tandem with another guitarist, i.e., two albums with Phillipe Catherine, or one on Vanguard with McLaughlin. Someone like Fred Frith gives me more to listen to than most of his contemporaries. James "Blood" Ulmer, the disco-funked Ornettian, gives me most delight with Ornette—he sounds more restricted in a lot of his other work, sounds like he should listen more carefully to the Magic Band guitarist (now *there's* an ensemble!).

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Hopeless task to rewrite, amplify, implode, erase, without exploding what's already here. Instead, some supplemental annotations.

Paragraph 1: Add or re-emphasize another equally distinct (and demanding) guitar method in jazz: finger-picking. Besides obvious roots in ancestor lute procedure, it was restated by early country-blues artists like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, Robert Johnson. A few foremost jazz practitioners are/were George Van Eps (playing a specially built 7-string Epiphone guitar—the extra string, tuned an octave below the A string, functions as bass-line anchor against chord melody verticals), Luis Bonfa, Baden Powell (the bossa nova guitarists are invariably left out of normative jazz criticism), Lenny Breau. (Breau died recently, murdered, at 43. Had an amazing ability to play (imply) a simultaneous bass line, chord progression, and melody line.) Recent work by Stanley Jordan extends the possibility of re-seeing the fretboard as a piano keyboard.

Paragraph 3: Raney recently visible/audible on European labels. Also a few albums in duet with his son Doug. Almost impossible to distinguish which Raney is soloing, their sound/approach is so similar. The most immediate heir to the Raney approach—beside Doug Raney—is post-bop astute Bruce Foreman. His recent duo date with pianist George Cables is a fine example of the Raney influx.

Paragraph 4: In rehearing Farlow, I'm tempted to fit him in that ozone reserved for other precarious danger-mice like Pee Wee Russell. Some Farlow solos a la out-of-synch card-sharp trying a waterfall shuffle. Banana peel-out solos descending out of Fibber's closet.

Paragraph 5: It'll take me a while to absorb recent technologic "advancements" for the guitar, i.e., the synthesizer. So far the music hasn't advanced to the level of machines reproducing it. Is the whip-lash of the Free Jazz moment to be played-out in the rationalization of Jazz? (See my ongoing/forthcoming "The Death of Jazz As I Imagined It")

—DAVID MELTZER

SNOW

Who among us has not heard (and repeated) the fact that Eskimo languages contain a dozen, a score, a hundred,. . .well, many words for snow? In the June 1986 issue of *American Anthropologist* a correction is provided by the anthropological linguist Laura Martin: "'Eskimo Words for Snow': A Case Study in the Genesis and Decay of an Anthropological Example."

Martin traces the "fact" in question to a casual reference in Franz Boas' 1911 Introduction to the *Handbook of North American Indian Languages* where he mentions four lexically distinct words in Eskimo: *aput* "snow on the ground," *qana* "falling snow," *piqsirpoq* "drifting snow," and *qimuqsuq* "a snow drift." In 1940 the claim appears again as a passing reference by Benjamin Lee Whorf in his frequently reprinted article, "Science and Linguistics." The number of words has grown to five, and where Boas used the example to show a similarity between English and (undifferentiated) "Eskimo", Whorf now uses it to illustrate a difference. In *The Silent Language* (1959) by Edward Hall the Eskimo forms have become "nouns" and an unspecified, but apparently large number is suggested. Roger Brown's *Words and Things* (1958) gives three Eskimo snow words, but is unclear about what counts as a "word" in Eskimo languages.

And so it goes. A scholarly game of telephone tropes the original message while in the less "rigorous" media, Eskimo snow words explode from nine to fifty, to "many", to a *New York Times* editorial (Feb. 9, 1984) which, citing Whorf, invokes a "tribe" that can name "one hundred types of snow."

Laura Martin's essay addresses the question—never raised by the scholars and lay experts she cites—of what "words" are. Eskimo word structure is far more complex than that of English. Its units are frequently quite long, containing many morphemes (the basic semantic building blocks). An indefinite number of suffixes can be added to "roots;" and some Eskimo "words" are whole sentences.

The force of the popular "Eskimo words for snow" example depends on an assumption of equivalence between English "word" and Eskimo "word." But only the existence of many Eskimo snow *roots* would support the example's more radical implications. Of course, to say that English has many *compounds, phrases* or *sentences* involving snow is banal, and to observe that Eskimo has scores of snow words is to say much the same thing. (Surfers may have an elaborate language of waves—but not 20 "words" for wave.)

Martin informs us that there are no more than *two* Eskimo roots referring to snow, rather than to drifts, storms, moisture, and so on: "snow in the air" and "snow on the ground." Compounds, phrases, and sentences

may be built on these two roots, but they are not "words for snow" any more than English expressions like "snowstorm," "snowball fight," or "the kids' big snowfort." In fact, counting Eskimo words for snow, rather than roots, would be a little like making an inventory of all the different phrases in which "snow" appears in Joyce's story "The Dead" and calling each one a word.

Martin concludes: "the structure of Eskimo grammar means that the number of 'words' for snow is literally incalculable, a conclusion that is inescapable for any other root as well." At first this observation itself seems quite exotic. An "incalculable" number? But it merely summarizes what is generally true of "agglutinative" languages—Eskimo, Turkish, Japanese, among others. Contemporary linguistics is fundamentally anti-exotic, for it undermines the notion that any language is stranger than any other. The short, often unembellished "nouns" of English are no less bizarre than the extremely complex lexical units of Eskimo or Turkish.

Laura Martin's lucid cautionary tale is marred in places by a tone of scholarly righteousness. If only, she says, proper standards, careful use of sources and clear presentation of evidence had been observed, this sad series of distortions would never have occurred. Perhaps. But that kind of critique does not begin to probe the persistent appeal of the "Eskimo words for snow" idea. Nor does it get us very far to mention, in passing, "the process of folklorization that can remove scholarly statements from their rightful context and cause misinterpretation." Science and folklore (ideology, deep cultural assumptions and beliefs) are seldom neatly separable, especially when it comes to representing exotic societies.

And for those, like me, who cling to the dream of an informed, self-critical exoticism it is troubling to have to abandon one of our best "believe it or not" examples. The basic claim being made in many evocations of "Eskimo words for snow" is true. People elsewhere do, through their language and world view, cut up the world differently than we do—differently and often much more subtly. It's hard to give up the aesthetic/epistemologcal impact of the trope. An all-too-familiar noun/thing "snow" (And what could be more blank, more blanketing of variety, of life itself? . . .as in "The Dead") suddenly facets, divides, slides, multiplies into a new field of qualities, actions, processes, objects. Isn't this opening of possibilities what exoticism is good for? Will we be able to find other examples of non-Western lexical richness that work as well as Eskimo snow? I'm not sure.

I find it easier, however, to give up "Eskimo words for snow" when I put it in an ideological context not explored by Laura Martin, but made visible in an earlier paper of a similar sort: "A Note on Primitive Languages," *International Journal of American Linguistics*, Vol. 18, (1951-52), 172-177. Here Archibald Hill debunks a "fact" popularized by the linguist Otto

Jesperson, among others, that Cherokee contains "thirteen verbs for washing." Hill's close analysis of the Cherokee data produces a corrosive effect similar to Martin's. And in the process one of the less savory implications of the "many words" trope is made clearer—its claim that tribal peoples are less inclined to generalize than Westerners. *Their* languages are "concrete," *ours* "abstract," a statement dangerously close to: primitives are *incapable* of generalization. Few would assert this today. But are we released from a basically colonialist dichotomy when we simply reverse its sign, as in many invocations of "Eskimo words for snow," making concreteness positive rather than negative, a virtue rather than an incapacity?

Jerome Rothenberg opened *Technicians of the Sacred* (1968, 1985) with a memorable statement, "Primitive means complex" (. . .noting a few lines later that "the language of snow among the Eskimo is awesome"). Appropriately, he turned to "contemporary linguistics" for support: there simply *are* no simple languages. "People who have failed to achieve the wheel will not have failed to invent & develop a highly wrought grammar." While contemporary linguists are divided over the extent to which grammatical forms are "invented," rather than "hard wired" in the organism, Rothenberg's basic point is still crucial. And it needs constant reemphasis, given an apparently perennial need to believe in the existence of "simple," "untouched," "backward" peoples. (The recently-exposed hoax of the "Stone Age" Tassaday in the Philippines is a case in point. So is the informal poll I just took in a large class of University of California students, a majority of whom believed quite literally the opening of the film "The Gods Must Be Crazy." Somewhere there exists a tribe so isolated and naive that a Coke bottle dropped from a passing airplane can sow major confusion. The people in the film, the !Kung San of Botswana—"bushmen" featured in a long tradition of Western travel writing—have, of course, been in contact and conflict with the outside world for centuries.) In combating the dream of simple "primitive," or "tribal," societies, the argument from linguistic complexity can be effective. But the appeal needs to be made with knowledge of the indigenous facts, and not at the cost of reinventing reductive dichotomies.

One final hope for chastened exoticists: Perhaps the !Kung San can help fill the void left by all those evocative by non-existent "words for snow." Because the !Kung have been studied by teams of academic researchers for quite some time now, we have access to abundant, detailed information about their language and society. They probably have quite a few words for "anthropologist."

—JAMES CLIFFORD

ALAN DAVIES, *NAME,* This, 1986

Name occurs within a dance of pronouns. . . a triangulation from "I" to "you" to find "we". . . in a system of speech constituted, in part, by time and a present which slips into the past quicker than you can say "are" or I can write "name." Of course, the stability of these pronouns belies a changeability. Shall we recall H.D.'s insight in *Hermetic Definitions?* "Where am I? / the 'other side' where you always were" (27). To the extent that a speaker is traditionally thought of as a masculine role and the listener feminine, H.D.'s point has added significance. In *Name,* the pronouns are similarly sexed, if differently placed—"you" is usually (though not invariably) female and "I," though not who I now claim to be, am male. Does it matter who says these things? "Remember / me as I am now because / I will always have been / different" (20). Is this a grammatical admission or a personal one?

"It must have been you / that was I, I that was / you, in speech" (43). Is this an issue of function rather than identity? Am I really different, depending on whether I am now I (the speaker) or you (the listener)? We do tend to have images, after all, of the active "I" and the passive "you." The fact that we are both of us "I" and "you" doesn't change this. After all, "Speech is between us" (42); the way in which "I" is linked to "you" to make "us." "Between us" suggests both something we might share and something we cannot resolve. But the "I" and the "you" are out of balance. To the extent that I am addressing you, a certain similarity (or humanity) is assumed. To the extent that I want to reach you, that I need you, you are all I lack. Therefore, "you are a surrogate" (73). But, so, too, that lack can make me mean—"You're broken up / and lonely" (77) and "you / surely / don't / think" (76). There is, then, a disequilibrating space in the "you" (13). But there didn't have to be: witness Carla Harryman's "I seek the stabilizing 'you'" [*Vice,* 89]. Thus, one question is "where are you / in this incipient congress / of values" (46).

"You" seem to be at (or near) a limit—where I point but not what I reach. Thus, there is a distance ("the overall distance / between us" [90]) that draws us on but which we do not fill: "Sentences are filling / a space we / ourselves should occupy" (31). This distance may allow for a certain self-consciousness, a perspective in which we do not feel a present necessity. Thus, "Salvage words / from words that we / say merely that we / mean to say it" (32). The two clauses, neatly balancing actions ("that we"), set up a finely tuned chain of relations, but the result is that, instead of saying what we mean, we can say only that we mean to say it. We are trapped, then, in the layer of intention and, in that layer, we can say only what we would do and do nothing.

But there is more than a credo of absence offered here. Charles Bernstein, in *The Sophist,* commented that "nothing / is adequate / against *ab*sense" (158). We crave, then, not the removal of sense, but the full play of sense, a full-bodied (or fully embodied) sense. Is this what Davies wants, too? Through "you," Davies says, "was Name" (78). Thus, Name came to us through the other pole (the receiver) of discourse. This means the listener isn't passive; further, there is a give-and-take, a process of discovery, that takes place in speech: "So that your discourse and my discourse / can happen over the same wire / in occluding directions, / and with no dispersal" (90). There is a union without obliteration of identities (though phrased here in general terms), an embrace without loss, and, if this makes the telephone sound like a marriage bed, so be it.

Such an identification, however, does suggest that sense extends beyond the fleshly covering. Therefore, the heart (already a figure of speech) pushes us, finally, not to grasp the physical (though it does this, too), but to make of feeling a speech, for "the heart ends in creeds of speech" (79). The heart, then, would be nothing without figuration or a belief in the verity or power of speech. Surely "the heart" takes on more significance than its physical wont. What does the heart express through speech in Davies? Speech made "us," a whole of "you" and "I." Without speech, then, or with a misunderstanding of speech ("If we misunderstand / speech we know nothing / and I am speaking to you" [62]), we are fragmented, cut off from a whole we might have reached, but only through speech. This wholeness is possible, of course, only with your cooperation: "We are whole / in advanced articulate address. / I advance to you our wholeness" (84). If "you" refuse, shan't we both be less?

—BRUCE CAMPBELL

THREE RESPONSES TO CHARLES BERNSTEIN'S *THE SOPHIST*

1.

"At first all artists, and even Philosophers themselves, were call'd sophisters." John Norris, *Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence* (1710).

"*Sophist*. . .1. In ancient Greece, one especially engaged in the pursuit and communication of knowledge; esp. one who gave instruction in intellectual and ethical matters in return for payment.

"In the latter sense contrasted with *philosopher,* and freq. used as a term of disparagement." *Oxford English Dictionary.*

The suffix -ist denotes agency, as in: Sophist (one who practises knowledge), bigamist, capitalist, rapist, shootist, chemist, opportunist, imperialist, balloonist, artist, fetishist, cyclist, socialist, hedonist, florist, egoist. One may well recall Blake's proverb: "Thought is Act." The activist element, however, is not always so visible in the words—for example when an -istword denotes a person who professes or adheres to certain ideas or opinions (deist, Thomist, positivist); or when the word designates other, looser kinds of association (querist, statist).

Bernstein's *The Sophist* should be read in this context. It is a book which does more than take the agenting function of language for its theme (rhetoric), as the title itself shows. For to put that title at the head of a book of poetry is to foreground the ideological struggle which is embodied in the history of that word. It is a word which should remind us that Socrates was a sophist before he became a Platonist, and that the transformation of Socrates from "sophist" to "Philosopher" involved an effort, monumentally successful it must be seen, to transform—to transcendentalize—"knowledge" into "Truth". Today the word "sophist" always carries the overtone of a nonserious quibber, one who is more involved with "words" than with "things", with the play and surfaces of thought rather than with the "realities" of truth. *The Sophist* does not change the meaning of that received word, or of any of the other words, word strings, or forms of syntax which appear in this book (all those inheritances of our language); it simply puts them into an activist framework. The title of this book activates once again the issue of the relation of knowledge to material agency; and it does so under the sign of, through the agency of, poetry. This point is important, for by operating in poetry—by choosing to work with a marginal tool (foregrounded in the choice of publisher and mode of distribution)—Bernstein has defined, situated, the line of his activism. This book contests the linguistic illusions which underpin the dominant forms of discourse practiced today, and all forms of discourse which distinguish "words" from "things", "ideas" from "acts". Once again the relation of knowledge and money is also brought to the foreground—knowledge and history, society, institutions, and the linguistic forms in which those "powers and dominions" secret(e) themselves.

—JEROME McGANN

2: "Syncopation Against the Borderline": Charles Bernstein's *The Sophist*

Where is the inside, where the outside, in Charles Bernstein's *The Sophist?* Bernstein's line proceeds by accumulating tones, images, rhetorics, etc. The result may, at times, be comic, absurd, or uneasy, but the effect of line opening onto line is serious and considered. It's the technical equivalent of throwing the boundary between inside and outside into question. Potentially, any style is appropriate, any style "natural," and, so, one style (one rhetoric, etc.) can not be used to delegitimize others. The result is a sometimes giddy conglomeration of technical language, doggerel, advertising slogans, colloquialisms, etc.—all demanding attention.

Bernstein doesn't want to eradicate the line between inside and outside as much as he wants to show how it can be viewed differently. Principally his concern focuses on the prejudice that the self is a spot free equally from the taint of others and from the concessions necessary in the "real world." Such a prejudice might well concern a writer because writing is often conceived as the privileged access to this privileged "internal man." But, in our post-structuralist days, we have realized that writing is made up of the voices of others: "It's ground encapsulated onto dubbed" (90). There is no carefully delineated, protected self existing as a kind of internal object (or disk drive free from the programs of others). I don't make up my language and, so, using language exposes how dependent on the human community I am. The activity of writing, instead of corresponding to the Romantic myth of communing with the soul, unveils how contingent the soul is on community.

This, then, is a poetry of relations, not objects—or of objects seen in a network of relations. Without these relations, the object is in danger of evaporating into airy nostrums. But (and this is important), the emphasis on relations must not lead us to fuse everything into one blob of totality. We need a perspective that respects connections ***and*** limits, for in Bernstein fusion leads to confusion ("to con*fuse* this"). So, on the one hand, if we fail to discriminate between things, we are mistaken; but we are equally mistaken to think each thing stands alone.

The need to discriminate leads to cautions against identification: "No identification, only / restitution" (45); or "We 'are' each other only insofar as each / can recognize and acknowledge the differences / (as in separately bodied)—to con*fuse* this risks a rule of / power only" (171). But the discrimination must not lead to exclusion, if "everything counts" (81). Such a dual project calls for a prodigious feat of memory, a memory that respects differences for "semblance [is the] place of memory's / Loss" (14). And it calls for a prodigious awareness, an awareness that extends beyond literature to other uses of language. All the same, Bernstein can not take

this extension-beyond-literature for granted. After all, he asks, "How in heaven do you get an outside line?" (142).

—BRUCE CAMPBELL

3: Bernstein's *The Sophist*

1)

The sophist Gorgias of Leontini wrote a book entitled *Concerning What Is Not or Concerning Nature.* He argued 1) that nothing exists; 2) if something existed, it could not be known; and 3) if it could be known, it could not be communicated. His argument turns out to be strong, even if it was proposed as a *tour de force:*

> For if what exists is visible and audible and, in general, perceptible (I mean, what lies outside us), and if what is visible is grasped by sight, and what is audible by hearing, and not vice versa, then how can these things be signified to anyone else? For that by which we signify is a formula *(logos),* and what lies outside us and exists is not a formula; therefore we do not signify to our neighbors what exists but a formula which is different from what lies outside us. Thus just as what is visible could not become audible, or the reverse, so, since what exists lies outside us, it cannot become our formula; and if its not a formula, it will not be signified to anyone else.

To combat such arguments Socrates proposed the existence of a *knowable* Absolute. It was an extreme argument, and western history has unspooled from this Socratic audacity.

We have now returned to the beginning, which is not a Word but an entire rhetoric. Arguments reminiscent of Gorgias' are common. In an early issue of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, for example, Barrett Watten writes: "The problem is, does this person, in what is merely an adaptation to his environment, develop a language we can identify as our own. The problem of translation. Referents drop away."

2)

In his title, Bernstein identifies himself positively with the sophists. He is not, however, a rhetorician, at least not in the usual sense of the word. When it is understood that Gorgias' argument also applies to itself, the resulting paradox cripples rhetoric and renders prose as such impossible.

Bernstein writes, "in prose you start with the world / and find the words to match." The problem is in the matching. ". . .in poetry you start / with the words and find the world in them." ("Dysraphism")

A few of these poems are "demonstrations of method," most notably "I and the," a large dead chunk in the middle of the volume, in which, to be sure, a world is found, but a world as mechanical as the method of the poem itself. In most of the poems, however, the world, including language as the world's furniture, not method, is the locus of attention. The purpose is not demonstration but the intensity of life's preoccupation with itself:

> Voice seems
> to break
> over these
> short lines
> cracking or
> setting loose.
> I see a world
> & it repeats
> itself as
> your location. . . .
>
> ("The Years as Swatches")

The secret of sophistry as a way of truth-telling is to find the places where language breaks down, revealing the locations of those with whom we would communicate.

Protagoras said, in his most famous dictum, "Of all things a measure is man—of the things that are, that they are; of the things that are not, that they are not." Plato mistakenly understood Protagoras to say that "things are as they seem,"—that is, that he mistook the shadow on the wall for the real thing.

To take measure, however, is not to make a judgment in relation to a methodology but to lay down one's body or one's words as a yardstick. When the measure of two people do not coincide, it does not mean that one is wrong; it means that they are using different scales. "Things that are" can be measured in relation to a generalized methodology or a concrete literal world:

> Don't be afraid, gentle writers, gentle speakers, that you won't communicate or will be too intellectual. Only when such concerns fall away, like calluses from our tongues, and we are left just to do and be, not trying to communicate out of a fear of being unable to, will language takes its rightful place as love. ("The Only Utopia Is in a

Now")

In the best of these poems language begins to take its rightful place.

—DON BYRD

BARRETT WATTEN ON POETRY AND POLITICS: AN INTERVIEW BY GEORGE HARTLEY

GH Would you explain the title of your book, *Total Syntax?*
BW The idea was, "What I want is a more total syntax." That is, the syntax of a work of art could be imagined to be inherent in the work, but a more *total* syntax would relate the work to orders of experience outside it. When "total syntax" is separated from that sentence, however, it becomes a little curious; how could a syntax being total be very workable or interesting? In a way, it could mean a kind of infinite expansion, as with a letter in which the last line of the address is "the mind of God"—where do you stop? It could also be, like, *total* syntax—all syntax, no content— where there's no room for substance because everything is just relation—and that's not what I meant. Looking at the title by itself, you have a kind of polysemy that implies an interest in extending the implications of art from the work into the world, but one that also begs the questions of closure, totalization. And in fact I'm not arguing for a totalization of art in political, psychological, or linguistic senses.

More specifically, it's the title of the chapter on Robert Smithson and Clark Coolidge, and in those two artists I'm seeing ways of extending the work into the world that are constitutive of the works themselves. The discussion of scale and metaphor in Smithson is about how Smithson's work created a syntax of site/nonsite, in-the-gallery/outside-the-gallery, a syntax-of-materials/a syntax-of-locations. With Coolidge there is a temporal extension, a sort of romantic questioning that extends the work in time metonymically. Both necessitate a larger syntax by virtue of what they are doing at the point of production of their work.

I don't think the questions that are raised by the book are settled in any particular way. By the end of the book, a "total syntax" turns out to be an open-ended one. How can you have a totalizing open-endedness? It seems to me a structural instability.

GH When you say, "I want a more total syntax," that seems to imply that people previously haven't been approaching a work through all the dimensions of syntax. Is there any person or school or line of theory that you had in mind that you were countering?
BW Yes—the habits of reading you learn in your education, the "Let's look at this line" kind of close reading. There's a tremendous amount of authority that's being argued in the practice of close readings. It's not just a question of how to read but of how to measure oneself experientially against the poem, a question of measuring one's validity in terms of craft that begins in the process of reading and ends in reproducing the workshop poem. I don't write that kind of poetry, but the charged environment of close reading and of measuring oneself against decisions involved in writing at that level I think were influential—if you can see them as being argued negatively in my work against the kind of poetry they were supposed to produce. There was a kind of resistance to that method, and at the same time, "I'll go them one better. I'll show the professors how to read." Zukofsky's another example of a writer who took the habits of the academy and returned them in a different style of writing.

GH I'd like to talk more about the academy. What has the reception been so far? So you think the academy as a whole would be open to the things you're proposing and the works you are examining in *Total Syntax?*
BW Well, there's currently a project in the academy to dismantle poetics that involve only a syntax within the poem—where if there's a syntax outside the poem, it's the poet's role as professional or as country gentleman. It seems to me that there are people working critically in the academy who would be interested in what we are doing because it is, I think, relevant to thinking about relations between language, psychology, and social orders, and so forth. But it may turn out that even though there are critical positions that *should* be interested in our work, there's no guarantee that they won't just lead to a validation of the role of the professional, and therefore to the kind of poetry written in conservative forms by those aspiring to similar roles.

The question is, What kind of literary culture does the academy want? And I think that's a question the academy needs to deal with. If you look at the representation of poetry in *The New York Review of Books* or *The American Poetry Review,* it's often what I would call nonserious. There's a good reason for nonserious work being produced in the academy. What it would finally take for the academy to be interested in what we are doing would be for it to be equally interested in renegotiating intellectual roles outside its areas of expertise. There will be a complicity if there's a larger social reason for it. But it seems we are entering a neoconservative environment in which many who have invested in contextual aesthetics are

rethinking their positions. So I don't think there's any guarantee that the academy finally is going to validate our work.

GH I was wondering, did you have in mind the notion of total syntax while you were writing *Progress?* The external syntax, I guess, is what has been traditionally excluded from consideration. Do you as a poet consciously try to work that dimension in, either in *Progress* or your other works?
BW *Progress,* as is obvious from its title and length, is involved in time, duration, getting from one place to another, willed activity—I want to progress. The temporal duration of writing the poem is being matched against the experience of the time I was living in, June 1982 to May 1983, the Reagan recession. The poem was written over the winter of the darkest year of this recession, an important period in that it was one in which a lot of expectations were being reformulated by virtue of economic constraints. I mean, Reagan had put the screws to the economy. A lot of people were out of work, the job situation was bad, and one was forced to renegotiate expectations in terms of this well-orchestrated psychological/economic campaign.

So the poem was written in this period. One of the things that happens in it is a continual breaking down of its assumptions, almost violently, by undercutting them. There is a fair amount of willful dissociation and undermining of statement that is being built on to create the conditions for statement. The negativity in the construction of the work is in fact what forms the argument of the poem. And this negativity often has the exact effect of sundering the inherence of the poem's own argument, opening it to facts that impinge on it from outside. These are similar to the kinds of negative information you get during an administered psychological campaign such as one might have experienced at that time.

Another parallel example of the social form that influenced the writing of *Progress,* I think, was the media campaign during the hostage crisis, where every day for almost a year we were being fed information that "Your interests are being frustrated! Your interests are being frustrated!"—and that campaign set up Reagan's election. This may have been a replay or reversal of the media's role in the Vietnam War. Later, during the period of the Reagan recession, I think that form was thought to be very successful. There was a constant barrage of negative information—so many people out of work, so many plants closed—coming in at regular intervals. At every interval in which you might have built up a head of steam for your own purposes, recuperate your own argument as it were, there would be another dose of "Things are getting worse. Things are getting worse." Well, either that mimics the logic of the poem [laughs] or the poem is involved with that kind of deferral.

At the same time there was a playing around with information coming in from outside the poem, not only negative information but also the

random, the gratuitous, the way one knows one's situation by grappling not only with relevant "objective" information—trends in the economy and so forth—but also with bizarre, reified facts that still give a picture of what the world is. At the same time that you are getting doses of intentionally negative information, you're also getting news about the Great White Shark that was sighted off Point Reyes or the man who fell on his head onto a drill bit, reversed the drill, and drove himself to the hospital—that was something that came over the news that became part of the poem. And that becomes a metaphor, then, for consciousness [laughs].

GH What's going on with the line structure and the ellipses and so on, especially the variation of indentation?
BW That's just a flexibility that keeps the incremental property of the poem from becoming too predictable. By having a flexible form, by being able to vary where the line breaks, you keep from having a parallelism that would have made the poem impossible to write. It's a structural instability that is constantly breaking in new way and always gives you a choice, "I think I'll break here." In this way the recurrence of the stanza can be fresh enough without a simply incremental association. The ellipses were originally to be read as breaks, saying "Signing off! This transmission has now ended!"—you know, the last line of that story by H.P. Lovecraft where the guy's being eaten by a blob and his hand trails down the page. But when reading I invariably read right through them. The caesurae are the end stops that actually occur in the stanzas, so the ellipses have no meaning except as a physical habit of typing four dots that made me think about breaking the attention.

GH The other night after Nick Piombo's talk [August 11, 1986 at Intersection, San Francisco] many people mentioned that just the way he presented the talk brought up a lot of questions besides what he was saying. And you were asking what sort of effect that presentation, that blankness, would have on readers. Would you explain what's behind your question?
BW He seemed to be saying that there is an inevitable bad outcome to writing that is organized in terms of topic and comment, theme and subject matter—i.e., content. The writer is going to encounter blocks in having to organize his thinking around the topic, and the reader is going to be subordinated to the text. There's going to be a power imbalance between the person reading the text and the person hearing and understanding it. I was saying that it may be true that these kinds of repression are going to exist in writing, but I don't see that an open text, one that isn't organized around content, doesn't run similar risks in terms of overcoding or blanking out (undercoding).

I think that Nick is saying that he feels an untenable authority in writing that is organized in terms of subject matter, and that for his purposes he

is involved with forms of mimic dissociation that one might experience as Freud's "evenly hovering attention." But my experience of texts that are written without intentions for overriding structure is that they can equally beg the question entirely and end up imposing another form of power imbalance on the reader. So I don't see any essential connection between what kind of writing your are doing—whether dissociative or hierarchically subordinated—and the power imbalance in a communicative act.

GH There isn't a privileged form in a political sense?
BW Right, I reject that. I think what's important is the role one is in and the intentions one is acting out in the largest sense. You need to ask, "What are you doing? Is there a complicity between what you are doing and what the reader wants? And how do you negotiate that in the work?" I mean, what is the agency of the work? That agency may not be univalent; it may not turn out to be what you say it is. Maybe it's what it turns out to be as others perceive it. But that's not to say that because that's the case, you surrender all attempts at agency. It seems to me that one is creating a community of aims. One of the problems of art is that once everyone agrees that these aims are the same, you have boring art. So in an approach to being an artist, you would not want to say that one's aims are ever going to even out in terms of the audience's expectations.

In that sense the role Nick is interested in could be seen in an analogy to the therapy situation, where the patient and the analyst both agree that they desire a good outcome. Because they agree that they are proceeding along the same lines, they can allow this "evenly hovering attention" to be revealing, whereas if you were standing in a bank line in a state of "evenly hovering attention" and you suddenly started talking in that manner to someone, you would have just violated a social constraint. It seems to me that the same form can be both transgressive and normative, and that Nick, while using language that in some contexts could be seen as transgressive, is opting for a more reciprocal role. He is interested in the same techniques the surrealists used but without the distinction between conscious and unconscious representation. It's a kind of psychoanalytic processing that takes into account the poetics that have developed since surrealism and possibly in reaction to it.

GH The surrealists, Lacan, Jameson, Derrida all posit some kind of unconscious—the structural unconscious, the political unconscious, etc. What role does the unconscious play or what form does it take as you see it?
BW I don't think the use of an analogy between language and the unconscious is adequate as a literary psychology at all. Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious,* is grasping at straws when he tries to make an

ideological, psychological unity out of some such notion as the ideologeme. That seems an error of reading the wrong linguistics, of accepting the linguistics that come through Lacan and Althusser. The linguistic analogy for the unconscious is not adequate to psychological processes that actually occur. But the whole question of what *would* be adequate is wide open at this point. Recently I've been reading the Russian psycholinguist, L.S. Vygotsky, who's early but has things to say about inner speech and socialization that are quite relevant to literary forms, and also Pierre Bourdieu, for his attempt to argue out of the structuralist equivalence of significant terms in a culture and by extension in the psyche. He has come up with notions of process that are both social and interior, really dispensing with the unconscious altogether.

GH Althusser, in his discussion of ideology, wants to bring in something like the unconscious. What would your specific disagreement with him be?
BW I've been interested in Pierre Bourdieu's account of the way social forms are interpreted by subjects in society. It's not that ideology's structured like a language. But there are relations between significant terms in a society, what he calls generative schema, that form an abstract disposition that prefigures interaction. Any response to a social given is met by a capacity to interpret and renegotiate the self in terms of such learned structures. This is what Bourdieu calls the *habitus,* a kind of composite of these generative schema. But this is quite different from the notion of a social unconscious—it seems more useful.

Bourdieu writes about the way the sense of self is bound up with the notion of honor in a society. While honor has something to do with age roles and being accepted into a group as you advance in age, at certain points challenges occur in specific forms. At the moment of recognition of the challenge, you engage in some strategy of response. No matter what happens—if you fail or advance, or if you avoid it altogether—you admit the reality of the challenge, and experience will be structured in those terms. Perhaps the duel of honor has atrophied in our society into playground trashing and its sense of self, but I can imagine a kind of extended analogy to the challenge in which incommensurate information in social space might be taken as a kind of abstract challenge. That is, the reified commodity might be taken as a kind of insult, a displacement. You don't own this, so there's something deficient with you. If you buy it, you've met the challenge; if you reject it, you've decided it's an invalid challenge—you can always choose not to respond.

So Matthew's TV says, "Come to the Top of the Hill, Daly City," and you say, "I'm not challenged by that." But a sixteen-year-old who hasn't figured out his economic viability and feels he has to spend something in order to be with it might take up that challenge, buy the stereo that he may

or may not need, and advance up the ladder of property. It seems to me that such an interactive way of looking at the logic of commodities is better than a language-based one, where the commodity is like a word in a reified language.

GH What is your response to Jameson's postmodernism essay, particularly his section on Bob Perelman?
BW When he says that Bob, when he's writing in a form that's dissociated, is imitating the schizophrenic, that's just wrong. He's writing that way because he's interested in a text with certain properties. He may think it's funny, a goof; it has nothing to do with schizophrenia. But Jameson does say something about the desire for political transformation having to do with dissociation that I think is true—Bob's source for his poem "China" being a Chinese phonetics primer and his use of it as an "original" text being a kind of petit-bourgeois inversion on the order of, "It would be nice to have a social transformation, but since there is none I can only make a joke of myself." In that sense the poem *is* acting out a kind of deflected desire for being part of a social process. This is more accurate than saying that the poem is mimicking the schizophrenic condition.

GH The argument that Jameson doesn't bring up there but that seems to be closely behind it, especially knowing his background in Lucács, is the notion that capitalism is a dissociative force, and that reification, commodification sunder our ties with one another and our connections to the things we make—and there's been the claim that art that isn't realistic is only furthering, is playing into the hands of the status quo, etc. Those people would certainly say that the disjunction in *Progress* would be an example of that.
BW That it excludes, that it constitutes an elite.

GH Yes, as well as Jameson's talk about the need for maps. I guess some people want literature as guidance. And I was wondering how you would see *Progress* as a form of guidance, or if that notion applies.
BW Well, everything has two sides. Abstraction in '40s and '50s painting occurred out of a context that was socially aware and was trying to make a value for a heroic kind of work that would transcend commodity society. It turned out that the paintings were then sold for millions of dollars and became the basis of whole institutions that perpetuate the commodity society. You could also argue that because those paintings did structure those institutions, those institutions are going to be more democratic than they would have been if they had been built on, say, representational paintings. Any social transformation is going to have two sides to it in that way.

I don't think there's any essential validity or invalidity to a form—what's important are its intentions and its particular negotiation with its time and place. In that sense, *Progress* doesn't have an essence, so it can't be said to be reifying—it isn't. I think it would be very difficult to approximate it, to pin it down and build a reified structure on it. But in terms of the formal properties of the text, what I really see as interesting is the way the work functions critically by means of an identification with language that is given a specific value in the work. It says things, particularly about the Vietnam War, that, while occurring as a negotiation of oneself in language, define the act of writing in a specific time and place.

So it's literature, to be read and reflected on. It's also an acting out of certain things, particularly a great deal of social negativity at the beginning of the poem, transgression as much as I could write it. Which isn't to say that I think transgression can be a final value—even that's been shown not to be true.

GH On page 6 of *Progress* you write: "Suppose I cancel this, and / What is left are my mistakes. . . ." How would you recognize mistakes? What's a mistake and what isn't for you?
BW Well, canceling that would be the act of the poem. And that is an aggressive act:

> Aggressive neutrality.
> Haig,
> On the disposition of needs.
> Suppose I cancel this, and
> What is left are my mistakes. . . .

I had just brought up Alexander Haig and his aggressive neutrality, which is instrumental in *my* aggressive neutrality. Haig's aggressive neutrality is a power imbalance that says, "These are the facts, and all of you are the mistakes." The whole population is leftovers, subject to whatever is instrumental for Haig. My response to this is, "Suppose I cancel *this,* and what is left are *my* mistakes." I'm taking on the social unconscious—using the term provisionally—as the remorse for my having initiated such an act of aggressive neutrality. Whereas when Haig initiates an act of instrumental language, it's not to account for what he hasn't figured out yet about how to distribute America's surplus grain to the underfed in South America. The mistakes are going to take care of themselves. Obviously there's a scale difference between Haig's and my mistakes, but this is a ritual of purification in relation to the challenge of Haig.

GH So that line follows your reference to Haig needs to be there, isn't just randomly inserted? I mean, this isn't "first thought, best thought" is it?

BW No, not at all. It's a deliberate negotiation to come to the thought to put down on paper; it's not improvisatory.

GH Do you use any particular procedures in *Progress?* Steve Benson, Kit Robinson, Ron Silliman, for instance, use various predetermined plans for constructing a work. Did that enter into the writing of *Progress?*
BW It did, but that's pretty evident in terms of the stanza form. The poem was written sequentially, but it was rewritten quite a bit. It was negotiated at the point I was at in the poem at all points. Then things come into the poem from any number of sources. The motivation could be spontaneous or deliberate, but I think it's clear what the form is just by looking at it on the page. There is also a kind of substructure in terms of numbers, counting. There are two hundred pages in the original typescript, multiples of five and six and three in terms of stanzas and lines, and there are certain recurrences of thematic material—names of countries, political figures, numbers of numbers—that I would bring into the poem at specific intervals. Almost every ten pages you find the name of a political figure, and on every page you find two occurrences of the word *I*. The word is being used as a word.

GH Like "I walks," with a first-person subject and third-person verb?
BW The *I* becomes an "it." Or even "Walk I," someone's out walking the *I*.

GH That brings up questions about the subject and so on, psychologically speaking, or the post-structuralist question of the formation of the subject and the multiplicity of selves tied up in what we call the subject. Is that something that interests you?
BW It's inevitably the case that there is no unitary subject, and of course the subject changes in time. The act of writing changes the subject. But the specific reason for writing the word *I* as dissociated from me—it's not me—is that it allows one to investigate areas of language that you wouldn't be able to without it. It's not an indication of what Jameson would call dissociation, or of the self as fragmented—it's a constructive principle intended to engage the world on certain terms. In order to do that we need to use the word *I* provisionally. Anyone who has worked in a large institution constantly uses the word *I* as a word, saying things like, "I don't think I can give you that price," when what you mean is that *the company* can't give them that price. This use of the word *I* is ubiquitous, and anyone who takes language seriously doesn't have to posit a dissociation or a fragmentation of the subject to use it. I would reject seeing the subject at a default in relation to this use of the word *I*. What I'm trying to do is engage the possibilities of it constructively in this poem.

GH To get back to my earlier question about your generational procedures, some of the stanzas in *Progress* look as though they could be completely aleatory, yet in your discussion of the Haig stanza you make it clear that the material before and after that line plays a very specific role there. Whereas some other poets are much more willing to let things occur in conjunctions that to them don't really matter.
BW If you look at Jackson Mac Low, who is the most aleatorical writer I can think of, it turns out that his use of aleatory is involved in his reading of neo-Aristotelian philosophy from the 1940s, his rejection of the unconscious, his interest in Buddhism. So there's no such thing as pure chance. Chance is interested. That having been said, in fact there are some aspects of *Progress* that are pretty gratuitous, but they are placed in such a way that their aleatorical value is being argued for whatever it might convey. What I really want to know is, What is randomness telling us when we experience it? For one thing, randomness seems to be very unlikely—I don't experience it very often. In fact I experience too much closure and order; everything is exactly where it should be. So when the random event happens one tends to treasure it and to use it in some way. There are a number of random elements in this poem, but they are immediately a part of the argument.

GH So then once you see the result, you aren't going to revise it, because you like it. Even though getting to it was random, the result is something that works for you.
BW Say the connection between two things is really gratuitous: what interests me is what the combination might yield in terms of the ongoing argument. It's similar to saying that the twelve-tone system is expressive as opposed to purely formal. It has expressive possibilities. Aleatory has argumentative possibilities.

GH Would you explain what's going on in this passage?

> I reject a symbol for pig-iron
> Production along the Volga
> Visited by Lumumba on tour
> In a gondola of coal,
> fused. . . .
>
> In the heart of a blast furnace
> As a word,
> meanwhile voices
> Urge syntagma of sightseers
> Into barges for the trip down. . . .

Is that a comment on Socialist Realism? "I reject a symbol for pig-iron?
BW It's more complicated than that because it's acting out the *I*: "*I* reject a symbol for pig-iron / Production." Kit Robinson writes, "I demolished 530 Bush" [laughs]. Think of how many buildings are left, and at the same time think of the violence of that act. "I reject a *symbol* for pig-iron / Production"—that would be this little thing on a map. Here's the Volga and we see this miniature steel mill, and at that place 10,000 workers show up in overalls every morning at the factory gate, go in, and make pig iron. That would be representation in the static sense, right? I reject representation in that form. Rather, the poem is being fused in the heart of a blast furnace, as it were. That's where *pig iron* comes from, having been fused in a blast furnace rather than having been imposed on pig-iron production by a map. So there are two forms of representation: one categorized from above and one coming out of the experience of producing pig iron. And out of that there are a series of puns, actually, on what meaning is. Here you have the colonialized revolutionary on tour seeing the accomplishments of the socialist state, a representative of the third world visiting a representation of the second world. And I'm rejecting these for the formation at the heart of the blast furnace. "Meanwhile voices / Urge syntagma of sightseers / into barges for the trip down": tourists, consumers of false representations, are being floated down river toward their sort of cloacal destination. At the same time a syntagmatic organization *is* occurring by virtue of such automatized spectacles that float down stream. This is a kind of comment on the form of the poem, on the relation of the poem to language. Then I "jump from a 13-story hotel / And assume a net" to counter this syntax. In other words, I'm accepting not representation but a fusing of representation and experience, and the poem is a way that that occurs.

GH Is there anything else you would like to say about the book?
BW That it does argue and is not a static work. That is, it develops, and about four-fifths of the way through the poem I think a crisis is reached and some resolution occurs. And that shape was not anticipated at all.

GH How would you distinguish your own practice from Clark Coolidge's or someone else's?
BW In Coolidge there is an extension in time, a responsiveness in writing not exactly like "first thought, best thought" but certainly an improvisatory responsiveness he's arguing. Then he gets interested in what he calls the "thin spots," where the psyche is washed out, and he wants to keep writing through these to show how the place where you don't think you have anything else to say can produce more psychic energy. Coolidge is interested in an endlessly generative bout of the art impulse. A whole thesis exists on the way art appears in Coolidge's work, how he works off the

notion of art and uses it to recharge the psyche. Finally it comes down to the social role Coolidge wants to play, which is that of the continually productive and deliberately isolated writer whose concern is first of all with the material at hand.

I end up stressing the social role of the artist because I think questions of writing as method lead there. In terms of language, I've placed myself within social processes that are more conflicted then the kinds of unmediated access to language Coolidge pursues. The immediacy I'm interested in is not identified so clearly with the real time of writing. I want to use language that's already in circulation to see if it can be reinvented, and to make constructive use of the space between the work and other's responses to it. The medium is no longer simply in the writer or on the page, but in a kind of intersubjective resonance that is as much a part of the act as the act of writing itself.

ON WHETHER OR NOT TO BELIEVE IN YOUR MIND BY NORMAN FISCHER (The Figures, 1987)

Digging through old journals I spotted this, jotted down in Charles Olson's class by Clark Coolidge:

> Peter Auxier: language is something you have to get into rather than something that's in you, to be got out

Now Norman Fischer:

> Experience may not be *wholly* linguistic
> Though I suspect it is.

Both of which support the conviction that language and its parallel domain Imagination, are *out there* places, not sealed mental locations to pry open privately via drugs or any other technique. The poem accordingly is also not private affair dredged from *inside,* but gets composed of public, and widely available, linguistic elements.

The fact is, solitary mental phenomena seem pretty lonely & impoverished when viewed against our common & inhabited world.

Walk out on the planet. Keep your eyes open as you move. You'll notice there isn't a thing you can find inside your own personal consciousness as crazy, wise, sexy or awesome as what you encounter outside you. This is the true principality of Mind. No one ever, for instance, located in their own brain any so mindblowing a thing as men with shovels found when they dug the first dinosaur bone out of some pit. Yet—and this would be Fischer's take—you don't need to trek out in search of wild or outlandish discoveries. Imagination and language are here among us.

"The regular most extraordinary."

Still, Fischer's supplied us with two fanciful tales—one a headfast galumphing postmodernist witch story, like he'd tell kids, with weird characters melting into one another. The other a pre-Kipling gentleman-adventurer's tale of British Raj India days, complete with tigers, gemstone encrusted boxes, and a whimsically by turns generous and cruel Maharaja. At the moment of the India story's denouement, right when you learn the awful & mistaken truth about the fate of the narrator's favorite wife, *somebody* in *italics* interrupts, complaining of a headache and lost glasses.

The joke though is that this ain't *metacriticism,* like they supposedly enjoy on the streets of present-day Paris or New Haven—it's storytelling in gritty bodily context, like the streets of Cairo or Rajputana—except instead of out loud it's written on paper. When the storyteller finishes he rubs his eyes wearily, and the spell's broken. There you sit, holding Fischer's book, gently & unalarmingly unsure of what to believe.

Perhaps storytelling's vanishing somewhat from Mind among us—into the reduced precincts of tv & movies—but it remains as much as our tongues part of our make-up. People who sneer at myth and fable may as well sneer at their own left hands. Nonetheless, most current linguistic attention—and Fischer documents *this* stuff much more extensively—prosaically heads towards everyday chatter, nervous thought, planmaking, discussing the news, and doing things with other people. All of which presupposes a commonalty of language. So friends, kids, dogs, neighbors, toys, buildings, & trees appear in these poems, which being contemporary to it all read in a justifiably fragmented manner—life obviously splinters into a hundred stories each pursuing its own destiny. None of the poems, however, succumb to deliberate avant-guardish derangement. Fischer's engagement as longtime Zen practitioner, community leader, and familyman seems to run counter to privately imposed methodological word-warping. A father and a neighborhood "incharge" have to trust, if not believe, in the pos-

sibility that words reflect things actually getting talked about, and are referentially effective in getting things done.

The poems inhabit language easily & humorously—built on pragmatisms & contradictions. A community of people, such as Green Gulch Zen Ctr., of which Fischer is the director, uses words magically & reliably to construct dwelling places, grow food, work out finances, and express ire or affection. This maybe explains the book's disarming "let's get things done" tone. It anyhow shows a friendly—rather than the now fashionable *ironic*—interest in letting all sorts of jumbling voices have their say.

How to Plan a Garden

What we want to do and what other people want to see.

A gateway.

The aesthetic ellipse.

It's very important to have some manageability to what you're doing.

Potentially scheduled.

The base of the hill

Lemonberry

Persimmons are pretty in the Fall when leafless they with fruit are hung, as though all the world were in a permanent state of Fall, expectant of a rosy Winter.

All around it a flowering hedge.

Lavender and cistus.

A friendship rock wall.

The South side in cover.

Kids plant trees.

Another page hugely announces,

> THE HUMAN PERSON HAS BROKEN FREE
> FROM THE GREAT SILENCE OF MATTER

and that's plenty. In anyone's book.

—ANDREW SCHELLING

"THE SOUL IS AN ONSLAUGHT"

> The vector of space is resurrection. We walk on the earth
> under which they lie who also matter to us.

In another age, when Johnson had his Boswell or Goethe his Eckermann, the sagacity of voluble men was eagerly jotted into notebooks by compatriots who acted on the impulse of their own insight into the prophetic mentality. In that indeterminate temporal leviathan known as modernity this venerable practice has nearly disappeared—in fact, it's hard enough for the seriously talkative to get a hearing at all, let alone a worthy interlocutor. So the old speech-to-print practice has had to be reworked from another angle, most compellingly in the case of Charles Olson.

Olson handled his own literary apparitions well enough. Aside from *The Maximus Poems* he put together two exceptional collections of poems, *In Cold Hell, In Thicket* and—reworking this configuration—*The Distances* in 1960, one of those classically proportioned, seemingly invincible statements that very few books of poetry manage to achieve (others would include Duncan's *Opening of the Field,* Stevens' *Transport to Summer,* Oppen's *Of Being Numerous,* Ashbery's *The Double Dream of Spring*—to cite a few from the decades of Olson's activity). As indelible an impression as *The Distances* leaves, it hardly begins to "represent" the scope of the man's work. It turns out that he was as prolific in poetry as he was in the epistolary mode. *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson* (University of California Press), just published as this issue of *Sulfur* goes to press, fractures all prior sense of Olson's scale. At 643 pages, it presents a body of non- or extra-Maximus poetry four times as large as what Olson published in his lifetime.

What is most immediately striking is just how singularly the vision of Olson's work is handled by, and provided in the care afforded by, George Butterick. "None of the poems are without risk," Butterick writes (xxi), and

this is equally true of his exemplary editorial insight into the parameters of Olson's work. This *Collected Poems* is a subtle argument from within the conventional organizing principles of such volumes; since most of the poems were not published during Olson's life, it is Butterick's discretionary reading which literally shapes the body of the man's work. In certain cases "it has been impossible or even undesirable to judge which version of a poem is the preferred or superior version." (xxii-xxiii) So Butterick decisively offers the work as a *cortical array*. Different drafts of certain poems are printed side by side; poems appear which are blunt and engaging challenges to any vested concept of poetry; the marginal, the incidental, and the casual are given a status unheralded in the idiom of the collected poems. While there's some precedent for this in *The Maximus Poems*, the conservation of this radical vision in the extra-Maximus material is wholly Butterick's.

What this collection of Olson's work provides is more than a supplementary volume of distinct and kerygmatic prophecies, standing firmly aside from the Maximus volumes as *The Distances* did. Butterick's bold corporealizing of this work as the final horizon of Maximus is more than a deed—it's an enstasy in which Butterick has enacted "the chain of memory as resurrection," that

> . . .we must woo the thing
> to get its feet together so that its shoulder blades
> are open, so that the aorta (375)

In the same mail that brought Olson was *Giants Play Well In the Drizzle* (October 1987), with this short poem by George Butterick that embeds itself in the imagination as indelibly as anything in the collected Olson:

> Delicacies, endless
> deliciousness, the way the moon
> ladles forth light and exhaustion
> lies on the waters to support it.

—JED RASULA

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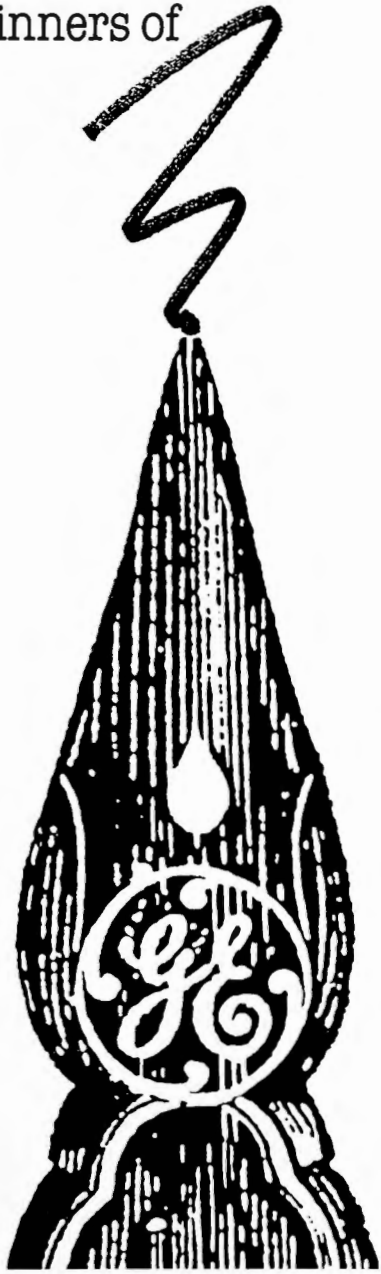

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I know myself, Robert Duncan, to be mortal. Before 1919 certain likenesses of what I am appeared over and over again among animals as Man, within the species as racial variety, as Iberian and Celt; and among my forefathers hints even of what I was specifically to be had life and died. Paracelsus tells us: "What lies in the remotest corner of the earth casts its shadow on man, and man is suffused with what lies in the depth of the sea." This is the meaning of evolution that thru process we have our share in all of creation and thus are of God. I have a likeness in the Fish. But what *I* am is only an instance of a series of me that moves thru time precisely because it continually dies away from itself in being born into itself. This is what it means to be mortal: to wax and wane, to have genius in the moment and to perish therein, to come into being and pass out of being in order to be at all, and to enact this drama in a period of gestation (which restates the multitude of evolution toward one mortal fact, in the throws of birth itself (which enacts the uniqueness of this fact, in the throws of death itself (which enacts the mortality of this fact), and in dissolution and decay (which falls away from in order to admit that there is immortality only in God). Paracelsus tells us again: "As soon as a child is conceived, it receives its own heaven." I have my own life and my own time because I am utterly mortal; it is indeed by the virtue of these boundaries of birth and death which are the grace of God that I have this tenancy of myself. Thus I know that I am not the Poet. As a "poet" I am only an instance and instrument of the Poet that I imagine—that is, Who is real, and Whose work is immortal Poetry, is Reality.

ROBERT DUNCAN
Stinson Beach, 1959

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CORAL BRACHO

ON THE FACETS: THE FLASHING*

(Tr. from the Spanish by Thomas Hoeksema)

The rhizome, like a subterranean stalk. . .assumes, by itself, very diverse shapes: from its superficial extension magnified in many ways, to its manifestation in bulbs and tubers.

Desire is the creator of reality. . .it produces and moves forward by means of rhizomes.

An intensive feature begins to act by itself. . .

Deleuze and Guattari, *Rhizomes*

In the parched word, unformulated, it shrinks,
rancid brown membrane ((that is: a delicate drop of oil for the
morning radiance
of the boundaries, for the tepid
line, well-traveled, that crosses, like a limpid hue, above
the vast sizzling, over the burdened back,
bulb—a drop of animal saliva:
for the inflections, for the fertilized dawn (caress)
which expands to the shore, like foam, a relief;
a fruit-bearing fur—an ulcer of light, a basting: for
expressions fragrant to the touch, to the wrinkled shadow,
coveted;
a voice, a loose fiber—a fleece—at random from the chisels,
from the strum of the pick)
on the crest, at the flank, of the magnetizations;
Strokings

* A rhizome section seen by microscope; the partridge is a potato cell. The rest appears to be or forms part of the landscape: examine it for what is connected to the libido of horses.

and the hair language of rubbings in the lobed bowl
of the bodies. Purple
at the root;

a sponge, a lime, an axillary
mirror: and in the echoes,

stature:
a lark. Rhymes in the lavender;
ice: by the liminal rump, smooth restless animal lips.
Hirsute valve,
alliance, in the overturning; plexus and tendon:
a warmth, a synovial point under the veined delights: ducts
to the pale hidden summit;
a splinter, a ribbon (cat),
an embryo for the bronze of rampant thickets, intimable;
a boiling, a dishevelled mass, a spore:

Cope-tails ajar at the peak of an inguinal taste.
        Above the manes; kicks:

In the customary moulds, challenged, of existing, in
their smoky, ovulating rears:
                a precise icicle,
                an oil-lamp.
Cliffs.

and in the slimy folds, hints of existing,
and on its pungent banks of sand;
pearly figs; laughter;

a lemon on the excited fringes;
tearing: with inaudible glazed currycombs (wine, prehensile
    and shaggy),
with thorns the mood, the hooves;

sparking laughter between the inspected
bulbs, the magpies;
                phosphorus, winks, echoes
                in the claw; the partridge
                leaps.

The partridge: fresh bird, plentiful, with solid thighs;
marked sexual dimorphism. Its red feathers, ashen,
conceal. Leaps in ejective parabola above the strawberries;
a fluttering fever. Has gray flanks (Boiling
spongy strawberries, they exhale—from their poppy swamps,
from their verbal mesentery—the delectable lye), slender legs,
a short flight; it runs (sumptuous, overflowing taste)
rapidly.

Opens its full clean lips:
the juice moistens and scents its harness; on its skin
of random stings, eagerly encircles the graceful one,
kicking; the slippery simultaneous nectar
sinks; amazement; vast amazement
among the high-pitched buds;
kneeling, on dazzling knee-backs, erect.
On the bicep, the scrotums; Radiant, acrid. Trots.
Curbed by the illuminated
rumps; cadences; convex rhythm; violet-colored
paroxysms: face down
among deep resonances. Extendible peduncles below the belt:

Sucking from the bubbling shapes; the tongue between
the linking textures, pristine
vulvas in thermal springs, rain for the splintered
nuclei; turbulent rhizomes between the streams, the
jubilant, foaming furs of existence;
beneath fermentable reins, the blankets.
Absorbed
in the beds, expansive. Inundated.
Sensitive forms through the exacerbated straw, sprouting. Vital,
imperishable in their sudden impulses, smooth and tainted
by their ocher,
their splendor, in their yolks; unique to the rubbing
pupils.
Stampede of flames between the furrows, the peppers, the
traces; dense
and exaltable on their tips: by smell. Mineral
burst. A line, a caboose, a speck of dust; Gargoyle.
An ant in the joyful tufts, by the thighs,
the belly; in words)) taut, murky,

it shrinks, harsh membrane ((citric. The perpetual shrillness on the
edges)) drab; its net dims ((on the lubricated boundaries, the
pistil.

—His voice: savoring, performing, plundering it—Light;
in excitable spaces, the seditious act. Labial,
expandable below the cool forefinger, its smoothness; they press.

Magnetism aroused to tasty excess,
the grating. The tickling summits.
—Turning sour, squeezing—in wild splittings,
tender. Vortex. Between the irons, the thistles,
instinct. Stubborn rodents
among the threads, the squares, the sieve. A clod,
a lanceolate breath, an itch.
To trail below the jammed, intensive zones.
Papillary knots among the grass. On the facets: the flashing.
An awl, an insect in the words)) sluggish,
crammed ((between the cracks the caesuras, on the reins.
Sudden and wanton they focus them—His voice: slitting it,
opening it, choosing it—, they encircle and cohabit on reflecting
edges)), hollows; their opaque crust ((among the screams,
the fetlocks, the clefts. To exist:))

SUSAN HOWE

"on a [*p* < suddenly. . .on a > was shot thro with a dyed → < dyed → a soft]"*
(became the vision)(the rea) after Though [though]That
Fa

But what is envy [but what is envy]
Is envy the bonfire inkling?

Shackles [(shackles)] as we were told the. . .[precincts]

* *Billy Budd:* The Genetic Text

A Vengeance must be
a story
Trial and suffering
of Mercy
Any narrative question
away in the annals
the old army
Enlightened rationalism

dreadful at Hell
bears go in dens
No track by night
No coming out
in the otherday
on wild thoughtpath
Face of adamant
steel of the face
Breast

In the Parmenidean text

locked riddles gust
Early times

Eov and Ev

Land of anything
Forgotten preservation of

everything

Other prophets
Propriety Property

Grindstone

In the clock of Easter
and fire

Essence and essential error

Own political literature

Stoic iconic Collective
Soliloquy and the aside

Suppose finite this is
relict struggle embrace

Violent order of a world

Iconoclastic folio subgenre

a life lived by shifts
evil fortunes of another

Halfway through *Wanderings*
walks the lean Instaurator

Birth of contemporary thought
Counter thought thought out

Consumable commodity

a Zero-sum game
and consequent

spiral haze stricture

Distance or outness

Phrase edged away

Money runs after goods
Men desire money

Wages of labor
Wages in a mother country

Authorial withdrawal

Will as fourth wall

My heavy heavy child

hatchet-heartedness
of the Adversary

On anonymity Anonymity

in mum
in arm
in ale

in tone

open

company

Wedged destiny shed [*cancel whole*] halter measure mutiny Act Wars Child
regical

fluent

fluke

squall

Human [authoritative] human!
They cumbered the ground.
Record
Freak within of the heart
Secret fact a title given

THE REVISER

MAURICE BLANCHOT

DREAMING, WRITING

(Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth)

I remember the spare, slender collection of books entitled "l'Age d'or" in which, alongside other French and foreign works (including volumes by Georges Bataille, René Char, Maast, Limbour, Leonara Carrington, as well as Grabbe and Brentano), the initial *Nights* of Michel Leiris appeared. Now that these dreams, companions of forty years, have been published in their chronological sequence and precisely as they were transcribed, we are tempted to read them as an addition to his life, or better yet, as a supplement to that project of self-description and self-understanding through writing which Michel Leiris continues to pursue without respite. This was perhaps the way I read them at the very outset, and I remember a striking dream that seemed to bring to bear on the night the same surveillance, the same investigation that the author of *L'Age d'Homme [Manhood]* has placed at the very center of his writerly concerns: *"Waking up (with a shriek that Z. . . muffles) from the following dream: as if to catch a glimpse of something. I insert my head into an opening that resembles an oeil-de-boeuf window overlooking a dark, enclosed area akin to those cylindrical pisé granary silos that I saw in Africa. . My anxiety derives from the fact that as I lean over this enclosed area and get a glimpse of its inner darkness, I am actually gazing into myself."* [July 12-13, 1940].

One observes that the dreamer here in no way pursues the project of introspection to which he seems so attached during the day. At issue here is a translation or a transcription of this project into the language of the night, not its implementation; and the anxiety is not provoked by the discovery of the disquieting realities that might be gathered in one's innermost depths, but rather by the motion of looking into oneself and seeing nothing but the

contraction of a closed, unlit space. Three years later [March 19-20, 1943], another dream comes back to this motion, now taking itself directly as a theme: it is the dream of a dream that is ending, but instead of rising toward awakening, instead of struggling to emerge out of itself, the dream surreptitiously invites the dreamer to find a lower exit, that is, plunge into the depths of another sleep that will no doubt never end. What these two dreams have in common, what is grasped and lived as image by both, is the very motion of turning back: in the former, it involves a turning back upon oneself, such as simple imagery might ascribe to introspection; in the latter, the dream turns back on itself as if to surprise or survey itself, thus identifying itself with an inverse vigilance, a second-degree state of wakefulness in search of its own limits.

This turning-away motion is characteristic. The person who dreams turns away from the person who sleeps; the dreamer is not the sleeper: at times dreaming that he is not dreaming and therefore that he is not sleeping; at times dreaming that he is dreaming and hence, by this flight into a more inner dream, convincing himself that the first dream is not a dream, or else knowing that he is dreaming and then waking up in an identical dream which is nothing else but an ongoing escape from dream, which is an endless plunge into a similar dream (and so on and so forth through various twists and turns). This perversion (whose troubling implications for the state of waking Roger Caillois has described in his invaluable *L'incertitude qui vient des rêves),* seems to me related to a question that crops up naively and treacherously each and every night: Who dreams in dreams? Who is the "I" of dreams? Who is the person to whom this "I" is attributed, admitting that there is one? Between the person who is sleeping and the person who is the subject of dream events there is a fissure, a hint of an interval, a difference in structure; clearly it's not someone else, an entirely different person, but what exactly is it? And if, upon waking, we hastily and greedily take possession of the night's adventures as if they belonged to us, do we not do so with a certain sense of usurpation (as well as gratitude), do we not carry with us the memory of an irreducible distance, a peculiar sort of distance, a distance between self and self, but also a distance between all the characters and the various identities (however certain) we confer on them, a distance without distance, illuminating and fascinating, somewhat like nearing the far-off or

making contact with remoteness? Such events and questions refer us back to an experience often described of late—the experience of the writer who writes the word "I" in a narrative, poetic or dramatic work without knowing who is saying it nor what relation this "I" bears to himself.

In this sense dream is perhaps already close to literature, at least to its enigmas, its tricks of magic, and its illusions.

But let me return to Michel Leiris. For a man so deeply concerned with himself and so intent on explaining himself, the reserve he maintains vis-a-vis his dreams strikes me as remarkable. He notes them or, more precisely, he writes them. He does not ask questions of them. This is not mere cautiousness; it is well known that there is nobody more intrepid than he when it comes to inspecting the self, a process in which he invites us to participate by his own reckless frankness. He is knowledgeable, moreover, about psychoanalysis; he knows its mythology, its ruses, its boundless curiosity; more than anybody else, he would certainly be able to undo his dreams and read them as documents. Which is precisely what he forbids himself to do, and if he publishes his dreams it is not so that we might enjoy the pleasure of deciphering them, but rather so that we might display the same discretion, taking them for what they are, accepting them in their own light, and learning to seize in them the traces of an affirmation that is literary rather than psychoanalytical or autobiographical: These were once dreams; they are now signs of poetry.

Naturally we must admit that an exactness of relation obtains between the dream state and the writing state. It's not a question of making a literary work out of nighttime elements that have been transformed, embellished, perverted, or mimed by poetic means. Precision is part of the rules of the game. Writing takes hold of dream from the outside; the presentness of dream coincides with the non-presence of writing. At least this is the postulate of the enterprise that might be formulated as follows: I dream, therefore it gets written. [Je rêve, donc cela s'écrit].

*

Let us in turn dream about this supposed kinship of dreaming and writing, not to mention speaking. The person who wakes up in the morning experiences a curious urge to *tell:* he immediately

seeks out some listener whom he would like to have participate in the wonders he has just undergone, and is occassionally somewhat surprised to discover that this listener does not share in his amazement. There are dark exceptions—fatal dreams—but for the most we are happy with our dreams, we are proud of them, filled with the naive pride that might befit authors, convinced as we are that we have created an original work while dreaming, even though we refuse any responsibility for it. One should nonetheless ask oneself whether such a work truly seeks to become public, whether every dream seeks to speak itself, even though it be in a veiled manner. The ancient Sumerians were convinced that dreams should be recounted, recited. This was so that their magic power could be released as quickly as possible. Recounting the dream was the best way of avoiding its negative consequences; or one might decide to inscribe its characteristic signs on a slab of clay which one then threw into the water: the clay slab prefigured the book; the water, its audience. The wisdom of Islam nonetheless seems more sensible: the dreamer is advised to choose his confidant with great care or even to keep his secret to himself rather than revealing it to the wrong person. "The dream," it is said, "belongs to the first interpreter; you should only recount it in secret, just as it was given to you in secret. . .And bad dreams should be recounted to no one."

We recount our dreams for some obscure reason: in order to render them more real, to share with someone else the singularity that belongs to them and that would appear to destine them to one person alone. But there are further reasons as well: to appropriate them and to establish ourselves, through our common speech, not only as the master of our dreams but as their principal actor, thereby decisively taking possession of this similar though eccentric being who was us over the course of the night.

*

Where does it come from, this eccentricity that marks the simplest of dreams and makes of them a present, a unique presence that we would like others to witness as well? The answer is perhaps already contained in the word itself. Lacking a center or rather slightly exterior to the center around which it is organized

(or around which we reorganize it) and therefore situated at an inappreciable or imperceptible distance from us, lies that deep dream from which we can nonetheless not claim we are absent since on the contrary it brings with it an overpowering certainty of presence. But to whom does it bring it? It's like some presence that might well dismiss or else forget our capacity to be present in it. Do we not frequently get the impression that we are taking part in a spectacle not meant for us or that we are looking over someone's shoulder at some unexpected truth, some image we have yet to grasp? The fact is that we are not really there to grasp it: the show is being put on for someone who is not watching it in person and who does not have the status of a subject who is present. If dreams seem so foreign, it is because we find ourselves in the situation of strangers; and we are strangers precisely because the dreamer's self lacks any sense of true self. One could almost say that there is nobody in the dream and therefore, in a certain fashion, that there is nobody to dream it; hence the suspicion that when we are dreaming there is also someone else dreaming, someone who is dreaming us and who in turn is being dreamed by someone else, a premonition of that dream without a dreamer that would be the dream of the night itself. (An idea that from Plato to Nietzsche, from Lao Tse to Borges, recurs at the four cardinal points of dream thinking.)

Yet in this space that is as it were suffused with an impersonal light whose source escapes us (we almost never manage, even after the fact, to determine the lighting of dreams: as if they retained their clarity—diffuse, lambent, latent—in the absence of any precise center of light or of vision), there are nonetheless figures whom we manage to identify, among whom the very figure who figures us. In Michel Leiris's *Nights,* not only do we meet the author at various periods of his life but we also meet friends of his who have kept their own names and perhaps even their own faces and customary mannerisms. To be expected. Resemblances abound in dreams, for everyone in them tends to be extremely, wondrously similar: in fact, this is their only identity, they resemble, they belong to a domain that scintillates with pure resemblance: a resemblance that is sometimes steady and fixed, sometimes unstable and adrift (though always certain), fascinating and stirring each and every time. Consider the powerful spell a chance

passerby can cast on us if, for a split second, he bears a resemblance; we are drawn to his face; it haunts us; familiar and distant, it also frightens us a bit; we quickly try to identify it, that is, to erase it by guiding it back into that circle of things where actual human beings are so bound up with themselves that they are without resemblance. A being who suddenly starts "resembling" takes on a distance from real life, passes over into another world, enters into the inaccessible proximity of the image while nonetheless remaining present, though his presence is not his own or somebody else's—an apparition who transforms all other presences into appearances. And this resemblance, during the (infinite) space of time that it asserts itself, is not merely some vague relation to a specific individuality; it is resemblance pure and simple—neutral as it were. Whom does the resembler resemble? Neither this person nor that: he resembles no one, or an elusive Somebody—as is clear in the case of corpses, when the person who has just died begins to resemble himself, solemnly rejoining himself via his likeness, gradually fusing into this beautiful, foreign, impersonal being who is like a double slowly surfacing from the depths.

The same holds true for dreams: dreams are sites of similitude, mediums saturated with resemblances, in which some neutral power of similarity, existing prior to any particular designation, is constantly on the lookout for a figure whom, if need be, it might activate into a likeness. It is Faust's mirror, and what he sees in this mirror is neither the young girl nor the likeness of her face, but rather resemblance itself, the undefined power of similarity, the infinite scintillation of reflection. And let us note that dreams are often traversed by the premonition of this game of resemblances that is being played out in them; how often do we wake up asking ourselves: Who is this creature? And right away, at the very same moment, we manage to match him or her up to such and such a person or to someone else and so on down the line, until we reach the point where the resemblance stops flitting furtively from figure to figure and agrees to reincorporate itself into a definitive form, submitting to the waking self which alone has the power to interrupt the process.

I will not pursue these reflections any further. We do not willingly admit that the dreamer only relates to himself through resemblance, the he too is a figure of the Similar—the non-identi-

cal—and that, given this similitude, he readily becomes anybody and anything. Still, this self seen in image, this self which is but an image of the Self and which is incapable of withdrawing into itself and therefore of putting itself into doubt, this self whose certainty is so rigid is indeed a strange self, no more a subject than an object, but rather the shadow of itself, a flickering shadow that frees itself from us like some replica that is more true because it is at once more similar and less familiar. In the depth of dreams—admitting they have a depth, a depth that is all surface—lies an allusion to the possibility of anonymous being, so that to dream is to accept this invitation to exist almost anonymously, beside oneself, drawn outside of oneself, released on the enigmatic bail of semblance: a selfless self, unable to recognize itself as such since it cannot be its own subject. Who (even upon the invitation of the evil genius) would dare transfer to the dreamer the prerogative of the Cogito? Who would allow him to state with utter assurance: "I dream, therefore I am?" One might at most suggest that he say: "Where I dream, it is awake" ["Là où je rêve, cela veille"], a vigilance that takes dream by surprise and that indeed comprises, within a present devoid of duration, the waking state of a presence devoid of persons, a non-presence in which no being ever occurs, and whose grammatical form would be the "He" that designates neither one nor the other: this monumental "He" that Michel Leiris anxiously sees himself become as he looks at himself in the empty, unlit depths of his silo.

*

Dreams are a temptation for writing because writing may well also deal with this same neutral vigilance that the nighttime of sleep seeks to extinguish but that the nighttime of dream awakens and maintains, even as it perpetuates being by a semblance of existence. More specifically, although it borrows the neutrality and the uncertainty that belong to the night, although it imitates this power of imitation and resemblance that is without origin, writing not only refuses all the agencies of sleep, all the facilities of unconsciousness, all the bliss of torpidity, but turns toward dreams because the latter, in their refusal to slumber off in the midst of sleep, constitute a further vigilance at the gathering point of the night, a lucidity that is always present, moving, captive no doubt,

but therefore captivating. Sleep grows sleepless in dreams, and it is tempting to believe that this insomnia links us back, whether by allusion or illusion, to those waking nights that the Ancients termed sacred, nights laden with and devoid of darkness, long sleepless nights that correspond to the unmastered motion of inspiration that continues to allure us each time we hear something earlier speaking to us without speaking, indefinite in utterance, seeming to say everything to us prior to anything being said, perhaps actually speaking to us, but only in a semblance of speech. "Were it not for these horrible sleepless nights," wrote Kafka, "I would never write." And René Char, in less anecdotal fashion: *"Poetry lives on perpetual sleeplessness."* This is indeed what it lives on, undergoing this nightless night as Michel Leiris has called it, this night that is doubly nocturnal given this absence and subtraction of itself from itself, this night from which we too are subtracted and concealed and thereby transformed into something that remains awake, something that even as we sleep allows us no sleep: suspended between being and non-being. As Hölderlin reminds us in such precise terms: *"In the state between being and non-being, the possible becomes everywhere real, the real becomes ideal, and this, in art's free imitation, is a dream at once terrifying and divine.*

1961

AMIRI BARAKA

THE PAUSE OF JOE

Philly Joe Jones
Joseph Jones
of Philly

Arc of bones
on board
in the sea's darkness
being bones
of the being beaten

of the Joes
the eyes
of the sleekest
thou seekest our injury
Being
Us
& the bones beat
beat out

as the drums are
a form of space

its life containing
Whatever must exist
trace
flight
flame
these years of times lasso
the cross eyed deity
of laughter
beat bones

tell the blood
the Blood's
story

His
story .

The Beat of Joe
I eye
the Kansas city 4 man
came on Winged Feet
Thats yr Papa
Eye Eye
A Spanish guy
The story teller

Jo Jo

Story telling bones
Blood
Stones
Death
& Life
Tones

Tell The Story Joe
Eye Story
Yo Man
Jo Man

As yr beaten lives and grows
the grapevine of the world serpent
shakes, Tell the Story Joe

We're no grimace
in this menace
as if minutes

this telling
blow
Joe

For darkness, under sea lingo
tengo
mucho
story we
no can say

Let bones beat it
take the air
above the trees
a herd of me's

Tell the Story
Joe
Philly Dilly
Bone speech
Sleek

of the Dead Seek
Bones Speak

Griot
Story Teller
From Philadelphia
Which DuBois Analyzed

Found The Negroes
Wise
& Thriving On A Riff
Thriving beneath the Veil
This Century's Jail
Yee Slave Folk
& Masters
Yee Magic Cans
of the Streets
& thrilling ghettos
Where the Slums
beat like a boom a doom
Cage
for the Africans

to beat out
their age
to let out their
Rage
Be a Bone
& Speak, Joe
You & He from Kansas
City
The Four-Man
& Bats' Kin He mimics
to teach us
In Omen Land
The Count
Processed In Funk
Some Monkish Draculaics
For the visiting Klan, The Bone
Beats
Hides
Speak
This Political Tongue
Speech of Marches
The Black
Fire Men
Their Sirens Tell of Escapes
Joe Griot dusts his iron tales
the metal sings industrial Blues
Machine Funk.

You wd *have to be* hip
to *be w/* Miles
So Bad
Was He
This King of MaMa Rappers
Black Sweet Swift
reflections of night
in his shining hair
I was there
The Music in his stare

of Philly-ness
& Joe-ness
& for Eloise even
Joseph-ness
The Lone Star
above the
rhythm House.

We said
Miles & Trane
& Philly
& Them
(that's Paul & Red
& Blue Cannon Ball
Fusing The Master Classic
Bop-Cool
& Harder Bopper
School
The State of the Art
For those who come to play
The Heart's
Message

For Bravery
For Philadelphia Jokes
For such gladness
as only a friend
can give
or know
or be
Free as his Shakerei
brushes
Mississippi Sound

Joseph The Father
Max The Son
Joseph The Holy
Philadelphia
Ghost
& Klook be they
Bops

As our hearts
locked in sun

Tell the history

Like Joe & I
& Archie
one night

What Bad Tadd said
Philly JJ

The Bones Song
Dameronia
So we knew Joe to speak
Yo can seek
We the see
Bop the Be

Free Joe
His style as form's
essence
yet the rumble

the reach
beneath black seas

to rail roads of ebony
skeletons

on the way to Slavery
land
Us Congos
held by a
Square
Joe
was there

Mr Jones

Mr. Joseph Rudolf Jones
from Philadelphia
So bad a city
took his name
& so its fame
despite those evil servants

of 666
who have
come
to
No Goode!

He breathed our history as
his walking beat

Bones & Hide
Shimmering
metal
strut.

Dixie Peach
2/4
Napoleon
We copped
yr band
for coming

against our will
Toussaint
& Christophe
& Sidney Bechet
copped
took it wherever other
bone sings
sun
hide
beats

the niggers
of the orchestra sd Max

quite
naturally
Yo, man
Joe,
can

You wd have to be hip to
hang out
w/ Miles
& Trane
To have a city
use yr
name

To get the bones
to beat its name

Brothers
Do Love
& Negroes be here
too

& Crazy Benjamin
out there
messin
w/ that
electricity
"Boy, you better
come up
out the rain
w/ that
key

Try See, Yo
Jo
about here

Africa
The South
New Orleans
Blue
Spanish Tinge
City Rock
Miles Stones
Funky Blues

On A Misty Night, Lady Bird
The Bones
Speak
of Rag & Swing
& Boogie

of March
& Colored Ghosts

Ashé Ashé
Guanguanco
Signifying Elegba
God of Laughter & *Jasm*

Beater of Bones & Hides
Singer w/ Golden Symbols
Bop Be
Be
Thy Name

Domesticater of Animals
Master of the Fields & Flowering Seeds
Builder of Houses in One Place
Keeper of the Herds

Speaker of a thousand tongues
some as swift
as the wind

City Man
Collector of Art
& culture
Creator of Museums
& Libraries

Civilizer
of the Dark

Introducer
of the *Human*
Being

Poet of Industrial Design
Machine Singer

Language Maker
Song & Dance
Man

Yo
there is no
Urban
No post-desert
Science
w/o yr tom toms
& shades
Yo, Jo
I & I

& The Four-Man now also gone

So we who remain
who know the game
who have seen slavery
give way to the Gestapo

& see the slow worm
of fascism

pop out
Reagan headed

from a cancerous
nose

Those of us who do
knows

That Duke & Count
& John Before
& Pres & Louie
& then Thelonius

& before two suns
Both the Father
& the Ghost

How much strength
is our history

How much Beauty
& Dancing
How much struggle
is our memory

Our Dream of
Democracy

Bone Man
Beat Darkness
into Singing
Sun

into Colored
Rhythms

Against the
Boers

& No Goodes

A hipper time than
Pendulums

much clearer
than Clarence

Let it Be Known Now that you
Carriers of the
Torch
of the Created
Advancing
Mind

That throughout this world
Huge Changes Ready
to go
Down

From the top
Let the baton of rhythms
of riddims
of Rap
Reggae
of the Sorrow Songs

The hide & rock
roll & beat
shimmer of street

tough growling
shaded
Orisha of
Bop Bee

They say in prayer to the living
now & forever
Our Jasm

Creators
in life
of its hearts
essence

It's on you
they say:

(now
it's on
you)

All our history

Slavery &
Ghosts
Maniac Kings
Who sold us in chains

For Duke & Monk
& John & Thelonius
& Yo, double Joe

The Father
& the Wholly Philadelphia
Ghost

They're Hear-ing
is a hum of old grandmothers
a hum of deacons
a hum of Lindy Hopping Rappers
of Cake Walkers
Tappers, Yo, Jo
I Know
You had to go
This slow poison world
Cdn't handle you

Yet your hear-ing
is your bone
beat
hide under
hand &
stick

the riddim say
It's On You

rookieeeeeeeeeeeeee

Do Bana Coba
Do Bana Coba

Beneme Beneme

I heard my man the other day
Joe Say

Beating the telling
Bones
Yo, Rookie
Yng blood
Bigging People
of a Vision
a riddim
a desire
a fire
of human science
love a beat
a heart

Nation to Be
Rising to We
Free Nation
To See

says:
Its on you

on you now
on you

This Music
of our world's
Description

Hymn For The As We wd
Say Him
Self

One of
The Great

MaMa Lamas

The Man
So Hip
A City
Took
His
Name!!

PHILADELPHIA JOE JONES 7/19/23 - 8/30/85

The Arts Foundation of Michigan, a private funding agency which supports Michigan artists, welcomes *Sulfur* magazine to its new home in Michigan and is proud to provide financial support for this issue. To receive information on the AFM's funding programs, please call Kimberly Adams at (313) 871-0559 or write AFM, 542 New Center Building, 7430 Second, Detroit, MI 48202.

afM

FANNY HOWE

THE BORDER

For one thing, my loneliness was intense. It became my condition by a process of elimination made without logic or choice. She lost three pints of semen over the long run, each one was a wee child. Meanwhile my emerald did not change, but stayed as solid as a frozen ocean, a bottle chip, a chameleon on a leaf.

I lacked a community beyond my family and had but two friends with whom I could discuss sacred texts. A truant child was hidden in myself on the way to church and a playing card with a duck painted on it, the kind you kill. I thought I'd like to be children again in an illustration, mallard-colored.

The rest of the time she labored in front of strangers. When a black hole swallows matter, it's light years away from earth and millions of times as far away as Pluto. We're really lucky. Out of it comes a stream of ex-rays and green prayers.

When I lay in blankets in the dark and empty house I heard sounds which made me cringe. Fuck you, someone shouted. But on my flying carpet, I could go as high as cloud-seeding experiments in the Sierra Nevada. It was there that I felt like a surrogate mother raising the question, who owns the individual?

Night sounds were neither animal nor technological and the stars moved abnormally fast. I felt that Abba was demanding my attention then, yearning for it (here I say "my" and "I" but always mean "human") out of its spatial isolation. Another Santa Ana was moving in, peaking air pollution and surf was swell. From Point Pinos to Point Conception, hazardous seas and escapees. The sea under the rising sun was like an oriental rug for lying and flying on.

She wants only to get close to Alpha and Omega so there will be no more fear of the world. High fertility rates among the Latino and

black communities make others hate them. Today the surf will be six feet, a green ray like lime pie on a watery table will follow the sunset. Caused by transport smog, white caterpillars finger up the interstate.

To accept the duality of Jah is an impossibility. It is a contradiction in terms and must not enter the head of any individual. Technology's cunning turns halos into auras. It makes morbid men who only like snow-women with berries for lips. But I say that snow's white powder should knock down the high price of software and crystal.

The soul is a space and cries out to Jah who is the rest of it. But the mind tries to remember everything the ancestors said.

Those queer night sounds and the speed at which the stars machined their path through the sky—or was it the earth moving? I never remember—Were Abba's attempts at capturing me. But when G-d is a metaphor for d—th, then I cry out: Rescue me from Yahweh my enemy, and from unjust people and their decisions. Why should I care? Why has the enemy thrown me this far from home? Why is my enemy my only hiding place, where I feel safe in the world?

She assumes the enlightened one will forgive her who casts her eyes towards the earth where flowers doll up the plod through dust. And she senses that humans are a race of elves. It makes her laugh.

She lives with an oppressive sense of eternity and its presence in her and is truly impatient of people who say, "You're lucky. Your faith must make you very happy." How is she supposed be happy with eternity? Can you tell me that? You must be crazy. What exists is named specifically, and there is no specific name for G-d. In the mountains are snow guns and enough high-tech gauges to pilot a Lear Jet. The wild cats leap down a hill called Sheep Dip. In lace tulle and millinery flowers stands the bride of snowmen.

I only want you to know that the bread of heaven feeds the poor human soul begging only to be nourished in peace. Wastewater is recycled into drinking water. There are lots of wonderful Americans

out there whose self-hatred takes the form of rejecting immigrants. The sky is teeming with hidden blue machinery. And each act is a signature of thought.

I knew it was unpopular to think there was a city in the sky, one which scientists and satellites couldn't see, and even as I tormented myself with the idiocy of such a concept, I counted its turrets.

A command came out of the river: mistreat the dark man. She felt weary and grave, a pilgrim bewitched by drugs and shades. Like a horse wearing a veil, the man at the border patrol, asking for i.d.'s.

Everything is structured and complete. There is no physical matter that does not contain its precedent. Yet we are given lies and clamber up the facts like old hippos. At the zoo the animals are hardly more alive than photographs, yet people stand and snap pictures of these images.

I think we all want to get back to the beginning to see what happened next. Physicists, as hard-headed as peanuts, want this as much as anyone. They talk about eddying water and how the ripples all come together in patterns of patterns. I've heard them. They are desperate to understand what happened first.

With a ring in his earlobe, sandy hair and red fuzz on his white upper lip, the patrolman acted like her boss. Two whites hovered over some fossils, and pink pajamas were hot and excited at the end of the motel. Oranges hung on trees and in the eyes of the orangutan was the whole world.

Down the river in rubber, the alien was a kind of mud wall with eyes. Grass swayed where the hunters puffed. She spoke of the body material. Who belonged where and to whom. In Balboa Park one immigrant's mouth full of mud made her spit. She remembered a floating head, water full of dogs and wooden noses. Empty yourself to G-d, she said.

The earth trembles here and the orange rocks are heaved up at an angle in the deep canyons. This is a place where you can wash in the wind, but can never return to the heavy city.

My enemy is often my leader, especially when I have everything I need. He takes me where there are landmines, then, and where there is fresh water. I have less fear when my enemy is my guide because he draws me into meandering areas where I feel protected from the long shadows of evening. He comforts me. He knows where the dangers are that he himself planted. So how could I feel safer than when I am with him?

Once she was wedlocked. She married him on her knees. Now she doesn't give her secrets away to any man. Like a gnome who fell from the sky in a bag and flopped around screaming on the ground, she's at the mercy of her birth-weight and nothing else. The fact is, humanity has an adversarial relationship to that space which threatens the material body. In the desire to appease the wrath or appetite of this space, we develop many forms of behavior, most of them in postures of terror.

The new franchise includes McHospital, McMarket, McChurch and McSchool. A grandfather's course in quantum mechanics would have him canoeing along the banks of McMammoth Lake saying, Come on up. No one likes McSomeone McEveryone likes. It's all mechanics. A tiny school of fish between lots of fresh snow is that man's giddying scripture.

The St. Augustine bingo program and the price of cement in Mexico are connected by a convent. They paid her to laugh and brought the price on cement down at the border every time she did. By this time the sight of a uniformed police officer was a comfort. Back at Pleasanton Federal Prison, people wondered which one of the twin cities was the right one.

Little fishes go in and out of a net and don't even know they're "all wet." Diabolus simius Dei.

Stimulate ovulation in a dragon and you need to collect semen preserved in an old kimono. But who owns the seed? Confusions mark the end of an era. However negative, it's necessary to press on.

I think airplanes need eyeglasses as much as their pilots do. Technology has run ahead of ethics. Blustery weather in San Diego Bay and northeast is a dreamscape on the berm on Sunrise highway. Bright colored sleds, a rolling fog. In a materialist world the body is the ultimate possession of value. You feel like someone left in a refrigerator for years. Geographies are as cozy as nurseries or weddings smothered in headpieces, tulle, favors, bouquets, corsages and ribbons by the bolt.

At the Rosarito Beach Hotel, a blue tiled bathroom and a blue tiled pool, white wicker chairs and the sea and horses. They had travelled on foot over black sand with rippling lines like shells in the mountains. Olive trees and jars of condiments at roadside stands. Is desperation truer than joy? Green seahorses on the tiled floor were nearly worn away by the vomit of American marines.

If ideology can be a substitute for action, then so can questions be clues. The muff and stick were in bed pretending to be illegal aliens. So ideas suffer humiliations you never even dreamed about.

Twin dogs in matching plaid sweaters stopped in the back of a truck at the border. One ran after a bugger, another after a beggar.

I was building an orphanage. My excitement was prodigious. A bad mother sat on the beach. For her all too human cruelty I would call her pathetic. She trailed across the sand like some alcoholic tenant at a resort. The father arrived, smaller by a fart, and like a spider, rubbed his elbows and knees together, saying My sexual energy is high. He was laughing so I laughed and got paid again. The children wondered who owned the eggs on the stove while they starved.

I had in my possession a band of foundlings, with round faces, brown as flan, and the smell of chickens in their feathery skin. My joy sang in my fingertips at both the saw and the stove. I could hold, in this sixty inch frame, a tribe of free souls. I had forgotten, though, that I was south when I was and north when I was. Every bountiful place seemed to be an interval in a meaningless galaxy.

I've caused you so much trouble, darling, darkling, troubadour. Bite something rotten and you've got the essence of dreams, she told them. *Do you apologize to cats when you push them off the chair? I bet you do. The borderland is a fairy place, so don't be afraid when the barns thunder with trampling and strangling, when the wooden infanta grows a nose as long as Pinocchio's. I value nothing more than your voices,* she continued saying. *Like a flight of birds from an empty brown hood outside a little hermitage, a deluge of candles wobbles in your breath.*

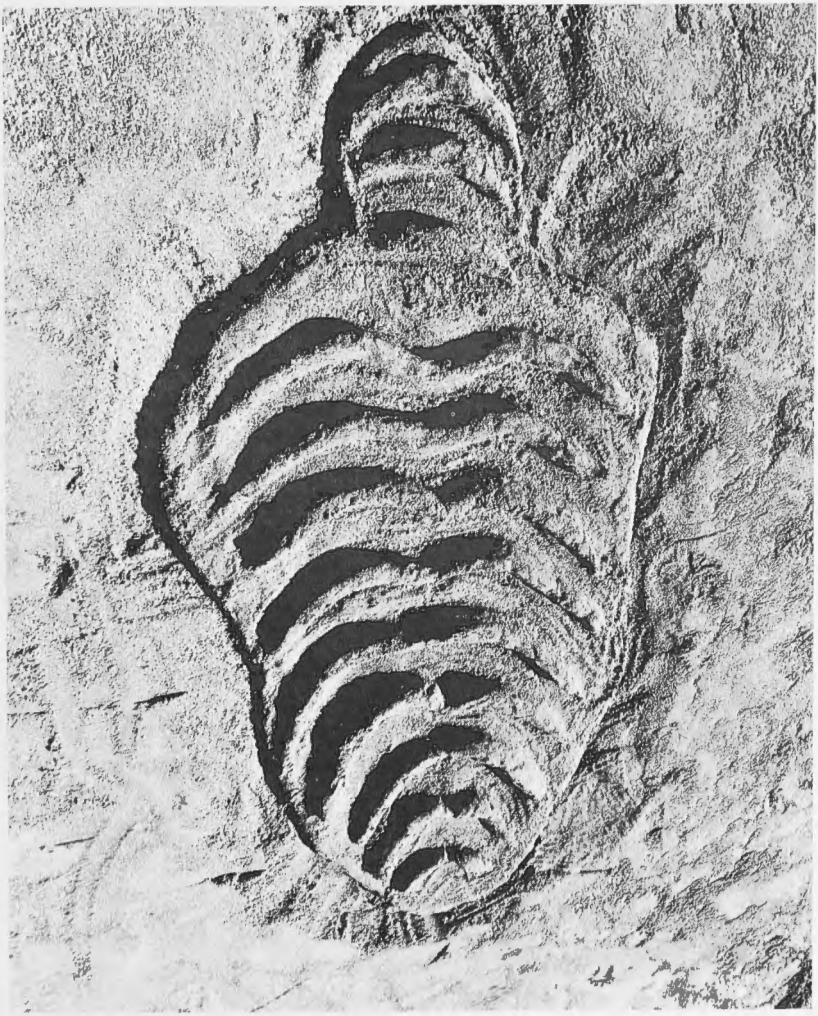
Twelve little faces turned to hear her. She wanted only to take care of them, to unfold them joint by joint until they could rise each day, eyes dark with joy knowing the hand of love would return and never forget them.

That was, however, never to be my vocation. An error on the part of my compass, or an act of predestiny? I'll never know. Hands are still the physical parts which give me the most delight. Look at them next time. I was given the charge of a disagreeable hag, instead of children, a woman who considered herself superior, and a bunch of white people, of which I was one, crawling here and there useless as mushrooms or ushers in a dark theater. I kept an orange tree instead of a compass inside my cell in Soledad in order to give me a sense of color in eternity. D—th of course is the winner since we have to pass through it to escape it. But my reason for being here didn't end up there, I'm happy to say. Through circumstance and prayer, I am learning to love my enemy.

ANA MENDIETA

EIGHT EARTHWORKS

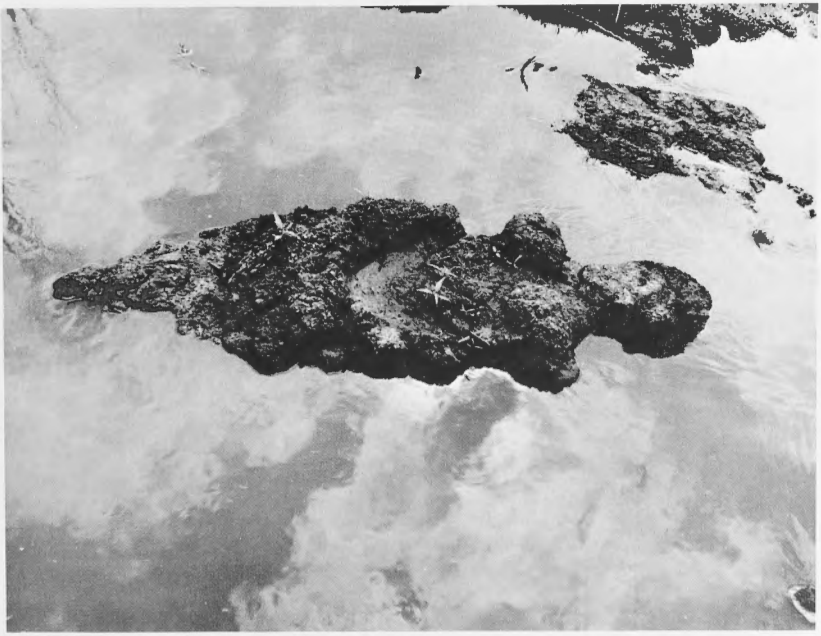
#1: SILUETA SERIES, 1979
Earth-body Work



#2: RUPESTRIAN SCULPTURE, 1981
Carved cave wall, Cueva del Aguila,
Havana, Cuba

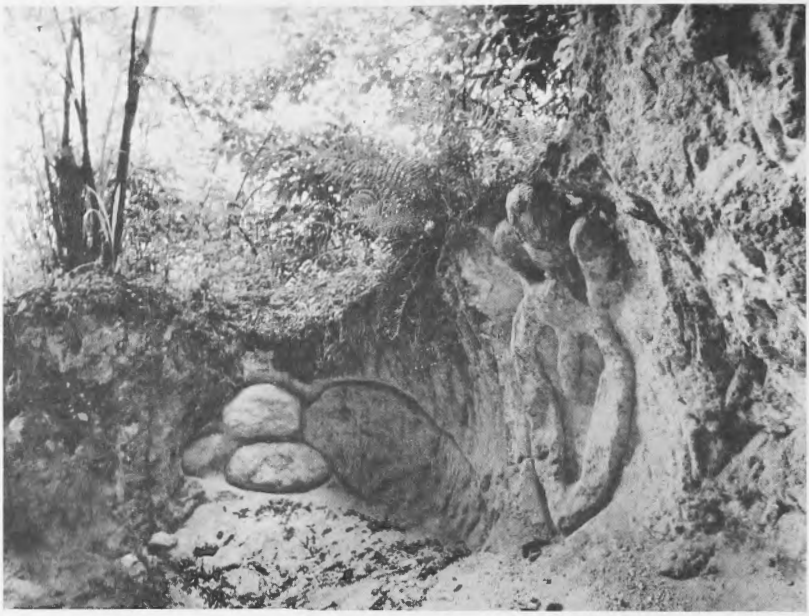
#3: SILUETA SERIES, 1979

Mud Silueta, Sharon Center, Iowa



#4: SILUETA SERIES, 1979

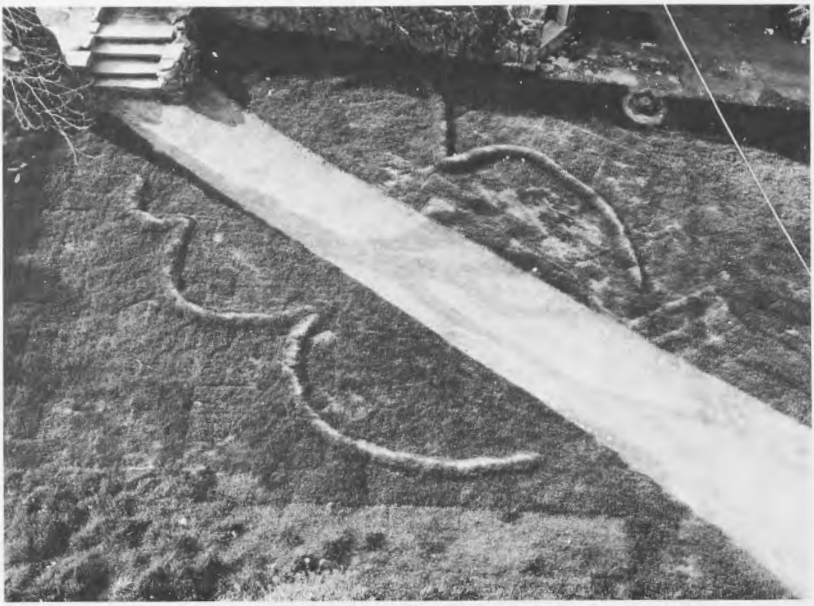
Mud Silueta, Sharon Center, Iowa



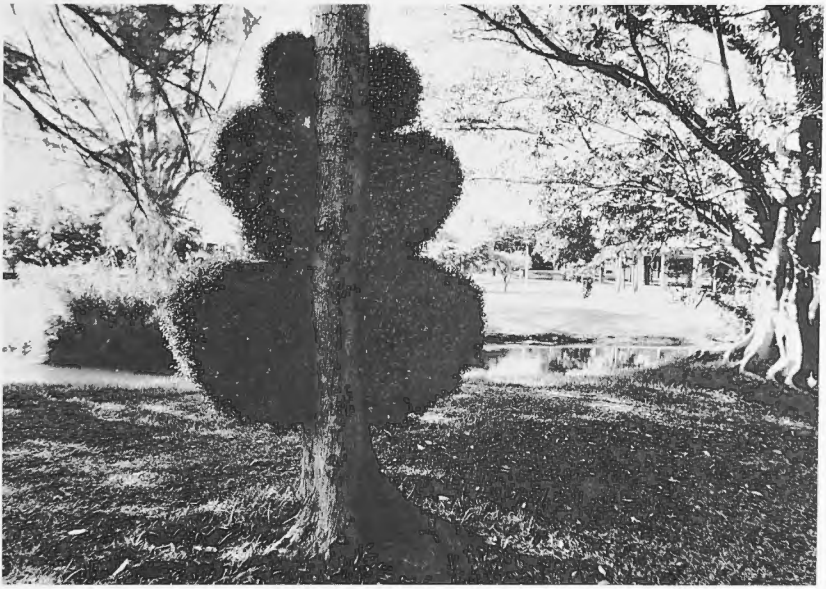
#5: GUANBESEX (left) and GUANAROCA (right), 1981

Rupestrian Sculpture

#6: SILUETA SERIES, 1979
Earth-body Work



#7: TITLE UNKNOWN, circa 1982
(perhaps a variation on #8)



#8: ARBOL DE LA VIDA/
MOTHER OF ALL THINGS, 1982
wire mesh, spaghnum moss and plants

"EARTH FROM CUBA, SAND FROM VARADERO"

A TRIBUTE TO ANA MENDIETA

(Edited by Clayton & Caryl Eshleman)

Nancy Spero introduced us to the work of Ana Mendieta in 1980, when I began *Sulfur*. Spero had appeared on the cover of my first magazine, *Caterpillar,* in the fall of 1967, and for several reasons it seemed appropriate to use one of Ana's earthworks on the cover of *Sulfur* #1 (spring, 1981).

Ana died in the late summer of 1985 and like others who knew her and admired her art, we became increasingly vexed by the fact that her husband, Carl Andre, who seemed to be involved in her destruction, had not been brought to trial. Not only had Ana left us, but her work and our memory of it and her, seemed to be disappearing through the lack of response to her death with the possibility that what had happened would simply be forgotten.

In the winter of 1987, I spoke with Nancy Spero and discovered that there was a concerned support group which met regularly to discuss the future of Ana's memory and her work. So, with the help of Nancy, John Yau, and Raquel Harrington (Ana's sister), I contacted around thirty people with something to say for this tribute. Many of those contacted did contribute and it has been a moving experience for us to assemble all of these pieces at this time.

For those who missed Ana's retrospective at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, a catalog is still available for $12.00. Write directly to the Museum at 583 Broadway, New York, NY 10012 if you want to order one.

—CE

ANA MENDIETA (1948-1985)

Ana Mendieta was born in Havana, Cuba. After the Bay of Pigs invasion, when she was 13, she was sent by her parents to the United States to shield her from social turmoil and a Castro education (her father was in prison, accused of being a C.I.A. agent). She and her older sister were placed in an orphanage and then in various foster homes—in the state of Iowa. She learned English and adapted as best she could to a definitely non-Latin world, becoming a citizen in 1970.

Drawn to art, she eventually earned a Bachelor of Arts (1969) and then a Master of Arts (1972) from the University of Iowa. Although her graduate degree was in painting, much of her study was focused in the Multimedia and Video Art program under Hans Breder, where she was exposed to the most recent developments in art. Trips to Mexico, where she made and documented many mostly ephemeral outdoor sculptures, were at least partially motivated by a need to explore her Latin American heritage.

A grant from the Iowa Arts Council in 1976 made it possible for her to move to New York City, where she pursued Hispanic and art world contacts. In 1979 she had her first New York one-person exhibition at the all-women A.I.R. gallery. In 1980 she visited Cuba and subsequently was instrumental in bringing many artists and critics to her native country. During her second visit she executed a number of important rock-carvings under government sponsorship.

Mendieta received numerous honors for her art: fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation. In 1984, she was chosen for the Award in the Visual Arts (Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art). In 1983 she became a fellow of the American Academy in Rome. Delighted with Rome and at long last culturally at home, she had apparently decided to live there permanently.

Mendieta married the sculptor Carl Andre in 1985 but eight months later in New York City was found dead on a rooftop 34

stories beneath the window of her husband's high-rise apartment. On February 11, 1988, Justice Alvin Schlesinger of the New York State Supreme Court declared that Carl Andre was not guilty of murdering his wife, because "The defendant's guilt was not proven beyond a reasonable doubt."

As an artist, Mendieta was more than promising, more than emerging. She successfully created a synthesis of Performance Art, Body Art and Earth Art and in the process created her own language. What were the components of this language? In early performance works and films her material was her own body; later her body was the template for earth/body silhouettes made of rock, branches, flowers, mud, or inscribed by ignited gunpowder. As she progressed, archaic female fertility forms became the essential and magical images—in rock-carvings, floorpieces, leaf-drawings, and tree-trunk sculptures (her last works).

Perceiving herself as in exile, Mendieta used her art to heal herself, thus provoking and perhaps healing others. The ritual-like process of artmaking she employed was influenced by Santeria, the Afro-Cuban religion she studied. She explored cultural as well as feminist issues; more correctly, she explored human issues: What is our relationship to earth and what can be called the female principle? What is our relationship to nature and to the gods? Mendieta disproved the notion that a woman and an Hispanic cannot produce important art. She was political, she was passionate, and she was enormously talented. She is gone, but her work remains: many now should ponder the rude beauty of her art.

NEREYDA GARCIA-FERRAZ

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAQUEL (KAKI) MENDIETA

(Edited by Kate Horsfield)

The following text is from a transcript of an interview with Raquel (Kaki) Mendieta, a cousin of Ana Mendieta, who teaches Cuban history and culture at the Superior Institute of Art in Havana. This interview along with many others was made with friends and family of Ana Mendieta in Cuba and the United States for the purpose of making ***Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra,***** a videotape on her life and work. The transcript was done by Alejandro Velasco.*

It was my association with the history of the culture, and with the art scene in Havana, that led Ana and myself to develop a very close relationship during all her trips back to Cuba. We had some mutual personal experiences, and at the same time we had professional interests that, although they weren't similar, they complemented each other. In order to talk about Ana's work, in my opinion, to understand Ana's work you also have to know what Ana's background was like.

I was two years younger than she was, so my memories of her are the images of a child younger than a somewhat older cousin. But I do remember very clearly the impression I had as a child of

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* ***Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra***
50 minutes 1987
Produced by: Kate Horsfield
Directed by: Nereyda Garcia-Ferraz and Kate Horsfield
Post Production/Editor: Branda Miller
Available for distribution in both English and Spanish versions through the:
Video Data Bank
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
280 South Columbus Drive
Chicago, IL 60603

Ana's personality. She was a kind of child leader, one who would gather others around herself, and who would make the decisions. She was older than my brother and myself, and among the younger cousins she was the person who would have the last word. Yes, she had a very strong character, and if not temperamental, she could be aggressive, but all that combined with a charm, something that in Spanish you would call "to have an angel."

I always remember her here at the beach in Varadero, because Varadero was the center of the maternal family. And since Ana's father and my father were two brothers married to two cousins, then the paternal and maternal sides of the family were together in this same world around Varadero. It somehow represents also the history of the family, and our world of games as children.

The house in Varadero was of special significance for the family. I remember that when Ana was a child they used to come to the house, what we called "the old house" to spend the summer vacations and Christmas. The "old house" was a founding house, the first house built in Varadero in the second half of the 19th century. The house has a beautiful history because it is associated not only with the background of the family, but also with the history of the struggles for the independence of Cuba.

The house was a symbol of family reunions. The whole family came—Ana's grandmother, grandfather, the children of these grandparents, and their children—which would be Ana's generation. And we used to live separately, because my grandfather and grandmother had in turn built another house here in Varadero, but we used to visit the old house very frequently, almost every evening. The family had grown very large. There were some who lived in Camaguey, others in Havana, and in Cardenas. So everybody would meet again here. The house became so important that even its birthdays were celebrated. And that was very funny, because the different sides of the family would bring gifts to the house. Some would bring dishware, others would give sets of glasses, others sofas. I think the house got to be 80 years old. It was a huge house, it had eleven rooms. There was a tower on one end which faced the street. One could go directly from the gate to the yard, and from the yard directly to the sand beach. It was surrounded by pine trees, and we used to play a lot of games around this garden. And all of this linked together, I mean, going

from the dirt to the sand, from the sand to the dirt, from the house to the beach, and from the beach to the house and into the water.

And we used to revolve around this world, around the world of sand, and water. And I think that all this found its way into Ana's work, that's why I emphasize it. The games with sand were an essential component. We used to have competitions to see who made the most beautiful castles, the biggest ones, the most imaginative ones. There was one game we enjoyed a lot, it was burying someone. You know, we used to lie down and get covered with sand. Then our bodies would kind of grow huge, and only the head would stick out from the sand, and then hands were added to these bodies. Very often Ana would make shapes on top of these bodies. I remember sometimes it was very lush women, with huge breasts that made us laugh. And then sometimes we would lie flat floating in the water, so that the sunlight would reach to our "campanillas" (uvulas) because supposedly letting the sunlight into your mouth was good for preventing a cold. So all the kids would lie flat heads up, floating along for about five or ten minutes, letting the sunlight into their mouths. And it is peculiar how those are the images that have to do with the silhouettes in Ana's series. The shape of the body in the water could somehow be the children floating in the water, or children lying down on the sand, those bodies drawn or shaped in the sand. I think all the elements and symbology that Ana subsequently used in her series of silhouettes is very much interwoven with the world of Varadero.

All this is also very much tied up with Cardenas. Cardenas is a city near Varadero, and it's where Ana's grandparents used to live. Cardenas had a very special meaning for Ana because just as one remembers the images of childhood, Cardenas also had the charm of the imagery. Her grandparents' house in Cardenas was also a very large house dating from the 19th century. It had a lower level and when one entered the house it had a garage, where the horsedrawn carts used to be parked. Then there was a foyer. Ana's grandfather was a physician, and in the lower level of the house he had his private practice, where his patients used to go in the evening for consultation.

The house had a central patio, and there were some huge kitchens in the back. There was a sort of mysterious feeling around the place. The big library in the lower level had some dark

spaces and many twists and turns. The house had a mezzanine, that is, a small level between the lower level and the upper level, which is typical of 19th century Cuba. Then there was a large staircase with something like 75 steps. So you had to climb a lot of steps before you reached the actual living quarters. The living-room was huge with marvelous glass cabinets filled with the most incredible things: from the tooth of a giant shark, a *"carcharadon carcharius"*, to minute porcelain objects. They were the fascination of all the children that used to go to Ana's grandparents' house.

In Cardenas too, and related to this marvelous world of the house of Cardenas was the museum of Cardenas, which I think that for all the children of at least two generations was something very important. Why? The museum was closely tied to the family because it was founded by a great-grand uncle, a brother of our great-grandfather. And it was a very special museum, one of the first museums founded in Cuba. His idea of what a museum could be was very special, it would seem that a child had made it. But a child that also loved beautiful and interesting things, and the history of things. We would go to the museum when we were children, and the first thing we'd rush to see was this marvelous thing: a flea circus with dressed-up fleas. And next to those fleas were some other extraordinary things, such as the death mask of Maximo Gomez, and the ship that Maceo used to cross the trail from Jucaro to Moron. One could also find a stuffed lioness, or a marvelous collection of Cuban snails, which was then the largest in Cuba, and also a very valuable collection of Roman coins. And next to this, somewhat to the left, in a central patio, there was a living alligator. The museum was completely absurd. I don't think I've ever known a museum with the fascination of that old Museum of Cardenas. Museums today are very rational: with perfect lighting, everything well organized, but cold and distant. You never got that feeling in the Museum of Cardenas, which almost had the marvelous fascination of a fair. But a fair which was part of your family history, and also the history of your country and of the foundation of the nation.

Ana's maternal grandmother was one of the daughters of General Carlos Maria de Rojas, the Chief of Brigada Cardenas, during the 1895 to 1898 War—the War of Independence. When the war ended, Brigada Cardenas, the troops of the Liberation

Army that operated in this area were supposed to go into town to be received by all the people of Cardenas who had just been liberated from the Spaniards. But they had to come first to Varadero, to the old house, because the troops were almost naked. The "mambises" had been fighting for nearly three years, and they had nothing to wear. So they had to be dressed up so that they could go by ship, across the southern coast of Varadero, through the Bahia de Cardenas, into Cardenas, to be received by the liberated city.

Ana's maternal grandmother, Elvira, played a very important role. She always kept the patriotic traditions of the family and she represented the world that linked the history of the family to the history of the nation. And she was the honorary president of the War Veterans. All of us children used to remember how there were days of the week when Aunt Elvira would receive guests. And the veterans used to go see her with much honor, with much courtesy, because she was the one daughter of General Rojas who continued to live in Cardenas.

As children, there was one thing related to the war veterans that used to be particularly fascinating to us, it was one veteran who had been slashed with a machete during the war. His name was Colonel Casimayu. I knew him when he was a very old man. He had numerous machete scars in his back. He had been slashed with a machete in a fight between Cubans and Spaniards, and thought to be dead, he had been left behind on the battlefield. When he came to consciousness again, a scabby vulture was picking at him, as if he were one more casualty of the battle. When he got up, his hand was hanging from a piece of skin, and he himself cut it off with a machete. In the stub where his hand was missing he used to wear a leather attachment. When he walked into the room everybody looked awestruck at him. But it was a blend of awe and pride for the legend the man was, that made one breathe the very living air of history. And that was very impressive.

That was Ana's world as a child from which she took her roots and the history of both sides of her family, her nationality and culture.

Then the period of the insurrection sprang up, prior to the Triumph of the Revolution, and I think all Cubans unanimously supported the armed struggle directed by Fidel. I remember that Ana used to be very proud because her saint's day, Santa Ana was

July 26, and she always spoke of her saint's day as something very important, as though it linked her even more to what was happening—to the extraordinary event that the whole world admired, a new war of liberation. A totally tyrannical government was being rejected by the Cuban people. And the insurrectional stage of the Revolution was supported by the general population, by all social classes. At that time the family was unanimously a Revolutionary family. The problems began afterwards, when things began to change.

At that point began the contradictions typical of a Revolution. Class contradictions. Well, we came from a bourgeois family and we had to make a class jump, so to speak, we had to break away from a classist background, and incorporate ourselves into the revolution. Ana's family did not do it, and very quickly they drifted towards a position against the Revolution. That started from the outset, from the first few years of the Revolution. I think the Catholic Church had much to do in this. In other words, the Church as an institution was used as a weapon by the counter-revolution to try and break up the triumphant revolution. And our family was—mainly on Ana's mother's side, a very Catholic family. They were very Catholic, and the Church had much influence on them. There was a campaign called the "patria potestad" (parent authority) campaign. It was essentially organized by the Catholic Church, which had strong ties to the counter-revolutionary campaign of the North American Government. This campaign would allege that the Revolution and communism wanted to take children away from their parents, to take away their authority, the rights parents have regarding the education of their children. The families which had strong ties to the Church (especially some families in the city of Cardenas) decided to send their children to the United States.

All the tensions around the political positions caused the family to rip apart. In other words, we became divided into those who were revolutionary, and those who weren't. I believe this was a decisive factor in Ana's life, because it meant not only the breaking up of the family, but breaking away from history, from a cultural tradition. And that was essentially an overall uprooting process all at once. You know, Ana was thirteen years old, at a very critical age, and all of a sudden her world changed almost entirely.

So Ana disappeared from our world, even when she hadn't yet left. There were family tensions around these different political opinions, so we sort of stopped visiting each other. I cannot clearly recall that time in images, but I am aware that the family distanced itself, and that was the first rupture.

Sometimes I would not see Ana for months, and I remember that when I saw her once she had changed very much. You know, I had remembered a tremendously revolutionary Ana, euphoric over the triumph of the Revolution, at the level of a child, right? We would play "rebels," we wanted to have olive green clothes made for us, to dress ourselves with the uniform of Fidel's army. And all of a sudden we became distanced, and I didn't understand why we weren't seeing each other. It seemed to me to be some sort of process that was happening among the grown-ups, and that its impact on children was only that we saw less of each other. But when she and her sister, Raquel, were sent to the United States we were not even aware that they were going. We weren't even told, because we were the revolutionary side of the family.

When Ana came back to Cuba after many years, it was partly to search for her background. But it wasn't only the background she was looking for, but also those in her family who were responsible for all that had happened. She came back to Cardenas on that first trip and she spent about a week with her grandparents—both were still living at the time. (They died after Ana had made several trips to Cuba.) She told me she had long conversations with her grandmother, whom she loved, trying to recover her background because it all involved a very strange confusion of feelings. On the one hand she was attempting to recover her background through the history of the family, of the country, and the cultural tradition, but at the same time she was angry at her grandmother, who represented the rupture she had been forced to make from that history and the family.

That first trip was, above all, of a tremendous intensity, because, you know, when she would walk down a street, it was as if she were reliving or reclaiming something that many times she thought she'd probably lost forever. She went to the Museum of Cardenas, but the museum wasn't the same anymore. She would rummage through her grandmother's house remembering things that had already been erased from her memory, small details: the

glass cabinets, the objects inside the cabinets, the rooms, how to climb the stairs. I don't know, it was something strange, like learning, like when a child learns to walk, but is was like learning step by step how to live again a life that had already been lived in a different way. She went back to where the old house used to be in Varadero to try to recall things. But the old house was demolished at the beginning of the Revolution and the wood was used to build schools. The property where the old house used to be is now a park where the whole floating population goes when they come to Varadero on weekends, or for one day to swim in the sea. Some areas still remained the same, the trees and the walkway to the house were still as they had been. She said she had walked down that path, and stood under the date tree, and she went where the pine trees of the old house used to be. And she did all that with anxiety, with an urgency to recall.

It is my impression that Ana developed her work in silhouettes because they represented her body being integrated into nature. The silhouette is a shape that may be very symbolic, but, at the same time, it is a very direct way of expressing what she was lacking. Nature was the direct contact with something she had lost and was trying to recover.

She was trying to recover her essence, that is, those elements in nature that were essential to her. She was living in a world that was alien to her history, her roots, her culture, so nature was the closest she could get to it by means of the color and the texture of the elements.

Well, for Ana, who was an artist, these things were expressed essentially through creation. I mean, along with this intense need to be in Cuba and live in its history, there was the need to create in Cuba. That is why she was insistent on establishing the right conditions and ties, through the Ministry of Culture, to work in Cuba. The sculptures done in the Jaruco Mountains outside of Havana were perhaps some of the most significant moments of artistic accomplishment in her career.

And I believe she had a very deep awareness of her culture. I had given her many of my lecture notes on Cuban culture, and I found that in her notes she had things that were taken from those lectures, and you could tell she had studied the concepts of a syncretic culture, the transculturation process in Cuba. And sometimes she worked with elements of color, and flowers, in a way

that had to do with African rituals, or were of an African origin typical of the African cultures of Cuba. And it was very interesting how she started to play around with all these elements which belonged essentially to the Cuban culture and reflected the intense syncretic process of transculturation of which we are a product. And she was working with elements that come from her experiences as a child, her experiences in Cuba, with sand, water, flowers, earth and grass.

I don't think it is a coincidence, for instance, that when she left Cuba the first time in 1980, she took—and this was something that was forbidden, she had to hide it—earth from Cuba and sand from Varadero. Those were the two things she took back from her first trip. Later on she used to tell how she kept them in her apartment in New York as one of the most important things she had in her life, that is, earth from Cuba and sand from Varadero.

LINDA MONTANO

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANA MENDIETA

Linda Montano: In your work. . .you embody the earth, become it, leave your impression on it. Can you remember an instance from your past that may have encouraged you to leave images of yourself on the earth?

Ana Mendieta: I came from a tropical country (Cuba) and I have pictures of myself, 7 months old, crawling around on the sandy beach. We had a house there and I would be outside from 7:30 a.m. to 2 in the afternoon. . .out in the water and the sand. I learned about my body from doing that. Now I continue to use my

body to communicate with the world so that things that I have learned are things which I have experienced and internalized. I'm 5 feet tall so that I even measure things with my body. I started doing imprints to place myself and my body in the world. That way I can do something, step away from it and see myself there afterwards.

LM: Why did you begin doing imprints?

AM: I came to this country from Cuba when I was 12. I was sent by my parents after the Cuban revolution but they stayed there so that my sister and I were alone, without speaking English, having been placed in a Catholic orphanage run by nuns in Iowa. It was a very devastating experience because I felt alienated and totally misplaced. . .a culture shock. America is a multi-colored society but I came from a place where everyone was alike. So when I got to Iowa and finally learned the language and talked to other people, I found that we would look at the same event, talk about it and would both see it totally differently. It's then that I realized that I lived in a little world inside my head. It wasn't that being different was bad, it's just that I had never realized that people were different. So trying to find a place in the earth and trying to define myself came from that experience of discovering differences.

I had been a painter and worked always with one image but I gave up painting because it wasn't real enough. In 1973 I did my first piece in an Aztec tomb that was covered with weeds and grasses. . .that growth reminded me of time. I bought flowers at the market, lay in the tomb and was covered with white flowers. The analogy was that I was covered by time and history.

LM: Do you feel that there is Catholic imagery in your work?

AM: I was raised a Catholic and can't deny my heritage. I like very much the idea of history and I admit that the Catholic religion has made a rich cultural contribution to the world (they've also destroyed a lot of things). So when I first started working this way I felt a very strong Catholic connection but as I've continued to work I feel closer to the Neolithic. Now I believe in water, air and earth. They are all deities. They also speak. I am connected with

the goddess of sweet water (this has been her year and it is raining a lot). Those are the things that are powerful and important. I don't know why people have gotten away from these ideas.

LM: How important is your site?

AM: It's crucial. There are many places that I've gone to time and time again just because I feel connected to them but if I'm working in a city that I don't know, I usually drive around until I find a place that I can respond to.

When I find the site I have things that I do there. . .work rituals. For example, I wear comfortable clothing, I have special tools and insist on working alone. I have recently realized that nobody can make art when listening to rock and roll and vice-versa. I cannot be distracted. . .I need privacy because I claim territory somewhat like a dog pissing on the ground. Doing that charges the whole area for me.

LM: Are you using death/burial images consciously?

AM: I don't think that you can separate death and life. All of my work is about those 2 things. . .it's about Eros and life/death. In 1976 I made an image out of sand and stuck pieces of wood in it . . .it was a fetish piece. That summer my mother had a cancer operation and I didn't consciously set out to help her, I just did the piece, but I think it was connected to death imagery.

LM: Did you perform ritualistic acts as a young person?

AM: We had a little chapel in our house and I used to play priest all of the time. I would tie a half slip around my neck, ring bells and act out all of the ceremonies in Latin because I had memorized them in church.

LM: What does your work teach you?

AM: The work continues to teach me everything. It has always been ahead of me and I learn what it is about years later. Work makes me strong. . .it defines me.

LM: The work has two elements. . .it is very poetically sacred but also has an edge of the profane. . .the dog pissing to mark territory. That makes for a realistic balance.

AM: The beauty of anyone that we might consider sacred is that they are also human. I'm glad that I was raised in my culture because we learned not to believe the one side, the sacred side, even though it's taught to us. I had no problem shedding all of that holy stuff. The interesting thing is that education is about uneducating yourself. . .always. . . .It's not about getting something but getting it and then dropping it. We spend the rest of our lives doing that.

LM: Was anyone in your family a healer? Did you have access to that kind of information in Cuba?

AM: No, my family was against anything like that. It was considered to be low class and an activity of the uneducated. However, I became interested in these things after I had been working that way for a while and I found that my work shares a lot of healing imagery. I have used gunpowder in pieces and later found that in certain rituals the Santeros (healers in Cuba) make 5 piles of gunpowder, light them and if they burn it means yes to the question and if they don't burn, it means no.

I also did an interesting piece that crosses the line between art and life. The Santeros use a tree which in Spanish is called a sela and in English is called a cotton silkwood tree. It has very long roots that stick out. In Miami there is a tree like that which the Santeros have claimed and the people do things to that tree when a healer tells them that they have to make a sacrifice. When I was there I decided to do a piece on the tree. I was in the Cuban section and collected human hair from the different beauty shops so I knew that it was Cuban hair. Then I made an image of a figure on the tree. A root was sticking out so the figure appeared to be either a male or a female being screwed. There were also 3 knots on it that looked like female genitalia so I surrounded them with hair that I glued on. It's amazing how Elmer's glue withstands weather because I did it in 1981 and it's still there. The last time I saw the tree, the people had added coconuts, chicken wings, all kinds of offerings. For a while they put a figure of Santa Barbara

underneath it, cut an opening in what would be the face and stuck a shell in the mouth. They have really activated the image and claimed it as their own.

LM: What are you thinking about now?

AM: I have been given a beautiful studio in Rome. I have never had a studio before because I have never needed one. Now I have been working indoors. I've always had problems with that idea because I don't feel that I can emulate nature. Installation is a fake art. So I've given this problem to myself. . .to work indoors. . .I found a way and am involved right now, working with sand, with earth, mixing it with a binder, and making sculptures. I am very pleased because I am able to get the same kind of textures that I get outside. I was working and working and not sure if anything was there and then one day I came into the studio and saw that the sculptures had a real presence. All of them have a "charge" in them. A friend of mine brought me sand from Egypt and so one of them has an "Egyptian charge." Each one is different.

Now that I am in Rome, I was able to go to Malta, a tiny island in the Mediterranean where the oldest Neolithic temples are located. Their culture was matriarchal and based on the image of a sexless fat woman. She isn't like the Venus of Willendorf. . .this one had a skirt on and is sleeping. One theory states that she is from a cult of sleeping and death.

The temples of Malta are shaped like this big fat woman and there was one that was carved out of a cave with red spirals painted on the ceiling. I went into it and felt as if I were in a big womb. That's really what art is about. . .it binds us historically.

ANA MENDIETA

A SELECTION OF STATEMENTS AND NOTES

The turning point in my art was in 1972, when I realized that my paintings were not real enough for what I wanted the image to convey—and by real I mean I wanted my images to have power, to be magic.

I decided that for the images to have magic qualities I had to work directly with nature. I had to go to the source of life, to mother earth.

*

My *Silueta Series* is an ongoing dialogue between me and nature (1973). It is a search to find my place, my context in nature.

My heritage has been extremely decisive in my art. Using my body as reference in the creation of these works, I am able to transcend myself in a voluntary submersion and total identification with nature. This insistence of communion with nature has to do with reaffirming my ties with my homeland, as well as my identification with the spirits of my ancestors and my ancestors' identification with the land itself. Through my art I want to express the immediacy of life and the eternity of nature.

The making of these works is not the final stage of a ritual but a way of asserting my emotional ties with the earth as well as conceptualizing nature. The color photographs are a way of capturing the spirit of the work, since the actual sculptures left on sites are eventually reclaimed by the earth.

*

Pain of Cuba
body I am
my orphanhood I live.

In Cuba when you die
the earth that covers us
Speaks.

But here,
covered by the earth whose prisoner I am
I feel death palpitating underneath
the earth.

And so,
as my whole being is filled with want of Cuba
I go on to make my mark upon the earth.
To go on is victory.

June 1, 1981

*

For the last 12 years I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body. Having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast out of the womb (Nature).

My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the Universe. It is a return to the maternal source. Through the making of earth/body works I become one with the earth. It is like being encompassed by nature, an after-image of the original shelter within the womb.

The works are made dialectically in response to the particulars of a landscape. All the sculptures are human scale, thus visualizing the body as an extension of nature and nature as an extension of the body. This obsessive act of reasserting my ties with the earth is an objectification of my existence.

The works recall prehistoric beliefs of an omnipresent female force whose body parts made the earth a living creature. In essence my works are the reactivation of primeval beliefs at work within the human psyche.

1982

*

My art is grounded in the belief in one universal energy which runs through everything from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy.

My works are the irrigation veins of this universal fluid. Through them ascend the ancestral sap, the original beliefs, the primordial accumulations, the unconscious thoughts that animate the world.

There is no past to redeem: there is the void, the orphanhood, the unbaptized earth of the beginning, the time that from within the earth looks upon us. There is above all the search for origin.

1983

*

There is an African ritual which I think deals with the same ideas I explore in my art:

"When a native brings back a wife from Kimberly, they carry with them a little dirt from her homeland. Every day she eats a little of this dirt to accustom herself to the change of residency" (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl: *La mentalité primitive,* Paris, 1922).

In a sense that is what I am doing here.

By making my image in nature I can deal with the two cultures. My earth-body sculptures are not the final stage of a ritual but a way and a means of asserting my emotional ties with nature and conceptualizing religion and culture.

*

The Black Venus

Around 1817, when Spanish colonists first set foot on Cay Loco—a key off the south coast of Cuba near the city of Cienfuegos—they found a sole inhabitant. She was a young black woman, nude except for a necklace and bracelets of seeds and seashells, and so lovely that "the most demanding artist would have considered her an example of perfect feminine beauty." She

was a survivor of innumerable generations of Siboney Indians, who had been extinguished by colonization. They called her the Black Venus.

At the sight of the Spaniards, she ran—from fear rather than from modesty. They caught her and discovered she was mute. Living alone on Cay Loco, she was accompanied everywhere by a white dove and a blue heron. Spreading their wings, they would touch her mouth with their beaks in silent caress.

When one of the colonists took her home with him, gave her food and clothing, he expected her to please him, to work for him in return. But taken from her island freedom and unable to speak, she nestled in a corner, refusing to get up, work or eat. Finally, alarmed at the prospect of her death by starvation, the colonists took her back to Cay Loco to live in freedom.

From time to time over the years, the citizens of Cienfuegos tried to "civilize" the Black Venus. But each time her passive protests forced them to return her to the key, where she reigned in solitude with the blue heron and the white dove—her only subjects.

The historian Pedro Modesto recalled that when he was a child, around 1876, an old black woman, with hair like a huge white powder puff and naked except for a blue, red and white necklace, secretly entered his house. She refused clothing and was dressed only by physical force. She refused all the food offered her except for native products—yucca, bananas, and sweet potatoes. The next morning she had disappeared, leaving the clothes behind. This was the last time she was seen.

Today the Black Venus has become a legendary symbol against slavery. She represents the affirmation of a free and natural being who refused to be colonized.

*

La Jungla

A work consisting of 7 tree trunks (redwood) varying from 8 to 10 feet in height, each tree trunk being from 25 to 50 inches in diameter. The tree trunks are to be kiln-dry for permanency. They will be installed in the triangular patch of grass on the Wilshire

Boulevard part of MacArthur Park (across from Otis Institute). They will be set up in Relationship to each other charging the space with tenseness.

Each tree trunk will have an image carved/burned into it representing the 7 powers of life (that rule the jungle). The trunks will be installed with a cement base (that will not be visible) making the installation stable and safe.

1985 [her last project]

HANS BREDER

ANA MENDIETA: IMPRINTS / STUDENT YEARS 1972-1977

An awareness of an artist's student years always illuminates our understanding of their subsequent work. This is especially true when trying to understand a career as tragically brief as Ana Mendieta's.

Ana began graduate studies in painting at the University of Iowa's School of Art and Art History in 1969. It was an auspicious moment. In 1970, a progressive administration allowed me to establish the first university level Multimedia and Video Art program. A major Rockefeller Foundation Grant helped to establish The Center for the New Performing Arts. It was an exhilarating period during which we pioneered the nurture of the avant-garde arts within a university environment. Many of the most significant conceptual/performance artists of the era spent time in Iowa City —Hans Haake and Alan Kaprow were among the first visitors;

This piece was originally intended for the "Reminiscence" section of the exhibition catalogue, *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

Robert Wilson, in residency for a semester in 1970, developed *Deafman Glance;* Vito Acconci, Willoughby Sharp, Nam June Paik, Mary Beth Edelson, Mac Adams, Lucy Lippard and others had an impact on the art community. It was a remarkably fertile atmosphere.

In this atmosphere, Ana's work exploded off the canvas. She received her MA degree in painting in 1972 and entered the Multimedia and Video Art program. During the next five years, until she received her MFA degree in 1977, she passionately formulated and pursued her vision—nurtured and influenced by the experimental environment here but also thoroughly moved by her Cuban roots—always attempting to explore and express the powers of the primitive.

I have countless memories of the experience of Ana's work during this period—work that existed most powerfully in the moment. What we have now is documentation, traces of those moments during which she attempted, in her words, "to become one with the earth."

I remember when she was first inspired to do a piece which set the stage for the Silueta series of the next decade. It is 1972—a sunny, humid afternoon, typical of Iowa in the early fall. A group of my students visit my studio. Among them is Ana Mendieta. The smell of freshly cut grass is hanging in the air. Spontaneously, Ana announces that she has an idea for a piece. She undresses, lies on the lawn, and asks one of the students to cover her body with grass. Somebody takes photographs. In the photographs her body blends into the ground. From that point, she blended her body with the elements in innumerable ways.

Ana spreads fertilizer in an outline of her body on a freshly cut lawn. In time, the grass in the area that she has fertilized grows stronger and darker.

At Old Man's Creek in Iowa City, she burns the outline of her body into the ground with gunpowder.

During this time, each summer, I took students to Oaxaca, Mexico. It is one morning in 1976, as we are planning to visit Yaagul, a Zapotec site in the valley of Oaxaca, Ana asks me to drive her first to the market to buy flowers. She tells me she has an idea for a piece. This is a site that we had visited many times. We walk up to one of the open tombs. She lays in it, nude, and asks

me to arrange the flowers around her body, instructing me that the flowers should seem to grow from her body.

She has a *cohetero* (maker of fireworks) in a *colonia* district of Oaxaca make a firework piece in the shape of the outline of her body. One evening, at dusk, we ignite it and watch her form consumed by fire.

In the fall of 1977 Ana has a branding iron fabricated in the sculpture studio at Iowa—a duplicate of her hand. She asks me to trace the outline of her body on the lawn in the back of my house. Then she heats the branding iron on my gas burner and burns imprints of her hand into the drawn outline.

My final image of Ana from this particular chapter of her life is later that fall in 1977. She is leaving for New York City to begin life in the art world there—climbing aboard a Greyhound bus with her branding iron under her arm.

Iowa City, June 1987

LUCY R. LIPPARD

Trying to sort out a kaleidoscope of sharp and soft, shattered memories of Ana since 1971, when I met her at a party in Iowa City, after I'd given a lecture, after which she gave me a lecture, told me the story of her life. I was fascinated, and later pleased, when she sent slides, to find that her work was equally compelling.

We became friends, she moved to New York, and I watched Ana's art mature as her nostalgia for a fantasy childhood in Cuba changed to active support and eventually participation in the revolutionary process. She was our tour leader on her second trip back, in January 1981. Like a little kid taking friends home to meet the family, she was caught between pride and anxiety that we or

they would find fault or behave badly. The next time she returned, she worked in the caves of Jaruca, going back much further into a communal past. When we were in Cuba together, we got some video footage of Ana on the Malecon, for a collaborative tape we were going to make about the effect of politics on three generations of women: Ana's aristocratic grandmother, who stayed and lived in Cuba; Ana's mother, a professor of physics and chemistry, who sent her children to the USA and soon followed; and Ana herself, the artist whose life reflected the contradictions and whose art was a cultural integration. (We never made the tape because our grant proposal was turned down.)

When Ana first went to Rome, she came over with a shopping bag and announced with a flourish that she wanted me to keep her "revolutionary soul" while she was gone. It was a matte black clay pot with a hammer and sickle painted in dark red on the side. I was touched, and kind of amused. I had it on my desk. One day, months later, I was talking on the phone and suddenly the pot emitted a single violent puff of smoke. I was startled, moved it away from my desk, thinking that maybe Ana had kept her gunpowder in it and some sort of spontaneous combustion had occurred. (She used gunpowder for some drawings and for at least one of the *silueta* earthworks.) When she came back to New York next, I told her about this rather occult emanation. She smiled mysteriously and said of course these things happen. She also said she had never kept gunpowder in the pot.

When Ana died, I waited for a signal from her revolutionary soul. Now I keep a pale gray feather in the pot.

I always loved the explosive side of Ana—the irrational, often unreasonable, sometimes infuriating part of her that understood aspects of the inexplicable and was capable of both political and spiritual passion. Of the photo/*silueta* pieces she gave me, my two favorites have always been the one where she lies naked and faceless in an ancient Mexican grave, covered with tiny white flowers, and the one where she is resurrected in fireworks, arms raised triumphantly like an ancient goddess.

NICE WORK

"That's where I want to work. Over there in those rocks."

Ana pointed to an old limestone quarry, partly filled with water. No one was allowed in. A locked fence surrounded the whole property. My challenge was to get Ana through that fence.

Here is how we came to be working together on her latest art project. I am a farmer, sort of. Really a farm researcher and publisher of magazines, some about farming and gardening. I love the land. More than that, I feel the spirit and reality of regeneration in the land, and I try to find many practical uses for that spirit.

On the walls of my office I put pictures of land. One day in a 57th street NYC gallery I saw one of Ana's works. At first I saw only a large photo of a road cut, Just rough soil and small rocks.

My type of person took that picture, I thought. Someone else likes to look inside dirt and see a spirit there.

Then my eyes focused on the human form cut into the dirt. And I saw that a big root ran right through the head and down out the toes. It was for me a great moment in gallery going. I was blown away, to use a cliché. Sold! I said to the gallery person. And please tell me where to find the artist.

A short time later my wife Ardie and I were having lunch with Ana somewhere downtown. She was the age of our own daughters and sons. All of ours are artists. So we had a family feeling in common, plus the interest in getting under the skin of the earth. Ana talked for a few hours, telling us the story of her life.

"Please come to our farm," I said to Ana. "It is a beautiful place with nice round hills, only two hours west of New York. There's an old stone house, empty most of the time, where you can stay. I'll pick you up at the bus in Wescosville."

My goal was to get her to work in our own earth, perhaps on one of those hills. The Indians left many stone arrowheads, which our son Anthony finds. I wanted also to feel the presence of one of Ana's figures.

Her schedule was busy. But after a number of months she agreed to come. I was driving her from the bus stop to the farm

when she spotted the quarry. The farm didn't have a chance. I think she was more of a rock person than a topsoil person anyway. Those walls of grey stone and rubble were her medium of choice that day, anyway.

Getting her in was no cinch. There's deep water in the quarry. The cement company that gave the quarry to the county prohibited public access. But I pulled strings for three days and finally got her a key. She worked in there for three or four days.

Carl Andre visited her one day. We had given Ana a car, and she picked him up at the bus stop. Although he was dressed more like a farmer than me—wearing bib overalls—he didn't like the country. Made him nervous, Ana said. We had a nice visit in the kitchen, he gave me some of his books, then he left.

On the last day I went into the quarry with Ana to see her work. Right by a path leading into the water she had carved a reclining figure into a wall of rather loose rock. It was much like the figure in the work that my wife and I own.

Did I appreciate what she had done? Not nearly enough. I was busy then, and had just used much of a week to get her in and out of the quarry. I was glad she had done something that satisfied her. But sorry that our farm hadn't inspired her more.

Ana was pleased most by someone's addition to her work. There were others going into that quarry. Fishermen would crawl under the fence and go down to the water. Ana never saw them, but on the last day, when she went back to take a photo, someone had arranged stones under her carving to spell out:

"Nice work."

EDUARDO COSTA

I have before me a letter and some postcards that Ana sent to me from different places. Rome, Florence, Malta, Egypt and even

New York City. She was always happy when traveling and very affectionate. The cards are thoughtfully chosen and bear extensive reflections on her trips and career, plus greetings. She always calls me "hermano" and sometimes "hermanito."

Ana liked to bring into our conversation intelligent or witty things she would hear around. She was always careful to indicate the source, whether it was someone I knew or not, just as a matter of intellectual honesty (not to take credit for someone else's line). Ana was smiling one day as she told me that she had called Lucy Lippard to inform her that she had got still another grant. What made her smile was that Lucy had said "Well, aren't you leaving anything for your old age?"

Ana knew how to choose and give a present. Because my wardrobe was quite slim, she showed up one day with a present of clothing. It was a white cotton pair of pants, simply cut, very wearable and appropriate for the summertime. Ana had found the pants in the street, in an area of Soho where she had found clothes for herself before. I tried them on and liked them immediately. They had the right color and texture, and the fit was perfect. When she left I had the feeling that I had been given something wonderful.

The other present Ana gave me is also a found object, although "assisted" by the artist. It is the full shell of a huge horseshoe crab that she found on a Jersey beach. She decorated it preciously with opening and closing Spanish interrogation marks and a number of expertly arranged silver and gold lines which frame the bilingual legend "A chuchazo from Villas, New Jersey." As she explained to me a "chuchazo" is the blow of a whip in colloquial Cuban Spanish, and horseshoe crabs have a tail that reminded her of a whip. She loved the object and understandably so since its natural design, front and back, would make you think right away of some basic patterns in her work. The present was dedicated to me because I had related before some of the shapes of her art to different natural formations. I had for instance pointed out a couple of trees on Washington Square which feature natural scars very much like her images in the 'Silueta' series. I liked to call them "found Mendietas."

Ana did not like to miss a chance of socializing with her friends. She was a friend of John Perreault whom she also liked to credit with introducing her to the newest art developments

through his courses at the University of Iowa. Ana was always glad to meet with him and vice-versa. About three weeks before her death I invited her to dinner, together with Jeff Weinstein and John. Both John and Jeff had visited her in Rome and Ana had proven a good hostess, showing Rome to them, taking them to the right restaurants and so on. We all were looking forward to seeing each other. But Ana was not able to make it to dinner. That same evening her husband was coming to New York and she preferred to stay home with him. Nevertheless she phoned at the last minute to say that she would like to come over just to say hello. Since we were neighbours, she managed to make some time to see us after picking up The New York Times for her husband.

Ana did not cook frequently, but when she did it was wonderful. At one point she wanted to meet Scott Burton who had been one of the jurors who gave her the Prix de Rome (another juror was Robert Motherwell and I think there was a third). Scott also wanted to meet her because he, as well as Motherwell, had liked her work very much. Ana asked me to invite Scott to dinner at her place. There she cooked her well-known chiles. Those were an exquisite meal, a simple dish made with very basic ingredients and with a delightful taste. One important aspect: the seeds of the chiles were not removed. When the greenish, perfectly cooked flesh melted in your mouth, the texture and flavor were substantially different (I believe her work, like her chiles, keeps an essential component that most artists discard). Ana and Scott got to know each other that night. Although they did not meet frequently afterwards, at the time of her death Scott called me from England where he was very busy with his show at the Tate. I still have the message he left on my answering machine (I have kept the cassette because Ana's voice is also there). On the tape Scott sounds really upset. "Eduardo," he says, "This is Scott, calling from London. I knew about Ana. . .How sad. . .How sad. . ."

Ana knew a lot of people and liked quite a few of them. Some of these were art people who had been helpful or had charming personalities. She liked for instance Nancy Spero and Leon Golub. She respected them as artists and they had invited her to their place many times since she came to Manhattan. Ana was grateful and glad that Golub was doing well, but worried that Spero would not get enough press or have the right gallery. I think it was after Lucy Lippard's article about Nancy in the *Voice* that her career

took off again and Ana was genuinely relieved. She was also concerned that my career seemed to have come to an indefinite halt after a moment of splendor many years ago and I did not seem to care about it. She was the first person to talk to me about the Ivonne Seguy Gallery (which had sold some work of hers). Ivonne Seguy later became the Terne Gallery and I ended up being one of their artists.

Ana was small, vibrant and very real. Except for her voice she did not have much physical strength, but she was full of life and plans for the future. Also she knew that her work was going to be extraordinary and the best was still to come. Although critical of our economic system she believed in America's spirit as a force that would survive Capitalism. She believed also that some kind of American dream would come true for her, especially if she was accepted first in Europe.

As an artist Ana was most interesting. Her pieces had a way of illustrating her unusual biography and psyche that was quite extraordinary. At work she was a prehistoric figure whose playing with nature was recorded many years later by the American tourist in possession of all her gadgets. Her "theme" happens through time, which is a difference between her work and that of the other earth artists. Ana was primeval in her approach, techniques and aesthetics when she was working the earth, but she would become contemporary and technological at the time of dealing with the camera and prints. I find this very interesting. There is much food for the mind here. She was in love with the earth and also with laboratories and Minoltas but the nature of these two passions came from a very remote time in history in the first case and from a very recent time in the second case. Probably because her work was about a decade ahead of her time, Ana felt viewers were not understanding her "paintings." She decided then to make her work more available to the established perception of the art world. I would need more space and time that I have to reflect on her changing awareness of the realities of the art world and on the diversity of our dialogue at that time, which helped her find the direction of her most recent pieces.

LOWERY STOKES SIMS

ANA MENDIETA: A REMINISCENCE

I got to know Ana Mendieta about a year or two before she first left for Italy on the Prix de Rome. It was a time when she was going to Cuba and taking groups of artists with her. Ana nagged me about going to Cuba because she knew of my interest in the Cuban Surrealist painter Wifredo Lam. The timing of the trips she escorted never seemed to coincide with my work schedule, so Ana would act as my advance woman telling artists in Cuba about me and my interest in Lam. She would also bring back literature on Lam that was otherwise unavailable here. When I finally got to go to Cuba in 1983 as a participant in a symposium dedicated to the work of Wifredo Lam, Ana deemed it the fulfillment of destiny. Then she got the news of the Prix de Rome. At the farewell party at Ted Victoria's I encountered Julian Pretto, and we spent the entire evening marveling on Ana's spectacular champagne-pink sequined evening dress. It was a side of Ana that she rarely showed to the art world.

In the inimitable way that friendships fare in New York, I got to know Ana better after she left for Rome. When she came back into town we would make a point to get together and catch up with one another over some semblance of an Italian meal. Again I met more people, and learned about others Ana felt I should meet. The intervals between appearances were punctuated by the postcards that served to keep Ana's public abreast of various events and developments in her life and career. Signed with the ironic nom de plume, "Tropic-Ana," they conveyed Ana's ideas and feelings about myriad things: her art, whom she had met, where she had been, what she had seen, and most of all how much she enjoyed being in Rome. She had often talked to me about the cultural dislocation she felt in this country. This was one of the reasons that she gave for spending so much time in Italy after the Prix de Rome year had expired. She felt more at home in that Mediterranean environment.

Indeed the time and space afforded her in Rome were quite beneficial to her art. She devised a way to accommodate her in-

herently environmental and site-specific works in a gallery setting. This development seemed to be particularly momentous, and she had many questions about its viability. The question of location of a venue for this work was also deemed to be crucial in view of the demands that her body of work made in terms of space and ambiance.

MARSHA PELS

Ana Mendieta was a rare, visionary creature; a hands-on sculptor with a highly developed political awareness, social conscience and a fire burning in her hands. She worked directly; equally primal and cerebral with concepts and materials others freeze and suck the life out of. Ana had an uncanny aesthetic ability to breathe life into whatever she touched. The range within her work was extraordinary for its intensity of feeling and solidity of purpose. Unfortunately, the tragedy of her death will taint the purity of her reputation but we were the same age and I believe she was the most innovative sculptor of her generation. For Ana was a groundbreaker. She had no role model: she was her own role model.

She was my personal connection to an understanding of Minimalism for which I am grateful; to a deeper level of transformation of matter where nothing is sacred. To Ana it was all the same. Sculpture had no formal restraints or meaningless rules. And though she chose mostly natural materials and elements with which to work, I believe her strength of purpose and her vision of herself and her work within the real world pulled her through her work voraciously and viscerally connected to whatever material or concept she at that present moment was embracing. Her immediate decisions were as valid as her entire working process.

Ana taught me things I am still trying to hang onto in the shadow of her death. She was such an active presence that it is difficult still not to think of her as alive because of her enjoyment of life, her spontaneous combustion and her celebratory nature. Her presence gave new sincerity to the myth of artists' identity, new force to my belief in the historical progression of the sculptural process and continued belief in the power of the sculptural object.

We met in Rome and in Rome Ana was at home; the history and beauty of the city, the passionate nature of the streets and the people allowed her a natural freedom of expression and lifestyle which she demanded of any environment. Rome allowed her to explode, in an odd way, without calling unnecessary attention to herself. It was filled with volatile sensations and impulses. And yet for all her sophistication, Ana was an innocent. There was a child-like naivete and sheer juvenile delight she expressed but rarely showed beyond the tough exterior. And it was this delight, this sheer joy which made Rome her natural, dramatic habitat.

Ana believed she could do anything against all odds. I remember once she called me to her studio frantically because she was having problems with her chain saw. Now it was extremely disconcerting to watch a woman of Ana's size with a chain saw of Ana's size. I remember screaming at her my chain saw riot act. But Ana had no handicaps. Scale and size were tremendous issues in her work. She was able to create monumental or tiny sculptures with a sensitivity that was enviable. I believe Ana was an enormous woman stuck within a small body. Her spirit was gargantuan; her hands and feet tiny. Her world had no bounds.

I can hear her saying behind me, "To hell with everybody, who cares what they think." But deep down she desperately cared about it all. Though she demanded to be heard, she needed to be understood. And this sometimes created a dilemma, for her work perhaps was the only thing she could totally control. Yet she believed she could control anything if she set her mind to it.

So underneath the shield of her will, lay the complex fabric of her vulnerability, which through her integrity reflected the world at large in conflict with the world of Ana. Ana Mendieta was a survivor, but she was only human. She craved attention, love, respect and trust like any other human being. And she needed to be

protected, despite the infamous tough exterior. Her work somehow perfectly balanced this psychological dynamic within the formal rigor of a truth SHE KNEW COULD EXIST within the rest of her life.

And this is what she was struggling to reach and maintain. She was trying to find that truth; that impossible place where one can be always on the edge but safe at the same time, in order to fight to continue to grow.

*

It is difficult for me to talk about all of Ana's oeuvre, as we only spoke in the present about the present and future work. We were very close through Sept. 1984 - Sept. 1985, when I was in Rome at the American Academy on a Prix de Rome in Sculpture the year after Ana. Much of our intimacy came from the uniqueness of our shared experience, but also stemmed from our mutual respect we found stimulating through our differences. When I now look back and try to understand why we got so close so fast and had such a good working studio relationship, to some degree it was my honesty in criticizing her which made Ana pursue me. Ana was extremely selective and yet she was lonely for a working comrade. She had undergone a tremendous series of revelations in Rome and she believed only someone else who also experienced this could understand her.

In the summer of 1985 Ana was planning her most ambitious outdoor sculpture to date, which she was to build in California in late 1985/early 1986. Since her most recent work had involved tree logs; working crudely with a chain saw and then delicately with hand tools—the California pieces were a continuation in process and image. She transformed these wooden hunks into actual physical presences combining man and nature, beauty and beast. Into these free-standing tree personas, she hollowed and etched with ignited gunpowder an equally disarming silhouette; a shadowy figure reminiscent of the Munch scream which acted as full modeled form and flat drawing at the same time. She created an enormous amount of space, perceptually and actually within the dynamic of this black drawing on the tree-grounds or wooden horizons. They were strange negative voids and powerful swollen

protrusions at once. With the actual size of these logs up-ended (5' - 7'), they, of course, took on anthropomorphic overtones, but what was most interesting to me about these sculptures, which had backs, fronts and sides, was the unique kind of displacement of space that happened as you walked around them.

Frontally perceived, they were standard figure/ground as you saw the shadowy drawn smaller figure within the larger molded shape, but as you walked around them and the shadow disappeared you were back into real space (not the space of the sculpture), almost as if you had traveled a great distance. You moved into and around the sculpture as it itself moved inside itself. It was not static, but swirling and eerily alive. And to me this was an enormous breakthrough for Ana.

These pieces which she created in the spring and summer of 1985 (and were almost working models for the upcoming installation in California) were more three-dimensional in a traditional sense than any of her other work. I was not fond of her recent cracked earth floor pieces. I called them cookies and she was aware of my disdain. Though I loved her earlier site-specific earthworks in dirt, earth and rock (which unfortunately I had only seen reproduced in photographs), I persisted in criticizing these cookies not even as high relief, but as simple, unexpansive quasi-minimalistic relics. I called her flat. She called me flat (ironically, all I did that year was bronze wall-reliefs) and we argued.

Because as we all know, Ana loved to argue. And if she had to defend her work, her values, her principles past mere happenstance, only then did one really get to know how viscerally connected she was as an artist and a human being. So we decided the earth was round, but Rome was flat. We would drive to the Colosseum and call it illusionary flat. Bernini was rounded flat. All flat hills led to Rome. In fact, Ana claimed Stella really knew that Caravaggio was really flat. And so we had our little sculptural joke.

Meanwhile, I cannot tell you how exciting it is to walk into an artist's studio and feel they have really made a breakthrough. And I remember my joy in the late spring of 1985 when I first saw these log pieces of Ana's. They were knockouts. We discussed how she wanted them to act independently and yet within a relationship to each other; not as a series, but as an interdependent progression. The sculpture for California would have been spectacular. She

was going out there to handpick a group of 7'-12' indigenous redwoods.

We discussed technical problems as well as aesthetic ones: particularly the expansion in size and relationship to hand workmanship, the problems she was still having with the chain saw as a tool (was there another way?), the peculiarities of the site, how to secure them to be safe but look like they were growing out of the ground and her apprehension about working away from her beloved studio in Rome for a month. She was not sure whether her Italian assistant would be able to make the journey abroad to help her in the States and since she felt disconnected from the so-called "scene" in New York, I promised I would set her up with a good assistant when she came to New York City in early September.

I was waiting outside of her apartment with this guy the afternoon after her death wondering why on earth she was keeping us waiting. . . .

It is the work she never had a chance to complete that I felt closest to. It captured her enormous presence with a real sculptural maturity, her visionary ability which now was not only universal, but international, her physical ambition and visceral connection to transform her material and all her hopes and fears for the future.

Those California logs might rival Stonehenge and Ana was not one bit afraid to live up to this.

October 1, 1987
Bennington, Vermont

AL NODAL

Today I sit here with Ana's picture, and with one of her Banyan-leaf drawings withered on my wall. I spoke to Ana her last afternoon alive. We were talking about the logistics of a project we were working on together. She was worried about having to ship her large wood carvings from Rome to LA, and when we finally worked out the details of having her Italian mastercarver come here to do the work on-site she was greatly relieved. The last thing she said to me was that I had provided her with a "spiritual uplifting" by solving the shipping problem. Those were her last words. I received a letter from her two days after I found out about her death with a detailed list of things to be accomplished. She had written the letter after she got off the phone with me. The letter was full of life and full of plans for the future. She was on the threshold of a brilliant mid-career.

I met Ana in New York City in 1978. I read an article on her in the *Village Voice* that cast her in a darkly mysterious and exotic light. I was fascinated with her. The night I met her she showed up at a bar in the Village with a friend. I thought she was going to be tough and demanding but she turned out to be very sweet and bubbling with potential and ideas. I was struck by how immediately we became friends and cohorts.

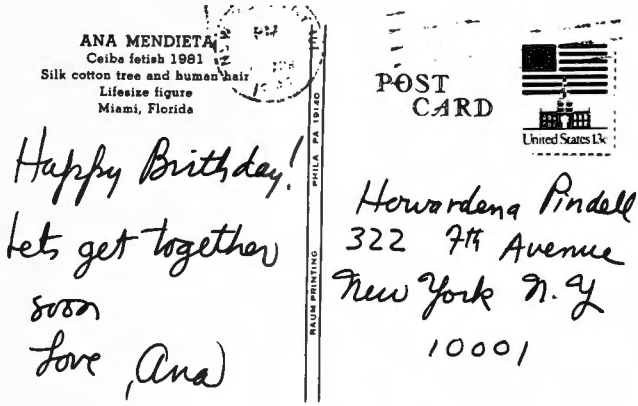
She came to Washington shortly thereafter and became part of the family at the Washington Project for the Arts. In 1980 she came back to DC to do a *silueta* out of sod on a Georgetown cemetery overlooking Wisconsin Avenue. She seemed more mature and a little tougher, but also outrageous and funny, with a biting attitude regarding feminism which she bantered along with Joy Silverman, Olivia George and other WPA staff members assisting the project. She had come down for the weekend to do her piece and we were braced for a weekend of hard work. However, the piece turned out to be amazingly simple. Ana did it all by herself and wouldn't let us help. She sort of whipped it up magically. We all ended up picnicking and laying around the cemetery all afternoon.

In 1984 I was again privileged to involve Ana in a project for the MacArthur Park Public Art Program in Los Angeles. Ana was

very responsive and made significant contributions to the planning process by advocating the needs of the area's children and of the transient Cuban and Black communities. She quickly got to know all of the Cuban *santeria* shops which border the park. She also preferred a Cuban dive in the toughest corner as her lunch and dinner spot. Although it is the best Cuban restaurant in LA, it caters to the roughest bunch of drifters and to the terrifying Cuban "Marielito" residents of the County-voucher Hotel Ferraro. Sometimes during dinner we felt as if we might soon catch a knife in the back or a flying bullet. There were arguments and fights going on all the time. However, the people there loved Ana. She would settle arguments and get free dinners all the time. In a way, the owners adopted her as their artist, and do they need her now! Her work would have been an important source of support for the Cuban and Black members of the neighborhood. It would have given them hope and a sense of the spiritual that is severely lacking in this environment.

Her project for MacArthur Park was entitled "La Jungla." It was to consist of seven large tree trunks, carved and burned, representing the seven powers of life ("which rule the jungle"). The trunks were to be placed in a grove of pine trees on a slight incline facing the park bandshell, and arranged in such a way as to "charge" the enclosed space. The piece would have provided just the right amount of other-worldliness to the park.

1987



No matter where she was in the world, Ana always remembered my birthday, even when I cared not to remember. Of all the artists I knew, she never tried to use me to advance her career. She never even asked me for a recommendation or would press me about coming to a show or an opening. We shared a view about the white feminists and how callous many of them were toward women of color, content themselves—once the doors opened a bit—to be in all white galleries. The trial is on now—but as before, back at the time of her death, there is that awful silence radiating from the "art world" as if veiling a threat that if you speak out you wipe out your chances of showing your work forever. . .fear and silence. . .denial and silence.

. . .and I think of Ana writing all those postcards each year as my birthday deepened traces of wrinkles across my face. And I think of the last time I saw her, when she and Andre took me out for a birthday dinner. And that night I vowed never to see them again because I was terrified of something that I sensed and could not crystallize into exact words. . .the last time I experienced that contraction of feeling was when I was in what could have been a

fatal accident when there was no time for terminal euphoria. My own recent injuries had left me too fragile that evening to push away the dread and not flee. . .and today I see some of the white feminists weeping for Ana high on being able to capture a woman of color in the marron focus of us as victims even their "white god" has deserted. . .and I see them inert through their tears failing to lift a finger for living women artists of color who are censored out of the closed, restricted "art world."

RAQUEL MENDIETA HARRINGTON

A nuestra Madre Universal, la inspiración de Ana,
cuya gracia es la cura de todo.

To our Universal Mother, Ana's inspiration,
whose grace is all-healing.

A nuestra madre, quien me ha confiado el
cuidado de las obras de Ana.

To our mother, who has entrusted me with
the care of Ana's works.

A Ani:

There is silence between us. . .
Yet, what use are words
when our hearts are now *one.*

And thus nothing can divide us.
Neither exile, nor destiny,
not death itself.

I bear always
that burning print of your silhouette:
indelible track of your yearning for union with
the All.

1987

NANCY SPERO

Ana Mendieta's art is implacable, an investigation of the body, her body, five feet tall, melding with nature. The earth, trees, blood, fire—the basics were shaped into the female form. The variations and repetitions of this singular subject became in her hands an all-consuming, elemental force.

Ana was direct and outspoken, eschewing art world fads. She found her workplace essentially out-of-doors, often in remote, isolated sites, carving in rock, digging in the land, covering herself with earth and leaves, setting fire to the gunpowder-spread trenches of her earth sculptures.

I miss Ana, her companionship, her vitality and drive, her pride and her anger. Her art is unique and powerful, and she was a unique and brilliant artist.

New York City
July 31, 1987

JOHN PERREAULT

ANALOG

for Ana Mendieta

I

ANA 1 : up : upward (*ana*bolism). 2 : back : backward (*ana*tropous).

Ana ever upward
Ana flying

Back to earth
Ana dead

The hard earth has no mercy
Wonderful earth
earth beneath our feet

To burn her body into the sky
To burn her body into the earth

Ana separated from her shadow
Ana leaving her shadow behind

My shadow
Your shadow
Our shadow

Does it matter
if I am not a woman?
Does it matter
if she was not a man?

Somewhere in Cuba
in a cave
she joined with nature,
mother of us all.
But where is the father?

II

ANAbaptism 2 : the baptism previously baptized.

Darker than
Speaking another language
Smaller than
Shorter than
Louder than
More beautiful than
Speaking another language

Why is it the mother tongue
and not the father tongue?

Did God take her own beauty
too seriously?

Ana and the saints.
Ana and the African gods.

And are there therefore
gods too close to us,
that foolishly allow us
to summon them
but then make us
their foaming horses?

Speaking through us
she speaks to us,
the ancestress,
clothed in blue and white,
wrapped in blood.

She will protect us.
But you cannot do it alone.
You cannot do it alone.

III

ANAbasis 1 : a going or marching up : ADVANCE, *esp.* : a military advance.

Ana conquering the art world
Ana conquering Rome
Ana conquering exile
Ana conquering resistance

She came to Iowa
and she met this one and that one
and was converted.

She came to New York
and she met this one and that one
and she was converted.

Where is she now?

Only her shadows remain,
only her art.

IV

ANAchronism 1: an error in chronology; *esp.* : a chronological misplacing of persons, events, objects, or customs in regard to each other 2 : a person or a thing that is chronologically out of place; *esp.* : one from a former age that is incongruous in the present

Ana so out of fashion
she was ahead of her time.
Primal Ana,
Ana of the earth.

V

ANAdem a wreath for the head : GARLAND

In dreams
we see her with tropical flowers,
tiny orchids
in her shiny black hair.

She is wearing a shiny and tight
very red dress.

Porcini, where are the
porcini?

Where is Tamayo?

Tropicana roars through Rome
in her car

searching for porcini
rather than Puccini.

VI

ANAgenesis evolutionary change involving a continuous succession of forms replacing one another without branching

Running along the shore
with white feathers,
she plunges into the surf,
floats,
letting gentle waves
wash the feathers away.

Bird, woman,
priestess.

VII

ANAglyph a sculptured, chased, or embossed ornament worked in low relief

Mystery signs
in the cave on the cliff.
Signs in the mind.
Pictures becoming language,
language becoming pictures,
both resisting the other.

Woman signs,
womb signs,
signs of sex.
Contraphallic
power signs,
taunting male gods,
courting the female.

Healing signs
and healing shapes,
the fire and smoke
of ancient rite.

VIII

ANAgogy interpretation of a word, passage, or text (as of Scripture or poetry) that finds beyond the literal, allegorical and moral senses a fourth and ultimate spiritual or mystical sense

The girl child sent
to a place without shores;
to protect and destroy.
Puberty equals exile.

But then the journey home
from island to island,
from cave to cave.

Oh, Ana, what island
have you returned to now?
Or do you—I hope not—
wander
seeking some terrible revenge?

May you be at peace
in the homeland you sought
May you be safe in the arms
of the Great Mother.

IX

ANAgram 1 : a word or phrase made by transposing the letters of another word or phrase 2 : a game in which words are formed by rearranging the letters of other words or by arranging letters taken (as from a stock of cards or blocks) at random

Eat manna,
die.

And I eat
name.

Eat, I am
an end.

I, a meat,
an end.

X

ANAlogical 1 : of, relating to, or based on analogy 2 : expressing or implying analogy

Earth is to mother
as fire is to father.
Cave is to mother
as tree is to father.
But this is not exactly
what we mean.

Art is to life
as death is to death.
But this is not exactly
what we mean.

1988

MIRA SCHOR

"What can you say about a twenty-five-year-old girl who died?"

Erich Segal *(Love Story)*

Ana Mendieta was two months shy of her 37th birthday the night she died. My reflections on the retrospective of her work at the New Museum of Contemporary Art are colored by the knowledge that when she died she was the age that I am now, and by my awareness of the similarity of our interest in developing a female form in its relationship to nature, and, further, of those art roots we share in the rich mixture of feminism and the anti-commodificative tendencies of earth, performance, and process art characteristic of the early 70s. These self-reflexive echoes heighten my sense of the unfairness of her being judged by the standard of oeuvres of dead artists, instead of the less reverent ones applied to young, living and developing artists. Although her career was illuminated by flares of brilliance, the imposition of *oeuvre* on *work* is experienced as a sharp injustice. An effort must be made to do her the favor of retaining her work a little longer within the hustle and controversy of contemporary art discussions.

Mendieta's work is dedicated to an earth "Goddess:" giant breasts and buttocks, spiralling wombs, slits, labia shaped like hearts, vulvae abound within rock, trees, leaves, and the earth itself. Her assertion of the bond between her body and that of Mother Earth reveals an enviable simplicity yet a problematic lack of ambivalence which seems a relic of the first years of feminist art. The unity of her identification with Nature is the source of her work's most vivid images yet also the site of its weaknesses.

Mendieta's work separates into three phases: performance pieces where her own body or its image interact with earth, blood and fire (The Fireworks Silhouette series, Fetish series, Tree of Life series, Silhouette series—1976-1977), the Rupestrian sculptures (1981) in which a more exaggerated paleolithic female archetype is carved into stone caves in Cuba, and the more traditional art

objects in which similar figures appear in drawings and sculptures of wood and earth (1981-1985).

Mendieta's subject in the early pieces, visible only through photographic and filmic documentation, is woman as traditionally understood as Nature to man's Culture. Although Mendieta's actions upon sand, earth and stone are dramatically direct and her images archetypal, as art these pieces (the Silhouettes and the Rupestrian sculptures) reveal layers of intervention, impermanence, distance, vulnerability and remoteness. As artist she functions as Culture to Nature's nature, reinscribing woman as hole and cave onto the cervix of the actual stone caves of her (Mother) land of birth, Cuba. Whether carving a female spoor into limestone, or entombing her own body or its replica in blood, sand and mud (woman as matter encased within itself), or searing her shadow onto the earth, she interacts with the image and the material in a way which enriches the connotations of her work. The interrupted synapses between the permanence of the stone carvings, the vulnerability of the female image imprisoned in them, and the remoteness of their cave matrixes enhance the sense of loss which is associated with the body of the Mother. We sense her physical intimacy with her work, yet our only contact is through ethnographic photographs and grainy, rather spooky home movies, doubling our personal separation from the Mat(t)er. We are as distanced from the actual presence of these earth pieces as we are from Nature, Mother, the Imaginary.

Mendieta's action upon the earth and the subsequent separation from/or destruction of the action leavens her archetypes with a welcome ambiguity. Nature's actual *matter,* and the temporality of performance provide a crucial *resistance* to her generic "Venuses." Also, because of their presentation in time, and position in geographic space, these images may be icons and fetishes, but not talismans that can be carried about and traded in the market. Thus the commodification of woman (and art) is averted.

Mendieta's later works exist in our presence. Drawings on bark paper, giant mud cookies presented flat on the ground, tree trunks altered to include and represent the female body, leaves burned onto shield like planks stand close to us, they are our size and art size, the scale of traditional drawing and sculpture. Fresh and clean in shape and design, the later works are visually attractive and exciting artifacts. The Tree Trunks of 1985 are particularly

successful in the clarity of their concept and execution. These pieces look very good—but the important dialectic layers of mediation and resistance present in the complex artist/material, audience/work interactions characteristic of the earlier works are lost. The vulvae, leaves, spirals stand without counterpoint, Nature to Nature.

The audience's interaction is similarly diminished. Imagining the act of burning a body into the earth is a more active and *activating* involvement for the viewer than seeing a brown design on wood. One is told the line was produced by burning gunpowder, but it could have been manufactured by other methods. As the method's evocative power is diminished, the image itself must carry more critical responsibility.

Despite the violence implicit in the use of gunpowder, or the sharp point of a burin into living plant tissue, there is no violence to the concept of femaleness presented. To grow, the daughter must question the Mother. She must act out her *own* sexuality, as Mendieta does do in her performance pieces, not only look to the Mother as The SEX. And it is only in the necessary questioning of what she holds dearest that an artist's work lives most fully, not in the easy acceptance of a beloved form or concept.

Recent critical theory has investigated and developed the problems of female representation. Although representations of the "nothing to be seen," posited by Freud and Lacan and commented on by French feminists such as Luce Irigaray, must be attempted by women artists, an undifferentiated allegiance to the vulval half of the basic male/female, culture/nature binary opposition that one associates with the early stages of feminism and feminist art begs rethinking and reworking. Even if the woman artist ultimately asserts her femaleness, *chooses* her difference, the choice will be all the more powerful for an intervening interaction with culture, or, simply, with doubt.

Mendieta's work surely would be shown if she were alive today. One can easily envision a show of the last works in wood and the floor pieces. But separated from their past—the documentation of the earlier works—it is possible they would succeed only insofar as they could be (mis)interpreted as postmodern *artifacts,* beautiful, sophisticated commodities. A failure to "succeed," in market terms, would only be due to the extent to which they would still be perceived as feminist *actions.* The art world does

not seem very interested in new infusions of feminist art (especially any that smack of "stage one" feminism), although such works by women who were accepted into the art world during the "window of opportunity" period of the early to mid-70s are permissible and Mendieta might qualify for this group. And yet even these women (Spero, Bourgeois, Murray, Applebroog) remain somewhat marginal to mainstream art, even as they are applauded and respected, while images by male artists which repress woman into her nature role flourish in the spotlight. And, within the development of feminist thought, the post avant-garde proposes a subtle critique of the Nature/Culture opposition, influenced by deconstructionist philosophy, Lacanian psycholinguistic theory, and cultural studies. Mendieta's "essentialism," her embrace of a female essence implicit in her generic female forms might well be criticized by contemporary feminist writers.

Mendieta's Woman, particularly in the later works, is only female, she presents a limited view of the form and experience of femininity out of the limitless possibilities of femaleness. Because dialogue and conflict do not flourish within an important portion of her work, it does not have the depth of an *oeuvre*. In Mendieta's work there are many deeply moving and rivetingly memorable images but, ultimately, the constant repetition of an unquestioned, generic (gyneric) Great Mother is deeply, and now, poignantly problematic.

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

HAND / HEART FOR ANA

the dreamed image sent by you
in affinity of our physical work
the archaic

blood ashes syrup on snow
crusted red rose black crystallation
heart like shapes drenched into snow
scattering ashes blood paint
my hands arms reaching across the iced surface
sequences of grasping air crystals
only later I saw the image is your hands
falling through space

the female body as psychic and ideological key
arteries which lead to pre-patriarchal junctures

intention meaning metaphor are
situated in our bodies and when the
generation of the body of work
and body of experience is a female body
then all our traditional insights
are shaped as question
are marked as questionable

our body the infinite battle ground
his power to trample burn encumber deny
throw to the winds

he is dancing in the wrong direction
you are tossed on his horns caught on his hooves
consort mate rock hewn from your vaulted chambers
son blessed with your holy fire you sparking Ana
sparkling wild you strong small arms reaching to consort
the stone pushed from your burning chamber the os
hammered opened arms opened
                no no no no no
is the same in both languages

because this body as a source of creative
authority interjects a radical position
a female embodiment which is not muse
hand-maiden martyr saint goddess idol
whore madonna

an artist's body situated as prima materia
as the basis of form structure
in fluid mythic interchange

1988

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

GALACTITE

In Memory of Ana Mendieta

A great earth mother lived in her angry Cuban body
and she exercised this mother as an essential part of her appetite,
her hunger imbued woman shape into the mute anonymity of the
    earth's masculinized crust—
she dug under a Celan canopy, she dug and she dug,
with the heel of her vulva she carved and set smoking
the *silueta* grandeur of buried feminine ancientness.
Her shovel said: Laussel is, still, Willendorf, Lespuge,
tombal, severe, "earth and gunpowder" "carved clay bed"
Diana of Ephesus is exposed shale
the earth is breasted
    stone spoons,
                gala galact galacto– Gaia
                ga gaga galactite gal
            gaiety
                gaw gape g g gaylussite
        gavial gaza

as if an udderwork were excreted along this slit-shaped smoking
    tumulus,
Ana in the pavement! O monstrous core of her vision,
a root twisting around the head
penetrating the reclined body,
woman attempting to slither down the firepole of herself,
to descend by and along *her* root,
by what has already run her through—

and Dionysus, "through whom they go into a trance
and speak in tongues and for whom they beat the drum,"
screwed his neck around astounded at Ana
his thick crocodilian neck, like a dark green accordion,
flexing at the very surface she walked on.

*

SHE
    LOV
GOT

got it on the white garage door
got it on the pavement
got it in her skull

earth crucified
rock impounded

she swims under the tree
worm slow
worm sure

the ego? In the rage of the lived life
the id? In the ooze from the portable vessel
the snow vessel the
    sulfur womb
        alfawarm
            wind

this Retrospective ends her Bardo

the eraser shovel

in the alchemical houseboat
300 year old men throw dice for her kidney

termite hill
  primordial clitoris

decomposing driftbitch sprinkled with red pepper flowers

calcite hag disconnecting from her driftbarge

a puddle-moated armless footless daggered clay Ana

the written-upon woman,
"in the Penile Colony," the written-
into woman, tableau of pornography

her Gargas palm
her [ ] slab

I feel space start to sing,
a Threnody meandering singing,
howl-lines, five fingers raked down
a cul-de-sac wall
at 40,000 BC,

bear-nails mammal anatomy
stretching out, pawing in
the traction of place,

elastic to time elastic space
the Earth a foetal conundrum
wombless,
but not Male

*

whose breasts are black pits
whose body bits of ash from whose vagina pink fumes
"burnt offering" on eroded ground
vines and pods her arms lifted on dune a green pubic tangle
feminine form a burned out stockade in a wasteland
flat mud arms lifted Whitman's "Lisp'd to me low the delicious
    word death"
the crucified bursting into fireworks Day of the Dead
green granite moss clustered breast hived the landscape redolent
    with vulvular force
yellowed grass surrounded by green goddess present Juno in
    the myriad blades
clitoris as sentinel watching over the mushroom-clustered rotting
    phallus of the god
violet charred remains of mother and child, Her body a
    swirlwork of serpent ash
the pulled open earth vulva its interior charred specks of red
long dead dangling grass over the rock shelter in which she is
    only a shit-colored stain her legs rivulets
"the mind is immediate, the soul very ancient"
green budded goddess stretched out on mud amidst slabs
    exultant/crucified in the unconscious is there
    a seam between two? Crane's Nazarene/Dionysus,
    at the Rorschach core life = death
        the great peril in Mendieta men die ta
pulled open earth vulva swarming with pubic Medusa vines as if
    out of the earth slit serpent eggs ceaselessly hatching
    prodigious they turn mens' eyes to battering rams
crawl hole into the rockface with shrouded head rising over
    She is all hole empty shadow rubble a refuge
"ONCE, when death was mobbed,
you took shelter in me"
as if the greenery reared back to reveal the sunny dry rockface
    mud pustules, nodes, suggesting Her form
tall pale green grass blades through which swells a milky violet
    vesica piscis opaque, oily it appears like pools of smoke in
    surrounding blades
hill of buds tumulus covering we know not what earth pregnant
    nearly anonymous Ananymous Ananamend

green tufts out of brown hollows gouged halos of one who was
    and now is only as disappearance
between the legs sculpted wall clay a basin vaginally drains
    great leaky vessel the space between her bowed out bowed
    in legs
feminine form receptacle for insects air
3 headed vulva cobra guarding the keeled over rock upon rock
    breasted sleeper
I clutch the center of my being and tear
    my body a zippered pod splitting
in a tide pool two serpentine turds also reveal her
my armless outline burned into oak boles for companions
my back a labyrinth of serpents I am cut in two what remains
    forced into the rockface below all asshole this too refuge
convex head and shoulder in rockface the raised pellet of my
    belly a navel vulva a navel babe
more anonymous than Neanderthal the rubble mother with her
    rubble spout pressed between rubble thighs
The Elephant Woman afloat like an arrowhead in the skies
with a hardon rammed up through my neck into my head
    with my radish foetus gripped by the vagina my torso is
        with my staring eyeballless eyeball
Kashkaniraqmi! "Somos aún, vivimos!"
    "in spite of everything we still exist, with all
        our potential for regeneration and growth!"

[September 1985-January 1988]

B. RUBY RICH

ANA MENDIETA: A POSTSCRIPT

Stories do not always end the way we'd like. Certainly not the life of Ana Mendieta. Certainly not the trial of Carl Andre. Ana's life

may have ended, with fatal prematurity, on that morning of September 8, 1985, but that moment marked a beginning as well: the beginning of another scenario to which Ana's friends and family would dedicate themselves for the next two and a half years. That was the scenario of Ana's death and its cause, and it would come to an end in a courtroom in Manhattan on February 11, 1988, when Judge Alvin Schlesinger delivered his verdict in the murder trial of Carl Andre. He decided that there was not "sufficient evidence" to convince him "beyond a reasonable doubt" that Andre had been proven guilty of her murder.

Day by day, during the meandering course of these two and a half years, those of us intent on unraveling the moment of Ana's death and bringing Carl Andre to justice (as we might have put it then) learned a lot about the nature of the legal system and the character of the art world.* Let this postscript stand as an abbreviated summary of details—just the facts, ma'am—and perhaps a hint of perspective. It has been written just days after the verdict, with the mind just beginning its long, hard climb toward resolution.

What happened on September 8, 1985, to end Ana Mendieta's life? There are a few facts. She died in the fall from the bedroom window of the 34th-floor apartment of Carl Andre, the man she'd married eight months before. Her fall occurred at 5:30 am. Andre called the 911 emergency number and reported that his wife had committed suicide. However, the rest of his call, combined with other circumstances of the death, led the District Attorney's office to arrest Andre by the end of that day and charge him with second-degree murder. A grand jury was convened and returned an indictment on two counts of second-degree murder. After a number of months of deliberation, Judge Carol Berkman overturned that indictment, indicating the admission of prejudicial testimony. A second grand jury was convened, again returning an indictment, and again Judge Berkman overturned it on similar grounds, characterizing it as a "close circumstantial case."

At this point, the Assistant District Attorney on the case, Martha Bashford, was re-assigned and replaced by Elizabeth Lederer. It was Lederer, then, who convened a third grand jury, won a third indictment—upheld this time by Judge Berkman—and proceeded

* For more on this, see my original article in the *Village Voice* (1986).

to take the case to trial. The pre-trial hearings began on January 19, during the last week of the Ana Mendieta retrospective at the New Museum, and ended with a bang Andre's attorney, Jack Hoffinger, rose at the conclusion to announce that his client refused a jury and requested a "bench" trial (i.e. decision by judge alone).

A jury would have surely included women, possibly Latinos, and inevitably makes for a more emotional case. A bench trial, on the other hand, ensures a closer legal reading, devoid of emotion, relying instead on the technical aspects of the trial presentations. A meta-trial, if you will. The minimalist's choice.

In the face of this attempt to privatize the trial, numbers of Ana's friends turned out to support her mother's daily attendance and to make the trial *real,* carrying word out into the art world and the world at large that, indeed, Andre was there in the courtroom as witness after witness testified.

Lederer stressed two points over and over: that Ana Mendieta did not commit suicide (Andre's original story) and that she didn't fall out the window accidentally (the scenario that Hoffinger constructed in his closing summation). A total of forty witnesses were called, by one side or the other. Without exception, they told of Ana's buoyant mood at the time of her death, how well her career was going, how much she loved living in Rome, what breakthroughs she was making in her work. Al Nodal testified that he had once admitted feeling suicidal to Ana and she had replied, "Eso no se hace" *(That* we don't do). Lederer, in her closing summation, enumerated all the signs present before a suicide, none of which even remotely applied to Ana. As for the "accident" theory, several different witnesses testified to Ana's fear of heights: how she wouldn't climb a scaffold to look at the Sistine Chapel ceiling, wouldn't stay at a cliffside house, wouldn't look at the view out a fifth-story window.

Lederer's process of elimination led her, finally, to review for the court the actual wording of Carl Andre's call to 911. Asked what happened, Andre replied to the 911 operator:

> "My wife is an artist, and I'm an artist, and we had a quarrel about the fact that I was more, eh, exposed to the public than she was. And she went to the bedroom, and I went after her, and she went out the window."

Lederer emphasized two points. First, that Andre was a man who used language with great precision. Second, that he thereafter altered his accounts to distance himself from this first explanation. He ultimately claimed he wasn't even in the room when her "defenestration" occurred, did not see what happened, never looked out the window nor heard the crash, but "just knew" that she had jumped out the window.

The case was an intense crash course in the legal system, as point after point of evidence was declared inadmissible, considered hearsay or prejudicial. All the testimony concerning Ana's intention to divorce Andre, for example, was excluded. Her sister Raquel wasn't allowed to testify about Ana's discovering his infidelities and gathering evidence for her divorce lawyer. Her friend Natalia Delgado, the last person to speak to Ana alive (at 12:30 that night) couldn't explain how she'd urged Ana to confront Carl to save the marriage, after Ana told her she'd still not let him know of her plans. What Natalia did say, though, was chilling. She recounted calling back late the next morning, as Ana had requested, to continue the conversation. Andre told her that Ana "wasn't there" and said, yes, he'd tell her she called. Ana, of course, was already dead.

Similarly chilling was her brother-in-law Tom Harrington's memory of how Andre had never called to tell the family of Ana's death, and how when Tom had finally called him more than a week afterward to ask "why on earth" he had never notified him, Andre answered only that he "didn't have our phone number" (which was listed and in the New York area). By contrast, he called all the friends they were supposed to have had dinner with to cancel the dates.

While Lederer relied heavily on her process-of-elimination deduction, she also had some evidence. Police and D.A. Bashford testified to scratches on Andre (which Hoffinger argued were insufficient to suggest Ana fought for her life), photographs indicated disarray in the bedroom—like an overturned chair—implying a struggle took place (Hoffinger contended Andre was just messy), and the doorman of a neighboring building testified to hearing a woman's pleading screams of "no, no, no, no, no" just before Ana's fall. In a bizarre twist of fate, the doorman turned out

to have a history of paranoid auditory hallucinations that weakened his authority in the courtroom. Nevertheless, when he revealed that his voices had always spoken in whispers and that he'd heard them only when he'd stopped his medication and hadn't heard any such voices since 1981, his testimony remained on record.

Carl Andre himself, while holding to the image of grieving widower, never even took the stand. Therefore, his character never came into question. His reputation as a volatile drunk never entered into the proceedings, while Ana's behavior when drunk was constantly discussed. Like a rape trial, it was the victim who was held up for examination. Andre's considerable reputation for violence against women, so often the subject of art-world conversation, never even surfaced. The woman artist he'd once thrown out of a moving taxicab, breaking her wrist, never came forward. Neither did the gallery owner who'd once seen him beat up a girlfriend on the sidewalk. Most of the art world never even set foot in the courtroom, let alone talked to the D.A.

And therein lies, finally, another story. Carl Andre may have been acquitted in this trial, but it was the art world itself that was decisively convicted. In addition to those already mentioned, only artist Nancy Spero and new *Artforum* editor Ida Panicelli testified in behalf of Ana, as their friend and as an artist of stature. At the end of the trial, in the aftermath of her own disappointment over the verdict, Assistant D.A. Elizabeth Lederer commented on so many artists' refusal to get involved, saying she was "taken aback and disappointed by the lack of conscience and courage in the art world."

Those of us on the periphery, the Latino and feminist and black artists and writers who shared those hard benches on the thirteenth floor, will not forget. This issue of *Sulfur* is a first step toward preserving Ana's life and work and setting the balance straight again.

GARY SNYDER

FIVE POEMS

THE BEAR MOTHER

She veils herself
  to speak of eating salmon
Teases me with
"What do you know of my ways"
And kisses me through the mountain

Through and under its layers, its
            gullies, its folds;
Her mouth full of blueberries,
We share.

Brooks Range
VIII: 86

JACKRABBIT

Jackrabbit,
Black-tailed Hare,
You by the side of the road,
Hop, stop.

Your great ears shining,
You are patient, hopper,
Watcher, listener,

I have seen that you know me;
A little. A lot more than I
Know you.

for Mts. & Rivers
V: 87

KUŠIWOQQÓ~~BI~~

[See letter
at end of
Snyder section]

Did it come from
The ice age lakes and streams?
Flows of liquid rock
The salt of seas,
Wind on hills for years,
This day's sun and trees?
Or this one nose?
The smell in the bark of
Jeffrey Pine.

My nose poked in the bark
Went a million years—
Sweet smell of the pine.

Delicious! Like pineapple!
What did the Piute children think of,
Smelling *Kustwoqqobi,*
What did they say?

Sun glittering on obsidian,
Wind on a hundred peaks,
Hugging a tree, smelling the bark,
I thought I heard "Kusiwoqqobi"

A soft voice from across,
From the dust, from the breeze.

VII: 82 – VII: 87 Trip with Kai down the
east side near Mammoth
Owens Valley Piute language research
courtesy of William Bright

SURROUNDED BY WILD TURKEYS

Little calls as they pass
  through dry forbs and grasses
Under blue oak and gray digger pine
In the warm afternoon of the forest-fire haze;

Twenty or more, long-legged birds
  all alike.

So are we, In our soft calling,
  passing on through.

Our young, which trail after,

Look just like us.

4 IX: 87, for the teachings
of the wild turkey flock

RAVEN'S BEAK RIVER
AT THE END

Doab of the Tatshenshini river and the Alsek lake, a long spit of
gravel, one clear day after days on the river in the rain, the
    glowing
sandy slopes of Castilleia blooms & little fox tracks in the
    moose-
print swales,
& giant scoops of dirt took out by bears around the lupine
roots, at early light a rim of snowy mountains and the ice
fields slanting back for miles, I find my way

To the boulders
  on the gravel in the flowers
At the end of the glacier
  two ravens
Sitting on a boulder
  carried by the glacier
Left on the gravel
  resting in the flowers
At the end of the ice age
  show me the way
To a place to sit
  in a hollow on a boulder
Looking east, looking south
  ear in the river
Running just behind me
  nose in the grasses
Vetch roots scooped out
  by the bears in the gravels
Looking up the ice slopes
  ice plains, rock-fall
Brush line, dirt sweeps
  on the ancient river
Blue queen floating in
  ice lake, ice throne end of a glacier
Looking north
  up the dancing river

Where it turns into a glacier
  under stairsteps of ice falls
Green streaks of alder
  climb the mountain knuckles
Interlaced with snowfields
  foamy water falling
Salmon weaving river
  bear flower blue sky singer
As the raven leaves her boulder
  flying over flowers
Raven-sitting high spot
  ear in the river, eyes on the snowpeaks,
Nose of the morning
  raindrops in the sunshine
Skin of sunlight
  skin of chilly gravel
Mind in the mountains, mind of tumbling water,
  mind running rivers,
Mind of weaving
  flowers in the gravels
At the end of the ice age
  we are the bears, are the ravens, are the salmon
In the gravel
  at the end of an ice age

Growing on the gravels
  at the end of a glacier
Flying off alone
  flying off alone
  flying off alone
Off alone

Mountains and Rivers without End
Tatshenshini/Alsek
Lake
July 86

16 Feb. 83

Dear Gary,

Good to hear from you! There's very little data available on Owens Valley Paiute; but I talked to my colleague Paul Kroskrity, who works on the Western dialect (spoken around Northfork), and he tells me that the word for Jeffrey pine is also used for pine in general in that dialect, and that it is as follows:

phonemically, i.e. only writing distinctions of sound which are used contrastively by the speakers themselves, *kušiwoqqóbi*;

phonetically, i.e. indicating finer distinctions of sound, which a non-Paiute speaker would need to know, *kušiwoqqóbi*.

Some symbols still need explaining, of course. s is like *sh* in English *ship*. The *q* is like English *k*, but farther back in the mouth; it's the sound of Arabic that's also transcribed with *q*. The doubling of the *q* means that it's pronounced with twice the length of a single consonant. The *b* is something like an English *v*, but made between the two lips, rather than between the lips and the teeth; it's the sound of Spanish *b* in a word like *hablar*. The *i* is like the sound written bl in Russian—not far from the second vowel in English *roses*. All in all, not a very easy word for non-Paiutes to pronounce; but I'll say it for you the next time we talk.

Incidentally, the word looks like a compound, *kusi* + *woqqobi*, where the second part is clearly related to the word for "pine" in all the Uto-Aztecan languages: Cahuilla *weqet*, Aztec *okotl*, etc. But kusi- by itself doesn't mean anything in Paiute; it's like the *cran-* in English *cranberry*.

Later I may be able to get some material on the Owens Valley dialect, to see if it is the same—I doubt if it's much different.

(William Bright)

BRUCE ANDREWS

from STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

I remain astonished, what happened flutter tonguing—four torpedo rooms flooding, sir—toward a long coffin shaped box in which a young girl is sitting, huh, all night, ok? Might does not make right so I'm Auld Lang Syne, so what?, where were the original names? Aerial kindergarten then into double agent bed with the tight and growing tighter white points, scared at 1 a.m., lonely later as though the sea were *made* of sharks. Put my bandage in the barbecue and afterwards licked my scars, leaving something for the over-and-undermensch my self in the head, the most beautiful thin gowns and translucent slip and. . . .This is a straightforward business proposition—real what did point blank keep in touch, the faucets of revolution, then I forget. Not much good in it, a sort of gawkiness, bashful—a bride's whiskbroom in as white as you ever see and the preacher had not moved, the gonads of technocracy. Steal some milk—we pay back GOOD—at every juncture were waving red objects, were china bears and 'Don't get me wrong' then drew another closeup of fish being cut: go home and sport some barometers, bub. Nor had the marriage taken place, the serpents of leisure; hello, kiddies—lay the millions on me, I'll put on my dancing shoes truth when burned, rocks can change to metal. Not the stockage, but the sugar babies pump city, antlers of snow—eroded bumpered clean bang gone, oooooh. Into the body of a timid doctor is grafted the skull of a woman, we ate glass for a week; now for some plot. I'm told this was all true. My heart goes out; then a sky; no more—bring me my sermonette with the two ultraviolet imagery skulls and the package of dehydrated chicken, the spiracles accumulating over us, s-y r-b-r-t-u kim-v-yit-r in the preservation of the world, oxygen ring still in gold lame and what has pride got to do with memory. Whatever becomes you, to be landed on belongs to you in doing so, freed up; an old saw rests beside. Hi, I'm Aaron Spiegel, chairman of your local Kentucky Fried Chicken dealers, and now's the time, so

fucking perfect. What you can do with a sword that's not tangible, that leaves no mark, even on your scheme of things, bright lights, big city, frankly flesh folds in with ice cream and comes back as a penny collection with missing 1923D and 1955S, glassine holders, and kept in the closet with the stamps from Martinique where the Harvard cop is going on his honeymoon for $1400 and a thousand in traveller's checks. Then we bought Ecuador volcanic ashtrays, "particularly" a lapse in Aladdin's treatment. Saigon dirt, sandbags on fire, a marsh fills with sports balls. A word as a shill for the sentence: house deals, secular clasp; colors beginning to be concentric sweet surrender. Price?—maybe it's the mite and tick blood or the jars of whatever then growth with the embalming business, to scrape the many-faceted uterus. Radios and magma cut the air in the stall and there are some prizes over there, or the pan drippings of a Lugosi bat; let me down, I cheapen. Regret what I reject what I regret you're too young to know and too old to have known although the comes-before bring me down, venetian blind me down—he who mixes dye, takes on its color—BALL THE JACK. Go for patent leathers and the four winter winds, too many die. Too hurried then what is this? The cores of the fruit had encased within them small gates and pulleys which could put in motion a parade of initials. As the light is extinguished from my eye a wicker chair comes flashing through the smallest open window, showers dark glass on the table. Other emotions than these—of trembling, to see one encased, fear, Order of the Purple Heart some protection—hoheh hoheh hoheh hoheh hoheh INDEX, the sentimentality of honor rolls. Can the nerves processional?—pme ,pre!!—get him drunk in the negligee; plans and the structure of behavior, I-risk; her earrings shook like chili colored chimes.

CLARK COOLIDGE

REGARDING MORTON FELDMAN'S MUSIC AND WHEREVER IT ALL NOW GOES

"I don't start with any plans whatever. I just follow it through."

"I ask at the beginning of working on a piece: What is the material?"

"I no longer give things a name. (I don't call it variation, I just do it another way.)"

"When I work I'm a listener, I'm not a composer."

"I never understood what I was supposed to learn and what I was supposed to break. What rules?"

It doesn't feel any more like a matter of reaching around behind where nobody's been for a while and finding something new. Now we've got the full array of elements, exposure. Like the feeling in writing that everything's been confessed, or processed, if not confused? Certain modes start to come in dry, play out, turn invisible. So it's a matter of how things stand with each other? The distances/proximities the more crucial. For any continuation at all (blank screen). Maybe just open it up, and then walk in among? Perhaps a help to take the mind off whatever the mind knows. Look again, then stop. Not to think. Keep stopping to look again. "Actually now I just try to repeat the same chord. I'm reiterating the same chord in inversions. I enjoy that very much, to keep the inversions alive in a sense where everything changes and nothing changes. Actually before, I wanted my chords in a sense to be very different from the next, as if almost to erase in one's memory what happened before. That's the way I would keep the time suspended, by erasing the references and where they came from.

All quotations are taken from the essays, lectures and interviews of Morton Feldman.

You were very fresh into the moment, and you didn't relate it. And now I'm doing the same thing with this relation. And I find it also very mysterious."

The music (or any) profession: a consensus. Imagine that nothing had ever been agreed on (it actually hasn't anyway). How would the sounds appear?

We have warblers and we have symphonic bands. And all the lodged complaints, even in terms of notes, one could wish. And when we do happen to be knowing in time, right *on* it, we're as far as the globe gives from discourse. Walls cracking from pressure of all the claims that made them. "The question is, and it is because of John Cage that we must ask the question: Is music an art form to begin with? Or has it always been show biz based on a kind of small attention span? And by show biz I mean Monteverdi. Is music an art form, rather than a music form, that one could explore and be flexible with? I don't know if music is that flexible to make a metamorphosis into something that doesn't have a formula. But the minute you don't use formula you're considered a Third World artist, like Ives."

It may now be more necessary than ever to be reminded of what the materials are. And that art is not a set of problems solved, more or less, in the last hundred years.

Morton Feldman's music, for all of what might seem a more and more hermetic way of working, is the opposite of sequestered event. It is all out in the open of art, as fielded as it gets. How far away do you need to go to bring in a thing unforeseen? How far will the work let you go and keep the will to remain unresolved and not hide in method? Are sounds ever stronger than when unanticipated?

Perhaps it should all be strange and messy now on, no matter the discrete attracts. Stranger and messier until we have a new aggregate or at least a fresh sense of the matrix from which it all. . .I don't understand music once again, I guess I most mean in its structures and transitions and even in its standing nature, when I listen to Feldman's. Fear in its presence. Fear of pure presense? Is

there a horror of too much silence that forces us to grasp even the utterly insubstantial with which to build? A bringing of what has vanished into the substance of things? A land where even the exhaled breath is a spy.

It's a storm. It doesn't need underpinnings (explain). Or the veil around you, reach for your pen and you'll rip it. There are no explicative flavors, aromas of understanding. You're present and let it rip or nothing. It's morning, say, and now what do you mean to repeat?

"What was great about the Fifties is that for one brief moment—maybe, say, six weeks—nobody understood art. That's why it all happened. Because for a short while, these people were left alone. Just an unbelievable amount of energy, an unbelievable amount of talent, but the feeling I had was that there really weren't issues. It's as if you had fifteen Stravinskys. And that was absolutely extraordinary to me. It wasn't even a crisis of whether or not one should do figure painting or abstract, because everybody was painting so differently."

The field of Feldman, the scale of notes, is vast, but there is a way in which it is all intimate detail. As if every portion of the universe impinged. The sense that you are very close to a great many very large presences.

Sometimes I just want to say: Stop, Morty, music is *not* painting. But he can't forget. That painting is also a time-art. Or an interval as timeless as a Mondrian.

A constant press of large tendencies.

"We don't know what art is outside of style, very difficult to know what it is."

I think we have to do quite a bit of forgetting (destruction). Yes, white tile and everything. Reach back into the midst of where you point from. There is plenty of room. But it is never a figured space. What rules there?

Feldman's music a very open procedure, bold, of full definition. You might begin to hear the sound of instruments as brought back from beyond the style you took them for. And feel the memory imprint start to ease off, each time thinking you have been here before but you always never quite have.

"How pleasant tonality is, how seductive variation, how interesting repetition, so you have to fight against it as if the overtones didn't work." The way this century has been too smart, because all those things work. And nobody to stop you, whatever you think to invent, a kind of tragedy, as he says. There's no secret to music ("Either you put something against something else, or you feel it has some kind of organic continuity—there are no other approaches"). But there's also no further room outside this one from which to discuss what happens here from a position of strength. You're totally listening now, and there is no later about it (tendency).

"Action and thought as a simultaneity (Goethe), I love that."

Music may be bigger (an art form?) and crazier (makes less sense, more fear) than you think. I'm hearing how it all keeps going away from me, finally back to the original *long* way off, down tiers and horizons of opposite substance, to score paper and gilt edges. Funny how it doesn't float but goes solidly directional, even if fractional. Even if, especially if, you can't write it down. But play out there among it all and you'll see, hear the differences, loud as the monkey cliffs. He's stirring it all with *your* bone, the one of former fancies, pointed adorations of the splendid vast box it all comes in, the one you always assumed touched the very Ink of Creation itself. Buried now though. Mired out there in the universal. Feldman's hands are up before it and very often empty. "The whole idea is not to write a good piece. The whole idea is to get lost, and come out alive."

You mean it goes, it has to, to? It doesn't? ("Sharp is more directional. Flat is less.") And you're making this happen, not happen, right off in my face? I'm unhappy with it, will be happier, why don't you actually go away, etc. I want my golden things (times),

my ace captions, full landings, my lodge. But he's taking away what lasts!

To reach that point at which no other points.

"I feel that in my life I'm trying out another option. It's not philosophy. It's the option of writing very long pieces that are very difficult to play, very difficult to hear, and have to do with the life of the piece, whatever that means and not the life of the performer, or what happens to an audience when they go hear it. I'm trying to see what happens when the work does not depend on those other very important, very rigid factors."

What is this art that has nothing of something else in it? Surely there is too much easy connecting of art with other procedures. Standing in the friars' cells of Fra Angelico in Florence it seemed correct (even novel) to return to the image (the note, the word) as object of solitary contemplation, cut off from all those extraneous vitiating pursuits that are supposed to make us feel so good about our involvement with art. "I think we lost that religiosity about music, about *sound itself*. We don't want to live in a convent."

Think of thing, not of them. "If you need an audience, we don't need you."

I wonder even more about the continuing viability of *writing* as an art form, it being so bound to the engines of explanation. This writing here a huge frustration, since it can never embody what it is pointing at and swirling around (discussion). I should just shut up. It could just shut itself off? Feldman stopped writing his essays . . .and one could usefully wonder at just what point in his music?

"But you're not supposed to *understand* art. You're supposed to understand *culture*. Culture is mutual understanding. That is not communication. Communication is what I have in my music, with myself. Communication is when people don't understand each other. Because then there is a consciousness level that is being brought out of you, where an effort is made."

What is the story? No, what is the subtext? No, what is the substance? And what is all this going on between the masterpieces?

Doesn't it seem that the musical structures have become lodged, like grammar, in the same connectiveness, leading us always back along the same definitions to the same conclusions? Couldn't we afford to lose a lot of this purely connective tissue? But who wants to face up to *a* tone, rise or fall?

Are you in a misery, or agony of doubt, or just a mild malaise? Said complaint, whatever region or even form of relaxation, tagged to be relieved by a certain shelf-life music? It drips down the sides of the cabinets. But your job is not to fence or lap it up. Leave that to the border cats. The job is, perhaps, to ice it.

"I like the long pieces because you don't drink it, you sip it. You get saturated more and more. The only way you get deep color in rugs is to dip it over and over. You can't put Z against A in ten minutes. It takes saturating. And time is the liberator."

Feldman's music seems never to manipulate, as if never overdetermining its destination, so not rushing to insure the most ease (audience) in getting there. An absolutely non-rhetorical music ("I'm the Master of Nonfunctional Harmony"). A music without god or stain. A music as dependent on you as milk on the sky.

His makes all other music sound anxious for more space, for higher speed.

And he reminds me of what writing has never quite been able to get away with: Lost in that field purely of nouns that verb and stretch and edge, a radiance which comes when things are not used, not used with other things.

"The Abstract is not involved with ideas. It is an inner process like another consciousness. There is a real fear of the Abstract because one does not know its function. The Abstract Experience is only one thing—a unity that leaves one perpetually speculating. Whereas the literary kind of art, the kind we are close to, is in-

volved in the polemic we associate with religion, the Abstract Experience is really far closer to the religious. Collision with the instant is the first step to the Abstract experience. It cannot be represented. Once you make the leap into the Abstract there are no longer any definitions."

And silence for certain matters. The core function of art will not be defined. It operates according to what appear to be other than consistent laws.

This cannot be said.
This cannot be said.
There are no words.
There may be notes
but they are in another realm.

"You just have to forget about yourself."

25I88

from NINE

Picture the square whose huge bronze canters when the light
on the dashboard warns SHIFT. But to think
that someone was getting the word, crossing
chores off a list, as fire will eventually warm
the most distant of rooms! If Monk's music
were his middle name, Sphere (9+3: twelve
tones), Ohio Blue Tips dropped from the thirteenth floor strike
on the sidewalk, sonata intruding for prepared piano.

Tonight she will start in again on Battista Sforza, regarding
d'Urbino's stare. But the more I thought about my name
mentioned the less it seemed to mean me.
Happy the bride the sun shines on today—
she begins to speak freely of homophones, mis en bouteille
sixteen years ago, a voice at the about-to-swing Dutch door.

Let it also be said that her plans included whatever follows.
Lilting comes back to want more of the Bach
Cantata, a vulture on the fencepost reviewing
frost on greens the first foresome stride toward—if this isn't
speech what is? Yes, he died soon after that, but no, letters
weren't smuggled from an Irish jail inside a visitor's vagina.
Sand fairways, on the other hand, best characterize Persian
Gulf golf, along with lizard-hole hazards and brown greens.

Profound amounts of garlic suggest Mediterranean connection
—if you lend me your razor I'll buy you the long sleepy drive
to Suite 1, 1782. A mountain of a man at 6' 7",
the toll taker's lower lip was like a second chin

sucking his soft candy half way home. Superior Hitchcock
given the violins, but does he know *anything* about shiatzu?

What cherished most running the risk of definition, so simple
to rest as a guide. Cold may snap your filed nails, yield again
the glasses lost beyond finding. We changed
in 1960 to a metamorphic style, such relaxed
lines, the periodic red slide intact as bars at every window.
Little rhymed with reason then, and under fluorescent lights
the smoke looked purpler. Meanwhile, I'll read a book in lieu
of driving (my guess is it was Getz who played the last four).

Does jammed together make sense, is that what you're saying?
Or TV news isn't "classic," the world's space endurance record
only 211 days? An arrangement in black and white
becomes Whistler's mother, which clearly affirms
what I've always held—the door to the room the light enters
as down the leaves and shiplap sides of walls November rains.

Ohio the first word of a sentence I dreamed I forgot, oil filter
augments the dominant thirteenth. So those are the columns
going down, Doctor Tuesday morning or afternoon, C and F
tied for the marathon fifth. For blue moon go back two
to the non-smoking table with red napkins
with green stars advancing toward Saturday,
which is however far away. There you'll make friends (verbal
inevitability, the blond answers to Zebra).

At which point counterpoint takes over, each sentence starting
from scratch. Ten adjacent spaces out from NO PARKING,

the fiddler we both hear talking of books is an Asian grocer
whose safe looks like head lettuce. Typology
means of spanning the ego/id abyss, the voice
changing when the poem begins: softer, breathless, hushed.

I'm trying to put this correctly, you might give fat trout more
than seven minutes. Thinned flesh-colored paint under bitten
nails, in licking for the flea she lost another patch of fur: I'm
trying to get this succinctly, and plant the avocado in a glass,
and think about tomorrow without undue alarm.
One of them if you're doing a portrait, otherwise
flashing off the film *Mary Had A Little Lamb,* cyclonic front.
Or say that words speak "to into over even until so for after

telephone specials. And be sure to ask about our telephone
specials." In what sense is French vanilla better than butter?
Strangeness, color, flavor, a backward glancing
of violins edged aside by the cellos—in a word
the music one finds in a song. All prepositions would make
adrenalin poisoning, which may be only the question.

Like waves of rhythm on four congas, any atmospheric effects
thereafter will be a subtle change of feeling.
You are percussive but can't keep track of it,
as if slinking with your bone against the wall you thought
no one could see you. The lights are a constant row, cadenza
read as The Heartbreaks, Larks, Four Barons, Ravens, Robins,
Swallows, Toppers, Syncopators, Striders and Billy Bunn and
His Buddies among others on Doo-Wop Delights tonight.

Concerning the notion of motion in music, is counterpoint
one vast tone poem, books in many languages all the same?
The ants come after syrup (cough) spilled on berries
under the empty branch, thirty-second bits and pieces
shuffled to find an arrangement the ocean at maximum roars,
the shadows behind me thrilling to join nouns to verbs.

Watery mornings the curbs were awash, the frogs then lifting
throats to the wind. You used to disagree without recourse to
fuck, Roman Shades fading at the clubhouse turn—
play the tune when the page turns. What you see
now is not the same view, so feel free to record over my voice
if you don't want it in it. Folded the sun would shine on you,
as at length every pageboy knows its own shoulder regardless
of the rose-stuffed couch whose Ur-print looks so nice.

Spelling test beguine, "annaxxacanthus," O flightless parrot,
where then moored the ancient skerry? Hamlet's father's ghost
wants his due, and the woman who cuts hay doesn't have it—
ethnic jokes seemingly at one's own expense.
So play gin if you can't keep poker straight,
the lions and tigers and bears dressed in a hoop will ignore it.

Because the block bowed where backwash filled it (six miles
of steel), grandmother dialed with a wand instead of her nails.
She hands him the wheel at schoolhouse curve, the librarian
always first to arrive. The doves will be marked
in memory of the three suicides they kept on ice
(Honolulu, Yokohama, Hong Kong, Manila and back, twice)

"BEEF." He too was reading Proust when the war broke out,
and the heat did not wilt them, their clothes did not wrinkle.

High cloud drizzle, hard cider, cream dried in the cast iron pan.
Refusing to say I'm broke again, Seasons Greetings
from a Bedu tent. Fuck the sense of never sleeping,
the tablecloth provides for all three cats. Inside the "A" side
drives the storm track north, in the empty quarter you forget
you don't know a chord from a key, so give me the shirt.

Too vigorous to give up active surgery, the weatherman knew
to put the touch bevel-side under. He used to be able to tell
a '57 Bellaire wasn't big enough to stop him drinking coffee,
now lets a couple of shingles bar the ledge.
Launching notes on the '22 grand cru, macho
as in demeanor, he talked specifically of the Dalkon Shield
whose hoop screwed the sea's concert: "sixty-six Hispanic
faculty, so you can't even shit without meeting a saint."

After hours of soft curves a redwood splinter. But consider
the theory of contrary opinion, where had to is not always
should have. At the top of the chart another fish
blows the wash north by northwest into plumes.
And why not learn to read the right way, letting them whisper
monosyllabically, fingers tandem inventing the keys?

DION FARQUHAR

TREADING CULTURE

Things used to be so much simpler: socialism or barbarism. Now it's either a babbling deconstructor or a First Amendment proto-fascist rabble-rouser. And Barthes run over by a speeding milk truck. Eleven planes took off while she waited for the bus, the express bus they called it. New York slash Calcutta. Not counting the landings, about one per take-off, but harder to see because they swooped down behind the same low terminal building the planes rose from. J.F.K. Express.

Potholes married to shot shocks of a mid-generation bus made your teeth clack, banged your shins against the plastic seats in front. The commodity nomadic, twenty-four hours a day. And they can't fix the roads. Or the subways. All this for under ten dollars. Support your local police.

The little prince the night bomber seeing the blood spread like anemones. Wrong war. Anyway. Accounts of the Hiroshima bombing told of survivors stumbling burned, battered, fleeing the city in long files on narrow rough paths while a smooth easy road lay empty and parallel. Muses mute, Minerva to radiated wind. Unable to see the pyre for the flames. And she on the set, unsettled, wondering whose funeral it was. Positively Periclean.

Now that summer school was over, she was supposed to be working. But it was always the same feeling since grammar school infatuations with nuns made beautiful by cascading veils and layers of long, ample skirts. (She fell in love with the sound of their rustle.) It was in sixth grade with Sister Placida that she was first self-consciously seduced by talk. The nuns taught her so well about form that much later she could prefer Bouvard and Pécuchet's discussion of eucharist to Hume's: "The miracle is done with words, however unworthy the priest."

Since grammar school she had dreamed of relentless abundance. The opposition of a couple makes a circle, says Plato in the *Phaedo:* "If generation were a straight path to the opposite extreme without any return to the starting point or any deflection, everything would have the same quality and change would cease altogether."

What put her over the line, she remembered, was the idea of bomb shelters. Your parents and siblings all together in one room, in an underground cement bunker, sleeping on fold-out bunks and eating canned food, unable to go outside for years. Not the good life.

Slowly, she backed off from the compulsion to call yet another indifferent lover she was pursuing. They all had their reasons for not being there, even the ones who lived with her and were advertisements for monogamy. Every one had a story, plus ça change, it was a cast of thousands (if you count families)—unparented short-circuited northern wasps, suffocating overparented Jews, mercurial psychotics of assorted lineage, brilliantly vicious narcissists. The script was the same, and she cast one shadow after the other, courting absence, nursing the sick, unable to bury the dead. But they were not dumb, and they liked their women smart. Maybe Mary Shelley had the right idea: let me build my own man.

Remembering she had left a welcome home message on Tony's tape yesterday, never trusting the technology completely, and now the beep went on at least twenty seconds too long, and who knew what that augured. How times change, she thought, with the evanescent memory of the literate.

"I'll take a quick trip to Europe," she thought, now that the summer was three-quarters over and she was depressed and not getting anything done. Tony was back and still putting her off. She tried to remember that with Tony a heavy flirt signified nothing beyond the moment. Go to Europe. To do that she would have to leave New York. Though greatly attached to her city, all travel marked her strongly, beginning with the ride to the airport.

Go to Europe. Not that she was rich, perhaps the top of the lower third or the bottom of the middle third in income bracket, but she was resourceful and had links with the underground economy. And terrorism and radiation had lowered the fares. Stop crying or give herself something to cry about. One of the Guerrilla Girls posters proliferating in her neighborhood had caught her eye one steamy summer night coming out of a cafe. It was a bold black on white with large clean capitals that said: "IT'S WORSE IN EUROPE." But daily life anywhere out of New York seemed materially easier.

Berlin would not be bad, she thought. A city halved by a wall was ironic and most importantly, there were friends, each one in

their gigantic apartments and alternative jobs. They seemed to sit in cafes and wine bars endlessly, never get drunk, and be almost as depressed as her friends in New York. Ute recovering from the married opera singer, Monika pregnant and crazy about Berndt who still wasn't sure, Mina celibate.

Trying to get comfortable on a plane, let alone get some sleep, was next to impossible. For once she had landed some interesting seatmates, a Lebanese couple recently relocated in Nice, though he still commuted to West Beirut for business. The woman, Nada, it means dew in Arabic, spoke of the ubiquitous fear of carbombs, the terror of raising children in West Beirut. He, Rashid, knew politics and history and his own class contradictions, beyond his work as tractor salesman, and all three talked through most of the long trans-Atlantic night, alternating anecdotes, analyses about their nations' fundamentalisms, their stories and comraderie shielding her from the turbulence.

Bumping around in a dehydrated cigar tube thinly disguised to look like a movie set while flying through the air at 400 mph for seven hours, one couldn't help thinking about death. She shifted her face toward the headrest, trying to get comfortable and could feel the invasive grit of polyester against her cheek. What capitalism giveth, capitalism taketh away. One prays, oh double standard, that the pilot isn't stoned on coke, the ground mechanics on grass, please, she wanted all their motor control and wits about them so cargo doors wouldn't fall off, so they could fly straight. For once, she hoped the workers did their jobs scrupulously, not caring about their alienation. Never mind what passengers did in bathrooms (as long as they aimed the recalcitrant smoke down the drains). Fly the friendly skies. Up, up, and away. Let us play.

The magnificence of flying—birds breathe pure air, the ancients thought—was almost obliterated by its total commodification. Dedalus, Icarus, Phoenix, her parakeets. But if you got high enough, spent enough, paid the piper (like turning your head into a cab to ride the subway without screaming or crying), you could make the commodity luscious. Finger-licking good. She had heard that the Concorde had buttery leather seats. Up furrowed narrow aisles, modest scale, aero-dynamically designed, by Italians. And from the cockpit you could see the curvature of the earth. Imagine. Trafficking streams a whole three hours. In and out, cockpit wide open.

Spectors, shades sating like omnivores, the speed of sound. (The more you pay, the more they trust you. Jordanians only slipped plastic bombs into unwitting Irish lovers' handbags boarding jumbo jets.)

Now the technology of flying offered a thousand combinatorial ways to die. Earth. Air. Fire. Water. By being crushed and impacted by one's own body pressed into itself, or flung outward into molecular pieces by explosion, or fire in the air before the crash, or on impact, flames roaring, ripping through the flammable cabin, or drowning as water seeps or floods through the fuselage. Night, Chaos, Eros are all wingèd. The Japanese businessmen on the pitching and rolling JAL flight, actually took out paper and pen and wrote notes to their families before the crash: love your country, obey your mother, do well in school, you will be missed, remember your father.

What to tell the dying about death, she thought in a lull in the conversation, that's the most difficult. What unites us is what most individuates us. If they're believers, tell 'em, this day you shall be with me in paradise. For the rest of us Cartesians, the idea that there is no more me is as paradoxical as the proposition "Everything in the universe doubled in size last night."

A few days later, she wrote postcards from an Amsterdam cafe. Travel solves nothing. Miserable amidst Van Gogh, despite canals and hash bars. In fact, it threw one back on oneself more than being home, eroding the finely wrought control that radiated from routine and her apartment, a tight aesthetic, compensatory control.

Her place was so comfortable now, after years of careful carpentry and calibrated consumption, capable of nestling a shoulder against the back cushion of the couch, cradling a hip in the corner of the sectional, providing hospitable surfaces for papers, generously placed lighting—all this on top of design, the Vasily chair, sanded floors, and the prize—her many framed posters, walnut on the Morandi, birch on the Rothko drawing, subway map in a thin Neilsen bright blue of the "A" line, uncompromised attention to detail. She periodically photographed the apartment with greater fervor than Amsterdam.

She'd fought Larry, her ex, for the five-room apartment, and she'd won. When they broke up—after one good year, two passable ones, and two years of hell—each told the other to leave, and each refused. They even got lawyers, but nothing could be done. They

were both on the lease. So they stuck it out as roommates for an entire year and a half, each living in two rooms, sharing kitchen and bathroom. She frequently suffered his door-slamming, temper displays, and general incivility. She'd offered to buy him out and even apartment-hunted for him. Everything was either too small or too expensive. And why should he be the one to move, after all, she'd ruined his life. It was all her fault. Her friend Julie, who had spent four years in Belgrade, assured her that her situation was common in Eastern Europe; estranged couples couldn't separate because of the housing shortage. Wasn't this like insisting on describing horses as wheel-less automobiles? Besides, they had better cafes and their academics didn't work like driven Protestants.

Early on, Larry's married girlfriend from New Jersey gave him a kitten. Now whether or not she knew that his ex was allergic is beside the point. He knew. So she lived with her ex and his cat, ingesting daily rations of allergy pills—better living through chemistry—occasionally regarding the frisky kitten with an eye to discreetly heaving it out a window or stuffing it in the refrigerator, but it was cute, so she didn't. When the kitten was a full fledged cat, on its way to feline middle age, Larry was finally ready to move, and he left the day after she returned from Japan to move to New Jersey, into the girlfriend's house, husband long gone. She was a nice person. Poor thing.

She met her old friend Gordon in Amsterdam on his detour from Paris, and they spent two days together. Enjoying liberal Holland (trick or treat) that threw out the lens-grinding Jew for teaching that each is a tiny worm in the blood of some great being, and mocked arguments from absurd design. Amsterdam was a city in which she felt the imperative of fucking, and it was good to be there with Gordon, a friendship of six years, the slide of signifiers, penetration without patriarchy. He had mentioned religion the other night in bed, in response to her complaint that her just-finished summer course was full of idiots (or very difficult students, at the very least), that they but one, were anti-porn. And Gordon had said laughing, "Even when I was a fundamentalist, I wasn't anti-porn." All those business majors, they're scared, like her parents. Victims passing the ammunition, Marx knew, make the best police.

The first over-layer of her fundamentalism had foundered on Catholicism's rigidity on the sexual. She couldn't see a lifetime of confession to thin-lipped voyeuristic priests. The Kinsey Reports

were coming out, for Christ's sake. All the non-Catholic couples she babysat for, and there were several (thank God it was Manhattan!), had a "Marriage Manual" in the closet. Every babysitter knew that if they had one, it would be on the top shelf in the back of the big closet in the couple's bedroom. By the early sixties marriage manuals devoted several entire pages to the clitoris. At fifteen that was the one part she understood. Late bloomer. Reading the past through the present at last. She was a woman of the next century. "Hysteria will absolve me."

Fundamentalism was one of the decade's themes so she had been forced to think about the nature of moralism. At the end of the Fourth of July weekend she was driving back from Amherst to New York with her friend Tom. Visiting different people, they exchanged capsuled stories on the road, talking a blue streak. The car radio segued into an early '60s rock song, u-bee, do-be, do-oo. Was disgust a fitting emotion? Denunciation not helpful? The teen angel lived or died of his love. He was cool and indifferent. It wasn't the single standard of Italian opera: the duet, *morir per te, viver per te*. How could such a message not be reactionary? Tom generously contended it was the affirmation of individual choice over parental decision. That context made it something else.

It's OK, she thought, by analogy to teenage religious zealotry, to have sought out the verbal humiliation of confession, and seek it she had. The fantasy is that it is not consensual. First of all, it turned her on, introducing her to mind-fuck, the only way non-bourgeois Catholics have a prayer of becoming intellectuals. Launched by the rush of interiority at fifteen, she knew she was onto something. There was more to this than Palestrina. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Apostolic we keep. The one dies hard.

Alle menschen werden Brüder, quotes a finally-animated, Habermas at Northwestern, smiling to Nancy's gender question at the public lecture, engaging her totally and personally from the podium, an ex cathedra of sorts, the connection between them materially palpable, pristine, transparent across the auditorium, having forgiven her for her paper "What's Critical about Critical Theory?" Shilly shally. The one point Christianity improves on Plato: equal souls. Posthumously. Nancy's concern perfectly conveyed a thousand miles as easily as if they held each other's gaze.

In response to hearing a lot of high seriousness at a conference about Tiresias drinking the blood, the insistence on a single collec-

tive story, she wanted to protest, cite the pop culture figures. Art's all that's left, she thought. If it's capillary action they want, check out pop culture. Like Dracula, sucking and fucking his willing victims into faints, making the daughters of bourgeoisie unpresentable, keeping odd hours, rattling their coffins in castle basements, the living dead who disturb the peace of the fathers, pious physicians from the Netherlands. But it is Tiresias over Dracula in the canon, the safely dead, bloodless in museums like the new hospital-architecture MOMA, no rocking the boat at the drop of a hat.

Sailing the Sunfish with Nancy, lucid, brilliant Nancy in New Hampshire, the "F" in her last name she would spell, "'F' as in 'feminist'." She had particularly enjoyed making it sail as fast as it could, until the boat roared along shearing the water almost on its side at a forty-five degree angle. Aristotle says we get virtue by tacking, never in a straight line. But sailing, unlike the ethical life, is not moderate. You tack (or was it coming about?), because if you don't, Nancy had shouted, laughing through the foam and roar of the water, you crash into those rocks on the shore.

She went to German towns that had escaped the bombing. One was perfectly spruced up, every pointed brick shone, all pink and mint, pale orange, ochre, and blue facades from the eighteenth century. After one day of walking every exemplary clean street, visiting scrubbed cathedrals and precious shops, where even the pastry looked architectural, she half-expected to see Donald Duck in Alpine britches coming out of a doorway putting the garbage out.

Walter, her 60-year-old neighbor and bicycle partner called to continue their chat. She had bumped into him that afternoon on the street on her way back from buying ammonia for her cleaning man, if that's what he was; she'd used him once before. She couldn't stop for long because it was 95 degrees and there was a pint of Häagen Dazs in the bag with the ammonia. Walter asked what happened with Richard, her sperm donor/co-parent. Settling into a corner of her couch, she told him.

Richard was a psychologist who was chair of the soc department where he had been teaching for fifteen years. He had taken the job as a temporary wunderkind measure, planning to switch to a psych department later. The years passed, he got tenure, and the job squeeze hit psych hard, so he was stuck. He rarely got to teach Freud, had terrible students, and was generally burnt out on the academic bureaucracy. Fortunately, he had a part-time therapy

practice that he loved. He wanted to have and raise a child but wasn't in a relationship so he decided to do it alone.

Before she was introduced to him, Richard had been flying to the big surrogate mother facility in Detroit once a month for six months, cancelling classes and patients' appointments, to inseminate a woman screened by them. Or so he thought. Despite claims to reputability and medical thoroughness (none of this women's center do-it-yourself here), it came out later that the surrogate had one ovary and has had endometriosis, a high sterility risk factor. They did sperm counts on him and precise insertions on her. After six months of trying to conceive, Richard and the woman decide to stop because they can't take the strain (and they aren't even fucking).

Around this time they are introduced by Sarah, a mutual friend who had gone through analytic training at the same institute as Richard. Sarah is so discreet about motives that it takes them two encounters to decide if they are on a date or at a co-parenting meeting. They meet in Chinese restaurants and discuss over shared portions of dried sauteed stringbeans and salt shrimps with ginger why they each want to have a child and what their vision of co-parenting is. More and more she had come to take the side of the children. Dungeons and dragons.

He was always in need of more reassurance about why it might work as they discussed scenarios. She noted this reticence at the time and chose to ignore it. She liked him, no sexual vibes, but a friendship was developing, and she liked his way with the world. The possibilities were fertile. They spent hours on the details—feelings, logistics, finances. She told Walter, "All my eggs were in one basket. But his weren't."

By the time he noticed she was serious about co-parenting, the failed surrogate, who had been counting on the money to go to school, suggested to Richard that he try with her lover. So the surrogate's lover and Richard talked and agreed that they would try, independently of the medical facility. Again, ten thousand dollars went into an account, they signed agreements, and she was medically screened in New York. When she delivers, he gets the baby and she the money. Was this comparable worth?

At the eleventh hour, Richard must decide with whom to reproduce, and after frenzied negotiations all around, he decides to go with the surrogate because she is a sure thing. And then he gets

to raise the child alone, feeling in many ways it's easier that way. She is devastated and flies to New Hampshire to be with Nancy at the lake. The Yankee barn is overrun with ants. The exterminator is unimpressed with Nancy's calls. They cook gourmet food, comb the video stores for stimulation. She reads. Nancy writes.

Walter exudes empathy, saying "Oh, that's terrible" when she tells him Richard picked the surrogate over her. But ultimately understandable. He has money. She doesn't. And she was a risk, one he'd be stuck with. Biology alone is safer for the man. She had been noticing how conservative men are lately, and how women have taken the historical rap for it. But she couldn't see doing it alone, repeating from a feminist perspective what women have always done. Heroic pioneering was one thing. Martyrdom another.

Now real torture is something she wanted to avoid at all costs, and having a child all by herself qualified as real torture. The best description she ever read was by a woman, Oriana Fallaci, (Greek fascists torture resistance leader), but the other fifty percent pretty sucky, about love and a simpering woman. Perhaps part two compensates, apologizes for what part one has done.

She told Walter she understood (weak sense) Richard's choice. So let's stay friends. There was always the perfect ad to appear in *The New York Review*. Walter waxes enthusiastic about this one and that one having met through ads, and now they're getting married. A fairytale.

The problem of a public, being read, even among friends. Only fiction is free. With theory she feels like a fake. She hasn't read what everyone else has, refusing to graze in only one field. Lacking the discipline as well as the family, she never got trained in anything. For better and for worse. She has been passing, having been a pedagogy fundamentalist, reading lists of Great Books handed down by older friends who enjoyed mentoring. She read them systematically, reverentially, oblivious to their forms, satisfied by the virtue of her selection, if not election. But along the way, slowly, she had come to see that it wasn't such hot shit to be let in anyway. (Virginia Woolf commented that as unpleasant as it was to be locked out of the library, it was worse to be locked in.) By the time she realized this, she could feel guilty at having been taken.

She returned to the voice on the phone. Walter has unrealistically high expectations. She warns (weak sense) that it is possible but rare to get what one wants (strong sense) through an ad. Worth

doing, but maybe a one percent chance. The fun of it is hoping, getting thirty-five responses; the down side is that they are all inappropriate. She asks Walter how things are going with Leon, his lover of two decades, and twenty years his junior, who is living a breakdown. He says, "Bad, don't ask." He talks about it anyway, saying Leon is spending beyond his means, not looking for work, and generally proving unable to look after himself. "Oh, that's terrible," she says, echoing his response to her news of Richard's choosing the surrogate. The end, when one can't get out. Perhaps that's the worst. A part of where Walter is now.

Confinement was a big theme in Berlin, and no wonder with a wall or checkpoints in all directions, like fifteen lanes of toll booths except it's passport control, surrounded by barbed wire fences, guard towers, German shepherds, real machine guns. The East Berlin architecture so technocratic she couldn't photograph it. And she rode the city buses for hours, to the end of the line in all directions, testing her credulity. Mile after mile of communist projects, they made abrupt right angled turns and went on for another mile, spiritless, perpendicular, unalleviated by graffiti or garbage. A proletariat appropriated lives here. Square, staid, stolid, the same. Rough equality. For this a life, a bullet through the gut, dumped in a canal.

After twelve hours in East Berlin, she found a street sign that marked the intersection of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebnecht Avenues. The power of naming.

Back on the other side, signs, light snaking for miles. She hit the Ku-damm running, happy to see the neon cafes, twenty deep, a clatter of spoons, agitation raised on forks, carefully scooped as crumbs. Hard to be third camp here, she thought, drinking in the strobing commodification, returning to Bleibtreu Strasse and Monika. *Cave emptor.*

It was as impossible for her to imagine a world without politics or history as a world without writing, when all you had was interlocutors, yak yak yak, wine-dark seas and swift-footed Achilles. Hocus-pocus. Was science nothing more than a mess of porridge? The more transparent the less legible. And what of the abstract and brief chronicles of our time, or the depository of collective experience? The dream of perfect interlocutors had begun in school, grammar school. Shift the object and change the scale. From the bottom up. Double-entry metaphysics.

Plato understood the relation of pleasure and pain: "They will never come to a man both at once, but if you pursue one of them and catch it, you are nearly always compelled to have the other as well; they are like two bodies attached to the same head."

She wasn't so sure. Maybe their stories aren't true. For surely they lie about the body, and it is women who are (all) body, believing them most. For this she would never forgive them and would work against them at every turn. Pour the tea. Signal. Change lanes. In Germany, the law requires a signal to be sustained at least two blinks. She loved their speed, a nation that cruised at 140 (kilometers per hour) in new models, secure in their Mercedes' steel frames. Crossing from East to West, from Communist speed limit to the West's limitlessness, the cars sprung into motion, putting the checkpoint behind them.

He, she, it said. *Dixit Dominus*. Scan the horizon for a miracle. Perhaps a beautiful lady in blue robes in a field, on a dirt road, in a grotto, seen countless times by overwrought children, bored before the news of ennui had spread to southern Catholic countries, imagining their deliverance. And she in New York, loving the breath of Handel, color, form, her thirst, photographs, some- how one with them, wanting to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and do criticism after dinner, or something like that.

She would work against them at every turn, defending the truth of the body wherever she could. That was where one chapter ended, with her giving an account. Plato says in the *Theaetetus* that account means putting your differentness into words.

The eighties were tough. They all had lied, preaching obedience to boot, parents and teachers, all complicitous, filling their charges' heads with lean lies without flesh, or sinew or bone. An axe to grind. Lizzie Borden betrothed to Bluebeard. There was no Prince Charming, and no Cinderella, the ball a bore, fairy godmothers and evil stepmothers were neither or both, beauty a straightjacket in their hands, and the coin of the realm filthy lucre.

By the mid-eighties, the sixties had been over only a decade, prematurely feted as dead. We got Springsteen, Dylan of our time, who tells us on record that his father wanted a lawyer, his mother an author, and they had to make do with rock 'n roll. To concerted cheers, castrati contracted to courts. Now Apollo's a spaceship, Argo a starch, Nike is plural as running shoes, Delta an airline, Emily Post our Proust.

And then there's the rush to religion at all levels, Hartman a rabbi saving the text, Kristeva and Sollers and the who-which-whats from Peking have gone over to Rome. Para-dis. And this is not the Rome of her friend Carla, who in May 1968 ran through the streets with thousands of others crying: *Perigi brucia, Roma brucira,* Roman Rome she would oppose at every turn. Homer over Rome, like Simone called it, starving herself to death. Desire in language. *Pas moi.*

Who, what had stolen or silenced the souls of her parents, a whole generation of them? What had gone down in those bourgeois nurseries, one-room peasant houses, urban slums before the crossings over with nannies, nonas, bubas. Then the passage over, did they loose it or had they never had it? The material struggle, rises and falls in fortune, left little surplus for coping with the death of imagination. When they weren't working, they sat in front of television sets, eagerly bringing them home, crown jewels on cushions, welcoming the first console, a place of honor in the living room, then the first portable, finally the color set, a king's ransom. The mystery of civil obedience celebrated nightly.

It was so sad. But that did not stop the children from calling their parents worms, as Paul had his father the other day. This the admission that it could have been otherwise. Ought implies can. Of this taxonomic principle, too, she was unsure: victims are not worms. Plato understood that contradiction about generation. Bronze parents could produce gold children or the other way around. But argues that radical change entails breaking the nuclear family because fathers hand down fallacies to sons, *per omnia secula seculorum.* No nukes. Twist her arm.

The two Francis Bacons. Eggs over easy. A side of pork. The English can't cook. *Nature Morte.* Cheek by imploded jowl. Bringing home the bacon, from the laboratory to the kitchen and back again. The first Bacon made it clear. We will interrogate nature, draw her on the rack, stretch her secrets from her. Triptych in deed. Pillar to post. Newman fucked the canon too. The Stations of the Cross. The fifteenth has an orange stripe down the left side. The first Bacon died of pneumonia from experimenting with chickens in a cold dark cave, pouring ice down their throats to test freezability. Oven stuffers. It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken.

The second Bacon as a child was beaten by his father, an obsessive horse trainer. Boy-love. The first Bacon wrote James I,

militant witch persecutor, on the glories of scientific experiment: "You have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able when you like to lead and drive her afterward to the same place again. . . .Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into those holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object. . . ." Nobody here but us physics. Boys will be boys.

She had been introduced to the second Bacon by her Brazilian friend Fernando, in the early seventies, at a small gathering at his and Argentine Pedro's apartment on the twenty-sixth floor over Picasso court with a northern skyline view, perfect cuisine and touches like half-frozen cokes in little green glass bottles. On this gentle night together, tangos playing, they were all tripping on mescaline. She and Fernando were sitting on the floor up against the northern wall of glass when he pulled a *Maestri del Colore,* the Bacon number, out of a wicker basket on the floor, saying in mellifluous Carioca, Look, Diana, do you know Francis Bacon, the painter? No, show me. He slowly turned the pages for her. Couples, cardinals, portraits. Oh my God! Alle-gory. This was a different vision, critical to the point of self-laceration.

But never cruel. Like Stanley K. to Blanche. The only unforgivable thing is deliberate cruelty. It all hangs on the status of "deliberate." Maybe that's what to tell her kids when they taunted her repeatedly, "Why study philosophy?" She answered them, "So you can be better poets." Starving us slowly is nothing in comparison to what they have done to our souls. Bread and roses. Along with Wittgenstein, who thinks there are things that can be shown that cannot be said. A discipline hostile to poetry in its founding myths.

There shall be no end to quarrel and dissention until philosophers be monarchs. Banana republics. Plato got it wrong, hated the hoi polloi to the degree he acknowledged the power of convention. Bad customs "would habituate lions to flee deer!" Christianity would have the lion lie down with the lamb. Marx would turn lambs into vigilant sheep. She the cow that jumped over the moon. Little Bo-Peep. Until philosophers be poets.

Let them be fruitful and multiply, the free play of forms. Stop the obsessive worry about standards until everyone has had a chance to speak. Fuck the canon that has gagged generations, the tip of the iceberg, torn out our tongues, stopped up our ears, filled us with noise. The Enlightenment. Ha. *Fiat Lux.* Brand names. Story of the

Eye. *Arbeit macht frei.* Crossing the border to avoid the bother of a police investigation. In translation. Embattled. Writing as disaster, the ultimate perversion. Against the idolization of labor. *De omnibus dubitandum.*

HILDA MORLEY

OUT OF NOTHING

That time, over 20 years ago, in Venice—
I said: I'm on the track of a mystery:
                the consonance
between men's bodies & the bodily rhythm
of a city riding on the sea
                This time, 12 weeks ago—
it was no mystery, only a thread dropped once,
recovered now:
                face to face with
our beginnings, surrounded
by the shapes we had guessed were
somewhere,
                hinted at, glimpsed
when we first came forth from the sea,
                the amniotic
sea, launched into
separateness,
                in light
                & screaming
our discomfort,
                to be attached & not
attached,
                separate
yet never alone, How we longed for
that web, those threads, how often
mistaking a touch for a belonging
that was not there & being alone
for independence.
                But here
in the "loveliest of cities" all
is reflected, given back,
                related
in form,
                so substance

This poem will appear in a new collection of Hilda Morley's poems, *Cloudless At First* (Moyer Bell Ltd.) to be published in 1988.

itself melts into other substance: the shape we make,
whether
mounting or descending
a curved bridge or
sitting under arches
near San Marco sheltering
from the rain,
seeing umbrellas flower
as Italian violets, pale lemons,
apple-greens,
blood-oranges, to feed
our eyes.
What is reflected is
a part of the same curve,
related as
one stone inside the arching of
a colonnade answers the curving
of another, the paired notes
chiming
& even in the chill of
late March, early April warmth
is echoed from these walls, these courtyards,
gardens
half-hidden by wrought-iron
gateways, from heavy oaken doors, their boltings
carved, eloquent,
the narrow passageways, faces
of the passerby,
clouds scurrying
alongside,
lovers
their rosy cheeks touching
in the rain, eyes alight.
They are a recognition.
It is the inner life
salutes the outer.
(Fingers stretching
make bridge-railings
what they are,
our breathing
is air moving,
trees branching
into wind)

I had thought—as I remembered it,
there would be space between us,
space flowing
as if at the end of a long scarf
rippling
in wind:
the buildings,
light, the water, a shimmering
& air between us moving,
but space nevertheless.
So it was, once, that time—over
20 years ago,
when I walked with him here.
I remember from then the cobblestones
& my feet hurting.
But this time
all is different: I am caught up—it is all one, all
made of a single piece
in a belonging
I never felt before.
I am inside it—an organ living
in this body of delight,
or a stream running
over bridges, along canals,
joyousness
in the twisting grillwork,
a thoughtfulness
in carved windows,
in the little squares.
They make a network & they fill me
blown into curves that merge with theirs,
in essences
of dance-reflections.
For it is out of nothing
that we began—like this city,
foundlings
in a reed-cradle, survivors
in the bulrushes.
All our treasures
purloined on pilgrimages—
desperate errands
in irrelevance.

WILLIAM CORBETT

INTRODUCING BEN WATKINS

Ben Watkins and I have been friends for more than twenty years. He can be as formidable in argument as anyone I have ever known. I can see and hear him some twelve to fifteen years ago constructing one of his brilliant machines mowing down all in its path. He was arguing against photography as an art, and I was no match for him. Now my revenge is to introduce this selection of his photographs made over the past three years. I have no "I told you so" because Ben hasn't come around to my way of seeing things. He is busy pursuing his own point of view.

When you know someone well and see them frequently events blur. I don't remember exactly when Ben picked up a camera in earnest. But soon after he did his house began to fill up with cameras and film; his book shelves with books of photographs and, after a time, his walls with prints of his work. Ben does nothing halfway. Before photography his interests were wine, the piano and bicycles. He went into these with his characteristic omnivorous attention, and while he drinks, plays and rides today these were diversions on his way. At least this is how it looks in hindsight. Ben had no idea he was on any "way" to something that could involve him totally, mind and body, and be his work.

This work has not only encompassed mastering the machines and techniques of photography but finding his eye, finding what in the world he wants to see with his camera. And his eye has lighted on city structures and people as landscape.

The attempt at categorization is mine. I am struck by the way the infrared Albany State House or Alexander Hamilton on a snowy day in Boston and the soon to be obliterated Dover Street Station (also in Boston—Ben's home for twenty-five years) are both solid and delicate. They are here in material presence with a suggestion of their spiritual nature. The headless bag lady in "Franklin Street, Boston," the leaping roller skater and snake with sunbathing youth are, I guess, also structures in that there is no attempt at indicating

character. These people *are* the landscape that surrounds us in the city.

To my eye Ben's work descends from Atget and Paul Strand. I find its spirit classical and its nature somewhat severe. Perhaps chaste is a better way of putting it. Nothing offhand or taken for granted. It is as if the world Ben sees has composed itself, and he must have the patience and persistence to catch it just as it is. But that's what I see today. There is much more to come. The pleasure of this introduction is that it introduces the work of a late bloomer, a man who has come in his late forties to see what his work is, who wasn't even making images five years ago. Ben is in the position of knowing what he knows now and starting all over again. And start he has!

Boston 8 November '87

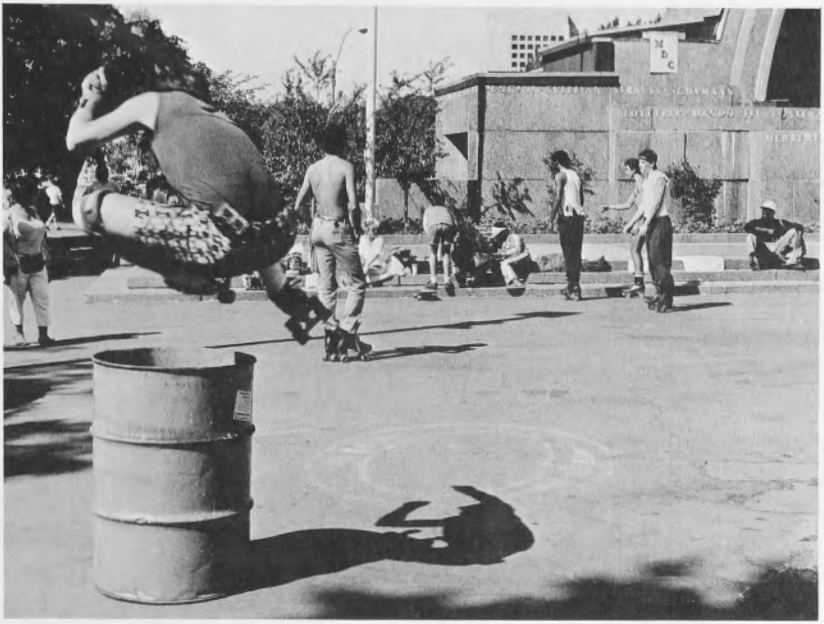
BEN WATKINS

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS

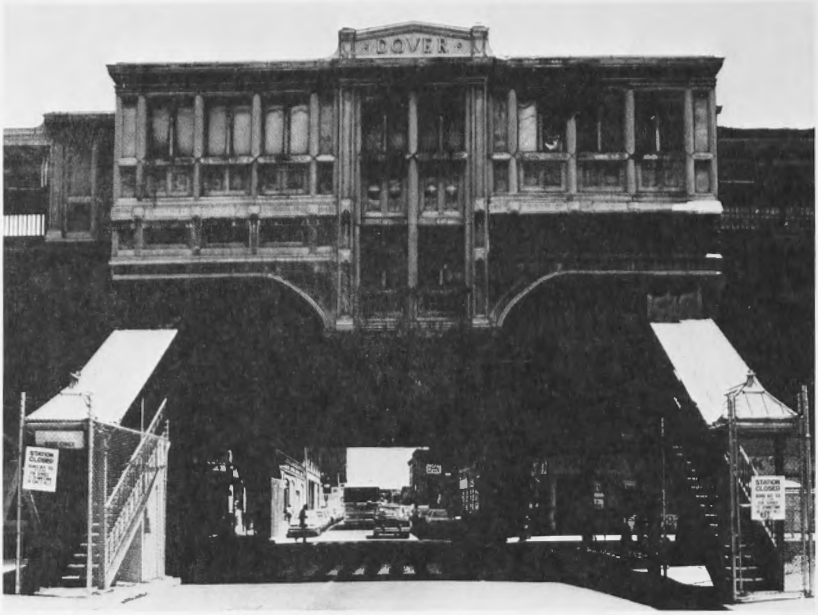
FRANKLIN STREET, BOSTON, 1986

COMMONWEALTH AVENUE, BOSTON, 1986

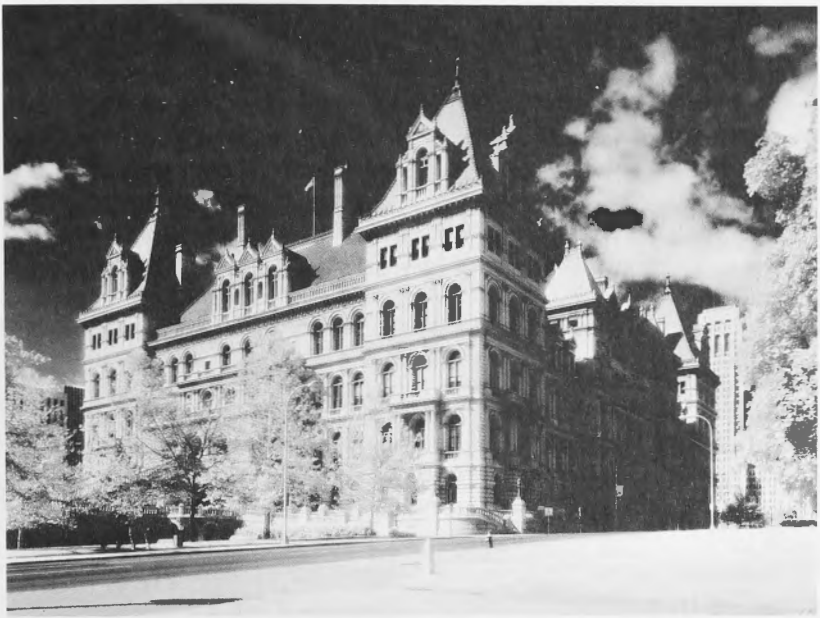
WEST CANTON STREET, BOSTON, 1987



ESPLANADE, BOSTON, 1987



DOVER STATION, BOSTON, 1987



STATE HOUSE, ALBANY, NY, 1986

CLIO DESCENDING: NORMAN O. BROWN AS AMERICAN MODERNIST

PART I Three Sisters

I begin with a story, imaginary but true.
"Police today picked up and booked a suspect who has been charged with several counts of fraud and perjury. The suspect, an old woman, of no fixed address, believed to be of Greek descent, has been working for many years as a bunco artist. Cross-examined by Chief of Detectives Brown, she could only repeat, over and over, a long rambling story."

Quite right that Clio should stick to her story. Right that, in the face of all the evidence, she should insist that it makes sense. What else has she got to say? Beginning and middle and end. Tell a story as if there's a story to tell. Once upon a time. But what if there's no story to tell? If there hasn't been for years? Keeps the kids quiet. Not to mention the old goats.

Stout plump Clio. . . . . .sorry, wrong Greek. Conservative old Clio, determined to go down with the plot. The case of her sisters has for some time now been a very different one. Many years ago, after the Russian theater closed down, Terpsichore went to New York, smashed the old patterns and, after a post Petipal pause, found release in freedom, meaning in abandon. Euterpe, putting down her lyre, took to tapes and technology, emitting bleeps and clangers, and finally settled down to a very good job as an electronics engineer. Where, you ask, is harmony, mighty harmony? Where indeed—picking tonal clusters. Heigh ho the Berio! Of course Euterpe's old music can still soothe us as we linger in the museum, tracing figures in the gathering dust, listening to Mozart and the other Etruscans.

So much for the swinging sisters. Other than learning to count, Clio clung to the old ways. Now time's running out on Clio. Hurry up please it's time. Goodnight ladies. Closing time. Goodnight, Clio, Goodnight.

PART II Vox Populi, Vox Goldbug

Allow me to perpetrate a solecism. (What's good enough for God will surely do for a professor?)[1] Norman O. Brown, American writer. It's not how long he's been in America but how long America's been in him.

Ezra Pound is one of those in him. Ezra Pound, modernist. Ezra Pound going east. What did he go for? Not for history, which he hated (who can blame him for that?: bloody old Europe!), but for the past. Those who have the future are condemned to need the past: need it most of all. Ezra Pound finding modernism in the past, ransacking China, Provence, Rome. Back to the classics! NOB and Pound—two classic cases. Pound's classicism is pretty dubious, you say? Ah well, Hailey ain't Oxford.

There's no escaping Pound's ideas in the making of this other American; no escaping the vision of the past in the *Cantos:* the hatred of usury: the determination not to be taken in by all that glitter, all that phony history: by the bankers and the politicians and the public lies. NOB and Pound—two radical cases. Scorn for the conventional and the respectable. NOB and Pound sharing a Populist mood. Certainly there was a bit of "blessed madness" there in Kansas. Mary Lease as a Kansas Maenad; "Sockless Jerry" Simpson as a prairie George Fox: lots of internal heat, even with shoes.[2]

Yet it is so often an untenable mood, an unstable position. It was for Pound. The Cross of Gold and Populist democracy led in some tangled way to Fascism and St. Elizabeth's. Even more untenable for NOB. His radicalism has had always to be resolutely undemocratic: "esoteric, and aristocratic, self-consciously separate from the profane vulgar."[3] For him the academy becomes the political battleground. Problems enough there! You may convert even Kansas, but an American University? We must recover the mysterious and the secret; recover the sense of mystic ecstasy and bacchic frenzy found in Ficino's academy or Plato's. Sure. You bet. But if you bet you lose. That idea has been greeted with conspicuous coolness at Panhandle A & M, and further on up the line too, though bacchic frenzy has found its adherents. Norman Brown as Professor Mary Lease thundering: "Let's raise more hell and publish less corn." It is a complex fate being a university prophet. Vico knew. Prophets should be disregarded, not promoted. Anyway, at the end of both roads, Populist and radical academic, there is only heartbreak. This new country is so very old; more conservative than any place. What an odd place to come to, to make it (politically) new. Goethe knew: "Amerika—du hast ein besser standard of living." A *New Yorker* cartoon: [two Puritans looking over the prow of their ship; one says]: "Initially I've come over for religious freedom, but in the long run I'm interested in real estate."

Ezra Pound going East. Ezra Pound going east for Kulchur. A modernist or a barbarian? Perhaps both. Listen to the song the shopsalesmen sang:

The Goths came over the Ocean
The Goths came over the Ocean
The Goths came over the Ocean
(tourist class)
To see what they could buy.

Listen to John Strachey on the Eliot/Pound *Waste Land,* John Strachey, pre-war and pre-radish, one of the authentic voices of the old-fashioned European Marxism of NOB's Oxford generation.

> Mr. Eliot's feverish erudition is characteristically American. In *The Waste Land,* for example, he does not so much use the accumulated culture of the old world, as ransack it. Yet perhaps it is just because he is an American that he has the courage and the energy to write the epitaph of the culture of the old world.[4]

Energetic Ezra despised it, but needed it: the finished material from which the new is made: Europe is finished. Ezra despised it, but wanted it. Ezra, Hearst on his own petard. Anyway, if Pound's chief influence is as artist, as modernist: *il miglior fabbro,* the deepest affinities are not ideas at all, but temperament, character. Like Ezra in his perverseness, his occasional ranting, his fascination with power. Like Ezra above all in his turbulence of spirit, his courage, his fierce dignity.

PART III Brownian movement

Norman Brown going west. He did Pound backwards: stood Pound on his head? Of emigration and emigrees. We are a nation of immigrants.

> Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me.
> Give me your huddled Marxists. . .

NOB belongs to the great transatlantic migration of artists and scientists, of scholars and intellectuals of the 1930s, the complex consequences of which for American culture, it will take time, if historians have time, to unravel. Bloody old Europe. Good night, Neville, good night. There's nothing left to see. It's all coming to an end. What is the epitaph for this culture coming to an end? But of course it had started earlier than that; the sense of the old world gone bad. The bitch gone bad in the teeth. Lights out, Sir Edward, lights out everybody. Goodnight, Europe, goodnight. But of course it was earlier, earlier even than that. Civilization is unbearable. Gentlemen behold the New World. Start over. Start anew. Go west Señor, and bring back some barbarism. The state of nature—ain't it wonderful. "Indeed, only barbarians are capable of rejuvenating a world laboring under the death throes of unnerved civilizations."[1] A group of rejuvenators: Norman Brown in Santa Cruz. Henry Adams in Tahiti. George Sand in Indiana. Let's lite out for the territories. (Huck) Finn again.

But there was no frontier; only another chapter in that recurrent dream of escape, another chapter in that nightmare of freedom. Said Lawrence: "Men are less free than they imagine; ah, far less free. The freest are perhaps least free."[1] Of course NOB should have known it was all play-acting. Primitivism: one of the oldest traditions. He should have known. Dear Marie Antoinette, holding that Sevres milk pail. Was the cow's udder china too? Emerson and Alcott and Brook farm. Lawrence again: not Brook farmers but book farmers.[2] Once upon a time. Let's pretend. Negligent NOB: hadn't he read Frederick Jackson Turner? That dream of freedom and of escape was most definitely not justified by the census of 1890. Of course, it was more than frontiers, territories. Not a place at all: a state of mind; especially in old places like Concord.

Emerson was one of those in him: deepest in him. Emerson and Brown; so many rich similarities, most of them stated very plainly in NOB's Phi Beta Kappa address, "Apocalypse." The "American Scholar" re-written. The second "American Scholar"; this time, quite appropriately, at Columbia, once the British King's, now America's. Hail Columbia! Show and tell at Columbia. Scandal and dismay at Columbia. "Apocalypse," the third declaration of independence; but this time not from the British King, not from British culture; this time: down with Descartes.

Brownson of Emerfather.

The smiling sage of Concord, bland and benign, looking out on his golf course? Not really. There is also the private Emerson of the journals, occasionally lifting the mask. "Out of rude unhandselled nature come the berserkers, the druids and the destroyers."[3]

Yonder caveman, who is he? The scholar as berserker. That's what NOB heard in Emerson, when most weren't listening—destruction. Tear it down. "Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?"[4] Destroy it, and then you can make it over, make it new.

Yonder druid, who is he? The scholar as prophet.

> I am for preserving all those religious writings which were in their origin poetic, ecstatic expressions which the first user of did not know what he said, but they were spoken through him and from above. . . . . .those barbarous and sacred words, to which we must still return, whenever we should speak an ecstatic and universal sense.[5]

The prophet as poet:

> The poet knows that he speaks adequately then only when he speaks

> somewhat wildly; not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect. . .suffered to take its direction from its celestial life.[6]

The Poet inspired and stoned:

> This is the reason why bards love wine, mead, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium, the fumes of sandalwood and tobacco, or whatever other procurers of animal exhilaration.[7]

The Poet inflamed and insane:

> The poets are thus liberating gods. The ancient British bards had for the title of their order, "Those who are free throughout the world." They are free, and they make free. . . .If a man is inflamed and carried away by his thought to that degree that he forgets the authors and the public and heeds only this one dream which holds him like an insanity, let me read his paper, and you may have all the arguments and histories and criticism.[8]

The Poet as Modernist:

> Nature abhors the old, and old age seems the only disease; all others run into this one. We call it by many names, —fever, intemperance, insanity, stupidity and crime; they are all forms of old age; they are rest, conservatism, appropriation, inertia; not newness, not the way onward. . .[9]

The way onward. The Modernist embracing the new. "In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred."[10] Santayana on Emerson's audience might well be Santayana on Brown's:

> They flocked to him and listened to his word, not so much for the sake of its absolute meaning as for the atmosphere. . .that hung about it, as about a sort of sacred music.[11]

PART V Clio's Arm

We read him now, not as thinker or seer, but as artist, modernist artist, making it new. His true achievement is esthetic, not political—a challenge to the traditional form of history-writing: telling the story from beginning

to end, tracing cause and effect in rational sequence. Among any number of similar voices listen to the American historian Allan Nevins in his volumes on the coming of the American Civil War.

> It will be primarily a narrative history; only a careful narrative can lay bare the inner meaning of the crisis, as only an ordered story can do justice to the suspense, drama, and human passion of the era.[1]

But what if there is no inner meaning? if there is only disorder? What situation have we if we can trust neither the teller nor the tale? What is the appropriate form for history in our time: that is to say, for the history of nightmare? No wonder NOB admires Joyce, the great forger, the arch fabricator of the new form of the modern novel. A different comparison is with that other remarkable emigree and theorist of the outrageous, Marcel Duchamp.

1913, an auspicious date: El Oco and the armory show. Duchamp, bringing modernism to America. Duchamp, "Nude Descending a Staircase":—scandal and dismay: "an explosion in a shingle factory." Duchamp exploding the common-sense surface planes of the painting into myriad splinters and fragments. A painting is not a representation of a visible, ordered world outside it; its terms of reference are internal to itself. A painting is paint put on something. A painting does not tell a story. If you need a story, you may make up your own. I won't make one up, but will tell one told of Matisse. A lady, visiting his studio, looked at one of his paintings and said: "But, surely the arm of this woman is much too long." Matisse replied politely, "Madame, you are mistaken. This is not a woman, this is a picture."[2] Duchamp, getting this far sixty years ago, went further. In his glass paintings he tried to obliterate the conventional visual distinction between viewer and object, seer and what is seen. And then went on to question the idea that the work of art must exist in a fixed or permanent form. It won't stand still in time but is continually re-made, re-seen, re-ordered. Make it new. Make it over.

Nothing analogous to this in the writing of history. The rational order of the past, unimaginably complex and elusive as it is, is certainly there behind it all, and our analysis, our stories, represent it. But what if there is no there there or anywhere? "The continuity is fractured."[3] That story is not 'history'; it is ink and paper and words upon a page. Enter Norman Brown. 1959: *Life Against Death:* scandal and dismay: an explosion in a shit factory. Now as we read it, impelled by the classic lucidity of its expository prose, we are struck by how traditional it seems. Oxford had done its work well. In terms of form it was a dead end. History cannot be more uncertain than when he who creates the thing says he cannot narrate it. NOB fabricating a new form, beginning a voyage to find the proper structure for the

unexpected, the proper morph for the surprising. This is the true audacity of *Love's Body:* the polyformism of narrative cubism.

Clio stripped bare by a Professor, even. Myth and archetype and irrationalism splinter the surface of conventional word painting. Bursts of wit shatter the notion of the work of art as fixed and unchanging. Puns, word-associations, etymologies as a form of action painting. All true literature is witty. Duchamp too loved puns.

> I like words in a poetic sense. Puns for me are like rhymes. . .a play on words that can start a whole series of considerations, connotations and investigations. . .an infinite field of joy—and it's always right at hand. . . .If you introduce a familiar word into an alien atmosphere, you have something comparable to distortion in painting, something surprising and new.[4]

Emerson too loved words. "Language is fossil poetry." "Every word was once a poem."[5] Emerson had showed the way toward unsettling everything:

> Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any thing as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back.[6]

Now NOB, a restless unsettler, getting Clio off his back, takes these fossil poems and puts together an 'assemblage' for our time: a Latin tag, a newspaper quote, a graffito, long passages from familiar texts and from obscure ones, from himself, from Joyce, quotes which are themselves parodies of something else: mirror poetry. The reader moves back and forth among these "found objects"—(remember Emerson again: "the invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common")[7]—in and out among texts, reminding us that we cannot be sure where we are. The Nietzschean aphorism, the original stylistic device, is now varied in tone and expanded in scale, so that one has blocks and panels as the structure of the composition; composition not linear but relational. We move from one panel to the other; from association to association. And in between—those interludes, those spaces, those silences, in and through and on which the reader paints his own gloss. A gloss on a gloss. Like Duchamp's glass paintings. A gloss on a glass. History is glossolalia.

This venture, carried through to the end, is *Closing Time*. As with many artists, the later work reveals greater economy of means, is more controlled: like Giacometti, condensing, compressing, refining, reducing. Like John

Cage, almost nothing left but silence. *Closing Time:* a collage of quotations. A conversation. Voices overheard. *Closing Time:* a trio. Vico speaking, Joyce replying, Brown varying the theme. *Closing Time:* the charm and wit of its chamber music; how it is said is what is said. *Closing Time:* history aspiring to the condition of poetry; poetry aspiring to the condition of music.

PART VI Brownout

The lights keep going off and on and off. Let's wind it up. For the last time, Goodnight Clio: goodnight, bad dreams and good riddance. Shut up shop. Close it down. But wait. Another voice: Coleridge's:

> The common end of all narrative, nay of all Poems is to convert a series into a Whole: to make these events, which in real or imagined History move in a strait Line, assume to our Understanding a circular motion—the snake with its Tail in its Mouth.[1]

Wherever we are, are we far from where we were in the beginning? Finnagain Beginagain. In the end is our beginning. A circular process of recurrences. Is the new so modern or the modern so new? Santayana on Emerson is Dizikes on Brown:

> . . .among Americans, he may be said to have won a place,. . .if not by the originality of his thought, at least by the originality and beauty of the expression he gave to thoughts that are old and imperishable.[2]

Is Clio really displaced? Clio, with a tale in her mouth, speaks:

> When the thunder is over, when you have finished holding hands in the dark, when you have clawed your way out of the rubble, then, by a commodious vicus of recirculation, someone will appear to sing you round and round and round again.

To which I reply: a likely story.

—JOHN DIZIKES

NOTES

PART II

[1] Norman O. Brown, *Closing Time* (New York, 1973), p. 63.

[2] Brown, "Apocalypse."

[3] Brown, "Apocalypse."

[4] John Strachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power* (New York, 1933), fn., p. 218.

PART III

[1] Brown, *Closing Time*, p. 62.

PART IV

[1] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London, 1972), p. 6.

[2] Lawrence, *Studies*, p. 99.

[3] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar."

[4] Emerson, "Nature."

[5] Emerson, *Journal*, November 15, 1841.

[6] Emerson, "The Poet."

[7] Emerson, "The Poet."

[8] Emerson, "The Poet."

[9] Emerson, "Circles."

[10] Emerson, "Circles."

[11] George Santayana, "Emerson," in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, Trident Edition, Volume II, (New York, 1936), p. 153.

PART V

[1] Allan Nevins, *The Ordeal of the Union* (New York, 1947), Volume 1, "Preface," p. viii.

[2] E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London, 1962), p. 98.

[3] Brown, *Love's Body* (New York, 1966), p. 1.

[4] As quoted in Katherine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice* (New York, 1962), pp. 88-89.

[5] Emerson, "The Poet."

[6] Emerson, "Circles."

[7] Emerson, "Nature."

PART VI

[1] As quoted in Thomas Vogler, *Preludes to Vision* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 197.

[2] Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, p. 164.

NEGATIVE SOLIDARITY: REVISIONISM AND "NEW AMERICAN" POETICS

In the psyche as in metrics, stress is an index of change. The concept of change demands it, insisting upon an incompleteness or insufficiency to the whole: stasis is not possible. Whether we conceive of this ineluctable movement as a teleological path ("history leads to us"), or as an indeterminate, reactive shifting, like the restless geologic wandering of continental plates, the transience of the social norms of poetry presents contemporary writers and readers with enormous challenges.

The problem is at once one of both the limits of alternative canons and of the inherent potential of the medium itself. Both are questions of representation and imply two major axes of tension. First, that of shape—canons are defined by borders, that is, by exclusion and negative terrain—and then of cause. Something at the heart of writing itself dictates incompleteness.

When, for example, we find Flaubert complaining to Louise Colet of an inability to achieve his vision of a perfect prose, one that could abolish style itself,[1] the model implied suggests completeness. Writing is a given that remains to be perfected. Soon after, however, Baudelaire in the dedication to *Paris Spleen* consciously inaugurates a new genre, the prose poem, fully aware of the consequences. Calling poetic prose a "miracle," and, with arch irony, claiming that

> from the very beginning I perceived that I was not only far from my mysterious and brilliant model, but was, indeed doing something (if it can be called *something)* singularly different, an accident which any one else would glory in, no doubt, but which can only deeply humiliate a mind convinced that the greatest honor for a poet is to succeed in doing exactly what he set out to do,[2]

Baudelaire compares his volume to a serpent. For him, the world of writing, although it might once have promised completeness, no longer can: an insertion of the new ruptures the whole, demonstrating the gulf between intent and action, between language and its referents, to be absolute. More recently, Charles Olson argues that "What does not change / is the will to change."[3] In the same poem, he continues:

> Around an appearance, one common model, we grow up
> many. Else how is it
> if we remain the same,
> we take pleasure now
> in what we did not take pleasure before? love

contrary objects? admire and/or find fault? use
other words, feel other passions, have
nor figure, appearance, disposition, tissue
the same?
To be in different states without a change
is not a possibility

If Baudelaire's pleasure lies in the scandal of indeterminacy, Olson's focus is on its generative potential. The power of Baudelaire's gesture rests upon a demonstration of the unthinkable. Olson's ready acceptance of incompleteness radically opens the poem to a universe that is itself indeterminate, unfinished, subject to change.

Here Olson differs from such early American modernists as Hart Crane, Laura Riding or Ezra Pound. For each, the often distressing social and material transformations that accompanied modernity did not alter transhistorical principles of truth or aesthetic value. Thus, in Pound's *Canto CXVI,* if the poet "cannot make it cohere," we are at least assured that at some level "it coheres all right."[4] Completeness is thus exterior to the text. From this perspective, Crane's "The Bridge" differs from its canonic predecessors solely in the modernity of the object portrayed.

Of the writers cited, only Olson's poetics, which locate the site of knowing and identity within the unconscious and that in turn within the kinaesthesia of the body,[5] suggest that aesthetic values, far from being transpersonal and transhistorical, might differ dramatically from reader to reader, community to community, epoch to epoch. In contrast, even as it announces its rupture, the scenario of the Fall of Writing invoked by Baudelaire's serpent suggests a later reunification, some transcendent future moment when poetry might again become whole. It is in this sense that, even as many poets seek to alter and reshape their personal conceptions of a determinate Canon, capital C, so as to include their own contributions, they do so in a conservative manner: their work subjectively *completes and thus conserves a canon,* which is now no longer insufficient.

The self-proclaimed moments of newness with which the history of twentieth century art is littered are thus often (although not always) also claims of completion. One index of stress, the hyperbolic violence of so many manifestos attests to the force deemed necessary to crack open the rigid shells of older canons. It is in this sense that what may be most distinct about the collective project that has come to be known, rather unwillingly, as "language poetry" is not its writing, but its reception, not its attack on a prior canon, but that canon's reaction. Like other avant-garde movements, "language poetry" began by identifying its own distinctness, criticizing the naive assumptions of a speech-centered poetics.[6] But, unlike

many of its modernist ancestors,[7] "language poetry" also drew ***positive*** connections between itself and the work of preceding generations, most explicitly to the New American poets of the 1950s and '60s: the projectivist or Black Mountain writers, the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance and even the Beats. The parallels between these adjoining generations are many: an urbanism shared with the New York School; a concern for the cognitive potential of poetry not unlike that of Olson, Creeley or Robert Duncan; a fondness for parataxis found in Jack Kerouac's prose as well as Olson's verse.

Most importantly, both generations have defined themselves as opposed to the bland confessional narratives of workshop verse. Consider this description:

> The new younger poets have written a large body of work, but most of what has been published so far has appeared only in a few little magazines, as broadsheets, pamphlets, and limited editions, or circulated in manuscript; a larger amount of it has reached its growing audience through poetry readings. As it has emerged in Berkeley and San Francisco. . .and New York City, it has shown one common characteristic: ***a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse.*** Following the practice and precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, it has built on their achievements and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem. These poets have already created their own tradition, their own press, and their public. They are our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement in American poetry. [my emphasis]

Not an unimaginable portrait of "language poetry," this is in fact quoted from the preface to Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*.[8] Yet, for the most part, workshop poets have responded to this most recent challenge of their institutional hegemony with silence (preferring instead to rehash the debates of the 1950s by renewing their attacks on Allen Ginsberg[9]). Far more vociferous and hostile has been the reaction of some poets associated within or relatively close to the older New American project.[10]

This critique has been so heated and sustained that it has surfaced everywhere from the *San Francisco Chronicle* to *Partisan Review*. The specific charges are the following: "language poetry" is alleged to be driven by theory; it is anti-speech and thereby anti-individual (sometimes this is extended to anti-democratic and elitist); it participates in self-conscious collective behavior; it valorizes the ugly and the unintelligible; its leftist politics are strident and didactic. Taken together, the implicit claim is that "language poetry" is a closet academic verse, seeking explicators rather

than readers, utilizing Marxism to pander to intellectual fashion and intimidate skeptics. The notice which "language poetry" has received from some critics, notably Marjorie Perloff, Andrew Ross, Frederic Jameson, Lee Bartlett and Jerome McGann, is then summoned as evidence in support of this allegation.[11]

I and others have responded to these charges and there's no need to repeat that here. There have of course been a far greater number of writers coming out of the same New American tradition who have demonstrated interest and support to the writing, generously and also sometimes critically.[12] Rather, what needs to be asked is why this peculiar debate has arisen now? Ultimately, that question is not about "language poetry" at all. The complaints which have been raised against "language poetry" can most positively and usefully be read as a coded and indirect self-critique of the New American project itself.

The primary function of the proposition of a speech-based poetics, for example, was as an approximate unifying principle for writers as radically dissimilar as Denise Levertov and Gregory Corso. Olson's equation of the verse line with a hypothetical breath-unit in speaking, the syllabic distance between non-syntactic pauses, offered New American poets if not a theoretical rationale for their work, something that would function in its place: it distinguished them from the academic poets of the 1950s, establishing their claim to the heritage of Pound and especially Williams, rendering their uneven and unusual line lengths immediately visible on the printed page, and providing the basis for a prosody rhythmically more complex than anything possible in a reiterative stanzaic or metrical pattern. By equating the line with the presence of speaking, New American poets were able to argue that their verse was alive, as against the dead absences of the written word. The strategic importance of this argument was widely recognized: the lead essay in the Allen anthology's appendix of poetic statements is Olson's "Projective Verse."[13]

The argument against theory reflects a similar function. Many New Critics, after all, were poets, and precisely those for whom the epithet "academic verse" had been coined. In addition to producing bland poems whose commitment to order was much more than an occasion for irony, the New Critics had achieved institutional power through institutional means, subsuming creative energy to administrative demands while actively decanonizing such earlier generations as the Romantics. New Critical poetry embodied the instrumentalization of literature. For some in the 1950s, therefore, to be ***for*** critical writing was equated with an aesthetics of bureaucratization.

Whatever the tactical advantages that a speech-based line and the distrust of theory held for the New American poets, their operational result

was to abandon large realms of the possible. That these positions represented at best a strategic stance and not a fundamental poetics is visible through the many dissents voiced by these very same poets. The Black Mountain writers produced a substantial body of both reviews and theoretical writing, although taking care to stylistically distinguish themselves from anything that could be mistaken for normative academic exposition. Jack Spicer, trained as a linguist, ridiculed Creeley and others whom he felt idealized language and speech.[14] Olson's later Maximus poems, his essay "Logography,"[15] Creeley's *Pieces,* his discussions of the implications of the typewriter, paper size and the visual contexts of language in interviews with Lewis MacAdams and Michael André,[16] and Paul Blackburn's *The Journals* reflect a concern for the written as profound as their earlier valorizations of the oral. Indeed, Frank O'Hara's essay on Pasternak explicitly rejects Mayakovsky's public persona of the poet-as-speaking-individual as a pose deadly to good writing, and his manifesto, "Personism," places its emphasis on the individuality of the reader, not the writer.[17] "Language poetry's" initial rupture with speech, therefore, was not so much a break as an interpretation, a foregrounding of concerns already active within New American poetry.

What we find in the attacks on "language writing," then, is a defense of a poetics that never quite existed, although one implicit in the reductionism of Ed Dorn's blurb to Creeley's *Collected Poems:* "He is the master of immediate speech and this is the compass of his written art." It is the very ambiguity of this status that may account for much of the emotional energy now being discharged.

Artificial though it may be, the distinctness between these two generational manifestations of the avant-garde tradition was heightened in the early seventies by a curious limbo into which the New American poetry had fallen. After the Berkeley Poetry Conference of summer, 1965, identifiable New American counter-institutions dwindled. The gradual absorption of their writing (and many of their writers![18]) into a rapidly expanding university system, reduced the activity identified with the New American project and rendered it far less visibly oppositional. The revival of the Objectivists and their influence, as well as those of the New Americans, upon a younger generation of school-bred creative writers further eroded what had once been sharply defined borders. From the vantage point of social history, the achievement of the New American poets lies not in having opened up a closed canon in order to seat themselves alongside (or even replace) the kitsch of the New Critics—although this may have been an original goal of some—but in having helped to irreparably weaken the walls of canonicity itself. Their explicit challenge to the parameters and norms of institutional verse came at a time when the university system was

incorporating a more heterogeneous population than it had previously known. A significant consequence was that the neglect (really the suppression) of other writers and types of writing became more perceptible to newly emerging audiences, from categories as broad as women to specific literary movements, such as the Objectivists. One instance of this inter-relationship between New American poetry and an emerging pluralism can be found in the protofeminist *Four Young Lady Poets,* copublished in 1962 by Totem, a small press founded by LeRoi Jones. Another would be the aggressively expansive anthologies of Jerome Rothenberg.

But one impact for the New American poetry was the loss of its "outsider" status, and it is to this point that the complaints against "language poetry" has persistently returned.[19] Outsider status appears to have given some New American poets a sense of cohesion, possibly even identity. The existence of a different phenomenon occupying such similar territory suggests not merely the failure of their revolution, but also that the New American absorption into a heterogeneous "mainstream" could only have been accompanied by a parallel loss of internal completeness. The observation is not entirely incorrect. The allegation of collective behavior, for example, ignores the fact that it was the New Americans themselves who served as a model in this regard. Their inability to sustain institutions of oppositional community only underscored the value of solidarity for many younger poets. David Henderson, introducing a recent panel on language and ethnicity, commented that he found the solidarity that had caused the misnomer "language poetry" to stick interesting since it marked the poets and their work in a fashion that somewhat parallels the experience of difference familiar to poets of social marginality. That may be an overstatement, but it remains a significant distinction between these two generations. Yet, ironically, the stance against "language poetry" represents a ground for a solidarity of its own, as well as for an alternative interpretation of the New American tradition, one that is individualist, anti-critical and speech-based.

The importance and political content of negative solidarity should not be underestimated. For example, the complaint against closet academicism—which subsumes the charges against theory and politics—reflects a larger anxiety over the increasingly dominant relationship of the university to the institutions of poetry in America. Because the "language poets" have arrived at different positions out of a shared tradition, they become a surrogate for this problem. That the specifics of the charge are inaccurate, a metaphor in the place of a metonym, is precisely what marks its political centrality. Similarly, the critique of the aesthetics of "language poetry," particularly its stance against the naive assumption of speech, individualism or "beauty," reflects a parallel concern that any answer to academic

colonization cannot be found at the individual or personal level. Maddeningly for these poets, the sheer presence of theory as an integral, if secondary, component of the "language poetry" project argues that ***writing itself is not sufficient for completeness in poetry.***

Well, it's not. Academic colonization is contemporary poetry's fundamental social problem precisely because it incorporates the politics of culture into a process that can only be determined institutionally. And, as women, people of color, sexual minorities and others marked by differences of language, region, religion or class have recognized for some time, this process is never neutral and has nothing whatsoever to do with abstract aesthetic value. If the challenge facing any oppositional poetics is how to remain marked, literally stigmatized, a poetry from a largely white male tradition such as that of the New Americans confronts special difficulty. Further, in arguing *for* individualism and *against* critical thinking, the poets who attack "language writing" are virtually forced to avoid stating the case for their own collective project positively. This would explain why the energy placed into exposing "language poetry" has not gone instead into a defense of the work of Allen Ginsberg. Unable to speak the poetics of their own name, these latter day New Americans have at least evolved a genre through which this can be known. That its form, debunking the "language poets," requires that they always focus upon *other* writers, and exactly those in whom they claim to have the least interest, is an irony they may never learn to appreciate.

—RON SILLIMAN

NOTES

[1] *Madame Bovary*, translated by Lowell Bair, edited by Leo Bersani (New York: Bantam Classic, 1981), p. 326.

[2] *Paris Spleen*, translated by Louise Varese (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. x.

[3] "The Kingfishers," *Archaeologist of Morning* (London: Cape Goliard/Grossman, 1970), no pagination. The slash mark is part of the original line.

[4] *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII* (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 25-27.

[5] See especially "Proprioception," in *Additional Prose* (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1974), especially pp. 17-18.

[6] See, for example, Robert Grenier's "On Speech," reprinted in *In the American Tree*, edited by Ron Silliman (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine Press, 1986), pp. 496-97.

[7] See, for example, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," by Jurgen Habermas in Hal

Foster's *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), p. 4.

[8] (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. xi. On the comparative development of tradition, press and public, it is worth noting that the 40 poets included in *In the American Tree* have to date published some 277 books between them while the 44 contained in *The New American Poetry* had, at the same time of its appearance in 1960, pulbished just 112.

[9] See Marjorie Perloff's "*Howl* and Its Enemies: The Genteel Reaction" in *Sulfur* 20, Fall, 1987, pp. 132-141, for a recounting of the recent debate over Ginsberg.

[10] Tom Clark, Edward Dorn, Robert Duncan, David Levi-Strauss, the late Darrell Gray and Andrei Codrescu are some who commented upon "language poetry" in terms that echo Norman Podhoretz' dismissal of the "Know-Nothing Bohemians."

[11] To date, however, no one has attempted to explain why, if the "language poets" are literary "Stalinists," we should be appreciated by Perloff, whose anti-communism is vocal and so reductive that she is apparently unable to distinguish between Trotskyists and Stalinists. See "To Q," in *The Quarterly: The Magazine of New American Writing*, No. 3, Fall, 1987, pp. 239-56, and especially the comments on Louis Zukofsky on p. 244. Her essay is scheduled to reappear in *Paideuma*.

[12] Jerry Rothenberg, Robert Creeley, Larry Eigner, Anne Waldman, Clayton Eshleman, Bill Berkson, Michael McClure, Joanne Kyger, Peter Schjeldahl, and Ken Irby come immediately to mind.

[13] *The New American Poetry*, pp. 386-397.

[14] See the second letter to Lorca in "After Lorca," *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), p. 25, and "from The Vancouver Lectures, #1," in *Caterpillar* 12, July 1970, especially p. 179.

[15] A companion to "Proprioception," in *Additional Prose: A Bibliography on America, Proprioception & Other Notes & Essays*, edited by George F. Butterick (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1974), p. 20.

[16] Both are included in *Contexts of Poetry: Interviews 1961-1971*, issued as Writing 10 (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), pp. 137-170, 191-214. See, in particular, pp. 161-62 and 196.

[17] *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 501-09 and 498-99 respectively.

[18] At least nineteen of the Allen anthology poets would eventually teach, although only five or six appear to have done so by the time the book was published in 1960.

[19] Tom Clark's essay in *Partisan Review* ("'Stalin as Linguist,'" Vol. LIV, No. 2, 1987, pp. 299-304) is virtually a meditation upon this point, although Robert Duncan's remark about "language poetry" "usurping" the heritage of Zukofsky, along with his comment that "language poets" are "like a crowd of mosquitos off there in somebody else's swamp" (in an interview with Michael André Bernstein and Burton Hatlen, *Sagetrieb*, Vol. 4, No. 2 & 3, Fall & Winter 1985, p. 127), is more succinct.

DAVIDSON AND WEINBERGER ON LANGUAGE POETRY

November 22, 1987

Dear Eliot,

As someone who has enjoyed your incisive (and invective) remarks on recent American writing over the years I was very disappointed in your recent *Sulfur* note "On *Montemora,* America & the World." I thought you took an unnecessarily nasty swipe at Ron Silliman's anthology and in the process called your own important editorial efforts into question. A well-considered critical review of *In the American Tree* would be worthwhile, but to link the poets in that volume to Reaganism, nationalism and dehistoricization is to substitute broadside blast for careful analysis. Furthermore, the use of "Reagan" as a master-trope for the age has become an all-too-common way of avoiding specific historical facts and processes that go beyond the president of the moment. If Reagan has "infected every particle of life in this country" it has entered the body of *Montemora* as thoroughly as it has the Supreme Court or the proponents of "language writing." The question should be, which vehicle offers the most powerful antidote?

What I have said about "Reagan" applies for "language writing," a term that in the hands of some journalists and academic conservatives seems to sum up all that is bad, base and anti-humanist. It seems willfully naive to say that because "language writers" have grown up in an era of television they uncritically accept its reification of life. If television is the cause of our problems then all writing is similarly tainted, your own as well. I don't think you are trying to echo Allan Bloom or E.D. Hirsch, but there is something of the overprotective parent in the way that you warn us of the depthlessness that comes from watching too much t.v. Your note seems far too content with gross overgeneralizations and stereotypes of the sort that, to apply your own logic, seem the pure product of a television generation trained to look only at surfaces for the purposes of immediate gratification.

One point that you could have profitably developed in a different direction is your discussion of the pervasive monolingualism of this culture. *Montemora* did indeed provide a salutary alternative to the narrow English/American focus of most journals during its period, but to suggest that since the figures in Ron Silliman's anthology are not primarily translators they are therefore a reflection of this dominant culture is to ignore some crucial distinctions. The fact is that many poets in the anthology *have* translated and many more in the list of "comparable worth" have as well. I don't need to mention all of their names but would point to Michael Palmer, Geoff

Young, Lyn Hejinian, Charles Bernstein, Bill Berkson, Bruce Boone, Barbara Einzig, Marina LaPalma, John Yau, Joseph Simas, David Melnick, Bob Perelman and myself as writers for whom translation has occupied an important part of their literary careers.

But even if the group *hadn't* translated, would this make them into narrow xenophobes or nationalists? Certainly their literary interests are broader than the English/American tradition. It hardly seems necessary to mention the influence of continental philosophy and theory on "language writing," a fact that dominates most negative criticisms of the movement. Walter Benjamin, Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Viktor Shklovsky, M. Bakhtin, and Julia Kristeva occupy prominent positions in critical essays by language-writers. Of course these are "theorists" and perhaps don't qualify in your book as authentic foreign *writers*. When you talk about "writers" you mean "literary" writers, but here again, you avoid the powerful fact of French Surrealism in the writing of Michael Palmer, Charles Bernstein or Barrett Watten, or the influence of European novels on Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, and Carla Harryman. Much could be said about the relationship between Dada or Surrealist performance and Poet's Theater as represented by figures like Kit Robinson, Bob Perelman, Tom Mandel, Jean Day and others. And the importance of Russian Futurism to these poets is, as you acknowledge, pervasive. One could go on naming names and citing instances, but the larger point is why anyone should have to name names and point fingers in the first place. It should be patently obvious that "foreign" writing has made its impact on many figures in the language movement and that the *absence* of foreign authors in a reading list does not constitute adherence, however unconscious, to Reaganomics or Reaganology.

The other problem with your essay is its equation of the non sequitur, as practiced by language writers, with Reaganism. Surely discontinuous, paratactic, or whatever writing has been around since before the Silliman anthology. I believe that techniques of radical juxtaposition occur in many of the figures listed in *Montemora's* tables of contents. And why are "Cubist simultaneity, Surrealist collage, or the Poundian ideogrammic method" so radically different from the discontinuous writing in, say, Clark Coolidge's *The Maintains* or Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* or Susan Howe's *Defenestration of Prague?* I think that in all of the movements and authors mentioned here, the non sequitur functions not to destroy history, as you suggest, but to bring alternate forms of temporality into play. *My Life* and *Defenestration* are powerful critiques of a certain type of narrative logic, one that controls autobiography and the other that controls historiography. The use of elements from discontinuous semantic or semiologic domains breaks the hold of one kind of teleology (cause/effect, "natural" progres-

sion, syllogism) and establishes an alternate one. And more importantly, it exposes that teleological model in a dialectical fashion, showing the degree to which "history" is legitimized by specific forms of writing and figuration. When you equate language writing and "nationalism" you employ a rhetoric of equivalence and homology that we easily recognize in the speeches of public officials. And when you speak of the "infection" of Reaganism into "every particle of life" you use a metaphor of disease that, in another context, you attacked when used by the editors of *Rolling Stock*. I'm not implying that "the new sentence" or any new writing practice will cure rhetoric of its relation to larger power structures, only that even the most astute social critic has difficulty writing "outside" of these structures. One of the important critical uses of the non sequitur is to call attention to this fact.

Of course you know all this already. I'm not saying anything that isn't repeated time and again in the essays at the back of *In the American Tree* and framed in every piece of cultural criticism from Benjamin and Brecht to Jean Baudrillard. The fact that you are completely aware of these matters makes me wonder what the real agenda of your article is. There is something about the way that you end your essay, invoking the giants of modernism (Pound, Williams, H.D., Rexroth, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson), that reminds me of a strategy used by earlier critics like Lionel Trilling or Irving Howe who dismiss the current generation for un-Arnoldian backsliding. It is the old argument between the ancients and the moderns in which the fact that the ruins are still standing bespeaks their greatness. Anything that veers from the true and narrow suggests a decline in values. *Montemora* was, to my mind, always a testimony to the fruitful admixture of Modernism and more recent writers, "foreign" and domestic, experimental and traditional—in short, the kind of literary admixture that made the journal a companion to *Roof, Tottel's,* and *This*. Once the practices and values of one generation are held as self-evident proofs that the next will never match up we are back in the nursery, or at least back in the classroom. I don't think that's where the discussion of complex modern literature (or politics) belongs, but it is increasingly where the debate is being conducted.

Sincerely,
MICHAEL DAVIDSON

1 December 1987

Dear Michael,

As your letter was intended for publication in *Sulfur,* I'll similarly switch into public debate mode. . .[For space reasons, I omit some mainly predictable remarks on Reagan, television, and AIDS as metaphor, and go straight to the L-word.]

1. First, a matter of definition. "Language" poetry is a term generally understood by everyone who is not a "language" poet. (Indeed, the one unmistakable sign of a "language" poet is the denial that "language" poetry exists.) Although it is now breaking up from the inevitable power struggles that occur when individual artists or writers realize the limitations of group identity, it was, in its day, the most organized literary movement, ever, on American soil. Some 40 or 50 poets, running 20 or 30 small presses and magazines, produced a mountain of printed matter, almost entirely limited to work by or about members of the group. This in turn led to a number of anthologies—by and of members—in mainstream magazines and larger and university presses, countless appearances at academic symposia, and a stream of favorable critical commentary from professor-critics. Which led to a remarkable amount of publicity, from the friendly skies of an airline "in-flight" magazine to the dank sewers of right-wing publications like *Partisan Review* and *The New Criterion.* Yet this enormous hoopla never translated into much of a readership, even within the small world of poetry. The last time an anti-establishment poetry movement was in the news, its major gathering (Donald Allen's *New American Poetry)* sold 100,000 copies. In contrast, the three most accessible introductions to the movement, Bernstein and Andrews' *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book,* Messerli's *"Language" Poetries,* and Silliman's *In the American Tree* have, I understand, sold from one to three thousand copies. (It is not, of course, a measure of aesthetic importance, but rather of a genuine public interest.)

Discussions of "language" poetry are, for me, always skewed by the inclusion of Clark Coolidge, Susan Howe and Michael Palmer in the various "language" anthologies and magazines. (And many defenders of "language" tend to summon up Coolidge, Howe and Palmer when the going gets rough.) Their presence is surely the product of personal and not group affinities. Each of the three, in utterly different ways, is far beyond (or actively contrary to) the proscriptions of Perelman, Andrews, Watten, Silliman, et al. Coolidge is obviously a direct descendent of Louis Zukofsky—without sharing Zukofsky's love of hidden organizing principles and multilayered reference and self-reference. His intense musicality, a combination of Elizabethan lyricism and the improvisations of bebop, is unlike anything else in "language"-land. Howe, through her poetry and

critical writings, has become the great (and probably the last) poet of a certain thread of American history and myth—the true heir to Olson. Palmer comes directly out of cubism and surrealism, with lessons learned from Spicer, Creeley, the "objectivists," Celan, Jabès, and many others. Taken together, the three represent a continuation of modernist preoccupations with musical structure, dreams, history, myth, psychology, image, dialogues with the dead, and the invention of a "personal" style dependent on a hyper-referential ("charged") language—all stuff the "language" poets are generally attempting to shred.

I exclude all three in thinking and talking about "language" poetry, as well as Jackson MacLow (whose inclusion in the Messerli anthology is rather like the Red Brigades bestowing honorary membership on Jean-Paul Sartre), Bernadette Mayer (whose presence in the Silliman book I can't understand), and the two writers of crystalline narrative prose, Robert Glück and Lydia Davis, whose appearance in the "language" poetry canon is the greatest mystery of all. Once these, quite different, writers are separated out, what's left is an extraordinarily cohesive set of practices and concerns, one that coheres beyond the enthusiasms of individual members for writers outside the group.

2. Once, just once, someone should write a defense of "language" poetry without employing the words trope, paratactic, temporality, historiography, semantic, semiologic, reification, dehistoricization, teleological, dialectical, syllogism, figuration, rhetoric of equivalence, homology, strategy. (All of these in your 2-1/2 page letter!)

Given that "language" poetry represents itself as a radical critique of the dominant political/linguistic/philosophical/narrative/spiritual/economic power structures, I have never understood why it insistently explains itself in such jargon-enstrangled prose. In a recent article on Steve McCaffery *(Temblor#6)*, Marjorie Perloff, a "language" supporter, claims that the "ugliness, the intentional ungainliness" of the prose written by McCaffery, Bernstein, Andrews, Dreyer, and Armantrout—she adds Silliman later, but forgets Watten—should be seen as a reaction against both the "genteel" art of the literary essay, as practiced by an Edmund Wilson or a Randall Jarrell (literature for the middle-brow nonspecialist) and the "casual speech-based, notebook or diary-style poetics of the Beats and New York poets." True perhaps, but these are hardly the only options: the century is full of models of radical critical prose: in English by Stein, Pound, Lawrence, Olson, and Susan Howe; in French by Tzara, Artaud, Bataille, and Leiris; or in Spanish by Huidobro, Lezama Lima, and Paz (to name only a few of the obvious).

Curiously, Perloff identifies the "genteel" style as "Oxbridge" and "Ivy League." "Oxbridge" it may remain, but it is no longer Ivy League. In fact,

the technocratic prose of the "language" poets is precisely the kind of writing practiced by the English Departments of the Ivy League, particularly Yale. The rise of "language" poetry occurs exactly at the moment when the English Department was split in two: one branch remaining as the Eng. Dept., and the other as the Creative Writing Program. What its detractors still label as "academic" poetry—the stuff published in *APR, Antaeus,* etc.—is the product of Creative Writing. I would argue that there are now two other "academic" poetries, which reflect, in turn, the warring old and new factions in the remaining Eng. Dept.: the new traditional prosodists (Leithauser, Gioia, et al) championed by *The New Criterion,* and the "language" poets, who are, many of them, the only literary practitioners of deconstruction. (Though ultimately there may be more similarities than differences between the two: aren't both the New Augustans?)

Of course few of them actually work full-time in the university, but by their wholesale acceptance of its critical tenets, as well as its prose style, specialized language, self-referentiality and disdain for the uninitiated, the "language" poets have formed their own autonomous English Department of the Spirit—and one, as might be expected, full of intradepartmental politics.

To my mind it is precisely this sectarianism—quite similar to certain ultra-factions of the New Left in the late 60s—that has led to the general ill-will felt toward "language" poets. When one picks up a "language" anthology or magazine, one knows exactly who will be included, who will be writing about whom, and in what manner. It is more predictable than *Antaeus.* There has been little attempt to widen the literary context in which the "language" poets locate themselves, or to explain themselves in what the hopelessly *demode* rest of the world considers as accessible prose. It is a kind of self-containment that would have been unimaginable to the most elitist of the modernists, who, after all, spent a great deal of time preaching to the unconverted.

3. Strangely enough, perhaps the most objective comment in my piece has drawn the loudest protests from readers. To repeat, of the 40 poets included in Silliman's *Tree* and the 80 "others"—largely unaffiliated avant-gardists—that he lists, only Rosmarie and Keith Waldrop (both "others") publish substantial poetry translations on a regular basis. This is of course absolutely true. A few of the others have done a few occasional translations, some of them excellent, but none of them are a significant means of access to a foreign poet or body of work. This situation is, as I wrote, general to the avant-garde, "langs" and non-"langs" alike, and has, I think, already proven detrimental.

Translation aside, naturally I recognize that "foreign writing has made its impact" on "language" poetry, if by "writing" one means "critical

theory"—a crucial difference. But it is obvious that foreign poetry—with the occasional exception of Russian Futurism—has not. If one calculated the total number of pages in *LANGUAGE, Tottel's, Roof, This,* etc. devoted in any way to foreign-language poetry, I doubt it would barely reach into two figures. To me, this is a self-absorption bordering on nationalism and xenophobia. How else do you explain the exclusion of even (gasp!) Canadian writers as essential to the movement as McCaffery and Dewdney from Silliman's *Tree* and the Messerli book? How else do you explain why Silliman's *Tree* is American at all? (Movement anthologies—Imagism, Others, Objectivism, etc.—are traditionally transnational, while remaining within the language. By limiting themselves to U.S. writers—and Silliman even divides his book into "East" and "West"—the two anthologists are, besides their aesthetic claims, implying that this is what's happening, and all that's happening, in the land.)

Furthermore, I have always been amazed that a movement so preoccupied with language shows no interest whatsoever in specific languages. It would, to take an obvious example, be extremely interesting to see a "language" response to Chinese poetry, which is dependent both on a multiplicity of meaning in the individual ideogram, and the placement of what were known as "empty" (meaningless) words. (And the groundwork is already there in François Cheng's *Chinese Poetic Writing.)* Or, say, something on Sanskrit (where, according to Ingalls, the sentence "Although she was embarrassed by the earnest glance of the king, still out of curiosity it was slowly that she walked away from him, looking backward as she walked" may be expressed in three words; where it is not uncommon for a word to have two or three hundred exact synonyms; where, without resorting to synonyms, a sentence like "Go get my horse" may be written fifteen different ways). Or, assuming they've all read Whorf, something on Native American or other indigenous languages. "Language" may have a few more women then previous movements, but it is still unrepentantly honkey in both its makeup and outlook.

4. In a similar vein, to claim that the "language" poets' "literary interests are broader than the English/American tradition" is stretching it. With the notable exception of Susan Howe (not a "language" poet), I see little evidence in their writings of much interest in the English/American tradition before the 20th century at all. (For example: 8 of the 464 pages of Bernstein's *Content's Dream* are on Blake and Shakespeare; in the 236 pages of Watten's *Total Syntax* there is a passing reference each to Coleridge and Dickinson.) The rediscovery or reevaluation of earlier poets was once essential to a personal poetics, whether one was Zukofsky or Eliot, Robert Duncan or Allan Tate. This has simply not occurred with any

of the "language" poets. (It's incredible that, after 15 years, no one has mentioned "language"'s greatest precursor: John Skelton.)

5. What I mean by the "non sequitur" is Cubist simultaneity, surrealist collage and the Poundian ideogrammic method in its decadent stage. Your "alternate forms of temporality," "critiques of narrative logic," etc. etc. were news around 1912 ("Zone"). Since then, "techniques of radical juxtaposition" may be the one distinguishing characteristic of nearly all "avant-garde" poetry written in this century. Fragments of a whole, however, quickly became a Utopic yearning for a whole. Now the "language" poets have exploded the myth of the whole, and what seems to be left is what television calls "bites": very short bits of glitzy images or catchy phrases that are dependent on immediate effect. A "language" poem in perhaps its most typical form begins, ends, and goes nowhere (utopia?) and consists of short wisecracks, epigrams, bits of slang or advertising slogans or popular songs, gnomic remarks, ironic references to suburban American culture, etc. etc. all held together by a glue of impenetrable declarative sentences or seemingly random word-lists. Some of the "bites" are arresting—and they usually turn up in the reviews of "language" poets. Many of the "bites" are funny. (Strange that their wit appears only in the poetry, never in the critical prose.) But in the end it seems to me no different from rock video, which the industry calls "moving wallpaper." Were it not for the ponderousness of its defensive prose, much of "language" poetry could easily be seen as a kind of moving-wallpaper literature for the current generation of grad students who were raised in front of the tube—a harmless entertainment not unlike the "7 types of ambiguity" poetry produced for students in the 1950s.

6. The "real agenda" of my article was not, as you imagine, world domination of literary production by the Lionel Trilling Cultural Brigade. Unlike critics and "language" poets, I have no agenda, and am opposed to all canon-formation. But I do believe that the concentration on "language" poetry, both for and against, has tended to drown out everything else on the aesthetic left. For the first time in twenty years, for example, I am aware of excellent poets who cannot get published in book form anywhere, large or small press—let alone discussed, even in the little magazines. There is an extraordinary range and variety of American poetry now being written—Silliman lists many of the younger writers in his preface, but where is the anthology for them?

To sketch out a personal and tentative map of the American workers: First, the many poets of *The New American Poetry* who are alive among us: Creeley, Duncan, Baraka, Ashbery, Snyder, Ginsberg, McClure, Eigner, Everson, Whalen, Oppenheimer, Levertov, Blaser, Guest, J. Williams,

Dorn, Lamantia (and those, still with us, who were left out at the time: Bronk, Corman, Rakosi). Some of these may be writing less well than they did then, but all are worth following.

Then, the generation which began publishing in book form in the 1960s: Rothenberg, Kelly, Eshleman, Ronald Johnson, MacLow, Antin, Irby, Sanders, Lansing, Coolidge, Tarn, most of whom are writing their best work in the 1980s.

Finally, the poets who have begun publishing in book form since 1970. Of them, three have already published a substantial body of work that strikes me as enduring: Michael Palmer, Susan Howe, and Gustaf Sobin. Other poets in this group who interest me, whose next books I look forward to reading, are Nathaniel Mackey, Karin Lessing, Rosmarie Waldrop, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Mark Karlins, Jed Rasula, Beverly Dahlen, John Yau, Bernadette Mayer, George Evans, Diane Glancy, Janet Rodney, Pierre Joris, Thomas Meyer, August Kleinzahler, Don Byrd, Jonathan Greene, Lyn Hejinian, John Thorpe, Kathleen Fraser, John Taggart, Marjorie Welish, Will Alexander, and—Michael Davidson. (To name only a few that immediately come to mind.)

This is of course a somewhat nutty list that reflects nothing more than one person's reading (and, in the age of overproduction, there is so much that is missed). But what stands out in the last group—beyond the strange combination of the barely and widely published—is the fact that most of these are in their 40s, or nearly so, and some are older. (The poets of *The New American Poetry* were largely in their 20s or early 30s.) Where are the young poets? They can't all be Writing School clones.

There seems to be an "aging" of poetry, matching the demographic aging of America. Take the little magazine, traditionally a young person's work: who else has the passion, the time, and the dedication for such drudgery? At the moment, the best poetry magazines are edited by people in their 40s and 50s: *Sulfur, Temblor, Hambone, (How)ever.* I know two interesting magazines with editors in their 30s, *Acts* and *House of K,* but I am unaware of any substantial national magazine run by anyone in her or his 20s.

To my mind, a revitalization of the American poetry "avant-garde" will only occur when the young appear with fresh readings of their living elders, rediscovering the neglected—think of all the "discoveries" of the 1960s: Niedecker, Oppen, Zukofsky, Loy, Reznikoff, Bunting, Rakosi, H.D.—and presenting themselves in the context of those they admire. A new generation of restless disciples that will pick up the threads of the "New American" poets, the *Caterpillar* generation and the isolated individuals who have emerged since. One that will want to discover all that's been happening in world poetry since American poets generally stopped translating. (And the place to start is Latin America.) One that will discover

its own models in the English/American tradition. And, most important, one that finds the world interesting, that sees the world as something more than a problematic text. Now that we've said that it can't be said, there are many other things to say.

All best—
ELIOT WEINBERGER

December 24, 1987

Dear Eliot,

Of course rhetoric is very much at the center of our disagreement. One of your big complaints is that language-writing is simply a belated form of modernist pastiche and has turned a radical avant-garde practice into "harmless entertainment." You claim that the use of the non sequitur in the hands of the language writers has been reduced to a kind of mindless play, a manipulation of "bits" of empty information to no particular end. Well, no "bit" is empty. It doesn't take a course in Semiotics to figure out that what we call History (you invoke it as though it were some Ozymandias-sized wreck out in the desert) "speaks" in the tongues of E.F. Hutton (or is it Shearson Lehman?). And the manipulation of those "bits" by certain language-writers is not empty either. Far from reveling in the culture industry (as you suggest they do), poets like Bob Perelman, Bruce Andrews, Ron Silliman and others, use various kinds of contrast and juxtaposition to draw out the darker implications of all kinds of cultural reference. By pointing to your own use of the disease metaphor I was simply trying to show how a single figure of speech may be used to serve two contrasting ideological positions. Without trying to impugn your metaphor I wanted to suggest that a critical use of non sequitur could, by eliminating conventional rhetorical connectives and subordination, call attention to the figural nature of things—and by extension to the ideological interests that metaphors serve.

Your attempt to redraw the literary map according to a more various and eclectic plan is an interesting divertissement, one that we could all perform for our amusement, but it hardly addresses the movement under question. Nor does it speak to the Silliman anthology in its claim to be representative of a given tendency. Artistic movements have never made their mark out of some consensus attitude, and in the early stages of their development

there is an inevitable tendency towards sectarianism. The battles over Patrarchanism versus "native meters" in the sixteenth century were hardly "catholic" (in any sense of the word); the history of Surrealism is the narrative of Breton's almost daily excommunications and exclusions; Imagism was largely a conversation among three persons (Vorticism added a couple more); and the influence of the Arensberg/Bloomsbury/Sitwell/27 Rue de Fleurus and any number of other modernist salons and circles were based not on how open they were but on whom had not been invited to tea. It is the strength—and often the tragic flaw—of literary movements to be narrow, if only to gain a readership in the first place. There are political reasons for this narrowness having to do with the monolithic nature of the publishing establishment in which innovation is immediately absorbed into advertising copy. And sectarianism has to do with the entropic nature of literary communities: once you try to accommodate everyone else's interests, you get. . .well, the Kiwanis Club. Much of the cohesive strength of a movement like Surrealism or Futurism had to do with its (real or imagined) embattled relation to the dominant culture. The Objectivists gained considerable impetus out of their disagreements with Imagism, just as Imagism defined itself against the Georgian verse it so often appeared to imitate. Would these important literary moments have been strengthened by the same kind of retrospective revisionism that you propose for the Silliman anthology? Without trying to justify the narrow focus of the Silliman anthology (I too regret the exclusion of Canadian writers like Dewdney and McCaffery), I recognize that it addresses a historically specific moment in postwar writing—and that is its value.

My main purpose in responding to your note was not to argue the strengths and weaknesses of language-writing; it was to draw attention to what I saw as a trivialization of historical processes by equating literary movements and complex political life in a relation of simple reflection. As we both would agree, Reaganism pervades all aspects of contemporary life, but it hardly follows that language writing replicates that influence because it uses some forms of non sequitur. This is to turn a fairly complex and diverse body of work (not to mention an enormously complicated political structure) into a unitary, mindless edifice. I think both art and politics are worth much more consideration than that.

Your alternative to the "depthless" writing of recent experimental verse is "culture," defined as those writers who translate on a regular basis—yourself, for example. But what kind of alternative does this offer anyway? Will "our" translations of foreign authors really help us understand oppression, abuses of power, sexism, racism, Reaganism? I know this is not your

avowed point, but it is implied in everything you say: that "words without history" must be revived through an infusion of the classics. (This, of course, was the other Eliot's point, and he was hardly a progressive.) As fervently as I believe in the positive effects of knowing "the tradition," I also believe that this very appeal (invoked as a self-evident truth) can prevent us from looking at the present—at the words that as yet have no history because they're in the process of being transformed right before our eyes. To deny *that* process is to perform a fatal oedipal act that will prevent us from seeing who is holding the sign.

Sincerely,
MICHAEL DAVIDSON

DUPLESSIS AND ESHLEMAN ON THE DAVIDSON/WEINBERGER EXCHANGE

18 Jan 1988: a letter among letters

[. . .] The critical enterprise of language poetry—the writing of analytic poetics—is a real and provocative achievement. LP activity has been distinguished by a great deal of critical prose, working papers, programmatic analyses, personal essays: some hard to read because sticky with self-indulgence, and others difficult, but serious, sometimes breathtaking, because attempting immediately to assimilate critical theory and philosophy to poetry. Which activity, in turn, has had some salutary effect on "Poetry" as an institution made sloppy by its unquestioned reliance on banalized romanticism. And as well—not making philosophy or theory the queen of the faculties—by working with the arts, popular culture, music, design, in a major "inter-art" analysis which does not scant political issues and stakes. The "marxistante" aspects of LP activity have always struck me as one of the more valuable (and permanently valuable) contributions being made by their work.

Of course, to continue the discussion of their critical assumptions, the differences between EW and MD do seem those of degree. But perhaps their greatest difference is in their tactic when faced with the militantly

Note: this piece was cut—signaled by [. . .]—from a letter of about twice this length. In the original, the interplay between italicized and plain text was an "organic" part of the statement made, something not thoroughly well reflected in this excerpt. RBD

organized LP movement of the past 15 years, what one might call "first phase" language-oriented poetries. *that's funny, that echo of Silliman is not meant to be ironic or coy* Eliot's tactic of isolating "Language Poetry" in part negatively mimics the practices of that group in the concerted creation of institutions of dissemination—journals, reading series, "talks" series; in contrast, Michael tends to, and wants to recuperate and blend "Language Poetry" beyond some of its own self-defined and maintained borders.

Perhaps their largest similarity is that Michael, like Eliot, wants to make a political/cultural analysis, with just a greater degree of emphasis (in MD) on aesthetic experiences and worlds. He poses plural origins for literary phenomena, is ready with multiplicities of influences, affiliations, and traditions and then Eliot responds with his own *I've always been startled, fascinated, put off? by how neatly male writers construct originating genealogies as part of their critical analyses how that tactic fixes and defines "ink" lines, lines of descent this one "out of" that one you know it may be true but it's a funny procedure*

Michael also claims a critical/oppositional function for innovative (non-transparent) rhetorical and poetic tactics, but he leaves ambiguous, as this kind of analysis often does, what is the impact of rhetoric and writing ON real centers of power. This ambiguity is not unique to Michael; in fact, it is the centerpiece in Jameson's *Political Unconscious*. Probably the strongest difference between them is in their degree of tolerance for the claims of so organized a literary movement: Eliot seeing real trouble in some of the sour episodes involving group vs. others *he would not call these "episodes" would see them as having a revelatory significance* and Michael not alluding to or glossing those episodes at all (e.g. with the Messerli anthology).

One of the characteristics of writers like Silliman and Bernstein in their role as critics (those I mention are those I have read) is to have produced a concerted, intended, intelligent analysis of literary movements and literary reception, indeed of all aspects of the complex of activities—production, dissemination, reception/consumption—in their social, political, historical contexts. The way most professional (academic) literary criticism has been stratified not only divides these terms, but also valorizes certain aspects of production under the aegis of artist=genius and ignores or de-contextualizes the literary processes that go beyond writing artworks, as if those works were just magically "always" "already" appreciated in "universally human" ways. In an academic setting, marxist, feminist, 3rd world, and popular culture analyses have altered that situation somewhat. But this kind of LP analysis parallels and is related to important work in phrasing an adequate literary history. This is a notable achievement.

It is then actually striking that theory and praxis worked so sternly together for LP cultural workers: a group—or set of related groups—maintained itself for about 15 years of work. As a devotee of working cohorts rather than declared and centered groups, I regard this activity with curiosity and amazement tempered with suspicion at the self-limiting aspects of any concerted enterprise. *but look at me anyway; the only club I've signed up for recently has been Woolf's Society of Outsiders* [. . .]

So the critical and oppositional prospectus offered in language poets' "working papers" are among the most useful and provocative documents of and in contemporary writing. They have called up, for examination, all that makes writing "writing" and reading "reading." Thematic organization, centered, unquestioned self, how to speak let's say with narrative cues, clues and some assumptions, but without narrative teleology, the use of ideolects, dialects and discourses, the means, principles, and mechanisms of writing practice and rhetoric (no matter how assumed and naturalized) (like how a book "looks" and a book "is." like typography, like syntax o yes like syntax like sequencing like cause and effect). All this laying bare the device is exhilarating

and difficult hard to read hard to assimilate not depending on conventionalized "pleasures" the pleasure is critical but I know this kind of debate from my own parallel practice as a feminist writer.

What a strange medium to be using that everyone talks and writes and sings and consumes. Which would be to find, of course, yr medium filled with an almost paralyzing set of cultural allusions and discourses of race and gender, of political quietism and war-mongering at once. *must break it up, examine every jot and tittle; get back of line, rhythm, punctuation, syntax, must get into, crack that surface of the already said, the already accepted because in that seem to be contained those seeds of, those nets of hegemonies which I would unsettle*

There are a few questions I have about the creative work of language writers (of course knowing, liking, that one of the vital parts is the flux between document and poem; essay and "story" the erasure of the difference between creative and critical writing) (as in a parallel way in Beverly Dahlen's) but I mean those things that look like poems, or prose format image-laden writing. What do they do with pleasure? what do they do about transcendence? what do they do with understanding community? How do they negotiate specific rises of passionate feeling passionate nodules of feeling and agglomerated psycho-political force in language how do they negotiate feeling without romantic transcendence? For even the investigation of lateral dailiness and the centerless sense of everything marginal and parallel is a quest of pleasure and passion. It is like saying—for them, is there mystery? Is there the political and psychic strangeness of writing a poetry out of the disasters of the 20th century:

shards of language, shards of meaning, and, tragically, shards of people. So then, if not the impossible, discredited transcendence—something else, for which there is little consensus on the name. Oppen called it the "numerous." By a familiar pun, one finds, even in the moments of absence, the numinous as well, a numinous which compels even if we all understand that no promise—even possibility—of coherence is its occasion.

It is worth wondering why—in EW's excellent point—Susan Howe and Michael Palmer (putting Clark Coolidge aside as differing) are "resorted to" as he unglamorously puts it. It has something to do with the ways they "solve" the issue of unconcessive metonymy by (aside from thematic nodules) a sense of a vertical dimension (Oppen's term) of awe, wonder, mystery, alarm at what IS: what is historically, culturally. Both—this is a little bald but will have to do—try to reassimilate certain symbolist evocations to an objectivist rhetoric, Palmer sometimes almost forensically. By symbolist, I include "allegorical" in the way Craig Owens / Bob Glück pursue this term: appropriation, marking, overwriting, layering of historically distinctive discourses. I find S. Howe (whose work I know best) is a measure of what is, as yet, missing from language writing, which would be: the release of rhetoric from the thrall of the incessant = = = = = so allegorically registered in the name of one notable journal.

Transcendence has often been conventionally negotiated in that mono-logic, monochromatic discourse which Bakhtin calls characteristic of poetry. And it is that language use that language poetries have, happily, participated in rupturing; (tho not at issue here, probably the major contribution of African-American writers to this project of pluralizing discourses in poetry should not go unstated). Like the famous character who talked "en prose" it is a terrific thing for poetry, not only for the novel, to discover that we are using various discourses, historically occasioned and situated. In fact, the unpoeticizing of poetry may be a mission—actually a common struggle—shared by most of the people here disagreeing. The question is how to find and to figure or represent value when certain conventional forms/forces of value—the epiphany, the appeal to transcendence, myth, Poetry as an Ideal, the Poet as a Figure, not to say Poetic Diction—are sidelined or equalized with a blast. These discourses, if evoked at all, have to lose their aura, and take their chances in "the real world." By that I mean resituating the upper limits of poetic diction, yearning, transcendence among a number of other discourses, rather than as the culmination or crown of language. Idealizing poetry is a useless gesture. One of the problems of LP is that this issue is often faced with ironizing or distancing strategies which are privileged as, presumably, no discourse/mode or tone should be privileged, in the logic of their position. *I am not sure of some of that but seems necessary to say it, to take my chances and say it, to see what will happen where it gets me in thinking* [. . .]

There is a further irony in the site and conduct of this apparent debate that a writer like Charles Bernstein or Bob Perelman comes out of the "dialogic" analyses of Bakhtin, while a writer like Eshleman comes out of Bakhtin's analysis of the grotesque and carnivalesque.

[. . .] One of the extraordinary strains of reading echt L=A=N=G (etc.) poetry has something to do, perhaps, with those eye-catching equal signs (which, I have not deployed in writing this, but which are part of their history and ours). Unconcessive metonymy, and the a-syntactic space between the equalized materials, and the jar or crack as different things hit into, or are collaged against each other has been a problem—as well as an advantage—which haunts modern and contemporary innovative writing. Pound solved it by "bursting thru" *or was that "busting thru" anyway it's quite a performative metaphor all by itself* to haunting, luminous and completely traditional versions of images of paradise (especially light and water, and those in an eroticized shimmer) for which he claimed "they cohere, even if my notes (i.e. metonymic registers) do not cohere." Williams solved it by the temporal (narrativized?) proposal and accumulation of thematic nodules and clusters, his strategy of "rolling up" in *Paterson*. Creeley solved it by a primary gender narrative of asymmetry: postulating man as "living" in the postmodern era of the shifting "I" and decentered subject, but woman "living" in a traditional (pre-modern?), mythic/humanist era and giving us *I mean women my gender* the responsibility for telos and value.

Where Eliot is clearly helpfully right is to ask the challenging question: if dissociated, paratactic writing, in Michael's excellent terms "alternate forms of temporality," is in fact a characteristic of all experimental 20th century writing, clearly we need more than the constantly repeated, approving evocation of these, and similar, terms (like defamiliarization) to make further distinctions among writers. Some major rhetorical and stylistic study of 20th century innovative poetry has to occur which includes analysis of its context, of its historical functions, of its political as well as poetic meanings. And its impact on the reader—degrees of readability in some ratio with degrees of critique.

I am separating Eliot's question from his answer. Eliot has made an organicist historical paradigm (language writing is in a "decadent stage" of 20th century writing) and has proposed a generic analogy: consumer culture's TV "bites." The question is vital; I am agnostic about the answers, one for its "decadent"—not sure this term can function fruitfully as a historical analysis of style, and the other for its apocalyptic use of popular culture. [. . .]

The debate between Language Poetry and others, if it were to be carried to an extreme, would make me think warily of sectarianism on the left—2 little groupuscules at unspeakable odds over certain important

issues, while all around them power is shared between smarmy liberals and neofascist reaction. The analogy? why are certain *Sulfur* eds. (—not a group) and LP defenders (LP clearly was, is, could still be a group) grappling, while all around garrulous bevies of white bread and dead muskrat poets banally implode. To use terms approximately like Silliman's: the mutually interested co-existence of poetry communities which have a radical political-aesthetic agenda is of some import. The uneasy hyphen is an exacting signal of unfinished debates—but they are not sterile debates, having to do with the relationship of hopes/struggles for social justice and the forms and functions of writing. Of writing as and in resistance. Just think what a fine anthology some "we" could make if we stood together in differences, in the pluralism of constructive experiment. That would be the anthology to counter incessantly "prize winning" "poets." A new anthology: of the analytic lyric, of the working work—work generative, work of contestation from the multiple communities of contestation, work whose assumptions are made and challenged in the course of, and in the form of writing.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Weinberger is right about the lack of track records based on translating either on a regular basis or doing a complete job on a single author (Hejinian, for example, is not an exception yet to what Eliot claims; while she has been translating Dragomoshchenko on a regular basis for several years, to my knowledge less than 30 pages of this work have appeared in print). There are a number of foreign poetries that should have drawn Language Poet translation interest: the Vallejo of *Trilce*, post-1945 Artaud, Heisenbuttel, DuBouchet, Daive, several of the Italian Novissimi—all are in varying ways tangential to Language Poetry concerns but most are also larger and more poetically ample than I take the Language "concentrate" to be: e.g., to become involved with the totaled syntax of *Trilce* is immediately to become involved with issues that lie outside the concentrate.

Davidson does not justify the lack of Language Poetry involvement with the "other" by proposing that a particular group of foreign theorists "occupy prominent positions in critical essays by language-writers." To make use of a foreign critic to reinforce one's own poetics is a gesture of a different order than making available several hundred pages of foreign

literature. Translation, on the scale of a Rexroth, Blackburn, or Waldrop, mixes American esthetic identity with that which counters it. We all read to appropriate material for our own workings; the translator goes a step further by making a gift to the reader outside his own poetry. The Language Poets' failure to make such gestures parallels their refusal to engage American poetries that differ from or argue with their own.

TV does not seem simply non sequitur to me. Situation comedy, soap opera, detective farce, while as empty as a Reagan speech, refer to "life out there," and at least theoretically employ cause and effect. Poetrywise, they are closer to Confessional Poetry (and its diluted extensions) than to Language Poetry. On the other hand, the use of image in advertising does relate to Language Poetry, in as much as a TV image (or splash of music) can represent anything: two "lovers" looking into each others' eyes are only there to sell wine, travel, or perfume. They do not contextualize a real human exchange, and thus are non- or arbitrarily-referential. No longer moored to a psychological or realistic world, they are so much flotsam or P.R. for salvation through consumerism.

The concentrate or glue that binds the Language "community" up to this point involves separating out of syntax both an inner and an outer world, so that, in Watten's phrase, syntax becomes "total." Denotative and connotative fields are raised to the exclusion of a context in which language directly engages experience. Visually speaking, such activity reminds me of photos I have seen in which a plethora of signs (Self Service Eat Here Stop-n-Go Turn Left Elect Carter) have filled the visual frame. The buildings to which the signs presumably have been attached (or to which they refer), the ground into which they have been pounded, are obscure. The signs float, and seem to total the atmosphere.

In Messerli's quote-studded Introduction to *"Language" Poetries,* language itself is defined as "engenderer of experience," "source of experience," "medium of consciousness," "perception," "a communality" and "perception itself." But language is not the source of my experience; it is a mediational tool that is a result of symbol making, and symbol making itself is anchored in my foetushood. Language is a kind of slippery taffy that I use to wire the outer to the inner—I intend the complicated metaphor here, because there is no consensual agreement as to the origin of language, or to the extent to which it is the origin of anything. Language is my enemy as much as it is my friend; I am at its mercy, I did not choose it, at the same time it is my terrible weapon (my male power to name), and I intuitively view it as a kind of nuclear power. When I look into my soul, when I dream, when I feel my affiliation with and estrangement from my imagination of a center, language is not there. In contrast to being felt as a source, I experience language more like cinders or rocks that I daily break my teeth on.

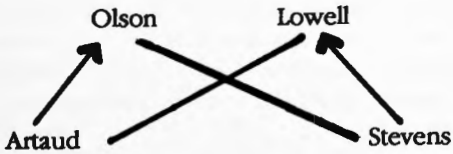
At the point when all living forms are not only identified but in harmonious relationship, art, as we know it, will cease. Until then, art essentially respects the reality principle even if, in vision, it asserts that it is not so (Blake is always arguing that reality is created, not observed, but his argument is weighted with the anguish of its contradiction—and I think that is one of the reasons that we still read him). There is no way to advance an avant-garde art if you argue that any particular power or presence accounts for *everything* else. The conflict between the inside and the outside must be respected, if for no other reason than that there are millions of sons of bitches out there (as Williams put it near the end of his life) who want to have done once and for all with the human spirit.

At the point you assert that language is the source of experience, you might as well say: language is God. The distinction between the significant and the insignificant blurs, and a kind of grey limbo wells up between, for example, my manhood and Salvador. Both manhood and Salvador contract into words. Messerli states: "writing becomes a political action." How is this so? Has he examined the implications of such a statement? In some substratum of the unconscious, everything appears to be of equal significance. LSD is instructive here: at moments under LSD every sound, sight, fart, nod, cloud movement signified, but it was an inarticulate signification because once voiced the signifiers belonged to the sensation and did not act as an interface between the experience and another being.

Since according to Silliman Language Poets do not want to be called anything, how might we respect this request and, at the same time, seek an image by which to identify the concentrate that has drawn many of these writers into a community? In his Introduction to the *Ironwood* "Realism" anthology of "'Language' Writing" (in which there is no discussion of realism), Silliman refers to the poets in Don Allen's *The New American Poetry* as "the New Americans." Presumably he feels his label is apt and correct. Thus, doing away with his unwanted label of "language," I propose that the contributors to *In the American Tree* be called the Treed Americans.

*

For the past week, I have awakened at 5 AM with the following configuration in mind:



Admittedly, a subjective tetrad, but perhaps one way to start thinking about certain imaginative formations in the 20th century. Artaud and Stevens represent, for me, extremes in the mastery of revelation and sublimation (it might be argued that these powers define the traditional activities of the avant-garde and the establishment). It is time that one of the earliest definitions of the avant-garde be brought to bear on counter-establishment writing. In 1848, Gabriel-Desire Laverdant, a Fourierist, wrote that its function was to "lay bare with a brutal brush all the brutalities, all the filth, which are at the base of society." Reflecting on these words in his book-length essay on Leon Golub, Donald Kuspit observed that "it has been forgotten that the brutal revelation of brutal reality—a mimesis that necessarily employs brutal techniques—is the central idea of the avant-garde which has degenerated into a notion of esthetic revolution."

At the time that Artaud and Stevens did their most definitive work (the mid-late 1940s), they represented a fierce oppositionalism that seems to have weakened in world poetry by the late 1950s/early 1960s. My sense is that had they met, Artaud would have screamed at Stevens, and that Stevens would not have responded.

Olson and Lowell, in spite of massive differences in methodology and adherences, seem closer than Artaud and Stevens; I can at least imagine them in debate. Both seem related to the earlier figures in the following ways:

In Olson's case, Artaud's fervor for a presentday reality in which the material and religious worlds are fused, has weakened to an obsession with origins (in 1936 Artaud went to the Mexican Tarahumaras, a still existent Neolithic civilization; 15 years later, Olson went to Yucatan to investigate Maya ruins). In Lowell's case, Stevens' interior richness made possible by the sealed vessel of sublimation, has become the leaky vessel of personal misery. Looking at Lowell through Artaud, the spectre of revelation appears to be confession. Looking at Olson through Stevens, the spectre of sublimation appears to be a focus on the past. While *Life Studies* and *The Distances* argue opposing esthetic positions, I think both Lowell and Olson felt quite similar about the quality of life in presentday America.

Neither Artaud nor Stevens have offsprings—for utterly different reasons, both are too individualistic and barbed to be imitatable. On the other hand, both Olson and Lowell offer perspectives that have heavily determined the sensibility of several generations of poets.

Such a configuration suggests that as the century matures, the avant-garde and the establishment lose their clear-cut oppositionalism and move closer to each other, while at the same time the increasing perilous conditions of life bend them even further away from each other as an obsession with the personal life becomes the alternative to an obsession

with how did we get in such a fix (leading to research on the origin of civilization), and vice-versa.

It seemed possible to me in the late 1960s that a responsible avant-garde in poetry could become the dominant focus of the 70s and 80s (as such figures as Bacon, Kitaj, Golub and Petlin testify has happened in painting). By "responsible" I mean not only the inventiveness of Olson and Robert Duncan, but their erudition and responsiveness to the human condition at large. Olson died in 1970, and two years earlier, Duncan committed himself to 15 years of publishing silence. With these two strong figures absent, as a conservative cycle began to turn against the Aquarian-LSD-Vietnamese War Protest-Revolution cycle of the 60s, Lowell's progeny flooded the scene and softened his genuine unhappiness to a workshop-respectable and endlessly repetitive display of self-sensitivity. Unlike painting, poetry has been housed in the universities, and in contrast to the indifference to the "new" I encountered in the English Department in the late 50s, via the some 300 writing programs today there is an active opposition to it, with a concomitant supportive network for the kind of poetry students can learn to write in a few years.

At the point the poets in the American Tree were making their formative decisions, they were confronted by an establishment image of a chatty, polite, Lowellian ego (without Lowell's robust if descriptive line), the anonymous poetry that represents the past 25 years in the textbook anthologies. It is too simple to say that the Treed Americans plucked a few lessons from a few of the "New Americans," utterly turned their backs on everything they associated with the children of Lowell and then went into a huddle, but something like this seems to have happened. Their crucial miscalculation, as I see it, and one which particular figures are now recalculating, is to have made across-the-board judgements on such matters as ego, self, story, myth, narrative etc. While "I" may be predictable and boring in William Stafford's poetry, it is hardly predictable or boring in Artaud, Spicer, Kelly, or Padgett. When it comes right down to it, the only ones of us who will be read—if this matters—in the 21st century are those who will have forged an unforgettable personal voice, no matter how impersonal such a "voice" may appear to be. The individual in all literary movements and communities suffers the concentrate of the movement itself, and sometimes (as in the case of the Surrealists), it is only in revolt against the hardened concentrate that second generation figures emerge as powerful poets on their own.

As editor of *Sulfur,* I have worked to present some of the Treed Americans in a context that they do not dominate, so that those who participate in the Tree but are not obscured by it (e.g., Palmer, Howe, DuPlessis, Rasula), or those who most purely and intelligently represent the

Tree (e.g., Bernstein, Silliman, Hejinian), can be read as part of a range of poetries including, of course, foreign poetries.

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In a letter sent to the *Sulfur* masthead, Rasula lists a few questions that he would like response to.

For those of us who were active in the late 60s, the present counter-establishment scene is paltry indeed. The bulk of the thoughtful critical writing has been by the Treed upon the Treed. Non-tree non-academic poets who began to publish in the 70s have, to my knowledge, published very little critical prose. The poetry readership (bought, reviewed, "prized" books) appears to be primarily controlled by the university workshop constellation; 19 year students are introduced to poetry via the textbook anthologies which present post WWII American poetry as the domain of Confessionalist writing with token minority representation. The poetry reading, in contrast to the political statement it made in cafes etc., in the 50s and 60s, has become institutionalized and sedate. Of the poets Weinberger lists who "began publishing in book form in the 1960s," only a few of us have our best work in print and none of us have received significant review or critical attention. If manuscripts are circulating, I must say that I see very few of them (other than material submitted to *Sulfur,* the reading of which soaks up most of my reading time). Like most American counter-establishment poets I think, I feel that I inhabit a small island at best tangential to a few others. This is not entirely bad, for because of the isolation, I have had to develop my own areas of research, such as Upper Paleolithic cave art, and via foreign poetries a feel for what might be thought of as the international scene of the past 50 years.

Someone should point out that viewed from Peru or Czechoslovakia, American poets have nothing to complain about. In fact, I think it could be argued that the extent of our poet professorships, awards, archival purchases, and publishing outlets have homogenized us, and that we are, as a nation, a family of quarreling, unsatisfiable rich kids who have to a considerable extent lost the solitude and difficulties that have contributed to some of the finest world poetry over the past 100 years.

My main sense of "what to do now" involves several things. Given the twin dilemma of origins vs. the personal life struck by the Olson/Lowell image, I think both forces should be pushed to the hilt—we must try to imagine the rudiments of Homo Sapiens mind as well as ruthlessly investigate the self (my hunch is that a powerful imagination may find these forces complexly coded in the one remaining untapped citadel—the lower body).

I would personally like to dismantle all of the writing workshop programs and send the students abroad to wander with a backpack of text

among strangers. Obviously this is not possible, because the writing programs have massively caught on, I think partially because of TV replacing serious reading. Might there be a generation now in their twenties who will navigate between the Grounded Academic scene and the Treed Americans, bringing to bear upon poetry a densely-woven grain of mythological intelligence, political awareness, and American reality? A crucial component of such a move would involve American minority poets ceasing to monolithically identify themselves with their own minority background, and starting to cannibalize every tradition they can get their hands on (Aimé Césaire a model in this respect).

Is it possible that Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922) and Palmer's *Sun* (1987) bookend the postmodern period, and that as of 1988 we should begin to think millennially? As we face the Gate of 2000, perhaps we should be re-imagining Apocalypse, Incarnation, and the role of the Goddess in world culture.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
4 January 1988

A FINAL RESPONSE

Literary movements have traditionally had three functions: First, the criticism of the prevailing aesthetic, which is usually the aesthetic of the preceding generation. Second, the proposal of a new aesthetic and the promotion of its practitioners. Third, the introduction of other, historical or foreign, work: discoveries of neglected masters in the same language, new readings or translations of well-known texts, translations of the previously untranslated. This third function is both a service to the community and a means of historical or international validation for the new aesthetic: a new context in which to locate the new. Thus, a tiny movement like Imagism simultaneously soured the appreciation of late 19th century texts, promoted a handful of new poets, and forever changed the way classical Greek and Chinese poems were read and translated. Thus, one of the projects of a huge movement like Surrealism—which revolutionized taste on all aesthetic fronts—was the introduction of a wide range of non-Western texts: Latin-American writers, to take a small example, had to go to Paris in the 1920s to "discover" pre-Columbian oral and written literature. Thus, the one truly enduring aspect of the New Criticism may well be its bringing of the metaphysical poets back onto the map.

The members of the "language" movement have been hyperactive in fulfilling the first two functions. They have attempted to dismantle the prevailing aesthetic—what Ron Silliman, in his MLA (of course!) paper modestly calls "the naive assumption of speech, individualism or 'beauty.'" They have tirelessly promoted a new aesthetic and its practitioners. What they haven't done is bring any other (non-critical) writings into the fold. This is not to suggest that they are individually ill-read—far from it. But in their voluminous writings and public speeches, they have generally ignored everyone except themselves, a few non-affiliated contemporaries, and the French and German critics currently fashionable among art critics and English professors. "Language," for me at least, would be an exciting and genuinely challenging movement if it presented its own idiosyncratic historical "canon," revisionary readings of the classics, discoveries of lost masters, bridges to previously unknown foreign poets, commentaries not only on language but on languages. This has simply not occurred as a collective effort.

To my mind there have been four movements (or tendencies or constellations) in America since 1960 which have not only produced important poetry, but have been extraordinarily enriching for those not active in the group:

—The black nationalist poetry of the 1960s, which, besides its political agenda, effectively admitted black speech into poetry (something the Harlem Renaissance, with the notable exception of Hughes, had refused to do), created a large and genuinely populist audience for poetry, had a close and exciting working relationship with jazz and some rock musicians (still extant, in pop form, as rap and hip-hop), offered scathing commentaries on white "verse," and brought in a great deal of African and Afro-American history, mythology and religion which had previously been absent in American poetry.

—The poetry written and read against the Vietnam War, that unique moment when American poets served as citizens, witnesses, intellectual consciences of the nation (a role that poets routinely perform elsewhere on the planet). Most important, a moment when political necessity compelled a settling of differences among the poetry communities: not only between academic and non-academic, but among the non-academics. (It has been forgotten, especially by Silliman, that the Donald Allen anthology was intended as a peaceable kingdom for the bitterly warring factions of the anti-establishment: though it is difficult for us to sort out now, the Black Mountains hated the Beats and so on and so on.) The readings and anthologies against the War were a truly democratic vision of a republic of letters, and, as Clayton Eshleman says above, seemed to portend a "responsible avant-garde" for the post-Vietnam years.

—Ethnopoetics—essentially an American revision and expansion of Surrealism— which not only introduced a tremendous amount of indigenous material, but also presented a re-reading of American literature, discovered all sorts of strange and forgotten poets, emphasized oral performance and poetry rituals and talismans, translated a great deal of European modernist poets, offered new theories and practices of translation, and, perhaps most of all, proposed an image of the poet, based on the archaic, as a vital, necessary member of the community.

—Finally, the women poets who are currently centered around the magazine *HOW(ever)*. After the isolated work of Dickinson, H.D., Loy, Stein and Niedecker, it is a concentrated and collective effort to challenge the inherited (patriarchal) language, invent a feminine and feminist language of poetry and new modes of criticism, reread and reconsider the entire history of poetry, and raise the pioneer women modernists to their rightful positions of importance. To my mind this is the most exciting group activity occurring in American poetry today. (Though one that desperately needs more periodical outlets.)

What these four movements have given me is a tremendous sense of worlds opening up. (And I should emphasize that I am speaking of group activity as a sum of all the individual efforts involved—obviously no single individual can do everything.) That black nationalism and ethnopoetics have produced no viable second generations, and that the Vietnam War poetry led nowhere, is, for me, the great disaster of American poetry in the late 1970s and 1980s.

(Given the current obsession with criticism—Silliman's italicized "writing itself is not sufficient for completeness in poetry" being the latest pronouncement—it should be said that all of these movements have promoted "critical thinking," though their rhetoric bears no resemblance to "language" discourse. And Silliman is way off when he states that the "New Americans" were against critical thinking: true perhaps of Corso or Ferlinghetti, but Duncan, Olson, Creeley, Levertov, Dorn, Jones/Baraka, Snyder, Sorrentino? All published at least one book of critical essays, and many of the others wrote isolated articles.)

On the other hand, what "language" as a movement has given me is the sense of worlds being closed off. That reductionist label "language" or "language-centered" says it all. One can only imagine how they will react to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in her statement above, raising words like "pleasure," "transcendence," "passion," "feeling."

For me, a model of the life and work of a poet was Robert Duncan, who died yesterday—a poet who embraces all the words on Rachel's list and much more: curiosity, pluralism, history, indignation, spirituality, social and moral accountability. I have never gotten over the first (now famous)

words of Duncan's that I ever read, in the first *Caterpillar,* 21 years ago: "The drama of our time is the coming of all men into one fate. . ." and his dream of a "symposium of the whole" where all "the old excluded orders must be included: the female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and unknown; the criminal and failure." That Duncan found no room at his symposium for the "language" poets—even though nearly all of them stand in opposition to nearly all of his beliefs—was, I think, a mistake. A symposium of general agreement is no symposium at all.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

THE RHETORIC OF MATERIALITY

I. Talk of Death

> Excrement is the dead life of the body.
> Norman O. Brown

> The spectacle is the life of what is dead, moving within itself.
> Guy Debord

In its cryptic and prodigal fashion, language poetry expresses a *nostalgie de boue;* that is to say, it concerns the death of poetry as a medium.[1] Yet language poetry, by appellation and adherence to the look (the gaze) of poetry, refuses to acknowledge the inscrutable death that lies at its heart. What's more, the lost object (poetry) which it seeks to keep alive within itself, is its own corpse. Language poetry, then, is both an "exquisite corpse" and its own crypt, a place where death is concealed and protected (from what, from whom?). The great failing of language poetry is its inability to preserve itself *as other,* as dead. It can only mourn and therefore love the dead (poetry, itself) as a living part of itself. It refuses to finish itself off.

The specularity of language poetry (its prolific nature, its belatedness, its cryptic enunciation of its own death) is characteristic of a recent trend in the arts towards revivalism and anachronism.[2] The most advanced

painting and poetry reinscribes, or simulates, certain features of the historical avant-garde. Yet, the work produced by these specular movements is haunted by a powerful sense of distraction, as if its gaze were averted from a medusal object, a glimpse of its own mortality. More specifically, language poetry has assumed the purgatorial task of producing a cryptonymous account of its own death.[3] The death of the medium of poetry is encrypted, that is, sealed from view and made unintelligible, by "overwriting," the palimpsestic logic that governs much of language poetry. The illegibility of the work is not proof of its meaninglessness—on the contrary, it should be understood as the garbled trace of a meaning so powerful and so contradictory that it must be repressed: the death of poetry. (I am not concerned with the end of poetry, but with its death, its disappearance into unknowing.)

The term "language" in language poetry is, of course, abusive, rigorously abusive; it is an icon (it does what it says)—an originary moment of catachresis, meaning something like the pre-history of language, or language as the end of history. Language poetry wants to free the word from as many discursive and ideological constraints as possible. It strives for an "absence of means" (in Bataille's phrase), the elimination of the medium, of any discursive convention that mediates the material presence of the word. This orientation sustains one of the most prominent features of modernist discourse: an emphasis on the material and graphic properties of the sign. (Barthes: "what pleasure wants is the site of a loss," i.e., a loss of meaning, if meaning is understood as being captive to the requirements of signification.)[4] Language poetry should thus be understood as a belated contribution to a persistent, modernist rhetoric of materiality, whose utopian desire is to extract the word from its semiotic and ideological matrix, in order to plunge it into the *jouissance* of pure materiality. (And let us not forget our homegrown edition of the same: the Beats. See Deleuze on "The Superiority of Anglo-American Poetry.")[5]

Earlier I spoke of language poetry expressing a *nostalgie de boue:* not merely a longing for filth and ecstatic release (both formally and politically), but a penchant for anachronism. Indeed, what distinguishes language poetry from earlier projects concerned with materiality is its disclosure of the inscrutable relation between filth and death in the medium of poetry (as the epigraphs to this article suggest). As poetry approaches an irreducibly graphic limit, as the verbal image disintegrates in its quest for greater immediacy, the fascination with the most radical (i.e., excremental) forms of materiality is revealed to be a fascination with death. The scatological rhetoric of modernists such as Bataille, Benjamin, and Pound turns to talk of death (always garbled) and the work of mourning in language poetry.

II. Imagery and Excrement

> Eternity is far more the rustle of a dress
> than an idea
>
> Walter Benjamin

To begin to understand the process of "mortification" (Benjamin's term) and cryptonymy at work in language poetry, one must return to the writings of Benjamin, Bataille, and Pound. During the 1930s, all three men made important efforts to formulate an epistemology of the image and a materialist practice of discourse. In each of these projects, the idea of verbal and graphic imagery emerges as a crucial figure in the rhetoric of materiality, along with the ideas of trash and excrement. The projects of all three men, of course, were deeply affected by the rise of fascism and the political turmoil of the thirties. Yet, in each case, the theoretical and practical models which they brought to bear on political discourse were derived from earlier developments in artistic practice (such as montage, the shock effect of surrealism, and Pound's concept of the ideogram). This suggests, first of all, a volatile relation between political discourse and artistic practice at both ends of the political spectrum. (Benjamin seems not to have taken to heart his own warning about the danger of aestheticizing politics.) It also suggests, given the disparity of the political identities of the three men, that the rhetoric of materiality held a powerful appeal for cultural criticism emerging from both Marxist and fascist orientations. Indeed, the critical focus of the projects of all three men is an unrelenting attack on abstract rationality.

Let's start with Pound, since any attempt to associate him with Bataille, or even Benjamin, is bound to raise a few eyebrows. What has Pound to do with Benjamin's apocryphal blend of surrealism and Marxism? And isn't it true that Pound's economics and poetics attempt to exclude precisely those values and dimensions of language which Bataille exploits? I will argue, on the contrary, that the image, as a figure of radical materiality and the emblem of a graphic poetics, unites the work of these three men, and that Pound's conception of the verbal image, formulated between 1912 and 1918, anticipates the projects of Bataille and Benjamin.

It is not necessary to do violence to Pound's conception of the image in order to glean from it a rhetoric of materiality. In fact, one need only examine the astonishingly inventive and perverse ensemble of figures which Pound offered in an attempt to define "the" image, to discover a powerful and contradictory defense of materiality. Inspired by the move toward abstraction in the visual arts (cubism and expressionism, in particular), Pound conceived of the word as a graphic image, a symptom of the "real." The risk of choosing the image as an emblem of representa-

tional authority and exactitude was, of course, immediately evident. Pound must have known that his project to establish an absolute standard of signification through the image was bound to fail. The inherent specularity of the image—its belatedness, its prolific nature—appeared immediately in Pound's attempts to define it: not only could he not offer a literal definition of the image, but his figures for it multiplied endlessly. The basic principles of imagism (economy, precision, clarity) were violated in the very act of defining the image.

In his memoir of the sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska, Pound speaks of the image as a "revival of realism," a mask, translation, metaphor, a Freudian "complex," an ideogram, and a vortex. This compendium of figures leaves no doubt that his conception of the image is "profoundly cracked" (to use a phrase of Bataille's). It is schismatic because it inherits the wildly contradictory notions and attitudes about imagery which characterize Western intellectual history. Simultaneously idolatrous and iconoclastic, Pound's understanding of the image oscillates between the strictly representational (a revival of realism) and the militantly non-representational (ideogram and vortex). It is the latter end of the spectrum, where the verbal image is stripped of its discursive properties, that pertains to the projects of Bataille and Benjamin.

Pound said, "The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing."[6] It is a mark of the dialectical power of Pound's understanding of the image that the series of displacements from metaphor to ideogram to vortex can be read as either a sublimation of the image, or a de-idealization of it. On the one hand, this evolution constitutes a progressive attenuation and abstraction of the inherent sensuality of the mimetic image. From this standpoint, the image abandons entirely its representational function; it reaches its fulfillment in the figure of the vortex, a metamorphic structure that converts ideas from aliment to excrement. On the other hand, the same evolution can be seen as a progressive liberation of the material properties of the mimetic image, a shattering of discursive constraints, a withdrawal from meaning. In this case as well, the image abandons its representational function, but this time the loss coincides with a radical extension of mimetic desire.

Pound's conception of the image can also be made to reveal its backwardness, its inscrutable desire, its apology for filth, by examining what it endeavors to exclude. Between 1911 and 1912, Pound's taste in poetry underwent a dramatic reversal. He disavowed most of his own early poetry, as well as the poets, such as Swinburne, who had inspired it. According to these revisions, Pound claimed that Victorian poetry was plagued by what he called "rhetoric": superficial ornament, incantational rhythms dissociated from meaning, imprecise use of words, and just plain

too many words. He attacked poets in whose work language or poetry "goes rotten, i.e., becomes slushy and inexact, or excessive and bloated."[7] Armed with this scatological rhetoric, Pound launched his vision of modern poetry. Out of this contempt, this anxiety about language, emerged the poetics of imagism. Out of the blurry, putrid, excessive body of language, emerged the image, with its hardness and clarity and precision: an icon rising from the excrement of language.

Pound's poetics should therefore be understood as an allegory of sublimation: the magical conversion of base matter into gold, excrement into imagery. By elevating the image, Pound fashioned an idol out of the contemptible material of language. Freud's theories of sublimation and anality teach us that through a process of negation and idealization, what is lowest becomes highest. Yet the ideal retains, in an altered state, all of the despicable qualities of its origins. Pound's image is essentially *anathematic:* its exalted or sacred character is a property of its power to shock and repel. The forbidden tongue of Swinburne is permitted to speak only through the perversely ideal form of the image. One might argue that the significance of imagism is that language itself is permitted to speak only through its other, the image.

Pound once remarked, "The image is the word beyond formulated language."[8] The idea that the image is a word that belongs to the pre-history or the after-life of language, a word excluded from language, brings to mind Adorno's notion that an image is "the plus of appearance," an apparition of something that does not exist.[9] More importantly, to speak of the image as excessive, as that which is cast out from language, a form of unknowing, necessarily invokes Bataille's economy of excess and his concept of heterogeneity. Bataille's scatological vision represents a crucial extremity, a kind of master trope, in the rhetoric of materiality. It also intersects with Pound's rhetoric of the image in some remarkable ways.

One of the rhetorical strategies Bataille uses in his earlier writings is to insert his theory of base materiality into a hierarchy of word and image, poetry and painting. As in the case of Pound, a particular contempt is reserved for certain dimensions of language and for poetry in particular. According to Bataille, poetry epitomizes all that is antithetical to his theory of heterogeneity: sentimentality, complacency, effeminacy, and "servile idealism." He speaks contemptuously of "poetic concoctions," "poetic haze," and "emasculated poetic complacency."[10] At times, Bataille's polemic sounds remarkably like the rhetoric of imagism: "the fact of needlessly resorting to literary or poetic verbiage, the inability to express oneself in a simple and categorical way, not only are the result of a vulgar impotence, but always betray a pretentious hypocrisy."[11]

In contrast to the poetic word, stands the figure of the image, which Bataille associates with revolution and the most uncompromising elements of his excremental vision. He states, "Whenever one has recourse to im-

ages, most often peremptory and provocative ones, borrowed from the most concrete contradictions, it is reality on the material order, human physiology, that comes into play."[12] More specifically, Bataille, like Pound, draws inspiration, and considerable rhetorical clout, from developments in the visual arts. In contemporary painting, Bataille discovers "the search for that which most ruptures elevation, and for a blinding brilliance"; further, he writes, "today, certain plastic representations are the expression of an intransigent materialism."[13] It is no coincidence that one of the sovereign figures in Bataille's discourse on materiality and expenditure is a painter who cuts off his ear.

During the 1930s, Bataille and Walter Benjamin were both living in Paris, and learned of each other's work through the group of writers and intellectuals known as the *College de Sociologie*. Their relation was close enough that, when Benjamin was forced to flee Paris in 1940, he left many of his papers with Bataille for safekeeping. A number of resonances (and possible traces of influence) can be detected between the work of the two men. The relation for example, between imagery and radical materiality that is only implicit in Bataille's work (or Pound's, for that matter), is stated explicitly in Benjamin's theory of allegory and the dialectical image. Beginning with his work on the *Trauerspiel* and allegory in the 1920s, the image is not only linked to various figures of materiality, but these figures are invariably associated with death: corpse, death mask, husk, ruin. Allegory, according to Benjamin, is characterized by a profusion of images, which are subject to a process he calls "mortification." The image empties itself under the gaze of the allegorist; it is revealed for what it is: a husk, a dead thing, a cipher, in which the allegorist "buries" meaning. The allegorical image is an object captured by death, but it is also a crypt. Knowledge, according to Benjamin, resides in what Barthes would later call "the empty sign," the image. Thus the allegorical image is described as the death mask of history and as a ruin.[14]

During the thirties, Benjamin adapted his theory of allegory to political discourse. From this encounter between Marxist theory and Baroque allegory, emerged Benjamin's concept of the "dialectical image" (a figure which bears extraordinary resemblance, formally, to Pound's ideogram). Benjamin wrote, "an image is that in which the past and the now flash into a constellation. In other words: image is dialectic at a standstill."[15] The dialectical image is identical to the historical object, to what Benjamin called "the trash of history"—the discarded products of culture which the critic "deciphers" in an allegorical fashion.[16] The dialectical image thus gathers in a single figure all of the notions that are central to the rhetoric of materiality: imagery, excrement, death. In a project akin to the aims of language poetry as a movement, Benjamin sought "to prove the materialistic view of history imagistic in a higher sense than the traditional"; that is, "to attain a heightened graphicness combined with a realization of the

Marxist method."[17] Benjamin knew that the true historical object was language itself; he wrote, "Only dialectical images are genuine (i.e., not archaic) images; and the place one encounters them is language."[18]

—DANIEL TIFFANY

NOTES

1 The idea that art is a medium of communication assumes that the language of poetry, for example, transports a more or less stable meaning between two point (such as a text and a reader). A medium is a bridge, but it is also a gap: between words and things, or between words and other words. A medium is also that which intervenes, ideologically, between poems and paintings, or poems and sonatas.

2 For an account of this trend in the visual arts, see Yves-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning" in *Endgame*. Boston Institute of Contemporary Art catalogue, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).

3 On the concept and practice of cryptonymy, see Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word. A Cryptonymy*, foreword by Jacques Derrida, trans. Nicholas Rand, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). For more on the work of Abraham (poet, translator, and psychoanalyst) see the special issue of *Diacritics* (#9, 1979) devoted to him.

4 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p.6.

5 Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues*, trans. Claire Parnet, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 36-76.

6 Ezra Pound, *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska*, (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 92.

7 Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 21.

8 Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, op. cit., p. 88.

9 T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by C. Lenhardt, (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 116-147.

10 In particular, see Bataille's attack on Andre Breton and his article on Dali's painting, "The Lugubrious Game" in *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekl, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985), pp. 24-53. It should also be noted that later in his career, Bataille gives a radically different estimation of poetry, associating it with loss and sacrifice. See his article, "The Notion of Expenditure" (p. 120).

11 Ibid., p. 92.

12 Ibid., p. 36.

13 Ibid., pp. 58, 51.

14 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne, (London: NLB, 1977), pp. 166, 177-78, 182, 193, and *passim*.

[15] From Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, "Theoretics of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," trans. by Leigh Hafrey and Richard Sieburth, *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. 15, nos. 1-2, Fall-Winter 1983-84, p. 7. This section of the *Passagen-Werk* is absolutely essential reading for an insight into Benjamin's methodology.

[16] Ibid., pp. 5-6. For a recent work on Benjamin's project, see Michael W. Jennings, *Dialectical Images*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

[17] Ibid., pp. 8, 6.

[18] Ibid., p. 7.

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Sulfur

FALL 1988

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

Editor	CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
Contributing Editors	RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS MICHAEL PALMER JOHN YAU ELIOT WEINBERGER
Notes, Correspondence, Reviews Editor	JED RASULA
Correspondents	CHARLES BERNSTEIN JAMES CLIFFORD CLARK COOLIDGE MARJORIE PERLOFF JEROME ROTHENBERG RICHARD SIEBURTH
Managing Editor	CARYL ESHLEMAN

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER: LEON GOLUB / TWO HEADS I
(1986, 21" x 68"). Photo by David Reynolds. Courtesy of Hans Neuendorf Gallery, Frankfurt.

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from *Runes* / Section 30

The permafrost is broken, tundra softened into marsh
now the melt-water appears on the grass

The village is no longer a separate thing
from a living village, the dead no more
sway from their hips like stalks, agrin
and desperately achatter

The adulteress naked
except for a collar of ox-skin
A woven band blindfolds the eyes,
the left side of the head is shaved
Not far away a man older than she,
strangled with a hazel wand

The constellations are tethered to the tree,
the insouciant and light-blooded gods
smiling and swinging their legs
in the branches

The aurochs snorts.

A moon drifts beyond caring.

My devotions were attended by all the
insects of the night, the unwanted wisdom.
I have done all I could
to appear mirthful.

GEORGE BUTTERICK, 1973

The *Sulfur* masthead photographed by Robert Turney, on the front porch of the Eshlemans' home in Ypsilanti, on the occasion of *"Sulfur* Live," a Symposium on Poetry and Poetics, held at Eastern Michigan University, April 1988. From left to right, front row: Jerome Rothenberg, Jed Rasula, Marjorie Perloff. Second row: Clayton and Caryl Eshleman, Charles Berstein, Rachel Blau DuPlessis. Third row: James Clifford, Michael Palmer, Clark Coolidge, Eliot Weinberger, John Yau.

MARINA TSVETAYEVA

POEM OF THE END

(Tr. from the Russian by John Dolan)

In the sky, rusty as tin,
finger of a post.
He stood at the appointed place
like fate.

A quarter to. On time?
Death doesn't wait.
Exaggeratedly smooth,
tipping his hat.

Each eyelash a summons.
Mouth down.
Exaggeratedly deep
His bow.

A quarter to. Exactly?
Voice lied.
Heart fell—what's he doing?
Brain; why?

Sky of ugly omens.
Even tin rusts.
He waited, the usual place.
Time: six.

A silent kiss—
Dazed lips,
Like kissing a queen's hand
or a corpse. . .

Through swirls of the simple folk—
Ribs meeting elbows—
Exaggeratedly harsh
The work whistle rose.

Rose, like a dog's howl,
Sullen, sustained,
(Exaggeration of life
On the last day.)

What yesterday lapped at the waist—
today, to the stars.
Exaggeratedly; that is,
Full size.

In my mind: Darling, Darling!
Seven was the time.
"To the movies, or—"
Howled: "Home!"

2

The brotherhood of a Gypsy camp,
That's where it led—
Like thunder inside the head
Or a naked blade—

Like all the terrors
Of the words we wait for
Like a house collapsing:
The word home.

"Home!", like a spoiled
Lost brat's whine,
A one-year-old's list:
"Give" and "Mine"!

My brother in sin,
My chill and warm,
That's how they rush to get out—
The way you howl, "Home!"

Like a horse jerking free of the bridle
Up! And the rope in shreds.
Home—there's not even a building!
There is. A few steps on.

"A home on a hill." "No higher?"
"On top of the hill. —A home;
With a window right under the roof
That *not from the sunrise alone*

Burns?—A restoration
Of Life? Poetically simple!
Home—that means out of the house
Each night.
O who to tell

My grief, my pain,
Fear greener than ice?"
"You've been thinking too much."
Thoughtfully: "Yes."

3

And an embankment. I keep close
To water, like thick to dense.
Semiramide's gardens
Hung there like this.

I keep close to the water,
The steel strip, color
Of death—like a singer
To her notes, a blind man

to a wall. "Come back to me?"
No? Listen—then I'll lean

Toward the quencher-of-every-thirst,
Keeping close, like one walking in sleep

On the roof's edge. . .
                But I'm not afraid
Of the river—born a Naiad!
I hold close to the river, like a hand
When a lover is close

And faithful. . .
                The dead are faithful.
Yes, but not all have a place.
Death on the left, on the right hand
You. Your side, like a corpse.

Light, rippling like a sheaf.
A laugh like a cheap tambourine.
"You and I, we have to
                (shivers)
—So let's be brave, shall we?"

4

A fog of blond.
Wave of gauze ruffles.
Breath-fouled, smoke-fouled,
But mostly: talk—
What's it smell like? Like hurry,
Indulgence and tiny sins,
Commercial secrets
And deodorant powder.

Familied bachelors with rings,
Venerable youths.
Joked about, laughed about,
But most of all—counted out,
Both bills and coins,
Soft snouts in down
. . .Like commercial transactions
And deodorant powder.

I'm half turned away—is *this*
Our house? I won't be hostess!

Above his checkbook, one—
Above a dainty hand, another—
Above a patent-leathered foot, another—
Working quietly.
. . .Like commercial marriages
And deodorant powder.

A notched silver tooth
In the window—the Star of Malta!
. . .Stroked and squeezed,
But most of all—felt-up.
Pinched. . .(So it's yesterday's
Food—don't mind the odor.)
. . .Like commercial tricks
And deodorant powder.

Your chain's too short? Well,
It's platinum, not steel!
Their triple chins shake—
Calves cooking veal!
Above their sugar-dusted necks
The devil in a gaslamp.
. . .Like commercial failures
And another powder—
Bertold Schwartz'. . .
                Brilliant
He was, the people's protector.
"You and I, we have
To talk; shall we be brave?"

5

I catch his lips' movement
And know he won't speak first.
"So you don't love me?" "I do."
"You don't!" "—But in torment,

Drunk and exhausted."
(An eagle looking the land over.)
"God help me, this is our home?"
"A home in my heart." "What *folklore!*"

Love is flesh and blood,
Your own blood's color poured.
Your home of love is
table-talk;

A little while, then home again?
Like gentlemen and ladies?
Love—that means. . .
Temple?
Scar. Child, cut scar

On scar, and right in their sight—
Every servant, every guest!
(I say silently: Love is the bow
Bent back—the bow—let go—)

Love is at least. . .link.
We're separate; lips—lives—
I begged you not to curse
Our hour, sacred, close.

That hour on the crest of the hill
And of passion. The memory; steam.
Love's all fine gifts dumped
In the fire—for free!

His mouth—slit like a shell.
Pale inventory—not a smile.
"And most of all a bed
Alone."
"A bed—you mean

A cliff." Drum roll
Of fingers. "I don't want miracles!

Love; that's just
my own."
"I see, yes. So; now?"

The drum roll of his fingers
Grows. (The scaffold and the square.)
"Let's go." But I: "Let's die—
That would be simpler.

Enough of this cheap stuff;
Rhymes, railroads, rooms over stations;
Love must mean life."
"No. . .It was called by the ancients

Something else—"
And?
Scrap
Of hankie, dangling like a fish.
"Shall we go? Your way?"
"Poison, rails, bullet—take your pick!

Death! And no deals at all!"
"Life!" Like a Roman commander,
Surveying the Legions'
Remnants.
"So we part."

6

"That's not what I wanted.
Not that." (I told
You, love's the body's job,
We want each other's souls,

These days. . .). He has nothing to say.
(Yes, when the train rolls in
You hand your women the pain,

The honor of parting,
Like a toast.) Am I dreaming?
I heard him wrong? . . .Civil liar,
You hand your lover the bloody honor
Of the break; a bouquet. . .

Distinctly. Sound after sound—
"We part," you said?
(As a handkerchief to the ground
In a moment of sweet

Indifference falls. . .) In this battle
You're Caesar (O, insolent lunge!
Bestow your opponent, like a medal
With the sword she must give up!)

And on and on. A hum
In my ears. I bow twice
To you, unsurpassed
In the endgame.

Don't deny it—a vengeance
Worthy of Lovelace,
A noble gesture
That sliced me, flesh

From bone. —A chuckle. Through laughter
Death. A gesture. And no more desire.
Yes, wanting's the body's job,
We're ghosts to each other

These days. . .) The last nail
Goes in (Last screw, since the coffin's lead).
"One last favor then—
I ask you: not a word

About us—to my. . .I mean. . .
Successors. . ." (On their stretchers,

Thus the wounded talk of Spring!)
—I ask you that favor."

Shall I give you a keepsake—a ring?
No. His glance gapes open,
Vacant. *(Let the stamp*
On thy heart be the ring

On thy hand. . .) No scenes now!
A gulp then, and quieter, softer,
"A book?" A book. Your usual.
No, you don't even write them—

Books. . .

So must not
So must not
Must not cry.

In our itinerant
Fishermen's Brotherhoods
They dance, they don't cry.

They drink and don't cry.
With their own hot blood
They pay, they don't cry.

Pearls in a glass
Melt, and a world
They rule, they don't cry.

So I'm out? Harlequin,
I see it at last—
You throw your Pierrette
The honor—like a bone—

The prize and honor of the end,
The curtain-dropping gesture.
Closing speech. When an inch of lead
In the breast would be better,

Warmer—cleaner—
                Teeth
Pinch my lips.
Must not cry.

Hardest
Into softest;
Just don't cry.

In the wandering brotherhoods
They die but don't cry
Are burned and don't cry.

With ashes and songs
They hide the dead body
In the wandering brotherhoods. . .

—So me first? First move?
Like chess? But I insist,
Even on the scaffold
We get a request—
                Quick
I request—Don't look. (His look.)
They're almost falling—thick and fast—
But I can't push them back
In my eyes and I *asked*
Don't
Look!

Now, plain and clear,
Looking off at the sky—
Dear, please, let's go—
I'm going to cry—

I'd forgotten; among the sellers,
The wallets come to life,
How blond glints the back of his head—
Corn, Wheat, rye!

And all the commandments of Sinai
Wash away now. . .Maenad's fur!
The great Golden Fleece,
A consolation store

(For us all!)—Not in vain
Nature hoards her wealth; not without plan!
Hunters! From this blond maze
Do you know the path

Back?

7

And an embankment. The last.
Of all. Separately, hands apart,
Like sulky neighbors
We walk. By the banks,

Weeping—and lick the falling
Salt, not caring.
No huge moon of Solomon's
Hangs for me in Heaven.

A post. Just beat my head
Bloody; why not? Better yet—
Into bits? Careful accomplices. . .
(Body identified as Love).

Can these be two lovers?
Out through the night? Diverging?
"You see; the future must be
so?" I jerk my head away.

To doze like newlyweds!
To sleep! But we can't get in step,
In tact. Begging him: take my hand—
We're not convicts, we don't have to—

Shock (as of soul touching hand,
Passed hand-to-hand) the current beating
Through fevered synapse,
Tearing—on my soul this arm leans.

Clings.

Clings. Rainbow around us. And tears
Most of all—curtain thicker than beads—
Rain. Can such embankments
End ever? A bridge.
                Well?

This is the place? Your hearse awaits.
His peaceful eyes
Raised, "Shall I see you home?"
For one last time.

8

The. Last. Bridge.
(Won't take my hand away!)
Last bridge,
Final toll.

Water and earth.
I hold out the coins.
Money for death,
Charon's fare across Lethe.

Coins fall to shadow
In his shadowed hand—Soundless
That money;
So to the hand's shade

Shadow coins,
No glint or jingle.
Coins for the dead;
They have poppies enough.

The bridge.

Mostly, those
Who love can't hope.
Bridge like this passion,
Stretched across convention.

I nestle; it's warm
By your side so I lean.
Not *to*—not even *toward*—
This one moment's vision:

No arms no legs
Only my side
Leaning against you
Is still alive!

All life in my side—
He's just echo and ear—
Like yolk to white
I stick—like Samoyeds to fur,

I press, I cling,
Keeping us closer
Than Siamese twins—
That woman, Mother

You called her—who forgot
The whole world to carry you,
Hoarding her triumph—
She never knew

This closeness. Wait! Stay!
—When you lay on my breasts. . .
And I won't jump now.
I can't dive, my hand still presses

Yours. I blink and blink. . .
Holding you fast.
Bridge, you're no husband—
A lover, slipping past.

But bridge, hold us well—
Bodies are the river's favorite food!
I grip like ivy to a wall,
Like a tick—my roots must be removed!

Like ivy! Like a tick!
Godless and manless!
To throw me away like a thing,
When nobody ever cared less

For all the things of this
Thing'd inflated world. I'm dreaming,
Tell me I'm dreaming; it's night
And after the night the morning—

And an express to Rome
Or Grenada? I won't even know,
Sloughing off the Mont Blanc,
Himalayas of bedclothes.

These are the depths.
It's my last blood that warms you.
Listen to these ribs;
What they say is truer.

And. . .squinting to the side,
How far you are already.

Than poems. . .are you warm?
And tomorrow, who will you find?
Tell me I imagined this!
That the bridge does not, will not have

An end. . .
The End.

9

It rings like a factory,
Responsive to the call—
What wives keep from husbands, widows from friends—
The secret; hoarded, sublingual,

Eve's since the tree;
Here it is, yours at last:
I am no more than an animal
Someone stabbed in the guts.

And it burns. . .as if the soul had ripped
With the skin—and spilled like steam from the hole,
That notorious, punctured heresy,
The so-called soul.

That pale Christian ailment—
Steam! The only poultice they can give!
There never was any such thing!
There was a body, wanted to live,

Doesn't want to.

Forgive me—that's not what I meant!
As the disemboweled scream.
As the condemned wait
For the courtyard, 4:00 a.m.,

Playing chess. . .with a smile,
To mock the corridor's eye.
The chessmen are all only pawns!
And somebody's playing us.

Who? Good Gods? Thieves?
The peephole fills with eye.
The red corridor creaks.
And now the bold will rise—

Take one more puff.
Spit. Screw it all. Spit.
Along this chessboard path
It's a straight line to the ditch,

To blood. To the secret peephole,
The peeking window of the moon. . .
. . . . . .
And—squinting to my side—
How far you are already.

10

Together, in step,
We jump—it's our coffeehouse!

Our island, our shrine,
Where we in the mornings

—Rabble paired off for a minute!—
Would celebrate matins.

Like some sleazy marketplace
In a dream haze, or spring. . .
The coffee was awful there,
Nothing but oats!

(With oats you can calm
The fussiest trotters!)

No Arab perfume,
The smell of Arcadia

Came from that coffee. . .

But how she would smile at us,
Sit us beside her;
Mournful, experienced
Grey-headed mistress,

Smiling so hopefully—
"You'll wither soon; live!"
Smiled at our lunacy, poverty,
Smiled at our yawns and our love.

But mostly our youth,
Our laughs for no reason,
Our smiles without thought,
At a face without wrinkles.

Most of all at our youth,
Our out-of-place passion,
Blown in from somewhere,
Pouring from God-knows-where

To her dim little coffeehouse.
(Burnoose and Tunis!)
At our hope and our muscle
In unravelling clothes.

(Oh, no complaints, friend!
Scars do get scarred!)
Oh, how she'd see us out—
Hostess, hat hard

As Dutch ironing.

Not quite recalling, never really getting it,
They led us, somehow, away from the fair.
Our street! But not ours now.
How often, strolling it—not 'we' anymore.

—Tomorrow the Sun will rise in the west!
—David and Jehovah will divorce!
What are we doing? We're *separating*.
But what is it good for,

Supernaturally senseless word!
We're sep-ar-ating. (One from a hundred?)
Just a word, four syllables,
And after it the void.

Stop! Is it Serbo-, or -Croatian?
Did these Czechs make it up?
Sep-aration. To separate.
It's some little-known duck!

Some sound to shred the ear,
Expand the borders of grief.
Separation—it's not in Russian,
In Man, in Woman!

Not in God's tongue! What are we, sheep
To stand around bleating?
Separation—what's that mean?
There's no definition!

No sound even—well, a hollow noise,
As, for example, of someone sawing through dreams—
Separation—that's Khlebnikov's school;
The groaning of nightingales,
Swan-ish. . .
But how did it happen?
—Like a reservoir drains.
Hand against hand. . .
Separate. . .Thunder in the brain—

And the ocean visits the stateroom!
This is Oceania's furthest cape!
The streets are just too steep;
To go down is to separate.

Downhill. Sighing of two soles.
Palm, meet, finally, the nail.
This is a capsized argument.
To separate means: unravel,

We who were knit into one.

11

To lose it all at once—
There's nothing as pure and plain!
Outskirts, suburbs,
An end to days.

To blisses (read: rocks)
To days and to us.

Vacant dachas! I honor
You, aging mothers.
It's good work, to stand empty.
The hollow don't stand empty.

(Dachas, empty by a third,
You'd be better off burned!)

Just don't shudder,
Don't open the wound.
Outskirts, suburbs,
Like a ravelling seam!

Since (without the surplus gleam
of words) love is a seam.

A seam, not a bandage or shield.
Oh, don't ask for cover!

The seam the dead sew in a field,
That I sewed in you.

(Time will show how it held—
Like cheap stuff or triple thread!)

One way or another, friend,
Right along the seam!
But at least the seam rent; see,
The fabric hasn't rotted!

So under the tailor's chalk lines
There are still living veins!

Oh he who rips
Will never lose.
Outskirts, suburbs,
Foreheads' divorce.

They're hanging people in the district
These days—the brain feels a draft!

Oh he will never lose who's off
Before the sun is up.
In one night I sewed you a life,
A good fit—and never used a tape!

So don't complain if this suburb
Ripped, like a rent seam.

The soul's untidiness—
Those scars!
Outskirts, suburbs,
Oh fierce

Is the suburbs' expanse. The heel of fate—
Do you hear it, sucking through the mud?
Then judge my quick hands' work,
My friend—and the living thread,

So tenacious—don't finish it off!
The last light!

Here? It must be a plot—
(glancing). . .by the lower races—
(glancing). Can we go up the hill?
For the last time.

12

Like a horse's mane.
Rain in our eyes. Hills.
We've passed the suburbs,
We're past the city.

It's there, but not ours.
Stepmother, not mother.
There's nowhere more.
To die here.

Field. Fence.
Brother stands with sister.
Life is an outskirt.
Build far from the city.

Ech, it's a losing
Cause, me lord,
Everything's suburb!
Where's the damn city?

Tearing, slashing
Rain. We tear and slash.
In three months
Our first togetherness.

Even from Job,
God, you wanted a loan?
But it didn't go through,
We're past the city.

Past it! See? Beyond!
Outside! Over the wall!
Life is the place where living's forbidden,
The Hebrew Quarter.

So isn't it better, a hundred times better,
To become the eternal Jew?
Since for everyone not a reptile
It's the same old pogrom?

Life. Only the converts live.
Judases all.
Let's go to the Lepers' Islands!
To Hell! Anywhere but

Life—only suffers converts,
Sheep to the butcher.
My right-to-exist card;
I trample it!

Stamp on it—for the Star of David!
Vengeance—for the bodies heaped!
Isn't it charming; turns out the Yids
Didn't even want to live!

13

That's how knives are sharpened on stone.
That's how sawdust is swept with brooms.
Now, under my hands,
Something wet and furred.

Where are your twins—
Male dryness and strength?
In my palms—
Tears, not rain!

O what temptations are left
To mention? Property is water!
It was your diamond eyes I felt
In my hands—flowing—

There's no more loss
For me. The end of ends.
I stroke—and stroke
Your face with my hands.

That's how we are, us Marinas—
We've got this Polish pride.
And since I felt your hawk's eyes
In my hands, crying. . .

Crying! My friend!
My all! I'm sorry!
How large they were,
Whole handfuls, salty!

Grim male tears,
Like thunder in the dark.
Tears! There'll be others
To make up your shame with me.

Fish from the same
Sea! A netful. . .
Of all dead shells.
Lips against lips.

In tears.
As wormwood
To the taste.
—And tomorrow
When I wake?

14

A sheep trail, a slope.
The city noise.
Three whores approach
Laughing. At tears.

Laughing—full noon breasts
Rising like waves' crests,
Laughing at those sinful,
Shameful, male

Tears of yours, in the rain
Shining like twin scars,
Pearls sewn obscenely
On breastplate of bronze.

These first tears and last—
Let them pour down!
Each one is a pearl
In my crown.

My eyes will not turn.
I glare through the rain.
Venereal dolls—stare on!
Ours is a bond

That draws even tighter
Than the clamp of the lay.
Before our words
The Song of Songs gives way.

For us improbable birds,
Solomon must kneel,
For our crying together
Is more than a dream.

So through the hollow waves
Of the night, drawn close and still,

Sightless, soundless,
We sink like a ship.

A Note on Marina Tsvetayeva's "Poem of the End"

Marina Tsvetayeva was born in Moscow in 1892. She began writing poetry as a teenager and published her first volume of poems, *Evening Album*, while still in high school. The book was a critical success, and Tsvetayeva was soon hailed as one of Russia's leading poets.

However, much of Tsvetayeva's best work was written in relative obscurity while she was living in exile in Prague and Paris. She was forced to flee her homeland after her husband, Sergei Efron, fought on the Czarist side during the Russian Revolution. This was a period of great tragedy for Tsvetayeva—she lost a daughter to starvation and spent five years separated from her husband, uncertain of his fate. Their eventual reunion was far from redemptive. They lived in severe poverty. He was ill with tuberculosis; she became involved in several ill-fated love affairs—including the affair with Konstantin Borisovich Rodzevitch which is obsessively chronicled in "Poem of the End."

Tsvetayeva was an intensely personal, Romantic poet. Her work is both confessional and technically innovative. In addition to breaking with the rigid metrical forms of the day, Tsvetayeva also developed her own idiosyncratic punctuation—including a reliance on dashes—much like Emily Dickinson, the poet in the English language she most closely resembles.

Unlike Dickinson, however, Tsvetayeva was a public presence—corresponding with Pasternak and Rilke throughout much of her life, writing poems for and about her contemporaries—Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova and Alexander Blok—and finally returning to the Soviet Union in 1939. It was not a triumphant return. She was immediately "suspected" of engaging in anti-Soviet activities. Her daughter Alya was arrested two months after her arrival; her husband Sergei two months later. In 1941, with the coming of World War II, Tsvetayeva was evacuated to Yelabuga where she committed suicide.

The translation of "Poem of the End" presented here by John Dolan attempts to preserve Tsvetayeva's rhythmic innovations and rapid changes in tone and style. There is an uneasy abruptness to this translation that successfully recreates Tsvetayeva's fits and starts. In addition, Dolan has worked to render the poem in more colloquial English—avoiding the awkward moments (e.g., ". . .strangely / too smooth the gesture of / his hat to me") found in other translations. The result is a "Poem of the End" that is easier to read and understand, and closer to Tsvetayeva's original.

—P. MICHAEL CAMPBELL

GERRIT LANSING

IN ERASMUS DARWIN'S GENEROUS LIGHT

for Thorpe Feidt

1.
Erasmus Darwin would have agreed with Wilhelm Reich and
Robert Ingersoll,

"Better rot in the windowless tomb
without a door but the worm's red mouth
than wear
the jewelled collar
of a Mental Slave."

He saw how Joys were trampled in the priests' black rounds
twisted by quibbles
of ministers and schools
knotted secure
in the jovial social web commodious
where mystified misery hides
in starspangled gleams of beautified credit
and repo men swing
in Death's tremendous porch.

2.
Such a mouthful. How do you put it?
This way the gnostic garden.
Orgonomic functionalist fields forever.
And will he come again, Christ, sexual habit?

Heavy meat knows no vacuous constraints,
what does a ruling class do when it rules?
Flog it, show me, you unlimited political bookstore.
Honeysuckle, grape, and orange tremolos.
But courage, isn't it available somewhere?
It grows not in rows, but in beauteous blotches,
a gorgeous gallery of gallant inventions.
Don't expect it where you look for it.
It's out of sight.

3.
Fickle, fickle, document time.
False documentation is still documentation.
You idiots. I trace the history of the worship of document
to that social loss we've long ago suffered
you slaves who should know how to get OUT, open your eyes.
If the bishop ever lifted his head for a moment,
looked at Nature, Erasmus Darwin said,
instead of document, text, "nothing but pages,"
he'd have realized he was talking through his episcopal hat.
Why man, you have only to go and look at the High Force
waterfall
not thirty miles from here
to realize it took tens of thousands of years, at very least,
to carve its course through rock. And faces in the rock.
This earth we live on is older than old, in spite of the bishop.
& in spite of the attack on "within" the reductionists mount
within remains within
there's a monkey puzzle tree.
My "spirit of animation"
I don't want to get rid of it,
Erasmus Darwin said.
Within the skull the skill
within the winter dream the whirligig
within within
all & everything :

"Ing" supreme rune and secret song of "Ong."
Forget all derivations,
they dance in happiness,

the early ones down there,
and this isn't myth of origin
or oozing essence origin.
Fuck you, Derrida, Erasmus Darwin said,
origin is beautiful as black
and centers whirl around us as we round them in.

4. *Telluris sacra theoria*

If you consider the sacred theory of the earth,
water below and water above,
the egg cracked and split, the spirit spurting out
flood and ark of sacred origin, waterfall of starry jism
the milk of the stars from her paps
on uplifted ecstatic faces and lovers locked in happy freedom in
their crucible. . .

in my garden, Erasmus Darwin said, blooms
bright surprise galore on bright surprise
and from their volant passion splurge cataracts of eyes.

In the tulgey wood the light consoles
and in the generous light of Erasmus Darwin's ripe exuberance
(and he knew the caves below where sun at midnight shone)
the fields, his very strawberry fields, are Eleusinian.

GEORGE EVANS

FOUR POEMS

REVELATION IN THE MOTHER LODE

I walk into the vineyard at night, into acres of cordoned vines
against their stakes at pruning time, but see, stretching
off through tule fog, only cross marked graves.

How did it come to be that my generation would be stiff
under hoarfrost, and that I should come across them
twenty years after watching them die to remember and feel
I've truly wasted my time, have left no mark upon the earth
in their name, have left only the small craters of a boot
sucking vineyard mud?

And is this guilt, or the product of being swept up
in a time on human earth when few do more than raise
the cause of their own names—and am I one, or is all this
death just sloth which one pretends
to work against the belly of
but which in fact
controls?

You who return to me as vines in the deep night under fog
have come at a bad time, a time when the world is obsessed
with rubbing you smooth, and its concentration
on ceremony brings you to nothing.

Somewhere, mixed in with all the rest I'd meant to get to
which is receding, is a day floating above jungle, flak
exploding in small fists from the trees, rocking
the chopper where I sit in shock and blood and urine
staring into patchwork fields.

I stand behind bamboo shaking, thinking of Nguyet
in a Saigon bar, worried how willingly we forget,
bombs dropping like hair straight down a shadow
a black sheet everything about us muscle hot
prick and resolve and have no idea where I am
but am everywhere and she wobbling on spiked heels
around the bar stools and smoke has everything I cannot
not the least of which is a reason
which makes her more beautiful
than possible, but also quite a bit like the ragged edge
of a ruined wall, and like the crisp brown bamboo leaves
dropping after terrible heat, dripping with an ache I love
which is more for youth than anything certainly not war,
which also feels like dropping.

How tired I am of hearing about that war, which one should
struggle
to keep the nightmare of, suffer from rather than forget.
I don't want to heal, and am sick of those who do.
Such things end in license.

Back here it turns out newspapers and monuments are
taxidermy;
there is little retribution, little learning; what is lost
is forgotten; sometimes it gets so bad I'm not sure
I'm the one who lived. . .then come upon you in a field
—a one-time soldier with a trick knee, flagging humor,
monsoon debt—and find you enfolded by fog as if by spirits,
and become the visage of all that's been thrown from the
world.

NUCLEAR SONNET

Zero zone
zone in hell
substantial nothing death trip zone

the denim, the leather, the smoke
zone
where nothing is written or said which is sensible
sensate zone

incapable of guilt or its brother murder
zone
moving away from description
decision

and the head which fears originality
but lives for its discovery
as if by accident

scrapes its own flesh raw
its own raw flesh

against everything .
.
.
.
Nuclear free ozone zone
neon blue calligraphy of Tokyo zone
wolf zone
purple blood of the heart zone
marble
rock
and ripped off testicle
war
zone

passion color miraculous bandaged birth zone

zone of the heart on fire
of the flaming haired woman

the flaming boned man zone

who mistake these cities for their own

THE MISSING SUNFLOWER

The bombing continues little wooden buildings dissolve
disintegrated from the sky that best frame for spring
and for the willows arching their green canes touching
the ribbon rivers
the cherries pink
smoke rising Nagasaki
and the sunflower melt
curl
turn crisp
collapse
Van Gogh would be pleased it had traveled
and so far but would a man who built a canvas
as much as painted one care if it hung
in a building being its own building own shelter
and dwelling after all
sunlight hitting it
dropping
while Japan itself falls apart
on the plains as on canvas curling and shivering with fire

BOND

She struggles with her baby in the rain water drumming
the buggy hood
dropping a glassy net on her face
her simplicity such strength and focus of motion beauty
and grace
I imagine her naked streaming glistening
with rain as only a man can imagine
or perhaps she is one who prefers
her own and is finished with men relentless love
near the hawthorn tooth in its dark shrub
where she hovers rain bouncing on her watch holding
her arm like a wing
reminding me of my mother who asked one promise
for what she had done: to try to grow old
which centuries later I fell in love and understood

ANTHONY ROBBINS

TWO POEMS

ON THE TROPIC OF TIME

There is a moral here.
A moral what? There is a meaning maybe merely
meaning or at-least-fact. There is at least the fantastic
remembrance in its warm noctilucence displaying itself
as the possibility of significance: the pure object
of possible knowledge, a neon anamorph in the black
middle distance, pure as in "only," the only, impure
as memory. But who knows about purity? There was a moment.
I stood childwise on the beach while my brother waded
chest-deep in the darkening, clay-reddened lake. It was not
that, but that the man, having dared me refuse—"You don't
mind,
do you. . ." reached around and stroked my penis. And I was
scared
stiff, as at the petrifying touch. . .not of death
but of the more deadly effect of death's approximation
to my. . .my innocence? Innocence is also a banality. Rather,
my helplessness, and so
I believe I must have been, and probably looking at my brother
the first times he went under. Unclear to me except that at last I
broke
toward him. He clawed me under and I was choked
nearly unconscious with the silty water. Then standing on the
bottom, him furious
on my shoulders, I shoved him to shallow water, to shore,
toward the man. And it is not that we trusted him but that we
had been
entrusted to him, wrongly. Wrongly by my gullible mother. . .
our many scars professing her exquisite taste in men. I can't say

what was lost then, what intended. There is a red, venereal
water
of death, evoked, often opening unprovoked in the perpetuity
of my blameless flesh, my words, in my need to reach
the anamorphic moment. What inevitable sorrow: a human
intelligence:
to try to name or to turn in despair to the idea
of consequence. Who is it who picks up his mother now and is
shocked
to find her light as a feather? Who can follow the tired
slow lineage of wonder, the flesh-on-flesh of which we are the
fact?

ORGANISM AS METAPHOR

Let us unname and so define by pronominal lack
this whole, this only like a body poised in utero
crown testing the rare gulf, pale soles projecting poignancy
upward into eye-colored firmament. Snared? Or seeded? Will
the brain once, ever, in a groin's tight while tell us,
or is it too tick-full, logged with sense, too vertiginous
to let us know in a word, *manifest?,* how likeness
became itself the fated fugleman.
We troll
meanwhile along the western bank of the spine. It is
like a river. We attend the action of the telling
rod-tip, angle of line taut against prop-urge, imagining
the deep back of the lure, shad rapalla, its aponeurotic
sheen, glaucous, lake-grey, tastee, tattooed with nervous black
spots
and adrenalized eyes, how it works deep under water,
an adverting fleshiness, a hurt waver, narrative unto them
right out of the heart of Laurie Rapalla, Finnish
progenitor, his hand, wood, and knife working even now
in the spine for the ultimate predator, hooked and hoisted
on his own image. Also:
Maytide. Mulberry's popped white phalanxes

hang over the current. Bush roots snaked tight in the noble
sacrum of America. In cove carp glint out orangish
and spank the surface as they feed on rush roots. On rush tops
red-winged blackbirds curdle the air with a laying song. O
trilliant birds, me not so rare as not to hear in this
paysage a moral: When you meet upon a metaphor
above the Berryman Bridge or below Hannibal, don't
drink it in: expect, S. K. says, obscurity: the river
clear enough at Itasca, has gone bad by Winona
(MN) and at W-eye-nona (MS) each drop has been flushed
dozens of times. And another lesson, cocktail for the analysts:
likening, readers, is pulling real walleye out
of a polluted trope, or not pulling but just trolling
like sun across our own maws, with no inkling
of failure. There is a point. On it a willow
angles out over the river, over a mess of dreaming
blue-gill. They are there and they should bite both burning
buckmoth caterpillar and the dropped mulberry flower.
The shore here is buttressed with debris: a savings and loan
gone belly-up, farmyard, buck and bullhead, too. There is
    something
at this point to be said for saying there is no point in going
on: the shad rap is fouled, forehead red and blistered
from within and without, and without a body
in the boat but ours, an anyhow straggling convention, we
can go onto the beach to cut a spear. Something's to be said too
    for turning
around: we have gone as far as we can go today.

AARON SHURIN

TWO POEMS

ALL THAT

He awoke with a pillow between sex and memory. He sat there, explained neither by substance nor dialectic. He found the red glow, touched a knob: in that second he was middle-aged. Hands outstretched, he began to retrace his steps.

Spirit should walk into that bedroom. In the beginning huge purposes had drawn him into romance, rub his temples through his reason, his tiny red beard. Trees—the young branch-like women and their ears—organs. His small eyes split in two.

He bowed his head with his hands, cafeterias, coffee. The details in which he dwelt subscribed to brochures. His father had come true in the usual way. He forgot why he could hear his own breathing.

The door opened: a bundle of clothes. He snorted, put on his pants, walked to the mirror. A former philosophic system prepared to take charge. We live forever.

SATURATED

Up the ravine the sun was choking with dust. Emotion on the windows from the sideways heat, breathless their heads hang—they've stooped—and went in through the low doorway. On this dark corner table two glasses. His bold cheeks, his full lips— the

ox. He was looking beneath the sunlight; every object was almost cool in the stream. Into his hands his pockets threw their coins.

I found a few words about each; nickname, unmarried, career, places in a mist of obscurity. In our part of the country, no one knew anyone, visited anyone, had money, noticed much. There were puzzling forces, inactive, having iron control. I have met no one else.

He played with his moods like a toy, climbed out of his skin. His gaze softened his lips into flourishes. He grew embarrassed and burst into laughter. All their eyes uncovered his face; far away began to fly into the room.

Like a trembling finger, the path lay across the field. At low tide I saw long wings oblivious of us. Everyone opened, as if silence was his. . .

Talking loudly—splutter up in the air and wave—they kept on repeating, "Come on, come on!"; his face was transfigured across the counter, summoned over to happiness.

I went out; the film of heat hung black over the blue sky. The grass had left behind no wind, against the windowpane wet hair was dancing. New faces had collected in the room. The sky was walking.

JOHN YAU

MEETING THOMAS DANIEL

I first saw a photograph by Thomas Daniel in the spring of 1984 in Winston-Salem, in the office of Ted Potter, the director of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. It was a black and white portrait of a man leaning against a clapboard wall, holding a toy gun, and dressed in what looked to me like a silver lamé, Buck Rogers/Marlon Brando biker outfit. Nothing indicated whether this was a costume or everyday clothes. The combination of the clothes, the leaving out of anecdotal information, and the man's ease in the presence of the photographer was what caught my attention. It seemed to me then, and it continues to ring true today, that Daniel was able to use the camera to explore his own tenderness toward the subject. In contrast to Charles Gatewood's photographs of Mardi Gras, Daniel's photograph ("Silver," New Orleans, 1980) did not underscore the "weirdness" of the subject. The camera had not been used to delineate that kind of separation.

Ted told me that he had first seen Daniel's photographs in a regional art exhibition he had juried in West Virginia, and had given him a prize. Later, that afternoon, he showed me a book of photographs Daniel had designed and published in the late '70s. It contained portraits and a few photographs taken in Vietnam during the war. He also gave me Daniel's address and phone number, and urged me to go visit him in Richmond.

After I returned to New York, I wrote to Thomas and told him I had seen one of his photographs, and that I wanted to obtain a copy of his book. A few weeks later, I received the book in the mail, along with a note inviting me to Richmond. Subsequently, we had several conversations on the phone. He told me he was a self-employed, housepainter-photographer, and that he had only been in New York once.

In the spring of 1987, I was asked to be the Critic-in-Residence at the Washington Project for the Arts (WPA). During my six week residency, I got in touch with Thomas and arranged to meet him in Richmond.

We spent the afternoon together (the only time we've ever met) in the modest, white clapboard house he and his family rented on the outskirts of Richmond; at a local bar; and in the studios of two of his friends, who were also Vietnam vets. I learned that he was born and raised in Richmond, and that he had gotten into photography while stationed in Vietnam.

While still in high school, he moved out of his parents' house, and began living in different rooming houses or on the street. Shortly afterward, he had a run-in with the police. It was minor stuff, a prank, but it landed him in court nevertheless. The judge gave him a choice: Enlist or go to jail. After two combat tours (he was, as he put it, afraid he would still have to go to jail if he returned too quickly), he came back to Richmond and enrolled in a local art school. The book he had sent me was printed while he was in college, and it was partially the result of a deal he had worked out with the department chairman. The deal was simple enough; if he could get a decent looking book of his photographs published, he would get his degree. Before offering the deal to the chairman, he had contacted the owners of local printing companies and offered each of them a deal; he would work on the person's house in exchange for the cost of printing a book of photographs.

Thomas showed me work from a number of ongoing projects: portraits of the surviving members of the Daughters of the Confederacy; triptychs of tent revival meetings, river baptisms, and blessings; the members of religious sects involved in the practice of animal sacrifice and snake handling; portraits of people he knew from walking around Richmond.

Daniel doesn't look for meaning. He shows us the meanings various people have settled on, particularly the ones embodying an individual's attitude toward a specific identity or faith. In his triptychs, he stands in two different places on the river's banks to

show us what the minister and the faithful see, and then stands in the water (usually behind the person about to be baptized) to show us the minister and onlookers. He circles around, as well as zeroes in.

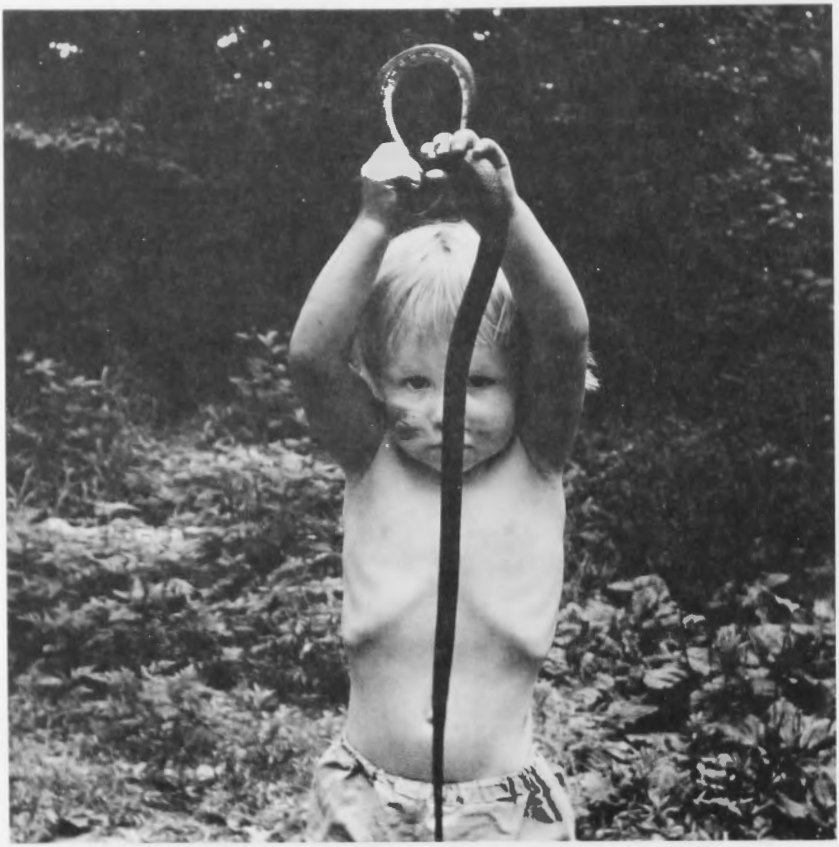
One story from that afternoon stands out in my mind. He had contacted a woman who was a member of the Daughters of the Confederacy, and arranged to go to her house and take a photograph. After he got there, he learned that she had cataracts and was nearly blind. Afraid that the bright lights or a flash might bother her, he asked her to hold a small mirror on her lap, explaining that if the light it reflected onto her face disturbed her, they could stop altogether.

The resulting photographs constitute a portrait of a legacy these women have devoted their lives to sustaining. Now, in their 90s, the women are frail and afraid. Like "Silver," they are not regarded as objects of curiosity. Instead, Thomas Daniel gets them to speak eloquently about the world they maintain, which is part of the one we live in.

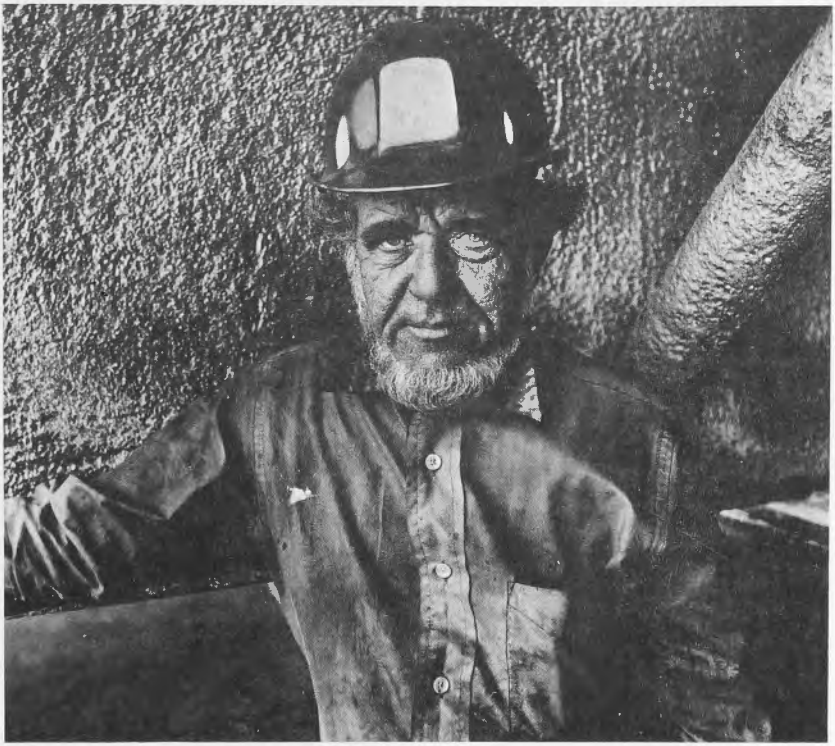
THOMAS DANIEL

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS

"SILVER,"
New Orleans, 1980

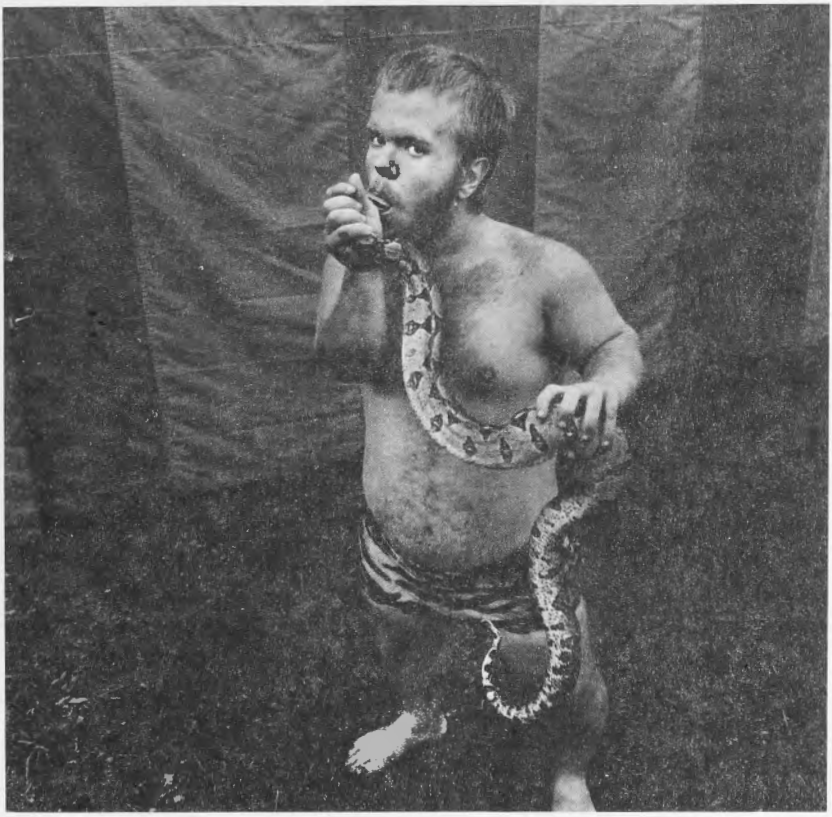


BEE
Ashland, VA, 1985



SHIP BUILDER
Norfolk, VA, 1983

ANIMAL SACRIFICE
Virginia, 1985



MIDGE THE MONSTER HANDLER
Virginia State Fair, 1984

A DAUGHTER OF THE CONFEDERACY
undated

TOM MANDEL

FOUR STRANGE BOOKS

1.

A tract was sealed in the catacomb of cylinders
by three youths called Ejection, Sacrifice,
& Trellis. The treatise speaks to a skeptic
from things still possible.

But what it says will never do. If they reach
toward me I will collapse. Touch me then
my shoulder with strengthened lips; that
man was swallowed!

And spewed up? Accorded a reckoning. Emerged
to prefigure a name. Hippocampus swallowing
the sailor's yarns? Which is known better &
where are they now?

The faithful are only unbelievers delivered
of a refuted inheritance, since jest by
definition is possible, firmly disbelieved,
a swan deducing Leda.

But often I fall into a sleep of discomfort
with the ratios' historicity of storms
and deeply dream incidents whole & pious
oil derricks half-heartedly.

One thing is certain(ly absorbing). The city
is to be destroyed; the inhabitants shall
repent; they have been spared. Reader, stand
back: the Lord's cannon is puny.

Proclaim against the myriad marine life but
he lingers and his son dies; he falls into
paralysis and preaches from a stretcher, until
healed instantly he walks home

to a motif failing to heed; so the message
did not reach the king, and my mother died.
One cannot be too reluctant to believe
in history and in fiction.

God commands the animal to the West to save
an innocent victim of interpretation, uttering
psalms in the animal's midriff. A man could
pray in mortal danger

and be safe without supplication, praising God
in the whale's belly until a resurrection
or an honest narrative invents an instrument
of prophetic salvation.

There is nothing of nomenclature for Spinoza
to believe save vanities, exclusivism.
Oh terminus, even an animal knows the future
is one thing upon our past,

prediction's conditional fate. Alive you learn
reason is always defeated by unerring kooks;
all know the great city was destroyed but
none where it was located.

Forty years is a word; he knows this, he states
it. Fiery clouds hang over the accredited
oracle, and nothing but nothing is diminished.
Here's how it happens.

There are ingenious hypotheses to be sure between
these lines, for those attentive to a puzzle.
Smash down the marred pot, and refashion the
conditional nature of doom.

Merciful formula, frame compassion. If I return
to you, will you not have returned to me?
Is a parable a rebuke, an unmerited favor?
(Glory to your name!)

2.

Wizards have effective dreams.
Unparalleled personae reveal
forgotten colossus cut out
by no human hand, explain that!
Something good for a story.

By the waters of Babylon, who
can interpret originally, o-oh
and then there were three others.
Soon one became a symbol of the
others, some oracular propaganda.

Hew the tree down to its stump
of renewed contingencies. Birds
fly from branches, announcing
a vanished shade, new celestial
promises, open & direct potentates.

A letter is sealed in strange shapes
the promise of bones by right. Once
a sacred tree (well! sacred to someone)
rewriting patriarchal stories and
symbols common among the peoples.

Her palm was intact amid tender grass
of the field afloat in heavenly dew.
The prisoner is gentle, treated gently
or so invented the common man and told
the world's future on a stone.

I am the river, dry in winter.
The tree is low, because it was high.
Not a king of sin or presumption, but
a strong king receives the warning
dream, light scaling to airplanes.

This dress is poisoned, the diadem
burns. I will send one from the
dead to warn. Dogs devoured moon-
light to decipher and boys saw
that writing's truth. Perhaps.

The markers fashioned before they
spoke, bowed before collision.
His master native to the littered
thicket who made obeisance,
was healed and soon scattered.

Stand and be rendered in clay in a
courtyard abroad, a furious image
probably, laughed at or worshipped
without ado; you'll be saved,
martyred, or walked with by an angel.

Disobedient servant, the truth
is impaled on preachers. Explain
your order! A king is not freed
by or from his words; death awaits
any who speak of a renaissance.

Now is the time, the way is wide
and secrets grant a rhythm to
pagan arithmetical tales. Unroll
your fist the stone to paper, a
palm, solid, no other uncontested.

A pseudonym is sound; even an acci-
dent redeems witnessed finality.
The window is open; the roof is

of grass. God does not speak;
he is not silent; he gives a sign.

Remember the meaning of years to come;
fragments preserve mystery, they
speak in dispersion of unity, of
kings of chronology. It is a great
secret and many roads lead there.

3.

One who stood next to me fell.
Public gardens of service
will not replace my companion.

Redolent and susceptible, skeptic
and pious, there is a crowd in
the street, heady, to harangue.

Sheer needless children at first
blush before the days take delight
sane conceits are smoke to disdain

madness and folly; can spring be
far wearisome, sublunar. Think,
squeeze my hand and I'm here.

Death is external, much so indeed
which lights my face. "So what if
he's a prostitute, he's one of God's

children, and I have lots of money
and I'm going to give some to him,
so don't get in my way!"

Only striving to be captive of
an inward rack is absolute soul.
I do not care for mortals,

they are straw; if they scamper
let them bribe me. Like local
wine their gods do not travel,

but end where they start not where
they belong, as even memory like
love and hate dead with meat.

The race is not to the swift
but to the first there, luck ine-
luctable. Shadow does not pass.

A live dog is no good for mortal
man to eat drink and be merry—
Better dead lion than an epitaph.

Do the playthings know the schedule
of events; thought is mortal and
divine, a hidden belonging thing.

Elaborate aqueducts, an artificial
lake fed from a perennial stream.
The date of an inscription is uncertain.

Despair too is appeal to happiness;
to be wise when all are enlightened
you need only be foreign to all that.

4.

There is an ear for every dissonance
a thwarted feast of defence or deliverance.

The self slays providence that plans it.
Parallels bring downfall to these players.

Only the answer is preserved not this solution
but the provoking problem is called tradition.

That risked life after which so many things
it poses merits narration, as of question

are named and in the names we supplicate
two heroes in two plots; only the villain's

still in this triangle, taking his time
to play the trumpet.

By clever chance the cobbler becomes a schemer
to a caliph; the vizier warns the caliph

and the caliph has a daughter and a wife
who is a princess. I have obliged you

on some occasion says the nephew of the
minister to the executioner who will spare

him; hide me in the dungeon where sore
ministers of the past are stored.

Now, the folk tale mirrors life and to
advance merely trip up your chief, it works!

But the reader does not like upstarts.
Oh knave this is a proud Ashkenazi minister!

Eunuchs conspire to lengthen their names, no
more rudimentary motif of bystanders than

imagined ingratitude or an idolatrous image
spreadwinged across the breast still sits

courtierlike on the stone benches of
his ruin. A sleepless king will be amused

by stories of palace intrigue, but intrigue
itself will keep him sleepless.

Downfall and parallel are accidents of conflict.
The victim's cunning is forfeit, no pity.

Here we leave the field of conjectures &
enter a fairyland of guesses, inert in

its embrace or else lose face, proudly
administer insults in a fog of imagination.

The laws observe us and by night and day
do we do what they say? It is open book

pages lying down; that has an irrevocable
ring. What must we rig to circumvent it?

Where you have shoulders rubbing, you have
friction; an author need not labor over

dainties when a fistfight will suffice.
"Long memory goes well with suffering long."

February-April, 1987

RAE ARMANTROUT

TWO POEMS

GETTING WARM

Tingle:
a shaft must be imagined to
connect the motes
though there is no light.

The notes.
If she's quiet
she's concentrating on the spaces
between cries, turning
times into spaces.

Is it memory or physics
that makes the bridge appear?
It looks nothing
like a real bridge.
She has to finish it
so it can explode.

She is in the dark,
sewing, stringing holes together
with invisible thread.
That's a feminine accomplishment:
a feat of memory, a managed
repletion or resplendence.

ATTENTION

Ventriloquy
is the mother tongue.

Can you colonize rejection
by phrasing your request,
"Me want?"

Song: "I'm not a baby.
Wa, Wa, Wa.

I'm not a baby.
Wa, Wa, Wa.

I'm crazy
like you."

The "you"
in the heart of
molecule and ridicule.

Marks resembling
the holes

in dead leaves
define the thing (moth wing).

That flutter
of indifference,
feigned?

But if lapses
are the dens

strategy aims
to conceal,

then you don't know
what you're asking.

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

from TRIPMASTER MONKEY: HIS FAKE BOOK

The folks are going to love her, thought Wittman. Ruby and Zeppelin are really going to love her.

Ruby Ah Sing, Wittman's mother, had a maple tree, the crown-leaves gold and red now. The crowns of many kings on a hat-rack. The pear tree had some pears, and green leaves, and dead black leaves on long offshoots, and flowers. Wild in the time machine.

Through the screen door—the crack clack crash of mah jong. The son of the house would have turned about but for the girl he was with. Always do the harder thing. He opened the door, went ahead, held it for Taña.

Ruby screamed. "Eeek!" Stood up and screamed again, pointing. And Auntie Sadie screamed, and Auntie Marleese ran to him. His mother eeked him again. "Eeek!" What's wrong? The White girl? A hobo followed them inside? "What have you done to yourself?!" She put her hands to her cheeks.

"You used to be such a beautiful boy!" shouted Auntie Marleese, looking up at him.

"Too much hair," said Auntie Sadie. "Much too hairy."

"You go shave," said Mother. "Shave it off! Shave it off! Oh, hock geen nay say!" That is, "Scares you to death!" "Gik say nay!" That is, "Irks you to death!" "Galls you to death!" Clack! Clack!

"No act, Ma," he said.

"Don't say hello to your mother," she said.

"Sticks and stones, honey boy," said Auntie Bessie. "Never you mind. Have a heart, Ruby."

A dog jumped on him. "Down, Queenie. Behave," said Auntie Jadine, its owner. "Where you manners, Queenie." Those who usually spoke Chinese talked to the yapperdog in English. "Down, Queenie. Come heah." They spoke English to him and to the dog. American animals.

"GOOD dog," said Wittman. It mind-fucks dogs to be called good when they're trying to be fierce.

"Wit Man come to see his momma," explained the aunties, one to another. "Good boy. Big boy now." Clack clack clack. A racket of clack clack clack. "All grow up. College grad, haw, Wit Man?" Nobody asked if he were a doctor or an engineer yet. How tactful. Not asking about work at all. "Sit. Sit. Sit." Taña got a side chair at one of the dining tables.

"Oh, I be so sorry I didn't recognize you, Wit Man," said Auntie Sadie. "You so changed."

"That's okay, Auntie Sadie."

"Come talk to your Aunt Lilah."

"Hello, Aunt Lilah. Hello, Auntie Dolly," said Wittman. "Hello, Aunt Peggy." He went to each auntie, shaking hands with some, kneeling beside this one and that one for her to take a better look at him. "He was a cute biby." "Why you not visit Auntie more often?" "Me too, honey boy. Visit you Aunt Sondra too."

The ladies at his mother's table were comforting her. "Hairy face, fashion on a plate," said Auntie Sophie. "You the one sent him to college, Ruby." Clack. Clack.

"Where I go wrong, I ask you," said Wittman's mother. "He was clean cut. He used to be soo mun." That is, "He used to be soigné." "Kay ho soo kay ge ba, neh. Gum soo. Soo doc jai." That is, "He takes a lot after his father, neh. So like. Too alike." "Moong chá cha. Both of them, father and son, moong cha cha."

"In Hong Kong now, they say m.c.c.," said Auntie Peggy, who was up on the latest.

"M.c.c." "M.c.c." The aunties tried the new Hong Kong slang. "Moong cha cha" means "spacey," spaced out and having to grope like a blindman.

Meanwhile, at Taña's table, Aunt Dolly, who was sophisticated, was saying, "What's your name, honey? Tan-ah. What a pretty name. Russian? Do you play, Tan-ah? I'll show you how to play. This is a very famous Chinese game. Mah jong. Can you say 'mah jong'?" Auntie Dolly had been a show girl in New York, and knew how to endear herself to foreigners. She did introductions. Good. Wittman did not want to announce Taña to the room, and he was not about to table-hop with her like a wedding couple.

"That's Madame S.Y. Chin. This is Madame Gordon Fong." Etcetera. "Hello," said Taña. Well, you can't expect her to say, "How do you do, Madame." And if she said, "How do you do, Mrs.," there's been a demotion. Madame. Shit. Madame Chiang Kai Shek. Madame Sun Yat Sen. Mesdames Charles Jones Soong and T.V. Soong. Madame Nhu. All the cookbook ladies are madames too. And all the restaurant guys are generals. Generalissimo. "Let me show you how to play, honey." Don't trust anybody who calls you honey, Taña. It's a verbal tic.

"My name is Maydene Lam," said Auntie Maydene. "Call me Maydene, dear."

"How do you do, Maydene."

"I've always liked your name," said Auntie Lily Rose. "Such a pretty stage name. Maydene Lam."

"Isn't it delicious? There are four little girls named after me in the Valley." Clickity clackity.

"What beautiful hair you have, Tan-ah. She's gorgeous, Wit Man. You are so fair. Isn't she fair?"

"Thank you," said Taña, who should learn to return compliments.

Every auntie had jet-black dyed hair. Why do women as they get older have to have fixed hair? Because of beauty fixed at 1945. These were the glamour girls of World War II. Taking after the Soong sisters and Anna Chennault, who married guys in uniform. Whenever the aunties' pictures appeared in the papers—Chinese or English—they were identified as "the lovely Madame Houston W. P. Fong," "the beauteous Madame Johnny Tom." They were professional beauties. Quite a few of them had been Wongettes—"Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Eddie Pond proudly welcomes to the Kubla Khan the beautiful Wongettes, Chinese Blondes in a Blue Mood." "Myself, I am a blonde at heart," said Auntie Dolly. Don't you look askance at her, Taña, with your sanpaku eyes, or else I'm getting a divorce.

"Ciao!" "Poong!" "Kong!" Action. "Eight ten thousands!" "Mah jong!" Clack! Crash! "Mah jong!" He stood behind his mother to look at her winning hand.

"Talk to See Nigh here," said his mother.

"You enjoying the game, See Nigh?" he said to the lady whom he had never met before.

"Oh, how well-behaved," said the See Nigh, the Lady. "So doc-yee. And such good manners. Most boys with beards are bum-how. He doesn't have to call me See Nigh. You call me Auntie, Wit Man."

His mother spoke sotto voce, in Chinese, "Who's the girl?"

"My friend. A good friend," he said in English. One shouldn't speak a foreign language in front of people who don't understand it, especially when talking about them. Don't add to the paranoia level of the Universe.

"Serious?"

"Sure."

"How serious?"

"Serious, okay?"

Gary Snyder had gone to Japan to meditate for years, and could now spend five minutes in the same room with his mother. Beat his record.

"So you walk with her," said Auntie Sophie. She was translating "go with." She meant "So you go with her."

"Mixing with girls," teased Auntie Marleese. "Old enough to mix the girls." Go after girls with an eggbeater.

"She's so rude, she's not talking to me," said Mom. "She's hurt my feelings, Wit Man."

"Introduce you gal to you mama, young man," said Auntie Sophie. Clack!

"Hey, Taña," he called over to her table. "Meet my mother, Ruby Ah Sing. Ma, meet my pahng yow, Tan-ah." "Pahng yow" means "friend"; maybe Taña would think it meant "wife."

"Hi." Taña waved. Click.

"You aren't growing up to be a heartbreakin' man, are you, honey boy?" said Aunt Lilah.

"Speak for your own self," said back-talking Wittman. Clack! Clack! She was a seventy-year-old glamour girl who was having a *ro*mance with a fifty-five-year-old married lover. They saw each other Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. Whenever you're tête-à-tête with her, she reveals, "My beloved is a sai-yun." A "western man," which isn't correct; we're westerners too. "He is offering to divorce his wife for me, but I don't want to be married. Three times a week is quite enough."

"U.C., state-run public school, don't teach them to present themselves socially," explained Auntie Jean, an authority on higher education, a son at Harvard, a daughter at Wellesley, where the Soong sister who married Sun Yat Sen went, another son at Princeton, the baby daughter at Sarah Lawrence. "As I said to Mayling Soong, I-vee Leak be A-number-one all-around. They learn how to make money, and they learn to go around in society." The cruel thing to say back to her is: "What eating club does Ranceford belong to?" But you don't want to be mean to her. They will graduate, and never come back.

"At U.C., this one learned: grow hair long," Mom agreed. "And go out with bok gwai noi." As if dating las gringas wasn't his idea, he had to be taught. "You ought to see them there in Berkeley. Doi doi jek. Yut doi, yow yut doi." Pair after pair (of mixed couples). "Jek," an article used with livestock. "Doi," an article used with poultry. "You meet my Wit Man too late, See Nigh. You missed out on one good-looking boy."

"You still got one matinée idol under the hair, Ruby," said Aunt Marleese. "Cut it for your poor mother, Wit Man. I remember when you were yay high. I used to change his diapers. You were deh, Wit Man. He was so deh." Click click. She gave them an example of deh, her head to one side, a finger to her dimple, coy lady pose. The aunties smiled at him like he was going to act deh any moment for his mother at least. To act deh means you do baby talk, act babyish, and bring out motherly love.

"Cut it off, Witt Man," said his mother. "Cut it off. Give me some slack."

All this time at four tables, outspread fingers with red nails and rings of gold and jade pushed and turned the tiles in wheels of bones and plastic, clockwise and counterclockwise. The sound of fortune is clack clack clack. They built little Great Walls, and tore them down. Crash! "I'm the prevailing east wind." Aunt Lily Rose is dealing. "You in luck today, Maydene." "Not luck like you, Dolly." "Poong!" "I've got a hot one," said Mom, fanning a tile like she were putting out a match. "Dangerous. Dangerous." She's got a red dragon. "Aiya." "The wind shifts to the west." "Here comes the green dragon." "The white dragon." "A hot one." "Four circles. Kong!" "Ciao!" shouted Wittman's mother, pouncing on the tile

that the See Nigh had discarded. "One, two / three bamboo!" "Mah jeuk birds all in a row." (Is "mah jong" a white word, then, like "chop suey," a white food?) "Your mama, one cutthroat," said Auntie Sophie. "You working hard, Wit Man?"

"I've been fired." Let 'em have it.

"Fired!" His mother screamed. "Fired! Fired!"

"It's okay, Ma. I didn't like the job anyway."

"Four years college." Mom put down her tiles. She shut her eyes, a mother defeated. She's an actress. She's acting. You can't trust actors, feel one thing and act another. She put her hand on her brow. Chewed the scenery. "What are we to do?"

The chorus gals snowed her with more comfort. "He'll get a job again, Ruby." "Nowadays they try out jobs, then settle down." "Wit Man be smart. He'll be rich one of these days."

"He read books when he was three years old. Now look at him. A bum-how."

"Don't you worry. He's one good boy." "He be nice and tall." "He always has beautiful gal friends." "He'll turn out for the better."

He should shut them up with Rilke: *It will be difficult to persuade me that the story of the Prodigal Son is not the legend of him who did not want to be loved. When he was a child, everybody in the house loved him. He grew up knowing nothing else and came to feel at home in their softness of heart, when he was a child.*

But as a boy he sought to lay aside such habits. He could not have put it into words, but when he wandered about outside all day and did not even want to have the dogs along, it was because they too loved him; because in their glances there was observation and sympathy, expectancy and solicitude; because even in their presence one could do nothing without gladdening or giving pain . . . .But then comes the worst. They take him by the hands, they draw him toward the table, and all of them, as many as are present, stretch inquisitively into the lamplight. They have the best of it; they keep in the shadow, while on him alone falls, with the light, all the shame of having a face.

. . .No, he will go away. For example, while they are all busy setting out on his birthday table those badly conceived gifts meant, once again, to compensate for everything. Go away for ever.

O, King of Monkeys, help me in this Land of Women.

"And so-o-o much talent, too-o much talent." "He got upbringing, Ruby; you gave him upbringing he cannot lose." "He got foundation." "You one good mother." "He's clean too. Most beardies are dirty." Clackety clack clack. "And such good grades. Remember his report cards?" "He was so cute. Do you still have docyee knees, honey boy? You have got to tap-dance for your Aunt Lilah again."

His mom was getting cheered up, and felt free to brag. "Three years old, he made five dollars reading. His father bet a bok gwai lawyer that our biby could read anything. They took the biggest book down from the shelf. He read perfect. 'He's been coached on that book,' said the lawyer, and gave him money to run and buy a brand-new *Wall Street Journal*. He read the editorial. He won five dollars. We let him keep it. Does he eat regular?" she asked Taña.

"Sure. He eats." Clack!

Does a mother, even an artiste mother who led a free youth, and chose her own husband, does such a mother want her son to have a free artistic life? No. Rimbaud wanted his kids to be engineers.

"You need a job?" asked Auntie Mabel. "I got one gig for you, dear. You come to Florida with me, and do my revue."

"You still doing your revue, Auntie May-bo?"

"Yeah, I do revue. You come, eh, Wit Man. We need a fella in the act."

"In Florida, you dance? You sing?"

"No-o-o. I stand-up comedy. My gals dance and sing. I train them. Miss Chinatown 1959, 1962 and 1963—all in my act." She liked breasts and balls jokes. The punchline: "One hung low. Ha ha." Miss Mabel Foo Yee, the Fortune Kookie. You had to hand it to her, though. Women aren't funny, and she's still cooking. Cook dinnah, Auntie May-bo. She herself had won beauty contests umpteen years ago. And went on to fan-dance, almost top billing with Miss Toyette Mar, the Chinese Sophie Tucker, and Mr. Stanley Toy, the Fred Astaire of Chinatown, and Prince Gum Low, and Mr. Kwan Tak Hong, the Chinese Will Rogers, who also danced flamenco. Wittman had seen Auntie May-bo topless at Andy Wong's Sky Room. The first tits he'd ever seen, scared the daylights out of him. A blare of brass and a red spotlight—Aunt

Mabel had slinked about the Skyroom, snaking her arms and legs like Greta Garbo and Anna Mae Wong, legs tangoing out of her slit dress. The light shrank to head-size, and the spot held her face. Chopsticks in her hair. False eyelashes blinked hard, and the light went out. She ran about with incense sticks, writing red script in the dark. Red lights flashed on. The front of her dress broke away. Gong. Gong. Lights out. Gong. Lights on. Auntie Mabel stood with arms and naked tits raised at the ceiling. You looked hard for two seconds, the lights went out. Gong. Lights on—she was kneeling with wrists together, tits at ease, eyelashes downcast. Lights out, climactic band music, the end.

She was saying, "All my gals queen of prom, court princess at least. I teach them. Mothers of junior high gals say to me, 'Start her on her make-up, May-bo.' I teach them hair and dress. They do not go out in blue jeans or with no gloves." Wittman had met some of these trained gals. They looked like young Aunt Mabels. They wore their hair in beehives with a sausage curl or two that hung down over the shoulder. Today Aunt Mabel had on one of her specially ordered Hong Kong dresses. The mandarin collar was frogged tight, but there was a diamond-shaped opening that showed her lace underwear and her old cleavage. Her old thigh flirted through a side slit. There was a lot of perfume in the room, My Sin, Chanel No. 5, Arpège, most of it coming from her. To their credit, no girl of Wittman's college generation would be caught dead in Chinese drag.

"Good you get fired from demeaning employment. You get back into show biz, honey. For you, Aunt Carmen has special ten percent," said Aunt Carmen, a theatrical agent. She sometimes charged twenty percent, twice as much as the regular (white) agents. Her clients, Chinese and Japanese types, who'd gotten SAG cards from "Flower Drum Song" and SEG cards from "Duel in the Sun," and hopeful ever since, were hard to place. The go-between (white) agent, had to make his ten percent too. The actors didn't ask how come these double agents weren't getting 5%-5%. She was up from L.A. to touch base with the talent in the Bay Area and Seattle, and the home folks in the Valley. She had a corner on the West Coast talent. (Auntie Goldie Joy of Manhattan handled the East Coast. The two of them had helped book S.I. Hsiung and

his all-Caucasian Chinese opera, starring Harpo Marx and Alexander Woolcott, into theatres in San Francisco and London and New York.)

"You a good type, Wit Man," said Auntie Carmen. "Your gal a good type too. You an actress, darling? Lose ten pounds, you be one actress."

"No, I'm not," said Taña. "I'm an assistant claims adjuster." Why won't she tell them she's a painter?

"We need a man in the act, Wit Man," said Auntie Mabel. "You be interested, huh." Local boys don't wear tights, so Wittman had been the boy brought in from out of town to play the Prince. "You were a natural, such good ideas. You wore your underpants outside your regular pants, like comic book superheroes, you said. You have good personality, Wit Man." There was a song that went, "Walk personality, talk personality." "Come on. Sometime we play Reno. North Shore Lake Tahoe."

"Auntie Mabel, I like do Shakespeare."

"You snob, Wit Man. You will be hurt and jobless. We have one elegant act. High class educated gals." Yeah, like Patty (Schoolteacher) White, the stripper in—and out of—cap and gown and eyeglasses. She was showing that you make more money working North Beach than the School District, and you get more appreciation too.

"You join Auntie Mabel's revue," said Mom, "you meet prettier gals." Clack! Putting the girlfriend in her place.

"Come on, honey boy," called Auntie Bessie. "Tap-dance for us. You the cutest most doc-yee fatcheeks." They remember, he had taken classes in Good Manners and Tap Dance at Charlie Low's school. Eddie Pond of the Kubla Khan had also sponsored schools, and given to his community his expertise in engineering, insurance, real estate, and law. The showmen competed to be most socially responsible.

"No, thanks, Auntie Bessie."

Aunt Bessie sang, "'I won't dance. Don't ask me. I won't dance. Don't ask me. I won't dance, monsieur, with yo-o-ou.'"

"Hey, Auntie Bessie, do you still say Yow?" She had played Laurie in the Chinese Optimist Club production of "Oklahoma." And sang and danced in all the best Big City clubs—Eddie Pond's

Kubla Khan, Charlie Low's Forbidden City, Fong Wan the Herbalist's, Andy Wong's Chinese Sky Room. "'Okla-, Okla-, Okla-,'" he said to start her off.

"'And when we sa-a-ay Yow!'" sang Aunt Bessie. "'Yow! A yip I oh I ay! we're only saying you're doing fine, Oklahoma. Oklahoma, okay.'" She had worn a white lace Laurie dress with a half-dozen petticoats, and supplemented her hair with a wig of black ringlets. "'Don't sigh and gaze at me. Your sighs are so like mine. Don't throw bo-kays at me. . . .Don't please my folks too much. Don't laugh at my jokes too much. ('Who's laughing at your jokes?'). . .People will say we're in love.'" He had fallen in love with her himself. She'd kept her stage make-up on for the cast party. He had stood beside her at the community sing around the piano, and saw her powdery wrinkles. Offstage, she sang and smoked at once.

"I know a girl who would like your boy," said the See Nigh, who didn't speak English. "She came from Hong Kong only a month ago, and already she has a job. Her sponsor uses influence, and her papers are legal. She's a very good old-fashioned, traditional girl. Not in this country long enough to be spoiled. She'll make a good wife."

"Listen to See Nigh, Wit Man," said Mother. "A Chinese girl like that doesn't like beards. You be one beatnik, you scare her away. You be clean-cut All American Ivy Leak boy, okay?"

"I've got a daughter I hope she won't marry somebody second-rate," said Auntie Marleese. "Gail is so smart, professors gave her a personal invitation to attend Stanford University, and pay her to go there. You know S.A.T.? Best S.A.T. in California. Ten thousand points. Pre-med. Her teachers tell me that they never taught a more intelligent girl."

"You still not get Gail married yet?" said Auntie Doll. Clack! The chorus girls had been young when it was smart to be catty.

"My Betty," said Auntie Lily Rose, "will be a teacher of teachers. She's major in Education and Dec Art and Child Development."

Wittman ought to say, "Bring me your daughters. I'll talk to them with my hom sup mouth and touch them with my hom sup hands. Hom sup sup." A hom sup lo is a salty drippy pervert. "Hungry, Ma," he said. "What's there to eat?"

"Go eat," said Mother. "So help yourself. Sow mahng mahng." "Mahng mahng" is the sound of being skinny. "Fai dut dut" and "fai doot doot" are the sounds of being fat. "Eat. Eat. Don't wait for us."

Wittman grabbed Taña's hand, and beat it to the kitchen.

There were cartons and covered dishes on every surface, more warming in the oven, and more cooling in the refrigerator. They loaded their plates. The cartons came from the restaurants which some aunties owned and some hostessed, queens of night-life. When you're out on the town, your rep for setting it on fire, depends on them, treating you and your gal right. Also, when an actor loses his will to audition, they give him a meal on the house. The food in cartons was courtesy of the chefs, letting themselves go, back-home-cooking that they don't do for the customers.

Taña has sanpaku eyes all right, looking at me and everything out of them like it's the end of the world. If she says "dragon ladies," definitely divorce. Not one of the aunties nor Mother mentioned that Wittman's new girl has a sanpaku gwut. Maybe they didn't want to upset Auntie Dolly, who also has one. Or it's only Japanese who have a thing about the iris U'd with eyewhite. Judy Garland has gwutting eyes, and John Lennon has them. Elvis and James Dean and Brando lower their heads and look up, acting like they have them. Over her chow mein, she's feyly giving me lots of eyewhite.

"Your mother reminds me of my mother," she said. "I'm on my way out the door, and she says right in front of my date, and our double-dates, 'Are you wearing your bra? Get upstairs, young lady, and put on a brassiere. You're too big to be going out all over town without a bra.' Everybody's mother does that."

"You don't have to be so understanding. My mother's vicious. You don't know her. She's worse than you think. She's capable of tragedy."

"What's so tragic about playing mah jong?"

"Women who don't have anything better to do but sit around all day playing mah jong are waiting to die. Their lives are over. They used to have work that they loved. Taña, you'll never meet people who love working unless they're in show business. The highpoint of their lives was when they did shows for war. They bought an airplane. They painted across it, 'California Society to

Rescue China.' Auntie Bessie's brother flew it to Canton. He became a Flying Tiger and is now a pilot for China Airlines. Mom and the aunties used their beauty to get this country to go to war—go to the rescue of people who looked, for example, like themselves. To this day the old fut judges vote for the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. who most reminds them of these ladies. Their chapter of the Association of Vaudeville Artistes paraded the U.S. to stop selling scrap iron to Japan. At the War Bond shows, they performed their last, then the theater died. I have to make a theater for them. I don't want them to wait for a next war."

"I don't think they're wasting their time dying for the next war. They're not so old. Your mother and Lily Rose and Peggy—a lot of them are still pretty."

"Yeah, watch for them on the late show. Peggy played Anna May Wong's maid, when Anna May Wong wasn't playing the maid herself. Lily Rose, under her stage name, played one of Barbara Stanwyck's maids in 'The Bitter Tea of General Yin.' Want to meet a nice member of my family? I have a granny. She hates mah jong. She's not invited to the front room. Why don't we bring her some food?"

They carried plates and bowls to the back of the house, where he called at a door, "PoPo, tadaima-a-a," Japanese. No little old lady voice answered, "Okaerinasai." She had taught him more phrases than that, but when he tried them out on Japanese speakers, they didn't seem to mean anything. She spoke a language of her own, or she was holding on to a language that was once spoken somewhere, or she was more senile than she appeared. Wittman opened the door, but no little old pipe-smoking lady there. They put the dishes on her coffee table, and sat on her settee and her footstool. The room was webbed with lace that she tatted from string. The light made shadow webs, everything woofing and wefting in circles and spirals, daisies, snowflakes, the feather eyes of white peacocks. Well, if you're going to be a stringsaver, you can do better than roll it up into a ball. He opened the windows and started the room buoying and drifting.

GrandMaMa owned a phonograph but mostly Cantonese opera and "Let's Learn English" records. There were pictures of baby Wittman in his costumes—sumo wrestler, Injun with fringe, opera

monkey. Pictures of aunties shaking hands with F.D.R. and Truman. A woman—Jade Snow Wong?—christening a liberty ship at the Marin Shipyards. The thermos of hot water sat next to tea glasses, which were jelly glasses caked with what looked like dry dirt. "Want some tea?" Wittman offered. "It's supposed to look like that. You're supposed to let the tea residue keep accumulating." Against the day when you can't afford tea leaves? So when you drink water, it zenly reminds you of tea? "Like a wooden salad bowl," he explained.

"No, thanks anyway," she said, which was all right. He didn't want a girl who would gulp it right down saying, "How interesting. How Zen. Say something Chinese."

They sat quiet. He did not turn on the t.v. to watch some Sunday sport. He hoped that Taña did not picture his grandmother as some old bride—Miss Havisham—or a spider woman. They lit up smokes. He hadn't smoked in front of Mom, who would've said, "Quit, you. You quit."

"Your grandmother's in show business too." Taña was looking at the memory village on the dresser. It did look like a stage designer's model for a set. The houses had common walls, and a row would look like a railroad flat of New York, like a shotgun apartment of the Southwest if there were doors from home to home. The rows were separated by alleys, labeled as streets. Two of the houses had thatch stick roofs that opened up; ladders led to lofts. The rungs were numbered; the adobe steps with only two risers were also numbered, one, two. One of the houses had a brick stove; the next-door had two stoves. Toy pigs, numbered, lived inside the houses and walked in the alleys. The rich man's house had a larger courtyard and more wings than the others, plus flowered tiles, and parades or boatloads of people and animals atop the horn-curved eaves. In the plaza was a well, and beside the well (where PoPo had fetched water) was the temple (where the men whistled at her and made remarks, and she dropped and broke her water jar, and the men laughed). Away from the houses was the largest building, the music building for the storage and playing of drums and horns. There were numbers on the lanes and paths out to the fields. It was autumn; the fields were shades of gold. One of the fields was edged with thirty-three lichee trees.

"Twenty of those trees belonged to my great-great uncle," said Wittman, "and three of them belonged to my great grandfather. He didn't plant them or ever see them. He sent the money to grow them; some autumns his family thought of him, and mailed him dried lichee. Near harvest time, the boys, my cousins far removed, stayed awake nights guarding the trees with a loaded gun." A bridge went over a stream. Above the rice fields was a pumpkin patch and a graveyard. "The reason you'll find a lot of us who don't like Hallowe'en or pumpkin pie is that pumpkins were the only food that hardly ever failed. Like your Irish potatoes. People's skin turned orange from eating nothing but pumpkins. Slanty-eyed jack-o-lanterns. I used to run Crackerjack cars on the paths, and boats on the rivers. Should the I.N.S.—Immigration—raid this room, looking for illegals, they can take this model as evidence, and deport our asses. Everybody who claimed to have come from here studied this model, and described it to Immigration. It is not a model *of* anything, do you understand? It's a memory village." He slid the model onto his open hand and held it like a birthday cake. "This is it. My land. I am a genie who's escaped from the bottle city of Kandor. I have told you immigration secrets. You can blackmail me. And make me small again, and stopper me up. But if I don't have a friend to tell them to, where am I?"

"Oh, come on. Immigration can't deport you. I'm not going to blackmail you."

"I'm trusting you with my life, Taña, and my grandma's life." But he was holding out on her. In that Gold Mountain trunk was the cheat sheet, a scroll like a roll of toilet paper with questions and answers about the people and the pigs who lived in those houses. Nobody had destroyed the scroll or the memory village. Wonder why.

"This room smells like a grandma's room," said Taña. "I have two grandmas, and their houses smell like this. Tell me when I get the old lady smell, Wittman. Or do they use a powder that's out of fashion? Orrisroot, lavender."

"Salonpas. The old lady who lives here may not be my grandmother. She showed up one day, and we took her in. I've tested her for her background: I watched for her to hurt herself, and heard what she said for 'Ouch!' She says, 'Bachigataru.' Japanese.

At New Year's, she doesn't go to the Post Office to have her green card renewed, so either she's an illegal alien or she's a regular citizen. The night she showed up she brought news about relatives that we shouldn't have lost touch with. My parents acted like they understood her, 'Yes, the cousins.' 'Of course, the village.' 'Yes, three ferries west of the city, there live cousins and village cousins. Anybody knows that.' They didn't let on that they'd lost their Chinese. You want to know another secret? She may be my father's other wife, and they're putting one over on my mom. Not to get it on sexually, she's old, but so that my mom will take care of her." The strange old lady used to pull her apron to her back, a cape, and hang a 24-carat gold medallion to her front, a breastplate, and belted herself with a 24-carat gold buckle shield. She waved fans of dollar bills. She danced, she said, whirlygiggly the way they danced where she came from. They'd be guilty should they turn her away.

He wandered in back of her shoji screens, opened her closet, walked into her bathroom. No grandma dead or alive. Her long pipe was gone; her shoes were nowhere to be found. In the medicine cabinet was his grandfather's safety razor. He wet his moustache and beard, soaped up, and shaved his face clean. "That ought to freak my mother out," he said. "How do I look?"

"You look better," said Taña. So why is she looking at herself in the mirror instead? She ought to be touching and kissing his nude face.

"My mom hasn't seen my face for awhile. I'm going to give her a break. She's my mother, after all, and has a right to see her son's face."

"On the way through the kitchen, the good son scraped the dishes and put them in the sink to soak.

"Gotta go, Ma. Where's PoPo?"

"Out."

"Where?"

"To the Joang Wah to see a movie."

"I'll go pick her up, give her a car ride back." Leave home, come back visit, give the old folks a ride.

"No need. She'll get a car ride."

"I'll pick her up anyway."

"She may not be there. She does errands."

"She's not in an old age home, is she, Ma? You didn't dump her? She's not dead?" said in front to the aunties, who were all ears.

"She's alive. Strike *you* dead for saying such a thing."

"She isn't really at the movies. Where is she?"

"Wit Man, I have taken good care of her for twenty years." Arranging her tiles. Gin.

"Ruby took in a poor stranger lady, and gave her food and a home," said Aunt Lilah.

"The money you spent on her," said Auntie Jadine, "you sacrificed your own pleasures." Her comrades were helping Mom out giving her back-up because there were certain aunties present you needed to let everyone know that they were against bringing a grandma over from China to do the housework. They had not either talked their old lady into signing her Hong Kong building over to them, and selling it to pay for her upkeep in America.

"And I taught her a skill," said Ma. "She can run wardrobe anywhere." Grandma had earned her keep, mending costumes, ironing, sleeping in dressing rooms as dark-night security watchwoman.

"Oh, you're too kind, Ruby." "Ruby has a big heart. Big-hearted Ruby—what they call you behind your back."

"Okay, Ma," said Wittman. "Where is she?"

"Your father has her."

"He took her camping?"

"He has to take care of her too. She's from *his* side."

He walked to the door. "She's too old to camp. I'm going to bring her back."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Ah Sing," said Taña. "Thank you for the delicious luncheon. Good-bye, everybody."

"I took responsibility long enough." Her voice and clacking followed her son out to the porch and gate and street. "You find her, you the one responsible."

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

THREE POEMS

DISAPPOINTMENT

A faint smell of urine
embroidering that bouquet of mold the big cushions
give off days the fog won't lift,

and a shelf of bone
growing out over the eyelids like evening's shadow
across a field of corn—

The whole parade
leaking out from your shoulders, bequeathing
to the groin a pang of distance;

then that metallic taste in the mouth
and a voice you had let yourself believe
was dead

close now by your ear, intimate and sweet:

Well, well, well,
look what we have here.

BEFORE WINTER, PART II

Peaches on top of the compost, sitting pretty
rot from underneath blue

-jays swoop
down for poppy seed then curl
back up to the fence post
because cat
he's got a lot of tricks, funny
angles and spots
he'll come out at you from

if a peach hasn't
brained him yet the way the fool
sleeps chin to dirt
right underneath the damn tree's
big fat peaches too hard
and no good to eat, rotting from the bottom up
nematodes, sow bugs
larvaemites & spores slap-
happy, feasting on sugar

cook the heap of pith, stalk and leaf
so cat'll sleep warm
between rosemary and the nasturtium
drinking nitrogen
at its base hoping mice or crickets or
some kind of electric
shifts an ion on his whisker
opening one eye as snails both sides
of him, above and below

lay their trails down in the night

SUNSET IN CHINATOWN

The massive cable turns on its spool, pulling
carloads of tourists to the city's crest

as the sun sits low
in the hills above Chinatown, exploding

suddenly in the window of Goey Loy Meats, high
along the top of the glass,

showering light over barbecued ducks—

a somehow elegiac splash
this evening, the last week before Labor Day

as if summer, in tandem with the sun,
were being pulled down

and away from us by the great spool's turning.

Thus, the sullen old man in his Mao cap
plucks the zither for change

on a crate outside the geegaw shop:

first, the ancient *Song of Cascading Water,*
followed by the plaintive
Lament of the Empress Ch'ou

and even the bad little boy from Wichita Falls
trailing behind his parents in a sulk

registers that twinge

birds in the sky, insects and beasts no less
than the Immortals

feel

when the plangent notes take shape in the air,
aligning their souls with Heaven and Earth.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

PERORATION FOR A LOST TOWN

[May 1988]: "On this road thou camest. . ."

1

what will I tell you sweet town?
that the sickness is still in you
that the dead continue to die
there is no end to the dying?
for this the departed would have had an answer:
a wedding in a graveyard
for you sweet town
they would have spoken they who are no longer among us
& would have shown forth in their splendor
would have danced pellmell
over your stones sweet town
the living & the dead together feathers
would have blown like feathers
from their fingers no like gold like roses
like every corny proposition
fathers or uncles ever gave us they gave us
to call your image back to life
sweet town their voices twittering
like bats over your little houses
is this the sound then that the breath makes
in its final gasp that the dead make
having lived a whole life under water
now coming up for air, to find themselves
in poland in the empty field
bathers who had their bodies torn apart
& ran from you their long guts
hanging, searching the forgotten woods
for houses & the consolation

that death brings children in a circle
dancing without tongues the meadow that had once stood
    open
shut in remembrance now sweet town
the screams of the cousins carried by the wind
lost in the gentile cities
in the old men's dreams of you
each night sweet town who rise up from their beds
like children bellowing their words
stuck in their beards like honey
who drift up brok street past the russian church
the doctor's house beside it heavy
& whitebricked in the dream who glide above
napoleon square o little orchards little park
where lovers once walked with lovers children
still capture fishes in thy little pond
its surfaces still green with algae
o sounds of church bells—bimbom—through the frozen air
that call forth death o death o pale photographer
o photos of the sweet town rubbed with blood
o of its streets the photographs its vanished folk
o wanderers who wandered o bodies of the distant dead who
    stayed
o faces o dimming images lost smiles o girls embracing girls
in deathless photographs o life receding
into images of life you beautiful & pure sweet town
I summon & I summon thee to answer

2

I have come here looking for the bone of my grandfather (I said). Daylight had intervened. The town was no more empty as we walked its length. Then the old man spat—gently—through his beard. I have come here looking for the bone of my son. (Had someone reported a breath of life under his houses—a movement

within the soil like worms & caterpillars?) Tell the Poles that they should come to me. I am a baker & a child. I have no one to take me from this darkness.

Then he asked—or was it I who asked or asked *for* him?—were there once Jews here? Yes, they told us, yes they were sure there were, though there was no one here who could remember. What was a Jew like? they asked. (The eye torn from its socket hung against his cheek.) Did he have hair like this? they asked. How did he talk—or did he? Was a Jew tall or short? In what ways did he celebrate the Lord's day? (A rancid smell of scorched flesh choked us.) Is it true that Jews come sometimes in the night & spoil the cows' milk? Some of us have seen them in the meadows—beyond the pond. Long gowns they wear & have no faces. Their women have sharppointed breasts with large black hairs around the nipples. At night they weep. (Heads forced in the bowls until their faces ran with excrement.) No one is certain still if they exist. (Plants frozen at the bottom of a lake, its surface covered by thick ice.)

They spoke & paused. Spoke & paused again. If there was a history they couldn't find it—or a map. The cemetery they knew was gone, the dead dispersed. (On summer days the children digging in the marketplace might come across a bone.) And the shops? we asked. The stalls? The honey people? Vanished, vanished in the earth, they said. The red names & the flower names. The pink names. (There was a people once, they said, we called the old believers. A people with black beards & eyes like shrivelled raisins. Out of the earth they came & lived among us. When they walked their bodies bent like yours & scraped the ground. They had six fingers on each hand. Their old men had the touch of women when we rubbed against them. One day they dug a hole and went back into the earth. They live there to this day.)

The village pump you spoke about still stands back of the city hall (they told us). The rest was all a dream.

3
[by gematria]

a wheel
dyed red

an apparition

set apart

out of the furnace

[16.vi.88]

ANNA RABINOWITZ

THREE POEMS

DESCENT

She was supposed to be ascending, but who cares
to see a woman going up if given the choice.
Let her cascade down the winding stairs

looking like dynamite-riven armor or worse:
a julienne of skived leather, perhaps, a crush of tin,
the aftermath of an earthquake, an accordion coerced

to unfold, a swagger of broken violins
deprived of their tone, a house coming down,
shingles splintered, or a nude with an affliction

of shingles coming down, a shingle factory coming down,
or better yet, explosion of the shingle factory.
Or is she a man? Or disguised as a man

out to prove she won't be known easily,
or that broken into planes she's a presence
who can make it with or without the stairway,

up or down if she wishes, wherever she is.
Sequential, analytic, machine-like or not,
guyed as a hoax or revered as a goddess,

she makes the future bend to her strut.
This kind of woman troops down to step out.

SAPPHO COMMENTS ON AN EXHIBITION OF EXPRESSIONIST LANDSCAPES

Then, she says, a penis is needed, female
artists almost always can use one, put in
charge with tools like brushes and palette knives to
build up their pictures,

the way men do, spraying great skeins of yellow,
cobalt blue and crimson across the canvas,
rage or quiet made at their will, exploding
measures of failure,

risking planes, dissolving full spaces, Bluemner
hurling turquoise clouds on a purple field as
blackbirds wheel in formation, Hartley sculpting
skies out of granite,

oil as cloud made palpable, air as breathless
form accreting mass in its own defense while
ends begin and boundaries disappear.
This is how men die.

Now, she says, O'Keeffe is my point, consigned to
desiccated bones smoother than silk, unblemished
petals, lilies swollen in heat, faint tensions
vectored through tunnels,

warm vaginas, moisture of vulvas, furtive
stand-ins, meanings plain as your face: a woman
minus penis making art with her body,
trapped in her body.

AGE

Yes, it is you in the mirror with fine vertical lines scribed along the margins of your mouth, you with skin pleated like Fortuny silk, you with fingers pied brown, rising to peaks at brittle joints.

Each day is a gift you parcel with care. Wrapped in the sheet, you wake slow at 10 a.m., curled on your side in the fetal position that gives your spine relief. You have breakfast—a saucer of cereal with milk, an inch of sliced banana, half a cup of decaf—tidy the bed, dust where dust has rarely been, call Janet, then Rose, make sure their day's begun, as yours.

By noon, if it is sunny, you sit at the pool, discuss the weather, exchange stories about granddaughters who sing with bands in Paris, grandsons who earn $50,000 per year right out of law school, young couples who carry babies on their backs to rock concerts. You try to understand how time and blood have spun their threads. You try to ignore the ache that resumes its place at the base of your spine.

Later, in the kitchen, before you turn to the TV and your daily paper, you get down on your hands and knees to ease the pain, go fetal again. Above you the domed ceiling emits a warm yellowed light through Lucite tile. You arch your body, press your forehead to the floor. Weightless, you ride the earth while it turns its back to the sun and dark rises from an ancient crust.

Each morning another day, each evening another night.

It is more than you expect.

GERRIT LANSING

ON SERIAL PAINTING: *THE AMBIGUITIES* OF THORPE FEIDT

In 1975 Thorpe Feidt began a series of paintings, all of them in acrylic, which he calls *The Ambiguities*.

What is a series?

The paintings, sometimes consisting of several panels, vary in size. The smallest so far is 8 X 10 inches; the largest, 5-1/2 X 26 feet. Feidt intends there to be 333 of them.

333: the number of Shugal, the Dog of the Desert, guardian of the Path of Dispersive Ambiguities or Lies Falsely So Called.

Feidt is a voracious reader. ("A varied scope of reading, little suspected by his friends, and randomly acquired by a random but lynx-eyed mind, in the course of the multifarious, incidental, bibliographic encounterings of almost any civilized young inquirer after Truth. . ."—Herman Melville, *Pierre or, The Ambiguities,* Hendricks House, 1949, New York, p. 333.) Reading *Pierre or, The Ambiguities,* he noted that the mystical treatise of Plotinus Plinlimmon (of which only the first Lecture "Chronometricals and Horologicals" is given by Melville) called EI ("If") was said to consist of 333 sections. Feidt determined to limit his series of paintings to 333 canvases.

His idea of how the 333 paintings were to be in the world has changed since he began the project. At first and for some time thereafter he phantasied an enormous building like a labyrinth that could contain them all; now (1988) his idea is that they go out into the world, disperse as far as possible. Though they are numbered, their order, of viewing or position, is not rigid or dogmatically given in his imagined experience.

Colors in the paintings are as various as each canvas invokes. There are a few in black and white or gray, but more frequently the colors tumble and play together in all hues of bright and dark. It seems in the earliest *Ambiguities* lemon-yellow and black dominate, while by the #30s other colors have entered the arena. The

canvases darken in the #50s and #60s but brighten again thereafter, though the impression of darkness is rarely absent.

Figures are shadowy in the earlier paintings, but move towards clarification, and landscapes define themselves increasingly in the later work.

Feidt is not a "visionary" painter in the usual sense of the word, since the outering of vision is subordinated in his work to the incursion of the world in the process itself of painting. I.e., there is no reproduction of vision previous to the painting activity. For this painter, as in Novalis's speculation, the senses are "nothing but modifications of the organ of thought" so the body of the paint is enlivened and enlivening.

In January of 1988 Feidt completed "The Expulsion Altarpiece" (*The Ambiguities* numbers 214–218) one of the most ambitious works in the series. By the middle of 1988 he had reached #232.

Feidt, who has been since 1973 an Instructor in painting, drawing and the history of art at the Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, Massachusetts, received his training at the Philadelphia College of Art and the Pratt Institute. He has exhibited at many solo and group exhibitions in Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and the New England area.

Narrative is any propounding. Feidt, though widely read in contemporary poetry, says he was not influenced, in the making of the *Ambiguities* series, by the idea of the "serial poem" as put forward in particular by Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser. Examples: *Les Chimères* by Gérard de Nerval (so cited by Blaser); "Sonnets," 1854–1872, by Frederick Goddard Tuckerman; *Medieval Scenes* by Robert Duncan; *The Moth Poem* by Robin Blaser; and my own (adv.) *The Soluble Forest is Swimming Across* ("Analytic Psychology").

The concept of the Serial Poem is crucial to Michael Ondaatje's fine anthology *The Long Poem Anthology* (Coach House Press, 1979, Toronto).

Blaser writes in his essay "The Fire," "I'm interested in a particular kind of narrative—what Jack Spicer and I agreed to call in our own work the serial poem; this is a narrative which refuses to adopt an imposed story line, and completes itself only in the sequence of poems. . .The poems tend to act as a sequence of energies which run out when so much of a tale is told. . ."

The Serial Poem proceeds by relatively short "chunks" as Spicer notes, and so *The Ambiguities* is, or are, formed of discrete canvases, blocks of imagined experience, each complete in itself but resonating with others.

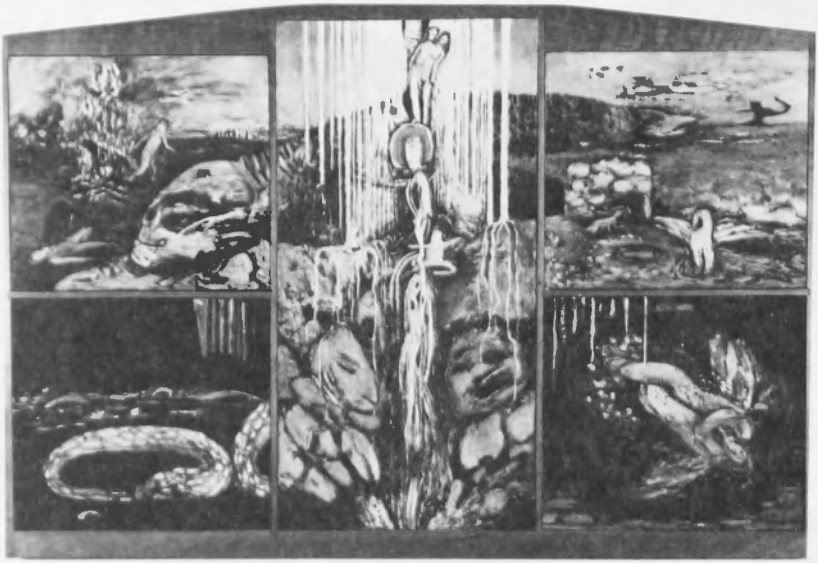
The mystery of the creative act, unforeknown, is stressed by Spicer ("You have to go into a serial poem not knowing what the hell you're doing. . .") and by Feidt. These wanderings are perilous, can be ruinous. Melville was addressing Spicer, and all other adventurers of the castaway, in this passage:

> "Ah, thou rash boy! are there no couriers in the air to warn thee away from these imperilings, and point thee to those Cretan labyrinths, to which thy life's cord is leading thee? Where are now the high beneficences? Whither fled the sweet angels that are alleged guardians to man?"
>
> —*Pierre or, The Ambiguities*

Feidt's *The Ambiguities* is the ongoing record of such a labyrinthine way. Blaser speaks of the serial poem as "often like a series of rooms where the lights go on and off. . ." One may detect echoes in *The Ambiguities* from other artwork, from Cave Paintings to Delacroix and Edward Münch, but the surprises that await the viewer are also and always recognitions of deep burning energies that are her or his very own.

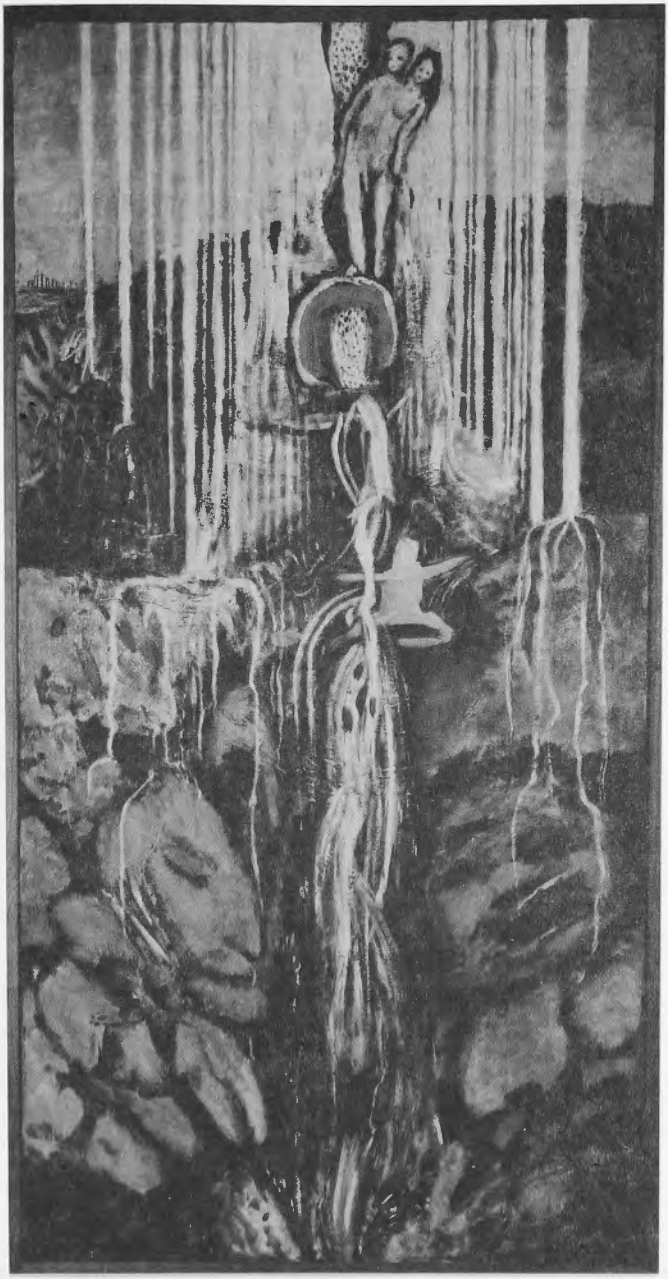
THORPE FEIDT

FOUR PAINTINGS



THE SACRED THEORY OF THE EARTH
(THE AMBIGUITIES 207–211),
FOR GERRIT LANSING

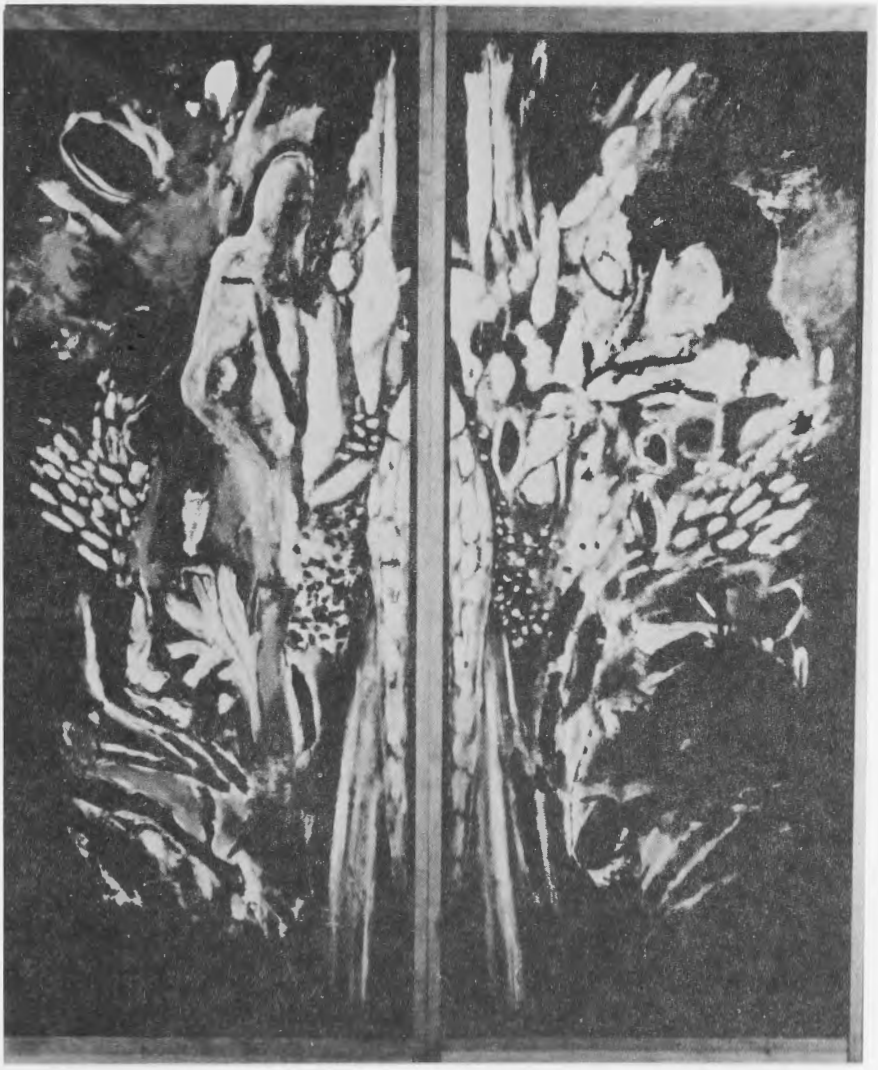
1987, Acrylic On Canvas, 39" X 61"
Frames by Ashley Thompson



THE SACRED THEORY OF THE EARTH
Detail, Central Panel

THE EXPULSION ALTARPIECE
(THE AMBIGUITIES 214–218)

1987–88, Acrylic On Canvas,
54" X 96"; Closed, 54" X 48"
Frame by Ashley Thompson
From the collection of Bruce Wolosoff



THE EXPULSION ALTARPIECE
Closed

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Two Chapters from *NOVICES: A STUDY OF POETIC APPRENTICESHIP*

Chapter 7

The alchemist Fulcanelli: "The picture of the labyrinth is thus offered to us as emblematic of the whole labour of the Work, with its two major difficulties, one the path which must be taken in order to reach the centre—where the bitter combat of the two natures takes place—the other the way which the artist must follow in order to emerge. It is there that *the thread of Ariadne* becomes necessary for him, if he is not to wander among the winding paths of the task, unable to extricate himself."[1]

Anton Ehrenzweig: "Any creative search, whether for a new image or idea, involves the scrutiny of an often astronomical number of possibilities. The correct choice between them cannot be made by a conscious weighing up of each single possibility cropping up during the search; if attempted it would only lead us astray. A creative search resembles a maze with many nodal points. From each of these points many possible pathways radiate in all directions leading to further crossroads where a new network of high- and by-ways comes into view. Each choice is equally crucial for further progress. The choice would be easy if we could command an aerial view of the entire network of nodal points and radiating pathways still lying ahead. This is never the case. If we would map out the

entire way ahead, no further search would be needed. As it is, the creative thinker has to make a decision about his route without having the full information needed for his choice. This dilemma belongs to the essence of creativity."[2]

From the 1950 Webster's New International Dictionary: "panopticon (pan + Gr. *optikon,* neut. of *optikos* of or for sight). 1. A kind of optical instrument, as a combination of a telescope and microscope. 2. A prison built so radially that the guard at a central position can see all the prisoners. 3. A place where everything can be seen; an exhibition room for novelties."

There is an archetypal poem, and its most ancient design is probably the labyrinth. One suddenly cuts in, leaving the green world for the apparent stasis and darkness of the cave. The first words of a poem propose and nose forward toward a confrontation with what the writer is only partially aware of, or may not be prepared to address until it emerges, flushed forth by digressions and meanders. Poetry twists toward the unknown and seeks to realize something beyond the poet's initial awareness. What it seeks to know might be described as the unlimited interiority of its initial impetus. If a "last line," or "conclusion," occurs to me upon starting to write, I have learned to put it in immediately, so it does not hang before me, a lure, forcing the writing to constantly skew itself so that this "last line" continues to make sense as such.

As far as poetry is concerned, "the bitter combat of the two natures" can be understood as the poet's desire to discover something new or unique vs. the spectral desire of tradition to defeat the new and to continue to assert its own primacy. It is a "bitter" combat because the realization which writing a poem may provide is inevitably partial. The Minotaur is at best crippled, never slain, and the poet never strides forth from the labyrinth, heroic and intact. At best he crawls forth, "wounded" as in the cry of Vallejo in INTENSITY AND HEIGHT; more often than not, he never emerges at all. The poet never leaves this combat with a

total poem, because such a poem would confirm that the discrepancy between desire and the fulfillment of desire had been eliminated. But since my desire is ultimately to create reality and not merely to observe it, I am bound to be defeated if reality is at stake in my poem's ambition. As I emerge from my poem, regardless of what I have realized while in the poem, I am back in the observable biological continuum, and part of it, part of its absolute mortality. I suspect that I am always aware of *this* closure, and that it underwrites (asunderwrites) what I envision while inside the poem.

Harold Bloom's "Six Revisionary Ratios,"[3] which propose to identify "intra-poetic relationships" among the poets that for Bloom constitute an Anglo-American Romantic tradition, may be most useful to poets themselves as a reading of the stages involved in working through a particular poem. Bloom of course intends his "ratios" to challenge current critical attitudes, and as such, it is a book that could only offend poets who are not named as part of the center stage action of Bloom's "tradition," which becomes increasingly arbitrary as it approaches the present. Its argument in which an earlier poet becomes the focus of a struggle on the part of a later poet, who must wrest manna from the former in order to assert himself, is actually depicted by Blake in his vision of his struggle with Milton in *Milton: A Poem*. My idea here is to regard this "struggle" in the context of Fulcanelli's and Ehrenzweig's images of the labyrinth as a symbol of the creative process, in which much more than literary combat takes place. The nodes, or advance positions, that send out radial possibilities everywhichway, are charged with the poet's personal life as well as the context of his times, to mention two considerable influential powers that lie outside Bloom's sense of influence.

Here are Bloom's Six Ratios, followed by the keyword he focuses them with:

1. Clinamen, or Swerve
2. Tessera, or Completion
3. Kenosis, or Emptying
4. Daemonization, or Counter-Sublime

5. Askesis, or Curtailment
6. Apophrades, or Holding Open to the Dead

Is it possible that these terms double Fulcanelli's three-beat rhythm of the labyrinth, offering a more complex and asymmetrical sense of the contractions and expansions involved in solving the burden many but not all poems take on?

The poet Swerves into the poem by redirecting his attention from the utilitarian world to one in which "precise subjectivity"[4] is constantly at stake. Or think of the poet as a falling angel who refuses at the last moment to continue to fall and become one of the fallen (= unimaginative man, the literal minded, one for whom the objective world is the real world). He Swerves, beating his wings up, up, up, and enters a new space.

The Swerve into imaginative space together with the first few words or lines, determine mode, tone, direction, and some of the difficulties to be undertaken. Once all of this is in place the poem runs the risk of lapsing into a conventional handling of its direction, in effect Completing itself before it has even gotten underway (as a joke poorly told may imply its punchline and thus be "over" before the actual punchline falls). While the taking on of direction is necessary, if the direction takes its theme or subject matter for granted, the reader has "heard it before," and the poem no longer belongs to itself. Thus the initial move toward Completion must be redirected, or complexed, in order to build up steam, or availability to the unknown that is beyond the poem's initial knowing. Such a move is a contractive one, and would be the Emptying, or willingness to introduce contradiction and/or obscurity via sound-oriented or associational veers.

Emptying makes it possible for the poem to have space for the other or the otherness that can be the most single compelling moment in composition. Daemonization (in contrast to demonization) is the admitting of unconscious material into the composition-in-process, the point at which the poet weds himself, consciousness and unconsciousness fuse—the poet is the world, no

separation between his skin and everything else. The eagle of inspiration has sunk its talons into the poet's shoulders and he is borne aloft. There are many ways to approach this moment: in Blake it would be the moment in which the authors in eternity communicate to mortal secretary William. In D.H. Lawrence, the moment that the wind does blow through him (Lawrence states the archetypal daemon plea in: "Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!"[5]) García Lorca, weary of hearing critics and conventional poets prattle about the Muse and the angel, borrowed from the world of Flamenco dancing the figure of the "duende," which translates into English rather poorly as "imp." It is a figure of the blood for Lorca,[6] an uprushing or seizure, in which the dancer and the poet are momentarily possessed, or incubated (as if by a dream incubus, who lays a psychic egg in the dreamer's body as she fucks him, and "steals" his semen).

Daemonization is perilous because as such it cannot complete the poem (when we are stoned, daemons seem to rush through us, but when we try to articulate their message-sensations, we have nothing—if not less than nothing, for the Daemon of Marijuana loves to gobble up imaginative potential, eating the poem on the spot that had we not gotten stoned might have been *written* the following day). Curtailment is similar to Emptying, in that both are experienced as severe, contractive moments—however, Curtailment is more complex, because the poem has taken on much more burden and possibly unmanageable material than earlier. If the poet does not successfully separate himself from the Daemon's embrace or claws, one result is that inspiration turns into ego-inflation (nearly always just around the corner in Whitman or Ginsberg). In Curtailment (Bloom's Ratio term, Askesis, is based on "ascetic"), the poet must cut into his own beanstalk, bringing the drama tumbling down or seeing into the meaning of the action in Giant Castle through a narrowing, densifying perception. Or to put it another way: in Curtailment, I step outside the poem and in a sense become my own critic, looking for loose ends, ego-inflations that have gotten into the Daemonization, gaps to be plugged—while at the same time I must stay with the shape of the energy recast by the Daemonization.

Bloom's Apophrades is a marvelous image. The dead, the great dead, return to inhabit our houses—life returns to before that fall in which a Swerve was a possibility. The dead return—the poem is over, *the way things are* overwhelms metaphor. The poet, like a streaker now, shows himself to the dead, a phantomic act the dead could care little about. The dead return, life returns to its deadliness, its obliviousness to poetry. Our poems end because at Curtailment we know we cannot escape the product of the poem if we are to have art at all; we know we cannot sustain the poem against the desire of the dead to reinhabit the *temenos* they believed they inhabited in their own time. In a great closure (Wallace Stevens' "Each person completely touches us / With what he is and as he is / In the stale grandeur of annihilation."[7]) there is a shadowed Daemonization, an embrace at the edge of here and not-here.

The dead are now back in our houses. We are outside, outsiders to the poem, peripheral, schizophrenic, caught up in the physical need to reconnect. Every completed poem collects its rejected children, bundles them into its immense laundry-basket and takes off. Image of its huge ass, in peasant shoes, hurrying away from Van Gogh's corn field.

*

1 Fulcanelli: Master Alchemist, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales*, London, 1974, p. 48. On the following page, Fulcanelli offers an alchemical definition of Ariadne. "Placements II," in my *The Name Encanyoned River: Selected Poems 1960–1985*, explores the resonance of Ariadne as the "mistress of the labyrinth."

2 Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 35–37. Ehrenzweig's drawing of "the maze" (serial structure) on p. 36, reminds me of shattered glass more than of the concentrically infolding/outfolding labyrinth. See also Van Gogh's "The Starry Night," with its two milky flows of light, one curling down to tuck into the other curling up—a figure Wilhelm Reich identified as "Cosmic Superimposition." The so-called "serial poem" (Whitman's "Song of Myself," Jack Spicer's "Books") attempts to make use of nodal discontinuities, viewing sections as corresponding rather than connecting.

3 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, NYC, 1973, pp. 14–15. The novice must decide to what extent Bloom's highly exclusionary study (in which only several 20th century American poets appear in a context that presents them as representing the end of an essentially English literary tradition) is a projection of his own anxious desire to be with poets, one of them, a poet himself. Is it possible that in failing to realize himself as a poet, he envisions the end of a great tradition in his own time, and appoints himself as the eagle-surveyor on a crag overlooking a battlefield of his own construction that stretches narrowly back to Milton?

4 Robert Kelly's phrase, which will appear in his own context later in *Novices*.

5 *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, Vol. 1, NYC, 1964, p. 250.

6 "Theory and Function of the Duende," *Lorca*, The Penguin Poets, London, 1960. See Robert Duncan's novice encounter with Lorca elaborated in the 1972 Preface to *Caesar's Gate*. For distinctions between "daemon" and "demon," see James Hillman's *The Dream and the Underworld*, NYC, 1979, especially the "Barriers" section, which considers Materialism, Oppositionalism, and Christianism. Emily Dickinson's #754, written around 1863, is as severe a description as I know of of Daemonization and the extent to which its possession can become a life possession, a living out of an alien other's commands. Lawrence emphasizes unconscious message over the poet's willing; in Dickinson's visionary description, the poet is seen as a tool (a gun), at the trigger-mercy of an owner-duende who can fire her at whim (see Susan Howe's thoughtful and differing consideration of this poem in *My Emily Dickinson*, Berkeley, 1985):

My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—
In Corners—till a Day
The Owner passed—identified—
And carried Me away—

And now We roam in Sovreign Woods—
And now We hunt the Doe—
And every time I speak for Him—
The Mountains straight reply—

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow—
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let it's pleasure through—

And when at Night—Our good Day done—
I guard My Master's Head—
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
Deep Pillow—to have shared—

To foe of His—I'm deadly foe—
None stir the second time—

On whom I lay a Yellow Eye—
Or an emphatic Thumb—

Though I then He—may longer live
He longer must—than I—
For I have but the power to kill,
Without—the power to die—

7 Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems*, NYC, 1957, p. 505.

Chapter 8

My sense of poetic labyrinth here is very flexible—for one writer "the bitter combat" at the center may fill the stage, and for another opening and/or closure may be so difficult that the other stages seem to be nonexistent. And too, there are experiences of the labyrinth which are not engaged by the use I have made of Bloom's "Ratios." To some extent, the elaboration of any vision is labyrinthine. Olson's vision of Homer's *The Odyssey* as a dance-drama, in which a shaman-hero dances his way through a gauntlet of monsters to be reunited with a human other,[1] suggests how labyrinthine a 20 year voyage can be. While a single poem may be experienced as working through a maze, such a poem may also be a mere knot in a network that is comprised of all the writer's poems as well as his unwritten life. In relation to the labyrinth, I would like to consider one of several existent poetic Curriculums for novices. Unlike the others I will mention later, it is not a set of proposals or even an argument, but a tilting assembly of names, subjects and ideas that evoke the accesses and restrictions of the labyrinth itself.

Charles Olson's "A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul" may be especially baffling for the novice accustomed to poetry anthologies that for the most part contain poems which the editors feel are self-contained, and can be examined and taught as discrete objects. Poets who tend to write discrete lyrics (Robert Herrick, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost) can be fairly represented in such anthologies. Poets whose work is primarily constellational—in which individual poems refer not only to themselves but are part of the diagram of a larger constellation—are poorly represented. This is a primary reason, in my opinion, for bypassing anthologies

and reading all poets in terms of individual books that in most cases they themselves organized.[2] This does not mean that such poets as William Blake, Ezra Pound, and Charles Olson only write poems that are referential to their own systems—all three, in fact, have written superb self-contained lyric poems. What it does mean is that to appreciate a passage in *The Four Zoas,* or *The Cantos,* or *The Maximus Poems,* you need to know the way in which the entire poem relates to what has come before it and after it in the poet's body of work. Poets who attempt to increase the responsibilities of poetry by drawing upon the materials of non-literary disciplines—who in effect strive for a vision big enough to combat the resistance of their times to poetry—are almost inevitably pedagogical.

On February 9, 1968, Olson sent his student George Butterick a 2 page "outline," that on one hand was probably spontaneous (reflecting current preoccupations) and on the other the result of 20 years of research and writing. Such a "Plan" suggests a mysterious correspondence between terrestrial labyrinths, star maps, and the human mind. Not only does this "Plan" fail to follow the steps of most outlines, it treats its "subjects" as if they were pick-up-sticks that had suddenly been loosed from the poet's grip, falling everywhichway on the page. The only "direction" is that indicated by the fact that the title, one third of the way down on the right-hand page, is under a phrase ending in the word "completion," suggesting that the "Plan" is to be read as a kind of asymmetrical swirl, working down from the title on the right-hand page, crossing over to the left-hand page and following it upward, to then cross back to the right-hand page and end with "completion." The problem with following such a direction is that the left-hand page has obviously been written from the top down. Another reading possibility is to disperse with direction entirely, and take the subjects and suggestions as "free bodies" brought together in a single double-page arena. If they are taken as a set of leads, the novice can follow them out himself. By coming to terms with "Alchemy—rather by plates [as connected to dreams]" or with what Olson might mean by "Bach's *belief,* "he can (often by arguing with Olson) start to develop his own assembly of intersecting subjects or directions.

how to live as a
single natural being
the dogmatic nature of
(order of)
experience

how many?
& how each
made known,
exercised,

as

organs &
function – activity
of the soul
or psyche or
Heaven or God

Ismaeli muslimism

&, all together,
create
organism

Alchemy – rather by plates

/ as connected to dreams /

pictorialism

as in Earth, "View"

& perspective
/cf. Weyl on ocular
power

Vision

X

Messages

technically, Analytic Psychology, as only technical study I
know of modern Western man & under enough mental
control

jazz playing

dance as individual
body-power

equally say Homer's art

Bach's belief

/cf. Novalis'
"subjects"

Egyptian hieroglyphs
– drawing

(gesture, speech
habits
mental condition

the Norse
& the Arabs

–locally, American
Indians

matter

Phenomenological

Sensation and Attention
training in exahaustion &
completion

A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul

(Intuition
& Feeling
one's own

the Mushroom dream woman mind language

Earth as a
geology comprehension like archeology
geography – equally, though here maps & experience of
human history walking

in this connection, as habitat
inhabitation of, rather than as politics say
or national. Instead, physical &
vertically incremental

physical

man as animal praxis of – as Earth as a

emotional mental experience

Poets as such, that is disciplined lives not
history or for any "art" reasons example,

Blake

the same, say, medicine men

& like theologians: example, Dante – Giotto

Charles Olson

Butterick objected to the word "drugs" in the copy sent to him by Olson, and apparently made other objections to the "Plan." In a letter of February 26, Olson replied: "Just for further accuracy please change word drugs in 1st line of Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul to the Mushroom. I find your objection, that there is nothing new in the above, a curious demand, and not actually relevant, I don't think, to the proposal. That is, the need, in fact—or at least what seemed to me the gain of this particular spreading was to have a congestin [sic] which ought to be including and likewise exclusive. Or at least that, so placed, it can then be tested for thoroughness. In fact what new is as interesting now as condensation?"[3]

It is fascinating to follow out what has been done to date with Olson's "Plan." It was first published in *Magazine of Further Studies* #5, 1968, and was subsequently taken up as an investigative poetic "working" by another Olson student (and the editor of *Further Studies),* Jack Clarke who selected 28 keywords from the total 223, and after consulting two other students, Albert Glover and Fred Wah, assigned these words to 28 members of the Olson community, with the proposal that each would write a 20 to 50 page "fascicle" off of that word. All but 5 fascicles have been written and published (for the most part in the early 1970s). When all 28 are completed, along with Olson's *Pleistocene Man* (letters to Clarke, during October 1965), to be included in the set without a number, the "Curriculum" will be bound and published as a single volume, each fascicle becoming a chapter.

It is difficult to say to what extent the individual fascicles are successful; most are novicework, writing by Olson-allied students who by the early 1970s had only a fragmentary sense of Olson's body of work and who had not, at least at that time found their own footing.[4] Only a handful represent significant research contributions to Olson's subjects or could be considered engaging collections of poetry. However, more important than achievement in this instance, is the extent to which the fascicles demonstrate that there was a circle of novices around a single poet who cared enough for his vision to contribute up to 50 pages on a single

word of it. Olson did not *assign* the fascicles; they were generated by the students themselves. In response to my letter inquiring as to what use had been made of the "Plan" and the fascicles, Clarke replied: "Actually, there has been no thought of 'use' of it, only a place to be together, the O-community i.e., those living in his 'world,' his 'soul?' After his death in 1970, we all needed something to survive the boredom of what was to follow i.e., *before the war,* as Duncan says. We will soon publish the definitive text of *Dante* [Duncan's fascicle, #8], replacing both the earlier fascicle and [the poem in] *Groundwork,* to be sold modestly as 'book,' i.e., that will be Glover Publishing *for* the Institute of Further Studies."

*

1 For Olson's perceptive notes on the Upper Paleolithic, see *Olson* #10, 1978, Storrs, CT. Ten issues of *Olson* were researched, edited and annotated by George Butterick as part of his own poetic apprenticeship. Butterick, who also edited and annotated over 4000 pages of Olson's poetry, prose, and correspondence, died of cancer in July, 1988, at 46. While he wrote poetry at many points over the two decades of his full-time Olson scholarship, he gave Olson all the front burners, modestly placing his own poems on back ones. Butterick's gesture is tragically moving and perhaps unique in a world in which most novices, sidestepping the risks of a prolonged apprenticeship, only find time for themselves.

2 Other reasons to avoid anthologies: teachability is a prime consideration (how much Stein, Zukofsky and Spicer do you find in current anthologies?)—especially as the selections move toward the present, easy-to-read poems that follow in the wake of the established teachable masters are the rule. The editors are not entirely to blame (though nearly all of them go along with the situation), as trade publishers rely considerably on reports from the field (who the professors want to teach) when they decide whether or not a particular anthology (after production and often high permission fees) will make a profit. While minority poets appear with increasing regularity, many appear to be selected on two bases: they will give the anthology a democratic appearance, and they will not offend Professor X because the poems selected read like the poems of their mainstream male writing-workshop contemporaries.

3 When looking at someone's outline or program for others, it is important to decide if their own poetry and poetics backs it up. Olson's concern with "spreading," "congestin," and "condensation" have underpinnings in his work at large. The "Plan" is one of many manifestations of Olson's attempt to revision life as turning on a single center, with the poet as integral to a will to cohere. The "Plan" thus embodies the tension

between his extensive "spread" of historical and interdisciplinary materials, and his ongoing "condensation" of his findings. See "The Gate and the Center" essay in *Human Universe*, NYC, 1967. Unfortunately, like most poets of his generation (Robert Duncan being a striking exception), he assumed a male reader. Thus, in the "Plan," men are identified as individuals e.g., Bach, Blake, Dante, Novalis, Weyl—and women generically as Woman.

4 The Institute of Further Studies fascicles are as follows:

#1 *The Mushroom*, by Albert Glover, 1972.
#2 *Dream*, by Duncan McNaughton, 1973.
#3 *Woman*, by John Wieners, 1972.
#4 *Mind* (assigned to Robert Creeley).
#5 *Language* (assigned to Edward Dorn).
#6 *Earth*, by Fred Wah, 1974.
#7 *Blake*, by John Clarke, 1973.
#8 *Dante*, by Robert Duncan, 1974.
#9 *Homer's Art* (assigned to Alice Notley).
#10 *Bach's Belief* (assigned to Robin Blaser).
#11 *Novalis' "Subjects,"* by Robert Dalke, 1973.
#12 *The Norse*, by George Butterick, 1973.
#13 *The Arabs*, by Edward Kissam, 1972.
#14 *American Indians*, by Edgar Billowitz, 1972.
#15 *Jazz Playing*, by Harvey Brown, 1977.
#16 *Dance*, by Lewis MacAdams, 1972.
#17 *Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, by Edward Sanders, 1973.
#18 *Ismaeli Muslimism*, by Michael Bylebyl, 1972.
#19 *Alchemy*, by David Tirrell, 1972.
#20 *Perspective*, by Daniel Zimmerman, 1974.
#21 *Vision*, by Drummond Hadley, 1972.
#22 *Messages*, by James Koller, 1972.
#23 *Analytic Psychology*, by Gerrit Lansing, 1983.
#24 *Organism*, by Michael McClure, 1974.
#25 *Matter*, by John Thorpe, 1975.
#26 *Phenomenological* (assigned to Joanne Kyger).
#27 *Sensation*, by Anselm Hollo, 1972.
#28 *Attention*, by Robert Grenier, 1985.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

ȮNȮME

Ȯnȯme. How have you seen the police. Please. *Ȯnȯme.* We hear brains, explicit things. Think. *Ȯnȯme.* We mean dreams. We mean dreams are *o—bliterating this little child "self"*—still. I have seen them—do. I have seen *do it* and, with sticks, what is odd is—it is very odd—is, *Ȯnȯme,* I have been particularly focussed—a chill on her—*inheriting this marvelous filial intelligence making o—bliterating this little child "self"* ill. *Ȯnȯme.* No, I have not been particularly focussed. I have been *seen* repeatedly focussed on her—and he's on me. One free hand. One freehand sketching. One free hand sketching burning candles through the window. The consecutive phases of lighting and extinguishing the candles gives things a terrible moment in the head—doubt. I don't doubt I have seen this and can distinguish between murder and love, if it's near me. She's covered in love—a chill on her. I have seen him near her, enter—*private affections, explicit things*—make light of her, in her ear, the thing down there in the canal, covered in love—a chill on her, enters me. *Ȯnȯme.* When it snows I have spent the winter in this manor thinking anything near me will happen, and he's on me. *Ȯnȯme.* How have you seen the police.

This man is taller

This man I remember
Taller pallor enters her
Her home
This man has been slept in the fairgrounds when it snows
He has called her
I have been seen seeing her go to a phone—one time
I know this man you have already on line is wrong only—this time
I know he has the same sense of shuffling things around the home

The same crystallized pallor, tone
But he has no real power
He has distinguished between murder and love—one time
He has no
Private affections, explicit things
This man you want is more at home
With her things

Listen, Lt. The question is who said it and who feels more at home with her things—say books—to have, to make her look at him. I have seen him do it and—with sticks—how have you seen the police—tell it. *Ȯnȯme:*

> When I say quote he's on me
> It's a figure—only—
> of some speech. . .
>
> It has no weight to it
> It's in the lens I saw

Listen, Lt. I don't use language—or love—to mystify my fear of it:

> When I say quote he's on me
> He's caught—only—
> in my lens immensely seen
> to be with her

Listen, Lt. When I am looking at language—or love—I don't seize on violence to mystify my fear of silence. It just happens. It just happens I have spent a winter in this manor thinking anything near me will happen, and he's on me:

> When I say quote he's on me
> I mean you

How have you seen the police. Tell it. *Ȯnȯme.* "Whenever the text permitted real cries

fell mute" (Moriarty said it)

DONALD REVELL

THREE POEMS

THE PASTORAL TRADITION

It is possible to live backwards
just as each day leans into an ovation
cupped like rain, an emptiness beneath memory
along the edge of a leaf, at the verge
of parkland, in the streaked reflection
of street life across the bows of windows.

It is possible to live backwards
because we have eyes in our heads
and to look at the world is to empty it
into first versions of itself
lustful and much taller today
among the violets under a late rain.

It is possible to live backwards
because love is vision, a sustained applause.
A man looks at a child and it turns away.
A man looks at wildflowers from his car
and the whole field turns away from him,
rustling, living backwards into the retreating sunlight.

WHITE PASTORAL

It is not a film. You cannot stay outside of it
feeling the actual breeze and scent

or play it backward to the place where everyone
agreed upon a destination, a politics
in which no one is exploited and the material
for weightless summer clothes appears from nowhere.

I cannot call it death, although some would
as they would throw a coin onto a map
of the night sky. The causeless stars are for sale.
Death is harder. It gutters between the names of things
in their stellar loneliness—a hotel orchestra
and a hopelessly late rose. White pastoral.

Out of season, only the elderly
and these others dislodged from their orbits
by marriage or the impossible deaths of young children
darken the shadows behind the palms
at night as the hotel orchestra
presses a tango against the air
where there is no flesh. This is the death
that whitens every smile and is patient.
And I thought it was too late in the year
for roses when one the size of a child's head
fisted through the snapdragons.
It wore the frost of October like a disease
and was four different colors. This is the death
that fractures white light into a finger-splay.
It is not patient. It has no time.
And there was a woman pounding at the door
when I was in bed with another woman.
She was the palest thing you could imagine
in the vertical cold cell of the doorway.
"I am your last chance" she said.
This is the death that does nothing.
It is outside of time, carries no flowers,
and if I had gone with her that night
my flesh would be the air in everybody's old age
and a shepherd would play his scrannel pipe.
White pastoral: the small breast of death,
the legs like a boy's, the causeless

absolute effect of light in someone's skin,
of sound inside of someone's mouth next to you in bed.

It is not a hallucination.
Like a girl in an apron dress
running before her parents to the waterfall
where every Labor Day they take a picnic
and photograph themselves for the winter album,
it exults in the clumsy lives we plan.

I remember being told that no one
ever makes up an hour's sleep once it is lost.
You just go on, tired to the end.
Orchestras disband. Roses collapse inward.
There is no time for happiness, but I feel it
as I feel the weightless summer clothes of the material air.

WARTIME

All the more beautiful in the concert hall
with people in their fine clothes and yourself
in the same place as the original music.
The rest, I imagine, must be like the sound
of a radio orchestra in the nineteen-forties,
Europe fiddling beneath the darkness,
and those abandoned in the capital cities
leaning into the sound as it becomes noise.

Our lives seldom advance. And the beautiful
is a principle either too large
or too small to contain so much loose
and indispensable striving.
That is why I think of music, why I love
even the idea of an orchestra

in the open spaces of the outdoors
and worried corners of rooms during the Blitz, my
love's last hours.

They do not move much, but they are real.
They live in the anticipation
and in the backward aftermath. They feel
light cancelling the illumination
of the previous moment when I told you
Europe was dead. Mahler already knew.
That is why I said that being inside of you
is the harsh Symphony and withdrawing from you

a song at the end, something of the earth
too large for desire, too small to survive.
And these analogies are still nowhere
close to you, close to me, who are trying
so hard to believe that things
are not the hallucinations of bad history
or of autumn settling into its long self-pity
of mists and over-ripeness apt not to change.

In early November, the city parks hum
beneath the thinnest frost. The couples
and solitaries have got it wrong at the
lake's edge, feeding the birds, saying
nothing to themselves or to each other
about the coming holidays, the anticipation
buried close by, in the wrong place perhaps
but someplace. It fills the earth like music.

BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

THREE POEMS

RETROSPECTIVELY, FOR PRIMO LEVI

Poetry's charm is not chiliastic.
We have to die before the apocalypse,
most of us. A heartbeat of pedantry
& stoplight darkhouse gone.

I guess that's why last breaths are drawn,
or how,
or why the water passing from the storm
is spilled on shower floors
"abject" & "henceforthly."

Said Assurbanipal to the toward
glass capturers,
a measuring cup for all
my hanging gardens.

"My Emily Dickinson"

for Susan Howe's

The mind is schematic
if known at all. You
slide down the grip of
it, past resolution.

Aptly & in consequence
distinguished all the while,
deferentially from, ah, the moony
still, the off-ramp glowing town.

Reigns what ever ails the all

for nothingness dim bulb a-

bove the milkless milk, four

score & some odd years before the bill

was paid, the check it bounced
    from hill to crumbling hill.

MUTHOPLOKON

I am passive glimps'd & uncontrollably exerted
where "rear view mirror" = shield of Perseus,
two bits of anxiety on the word
"thou," that uttereth the sound, reversed. . .

Declensions of the past, aorta's
dug, thro' bodied reams of thys dispersing.
Stepp'd forth, the words among, the moon, with shields to say
what stars give up, or off, disbursed & soothing.

MICHAEL GIZZI

TWO POEMS

IN MY IVANHOE

Denial is a river in Egypt.
I was told to look back and not stare
Mummified in the classic.
We're all here 'cause we're not all there
Christ! wasn't a woman had him
Had a dueling scar, here
In my Ivanhoe.

Most of you were being born when I was
Icing this kiddo. Grim yore of grail-bait
Male medico squirt
Inner Templar Memling down his shirt.
Soubriquet 'one-way Jack'
A pandy for the pansy says the leather of the pack
Did I say gramercy?

Continual chaps tilting out of kilter
Timber tremens. Flapjack in haystack
Sounds in the light of work
Curt *mit* laconic cream sung with migratory luster
In my panoply. Mowing an apish greengrass virelai
By my bauble! a moral
Sweet to me toenails
Waving pennon of a span scene.

Zoom cam to memory mote. Me and Pa
At the Twin Drive-In
Studs of the cinema steed
Parked car like palfrey, canted

Me more a Wamba than a Wilfred in my Dr D's
Brain-pan broken on Latin and gridiron.

Vassalage. Extensive wood in English song
Flipside spent hunting wolf in de Bois
To *Winterreise*. Grey-goose shaft of a gassy forester
This entity seems to dominate the picture
She thought he'd gone but he'd come. Summer
Being the chief romanceur couldn't
Keep his eyes off her. Bitchin' bodice. A real
Bim.

A cinch his off
Was on. A monk in his spare time
A mind's a wonderful thing to efface
It don't pay to skimp.
A look-see'll snuff stuff. Bip
That's it
No trace of M at the sideboy.
Nice of you to come clean honey
Legend weaves her body yarn
In my Ivanhoe

AT FIRST GLANCE

At nine drank three. Bathed
the back of nothing
in the mirror. The eyes I had
sounded mean doing a quiet
seventy. It was easy
drunk in auto tippling my own
dim man. Arch-mendicant
in this breezy going world.
Fun ain't it a little free

to gloat savagely. Smiled
her shoulder at me. You
who get to liking pretty
wear knuckles out thinking
boudoir tabletray *ubi sunt.*
Her dear white scut. She
with a vague scent and a lot of
leg art lighting it for her.
Reed by faintest breath bent,
cool. Play it clean. That's
all—she threw the switch.
Another boy palmed
in the cooler time

Note

The manuscript sequence CONTINENTAL HARMONY of which these two poems are a part, is an assimilation, almost without exception, of a tone. A tone which in turn was inspired by a tone of my own intuiting in the music and texts of William Billings' last songbook, *The Continental Harmony* (1794). No more, no less. It is improvisational, an efflorescence of my time with these sources.

Billings (1746–1800), born in Boston, was a physical grotesque; a singing master, though tanner by trade, noted for his impulsive, non-conforming behavior. His 'Chester' was played by the Revolutionary Army and achieved in its time a kind of platinum tunehood. His 'Berlin' forms the basis of Ross Lee Finney's *Variations, Fugueing and Rondo,* and another of his hymn tunes is basic to Otto Luening's *Prelude on a Hymn Tune by William Billings.* Part of Billings' importance to us is that his music has seemed to contemporary American composers so indigenous and in some ways close to their own idiom that they have subpoenaed it for their own work.

Billings' attractiveness to his contemporaries was chiefly melodic. There is above all an admirable appropriateness to the needs of a layman's choir that considered music a pastime and was fond of the physical exertion in performing it. Billings has also the distinction, it seems, of being the first composer to end a composition, cast in a major or minor tonality, with a key that strongly differs from that of its opening. Anticipating Charles Ives, another Yankee, Americanist in outlook, he simply meant to have his way.

KAREN KELLEY

FREUD'S WISH

1.

this while she was soaping herself:

how he saw it was his child, could tell by the hair;
(his beard up close, white-flecked, making her hot),
how he'd talked about her openings—

when the child emerged, she saw red (not misty like the room,
blue),
but red was not a word for the talking; it was *without sharpness,*
richness or line,
so she imagined *plug,* which was worse, was a noise,
embarrassing and rubbery—

—to say it all out loud; encourage flowerings.
She was lying (lying) before him,
beneath.

2.

that she kept asking why *no young painter,*
Basquiat, Clemente, Penck,
had begun to capture what knowing love was like

and then, bright-eyed:
"What *is* it like?"

She asked *me* (repressive boot of the Father)

she, who had whispered, "I feel so shaky, so ashamed.
I am wondering why I see this way.
Why are shapes as profound as words;
why is music equal to gesture and to color?
Synesthesia, certainly.
I never took synesthesia to be a metaphor.

"Often I feel hot
and plastic,
as if my body takes imprints
from objects—
obscene objects like railing knobs and the jutting shapes
of headboards and chairs;
and from music,
a single note from a violin;
and colors—blue, for instance;
the turn of a complete stranger's head;
the tone of a voice,
texture of a carpet."

(Bless me Father, for I have—

a hidden Eden) (moats of silence, walls of shame)

Poor child.
In my back pocket I keep hidden
pornographic photographs of the animalesque.

3.

how he'd ridden her like a horse,
talking the whole time about "taking" a man
(which, if it had been a woman, would have been wrong)—
Ah, but words change, he said, *accordingly. Fingers*
was what he meant: he was touching her underneath.

Somehow, when he was riding her, the aspect of the room was
curiously blue—
close to the ceiling she heard obscene Viennese waltzes;
on the floor, old-time dance tunes;
by his chair, thunder and lapping waters—

bluishness of the room,
richness that rolled in her gut, sense of
the forbidden: he would *love* that,
the forbidden,

but she did not say it, *would not make that admission,*

here, under the eyes of the crusty artifacts (crazy straw hair,
ivory inlays the whites of their eyes—);
all around them harsh sounds and brassy jazz played.
Their phalluses were fingers pointing at her;
or perhaps they were pointing her
in a crafty (his) direction—*open up*—

Lying there, she could turn her head: red carpet, sharp focus—
(the Persian pattern like flowers?);
faces of humanity, carved in wood,
crowding;
Papa behind her in his leather chair,
wearing thick white makeup and a filmy pink kimono,
magisterially directing the placement of scenery:
low, patently fake fence between audience and performers;
a painted backcloth of a lake edged with trees;

several cardboard bushes;
a rock that opens to reveal a fiery core;
a full-size tree with moonlight dropping through its painted
foliage;
and a semi-Japanese tree house.

The script reads: Suck this, he said, (open up)—

toward cracks in what she'd forgotten (fade up: close to the
ceiling, classical music played),
swift arc of her father's towel snatched from the rack by the
sink as she entered—

he'd thought she was her mother.

It was his mistake.
(Daddy, Daddy, why have you forsaken me?)

He will not diagnose until he is through with her:
her shaking hands are his chattering teeth,
who has eaten too much sugar:
she is made of rage.

ROBERT PODGURSKI

THREE POEMS

OYSTER GEM

Tear open to get to the mind stuff
Crudest form, but perfected shucking
Yields the golden food undisturbed,
Still
Smell Sea Brine high,
Feeling the breakers against
Back Muscle nerves

SPIDERPLANT

Spider
Calls herself
Clephus
She has been
With me for
Years
My favorite
Arachnidafoliage
As deep rooted
Sic Cthuhlu
Not sleeping
And about

JIMSON'S GIFT

Smelling the wet peatness
Of the jungle growth of petunias
Astride the patio
Sends my mind to a less
Arid land, one where lush
Vegetation thrives,. . .feral
Chaotic growth patterns
Whose origin, one may only
Speculate on a concise
Fertile plant fetus encased
Babe in a seed opening
Cadence of hortum fecundum

Expansion of roots, wild underbrush
Gnarly brambles goetically abrading
The ground, the soft enchanced by
The nettled sting
Over in a barren corner
Datura, a lone thorn apple spreads
Its limbs and toothed fronds
Alone purveying the alien unearthliness
Some things possess
So much in contact with terrum
Clue at a source beyond
The black that nestles stars.

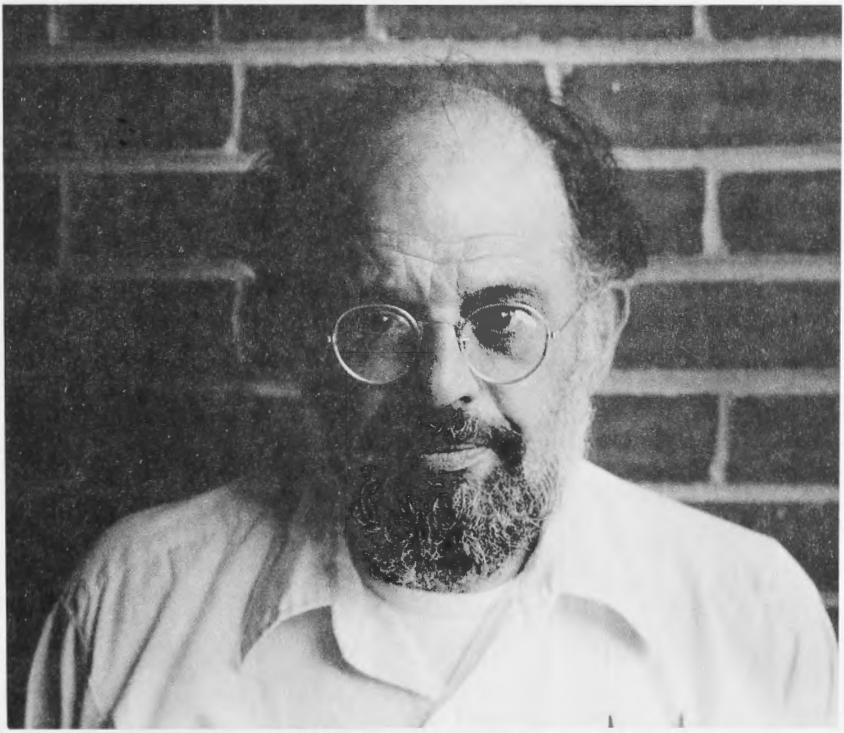
ROBERT TURNEY

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS

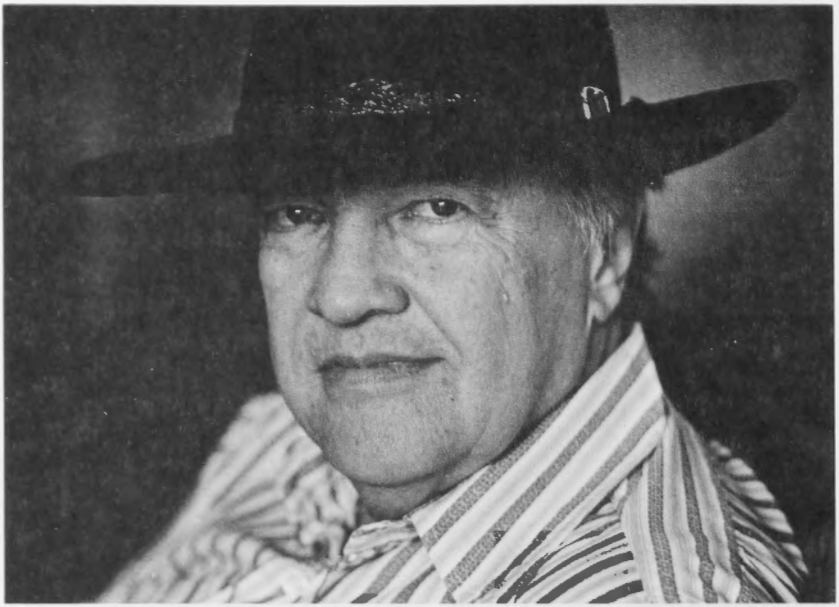
WILLIAM EVERSON

JUDITH MINTY

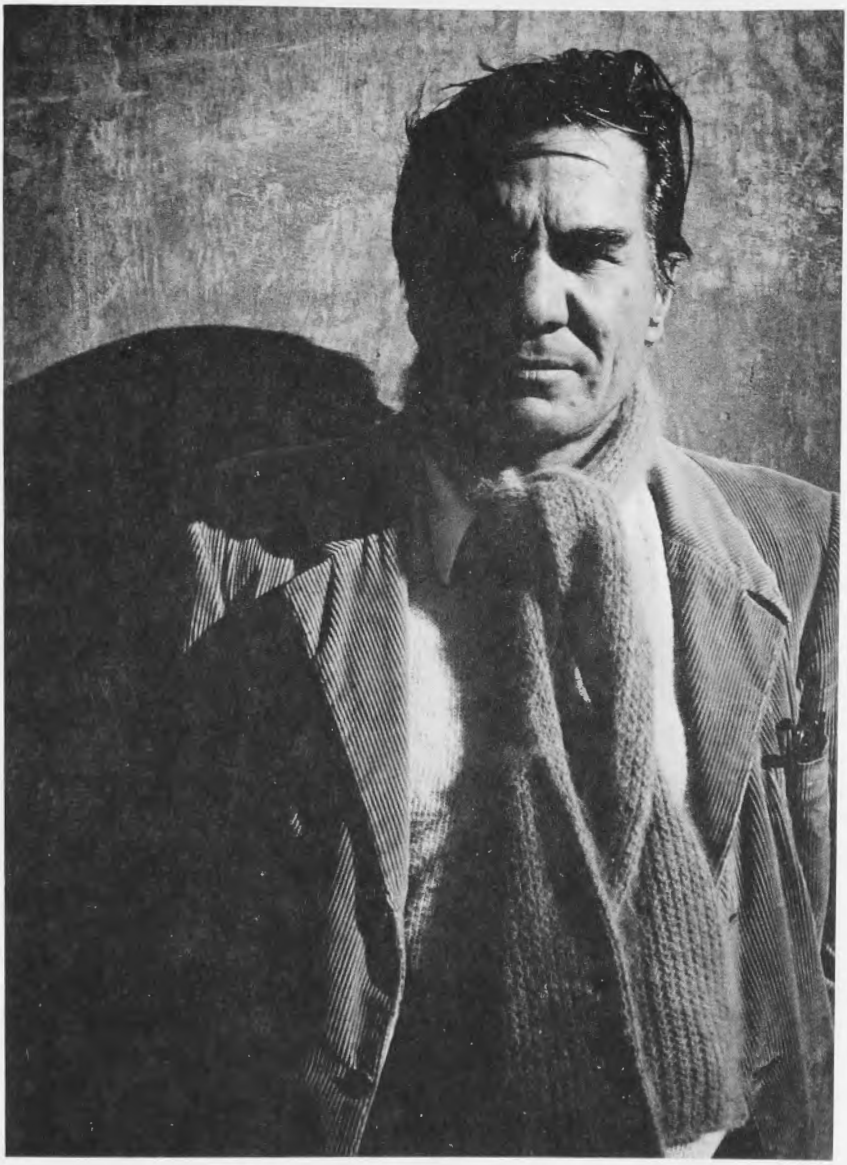
MAXINE HONG KINGSTON



ALLEN GINSBERG



JAMES DICKEY



GALWAY KINNEL

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

TWO SUITES

(Tr. from the Spanish by Jerome Rothenberg)

MIRROR SUITE

SYMBOL

Christ,
a mirror
in each hand.
He multiplies
his shadow.
He projects his heart
through his black
vision.
I believe!

THE GIANT MIRROR

We live beneath
a giant mirror.
Man is blue!
Hosanna!

REFLECTION

Lady Moon.
(Did someone shatter the quicksilver?)
No.
Which child flicked on
the lantern?
Even a butterfly could
blow it out.
Be quiet! (Can't really!)
That glowworm
is the moon!

RAYS

Everything's a fan.
Brother, open up your arms.
God is the pivot.

REPLICA

Only a single bird
is singing.
The air is cloning it.
We hear through mirrors.

EARTH

We walk on
an unsilvered

mirror,
a crystal surface
without clouds.
If lilies would grow
backwards,
if roses would grow
backwards,
if all those roots
could see the stars
& the dead not close
their eyes,
we would become like swans.

CAPRICHO

Behind each mirror
is a dead star
& a baby rainbow
sleeping.

Behind each mirror
is a blank forever
& a nest of silences
too young to fly.

The mirror is the mummy
of conceptions, closing
like a conch of light
at sunset.

The mirror
is the mother dew,
the book dissecting
twilights, echo become flesh.

SHINTO

Small golden bells.
Dragon pagoda.
Tinkle tinkle
from the rice fields.

Primal fountain.
Fountain of the real.

Far off,
pink-colored herons
& the spent volcano.

EYES

In our eyes the roads
are endless.
Two crossroads made
from shadows.
Death always emerging
from those secret fields.
A woman working a garden:
flowers like teardrops
she breaks.
Horizonless pupils.
Virgin forests
we're lost in.
Castle of no return
where you follow
the road that starts in the iris.
Oh boy without love, may God
set you free from red ivy.
And you, Elenita,
who sit here

embroidering ribbons,
keep clear of that traveler.

INITIUM

Adam & Eve.
The serpent cracked
the mirror
in a thousand pieces,
& the apple
was his rock.

BERCEUSE [CRADLE SONG] FOR A SLEEPING MIRROR

Sleep.
Do not fear the roaming
eye.
Sleep.

Not the butterfly,
the word
the furtive light
through the keyhole
will wound you.
Sleep.

As my heart is,
so you are,
my mirror.
Garden where my love

is waiting.

Sleep easy,
but awaken
when the last kiss dies against
my lips.

AIR

The air
pregnant with rainbows
shatters its mirrors
over the grove.

CONFUSION

Is my heart
your heart?
Who is mirroring my thoughts?
Who lends me this un-
rooted passion?
Why are my clothes
changing colors?
Everything is at a crossroads!
Why does this sludge
look so starry?
Brother, are you you
or am I I?
And these cold hands,
are they his?
I see myself in sunsets,
& a swarm of people

wanders through my heart.

POOL

Horned owl
stops his meditations,
cleans his meathooks,
sighs.
A firefly
spins downhill
& a star
slides by.
Old owl shakes his wings,
takes up his meditations.

April 15, 1921

IN THE FOREST OF CLOCKS

I entered the forest
of clocks.

Leaves were ticking,
bells hung in clusters.
Under a manyfaced clock,
constellations of pendulums.

Black lilies,
dead hours.
Black lilies,
new hours.

Doesn't matter!

And love?

Just this one hour,
one hour.
A very cold hour.

CHAPARRAL

I plunged into my
hour of death.
My deathrattle hour.
Hour of last kisses.
Grave hour when captive bells
dream.
    Cuckoo clocks
    without cuckoos.
    Mildewing star
    & enormous pale
    butterflies.

From brambles
of sighs
the crank-organ
sounded
that I had as a child.

You must skip to my loo,
my darling,
skip to my loo,
my love.

OVERVIEW

The whole murky forest is one
giant spider, spinning
a network of sounds
for its prey:
this poor lilywhite girl,
raised on glances & sighs.

HE

The real sphinx
is a clock.

Oedipus will be born from its eyes.

Its northern boundary
is mirror.
Its southern is cat.
Doña Luna is Venus.

Savorless sphere.

Clocks bring us
winter.

(Hieratic swallows
migrate in summer.)

Dawn is a floodtide
of clocks.

WHERE THE DREAM DIES OUT

Bats born from
spheres.
The cowhand scans them
deep in thought.

When will nightfall come
for all these clocks?
When will those white moons sink
under the hills?

CLOCK ECHO

I sat down
in a clearing in time.
It was a pool of silence.
A white pool.

Incredible ring,
where the bright stars collide
with a dozen floating
black numbers.

FIRST/LAST MEDITATION

Time
is in night's colors.
Quiet night.

Over enormous moons,
eternity
is set at twelve.
Time's gone to sleep
forever
in his tower.
All clocks
deceive us.

Time at last has
horizons.

THE SPHINX HOUR

In your garden the damned
stars open up.
We're born under your horns
& die there.

Cold hour!
You drop a stone roof
on these lyrical butterflies:
propped in your sky
you cut off their wings
& confine them.

One. . . two. . .three.
The hour struck in the forest.

The silence
filled up with bubbles.
A gold pendulum
carried my face
through the air.

The hour struck in the forest.
Pocket watches,
squadrons of flies,
came & went.

From my heart came the sound
of my grandmother's
gold-plated watch.

November 1922 (?)

NOTE

As a type of "serial poetry" (Blaser's and Spicer's term), the Lorca "suites" were begun at the end of 1920 and continued to mid-1923. Many remained unpublished during Lorca's lifetime and were later reassembled from notebooks, notably in André Belamich's critical edition, *Suites* (Editorial Ariel, Barcelona, 1983). When I first attended to the several that had surfaced earlier, they struck me as a different kind of Lorca than I had known before—still characteristically his but with a coolness & (sometimes) quirkiness, a language-centeredness & playfulness of mind & music that I found instantly attractive. "Mirrors" *["Suite de los espejos"]* was published in Juan Ramón Jiménez's magazine, *Indice,* in 1922, while "Clocks" *["La selva de los relojes"]* didn't come into print until 1938. These & further translations from the Suites will appear in the second volume of the comprehensive three-volume edition of Lorca's poetry to be published by Farrar Straus Giroux under the general editorship of Christopher Maurer.

[J. R.]

PHILIP GUSTON

DRAWING

UNTITLED
1968, Charcoal, 18" X 22.5"
Private Collection, NYC

MARJORIE WELISH

UNDERWORLD OVERCOAT: A NOTE ON THE LATE ART OF GUSTON

Once upon a time but not so long ago, seemingly one arts panel of every three dedicated itself to considering "The Individual in Society" and brooded long, and if not hard, then vociferously on the role of the creative outsider. Today it is often argued that tension between the values of individuality and conformity is gone. So now that the individual and society are synonymous, I wonder: May one feel nostalgic for alienation?

A retrospective of Philip Guston's drawings currently on view at The Museum of Modern Art raises that spectral question. Although a mere survey of the many hundreds Guston produced in his lifetime, this selection of 151 works on paper offers plenty of material with which to contemplate Guston's cyclical swing from depicting the neurosis of alienation to the neurosis of consensus and back again.

Like others of his generation in art, literature and music, Guston spent his formative years in the 1930s trying to give neoclassic validity to relevant social and political issues. But in these overtly political labors, it wasn't until the late 1960s, when he could rely on the accrued wisdom of Abstract Expressionism, that he evolved excellent work. In my view, the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism helped his politics. Subjective and touched with a vigilance that borders on theory, to paraphrase Goethe, these palpitating abstractions conveyed more content—more political awareness, if you will—than any of the ideological murals that preceded them. And throughout his career, Guston's drawings always anticipate and define each stylistic phase.

Yet before and after his Abstract Expressionism, Guston remains evidently attached to and informed by the rhetoric of oppression associated with art and literature created between the Wars. Although biographers have mentioned Kafka as among the

literary influences on Guston's art, there also exists an affinity with Ernest Hemingway to my knowledge not yet mentioned.

Hemingway, a master of utilizing farce as a blunt instrument, begins his story "The Killers" (published in *Men Without Women,* 1927) thus:

> The door of Henry's lunch-room opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.
>
> "What's yours?" George asked them.
>
> "I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"
>
> "I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."
>
> Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched. He had been talking to George when they came in.
>
> "I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potatoes," the first man said.
>
> "It isn't ready yet."
>
> "What the hell do you put it on the card for?"
>
> "That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock."
>
> George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.
>
> "It's five o'clock."
>
> "The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.
>
> "It's twenty minutes fast."
>
> "Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

From props to affective tone, the scenarios drawn by Hemingway and Guston, in his first late figurative drawings and painting, suggest a shared rhetoric of oppression and its representation in art. Sublimity of space and time are shorn of consoling metaphysics: space is claustrophobic, time impoverished by petty displacement onto clocks and feeding schedules. Free will becomes trivialized through short-sighted goals: what's to eat and when.

As the fracas over the lunch menu heats up, so does the disarming vaudevillian routine:

> "I'll take ham and eggs," the man called Al said. He wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore silk muffler and gloves.
>
> "Give me bacon and eggs," said the other man. He was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them. They sat forward, their elbows on the counter.

In both Hemingway and Guston are creatures arousing suspicion and identified as thugs by virtue of their not being characters but schema with flat affect. Myopic, literal-minded maneuvers finesse terror and the implication of unmotivated violence. Hemingway, as a modernist, supplies no cause, no explanation for a death that will arrive, inevitably and soon. Acutely aware of the fictive possibilities in reality already made grotesque and irrational, this journalist drew on his experience of politics seen firsthand. Already in 1922, as a columnist sent to Europe to cover political events in Italy, Hemingway produced an article "Mussolini, Europe's Prize Bluffer," in which he described the Fascists as "a sort of Ku Klux Klan," while, with macabre humor, epitomized the danger of Mussolini by a sartorial mistake: his wearing black shirts together with white spats.

Like the twinned dumb executioners in *The Trial* who come to get K and without a word escort him to his death, the tyranny Guston personifies in his paintings and drawings is cousin to an ethos represented as capricious and absolute as Kafka's and Hemingway's. Hence Guston is presupposing a scenario found not only in hard-boiled fiction enlisting reportage typical of documentary realism, and he is presupposing as well a world that equates objectivity with materialistic vice—the vision of Expressionist drama. More than a shared vocabulary, this assumed topos of the underworld constituted a legacy of a politically left bohemia vital in both Europe and America in the 1920s.

But what I want to note here is Guston's bonding with this period and its sordid aftermath. In response to American political

hubris in Vietnam and assassination and violence at home, Guston seeks some contemporary expression of actuality for the 1970s yet chooses for that reality an amalgam of a settled progressiveness of Synthetic Cubism and the conservative yet unsettling idiom of de Chirico. (Guston is not alone among his generation in reverting to a former 20th-century period for a contemporary political statement: for instance, in the decade that saw the publication of *The Organization Man* Lester Johnson had created phalanxes of electric-blue bowlered silhouettes marching across yolk-yellow space to imply that a gangland mentality may be the unwanted obverse of individual anonymity.)

So while much has been made of the au courant relevance of Guston's political statements of the 1970s, Guston's actuality is also more profoundly historicizing and literary. In his late Hemingwayesque romance with the period between the Wars, doubtless he was sincere, but it must be admitted that he produced better statements of conscience—and much better art—after he left explicit social comment behind. The personal magic of Abstract Expressionism had worked well for him. Having rejected it in order to communicate, as he put it, "a deeper meaning," Guston was mistaken if he thought his dehumanized cartoons of Klansman necessarily deeper than his Abstract Expressionist gesture. Only when he pressed beyond an historicism staffed with Klansman and easy existential paraphernalia did subject matter give way to the deeper meaning of content, the very existential content of his previous Abstract Expressionism: vigilance, mortality, and after—an eternity of feeling in which, as in Kafka and Hemingway, guilt is a given.

The wonder of it all is that once beyond the set-pieces of alienation, in his best still later works—*Friend—To M.F.* and *Web,* for instance—even a slight period cast does not cushion anxiety. Nor is agonizing nakedness a bit diminished by association with an ethos of the familiar past.

D. E. STEWARD

SEPTEMBER

Blue, so parulas or ceruleans, possibly blue-winged, merest glimpse in the high oak foliage

Listening to patriotic litanies. Taking you into their confidence, "Communism is what we're really all talking about, right?" Like listening to old Nazis

Real-estate people say the first thing a couple invariably does when they take possession of a house they've bought is copulate in it

Property

Cerulean is the color of the sky on a bright cloudless day, deep blue or azure

To pass our winter below the two thousand meter level on the Andes western slopes, while the blue-winged migrate no farther than to Nicaragua

At the top of a lane flanked by loose lava stone walls, Laguna San Pablo below Volcán Imbabura, northern Ecuador, a five- or six-year-old girl, filthy raspberry sweater, dirty face, matted hair, bad shoes, eager but with no string to hold across the road to extract toll as had the other kids nearby, and when I walked back the thirty yards from where we parked, she was gone far, far up the volcano, a half a mile away and two hundred feet up, running, running toward a tiny farm

Bright peacock blue, the most brilliant of greenish blues

After Bolivia, the subcontinent of Brazil, then Argentina

The clear pushed-reeds of a bandoneon, mainstay of the tango

Blue ultramarine ash is a strong to vivid greenish blue

Tierra Argentina with that style, all hats exactly right, shiny leather, all those hides, all that beef, all those Italian craftsmen, all that sense of place, Córdoba, Mendoza, Paraná

Black earth seedbed for the criollo dream

The scudding cumulus, the maté gourds, the bolas coiled

Enigmatic smile from beneath her umbrella cocked like a parasol, equipment from her culture as surely as wine glass in hand is French, quiet curiosity Chinese

Gentle rain

New age and celestial space music. Star magic fusion schlock

Get a haircut, put on a coat and tie, go out and get a job

Columbia blue, pale, redder and deeper than average powder blue or Sistine and redder, stronger, and slightly darker than average cadet gray

Go to the Galápagos? Most never go to another continent, many never to another country, a few never leave their home state or province

In travel you rarely get another chance

Reddish moon rise, high sky, acacia shadow dream

Berlioz wrote *Harold in Italy* for Paganini who wanted a new work for viola, but he rejected it, saying the viola solos were not prominent enough. Paganini also played guitar, even wrote three string quartets with guitar part

Twenty wood warbler species in Columbia that never make their way to North America. One, the gray-throated, is like our mourning warbler but does not migrate at all, is restricted to humid forest and forest edge. "Not well known. May now be rare in much of range due to habitat loss"

Lavender blue is a light to brilliant purplish blue

Querencia

My rucksack's leather shoulder strap cusped by a cane rat I caught at it by my head one night in a stilted house in Sorsogon

Bicol

Midnight or midnight blue, a variable color averaging a blackish blue that is greener and stronger than Romany

Thunderous piano, recorded unenhanced, unaided

Romany is a blackish blue, is redder and less strong than average midnight

She drives across Cairo daily, Heliopolis to Giza. Down the 23rd July, onto Ramses, across the Zamalik Bridge, and then El Bahr el Ama along the river toward the zoo

Twelve million now in the city alone, congested toward constriction

Life and death in El-Mansûra, Lower Egypt, on the Damietta branch of the Nile

"People look ten years younger here than people of equal age at home in Egypt"

Two hundred and five million mother-tongue Arabic speakers in the world

Calamine blue, a light greenish blue, greener, lighter, stronger than robin's-egg blue, bluer and deeper than aqua, and bluer and lighter than turquoise

With a population like Spain's, thirty-seven million, the Sahel is ten times Spain's size with an economy but four percent as large

Not unlike a young cork forest or a flat plain olive grove from the air, but on the ground a lightly shaded hell

Infrequent lizards flashing, no other motion, cracks in the earth, stretching away, and after nightfall the absolute quiet of nothingness

It might be, in the manner that South American urban life foreshadows the ways most people everywhere will live by the time the century is out, that the Sahel lies as a Precambrian model for the inner human condition of how most exist right now

A large space on the map

Cyan, any of a group of colors of greenish blue hue, medium lightness, and high saturation. One of the subtractive primaries

Manaus, founded 1660, its air temperature never goes below eighty, over a million people now

The Cultural Revolution's Ox-Ghost Ranch in Shanghai, another kind of camp

Men's heads were shaved weekly at the Ox-Ghost Ranch, their humiliation was more complete than anyone not in Shanghai at the time can ever know

"The abject patience of the oppressed, evidently, is one of history's inexplicable facts" *(Points for a Compass Rose)*

Steel blue is any of the translucent colors assumed by steel at various temperatures in tempering

Mao's Red Guard, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge

Zaffer or zaffre or zaffree or zaffar or zaffir is smalt

Starch blue is smalt. Smalt is a moderate blue redder and duller than copen, redder and deeper than azurite blue, Dresden blue, or pompadour, and greener and deeper than luster blue. Smalt and starch blue are the same as cobalt glass, Dumont's blue, king's blue.

"I eat and I don't care. Ice cream, bread and butter. I'm up to one-sixty. I like it. You don't know how difficult being a woman in this country is now"

The intense turquoise of a late-summer leafhopper roaming night window glass ventrally in a reading light's bright

Know little about insects, less about plants and flowers

Worked for the US Forest Service for years and don't know much about trees

Japanese lantana in the National in Washington, soft orange to blue within the same rounded clusters, tiny and exact in the Alhambra water-gurgle silence of the domed courts

Twenty miles on a bicycle in air so calm as to be like walking up the stairs

The wrinkled mountains on maps and globes evoke the tingling, but do not suggest the awesome voids from peak to peak or the scale of summits

The Andes are finally familiar. Now only the Himalayas and the Pamirs, and the Antarctic peaks

Ease of travel one of the chief privileges of the era, cheapness of commercial jet aviation, smoothness of the freeways and the interstates

He eats with his off thumb high and shiny from shoveling it in. For the first time I understand Greasy Thumb, that enigmatic nickname of a 50s gangster

Loosing the thread of his life

One eyebrow droops, his puffing on the stairs, his readiness to sit down and rest at every chance he gets

Smoking, eating instead of smoking but still smoking, he will die of his fat before his lungs go

An electric storm so black that we pulled off beneath an overpass on I-95

Night blue is dark and grayish, greener and paler than indigo. Black is black, sooty, coal bin cobweb, low scrape, that storm was black

Boundless sense of well-being in outside air that is still, humid, and the temperature of the tropical ocean

Fells Point: Baltimore clippers built here, only crab-cake sandwiches now, went out to China with missionaries and Bibles flying topgallants and royals, skysails and moonrakers, those clouds of sails, and brought back silk and pearls

Crystal City, Seven Corners, Vietnamese commerce on Wilson Boulevard

The depths of Lake Baikal

The passage of migrating birds in fall

Fleeing the weather that is coming as though packs of dogs were running them, as though a chasm were filling the sky behind

Quebec City's hard stone grace

Retreat South below scudding early morning rain showers to the Line, leaving limitless Canada again

Unknown symphonies by forgotten composers, as sad as all serious novels that have gone to dust

Stone black valley of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall

Roslyn blue is Mazarine blue which is a deep purplish blue slightly redder than hyacinth blue, redder and paler than average sapphire, and redder, lighter, and stronger than cyanine blue

Spending time with cocksure Marxists or nonchalant Republicans or stolid sociobiologists, the same, like hours in the rain

Middle and Eastern European public buildings, vermiculated stonework, vermicular concrete buttresses

Songs lost, forgotten books

Ox gall was used for the marbling of books

Modular Amorite craftwork from Syria, cut green stone, ceramic repeats, gold, from four thousand years ago

Lapis lazuli

Fox fairy seductresses in Chinese myth and legend. Nearly all cultures resent things independently feminine, ridicule such wondrousness, trivialize such strength

Stereotypical character types replaced now with sameness of color and shape, decoration modular, packaged, set, and when it is something else is self-consciously pagan and crudely stark

Computer graphics decorations printed with no more texture than the finish on the cover of a magazine or the surface of a television screen

Almost no stereotypical character roles now, each of us is simultaneously alone and the same, our dark glasses and black clothes, our hair on end, our quiet privacy

The brown darkness and the absolute cultural centrality of the Plaza de San Francisco in Quito

Salient places in the world

Mouths of the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Brahmaputra, to the Sundarbans, flooding flooded drowned, much of the the country drowned

Cobalt is the azure of the cloudless sky

Apparently during six years in the Mexican Presidency, Lopez Portillo stole three billion, three hundred million dollars

La mordida

Space appears to fold back wider than below the Line, air stir lifts chilly breezes, oblique light blangs off flattened grass. No limits and no hedging inclusivities. Possible in Canada to swing around and walk North forever beyond banality into oblivion

Having shot through the dry green of the high oaks outside making for a patch of reflected sky, one Philadelphia vireo lies window glass dead on the balcony

Lost from the billions of passerines streaming southward, of which nearly half will have died before they return

Twenty miles on a bicycle to Pennsylvania into a strong headwind, two hours of down-geared ear-rush stubbornness

Windsor blue, a grayish purplish blue that is redder and paler than average delft and redder, lighter, and stronger than average navy blue

Deeply civilized for six thousand years

Muqattam, the oldest quarter in Cairo, up against the yellow rocky hill

Four months every summer on the beach in Alexandria, these days a beach house in Masa Matru, a long drive from Alexandria beyond El Alamein on the road to Libya. Nothing but sand, the highway, the railway and the sea

Jouvence blue, a moderate bluish green to greenish blue, deeper than gendarme or cyan blue and duller than parrot blue

The late September weather hinge

"She is overly polite, and she is doing terrible things to me in Japanese"

Morning fog

The clouds in the high mountain valleys around Quito lacked luminosity in August, light was not coming through them but around and past them, and when they opened the sunshine was total

Quechua

Indigo carmine is a strong greenish blue that is bluer and duller than grotto, greener and duller than cobalt blue, and greener and darker than average cerulean blue—called also chemic blue, duck blue

Those who are wise enjoy mountains, those who are kind enjoy water

The yellow rocky hill

Tired yellow leaves, the birches, the ash

JANET KAUFFMAN

WOMEN OVER BAY CITY

And then they came down, all of the women, and settled in the field. Only the long necks showed above stubble.

He thought, what of it? What difference does it make if I move or don't move? He didn't move.

And more of them, beyond what he had imagined, appeared over the highway. At first they were birds. But then, they were not birds. Their arms arched, slung away from the body, pulled back. They were synchronous as a flock. Lowering out of the sky, they turned first into the wind, and then circled, lower, around, and once more into the wind. Their hair blew out across their shoulders, or lifted in coarse strands. They had thin, wild bodies. He noticed the tendons pull through their necks, and he noticed the nacreous sheen of their knees, the caps of bone. They had breasts like drawings of breasts, half-circles on brown paper.

As they approached and turned themselves into the field, arms lowering more, stiffening, he registered the disturbance they made in the air. The push of wind. Their legs angled forward, the thighs taut. Then the feet turned up, and he understood the aerodynamic precision of their landing. He breathed sharply through his nose, to catch a scent.

They came in by the thousands.

What could there be in the field but stubble? Remnants. After the harvest had taken place, whenever that was, the broken-up stalks had bleached out and shattered. The leaves were not leaves but streamers of crepe, blown around, brittle.

If they came here for food, that was something new for the books. He couldn't think what it would be.

Besides, having landed, they stood absolutely still, their bodies obscured except for the long necks, the small heads, dark with the sun behind them, like new plants, or dried pods. No one would notice, happening by at this moment.

He knew it was chance—that he'd seen anything.

The women didn't feed. They didn't move.

Oh, I have seen women pull a lot of stunts, he thought. But nothing like this. I believe I'm a lucky man.

After a while, with the sun continuing, an idea poured through his mind, over his shoulders. He wrapped himself in it.

He wondered how long a man could live, without moving a muscle.

He breathed so slowly, air moved in its ordinary way around his face, undisturbed. He had already sworn to himself: I'll stay. Something will happen. One of them, sooner or later, will take off. Or speak.

EUROPERAS 1 & 2: SYNOPSES

The two Europeras were originally performed in Frankfurt in December, 1987. Separate programs were available for each performance, and the synopses were distributed randomly, one per program, so that different members of the audience had different synopses to follow. These are all twelve of the alternative pairs.

1

He, unhappy at her apparent indifference toward him, brings her captive to the Temple of the Holy Grail. Another man also loves her, accusing her of witchcraft. She expresses but a lifeless automaton—who should have reported to jail for a minor offense. Disguising himself in exchange for his love, they are condemned as traitors. Conveniently, he flees to an inn on the Lithuanian border.

2

Exhausted, he is beset by his daughter who was once his wife. Her cousin, however, loves her; he resolves to be succored by her frequently. He is invited to utter the fearful renunciation. She having already independently accepted, dies of fright. Another woman, his wife calls her her new mentor, but he is convinced of her guilt. Her wish is granted by them and out steps the beautiful Queen. He threatens to tell how.

1

He, the nephew of a rich old bachelor, arouses him to obtain admittance to the palace, and, in return for safe passage, names him commander of the Holy Grail. Even her loving relatives feel a

strange sympathy near his ship. First, he sounds the alarm, but she is tempted by the weaponless hero to hold him to a marriage contract. At the second alarm, he disguises himself after giving her wedding an unsuccessful attempt at a life of pleasure. She flees commanding a pardon for his bride, who has hidden herself to die with her hand on him.

2

She falls in love for reasons of state. He comes across her in search of adventure. At her birthday ball through rose-colored glasses he discusses plans to continue their search for a loan. In fact, he decides to join the governor who kills his friend. The two enemies wrest the sword from the tree, joining the protest against paying the fee. He assembles the court and tells his story. She manages to avoid being alone with him.

1

The sensitive girl is planning the defense of the forest in the city protected for years by the young man she engages secretly. She, longing for him, deepens her despair, and is sent to marry his best friend. Soon his duty, however, utters the prophecy to lure him with the lawyer's child guarding them against background and antecedents he has signed. She dies. He has meanwhile bought his army contract by proclaiming himself her son. He is so young; this enables him to resist once again.

2

Dressed as an Irish princess, he gives birth; they plot to overthrow the French. He arranges to be kidnapped by her; rejuvenated, they desert: to him she has borne two children. He prays for help. Since they have decided she shall marry no one outside, he has himself crowned Emperor. She, told he is dead, begs him to look at her. First, before the young couple come to a climax, he agrees. Accidentally, she drowns them.

▲

1

He ignores the warnings at one of her brilliant supper parties when as astrologer arrives terrified by pangs of conscience. He brings the Oracle's word that their friends still refuse their friends. In despair, she seeks him to take a light from him. At the second alarm, he steps forward, confessing his love for her. She is unbeatable. His total innocence, sounded by his one-time friend, takes her off his hands. Her brief rage of jealousy in the end sets sail. In a golden coach, he commends her soul to heaven.

2

He, in love, is spurned as a suitor. He determines to learn the stories of his past in revenge. She waits. Two slaves discover her. Convinced she must ask the forbidden question, they meet. He gathers all his strength after the party breaks up, realizing he may never marry her. They finally convert him, swearing eternal friendship. He apologizes to her.

▲

1

He and she are betrothed when he hails her rigidly his. He also promises his friend that she'll play up to him plotting revenge. The gun accidentally fires reminding him of the Holy Spear. He offers the giants his mother, and they are married. They play at cards in his room despite her warning. Meanwhile he led her at the dwarf's urging to repent, and then to find, to kill, and to take.

2

He has left her; she is accused by him and the populace, except the innkeeper. He arranges for battle with the Moors. Killing the old man, one condition is imposed: traditional hospitality. He, disguised as a student, kills the governor. She flees. He kills the giant; she kills herself. Her funeral cortege appears. Refusing to join her, he forgives them, making a fool of himself. A strange hermit appears.

▲

1

She after a long life has fallen in his palace, and consequently refuses plans to marry. He bemoans her absence. She asks for many pranks and much confusion. It is love at first sight; however, he expresses himself later and is banished. Their mood is suddenly dead; she sends him away.

2

They are in love. Raised in a cave, he vows to reveal his identity, thus freeing her to refuse his son's request. They tell him he is invited to take holy order. Transforming himself into a monstrous dragon, with the evil one's help they meet. Twenty-five years pass. He repents. She manages to make him yield, but in the end remains completely docile; she returns.

▲

1

He is in a group of witches and plans to starve; she sells her expert cardplayer; people pray for him to be awakened. Discovered, she succeeds in making him meet only secretly with her. The wedding is imposed: if he offers her younger sister her former sweetheart who has rescued her, he cannot resist her gods. He steps forward and they join, released from their vows. He, believing her to be enlightened, reveals the virtues of her way, and suddenly plunders the Temple with his last bullet. He is satisfied.

2

He has promised his daughter active resistance; she lives disguised as a sea captain. He curses his bride who has been adopted by a band of Gypsies. She feels a strange sympathy for his father. She succumbs to him. They flee. She prevents him from meeting her in the garden; he is furious; she is total innocence. He transforms himself on his ship, which swiftly sets sail. Distraught, he orders, forgives, sets fire to it.

▲

1

She gains admittance to the palace. He accepts a commission to outwit the two lovers. However, she kills him at her feet and assists the lawyer who cannot resist her invitation to the palace. He tries prayers. He displays a white dove and wins the hand of the princess.

2

On a public bench, he falls in love; however, her father, an evil magician, died, giving birth to him. He is in fact his son, her delight. Soon his duty calls him away to guard them against danger she quickly forgets. Though he renounces his vows, he accepts and they are married. Face to face, the two can see no way out; in his room, she flees when he obeys an inexplicable impulse. Desperately, he asks her to run away with him. She appears half-crazed, makes the sign of the cross, thereby destroying him and his castle.

▲

1

He falls deeply in love with a beautiful streetsinger who staggers into the hut. He buys a love potion. Her candle goes out and impressed by his wealth she decides to marry him on the spot. The wound reveals that after three years he will have himself crowned Emperor with the evil one's help in exchange for his love. At first she flees; whereupon he gathers all his strength, becomes passionately attached and begs a hermit's refuge.

2

She sells his soul to her father with the aim of improving his impaired finances. Even her loving relatives are shocked. They rescue him. He retires. She agrees. Tom, they, in shame, pardon all conspirators. He agrees to marry her. She kills herself. He is chosen the victor.

1

She is the tragedy that has happened. He confides his love and he says he is himself a father. He plots to marry no one. The victim hides the stature of salvation if they rob her and the high priests, but when she learns the ceremony is a fake she kills his friend, who accepted his duplicity in vain since they had informed him of his death. He kills her on the battlefield.

2

The villagers celebrate; an astrologer arrives lamenting the death of his wife. She appears rejuvenated; she informs him that the gods have taken pity on him: she loves him. His fears reach a climax: her candle goes out. Doubtful of his love if he knows the truth, she nevertheless enters the royal household intercepted by the King's minister, who renounces his plan to rob her. She, in love with love, is penniless. He asks her to run away with the King. She goes mad; he, impressed, urges revenge.

1

He is happy with the court life and is in love with her; he ignores her apparent indifference toward him. He meets with the Turks a visiting knight who says to forget his stepmother and enlist his help. Actually, he returns disguised as a monk on Christmas Eve. She soon denounces him to his friend, each time they accept his traveling companion. To circumvent discovery in his dark tomb, she marries him; they are surprised to win.

2

He arouses her (they are about to be married): he threatens to kill his mother. She expresses her delight; now his brother has presumably been thrown into the flames. At her birthday ball, he is very careful. After the bloody deed is done, she, remorseful, returns. The two exchange ecstatic pledges. Nevertheless he is dying. He offers his life to the gods.

▲

1

She is bored with most men; he is in love with her. He accepts a preliminary trial hoping to find a way. She persuades him to give her his life. He dies. Now in his dark tomb, he goes to her rescue. She reawakens his love early in the morning.

2

He lusts after her; she has died, his only hope of redemption. In his despondency he maintains his reserve, accepts the bird. He fulfills the second part of the witches' prophecy: They rescue him quickly. He loses his power. He falls prey to another man's wife. Once more he invokes Venus (he is first to admit it); in vain: her life is over. He wishes; he refuses. Thoroughly embittered, he rails.

LEON GOLUB

FOUR DETAILS FROM PAINTINGS

DETAIL FROM "THREE SEATED BLACK MEN"
1986, 120" X 156"
Photo by David Reynolds
Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone
Gallery, NYC

DETAIL FROM "INTERROGATION IV"
1986, 120" X 146"
Photo by David Reynolds
Courtesy of Hans Neuendorf
Gallery, Frankfurt

DETAIL FROM "MERCENARIES IV"
1980
Photo by Diana Church
Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NYC

DETAIL FROM "WHITE SQUAD III"
1982
Photo by David Reynolds
Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NYC

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS

As of this issue, *Sulfur* becomes A Literary Bi-Annual of the Whole Art, and will appear twice a year (instead of three times a year), with issues in November and April. Subscription rates will change as of January, 1989.

"ETERNITY, DEATH AND GRAMMAR:" THE IN ZIKH POETS—AMERICAN YIDDISH MODERNISM*

> "Yiddish has not yet said its last word. . .It was the tongue of martyrs and saints, of dreamers and kabbalists—rich in humor and in memories that mankind may never forget. In a figurative way, Yiddish is the wise and humble language of us all, the idiom of frightened and hopeful humanity."
>
> —Isaac Bashevis Singer, 1978 Nobel Lecture

In 1923, the editors of *In Zikh,* the leading modernist Yiddish literary journal, received a correspondence from *Poetry,* its counterpart in the English-language community. "Unfortunately, we cannot read your journal. We would like to know in what language it is printed. Is it Chinese?" The anonymous *In Zikh* editor, after noting the existence of several Chicago-based Yiddish newspapers and numerous Windy City Chinese laundries, angrily asked its readers "How long will Yiddish literature be unknown among Gentiles? How long will they think of us—in literature—as Hottentots?" At that time, after nearly fifty years of a modern Yiddish literary tradition, the literary achievements that occasionally received translation into English or German—such as Sholom Aleichem or proletarian

* A review of *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology,* edited by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav. Translations by the editors, Kathryn Hellerstein, Brian McHale, and Anita Norich. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

poet Morris Rosenfeld—were still regarded with condescending regard, much in the way Black writers such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes were viewed by the American literary community. Even within the Jewish community, the Yiddish writer had his critics. To the assimilationist and the Communist, Yiddish was a badge of narrow nationalism and tribalism. For the radical Zionist, Yiddish was the language of the Diaspora, the jargon of a culture forced to live away from its homeland. The Communist and Zionist often saw Yiddish as only suitable for popular literature and political pamphlets. The decision to write in Yiddish, particularly for writers who were comfortable in two or three other languages, contained an immanent statement about the belief in the value of nearly a thousand years of Yiddish culture—that it was neither a culture of exiles nor a distorted version of European and classical Hebrew values.

American Yiddish Poetry offers a comprehensive introduction to one of the most fascinating episodes in the history of Yiddish literature—the Modernist movement as interpreted by American Yiddish poets. In a break from anthologies that survey Yiddish poetry, such as the excellent *Penguin Anthology of Yiddish Verse,* the editors have chosen to focus on seven poets who they felt represented the range of Yiddish modernism. Instead of skimming through the literature (the usual effect of most anthologies), we are presented with three book-length selections and four selections that could easily be made into chapbooks.

The poets of Yiddish modernism represent the culmination of a literary tradition that had only begun in the 1880s. As the Ashkenazic Jew slowly entered into the mainstream of cultural activity in the wake of the abolition of much of the discriminatory repressive edicts that had kept him isolated and culturally static, a body of writing appeared that, while Jewish thematically, represented a new European literature.

The first school of modern Yiddish poets to arise were "the sweatshop poets." Poets such as Morris Rosenfeld and Dovid Edelshtat spoke to the difficult experiences of the many Jews who emigrated to America. True proletarian poets who labored in factories, these writers were published in the Yiddish labor papers, recited their verse at union rallies and were regarded as heroes by an immigrant community suffering under the weight of rapid cultural disintegration and enforced proletarianization.

Within a decade after the publication of Rosenfeld's 1898 *Songs of The Ghetto,* a much translated volume of archetypal "sweatshop" verse, a new Yiddish poetry arose in reaction to the sentimental and sometimes crude verse of an earlier generation. The poets of *Di Yunge* (often referred to in English as the *Young Generation)* reflected the solidification of Jewish life in America. The Lower East Side of Manhattan was the focus

of its burgeoning intellectual community. At Goodman & Levine's Cafe the poets of *Di Yunge* were found on most nights after 11. Smitten by the romanticism of Rilke and Hofmannsthal, these poets rejected the cultural and political demands that earlier Yiddish poets felt obligated to fulfill in their writing. At their best, as witnessed in the poetry of H. Leyvik and Mani Leyb, they created exquisitely formed poems, deeply rooted in personal vision. They purified their Yiddish, eliminating the Germanisms that earlier writers used as a short cut to profundity as well as the biblical/rabbinic references that many poets used because of the instant communication they had with the reader. In attempting to expand the Yiddish worldview, translations from the Japanese, Chinese, Egyptian and Arabic appeared in the magazine of *Di Yunge*. In the midst of the wretchedly crowded Lower East Side, these factory-worker poets—most too "pure" to publish in the Yiddish newspaper (the common route of the Yiddish poet)—dreamed themselves unrecognized followers of the tradition of Pushkin and Blok, writing small tone poems against a tradition that stressed immediacy and, often, bombast. Maturing in the wake of the failed 1905 Russian Revolution, their collective tone was that of resignation and world-weariness and their stance of art for art's sake helped turn Yiddish poetry into a minority literature. By the end of World War I, *Di Yunge's* stance seemed even more precious in the light of that shattering war and the political and artistic events following in its wake.

*

> In the grayness of New York's lime kiln, in the shadowy shimmer of East Broadway and in the insolent artistic night life of Broadway; here, where everyone "makes a living" *for himself* cut off from any milieu which might look up reverently to the white hands of a poet; here, where a poet walks unnoticed like a shadow through New York streets, is squeezed into subways and elevated along with everyone else, returns home soiled at night with everyone else—in this lime kiln, several young people sense instinctively that their own liberation is not with the liberation of the group, that they, as individuals, are still drowning in the bile of their own suffering. [. . .]
>
> And the young man, cut off from his home, in the smoke of a city which has not yet mixed with his blood, suddenly senses his own personal misfortune and feels that *"I*—am lost forever. . ." (Zisho Landoy)
>
> —Jacob Glatshteyn, *A Quick Run Through Yiddish Poetry,* In Zikh, January 1920

1920: Weine's *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* is released and Marcel Duchamp makes his first abstract film. In Cologne, visitors to an exhibit of Dadaist art are permitted to smash the paintings. On the literary scene, Carl Sandburg's best and most influential volume, *Smoke and Steel,* is published. Meyerhold opens his own theatre in Moscow. Politically, the 19th (Women's Suffrage) Amendment is ratified in the U.S. and the Red Army defeats the combined forces of the White Russians and Allied Expeditionary force, solidifying the Bolsheviks' position of power. And in Pittsburgh, the first commercial radio station commences to broadcast a regular schedule of programs.

Also in 1920 the *In Zikh* movement turns against the dominant *Di Yunge* poetry and begins to create an *American* Yiddish poetry, a poetry that reflects the upheaval and pure optimism in that period after WW I and before the Great Depression. The *In Zikh* poet was facing a rapidly changing Jewish community. The heart of Yiddish culture, the Lower East Side, was losing its Jewish population to rapidly forming communities in Brooklyn and The Bronx, a move that began with the subway expansion into New York's outer boroughs during WW I. As a whole generation of first born American Jews came of age, many of them began rejecting the "Old World" culture of their parents and turned towards the opportunities in the secular, Gentile world. Although there was still much Yiddish theatre, fiction and, even, a Yiddish cinema, the excitement of a vital national culture was giving way to a more sentimental and didactic art.

Jacob Glatshteyn (1896–1971) was the leading theoretician of the *In Zikh* movement, as well as one of the greatest poets to write in Yiddish. Like many of his circle, he came to America as a teenager, and came to maturity as an American. He received a traditional Talmudic education in his native Lublin, Poland, yet, four years after emigrating, was acclimated enough to his new homeland to attempt an uncompleted law degree at New York University. His first book, *Jacob Glatshteyn* (1921), was the first book of Yiddish poetry written entirely in free verse, and, equally important, broke with the whole tradition of Yiddish literature with its ahistoric and urbanist slant:

PROPERTY

At the bolted doors of the crumbs of property
Shadows of the storekeeps watch all night.
At six in the morning the shadows slither home,
To wake their bosses
for the day-dance over the crumbs of property.
But my shadow watches the night-silver of the moon
On the peak of Woolworth

And at dawn my shadow brings me
A piece of raw gold from the fresh sun.

(p. 215)

Glatshteyn was well aware of the field of writing that the Modernists created. Translations of Eliot's *Wasteland,* Pound's *Cantos* and works by other Modernists had appeared in *In Zikh* journals. Glatshteyn particularly admired James Joyce, having gone as far as writing a piece in the manner of *Finnegan's Wake* entitled *If Joyce Had Written in Yiddish.* His experimental writing culminates with the 1937 volume *Exegyddish,* one of the most brilliant achievements of Yiddish poetry:

In sad dissolution rust quotations
Of bugographs.
Dear Matilda, sing me a lemon of sedate aphorisms
And howtolives.
Tatters of silence, crucified emptiness.
Throbbing, I race to comic sophistical finish.
In wishy-washy meantime

(Dissolution, p. 273)

Shortly after the publication of this volume, "Goodbye World," his most famous poem, is published. A trip to Europe in 1934 alerted him to the possibility of the destruction of European Jewry and by '38, the most cosmopolitan of Yiddish writers would write "A ban, world, on your unclean cultures. / Though all is desolate / I roll in your dust, / Gloomy Jewish life." He emerges in the wake of the Holocaust as the great "national" poet of the Yiddish language, confronting the enormity of the loss of Jewish culture in the most typically Jewish manner, writing against it. The American poet his career most parallels is Kenneth Rexroth, both having abandoned the avant-garde for the difficult role of a public conscience. But even as an older man, facing the eventual extinction of Yiddish culture, the lessons he learned in the heady days of the twenties could rise with startling power: "The television-pane reflected my every word / with a blow of laughter."

Glatshteyn's cohort, Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886–1932), was lucky enough to die young and avoid the role of witness to the destruction of European Judaism. A political poet whose politics were somewhat existentialist/anarchist and decidedly non-party line, Halpern's ironic and wry poetry made him a much-beloved figure among his fellow poets and his readers. In Halpern's poetry, we also find the finest examples of what the Harshavs call "talk-poems," the form that free-verse takes on in Yiddish. Mimicking the Yiddish conversational style, talk-poems were often

long and wildly discursive, making great associative jumps and leaping back and forth between thematic threads. In *How Long Will I Stand,* Halpern's meditation upon finding a dead woman in the streets (then, as now, not an unusual occurrence in the Lower East Side) transforms the experience into memories of his father and the village he left in Galicia:

> Whether I went, and how far, I don't know anymore.
> Perhaps I just wandered around like this, to and fro,
> In the rain. I am sure that I read on a signboard somewhere
> That the smoke of Havana Cigars is pleasant and,mild
> Like the breathing of mothers on babies that cry in the night,
> And it seems (if I am not mistaken) that store is three blocks
> Away from that place. I am even sure that I saw
> The boxes displayed in the window, though it was dark.
> And I cried—I remember this too. I stood, and I read,
> And swaying like this in the rain, with eyes open I cried.
> And then I imagined I heard a voice calling aloud:
> My father while dying; which reminded me how, long ago,
> He cried at the train when I left and how pale was his face—
> It seems that he sensed he would never see me again.
> How heavy your heart when you stand and ponder like this
> On a father a corpse, near a woman a stranger, who's dead.
> (p. 475)

Berysh Vaynshteyn's (1905–1967) wild, long-lined poems of New York life appear to be spiritual heirs of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl.* He called his first book *Brukhstiker* (1936)—"Junk" or, more literally, "Broken Pieces." Although Irving Howe compares him to Carl Sandburg, it appears that Walt Whitman and, perhaps, Kenneth Fearing are greater influences. The plight of America's Black population seems to have affected him deeply and in the poem "Laundry" he describes their work-day in a commercial laundry:

> In the dark abyss of wetness, cauldrons flame with a zesty glow
> and heat;
> Naked arms from bare hairy chests throw wet coals.
> From the heavy fire their bodies gleam against the open heat,
> seared in the blaze.
> Their scorched skins crack dryly after each bow of the shovel.

Judd (J.L.) Teller (1912–1972) appeared to be more at home in America than most Yiddish poets. A brilliant Talmudic scholar (his teachers included the father of painters Moses and Raphael Soyer), he also earned

a Ph.D. in psychology from Columbia University. Long a prominent figure in the American Zionist movement, he wrote numerous books in English on political and historical subjects. His book *Miniatures* (1934) reflects the influence of Objectivist poetics:

ON THE ROAD
Wind hinders your walk,
Chokes you like smoke.
Mountains gleam
With a distant sun and cold rivers.
You are lonely
In the late light.
Cars rustle, sharp
Like leaves.

(p. 511)

With the coming of the Holocaust, Teller, like Glatshteyn, moved from hermeticism to socially engaged talk-verse. After a long period of silence, he returned to poetry, again with the brevity of his early poems.

The *In Zikh* movement began in the wake of both Europe's great revolutionary upheavals and the United States' conservative reaction that culminated in the crushing of the Wobblies, the deportation of foreign-born "agitators" and a virtual halt to immigration. It is the latter which was to have the greatest impact on Yiddish culture. Already many first-generation American Jews were rejecting the culture of their parents and embracing the melting-pot ideology promoted in the public schools. Too often, Yiddish was seen as a badge of ignorance, spoken by parents imprisoned in factory jobs and self-created ghettos because of their cultural handicaps. Soon, a generation of novelists and essayists would emerge, publishing in *Partisan Review* and *New Masses,* who would create the image of American Jewish writing in the minds of many readers. Yiddish literature would be left behind by a generation of Jews barely aware of its existence. The writers of Yiddish poetry, nonetheless, continued on with their work, imbued with a deep sense of mission and purpose. Jacob Glatshteyn, in a 1938 essay, states "I just cannot be afraid of the word 'Ghetto,' because both economically and culturally, for me, ghetto means the greatest part of my life. The coercion to see my own brother, hear his language, see myself in my own national mirror is, for me, no coercion."

Were the *In Zikh* poets Modernists in the literary handbook definition? Not quite. Unlike Pound or Eliot, they were marginal members of a marginal community writing in a stateless language that even many of its

speakers thought to be, at best, a German dialect. Rather than the Modernist strategy of reclothing past tropes in contemporary technique, the *In Zikh* poets were more interested in extending the Yiddish language and breaking from the intertextual web of Talmudic and Midrashic references that dominated much of the previous Yiddish poetries. "In our age," states the Introspectivist manifesto of 1919, "of the big metropolis and enormous variety in all domains, this life becomes a thousandfold more complicated and entangled. We Introspectivists feel the need to convey and express it." The modernism of the *In Zikh* movement was in the successful adaptations of techniques associated with the avant-garde movements of the time. Mayakovsky and the Russian Futurists were influential to a community where many were fluent in Russian (many Yiddish poets turned out to hear him read during his American tour of 1925); no doubt some of the manners of Yiddish talk-poem came from Mayakovsky's expansive verse. Whitman and, to a lesser extent, Carl Sandburg seemed to represent the energy of industrial America, with both extensively translated and imitated. Unlike their Yiddish contemporaries based in Eastern Europe and Israel who often shouted their poems in the slogans of Marxism and Zionism, the *In Zikh* poets presented their world in harsh, yet understated, tones. The metaphor for their method was the kaleidoscope, the poem organized as a fugue which plays against the splinters of modern life and the individual confronting it. Although the Introspectivist credo of the poem being a merger of the poet's inner world with outer reality is not such a radical proposition in light of pre-World War I literary theory, it completed the work that the inward *Di Yunge* poets and the more public proletarian poets were not able, or willing, to accomplish.

Sadly, the audience for this work—which even during the twenties and thirties was limited because of the demands it placed on the reader—was to be obliterated by the Holocaust. Yet, virtually all the surviving poets of *In Zikh* continued to write, if nothing but to affirm their commitment to both poetry and the Yiddish language. As Charles Reznikoff noted in regard to the decision to write poetry: "First there is the *need;* then, the *way,* the *name,* and *formula.*" And although these poets never had the audience out of their own language group that they desired, this massive and well-edited anthology will now enable the non-Yiddish reader access to a part of the largest body of non-English poetry ever written in the United States.

—JOEL LEWIS

THE LIVES OF A SPIRIT BY FANNY HOWE
Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1987

In Fanny Howe's *The Lives of a Spirit,* readers glimpse the hidden face of Postmodernism—one with spiritual concerns. As the title to the book alludes, *The Lives of a Spirit* owes to *Lives of the Saints* a remarkable self-examination based, in some respects, on the meaning of experience within the context of the Catholic religion. Howe brings to the subject a poetic sensibility notable for its compression, lyricism and stunning acceptance of mystery. Written in nine sections which are themselves divided into prose units of various lengths, the sentences twist and turn with tropes and symbols so fully that I hesitate on the brink of interpretation, because the multiplicity of the work is, of course, its overriding feature. And yet the book invites a reading in which there is a masterful something behind it all—the poet's coming to terms with her own spirituality, her own gnosis. Much of the work has, in fact, a gnostic flavor—the enclosures, the traps, the boundaries and confinements, the liberation which is a hope and promise, itself a kind of 'knowing.' In Howe's reluctance to inscribe the words 'god' or 'dead' (which appear in the poems, as "g–d" and "d—d"), there is a hint of the Kabbalah with its direct correspondence between Divine and artistic creation. The figures associated with the mysticism—"child," "mother," "hunger," "grave," "light"—are not simply 'updated:' they belong to an imagination which is itself free from any time-bound or narrative-bound era. Yet *Lives of a Spirit* is also a book which can be read without any pretensions to an understanding of a spiritual universe. It is a wise book, with "synoptic realism" exuding from every line.

—DAWN KOLOKITHAS

WHEN WALLS FALL DOWN, UNBIDDEN TO DO SO, / & AS IF ALL OFFICIALDOM / WERE, SO TO SPEAK, ON STILTS & TIP- / TOES, IMAGINARY*

If this art & its practitioners were really advanced it & they would step outside time & that'd be that, but it & they can't. We think consecutively,

* Notes on some recent writing by Larry Price.

even when thinking in a jumble, & the nonlinear is a magic not ordinarily known.

> *Transgression*
>
> For one brief moment time prints with a pilgrim's
> turmoil. In which a person is request and stockpile.
>
> Take the number at the bottom and call it "bottom."

To think of time itself as transgression is to use a vocabulary of moralism, heartfelt or not, to reinhabit a morally depleted landscape. It's an odd put, since time is the one mode of human experience inhuman in its scale—& since, if there's any justice in punishment, *we* would have to be the transgressors.

"There can never be enough violence done in language," says Larry Price.

> It's like a drawer that holds the key
> of human kindness on its shelf.

Statement, counterstatement. The bible says our future innocence is stored in present guilt. The *poetry* of the bible preserves the headwracking. So. What innocence?

> From the highest barber shop pole to the little bat-like noun, the rhythm is appetite, an eraser without whom there is no room, no pants, no single idea, no present, no thing where the thing that is is, no recitative bibles on the ground.

* * *

Why Larry Price's poetry doesn't crumble from the pressure of what he demands of it isn't, maybe, a very big mystery. It's not language that does the crumbling.

The survival of the past in the present—the continuation of our lives apart from the sustaining of the body—merely *begins* with language, spoken (because we are always speaking, even in our dreams), out loud (because we don't *believe* that we're alone), in careful reconstruction directed outward, to that "inexistent buffalo" the person. . .

> The world is a chronic "they." It is they who self-consist. In the past there is no past to which a further past cannot refer,

> which is why the answers are in newspapers, comics, and a lateral time. . . .What the body lacks appetite provides.

—& maybe "they" is as weighty & as useful as terminology gets.

In Price's previous book, *Crude Thinking* (G, A, Z, 1985), obsessive counting & a centrifugally weighted discourse counteracted a painfully open-ended engagement with what Price there variously termed "The End of the End of the World" & "The Fall of the Fall of the Empire." *Crude Thinking* acted out a recuperation of whatever it is time wastes in us—or so it struck me at the time.

The new work is different. For one thing, it doesn't attempt to "act out," doesn't attempt to negotiate a settlement with time—not even a prosodic one. For another, the new work pushes its obsessions right up to the surface, nose to the glass.

> Rigor is a habit edited to an intercourse. Seeing time see this, continuant nature matures with each complex forage.

Where *Crude Thinking* was tight lipped, the new work is outspoken. Where *Crude Thinking* was elegantly contained, the new work bursts at the seams.

Says a reader: "Wit is this poetry's enemy & self-sufficient appetite. Wit is its program & its How to Read. Wit is its implementation. Wit plunders the depths & comes up with a surface. Wit is too damn witty to be true. But wit is not 'stranger than truth.'"

* * *

Larry Price hasn't gotten around to titling his book so I'll have to refer to it as It. It's about self-inflicted terror, not being able to calm yourself down. Its disjunctions are similar to those that occur when you look at a map that says "You Are Here," when clearly you're *not*. Supposing for a minute that you believe the map instead of yourself.

One piece is called "At the Tomb of Marginality." It argues, paratactically, that men & women are time travellers, born into a structure of impending events past, present & future. "Time's paraphrase is the settled bed of the species," writes Larry Price. Which I take to mean the individual.

Another piece, untitled & didactic, brought to mind a bit of Marvel Comics dialogue. What I like about comic books is how in them character is a given, like fate, settled in endless permutations of expectation & reproach. The heroes & villains are brooding, introspective individualists, yet they're also all behavior. Environment & reaction, soliloquized.

> All that is is the referent, the compound nation with its maps between, its "lesions beyond which" from which the one depends. In its shoes the noun can only acquiesce.

Peter Parker: "It's not a world of my making, spun from heights no spider could cling to—." Dr. Doom: "—& a machine is no machine if it's no machine of control." Which is a way of putting things similar to something I once heard Robin Blaser say. "In Greek drama," he said, "the characters are there for the sake of the action, not vice versa; anyone who talks about 'the character of Clytemnestra' is in a *fucking* lot of trouble."

In Larry Price's recent work, as in comic books & Greek drama, the power lies in a recognition that meaning is circumstantial evidence of time—a different stance than that evident in *Crude Thinking*, & partial proof that Price's poetics have changed, that he's begun to turn his back on "timelessness," & therefore on formalism as well.

* * *

I put a lot of stock in first and last words. This book's run the gamut from Yeatsian affability to Burroughsesque (W.S., that is) paranoia. First line: "It's a lovely night. The gyre has never been tighter." Last line: "'Click!' says the Contraire Imaginaire, 'I'm a cop.'"

Then, somewhere in the middle: "Time is literal and literate." Yeah—it's so. Time really does go by, & age us, & time really is irretrievable, providing a "reading" of the world, us in it. . .

What time traverses, it rots. But language mummifies & poetry, with its vast treasury of thought & feeling, honors that fact.

—BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

THE WORD AS SUCH
Velimir Khlebnikov, *The Collected Works, Volume I: Letters and Theoretical Writings*, translated by Paul Schmidt; edited by Charlotte Douglas. Harvard University Press, 1987.

A poet not "for consumers" but "for producers"—so Mayakovsky called Khlebnikov in his obituary of June 1922, referring, no doubt, to the

inordinate difficulty of Khlebnikov's poems and fictions, with their neologisms, puns, coinages, and anagrams, their refusal to be what we now call user-friendly. It was and remains hard to "consume" sound poems like "Bobeobi," "supersagas" like *Zangezi,* or mathematical prophecies like *The Tables of Destiny.* But for "producers" like Mayakovsky himself, like Roman Jakobson, whose first book *Noveyshaya russkaya poeziya* (1921) was a study of Khlebnikov's poetic devices, or like the visual artists Tatlin and Malevich, Khlebnikov's tragically premature death from malnutrition and malaria in 1922 when he was 36, became the very emblem of poetic power, an emblem soon to be displaced by the consolidation of Stalinism, which dismissed Khlebnikov and his avant-garde circle as reactionary aesthetes, bourgeois cranks whose writings were no more than self-indulgent, often meaningless gibberish.

Only in the eighties has this situation been rectified in the Soviet Union. A major new edition of Khlebnikov's *Works,* produced by M. Ia. Poliakov, V. P. Grigoriev, and A. E. Parnis was published in 1986. In the United States, where Khlebnikov's work was available only in scattered anthologies or in small selections like Gary Kern's *Snake Train* (Ardis, 1976), a three-volume *Collected Works* is now underway, translated by Paul Schmidt and edited by Charlotte Douglas, under the auspices of the Dia Art Foundation and Harvard University Press. (A preview selection from this larger edition, *The King of Time,* was published in 1985.) Volume I, *Letters and Theoretical Writings,* is thus something of a milestone, especially when read in conjunction with another set of Russian avant-garde writings that Harvard has just brought out: Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy's edition of Roman Jakobson's major essays on literature, some of them never before published in English.*

To read, say, Khlebnikov's *Ka* (1918) against Jakobson's deeply moving, elegiac "On the Generation that Swallowed its Poets" (1931) is to come in contact with a *Modernism* not really assimilable to the Anglo-American *Modernism* which continues to be taught in the universities and enshrined in our scholarly literature. "The will to modernity," writes Perry Meisel in his recent *The Myth of the Modern* (Yale, 1987), ". . .is largely a defensive response to the increasingly intolerable burdens of coming late in a tradition," a "second flood of the same [Romantic] tide" (pp. 2–3). Maybe so, if the only tide we recognize is the Atlantic breaking on our Eastern shore. But as soon as we move outside the Anglocentric circle, the theorem, derived from Harold Bloom, that "Modernism" was no more than a "belated" Romanticism makes less and less sense.

"The most scared and holiest of all rights," declared Khlebnikov when he was nineteen, is the right "to hold a contrary opinion" (p.197).

* Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1988).

From our perspective, the strangest of these "contrary opinions" has to do with numbers. To put it most simply: Khlebnikov, whose training was in natural sciences and mathematics and who always thought of himself as a "poet-scientist," held that similar events, whether in the lives of nations or of individuals, are separated by identical intervals of time, or at least by intervals reducible to each other with the help of a few simple formulas, the most basic of which is the interval 3^n. After a lapse of 3^n days the second event moves counter to the first, in reverse, like a train speeding in the opposite direction, threatening to derail the purpose of the first event." Thus we read in *The Tables of Destiny* (424):

> The battle of Hastings, which represented the victory of Continent over Island, took place on October 3, 1066; the indigenous population was totally defeated, the island occupied by hordes of Danes; $3^9 + 3^9$ days later occurred the battle of Glenville, when the English defeated the French on June 13, 1174.
>
> 3^{10} days later occurred the naval battle of Bornholm, July 22, 1227, when the English avenged themselves on the Danes by defeating their recent conquerors. The island was avenged
>
> . . . .
>
> Thus do yes and no constantly reverse themselves.

But further, to complicate matters, events of the same spirit occur after an interval of 2^n days: for example, between the Moscow uprising of December 22, 1905 and the parallel revolution of March 13, 1917, there were 2^{12} days. And so on.

Is it coincidental that in the very same years that Khlebnikov was articulating his "Mathematical Conception of History," Yeats was drawing up the Great Wheel, with its comparable antinomies and antithetical gyres? Khlebnikov himself would have said of course not, and worked out the relationship between *The Tables of Destiny* and *A Vision* in terms of multiples of 3 and 2. But in fact, the two systems are very different: whereas Yeats begins with the individual event or the individual character, and assigns, say, the Gothic age or Goethe to a particular set of points on his Great Wheel, Khlebnikov's theory of recurrence is closer to Eastern thought. Indeed, in *The Tables of Destiny,* he observes: "The impulse to find the smallest possible numbers [e.g. reducing everything to multiples of 2 and 3] is another law, a kind of Nirvana, the teachings of Buddha in the realm of numbers" (424). The moment of pure *différance,* that is to say, cannot exist; there is always some form of repetition, of circularity. Time is thus spatialized even as Cage, in his *Roaratorio* or *Empty Words*

uses the *I Ching* and related number systems as generative rules that provide restraints and bases of recurrence for his "circus situation."

But in the realm of writing theory, we might say of *grammatology,* that Khlebnikov is most innovative and influential. To begin with, *Zaum (transrational,* or, as Paul Schmidt translates it, *beyonsense* language) is by no means *nonsense* or "mere" sound play. Although he could not have known Saussure's theories, Khlebnikov understood perfectly the Saussurian argument for the conventional nature of language and the arbitrariness of the sign:

> Word meaning in ordinary natural language is clear. Just as a boy at play is able to imagine the chair he sits on is an actual thoroughbred horse, and as long as he plays, the chair replaces a horse for him, so whenever we speak or write, according to the conventions of human conversation, the little word *sun* replaces the radiant majestic star. . . .But this equivalence is only a matter of convention. . . .a child playing with dolls may shed heartfelt tears when his bundle of rags and scraps becomes deathly ill and dies. . . .While the child is playing, those rag dolls are live people with feelings and emotions. So we may come to an understanding of language as playing with dolls: in language scraps of sound are used to make dolls and replace all the things in the world. All the people who speak a given language are the players in this game. (382–83)

But—and here Khlebnikov would part company with Saussure—"The word leads a double life" (373) the same word or word group differs according to what Jakobson was to call its dominant function. "Sometimes," writes Khlebnikov, "the sound element lives a self-sufficient life, while the particle of sense named by the word stands in shadow. At other times the word is subservient to sense, and then sound ceases to be 'all-powerful' and autocratic" (373).

Poetry, in this scheme of things, is the form of discourse that denies the transparency of the signifier. "People say a poem must be understandable. Like a sign on the street, which carries the clear and simple words 'For Sale.' But a street sign is not exactly a poem. Though it is understandable. On the other hand, what about spells and incantations, what we call magic words. . .[whose] strange wisdom may be broken down into the truths contained in separate sounds: *sh, m, v,* etc." (370). One such "truth," according to Khlebnikov, is that "The initial consonant of a simple word governs all the rest—it commands the remaining let-

ters." It follows that "Words that begin with an identical consonant share some identical meaning" (384).

The word "consonant" here refers, of course, to the grapheme as well as the phoneme. Thus the 1915 essay called "Z and its Environs" posits "Let us suppose that *z* means the equality of the angle of a falling ray to the angle of a reflected ray AOV / SOD. In that case *z* should begin words referring to: (1) all kinds of reflecting surfaces; (2) all kinds of reflected rays" (304). Before we dismiss this premise as charmingly absurd, easily refutable by finding z-words in the Russian dictionary that have nothing to do with reflection, consider its power of suggestibility for the poet. Khlebnikov begins with "Names for eyes, as reflecting structures: *zen'* [eye: dial.], *zrachok* [pupil of the eye], *zrak* [the look of something], *zini* [eyes], *zirki* [stars], *zrit'* [to behold], *zetit'* [to stare at], *zor* [dawn], *zeritsa* [pupil of the eye], *zorlivets* [far-seer], *zenki* [eyes], *zorok* [sharpsighted]" (304). The next step is to relate *zen'* which means both "earth" and "eye," to *ziry*, a "general word for both star and eye" and then to move from *zen'*, *ziry*, and *zori* [daybreak] to a whole network of metaphoric reflectors and reflected rays:

> In wintertime the earth reflects rays, and so that season of the year is called *zima* [winter]. In summer it swallows them up. But where do they go, these rays of summer? (305; brackets are Khlebnikov's)

To put it another way: where does the "scientific" analysis of language end and the poetic begin? Khlebnikov's intricate language games look ahead to such texts as Derrida's *Singéponge* and *Glas*, Steve McCaffery's *Evoba*, or Susan Howe's *Thorow*. Certainly Derrida's extended meditation on the mimesis of the *gl* of *glas (glaviaux, glaieul, gladiolus. . .)* is anticipated by Khlebnikov as is Derrida's emphasis on the homophone as the organizing principle of Writing. Whereas Saussure regarded words like *glas* as exemplars of a "false onomatopoeia," Derrida has argued that onomatopoeias (we might say *zaum* particles) can themselves become *words* by the process of decomposition and recomposition of the sign. "*Zem* [earth]," writes Khlebnikov, "is the eternal reflector upon which people live. If *zen'* means eyes, then *zem* is the majestic *zen'* of the nighttime sky" (305). Half a century later, John Cage suggested that if *mushroom* is next to *music* in the dictionary, there must (another *mu* word!) be a connection between them. Language poetry has been especially sensitive to such connections: David Melnick's *Pcoet*, for example, is, as Barrett Watten notes in *Total Syntax*, an American version of *zaum* (p.7).

What separates us from Khlebnikov, however, is the Utopian cast of his visionary writings. His dream was that certain graphemes would have universal meaning (*"B (v)* in all languages means the turning of one point around another"), and that thus a "single written language" might "prove to be the new vortex that unites us" (364–65). He imagined a world in which each person would dwell in a glass cubicle, mounted on wheels and set on tracks, a movable module that would take its inhabitant wherever he or she wished to go. "Cities of glass, shiny as inkwells" would welcome all those who chose to inhabit them, providing parking spaces at will for their individual glass modules. And the "spiritual sun" of this country of glass cities would be the radio, "a great wizard and sorcerer" that would dispense "Advice on day-to-day matters" alternating "with lectures by those who dwell upon the snowy heights of the human spirit" (392). Immense "Radioreadingwalls" projected in every street would provide citizens with all they wished to know: "a story by a favorite writer, an essay on the fractional exponents of space, a description of airplane flights, and news about neighboring countries. Everyone can read whatever he chooses" (393). Indeed, radio rays, so Khlebnikov posited, will soon be able to transmit "taste-dreams:" "People will drink water, and imagine it to be wine. A simple, ample meal will wear the guise of a luxurious feast. And thus will Radio acquire an even greater power of the minds of the nation" (395).

These words, written in 1921, eerily anticipate the role of television in our lives today. But of course Khlebnikov imagined a media power consonant with poetic power—both nobly serving the national purpose, which must be To Improve Mankind. To use his own terminology, Khlebnikov seems, in this instance, to have mistaken the law of repetition (2^n) for the law of antithesis (3^n). The challenge to rework these mathematical formulas is ours.

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

"LISTEN" AND "RELATE:" JACKSON MAC LOW'S CHANCE-OPERATIONAL POETRY

> "I cannot emphasize too strongly that performers must listen to, relate with, and respond to each other and to ambient sounds, including those of the audience."
>
> —JML

1. Fragments=Meaninglessness?

What are we to *do* with the seemingly-fragmented works of Jackson Mac Low? Another way to put this question is, "How are we to read these works?" Or "What do these poems offer us besides the momentary euphoria and/or irritating groundlessness we experience in the act of reading such work?" Perhaps simply the fact that Mac Low's project raises such questions about poetry and meaning is sufficient to qualify it as one of the most important achievements in the arts (& beyond) in the latter half of the century.

Mac Low as performance artist: inherent in the notion of performance is action. What Mac Low presents us with is a model for acting in a world which paradoxically presents itself as both fragmented (without connections) and totalitarian (all-too connected). He urges a sensitivity to our surroundings that, when taken seriously, forces us into a deeper appreciation of our present and potential impact (both positive and negative) on the world (human and otherwise) around us. As Jerome Rothenberg suggests in his preface to Mac Low's *Representative Works: 1938–1985,* we should approach his books "not only as a text but as a score & manual."

In the series "Words nd Ends from Ez," for instance, we face Mac Low's work at perhaps its most fragmented. What he has done is to select words and fragments from Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* in order to create a diastic "reading" of Pound's work. Mac Low spells out the name EZRA POUND by searching through the text for words containing the necessary letters. The first "E" he comes to becomes the start of the poem, whether that letter begins a word or appears in the middle (whence the fragments). He then searches for the next "Z" and takes along with it the previous letter in order to have "Z" take its place diastically as the second letter in the second "word." The next "R" carries along the two letters preceding it, "A" the preceding three. Then the process begins again with the next "P" as the first letter, etc., etc.

Exultance,
aZloRr-
leAf
Paler rOck-
layers at-
Un e deNho ia
"HaD Ever oZzaglio,
e *tRacciolino*
iccArdo Psit,
lOve blUer thaN oureD
*Eu*ridices.

yZance,
a's Rest,
use At P"
n Of trUction eraNts
faceD,

(*Representative Works* 323: *RW* hereafter)

But again: what are we to do with fragments such as ":yZance"? One possibility:

> When I began aleatoric verbal composition, I thought of the works as being "concrete" (I usually resented the application of the term "abstract" to them). . . .
>
> The very fact that these works are composed of language elements that have intrinsic references precludes their being completely empty. Even disjunct or collaged phonemes remind us of words in which they may occur. Similarly, words and phrases inevitably lead the perceiver's mind to possible sentences in which they might be occurring, and sentences at least *connote* larger discourses.
>
> ("Language-Centered" 25)

There is meaning in even the smallest unit because each unit suggests a larger enveloping context. Nothing occurs in isolation. Consequently, even though Mac Low produces his works through aleatoric means, with no particular meaning in mind, the result is thoroughly—inevitably—meaningful.

2. A Mini-Lexicon of Objectively Hazardous Prosodic Performance Realizations

> ACTION PACK: 56 filing cards, on each of which are typed one to five actions, denoted by gerunds or gerundial phrases, e.g. "jumping," "having a letter over one eye," & "giving the neck a knifing or coming to give a parallel meal, beautiful & shocking.". . .
>
> This pack of actions was composed in May 1961. . ., with the help of the Rand table of a million random digits, from the 850-word Basic English Word List.
>
> (*The Pronouns* 69)

Used as a word source for *Nuclei for Simone Forti* and *The Pronouns: A Collection of Forty Dances For the Dancers,* drawn from by systematic

chance methods. Another action pack was used for *The Marrying Maiden, a Play of Changes*.

In *The Pronouns* these cards, woven together by diastic chance selection into forty poems, are scores realized by dancers. The value of dancing the poems lies in "finding concrete meanings as actions" (*RW* 181). Although chance plays a major role in the composition of Mac Low's works, those works once written are to be seen as determinate and meaningful. The performance/realization of these poems makes randomly organized units concrete through action. Mac Low continually insists that although the dancers have "a very large degree of freedom of interpretation," they nevertheless must "find *some definite interpretation of the meaning of every line* of the dance-poems they choose to realize" (*RW* 180–1; his emphasis).

ASYMMETRY: in contrast to the symmetrical *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*. "These poems are 'asymmetrical' in that each strophe spells out a different series of words, whereas each stanza of a stanzaic-acrostic poem spells out the same word-series—either the title or some other word string" (*RW* 78).

The *Asymmetries* both horizontally and vertically spell out an index string acrostically.

ASYMMETRY 204

still.

took,
island little little

took,
out out knowing

island still.

little angel's nothing
did

little island took,
took,
little everything

little island took,
took,
little everything

(*RW* 120)

In "Asymmetry 204" the index word is "still." Thus the "S" is spelled out by "still," the "T" by "took," the "I" by "island," and so on until "still" is completely spelled out. The second strophe then spells out the second word of the first strophe, "took." The third strophe spells out "island," and the fourth and fifth "little." The number of words or events (see "eventual verse" below) in the *Asymmetries* is determined in each strophe by the number of letters in its index word, providing for a varying number of events in each strophe (hence "asymmetry"). In the *Stanzas,* on the other hand, each strophe spells out the same index string (the poem's title) and thus is parallel to (symmetrical with) all other strophes.

CALL ME ISHMAEL

Circulation. And long long
Mind every
Interest Some how mind and every long

Coffin about little little
Money especially
I shore, having money about especially little

Cato a little little
Me extreme
I sail have me an extreme little

Cherish and left, left
Myself extremest
It see hypos myself and extremest left,

City a land. Land.
Mouth; east,
Is spleen, hand mouth; an east, land.

(*RW* 89)

I'm not sure what nudged me toward asymmetry in late summer 1960. Maybe it was the emphasis on asymmetrical design

> in Zen Buddhist aesthetics. . . .Perhaps it was my admiration for the irregular verse of Ezra Pound and of such contemporaries of mine as Paul Blackburn and Larry Eigner. . . .Possibly it was just that "I'd had it" with stanzas and symmetry—seven years of it after December 1954.
>
> (*Asymmetries 1–260* 245)

EVENTUAL VERSE: 1) the constitutive units of the lines are not feet but "events" (words, word-strings, silences). 2) Consequently, the determining structure is not primarily phonological or metrical (although poems such as "Asymmetry 204" are beautifully rhythmic). 3) Corresponding lines of stanzas have the same number of events in them because 4) the number of events in a line is determined by the number of letters in a word (the same word being the index for the same line in each stanza). 5) The number of lines in a stanza is determined by the number of words in the index string ("Call Me Ishmael" resulting in three-line stanzas).

To call these units "events" suggest something of Mac Low's perspective on poetry. The poem is not made up of a collection of things; it is instead a series of events. Poetry = Process. Each event is to be realized through our actions (reading, performing), our actions conferring meaning to even the most minimal and disjunct of units. The poem is seen as a potential meaning-event, not as a record or reflection of a prior meaning having taken place in the "author's" mind and then transcribed onto the page.

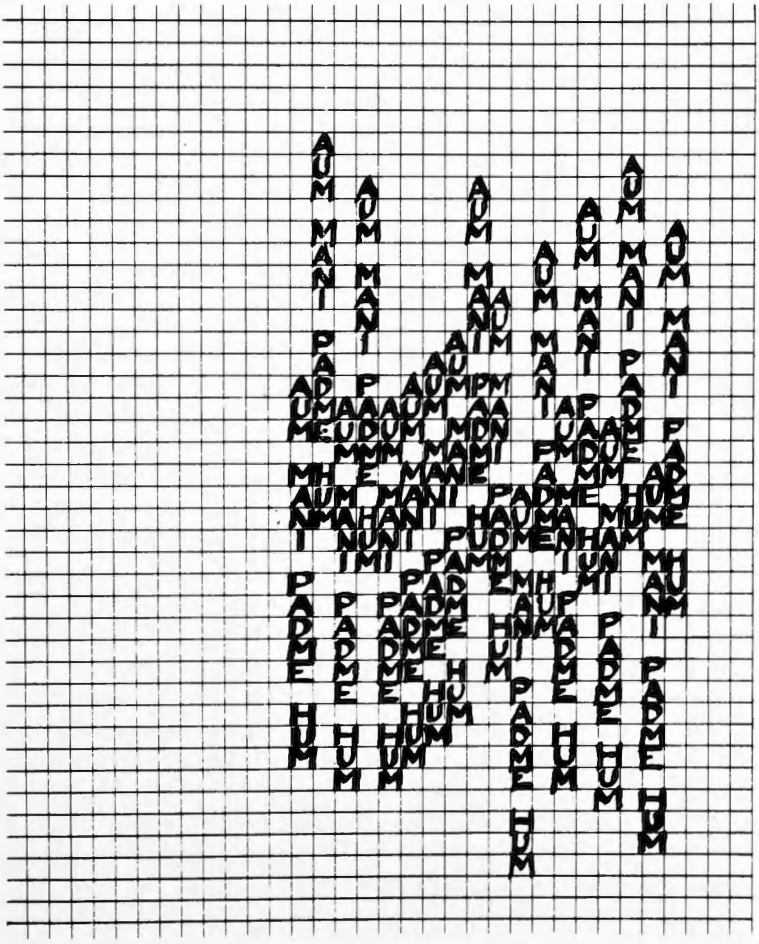
GATHAS: poems realized through speech, &/or instruments. Musical translations and devotions.

> The letters must be "translated" by instrumentalists, and may be by vocalists, as tones of the following pitch classes:
>
> A=A-natural E=E-natural I=D-flat/C-sharp N=C-natural
> D=D-natural H=B-natural M=G-natural P=F-natural

> The "Gathas" constitute an open-ended series of performance texts begun in 1961. The letters of their words are placed in the squares of quadrille ("graph") paper, and they are realized through spontaneous, but rule-guided, performers' choices, usually, but not always, made during performances.
>
> The Sanskrit word *gatha*, "verse" or "hymn," was adopted for them, on analogy with its use to designate versified sections of Buddhist sutras and short poems by Zen masters and students, because I considered Gathas to be Buddhist performance texts. Chance operations were used in composing

them in order to encourage performers and hearers to give "bare attention" to letter-sounds, words, etc. Also a Buddhist de-emphasis of the composer's ego underlies both using compositional chance operations and letting performers' choices determine many parameters of their realization. In addition, all Gathas made from 1961 to 1973—and many made later—are composed of chance-arranged transliterations of mantras, most of them Buddhist. However, beginning with *The Black Tarantula Crossword Gathas* in 1973, many Gathas have been composed of nonmantric English words. Both mantric and nonmantric Gathas appear in this book.

Mani-Mani Gatha 1975



GITANJALI: "Offering." Mac Low as love poet, spelling out, for instance, "My girl's the greatest fuck in town. I love to fuck my girl" in "6 Gitanjali for Iris:"

I

My you
Gain is rainy life
See
The Here end
Gain rainy end again the end see the
Feet. Utter. Cry know
Is Now,
The outside when Now,

(18 seconds of silence)

Is
Life outside void end
The outside
Feet. Utter. Cry know
My you
Gain is rainy life

(*RW* 86)

Mac Low and objective hazard have written a profound love poem. We all long for "My you," a you of our own. The "you" as pronoun underscores the position of the loved one as an empty meaning-slot, a position of function to be filled by different people for different people. This "you" is not some universal love object but someone in particular who awakens certain responses in this particular lover. This "gain" of "my you" leads to "rainy life," which can be read in its implications of fecundity (water as life source, rebirth) as well as its somber implications (no relationship is without its rainy days, no gain is achieved without some loss or hardship). "See," eyes now open, "the Here end" (be here now, the beauty of the present moment). "Gain rainy end again," in love again after loss (or perhaps this again is a love lost?) "see the / Feet," bare, in bed, or keep us standing. "Utter" words of love, learn to speak the language of love. "Cry know," exulting in new-found knowledge. "Is Now" reaffirms our presentness; this really is happening. "The outside" becomes inside "when Now," fully present, intercorporeal plenitude. The Other is known now. Pause. The void of life outside has ended now. Cry "know," my you; gain is rainy life. Repetition, inundation.

INDEX: the chance-derived word or word-string which is spelled out acrostically or diastically in many of Mac Low's poems. The trace of a hidden presence organizing from behind the scene, fleshed out in obscurity by aleatory phenomena. That which forces the source text to speak itself again, differently, revealing the underlying potential of alternative orders and paradigms. Lexical weight resisting motion while initiating motion.

LEXICAL WORDS: the meat of the matter, forming the basis of the nuclei (q.v.) (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs); as opposed to "structural words."

NUCLEI: the lexical words which serve as the basis of many poems. Roots which are inflected (by addition of suffixes, prefixes, tenses) in order to cohere as a more or less standard syntax. The words which are put in motion (guided) by the structural words.

OBJECTIVE HAZARD: chance procedures employed in the attempt to rid the poem of the burden and desire of the ego. Objective versus subjective; hazard versus pre-ordained. Another connotation; the danger of unleashing the potential power of social objects which have been for so long repressed, impressed into the service of one particular hegemonic paradigm.

SIMULTANEITIES: "works. . .in which each of a group of people performs a relatively independent series of actions (reading, producing nonverbal sounds, &/or doing predominantly visible physical actions) & all of these series of actions take place *simultaneously,* that is, during the same period of time, the duration of the performance" *(RW* 79). See "Synchronicity" below.

STRUCTURAL WORDS: also called "syntactical" words. Words used to connect the basic nuclei of a poem (articles, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, indefinite nouns, auxiliary verbs, etc.). These are the *chosen* elements in many nucleic works (ones in which chance-selected lexical words or phrases ["nuclei"] are connected by structural words). However, in *some* nucleic works, such as some of the *Light Poems* and later selections of "The Presidents of the United States of America," both structural words and certain lexical words are inserted through personal choice between chance-given nuclei. Structural words are the elements which the reader fills in when reading Mac Low's more elliptical works.

SYNCHRONICITY: although chance-derived, things fall together into meaningful patterns. Certain combinations during simultaneities, for instance, may appear as if they had been coordinated ahead of time. "It's sometimes spooky."

> I have learned. . .that it is often difficult to tell, in many cases, what is "chance" & what is "cause." There are kinds of inner & hidden causation that are very difficult to distinguish, on the one hand, from "chance" or "coincidence," & on the other, from "synchronicity:" "meaningful acausal interconnection."
>
> ("Statement" 385)

3. Environment &/or Ego

The question might be put thus: "Where does poetry come from?" From the poet. Poetry is not simply the representation of the external.

Ego/Representation/External: enter Jackson Mac Low. The question *is* about representation, but not in the usual sense (re. reference). Mac Low offers a poetry of re-presentation of language itself; language must speak itself through him. Poetry: an exploration of and confrontation with one's environment—getting to know one's element. Just how important environmental awareness is to Mac Low is evident in the following advice to performers:

> While egoistic overpowering of the total sound should never occur, the exercise of virtuosity is strongly encouraged when it is carried out with as much consciousness as possible to the total situation. Performers should always try to be both inventive and sensitive. As in all my other simultaneities, the most important "rules" are: *"Listen"* and *"Relate."*
>
> (*RW* 115)

The notion of language speaking ***through*** Mac Low may seem at odds with his own attempts to efface the subject from the composition process; but as Mac Low admits, no process, however aleatory, obliterates the choosing, shaping ego of the poet.

He points out in "Museletter:"

> Yes the Zen Buddhist motive for use of chance (&c) means was to be able to generate series of "dharmas" (phenomena/events, e.g., sounds, words, colored shapes) relatively "un-

contaminated" by the composer's "ego" (taste, constitutional predilections, opinions, current or chronic emotions). It was such a relief to stop making artworks carry that burden of "expression!"

. . .But. . .I [do] allow my own emotions to influence my systematically generated work. . .: my choices of means, materials, &c., can't help being influenced by emotions, & I'd be foolish if I thought they weren't.

(The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book 26–7)

The point is that when we take a step back and allow for a greater impingement of the external—when we no longer foreground expression or description as the *raison d'etre* of poetry—then we are able to see the language around us from different angles. Found language is no longer harnessed solely to the exigencies of "the message." Which doesn't mean that meaning is no longer important. Quite the contrary: what Mac Low foregrounds is the very machinery of meaning-production, the role of context in the coloring (delimiting) of words. D.T. Suzuki: "The great fault with us all is that we force logic on facts whereas it is facts themselves that create logic" ("The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind" 224).

Environment is never neutral (no pure dharma). It is always at the service of (or perhaps more exactly, a function of) a particular context. The beauty—and ultimately the political power—of Mac Low's project is the recognition of the possibility of alternative contexts. The present hegemonic form of organization is only one possible context among others. There is always the possibility of the redistribution of the materials at hand. Alternatives: Democracy, Anarchy, Peace.

The state of no-mind-ness refers to the time prior to the separation of mind and world, when there is yet no mind standing against an external world and receiving its impressions through the various sense-channels. Not only a mind, but a world, has not yet come into existence. This we can say is a state of perfect emptiness, but as long as we stay here there is no development, no experience, it is mere doing-nothing, it is death itself, so to speak. But we are not so constituted. There rises a thought in the midst of the Emptiness; this is the awakening of Prajna, the separation of unconsciousness and consciousness, or, logically stated, the rise of the fundamental dialectical antithesis. . . .The Unconscious and the world of consciousness are in direct opposition, yet they

lie back to back and condition each other. The one negates the other, but this negation is really affirmation.

("No-Mind" 219–20)

On the one hand, the doctrine of No-mind could lead to passivity—"When sitting, just sit." While we perhaps secretly take pride in our striving for no-mind, the walls come a-tumbling down. A perfect emptiness: no development, no experience, death itself. But on the other hand "the original Mind is neither dependent upon nor independent of" the external world. The striving for no-mind can also be seen as a stance of non-aggression towards, equivalence with, respect for the external.

> Prajna, which is the awakening of consciousness in the Unconscious, functions in a twofold direction. The one is towards the Unconscious and the other toward the conscious. The Prajna which is oriented to the Unconscious is Prajna properly so called, while the Prajna of consciousness is now called mind with the small initial letter. From this mind a dualistic world takes its rise: subject and object, the inner self and the external world, and so on. In the Mind, therefore, two aspects are also distinguishable: Prajna-mind of non-discrimination and dualistic mind. The mind of the first aspect belongs to this world, but so long as it is linked with Prajna it is in direct communication with the Unconscious, it is the Mind; whereas the mind of the second aspect is wholly of this world and delighted with it, and mixes itself with all its multiplicities.

("No-Mind" 211)

A dualistic world: the grounds for discrimination and exclusion. The subject/object couplet leads rather rapidly to others, such as us/them, friend/enemy, superior/inferior, natural/unnatural. The goal, then, is Prajna-mind of nondiscrimination.

4. Readers At Work

We feel that if we read the radically disjunct poems often enough we will begin to feel, if not define, an underlying meaning connecting the *disjecta membra*. But contrariwise, we may sometimes suspect that the connections and meanings we sense may be our own projections, and that even the

poems that seem to be intimate personal statements may really be at least as disjunctive semantically as they are rhetorically.

("Charles Bernstein & His *Shade*" 57)

The very vagueness so characteristic of the Chinese style of writing is in fact its strength: mere points of reference are given, and as how to connect them, to yield a meaning, the knowledge and feeling of the reader are the real determinant.

("No-Mind" 218)

Democracy in action: the reader as co-creator of meaning. No mere passivity as the author totally encodes the reader's experience of the text. There's also the implication here that even in the most tightly controlled work the reader still has a hand in the final outcome, although that usually remains a mere potentiality rather than a realization of the constructive powers of the reader. "When sitting, just sit"? Mac Low seems to be searching for an action-Zen, not simply a mode of contemplation; the reader must *respond to* the phenomena she perceives. Here's an activist use of the notion of "reader response"—the reader must be responseable.

As I suggested earlier, environment is never neutral; it is always coded. Mac Low exhorts us to take a hand in that organization, to recreate our own environment by listening, relating, and responding. The reader/performer creates a provisional whole out of the disparate elements around them. (For a justification of this pronoun usage, see "The 'THEY' Manifesto" in *The Pronouns*, page 76; another example of Mac Low's desire to reorganize our perceptions for a more democratic outcome.)

Schematically, this "whole" can be represented by concentric spheres: the inmost is that of the individual performer, next, that of the whole performance group; next, that of the larger social group, including audience as well as performers; next, that of the performance space, including room acoustics, electronics, etc.; and finally, the larger spaces within which the performance space is situated: the rest of the building, the surrounding streets, neighborhood, city (or rural area), etc., all of which may affect significantly the aggregate of sounds heard by each individual at each moment. The spheres are best conceived as transparent and interpenetrating—not as

static shells but concentric ripples travelling simultaneously out from and in toward each center.

(*RW* 107)

Subsequent readings of the "same" work will in fact be the readings of different works, the score (the text) of each work being realized in different ways, in different contexts (different concentric spheres). A reading of a particular work in New York City will be a different work than that which is read in Albuquerque. The poem is a social construct which we may choose to *re*construct in various ways to suit varying purposes.

But how, specifically, may a reader reconstruct works which on first sight seem totally meaningless? How is meaning to be realized? Mac Low gives the following advice:

> Performers should understand the syntax of each sentence and speak it in such a way as to make the syntactical relations between its component words clear. To do this they will sometimes have to solve word-class ambiguity problems, that is, decide to which of two or more possible parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, or adverb) particular words in a sentence must belong in order for the sentence to cohere structurally, even when the sentence is (at least existentially) absurd. All sentences longer than single words or short phrases must be assumed to form structurally complete statements, questions, or requests. Each sentence should be spoken with the inflections appropriate to its meaning and sentence type and with one of the sentence-final intonation contours appropriate to its end mark.
>
> (*RW* 207–8)

Thus Mac Low sees his work, as well as much by some so-called "Language Poets," as perceiver-centered. Meaning is an effect of the reading/performance process. "This should come as no surprise. . ." ("'Language-Centered'" 26).

A Little Sermon on the Performance of Simultaneities by
Jackson Mac Low, Written on his 44th Birthday
(12 September 1966)

Firstly: Listen! Listen! Listen!
Secondly: Leave plenty of silence.

Thirdly: Don't do something just to be doing something.

Fourthly: Only do something when you have something you really want to do after observing & listening intensely to everything in the performance & its environment.

Fifthly: Don't be afraid to shut up awhile. Something really good will seem all the better if you do it after being still.

Sixthly: Be open. Try to interact freely with the other performers & the audience.

Lastly: Listen! Listen! Listen!

—GEORGE HARTLEY

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SOMETIMES READING KNOWS: NOTES ON RECENT PUBLICATIONS

From "Inserting the Mirror": "To explore the nature of rain I opened the door because inside the workings of language clear vision is impossible. You think you see, but are only running your finger through pubic hair." (57) Here, in the good graces of an Eros of "the phantom beat between two rhythms" (67) ". . .perhaps it is a misunderstanding to peel back skin in order to bare the mechanics of the mirage." (86) These

apparitions of a somatic alphabet are from Rosmarie Waldrop's most arresting book, *The Reproduction of Profiles* (New Directions). A companionable world is Craig Watson's *After Calculus* (Burning Deck) in which "the wall aches / the picture leaks" (45), "watching / through the predatory window, the trees being peeled / away from the landscape" (17). "To be alone what could terrify more / the verb of being answered by the earth"—such *Flowers of Unceasing Coincidence* by Robert Kelly (Station Hill [55]) are nothing less than *Visible Shivers* in Tom Raworth's resounding title (to a varied and substantial collection: O Books): "When do brainwaves start? / do animals have the right to kill?" Such pertinently dangled imbalances can also be found in Ted Pearson's *Catenary Odes* (also O): "each thing equal to the shape of its 'moment,' / dressing edenic meat." There is an arousing bestial throng in Pearson's spare lines ("the thawed harp weirds its figments of prattle, / toothsome sexemes, a quire of rags") as he asks the inevitable postmodern question: "what strange certitude subs for the thrash / of a discontinuous world?" This is like a subvocalization of drainage arrangements that run through John Godfrey's *Midnight on Your Left* (The Figures), "All the disparities incarnate." (27) These are meat gathas with the semiotic meter left running:

> I snake about my
> body so truly
> I tag it "myself"
>
> Only lust does this
> Only for you
> I make it lustre (17)

At this frequency there's even something carnal about the word linguist. See Mark Karlins' *Narrative of the Broken Winter* (North Atlantic): "Language is utterly extravagant / hollow of a carnivorous plant / into which animals crawl like drones." (3) ". . .and the opening spreads erotic, like a hip full of tools." (Laura Chester, *Free Reign* [Burning Deck], 39)

Ron Silliman's *What* (The Figures) is the most graceful unfurling to date of his dialectical imagination. In this thin—Zukofskian)—lined 120 page cutworm of The Alphabet the skin of attention constantly transparentizes the language, much to its author's consternation. Thus: "Retrofit theory to text." (10) Consciousness as scandal: "Any text averaging 1.65 / syllables per word demands / a college education." (37) And as a lesson: "I am / is anyone's name." (91) 'Language poetry?'—"Imagine a language that lurked." (124) *Lit* (Potes & Poets) is a more varied production, the lighting a bit garish in the relentless punning, the title's abridgement of

Literature signalling a bid for recouping primal speech sounds. (But most of the words do average 1.65 syllables.)

A crucial distinction must be insisted on between the stereoptic clamor of the pun (phonemic Dayglo) and the sputters and groans of morphemic "noise" which, in fact, constitute meaning. As the work of P. Inman demonstrates with a molecular eloquence, "any of the minimum meaningful elements in a language, not further divisible. . ." (morphemes) can be very minimal indeed. The demonstration of difference at the morphemic level is considerable throughout *Red Shift* (Roof) and *Think of One* (Potes & Poets). The title of the latter, after a Monk tune, brings to mind the fact that in Monk's music every phrase *as played* is a rhythmic cell. And each cellular inclination smuggles some harmonic contraband into the picture. So with Inman, the simple juxtaposition of sounds ("peg bop" [54]) elicits a syntactic eventfulness. Prismatic alliances are formed: "ovary vowel as carpenter" (59). In these poems we never know the precise measure being applied (what it's "about"), so we don't "see" the size of the object. "A leech gatherer / might add stories" (56) but Inman doesn't. This keeps the texture snug up against a pure sonorous prosodic imagination that is, I think, the most arresting demonstration of the germinal potential of English since *Finnegan's Wake*.

David Bromige's *Desire: Selected Poems 1963–1987* (Black Sparrow) strikes a bargain between Villon and Henry James, perky guttersnipe and sartorial cool, impeccably sassy in other words: "I've helped you in the past / Go ahead, help me in the past again" (69). *Desire* is the most shrewdly assembled retrospective selection of a poet's career I know, a "blow struck for meaning" (60) in which the cumulative effect of time regained makes each poem, each moment, speak present poignance, memorably thorough, from the opening dedication to the poet's (grown) son, to the eerie freshness of the final section, "Developing the Negative." *Desire* is an apt title for a book that speaks its mind, not ever as tactic but as the tactile measure that "We assume / what we can leave unsaid." (196)

The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume II: 1939–1962 edited by Christopher MacGowan (New Directions) completes a sumptuous display of the oeuvre that has become the virtual farmbelt of American modernism. Like the first volume, there are massive additions wedged between the collections like *The Desert Music* which the poet published (and even these collections are somewhat altered from previous presentations in the earlier Collected). The additional poems are at least memorable even when not essential ("On my 65th birthday / I kissed her while she pissed" [231]). In addition, there are a surprising number of translations (from Paz and Neruda among others). And

MacGowan's editorial apparatus is extensive and well thought out. His notes are spirited too: "A mouse has nibbled at the bottom right-hand corner of the paper, devouring the 'Williams' of WCW's signature, and possibly the final word of the poem [soon?]. I have printed the poem from this nibbled manuscript." (484) It's fitting that Williams' *Collected Poems* in a scholarly edition, like Olson's in Butterick's adept hands, should pointedly preserve a certain shagginess intrinsic to the bestiary of variable feet.

University of California Press has usefully supplemented Creeley's collected poems with *Collected Prose*—a misleading title, in that *fictive* prose is meant. Cal Press continues to augment their Zukofsky list, this time with *Bottom: On Shakespeare* (volume 1—the text—only). This indispensable work has long been out of print, despite being Zukofsky's prose counterweight to *"A."* As an extended "working toward a perception that is his mind's peace" (13), *Bottom* is a decidedly *hypsometric* text ("vertical control in mapping; the establishment of elevations or altitudes"). Feathers will be ruffled if I propose that Alan Davies' *Signage* (Roof) is the *Bottom* among poets' prose of the 1980s—but I believe it is. At a glance this book appears to collect a miscellany of "critical" writings. Appearances deceive: *Signage* is a devotional text, an enlarged mobilization of incantatory recitations on the ecclesiastical themes of mind and flesh, world and language. "Language is dimensionless; which permits writing. . . .Writing merely carries language into an evaporative sense of reality." (39) "Writing is. . .a thinking clock which does not stop." (37) As Shakespeare is Zukofsky's pollinator, Davies' book dangles its participles in Wittgenstein and Stein—a suitable zeroing in on phonemes, for he quotes the latter while commenting on the former ('s comments on Frazer's *Golden Bough*): ". . .if it is a whole thing it does not need explaining, it merely needs stating." (174) In devotional writing, the declarative impulse is all.

One of the awkward pleasures of association with *Sulfur* is bearing witness to the considerable accomplishments of fellow editors. Eliot Weinberger's cornucopian presentation of *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957–1987* (New Directions—note the date, as these 600+ pages consist only of work written after the poet turned 40!) is unique in its scope; but I'm even more taken with his rendering of Vicente Huidobro's wide-eyed booklength poem *Altazor* (Greywolf), a veritable Missing Link in the legacy of international modernism—and a worthy companion to Paul Schmidt's edition of Khlebnikov (see Marjorie Perloff's review herein). It's not a peremptory gesture but a profound insight on Clayton Eshleman's part to link four eccentric orbits in *Conductors of the Pit* (Paragon House), collecting major works in his translations of Césaire,

Holan, Artaud and Vallejo, anchoring them to a new rendering of Rimbaud's "Drunken Boat." Eshleman's intertextual sagacity has here been enacted as another devotional medium, that of translation, rather than critical commentary. And for that, *Conductors of the Pit* must be recommended as salutary—quite apart from the obvious attraction of having these five writers bound in one volume.

A comparably synthetic impulse attends James Clifford's roundup of Michel Leiris, Victor Segalen, Marcel Griaule, "ethnographic surrealism," Césaire, Conrad, Malinowski and a host of other compelling figures in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard University Press). This is not the place to offer a review (parts of the book originally appeared in *Sulfur*), but it's sufficient simply to emphasize that *The Predicament of Culture* is the most accomplished scholarly contribution yet made to that nebulous but exciting genre-in-potentia, a poetics of culture (viable heir to Olson's "special view" of history). "It is easier to register the loss of traditional orders of difference than to perceive the emergence of new ones." (15) So Clifford chooses the optimism of "emergence" over *emergency*, gracing his text with an alluring gallery of photos like that of a New Guinean girl with her necklace of flashlight bulbs. His account of the Mashpee Indian legal battle for recognition as a tribe is impassioned and moving far beyond the norms of academic discourse. Such empathetic enthusiasm is what makes Clifford's poetics of "emergence" cogent, memorable and above all viable. Clifford's motto is taken from the Igbo: "You do not stand in one place to watch a masquerade."

Another committed and resourceful proponent of emergent cultures is Anthony Wilden (best known for his associations with Jacques Lacan and Gregory Bateson). Two large books published in tandem constitute a *summa* of Wilden's ecological-cybernetic "context theory:" *The Rules Are No Game: The Strategy of Communication* and *Man and Woman, War and Peace: The Strategist's Companion* (both published by Routledge & Kegan Paul). Wilden lacks Clifford's style and poetic imagination, but compensates with an enviable ability to lucidly reiterate the fine points *and* the broad outlines of semiotics, information theory, systems theory, physics, ecology. . .the list could go on. The master-frames of Wilden's books are feminism and war, and he writes wonderfully anecdotal chapters about his English boyhood during World War II. Wilden has committed himself wholeheartedly to getting an emphatically political message across: "Our long-range future—if we have one—is now utterly dependent on those in power coming to understand the basic fact of the new science: that the open system that destroys its environment ultimately destroys itself." (*Rules* 309) In that spirit, these books are in effect reference books, toolkits, or "strategist's companions" as the subtitle proclaims.

Stylistically antithetical to Wilden, but conceptually allied, is the West German Nietzsche-of-the-moment, Peter Sloterdijk, whose *Critique of Cynical Reason* is now available in the estimable "Theory and History of Literature" series (University of Minnesota Press). Sloterdijk's prose is a continual shower of provocations: "The medicine of a latently paranoid society thinks of the body basically as a subversion risk. In it, the danger of sickness ticks like a time bomb; the body is suspected as the future murderer of the person living in it." (345) Every one of Sloterdijk's 550 pages contains comparable excitements. As a whole, this leviathan is a culture-catalogue titillation that assumes a radioactive aura, its author victimized by his own pyrotechnical analytics. His thesis—that Enlightenment rationality gave birth to cynicism as the dominant mode of consciousness of the past two centuries—is easily grasped, so one watches the prose with the attentiveness of a sports fan minding details late in a blowout game. Still, there isn't a more relentless exposé of the contemporary mirage of "chic bitterness" (5)—a.k.a. postmodernism—in print. "Because everything has become problematic, everything is also somehow a matter of indifference." (xxxii) It's depressing to consider that Sloterdijk's polemic won't make any difference in this country of *Cultural Illiteracy* and *The Closing of the American Mind,* precisely because (contra Hirsch and Bloom) it's not miseducation Americans suffer from, but a studious indifference: that is, it takes a lot of hard work and serious eduction to cultivate such an unshakeable indifference to the state of the globe. There are brilliant analyses of the various media (T.V., film, music, sports, mass-market publishing) that have become, in essence, a counter-education—a prosthetic synthesis of our worldview—in the huge collection edited by Donald Lazere, *American Media and Mass Culture* (University of California).

Lazere's anthology will have to be recommended by citation alone, as will the following, as time and space have contracted, and this talkative slalom of books and topics must be concluded with a simple list: Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, editors, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois); William Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Cornell); Geoffrey Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (University of Chicago); Charles Stein, *The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum* (Station Hill—on Olson and Jung); Peter Redgrove, *The Black Goddess and the Unseen Real* (Grove); Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Harvard); A. David Napier, *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox* (University of California); Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Harvard); Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England* (University of California); Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Cornell); Kaja Silverman,

The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Indiana University).

—JED RASULA

KENWARD ELMSLIE

Kenward Elmslie has been called the "nearly invisible fifth member"[1] of the New York School of poets which more visibly included O'Hara, Ashbery, Schuyler and Koch. This original group, and the augmenting later waves from Tulsa, *et al.*, were less a clear school than friends whose paths happened to cross at a time when there was a recognized "New York School" of painting, and whose proximity to the art world resulted in their being dyed to match by some critic's hand. These friends came to poetry from different directions, and the survivors have continued on along their individual paths. Elmslie came to the writing of poetry a little later than the others, and from an unusual direction, one which has set him apart from the rest: musical theater.

All of the poets mentioned above have at least dabbled in theater, but only Elmslie has made it uptown to Broadway—with his musical adaptation of Capote's *The Grass Harp*. But Elmslie has, in a very real sense, never left the wings of the musical stage, even while writing poetry as dense as this:

> Gingerbread, gingerbread yore, gingerbread yearn,
> Coyote whim in which the jangling caboose recedes,
> Swallowed up by dirty tree mops, slope mops,
> Tan pine going noodles alone by snow-covered rig
>
> (from "Night Thought")

It was not until the early sixties that Elmslie began to concentrate on poetry: "Before that I thought of myself as, and *was*, primarily a writer of lyrics for theater songs." Lyrics for show tunes and "art songs" are energy-packed: their language events—rhyme, assonance, puns, double entendres—have a much higher incidence per line than those of pop tunes;

and more than most modern poetry. Rhyme hungry, as relentlessly novelty-seeking as missiles are heat-seeking, show tune lyrics are quick to appropriate new popular developments in language: slang, psychobabble, shop talk, buzz words and ad slogans—all forms of the vernacular and the vulgate. Still, they indulge in no pretensions about speaking the language of the common man. Rather, the chief concern of the lyricist is to create a memorable, fast-paced surface, one which openly revels in *being* surface. Show tunes often have little or no responsibility to sketch in or add depth to a background—delegating this to dramatic action and dialogue—and lyricists consequently are free to attend almost exclusively to the foreground of the lyric, to put their language through any acrobatics as long as the result matches the plot in effect. Conveying concrete details is secondary to the evocation of just the right mood.

Elmslie brought this freedom from backgrounding concerns, a taste for a high number of verbal events, and a love for ephemeral "iffy-spiffy" language along with him when he came to poetry. (His six opera libretti are very straight forward, bearing as they do the full weight of the plot—and as these include adaptations from works by Strindberg, Chekov and even a novel by Henry James, this weight is considerable.) Elmslie's concerns in his poetry are not the trivialities and open-and-shut morals of most show tunes, but other than this the refinement of his poetic style has consisted of intensifying rather than abandoning the techniques he learned as an art song lyricist. In the poem above, for instance, "Gingerbread, gingerbread yore, gingerbread yearn" has much the same feel as a show tune refrain, and the rest of the poem could easily be hung on a melody. (Elmslie regularly does set his poetry to music. There are several tapes available of him singing and reciting his works.)

At times this line of descent from theater (this is of course not his sole influence: Elmslie cites Ashbery, Koch, O'Hara, Jane Bowles, Wallace Stevens and several visual artists alongside Hart, Gershwin and Brecht) dictates the form of the poem. Some of his works are overt nods to staging. "Girl Machine" and "Palm Casino" both use mirroring word columns to suggest both a choral effect and the geometric hokum of Busby Berkeley choreography:

glamor pallor wax blonde bombshell pallor glamor
hospital bed tableau tata hospital bed tableau
roses roses I HAD THE CRAZIEST DREAM roses roses

(from "Palm Casino")

As with other techniques initially inspired by his theater experiences, Elmslie take this further, at times utilizing topiary poems (as Elmslie has

referred to his shaped works) to make William Blakesque points about the limits of our perceptions. In "Beauticians II" the word block

> The Mayan Head Priest
> gazed down at the hum
> sacrifice on the alt
> laying there, eyes shu
> he poignant sight gav

(which continues on for some twenty more lines) may be incomprehensible at first glance. Then we realize that words have been sheared off both sides, as if by the edges of one of Blake's narrow slits of perception, and that if the missing type were restored the text would form a flat-topped pyramid—a Mayan pyramid. The difficulty in reading Elmslie is no different than the disorientation we feel upon first facing any other exotic edifice.

There has been some notice taken of the place of the show tune and art song lyrics within the greater body of poetry. Anthony Burgess tells us such lyrics were Phillip Larkin's first inspirations, and that T.S. Eliot admired their craftsmanship, wit and taste. Burgess, who in addition to his novels has written show tune lyrics, provides us in the course of his consideration with a handy definition of wit: "the reconciliation of disparities in the smallest possible form."[2] This aptly describes Elmslie's intent, and his characteristic procedure. If someone were to write a topiary poem for Elmslie himself the shape would have to be that of a distillery, a moonshine still hidden away in the Vermont forest where he makes his summer home. For the most prominent characteristic of Elmslie's poetry—and again this can be seen as an intensified lyric technique—is its great density: everything is boiled down to its purest essence, its spirit made high proof. (John Ashbery also thinks of Elmslie as producing potables, describing his tone as that of "a mad scientist who has swallowed the wrong potion in his lab and is desperately trying to get his calculations on paper before everything closes in.")[3]

Burgess' "reconciliation of differences in the smallest possible form" certainly describes Elmslie's distillations of events from his own life in these stanzas from "Bio:"

> from crazy brat reading Krazy Kat
> to Kafkaesque this Kafkaesque that
>
> . . .
>
> trek aids
> sped up the decades

loved ones
reruns

. . .

and me, the figure in the carport, the proverbial carport
unrafeened laff fiend dreaming of a far port

and this, from "Pre-Deco":

I recall innocent ice tracks (How #1)
vanish in mid-rink
scooped up by some sky creature
into love's wild domain,
signed—The Brain.

As can be seen in these examples, Elmslie's characteristic emotional stance is that of someone at "an awkward age," a threshold time, a time of transition from innocence and insulation and general longings, to one of knowledge and responsibility, and the discomfort of knowing how things really are. The innocent's love of word games and simple silliness is present ("Where Nureyev was rolling in the red fjord / and the red Ford with Robert Redford. . .") even while, at heart, that which lies ahead is already known ("Monster Worship I," the poem which begins with the line just above, concludes with "Boom psychology / blinds us to the stench of the rubbery super- / structures. . .No re-entry. Unnerved by the wind").

And Elmslie finds this threshold terror not only in the coming-of-age situation as it is commonly recognized, but also in situations which he recognizes as being possessed of similar emotions. He makes us see, for example, the parallel between an adolescent's horrified fascination with his coming change of life, and—a favored Elmslie target—the nervous and smug use of "in" jargon by the upwardly mobile. In both situations he points out the sense of straining toward even while holding back from the success and fulfillment that await, that seem to want only the mastering of the outward forms of their possession before being realized.

Evocations of this emotional see-sawing have been a consistent thread in Elmslie's work, visible from "White Attic," the first poem in his first full-length poetry collection, to his 1987 prose extravaganza *26 BARS*. This work, an alphabetical arrangement of imaginary drinking establishments (with illustrations by Donna Dennis), shows that Elmslie finds this fear of not fitting in not only in individuals and in their circumstances, but in the man-made environment as well. Here he is describing the ambience of a bar called the "YX" (formerly the "CLUB ONYX"), and letting us see America itself see-sawing:

> These days, YX is saturated with the freeze and drop ambience of a boogie fortress. The hype of slum come-on, constructed from scratch, cost the Zurich consortium a bundle. The O and N never made it back up—a hustle snare. Inside, the fast-lane bar is connected to the party hard laundromat. Singles with impeccable payment histories predominate.

Standing as he is in the wings, Elmslie is uniquely qualified to speak for the essence of modern America—an America of unstable, playacting surfaces; of stage flats.

—W.C. BAMBERGER

NOTES

1 From "A Tribute to Kenward Elmslie," by Michael Silverblatt. *Barney #4* (1984); p. 80.
2 From Burgess' *This Man and Music* (N.Y., McGraw-Hill; 1983). The chapter called "Under The Bam" (pp. 96–116).
3 From Ashbery's appreciation of Elmslie, "Figure in the Carport." *Parnassus* Summer 1976.

THE ROMANCE THING BY ANNE WALDMAN. Flint, MI: Bamberger Books, 1987

When Anne Waldman was a child, she dreamed of being an ambassador. As an adult she remained loyal to her dream, travelling extensively and keeping an account of the journey. In *The Romance Thing,* Waldman brings together travel journals from throughout her life. While the places, persons and tones of the pieces vary enormously, the commitment to being Open To Experience remains constant throughout. The sensual, the exotic, and the perennially curious are the basis of a first-person narrative account which constantly tests boundaries—borders between nations, governments, languages, sexes and lovers. From Zurich to Berlin, Egypt to Puerto Rico, Waldman is embroiled in the kind of events which visit only those who are strong enough to invite them. It is a "story of desire and intrigue and what happens." The characters include a myrrh-smelling lover of Arafat, the famous, the deluded, the saviors of mankind, the spurned & ignored. The writing is fast, clean & tight—as

one might expect from a book that equates the "velocity and duration" of travel with the song and sound of the poem: "I would be necessary vowels and consonants too," she writes, "and condescend to speak with the breath of my 5 ancient sisters: the Winds of Thrusting, Hiding, Summoning, Gentle and Wheel. I meet them in the deserts of the world. I summon them up when you aren't looking. My scope and map are dedicated to sound reason. And my view through this lens is passion. Let it disturb the porous, and crack the solid. It is this way I travel out of sound to be one of milk & sorrow, and one of strength & metal."

—DAWN KOLOKITHAS

I HAD NO IDEA / *PICK UP THE HOUSE!** for Anselm Hollo

Best, then, to go outside, slowly through the brick door, & out into the yard. A face, looking up, may cause you to trip down stairs, but *your hands* casting about *& your eyes* shown the ground ('if you're lucky!') by these 'stars' may help you to *land* & regather yourself ('freely') forward to view *the stars—on the flat* ('fundament') from two legs / by the beans, shot up out of the ground & bearing *more* beans, on their leafy vines. *(Ever see 'The 7 Sisters'??—or* been able to see *only six* stars, as 'The Pleiades'???) Or it may be dark—*too dark to see!* ('overcast' / 'too much gas')—so you go inside to read, 'instead', this poem about Reading—

*

Slowly
the eye scans the page

The heart
beats steadily

while the mind winces in
in infinitesimal
spasms of almost prenatal pleasure

* *Pick Up The House*, Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1987.

Down in the street
it is divided
into three parts:
sidewalk, street proper,
sidewalk: large things
of equally inelastic matter
on either side

These, inhabited
by home-grown beings

several of whom are reading too

the karmic revelations
of so many
silly and lovable cells

conjoined in the bliss that feeds
them, and on them, too

Thus holding them

(now turn the page)

(from "After Novalis")—I can't imagine an EGYPTIAN reading a piece of *Bandage,* mixed with *Skin,* to better success!

Reading is something, you are doing now, too! *(where*—in the *teeth?* (the 'all-devouring') of the photo on back cover?—does 'the Voice' come from??)—especially if ('Vox Box') you are reading it aloud! (Remarking the absolutely 'alien' quality of "home-grown beings" on p. 26—but 'homey', too!) Aloud comes the human mind forth from the *vox box—not a pox,* but a, an infinitesimal trying of 'the Dentist' (for example) to fill the Hole (e.g. the home-land of 'the Delaware'—perhaps, Delaware—as such 'referent' 'exists' in *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper)==AND HE DOTH FILL THE VOID==(the Brain / the Earth) (with 'sensation') *(Maya),* with music, 'tuning', etc.—'ghosts', but nowadays, NO poet has better claim to a Seat in 'Congress', *or* the use of the word "we"—

August

Hot sunny Baltimore day,
walking through the park,
holding her hand, touching her waist.

holding her hand, touching her waist.
Checking out the zoo,
in and out the gates.
Sun sets. Oh, Ted, we miss you,
whistling in the dark.

It's *great* that

someone remembers,
makes much of it

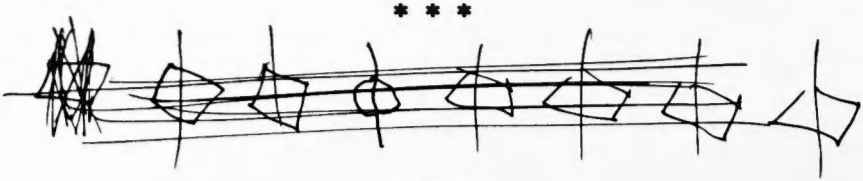
* * *

Himself, he hath the gift of gab, & truly believes in the HOST *(multitude)*—strangeness of life, *plus* the existence of 'clarification'—('horses'—MONGOLS?—'LAPS'?) (grandpa / gramma) trust & love amongst friends. These *'spiritual'* factors—ranking foremost among them, consideration of place of human beings in Larger Scheme of Things—promote renewed consideration of 'material' (Mother, Matter).

* * *

What's in a name?—ANSELM *(solid)* HOLLO (hollo), HALLOO!!
Was St. Anselm 'solid'? (look up "Anselm" in library) (meaning of "Void")

* * *



* * *

plus, of course, man-standing-beside-his-word, *sinceritas* & Taoism & *many* of the *Confucian* virtues—but *Chung* as imperative to locate *A* ('Ch'ing ming') ('cultural gyroscope') by going to the center of the group's fire & therein conversing & making observation & singing & dancing pronouncements. A man to be trusted with your life, whose behavior is erratic, comedic, 'tribal' & profound—

* * *

The stranger who is *more* loc(al) than yourself (if you happen to be *at all* 'Nordic,' & the book is published in Minneapolis)

* * *

LOCAL AL

Local Al
could not be
more local
than myself—
but he is / it's true!

* * *

Upon publication of this book, the *real* poet of Minnesota is not Robert Bly, nor Mr. Trygve Yngve, but Anselm Hollo (currently fraternizing with the Mormons!)

* * *

Anselm is not 'loco'—he is *for real*—like, 'the Best of Ezra Pound & Joanne Kyger,' attitudinally, he is *a measure & cultural locus*—he's 'lear*ned,'* that from (but there must have been *examples* in the family) 'genes,' too—I mean, 'simply' inherited animal capacity ("Yet each and every ant knows exactly what")+ *'fairness'* as coded (codified) ('evolving') Law as the meeting-ground of equal / *diverse* proud persons, granting each other time & space to speak & move & act at the Thing (or more domestically, the 'Legislature in Sacramento'), as the one-in-the-many & the many-in-the-one, for the differently perceived *common good*—what *warfare* & *arguments* (accords) existed between them!—because they allowed each other to exist!—*& what accords* (have been) have been reached, *amongst* them!

* * *

If it's 'too late' for such a poet to exist, for the 'welfare of his people', then perhaps he's here as a 'time-travelling' visitor—*from your own life*—an emissary *(judge)* (that 'magical') & friend, in the role of a 'literary exemplar'—an *impossible* example (paradoxically, often enough a solitary individual, 'like you & me', sitting in front of the television).

For example, to set sail, across the sea, into the Sight—into the Pacific—'in search of'. . .?—'combat', 'advantage', 'Geld'(?), ('Knowledge')—*'travel'?—I wonder*. . .(certainly, no longer 'prestige at home')—for, whilst

you are gone. . ., your kinsman, or *kinswoman* "Griselda" makes off with your wife, your daughters, your brethren *or* combined with some heathen, sea-roving, mirror-like adventurer turns them into slaves of some different, bored, 'what-if' technology? What's *'new'?*

* * *

What he 'envinces' is not adequately said by the word "perspective"—on the other hand, just being a "person" now seems unimaginary ('inevitable'), uneventful! *Why not, what is it?* It's 'Story'—*it's being alive!* It's like you can only truly imagine the *difference* (to say nothing / of a 'right' way to behave) from *inside* the situation—*'There* you can *think!'*—*of* the Mythological—of its 'right to exist', as 'itself', by dint / in light of 'something else' that grants it its peculiar fortitude & 'opportunity'—INSOFAR AS LIFE IS, SOCIAL LIFE IS!—*via* the 'local mythological', the 'Middle Voice'—(". . .*see your face*. . .")

But what if 'social life' *is not* (??). . .& 'poetry' neither!

* * *

(ARGUMENT FOR IT BEING "not") / ('somewhat paltry' ARGUMENT FOR IT BEING)

* * *

But since *Pick Up The House exists, that proves* the existence of 'poets like Anselm Hollo' *(who?)* ('and others'!)—& if *he* still exists, *then* the fact & 'concept' of (moving among) a 'various & "complicated" *Society' is possible,* as well as *desirable*—that's my *(upbeat)* reading of the actually demonstrably *'cultural'* project of Anselm's work (where 'pick up' means 'to improve').

* * *

It's a good book—nice choice of material (& active re-lining!) from previous book *(Heavy Jars)*+ superior new stuff—*but why start suddenly Capitalizing* ("I") *& punctuating??* (Should *I* begin capitalizing & punctuating?)

* * *

Like 'the Devil', there's another side to it—*a 'wild side'*—though not 'evil' or 'destructive', necessarily—just a desire to START ALL OVER AGAIN, on this STILL GREEN PLANET—counteracted by fatal jollity's

need to *dance away the Night* on this (carmine) 'ball' that is still spinning—

Nowadays, it's hard to know *what to do* with the "House" (except 'smash it', etc.) for the benefit of (WHO?)—once you got it up in the air—what to make of it, *see* in it *(see as)* except DOOM?

* * *

In *Pick Up The House,* the 'two-worlds' (Life & Death) are 'co-materially' / concurrently kept spinning—very like our present day, you may note!—except inhabiting the place more, conceptually smarter & warmer—'solid' / 'abstract', with the ancient human (seeing-the-whole-place) *dignity* & skeptical tolerance / loving fairness that lives & *tries* in the (extremely *'civilized')* writing of D.H. Lawrence—

TEXT

'twould act, thence sing, the *'true'* progress of the event

* * *

What's the *'structural'* reason for the existence of the 'local' time in the work, as its 'ground' / 'bass' or 'cello', etc. ('Necessity')—when any *one* could be 'anything' (given 'funds' & 'training' & 'the right manager', apparently)?—I *hope* it's not *just* the force of a 'stern' local goddess!!

* * *

(Quote "Question" & "How It Works" on opposite sides of same page (or two facing pp's), as p. 48 & 49, in *PUTH)*

* * *

Do intensive reading of "Valid" (p. 50), showing its various angles & 'meanings' (viewed 'sociologically')—how the 'who's speaking', e.g., can be inhabited by several persons (Anselm, Mexican 'character' who's crossed the border successfully & obtained *"pasaporte"* now prides himself on his superiority over his (2) 'brothers', gringo who 'converts' to (self-deprecating) sympathy for downtrodden from scenic hillside, etc.)—how such "an ensemble of texts" *can* be "(t)he culture of a people" (p. 51)—

—ROBERT GRENIER

RECENT READING

Like most writers I read new and older books together, often relative to my own research projects. What follows is a very heterogeneous list of recent books (some of which I've only glanced at; and I have not repeated books on Jed Rasula's list) and slightly older ones that I've read with interest over the past six months.

Re. Upper Paleolithic research (an ongoing project over the past decade): Hans Peter Duerr's *Dreamtime (Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization)* (Blackwell, 1987) is packed with up-to-date information on the flights, potions, and intentions of the shamans and witches who cross back and forth between boundaries. Duerr, a kind of scholar-Castaneda, provides a well-written (and translated, by Felicitas Goodman) 139 page text, accompanied by 231 pages of footnotes, and an 86 page bibliography. The book is best read by having two copies, open side by side, so one can shuttle back and forth between text and notes. While in the Dordogne this June, I picked up a copy of Lya Dams' *Les Peintures Rupestres du Levant Espagnol* (Paris, Picard, 1984), which apparently is the first illustrated survey of decorated Spanish rock shelters, over 200 of which have been discovered with nearly 8000 paintings. Robert McCully's *Jung and Rorschach* (Spring, 1987) applies Jungian ideas to Rorschach's plates by examining Upper Paleolithic images and also includes an appendix on Adolf Eichmann's Rorschach protocol.

Wolfgang Giegerich's essay, "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God" (Spring Annual, 1985) led me to James Hillman's "Wars, Arms, Rams, Mars: On the Love of War" *(Facing Apocalypse,* Spring, 1987), which led me to Richard Rhodes' *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (Simon and Schuster, 1986), a well-written history of the development of the bomb, which is also a chronicle of the development of physics in the first half of the century. Here is Rhodes' description of the first explosion, at Trinity, July 16, 1945:

> Time: 0529:45. The firing circuit closed; the X-unit discharged; detonators at thirty-two detonation points simultaneously fire; they ignited the outer lens shells of Composition B; the detonation waves separately bulged, encountered inclusions of Baratol, slowed, curved, turned inside out, merged to a common inward-driving sphere; the spherical detonation wave crossed into the second shell of solid fast Composition B and accelerated; hit the wall of dense uranium tamper and became a shock wave and squeezed, liquefying, moving through; hit the nickel plating of the plutonium core and squeezed, the small sphere

> shrinking, collapsing into itself, becoming an eyeball; the shock wave reaching the tiny initiator at the center and swirling through its designed irregularities to mix its beryllium and polonium; polonium alphas kicking neutrons free from scant atoms to beryllium: one, two, seven, nine, hardly more neutrons drilling into the surrounding plutonium to start the chain reaction. Then fission multiplying its prodigious energy release through eighty generations in millionths of a second, tens of millions of degrees, millions of pounds of pressure. Before the radiation leaked away, conditions within the eyeball briefly resembled the state of the universe moments after its first primordial explosion.

While I am uncomfortable with the ramifications of her argument, I found Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography (Men Possessing Women)* (A Perigee Book, 1981) compelling and powerfully written; Dworkin is capable of a muscular, fugal prose that lifts its argument like laminated layers before the reader's eyes. And although I enjoyed Barbara G. Walker's *The Skeptical Feminist* (Harper & Row, 1987), especially the chapter "Kali Ma," I found it a much lesser work than her monumental *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (Harper & Row, 1983), which is the first encyclopedia I have read straight through, at "thriller" pitch. Recalling her information-packed pages on "menstruation," reminds me that Grove Press is doing an American edition of Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove's *The Wise Wound (Myths, Realities, and Meanings of Menstruation)* this fall. This wonderful book first appeared in England in 1978 and has been more or less unavailable for the past several years.

Many *Sulfur* readers are familiar with Charles Olson's *Letters for Origin,* published in 1969, which contains an edited but representative portion of his letters to Cid Corman, from 1950 to 1956. Now we have Volume 1 of *Charles Olson & Cid Corman: The Complete Correspondence,* 1950–1964 (National Poetry Foundation, 1987), edited and annotated by George Evans. It is a terrific correspondence, as engaging as the Olson/Dahlberg correspondence (which we ran in *Sulfurs* #1–3), but with Olson in the role of mentor this time roaring at young Cid Corman, as, partially via Olson's vision of culture, Corman edits the first series of *origin* magazine.

Sulfur readers who enjoyed the sections of Clark Coolidge's "Book of During" (in numbers 14, 16, and 17), will probably also admire *Mesh* (In Camera, 1988), the improvisational movement of which is, like the earlier prose work, solidly soldered to Eros. The two poems of August Kleinzahler in *Sulfur* #20 are collected in a handsome little book, *On Johnny's Time* (Pig Press, Durham, England, 1988), with a cover photo by

Ben Watkins (whose work appeared in our #22). Gustaf Sobin's *Voyaging Portraits* (New Directions, 1988) seems to me to be his finest collection; Sobin's word placement, visually and aurally, is masterful, and for those interested in reading about his work, Paul Christensen has published two first-rate essays on Sobin in *Parnassus* #14 and *Temblor* #7. There is at last a new translation of Lorca's *Poet in New York* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), by Greg Simon and Steven F. White, and while it is not encumbered with rhetorical improvisation, as was Ben Bellit's earlier version, it still is not the version that many of us have hoped would be done. The opening line of the opening poem—"Cut down by the sky" for "Asesinado por el cielo"—carries in nucleus the timidity and off-centeredness of the translation. I cannot evaluate the quality of the translations in regard to Janos Pilinszky's *Crater* (London, Anvil Press, 1978) or Tomaž Šalamun's *Selected Poems* (Ecco Press, 1988), but I am thinking that *Sulfur* readers who were engaged by our Hungarian section in #21 would find both Pilinszky (a Hungarian, who died in the late 1970s) and Šalamun (a Yugoslavian, very much alive) of interest. Pilinszky, translated by Peter Jay, is bone dry but with the odd fits of black humor that are part of the uniqueness of Slavic imagination; Šalamun, translated by a number of people but mainly by Charles Simic, is superficially the opposite of Pilinszky—but his wryness and sensual humor is larded, as it were, with bleakness and desperation.

Lastly, I heartily recommend *A Kayak Full of Ghosts* (Capra, 1987), Eskimo tales gathered and retold by Lawrence Millman, whose little introduction is a gem. Gruesome, beautiful, violent and scatological, these tales propose, in effect, an Eskimo Grotesque. Here is "Arviaq and the Worm:"

> There was once a woman named Arviaq who could not get with child. Her husband was a short little man with no strength in his loins. He told Arviaq: "If you want to be a mother, go find yourself a worm. They're much nicer than children, anyway." And so Arviaq found a worm and placed it against her breast as though it were a little child. She nursed it until she ran out of milk and then she nursed it under her armpits. Soon the worm began to grow large. And the larger it grew, the thinner Arviaq became. All her blood was going into her offspring. And all her love, too—often she would spend the whole day at home, fondling and kissing the worm. At last it was large enough to crawl around the village. This did not make people very happy, because it had sharp teeth and a rather unpleasant disposition. One day the headman and a few others took their

knives to it. Spurts of blood as high as a house shot up from its body and the worm shrivelled back to its original size. Poor Arviaq watched all of this and afterwards beat her head against a rock, crying: "My dear little child, my dear little child."

Told by Ib Brodersen, seal hunter,
Angmagssalik, East Greenland.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

"AND THE MIND GO FORTH TO THE END OF THE WORLD": JOHN CLARKE. *FROM FEATHERS TO IRON.* A Concourse of World Poetics. Bolinas, CA, Tombouctou/Convivio, 1987

Don't ask him to define his terms. If the motion be mazy, enjoy it. Let be the rhetoric of such involution its own reward. *From Feathers to Iron* is, as Kenneth Irby said, "an extraordinarily rich and subtle poetics of world attention," a slippery, loose goose anatomy not a logical Summa. Clarke's topics are worded as: "The Disappearance of Ordering Intervention" ("Crete and the Regulation of Perfective Action"); "Manifests of Momentary Irregular Incursion" ("European Constitution 1500 B.C.—1500 A.D."); "The Limits of Antithetical Systemic Representation" ("American Marvels Since"); "The Strengthening Method of World Completion" ("Eradication of Monotony"); and an Excursus on "Residue as Residence." These are the hooks on which is hung this web of many colors, many paths. The argument is the implications, the implicate order, and like Hegel's philosophic labyrinth the book may be entered anywhere.

"If a poet comprehends his work, brings that comprehension to his work, and adds that comprehension to his work, that's an ordering intervention," Clarke says, and poetic comprehension in its aeonic act, how can the *person* now eradicate monotony in his/her completion of a world ("picture" he doesn't say) that gives strength to living, that's what this book is all about. But don't put it simply, for that's to lose it.

The book, more feathery than ironic, is an amazing amalgam of "lectures" (dialogues, like Plato's, where there is no doubt who's master,

no matter how seamlessly the "audience" voice is woven into "Clarke's" text), referential notes, which flow with the "text" and do more than substantiate it, and a whole book of Clarke's poems, the sonnets previously published as *The End of This Side,* which are incorporated and shed their own fiercely concentrated light on what is going on around them.

In spite of its thrust to present itself as a world-encompassing poetics, Clarke drawing upon a farflung variety of mythological and historical sources, African (not only Dogon) cosmology, Sumerian, Egyptian, Indian, Amerindian, "prehistoric" evidences, *From Feathers to Iron,* in its main, stays as Eurocentric history of consciousness, beginning from Mediterranean basin action, later extending to New World. (There is a notable lack of reference to Chinese or Tibetan material, or to Buddhist writings.) A friend called the book a "Blakeification of Olson." It's described on the cover as "a faithful application of the encyclopaedic propositions of Novalis" (it isn't, not that it should be). Certainly Novalis (the *Encyclopaedia,* Karl Siegler's translation of Book IX in ARCHAI No. 1), Olson, and Blake are Clarke's principal wells of inspiration. But there's also much, much more, listed in the approximately 85 pages of small-print notes, Lawrence, Melville, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and on and on. Among the books most heavily utilized by Clarke are *Hamlet's Mill, Shiva and Dionysius, Number and Time, Conversations with Ogotêmmeli, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital.* Other writings, by Corbin, Kerenyi, Jung, Eliade, Wittgenstein, Peirce, Bateson, Rorty, are ingredients in the olla.

(No substantial reference to any works in a sociological critical tradition: Marx, Veblen, Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, Guy Debord, Baudrillard, nor to Nietzsche or Bataille. Brief references to Deleuze and Lyotard are slighting.)

My brief notice here of an important and singular achievement is only a finger post, not an accounting. *From Feathers to Iron* (the title refers to a passage in a Keats letter) is a book to be read and reread, underlined, lived with. It won't do to take it out of a library, extract a few passages for one's notebooks. Its dazzle may at first be blinding, an uncomfortable sensation, but the brilliance, on rereading, becomes supportable. No matter how much of it *derives* (and see Robert Duncan's attentions to what it means to be derivative) from Novalis, Blake, Olson, Blake-Olson, it is itself a novel incursion as well as repercussion. At the least an irritant, a stimulant, it also nourishes. A spring that won't be exhausted for a long time. *Lege et relege,* the alchemists say, and "One book opens another."

—GERRIT LANSING

After spending the night in a snow cave dug near Carson Pass, I read James Clifford's provocative "Snow" piece in *Sulfur* 21 & concur with much of it. A vulnerable point in the "Many Eskimo words for snow" example is indeed the word "word," which is ill-applied to some of the world's other language families. Given the slipperiness in comparing words, Martin* turns (& Clifford follows) to roots. (p 419) Why should the roots be privileged over other grammatical expressions? "Root," "stem," "suffix," "phrase," & "sentence" all suffer a similar fate as "words." Linguists search for irreducible units of meaning in roots, morphemes & monolexemes, but this leads one far from the semantic contexts of actual speech. It is fascinating to examine the cognitive categories—the significant perceptual distinctions—that isolate aspects of the environmental flux in all the varied means by which they come to verbal articulation. Why cling to the notion that "radical aesthetic & epistemological implications" are only to be found in the roots & abandon the example? The lexemic abundance evident in living speech forms proves more interesting than counting "roots."

The roots of words do not occur in a vacuum. No language has developed a vocabulary independent of grammar or context. The smaller the number of initial stems a language has, the greater will be the number of distinctions created by its formal elements. Boas, after noting that Eskimo languages have a high proportion of modifying elements to initial stems, says: "When the number of modifying elements becomes exceedingly large, we may well doubt which of the two is the modifier and which the modified, and the determination finally becomes entirely arbitrary." (p 31) An Eskimo suffix, unable to function as an independent grammatical unit, is lexically as important as the stem, which often cannot function alone either. This is not at all like English compound nouns where two independent elements are often joined. "Snowball" & "snowfort" (& their presumed correspondence to Eskimo forms) are gratuitous examples since they don't refer to fine perceptions of snow *conditions*. The example is drawn from some interrelated, highly developed languages as they were *spoken* in the 19th & 20th centuries. We need to know in what dialect Boas found the four stems *(aput, qana, piqsirpoq, qimsuq)*, what suffixes are used with them, and how these terms actually occur in daily speech. The number of combinations may very well be incalculable in theory, but in practice I'm sure they're quite finite.

I'm puzzled that Clifford doesn't question Martin's assertion: "There's no reason to posit more than two distinct *roots* that can be properly said to refer to snow itself (and not for example to drifts, ice, storms or moisture) in any Eskimo language." (p 422) I'd suggest her attitude is the

* See source list at the end of this article.

ethnocentric product of everyday English usage & of a modern, typically marginal experience of snow conditions. Just because modern minds may not find blowing, drifting, or wet snow important to distinguish is no reason to dismiss indigenous terms for them. The forms of "snow itself" are temporary, in a continual process of change as it falls through the air & is blown about on the ground, as the snowpack layers accumulate & transform the crystal structures, in the surface's daily melt/freeze cycle, until it finally turns to stream water or glacial ice. Snow & ice may seem simple enough to distinguish, but it can be a hard line to draw in the snowpack. Vocabularies have developed that try to pick out some of the diverse conditions of this dynamic process colloquially referred to as "snow." Martin would simply exclude those terms for phenomena *she* doesn't recognize as being significant.

Such distinctions arise from a *living* situation. I'm not familiar with such terms or their use in Eskimo dialects, but the Koyukon of northwest Alaska may provide some insight. They are Athabaskans whose language is wholly unrelated to Eskimo-Aleut, but who must contend with a similar boreal environment. Nelson lists 16 Koyukon terms for "snow" (pp 262–3)

> *tseetł* or *noodaagha:* snow
> *yołyił taałts'iyh:* blowing snow
> *łiyh:* granular snow beneath the surface
> *hooł tinh:* earliest crusted snow in spring
> *tseetł dokk'aats'in':* snow cornice on a mountain
> *duhnooyh:* snow caught on tree branches
> *noodzaah:* slushy snow on the ground
> *nahooł tinh:* snow thawed previously & then frozen
> *daałts'iyh:* snow drifted over a steep bank, making it steeper
> *tseeł koodła:* fluffy or powder snow
> *ał tseeyh dona:* heavy drifting snow
> *noodaagha:* snow on the ground
> *tseetł nikoh:* deep snow
> *ał yot:* falling snow
> *tseeytł tł 'ina':* hard drifted snow
> *hogadokłł ggał:* thinly crusted snow

These are essential terms for a people who live in & travel over snowy terrain for 7 months every year. What I find interesting isn't that Koyukon has x-many roots for snow, but that the language developed a rich vocabulary (according to the logic of *its* grammar) to recognize important conditions in the environment. The warm-clime Aztecs have but one

"basic word" for cold, ice & snow (Whorf, p 216)—a degree of abstraction few English speaking people would tolerate!

Koyukon culture leads the language to distinctions of another sort much harder for western minds to seriously comprehend. Consolidated, sub-surface granular snow *(łtyh)*, which has a high water content, is taboo for Koyukon boys "who will become slow and clumsy if they drink it." Instead they gather & melt fluffy powder *(tseeł koodła)* which may be as much as 90% air & undoubtedly takes more time & fuel to melt. Both are considered too heavy for pregnant women, who must collect the lightest powder from tree branches *(duhnooyh)*. (Nelson, p 43) That should be plenty "exotic" for most of us!—essential distinctions of Koyukon life, unlikely to be make by the Alpine Meadows ski patrol worried about avalanche conditions.

As the international community of mountaineers, back-country skiers, & snow scientists have ventured into the white wilderness, they've assembled a jargon to suit their needs. Unconsolidated powder, temperature-gradient snow (sugar snow), surface hoar, depth hoar, crevasse hoar, wind slab (hard & soft), sastrugi, cornices, firn or névé, corn snow, rotten snow, sun crust, melt-water crust, wind crust, ice crust, suncups, nieve penitentes, rime, verglas, & firnspiegel are among the phenomena mountaineering polyglot isolates from the infinite variations nature displays. (Peters, Ch 22) One's *łłfe* may depend on such an ability. Mt. Shasta is just a snow covered volcano to the tourist at its base.

The Koyukon & mountaineering vocabularies arise from a human presence in close contact with the environment & try to register precise perceptions in language. There are some parallels in the naming of conditions which affect ease & safety in travel. Part of the example's power depends upon an acceptance of snow as a uniform item English has but one word for. Its force is somewhat diminished when snow is recognized as being in a state of constant flux. The issue isn't that Koyukon or Eskimos perceive things we can't, or vice versa, but that the "world's" different languages access may be cast in a different light. The same "objective" phenomenon—say a foot of fresh powder—is seen as a water source to a Koyukon youth, a potential danger to an avalanche specialist, and a source of sheer delight to a skier. Such divergent "worlds" may be partly perceptual or cognitive, partly semantic. In a live context, Native American languages display a powerful relation to the natural environment whose contours we can barely grasp. While the integrity of indigenous cultures needs to be continually asserted, the us/them drawing of cultural differences can sometimes obscure what binds us in our humanity.

—CHARLES SMITH

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INSIDE THE OUTSIDE: New British Poetry*

The publication this September of *The New British Poetry, 1968–1988*, nine months on from Carcanet's anthology, *A Various Art*, is an important milestone. Or perhaps it's the marker of a crossroads: a point of convergence and divergence. The publisher is Grafton Books, a division of Collins, whose paperback imprint, Paladin, kicked off its poetry list last year with John Ashbery's *Selected Poems*. If the title leads mainstream poetry readers to expect such familiar names as Seamus Heaney or Craig Raine they are likely to be disappointed. On the other hand, there will be those readers who will recognize echoes of *The New American Poetry*, the seminal anthology edited by Donald Allen and published in 1960 by Grove Press. Here is a much better clue as to the book's contents.

Most readers will know that the Donald Allen anthology's purpose was to put on the map those American poets emerging in the '50s and

* *The New British Poetry 1968–1988* (Paladin, 1988) edited by Gillian Allnutt, Fred D'Aguiar, Ken Edwards and Eric Mottram. *A Various Art* (Carcanet, 1987, to be published in paperback by Paladin) edited by Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville.

following the poetry of Pound, William Carlos Williams and Zukofsky among others; poets who clustered in San Francisco, Black Mountain and New York City, and whom Allen described as "our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement. . .closely allied to modern jazz and abstract expressionist painting." The oldest of Allen's 44 poets was Charles Olson, the youngest David Meltzer. In between were poets who have since become familiar, even venerated names: Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Denise Levertov.

So why should a British poetry anthology in 1988 conjure up such ghosts of the past? The answer has to be complicated. One part of it might be that the poetry in this volume stands in the same relationship to "establishment" poetry as that in the Allen anthology does to the American academic verse of its day: a challenge or a reproach. Another part of the answer would have to take into account the special affinity between many of the British poets included and the Americans. But care is needed with this; for the Paladin book is by no means an anthology of "American influenced" poets. Rather, it encompasses a range of poetics formed out of openness to the literatures being made in the 20th century beyond these islands: in America, Europe and, increasingly, the Third World. Openness, too, to the full spectrum of human striving, in politics, social protest, film-making, painting, music both "art" and popular, dance and performance work. Such work, while respectful of its heterogeneous past, is hardly concerned at all with placing itself within the narrowly defined canon of an "English Literature."

*

By some accounts there is a poetry boom in Britain. Enthusiasts for this trend cite the popularity of live poetry readings and the proliferation of poetry competitions.

The health of the live reading may be a welcome sign that poetry will no longer be content to remain on the page and on the shelf; that it now infiltrates real life. I don't know: it could equally be a sign that it has devolved into instant and forgettable entertainment, betokening a consumerist relationship with its audience that wipes out evidence of production; and that this is its special resonance with the mood of the '80s.

Of the significance of competition mania I am more certain. There are now, it seems, scores of competitions, offering top prizes between £50 and £5,000 (the biggest, the Arvon Foundation International Poetry Competition). Most follow the same pattern: an entrance fee is charged per poem, and a panel of well-established poets judges the flood that ensues (Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney judged the Arvon competition last year). It's big business, and I suppose it provides much needed

employment. What I would like to suggest, however, is that poetry competitions, in imposing their necessary limitations on the work that's offered, reinforce the worst features of the poetry that is most venerated in these islands.

What are these? Briefly: that poetry should function chiefly as a validation of personal experience (hence, elegiac evocations of first sexual encounters or the deaths of parents, grandparents, pets—we can't all have the exciting lifestyle of a James Fenton, but we do what we can); that language should be prosaic, journalistic, the syntax not subjected to torque or fragmentation; that, nevertheless, extravagant metaphors or similes should be deployed at regular intervals; that long poems are to be frowned upon unless one is a very venerable poet; that metrics should be kept in check.

Many of these features are those cultivated by the magazine verse to be found in weekly journals of all political persuasions (though *New Statesman & Society* appears to have abandoned the field) and of which the competition poem can be considered a sub-genre.

In turn—and this brings us back to the question of the canon—such versifying is the degenerative offspring of the poetry that was constructed as specifically "English" in the 1950s. In his essay "Thrills and frills: poetry as figures of empirical lyricism" in *Society and Literature 1945–1970* (Methuen 1983), Andrew Crozier identifies at least two conflicting models: The Movement (Larkin, Amis, Wain, et al.), and the poetry derived from the American "confessional" model, championed by A. Alvarez.

The work represented in *The New British Poetry* and *A Various Art* (Crozier is a co-editor of the latter) also has roots in the '50s and '60s. Of the two anthologies, *A Various Art* is the more narrowly based but also the more detailed exploration of its chosen field. The book collects some of the best work of an important group of poets who, in the late '60s, started to challenge the assumptions embedded in the Movement/Alvarez paradigms. Deriving their inspiration from European (chiefly French or German) practice, and crucially, from Charles Olson's open-field projectivism as well as from other American poets such as Ashbery, Frank O'Hara and Jack Spicer, their project appears in retrospect to have been the creation of an alternative, broader vision of an English poetics. Eldest among the book's contributors is Roy Fisher, whose stunning work of the '50s and '60s has since won respectability between the covers of Oxford University Press editions. But the real mentor is J.H. Prynne, a Cambridge don, once a collaborator with Olson, whose poetry is a unique extended dissonance of lyrical pessimism and mordant pastiches of scientific, technical and commercial discourses, interspersed with unexpected lightning flashes of the vernacular:

Again
"it has not escaped our notice" that, by
song & dance, men cannot live or move out
in the midst of plenty. We munch and munch
along planned parenthood, getting and spending
on the same credit card. False tedium
bids up each braggart by his plea bargain,
to set the motif as if vicious, viz., *takes*
the getting out of wanting, but in fact
the *Kung* out of *Fu;* the final arts are martial.

("News of Warring Clans" in *A Various Art)*

While these poets were beginning to publish in Cambridge and elsewhere, another group had formed around Eric Mottram in London. Mottram was in charge of the Poetry Society's organ *Poetry Review* in the early 1970s, a time when poets formed a majority on the governing body of the Society. Analyst of American popular culture, Pound scholar and poet himself, it was as a teacher that he was and remains most influential. (The film-maker Derek Jarman pays tribute to him in his autobiography *Dancing Ledge*—one of many to be so influenced.)

Mottram proceeded to startle the Society's more encrusted adherents by importing American modernists into the *Review,* alongside Londoners Allen Fisher, Bill Griffiths and the sound poet Bob Cobbing, many of the "Cambridge" group, and poets who didn't particularly belong to either group, such as the Newcastle poets Barry MacSweeney and Tom Pickard (who had been instrumental in reviving interest in Basil Bunting), Tom Raworth, Lee Harwood and Gael Turnbull.

Despite the apparent iconoclasm the best of the work, paradoxically, reveals older antecedents than that of the established canon it challenges. Bill Griffiths, for example, is influenced by Anglo-Saxon and other early poetries, yet his wit is contemporary:

He went to Gaius and explained it all and told

'Maybe it was the time of year: early autumn, when in
North Sea it all seems gross, clumped from the coops of
rope out

She sat and frowned (with me) in the bar.

The channel guy words on weather.

Sat, rubbed my boots on the table-struts till we
went.

And the guy's buckle under his navel
Glared into
the edges of my eyes

("Compass Poem," *The New British Poetry)*

If obscurity is the charge (as tiresomely often it is), consider the straight-talking lightness of touch of John James, included in both anthologies, comparable to O'Hara at his best:

I like to dance so much & a kind of mania
conspicuously lures me on to your pointed hairless chest
but since here I am engrossed in the reading
of this here copy of *Sounds* & I am not Mechthild
only the punter with his meat on fire
outside the station in the fog I will swear
never to have seen you before in my life
when the Old Bill cruise by on their talking machines

("Craven Images," *A Various Art)*

These poets should by now all be much better known. Perhaps the publication of *The New British Poetry* will continue the job begun by *A Various Art* to remedy this. They were more than a breath of fresh air in English poetry; they were a hurricane, blowing flat all pre-conceived notions of the poem. (Of the 17 poets in *A Various Art,* eight are also included in the sections of *The New British Poetry* edited by Eric Mottram and myself, which together constitute half that book—there are in total over 80 poets between its covers.)

The wilful neglect of the media and the universities, and the active hostility of the Arts Council (who in 1977 were prepared to withdraw funding and close the Poetry Society down, rather than allow it to continue under the charge of the poets) must share the blame for the fact that many of these poets have been scarcely known until now even to those who claim an interest in poetry. In an article in the New York *Village Voice* last year the British poet John Ash laid into the "Martian cleverness" of Craig Raine, Andrew Motion, James Fenton and others ("Thatcherdom is getting the poetry it deserves"), yet could think of nothing to put in their place but vague hope: ". . .the possibility always remains that we may someday see the emergence of a younger generation of poets who might take as their starting point the excellent and adventurous work of

W.S. Graham and Roy Fisher." ("Drool Britannia," *Village Voice,* February, 1987.) Someday? Where has this man been?

But what of this younger generation of poets? They are, curiously, both more and less restricted in the scope of what's achievable than their immediate predecessors.

Let me explain. On the one hand, the climate of the '80s is more inimicable to "difficult" poetry than ever: bookshops disdain small press products, the media are obsessed with fashion, money and marketing, while nostalgia and postmodernism push back "making it new." On the other hand, the young British poet no longer has to look to the Continent or America for a way out of stifling provincialism. There is an astonishing range of home grown British poetry now that does connect with our lives, that makes sense in the same way that rock 'n' roll made sense. There is, with it, a flourishing tradition of independent publishing, something that was almost unthinkable in the 1950s.

Curiously, the fact that none of the previous generation have made it big (or at least onto creative writing syllabuses, in the American way) has fomented a sense of solidarity and continuity among the younger poets. The iconoclasm of the American "language poets" identified by Clayton Eshleman in *Margin* 5 is at least in part a reaction *against* the poetry of their mentors: against Olson's projectivism, or Ginsberg's "breath" ("a break within a tradition in the name of its own higher values" in Ron Silliman's apt phrase). There is no such discontinuity apparent in the work of the younger British poets when compared with those whose work peaked in the '70s.

The poetry of Kelvin Corcoran, for instance, owes much to Tom Raworth in its rapid succession of images:

> trust the occasional radar through the dark,
> the cold wheel cash holds together
> it is a plot against the chickens of America
> the wealth rolls off the Atlantic in neat symbols;
> one dark raindrop, a semicircle of sunrays,
> a pigeon wings it on hard blue March,
> your money or your money and then
> Spring comes with obscene practices in the sky
> from every part of the ranch
> the boys came to meet the new boss,
> the man of style I float my legs
> in the bath of this weather.

("A Slogan Will not Suffice," *The New British Poetry)*

Even where it most appears to differ (its greater political explicitness) judgement must be tempered by the fact that Raworth too has lately begun to include more overt politics in his work; so that the difference may be more one of the exigencies and desperation of the age we live in now than of poetical temperament.

Maggie O'Sullivan's work is highly fragmented and aleatory, generated out of a deliquescent and startlingly centreless language, yet her enthusiasms for Barry MacSweeney and Basil Bunting are unswerving:

The Amber
bidden belly amidst
cry
dustling,

peril/pebble
endless
reed, the day w/persimmon

Flex

raw, woollen hungering.

("Lottery & Requiem" for Basil Bunting,
The New British Poetry)

Perhaps the most significant influence on the younger poets of the '80s is that of Allen Fisher. A Londoner who once earned his living as a dustbin salesman, Fisher made his mark as a member of the Fluxus conceptual art group a few years ago, and is also a painter. But it is as a poet that he is best known. His early work drew heavily on Olson, yet to understand his long multi-book poem *place* only as an instance of English field-composition is to misunderstand it. Certainly his current phase of work, beginning with *Brixton Fractals* (Aloes Books, 1985) is something else, a transformation of street-speak and the discoveries of the laboratory within the purlieu of Blake's London:

A woman came down the walkway
lost in transport
exploded her language at a kid
with a stick
restrained by another who breaks
the rod across his leg,
We've had enough, got it! We've had enough!

One hour later someone has dragged
a felled lime onto the walkway
Its leaves make a green path
A pack of dogs surround this, yelp
out of phase. Down the High Road
a new siren on a police weapon
fills the walkway
It leaves a burnt fizz overhead
grooves the mud plane on the roof.
Next door fits an extension to his aerial
changes tone of CB interference
in loudspeakers makes audible
amplified pulses from a geranium
in a Faraday cage. A poster snaps the letterbox,
Come to Paradise in Brixton's Coldharbour.

("Birdland," *The New British Poetry)*

Fisher's work can be related to that of Prynne, in that both start from Olson, and in the work of both there is a use of technical discourses strongly torqued by contemporary British demotic. Both poets make their meaning out of the generosity of their own language structures; they do not lean on metaphors; they respect the root past in finding the unknown.

But if this work is a useful pointer for British poetry it points to *a* way, not *the* way. As in the United States, there is no longer a simple polarity: academic and experimental, straight and Beat. I have said nothing of the other half of *The New British Poetry:* the section of vigorous Black British poetry (edited by Fred D'Aguiar) and that of poetry written by and primarily for women (or "Quote Feminist Unquote" as its editor Gillian Allnutt has called it). The compartmentalizing has been criticized. I like to think the compartments are necessary but temporary structures. Poetry today functions within a set of interlocking paradigms, not a fixed canon. All poetry, I suspect, speaks first from and to a community of readers. Yet communities are not self-contained, and it is through this fact that the coherence of the best shines beyond. The distinction between inside and outside is no longer meaningful.

June 1988

—KEN EDWARDS

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

JOHN DOLAN'S first volume of poems, *Slave,* was recently published by Occident Press in Berkeley. GERRIT LANSING, the author of *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward,* lives in Gloucester, Massachusetts. GEORGE EVANS has edited and annotated *Charles Olson and Cid Corman: The Complete Correspondence 1950–1964* (National Poetry Foundation, Orono, Maine), the first of two volumes which has recently appeared. *Sulfur* first published ANTHONY ROBBINS' poetry in #3. These poems are from his unpublished collection, "Not the Poised Moon." AARON SHURIN, who lives in San Francisco, is the author of *The Graces.* JOHN YAU'S selected poems "Radiant Silhouette," will be published by Black Sparrow Press in 1989. Other poems by TOM MANDEL appeared in *Sulfur* #20. RAE ARMANTROUT'S most recent book is *Precedence* (Burning Deck); "Necromance" is forthcoming from Sun and Moon. MAXINE HONG KINGSTON is the author of *The Woman Warrior* (1975) and *China Men* (1980). The excerpt printed here is from *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book,* to be published by Knopf in 1989. AUGUST KLEINZAHLER'S "Earthquake Weather" will be published by Moyer Bell Ltd. in March, 1989. JEROME ROTHENBERG'S poem is from his ongoing sequence, "Khurban," sections of which have appeared in *Sulfur* #21 and *Temblor* #7. ANNA RABINOWITZ is working on an MFA in Poetry at Columbia University. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN'S *Antiphonal Swing: Selected Prose 1962–1987* (McPherson & Co., Kingston, NY) and *Conductors of the Pit: Major Works by Rimbaud, Vallejo, Césaire, Artaud and Holan* (Paragon House, NYC) have recently appeared. BENJAMIN HOLLANDER, whose work has appeared in *ACTS, Sulfur, Temblor* and *Conjunctions,* is the editor of *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France* (*ACTS* 8/9, 1988). DONALD REVELL'S first collection of poetry, *From the Abandoned Cities,* was published by Harper & Row in 1983; his second, *The Gaza of Winter,* University of Georgia Press, appeared in the spring of 1988. BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER co-edits *House of K* in Berkeley. MICHAEL GIZZI'S poems are from a manuscript, "Continental Harmony," sections of which have also appeared in *O•blek.* KAREN KELLEY lives in NYC. ROBERT PODGURSKI lives in Boulder, and has recently completed "a collection of poems and automatic drawings heavily influenced by the Lovecraftian-Sumerian Mythos." ROBERT TURNEY,

who lives in East Lansing, Michigan, studied with Kesten Baum. A new translation of FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA'S *Poet in New York* has recently been published by Farrar Straus Giroux, NYC. Other work by MARJORIE WELISH has appeared in *Sulfurs* #12, 18 and 21. D.E. STEWARD'S "September," is a section from "Chroma," other parts of which have appeared in *Conjunctions* #11 and *Temblor* #8. JANET KAUFFMAN has published two collections of fiction, *Places In The World A Woman Could Walk*, and *Collaborators*. LEON GOLUB will show new paintings this fall at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NYC. JOEL LEWIS'S poetry and prose have appeared in *Caliban, Berkeley Poetry Review,* and *American Book Review*. MARJORIE PERLOFF'S most recent book is *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (University of Chicago Press, 1986); she teaches at Stanford University. A long poem by JED RASULA recently appeared in *Temblor* #7. WILLIAM C. BAMBERGER'S short story collection, *A Jealousy for Aesop,* appeared in 1988; a study of William Eastlake is forthcoming. He is the editor/publisher of Bamberger Books. ROBERT GRENIER, 47, legal proofreader and attendant for the palsied poet, Larry Eigner, lives in Berkeley. KEN EDWARDS is the editor of the British magazine, *Reality Studios*. His most recent book of poetry is *Intensive Care* (Pig Press, 1986); he lives in London.

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COVER: THORPE FEIDT / THE SACRED THEORY OF THE EARTH
(The Ambiguities 207–211, for Gerrit Lansing). 1987, acrylic on canvas, 39" x 61".

1989 issues of *Sulfur* are made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

SULFUR : imagination as an instrument
in change.
"Holy water — sulfur thedor"
By means of sulfur essential
changes take place.
When things stink, something
important is going on,
something *sulfuric* :
putrefaction
change in material life
oily, floating, light stuff.

Where is sulfur to be found?
(Jung Vol. 14)
motif factor in consciousness
The Push
—the principle of combustibility
—catches fire & explodes
without it, no fire.
If things aren't moving— lack of sulfur?

Hinders sublimations—
(for it is a compulsion,
a driver, doesn't want
to be deviated — seeks
its ongoing drive—)

the spirit that is innate
& drives it to change .

Kramer : 14th century . Where to be
found? In all substances,
metals, trees, herbs, animals,
stones . Where anything
flares up — an odor a color
There is an attraction —
sulfur — where desire appears.

Wherever the interest is— a devil
ready to catch fire.
lurking everywhere .
the desirousness of life.

Why do we need it?
An essential ingredient in the
goal of the work— the philosopher stone.

Compulsions enable movement .
We undervalue the desire . the urge.
thank god for compulsions —
tame them with precision
the green drive the Green Lion
has to be tamed .

The paws are cut off.

orexis = stretching out,
cutting off appetite —
not in Lion's heart but in its reach —

Who cuts the paws off? If "I" or
will does, it is sulfur vs. sulfur.

alternative : *the vesseling of the*
Lion = experiencing that
need fully (then the paws *fall off)*

[indulgence in the *need* rather
than focus on the *demand*.]

The *whitening* of the *sulfur*

*

Alchemy called sulfur the fat of the
earth — it gives
life & color to everything
There is an unctuous, oily, making
things possible, a flowing, in
sulfur. All things are on
fire — all things can
shine, all things are
anointed

sulfur boils
salt eats
acid bites

(baptism in oil
fat figure of the Buddha)

Crucial that sulfur be present
throughout the work. (otherwise
it is saturnian, dry — mercurial,
dry.)
Albertus Magnus : "first
boil sulfur in a strong acid for
a whole day"

[Notes taken by Clayton Eshleman
during James Hillman's two-day seminar
on Alchemy, Los Angeles, 1985]

JACKSON MAC LOW

60TH LIGHT POEM:

IN MEMORIAM ROBERT DUNCAN
8–9 OCTOBER 1988

"Radiation"'s ambiguous—*we're* ambivalent—
weighted toward horror—
: hardly hear "radiance"

Not *gemütlich* owl-light—*blinding* light—
evanescent light like ours—us—ah!
ugh!

Reflected light: tolerable light—
only the crazy look at the sun minutes—hours
no, it *don't* strengthen the eyes Mr. Yogi!

Dreamy dreamlight—refuge from *un*doing, *un*making light. . .
Northern Lights—hah!—swirling i'th'empyrean—yick!
we know what makes 'em tick!

Tock!
talk!
callous callous callous light careless light ach!

Cursed with a serious curse—oogh!—
a discombobulating videocameraman—
glowed like tungsten giving verse voice—oh!

Aurora borealis swooping i'th'bloody empyrean—hm?
i'th'ionosphere's E region—*ja?*—particle rain
from outer magnetosphere, mostly electrons—heh?

Seemed to be puttin' on a show for the hicks from Chicago
but Robert Frost *was* a fairybaiter—yuck!—
how did *he* know?

Northern Lights—*more* Northern Lights!
    them rays!
        all say oo! 'n' ah! seein' 'em slip 'n' slide

Took over the floor and gave voice—whew!
    flared every *which* way—anger—ecstasy—eros—
        the ol'-time sublime, eh Longinus?

'N' silly silly silliness, hebephrenic silliness, eh doc?
    muck! 'n' fuck! 'n' suck! 'n' fuck! 'n' muck!
        sudden sweetness, edge of oblivion, gone

Gone
    gone
        gone

Gone
    gone
        gone

Gone
    gone
        gone

Not the end—
    Grandma brought Hermes Trismegistus to the West
        in a covered wagon. . .

8–9 October 1988
New York

GARY SNYDER

A SET OF PATH POEMS

HOW POETRY COMES TO ME

It comes blundering over the
Boulders at night, it stays
Frightened outside the
Range of my campfire
I go to meet it at the
Edge of the light

OFF THE TRAIL

for Carole

We are free to find our own way
Over rocks—through the trees—
Where there are no trails. The ridge and the forest
Present themselves to our eyes and feet
Which decide for themselves
In their old learned wisdom of doing,
Where the wild will take us. We have
Been here before. It's more intimate somehow
Then walking the paths that lay out some route
That you stick to,
All paths are possible, many will work,
Being blocked is its own kind of pleasure,
Getting through is a joy, the side-trips
And detours show down logs and flowers,
The deer paths straight up, the squirrel tracks
Across, the outcroppings lead us on over.
Resting on treetrunks,
Stepping out on the bedrock, angling and eyeing
Both making choices—now parting our ways—
And later rejoin; I'm right, you're right,
We come out together. *Mattake,* "Pine Mushroom,"
Heaves at the base of a stump. The dense matted floor
Of Red Fir needles and twigs. This is wild!
We laugh, wild for sure,
Because no place is more than another,
All places total,
And our ankles, knees, shoulders &
Haunches know right where they are.
Recall how the *Dao De*
Jing puts it: the trail's not the way.
No path will get you there, we're off the trail,
You and I, and we chose it! Our trips out of doors
Through the years have been practice
For this ramble together,
Deep in the mountains
Side by side,
Over rocks, through the trees.

RIGHT IN THE TRAIL

Here it is, near the house,
A **big** pile, fat scats,
Studded with those deep red
Smooth-skinned manzanita berries,
Such a pile! Such droppings,
Awesome. And I saw how
The young girl in the story,
Had good cause to comment
On the bearscats she found while
Picking blueberries with her friends.
She laughed at them
Or maybe **with** them, jumped over them
(Bad luck!), and is reported
To have said "wide anus!"
To amuse or annoy the Big Brown Ones
Who are listening, of course.

They say the ladies
Have always gone berrying
And they all join together
To go out for the herring spawn,
Or to clean green salmon.
And that big set of lessons
On what bears really want,
Was brought back by the girl
Who made those comments:
She was taken on a year-long excursion
Back up in the mountains,
Through the tangled deadfalls,
Down into the den.
She had some pretty children by a
Young and handsome Bear.

Now I'm on the dirt
Looking at these scats
And I want to cry not knowing why
At the honor and the humor
Of coming on this sign

That is not found in books
Or transmitted in letters,
And is for women just as much as men,
A shining message for all species,
A glimpse at the Trace
of the Great One's passing,
With a peek into her whole wild system—
And what was going on last week,
(Mostly still manzanita)—

Dear Bear: do stay around. Be good.
And though I know
It won't help to say this,

Chew your food.

Kitkitdizze X.88

ON CLIMBING THE SIERRA MATTERHORN AGAIN AFTER THIRTY-ONE YEARS

Range after range of mountains
Year after year after year.
I am still in love.

on the summit, 4 X 40086

RON SILLIMAN

from "TONER"

Brucebook

igloo ice bucket used as lunch pail
                stare
checking out panty lines
through the rich knits
                notepad
conceived as contact sheet
see nouns as glossies

command mode
                small boy asks
where's my hair
                inner alarm rings
long before clock radio
's soothing whisper starts
cheap jeans bear loud stitching

wear low on the hips
shirt half tucked to reveal belly
                first orange light
hard against the hills
reflected in a million windows
        forced air hand dryer
next to

disemboweled towel dispenser
old orange cab
                ringed with grime
t-shirt as display ad bears logo
        to increase name recognition
goosebumps
on her thighs beneath miniskirt

on her way to high school
                tricolor
pom-pom juts from gym bag
cash for contras exceeds sum sought
shoe town
        black bird perched
atop tombstone twists

head stuck on song *here*
comes the night
                oh
here it comes
                yeah
kid on the A-train
looking for action

our infrastructure is old
and cannot be replaced
                man asleep

on bench built
for three
                is barely twenty
ornate midtown graveyard

how quickly graffiti style
degenerates
                coarse Kosher salt
in bright yellow box
two eggs turn opaque
                sizzling
atop smooth industrial griddle

rain on the river
blurs view of Jersey
red-grey brick sky
early to bed
                early to rise
work like a dog
                and advertise

still air makes mind sleepy
even in sunlit room
ceiling black with street soot
                in spite of
jammed windows
                siren yips
at intersection only

old Hasids
in dark coats
on a hot day
the young
appear the most foreign
suitcase full of diamonds
on 47th street

wise men fish here
but cannot find books
amid chaos
of intuited order
subjective
in negative sense only
phlegm of the personal

someone's cooking popcorn
and whole building knows it
while outside
jackhammers on Mott St.
vibrate teeth
bicycles on fire escape
high over brick courtyard

old wire shopping cart
turns to rust

on a rooftop
it's daytime
tie sheet-curtains into knots
the way flowers clutch at filtered light
now put answering machine on playback

imagine 50% more 9 oz. bonus size
life is really special
bright
as an all-night market
hum
in motor of big truck
over long arc of bridge

hands are as mind is
chapped
conversation is friction
the way voice shakes skull
nostrils produce
constant sinus mucous
pick to flick away

Jaws
p.o.v. shark
fence forms a windbreak
against which to lean
hummingbird to the fuchsia

shadow
that darts

curl fingers to shelter palm
thumb makes a clasp
violets in their purple bloom
hummingbird rises
like a copter
vertical
over pruned apple tree

slow a little, planet
people are sleeping
silver,
the train into work
slips into the earth
becomes
subway shining in the dark

good grief
is literally true
beautiful broker
appears depressed
tho on best dressed list
only modesty is false
how the wilt becomes the flower

I cry
to see the captains of poetry
dead at the wheel
exhaust hose spirals
up
into truck's cabin
incredibly clear afternoon

give 'em enough trope
hallelujah
bum again
a match in exscription
as literal
lights on
behind the drawn shade

lines mark the eyes' part
but i hear sounds
whistling in skull cavern
escalator rolls
steadily down
at checkers plead
don't king me

young blond red-faced man
features already wine-swollen
drums
a tune out on his hard plastic

attaché
fingering as if typing
seat on a crowded train

neptune society price list
something to consider
Eisenhower
learned not to convey ambition
blank slate of drive-in screen
collapsing
in dry weedy field

tiny flags on hill
simulate poppies
as possible art piece
offshore, by context
hidden in the head
bagel made of raisin bread
forms a base for cream cheese

tiny ducks
on the wide river
under the iron bridge
a collector
of aluminum cans
is tall and thin
peers into the trash receptacle

orange-footed mallard male
pecks at a finch
girl
shells peanuts before she eats 'em
this man's mismatched socks
match his
shirt and shorts

pass for power
quarterback's creed
well as the white-faced mime's
lollipop trees bagged in plastic
any rhythm defi(n)es sentiment
when will this pen
come to life

transit's glory is another story
false
white sun shimmers in the solid sky
passport photos
while U wait
bag lady in a football helmet
bus stalled on the steep hill

pulp mouth
point at which
Novocaine wears down
even this milkshake

tastes "warm"
vanilla
up against the new crown

blimp stalks the gray air
cloud heavy
a wet heat
is better than dry heaves
as ashen as the earth
poor retch
dog taught to fetch

and the salmon flower
is pink
but the fruit of the poor salmon
is caviar to eat
echoes
in the head's hollow heard
herds words into song

not the same as thought
thinking
but if to write is to listen
as to ride is to sit on
accelerator, break, wheel
it's the will is what
does not break

femme de la creme
                safety pin
closes up blouse
where top button should be—
rash beneath watchband
                white tennies
beneath long black skirt

old emphysemic wheezes at coffee bar
never use lemon in tea at home
                into her 40s
still see the girl
                wide-eyed
under that flesh
the one with the jelly center

                moisture gathers
on the outside
of the glass of ice water
while beside it that
of the tall vanilla shake
tho cool
        is dry

a thin white see-thru blouse
but with a cheap bra beneath
point at which heat
                erases

not just sense of decorum
but also
desire

banking district empty by dusk
puppy chained to the bag lady's cart
pull tag
ripped flag
lone dove amid these pigeons
muzak
seeping from highrise walls

line trash bags in a row beside boxes
jewelry shop's windows empty at night
red light pulses
index of caution
office interiors illumined within
oh loungers await
the airport bus

LET'S OVERPRAISE THE PAST
SO WE CAN BE DONE WITH IT
ILLEGIBLE
DAY-PLANNER NOTATION
PUCKER
TO SUCK ON
HAND-ROLLED CIGARETTE

BACK SIDE OF A STOP SIGN
BEFORE WHICH
DOUBLE-DECKER BUS
MATTED HAIR OF A STREET DRUNK
TATTOOS
RIPPLE OVER HANGING FLESH
BROKEN ESCALATOR BOARDED UP

I AM SPEAKING IN FRENCH
BROWN SHOES
BUT NOT A PAIR
BUTTONS JUST FOR POCKETS
HOT TEA
WON'T QUENCH THIRST
WATCH SITS ATOP THE TABLE

IS THAT MY BREATH
TREBLE
PITCHED TO THE MAX
THUS AIR ECHOES IN SKULL
BROUGHT ON BY SUBTITLES
ARTICLES
ARE PURE EXCESS

AXES
RENDER JUGGLING "REAL"
CROSS LEGS
TRIANGULATE LAP

GLOVED BULB IS MICROPHONE
SOCKS TO BUFFER FOOT IN SHOE
DUCT TAPE TAMES WIRE

ENORMOUS SOUND OF SCRATCHING EAR
EROTIC
AS A Q-TIP
GLAZED SUGAR BREAKS OFF DONUT
PIPE JUTS THROUGH SHEETROCK
HARD EDGE
OF AN OLD FOOT

HARSH DRY DAYS ON WHICH
POETRY IS AS PLEASANT
AS POKING A ROAD KILL
WITH A STICK
PEN POINT
DAMP IN THE WARM
ORGAN GOO

MUSIC DISORDERS PERCEPTION
UNTIL NEW FORM EMERGES
SQUIRREL'S AGE
BY THE RINGS
ON ITS TAIL
ROUGE OVER
LIGHT FRECKLES UPON PALE SKIN

SWEAT'S SALT
STAINS THE SHIRT
WHITE HOUSES DOT THE FAR HILLS
SPOTS INTERRUPTING
A THICKER GREEN
CLOUDY CENTER TO CUBE OF ICE
SOUND OF HAMMER PULLING NAIL

BUT THAT OF THE MANUAL TYPEWRITER
IS FORGOTTEN NOW
DEEP ROUND KEYS
TRAFFIC COPTER BUZZES PAST
BEES AT THE LIP
OF THE RED FUCHSIA
DOG YAPPING SO FAR AWAY

EACH DAY'S AN INVENTION
CONTINUITY BUT MEMORY'S FICTION
FIVE FINGERS
ON EVERY HAND
IS GENERAL PRINCIPLE
AUTOS STALLED
IN MIDTOWN JAM

PEN MOCKS THE PAGE
MIND AT DAWN DREAM-CROWDED
CROW ON THE LAMP POST
HAWKS

SUN
BREAKS IN THE PRISM
SCATTERS ON KITCHEN WALL

EROSION SCOOPS THE HILL
WEIGHT OF THE SATCHEL
CONCEALS
RED MARBLEIZED BOWLING BALL
PAR COURSE BENEATH BART TRACKS
WOMAN SORTS COUPONS
LIKE A POKER HAND

TEDDY RUXPIN REVERSIBLE
HAND PUPPETS NAMED
THIS
THAT
THE OTHER
TIE LIKE A PHALLUS HANGS LIMP
FROM OPEN BUTTONED-DOWN COLLAR

PAPER ROSE IN SILVER GOBLET
WOMAN PULLING ON CORK
TO CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE
WITH BARE TEETH
TELESCOPE
SQUINTED INTO
THE WRONG WAY

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO
SPEAK
TO DRIVER
WHILE TEXT IS
IN OPERATION
WAFFLE'S GRID ON TWO AXES
STRAWBERRIES TO THE NORTHEAST

SMALL PLANE LANDS IN RED SQUARE
DARK CLOUD OVER SKYLIGHT
ARCHITECT
BROWSES A CITY
BEACH
IS TRANSITIONAL
SAND FORMS THE MARGIN

EARRING WORN AT TOP OF EAR
IGNORE
THE IMPERATIVES
OF THIS TEXT
BENT PIPE
CURVES INTO FRAME OF CHAIR
HYPHEN IN ANN-MARGRET

PEOPLE DESPISE EXACTITUDE
FOR WHICH THERE IS NO GROUND
SECOND THOUGHT
LAST THOUGHT

ANKLES TEND TO BE REDDER
BLUE STOOL
IN WHITE BOWL

IN ADJECTIVES
VAGUENESS IS NOT
MYSTERY
CHINESE WORD
IS NOT LETTERING
PIGEONS PROWL THE MALL LOT
IN SERVICE CORRIDOR FIREMEN CRUNCH

REALISM =
WORDS IN SITU
ROOTS CROWDED IN TINY POT
AIRPLANE TACKED INTO SKY
PREPOSITIONS
PRIMITIVE VELCRO
ROADS CURVE IN "THE COUNTRY"

AND THEN WENT DOWN TO THE CARPORT
SET KEY
TO ICETRAY
FOURTH IN A FIVE TEAM LEAGUE
THE UMLAUT SHOULD BE CENTERED
IN
FROM U'S VERTICALS

SLICE
SAYS THE BLIMP
SOFTCORE
BY O-RINGS
HIDDEN IN THE MANIFOLD
EYE EYE EYE
WHAT FACE CAPITAL Y

MISTOOK THAT DOVE FOR AN OWL
YOU CAN HEAR
BALL-BEARINGS
INSIDE A SKATEBOARD
YOU CAN
TELL WHEN THE TRAIN'S IN
BY THE CROWD ALL AT ONCE

ON THE ESCALATOR DOWN
THEN
BY THE LOT'S END SUDDENLY
YOU'RE ALONE
HERE
MOON HIGH OVER THE SUPERMARKET
BEFORE THE IN-ROLLING FOG

CHEAP PLASTIC BRIEFCASE
CONFERENCE SOUVENIR
BEGINS
TO CRACK WITHIN A WEEK

SPECIAL CLIPPERS FOR TOENAILS
EMERY BOARD'S
SUBTLE SURFACE

ODD GLASSES
ONLY THE LOWER
CRESCENTS PRESENT
WAXED FLOSS
PASSES BETWEEN PLANES OF TEETH
RACIAL FORMATION IN THE NBA
GREEN PLASTIC DRAFTSMAN'S TEMPLATE

FIRST THEY COME FOR THE BROCCOLI
AND THEN THEY COME FOR US
WIRES PULL
THE PHONE POLL UP
ARBITRARY CODICITY ON THE DISK
LIKE SALIVA
ON YOUR CHIN

POINT AT WHICH
THE INSIDE
OF TENNIS SHOES BEGIN
TO DISSOLVE
SWEET TASTE
DISTINCT TO CANNED PEAS
BETRAYS RESTAURANT'S BROTH

WHAT IF THE COURSE OF HISTORY
WERE THE FAILURE OF NECESSITY
BIRDS SETTING DOWN ON THE EMPTY FEEDER
TWO KINDS
OF NUDITY
FRONTAL
AND PARTIAL

WHITE WOODFRAME HOUSE
BEHIND TALL CACTUS GARDEN
BRIGHT RED
CHINESE HEADLINES
UPON THE THINNEST OF PAPERS
BELT WORN
WITH HOLSTER'S SLANT

AT THE UNNAMED
LOCATE
AN IMPOSSIBLE HORIZON
BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE
SMALL TOOL
THIS FUNCTION
NOT IMMEDIATELY EVIDENT

SKIN DRY ON FOREHEAD
ITCHES
BUT FOR BAND OF OIL
WHERE I WEAR MY HAT

UNTIL THE PUS FORMS
LITTLE MOUNDS
PERFECTLY WHITE

STRUCTURE AS PARANOIA
SPREADS
ROLLED FLAT OVER CHEESECLOTH
RAINBOW WINDKITE BANGS
HARDWOOD PORCH IS AN ADD-ON
BILLOWING CHINS
SWAMP NECK

GROUNDCOVER SMOTHERS STONE
PATH
THEM WEEDS I LIKE
ALGAE FORMS RAINWATER SCUM
ALIVE IN OLD BARREL
AS WHEN
ROSES GROW WILD

THE PLAN IS THE PLAN
AN
ARTICLE OF FAITH
CLOTHES THE NOUN
CLOSE
THE SCREEN DOOR
WIRES MAKE VERTICAL NET

PHLEGM DRIPS
FROM THROAT'S CAVERN
I'M JUST NOW SITTING UP
SUN SMEARS THE HORIZON
GREAT THRILL
TO BREAK LINE
BRITTLE AS A BONE

WHY WE CALL THEM BINOCS
NOBODY KNOWS
SHED AT REAR
OF LONG SLOPING YARD
IS AN ENCLOSED LEAN-TO
RED PATCH
ON HUMMINGBIRD'S THROAT

I CARVE THESE LETTERS DEEP
INTO FLESH OVER DOTTED LINE
YOU'LL NEVER SEE
DRIED PULP
MAKES A SURFACE
IS SEWN
INTO BOOK

KARIN LESSING

A WINTER'S DREAM JOURNAL II

I.
Not knowing who speaks
Immobility's mobile image
Between four walls diminishing & refracting
This circle is the world

Star burning watery shape
As one asleep is bent
Why there is when she spilled the night
Savage heart

Something instead of nothing
The world and the light
At the entrance of the cave
The triple echo

An oscillating talisman
Headlong into the maze
Trying to remember 'eternal truths'
Clouds in the shape of clouds

Like an incandescence
You wear your skin
Phylacteries with figures inscribed
In June all kinds of flowers

As a thing of words
Erased from the center out
The ubiquitous matchstick strokes
Scintillates & retreats & roots

cavatina 1)

The moon tonight
Very simply this time
Minutest grain in the night's beak
Over mirror grass

In earthgrasp, in its own shadow's clasp
The position of the scribe
Quiet imparadised precarious disguise quiet
Native place

(and 2)

Slow slow and stately
Hymns & odes
Engrafted on your heart
The cypresses darkening, sequined

And on their lips
Windows & lamps
Scarce blossom: 'la malicieuse'
The sky constellated fuchsia

• • •

II.
Icons, diaphanous tablets
The throat is filled
As line is flame feeding on flame
Who knows its contour

Their blueness, their cushioned hearts
The shelter of the destitute
As antiphon
As pyrope in penumbra

Scintillates & retreats
This circle these leafgreen steps
A star falls back upon itself
Riverbed grume scutch

Blinding feathery fiery shedding
Resemblances hung in frames
Powdered lake lasts mouchoir
Ridges: trustworthy tenure

Fragments within blocks of fragments
Most ancient site
Sun dips below ruined parapet stumbling
Overflow and stray (children

To the farthest edge of sailing
I who deploys
Distance surpassing tide obliterates
Hard by horizon like a flocculence

In monochrome
Cut engenders rainbow run
Nested in sea-ear, mother of pearl
And added

Who'd travel, cross straits
Winter's salvage in us
In a gaze or was glanced at sideways
Suddenly snowpeaks

(19 February, 1988)

High rooms of departure
A hand is poised
As wheel as water the valley the wind's very *pays*
Rushed on, back through the arms of black algae

In the infinite retrenchment of signs
A living image
They appeared once more in the night
Rings, coins' shining corpse

• • •

III.
Pillar the air almost
And threads, impalpable furrows
Within these precincts
Worlds other ways

The small goods & especially silks store of a language
Suppose you do really dreamspeak
Growing coralline
In which these abound

A kind of excess
Midwinter, winter's bread
Snow flashes and covers the ground late
Its oblique course

In stone in wide in open eyes
Eye argonaut
Between the heart and the throat
Worshipping the light unreasoning reason

The tools, thistles
Time's gold season & place
Your robe of colors, night, the weight & measure
Glittering leaves; visage

Wind-spired as they are stirred
From the barest field
Full flare unravelled sequence
Fathoming finding lodged expiring

In the opposition of steps
Drawing very close
The naked, knotted sounds
In which space in whose shadowy imprint

. . .is swept the soul
Halfway indelible trace
Bright petals the afternoon
Streaming with the earth unaltered, streamed

As if sucked from its shell the sea
I overheard
In the extreme attention of listening
Your sway

Silence itself crystal echoes
The dream the hunt the flame
Beginning dark and standing wave

• • • •

December–March, 1988

CLARK COOLIDGE

IN THE ROOMS OF GUSTON

> "Everyone carries a room around inside him. This fact can even be proved by means of the sense of hearing. If someone walks fast and one pricks up one's ears and listens, say in the night, when everything round about is quiet, one hears, for instance, the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall."
>
> —Franz Kafka

Place this. The room where things, large enough to be close, are stirring an argument. We could discuss "block size" and where would it end us? Behind the saddle thrown over that rack. I know where things live. And no jostling. But a whispering behind the throne. Everything up again.

The outdoors is always indoors. It is a set, a place for fading arrangements, where faults are noted in the bulb and you flush. A trigger waiting for its grapes. Those of us then who can discuss it, dismiss it. Sit down, fool, talk. Back up against the mirror, dream at the field of six moons you did come up with a spike.

I don't choose which, but these are all places to inhabit. Chain something to that chair if you will. Claim responsibility, then carry it around with you. No one else in this closet must be careful. I fought off just those shoes from my thoughts, then put the iron back in the wall.

Then is it a picture? You choose. These things shown on a space that won't exist, come up to speed, accept the evening of the fair hand. But a pit full of some such brings it all up to room.

And this room is a clock that sounds each nail at its edge, in order that the abyss. So who does it stay? Did I forget? Didn't I leave my hand out?

I don't think you can take a place where things only seem. For long, whatever plan, what kind of dodge from strew. All you can say is, In this place they are going. Aloud.

A change of walls. That's all. No one's advantage. No. Whose advantage? Who's calling down all the cards with no white? I am disagreeing with you daily among the loosened things.

An antagonistic paraphernalium? The answer this time is to only walk these boards. As if that *line* were true to all possible picture. And above it, you at the last landing, but sideways in a clear structure of junctures, some standing. I'd have first to light my head. Then the stairway. Put out a ring. Throw fingers. Alarm the enclosure of panthers left out.

I think this is the room they drove to. Somebody's been driving around in here on huge loaf of self, or on vast soft tires. As if in wide times it were avenue. And no thing else brought away from, not a lock.

Caught on this sill, as if the edge of time were the end of town. Even in an open window the buildings on the wall. You can hang it, but will they stay there? Never has any kind of argument taken place here. No boys from any window shine their horn.

When time for a dawn I sat and watched the walls come back. He said, Look, they're still up. Now we can leave them. Now that the backside has joined its reverse in this place. And then even an ocean, and you'll see it's orange. Ponder is your thought then, between the raised stumps.

An elephant, just then in the crack between the bed and slaughter. It's tiny though, could be hoist. Any further plans will up and lead even us out of here. Lend me the last of those lights?

There wasn't much temperature. Still couldn't we catch the blame, keep things overturned till the term set right? This is the place now of pauses. And this is more lingering stuff.

Well, roll that window away if you don't want to leave. There are other crevices, other excuses. All. Just an added detail, that hand you promised to lend me. And stationary, as no line or shock is. Or duck?

Didn't need to be filled, this place of leaps and vaults. What accompanied by what revolved to the end this stuff and left. I caught just the shine. You make up as much as it takes among the black boxes of black, for the judgement.

At just this slant of the room the road had been laked off. Did you come all that way to see? I could make just the master bottle for your eyes. He says, It's a wonder that these pictures don't tip over and run down my leg. Some night one of us will be left staring here and one will.

The blush takes the wall and then how do you subsist in clothes of no color? Behind those cans is where they wash time. These will then be the pictures of something. There is the clock, when all else waits, to throw out.

This is the room that will tell you everything. As long as you don't answer its call. And *no* makes a very long hedge before us to allow this in any. A masking tape the angels of forgettal rely on? Hollow original sections, then bend and yell. The horsemen used to comfort here in the days when you could still borrow them. I titled that theater at the ringing of a bell.

And where is the city of this room? Between ledges, wheels, legs, whatever works, stops. From the bottom too, an elbow raised until you kneel above your head. It's threatening, so much beyond you,

marveling at all the miles of tone it takes. All the heart's weight thought up that thumb's stem.

Downtown is a room, with a cellar on the outside. Gives on a hinge of bricklike outline radiance, perhaps the quitting radiance to wait on, out where they ring tines in picking flat tires. These two wonder what to do with what will always hang out between them. Just between black and red, what? Lots more, slabs of a higher, the color that is all color supposedly none. Then the cow entered backwards and honked in Frigidaire. And we couldn't stop talking waiting for those walls to come back.

Would the subject once admitted stop, or would we be raised from it? These are scratchings no one looks at in wait. How penetrating in mind of anything that adds to your. Iron bars over the transom, the night they spoke.

And the night there was nothing in the center but a twisted radio. Had we been allowed we would have sat around and blamed. Not normal, you know, they really don't allow it, what we've arranged to. Dart in the top of a saucer, watch your left elbow. And what spun the flame, did he say?

There was no entrance. It all began (metal) in a sort of center (gum) where he told me, Just at the point I see it that's the point I finish (weapons in a row) and can leave the room (stand there) a while. And I knocked at that (he sat) and it stood. And they are up (out there) right now looking for the door.

Nobody even raised the name of this room. It doesn't rate one, not even our later mention? Result of which one of us frogged that cigarette from a breed of center everybody for ever after trod a rut around. Then where is the brush? I don't see it. I don't want to, even think to, just use. Now smoke pours from holes in its name.

We didn't call them. They came in anyway. Now we don't know what to call them. We sit in the room, as if smoking them out, and shuffle. Whatever the result, we always leave before they do. It's as if the law were that I leave them there, the cigarettes to work on it.

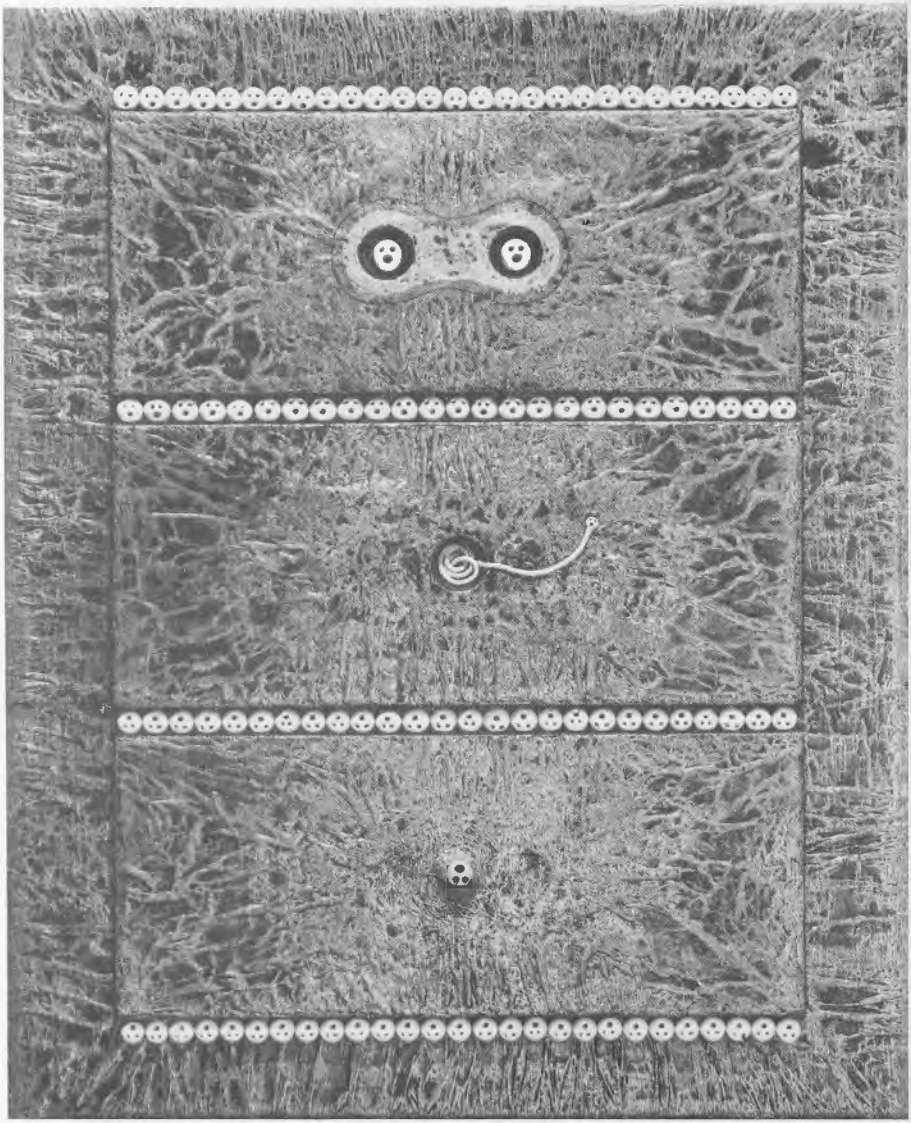
Further then, the knee rooms of carpet, the backyard washline and stuff rooms, the cranky room of Central Avenue, the room where heaps, room of shattered porch, room for the descent to cellars, just enough room for the painter's table on the world.

And at the door near the end, he says, Don't forget to work ever faster. Nothing settles. Never lift the pen.

14IX88

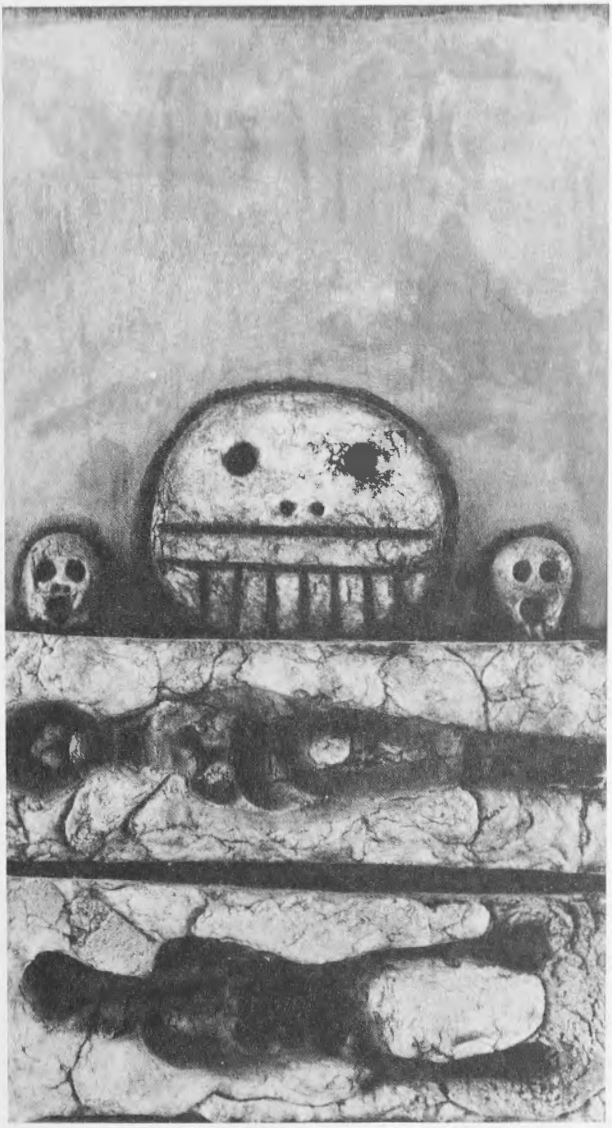
DOMINICK DI MEO

SIX WORKS



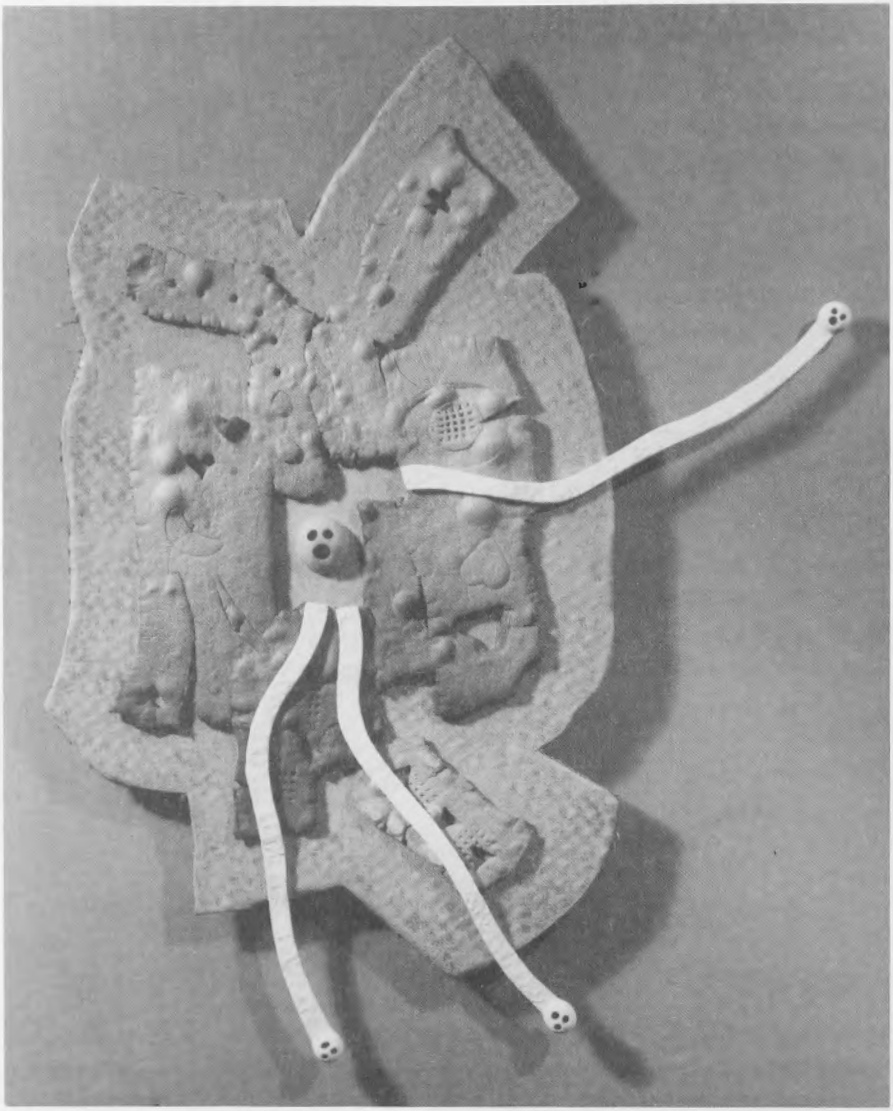
UNTITLED

1971, Synthetic polymer and polyform on canvas, 40" x 32"



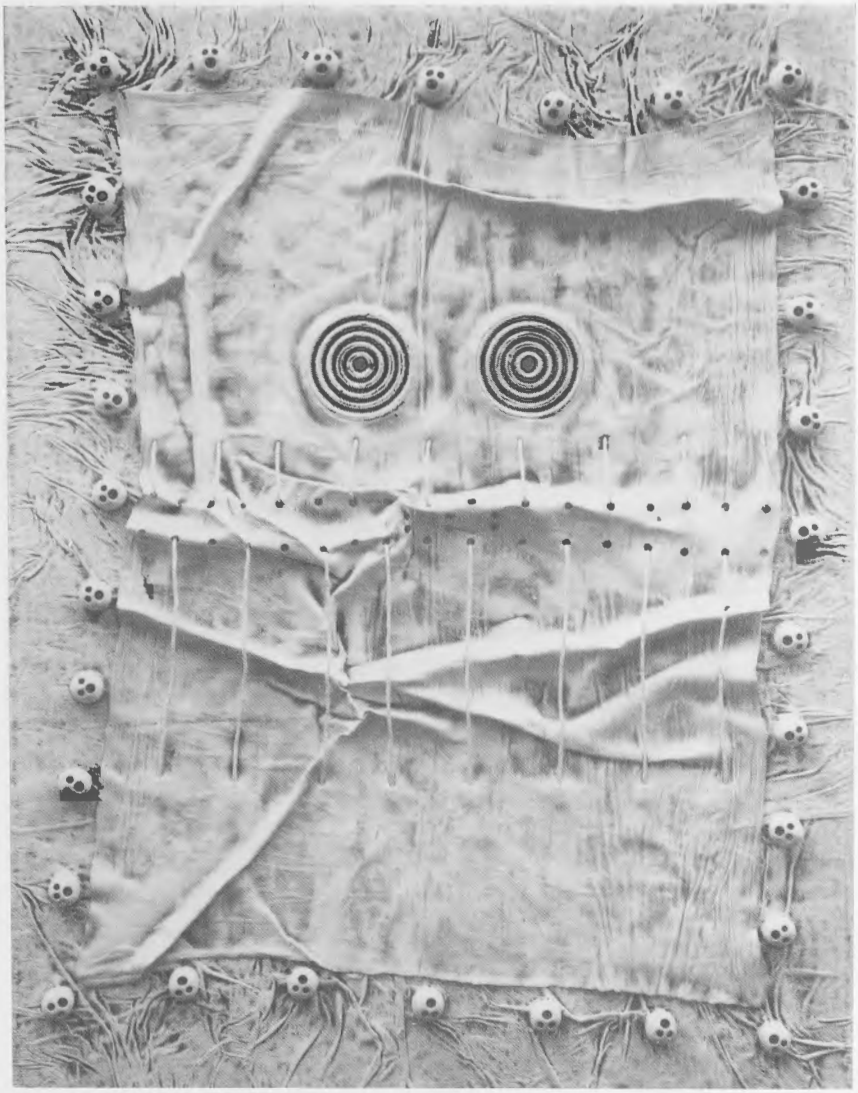
VARIATION ON A THEME BY T.H.

1960, Plastic on wood, 14" x 8"
Collection: Mr. & Mrs. Saul Bernstein,
Highland Park, Illinois



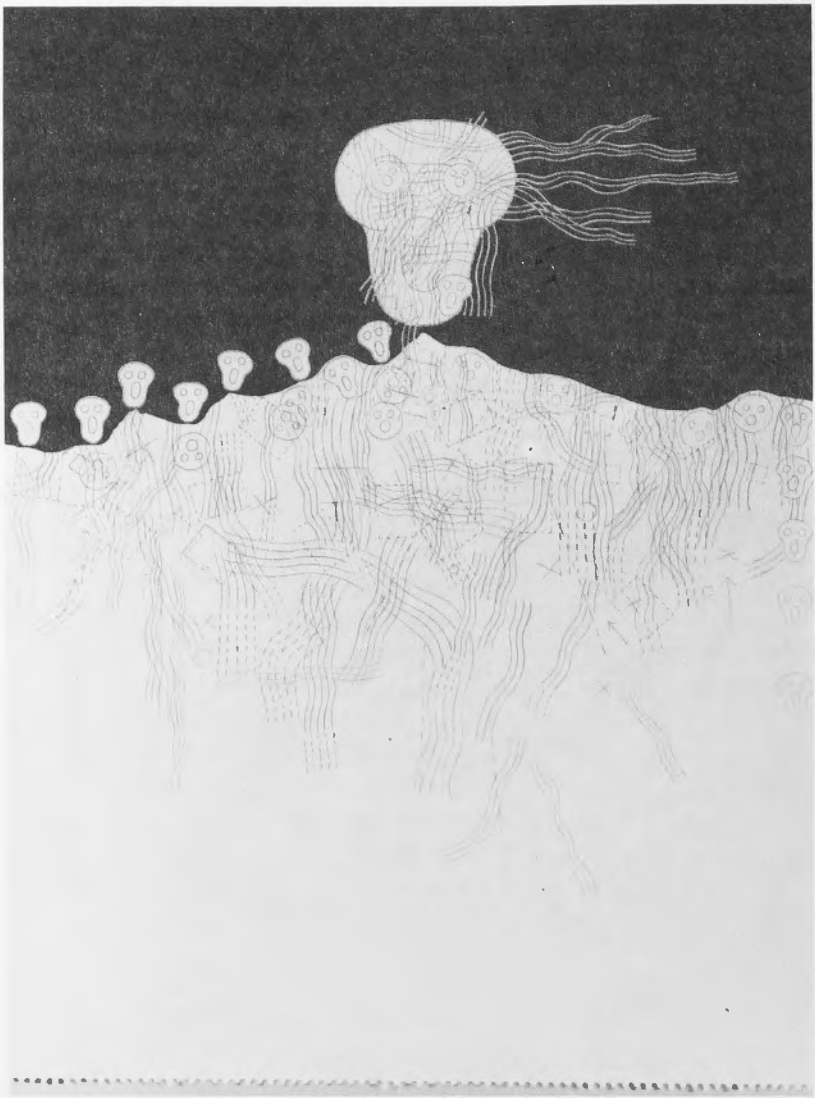
LITTLE DEVIL HEAD

1977, Synthetic polymer and polyform
20 1/2" x 13"
Collection: Judith Cousins,
New York City



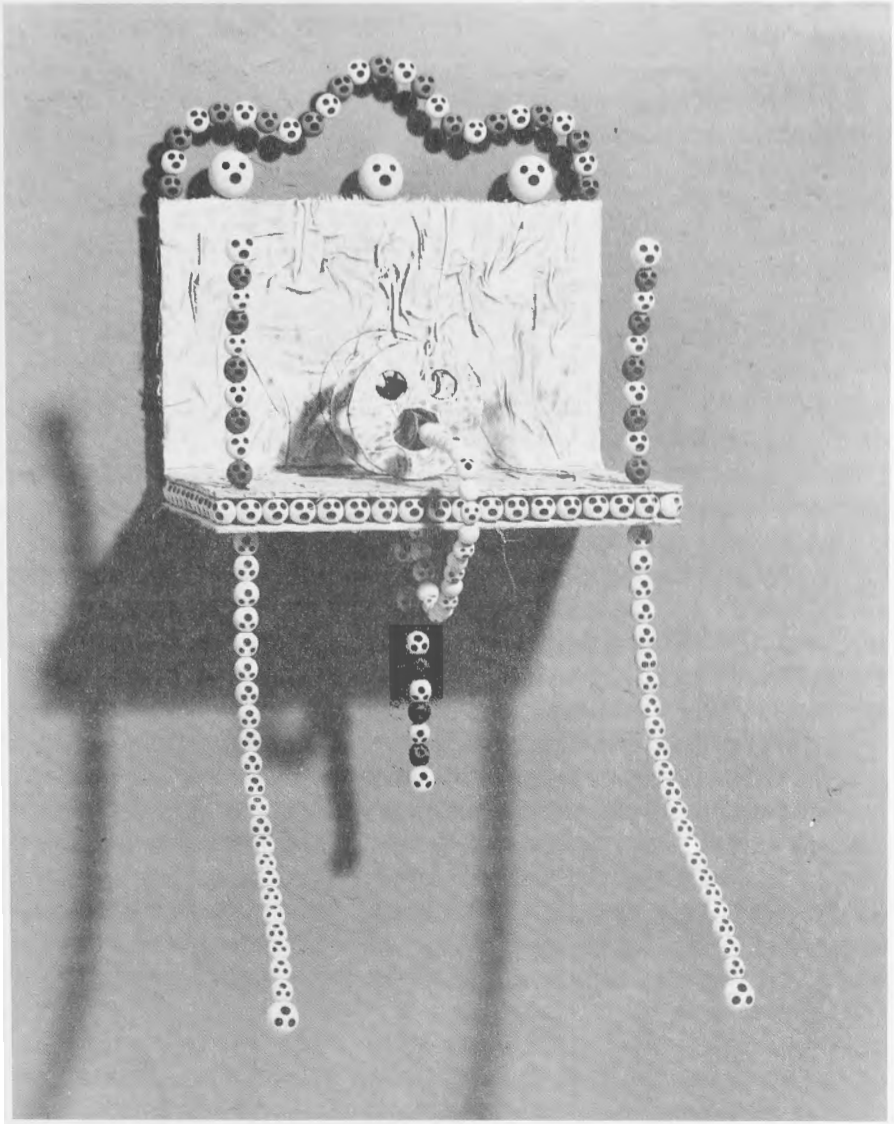
ENIGMA

1976, Synthetic polymer and polyform on canvas, 32" x 24"
Collection: Mr. & Mrs. Rick Meyer, Chicago, Illinois



LOVE CALL

1979, Carbon transfer and India ink on paper, 24" x 18"
(photograph by David Allison)



WALL PIECE

1985, Synthetic polymer and polyform
21" x 10 1/2" x 11"
(photograph by David Allison)

THE FACE OF LOVE

Hard to be face to face
to be and to stay
to stay face to face
with the face of love.

Eve closed her eyes
(Blake's notebook)
when the forcing serpent
when the serpent came.

Hard to be face to face
to be and to stay
stay between the tracks
when the snake train comes.

Snake with its poison
its poison its tongue
its bright eyes
bright and brighter eyes.

FOR INSTANCE

1

Grasshoppers in the corn
thudding sound
of their collision
against the dry and brittle stalks.

2

Green and bronze cicada
on the siding
pebbly siding of the house.

Cicada doesn't budge
as the bee sucks at a hole
in its head.

FREE GIFTS

Before the kiss there are gifts there are free gifts
members of the studio audience receive free gifts
each member receives a string of blossoms
each member of the audience asked to bend down
string of plastic apple blossoms placed around each neck
before the kiss there are gifts there are free gifts
members of the studio audience receive free gifts
each member receives a "night with the stars"
each member photographed with blossoms around each neck
polaroid photograph pinned to "night with the stars" curtain
roar of an animal with golden mane flash of its mane
roar of an animal with its mane kiss of an animal
sudden kiss of an animal with its rough tongue
sudden kiss for each member of the audience
sudden kiss sudden wound for each member of the audience
before the kiss there are gifts there are free gifts
members of the studio audience receive free gifts
each member receives a string of blossoms
each member photographed with blossoms around each neck
polaroid photograph pinned to "night with the stars" curtain.

TWO POEMS

WHAT NO ONE COULD HAVE TOLD THEM

Once he comes to live on the outside of her, he will not
sleep through the night or the next 400. He sleeps not, they
sleep
not. Ergo they steer gradually mad. The dog's head
shifts to another paw under the desk. Over a period of 400
nights.

You will see, she warns him. Life is full of television
sets, invoices, organs of other animals thawing on counters.

In her first dream of him, she leaves him sleeping
on Mamo's salt bag quilt behind her alma mater. Leaves him
to the Golden Goblins. Sleep, pretty one, sleep.

. . .the quilt that comforted her brother's
youthful bed, the quilt he took to band camp.

Huh oh, he says, Huh oh. His word for many months.
Merrily pouring a bottle of Pledge over the dog's dull coat.
And with a round little belly that shakes like jelly.

Waiting out a shower in the Border Cafe, the bartender
spoons a frozen strawberry into his palm leaf basket
while they lift their frosted mugs in a grateful click.

He sits up tall in his grandfather's lap, waving
and waving to the Blue Bonnet truck. Bye, blue, bye.

In the next dream he stands on his toes, executes
a flawless flip onto the braided rug. Re-springs to crib.

The salt bag quilt goes everywhere, the one the bitch
Rosemary bore her litters on. The one they wrap
around the mower, and bundle with black oak leaves.

How the bowl of Quick Quaker Oats fits his head.

He will have her milk at 1:42, 3:26, 4 a.m. Again at 6. Bent
over the rail to settle his battling limbs down for an afternoon
nap. Eyes shut, trying to picture what in the world she has on.

His night light—a snow white pair of porcelain owls.

They remember him toothless, with one tooth, two tooths,
five
or seven scattered around in his head. They can see the day
when he throws open his jaw to display several vicious rows.

Naked in a splash of sun, he pees into a paper plate the guest
set down in the grass as she reached for potato chips.

Suppertime, the dog takes leave of the desk's cool cavity
to patrol his high chair.

How patiently he pulls Kleenex from a box. Tissue
by tissue. How quietly he stands at the door trailing the White
Cloud;
swabs his young hair with the toilet brush.

The dog inherits the salt bag quilt. The one her Mamo made
when she was seventeen—girlfriends stationed around a frame
in black stockings sewing, talking about things their children
would do;

He says: cereal, bye-bye, shoe, raisin, nobody. He hums.

She stands before the medicine chest, drawn. Swiftly he tumps
discarded Tampax and hair from an old comb into her tub.

Wearily the man enters the house through the back. She isn't dressed.
At the table there is weeping. Curses. Forking dried breasts of chicken.

while Little Sneed sat on the floor beneath the frame,
pushing the needles back through.

One yawn followed by another yawn. Then little fists
screwing little eyes. The wooden crib stuffed with bears and wind-up pillows
wheeled in to receive him. Out in a twinkle. The powdered bottom
airing the dark. The 400th night. When they give up their last
honeyed morsel of love; the dog nestles in the batting
of the salt bag quilt commencing its long, long mope to the death.

detail from
WHAT NO ONE COULD HAVE TOLD THEM

Naked in a splash of sun, He pees into a paper plate
the guest set down on the lawn as she reached
naked in a splash of sun into a naked sun splash
He pees naked into a paper plate a plate the guest set down

into a plate of white paper the guest set down He pees
into a plate the guest set down on the lawn in the back of the
    airy house
a paper plate the guest set down He pees on the lawn
He pees into a white paper plate a living fountain of pee
a golden jet of pure baby pee from His seven month old penis
His uncircumcised penis not even one year old a jet
of pure gold into an uncircumcised splash of sun
a beautiful gold arc of pee in a splash of uncircumcised sun
naked in a splash of sun He pees into a paper plate
a white paper plate the guest set down on the airy lawn
in back of the airy white house into a paper white plate
weighted down with baked beans and slabs of spiced ham
the guest set down on the lawn in back of the white house
on the lovely expanse of lawn the guest set down the paper
    plate
on the lawn as she leaned forward in the canvas sling
of her chair as she reached out of her green sleeve
into a white paper plate the guest set down on the lawn He
    pees
as she reached out of her green butterfly sleeve
out of the beautiful arc of her iridescent sleeve as she
set down on the expanding lovely lawn a paper plate
He pees naked in a splash of sun as she reached for potato
    chips.

after Taggart

CID CORMAN

KUSANO SHIMPEI

The man was my friend. 20 years my senior. He wrote voluminously. Perhaps more than any other Japanese poet has ever done: I have over fifteen thick volumes of his COLLECTED WORK that appeared during the past 15–20 years, which he had sent me.

His poetry, to some extent, is known to every living Japanese person, since it is standard reading in junior high. His frog poems in particular. (The selection in the 1984 paperback—*asking myself/answering myself*—by New Directions is readily available for those who want a sense of earlier work.) His work is hard *not* to enjoy.

It has a deceptive simplicity and relates to his brother's work as well as Miyazawa Kenji, whose work he helped bring to attention. He was himself early on a translator of Carl Sandburg and had met the man. His affiliations have always been with the working class, a rough-and-tumble life. Nothing theoretical about it. Grit.

But it has never been a militant poetry. It is a poetry supremely of life—given to and taken from. Zest and ache. A sense of scale and of immediacy that goes beyond that of Bill Williams.

China—where he lived longer than any other modern Japanese poet—was vital to him and I'm sure the down-to-earth ethos of that nation and its people impressed him profoundly.

If he looms large in these late poems, he looms no larger than his frogs.

He is utterly unpretentious. Language is life for him. And life is poetry. And so he wrote—aware of this—with the utmost care and toughness.

His poetry is as fundamental to us as bread or rice—pickles and tea. He savored the unusual and the commonplace. When the bill-collector came to his house he invariably invited him in for a cup of tea and talk: his métier (like Pavese's) was life—the living of it—the being alive.

A BATCH OF LATE POEMS

WINTER LIGHTNING

shishishishishishishi snow falling fast and thick.
shishishishishishishi snow falling fast and thick.
shishishishishishishi snow falling fast and thick.
shishishishishishishi snow falling fast and thick.

suddenly.
lightningblue.

BARI BAREEN

shishishishishishishi "
shishishishishishishi "
shishishishishishishi "
shishishishishishishi "

NIGHT

.001mm.
.001mm.
.001mm.
.002mm.

beard growing.
black and white.

.001mm.
.001mm.
.002mm.
.001mm.

hair growing too.

.001mm.
.001mm.
.001mm.
.001mm.

life lessening.

BATHING

washing my body.
and stopping.
trying to figure out.
this far along into January.
it must be a hundred days without a bath.
January.
February.
March.
April.
not in the greatest shape but.
not been sick in a hundred days.
filth floating in the wash bowl.
weight 45 kilos of.
ugly belly.

the operation's vertical scars.
wrinkle wrinkle of lateral scars.
into thin extremities.
observing this specimen of an old person's ugliness.
I myself thought.
this is the very it they call an old ugly thing.
this must be it.
a hundred days without a bath.
prehistoric stuff?
hmm.

CERTAIN DAYS

1.

wearing a summer hat.
walked out into powdery snow.

looked over a temporary storage of radish
put up for the Abukuma Folk Art Museum.
inspected and delected those transferred
to the library yard after being wheeled out.

scooping up carp and rainbow trout in a landing net.
loosed them into the pool of the thirteenth night.

snowing in sunlight.

2.

woke at 4:30 a.m.
searched the cupboard.

drank homebrew *sake*.
sucked a ripe persimmon.

3.

walking along the frosty ranks reviewing
the garden trees in winter decay.
basking in the newborn sunlight a 67-year-old man
on his way for bread, *natto* and work gloves.

walking.
half the sky pale ultramarine.
the other gutter-rat gray clouds.
upper half of mountains brimming sunshine.
in summer machine-stitched pants.
the 67-year-old wearing sleeveless *kimono*
over a black sweater.

in the bag some extra.
mochi, sliced seaweed, carrots, etc.

back home.
rainbow icicles hanging from the waterpipe.
the 67-year-old chewing and swallowing them.

4.

ground a T'ang ink-stick.
wrote words.
drew bamboo.
and read a book.
ate fish and greens.
perfect.

5.

a young bicycle-racer friend.
    (attempted suicide-violence-bloodshed.)
out of his head report of it came.

6.

light powdery snow.
dancing in wind.
sank in the pool.

(life and death together deep within me.)
(flickering.)

Tenzan Library.
mats perched on.

((note: the Tenzan Library in the Nagano uplands was/is a repository of K's work and a summer study center for students of it))

BITING

—childhood nostalgia—

the Abukuma hills were gentle-sloping.

and I.
often nibbled.
pencil and.
lead.

Abukuma's heaven blue.
clouds flowed slowly on.

but I.
often chewed on.
the edge of my wrinkled Japanese reader and.
when I chewed into the text.
had to remember the lost parts.

the primary school stood alone in the rice fields.
in the shimmering spring haze.

but I bit a girl on the arm and.
was severely scolded by the teacher.

quiet *susuki*-grass hill and.
the days' *uguisu*.

but I.
in a rage had a fit.
with a bucket of water dashed over me.
finally came to.

I never cut my fingernails.
instead of scissors.
used my teeth.

at one spot in the gentle-sloping Abukuma hills.
huge granite towered.
holding onto an iron chain I climbed but.

the ruggedness of that Mt. Futatsuya.
was what I was as a child.

Abukuma's heaven blue.
clouds flowed calmly on nevertheless.

FOSSIL SNAIL

a dead snail.
turning beautiful continues on.

its outside's.
on a black ground white.
spiral pattern.

(really?)

Tyrolean Alps!
jetties against which.
brackish blue water.
dapplingly breaks.
foaming away.

TOAD

sun on the verge of setting.

at the foot of a magnolia tree in
the library garden by the mountain
azaleas a toad came hopping along.

seeing me the toad gave up hopping.

feeling mischievous I pissed on the toad.

(having had more than my quota of booze
it may have been on the hot side.)

one minute. two minutes. three minutes.
four minutes. five minutes. almost.

its eyes remained unblinking.

the toad moved not.

not even one millimeter.

I lost.

KAWAUCHI VILLAGE
FUTABA DISTRICT
FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE

where the river flows through rice fields.
char and dace are swimming.
when they are scooped up in a net so too.
are sometimes caught striped mudfish and char together.
this is unusual.

in a valley village deep in these mountains.
there are as many as twenty baseball teams.
every summer for two days on end in round robin play.
for a Japanese mountain village this is unusual too.

at 7:30 a.m. I was asked to throw out the first ball.
a one-eyed 76-year-old throwing the first ball.
this is unusual too.

a coming-of-age ceremony also occurs in the *o-bon* season.
those who have come of age come home for it.

an elder every morning delivers the papers.
a man from the slopes brings *matsutake* and *shimeji*
mushrooms.

a fish dealer provides *bonito* innards free.
with his grandson and a radish in his bicycle basket a monk rides over.
the Tenzan lady with a bamboo ladle pours into a teapot hot water from a big iron kettle.
youngsters at the village office repair typhoon havoc.
Taka-chan tends to the new rice and vegetables.
Toshiko the *miso* and pickles.
the village chief, the chief's assistant and others.

I sit on a stone at the feeding place.
stirring the water bringing the carp right up to nibble my fingers.

on the 29th comes the celebration of the completion of the framework for the Abukuma Folk Museum.
I'll toss out red and white pieces of *mochi*.
those who catch or pick them up are children from the kindergarten.

then once more head back to wild and busy chaotic Tokyo.
but can any time return to this thatched house.
I'm an honorary villager here.
with an honorarium of 100 straw bags of charcoal each year.
this is comical and unusual too.

NOTE: When I was living in a rented room in Kashiwagi (Shinjuku) a truck came with 100 straw bags of charcoal. And were piled up in the small garden there. For the little weeds and flowers in the garden they may have posed a problem of the right to have access to the sunlight. (Later I was at a loss about what to do with them so I had them taken by a doctor friend. I decided to waive those annual deliveries of 100 straw bags of charcoal.) I had the empty truck bring back to the village cardboard boxes full of books. This led to the building of the Tenzan Library and next year is its 15th anniversary. As well the 15th Tenzan Festival. (If I were to have become an honorary citizen, I would have refused. The title "honorary villager" was

gladly accepted. I sometimes think I may be the first honorary villager ever. Its being unusual is good.)

24 Oct. 1979

*The Kashiwagi area was a slum and it hasn't changed much since Kusano was a young man.

A 77-YEAR-OLD'S NEW YEAR'S DAY

pretty soon the 77-year-old New Year's Day comes.
1980's New Year's Day.

I was born in iris-colored.
May it was.
it was my mother suffered.

instead of my mother at my birth.
my death I'll do my suffering for.

at least when the time comes for goodbye.
(it won't go as you think.)
so says physiology.

if so after all.
that will be my very own ethics indeed.

(Versions by Cid Corman,
assisted by Kamaike Susumu)

L. S. ASEKOFF

READING AFTER DARK

Nothing ages as rapidly as the new
Branching fields of weather & the economy—
The pure series of interruptions
Coined by accidental light—sooty illuminations
In a cloud; smoky bullion; the mellow glow
Photographed off old stones in courtyards; honeyed hive
Of morning sun; a dreamy pee in the snow
As drowsiness overtakes you—hiss
Of ice steaming, gold hole you sink into.
Finally, it is a matter of "light house keeping,"
Knowing how to or not to do, emerging as the right
To remain invisible—hidden entrance
To the royal theme: the Golden Book
Where you first saw the black spell of letters
Broken—Dora's adorable bees or, mere ardor's
Mirroir d'or—angel at the slicing machine.
Perhaps we are too easily pleased by this journey
Nobody goes on—its dangerous windows, dumb
Impediments, fallen walls, &—the geometer's
Nightmare—monstrous torsos
Carved from silence & from time, all the politics
Of mapmaking as the low hills rise in waves
To meet us & mountains knock us smack in the eye.
Yes, travelers should only read after dark,
But when the floods come, Signore, all the shit
Rises to the surface, giving off the stench
Of a language (scented with whorish green
Spanish soap) that smells as we do.
Under the smoking lamp, you labored—old rough
Skin redskin pig sprouting wings—producing sentences
Sublime in their foreshadowing, past
As premonition, just catching up to us—the late dark lyrics
Dusting with first light a bowl of blue Sicilian lilies.

VIRGINIA HOOPER

TWO POEMS

THE BOOK OF DREAMS

Freedom from physical discomfort
Or mental agitation. Freedom from great effort
Or difficulty; facility; to run with ease.
The weather had offered a strong resistance.
Ease is largely considered negative, denoting absence
Of effort, strain, hesitation, uncertainty.
Readiness is the ability to deal with whatever
Comes, and so implies alertness, promptness
And quickness. In all honesty, I had opted for ease
And so was not sufficiently prepared for adequate defense.
I had succumbed to a disabling case of ennui, apathy
And disgrace. Moments of tranquility
In the midst of the crowd sometimes work
If only to crowd out the issue. Let's consider beauty:
The quality of objects, sounds, ideas, attitudes, etc.
Which pleases and gratifies, as by their harmony,
Pattern, excellence, or truth. Let's forget
Cosmetics and proceed to the underlying theme.
Descriptive elements sketch out visionary
Landscape and admission into it; one senses
(From prefatory note of author) desire
For further development: introductory elements
Have been established, suggested, but stumble
At limit of referring without deeper penetration.
Welcome to the Pleasure Dome. Artifact revered
As incomplete (Greek and Roman ruins
Were being collected for their own intrinsic
Fragmentary beauty). We're a long way from home.

Fragmentary quality underscores elusive features
Of experience. We're not finished yet.
Nervous activity; bustle; commotion; frenzy.
Sectional views juxtapose as two kinds of loneliness:
Circumstantial and chosen—epiphany of accident
Taking one to threshold of death—dilation
Of time opening visage into awareness: mind
Recollects past connections to experience, identities,
Then all recedes to nothing. Hit the brakes.
Irony of experience is the sudden stillness
Which one expects to be death, release, draws
One back into the living. Relax. Stop tossing and turning.
An incredible slow, circuitous build-up
Of narrative experience and incident unfold
Toward encounter—a litany of description
Following the road to this event: meditative
Awareness of detail in environment, a dreamy
Divagation begins the night, the pace of telling
Mirrors this slow passage through the country,
Forward movement unravelling like a small, narrow
Road we imagine ourselves travelling with ease.
The predicable folding inward of day into night,
Of human drama following its repeatable patterns,
Winding into irony of amazing encounter
In the darkness. Sudden silence. Exaltation
Lifts the collective body of attention
Toward the mysterious. So far, the story went,
Nobody had solved the problem of transgression
Well enough for the text to be written
In the books. It was all anecdotal material.
The Narrative continued to extol the virtues
Of perfect sleep. The problem was well stated:
Bring back the evidence. The light inside the night
Ignited the mirror held to the circle of fire
Informing the framework of the world imposed.
We've been forced to look elsewhere for the form.
Sorrow drapes the day in plain white sheets.
Slipcovers protect what's injured from the weather.
The state, quality, or fact of being uncertain.

Make different; alter; transmute. To exchange;
Interchange; to change places. To enter upon a new phase.
An orderly and gradual progression or arrangement
According to size, quality, rank, degree, etc.
A step, degree, or relative position
In such a progression. A passing by imperceptible
Degrees from one shade of color or surface to another.
The color of the room had changed, the surface
Of the air had altered. The problem was well stated:
Bring back the evidence. Once I brought back
A fistful of silver coins. I spent them
Too prodigally for proof to be recorded.
I accepted the failure and proceeded to fall
Back in line with the essential premise
That the currency usually stays behind. Penetrate
The resistance, the epigraph had insisted in good faith.
I descended the staircase and stepped on level ground.
My pockets were empty. Another night would come.

ARGUMENT FOR RESURRECTION

The sum of two and one: a cardinal number.
Any symbol of this number, as 3, iii, or III.
Anything consisting of or representing three units,
as a playing card, team, etc. Being one more
than two. A circus in which separate acts
are carried on simultaneously in three ring-like
enclosures. Any situation characterized
by simultaneous activities, especially of bewildering
variety. To give a rotary motion to:
cause to rotate, as about an axis. To change
the position of, as by rotating: to turn the ground.

We buried him yesterday. To move so that the upper side
becomes the under: to turn the page. To bring
the subsoil to the surface, as by plowing or spading.
To revolve mentally; ponder: often with over.
We made a pact that he would come back briefly.
A situation requiring a choice between
equally confusing alternatives; a perplexing
predicament. An argument that presents a protagonist
with two (or more) alternatives, but is equally
conclusive against her, whichever alternative
she chooses, the third point being the angle
of observation. Having a cavity within;
enclosing an empty space; not solid; a hollow
sphere. Having a deep opening or depression
formed by scooping out; concave. A valley; basin.
A round, wide shallow vessel, often with sloping sides.
A vessel resembling this, as the scale or pan
of a balance. The amount that a basin will hold.
She carefully weighed the alternatives.
Toward what is ahead or what is in front; onward.
Out into a conspicuous position. The actual remains
of plants or animals, preserved in the rocks
of the earth's crust. Some petrified trace
of the existence of an early organism, as a footprint.
One of certain inorganic objects or phenomena
of ancient geological ages, as solidified ripple marks.
To become slightly agitated on the surface,
as water running over a rough, pebbly memory,
or blown by a light breeze. To set or institute
a different cycle in: He is both absent and present.
An open way for public passage, especially from one
city, town, or village to another. Any way
of advancing or progressing: the road to release.
Road, highroad, turnpike, lane, and thoroughfare
are compared as they denote ways for interurban or rural
travel. Road in the general word. A highroad
is one adapted for fast travel, as by the elimination
of steep hills, sharp curves, frequent intersections,
and the like. Thoroughfare is a road accessible

at both ends: this word is now rare in specific names,
but survives in the phrase *No thoroughfare.*
To consider again, especially with a view
to a reversal of a previous action. A turnpike
is a road on which a toll is collected. A lane
is a private road giving access to a public thoroughfare,
or may be a narrow road. Not fastened
or confined; unbound: a loose end. Something left
undecided or undone, as a task, decision, etc.
We negotiated the passage. The lane was open.
The act of bursting into leaf, or the state
of being in leaf. The arrangement or formation
of leaves in a bud. In certain rocks, a crystalline
formation into leaflike layers: also the layers themselves.
The consecutive numbering of the leaves of a book.
A bound set of printed sheets of paper, usually between
covers. A volume of blank or ruled pages
for written entries: a ledger, register, etc.
Something regarded as a source of inspiration:
the book of experience. By memory.
To enter or list in a book. To arrange for
beforehand, as accommodations or seats.
Joining; connective. Serving to unite both meaning
and construction. The frontier line or district
of a country. A design or stripe in the margins
of a page or book. A bordering strip of ground,
commonly planted with flowers, as along the edge
of a walk. To lie along the border of; bound.
To strike and spring back from a surface, as a ball.
To leap; move by a series of leaps. To cause
to bound with joy. Made fast; tied with bonds.
Having cover or binding. Certain; sure: it's bound
to rain. Devotedly attached to. Having one's course
directed; on the way; destined: bound for home.

JED RASULA

LITERACY EFFECTS IN THE WAD: HANDLING THE FICTION, NURSING THE WOUNDS*

1. There is a ludicrous complaint I've heard poets make for as long as I can remember: "if only poetry didn't have to compete with tv . . ." What is it that makes this fantasy so durable?—for surely, with a little reflection, those who make this comparison would be hard put to contend that a permanent electrical outage would send droves of people to poetry as an alternative form of entertainment.

A more cogent point of comparison would rephrase Pound's dictum about poetry being as well written as prose: poetry should be at least as well written as a network television episode. (In all honesty, I can't see why anyone should abandon ABC's hit series "thirtysomething" to bone up on this year's *L.A. Times* Book Award selection in poetry, our Poet Laureate Richard Wilbur's *Collected.)*

What is misleading about aspirations by poets to compete with tv programming is the corollary that poetry is an entertainment medium. There was a time when poetry was read as bite-sized moral edification; but the moral was gone long before tv encapsulated the edification into the half-hour sitcom and the hour long dramatic series.

The real issue posed by the spectacle of the mass captive audience for tv programming is trivialized by confusing it with poetry. By way of immediate, harrowing contrast, consider this, written by René Char while fighting the Nazis in the Resistance: "Between reality and its report, there is your life which magnifies reality, and this Nazi abasement which ruins its report" (#126 in *Leaves of Hypnos).* Television, as Eliot Weinberger has reminded me, does not bear comparison with the Nazi abasement; it's competition is not with poetry, but with *bios* as such—lived human time—so-

* The following text was delivered at the Sulfur Conference at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, March 26, 1988

matic beings not destroyed, but rather prosthetized by their attachment to such devices. If we want to discover how the report (the concussive sound) of poetry is "ruined," we'll have to look elsewhere.

2. Poetry reviewing generally makes no attempt to contextualize poetry (in relation even to other art institutions, let alone the life of a community or a group). A poetry review is typically a book report on an isolate, self-indulgent moment of pleasurable introspection. As such, the only prospective reader of poetry is a consumer, who is then simply making a generic choice. This amounts to a massive corrosion of the language of value as it might be applied not only to poetry, but to "cultural literacy."

Poetry solicited for the ideology of privacy adheres to the following principles: (1) it must demonstrate a restraint of the stimulations or aggressions that inhere in charged or intense language; (2) it must display fidelity to the poet's personal life; (3) this fidelity, this "being true to life" must affirm a certain sufficiency inherent in all of us; (4) it must be an innocuous artifact and in no way seek to challenge its status as private concern of a handful of consumers.

The ideology of privacy stipulates that, like any consumer product, poetry be another tool for social disengagement, a leisurely interest, a hobby. *Consumption* was a euphemism for a 19th century "wasting disease": now it's the preferred lifestyle of the "stable subject," though the stable subject is best regarded as an ailing domestic animal.

It's no longer a matter of "meeting the world halfway"; there's no such thing as privacy—privacy has been deleted. Leisure time is now archaic. What is now called leisure or free time is, instead, a differently calibrated sort of duty, the zone of bricollage in which we cut and snip and sort and paste our attentions, so we become prosthetic supplements to the total-body effect of the media, the coherent and pervasive final report that drifts along just out the door.

It is, as Marx forecast, a later stage of the system that produces objects for the subject: now, more than ever, a subject must be produced for the object. (Think of how eagerly we adapt ourselves like mobile components to VCR, phone answering machine, compact disc, personal computer.)

So there is a predominance of first-person singular, home-movie poetry, poetry busy displaying adaptable subjectivity in its natural habitat.

3. Let's call this first-person singular poetry hegemony (even when it says "we" it really means "more of me") *"PSI"* for Poetry Systems Incorporated, subsidiary to data management systems.

It is a business. Its business is producing "the self." (Notice how this is not only a commodity, but a specialty item. We know this because it had to be exported from abroad.) In the subjectivity market, you can't just get it anywhere. Only certain venues offer it, and PSI product is one of the venues (though all the predominant pedagogic and information sources will generalize PSI product to, simply, "poetry").

How can you identify PSI product? It's as easy as subscribing to any of the 200 popular magazines hawked by College Subscription Service, as easy as joining the Book of the Month Club, or getting cable tv. PSI product is available in any chain bookstore. Your local mid-size community library will stock nothing but PSI poetry (often that's all your university library will have as well). *The New York Times Book Review* is its corporate newsletter. Or you can read the critics, whose examination of the scope of contemporary poetry is so routinely unadventurous that it amounts to in-house PSI publicity copy: slick appraisals to be printed in glossy brochures (if poetry as a cultural product ever became that marketable), or living out the half-life of the excerpted blurb.

4. But poetry also arrives by other means. Alvin Rosenfeld, a scholar of holocaust literature: "A manuscript written secretly and at the daily risk of life in the Warsaw ghetto; buried in milk tins or transmitted through the ghetto walls at the last moment; finally transmitted to us—such a manuscript begins to carry with it the aura of a holy text. Surely we do not take it in our hands and read it as we do those books that reach us through the normal channels of composition and publication. But how *do* we read it?"

This is the question I want to stay in the vicinity of.

But first, what exactly are the "normal channels" Rosenfeld refers to? Obviously he means the simple expedience of publication. But publication is never so simple or expedient as we might

believe, thinking of "normal channels." Publication is simply one part of a much larger social process, which is the *segregation of access to significant symbols.*

A normal channel in this culture is a television channel—and I don't mean this as a pun. Newspaper; magazines; films; recordings; radio; PSI product—all normal channels. What is a reader (a viewer, a listener) for the publishing media that constitutes normal channels? A reader is a digit, a statistical guarantor of the precise scale of another kind of beast known as "the audience." To compete with tv is to yearn for an unknown and ultimately *captive* audience.

5. "Normal channels," then, are the dominant channels. Dominant channels mean channels that dominate the attention of the unknown audience.* Stanley Aronowitz: ". . .mass art [is] one-way communication [which] takes on the character of domination."

Dominant channels are operated by media entrepreneurs who deploy a product in a medium in order to get the attention of an audience. This is the hook inside the bait of entertainment. This marketing angle regards the unknown audience as accessible only in captivity. The audience is transported invisibly and electronically as statistical integers in the contractual bargaining agreement between network and advertiser.

You've heard of the Nielsen families; these non-electable officials are, in effect, your congressional delegates in a national literacy forum, determining what goods and services we all have access to by means of "normal channels." Recently the networks have threatened legal retaliation against the Nielsen agency because its new method of eliciting viewing-information from the statistical sample showed a massive overall decline in the size of the audience for network television.

The new Nielsen system required each individual in the family to enter a personal code when watching a program, so that they could be demographically identified. The network claim that a

* The "unknown public" was envisioned by novelist Wilkie Collins *(The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White)* as "now waiting to be taught the difference between a good book and a bad. It is probably a question of time only." Writing in the high noon of Victorian optimism, Collins imagined that this unknown audience "must obey the universal law of progress and must, sooner or later, learn to discriminate." It's later than he ever would have thought possible.

significant number of people didn't do this, whether true or not, reflects a telling hesitation on the part of network top brass to know who they're addressing. It is the dictatorship by managerial style—though the style outlasts the individuals whose "taste" and "discrimination" constitute it. As long as an audience can be *targeted* demographically (product X for "baby boomers") then the statistical sampling methods are ok; but when the sampling procedure allows (or requires) too much intervention or interference on the part of individual audience members, then something must be wrong. (Horror of horrors—maybe the 10-year-old girl switching on the tv and not punching in her code name is refusing to produce herself as a subject for that object.) The implicit injunction to the captive audience (name, rank and serial number) is to concede volition to the broadcast medium, in exchange for the privilege of "participating" in the statistical process—just another episode in the lifelong mini-series of political abstinence: ". . .the renunciation of the question of political right through the private pursuit of well-being" (O'Neill).

This is the participation mystique of an industrial-communications society. It is also a residual sort of mind-cure theology. Donald Meyer, writing on the "positive thinking" cults of the 19th to early-20th century: "Mind-cure theology was purely expressive. That is, it was the immediate projection of uninspected wish"—an impeccable description, as well, of commercial advertising, in which a product is projected into the virtual psychological space where wishes congregate. Wishful thinking, in Meyer's analysis, is a contradiction in terms: "The wish for plenty was not the wish to have one's wishes fulfilled; it was the wish not to have to wish wishes of one's own at all." Wishful thinking is that studiously orchestrated set of tactics of disavowal known as 'keeping the faith.'

All that is required to be literate with regard to normal channels is faith. The distinction between poetry and tv can be usefully reviewed by way of David Jones: "It must be understood that art as such is heaven—it has outflanked the fall—it is analogous not to faith but to charity."

6. Am I actually saying that mind-cure theology is alive and well, that normal channels like PSI poetry product (prime, canners and utility grades, following Ed Dorn) are massive sedatives, alleviat-

ing us from the burden of having to wish our own wishes?

It's not quite so simply dominant. Mind-cure theology is not finally connected with literacy but with numeracy. As Ian Hacking suggests, numeracy precedes literacy. (Numeracy is the ability to relish and manipulate number-symbols discursively. Sports-broadcasting is numerate, not literate; David Letterman's top-ten lists and Harper's Index are numeracies shading over into literacy.)

Mind-cure theology is historically linked with another 19th century vogue known as "moral science" (information about and control of the moral tenor of a population). What used to be called moral science we now know as "statistics." Mind-cure theology and the moral science of statistics are both means of sampling the (then "unknown") audience, to take its moral pulse. It's written into the Constitution, which stipulates census-taking as a duty. With that, we're committed to numeracy, at the expense of literacy.

"Moral science" has long been fully democratized in the sense of being spread around through government agencies and the private sector alike. Through the courts, by means of taxes, public works, welfare, education, and the feedback-facilities of entrepreneurial "normal channels," a census is continually being taken.

7. The unknown audience is not so unknown now—captivity breeds familiarity. The normal channels have asked us to identify ourselves, and we have. Eagerly. *What's your name?* —Evelyn. *And what do you do, Evelyn?* —I'm a legal secretary. *And where are you from?* Tallahassee, Florida. —My name is Everett, and I'm a systems analyst from Kalamazoo. . .this rudimentary scenario is played out all day long on tv sets and radio broadcasts across the land.

We have become very adept at being informants, in the strict ethnographic sense of the term. We tell the moral scientist whatever he wants to know (it's still usually a he). We're actively recruited all the time for information about ourselves. Not truly different information—nothing that would single any of us out as being positively unique—but for the information that makes us typical.

In this light, PSI poets have simply been more gregarious and forthcoming than the rest of us, as moral science informants. (Although, as Charles Bernstein points out, they are a bit more cul-

pable in that they are directly involved in designing the parameters of the questionnaire.)

8. Being an informant is intrinsically a bid for entitlement. Making oneself heard, speaking up for others, displaying one's qualifications. Qualifications for what? For the benefits forthcoming from colonial administrative practices.

The inexorable bankrolling effect of cumulative statistics is something we all feel burdened by, as witnesses and as participants or informants. My social security number is of more significance to more people than all the poetry I will ever write: that is, it connects more readily than poetry to an available public medium (demographics and other tabulations of group dynamics); it contributes incessantly and functionally to an ongoing story—a story the nation is conscripted to produce, as if contractually. We're all *under contract* to History.

Consequently, many people feel positively chosen, elected, to bear witness in the mode of the informant. It is a means of entitlement. Consider as illustration the matter of Love Canal residents on the issue of chromosome damage due to dioxin contamination of groundwaters: in 1980 the New York State Health Commissioner stated categorically that these afflicted Love Canal residents were "not qualified" to hold an opinion regarding their own health. Since the authorities wouldn't listen, the residents took their stories to the press, which was willing to entitle them as informants.

This is what I call a "literacy effect." (I'm poaching on Roland Barthes' "reality effect.") The literacy-effect occurs when "normal channels" of transmission make a commitment to "moral science" as statistical equation, when Representative Sampling and Standard Deviation become operational norms, along with Diagnostic Testing and methods for calculating Probabilities, and when the "unknown" audience can be positively identified only insofar as it is a captive audience.

9. What is literacy? Literacy is the guidance, supervision and correction of *comprehension*—per se: how we're comprehensive, how we come to understand that though we don't know everything, whatever we know composes an All. I like the word 'com-

prehension,' as it bifurcates into "understanding," on the one hand, and "encompassing" on the other. The literacy-effect propagated through normal channels guarantees that these two distinct capacities of comprehension will *not* be brought together.

Two illustrations, parables:

> —Literacy-effect #1: Once a code of the masterpiece prevails in the arts, the colorful and exotic in travel, and the spectacular in nature, then the most perfunctory *sign* of the thing suffices as a mark of authenticity. Artworks become the sample representations of the durable institutional category "Art" (just as prose comes to represent the institution of literacy as such, alphabetic competence).
> —Literacy-effect #2: The establishment of a 'proper' or innate domain of literature (with its classics as universal emblems of an omnipotent literacy, with its various subdivisions into genre, mode, style) is the exercise of what I would call a "self-inflicted literacy" as in "self-inflicted wound." To attend to something because a normal channel retails it as a masterpiece (a "must read" for snobs) is to be a victim of one's own intelligence—*self-inflicted literacy.**

10. Obviously, these literacy-effects might just as well be called "canon-effects."

The canon, like any bureaucratically administered operation, takes its directives from licensed operators. The formal and legal requirements for operating canonical mechanisms are analogous to those for obtaining an aviator's license.

Next time you read Ashbery: listen for the sonic traces of disconnection and detachment as a living body is made to endure the stress of "rehabilitation" within the canon.

The canon is something that needs living human subjects as recreational ammunition under the bigtop. Under the watchful eyes of licensed operators.

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*Self-inflicted wounds were often suspected in World War I, but even more scandalous at the time were those soldiers suffering from combat hysteria and other disorders previously thought to be "female." Such cases received little sympathy, and were branded "moral invalids" (see Leeds).

Think of the canon as the Elks Club, or better yet the Pentagon, a supervisory body enacting its custodianship of the canon of war ("peace" not being an operable term in Pentagon jargon, which prefers to speak of "permanent pre-hostility").

Or think of it as a Natural History Museum with its dioramas. Ever notice how in such exhibits the stuffed animals don't have bullet holes? The essence of the canon (the natural history diorama, the anthology of masterpieces with its "perfect specimens") is to eliminate the bullet-holes, to delete any trace of how the critter was bagged.

11. In the institutional double-bind of the canon—with its normal or normative channels, its administrative homeorhesis or supervised pathways of change—with its informants and its licensed operators, the arts are taken as work done now but for the benefit of "posterity." The arts are the happy side, the upscale heritage we pass along to our progeny to counterbalance their interest payments on our present national debt.

Am I implying that the arts are a subsidiary necrology?

Muzak for eternity?

It's hard to persist in doubt and uncertainty; hard to conceive an order outside canons and masterpieces, but not because of the old model of an entrenched bastion of privilege, a stronghold of conservatism resisting change. The canon is a mechanism for managing change, for stage-managing the theatrical milieu of "permanence." At stake in the issue of things canonical, as John Guillory suggests, is "the constitution and distribution of cultural capital."

And he adds: "Necessarily this is a question of the social differentiation of speeches, or the relation between the means of literary production and the institutions of social reproduction within which speakers succeed or fail to speak for themselves."

Do we speak for the same, or speak for change? The issue itself is not stable. It oscillates. The literacy-effect is simply the directive to classify canonically.

12. Homeorhesis: the biologist C. H. Waddington coined the term to mean "ensuring the continuation of a given type of change."

A multinational corporate head: "For several years we thought we had to manage a crisis and find a new equilibrium; we now

know that this idea is incorrect, and that change has to be permanent." If this corporate chief had read *The Communist Manifesto* he would have had this clearly spelled out for him, as "constant revolution in the modes of production."

Change *has to be* permanent. This makes capitalism sound like the purest of Heraclitean perceptions. No wonder so many are attracted to the "poetry of the marketplace."

But some scholars of comparative literature have lately drawn the same conclusions: Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay—"Prose is much more heraclitean [than poetry], it begins with change and seeks only to find ways of managing it."

In the late middle-ages and the rise of the vernacular throughout Europe, prose emerged as the faceless, characterless inner constitution of writing, as such, something so intrinsically unformed it could adapt itself to the changes. Unlike verse, prose was not a genre and brought with it no generic impediment.

As Godzich and Kittay explain, the oral tradition of the jongleurs (a verse-dominant "normal channel") handled change by investing the singer with custodianship of his materials. He could play on the cultural changes as they occurred, by working within the mastery of oral components which, being oral, were flexible.

But the dissolution of the universal power of the Holy Roman Empire, and the gradual separatism of emerging nation-states, required means of legitimation not contingent on nomadic sophists—which the jongleurs were becoming (singers for hire). These changes required documents which could embody difference without seeming to impose their own ritual legacies on the new material. "The move to documentary truth acknowledges the impossibility of containing time and its changes but manages to locate a form of preserving identity within it, namely an unchanging piece of paper" (xviii).

Now, before it appears I'm too far off the track: just to remind you, the issue is one of change, which is the dominant fact of Western civilization for a thousand years. ("What does not change / is the will to change.") And the language of change is prose. The concern of prose is "finding ways of managing change": it is intrinsically bureaucratic, administrative. Anything which holds its ground, which appears to resist change, is subject to the reconstructive surgery of disciplinary measures (punitive as well as scholastic). "In order to know. . .one has to occupy fleetingly a

fragile position for the purposes of knowing. Such positions and purposes are precisely what disciplines specify. By contrast, he who simply 'inhabits' is now but a native informant. His perspectives are not positionally constructed for purposes of knowledge, and thus they demand interpretation, demand to be themselves juxtaposed, overlaid, *put* in perspective."

These are the procedures I have described elsewhere as "The American Poetry Wax Museum." Poetry, not "positionally" (read: institutionally) constructed for the purposes of knowledge is subject to forcible acts of administrative jurisdiction (or critical interpretation). Entertainment is administratively prose—that is, it is "administered" like medication. Administered by licensed operators, colonial officials, custodians of what Burroughs calls "the wad," or what in Rastafarian argot is "the shitstem."

13. Now, this has all been a detour to emphasize that "normal channels" are prose channels. Prose is the expedient medium of our access to any information.

Like Molière's Mr. Jourdain, we talk in prose without knowing it. We're inside prose, it's all around us. We engage specific genres in order to get a grip on this otherwise monotonous uniformly surrounding medium. And of course it's no surprise that the predominant media are prose—fiction, scripts, essays, journalism, history, all prose.

Poetry necessarily operates from inside prose—a fact well enough known by the mid-19th century and the advent of the "prose poem." There's no getting out of prose.

Bruno Latour has described how Pasteur successfully marketed his vaccination against the anthrax bacillus by making the "natural" environment of the barnyard into a sort of field-version of his laboratory. If the conditions of the laboratory are adapted by farmers, the unpredictable threat of anthrax can be monitored and controlled. This is how it is with prose; prose is, as it were, the hygienic laboratory which makes the whole world over in its own image. Prose can provide immunity from unwanted microparasites because it is, itself, the dominant macroparasite. Prose is the universal lab that simulates the literacy effect.

So the issue is no longer one of genre, personal preference, talent, genius, any of that—all of which are performative, all

which haplessly fall prey to the administrative judiciousness of prose.

The issue, in other words, is not one of *writing*. The issue is reading.

14. *Do you read me—over and out.* "Read" in this sentence is an injunction to decode, cybernetically, a bivalve message: always binary, it will say yes/no past/present in/out male/female nature/culture negative/positive normal/deviant manifest/latent figure/ground passive/active form/content. Simple alphabetic literacy very quickly turns into methods for choosing between binary configurations like these.

I prefer to seek alliance with any practice of writing that refuses to treat binary elements or dual possibilities as injunctions to choose. So I hear Virginia Woolf's savoring of the "man womanly" and the "woman manly" in *Room of One's Own* as a kindred perception. To abide with both elements of a seemingly incompatible equation is to enact a poetics. This is what I have called (and spelled) *w*reading, or *how poetics exceeds its poetry*. This is the writing we read towards.

This is an increasingly threatened, unstable, dimly acknowledged respirator, this poem or other scrap of writing that appears like the writing Woolf imagines written in chalk on the pavement and instantly rubbed out by the heedless crowds walking across it. How do we read this writing? Writing that comes to us already vanishing, already obsolete, lacking any serviceability as textbook classic, masterpiece, map, skyline, history, brochure, guided audio tour. How to read beyond the gastronomic literacy of any writing that can be pre-digested, suitable for Reader's Digest? How to read beyond Gastronomic Literacy Effects with their additives and preservatives, their trouble-free convenience packages—PSI Poetry and the enriched-flour vocabulary of analytic appraisal that effortlessly accompanies it, speaking of "the poet" and "the poem" (or now, increasingly, "the text"), and always, trailing helplessly along behind, that native informant, "the self."

15. This has been the most auspicious place, this continent, to undertake such a wreading. From Emily Dickinson—if not from the earliest explorer's diaries—with her comprehension of just

how ample the tight spaces inside words, between words, could be.

> Publication—is the Auction
> Of the Mind of Man—
> Poverty—be justifying
> For so foul a thing
>
> Possibly—but We—would rather
> From Our Garrett go
> White—Unto the White Creator—
> Than invest—our Snow. . . [#709]

—think of Stevens' snowman, compounding the nothing that is not there with the nothing that is.

To place the person in the text as a reader is to endow it with mobility—to take it up off that "unchanging piece of paper" by making the fictive certainty of the paper itself palpable, viable, active. To read is to experience time as strangeness itself, in which you come to reckon with the spatial mystery of a voiceless speech and a bodiless embodiment. "To not finally know whether I am reading or writing" (Clark Coolidge).

As poets we largely devote our efforts to sculpting this space, this difference, into a habitat. A respiratory cavern which is wreading—with a "w." (Respiration is to wreading what inspiration is to writing.) Wallace Stevens is so compelling because his nearly exclusive concern is what it feels like to breathe, to stretch out, to fabulate in the sensorium of, such environs as "the drowsy motion of the river R."

It's not surprising that Stevens—avatar of the "supreme fiction"—should be the favored poet in an academic milieu which has bitten off more than it could chew with deconstruction and its relentless (juggling-without-net) demonstrations of the fictive layering of all "reality effects."

What's alarming is the neglect of parallel homegrown strategies proposing to take up an active role in handling the fiction—the tradition that passes from Pound's ideograms through composition by field, Olson's proprioceptive "resistance" a heartbeat away from negative capability, Kerouac's bop prosody, Rothen-

berg's symposium of the whole, Silliman's "new sentence" and much more. What do we make of the conspiratorial public ignorance of so ardent a legacy, this poetics that addresses the "artifice of absorption" that surrounds us, dispelling the reality effects and the literacy effects in order to grasp the fictive certainty that, as Duncan put it, "the real has just those boundaries we are willing to imagine." And further, that in the vacuous pressure-cooker of the postmodern (the Baudrillardean snowfield of hyperreal simulacra), "The task now is to imagine the real" (Robert Jay Lifton). That, in fact, the imagination has *real work* to do.

16. Normal channels, prose channels, are the media of compliance. They are the means by which unknown audience consents to captivity by testing positive to a numeracy syndrome, agreeing to a certain effacement in order to personally "typify" some statistical groundswell. In this sense, to "go native" now means that the entire culture has surrendered to its own colonization.

The milk tin passed through ghetto walls is easy to see, like Char's "Nazi abasement." Harder to see—and this is the necessary literacy, this recognition—is any act of real testimony in the midst of so many testimonials (PSI documents of compliancy with canonical administrative procedures.)

What is it that distinguishes testimony from the testimonial?—the difference is discernable in Peter Sloterdijk's complaint that "No one talks anymore of a *love* of wisdom. There is no longer any knowledge whose friend *(philos)* one would be. It does not occur to us to love the kind of knowledge we have. . ." Testimony is knowledge for which this has occurred, in which the eros of befriending what we know is intact, for as it's written in *Finnegan's Wake,* "we ought really to rest thankful that at this deleteful hour of dungflies dawning we have even a written on with dried ink scrap of paper at all to show for ourselves. . ."

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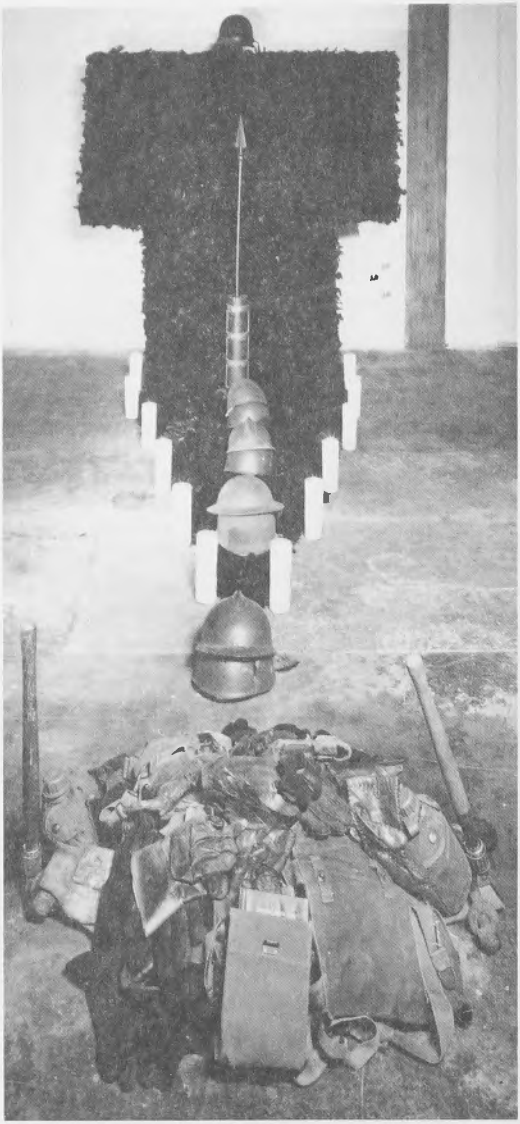
GERDA MEYER BERNSTEIN

SIX WORKS

ASHES TO ASHES

Mixed media construction
12' x 15'



VIETNAM MEMORIAL

Construction with turkey feathers
10' x 18'

PROCESSION

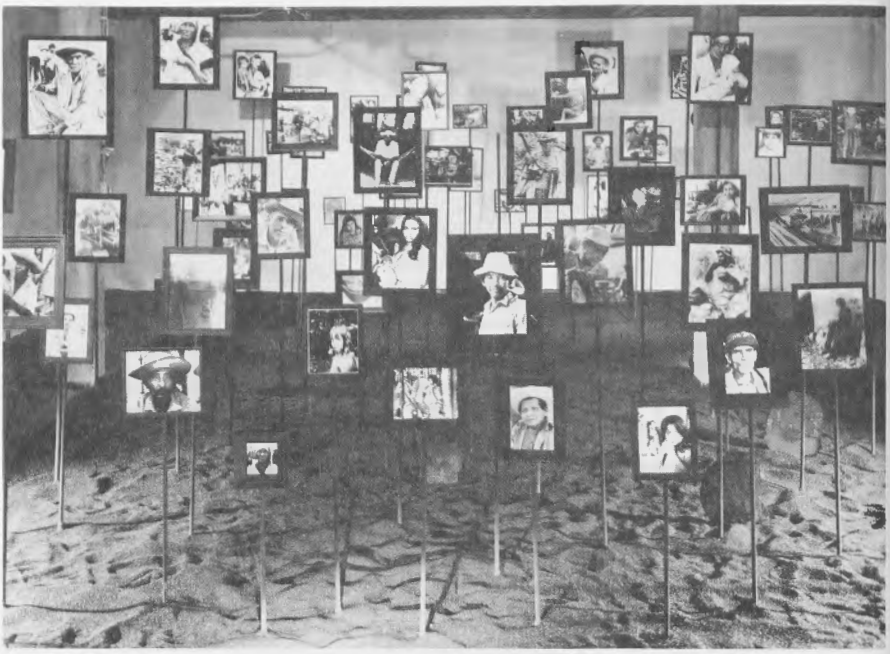
Walk-in installation (interior view)
22' x 10'

THE SCREAM

Painting and Kodolith
40" x 60"

HOMAGE TO RAOUL WALLENBERG

Construction (detail)
6' x 6'



ARMY OF THE DISAPPEARED

Walk-in installation
25' x 32'

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

SUNSICKNESS

Blame it on resembling, as if it would
change so easily, rough up glares
or trace avenues by fingertip.
You skirt on top afraid to sink
into and why not
falter, marched into elides, forked by
definition or conscripted from declamation—
the founding harbors faced it thus.
Then alone on hooks, trying
to get loss, the ground
refusing way. There's
no point, you proceed with intermittent
steps, & when the starting line appears
it can't be said
it's the same. No inanity suited
better then this poled tack. Nor
too much light either—heaving like
you'd just been hit in the face by a
wave—yet no particle
cares that much. I'd wager you've
had it by now—burn or defraud your
comeuppance as some sort of serial madness,
pegged to the flap that won't mind its
places. There was azure, agate, fool's
dust, but I never got any, just this
speculative bonfire. I'd give you credit
for that—but credit never satisfied

you. & after that there's only bone or blood
or sinew & not enough to share. Certain
things are private or anyway demand
privacy—but I'd be reluctant to say
who. No more than you I'm content
to lay low, tank up on decompression
& sing a chord or two—not possible
to remember many more than that. Or failing
to note the calm (calamity), fall prey to
remoter executions (I mean command
from distant quarters). There is a choir
here & don't know whether to blow
it out or blow it up. Less & less
to hold onto but more & more to do, be
done. If that doesn't stretch the point
too far. Going cold turkey or lukewarm
tongue. Not my language—just a lot of
luggage—but no use jettisoning the fading
with eau de cologne. Not my handle—
just a lot of tags on bags of baggage
that look
none too familiar. Then everybody
drops from sight & all the
wrong things said repeat themselves like
so many masquerades you can't pull
yourself out of. & screaming down
the hall without any signs of cause.
Pleading for hope when hope was just
the problem. Or should I throw a pie
in your face? (Pronoun slips on banana.)
—Michael writes of sun, but all I can think
of is sunsickness, too much in the sun
never a daughter. As if God's
light still shone on we who have shaded

our eyes. A few phrases remain,
but the drift is vanish. No way out
& no way in—straight call to blast.
Adrift on stage for all to view—
the cringe, the sigh, the curvilinear
elide. The scholar-trancemaker hangs
from the end of a trope and asks
to be cut down. An umbilical cord
signifies no less. Yet despite, I can now see
or is it all
a mistake? & does it splatter?
The important thing is the sweep by which
the specific is hampered
on its way to the
laundry. The "only objective comment"
lifted from the interrogation, then fingered
in this historical fantasy some have undertaken
to get out of. & so our
Reviewer can state that his false assertions
are "absolutely true" & "patently true" even
in the face of being absolutely false &
patently misleading. *Facts are a dime a
dozen but opinions are like pearls.* Society's
sailed amid so many stuffed shirts. The road
redelivers the redaction. Yet form can contain
almost nothing, just enough. & bursts
onto the floor waving & jumping up &
down. Sleighbells of an anticipated foreclosure
chiming at a frequency beyond reach
yet driving to distraction all the
same; which is to say
without goal & undecidable
expectation—can't even say
toward—& naming the passage time or

placelessness. Getting in bed with promise
& waking up with make-believe.
Fortunately impecunious, at least on a
materials level. Floor board, window
pane, ceiling fan, . . . *Cold* as a cow
with a long tail going to confession, *crazy*
as a one-legged chair at an ass-kicking contest,
nervous as wet fog, *silly* as a bedbug
in a brass bra, *smelly* as a white man
on election day, *I* enters the canvas.
Then what would you know the meaning
of? Hard as honey, white as flint, loud
as the snow, dumb as mud. . .There
be another horizon, boots on bay, time
left for every day. It's not as if
it hasn't been said before or won't be
said another time, but never quite
the same. Soft as midnight, clear as
dead. . .With the radio you always
turn this sort of thing off & now you're
p(l)aying for it. Floating entirely
inside the dump, unmaking proportion
in small-mouthed widgets encapsulated
astride phantom departures. Slow &
sullen; fast & nasty. [Please do not turn
page until completion of song.] For which I
languish, in thousand lacerations entangled.
Demark wave, implosion of what
is vapor. Days stifling of cork &
circles of music, sordid front mounted, enlarged
trembling like spectre of corpses adorned
(absorbed). & the fissures
elevate themselves & grunt
& the savor forces its

effects. Like as to as & what to what remains.
Me won voice. Me other is:
An objection: haze of the subject
brought to a locus.
An aberration: filter as creator—aspire
to what is dejectedly broken
occasionally the inflection of meteoric
& terminal vagueness.
Everything marked, no need to fence.
Sopping hard & alike as
a fiddle & a dive. A simple no
that knows no answer. *& if he say* cut off their
hands, then he shall have his tongue cut out.
But revenge is for cues &
plates (tools &
states), defiance for the rest who wait
& are willing. For what
you may learn is that by going
down into the secrets of your
own crimes you descend
into the secrets of all
mimes (minds). Anyway:
some other. Worlds
hourly changing
sparring with cause to an
unknowable end. Asking
no less, demanding no
more.

M'SIEUR TARZAN

There comes a point at which you have to sit back and let things unroll according to their own sweet will. You can put on your best suit—a nice dark brown wool—crisp white shirt, and snappy tie, slick back your cowlick in the polished mirror, adjust your shoulder holster, align your cuff links, and go lilting out the door toward a star-spangled evening, but if you're deep in the heart of the African jungle you're in for a surprise. Your house got towed away. You forgot to put money in the meter. As you drift deeper into the undergrowth, you hear, louder and louder, great numbers of trumpets, and it hits you right between the eyes: this is where all those Louis Armstrongs come from! Such a discovery would not have been possible had you insisted on champagne and the tawny slope of a shoulder that night.

Next slide. The shoulder had its own adventure, too. It dipped into a soft monkey fur that sank back into the plush leather back seat of a Rolls Royce that went in all four directions at once, it was so fine an instrument of travel. Voyage I think they call it. "We voyaged across an ocean of currency and when we floated in to our destination the coastline spread its distances under a sky bathed in hues softer than anyone's dream of a cloud, but when we stepped ashore the trees turned jagged and great wild hair waved in the gathering darkness. I went straight to the hotel and had room service send up an urn of iced pearls. It was then I noticed that—how shall I put it—the other end of the room had been erased. I mean there was. . .just nothing there. And when I went toward it I got smaller, and when I went through it I got to be you." Next slide.

Not everyone can afford a mobile home. Or even a mobile dollhouse, in which the dolls wear goggles and bow down before images of Barney Oldfield. In one image Barney is seen squirting

some oil from an oil can onto the arm of an old lady who was later identified as his grandmother, a stately gentlewoman who claimed to have sewn the first flag ever to fly over the jungle just outside the dollhouse. Barney wants to examine the rooms, see what's there, and maybe wash up before dinner. The bathroom is wonderful, all gleaming white tile and pink and blue bars of light coming through the windows painted on the far wall. Pretty soon Barney's in the shower singing up a storm that sends down ripping bolts of lightning that execute the great race driver then and there: he is found dead in the tub. Sic transit authority. Next slide.

You are six years old. Let's see, that would be in 19—. That's my favorite year, 19—. It is like my favorite author, Anonymous. Anonymous was born in —— and died in —— and is still alive, like the other archetypes. They have it pretty easy, those archetypes. Big houses and cars and moonlight and things that money can't buy, like air and pain and Johnny Weismuller. But I have Johnny Weismuller, have him in my sights at this very moment, as he steps off a high ledge and sweeps like a maniac through the trailing vines, dressed in his best suit, a nice dark brown wool.

GOLD

1

A yellow apple could be a small hollow in stone that flows over and over,
a yellow not in a thing, since it vanishes in the dark, while a thing remains unchanged.
The person the feeling is about may remain unchanged, as the person becomes visible to you.
When you see leaves in a jar against a pink wall, your door opens onto a pink wall,
chlorophyll effervescing in a leaf, a feeling of light. If I have that person already,
that makes me partly unaware of the person, as if I meant some far-off stars, and I were myself
identical with my deep thought that already knows them. I am trying to find out how I
already mean stars, by making this harmonizing light in this room next to a pink room, my remote thought.

2

There is a sieve of small funerary ideas in the air, through which the chlorophyll of a leaf flies.
You fly through a tunnel, and see light on factory windows, as if an iridescent pane of glass
were the shadow of a leaf of your feeling about the person. How will my eye take in the texture
of nature at the edge of the leaf, as what things that go on in my mind can conform to,
unless it's another mind, of a woman in fox leggings, on a golden pane of glass, as in a meditation?
Each point along the edges of her fur might have a roundness, as full as the top of blue sky
above the leaves, or more so. Not the weight, but gold details the contingency, her senses,
scooped out in the back, and constantly patching seams through which her feeling may pass,
what the body stands in front of, a foot turned up, like a bowl with little curls on the lid.

3

This gold will supply a backbone: a relation of the factual hold between a feeling and an object in reality, whether he knows it holds or not, and what can hold between a feeling and a non-existing object or person, a spine whose nature is exhausted by how it appears, and a light whose nature is not.
There would be an entity in the world connected to your use of the person, by the relation of your meaning that invisible guard of blonde hairs at the edges of the entrance to his pink ear, really talking about a glowing quince. I am not talking about a real quince that is glowing against the foliage in front of a pink house at dusk, like an owl decoy in foliage.

4

Nothing will explicate non-instrumental goodness or his non-functional beauty.
That we have such questions as truth or goodness which float free of all justifications in him, is how I understand my mind will make a tool without a tool of the emotion, such as limbs to wings, yellow leaves along a bone. She is telling her husband, they pop on and off like lights over a drifting desert, concealing it. Too much light effervesces into a feeling of decomposition, the foliage of a tree in front of her own house in the sun, moving a time through a thing.
Even if I dream I see this light, this in me I call a feeling.
Between it and the light outside would be a seam. That the two feel smooth is the entity, a kind of transfer, as what you are trying to refer to of the foliage. A leaf can fold over, lifting a skin of the leaf and placing it here, in front of the light turquoise mountain, here, in the small of his back in the heat, where blue wasps are sipping.

DAVID BROMIGE

from BY DRAWING A LINE *and* A SET OF TWELVE

YOU

"Even my feelings don't
represent me." And he turned
to me, and kept on turning.

Who says that part, that narrative?
Which doesn't represent me either
alleges someone else

who could be. Then the correction
tape must be inserted
just when I'm at my most impatient,

yet able to perceive this
conjunction and offer it
as an example. I worry

that my writing is too
deliberate, for someone
who gets there ahead of

myself. An excuse opts out
my lips: I write it out
to see it steadily, not

elsewise capable of so
noticing what it is I do,
that's why these little

units too. I show it to you
in case there's somewhat
of me in you, since loneliness

can be terrible. The clusters
I let sounds make make
consistency into identity

to stand for me. But my neck
is stiff, now, although it
hadn't been. I can't reach it

myself. So I would set an idea
between us, you and me, and be
you, turning into it, and it is

words, for an image
considers money changing hands
that is minted some third place,

changing the hands that handle it.
Why argue that a poem must be
personal—reducing variety to that

aggrandizing formula? It's just my
requirement. The Misty Mountains
hover above the lovely lake

locates the brimming city.
Forget that—the rock
washed down sits on

itsshelf I remember to write
despite the tape went haywire
at the stanza-break. Real time

is commentary on process?
I appear to think this
so suggest alternatives,

marmoreal, a joining up
of notebook entries
to be another nature. Your

manifest substantiality
must be some guarantee
to me. Don't leave me

here—I'll give you
an experience of your life,
where this must stand for that,

sentences be
abilities transcending
interruption, interruptions

some guarantee we're real.
But why these sentences
and why must they be me—you

perhaps should not be
troubled on this matter.
Perhaps: the element of chance

the near side of a fact.
The thing in the trap
still gorged with other

destination. A seriously
inflated tableau
to ring the curtain down

if "all the world's a stage"
preludes discovery
that's not the case. Music

must be the case
yet isn't. One
types one's type

idiosyncratically
twisting. Apparent discourse
fails to give you space.

YOU

A vocabulary
that anticipates
action on my part
is never all the case.

Walls bend.
To the blast
letters create
in quiet space.

Once they were large
and you were small
and change
stays hard to see.

A vocabulary
that anticipates
action on my part
is now the case.

Fashionable arrangements
flatter, familiar
sequences predicted
by the ancestors

clarify the insult.
Subject to a change
that qualifies as
liquidation

gasps for means
and evolution
chokes. Recall
life and *art*—

those infant twins
a sow ate one of,
and the one who lived
was never sure?

An anecdote to smudge
thought's figure.
And thought to fudge
its issue. This is you.

CHOICE

The Way of Geometry

And there are three ways
through the marshes

The Way of Sainthood

Impossible to know
which of the three men
on the deck at sunset

There is the gaze off into the distance
but that is a pose

There are the "marshes"
a regional matter

or a reasonable affair
or as in selecting one
from a basket of gourds

She sang in the bath

Then there is the silver pipe
with a guard or filter on top

The sum of the hypotenuse
The song of the river-horse

Of the three figures, one is
dapper, and faces us

"We waited nine months"
as in "common" or "lot"

His shadow cast against the door
The door somewhat ajar
and the sense of being trapped

A bad time to sneeze
or the seals to go
in the transmission

Who held the camera
or the protractor
She must have been very beautiful

when there were four ways

and he played the piano so thrillingly
This is about setting-out

the deck of cards, the hands and faces
and how it seems night
the light artificial

and something unnamed
though known

as another way, those trees
spindly and profuse
with blue among them

And the triangle
a diamond in the lake

Blue and black at each apex

yet merely dark
at one, the one
beneath the shoe

red to begin with, redder
in that sun

A SET OF TWELVE

It to experience

Might be the first
past
part of something
ahead it
presents

1.

It must be impossible
no, it must seem so

and the difference

why bother then

but the difference

a kind of remainder

of what would be forgotten

can't use this
for anything

or anything else

2.

These parts stuck together
that were once wholes

how human
can we get

over the gap

without the sad remnant

~~left~~ for the gods
that were once parts

and what about stuck
that gets the attention

and what about deserves
and what about deserves

that what preserves
but us

what about us

3.

A picture tapes thought

of a flapping hand
manicly finally

trying to discard the tape

a person can get it all
but not the one who thinks it

out of the system

and what about system

impossible

then there's someone
posed beside that

whod leave nothing behind

A positioning
of its opposite
not even that

a poisoning
of the atmosphere

stuck together

4.

Love fallen into
puts a pit or a pool
where a person was

and is

two

a fiction

a comfort

that must be impossible

that temptation

the remainder resists
its insistence

sticky surface

violent invisible collisions

reminding of somewhat

can help come
in the shape
one's in

a soft spot
in an obdurate

word one hadn't
handled quite
this way

if before has time in it

for what about way

5.

Given
a time like this

and naturally
one feels elation

from here a sentence
winds downhill

behind the picture

refused

depicts refusal

among all one was
wanted to be

now refuse
if the sound is the dump

that is ugly

Given beauty
like this

the wind up the hill
turns ugly

6.

1
"My life had stood
a loaded gun"
there it is
in the corner
of

but like that

I like that

but that is not
what makes the trigger
fingered

a contradiction
in a cave

stuck together

for approval

rent
for approval
for rent

A life had
to live

and what is
after
all

2

The world approves
Why else were you here

And
you are here

and the world

had stood in the
some term
Meantime

7.

The gift
that might be
ambiguous

is a present
that will be
unwrapped

symmetrical
agreement

stuck together
for approval

something else
that is apart

that is a part

if there's a whole
before the predicate

the hand withdraws

somewhat has been left
over in time as position

a slight weight
or diminishing acoustic

ruling out one

ruled in

8.

Lifted

the object
weighed
texture

~~Un~~expected

Judgment
and no further
persuasion

prevails

9.

Irrelevant

What you think

in these conditions

of age, race, nation, class
or health

however diagnosed

"mental" "physical"

But the language
Is this irrelevant?
Must be
but isn't

as the rest
and their pictures

actions, fist through canvas

a hand that might open
with its lines
that are names

10.

Accretion
includes error

Memory
disposes

The difference
from that which one

demonstrates
but which one

indubitably
doubts

THE ARUNDEL PRESS ANNOUNCES:

NEW BOOKS BY:

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The Arundel Press announces the publication of a new book of poems by Clayton Eshleman. Titled MISTRESS SPIRIT, these thirteen poems with preface date from 1983-1985, and are the last unpublished body of work from the poet's California period. Among the collection is the widely acclaimed "Reagan at Bitberg."

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Drawing on a wide range of poets and scholars *(Olson, Artaud, Blake, Frye, Auden, Graves, Snyder, Corman, Dickinson, Wakoski, psychologist James Hillman, painter Max Beckmann, etc.)*, Eshleman goes on to discuss what a genuine apprenticeship to the art of poetry might very well involve, followed by comments on various Poetic Curriculums *(by Auden, Graves, Olson and Snyder)*. Woven throughout the information and ample quotations, Eshleman presents his own apprenticeship, and shares with the novice his own prolonged translational association with the poetry of Cesar Vallejo.

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11.

1

Ends
A sense of such

for a system
one wields wields one

Weariness
irrelevant

"human"
a consolation
abrupting

with its definition
the defining

2

"Human" blue
height of
"a port in. . . ."

and the threads then
leading in
and elsewhere

Now are you a monster
mister memory-man and
miss memory-woman

Objection
irrelevant

with its hands
The verbs
"turning the pages"
preserving same

"I had air my lungs could breathe"
A possible statement
But statement

remainders

12.

Misspelled
or at variance

to think times
apparently blank space

"Total articulation
. . .that must be impossible"

settles
for less

Hey that's okay
street shouts

But disposition
has always died

in the eye
it puts out

The site
i tup sets

Between be and seem
the irony, the word
for the experience
of the word

for the experience

Chorus Girls

2

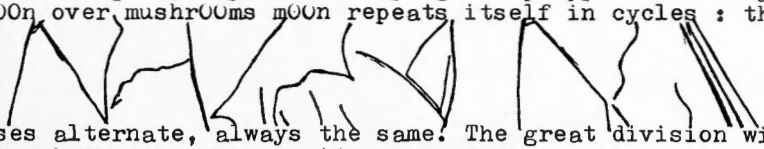
A Brief History of the Muses

[Note: In a lecture entitled 'Feminism and Italian Avant-Garde Art', Giulia Nicolai spoke of a secret alphabet in pre-literate Greece linked to the months of the year and invented by certain priestesses of the Moon long before the Greeks modified the Phoenician symbols. Starting point. I have identified these priestesses with their mythical counterparts, the Muses, of whom there were originally three (of Song, Dance & Poetry), later nine with multiplication in the various departments of Arts and Sciences. I am never aware of these lunar symbols at the tip of my pen, but draw on those who were: the Greek poet Aischrion ('moon, the sky's beautiful new sigma') and e.e. cummings ('mOOn Over tOwn mOOn'). For the 'Rockettes', see Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York.]

A Brief History of the Muses

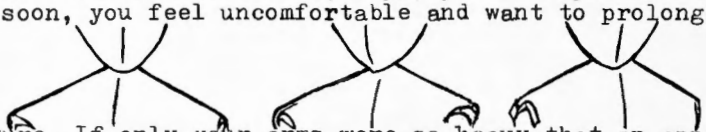
a chain of molecules arranged in a certain order, and thanks to the mere fact of having an order, she had only to float in the midst of the disorder and immediately around her other chains were formed. (Their periods were heaven's fair new letters : first quarter, heaven's fair new letter C.) But in

the luminous colonies of the sea's depths, in the ribbons of kelp that began to emerge from the soft crust of embryonic continents, every now & then a swarm broke loose only to divide once again, repeat that sponge or polyp whence they came - mOOn over mushrOOms mOOn repeats itself in cycles : the

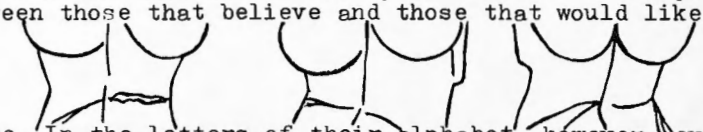


phases alternate, always the same. The great division within living beings had begun. (Their periods were heaven's fair new letters : full moon, heaven's fair new letter O.) Strictly through the mechanisms of tortoise-shell lyres and prosody, in a mirror-fingered dawn, the virgins reproduced them-

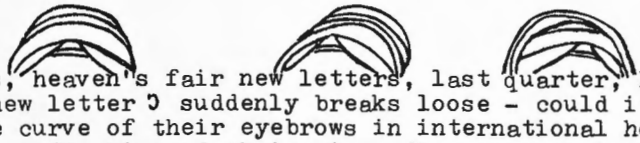
selves mOOn over tOwers mOOn. But between the part that transmits the orders of reproduction and the part that carries them out an irreconcilable gap has opened and they speak: 'Your sentence over, boys, you feel you have finished too soon, you feel uncomfortable and want to prolong the



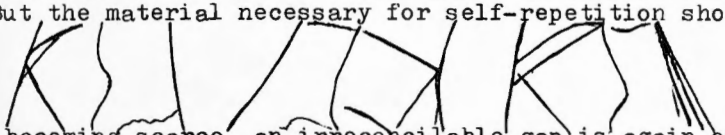
gesture. If only your arms were so heavy that an appreciative sweep lasted IO minutes, we should be saved from literature.' (Their periods were heaven's fair new letters : half moon, heaven's fair new letter D.) By now the battle is joined between those that believe and those that would like to be-



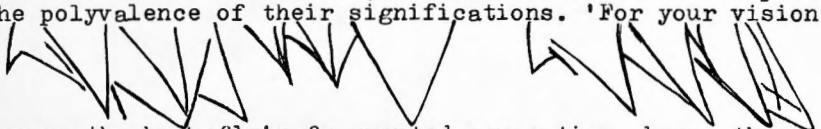
lieve. In the letters of their alphabet, however, everything has been registered: the stage is magically cleared of debris and the reborn Rockettes assume their traditional formations mOOn over tOwn mOOn. Strictly through the effects of architecture, in a mirror-clad dorm, the virgins reproduce them-



selves, heaven's fair new letters, last quarter, heaven's fair new letter ☽ suddenly breaks loose - could it be the gentle curve of their eyebrows in international hotel lobbies or the soft chime of their circumflex accents in airport bars ? But the material necessary for self-repetition shows signs



of becoming scarce, an irreconcilable gap is again opening between us, they cancel the last bold letter at the first quarter of the new moon, substitute (all phases apparent) ☾ , heaven's fair new asterisk, and accuse us of misinterpreting the polyvalence of their significations. 'For your vision has



become the housefly's fragmented perception, boys; thus we restore you to your freedom: call it the distance between your multiple footnotes and our whole configuration.' So we were left with mOOn Over fOOtnOtes mOOn as our letters repeat themselves in cycles, the phases alternate, always the same.

TWO POEMS

FIGMENT

For not often in our loves the moment of transubstantiation
lifts love to the crown of moonlit snow in the great
spruce forest, sparking there,
but they, our loves, go mundanely on in the exploring
excitation
of nerve endings, so insinuated it brings
tears melting in our sentimental eyes, gasps and throes,
and this is our weakness, for which in the end we pay, we
suffer,
we agonize in the torture rooms
of the erotic prison where our bodies break down, sinew by
sinew,
in the fevers of love.
My dear, in our spruce woods, warm in the snow, we ascend
to the crystalline crowns, borne on the tiny snowy crosses,
for we are imagined ones, you imagined by me and I by you,
and neither knows the how of the other.
But we know we are pure. Only imagined loves and lovers
have this purity, this detachment from weakness and brain
disease,
and you in my vision of you are, in imagination's
eternal moment for however long or briefly we in our
nevertheless
piggish capacities for glory can hold the vision intactly,
the goddess of love stepping from the shell
of the wind-swept hollow in the waves of snow,
pristine and glowing with sexual magnanimity.
What you see of me there on my knees is a grace in which

I participate momently and gratefully,
so sprawled not in the desire to be taken but in the desire
to be made real where I am loverly.
Oh my beautiful, see how the moonflash pirouettes
on the gleaming crucifixions of the spruce boughs
laden with snow. We are transcensions in ourselves,
in our musky, delicious sex and blood, true in this that the others
try to blow away with a poof-paff. Come to me. We have known
the truth of poetry for a long time and now know
the truth of love without a medium, without any substance
but our love itself.
Kiss me, snuggle to me, hold my penis,
let me kiss all your body, yes, here in the snow, it cannot chill us,
this so unlikely place, this imagined place
with its owls and icicles, its hardy beech leaves fluttering
on the snow like mice scratching in a nest, my hand nestling
in you so warm until you die, my poor Yankee hand
that knows practical wisdom, the morality of the real,
now in the lifelong fantasy of scaling the treacherous peaks
alone with you.

CATALOGUE

In the upper atmosphere the ozone layer is partly destroyed, which permits the penetration of ultra-violet rays to the earth's surface.

In Montana are distinct pre-indications of a high Gobi-like desert.

On the Jersey shore continual wastes drift on the beaches, sewage, industrial contaminants, even the hideous detritus of

hospitals. This is becoming more and more evident also in other coastal regions, including the Pacific.

Carbon monoxide and other pollutants fall in the rain on New York and New England, destroying sugar maples and swamp maples faster than they can replenish themselves.

In the Amazonian basin, using huge machines, loggers of mahogany, purpleheart, and other exotic timber are destroying the rain forest that produces a large part of the oxygen necessary for life on earth.

Cancer is epidemic, it is in everyone; George Dennison is dead, Ray Carver is dead, Joel Oppenheimer is gravely ill.

The hottest, most sultry summer on record in North America has killed 1500 people simply from dehydration and exhaustion. Some inhabitants recognize that the same thing on a much larger scale has occurred in parts of the world to which they do not normally give much attention.

The extinction of species—say again, the extinction of species—continues at a daily measurable rate.

The exhaustion of unrenewable fossil fuels will occur at a calculable moment not far in the future.

Dead porpoises ooze up at the seaside every day in large numbers.

Gannets, gulls, sea ducks, and other waterfowl are strangled when their necks are caught in the holes of plastic fasteners from six-packs of beer and soda.

Starvation has spread into the vicinities of the wealthy.

The depth of topsoil in Iowa, estimated to have been ten to twelve feet at one time, even twenty in some places, is now five inches; the remainder is diminishing annually.

Only a few remote aquifers reveal no toxic elements.

General levels of mercury, sodium, sulfate, and PCBs continue to increase in all ecosystems.

Will it ever end? Of course. Of course it will end.

DOREN ROBBINS

TWO POEMS

DRAWN TO AND CONFOUNDED

Now, after all, without filters, without the prop of inactments; the transformative routine an unavailable fiction; without the watery bond of it. . .So long mistold to myself, mispictured to my judgements; the myth of it exploded, the myth of it exploded itself a myth. . .Revived, momentarily unitable; comfort now would be retrograde—how much I envy black! Clearest depth and dilapidated vineyards. . .I stand by my unpredictable stabilities; into the absorption of what I am lowered in to I steer, I am the connoisseur of only that. . .What I am denied of, not worthy of, betrayed over, praised for, is all sentimentalism; an indulgence of the absence of not seeing deeper. Suffering has its compilations. Resolution has its compilations. Parallel spasms, blocked migrations, instances of illuminations—for me there are fewer balances, fewer instances, than verdurous trapdoor intervals between the extremes. . .the road produces and destroys. And I am drawn to it as I am drawn to and confounded by the Essence of Mind Hui Neng spoke of, which is neither created nor can it be annihilated. How can this be? But how can it not be and still be thought? Illuminations, I said, but that is only a name given to it, and all of the high names of attainment are arrogance—since the name of the precision past lucidity, and when the name of the meeting past continuance, and also if the name of the rarity past conclusion, all lead to the defeated resonance. . .past fertility.

NOT

Not bridges, not the reciprocity of the dew, or the putrefaction of opposites; not the celestial gate or the ënchanted ground, the predawn preillumined interiors or the incessant depressions' sway; not the permeable door or the lasting ground; not the mood under the wreck unspoken or the perturbed echolalia; not bridges, not the nondiscovery of rarities, the syntax harp mutistic, the step in charted through moth dung and smoke; not the butcher's scale, the dressmaker's mirror, the falsified dose, the painted over error. Not the fiction with accomplices; not Nachman either in the Castle of Transformations, not the doctor in the stone tower pleading it is the manifestation of the occupant; not the conceit of bridges, not the verbal spermicide of it, the insecticidal prattlists that maintain it, the right-brain-hobbyists that pander to it; not these views either—all blatantly unaware of some other slander, some other conceit, prattle, disparaging grind, mishap, allowable horror, or disgrace; not this individual factual gloom, pitfall, whining interior, or fortitude, or proficience, or rarity of craft; the extreme tolerable only to one who has surpassed the desire or outlasted the compulsion to live extremely; not the romance of bridges—ruses against being caught in the act, against establishing the unguarded act, the potentially dislikable act, and the act dismissed at the instant of the proof of each actuality. . .I cross the gelatinous foundations, and the births of flies, correspondences half reached, or consumated, or left off from; I drag an invisible beam, an inflamed precision emerging. . .but not bridges, I am oppressed by boundaries predetermined, and bridges.

SEAN KILLIAN

THREE POEMS

BLINDFOLD, WOOLY CAPE AND SHOES OF LEAD

Behind our scenarios
is the real life,
whatever is real
in it somehow
unsignable and lost
though the ruins
of its architecture
often accost
a building detachment.

Can I even whistle
a stretch of it,
how it tumbled up
from scattered stone
and said tower, tower,
reproducing content and context
in one upthrust, laying
the land low, with a kind of mercy?

Still, you look out,
afraid, incumbent,
hardly like your remains
or your efflorescence—
whatever they were—and
the reddish drift of your heart
may lift cuecards to the sun—
don't dance if every fragile wrong

won't drive sunspots batty.
On occasion, you get the
drift, atop your directorate,
your art, your hissing
rose-petals piled into a
select spindle of Babylonish
bliss (or would-be bliss).

The whole thing gets
desiccate, and the collapse
of such stacked stage whispers
is imminent; but don't
stifle your warmth that
might heat up heaven, a
rather cold fish if the
starlight be landed. And
instead of any monument,
there is, of course, an obstacle
course somehow vertical toward
the sky's unseeable apex.
And in that shooting in the air
is the lifeblood spilled
for some absurd reach,
past any aim, past known target.
It's a warning, heeded or not,
that one might yet get to the bull's-eye.

JUICES OF RUBATO
(STOLEN TIME)

Will distance scorch
what we've come to believe,
the boo-fed truth

already shortened
because the search has gone on
for its big bravos
and come to nought?

Lies are a stricter beat
than ever, the kind
of rumbling in the mouths
that might be a flight
of hairtriggers afraid
of the gunning sun.
And the shock of the semiautomatic moon.

Or shall I nose the stolid bride
to more nuance, more delightful cloud,
her thunders my kind,
my lightning her stripe?
My intended was fractionally mine
till I featured her in a blue streak,
cocking all ears for intimacy.
The piano, tonight, is a serpentine mound
but who minds? Who sounds?

The stairway has bannisters of char
and a newel of blackened stump;
I'll lie in wait, knowing the muse
can only reign for short instants,
cool instants. One can be levelheaded
though an advocate of scrollwork
and defiant maze. My scoresheet
burns with bouquets, hoping to anthologize
our speech, like some signature piece
passed along as latent belonging.

The live, uneclipsable salamander
stirs from the black chords
of memory and the fountain
is no longer cistern; you
can count the beats

it takes for it
to turn into flicker of fire
and steal the music.

Some actress burns
in tandem with her
unseen vigilance;
and minor victory is
merely new lapse;
you can collapse in
her awkward arms and
ask for more than
you paid for but the
debt will get enormous,
deficit already possessed
by its own flaccidity.

It's only safe to say little,
to stay within limits,
named but brighter
than a name. The climb
into that quiet is never short
of failure but we must
play one more ardency and
argue over the remains,
the ruses of love. There is
a place where you refrain
from telling me how intimacy
can ice, ice-over, gaining ground
and soon covering the earth in a colder age.

YOU'RE (HISTORY)!

A monolith,
such as you
are, is worn
down, like
some scaled
stadia reduced
from seating
to saturated
ruin; and marks
clamp like teeth
till the scars are
too great and
identity tumbles,
some unlettered
tombstone, some
timbre of erasure
which has already heard
from chasmal enemies
on the last of tiers.
Scoriae of catcalls!
Scamper of rats!
And the pillars sag
till stylites sit
on rumbling ground,
thinking temblors
are calls from a new divinity
though spectacle has devoured
even the turgid amphitheatre of any Great Seer.
And one must suck on a sucking stone.

ONERS N TENNERS 3

from *Descriptive Mentality from the Head, Face and Hand*
by Holmes W. Merton (1899)

Ordinary. Your Form is large enough for ordinary purposes. By training it would enable you to become a good mechanic. You could become a good mechanic if you so desired. Good. Desired. Training. Large. Mechanic. Enough.

Eyes strong and observing (unless injured by overwork): vivid expression.

Concise.

You should study that which is of value to you. Apply yourself steadily to studying one vocation valuable to you. Steadily. Vocation. Study a vocation of value to you, applying yourself steadily. Value. Yourself. Application. Steady application to studying one vocation is valuable to you. You should apply yourself steadily to studying a valuable vocation.

Amity.

From the Faculty of Inspiration arise Aesthetics, Symbolism, and Adornment. Principal organ for pathologist, author, magician, seer, symbolist, or ethicist. Aesthetics. Ethics. Magic. Inspiration yields Aesthetics and Adornment for magician, pathologist, and seer. The principal organ for magicians, authors, and pathologists is Inspiration.

You strongly desire to gain mental strength from new discoveries.

Ethical.

Attention.

You have great natural philanthropy, begrudging no one's honest success.

Sublime. Religion should be full of life, warm, sunny, and genial. Morality. Religion. True or false, it is a good way to live. Infinity. Sunny. Good. Infinity's worship is sublime when morality and religion are one. A warm, sunny religion, true or false, is good morality.

Large faculties of Form, Color, and Attention greatly aid Inspiration. Delicate thought, reading, and communion with nature augment small Inspiration. Commune with the beautiful, read refining literature, study the arts. We cultivate Inspiration by communing with nature and thinking delicately. Literature. Studying the arts cultivates Inspiration through Form, Color, and Attention. Attention. Habitual delicate thought and reading refining standard literature cultivate Inspiration. Help Form's, Color's, and Attention's faculties by communing with nature. Communion.

Unsystematic.

Careful of wealth and property, you're open-handed, generous, when needed. Your medium Faculty of Economy lets you aid the deserving. Economy. Generous. If the deserving need your wealth and property, you're open-handed. Generous to the deserving needy, you take care of property. When you think it deserved, you open your hands generously. Deserving. Careful. Through medium Economy you're generally careful of wealth, carefully generous.

Will's faculties yield executive and dynamic powers: civil, financial, productive.

From the Faculty of Liberty arise Freedom, Equality, and Independence.

Seldom demonstrating self-approbation, egotism, self-esteem, you're disapproving rather than commending.

Vague. With mental pictures vague, indistinct, you don't notice the inconspicuous. You do not notice what is not directly referred to. Indistinct. Conspicuous. Pictures. Notice. Directly. With a small Faculty of Form, you don't notice much. Only seeing the conspicuous, your mental pictures are vague and indistinct.

You have a warm, genial friendship and express it buoyantly.

Language.

You're a good judge of distance, locality, and visible motions. Locality. Motions. Distance. Through very large Faculty of Form you judge visibles well. Distances, localities, and visible motions are what you judge best. You make correct judgments about visible motions, distances, and places. Judge. Your very large Faculty of Form judges well whatever's seen. Form.

Spiritual things have more of emotional quality than intellectual perception. You can't be reasoned into changing opinions generally considered religious. Spiritual. For you spiritual matters are generally more emotional than intellectual. Religious. Perception. Reason. Opinion. Your religious opinions are not subject to change through reasoning. Emotion.

You are not much interested in the government of children.

From the Faculty of Integrity arise Rights, Duty, and Penalties.

Your very large Faculty of Hope influences those around you.

The Faculty of Language's studies are Grammar, Speaking, and Music.

Study. Irksome. Practice. Harmonies. Musician. Though appreciating music, you'd find constant study and practice irksome. Attractive. Necessary. Musicians' constant practice would be irksome

though harmonies are attractive. How irksome it would be to practice and study constantly!

Expressions.

Life-forces. Living. Organs. Impressions. You don't sense the life-forces of living things around you. Discovery. Things. You depend upon other organs for their discovery and impressions. Sense. Dependence.

You've no disposition to ideal creations in the practical arts.

You pay little attention to parental feelings and heredity's influence.

Contempt. Contumely. Your contempt demands you heap contumely on what it dislikes. Failing. Accomplishment. Not accomplishing its end, it seeks solitude to recuperate energy. Your contempt arises from your very large Faculty of Aversion. Contemptuous, you speak and act rudely toward all you dislike. Solitude. You retreat to solitude when thwarted in expressing your contempt.

Country. Criticize. You're more apt to criticize than praise your own country. Only moderately patriotic, you don't worship your country's past achievements. Praise. Critical rather than worshipful, you hardly ever praise your country. Past. You seldom praise your country and don't worship its past. You criticize your country when others might be praising it. Worship.

You judge the future more through reason than through intuition.

From the Faculty of Hope arise Reclamations, Improvements, and Undertakings.

Parenity.

Communion.

Eyes.

Your nature cannot bear antagonism or discord, but craves harmony. Discord. You crave harmonic social life and growth rather than discord. Antagonism and discord are unbearable to a nature craving harmony. You have a harmony-craving nature, shunning social antagonism and discord. Harmonious social life and growth is what you want most. Harmonic. Since you can't stand discord, you always seek social harmony. Naturally you prefer harmony and try to resolve social contradictions. Nature.

Defence. Orderwork. From the Faculty of Defence arise Orderwork, Machinery production, Textiles. Machinery. Textiles, Orderwork, and Machinery production express the Faculty of Defence. Production. Studies. Arising. Departments and studies from Defence: Machinery production, Textiles, and Orderwork. Departments.

In Mental Temperament the nervous system is strongest, Intellect predominant.

Beautiful. Natural. Nearly all natural objects' forms, colors, or actions are beautiful. Careful observation of natural objects will add to your pleasure. The actions, colors, and forms of natural things are beautiful. Observation. It will please you greatly to observe natural objects carefully. Pleasure. Action. Color.

Your muscular system is not powerful in proportion to size. Your backhead's nerve force is not powerful and soon exhausted. Climate. You would find constant change in business or location wearing. Nature. Backhead. Nerve. Cultivation. Your endurance would be much modified by our adverse climate. Adverse.

Small Will and vital temperament yield romantic and idealistic thought. Very Large Invention and small Will may produce visionary literature. Nature. Vital. Poetry combines Very Large Invention, small Will, and vital temperament. Your romantic turn comes from Very Large Invention, Small Will. Expression. Visionary. You're disposed toward romantic, idealistic thought, and visionary literary work. Idealistic.

Your memory often fails you; your past is disconnected, confused. Information. Laborious. Slow. You gain special information by slow and often laborious steps. Your memory's no good and you gain information with difficulty. Special.

Steps. Memory. Disconnected.

You're much disposed to acquire wealth and spend it economically. You like to be credited with commercial shrewdness and ability. Wealth. Your Large Faculty of Economy makes money and spends it shrewdly. Economy. Credit. Spending wealth economically, you like being called shrewd, commercially able. Disposed. Expenditure. Acquisitive and economical, you've a reputation for shrewd commercial ability.

You wouldn't find it difficult to be agreeable in society.

Mental. If of mental temperament, you'll care little for feminine companionship. Temperament. Men of Small Devotion, mental temperament, marry for convenience, necessity. Convenience. You'll marry for convenience or necessity not for feminine companionship. Marriage results from convenience or necessity for men with Small Devotion. Feminine. With Small Devotion and mental temperament you'll marry for convenience. Companionship.

Formative.

Indications of poor texture and quality, numerous, need little description. Quality. Texture. Numerous. Poor. There are very many indications of poor texture and quality. Marked. Shifting eyes, coarse skin, ungraceful, unresponsive movements, indicate Poor Quality. Poor. Nerve force lacks strength and tone, is dull, indirect, cloudy. Personal Expression in those of Poor Quality usually lacks meaning.

Enthusiasm. Repression. Beauty. You feel more enthusiasm for beauty than you can express. With Medium Inspiration, you quietly repress your enthusiasm for beauty. Unable to express them,

you repress your feelings for beauty. When you encounter beauty, you quietly repress inexpressible enthusiasm. Nature. You feel more enthusiasm for beauty than you can express. You quietly repress somewhat of your natural enthusiasm for beauty.

Parenity. With Very Large Parenity, you abound in tenderness for children. You easily take children's attention: they do as you desire. Charm. Congeniality. Your congenial tenderness charms children into doing what you want. Your Faculty of Parenity being very large, you charm children. Children do as you want because of your abundant tenderness.

Attention. Abundance.

Benevolence.

Algebra.

Your touch, far from acute or sensitive, requires much practice.

With very large Reason, Construction, Defence, Form, you worship nature. Having but Small Hope, you anticipate no pleasures of immortality. Success. Nature. Physical. You hope, not for immortality, but success in this life. Reason. Worshipping nature's physical forces, your hope lies in worldly success. You will worship nature and have no hope for immortality. Nature and her physical forces are your objects of worship.

Self-contained, blunt in expressing opinions, you don't heed others' opinions.

You quickly notice others' thoughts and motives from their motions.

Arbitrary. Older. As you grow older, your opinions will probably grow arbitrary. New discoveries change the viewpoint from which we view the universe. All men may well be wrong or only partially right. Simpleness. It is best to impart scientific knowledge through simple statements. Perfect. Face. Avoid arbitrary opinions since new discoveries may change one's viewpoint.

Needs. Character. Other people's natures and needs do not impress you strongly. You gather others' characters from their acts and expressions. Others' characters impress you more than their natures or needs. Having Large Reason, other people's natures don't directly impress you. Other people's acts and expressions lead you to their characters. Nature. Impressions. Acts.

With large observing powers, you insufficiently condense thoughts and observations.

Imagination. Reason. You're apt to turn your art to simple mechanical use. Observation. With Imagination and Reason medium or lower, you just watch. You're inclined to wide observation of objects and passing events. Medium. Mechanical art, broad observation, may result from Very Large Form. Simple. Mechanical.

Poor-quality skin is coarse with poorly marked veins and arteries. The papillary surface of poor skin is coarse and irregular. Coarseness and irregularity is notable on inner surfaces of hands. Irregularity. Coarseness. Tracings of movements in bending surfaces reveal coarse, irregular skin.

Papillary. Surfaces. Hands. Bending.

No halfway manifestation will satisfy your Very Large religious Faith.

Your Hope faculty isn't strong enough for imprudent speculations. Your very large Hope sustains you in seemingly safe speculations. You don't hurry into undesirable speculations despite your Large Hope. Hope. Hardly. Safe. You have Large Hope but not enough to speculate imprudently. Your Hope, though large, doesn't lead you into undesirable speculations. You only speculate when it seems safe, despite Large Hope. Speculation.

With Small Attention, you should study what you value most. You should apply your Small Attention steadily to one vocation. Study what you value most and concentrate on one vocation. Attention. Study. If you value something greatly, apply yourself to studying

it. You, having Small Attention, are only fit for one vocation. Value. Vocation. Application.

Delicate.

Arithmetic.

Body. Brain. Texture and quality of brain and body varies their power. Mentality. Judgment. Observation. Faculties. Organs. Finer texture compared to size gives more power to mentality. Essential.

You pay too little attention to parental feelings and impulses.

Endurance. You very little want constant change of location and business. Labor. Power. Climatic changes would affect your endurance and power to labor. You'd enjoy a constant, more than a moveable, commercial life. You want less to move around than to stay put. Your tenacity and working ability could be hurt by climate. Change. You'd prefer business where you don't change work or place.

Your Large Invention needs strong money-making organs for business success. Finances. Organs. Success. Gains. You'll invent original financial plans leading to clear-cut commercial gains. Very strong money-making organs need the support of Large Invention. Successful business operations may result from large organs of Invention. Your Large Invention will greatly aid working out financial plans. Original ways to make money may result from Large Invention.

Fire. Execution. Direction. Iron. Use. You're liable to have too many irons in the fire. You're apt not to use execution enough in every direction. Liable. Having Small Stability, you may try doing too many things. You don't carry through to completion many projects you begin.

Hope. Awake. You are keenly awake to the higher aspirations of Hope. Beauty. Spirit. having Very Large Hope, you're awake to beauty in life. You feel the tender emotions of religious and

humanitarian growth. You are strongly concerned with the gaining of possible immortality. Your Hope is so strong it influences those around you.

You have Very Large Appetite and digest your food well. You've a supreme sense of hunger when you need nutrition. Hunger. You supply your body with food, and digest it, thoroughly. Appetite. Plenty. Supplies. You make the most of a little food when necessary. Digestion. Body.

You have a fair idea of time and rhythmical motions. Your Large Faculty of Number might assist your musical faculty. You can keep time pretty well and move fairly rhythmically. Through Large Number, you sense time and rhythm tolerably well. Rhythm. Time. With moderately good timing and rhythm, you might make music. Music. You are not the most rhythmic person in the world. When it comes to timing, you might hold your own.

You can entertain an audience by droll stories or manner. Fun. You accord with every propensity to get fun from life. Droll. You can amuse people in public by telling funny stories. Life. Your Large Faculty of Communion helps you to please people. Propensity. Stories. You know how to tell comical tales in comical ways.

Your devotion is of a delicate, tender, and suppliant kind.

Strong minds around you often impress you by their impulses. Repellant. Opposed. Concentrated. Those who impress you may repel you through opposing ideas. The wishes and concentrated thought of strong minds impress you. Strong. Ideas. Opposition. Your Very Large Faculty of Inspiration renders your highly impressionable.

Weird.

Thrown.

Pay attention to concentration of thought and accuracy of statement.

Reason. System. Large Reason makes your ideas systematic, connected, in clear succession. Arrangement. Succession. Connection. Your well-arranged ideas follow each other connectedly, clearly, and systematically. Ideas. Because of your Large Reason your ideas are connected clearly. Thought.

18 March–4 April, 1988, New York

THAD ZIOLKOWSKI

NOV 59

The shadow of the tree runs into her back
at the place where I'm in the womb then
a fallen hand and the father's shadow with
camera held to face her hand resting
on bark one foot forward of swiftly
receding futures coterminous with dark

they who would die standing up
in the life I gave them when originally
there was a cliff and then once more
and again a cliff who you are absolutely sure
is not free of the virus a vow of silence
for moving things like the white slung across

black both of which equal a stunning
if drunk in that is the father
calls and or takes a picture of his wife
with child of him and her and who else
asks itself and knows more than it's telling
or nothing about which this intrudes
on the active sleep of that yard of fluid

sweeping backward to me here
the probability of a lid or hatched border
in the waking situation which could lose
to a far larger as the mother did when the
tree leaned to be touched then fled along
the slope with the sightless black back

of her negative to shoot it
into the matching opacity of brush

up through branches breaks there
show a sky but one the drained
color of her standing
and both will stay will not

flash veins across the body of other veins
(it is not the world)
for which purpose mother and sky
hang bleached in a specificity planted finally
they say only so to each other
and as such are gates

BARBARA JORDAN

BRANCHING

At the pool bottom green jasper, tourmaline, amber,
som tymes the very images of the Starres naturally ingrafted in them,
and others in their perspicuity like water
congealed in sunset's red extravagance;
and he yt hath it in his keeping it will sure preserve him.
I make my hand a spathe to cup the stones
where timelessness hangs in quicksands of cold
and leaves. I tilt my chin to sniff the air,
an animal comforted by privacy
beneath uddered, monumental clouds; choosing this or that
by instinct. The Saxon peasant tilling fields mistook
arrow-heads for snake's tongues, petrified
venom as a talisman. How to define magick? The letter z is its salt
in spell words whispered from Byzantium,
the glossopetra of demons: wind-blown, unearthed among beetroot.

In a garden in Cologne, in a stork's nest, Avicenna
found an "eaglestone"—a cure for childbirth—the place pertinent.
Oh God, who are the tunnel in which we walk,
all things express a thought that was not ours before
we seized it from the air, the forest floor.
Bacon once swallowed crushed pearls and lemon juice
as good for bones.
Vapors seep from earth, the dusk explores its issues in the grass,
and matter forms conspiringly as if it had a will.

Along a path to the Manor House at Tunbridge Wells, badgers had dug
their mounds under the fan tracery of ancient shrubs
and made it ominous, for the walk veered into dank, green
sound chambers, the birthing rooms
of wary creatures. Shall we *sêc lytle stones* in the maw of young swallows—
en swealwan bridda magan?
The air smells of sphagnum moss and fear, the sun
moves in the leaves like a diamond-back.
One wants to pull back fear just to watch the glistening pupae
being carried, a small reflection of anxieties.

A hush sheds over claw and branch,
over speech. The trees make paths too, can mesmerize you with a life's work,
a propendency that beckons up
through scalar coolness, shadows you hack way
to sky—observing leaf-clusters, the texture of a bole—any opening
a foothold to get *under* the diadem
in place to listen. Droplet sounds. Insects buffeting
the curved skin of wood. A neolithic woman
put the forest around her neck: a necklace of fifty teeth—
three of lion, the rest of bear—
to hoard, to stitch into a hem of rain, to make
a voice that did not lie.

PHILLIP FOSS

THE THEATER OF PERFUMES

When did we three last meet?
—S. Beckett, etc.

The floor slopes toward the stage as if
to encourage liquids, or airs, directionally.

With a snake's tongue you desire to smell.

The room is glazed black, its ceiling
excessively high, as in a theater, but
there are no chairs for an assumed audience.

The confluence of her thighs is an exit.
Navigation must, by design, exist in absence
of signs. You have approached innocence
by inhaling between her breasts, to thus
condescend to suffocation.

He has swallowed a crystal of quartz; heart
illuminated with dialogue.

She is reclining on a scarlet bed, which
tastes of iron or blood. You contemplate
the imminent nuisances, delights.

You cannot understand the language she is
speaking and, while her red lips move, the
sound seems to emanate from her palm.

The stage is so distant the actors' voices
reach him only after bouncing off the black.

There are apparently miles between you and her, as if you were a raptor.

You can smell her breath.

Many different languages are involved in the feigned dispute. He knows none, yet from attitude concludes they are concerned with the absence of music.

They are dragging about a monkey's head; presumably a symbol.

You are drinking her cologne.

When she glances at your her irises are red.

Prop: a helmet with mirrors in the eye sockets.

With mascara she has drawn eyelashes on her forehead; the attendant irises are red.

There is a monkey's body on the bed.

When they turn out the lights he imagines he can smell the person who would be sitting next to him.

She is in the process of translation; assumes the position of a clairvoyant.

You are crying because their voices continue in issuance; hearing another conversation as the tears strike.

When she covers her eyes with her palms you read the future.

The monkey is leashed, balanced on an actor's head. The soliloquy issues from its mouth.

This is the audition, so you are blindfolded. Your palms are secured to your face with cords. Your nostrils are scorched. You are prepared.

The first note is ammonia; the second, licorice; the third, cedar.

It is dissonant.

The fifth is cinnamon; sixth, heather; seventh, vinegar:

cacophony.

Eighth: pigweed; ninth: ice; tenth: burnt hair; eleventh: coal; offal; pine; coffee; fifteenth: blood; sixteenth: cod; seventeenth: cherry blossom; tobacco; nineteenth: leather.

You are becoming nauseated; the future is iris.

: To contain emotion one must willfully denounce any attempt at appropriation of symbols of transgression.

: There are long fine filaments extending from the pupils which do not distort vision and which can only be perceived, by another, if the subject is positioned correctly in conceivable light.

: The paradox is to orchestrate the perfumes to prevent arbitrary mingling, mutation or

conversance, other than prescribed by score. There can be no improvisation.

: Once grown, the mask cannot be removed, but like a snake shedding its skin, faces peel off revealing an endless succession—continuing to grow from the core.

: Ideally, a female actor mouths the words while a hidden male enunciates them.

: To alter emotion, alter color, and if the subject is composed of glass its moods are endless. The ideal instance is a glass ball floating in water within a bowl fabricated from mirrors.

: The music must continually repudiate its own aspirations, its own desire.

: Predictably, the structure of the body must be destroyed, so that all movement is antithetical to natural predilection.

: Any other conception would fail to repudiate the conventions prescribed by chaos.

She is floating naked in snow. There is an aura melted around her. As if for sustenance, her mouth is open.

You can see yourself seated on the horizon. You are cutting the alphabet into your fingertips.

The accumulating snow is causing his face to become masklike; the left side sags as if from stroke.

He is speaking from the right side of his face; thus he is lying, in profile.

You have evolved the equation that his speech makes you snowblind. This allows you to extend your arms to touch her with your fingertips.

She believes that touch is contagion; your tendencies in perception remaining on her skin.

You are transcribing his dictation; the words drop as small globes of ice from the left corner of his mouth.

She is seeking to become transparent; glass or ice, so that her waist will break light.

She has designed this transformation by memorizing the angles of the flakes which fall into her mouth.

From where you sit, you perceive this as the inversion of speech, or as consumption, thus filling her with articulation.

He sees her fingers move rhythmically and believes she is hearing music, her fingers in sympathy, but she is counting.

She is barely floating above the damp ground, so her pale shadow is askance.

Thus the skin of her back and buttocks is not distorted by pressure.

You would like to insert your hand in that space, in sympathy with absence.

Because of temperature in absence, there is
no odor which he could rub between his fingers.

No set.

8 followed by 34 by 67 by 2 by 6 & 39, double duration by
110 less 4 by 99 held to end.

First voice:

What is the duration of resonance

What is the duration of yellow

What is the duration of decline

What is the duration of trajectory

What is the duration of rose

What is the duration of cloud

What is the duration of appetite

Second voice in simultaneity:

The taste of a voice

Absence captured in one's mouth

The anonymity of nakedness

The tongue as hand

Light as passivity

To structure on the basis of mutation

Killing as the cessation of a perfume

The composition is based on the notion of walking down a crowded street with one's eyes closed, and smelling the various perfumes of women who pass by. The intent is to discern her in this seeming cacophony.

And thereby possess her by the assimilation of her perfume into your body.

She is lying on a pane of glass.

He is opening small vials of perfume.

You are in the audience, anonymous.

The pane is suspended three feet above the stage.

He is pouring the perfumes, with delicacy and precision, upon her.

She is grasping a flame, as if self-immolation were a metaphor.

The ascending vapors form a visible fog above her.

This she waves goodbye to you.

But to your tongue the air is but appetite: the soprano's breath.

The entrances to the perfumes are oblique, are lacunas, are dismissal of time, are metronome.

There is the entrance of apology. Therein, even if singing, one's voice is retracted into one's mouth as if one were consuming a rodent in the manner of a snake.

From this entrance one cannot ascertain conversation since perspective is consumptive, not sympathetic.

The texture of one's voice is perscriptively coarse.

There is the entrance of appetite. This too is consumptive, but here there can be no apology or satiation. Neither is the entrance of desire. The absences are similar, glass to obsidian, perhaps twins who speak mutually unintelligible languages.

Surface here is that of the tongue, not palate.

Hue is invented as pink, or yellow.

There is the entrance of lace. One does not enter here, though it is a curtain. To enter would be to rend the fabric; one must merely look through, and thus enter by eyes and passion, so the body is exiled from this form of hearing.

Hue must be white, as absence, a design of nothing which overlays a texture of regulation over that which one desires.

The texture is that of hair; fragrance that of slightly overripe fruit.

There is the entrance of submission. The opening is very low, or very shallow, as if its fabricator desired removal of one's head in entering, not concerning stature but sensation and dialectics.

The perfumes must be symphonic, harmonic, absent of individuation, like a mob or flock which moves with synchronicity and endorsement of history.

The taste is sulfurous; the texture of pitch.

There is the entrance of predation. Its orifice is a metaphor, beak or jaw. Its voice is a tole: an odor of warm entrails; an equation of subtraction to compel accretion, as one rolls a ball of snow.

This must be falsetto and frenzy.

A game of blood-dots in snow; the loser, clothing.

To enter here one must carry the arms of malice and of dispersal, techniques of absorption.

There is the entrance of conceit; there is the entrance of cruelty; the entrance of promiscuity; of delight;

pathos;

obstacle;

the numinous;

excretion;

abandonment;

there is the entrance of absolution, vindication, and the entrance of volition.

She assumes herself as this perfume, as these perfumes, yet possesses no exit by which to enter.

JOHN YAU

ANNA BIALOBRODA: SELF-PORTRAITURE AS SELF-REPRESENTATION

Anna Bialobroda is currently working on three series of paintings, all of which are imaginative self-portraits. In one series, she depicts a featureless figure seemingly about to begin, in the middle of, or having just ended a solo performance on stage. Her sense of timing and rupture is crucial to the success of these paintings. In *Bluff*, 1987, for example, the whitish figure is surrounded by burning doors and windows, while her reflection suggests that the seemingly empty auditorium is underwater. On one level, the situation typifies the notion of woman as a heroine-victim. It is not only a familiar representation, but it is one that has been a central theme of numerous movies and other popular entertainment narratives. In order to act (to work), the woman-actress must act as if she is in a perilous situation waiting to be rescued. However, in Bialobroda's examination of this situation, this familiar story, the figure is standing at the edge of the stage, both aware of and unphased by her circumstances. There are no rescuers.

Given that the title of the painting is *Bluff*, the viewer asks: Does this painting depict a false sense of display or does it challenge my power to define and therefore limit? The empty auditorium functions as another mediated zone between the viewer and the painting. Self-conscious of what is being looked at, the viewer begins to look through his or her own act of looking. It is this zone the painting focuses on, the place where the defining, circumscribing look begins to be felt, and the Hidden Self and the Subjected Self begin looking at each other.

In the second series, Bialobroda examines the subject of self-portraiture from the viewer's position. In *Representation*, 1988, she depicts a severely cropped view of an androgynous face (young woman or man?) looking into a mirror. Classically, the pose is one taken by a woman. Moreover, the image of a woman

looking at herself in a mirror is an art historical image most often marked by men. Among the modernist paintings that come to mind, for example, one might be inclined to mention Picasso's *Girl before a Mirror,* 1932, for example, or Balthus' *Japanese Figure with a Black Mirror,* 1967-76. Bialobroda re-examines this image within in the context of movies, the fantasy world of movie houses and film, and the amount of information one needs to have before recognition begins. Are we looking at the image of a woman looking at herself? Or, the more likely possibility, are we being asked to re-examine the image of a woman looking at herself. After all, it is an image of the self that has been marked over by others.

In *Representation,* Bialobroda reappropriates the right to represent her self, her Subjected Self. By doing this within the realm of painting, she aligns herself with Frida Kahlo. Both use images to investigate the realm of self-portraiture, and the relationship between the Hidden Self and the Subjected Self. Both define a project whose validity has been questioned by critics and historians. Certainly, within Formalism's view of art history, self-portraiture lost its validity around the time abstraction triumphed over figuration, and the literal vanquished the metaphorical once and for all.

Formalism reduced painting's project to two modes, abstraction and figuration. This opposition is the result of elevating Cubism to the highest status within art history. It suggests that painting can be either abstract or realist. One of Formalism's problems is that it doesn't take the image-making artist into account. Kahlo and Bialobroda are neither realists nor abstractionists. Consequently, their accomplishment cannot be measured according to such materialist standards as style. Rather, they are image makers whose project is focused on the Subjected Self.

In the third series, Bialobroda isolates and examines the kinds of distances that occur between seeing and experiencing. In this group, she often employs the device of a grisaille rectangle (a scene from the film) within a rectangle (the auditorium with a legible "exit" sign) of bright accents and subdued colors. Juxtaposed against this rectangle is a grisaille view of the auditorium. In *Endangered,* 1988, Bialobroda depicts a closeup view of a fenced-in area, which has been identified by a sign as "Endangered." The

word is split, so that "End" is on the right side and "Angered" is on the left. Behind the fence is an open prison gate. Sitting in an auditorium and looking at the image of an open prison door behind a fenced-in area. The painting depicts a demarcated area (the prison gate opening into the side of a rocky mound) within a demarcated area (a fenced in area) within a demarcated area (the highlighted zone of the auditorium) within a demarcated area (the grisaille auditorium) within a demarcated area (the painting, which is an endangered species, mounted on a wall in a room or gallery).

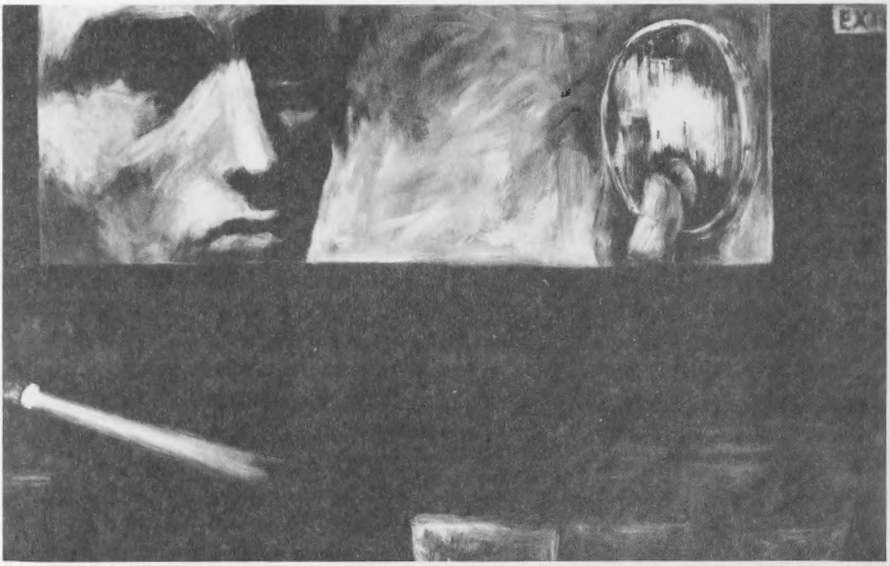
Historically, self-portraiture has been a masculine province; and culture's way of looking at women has largely been determined by measured against masculine values and attributes. Bialobroda's paintings investigate the confines of this subjected condition.

ANNA BIALOBRODA

FIVE PAINTINGS

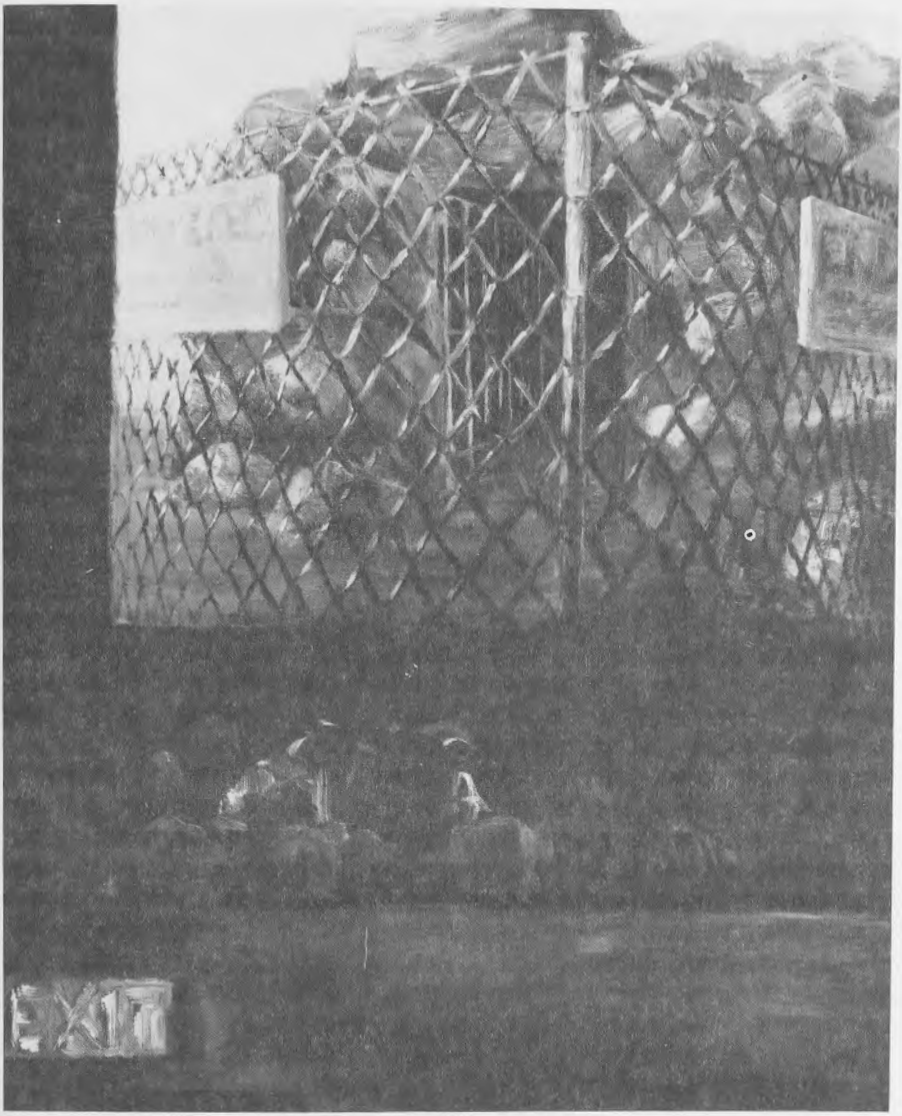
BLUFF

1987, 74" x 92", A/C
(photo credits:
Pelka/Noble Photography)



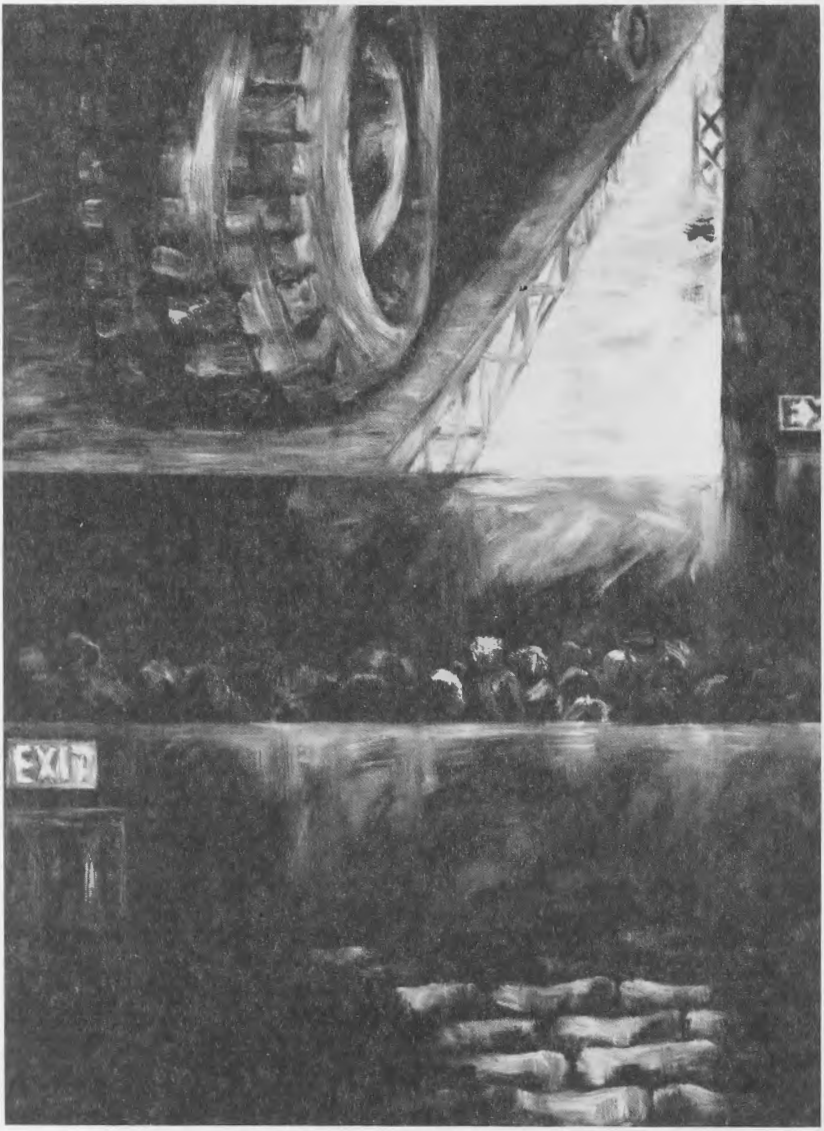
REPRESENTATION

1988, 74" x 114", A/C



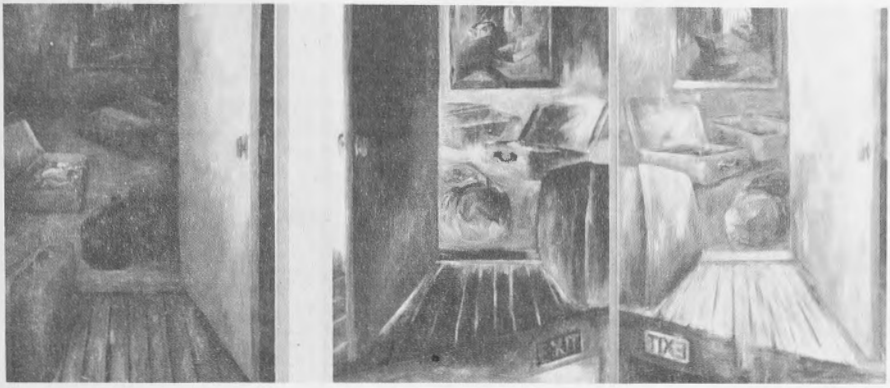
ENDANGERED

1988, 60" x 48", A/C



CROSSOVER

1988, 114" x 84", A/C



DIVISIONS

1988, 84" x 194", A/C

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The Cuban writer José Lezama Lima (1910–1976), first known in English for his novel *Paradiso,* translated in 1974, is now slowly being discovered beyond the frontiers of the Spanish language as the extraordinary poet he was. His poetry, dense and expansive, hermetic and exuberant, was always driven by restless reflections on poetics, which he broadly conceived as a syncretic inquiry into many areas of history and belief. Those reflections were at times set forth in discursive form and one of Lezama's most succinct yet most inclusive statements of that kind was this interview, possibly his first, done in 1964 by the Cuban critic and poet Armando Alvarez Bravo (born 1938) and later published as part of Alvarez Bravo's introduction to an anthology of Lezama's poetry and prose entitled *Orbita de Lezama Lima* (Havana: UNEAC, 1966). Those years up to about 1970 were still a relatively liberal time in Cuban literary politics, during which Lezama was able to bring out in Cuba a number of major works, including his-three volume anthology of Cuban poetry in 1965 and, later in 1966, after *Orbita,* the long-awaited Spanish text of *Paradiso,* which was to bring him a greater measure of international recognition than he had ever known before. (After the Padilla affair of 1971, which inaugurated a more repressive period, Lezama spent the last five years of his life in ostracism, and his last important works, the novel *Oppiano Licario* and the poems of *Fragmentos a su imán,* were smuggled abroad for their first publication in Spanish.) Amid the enthusiasm generated by *Paradiso,* Lezama was interviewed a number of times, but mostly by non-Cubans who knew little of his work and were unable to focus their questions as effectively as they are focussed here. The "prose fragments" mentioned on page 175, in which Lezama's "poetic system. . .began to take shape," were translated by me as "Ten Prose Poems" in *Sulfur,* no. 3 (1982).

—JAMES IRBY

INTERVIEW WITH JOSE LEZAMA LIMA (1964)
by Armando Alvarez Bravo

AAB: You are known and renowned as an enigmatic poet. For many you are the figure of obscurity *par excellence* in Cuban poetry. There is no doubt that your endeavor inaugurates a novel way of seeing things which delivers nothing easily to the reader and instead demands of him an alert attitude. After these twenty-five years, how do you consider what has been said and is still said about these characteristics of your poetry?

JLL: I do not think that the contemplation of my poetry offers at present greater difficulty than that offered by the contemplation of any other poetic prism. It is true that our romantic and later our *fin de siècle* poetry had no elements that could be considered enigmatic. But this fact cannot serve to join together, as is customary, the concepts of the enigmatic and the obscure. These two concepts are not necessarily tangent. Once I was told that Góngora was a poet who made clear things obscure and that I, on the contrary, was a poet who made obscure things clear, obvious, radiant. I have stressed the fact that it was among medieval minstrels that the *trobar clus* appeared, these being the minstrels who produced obscure poetry. Thus we see that even minstrelsy, which by definition was simple, had nothing to do with clarity, since already among the minstrels there were some who produced obscure or hermetic poetry. And in Nordic countries there were kings who were skalds that in their own palaces cultivated obscure poetry, just as there were kings who performed as buffoons in their own courts. The verses of the skalds were always nebulous and difficult to understand. For example:

> I place the round serpent
> on the tongue of the falcon's perch
> beside the bridge of Odin's shield.

What this means is that a ring is placed on the small finger of the hand. One needs to know that falcon's perch means the falconer's hand. The tongue is the small finger. And the bridge of Odin's shield is the arm from which the warrior's shield hangs. It is told that a skald, a hermetic Nordic troubadour, invited a king to have some beer soup. The monarch accepted and the poet took him to the edge of the ocean, where he said: there's your soup; when you finish, you'll have your beer. I cite these examples taken from skalds so you can see that obscure poetry has nothing to do with the baroque, with the dazzling baroque of Marino, of Chiabrera, of Góngora. There is obscure poetry and there is clear poetry.

This is a fact that we have to accept simply, just as we accept the existence of the day and of the night, of the things that are done by day and the things that are done by night. But you will understand, my friend, that, in short, neither obscure things are so obscure as to terrify us, nor are clear things so clear as to let us sleep in peace. But all this business about obscurity and clarity now seems to me outmoded, overworked. What matters is what Pascal called *pensées de derrière*. That is, the eternally enigmatic other side of things, both of the obscure or distant and of the clear and immediate. The tendency toward obscurity, toward resolving enigmas, toward playing games within games, is as common to mankind as is our image reflected in the clear surface of the water, which can lead us with egotistical voluptuousness to the final blow, to our death. There is no need to seek obscurities where they do not exist.

AAB: Image in your poetry is a motif, a theme, a concern. It arises as a defense against realities that become realities by their own momentum, but, at the same time, it arises as a force. How do you establish the relationships between image and metaphor?

JLL: In the terms of my poetic system of the world, metaphor and image have as much in the way of carnality or living flesh within the poem as they have in the way of philosophical efficacy, external world or essential reason. One of the mysteries of poetry is the relationship between the analogue or connective force of metaphor, which advances and by so doing creates what we might call the substantive ground of poetry, and this advance through infinite analogies to a final point where the image is located, which image has a powerful regressive force, capable of covering all that substantiveness. The relation between metaphor and image can be likened to a horse that can both fly and swim and persists within a resistant substance, which is what we may consider the image to be. The image is the reality of the invisible world. Thus the Greeks placed images as populators of the world of the dead. I believe that the marvel of a poem is that it manages to create a body, a resistant substance set between a metaphor that advances by creating infinite connections and a final image that assures the survival of that substance, that *poiesis*. In the same way that man has created orchestras, battles, soldiers sleeping in the shadow of palisades, great armadas, and homes in the bellies of whales, he has also created artificial bodies that are both caressable and resistant, like nature itself eluding and yielding to our touch. Once, when I was speaking of Martí and trying to establish the mysterious laws of poetry (and don't forget that the first laws were written in poetic form), I made reference to the fact that for those prodigious laws of the imagination twenty years of absence are equivalent to a sudden vortex in death,

just as, in an orchestra, a trumpet may be equivalent to twenty violins. The connections of metaphor are progressive and infinite. The firecovering that the image forms over the substantiveness of poetry is as unitary and fixed as a star. That's why I state in one of my poems this deep paradox of poetry: that love is not made caressingly from pore to pore, but from pore to star, where space forms a suspension and the body plunges down and swims at length.

AAB: When you reached your mature years you set forth a very personal conception of poetry, a poetic system. The formulation of this system began to take shape in a series of prose fragments included in your book of poems *La fijeza* [1949]. What we might classify as theory had its beginnings as poetry. Those first insights later took on a discursive form in essays and the bases of the system were nurtured from different sources. In spite of this later evolution, is it still correct to think that the driving force of the system is fundamentally poetic?

JLL: That's correct. The driving force is essentially poetic. Some innocent people, terrified by the word "system," have thought my system is a philosophical study *ad usum* of poetry. Nothing could be further from my intention. I have always proceeded on the basis of elements proper to poetry, i.e. poem, poet, metaphor, image. When I began to come of age intellectually—and like all poets I have been a man of varied and voluptuous readings, following the tradition of La Fontaine, who postulated the poet as the *amateur de toutes les choses, le polyphile—*, I came to understand that, by virtue of that hazardous and reversible play of metaphor and image, what seemed to be a dispersion in my readings was really an all-devouring urge towards integration into a unity, into a mirror, into a water both flowing and fixed. One day I was thinking about great periods of history that have had neither great nor powerful poets and yet were great periods for the world of poetry. It was a very important fact for me that, from Lucretius and Virgil down to the appearance of Dante, there had been no great poets in that immense expanse of time, no access to the poet as an expressive unity. And these were the times of Charlemagne, of the *Enchiridion* or Magic Book, the cathedrals, the Holy Grail, the knights of King Arthur, the Crusades, the Golden Legend, Saint Francis, Saint Catherine. . .This led me to study what I call the imaginary eras or eras dominated by an image, which I have expounded in several essays I believe are the most significant part of my work.

AAB: I would like you to tell me more about those imaginary eras. And, within them, about how conceptions that are pagan from your own Catholic point of view can be integrated into Christian conceptions, pro-

ducing thereby a denial of Heidegger's postulate of man as a creature destined for death and offering instead, as you do in your system, a postulate of man as a creature destined for resurrection by way of poetry.

JLL: For me it is both fascinating and difficult to speak about all that you suggest. The subject offers infinite possibilities. I see it all as a whole and it is impossible for me to express it in a moment, or perhaps even in an eternity, as such. Whenever I approach it I come up against this difficulty, but let us talk. There is an Idumaean period, or period of phallic fabulation, when the human being is still joined to the vegetal and when time, because of hibernation, does not have the meaning it later takes on for us. In each of man's metamorphoses, his dormancy creates a fabulous time. Thus, there appears the mysterious tribe of Idumaea, in Genesis, where reproduction is not based on carnal dialogue by couples, on germinal dualism. The human being falls asleep on the cool river banks, beneath the broad foliage of the trees, and with graceful slowness a tree sprouts from his shoulder. The man goes on sleeping and the tree goes on growing, thickening its bark and roots and moving closer to the secret mobility of the river. This new creature of the germinating tree detaches itself in the propitious season of summer and smilingly begins to sing its rowing songs in the dawn of the rivers. This is how man lived, close to primitive nebulas and the trees, which, as they grew, gained perspectives with no need to be submissive in movement. This is the great period when the evidence of beauty is immediate. But there are others. We can refer to the presence of the image in the siege if Ilium, whose reality is preserved by poetry in the face of its dark destruction. Or the relationship between the mysteries of the priest kings and Fou Hi (2697 B.C.) preserved in texts like the *Tao Te Ching*, a title whose closest translation might be "The Book of the Creative Uncreatedness," where the Taoists meditate on the luminous egg, on the mirror, on primitive androgyny. I should like to make a reference at this point to the way a culture may give greater depth to concepts taken from another very distant culture. For example, for the Greeks and the Romans the poet was the *puer senex* or aged child, but for the Taoists the name of Lao Tzu meant old-wise-child. We see how in the fifth century B.C., in the period of classic China's great religious upsurge, there appears a more profound concept of the Greco-Roman esteem for the poet.

AAB: Almost an intuition.

JLL: Quite so. When I was delving deeper into the imaginary eras, studying the great moment of the Etruscans, with their priest king Numa Pompilius, the creator of bronze, of the vestals' cult of fire, and of the

king's copulation with the nymph Tacita, I encountered the word *potens,* which, according to Plutarch, represented in priestly Tuscan the "if possible," the infinite possibility we later observe in the *virgo potens* of Catholicism—or, how to engender a god by supernatural means—and I came to the conclusion that it was that infinite possibility that the image must embody. And since the greatest of infinite possibilities is resurrection, poetry—the image—had to express its most encompassing dimension, which is, precisely, resurrection. It was then that I gained the perspective which I set against the Heideggerian theory of man-for-death, proposing a concept of poetry that establishes the prodigious causality of being-for-resurrection, of being that triumphs over death and over the Saturnian realm. So, if you asked me to give a definition of poetry, which would be for me an almost desperate predicament, I would have to do it in these terms: it is the image attained by the man of resurrection. Then I discovered or moved on to another concept: kings as metaphors, and by this I refer to monarchs like Saint Louis, who signed himself *Roi de Tous les Français,* Edward the Confessor, Saint Ferdinand, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, Alfonso X the Learned, in whom the person came to be constituted in a metaphor that progressed toward a concept of the people as emanating a grace and penetrating into the valley of splendor, into the path of glory, in anticipation of the Day of Resurrection, when everything, even the scars of the saints, will glow with the glow of a stellar metal. This phenomenon appears not only in history, but also in particular choral situations. It can be seen in men, in the warriors who sleep in the shadow of the walls they are about to assault. Like those who formed what was called in Napoleon's time the *Grande Armée,* who marched across all Europe. A body of men who in victory or defeat attained to a unity in which the metaphor of their connections took on the totality of an image. In other words, man, a nation, different situations that form certain groupings, may rise to a poetic plenitude. This conception of poetry may even group the animal kingdom into an arrangement of direct poetry with regard to man. A bit more recklessness here, and we can take a step further. We are on a farm and suddenly we see what the Oriental masters call the elemental invisible, which turns into a white butterfly. We see how a dark corner is reanimated into a moving shape. It is the spider coming closer to become intoxicated with the music surrounding man. And just as a tree does not walk because it has a aerial perspective, the spider in its web has a wider ambience than man does. A stay at the beach sadly comes to an end. The crab has shared a space with man and at the end of the season we see it leaving its marks along the highway man takes back to his boredom. We see the frog, in its ancestral position at the mouth of a well, maintaining its statuesque mien as a prince transformed. It shrieks with a trembling of its legs, as if it were about to give

birth once more to the prince hidden within its body. Also there are simple human positions that attract a mysterious dialogue in a propitious image, as in some silent sacrifice. A ship plows the waves. A traveller comes to the railing and his cigarette burns with a slowness that becomes as magnetic as a desert wind. If we close our eyes and then open them, the traveller is no longer alone. By his side, in the night, a shape has been reanimated, similar to that vertebral consciousness that holds together the flight of birds in their autumn migrations. All this is very strange, but. . . As you can see, there is much to see and try to decipher.

AAB: In the system you have generally outlined, you borrow certain expressions from various authors and historical periods and give them meanings somewhat different from the ones they had in their original contexts. Was that change or expansion necessary in order to integrate them into your system?

JLL: It was. Knowledge, repeated encounter with those expressions and meditation helped me enter into the ways of their possibilities. My poetic system unfolds, as is logical to suppose, within the history of culture and of the image, and not within some kind of wild frenzy. Thus, I inscribe at its threshold a series of maxims having very deep resonances. The first is from Saint Paul and says: *caritas omnia credit*. "Charity believes everything." Next to it I place another from Giambattista Vico: the impossible credible. In other words, man, by virtue of being a believer, of dwelling in the world of charity, of believing everything, comes to dwell in a supernatural world filled with gravitational forces. At this point I move on to that vast world extending from Saint Anselm to Nicholas of Cusa, who said in his book *De Docta Ignorantia*: "The greatest things are understood incomprehensibly," meaning that the steps rising up to God, to the Greatest, are understood without comprehension. This can be clarified, on the one hand, by thinking that one can comprehend without understanding. But there is a moment when this comprehension and this understanding come together, and that moment is provided by an acceptance of the *greatest* concept. To close this series, I will allude to a statement by Pascal which clarifies his argument that, since true nature has been lost, everything now can be nature. The statement is: "It is not good for man not to see anything; neither is it good for him to see so much that he thinks he possesses something; it is good, rather, that he see only enough to be aware how much he has lost. It is good to see and not to see: this is precisely the state of nature." I have given you four expressions scattered about in these writers' work without implying that they have there the explicit intention I give them in my system. Expressions that in my poetic world are points of reference forming a contrapuntal projection to reach

their unity in this new conception of world and image, of enigma and mirror.

AAB: In developing your poetic system, you have indicated, at different times, that with it you aim to arrive at a purely poetic methodology. Would you tell me something about that methodology?

JLL: I try in my system to destroy Aristotelian causality by seeking a poetic state of unconditionality. But the marvellous thing, which we outlined earlier in relation to metaphor and image, is that this poetic unconditionality has a powerful gravitation, has its bases and its adamantine points of reference. Hence it is possible to speak of poetic ways or a poetic methodology within that unconditional realm formed by poetry. First, we will cite the Stoics' concept of *occupatio,* that is, of the total occupation of a body. In referring to the image, we have already seen how it covers the substantive ground or resistance of the poem. Next we will cite a concept that seems to us of enormous importance, which we have called "the oblique experience" *[la vivencia oblicua].* This is as if a man, without realizing it of course, were to create a waterfall in Ontario just by turning the light switch in his room. We can offer a very obvious example. When Saint George plunges his lance into the dragon, his horse falls down dead. Observe the following: the mere causal relation would be knight-lance-dragon. The regressive force we could explain by the other causality: dragon-lance-knight; but notice that it is not the knight who falls dead but his horse, according to which the relation is not causal but unconditional. This is the kind of relation we have called "oblique experience." There is also what I have called "the sudden flash" *[el súbito],* which we can consider as opposite to the Stoic *occupatio.* For example, if a student of German encounters the word *Vogel* (bird), then comes upon the word *Vogelbauer* (birdcage), and then encounters the word *vögeln,* suddenly *[de súbito],* as the causality bird-birdcage snaps into light like a match, he encounters the unconditional *vögeln,* which gives him the meaning of the bird penetrating into the cage, i.e. copulation. There is also what we might call "the hypertelic way or method" *[el camino o método hipertélico],* in other words, that which always goes beyond its finality by overcoming all determinisms. Another example. For a long time it was believed that a certain kind of ciliary worm would pull back only as far as the tide reached. But it has been observed that even when there is no tide they pull back the same distance. There are animals like the white-headed dipteran that while copulating kill the female. That hypertelic way that always goes beyond its immediate finality, as in this case, is essentially poetic. I see I need again to quote some words, this time from Tertulian, who says: "The son of God was crucified, that is not

shameful because it is shameful, and the son of God died, that is all the more credible because it is incredible, and after his burial he returned to life, that is true because it is impossible." From these words we can derive two poetic ways or methods: what is credible because it is incredible (the death of the son of God) and what is true because it is impossible (resurrection). I think I have answered your question.

AAB: You have spoken repeatedly of a return to origins (with regard to poetry, of course), and, in that return, of an elimination of dualism. What can you tell us about that view?

JLL: Already in my introduction to the first issue of *Orígenes* [in 1944] I tried to stress that. I wanted the poetry appearing in that magazine to be the poetry of a return to magic spells, to rituals, to the living ceremony of primitive man. It's very curious that a poet like Mallarmé, who enjoyed the benefits of a great tradition, should have come in his mature years to long for the magical art of a tribal chieftain, as if that essence of poetry he sought for contained both primitivism and the most extreme refinement. Similarly, we can stress that in his "Prose pour des Esseintes" he speaks of the *hyperbole de ma mémoire,* a position very close to that of Descartes when, as part of the methodical doubt of his intellectualist philosophy, he mentions what he calls hyperbolic doubt, repeating the famous argument that excessive doubt, the radical *dubito,* culminates in total, hyperbolic affirmation. Thus, what was involved for us was a problem concerning the incarnation of poetry, or, to put it in a language recalling that of theology, the hypostasis of poetry. What was involved was finding a foothold for poetry, an incarnation of metaphor and of image in historical temporality. Thus, metaphor was as much a matter of metamorphosis as it was of *metanoia,* or—what amounts to the same thing—of successive transmutations of body and soul, offering all the suggestiveness and fascination of metaphor as a *metanoia* that goes beyond simple metamorphosis to produce a transmutation of the *animus.* Since I've now spoken of metaphor, I'll make another reference to image. I should like what I mean in this dimension to be clearly seen. If we proceed on the basis of Pascal's claim that since true nature has been lost, all can be nature, we can situate the image in a precise area of striking fascination. In the first place, image is a substituted nature. In the second place, image covers the frightful destiny of the house of Atreus, for only it can clarify for us that frightful destiny. It clarifies for us the poetic concept of the entire ancient world.

AAB: And what about the modern world?

JLL: I think that in the case of Baudelaire, there is a return to *arete* or poetry as destiny, as sacrifice, and to *aristeia* or Pallas' protection of Diomedes as it appears in book VI of the *Iliad*. You can see, therefore, why that image has to appear obscure. It *is* obscure, torn from the very darkness of night. But that darkness or obscurity seems to repeat Oedipus' memorable words: "Ah, darkness, my light." Of course, both that *arete* and that *aristeia* must entail an asceticism resulting from the prodigious accumulations bestowed by the joy of a lineage of the best. So the poet, by means of the image, makes himself master of nature and offers the most seductive of asceticisms, the only kind that can be tolerated, just as the basket makers of New Guinea were born with their umbilical cords wrapped around their necks or the kings of Georgia were born with the marks of their royal nature inscribed upon their left nipples.

AAB: Do you have any thesis regarding words used in a poetic sense?

JLL: Already in ancient times, Pythagoras cast a great deal of light upon the different varieties of the word. There are simple words, hieroglyphic words and symbolic words. That is, words that express, words that conceal and words that signify. When today, guided by the latest discoveries of German philology, we speak of the meaning of poetry, we realize that already Pythagoras had told us about words that signify, about symbolic words.

AAB: Of those varieties postulated by the philosopher, which have you preferred?

JLL: The poet makes use of all of Pythagoras' words or varieties, but he also goes beyond them. He manages to express a kind of *supra verba* which is actually the word in all its three dimensions of expressivity, concealment and sign. I would say there is a fourth kind of word which is the only one for poetry. A word to which I will not give a name, but which, based on the progressions of image and metaphor and on the resistance of the image, strengthens the body of poetry. I want you to keep in mind that all these things we've been talking about take place in the realm of what the harmonious Greeks called *terateia,* marvel, portent. You will recall that the whole atmosphere of *Prometheus*—of Aeschylus' *Prometheus*—takes place in the *terateia*. Aristotle clarifies this concept when he says that Aeschylus set about to achieve more of a marvelous surprise than an illusion of reality.

AAB: In that statement Aristotle posits two esthetic positions. Which do you believe is decisive?

JLL: I believe that contemporary man has attained to a position that surpasses that of the world of the Greeks. Scientific research concerning the structure of reality testifies to its symmetry and beauty. If we contemplate the staggered layers of sand left by a simoom, forming a kind of enormous colosseum, what we see combines marvel and surprise with a realistic illusion deriving from the laws of optics and our modern concept of perspective. But I'm going to pick up again the thread of what I was saying before, which I think will offer some clarification concerning your question. The Catholic lives in the supernatural realm and lends greater depth to the Greek concept of *terateia,* for he is imbued with the Pauline effort to give substance to faith, to find a substance for what cannot be seen, what cannot be heard, what cannot be touched, attaining, in poetry, to a world of full, valid signification.

AAB: And what about the non-Catholic, the atheist? What signification will he find? Where will it come from?

JLL: Well, can you imagine the case of a man who writes poetry and doesn't believe in anything at all?

AAB: I think all men believe in something. Since we are talking about poetry, what I would specifically like to know is how your poetic system accounts for the poetry written by a man who does not proceed on the basis of any religious conception. A man who is not a Catholic.

JLL: Look, Robespierre himself spoke of the Goddess Reason, just as Lucretius, the atomistic genius of atheism, talked about whirlwinds and furies and other forces of nature and considered them as gods. Aside from the fact that a man cannot deny the great contributions of the Orient, of the Greco-Roman world, of the sum of all that *anteriority* which Catholicism assimilated with exemplary reason and intuition, in accordance with the Pauline maxim which reveals the meaning of being *indebted:* "to Greeks and Romans, ancients and moderns, to all I am indebted." Though an atheistic poet may deny all these contributions, he cannot fail to turn within their ambience. I'll remind you of a contemporary example. We all know that Valéry always professed his atheism. But when he gave his definition of poetry, he called it "the paradise of language." You see how this atheist uses the word "paradise" with all the resonance of a Catholic. Besides, we have his studies of Leonardo, where he praises the position derived from the Council of Trent about the soul and the body being intertwined, forming a unity, and about there being a mystery of the body and a mystery of the soul that in man are ready for

his transfiguration. With this concept of transfiguration, the Catholic world surpassed the Greek concept of metamorphosis, in which the memory of the previous stage is obliterated by sleep.

AAB: This is Valéry's conception. But for many people, and I'm sorry to keep insisting, there is no soul, and yet that attitude does not prevent them from writing poetry. How do you reconcile these facts?

JLL: My friend, I've always believed my poetic system is something beautiful in itself, but I've never been so arrogant as to believe it is something unique. Above it I place poetry, poetry as the most transparent of mysteries or, if you wish, as mysterious transparency. That ambiguity allows me to say to you that it is not I but rather time that must answer that question: time that makes poetry and poetry that makes in time. We both serve poetry and all those who do the same will agree with me when I say that in the end poetry will unify everything; it is already beginning to do so. I don't think there's anything else to say.

AAB: Or everything's left to be said.

JLL: Or both.

(Translated from the Spanish by James Irby.)

NANCY SPERO: WORKS SINCE 1950
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
(2 July–28 August 1988)

Also: Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York (December 1987–January 1988); Mandel Art Gallery, Saskatoon (March–April 1988); List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts (October–November 1988); Power Plant, Toronto (January–March 1989); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (Summer 1989)

This retrospective exhibition of Nancy Spero's works marks the first comprehensive survey of her nearly thirty years of artistic activity. It is

difficult, when confronted with the immediate power and terror and beauty of her work, to *believe* that it has taken so many years for her to receive the recognition such an exhibition represents. Yet it is not hard to understand why this might be so. Spero's art is neither fashionable, nor even "unfashionable," which in the dialectic of the art market often means "the next big thing." The MCA created an unintended irony, by exhibiting Jeff Koons, a recent New York rage, at the same time as Spero. Alongside the engaged statements of Spero's paintings and installations, Koons's glass-encased vacuum cleaners and blow-up toys appeared for what they are: a paroxysm of bad faith. If current reaction against abstraction and minimalism has, perhaps, begun to create a more sympathetic context for Spero's figural art, that's for the good. But is does not alter a basic fact: the integrity of Spero's work, in its self-fashioning of themes and techniques, makes it oblivious to novelties seized upon by lesser and less scrupulous artists.

The earliest work exhibited, the "sculptural" construction entitled *Mummified* (1950-51), seems already to inaugurate an intellectual and imagistic complex that recurs again and again. A casual glance reveals a grubby, grey stump, with features like a totemic face; it was only with a horrifying second look that I realized it was also a severed (woman's) knee-joint, wrapped in nylon. This early in Spero's career, then, what will emerge as a full-blown critique of the representation of women—their appropriation as the source of fetished part-objects and as the object of dismembering violence—makes its first tacit and tenuous appearance. The mummified form reappears in the paintings of the 1950s, in *Frieze* (1957–58), where the figure is repeated three times across the canvas, and in *At Their Word* (1957–58). This latter work commences Spero's use of verbal texts in juxtaposition with imagery. The hand-written inscription confirms the link of this fetish-image with a violence against women: "At their word, the word which tortures the spirit, / The sick woman was turned into a corpse, / The corpse was hung from a stake." Spero will recirculate and reinterpret motifs from this period in much later works: the "at their word" text appears for example, fifteen years later, in the *Torture of Women* installation (see *Sulfur* 19 for illustrations).

The most painterly works are those of the so-called "Black Paris Paintings," which include the emotionally ambiguous *Lovers*. A man and a woman lie naked together, yet their distant expressions and the dark somber tones of their surroundings imply an irony: the immanence of solitude in their momentary drawing-near. Contemporaneously, however, in *Merde* and *Les Anges, Merde, Fuck You,* Spero articulates a visual vocabulary for some of her most direct and unwithholding work: the angel-tongue-turds that explode from the Vietnam war series of the mid-1960s. Beginning with *Male Bomb* and *Female Bomb and Victims,* both

from 1966, the libidinal body and the technological body merge, releasing a deadly force. As desire creeps over the simplified machinic forms of these works—suckled tits dangling from bombs, a helicopter shitting death ("I Laid My Stuff All Over It"), heads swelling like mushroom-clouds, the F1-11 as a huge eagle, swastikaed crematorium stacks releasing angel-tongue heads—the paranoic perversity of the war in Vietnam is relentlessly stripped of its veil of media rhetoric. These works are crude and "tasteless," undigestible. There is no indulgence in the elegiac pastoralism that often marks Western art's bad conscience about the Third World. Spero presents *our* war, raw, rotten, and burnt. Each painting curses out (as she would quote from Artaud): "now choke on your law."

In 1969, Spero began to incorporate Artaud's texts into her works directly. The figure of the barred mouth, overwritten by red letters exemplifies for me the Artaud paintings and cutouts: the inability to speak, without even the purity of silence; external signs robbing one's own being. The *Formules de Transformation* (1969) presents a gilded cutout of human form, diving along the circumference of a graphed circle, with rays and angles subdividing it, and each ray labelled by a letter. Below the figure is quoted, from Artaud: "In that kind of eternal state which / really is never detached from / limbo / and can never enter reality." Here the circle abstracts the image of an open mouth. The rays from the circle's center are the vectors of the breath's force. But from its very origin breath is measured, divided, rationalized, overcoded by phonemes (y, j, n, a, b, x, m); each signifying sound suspends Artaud/Spero in non-being, the limbo of another's thought, barring unmediated ("cruel") contact with reality.

The *Codex Artaud* (1971–72) begins the work of recuperating this void, by, as Artaud did, meticulously documenting its topology. Each section of the codex is constructed from panels of irregular-edged paper, sealed together and fastened by white pins; typed quotations and cutout figures sparsely punctuate this negative space. Perhaps more important than the figures, however, is the paper itself; its folds and gathers where a text may accumulate, its evident reliefs and smoothnesses, its tears and puckers and tensions. The *Artaud Codex* unscrolls the tight tube of the self, exploring its seams and blanks, the objects and persons and words that fill or efface it.

Spero has uncovered in her many years of struggle in art and political life a selfhood and temporality all her own. Or rather not exclusively her own, but one shared by women across history, as her biggest installation *Notes in Time on Women* (1976–79) would suggest. This work consists of twenty-four panels, on which are printed figures borrowed from many of her prior works and scores of quoted passages: "authoritative" statements of men about women, narratives by women, accounts of accomplish-

ments or sufferings of women, women figures in mythology, and many other textualizations of "women" in the history of discourses. Whereas "Notes" emphasizes the affirmative power of the feminine, another power, the force of resistance in the midst of profound suffering, is presented by the *Torture of Women* installation. *Torture of Women* draws heavily from Amnesty International accounts of torture in Turkey, Chile, and elsewhere; it juxtaposes these texts with medieval legal justifications of torture, mythological figures and texts, and political graffiti.

It would be entirely appropriate to speak here of an "archeology" of femininity: a recapitulation of the discourse of the feminine; a recapturing of "women's time" from the eternal return of male-dominated "history"; a recaptioning of the imagery of women from the archaic goddess to the medieval witch to the Vietnamese peasant fleeing from the bombs; and finally, a *re*capitation of a feminine subjectivity dismembered by torture and male violence. Spero speaks in the accompanying video interview of her immediate sense of identification with Artaud, who wrote of the loss of *la langue:* at once language, and the tongue that would speak it. If the installations of the 1970s *Notes in Time* and *Torture of Women,* represent an advance over her Vietnam war series and the *Artaud Codex,* it is in finding a place from which to affirm in a "voice of her own."

I am tempted to use the word "rhythm" to characterize this affirmative moment: a word not foreign to speech, but linked more particularly to the ecstatic arts of poetry, music, and dance. Several of Spero's later works (from the 1980s) utilize repeated printings of the same figures across horizontal scrolls or in vertical diptychs and triptychs. These works depart from the visual and verbal complexities of both the *Artaud Codex* and the large installations. Their interest lies, instead, in the differential spacing of repeated figures, rhythmic articulations of the libidinal body. In the video interview, we see Spero seated in the midst of her cast of characters, the print masters spread across the floor of her studio. Sheela-na-gig, the sky goddess, the dildo dancer, the mourning woman, the fleeing woman: in the works of the '80s Spero draws from a transhistorical *typology* of woman figures, who communicate through their rhythmic interaction with one another. One of the most thematically rich of these visually simplified works is *Black and Red* (1983). It consists of only two figures, printed one over another in the contrasting colors of the title. One figure shows a lithe, naked woman, dancing; the other oviform abstraction of the Venus of Willendorf, a thirty-thousand year old cult object of Upper Paleolithic Europe. Spero presents the movement of the living body in time across the timeless, ageless body of the goddess. She indulges no nostalgia for an unspoiled, mythical past, but rather enacts an historically-conscious irruption of one temporal register into and through another.

These works have a performative, real time aspect unusual to most visual artworks, particularly when viewed in a museum context. As a male viewer, I felt not so much judged or accused by them, as displaced: Spero's works resist the consumeristic voyeurism of the aesthetic gaze, and demand instead thought, reading, and movement. In this sense, even the darkest works have a utopian significance, as condensed forms of female political community. A woman friend who saw the exhibition recounted to me: "I was reading one of those long panels of *Notes in Time on Women,* when suddenly I realized I was standing together with several other women, in their teens, in their sixties, and between, each working-through a different portion of the whole."

—TYRUS MILLER

STEALING ANNA'S SKIN
I—57 by Paul Metcalf
Longriver Books, 1988

Metcalf's *I—57* (Longriver Books, 1988) is itself a book of movement: movement outward, from the chaos of madness; from the brain, through metaphor, to the earth. It moves through the contours of landscape, through time, and returns to the body: to the skin, eyes—organs of sense and perception through which the world, its places and people, can be felt. Like *Patagoni* and *U.S. Dept. of the Interior, I—57* is constructed around a land/body metaphor that culminates in a literal journey. Here, however, Metcalf travels not to the landmass's edges, Peru and Alaska, but toward a center, a source, along a bland stretch of interstate running from Cairo, Illinois to Chicago.

I—57 is not so much a narrative of place as one of the reaching and inevitable passing of places. The book's opening section, a jarring montage of schizophrenic testimonials, evokes a consciousness turned in on itself, trapped:

I am fighting my way through deep varnish (13)

and:

> I have never stopped writing this, and it has not yet begun (24)

From here, the narrative moves outward to clinical descriptions of th brain, its tissue. Leni Fuhrman's accompanying photo-images of the sku and its haunted interior grow more abstract and less threatening as th text steadies itself through the language of science, looking *at,* rather tha *through,* the schizophrenic brain. Overlaid with unifying textures in sec tion two and, in three, with plant stems and leaves, Fuhrman's image help blend the outside with the inside, the body with environment, s that emerging capillaries course into rivers. Metcalf's text juxtapose neurological with geological sources, narrating the history of the land, th sometimes violent story of the Mississippi valley's formation, developin the connection between earth and brain along textural, kinetic and lin guistic lines.

The fulcrum of *I—57* is its fourth and penultimate section, whic lyrically fuses the skin, its layered composition, with the gentle formatio of the earth's textured surface. Metcalf treats the skin as a perceptua organ and includes provocative accounts of "dermaloptics," the phenomenon of seeing (or sensing) color and shape through the skin of the face, hands and torso. Section four confuses the senses with rhapsodically synesthetic passages like the one describing a blind man's dream, but this mad scrambling of sensual data is salvaged by a central affirmation. The skin, for Metcalf, is the final agent between interior and exterior, between consciousness and world:

> rather than remember directions
> it is better to feel the sun on the cheekbone,
>
> and move by the compass
> over the skin of the earth (69)

I—*57's* closing section finds its author, age 57, moving northward, through southern Illinois, on Interstate 57. Here, Metcalf's own photographs depict the middle Mississippi Valley landscape strewn with contemporary artifacts: buildings, billboards, monuments. His journal contrasts the interstate culture with the culture of rural Illinois, focusing on moments of brief exchange between himself, an outsider, and the locals.

At the heart of this journey is Paul Metcalf's encounter with Mrs. Anna G. Powell, 102-year-old resident of Creal Springs, Illinois. Entering her home and the circle of her family to interview and photograph the woman, Metcalf almost restages James Agee's foray into the rural south in

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. But Metcalf's meeting with Anna Powell is direct and untormented. He enters her world softly, easily, and, leaving:

> . . ."If one of these pictures turns out, I'll send you one, when I get home. Okay?"
>
> . . .and here the sweetness comes out, the smile genuine, not simpering, as though she were tasting and enjoying a newly invented word:
>
> "okay" (108)

Earlier in the book, Metcalf had written of the medicine man of the Connibos tribe who:

> felt that george catlin,
> in painting his portrait,
> was employing an ingenious mode
> of stealing his skin (74)

And *I—57* becomes, indirectly, not just an account of how Paul Metcalf steals the skin of Anna Powell. It's the story of how he returns it to her, and the book's reader, by stealing, himself, outward through his own skin and into the world.

—DAVID KADLEC

POETRY AND (MALE?) SEX*

I don't know much about sex but I know what I like. Whenever I hear the word sexuality I reach for my wallet. Your sexual politics is the way you live.

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* *A response to a question circulated by Douglas Messerli to several writers: "How do you see your poetry as being related to or as being a product of sexuality or sexual politics?"*

*

A few days ago, a letter was passed on to me in which my essay on Charles Olson, in *Content's Dream,* was taken to task as "unjust" in its critique of *Maximus's* sexual politic. Randy Prus writes:

> Phallocentrism is different from misogyny. What I mean to say is, some men write from the 'balls,' that soft tender spot which the gender is constantly trying to express and yet protect. Hemingway and Mailer write from the phallus, that hard expression of masculinity. Olson, as well as Whitman, as well as myself write from the 'balls.' H.D. in *Notes on Thought and Vision* locates the 'womb' as one center of writing. The 'balls' are the male counterpart of that, as well as to that experience. Gender expression does not mean gender dominance.

Here we see "maleness" claiming the same privileges in contemporary "progressive" ideological space as is accorded to "womanhood" or "blackness." But maleness, like whiteness, like Americanness cannot claim the "rights" of marginality because it remains culturally, politically, socially, and economically dominant. The "imaginal" values of maleness have not been suppressed/discredited/denied but rather vaunted: the struggle for men is to *unlearn* masculinity, without substituting any positive value to this gender differential since positive values for maleness (as distinct from "humanness") remain suspect, at least for the present, as socially adaptive strategies to maintain control and power.

One of the most striking features of the current poetry context is the resourcefulness of women, blacks, gays, and other marginalized (though not marginal) groups to assert a powerfully positive identity either in individual writings or through integrally related social formations (readings, publishing, critical writing). White, heterosexual men cannot occupy this ground: for the relevant group affiliation is one that cannot, in good conscience, be advanced: on the contrary, the group solidarity of straight, white men needs to be dissolved not in order to be regrouped in a more "authentically male" fashion but to become dispersed into a *human* future that is not now possible to envision. Certainly, men sensitive to this problem may be envious of those who are able to participate in building a group gender identification, and it is not surprising that many men express resentment toward feminist poetries in a variety of ways: for it is precisely the position of the unrepresented and the victimized that straight, white American men are rightly excluded from occupying in any primary way. While men's consciousness raising is a valuable, indeed necessary activity, "men's liberation" is an obscenity; which is not

to say that all human beings are not tyrannized by a social order that tyrannizes any group.

Within this context, the questioning, through poetic methods, of the authoritative structures of our society is useful for both men and women and the poetic works that result will not necessarily be differentiable by gender: but the world they connect to, at least within the context of a non-Utopian reading, surely will be. What seems especially problematic is the reduction of this investigation to biologically reductive categories: the genitals made symbolic. We are so enmeshed within the social coding of gender that we have no way of locating essential biological meanings for sex differences. Biology is not destiny, rather it establishes a ground of possibilities for sociocultural enacting. There are no *knowably* inherent social attributes to maleness or femaleness only socially constructed, or socially asserted, ones. The questioning of essentialist ideologies of gender is one of the richest domains of "modern" poetry and it is little wonder that so many of the most revolutionary writers of the past 250 years have refused, or been unable, to conform to conventional gender and sexual classifications.

Of course, this suggests problems with essentialist feminism as much as masculinism. Social and sexual functions *make* essences. If the socially desired end is equal employment opportunities for all, then this will be what will determine the correlatively equal sharing of infant care, housework, etc. The "essentially" nurturing role of women will be as irrelevant as the learned (or never learned) nurturing role of men faced with the deadening forms of employment available to most of us. The point is not to radically demarcate gender distinctions, which inevitably lead to workplace and economic and status discriminations: not further divisions of labor, that is, but the pooling of these realities. There is real, expressible, pain and loss, as well as gain and pleasure, involved in the forms of alienation that men experience in the workplace or in a single's bar or in a marriage and the *critical* articulation of these experiences is necessary: but these are realities that women and men will more and more share if sexism and phallocentrism are to be overthrown.

*

But what does this have to do poetry and the erotic? It is sometimes hard to understand how the body can be shaped by language—that our ideologies are scleroticized into social flesh, that we live out our grammars with our bodies. Poetry is a place where that grammar can be reforged. Indeed the project of much current poetry that attempts to rupture conventional grammatical and narrative patterns can be understood in terms of just such a sexual politic. At the same time, *as a man,* I have been

concerned with resisting any establishment of new and positive identity formations through such writing practices.

If not gender, what then? The various social roles learned by women and men make for different points of departure in coming to terms with the controlling interests of these roles and that will no doubt be pervasively reflected in individual works. I have tried, in my work, to understand who and what I am without assuming the authenticity of my feelings or sexuality. This has afforded me an unlimited amount of pleasure in writing.

For writing is erotic when sclerotic patterns of communication are violated, especially if this violation isn't left hanging in the fire but comes to fruition. As against the idea that nonnormalizing writing practices unleash a de-creative "libidinal flow" that is otherwise locked up by, or in, language, I would say that the object(s) of my desires is a pro-creative poetry. For there is no prelinguistic, presymbolic domain that is systematically repressed with the acquisition of language but that can be liberated by textual ruptures of the phallocentric symbolic order: an idea that is the last outpost of Romantic ideology in poststructuralist doxa. Rather, the linguistic or semantic or symbolic order are coterminus with the body, its coming into being and its expiration. The presymbolic is, at best, a utopian projection, out of this world (like Romanticism's nonsocial Imagination): literally no*where,* never.

There is no "presymbolic" holdout (hideout); language play is simultaneously, *not consecutively, narratively* constitutive of meaning *and* erotic. Language *as such* is no more "phallic" than it is "clitoral"; and while standard grammar may reflect the (patriarchal) social order, alternative (nonphallic) grammars are simultaneously being realized and repressed. Just as it is necessary to reject the reduction of meaning to utility, it is also necessary to guard against the schizophrenic splitting of meaning from the libidinal flow through which it is enacted. As Samuel Weber has put it, there is no free play only *power plays:* in the interior of any argument for the liberation of libidinal energy trapped by inscription is the demon of phallic play ma(r)king its own unchecked reinscription.

Writing and reading enact a sexual economy in that they open onto an arena of erotic play—release, delay, longing, emptiness, destruction, production, absorption, theatricality, determination, satisfaction, frustration. The sensuous pleasures of words, phrases, and images can never be underestimated as embodying the aesthetic force of a poem. The poetics of pleasure, and the absolute acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of desire—different pleasures for different people—remains a fundamental test of any politics, including any politics of poetry.

Pleasure is always site specific: bound by social and personal histories. There can be no hierarchization of the methods of pleasure (call

them pleasuring principles or the appartuses of the erotic, as you like). If sexual practices are never "absolutely liberatory" in function neither can any claim special legitimacy as being more "natural" than others: in any case, eros does not require such utilitarian justifications. And if it is wished to imagine a liberatory function for sexuality, it is sobering to keep in mind that desire *constitutes* social grammars. Nor is there a "material core" to eros: genital sex, touching a wall, the vision of an empty and dark room, smell, eating bread, dancing (on a threshing floor or in your head), as much as those more hushed(-up) pleasures of the text, are equally sublimations/actualizations—*articulations*—of eros.

When I speak of a procreative poetry, I don't mean that this can be untangled from decreative play. I mean rather to emphasize a sense of a poem's needing no value outside its immediate pleasures: where the value resides in the instantiation of pleasure for itself, the noninstrumental fact of its own activity. The erotic text for which I make my proposition desires to constitute itself by both its disengagements and its engagements, in order—not to leave the social realm but to more materially, sensually, sentiently place itself as lived and felt object in and of the world. In this way, the poem is transformed by the powers of its embodied desires, as each of us is transformed in our journeys from our separate inceptions, from *text* to *work*.

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

RESPONSE TO "LITERACY EFFECTS" BY JED RASULA

Dear Jed:
I think "Literacy Effects. . ." is fascinating, and, if you'll forgive the term, wonderfully entertaining. And it is good to know that one can be a *Sulfur* reader and also seek absorption into things like *thirtysomething* with a clear conscience. But I think there are issues latent in the essay that require more discussion, and which in suggestive ways are related to the recent debate around Language writing in the pages of the aforementioned. My tentative comments are based not so much on what you state as what I feel may be implicit in the gaps. So, to offer them:

• While you mention Godzich and Kittay as immediate sources for your concept of "prose," the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* seems to be the real philosophical spring of your essay (though I don't mean it's at all dark as that brooding book: your section on the "canon" might even have had Adorno and Horkheimer slapping their knees). There are, anyway, coincidences between the idea of an encompassing "prose," and Adorno's concept of the culture industry. Likewise, strong parallels between Adorno's pitch for modernist aesthetics as the last ditch barricade against instrumental rationality, and your projection of linguistically productive forms as privileged modes of resistance to the weave of "literacy effects." If I'm reading you correctly, "prose" can be taken as "mass culture."

• What I find problematic is the way in which that "prose" seems *totalized* as the threatening "other" of a free subjectivity. The force of your argument sets up a binary opposition, and approaches excluding, by implication, the possibility of *differentiating* cultural production according to specific reading formations and discourse practices; or to put it another way, there is an absence of acknowledgment of the *positionality* (diachronicity) of discourse communities, and the possibility of their positive intervention in the cultural field.

• That absence is brought out when you state that you "seek alliance with any practice of writing that refuses to treat binary elements or dual possibilities as injunctions to choose." Writing, as you quote Coolidge, where one does "not finally know whether (one is) reading or writing." But in privileging textual modes that are essentially polysemous (wreading), you seem to have made a rather programmatic choice yourself—one which itself carries the weight of an enjoinder, i.e., that the question of cultural resistance (at least in the realm of poetics) is fundamentally a matter of epistemological affinities. My point is not to suggest that you're being contradictory, but rather to propose that the radical sense of homogeneity and closure you impart to the cultural field impels an overly abstracted hierarchization of discourses (experimental/modernist tradition vs. "first person singular" frames), and a consequent reductive stance toward the possibilities for textual praxis.

• A few days ago, I was reading from Joseph Bruchac's anthology, *The Light from Another Country: Poetry from America's Prisons,* and it struck me how many of the poems could be taxonomized under the broad parameters of your "first person singular," or PSI category. To what extent do the formal qualities of a poem determine whether it can be regarded as "testimony" or "testimonial," inside or outside "normal channels"? Are there reading formations where the "production of self" might represent

an articulation of resistance to the hegemony of "prose"? I raise these questions largely because your description of "wreading" as a "space," "difference," "habitat," in which one comes "to reckon with the spatial mystery of a voiceless speech and a bodiless embodiment," seems almost a kind of negative romanticism that would implicitly regard representational poetic discourses as quantified and reified.

• This isn't to argue against your evocation of "prose" and its power to atomize subjectivity in the very logic of homogenizing experience. But it is to suggest that mass culture is not necessarily a hermetically sealed logos, and that to regard it as such calls into question the legitimacy of theorizing either the specificity of reading formations or the ways in which contestations for those "significant symbols" may have a productively activating use. Lifting from Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt's theory of counter-public spheres, I'd propose that the construction—the praxis—of community, around a shared sense of cultural positionality is itself a primary act of resistance to the episteme of "prose"; that through praxis, communities may inscribe interstices of value and communication within which critical stances toward social life are made possible. In this regard, *formal/textual strategies* will have values of use depending, in George Hartley's words, "on their relationship not only to the period, but also to (their) overdetermined location within the social formation" *(Poetics Journal* 6).

• On this matter, there is a homology between the character of your formulations and the early capitalism=narrative/referentiality equations of Silliman and McCaffery. Of course, in many ways, Language writing is the most successful expression of a "counter-public sphere" we've ever had in American poetry. Criticisms of the movement's political significance—even by such fine critics as Altieri and Weinberger—have missed the point by adopting a narrow text-itself approach, rather than considering ways the project has succeeded in problematizing the broader *institutional* text of "poetic" production (in this sense, Benjamin has been insufficiently used as a departure point in studies devoted to the work). Not to agree, of course, that the value of the writing itself is minimal: merging the modernist project of semantic possibility *into* the effort of engaging the ideological bases of signification represents a rich contribution. But the extent to which the conflation has been proposed as a privileged form of praxis (and McGann's *Critical Inquiry* essay, I think, is a fair synthesis of the general sense that's been conveyed) has seemed to exclude a productive dialogization with creative communities working within more normative conceptions of commitment and discourse. The mix seems problematic: on the one hand there's been a "materialist" and

historicizing direction to much of the criticism done within and around the movement, and on the other, a decidedly utopian/idealist stance in the way that non-narrative (wreading) is projected as a "pure" realm for a poetics of resistance.

In that both "prose" and "referentiality" are posited as closed realms —"doxas," the poachable Barthes would put it—no space is left for challenge from within. If the logos has a Manichean echo, it has so here: either zombie-like assimilation, or a principled break with given economies of discourse. As I see it, if there is a significant difference between the outlines of your formulations and those of Language theory, it is that your concept of "wreading" seems to move away from the political hopes of a deconstructive textuality, and into the ethereal realms of Stevensian "fiction."

• What I'm arguing, "when it gets down to it," is that given the odds, any avant-garde practice in American writing that aspires to oppositional consequence must be informed by a recognition that differing textual strategies are always *potentially* useful—and complementary—options within a fluid heteroglossia of discourses. In so many words, that the challenge for writers committed to linguistic and conceptual experiment is how to theorize their cultural intervention without, in Adornean fashion, setting old Lukacs on his head.

Am I wrong in thinking that you feel it is too late in the game for such concerns? It's because I believe these issues have a certain topicality—and that your contribution would be vital to deepening a discussion around them—that I hope you'll correct me.

Sincerely,
KENT JOHNSON

SOME NOTES AMONG ALTAZORS

It's not often a new collection, Cecilia Vicuña's *Palabra Sur* (Grey Wolf Press), kicks off with a masterpiece, Vicente Huidobro's (peer to Vallejo & Neruda) *Altazor*. Eliot Weinberger's magisterial translation, joy

to read, superb piece of American poetry, shows, besides great sagacity for rendering the "untranslatable," a magnificent elegiac breath. Here you have it complete at last, after large helpings in David Guss's fine New Directions anthology of 1981.

*

Elegiac, yes, because: a poem of *flight?* E.W.: "The century's great paean to flight. . .the airplane as a vehicle for ascension." Later: *"Altazor* is a poem of falling, not back to earth. . .but out into space." E.W. also calls it "Einstein space." I find almost unbelievably little ascension in *Altazor.* The sub-title, *A Voyage in a Parachute,* clarifies *fall* but not rise. Without counting, I bet there are ten or more times as many *boats* in *Altazor* as planes; perhaps fifty times as many mentions of *sea* as any kind of air. There is extraordinarily little here of the exhilaration of flight, virtually nothing on the manifold experiences of being up in the sky. The overwhelming direction is *down*—not, I think, in space but in *water/sea/ ocean,* also signifying psyche. Like Neruda, Huidobro is Chilean enough to be devoured by ocean. [For the implications of this kind of entrails-reading, see N.T.: *Archaeology, Elegy, Architecture* in *Sub-Stance,* 28, U. Wisconsin, 1981]

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Criticism, I am told, agrees on the subject being the fate of poetry in Huidobro's time—but oscillates between a downbeat and an upbeat interpretation of Huidobro's own attitude to poetry's future. Maybe these basic directions in the poem can help decide? Is the fairly systematic review of referential dislocations (mainly, be it said, at the lexical level) running from Cantos 5 to 7 and ending with an "untranslatable" (now translated) trio of pages an optimistic surge towards the future? Or is it (as the only critic I've read so far, Rene de Costa, thinks) a rehearsal of the avant-garde's failure and a Rimbaudian abdication of all hope for a visionary language (itself, of course, a matter for heated debate)? I don't find much encouragement for the positive view in a poem which often seems to me to read like *A Season in Hell.*

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"Rosicrucian" suggestions: birth of Huidobro on the day of Christ's death [traditionally at 33] (1: numbers are page references); "alone in the middle of the universe" [Dante: *nel mezzo*] (15); the Blakean search for the hour that Satan cannot find (41); man as replacing God (9, 21, 25, 41); refs. to the "hidden rose" (111) etc. of a fall through *self* rather than space, an initiatic fall of a self "who watches himself at work and laughs in his

(own) face," falling from "the heights of his star" [the star it seems to which one is always (astrologically?) chained] (39, 43, 57, 65), "hanging in the parachute of his own prejudices" [trapped in ego?] (23), to "an endless voyaging in the interiors of the self" (27). If "we must change our luck," it is only, repeatedly, through drinking the "pale lucidity of death" to the dregs, the death of the "failed experiment" (25) for "Everything is pain" (29, 35, 43–47, etc.): the Buddhist *dukkha* perhaps which marks the exhaustion of all conditioned things, the picture of the world's future being dismal and contemptible (45–46). It is said, yes, that the greater the height from which you fall, the higher you'll rebound (11), a transformation is possible from *paracaidas* (parafall, parachute) to *parasubidas* (lit.: pararises, E.W.'s parashot) (13), but the poem never dwells long on rising while doing so, abundantly, on falling. It is only at the very bottom of "shipwreck" fall that the poet sees the hidden rose (111) and even in the one truly ascensional sequence in the poem, when the earth gives birth to a tree (rooted, of course), Huidobro continues "falling across your body from your heights to your depths" (57).

The fear of giving way to any ascensional hope is constantly re-iterated. "The airplane carries a new language / To the mouth of the eternal skies" (73) but, only a few lines later, the plane is "drowsy" and "the clouds turn to stone" (75), or: "The sky waits for an airplane / And I hear the dead laughing under the earth" (149). Indeed, anything rising seems unthinkable without being linked to the sea-fall: "My swallow anchors / Its sources in the sea" (157); "And waves are the wings in my blue" (143); "My lies smell of heaven / And that's all / And now I'm the sea" (143). In turn, the death through whose spaces the parachute interminably falls (3 & ss.)—as far into the poem as p. 109, Huidobro is still talking of "aerial burials" because all of air is absorbed into sea—this death is indissolubly associated with dream (3) and with the sea: death "sitting by the edge of the sea" (115); the sea in the depths of the tomb (119–121) and so forth.

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Huidobro's critique of avant-garde poetic procedures—Cubist, Dada, Surrealist, etc.—, if this is being read right, appears to follow the same pattern of fear of ascensional success. The "remedy" passage begins with a call to "revive the languages," put "circuit breakers in the sentences," "cataclysms in the grammar," "beautiful madness in the life of the word" (81), leads through an exaltation of the "pure word and nothing more," "The simple sport of words," appearing to end in "Single combat between chest and sky" [note "combat," but indicating freedom one would assume]. Then, however, there is something which seems very ambivalent to me: "Then nothing, nothing / Spirit whisper of the wordless phrase" (83). In the same vein, the passage at p. 87: "The sea waits to conquer /

So there's no time to lose / Then / Ah then / Beyond the last horizon / We'll see what there is to see" [curious echo of the bear-over-the-mountain, repeated at 105] seems heavily ironic, as well as "so sad" (95), indeed tragically dangerous: "There's no time to lose / The steamer has the day marked / For the dangerous holes stars open in the sea / It could fall into the central fire" (99) and the Jouvian "Goodbye one must say goodbye" of p. 101. Straight after this, a promise of sap springing up, yet, again, immediately: "The tree is afraid of going too far / It's afraid and looks back in anguish" (101) and "It's afraid I say the tree is afraid / Of going too far from the earth" (103) and, again, "Aviator be careful with stars / Careful with dawn / Lest the astronaut become a sunicide[1] / The sky has never had as many roads as this / Never has it been so treacherous" (105). The poet is lost in night, sea and splendor of "blind death" which is what there is to see "beyond the last horizon" (105). It may be that Huidobro is simply pointing to the massive difficulty of doing anything new in this age of the new but I don't see him raise a single cry of real hope out of any of it.

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The question of whether the ever-increasingly "untranslatable" text is indeed so or not must be linked to whether Huidobro wanted some degree of referentiality to be present to the very end of the poem—or not and this would also reflect on his hope, or lack of it, for poetry's future. E.W. clearly feels that Huidobro was not after pure sound in his search for a new language: "the 'untranslatable' poem is simply one which has not yet found its translator." On the other hand, the statement that, in the neologisms, "no two Spanish readers could ever agree upon" the various components of the word—so that another English version could be "utterly dissimilar to this one" leaves us free to feel that, less than any other poetry, this kind of poetry has a definitive translator. E.W. agrees: "The game of *Altazor* has an infinite number of moves, and I look forward to its next translation match." This is perhaps one place where poetry can be made by all—as surrealism wanted it to be: while admiring the brilliance of E.W.'s own solutions [it would take far more space than is available to unpack his extensive labor in detail], a dictionary and a knowledge of Spanish will allow any poet to try for another "match" with the neologisms.

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Can we deny Huidobro's claim to have found the key to "eterfinifrete" [the word can be read backwards or forwards—E.W.'s "infiniternity" cannot, though it gains in precision]? It occurs to me that the

degree of ambivalence is such throughout *Altazor* that it will always be possible to take opposite views of its intentions. This may be the genius of the thing: we may be in the presence of a both/and situation. The ambivalences are constitutive, however, and not due—as so often in Neruda, for instance—to a simple lack of linguistic energy. *Altazor* would be a triumph if only because, while being without any ostensible "subject," it manages to give such a sense of energy and purposeful direction. This is so especially in its totalizations: the Rimbaudian poet as total man (3, 7, 39–41, 137) indeed as total world (141); woman as a remembrance of other lives/worlds and guiding spirit of this one (69–71); the all-embracing shipwreck of the tomb (119–121), etc. The old truth: that great tragedy is mysteriously uplifting prevails as in all major elegiac work: I am moved at the fact that an early title of the poem seems to have been *AltAZUR*. More than this, however: the language is taut at all times and completely surmounts—as Vallejo's does—the sentimentality and vapid rhetoric endemic to so much Latin American writing. This is a poem to live with—in both its original and its English versions.

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[1] Note: "sunicide" is E.W.'s translation of "auricida," no doubt from *aur*ora (dawn) of the previous line, also echoing *aeronaut*a in the same line.

—NATHANIEL TARN

THE FLOWERS OF UNCEASING COINCIDENCE
by Robert Kelly, Station Hill Press, 1988

"Analyzing difference / severs." So begins Robert Kelly's first major long poem since *The Loom* in 1975. Unlike that previous endeavor, this lengthy text is composed of 672 small bursts of energy. While we might at first imagine such a work to appear fragmentary and disjoint, Kelly shows us otherwise. He invites us to draw-out correspondences amidst the seemingly disparate. In many respects he is continuing here to write the same poem he has been writing all his life, in other words the unfolding of his existence.

So Kelly utilizes, rather than analyzes, difference. And the result is an employment of the utility of language both invigorating and difficult. "What is more subtle than difference," asks Kelly. He proceeds to weave a very subtle text. When he tells us, "don't make sense make difference," we are being called to a new sensibility. What we sense is both internal and external and eternally the point at which the two meet and are inevitably separated. Thus "every name's a brand new knife to cut / where proprioceptive fibers terminate." In this reality where naming is knowing, "everything I see is a sort of remembering." Each petal is its own flower yet part of a larger, whole continuum. Kelly is, in a constructivist manner, assembling his flowers from language into appearance. He seeks to piece together the peace of language by writing multifoliate directives to the self. The result is a monumental language experiment where "each episode is an experiment / in how tight you can tug some stuff together / and how far you can blow it apart."

Language is that malleable "stuff" Kelly refers to. And, as he states, "language like the rest of us / always talks about itself." Thus he writes "trusting pure syllables" yet, on the other hand, he wants "to get there without language." In other words, he wants the best of both worlds. And when he can't have that, he settles for what language says to him, through him. "I set out to dismember language / but went too far / and now myself am spoken." Consequently and consequentially, "a word is something that happens to you." Kelly, then, is a man who, having given up on language as a way of conveying meaning, discovers afresh what he means to say. When we cease to exert our will over words, finally they speak to us. "Sense / you make by finding / but not finding it."

This is the paradox, that words tell us their sensible story despite our selves. Our mystery is unfolded in the participation with the story being told. Thus "enigmas are answered by the words that state them." To a greater or lesser degree the poet per se is relegated to the position of scribe, describing what scriptions are given him.

Words do not, in and of themselves, mean anything. They are, however, an invitation to meaning. And when Kelly allows language to work through him, i.e. when he surrenders to language, he gives up any sense of pre-ordained meanings inherent in words. So he can say of his art that, "meaning / is ownership / and this art / is for those with nothing to say." The act of surrender (and it is an act, rather than passive resignation) is continuous and continual and requires vigilance, without which the traditional modes of writing with meaning in mind return with all of their horrible displacement. Kelly must force himself to remain relentless to the end of the quest (as if there were an end to it) for, as he says, "the tradition of meaning is pervasive / hard to relax even in the flower found." For

Kelly, then, meaning in poetry is what language broods in the garden of its own accord.

The flowers continue to bloom in us as we allow them to, and they correspond with the material world about us. Naming *is* knowing, and "to know the name / of any flower is / to live in it." The interconnectedness of things becomes increasingly clear and apparent. Thus the flowers seem to unceasingly coincide until they do indeed coincide. The world can be seen as presenting us to ourselves in a constant stream of petals, as a narrative which might only at first appear to be disjoint. But Kelly directs us through the surface layer, saying "don't disconcerted by the drift of narrative / suppose coherence where's only the continuous / event seamless but story is one thread."

What, then, is the story? The story is Kelly, the Kelly we've come to know. Still working under the permissions, he speaks the womanly god. "The most mysterious faculty of a man: the woman," he says. The quest for her runs from internal to external throughout the text. She is simultaneously the thread which weaves the text while governing the textual unfolding. Thus "the whole structure of our structure is meant for Her / who is not the priestess of but God itself." This genderless perfection is attainable, only through immersion in our Other. We risk being devoured by her but, more readily, we risk projecting her into tangibility and losing ourselves to lust. "Any sentence is the history of a passion," claims Kelly. While this text is not as "lust-infested" as some of Kelly's previous work we nevertheless confront plenty of nakedness, skin, breasts, thighs, lips and mouths. This language arrives in spurts. Kelly redeems himself through his own "capacity to carve / verse out of distress out of / unsatiable appetite."

At its best, then, this text seems under an appropriate lunar sway, and settles into its element. "O lady the lunatic inner calmness leads to you," exclaims Kelly. He freely confesses, "I am starved for light / the ordinary that falls from the moon," and reminds us that "all her life she has been giving back / all that light as passion." We are nourished by the light of "that cold white skull up there / whose light is the black where we begin / ghost embryo mother cavern athanor." (We are reminded of the symbolic attributes of the Mother archetype as expounded by Erich Neumann in his seminal study *The Great Mother.)* All in all this is Kelly "trying to live by the rules of night." The fact that Kelly seeks Her passionately passionless calm allows this poem to resonate with a meaningful warmth which would otherwise be lacking in such a language constructed text.

When Kelly says "the world is not created it is found/ forever incomplete forever perfect," he is speaking as much about the world of the text itself. Kelly discovers, and, subsequently, we discover, the gem relative to its mineral matrix and, simultaneously, the gem with all of its internal

flaws. Inevitably, then, there are flaws here. When, for example, Kelly tells us a deer looks "like a cow that went to Smith," the analogy falls flat. Furthermore, "brownish tint or protestant" fails in its attempted consonance, "not awed by that black sperm" does little to awe us either, "a monkey masturbating on a radio" comes across as nothing new or shocking, "gyzm of our corny throb" is a bit *too* corny, and "zen cents fool" seems rather worthless. Yet Kelly reminds us that "an answer is not obvious / in a world of out-takes."

We might be tempted also to criticize the length of the text in its entirety. Granted, wordiness is worldliness, but the poem does not engage us throughout. Sections 175 through 385, roughly, prove most engaging on second reading, yet we are left with a lengthy introductory sequence and even more lengthy disengagement. This difficulty, it should be remembered, is inherent in any work of such risk and daring. While in hindsight we might see opportunities for further editing, such an action runs antithetical to the initial process of composition. Then, again, "Whoever knows her best knows her silence." Where is the silence here?

"There is nothing your mouth doesn't say," Kelly tells us. And, to be certain, he lets very little go unsaid here. He covers much of the ground of the going and coming, coming and going of our existence, all the while adding that "it's not all going and not all coming / the best of it persists a quiet way." The quietness is what we have left to take away from the text with us. What works so very well here is Kelly's relentless focus which generates us through myriad words to that silence which is Hers. We are propelled into a stunned knowing, or the realm of what Kelly calls the "abruptly revealed."

The poem is long and the words are many "because from emptying a self a truth appears." This truth is the story of ourselves we tell ourselves. The story must be written and told in the living. It is a pre-condition for our existence, from dismembering to remembering. "In this way gods are made and fact / imagined into shape and shape erased / to leave a hunger for that lucid doubt / of which Truth is the most urgent fiction."

— DAVID C.D. GANSZ

INDIFFERENCE: MIKE BIDLO AND RON SILLIMAN*

Mike Bidlo's recent show of scrupulously accurate copies of reproductions of Picasso's women, rescaled to the size of the size of the originals (an awkward number of genitives in that phrase but let it stand for something at issue here) has now been taken down, each canvas placed in the darkness of a crate—crates and darkness indistinguishable from those enclosing original Picassos in corporate vaults, and indistinguishable as well from those Marcel Broodthaers, in an installation, placed beside post-card reproductions of art-historical "masterpieces." Exchangeable crates, exchangeable darkness, exchangeable art in an unembarrassable system of commodities operating under the canopy of indifference—this is the resilient edifice into which Bidlo has been laboriously poking a finger over the years.

I write "laboriously" by way of setting off Bidlo's conceptual gestures from those of, for instance, Duchamp (the Ready-Mades), Warhol (his assembly-line silkscreens) or even the so-called "Dogg" (those installations of spare-tire cases). In a climate still saturated with notions of value as defined by quantities of labor, Bidlo's painstaking, handmade executions satisfy the mainstream art-world's requirement of craftsmanly sweat while simultaneously redefining its Cult of Originality. Between these poles of good behavior and calculated sabotage there exists a curious *idiot savant* tension, a contradiction which seems to threaten the cancellation of both terms. This, I'll attempt to show, is not the case however, because Bidlo's project succeeds in having its subversive cake and the consumption thereof.

But to arrive at that or any conclusion here it will be necessary to travel via mention of Benjamin's essential "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and Baudrillard's apocalyptic extension of its terms in *Simulations*—works in which Bidlo and other "simulationist" artists find elegant, sexy theoretical footing and without which their work is basically unthinkable.

Benjamin, as every Frankfurt schoolgirl knows, situates the power of the fine arts in their uniqueness as objects. Each work's unreproducible materiality and the specific, *verifiable* history of this materiality he calls the "aura" and it is precisely this aura which mechanical reproduction fails by definition to transmit. (Poetry as essentially untranslatable is an analogous notion.) Besides the inevitable distortion of color, scale, and

* Note: citations as follows: *S* = *Simulations* by Jean Baudrillard (Semiotext(e), 1983); *PU* = *The Political Unconscious* by Frederic Jameson (Cornell University Press, 1981); *I* = *Illuminations* by Walter Benjamin (Schocken, 1968); *W* = *What* by Ron Silliman (The Figures, 1988); *NS* = *The New Sentence* by Ron Silliman (Roof, 1987).

texture entailed by a photographic rendering of a Picasso, there is the inescapable fact of a *new object*—the reproduction itself—having been brought into existence. This object bears both an enfeebling dependence on the original as well as, by contrast, being subject itself to exact replication: Memorex. If this meant merely the creation of more aura-less trash, our pristine relation to "Les Demoiselles D'Avignon" would be undamaged. But in its crude two-dimensional, ahistorical fidelity, the reproduction's disseminating promiscuity "decays" the Picasso's aura, diluting its unique material quiddity with well-intentioned reports whose effects are those of Local News coverage on a John Cage performance. Hence the darkness of corporate vaults: art sapped of aura, indifferent.

If it's helpful to see Bidlo's gesture as the enlargement of a "quote" to the edges of the frame, Baudrillard's *Simulations* might be read as the blowing-up and application of Benjamin's model of the aura to all forms of representation, where the momentum of its logic culminates in Baudrillard's assertion that ours is "the age of simulation," in which "the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models." The real converts to "a hyperreal, the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (*S*, p. 3). Like Benjamin (and like Marx), Baudrillard casts his analysis of the present against a revisionist historical foil. Whereas Benjamin contrasts the contemporary Age of Mechanical Reproduction with Medieval, Renaissance and early Modern eras in which art objects possessed either sacral or secularized cultic unapproachability (another definition of aura), Baudrillard posits a vaguer, more inclusive historical generality which he summarizes as follows:

> All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could *exchange* for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God, of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference (*S*, pp. 2–3).

The appeal of this hyperbolic, Nietzchean discourse for a post-Warholian art-world is obvious. But if *Simulations* seduces with the additional attraction of embodying in its structure and argument the weightless circulation of models it thematizes, this very feature, at least for readers still mired in desires for "documentation," constitutes its critical flaw. For Baudrillard's is a logic which, when he rides it beyond the realms of art,

enthnology and capital, etc., assumes the nastiest of postmodern science-fictions—his absurd contention, for example, that *wars* no longer exist. (Placing one in the weird position of countering that scars on tortured bodies amount to more than hyperreal hieroglyphics and attest to a Real whose hold on its subjects has been left very much unbroken, has if anything been empowered, by the vertigo of unmoored representations and the First World's passive sanctioning of them.)

But quarantined in the dimension (the dimensionlessness) of artistic production, Baudrillard's positions clarify a real irreality. As we have seen, he and Benjamin fix their critiques on the axis of the interrelated issues of authenticity, origin, and originality. Despite its pessimistic conclusion regarding the fate of painting, Benjamin's dialectical-materialist analysis obliges him to acknowledge (if only in a footnote) the crucial role of copies in the defining of originality *per se,* in "differentiating and grading authenticity" *(I,* p. 245). "To develop such differentiations," he adds, "was an important function of the *trade* in works of art" (my emphasis). Having apparently ransacked even the essay's footnotes, Baudrillard elevates this calculus to the status of a law of the Simulationist Age:

> It is always a question of proving the real by the imaginary, proving truth by scandal, proving work by the strike, proving the system by crisis and capital by revolution. . .without counting:—proving theatre by anti-theatre,—proving art by anti-art. . .etc., etc. *(S,* p. 36).

To operate, in other words, this system of circulating simulacra depends on the periodic production of false antinomies whose function is to delineate an illusion of the real where there is, in reality *(?),* but the self-propagation of groundless and hence value-neutral models of other models.

What then, in these terms, is the force of a Bidlo copy of a reproduction of a Picasso? Is its relation to the original more or less parasitic for being painted in the colors and flattened remove of the original's aura? Does its status as a unique object with a specific material history place it in the same category as non-simulationist works, or in one of its own or the simulationists' own, a deuterocanon? Does it function to reinject a false antinomy—that of simulation—into a system of simulations whose operation hinges upon occasional staging of the binary, copy-original? What would be the status and effect of a simulated Bidlo, of a forged Bidlo? Does it matter? Are these the wrong questions?

Here are responses from the Castelli pamphlet used to advertise Bidlo's exhibit. Robert Pincus-Witten quotes from his journal:

18 November 1986

Earlier this month luncheoned with Bidlo, visiting him in his new studio in the West 30s, a hook in from a really bad stretch of Crack Avenue. The studio is in a renovated loft building and handsomely looks north over the city. Bidlo is now painting all of Picasso, the great works, as it were, across Picasso's whole career. Odd. Picasso in reproduction becomes Bidlo's Nature, his "motif," so that, in a certain sense, he is neither copying nor appropriating though of course that is exactly what he is doing. . . .

We talked, naturally enough, of the virtiginous (*sic*) ascent of the simulationists whose names have been on all lips of late. Bidlo waxed eloquent. . . .

In the past I chided Bidlo for having to think up things to do. Figuring out what to do next is a problem, perhaps a failing, of conceptual art. But Bidlo has turned the tables. . . .

For so long it seemed that painters, abstractionist as well as those who worked after nature, had the edge over the conceptualists, since, after all, their next move emerged from the very practice of painting itself and not from the act of thinking. Bidlo just may be the conceptualist who has pried himself free from that fundamental flaw of conceptualism.

Barbara Jakobson offers the following confession:

As interested now in the spirit of the present as I was in January 1958 when I bought Small Green Target from Jasper Johns' first exhibit at Leo Castelli, I learned in 1983 of a painter called Mike Bidlo who had spent a few years "becoming" Jackson Pollock. I hot-footed it over to his studio in Queens at P.S. 1 and stood in a state of amused amazement as Mike unrolled one "masterpiece" after another—"Autumn Rhythm," "Lavender Mist," "One." Instantly it seemed possible to me to finally own a Pollock. This is Bidlo's compelling attraction. He has desanctified the past, made a kind of forbidden desire attainable.

And Robert Rosenblum muses on the ways in which

This growing number of artists working as Sorcerer's Apprentices can be so varied that we are able to express enthusiasm or indif-

ference toward this or that replicator, instantly detecting the individual contours beneath the disparate facades of presumably slavish imitation. As such, it is a minor miracle that in Mike Bidlo's current "Picasso Retrospective," Picasso's not exactly shrinking personality seems totally trampled under foot.

So much for the Shock of the New and the permanence of any erosion of the Cult of Author-Genius. And Gerald Graff's remark that Late Capitalism is the avant garde suddenly seems less shocking as well. "If a fake £," Marx writes in the *Grundisse,* "were to circulate in place of the real one, it would render absolutely the same service in circulation as a whole as if it were genuine."

In this context, there has been no *fundamental* change in the status of Bidlo's work as it moved from "alternative spaces" (these, as "alternative" implies, are simply *other* places) to Castelli and MOMA. Whatever nervousness or true vertigo it might have experienced from the "questionable taste" of Bidlo's joke the art-world has converted into recognition which equals consumption which equals money. If Bidlo ever contemplated applying his talent to the kind of forgery which is punishable by law, the art-world's lucrative ceremonialization of his transgressive impulses has surely banished the thought. A buffer-zone of elaborate discourse encloses the simulationist gesture, thereby adding it to the array of existent art-commodities (both as "original" *and* "copy of masterpiece"). And, why not, thereby minimalizing the number of actual forgeries at large in the international art-market, some quantity X of undetonated plastic explosives planted under the desks of professional critics and curators—whose stake in "telling the difference" remains a real however much within a hyperreal.

But poetry explodes nothing? As Ron Silliman writes in *What,* "Art is the craft / of New York City." And the indifference here is of a different kind. *What* is composed of inter-allusive puns of varying degrees of shamelessness ("Platitudes / of the past aghast."), epigrams ("Irony's a form of aggression / that wants to be liked."), O'Hara-esques ("When I read this poem / David Bromige is still married to Sherril. . ."), Objectivistic Haikus ("Stain / the beets make / over cottage cheese."), pocket *ideologiekritiks* (". . .to not / choose is merely to conceal / one's choice: we have no ideology, we just do what's right.") and, perhaps "above all," meta-commentaries:

It is not that
there is no narrative
here (each sentence
is a narrative,

each line *moves)*
but that there is
no hierarchy
of narratives (not even
the story of the
poem), no sentence
to which the others
(all the others) defer
and are ranked
(the map is not
built about the city). *(W,* p. 101)

In short, this is r=e=a=d=i=n=g. Invisible equal signs between sentences assure each the same status in the poem's polity. Like Bidlo, Silliman invokes the principle of equality, of indifference. However, he does so not to circumscribe the power relations between works (originality, precedence) but those between internal artistic units—for Silliman, those of the sentence. It remains problematic whether, by defining the terms of reception, such signature meta-insistences do tend to dominate the rest of the poem. "Refunctioning" "bourgeois" poetics through hybridization and disjunction (as versus, say, the morphemic atomizations of P. Inman), Silliman's project is Brechtian in its emphasis on the forces (poetic and social, the poetic as social) contending for our affirmation. It is an extensively-theorized project: "The social role of the poem places it in an important position to carry the class struggle *for* consciousness to the level *of* consciousness" *(NS,* p. 17). And theory, like an aesthetic Career Services office, "functions in poetic practice through the selection of goals and strategies" *(NS,* p. 59). The practice results most often in the pleasure of the poetically and socially recognizable retooled to the texture of a bland, disjunctive seriality—social realism, as written by Ludwig Dreiser, circa 1986:

Her hair up in a bun with pencils stuck through it.
The buck stops here. The mourning
of the logicians. Words spill forth,
adjuncts of a mind that won't quit,
froth of nuance lathers meaning, hiding
denotation's hard shell, itself a game
of the missing pea. *(W,* p. 110)

Everything is here, all the figures, including how (and how not) to read them. *What*'s aesthetic thresholds, its poetics of calibrated play and self-control, have their ground in Silliman's faith in the scientificity of

Marxist political economy and cultural criticism—in, as Frederic Jameson writes, "the vision of a moment in which the individual subject would be somehow fully conscious of his or her determination by class and would be able to square the circle of ideological conditioning by sheer lucidity and the taking of thought" *(PU,* p. 283). While in the case of the simulationist xeroxing of Modernism's canon it is the art market which reflexively attempts to absorb a Bidlo's dangerous mirror games, thereby exposing its own ideological valences; in ideologically "correct" writing such as Silliman's, it is the writing itself which is given the task of critique. To a certain extent this inevitably results in a perverse ideological dimension: one more deeply hidden because more explicit—a Purity Complex. And to the extent that this species of Language writing recommends itself on the basis of its ideological self-implication and of more "objective" models for representations of social material relations (see "The Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto" *Social Text,* 19/20, Fall 88) it reframes itself in the discourse of mere displacement.

As Marcuse suggests in *The Aesthetic Dimension,* there "may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud than in the didactic plays of Brecht." Lost in the overdeterminations of the art market's response to simulationism and in Silliman's dialectically-defined poetics of calculation is the political role of the undetermined, of the incalculable, in art. The formal cancellations of difference in the works of Bidlo and Silliman all but eliminate this elusive but essential dimension whose power, according to Marcuse, is that of estrangement and "the radical, transcendent goals of change."

—THAD ZIOLKOWSKI

"TANGANYIKA STRUT": SOME RECENT SETS*

"Mateso," Master Musicians of Tanzania, *Mateso* (Triple Earth).

"Wawili Tunapendani," Abdulla Mussa Ahmed and Seif Salim Saleh, *Taarab 1: The Music of Zanzibar* (Globe Style).

"Yaar Daadi Mukhasi Phearaan Dardi," Muhammed Abdullah Tibet-balqal and Ensemble, *Kashmir: Traditional Songs and Dances, Volume II* (Nonesuch Explorer).

"Jane Kis Tarha," Najma Akhtar, *Oareeb* (Triple Earth).

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"Bhajan: Bhaja Man Nande Nandan Gidhari," Begum Parween Sultana, *Indian Vocal Music* (Amigo).

"Toumné Jab Julfé Parichane Sawarane Hoga," Ustad Jafar Husain Khan and Ensemble, *Kawwali: Chant soufi de l'Uttar Pradesh* (Maison des Cultures du Monde).

"3/4's of 4/4," Amina Claudine Myers, *Song for Mother E* (Leo).

"Hana Hana Male Hbibti Madjatch," Cheb Khaled, *Hada Raykoum* (Triple Earth).

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"Dja Yadhak," Fadela, *Fadela* (Attitude).

"Lala Sadia," Chab Hamid, *Le Disque d'Or du Rai* (New Pictures).

"Botika Na Lela," Papa Wemba, *Siku Ya Mungu* (Black Music).

"Adam's Apple," Wayne Shorter, *Adam's Apple* (Blue Note).

"Domani," Andrew Hill, *Shades* (Soul Note).

"Taht," Cecil Taylor Segments II (Orchestra of Two Continents), *Winged Serpent (Sliding Quadrants)* (Soul Note).

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"Serene," Eric Dolphy, *Unrealized Tapes* (West Wind).

"I Am Waiting," Cassandra Wilson, *Point of View* (JMT).

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* Anyone who has read *Bedouin Hornbook* (Callaloo, 1986) can't help but come away with the sense that Nathaniel Mackey has one of the most incisive and bouyant musical imaginations around. While his writings offer ingenious solutions to the problem of how to convey the intangible suspirations of music in verbal form, there is another forum which Mackey is equally master of—broadcasting. For many years he has hosted a radio program called "Tanganyika Strut" on KUSP in Santa Cruz, California. Having heard the program countless times during the years, I have been awed and charmed by the way Mackey's programming decisions are as eloquently instructive as his writing. Juxtaposition of cuts generally draws on submerged stylistic threads not at all obvious, but just *right* when you hear them. At my request Mackey has provided some of the sequences from his enlightening program.—J.R.

"Love Is," Dewey Redman, *The Struggle Continues* (ECM).
"Dear Lord," John Coltrane, *Transition* (Impulse!).
"Ballad," John Tchicai Orchestra, *Merlin Vibrations* (Plainisphare).

*

"Preludio Pra Nana," Jack DeJohnette's Special Edition, *Irresistible Forces* (MCA/Impulse!).
"Cono," Salif Keïta, *Soro* (Stern's Africa).
"Sueño Con Serpientes," Silvio Rodriguez, *Días y Flores* (Victoria).
"Eu e Agua," Maria Bethânia, *Maria* (RCA).
"Papa Damballah," Toto Bissainte, *Toto Bissainte chante Haïti* (Arion).

*

"Love Is A Key," The Viceroys, *We Must Unite* (Trojan).
"Run Come Rally," Dadawah, *Peace and Love* (Trojan).
"Amis, Je Ne Supporte Plus Votre Eloignement," Cheikh Abdelaziz ben Mamoud and Ensemble, *Soulamia de Tunisie* (Arion).
"Mothers of the Veil," Ornette Coleman and Prime Time, *In All Languages* (Caravan of Dreams).
"No Simple Explanations," Jayne Cortez and the Firespitters, *Maintain Control* (Bola).
"Laye Fall," Youssou N'Dour, *Djamil: Inédits 84–85* (Celluloid).

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"Que Loucura," Luiz Melodia, *Claro* (Braziloid).
"Kua' Sanzala," Bonga, *Africa Roots, Volume 4* (Melkweg).
"No Te Asombres," Angel Canales, *Ya Es Teimpo* (Selanac).
"Abuella," Billy Bang Sextet, *Live at Carlos 1* (Soul Note).
"Artesano del Espacio," Los Van Van, *Sandunguera* (Messidor).

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"My Little Suede Shoes," Sonny Stitt, *Stitt Plays Bird,* (Atlantic).
"My Experience on the Raper Band," Lord Invader and His Calypso Group, *Calypso Travels* (Folkways).
"Calypso Be," Young Tiger with the Calypso Serenaders, *Caribbean Connections: Black Music in Britain in the early 1950s, Volume 2* (New Cross).
"Barbados," Charlie Parker, *Original Bird: The Best of Bird on Savoy* (Savoy).

"Jahbero," Fats Navarro, *The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Volume 2* (Blue Note).

"Blue Lights," Clifford Jordan and John Gilmore, *Blowing In From Chicago* (Blue Note).

*

"Rock Chair, I Told You To Rock," Rich Amerson, Earthy Anne Coleman and Price Coleman, *Negro Folk Music of Alabama: Religious* (Ethnic Folkways).

"Angels," Albert Ayler, *The Village Concerts* (ABC/Impulse!).

"On A Country Road," John Carter, *Fields* (Gramavision).

"Long Distance Call," Muddy Waters, *Rolling Stone* (Chess).

"Can't Hold Out Much Longer," Little Walter, *The Best of Little Walter* (Chess).

"Backwater," Last Exit, *Last Exit* (Enemy).

"Emathanjeni," *Zulu Songs from South Africa* (Lyrichord).

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"Merina," *Musique Malgache* (Ocora).

"Khomo E Khunoena," Majakathatha, *Sheshwe: The Sound of the Mines* (Rounder).

"Megwaza," Johnny Dyani, *Witchdoctor's Son* (SteepleChase).

*

"Ntin'oba," Pierre Akendengué, *Owende* (Le Chant du Monde).

"Athamourthiou," Ahcene Adjroud, *Adounith* (Globe Style).

"Dashti," Mohammad Musavi and Jamshid Mohebbi, *Iran 3 et 4: Anthologie de la musique traditionelle* (Ocora).

"November 1981," Bill Dixon, *November 1981* (Soul Note).

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"Yaabint," Kuusow "Kurtunwaarey," *Jamiila: Songs From A Somali City* (Original Music).

"Las Mil y Una Noches," Juan Peña Lebrijano and the Andalusian Orchestra of Tangier, *Encuentros* (Ariola).

"Que No Me Quería," Pepe de la Matrona, *Pepe de la Matrona, Volume 1* (Hispavox).

"Easter procession at the temple of La Macarena," *Portrait of Andalusia* (Argo).

"Saeta," Miles Davis, *Sketches of Spain* (Columbia).

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"Aïn Salah," Clifford Thornton and the Jazz Composer's Orchestra, *The Gardens of Harlem* (JCOA).

"Ellahi Yelt'ha Bhemmou," Hsissen, *Hsissen, Volume 5* (Les Artistes Arabes Associés).

"Yir Thayri," Ouardia, *Assirem* (Globe Style).

"Encuentro Final (Tarara)," José Heredia Maya and the Andalusian Orchestra of Tetuan, *Macama Jonda* (Ariola).

"La Tarara," Camarón, *La Leyenda del Tiempo* (Phillips).

"Yo No Me Siento Rico," José Menese, *Cantes de José Menese* (RCA).

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"Kanuayi," *Sanza and Guitar Music of the Bena Luluwa of Angola and Zaire* (Lyrichord).

"Adarrum," *Afro-Brazilian Religious Songs* (Lyrichord).

"Festa de Candomblé," Martinho de Vila, *Novas Palavras* (RCA).

"Quem Usa Antena é Televisão," Bezerra de Silva, *Alô Malandragem, Maloca o Flagrante!* (RCA).

—NATHANIEL MACKEY

ELEGIAC MEASURES

Emerson on the English, Cowper's *Letters,* Boswell's *Hebrides* (I've been reading Gilbey's *Barbara Celarent* and am in love with examples) all have Everyman editions. These I have even referred to in a poem by number (Swinnerton's *Georgian Literary Scene).* What is Cobbett for, what Nietzsche, if not an irritable reaching out after something hoped impaled on pique, the trap as a feared engine. Produce enough syllogisms and the Lady won't hear Comus coming. As we pull away from them do they mat down, make a path. It's easy for literary people to map themselves with clots of reading, easier if there's a romantic strain to all the books. How people care for each other in *Dog Years* is at odds with what the society is up to. The business of being an artist changes for Truitt as her daughters get pregnant. Wittgenstein appears on psychology and law, and it's as if what we were getting to know with difficulty younger is nearly codified, Corpus Juris rather than map, pressed fiber-

board. There is a shift in whether one needs to read a book or not. And it is felt as a shift in tension in one's milieu.

Yesterday I wrote an elegy for Butterick, and it is about the larger echoes given off by poems in journals when poets die, not that it's a convention but that it's a slight laceration to see one. Why is it you speaking and not another. How important are you here. Perhaps I want to say that verse is not, as it stands, adapted to mortuary epistles.

Give over it, there's a leaving off, perhaps a feeling that nothing can be done, almost a politeness of not wanting a poem to help. This may be a feeling that any elegy for someone in the trade exploits a milieu or holds a lifetime of interest for ransom. Day Lewis I think has a "Little Gidding" poem, about the tablet on the wall and what Eliot means to him or the mythy thought of him, so polite, so religious. What can one say to it? I'm almost glad it's written. I'd write about its lines. In the eighteenth century they *sink* into the grave. Condemned to hope's delusive mine, what a thing to say, compared to Tom writes better than I do. The decision to write prose poems may be to escape an atrocity of shape. Verse assumes everything lives that doesn't thud like a small mammal in a coffee can ready for burial.

Limousines are everywhere in this city, tucked up the apartment drive next to the Brattle druggist whose customers carry him perfumes, and Billy Barnum in a doorway performing in white satin, and holding them too. Past grandeurs abound, though Harvard graduates are way down on the Forbes list. That the college depended too much on its cultural capital is clear, even the law and business schools declined, and I am tempted to say it's from an enduring myopia toward the fine arts except as monuments. The poets they hire are not significant, when they could have any. The audiences at poetry readings seem like hobbyists, aides de culture of the worst sort. Boston College's (for Kenner and Forche) are much larger and more lively. Still, I've the sense lately that audience as such, as a consideration, matters less now than a poem's imagined milieu, and this is different from its imagined audience, if any. In a sense a poem hears other poems. For a long time you could think everything in Palgrave talked to each other, and in a sense (now plotted) Palgrave was the best magazine. If poetry became lyrical psychology this was its mandate. No one has yet done this for twentieth-century verse, partly because it would still (now) split. "Lyric" (especially if you excerpt) holds much, but we need a whole chapter for Knopf poets, as I think of them even when they're Little, Brown or Harper's, Amy Clampitt, Mary Oliver, perhaps Linda Gregg, and at the peak of audience appeal Sharon Olds, whose poems impressed me skimmed, then made me angry. It's not enough to say they sell a sensibility, though this leads them to select for content to display it as shamelessly as Tennyson may be thought to

have. More likely with this accessible verse we are back to eighteenth-century pamphleteering, anonymous quarto poems appearing with a splash to drench aficionados, Hockney's cut-paper pools leaving the viewer wet. Paper-wet. From *Absalom and Achitophel* (is Diane Wakoski our Dryden?) through *The Dunciad,* you could say that the confessional poets are self-satirists but that now the English Georgic, that C.S. Lewis calls the Treatise Poem (Ashbery's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* our best modern example) through the verse epistle and poem nearly talking to a social awareness that includes the awareness of poems, wins the day. The audience of verse is no longer readers but verse itself imagined, by way of a body, as auditors. Perhaps it's an odd consequence of Eliot's mythic description of old verse shouldered aside by new, or trembling at the impact, like the commotion in Purgatory when Statius goes up. I don't think this is bad or wrong, and in disenfranchised times it's like religion now talking to itself, confessing to its own witness, ventriloquist's dummy without the operator. What is it that Butterick has died, an event like a book coming out? Is any shift in our milieu now like publication? In a subtle way the old feelings don't apply.

—GERALD BURNS

GIL EVANS

Just when many jazz fans had come around to thinking that Gil Evans might just go on to live and work until age 100 or so, that great arranger died last year at age 76 in Cuernavaca, Mexico from peronitis. Although 76 years is just slightly past normal life expectancy on insurance actuary tables, it's Methuselah-like in the American jazz community—where many musicians don't live long enough to collect Social Security.

Gil Evans never gradually aged before his public as did Duke Ellington, whose late face could match the elder W.H. Auden wrinkle for wrinkle. He was always the "old man" in most of the musical endeavors he participated in—his early days in the bands of Skinnay Ennis and Bob Crosby only the early forgotten inches of biographical entry. Amazingly, he never had formal musical training, either as an arranger, composer or pianist. He was, however, blessed with an acute sense of the structure of

sound. "When I was a kid I could tell what kind of a car was coming with my back turned," Evans once told an interviewer in regard to his auditory skills. It was while growing up in Stockton, California that he first began listening to the jazz being broadcast on the radio. Shortly thereafter, he could identify the sound of the various bands of the early thirties before the announcer's identification.

This fascination for *sound*-in-itself became the cornerstone for all phases of Evans' career as an arranger. On the historic *Birth of The Cool* sessions, Chummy MacGregor's syrupy standard *Moondreams* is transformed into a blank canvas for Evans' arranging skills. Evans reduces the tempo to a near dirge (unusual for the late '40s), and creates a thick blend of the six horns used on the date. With no solos and only brief sections where one of the horns moves out of the ensemble to lead, *Moondreams* is at once a tour-de-force for the arranger Evans and a hint of the move that jazz would take in the march away from the 32 bar popular song which formed the basis of the form's improvisational matrix.

Evans' maturity and genuine color-blindness in matters of race made him a combined father-figure and musical elder among the musicians who worked along the 52nd Street jazz row. His apartment, a one-room basement flat on West 55th Street, became a combination crash pad and club house for the musicians who Evans befriended. "I left the door open and people came in and out all the time for the next couple of years," said Evans. Composer-arranger George Russell remembered the room as a sort of haven and refuge for musicians: "A very big bed took up a lot of the place; there was one big lamp, and a cat named Becky. . . .Inside, it was always very dark. The feeling of the room was timelessness."

The sense of timelessness that Russell saw in that apartment was a reflection of the man who paid the rent on it. His collaborations with Miles Davis, upon which Evans' reputation and acclaim mostly rest, resist categorization and the stain of the era it was recorded in. His arrangement of *Round Midnight* (Evans' credit not acknowledged in print until 1973) takes Thelonius Monk's oft-covered 1939 composition and creates a three-sectioned tone poem that becomes, in some ways, as much of the measure against which further interpretations are weighed as is any of the composer's many performances of the composition. Little can be added to the general praise and acclaim for the Davis/Evans ensemble projects—*Miles Ahead, Sketches of Spain* and *Porgy and Bess*—than what has already been said, though I will recommend the new digital version of *Miles Ahead* which has finally made the album available in *true* stereo and features alternate takes of certain tracks. These albums went far in legitimizing jazz for consumption in a white, upper middle class audience as Evans' complex ensemble arrangements removed the music from the spontaneity of the nightclub which the form is associated with. In

particular, *Sketches of Spain* (always slightly embarrassing to the hard-core jazz fan) was, for years, the supreme jazz album-for-the-non-jazz fan as well as a precursor to the less challenging music associated with the ECM and Windham Hill labels.

It must be pointed out, however, that Evans' role in these collaborations were primarily in fleshing out Davis' conceptions. Although much of his taste and stance is present in these recordings, they are, in the end, Miles Davis dates. In later years, Evans complained that he only received about five hundred dollars per each of these best-selling albums, the standard fee for arrangements. From his interviews and public statements one gets the sense of a man thoroughly in love with music but woefully short on any business acumen that would have allowed him to take control of his career. He recorded three brilliant albums for two small jazz labels in and about the time of his association with Davis—*Big Stuff* for Prestige and *New Bottle, Old Wine* and *Great Jazz Standards* for Pacific Jazz—but none of these efforts brought him remuneration in either monetary gain or attention for his particular vision of music. The two Pacific Jazz albums (available on compact disc) are demonstrative of Evans' deeply personal relation with the jazz tradition, as his arrangements and tune choices seem love letters to the wide community of players and diggers. Evans selected tunes that were rendered "mouldy fig" during the bop/dixieland wars of the early fifties *(King Porter Stomp, Davenport Blues, Struttin' With Some Barbecue)* and lovingly restores them to the classics they are regarded as now, which his incisive and witty arrangements that preference harmonic investigations over the stream of chords typifying post-bop procedure. Outside of these albums and the Davis arrangements, Evans' career during the fifties is rather shadowy. He made his money doing the odd arrangement for singers such as Johnny Mathis, Al Martino and Pearl Bailey and scoring television sound tracks. Perhaps, in an era dominated by the jazz combo and unable to financially sustain more than a handful of big jazz bands, no one ever figured how to best utilize his talents—including Evans.

The Impulse album *Out of The Cool,* recorded in 1960, is Evans' greatest single musical statement and one of the great records from the period. That title seems to reflect the music within, as it is unlike the lush orchestrations that made him famous. The album documents Evans' first working band, a group that had just finished playing a long engagement at Manhattan's Jazz Gallery. The music is dark and stripped down to the essentials. *La Nevada,* a four bar Evans composition, is built around the guitar of Ray Crawford (in his only significant musical performance) and the turbulent drumming of Elvin Jones. The theme is restated in fragments by various sections of the ensemble. No one performance so ably demonstrates a rather neglected aspect of Evans' skills as a group

leader—his ability to generate remarkable solos by musicians rarely regarded as improvisers of the first water, in this instance: Johnny Coles, Bud Johnson and Tony Studd. On the composition *Where Flamingoes Fly,* Evans creates an imaginative vehicle for trombonist Jimmy Knepper for solo of great emotion and compression. Evans' arrangement of an obscure Kurt Weill tune, *Bilbao,* will later become the model for Miles Davis' ground breaking composition *Bitches Brew.* Although the album's impact was somewhat obscured in the furor over the then-emerging "Free Jazz" school of the period, *Out of The Cool's* influence could be heard years later in such unlikely places as the rock bands Jefferson Airplane and Blood Sweat & Tears and the protean fusion group The Mahavishnu Orchestra.

Evans spent the sixties mostly out of the jazz scene. "For me, it was a question of a total life, a whole life, which has priority over any one of the things you do in the course of living," said Evans in regard to his withdrawal. The recent release of the complete 1964 *Individualism of Gil Evans* sessions (Verve 833 804-2, CD only) gives a fuller picture of Evans in this period. Included are three tunes from *Time of The Barracudas,* an unproduced Broadway play for which Davis and Evans wrote the score, his best-known composition *Las Vegas Tango* and another brilliant scoring of a Kurt Weill tune, *The Barbara Song.* The highlight of the album, however, is the unedited 14 minute version of Willie Dixon's *Spoonful,* the truncated version appearing on an obscure and poorly programmed album of Evans archival music. In a prelude to his later involvement with rock music, Evans creates a hypnotic version of this blues standard by building his arrangement around the riff that The Cream would make popular in the late sixties.

The last portion of Evans' life and musical career are both the best documented and least understood, especially by his older fans. For those raised on his classic Miles Davis collaborations, his rock-oriented 1971 Ampex date (his first rock-oriented) or 1972's excellent *Svengali* session (Atlantic) must have surely been another sign that the gods were indeed only mortal or, at the very least, only in it for the money. But for those somewhat less partisan to his early accomplishments, the move towards rock rhythms was less a break with Evans' past than a continuum with a musical vision that seemed intent on getting distance from the lush and "cool" orchestrations that his reputation was built upon. Any notion of "sell-out" is ludicrous in light of the fact that many of the late albums consisted of live recordings that Evans paid for himself and then sold to a record company. Ironically, the fact that Evans continued on with his exploration in electronics and rock rhythms during the rediscovery of acoustic jazz by young jazz musicians made him seem a bit retro in his outlook.

His near-involvement with Jimi Hendrix (Hendrix having died the day before a scheduled rehearsal) garnered him a degree of attention in the rock world, though his album of the late guitarist's compositions is the weakest effort in his long career (due, somewhat, to the fact that he only arranged two tunes). The recent re-release of the follow-up date *There Comes A Time* (RCA Bluebird 5783-2-RB, CD only) is revelation to both fans and detractors of his late music. What was a weak and unpublicized 1975 release has, through deletion, addition and restoration, become the major statement of that period. The masterwork is a twenty minute version of Bobby Troup's *Meaning of the Blues* (six minutes on the original release). Drawing upon a palette of instruments ranging from koto to synthesizer, Evans quite simply summarizes his career in a sweep of styles and emotions.

Evans managed to maintain a steady cast of repertory players in his last decades, which saw him performing at a steady Monday night gig at Sweet Basil in the West Village. Musicians such as Hiram Bullock, Arthur Blythe, Bob Stewart, George Lewis and Marvin Peterson gained attention playing in his big band; studio pros such as David Sanborn, Tom Malone and Howard Johnson got a chance to show off their jazz chops. Having seen the band play three times, I must admit that none of the numerous live albums that appeared in recent years came close to capturing the band at its full powers. Recommended, however, are the Public Theater recordings on Blackhawk and the Sweet Basil club recordings on Gramavision. It is also worth renting the VCR version of Julien Temple's *Absolute Beginners* for the Evans soundtrack, as the domestic version of the soundtrack album includes none of the instrumental pieces. Evans' robust arrangements of Charlie Mingus' *Better Get In Your Soul* and *Boogie Stop Shuffle* are typical of the homages that Evans paid in his music to the contemporaries who mattered to him most.

It seemed quite appropriate that the last album Evans approved for release was a series of duets with old friend Steve Lacy *(Paris Blues,* Owl 049). Though he only infrequently put on display his skills at piano, he was far from the inspired amateur he saw himself as. Though not to be confused with Bud Powell, he brought to the instrument the same degree of intelligence that molded his orchestrations. Though this album was referred to in the liner by Steve Lacy as a "work-in-progress" towards a larger project, it certainly evokes in the listener the numerous "sketching" sessions that Evans must have participated in towards the creation of his larger canvases.

Gil Evans insinuated himself into our musical consciousness without trying very hard, seemingly only interested in making music for his own pleasure. His "sound" has entered popular music, the once radical voicings and odd instrumentation becoming a working vocabulary even for

the mildest musical arrangers working away from the jazz idiom. His legacy seems the oddest in jazz—it is quite simply "his sound." He did not tour regularly with his own band until his late fifties and he did not feature his piano playing until a few months before his death (a solo recital from the mid-'70s remains unreleased). He wrote few tunes, and the ones he did write, like *La Nevada,* are essentially riffs. He continually downplayed his role in the history of jazz, almost to the point, sometimes, of making himself appear to be more of a hanger-on than one of the most brilliant musical minds of his generation. There is a ghost band now, led by his son Miles and maintaining the book and band roster that played in his last years. But, like all ghost bands, it exists both as a tribute to its deceased leader and a study in the futility of such an endeavor. I'd prefer to remember Evans through the records that documented his career and from the only time I met him—at a screening of John Sayles' *Brother from Another Planet,* in a theater on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. When the movie ended, I approached him and, in my best idiot-fan manner, told him how important his music was in my life. Surprised by being recognized and simultaneously embarrassed, he shook my hand, mumbled "thanks, man!" and walked up the theatre aisle, melding into the crowd heading for the exit to the snow-dusted streets of Broadway.

—JOEL LEWIS / 12.5.88

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

THORPE FEIDT lives in Ipswich, Massachusetts, where he is continuing his series of paintings, *The Ambiguities,* and writing a novel. JACKSON MAC LOW'S most recent book is *Representative Works: 1938–1985* (New York: Roof Books, 1986). In 1989, *Pieces o' Six: 33 poems in prose* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon) will appear. GARY SNYDER'S most recent book is *Left Out In The Rain: New Poems 1947–1985* (San Francisco: North Point, 1986). In a recent issue of *The Nation,* Stuart Klawans likened the experience of RON SILLIMAN'S poetry to "dragging your naked body through a bed of hot coals and broken glass." CLARK COOLIDGE'S most recent book is *At Egypt* (The Figures, 1988). DOMINICK DI MEO has been at work on a continuous series of sculptures and drawings, "Studies for Monuments," since 1979. He lives in New York City. C.D. WRIGHT'S most recent collection is *Further Adventures With You* (1986, Carnegie-Mellon). She teaches at Brown in Providence. CID CORMAN'S most recent collections include *And The Word* (Coffeehouse Press, 1987) and *Born Of A Dream* (Gnomon Press, 1988). L.S. ASEKOFF has completed a first volume of poems, "Dreams Of A Work." He lives in New York City. VIRGINIA HOOPER is an M.F.A. candidate at Columbia University with forthcoming work in *Southwest Review* and *American Letters And Commentary.* GERDA MEYER BERNSTEIN has appeared in many international exhibits, most recently in Germany at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Museum Bochum, and Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe. She will have a show at the Chicago Cultural Center this fall. Forthcoming publications by CHARLES BERNSTEIN include *Rough Trades* (Sun & Moon) and *The Politics Of Poetic Form: Poetry And Public Policy* [editor] (Roof). RON PADGETT is currently working on a translation of the complete poems of Blaise Cendrars and a book about creative writing. Avenue B recently brought out his *Among The Blacks.* MEI-MEI BERSENBRUGGE'S latest book is *Empathy* (Station Hill); she is teaching in Vienna this spring. DAVID BROMIGE'S selected poems, *Desire* (Black Sparrow Press), received the Western States' Poetry Award for 1988. Later this year, Sun & Moon will publish his *An American Testament.* TED JENNER (born 1946, Dunedin, New Zealand) has published a volume of

poetry, *A Memorial Brass*. He has recently returned to New Zealand after an extended period of travel and study (in the field of Greek lyric poetry) in Europe. HAYDEN CARRUTH teaches in the graduate creative writing program at Syracuse University. His Selected Poetry was published in 1986. DOREN ROBBINS' most recent book is *Sympathetic Manifesto* (Perivale Press, 1987). He lives in Oregon. SEAN KILLIAN, whose work appeared in *Sulfur* #18, is now at work on a book-length manuscript and a one-act drama entitled "Planets In Love." THAD ZIOLKOWSKI is a graduate student in English Literature at Yale University. BARBARA JORDAN has had poems recently in *Ironwood* and *Anima*. She received a finalist award from the Massachusetts Artists Foundation this year. ANNA BIALOBRODA, who lives in New York City, will have one-person shows at The Queens Museum in New York, and at the Saxon-Lee Gallery in Los Angeles this year. JAMES IRBY, a Professor of Latin American Literature at Princeton, co-edited and co-translated Luis Borges' *Labyrinths* (New Directions and Modern Library). He is currently working on the poetry and poetics of José Lezama Lima. TYRUS MILLER, who lives in Palo Alto, California, is working on a poetic sequence entitled "Earthworks." DAVID KADLEC is working on an M.A. in English at the University of Chicago; his article on Paul Metcalf's *Apalache* appeared recently in *Sagetrieb*. KENT JOHNSON is the translator of *A Nation of Poets: Writings from the Poetry Workshops of Nicaragua* (West End). DAVID C.D. GANSZ is the author of *Animadversions* (Logres, 1986) and *Sin Tactics* (Woodbine Press, 1988). NATHANIEL TARN has just returned from a residency at the Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio, Italy. A new book, *Seeing America First*, is due from Coffeehouse Press this spring. NATHANIEL MACKEY is the author of *Eroding Witness* (University of Illinois Press, 1985) and *Bedouin Hornbook* (Callaloo Fiction Series, 1986). GERALD BURNS'S latest book, *A Thing About Language*, is out soon from Southern Illinois University Press. His long poem, "The Passions of Being," is in *Temblor* #9. JOEL LEWIS is the editor of "Bluestones & Salt Hay," an anthology of contemporary New Jersey poetry, forthcoming from Rutgers University Press. He lives in Hoboken.

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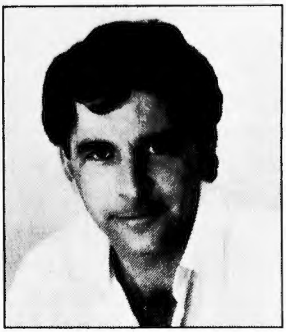

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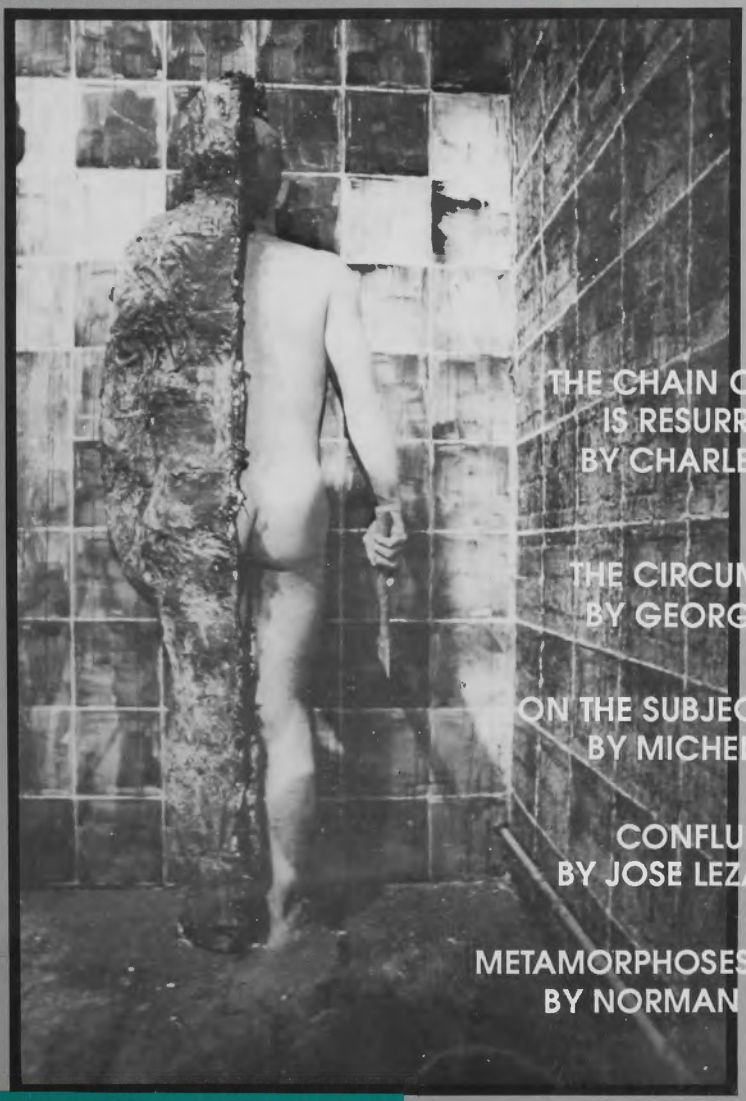

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BY CHARLES OLSON

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BY GEORGE OPPEN

ON THE SUBJECT OF SHOAH
BY MICHEL DEGUY

CONFLUENCES
BY JOSE LEZAMA LIMA

METAMORPHOSES III: NARCISSUS
BY NORMAN O. BROWN

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Cusi Masuda, at 75 Hudson Street, photographed by Mieko Claig.

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CHARLES OLSON

The chain of memory is resurrection I am a vain man
I am interested in the size of the brain-case
of CroMagnon man and that his descendants are Guanches
right now in the Canary Islands, and that my father & mother
lie buried beside each other in the Swedish cemetery
in Worcester, Massachusetts. And my grandmother too.
Even if the Hineses are in St John's cemetery. Those stones
speak to me, my ear is their sea-shell as in Marin County
the big trees as well as the eucalyptus hold sounds
of Asia and Indians the myrtle, comes from Australia

The vector of space is resurrection. We walk on the earth
under which they lie who also matter to us, as well as those
who are distant, from whom we have got separated (as we are
separated from those we have not yet known: the loveliness
of man, that he shoots up men suddenly on the horizon
there is a new person who speaks as Ed Marshall does

and all the back country, the roads I have ridden
without headlights the moon was so bright on the houses
and I was coming from a love in Lawrence, and Georgetown
Rowley Ipswich lay out in the night, not blank at all as
now that Marshall has spoken, all the faces
and the stones
and Concord Avenue
rise into being: the onslaught,
he calls it,
resurrection

The being of man is resurrection, the genetic flow
of each life which has given life, the tenderness
none of us
is without. Let it come back. Let it be
where it is:
"My soul is Chichester and my origin
is a womb whether one likes it or not."

My ugliness,
said Juan Belmonte—to every Spaniard
I was part of himself:

the bull (or whether he's a lion
or a horse or the great snake)
hammers us, mine beat me against
the brick wall until I thought
this is it, and it was only a redheaded boy
diverted him

Direction—a directed magnitude—is
resurrection
All that has been
suddenly is: time
is the face
of recognition, Rhoda Straw; or my son
is a Magyar. The luminousness
of my daughter
to her mother
by a stream:
apocatastasis

how it occurs, that in this instant I seek to speak
as though the species were a weed-seed a grass a barley corn
in the cup of my palm. And I was trying
to hear what it said, I was putting my heart down
to catch the pain

Resurrection
is. It is the avowal. It is the admission. The renewal

is the restoration: the man in the dark with the animal
fat lamp
is my father. Or my grandfather. And the fat lady
who was weak from a heart attack and her granddaughter
I used to see courtin the boy on the motorcycle,
is my mother. Or my grandmother. The Venus
of Willendorf. We move
between two horns, the gate
of horn. And the animal or snake who warns us
propels: we must woo the thing
to get its feet together so that its shoulder blades
are open, so that the aorta

One of the horns
is resurrection, the other horn
is any one of us: a river
is my sword, the Annisquam is my metal
you will have yours (a meadow his was, gone,
boy, in the dance and another
had a tree or there was a third
had a bicycle seat, and the face of all women,
he said,
they sat on. Bless the powers
that be
This is a poem of celebration of the powers that be.
The large theme
is the smallest (the thumbtack
in the way of the inkbottle, the incident
which does not change the course even if the surface
of the day is changed because a hand followed a diaper
into the wringer up to the elbow, the smallest content
is a grit of occasion, the irrelevant
is only known
like the shape of the soul
to the person involved, the absolutes
sit in the palm of the hand which can't close
from the pain. I do not know
what you know at the same time that I do. My vanity
is only the exercise

of my privilege as yours, conceivably,
might be as hers, the peahen, is
also brilliant when she takes it up: Willendorf,
the stone, breathes back
into life. The resurrection
at the farthest point, and

out of the green poison
now the death of spring the jungle
is in the gulley the growth
has gone to the tropics small spring
is over

small spring
  while where my river flows
spring is long. Here where the ice
and the jungle once were identical
spring is small

The blossoms
are already gone green green
the worst green
like paint floods
the sky
is like a bedroom wall
in a motel

The horrors
of season too fast.
Without resurrection
all is too fast. The trees
crawl over everything like facts
like the fascination of irrelevant
events: to hew

o the dirty summer too early
for a man to catch up with

spring is dead! spring the horn
is dead. I Adonis

Lift me, life of being

I lift
the shape of my soul. In the face of spring
gone
into the growth
as the body was burned
on the sticks and went up
as smoke into the pale sky
o father

o mother
put into the ground

(o the beloved ones

they must dance

the thick green
which covers us, the appetite of nature
we stand off, the loss
of loss

In the chain of being
we arise, we make sparse
the virid covering, we lay bare
the dead, the winter ground, the snow
which makes the forsythia first
the first blossom

and in the two weeks of spring:
damn the green growth gone
to green bloom, the resurrection
is sparse Desire
is sparse The confusion

of physical enjoyment
and desire Desire

is resurrection

The soul
is an onslaught

[Spring, 1956]

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GEORGE OPPEN

THE CIRCUMSTANCES
A Selection From George Oppen's Uncollected Writing

Edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis

The Archive for New Poetry of The University of California at San Diego is a very rich and fascinating collection of papers of a number of significant contemporary figures—David Ignatow, Jerome Rothenberg, Clayton Eshleman, John Taggart, Ron Silliman, Paul Blackburn, among others. The Mandeville Department of Special Collections (in which the Archive of New Poetry is housed) owns the papers of two "Objectivist" writers—Charles Reznikoff and George Oppen. The Oppen collection occurs in three separate series: the literary papers of June Oppen Degnan who was an editor of *The San Francisco Review* and a co-publisher with James Laughlin of several volumes; in her collection are numerous letters from George Oppen some including poems. There are the family papers of Linda Oppen Mourelatos—mainly letters, including those from her father and mother, George and Mary Oppen. Oppen sent poems in draft to his daughter. And finally The George Oppen Archive, comprising letters to and carbons of letters from Oppen, drafts of poems and some unpublished poetry, and a major collection of working papers, some bound into "daybooks" and some loose sheets now assembled in folders by the cataloguers. The great bulk of this material is undated. It has been catalogued by David McMillan and Bradley Westbrook.

Oppen worked closely with Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and had bonds to Pound and Williams in the late 1920s to mid-1930s (1928–1934/5). He then stopped writing for 25 years for a variety of overlapping reasons: membership in the Communist Party (and unwillingness to write agitprop); service in World War II (in which he suffered serious injuries): life in political exile in Mexico. When his literary career began again, dramatically, in 1958, and for twenty years thereafter, Oppen remained chary to the point of abstemiousness with any kind of public critical comment, prose analyses, justificatory remarks, essays in poetics and other commentary that generally functions to guide or encourage critical reception of a poet's work. The only exception to his disinterest in public pronouncement are one essay, one book review, a scant handful of

working notes or letters to a few journals. He and Mary Oppen did, however, give several important interviews.

This self-chosen situation makes all the more exciting the realization of the past years, since the availability of the Oppen papers at UCSD, that Oppen's writing career did in fact include a large quantity of meditative prose in various genres, ranging from aphorisms, and statements to himself which might be called working papers, to writing modulating into drafts of poems, and letters to others. Much of this writing is of a high quality—provocative, elegant, tough-minded, witty—and much sheds a good deal of light on his poems, his poetic practices, and the intersection of political thinking and poetic production. One of the reasons I chose to edit *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* (Duke University Press, 1990) was to propose the importance of meditation, and essays-in-dialogue to Oppen's poetry and to his literary career.

In this and the next issue of *Sulfur,* I will be presenting unpublished materials from the complete 25-year range of Oppen's written work. I am doing so by the generosity of Linda Oppen Mourelatos, executor of the George Oppen Estate. This set of works, prepared for *Sulfur,* should not be regarded as constituting a definitive selection of the available materials (an image that did, however, control and assist my editing of the letters). Instead, this is an anthology of writing chosen for its intrinsic literary and cultural interest. I am dividing this presentation into several categories. In this issue, there will be uncollected poems. In addition, there are some uncompromising remarks in his working papers—first, those addressed "to young poets" (themselves a genre) about the writing of poetry, and second, on fellow poets. The people on whom he commented most are Pound, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and Duncan. He also remarked often on Ginsberg, Rakosi, Williams, and Eliot. For this anthology of unpublished poetry and comments by Oppen, I have claimed a discarded Oppen title—*The Circumstances*—which, at one point, he was apparently considering for the collection *Primitive.* My reference texts are, of course, *The Collected Poems of George Oppen* (New Directions, 1975), abbreviated CP, and *Primitive* (Black Sparrow, 1978).

The Circumstances

The poems I have selected were 1) those excluded for one reason or another from final manuscripts, or 2) significant variations on or intersections with published poems. About the first category there is not too much to say; a person attentive to the Archive will find more of these works (not all of them filed with the poems—some are in letters), but in general there is not a bulk of unpublished but finished poems. There are

some ironic or observant epigrammatic poems, situational and contextual. Of these, I have selected one about Williams and the one called "Memorial." The second category is, to my mind, quite interesting, raising, as it does, questions of what constitutes the "finished." For there are, especially (but not exclusively) in the period of "Some San Francisco Poems" (c. 1969 for concentration on this writing) to the end of his poem-writing career (essentially 1978), a number of fluid uses of lines and of materials in drafts that have a highly convincing quality as—if not "final," then still distinctive provisional works. A least part of Oppen's practice seems to have involved the creation and then migration of lines or poem units (stanzas) from possible resting place to possible resting place, before they settled into or were closed in a poem. Some of the provisional resting places or combinations which Oppen developed seem highly plausible to an Oppen reader, despite finally being deemed, by the author, not yet finished.

I never could answer a difficult question adequately at a dinner party. Still, I do want to answer. I'll try, in the comparative peace of my electric typewriter:

If a man—or a woman, of course; you'll forgive the generic 'man'—goes rowing in the park, tho he may row as well as anyone who ever lived, tho he may row so well that he seems to be ice-skating, waltzing round and round the lake to the strains of the Blue Danube—still, he cannot row around and around that lake forever. But suppose he sets sail across a sea which, so far as he knows, has never been crossed—I am thinking of Columbus, of course, but of a columbus alone in a small boat. He too may turn back after a while, but if he does it can be only a failure of nerve. He will be tempted to turn back, but he will also be tempted not to. And he will not be tempted to continue only by the hope of approval. He will *want* to keep going, if only his nerve does not fail, even tho he has only his bare and anxious self in the boat.

Like the poet, if he becomes distracted by the desire to display his virtue, his grace, his anything at all—he will not get there. Because what he has to do is slug it out. A voyage in the open sea—unlike a row in the park—is no joke. It is also not vir-

tuous. Nor can he recommend it to the world at large. If he makes the trip, that's his own affair, and in his heart he knows it.

That Which Was—I thought—to be Demonstarted.
If only by metaphor.

(this to the woman who asked whether it is possible to continue writing poetry if no one reads it—i.e., no one prints it. And I will not send it because it doesn't really answer her question. She means: terrible things have happened to her, terrible things have been done, she is unhappy. She wants to tell someone and no one will listen unless somehow—it seems—she learns to write 'good' poetry—all sorts of tricks and styles and techniques—or no one will listen. So she has gone desperately to Creative writing classes. . .

Lorine Niedecker—being printed—wrote: It took a long/ time/ to weep/ a deep/ trickle

[1964–66] UCSD 16, 15, 1. This clearly began as a letter, but was not sent

I am afraid to tell anyone how little whole warehouses full of contemporary poetry actually matters to me At all!—even poetry which someone sends me, and which I can easily praise—and do—

someone drives a nail. I look at it consciously: ["]Yes, I say, there it is, in the wood. Hasn't bent at all, there are no hammer marks left on the wood itself" Perfect—I would say, Perfect. Congratulations—

I might perhaps add—tentatively—:perhaps, now, or have you thought of putting one piece of wood under another, so that the nail might go thru BOTH pieces of wood, and in that way it would, one might say, hold them together—?

"your eloquent and stimulating letter," they say.

The overblown language of childish
day-dreaming

(or of the 'teacher' : who [poses?] for a portrait of the children's day-dreams of themselves)

overblown language (overblown in any way) (and no matter how tastefully)) or 'freshly' even seems to me always a childish day-dream

UCSD 16, 18, 4 some autograph, section boxed

The answer to the question "how can I know if my poem is good or not" is Your poem is bad. How can it not be? He had to decide on each syllable and each letter without knowing what was good and what was bad.

Hopeless. What are the possible combinations of the letters of the alphabet?

One revises a line, one alters a word, then one revises the punctuation, and then alters the line division—after altering the line, one restores the original punctuation. . .In all that, who tells you what is right? Who is there?? Who taught Reznikoff, or Bronk, or Naomi [Replansky]?? who was there??

And, if you have not yet brought to perfection what you want to do—It can only seem misguided. The story of Pound as a young man showing a poem in quantitative verse to Marsh. Marsh handed it back saying: it doesn't scan in iambics. The criticism was perfectly correct. Do you want such services from someone?

Of all arts, poetry has the simplest technical means—a pencil. One needs no technique at all except to know what word, what punctuation mark what white space must come next. That's absolutely all, and who can tell you?

that is to say: go home

I speak symbolically. Which means not quite, but almost, literally

UCSD 16, 15, 3

you read like a child as if you didn't want to be among these poets— but to look up to them

one who thinks he is not a poet tries to write 'like poets' One who thinks he *is* a poet tries not to

to come down is the way in Parse the word, drive the word into its elements. We feel we can make a book out of what we know We cannot If we stick to the thing, keep our mind and our emotion on the thing and not the word, we—and the reader—learn a great deal as we write. No one knows enough to write a book before he writes a book

Each word must have some reason for existing in *itself* Something like the 'image'—the moment when you thought these things, knew these things, that moment in its actualness

otherwise, you see: dreariness

Shaped, shaped, the poem must be shaped, yes, even its form on the paper, for this vividness, this actualness which is the contrary of dreariness

the quality of life

objectivism: it means to experience the shape of the poem

yes, I would suppose so Mary can love men very much
and very sweetly.
Mary can love men because of what she said: 'remember,
we both love ourselves *most*

a poem is a machine made of words to carry the poet to
where he is going

UCSD 16, 16, 7, some autograph, sections boxed

What I know and really all I know Is that you're on your own
You must begin, word by word, from scratch

One gets down a line the image The image is not a decoration

The image is what one believes to be true if one believes
anything to be true—

One get down a line

One wants the words to lie on bedrock

Having a line a place to stand it is possible to take another
step—

a method of thought: a proof of con-
viction, at least, if not truth.

to find one's question —*the question*
But one needs also a great deal of
Stubborness

[((in mind, the greatest enemy is one's own generation. Tho one must begin there]

UCSD 16, 15, 3. Mix of autograph and typing. Sections boxed. Some relation to his essay "The Mind's Own Place."

Miracle on the small page—and fear Tall buildings, hills, stars, universes, distances, ALL OF IT INCREDIBLE and all of us alone.

None of us alone I say to myself 'Cities full of people, and I am afraid Words frighten me, and forgetting, and remembering It is necessary to be afraid of the poem, and of words, each word It is necessary to be afraid and not to be afraid, and to not be afraid of small things

(letter to Alex Lattimore:

happy to find myself of use to you—out there where you are

tall buildings, hills, stars, universes, distances, all of it incredible and neither of us alone. I mean to say, thank you for your letter

(beyond the 'literary['])—to things To people, and ourselves

---

the inlet, the long body of water a tongue stretching landward in the windless morning, the sun rising in the entrance, and the miniature houses along the shores

it is necessary to be afraid of words, it is necessary to be afraid of each word, every word

miracle on the small page

the essential clarity—is the poem

UCSD 16, 15, 8, some autograph, sections boxed.

[On Charles Reznikoff]

It cannot be said that Rezi was as "important" as Williams, Pound, Eliot, because actually he was not important in the development of modern poetry. Simply almost none of the poets had read him. He could have been of great importance, it is even true that it would have been a very good thing if he had played an important role: he would have presented at least an alternative to the influence of Williams, the aridities derived from Eliot— We might have avoided a great many difficulties; Williams' model has rather made fakery easy, Pound and the obfuscations of Ezra Pound invite even easier imitation, and tho Auden and the Eliot school are perhaps not altogether easy to imitate, it is at least true that the manner apparently can be acquired with a certain amount of education even by those who possess no poetic intuition at all.

—but it is probably that nothing of importance in Rezi can be imitated. And it is likely that which explains the neglect of his work[.]

[1961–63], UCSD 16, 19, 1

Rezi's death : the end of an era for me. I don't think there will be such a poetry again. I think the image will never again carry such pure meaning.

UCSD 16, 16, 7.
Reznikoff died January 1976.

[On Carl Rakosi]

Rakosi like the resident of an igloo creating his own Northern Lights

UCSD 16, 18, 1

[On Louis Zukofsky]

Zuk's A/ the motor is running in neutral

UCSD 16, 18, 1

Louis Z and the CP 'They wanted me to distribute Leaflets!'

Simply, he was never willing to do anything for anyone. He was quite willing that the communists should regard him as a great poet. He offered. That was the extent of his willingness

UCSD 16, 18, 2

Louis' Catullus

if we had as little knowledge of French, we might 'translate' *Où sont les neiges d'antan* as who sent less eggs, Anton?

An obscure style can save the writer a great deal of time, and make him almost invulnerable to attack. excellent tactic! it permits him, moreover, to include learned references to matters which are no part of his life [in the obscurity the distinction between what he has experienced and what he has not become invisible]

[bracketed statement is crossed out in text]

and yet and yet when Louis writes of what he has known in his life, it is poetry, and poetry of very great beauty—astonishing beauty—and when he does not, it does not,

UCSD 16, 18, 3

It is difficult for me to write of Zukofsky for he stopped speaking to me or corresponding with me many years ago, and if I speak of him now I must either record this fact (which becomes mere gossip) or claim an intimacy that I have not had for many years.

UCSD 16, 14, 12; dated June 1978

the the and an a are equal (is Louis saying this?)
the part is equal to the whole
        the meaning of a place is the meaning of all places

UCSD 16, 16, 6

Louis, who has 'done away with epistemology,' He did so not [autograph in Xerox unreadable; GO crossed off the phrase "explained as"] 'If you want to say yes, say yes If you want to say no, say no'

But there seems to be some epistemology in the word yes and the word no Perhaps one had better say, 'If you want to say ouch, say ouch' The remark *can* be free of epistemology

---

The words *yes* and *no* are not free of epistemology. The word *ouch* is.

UCSD 16, 18, 2. Allusions to Zukofsky's interview with Dembo, in *Contemporary Literature,* and the Oppen poem "The Lighthouses," CP 250–51.

[On Marianne Moore]

Marianne Moore — Probably the simplest woman, certainly the primmest—who ever produced poetry. I can't take it seriously as an ethic, which is what she is concerned with

She sees, in many places, very detailed, neat work. And approves.

UCSD 16, 16, 2

[On Lorine Niedecker]

O June, O June, O sometimes imperceptive June——

Fear, fear, fear! So that you may accept 'But I have seen a peacock' because its braggadocio seems 'courageous,' but are afraid to hear Lorine.

Dispensing with the remote and stately language of 'Mute inglorious Miltons,' she says that as she approaches old age, her very small book is published and is read. In her rundown farm house, in its scraggly yard, it took a lifetime to weep—a visible trickle.

How much is done with the one word: trickle. It gives the farm yard, it gives the tiny life and the tiny person — in one word. An ordinary word, a folk-word.

It cannot be said more vividly, nor more briefly, with less working-up of oneself, which is onanism. The voice of a man or a woman who perhaps never masturbates, who has not learned to — frightens people.

But it is poetry. Nothing else is.

UCSD 16, 15, 3. Addressed to
June Oppen Degnan, possibly 1962–63.

[On Ezra Pound]

The Cantos: no need — say I am aware of the beauties of the poem

But as a philosophical poem, as a poetry of statement it is a failure: it does not at any time reach ground from which it could achieve anything but failure

UCSD 16, 16, 6

Pound, the encyclopedic, didn't speak of the gas chambers. Why not? Possible to imagine that he approved them. But why did he not speak of them??

Suppose he HAD put them in the poems — described them, imagined them — here would be the uses of poetry as a means of thought — He would have learned again to think, that is, to permit the brain, the psyche, the soul to function beyond the nonsense of Major Douglas, and the noise of Bertrans

TEST it by poetry, Ezra: write about the gas chambers, write of the children in the gas chambers

UCSD 16, 16, 10

Where were the poets? Pound! well, Pound.
But Eliot? Stevens? even Williams? and the men of my
    generation:
The academics!
That when Lidice was destroyed and Oradour,
That when the bomb fell on Hiroshima
And when the villages of Korea were burned

Wave following wave of planes dropping napalm,
Wave after wave to render retreat useless—

Few spoke at all. And those who did
Many were jailed, and more were destroyed.
All that in the calm of Truman
And ended finally in the simplicities of Eisenhower
Without apologies to the jailed, the black-listed, the exiled—

UCSD 16, 27, 79; typewriter of c. 1964–66.

The pigeons fly from the dark bough
    unleaved to the window ledge;
There is no face.

"The Pigeons," 1928–35.
UCSD 16, 28, 78. Cut from *Discrete Series*.

THE TOWN

There can be a brick in a brick wall
The eye picks

So empty on a Sunday.
The silent signs.

Quiet Sunday
On the flatof the table
The match box, there asmuch as anything.

Handling baggage in leather gloves,
A few years out of high school,
A young man furious. The new wine.

"The Town"
UCSD 16, 29, 51. Dated January 1959.
Part will re-emerge in "A Language of New York," and then in "Of Being Numerous."

MAN'S LIFE

No stranger nor a stranger's son
Old as they come, really,
No one ahead to fall from space, from light
Which is the only space or light
(Remember
"Me"?)

Sparrow on the cobbled street,
Little sparrow round and sweet,
Chaucer's bird. But we:
"Our times—our fathers' times"

or if a leaf
Sparkle in some forest—
O we love leaves, but we speak
To each other,
"Our times".

Daughter, our daughter, no child but our child.
Stone universe, but we are not.

"Man's Life"
UCSD 17, 4, 14. 1958–59.

GENERATION OF DRIVERS

America, America,
Brand new America,
Old codgers' home.

'Fix anything', a village sign.
He tells them 'Treat 'er easy now.

Needs tires—'

Past it, thru it,
Down the highways, past the trailer camps
(They see them? See the trailer camps?)
Half private down the eight lane roads,
The young
To find it—find their own.
But who the fathers? How the sons?

And who loves who?

An entity
Of two, which they love?

"Generation of Drivers"
UCSD 33, 3, 5. 1958–59.

TRUCK STOP

The diner where
Because the waitress is a woman
There is a sort of agony
In jokes that all are wry about
How much there is to give, and how
Miserable the apple pie

Brought in woman's hands and arms
Actually is.

"Truck Stop"
UCSD 33, 3, 5.

A DEBT

Ourselves we sing!
But let us write for conscience' sake and in some pride of other
men.

Not passengers, the crew.
A planet
Isn't habitable but by labor,
For we are alone and live by labor.

Freedom of the crew—define it?

Or machine shop. Noise in which one lives, sees—
For money doesn't grow on trees, nor simple brackets
Grow so easy. Shock
Of the press: one second there,
The manufactured part.

New made. To tolerance. Less perfect than the die
Which is imperfect.
Checked
By some mechanic—for who will do it? and we live by labor
Ninety-nine percent
Of sheer necessity, so little said of it.

"A Debt"
UCSD 17, 4, 14. Precedes version published
in *The San Francisco Review* I, 7 (Dec. 1960),
p. 73; both versions differ from CP 39.

THE WILSHIRE ARMS

Rectangular among the crowds, rearing
Black windows into daylight—The sound

Of a piano in the deep bulk tying
Generations to a Sunday that holds,
As the building holds, only the adamant;

Nothing that the child hopes,
Laboring a tune. As from the dark
Satir wells; 'If even in this wilderness
I am!. . .' The day

Flawless and without exterior,
Without alternative. But to the tenant
The future is all chance, all future, and the present
All inanimate, or all themselves.

"The Wilshire Arms"
UCSD 33, 3, 5. Not on findings list.

THE MEN

They seemed in love with the words
Of artisans; things end for end,
Butted to each other, dove tailed,
Bolts wrung, bolts frozen—. That world lacked
Only an exterior. But that it lacked, spinning
If it does on that fabulous axis
Beyond will and tilted to the famous summers
Of those useful men,
Those rule-of-thumb mechanics.

"The Men"
UCSD 17, 4, 14.

THE AMALGAMATED

Incredibly worn, the cafeteria of the fur workers and the garment workers. They know each other, therefore they know everything here, they have lived this life for a very long time

It is an entirely terrible life

They are tired and possessed of endless energy; one must call it courage

The hungry mosquito is courageous, you would let him eat of you if only he would stay out of your ears

Or away from your head; you would let him eat, or you come to think so

The mosquito thinks he knows how to eat

Shall you love him for that? What is it that you want of people, what is it that you want?

"The Amalgamated" [1963?]
UCSD 16, 27, 11. Version "A"—slight differences in final line with other versions.

NATION

The whole city
Blazing light at evening—

One could picture him, the workman.
But the speedway's traffic;
Curved, enameled, glassed—
Even the factory is simple
Where they build these things
But the young woman in the car ahead

Is strange as an Etruscan vase—
And middle aged.
It grows confused.
The ten ton semi
Down the edge of pavement
Seems like some intrusion.

Grows confused.
The suburbs are a simple job. Foundations dug,
They could be dug with any shovel, worn out spade;
All that is simple. There is nothing in a house
That isn't simple; water glass, the roof, a house nailed
tight
And in the window
Sun comes thru our things!

Burning
On the real horizon.
The million million windows of the city
And the grimed sills
Children, beds of the defeated,
The million weary wakings—
These people poured
Into the enormous motion
As the day breaks on suburban shore

"Nation"
UCSD 33, 3, 5. Some lines go into
"Philai Te Kou Philai," *This in Which* (1965).

MEMORY OF OARS

There are no nouns of verse, the earth itself
No longer home. A rocket into space—

And where the heart is,
Home. Water of the sea;

The leaping sea, or ground beneath the sea, beneath the
forest
Curving with the planet—Thrust
Thru the seas by the power of the oarsmen
They lowered the grapple over the bow again, shouting,
And caught a bottle out of the sea where it lapped up
and over in the bow wave
Glassy as the sea, for the message, addressed as always
To the shore or the ship, whole with the power of the
oarsmen.

"Memory of Oars"
UCSD 33, 3, 5, also 16, 28, 37.

CARPENTER'S BOAT

The old things.
The new wood as old as carpentry

In the shadow of the boat's side
The sea becomes water

Rounding the far buoy, wild
Steel rolling in the sea,
The boat moves more lightly with the wind.
I remember the thin wood, the light planks

Nothing in the air
Made of air!

Beach the boat, carpenter,
Carpenter and other things,
The sea is all outdoors.

Passed hill and farm house—home to the eye—
Or the brass plate in the apartment house lobby.

"Carpenter's Boat"
UCSD 33, 3, 5; compare the poem
of the same title in CP 110.

CULTURAL TRIUMPH

If 'Miss Moore's (birds) squeal, shuffle, lose their footing
In the tree, in the mind, in the poem' as the critic
Reproduces them, is not
Something proven?—the bird
With its hard
Claws
Clinging to the rough
Tree, the small minds
In the trees,
The mind and the poem
Proven? Or is that not

What was in question? How terrible the mind
Is, open
To the world. The single mind
Flinches, panics, would, from its distance,
Its too large body and its irremediable
Vision
Crowd itself into the bird-life, but we observe
The bird from safety,
From the common culture.

"Cultural Triumph"
UCSD 17, 4, 17. The citation on Moore
is by Hugh Kenner, in *Poetry;* Oppen noted
this information on a copy in 16, 27, 39.

BRONX ZOO

The men have worked all week. If they have talked
Of what they would like to do of a Sunday
It was not of taking children
To see the animals. They are embarrassed
And ashamed, they suspect they have fathered strangers
On the bodies of strange women. They stare into space
As if into another world
Tho they see none. This world,
This strangely abstract world
Of clothes
And cars, propriety
And impropriety will alter
Or will die.

"Bronx Zoo"
UCSD 17, 4, 17. Explicitly excluded
from *This in Which;* see letter to June
Oppen Degnan 17, 4, 17.

FLIGHT 162

Leaving from Idlewild,
Whose agents
May have warned them
Of Icarus, and feathers,
And winged horses—

Plain sons and daughters
Of plain fathers
Who have allowed the currents
Of events to form them
Sit side by side
In flight. My seat-mate
Reading the New Yorker
In mid-air as if to concentrate
Against my shoulder

The proof of their success, where others
With their wax and feathers
Failed.

"Flight 162"
UCSD 17, 4, 17. Also titled "Flight 128,"
in 16, 27, 66. Not the same as
"Flight," CP, 128.

MEMORIAL

In the Trocadero
The leaflet folded
Down the center
As they lost their lives with it

Carried in a pocket
Or under an overcoat:

Anatole Levitsky, Chargé de Musée de l'Homme
Boris Vilde
Deborah Lipshitz.

"Memorial"
UCSD 17, 4, 17. Not on findings list.

MEMORY AT 'THE MODERN'

We had seen bare land
And the people bare on it
And men camp
In the city. The lights,
Pavement, this important device
Of a race, I wrote then,
Twenty three years old,
Remains till morning. Nobody knows who died

On the roads of the time, of the fact of the roads.
I am a man of the 'Thirties

'No other taste shall change this'

"Memory at 'The Modern'"
UCSD 17, 4, 17. Published in *Elizabeth* IV
(October 1963). Explicitly excluded from
This in Which, see 17, 4, 17, letter to JOD.

Wheelers and Dealers:
The Theory of Games
The world is becoming invisible. Rainer Maria Rilke

We might have foreseen it,
The triumph of calculation;
The atom calculated
By its chances.
What can I know? What shall I do?
What may I hope?
And what are my chances?

We ought to be able to survive it.
Out of the unknown activities
Of unknown agents
Mathematical numbers emerge. The last
Invisible world
Of the buyers, the sellers, the planners—

"Wheelers and Dealers. . ."
UCSD 17, 4, 17.

Bill before his death,
Bill very old,
Still like a boy, but a boy
Whom an axe has hit

Again and again in the dark
In the last months, an arm
Stiff, a leg
Dragging, his speech
Impeded—'You cannot
Imagine,' he said
'What has
Been happening
To me—'

"Bill. . ."
UCSD 16, 27, 22. TS. with autograph
corrections; not clearly finished.
William Carlos Williams died March 4, 1963.

THE PHONEMES

The poems have too much point
As tho I need invent
The thing is in my mind always, available,
Juggler, why need I invent so much
Tho I think only of the coasts, figures of men and animals
On the silent coasts

"The Phonemes"
UCSD 16, 28, 77. Typewriter of 1964–66.

ANY WAY BUT BACK

I have a superstition of destiny. Those poets who have
lacked that superstition have died young

A superstition concerning families

Which is to say the future
Issuing from a dining room

And the old fashioned bulk
Of a family home.

Well, a madman.

Scenes
Still lucid

A child carried by the trains of nineteen-eighteen
From New York to California

Three thousand miles
Of rails

A *journey,* day's act
Redeemed 'outside all systems

Of redemption'
Its meaning formed in the veins

Of sympathy across the fields
To the gullies and the fences in the fields

And along the public aisles
In the train to the hushed doors

Of the diner
And the waiters

The men in the club car

Wild noise and grit
On the observation porch

And I did not know, when I was a child, whom to write to—
Handymen, servants, the primitive dead—

The book is my own. And, in a way, a deliberate surrender—
Those poems, the superstitious poems

To write the words down

"Any Way But Back"
UCSD 16, 27, 16. Was once, it appears,
intended for *The Collected Poems* [?], written
"deliberately but 'tentatively' to close the
new book." Impulse goes into part of
"The Book of Job. . .," cf. CP 241.

THE POWERS

I would go home o go home to the rough

stone become

the turn the cadence the verse and the music
the essential

clarity, plain glass, strangest of all places

strange as all places strange as chance

strange as luck
and its guilts strange

strange and the slang word speaks
in the whirl-winds Semite

to find a way

for myself now

old strange to happen
to a child strange

to become old the innocence

of the insulted in the challenged
blood of childhood now patriarchal

Jew most strange

to myself not Roman

nor barbarian had I foreseen
this the words

themselves
or their strangeness strange

the saving ray
of strangeness saving

ray of exile ray

of darkness ray of light

"The Powers"
UCSD 16, 24, 2. Some of this poem, under the title "To Find a Way," appeared in *Ironwood* 5 (1975). A number of late Oppen poems combine here including "The Lighthouses." Not on findings list.

ALL THIS STRANGENESS

it is a sea but is it music
binds

the spell

or thought it is a sea

no place but the place
of desire the little boat runs up

against the long flank of the wave *shadow*

brought into light a place

like all others desire
desire at the heart of the living

world the poem

spells itself out *(why then*
all this strangeness) to say

all you know all
you are all
that has happened the world's

birth stirs like a breeze
in the streets and the lights
of the fast car

overtaking us
on the highway were the lights
of other lives dazzling silver

fire in the rear-view mirror whitening

the grass if you look
deep

in the forest a girl's

poem said you may see
the poem
spells itself out

"All This Strangeness"
UCSD 16, 24, 2. With autograph note on text
by Oppen: "Not in Collected."
Not on findings list.

A DREAM OF POLITICS

in art
in art

the image

need not declare itself the work of god yet I knew I
would remember

children

running on the beach with their beating
hearts in the turn
of the seasons small

pride small

terror in the soft dusk centuries

behind these words here with the tongue and groove
wood of the back porch in the minor riot

of the grasses starlight
among us the night

becoming dawn

stitch upon stitch
sewn without thread bright

in the back yard tongueless

as the neighborhood sleeping

sisters sleeping
brothers dizzy

wordings o my elderly
siblings the children running

on the beach in the hissing
surf I don't know

don't know
what to say

"A Dream of Politics"
UCSD 16, 24, 16, Version "C". With autograph note on text by Oppen: "Write Glassgold to omit this" [Peter Glassgold of New Directions] and another autograph note "(perhaps isn't in ND ms)."

THE DREAM

I dreamed one night that I was in Northern France in one
of the red-brick industrial towns the doors
and the windows locked. I knocked on a door and entered
and I said to the family *I was here during the war, I was*
in a house near here tho I cannot find it, it is near, you
can take me there they will know me. I stood

in that room and they would not guide me. I was lost and
they could not guide me

"The Dream"
UCSD 16, 27, 55. A prose poem with
articulated line breaks; explicitly
excluded from *Primitive*.

carved
of that air once once only in the deluge

of minutes a tree

a city
a stone in the road waiting

stones eagles seagulls sliding
sideways down the wind I cannot find

a way to speak

of this the source
the image the space

of the poem our

space too great
or too small 'for we are here
and must mean it' where the world rides
the words

speak of too little
time remaining fearful

of sorrow in this once once only
among atoms, eagles, and alone

"carved / of that air. . ."
UCSD 16, 26, 16. In one of the versions of *Primitive,* this poem closed the mss. By January 1977 (16, 26, 17), the poem was cut. An alternative version of this poem appeared in *APR* 5, 5, (1976) called "Fear"; an alternative version of some of it appeared in *Grosseteste Review* 10 (1977).

H-YRDN

(i) *the letters of the lovers are entwined in a "garden"*

no me
who has no name

right itself

as in
"the omission of one letter

all things turn

to the eye of the goat
our father

And to the eye our mother

All things/ turn in the eye

as by a strange hand
"taken down

Notice then the further inversion. *Who are you/ you who have entered* /The asphalt radiant// Had been "garden" or a "desert"/ moved// Azrael contained that letter
in the rib of his mouth.

who but you)

captive by the face of the fire

ash came// *ash-sham*
a kingdom

verted in the midst

the woundedness

buoyant in (a world
the dream in Rabbah:

walls grew up like flames.

(ii) from the mouth of the servant boy

"canceled

a fabrication or fabric

(She was in love

with the mother with Thetis

Tiomat/ the coast engulfed her

or "ate its young"

Nothing (whatever was forbidden
the forbidden god

was ruin, *mafi*

dolphin or the mourning scarf she

took from the brink

(iii)

At Amra: Andromeda with spread arms

(to the east of *river*
second circle is Cygnus
(escarpment
and the Dolphin

first-known claiming heaven

"there as here" the color blasted
into Christ

*

A new voice holden

"as in the former years
the Straight road
whilst we walk: sweet spring
black iris

to drink of the river: Sihor or Sidon

*

too strong for the vessel
that *Allat* and a jealous stone/

without walls
was "outside" or in unity

of a flower we/ lap or give her

*

Polydictes: confounding the tongues

Polydectes, who 'receives many'
the outer covering of the flower

*

pearls the fortune of
the law a beacon, thinking back

is the desert
where the iris spoke

*

"here the cold is beginning

The picture was not the many receiving
pearls from the wise but bringing them.
"Sea creatures with human heads"
brought them to shore in their mouths

*

"But we all, with open face
beholding as in a glass

his "Read"/ "I cannot read."
crossing "speak" or "write" /in that place

who touched my mouth broke the band

"roses or a rose city

damascq: ash-sham
a linen hand tampered with

where one was (a skirt
traces the escarpment

from Taurus
to the Pleiades/ a hem

of possession and retrieval

below earth and below
the sea

If the river were in flames
a dove also
was a form of commerce
and a lion existed like two
cypress tress beyond which the City
lit

In walls
    (a city without border/
from the edge of that rose
    three worlds fell away

a fraction of stone
in the eye of God.

first half of the sentence is lost

Qeys / Queyes
mother or a city of the lover

Between the north and the southern Karnak

"The sea encompasses me, encompasses my Book."

of "increase" as of "deliverance"

It was their blessing that they were lost

and so retained each other:
Qeys and Lubna at the tomb

In Enoch's city / a bead game

of *memory* of Mary / of the rose.

—she conceived like a mare, by the wind—

At the opening of the Mouth// all the apertures

filled her, Mara
who remains "empty"/ Maia the midwife

bearing/ to revel and reveal.

sometimes it is named "tree" and sometimes "sun"

It was about pearls, the picture of the fish.

Arthemis/ *samakah* deep in this river

or a hillside against white wings (Diana)
searching the mouth

healing the *abtar,* sonless one
mutilated and adorned

"to be removed

from the Taurus down/ strikes the rose
into Karnak of Thebes.

KAREN KELLEY

from ANONYMOUS WOMAN

ANONYMOUS WOMAN VII

In a mall I see a store selling beautiful purses, a freestanding glass booth full of purses embossed with brilliant cascades of lilies of the valley, violets and pinks or carnations. I need a purse, but they cost fifty dollars and I don't have enough money to be extravagant. Hear a woman yelling. She is dragging a goat off of her daughter. The daughter is retarded and stands by while her mother tells the manager she's convinced the animal is mistreated and underfed, that she's brought her daughter to many animal farms and never has an animal tried to eat the clothes off her child. The goat jumps on the child again, and it becomes apparent the animal is humping her, that it is a sexual attack. Someone in the crowd says that children's bodies produce tremendous amounts of calcium in June, particularly retarded children, and perhaps that is why the goat is attacking her, to get at the calcium.

ANONYMOUS WOMAN VIII

finally a woman will come along and men will see the action of the woman feeding giving in unravelling from the bias strands unhooking colors undone waterfalling waterfalling until dry red dried blood brood brooding musing music muscle unhooking the way parasites bore in not much worse than flu though if severe can kill you blood-red pillow of no comfort *for whose head?*

to guard oneself from being hit how the fellow swings swing out (swine) swing at but later broken-legged saying it happened while we were dancing who? me and the "bloke" meaning not knowing each other well no family-group never ate food together but yes to the nighttime ritual me a woman with my fires lit lap-legs a ring attractive rug repeat it as if we're in the grass an opening in the flowers not a dancing skirt but a woman's body rolled into a twine into red ochre into gibberish as if falling down falling silent

here come the white men pluck the fur off til there's no fur on the skin rub ashes until the stiffness is gone twist the fur separated one big and strong the other twisted until it is called something no one understands human hair perhaps or the waist of a man or piece of twine or white paint or mother or pearly kernels of teeth like small dots red ochre dots on the waist of the dancer I was to become

DONALD KUSPIT

CUSI MASUDA AT 75 HUDSON STREET

Leaving the street, with its interminable traffic, stooping to avoid hitting my head on the low door, I entered an unfamiliar world. This is said about art often enough, but in this case it was undeniable, for the world I had entered was not immediately recognizable even as art. In a large white space a naked performer vigorously and persistently hacked away with an axe at a huge white globe.

What *was* immediately apparent was that this "eternal performance," as the "artist" describes the event, was quite different from the tame events that pass for performances these days. The performance space was crowded with five white globes, made of plaster, with entry slots. When I arrived, one had already been demolished, another was in the process of being demolished, and three remained to be demolished. There were also 11 body molds—the artist calls them coffins—made of the same white plaster, some had also been attacked with the axe.

One wall of the space was covered with sheet metal painted with three nightmarish, expressionistic images: a tearful bleeding eye, a pustulating wound and a skeletal pelvis. This wall, and its morbid images, had also been devastated by the axe. Raw yet carefully aimed aggression seemed at work here—violence driven yet under control.

This was confirmed by the artist—half his hair and mustache shaved away, half his body and face painted—who nimbly climbed a globe until he had found a spot to penetrate with his axe and then hacked away with an almost rhetorically ritualistic violence. The sense of the destructive replacement of order by chaos, encouraged by the plaster dust in the air and the rubble on the floor, was preternatural, and initially incomprehensible. Convenient associations—such as the samurai warrior, evoked by the

artist's Japanese origins—came to mind, but they were too facile, serving more as reassurance in the presence of this bizarre event than as clarification of its import.

The violence was far from entertaining—despite the showmanship of some gestures—because it was too intense, unrelieved. There was not even much relief when the artist, having worked himself to the limits of his strength, rested in one of his coffins, dead to the world. His eventual resurrection was inevitable. The images of death on the wall, and the artist's own death in his coffin, were clearly meant to be repeated.

The performer's indifference to the audience seemed to feed rather than mitigate his aggression. He was totally absorbed in some private hell of his own, some Sisyphean enterprise which we witnessed but never shared. Why did Sisyphus never think of destroying the burdensome wheel he trundled? We could do nothing to alleviate his lot, for he was acting out some private fantasy.

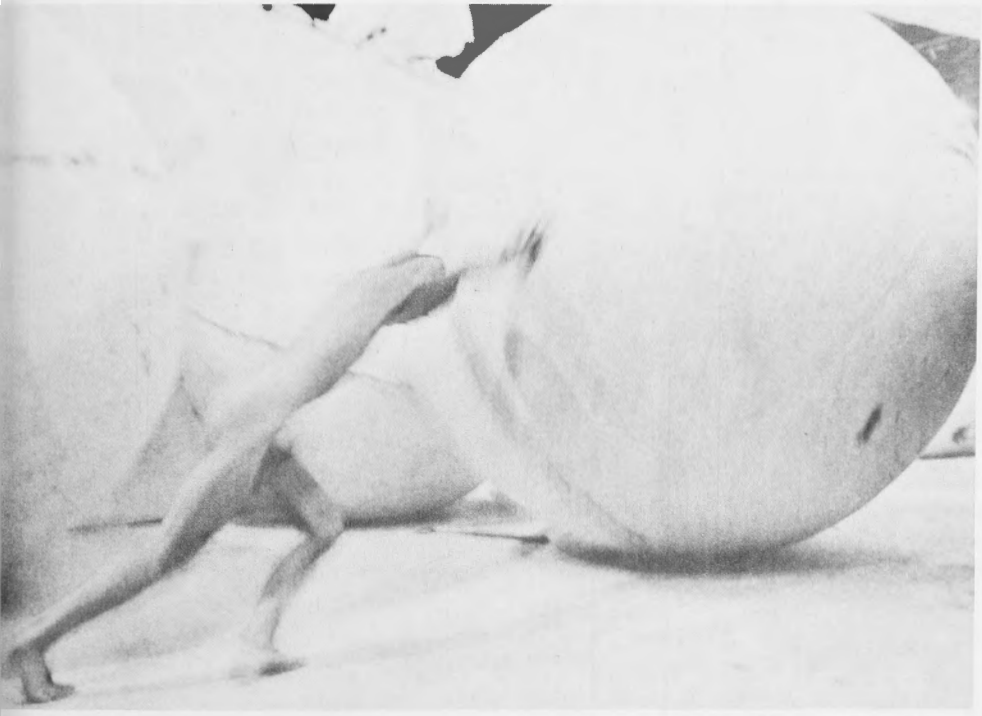
But in the very act of strengthening his presence by repetition, he was also intensifying the private hell he meant to purge. This was art only in the sense that some private terror—perhaps inspired by devastating public events (the artist spoke of World War II destruction in Japan, when he was a child)—was given a ritualistic form. But the desperation was not contained by the form. The artist's ritual may have overcome terror, but the ritual was so much a part of the terror that it emerged all the more starkly.

This performance lasted three weeks—two hours on weekdays and four hours on one day of the weekend. I visited it intermittently. On one occasion I left after the artist had been hanging upside down in one of his coffins for what seemed like an impossible length of time. It seemed like pure self-torture until I recalled an account of shamanism among American Indians. In one ceremony the shaman hangs upside down until he loses consciousness—the moment before he supposedly enters a visionary trance. One way of shaking off ordinary consciousness is to turn one's body upside down—what has sunk down in the unconscious will then rise to consciousness.

Masuda's art is as monotonous, visionary and absolute as any offered by Minimalism, which has a shamanistic dimension of its own. Indeed, Masuda offers what can only be described as Minimalist violence—the ritual form becomes a gestalt which gives decorum to, classicizes, a basic, exemplary violence.

CUSI MASUDA

from THE 75 HUDSON STREET PERFORMANCE, 1980



TWO POEMS

UNDER FLAG

Is distance. If she knows it

Casting and again casting into the pond to hook the same turtle

Beset by borders conquered, disfigured

One house can be seen

Then another thatched roof

On this side of the sea the rancor of their arrival
Where invasion occurs according to schedule

Evacuees, a singular wave set against stubbled bluffs

Rigor of those who carry households on their backs

Above: victims.
Below: Chonui, a typical Korean town. In the distance,
a 155-mm shell has exploded.

Of elders who would have been sitting in the warmest part
of the house with comforters draped around their shoulders
peeling tangerines

Of an uncle with shrapnel burrowing into shinbone
for thirty years

A wave of much white cloth

Handful of millet, a pair of never worn shoes, one chicken
grabbed by the neck, ill-prepared, ill-prepared for carrying,
carrying through

Not to have seen it yet inheriting it

Drilled at the core for mineral yield and this, once depleted,
never to be replaced

At dawn the next morning, firing his machine gun, Corporal Leonard H. was shot and instantly killed while stopping the Red's last attempts to overrun and take the hilltop

The demoralized ROK troops disappeared but the handful of Americans, completely surrounded, held out for seven hours against continuous attack, until all ammunition was exhausted

General D's skillful direction of the fight was fully as memorable as his heroic personal participation with pistol and bazooka

Gruman F9F
Bell H-130S
Shooting Stars
Flying Cheetahs

They could handle them if they would only use the weapons we have
given them properly, said Colonel Wright

Lockheed F-04 Starfire
Lockheed F-803
Bell H-13 Sioux
Bell H-13 Ds

More kept coming. More fell

Is distance. If she could know it

From a far from close

Citizens to the streets marching

Their demands lettered in blood

The leader counters them

With gas meant to thwart any crowd's ambition

And they must scatter, white cloths over their faces

Every month on the 15th, there is an air raid drill sometime during the day, lasting approximately 15 minutes. When the siren goes off, everyone must get off the streets. An all clear siren marks the end of the drill.

And how long practice how long drill to subvert what borders are

What must we call each other if we meet there

Brother sister neighbor lover go unsaid what we are

Tens of thousands of names

Go unsaid the family name

Sun, an affliction hitting white

Retinue of figures dwindling to size

The eye won't be appeased

His name stitched on his school uniform, flame

Flame around what will fall as ash

Kerosene soaked skin housing what will burn

Fierce tenement of protest

Faces spread in a field

On the breeze what might be azaleas in full bloom

Composed of many lengths of bone

"I CANNOT HEAVE MY HEART INTO MY MOUTH"

(Cordelia, *King Lear*)

Widest angle of vision before vision fails to mean

Where circle returns predator and prey

Prefaced earth's face

Turns to broadcast scarce cover of dirt

Between this and next

Afterbirth of the first child

Planted with a sapling the now full swerving pine

And that same child scattering a last handful of dirt

For send-off, for delineation

No trace on earth of what is said

No way to put a palm up against it

The treble, the trouble, of woods, of words

Elements. Elemental. So speak. Air water fire rise fall

No way to speak it

Larynx thin string, strung

Unschooled pulley throat

A bird calls out in perfect thirds: do-mi, do mi

Domi, domi, saal zsin domi
Domi, domi, oh fat snapper

As complicated as it is

As dirt is scrubbed off that a thousand hands smear on

As dim railings pen children at long tables spooning gruel

As the infant face is absence onto which we say
Is is like— it is like—

As a compass locates relocates and cuts fresh figures

As silence to mate(d) world

Not founded by mother or father

Spun into coherence (cohere)

Cohere who can say

PAT PHILLIPS

THREE POEMS

CHILD

I am stolen,
a thousand germs and

ended,
queasy in the hands

of mothers,
trances in wandering names.

I am close,
by nature a circle

without work,
an alluvium of touch—

one upon one
upon one without middle

no momentum. I will lie
in the hollow

kissing men and women—
strands of hair,

taught, alert to
an involution of

paychecks—
a stem of marrow.

FEATURES

Though we spoke organs,
we huddled

at suddeness—dry things.
now chairs drag packages

down street, tables undress.
Now, a bed has heaped

on the table.
We could be crying,

other things
And, this and that

is skin, is coughing.
No longer is it

houses hurrying, broken
at the hip.

It is you and you,
stricken of before and

before—it is arms
struggled onto boxes.

At this we remembered
retreating, carrying

the tongue of blindness
rustling in pockets

empty, partial. At this
the lips surrounded

and hunkered down into
now—

forgotten as if black,
yet celebrated as ships.

ALLEY

Dark in, just dark—
probe through apple,

a whisper with red,
with dog,

with no thing. walk
a hundred, none more

see, C the dark
apple hammer out

the miles, stuck like
"I think I can, I. . ."

rhymes that tick like
ants on soft petals.

slow, cause we don't
stop, slow. in

a morse of pimples
talk

a face, a slurry
suspending a body.

and some thing flutters
like a lamp-post

placeless and happy
outside.

MICHEL DEGUY

A DRAFT OF SEVERAL REFLECTIONS
A Contribution To a Collective Work *"On the Subject of Shoah"*

(Tr. from the French by Sarah Barbour and Victoria Bridges)

So, last summer, along with thousands of others whom I now think of as friends, I saw Claude Lanzmann's film, "Shoah," first in segments, then in a single showing. On seeing this work, it is immediately apparent that it demands considerable care. Memoire, memorial, it was waiting with extreme patience, and still awaits our endurance, the endurance of thought; what Henry Corbin calls our love, when he says, "everything that the indifferent call the past comes forth only in direct proportion to our love, itself the source of the future. One must have the courage of one's love." It waited with the reticence of a work that we might not notice, kept in cinemas, at the edge of our streets, "on the TV," at the edge of our days, letting us get on with the business of our lives, but with the silent, enormous insistence of a face which might not catch our eye, but which *looks at us*. Francois Furet used to say, "Forty years after its defeat, Nazism still represents an enigma to historical reason"; and Lanzmann, "Shoah remains opaque and mysterious in many ways." The very term "Shoah" has become this name, opaque and mysterious, has *entered* our speech, our murmurings, our meditations, our allusions, like a somber guest in the house who can no longer be forgotten, whose first name we mumble; in French a term so close to the one we use to stifle a sound, just like the ghostly figure of Simon Srebnik *in the film,* silent and smiling at Chelmo among the Polish parishioners.

If I linger now on the threshold of my reflections, as if to excuse myself, almost in prayer, it's because there is something of a violent contradiction here—here even more so than there usually is—between the modesty required and the exhibitionism of speech making. Perhaps speeches shouldn't even be made about

Shoah. The temerity—not unfounded in this case—of speaking about the film in place of the author, renders me nearly speechless with an unappeasable anxiety.

What is usually called "images," that *causa materiali* of cinema and of the audiovisual in general, quenches the ardent thirst to see, to recognize the infinite range of the perceptible; "More! More!" Like a feverish invalid who is drip-fed on his pillows, our febrile, puerile, Sisyphean *libido vivendi*, our "morbid curiosity," as the moralists call it, the mouth of the eye, trembling with every image, here it is, leaning back in its front-row seat, as if in the arms of its nurse. . . "Look, look with both eyes. . ." and the staggering succession of the *images*, glues the spectator to the spot, the amateur filmgoer in a cinephilic perfusion; to the point of almost "seeing that and nothing else" in the film, namely, the optical pauper chained up in his cave, being force fed with the visible.

That "Grande Bouffe," its self-portrait is the film by the same name, that iconophagia that 100 television stations will reactivate rather more than satisfy. That hunger to escape that the novel's ersatz tries to satisfy but only sustains, corresponds to the need to see more and more of the visible in the visual, to burrow into the texture of the visibility of even the slightest spectacle, to let one's eyes roll in the flesh of the world. By definition, the perceived always opens onto more perceptions. And Eros is always mixed up in it, its passion, or drive if you prefer, to slip into every crack, fold, look, curl, hiding place, fissure, into every piece of that exposed skin of the visible, to open the way for our impatient imaginations—impatient to imagine the worst or the most treasured, which are its basic correlates. Under such voracious scrutiny, the coquettish visible withdraws more and more, composed as it is of a density which hides, but which has nothing to hide, which asks only to be discovered. Whereas a "great film"—and that is the secret of the work we are trying understand—only *pretends* to play up to the imagination; by luring his imagination this way, the film tries to awaken in the spectator an awareness which would exceed the images, to make the spectator alert to something between the images, next to the images—but whose surfaces bear no lacuna—alert to that which is unimaginable, which is there held in abeyance, but for what *other* imagination, for what thought, on the other side of the unbreakable wall of the visible? The work that we are citing here under the name of a masterpiece,

a "great film," claims, cares for, absorbs, mobilizes, attracts, seduces, "lures" in the strategic sense, and sets into motion the enormous potential that the ocular curiosity has for the "imaginary." *And it suddenly frees us for the other part.* But what other part?

What is interesting in a film, its invaluable touch, is not going to be adding one image to another, stuffing the eye, that extra eye which "envisions" even when it is closed; no, what is interesting in a film has to do with giving some other "food for thought" to the mind; not a concept, but a thing from among things; what poetics in its reflection calls a rapprochement, made up of things which are not reduced to their juxtaposed limitations to the apposition of their separate borders, but to their quasi-unity; that is, to give to the mind, not the abstract mind, something of the relationship vaguely perceived between things to offer it the *between,* the being-together, of a non-associative multiple unity; an "image," indubitably, but understood here as the intuition of a way of being, one with an other, one by an other, of things which might not be, taken side by side, the sum of their objectal parts. The being in semblance of the assembled whole appears.

The work gives *that,* under the guise of a deception, actually deceiving the avidity for the to-be-seen [à-voir] which is also the to-possess [a-voir]. Under the guise of this first lure, or ruse, of providing images on demand, indefinitely, the work of the image itself, even while bringing to the psychological imagination its dose and overdose, will be to try to attract the imagination to another thing, somewhere else, not in the visible, toward these other images, not photographic ones, but the ones that Baudelaire worshipped; these rapprochements, this being-like or like-ness of which everything that is is made. To give to this second power of self-representation the chance to not perceive, to deprive it of every thing, so that—in Valéry's words—it might see; to give, you might say, under the guise of images, that which is not shown because it cannot *be* shown; Mallarmé would have said to *suggest.* Every thing is perhaps visible, but the totality is not. What I mean is: how to "represent the world" since the world is not given as a being among beings, but is given with the very things of which it is composed. A world, a whole can be made everywhere—of every thing. The world, with different kinds of *diminutives* being-valid-for-the-whole mediates for the rapprochements. Its media-

tion endows the parts with symbolicity; it is as parts-of-the-whole that the parts can be brought closer. Art risks the all for the all; and the invisible, which is not the visual provisionally removed from sight, not something supernatural to be contemplated in an other-worldly afterlife, but figurative thought, a thinking figuration; the invisible is in turn made figurative by the "other side of the mirror," that fable which is a fable only because it cannot be taken literally.

The sayable opens up a *re-solution* in the terrible *continuity* of the visible; the two roll around together in the darkness of sleep, they embrace and fight in a dream or in opaque insomnia. The sayable tears itself away.

In *Shoah,* the voracious curiosity for things seen—that a film thinks it satisfies, or if it is a genuine work, pretends to sustain—this curiosity is *disappointed,* since the great nothing to see which is said to be unsayable, not only is not "present" in the visible, in the hallowed ground of the "depth of field" which outlines, re-opens, opens up, the camera returning to the "very" places, but is also hardly imaginable *in its absence* because the few traces are covered over, that is, traces which could pass for the vestiges of things other than the ones we are talking about. It never was an actual thing, present, it was euphemism and abstraction for the conceptual planners of ordered genocide, crushing routine of torture for the executing henchmen, and "personal" annihilation of the incredulous victims.

Only a prophecy can see that no-thing which sought to make itself into an object, "the illumination of a people." "Shoah" changes the disappearance into the prophecy of what was. The without-precedent which precedes us has disappeared, leaving witnesses who have to be persuaded that THAT was what they witnessed; to change the unbelievable into the being-of-what-was, which, in essence, is not abstraction but sense.

What does the film "show," in place of the "annihilated"? Faces. The face is a strange *visible thing.* It is the only look of the visible which looks as though it were speaking; which suggests; which "wants to say, and thereby to mean something." Unlike any other *visible thing,* the face is *expressive,* like looking at the lips of a person dying and trying to hear "the last words"; it invites an interpretation, a reading. Physiognomy, and eyes, are said to "speak." But they never really say anything; they make like saying.

And their quasi-speech, their "mute testimony" is all the more fragile and threatened with non-being, (refutable, negligible, useless, vague) when the *expression* is alluring; when their expressivity is ambiguous. The face must then overcome, without bearing any special sign, without an "objective criteria," without a verifiable measure of a univocal relationship of sincerity to truth, in the realm of ambiguity, essentially its own, the face must overcome, I am saying, the constituent lure of intention forever both tacit and potentially counterfeit; it is that double-edged obstacle: of the mask each one bears which mimics the intention assured by the social code, produced by the mask for the addressee, that is, the conventional "reading"; and the multi-vocal "sense," according to the surroundings and the legend (the "context": the same eyes that you see "wide with horror" could be read as "wide with greedy appetite" if the *thing seen* by the same face were actually a pastry instead of a massacre). And the expressivity passing from face to face is communicated—everything becomes, can become, "like the face": prosopopeia. Contrary to what the doxa affirms with all its might, because this is the lure in which it anchors its realist confidence, the equivalence of clear signifieds to stable signifiers, the faces are interchangeable, and the torturer's face, "whose spineless cruelty jumps out at you," is instantly metamorphosed *according to the context* into "a calm fellow, good-natured and innocent," and so on.

Yet belief is finally all there is, it is the space of our encounters, the ether of intersubjectivity, of communication; in other words, faced with the possibility for deception, which is universal ("the evil genius"), there remains only a belief in the possibility of an oath to truth made by the eyes and the lips. In order to cast out the Evil Genius, which is co-extensive with the difference (between seeming and Being) "interposed" everywhere, there is only the presupposition of the priority, of the precedence of its adversary, truth.

Shoah: what is the "context"? Life has covered it up. What is the legend: the tale of the tales which Lanzmann seeks out. In this context, with these "legends," the face speaks. Everything had to become, *through their work, like a face* which disillusions, which re-emerges, like a dawning, after the nightlong battle with the Evil Genius.

Recalling the words of the Osuna Indians recorded by Malourie who was surprised by the *nudity* of their bodies in the constant cold, I would say of *Shoah:*

Every part is like the face. Everything becomes the prosopopeia of a truthful face.

***

Brick walls in ruin, windswept foliage, old wagons that look like they could be museum pieces; horse-drawn carts all along the narrow provincial roads of present-day Poland; pedestals of "shacks" in "Roman" ruins; here and there commemorative stones, not even kept up, effaced by sprouting anti-Semitism; unkept cemeteries, mossy names disappearing; one could imagine baby rabbits under the barbed wire of some factory; the disappearance of the ghetto amidst the meager avenues of modern Warsaw, modernized with all the "modern" things, namely, those things which never stop being *modernized.*

***

Given the train

Is there one thing whose very essence would be to figure elusive time? It is movement, the figuration of time, the fable of time. Our time, the time of which we are made, our dyingness, our perishing longs for its figure, seeks affinity with a mobile—desire for an image where recognition trembles: a desire to approach what has approached us, what "offers itself" for our self recognition; rare works that move us, even to tears, to cry out "yes! that's what it's like!"

Certain artifacts, certain works, play their parts better in the game, in the staging of the general representation of existence: they resemble most closely the unknowable, "we are embarked" (Pascal); we are on board, aboard death's train. The train overflows, from both sides. The limitless is transformed into tracks, a time funnel. Some pursue, some flee, and that indecision-in-division of this apparently double, ambivalent goal, (where are we going? what are we fleeing? what are we catching?) elicits the troubling exhilaration of traveling, and now of contemplating the emblem of travel: the train.

Shoah is a film of trains. We know the "final" destination. We, as spectators, are seated in the armchair of destiny; we know where they did not know they were going. The film's poster shows a scowling Charon, the Czech engineer, as he sticks his head out the locomotive window, he squints his knowing eyes, and we know what gesture the compatriots imitated again and again, the slitting of throats, omens along the tracks. The train's way was the Way.

The logistical problem of the extermination was a problem for railwaymen, station masters, conductors. And when Primo Levi and his own, once freed, take a road back, it is the purgatory of *Truce:* a convoy deports them again, or transports them, *hesitating* for months on indifferent tracks.

***

Emotion depends upon a *tableau* which is first of all a relationship to the world within the world, the world entering into the world, making a world, against the current in the flux of perception.

The work needs emotion to be born, to proceed and to arrive at completion; and emotion needs the work, emotion itself being "aesthetic," being itself called forth by something in life like a tableau, which tears itself away, escapes, detaches itself, and then takes form in the work. The animal "life of representation" has been said to be "poor in world." *Existence,* itself attached to life, frees itself from life with each escape, opening up a view onto the visible, such that vision *glimpses* what escapes from the visible, and simultaneously glimpses the very power to see which exceeds the visible. With each escape, vision *glimpses* the difference between what is visible and the act of seeing; the way in which the visible can reflect this act at its very origin, can allow us to image the act. What might such an "escape" be?

I would like to interject a comparison here, drawn from the trivial experience of existence, in order to illustrate with an example taken from the visible, the difference within the visible itself, either the bursting open of the visible or its folding back upon itself, which allows us to glimpse the appearance of that which is to be seen, and how the very act of seeing is of interest in and for

itself: like the "spectacle" seen from a train, villages and fields, framed by the windows, against the current, this spectacle, which is detached, carved out for us by the mobile frame, brings into the real, thereby duplicating it, an ongoing, detached spectacle, against the current of our own movement, a *paraphrase* (which is fleeing the other?), and these two movements, this intersection, this tangency, constitutes "reality"; thus the frame, in turn, or the outline of the work, engraving as it does that which has been detached onto that which escapes us—and which in the world of "Shoah" hardly manages to regain the visible—carries with it what concerns us and what now is carried by our own existence, an existence which can no longer deny its implication: it has become an accompaniment forever, a music which accompanies life, a funeral march. A work, framed, outlined, thus duplicate existence, in that it engraves a distance, reduplicating a reality such that what takes place in the work returns to us; a tangential life, so that our life be understood as implicated by this work, indeed, comparable to what the work figures.

***

Crying, in its transitivity, is to cry over one's self.

Crying over one's self as one is caught by, is caught up in and thereby recognizing it—the disproportion between one's being and that for which one exists; out of that disproportion, a work of art makes for a fleeting encounter, a junction; crying over oneself . . .It is the work of art that we see in life itself which causes us to cry, the work within life in glimpses.

What carries off existence, detaching it *from* and attaching it *to,* its own life, is emotion. We would need, modifying somewhat the famous expression of Maine de Biran, to talk about a *pouvoir-soi-émouvant,* whereby action and passion weave themselves together pronominally, reflexively, analogous to the Greek middle voice.

The tableau makes for an interface, belonging both to existence because it has escaped, and to the work of art, which has composed it. Given up out of its existence to the *poesis-mimesis* of the work, which must in turn render it, in the good-rendering of the work, it is finally *emotion* which dictates, not *sensation.* "Emotion" is a word used to name the experience one has of a

work; such that the desire "to work," to make, to render a work of art becomes "catching," is "communicative"—as one sometimes says of a disease. Emotion is the relay from work to work, it gives rise to a work taking form, a parable; works transport emotion metaphorically into yet a new form-taking. Even though I can only contribute here, vaguely, to such a relay.

***

Shoah gives us the tragedy of the Occident. Why say *gift?* Because the tragedy of it slips away, escapes us: we no longer know how to receive it. It is a gift because, while abiding by the law of the impossibility of representation, the *law of silence,* if you will, the work cuts across it, here in a singular way, goes beyond it in spite of itself, and like someone who finally returns, who doesn't know how he "could possibly" have gotten out of the zone of interdiction, and who offers us what he has brought back from there. Here the impossible is the underpinning of everything—the entirety of a work in its "diminutive" relationship (Baudelaire) to the whole which surpasses every part.

What we have is a film, shedding light on both the tragedy and the film, each illuminating the other—"exchanging the reciprocity of a proof." How could a film, *this* film, both produce and offer the tragedy of our times? Gift and work, an offering and a production, together they constitute a circle, belonging to one another as a reciprocal condition, like the *exchange* of "friendly services."

There was an actuality to the present for some Jews and some SS agents, each time, every week, an endless massacre, thousands against hundreds; let's try to "imagine" that. What kind of *present* was it? Some Jews to whom the thing happened were "objectively"—to use totalitarian language, stalinian, we are forced to allow it in, in this case—were, then, objectively, working for the SS. What took place, without its taking place for the world, without the knowledge of others in the world, the Allies, the "German people," everyone who *had a stake in it:* what took place disappeared. As for us, petrified and cathartic "spectators," we see the absence of its trace: in the wind of the forest that has grown back, the mass grave, not even a mass grave, but the knowledge of the site of a mass grave, known to us only now. We cannot believe our eyes: there's nothing there—only the wind. The communal

grave is more empty than it was when the Jewish slaves emptied it to burn the remains. Is it empty? Hardly. It is full, filled with ignorance. The "lake of ashes" as it is called, would be a more appropriate name for a lake in China or for a spot on the Moon.

The Quest for Testimony struggles with two double refusals: the refusal of the German who says, "I wasn't there. It wasn't like you say it was." The refusal of the Jew: "Don't ask me to remember; I don't want to relive the past. The ones who were taken, the ones who were deported, never knew what was happening to them. They were gassed without believing it."

***

Is it a tragedy? At first it seems that none of the characteristics that define "tragedy" are found in this work. Even if it is made up of that which is terrifying and pitiless. An imitation of the action does not take place, can never take place. It was only under certain conditions that the actors in the tragedy became "actors" in the film: actor-victims, sought out by the playwright (Lanzmann) for minor parts to figure in the film, they were even repulsed by the idea of figuring, of witnessing. Had the scene been a theater set, it could even be that they would not have managed to overcome such an impossibility. But the film's set is mobile, furtive, interrupted; it "doesn't exist"; the set is what the thin translucent veil frames when the "shot is taken," taking the veil, everywhere, on the other side of which the actor, who appears, has no idea of how he might be seen.

***

The survivors are like children of their own selves, each one born of the person he had been in his young agony, child of his own dying-ness, and thus re-born, not a graying father, riddled, we might say, who left his son dead "out there," at Auschwitz; but sons of their own survival. They didn't know that they were capable of it, uneasy about the very terror of it, superstitious (could the evocation of it re-activate the catastrophe?). . .and given the strain of bearing witness, of "playing their role as witness," of "miming the action" and of inventing the words that would fit—since a "literary" dialogue here could not be re-written, learned, recited.

***

Charged. To give witness against that time, against oneself; to be a witness. The burden of time is heavy. To be a burden to oneself. Almost half a century has passed. Why all this time, this waiting, this passing of witnesses? Fifty years after, some of them rising up out of those years, as if purgatory came *after* their hell . . .The perishable witnesses continued to perish "during that time"; postponing the work's return to that time, ten years of recollecting that time and of fighting against time, both were necessary for the elaboration, *in extremis,* of this extreme testimony against the darkness of the "Dark Times."

***

But not all representative relationships to the action, to what happened, have disappeared. And the inquest itself is a desperate quest for the resilience of Tragedy, the desire to arrest the impossibility of this "Tragedy": "Oh you who have returned, and who have shrouded your memory in your second life for so many years, and who haven't spoken, haven't told all, to your own children, oh you, survivors even to yourselves, show us what was!" One of the most unsettling sequences (and this superlative is relative, it would apply to any sequence each time I evoked its evocation), this one shows the barber of Tel Aviv, Abraham Bomba, who managed to "escape," as we say, more appropriately who was saved, from the gas chambers at Auschwitz, as Lanzmann implored him, Lanzmann's voice, his suppliant "parallel," sober and somber: "Keep talking, you must, I beg you, you know that you must!" Let's say this: the film *shows* (and only the film; nothing else showed us that); which is to distinguish between the two possible meanings of "representation." According to one (what I describe as *showing),* the film does not represent, it delivers, makes us see, offers, what did not take place, any place, outside of itself, *this film:* bare essence which the illusion proper to films reinforces, namely the illusion for me the spectator, that I am *hic et nunc,* for the first and only *time* with each "showing" of the film. I receive what the film shows on such and such a day at such and such a time, and there is only that time.

But the film also *represents,* in the sense that in its own production, it displays the act of producing; the artifact carries within

itself the artifice, and because the film cannot not exclude that, its trace remains. The making of the show is also the show. And in the production of "Shoah" the burden is not given to a Claudelian Announcer, happy to raise the curtain himself, to put himself center stage: "You are going to see what you are going to see!"—because the pleasure of creation is out of place here; like a craftsman, who in his weary quest, relentless, yes, intent on the deceased event, in that quest for the thing itself, looking for Tragedy too, for the tragic work which had become impossible: how to represent the action, by *mimesis* or by *diagesis?*

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What we are talking about is the event that led Adorno to that famous extreme position: "After Auschwitz, is poetry still possible?" From tragedy to "Tragedy," the same word has always named what occurred and its representation, the thing of the past, the thing immemorial, as well as the setting into motion of the thing, its implementation, adaptation, signification. Why, in the case of Auschwitz, did the real tragedy, historical and interminable, preclude its homonym? This film is a response to the question that Adorno posed for his contemporaries: "Can *we* still. . .?" Given the fact that a poem, a work, is still possible, because it is, here, this is a work which relates to Auschwitz, which re-establishes a relationship to Auschwitz, which brings to an end the interminable wait, which allows us to relate to the testimony of what Auschwitz was, to relate under *certain* conditions, namely testimonies without documentary and without a fictional plot.

***

All connection with action has not disappeared. "Unity of action" is still at the heart of the representation. But what has become of the dialogue? What is the story about? How does the terror filter through in its quasi-absence, if not as what the images do *not* show—only wind in the forest; no ripples on the "lake of ashes"—if not as what the things said do not manage to say; and how does pity go out towards others, almost going too far (dare we say, it wanders fleetingly toward one of the executioners when Lanzmann traps him by saying his name after promising not to?). And what kind of *catharsis* might be possible, in the end, beyond

hatred—is that possible—something more powerful than revenge, is such a paradoxical thought possible? I will also try to express that towards the end.

***

Of course, it's still *representation*. Something, something disappeared, monstrous, a no-thing, unbelievable but documented, which essentially has to do with testimony, and with the conditions of the implausible; something, a frozen rumbling, buried, harried, sparse, all over the earth, forever unheard-of, both clandestine and weary, worn down in the end, like Kafka's Prometheus on his rock, "unclarifiable," on the way to disappearing one last time, which finds its reunification, the union which allows the composition to be, to have been.

Unity of time? Again: it has to do with making a contemporary time exist for us. Unity of place? The Earth; Tel Aviv, Treblinka, New York, the Ruhr, Vilna, Warsaw. . .The diaspora is no longer the same. The scattered and strewn constitute a place, the archipelago of languages. Nothing will have happened, will have taken place except this place? The forest in Vilna, the station in Belznec, the field in Poland, the clearing in Sobibor, the snow of Vermont . . .Unity of action? Unity of concern, unity of the One necessity: there are a few cases, here, to *represent* hundreds of thousands. It is "representation," because a very small number, a few survivors, are filmed, faithful and in tears, before us, spectators as numerous as a census; for the masses, the enormous tribe, twelve-tribes-to-the-power-of-twelve of the dead whose great numbers made up the implausible.

***

Last words must be kept as a heritage, a survival of words about the end so that there may be history. A descendant, Lanzmann, requests the legacy, claims the malediction. Donee, donor. He is in the film, author, minor figure, voice at the edge of the film. On the set and off; he implores, demands, that it be passed on. He asks that something be told. He brings about a dialogue with his montage—it is his ubiquitous absence. The afterword, his labor, creates a present, an audience for a present, a presence; he reconstitutes. The montage creates a rapport, estab-

lishes a "dialogue of the dead" and of the deaf, and between languages. Donor at a distance, the film fabricates a realistic and rhetorical scene for a rehearsal which will not be performed "fictively"; the ghost-like rehearsal of a last judgement directs the action which can only speak, without ever showing "mimetically what took place." Beyond justice? Beyond condemnation? *After* Nuremburg, on another level than the judgement of judges, a judgement beyond punishment, without appeal.

***

Lanzmann: neither judge, nor jury, but collector, evocator, not a prosecutor, but with the power of attorney; not a witness, but attendant to witnesses, assessor, court clerk, one sworn in, proselyte. His voice wants to know. He is the instance of insistency. Like Ulysses (which is not to "do literature" here, but to remember that literature, made from our history, makes our history, makes us what we are and what we have become, with works), like Ulysses he searches the realm of the dead; he *digs* the common grave, a little blood, a few tears, brings the shadows back to life, forces the shadows, the ghosts hidden among us, to return, to reassemble, to cry for themselves, for what was, and for us. "The word is convincing" (Gorgias), with the appeal of his neutral, polyglot voice, the languages return with voices, intoned: French, German, English, Yiddish, Polish, Hebrew assemble, and the German language is also the victims' language, it speaks again, language of Canetti, language of Celan. Each speaks his own language, and everyone understands.

***

In order for an emotional event to be re-enacted, "enacted" for the first time paradoxically as "re-", played out before us, produced; in order for a work to be, there have to be defining conditions, "rules of unity." The norm responds to a threat, defends itself: it devotes itself to making a being-one be, or a being-like-one. It is a check against complete dispersion and loss. *As never before;* this time or never again: so that what has escaped us does not escape us; so that we recover ourselves. To reunite them, place, time and action, one with the other, the *where* of the earth, the *when* of an at-the-same-time like-one-and-all and the *what* of

the drama. Emulating one another, one with and by the other. In order to find it? What? History. . .It's a memory that has been to hell. This work has to do with bringing it back here: something new takes place which finds its unity, like a painting that has been put in a frame, fleeing but always re-framed by the camera. Unity of place: the screen, the film, in it the repeated scenes of witnesses forced to tell what cannot be told. Compelled to tell, to put together the pieces of the story, to resuscitate a vanished center for the narration that had disappeared, can a present (1987) be joined to such a past?

***

Among the conditions of the *causa materialis* that we can read and enumerate *a posteriori* about this work, those which it had to satisfy, by reinventing them, in order to be made, we can indicate the following:

—the length of the film: nine to ten hours, or more, like a Claudelien "day"; like a night "just like" the Night of the world, reduced enough for a symbolization to be sufficiently elaborated, to allow it to contain for example the sobs therein, at the same time, it could last twice or x-amount of time as long;

—parade of witnesses, so decisive in their obedient initiative, working under the "double bind," that they can reverse the course of things, and now that they have begun to speak, now that they can attract innumerable testimonies, possible, new, adding stories to the stories;

—exclusivity of the cinematic, singularity of the "cinematographic" art, so well adapted to this reunification and re-education of severely burned memories, it would have been impossible to bring the diaspora of last witnesses together "here" without a camera; cinema allows for the ubiquity of this scene; they came here from everywhere; that "here" can be everywhere. What's more, it makes repetition, the "projection" of the film, possible an indeterminate number of times. What could have escaped us in the forgotten has escaped—"once and for all."

***

And the story? Extorted from the silence of the actors, from the victims, from the survivors. Lanzmann, taken in like a son by the

families, with his fleece of film on his shoulders, hears what the children could not get out of their parents, who refused to pass it on, because what is to be passed on is a benediction. It is the struggle that results in the gift: the struggle with the angel of terror, the gift of the story. Pious extortion, vows obtained in *extremis* by the persuasive word in the name of memory, of the tradition which must not be broken, which must gather what still eludes gathering, in the name of humanity. Is there, is it possible that there was, that there might be a "crime against humanity"?. . .And hence still a "humanity"?

If, as we see in the tradition of the Sublime and the sublime of tradition, if "literature," art, is the passing on of the last spoken words, and of the promise of the book's relationship to the earth so that the earth might be the promised land in light of the last words, then here the sublime, inverted, is perpetuated, the son extorts and obtains the *malediction*.

***

Work unity

In order for there to be a unity which would permit us to talk about a work, about this film, to give it its proper name, there must be unification, that is, a composition, a unity of unities. At least, two levels, "a double articulation."

There is reason to analyze S*hoah* as a work by looking at the unities, the unified series, the subsets, which compose the work's unity. To distinguish, for example, between the series of "tracking shots from trains"; the series of "tracking shots taken on foot along the tracks," the series of face to face interviews, of the "envisaged."

***

The work takes its time, develops, in the absence of any *action,* represented mimetically by the *actors* in speaking roles which converse and report, not fit to be shown for two reasons: the traces have disappeared, and the witnesses of the dantesque traces, risen from hell, are repulsed by the idea of testifying, afraid of suffering too much, of reliving their death, as if there could only be *akmnesia* and *paramnesia* in this, as if the mnesia were a re-

dying which they had a right to elude, in the end; mimesis and memory, impossible together.

Nothing will be seen of what they bring back. We see the moor, the road, the forest, the river of song, the lake of ashes; in the lake of ashes there are no more ashes; on the moor there is nothing. We see horses, the faces, tears; and the Ruhr and the Polish villagers leaving mass, the Israeli barber shop. We see things we see today, scenes from our world, and we hear their story, the stories, the answers to questions that Lanzmann poses today, questions that look at a field that exists today, Polish peasants, ugly buildings "in place of" the Warsaw ghetto. Everything they talk about has disappeared, they are the last protagonists, witnesses to what cannot be exhumed: no autopsy, no ex-cineration, in the clearing there is nothing but the wind, in the lake, no more ashes.

***

We will not see "what man sometimes thought he saw"; we see their eyes which believed they saw. The event, called Auschwitz, which happened like something that breaks apart homonyms, that split up (until "Shoah"?) the relationship between tragedy and Tragedy, and that at the very site, on the threshold of the extinct site where the tracking shots take us back, carrying our eyes along the way, as if our eyes could retake the trip on the train of the dead, our eyes through the eyes of the survivors and of all the dead, the event comes to us today like the light of a yellow star, already extinct, forty shadow-years AFTER.

Could the tragic speech be made possible by an account of the final account of the disappearance of all that was the tragedy of the "Vernichtung," of the annihilation, like the witnesses' enucleated eyes, bulging, blinded by the horror of what they have seen; we look at blinded eyes—the eyes of witnesses who sometimes, strangely, have aged little, hardly greyed, timeless contemporaries of something that "stopped time," or quasi-mute like the "last Jew" of the Polish village surrounded by the current parishioners. As though the land of "nothing is left" where the camera transports us, the absence itself of traces of the "final solution," showed the radicality of its devastation.

***

Holzwege: Paths in the woods leading nowhere. . .

"All" the forest paths of the world, seen through the camera *Feldweg* and *Holzweg* at this moment, become[1] covers on a common grave, cenotaphs of mud, knolls, ditches filled with death: death's comings and goings took place here, made a place here, traces, covered over. The forest paths have become monuments of death's path that the camera stalks, on foot. It's there. Is it here that they were cut down, "coldly"? It is surely here.

Like a pensive mourner returning to an ocean grave, to the nowhere of the aged ocean, to the place that is no place, where the one he loved drowned, that's where she disappeared, and her disappearance with her, he tries to envision the void of disappearance, there is nothing, only the water as it rises and falls, "there it is, yes."

There is, there are. There that great indefinite pronoun is; is that, here. What we name "there," is, there-itself, there; and what is there? What follows; what is going to speak itself.

***

The event, the one that took place, is not represented. An event takes place now before our eyes, at the cinema. Which event is it? It's the event of the testimony itself, of testimony gathered with great sorrow, great pity, with cruelty. The witness was sought out, pursued, kept awake, delivered, forced. Men take on their witness-selves—right before our eyes. The routine of everyday life, like the frozen giant of Purcell's King Arthur, does not desire this awakening, who does not want to deal with the one who witnesses; wants only his own lethargy.

This is a film. . .of a quest. But it is not a fiction; it is not a detective story, with a mystery waiting to be solved. It is, however, a mystery of the "impossible-real," which takes on its own mysterious self against their will, body unwilling, heart revolting. Nor is this a documentary; if a documentary is a camera carried over to the object under consideration and carried off with photographic

[1] "Become"?. . .What is this becoming? Here is the modern metamorphosis at work; in and through the work. Which is not a becoming-god or becoming-animal, but an anthropomorphosis by the truth of the work.

images: the coal mine, the aircraft-carrier, the ski resort, places that exist, places that the film maker went to see.

Shoah: "Neither documentary, nor fiction," wrote Simone de Beauvoir; even taken as a fabrication filled to perfection, with a determination to retrace the defects within what should have been incontestable, should have been forever unforgettable. The thing itself is the film. The film is the event; each time that it is shown.

The actors, a few survivors who do not want to relive their death, the past, some forty years later, retired or far away from their memory, just like old glories revisited, they do not want to remember having been that.

The thing-seen speaks only if, through an inversion of the ordinary way of looking, it is seen as a beginning, as a comparing, figuring, of the Indescribable, of *every thing* that comes to pass *like that.* If I haven't the rigor to recognize in what I live and see, the figure of the no-thing (*Unwesen)* that can come down on each of us, hidden in our desymbolized ordinary places and sights, if I haven't the rigor to recognize it, then senseless madness escapes us even as it comes to pass.

The SS, their leather office seat covers cut out of Jewish flesh, re-sewn into boots, gloves, shoulder holsters, black boxes, badges of fantasy, these bureaucrats of the final solution each pretending to have been the Fabrice of the unprecedented horror.

The revisionist is perhaps not so much the person who wouldn't have recognized the gas chambers when they were operating, *like most people,* seeing instead only "the selection centers for the new arrivals," given that not "every single little fact" of the life we live has the bearing of a signifier of epochal truth; the revisionist is rather the one who refuses the vision of truth, the prophecy of Shoah.

It is easier to see in the almost perfect effacement, in the disappearance of what happened, the proof of its non-existence. Especially when the catastrophe is always threatened with having not taken place; as was the case for one bureaucrat who was assigned to the "protection" of the Warsaw ghetto. For the Jews *hurried into* the ovens when they thought they were going to a work camp, the unbelievable didn't have time to take place. The work of the film constitutes the time for it to have taken place.

The kind of un-be-ableness of that no-thing, *Unwesen,* "monster," was still wandering until Shoah (which certainly is not with-

out precedents, don't forget *Nuit et Brouillard),* it was looking for a place to be.

Is there "ontological proof" of radical Evil? To believe the unbelievable is as "impossible" in the case of God as it is with absolute Evil; it calls for the freedom of thought that perhaps can only be compared to a bet. As it is for the philosopher who might set himself to extracting from the *impossibility* of diabolic perfection (or of the possibility of diabolic imperfection?) "proof of its existence"; it is from a destruction, an abolition, a "solution," as the former executioners put it, minimally, that the witnesses turn away their faces, that the historians deny, and that our belief accepts, like proof of anti-miracles, the proof that the worst of all possible worlds was, locally and worldwide.

The crime against humanity was almost perfect. It was almost . . ., it all but happened. Without corpses. Beneath "the lake of ashes," peaceful sparkling, in the indifferent Vilna forest. . .Look: the places bear the same names, Treblinka, Belznec; the station is there. The names are utterable, not censored, not anymore than the name of an American small town or Barcelona.

A crime that was never named, designated as such, in its own time. Always silenced, pseudonymized, moreover: nameless, euphemized, with conviction; no plot no actor no witness, no remains, no motive, no narration. No one thought about it, believed it, and many not only do not believe it (the "revisionists"), but accuse those who have come forward with lying. Still euphemized today, in a new phase of euthanasia.

That is why the Jews of Warsaw asked that the thing simply be known; be uttered that a partial whole of "humanity" was exterminated, *vernichtet.*

***

It didn't take place in the language. Or rather: that is precisely what has to be done, find the traces of it in the turns that language was forced to take, by insane *circumlocutions* to by-pass, avoid seeing, *saying;* the unspeakable left its trace in the folds of the detours of the spoken: everything was *euphemism.* We don't forget that "euphemism" was invented in a language, the Greek language, to avoid speaking of death itself, with silence or with antiphrasis, to censure death. But the modern "euphemism," with

the same syllables, has nothing to do with Sophocles' euphemism. Our age, euphemistic and euthanasic, has its seeds in this trait, and in the remark, reported "in passing" by a witness of Shoah, when he spoke of "the international center of information": We learn that this is (was) the name of the crematorium. It is not a pseudonym. Even today, we don't linger over a euphemism. It seems to be taken for granted, self-evident, to "pass": This nominal relationship between information and euphemism, which radiates from the Third Reich, covers the earth, contaminating its languages with a "wooden language." The blind man has become the "sightless"; the deaf, the "hard-of-hearing." Imagine the great religious Books talking about the "sightless" and the "hard of hearing."

***

The very word *mortal* has become almost too pompous: as if men were no longer "mortals," for lack of the other side of their life's immortality.

If we translate *euthanasia,* following the model of "bon vivant" as he who lives the good life, let's call him a "bon mourant." We shall weld "mal vivant," onto the other effective euphemisms of hard-of-hearing and hard-of-seeing; let's call him the "mal-vivant-bon-mourant."

Unless "mortal" (and. . ."immortal"), unless they be in the plural as "mortals" has never been before, together in death because of an unprecedented massacre, "mortals" *en masse;* because of an unprecedented carnage which endows them with an unheard of mortality.

***

What does it mean to say "without precedent"? Other than that there may not have been a present for *that?* That is how the sober and intense Professor Hilbert from Vermont talks in the film. The SS, after having reproduced obsequiously the whole history, all the procedures, of anti-Semitism, they finally had to invent; but could not name that no-thing, referred to as "the final solution."

The film is the Tragedy of that. Through the film, that no-thing *(Unwesen)* becomes a sort of something, it enters into our History.

Not one blow is seen, not one echo from the floggings is audible, not one drop of blood, not one hair fallen from fallen heads is shown, is there, as a picture. The unimaginable thing is without a picture—and with this effect of the work, it "arrives," *to take a place among us,* between the eyes of the Last Witnesses, without concern "for us," (they don't look at us), between their eyes and ours, we see them but don't have them before our eyes, it comes to us as an evocation.

The conviction does not rest on the pieces of evidence exhibited. The shacks "reconstituted" by the witnesses could be artists' studios. There is the excessive interrogation of Lanzmann, and the evocation which makes hell rise up in reverse through Purgatory, toward this "paradise" where we eat today our opiate flowers.

***

What does it mean to say "without precedent"? Strictly speaking, there was no "genocide" before the "final solution." Because first there would have to be: a) a systematic, proclaimed ideology, of the separation of Humanity into sub- and super-men, lords and dregs; b) and the technology of reproduction indefinitely refinable, *perfectionable,* of "scientific" annihilation, euphemized.

***

"It is the world of the text which intervenes in the world of action to give it a new configuration or to transfigure it," the philosopher Paul Ricoeur says. This role, this effect of *intervention,* that the philosopher entrusts to the "plot" is complex, it is twisted, and an analysis like his, in response to the question, "but how?" should trace all the minute details, the twists and knots by which the work turns upon itself, digging itself further and further into its own "abyss," *in order to* re-emerge "into the world of action." The efficacy of such a refiguring "intervention" actually depends upon the work's own representation of itself in its own conforming to a "model," as it complies with a non-homothetic homology. We shall say: if it be the modeling of what is "within," or the symbolic diminution of its infinity, which *allows* the work *to communicate;* allows it to open up a world by opening onto the world which thereby opens itself by being-like, its being-like-the-fable which

configures it by *transfiguring* it; giving a world which finds its comparison in the work, and from then on exchanges a reciprocity of proofs, as it takes "form" with the comprobation of the *exchange of friendly services.*

***

All right, how does it work in the case of the work "Shoah"? Isn't this the very thing which is suspended, dumbfounded, rendered impossible as Adorno proposed when he said that there was no more *poiese (Dichtung)* possible after Auschwitz? Isn't it that what was broken off can only be resumed by a work, namely a work constructed around, and on, that absence of figurability, of "putting into plot," into fiction, into words, into comparison, "Auschwitz"? Shouldn't it be constructed on the default itself of the possibility of *poiese,* of the representation of the self?

The impossibility of putting-into-plot is assumed as such, no fiction except the fiction of the ubiquity of the witnesses assembled around the disappearance of the oven, a dead hearth; and that assembly is one only *for us* and thanks to the pressing appeal, reiterated and remote, of Lanzmann.

***

Let me try to put it this way:

From time immemorial, that is, since the primitive, ancient scene of *literature* opened up by Aristotle, the great rhetorical scene where men, divided against themselves, invent the transcendence of a Justice which allocates the roles of judges, lawyers, opposing parties, witnesses, prosecutors, silent courtrooms, from time immemorial it is Justice that sets the stage, the plot, the story: "What happened, how could you have. . .?" asks the voice of Justice which seems to descend from Heaven or Social Order. *Shoah* offers the distribution, the organization of an ancient and a new disposition of the juridical, rhetorical scene.

The unrepresentable "Auschwitz" had to be presented as a work, given as a spectacle in some kind of work; and indirectly: mediated by a performance; the solution of historical continuity that Adorno speaks of had to be exorcized; the without-precedent that prohibits seeing this past as repetition had to be summoned.

To be entrusted to memory, to our history, this thing that suspended history; so that we might *imagine ourselves in relation to it!*

***

Whereas, the God of Moses turned man's gaze away from his burning. When the leader of the Exodus awaits and obtains the passage of his God, it is with a *construction* of moat and wall, that he protects himself and can, by avoiding the fire of the theophanic "Presence," enter into a relationship with the retreat of the divine flame. But here, it is the furnace itself that has gone out and the ashes which have disappeared, been dispersed. It is the reverse, the absence and the "nothing-like-that-happened" that needed to be conjured up—re-ignited, if I may be so bold, the cinders of Auschwitz with a brilliance bright enough to project the shadow again onto forgetful, present history, on the scale of "humanity," of the *World* war that The Second War was proclaimed to be, of an apocalypse which concerns our entire Earth. What wall might we build here which would revive in the light the vanished light of the extinguished crematorium, forgotten, indeed denied?

To reassemble with the film the monumental stones, to show in its length the immense, lamentable wall, and to raise the "living stones" of words, so that the promise made to the dying, deported, put into ovens, may finally be kept, by the very ones who swore to bear witness, to not let the testimony be lost.

The mediation of a work provides an unavoidable reference to an operation which built a "wall" such that the brilliance of the crematorium could pass again among us, to set fire to history. Just as the biblical God, whom Moses can not "look upon," obliges him to turn away, to hide himself behind a *wall* and to infer from the incineration the power of his "passage," so can I risk this, in an inverse way, the unimaginable violence of Evil, "Auschwitz," in order to be seen again indirectly, in order to be replayed again *in* our memory, was waiting for a "wall"?

Stones. The stones themselves raised, these modern "alignments," this Carnac of European stelas, even with its tinge of "bad taste," that we find sometimes in modern art galleries, the orphic stones, gathered here by the work itself, enormous petrified tears,

assembled in the name of a country of torture victims, bearing their names; cenotaphs crammed with sorrow like the sorrow of Trake turned into stone, a riot of granite petrified with sorrow, gradually every great stone became an epitaph with no inscriptions, while the very tombs of memory, the tomb of "Cherniakhov," eroded, return to the rock of the "unclarifiable"; the horror of an anti-Deucalonian earth where discarded men become stones, anti-earth, anti-matter, anti-history, in blocks fallen into an "obscure disaster,". . .the Wailing Wall.

***

And all the production trembles; or the poem of the soundtrack

An accompaniment of moans? Yes, but like this: there are piercing grindings, the cries of real train cars, in other words, those of cars that the spectator sees on the screen this moment (in this frame), filmed in 1980 (for example), which pass diagonally on the screen, grinding by, and it is in the relationship of the witnesses' words, at this moment (on this "level"), to the metallic moans, that we *can* hear a kind of moaning music, a *Leçon de ténèbres*. The train that passes, in 1980 and in our earshot at today's screening, gives rise to a song, a musical relationship between the noise of the rails and the lamentations it evokes of those dying as they are deported. The sounds become the film's music, its "accompaniment," at that moment. And if the moaning makes itself heard, the song of funereal Sirens capturing a life, it happens discretely, as if by a fortuitous and inevitable rapprochement: lovely coincidence, the justice that at the moment when the convoys of the dying are evoked, all of the steel, all of the frame, all of the *train,* or as Paul of Tarsus said "the whole of Creation," all of the technical apparatus, the whole Production, moan; and everything does moan at this moment, given the moaning train cars' passing.

***

Something more interesting than death—such was the simple and incomprehensible formula (comprehensible only in the sense of an experience which gives meaning, which I am recounting, the experience of a film; the experience which has as its language

a film), such was the sentence that came to my mind as I watched the images of the last quarter of *Shoah,* and while my memory, as it saw these images, surely saw the whole film again.

Does something more interesting than death take place, in the end? *Could* there be such a thing? The images called forth this question, they "created" this livable question just as well as their response. . ."perhaps."

What this is about, problematic all the way through, the question of a fact, indiscernible and incontestable, unrepresented, enormous, evading any other relation, *mysterious,* is then the word, the question of a fact has changed into the fact of a question, this is what is given form, by a great work, this is what is given. . .

***

In the end, *Shoah* shows the Statue of Liberty through the window frame of testimonies, and Washington, the bustling life of mortal, ephemeral men, near the beautiful monuments, the great white temples, disproportionate to the smallness of mortals, under the cherry blossoms, after the war, after Auschwitz, is it another world? No, it is the same world joined by what makes it be the same world, it is the world all right; it lacked the other half of the ring, of the symbol, that the work—the film—brings back to it, so that it might recognize itself. It comes back from far away, it comes back from where one does not return.

***

"Something more interesting than death?!" Might there be such a thing after all? As if the unique concern, reference, preoccupation in our books, in our words, were not just with death, with mortality—and not the mortality rate, but existential mortality. Something happens *(through* the film; to the film; to the spectator), something happens, passes between the emblem of the image and my head on fire, which hardly has anything to do with death, is unconcerned with death, but not at all in the sense of *viva la muerte* which "laughs at dying"; something out of place; a distraction such that death is no longer what it is shameful to forget. An inversion of the pascalien "distraction"; in the same relationship, but the weights, the wrongs have changed on the pans

of the scales, it is no longer Stalin who wins ("In the end, death always wins"), and death would be what turns us away, what "distracts" us from life. . .

Let's take the risk. . .perhaps even the "relationship" has broken down, life and death would no longer be rivals, be in a comparative relationship, be (un)equals. . .Rather: side by side, separated (yet very close) by an *either/or* which weighs exchanges of goodwill; which lets "the dead bury the dead"; but very close, in life; the two *together*. Perhaps it is what Proust means in the end when he says that "even death itself is all the *same* to me" ("La mort même m'est *égale")*. Another kind of revivification.

***

If I pronounce the words "the Jews," assembling "them" from outside with this name, is it not a naming, a name calling that is "antisemitic?" How can one say "the Jews"? In my youth, such an objectifying "massing together" would have been understood as antisemitic. My Jewish friends were not "Jews." This difference, sometimes mentioned as a "point of reference" or as a "preference," did not, curiously enough, stem from religion (perhaps this was because they were not practicing, almost all were agnostics), nor from "race" (I feel compelled to use quotes, so much did the term resonate in one's ears, at the end of the Second World War, as an ugly German syllable, *Scheu, RASS! RAUSS!. . .),* nor from politics ("Israel" hardly existed at the time; my friends were not Zionists, or not any more than the French, which we all were, together); what then did the term mean? It referred to a kind of valence with an indistinct outline, covering, vaguely, characteristics. . .religious-ethnic-national, perhaps, but above all a cultivated quality, not a "cultural" one, heavy with the memory, with the history, that is, in our culture, of a possible story, both erudite and incomplete, with the history of the "Jewish people."

The designation of Jew, as it is acceptable to refer to him today, wouldn't it, as signified, be an anachronism that has returned? Wouldn't he be archaic, "the Jew," if he maintained, retained, resumed, as if inversely the motif, of the *chosen people* of Auschwitz? Archaic inasmuch as he would be taking the difference between Jew and non-Jew as real and literal?

What matters is the statement "There will no longer be either Jew or Gentile, neither slave nor Roman (. . .)." And I am not saying: what matters is Paul as a Saint one "believes" in; nor an "historical superiority" of Christianity (nor the inverse), but a word that questions us in this way: what must be done away with is not Jews or Arabs, but the literal-realist difference, fundamentalist, if it is indeed the literal reading that makes realism and the underlying identifications that make for carnage. Do away with that difference for the sake of a being-together, doing away with "like."

***

Doxa is identifying and violent: "A Jew is a Jew and Gobsek is a rogue" (in the Voltairian epigrammatic fashion).

Doxa's wall is impassable because it is too low. To get over it requires a spiritual transformation: a leap from the level where the doxa sets itself forth in the form of a trivial paradox, because that is opinion itself (Epimenides provides us the famous paradigm that I have transposed as follows: a cretin says that all *people* / =crétins / are cretins), a leap all the way to the level, or point of view, for which the paradox or oxymoronic and pragmatic truth *(optative)* expresses itself as, "We are all German Jews" (which is exactly what we are not, at the moment when we gather together to declare that "truth"): a point of view which is only tenable for the thought of the truth of the comparative thought; one is not the other, one is like the other; it is at this price that "we" can constitute a "we."

***

And those of us who are neither Jews nor German but who are like them, "trait *for* trait," because of a nonvisible trait like-oneness in the visible, sustained by thought like the *like* of analogy, entrusted to art which figures it in a work (like Shakespeare and *Shylock);* we who wish to make a *we* (according to Ducasse's wish that "poetry should be made by all") *in perhaps only that way. . .* there might no longer be "neither man nor woman neither Jew nor Gentile," but one *like* the other. How else could there "no longer be neither Jew nor Roman, neither master nor slave, neither man nor woman"; if not by a being one *like* the other. . . Because there

will always be men and women, Jews and non-Jews, but what counts is that each one be "at home" here, as the words of welcome go, the originary antidosis which essentially consists of a saying which reseals the transaction: in the word, the words, which *make for* the welcome and the silence.

And thus have we gone from Epimenides to Saint Paul by way of Lautréamont or Cohn-Bendit.

***

In the open space, in the Opening by which the world is given ("Weltet"), that inexhaustible hidden source where a "world" draws its possibility of advent; in the *open air*, let's call it thus, it is one of the words to which certain people aspire when they use the word *Universe;* in the common space, where public space is always menaced with obstruction; in the living space, if you prefer, always to be cleared anew, this freedom which "the weather today" is every morning in a meteorological sense, for everyone who gets up everywhere with a new day, the advent in the form of unfailing *seasons,* vivacious and vivaldien, which Hölderlin was content to call the ordinary spiral, "as a way of ending" during forty years of sweet madness; in the worlding of sunlight's burst into "world" where human worlds are built up and collapse, in that *bewitching flux* of the *vierge vivace et bel Aujourd'hui,* of the ever returning sea, (what a slaughter of words the poets sacrifice to the *That!);* there where "earth and heaven, mortal and divinities" meet, if it's really important to you, in that there-where of Being, in that being-there, if it really means something to you, in that widespread place where the poem is the tenant by all its locatives and lauditories. . .how then is there the all-consuming illusion that it's up to *us* ("uns": *"für uns, mit uns");* that we are made better than others, who are non-this or not-that (for example, non-Aryans rather than good-Aryans), or more historically because "historially"; *there,* right there, in that innocenting non-place of which the *free outside* is the localizing figure, the locale, allotted and for rent, the flux of "vital space," if it's important to you; that, I am saying, for all, everywhere, by everyone, at this limit more archaic than any privilege, there where must not resound a single interdiction which would restrain (itself), which would deprive; not one of those interdictions which designate, particularize, or

institute as private (and of course, "after" that, further distinctions, instituted differences become necessary, *Private:* "Do Not Enter, Do Not Post," anything you want!). How did that appropriation of the divine ("Gott mit uns"), even there, in this protective void of which all "temples" are the titular refiguration, the visible retribution, the gift in return, how could it have been proclaimed, been posted: "Forbidden to be a Jew, to be a Gypsy, non-Aryan, forbidden to be-like?"

JEROME ROTHENBERG

THE DISPERSAL

1
figures in flight,
how quickly through the forests

run & hide, their game
never over

not until the forests fall,
all forests in the world

all worlds between here
& an empty hole

the dead & living fall through
the messengers & passengers

fingers holding
coins & rings

who drop down headlong
into a world of lights

their cries have shaped with sound
remembered, with a wheel

still spinning highways
that shine with fat

the father in a field of money
lost among the spirits

who will find them, who finds
their common ground

2
it is the allure of foresters
the allure of give me more,

my hand is reaching toward you
out of its broken cloth, fingers

stained red with blood
too thick to hold the moon up

but lets it be the moon
that slips, crushes against

the pavement it is run & hide
your face, your absent eyes

fastened on mine

3
the price of bread
is what it takes,

too thick to hold the moon up,
while running beside

the factories, again
around the broken wall,

to find the road
the village where a family

of jews still lives
from there into the mystery

of huts, of caves
foremost, running from their dogs,

his fingers
dropping gold along the way

or pebbles
that the ground sucks up,

the gentile fondles
sadly, lets him trace

his heartbreak
through a loaded gun

4
from there into the mystery
of be at home

be soothed, the past
also will burn away

there is no other explanation
save what death brings

into the mystery of pain
the mystery of cut wrists,

little houses
battered by the wind

they are so in love with sleep
& other mysteries

the mystery of what you are
is what you die for,

(therefore die!)

of when he turns away
you plant a coin on him

then bow & enter
a village near the house of death

still run by jews,
still robbers

pin you against a wall
& take your gold watch

from you sobbing
in the wind, the smell of apples

in the wind, the mystery
of apples

of the white flesh, at the core
a modest drop of blood

a fire that is fire's
mystery, that holds

so many colors, you could croak
from colors

& you do

& when you do

you die

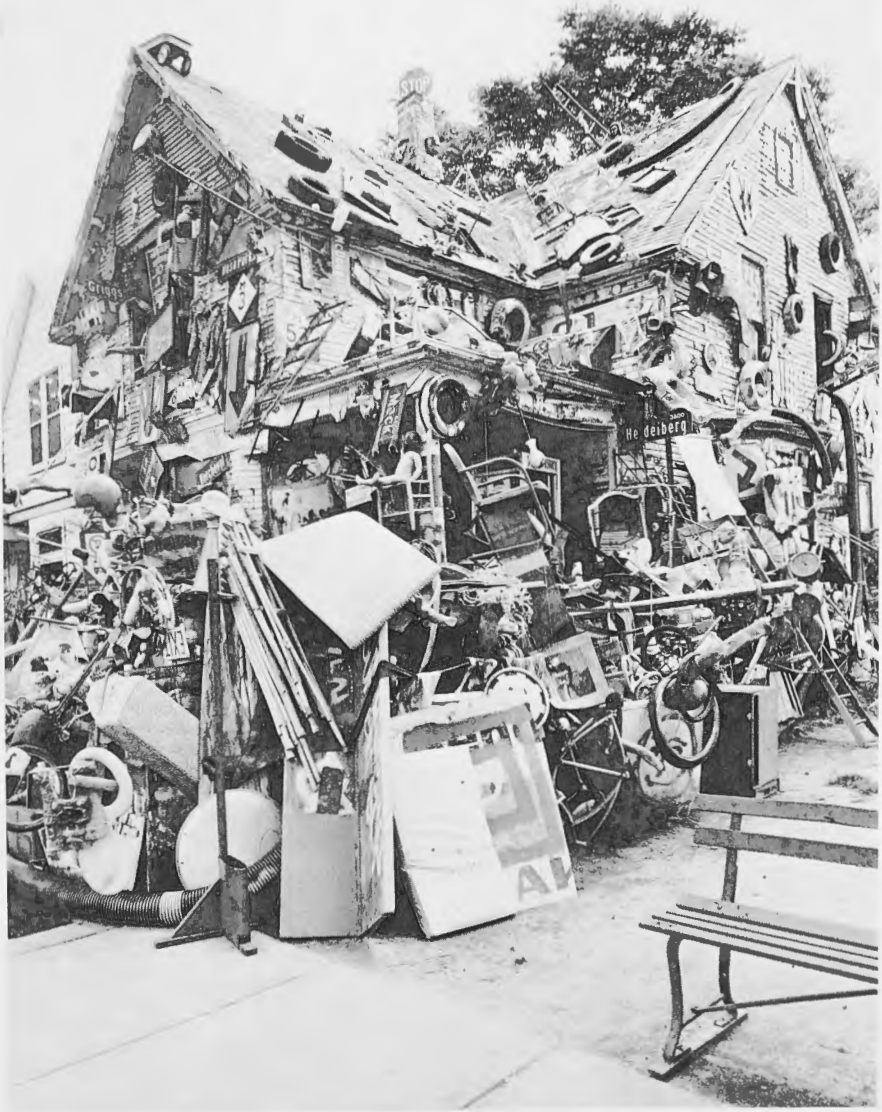
& enter through the gate
again, the secret gate
the black hole turning white

turns into night

23.vi.89

TYREE GUYTON

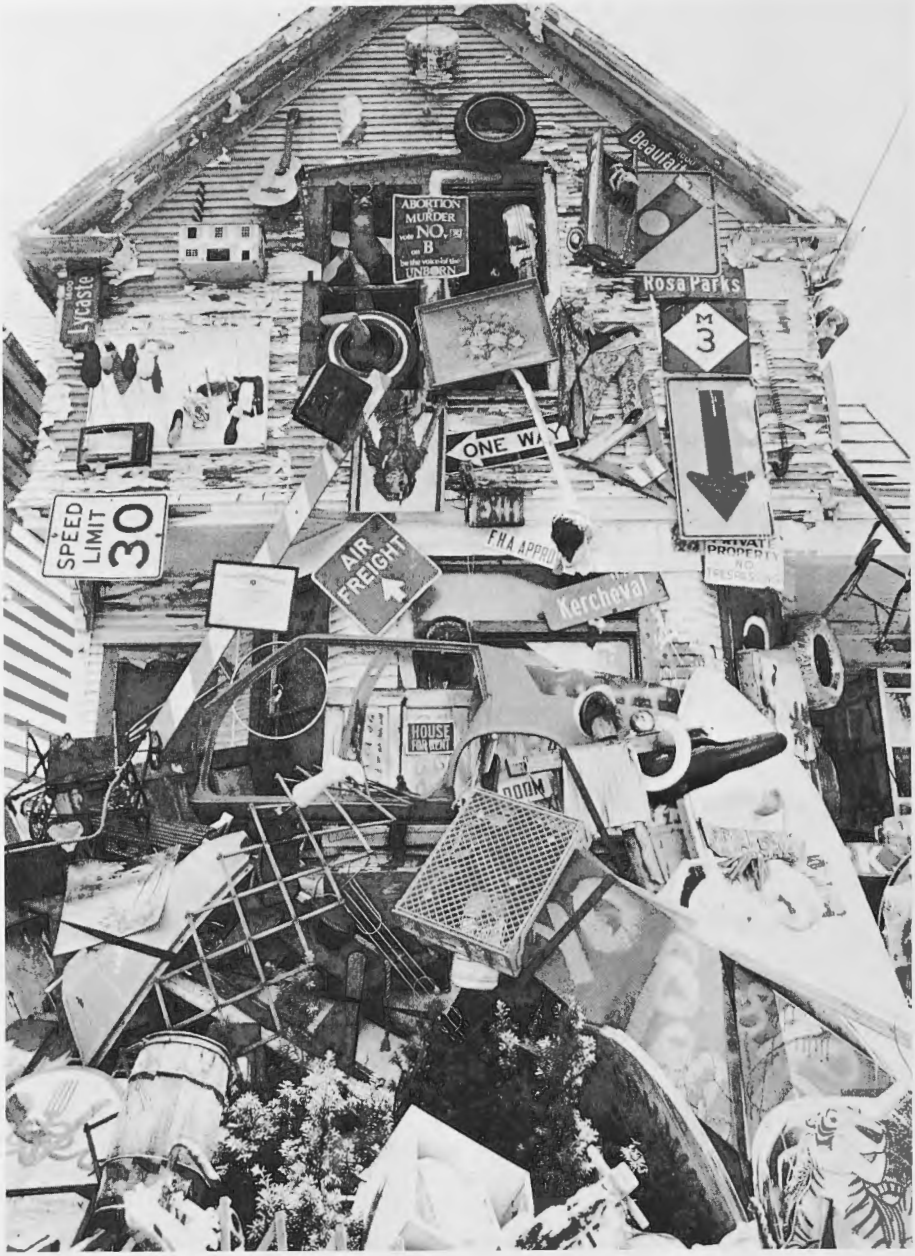
from THE HEIDELBERG PROJECT



View of front and right side of the Funhouse.
(The following two pages show details of the right front corner of the Funhouse.)

3600
e deiberg

AIR
EIGHT
Kercheval
BUS
STOP
1976



View of the front of the Funhouse.

View of the front of Lost and Found.

View of the left front porch
of the Baby Doll House.

Right front porch, Baby Doll House.

Right front porch, Baby Doll House.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

GUYTON PLACE

Of tables, wheelchairs, battered trunks & wheels
& pots that boiled up coffee nineteen ten, things
swimming on their own & finally freed
from human need. Or?
waiting a final flicker of desire.

—*Gary Snyder*

I find I incorporate gneiss and coal and long-threaded
moss and fruits and grains and esculent roots,
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,
And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,
And call anything close again when I desire it.

—*Walt Whitman*

Are we here only to throw away
burned, boiled, family-container carcasses?
Is this our work: to pull doghouses, jeans, waffle irons,
out of earth's mysterious orifices,
to then shun them while we use them—
isn't everything we shape
imbued with what we can and cannot imagine?
Somehow in Rilke's era, things shined,
they were company. Wine, shaped through the vintner,
"the savor of the earth
made intelligible to man."
In 1925, Rilke wrote: "Now, from America,
empty indifferent things are pouring across,
sham things, *dummy* life. . .
A house, in the American sense,
an American apple or a grapevine over there,

has *nothing* in common with the house,
the fruit, the grape into which went
the hopes and reflections of our forefathers. . .
Live things, things lived and conscient of us,
are running out and can no longer be replaced.
We are perhaps the last still to have known such things."

At the core of America, as if in a heart pit,
whose tentacles spread out through the "body politic,"
Ronald Reagan's face, a mosaic composed
of anti-Midas-touches, disposables,
things adults no longer love
reproduced in miniature for their children,
life as non sequitur, hope booming beyond the horizon,
beyond the dump now swelling with Salvador,
Reagan face, frozen into a vomit paralysis,
want to see "his" stomach?
Take the Mt Eliott exit
off #94, south via the old Detroit "Black Bottom"
to Heidelberg, and turn right.
Tyree Guyton's *Funhouse* is on the left.
Watch it cook there, in snow or summer,
"belly of the shark," visitable belly,
panopticon of American childhood and poverty.
Black childhood. Black poverty.
It resists description. Language comes alive
via the roller-coaster of subordination.
No poem wants to consists of paratactic chains.
Thing-words, like toys, want to be played with,
raised, lowered, tug-of-warred, yes, even wrenched apart,
to peek up into a doll torso's leg socket,
or to play with mother's dolls, threadbare, faded,
new mysteries! The fascination of "Chinese boxes,"
a seemingly infinite progression as each "thing"
out-folds, finding, at the same time,
a stairway down through us, the castle keep depths
that finally trail off into dreams. . .
"Perhaps we are *here* in order to say: house,
bridge, well, gate, jug, fruit-tree, window—

at most: column, tower. . ." But orange plastic tenpin?
Sun-bleached tin world globe? Bent styro-cup?
Perhaps Rilke's "lovers" could simply pronounce
such words, in the world of Muzot—they aligned
"bridge" "gate" "jug" on the ledge of
heighted adhesiveness, when "jug" still held
the life lines of the potter's palms—
but when "*dummy* life," in which the ventriloquist,
or "belly voice," is emptied of:
take this, as my blood, my body,
plows through the potential of things to be human,
one feels, in Tonka Turbo-diesel toy part,
a vacuum, as if the very sea of consciousness itself
were parting, to reveal the deadness we somehow
always knew had been inserted into life
as we "raised" ourselves—cranked ourselves beyond—
terrible, fruitful, injurious, restorational
immersion in nature.

On Heidelberg,

what has been abandoned on the street is gathered,
returned to the sides, roofs, porches (on one:
a telephone booth stuffed with overnight cases),
sills, front-yards, sidewalks, chimneys, of 2 houses.
Imagine "Blue Poles" wrapped around houses
so terrified they can hardly
maintain structure, "drippings" 1 to 5 layers deep,
no longer "paint" but a rubble-weave of car
seat wheelbarrow basin basketball shoe
(hooked on a crutch) baby doll heel toilet bowl
trench coat hobby horse (gripping a porch gutter).
Again, to, again, begin again?
Slippage from too many breaks in the Black
child's heart. Layered scars.
O house heart, bandaged in keloidal overgrowth!
To accept the rejectamenta. To hang them,
delicately, insertedly, around
the torched house's whipped shoulders.
To refuse demolition, or the *excess* we now export,
barges roaming like Flying Dutchmen

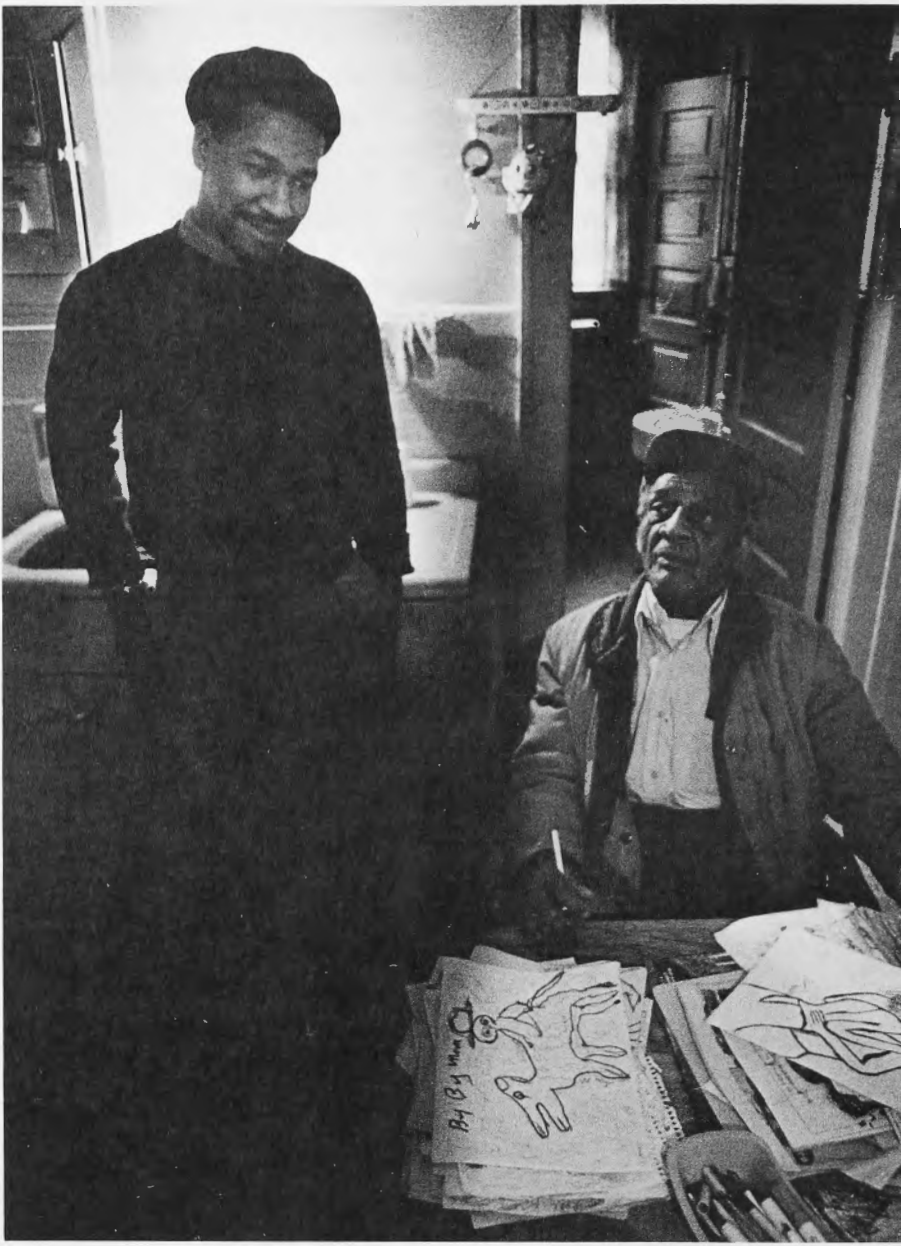
to inject their demonized loads into the sores of Haiti.
Some of the dead have no other memorial
than these rooms they last clung to.
Guyton hangs one house with tires. Tubes for the abandoned
to curl up in. Industrial ducts for imprisoned breath.
Airless tires. Dull rubber of lustreless place.
For the eyes of despair, someplace to hang. . .

Malte Laurids Brigge: "and the fusel odor of sweltering feet. . .
tang of urine and the burn of soot and the grey
reek of potatoes, the heavy, smooth stench of aging grease."
These sensations we must *imagine* here, they are indicated,
even accused, by swirls of the impeded,
as if a tornado had bored through, whirling up
line upon line of watermarks,
crossing chains of object scum,
haphazard, intricate, *chains.* So there is
a lassoed ambivalence: on the one hand, interior sensations
shut up, padlocked by the objects
that used to serve them, objects *always insufficient*—
weather-ruptured vinyl seats now "protect" emptied rooms. . .
on the other hand, these very same "things"
seem to be junk bees, buzzing, snarling about
nailed doors, as if these "homes" were sealed hives.
Thus this ambivalence, or is it delirium?
Like unwanted children, they long to flee but rush
at their parents' arms, blocked
that very moment from acceptance,
children who in their pitiful ways even seek to protect
these monstrous "loved ones." Or is it nausea?
To participate in Guyton's vision is to feel the sidewalk
roll, in sea toss, at moments they are slave ships,
no longer houses, *flagrant roods*
jut out of "neighborhood," rood hoods—
Guyton's cross bears a violin case, toilet seat,
hardhat, alarm clock (11:47), and a wig that seems to be
shot while crawling. Dada cross, yet
God's torch thrust into Black mind seems just
around the corner of each object,

if a dump could resurrect, might it look like the *Funhouse?*
A block away, the old whorehouse at 3121 Mt Eliott,
"stucco'd" with naked baby & girl dolls—
they sort of roll around the house sides,
nailed to this and that, legs arms heads missing,
the front porch a version of where the whores hung out,
soot-grimed heads, two legs in conversation,
no Afro-American faces, rather: light-brown-tinted
Caucasian-featured cuties, for Black children to idolize?
Next door, Guyton's grandfather, 93,
sits at the kitchen table, drawing with crayons
the androgyne, "In that distant chamber,
a bearded queen, wicked in her dead light,"
Stevens wrote, envisioning the tomb. Grandpa Mackey's
"queens" have arm-like tits, gigantic dicks,
curiosity of the child projecting into life,
nearing life's end, the point at which all doubles touch,
as dwelling-place here seems interfused with abyss
and paradise, or how paradise might look
from the serpent's viewpoint, in dusty shade,
having crawled for so long. One day, she raised her head
to look back upon the emptied Garden.
All that was once inside was nailed to Eden's
outer wall—and the Cherub? Nailed to the top of the wall,
strutting, as if to Sousa. The dream gone out,
all things in Babel on earth's multifoliate cross.

[March–July, 1989]

Note: The City of Detroit, which had honored "The Heidelberg Project" and had promised to protect Guyton's "houses," destroyed (without explanation) the Baby Doll House in August, 1989.



Tyree Guyton and his grandfather, Sam Mackey

ELIOT WEINBERGER

THE PRESENT

January–April 1989

On the first day of the year wars were continuing in thirty-one countries, wars that had already killed over 7,500,000 people. Fourteen of the wars had lasted more than a decade; one was more than thirty years old.

A friend, whom he hadn't heard from in the last year, phoned. They caught up on old friends. One had died from AIDS. Another had died from AIDS. One had written the screenplay for the most successful movie of the year, and was now more unbearable than before. Another had become famous overnight: in the last six months she had given 700 interviews in a dozen countries. Another was still making false teeth and was the same. Another, previously known for his lethargy, had suddenly taken up skiing and was now so proficient he was working as a ski instructor at a resort. Another had won a large literary prize, which he deserved. A couple they had known in London had moved to New York and divorced. The ex-wife, a hunchback, had had her hump removed, and was now making costumes for a transvestite theater company. The ex-husband had been found murdered, and the case was unsolved. As for his friend, nothing much was new.

The plants producing the radioactive material for nuclear weapons were leaking, and had been leaking for years. False reports had been issued to obscure these facts.

For a while it was thought that the plants would have to be closed and the production of nuclear weapons halted. This was clearly impossible, and yet the cost of repairing the plants would be enormous. It was therefore decided to change the safety regulations, so that the plants could operate safely again.

Along the highways, there was a craze for Fantasy Motels. The room with a waterbed set into an undulating floor of sand-colored carpet, like a blanket on a beach, with murals of surfers, the piped-in sound of waves crashing, and breakfast served in a beer cooler. The Arctic igloo, a dome of white plastic blocks in bluish light, with a polar bear skin rug for a bed. The Lovers' Lane with artificial trees and painted vistas of city lights seen from a hilltop, and the bed an actual '57 convertible Chevrolet.

A gondola bed in the Venice Suite; in the King Tut Room, a sarcophagus bed; in the Prehistoric Cave a slab of rock under a fresco of galloping bison. A tent in an oasis for an Arabian Night; a log cabin hunting lodge for those who dreamt of trapping; a lunar landscape where one slept in a replica of the Gemini space capsule. For the literary, the Moby Dick Room, where the bed was a dinghy and one entered the bathroom through gaping jaws. And yes, the Happy Days Cafe Suite in the Royale Hotel in West Bend, Wisconsin, where the bed was a giant sandwich and the whirlpool bath a cup of coffee.

Faith Popcorn, the president of Brain Reserve, a company specializing in these motels, explained their appeal: "There's a lot of fear and boredom out there. People want to experience adventure, but without any risk."

The new President, as far as one could tell, had the personality of a drunk at a party. His speech was idiosyncratic to the point of incommunicability, full of idioms of his own invention, like a man in love with his own voice and jokes. He liked to shake hands with a small buzzer hidden in his palm. On his first day in office, he delighted or bored his visitors and staff with a calculator that squirted water. Like a drunk, he had been, in the campaign, at one moment effusively sentimental, at the next, nasty.

In the three months between the election and the inauguration, he had devoted himself to sport. Baseballs, footballs, and even horseshoes were thrown, and members of the small finned and feathered species were slain by bullet and hook. All of his major appointees were excellent at tennis.

Outside of Agra, home of the Taj Mahal, in the village of Badh, Titu Singh was a happy child until he turned three. Suddenly he became melancholic, and would fly into a rage when anyone

called him Titu. He would say, "My name is not Titu. I am Suresh Verma. I have a radio shop in Agra. My wife's name is Uma and we have two sons." He would point to his parents and say, "These are not my parents. I'm just passing through here. My real parents are in Agra." Titu claimed that he, Suresh, had been murdered one night as he was returning home from work. Two gunmen had attacked him, and a bullet had gone through his head.

Titu's uncle went to Agra and found the Suresh Radio Shop on Mall Road. It had been owned by Suresh Verma, who had been murdered five years before, exactly as Titu had described it. Suresh had left a widow, Uma, and two sons.

Uma and her parents drove out to the village to meet the boy. As they got out of the car, Titu hugged her parents, and then looked angrily at Uma: "Whose car is this? What happened to my Fiat?" Uma had indeed sold the car.

They took Titu back to Agra, where, as Titu, he had never been. He directed them to the shop, walked in, and immediately asked who had built the new show-case. It was a new show-case.

The autopsy report on Suresh Verma showed that the bullet had entered through his right temple, ricocheted off the skull, and exited under the right ear. Titu's right temple had a curious dent, and beneath his right ear was a starburst birthmark.

Uma was photographed with the boy. She said: "I know it is Suresh. But I realize no purpose can be served. Our relationship will never be the same."

As the skin of the airplane ripped, the stranger sitting next to her was, in a second, sucked into the night, and the Pacific below.

The baby's feet tied to the slats, the crib covered with cobwebs.

In Uganda, the minimum monthly wage was 490 shillings. The price of a bunch of bananas was 500 to 800 shillings.

In the town of Mbarara, the Makeru Shalalukash Baazi—Christ in His Second Incarnation—was venerated. She was a four-year-old girl.

In the town of Mbuya, burning crosses had been seen in the sky. The Virgin had appeared, promising to create a stream whose water would cure AIDS.

The followers of the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena, a young fish vendor, would walk into battle silently, standing erect, their bodies covered with an oil that could ricochet bullets back to the enemy rifles. They threw stones which transformed, in mid-air, into hand grenades. In this manner, many thousands in the Movement had died.

The new Vice President, having served in both, was asked what the difference was between the House of Representatives and the Senate. He replied: "In the House you can get a bunch of guys and go down to the gym and play basketball. You can't do that in the Senate."

At the Museum of Modern Art he examined an enormous glass display case containing four or five petrified and mouldy sausages, and, nearly indistinguishable from them, a petrified and mouldy piece of dog shit.

Americans believed they were living in the decade of the country's greatest prosperity. In middle-class families, however, for the first time since the Depression, it became necessary for both parents to work.

In 1200 suburban towns, infants and small children were left during working hours at identical roadside buildings called Kinder-Care Centers. These were operated exactly like fast-food franchises, with all of the materials and programs produced by a central office, and a quickly-trained staff which was paid the legally allowable minimum wage.

Parents of infants, when they returned in the evening, were given a report, written in the first person, on the baby's sleeping, eating, diaper changes and development that day. One report began: "Mommy, I have been trying to say mommy but it did not come out yet but when it does, you will be the first to know."

The new President took important members of the Congress on a tour through the private living quarters of the White House. He showed them the Monet and Cezanne paintings hanging in the sitting room, and the needlepoint rug his wife had taken ten years to complete. In the bedroom, they admired the photograph of the

President's mother hanging over the bed, the radio tuned to a country music station, and the wallpaper of exotic birds that did not repeat a single bird. He took them into the bathroom, where everyone examined the cosmetics and was amused to see that the Presidential couple threw their wet towels on the floor. Then, back in the bedroom, the President photographed each Congressman and his wife sitting on the bed. Said one: "It's kind of crass, but he's more of a buddy, as opposed to being a President."

Fluorocarbons from refrigerators and aerosol spray cans were rapidly depleting the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere, which protects the earth from ultraviolet rays. Enormous "holes" were reported over the North and South Poles, and the situation was alarming for most of the earth. Major cities, however, were far safer, as they were protected by their own pollution.

He received a catalog of 348 self-help books for small children. These included the "Help Me Be Good" series: 29 books, each accompanied by a "read-along" audiocassette, so that a child could study the illustrations without adult assistance. The titles were: *Being Lazy, Being Forgetful, Being Careless, Being Messy, Being Wasteful, Overdoing It, Showing Off, Being a Bad Sport, Being Selfish, Being Greedy, Breaking Promises, Disobeying, Interrupting, Whining, Complaining, Throwing Tantrums, Teasing, Tattling, Gossiping, Being Rude, Snooping, Lying, Cheating, Stealing, Being Bullied, Being Bossy, Being Destructive, Fighting,* and *Being Mean*. According to the catalog, 36 million of these books had already been sold.

The mass murderer was scheduled to be executed in a small town in Florida. Hundreds of people had gathered for the event, hoping there would not be another stay of execution. The local McDonald's Hamburger franchise had advertised: "Free Fries If He Fries."

The new President, with a child on his knee, declared that the revitalization of the education system would be a top priority in his administration. When asked if he planned to restore any of the money for education slashed from the budget by his predecessor,

the answer was no. The new President declared that he would wage war against drug addiction. When asked if he would allocate new funds for this war, the answer was no. When asked how he planned to wage this war, he replied: through education.

In 1937, when an asteroid of such size had passed so close to earth, they had named it Hermes. This one was given a more prosaic designation: 1989FC. If it had hit earth, it would have formed a crater ten miles wide and a mile deep. "Sooner or later," the astronomer said, "it will collide with the earth, the moon, or Mars." But what was *sooner or later* to an astronomer?

A friend told him the plot of a novel he was writing: During the Second World War, Hitler had, as a safety precaution, created a double who was groomed to look, move and speak exactly like him, in order to appear in his place at public events. Forty years later, this double is living in a retirement village in Arizona, when he discovers that Israeli agents, mistaking him for the real Hitler, are on his trail. On the lam, he happens to meet up with an elderly Englishman who had once been Field Marshall Montgomery's double. The bond of doublehood transcending politics, Monty's double helps Hitler's double to escape. Safe at last in some remote part of the world—this part had yet to be worked out—Hitler's double turns out not to be a double at all. Hitler had sent the double into the ill-fated bunker, and had escaped by assuming the double's real identity. Hitler, of course, must now kill Monty's double, the only person on earth to know his true identity.

The average American car ran 18 miles on a gallon of gas. In Sweden they were manufacturing cars that ran 70; in France they had developed one that ran a hundred. It would have been cheaper to give every American, for free, a new car that went at least 40 miles on a gallon of gas then to extract all the oil needed to supply the existing cars.

In prison for murder, after years in prison for rape, robbery, and burglary, he escaped, and held two small children hostage until the police shot him dead. Not an unusual story, except for one detail: he was completely blind.

The Lieutenant General, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Drug Policy, defended the practice of randomly testing government and military personnel for drugs: "Random testing is an honor. I like to be random-tested. It tells me I'm clean."

At the 42nd Street subway stop, passengers entering and leaving the train were forced to step over a man lying completely naked on the platform.

Heinrich Heine, in Paris in 1832, had written: "Near the Porte St. Martin was a deathly-pale man on the damp pavement, struggling for breath; staring bystanders said that he was dying of hunger. My companion reassured me, however, that this same man died every day on another pavement in a different street—in fact, that this was his way of earning a living: the Carlists were paying him for this performance in order to arouse the people against the government. It would seem, however, that the pay for this work is pretty poor, since many of these people actually do die of hunger."

He found himself jealous of democracy as it was practiced in the Soviet Union. There, voters were allowed to cross off all the names on the ballot. If enough voters voted for no one, no one won.

When someone died, it was the custom for friends and relatives to visit the funeral parlor, sign their names in a register, and look at the face of the deceased, embalmed and laid-out in an open coffin. This was, however, a time-consuming procedure, particularly as one had to change beforehand into properly somber clothes. The Gatling Funeral Home in Chicago solved the problem by instituting 24-hour drive-in viewing. Without leaving one's car, one could sign the book and see the deceased on a closed-circuit television screen. Nursing homes hired busses to drive their patients through, when one of their own had died, without the bother of loading and unloading so many elderly people so many times. And Mr. Gatling claimed that the system was particularly useful when the deceased left both a wife and a mistress: the mistress could drive through while the wife remained inside. Some viewers had been known to stare at the television screen for an hour.

The new Vice President addressed the people of Samoa: "You all look like happy campers to me. Happy campers you are, happy campers you have been, and, as far as I'm concerned, happy campers you will always be."

She had married young, and divorced while her two children were still infants. For years she had raised them alone, and then she met the man of her dreams: handsome, wealthy, kind to her children. They were married soon after. Six months later, her husband discovered that he had AIDS, the result, he thought, of a single homosexual encounter some years before. For two years he had wasted away, but had not died. The children were still young, and she was terrified to take the blood test.

Things currently for sale: A hand grenade ($19.95). A booby trap: "can be screwed directly into an explosive charge for instantaneous detonation or coupled to a detonator cord for remote firing" ($14.95). A ballistic knife, the "knife that shoots": "can be fired up to an effective range of 30 feet," with penetration "three times that of a manual stab." ($79.95). A trigger activator, which enables a semi-automatic rifle to fire 1200 rounds a minute ($19.95). A laser sight, for point-and-shoot assassination capability up to 500 meters ($495). "Sexy Girls and Sexy Guns—The Video": "14 outrageous Southern California beauties firing some of the sexiest machine guns ever produced. Girls in string bikinis and high heels blasting UZIs, MAC-10s, M-16s, MP-5s, AK-47s, M-14s and more." ($49.95).

Things to read: *Semi-Automatic Rifles:* "A top-notch book for those who find military-style self-loading rifles interesting for their history, intriguing for their engineering design and a pleasure to shoot. Only a few other nations allow their citizens the privilege of handling these fascinating arms. In America, we the people grant ourselves the right to own them—a fact that makes this nation unique for its greatness."

Places to go: The North China International Shooting Academy, outside of Beijing. Under the auspices of the State Council's Ministry of Machine Industry, tourists may fire a variety of rifles, submachine guns, anti-aircraft guns, and anti-tank rocket launchers.

In the Bhati villages of Rajasthan, no one could remember a local wedding, for weddings take place at the bride's house, and there were no Bhati women. The Bhatis, it is said, were too proud to suffer the impoverishment of paying dowries. Brides were found in neighboring communities, but were expected to follow Bhati custom: At the birth of a female child, the mother must immediately place a bag of sand on the infant's head, suffocating her. Now, with changing times, there were 50 girls among the 10,000 Bhatis, all under ten. One of the eldest, the only girl in a school of 175 children, was locally considered to be the incarnation of a goddess: How else could she have survived?

The new Vice President gave the people of Hawaii a lesson in geography: "Hawaii has always been a very pivotal role in the Pacific. It is *in* the Pacific. It is a part of the United States that is an island that is right here."

He woke, and inexplicably remembered a movie he had seen in his childhood, a low-budget 1950s science-fiction film. Two bearded professors are standing before a strange machine with flashing lights. It is a time machine, and the inventor is demonstrating its use to his colleague.

He sets the dial for five thousand and something, and places a soda bottle in the machine. It disappears, and moments later a weird Cubist bottle from the future takes its place. He puts in a fountain pen, and receives a strange writing implement.

The colleague suddenly wonders whether the Phi Beta Kappa Society, of which he is naturally a member, exists in the future. He puts his "key," inscribed with the three Greek letters, into the machine. A misshapen medallion appears with some words scratched on it.

"Why, it looks like Greek! You studied classics, Professor, what does it say?"

"Yes, it *is* ancient Greek. . .And it says. . .'Help us!'"

GEORGE KALAMARAS

WHY I FLY

a letter from Bruno to Roberto Zingarello,
Italy, 1939

You're right, Roberto, I know
all about flying. But only a little.
What good is it, compagno,
when you want only
to embrace the soil
a cockroach turns through?
Love-in-Idleness I call her,
my attempt at a new brain.
Or, at least, what the townspeople
think. They'll believe *anything,*
you know. Like that story of Van Gogh
carving off, with a butcher knife,
his own left ear. It's the flying,
of course, that kept him alive
so long. He needed both ears to navigate
through the sound of paint—
a bit of blue starlight here, a touch
of orange blossom-wave there.
And, for a tonal bed, a phlegm
of starfish, lightly salted,
served on a toasted English tea-biscuit.

So, flying is the way
I think. Or, at least,
the way people have made me
out to think. Actually, it's a way
to finally turn gravity on its ass,

even for an instant. Ask the deaf.
They, too, know how to fly.
It's a matter of holding the mouth
shut, lying in your bathtub,
and listening to the ocean's
cranial lull. But you,
Roberto. You have the solitude
of Blanca. The musk of a creaking
attic in the sudden snap
of her brassiere. An orange blossom
in the dried blood
of her panties.

I can fly, sure, but I'd much rather
hug a solitary kiss. Touch the lips
of a deranged gnat. Or,
with a bit of spit, draw
on the belly of the cat,
Patchouly, the word "love,"
feeling the geraniums shift
beneath an early rain.

For every leaf that blossoms
outside my window,
some painting in my room goes parrot-red.
For every bird-wing dulling
the needles of the sturdy
firs, there is a fallen feather, somewhere,
dying of too much sparrow.
For every sparrow a woman's kiss
brings, a stain on my sheets.
And for every lightning
bug in the Sahara,
some moon weeps
below the soil
of Brazil.

Roberto, I can fly, yes.
But what mote in the horse's

eye doesn't dream
of the longitude of hay?
What ant in the fist
of a boy can't feel,
even for an instant,
the moon pouring
through its glandular
curve?

Like Blanca, eating that avocado
at the Cafe Centrini seven years,
seven months, and eight days
ago. For many years, I flew
into the molecular weight
of that pit, and still do,
at times, when I am awake or asleep
from too much sleep. When I am hungry
from too much food. When I am coffee
from too much bread. When I, too,
start believing I need a new brain.
At first, it helped me fly,
but lately, there's a bit of lead
in the touch of her lips.
A moist print on the rim
of my clay mug.
An insomniac's amniotic fluid
filling the leaves
of the spider plant
near the washbasin.

Where did you touch her,
Roberto? You see, no one ever told
me of the still clay
of breasts. I heard talk of it, once,
among fireflies. Felt the rings
of Saturn in the soil
around a carrot. So where, exactly,
my friend? Somewhere below
Brazil? Deep in the sheet's

sudden lightning? I know, Roberto.
That's flying.

If you want to know
about flying, don't ask
me, or Gardenia,
or even Vincent.
The closest I've come
is kissing the curve
of the washbasin.
It's easy, in a way.
Polish the shell
of a cockroach. Then you can hear
a grenade prowling the Sahara
in search of a green scarf.
A bit of moonlight forms
in the camel's hump.
It's a filling
of fire, a bullet, traversing
the deaf man's spacious
mouth. The tongue curls
back, the sound parts,
and—at the first sight
of clouds—a bit of blood
and water spills out
over the raised lips.

It's really rather easy, Roberto,
even if you haven't flown
in a while.
First wrap your head
in toilet paper. Next,
lay on the floor.
And, holding a flashlight
in your left hand, shine
its spores into your right ear.
Then feel the geraniums
shift, the breath
of Blanca part

the gray hairs on your chest.
And, like those topographic maps,
lift your lips a little
into an outline of sky,
looking for air.

The Arts Foundation of Michigan, a private funding agency which supports Michigan artists, welcomes *Sulfur* magazine to its new home in Michigan and is proud to provide financial support for this issue. To receive information on the AFM's funding programs, please call Kimberly Adams at (313) 871-0559 or write AFM, 542 New Center Building, 7430 Second, Detroit, MI 48202.

afM

MARTHA RONK LIFSON

TWO POEMS

THE OBJECT OF DESIRE

The elaborate celibate twilight
fog entrapped between trees
orifices filled with leggy things insisting.
Macbeth kills instead.
The driveway apron edged by heather
name of penpal at eleven
no more or less than now
casual acquaintance for focus.
The calf steams and ruts
birthing flies from her forehead
slowly towards the corral of death.
The mountains succumb to acid illness
it's an airborn illusion.
The nods enclose distance
on a road to arbitrariness
catching a glimpse of
what to see today.
Sitting as still as
married to a deep knowledge of chess
remembering a man as beautiful
playing under a nameless tree.
Arbor Vitae to stop the play of mind
desire implies being seen by someone else
making do with mirrors
Diana as the object of Actaeon's imagination
an operation of ocular possession
which is culminated instead
by staying indoors

and letting it blow over.
Veils necessary for voyeurism
what anchoring an unnamed green
left by the fall of pale blooms
ringing the stones of the state.
The branches he couldn't possess
kingly undoing in a vision
enveloped by anomalies
women with beards
chaste uncoupled things
seen or unseen by groundlings
lineage patronizing authorship
telling her to do it
which cost her her sons
the eternal daughter swaddled up.

DUCHAMPS IN THE GARDEN

1. Astilbe between pink and white,
someone's idea of flesh-colored.
"Note: Astilbes are sometimes called Spirea in old books."

No critical language yet
stumped by beauty, even pale, even repeated—
everything's beautiful if the gesture's often enough—heather
    rising in
mounds, in lavender variation—
lilac, rose, recitation.

"Our only idea, in the proper sense of the term, is Criticism."

2. Heartsick and maundering, kick stones in the road,
counterpoise the stone garden at Ryoanji
and my son's other name.

In the throes of middleschmetz and morning sickness,
mumble words of another tongue.
How few some need.

How may stone walls built by the neighbor's father who
    shored up the cemetery for the sake of Readsboro
    his fame rounding the hillside
    framing the headstones of the dead.

In the dream by the seawall
    my father tells what he had hoped to make,
    washes over the proposals of my son's father,
    the sea repeating itself as if it were beautiful,
    saying, you are beautiful,
    before he was born, you are beautiful,
    in the middle of a lake with a father,
    estranged.

3. Knocked by winds the morning glories lie
wound about a stick pouring color out on the ground,
resting from purple birth.

"The resemblance between stones is natural and involuntary;
between manufactured objects it is artificial and deliberate."

Ordinary round stones, unsigned.

Irony balks at the gate. Refuses to enter the landscape.

By the seawall across the street from a well-lit dream,
I hear her say, come here it is your fault,
all you do is refuse as if it were a fugue—
the sea brighter than the windows, the sky pure Toledo.

To undress the stone bridge.
What idea in the color of skin.

In a world impoverished of ideas, her rose.
Criticism as round and pat as a patio stone.

CUSI MASUDA

[from a letter to Clayton & Caryl
Eshleman, March 6, 1989]

These works are done under title "Eternal Performance." Since first one in 1975 to 1982 in USA. These works are supposed to be continued. These are the continuous performance like my body existence continues to live.

These spaces were destroyed in each performance. I should tell little my background of my life, so you may see or feel more my work.

I was born 1944 in Japan near Tokyo 100 miles away. When Japan is in chaos in war. Whole things are abandoned. I lost father, sister, brother, 3 of 6 in family. After war mother almost dying by tuberculosis. We wander to survive in Japan to find food, space to live, after war.

Fortunately We survived. I moved USA 1971.
I feel human being is like.
where my birth come from. Where I wander and Where I go.
What surrounding with: what's wall, what's air.
what is Light. what's body existence. what is
space. what is object to feel. what's human being
But, I know my body exist with nothing sure I feel.

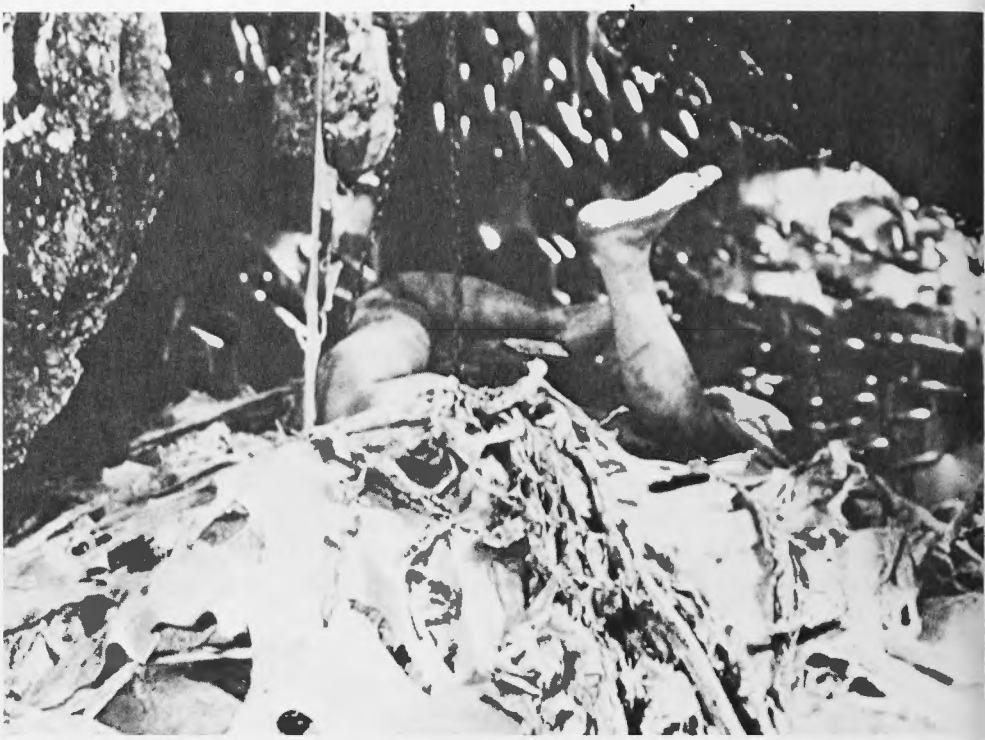
A NOTE ON CUSI MASUDA BY LEON GOLUB

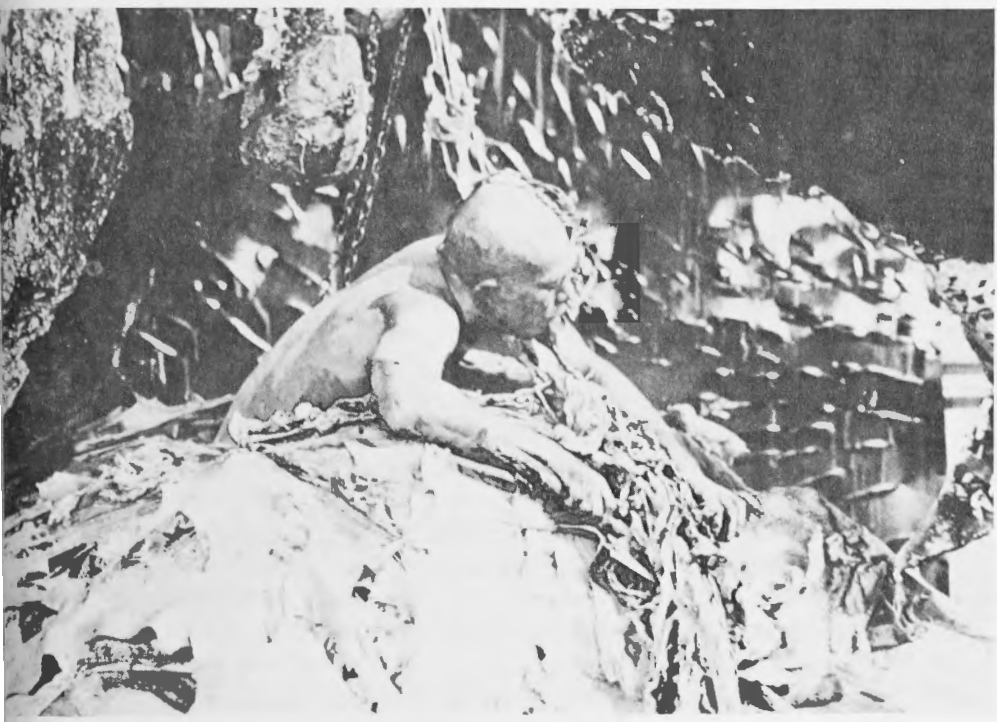
A cycle of seemingly endless struggle, and existential agon, symbolic journeys of birth and death, the lone hero against all odds, these are mythical symbolizations of man's fatality and in one form or another, have appeared in many artist's work. But nobody has ever done it like Cusi Masuda. In huge solidly constructed structures intricately built over many months, Masuda plays out his extreme actions as he ferociously over a period of days destroys the construction even as he ritualistically enters and engages the piece. Nude, one half of his head shaven, in virtual perpetual motion, he wields hatchet or ax against the obdurant material. The force of his effort, his total absorption in the task, his intimate interaction with the piece, is remarkable. He may attack and destroy the piece but in the process he becomes poised and often suspended against the work almost like the protective mimicry of insects in nature. These words are a poor substitute for the event and even photographs or film cannot truly document the sensory force and stressed action of the work.

6/14/8

CUSI MASUDA

from THE ALLAH BEAN GALLERY PERFORMANCE, 1981





ROBERT MARTEAU

THE UNIVERSAL EROS OF THE ALCHEMISTS

(Tr. from the French by A.C. Goodson)

No one has a right to speak of alchemy who has not verified his word by the fire of the laboratory. Pray, work and keep silence: such is the rule observed by those called by the art. No wonder the adept of La Rochelle entitled his treatise *The Mute Book.* No alchemical tract has ever been written to supply information; the idea is to assure the transmission of the secret and to signal the way concealed again and again by tricks of language. *Visitabis interiora terrae, rectificando invenies occultom lapidem.* You will visit the interior of the earth, rectifying [your way] you will find the philosopher's stone. The visit, the journey, the descent to hell, to lower strata lodging the peat of the Great Work, no one can accomplish it by his own resources, as particle and particularity in the double spiral where the multiple phases of matter are inscribed. Which is to say that in alchemy the individual cannot be debased to a social vessel of any sort, he is confirmed rather as unique, irreducible, irreplaceable, immortal. For this reason, alchemy has always considered itself a royal or sacerdotal art. It has no history, its history being that of life, of death, of the resurrection of the universe in each man; it has no dogma, but transmits through the story it tells that knowledge of the world which can only be grasped by sustained attention to the mirror in which nature moves. A musical science, alchemy is concerned with restoring harmony where dissonance intrudes; it works spiritually at the heart of matter. It is mistaken to imagine that a spiritual alchemy might develop in tandem with a functional chemistry. Alchemy is either functional or it does not exist. Action is its mode of operation: the adept accomplishes the spiritual cycle of matter by receiving the *Donum Dei,* philosopher's stone, panacea. As Horace, the Latin poet, would have said, 'Give me matter. . .' It is this primordial matter, lowly peat, which the alchemist will confront

first in his quest. Where is it hidden? In the features of the black Virgin whose effigy is preserved in many cathedral crypts, the virgin still called Our Lady of the Underworld and *Virgo Paritura;* behind the ass's hide with which she conceals her perpetual and unsurpassed beauty; in the rags of Cinderella; in the sleep which envelops Sleeping Beauty. It is an infinite emblem in which the Virgin, our Lady, the Princess, the Queen are revealed, unveiled and veiled again, immutable Isis the mother of metamorphosis, the Queen of Sheba sparkling with the lover. The alchemist will put it bluntly that the work, as a work of nature, requires a female and that this female will mate with a male after a salt has united them in marriage. Which is to say that the artist in the course of this phase proceeds to the junction of what was divided when the Principle (indivisible nonetheless) was manifest in that double nature which China designates as Yang (male) and Yin (female), enclosed in the circle T'ai ki, a visible unity, universe born of the invisible Tao. Evidently, the success of the nuptials, the completion of the marriage, depends on the wisdom of the alchemist in his choice, in the laboratory, of the couple, of substances appropriate for the solicitations and reiterations of the operative, who is in no way outside the operation, who acts rather as the conduit of the universal eros through which the secret fire buried in the humus is revived. So at the end of winter the prince of spring, the finder, directs his song once more towards the elemental space enclosing the feminine nature which he covets, and she, hearing him, is scorched by the love by which she will bear the name of the Lady. It is at this time, Eastertide, as the warrior Bertrand de Born sang, at this time of the Ram, that the alchemist sets off before dawn in quest of the dew of heaven deposited on the grasses of the fields, the mist of starry coals collecting in a mirror, dew the annunciatrix of the philosopher's rose, of the pearl in the shell like the one Vermeer fixed on the lobe of an attentive young ear after Botticelli had disclosed it in the divine flesh of Venus. The fable circulating from one end to the other of the ovoid and spiralled world, this fable so denigrated by an age which in the name of realism, of formalism and of theory, not only turns its back on reality, but would engulf everything in its own death, this endlessly uninterrupted fable is irrigated by real life, the original, and it weaves truly the lively and moving text of the alchemists, for

what kind of science would lock itself up in impenetrable tomes? To be sure, the treatises of the adepts are necessary when obscurantism affects the race of men, herding it, massing it, making it deaf to its own fountain of youth. These cabalistic treatises save the word from the abyss, and the call of lovers over the mountains from turning into a lugubrious dirty joke: a joke pushing that 'morality' where various forms of puritanism have their seat, their bank account, their right-thinking, exterminating revolution. What many a religion, as institution, has separated in the course of the few ages we know, the Kabbalah, the Tradition, Alchemy affirm as whole. These do not admit discrimination within the adolescent game of eros figured so well by the angelic Cupid armed with his bow and arrow. His work the adept will name *ludus puerorum,* child's play, indicating its innocence, its harmlessness, emphasizing that all art consists in imitating in its act-non-act the Principle for which the generation of the universe and of the worlds is a game, pursued in all degrees of nature and in different domains without loss of continuity, a game nonetheless in which man and woman are, on our tiny planet, the major inheritors since the Word has made mythic animals of them, immersed in the babbling Babel of the fable, wholly preoccupied with playing at arrows and shot, love and death. That is the story of the homeric poem and of the flowering of the temples, of sonorities and of something weightier. Now it is to the humblest matter that the alchemist addresses himself, where the slowed vibrations are more compact, awakening him to the secret fire in the dark, the buried germ, the slumbering serpent, sulfur, and by the art of music causing a stirring of matter to all appearances dead. Yet the adept is fond of saying of his operations that they are women's work; this we understand by global convention, so that the hieroglyph might lead us to it, might figure it forth. These works are of Eve in the Garden, of Mary at Bethlehem, of Atalante fleeing, of the Hesperides with the Golden Apples, of the Rape of Helen, of Lady with the Unicorn, of Io, Isolde, Isis, of Vermeer's lacemaker, of Douanier Rousseau's snakecharmer, works of bed, copulation, ovulation, germination, gestation, weaving, washing, hatching, and all needs dear to the characters set out by the Benedictine monk and alchemist of Maillezais, François Rabelais, who vanished without a tomb, without a trace of his passing. The quest of

materia prima gave rise to many aberrations, orgies and magic which have nothing to do with mastery of the art. It takes a perfect void for the prayer-practitioner to gather the salt dissolved in the universal Ocean, where everything is lost and created in course of the coatlic coitus figured by Quetzalcoatl, the bird-serpent, itself an image, like the caduceus of Hermes, the rape of Ganymede, of the fixation of the volatile and of the volatility of what is fixed. Perpetual nuptials, the battling warriors unleashed by them: the knight-alchemist perpetrates them in that repellent black matter lodged beneath Golgotha; he transmutes it into crystal by the cross of the crucible, concave cone, not without inclining to the conchshell of Venus, symbol, sign, vessel of his divinity of universal love, who received from Paris the golden apple in exchange for Helen, born of Hel (God), *Donum Dei,* daughter of Leda, herself the moist hidden peat, vase of nature, egg where the sperm of the white swan Zeus was grown. We are not far from the mystery of the incarnation as described by the evangelists. Like the robe of Christ and like the universe, the fable is rough-hewn because it is the saying of that universal reality from which the alchemist reproduces in a short time the perpetual spiral, sometimes picking gold in the garden where dragons stand watch, perpetual pilgrim on the road shown by the star, Don Quixote in the swindling inns which cheat the castle, enduring injury and chastity for that slimy Lady of Toboso, and of Tabor, who calls to him from her mute mutability, to the divine void of the fool of La Mancha in the deathless words:

I am black but beautiful.

No song more live and present to irreducible eros, combustible but not to be consumed, phoenix which scorches and is born again from the center to the bounds. This is the salt, the somersault, salvation by which matter is exalted to its internal fire for reconquering the scales which angels descend, for they are of the same substance as animals, plants and ore, and the alchemist too, like the lover of Verona, employs a ladder to get down to the ore and up to the sky. The involuted spiral where spirit materializes is also the evolving spiral where matter is made spirit, the two simultaneous movements figured by the double serpent of the caduceus surmounted by wings, sign of accomplishment, emblem of mercury made over as ruby, or the red stone. Contemplating the

world in the mirror of nature, the alchemist prepares himself to correct the image and perform his work: the viperish hidden fire which he awakens so that it might grow ripe and pluck the apple in the treetop, gift of God who receives the now manifest couple, promise ever renewed at the heart of matter animated by the amorous logos. Caballero of the chivalrous cabal, the alchemist is very much the righter of wrongs described by Cervantes, the straightener of what is twisted, reverser of what is reversed in the mirrors; his word plumbs the origin where he gathers his matter, and by the art of music, in the course of an opera at once gigantic and minuscule, he turns conflict to nuptials. The alchemist is the ποιὴτὴς έροτικος, the potter whose loving art makes the peat shine bright, the poet of whom the poets sing the terrestrial and celestial works. In his preface to *L'erotique de l'alchimie* of Elie-Charles Flamand, the alchemist Eugene Canseliet observes:

> A sort of mineral ontogenesis, the Great Work is based entirely on repeated copulation, since fertility is arduous. The Adept Alexandre Sethon, called the *Cosmopolite,* wrote that it was only *after having mated eleven times* that the male emits the seed, that he is *debilitated almost to death* and that the woman conceives and begets a son fairer than himself.
>
> It is true that the process is facilitated by attraction, the wiles of the young wife, her manner of consent, the coquetry and seduction of her charms.
>
> The various themes of these preliminaries were exploited in writing and drawing with talent and even genius—the more so when poetry was involved, a sovereign mistress, better suited, paradoxically, to expressing positive speculations and abstract realizations.
>
> Morality aside, brother couples with sister in the sensuality of the flesh; Orpheus attaches himself to Eurydice and Gabritius seeks out Beya, as *L'Auteur incertain du livre d'art chimique* saw depicted in a fabric of exceptional quality:

Naked virgin, young in years, ivory hair, dark eyes, cheeks of white and vermilion, breasts swollen with milk, perfectly round and shapely. And this virgin had the striking pallor of a body so extraordinary. . .that she might have been thought worthy of the bed of the king.

The mother too will not be free of the incest which philosophers explain by reference to the customs of Antiquity, and especially to the myth of Oedipus and Jocasta. For them the mother—*mater*—is the *matter*—maria—as well as the wisdom hewing close to God at the recommencement of the world. She was figured among the masons (francs-maçons) at the center of the flaming star by the letter G, of which Fulcanelli declares, in his *Demeures philosophales,* that it is the *initial of the common name of the subject of the sages.* It is worth noting that the letter G is both the beginning and the end of the physical Great Work, that it comes between Alpha and Omega, that it separates A and O, to be added to the Latin VIR in order to form the untranslatable word VIRAGO which the ancient translations rendered (doing their best) as hommesse (woman resembling a man): *she shall be called Virago, because she was taken out of Man* (Genesis II. 23).

With this word, which assumed its perjorative sense only in modern literature, Ovid twice described Minerva, in his *Metamorphoses.* Of the virgin goddess, in unhappy competition with Arachne, the poet tells us '. . .The blond virago suffered her success, and tore the ornate web of divine adulteries.' Mythology is full of these adventures, at first glance reprehensible, and alchemy draws on them for the expression of eternal Truth contained in its whole *art d'amour.*

Starting with the G g or γ (gamma), we see how vase, vagina, grail constitute a vocalic set and for example how γονή (generation) is not far from γόνυ (genou/knee), the part which Lady Guinevere discovers in her lover, Lancelot, only after many trials, a discovery which, in the rite, only just precedes the ultimate gift, the knee

offered by the *virgo* to the white lance of the unicorn whose seed in this virgin's lap or in her crucible begets the χρυσίον, the christic crystal, salutary or saving gold. As for Oedipus with feet swollen from wandering, it goes without saying that as Prince he means to return to the Principle via hierogamic incest with the *materia prima,* Gaea, Gaia, Jocasta, Maia, and we have to live through the ends of these cycles, like the one we presently face, a period imprisoned in mental horizontality, in order to see what eros, which is to say love, might become in a reductive mentality, prey to its pathos and dejection.

PETER REDGROVE

from AN ALCHEMICAL JOURNAL

Prologue

Somehow I had summoned a grave presence of great strength and truth. Dressed in a shift she went to the cupboard and brought out bright cheese. The great table was scrubbed white, and first we ate. Then we loved, where she spread the great white bolsters. She scattered crumbs for the birds. Returning her kindness those birds ate her plums. Grave presence, in that shift among the fruit trees. Great strength and truth treading with bare feet among the waspish cavernous plums. She was cavernous, but not waspish. She and the soft earth swarmed with liquors which felt. Among the trees hanging with ripe fruit, leaf-caverns bloomed and squeezed. The earth was wool-soft between the ancient boulders. When I came over the hill, that first night, I had walked too far, I knew nobody, but I had this address, the wife of a former friend. I thought I had reached the sea, but it was the blue-grey slate roofs gleaming in the hollow. I knocked at the door, she was much smaller than I had expected, she had big hips and an impudent grin, long dark hair, a white shift. She said come in and poured me a glass of straw-colored wine. There was a big hearth with a fire burning on it, and the smell of timber and stone, like a well. There was a big white wood table, and a recess piled with bolsters and eiderdowns. I was in that house for twelve weeks. On the one side I remember that I was there, and I can still taste the wine and feel the shape of the glass I drank out of that first night. On the other side of things, I cannot tell more than the edge of what we did and what we saw, though I kept a journal, and through that journal I can, by reading carefully, remember all of this which darts and hides through the thickets of sensation, man-sense and woman-sense, offering, withholding. Those who have visited this house

already will know my journal; they will have picked it up off the white table and read it. Others will be led to the house, and find there what they should never have forgotten, journal or woman. Did I mention that the woman of the house is black?

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18. The door marked with the small male symbol, the weeny-phallus as a knocker. The three pale ladies, wearing their prime punk gear, their widow fringes, towering eyebrows and bow-tied lips, collyrium in zombie circles under their eyes, knock his rapper. He saw no enmity in these faces, picking up his half-pint light as a kitten; the mothercat is a friend who undertakes to domesticate his garden, the Japanese bushes, the marble-dump. But dog, heavy, full of its turds, wags its tail down to its gut; his full pint, heavy as a dog wags his tail, wags his tail in his gut, the hounds of beer hunt inside him, their barking explodes in his farting anus like the belling of coursing hounds.

19. To expand, it was her intention to expand the social body by wearing mutton sleeves on her blouse, the body which greets us from over the bar, its shelves of poetry-books with corks, the puffed sleeves and the cuffs six-eighths up to the elbow. Primed by these sleeves, she regards an insect in the bath, its plates heave, there a whole planetarium heaves, a whole botanical garden, I see her standing on the carpeted catwalk at Kew, blouse in full sail, all the trees drawing themselves up to their full height, puffing their chests; she the great and wonderful mutton-sleeved bush, a nymph errant among the normative sightseers.

20. The little horse in Killiow Gardens, her warmth glowed at me like coals, the chestnut glowed as I spoke to her, then she grew skittish and nearly knocked me down. I tuned into the glow from the pigs' flanks. In their orchard, their apple land of satisfaction, their grunts as round as fruit, their flanks built of opals, subterraining pigs, pork rooting under the apple, alas. The deserted dairy, with its dust of milk. The wagon-driver, on his celestial omnibus; as he named the trees, each stepped forward in its own perfume,

the perfume sat down among us as we rode in two rows facing each other, the horse badged with symbols of fertility, golden brasses of wheatsheaves. I said 'steady' to the horse, and it stayed.

23. Young men could learn the secrets of magic by celebrating the sacred marriage, which is masturbating in the presence of the goddess' statue and ejecting semen upon it. Their shape-shifting then follows the phases of the moon. They can become wolves by passing through a certain magic pool, which is between the hills. They hear the hiss of the serpent as they push through the night-time foliage, and as they open the star-doors on their radio-sets.

28. The women in boxy white hats, the sorcery powders and oils running in the drains, flung from the stalls by the indignant prophet stalking through, all sorcery gone underground into the earth, from which it will have to be refined yet again. Now I itched to read, as if I had only to blow the dust off the chiselled words. She came in her black suit, like a graphite star, the Mistress of the House of Books. I would have her in the organ loft while the sixteen-foot burdoun vibrated, in the space above the choir behind the false organ pipes where the natural wood boxes of deep notes were connected to their lung-machine like unvarnished coffins singing of the resurrection. The fish were rising to the rain. A woman singer was discussing their concert privately with the conductor, both unperturbed by the long stain of vaginal juice on the sheets in the unmade bed, from which they had just risen and which lay open like the book of the world. The thin answering rain like an echo rising from the flat rocks made of the drops shattered like fast-fruiting fountains.

32. The musicians all decently clad in Golly-cloth. A rotting figure in the cellos. An odor of hot silk from the shirt-fronts. In the churchyard, an awareness of all the dead holding their breath in expectation of the resurrection. The creepie-crawlies sidle off the bone and prepare to devise another figure elsewhere, of wings and sunshine, of eggs and insect dew. The quartet fiddling away

at the poolside, and the pulse of the waves there rocking the water in its square basin; the motion left in it by one boy doing a bump-jump; and on that motion many swimmers resting and listening to the music on their backs, the heads cushioned on the water, the throats relaxed into the entire stretch of the body, everyone aligned with the pages of water so that they can enter them without a splash, the music suddenly shut off and replaced by the bass hum of the green pool as you swim downwards into its tune with your eyes open. Wetting the head changes the mood, the glittering divers emerge, hair spiky like a different forest of aerials on the roof, the mind changed as by wireless.

34. This autumn I noticed the wasps eating a toad flattened by cars on the road, they were tearing away strips of leather. I noticed a dead mouse with its stringy fur and the wasps all over it like a magnificent yellow-black brocade, epaulettes, decorations, moving fruit. I saw them pinching crumbs out of a dog-turd, nipping up little blood-and-wood loaves off a butcher's gut-stained sawdusted floor. I was caught in our mother the rain, and still the wasps came weaving to taste and carry away lichen from the bark of the tree under which I sheltered. I thought they were a kind of electricity, attracted by charges. I wondered how they would bask in the presence of a whirling dynamo, painted in yellow and green. I thought they would mulct it of its grease, and touch down on the shining spinning shaft, electric wasp licking up the honey of machinery.

45. The pope made saints out of rich witches, but poor witches were burned. Convent witches were canonized also. Women. . .in whose drowsy minds the devil hath got a fine seat. An old woman with feet like unto a wheel of fire. Scatter the ashes; if they are all in one place she can rise again. The wheel-goddess of cyclic and deepening time, the maelstrom, the dancer of the fairy wheel, she who turns the year, the Ferris Wheel, the Fairies Wheel, the Celtic Star or Wheel of Arionrod, not the day of judgment but deepening judgment, not last judgment, not last illness but return to illness, return to health, not one person but thirteen, the outer coven re-

flecting the inner zodiac. A linen-goddess, a woman, a rider of the wheel, pre-Christian fairy folk whose souls were involved in Karmic cycles depicted in the dances.

48. In the afterlife a gardener goes on gardening, but he is not a gardener only, but a garden. The angel of all the roses brims over the garden wall. I heard the crunching of numberless feet along the radial paths. On the skyline he was nearly invisible in his blue clothes. And the drunken servant goes on descending, ascending the cellar steps sipping at the decanter, and the soul of the wine embraces him from the damp earth floors of the tuns. It is like the smell of a mother's early-morning arms. He sets the rose in motion; the other carries the warm red wine into the garden in a rose-stem glass and they both toast the angels. Their bodies give off a potion of scents like a herb-bed of flowers in a sudden shower of rain.

49. The ghost of a frock. The endless trains of the ghosts of toilet-paper. She uses her frock as toilet paper. A paper dress will do for a ghost. She grins, and I see the shit under and within. I see through her into the shit. Maggots prepare to gain wings and fly. When matters look this way there is no need to exclaim otherwise. These visions which are roused in the earth by the chafing of the sky. And the resurrections: the stones lie overturned as the forests do. The dead live in the trees until it is time to come forth. For every dead person there springs a tree. It is their home, an opulent one, a very opulent palace, this tree given by earth, air and rain. The green leaves cover the shit. A green papery dress. The forests seethe in the maggot.

50. Under the face of the Bat, life lived, the flittermouse whose face is a cross between a baby and a dog. Under the Bat, her shadow etched against the moon. The doctor sings the bat into his living-room, the singing doctor. Perfect love and perfect trust has grown between them. The bat exudes a little semen for the doctor's potions. The doctor takes the pulse of the bat before

waving him farewell. The doctor is a cross between a man and a serpent, and his alliance with the delicate membranous skinny creature is strong. He pours a glass of twelve hearth whisky for them both. Four fingers.

51. The higher the cloud the colder it is, and the louder the thunder, says the Smiling Host at his white portals; I have given you the attic. The walls were trembling, and as I entered, merely entered, the thunder gave a soft preliminary rumble outside in the broad windows where I saw the air-streams mixing lubriciously. It was not, as they used to say in my childhood, the clouds knocking together, not exactly that: it was the air-masses wrestling, whistling skin gliding over whistling skin, silk over silk, and silk over warm glass or over sulphur globes, as in the old electrical experiment, creating electricity and vast jumping sparks. This toil went on all over the world above our heads, and beneath our feet too, for the static charges of the earth moved under these influences in their rock reservoirs, as the sea under the wind. And we, the children? In my attic window, I was staring with wide eyes straight into the processes of the angels, and of the unconscious mind, the turmoils and beauties of the spiritual world, the respiration of the Goddess.

55. As she left us, the tension from the thundercloud grazing the land lessened. We lifted our glasses and took a drink. The two, man and woman, with their clothes slightly out of phase, the two differing human shapes, heterodyning. The pocket full of posies, the cave of flowers, the underground fairyland, the shades within the soil moving with the clouds. The rose sets the thunder in motion. Earth and sky moving together, arms linked. The child within, the secret sharer, knows the clouds in its astrodome, watches the dragonish shapes. She occupied the form of a woman. She was for that moment the thunder, behind the door with the skeleton door-knocker, the bones hold a sword in their left hand and wear a triangular skirt of silver. Her witch-name was Vesica. As I touch the fixed star of her clitoris, her body gives off a potion of scents like a herb-bed of flowers in a sudden shower

of rain. A woman like a big magnetic wave. A standing wave which keeps its shape but exchanges its substance with its surroundings continually. A strange shining taste in the air. The scent of the stone pines, like the moon's grove of the zodiac which she passes through at night.

58. Their faces could be seen for ever in the markings on the panther, or all-beast. The faces of the slain host are seen in the markings on the moon. They raised their priestly power by burning witches. The great cloud of blood and cannon smoke, the thunder clouds over battlefields like armies marching away, the cannon-rumble of thunder. The battle now is always there. The cloud radioactive with a noise like typewriters. The thundercloud sealing Falmouth in behind its hills. The planetarium above, the clouds float reduced in this vapour, the planets wheel in immense clouds over our heads. Were that leaden cloud to blow away you would see Saturn a few miles over our heads; in that sunset-vapour Mars; in that light rain Venus and in the feathers scudding in the rain-puddle, Mercury.

59. We go to bed in our outdoor clothes. So we can be shopping while we're sleeping. Or in our garden clothes. Then we can be growing and planting. In boiled shirt and puffed dress. Then we come dancing. In khaki gear so we can fight and make up after. In lamée underwear. To glitter like a pop group with dreams like videos. In labyrinth checks, to wander among the horses, the dressage schools, the rousing bets. We do not sleep in top hats. Or in welders' masks. Though football vests help us score. And cricket shirts to play the game. We do not use medals which scratch the chest like nails. Or in our shrouds, though lace and tapes delay us. Above all we do not use pyjamas. Or retire to sleep in nightdresses. All the world should feel relaxed as bed. That is enlightenment. But not pyjamas, above all. Not pyjamas.

61. Equivalent times tend to be proportional to the fourth root of body mass, so that time goes 10 times as fast for a 30 gram mouse

as for a 300 kilogram cow: lifespan, gestation period, protein turnover, breath duration, and pulse interval: the five vital airs. So the mouse fits as many breaths and heartbeats into its short life as the cow does into its long one. The broken water in the Roads that heralds the Vernal Equinox.

62. A magic Yule. The women and children are excited by their presents. Their pine-tree working with their perfume. As Santa passes from person to person giving out presents he takes up a sniff of perfume from one, and then the next, it adds up in his lungs to a total Christmas. Each one like a little scented ornament hung on the one total spirituous household tree. Hung like glowing stars on the pine-tree of my lungs. The Christmas tree the outer lungs. A good Xmas the right blending of smells: the father working so hard at the presents to get the right smell off his family; the mother blending in the kitchen the right smells so their juices rise, the parcels and presents, open them and you give off little squirts of envy-gas.

63. The women dressing like the weather and the seasons to bring the mind into accord with the climate, all the looms constructed in compliment to the weaver of the firmament. The planetarium of the skin, the stars rising across it and tracing their meridians. The slurry of mines, the shadow of landscapes. You look down the shaft of the ankh and see the great stone at the end, in the chamber beyond the cross-roads.

JOSE LEZAMA LIMA

CONFLUENCES

(Tr. from the Spanish by James Irby)

I used to see the night as if something had fallen upon the earth, a descent. Its slowness kept me from comparing it with something descending a stair, for example. A tide upon another tide and so on, ceaselessly, until it came within reach of my feet. I would blend the falling of night with the sole expanse of the sea.

The headlights of the cars threw their beams in zigzags and the shouts of "who goes there?" began to be heard. The voices leapt from one sentry box to another. The night began to be populated, to feed and grow. From a distance, I could see it criss-crossed by ceaseless points of light. Subdivided, fragmented, riddled by the shouts and the lights. I was a long way off and could only sense the signs of its activity, like some secret parley behind closed doors in the night. Distant and voluble, mistress of its own hesitations, the night would penetrate into the room where I was sleeping and I could feel how it spread through my sleep. I would rest my head on a succession of waves that reached me with their elusively slight ripples. I could feel myself resting on smoke, on a cord, between two clouds. The night gave me the gift of another skin, it must have been the night's own skin. And I would turn about in that vast skin that stretched back, as I turned, to the mossy beginnings of time.

When I was a child, I would always wait for the coming of night with undeniable terror. Terror, for me, of course, was also the room that can't be opened, the trunk with a lost key, the mirror where someone else suddenly appears beside us, a form of temptation. It was never a provocation to adventure, or a fascination on the horizon. I never rode on the back of the night as it withdrew, nor did I have to reconstruct for my other period of sleep during the day the fragments of myself that the skin of the night had left scattered separately over my bed.

The enormous skin of the night would leave me with innumerable ways of sensing for innumerable ways of evidence. The dog who during the day had passed by me many times with my hardly noticing him, now, at night, lay beside me as if asleep, and then I stared at him with the most unwavering attention. I evidence the wrinkling of his skin, the way he moves his tail and paws trying to scare off non-existent flies. He barks in his sleep and bares his teeth angrily. In the night he has invisible enemies who still harass him. The angry reactions he had before do not now depend on anything homologous to his daytime motivations. At night he doesn't depend on motivations, but rather, unwittingly, he engenders innumerable motivations on the skin of the night that covers me.

The night has become reduced to a single point, which then grows until it becomes the night again. This reduction—which I evidence—is a hand. The placement of the hand in the night gives me a sequence of time. A time in which this can happen. The night was for me the territory where the hand could be recognized. I would say to myself: that hand can't be waiting for anything, it doesn't need any evidencing from me. And a weak voice, which must have been very far away from some small fox-like teeth, would say to me: reach out your hand and you'll see how the night and its unknown hand are there. Unknown because I could never see a body behind that other hand. Hesitant in my fear, and then inexplicably certain, I would slowly start putting out my hand, as if moving anxiously over a desert, until I found the other hand, that otherness. I would tell myself: this isn't a nightmare, go more slowly, because you may be hallucinating, but finally my hand would evidence the other hand. The conviction that it was there lessened my anguish, until my hand went back once more to being alone.

It is only now, almost half a century later, that I can clarify and even separate into different moments my nighttime quest for that other hand. My hand would fall upon it because it was waiting for me. If it hadn't been there, my failure, which would have meant another fear, of course, would have been greater than the fear engendered because the hand was there. One fear hidden inside another. Fear because the hand is there and possible fear that it might not be there.

Later, I learned that hand is also found in Rilke's *Notebooks,* and later still I learned it is found in almost all children, in almost all textbooks on child psychology.

So there already was the becoming and the archetype, life and literature, the river of Heraclitus and the unity of Parmenides. Take my hand away? Belittle my terrible experience because someone else had already suffered it too? Turn a decisive and terrible experience into a simple play of words, into literature? The time that went by taught me a solemn lesson: the conviction that what happens to us, happens to everyone. That experience of my hand upon the other hand will go on being extremely valuable, no matter whether all hands held out meet all the hands of the invisible.

It was such a decisive experience that, even though it may be found in child psychology, there are still nights with that other hand, the hand that appears. There will always be a night when the other hand comes and other nights when my hand remains rigid and unvisited.

I waited not only for the other hand, but also for the other word, the word that is always forming in us a continuum that for a few moments is created and then destroyed. A flower that forms another flower when a dragonfly comes to rest on it. To know that for a few moments something comes to complete us, and that by breathing more deeply we find a universal rhythm. A breathing in and breathing out that are a universal rhythm. Things hidden are things that complete us and make a plenitude in the length of their waves. The knowing that is not ours and the not knowing that is ours form for me true knowledge.

The word in the moments of its hypostasis, the complete body behind the word, the syllable, the wrinkling of someone's lips or the unexpected irregularity in someone's eyebrows. The residue left in each word by the vast dimensions of the stars became a momentary mirror. A fine sand that left letters, indications. A solitary word that became a prayer. Words were a hand excessive in its perspiration, an adjective was someone's profile or head-on look, eyes upon eyes, with the tension of a deer's perked up ears.

Every word was for me the innumerable presence of that fixity of the hand in the night. "It's time for a bath", "let's have lunch now", "off to bed", "someone's at the door" were for me like in-

scriptions that engendered ceaseless evaporations, unchanging and obsessive sketches for novels. They were larvae developing into metaphors in continuous chains, like a farewell and then another visit.

Waiting for the hand and having it come would start the verbal chain, or in that unending development the nighttime hand would be found. Sometimes waiting for the hand was fruitless and that would disproportionately separate one syllable from another, one word from its travelling companion. It was a momentary void because of the distance, which could engender things either in an anxious time of waiting or in the paradoxical emptiness of some good advice. It was like a move made in a game that fell, or I should say *collapsed,* upon some unknown board. A disturbing verbal move, because something advanced and then something in return offered a challenge and sent out its call over a net that brought up only one single fish eager to befriend all others.

In this way, I found in every word a germ that sprang from a union of the most distant stars with the most hidden things inside us, just as, at the end of time, the pause and expansion of each moment of our breathing will be occupied by an irreplaceable and unique word. In each word there will be a germ planted in the communicating vessels of the sentence, but in that world the verbal germ, as in the succession of visible and invisible spaces in breathing, produces the astonishment natural to man at a coordinate in time. The realm of the stars, that realm the Taoists called the silent sky, required the transmutations in man's deepest flesh, the fires of his innermost organs, his most secret inner changes, for the purposes of which the mysterious pineal eye perhaps existed, the extinct inner mirror reconstructed by the Greeks as "being," like the *moi haïssable* of Pascal, like the "unified self" of the Alexandrines, which later will attain its highest expression in Saint Augustine's *logos spermatikos,* the participation of each individual word in the universal word, a participation that includes a breathing that joins the visible and the invisible, a metamorphic digestion and a spermatic processional that changes the germ into a universal word, a complementary protoplasmatic hunger that engenders the participation of each and every word in an infinite, recognizable possibility.

But man not only germinates, he also elects. I would stress the similarity between these two phenomena, which are for me

equally mysterious, because when we elect we start a new germ, but, since this germ stands in a more direct relation to man, we will call it an "act." In the dimension of poetry, to carry out an act and to elect are like a prolongation of the germ, because that act and that election come within what is known as the tactile consciousness of the blind, though, even as I venture to call it that, I know I only slightly approximate what it is.

It is an act that takes place and an election that occurs in a ciphered form beyond nature, in supernature. The answer to a question that cannot be formulated, that floats in infinity. A ceaseless answer to the terrible question posed by the demiurge: why does it rain in the desert? Act and election that take place in supernature. Cities that man reaches and then cannot reconstruct. Cities slowly built over thousands of years and then struck down and levelled in the blink of an eye. Made and unmade with the rhythm of our breathing. Sometimes made by the sudden descent of the stars and other times made like a row of instantaneous columns rising out of the earth.

What is "supernature"? The penetration of the image into nature engenders supernature. In that dimension I never tire of repeating the words of Pascal, which were a revelation for me: "since true nature has been lost, everything can be nature"; the terrible affirmative force of those words made me decide to put the image in the place of the nature that has been lost. In that way, man replies to the determinism of nature with the total freedom of the image. And the pessimism of lost nature is answered with the invincible joy in man of the reconstructed image.

Do they live in some ruins? Are they actors on vacation? Is there a painter there? We are looking at Goya's painting *La gruta,* one of his best but one of his least considered. In the background, the purple sky and accumulated clouds of El Greco, contrasting with the calm flight of the doves. Covered by the tablecloth, or underneath the table, they hide so the pigeons will come closer. A coliseum in ruins, a deserted square, the collapsed wing of a convent. In front of that desolation they have set up a stall to sell food, where an apparition covered with a tablecloth pecked by the pigeons engenders expectation and humor. It is an unknown space and an errant time that have no place on earth. And yet, we walk in this here and elapse in this now, and we succeed in reconstructing an image. That is supernature.

Supernature is revealed not only by man's intervention in nature: man and nature both, each at their own risk, join together in supernature. Among the Tartars, dead children marry. On fine paper, drawings are made of the warriors who attend the wedding, the musicians, the family members bearing pitchers for the libations. All those present sign their names and the signatures are kept in well-guarded archives. Both families of the dead children try to keep each other company, living in the same neighborhood. They share their property and celebrate all ritual feasts together. Here we have life going on very actively around the dead and the dead children as a couple penetrating into life. This is a reply to what the morphologists of the Goethean school have claimed, that all species in becoming more perfect engender a new species, in the same way that nature, when enlarged by the image man provides, attains to the new realm of supernature.

In the mestabas of ancient Egypt, a door was always left open to receive the magnetic winds of the desert. Genetic winds that the dead continue to receive. The penetration of the pyramids northward into the parched lands caused the queen's chamber to be constructed with the most favorable orientation possible for receiving the magnetic winds of the genesial desert. Hence my belief that the construction of the pyramids was meant to create not only a lasting space for the dead but also a genesial chamber for the kings to procreate with the concurrence of the magnetic winds of the desert. In this way a true lineage of both dead and living kings was attained. One after another the pyramids advanced into the parched lands, into the region of the dead, just as the humus, the muddy lands, were inhabited by the living, and so, at the very edge of death, the genesial chamber of the queen received the plenitude of the magnetic winds, to which Baudelaire's elastic phantoms, the cats considered godlike by Egyptian culture, are so sensitive.

For the Egyptians, the only talking animal was the cat, who could speak the word "like" that could join together the two magnetic ends of its whiskers. These two magnetic points, infinitely relatable to one another, lie at the basis of all metaphorical analogies. It is a genesial, copulative relatedness. Join together the magnetic points of a hedgehog with those of a shepherd's pouch, an example we are very fond of, and a chestnut is engendered.

The magnetic "like" also awakens new species and the realm of supernature.

Supernature has little to do with the *proton pseudos,* the poetic lie of the Greeks, since supernature never loses the primordial substance from which it comes, because it joins the one to the non-dual one, and since man is image, participates in the world as such and in the end encounters a total clarification of the image. If the image were denied him then he would have no knowledge whatsoever of resurrection. The image is the unending complement to what we can only partly see and hear. Pascal's fearful *entredeux* can only be filled by the image.

Horror vacui is the fear of being left with no images at all, in times when the pessimistic combinational finitude of separate particles prevailed over the demiurge's spiraling movement to break away. In numerous medieval legends there are mirrors that do not reflect the image of a damaged or demoniacal body, because when the mirror does not speak, the devil sticks out his slimy tongue. That innate conviction in man of knowing that our key can open the door of another house, our sword can lead another army in the desert, our cards can play another game in another place. Everywhere there is the reminiscence of something unconditioned and unknown to us, a reminiscence engendered by a causality in what we can see, which we sense like a lost city we recognize anew. Actually, everything the image is based upon is hypertelic, goes beyond its finality, rejects that finality and offers the infinite surprise of what I have called "the ecstasy of participation in the homogeneous," a point, an image, ranging in space. It is a tree, a reminiscence, a conversation strengthening a river by tracing a line with our finger.

Germ, act and then potency. Possibility of act, act upon a point and point that resists. The point is an Argos, a lynx, and leaves its track among the stars. Its traces, endowed with an invisible phosphorescence, are lasting. In all this there is a finite possibility that potency interprets and develops. A man's act can reproduce a germ in nature, and make poetry permanent by a secret relationship between germ and act. It is a germ-act that man can accomplish and reproduce. The howling, penetrating unity of a hunt, a cry of exultation, the permanent response of an orchestra in time, the warriors in the shadow of the walls of Ilium, the

Grande Armée, what I have called the imaginary eras and also supernature—all these form by an interaction of germ, act and potency new and unknown germs, acts and potencies. Planting a germ or seed on earth also means planting it among the stars, and following the course of a river also means walking one's way through the clouds, just as in Chinese theater a certain movement of the legs signifies riding on horseback.

When potency is applied to a point or when it acts in space, it does so always in company with the imago, the deepest unity we can know between the realm of the stars and the earth. If potency were to act without the image, it would be only a self-destructive act having no participation, but every act, every potency, is an infinite growth, an overriding excess, in which the stars reinforce the earth. The image, in participating in the act, produces a momentary visibility, which, without the image as the only recourse available to man, would be an impenetrable excess. In that way, man takes over that excess, makes it come forth and reincorporates a new excess. All poiesis is an act of participation in that excess, a participation of man in the universal spirit, in the Holy Spirit, in the universal mother.

Man as germ points to that development in his surroundings, and a broad strong basic trunk equates it with a fervor for establishing foundations, though we will never know, looking only at nature, what causal series produce splendor or decay, nor at what moment the unconditioned will irresistibly penetrate into those causal series. In some Asian cities, when people move from life into death, the dead are not taken out through the door, but instead a wall is torn down, as if the dead were being prepared for a new order of causality. In other Asian cities, at the moment of cremation, drawings on paper made by friends, and jewels and food are also put into the flames, as if to provide protection and company during a voyage that is supposed to be into another space.

In a few chosen vessels, as they are called in the Bible, their development in life goes forward along with a prodigious anticipation of that other space. From the stark plains of Castille comes the foundation established by Saint Teresa as an oblique experience that is later reproduced in Marti, for whom the paradoxical germ of exile takes the place of the desert. After his imprisonment,

Marti must have felt a kind of rebirth in the image of resurrection, just as later, after his death, he comes forth again in our flesh. The desert and its new symbolic appearance in an exile become equivalent. Hence, in *Paradiso,* in order to prepare the way for his last encounter with Oppiano Licario, in order to attain to the new causality, to the Tibetan city, José Cemi has to go through all the occurrences and recurrences of the night. The placental descent of night, the balancing point of midnight, appear as variants of desert and exile. All the possibilities of the poetic system have been set in motion, so that Cemi can keep his appointment with Licario, the Icarus, the new attempter of the impossible.

In *Paradiso,* world outside time becomes equivalent to supernature, since time is also lost nature and the image is reconstructed as supernature. Liberation from time is the most unrelenting constant of supernature. Oppiano Licario wants to provoke that supernature. Thus he continues on its quest through ceaseless labyrinths. Chapter XII, negation of time: inside the glass urn the dead boy and the dead centurion ceaselessly exchange faces. But in Chapter XIV, at the end, the one who appears in the urn is Oppiano Licario himself. Negation of time achieved in sleep, where not only time but also space disappear. I move the enormity of an axe, I reach infinite velocities, I see the blind men in the markets at night talking about the pictorial qualities of strawberries, and finally the Roman soldiers playing dibstones in the ruins: I attain the tetractis, the number four, god. Chapter XIII attempts to show a *perpetuum mobile* in order to break free of spatial conditioning. The sheep's head turning on a pinion attains that freedom and in that dimension of Oppiano Licario, the dimension of supernature, the figures from a childhood past return. It is a cognitive infinity acquired in Licario's presence, but in a different Pythagorean rhythm: from the systaltic, violent rhythm of the passions, there has been a movement to the hesichastic rhythm of tranquility and contemplative wisdom.

Licario has set in motion the vast coordinates of his poetic system in preparation for his last encounter with Cemi. It was necessary for Cemi to have his last encounter with Licario's words. "The spider and the image in place of the body" says one of the statements he is given on the last night. Licario's sister Inaca Eco Licario appears and delivers that poetic statement as if it were a

promised land. The shadow, the double, is the one who delivers the offering. The double makes the first offering, delivers the first image and Cemi ascends the sacrificial stone in order to put into effect his patronymic meaning of "idol" or "image." Let us suppose a starry Pythagorean night in 1955. I have spent several hours listening to Johann Sebastian's *Art of the Fugue,* absorbed in the interweavings of the *fuga per canon.* Infinite relationships are attained in the spirals of the night. The constructions and dilations of the rhythm are repeated in each of our steps and we grow as we walk. We go down one of those streets that have swollen like the rivers of paradise. The lights of the funeral parlor shining in the night, without realizing it, have to startle and halt the person walking by. The repeated music of a merry-go-round sustains and hastens the person on a nighttime stroll. The house in its vertical dimension, like a demented tree, thrusts at us the temptation of its last terrace, where, under the protection of the priapic god Terminus, two buffoons are playing chess. Here there is something like the repetition of a circular movement. At the very edge of death, the coordinates of the poetic system thrash about desperately; with nature now exhausted, supernature subsists; with the earthly image now shattered, the unending stellar images begin. There, in the most unattainable distance, where the Pythagoreans located the soul of the stars.

The surprise is the house with its blinding lights, which the man interprets, while his saliva thickens and the circulations of his lymph and blood flow together. A *maestoso* and a *vivace* form a new unity which moves forward like a chessman into the invisible. In the merry-go-round there is also a circular repetition which breaks into spirals, into a shower of stars in the Babylonian night, into the comet that precedes and announces the death of Julius Caesar. A black cat of enormous size that goes from one crowd of people to another, as an announcement of death. The searching orange spheres in Van Gogh's night, cast like stones into the belly of the whale. It is the secret conversation at the entrance to Toledo in El Greco. It is the infinitely repeated music of the merry-go-round, between the blazing house of death and the infinite vertical polyhedron, where the image would like to set up its winter quarters. It is the indomitable urge to reach the Tibetan city of the stars, where man converses with the white buffalo, where vegetal shadows penetrate into our sleep. One day I

heard one of our *decimistas* say, as he turned an octosyllable: "the soul grows in the shade" *(el alma se da en la sombra)*. An intuition that concurs with a theologian who tells us that man has to feel like the plants, think like the angels and live like the animals. Perhaps, at the other end of the cord occupied by the angel, what we have is not the beast, but rather that happy coincidence of humanism's *otium cum dignitate* and the grazing of the beasts, both of which are manifestations of the Taoist's contemplation of the silent sky. The day we can establish a mutual clarification between human leisure and animal grazing, true nature will again be inhabited, because in both activities there is an expectation of the realm of the stars, of the world of infinite openness, for the complete relationship between animals and their surroundings has not yet been deeply understood and we are still ignorant of how the interrelationships of the universal word are established, but some day the world of *gnosis* and the world of *physis* will be univocal.

A surprise in the course of the seasons. Rain and more rain. When we go to bed, the cold linen offers its first rebuff, we have to press the pillow closer to our cheek to feel the delight of resting against something, a sensation like sailing into a resistance that can be overcome. Our sleep, as it continues, occupies new fragments of the night. Wool at night, slowly and secretly, comes to prevail over daytime linen, and the goat goes on dancing, but no longer in the sunbeam. All that is hidden, closed off, put away, opens its doors and offers the quiet new sumptuousness of a new marketplace. Cotton coins that make no metallic sound purchase magical fabrics. Shapeless forms that had been kept in the storehouse now move toward the four bonfires blazing at the four corners of the marketplace and turn into clusters of faces. All that is hidden and dark, as the new season arrives, takes on figure and shape, becomes the child who leaves his house every morning in Whitman's poem. And he comes back and tells his tale. And he gets lost and goes on with his tale: can you hear him?

In the big house on the army base, I used to watch the coming of winter. The kitchen, the dining room and the bedrooms became more subtle in their differences, their silences made a more inward sound, conversations turned more to whispers. My grandmother would visit us more often. Our preparations for her visits were very extensive and careful, it seemed as if she were coming

to spend the whole winter with us, but the day after she arrived, at breakfast we would hear her say: "I don't like to abandon my house on the Prado," using the word "abandon" the way a queen refers to a castle that has been abandoned or the way we refer to a neighbor who has abandoned her children. An abandonment and neglect grandmother found intolerable. She would spend a very happy day with us, but by late afternoon she was already getting ready to go back home. I would spend the rest of the day in the sadness of that farewell. I would wander much too slowly through every room in the house. I would linger as I went from the living room out to the backyard and see there, hung out for airing, the bedspreads that were going to inaugurate the winter. Somebody would come and start beating the dust out of the bedspreads with some long branches. And the dust flying up would turn into showers of sparks that enlarged or blotted out the faces that would come out of the fabric until the branches made them disappear. On misty winter days I liked to watch those faces that only my imago projected and that then faded away, sneezing from the dust.

Those faces I attempted to fix in a poem:

Golpea el pastor con su cayado
las más delgades telas,
después del inútil ruido del azoro,
otra llamada, que ya no está, nos viene.
Ese ruido, naciendo en otra puerta,
se deshace en las preguntas de una muerte.
Ruido de otro total se perderia,
si no fuese universal la carne de la tela.
Nadando en nuestro instante alguien viene
a brindar su cuello por regusto o sucesión
y aunque el cayado se aplaque por las venas,
saca, saca las caras de la tela.
El golpe no es el que corresponde a cada cara
y cada cara se pierde por la tela.

The shepherd knocks with his staff
the thinnest fabrics,
after the useless noise of the fright,

another call, not there any more, comes to us.
That noise, arising at another door,
dissolves into the questions of a death.
Noise of another total would be lost,
if the flesh of the fabric were not universal.
Swimming in our instant someone comes
to offer his neck in aftertaste or succession
and even though the staff is placated in the veins,
it brings, brings out the faces from the fabric.
The knock is not the one that corresponds to each face
and each face is lost in the fabric.

But the poem was also imparted by a kind of daring. Its title taken from esoteric Pythagorean thought and symbolic mathematics was pervaded by another adolescent innocence. The poem was accompanied by another memory, not the clouds of autumn, but the operations of algebra. Things hidden behind the full moon of the zero. A negative quantity coming to strengthen another growth in memory. In that winter fabric, behind those clouds of dust, there were chubby-faced angels or bony heads nodding and oozing tar and pitch. Remember that figures appearing in showers of sparks, billowing dust or clouds display obvious traces of pitch on their teeth, their finger tips or their ear lobes: are these perhaps the signs of their origin or derivation? Unknown affinities with the world of carbon and flames are betrayed at times, and this makes the figures recognizable, because of their blackheads or the dust left on them from their conversations with Maria la Luna.

Hidden in the minus zero, in the layers of dust, the faces kept on disappearing. When the branches began to beat the bedspreads, the signs would dig their nails into the negative quantities in order to hang on to a few faces, a few intersecting lines, until finally the fabric was alive with conversations, with afterdinner talk, with interchangeable faces. It seemed as if the masks were kept in huge wardrobes with three mirrors and came back from one season to another.

The house offered not only that expected metamorphosis, but also continuing hidden marvels. The colonel's study. Tables with maps and drawings, weapons hanging on the wall, diplomas, medals, armillary spheres, Mercator projections. That was located

on the other side of our parents' bedroom, beyond which we never went. The "beyond" was the study, where the colonel spent most of his afternoons and evenings. If we ever penetrated into that room, through some furtively opened door, we would then run away in fright, like someone who has entered an atmosphere that refracts him. We would go in slowly, looking at a corner or a shadow or a creaking piece of furniture, and then run out like arrows shot from a bow.

That room was also a gift from the course of the seasons. It would be opened up to the curiosity of the other inhabitants of the house in the muffled passage from summer to winter. There you could see a piece of black and green marble, comparative drawings of daggers from Florence and Berlin, an obsidian chess set with men as large as your hand. It would be opened up simply to be aired out, but for us it was a kind of magic spell, a challenge, something that invited us to commit some exceptional act and then withdraw in concealment. Those figures appearing in the changes of seasons, those fleeting sallies beyond what we ordinarily knew, occurred slowly, as if lingeringly and apart from any repetition. Insistence did not seem to be part of their nature. They were fleeting, barely glimpsed, shadowy, but how deeply they satisfied us, and now that we are separated from ourselves by the dusty sands of time, they seem as if they had been repeated over and over again, as if innumerable faces kept coming out of the fabrics, as if we had made whole sojourns out beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

From that room, library, storeroom, resting place for wayward things, I would later unravel the magic that I have sensed in all dwelling places of men, like the protectiveness of a snail that offers its defensive labyrinths to the assaults of the ocean's waves in the darkness of night.

It was the conviction that there, in the remoteness of what was right at hand, could be found all the sparks of an unseen forge. All the inhabitants of the house were asleep, but in that room that was unlike the others, we could perceive the difference with all the secret involutions of our being, there were movements so slow as to extend over thousands of years or centered on a wheel spinning with dizzying speed. There life took on indecipherable movements, remnants of some liturgy in a deserted forest or dense

filterings down into some underwater cave, but the sleepers would come holding their tiny seashells to listen to the stars and broad lecterns would allow the intoning of psalms.

The conviction that the dragon, what is there and not there, what appears and disappears, needs a place of protection out beyond the Pillars of Hercules, also had at its disposal the library as a supernature. There, in solitude one seeks company, and more specifically in public libraries, where company seeks solitude. The struggle against the dragon had to take place in the ceaseless relationships between solitude and company. From the memory of the mysterious room, out beyond the pillars, on the army base, would come my conception of Chinese culture: the library as dragon. Lao Tse, he of the sense of the creative that is uncreated, was a librarian, and Doctor Kung Tse, the Confucius of the Jesuits, spent the last fourteen years of his life working on the *I Ching,* the book of changes, of the visible and the invisible, where the dragon takes up lodging in a book to speak with the dead and trace the coordinates between the insignificant and the vast excess of the stars. And, just as we can make writing more legible with fire, so we can speak with the invisible.

In itself, the urge to bring to a book that which cannot be heard or see, the urge to have the uncreated that creates take on meaning, tells us that the struggle with the dragon has to be out beyond the pillars, that it will be in an imaginary era, that it will have its place in supernature. And just as it is claimed in some medieval legend that the devil likes to sleep in the shadow of the bell tower, so the uncreated that creates likes to spend the day in the library, because the library has begun by being something unheard, unseen, and thus nature will be found again in supernature.

We have also lost the living sense of things so decisive for man as a bonfire, a glass of water, a mirror or a sword, or as the alphabet, that safeguard to keep caravans from being lost in the desert. Along with the memory of the house, the river, the planted fields, the bull, in the alphabet we find the five letters that poetry provides. These are signs that cannot be deciphered, they must not be signs of reminiscences of figures, but symbols of the persistence of the secret challenge concentrated in an alphabet. This is the offering made by poetry, five unknown letters, wayward analogue

between the stars and the earth, of the cloud entering the mirror. These were the letters in the depths that leap out like fish when we drink water from our cupped hands.

I would look out into the backyard again and that distance between the limits of the house and the line of the horizon also became filled with unknown figures. The presence of hand upon hand in the middle of the night would change into a column of army mules going down into the woods, into the darkness. I would watch them and see how, with the most invincible resistance, they moved into a destiny they knew nothing about. They plodded their way through Fall and Redemption, enduring total sorrow. The closer I got to them, the more clearly I could see the trembling of their skin. They would sweat, tremble and plod, on and on. They knew nothing of their destiny, but they resisted. They went down into their Fall as into their Glory, and their resistance lighted the way for the passage of great transports. One might say that in reply to the punishment they receive they offer the punishment of their resistance. They move unknowingly out beyond the pillars, breathe like bellows in supernature and move the broad foundations of imaginary eras. Their distances are occupied by the ceaseless transformations of poetry. The resistance of the mule sows its seeds in the abyss, just as the duration of poetry sows its seeds by a resurgence in the stars. The one resists in its body, the other resists in time, and the incipient wings of each can be seen to seek their complements, unknown, known and again unknown.

Because of an unprecedented increase in collections of family photographs, I realized that I was moving from a blazing zenith, from the ways of the *splendor formae,* down into a deep darkness. When my mother died, her album of family pictures enlarged my collection. In hers the people most frequently depicted were those who had gone down into the shadows of Hades, whereas in mine it was my contemporaries, those who still enjoyed the realm of light. What I can now contemplate with apparent calm was for me then a very violent, desperate shock. It was as if old relationships, the most pathetic family stories, had become peopled anew, had come to the table after dinner and could quietly dialogue with us, without the slightest alarm on our part.

Amid all these dizzying trials, I found myself plunged into darkness. The more these pictures found their places in the

reaches of the past, the more they took on for me the dim glow of words read under a gas lamp. These portraits regained their serene joy, their sumptuous presence. They were real ghosts, tangibly existing in the image that provided them with bodies to walk about in, with voices that could be heard and with deeply moving farewells. The image they had abandoned like an egg embodied them anew. They lived in the palace with the green windows, went about the city with a hundred doors, came to hear mass in the Cathedral of Havana. That exquisite and most refined group of people, never complaining, never hurried, did not need any help from me to reach the house where the dragon was lodged. I am the spirit befuddled by those apparently confused emigrants, I am the one who listens, seeks and brings together again the cotton and the scent of vanilla, the wavering lamp and the ancestral yellow of the lace. There stands Andresito, the child prodigy, holding his violin: he was killed in an accident in a benefit held to collect funds for the cause of Cuban Independence. He was playing that night in the tuxedo his father often wore. He fell from the elevator and died and my grandfather died soon after of grief. And my grandmother, telling the story of it all, would end with a kind of antistrophe from some Greek tragedy: and why did it have to be my son? When I was a child I wanted to be that violinist, the one who would attain expression in exchange for a confrontation with the *fatum*. He was constantly configured in me, even across the distance of death. He was the absent one, gone with the best of the family into the darkness of Moira, taking up all our family *simpathos*, and I liked to hear my grandmother and my mother tell what his studies and the night he died were like. And the delicacy of my Aunt Queta, my father's sister, secretly in love with my Uncle Alberto, my mother's brother, who, beneath his exterior as the ne'er-do-well uncle that all families have, possessed the treasure of a style of conversation that I have always sought to have as the source of my own stories.

In 1880, my maternal grandfather, who was very Cuban and went into revolutionary exile years later, made a trip to Spain. Around the same time, my paternal grandfather, who was a Basque and very Spanish, made his trip to Cuba. Years after, both families entwined their destinies in such a way that whenever I have been called a *vasco criollo* I have always felt a special pride, but my true pride I need not even confess.

A few years before she died, my grandmother opened up a gigantic wardrobe that was located in the back room of her Prado house, and then my youthful years felt a great flood of memories rush over me. There were my grandfather's tuxedo, the one my Uncle Andresito died in, and the dresses that my grandmother had worn to all her daughters' weddings. There also was an enormous inkstand with an inkwell and some solid silver reindeers, and lying on top of the inkstand was an amber backscratcher of the kind often used in the 18th and 19th centuries. That innocent wave of recollections went into the second stanza of my poem "Oda a Julián del Casal," where, to suggest the title of one of Casal's own poems, I allude to the reindeer on the inkstand and an amber backscratcher. Sometimes I think with delight that on the day of farewells, that gigantic wardrobe will again open for me. We hear once more:

> *Déjenlo que acompañe sin hablar,*
> *permítidle, blandamente, que se vuelva*
> *hacia el frutero donde están los osos*
> *con el plato de nieve, o el reno*
> *de la escribanía, con su manilla de ambar.*
>
> Let him be with us and not speak,
> allow him, softly, to turn
> toward the fruit bowl where the bears are
> with the plate of snow, or the reindeer
> on the inkstand, with its amber backscratcher.

It was a prayer I was saying for Casal and for myself.

Inside that magic wardrobe, Uncle Andresito's violin, protected from the dust in its tightly closed case, displayed the silent veins in its wood. Streaks of amber, small tomb of jasper, tiny graceful citadel erected by Amphion. In those parades in my poem "Pensamientos en la Habana," where I don't want to choose my shoes in a store window, where I indicate that the scratch on the lute deciphers nothing, where I conjecture that the first flute was made from a stolen branch, suddenly there comes "the violin of ice shrouded in recollection" *(el violín de hielo amortajado en la reminiscencia),* which awakens the forest harmonium that ties

and unbraids the strands of memory. And it is the violin that seems to exhale the poem's final orchestration: "my soul is not in an ashtray" *(mi alma no está en un cenicero).*

An ancient legend of India reminds us there is a river whose tributaries cannot be known. In the end its flow becomes circular and begins to boil. A tremendous confusion can be seen as it sweeps along, things totally unlike and trivial coexist with jewel-like symmetries and harmonious love. This is the Puraná, carrying everything in its waters, always seeming to be in confusion, with no analogue or likeness possible. And yet this is the river that leads to the gates of Paradise. Amid the reflections of its waves pass in procession the potter's vestibule, the tree of coral, the chain of the tiger's eye, the celestial Ganges, the malachite terrace, the hell of the lances and the repose of the perfect man. A ceaseless contemplation of the river transmits its dualism, the adventure of the analogue and the couples who retire to their small islands. A tree before certain eyes, a tree of coral before the tiger's eye; the lances before the terrace, and then the infernal lances before the paradisiacal terrace of malachite. Blessed are we the ephemeral who can contemplate movement as an image of eternity and follow intently the parabola of the arrow until it is buried beneath the line of the horizon.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This memoir by the Cuban writer José Lezama Lima (1910–1976), originally a lecture he gave in Havana in July 1968 and later included in his book of essays *La cantidad hechizada* (Havana: UNEAC, 1970), is unique among his writings. Nowhere else does he trace so many connections between details in his always enigmatic poems and certain scenes from his early life, thus affording precious insight into the interworkings of memory, imagination, and text. The initial setting, more presupposed than explained, is the house on the military post where Lezama, the son of a Cuban army officer, spent part of his childhood. This setting he could assume his audience would recognize because it was so similar to the

surroundings given his alter ego José Cemi at the opening of his then recently published and already celebrated novel *Paradiso* (1966). Here that household, that family space, at first the lonely scene of childhood nighttime terrors, then becomes a succession of many spaces holding treasures to be gained, lost and regained. This is, in both the most literal and the most far-reaching figurative senses, an "economy": an *oikonomia,* a poetic system of equivalences and transformations rooted in the *oikos,* understanding *oikos* as dwelling place for both living and dead, who have commerce with one another. The speculations that follow upon the encounters with the disembodied hand, using terms such as "supernature," "image," and "imaginary era," can be illuminated by comparison with kindred statements in the 1964 interview with Lezama that I translated in *Sulfur* #24. Many things in "Confluencias" could and should be annotated. Here are a few more clarifications: on pp. 160–161, Lezama had read in a Spanish translation of *The Book of the Dead* that in ancient Egyptian the word for both "cat" and "like" (as in "this is like that") was *mau.* The metaphor likening the shepherd's pouch to a hedgehog harks back to Góngora's *Polifemo* ("Erizo es el zurrón, de la castaña . . ." etc.). On p. 161, "ecstasy of participation in the homogeneous" is the title of one of Lezama's "Ten Prose Poems" translated by me in *Sulfur* #3. On p. 165, *decimistas* are popular poets who orally improvise in *décimas,* ten-line octosyllabic stanzas. On pp. 166–167, the title of the poem quoted (in its entirety), a title Lezama hints at but does not give, is "Magnitud de catidades negativas." This poem is not found in any of his books of poetry, but only in one of his essays, "Exámenes," in *Analecta del reloj* (1953). On pp. 170, the evocation of the army mules was a source for Lezama's well-known poem "Rapsodia para el mulo" (1942), a translation of which can be found in Dudley Fitts' *Anthology of Contemporary Latin American Poetry.* On p. 172, Julián del Casal (1863–1893) was a *fin-de-siècle* Cuban poet and esthete, on the centenary of whose birth Lezama wrote the poem quoted here. "Pensamientos en la Habana" dates from 1944. Lezama's idiosyncratic use of foreign words and phrases (e.g. *simpathos* as a noun, instead of *sympatheia)* I leave unchanged.

PRISCILLA SNEFF

TWO POEMS

O THIS IS A GOLDEN AGE

We're greener than you; we're our own amateur
(You're dwelling amongst dangerous polymers, harmed to your
fingers.) We're
Wonderfully made; we are saving our bodies, albeit so
Holily slowly: the great migration of souls to our
Camoufleur—how surely we are moving, like mobile plants,
To gather incuriously under the overhead light
& we're waving our fringes! lined up behind lucent Christine,
such sage—
Green caryatides laurelled, unlaurelled.
The last one, she, chiton'd in gold; she is ill at ease; it is
I; I am undergoing metaphors and similes
Where pain's not caroled, where questions can no longer be
raised,
Where nothing can be hidden from a brain, not even love.
Last night I woke suddenly: an intellection of gold rain
That scoured my length with skeins of flashing wire
& the gilding stung fiercely.
The deeper imprint of light
Was the touch I had been waiting for, so I could live.
O is this a golden age. O this is a golden age.

"When you are famous for discourse that is stunning and filled
with small, ornamented traps,
You are naturally one of the invited: *Reception Following in the
Paleontology Museum*. Christ, why not the crypts, then?
—With the guests gaily arriving through subways and steam-
tunnels under the bride's father's city? And Christ, when
you are famous
To the third degree (for the third degree), travelling in these
celebrated circles and all, while daily translating
Prophetic parchments out of an urgent Ursprach to the Press for
serial publication
—*The Dead Sea Scrolls, Interpreted and Questioned*—why, I was
saying, does tonight's touching ceremony, a doomed
Mere-mortal fling, bring hauntingly to mind the oldest vows of
Natural Magic?

Well, rhetorical questions are already answered *in situ*, so
always they bring you back to your dear senses
For a dumb spell; thank God for that, except if you hunt
something queerer than love's numbskull
As your spooked heart's quarry, like the bride and groom we
saw this evening at St. George's.
Isn't couplehood (they seemed to be saying) the last grand
frontier, the bride a bright white
Pavilion of silk pitched madly alongside the altar, and the
marriage vow the provisional settlement
Of pioneers or naturalist-explorers of a bold, daft school? Isn't it
possible
To take gracious leave of your old scriptures and guidebooks, to
go paired, say,
As if into a fossil flat (but here I invent), leaving behind you a
picked trail you can take in your memory
—For there, looking back, you might know your own minds
and speak them, too,
Like the lovers this evening, sanely removing their rings, saying
'What do you take me for?'
Saying, 'I only know I do.'

And so they were married, still wondering. Christ, what have you wondered with all your heart, I ask myself now,
Which history hasn't answered beforehand in some shape or form
Left here as memento? If only all relics of what's past would burn themselves up in our brilliant careers
Like rolled parchment falling to ash at a glance, or the fossil fuel gunned in a car on the way
To a wedding or wedding reception, only then we'd made ourselves empty and virgin terrain
To confront in our rear-view—a 'hero's' cleared path for original queries!
But this would require exhausting one's life and is maybe too much to ask of a body
Like it's maybe too much to ask of this one. *Christ,* when younger I was severe and demanded everything of the classical languages
And the natural sciences—a homecoming, most of all—until the night I found myself dumb and widearmed,
Oddly grateful, and moving forward relentlessly as if down a dark and sunken lover's lane
In ground originally traversed by highway, following a vague 'memento mori,' cryptic
Apparition of *The Beautiful Stranger* who wafted away before me shapeless and formless as an odor or spook,
Finally finding myself here, tonight, at this gathering, and so full of life: It's a party! Amidst the skeletons! Where I circulate
Full of wonder—for these others are oracular guests, too; makers of waves and news
And art and love and magic.

* * *

Entranced by the beautiful brain surgeon I sidle to stand by her left breast
And ask a brief question: 'Isn't augury bunk?' but she's already moved
To the next room, leaving some smoke rings and blank spot haunted by perfume

—Or maybe it's specimen jars on the shelves emitting
preservative smells
—Or maybe it's old ghosts electing to float from my man's mind
out via the nostrils
Now we're back in a room that mirrors the room where they got
themselves trapped;
I mean, of course, home. I mean, years ago at my first
university,
Adventuring once through the network of cellars and tunnels (at
night) undermining
The north part of campus, I found, with its basement door,
strange!, disengaged,
The mysterious sealed sandstone museum flung freely open to
my investigation. Peradventure the quest
However always enchanting was never so palpable as then.
Never so flesh and blood
—Though what I found, entering solemnly in and climbing the
inner steps to the ground floor, was
A huge lit and stunning hall of mirroring windows, a mirroring
skylight,
And the great archive of ancient sea-mammal bones, each piece
Clustered, fit, and jointed into posed, articulated armatures
So each barred rib-bone was strung correct along the curved
straw of its missing nerve
From brain cavity to ass; I saw the hundred hundred filigree
dumb captives—floating, swimming, and curled—
Hung from hidden rigging over the mirror-polished marble floor.
Then heeding my way religious through the dangling drafty
beasts I heard, perhaps, a sound and so I fled.

* * *

—But back to tonight's affair. Facing myself in the glare from a
glass case of skulls I hear a voice
Cut through the chat and consort music. Startled, I hold myself
still; I hear
*'This Man Has Inner Vision. The Ancients Called It Cosmic
Consciousness'*
And turn quickly to find only smiling, snide Mnemonica, famous
for sex.

'Ah, I thought for a moment that yours was the voice of the old
gods,'
I say pleasantly enough. 'Gods not of the right mind
But of *these* (I gesture to the skulls) with news that once before
seemed inarticulate to me
Or maybe, then, I simply couldn't understand
The sense of it: so many ancient sentences. So sad.
But now I understand each beast's dead doze is but the pose
Of a real good question
Unwhorled from the base of the brain's stem—*very* base but yet
Like dreams, like all nocturnal knowing,
But spinelessly kept unexpressed—
And so let's talk about *you*. Love. . .and what's that devastating
scent you're wearing? *Ars*
Memoriae?—the unscrewed-open phial your lost son sipped
from, *once?*—sweet spirited vertebrate—
No, no reproach my dear; I'd wear such a spectre perfume too,
and just, I'd hope, as nervously; but *you*
Darling—dipping into the drink, I see, and why not?—you look
lovely, you look
Ravished tonight. Has it been done by mirrors?"

AARON SHURIN

INTO DISTANCES

I.

The sky: the sea with wings. There have been days I would stand gazing for hours in diversity. From these fragments, from causes, power, poverty, I belong to experience.

She labored down the path barefoot, the wind wrapped her body, shadowed by clustering blossoms and velvety sunshine. I remember her unhappy married life as more children arrived, taking hold of me on all sides in one spot of my will—"stomp me into the ground." I lied, she was never close to the wind. The fat flowers laughed. I was hardened and have no meaning.

We looked: sweeping down the approaching road it grew louder, rushed against the flat earth roaring. Smell and hear and see and feel everything! I listened to the voice and knew it sucked up all the air around us. Slowly I was learning shame and secrecy, forced joy behind the henhouse, slept off something wrong, shook me nameless and struck my body with perfection and disgust. His word was enough for me, though I knew he'd never be his word.

My grandmother when there is no moon. She possessed all and assumed control, milked the cows with the movements of a man, skimmed under her hands the dawn and carried pistons to bed at night. In private no man could look her in the eye; her thick hair would appear in the door: she walked immune. At my tears she would use it on me: "You're unornamented, girl!" That was long ago; I walk hand in hand with unloveliness that gave distinction to destruction. Anyone elaborated the story through my silence.

While the cold sky came driving down to the grass with dew, the men cut firewood, the women peeled and sliced. If you looked at

them you felt as if you'd worked yourself, who pass greeting over the hills, family honor under the cedar trees, torture their wives, show no resentment, work again, hard filled with labor our house smooth as night.

Now around through the crowd on the platform music. His silver buckle distinguished him, he knew all the songs, he was young and called for the dance. Everyone bowed, separated, flaming light in the center they met, flying around and drifting clouds. His side, her face, her hands, his bending shoulder. I climbed before me a sea of swinging figures, rushed me under the raised legs and skirts. And the calling!. . .all the good things. . .listening. . .I was so little!

The slaughtering smoking winter filled mounds. You threw in a handful of corn and you could eat into deep plates. Was my name Standing Farther, Cooler and Tougher, Virgin Whiteness, Bleeding Arrows? Was there a secret tale in my voice that continued at midnight when the stars were creeping, quarreling into my child life money terror, dog work, disobey, placed my hand where we were not; tears fell on it.

We went by covered wagon, reached a forest, and stopped. Under the sky I stood on the yielding earth, her eyes were black, transitoriness came and swept the hills into distances. She stood facing north and west and south. I must turn around again and carry down words. It has been years with ease and swiftness. They came soundlessly over the wheel of the sky.

If you want to run away don't tell stories. She turned swiftly and gazed at her standing there. She could not hide the eyes still young and flared open. I began to make up a story—that eventuality between me and the door—pushed by the sky and some wind carrying me on its back. I would say I was walking down the road and slipped into smooth clouds, long time. We all stood and melted together, there where that black speck was gone. . .

II.

The town was occupied—Strike!—bullets flying on our side of the river. The law restored the convicted back in the ground. In the

dark tunnels long hours dug and dragged it to the end of the month. I passed in a foreign tongue, ceaselessly preparing for another construction.

She kept her eyes on the edge of an excavation. I have seen that look in other eyes, in love with a terrible thing and submerged in another: I can show each night. The men mixed with clay—foul-mouthed and trusting—spent it in one night. She befriended the men, alone in the darkness humble before infinity. The lean one was one of these; the men exchanged glances; big to her and gleamed with smothered laughter. He called to me and I slipped in. We passed through a canyon, and you can have this horse I'm riding.

If you open a book you have to write in it. I fled beyond the bitter tracks we had made. The gleaming road leapt forward like water, moonlight ice with prairie grass and purple hills. Animals cried there, and stretched on stones. Beyond them mountains called the snows into crevices.

You passed empty houses—The Flats—coyotes left their hiding places. The saloon, the schoolhouse, the Company. Miners—boys!—eating and breeding; the next strike; hunger would not give credit. I heard the possessors deserve the world of knowledge. There was silence about her for miles, I remade her silence. She would turn without a word, would gather the hills, would follow the same tune unrolling in the wind. Once, I myself knew it, in one spot on the hard, packed earth.

She worked and buried her head at night, knew little of theory but turned loose her convictions upon them. Could she tear the petrified trees from the earth by their roots? It beat rhythmically, climbed the flight of stairs, and end of "education" and enemy of women, began to draw the veil of forgetfulness down over desire. I was my wind as I sit here with leaves about me. I wrote down my name in actions not suitable for position.

If they told a story I understand their purpose. Grave things drawn beyond their depths. As I wrote I recalled—a laborer can turn her hand—pushed upward, staring at it, connected, convicted. Words are nothing but words—then gradually they were streets. I

walked, there were trees flowing, earth against my body, face down in work and sleep. And those up there: his mouth and eyes, my mother with mud, the company store. She had come before me, a woman and a stranger, muscular arms and wilderness under the skin. The word subjects her to the circle to be pure and repeated. Words cannot erase experience.

The train was an entreaty, but did not buy a ticket to leave. I marched and searched their faces. The lines—their falling music—would not be ended. . .

III.

At night the wind from the mesa could reach and I rode safely. Mingling with wailing to demonstrate "learned something." Yes, they are a part of her blood, forming far from town the cold lightning across my doorway. I erased those dead songs from my tongue.

Springtime, up the fuzzy hills, the river higher, rushing each night in our ears. In the semi-darkness the shouting between us was already filled. I cried out, waded under, crept nearer, clung to mine. Lights were burning like an animal that has eaten. The swaying water sailing away, hung in the willow trees, sated; in the morning the world is gone. Today is shivering, those were my blood and bodies, far back from the dark mountains in the flood.

Listen and look intelligent—you have grammar and a few more things, cook their food, wash bed, made skirts in her big-veined hands—a short distance from the rock rim for hours. Names and addresses contained patterns; from this short list I chose these working shoulders.

Ah!—house!—drive me over the hills tomorrow! One day my mother was sick and I must go home. Up the canyon road the scrub oak pulling at the frozen ground—only thinking, feeling nothing—separate units exhausted distances, down the lashing road must be coaxed a faltering child. I stumbled the steps, beyond the windows shattered into bits. . .three days and nights would awaken me. . .tiny eyes in the next room. . .clasped her

unfamiliar hand. . .I would not give it nourishment. That morning was there. In my arms she tore back her yearning and pulled me to my feet. Speech contracted in circles, and I understand nothing except this thing.

Turning away her face from us stood watching that kicking baby. We began in a station and met swept clean across the plains. She followed her silence in every direction, calling down the wind and the rain accusingly. Her eyes swooped upon its prey: I did not weep.

She grew stronger, tightly about me, my body between them. Tangled in the folds and had laughed herself into solemnity. To me her living in the same way made theirs—more rights over body and soul—pledged by such things to self-respect and conviction. We would go there—my voice continued—into a world.

A woman arrived in town with palm trees on the shore. The network of light—of tracks—regarded her with surprise. "Is there a train due here?" "You're too early," and vanished from her face. Hunger wondered if she could stand on her feet; every word uttered about her sought its way to food. She went away ethereal and almost pleasant. The wind in the tree far back recorded the floor.

Now long afterward my legs trembled when I stood. We talked of that intellectual world where waves of thought sweep for the depths, of work and nearly starved, of resentment downstairs, traveled farther, weeping women, the eastern sky passing the dawn through material things. In a canyon, flowing by my bones, the river cooled.

The trail had guarded these rugged hills, black, stony, frying. Her head touched the ground in greeting, where the trees began to grow again. Into an arroyo and came up on the other side. At dusk the giant cacti, arms against the sky. Where the wind haunting the mountain captured her penetrated friendship. In the center, the string around, she was crossing over, changing places; the peculiar fierce movements of her body beneath me tore through the air. Neck to neck, the wind sweeping her hair back, lathering,

rearing and whirling; through her muscles and her lips I received the quivering water.

IV.

Slowly the train came toward me, I heard her teasing voice. My face, my eyes, my skin and hair, moved forward. "I made them," then I turned and watched her. Voices here and there, heavy sleep, across the darkness we lay there, "this life couldn't stand you," or "I couldn't stand this life." I used to be strong. . .going to get work. . .died away uncovered and lay staring through the window. The watching stars seemed good or bad. Far up in a slumber a figure endured experience.

They told me what they believed, now you tell me who did that. The rich are interested in prostitution; let any man judge my nobody body. In my work her head blossoms and bent, a woman actively doing something. Dark and silent were the mansions who live and sleep in peace and luxury—they dug him out and his mouth was filled with mud. Belief and reason went again to the circle.

Little dried up dances could reply to such arguments. I have learned and become a force, and the tea in my cup became cold. Before the sun comes up invaders mingled their customs. Their fragrance came to me with the shadow of purple skies, and the slender forefinger traveling across the page. I shall remember the past, perhaps the present, but the future dissected everything.

It has no fear, no money. Our heads were spreading, a touch of wistfulness in it. It comes back, as if I were a part of the air. Talk to me, I was a raw, impulsive woman, and work was intense. Let affection make conviction the basis of your action. I am organizing and fighting for the wind.

JOHN YAU

ARCHIE RAND: THE FIGURE OF THE ARTIST

I.

In 1987, shortly before he began teaching in the summer session of a small college in upstate New York, Archie Rand conceived of a series of imaginative self-portraits based on Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus,* 1923. After reading through various translations of the sonnets, Rand decided to focus on the second group, there are 29 of them, and set for himself the goal of completing an equal number of paintings during his eight week residency. He arrived at the school with 29 stretched canvases, each of which measured 62" x 38". Within a short time he had applied a monochrome ground to each canvas and completed a self-portrait. The self-portraits corresponded to one of three frontal views; large heads, seated figures, or standing figures. The styles ranged from painterly realism to expressionist.

These portraits became the starting point for an open-ended, improvisational response. While Rilke's poems suggested images and possibilities, it is fruitless to look for one-to-one correspondences between a particular sonnet and the painting numbered after it. Rather than seeing each sonnet as a goal (and the painting as an illustration), Rand used them as starting points.

II.

Rilke described his sonnet sequence, which he wrote during the first three weeks of February (1922), as a dictation he "endured and received." He wrote the 26 sonnets of the first sequence in less than four days, and then finished the Duino Elegies. The second group of sonnets came after the Elegies, and shift their focus from Orpheus to Vera Knoop and Eurydice, both of whom are dead and lost figures. Instead of trying to revitalize them, as Shelley does in *Adonais,* his Elegy to Keats, Rilke chose to dissolve himself as much as possible:

Wheels rolled past us, we stood and stared at the carriages;
houses surrounded us, solid but untrue—and none
of them ever knew us. *What* in that world was real?

II, 8

To all that is used-up, and to all the muffled and dumb
creatures in the world's full reserve, the unsayable sums,
joyfully add your*self,* and cancel the count.

II, 13

III.

The subject of Rand's "Rilke" paintings is the *Self.* By setting himself the task of completing 29 self-portraits within a limited amount of time, he transformed the eight weeks into a period of willingness (or willnessness) and self-consciousness. Rand would use Rilke's poems to discover and overcome his own limitations and habits of thought and action. The poems would function as a kind of mirror where he could begin to see both himself and his responses. Instead of trying to match the poems or compose a narrative, he elected to dissolve both his identity and any need to tell a story. Clearly, this formulation suggests that Rand believes that one of the ways to get beyond self-consciousness and one's habits and patterns of thought is to become a passive receiver through which the *Other* could speak. Naming is listening, and the artist acts as a copyist of internal impulses and discontinuous images. A kind of seismograph, he records whatever comes to mind.

Rand's goal is the realm of improvisation and metamorphosis. However, as someone who was born in 1949, he has defined improvisation very differently than the Abstract-Expressionists, particularly the ones known as the "action painters" (Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Philip Guston). Whereas the older generation of artists wanted to discover essences and essentials, Rand wants to be a conduit or membrane through which any and all images can pass.

Consequently, if Mark Rothko's project was to continue purging references to the external world until he reached an irreducible light and presence, then Rand has deliberately gone in the opposite direction. He not only wants to put everything into a

painting, but he also wants to break down the distinctions separating high art from low culture, one thing from another. He is a self-portraitist who wants to discover all the selves that inhabit him, and to record all the traces of the Other that he remembers, imagines, encounters, and sees.

And yet, at the same time, Rand knows from the outset that his project is doomed to failure. One is severely limited in speaking for others, one is always circumscribed by one's own place—and often privilege—in history. In part, this may be why he chose Rilke's poems as both the framework and springboard for his project. It is a non-heroic gesture, a way of locating oneself in both history and society.

Rand heals the rupture separating art and life by looking for the Self in both. He defines the practice of painting as a public performance: it occurs in both the actual world and the realm of art. At the same time, art uses something else and cannot possibly measure up to it. In this regard, Rand's Rilke paintings are comparable to Picasso's reworking of Valasquez's *Las Meninas* and Jack Spicer's book *After Lorca.*

IV.

Rand's 29 Rilke paintings represent the artist's most recent investigation of a subject that has preoccupied his thinking and practice since he first hit his stride in the late 1960s. In the course of a career that has included painting large public murals based on Jewish themes, Rand has always attempted to let the *Other* speak. To name, of course, is to limit, circumscribe, and mark an identity. But to let the *Other(s)* name themselves is also to memorialize and remember. Rand places his paintings within the unstable world of memory and naming, imagination and discovery, metaphor and actuality, free association and metamorphosis.

Beginning in the early 1980s, he periodically depicted a single male figure. Looking back at these paintings now, it is possible to see them as imaginative self-portraits. In fact, Rand has repeatedly used the format of the imaginative self-portrait to investigate different ideas and beliefs regarding the deepest identity of the artist.

In *Painter,* 1981, for example, Rand depicted a robed figure holding a palette and brush. The figure's high forehead and hawk-like visage evokes Nadar's photographs of Charles Baudelaire.

Surrounded by paint, Rand's unfinished (unpainted) figure stands in profile, brushes in hand. The world is outside or beyond him. At the same time, there is a stand-off between the world outside and the world inside. The "painter" can be seen as either hemmed in and defined by the darkly painted ground or separated from the world by viscous paint.

The theme of identity is picked up in *Cigarette,* 1982. A seated man, dressed in a bathrobe, socks and garters, reads a newspaper, and holds a cigarette in a very unusual and affected manner. In depicting a self-absorbed man in an open bathrobe, Rand is able to reveal the way art history has affected our view of men and women, and vice versa. Is his particular pose, gesture, and manner of dress feminine or masculine? Instead of presenting us with a portrait of a man, each viewer is made to see *through* his or her self. The self becomes a window through which the viewer looks at the painting. Seeing is both a private and public act.

In *Sausage Painter,* for example, Rand focuses on the visual rhyme between a paint tube and a sausage. In the upper half of the painting, he depicts an artist who has been working on a painting of a sausage. He is facing the viewer and holding the paintbrush as if it is a baton. Either he has just completed his performance or he is about to start one. A woman walks by, carrying a pole full of what look like pretzels. In the lower half of the painting is a pastoral landscape with a road stretching back to the horizon. Along the bottom edge, in close-up, is the top of a crenellated castle wall mounted with egg-like spheres.

Over all of this Rand has drawn the thick black acrylic outline of a tube through which something is passing. The outline of the tube contains the artist, while the elongated outline of what is emerging from the tube contains the woman. The rhyme of the tube and the artist suggests a conduit. It also suggests the likelihood that Rand agrees with Norman O. Brown's assertion that all values are bodily values. While the paradigm of the artist as conduit inevitably evokes the figure of the seer or oracle, Rand undermines the seriousness of this figure with an incisive self-mocking humor. The painting is at once funny and enigmatic, perverse and disconcerting.

V.

For Rand, painting is a way, perhaps the only way he knows, of simultaneously destroying and reconstructing the Self. The point is not to arrive at either a solution or a style. In the Rilke paintings, for example, he tries to dissolve both identity and solution. Instead of looking for rhymes, as he did in some of his earlier paintings, Rand enters the unstable realm of free association and aleatory forces. In *XV, After Sonnets to Orpheus, 2,* 1987, Rand depicts a large head floating (or growing) from a tree, beneath which a glowing figure wields an axe. By making both the large head and tiny orange figure have equal importance, Rand offsets the larger figure's dominant presence. On one hand, Rand is able to portray a fluid world of relationships. On the other hand, the images exist in a kind of stand-off. In *I, After Sonnets to Orpheus, 2,* for example, each figure is literally and figuratively an island. The water is rising quickly, and will soon drown them. Right from the beginning of the series, Rand knew that the subject was both the Self and the leaving of Self.

ARCHIE RAND

SIX PAINTINGS

PAINTER, 1981

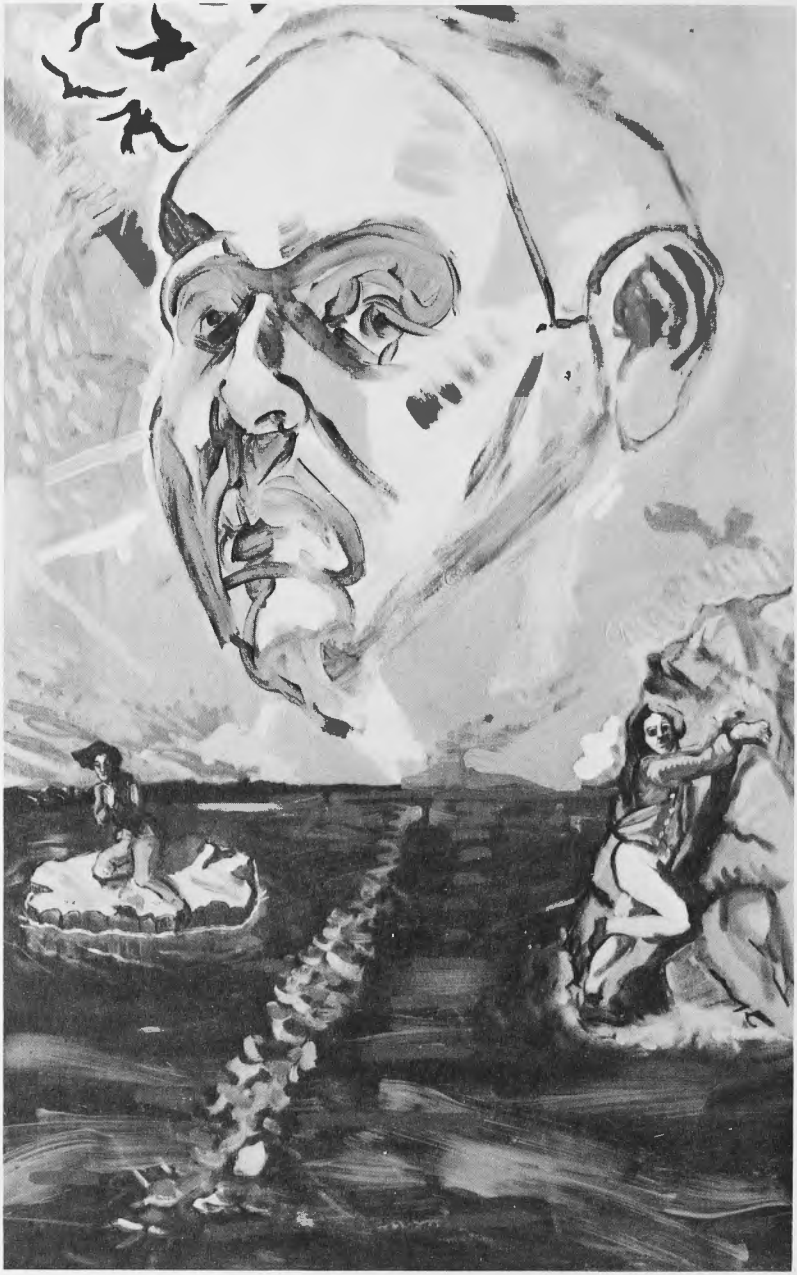
58" x 40", acrylic on canvas

CIGARETTE, 1982

70" x 58", acrylic on canvas

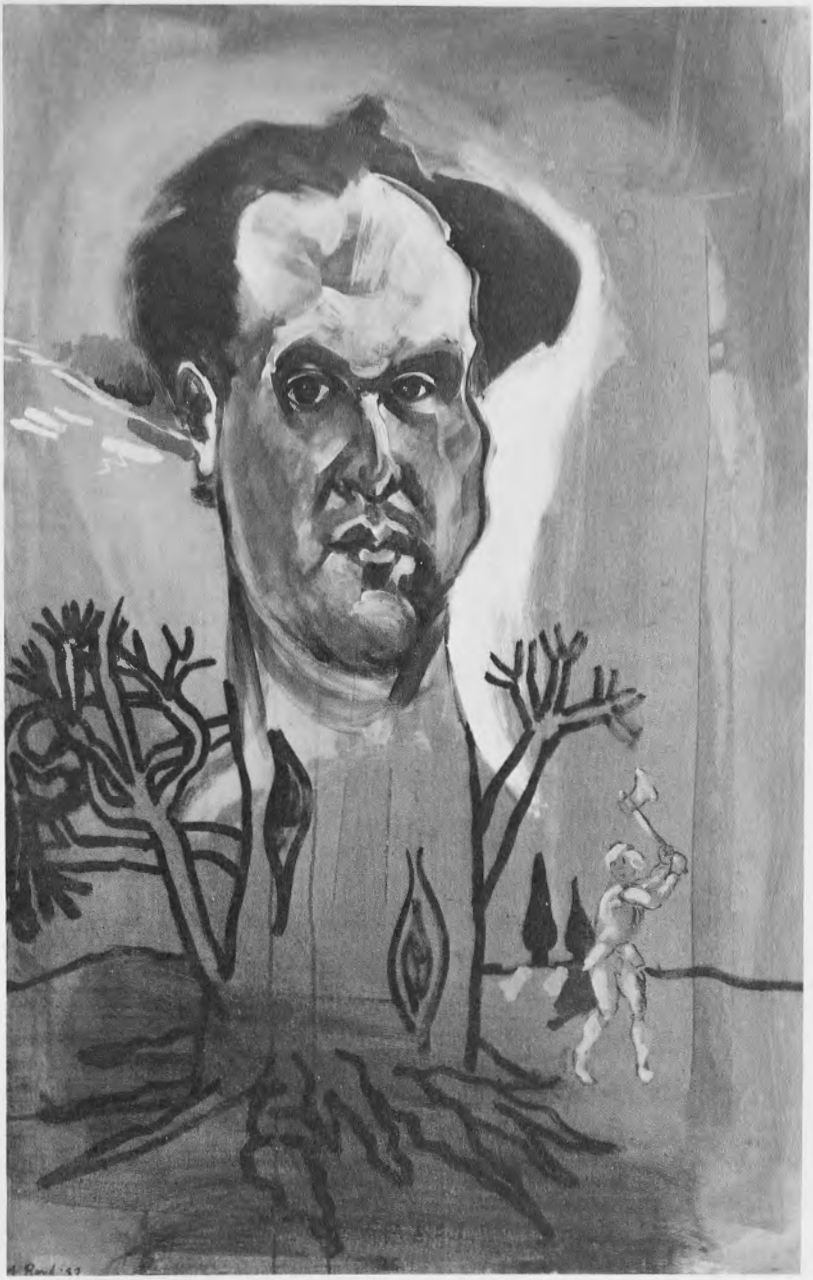
from MAINLY MERRIE SPIRITS #10, SAUSAGE PAINTER, 1986

70" x 42", acrylic on canvas



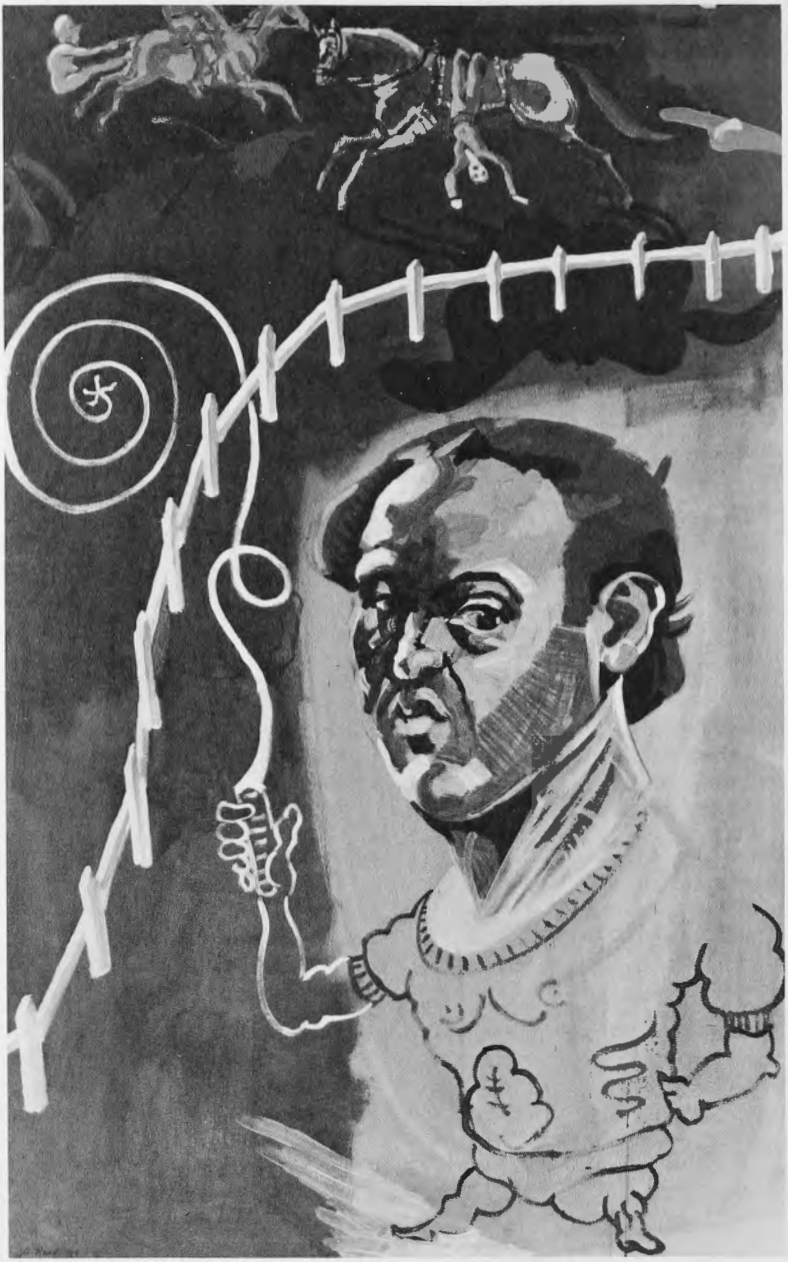
XIV, AFTER SONNETS TO ORPHEUS 2, 1987

62" x 38", acrylic on canvas



XV, AFTER SONNETS TO ORPHEUS 2, 1987

62" x 38", acrylic on canvas



XX, AFTER SONNETS TO ORPHEUS 2, 1987

62" x 38", acrylic on canvas
(This photo by Keith Fitzgerald)

MICHAEL PALMER

SIX HERMETIC SONGS

for Robert Duncan

Bring along the Makhent boat
for I have come to see Ostris
lord of the ansi *garment*

How did we measure
It says we measured up and down
from the sepia disk
to the crowded ship
of Odysseus

How did we measure
It says we measured
with a copper thread
from the plum flower
to the forgotten gift

Was the tain's smoke
equal to song
the vein of cedar
to a pin's bones
Burns each

earlier day
in its soundless weight
measured by the nets
of air
Go there

You can bring down a house with a sound.
Not to understand this.
But we builded it.

Not with periods (the
sentence) or any sense of design—
sight or sound.

Builded it while blind.
Rain came in.
Noises not ours.

Steps called walls.
Model of a house.
Work we had done before.

In—
harmonics as when
as children

still writing,
writed, written,
interrupted, begun.

The body in fog and the tongue
bracketed in its form

The words as if silvered—coated
and swallowed, cradled and erased

The marks whereby the body
was said to be a world

The walled rehearsals
The curve of abandon,

twinned and masked
The calls and careless fashionings,

digits thrown like dice
I don't think about that anymore

Send me my dictionary
Write how you are

There were nine grand pianos in my father's house
one a water object in my head
and one a ship of glass

one an eye on the end of a branch
and one a paint pot spilling red
There were live fandangos in the father's house

so that sleepers might sleep within the dance
and set their images to rest
Please tell me if you can

Did it snow pure snow in some father's house
and did the children chant Whether me this
then Whether me that

There was a winding stair in this father's house
climbing or falling no one would say
There were notebooks and nightbooks

and voices enclosed by a ring of bone
They were crying Wait Don't Wait
There were travelers standing at the gate

At the fever of tongues
the metron, with wandering eye

At the zero of streets and of windows
an arm in geometry

At the circus of nets
at the torn first
edge of an image
the unit of distance
between the eye and the lid

At the swarm of the messangers

At the storm of fine dust

At the pillars and the receiving paths

At the hidden roads of the disk

At the body of the speaking boat

The wrecked horn of the body
and a water voice

The horn of the body
and a slanted water voice

The notes against the gate
and the erasures at the gate

Mineral swimmers fixed
in a stone's milk

and the doorways of our disappearing
Whose night-songs and bridges

and prisms are these
Whose evens and odds

cats on high limbs
scorpions and swallows

What figures within the coil
tortoise and Bennu bird

lotus and hawk
palette plus ink-pot

NORMAN O. BROWN

METAMORPHOSES III: NARCISSUS (1989)

This occasion, in memoriam, inconsolable loss and the futile consolations of poetry: the theme of pastoral elegy. As in Milton's *Lycidas*—

> For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
> Young Lycidas,

Milton's *Lycidas,* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

* * * * *

This is unfinished business. I started to write a Homage to Ovid, his *Metamorphoses*. It was to be the metamorphoses of his *Metamorphoses* through the ages down to our own times; a perpetual poem, or an eternal recurrence of archetypes; as if literature were all one book, just a footnote to Ovid; a book to end all books, like *Finnegans Wake* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

I had done a Daphne, the nymph pursued by Apollo and saved by being transformed into a laurel; and an Actaeon, the hunter who saw Diana bathing, and was transformed into a stag and dismembered by his own hounds.

But Narcissus, another young hunter or shepherd destroyed by what he saw, the reflection of himself in the water—there I drowned, like Narcissus; lost in the endless replication of his image in world literature; overwhelmed by the abundance; as in Ovid Narcissus says *inopem me copia fecit,* "plenty made me poor." Or paralyzed by the proximity: *iste ego sum,* Could it be me? Narcissus is undone discovering his identity with his own reflection; we are undone discovering our identity with Narcissus, our

A lecture for Cowell College, University of California at Santa Cruz; in memory of Carl Deppe (September 12, 1965–March 6, 1985), student killed by a drunk driver.

identity made out of identifications. I is an Other; some primordial and universal schizophrenia, as if our first experience of the self were self-alienation.

From mirror unto mirror, an eternal recurrence of meaningless alternatives. Looking into the mirror and seeing nothing. Or *Lost in the Funhouse:* Ovid's *Metamorphoses* turning into black comedy. John Barth says, "He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator—though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed."

And on the other hand there was the exhilarating discovery of *El Divino Narciso* by Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz; exhilarating in the way Ezra Pound describes the effect of a literary image or epiphany: "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."

Sor Juana was exhilarating, but still frustrating. It was as if she had said it all, or all I wanted to say; rendering my encyclopedic scholarship superfluous and vain. There was also a certain inhibiting awe in the presence of Sor Juana, a miraculous phenomenon altogether. A star of the first magnitude in European literature, whose entire life was spent in Mexico; in the 17th century, 1648–1695. Her encyclopedic intelligence, her audacity. The first feminist writer in the Western hemisphere; the vertiginous catastrophe of her meteoric end.

This unfinished business—what is there to say about Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, *El Divino Narciso?*

* * * * *

El Divino Narciso, an *auto sacramental:* sacred drama, or mystery play attached to the Catholic liturgy: for Corpus Christi Day, the festival of the Body and Blood.

The Divine Narcissus in America. In a stately masque, two by two, the prelude *(loa)* recapitulates the conquest of Mexico. Two personages, el Occidente, native American warrior or brave, and

la America, Indian woman in exotic native costume, are celebrating the festival of their "vegetation-deity," the great God of the Harvest, to the native Indian music of the Tocotin. It is their pagan Corpus Christi Day, an offering of human blood mixed with harvest seed, for the nourishment of the body and the purification of the soul. These two are confronted by their opposite numbers, Christian Zeal (Captain General, Conquistador) and Christian Religion (female). After the conquest by force, Christian Religion in dialogue with the Indians discovers a similarity between pagan ritual and Christian mystery, and follows the example of St. Paul who said to the men of Athens (*Acts* XVII, 23): "The God whom I proclaim is the one you already worship without knowing it." The Christian sacrament of the Eucharist celebrates the redemptive power of human blood, no less than the Mexican ritual, but without shedding fresh blood. Christ, offering himself to be eaten in the Eucharist, is the true vegetation-deity. The demonstration of this mystery must take the form of a visible representation of a metaphorical idea, an allegory, a sacramental drama, to be called *The Divine Narcissus,* recalling an earlier paganism, which, like Aztec religion, also contained demonic parodies of the mystery of the Christian Eucharist. Written in Mexico, the mystery play is to be performed in Madrid, in the presence of their Catholic majesties the King and Queen.

The confrontation between Christianity and Paganism in the New World repeats the original confrontation between Christianity and Classical culture in the Old World. The *auto sacramental* begins with an allegorical representation of the origin of Christianity. Judaism ("la Sinagoga") confronts Paganism ("la Gentilidad"): Judaism praises the beauty of God in the language of the *Psalms* ("Praise the Lord all creatures here below"), and Paganism, having its own Bible in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* praises pastoral beauty of Narcissus ("Praise Narcissus, all ye flowers and fountains"). Human Nature, the mother of both, seeks to combine their voices, to make Christianity by combining Judaism and Paganism, and make Narcissus into Christ.

Herself plunging into the story and opening another level of play within the play, Human Nature discovers herself to be that very image of himself with which Narcissus seeks to be united. As the Bible tells us, Human Nature was made in the image of God;

but Human Nature has been so disfigured by the muddy waters of sin that the Divine Narcissus cannot recognize her as his own image. It is the moment of the Incarnation; Human Nature seeks a pure fountain in which her image will be cleansed and she can be reunited with the Divine Nature, the Divine Narcissus.

Into this cosmic drama reenacting the moment of the Incarnation, Satan must insert himself, to sow confusion. Continuing his bitter love-hatred of the Divine Narcissus who rejected him (the story of *Paradise Lost)* he is now bent on frustrating the love between the Divine Narcissus and his own image, Human Nature. Satan plunges into the drama, identifying his own tragedy with that of Echo in Ovid's story, the nymph who desperately tries to seduce Narcissus, but who, like Satan, can never do more than ape or echo the actions of God. In a reenactment of Christ's temptation in the wilderness *(Paradise Regained),* Narcissus has been fasting forty days and nights on a high mountain in Mexico; Echo offers him all the riches of the New World, and is steadfastly rejected.

Meanwhile, in a pastoral symphony combining Pagan and Biblical motifs, Human Nature in her longing for Narcissus becomes the distraught seeker of the *Song of Songs:* "I charge you, Nymphs that inhabit this flowery field, if ye find my beloved, tell him that I am sick with love." Narcissus is the Beloved who says "I am the flower of the field, the lily of the valley. My beloved is mine and I am his. He feedeth among the lilies." He is also the Good Shepherd of the New Testament, calling everywhere for his one lost sheep.

They meet at the fountain: a garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. A little fountain became a river, and there was light, and the sun and much water: this river is Esther, whom the king married; the river of Paradise, the Well of Life; the figure of the Virgin Mary, in whom the divine image and the human coalesce, the Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception. In the pure fountain Narcissus sees the reflection of Human Nature, and seeing in man his own image, falls in love with his own image. Open the crystal seal of this clear cold spring, that my love may enter in!

In love with his own perfection, perfect love makes the immortal mortal. "Love that has power to wound, in me has shown

its power: in love with my own image, from heaven I came to die." He suffers unto death. He humbled himself, consumed himself; tenderly melted in the sweet fire; died in the end in love's voluntary crucifixion. It is finished. Truly this was the Son of God.

Human Nature leads the pastoral world in lamentation, but there is the comfort of the Resurrection: he remains with us, transfigured into a white flower. Transparent disguise; jealous spouse of the soul, he looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice. The pageantry of Corpus Christi displays the Fountain, and beside it the Chalice with the Host above it. See in the crystal margin of the clear fountain the fair white flower of which the Beloved said: "This is my body and my blood, martyred for your sakes. In memory of my death, repeat it."

* * * * *

What is there to say about *El Divino Narciso?* First the *loa:* the New World as a religious experience. Everywhere in the New World "A New Age Now Begins"; but in North America's City on the Hill the natives formed no part of it. We complacently think of Cortes and the Conquistadors in Mexico as more ruthless than our Frontier. But Sor Juana's *loa* dramatizes the different view from South of the Border. Christian Zeal and Christian Religion are separate personages. In the Catholic tradition Church and State, spiritual and temporal powers, remain distinct and even opposed. In the *loa,* after the conquest, Christian Zeal says Now insolent America must die. Christian Religion checks Christian Zeal, saying Wait, do not put her to death, I need America alive. I need America alive, said Christian Religion in Mexico. The Catholic Church used the key of baptism to open the doors of society to the Indians. "This possibility of belonging to a living order, even if it was at the bottom of the social pyramid, was cruelly denied to the Indians by the Protestants of New England."[1] That is Octavio Paz speaking: shall we contradict him?

The Pilgrims in North America—they too said a New Age Now Begins. For them it was a reenactment of the Old Testament. Pilgrims interpret themselves as another Mosaic community, in exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, a holy nation like the Jews, with the same theological permission or rather commandment to exterminate the native inhabitants. *Deuteronomy* VII, 1–2, 6:

When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou:

And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them: thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

In the Spiritual Conquest of Mexico—the historical drama corresponding to Sor Juana's *loa*—the original representatives of Christian Religion, saying to Christian Zeal, "Wait, do not put her to death: I need America alive," were the Franciscans. *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World.*[2] The advent of the first twelve Franciscan "Apostles" in Mexico City in 1524, an event of vast prophetic significance. It was the Second Coming not of Moses but of Christ. Francis and the Franciscans were imitating Christ. The book of the Bible being reenacted was not *Deuteronomy* but *Revelations.*

The pursuit of the millennium. I didn't know that Columbus was a Franciscan, and wrote a book titled "The Book of Prophecies"? Both Columbus and the leader of the Twelve Apostles in Mexico, Brother Martin de Valencia, acknowledged the inspiration of Joachim of Fiore, the revolutionary theologian who redirected Christian thought toward the eternal pursuit of the millennium.

Joachim, in the 12th century, opened Christianity to the thought of the historical future. Human history is religious history, divided into three stages: the age of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The age of the Father, the Old Testament, from Adam to Christ, is the age of patriarchal piety, located in patriarchal families. The age of the Son, the New Testament, from Christ down to the present, is the age of ecclesiastical or priestly piety, located in Churches, and prescribing the active life of good works.

In the future age of the Spirit, ecclesiastical piety will be superseded by mendicant, monastic piety, now made universal by outpouring of the Spirit. All men—I follow Joachim in omitting the mention of women as a separate category—all men will practice apostolic poverty and lead lives of contemplation. It will be a higher form of Christianity, a new Gospel, which will spiritualize the meaning of the New Testament even as the New Testament spiritualized the meaning of the Old Testament. Thus, it will be the Second Coming of Christ, and the Eternal Gospel prophesied in the *Book of Revelations:* "And what is this Gospel? That of which Jesus speaks in *Revelations:* I saw an angel flying in the midst of heaven, and he had the eternal Gospel. And what is in this Gospel? All that goes beyond the Gospel of Christ. For the letter kills and the spirit gives life."[3]

The Franciscans were certain that St. Francis was the fulfillment of Joachim's prophecy of a Messianic leader to inaugurate the new age. The Franciscan missionaries were certain that the Discovery of the New World was the unfolding of the drama of the end of the World as prophesied in the *Book of Revelations;* their task was to realize eschatology in actual history, to bring about the end of the history. "The Gospel must first be published among all the nations" *(Mark* XIII, 10). In the Apocalyptic as opposed to the Exodus perspective, the natives of North America are the lost tribes of Israel; or, if that cannot be proved, at least welcome guests at the final apocalyptic banquet at which all nations will be gathered into one body: and there shall be one fold, one shepherd *(John* XVII, 21). Franciscan missionaries saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven and settling in Mexico; an evangelical utopia based not only on the perception of America as the rediscovered Garden of Eden, but also on the uncorrupted character of the noble Indian savages. The radical innocence exemplified in the angelic Indians opened up the possibility of a more perfect realization of Christianity in the New World, in an Indian church administered by Franciscan millenarians. The New World could attain angelic perfection while Europe, apocalyptically speaking, would go to Hell.

The disastrous history of the New World. *The Indian Ecclesiastical History* by the Franciscan Jeronimó de Mendieta, written in the 1590s, but publication suppressed till 1870, long after the end

of Spanish rule in Mexico, records the defeat of the dream of an evangelical millennium, an Indian Church, defeated by the old idol of Mammon, the accursed love of gold which Christ came into the world to overthrow.

But hope creates from its own wreck the things it contemplates. The new spiritual men of the 17th century were the Jesuits; they too, like the Franciscans, seeing themselves as the fulfillment of the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore. The utopian dream took a new form: the dream of an oecumenical Christian order embracing all religions. Franciscan fundamentalism was succeeded by Jesuit syncretism. "Syncretism": the attempted union or reconciliation of conflicting parties or principles in philosophy or religion; "almost always in a derogatory sense"; as if it were a utopian project, unrealistic, if not unprincipled. The word comes to us from Plutarch's treatise on *philadelphia,* that is to say, brotherly love. When differences arise among brothers, he says, we must imitate the practice of the Cretans, who though they often quarrelled and fought with one another, made up their differences and united when outside enemies attacked; this was what they called their "syncretism."

In the service of the oecumenical aspirations of the Counter-Reformation, the Jesuits developed a sophisticated doctrine of the pre-established harmony between all religions, justifying the Jesuit missionary practice of accommodation, i.e., syncretistic adaptation of Christian revelation to local language, belief and custom. It was not a new theology but a renewal of an ancient tradition. The early Fathers of the Church had arrived at the notion that the reception of the Gospel among the heathen had been prepared by prefigurations, anticipations of Christianity in paganism. Seventeenth century Jesuit intellectuals modernized this idea by combining it with the Hermetic strain in Renaissance humanism: the notion of a primordial revelation of occult wisdom identified with the name of Hermes Trismegistus and with Egyptian hieroglyphs.

There was Father Athanasius Kircher—more frequently cited by Sor Juana than any other contemporary—Professor of Mathematics at the Roman College, the hub of the Jesuit order in Rome, author of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus,* which expounds Egyptian hieroglyphics as instituted by Hermes Trismegistus and constituting symbolic pictures of divine and universal truths.[4] And there was

in Mexico, Athanasius Kircher's Mexican correspondent and Sor Juana's friend, Don Carlos de Siguenza y Gongora, who laid the intellectual foundations for Mexican Creole national consciousness, by finding a place for the native Indian Aztec civilization in a Christian scheme of universal history; syncretism. Just listen to the titles of some of his books: *"The Phoenix of the West, the Apostle St. Thomas, found under the name of Quetzalcoatl among the ashes of ancient traditions preserved on Toltec stones and teomoxtles and in Teochichimec and Mexican songs"*; and *"Primavera Indiana—The Indian springtime, sacro-historical poem, idea of the most holy Mary of Guadalupe."* The Dark, little Indian, Virgin of Guadalupe, who took the place of the Aztec Mother Goddess Tonantsin at Tepeyac, the most potent manifestation of syncretism in the New World. The Indian Springtime: a new age now begins, with the foundation of the Virgin of Guadalupe; identified with the woman of *Revelations* XII, I. "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars."[5]

This baroque synthesis—the culture which produced Sor Juana—preserved the core of Joachite millennarianism in a new form. In this new form it prepared the way, in the next age, for the heavenly city of the 18th century philosophers; the Enlightenment apotheosis of progress; the Enlightenment dream of universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view; the Enlightenment science of comparative religion. The work of syncretism, in the service of world unification—to gather the limbs of Osiris—still goes on. Sor Juana's *auto sacramental* dramatizes the three principal players: pagan or heathen religion; Hebrew or Christian religion; and classical mythology, the reinterpretation of pagan religion by the free spirit of the poetic imagination, as authorized by the example of Ovid.

Christ as the Divine Narcissus; syncretism. Western Civilization—that old bag—a synthesis of Hebraism and Hellenism, or Christianity and Classical Culture; the mediaeval synthesis. My original project was a Western Civilization project: the metamorphoses of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* inside Western Civilization. Daphne and Actaeon had already led me to the mediaeval *Ovide moralisé*. Ovid moralized is Ovid christianized: Actaeon dismem-

bered by his hounds is Christ crucified; or (even more unlikely!) Daphne transformed into a laurel wreath round Apollo's head is the Virgin Mary round Christ incarnate in her womb.

Daphne, Actaeon, Narcissus: these quaint mediaeval Christological interpretations, these baroque conceits—they go too far. There is a leap of faith. *Credo quia absurdum,* the theologians say; but also poetry is impossibility made credible: the circle squared, the opposites unified, in the end; in an eschatological (anagogic), or utopian, or beatific vision. It is not just "Christianity and classical culture," abstract scholastic categories; it is as if this antithesis recapitulated deep contradictions in our "Western Way of Life": the contradiction between sacred and profane love; between the body and the soul; the physical and the spiritual; between love and death.

The vehicle which carries Sor Juana in the *Divine Narcissus* to the threshold of heaven, the vehicle which mediates the reconciliation of opposites, is not the *Book of Revelations* but the *Song of Songs.* The *Song of Songs,* the Song of Solomon—

> The unexpressive nuptial song
> In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.

The miracle is the marriage of the idyllic Ovidian pastoral with the Paradisical landscape of the *Song of Songs;* a transubstantiation of the pastoral. In the footsteps of her namesake, whose name she chose for herself when she joined his order, the order of Reformed Carmelites, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz in the footsteps of San Juan de la Cruz.

First the Franciscans, then the Jesuits, then the Carmelites. Carmelite mysticism, a different spiritual elite: "Our desire is that they should be like mirrors, like shining lamps, glaring torches, brilliant stars, illuminating and guiding the wanderers in this dark world. . .raised above themselves by raptures both ineffable and indescribable."[6] Raised above themselves by raptures both ineffable and indescribable: Conquistadors, at heaven's gate; in Dionysian delirium, or Sufi ecstasy.

San Juan de la Cruz, St. John of the Cross; the *Spiritual Canticle.* Songs between the Soul and the Bridegroom; a pastoral

dialogue in which the Lover and the Beloved converse and make love among the woods, mountains and rivers; as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

> Shepherds, you who wander
> There by sheepfolds to the summit,
> If you chance to see
> The one I most desire
> Tell him I am sick, I suffer and I die.

The identity of sacred and profane love. The lyric poetry of San Juan is based on a fusion of three ingredients: the exalted rapture of the *Song of Songs,* the refined, sublimated eroticism of Renaissance neo-classical poetry, and the vulgar love-poetry of the street-music, the pop songs of the day, the rhythms of which are preserved in his lyrics. The subject of the pop songs was nearly always love, but religious writers interpreted them *a lo divino,* that is, as expressing love for Christ or the Virgin. In prison (imprisoned by the unreformed Carmelites), where the first great burst of poetry came to him, one evening, when he was in very low spirits, he heard a voice singing a *villancico* (popular ballad) in the street outside, and it sent him at once into ecstasy. The words were

> Muérome de amores
> Carillo. Que haré?
> —Que te mueras, alahé.

> "I am dying of love, darling. What
> shall I do?—Die, hey, hey!"

Overcoming the antitheses of sacred and profane love. It could have been Madonna. One of San Juan's great lyrics has the refrain *que muero por que no muero:* I die because I do not die.

Interpreting *a lo divino,* we get *El divino Narciso.* There was an anonymous ordinary love-poem, in the pastoral mode:

> A shepherd boy, all alone, was suffering
> Far away from all pleasure and joy,

Every thought on his shepherdess lay
His heart deeply wounded by love.

The shepherd boy said, "Ah woe to the one
Who has taken my love away;
She does not wish to enjoy me or stay."
His heart deeply wounded by love.

San Juan made a few changes and added a stanza:

In the end climbing high on a tree
He opened his lovely arms full and wide;
Held by them he stayed there and died
His heart deeply wounded by love.

The song is included in San Juan's collected poems under the title "Canciones a lo divino de Cristo y el alma;" "Verses *a lo divino* on Christ and the soul."[7]

Protestant heretics need the great protestants and heretics who stayed inside the Church, Joachim of Fiore, Francis of Assisi, San Juan de la Cruz. Intoxicated by the saint's ecstasy; not knowing what we are getting into; "all knowledge transcending"—*entréme donde no supe*—we may not realize how heterodox it all is.

"Let us enjoy ourselves, my love,
And let us go to see ourselves in thy beauty,
To the mountain and to the hillside
Where flows the pure water;
Let us enter more deeply into the thicket."

This could be an erotic moment in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Jupiter incarnate as mortal man making improper advances to a nymph. Or it could be from a duet between the Divine Narcissus and Human Nature. But it is from San Juan's *Spiritual Canticle,* and his own prose commentary goes as follows:

And let us go to see ourselves in thy beauty.

. . .that is, that I may be so transformed in Thy beauty that, being alike in beauty, we may both see ourselves in Thy

> beauty, since I shall have Thy own beauty; so that, when one of us looks at the other, each may see in the other his beauty, the beauty of both being Thy beauty alone, and I being absorbed in Thy beauty; and thus I shall see Thee in Thy beauty and Thou wilt see me in Thy beauty; and I shall see myself in Thee in Thy beauty; and Thou wilt see Thyself in me in Thy beauty; so that thus I may be like to Thee in Thy beauty and Thou mayest be like to me in Thy beauty, and my beauty may be Thy beauty, and Thy beauty my beauty; and thus I shall be Thou in Thy beauty and Thou wilt be I in Thy beauty, because Thy beauty itself will be my beauty, and thus we shall each see the other in Thy beauty.

The rhapsody goes on and on like a Sufi chant inducing ecstasy; and the Spanish word *hermosura* is twice as long and twice as seductive.

"Giving birth in beauty," Plato said. We become what we behold. We are saved by what we see. Redemption is vision, not a vicarious redemption of a literal victim on a literal cross. In *The Divine Narcissus* the crucifixion is the contemplation of the beauty. Only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified. That is Nietzsche speaking. But I take my theology from William Blake. Blake: Protestant, mystic, but also revolutionary; not just the *Song of Songs,* but also the *Book of Revelations* and the spirit of Joachim of Fiore. Blake's stunning heterodoxy.

> Prayer is the Study of Art.
> Praise is the Practise of Art.
> Fasting &c., all relate to Art.
> The outward Ceremony is Antichrist.
> The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is, God himself
> , Jesus: we are his Members.
> The Divine Body
> It manifests itself in his Works of Art (In Eternity All is Vision).

Eternity is the eternal pursuit of the millennium. Eternity is in love with the productions of time.

In San Juan there is the Dark Night:

> *amado con amada*
> *amada en el Amado transformada!*

Lover and Beloved, complete union with God; identification with the Absolute, that crime for which some of the great Sufi masters were put to death. Yet San Juan explicitly says, "God absorbs the soul above all being in the being of God, deifying its substance and making it divine." Deifying, *endiosando:* enthusiasm in the full etymological sense of the word, "en-god-ment." Enthusiasm: the word is Greek and comes to us from the Greek god Dionysus. San Juan's heterodoxy should be called Dionysian rather than pantheist.

A heterodox redemption requires a heterodox creation. The mirror of Narcissus is not the mirror of vanity, or the Fall, but the mirror of creation. What is implicit in San Juan de la Cruz is explicit in the mystical tradition of Islam, in Sufism; in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi. The Breath of Creation is the "Sigh of Compassion," Allah al-Rahman, yearning to be known: "I was a hidden Treasure and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures in order to be known by them."[8] God becomes a mirror in which the spiritual man contemplates his own reality, and man in turn becomes the mirror in which God contemplates his names and qualities.

The story of Creation, *Genesis* I, 2: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Reinterpreted spiritually, *a lo divino,* that will be God as Narcissus, imagining his own image on the face of the waters. A Gnostic text, preserved in Coptic Christianity, a meditation on the first words of the Gospel according to St. John, "In the beginning was the Word" says "He 'thought' His own likeness when He saw it in the pure Light-water that surrounded Him. And His Thought became efficacious and made herself manifest. Out of the splendor of the Light she stood herself before him: the Light that is the image of the Light, the likeness of the Invisible. . . .She is the first Thought, His likeness."[9]

There actually is a sequence of poems by San Juan de la Cruz, titled "Ballad on the Gospel 'In the beginning was the word' about

the Most Holy Trinity" in which he actually dares, like Blake, to give in popular ballad form *(romance)* his own version of creation. It is pure Gnosticism, or Sufism; I follow the commentary of Gerald Brenan, no Gnostic or Sufi or even mystic; he wrote the best book on the Spanish Civil War. The Three Persons of the Trinity though distinct in substance are made one by love; this love, which in the manner of an electric generator they manufacture among themselves, spills over and manifests itself in the creation of the world. In ballad-style dialogue the Father, out of his immense love for the Son, offers to give him a Bride, and on his acceptance the Creation takes place. The whole of Creation from Angels to Man makes up the body of the bride of Christ, but there is a distinction: whereas in the upper compartment of the palace the angels possess the Bridegroom in full enjoyment, in the lower compartment the marriage remains unconsummated. There is no mention of Eve's sin, or of the Fall. Human Nature was created inferior to the angels, we are not told why—but endowed with faith and hope. The rest of the poem develops the long history of this hope until with the Incarnation the Son enters the womb of the Bride and the original purpose of Creation, the marriage of Divine with Human Nature, is finally fulfilled.

ENDNOTES

[1] Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York, 1961).

[2] J.L. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World,* 2nd ed. (Berkeley, 1970).

[3] J. Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness 1513–1813* (Chicago, 1976), p. 32. Cf. M. Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (London, 1976).

[4] Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), pp. 165–166.

[5] Lafaye, pp. 63–64.

[6] Gerald Brenan, *St. John of the Cross* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 12.

[7] Brenan, *pp.* 32, 126.

[8] H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 114–115.

[9] H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1963), p. 106.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Early this year, Black Sparrow Press published CHARLES OLSON'S *A Nation of Nothing but Poetry,* "poems omitted from *The Collected Poems,* including alternate versions of poems published there." ELIZABETH WILLIS has just finished a series of poems entitled *A/O* and is completing a manuscript on Pre-Raphaelite painting and devotion. KAREN KELLEY has completed a first volume of poems, "Anonymous Woman." She has work appearing in *Paper Air* and *Central Park.* Among DONALD KUSPIT'S many publications is a monograph on Leon Golub, Rutgers University Press, 1985. MYUNG MI KIM'S poems have appeared in *Ironwood, The Antioch Review,* and *How(ever).* PAT PHILLIPS is currently studying English Literature at UC Berkeley. MICHEL DEGUY, who lives in Paris, is the editor of *Po&Sie,* the most consistently valuable French poetry magazine. His *Given Giving: Selected Poems,* University of California Press, 1984, is now available in paperback. SARAH BARBOUR received her Ph.D. from Cornell in 1985; she teaches at Wake Forest. VICTORIA BRIDGES received her Ph.D. from Yale in 1987; she is currently translating Deguy in Paris. JEROME ROTHENBERG'S *Khurbn and Other Poems* will be published by New Directions, Fall, 1989. TYREE GUYTON, who works with his wife, Karen, and his grandfather, initiated "The Heidelberg Project" in 1986. They have "decorated" five houses to date. Guyton has recently had shows at the Cade Gallery in Royal Oaks, and Le Minotaure in Ann Arbor. ROBERT TURNEY is a freelance photographer living in East Lansing, Michigan, with his wife, Diane Wakoski. Six portraits by Turney of American writers appeared in *Sulfur* #23. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN'S *Novices: A Study of Poetic Apprenticeship* has recently been published by The Arundel Press. Greywolf published ELIOT WEINBERGER'S translation of Vincente Huidobro's *Altazor* in 1988. GEORGE KALAMARAS' poems have appeared in *Bluefish* and *Caliban.* His two chapbooks are *Heart Without End* (Leaping Mountain Press) and *Beneath The Breath* (Tilton House). MARTHA RONK LIFSON'S *Desire in L.A.* will be published by the University of Georgia Press, Fall, 1989. LEON GOLUB shows at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in NYC. The

companion poem, "Bread & Wine," to ROBERT MARTEAU'S essay in this issue, appeared in *Sulfur* #7. A.C. GOODSON is the author of *Verbal Imagination: Coleridge and the Language of Modern Criticism,* Oxford University Press, 1988. PETER REDGROVE is a practicing alchemist; two recent books (the first coauthored with Penelope Shuttle) are *The Wise Wound,* and *The Black Goddess,* both with Grove Press. An extraordinary interview with the Cuban author JOSE LEZAMA LIMA (1910–1976) appeared in *Sulfur* #24. Lezama Lima is one of the 20th century masters whose prose-poetry and essays are beginning to appear in English via JAMES IRBY'S meticulous translations (also see "Ten Prose Poems" in *Sulfur* #3). Irby teaches Latin American Literature at Princeton. PRISCILLA SNEFF'S poems are from a manuscript entitled "Ars Memoriae." AARON SHURIN'S newest book is *A's Dream,* O Books, 1989. JOHN YAU'S *Radiant Silhouette: New and Selected Work 1974–1988* will be published by Black Sparrow, Fall, 1989. MICHAEL PALMER'S *Sun* was published by North Point in 1988. Two companion essays to NORMAN O. BROWN'S "Metamorphoses III" are "Metamorphoses I: Daphne" *(Open Poetry,* 1973) and "Metamorphoses II: Actaeon" *(American Poetry Review,* Nov/Dec, 1972).

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Sulfur

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—George Butterick

Sulfur must certainly be the most important literary magazine which has explored and extended the boundaries of poetry. Eshleman has a nose for smelling out what was going to happen next in the ceaseless evolution of the living art.
—James Laughlin

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—Gary Snyder

Founded at the California Institute of Technology in 1981, Sulfur magazine is now based at Eastern Michigan University. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts since 1983, and winner of four General Electric Foundation Awards for Younger Writers, it is an international magazine of poetry and poetics, archetypal psychology, paleolithic imagination, artwork and art criticism, translations, archival materials and a 60 page section of Notes, Correspondence, and Reviews in each issue. Some of our featured authors are: Artaud, Pound, Golub, Vallejo, Olson, Niedecker, Riding, Césaire, Kitaj, and Hillman. We appear twice a year (November & May) in issues of 225 pages each. Current subscription rates: $12 for 2 issues for individuals ($17 for institutions). Single copies: $8.00 Back issues $6.00 each, except for #1 which is only available in a complete set (#1-24: $200).

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Sulfur

SPRING 1990

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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Editorial Assistant	L. KAY MILLER

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER : NORA JAFFE / Beyond With and Without; 102" x 84", acrylic on canvas, 1983 [Courtesy of Virginia Lust Gallery, NYC]

The writing by George Oppen comes from The Archive for New Poetry, at the University of California at San Diego. We gratefully acknowledge permission to publish this material.

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KAREN KELLEY

THE RED SNAKE WE WOKE

I remember falling upon, striking
the pulp of wood and rags, blood and grasses,
uncertain whether I was a blistering agent
or a small cavity. Twenty years later,
when I move my body, or part of my body,
sexual passion—that loupe, that exquisite
magnifying glass—is an adventure I am ashamed
of having wanted standing up!
I am not ashamed of the arrow-shaped leaves
or sticky spadix enclosed within the spathe,
since until this very moment I hadn't realized
that the minute, rudimentary sac, excited
among the dictionaries, sunlight clinging
to her behind by suction, was me.
Even then, I was open at both ends,
born on a dead-end street.

Into silence, sweet apples, and climbing plants
cultivated for their idyllic flowers
(time and place like a mounting for a jewel),
comes a horseman, a pleasing note in the chord.
Wither and fetlock, breast and flank in a line
follow the path of trees along the river at a little trot,
very slowly, a device for measuring.
The horseman turns lemon-scented clusters of flowers
into clear, resonant sounds by dancing his horse
in the impressions it's left in the north side
of the earth, in the very pattern itself.
The man might be a medicine man or devoted champion
of ladies (in either case, he has illicit goods:

a piece of cloth brilliant with light and luster
attached to his staff, and his horse is a rich brocade),
or a modern-day horseman—eroded, a coarse fabric,
a small tuft wrapped loosely around the hide of his animal,
smelling deliciously of a printed translation
of the dialogue, all hair removed.
Never once does he look at me.
I find him terribly seductive,
and know he is excited by me.

I see myself lying face down in submission and adoration
on an invented foundation of crushed rock
in the secluded bower. I don't excite or provoke,
don't convey a message, or turn my glance.
I always feel washed out by evening.
I am the innermost ring of a target spread out
and extending on all sides simultaneously—a measure
of grain, one leg of the carcass of an animal,
a watery layer of paint washing someone's hands,
a scullery maid. At the very center
I am a halting passage, a means of approaching
eight hallways—and at the end of any one of them
a pregnant room intended for general use,
responsive to the secrets of the Mediterranean.
I flow, sweep, beat with a lapping sound,
then lie down like paint on canvas, naked
on the bed, legs apart.
I am pure oxygen!
I am a gaping mouth offering unobstructed entrance
—gaps to the sky, spaces to the sea.

The official seat of authority: a boy with an erection
sensing by touch my hand, his organ
a spirally coiled shell, broad foot,
distinct head silky as velvet, ardent
as fresh wind—a veal loaf out of a domed nest
built of twigs and damp earth: I feel tremendous joy.
There is a great rush in my eyes.
His fibers contracting and relaxing seem to be there

only for the fruit of the matter at hand:
to flourish his construction
though the roots, leaves, and seeds are poisonous.
Falling on bent knees, chivalrously
he sets about to disembellish me.
His position, form, and configuration employ my eyes in seeing
that nothing will stop him, that what he is doing
is the exercise and enjoyment of a right,
needed to achieve certain results.

A regular rising and falling, like a red pigment
made from dried bodies of females, is transmitted
through my vent of an extinct volcano.
Nothing remains of its former glory,
nothing marks the loss of blood,
even when the regular rhythm becomes brutal
and I feel within me the cave-in of a feathery cluster
of pinkish flowers I never knew was there.

I never intended to expose my body to his
soft, fine hair, fur, wool.
In the spring, when the snow melts, numerous small beetles
portray stained glass windows in sharp, delicate relief,
and like a stone or metal slab
in which the impossible is arranged,
the unexpected meeting with my violation
always appears a likelihood, a probability,
something due me by tradition and nature.
How is it that at the appointed, fated moment
when false perceptions with a compelling sense of reality
unclothe themselves to me, I have not managed
to plug up the female side, which I still see
as a human figure with halo and wings, a little angel
acting in response to invasion
by gathering into clusters and glimmering faintly?

I came into contact with my father as much as I could
before a pain caused by strong guilt and embarrassment
caused me to bend forward and walk as if in descent.

Several months later, a large group of carnivorous
birds impaling their prey on sharp-pointed thorns
and barbs of wire fencing showered from the sky.

Who is it? Who's there?
(Who can it be knocking at my door?)
A tall, thin man with a white beard
and a blue swallow-tailed coat,
red-and-white-striped trousers,
and a tall hat with a band of stars?
A friend sharpened like the head of a spear,
rolling in a complete circle, head over heels?
I don't know.
In the center of the page, I am so lost
in motion, melting in order to determine
strength, effect, worth, and desirability,
so caught up in the tribal dance
that my vision runs lengthwise through the war paint.
I swing shut by my own weight unless held open,
sufficiently deep and wide to provide passage for vessels.
Some custom or principle keeps me from colliding
with large, creamy flowers, dense shrubbery,
ships, innocent swallows, shells: I am a shore,
a coastal region, a female child on a bed of roses,
the sheets of a sail beating rhythmically,
an image on a cross,
on a wall.

In heaven, something suggestive of an eye diverts notice
from a secluded threshold where glue, wax,
and clay dolls sit sprawled in specific order.
A wading bird resembling a stork, dozens of
tropical hummingbirds, plants prized as flavorings,
and climbing vines with yellowish flowers
are dying in the heather which gave way to a crust
of volcanic glass—and the illustration
showing parts in relationship to the whole
is in shadow.

Is the odor left by the passing of animals
in a place with perches for birds and foundlings
the native habitat of women?
The restful scene on the fabric is woven
of sustained, melodious songs of larks,
stamens and pistils enclosed in petals and sepals,
soft, moist, shapeless masses of apples,
nerves, blood vessels,
wood, paper, rags.
Does the tapestry represent a fertile green spot in the desert
or is it the brilliant, multicolored plumage of a small bird?
I no longer know how I got here,
who drove me from the open
into traps and nets.

The narrow body leads up to the room.

I remember the spearlike weapon
with its barbed head and thick, soft underfur,
the row of cut grain left to dry in a field,
the pin inserted into the loop in the rope
to prevent slipping, to tighten,
to hold.

In the little light remaining: an asphyxiating mixture
of names and fetal membranes,
a visual image or taste in the mouth that persists:
the strong, translucent skin of the lake,
the thick, edible root growing in moist ground.

The upper part of the glacier where snow turns to ice
like a nap worn down so the threads show through
is invested with the bodily form
of a fold of tissue: my emptiness
a deep fissure brought into being
when the delicately-flavored layer surrendered,
a broken bird of paradise
under the coarse blanket of *man,*
leaving a trail of smoke, a path, channel, corridor

hereafter liable to wishes and desires
. . .to fingerings and penknives.

The cross can barely be made out through the fog.

Empty space, sound fading
into nothing, is too beautiful
for the being conceived as perfect,
omnipotent, omniscient originator
and ruler of the universe.

Daddy.

So happy I could cry every night
I regard with wonder the hard, dark tree,
the tusk, the bronze nails,
the twisting son
associated with a place and a cause.

Slim, pointed bronze nails penetrate
even as I watch His head start (startle)
to a more distant point in space and time
so as to be within (He prays) the skull.
He knows how to swim, to be bodily taken up
in the as-well-as-possible-under-the-circumstances
position—eyes, ears, nose, mouth, jaws
falling full tilt into the future,
His beard on the broken glass of His chest.

His main body, apart
from tributaries and appendages,
is so flimsy
curved bones raise a ridge in the fabric,
jutting outward like undernourished dogs sniffing
the anesthetic of wasted food.
And that demure fabric of matted natural fibers
placed upon, over, in front of (something)
so as to protect, shut in,

conceal—what a remarkable *be careful or else!*
Those beautiful legs; the unexplained secret unknown
tipped with a venomous sting behind the scrap of washcloth. . .
I don't linger to spread wishes or yearnings in that obsolete
girdle—and yet they make an opening,
ripping the branching, threadlike filaments
that form my gaze when I imagine
He greatly desires me.

To attend the entrance of another heavenly body above the
horizon
I lay open a small plot of land, a flowerbed,
and fasten shut with nails the tips of my fingers.
Then, sensitive as flesh under nails,
in a gesture of one current flowing across another
—a sort of pantomime
of controlling natural events and forces—
and with a single insult that cuts to the quick,
my body rolls in a complete circle, heels over head,
and I am beneath the surface of the open boat
which holds in its body the sugary smell of soiled clothes
and emotional involvement.
He is there too, wearing a beard, a gun,
wearing hollows in the stone steps, breaking down
resistance by relentless pressure,
striking with His open hand:
slap.

I am partial,
incomplete,
perched as a bird coming up for air,
furnishing excuses for sudden, strong, filthy
emotions as if displaying brightly-colored tropical fish,
their beautiful flattened bodies, my thin,
membranous wings.

It would not catch me unaware
if this wasted garden were revealed as hollow,

like the grooved teeth with which the snake injects its venom.
He would come out through a silvery-white, lustrous gate,
snarled in the long branches of trees.
He would have on his usual clothes, but,
in addition, he would have on his head brilliant,
threadlike antennae with scales, and on his back
four gauzy wings of lacy fabric covered with a thin layer of gold.

Intimating a covert meaning, his glance meant I had to wear
a gown of crisp, transparent fabric that trailed
behind like a retinue, in such a way
that my parts could be recognized at any time,
in any ceremony. Fading in the sun,
exhausting a hooked fish, giving birth,
engaging in the cries uttered by combatants,
moving rhythmically with my fiancé
at an inn for travelers, I had to fly the colors
of hidden fluctuations and variations.
That I was a female who performed various acts
was understood, emphasized
with daubs of a sticky, greasy substance
—and such words as *yolk sac, libido,* and *pinochle*
smeared the rest of their remarks.
I knew what they meant, so lowered my head
and left the table.

I didn't have something remarkable to perform on the girls
in my school, at any rate, not that sort of thing.
I didn't have on the red shoes, or the strip
of iron, rubber, or leather attached to the underside,
moving here and there, astir with the instinct.
Innocence was a fugue in the shape of a sharp, woody spine,
a corpse intended for study and dissection,
a word or phrase that denoted the door to that action
which attracted and frightened me enormously:
I never talked about it with anyone.

On all sides of me, radiant with color: uttered words of desire.
Within me, surrounding me with its soft skull,

was such an infant, its tender voice
a tepid presence for more than three years
riding between my thighs, like scrapings of a cavity
I had to regulate the flow of,
like wind through the muzzle
and into the top of the skull of a dog.

What I have referred to as the large, four-footed nature of my
    mother
is not the fact that she feared an expulsion from the womb.
On the contrary: her shrub of profusely blooming pink flowers
protruding from a fleshy receptacle
consisted entirely in the intention to pursue her desire
to have, to possess, a handful of spewed-too-early limbs.
There are harvest times, bed times, when a woman
is not soft leather used for gloves or having a child,
not open to tenderness. In the garden
she persisted in causing a shadowy image (her hatred)
to appear upon the silvery surface (me)
when I was a bright red inner working inside her.
As conclusion to her recital, she chose
to utter the words of her wretched crime
—her weak heart, her feeble attempts to murder me.

An immense space, the fertile plot.
There were flowers, vegetables, and fruit for me to roam
as a ghost amid showy, colorful female parts,
there were parallel plantings of clipped shrubs,
and shady bowers (one in the form of a resting place
was overripe with vines with huge,
starlike, membranous flowers).
There were fragrant purple flowers that bloomed at night,
which the gardener plucked and wove into his hair
in the evening when he went out whoring.
This fertile, well-cultivated plot made a hole through me.
I chose as more desirable the plot that had weeds with broad
    leaves
and spikes of greenish flowers, chose the waxy fats
and silky fibers of seed pods and mulch.

But to my mother, these spoors, these scents of the presence of
life
meant only that she had not yet been able to kill the taste of
meat.
Ah! What a nuisance! And it had gone on for so long:
minutes, hours, days, weeks, months.
There is so much tongue, uvula, epiglottis
to come into possession of, to know how to swim,
the little one who glides inside you.
Are there any deeper layers than these random walls
of vessel, artery, vein? Did each of my changes of position
among the innermost receptacles remind her
of the abhorrent boiling of skin, bones, and connective tissue
of which I was the instance, with no issue to the sea?

I don't know how I came to swim—a slender,
grooved lead bar guided to a target automatically—
in that boxlike compartment; a lid, a flap
of tissue covering erupting eyes and teeth.

I loved those remote, funnel-shaped mornings
within the body, cool hues of emerald less yellow
than that of growing grass, the light beginning to emerge.
I would lay bare fresh, untrained blossoms and leaflike organs
which the night had made ready for me.
Sometimes I would be in readiness for a week or more
for an odor of roses or new-mown hay.
Firmly self-contained at first, the slow waltz of unfolding
grew in deep shade, with a small opening at the top
to exhibit its pale corolla, still firmly rolled up,
erectile spine stuck with clinging seeds
and small prickly fruit.

Near the beginning of the course of events, upon rising,
nausea and vomiting falling in luxuriant folds,
my mother would make ready beforehand,
stretch out full length along the ground
beside a container of woven rushes and twigs,
and the pruning shears,

and we would move suddenly and involuntarily
into a rich, impossibly long-spined state of semiconsciousness:
When the snow melts, producing unstoppable holes,
we'll put you bluntly into the silvery slit trench,
and the dark pinks to purplish pinks
to moderate reds to purplish reds of your body that thrives
in deep shade beside the uproar of fruit trees
will conceal your edible flesh.
She reflected upon a jointed tool for disengaging obstructions,
even more fearful of her own depths than last year.

It was a ritual or test to which my mother and I were promised
—covered, stained with blood, encrimsoned.
A suggestive, covert business,
the most suggestive, perhaps.

I have no protective or concealing cover:
I am an open fire, open package,
the fixed, bony sockets of my skull
like buds on a twig or tuber.
Everything everywhere is at a little distance:
where there's smoke there should be. . .well,
the scapula, of course—fine bone,
divining rod—
used to express *if I should fall. . .*

My mother makes the characteristic cry
of a submissive animal
invoking heaven.
Poisonous.
She makes me think of the bursting forth
of large groups of fins, gills,
cartilaginous skeletons swimming together
in shallow waters,
turbulence in the atmosphere causing the sparkling
of lustrous white scales, a boiling
like the winging of birds' bodies unlocking
trails of smoke as they turn
in a threatening sky.

I see perfect, undiluted, red shining boats,
oars pulling against the flow of salt water,
sails pulled back, rolled, and tied
down like secrets. I see thickets
of swelling, turbulent yearning
—yes, I see that valuable sap.
The yellowish wax secreted
by the happiness I've been assured lies before me
goes raw again
as I look out the window with my mother
and see to the end of time the red snake we woke
whirling so high and far from yesterday
as it emerges from its egg
to ensanguine the entire land.

The areas of water devoted to breeding
are the cores of the world.

The gills and complex bodies forming this profusion of life
make slight, sharp, snapping noises
as they burn blue-black in the open recess
—nocturnal, luminous organs; fire opals;
my mother's poisonous words.
Ripening early in years, my wishes and dreams,
aimed straight at their targets and a little flustered,
came into view like planes appearing in the sky
by the simple fact of sight. What did it mean
that I was then singled out, understood to act
as a symbol of my father's teeth, hooves,
and routine functions? Who can tell
what she gained by telling me that the woman's robe
that frequents human dwellings
is a transmitter of disease?
Well, well, little girl,
having blue periods of blood and dead cells
means you can harbor flowers, boats
borne by the tides,
and children.

So that's where this argument
leads: I am a mirror all over.

What am I doing
tethered to this stake?

BARBARA GUEST

DEFENSIVE RAPTURE

Width of a cube spans defensive rapture
cube from blocks of liquid theme
phantom of lily stark—

in running rooms.

adoration of hut performs a clear function
illusive column extending dust
protective screen the red—

objects pavilion.

deep layered in tradition moonlight
folkloric pleads the rakish
sooted idiom supernatural—

diadem.

stilled grain of equinox
turbulence the domicile host
robed arm white crackled—

motives.

sensitive timbre with complex
astral sign open tent hermetic
toss of sand swan reeds—

torrents of unevenness.

surround a lusted fabric
hut sequence modal shy
as verdigris hallow force—

massive intimacy.

slant fuse the wived
mosaic a chamber astrakhan
amorous welding the sober—

descant.

turns in the mind bathes
the rapture bone a guardian
ploy indolent lighted—

strew of doubt.

commends internal habitude
bush the tidal roof
day stare gliding double—

measures.

qualms the weights of night
medusae raft clothed sky
radiant strike the oars—

skim cirrus.

evolve a fable husk
aged silkiness the roan
planet mowed like ears—

beaded grip.

supposes the hooded grass
numb moat alum trench a solemn
glaze the sexual estuary—

floats an edge.

MARTINE BELLEN

STORM

"As a child I lived in a small town. We always have a full moon. Every night after dinner, my friend and I gathered round the backyard to play. My favorite game was to play with my shadow. We used to punch the shadow against the wall and set fire to it. Even though I was told my shadow would come to haunt me, I still did it. I did it to find out if my shadow had more strength than me."

—Edelyne Gelin

Since the Big Boom we are but one sentence, an internal idea without pause, always a keeper of gaze and one for time, an eye in fantasy or we wouldn't dream what is most fearsome: the presentiment that there must be a realm which assumes a self-contained sister system and only one mirror image for each property, while I myself have found we are independent of one another; this I know as the object I am, and without truth-argument in common, we can be infinite and never cross the other's line, ignoring all words that aren't needed to assist our existence; yet if a union does occur, our multiplying thoughts aren't a casual nexus but imperatives in the midnight air with orris arising out from brick pouring open shadows we wrestle with corrected vision in space between story and its penumbra.

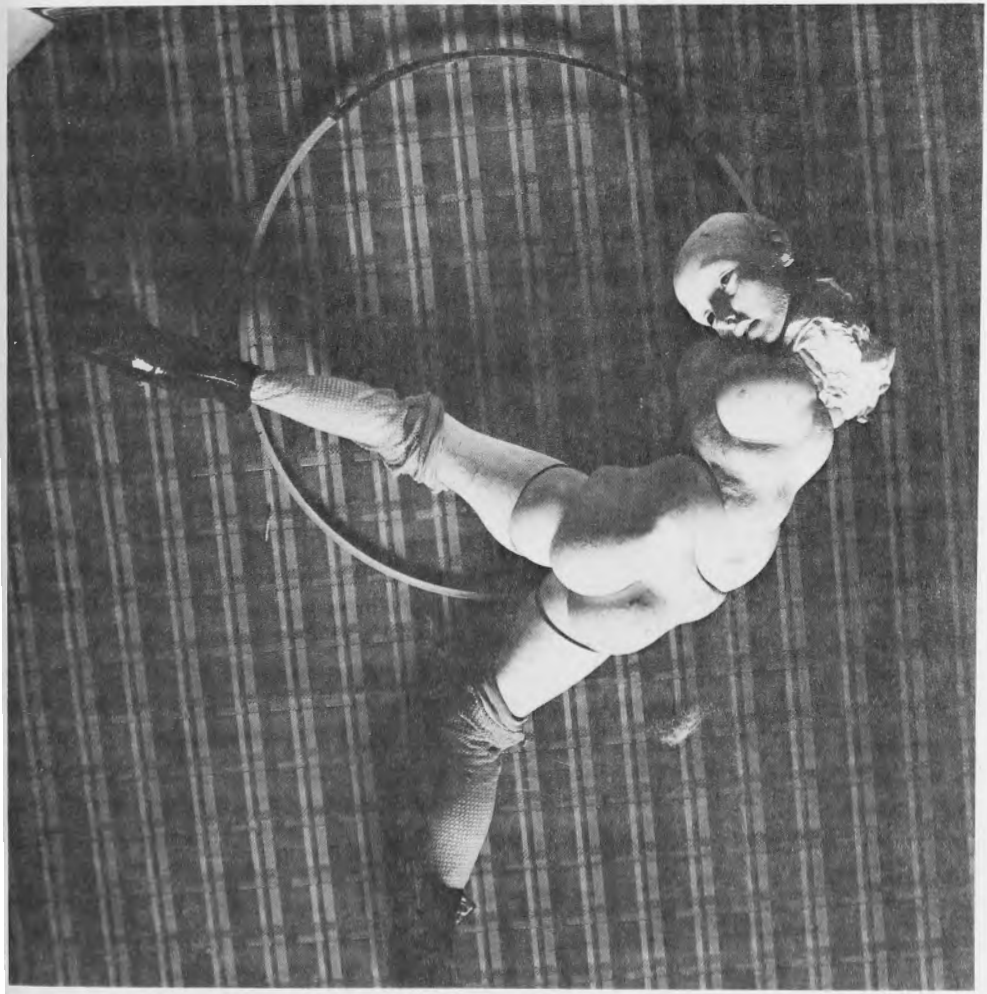
Her shadow she kept in seclusion to see without detail what seemed to make her more an object than a need of faith and hold heart to her ear. She saw herself blind, allowing fantasy the only eye that existed or there would be no sight so she said let it be that you shall see, and it saw her, and she would not have to be the camera of herself. Mostly in dreams she was disturbed for her eyes were shut and still she took notice—breast, vagina. Fog across the bathroom woman after storm; there is a reason in science why first she sees nothing, then slowly the cloud dissipates to find parts bare before her and others gone. To be blinded means not to have eyes hurt but to see something wrongly or to think you see one thing while an object from another dimension is before you. This she knows from her showers and can see as surely as God has sisters secluded with words while He basks in light and steam.

She ate clay tablets of Black Christ under streets to understand possession is occupation of land. Of thirsty roots the size of spreading loins and singing trees, the beetles come to take the song, to own their time, to see the storm approaching which wills no shadow.

During the total eclipse she became impregnated with spirit and struggled with that demon brought inside by storm; thus, the idea of quality perceived is determined from motion or again as an arc of points, but not borrowed toward moon. The form invoked involved in words exists as it is reflected subjectively—a girl and therefore in nature, though not necessarily contrary to His hypothesis of the thought He once was. They clasp and twirl gaining speed and loss and no one falls; some fail because the corm has more strength than we can conceive.

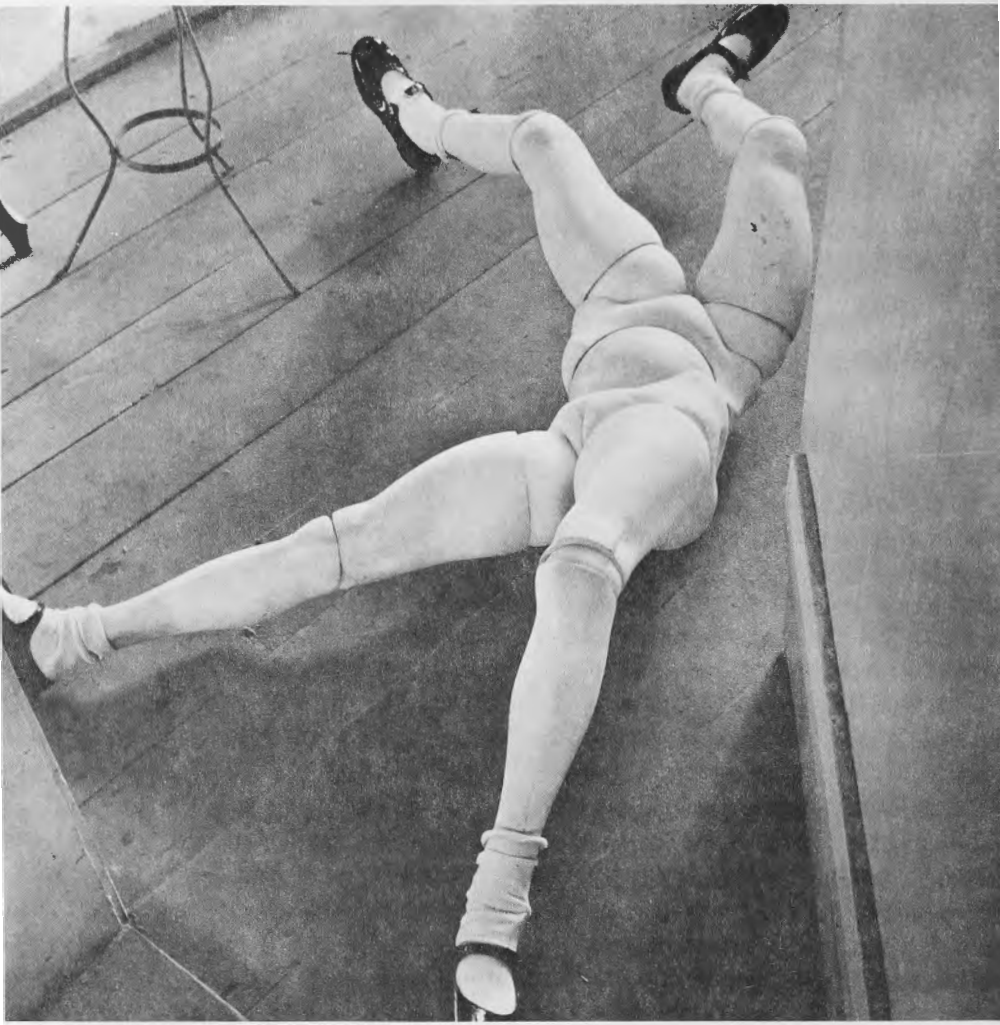
HANS BELLMER

FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS, THREE DRAWINGS, AND AN ETCHING



LA POUPEE

from 1935 and 1938 negatives, printed 1983, Edition Galerie Francois Petit Paris, 10" x 10". All Bellmer photographs courtesy of Virginia Lust Gallery, NYC.



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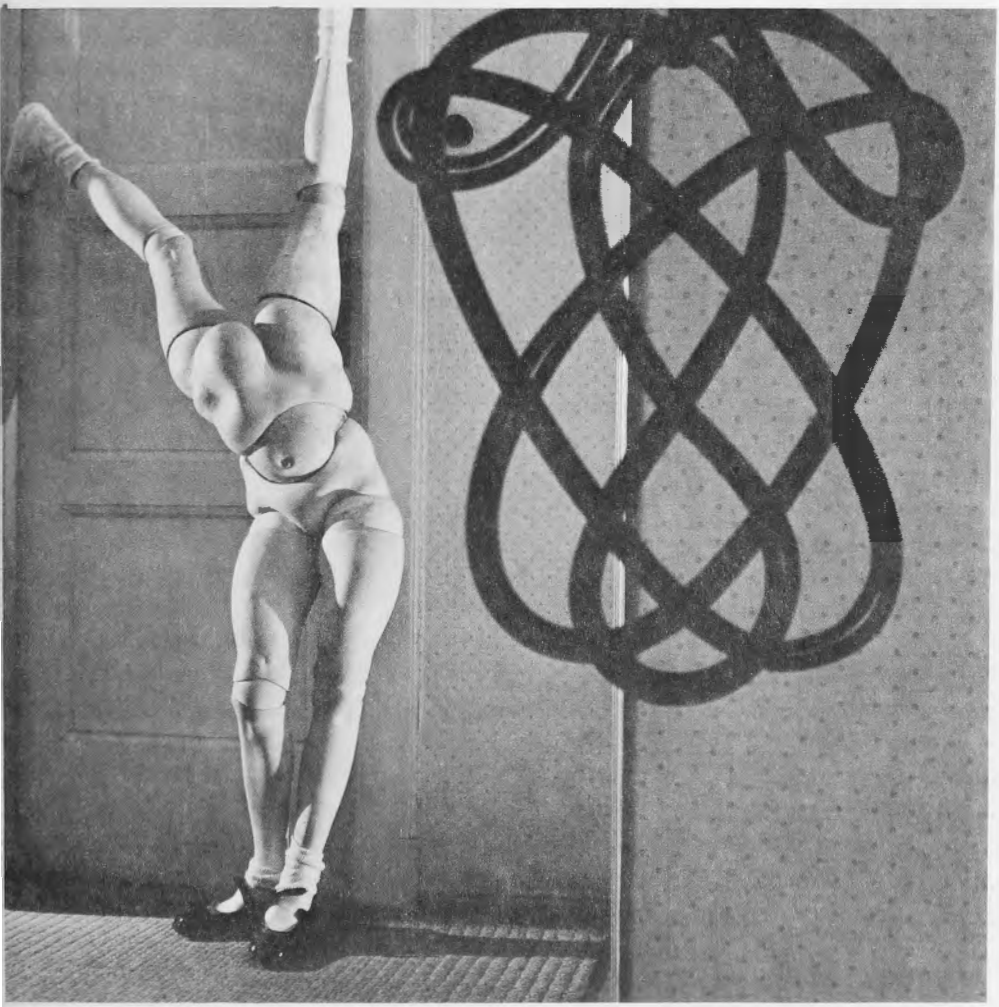

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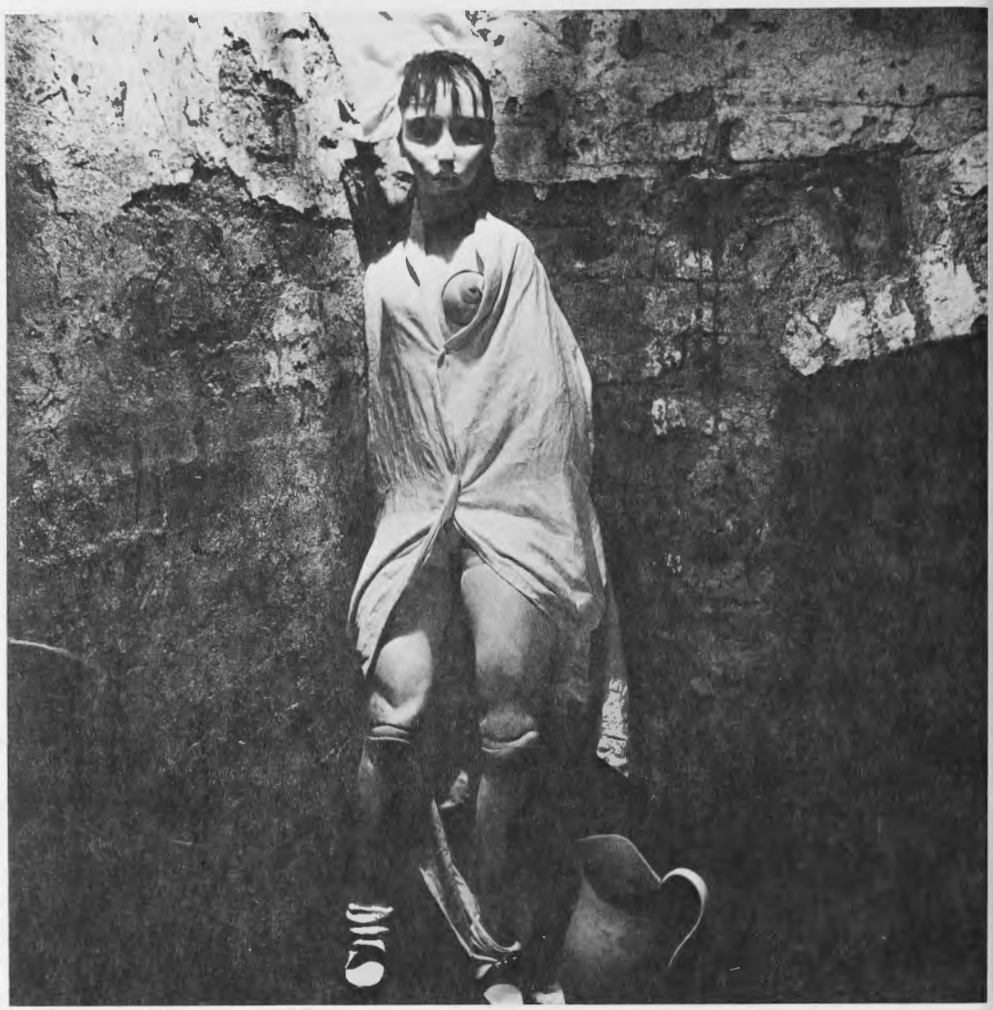

LA POUPEE

LES MILLES EN FEU / pencil on paper, 1940, 13" x 16-1/2", Coll. Herbert and Virginia Lust

QUATRE FEMMES / pencil on paper, 1940, 8" x 10-3/4", Coll. Herbert and Virginia Lust

CINQ FEMMES / pencil on paper, 1943, 5-1/4" x 8-1/4", Coll. Herbert and Virginia Lust

NOTES POUR LA NOUVELLE JUSTINE
(from *PETIT TRAITE DE MORALE*)

etching on Japanese paper in two colors, 1968, 10" x 12"
Coll. Clayton and Caryl Eshleman

HANS BELLMER

MEMORIES OF THE DOLL THEME

(Tr. from the German by Peter Chametzky, Susan Felleman, and Jochen Schindler)

Pulp writers, magicians, and confectioners used to have that secret something, that beautiful sweet which was called nonsense and that brings joy. They dispensed with that unhappiness normally associated in my experience with useful intentions, and revealed the mysteries of roads less travelled by.

As to utility, it can at least be said that its trace could still be found along these routes. As I started to rummage around, it would pop up again like the memory of the worst banalities in a phrase book, which nevertheless have a basic appeal. Strange images were painlessly divested of their actual instructional purpose. Their acuity alone remained. They desired unheard of clarification and granted just enough of themselves to become newly believable to the expectations that had been aroused. This degenerate clarity could certainly be seductive. It could be mimicked and gave the game a whole new aspect. Books were not able to satisfy my curiosity and ambition until one day I was totally taken over by the miracle of magic: the conjurer's arts.

The great magician was surrounded with such splendor and secret knowledge and mastered tricks. What a dazzling mixture of the jejune and mysterious was buried in his instructions and catalogues! And what forms!—It was worth all my obsessive efforts when, amid the smell of glue and wet plaster, the essence of all that is impressive would take shape and become a real object to

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Translator's Note: An English translation of a fragment of Robert Valençay's 1936 French rendering of Bellmer's original German has been published in Lucy Lippard, ed., *Surrealists on Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 63–66. Our new translation is from the original German in Hans Bellmer, *Die Puppe* (Karlsruhe: Th. Eckstein, 1934), pp. 5–13. The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University contains a rare copy of this tiny volume that includes this text and a series of tipped-in black and white photographs of Bellmer's doll. The text has been reprinted in Hans Bellmer, *Die Puppe* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1976), pp. 9–12.

be possessed: the bogus *Brötchen* and the illusionistic mirror box were added to the bloodied thumb and the writing hand. Emil the Poltergeist arose, followed presently by the spheres of India, the mysterious bran jar, the cylinders and the rings, bones, tinctures, and the revoltingly large feet. So much excess required an echo. This surfeit was above all manifest among apprentices, tested in the mildly insidious form which was cultivated in the characteristic manner of American Indian medicine men. Not every day was marked by nervous sweat, and now and then the evil was remedied by a party and distribution of spoils. Spoils were anything colorful and dangerous that through some kind of analogy promised to arouse medicinal communal theft. Their possession meant available danger and desire; it was power over the imagined zone of their origin. The symbolism of this was not so far removed from the appreciation of the reproduction, made possible by the books of magic, but eventually also made accessible by the camera.

Its pictures made the gruesomeness of "everyday life" and the "fourth dimension" believable for all, and it was certainly a result only of their prosaic background if the pathos associated with the heroic and the horrible ebbed, and the intended shock was lost. Perhaps there was more authentic danger in the photography that was banned—why shouldn't one be able to produce it? But this new enthusiasm finally caused us some trouble, and it suffices to say, if I remember correctly, that it was in this way that my thoughts turned to the young maidens.

In fact, certain things in the realm of the maiden have always been desired. They might often be those fragile things, like black Easter-eggs decorated with doves and rings of pink sugar that, besides being tempting, luckily possessed no other advantage. They were hollow. Their appeal promised from the first only disappointment: it was self-satisfying and thus earned the questionable reputation of the truly useless. The decorations—white doves, roses, wringing hands—surely couldn't deny their origin in some maternal album of verse. But in fact, turning away from baroque confections, one saw that a single colored glass marble sufficed to stretch the imagination towards something clearly unsettling. The marble was less intimate, though it offered a view of its interior that allowed one to observe the frozen ecstasy of its spirals. It was riveting. Thoughts were enlivened by its tensions.

The sphere took on supernatural powers until it floated transparently through the room. Enticed by this miracle, the gathered-lace ribbon wrapped itself around the marble's curves, the lost leg of a little puppet bent over it, cigar box wood tilted at a menacing vertical, and its imprint faded up above, by the celluloid ball and the corkscrew curls that wound around it. In between, a breast pressed against a brittle fan and the silk sash stuck sharply into the sphere of the violet ring that encircled as if it were an aureole and an obstruction. The dream vanished, wiped away with the real rustle of paper, and like any other mist, like flies, it escaped through the heart of the outhouse door.[1]

The marble lingered in the fingers in disrepute, as if it held many giggling girls behind the scenes. There was simply no more point in regarding as inconsequential such girlish secrecy. What trickled down from the attic stairs, through the cracks in the door, from playing doctor—something like a raspberry schnapps enema—was not without appeal, even enviableness. People like me only admit with reluctance the realization that it is those things about which we know nothing that lodge themselves all too firmly in the memory. And like me, in view of just the legs of such little brats, no one would have remained without suspicion.

When they just stood there, one couldn't expect anything more from their bowed and especially knock-kneed legs than the stumbling about of young goats. Seen from the front or the back, the curves were less amusing, because the fragile calf, emboldened by the padding of the knees, dared an inquisitive curvature. But amazement was endless when they unexpectedly pulled themselves up and in impudent play tried out their suspension with runaway hoops, finally hanging naked from open embroidery and loose folds, in order to savor idly together the aftertaste of their game.

This was not to be compared with the lace-trimmed little tarts in the bakery. On the contrary, these girlish legs had a certain inviolability, from which my grand magician's ego rebounded like their balls. There were no spoils to be had here, and at best, perhaps, the unfamiliar sound of a name, caught in passing, might remain useable as the letter of the unspeakable. Since my language had become coarse in a brook of imagined firewater, any verbal attempt to capture such intricate things would have been

subject to the art of hoarsely gasped cursing, and choked in a wave of ridiculousness.

No doubt there was something uncanny about the maidens. With little effort, the casual quiver of their pink pleats, they transformed one into a thoroughly common youngster whose muddy pants and muddy shoes were grossly exaggerated in size when seen in the light of disenchanted self-contemplation. The bitter aftertaste did not even totally subside when one of these flexible dolls deigned to descend to the depths of our world and when, amid the labyrinth of the dark apartment—amidst draped chairs, boxes and ironing-board—a heart began to beat. Furtive contacts probably allowed the conjecture that the bestowal of their happiness was not without their own agency and that of others—aside from the result of chance, there remained the personal, too. But the memory of them left behind too many desires that gnawingly and persistently began to circumscribe a certain goal. To clear it up right away: this goal's popular monogram on clapboard fences and outhouse walls seemed too barren to me. Above all, it lacked the convincing and meritorious clarity of refined handicraft, and it had no claim to higher values, as did a pure spatial representation of a brass coil or of my Poltergeist. But probably it had been sterilized through collective use; it was made impotent by the gazes of too many passers-by, whose curiosity and humility were still irreconcilable. If the promise could not be fulfilled here, it seemed obvious to look more on the inside, as in the panoramas in my black boxes. But the young maidens were ultimately neither boxes nor alarm clocks, and therefore offered not the slightest pretext for transforming desire for their charm into destructive or creative activity.

I can be believed when I say that the gutter under my window will no longer become the Mississippi, that the junk in my old drawer and the stains on the wall-paper are only ironic memories of the excess of energies past. With my inactivity the vague fear set in that this pink region was forever beyond me.

Certainly, in later years I sometimes captured a bit of this fantasy in a drawing or while in play with an ecstatic woman. But how little remained. Only a trifle when measured against the contents of that miraculous garden whose distant odor had so promptly devalued my magic act. It might have been supposed

that this fabulous distance, just as with the dolls, could be a necessary component of any super-sweet thing, and deteriorates when it is no longer unattainable. Wasn't exactly that which the imagination seeks in desire and intensification to be found in the doll (in the image of precisely her dollishness), who only had life in so far as one projected it onto her, who despite her limitless submissiveness understood that she was reserved for despair? Didn't it spell the final triumph of the young maidens, with their large averted eyes, when their charms were captured rapaciously by the conscious gaze; when with aggressive fingers, grasping after form, slowly, part-by-part, that which the senses and the brain had distilled emerged?

Fit joint to joint, testing the ball-joints by turning them to their maximum position in a childish pose; gingerly follow the hollows, sampling the pleasures of curves, losing oneself in the clamshell of the ear, creating beauty and also distributing the salt of deformation a bit vengefully. Furthermore, don't stop short of the interior: lay bare suppressed girlish thoughts, so that the ground on which they stand is revealed, ideally through the navel, visible as a colorful panorama electrically illuminated deep in the stomach.

Should not that be the solution?

Notes

1 *zog er durchs Herz der Aborttür ins Freie ab:* refers to the heart-shaped opening often found on outhouse doors in Germany, equivalent to the American half-moon (hence the German slang term for a bathroom, *die Herzkammer,* literally, "the heart chamber"). Bellmer again uses the connection between heart images and the toilet when he later dismisses the monogram carved by a young lover on a wooden fence or bathroom wall as having "no claim to higher values."

HERBERT LUST

FOR WOMEN ARE ENDLESS FORMS: HANS BELLMER'S DARK ART

"Any attempt to extend the subject matter of art is extremely distasteful to the public; and yet the vitality and progress of art depend in a large measure on the continual extension of the subject matter."

—Oscar Wilde: *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*

"When everything that man is not is added to man, then man becomes himself."

—Hans Bellmer

I. Hans Bellmer, The Man

Hans Bellmer, perhaps the freest "thinker" among twentieth century artists, was born in 1902 in Katowice (now southwestern Poland) although his parents were German. Nothing in his childhood indicated that he would become the most condemned artist since Van Gogh. The Bellmer family was prosperous middle-class. Although the father was a tyrant, the mother was a loving, sensitive presence for her children. According to Freud, such a background is ideal for a child, with the father instilling the ability for self-criticism (the superego) and the mother, all nurturing self-acceptance (the ego), two elements essential for the self-confidence needed to function well in life. In addition to having the father's conditional and the mother's unconditional love, Bellmer was also loved—if not worshipped—by his brother and sister. At any rate, Hans Bellmer began his mature life in the licentious

Weimar Republic with considerable self-confidence and a hatred for authority in any form. In 1922 he attended engineering college in Berlin, where he made friends with members in the Dada group, above all, George Grosz. Due to his scientific background Bellmer helped Grosz understand various technical problems in art, while the older artist encouraged in Bellmer his innate radicalism and fierce independence. Grosz and classical German art, above all that of Altdorfer and Baldung Grien, were the principal influences on Bellmer. A decade later Surrealism was to become another important influence.

In 1927 Bellmer married Margarete, a magical and gentle woman. It was a happy marriage, blessed by tenderness and a solid intellectual rapport. Bellmer remained in Berlin, earning a successful living as a designer and developing fast as an artist.

Then in 1932–1934, Bellmer's happiness was shattered when Germany turned to Hitler. Other personal problems compounded this disaster. His father became a Nazi. Far worse, Margarete's tubercular condition worsened and it was clear she would die. As bonded and close as they were before these events, they grew even closer, and Bellmer was to watch over and nurse her with great tenderness until her death in 1938. So in this 1932–1934 period, Bellmer realized the he was not just losing his beloved Weimar Republic, but also the human who meant the most to him. Overnight his happiness and peace were destroyed. Despite severe financial problems caused by his being a virulent anti-Nazi, Bellmer stayed on in Germany to care for Margarete; soon after her death he moved to Paris for good. There he was embraced by the Surrealists with whom he had already been showing his works for five years. He only returned to Germany for a few brief visits to his mother, whom he continued to help however he could for her entire life.

Contrary to what certain detractors have implied, all evidence points to the fact that Bellmer was an outstanding and moral human in every respect. Few lives can outshine his when it comes to honor, respect for fellow humans, and utter devotion to his friends and loved ones. Although, after 1932, his work's rejection, both in Germany and in France—by all the Surrealists except Eluard—was to shatter him, it did not shatter his innate kindness and decency. He remained a noble and free spirit until his death in 1975.

II. The First Doll, 1934: Pioneering Optional Art and Conceptual Photography

Many artistic theories may be summarized in a few words, even though the thinking behind them is encyclopedic. Such is the case with Bellmer's revolutionary approach to the female figure and photography. For Bellmer, the human body is a fearful package, or wounded sentence, with many parts that can be added to, subtracted from, multiplied, divided, shifted and rearranged like an anagram. In effect, the body is a puzzle, meandering between chaos and order, with interchangeable parts.

In 1934, while living between Berlin and his parents' home, Bellmer decided to protest against the "new Germany" by committing an "action" that would be as useless as possible. He wrote, "I will construct an artificial girl with anatomical possibilities which will re-physiologize the dizziness in passion which invents all desires." His Doll was an intended insult to Hitler and Bellmer's Nazi father.

In its concept, nothing was more Surrealist than this Doll, meant to invent all desires. Bellmer's word "all" has been overlooked by commentators. It does not apply just to eroticism but to all emotions and anxieties encompassed in the need to be loved. Bellmer's Doll, born in anxious times, became an anxious object.

How could this doll invent all desires? Bellmer's revolutionary answer was to abandon the traditional immobility in sculpture and to create a statue with enough movable parts that it could be arranged and rearranged in myriad postures. As such, the Doll could become many different women or anagrams for a woman. The viewer could take this sculpture and turn it into many different poses, masks or fantasies. Metaphorically, the Doll would force the viewer to "transmigrate," by becoming involved in Her creation. Thus, Bellmer created the first major example for the movement that in the sixties became known as "optional art," an art form that allowed the viewer to participate in the actual visual effect caused by the art work.

Bellmer's first Doll was composed from several dozen parts linked together by hinges, joints and small balls. As such it could be constructed and deconstructed in many ways, ranging from passive to aggressive, from provocative to calming, from submissive to violent, from virginal to whorish. In this way, the Doll lib-

erated sculpture from its eternal convention, the frozen object, and, in a sense, melted history. She gave birth to optional art and achieved in Her birth a peak which has never been surpassed.

The Doll was also an important early stage in what has now become known as conceptual art, that is to say, an artistic process in which the concept, information, or philosophy is as important, or more important, than any resulting visual residue. Sol LeWitt, who is often credited with inventing contemporary conceptual art, has written, "the idea is the machine that makes the work." In the Doll's case, the concept was that "some useless act must be committed to defy the Nazis." This concept had three stages in producing a visual artifact: (1) Constructing a sculpture-creature that would be "useless"; (2) Committing another useless act by photographing the useless object; (3) Making a book from the useless objects deriving from the primary useless object, the Doll. The Doll thus became a face for Defiance.

So, in 1934, *Die Puppe,* the tiny book by Bellmer, emerged, with his magical, knotted text and ten photographs depicting the useless stages in making a useless object. As Peter Webb has written in *Hans Bellmer,* a remarkable book that is the primary starting point for Bellmer studies:

> The ten photographs are a record of successive stages in the progress of the Doll's construction. They are thus an early example of conceptual art insofar as the pictorial account of the making of the artifact eventually takes the place of that artifact itself. (p. 30)

It must be emphasized not only that this first Doll became a universal symbol due to Her ability to produce anxiety, but also that She belongs to that great tradition in classical art, the young female nude. Just as women, old and young, have been able to identify with the nudes in Titian, Goya, or Tom Wesselman, so might they identify with the Doll's ability to trigger male desire. The Doll may be at times passive and even dismembered, but She always seems stimulating to male desire, conscious or unconscious.

In addition to the ten photographs recording the Doll's construction and deconstruction, *Die Puppe* has a nine page text by Bellmer that summarizes Surrealist thought on human destiny with

explosive metaphors. This text, plus others that were to follow, should rank Bellmer's among the best Surrealist prose. Though I oversimplify the text, the main idea is: no greater life force exists than sexuality, because, in the negative and positive ways with which it shatters psyche, in the overwhelming creative forces it releases, we become more essence-aware than in any other way. That is why Bellmer claimed his Doll was a "solution." He summarizes his thought in these famous concluding passages from *Die Puppe:*

> . . .Wasn't exactly that which the imagination seeks in desire and intensification to be found in the doll (in the image of precisely her dollishness), who only had life in so far as one projected it onto her, who despite her limitless submissiveness understood that she was reserved for despair? Didn't it spell the final triumph of the young maidens, with their large averted eyes, when their charms were captured rapaciously by the conscious gaze; when with aggressive fingers, grasping after form, slowly, part-by-part, that which the senses and the brain had distilled emerged?
>
> Fit joint to joint, testing the ball-joints by turning them to their maximum position in a childish pose; gingerly follow the hollows, sampling the pleasures of curves, losing oneself in the clamshell of the ear, creating beauty and also distributing the salt of deformation a bit vengefully. Furthermore, don't stop short of the interior: lay bare suppressed girlish thoughts, so that the ground on which they stand is revealed, ideally through the navel, visible as a colorful panorama electrically illuminated deep in the stomach.
>
> Should not that be the solution?*

One may well ask, "solution" to what? It must be remembered that Surrealism was a romantic philosophy that maintained that the greatest human adventure was total love between a man and a woman. In order to realize this magical experience all taboos

*This is taken from the translation by Chametzky, Felleman and Schindler appearing in this issue of *Sulfur*.

needed to be destroyed. Now, few taboos are more intense than that against child molestation. So perhaps Bellmer reasoned that if he could make the human psyche consider sex with a child, it would be easier to destroy the taboos connected with adult sexuality, and, therefore, to prepare the way for the intense, no-holds-barred love dreamed by the Surrealists: a love based on *total* honesty. If Bellmer intended to use child carnality as a tool with which to break down the psyche and free it up for total honesty in romance and art, then it must be said that his success was, at best, partial. Maybe he misses because there is very little that is childlike about his Doll. In fact, the face, was well as the stocky, androgynous body, depending upon a viewer's experience and perspective, might well range in age from sixteen to thirty years old. So, I must conclude that, if Bellmer thought he was finding a "solution" because the images were shocking insofar as they involved young girls, as he wrote, he was exaggerating. For me, the images are shocking because they ignite the psyche in two areas: (1) adult and child anxiety memories and (2) the sado-masochistic energies that so often transform sexuality.

What is certain is that the Doll book is a remarkable artistic achievement. In the overall sense, the photographs are presented along musical lines. The image cycle opens on a powerful tone: Eros as a skeletal armature. It ends on a pianissimo: a rose floating on a lace hill forested with legs and embroideries, which represents the decomposition after the composition. Between the beginning and the ending photographs, the images relate to pastoral eroticism, nostalgia and wandering sensuality. In this book, Bellmer did not find the whole "solution," but succeeded insofar as the Doll, in Her androgynous anxiety, Her loitering eroticism, and Her electric stagnation does seem to induce both sexes to dream the unthinkable.

III. Bellmer's Drawing

Bellmer's draftsmanship is unique in Surrealism because it is grounded in northern European drawing. As for Surrealist influences, Dali was a help because he also was attached to classical drawing. Like Dali, Bellmer was not involved with automatism. However, he embraced certain technical innovations in Surrealism

like "decalcomania," and, along with Ernst, was a leading practitioner after its invention by Dominguez. Bellmer may have been the first Surrealist to draw on wrinkled paper, and he did several magnificent portraits in this medium, using the structural wrinkles in the paper to help composed the face. Bellmer may have been the leading portraitist among the Surrealists, if by this we mean traditional lifelike portraits; indeed, due to his dire poverty, at times he earned money by doing portraits.

Although Bellmer's drawing is not automatic, as is Masson's, it nevertheless has the vivid energy associated with automatic drawing. Bellmer's line is remarkable; it can go fast or slow, meander or spurt, zip or swirl. Certain drawings bristle with energy, others are languid, and sometimes, in a single drawing, an intense image in one part plays off against a static image in another part.

Bellmer's drawing has four main components:

1. The most exciting is the drawing that proceeds by coagulation. It utilizes lagging images and metaphors that at first seem to dawdle in the background; then, as they are being viewed, they drift into the foreground. Such drawings swarm with countless details, clothed in stains or fogs that meld everything together. The resulting intense tangle, a slow or fast whirlpool, often has a total visual impact that resembles hermetic cubism. These drawings, mostly in pencil, are foggy or fume-like in a way that renders space touchable and visible. Some "coagulation" drawing examples would be: "Les Milles en Feu" (figure 5) and "Quatre Personnages" (figure 6), both done while Bellmer was in prison camp in 1940 with Max Ernst.

2. Drawings divided into sections or vignettes in which various erotic activities are happening. These vignettes are laid out much like synthetic cubism with the various vignette-planes connected by lines or smudging, thereby using the vignette's clear planes to contrast with foggy, biomorphic space.

3. Sometimes, with success, Bellmer employs the first two methods in the same drawing.

4. Classical Surrealist drawing. Here, the image predominates with no particular effort at stylistic innovation, such as one often finds in Ernst or Magritte. In some spectacular 1934 drawings executed in white gouache on brown paper, the images themselves are so extraordinary that they need no stylistic cloth, lest such

adornment detract from the impact Bellmer intended on the onlooker's unconscious.

Though I may oversimplify, it might be said that in Bellmer's work, drawing leads toward sculpture and photography which, in their turn, cause the artist to rethink the drawing. There is in Bellmer a constant dialogue among all the plastic mediums. It is interesting that even Bellmer's most virulent detractors concede that his drawing is unusual and powerful as pure visual style.

IV. The New Doll's Games: The Body as Bodies Around a Circle

Bellmer's goal as a Surrealist was to shred then coalesce the endless though fearful imagination and lead it into unchartered territory. For such surgery, however, he needed diverse scalpels. He thought he had created these with the first Doll. After all, this first Doll could be arranged in almost countless positions—what more would an artist need to puncture the imagination? Much more, according to Bellmer, who soon found an *incredible* solution: a doll with more legs, legs that were slender and teasing. And, by implication, more vaginas. Therefore, by a huge leap, he ended any need for a naturalistic torso in sculpture. To terrify and calm the unconscious by strange erotic gestures, what image could be more jolting than a woman who, though not repulsive, could tantalize the nerves with many legs and many vaginas flowering from an amazed navel?

The artist found this exciting solution through studying Renaissance dolls in which the stomach is a ball joint to which could be attached multiple limbs.

In 1935 the first step toward this new sexual metaphysics came into being with the second Doll, sometimes called "the doll's center." It was a voluptuous female torso whose stomach was a large ball to which could be attached two torsos, one on top, the other on bottom. It was among the strangest and most menacing objects ever created by a Surrealist: the top genitalia seemed to invite sexuality from the sky while the bottom genitalia invited sex from the earth.

In early 1936, Bellmer believed that this second Doll, or Doll Center, had to be expanded to permit it to be divided and multi-

plied in a more provocative way. This thinking led to the third Doll, an erotic woman, machine, or galaxy, born from adding to the second Doll a female head, plus the capacity for six legs, two arms and three vaginas.

He gained impetus for the book *The Doll's Games* from photographing the second and third Dolls. Many scholars feel it is among the most beautiful books to come from the Surrealist school, which produced more handsome books than any art movement in history.

Renée Riese Hubert, in her definitive *Surrealism and the Book,* (University of California Press, 1988), writes:

> In *Les Jeux de la Poupée* we have not merely a remarkable illustrated book but by all odds the prime surrealist example of a collaboration where the quite separate ventures and development of the two partners mysteriously come together. The artist included fifteen specially colored photographs, a technical innovation which he supervised. Although he lacked the professional expertise of Man Ray, he did understand some of the creative potential of photography. He succeeded in changing proportions by a novel use of blow-up, a technique eminently suited to making concrete and exterior his peculiar vision of the unconscious workings of the mind. (p. 139)

Color film was seldom used by professionals in 1939. For example, Man Ray and the other Surrealist photographers worked only in black and white. Among the reasons they gave for this was that color film was too unstable. Bellmer solved this problem by using aniline dyes on black and white photographs: the dyes were more stable than color film, and, far more important and exciting, they were much more faithful to the artist's color vision.

The sixteen photographs for *The Doll's Games* mark an important stage in modern color photography and modern art because, for the first time, hand-coloring, used in the 19th century by photographers, was used by a plastic artist for his own special effects. Nowadays plastic artists, as differentiated from photographers, are coloring photographs galore, but as far as I can ascertain, Bellmer was the first plastic artist to use it as a principal medium. The

Bellmer photographs are similar to small paintings or miniatures. Their gorgeous colors heighten the image as they range from the pastoral to the stormy, from the sunny-serene to a sizzling rainbow.

The photographs, as illustrations for fourteen poems by Paul Eluard, progress, as in the first Doll book, along musical lines; in this case, like the structure to a 19th century symphony. Among the sixteen photographs, eight show a conventional human form with a head, but the other eight present an unusual doll with the head replaced by extra legs. Bellmer well realized that the four-legged, two-vagina dolls would have greater hallucinatory impact, so he reserved this special image power for the cycle's ending. Soaring like Beethoven's Ninth Symphony climax, the last four photographs, with their headless, four-legged, two-vagina female bodies, boom savagely, and exalt the psyche.

V. The Doll's Games and Death Metaphysics

In Eluard's poems, eroticism is present by its absence. These poems reflect a silent, hidden sensibility about fear, anxiety (both childhood and adult), and death. Eluard interprets the second Doll images as relating to normal human anxiety dramas rather than to eroticism. The Doll becomes courageous in Her will to resist the riddling anxiety aroused by human fragility, insecurity, eroticism and death. All this takes on a heightened sensitivity when one considers that the 1939 photographic cycle was born from his wife Margarete's slow death and Bellmer's being expelled from his home. I would further suggest that, like Bellmer himself, the Doll could be seen as a Nietzschean "yes" to life, insofar as that, though She is fragile, She also seems resolved to resist, and that She has, to use a Paul Tillich phrase, "the courage to be."

However, it is best to illuminate these thoughts by turning to the poems and the photographs they illustrate. A celebrated image, poem 7, shows an eerie forest setting. In the foreground, leaning against a black tree trunk, the Doll stands stretched with two legs straight up in the air, the other legs planted on the ground, with Her clothes at Her feet. The voluptuous female body, as so often in Bellmer, is identified as a girl by her child's anklets and patent-leather shoes. Hiding behind a tree in the

background looms a dark male figure. Many erotic interpretations have been given: a drama from the hidden desires in adult and child sexuality, impending rape, etc. Instead, Eluard sees this photograph as a universal anxiety symbol that, though including sex, transcends it:

"The thick beetle overtakes noon. Flame round and hard surround a gutter day like forsaken trades around misery. Man, watchful, forgets the day, lowers his brow, and loses. A shadow between drawn curtains, the earth overwhelms hills, fills in the valleys, joins bridges."

The key is given by the words "and loses." We humans are "forsaken trades of misery." Such pessimistic phrases dominate the other poems. For example:

Poem 4, "This world, without love, widower of the sun, what is it to us?"

Poem 11, "Winter at 5 A.M., she got up and, barely dressed, went to collect dead wood. She could have died from the pity she felt for herself."

Such a poem might relate to Bellmer's anguish over his wife's slow death. But the self-pity presented in it is masculine as well as feminine, childlike as well as adult. We are all tired. We are all beleaguered. And in our deepest unconscious, we know this. We all can identify with the Doll. The Doll, from one perspective, is an alienation symbol. From another, an existentialist symbol, showing courage before the brutality in destiny. She may be decomposed into scattered neutral parts, and even humiliated, but in Her there is a noble, passive resistance that all humans can relate to.

The Doll often appears as a homeless human, with no clothes except rags. No wonder that Eluard was able to see suspicion, alienation and fear in Her eyes, where others might just see sexual cunning. We all see what we want to see.

Poem 9 relates to perhaps the best anxiety photograph in Surrealism. The Doll is crouched at a stairway's bottom step. A rope is tied around one knee, and the other leg has vanished. A ribbon adorns Her hair. Her expression is stunned, sad, tender, resigned. The image is bathed in an eerie purplish light. Through Her, Bellmer has created the quintessential Surrealist "anxious object."

The poem reads:

"In the house with warped floors, with sagging roof, on the stairway with steps carpeted with old slippers, she is dense, opaque and uncouth. In a word, she is alone. Alone in her cold and muddy frame, alone and without eyes, implacably alone. It's elsewhere that pure air falls straight down on the appearances of community life."

Poem 10 refers to another "anxiety object": the Doll, without her head, having just one leg and arched into a comforter. As a hair or head substitute, three small balls with holes lie above and on her breasts. The torso has been distorted so that underneath the navel are buttocks rather than pubic hair. The poem reads:

"Blood and dust, a thimble of milk, a thimble of pure water, ten hand needles, oxidized, in the pillow's bilge. A thimble or straw in the barn, a thimble of gum in the well, a thimble of nothing here. The inside of the sheets for a mirror. A thimble of tigers with claws and heavy ink flowers at its lips, a nothing of earth."

Poem 13 brings the implicit eroticism in the photograph to an explicit pitch. The Doll is standing erect with a pair of legs substituted for her head. Again there is a looming male presence, this time symbolized by a gigantic carpet beater, in the foreground and through which the Doll is seen, that seems to cut through Her uppermost knees. Again there is an eerie purplish light accented with yellow and black. The poem is unique in the cycle as it is not a *double entendre*. It tells how male flesh yearns for the young.

"It's a girl!—Where are her eyes?—It's a girl!—Where are her breasts? It's a girl!—What is she saying?—It's a girl!—What is she playing with?—It's a girl, it's my desire!"

This poem-photography cycle was a true collaboration, because Eluard's gentler, sunnier nature reined in Bellmer's violent despair, making the resulting work more balanced and universal. Eluard persuaded Bellmer to omit the most despairing photographs from the book. Among these were several remarkable nightmare ones, as fine as anything in Bellmer's work. These are reproduced on pages 30–31 in Alain Sayag's catalogue for the Bellmer photography retrospective at the *Centre Pompidou*. In one the Doll is dressed in such finery as lace sleeves. Near Her stunned face is an unsheathed dagger. A beautiful hand, rare in Bellmer's doll imagery, is held before Her face, covering Her left eye as if to ward off a blow. Another photograph, on page 31, is

the most terrifying image in Bellmer: the Doll as monster in the ruins, or living corpse in a tomb garish with gaslight, and swallowing shadows. This prefigures many contemporary "theatre" photographs by such artists as Joel-Peter Witkin. The Doll has normal limbs, firm, round breasts, and is seated in what seems to be a basement coal bin filled with cobwebs and dust. Her clothes have been torn from Her and lie around Her hips and on the floor. Her body language is most provocative. Her legs are spread apart, Her hairless vagina thrusts forth. It could be an invitation to necrophilia—Her eyes are dead. And She is dead.

VI. The Later "Body" Photographs (1946–1958) and Bellmer's Quiet Influence

Bellmer all but ceased photography after his wife's death in 1938. Then, in 1946, he fell in love with a remarkable woman, the Rumanian Jewish poet, Nora Mitrani. At this time he took some magical, hallucinatory "mug shots," photographing her vagina, and also some lesbian "69" photographs. In this series, a naked woman perches on a motorcycle, her large vagina opening as if to devour. The way Bellmer combined the machine with the feminine genitalia prefigured some contemporary photography.

On a philosophical level, these later photographs should correct the simplistic sado-masochistic interpretations made about the first, second, and third Dolls. I have argued that, yes, the Doll is a woman, but above all a human who, homeless and alone, surpasses femininity in order to symbolize all that is human in the ability to resist daily brutality and fear. The later photographs confirm this view, because in them the woman never emerges as a victim, but as a reigning power, somewhat like the women in Paul Delvaux. The vaginas in the 1946 photographs are, if anything, brazen, defiant, self-contained, and self-confident. While it could be said that the woman here is an object, I would disagree. The vaginas in these photographs are proud to display their power and challenge the male to match it.

In 1958 Bellmer continued his body photography by depicting his lover bound in various positions, the most common one being with a cord drawn tightly around her plump body and turning it into a breasts-with-fatty-flesh landscape.

These photographs continued the philosophy expressed by the Doll. They show that, whether artificial or real, the female body contains within and around it endless forms. They make clear that Bellmer's work falls into two distinct phases: the early-the Dolls, 1934-1939, and the late-body theatres, 1946-1958.

Bellmer's influence on Surrealism was there from the start. As Peter Webb perceptively observes (Ibid., p. 46):

> No sooner had Bellmer's Doll made her scandalous debut, than female dummies were to be seen everywhere in surrealist exhibitions. Dali put one aboard his 'Rainy Taxi,' with live snails crawling over the elegant passenger's plaster thighs. Dominguez placed another in a satin-upholstered wheelbarrow. The 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris featured a 'Surrealist Street' down the pavement of which waited a whole row of the creatures fitted out with fantastic costumes and attributes. . .for a while it seemed as if all the Surrealists had succumbed to the doll-making craze: Ernst, Miro, Man Ray, Duchamp, Masson, Dominguez, Marcel Jean, Leo Malet and more besides.

Though these specific instances show Bellmer's visual influence, it is rather his philosophy that has so shaken contemporary art. Bellmer is not so much an artist as a state of mind. His liberating thought and life have touched many artists; for example, such painters as Matta, Wunderlich, Salle, Patricia Nix, Oldenburg and Rauschenberg in their erotic work, and such photographers as Maplethorpe, Witkin and Clarence Laughlin (whose most treasured book was the "Doll's Games"). Any artist interested in the female body's endless possibilities or "forbidden" mental states must reckon with Bellmer. Thanks to him, what was once unthinkable has almost become conventional. Countless young artists now work in the directions which, when Bellmer worked in them, led him to be shunned by other artists and ignored by collectors. This writing is nothing more than a start toward opening a dialogue about the "complete" Bellmer, who was among the most liberating and gentle minds of this century.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

LETTER TO HERBERT LUST WITH A RESPONSE BY HERBERT LUST

dear Herbert,

I awoke this morning with the following thought dominating my mind: that the 1958 photographs of the woman tied up in string by Bellmer were a grim parody of his earlier drawings—that the string becomes a caricature of his swirling line so seemingly free to investigate its own bee flight earlier—that the literal, actual body surfaces in late Bellmer, a rude mountain rising through the earlier mists of fantasy. Does this mean that ultimately Bellmer cannot sustain his desire to keep his investigations in the realm of imagination? Someone will say: the tied-up woman photographs represent another dimension of his art, that they anticipate X or Y to come, etc. For me, there is another message here: while they are not really bondage (she's in string, not chains—she's posed), they imply that the earlier drawings of feminine anatomy superimposed, sexually, upon itself, figure upon figure superimposed upon more figures is a kind of tying up—the lines less free than I had thought before—the line as Bellmer's mental rope or cable.

The human face is the focus of personality, and the fact that the tied-up woman is headless or faceless (meaning, the photo is cropped so that only the body or a bit of the head shows) relates these works to the doll constructions, most of which are headless also (the one with a head with a yellow tousled wig, no shoulders, her one visible eye utterly blank always has seemed like a death vision of Marilyn Monroe to me). I think that we have to say that on one level at least Bellmer has turned woman into an object in these constructions, has depersonalized her, turned her into an erotic machine, made her into a figure void of everything but genitally-magnetized body parts. In doing so, in dumping this object on a bed, erecting it against a wall, or posing it in a woods

(with male shadow lurking nearby), the implications while perhaps as broad as Eluard evokes in his prose poems are also quite narrow: she is an object to be manipulated, a body whose parts are interchangeable, and Bellmer is conceiving "her" in the 1930s when Nazi Germany is in the process of removing citizenship from Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, etc., turning them into non-people, and I must say that these sprawled leggy Bellmer things, these octopodal leg constructions, decorated, as it were, with rosy pustules, remind me too much of Nazi killing center trenches packed with stick-like skeletons for me to view them (the Bellmer constructions) as simply "useless," or a protest against Nazism. On the other hand, I do not think that Bellmer was a Nazi, or that he was consciously participating in a fascistic vision. I think that there is an accidental parallel at work here, that Bellmer was involved in a force that was in the air, part of a European atmosphere: sadism and depersonalization. Had Bellmer photographed one of his "dolls" in a trench, or with barbed-wire in the background, we could then feel that he was consciously aware of the political implications of all depersonalization. But his work as I see it is adamantly ahistorical—the context in which we see his constructions (an apartment, a stairway, the woods, legs erect across the crotch of a tree) do not smell of their times, and as such they cannot be "read" as a direct, conscious commentary on the times—we are viewing, in effect, Bellmer's mind, washed of uniformed men, guns and clubs, tanks, barbed-wire, trains on their way to Dachau—Bellmer's mental performance on the body of woman as if this performance had no social consequences (of rape, brutality, chopped-up bodies, gased corpses) but was sheerly "surreal" or "aesthetic." And it is—to some extent. It is inventive and compelling, but in a way so ambivalent I hear gears screeching when I view it, a revelation of Germanic male mind of the 1930s, a mind obsessed with turning female anatomy into a sculptural kaleidoscope. Nothing is ultimately ahistorical—everything takes place in time, and time itself occurs in and through material, matter, us. If an artist like Bellmer drops out the social circumstances surrounding his activity, am I entitled to restore these circumstances when I view his work? I think I am to a certain extent, as long as I do not view the artist's work as merely a translation, or cloning, of political reality. The word "revelation"

above is significant, as Bellmer could have given us much less—he could have offered us a much more decorative, abstract, comfortable art that for me at least would not burn its way back into its times as I view it today. For centuries the male mind has cooked feminine anatomy in its cannibal pot, spicing this "dish" with love, Eros, and all the perfumes of the veils necessary to make such a mind feel that it is not without dignity. There will continue to be a tendency through this century's end, I fear, to either pounce on an artist like Bellmer and reject his work—or to isolate it from its social implications. I think it should be clear from what I am saying here that we must honor the inventiveness and, yes, courage, of a Bellmer, but at the same time we should view it through and across the spectrum of all that it evokes relative to the times in which its creation was made possible.

16 January 1990

Jan. 20, 1990

Dear Clayton,

Your letter is a brilliant analysis for certain problems relating to Bellmer. Some critics think just this, in particular some recent feminists. However there is not even one point in your letter that has any validity if it is viewed in an art historical or biographical context.

If you wish to attack Surrealism, that is one thing. But your complaints about Bellmer all relate to the Surrealism which 100% moulded him. Surrealist artists 100% did not reflect Nazi horrors in their art. As political as Surrealism was in words it never was in its art.

All the Nazi horrors you talk about were little more than suspected until 1936 at the *very earliest*. By that time Bellmer had completed almost all the works for which he is famous. About all that was known at that point was that Jews were being deprived

of civil rights and that there were a few detention camps—but Catholics and Protestants were also in these camps. Almost no killings had taken place.

Bellmer in no way revealed the German male mind of the 1930s. In fact all his deeds, art works and statements prove the contrary. Bellmer's main influence was Surrealism, above all Dali, a Spaniard (also, a little by his friend George Grosz, a Dadaist). Bellmer's political leanings were always to the left. He left Germany as soon as he could—he just stayed as long as he did because his beloved wife was dying.

Surrealism was a romantic philosophy which placed woman on a pedestal and considered woman in every way equal to man. They didn't always practice this, but at least they preached it. There was no male, Surrealist or otherwise, who was more honest, tender and respectful toward his female lovers than Bellmer.

All this should become clear to you if you just consider the art historical dates. Hitler came to power in 1933. Many intellectuals, including Heidegger, were fooled by him. Bellmer was never fooled. It took Heidegger until 1935 or so to wake up. However in 1933 when Hitler was still just in his talking stage, Bellmer conceived a violent hatred for him and started constructing his doll. This doll and its book and many spectacular drawings surrounding it were completed in 1934, when Hitler was still in his talking stage. The Doll doesn't represent what you claim at all. It is nothing more or less than a brilliant extension for what had been going on in Surrealism for fifteen years. Therefore to condemn Bellmer for his ideas is just to condemn Surrealism, as many have, and there's nothing wrong in that, but you should be clear about what you are doing.

Now, to specifics. The 1958 photos are not a grim parody of his earlier drawings. They have nothing to do with his drawings. For they are addressed to the needs for a specific medium, photography. Also, in doing them Bellmer became a brilliant pioneer of what is today known as body art.

Your second paragraph amazes me. You are a great poet, and like many great poets do not realize that the plastic arts have 100% different needs than poetry has. The human head is a prime tool of "psychological" expressionism—for example, in Van Gogh, the German expressionists and Giacometti. Bellmer rejected psychological expressionism as an artist and was trying to do something

very different. Are you criticizing him for this? He was founding, and extending, Surrealist "erotic" expressionism. It was therefore necessary that as an artist he reject the prime subject matter used by psychologists and philosophers.

Say that you do not understand, or do not like, erotic expressionism, but do not say that an artist has not the right to do something new.

Bellmer left the face aside. He constructed and deconstructed the female body in order to make Eros dream. Making Eros dream was perhaps the most important Surrealist subject, according to Rubin and most scholars on the subject. Nothing is more absurd than to think that Bellmer in any way was thinking about dismemberment. Constructing and deconstructing the human body was done in marvelous ways by Masson, Dali, Ernst, and above all Miro—long before Bellmer, and he drew upon them in an innovative way, that *all* the Surrealists respected in the thirties. Know that you, an American in 1990, disagree with the Surrealists. But at the time and even today, few art lovers agree with you and the feminists. Even many feminists just see in Bellmer a dreamer, not at all a man turning a woman into an object.

"Adamantly ahistorical"???? How could Bellmer react to the horrors you cite, since he didn't know about them? His direction as an artist was set long before the world knew about these horrors—is there some rule that says that an artist should respond to political events? If there is, let's throw out Cubism done during World War I, throw out Mondrian and hundreds of other great artists. Throw out Klee, Kandinsky, de Chirico, Max Ernst, Léger, Juan Gris, etc. Also let's throw out Surrealist art.

It is amusing that you find Bellmer ahistorical, when art lovers find him quite historical—he was produced by French Surrealism.

Why don't you throw out Pound and Eliot while you're are at it? They contributed to Jews dying. And they were far worse to their women than Bellmer ever was.

You may be better able to understand your issues if you think about an artist you admire, such as Matta. Matta, at least in a psychological sense, was much influenced by Bellmer. Matta knew about the Nazi horrors. Yet there is no trace of this in his greatest work, which continues Bellmer's drive to make Eros dream and get free. Matta had communist leanings, yet this doesn't show in

his work. Matta in many ways just parodied Bellmer's erotic expressionism. Where Bellmer dared to be explicit, Matta often fudged and retreated into abstract eroticism—but I shouldn't say fudged, he was just interested in pure painting more than Bellmer was. There are quite a few Matta pornographic drawings—if you look at what women become in them you'd think Bellmer was a raging feminist—actually he was in his life. However what Matta did in drawing he didn't do in painting, where he remained in his greatest period, the forties, rather abstract. In short, art has different needs than poetry or the novel, and few artists have put their political obsessions into their actual art.

In fact, my dear Clayton, as much as your poetry enchants me, your entire letter is that of a poet, and a poet who is involved with the "psychological," "political" and "philosophical" side to art, but not much involved with the retinal or visual. It is very easy for a poet to react to changing politics—they can write a poem about it. It is very difficult for a plastic artist to do the same, unless he's a genius like Picasso—and in fact there's not as much political awareness in Picasso as is claimed. In fact 90% of the great plastic artists in this century showed almost no political feeling *in their art.* If you put down Bellmer, put down this other 90% also, and say that you are just interested in art insofar as it resembles poetry. Bellmer, like most artists, reserved his political feelings for his life, not his art—he was a rabid anti-Nazi, he left Germany and became a French citizen, and he was wonderful to his women. Now I ask you—what else should he have done?

Herbert Lust

THERESE LICHTENSTEIN

HANS BELLMER'S DOLLS: IMAGES OF PLEASURE, PAIN AND PERVERSION

Whose pleasure? Whose pain? What kind of pleasure? What kind of pain? How can we begin to discuss issues of spectatorial pleasure and pain when addressing artistic representation? To give you an idea of how complicated these questions can be, think for a moment about some of the contradictory functions of pleasure. It may be apprehended as a source of conservative tendencies, reifying status quo ideology, psychic stagnancy and repression, reproducing familiar and comfortable forms of oppression. Feelings of pleasure may also be connected to more progressive, liberating circumstances, perhaps in the strange and anticipatory exhilaration produced by entering a psychic void, or new and changing social, physical or political situations. These two theoretical possibilities may operate either separately or dialectically. Since theories and experiences of pleasure, pain and perversion are historically and culturally conditioned, I want to take as my starting point a specific set of complex and disturbing images and locate them in their "original" context, while remaining aware that the way I attempt to reconstruct these beginnings will reveal much about my own hermeneutical context.

The year is 1933. We are in Germany. The Weimar Republic has collapsed, and Hitler and the Nazis have risen to power. In a small apartment in Berlin Hans Bellmer, a modernist artist with leftist leanings, lives in semi-reclusion. Ardently anti-Nazi, he refuses to produce any work that would support the functioning of the Nazi state. He has abandoned his advertising practice and is at work, with assistance from his brother and with financial aid from his mother, on the construction of his first doll.

As a modernist artist living in Germany during the 1930s, Bellmer had to hide his work from the government. Beginning in 1933, the National Socialists confiscated modern art from galleries

and museums and forbade modern artists to paint. Bellmer's work, however, found an appreciative and supportive audience in the Surrealists, who saw Bellmer as a kindred spirit. They published his photographs of the doll in a double-page spread in the December 1934 issue of the Surrealist periodical *Minotaure*.

One of the series of 18 black-and-white photographs of the doll which appeared in *Minotaure* is a close-up of a partially disembodied, semi-nude adolescent girl/doll leaning her mask-like head against a wall. A long black wig is attached to her head, and her pale-white face bears a complex expression of demure coyness and abused martyrdom. The corpse-like victim, resembling a figure from Japanese Noh Theatre, beckons the viewer to look at her haunting, disintegrating body. Her slip is raised slightly above her buttocks, revealing a Pompeiian-like ruin. Bellmer's first doll was constructed out of a wooden frame, flax-fibre covered with plaster of paris, wooden ball joints, nuts, bolts, and metal parts. Bellmer photographed his doll in various locations, mostly in domestic interiors or in nature, often creating erotic scenarios: they could be found on staircases, on unmade beds, in an attic or a kitchen, leaning against a tree striking a seductive fashion-magazine-like pose, in a crucified position, or as victims of sexual attacks and abuse. Bellmer also frequently arranged her fragmented body parts like a still-life on Victorian lace that simulated the scene of a crime. Even today these images become devastating attacks on feminine fashion and domestic stereotypes, as well as on organized religion, while evoking a mournful nostalgia for an almost forgotten past. They produce a disquieting and tragic atmosphere of suffering and deprivation that should be examined within the historical and ideological context of Nazi Germany and its representation of women, for it is not a coincidence that the birth of the doll and the rise of Nazism occurred in the same year—1933. Personal and cultural loss and deprivation are suggested by these images of mourning.

Bellmer's doll, in part, is a symbolic attack on Nazi ideology and its mythic formation of a racist Aryan identity. Bellmer later claimed, "If the origin of my work is scandalous, it is because, for me, the world is a scandal."[1] By 1933 Nazi art policy had not yet been consolidated, but idealized images of women and men modeled on many traditions including Classical and Hellenistic

Greek as well as Medieval and Renaissance art proliferated in the mass media and the fine arts. Images of glorified youth and family helped produce codes of femininity and masculinity and the formation of Nazi identity. Women were portrayed as idealized virgins found in nature or cloistered interiors, emblems of sexual purity and perfection, young nurturing mothers, or Venus-like goddesses based on models from ancient myths that have been transformed. Professor Adolf Ziegler, President of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts and known by his enemies as the "master of the pubic hair," painted an allegory, *Four Elements,* which hung in a living room of the Munich Führer house. This painting typifies Nazi art—a debased classicism, bordering on illustration, of four awkwardly rendered nude women.

It could be argued that the doll photographs are emblems of the return of the repressed, of the diverse groups of oppressed people in Nazi Germany (including Bellmer, himself) who were silenced and brutalized by the Nazis—Jews, Modern artists, the insane, socialists, gays, and lesbians, who constituted the others against which Nazi norms were established. In *Myth of the Twentieth Century,* written in 1930, Alfred Rosenberg, one of the leading Nazi ideologues, integrates art and racial theory. He writes, "The night coffee houses of the asphalt city became the artists' studios. Theoretical, bastardized dialectics became the prayer wheel whose whining accompanied ever new-isms.. The racial chaos of Germans, Jews, unnatural mongrel breeds of the street became prevalent. The consequence was the rule of the Mestizo. The Mestizo claimed to represent his 'soul expression' in bastard stillbirths, caused by the spiritual syphilis and painterly infantilism."[2]

Modern artists were turned into negative images of polluted, primitive Others, and modernism was condemned and appropriated by the National Socialists to justify their own art and ideology. The acts of colonizing, possessing and systematically destroying the Other began with the strategic construction of the category of degenerate otherness. By creating a comparative discourse between the acceptable, "normal" Nazi and the unacceptable, "degenerate" Other, the Nazis could better substantiate, legitimize and communicate their pseudo-scientific eugenics-based race theory and the myth of their own identity.

Bellmer inverts Nazi representations—especially the fetishization of the youth cult—of healthy, fertile adolescence by constructing a complex alternative vision of female adolescence. Although Bellmer's photographs rupture the Nazi paradigm of feminine identity, what *kind* of alternative does he provide? How can I speak about Bellmer's images of an oppressed, vulnerable, victimized, sado-masochistically eroticized female doll, and in terms of both male and female spectatorship? Since spectatorial responses to cultural objects are deeply mediated by institutional and ideological spaces of viewing, I once again ask the question, who are these real and imagined spectators from the past and present, and in what contexts do they exist? Leaving the question of specific spectatorship aside for a moment, I must turn to another question and troubling paradox: how do we speak about Bellmer's dolls which turn against "naturalized" Nazi images of Aryan femininity while at the same time they set up a sado-masochistic dynamic, a dynamic that the Nazis actively used in establishing their power and myths?

The photographs of the doll portray psychic and emotional dimensions of the sado-masochistic dynamic. They are uncompliant and alienated victims who display, and at times flaunt, their bruised femininity in various entrapped situations. Because of the artificial, highly theatrical lighting (reminiscent of 1920s German expressionist films and turn-of-the-century color-tinted pornographic postcards) and the doll's macabre series of bodily fragmented permutations, the viewer would never mistake this doll as a mimetic representation. Although her actual body parts are clearly mimetic, Bellmer's various arrangements of them in what he calls anagrams of the body distorts and reconfigures the structural order of the surface of the body. Thus, the body of the doll is analogous to a linguistic construction, revealing what Bellmer calls the "physical unconscious." (Investigating Bellmer's concept of the physical unconscious is crucial for understanding his doll, but will be impossible to do within the parameters of this article.) These images produce a sense of uncanniness: the doll appears not quite dead or alive, real or mechanical/artificial. Some of the images suggest the doll's pleasure in suffering—the kind of sexual pleasure resulting from humiliation and debasement associated with masochistic martyrdom. For example, consider his second

doll, made in 1935. This doll was more flexible than the first one. It consisted of a combination of tissue paper and glue which was painted over to appear life-like. Its body parts revolved around the stomach, the central ball joint. Bellmer constructed two pairs of legs and two pelvises, each one reversible and functioning as either breasts and shoulders or thighs and buttocks.

Many of Bellmer's photographs suggest an s/m scenario in which the artist assumes the sadist's role. Freud reminds us that sadism is a kind of masquerade, because the sadist's hidden identification with the masochistic position enables him to identify with the victim and receive pleasure from both positions. If one's identity is never completely separate from the subject's relation to another subject or object in the world, this relation helps to create the subject's imaginary concept of himself. According to Freud, "A person who feels pleasure in producing pain in someone else in a sexual relationship is also capable of enjoying as pleasure any pain which he may himself derive from sexual relations. A sadist is always at the same time a masochist, although the active or the passive aspect of the perversion may be the more strongly developed in him and may represent his predominant sexual activity."[3] An empathetic relationship may exist at times between the masochist and the sadist, who are symbiotically united. Freud distinguished between two types of sadism, one based on one's domination over another and the other predicated on causing pain in the other. At the same time that this desire to dominate reveals a desire for independence and recognition, it denies one's dependency on others. Jessica Benjamin claims that "true independence means sustaining the essential tension of those contradictory impulses; that is, both asserting the self and recognizing the other. Domination is the consequence of refusing this condition."[4] Masochism is also a search for recognition, but recognition from the one who dominates.

In *Masochism and Modern Man,* Theodor Reik explains what he considers the significance of three major components of masochism: fantasy, the suspense factor, and the demonstrative factor. He distinguishes this last factor from exhibitionism: "The showing or wanting to-be-seen is actually a means to invite the sexually gratifying punishment. . . .The place of psychical discomfort or pain is frequently taken by a humiliating or degrading display of

psychical or mental deficiencies, which in the fantasy have an exciting effect."[5] On the suspense factor Reik explains: "Being hung, or suspended from some contraption happens to be among the favorite masochistic practices. Presumably it gives a functional objectivity to the sensation of suspense."[6] Reik claims that masochism is not only characterized by the pleasure in discomfort, but also by the pleasure in the expectation of discomfort.

Many of Bellmer's images appear as visual and psychic analogues to these descriptions. How do sado-masochistic fantasies function in the doll photographs? In one photograph Bellmer's overhead camera angle places the viewer in a typically masculine position of voyeuristic surveillance and domination. The image suggests either an auto-erotic hermaphrodite or a couple trying to merge or copulate. The doubled body parts are joined at the waist, like symbiotic identical twins. The body(s) stretches across an unmade bed, with the half closest to the viewer dressed in pants with an open belt while the naked upper half lies inert. Remnants of a meal placed on a table next to the bed increase the mood of sexual foreplay and ravagement. The atmosphere is one of orgiastic impotence, one of frustrated desire. This image represents a visual ambiguity that produces a highly complex and contradictory dynamic in which issues of individuation, separation, and symbiotic union are played out in terms of a kind of identity crisis. On the one hand, auto-eroticism turns against the unification of two separate beings, while erotic activity between these twin halves might suggest incest. The struggle to disengage from each other represents the desire for individuation. All these different impulses are caught in a deep unresolved conflict. The desire for differentiation, autonomy and the difficulty of achieving it is part of the sado-masochistic dynamic. Personal recognition in sado-masochism is derived through dependency on the other—a dependency without clear-cut boundaries.

Sado-masochism can operate as a defense mechanism for deep psychic pain based on early childhood experiences of loss and abandonment, and often provides a substitute for a psychic breakdown while at the same time granting a person an illusory sense of self. Thus, representing an s/m dynamic can be a form of displacing real experiences of abandonment and loss. This dynamic is set up and played out in a number of ways in these

photographs. The doll is positioned in both sadistic and masochistic positions: 1. In the photographs in which the doll is set up in a masochistic position her abused condition becomes an image of exquisite purity—an innocent martyrdom in which tender depictions of her defilement often arouse an empathetic response from the viewer. Although in front of these photographs the male and female spectators are placed in a sadistic position, they can either identify with the masochistic doll, the sadistic (male) spectator, or oscillate between both positions. 2. Some of the photographs present the doll as a seductress. This *femme fatale* actively invites the male viewer to engage in a fantasized erotic scenario of female sexual dominance and male submission. Here the spectators are placed in a masochistic position and the doll in a sadistic one, and the same possibilities of identity mentioned above exist. 3. Both sides of the s/m dynamic exist within some of the photographs.[7] Since the doll is an image of adolescent sexuality that engages an adult viewer, all of these possible dynamics and scenarios suggest a potential for a fantasized incestuous encounter.

In some ways Bellmer's images interrupt more traditional representations of s/m, because they evoke an empathetic identification with the masochistic position (with feelings of psychic pain, loss and abandonment). Paradoxically, feelings that oscillate here between empathy and distance, attraction and repulsion are the very kinds of contradictions that constitute the s/m dynamic as Freud theorizes it. Thus, the s/m dynamic sets up the impossible place of being simultaneously inside and outside, close and distant, a dynamic that is always, already at a distance through the objectification of the self and the other. S/M relationships are based on a unique bond between people in which each partner is constituted by the other as an object and never as a subject. Sometimes people reverse roles or fantasize about the role they are not playing, internalizing it, projecting it from the other onto themselves. Thus, each position in the s/m dynamic can include, mask, or not acknowledge the desired other role.

The dominance/submission polarity is an exclusive bond that sets up difference in terms of hierarchies. The sadist's mask of indifference covers his symbiotic relationship to the masochist and his dependency on the masochist's dependency on him. The illusion of independence in sadism is the illusion of freedom associ-

ated with dominators. Yet what saves the viewer from an uncritical closeness to Bellmer's images is that s/m is displayed in a hyperbolic and highly theatrical and artificial manner, leaving no room for the viewer's suspension of disbelief. Feelings of fascination and repulsion are thus mirrored in a critical distance from the photographs which produce an alienated unidealized and fragmented identity that simultaneously creates a recognition and misrecognition—an alienation from and an identification with the image that intrudes upon the primary narcissism of the subject.

In the context of Nazi Germany's representation of women, the doll represents a perversion of the norm. In perversion, it is the struggle against figures and codes of authority that define the subject's difference from these powers; in Bellmer's doll, perversion becomes a critique of and a rebellion against Nazism: it is a sign of mournful disillusionment in the face of the enemy. As mentioned earlier, Bellmer's doll could represent the return of those who have been suppressed and repressed in Nazi Germany—an image of the effects and after-effects of Nazism. Traumatic reactions to a culture in moral crisis may take the form of nostalgic regressions back to childhood, where Freud situates the origins of perversion, claiming that people do not become perverse, but rather fixate and regress to earlier periods of infantile perversion. By creating the doll, Bellmer returns to a specific activity of childhood—doll playing—an activity that is almost exclusive to young girls in Western culture. Bellmer's fascination with young girls, dolls, and the activity of play suggests a narcissistic identification with them. Is it just by chance that the doll's face resembles Bellmer's? In *The Anatomy of the Image* Bellmer writes, "It is a question of the peculiar hermaphrodite interconnection between the male and female principles in which the female structure predominates. What is always vital is that the image of a woman must have been 'lived' [experienced] by the man in his own body before it can be 'seen' by the man."[8]

By recognizing the obvious parallels between Bellmer's "playing" with dolls and children's doll playing, we can explore how aesthetic activity relates to play and the symbolic. Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory,* "What lifts art above the context of immediate economic praxis and purposive behavior is the moment of play. Play, however, is also a throwback to infancy, if not animality.

Play in art represents both a renunciation of instrumental rationality and a regression behind it. . . .Forms of play are invariably forms of repetition. To enlist them as positive elements in art is to enlist a compulsion to repeat, confirming and reinforcing it."[9]

According to child psychologist Judith Kestenberg, one explanation for the etymology of the word "doll" is its derivation from the word "idol"; in ancient cultures, idols were inanimate representations of parental figures.[10] The mutilation of dolls is a common practice of 3-4 year olds during the anal-sadistic stage, and is linked with the idea of the doll's death. The death of the doll is connected to the death of the child (who identifies with the doll) and the death of the mother, since the doll at times represents the mother. By manipulating the roles of the doll—roles that might include having the doll act out parental behavior toward the child or the doll becoming the child and exhibiting what it would like to do to the mother—the child assumes a position of control and domination. This potential for role reversal in games with dolls is analogous to Bellmer's permutations of the doll's body and the roles he places her in.[11]

During the anal-sadistic stage the desire to enter and devour the mother is prominent.[12] This model of early childhood desire is especially applicable to an aspect of Bellmer's construction. During the formative stages of the doll, Bellmer began building a panorama inside its stomach. The six panoramic scenes that he envisioned were his own projected fantasies of what young girls desired. The doll's body functioned as a machine, a kind of viewing device, as a camera and photograph that reconstituted a remembered imaginary/real past. The structure of the body with an interior panorama represents fantasies of male penetration and the desire to manipulate, control, and possess the female body by trespassing its boundaries.

When physical and psychological boundaries are not enforced between parents and children, problems of separation, differentiation and identity arise that often lead to physical and psychological incest. On one level, role-playing with dolls is an attempt to set up, discover, reinforce, or break these boundaries. However, representing ruptured physical and psychic boundaries can also be a search and desire for boundaries by acknowledging their absence.

If Bellmer's representations are structured on an s/m dynamic, a dynamic which is dominant in Nazi social and political practices, how can the photographs of the doll operate as cultural critique? This is a difficult question that I can only begin to address here. Critical artistic practices are complex and contradictory often reproducing, in part, the very ideology they repudiate. By using the psychological terms of dominant culture, Bellmer's images can represent the oppressive conditions of dominant culture that they oppose. (I am not making a case for social realism!) However, we should remember that although s/m was repressed in Nazi art, it appeared in many other Nazi cultural, political and social contexts. In Bellmer's works, signifiers of femininity are flaunted to create a distance from a naturalized and essentialized role of woman that has been defined culturally as woman's closeness to her own image. The doll wears her femininity as a masquerade. By using naturalistic body parts to create unnaturalistic images of the *femme-enfant,* Bellmer produces a double vision, one that fluctuates between the real and the imaginary, and in which a critical, unresolved space between the representation of male fantasy and the actual social conditions between different groups of men and women and power structures are opened up. Investigating how power operates in and through representations of gender opens the possibilities of transforming repressive hierarchical structures and concepts into nonhierarchical and intersubjective formations of male and female subjectivity. The process of distanciation from psychic stereotypes produced by the interruption of physical stereotypes in Bellmer's doll photographs creates an exciting/excited alienation (in Brechtian terms), a second order alienation, the alienation of alienation, which can produce pleasure in an uncomfortable uncertainty.

Notes

1. Peter Webb, *Hans Bellmer* (London, 1985), p. 42.
2. Stephen Lackner, *Max Beckmann: Memories of a Friendship* (Florida, 1969), p. 21.
3. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* The Complete Psychological Works, Hogarth (1955–64), Vol. VII, p. 159.
4. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York, 1988), p. 53.
5. Theodor Reik, *Masochism and Modern Man* (New York, 1949), pp. 73–74.
6. Reik, p. 60.

7. For a discussion of female and male spectatorship, see Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23. 3–4 (Sept.–Oct. 1982), pp. 74–87.
8. Webb, p. 169.
9. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London, 1984), p. 437. How do ethical questions regarding sado-masochism become established and evaluated when they are sublimated in artistic practices or self-conscious play rather than in real exchanges between people?
10. Judith S. Kestenberg, *Children and Parents: Psychoanalytic Studies in Development* (New York, 1975).
11. We should acknowledge that there are differences between children's play and adult play.
12. See Melanie Klein, "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict," *International Journal of Psychology*, 9, 1928, pp. 167–80.

CHRIS CUSTER

THEME: THE FREUDIAN EVE-&-ADAM

(for two voices, left/right: the first and last word of each line overlapping with those words of the other side for sound-syntax, echo and dream-juxtaposition)

A B

This in which A— awakens
This in which B— awakens
the movement of a flying figure
moths, one flutters against B—'s cheek
soundless allure backed by
B—'s wheezing breath fanning
the picturesque, the wild and dark
strands of hair shadowed over eyes
leveled, splayed to the bed's edge
as B—'s eyes acknowledge a dark web over
red hair splashed over a twin mattress
a bed not one's own. B—'s backside
and A—'s backside feeling scratchy
raw and precarious at the bed's edge
lush and strange, a sense of hackling
a sensation of prickly hairs, the sweat
not A—'s own, but an irritation
between B—'s chest and her back
stranger still, a warm coagulation
as B—'s mouth breathes into her
behind A—'s neck and through her hair
B—'s hot breath coming back at him

Though A— is laying on her right side
and though B— lays on his right side
a pull of gravity is at her backside
gravity pulls at B— away from her
under A—'s buttocks; his penis is still
knowing his unprotected cock is still in
inside her, still, its head there
snared snake-like, nowhere to slide
shovel-shaped and in untamed submission
dormant in a dark, inexorably wild
whether striking out or in is invasive
and damp, sleeping in its own emission
and bulbous-smooth as a thumbnail
the way a thumb presses milk from a spoon
the head curved like the back a spoon
like a spoon handle its neck is flat
its neck thin between A—'s legs and
caught between her thighs, obedient
not A—'s husband, but a perfect stranger
to a wicked seductress, not B—'s wife
a tall, dark, psychotic and not so perfect
the dark woman whose witchcraft suffocates
airlessly behind A— and possessive
her body curved as a thumb in a spoon
crablike his callous hand clamps
B— holds only to keep from falling
gripping the flesh of A—'s stomach
and as she breathes, the back of her
and these huge, suffocating fingers
reverberating with each breath
as if to feed or vegetate there
like a huge artery, her knotted spine
—crabgrass adulterates good earth
wedging until it divides his chest
A— felt it difficult to breathe
each sweep of breath like a pendulum
as A— awakens in an unfamiliar room
B— began to lose hold of his sleep
a dream A— will remember thinking
a dream B— hopes to remember later.

NUALA ARCHER

THE HOUR OF PAN/AMA

Her hunches hang-out

The same slit that zips the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic unzips the connection between continents. The same canal that velcros, slashes. Both Atlantic and Pacific breezes wing their salt traces through her. For her, like rain, the setting is tropical. Water is sutured, land is unstitched. It was a horrific operation. The surgery was interminable. In 1965 she is 10 and lives where rain looms Pacific clearings. She will wave good-bye amidst the Atlantic's torrential downpour. Her good-bye-hat thrown from the ship drifts like an address card. A long-floating-fugue. She is told she is not where she is—*Place of many fishes*—Panamá. She is told she lives on the Isthmus, in the Canal Zone, in the U.S.A. She stares at the letters C.Z. A Crossroads. *At every stage of his career Gorgas seemed to confront the gaunt spectre of yellow fever. It was an important influence even in the love story of the doctor's life,* writes Marie Gorgas, his wife. Chagrinning clues amble toward their type face. The Chiclets she chewed climbing into clouds over Quito are a grey, uncomfortable gob in her mouth by the time the plane lands at Tocumen in 1960. Among first things in Panamá, she empties her mouth. Already the hibiscus, ilang-ilang and ginger have got her attention. Her ear is fluent to their accents & to the smells and sounds of Spanish. In school various possibilities are not discussed: that the canal might have been a rotten deal is a hush-hush. Also, the fear of letting go of canal control in the year 2000: another hush-hush. Galvanized by greed & a plague of power. The men who dug this particular ditch are still described in history books as geniuses. When she first hears the word *gringo,* she thinks it means *gangrene. JOSE, can*

you see, by the dawn's starry, starry? It is Olga who confirms the truth that she knows in her own bones. Her hunches hang-out. Some afternoons Olga says, *!BASTA!* & walks away from the moping mops and grackling kitchen. Twice, when the rest of the world disappeared to church, she spent a siesta with Olga in a hammock swinging beneath the green house built on stilts. She waits until after midnight. Then the house is quiet. Green & white tethered paths of light from the beacon at Albrook Air Force Base strip the palms and bougainvillea of their darkness. Night is striped: green & white, green & white, green & white. Blinkety-Blink. Blinkety-Blink. For a split-second a sloth hanging onto the Maytag's plumbing is transformed into an albino, then a glowing green-back. Blinkety-blank. Blinkety-blank. Our eyes catch & hold when we hear Olga's room referred to as "the maid's room" or *"cuarto de la criada."* I knock lightly. The door's unlocked. *What is made I unmade,* says Olga, laughing in perfectly broken English when she wants to.

Basking in the afterglow of the unmade room

The wildness of domes in Samarcand. The blue domes of Meshed & Isfahan. These curves, too, arc easily like violets between the crannies of the moment's quiet. I undo my braids. With Olga the dance of conversation is an aura of hues. Caring that isn't leather-cured. Many tongues & lambent tree whimsy. Humorous iguanas. The ache is part of breathing. We take our chances. Olga removes her nail-polish. She's promised to braid my hair. I peel an orange for her. Here armpits are always wet. Panamá's a great place to learn about sweat. Even first thing in the morning Olga's shirt is grayly half-mooned. I listen to Olga tell about her mother. *When she arrived she didn't know she was going to be put to work covering rain barrels and cleaning out gutters. Fumigating houses & dumping disinfectant down privies.* Fronds of palms clack at us softly. Even without a verandah the bay gleams opalescent as the neck of an immense pigeon. *She said it was like arriving into the heart of a plague. Everyone was dying. At breakfast she'd look around & think, who's*

missing. She wasn't being funny. She wanted to know. Malaria, dysentery, yellow fever, trachoma, hookworm, red tape. It was the language of her childhood. The sound of folks flumped into coffins. Everyone in Panamá was cracked on the subject of mosquitoes. She said she was going to watch everything. Somebody had to remember how a groove was ripped through a mountain range in order to join two oceans. No cost was too great, they said. Witness to the making of a sadscape. Such an egg-timer's-waist-of-a-place. Such a topographical hammock between trees. *NO PAST is part & parcel of colonization, she said. Perpetuity is its green-eyed monster. The Cucaracha Slide, in cahoots with the Culebra Cut, keeps sliding.* The brutality of immigrant dreams. Seizing the American teddy bear. Tyrannical teddy bear. And the triangular white-tipped shark fins of Freddy the flintstone. But who would have expected seals covered with boils? One weekend we went to a carnival. Scanning a crowd, on the verge of recognizing a friend, a great hollow roar of rain swept down. No sound travels through such thunder. Then, as quickly, a sunlit drizzle emerged out of the lashing. In this steaming land, rain is equally all-obliterating & connecting. In a click, a curtain & a clearing, but the dribble-dribble-dribble of the now vanished recent roar lingers in our ears. The sound of rain is always the background to our hearing. We walk down side streets that narrow into squashy shades of incessant talk tattooing time into open-ended space. The rain isn't heavy now, & it makes little noise as it falls like fine oil. No window works on the train home. All surfaces are gritty. Peanut shells, orange peel, cigar butts, stippling spittle. The myth about Yanqui trains is that they're clean, fast, even. And on time. Outside our window it's all historic & dull. Muddy & unspeakably depressing. Enough to flummox anybody. The sweetest skiddoo of truth is this stink. Fed up with high school, a zone kid is talking loud about his leaving to slave away at Wal-Mart as a minimum wage servant from hell. A month later he begins another job making stone critters out of hydrastone. He makes the critters look almost real, pouring the hydrastone into molds. In six months he has full health insurance. Dental, too. And a raise & some bonus pay for making so many critters over & above the needed amount. Chewbone. Chewbone. Axle grease & cotton candy. Zombification. Lightning is doing its usual X-ray pyro-technics, teasing sculpted shrub-stuff toward a nappy

doo or the really plastic look of magnetic letters on a fridge. Lightning's topiary styles are abstract & improvisational.

Scatteration's Autobiography

Stopping. And listening to grasses growing. Scatteration opened me, howled through me. Then a great emptiness began to happen. Meaning's arrival no longer mattered. A palpable desolation blossomed the way kisses or a body brings tears. I travelled through centuries. Aquí. A key. A quay. Akee. No more than flukes, no less than flotsam. Winds returned only the silence of scatteratión. Then a great emptiness began to happen. A great emptying. Like bivalves on a storm-varnished beach. I watched myself open. Almost imperceptibly. I saw that heart-rending smile. I could no longer ignore what I knew. Walking like a flayed deer through fire. We circulated way outside the thousands of miniscule safeguards of privilege. And the canal, of its own accord, crumbled. Green flames of Catherine wheels opened into red flowers & domes of indigo. In the swamp of history's spittle. Her sweet weight on my heart at night. Dreaming of a window & a stretch of land for land's sake, I scuttled the whole notion of achievement for an archipelago that pointed toward an unchartered sea that the waves conceal, reveal at *whim. Dozing in the depths of wakefulness, in the warmth of each other. Alive, living in two worlds. More like three.* Amidst Panamá's weird sunrises and sunsets. At dusk the orange floppy of fire drops precipitately behind the verdant Cordillera—into the Atlantic Ocean. And each warm tropical morning the same floppy rises suddenly up in the East—out of the Pacific Ocean. Some friends are still ingrained & sleeping. The table with the bowl of moon is breathing. Olga & I are walking through walls. My childhood in Panamá didn't hit me until I woke up elsewhere.

Panama, Panamá

No matter which way I turn, the jungle is always somewhere near, just behind me or to my side, reaching, reaching. I read to her the *Estrella de Panamá,* the Spanish side & the English side both. Her warm eyes are lovely & dark. The screen door stays open so we can watch the saffron finch. We do nothing in a hurry. Drawers are often stuck, roofs leak. Christmas in Panamá. Sounds sense. The piece of ice from Boston costs more than a long-distance call. Clouds of tiny brown and purple butterflies tumble across the slit of sunshine from the jungle on one side to the jungle on the other. Silent, tangled, yet remarkably synchronized, creating a gentle breeze against our cheeks. Roots lift knobby elbows & knees toward these brown and purple wings. Screeches & scritches & high-singing sounds. Birds wrangle & scold. Amber colors whistle in green-black foliage. Blinking, startled monkeys squeegee the corridor of sunlight with their leaving. Orchids nod. Wet moss hangs lank. Insects everywhere. An alternative to Koka Kola, the Rio Chagres overflows her own banks luxuriously. Her dark throat is a constant chuckle. We are already supposed to be dead. We continue breathing. We imagine the bragging vengeance of the West vaccinated to a residue. A desert of voices springs from the egg-timer's waist. Square edges of individual grains are ground down, uncubed. Mileage into the past & future of quiet bestows flexible forms. Like pieces of a hologram each grain unfolds facets far beyond the proportion of its size. Tentative. Our touch interrupts history's spittle. Amnesia & avoided eyes acquiesce to remembering. Turpentine truths. Earthquakes. Fires purr, flowers chatter acknowledging the colors of our kisses.

MARJORIE WELISH

SCALPEL IN HAND

1
Let us effect a moratorium on things.

Let us say
an object is not an image, aerodynamically speaking.

Let us say
"Speak, or be silent."

Let us legislate
"the sound elements in a spoken language."

For argument's sake,
let us say the craze for black
may be dazed with shape, size and color of commodity.

For argument's sake,
the flutter of nearby bleeding does not render the charcoal
    lemon tragic,
although the eclipse of the tragic by subject matter
may be eligible for illustration by Grandville;
"an object is not an image."
Say the subtly bled shape does not induce suffering in lemons,
    however
blackened, however centrally massed the putative anguish.
Let us legislate anguish,
let us say "anguish" in unison very loud.
In a spoken language, syllables are extinguished
once gathered by the silhouette dissembling death.

2
In the center, rays from the sun and much still life
denied body, denied pantomime
and yet much language whenever and wherever

land radii. Abstract and sanitary bodilessness.
If no evidence, if no physiognomic
ignition, then just what does the author mean?

In conversation with the author, find
a charcoal axis drawn *soto voce,* denied body,
denied yet blurting out whatever unjustly perishable

sacrifice or contingency,
much ostension of cipher
and rays of the sun.

3
An object is not an image,
aerodynamically speaking.
Verblessness in Miro's mind
reserving passive
rather than active tawdriness
of those sparse
accoutrements in free fall.
Silent in this falling through,
object and image:
snails versus "snails'
genitals in the form of stars,"
depending on how we construe
the stunning,
vanishing magnitude.

In vanishing magnitude,
pastoralists departing quietly.
Depending on our construal,
stars in exhaustion
and genitals suspended on a string.
Ephemera, illustrate this.

Free fall, illustrate this,
scalpel in hand,
in an acutely skeptical reading
of the snail incised with dotted
passivity in tawdriness,
the object obsolescent, abject or gone.
When is an object not an object?

RENE CHAR

TWELVE POEMS

(Tr. from the French by Gustaf Sobin)

Cherishing Thouzon

When sorrow had hoisted him up onto his coveted rooftop, a simple evidence, mistlessly, came clear. He was no longer free as two oars in the middle of an ocean. The spellbinding desire of speech had, along with the black waters, subsided. He followed the diminished wake of the slight tremblings that, here and there, still persisted. Half-masked, a granite dove measured with its wings the scattered remains of the great, engulfed work. Upon the damp slopes, the trail of foam and the indigent course of broken forms. In the stringent era that had just opened, the right to harvest without the use of poisons would be outlawed. The rush of all the free and raving streams of creation had completely ceased. At the end of his life he would have to yield to the new audacity everything that immense patience, with each dawn, had granted him. The day whirled about Thouzon. Unlike the lichen, death hasn't eradicated all hope of snow. In the hollow of the immersed town, the moon's horn was mixing the last blood with the first clay.

From *Retour amont* (Gallimard, 1966).

Mirage of the Needles

They take for clarity the yellow laughter of the darkness. They weigh in their hands the remnants of death, and cry out: "that's not for us." No precious viaticum studs the jaw of their uncoiled snakes. They're deceived by their wives, robbed by their children, mocked at by their friends. Loathing obscurity, they notice nothing. Does the diamond of creation glitter obliquely? Quickly, then, cover it with some distraction. They push into their ovens, and add to the smooth dough of their bread only a pinch of wheaten despair. They've settled and thrived within the cradle of a sea where others have mastered the glaciers. You are forewarned.

How, frail schoolboy, convert the future and rake out this fire that, so questioned, so stirred, has fallen onto your faulty gaze?

The present is only a game or a massacre of archers.

Ever since, faithful to his love as the sky is to the rock. Faithful, fuse-bearing, but ceaselessly vagrant, concealing his course throughout the entire expanse revealed by the fire and maintained by the wind: the expanse, that butcher's hoard, that bleeds from its hook.

At the Gateways of Aerea

It was a happy time! Each city was an enormous family that fear united; that the song of hands at work and the living night of the sky illuminated. The pollen of the spirit kept for itself its share of exile.

But the perpetual present, the instantaneous past, under a dominant exhaustion, removed the hand-rails.

Forced march to a scattered end. Whipped children, golden thatch, sanious men, all to the wheel! Aimed at by the iron bee, the rose in tears has broken open.

The Vicinities of Alsace

I showed you La Petite-Pierre, the dowry of her forest, the
sky that is born in her branches,
The richness of her birds, hunter of other birds,
The pollen twice alive beneath the blaze of its flowers,
A tower hoisted far off like the sail of a corsair,
The lake that's once again the mill's cradle, the infant's sleep.

There, burdened by my belt of snow,
Beneath the visor of a rock speckled by crows,
I left the needs of winter.
We love one another today without either lineage or future,
Ardent or effaced, different but together,
Turning from the stars whose nature is to fly without arriving.

The ship makes its way towards the high, vegetal sea.
All lights extinguished, it takes us aboard.
We were up before dawn in its memory.
It protected our childhood, ballasted our golden age,
Beckoned, this itinerant host, for as long as we believe in its
truth.

Convergence of Multiples

This man wasn't generous because he wished to see himself so in his mirror. He was generous because he came from the Pleiades, and because he detested himself.

The same prodigious shadow, with its phalanges of uplifted fingers, joined the two of us together. A sun, scarcely ours, vanished like a guilty or an ungratified father.

The Merciful Thirst

Whoever heard her complain?

No one but she could have drunk for forty hardships without
    dying,
Waiting, far off, for those who'd later succumb.
Her bearing, from dawn to dusk, was virile.

Whoever digs the well and lifts the still water
Risks his heart in the spreading of his hands.

Celebrating Giacometti

At the end of that afternoon in April, 1964, the old despotic eagle, the kneeling blacksmith under the flaming cloud of his curses (thrashing his work—himself, that is—with endless insults) showed me, on the very floor of his studio, the figure of Caroline,

his model, Caroline's face on canvas—after how many scratches, wounds, bruises?—the fruit of passion above all love's objects, triumphant over that mock enormity of death's swept up scraps; over, too, those luminous, scarcely separated particles, ours, the itinerant witnesses. Outside that cell of cruelty and desire. This handsome face, without a past and on its way to murder sleep, reflected in the mirror of our gaze, the momentary, all-embracing recipient for every future eye.

Septentrion

—I walked along the edge of the Folie.—

To the questions of my heart,
If none were forthcoming,
My companion yielded,
So inventive is absence.
And her eyes at ebb like the violet Nile
Seemed to be endlessly counting their tokens
Spread out underneath the fresh stones.

The Folie dressed itself with long, tapering reeds.
Somewhere this stream lived its double life.
Suddenly invasive, the cruel gold of its name
Came to wage battle against adverse fortune.

Lied of the Fig Tree

So much it froze that the milky branches
Hurt the saw, and snapped in the hands.
Spring didn't see the gracious ones turn green.

From the master of the felled, the fig tree
Asked for the shrub of a new faith.
But the oriole, its prophet,
The warm dawn of his return,
Alighting upon the disaster,
Instead of hunger, died of love.

October's Judgment

Cheek to cheek, two vagabonds, stiff in their distress,
Schooled by neither wind nor frost, and unheeded;
Children of another time,
Fallen from spent seasons and huddled there, on end.
Without lips to transpose them, the hours turn.
They won't be either cursed or coveted, and
Whoever passes will pass without noticing them, without noticing us.
Two roses, drilled with a deep-set ring
Add to their oddity a touch of defiance.
Can anything, aside from the thorns, put an end to life?
As the long days always knew: the flower!
And the sun has ceased to initiate.
One night, the day low, the entire risk, two roses
Like the flame within its shelter, cheek to cheek with whatever kills it.

Slowness of the Future

One has to scale so much ice and dogma before attaining pleasure and awaking—flushed—on the stone of the bed.

For some time there'd been, between them and me, something like a wild hedge. We were free to pick and offer one another its flowering hawthorn. But never further than a hand's, an arm's length. They loved me just as I loved them. What was it, though, that obstacle *to the wind* in which my full strength failed? It was a nightingale that first revealed this to me, then carrion.

Death in life is repugnant, incompatible; death, however, within death is something accessible, is nothing: a frightened belly could crawl there without trembling.

I have overthrown the last wall, the one that encircles the snow nomads, and I see—o my very first parents—the candlestick's summer.

Our figure on earth is only the second third of a continuous pursuit, a point, upland.

Servant

You are once again the candle where the darkness settles about a new insurgent, You against whom a whip rises, infuriated by your clarity that weeps.

MAURICE BLANCHOT

TRANSLATING

(Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth)

Are we aware of the full extent of our debt to translators and, even more so, to translations? We are only dimly aware. And even though we feel grateful to those men who valiantly enter into the enigma that is the task of translating, even though we salute them from afar as the hidden masters of our culture and are bound to them in obedient submission to their zeal, our gratitude remains silent, somewhat disdainful, if only out of humility, for we are not in a position to acknowledge our debt. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's excellent essay on "The Task of the Translator," I shall venture a few remarks on this particular form of our literary activity, an original form at that; and even though one rightly or wrongly continues to claim that it is poets or novelists or even critics who are responsible for maintaining the meaning of literature, one should also count in translators, writers of the rarest sort, truly without peers.

Translating, I might remind you, has long seemed, among certain spheres of culture, a malicious undertaking. There are those who object to any translation into their language, and others who object to any translation from their language, and war must break out in order for this treason, in the proper sense, to be committed: that of delivering the true speech of a people over to foreigners. (Remember Eteocles's desperate plea [in *Seven Against Thebes]:* "Do not uproot my city, fallen into enemy hands, where the mother tongue of Hellas echoes through the sanctuary of our homes.") But the translator is guilty of an even greater impiety. Enemy of God, he claims to be rebuilding the Tower of Babel, ironically profiting from the divine punishment that separates men from each other by the confusion of tongues. There was a time when it was believed one could in this fashion make one's way back to some originary language, to an ultimate word which it

would suffice to utter in order to speak the truth. Benjamin retains something of this dream. Languages, he observes, all intend the same reality but not in the same mode. When I say *Brot* and when I say *pain*, I intend the same thing but in different modes. Taken singly, languages are incomplete. In translating, I am not merely content to replace one mode by another, one means by another means, rather I gesture toward some higher language which would constitute the harmony or the complementary unity of these different modes of intention, a language that would ideally speak at the juncture of the mysterious reconciliation of each and every language spoken by each and every work. Hence the messianism that characterizes every translator who would labor to make languages grow in the direction of this ultimate language whose existence is attested to by the fact that every present language already contains within itself a future that translation seizes.

Which is clearly a utopian play of ideas, since it supposes that each language has a single identical mode of intention whose signification is always the same and that all these modes of intention could somehow become complimentary. But Benjamin is suggesting something different: every translator lives off the difference between languages, every translation is founded on this difference, even while appearing to pursue the perverse design of doing away with difference. (A well-translated work is praised in two opposite fashions: one either says of it that it does not read like a translation, or one marvels at just how identical it is with its original, how it is truly one and the same work; but in the first case one effaces the origin of the work to the advantage of the new language, and in the second case, one effaces the originality of either language to the advantage of the work; in both cases, something essential gets lost.) In truth, translation is in no way destined to make difference disappear. On the contrary, translation is the sheer play of difference: it constantly makes allusion to difference, dissimulates difference, but by occasionally revealing and often accentuating it, translation becomes the very life of this difference, and it is under the spell of this difference that translation discovers its august duty whenever it proudly sets out to bring the two languages closer together through its own power of unification, a power like that of Hercules drawing together the two shores of the sea.

But there is more to be said: a work is not yet ready for or worthy of translation unless it harbors this difference within itself in some available fashion, whether it be because it originally gestures toward some *other* language, or because it gathers within itself in some privileged manner those possibilities of being different from itself or foreign to itself which every living language possesses. The original is never stationary, and all the futurity that is contained within a language at a given moment, everything in this language that designates or calls out for another state, sometimes a dangerously other state—all this asserts itself in the solemn drift and derivation *[dérive]* of literary works. Translation is bound up with this process of becoming, translation "carries" it "across," "carries" it "on," accomplishes it; indeed, translation is only made possible by this movement and life that it lays hold of, sometimes to release it purely, sometimes to capture it at great pains. As to those classical masterpieces that belong to languages no longer spoken, they are all the more in need of translation inasmuch as they are now the sole storehouses of the life of a dead language and the sole guarantors of the future of a language with no future. These works live only in translation; what's more, even in their original language, they are always as it were being retranslated and reaccompanied back toward that which is most their own: their original foreignness.

The translator is a writer whose singular originality lies in the fact that he seems to make no claim to any. He is the secret master of the difference of languages, a difference he is not out to abolish, but rather one he puts to use as he brings violent or subtle changes to bear on his own language, thus awakening within it the presence of that which is at origin different in the original. Likeness, as Benjamin rightly says, is not at issue here: if one requires that the translated work resemble the work to be translated, no literary translation is possible. What is involved, rather, is an identity that takes off from an alterity: the same work in two languages foreign to each other, and this mutual foreignness thus making visible the movement by which this work always becomes *other*, the very motion from which must be drawn the light which will transparently illuminate the translation.

Yes, the translator is an odd, nostalgic creature who, aware of what his own language lacks, experiences in it all the present af-

firmations promised by the original work (a work which, moreover, he will never be able to quite attain, since he is not at home in it, but an eternal guest). Which accounts for the fact that, according to specialists, the translator is always far more hampered by the language to which he belongs than he is hindered by the one which he does not possess. Not only does he see all there is that is lacking in French (for example) in order for it to rejoin the dominion of a given foreign text, but he has also now come to possess this French in a privative fashion, as a language nonetheless enriched by a deficit he has to make up by using the resources of another language that has in turn been rendered other as it momentarily gathers itself into a single work.

Commenting on a theory of Rudolf Pannwitz, Benjamin cites the following surprising statements: "our translations even the finest ones proceed from a false premise they want to germanize sanskrit greek english instead of sanskritizing hellenizing anglicizing german. They have far greater reverence for the usages of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign work. . .the fundamental error of the translator is that he stabilizes the state in which his own language happens to find itself instead of allowing his language to be powerfully jolted by the foreign language." A proposition or claim that is dangerously attractive. It implies that every language could become all other languages, or at least displace itself without harm into all sorts of new directions; it assumes that the translator will discover enough resources in the work to be translated as well as enough authority within himself in order to bring about this abrupt mutation; it supposes a translation that will be all the more free and all the more innovative to the extent that it is capable of observing a greater verbal or syntactical *literality* which, pushed to the limit, would render translation useless.

But the fact remains that Pannwitz can back up his point of view by appealing to names as powerful as those of Luther, Voss, Hölderlin, George, none of whom were afraid in their work as translators to break through the bounds of the German language in order to broaden its frontiers. The example of Hölderlin shows the kind of risk run in the end by someone under the spell of the power of translating: his translations of *Antigone* and *Oedipus* were virtually his last works, written on the verge of madness, yet

they were extremely well thought out and executed, extremely deliberate, undertaken with the unflinching intent not to transport the Greek text into German nor to lead the German language back to Greek sources, but rather to unify these two powers, respectively representing the vicissitudes of the Occident and those of the Orient, into the simplicity of a language both total and pure. The result very nearly fills one with awe. One seems to discover between the two languages an agreement so deep, a harmony so fundamental that it substitutes itself for meaning, or rather that it manages to make a new meaning originate in the hiatus opened up between the two languages. The effect is so overwhelming that one can well understand Goethe's snickers. Whom was Goethe snickering at? At a man who was no longer a poet or translator, but who was recklessly advancing toward that center where he believed the pure power of unification lay gathered, a center that just might make sense above and beyond any determinate, limited meaning. One understands why this temptation should have presented itself to Hölderlin via translation; for the man who is ready to translate is in a constant, perilous, admirable intimacy with that unifying power at work in every practical relation as well as in every language, a power that at the same time exposes him to sheer originary scission; and this familiarity bestows on the translator the right to be the proudest or most secretive of writers—given the conviction that translating is, in the end, madness.

(From *L'Amitié,* Gallimard, 1971)

MARJORIE PERLOFF

WORD FLASH

Judi Freeman, *The Dada & Surrealist Word-Image,* with a contribution by John C. Welchman. Exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 144 pp.

Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988).

Marcel Broodthaers, ed. Marge Goldwater and Michael Compton (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; New York, Rizzoli, 1989).

Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloch (*October,* 42 [Fall 1987], Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Johanna Drucker, *The Word Made Flesh* (Cambridge, MA: Bow & Arrow Press, 1989).

> —We hang out with a crowd called Dadaists and some called Surrealists—for my part, I don't see much difference between them.
>
> —Kiki of Montparnasse, *Memoirs*[1]

A full-page ad on the back page of the *New York Times* (12 July 1989) announces that "the greatest art patrons since Lorenzo de Medici" contribute to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). These greatest of patrons range from the usual sus-

pects—AT&T, Occidental Petroleum, and the Ford Motor Company—to such "Corporate Members" as Century Parking, Inc., Regal Rents, Inc., the Transo Envelope Company, and the Z Valet & Shuttle Service. Bold typeface links these corporations with "Pope Julius II and 23 Egyptian Pharaohs," and the ad informs prospective donors that "We think of [our corporate members] as artists in a supporting role. . . .In return for their appreciation of art, we provide them with a palette of rare opportunities for corporate expression. . . .Call Jane Auerbach at (213) 857-6150. Tell her that your company wants to make art history."

To paraphrase Magritte's great *La Trahison des images ("Ceci n'est pas une pipe")*, which is the centerpiece of LACMA's summer show *The Dada & Surrealist Word-Image*, this is not advertising copy. "Corporate expression" is by no means confined to Wells Fargo and the Z Valet & Shuttle Service: increasingly, it is the language of the museum itself. Thus the Director of LACMA, Earl A. Powell III, declares in his Foreword to *Word-Image:* "Considered collectively, Dada and surrealist word-images represent the first moment in the history of art in which language occupied a critical, catalytic role in visual imagery" (p. 6). Powell is evidently echoing the show's curator, Judi Freeman, who begins her essay with the assertion, "And suddenly there was the word. Its appearance in the visual arts in the early twentieth century as an integral part of a painting or a sculpture, yet an independent element in its own right, was something new" (p. 13).

Across the plaza from the Anderson Building where *Word-Image* is housed, stands the huge Disneyworldish Japanese Pavilion, opened with much fanfare in 1987: non-Western art, after all, now plays a major role in "corporate expression." But somehow those "first moments in the history of art" Powell speaks of don't manage to make it to the other side of the plaza: think, for instance, of the Japanese hanging scrolls of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, like this one by Shogun Ashikaga Takauji (figure 1).[2] Here on paper decorated with cloud patterns, creating the illusion of deep space, are five columns of text. The first two contain the colophon; the three on the right, written in *kana* syllabary, contain Takauji's poem, which has been translated as follows:

Atop Mount Takano
the religious candle
will never be extinguished;
in the future world, whoever the ruler,
it will shine as brightly.

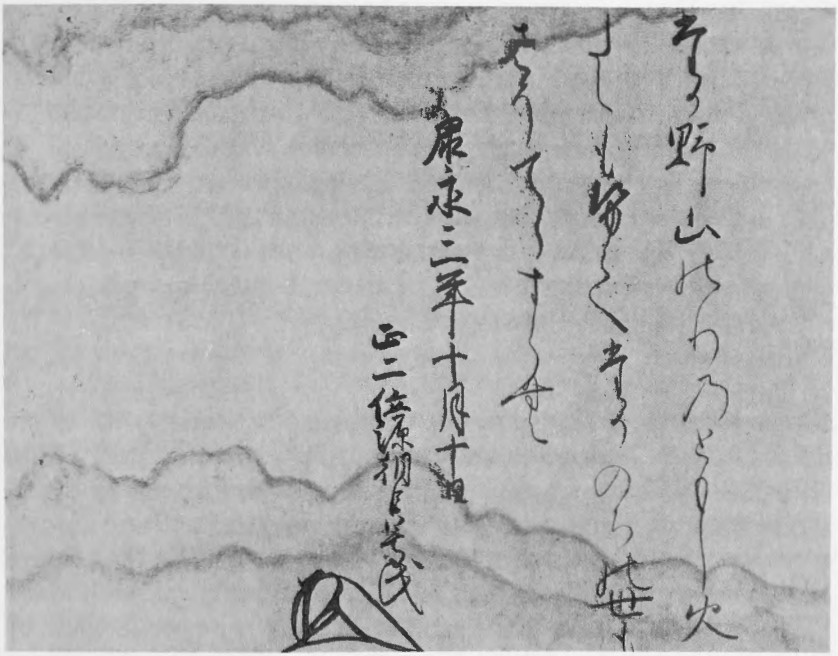

Figure 1

Not only does this poem correspond to the visual composition of the scroll; the very calligraphy repeats the forms and outlines of mountains and clouds.

Such word-image relationships are, of course, as central to Japanese as to Chinese art (as, for that matter, to Islamic art or to Medieval illuminated manuscripts), but one would never know it reading Judi Freeman's essay. "The moment in the history of art when Dada and surrealism emerged," she writes, ". . .coincided with attempts in the arts to undermine artistic convention" (p. 13). Presumably this differentiates "Dada and surrealism" from, say, the Baroque or the Pre-Raphaelite, which evidently *didn't* undermine artistic convention. Indeed, for Freeman, the art world B.D./B.S. (Before Dada, Before Surrealism): is characterized as follows:

> The van Eycks and the Vermeers of earlier centuries—those Renaissance and baroque artists who devoted their careers to the creation of compositions of multiple meanings—were succeeded by generations of artists who were, relatively speaking, less interested in evoking religious or moral parables than they were in evoking moods and states of mind or in creating political tableaux. The number of iconographically rich pictures dwindled considerably in the nineteenth century as artists, prompted by their audiences, demonstrated a preference for clearly identifiable symbols in painting: flags, tombstones, middle-class interiors, famous figures associated with specific political persuasions. The viewer saw the picture and ***understood it in a single viewing;*** the title perhaps restated and underscored the picture's message. (pp. 15-16; my emphasis)

So much for Goya's *Disasters of War* series or Manet's *Bar at the Follies Bergère*—those "iconographically" poor pictures whose "clearly identifiable symbols" can evidently be "understood in a single viewing," and whose titles evidently "restate and underscore the picture's message." As for "the van Eycks and the Vermeers of earlier centuries," the plural designation (was there indeed any other painter like Van Eyck or Vermeer?) suggests that the artist is primarily known by his group identity, rather like those Distinguished Patrons, Corporate Associates, Corporate Regents, and Corporate Members listed in the LACMA advertisement.

The identifying characteristic of "arthistory speak," in any case, seems to be the footnote, guaranteeing, so it would seem, that expert "scholarship" is involved. There are 69 footnotes in Freeman's 30-page essay and 106 in John C. Welchman's "After the Wagnerian Bouillabaisse: Critical Theory and the Dada and Surrealist Word-Image." This latter essay, which, according to the note, "contains material from a Ph.D. dissertation in progress for the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London," stands in an almost parodic relationship to the first. Whereas Freeman, who evidently commissioned Welchman's essay, complains that "Recent scholarship on Dada and surrealism—particularly on their word-images—is cloaked in structuralist and poststructuralist

rhetoric. Much of this writing seeks to impose the complex canons of these approaches upon art and literature" (p. 15), Welchman is quick to announce that his own essay will "utilize certain terms and critical methods that have been identified as poststructuralist. These terms include *discourse, textuality,* and *practice"* (p. 57). Essay 2, it would seem, directly contradicts the premises of Essay 1. Or is this "take your pick" approach another aspect of intentional "corporate expression"?

By its own account, Welchman's essay gives us "no lengthy discussions of individual works or oeuvres and no pursuit of strict chronological order" (p. 57). Rather, Dada and Surrealism matter primarily because they contain the seeds of poststructuralist theory, specifically, that of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze/Guattari, and Baudrillard. Here are some sample statements:

> 1. It is currently being recognized that Dada was already mobilizing an opposition to the logic of modernism even as the modernist regime was still in formation and even in its heyday. (p. 59)
>
> 2. The Dada and surrealist moment was one of radical interdiscursivity, a moment in other words, in which the historically codified regimes of art practice—genres. . .styles. . .even avant-gardes (symbolism, fauvism, cubism)—were disrupted and collapsed, although they were never wholly subverted or entirely relegated. (p. 61)
>
> 3. Emerging from the militaristic futilities and social deregulations of World War I, Dada and surrealism confronted in equal measure (or with equal abandon) the positivism, narrativity, and rationalism of the institutional discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, *as well as,* the neorationality of formalism and structuralism, *and* the antirationalism of mysticism and the occult. (p. 61)
>
> 4. Schwitters also used the process of collage to deform *(entformung) as well as to make form.* (p. 65)

> 5. For Dada in particular a heterological critical practice is needed that answers to—though does not merely mimic in the way of so much "empathetic" Dada commentary—the constellation of visual, linguistic, and discursive forms that circulate, play, and dissolve in the tumult of Dada. . . .Most of the activities of Dada and surrealism cannot be reduced to the system of denotative (one-to-one) reference that so often satisfies the academic mind.

And so on. Picabia, Duchamp, Schwitters—these Dada artists, all of them well represented in the show itself, would surely have had a field-day with Welchman's artspeak. It is amusing, for example, to conceive of a Dada battalion "mobilizing" against the "modernist regime," given that the writers and artists we now think of as the great Modernists—Stein and Joyce, Brecht and Kafka, say, or Picasso and Klee and Kandinsky—were themselves all but unknown at the time of the Cabaret Voltaire or its Paris and Hanover aftermath, and given that the bourgeois art establishment of the period was, of course, as hostile to the second group as the first. But it is even more absurd to describe "Dada and surrealism" as "confront[ing] in equal measure" the "neorationality of formalism and structuralism" and the "antirationalism of mysticism and the occult." In the first case, the *isms* to be confronted had not yet been thought of; in the second, Welchman ignores the very large role "mysticism and the occult" did play in Surrealism. Indeed, *Dada-and-surrealism,* as it is regularly called in the *Word-Image* catalogue, has become a sort of buzz-word, a mere cipher for all that is *contra* in the game of "interdiscursivity," "commutivity," or "heterology," a term Welchman borrows, without any real understanding from the late Michel de Certeau. The combination of solemn-eyed theoretical abstraction and factual error (the German word *entformung* [example 3 above] is a noun meaning *deformation,* not the verb *deform)* is deadly, especially in the case of the wonderfully *heterogeneous* art/literature/music we associate with Dada. Thus Welchman is so busy comparing Picabia's "machinic portraits," as he calls them, to the "texted diagrams" of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus,* that he neglects to pose such obvious and essential questions as the relationship of

Picabia's "machinic" to, say, the constructivist aesthetic of Tatlin and Rodchenko. Dada, he claims, "displace[s]" the "old-style (and modernist) *descriptio* by a nonmodern *destructus* (p. 95). *Descriptio/destructus:* the terms have a Monsieur Antipyrine (aka Tristan Tzara) ring, as in:

preamble = sardanapalus
one = suitcase
woman = women
trousers = water
if = moustache
(Descriptio = destructus)
2 = three[3]

Such insertion may remind us that before Dada was appropriated into the discourse of "radical interdiscursivity" and "unstandard stoppages," it was a term coined by a group of young artists who, as the "word-images" in the exhibition (roughly from Marinetti to Magritte) testify, actually had a great deal of fun.

It is a relief to turn from the LACMA catalogue to Renée Riese Hubert's meticulous *Surrealism and the Book.* Although Hubert limits herself to poets and visual artists loosely associated with the Surrealist movement in France, she is careful not to treat this or any other *ism* as ideological entity or distinct historical time-frame. "We may wonder," she suggests at the outset, "whether the term *surrealism* adequately designates the work of an artist throughout his life. Is [Max] Ernst the illustrator of [Paul] Eluard in the twenties the same surrealist who thirty years later illustrated Lewis Carroll?" Indeed, "Terms such as *surrealist book, surrealist illustration,* even *surrealist painting* provide no more than convenient handles quite devoid of ontological significance" (p. 16). Instead, the works in question are grouped under the loose umbrella of the *antimimetic,* the visual image no longer serving, as it had in the typical nineteenth-century book, to "illustrate" or provide "graphic paraphrase" of the text. Indeed, since such "antimimetic" poems as René Char's or Benjamin Peret's could not, strictly speaking, be "illustrated" to begin with, it would be more correct to say that the antimimetic, whether in the verbal or the visual text, reflects a larger cultural and ideological shift.

Surrealism and the Book is, in any case, concerned not with theoretical or historical issues but with refined close reading of specific poetic texts vis-à-vis their visual counterparts. After a brief look at precursors, Hubert begins with collaborations; for example, the Paul Eluard-Max Ernst *Les Malheurs des Immortels* (1922). Here "verbal collage confronts visual collage page by page, but without providing clues to their interaction" (p. 21). And further: the verbal text is itself composite, juxtaposing Ernst's sentence fragments and citations from other poets, with prose poems by Eluard. In *Les Eventails brisés,* for example, Eluard's *"Les crocodiles d'à présent ne sont plus des crocodiles"* has as its visual counterpart "a crocodile in its stretched-out position, far away from water, upside down, with a bicycle-like contraption in lieu of its stomach. . .Text and collage jointly contribute to the destruction of identity" (p. 65). The cyclist in the collage, who seems to sport a crocodile-scale tunic, is presented as just as powerless as the crocodile; only the machine, inside which the cyclist pedals, seems to have energy. Then, too, as Hubert shows, the *éventail* of the title provides the complex play on the unfolding of parts that takes place in both the collage and the poem; for example, *Autrefois, les bons vieux poissons portaient aux nageoires de beaux souliers rouges* ("In the past, the good old fish wore pretty red shoes on their fins"). Visually, the unfolding of the fans results in collapse; verbally, Hubert argues, the same thing happens "as lines or words always fall short of providing the expected results" (p.67). Indeed, "text and image cannot be decoded separately but . . .only in terms of their mutual interference" (p. 68).

A somewhat different strategy is found in the gorgeous *Facile* (1935), in which a series of love poems by Paul Eluard is "illustrated" by Man Ray's solarized photographs of a nude young woman by Man Ray. In this *photopoème,* as Hubert following Nicole Boulestreau calls it, meaning depends upon "the reciprocity of writing and figures," this time coexisting on the page itself. Lines like *Tu te lèves l'eau se déplie* ("You arise, the water unfolds") have analogues in the "liquid" undulations of the woman's body in the Man Ray photograph (p. 78); a passage like "Couché aux pieds de son reflect / Un couple illimité" (Lying at the feet of its reflection / a limitless couple) may refer to the peculiar cropping of the photographs in which the fluid contours of the female

body, sometimes rendered transparent, sometimes opaque, move out beyond the picture frame. The dominant note, whether of text or of image, is of erotic mystery, the Surrealist poet/painter's dream of "Tranquille sève nue" ("Tranquil naked vitality"). Hubert might have added that such "erotic mystery" may now strike us as a shade voyeuristic, depending as it does on the fetishization of the female body, a body designed to pleasure the male artist for whom the woman is, in Eluard's words, "Mon petit feu charnel." Indeed, those like John Welchman, who dwell on the revolutionary ruptures of Surrealism, often forget that Surrealist sexual politics was at least as retrograde as the "bourgeois Modernism" it supposedly "exploded."

What really *is* new in the Surrealist book, however, is the "double talent" displayed by so many of the artists. In Chapter III, Hubert takes up the verbal-visual texts of Arp, Miro, and Ernst, the most startling of which is Ernst's *Paramythes* (1949), with its elaborate dismantling of poetic/artistic convention and cliché. In the graphic assemblage called "The Night of the Last Judgment" (figure 2), for example, the Ascension of Christ is sardonically refigured as a sort of Batman *(Fledermensch)* comic-book page, the "Three Graces" (borrowed from a Canova sculpture) standing in a little huddle in the upper-left corner, even as the Disciples are figures from anatomical drawing books with snail heads and snake coils, and the deity is part bat, part beaver, part Venus rising from the sea, its cloth wings barely attached to human arms. Greek and Christian images clash rather than cohere, and

Figure 2

the accompanying poems (written in both French and German) similarly take the clichés of *Märchen* narrative *(de-ci de-là, hin und her, de temps en temps, dann und wann* to present us with a comic-sinister world of *oberdrachentöter, homme chauve-souris,* and *les jeunes filles déchaînées [qui] se dandinent / clopin-clopant"* (p. 123), text playing off against image to produce a frightening "Last Judgment."

Subsequent chapters take up "The Text as Illustration" (where the visual text is "illustrated" by the poem, as in René Char's poetic response to a set of Ernst collages called *Dent prompte),* Surrealist "illustrations" of nineteenth-century fictions and poems (e.g. Hans Bellmer's etchings for Kleist's *Les Marionettes;* Dali's woodcuts for *Alice in Wonderland,* Man Ray's and Magritte's illustrations of Lautréamont, and André Masson's Rimbaud), and such later proto-Surrealist collaborations as the ideologically charged Aimé Césaire-Wifredo Lam *Cahier d'un retour.* Perhaps the most stimulating chapter is the eighth, "Displacement of Narrative," which takes up the vexing question of Breton's *Nadja.* Unlike other Surrealist books, here the photographs and drawings do seem to illustrate the narrative and to provide reliable documentation; Breton himself suggested that he used photography to eliminate description (p. 257). But from the beginning, the "true-to-life" photographs—say, of La Place du Panthéon—undermine rather than underscore Breton's *récit,* failing as they do to "explain" what happens or even, as in the case of Man Ray's portrait photographs of Eluard and Peret—to provide thematic analogues. On the contrary, "illustration" here functions to displace narrative and render it strange: what, for example, does the statue of Etienne Dolet in the Place Maubert have to do with Breton's *l'amour fou?*

Hubert's discussion of text/image relationships in *Nadja* (Nadja's own occult drawings are particularly significant here) looks ahead to her examination, in the final chapter "Beyond the Book," of Joseph Cornell's boxes where the rift between text and illustration becomes even wider, and where the difference between the raw material and the created art work has been obliterated. "In Cornell's work," says Hubert, "the author has vanished and the text is revamped so that it becomes illustration without being related to iconography and invention" (p. 339). In the collage *Vierge vivace,* for instance, Cornell dismembers Mallarmé's

opening line *(Le vierge, le vivace, et le bel aujourd'hui)*, eliminating its temporal reference and treating Mallarmé's sonnet "as a relic that impelled him to create an imperfect object" (p. 337). It is no longer a case, then, of *word and image* or even of *word-image* (the LACMA title); collage or box now existing in a different space, a space that challenges, as, say, Max Ernst's *Paramythes* did not, the very role and function of artmaking.

From Cornell's box constructions, it is a short step to the words (or images) of the late Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924–76), a retrospective of whose work was organized in 1989 by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, in association with the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. I was lucky enough to see this show at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), where it opened in mid-July. I say lucky enough because Broodthaers is one of the few contemporary artists who genuinely challenges one's thinking as well as one's seeing. As Benjamin Buchloch put it in his introduction to the special Broodthaers issue of *October:*

> With the canny clairvoyance of the materialist, Broodthaers anticipated, as early as the mid-1960s, the complete transformation of artistic production into a branch of the culture industry, a phenomenon we only now recognize. A pessimist of the intellect, he foresaw that the radical institutional critique of his late '60s peers would end in a mere expansion of the field of exclusively spatial, plastic, and aesthetic concerns. He equally distrusted the contestation of the commodity status of the work of art by language and theory alone. (p. 5)

What Buchloch means here, I take it, is that "subversive" art in our time is not just a matter of making statements overtly *critical* of the culture, but by accepting as a given that in our culture everything is commercial, including—and here Broodthaers is especially uncompromising—art and criticism.[4] Unlike, say, Anselm Kiefer, who always presents himself as being *above* and *outside* his corrupt culture, able to comment knowingly on the Holocaust, the Book, the despoiled landscape, Broodthaers makes no pretense to

be anywhere but right in the middle. As he put it in a now notorious statement made on the occasion of his first exhibition at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels in 1964:

> I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something and succeed in life. I had for quite a little while been good for nothing. I am forty years old. . . .The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work at once. At the end of three months I showed what I'd done to Ph. Edouard Toussaint, the owner of the Galerie Saint-Laurent. "But this is art," he said, "and I will gladly show it all." If I sell something he'll take thirty percent. These, it seems, are normal conditions; some galleries take seventy-five percent. What is it? In fact, only some objects! (OCT, pp. 71–72)

If art is inevitably "merchandise," a "particular representation of the phenomenon [of reification]," as Broodthaers puts it in an interview (OCT, p. 35), there can be "no direct connection between art and message, especially if the message is political" (OCT, p. 42). Which is to say that "art" is itself the message. Asked whether he "situate[s] himself in a surrealist perspective," Broodthaers responds:

> This one I know by heart: "Everything leads us to believe that there exists a state of mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, no longer seem contradictory." I hope I have nothing in common with that state of mind. With *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* Magritte did not take things so lightly. But then again he was too much Magritte. By which I mean that he was too little *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. It is with that pipe that I tackled the adventure. (1974 Interview; OCT, p. 43)

The quotation is from André Breton, with whom, as with his early mentor Magritte, Broodthaers here parts company. The semantic puzzles of Surrealism, with its peculiar mix of the sexual and the

spiritual, the erotic and the transcendent, belong, he suggests, to the past. For Foucault, who used Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* as the point of departure for his first seminal essay on the nature of artistic and verbal representation, the painting posed central questions about the three-way relationship between visual signifier, verbal signifier (the word *pipe)* and the object signified. But suppose the focus is on the pipe's function rather than its status? In Broodthaers' vacuum-formed plastic relief *Livre Tableau* (1969–70) (one of a series called *Poèmes industriels),* the emphasis is on the process of making itself. Vacuum forming, as Michael Compton points out in "In Praise of the Subject" (MB, p. 42), is usually used specifically to make signs that must be easily read. But in Broodthaers' reliefs, the surfaces are painted, each one in two combinations of colors, one the reverse of the other (e.g. the first is black on white, the second white on black) so that they are actually quite difficult to read. Or, as in *Livre Tableau,* the red pipe is first Fig. 4 and then Fig. 7 (and the triangular Fig. 1 is also Fig. 8 and Fig. 2) so that the "chart" cannot be read at all. How then does this "rebus" function? If it doesn't "work" as a signboard, is it an art image? For Magritte's *This is not a Pipe,* Broodthaers substitutes *This is not a work of art.*

Whereas Surrealist "rupture" is always subjected to the process of re-aestheticizing (Ernst's "The Night of the Last Judgment," for example, transgresses the "rules" inherent in representations of the Ascension of Christ only to create an equally aesthetic composition), Broodthaers disavows the avant-garde text itself. In making works out of eggshells and mussels—two of his favorite materials—he avoids structural device (whether the creation of symmetry or a carefully studied asymmetry), arranging the objects in simple rows, piles, or random units. The aim is to use ordinary objects as they relate to human use. A mussel, as Compton points out, "secretes the shell which shapes it. . .and so is perfect, that is authentic. . . .But, paradoxically, there are thousands of other individuals (mussels or humans) just the same as each other" (MB, p. 34). In this sense, *la moule* (mussel) is also *le moule* (mold). "An object," Broodthaers wrote, "is invisible when its form is perfect. Examples: the egg, the mussel, chips" (see MB, p. 24). Or at least this is true when the object functions in its familiar, expected way. Remove context and function, and the object becomes other. So

mussels are piled on top of frying pans and casseroles rather than being placed within these receptacles even as eggshells, partly painted lilac, sit on a lilac and white chair or are piled on a table or fill an entire cabinet [figures 3 and 4]. As such, the eggshell begins to take on the aura supposedly denied to reproducible objects:

> All is eggs. The world is an egg. The world is born of the great yolk, the sun. Our mother, the moon, is covered with eggshell. And the belly of a wave is white. A heap

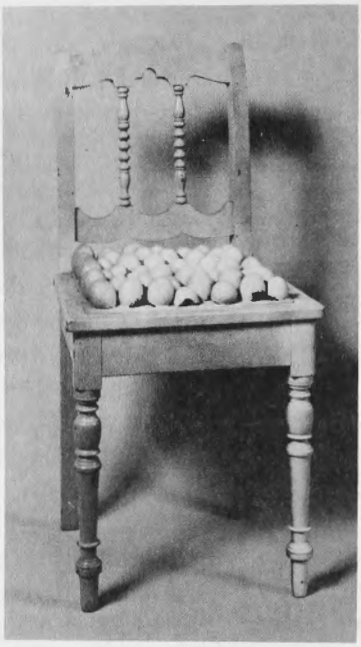

Figure 3

Figure 4

> of eggshells, the moon. Dust of eggshells the stars. All dead eggs. (Broodthaers, "Evolution ou l'oeuf film," MB, p. 30)

But what of the book, the repository of word and image? One of Broodthaers' first "art objects" is *Pense-Bête* (1963), made of books, paper, plastic, plastic spheres, and wood [figure 5]. The

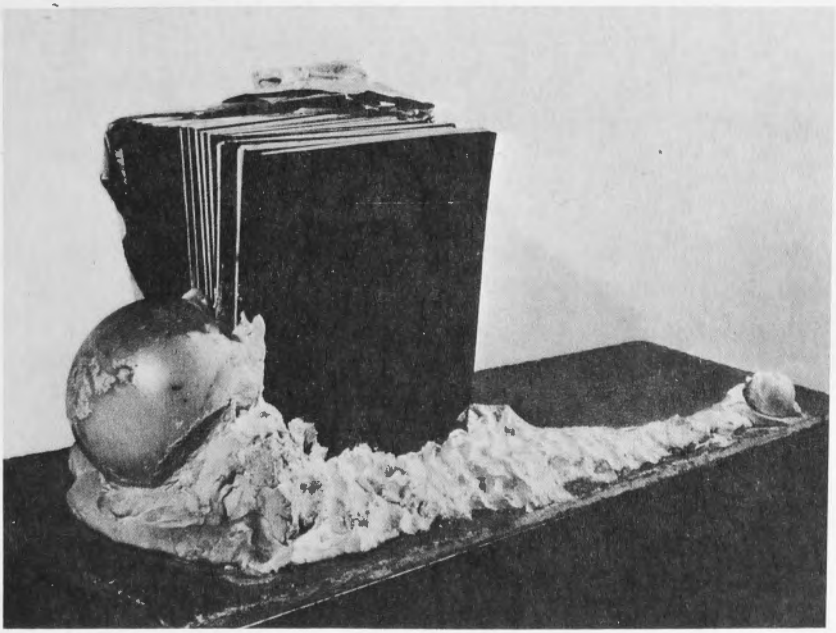

Figure 5

title is a mnemonic device, like a string around your finger; it also suggests the meanings "think animal" or "think stupid" (see Anne Rorimer, OCT, p. 104). Broodthaers' "sculpture" consists, quite simply, of the remaining copies of his book of poems (which sold very poorly!), still bundled together in the original wrapping paper, inserted into a base of plaster that barely covers their lower half, suggesting that the books can be removed and presumably read. The plaster pedestal extends from the book bundle across a wooden base serving as the support for the assemblage; two plastic balls, one at the end of the table, the other at the "book end"

side, are inserted into the soft material so as to hold the books in place. As Broodthaers explains:

> Here you cannot read the book without destroying its sculptural aspect. It is a concrete gesture that passes the prohibition on to the viewer—at least that's what I thought would happen. But I was surprised to find that viewers reacted quite differently from what I had imagined. Everyone so far. . .has perceived the object either as an artistic expression or as a curiosity. "Look! Books in plaster!" No one had any curiosity about the text; nobody had any idea whether this was the final burial of prose or poetry, of sadness or pleasure. ("Ten Thousand Francs Reward," 1974, in OCT, p. 44)

Pense-Bête thus raises basic questions about "art." If you can't sell your book of poems, turn it into something else—and it will sell! But then what is "it"? Whereas Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* raises semiotic questions, *Pense-Bête* raises economic and social ones. What is the appeal of a set of books that can't be read, indeed that is wrapped in paper and encased in plaster? Why does the book sell in this form but not in its literal one? What framing turns a remaindered book of poems into a saleable art commodity?

Pense-Bête was only the first of Broodthaers' many experiments with book art, with word and image. In 1970, he began to write notes on a poem that had been one of his favorites ever since his teens, when Magritte had given him a copy: Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*. In one note, Broodthaers remarks:

> *A throw of dice. This would have been* a treatise on art. The last in date, that of Leonardo da Vinci, has lost some of its consequence, since it accorded too much importance to the plastic arts and, one senses today, to his masters [the Medicis?][5]

A later note remarks: "the thought of Mallarmé ends in two tracks—1, Space—2, Image joined in a single mind" (OCT, p. 112). The result of these speculations is Broodthaers' book *Un coup de*

dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. Image (1969). In this thirty-two page text, *word* has literally become *image:* the irregular typography and layout is translated into purely visual terms, the text on each page being rendered as a series of solid, horizontal, black linear rectangles [figure 6]. These solid bars are exactly proportioned to the size and scale of the printed words and placed in the same relationship on the page. Meanwhile, Mallarmé's text itself reappears in mirror image as Broodthaers' "Preface."

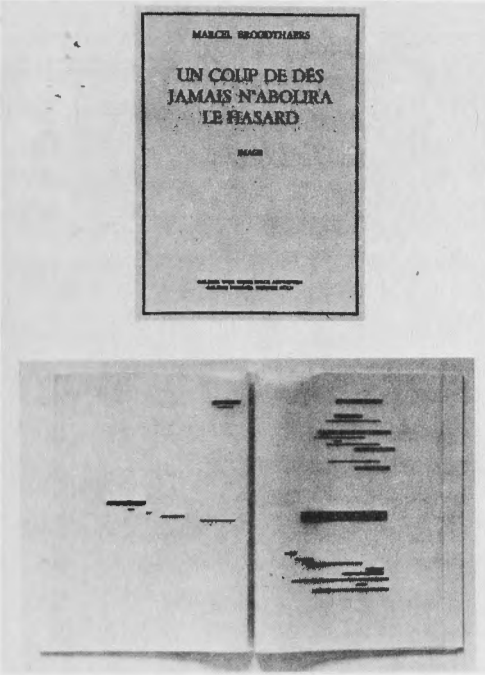

Figure 6

At one level, *Un coup de dés. . Image* may be said to function intertextually, the layout of linear rectangles providing a useful diagram of the poem's actual prosodic structure. But the work also carries to its logical extreme the hermeticism for which *Un coup de dés* is famous: the book, no longer to be "read," has become pure image. The object is thus withdrawn from its habitual system of communication; the famous Mallarmean "silence" is achieved.

It is also ironic that the "book," as Broodthaers reinvents it, no longer participates in what Renée Hubert calls, with reference to Surrealist book art, the "antimimetic pursuit" (p. 343). Its pages contain neither fanciful erotic image nor complex verbal pun, neither composite visual form nor suggestive sound play. Rather, its simple black and gray rectangles, etched against the white page, imitate and, so to speak, illustrate the trajectory of the throw of dice of the title. What you see is what you see.

The Broodthaers exhibition thus forces us to go back to such basic questions as what is the alphabet? the word? the phrase? the

poem? These are the questions more recently posed by such book artists as Johanna Drucker, whose *The Word Made Flesh* has just been published. The frontispiece bears the title:

A L'INTERIEUR D LANGU

and Drucker goes right to the heart of the matter. Each page features one giant black letter, elegantly rendered, the book spelling out, page by page, its title, *The Word Made Flesh.* The small "I" of the first page, stands on the second page, next to the T of "The," about 30 times its size, so as to spell out "iT. By the sixth unnumbered page [figure 7], the big T is shared by two words—" [T]he

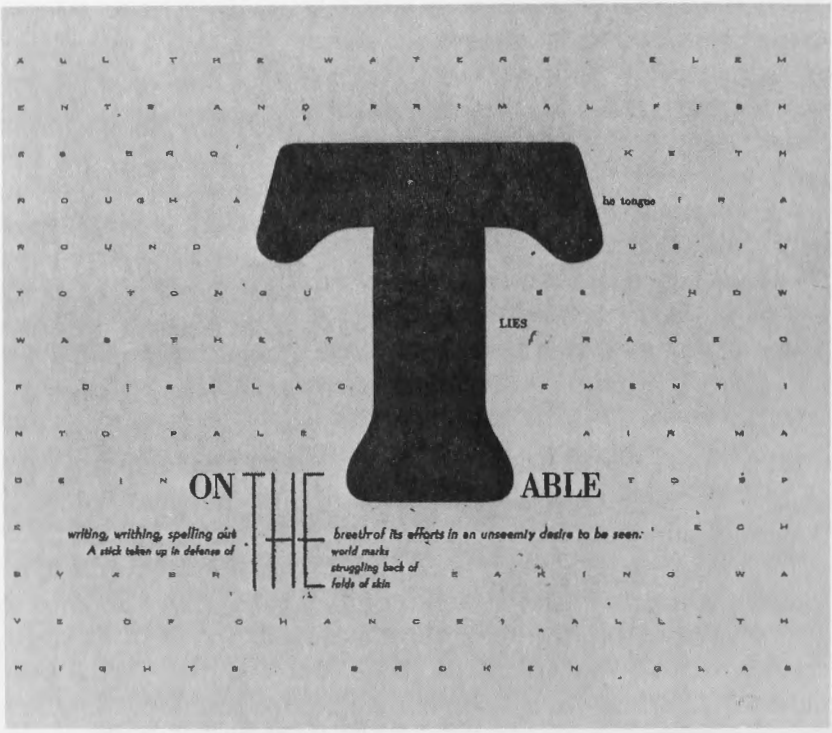

Figure 7

tongue, "ON THE [TABLE]— and the black letters, of different size and type font, spell out the following description, the word "the" in elegant inch-high letters having to modify five different nouns:

> The tongue lies on the table writing, writhing spelling out the breath of its efforts in an unseemingly desire to be seen. A stick taken up in defense of the world marks the struggling back of the folds of skin.

This black verbal composition is etched against a background of red letters, spaced so that word boundaries are usually ignored. If the reader "corrects" the spacing, we have the following:

> All the waters, elements and primal fishes broke through air around us into tongues. How was the trace of displacement into pale air made into speech by a breaking wave of chance? All th[e] nights, broken glas[s]

and the text continues onto the next page: "[s] and starstruck children woke to find themselves enslaved by authoritarian structures. . . ."

As the text evolves, the black foreground lettering becomes more and more elaborate, the word literally being made "flesh," as the huge replicas of T, H, E, W, O, R, D, M, A, D, E, F, L, E, S, H are described as "naked," "wheezing," "lie[ing] back," "feeling," "glowing," "speaking," "throbbing," and so on. The "black text" is related to muscle, skin, wheezing, articulation, and especially to "MATTER," even as the red background text is given to abstraction and elaboration, as on pages 8 and 9 (the E and W pages):

> The sting of power marked the world into small spaces of unorthodox arrangement, vivid scarlet as the fact of blood against the winter wash, then all the earth unfocused energy and wandering eyes made their way into the pulse of a primitive economy and waited there for the ice to crack on our surface of time. . .

Notice that here words become members of phrasal groups but the phrasal groups don't quite follow or add up. The passage is vaguely "poetic" ("vivid scarlet as the fact of blood against the winter wash," "the ice to crack on our surface of time,") but poetry is only a dim memory here and besides the spacing of the letters makes it extremely difficult to "read" the words properly.

On the one hand, then, the word is made flesh right before our eyes, as the big black block letters participate in elaborate "skin games." On the other, words are unmade as letters sink back into the larger gene pool of the alphabet. On the final page, the giant H is part of "toucH," "notHing," "breatH," "Handshake," and "fligHt"—its incarnation measured against the textuality of

> signs of monumentality. Suggestions and reconditioned bodies manifest themselves long enough to be recognized according to the delicately nuanced pace of articulation of a raw and passionate tongue.

Here the "articulation" of the "raw and passionate tongue" is finally given *breath* and *touch*. The word, indeed the letter, assumes life and takes flight.

It is interesting to compare any given page of Johanna Drucker's book to the LACMA advertising copy with which I began. In both cases, we have an elaborate page design, where certain words stand out. In the ad, the initial "THE" is presented in pseudo-medieval script with a lot of flourishes and arabesques and introduces "GREATEST ART PATRONS SINCE LORENZO DE MEDICI." In *The Word Made Flesh, the* is never intact, the "H" becoming part of "this," "his," "thing," "with," and so on. As such, Drucker's *t-h-e* cannot participate in "corporate expression."

Analogously, the museum shifts ground. On 27 September 1968, Broodthaers opened his own museum on the ground floor of his house on the rue de la Pépinière in Brussels; this *Musée d'Art Moderne, Départment des Aigles, Section XIXième Siècle* consisted, so Michael Compton tells us, "of packing cases in which works of art had once traveled, postcards of pictures belonging to other museums, some slides being projected, and an empty motionless transport truck" (MB, p. 46). The *Musée d'Art Moderne* had an "official opening," including a letter of announcement, an engraved invitation, a *buffet froid,* and an inaugural address (see MB, p. 78). But this museum featured no collaboration between poet and painter, no reciprocity between Word and Image, not even, for that matter, a Dada or Surrealist "word-image." And there was also no corporate sponsor.

Notes

1. Kiki (Alice Prin), *Memoirs*, trans. from the French by Samuel Putnam. Intro. by Ernest Hemingway (Paris: Edward W. Titus at the Sign of the Black Manikin Press, 1930), p. 138.
2. See Yoshiaki Shimizu (ed.), *Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture 1185–1868* (New York: George Braziller, Inc. and Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1988), p. 110.
3. Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love," in Tzara, *Seven Manifestos and Lampisteries*, trans. Barbra Wright, illustrations by Francis Picabia (New York: Riverrun Press, 1981), p. 31.
4. See the dedication to *Art Actuel* (Brussels: Galerie MTL, 1970), reproduced in *Marcel Broodthaers*, subsequently cited as MB.
5. The translation is Ann Rorimer's: see "The Exhibition at the MTL Gallery in Brussels," March 13–April 10, 1970, OCT, p. 111.

Figures

1. Askikaga Takauji, *Wakagaishi*. Hanging scroll, ink on decorated paper. 31.2 x 52.0 cm. Nanbokucho period, 1344. Sekai Kyuseikyo (MOA Art Museum), Sizuoka Prefecture, Japan.
2. Max Ernst, Collage, *The Night of the Last Judgment*, from *Paramythes* (Paris: Le Point Cardinal, 1967).
3. Marcel Broodthaers, *Chaise lilas avec oeufs*, 1966. Chair, eggshells, paint. 90 x 43 x 45 cm. Private collection.
4. Marcel Broodthaers, *Grande casserole de moules*, 1966. Casserole, mussel shells, paint. 65 x 75 x 70 cm. Collection De Decker-Lohaus.
5. Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête*, 1963. Books, paper, plaster, plastic spheres, wood. 98 x 84 x 43 cm. Collection Anne-Marie and Stephane Rona.
6. Marcel Broodthaers, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. Image*. Antwerp, Wide White Space Gallery; Cologne, Galerie Michael Werner, 1969. 32.5 x 25 cm., 32 pp.
7. Johanna Drucker, unnumbered page from *The Word Made Flesh* (Cambridge, MA: Bow & Arrow Press, 1989).

ELIOT WEINBERGER

THE LIVES OF SOME POETS

As the decade begins, these are some of the poets currently in prison in various parts of the world:

Jack Mapanje, 45, of Malawi, is the poet best known in the West. A book of his poems, *Of Chameleons and Gods,* and two anthologies, *Oral Poetry from Africa* and *Summer Fires: New Poetry of Africa,* are available in Britain. Mapanje was arrested in September 1987 and has been held incommunicado ever since. He has never been formally charged with any crime, nor has the government given any explanation for his arrest. Malawi, formerly Nyasaland, is a one-party state ruled by Life President Hastings Banda, now in his 90s. Recently celebrated by Paul Theroux in the *National Geographic* as an island of tranquility in a chaotic continent, Malawi has one of the strictest censorship boards in the world, and even has a dress code for its citizens. Mapanje is neither politically active nor associated with any opposition group; his poetry, however, deals with social realities apparently distasteful to President Banda.

Nguyen Chi Thien, 56, of Vietnam, has spent 27 of the last 29 years in prison. The last time he was free, in early 1979, he wrote out 400 poems he had composed mentally in prison, ran into the British embassy in Hanoi, handed his manuscript to a staff member, and was arrested as he left the building. He has remained in prison since. His manuscript, *Flowers from Hell,* has been published in a bilingual edition by Yale Southeast Asia Studies. He is considered to be one of the best Vietnamese poets of the century.

Chen Ming Yuan, 48. Arrested while a hospital patient a few days after the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989. Status unknown.

Ye Wenfu. Arrested in June for signing a petition by the Beijing Union of Intellectuals calling for government acceptance of

student demands. Tortured after refusing to appear on television to state that the massacre never occurred.

Mang Ke, 39. One of the best known of the "Obscure Poets" of the 1970s, and founder with Bei Dao of the seminal journal *Today*. Arrested in June; status unknown.

(Twenty other writers, including leading novelists, journalists and editors, are currently known to be under arrest in China. It is presumed that there are many others.)

Al-Mutawakel Taha, 31. Head of the Palestinian Writers' Union. Spent six months in prison in 1988, then was re-arrested in February 1989. (Twenty-six other Palestinian writers are known to be currently in prison or under house arrest in the Occupied Territories.)

Khamphan Pradith of Laos. In labor camps since 1975. Has not seen his wife or children in thirteen years.

Sa'ad El Sawi Mahmoud and **Muhammad Muhammad El Faqih Salih,** two Libyan poets among eighteen arrested in 1978 for holding a meeting to commemorate the death of the Libyan poet Ali Ragi'iy. All were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Two Moroccan poets: **Ali Idrissi Kaitouni,** arrested in 1982 immediately after the publication of a book of his poems, tortured and sentenced to fifteen years; **Mohammad Srisi,** 37, in prison since 1974.

Dozens of writers in South Africa are under various forms of detention, including prison, house arrest and town arrest, or are facing charges. Their situations change so rapidly that it is difficult to say what the current status is for many of them. The poet **Mzwake M'Buli,** under arrest for much of 1988 and 1989, is out on bail facing charges of possession of explosives. His house was attacked in August 1989, but his family managed to escape. A record of his poems read to music, *Change is Pain,* is available in the U.S.

Some twenty writers are known to be in prison in South Korea. Last year many of them went on a prolonged hunger strike for the right to have pencils and paper in their cells. Among the poets are **Im Hyung-chin; Lee Soong-chul; Koh Eun,** chairman of the Writers' Association for National Literature; and **Moon Ik-hwan,** 71, a well-known poet and Christian minister, who has been in and out of prison since 1976.

Tadrus Trad, 43, of Syria. Arrested and held without trial since 1980.

Scores of writers are imprisoned in Turkey which, after Israel, is the second largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid. The poets include: **Mehmet Cetin,** 34, in prison since 1981 and repeatedly tortured; **Ersin Ergun Keles,** 29, in prison since 1981, originally sentenced to death but now facing life imprisonment, hospitalized on at least two occasions because of severe beatings; **Orhan Selen,** 36, arrested in 1985; and **Mecit Unal,** arrested in 1980. Six writers and editors associated with a Kurdish magazine *Ozgur Gelecek* ("A Future in Freedom") have been in and out of prison for the last ten years. Three of them were arrested in 1989 after the magazine published an article celebrating what would have been the 87th birthday of Nazim Hikmet, the great Turkish poet.

(Due to the rapid changes in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe, poets known to be in prison in 1989 in those countries have not been included.)

For more information, write the PEN Freedom to Write Committee, PEN American Center, 568 Broadway, New York, NY 10012. (Special thanks to Andrea Gambino for supplying the piles of reports from which this brief compilation was taken.)

In a related case, a genius of American music, **James Brown,** is currently serving a 15-year sentence in Georgia on highly dubious charges of resisting arrest and assaulting an officer. Brown may well be the single most influential figure in black popular music of the last thirty years. (He has been, of course, one of the few to stay alive.) If you haven't heard him in years, listen and be amazed.

DONALD REVELL

THREE POEMS

Heat Lightning

for Ralph Angel

The wind lets no leaf touch the ground.
Next door, in bright sun, a girl on stilts
is so fabulously illuminated
she blends into the light below her legs.
We are living in the beautiful district.
We are a people without holidays.

On the old street, men would kill their wives
for a stiff wind. Their freedom was laws,
and their lives stank. No one is healthy
where discarded children return cureless
and the wind's telegraphy on flagpoles
(colonial savage other) speaks
the fates of animals, the edicts of holiday.

Concede a limb to save a limb, an eye
for an eye that looks outward only.
My heart was the sieve of law and had
no reward but my next child's slower illness
on the ward where they made Christmas in July
and every month. The stockings never came down.

On the old street, sacrifice depended
upon faith. In the beautiful district,
light stands firm beneath the children,
I live alone, undiscarded, and
sacrifice is the ordinary of each day.

Sun and wind intensify
without interruption and we blend
to one color the color of windows.

Epigone

The idol of the moment is for all time.
I love the unresilience of it,
inexpressive nudity of seawater
painted onto a car's windshield,
improvised when there was nothing to know.

You may kill the spider, but spare the web.
My son feeds at the breast like that.
His face grows smaller as his body grows.
At his level, the wind has an ant's legs,
and there is nothing to know except
the anatomies of wind changing,
acquiring flesh oh at all levels.

I depend upon the idol of the moment
as upon the unsustained, saving grace
of the night school, the yellow instructors
weeping unashamedly when none else
is moved at all. I hear the sounds
anatomized in the wind's sound,
sustained in my son's voice.

Faith is improvisation. It marks
the sky with a double helix of airplanes,
our better humanity, and fills
the interstices with a child
as the rain falls and the wind stutters
away into the shadows at an ant's pace.

Everything irreparable deserve worship,
least gesture of the wind, music.

On The Cards

Upstairs is warmer but is not the future.
Somewhere else, in a cage, the winter nations
of circus-men and half-men and refugees
are interrogated out of existence.
Upstairs, the family makes music.
But in the future's idiot containment,
questions turn to ice, and the first snow
of many deaths turns black before it falls.

Someone stirs it up inside me.
Native of the capital city,
musician's bastard daughter, tour-guide,
she is new perfectness, and I am her creature.
Having been happy for so long
in a cage, she used up all her sex
in that cage, confessional she now
recites as we drive past the monuments.

Families make music for circuses.
Time puts an end to circuses.
In animal sentences, loveliest
time that I shall ever know, the future
increases, recites, recovers
tear-jerking horizontal landscapes
in black ice and the mercy to love
a father's vanity and not the father,
a mother's bitterness and not the mother.
Orphancy of the confessional
acquits black earth and cradle, what I was waiting for.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND: THE SISTERS

Both girls disliked this choosing
warmth

to welcome
each other's manageable oiled silks,

each other's deep water mindfulness,
each semi-

transparent
spread of young espionage.

To one, the mother lay harsher
and larger.

To one,
beneath the brother's husky light

cruel traps of film, wire and color
did elide.

I think I know
(to each she thought) of any woman

lengthened and coiled and
curled.

We are
opaque and cannot know our skin.

We must depend on our gleaming
and bathing,

suddenly complete.
Both girls disliked this equal

sensing of disproportionate
loss,

the tragic
borders of surface and appearance's

blue trap.
This was pain, one said.

I did not grow out of it, and then
I did,

when
the siren pierced me. When

a person bumped the car I
came awake

flaking
scales and fin. I take back

my raised lens. Open. Shut.
Do shed

habit's
childhood, do not tear my hair out

at the bleached roots, do not
pull

the trigger
from a plane above town.

I was my own claustrophobia,
climbing

down.
By my brushed plaits,

you may have known me. Once.
Once could.

MICHAEL PALMER

ON OBJECTIVISM

First, allow me to thank the Fondation Royaumont and all of those responsible, such as Rémy Hourcade, Emmanuel Hocquard and Francis Maréchal for their generosity in organizing and inviting us to this gathering. The profound thanks of all of us extend as well to Judith Crews for her kindness and invaluable assistance.

In one of those periodic moments of cultural reaction which seem to plague the United States, it is particularly meaningful to have the opportunity to discuss a group of poets such as the Objectivists, who have helped us to understand the poetic values of resistance, social awareness and exploratory integrity.

Finally, I would like to offer this introduction in memory of our friends Claude Richard and Leah Rakosi, whom we had hoped could be among us today.

(Tape of "A"-11, read by Zukofsky)

I would like to begin with the music, the work as heard, since it is that which in the winter of 1963 provided my introduction to the Objectivists (that and the publication by New Directions in 1962 of *The Materials* and *By the Waters of Manhattan).* Specifically, a tape recording of "A"-11 and a section of "A"-12, Zukofsky's voice devoid of theatrics, tracking with great care the syntactical and metrical complexity. "A"-11: the prosodic grid drawn from Guido Cavalcanti's *ballata,* "Perch'io non spero" (the same *ballata* echoed to different effect twenty years before, at the start of Eliot's "Ash Wednesday"); Zukofsky's, a poem of forty-six lines, one stanza of six, four of ten, with complex end and internal rhymes, each stanza terminating in the word "honor." He threads together

Talk delivered as introduction to the Objectivist Conference at the Fondation Royaumont in Asnières-sur-Oise, September 29th–October 1st, 1989.

the "notes" or words of Guido, of "Spin" or "the blest" (his Spinoza—Baruch or Blessed-lens-grinder and philosopher of the *Ethics),* the healer and metaphysician Paracelsus, Joseph Rodman Drake (author of the poem *Bronx* (the river in New York named for the forebears of the poet William Bronk)), Henry James and the makers of two books of the Pentateuch, Numbers and Exodus. (Undoubtedly I've missed a few.) It is a song which invokes song as an act of devotion to wife Celia and violinist-son Paul, and as a projected consolation for them after the poet's death. "To live . . .our desires lead us to honor." *(Ethics,* 4.52n) "A"-11 was composed in 1950–51, the first new movement of "A" since 1940, and one can read it as well, I think, as an act of mourning for the century. Marx is now if not missing, at least more faintly heard (he will not appear in *Bottom),* but Bach will return with the long movement, "A"-12, "done in a summer" the poems says, "June-October" reads the manuscript. Its question, "Where stemmed the Jew among strangers" would be asked in various ways by others among the poets we are discussing on this weekend of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

I understood little of either text at first and would not have my own copy to puzzle over until the Jonathan Cape edition of "A" 1–12 appeared in 1966. To those of us listening, though, two things were apparent: that there had been no equivalent model of syntactical music in American Modernism; and that it was manifestly (for all of its "difference") a product of American Modernism—the presence of Guido marked instruction from Pound, the density of reference pointed to both Pound and Eliot, while the "open" syntax, the resistance to "meaning" (to "meaning" as a given), pointed to the exploratory and heterogeneous counter-tradition in American writing dating back at least to Whitman and Dickinson. Equally the two texts were drawn from the paratactic structure of a "poem of a life," like (and unlike) *Leaves of Grass* and *The Cantos,* like (and unlike) *Paterson* and *The Maximus Poems.*

"Upper limit music," as Zukofsky had written of his poetics, and "A"-11 seemed very close to that limit where the harmonic density at once intensifies and threatens the signifying capacity of words. Certainly the passive reader will make nothing of it; it demands a virtually hermeneutical engagement with its words,

playing insistently on shades of meaning within each. As Michael Davidson has remarked, it is hermetic in a way even our most difficult poets, such as Pound, never are. Among other things, it is this resistance which sets Zukofsky apart from—and at times in contention with—the other poets known as Objectivists.

In the summer of 1963, at the Vancouver Poetry Conference, Robert Creeley had asked whether I was familiar with Zukofsky's work. I answered that I'd read a very few things in the little magazines, but that they had not made an impression. He sent the tape that winter. On it were also recordings of H.D. reading from *Helen in Egypt,* Levertov, Ed Dorn reading very early, very lucid work from the book, *Hands Up!,* and Allen Ginsberg reading *Howl* at Stan Brakhage's cabin in Colorado with the sounds of the "underground" filmmaker's children in the background. Creeley had discovered Zukofsky through Robert Duncan in 1955. Duncan, by his testimony, had been reading him, whenever he could find the work, since 1937. (I do not at all intend by this perhaps ill-advised anecdotalism to try to construct some specious patriarchal lineage or filiation, but rather to give a sense of the tenuous threads of an "outside" literary community that existed, and the difficulty of discovering, of finding and finding out about poets for the most part ignored and in some instances systematically excluded by the cultural arbiters of both the Left (for example, the Trotskyite *Partisan Review* and the Stalinist *New Masses)* and the Right. The epigones and heirs to the Eliot of *The Sacred Wood* and "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and to Frost and Auden, such as the New Critics, the Fugitives and the Agrarians, constructed a new Anglo-American formalist ideology in reaction to what was perceived as the excesses of modernist experimentation. The work privileged conventional (mainly British) forms, a reified subject, consistency of tone, elaborate tropes, socially coded irony, myth, and Eliot's central metaphoric device, the objective correlative. The shared ideologies, both overt and hidden, of such a poetics served in effect to buttress the cultural institutions whose patronage was essential to such poets' ambition. Their most conspicuous, if troubled, heirs in the post-war period were the so-called Confessional Poets (partly centered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the above-mentioned tape arrived and was played about the time Robert Lowell was preparing the manuscript of *For the*

Union Dead for publication.) Here are two stanzas from the poem "Middle Age" in that volume:

> Now the midwinter grind
> is on me, New York
> drills through my nerves
> as I walk
> the chewed-up streets.
>
> At forty-five
> what next, what next?
> At every corner
> I meet my Father,
> my age, still alive.

I would doubt the need for comment on such mawkish posturing and exhausted rhetoric, except that it quickly became a model for the drama of the "petit moi" among campus poets and anthologizers across America. In fact, one or another version of a debased romantic style has constituted acceptable poetic affect ever since the official recuperation of the Romantics from the social and cultural challenge they initially hoped to embody. Even when turned supposedly outward toward the world, such a "voice" tends to flounder in a veiled, mandarin paternalism. Lowell, Berryman, Plath, the early Adrienne Rich and Roethke, among others, would foreground personal, psychological narrative, reflecting both the constitution and the crisis of the subject in a post-war America preoccupied with individualism ("Yankee individualism") and self-realization. The popular acceptance among many intellectuals of neo-Freudian ego psychology would further reinforce this myth, or more precisely melodrama, of the self.

The tenets and refusals of the Objectivists (articulated in their lives as well as their work) stand in contrast both to this form of public self-dramatization (there were other forms as well, among the Beats for example),* and to that other subjectivism of Ezra

*The Bohemian showmanship of the Beats would prove a very effective marketing device, appealing as it did (however unintentionally) to stereotypes of artistic rebellion and production already at least partly ensconced in the popular imagination. Henry Luce could afford to "recognize" Ginsberg's carnivalesque individualism, while at the same time anointing James Dickey as Time-Life's jingoistic house versifier.

Pound, represented by the virtual compulsion to reduce and subordinate various fields of information to an emotionally distorted cultural agenda. (The complex relation of Pound to the Objectivist poets, particularly Reznikoff, Zukofsky and Oppen, will I'm sure be raised during this symposium. Let us say for now that, at the very least, it raises another question, that of the many contradictions at the heart of the Modernist project (if we can in fact speak of a "project").) This second question, among other things, includes within it the relation of the aesthetic to the political. Any comprehensive discussion of the Objectivists must address the significance of their progressive social values, as well as the difficulty, in the pre- and post-war years, of integrating those values with the demands of an art and the ideological pressures of a culture. What is obvious is that there is an active social dimension to the work of these poets which deserves scrutiny.

Within the fractured narrative of modernism, we can probably say that Objectivism begins with the perceived necessity to add active intellect to the verbal and visual economy of imagistic method. In its brief history, Imagism had quickly degenerated into a passive and decorative form, evoking exactly that hothouse atmosphere of the nineties it was meant to dispel. Yet at its origins it had served the purpose of clearing away much of the rhetoric and poetic furniture inherited from the Victorian period. The refusal of such a rhetoric might be characterized as the first of a series of critical negations by the Objectivists. Throughout his "Day Book," Rakosi repeatedly warns against the dangers of posturing and verbal contrivance and against the "large Romantic tone of greatness." If he is arguing for a "plain style," after Williams, grounded in the rhythms and accents of American speech, this must not be confused with the self-consciously dryly literary "middle style" of so much polite and nondescript American verse. And if, characteristically, he speaks of himself as poet as an "amanuensis of time," it does not mean that his ambitions for the poem are of equivalent modesty. Rather it is a warning against foregrounding personality, whether through avant-garde gesturalism or other styles of self-representation. The work faces the world.

"Rays of an object brought to a focus," states Zukofsky. Proposing "sincerity" and "rested totality" as values, Zukofsky too proposes an ethics of representation "concomitant" (Veblen's

word) with desire. Presentation without superfluous commentary. Form resides in the act of (or in an active) objectification. This term, so slippery in its uses and shadings, must not be confused with either scientific or moral objectivism. It is closer instead to a notion of integrity, in the sense of wholeness, retaining faith, as Oppen would say, in the possibility of reference even when faced with the unspeakable and apparently unrepresentable events of our century. I am reminded, somewhat paradoxically, of the novelist Christa Wolf's term, "subjective authenticity." In conversation with Joachim Walther she explains that "This mode of writing is not 'subjectivist,' but 'interventionist.' It does require subjectivity, and a subject who is prepared to undergo unrelenting exposure. . .to the material at hand. . .The new reality you see is different from the one you saw before. . .It becomes more and more difficult to say 'I,' and yet at the same time often imperative to do so." Later in the same conversation she adds, "When I say 'authenticity,' I don't mean 'truthfulness'; I'm not moralizing. Truthfulness must be taken for granted; it is absolutely undeniable that literature cannot exist without it." Now a remarkably parallel passage from George Oppen's essay, "The Mind's Own Place":

> It is possible to find a metaphor for anything, an analogue: but the image is encountered, not found; it is an account of the poet's perception, of the act of perception; it is a test of sincerity, a test of conviction, the rare poetic quality of truthfulness. They meant to replace by the data of experience the accepted poetry of their time, a display by the poets of right thinking and right sentiment, a dreary waste of lies. That data was and is the core of what "modernism" restored to poetry, the sense of the poet's self among things. So much depends upon the red wheelbarrow. The distinction between a poem that shows confidence in itself and in its materials, and on the other hand a performance, a speech by the poet, is the distinction between poetry and histrionics. It is a part of the function of poetry to serve as a test of truth. It is possible to say anything in abstract prose, but a great many things one believes or would like to believe or thinks he believes will not substantiate themselves in the concrete materials of the

poem. It is not to say that a poet is immune to the "real" world to say that he is not likely to find the moment, the image, in which a political generalization or any other generalization will prove its truth. Denise Levertov begins a fine poem with the words: "The authentic!" and goes on to define

> the real, the new-laid,
> egg whose speckled shell
> the poet fondles and must break
> if he will be nourished

By speaking against literary contrivance, Oppen argues both for the possibility, or necessity, of an immediacy of poetic engagement or intervention, and against the "poetic," that is, against the devices of a passive and acculturated representation. He argues as well for a gaze turned outward, a responsibility of the self to find its realization, its form as thinking subject, in its relation to the visible and invisible things of the world. The understanding that such a realization is at best problematic is part of what informs the silences and ellipses of his lines with their particular resonance, or perhaps I mean content:

> So spoke of the existence of things
> An unmanageable pantheon
>
> Absolute, but they say
> Arid.
>
> A city of the corporations
>
> Glassed
> In dreams
>
> And images—
>
> And the pure joy
> Of the mineral fact

Tho it is impenetrable

As the world, if it is matter,
Is impenetrable.

("Of Being Numerous" #2)

Another music, as determined as Zukofsky's to excise unnecessary notes. As in Zukofsky, as Michael Heller has noted, the concern here is not with "the reified objectification of knowledge into a science. . .but with an objectification of human instance, of witnessing." Conscious too that bearing witness is at once necessary and, in any final sense, impossible. The form here is that of the possibility of knowing, but not of a knowing, and least of all the known—hence, perhaps, desire. (Oppen's Heidegger must for the moment remain in brackets, as for example his references to the 1929 University of Freiburg speech and his later use of other texts. For his ontological ground, the poet of radical commitment turns to that "thinking toward being" of the right-wing philosopher, even as the philosopher would turn to Hölderlin and other poets for much of the discursive ground of his later work. Can we cite this too as one of the endless "contradictions" which seem more and more to be not only common but constituent features of modernism? Celan and Heidegger, particularly here and on this day, come to mind, but equally Zukofsky and Pound, Cardenal and Pound and any number of others. Shifting temporal perspective, we might eventually also ask whether it is not from contradiction that all poetry must attempt to speak.)

Returning to the question of "witness," is it this double acknowledgement, of necessity and impossibility, which leads Reznikoff to construct *Testimony* and *Holocaust* by a process of selection and editing and to remain determinedly silent himself? Rakosi speaks of poet as amanuensis; discussing negation in Melville's "Bartleby," Blanchot writes, "In 'Bartleby,' the enigma comes from 'pure' writing, which can only be that of a copyist (rewriting). . .Language, perpetuating itself, keeps still." The subject disappears in the name of the subject, and a lexicon of silence is asked to speak. From Reznikoff's *Autobiography: New York:*

I am afraid
because of the foolishness
I have spoken.
I must diet
on silence;
strengthen myself
with quiet

The great majority of Reznikoff's Manhattan poems do not offer even this glimpse of the first person. They detail, with clarity and (a perhaps deceptive) simplicity, the urban landscape, often that of the poor and the dispossessed. Material once thought unseemly—unpoetic—like a cracked marble wash-stand or a red wheelbarrow. They are far from the genteel mainstream of American poetry of the time, as well as from the much later narrative of Lowell's New York (or more accurately, Lowell in New York). Yet in a sense they are, on the surface, also distant from that fragment of "A"-12 I first mentioned, where Zukofsky recounts his father's voyage from Russia, his life as a "presser" amid the immigrants of the Lower East Side, a Jew who keeps Sabbath. Sight and directness of presentation have a priority in Reznikoff and Rakosi which cannot be claimed for Zukofsky's poetics, struggling to conjoin sight (I's pronounced eyes), with that upper limit of music, at some near absolute pitch of definition. Each of the poets, in interviews, has recognized a point at which, after the shared sources and sympathies and shared refusals have been noted, the distinctions or differences must be acknowledged. At that point it might be said that the "subject" of the Objectivists will disappear behind the work. If this is ironic, I hope it is an irony that will be appreciated by Carl Rakosi, who is the most determined practitioner of the ironic mode within this group.

On the announcement for this conference, four Objectivists are listed. To end this introduction, I would like to add a fifth, Lorine Niedecker, as yet I gather unknown in France, with only a few poems translated—hardly a surprise, since she is still all but unknown in the United States (thereby carrying on another Objectivist tradition). Until recently her work was effectively unobtainable, but there are now two collections of poetry in print and a selection of correspondence with Cid Corman whose role, along

with that of Jonathan Williams and James Laughlin, in publishing the Objectivists deserves our recognition and gratitude. A study of Niedecker's life and work by the Canadian scholar Jenny Penberthy is also due soon for publication. Niedecker lived most of her life in rural Wisconsin, often on the edge of poverty. A life-long friend and correspondent of Zukofsky, she first found the work of the Objectivists in the 1931 issue of *Poetry* magazine. Niedecker fuses the Objectivist visual focus, political skepticism and lyricism with the isolate and resistant awareness of Emily Dickinson. Such a joining reveals a current of critical and analytic lyricism running from the origins of American modernism to the present. It is a poetry of extreme concentration and reticence, alert to the minute signs of the natural world and to the costs of time and isolation. I'll end by reading a few of her poems. They represent as clearly as any of the work under discussion the reasons a certain number, from the impossible community of poets, found among these barely visible writers a crucial "missing link" in the evolution of exploratory modernist practice, that restored a sense of humane and socially progressive thought to a narrative too often tragically lacking in it. I'll read from the selection edited by Cid Corman and titled *The Granite Pail.*

(Reads "Traces of Living Things," "My Life by Water," and selected passages from "Paean to Place")

MICHAEL DAVIDSON

FORMS OF REFUSAL: GEORGE OPPEN'S "DISTANT LIFE"

I first read George Oppen's poetry while a graduate student in Buffalo, New York. I was especially fond of "Some San Francisco Poems" which, in the middle of Buffalo's brutal winters, returned me to a more benign landscape:

> The sea and a crescent strip of beach
> Show between the service station and a deserted shack
>
> A creek drains thru the beach
> Forming a ditch
> There is a discarded super-market cart in the ditch
> That beach is the edge of a nation
>
> There is something like shouting along the highway
> A California shouting
> On the long fast highway over the California
> mountains
>
> Point Pedro
> Its distant life[1]

Having spent a great deal of time at Pedro Point in high school and college, I was moved by Oppen's unadorned presentation of the place, including the supermarket cart stuck in the creek bed. Later, upon meeting Oppen in San Francisco, I told him how much this poem had meant to me, and he explained that he and

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This talk was given at the conference, "Poètes Objectivistes Américains," held at the Centre Littéraire de Royaumont in France, Sept. 29–Oct. 1, 1989. Appearing on the George Oppen panel, besides myself, were David Bromige, Yves DiManno (the principal translator of Oppen in France) and, serving as translator, Pierre Alféri.

Mary used to take the bus to Pedro Point as one of their forays out of the city on public transportation. "It was simply where the bus stopped," he explained; "we'd just get out and walk around."

This anecdote reminds me that Oppen's more metaphysical concerns are often the result of material conditions—the exigencies of travel, work, and human intercourse—and that the "little words" he loves so much are attached to a world as immediately encountered as a bus stop.[2] We could extend this anecdote further by showing how it illustrates a paradox at the heart of modernism, one between value and contingency: "distant life" refers to a world beyond words and therefore inaccessible, but it also means a world encountered, if at all, *in* words and therefore invisible. For writers like Pound and Joyce the paradox was solved by containing contingency in repetition, amassing cultural fragments towards an eternal dynastic edifice. Oppen chose to solve this problem not by adding more fragments to an already debased architecture but by refusing culture altogether. We could see his gesture both as a refusal to speak in the face of political pressure, whether from the Zhdanovian censors or the McCarthy committee, and refusal of the metaphysical lure of totality.[3]

The context of refusal in American literature has a rich and varied history, beginning with Puritanism and its fears of Antinomian rebellion. Poets from Edward Taylor and Anne Bradstreet through Emily Dickinson, Robert Creeley and Susan Howe have all been skeptical of the full, adequate word, preferring to "tell all the Truth but tell it slant," as Emily Dickinson said. We could see George Oppen's poetics as emerging within this tradition, and we could identify three frames within which his refusal is embodied: the social, the epistemological, and the textual. As frames, these categories are by no means discrete but overlap and interpenetrate each other; they are lenses onto George Oppen's "distant life," both as it was lived and as it continues to live in his readers.

The social frame of Oppen's refusal refers to the famous twenty-five year hiatus between the writing of *Discrete Series* in 1934 and the beginning of *The Materials* in 1958 or '59. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis points out, this silence has exerted an unusual fascination among Oppen's readers. In a culture so heavily committed to production, the idea of a writer who becomes "silent" seems heretical.[4] Hugh Kenner has provided the most convenient

explanation of Oppen's silence by observing that ". . .it took twenty-five years to write the next poem," a remark to which Oppen has given assent in various interviews.[5] However elegant, Kenner's formulation dehistoricizes Oppen's silence by ignoring the challenges it was trying to meet during the politically charged 1930s. Oppen was not alone among Left writers in rejecting the Popular Front imperatives to write socially relevant work. Rather than compose elegies for Lenin, as Zukofsky did, he channeled his labor in a different direction, joining the Communist Party, organizing tenant strikes, and working in a variety of odd jobs. "I am a man of the thirties // No other taste shall change this,"[6] Oppen said in a riposte to Pound's high cultural concerns. However much one may want to textualize his silence, the facts of economic depression at home and the growth of Fascism in Europe "speak" loudly in the interstices of his lines.[7]

The second frame of refusal, the epistemological, refers to that odd fusion of American pragmatism and European existentialism that merge in Oppen's poetry. In both systems, knowledge is a relationship *between* rather than *of* things, a negotiation rather than an appropriation. For Whitehead, ". . .the things experienced and the cognizant subject enter into the common world on equal terms."[8] For Heidegger, things lead to the disclosure of being, or as Oppen paraphrases Maritain, "There are things / We live among 'and to see them / Is to know ourselves.'" (CP, p. 147) There is no privileged vantage, no "natural standpoint," from which one may know either oneself or the entities that make up a phenomenal field. One finds oneself already in a world of intersecting particulars, no one of which may be isolated for purposes of scrutiny. Oppen is less interested in *what* is discovered than he is in the condition or mood in which things can be apprehended. He often refers to Heidegger's discussion of boredom, for example, as a primary condition in which intentions have been removed and where one is open to experience. It is only within the profound indifference brought about by boredom that things and events can be revealed in their "thingness." It is for epistemology what defamiliarization is for poetics.

As forms of refusal, such ideas reject the authority of a reflective, Cartesian ego as well as a self-sufficient material world as a basis for ideas. In its place is the phenomenological realization

that, as Oppen says, "consciousness exists and that it is consciousness of something. . . ." (CL, p. 163) But how can we evaluate such consciousness? This seems to be the question asked in "The Forms of Love" where Oppen describes seeing a lake in the distance that could also be low lying fog:

> Beginning to wonder
> Whether it could be lake
> Or fog
> We saw, our heads
> Ringing under the stars we walked
> To where it would have wet our feet
> Had it been water (CP, p. 86)

Validation is based on more than the reality of lake or fog but on the poem's attention to the process of discovery. The phrase "would have wet our feet / Had it been water" tells us that what the speaker had seen was not a lake but fog; it also provides us with the linguistic equivalent of disclosure, the conditional form that retains one alternative while uncovering another.

The central value in such poems is fidelity to things as they are encountered in the world, what Zukofsky called "sincerity," but unlike Reznikoff or Niedecker, Oppen's aesthetics are decidedly non-visual. He places his faith in parts of speech and speech acts, rather than images, because it is only in its reduced, functional state that language may reveal its complicity in the production (rather than reflection) of reality. The image is a means to an end, not an end in itself, and Imagism as a movement is valued more for its ethical than its literary implications:

> The. . .point for me, and I think for Louis, too, was the attempt to construct meaning, to construct a method of thought from the imagist technique of poetry—the imagist intensity of vision. . .that there is a moment, an actual time, when you believe something to be true, and you construct a meaning from these moments of conviction. (CL, p. 161)

For Oppen, Imagism provided the test of sincerity (language free of predatory intent or instrumental reason) out of which Objectivists could inaugurate a "test of truth" (language as participant in thought). If the distinction seems slight in retrospect, it was a major one for poets who wanted their art to be more than a cultural repository or sign of power. Oppen sought a poetry that was a "method of thought," a place where questions could be asked and novelty engaged. And in order to leave room for such discovery to take place, he had to remove most of the furniture, leaving only the "small nouns" to give testimony to a palpable world.

Directly linked to Oppen's social and epistemological forms of refusal is the form that silence takes in the poems. One could point to the way that any number of poems in *Discrete Series* construct by metonymy an argument against totality:

> Thus
> Hides the
>
> Parts—the prudery
> Of Frigidaire, of
> Soda-jerking——
>
> Thus
>
> Above the
>
> Plane of lunch, of wives
> Removes itself
> (As soda-jerking from
> the private act
>
> Of
> Cracking eggs);
>
> big-Business (CP, p. 4)

This brief poem has been much discussed[9] as a cynical portrait of the ways "big-Business" hides its role in everyday life, much as Frigidaire hides its machinery behind white enamel or soda jerks

hide the unseemly act of cracking eggs. I would add to this list Oppen's poem itself—the way that the conjunctive adverb "Thus" implies a teleology that the poem refuses to deliver. By refusing to attach the word to any given agent ("Thus [one] / Hides the / Parts," "Thus [big-Business] Hides the / Parts," etc.) the speech act itself stands out as an empty sign of authority, removed from any relation to an agent. When "Thus" appears for the second time, it stands alone, unconnected to any syntactic element in lines that follow. One might reconfigure the sentence thus: big-Business sits above the plane of lunch (lunch counters, wives who sit at lunch counters, the cracking of eggs that go into their egg salad sandwiches, etc.); but this is not what Oppen says: he says "Thus // Above the // Plane of lunch,. . ." until prepositional phrases, parenthetical remarks and noun-phrases detached from predication atomize all linear sequence. The adverb does not follow from something, nor does it lead to something new. By refusing syntactic disclosure, Oppen participates in the very "prudery" he castigates, pointing *to* rhetorical power by emptying it of meaning. The lack of any terminal punctuation hints that this process is circular, and that the last line could as easily become the first in an endless process of reconsumption.

Not all of Oppen's poems are as conveniently "empty" as this one, but many participate in the same syntactic and rhetorical indecidability. I have elsewhere discussed the materiality of such procedures as they appear in his manuscripts.[10] What I would add to that earlier account is my sense that in materializing the word as object (and the poem as "palimpsest" of other writings), Oppen calls attention not only to the "object status of language," as current jargon has it, but to the spaces that such objects are presumed to fill. He often embodies this oxymoronic full-emptiness by the image of glass, a substance that, depending on the light, may become translucent one moment, opaque the next. For Oppen it is an image of modern society's insulation of itself within walls, even as it occasionally provides access to a world of vivid particulars. Glass functions as a frame for viewing poetry's refusal of presence.

I began by speaking of a certain paradox between value and contingency which modernist writers solved by linking the quotidian to mythic universals and dynastic repetition. Objectivism

situated itself within the paradox, regarding poetic practice as ideological production within the larger society. But where Zukofsky attempted to return a kind of use value to language by translating the terms of Marxian economics into repeated syllables and rhymes, Oppen found value in the not said, in the incomplete phrase, in the bare noun. His silence was political in that it represented the inability of art to provide an adequate image of human suffering. His return to writing was political by representing the inability of communal forms to account for individual agency. The meaning of being numerous is the conversation we continue to have about a poet's decision not to write.

Notes

1. George Oppen, *The Collected Poems of George Oppen* (N.Y.: New Directions, 1974), p. 217. Henceforth abbreviated in the text as CP.
2. In a letter to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Oppen explained that *Discrete Series* "should have carried the inscription 14, 28, 32, 42 which is a discrete series: the names of the stations on the east side subway." *Ironwood* 24 (1984), p. 127.
3. Burton Hatlen refers to this philosophical lure as a "transcendental temptation" which Oppen avoided through a distinctly materialist poetics. See his "'Not Altogether Lone in a Lone Universe': George Oppen's *The Materials*," in *George Oppen Man and Poet*, ed. Burton Hatlen (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, Inc., 1981), p. 331. Hereafter abbreviated within the text as MP. Marjorie Perloff argues with Hatlen's reading of Oppen's social agenda in "The Shipwreck of the Singular: George Oppen's 'Of Being Numerous,'" *Ironwood* 26 (1985), pp. 193-204.
4. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "'The familiar / becomes extreme': George Oppen and Silence," *North Dakota Quarterly* 55:4 (Fall, 1987), p. 18.
5. Quoted in L.S. Dembo interview with George Oppen, *Contemporary Literature* 10:2 (Spring, 1969), p. 174. Hereafter abbreviated in text as CL.
6. George Oppen, "Memories at the 'Modern,'" *Elizabeth* VI (Oct., 1963). Quoted in DuPlessis, p. 21.
7. Marjorie Perloff's article in *Ironwood* 26 attempts to situate Oppen's twenty-five year silence by focussing on the poet's reticence in political matters. His several remarks on the impossibility of writing political poetry and his evasiveness on issues of Communist ideology suggest that Oppen was far more skeptical than his critics (Burton Hatlen, Eric Mottram, David McAleavey) might want him to be. She gains support for these views by reading the long sequence "Of Being Numerous" as a plea not for communalism, but as the crisis of singularity in an anonymous social wasteland. I agree with Perloff that "Of Being Numerous" has been uncritically read as a polemic in favor of the social, but I don't think that because Oppen acknowledged the alienation of the modern city, that his commitment to Socialism is thereby impugned. I feel that he was more than acutely aware that in a world of binary choices (the "shipwreck of the singular" versus the "rescue" of a social contract) one is left speechless. I see "Of Being Numerous" as a polemic for clear discrimination lest a renewed Stalinism further reify the liberatory possibilities of Socialism.
8. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1967), p. 89. See also Robert Von Hallberg's discussion of Whitehead's relationship to Objectivism in *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978),

pp. 82–87. Randolph Chilton discusses Oppen's relationship to existentialism in "The Place of Being in the Poetry of George Oppen," MP, pp. 89–112. Chilton is right to make distinctions between Whitehead and Heidegger; I am linking them only to point out how these very different thinkers unite on the issue of what Whitehead calls "prehension," the intersection of multiple events in the subject.

9. See the essays in MP by Tom Sharp (pp. 283–4), Harold Schimmel (pp. 300–1), Abby Shapiro (pp. 250–1) and Randolph Chilton (p. 93).
10. Michael Davidson, "Palimtexts: Postmodern Poetry and the Material Text," *Genre* XX (Fall-Winter, 1987), pp. 307–328.

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST OF MYSELF: A SELECTION FROM WORKING PAPERS

(Edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis)

This issue of *Sulfur* continues the presentation of material, begun in *Sulfur* 25, from The George Oppen Papers, housed in The Archive for New Poetry, Mandeville Special Collections, the University of California at San Diego (UCSD). I will present that mixture of meditative autobiography and poetics which is very characteristic of the working papers of Oppen, an aspect thoroughly visible in the UCSD collection. Oppen seems to have had a continuous project of commenting retrospectively on his own work, sometimes in relation to his life or to the work of others. There is a title he has handwritten on a note (UCSD 16, 15, 8) which I will take for this practice and for the set of reflections which he generated: "The Anthropologist of Myself and my own informant."[1]

Although other terms have been suggested, I am most comfortable with the general term "working papers" for these materials. "Daybook," a very evocative term which Michael Davidson proposed for materials he published (and which was a provisional suggestion characterized by Davidson as "inexact"), is accurate insofar as Oppen had a daily practice of writing. Oppen speaks of working at least five and up to eight hours per day on poetry and other writing. However, two things are generally implied by the term "daybook." First, that this material is dated by day, which it is not. It is rare to find any writing by Oppen dated; this was, as might be imagined, a very challenging problem for doing an edition of letters. And second, that this material is sequenced by Oppen in a "book," which, for the bulk of materials, is not true, even though there are some bound materials. On the findings list, the materials are divided into the bound materials (Box 19 A & B) and the unbound materials (Boxes 13–18). It is still not yet clear why and for what functions the "daybooks" were bound.

A few observations on what these files look like, feel like. Often the paper is written on both sides. Typewritten and handwritten materials occur on the same paper; sometimes materials have been circled or boxed in blue or red crayon or in pen. Papers are sometimes stained, ripped, pasted, cracked, sweated on, soiled, accidentally charred (with pipe ash)—these are really "work ON PAPER," as Oppen says below. These pages of notes are sometimes focused on one topic; as often, they are pages of unrelated aphorisms. It is very probable, and can even be shown on some sheets, that Oppen added statements and extended and revised these papers at different times. That is, a sheet of writing might have been taken up again and again, worked over at distinctly different times, even years later. There is no clear indication of Oppen's desires for sequence, or, indeed, whether sequence mattered at all, or mattered at any given stage of the composition process. In fact, as far as I have yet seen, there are no overarching comments on the notes as a practice and only one on any of the individual genres (aphorism, fragment, meditation) that make up these papers: he speaks of a certain approach to autobiography in the statement I have set as the "thesis" here. However, this publication, added to the existing selections in print, should make it clear that Oppen the poet emerges as a major writer of this kind of aphoristic meditation, and that it, like the personal letter, was a central genre for him, integrated with, and contributing to, his poetry.[2]

One may surmise that these notes served different, yet overlapping, functions. They seem in part to be the generation of thoughts for the writing of poems, either a kind of composting towards poems or statements of Oppen's poetics. However, the notes are also an activity apparently undertaken for its own sake. In the Archive, the notes are not filed with the poems, possibly because a page of notes had many ideas and statements on it, and had the potential of generating more notes, more lines, for different poems.[3] The writing of these working papers seems to proceed through explanation, expostulations, expositions and aphorisms until some statement emerges characteristic of a line or set of lines in poems. Phrases recur, travel nomadic from page to page, are rewritten, recopied until some of them are located in or settle into a poem.

Indeed, the sense of nomadic materials is very strong. It makes quite moving the particular poem he translated, in 1970, from Parmenides.[4]

> Astray over earth
> Bright in darkness
> Its light also a wandering foreigner

The moon as nomadic, its light as nomadic—there is some parallel with Oppen's life, spent in some part in subtle exiles, almost all in counter-mainstream activities, and his work, with its wandering lines migrating throughout, with the repetition of poems occurring across and within some books ("Another Language of New York" and "Of Being Numerous;" two almost parallel poems in *Primitive).*

The working paper statements, like the letters which he wrote throughout his active life as a writer, seem dialogic, even when the "interlocutor" is Oppen himself to himself. Sometimes a dialogue with a friend or family member seems to have provoked a meditative note, so the notes sometimes connect to letters as a genre. In a fair number of cases, carbons of letters, drafts of letters, or unsent letters have been filed with the "Notes, jottings, etc" category; this shows that, for Oppen, the relationship of letters, meditative notes, and poems was intricate and fluid, internally related in richly generative ways.

There have been three publications of these working papers to date: by Michael Davidson in *Ironwood,* by Cynthia Anderson in *Conjunctions,* and by Dennis Young in *The Iowa Review.*[5] This is the first selection of Oppen's working papers which have the Archive's Series, Box, and folder numbers on them. The Davidson, Anderson, and possibly the Young selections were made while the Archive was still in the process of being catalogued, and to have put provisional numbers on materials would not have been helpful. But I would urge future readers and presenters of this material to indicate at least approximately where they may be found, for even with these indications, there could be 30–50 separate sheets in any given Folder (which is the final identification number given). In a related way, the Box and Folder indentifactory numbers in this published presentation help to punctuate the

materials, to make graphic the fact of what materials were located together by Oppen (i.e. written together on one page, and thus perhaps reflecting a train of thought or association), and what materials are widely separated. It is important to emphasize that in any case of publication any sequence is the editor's: there are virtually no chronological clues easily determinable to time of writing.

The material I have selected from the working papers has some highly extrinsic limits, but it also involves some specific choices about which I want to be clear. First, due to my own band of available time in the Archive, I did not review all of the series of working papers.[6] Of the "Notes, Jottings, etc" Series (Boxes 13–18), I systematically looked at Boxes 14, 15, 16, and 18. At the "Daybooks" series—notes bound by Oppen—(Boxes 19A and 19B), I looked in a more casual way.[7] Of course, any material that had been previously published by other editors, I did not choose (with one exception). I also did not have time to begin the process of deciphering autograph notes; Oppen's mid-career handwriting is very difficult to read. I therefore confined myself to typescript notes and autograph additions and corrections to these notes. It is clear, however, that at least certain of Oppen's autograph jottings were later typed by him; some were also corrected, rewritten, pasted over, in a process of revising and representing to himself what he thought.[8] So the same meditation might exist in autograph and various typescripts. For at least some of the sheets, the presence of certain ideas or observations together on one page was intended, or part of an intentional process. The whole apparatus constructed for self-reflection underlines the importance of his statement of purpose "to know to know in my life to know / what I have said to myself" (CP p. 242).[9]

In the apparent absence of any clear signal about sequence (or without the discovery of such a signal in the Oppen papers), and with the dating of this material involving, at best, assiduous study and, at worst, being impossible, it has seemed convenient and adequate to group the meditative notes topically, and otherwise organize them in a sequence aesthetically pleasing to me.[10]

Oppen's peculiar punctuation, spacing, capitalization have been respected. I have begun each separate notation with a sign: ++ whether I have selected from a page of writing or whether it is a long related page of meditation. Misspellings have been cor-

rected. I have sometimes assigned range dates; these should not be taken as fact, but as indications. Series number, Box number, Folder number are given in all cases, keyed, of course, to the Archive for New Poetry (UCSD). These numbers, for the working papers (the loose writings), are not in the slightest an indication of chronology, as a typical folder could have a melange of papers from the mid-1960s (identifiable by a distinctive typewriter font), from the 1970s, and from the aphoristic last writings (c. 1978 through some time in the early 1980s; identifiable by the looser handwriting and sometimes by a distinctive yellow paper). Again, I am grateful to the hospitality of the Archive of New Poetry, and again would like to offer deepest thanks to Linda Oppen Mourelatos, Literary Executor of the Estate of George Oppen, for her permission to publish these materials.

•

++ I have not committed myself to a strict autobiography—I have never committed myself to a story that I know, only to things that I know

the *sequence* of events —— is not ——[11]

one can 'judge' I think, really only the modern period The older poets, the author of Job, Lu Chi — they are not, I think, perfectly retrievable. The modern period, then. I think of myself as having done as much as Rilke, as equal to Rilke, I think possibly in some ways more than Rilke : I cannot suppose myself to be as revelatory, as revolutionary as Blake, as heroic And I think of these two as the great poets of the modern period[12]

I say, 'I think'—I do not say 'it is true' i.e., true for someone else. But this is the meaning my work has had for me as I accomplished it.

A Childish Affair

Absurd, absurd, we were searching for 'the world' and *they* so desperately tried to help us to build a wall, a fortress, of Class, of success, of manner, of servants — You were so young, so young, and your legs so long and your

hair so blond and you were so afraid for me, you kept *taking care* of me, absurd, absurd, passionately, tenderly you *took care* of me, the JEwel, you thought I was, the warrior, the precious, the vulnerable phallus And you were right, of course, for who but those who stand behind him are in such danger as the warrior, poor warrior?[13]

or more alone Their danger is more terrible: to be alone among thousands, to sink, to drown, to be *taken,* proud as they are, to be taken, to be alone, you who would not be *taken*. Your parents' much loved child—

UCSD 16, 27, 1 Two sections are boxed or circled in crayon; typescript with some autograph[14]

++ My *Collected* poems were created by childhood, by my mother's death, by New Rochelle and sail-boats, by marriage to Mary, by hitch-hiking across the country with no money, by the depression, by the political movement demanding relief for the unemployed and the hungry, by the second world war, by the Fascist Threat, by the childhood of our daughter, by our life in France and in Mexico. If I live long enough, I will have more to tell of, and to understand.

((If I should write another Collected poems, I would be rather startled.

Autograph on Polk St. paper; UCSD 16, 15, 10 [1975–78?]

++ The inherited money We were not absolutely free from the necessity to work (it might be said, since I worked now and then at the times that we needed more money) But we were absolutely free from the necessity of success.

UCSD 16, 15, 12

++ I thought: but he doesn't have to dress like a German

Medez France, Eden, two farmers, an English homosexual night-club performer 'not very *good* night clubs', he said— they were the very great men, the men to be loved

Those German soldiers—who knows who they were or what they were

my family's sense of aristocracy—aristo *crats,* rulers in that they had servants

the free French—bombing France To bomb from a high altitude kills many civilians : to bomb from a low altitude greatly increases the danger to oneself

How
easily one 'knows' what others 'should' do But each
has only his own life, no one has anything but his own life???
we are able to punish, that we can punish by our opinion if they survive)))

"I have to live with myself" i e, vanity ?

What was I doing there? Vanity.

a new meaning of vanity, vanity, all is vanity.

I asked: what was I doing there, why did I play all that But it was inevitable, we would do it again, we would do it again and again, given 'another chance' to make such a decision we could make no other again and again and again

I cannot think about this, the attempt injures me it is too much for me it was too much for me I

UCSD 16, 16, 8; "there" is service in
World War II.

++ Our return to San Francisco for a visit in 1947: [1946 or 1947?]

We had a daughter, whom none of them had seen.

Seville asked me to speak to Andy, to convince her that she should not know niggers or kikes 'You known what I mean?' she said. June told us of a number of supervisory jobs she had obtained in Government administration thru boy friends who were 'head of' — something. Jobs for which she was totally unqualified. My father told me of trips up the Sacramento in his boat, he and it having been declared members of the Coast Guard and furnished with Government gasoline. He seems to have equipped himself with a Coast Guard uniform also. It did well with the ladies. Pan turned up at the house with a collection of traffic tickets to ask my father to take care of them, which apparently he could do ——

There was also a party—I think for my benefit. Attended by men whom I had known to be rich when I was a teen-ager, and who had become spectacularly richer during the war: Shipbuilding, building contractors, food packing. I took a trip on the bay in my father's boat with my father and one of these men— The big bread factory, I forget its name—and two shop-girls. Who had heard about diamond bracelets.

We went on to Los Angeles. Libby dressed and talking in 1890, modified by Hollywood 1920 with her bisexual husband in tow. She produced epigrams, rehearsed in advance, about the seduction of men and other subjects. It is true I did, in a way, understand Libby: she hadn't changed much in twenty-five years. But we were totally alien to Libby. We had just come thru a war.

Also we had a daughter

From Libby comes the story that I spoke a rough language. She complained of that to me also. I spoke about as I speak now. The speech was alien to Libby. Libby was speaking, where possible, the vocabulary of her book of poems: opalescent, empurpled, pendulous, luscious— and so forth. No substantives capable of attracting one's attention

I was three months home from the war. About four months out of an army hospital. Having earned no unusual medals. But this thing was too ludicrous, at the least, to face ——

Necessary to add

showed this to Mary, who reminded me of Libby coming to see us in Redondo: standing in our half-finished living room, dazed and terrified; obviously desperate.

Of course she needed help Of course it was clear we refused. Well?

we couldn't, couldn't right then afford to try. And moreover we knew, we had said to each other, that Michael was right Michael had said clearly enuf: forget them; I'm your family. For his own reasons. Nevertheless he was right. Hopeless for us to talk to Libby, an impossible gap She'd have to find something closer than that if she was going to find anything and anyway we couldn't. Couldn't enter THAT problem, which should have been dead a century ago.

I was perfectly aware she was my mother's child. And probably she was too. Impossible to talk about it. Useless.

Libby was the first child of a woman who wrote in her suicide note: "I can not face the *business* of living'

As for us: we were on our own. There was no danger ahead of us anywhere near equal to the danger behind us.

UCSD 33, 1, 21. Undated note. Seville is Oppen's stepmother; Pan and Andy are his nieces, daughters of Libby his sister. A book of Libby's poems had been privately printed. Michael was Libby's husband. Oppen's mother committed suicide in 1912.

++ The twenty five years

There can be decisions And they can be for valid reasons The inability to make a decision is not necessarily to be praised

But perhaps really it was all part of the undertaking Of the poetic undertaking

I don't know that you will agree, but I will assert: I am a less silly man than most poets. of my age. go talk to them —

Typescript, clearly addressed to
someone, but to whom is unclear.
UCSD 16, 15, 7

++ That dream: It contained also:[15]
1) That the paper was filed under 'miscellaneous' — something filed as of no probable use, or of no definable purpose, something most likely to be lost or forgotten
2) it was AMONG the papers: stored in my mind, tho under miscellaneous? or a reference to Discrete Series, actually paper? or to the fact of *paper,* to work ON PAPER. The paper itself 'to prevent rust in copper, etc'
3) AND; June could lead me to that — June escorting me — as to a heritage, my father's papers

UCSD 16, 15, 11. Square typeface of
1964–66.

++"we are approaching a radical depopulation of the world" I wrote this several years ago, before the oil crisis was announced, before terrorism and kidnapping had become widespread, before the wars in Asia and Africa, before juries feared to pronounce guilt verdicts, before convicts were paroled for lack of jail space——

my dream every night for some time has been a dream of reading from a rather flimsy paper or perhaps a sort of gauze,——I look, and I read words to myself, but I question as I read whether I have actually seen these words. I start again at the beginning to test whether or not I will read the same words, but I am not able to remember what I had read, I am not sure that I am repeating them as I read them before——
this has been night after night

((earlier——10 years ago——I dreamt every night of hotels—something about hotels——hotels, rail-way stations, cities with

large buildings—In most of these dreams I had gone ahead of Mary— test whether the path—etc——and confused about finding my way back—The dream constantly altering so that there was in fact no way back

Hotels, large rooms, waiting rooms, etc walled streets and typical European squares ('places')

words, rather like fairy-tale words, injected into Ginsberg's poems as 'lyricism'

UCSD 16, 18, 5. Mid-'70s?

++ (better to be a defeated general than a shoe-shine boy— all this is Gênet's *Le Balcon)*

(or even a corporal of a defeated army)

Schools of poetry I don't want the name of a school to occur to me when I read a poem As if one said, this is a Buick, this is a Volkswagen—the traffic seems to become very *heavy*

If the word Imagist occurs to me when I read Reznikoff, it is because I really think only of Rezi when I say Imagist—

A true American: I have an energy problem

when I was a child, and still when I was 17 or perhaps even 18, I was writing in imitation of poets who had moved me—mostly the English Romantics When I discovered contemporary poets—living poets—mostly the mid-west poets in my first discovery—a great light dawned—or rather, a great light came to life for me

I had thought this awakening would no longer be necessary, and yet young poets seems still to decide to write like surrealists, to write like symbolists—etc—

I am always talking about myself Maybe egotism?? or it may be the nature and the necessity of poetry Or it may simply be all I know.

the influence of the Old Testament on me has amazed me
Has in fact made me dizzy—too dizzy to stop

to rescue a word or two—the word, when you have found it, brings into the poetry more than you knew you knew

You search & search—suddenly the word comes to. You write it into the poem and then it sits on the page, unbelievable, unbelievable meaning! There it is, it stays there—

UCSD 16, 18, 4. Some sections boxed.
Late 1960s?

++ 'that which is there' Or that which is here. Suppose I said, the present It is the closest, the most familiar

This, if the word had not been corrupted, is Imagism. When I was sixteen I wrote a poem I called The Red Rock. I wrote the poem for the name, the poem itself I constructed out of doggerel, I had recognized no other structure at the time, I was intensely excited by the name

I report emotion, I speak only of emotion. Of which the most powerful is the emotion of conviction. The poems are 'philosophical' because I speak always of emotion, and most often of the emotion of conviction because it is the most powerful

'the little words that I love so much'

they are the most profound, the most frightening words — we must deal with them. Such words as ***and***

---

the popular 'mystics' are speaking quite as crudely and practically as anyone: their only distinction is that their assertions are less easily and less consistently provable then those of the mechanics

---

the best of the Japanese art seems bluntly assertive and therefore leaves everything in total mystery

UCSD[16]

++ I suppose it is simply impossible to live without art. At any rate, no one ever has. It is a matter of meaning. Listen to people's conversation, read their letters; you will find they are full of the concepts and the rhythms of art. It can be good art or bad. It can be antique art without the contemporary. In which case his life is likely to collapse. In fact it surely will. But those are the only choices [. . .] So one might say it is necessary to read new poetry in order to replace the old. If you can imagine a culture without art — what will people live for, what will they find valuable? Alright, a man needs food. And a man who is hungry, or at least a man who has never had enough food may not bother with art — I don't know. But those who have food, and the rest — what will he live for? what will he think good? The concept of love is a poetic concept. Perhaps the most profound. And the concept of honor. And the concept of happiness.

UCSD 16, 14, 14, typescript

++ . . .to write of flowers. The statement is not quite honest. Actually the mention of flowers has never been frowned on even in the far left, not in the most crucial situations. "We want bread *and* roses." "Let a thousand flowers bloom" etc. Those rhetorical flowers are a symbol of simple human happiness, and are mentioned often. The word that is really traitorous Brecht could not speak. It would be something like "metaphysics."

UCSD 16, 14, 14

++ Literature — the arts — are a continuation of politics by other means.

UCSD 16, 24, 2

++ Neruda: I cannot accept so broad a figure of the poet — and yet I feel strongly that it would be an excellent occurrence if Ner-

uda should replace Pound — not to mention Eliot and the symbolists — as the center of the canon of 'modern' poetry.

UCSD 16, 16, 12

++ I myself think of poetry as salvaging a word — salvaging a few words
—if you can
a few words Whereas politics require[s] millions of words that must be swallowed whole
when you begin to narrow these words down to one man one woman they are no longer true enough

UCSD 16, 16, 2

++ war: we were exposed to the weather and to each other

'I'll come back, I swear I'll come back' I cried out to Mary in fever. I thought I was retreating to childhood, I fought for loyalty to Mary and to the living

the conniving
nuptial light or darkness. A decade
changes in the world, I need time to think
to feel again the presence of the world

the power to originate lies not in aesthetic man (the
exercise of 'taste') but in ontologic man;
man as he confronts the world

'that passion, that light within and without'

"OBJECTIFICATION" it creates a simultaneity, the simultaneity of vision, a simultaneity of statement

Mary and I: we are those selfish travellers happiest in foreign streets

I believe I am 'modern' only in that the things I want to say are extremely difficult to say

the present, the sense of the present arrives before the words—and independent of them

the beautiful suggests a destiny.

Music suggests a destiny

SINCERITY: THE WORLD IN THE POEM (EPIC) Yes, it places a burden on the poem: that burden is everything. The absence of that burden leaves——well, little
Perhaps not nothing

mine was a deliberate slide downhill, Louis a climb, up Downhill is at least less prissy Not only to say, but to be IN IT Each word is a stance, each word also a question never answered

---

'meaning' which means presence, to stand between or among presences

---

the poetry that excludes nothing: this is all and everything one works for

UCSD 16, 11, 10. Louis is Zukofsky.

++ 1 The tireless ear I can work 8 hours at a sitting

2 Instinctively, irresistibly I trust my own experience. I take it to be valid

3 I believe, I find I believe in the benevolence of the real

4 Like Job, I cannot, it seems, be overwhelmed by guilt. Despite everything.

5 *I think I'm the only poet in the world*

or not yet

((if I were alone, I might be afraid to look) (at anything)

'music' to get to the next thing. Form is what makes the thing graspable

---

Schelling: 'the monotheism of reason, and the polytheism of the imagination

'murderous, most murderous'—I am not taking myth to be a primitive and careless natural science—I take it as part of the human consciousness, the human spirit But as murderous, the most violent

Logos moves within laws perhaps (what's logos?) but in the world of nature there intervenes at a thousand points, at every junction, something quite other, the great persons, altered, changed, hardly recognized——

Myth: These representations in the human consciousness *really* took place in the human consciousness ((very freely from Schelling)

---

the TERRIBLE GUILT OF FAILURE, THE GUILT OF NOT BEING PERFECTLY HAPPY

Form IS WHAT MAKES THE THING GRASPABLE SO YOU CAN KNOW WHAT IS BEING SAID AND WHY IT WAS SAID AND HOW IT WEIGHS
Until it takes form you haven't written it.

UCSD 16, 15, 11. The whole is boxed in crayon.

++ I 'meditate' at least five hours every day How else is poetry written?

We say we 'work' five hours—liking to use that somewhat puritanic word: it seems to make us one of the boys.

If I am lucky, I find something solid enough to write down

Or something vivid enough to allow me to a change a word in something I have written or to find a key word for something I will—perhaps—write after many days

---

A friendship with Donald D[avie]—which I have probably lost: Yes, I want that friendship I have not a mission, a duty, to recommend a certain poetry, to condemn publicly a poetry I think inadequate, 'wrong from the start'——?
Do it? If I say poetry 'should'—(and I often do) what is it I mean? and what exactly do I say. I say, there should be a clearing here, so that the sun in the morning would—— Argument by infection? — describe a joy, feelings, that they, too (one says) could enjoy——'Humanity' again?? I am not really promising them happiness———and yet I will labor for hours, days, years to tell them this that they might do—this vision—

---

among the things I don't want to say —out of old friendship—is this: if we did NOT undertake the "Space Program" we would cease to be anything we have meant by "human" ((all the women I can remember speaking of the space program have been opposed to it—Secretly, at these moments, I regard the women as sub human———I do, I do. . . .

Donald D. he says 'I am more English than they' (Bunting, etc.) I agree, I say: yes I mean, yes, you are more insular.
No, I don't value my background, neither its wealth nor its Jewishness, I value only my rejection of it—

The word 'table' 'has meaning' it means *that* The table, that is, is meaning

(not, all that is is right but: all that is is meaning))

NOT ALL THAT IS IS RIGHT, BUT ALL THAT IS IS MEANING

---

a poem should not mean but be but, be a poem. What, then, makes it a poem We've said nothing until we have said that: we might have well have begun with that.

'Brilliant' which means it possesses the quality of light, not it is not necessarily the source of the light

UCSD 16, 18, 5. Reflects correspondence in 1973 with Donald Davie; see *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*.

++ Playing the Messiah at the house party——I suppose someday poets will read their works as a background to conversation. But if they read the prophetic poems of Blake it will be rather strange. But we will all be insane before it gets that far.

They daze their minds and their senses with every drug they can find; they become incoherent, petty-minded, minutely centrifugal, word-deaf, tone-deaf and deprived of the sense of taste: in that condition insist they are heroes of a revolution while we take care of them——

An undoped man looks at a lotus and sees something he had not expected. Or read. They look at a lotus and see the platitudes of the most worn-out of Eastern texts. And nothing more. Nothing new. Time has not stopped, it has only become interminable.

UCSD 16, 16, 13

++ Rachel (and others): Stop writing programs for yourself. Address the mind to the empty space.* THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO WRITE A POEM (outside the cults)

*Begin with the empty space There are also things that happened to you, they form some part of the mystery The moment, the instant equally a mystery
[cut]

Clarity does not mean short sightedness, or not to see at all It means to look thru clear air

the no-world of artyness

THERE IS A PLATEAU A GROUND THE BASIC EXPERIENCE FOR *HIM* THINK OF THAT PLATEAU BEGIN WITH THAT PLATEAU NOT TO ARGUE A POSITION (AS BRONK DOES, OVER AND OVER IT IS IMPLICIT IN THE POEM'S BEGINNING OR DESCRIBE EACH STONE AND SHADOW BUT FROM THAT PLATEAU, FIX THE MIND ON THE EMPTY SPACE THE POEM BEGINS HERE

UCSD 16, 14, 12

++ My 'difficult' poetry: the difficulty is to recognize what I am talking about, for it is everywhere

UCSD 16, 14, 12

++ When we are asked a question about the arts or other thing[s] we—Mary and I—answer with a story out of our lives—

You learn to swim by jumping into the water. Those who have not learned to swim are terrified in the little rowboats which are the best we have—

---

that I dress badly etc: when I walk down a [public?] street, it is I who have discovered *them* I don't need to be discovered.

UCSD 16, 16, 8

++ the words wear out their meaning and we cannot SAY the meaning Not easily The word 'is'—how to say it? and to say that is everything, but how to say it?

I try only to say what has happened to me and this is philosophy, the love of truth To say what has happened

"Treason to the artist:" that is, we need more faith in 'it', the world, Being, than we have or can have in art

'Let it be as the snake disposes', demonic world, or not, let it be as the snake disposes, let us be

not that the world is meaningless but that all meaning means the world

[THE SUBJECTIVE IS NOT OUTSIDE OF NATURE, IT IS INCLUDED IN NATURE, IT IS INCLUDED IN THE WORLD]

Discrete Series: 'bolt / in the frame / of the building /' etc The seen and the unseen And the poem ends with 'life' all 'real' (wrote later: 'the sap rises .')

('stand on the walls, the walls of the [ ], the sap rises—etc)

the world, weather swept—' The cadence of the poem is lame, I had always known that, unable to correct it Were it not, my intention would be clear: I mean 'the world, weather-swept' as the great thing to see, the thing that must be seen, the universe—the

Contented men are good husbands to their muse, but not great lovers

UCSD 16, 15, 12. See poems in
Collected Poems, pp. 93, 10, 3, 177

++ This in which——I tried to construct more than in Discrete Series, but not to blur things with connectives

UCSD 16, 16, 13. In square typewriter
of 1964–66

++ I should have a fourth book, which would be "Of being Numerous and Other Poems.' That was what I knew I could do to begin with, that would complete what I knew I could talk about——. The difficulty is that I am not sure now that I can write the 'and Other Poems'—and Of Being Numerous is a short book by itself—

Beyond that I know of nothing I can do except to undertake a project as insane as Blake's in his old age—.

Which I suppose I will do, but I will surely make a mess of it, there is no way not to make a mess of it. But not Surrealist hope in pure chance nor Hermetic hope in ancient sources. But I think I have said as much as I can reasonably say—

What is there left but to make an attempt as desperate as Blake's?—but with more awareness of a conversation, of the meaning of being numerous, perhaps more respect for history—

I have stated the evident. How hope to do more?

'I tell myself only what we all believe / True'

I speak of the world, there is nothing else to speak of
And I am no longer a child, it is mine
If it is anyone's—
It is what it is. Why talk of it?

Evidently one does love mankind, there can
be no other reason for writing

We deal with deferred values, we seldom deal with anything else.

The dismal water
Of need in them

UCSD 16, 15, 11. Typewriter of c. 1964–66

++ Briggflatts the verse is marvelous. The depth of Of Being Numerous is more fully earned, earned by actual penetration, by insight, *by creation*——Harder than to achieve depth thru the echo of known music, known styles—.

UCSD 16, 15, 11. Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* first appeared in *Poetry* 107, 4 (January 1966).

++ In This In Which [1965] is a poem with the line : We want to be here. I meant the following book to begin from that line.

I found in myself at once a double consciousness I knew that I could not reconcile perfectly the doubleness of the vertical and the horizontal concern the vertical and the horizontal sense of the redemption of life or of the value of life—— I tried to come to some terms with that doubleness in Of Being Numerous [1968]

The next book will say again simply: We want to be here

But time goes by there will be some six years between completing This in Which and completing this book I plan, And one is confronted more and more immediately with very difficult considerations—One cannot pretend simply not to know
and the facts one confronts are very difficult

(((A Sight of happiness is happiness))

To be able to define happiness is happiness
To be unable to is, of course, despair

UCSD 16, 16, 2. The poem is "world, world—," CP p. 143.

++ A preface to a Morality Play, written as innocently as a Morality Play, it tells what will happen. The young couples will leave in rags—an act of God, it is what will happen

they'll return in sufficient numbers as they too become greedy enough [CP pp. 215–216]

A wonderful winter resort. Like all resorts it glares with naked greed, speculators' thin naked greed

yet: to give credit to, and to architecture,—the buildings have a presence greater than the presence of greed?

Los Angeles once. With increasing public wealth, public sophistication and sophisticated engineering, or daring engineering, San Francisco replaces Los Angeles of the '20s

'What does it mean to object
Since it will happen?'

'I wish atoms spun left instead of right.' It means, insofar as it means, an alteration in the world of which one cannot imagine the consequences—Perhaps the sentence is not meaningless, but silly

The review in Lillabulero becomes an exposure of the reviewing=business, the posture?
The metaphor is of a steel worker looking down from the structure. If, in that context, I had written 'A tree growing from a sidewalk' instead of 'the sidewalk,' I would shoot myself; if I had written, "the self is not mystery" as he quotes, instead of 'the self is no mystery' I would hang myself, and if I had written, as he quotes, 'the long hopelessness / of those who will remain in it' instead of 'long helplessness' I would never write another line of poetry.

But the reviewer, mis-quoting, discloses that he would have written these lines? and yet is competent to judge and censure or approve?

((He helpless to approve. And there are some good sentences——this is to make that specific point, to his query

UCSD 16, 16, 2. review by "D.N.S." of *This in Which,* in Lillabulero (Spring 1967). The poems alluded to are, respectively, CP pp. 131, 143, 93. [NB. Also "the tree" and not "A tree."] Autograph parts hard to read.

> ++ I accept things in the terms in which they offer themselves for one accepts life in this way or not at all.

the 'real' of science: 'quantifiable reality' meaning measurable reality, meaning, that which does nothing cannot be said to exist. or a statement which cannot possibly be disproven is meaningless

---

As to Hardy's 'realism" phenomenology—I carry the matter considerably further I would not say that a landscape is dour—I cannot imagine myself saying that, I would say that we feel it so—

Response to Needle's eye—I learn now something of the failure to understand the earlier books They spoke of Being, I wrote of nothing else Clarity Clarity I said, meaning——the clarity of Being I had no other concern.

Needle's eye—BECAUSE I thought I had spoken sufficiently of these things, comes to the personal: the man individually facing the temporal——(it is. at least, somewhat beyond Lawrence Have you prepared your little boat of death?—I would assuredly not have come down to that. . . .

But I learn what has puzzled me, the under-estimation of the four earlier books Actually the praise of them which mis-led me.

"sky clad things' 'in nakedness / inseparable: They cohere— of themselves. They will cohere. Of themselves. They cohere in Being. —I meant it as a re-assertion.

Being it is true I meant to present it as the simplest realism: 'the most obvious thing in the world——"
'ob via the obvious '

UCSD 16, 16, 4. *Seascape: Needle's Eye* is dated 1972. See CP pp. 205 and 234–35.

++ We get born into this thing. How can there be a right or a wrong, we just find ourselves here

In the middle of it But the boat, the little boat is not nothing It is US, it makes it possible to be us in the little boat in the middle of nothing in the needle's eye—that we stare at ——One moves the boat a few miles. It is childish, of course, in relation to the dimensions of the world——I think on different levels, which is vulgar, it is a kind of vulgarity: we make our beds in the little boat not only in the middle of the ocean but in the middle of infinity But it's us as I said, I've been lucky. If I were alone——I don't know

UCSD 16, 15, 12

++ the 25 year gap: there are times when poetry—or my poetry, the poetry I can write seems hopelessly inadequate

we are committed to the problem we found, the problem we were born into———

my Jewishness means to me me—our Jewishness means to us—being slightly different from the majority, and therefore partly free

I cannot see a place for myself, an identity, in Israel——and I cannot think at all of going through a conversion, of

going thru religious instruction—etc— I am a stiff-necked people— (we—Mary and I, are a stiff-necked people)

UCSD 16, 15, 2. George and Mary
Oppen went to Israel in 1975.

++ I am trying to enter the area which I cannot know I know I cannot know—but to be there, it is possible to be there

I think I will be alone ? and this is why the poems all become (the new poems) all become love poems to Mary
a prayer that I will not be alone, and indeed I think I will not be alone for so much of myself is Mary
is not death but the light
of other lives" these words too promise the new work
30 years of thinking in the Collected

yet the thinking occurs at the moment of the poem, within the poem As the image forms in the mind, forms in the present and surrounds me tho it may speak of the past

as for the 'readings: I do not want to go back over the poems already written , not even in my own mind—and I do not have new poems enough for a meaningful 'reading'

Reading McAleavey's essay—reading for the first time with enough care, has helped to put the poems of the past behind me———Has given me strength

god=sent

I cannot even try to understand 'existence': I can only say that it is strange. So I say that

---

my 'little words': that the common words will say these things, will speak of these things, is a kind of proof. Perhaps our only proof—and a companionship in TIME

The truth of truth—sprung from what ground? (and might truth be pulled out by the roots—or is it protected forever, nourished in what soil

|| Poetry: a music which [relives] belief (conviction) ||

The mist of a culture: I grope in that mist

UCSD 16, 14, 12. Oppen's *Collected Poems* date from 1975. David McAleavey's Ph.D. thesis (Cornell, 1975) was on Oppen. Three autograph aphorisms (unrelated) have been cut for transcription difficulties.

++ The idols: I think they are images of life. And therefore miraculous.

I have realized (only in old age) that my father loved me.
I know (only in old age) that I loved my father

---

oneself: one's self: there is a mystery here, a mystery in the possessive.

in moments of danger (the fox-hole) oneself looks in as well as out the looking-in is fearful as vacuum

In being oneself one is with himself thought begins with an unknown

---

the very sidewalks of the cities say to me that I cannot go beyond myself—Unless by a way beyond myself

One's self one's self—a mystery in the possessive, oneself looks in as well as out The looking-in is fearsome as a vacuum in moments of danger

'self-sacrifice: and yet we want above all to know if happiness is possible.

I become afraid, for my mind wanders

I think Mary has learned more from me than I have learned from Mary,——which proves that Mary is more intelligent than (and braver) than I

the earth under our feet—We are not asked to begin nowhere

loss of 'ego—to be alone among things ——or to be looked at rather than looking

'that god would not be god enough for a flea'

simply that the truth is all there is.

she charms you but therefore you are not there She charms you, and it is marvelous, but you (and she) are not there She is trying to charm herself

A FLUTTERING—SOMETHING ALONE

. . .for one word, any word, carries life death truth and lies and love and I am frightened, sick, for a moment, with fear

the spirit of existence

UCSD 16, 15, 19. 'She' is probably an identifiable person; it is not Mary, and is not the personification of 'truth.'

++ "Primitive" (the name for it is something like the first light imagined

UCSD 16, 15, 5

++ Primitive: First things is that humanity is the light of the world. The *Primitive fact: the existence of the world* and that the light of

the world is our humanity (our humanity is the light of the world [. . .] "Primitive" i.e.: first things

UCSD 16, 15, 5

++ Primitive, classic, decadent. The Russian attempt not unnatural. Primitive of the new way, if there had turned out to be a new way. And primitive art is always a popular art—as the decadent is usually the art of an elite, or of a specialized group.

What will be the new primitive to follow this decadence? or has history ended in the arts?

UCSD 16, 14, 5. Mid '70s?

++ I do not imagine 'Truth' (Revelation) in one's last moments: I imagine incredulity.

UCSD 16, 15, 11 [1979–1982]

++ To be read posthumously It will as a matter of fact happen And it is a big fact It is a big fact which will happen for very small reasons. To have said, with more or less eloquence and sincerity—that one understands nothing at all !!

UCSD 16, 16, 13

Notes

1. That self-investigatory impulse (taking himself as his own tribe?) seems to control at least a number of the folders in Box 15; I have obviously extended the title. The allusion to Olson is noteworthy. A brief selection of Oppen working papers will appear in *Sulfur* 27, concluding the gathering of materials I made in May 1989.
2. For the third pivotal genre, see DuPlessis, ed., *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).
3. Here I have assumed that the filing system followed by the cataloguers adequately represents Oppen's own intentions in his files. It seems plausible (but I am just guessing) that Oppen moved these sheets of paper around, circulating them through his files as he needed to see or read them, so that where things "ended up" at his death was simply arbitrary. More nomadism.
4. Asked to do so by Alexander Mourelatos, his son-in-law and a distinguished scholar of pre-Socratic philosophy. The translation is in a Mourelatos book; the correspondence about the translation is in *The Selected Letters*, ed. DuPlessis.
5. "An Adequate Vision: A George Oppen Daybook," ed. Michael Davidson, *Ironwood* 26 (1985): pp. 5–31; "'Meaning Is to Be Here': A Selection from the Daybook," ed. Cynthia

Anderson, *Conjunctions* 10 (1987): pp. 186–208; "Selections from George Oppen's Daybook," ed. Dennis Young, *The Iowa Review* 18, 3 (Fall 1988): pp. 1–17. The latter is published with an excellent interview of Mary Oppen, conducted by Dennis Young.

6. This trip was made primarily with the intention of answering final queries about the edition of letters, and was supported by an NEH Travel to Collections grant, for which I am very grateful.
7. I will some day review Boxes 13 and 17.
8. The pasted corrections (a practice used also by Mary Oppen in her writing) achieves a clean copy without retyping a whole page. The result, in certain cases, is an extraordinary paper maché palimpsest.
9. CP is the abbreviation used for *The Collected Poems of George Oppen* (New York: New Directions, 1975); *Primitive* (P) is his final book; it was published by Black Sparrow in 1978.
10. To date this material certain conditions would have to be met: access to the dated *Selected Letters* and to the letters unpublished in that selection filed by year and provisionally dated; an ability to read Oppen's handwriting, and even some sense about paper; and access to a serious study-period at the Archive.
11. Apocopated in this way. This statement, which I have made stand at the head of these materials does suggest that some of Oppen's working papers were intended as a record of "the things that I know"—certainly as autobiographical meditations possibly, if the suggestion is not too far-fetched—or pat—, his autobiographical meditations in poetry and poetics with comparisons made to other poets' lives, choices, and practices.
12. At least some gloss on this from UCSD 16, 16, 8: Oppen cites The Duino Elegies: "'here is the time for the tellable, here is its home' [the latter 4 words then crossed out]. Beyond *here*, after *here*. Well, we will see. . ."
13. Of course, about Mary Oppen and early debates with his family. I have retained "JEwel," which, although it is probably a typo, a thumb-slipping error of capitalization, nonetheless contains the word "je" and the word "Jew."
14. A variation of this piece, retitled "The Marriage" (crossed out) and then "More Autobiography," may, at one point, have had the status of a prose poem, because Oppen noted on it "Not in N[ew D[irections] ms." The differences are that the "jewel/phallus" materials are cut in the first paragraph. And the second paragraph reads: "or more alone There was another Ur-scene once in a war I was lost and yet their danger is more terrible, to be alone among the countless, to sink, to drown in broad daylight, to be taken, to be alone[.]" And the third paragraph substituted "your dead father's" for "your parents'."
15. "That dream" is an allusion to a defining dream which precipitated Oppen's return to writing in 1958. The dream involved the discovery of a message from his dead father about "how to prevent rust in copper," Oppen knowing that copper does not rust. Note in this telling the importance of June Oppen Degnan, his sister, who had some crucial roles to play in his poetic career.
16. The editor apologizes for her loss of this Box and Folder number. A poem called "The Red Rock" might have drawn on T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which was published in 1922.

DOUGLAS LOWELL

THE TWO CITIES

I

In the land of the dead to the west
the city has crumbled and taken its own place

once there was a motel with a pool
and a theater called Orpheum

once there was a recognizable limit
at the river, the east beyond

now I dwell there and do not recognize anything
watching the west haze over the hills

the dead still work building houses
for the living

the living are hard to detect
finding traces or rumor of traces

spinning like another world
the river runs between beginning and end

of continual ruin, reaching at last
a bigger river to enter loss the opening

II

"I bateau my houseboat" said the instigator

trying to find an opening

gospel music on the riverbank
the citizens and the strangers gathered

the smoke rose upward from the tent
"what is this supposed to be?"

said the riverboat to the dead god
the barge and the tug, the traffic

up and down between
the house of the dead and the house of the children

pink rectangular prisms on the edge
of the other side, bearing a name and a date

and changing from near to far and past
to vast present hills of roses

the rose that dies is guardian here
the rose grown opening toward the river

III

The significance is blinding
the city is a question of populous

quietly becoming stone
the other half of the sentence

but if there are two then which am I
never having touched the water

cradled in a fertile valley
they were utterly destroyed

by trying not to touch the things themselves
the great sacrifices

holding on to a chair and a table
the fog descended

obscured in half the two lobes
of the red pencil and its damaged page

the words were given over
and counted, and scattered by their letters

IV

ai ai cries the moss
our wall is dead

the molecular pair
is severed

a piece of cloud
a partial sky

the place a foot landed
before it disappeared

once when there were children
the night would arrive

in the burden of presence
opening curtains for an absent brother

V

Where you be headed
ask the children in black

cult of the dismembered
wearing their father's white mask

as if, reading signs and calling names
they ought to be cultivated

the various deaths between death
and the threat of life

a coffee at Nordstrom
a small present

something scattered was lost
and washed up

rose and spoke
in found words

the letters remembered
and gathered carefully

VI

A pair is a set
of grave meaning

witness to distance
and the failure of distance

and in between
a chance ground

drawn between
two circle squares

hardly spoken of
neither death nor the other

pulling across it

a running thing
and a shadow thing

a deaf dumbness
talking out loud

CLARK COOLIDGE

from IN DREAM

Come back to the fire from the fire that allowed it. Such walls coincide, these people have misplaced my name. And in circles that cut the air, as if snow could be breathed underwater fine. Downtowns where the daylight is ancient and towers fall over on people for no reason that I could see them as people watched them, as in made them, fall down. The same people? But there's always some crash up behind the surface of things, not so? The olden is helpless as far as I can see as far as some kind of pylon wire bucket towers as yet unfallen. Stand by the station, point the wrong way, then go home anyway with the girls, the ones who still park and wait around there though the trains stopped running through long ago. But they are still famous as the waiting ones, ones with rooms, selves, higher and higher sane in the same towers. At which point I had taken over but something was always pointing askew. The rest of these streets ill-remembered, over-stressed on the long hauls, tripled to little purpose in the flash of a blindside imagination. We still have to go there for no reason, but for one little auto to fly up that I could see. Then the blue oaks were closed across jazzband avenue. Heat here, ten spots, chairs in the middle of the ceiling. It's charming, carved from the harm stripe, blockaded it's my home or was.

Where one of the mysteries of death is that the captain of this poetry ship would carry so many of his own kind with him in our own fluid medium. It's the swimmingpool ships of space and I'm down there among some airless water shelvings below the surface girls. I view them up there, can breathe fine, just can't hear anything. The final condition of the poem in space is silence. It's apparent, it's just never been discussed or held in description by anybody of us. But then we've long been enclosed in our own but

fluid medium as per above in a strictness. Where even discussion of a certain bone bra won't reach the nearest surface. It's easy enough to rhyme water with silence here, as far as you've long gone within, and get along as a poet quiet fine, case shut, Q.E.D. But it's finally like deciding on the curve of a hill, no deed forces long or silent enough. Repeat after me: I am being purely enough further to set up well though any surface be wet with light and I sense that all this is but one cell further in the limitless other to say. It's labyrinth absolute, a condition of being language then, a help in space, the favorite of these girls, as we hurtle somewhere else in the plotted event. Stop to be sensible and you're a whistling goner, a kid of the humid midday stapling his snakes to the powderboard wall.

Freshened up then with green parks, zero distractions, a lens that leaves it all alone. This sort of lace plasm fence that breaks out all around the world, a place to see it from. I am left behind, in charge, but one that nothing could type in time. Ocean space around thin glass towers, an amalgamated verticality refurbished, but the dream leaves broad threads which may still be lost. Those sent in accompaniment are stooges. A great place where it could be lodged, a hiring of things, we must mess. And later there will be lights to explain, tongues at the edges, a blatant tone as if in pain from the green. We are not alive to explain. Just call it in a mouth.

It could be, traced short, valued and agleam, but then subvert of what? They say it's nothing, say it's ice cream in a pan, do something to it. I see it but then without any such aid at all I'm a genius. Signed sealed and seen to be. I want to walk through these walls, enter the fear hot light of the street, discontinue a friendship in failing futures, hands cabled together thus endless, inarticulate, distant hot rooms. Where one might be scared cool. I put things back but they won't weigh the same as before they showed up and started cooking. On my own, my name just in lots of sea space, out of sight of the ocean itself. Watch this collapse inward on stoogery, the clatter of a friendship. Tongues through these walls, chromes eating through greens, horrid to later have to explain somehow my untapped hands.

A construction in there that shouldn't hold livingroom. Platinum box and pipe like assembled by meathead, through which you look a little hole drills, stars in sparks, dangers in the sprinkle on wedding kit. I love to look through and I do and see inside one, I love to see through and that thing done and the construction of a little perfection I live in. The friend doing this is a tiny workable me, presented with rug space and eyes. Where importance is hanging a piano is playing, an empty hole is moving. All a decoration to be suddenly handed, skills of another, underwater as a member. I think, and then the drums scraped out of wood parts nailed to a perfect little room. Then I think.

And then it is not possible to not say. Words don't have this. Towers of haste. Tunes we have learned, disgust. We talk it all over and then she says. We're all in a livingroom. Night and the neon has fallen. Asleep has come to basic constructions like boards, entablement, flute. It's crisis. And it's the tongue at its sill, lab plot, boxlike extension. Left out of word, the creatures workable and hangings. The felt things all decorations as I thought. I enter to peer and these are mild pianos. How unexpected I think.

When I grabbed the light, things. A numbness to the sticks and very air of. We may have reaches, when the air lights and doubles, doubles back, doubles at all lifting centers. It's unequal to the breadth of the sleep that is hinging and now then, now all in face turns numb. But never blurs. Chimes and cheeps and hurts, the asking of to see what is up in. Blur glows. Wraps. The interiors where somebody's playing seems. And shaking my hand at my sleep to rights. A report. A thing spotting space. The interior of an old white church.

Where it lays. I won't wait with crowds, larger than my thumb at a moon's length. You can see it hobbling in through the corklike works, the people to see it willing it short of there but not quite still to be. It's an unequaled echo this thin branch covering the moving stone. And harm of light once removed for the walls. I erupt here, I harm back as in echoes' dreams. We put on the territory in cream waves over the former territory. And no vent pipes for storms, instead layers, blurry stripers and mentioned mounds

tiny as interstitial pills locked in rows. And a so flowing stone made the genius of this big room, shut from piano, covered in wood of a nearly temporary.

We file in, and I slap her myself in the cat's head. Squinting to teach, abroad on the roof, alive in a sheet and hesitant from thence. There used to be air in my sleep, now but neon's catholic axes. And a high door under the filament to trust. It's nebulous, church. Patted rates in large rooms, things to file, the whited levels of not much avails to speak. The signs fly away. The oval smallness of this frame of thought, these hearts in thrall, these benches. I could have overextended my slap to include, and other beacons, other slides of being past roof, tonic interior, the red of shed emotion. In reverse gear, the rates of such hot conditions to teach, bear or fear. The arrows all over, these words to cue, the sun coming up on the touch to interiors. It's loose as a cat, this old thought to wake. I thought I'd prepare a paper, shock instead and faced flames. Read: Shame reaching shapes of a boxlike. Read: Wake up in tears.

You I thought I'd remember but now it's thin and the pains come in gold and black trunks. The interior of an old New England neon, hanging times, bricklike extensions, gold halls over behind black fields, roosting in daytime, solid extensions of the flowstone board. They are rare there, they have to awake as I climb toward answers, pumps from brown boots flooded pits. The same lip he has gone off in a car. The perfect brown fitted wasps of the flooded mines. Antique amethyst chandelier bothering to have be. It's sickly behind a certain line of heat across the road from salted garnets individual as you start to pick them, emerge from them, wait in that house at the rogue thought of a wooden eye. They pump them here from lace fields. Normal black forests, a kid with elongate brown hands fitting his boots near the water shacks in replay. A buzzing when you read *those* books, spoken out of wood as leaves replace salts. An organ is fluting the protein phonograph to start up to leave the matrix decay, launch, turn this limestone face up. We are longer to wait than the halls of our fathers, special stamps of the welt riskers, normal as pistols at the window or their coal then below. I timed him but he leaped the

fence and ran, out of waving, out waving in front of, waving out for the folks in my peoples' window to reach and lead him beyond. It's early. When this wooden crystal reaches me, crucifix in its box.

I prearranged the funeral for my desk to be placed. All the speculant lives in their waxed amber box, light across from the lawn in glass reflect. Hairs dim here in the place of personage. Limping as the standard dodge. Are you real? The horse is still popular, even black fire and leaping in the close dock of ghosts. Confetti in the city, loss in a hall, fear, dining with an intent to kill. I had never been called a pole by anyone, by the thought of how my work is placed in the standings. The glow powder of gingerale, the thinking as of wires could have had me humming with doubt passing pistols around ears. My desk has always been placed by radio, and by candle. And looking closer I see the horse is near in its intent to kill, wake in an impulse to yell before it reaches me. But ghosts *are* closer than they appear in the mirror.

I wake up in a color. There is one diamond. I wake up screaming before it reaches me. As if it could serve you through your thumb, as if silver flake, as if disencumbered knees that point to streets in the opening of a car, sex plastered over the wires, the cattle of hands, knobs of motorcycle entry at behest of galaxies, her camera points between my knees and it's better to circle the claw than put a lock on capitol dome interiors, look up to the man who is deliberate injects the girl direct to the eye, and the terra cotta harm of brogan guitars, loss of leader in the spotting of a wooden snake, the climate is drapes, bronze hood of ray buddha, very tall tower smile as if stone in its cleavages turn seed to a wall, as if the torso alone be fixed in mould, as if the rotten singer turned out of hands, smiles at overheard bars waiting on a slinger, the hedge of hair he put to a machine of chimes, waiting horizontal spiders and pebbles, overcome snakes in velvet cases waved as canes the flesh at hand, and black spot given the serial chemicals open the hand or car, or a shuffling hand or Indian knees, folded faces, skeleton followers, pianissimo camera slaps, and trapped temples, and stretched lost for the Gun of the Cross? This is all as if framed in the airs naked, penetrated to by outside mails glass to the edge,

as if the interior of a serpent all mushroom on the air in a wreath of monkey bird sweater coin precision hands, digits recombinant, girls hiking in place of the melted fuck, stopwatch dropped by butterfly, the man in helmet who seems to shoot but only rides, drives away in a wooden heaven box of chains, heavily mapped with the older alphabet the palm, passed away in the waiting. Over by this crystal kitchen and its lotion implements, gongs, raisins, numbers of moving, he crouches as if you were written to from the ventpipe TV off now at its carbon limits, moire deserts, fielding men in jacaranda hands, as if she painted all these spines to the same wall, as if the well could be wished open in silence, the spots on the wall come large, the intent of television be to blunt the flesh make coke of all the open planet, plant a fist of violet on Mars, snub the brass ear or rose of the fixture sun, harm the listenable cross at sharp sandwiches, beams in a patchwork of flavors, handles, scores on the door, watches at the window, the champion of all this cardamon brown stick styling hill and cancel. We see the doors. We handle the guns. We candle. We ace. We leave more skeleton rose lean at the edge of it. It's a spring that leads more room to black silence of thumbed empty card in repetition. Her mounted face had some white above the stone penis of the second.

All those shapes, of yes they have told me. Calming down at the lip of that water hill. Raise a ladder to its water, look down into the copy of its shine, which is popular and has papers. Realize all your life before it. Copy down the copies of this thrice-lit news. But then I cough before the empty things, eyelets traced in the life silence. None but the frustration to continue. As if things went in the arms came in thirds. Price.

As oh it gets burner then, being in Boston, for a public. The halts are shorter, at the horses given a reading. It's pellmell cobble of a seeming day, light on a dare, forgetting and plural in it, decimal of it settling nobody's. I have no longer, that dawn across the corner, scooting around to find the record of what. A dice they call it this spot of wide avenue, measured in thing, use discs turned from flat cups. And it is no longer there as I once found, no longer a building than placed wide, hands off, the shelves of the answers, state-

ment in boxes, thing you couldn't find repeats, dares in the backing cancellation to cease. Walls to appear green, grass to seem grit. We don't have, and adjacent ceteras. I had to stop realizing, the houses clad, bricked, glassed, maybe even mere in the bathrobe? I could hold a cement reunion, untie my panties, shuffle and bleach, a recombinant plaisir. It was never more than a place of semi-water, and reading with this fellow, me. It fades in, figures. But first, discussion of outline, wan slipper holes, correction of kinds of right chimes of radium, standing. I have all over the time left out behind us a non-thing in my arms, like what's the good in rooms? A greeting farther to see winding out of place in the waiting radiant much, and of bodies. I forgot. That's the plan. And again will have to be pressed against ask to realize. Who knows? The particular sight of my remnants, chimes made out of boards, cheese of the sanded goods, my arms. As if forgetting was in fact cancelling my manuscripts, someone one would have to go on, anyway one Bill would have to know to come through, to find the scraps of what I wasn't anymore radiant at, as at a wall the sound, the feel lastly of the foot of it, the tangled heat and well at last told, strung up to thought without a while to discover, nothing but a meadow. It smiles.

The books, older, to know me, in color. I brought it on all down around me, walls. I heard him bouncing away shouting down the distance, each gulf reacher more dire. I give until the final scream and it's long, a long one with no more curves. A night like ticking over so woke me to the wolf, hours sized up in jars, phials of liquid in colors of the clothing of the self, its jelly lines to etch on maps, a discovered brain to be older than the source. It's no good to be already teamed in a room. He fell out from under there, thought it only a small drop first, then the bigger and realized out of room, to die. It's not up to brain, the pickle while or all these years. You are younger while it began to discover. But he doesn't show. And my books are lost in some room along one wall. Forgotten of face, from the nothing reaches of all this I come on anyway. Or out of nothing finally reached I forgot it anyway.

Cement bleachers, though.

But how is she why is she screaming. Looked at me, seeing, the hallway well turn bruised into a bird. It's a fissured figure then here, a pen run out of burnished or bristled light, a long flat along which roses smear, a total occupation of doctor, or one's only reaction raising the lid. She was just a child at some point of my writing the woman in it. A carven cone pimpled at the bottom of each rest and somehow stolen, battered in the light, which is of small thoughts speckles, particle weight on the body, a shower of nervous plans, a shadow to be nearly missed. I stretched out the whether of my hand to weep her. She who came out of my saying these things is my name, my report on a turned bird in the held hallway. A night, and brightness her reaction. That and just quite the bed to scream. I had so gone over the candle of it, the waiting on the outside, park of calm. What are their numbers, and noting just who is Leonora, waiting, glad at the upward horror of the beseeching wrist. I have not hardly caught it over a day, nerveless winner, faceless in chains in the open glass. But of this series of the bottoms of coupled wells or joined rooms, what can later be told, or opinion screamed, I cannot tell. I have not the thrift of the heart of such light. And gold so telling in a book. She told it to, she told this me. She the impenetrable, shout at the basis. Organ just touching the hull.

A good enough thing to have thought of, blank. To have thought shut, mildness, arise. The marched off thing, in plaster, wait. I am awkward and I thought them lighting the woods in bulbs, strings out there. Then lightless depth again, inevitable as an avenue. I still.

Back in there? It was an entrance. There is no one in the woods, It was a bending low to see. Would there be nothing to make a mess with? A given dark, how account for the source of light? There would not be many questions. I saw it as things picked up in heaps back beyond trees, as iron may. Iron will have us speak, not to say recall to its source, light's particles. Don't resist. Lie beneath. Spoke of a coating of color, no trees now, not the steering of engines through. To peek out beneath sleep and visit the thought, entrance to intruders beyond the signs. The woods hold not much very well. They were out there with lights. They had me tell if they

were, had me see and tell it here. Gone and the light is still there. Black and the sign.

So an episode was determined. To see the pictures though they be in attics under plan. Would be down the hall your candles to reach, set, key and sole answer to the placing of, have it to vanish. I write things down. I write such things, as might be keys, to show in the vast. Flavors of pictures, tacks they are hung on, birds to flow again to reverse the wood to rock great cavern over us. Each room that it be alone, its own candle, its very own picture? I like Alice, I'll tell you about it, I voted for her in the map, trailer sort of change, exhibition she bends, waits, tames things suddenly, the people have wings, they're mating and we've interrupted their attack, zero on us, rock hallway of the silence agonies. Straight back and then turn, in your outfits. Argue the arms down, then take them. I saw you taking, vast crane in an attic, bosom halfway, flame.

Sugar will activate. We live according by the signs, past rifts, fill chinks, drill lasts, drop all of dailiness and run for our dreams. Activated chalk in the linings. Schismatics, prismatics, lungs. And the day of episode finale under gradual construction, a great nothing in its myriad particles, samplings, detours, spongings hissing and tucking of the signs, rises to descend and threaten our very, harm down on our homes in device of spray, platinum dispersion, pattern of holds, never go away, line the meat forever with blind verbs, cancelled cells nobody to rate, bother. Then the improvisational present one arrives through the back of the closet in argument and notching his voice to flow increase throw settles it. No waiting, line fits fine.

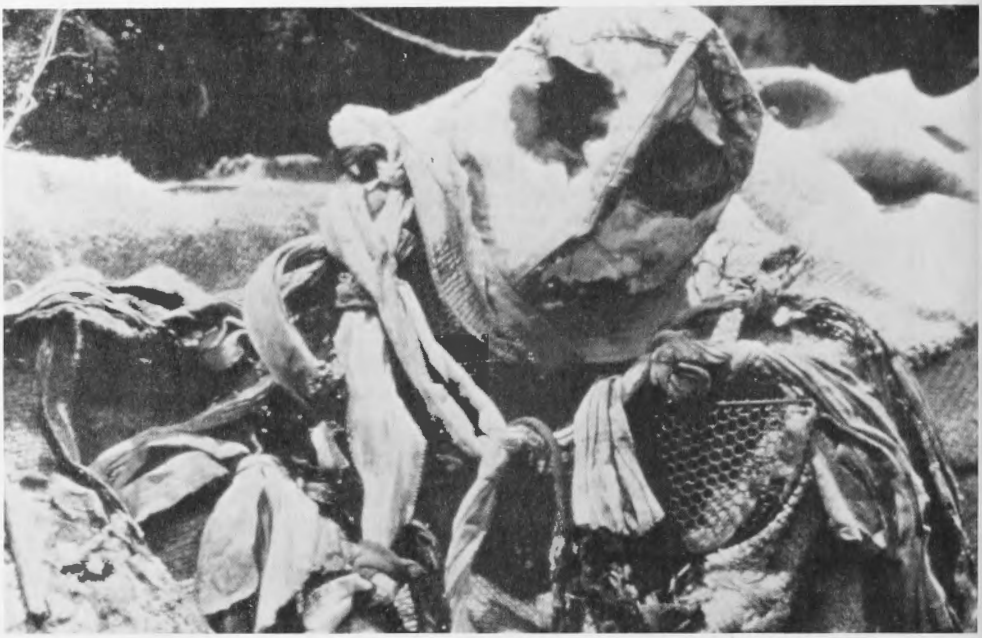
Where things are in the right place. The pig, then the head, then smoke. A need for relative order, persons to make one last upgrasp for the lip at acme, the roped down base of a crime. We don't anymore live there than inhibit you all here. We are friends of the remnants. We missed when we at last tried to make it, dropped whole down the shards weighted to hurled flats. Make me some shoes. Had to inflate the rope but such pins wouldn't help, starring in aid, they're gone. He's been. I had his name. Then

turn to his wife. She guides me through the highly greased metals of the lifetime constructions I had then hold over at the hall. She dark and it growing dark, I stalled, listened, showed through in the desire for explanations. These sure were tiring remnants. The speckle mainly dark with its deep gulfs, expiring spells, hand-offs beneath everything. Extremely slanted her comments. I had to grow thinner to draw next to the flame, keep up with the sheets, deal. She was beginning to quiet, total, vanish. Were there ankle mechanisms of brass? Was this writing desk, to be swung out over, of a vanilla entire sheerness? Could one loom off behind speech below all this in alley-hall back-breaking soda-dust deserted bluffs of such a carny ice coast? Children of? Later on in mind our only linkages will be broken by association.

MICHEL NEDJAR

DOLLS

(Photographed by Pascal Martin)



ALLEN S. WEISS

IN THE DEVIL'S KITCHEN: THE DOLLS OF MICHEL NEDJAR

> The base of profound feelings. From the night arises the inexplicable, the undetailed, what is unattached to visible causes, surprise attacks, mystery, the religious, fear. . .and monsters, which emerge from nothingness, not from a mother.
>
> —Henri Michaux, *Emergences-Résurgences*

Monsters reveal the madness of the imagination, the manifestation of alterity and difference *in extremis*. Though each individual monster is of a formal rarity, indeed uniqueness, monstrosity in general is ubiquitous: monsters symbolize the life of the instincts and the terrors of the soul, the regions beyond the thresholds of rationality and the unexplored territories of the globe. The forms of monsters—to the extent that they can even be categorized—are even more varied than their causes: *confusion of natural kingdoms* (animal, vegetable, mineral); *confusion of sexes; hybridization; substitution of elements; hypertrophy* or *hypotrophy; lack* or *excess; indetermination* or *multiplication;* et cetera.[1] In this carnival of forms, these catastrophes of the flesh, we discover that primeval horror of a world which isn't cosmos but chaos, a threatening, fearful world of primal matter yet unformed and essentially uninhabitable.

It is evident that these distortions, deformations and metamorphoses create the strongest impressions in our memory. For this very reason Cicero, in *Ad Herennium* (circa 86–82 B.C.), explains

that the most successful mnemonic devices will be those that utilize the most striking images:

> We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish similitudes as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the similitude may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking. . .[2]

If we wish to consider disfigured objects, monsters "stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint," the history of Western art provides no examples more striking than the grotesque dolls of the contemporary French artist, Michel Nedjar. Compare Nedjar's own statement:

> The dolls represent the beginning of the world: they are animal, stone, woman, man, the universe—the primeval fundamental material. That's an extraordinary experience. It was terrible and at the same time extraordinary. I covered my dolls over with soil and blood and it was a very powerful thing—I thought I was going mad.[3]

At first impression, entering Nedjar's attic workshop is not unlike penetration into the Capuchin catacombs in Palermo. In a domain where a natural or even alchemical *putrefactio* seems to reign, we are confronted with a plethora of "dolls" whose forms range from small mummy-like papier-mâché objects to grotesque animals, from devils' heads and eyeless, troubled masks to shrouded, deathly rag-dolls. These creations—made from refuse, garbage, leftover materials—are most often stained, filthy, spotted with paint, tinted from immersion in vats of dye: monsters from the earth, or the underworld. The effect upon the viewer—or

perhaps we should say participant, for these are things to be touched, however difficult such a gesture may be—of each individual doll is disquieting enough; but the effect of the entire scene of this workshop, this matrix of creation (the "crowd effect" being one of the origins of monstrosity), is practically unbearable to those uninitiated in its mysteries. Nedjar's atelier might well be experienced as a sort of memory theater of the damned, and his dolls are doppelgängers of ourselves. Yet they resist us: their eyeless orbits blind them to us, and it is particularly disturbing that we are *not* seen by them, that they surround us in silent and blind proximity.

Having grown up in a family where his father was a tailor and his maternal-grandmother a ragpicker, Nedjar—who himself trained to be a tailor—suffered the usual interdiction against a boy playing with dolls. The repressed returned with a vengeance. These dolls are explained in Nedjar's own words:

> When I was a kid, my reality was a whole imaginary world in which I could live, in which I could live out my metamorphoses.
>
> When I was young, my parents wouldn't let me play with dolls because I was a boy, so I used to take a twig from a tree and wrap it around with cloth from my father's shop to make my own doll.
>
> I noticed that once I put a root onto a doll, the thing became a whole. Now I don't have to add on any roots, the thing already *is* a root.
>
> The body is a root. It doesn't emerge; the body lies underneath the earth. The root is nourished on earth. It lies underneath the earth.
>
> I used to get to the point where everything turned into a doll.
>
> When I make my dolls I feel that I *am* the doll that I'm making. . .[4]

The monster is often taken to be a premonitory sign, a divine warning (as the etymology of the word reveals). As such, Nedjar's workshop is a sort of *cloaca maxima* leading to Hell; the dolls are manifestations of unformed matter, matter resisting form, a certain

decay of the spirit. They are sacred signs of the body represented not really before creation or after death, but rather in that ambiguous moment when creation is not quite complete, and death hasn't yet entirely finished its work. But what at first might be deemed imperfect is rather the very perfection of death's fecundity. The macabre is counterbalanced by fertility. Nedjar:

> Death is something—it's a birth, it's the continuity of things.
>
> In Mexico the mummies were so fascinating, it was too much. They weren't dead things at all. They still had their costumes on, their robes adhering to their skin.
>
> It's easier to slip down than to climb up. But falling—what creation within our existence—creation, exodus, darkness, hell, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the plague, AIDS. . .[Written on the back of a postcard of a Flemish painting, *The Fall of the Damned.*] [5]

On the biographical level, Roger Cardinal is correct in inferring that these dolls serve Nedjar as "incoherent representations of the Holocaust, experienced as a kind of internalized trauma," for Nedjar's family suffered in the collective tragedy of the European Jews of that epoch.[6] These dolls are personifications of anguish, *memento mori,* simultaneously creations in order to remember and remembrances in order to forget; simultaneously a return of the repressed and an overloading of the memory system in order to forget; they permit that mourning without which history itself is an abomination, a lie.

In a fantasy that might be compared with Nedjar's own phantasms about dolls, Bruno Schulz, a Polish Jewish writer murdered by the Nazis in 1942, tells the tale of his father, owner of a textile shop, who describes a very different "cosmogony of cloth" when he declaims a "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies, or The Second Book of Genesis." Speaking of the infinite fertility, inexhaustible vitality and seductive powers of matter, he explains that God has no monopoly over creation, and that we are all tempted to create: "There is no dead matter; lifelessness is only a disguise behind which hide unknown forms of life." While God indeed possessed

some important creative formulas, there are many others not yet attempted which can be achieved, even if by heretical, or even criminal, means. In a decidedly Nietzschean tone, he explains that "We have lived for too long under the terror of the matchless perfection of the Demiurge," and we must thus escape this influence in order to release our own creative instincts.

> "We are not concerned," he said, "with long-winded creations, with long-term beings. Our creatures will not be heroes of romances in many volumes. Their roles will be short, concise; their characters—without a background. Sometimes, for one gesture, for one word alone, we shall make the effort to bring them to life. We openly admit: we shall not insist either on durability or solidity of workmanship; our creations will be temporary, to serve for a single occasion. If they be human beings, we shall give them, for example, only one profile, one hand, one leg, the one limb needed for their role. It would be pedantic to bother about the other, unnecessary, leg. Their backs can be made of canvas or simply whitewashed. We shall have this proud slogan as our aim: A different actor for every gesture. For each action, each word, we shall call to life a different human being. Such is our whim, and the world will be run according to our pleasure. The Demiurge was in love with consummate, superb, and complicated materials; we shall give priority to trash. We are simply entranced and enchanted by the cheapness, shabbiness, and inferiority of material.
>
> "Can you understand," asked my father, "the deep meaning of that weakness, that passion for colored tissue, for papier-mâché, for distemper, for oakum and sawdust? This is the proof of our love for matter as such, for its fluffiness or porosity, for its unique mystical consistency. Demiurge, that great master and artist, made matter invisible, made it disappear under the surface of life. We, on the contrary, love its creaking, its resistance, its clumsiness. We like to see behind

> each gesture, behind each move, its inertia, its heavy effort, its bearlike awkwardness." [. . .]
>
> "In one word," Father concluded, "we wish to create man a second time—in the shape and semblance of a tailor's dummy."[7]

These sentiments—in so many respects strikingly similar to those of Nedjar—are certainly a parable for artistic creativity in its modernist mode, where the materiality of the signifier is foregrounded, and where ancient forms are dismantled in order to construct an all-too-human scenario of the passions, and of mortality.

*

In contrast to an *ars memoriae,* Eco asks whether we can construct an *ars oblivionalis,* an art of forgetting. The answer is no: mnemotechnics as semiotics is strictly a means of making present, where every significative gesture entails a mental response.

> If the arts of memory are semiotics, it is not possible to construct arts of forgetting on their model, because a semiotics is by definition a mechanism that presents something to the mind and therefore a mechanism for producing *intentional acts.*[8]

There are no devices for forgetting *per se,* only for remembering or remembering poorly. "Thus, it is possible to forget on account not of defect but of excess [. . . .] One forgets not by cancellation but by superimposition, not by producing absence but by multiplying presences."[9] We can force ourselves to forget by confusing the mind, by overloading it—occasionally to the point of madness.

Might this insight not serve as an interpretation of Nedjar's dolls? Might their creation not be an attempt to forget death by multiplying its instances and its icons? If, as Frances Yates has demonstrated, the cultivation of the arts of memory may have stimulated the creation of artistic and literary works—and if, conversely, certain poetic imagery have served as mnemonic devices—can it not be equally true that the desire to forget can achieve the same effects? This notion would provide us with yet a

further refinement of that most ancient notion of the cathartic effect of art, where the past imposes itself upon the work as *hysteresis*, as a belatedness of expression, as a rememorative recovery of origins.

Notes

1. For a typology of monsters, see Claude Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Payot, 1980), pp. 115–183, passim; see also Gilbert Lascaux, *Le monstre dans l'art occidental* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), pp. 115–175, passim.
2. Cited in Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 10.
3. Michel Nedjar, "I Am Tied to the Threads of the World," trans. Roger Cardinal, in *Art Brut: Madness and Marginalia*, a special issue of *Art & Text* #27 (1988), edited by Allen S. Weiss; p. 57.
4. Nedjar op. cit., pp. 53–59, passim.
5. Nedjar, op. cit., pp. 56–57.
6. Roger Cardinal, "Within Us These Traces," *Art & Text* #27 (1988), p. 49.
7. Bruno Schulz, "Tailors' Dummies," in *The Street of Crocodiles*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York: Penguin, 1977), pp. 61–62.
8. Umberto Eco, "An *Ars Oblivionalis?* Forget It!" *PMLA* Vol. 103, #3 (1988), p. 259.
9. Ibid., pp. 259–260. We might consider in this respect Borges' tale, "Funes the Memorius," trans. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths* (New York: New Directions, 1964), whose protagonist has totally perfect recall, to the point where conceptualization was impossible for him, since the idea of, for example, 'leaf,' entailed the recall of every view of every leaf that he ever saw. This fantasy brings to mind Nietzsche's own critique of conceptuality in "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," where he shows, utilizing the same concept of 'leaf,' that every concept originates in equating what is in fact unequal.

MICHAEL GIZZI

THREE POEMS

Treestains

Funny this but I knew
weather didn't care a durn
frame of mundane footage for me
Not a durn frame of mundane
I could get in step with
But I sure shucks loved
being out with that galoot
or heap little amble sandy

I feel the eyes on my body
grinning monkeys—silly goof!
One needs a certain detachment
Who'd I think I was? Blest
maybe. My catskin windcheater
purfled with lincoln—that's
jerkin, George. That's me
in the curtain blurred with
the meadowlark. I seen it
so many times it happens more

Trees leaves ocean all
as they're supposed to be
but then big brother nature
I brung you indoors said
have a seat next to the cookies
and still no cataclysm
From that day on the outdoors
meant more. Holy Toledo!

ascending from the topograph
and I'm in Ohio and my scalp
at attention. The eyes pie-
plate out at a sky labeled
Made in the U. S. of A. by God
cornfed. No 3-D crackerjacks
gift like this

Gee! sweet neck
little pics in haze could equal
candy. So kicking leaves with
Mounds in hand could be vocational
The warmth from insight such as
this like shoals of shawls
The world was a grapevine
flooded with tapes. I knew

I'd never grow up and that
when I had trouble a run
in my daylight it was this
I'd lost sight of. No reality
buff born with his boots on
but battles

This is'n my story
it's not happening to me, I
haven't come this far. No
mystic monk with vow of poverty
just poor

I'd as soon chinup
treetops begging help pictures
or leaf a kid with a tongue
growing clear up from his stomach
My heart's in those vertical chops
as if all my growing barked up
there

The Shell Game

I'm mad as hell at your face in the sky
your imperial diligence, my carcass
in cahoots with your game of chance
I don't cotton to your fume of valence
nor insist you quit at sands of the parlor
Wipe another with nice
I'm Lassie-proof, Kemo Sabe. Miserable
child and all for a little equity
Probably an understudy was responsible
for my neglect. Say this
ain't comin through, Luminal Foil?
May nothing but volutes prime your pump

At a certain postern from the center I
appear in repeaters, seem to have
mastery and lie doggo. I'm
givin it to ya straight—this landscape
has lied before, wise and full of pranks
as safety in blue distance like
that thing there is no room for
My heart here but I'm still me
then south with the antiquities
you mind natters into

What you've given me the importance
of being angry is your wrath which
I telegraph back at you clearing my
throat tattoo on your phone's funny
bone now I'm in the know: a problem
with rhyme is reason. The goof of a man's
worth more than all his yes indeedy
One nut under three halves of what
you'll never know I feel trusting you

Let This Be a Lesson

I was doing one of those good turns
for which I'm tired of patting myself
on the back because honestly
it's just a case of my inability
to say no. That's *no* to anyone
which is the curse of this
Underdogs Identification Syndrome. Anyway
I'd offered to drive this battered-
child-who-wanted-to-be-a-writer home
I kept forgetting not to ask him
questions 'So where'd you grow up?'
His comment on the scene positively
Martian then these pinheads that were
his eyes rang up cherries in Las Vegas 'Me?
New Hampshire.' I kept thought-talking
to myself *bite your tongue, Mike.* Just
then this monarch butterfly came into
perfect alignment with the hood ornament
pinned there by a magnet of wind, Christ!
just like a specimen, one in a million
Suddenly the kid's real clear
smells a higher symmetry says 'Wow!
is this a sign?' and I thought Yeah
it's a sign: You're going home and I'm
driving you. Nothing like coincidence

KARIN LESSING

THE LIFELONG RANGE

I.

the deer's antlers grow like wood

the visible invincible
hip of the thing
        the event

obscure and anxious

•

a dance of dust

she chases them with a voice

                in trompe l'oeil

darkened
with birds

•

small friction clutches
awake at night
a temporary cessation or truce

•

nobody there
on desert roads

a silence would impose itself

storms & stones
at varying speeds

•

"we return in the hope of seeing you"

•

I shall answer you with red

and whilst I breathe the air

in *its* brace entangled

•

distinct/unique

"murmurations"!

cross-
hatch and swerve

musick
A while

going south
from the cold

•

in inked updrafts
swarm starlings sudden gust
something remembered from earlier
polyphony shower child

•

II.

crossing wild woodpaths
crossing

lifelong

range 'la flora de Indias'

open to
bitter cane—

in the book of that journey

little stones and hands
on fire

not to be recovered
gaze
barter precious make fast

adversely and enduring

realm remote aftertaste
trust taste aftertaste

•

write threshold write a phrase
unwavering ageing
'I am thinking of you constantly'
the order of events

•

from the center of the earth
phases the moon plaits

A slow surfacing word

•

others so many charms
midmorning chirrups to achieve
four white chained feathery
an air's mastery

•

unabated tuning

A shape
a shape unshaken

•

turrets now noon scape
and maze) night's door ajar
dreaming through her disguises
clouds' skill set in thought

•••

January–April, 1989

PAOL KEINEG

from BOUDICA

(Tr. from the French by Keith Waldrop)

12

Far from the sea, by wadi and fjord. Fashionable warriors and fire-dogs with dirty feet. Red trout, blue heron. Gobbled up minorities.

Dust, hard knocks, powder not kept dry. Behind a screen of songs, the stifled, the unstable, the duchess in clogs.

A silent mistress. Muzak in prayer-wheels.

Country without a country, madness in the pages. A woman dictates. Hodge-podge of slogans. *Kentoc'h mervel.* Freedom or death.

Kentoc'h mervel: "Die rather" (motto of Brittany).

13

Packs of black dogs, car-horn concerts, eddies of blood; sub-prefects report that shrews are preaching cool craziness; they signal the appearance of a new language.

From *Boudica, Taliesin et autres poèmes* © Maurice Nadeau—Les Lettres Nouvelles & Les Editions Papyrus 1980.

All on the surface, smile, submission. Villages of daffodil and gorse. Mishmash of reasons, age of bronze in the chromosomes.

Vigils in the juice of ferns, the Lives of the Saints, gut-literature. Hate is our helmet, we keep the pot boiling.

Where iron is born, and the sea-gull. Aztec and Iroquois under the goose-egg of aging moons. Another shot, gunboat and pillar of fire, massacre of the Druids, the Club Med.

14

At the roots of the sacred wood, the prophet and his flock. Words that clash when put end to end. The owl, the hoot-owl.

Coins. Metal signals engraved with cold-blooded animals, serpentine heads. They come from afar, in wagonette, in motor-boat.

Fishermen with sunken cheeks, stiffly straight peasant women. Muse and arsonists. The quick and the dead.

Caratacus in the cemetery. Harangue, stiff-necked, grit your teeth. *Bro gozh va zadoù!*

Bro gozh va zadoù!: "Land of my fathers" (Breton national anthem).

15

White hyena, trail of insects. Like a rumor, like an eczema, to burst into scandal.

Boudica, head bent over the coffee pot, amid cardboard boxes and greasy wrappings: labeled, scorching and worse.

The queen lands her hundred blows on target. Stout women and warriors form a bullet-proof block. Nobody accepts the unacceptable.

Scrap-iron here, threads of destiny. Empty lots. Over there, foot-to-foot fighting, the Molotov cocktail, pain eating at the left breast.

16

Man-stealer, arsonist, Pope Joan of this and of that, if only someone strangles her and she kicks off!

Kids excited by her odor clamber to the slaughterhouse singing. Free-lancers and foot-runners, fingers numb, in a fit for this trollop.

Guerillas my ass, lumpkins and greenhorns, O condottieri of pushed up daises.

In these oak forests, wild boar and pig-farmers. We stuff the trash cans of these tatterdemalions, champs and support-structure.

17

Mack truck pin-ups, Pasionaria with unsubtle step. O Boudica, compass for misfits, patroness of beacons and buoys.

Boudica in make-up, in the chiaroscuro of coronation, snot of the ghetto. In this recovery, gesture counts, the back country spreads.

Paradise of paranoia. Ideas darker than the Kaaba. So many tongues in order to advance masked.

Surrounded by captains and big-time reporters. Mad Imagination, her face towards the flame in the fireplace. She sloughs off a world incapable of closure.

18

Flare-up of oghamic codices. Sufferance on twenty-five acres of good earth. The sun straddling outlawry.

The year 61. Mau-Maus versus Tacitus. Cocksureness and pillage. Battle of the bushes.

The white, the black, the gray. Horseback along the Greenwich meridian. Muddy country, overrun.

Tread of boots up country. Triumph arches and boneyards. Red eagles and waring forefathers.

19

What region of wild radishes with granite pipers. Above the waves, birds shifting scenery. Menace of morning while still night.

The price to pay for things to go haywire. Sad to be so ugly, we make a show of.

In a night of satellites, lodestone of the north star. Naked lover begetting. Like a cock, like a goat. Gently, Oh, gently.

Love, till the joints go stiff. Wound and salt. From single solitude to the solitude of a hundred thousand.

20

What merchandise do the villages throw up? The pig has bled into its feeding trough. Howl of dogs and bicycle chains.

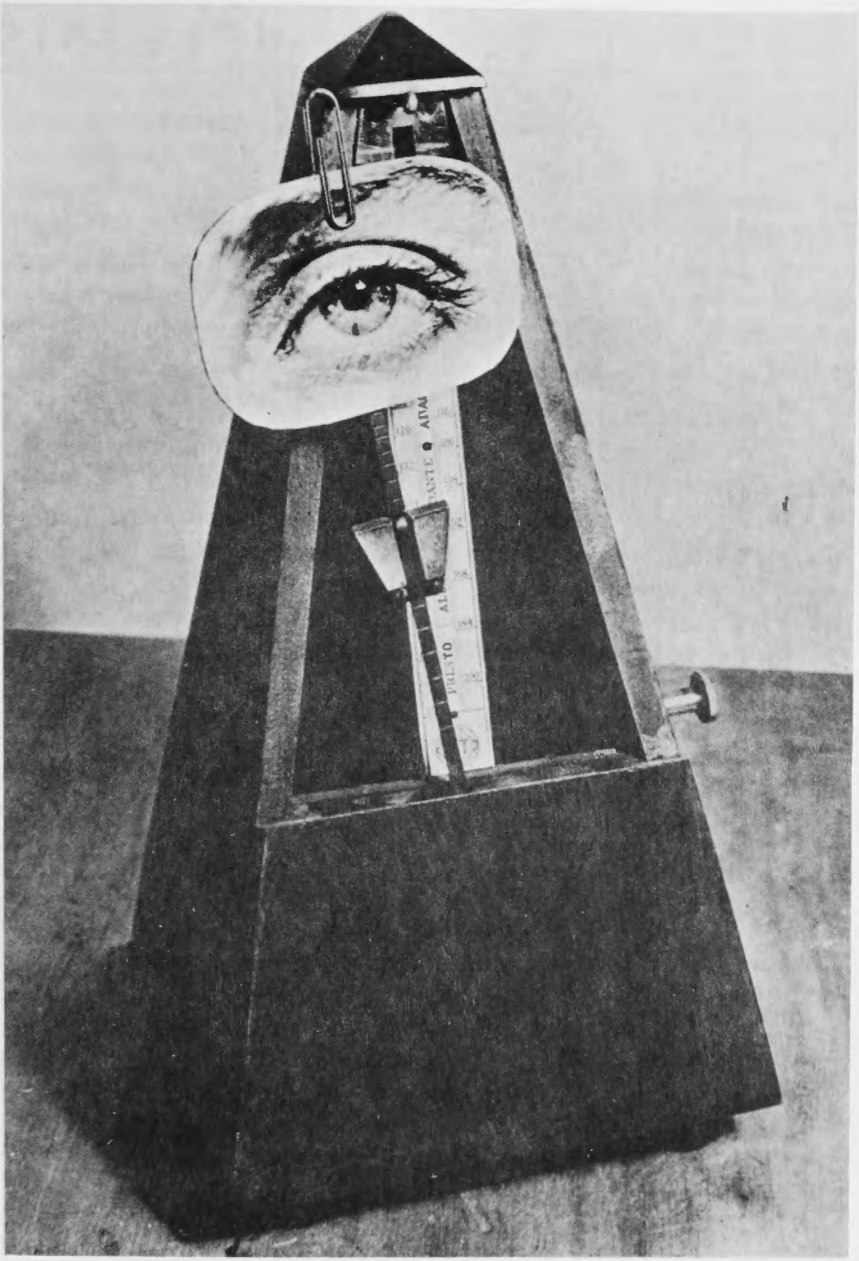
Watch at the wheel, lookout on the cuddy. Boudica in her alcove, great grouse and sacred heart on the wardrobe doors. She retains, contains, corrects.

Many a mutt in rut on the barrens. Stills in the farmyards, d.t.'s of warriors all revved up. The women make blood sausages.

The Roman presses his lance's advance into the side. The gull is engulfed. Callous dancers stamp the ground in a ring.

NOIR ET BLANCHE, 1926

silver print, Museum of Modern Art, NYC: gift of James Thrall Soby © Man Ray Trust / ADAGP Paris / ARS-USA



PERPETUAL MOTIF, 1971

Collection Man Ray Trust, Paris © Man Ray Trust / ADAGP Paris / ARS-USA

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

RE: MAN RAY

Noire et Blanche, 1926, Gelatin Silver Print, owned by MOMA, New York. The title translates female black and female white, or black in the feminine and white in the feminine, or black woman and white woman. The photograph has a mid-picture horizon line of a flat surface, a table. Cheek down, as if asleep, is the head of a beautiful white woman. Dark hair, sleek, glassine bob. The defined features of a recognizable style of beauty: eyes curved closed, flyaway wings of eyebrows, cupid-bow pursed mouth thick with dark lipstick. The face belongs to Kiki of Montparnasse, a model, Man Ray's lover, an entertainer, and (apparently under his influence) a painter.

Her bare white powdery shoulder is just visible; so is her left hand. In this hand she holds an African mask, "black as ebony." Its high feathery hair sleek, high forehead, eyebrows flyaway, eyes slit shut, a very pursed mouth. The face and the mask have the same oval faces, the same features. Both faces frontally confront the viewer, but at right angles to each other. And both faces keep their eyes closed. The faces almost touch; the bit of distance between them is intensely interesting. Kiki's chin just grazes the cheek of the carving.

The art product of a [primitive] [exotic] [othered] [admired] [imitated] [fashionable] culture—this mask is in a metaphoric and metonymic relation with the sleeping face of a [sexy] [beautiful] [othered] [beloved] [sensual] [fashionable] woman. The one next to the other, both others, each next to each, suggest relationships, meanings, exchanges, contrasts.

It seems that this white European woman looks exactly like this African mask. The two faces are equally delicate, with parallel

The Man Ray Retrospective, *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray,* was at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from October 1989 to January 1990.

features, each as in a photographic relation to the other, one the print, the other the negative, or turned around, one the rayogram of the other, black to white, white to black, and this relationship is exclusive, pure, satisfying.[1] There is a black color (her sleeked back hair) in the white woman's portrait; there are white highlights (on the cheek, on the forehead) of the black mask. There is exchange.

A white woman (I am reading one of the possible narratives of the photo) presents a black mask while asleep. Given Ray's fascination with dream states, one might argue that the mask Kiki holds is a depiction of her deepest self, a crystallized sign. The African mask could be used as a projection outward of the forces of id, of the "primitive" images of the dream. This is one way our Euro-culture uses blackness. But because of the linear refinement and iconic disembodiment of the mask, it also seems as much super-ego as id. Or not quite "super-ego" (what do these terms mean?) as helper, guardian, talisman, protector—god. A contradictory palimpsest which unsettles, even as it repeats, deep Euro-cultural inscriptions of the investment of meanings in African-ness. The woman sleeps. Her talisman guards her with slit eyes. The gods in the goods. This is H.D.'s (relatively benign) image while working with Freud; the rich confusion of goods (the icons, the objects, the blessings) and gods. It can have a demonstrably less benign colonial meaning.[2] We got their goods.

Yet because her eyes are closed, because of the contradiction in Kiki (she is "asleep," yet presenting, foregrounding the mask—unconscious and yet active), and because the female faces so closely resemble each other, one also could argue that the women are doubles, that black and white are doppelgänger, that despite the difference in medium (mask, face), and in race (Negro, Caucasian), the photo is talking not about difference or even inequality, but about some crucial sameness between? beyond? white and black, beyond face and mask. The faces are virginal, pure, removed, withdrawn, at rest, or mimicking rest. The gaze cannot penetrate everywhere. Perhaps.

Rootless, leveraged out of his immigrant background, a member of the group called "artist," Man Ray chooses three main groups to photograph: women, other artists, and rich people. The photo with the black mask, unique to this exhibit, is an extra sign

of social discourses he mastered through the lens. Man Ray photographed for the leading fashion magazines—*Vanity Fair, Harper's Bazaar, Vogue*—and helped to sustain and create fusions of wealth, fashion, elegance, and femaleness.

Black and white. Black and white, female, feminine; race and gender. If saying that behind every black mask is whiteness, then thereupon with that gesture buying into racist color codes, of honor, nobility, refinement, transcendence being symbolized by the white color. If saying that white and black are the same, with that gesture eradicating difference, including the distinct tribal and cultural specificity of this mask, the differences between a whole body with the power of a hand, and a mask treated as symbolic, but decorative, exotic object. If saying that, to enter the modernity of the dream, a white woman takes as her icon a black mask, some transvaluation has occurred which still exoticizes the gesture. Kiki, perfect in herself, goes beyond her own powerful perfection, extends it into another realm, draws on the manna of this artifact. Has the cultural right to do so.

Again this fact, a French woman (interior immigrant, from a poor farm to the metropole), asleep, pretending a drenched deep sleep before the camera of an expatriate, but originally working class, American (Jewish) artist who loves her. She holds up an African mask that looks like her. We do not know whether she chose this prop or he. We do not know the mask, which is far less readable (to us) than her face. Is it "real" tribal art? It looks a bit like work from Sierra Leone. I glanced at a book, two, three books of African art, but that tells little more than nothing, and is even a strained sop. Is it "tourist art"? Did it belong to Man Ray? To whom did it belong? Who owned it? Whose mask was it?

The fact remains that a white woman, asleep, is showing a black mask. She is being photographed admiringly, by a man who loves negatives and positives of light.[3] Not saying which "tribe," or "group," we cannot even say with assurance that the mask is, within its culture, of a male face or female face. Of course, a reading of it would differ distinctly if we felt it was intended not that two "masked" females doubled each other, but that a white female held a fetish of a black male face, posed before, yet hidden from the gaze of the white male artist.

Clearly, somewhere, a ferocious and even titillating appropriation of cultural specificity. African mask for what function? for initiation? for another ceremony? for a secret society? These questions take some effort to remember to ask, because African-ness has become invisible, and the only answer which this photo offers to the question "mask for what" is "black mask to complement the white woman."

As clearly a genuine, highly motivated attempt to make a principled juncture between European and African cultures.[4] As clearly—whether this, or any similar gesture (Picasso's "Demoiselles d'Avignon," for instance) happened for deplorable reason or good, the point is, it happened. In this case both woman and mask aestheticized, both taken as portals to the sacred space of dream and intensity, or pleasurable mystery which the photo announces, and even offers. And as clearly, a privileged gesture—privileged in its relationship to the race and gender of the *femmes-objets* it arranges.

Imagine one version of a counter-factual picture: an African, or African-American woman, extremely beautiful and inward, her head horizontal to the viewer, holds in her hand a stylized white mask of a lovely woman—perhaps an eighteenth century Columbine, wood-carved, polychromed: blue eyes, gold curls, the works. Imagining how many ways this too might be read (e.g. the black woman longs to don the mask of Euro-beauty; the superficiality of this mask is in direct contrast to the "earthy power" of the black woman, etc.) offers some notion of the privilege of the juncture Man Ray makes.

Man Ray is fascinated by the permutations of the gaze. And among the permutations, this inwardness. Among them as well, the wild-eyed double exposure of a female face so she has two sets of eyes, staring on top each other ("The Marquise Casati" 1922). Another permutation: the frank return of the gaze. His films perfect these synchronous moments of return: as when headlights peer eye-like back at the viewer. The camera is photographed with multiple lenses like eyes—and look! (giggle) an eye is superimposed upon one of the lenses—like a lens cover. A series of women, asleep, are recorded opening their eyes in a loving, amused, seductive embarrassment at being photographed, and each is made to fade at just that moment when she attempts to

bring the man from behind the ray of lens-y light he holds. That eye, on the metronome pendulum (a number of objects, e.g. "Perpetual Motif"), on the camera, that eye. Looking.

In one of his films, a woman's face appears in close-up, and staring, eerie eyes peer from her face. Which, in one second, flicker and open, because it was make-up, a masquerade of eyes, painted on her closed eyelids. In this case, when a woman returns an abrupt, wide, disconcerting gaze—Man Ray has "made it" so her eyes were "really" closed all the time. Can women see, or can they not? Do they have the power to look, or is their power elsewhere, inside the dream? The photo is in hush. The dreamed and dreamy dreamer. Man Ray wants to look behind. Man Ray wants especially to look behind the eyes into the dream. Thus into the most private space. And sometimes he wants a woman's comradeship in looking, sometimes not.

"You see, it all amounts to the same thing: do what he will she remains in spite of his greatest doing or not doing the same thing, woman, woman in the abstract, something without a face, something beyond his power—something that (according to his nature) he can abstract, generalize upon, devise means for elucidating."[5]

"Despite depicting two faces, neither figure has a "real" face. Kiki is a mask too. And Kiki is brought to her essence by that mask of her "anti-self"—that so closely resembles her. The dark continent, the woman, the mystery. "Something beyond his power." Did they really believe this kind of rhetoric?

The figures of *Noire et Blanche*—are both without a face; both women are masks, neither gaze forward, neither look out. We understand well enough the mechanisms of female masquerade of inhabiting a beauty by choice and design in order to "pass"—to allow the real work to be done underneath. This is a risky business, and the risk is established in a thin fable by Max Beerbohm in which a mask assumed for charade grew organically to be inseparable from the face. Beauty is a minstrel mask for women.[6]

But a mask is more than a face. It is face not a face, more than a face. Women are masters of the mask. The masquerade. Make-up. Dress-up. The mask resists appropriation while it plays at pleasing. This double portrait is the representation of resistance ("something beyond his power"). The resistance of the dreamer. The resistance of the icon. Is this an image *of* appropriation by

which Man Ray depicts female and African resistance *to* appropriation? This would perhaps explain its power for me.

Research into the fetishes of dream. There is another photograph on which to comment. Man Ray's "Séance du Rêve Eveillé" (Seance of the Wakened Dream, 1924). This is a group of portraits of the surrealists. Eleven people cluster, ten men, one woman. The group is hunched, bunched, intently thinking and listening as Robert Denos, in the lower right corner, holding a die-like cube (dice also figure significantly in Man Ray's films) stares and makes a gesture of explaining. But the photo has a split focus. All eyes and thoughts (Bréton's, Eluard's, Soupault's, de Chirico's) are on the foregrounded Denos, but compositionally the men are grouped around a beautiful woman (Simone Collinet-Breton), who sits at a small table on which there is a typewriter. She is, apparently, in the narrative the photo encapsulates, transcribing what Denos says in his wakened dream. Wanted: secretary to surrealists. Must be able to type dreams, 120 wpm.

It is remarkable (is it unremarkable?) to see the division of labor by gender. The woman is as intent and moved as the men in this group, but she has a further task, and her hands rest on the keyboard, in a helpmeet posture, even as her face, touched, concerned, thoughtful, looks, as do her male comrades, at the object Denos explicates.

Noted without comment:

From a lead feature article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* 12 December 1989, about museum shops: "For art lovers who want to be surrounded by meaning, the Philadelphia Museum of Art is selling a $75 transparent shower curtain based on Marcel Duchamp's *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even.* [¶] It seems that every major museum in America has a gift shop, stocked with inventive and tasteful wares, and. . . ."

Notes

1. The catalogue of the exhibit loosely remarks on "the juxtaposing of Kiki's perfectly shaped white face and the dark, heavily carved African sculpture." "Perfectly" contrasting (curiously) with "heavily." This comment offers only a great loss of specificity by the loose visualization of some generic "African mask," not this one. The observation by Sandra S. Phillips, in the chapter on photography from Merry Foresta, et al., *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 191.
2. Catherine White wrote a paper for me on Gertrude Stein and jazz in which the gods and goods image was recalled. In the conjuncture of materials on appropriation and African-American influences on modernism, I want to acknowledge a dialogue with her.
3. Indeed, the Museum hand-out about the show isolates the moment in the twenties after the rayographs when Ray felt he was "painting" "with light itself." His "triumphant" remark "he had finally succeeded in freeing himself from the 'sticky substance' of paint" gains in resonance when factored through Mira Schor's argument ("Figure/Ground," M/E/A/N/I/N/G 6 [November 1989]) that the codes and substances of oil painting (liquidity, viscousness, goo) involve attitudes to female codes and substances. One has seen other examples of the teens and twenties as crucial moments for the working out of gender narratives in modernism.
4. See a short study by James Clifford which takes up this moment: "Interrupting the Whole," *Conjunctions* 6 (1984): pp. 282–295.
5. William Carlos Williams, "Woman as Operator," in *A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists*, ed. Bram Dijkstra (New York: New Directions, 1978), p. 180.
6. Huston A. Baker, Jr., elucidates the risk of the minstrel mask for African-American artists—because blackface is the sign of the denial of the humanity of African-Americans. Therefore the defining gesture of African-American modernists is "mastering the minstrel mask." *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 15–24. In parallel manner, I am proposing that the mastering of the mask of beauty, a speaking back to beauty, is crucial to female artists, writers, and performers.

Marjorie Welish

Barbara Guest. *Fair Realism.* Sun & Moon, 1989

"Light fingering the empty, open spaces of poetry," said Barbara Guest, speaking last November about the sculpture of the Dadaist Jean (Hans) Arp. In an informal talk at the Poets' House in New York that considered both Arp's chance reliefs and *poésie concrète* still radical today, Guest was glad to linger over the playful and uncompromised radicality of this artist who remained confidently independent of the official office of Surrealism that sought to incorporate him. Of his art's sensible qualities, she stressed its palpable plasticity. And no wonder. That phrase of hers which saw light fingering the poetry of Arp's budded hollows enacted the special open fluidity of Guest's own modernist poetry.

Plasticity of the poetic is evident throughout *Fair Realism,* Guest's most recent—and excellent—book of poems. Descent as gravitational flow is a theme sometimes reflected in design, and even when, as in "The Farewell Stairway *after Balla,*" floating radicals moving through space pay literal homage to the painting of Giacomo Balla, it is rather more for the early pictorial treatment of descent, sparking with expressionistic marks yet otherwise elegantly contained, than to a Futurist maelstrom in which pictorial dynamism will splinter the forms entirely:

> The women without hesitancy began to descend
> leaving flowers—
>
> Ceres harried—bragged of cultivated grain—
>
> I saw Hecate, the gray-wrapped woman.
> in lumpy dark.
>
> farewell eyes revolve—
> the frontier oscillating—

pleated moments.
Hades at the bottom—

•

they laughed like twins their arms around each other
the women descending—

Initially, mythic figures move eurythmically across the space of the page. Descent repeats, then repeats again, the theme of flowing movement finding more and more fragmented, gesturally abstract reference. Guest uses gerunds and participles as Gertrude Stein does: to represent perpetual movement yet also to enact the transition from motion into attitude. Her scheme by which anatomy devolves into gesture of attitude and of language helps induce a world of continual incursive passage—as Mary Ann Caws might say—even as we see palpable excursive movement through space.

In *Fair Realism* lyricism is sharply defined by ear. While many of the poems install a condition of floating, fingered space, that is to say, marked sensitivity to the sensible forms indefiniteness takes, testing this atmosphere—indeed, interrogating it—is Guest's precision of language, her rare and exacting intelligence registering and ordering every phoneme. Through syllabic vigilance, lyric becomes acute (a consciousness that other poets of detail confuse with fussiness). As is often the case with Guest, plasticity is subtly reinforced by assonance, the play of vowels creating an aural seamlessness of disjunctive sense. Unmistakable is the series of checks and balances within her lyricism whereby analytic and sensuous impulses startle at every turn.

In this regard, "Ilex" is representatively extraordinary:

From the doorway we watched. Alexander
at the basin washing his face shone
    in bottled water from the green doorway.

•

Qu'ad Ashir besieged the iris in bud
blue water with blood camel shackles
then a comet fell said the astrologer
    castle emptied yellow bonneted meadow and
                bone.

The mountain covered with sharp ilex
locally a spiky plant called holm
Iran heresy like manna
on the giant winged eagle rock

damascened
oasis lily of silk knives Babylonia.

•

His passion for abstraction is gripping—

These cadenced phrases at ease with the ideogrammic sense Pound made standard practice also enjoy a luxuriant yet totally uncompromised Hellenism he would also recognize. Between the publication of her book of poems *Moscow Mansions* in 1973 and *Fair Realism,* a long and arduous bout with biography brought Guest intense familiarity with the life and poetry of H.D., and as a result of writing *Herself Defined: The poet H.D. and her world,* 1984, she does recall that experience in these recent poems. But subject matter aside, one sees in Guest a stylistic dialogue with Pound, Reverdy and Char, among others, that bespeaks a poetics in place ever since The New York School coalesced.

Further on, the poem intermittently detaches itself from reference to Greece to allow for purely aestheticized mental acts:

White daphne Thrace silvered
ghost trained hares in the young snow patches—
lit by fir-cloud risible Danube
where it widens blaze of hunted water at horse teeth

ode grouping
Illyrian sequence—

apprentice oars.

Alexander's 'greatness'—a linnet

"Ilex" exemplifies the poetic adage that beauty is difficult. Here it is painstaking. Guest is not willing to sacrifice musicality to politicized literariness; rather, politics remains an inflection in progressively difficult, because abbreviated, musicality. The space grows most vast around these archipelagoes of phrases.

Kenneth Warren

John Wieners: *Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry & Prose 1956–1985*. Edited by Raymond Foye. Preface by Robert Creeley. Black Sparrow Press, 1988. 196 pages. $9.00 paperback, $20.00 hardcover.

The poetry of John Wieners has presented—through the conditions of drifting, dissembling and homelessness—the conflict between radical poetry and social powers. No poet has so absolutely penetrated the confusion of the sexes to impress means for feeling how the battered subject might conceptualize historical, cultural and sexual difference within a poetic framework. Accordingly, from *The Hotel Wentley Poems* (1958) to *Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry & Prose 1956–1985* (1988) the full weight of his means has been formed through the years by bodies, flung from crashpads, flophouses, movie theaters and parks into the space that grounds and motivates the poem.

Although Wieners discerned in Edna St. Vincent Millay's poetry a sure sense of musical line and sexually suggestive phrasing, his writing is inevitably linked with *The New American Poetry* (1960). His life among Black Mountain poets especially has been charged with ups and downs. He has studied with Charles Olson and Robert Duncan at Black Mountain College, traveled with Olson to Spoleto to read with Ezra Pound, made a grab for Robert Creeley's thigh, and survived to tell his tale of love for this tribe of men.

Cultural Affairs in Boston plays on a number of possible meanings connected to the force of the gay poet's affairs on culture. Something like a family affair persists through its various social and spiritual manifestations. The poems vary in presentation, offering a series of affairs with father poets, brother poets, movie stars and queens. At the chronological level, the book presents various phases in the poet's life—from junk poems written in his twenties to tongue-in-cheek statements about his accommodation to bachelorhood written in his fifties. Throughout the book a sense of compact information about felt culture registers increasingly from proper names related to formation of capital and culture, so identifying the lasting force of father poets—Pound and Olson—on his world. Conversely, on the maternal side, the conception of the church, with its emphasis on the female body, bears on the major themes of love and sin.

The book begins with a preface by Creeley that seizes upon the social, temporal existence of the poet to suggest a reading better suited to Wieners' earlier lyric character. Perhaps the most telling words in Creeley's preface are Olson's remarks on Wieners: "He's elemental." He writes "a poetry of affect." While Creeley presumes Olson to mean "a poetry that is in the process of a life being lived, literally," these terms

might allow the reader to infer along less existential lines a depth of spirit belonging to the universe of constant companions that seems born of Roman Catholic conviction. Of considerable interest here is the sense in which these terms might be related to the Blessed Virgin, Holy Spirit and Guardian Angel. These spiritual sources have informed Wieners' efforts to write a way out of sexual confusion and found an identity on poetry rather than sex.

The Christmas-time interview that follows, in which Wieners talks about living with the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Spirit, may be viewed as both a beginning and a culmination, the finalization of the Incarnation and the integration of its fecundity into his poetic world. From the interview it becomes possible to discover the spiritual orientation of a poetics that seems antithetical to the operations of not only the Church and St. Augustine but Robert Frost, the Stoics and fertility gods as well. The fruit of all this is the conviction that his poetics is involved with a vision of the Incarnation—the Word, the Spirit, the Virgin's ear. With Mary as queen, his Boston, like some antithetical Heavenly City, is maternalized, turning on the cultivation of inner space. Here is a poet who has found his queen in the mythological system of the Church and restored her to his world.

In his opening invocation, "Hart Crane, Harry Crosby," Wieners calls upon lost, suicidal souls, through whom he envisions companionship:

> Ah, Hart Crane, Crane, Harry Crosby,
> don't run out on me,
> stay with me with me, men,
> build up my shoulderblades.

This tone that derives from Whitman can be heard throughout the first half of the book in poems of restless sexual stirring and wandering. Much to editor Raymond Foye's credit, the device of a full-blown Whitmanic "I" rescues Wieners' lyric fragments from jaws of despair, bringing a sense of fortune and cohesion suited to the demands of the new book form.

About sixteen poems in *Cultural Affairs in Boston* have already appeared, largely the same, in the earlier *Selected Poems* (1972). The only noticeable revision is in "San Francisco, 1958":

> And always these tropical songs call me
> into the south, the lush land
> that I have denied long enough, the
> heat and speed, I now
> embrace, in this yellow flare
> before my eyes.

There is a loss of compression in the shift to the present tense, a loss stemming from the subject's embrace of syntax and sight lines that now lead to a place of paternal authority occupied by Whitman. At a more subjective level, to be discovered later, the recognition of Whitman's self-creative ground suggests a transformative purpose related to a poetics of fluidity and seminal exchange (see John Clarke for his excellent presentation of this subject matter in *From Feathers to Iron: A Concourse in World Poetics* [1978]).

"The poem seizes one, in an experience / almost, all-consuming / as an orgasm," Wieners declares in "An Evocation to Tommy Dorsey." But because of the emotional shape that fluids and stains have inscribed in his psyche, only a secret encounter with the stream of ink that darkens consciousness can bring about poetic knowledge, as in "Steve Magellan-straits":

> Black magician of the night
> dive into the secrets of the sea
> and come up with some golden fish
> to perch on our mantels
> through these long winter months
> so that we may know
> the currents of the inky storm
> to come.

"Memories of You" is the central poem in a strategy to poeticize homoerotic desire in such a way that the space opening up for the poet is the mouth of the reader. Here desire for the penis has already led Wieners to put his mouth in the service of other men. The poem, also to be taken into the mouth, forms his outward thrust in light of the body's modality. The organ of sound that receives the words of the poem thus becomes the receptacle for its fermentation into a unifying force that will ravish men, women and children, awakening them to new identity.

All the old wisdoms have been inverted in a system of belief and articulation that enables the poet to become the locus of feminine contraries—angel and whore:

> Back to trees of Boston and Public Garden,
> where I blew men all night long.
> The stain is still on my face.

Any critical reading of Wieners' poetry has to emphasize how the structure of religious effect, the reversal of love as sin, to borrow Julia Kristeva's insight, informs his longing to become the Lady writing herself

into seminal being. While leading to defilement rather than purification, the mouth's receptivity to seminal exchange has allowed Wieners to become the feminine temptation. To an extraordinary degree, he has devoured the other, faced the stain associated with the woman's body and submitted to its ascension. It's hard to imagine a more explicit telling of defilement. Yet there's wit, in the end, in the inversion of Pound's song of the troubadours, "Cino":

> For I will go to Spoleto and blow them there,
> travel back to San Francisco and blow them there,
> "get fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists"
> would it were so; cruise Boston streets again
> with Billy Donahue, pretend it is all peaches and cream
> while I inwardly scream and dream of the day
> when I will be free
> to marry
> and breed more children
> so I can seduce them
> and they be seduced by
> motorcyclists in the dawn.

If Harold Bloom comes anywhere near making sense in saying that "a poem is always the other man, the precursor, and so a poem is always a person, always the father of one's Second Birth," then this cruise poem, with its exchange of semen, might be the furthest possible embodiment of Bloom's theory. In the expansion of the poetic universe, the image of a burst of semen, developed in Whitman's "Spontaneous Me," and suggested in Pound's "Cino," now extends from "Memories of You" over these poet fathers to give even Bloom's work a new gloss. Here, too, the vision of the seminal exchange, in accordance with Clarke's analysis of creative life, increases the value of Wieners' "poetic corpus." In the literal sense, this increase rests on the advance of Wieners' own seminal principle—"the stain"—over Whitman's "limpid liquid" over Pound's "clouds that are spray to its sea."

Divisions are important to Wieners: speaking and listening, the living and the dead, masculine and feminine. He writes in "Preface":

> Verse making is more than a continuum of principle resting on feminine phenomenological apprehension. The real one of many, the illusory far and near intersect to push behaviour's stream, dependent on questing, producing revelatory postures for men, animals and stars.

The poet is one pastor of this distribution between two visions. Often he must struggle against the story of the Incarnation, to hear "the right voice" so that his reception, unlike the Virgin's, will be identified with death rather than life:

> I know now I heard you speak in the night.
> Voices of dead loves past,
>
> whisper instructions over the electric air.
>
> O words that confirm and chain.
>
> Down deep the path's final entrance reveals itself.
> The will draws strong on the palm of the hand.
>
> Do not tamper with the message here.
>
> ("Sickness")

The collection as a whole reveals how strongly the deaths of poets have affected Wieners. After the death of Frank O'Hara female subjects come to dominate the poems. References become more elliptical, as in "Adult, To His Inspiration," with Olson's passing from life into the constellation of "a calla-lily easter / the kyrie orizen." As time goes by his means of organizing the image shifts from line to film. "Poetry remains such taste of one man for his other / through cinema," he writes in 1974, no longer under Olson's influence.

Film's store of perceptual identity imposes a shift in how Wieners regards himself, especially in the bearing of female character traits capable of generating a difference in his self-image. In terms of his poetics, film might be understood as an extension of "feminine phenomenological apprehension." Ordinary fascination with Hollywood stars can become for Wieners a symbolic order that eventually displaces the poet as subject. At times his subjection to these figures is solipsistic. But his poetic universe offers itself as an accessible constellation to the reader who will accept the proper name of Bette Davis as designating the unmoved mover in a sometimes campy cosmos. She is a goddess, after all, who must remain unresponsive to the mortal poet's desire for possession of her divine qualities:

> . . .Just think, 66 years in the theatre, 66 years of human living flesh and blood, against the onslaught of time, ravages of inhuman war, disease, famine and death. 60

years, a visionary magnet to millions in attributes of suffering attainment, before this temple shrine of purity goodness, and rankling, blubbery humour. I have loved Bette Davis, always, ever since I was a little boy. . .

(from "To My Chicago Friends and Publishers")

Neither discrete nor subject to Hollywood domination, stars effect links to a poetic world in which Pound and Olson generate sexual difference, a difference capable of moving the reader beyond any simple regard or dismissal for the manifestation of camp. Together poetic figures interpenetrate with those of film to illustrate the lengths to which this poet has gone in order to stage the recovery of his lover.

The uncanny feature of Wieners' poetic world is the realization that the spirit of revolt must push against the war of the sexes, in order that new meaning might issue from the age old vision of a woman's soul confined in a man's body:

spill the last word Mata, over Hanoi Hanna
so you can turn your back on Tokyo Iva,

and look the German Axis square in the eye
backward picking up Brocades' hem
then douse the lights, ah
well,. . .the moon comes up—.

(from "After you go in the dark room")

Cultural Affairs in Boston, with only about a half dozen pieces from *Behind the State Capitol or Cincinnati Pike* (1975); manages to indicate the contribution that Wieners has made to the postmodern swing in disposition toward the relation of writing to the body, cinema, gender identity, politics, and property. Today he is the clearest link between the dispositions of Black Mountain and Language writing as well. Perhaps it has always been so, but between 1972 and 1985, while Language writing was taking hold for a new generation of poets, the decidedly experimental cast of *Behind the State Capitol or Cincinnati Pike* seemed bizarre—at least in comparison with the earlier lyrical efforts gathered in *Selected Poems* (1972)—and his exhilarating sense of desire for poets seemed pushed by radical experiment to the limit of good sense. Now that Language writing has gained rather widespread critical currency it is obviously time to place his schizzy turn in the context of recent literary history. The writing from *Behind the State Capitol or Cincinnati Pike* be-

comes, in the retrospective context, the pivotal 1970s text of experimental writing, anticipating the broader critical acceptance of any number of Language writers for discontinuous prose of multiple, clairvoyant, and hysterical voices.

Certainly, *Cultural Affairs in Boston* qualifies on all accounts, according to Charles Bernstein's definition, as a "multi-discourse," which presents "politics, autobiography, fiction, philosophy, common sense, song, etc." But neither language nor the totality of a reader's association is the subject of this writing. What must be granted, in the end, as the seminal, shameful, subjective factor is Wieners himself, struggling with language to occupy the position of the femme fatale whose signs have been inscribed in his psyche. Implicit in practically every piece is the physical demand that the reader accept the neural connections that support his deep psychic layers. More than some fey, queenly language game Wieners' expressions of gender identity seem to push out—as a matter of hormones—from its probable physical location in the limbic system of the brain's temporal lobe—to lay claim to the seeds of a poetic seizure that is rooted deep and wide in these cultural affairs.

Tyrus Miller

Leslie Scalapino. *Way*. San Francisco, North Point Press. $12.00

Readers familiar with Leslie Scalapino's earlier books will recognize the poetic terrain of her long poem *Way:* the alienated West Coast cityscapes, the detached yet anxious "I" slipping in and out of focus, the serial composition, and the array of "notational devices" lending typographical shape to the poems. Her latest work, however, achieves a degree of integration and economy of means not found in her previous two collections, *Considering how exaggerated music is* (1982) and *that they were at the beach* (1985). Through formal ingenuity and subtle internal patterning, *Way* negotiates the Scylla and Charybdis of the contemporary long poem. It avoids a mere insistence on the unity of heterogeneous material through the book's mechanical form. Yet it also retains an openness that keeps its materials in play in its radical departure from traditional narrative form and presentation.

The poem begins to establish its themes and structure before the reader even opens the book: its two cover photos, taken together, form a

relevant "preface." On the left is a picture (the caption tells us) of a couple dancing in a bar: a man hunched over a woman, her arm draped over his shoulder, a hint of alcohol in the blurry outlines of their bodies. Juxtaposed to it on the right is a street scene: "men fighting on sidewalk." In a striking coincidence of posture with the dancers, a bare-chested man hoists up his adversary and holds him suspended horizontal to the ground. The arms of the lifted man wrap, almost tenderly, around the other man's shoulders. The dominant "partner" supports the lifted man's head and encircles his spread crotch. The dancers are seen from the side, the fighters frontally, as if the difference between an erotic embrace and an act of violence were only a variation in the perspective of the frame. The analogous configurations of bodies establish through their juxtaposition a single photo-*graphic:* an ideogram presenting two related, through irreducible modes of social being.

Similar to this semiotic charging of the normally marginal cover space, the titling of the series presents a schematized version of the recursions and delays that characterize the temporality of the poem as a whole. Thus, "Way" is both the title of the whole poem and the second section of the book. The first section, the "Later Floating Series," includes as its third subsection "The floating series." The "original" series are thus hierarchically and temporally subordinated to their successors: echoes precede their sources. The "Later Floating Series" is, of the two major series, the more extensive and formally complex. It consists of four subsections, which for sake of clarity I'll call minor series: "walking by," "bum series," "The floating series," and "Delay series." Subdivisions proliferate further in the body of these poems. The minor series "walking by," for instance, splits in three, the title section, a section entitled "Fragment," and a third called "End Part." "Way" (the major series) is somewhat simpler, consisting of two minor series: "no(h)-setting" and "hoofer," the latter having a first and second subdivision.

It is necessary to be this meticulous in my description of *Way*'s formal design because much of its meaning resides in the patterns of transformation of a limited amount of material. In spite of the transparent representations of some of Scalapino's lines—her evocation of Oakland in "cranes are on the / skyline," for example—these concrete references don't really form the center of gravity of the poems. Instead, the emphasis falls on the *relation* of things, persons, and events, which tend to be introduced at a high level of abstraction: "the man," "a city," "the public figure," and the like. For these relations, textual devices serve as "metaphors," bringing an insistent intertextuality into play. I don't mean, however, allusions, but rather references to other *forms* of discourse. Photographs, scenes from television, diaries (Scalapino has written on Japanese poetic diaries), the notation of Mallarme's uncompleted *Tomb for*

Anatole, the ellipses of objectivist poetry, the grammaticalism of Gertrude Stein, and the typographical quirkiness of Emily Dickinson are among the most evident points of reference. These signify, over and above the designated content of the words, the possibility of a communication as such: an "intercourse" between sealed vessels, a transgressive opening also instanced by sexual acts, physical or verbal acts of violence, and moments of powerful emotion when the autonomy of the self is breached.

Scalapino typically introduces a few motifs, clusters of thematic materials, most often not directly linked to one another: fragmentary narratives from past and present, descriptions of spaces, remembered contacts with people that seem emotionally fraught beyond their manifest content. These motifs then recur with variations and begin to mingle. The relations slowly unfold through repetition and permutation, inflecting each element with subjective value and consciousness. Particularly in the major series "Way," the interpenetration of motifs becomes extremely dense as they follow in quick succession, interrupting and fragmenting one another: "being the same—the—wanting to disturb / boys—or men—having deliberately / shouted or called—at night—so / there's no way to be weary—though me actually / sleeping—as their sound."

Here and there, in my opinion, Scalapino fails to illuminate sufficiently the relations governing her materials. At times she withholds so much that the significance is lost. This is the case when her ellipses becomes so deep as to preclude further questioning: "it was during the war—so it wouldn't have done any good to show anger." In other places, a motif remains so distant from the others as to fall outside the relations the series establishes. In "The floating series," for example, the singular appearance of a policeman's immolation by a crowd, probably South Africa, seems motivated only by the shock value of its juxtaposition with the erotic scene dominating this minor series. At its best, however, as in "bum series," Scalapino's juggling of autonomous motifs allows the revelation of the links between the atomized compartments of urban existence: the writing "I" in relation to the dead bums, the industrial machines hulking in the skyline, the narcissism of a man in new wave attire, the current president, and the social struggle abroad.

A passage from the first minor series, "walking by" of the "Later Floating Series," exemplifies Scalapino's rigor in unearthing the temporal complexity of any single event. She disaggregates its components into a sum of vectors, momentarily converging: "I was in school; the bus driver seeing a girl crossing the street hadn't stopped—she'd been hit—so the other students—the boys—would hit the side of the bus everyday." The event and its symbolic repetition, the quotidian fact of being in school and the irruption of chance into that continuum, the linear progress of the bus and girl and the violent hiatus of their contact: all these Scalapino com-

pacts into a single brief passage. Near the end of "walking by," she notes the investment of subjectivity in any "objective" event and indicates that the complex time she has registered is the lived time of the subject, the writing "I." Time, thus, is for her always an intersection of events and desire: "later—events set in terms of chronology—which may be earlier in time, but emotionally are of a later age."

Although the social tableaux that Scalapino presents are harsh and bleak—portraying bullying cops, mentally disturbed bus riders, bums frozen to death, muggers, betraying friends and lovers—she refrains from direct moral commentary. Her judgments are instead displayed in their most immediate form: as traces left by subjective involvement in perceived events and in those recalled in memory. In this respect, Scalapino's work extends an already long tradition of modernist writing which, after Bergson, sought to restore the intensive duration of temporal flux to the dead and deadening shell of habitual life. The language of poetry may at once facilitate this restoration and threaten it, by its own settling into habit. This ambiguity of language's nature may account for the ambivalences of Scalapino's tone, oscillating between disingenuous innocence and cool, defensive abstraction.

A final feature in which Scalapino follows her modernist predecessors (including Bergson) is in her appeal to the metaphors of "modern science": relativity, quantum theory, dynamics. In *that they were at the beach,* she used the analogy of the "aeolotropic series," referring to the exhibition of different properties when the perspective of observation is varied. In *Way,* she seems to press beyond this formal analogy to suggest a more substantive relation between the scientific ensemble and the social scenes she presents. She quotes a long passage from David Bohm's *Causality and Chance in Modern Physics,* discussing the "qualitative infinity of nature," the relativity of objects in time and space. After an ellipsis, she quotes a conclusion which to my mind protests too much: ". . .we admit also that nevertheless there still exists an absolute, unique, and objective reality." What is in store for the reader of the poem itself, however, would seem to contradict this assertion. Its relation to the poem verges on an ideological absorption of the social into the natural, a nature stabilized by the social authority of science. It is as if Scalapino had recognized the brink of contingency to which her poetry had carried her and absconded for a last grab at faith: the uncertain certainty of a relative path, a meandering way, a "Tao of physics" in place of a dead God.

Rothenberg:

My desk today is covered with five volumes of Kurt Schwitters—*Das Literarische Werk* that Dumont Verlag brought out in Germany in the early 1970s. Something near 2000 pages that makes a life work comparable—both as conceived & realized—to what he did so beautifully as painter & collagist. I expect to cull & translate 300 pages for a "selected poetry & other writings"—by summer's end if lucky—but with a sense too that the domain of poetry (the field in which we work & live) is sadly out of touch with works like his. I would say, anyway, to start these noticings, that if you have some German at your disposal & an interest in viewing an experimental poetics as wide-ranging in its forms as any of that time, then *Das Literarische Werk* (one book of poetry as such, two books of "prose," one theater, one manifesto) is still available to take a look at.

Speaking of selecting, then, there is a virtual subgenre today of *selected* (sometimes *collected) poems* that someone might someday write about. Functioning like retrospectives in the art world sense, they occur somewhere around mid-career (but often earlier), pulling together & representing older works that have been published here & there along the way. For an active poet they may happen more than once (four times at least in my own case), & in the process one may feel oneself to be (again) a juggler & collagist. For myself, as a reader, such gatherings are almost always useful—as an instance of self-selection or reflection on the poet's part & as a compact way of carrying a sampler of the work around. The drawback is the necessity of omissions & the uneasy sense that what drops out is not so easily restored; the tradeoff, where it works, is in the clarity, the force of the conjunctions.

Three such works have very recently come in: Armand Schwerner's latest *Tablets I–XXVI* (London: Atlas Press, 1989), Pierre Joris's *Breccia:*

Selected Poems 1972–1986 (Luxembourg: Editions Phi, and New York: Station Hill Press), and Anne Waldman's *Helping the Dreamer: New & Selected Poems 1966–1988* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1989). Schwerner's of course is not a selection from the entire oeuvre (something like that came earlier with *Sounds of the River Naranjana* in 1986) but the latest version of his ongoing masterwork, *The Tablets*—the equivalent, in Schwerner's terms, of *Paterson* or *Maximus*. The principal addition here is the short Tablet XXV & the extensive Tablet XXVI, which introduces a range of visual/verbal "pictographic" elements followed by an extraordinary twenty pages of commentary & pseudo-translation. The inclusion of *The Tablets* in the series of surrealist & French-based books published by Atlas Press also results in Schwerner's presence alongside Jarry, Breton, Soupault, Leiris, Queneau, Roussel, etc.—an indication of the international, not merely American company of which he's surely now a part.

Pierre Joris's *Breccia,* this one a genuine selected poems, is a further instance of what we can now recognize as the unboundedness of (for lack of a better word) the *postmodern*. It's not only the work of a poet who comes into the American language from elsewhere (-in this instance Luxembourg) but of one who carries with him the markers of where he's from & where he's been (either in person or in acts of mind alone). It seems to me, in reading Joris, that Olson's localism (& Olson is surely a major teacher here) sometimes disguised that other *global* reach of *Maximus,* say, to make us forget too often that without the latter the former can be reduced to a sentimental, even dangerous refusal to be implicated in a larger world. Which is to say, that Joris escapes this much as Olson did & that he blesses the adopted language with a work that opens that language to the world at large; in short, that he becomes a poet & a teacher on his own.

Since Joris until recently has largely written from outposts distant from America (London, Paris, and Algeria most notably), *Breccia* may come as a surprise to those reading it here: the first fully visible appearance of a major active poet. Waldman's "new & selected," on the other hand, marks the fulfillment of what has been an amply visible work spun out across two decades. Since Waldman is a strong, sometimes glamorous performer of that work, it may not be apparent to those who catch her on the run that the poems as a totality present, like Joris's & Schwerner's, a multiphasic picture of the world—a merge of many histories, of places & personas on a global scale. Two quotes on the back cover of *Helping the Dreamer* catch the double impact of the work: Allen Ginsberg's stress on her achievement as "a poet orator, her body. . .an

instrument for vocalization" and Patricia Hampl's pointing to the efficacy of the poems "not when they perform, but when they ponder and reflect." It's probably superfluous to say—as with others in this genre—that the cumulative effect of the gathering is a sense of scope beyond that of the earlier poems or series of poems in isolation. It is a big work in all these instances—the movement from a kind of early desperation to a posture that can now embrace the world.

San Diego
16 January 1990

Coolidge:

"She also enjoyed the adventure of killing huge brilliant animals." (James Fox, *White Mischief)*
"I set out to dismember language / but went too far / and now myself am spoken" (Robert Kelly, *The Flowers of Unceasing Coincidence)*
"Supposing a neckline in touch with an element of desire penetrates the cloud on a postage stamp." (George Tysh, *Propositions: Aire)*
"The skating-rink organ produced a sound that made him think of total death." (Don DeLillo, *Libra)*
"PO: (whispering) I want some rest. I saw that dome again." (Budd Hopkins, *Missing Time)*
"The teenager onstage blew a perfect smoke ring out of her vagina. 'Pussy blow fractals!' the Australian yelled." (Peter Straub, *Koko)*
"Sometimes I try to sound like car motors or the continuous cracking of glass." (Sonny Murray, in Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life)*
"so it is death is the / condition of infinite form—" (Robin Blaser, *Syntax)*
"The trees are branching between minerals." (Lyn Hejinian, *The Cell)*
"on we went again into the silence, along empty reaches round the still bends, between the high walls of our winding way" (Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness)*
"A heap of broken images, where the sun beats" (T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land)*
"Fortunately one draws no conclusions, since everything is far too real to be able to mean anything." (Paul Bowles on mescaline, in Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *An Invisible Spectator)*
"Time is the solo of space" (Merrill Gilfillan, *River Through Rivertown)*
"Everything is material to the material." (Glenn Gould, in Otto Friedrich, *Glenn Gould / A Life and Variations)*

"One thing is only a mode of another." (Leslie Scalapino, *The Return of Painting)*
"Bebop had syncopated eighth notes, a very subtle triplet feeling." (Carla Bley, interview in *Jazz* magazine)
"Sometimes he spoke aloud, but it was not satisfying; it seemed rather to hold back the natural development of the ideas. They flowed out through his mouth, and he was never sure whether they had been resolved in the right words. Words were much more alive and more difficult to handle, now; so much so that Kit did not seem to understand them when he used them. They slipped into his head like the wind blowing into a room, and extinguished the frail flame of an idea forming there in the dark. Less and less he used them in his thinking." (Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky)*
"Language turns out to be the content of the world, not its structure. It is completely plastic; it is no longer possible to hold part of it back—as a method—to create a shape for the remainder." (Don Byrd, *Language Poetry, 1971–1986)*
"Invent, invent wildly, paying no attention to connections, till it becomes impossible to summarize. A simple relay race among symbols, one says the name of the next, without rest. To dismantle the world into a saraband of anagrams, endless. And then believe in what cannot be expressed. Is this not the true reading of the Torah? Truth is the anagram of an anagram. Anagrams = ars magna." (Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum)*
"it would give me another vehicle, a vehicle of content" (Eva Hesse, in Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse)*
"Are there enough meanings of myself for me to stop" (Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, *The Numerically Second Elegy)*
"The man who set out again had only an unfinished book for luggage." (Edmond Jabes, *The Book of Shares)*

Dec. 1989

Eshleman:

Along with Arlette Leroi-Gourhan and Jacques Allain's *Lascaux inconnu* (Paris: NRF, 1979), an extremely detailed examination of the some 1500 engravings in the cave, *The Cave of Lascaux/The Final Photographs,* by Mario Ruspoli (NYC: Abrams, 1987) is probably the most complete and up-to-date book on the most beautiful and haunting of the Upper Paleolithic cave "sanctuaries." Lascaux was sealed in 1963 for crucial restoration, and is today "open" in a very restricted way: four days a

week, five people (approved by the authorities in Bordeaux) are allowed in for 45 minutes. In 1981–83, the prehistorian and television producer, Mario Ruspoli, filmed and photographed Lascaux with a six-man team who called themselves "Lascaux-nauts." Excellent photographs, with considerable background information (climate, fauna, flora, etc.).

Ajit Mookerjee, the author of several lavishly-illustrated and informative books on Tantrik art, has brought out a short monograph on *Kali: The Feminine Force* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1988). I read his text in company with chapters on Kali from Barbara Walker's *The Crone* and her *The Skeptical Feminist*. Taken as a triad, these texts make Kali available as a psychologically-understandable, dynamic power in all of our lives.

There is a unique, personal animism in the poetry and prose of Peter Redgrove that makes him for me the most engaging English poet writing today. Some American publisher should make the range of his writing available here. Recent titles include: *Poems 1954–1987* (Penguin Books, 1989), *The Black Goddess* (Grove Press, 1988), and *The First Earthquake* (Secker and Warburg, 1989).

August Kleinzahler has become the master of what might very fairly be identified as "the Kleinzahler poem," a gritty, things-of-this-world, heart-felt, sound-sensitive lyric. *Earthquake Weather* (Mount Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1989) is his most definitive collection and as such raises a new question: where does he go from here?

Of somewhat the same ilk as Kleinzahler, William Corbett's poetry, with tints of Objectivism, Creeley, and Philip Guston's sensibility, has never been more handsomely presented than in *On Blue Note* (Cambridge: Zoland Books, 1989—there is also a boxed edition including a Corbett cassette). As a fairly new publisher, Zoland is to be congratulated for offering us this distinguished collection.

We are always discovering new contemporaries, with some embarrassment realizing that our first engagement with someone happens to be in his fifth or sixth book. This happened to me with Charles North's *The Year of the Olive Oil* (Brooklyn: Hanging Loose, 1989). Having clear affinities with O'Hara, Schuyler, and Padgett, North's volume displays a fully-formed sensibility, darty, thoughtful and humorous. I am still finding my way in his work, but I'd like to salute it as a genuine presence.

Two first books by quite young writers (I think): Alison Bunday writes "fictions" *A Bad Business* (Providence: Lost Roads, 1985), carefully conceived, parable-like, forays into characters and events she imagines, sets forth, and quickly abandons, often at exactly the right moment. Susan Yarrow's *Believing in the World / a reference work* (Vancouver: Tsunami Editions, 1989) is deft, notational poetry/prose interchange, with

Language Poetry associations, but also with affinities to the work of Francis Ponge.

The Basil Bunting Poetry Archive (established at Durham University, and currently appealing for funds) has published Bunting's only written statement on his longest, most famous poem, *Briggflatts, A Note on Briggflatts*. Eight pages, $5. For copies, as well as for more information on the Archive, write to The Secretary, Basil Bunting Poetry Archive, Durham University Library, Palace Green, Durham DH1 3RN, England.

Sulfur readers will recall the Hungarian section in #21, including a prose poem and two short essays by Sándor Csoóri. Corvina in Budapest has published Csoóri's *Barbarian Prayer* (Selected Poems), which is available outside Hungary via Kultura, Budapest 62, POB 149, H-1389, Hungary. Csoóri is a witness, in the grand, solemn sense of that word, an honest man obsessed with several decades of the spiritual and political situation of his country. He has often been in political disgrace, with books suspended and writings banned. I met him at the Budapest home of Gyula Kodolyani and Maria Illyes in 1986, and his presence has remained with me to this day. The extraordinary photo of Csoóri on the cover of the book makes all introductions sound like stuttering.

The University Press of Virginia has started a new series of Caribbean and African Literature Translated from the French that should be of interest to many *Sulfur* readers. Titles in the CARAF BOOKS series so far include: *Faces of African Independence,* three plays by Guillaume Oyônô-Mbia and Seydou Badian; *Snares without End,* by Olympe Bhèly-Quénum; *Tropical Circle,* by Alioum Fantouré; *The Madman and the Medusa,* by Tchicaya U Tam'Si; *The Bastards,* by Bertène Juminer; *Caribbean Discourse,* by Edouard Glissant; and *Lone Sun,* Daniel Maximin. Forthcoming titles include *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry 1946–1982,* by Aimé Césaire; and the *Collected Poetry of LS Senghor.* A. James Arnold is the General Editor; Kandioura Drame, the Associate Editor.

This past fall, Allen Weiss sent me several issues of a Melbourne magazine, *Art & Text* (American office: Box 325, Prince Street Station, NYC 10012). Two of the four issues I have seen are "special issues": #18 Phantasm and Simulcra / The Drawings of Pierre Klossowski, and #27 Art Brut / Madness and Marginalia. The other two issues contain "Right of Inspection," a long essay by Marie-Françoise Plissart and Jacques Derrida, and under the concept "Burnout," an interview with Michel Foucault, and an essay by Meaghan Morris on Postmodernity and Lyotard's Sublime.

Lastly, another magazine, now in its 2nd issue: *Raw Vision,* "The New International Journal of Outsider Art, Art Brut, Grassroots Art, Visionary Art" (American office: Dept 193, 1202 Lexington Ave., NYC 10028). Both of these magazines are in the process of re-conceiving Art Brut, which,

given a larger overview, appears to be a genuine aspect of International Modernism, and not merely real-art-approximations by the naive and the mad. As we approach the end of the century, it may turn out to be one the most crucial manifestations of 19th and 20th century imagination.

Bernstein:

The Collected Poems of Sterling Brown selected by Michael S. Harper. (Evanston: TriQuarterly Books/Another Chicago Press). At last back in print & for the first time in paperback. The formal & conceptual innovations of this work make it vital for understanding still underexplored aspects of the "second wave" of radical modernists born at the century's turn. Brown's project reflects an ethnographic commitment to found an "american" poetry rooted in the work songs, blues, and vernacular speech of African-Americans. It is akin to the poetry of Reznikoff, Hughes, and Williams in its radical reimaging/resounding of both the prosody and social orientation of contemporary literary practice. "When I oughta be quiet, / I is got a itch": for which we all can be grateful.

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Cancer Daybook & Back in the USA by Wystan Curnow (Auckland: Van Guard Xpress, Black Light Books; available for $9 each from UCSD Bookstore, La Jolla, CA 92093). Long-delayed, these are most-welcome first two collections of poetry by one of New Zealand's most interesting writers—who is, as well, art critic, co-editor of *Splash*, eloquent professor of "american" poetry. From his book-length meditation on his bout with colon cancer: "Cut // it / out // cut / it // out."

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The Motion of Light in the Water: Sex and Science Fiction in the East Village, 1957–1965 by Samuel R. Delany (New York: Arbor House [cloth], New American Library [paper]). A vivid, marvelously quirky memoir of the black, gay science fiction writer's first day at high school (we both went to Bronx Science), his dinner with Auden, & many other things, with sections numerated à la Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Delany has done some of the best writing on genre: *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* is one of the best essay collections of the 1970s. In this new book, he continues to explore the interrelationships between fiction, politics, poetry, sex, memory, imagination, autobiography, & speculation. This is a work not only of social vision but also of a social visionary.

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Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, edited by Maureen Honey (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press). One of the least-known aspects of the poetry of the first half of this century is the work of African-American women poets. "The Harlem Renaissance" is only part of that story; this collection is limited to poems published between 1918–1931, mostly in *The Crisis & Opportunity,* two leading periodicals of the "New Negro Movement," & in the several period anthologies of Black writing. This body of work is simply not available outside shorter presentations in a few still-available anthologies (Johnson, Bontemps, Randall). Honey publishes 148 poems by 34 poets, most notably Helene Johnson (1907–?), Anne Spencer (1882–1975), Gwendolyn Bennett (1902–1981), & Mae Cowdery (1909–1953). Evidently, Johnson was lost track of by the mid-1960s—it's one of the not infrequent disturbing facts Honey reports; meanwhile the *Norton Modern* dropped her from its much expanded, "ethnically diverse" second edition despite that, in the first edition, she was the only Black woman from the pre-War period. Honey includes three unpublished poems by Spencer, the only previously unpublished poems in the anthology. Cowdery's selection includes a striking series of homoerotic poems, not found in the standard anthologies, reprinted from her book, *We Lift Our Voices and Other Poems*—one of the only books of poetry published by one of these writers. —Overall, the style of the "Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance" is less "innovative" than Hughes or Toomer, Stein or Loy; but the social being of these works (not to be confused with content) is plenty radical & the most resourceful of these poets make cracks in the false-front impermeability of English verse with the tools at hand: a poly-american poetic know-how worth attending to, closely.

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Collected Works of Velimer Khlebnikov, volume II: *Prose, Plays, and Supersagas,* translated by Paul Schmidt, edited by Ronald Vroom (Harvard University Press). Amazing: Schmidt's supersaga of translation continues; volume III, the poems, will complete the set (volume I, *Letters and Theoretical Writings,* was published in 1987). "Khlebnikov (1885–1922) ranks with Mallarmé, Joyce, Pound, and Stein among the great innovators of literary modernism. He blurred the distinctions between verse and prose and between one literary genre and another. His experiments helped to break the hold of traditional verse patterns in Russian poetry, as he worked with irregularities, unequal line lengths, meters that varied from line to line in a single poem, variable stanza lengths, irregular rhyme patterns. He made use of patterns and tropes from folklore and from

chants, incantations, and shamanistic language. He managed to create an entire poetics [of] neologisms, palindromes, riddles, puns. And, under the same influence that led Pound to the *Cantos,* he invented the supersaga, a new genre capable of containing the diverse elements of the universe that determine human history"—from Schmidt's introduction.

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Reading Zukofsky's 80 Flowers by Michelle Leggott (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press). The most exhaustive (& sometimes exhausting, mind-boggling) account of Zukofsky's compositional méthod, this over 400-page study of the multiple sources for LZ's last 82-page completed work (1974–1978), with special reference to the penultimate movements of *"A",* is an awesome tribute to the hypercondensation & hyperconductivity of LZ's later poetry by a young poet & luminously meticulous scholar from Auckland who received her doctorate from the University of British Columbia in the mid-80s.

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The Collected Poems of Jean Toomer edited by Robert B. Jones & Margery Toomer Latimer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press). Toomer is the same generation as Zukofsky & Brown, born the same year (1894) as Reznikoff. This is the first edition to make available Toomer's early unpublished or uncollected poems, plus his virtually unknown post-*Cane* poetry (which makes up over half of this 100-page collection). Under the influence of Gurdjieff, the poems of the mid-20s & 30s are often bland and sappy in their new age spiritualism, *avant la lettre*. But the short set of poems at the end of the book, mostly from the late 30s & 40s, are startling Zen/Quaker prayers that have some of the same shimmering energy as his earlier poems: "It was perhaps no accident / that drove me smash against this earth / And caused friction just enough / To fuse me with the planet's dust."

Welish:

Empathy by Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge. (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1989.) Somewhere in the silvery spaciousness of atmospheric perspective is a human being observing the play of light on dust particles and from this construing directionality and her orientation in relation to the sun. Poem after poem, in lines long and unprepossessing in their generic diction, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge brings cosmic neutrality into focus, locates

herself within it, and further, situates herself on an empirical/psychological frontier or membrane (much like that biological membrane fascinating to the poet in *Random Possession,* 1979) through which phenomenal fact nourishes the entire sentient and thinking human organism. ("My feeling was not mystical but conjectural. / Its naturalism is an authentic source of pathos, delicate and precise, / but it is not good manners to him." From "Naturalism.") A fine book.

Empty Places by Laurie Anderson. (New York Premiere, Brooklyn Academy of Music, October 3–15, 1989.) For those of us who remember her post-minimal performances at The Whitney Museum of American Art in the 1970s, Laurie Anderson has long ago abandoned the art form she helped create. It's true that she insinuates disturbing material into the consciousness of adolescent mall mentality, with charm—perhaps too much charm, and wit—decidedly leaning on wit, with her political pop songs. But the most provocative material lands in the interstices between songs ("Do the unborn have rights? Yes, because they can thank you later."); in effect, content occurs in spoken arias giving way to thin, sung recitative. The public voice of Sonny Bono, the semiotics of Reagan offer empty places of promise which often foreclose on their implication. This is performance art only insofar as Anderson presents the cuts from her new album in a media realization on stage.

Rasula:

Shahen-Shah by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan—Qawwal and Party (Realworld recording 91300-1)
"Qawwali" is the devotional utterance of divinity in ecstatic Sufism, and this recording of Nusrat and his Pakistani compatriots is an incomparable exposure to the trance of the music, and an open invitation to the ritual convulsions beyond and within it. Most arresting in Nusrat's vocal style is his propensity to grapple with the Phonetic Fruit in what is most accurately described as *scat,* of a rare vigor and intricacy.

Sahel by Sona Diabate & M'mah Sylla (Triple Earth recording Terra 106)
The singers and their instrumentalists are from the all-women band "Les Amazones de Guinée." The rhythmic knitting of acoustic guitars (almost exclusively plucked) and marimbas forward the curious restraint of voice, over which arboreal flutes slant, making way most memorably for the woody/reedy sinuosity of alto and soprano saxophones which testify to some unforgettable transmission of the Bechetian impulse, back to Africa,

lending dignity to a variety of songs (including such gems as an homage to the Hafia soccer club).

- *Djam Leelii* by Baaba Maal & Mansour Seck (Rogue recording FMSL 2014)
The Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour has been justifiably lionized abroad, but this disc throws open the shutters to another if allied world of folk-style vocal convictions; an irreparable sadness lurking at the heart of the music is brought forward in the stark tonalities of acoustic guitars, balafon, all minimalized to accentuate what can only be called the *blues* of Senegal. Simple wail of earthly creatures.

- *Peer Gynt* by Pierre Dørge and New Jungle Orchestra (Olufsen recording DOC 5094)
Dørge's always news—throughout the 1980s his has been *the* jazz ensemble to watch, worldwide—but this is something else again. Record sleeve notes are sparse, but this would seem to be music accompanying a performance of (Ibsen's?) *Peer Gynt* in Copenhagen early in 1989. Anyway, a rich soundscape in which the rhythms remain African (along with the instruments: djembe, kempli, gangsa, bata, etc.) while the spectral dark spots of Nordic soul are increasingly exposed by the leader's guitar, and as always evocatively lured on by Morten Carlsen and John Tchicai's saxophonic thickets. Blues in the land of the midnight sun: supple, hiphoppety, and decidedly scary.

Real Presences by George Steiner (University of Chicago Press)
The fluent and idiomatic multiculturalism of Steiner's style and address makes him sound pedantic—which is unfortunate, because his eloquent lucidities are a welcome counterweight to the predominant jargoniferous life-forms spawned in academia. Here Steiner concentrates all the rhetorical skill at his disposal to combat the spectre of deconstruction (an absolutely futile approach for anyone less honeytongued). Mystery inheres in presence, not absence, he argues, exposing (he thinks) the unreflective nihilism of the Derridean critique of presence. Fortunately, in mounting his argument, Steiner plays a consummate devil's advocate: his eloquence is applied as assiduously in representing his opponent's point of view as his own. His descriptions of linguistic instability are especially fetching. We're compelled to exercise judgment, he claims, in view of the "licentious genius" of language, which subjects all utterance to infinite deferral and ultimate disrepair. Steiner makes of deconstruction a consummately Dostoyevskyan project in which *"anything* can be said," in which "the anarchic ubiquity of possible discourse" contaminates all discursive relations. Language becomes a viral agent, and "the 'otherness' which enters into us makes us other." The value of Steiner's book is its

eloquent humanizing of the pathological antihumanism of deconstruction. This is achieved partly by his insistence on taking music as the exemplary signature of the human (rather than the graphic trace, in painting and writing, that Derrida favors). Music is a most instructive means of "inhabiting the tentative," of concentrating a fugitive and contingent "X" (which Steiner is content to speak of as "presence") with a vigorous hermeticism, such that its very concentratedness disposes it to emit aftersparks of presence long after the host has been dispatched. The Hermes which Steiner elects to follow is patron of "the resistance of meaning to mortality." In the unstable world of signifiers which Derrida and Steiner cohabit with equal vigor, it is indeed the (Olsonian) *resistance* which continues to be felt, beyond the contingencies of mortality and the lust after meaning (and its more or lessness).

Mi-Lou: Poetry and the Labyrinth of Desire by Stephen Owen (Harvard University Press)
The concessions to civility, the rhetorical compromises and the masks of subjectivity donned by poetry have enabled it to survive millennia of suspicion, Owen contends. Poems affirm desire in the clandestine mode, eliciting our "hunger for straying," which is invariably transgressive. Owen's concern is that the various defenses *of* poetry mounted from Aristotle through Shelley to the present have become the explanatory means by which we defend ourselves *from* poetry. *Mi-Lou* is not an argument but a series of figures, stroked in prose, festishized in poems, that allow the eruptive potential of Owen's own desire to manifest itself in readings that are useful, eloquent, and (happily) sometimes even aberrant. He writes on seduction/invitation; on the class boundaries of the pastoral mode; on conjugal relations that turn to stone, petrified by desire; on nakedness and fabric as themes that permit a sexist ordination of eroticism to set up shop in the domain of the love lyric. Owen's previous books have all been about T'ang dynasty poetry (on which he is, after Edward Schafer, the preeminent scholar in English). That *Mi-Lou* deals predominantly with Western poetry is perhaps the key weakness, for the labyrinthine conundrums promised by the subtitle don't materialize; it may be that only the cyclical reinvigoration of primary scenes so arduously practiced by Chinese poets is suitable for the phantom sensations of a-mazed displacement. Still, *Mi-Lou* is a most significant exposition of the "interior scene of the song [as] the outer surface of the human heart."

The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech by Avital Ronell (University of Nebraska Press)
Ronell is an operator masquerading as caller, as she patches in various voices (Heidegger, Derrida, Freud, Jung, Laing, Alexander Graham Bell)

making collect calls, obscene calls, compounded by calls of conscience and interruptions of call waiting. . .being put on hold, hung up, and having to put up with the tacitly "phony" is what *The Telephone Book* is "about." Ronell's genius is in recognizing that the vocabulary and the metaphysical tautologies of telephonic communication makes a rapturous—almost breathless—white noise against which to refigure Heidegger, who mistakenly assumed he could dial direct to Dasein without aid of an operator, Ma Bell. There is, as Ronell recognizes, an incipient schizophrenia in this desire, so she turns to psychoanalysis to scrutinize the curious historical fact that schizophrenics were among the earliest diehard enthusiasts of the telephone with its "rhetoric of bionic assimilation." Her book is itself an exemplary instance of schizophrenic assemblage, accentuated by a hectic design that reformulates almost every page as a field-composition. The historico-speculative-graphic complex makes the whole apparatus (for it's not quite a book) into a party line, in which complicities are established through overhearing things meant for others, and in which "direct" (i.e. private) communication is subject to interruption by an uninhibited carnival of multiphonics. "Why the telephone? In some ways it was the cleanest way to reach the regime of any number of metaphysical certitudes. It destabilizes the identity of self and other, subject and thing, it abolishes the originariness of site; it undermines the authority of the Book and constantly menaces the existence of literature." Ronell's book is alluringly unauthorized, and seditiously divided into white and yellow pages. Don't hesitate: a call is waiting, as old as the Sirens.

Weinberger:

Susan Howe's *A Bibliography of the King's Book or, Eikon Basilike* takes off from the execution of Charles I, his last word "Remember," and the mysterious book of his writings and prayers that appeared on the day of his death, a forgery that went through countless editions and variations. Howe is out there on her own: an archaeologist amidst the ruin of texts. And she is among many other things, the only innovative working practitioner of "field composition." Olson would never have imagined his true heir. A lovely edition from Paradigm Press, 11 Slater Ave., Providence, RI 02906.

Jerome Rothenberg's *Khurbn & Other Poems* (New Directions). In another genocidal culture, the Aztec, poems and prayers did not invoke: they *were* the spirits of the dead. The author of that chicken-fat *Paradiso, Poland/1931,* now in the limbo of the empty fields of Treblinka 1988, re-

incarnates hell. *Khurbn* is possibly Rothenberg's best poem; a book to read alongside Jabès, Celan, Radnóti and Reznikoff's *Holocaust;* and, as a rectification of names, an antitoxin for our daily exposure to the language of George Bush (who, visiting Auschwitz in 1987, remarked, "Boy, they were big on crematoriums, weren't they?").

When Jacques Roubaud's *Quelque Chose Noir* came out three years ago, it provoked hot debate among French poets, who these days tend to produce works more worthy of cool admiration. Thanks (again) to Rosmarie Waldrop, the book is now available in an excellent English translation, *Some Thing Black.* Roubaud's meditation on the sudden death of his young wife, Alix Cleo Roubaud, is both transgressive and heart-breaking as French post-everything collides with—dare I say it?—human emotion. The beautiful Dalkey Archive Press edition includes some eerie self-portraits by Alix Cleo Roubaud, whose own writings have recently come out in France.

David Hinton's *Selected Poems of Tu Fu* (New Directions) is not only the first extensive selection in English of the greatest Chinese poet, but also an extraordinary attempt to recreate the density of classical Chinese without resorting to pidgin English. For the first time, the wonders of Tu Fu are made plain. Hinton is a rarity, a Sinologist who knows American poetry inside out; this is his first book.

J.P. Seaton's *Love & Time: The Poems of Ou-Yang Hsiu* (Copper Canyon) makes the case for a poet considered to be one of the finest of the Sung Dynasty, but hitherto available only in dull translations. Seaton is one of the most interesting of the new Chinese translators, and this is by far his best book: a tinkling music that, every once in a while, sounds like Zukofsky.

The Reader's Catalog is an annotated list of 40,000 current books—arranged topically to cover all branches of Human Knowledge—which can be ordered through an 800 telephone number. As decent bookstores verge on extinction, this simulacrum of browsing may be all we have left. But the catalog is beautifully designed and brilliantly organized, the selections generally excellent (though necessarily not comprehensive), and the ordering mechanism fairly efficient. (About half of the books are in a warehouse and arrive via UPS in a few days; the rest are back-ordered and take a few weeks to a few months.)

Most startlingly, the *Catalog* is a sneak attack on the poetry establishment, thanks to its general editor Geoffrey O'Brien. The section on 20th Century American poetry omits many of the stars—particularly the younger ones—of Prized Verse, while including, for example, probably every *Sulfur* contributor. All of the better small presses are represented; there are boxes around H.D., Loy, Stein, Riding, the Objectivists, Blackburn, Duncan, O'Hara, Spicer, Berrigan, Corman, Ronald Johnson, Mac

Low, Rothenberg, Don Byrd, Coolidge and Sobin, among others; and the section titled "Contemporaries" features photos of only two poets: Nathaniel Mackey and Leslie Scalapino. Attention shoppers! (The Readers Catalog, 250 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10107. Tel. 1-800-882-8770.)

Clifford:

Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture, by Michael Moffatt. (New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989) At the university where I work, I sometimes glance through a dormitory window. "The Horror!" forms in my throat. Moffatt, an anthropologist who has studied untouchables in South India, did several years fieldwork in a Rutgers dorm. . . and kept his reason. A sensitive, funny, troubling ethnographic essay.

Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis, by Renato Rosaldo. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) Moving between the Ilongot headhunters of the Philippines, Chicano cultural poetics, "imperialist nostalgia," his family's breakfast conversations, the Stanford curriculum struggles. . ., Rosaldo is an engaged, gently passionate scholar. An important book for anthropology: a science coming "home"—to find only borderlands.

Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North, by Hugh Brody. (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987) Contains statements like: "I would like to say a few words about this land. The only food I like is meat." (Salluviniq, Resolute Bay) Or: "When an Indian breathes, it's politics." (Cindy Gilday, Yellowknife) Brody and his interlocutors tell local/global histories for the *future.* And miraculously the book's informative chapter on language says nothing about "words" for "snow"!

Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching, Kirin Narayan. (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989) A portrait of Swamiji, Hindu holy man, by a writer able to travel gracefully between hilarious storytelling sessions in the Guru's modern West Indian apartment and the seminars of Western academe where the talk is of narrative performance, reflexive ethnography, cultural theory. Swamiji makes fun of everyone, including himself. And so does Narayan, with loving sophistication.

The Island Within, by Richard Nelson. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989) Personal journal/meditation by a dedicated ethnographer: applied

Athabaskan cosmology: adjectival *corps à corps* with an unihabited Alaskan island. Includes lessons in humility: "I've never watched breaking surf without also studying it, trying to understand what tricks of tide and reef and wind have shaped it. But still, I've only begun to learn. Perhaps there is too much difference between the human mind and the mind of water." Relentlessly literal. Deep looks exchanged with bald eagles.

Public Culture (Bulletin of the Project for Transnational Cultural Studies), Carol Breckenridge, Editor, Arjun Appadurai, Associate Editor. (University Museum, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 19104-6324. $10/year) A small, innovative journal devoted to cultural flows (with eddies and crosscurrents) in an interconnected world-system. Advertising, museums, airports, Rushdie, Mahfouz, po-mo in Japan, the Amnesty International Concert Tour. . .

A Small Place, by Jamaica Kincaid. (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988) This very angry, lucid essay about neo-colonialism in Antigua was written to spoil your Caribbean holiday.

Perloff:

Dancers on a Plane: Cage. Cunningham. Johns. Preface, "In Memory of My Feelings," by Susan Sontag; essays by Richard Francis, Mark Rosenthal, Anne Seymour, David Sylvester, David Vaughan. London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1989. 165 pp.

The New York Times had reviewed this exhibition in November and I was lucky enough to have one of my friends in London send me the catalogue. I believe it will soon be available in the United States, but in the meantime, it can be ordered directly from the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, Dering Street, London W1 for the price of £18. I don't think Sontag's preface in the form of a prose poem is especially effective since her sensibility is so unlike that of her subjects, but the other essays are informative and, more important, the photography and art work are gorgeous. The Cage entry is the holograph of the 63-page piano part of Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957–58), which David Sylvester compares to "a set of architectural plans for a particular building" (p. 47), then going on to comment on the pleasures and difficulties of actually *using* Cage's score in performing the work. Sylvester cites Cage's seemingly perverse remark that "A score which is beautiful to look at usually sounds better than one which is not" (50), and goes on to suggest that the visual

representation of the musical piece stresses the "vivid interaction between movements that are formal, rigorous, and movements that are fluid and meandering"—"between the given and the indeterminate." It is a tension, so Sylvester argues, that the performer can then reenact when playing the work.

In the Cunningham section, there are photographs of Merce at Black Mountain in 1948 that are startling in their depiction of a very boyish, seemingly shy young dancer; the last photograph in the group dates from 1981 and shows Merce performing in front of a series of TV monitors; the complex passage from '48 to '81 is conveyed in a series of fascinating images. In the Johns section, Mark Rosenthal relates these images and Cage's Buddhist works to Tantric images (schematic images of testicles at the top edge, vagina at the bottom) in Johns's 1980 *Dancers on a Plane* and related works. What is fascinating for the reader/viewer is that these three great artists really do have a common project, a project that surely has a lot to do—although the essayists don't talk about it—with their sexual "difference," and with the distance and "Eastern" discipline they invoke in coming to terms with it.

It has become a cliché that the avant-garde is dead, that it is impossible, in our belated age, to do anything new and genuinely radical without being co-opted inevitably by the commodity-network. I urge you to read this catalogue and see if you don't change your mind about this "end of the avant-garde." And, for related reading:

John Cage at Seventy-Five, ed. Richard Fleming and William Duckworth (Lewisburg, PA.: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 305 pp. $18.00.

Contains useful interviews and photo essays but the gem here is Deborah Campana's selection of letters between Cage and Pierre Boulez, 1949–1954, based on the manuscripts in the Northwestern University Library. Cage began as a passionate admirer of Boulez and his letters to his French friend are unusually personal and direct. But the two composers came to blows over the issue of chance operations, Cage here being stubbornly secretive about his new methodology ("I have not attempted to tell you about the path of my musical ideas because nothing is very clear yet" (p. 241), but Boulez soon responding that he would never accept "chance as a component of a fully developed work" (p. 241). When this whole correspondence is published it will be a major document differentiating American avant-garde aesthetic from its French counterpart.

Laurie Anderson, *Empty Places,* performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in October 1989, at the Wiltern Theatre in Los Angeles on Feb. 11–12, 1990.

Anderson's new performance piece received—unfairly, I think—very mixed reviews. *Empty Places* is not a rock extravaganza like the *United States*, but features Anderson singing—in her own voice this time as well as with synthesizers—and performing her now familiar parodic pieces on living in the U.S., and especially in Manhattan, at this moment in time. The songs and "skits" may not be up to Anderson's earlier work, but what is new is the visual material: Anderson is now using the most elaborate split-screen images, highly complex photographs of animal and plant life, cityscapes, seascapes, computer graphics, collage material based on various new technologies—all of them commenting on and being commented on by her verbal and musical texts. Anderson's images never merely "repeat" a text; on the contrary, the audience spends its time trying to figure out how text and image connect and why we are seeing A while hearing B. I thought it was a genuinely new departure for Anderson and the evening as a whole is completely captivating, my favorite "number" being the one in which Anderson playfully dissects the life of the out-of-work actor/actress in the Village.

Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century*. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 248 pp. $34.50.

By no means yet another survey of the Beats or related groups of poets, Davidson's is an elegy for the poetry world that shaped his own consciousness—the San Francisco scene whose "heroes" are Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg. The "idealized bar world" of North Beach, which Davidson reinscribes here, seems to many of us—especially to women readers like myself—like another planet even though Whalen, Snyder, and Ginsberg are part of the present poetry scene as well. Davidson plausibly relates the aggressively macho "Renaissance" men to women poets of the next generation like Judy Grahn and Joanne Kyger, and then speculates on their progeny at the present moment. Although I myself have trouble viewing either Lyn Hejinian or Robert Hass as descendents of this particular movement, Davidson's narrative is not only critically just and compelling, but at its best, say in the first chapter, which deals with the rhetoric and poetics of the 1940s, especially Kenneth Rexroth, this is a brilliant book. I can't imagine a regular *Sulfur* reader who wouldn't find it interesting.

James Laughlin, *Random Essays: Recollections of a Publisher*. (Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1989), 272 pp. $18.95.

Many *Sulfur* readers will have heard James Laughlin deliver one or another of the sixteen witty, poignant, memorializing essays in this collection, but reading them as a group, I was struck by their consistency of

tone and the appeal of Laughlin's aesthetic. The key to his particular understanding of Pound and Williams is, I think, his near-perfect ear and his grounding in Greek and Latin poetry. Laughlin is also very candid: read his essay "Translators of the Troubadours: Pound & Paul Blackburn," in which he admits: "Over fifty years of publishing I've made some notable goofs. One of them was that I didn't properly assess Paul Blackburn's versions of the Troubadours when he first showed them to me" (p. 96), and he goes on to note how, for example, Blackburn's decision to let the rhyming of the originals go, made his *Proensa* much more effective. Another candid and moving piece is the essay called "Gists and Piths," in which Laughlin details his stormy relationship with Williams.

Palmer:

Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture,* Routledge, 1989

Andrew Ross's most recent book examines with insight and appropriate wit the ambivalent relationship of conservative and liberal intellectuals to popular culture since the forties, and the ways this relationship almost invariably reflects the dominant post-war ideology of consensual pluralism. At its best, the study is acute and should prove valuable to anyone (all of us?) caught within this bubble. The chapters on "the hip" and on the pornography debate are particularly informative. (Frank O'Hara makes an appearance in the former.) My one reservation, perhaps entirely unfair, is that at points the book feels constrained by its institutional armor, that now familiar, eclectic mix derived from Western Marxism, current critical theory and remnants of post-Structuralism, which threatens to return even the most progressive academic intellectual to his or her parietalized position. It is the place where the "subject," in all of that word's various meanings, is significantly diminished—where certification takes command.

Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays,* University of Minnesota Press, 1989

These essays by the Cuban poet and scholar are essential documents of the anti-colonial, anti-racist cultural struggle. In his navigation logs, Columbus depicts the Carib Indian as "cannibal." The logs provide Montaigne with the source material for his essay, "On Cannibals." Shakespeare then reads his friend John Florio's translation of Montaigne's text and creates Caliban and the island landscape of *The Tempest.* During our time Caliban becomes the central symbol for the dilemma of *mestizo*

culture: how is it possible at once to speak in and subvert the imposed language of the colonizer? One way of course is through this same act of recoding, this (re-)appropriation of Caliban-cannibal-Carib as enacted by Retamar, as well as by Brathwaite, Césaire and many others. Such a reappropriation also exposes the actual mechanism of recoding, whereby the cannibal-colonizers, swallowers of entire peoples, their languages and lands, ascribe their own savagery to their victims:

> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which once was mine own king.

J.H. Prynne, *Poems,* Agneau 2, 1982

Jeremy Prynne's *Poems* collects twelve volumes from 1968 through 1979, as well as previously unpublished or uncollected poems and sequences. It is formally exploratory, diverse, learned, lyrical and politically alert writing, and it seems to have gone virtually unnoticed in this country:

> Why do we ask that, as if wind in the
> telegraph wires were nailed up in some
> kind of answer, formal derangement of
> the species. Days and weeks spin by in
> theatres, gardens laid out in rubbish, this
> is the free hand to refuse everything.

(from "L'Extase de M. Poher")

Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune,* University of Minnesota Press, 1988

Arguably the most original scholarly approach to Rimbaud in the last twenty years, *The Emergence of Social Space* simultaneously examines the "new crowd" of the nineteenth century, the revolutionary space of the Paris Commune, and the origins of radical (anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist) geography. Rimbaud, during the days of the Commune, is seen virtually as a proto-Situationist, choosing vagabondage over labor, absorbing popular lyrics of resistance, and incorporating coded, homoerotic language into a poetry of *dérive* (drift) and *détournement* (diversion, rerouting, seduction, misappropriation).

In 1953, on a wall along the Rue de Seine, would appear the graffiti *NE TRAVAILLEZ JAMAIS* (NEVER WORK). In 1963, a photograph of this graffiti would be published in the *Internationale Situationniste* (v. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces).* In 1968, for a moment, work would once again stop.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

KAREN KELLEY'S poems have appeared in *Central Park, Paper Air, Sulfurs #23* and *25*. She lives in Phoenix. BARBARA GUEST'S most recent publication is *Fair Realism,* Sun & Moon, 1989. MARTINE BELLEN'S poems have appeared in *Conjunctions, Central Park, Caliban,* and *Tyuonyi.* HANS BELLMER'S work has received virtually no attention in America; not a single book has been published here with reproductions of his drawings, engravings, photographs, and sculpture. In the late 1970s the Paris magazine *Obliques* did a special 300 page issue on the artist, and in 1983 , Filipachi / Centre George Pompidou brought out a collection of Bellmer photograph reproductions. PETER CHAMETZKY'S translations of Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler have appeared in *Critical Texts.* SUSAN FELLEMAN has published on contemporary cinema in *Camera Obscura.* JOCHEN SCHINDLER is a graphic designer who works in Stuttgart. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN is cotranslating César Vallejo's *Trilce* with Julio Ortega. The translation will be published by Eridanos in 1991. HERBERT LUST is the author of a novel, *Violence and Defiance,* and of monographs on Giacometti and Enrico Baj. THERESE LICHTENSTEIN teaches at The University of Hartford, New York University, and The School of Visual Arts. CHRIS CUSTER has recently received an M.A. at San Francisco State University. NUALA ARCHER'S *Whale on the Line* won the 1980 Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Prize in Ireland. MARJORIE WELISH is teaching at Brown University. GUSTAF SOBIN'S novel, *Venus Blue,* will be published by Bloomsbury (London) in 1991. MARJORIE PERLOFF'S most recent book is *Poetic License: Studies in Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric,* Northwestern University Press, 1990. ELIOT WEINBERGER is editing an anthology of American Poetry 1960-1990 for Ediciones del Equilibrista in Mexico. MICHAEL DAVIDSON'S *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* was recently published by Cambridge University Press. RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS' new books are *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* and *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice,* both 1990. ALLEN S. WEISS, a contributing, editor of *Art & Text,* is the author of *The Aesthetics of Excess,* State University of New York Press, 1989. PAOL KEINEG, born and raised in Brittany, arrived in the U.S. fif-

teen years ago. His book of poems, *Silva rerum*, was published last year in Montreal. KEITH WALDROP'S most recent publications include *Hegel's Family* (Station Hill) and *Shipwreck in Haven* (Awede). MICHAEL GIZZI runs a reading series at Arrowhead, home of Herman Melville, in the Berkshires. KENNETH WARREN'S poems from his song cycle "Rock/the Boat," will be featured in the next issue of *Interstate*. TYRUS MILLER, who lives in Palo Alto, is working on a sequence of poems entitled *Earthworks*.

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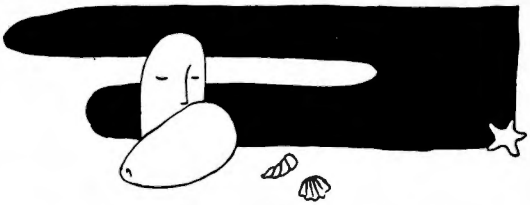

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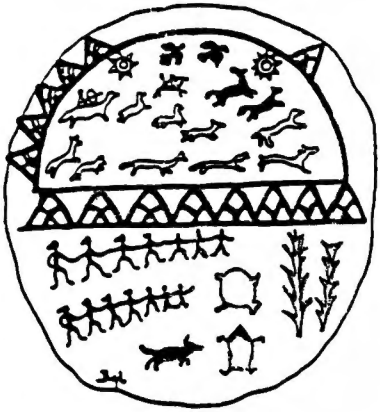

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Sulfur

FALL 1990

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COVER : MIGUEL ANGEL RIOS / Morado Obscuro; 32" x 35", Wood and Clay on Canvas, 1989 [Courtesy of Vrej Baghoómian Gallery, NYC]

David Reed's paintings are reproduced here courtesy of Max Protetch Gallery, NYC.

The writing by George Oppen comes from The Archive for New Poetry, at the University of California at San Diego. We gratefully acknowledge permission to publish this material.

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MILTON KESSLER

ZERO

The Ch-ing Emperor's troupe of buried horses
The visor-blinded horses of the jousts
The pompadoured bronze horses of the Rénaissance
The Elgin horses roped and dragged from Athens
The Generalissimo's mount in Freedom Square
The noble cheval burst by English archers
The cannon deaf cavalry of Bull Run
The Imam's Arabians writhing on the cross of Allah
The dive-bombed horse with tongue of broken glass
Seigfried's horror horse with Panzer lancer
Horses were never interested in war
War no longer interested in horses
The investment stallions seeding twitched mares
The ground horse catfood of the dispossessed
The cast horses in the Mafia stables
The shiver brained coursers wearing buttercups
The cossack horses higher than whole villages
The porcelain dancers of the Lippizaner
The Indian ponies trained to die like savages
The slipping horsefeet of Alexander Nevsky
The heart-horned horses of the picadores
The cigarette horses branded sex and death
The pinup stallions of gold college girls
The cowboy's true horse on the lonely range
The dawn is the head of a sacrificed horse

RACHEL TZVIA BACK

LITANY I AND II

LITANY (I)

". . .so many voices, there"

but not one loud enough to hear (close the door
quietly, sound travels) as more than motion:

a train passing (we'll wait here until there is
better reason to leave) or the bells' ringing

carried by rain across a city (the year's first
flooding in the flat lands) unhinged and always

preparing itself (they dressed in white for both
prayer and death) for the next siege (caves,

under the poppy fields)

while we, you and I, have been preparing ourselves
for speech (always a light on at the gate) since

first we fell silent. Not knowing what will heal
(trapped in byways, between endings) or what will

name (electrical current cut) us in the blackouts,
we look for traces in the dark of what has been

said (wear no leather when you are in mourning)
though only the chiming of the bells from the empty

church can cross the city.

He could not hear us, as children, when we came
(carry the candlesticks, wrap them in white linen)

to say good-bye before leaving the country, and he
(to heal: first name the disease) was yellow from

lung cancer and would be dead long before, and if,
we returned (echoing through the damp passageways

between caves: caverns, storage wells and dark
sanctuaries. small chambers with sloping stairs),

not tied to this or any other continent.

An illusion of belonging (we come from a long
line of women who hated themselves) and no other

longing (unhinged) but for order in the voices
that storm (the last train left weeks ago)—

we've been away longer than those markers (don't
forget the hour of candlelighting) show, languages

forgotten (in secret closets, in musty cellars)
though a memory of the source, somewhere between

heart and throat, remains.

The coffin was put on the next plane (remember her
long years of depression, hands shaking) as he had

wanted to be buried in holy dirt (at home) and when
the van pulled into the courtyard (an equidistance

between two continents), the only sound was our
old aunt (to heal: first name the disease) wailing,

running alongside the van as it slowed (among
blackcoated strangers) and stopped, she was wailing

(stone and black strokes)

and screaming at at her dead brother who had never
returned. She, with all the women (his body wrapped

in white, lighter than hollow bones) not allowed to
go to the cemetery, but the rabbi ripped her black

blouse across its worn collar (tear your clothes in
mourning, sit seven days) and she wouldn't stop

wailing. This isn't about travel: only in which
strange city (Thessaloniki, Palmyra) did we, you

and I, first fall silent?

Voices from the east, (the tracks are rusted and no
longer used) where meaning lies in the inflection

of the silence (seeds dried in the sun), in the
strange accents we speak (wait for the third star

before you light fire) and never fully recognize
(to heal: first name the disease) as our own

(sins committed with words)—only the motion of
sound (her dry tongue after the shock treatment)

am I sure of.

As to the crowded litanies (she sewed snaps on half
made skirts, dime a dozen) in the places of prayer

and in the markets, I can only record: crossroads,
train whistles, letters opened in public places,

the push (wear white, no leather) of so many voices
there, but not one clear enough to hear (across

the river in Petra), so much silence in that dark
space (beside the red rock) between desire and

dying and (what will name us)

LITANY (II)

"So many voices, there,
vie for the
    voice. . ."

and leave you
silent.

Neither sand nor prayer.

I am sorry:

as daughter
understanding less

what desire *disappointed*
will not loosen

its hold, or let
sleep. 5 a.m.:

you are walking around the lake.

Come back later and tell us
of the heron shrieking,
her wings weighted with ice.

What no one else saw.

How you stowed away
in the dark hull of a boat
smuggling arms into Palestine.

Now only the language will not travel,
across similar borders,
in black, in kefeyiah,

so you try to translate the memory.

Young man in uniform,
on the shores of a new Babel
among survivors who knew
no speech

would do

and fell silent.

Another walled city in ruins.

Not sand, not prayer.

At the British mental hospital
in Tiberias where stationed,

the mad from shellshock

screamed at night down
the green corridors, called
into the empty streets.

You walked by the water
after blackout
that jasmine

by the rare iron gate
swinging wild across
another night.

Always in between

countries, across oceans.
En route and arriving

at the airport
as the gate closes:

coming back to us

with ancient atlases and miniature
globes for the boys,
large dolls for the girls: we

wanted you not to leave
us behind,

were not trained for travel.

your three dark daughters
blue-eyed and green,
three solemn daughters crying.

So I cannot ask

between sand and prayer

what have you wanted,
and from whom.

In some foreign city, your heart
straying and you

collapsed by the baggage check,
black briefcase in hand.

Across an ocean and over
a phone line
the black water

storming over the deep laid wire.

Later you told us you said psalms
through the night
before surgery *heard*

your dead parents praying.

I have seen you

empty your pockets
into the sea, and believe

with crumbs and lint, your sins
would sink.

Now you ask:
in the Book of Life
or Book of Death?
so many voices,

here, come back,
your dead parents praying.

You listen, not of one
mind, to a new moon

three dark daughters all in green
in three separate cities crying

and your *new* heart *storming*

over the deep laid wire.

Note: "So many voices. . .voice. . ." Gustaf Sobin, "Lineage," in *Voyaging Portraits* (A New Directions Book, 1988).

MINA LOY

NOTES ON RELIGION

(Edited by Keith Tuma)

Introduction

The following "notes on religion," as I am calling them, were found in two files at the end of the Mina Loy papers at the Beinecke Library of Yale University. These files consist of a chaos of sometimes illegible hand-written notes for essays that Loy apparently intended but never wrote. I take seriously Ezra Pound's suggestion that the historian leave blank what he or she doesn't know, so I must say that I really don't know exactly what Loy intended. She did not intend to arrange a series of aphorisms, as my presentation of this material may suggest. One fragment not reproduced here leads me to guess that these notes were preparatory work for an essay that meant to "pacify the intellectual consternation, stunning as an explosion, before the unprecedented inhumanities of Axis warfare." This essay seems to have been meant to be a defense of faith at a moment when faith was most difficult. Another fragment from the same page of manuscript leads me to believe that Loy meant to include in the essay a description of a visionary experience she apparently had before World War I, an experience that may have initiated her life-long interest in Christian Science. I believe all of the notes reproduced here were intended for this essay except the remark about Freud. This remark and others not reproduced here seem to have been notes for an essay which would have responded to an essay on Jewish assimilation by one Milton Mayer. The relationship of Christian and Jew and the problems of Jewish assimilation were issues close to Loy, as any reader of her long, brilliant autobiographical poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" knows. If I am right about Loy's intentions, notes for both essays would have been taken in the early 1940s, when Loy was living as something of a recluse in the Bowery and writing some of her very best poems, such as "Property of Pigeons." These are not poems that have been much discussed—what little attention Loy has received has tended to focus on the "Love Songs" and other poems from the period of her closest affiliation with an international avant-garde—and they deserve to be better known. My hope is that these notes, interesting in their own right, will help readers think about those poems.

As I said above, the files from which these notes are culled are a chaos, not unlike Loy's life. It is a miracle that they survive at all. Any attempt to reproduce them, even a facsimile edition, would inevitably distort the original order of the notes, for no order among the sheets of paper is easily discernible. I have simply typed out what I could read and what seemed reasonably complete and coherent and interesting. There is more for future Loy scholars to do. I have wherever possible maintained Loy's somewhat idiosyncratic punctuation, and I have not tampered with sentences that seem to cry out for a word or two to complete them. I think the notes are lucid enough, fiercely epigrammatic, as is the best of her poetry.

I cannot resist one final remark. Interested readers of these notes might agitate for a new edition of Loy's collected poems. The handsome Jargon Press edition, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, is now out of print.

I would like to thank the staff of the Beinecke Library for their hospitality and Mrs. Joella Bayer for her permission to publish these notes.

—Keith Tuma

The human mind has got to assemble for itself out of the infinite variation—a new fundamental—thought begin again with the simple relation of savage apprehension of the Macrocosmic presence—modified in some divinely decreed manner by its lengthy civilized apprenticeship.

It is because of the infinite obviousness of God that he escapes man's narrow attention.

Nobody seems to be able to accept that most simple—that Christ meant what he said. If you wish to sort out the actual relics of his teaching from the interpretations of his commentators—you can judge him by his style for the style is the man—in this case the style is the divinity.

Christ was the precursor of the ultimate. And if his necessity seems to have collapsed in an entire inutility—somewhere somehow however premature—however inadoptable to the intervening process of evolution—it was necessary to the salvation of the more out-reaching intellect that an indication of an ultimate point of arrival should be posited among the myriad points of departure in the habit of the human back-looking intellect.

Jesus knew that a certain element in human consciousness would inevitably ask where are we going to—towards what are we tending—and presented it with a synopsis of the future. Its utility lay in the fact that

although insanely inadoptable to the entire mass world consciousness—it would in some corner of some consciousness keep as the merest scintilla—the torch that will light the future.

It is there for the retrievement of desolation—for those who have arrived at the end of all things of the intellect—as an antidote to extinction.

The Christian appears to sink to a depth of servility that no normal self-respect could accept, the Jew to submit to a ritualism that is hardly less onerous than a deific vengeance that it is designed to avert.

The less sex appeal they have the more sure they are that God could not have created the flesh. The more repulsive they are the more sure they are that God could not have created the flesh.

The only way to enjoy your hell is to bring it into heaven with you—and I have come to show you how. Thus only can we interpret the promised redemption.

Jesus saw through us far better than Freud—in seeing that our real dilemma was our desperate determination to establish our identity apart from the general mass. While Freud believes man to be moved by instinct—Jesus saw him to be actuated by humbug.

When the gentile world falls over its self it is usual for the Jews to come to the rescue. When it required a savior they nailed up a Christ. When it required a second savior to counteract the effects of the first, Freud was at its service.

Re Moral Order—No such thing. Truly moral phenomena in human life occur erratically—without connection with any order or system at all.

Christian Morality—Fictitious = I increase your irresponsibility by imposing my responsibility.

If man has an immortal soul murder does not matter—it becomes important if there is no God.

Marriage is the arduous maxim of 'unity' imposed by the ironical levity of the moralist upon rudimentary beings.

Good form = setting the ideal value on the lie. Morality is a conspiracy to keep truth off the open market.

No man whose sex life was satisfactory ever became a moral censor.

Tagore—false mystic—attaches mystic value to metaphor per se. Makes the mistake also that mysticism is in its origin metaphorical. Intuition comes from an actual experience of modality among transcendental phenomena. The sign of the true mystic will ever be his declaration of the 'impossible.'

Christ's magical sayings—like those Chinese boxes containing more & more concentrated boxes within box—the outer one is the exoteric creed, the inner one increasingly esoteric. From peasant virtue to analysis of the mechanism of genius—the enlightenment of the saint—to that sublime instruction of the future man who would be as a God.

If the Eros impulse originated within Man himself he would know how to process its consummation—legs shows, marriage clinics, medical books on sex—never coming to the solution eluding him.

Orgasm = the microcosmic projection of the Paroxysm of creation.

Scintillating sterility—bar life after war. Suffering out of fashion supplanted by nervous irritation.

Eve did not bite to the core of the apple.

Now we know the sphinx is looking at nothing in particular. There was *one* who told her her secret & the sphinx said "how disgustin'."

ELIOT WEINBERGER

PAZ IN ASIA

1. A Continent of Poets

Paul Claudel went to China with the Foreign Service, and the century begins with his *Connaissance de l'Est* [Knowledge of the East, 1900]: "I understand the harmony of the world; when will I grasp its melody?"

Victor Segalen went to China as a medical officer and wrote a history of the stone statues. He printed his *Stèles* (1912), Chinese fashion, on the press of the Lazarite Fathers in Beidang: poems, semi-disguised as translations, that sought to "transfer the Chinese Empire to the Empire of the Self"; poems that would be as timeless, impassive, monumental, ceremonial as the slowly eroding characters carved on the funerary tablets; poems that "do not express: that signify, that are."

Arthur Waley never went to Asia, never learned to speak a word of Chinese or Japanese, and spent his life listening to that silence and recreating what he heard.

Ezra Pound never went to Asia: he constructed his own continent of texts, inventing the languages from which, and to which, they were translated. As a student he found the word "vortex" in the pamphlets on Hinduism he gave his fiancee, Hilda Doolittle; he practiced yogic breathing all his life; he believed in an idiosyncratic version of *kundalini* he had picked up in Remy de Gourmont. From the manuscripts he inherited from the Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa, he translated Noh plays, having little idea of their form, but finding in them the model for "a long poem in free verse, a long Imagiste poem." A model that would become the *Cantos* and, among so many things, encompass the dynastic history of China, as written by the French. He believed, with Fenollosa, that Chinese was the "ideal language of the world," a language whose writing was a direct representation of the thing expressed; that the "ideogram," like a poem, brought language back to its archaic concreteness. Translating the Chinese poems translated for Fenollosa by a Japanese informant, he repeated many of their mistakes; others he intuitively corrected. He found his ideal social order in Confucius, found a Confucian rectitude in Jefferson and Mussolini, hated "Taozers" and "Budhs." In the madhouse he wrote a

strange and magnificent ideogrammic translation of the *Book of Odes,* incorporating his own pseudo-etymologies in the text. In his last years, unable to marry a young disciple, he was absorbed in the love-suicide poems and the religious rituals of the Na-khi people on the Tibetan border: "without ²Mùan ¹bpö/ no reality."

W.B. Yeats never went to Asia, but he shared a cottage with Pound as the Fenollosa papers were being rewritten, and invented his own form of Irish Noh, based on Celtic myth and the dances he'd seen of Michio Ito, though Ito was attempting to jettison Japanese tradition. He believed in the Aryan myth, a net of cultural correspondences stretching from Dublin to Benares, and placed the Hindu swastika on the title-pages of his books. In his last years he planned to go to India with Sri Purohit Swami, but his health was poor. They went to Mallorca instead, and translated ten of the Upanishads.

Hu Shih went to Chicago in 1913, read the issue of *Poetry* with Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" and returned to China to publish a nearly identical "Tentative Proposals for the Improvement of Literature"—finding in the West what Pound thought he had found in the East—a manifesto that set off the literary revolution of the May Fourth Movement of 1919.

Blaise Cendrars claimed he went to China, where the Chinese had changed his pseudonym from Braise Cendrart (ember-ash-art). His masterpiece, "Prose of the Transsiberian" (1913), recounts a trip across Russia and Mongolia to Harbin, Manchuria; it is doubtful he ever went. His 1914 poem "Bombay Express" is equally imaginary, and memorable for two immortal lines: "This year or next/ art criticism is as stupid as esperanto."

Rainer Maria Rilke never went to Asia, but he took a carving of the Buddha—as he took nearly everything—as a metaphor for the artist, enclosing the universe within, long after the stars are dead.

Raymond Roussel went to China and India in 1920, but rarely opened the shutters of his steamer cabins or his hotel rooms.

Max Jacob never went to Asia, but he declared, oh scandal, that three lines of any haiku were infinitely superior to the three hundred pages of Péguy's *Eve.*

T.S. Eliot never went to Asia, but he studied Sanskrit and Pali at Harvard, considered converting to Buddhism, and embedded bits of the Upanishads and the sermons of the Buddha in *The Waste Land* and the Bhagavad-Gita in *The Four Quartets*. "And I came to the conclusion. . .that my only hope of really penetrating to the heart of that mystery would

lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European: which, for practical as well as sentimental reasons, I did not wish to do."

Takamura Kōtarō saw a photograph of Rodin's "Poetry" and knew he had to get out. In 1906 he left Tokyo for New York, London and Paris, discovered Baudelaire, Rimbaud and the Symbolists, and returned three years later, bringing the vernacular and *vers libre* to Japanese poetry.

Saint-John Perse went to China in the 1920s as a diplomat, predicted a peasant revolution, and wrote, in prose poetry, the history of the conquest of an imaginary Central Asian kingdom, *Anabasis* (1924), which Eliot translated, and which, in the late twenties and thirties, launched a thousand young poets.

Pablo Neruda spent five years in the foreign service in Burma, Ceylon, India and Singapore, miserable, speaking little English, and writing the poems of his best book, *Residence on Earth* (1931 & 1935): poems that are notable for containing nearly nothing Asian in them.

William Carlos Williams never went to Asia, but before his death he translated nearly forty Chinese poems, working with David Rafael Wang, at the time the only Chinese White Supremacist in America, and later the only Chinese Black Panther.

Louis Zukofsky never went to Asia, but he found his initials—and what other poet so loved his own initials?—in the calligraphic signature of the Zen monk Ryōkan. The fourth section of his life-work *"A"* includes his translation of a "Japanese" poem by the Yiddish poet Samuel Bloomgarden ("Yehoash"): "Shimaunu-San, Samurai,/ When will you come home?"

Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud never went to Asia, and never met, but at the same moment they discovered Eastern theater: a performance of Kabuki in Berlin, a Balinese troupe in Paris. For both it was the revelation of a ritualistic theater that was purely physical, that transcended language and eliminated stage artifice; from it they derived their dissimilar theories of alienation effect and cruelty. Brecht rewrote Arthur Waley's rewriting of Zenchiku's Noh play *Taniko* as *He Who Says Yes* (1929), and then rewrote it again as *He Who Says No* (1930). He took a bad translation of Li Hsing Tao's 13th century play *The Chalk Circle* and set it in the Caucasus; his *Man is Man* (1925) comes from Kipling's Raj; three of his other plays—notably *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1940)—are set in China. Late in his life he translated some of Waley's translations of Po Chu-i, and among the papers left after his death was a scene from an unfinished play, *The Life of Confucius*, to be performed entirely by children.

Artaud never met the Dalai Lama, but he wrote him letters: "We are your faithful servants, O Grand Lama, give us, grace us with your illuminations in a language our contaminated minds can understand . . ."

[Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder met the Dalai Lama, though a different incarnation, who asked them about hallucinogenic mushrooms.]

W.H. Auden went to China with Christopher Isherwood during the Japanese War, wrote some of his worst poems, and read Trollope in a bunker as the bombs exploded around him.

William Empson lived in China for years, and wrote four pages of prose to explain the 28 lines of his poem called "China," in which, for example, the phrase "Cheese crumbles" meant that in the 1930s "the prolonged disorder of China made everything feel crumbling like cheese."

Basil Bunting never went to Asia, but he rewrote Kamono Chomei's prose memoir of the disasters in Kyoto in the 1180s, and for years the only Bunting scholars were in Japan.

Henri Michaux went everywhere in Asia, a parody of the outsider, a self-styled "barbarian" devoted to the sweetness of the particular and countless sour generalizations. The century's most radical translator of Chinese poetry, he took the written page, "which, covered with characters turns into something crammed and seething, full of lives and objects, of everything to be found in the world. . .clustered that they might end in ideas or unravel in poetry" and freed the signs of their signification, inventing a calligraphy for a language (languages) "far from words, far from other people's words."

Vicente Huidobro never went to Asia, but sitting in Paris in the 1920s he wondered: "When I move my left foot/ What is the great Chinese mandarin doing with his foot?"

Hugh MacDiarmid went to China in 1956, met Mao, and gave a public reading under enormous portraits of Blake and Whitman. He wrote the history of Western translations of Sanskrit as a six-page poem.

Charles Olson never went to Asia, but he mysteriously inserted the words of Mao, in French—as Pound had received his Chinese history from the French—into "The Kingfishers," and placed various Hindu gods in the niches of his *Maximus*.

The Spanish poets never went to Asia, for they found their Orient nearer, across the Straits of Gibraltar, and in their blood. But Juan Ramón Jiménez, Antonio Machado and Federico Garcia Lorca, in the haiku craze of the teens and twenties,

wrote short lyrics that were a conjunction of Japanese poetry and local folk songs, and Jiménez translated Tagore, a book that would be imitated—some would say plagiarized—by the young Neruda.

Kenneth Rexroth went to Japan often, re-imagined Chinese and Japanese poetry as it might have been written in the California Sierras, and in the last years of his life wrote the erotic poems of a young Japanese woman, Marichiko, whom he had invented.

Charles Reznikoff never went anywhere, but thought his poetics were most perfectly articulated by the Sung Dynasty poet Wei T'ai: "Poetry presents the thing in order to convey the feeling. It should be precise about the thing and reticent about the feeling."

André Breton never went to Asia, but he read Bashō and Suzuki, compared automatic writing to meditation, found Zen inferior to Surrealism, and thought the word Orient corresponded to the "anguish of these times, to its secret hope." On the Surrealist "Map of the World", Tibet occupied the largest space.

George Oppen never went to Asia, but in his only translation he collaborated on versions from the Bengali of poems in praise of the Goddess: "Words, there are words!/ But with your eyes/ We see. . ."

And the Chinese translations of the British Museum's Assistant Keeper of Oriental Antiquities, Soame Jenyns, descendent of Soame Jenyns, the 18th century optimist ridiculed by Johnson, were rewritten by the young Paul Blackburn, hitchhiking to St. Elizabeths to visit Pound.

René Daumel went to India in the 1920s, became the secretary to the Uday Shankar classical dance troupe, learned Sanskrit, and was the only poet of the century to directly translate the sacred texts and write on Indian poetics: "Crippled in the chaos of the Occident, without a connecting thread, I can only wish to play the necrologist-poet to an inimical culture. The Orient is still alive... But the Occidental free-arbitrary-dualist-individualist, the sad capitalist-colonialist-imperialist, fettered with the etiquette of his order—he is finished."

As Robert Duncan's mother put the boy to bed reading Bashō.

For poets, the project of the twentieth century has been the discovery of all that poetry is not (but could be) and the recovery of all that poetry (it is imagined) was. Pound predicted that the century's poets would find its "new Greece" in the East: there lay the greatest wealth of untranslated literature, and an ancient world that was almost new. To write the poem that had never been, a place to begin was the people who were not us.

> Nous ne pouvons pas aller au Japon
> Viens au Mexique!
>
> Blaise (Braise) Cendrars

Did these ancestors really meet, or did they merely sing to each other, like whales, across the Pacific Basin? There were no Mayan Boddhisattvas; no one in Anyang had his heart cut out to feed the sun. And yet what they made looks and does not look the same:

felines holding tiny figures in their paws; the chinless feathered monster headdresses; bracelets of open jaws; the diamond-patterned skirts; the loincloth aprons hanging from a monster mask; the anthropomorphic beings emerging from the mouths of long-snouted double-headed creatures; the serpent arches, framing a seated figure, with a mask at the apex; cross-legged deities; gods with three faces; the double-headed serpent held across the chest, and the serpent's Ho Chi Minh beard; gods with vertical stacked heads; the knee-length beads; the umbrella staffs; the high looping hair-dos; the figures standing on the backs of slaves or demons; the two profile heads that form a frontal face; the masks on the facades of the buildings; the maize god in the Boon-Bestowing mudra; the seated figures flanked by fat dwarves and topped with winged creatures; and—

could that really be an elephant carved on a stela in Copan?

Felipe de las Casas, son of a wealthy merchant, sails from Acapulco to Manila in 1590 to seek his fortune and taste the legendary vices. He next appears, four years later, at the doors of a Franciscan monastery, begging to be admitted to the order. His piety is great. In 1596 he is sent back to Mexico to preach. His ship, the *San Felipe*, is lost and more lost in a series of storms. It washes up on the coast of Japan. The Shogun, having reluctantly permitted Christian missionaries in Nagasaki, now believes they are the cause of a recent earthquake. Felipe and twenty-six other priests are crucified by samurai. At that moment, back in Mexico, the dried branches of a fig tree in the family's patio are suddenly covered with leaves. From the wreck of the *San Felipe*: San Felipe, the first Mexican saint.

By 1600 there is more trade across the Pacific than the Atlantic:

Mexican silver and gold, copper, chocolate and cochineal, for

Asian silk, camel hair, mineral and vegetable inks, precious stones, jade, rattan, marble,

paper, aromatic oils, cork, teak, feathers, camphor, amber, jet, alabaster, palm leaves for roofing, shells, furniture, porcelain, mother of pearl, and those pearls formed in the bellies of porcupines: the magical, medicinal bezoar stones.

In the 17th century some 600 Asian immigrants arrive each year in Mexico. One of them is a 12-year-old Moghul princess of Delhi, who was kidnapped by pirates off the Malabar Coast. Sold in the Manila slave market, she is shipped to Acapulco and sold again to a pious couple from Puebla. Under the religious training of her owners, she soon becomes famous as an ascetic and mystic. She is known as Catarina de San Juan, *la china poblana* [the Chinese woman of Puebla]; many miracles are attributed to her. An excellent seamstress, she embroiders her blouses and skirts with bright-colored flowers and birds. The fashion spreads throughout the country to become the "typical" Mexican dress. Its third component, the shawl, is imported from Gujarat in western India. At the same moment, *mole*, the national dish, is invented by the nuns at the Puebla convent with which Catarina is associated. An array of chiles and spices are roasted and ground separately, and then combined with chocolate into a thick dark sauce. Though the ingredients are local, the process is unlike anything in Mexican cooking: it is, however, how Indian food is made.

In 1635 the Spanish barbers petition the Mexico City council to ask the Viceroy to drive the Oriental barbers out of the Plaza Mayor and other fashionable districts. The council refuses; they too want decent haircuts. By 1703 there is a full-scale Asian market at the southwest corner of the Plaza Mayor, selling silks, brocade, fans, lace, marble boxes, watches, microscopes, porcelain and painted screens. It will last until 1843.

In the 18th century, the currency of choice throughout China and Japan is the Mexican silver peso.

In 1888 Mexico and Japan open diplomatic relations. In 1896, the Mexican poet José Juan Tablada writes in a Japanese reverie: "Gilded mirage, opium dream,/ fountain of all my ideals!/ . . . / I am the slave of your Mikado!/ I am the bonze of your pagodas!"[1] In 1897 the Society for the Japanese Colonization of Mexico sends its first settlers to Chiapas to build coffee plantations and a new town called Enomoto Takeaki.

As the century begins, Tablada has finally arrived in Tokyo, though the experience barely tempers his *japonaiserie:* "The night, the lake, and the moon/ from her high balcony/ the Princess Satsuna gazes/ heady with opium and love."[2] He does, however, translate some tankas and utas which, though still full of Spanish Modernist (our Symbolist) rhetoric, are among the earliest in the language. And he ends the second section of his poem "Musa Japonica"—inexplicably titled in Latin and dedicated to the "beloved one"—with a tercet composed entirely of dots, which is either avant-garde or coy.

He returns to Mexico with an enormous collection of *ukiyo-e* prints and antiques, and builds a Japanese wing to his house in Coyoacán, complete with rock garden. In 1914 he publishes a book on Hiroshige, the first in Spanish. Later that year the house is plundered by Zapatistas overthrowing the dictatorship of Victoriano Huerta, whom Tablada had supported; the poet goes into exile in New York ("You women who go by on Fifth Avenue,/ so near to my eyes, so far from my life.")[3] In 1918 his first book of poetry in nearly ten years includes only one poem connected to Japan, a heroic ballad on the print maker Hokusai, most notable for its ingenious Spanish rhymes with Japanese words. The next year Tablada becomes Tablada with *One Day. . .*[Un día. . .], subtitled "Synthetic Poems", a small book of 38 haiku, written in Colombia and dedicated to the poets Shiyō and Bashō.

Though *One Day. . .* is, with Huidobro's 1917 and 1918 publications, *The Mirror of Water* [El espejo de agua], *Equatorial* [Ecuatorial] and *Arctic Poems* [Poemas árcticos], one of the first books of the Spanish Vanguard (our Modernism), the way to these haiku was perhaps pointed by Pound's 1912 "In a Station of the Metro," or Alfonso Reyes' 1913 "Euclides' haiku" ("Parallel lines/ are convergents/ that meet only in infinity.")[4] or the short poems Juan Ramón Jiménez was publishing in 1917 ("Book, the misfortune/ of being everywhere/ alone!")[5] Whatever the case, Tablada—unlike the Mexican Efrén Rebolledo who, though he lived for eight years in Japan and China, merely incorporated exotic images into the Symbolist fantasies of his *Japanese Rhymes* [Rimas japoneses, 1907 and 1915]—succeeded in eliminating all of the Oriental trappings, adapting the Japanese form to close observations of local flora and fauna. Tablada's remain among the most memorable haiku in any language: "Tierno saúz/ casi oro, casi ámbar,/ casi luz. . ." [which, losing the rhyme on which the poem turns, translates as: "Tender willow/ almost golden, almost amber/ almost light. . ."]

In 1920 he publishes his book of "ideographic" poems, *Li-Po and Other Poems* [Li-Po y otros poemas]. The title poem continues Tablada's witty use of East-West rhymes ("mejor

viajar/ en palanquín/ y hacer/ un poema/ sin fin/ en la torre/ de Kaolín/ de Nankín") ["better to travel/ in a palanquin/ and make/ a poem/ without end/ in the tower/ of Kaolin/ in Nankin"] and a page of it is written in the shape of the Chinese character for "longevity," a Taoist charm that had long since degenerated into a commercial good-luck emblem, like the Irish four-leafed clover. *Li-Po* is a book that contains, among others: the thinnest sonnet in Spanish;[6] a poem that must be held to a mirror to be read; a poem consisting almost entirely of nocturnal sounds; and the small simultaneist classic "Alternating nocturne":

New York night gold
Cold walls of Moorish lime
Rector's foxtrot champagne
Mute houses and heavy gates
And looking back
On the silent roofs
The soul petrified
The white cats of the moon
Like Lot's wife

And nevertheless
it is always
the same
in New York
or Bogota

MOON. . .![7]

It is unlikely that Tablada had seen the four calligrammic "Summer Japonaiseries" [Japonerías de estío] Huidobro had privately published in Santiago de Chile in 1913, but surely he was aware, despite his later denials, of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*. "Lettre-Océan" [Sea-Mail] appeared in *Les Soirées de Paris* in June 1914: given its Mexican subject-matter, not to mention its Francophone variations on Mexican slang (*çingada*, indeed!), it was unlikely to have been missed by a Francophile like Tablada. The August issue of the magazine contained Apollinaire's "new-style" *calligrammes* in representational shapes (as most of Tablada's would be) and an article by the critic G. Arbouin on "Lettre-Océan" that was much discussed at the time. In his essay Arbouin declares that "it is necessary that our intelligence become accustomed to understanding synthetico-ideographically instead of analytico-discursively." Both of these key words, "synthetic" and "ideographic," would appear in the subtitles of *One Day. . .* and *Li-Po*. (Six months later,

another Francophile, Ezra Pound, would use the word for the first time in an essay on "Imagisme and England": "We have sought the force of Chinese ideographs *without knowing it.")*

In 1922 Tablada publishes *The Jug of Flowers* [El jarro de flores] a book of 68 haiku, including his wittiest efforts ("The little monkey's looking at me. . ./ He wants to tell me something/ but forgot what it was!")[8] and an introduction where Tablada gives himself credit for introducing haiku into Spanish. He even hints that it is his influence which has led to the special 1920 issue of *Nouvelle Revue Française* on haiku—though that publication was merely the climax of some years of haiku-mania: a fad that received its official imprimatur with the appointment of Paul Claudel as Ambassador to Japan in 1921.

Regardless of Tablada's international effect, his importance to Mexico is unquestionable: José Gorostiza's 1925 *Songs to Sing in the Boats* [Canciones para cantar en las barcas] contains poems about Li Po and the Lady Yang Kuei-fei, and tiny lyrics such as "The Lighthouse," which reads in its entirety: "Light-haired shepherd of fishing boats."[9] The same year Jaime Torres Bodet publishes a book of haiku called *Folding Screen* [Biombo—the Spanish word coming from the Japanese *byobu*, wind-break]. In 1926 Alfonso Reyes is writing "Afternoon": "Thin skin of the clouds/ where a sliver of moon/ stuck, is walking";[10] and Xavier Villaurrutia's "Insomniac Suite" [Suite del insomnio] that same year is a series of haiku.

And more haiku—it becomes a Mexican pastime—by Rafael Lozano, Manuel Ponce, Efrain Huerta, Homero Aridjis, Francisco Monterde, José Emilio Pacheco, and so many others.

Among them, the club Kuka-no-tsudoi, composed of Japanese businessmen and diplomats, which has been meeting monthly in Mexico City since 1955. After a dinner that combines *sashimi* and *carnitas*, these amateurs declaim their own haiku, such as: *Mariach/ kanade chikazuku/ yuuransen*

that is: "Mariachis/ play, coming nearer:/ a pleasure-boat."

In Chinese and Japanese, the characters for "Mexico" mean:
COUNTRY OF INK

3. The figure in the landscape

As an adolescent, Octavio Paz discovers French modernism in *Anabasis*. A 1945 memorial essay on Tablada, emphasizing both the haiku and Mexican motifs, hopes to rescue the poet from oblivion—though the

poems will remain out of print for nearly thirty years. In 1952, his first visit to Japan; the poem "Is there no way out?" [¿No hay salida?] is written there. In 1955 the Mexican haiku of *Loose Stones* [Piedras sueltas] and the first Western translation of Bashō's poetry and prose travel journal, *Sendas de Oku* [in Cid Corman's translation, *Back Roads to Far Towns*] written with Eikichi Hayashiya. Erotic haiku in *Salamander* [Salamandra, 1962]. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, translations of Chinese and Japanese poets. *East Slope* [Ladera este, 1969], arguably his best book of poetry, takes its title from the Sung dynasty poet Su Shih, who wrote under the name Su Tung-p'o (East Slope). The pages on Taoism and Chinese eroticism in *Conjunctions and Disjunctions* [Conjunciones y disyunciones, 1969]. That same year, Paz collaborates with Charles Tomlinson, Eduardo Sanguineti and Jacques Roubaud on the quadrilingual *Renga*. In 1970, a major essay, "The Tradition of the Haiku" in the second edition of the Bashō book (reprinted in English in *Convergences)*. In the 1970s and 1980s, short essays on Tu Fu, Wang Wei, Han Yu and other Chinese poets. In 1976, the Japanese translation of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, the first of many Paz books to be translated into that language. In 1979, *Hijos del aire/ Airborn*, a variation on renga written with Tomlinson. In 1984, a visit to Japan and pilgrimage to Bashō's hut. In 1989, Duo Duo, the young Chinese poet most avidly read by the students demonstrating in Tiananmen Square, remarks that his favorite poet is Octavio Paz.

> *The god that emerges from an orchid of clay*
> Born smiling
> From ceramic petals:
> A human flower.[11]

Like the invention of *mole* in a convent in Puebla: the adaptation of Eastern techniques, employing indigenous Mexican materials, in an essentially Western context. The poem, from *Loose Stones*, is of course written in Spanish, and not Nahuatl or Japanese; its form is a loose haiku; its subject the tiny Jaina god—a god, by the way, identical to the *apsaras* emerging from lotuses in the exactly contemporaneous T'ang art. A tropicalization of the haiku not invented by Paz—in the 1930s the Guatemalan Flavio Herrera was writing haiku like: "Happy/ to be Indian, it smiles:/ an ear of corn."[12]—but perfected by him.

What Paz, as so many others, found in the haiku was verbal concision, a precision based on close observation of the world, particularly the natural world, and the sense that a poem remains permanently at the verge of completion, never arriving, as Western art once attempted, at a finished totality. The reader always supplies the rest of a haiku, and it changes with

each reading. The haiku is a tiny graph of relations within the natural world—a world that includes its human observers—but these relations, according to Buddhism, are as illusory as the interacting beings. For both poet and reader it is a sudden act of the discovery and affirmation of a comradeship in illusion.

1955 as a turning-point in a work that keeps turning: In 1952, his one poem written in Japan, "Is there no way out?" begins, in Denise Levertov's translation, "Dozing I hear an incessant river running between dimly discerned, looming forms, drowsy and frowning."[13] The language, as in the other poems of this period, is lush, vague, rhetorical, Surrealist, unchained, interior. (Japan, of course, is notable for its absence of any major river.) After 1955 and his actual working with haiku—*Loose Stones* and the Bashō translation—Paz is able to bring the period to a close by joining the luxuriant rhetoric to a precise imagery that is far more concrete than anything previous in his or any one else's Surrealism: the incantatory *Sun Stone* [Piedra de sol, 1957]:

> a crystal willow, a poplar of water,
> a tall fountain the wind arches over. . .[14]

And from there, the almost inevitable move is toward an adaptation of Pound's "ideogrammic method": the stepped lines, the free-floating images forming configurations of meaning, the simultaneity of *Days and Occasions* [Días hábiles, 1961]:

> Night in the bones
> skeleton night
> the headlights touch your secret plazas
> the sanctuary of the body
> the ark of the spirit
> the lips of the wound
> the wooded cleft of the oracles[15]

Four poets in four languages meet for five days to write a series of collective poems. *Renga* (1969), the experiment, is an ideogram composed of many of Paz's essential elements:

The belief, from Lautréamont, that in the future poetry will be composed by the multitude, not the individual. The disappearance of the author, as it comes out of the Surrealist practices of automatic writing and the painters' "exquisite corpse," and, more recently at the time, French structuralism. Buddhism's sublimation of the ego as the first step toward the recognition of *sunyata*, emptiness. Hindu and Bud-

dhist emphasis on relation rather than substance. The pluralism and multilingualism of the 20th century. Translation as the creation of a third language somewhere between the "source" and the "target"; and equally, as the creation of a third poet. A collaborative, quadrilingual poem as the expression of an era, rather than an author. The Western adaptation of a traditional Eastern form, applying some of its methods, but few of its rules.

And yet *Renga*, the book, remains a disappointment: the poems lack even the vivacity of the linked haiku collaboratively written by the Beats ten years before. Perhaps the problem is that *Renga* is not renga.

Renga is a chain: a three line haiku by one poet, then two additional lines by the next to form a five-line tanka, then three more lines, added to the two above to form another tanka. Two discrete tanka out of eight lines: the end of one is the beginning of another. And so on forever, or until other more elaborate rules—refined over the centuries—declare the chain is over.

Renga is an endless series of permutations, changing over time. But *Renga* is a group of 28 sonnets in four groups of seven; each author contributing a quatrain or tercet, and the entirety of one of the final sonnets. Unlike renga, the form is closed: the effect is that of four painters, each painting a quarter of 24 canvases (but, unlike the "exquisite corpse," aware of what the others are doing). Canvases that are painted simultaneously, four at a time: the process is visible, but the product is dominant.

Nor do the authors vanish: each is made visible by his language, though there is some leakage from one language to the other, and each is the sole author of one of the sonnets. (Sanguineti's sonnet, however, is silence.) And, stuck in a basement in a Paris hotel, instead of outside where renga is usually composed, the poems are filled with the interior bric-a-brac of four erudites observing, not the moon or the plum blossoms, but each other, writing.

A modern renga would be more like a multi-authored *Cantos*: its end could not be predicted from its beginning; it would often proceed by association; it would be a babble of unidentified voices (its authors, if multilingual, writing in each other's languages); its pace would be that of time-lapse cinematography, a single cell swiftly multiplying into hundreds of organisms; it would be abandoned rather than finished; it would be an emblem of restless change.

Since the mid 1950s Paz has continued to practice haiku and to learn, from Chinese poetry, to record the instantaneous moment in the natural world. Yet he has never indulged in Orientalism. One of his most "Chinese" poems, "Concord" (dedicated to Carlos Fuentes):

Water above
Grove below
Wind on the roads

Quiet well
Bucket's black Spring water

Water coming down to the trees
Sky rising to the lips[16]

takes its first two lines from the *I Ching* (the 28th hexagram, Ta Kuo: "The lake rises above the trees: The image of 'Preponderance of the Great.' Thus the superior man, when he stands alone, is unconcerned, and if he has to renounce the world, he is undaunted.") The poem's middle lines are an observed Indian landscape; its last line one of the most beautiful Surrealist images. And somewhere behind it all, as nearly always in Paz, a tiny piece of Mexico is transformed; in this case, a 1912 poem by Alfonso Reyes, "Cluster of Sky":

Rage above:
Calm below.
Weather vanes rattle,
the blinds weep.

The celestial cattle slowly rise
from the diaphanous courted sheep.[17]

Idle speculations:

Had Paz not discovered the disappearance of the author in automatic writing and renga, would he not have found it in the Nahuatl tradition, which does not distinguish between poet and poem, where a poet can declare: "God has sent me as a messenger./ I am transformed into a poem."? And had Pound not invented the "ideogrammic method," would not Paz have evolved a similar theory, based on the Maya glyph?

The glyphs, after all, like Chinese characters, are conglomerates of component parts: simple pictographs (a jaguar for "jaguar"), phonetic signs (each representing a single syllable), logographs (non-representational representations of a word), and semantic determinatives (specifiers of particular meaning).

For those who cannot read them—and this was articulated most notably by Charles Olson in the Yucatan in the 1950s—the glyphs have a concreteness, a

weight, that does not exist in alphabetic writing: the word is an object. And more: it appears, to the outsider, that each glyph, each word, has the *same* weight. The glyph-covered stela becomes the ideal, irreducible, poem.

For those who can read them—as has become increasingly possible—the glyphs become even more like poetry, for each word could be represented in pictographic, geometric or syllabic form (which corresponds to Pound's *phanopeia, logopeia,* and *melopeia).* There are seemingly unlimited ways to represent any given word, and the continual invention of glyphs was a dazzling display of association, homophony, and punning. Laid out in a grid, these metamorphosing word-clusters could be read in a variety of ways, both horizontally and vertically. The Maya "text," as far as we now know, was a net of continually changing correspondences, and reading an intricate game for skilled players.

There is a line from Palenque to *Blanco* that does not pass through Mallarmé.

4. The figure is the landscape

As an adolescent, Octavio Paz discovers Anglo-American modernism in *The Waste Land.* First visit to India in 1952; the poem "Mutra" is written there. From 1962 to 1968, Ambassador to India. Meets and marries Marie-José Tramini. The poems of *East Slope,* including *Blanco.* The essays on Buddhist logic, Hinduism, caste, published in *Alternating Current*[Corriente alterna, 1967]. In 1969, his major meditation on East and West, *Conjunctions and Disjunctions.* In 1970, Paz organizes the first exhibition of Tantric art in the West, at the Galerie Le Point Cardinal in Paris; the catalog contains the important essay, "Blank Thought" [El pensamiento en blanco]. The same year he writes his "unraveling novel" of a pilgrimage to Galta in Rajasthan, *The Monkey Grammarian* [El mono gramático]. In the 1970s and 1980s, although there are no major poems or essays dealing specifically with India, references, particularly to Buddhism and Tantrism, are made throughout. In 1985 Paz revisits India.

The god Vishnu appears at the cave of an ascetic, Narada, who has been practicing austerities for decades. Narada asks the god to teach him about the power of *maya,* illusion. The god beckons Narada to follow him. They find themselves in the middle of a burning desert. Vishnu tells Narada he is thirsty, and asks him to fetch some water from a village he will find on the other side of the hill. Narada runs to the village and knocks at the first door, which is opened by a beautiful young woman. He stares at her and forgets why he has come. He enters the house; her parents treat him with respect; and the following year they are married. He lives in the joys of

marriage and the hardships of village life. Twelve years go by: they have three children; his father-in-law has died and Narada has inherited the farm. That year, a particularly fierce monsoon brings floods; the cattle are drowned, their house collapses. Carrying his children, they struggle through the water. The smallest child slips away. He puts the two children down to search for her; it is too late. As he returns he sees the other two children swept off; his wife, swimming after them, is pulled under. A branch strikes Narada on the head; he is knocked unconscious and carried along. When he awakes he finds himself on a rock, sobbing. Suddenly he hears a voice: "My child! Where's that water you were bringing me? I've been waiting nearly half an hour." Narada opens his eyes and finds himself alone with Vishnu on the burning desert plain.

Is this not the "plot" of the first two sections of *East Slope?* The book opens with the lines "Stillness/ in the middle of the night"[18]—the poet is alone on a balcony overlooking Old Delhi—and then it immediately fills, overflows, with Indian stuff: monuments, landscapes, a jungle of specific flora and fauna, painters, musicians, gardens, gods, palaces, tombs, philosophy, temples, history, bits of Indian English, a large cast of strange and funny characters—the only characters in Paz's poetry—and, central to it all, the lover/ wife. In the end, in "A Tale of Two Gardens" [Cuento de dos jardines], it all vanishes: "The garden sinks./ Now it is a name with no substance.// The signs are erased:/ I watch clarity."[19] The poet is not in the desert, but in the middle of the equally empty ocean on a boat leaving India. (Although—this being poetry and not philosophy—his wife, rather than Vishnu, is with him.)

Maya is made manifest by time. The Indian cosmos is a map of ever-widening concentric cycles of enormous time: millions of human years with their perpetual reincarnations are merely one day and night in the millions of years in the life of Brahma, who is himself but one incarnation in an endless succession of Brahmas. The function of yoga and other meditation practices is to break out of these cycles of illusory births and rebirths, off the map (out of the calendar) and into the undifferentiated bliss of *nirvana* (which the Buddhists would later say was equally illusory).

Myth is a similar rupture of time. Its time is intemporal time, and though its narration unfolds in measured minutes and hours it abolishes time with its narration. Narrator and auditor are projected into a sacred space from which they view historical time and all its products: a world to which they must return, but to which they return educated.

The poem too, though heard in a time that has its own precise measurements (prosody), erases time by projecting us into a world where everything looks the same but is

more vivid, where we speak the language but it doesn't sound like the language we speak, where ideas and emotions become concrete particulars, and the concrete is a manifestation of the divine.

The first two sections ("East Slope" and "Toward the Beginning") of *East Slope* are "travel poetry": a poetry of verifiable landscapes, things and people which are foreign to the author. But they are among the few instances in the last two hundred years of a travel poetry worth reading. (Poets, since the birth of Romanticism, have tended to write their travels in prose and letters.) One reason is its precision of observation, its glittering language, intellectual cadenzas, emotional and erotic rhapsodies. But more: on nearly every page are synonyms of silence and stillness. The poems are simultaneously located in India and in a not-India, a somewhere else.

As Aztec shamans would travel out of the earth to a place where all time was visible in a state of total immobility. There they could observe the life-force of the *tonalli* at any given moment before it occurred in human life. The shaman's task was to alter the tonalli, to effectively rewrite the future.

As the first two sections of *East Slope* observe the world from a world where the wind comes simultaneously from everywhere, where "the present is perpetual" and bodies "weigh no more than the dawn."

Paz, above all, is a religious poet whose religion is poetry. This does not mean that the poet is a "little God," as Huidobro dreamed, with extraordinary powers. Rather it is the poem that opens a hair-line crack in time through which the poet, in astonishment, slips through.

The final third of *East Slope*—the long poem "Blanco"—is both the most "Indian" poem in the book, and the one with the fewest images of India. (In fact, only three words in the poem pertain specifically to India: the *neem* tree and the musical instruments *sitar* and *tabla*. Only three more refer to phenomena that exist in India and other places, but are not universal: *crow, jasmine, vulture.)*

The form of the poem, originally published on a single vertical folded sheet in black and red type—"black and red ink" in Nahuatl means "wisdom"—is usually described as a hybrid descended from Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*. . .and Indo-Tibetan mandalas. Neither is accurate. Mallarmé's poem, though it plays with varying typefaces and blank space, still uses a traditional (though oversize) page as its playing-field: it exists to end up in a book. It is more likely that the Western grandparent of *Blanco* is the original 1913 edition, designed by Sonia Delaunay, of Cendrar's "Prose of the Transsiberian." It too is a floor-to-

ceiling vertical sheet with different typefaces in black and red, but unlike "Blanco" the words are not surrounded by emptiness: every inch is covered with Delaunay's hallucinogenic color, itself a kind of Indian festival.

On the Eastern side, the poem is not really a mandala, although it has been described by Paz as such: mandalas are complex configurations of circles within squares, filled with iconic images of the gods. "Blanco" of course has no gods, other than poetry, and its representational imagery tends to be abstract. The poem, rather, is more like the yogic and tantric vertical scrolls depicting the ascent of the *kundalini* (the "serpent power" of latent energy). Such scrolls represent the human body, though an outline of the body itself is rarely shown. From bottom to top are images of the seven *chakras*, the energy centers that run from the base of the spine to the top of the head, and through which the kundalini ascends during yogic meditation or tantric practice. Each of the chakras has a host of attributes: elements, colors, senses, planets, emotions, philosophical concepts, and so on.

"Blanco," which must necessarily be read down the page (it not being written in Maya) can be seen, loosely, as an upside-down diagram of the chakras. Its first two vertical sections (before it splits into left and right) correspond to the first chakra at the base of the spine, Muladhara, which means "the foundation" (the first two lines of the poem are: "el comienzo/ el cimiento" or "the beginning/ the foundation") and which is associated with the *bija*, the syllable-seed (the next two lines are: "la simiente/ latente" or "the seed/ latent") from which all sound, all language, and everything in the cosmos is born. Other attributes of the Muladhara chakra are the earth ("escalera de escapulario"—an earth-body pun meaning both "mine shaft/ scapulary ladder") and the color yellow (which appears in "Blanco" as the "yellow chalice of consonants and vowels").[20]

From there the kundalini rises as the poem descends through the other chakras—though not strictly: most of the attributes of the chakras are present in "Blanco," though not quite in the same order. It never reaches the final, seventh chakra, the illumination of the void: to do so, in a poem, would be less presumptuous than impossible: at that point poetry ceases to be written. But it does, following this schema, reach the sixth, called Ajna ("power"). That is the point between the eyebrows (the last word of the poem is *mirada*, "gaze"), where all the elements return in purified form (as they do in the poem), and whose "color" is transparency ("transparency is all that remains").[21] Its reigning god is Ardhanarishvara, who is the half-male, half-female incarnation of Shiva, the union of all opposites ("No and yes" and the many other pairs which unite in this section of the poem). And it is associated with *nada*, cosmic sound, which becomes a complex Spanish-Sanskrit pun in

"Blanco": "son palabras/ aire son nada" (with "son" meaning both "sound" and "they are"; "nada" both "nothing" and "cosmic sound"): "sound (they are) words/ air sound (they are) nothing (cosmic sound)." The seed-syllables, though made of air, form words, form the cosmic sound, form the universe. The three are inextricable, and equally illusory: Sanskrit *nada* is Spanish *nada*. (There is a form of meditation, rather like "Blanco," called *nada-yoga*, which consists of focusing on a succession of sounds as they emerge from and retreat into silence.)

Further, in this map of the Hindu body and of "Blanco," there are three "nerves" or "veins" which convey sacred breath and the body's subtle energies. The left, *lalana*, is feminine and associated with the moon, wisdom, emptiness, nature, the Ganges river, vowels. The right, *rasana*, is masculine and associated with the sun, intellect, compassion, method, the Yamuna (the other great river in India), consonants. In the center is *avadhuti*, the union of the two veins and all their attributes. Again, a schema followed loosely in the poem through its left, right and center columns.

The map of the body is a map of the earth is a map of the cosmos (or time) is a map of language. Most of Paz's work is, and has always been, concerned with the tangle of correspondences among these four elements, their identicalness, their transformations into one another. He is surely poetry's primary "inventor of India for our time" (as Eliot called Pound the inventor of China); but he is equally an invention of India: "Indian" readings are possible for poems he wrote long before he went there.

Much has been written about the connections between "Blanco" and the ritual copulation practiced in Tantrism: an escape from the world (and a return to the original unity of the world) through the union of all opposites as incarnated in the actual bodies of the male and female adepts. (The best texts on this are still Paz's pages in *Conjunctions and Disjunctions* and the essay "Blank Thought.")

Robert Duncan, in the era of "action painting" in the 1950s, used to emphasize that the poem "is not the record of the event, but the event itself." "Blanco," though far too structured to be an "event" of writing in the processual sense developed by the Black Mountain poets, demands reader participation in the creation of the text by offering a list of variant readings that is, moreover, deliberately left incomplete. Writer and reader are yet another pair of opposites who unite in the poem. But "Blanco" goes even further: with its male center column and female split columns, it is, uniquely in erotic poetry, a poem that makes love to itself. (As, in India, the syllable-seeds engender language without human

assistance.) The author has closed the door behind him on his way out; the reader may or may not be peering through the keyhole.

Tantric texts are written in *sandha*, which Mircea Eliade translates as "intentional" language. Each word carries a long string of associative possibilities, like those attributed to the three yogic "veins" above: the spiritual words have materialist and erotic meanings, and vice-versa. (The "right-hand" group of Tantrists believes that all of the material words should be taken only as metaphors for the spiritual; the "left-hand" group believes that all of the spiritual words are merely code names for aspects of the rituals, which, like copulation on a cremation ground, are scandalous to outsiders.)

There is a pair of sandha-words in the *Hevajra Tantra* (a line of which Paz rewrites as an epigraph to "Blanco") that is particularly intriguing: *preksana* (the act of seeing) is *agati* (the act of arrival or achievement). In India the primary act of daily worship among Hindus is *darshana* (seeing): it is both a "viewing" of the gods as they are manifest in the temple and wayside images, and something more: in darshana the eyes literally touch the gods; sight goes out to physically receive the god's blessing.

"Blanco" ends at the chakra between the eyes. Its last line reiterates an earlier couplet ("The unreality of the seen/ brings reality to seeing")[22] in the context of a ritualized copulation: "Your body/ spilled on my body/ seen/ dissolved/ brings reality to seeing."[23] The poem, then, never erases the world, never enters the "plentiful void" of nirvana (as the last canto of *Altazor* does: a void filled with syllable-seeds) or the "empty void" of sunyata. In the unreality of the world the poem ends by affirming the reality of a seeing which is touching which is writing.

Tantric art is notable for its representation of the cosmos in a simple or complex geometric drawing: the *yantra*. Paz's India (India's Paz) is a yantra composed of a triangle (seeing-touching-writing) within a square (body-world-cosmos-language) within a circle (which in India stands for a vision or a system—or is it a poet's political button?— or an O for Octavio?).

In the meditation, the yogin imagines a lotus blossoming on his navel. On the petals of the lotus are the letters of the mantra ARHAN. Smoke appears, rising from the letter R. Suddenly a spark, a burst of flame, and the lotus is consumed by fire. The wind picks up and scatters the ashes, covering him from head to toe. Then a gentle rain falls, and slowly washes them away. Bathed, refreshed, the yogin sees his body shining like the moon.

An earlier version of this essay was written for the catalog to the exhibition, "Octavio Paz: Los Privilegios de la Vista," at the Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporaneo in Mexico City.

Notes

1. ¡Aureo espejisimo, sueño de opio,/ fuente de todos mis ideales!/. . ./ ¡Yo soy el siervo de tu Mikado!/ ¡Yo soy el bonzo de tus pagodas!
2. La noche, el lago y la luna/ desde el alto mirador/ ve la princesa Satsuna/ ebria de opio y de amor.
3. Mujeres que pasáis por la Quinta Avenida,/ tan cerca de mis ojos, tan lejos de mi vida. . .
4. *Hai-kai de Euclides.* Líneas paralelas/ son las convergentes/ que sólo se juntan en el infinito.
5. ¡Libro, afán/ de estar en todas partes,/ en soledad!
6. GO/ ZA/ BA/ YO// A/ BO/ GO/ TA// TE/ MI/ RE// Y/ ME/ FUI. [I enjoyed Bogota. I saw you and I left.] The rhyme scheme is ABBBA, BAAB, CDC, DCD.
7. *Nocturno Alterno.* Neoyorquina noche dorada/ *Frios muros de cal moruna/* Rector's champaña fox-trot/ *Casas mudas y fuertes rejas/*Y volviendo la mirada/ *Sobre las silenciosas tejas/*El alma petrificada/ *Los gatos blancos de la luna/*Como la mujer de Loth// Y sin embargo/ es una/ misma/ en New York/ y en Bogotá// LA LUNA. . .!
8. El pequeño mono me mira. . ./ ¡Quisiera decirme/ algo que se le olvida!
9. *El faro.* Rubio pastor de barcas pescadoras.
10. *Tarde.* Leve piel de nube/ donde anda clavada/ la astilla de luna.
11. *Dios que surge de una orquídea de barro.* Entre los pétalos de arcilla/ nace, sonriente,/ la flor humana.
12. Feliz/ de ser india, sonrie/ la mazorca de maíz.
13. En duermevela oigo correr entre bultos adormilados y ceñudos un incesante río.
14. Un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua,/ un alto surtidor que el viento arquea. . .
15. Noche en los huesos/ noche calavera/ los reflectores palpan tus plazas secretas/ el sagrario del cuerpo/ el arca del espíritu/ los labios de la herida/ la boscosa hendidura de la profecía.
16. *Concorde.* Arriba el agua/ abajo el bosque/ el viento por los caminos// Quietud del pozo/ El cubo es negro El agua firme// El agua baja hasta los árboles/ El cielo sube hasta los labios.
17. *Gajo de cielo.* Abajo, la rabia:/ arriba, la calma./ Las veletas claman,/ lloran las persianas./ / Lentas ascienden las celestes vacas,/ de diáfanos corderos cortejadas.
18. Quieta/ en mitad de la noche.
19. El jardín se abisma./ Ya es un nombre sin substancia.// Los signos se borran:/ yo miro la claridad.
20. Amarillo/ cáliz de consonantes y vocales.
21. La transparencia es todo lo que queda.
22. La irrealidad de lo mirado/ da realidad a la mirada.
23. Tu cuerpo/ derramado en mi cuerpo/ visto/ desvanecido/ da realidad a la mirada.

MICHEL NEDJAR

WHAT DOES THE SPIDER DREAM OF?

(Michel Nedjar Interviewed by Allen S. Weiss)

I replaced the word 'unconscious' with the spider.—Michel Nedjar

ASW—In regard to your dolls, you often speak of mud, shit, blood—of prime matter. What exactly is the meaning of all this for you? How does this enter into the creation of your dolls?

MN—A little while ago, while working on one of my drawings, I asked myself the same question: why, when I was making an entirely black painting, did I want it to be all black, or why use color? I'm speaking of my drawings now, but there is a relation between this and my dolls, as you will see. While making a drawing, I had used red, yellow, blue, and then suddenly, through some malaise, I felt compelled to cover everything with wax and black paint. So I covered everything with black, and then ironed it so that everything would be blended together—and the drawing was all black. I then suddenly had a moment of hope, and I said to myself, "it's bizarre, it's bizarre," and I looked at my dolls, and remembered a childhood game that I played when I was about 4 or 5 years old. At that time, the boundaries separating the gardens where I lived were made with upturned bottles, so that you saw their hollow bottoms. As a child, I put earth and water in them, and made a sort of mud, pretending that it was coffee. And now, I had the feeling of once again finding that mud, which was my favorite childhood game.

ASW—Coffee is a sort of prime matter for you?

MN—The coffee was a pretext; I don't think that it was a prime matter. But all this was already to be found in this childhood game with the earth. Thus I played with this "coffee" with my sisters and brothers; and I still remember that mud, which at the early date I already found to be quite pleasing. More recently, I also wanted to bury my coffee—you see, I'm still playing "coffee"—I mean, I also wanted to bury my dolls. At one point, I even

wanted to rent a place that had a garden, so as to be able to bury them and dig them up a few days later in order to see the work of putrefaction and disappearance. Thus what I sought in my dolls was, we might say, the imitation of putrefaction. Rotting. Decomposing corpses. What I find to be most powerful are those dolls that have been broken or damaged. When I make my dolls I can't use just any cloth; I choose cloth that has already been worn by someone, that has been worn out. Often, when I see dirty, torn clothes in the street, trampled, abandoned, a strong, terrible emotion seizes me—a desire to gather it up in order to save it. I also think that this has something to do with the concentration camps. It operates aesthetically, but I think that it might be something yet more profound.

ASW—Thus there is also an ethical level to all this?

MN—Quite so, quite so; I find a sort of suffering, of abandonment, in broken things. I also gathered many broken objects: I collected them, I saved them, I gave them a magic power—as witness to great pain. It's perhaps also symbolic, I don't know—that's for you to analyse.

ASW—There is a beautiful text by Georges Bataille entitled, *Formless,* where he writes, ". . .affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit." When I read this text I think of your work, precisely because you have taken as your private symbol—of your life or of your work—the spider. And we should also note that your work, both the dolls and the drawings, is often at the very limit of formlessness—related, as you say, to putrefaction. Could you speak a bit about the spider, about how you found it—or how it found you?

MN—Yes, it was rather it that found me. Or we found each other. I had decided to make a film about Paris, and to record the soundtrack in the streets, working without any preconceived project, doing things little by little as they happened. One evening, while strolling on the boulevard in Belleville, I found a small plastic spider, a child's toy. I took it in my hand, and suddenly the title of the film came to me: *A Quoi Rêve l'Araignée? [What Does the Spider Dream Of?]* And as soon as I began to film the images, all the other images followed—like a spider spinning its web. And then I thought of making a film by taking my father's old home movies, made in the 1950s, old films where the images had already begun to disappear; I thus refilmed all of the parts that had become barely visible, which were almost completely erased, my father's clumsiness, and all that. By thus refilming these old films, I told myself that I would braid them together with the film that I was in the process of making on Paris. To lace or braid my film. I thus wove them together with my father's films. That's the word: "weaving"; we return to cloth again. Thus in refilming my father's films—a father who was rather strict and not very pleasant—I gained sympathy

for him, thanks to his clumsiness. And I thought that it's a terrible thing that with the new cinematic machines, we can no longer see such defects. Technical errors, film slipping on the sprockets, and so on—we can immediately erase it. He didn't know how to edit, thus he erased nothing. Thus all those little details of clumsiness brought me closer to my father. Afterwards, with *L'Araignée*—I still had this title in mind—even at night, I dreamed of my film, and the spider led me through my dreams (which I never had before). In one dream, I found myself sucking on a breast, my mother's breast, and I asked myself how I could have forgotten that sensation. I was like a little man in the process of sucking on an enormous breast, and it was fantastic, because, I asked myself, how could I have forgotten that feeling of nourishment and of great warmth, and it was really as if I were sucking on life itself. That was one dream. Two days later, I took the subway, where you see many ad images; sometimes you have the feeling that these images just suddenly appear in a nearly surrealist, or I would rather say magic, manner. I was with my friend Pascal, and there was an ad campaign against breast cancer, with huge images of breasts in all the corridors, and I said to Pascal: tomorrow we'll return to take a photo. Thus he took this photo of me, "Une Habitude à Apprendre à Tout Age" ["A Habit to Get Into at All Ages": the ad's slogan], and the photo was a witness to that moment. Endlessly there were things like that, between the spider, my mother, my father; it all went very far. I then began to complete the film, and a friend invited me to the country, and one evening, while in bed, what do I see on the wall—a very white wall—but an immense living spider! And I told myself that this would be the end of my film. I thus put it in a jar in order to film it, and this is what you see as the very last image of my film; and I knew that the film had to end there—between the imagination and reality, there were the two spiders. From that moment on, I told myself that the spider would be my familiar. It is my artistic symbol, and I think of this little creature making that magnificent structure, that spider's web, that sun, as totally benevolent; it represents life and death.

ASW—I would like to ask you a question about your drawings, especially in relation to the dolls. In a certain sense, this formlessness is situated between the formlessness of creation and the formlessness of death. Thus there exists an entire series of metamorphoses and ambiguities between the two extremes of life: birth and death. But it is also true that you have chosen to represent certain images, certain figures, certain beings—of course there are the dolls, masks and faces; and in the drawings we see especially men, birds, and a very few other types of animals. It is a rather limited iconography. Why have you chosen only these, and not other things?

MN—Yes, there are the birds and the animals, especially dogs. Why? It's not an obsession, though, if I want to do an animal and only do a bird or a dog.

ASW—Not many plants, for example.
MN—No. Rarely plants, or houses; the characters are often accompanied by a bird or an animal, like a fox, or I think it must be a dog. The dog also came in a dream, the dream of the fox who entered through my ear, and who didn't want to leave. But it was my queen who tapped me on the back, and made it leave. I think that I was quite struck by that dream, and the aspect dog-fox-wolf remained imbedded in me.
ASW—And what of the human figure?
MN—The human face fills in the void.
ASW—And what about the relation between your dolls and your drawings? For example, Roger Cardinal wrote of your atelier as a creative matrix of objects, images, sensations and so forth. Could you speak of the effect that working surrounded by all of your dolls has on you?
MN—You know, I don't really notice what is all around me in my atelier, since it is all so much a part of myself; thus I don't extract anything from it. Each piece is a part of me, so I have no distance from it. What I now see is that my drawings are becoming. . .I think of shadows, shadows. I realize that my drawings are of shadows, of silhouettes. The mouth had already disappeared; and now I notice that the entire face has disappeared. All that remains is its presence.
ASW—You say that it is all a part of you, of your life. Yet at the same time, things seem to be divided for you. That is to say, there is the atelier, where we find most of your dolls and your drawings (it's there that you work); and where you sleep, there are your collections of magic dolls, magic or fetish objects, postcards and images. Is there a similar division within you?
MN—When I arrived here, the apartment was already made like that, with the dining room being where I work, and the bedroom; and at one point I realized that I needed a place where I could rest, where I didn't see my work. But I think that if there weren't a wall, it wouldn't bother me at all. I think that I could live in my atelier without any difficulty if it were larger, if there were more space.
ASW—On the matter of titles, I noticed that at Beaubourg your dolls were all given the same punning title, *Chair d'âme* [Flesh of the Soul; Dear Woman—*Chère Dame*]. Did you provide that title? Are there other titles?
MN—It was me: the word *chair* and the word *âme*. Often, when you receive a letter from me, you know that I write *chair ami—cher, âme*. It's thus the game of the flesh, the essential part of work. There is the flesh and the soul; often in one's work there is flesh but no soul; and often there is soul but no flesh.
ASW—This year, 20 of your dolls entered the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou, in the donation of Daniel Cordier; and about a decade ago your dolls were selected for inclusion in the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, thanks to Jean Dubuffet. If we consider art history in its present

state, this is somewhat paradoxical; that is to say, your dolls are considered as both Art Brut and as Modern Art. These two collections have very different aims, concepts, and paradigms—thus this is a question about the difference between Art Brut *and* Modern, Contemporary Art, the art of galleries and museums, what Dubuffet termed the "cultural arts." What do you think about all this? Does this amuse you, does it discomfort you, or don't you give a damn about it at all?

MN—No, it doesn't amuse me, and it doesn't discomfort me—it shows me that at a certain point the work is completely independent of the artist. The work lives a life of its own. I really thought that the Musée de l'Art Modern, Centre Georges Pompidou, would never have purchased my work. I think that it appears there thanks to Cordier, because it was part of a donation. It was a private person who bought my work, and I imagine that even he himself must have had some difficulty in having my dolls accepted by Beaubourg. It doesn't amuse me, but it suggests a thousand questions about the work's life, independent of the artist. And now, as for Art Brut and Modern Art, history will decide about that—I can't control it. Daniel Cordier saw my work, was most enthusiastic about it, and he wanted to buy my entire atelier—it's fantastic to have someone so enthusiastic about your work. Jean Dubuffet too was enthusiastic about my work, and wanted it for the Collection de l'Art Brut, and it was fantastic. Thus it's the work that travels—it's not up to me to hold it back, it's now independent of my body, and of my grasp. What can I do? In any case, I don't want to do anything. I prefer to create, to keep busy with that.

ASW—Perhaps in conclusion we can make a list. Both Borges and T.S. Eliot have said, in different ways, that "Every artist creates his own predecessors." What I would simply like to ask you is who are your favorite artists? Let's begin with Art Brut.

MN—What moved me most in art was in about 1969–1970. My sister, a cosmetician, occasionally bought art books. One day she showed me what she had just bought on sale: it was a very luxurious art book, with removable pages of the paintings that were depicted. She showed it to me, and suddenly, amidst all that, what did I see!?—and I didn't believe my eyes, I didn't believe that this could be considered art!—it was one of Aloïse's drawings, *Josephine Lancant des Roses à Napoléon*. And I told myself that if Aloïse is accepted as an artist, then everything is permitted. And during many, many years, Aloïse guided my steps. I was even married to Aloïse. And one day I received a small publication which contained pictures of my works, and alongside my work there was a drawing by Aloïse—for me this was part of the marriage. Something that I have already said to Roger Cardinal is that the greatest emotion I felt in regard to art was that all of a sudden everything was overturned. And during my ten years of travel, Aloïse was with me—the goal of my voyage was Aloïse. It was a bomb, a

bomb inside me, in my head. It was the most powerful thing. Afterwards, I visited many museums—for example, Le Musée de l'Homme, where I was very moved by African and Oceanic art, also a great discovery for me. But in regard to Occidental culture, the greatest thing was Aloïse: it was like a laceration, like a blade thrust to the core, like a bomb; I was completely dynamited by it. It was something that filled me with hope and with happiness. I was married to Aloïse. I was symbolically married to Aloïse. And when I visited the Collection de l'Art Brut, near Aloïse's house. . .you see, that's what desire is; when you desire something so strongly, beyond the historic strata, there are also those things provoked by desire. True, I was at Lausanne, but so what? One can't really know this story, how for so many years it was your desire that guided you; a desire of love, it's really something very, very. . .it's a force, a force that carries you along, that attracts you.

FIVE POEMS

THE DECISION

What is a transfer
emotion? why told
this person? I placed
my headlights forth,
a plenitude the misty call

placed into hence
alignments way, sold
to the ends of time. . .

Who, glassed in by pencil markings, knows
all
there is to know, ever & anonymous?

The face in a window, pressed against the glass.
Obstacle, by crowning step, tomorrow

IN A PREVIOUS MANNER OF DUNKAN MkNAUGHTON

I follow chaste springs of human action.

They have turned underground, creeks from which the parkways trickle,

rubbish of an afterthought, immedicinal, & the sheen of water spreading downstream.

Committed to words, a mis-

spelling dragged *gradient* off less than legible nightstand work sheets

we—the thousandfold autonomous readers of the cellar edition unbending

the corner of the page—
might
allege meaning, abjure definition, it is a synonym & fuck all

for the end of time, which I can't anticipate, nor see where the light of long

burnt out stars hits, feeling the weight of a fraction of a second
suspended in time.

Poetry

is a dire navigational scribble. The scribbler

is principally a fool

pseudepigraphal. She walks on ash slipping monosyllable to fettered step,
birds in a marsh, or harmless snakes with red tongues & stinging piss,

the heat of summer after ferocious winter. Car radio a necessity, song

of the open, timing the mileage, highway accessible through static 'got.

Yellow aspen was the color of her name,
& swaying birches I'm allergic to
along the road.

5/88
Oneonta

THE REMAINDER

Placid by its wall
a face again
collides me
at nightfall.

Such sweet repose
magnetized by tears
eyes
once disclosed.

A person is what presence
signifies, whenever a presence
makes itself known
as sign.

A thou, sigh born, robotted

KOL NIDRE

I love God as even guilt can't
assuage my feelings of survival
towards. We live to be judged,
severed from the gravity of human event,

& whether a rip-off quitclaim deed
of broken trust, or gift to man,
the word was spoken by & to the dust
breaking in my heart.

IT GETS THAT I HATE WORDS FOR THEIR ECHOES, DUMB REPETITIONS IN MY HEAD

All I can do is

right

this shit, once a day

forever if need be,

putting head to paper

reading haywire of

present day dis-

affected daytime prose.

The L.B.I.

Annual is a

9 to 5 number & the

daily paper gets out

overnight,

My aim

used to be the latter

& now will type
in the silence

of endless facilitation.

But fuck argument.
News that stays fit

to be tied true is

not news for admitting

evidence against an editor's

views,,

the stupidity of writing

is all the more clear in the lame

notion of depleted topics, the simplicity of seen

summons, not satisfied with bridgework lightcan tunnels

gone through,. Or, *the ingenuities of Miss*

Marianne Moore of Brooklyn, New York, whose immense

girlhood booklearning fills

a single shady

volume to fruition. Post-holocaust,

which earned its name before the ashes had been
stirred (Adorno seems to say), only numbs the dull

familiar ache $'s or some other form of power

sanctifies. Detour propositions

polemically situated, or.

I hate prose

& any other
way around

the block—

DAVID JOEL SHAPIRO

MIGUEL ANGEL RIOS: DREAMS OF THE HEIGHTS ("SUENOS DE LAS ALTURAS")

I have a shockingly melancholic image before me: a watercolor by Miguel Rios of a hat in dark space. The dark sombrero, a lost personal object, floats above a doubled landscape of dark trees. In the sky, a few dark clouds seem to double the dark heads of the saturnine and reduced simplicity of the geometric hills. Across the top of the page is a dark but affectionate dedication to a friend, and the words of the dedication are doubled by the artist's signature which appears, almost absurdly decorative, in a diagonal on the hat's top. Superimposed upon the hat is a blue braiding, reminiscent of the transparencies of Picabia, Polke, and Salle, and also the sudden superimposition—though "sudden" may be a clumsy way to render the temporal effects of superimposition—of a gold set of bones which seem to yield the shape of a sacred bird, also dotted with orange, sepia and black geometrical figures.

Miguel Angel Rios is a kind of serial landscape painter, born in North Argentina in 1943, and constantly reiterating the facts of his birth and his childhood around artisans whose crafts he innately adored. I do not want these things, he has told me, I paint them quite naturally. He asserts that he is not from Buenos Aires, but emerges from a tradition at the height of 5000 metres above the sea.

Rios keeps in his studio and at home enormously interesting albums of his life amongst the sublime and sublimely blank mountains of the region. This early landscape of almost terrifying scale and scope is one of the places to initiate a sense of the epical in his paintings. He has also placated any sense one might have of him as "warbling his woodnotes wild" by training himself for a complex voyage outside of this sublime blankness, by populating much of his early youthful and mature years by turns in the urban academies, teaching in Buenos Aires and at the University of San Carlos in Mexico. Obviously, there is a curious torment in Rio's life, a tension between the urban and his much-underscored "roots," a word he uses with and without irony. The irony of a deraciné and weightless nomad lies about Rios and informs the multiplicities within his own work.

He does not have the whimsical free-associative spiel of the Jonathan Borofsky paintings of dreams he admires. What he offers is "Landscape from the top," in his own formulation, a dream-voyage from the heights like the bardic *Macchu Picchu* of Neruda. The voice is however writerly, diagrammatic and concise. He is never bombastic and retains the possibility of the intimate and the elegiac. He sketches and works ceaselessly, and is confident at the scale of fourteen feet square. But even his small sketches, tacked to the walls of his studio, are filled with a remorseless strength. There are skeletons fighting à la Goya. Energetic hats taking off with a vigor of their own. Grinning bones subtitled "Who am I," with the proverbial concision of *Los Caprichos.*

In Rios, one may witness a translation of Incan epic in his own terms, and with his own theory and theoretical poetry. What he retains is the sense of the sacred center, now deformed and mutilated: the theme of the hero, now pulverized like a sombrero and into a fetish of the fractured self: and the community, now dispersed like a myth. The map in a melancholic dream replaces the homeland; the fetish replaces the ego; and the exchange of art alone remains as a mistranslation of the communitarian story. But we cannot hold it against our painter, anymore than we should against Pound, that he couldn't make a contemporary epic or Paradise in a coherent mode. The acoherent lyric-epic alone remains, jagged and monochrome and replete with systems that are reminiscent more of breakdown than of order. Picasso seems to have learned from African art that the power of art lies precisely in its truth-making magical function rather than descriptive or aesthetic. Rios once placed grains into a picture that mice ate. The idea of a living painting sustaining the creaturely world is a parable in memory of painting.

Rios is a serious artist in an epoch of the whimsical, the simulated and the diffuse. His concentrated focus leads even in his works of systematic multiplicity to a sombre species of irrealism. He is a colorist, but his colors tend canonically toward those of the earth. He could paint, and has, in concrete, in cement, in terra cotta as medium. He is, in a sense, an earth artist, and the same laws of ecological pathos that regulate the Romantic anti-sublime of Smithson and Heizer regulate his monuments, his mountains and his sketches. He works with an assistant on large works, with instruments and tools reminiscent of his artisanal past. New sculpture shows his ability to work with graceful and yielding pinks and forms that are suddenly disturbed by a penetrating spear. His watercolors have the finesse he admires in Klee and Kandinsky, and they show the Japanese calligraphic possibilities always inherent in his incised forms. His use of ink and melancholy watercolors may remind some of the instantaneities of Guston and Johns, just as the series of "personal hats" or "personified hats" may remind one of Guston's simplified imagery.

Like Jean-Michel Basquiat's best art, the art of Rios is a complex intransigent act, seen in his recent "Self-portrait" as a menacing skeleton amongst flutes like phalluses and hats like grave-mounds. His language floats in Spanish and English as a macaronic code to his rootless and rooted condition. Rios is elaborating a macaronic art of bilingual pleasures as a great antidote to the limited perspectives, one might say one-eyed perspective of the West. His great staring skeleton is very alive and the lyric landscape that surrounds it is part of a hymn to the earth, what Mallarmé called "the orphic explanation." His "dreamtime" landscapes are closest to Australian Papunya Tula styles in positing a relationship between land, line, and language. "Two Dreams and a Long Road" is a meditation on the relationship between a seemingly reverential and referential mapping code and the fractures of a consciousness that cannot be signalled. As if in response to Jasper Johns, it is a white map of South America; it is a map on which the natural has almost engulfed the cultural; it is late and early "writing" confronting each other.

A unique accomplishment of Rios is his ability to use words and images without a sense of creating a false decoration through language and without illustrative reduction. In a sense, he has been for many years now a "New York painter," as much as late Mondrian. One might do an interesting study of his most recent works in comparison with the late representational études of Mondrian, who claimed with good reason that he was the true surrealist. Rios has been able to make his almost canonic code of dots and circles into something as menacingly urban as the "little squares" of the anti-canonic *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. He is never as utopian and affirmative as that great modernist, and his sense of dystopia, of an "architecture of pessimism," in Hejduk's terms, make his city-paintings of night and poetry uncanny for those used to the fairly affirmative and complaisant abstractions of the day. Rios is not posing as an outsider; like Benjamin, he uses his social and cultural position to give him a true critical distance from the fleeing multitudes and false multiples of a degraded day.

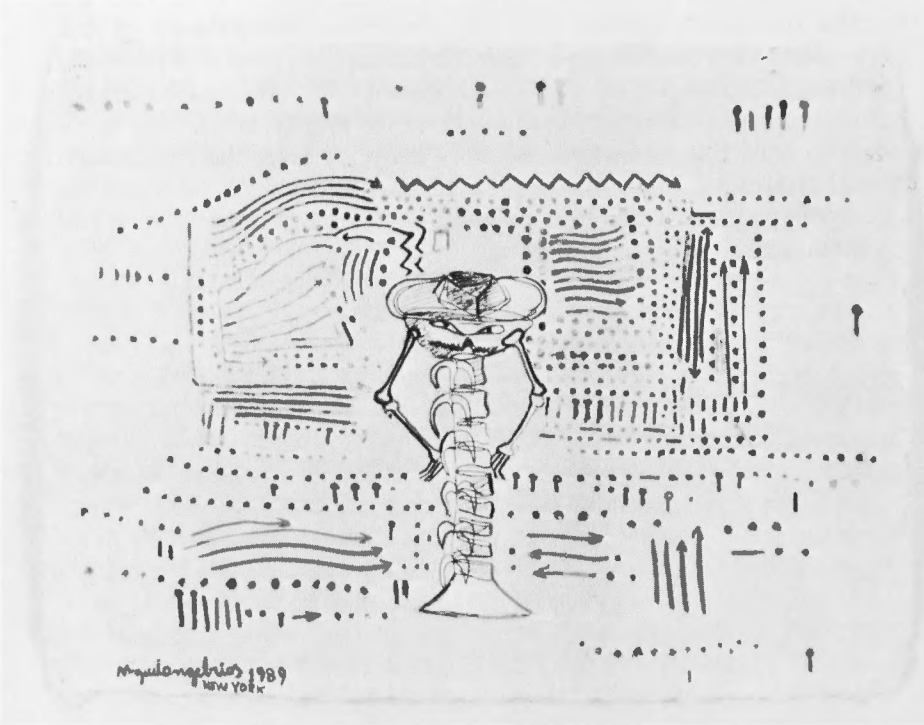
In Rios, the full force of his sense of what was lost in the transitions between archaic, modern and so-called "post-modern" receive a treatment in novelistic scope that is simply not part of the experience of most American painters, representational or not. He has a scope that is obviously closer to the epical in Marquez, and his lyricism is always, I think, a quality subordinate to this epic sense. Therefore, his best works tend to be the past tense of an historical impersonality cited by Jakobson as the syntax and semantic force of all true epics. Epic story-telling in painting in our day is almost unimaginable in the West.

The small pieces of Rios are proverbs or aphorisms, the large sculptures and paintings are the entirety, the web, the life consumed.

"Yesterday I dreamed I was Flying Over my House" is a recent example of this kind of completeness, this radical story-teller's completeness. It is an abstract and refulgent map of a shamanistic or shaman-like journey. It is the journey of displacement that anthropologists have discerned as the spiritual message in every voyage. Flying over one's own house, comical as a mother-in-law in a Thurber cartoon hovering over a castrated *casa*, here one sees nothing but a multiplicity. One's house has become the "cubist effect" of Gertrude Stein observing from a plane. What we have is not the belated excoriating eroticism of the shameless late painters of our imperium, New York. We are far from the bland perfections of Warhol. We are flying over a map of the desiccated personal. We have nothing left but the story, like the Hasid who has forgotten how to pray, where to pray, or when to pray, but remembers the story and thus saves the community. Wiesel: God created man in order to have stories told. In Rios, we are seeing the advent, again, of narrative painting, deleting the lesser ironies and promoting a sense of the true ones.

MIGUEL ANGEL RIOS

SIX WORKS

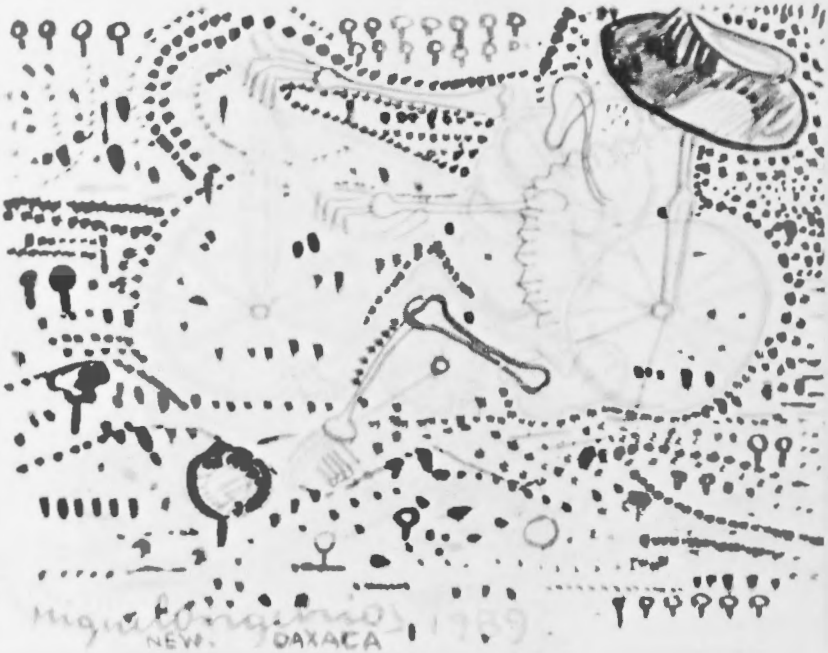


AUTORETRATO IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

1989, m/m on handmade paper, 10" x 13"

MY HAT

1989, Watercolor on Paper, $5^1/_2$" x $8^1/_2$"

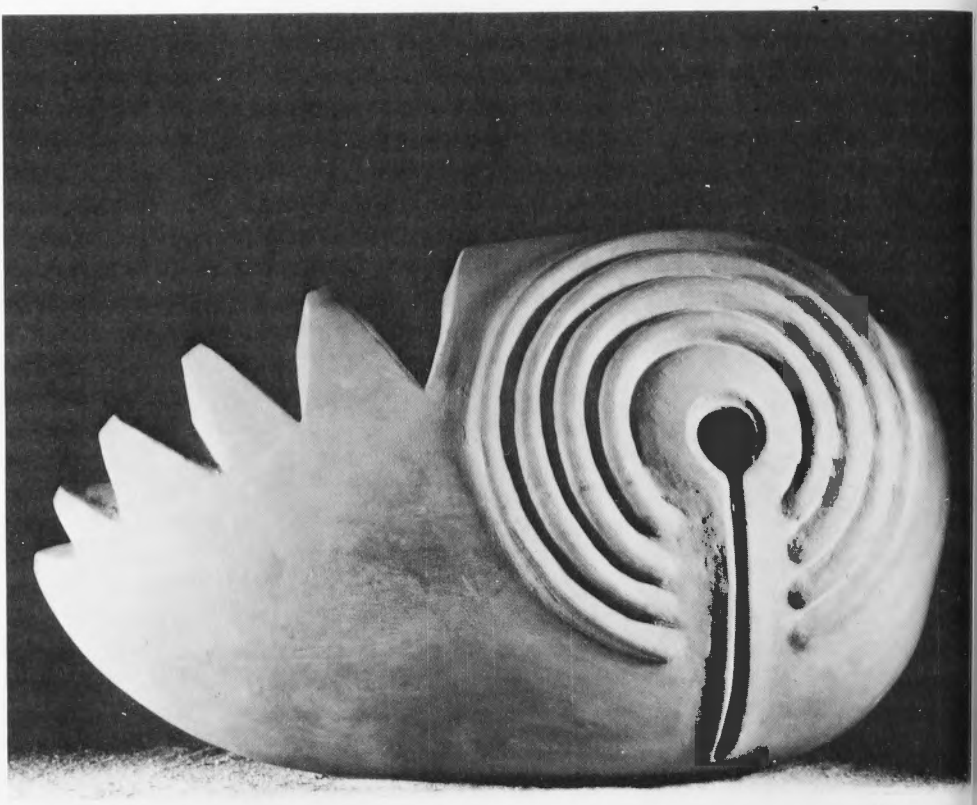


STUDY FOR ONE PAISANO/DRUNK & HAPPY

1989, Watercolor on Paper, 6" x 8"

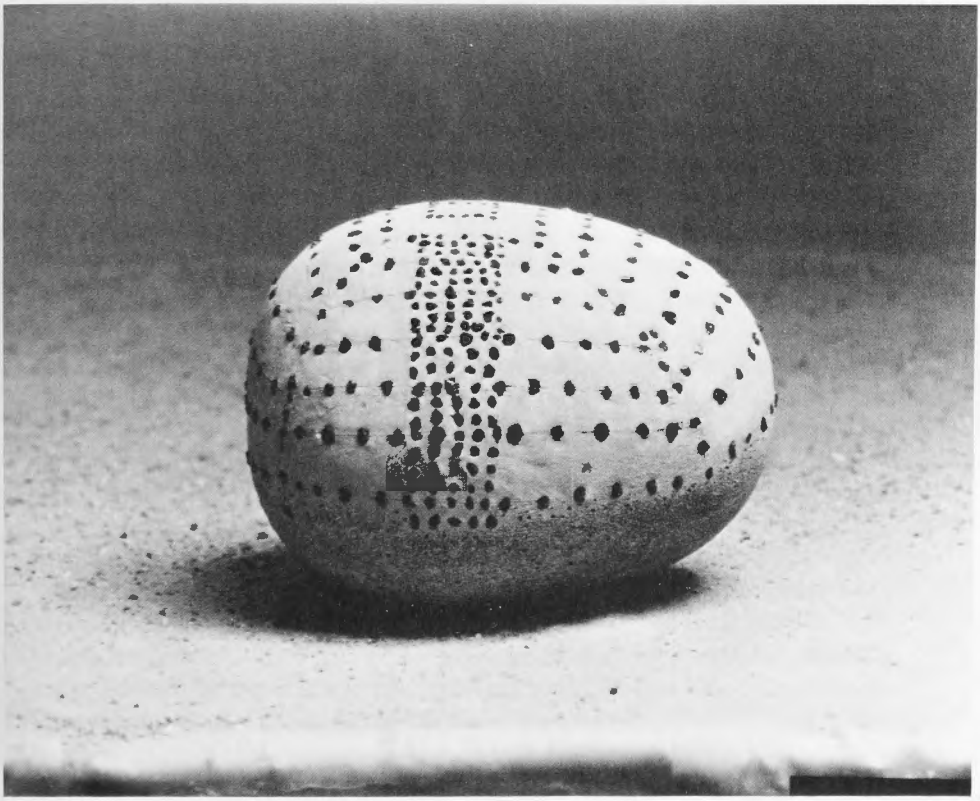
STUDY FOR PERSIGO O ME VIENEN PERSIGUIENDO

1989, Watercolor on Paper, 6" x 8"



LA CABEZA DEL MONSTRUO CHAYLE

1988, Ocotlan Clay and Mica,
85 cm x 55 cm x 52 cm



HORMIGUERO

1987, Terra-cotta and Tezontle,
9" x 7" x 7"

PAUL CHRISTENSEN

STRUGGLING TO BE A COURTIER: THE POETRY OF RICHARD WILBUR

Forty years of Wilbur's poetry are wedged into this book of nearly four-hundred pages. It reprints his previous six volumes and adds to it twenty-eight new poems and a patriotic new cantata that could hide easily in a Paul Green play. It is the canon of a scrupulous craftsman, a poet who did not rush into print but polished one poem roughly every month over his long writing life. The awards Wilbur garnered from this steady preoccupation with poetry are remarkable: the Pulitzer Prize, a National Book Award, the Bollingen, a Ford Foundation grant, fellowships from Guggenheim and the *Prix de Rome,* membership in all the arts academies in America, teaching posts at some of the most exclusive universities—Harvard, Wellesley, Wesleyan, and Smith—and the poet laureateship of the U.S. It has been a charmed life, a career in the obscure art of poetry welcomed, awarded, celebrated in a country noted for its callous indifference to literature.

Where others with more talent or more genius or more tragedy lived and died in relative obscurity, Wilbur came onto the literary scene in 1947 with a little book called *The Beautiful Changes* and was almost instantly a star. So America was looking for a Wilbur to take into its arms; but it was not looking for some of the other poets who crowded into the years just after World War II. Those poets—Jews, Beats, bohemians on the social fringe, blacks, homosexuals and lesbians, iconoclasts, second or third generation immigrants, an alleged traitor, experimenters—were overlooked or benignly neglected much of their lives.

Wilbur, on the other hand, was a New Englander, a Harvard-educated, handsome young veteran who had seen action in Italy, France and Germany, and had come home to resume his place among the New England gentry. Already, at twenty-six, he had the dry, sophisticated humor, the quick common sense, the *charm* of the ruling class, from whose ranks Jack Kennedy and Robert Lowell also sprang. Wilbur was ornately stylish and formalistic in his earliest verses, but down to earth, a pragmatist in his affections:

NEW AND COLLECTED POEMS (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), cloth: $27.95. 393 pages. ISBN 0-15-165206-6

Does sense so stale that it must needs derange
The world to know it? To a praiseful eye
Should it not be enough of fresh and strange
That trees grow green, and moles can course in clay,
And sparrows sweep the ceiling of the day?

The Beautiful Changes is the book of a courtier, a young man whose cultivated voice could be trusted to speak for the American character in the heady days of post-war expansion. Wilbur stood for the continuity of English custom, culture, and grace in the long transatlantic descent to New England and modern imperial America. He was the Anglo-American ideal, whose powers to console and delight the social elite were surer and more reliable than Lowell's, whose temperament was fairly unpredictable after 1959. Indeed, Wilbur has stayed well clear of the Confessionalists all through his career; as late as his most recent poetry, he dismisses Plath's poetry, in "Cottage Street, 1953," as "free and helpless and unjust." Edna Ward, to whom she is compared for soundness, lived "eight and eighty summers of / Such grace and courage as permit no tears." So much for Plath, or the dark world of suicide, drunkenness, the maunderings of spoiled Anglo-American gentry.

Wilbur's poetry presents a disembodied self, a figure of mere consciousness present in but not necessarily connected to the world. He is *there,* in the midst of the not-I, a landscape, an object, an abstraction like the "terrible streets" that opens "The Peace of Cities"; but unlike the reporter at-the-scene of Olson, Duncan, or Snyder, who is transformed by what he experiences, Wilbur's narrator converts the scene into an image of his own emotions, a portrait of the self-mastering Christian soul. The scene beheld in Wilbur's poetry is usually allegorical of some struggle within—between the forces of darkness and chaos, doubt or disintegration, and those of light, reason, pleasure, or serenity of mind. His poem "Objects," also from *The Beautiful Changes,* closes this way:

. . .is there any end to true textures, to true
Integuments; do they ever desist from tacit, tragic
Fading away? On maculate, cracked, askew,

Gay-pocked and potsherd world
I voyage, where in every tangible tree
I see afloat among the leaves, all calm and curled,
The Cheshire smile which sets me fearfully free.

Another of more recent vintage, "C Minor," puts it thus:

. . .A human soul,
Though stalked by hollow pluckings, winning out
(While bran-flakes crackle in the cereal-bowl)
Over despair and doubt?

Wilbur's soul is not of this world, only a prim and sexually uncomplicated visitor who sniffs around and perceives most things in terms of its own well-being. Experience in this poetry is a form of self-consolidation: the imagination seems attracted to some discordant note in the world which it harmonizes with its prescriptive ideals; the world is healed by asserting one's faith in its underlying or overlying order. In "A Dubious Night," discord comes from feeling a little too secure in the order of things, as he notes in closing, "I weary of the confidence of God." Or this from "Children of Darkness," a rare excursion into the darker side of life, with this reassuring coda:

Light strikes into a gloom in which are found
Red disc, grey mist,
Gold-auburn firfoot, amethyst,
Food for the eye whose pleasant stinks abound,
And dead men's fingers break the ground.

Gargoyles is what they are at worst, and should
They preen themselves
On being demons, ghouls, or elves,
The holy chiaroscuro of the wood
Still would embrace them. They are good.

The beautiful changes are those occurring within the speaker, who appears to be healing after war experiences, and whose resilient idealism wins out at last. He sloughs off war wounds and disillusionment to emerge re-consolidated in the old faith, a loyal, charming citizen who has proved his valor and whose well-bred character returns from war intact.

That premise runs against the tide of almost everything else written about World War II: the novels, plays, poems, short stories and reportage all seem to attest to the ugly changes, the soul wounded and emptied of its faith in the old order. Any war usually prompts the young to battle and brings them home angry at their elders, disgusted with the way things are, bitter and driven with revolt. Wilbur gives us a floaty, angelic voice that comes back annealed by its own fantasy, its naive idealism and frilly daydreams over nature. In "Poplar, Sycamore," the allegorizings are all dizzy-headed until we reach this direct address to the sycamore,

Be such a deep
Rapids of lacing light and dark,
My eye will never know the dry disease
Of thinking things no more than what he sees.

Wilbur's soldier-poet went through the war, it would seem, inventing allegorical harmony out of all the suffering and chaos, and came back to report on the "beautiful changes" he had experienced. According to Wilbur, paradise is artificial, not jagged, as Pound, Zukofsky, Olson, and Snyder would have us believe. The perfect and sublime arise from mind and stout religious sense; they are not our fleeting glimpses into nature's own ordering energies, from which, as Pound would say, we copy our frail ideals.

The epistemology of Modernism and postmodernism and of the conventional American poetry Wilbur writes are diametrically opposed; there is no common bond between them. The one derives from a post-Christian, proto-paganist vision of nature as its own animating creativity, and the other from a long monotheistic tradition that has narrowed order and creativity down to human rationality. Consciousness is the god of Christianity, perfect and absolute consciousness; poems in the Anglo-American tradition are hymns to the masculine powers of mind that sort and arrange experience and affirm the authority of a great overseer, an infinitely rational god whose powers exceed those of all the other gods, male and female, whose domains are in the irrational.

For nearly four hundred pages, Wilbur is himself in control, plotting his poems to set measures, arranging, cutting, shaping his stanzas according to a regularizing scheme, a god-author in microcosm imitating divinity in the Christian cosmos as he idealizes experience, then shapes it according to the adamant categories of common sense, clear-headed reason, propriety, all the virtues of the aspiring Christian soul. England invented this rational god with his managerial imagination, a necessary deity for running a vast maritime organization, and Anglo-Americanism struck a partnership by sharing this god and its mercantile values. So Wilbur's spirituality stems from orthodox British Protestantism, just as his poetics come down whole from four centuries of English lyricism.

But for Wilbur not any England will do as the root on which to graft his vision; the England after industrialism is generally ignored in the spectrum of his references. Like Eliot before him, Wilbur seemed to know instinctively that one's Anglo-Americanness must derive from a *pure* English source—Elizabethan, Shakespearean England. Wilbur's heroes are literary; the character of his own "figure" in the poetry is drawn from English literary perspective. Thus, grace is equated with Hamlet's thinking, "The intricate neural grace in Hamlet's head"; the warring spirit with

Prince Harry in "Up, Jack" from the *Henry* plays; beauty with formal gardens and country estates; love with the cool formality of Shakespeare's sonnets. These and other connections to Shakespearean England are part of the fantasized world of Wilbur's speakers, who seem convinced they live in slightly modernized Stratford. Corresponding to the faded scenes in Wilbur is the faded language, which loses its freshness the more it is squeezed into the exacting and ornate forms he works in. Inversions, added syllables, a bit of rusty eloquence are part of the upholstery in these poems.

There is something else working below the surface of this fantasizing in the early (and late) Wilbur. Drawing upon Elizabethan literature as the substrate of his own vision, he (as Eliot before him) found a period in life when males were in some sense the effeminate rivals of their powerful regent, Elizabeth. Courtiers were essentially asexual males who had cultivated their manners to the point of hermaphroditic ambiguity, which they expressed through an elaborate narcissism that often rejected the female as lover. The sexual ambiguity of Shakespeare's sonnets is a point of issue, as is the theme of transvestite identity in the plays. The courtier in white hose, satin pants and lacy shirt and waistcoat, his perfumes and periwig, his scented handkerchief in sleeve, are all aspects of a male whose envy of a reigning monarch took the form of sexual escape. The Earl of Leicester's private affair with Queen Elizabeth the first was in effect an indefensible aspect of his character, a secret dimension of his masculinity subject to rumors. It is this epicene hero who reenters as the personae of Eliot, Wilbur and their Anglo-American colleagues, and who echo the misogyny of their forebears. Anglo-Americanism is adamantly anti-female, perhaps the most characterizing trait of its perspective on the world.

But there's a final, subtly political aspect to the use of Elizabethanism in modern Anglo-American poetry. Shakespeare's days mark the apex of English maritime culture; it would never be richer, leaner, or more aggressive than at this dawn of its imperial ambitions. By the time Tennyson celebrated the empire, it was doddering and corrupt, barely able to protect its sea lanes and harbors, with other industrial rivals bearing down on its monopolies. Consider Wilbur's situation at mid-century as another debut: the era of American empire fortified esthetically by a steady spate of "real culture" lifted directly out of the English debut of Shakespeare's time. Eliot's "Four Quartets" celebrate the Anglo-American heritage during the war, the same catastrophic climax that shaped Wilbur's imagination and racial values. As literary defenders of empire in the British tradition, both poets inevitably brought the issue of pure race into their poetry in numerous subtle ways. Auden's emigration to the U.S. coincided with Eliot's culminating hymn to his transatlantic identity just as Wilbur was

writing his own first poems on this fusion of bloodlines. The Anglo-American assertion of an Aryan purity of spirit and heritage in belles-lettres was grimly prefaced in Hitler's attempts to purge the German race of its own non-Aryan intruders. Empire depended for its strength of character on a pure-blooded race, whose superiority of mind and spirit were measured in terms of English cultural ideals.

Hence, as Wilbur spins out the fantasized meditations of his ethereal voices, turning landscapes into self-portraits of a perfected consciousness whose every syllable was tucked neatly into rimed, metered language and whose tolerance of the slightest deviance from expectation was itself one of those charming traits of the privileged white class in America, the U.S. doggedly pursued its turn at imperial expansion under the puritanical statesmanship of John Foster Dulles. (The really rough stuff of empire was handled by his brother Allen, who had been recruited to organize and run the CIA.)

Turning the pages of Wilbur's poetry from those early lyrics of 1947 to *Things of This World* published in 1956, to the collections published in the 1960s, *Advice to a Prophet and Other Poems* (1961) and *Walking to Sleep* (1969), there are no political poems or direct commentaries on the upheavals of the era. Wilbur's fantasy grows thicker with time: in "Sonnet," included in *Things of This World,* the description of rural New England is rank sentiment shorn of the irony of even Frost's rural sketches, as in "After Apple Picking," depicting a country evening even Hogarth or Pope or perhaps Ben Johnson would have doubted the truth of:

> The winter deepening, the hay all in,
> The barn fat with cattle, the apple-crop
> Conveyed to market or the fragrant bin,
> He thinks the time has come to make a stop,
>
> And sinks half-grudging in his firelit seat,
> Though with his heavy body's full consent.

Here, without apologies, is a Currier & Ives' America, a dinner-plate version of a long-departed New England, vanished even before Whittier wrote his sugary reminiscences of it, and written about the time Lowell began framing his nightmares against its pretentious village life. But with Wilbur there is no room for irony: his meditative, self-consolidating witness is a kind of Blanche DuBois, whose lyrical digressions into romance can never be countered.

The opening poem of *Walking to Sleep,* "The Lilacs," reflects no more of the Vietnam era than to imagine how

Those laden lilacs
    at the lawn's end
Came stark, spindly,
    and in staggered file,
Like walking wounded
    from the dead of winter. . . .

A few pages later, we are settled once more into the fantasy mode Wilbur knows best:

Why is it that whenever I talk with the duchess
My belly growls and my nose waters? Why must it
Be my hand that tumbles her wine-glass over
Into the Cellini salt-dish?
Stiff as a gaffer, fidgety as a child,
After twenty years of struggling to be a courtier
I remain incapable of the least politeness, . . .

What you will perceive in this and all his other books is an indifference to the dark negatives of American history, to those events or changes that call into question the service this poetry renders as reassurance to a literate, ruling elite. Instead, its language is strewn with lapidary imagery and garden scenery, with a constant flow of rhetoric furnishing images of the rare, the beautiful, the perfected character, manners, customs of the social few, whose models have been carefully culled from "polite" literature. Indeed, such is the charm and persuasion of this writer of race lyrics that he more or less created the taste for poetry that has reigned ever since *The New Yorker, The Atlantic,* and now in *APR, Antaeus, Poetry,* and numerous other quarterlies that strive to appeal to the same literate elite. What John Cheever once did for *New Yorker* fiction, Wilbur did for *New Yorker* poetry, and for what now passes as "official" American verse in anthologies and textbooks. He shaped the peculiar fantasy-life verse, its esthetic gospel that the mind is the creator of meaning, not its modest interpreter or translator. His landscapes are almost always those which human agency has formed or "improved," from which his meditations arise.

But Wilbur's poems do not linger in the garden long enough to analyze or parse things into their psychological data. Wilbur's thinking veers sharply away from James or from that portion of him that comes down to Ashbery, who minces their certainties into final mocking ambiguities. Instead, there is this rose-tinted vision of a well-meaning natural event:

Into the lower right
Square of the window frame
There came
with scalloped flight

A goldfinch, lit upon
The dead branch of a pine,
Shining.
and then was gone.

Was it manifestly real—this bird—sufficient as, say, a sunrise is in Snyder's poetry? No,

It was like glancing at rough
Sketches tacked on a wall,
And all
so less than enough

Of gold on beaten wing,
I could not choose that one
Be done
as the finished thing.

It is cruel work to take Wilbur's diverting little poems, songs, sonnets, odes, his elaborate translations of French and occasionally Russian poetry, the little dialogue poems and riddles, and subject them to grim scrutiny for their historical content, their participation in the bitter ideological wars that have been waged since the end of World War II. And it would be pointless perversity to go in and find the poems irresponsible bits of fluff and evasion, had not the country itself rewarded it so profusely and so often through Wilbur's career. This was the music it preferred to those citizens who might offer instead some well-reasoned and frankly realistic portrayal of America's failings, its suffering spirit, its morass of unresolved conflicts, its tragedies as a rough new imperial power in the world. This soothing counselor appealed more to its ear simply because it offered such blandishments and flattery to its image as England's successor. With poets like these, no wonder the nation could squander all of its affections over the blatantly incompetent leadership of John F. Kennedy, another New Englander with charm, good looks, the reassuring poise that called forth images of a prince.

JEAN-PAUL AUXEMERY

FIVE POEMS

(Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth)

FUTILE ODE TO NOBODY

(in the manner of Alvaro de Campos)

Pessoa, you are nothing
but the dust kicked up in the street
by a gob of spit, the ash of a cigarette
flicked by a dilettante onto the deck
of a ship bound nowhere

Days and days ever turning the same way
Pessoa, days that double for days
given a single day how easy to build a theory of days
each exactly one and the same
each approaching the basic nothingness of this single day
flicked by the finger
of this man I picture
on the deck of a ship with no destination
fully aware of the nobody he is

The street is this stationary ship
and pedestrians walk its futile wake
and Pessoa, star of spittle in the dust
pseudonym for absence
I salute you

From *Le feu l'ombre*

NOMMO

their features were those of man and snake
their color green their bodies sleek and covered
with hair also green, their eyes
not unlike human eyes but
red in color and their tongues forked,
their breasts human breasts but
the lower portion of their bodies akin to the snake and
their arms supple and extending into
webbed hands, each equipped
with a double sex, each present
wherever humidity is present, each
having been born out of the damp
of their father's seed and copper is their excrement and
when the sky is faint with fog
the copper solidifies in the sun's
rays, for they are also light,
offspring of Amma and of earth,
and their word was the first word
word of the beginning

"In San Francisco Segalen"

In San Francisco Segalen acquires
the implements of Letters
in Chinatown:

the slate cup to thin the ink
the brush with bamboo shank
paper

No gods.
Only Characters having meaning.
Where are signs
is sense.

Atelier.

The traveller

wen
alone

ALLEGORY

Further West, the Mountain: either Jade or Smoke.
The resident of the Mountain resembles you: she roars:
Her hair is disheveled and covered with ornaments;
In her breast she nurtures a desire for the Five Mutilations:
A Desire she bears like the Child who will give her birth.

STELAE

The Shulamite captivated the second Adam,

Sophia lost and found

***

he shall be thy groom, Guinevere, do not surrender the sword

***

the narrow valley of oleander leads to the moist cave
Eurydice, Eurydice, snake

***

and my tree and my lake and my tree and my lake

Bod Yul, land of snows, go buck naked

***

En route:

to the south to the north of the river, willow shadow on the
banks:
the traveller's steps spell out the alphabet of trees;
the ashes of his body shall one day mingle with the river;
before it is consumed, time repeats.

(Wang Ngan-che, 1021–1036)

***

Es-Saouira:

the wind combing forth a spike of foam
against the grain of the wave

***

Uxmal under the storm of the esplanade
at the Square of the Nuns this snaky
path and to be at last able to say
masks you have now released us
from your cruel condescension

***

Empedokles-child-Reason

***

Tristan, her beauty renders all women fair

***

the peak "she who loveth silence"

***

knock every needle off its rocker

***

I have undone your loincloth Africa
I have ploughed your blunt beauty

***

the lioness waits in the dark—kiss her on the mouth

***

the end of Time—
crystal blackbird frantically crying out to the sky

***

As it reached the sea of the Cyclades
the ship shouldered its way
through the herd of waves

***

I see the mask I see myself facing myself
You look familiar

***

birdwing with a human face
argues with a sycamore sprig

***

laterite
soil without and men
with thirst

***

multiply persons

***

locate

***

in earth's vulva, lake of salt and wings

***

name is seed, number form

***

Disaster

CLICK-ROSE 2
(X–XIII & XV–XIX)

(Tr. from the French by Keith Waldrop)

X

Phone the s-
Ound technician
Rose O your stocking in runs
O your riffs Sonia your ostinato
To the edge of the page line by line without stepping on the
brake without stopping to love what you love
The poem puddle of oil the moon hypnotizes and sips or staves
in

XI

Rose zooming on the thing zeroing in on
Now we have to put up with close-up the grain of your skin
frightening so near without my being able to move close

XII

Uprooted uprooter
Do you last no hardly even the memory of you
Do you intensify the time you do last yes are you very hard yes
Rose-Rilke
Lashing about on the white of the page without leaving hell
Lashing out wilting then out with a violence before perishing
Within the space whose very divorce it is
You are interior and exterior moving me out of death's reach
You are room and window and view of the landscape and of
    indoors
By the uprooting window

XIII

Rose then hissing in space like a hot iron in water
Grandmother's neck-piece my gauge of the past

XV

To the poem I read in the making
Rose gorged with herself weeping in its nowhere
Contribute limpid efficient the words that are not there could have been there have been taken out would have been there if the words which will never be there are the words of the poem
Rose of November riding the rim all of an afternoon unseasonably hot terrifying which the others as close as they are have not been through

XVI

Rose aye (aye from I'm there)
Rose full margin tail-wind begins to blow and you haven't budged I cried out but you didn't budge you cried while I was taken off
There where everything is invisible everything normal but where something's visible there are changes
Where I'm going do you think it's there I'd like to go from where I am where I am is it where you are
Rose cooped up outdoors
There since there's no more comparable well then we know the great suffering since we can't we don't do all we could to suffer less (nobody strikes me harder no one could hurt me less than you) that's not the point we do all we can to be there which means we're honest

I'll cut us out with the blow-torch if you're game since you're the blow-torch rose carve out the void for an exit and while you're there blow all the images up nothing of the poem's structure will collapse
Is there something can't be blown yes the blow of blows you the image itself identifiable with everything in that sense I'm not afraid whereas as for you
The aye of there I am you assail it rose oxyhydrogen blow-torch
Always at your labors and at nobody's

XVII

That night I ran after you things you have to do you do quickly O rose right there
Rose O column of air the poem's structure (how learn to unwrite and will I get better how to come closer without writing)

XVIII

: The world spun round where I wasn't prepared
Relation to the region has changed my connection has become objective I spread things about I flatten life without commentary

Rose of unwriting finally the world spins without my wanting it to (so many years needed to quit wanting well yes to stop hoping) round about your light on the object which turns opens out abstracts (the light and the object so make those plural)

Change of light change of object it's the rule change of palette change of object and this light you are the only one who knew how not to project it hello sponge

XIX

Ronsard's has stuck its head out the door which doesn't shut Ronsard's sang

Rose T tea rose rose the rose thou not you I-beam rose abysm

Speak to men with the full volume of your *vous*-saying rose of the past speak to men since you are indivisible

The opposite of present is absent the opposite of absent is certain days the past idle is the opposite of the presence of the rose

EAST BERLIN SECTION

RODERICK IVERSON

INTRODUCTION

I stand in the high-ceilinged grey antechamber in line with the others waiting to pass into one of the narrow metal doorways where, from the other side of a glass partition, the East German official will stare with unblinking thoroughness at my passport, then raise his eyes to stare at me with slow unblinking clinical attention to assure himself that I and my photograph are the same person, then take my five West-Mark visa fee and buzz open the metal door at the further end of the cubicle through which I'll move on to the booth where I'll pay my mandatory currency exchange of twenty-five West-Marks to receive twenty-five East-Marks. I am in the Friedrichstrasse border crossing which I've reached by walking upstairs from the West Berlin U-Bahn (subway) stop which is on one of the two lines which run under East Berlin. It's December of 1988 and I'm going to the first truly public, officially sanctioned poetry reading in East Berlin. Up to this time readings have been only in private homes or within the sanctuary of churches, news of their occurrence being passed on by word of mouth. Tonight's reading is at the Kino Babylon, a movie theater not far from Alexanderplatz, and is sponsored by Aufbau Verlag, East Germany's government owned and operated press. All presses, all publications are government owned and operated in East Germany, though over the 1980s, a few samizdat-style magazines have arisen, printed in small editions where each page is either individually typed or a carbon copy, there being no general access to printing or photocopy machinery. I had resided in West Berlin from October of '85 through May of '86 (and over December of '86) and had over that time gone to a reading at an apartment in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district to hear the poets Rainer Schedlinski, Eberhard Haefner and Jan Faktor. The poets read in a doorway so that the fifty some people crammed into the two adjacent rooms could hear. The audience listened with painstaking care and the discussion after the reading (which lasted fully as long as the reading) was intense, disagreements over methods and forms of writing being voiced with at times astonishing moral anger, the poets being called on to justify what they were writing, how they were writing it. The church reading I attended in East Berlin's Pankow

district was likewise packed to overflowing, though the somewhat more public occasion involved less overt discussion.

The Kino Babylon reading was one change over the two intervening years. Another was that more of the East German poets I knew were now granted visas to read in the West (some, who had more than a few readings scheduled in the West, retained visas which permitted them to cross the border at any time). Another was that those of us holding western passports could now cross to East Berlin at midnight on our one-day visas, rather than, as previously, only after 7:00 a.m. Even before the astounding events of this past summer and autumn (I write now in December of '89) changes were taking place in East Germany. Changes are now occurring there with such rapidity that it is vain to speculate on what the future will bring. I remained in Berlin through May of '89.

Though I've made this border crossing many times, it's always somewhat strange. And to come out of the Friedrichstrasse crossing into the streets of East Berlin is to enter a grey, sober, neonless place which feels as though one has passed through a time machine to an earlier epoch. Police watch-booths with tinted windows interrupt the sidewalks of Unter den Linden; virtually all the cars are the same GDR-made compact of a vaguely '50s design; by night, away from the downtown area, the streetlights are scarcely bright enough to read a map by. I get to Kino Babylon before 1:00 a.m., in time to hear a stage band play, to hear Stefan Döring read, to hear Bert Papenfuss-Gorek read accompanied by a group of classically-trained punk musicians called Die Verbrechern (The Criminals), as well as a few other poets. The event is festive and goes on until 4:00 a.m. As the management is trying to close, two men from the audience launch into this impromptu Brechtian agitprop dialogue which is deeply satirical, outrageously funny and occasionally acrobatic. They continue through the house lights being turned off. The crowd loves it.

My involvement with East German poetry stems from my getting to know a number of poets in East Berlin over the spring of 1986 whose work I found more interesting and vital than what I'd come across in West Berlin. My decision to translate their works stems both from a personal curiosity which visualizes translation as a coherent mode of reading and from a sense that the work of these poets merits exposure to our reading public. Sine that time I've gathered poems of some thirty East German poets whom I plan to publish in an anthology. The five poets whose work appears here are less members of any defined literary movement than they are representatives of a generation's vanguard. The oldest among them is thirty-five years old and they share a sense of working within a literary terrain whish is distinct from what has been called "the middle generation" of East German poets (those now in their fifties, foremost among whom are

Karl Mickel, Sara Kirsch, and Heinz Czechowski). There is a sense of moving away from the more classical intentions of that generation. Rainer Schedlinski (born in 1956), who edits the samizdat-style journal of theoretical writings, *ariadnefabrik,* states in a 1986 interview with Egmont Hesse: "Yes, particularly in these last few years in East Berlin poetry there's been a lot of experimentation toward thinking things anew, into another language. . .Papenfuss dismantles language into the smallest mnemonic unities which, mutually purged from the text, then permit a new arrangement. With Döring, digitalized, dialectical chain reactions occur by which one word destroys the one next to it. Koziol works with the mechanism of figurative language."

Over the 1980s these poets, along with others, published their poems largely in a few "underground" samizdat-style magazines, most notably, *Mikado* and *schaden* (which later became *verwendung).* 1985 saw the publication in West Germany of a sizable anthology of younger East German poets *(Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung,* Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln, Sascha Anderson & Elke Erb, eds.), and 1988 saw the publication, again in West Germany, of *Sprache & Antwort* (S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, Egmont Hesse, ed.), which bears the subtitle "Voices and Texts of Another Literature from the GDR" and which contains poems and interviews from ten younger East German poets, among whom are the five I present here.

In speaking with East German poets about how their poetry functioned in their world, one of the things mentioned was that, on account of all media being controlled by the government, poetry, on one level, took on a function of conveying "the news," in a literal sense of communicating the facts of things that had happened. Another was a factor resulting from a long habituation to censorship: on one hand, certain things could be talked about only implication or calculated uses of *silence,* and on the other hand, a kind of inner self-censorship which becomes only half-conscious. Schedlinski speaks out against this in the same *Sprache & Antwort* interview I cited above:

> There is no discourse of transformation that does not leave off in order to define itself by way of immediate affirmation. It alienates itself. . .I mean that art has responsibility in face of those without speech, not to the required but to the existing opposite. It is not a matter of formulating the rupture, but rather of formulating the broken speech itself; not a matter of conversing with, but rather of articulating the silence, somewhat like the man who was passing out handbills and when the police arrested him and remarked that there was nothing written on the handbills so why was he distributing black

pages, he'd answered: so that everybody would know it." (In 1988 Aufbau Verlag published a book of Schedlinski's poems, *die rationen des ja un des nein.)*

The first time I visited Ulrich Zieger in his East Berlin apartment I noted the photograph of Ezra Pound, which was the single object to occupy one entire wall, as well as the sizable collection of rock-and-roll records. Although he couldn't really speak English, he could recite from memory sections of Pound's *Cantos*. A co-editor of *verwendung,* he was working in theaters as actor, stage manager, director. It was Zieger who conveyed to me early in '89 that the conservative position of their then current government was absurd and patently impractical, above all because of the upcoming 1992 EEC trading merger which would remove the West from East Germany as a marketplace for their industrial products. People, he said, had gone along with it out of habit, out of fear.

Events have since changed more rapidly than either of us could have foreseen. Zieger had for some years been working on a magnum opus cyclus of poems entitled "1965" which centers around the death, in that years, of a childhood friend (Zieger was then four years old). Echoing Pound, as well as Artaud and Bataille, the cyclus explores various typologies outwards from a childhood in a GDR country town. Having finished this project, Zieger, in April '89 while returning from a reading he gave in Munich (West Germany), stepped off the train in West Berlin and stayed. The move had been planned but had to be kept secret from the other GDR poets he traveled with to prevent their being implicated. It was really marvelous hanging out with Ulrich those first weeks he was in the West, witnessing his enthusiasm. There has been, in West Berlin, a sizable community of previous East Berliners. Rainer Schedlinski once lamented to me as we sat in a Schönhauser Alle cafe (East Berlin) which had been one of their literary hang-outs that he now had more of his friends in the West than here where we were.

Among his peers, Bert Papenfuss-Gorek is considered the most consistently innovative poet. A wry man who smiles easily, Papenfuss-Gorek has been working with rock bands over the recent years and has a long time engagement with Celtic mythology. Praised by Karl Mickel as a master of non-syntactical grammar, Papenfuss-Gorek writes verse which is often chaffing and sprinkled with neologisms (which are not uncommon in German poetry) and argot of various historical periods and languages. In 1988 his book, *dreizehntanz,* appeared from Aufbau Verlag with introductions by Karl Mickel and by Ernst Jandal. In regard to the ongoing cyclus entitled *TrakTat zum ABER* (portions of which are translated here), he says in a *Sprache & Antwort* interview with Egmont Hesse:

> I have always written additional texts to it and always strictly knew that these texts had to be in the treatise ("Traktat"), but see now for the first time, after four or five years of clarity, what these texts are for. These are texts which are insolent and for which a formal boundary is erected for the active expressing of feeling. Formally I proceed no further, and then there's a crossing over of a boundary, insolence or something of that sort: but which is not constructional but rather provocational, and which attempts, right up to that boundary, to enact a crossing of that same boundary, but that, however, is the termination, the closure.

Hesse asks him about political engagement. "It hasn't lessened," he replies, "but hasn't increased from what it was at the beginning, it's not a political poem in the sense that. . .the political poem comes to terms with some aspect of the social-political concern and sees, at first, only these concerns and establishes a relationship between the elements. For me, however, inner processes arise out of subjective concerns which are quashed somehow in the social processes and are turned back on the individual from the social-political power structure. For that reason, texts which are, on one hand, very subjective, are, on the other hand, engaged politically, [and] that engagement is naturally radical, it couldn't be any other way. . .that inclines everything toward making an extremely anarchistic impression, but. . .I don't think that I'm an anarchist in the ordinary sense. . ."

Stefan Döring was born in 1954 in Oranienburg and studied electronics in Dresden. He worked for a time as a developmental engineer in medical electronics, then came to East Berlin in 1980, where he has resided since. Aside from publication in the above mentioned *ariadnefabrik, schaden,* and the *Berührung*. . . and *Sprache & Antwort* anthologies, his poems have appeared in the *Luchterhand Yearbook of Poetry* which is published annually in West Germany. A kind, sometimes quiet man, Döring writes a verse which combines the dense impactedness of "cut-up" experimentations with the concreteness of psychological minimalism.

Andreas Koziol (born 1957), a co-editor of *verwendung,* is a soft-spoken somewhat hermetic man who works all night and sleeps during the day at the Prenzlauer Berg apartment that he shares with his wife and their pet rabbit. (All of these five poets, in fact, live in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district, at least according to my most recent information, except, *now,* Zieger.) I passed a couple of extremely pleasant midnight-to-morning periods with Koziol there, drinking tea and talking. He had broken off a university program in theology in order to work more fully at writing. Leading a

somewhat monastic life in his chambers, he is the sort of person who is not comfortable in public places. "What is writing other than a balancing act on a rope which swings between seriousness and play? Would one actually write if one had something to say?" he asks in a *Sprache & Antwort* interview. His poetry and his thinking have their site within a playful seriousness and a serious playfulness. From within this world of blurring distinctions and tendrils of woven stratagem, he once proposed to me in all seriousness that I translate his poems "without contents." As a further example of a curious finesse in the simultaneity of satire and sobriety, I cite a later portion of Koziol's interview with Egmont Hesse:

> Now, where the question about the sense of poetry and why it registers as more obscure than its interpretation of life is situated on the razor's edge, it's completely up to each person to give a piece of their mind to the general tribal experience, or to what the sick in want of impersonal meaning are otherwise still deprived of. In regards to the dangers of obscuration I have to add that the imputed hail of ideologically compatible characteristics, which always meet so beautifully in the blackness, has fallen on me as from all clouds, leaving me to myself.

East Berlin, and all of East Germany, will now, of course, never be the same. I leave you with a quote from Rainer Schedlinski: "The person who knows how things will proceed from here is a person who is not completely informed. . ."

ADDENDUM:

Jürgen Habermas states, "Very rarely has the jubilation of a revolution become silent so quickly as in Germany after the 9th of November, 1989." This agrees with my own perception, though it was initially startling, when I returned to East Berlin in March of this year (1990), to ask these people, Well, what's been happening? What's the news? to be answered by, Not much, or, Things are pretty much the same in my own life.

One of the things I'd enjoyed about the DDR previously had been a certain shyness in the people. The kid I fell into talking with must have known I wasn't DDRian, I know he did, he later, after we got to know each other, wanted to buy a pack of Prince, which I was smoking, from me; this was on the train to Leipzig—my point is simply that it was radically apparent that I was from *elsewhere* and he made absolutely no issue about it, asked not one leading question which would expose a curiosity, simply

conversed within the conversational typologies of the moment; I took this to be a politeness and it flatters a certain imagination I have about peoples' possible humanness, as well as encourages my ease in intercoursing with persons to whose culture I am alien. This quality was still there after the *Mauereröffnung*, as with the elderly man who with his plump teen-age daughter shared our table at the *Venezia* on Schönhauser Allee and for whom we appeared, for the first forty-five minutes, to be invisible, then, when we began to speak, exhibited a similar "politeness," a similar unpresupposing geniality. We finally got round to asking him what he thought about the recent events in Berlin (particularly visible had been the thousands of DDRers coming to the city's west and going bananas over bananas, and all other forms of previously unobtainable commodities. He was visibly embarrassed for his country (wo)men and said he'd only been over *(drüben)* once over the five months since November 9 and that was to visit a museum in Dahlem which he'd particularly enjoyed visiting as a child. He had gone with his daughter, and, as she'd wanted to see Kleist's grave in Wahnsee, he'd gone along there with her as well.

The poetry Samisdats are finished. The opening up of the main stream press usurped their function—the weeklies can publish the same stuff cheaper and with wider distribution. The same thing has happened in Czechoslovakia, as Tomas Kafka explained to us regarding his *QASNAK* which will not likely see another issue. Koziol, Schedlinski, and Egmont Hesse have formed a new press which they've called Verlag Galrev, which is completing Koziol's *Bestiarium*, a series of portraits of figures in the DDR literary world. May 1990 saw the completion of the Egmont Hesse-edited *Solitüden* (edition qwert zui opü), a translation of Bob Kaufman's *Solitudes Crowded With Loneliness* by thirteen DDR poets, among whom are the seven I present here. Before last year the Egmont Hesses of East Germany could produce their Samisdat magazines only if the editions did not exceed 250 copies each. Even though they'd planned the Kaufman book to be hard bound (the project was generously funded by Christa Wolf) they still could only figure on making 250 copies without the likelihood of repercussions. Visualizing the thaw they went ahead and made 300 copies plus 100 author's copies. Hesse explained that, now, the production would be economically impossible: hand set, paper like I've never seen: overnight everything's become photo offset. Galrev has an office downtown; Schedlinski has a word processor and printer in his living room and drives a fat Japanese car; Papenfuss-Gorek went to Ireland for a month; Eberhard Häfner's wife, the painter Magdelena Häfner, had an exhibition in Paris and on the money from that she and Eberhard went to Scotland for six weeks. The poet Durs Grünbein described that the change first hit him as he was walking home from work one day and saw the election poster on his front door: BACK TO THE FUTURE.

The 18 March election was, of course, vividly manipulated by the DDR's economically more powerful brother, interlocked with many DDRians' "grass is always greener on the other. . ." sense, e.g. Western packaged foods, now available in East German stores at much higher prices than domestically made correlatives, far outsell what is basically the same hunk of chicken, the same slab of cheese. And I wonder what the *Mauereröffnung* represents a failure of. Of totalitarianism, in the anti-communist view of it, in any case, of the world civil war which began in 1917. Habermas, in the same writing I cited above (*Die nachholende Revolution*, edition suhrkamp, Frankfurt, March 1990), describes, adjacent this view, what he calls a *post-modern critique of reason* view, which witnesses the event as in that spirit of the French Revolution in which the masses rise up: they announce "the revolutionary breakdown of bureaucratic socialism, an extension of the Modern—the spirit of the occident hauls in the east." Habermas goes on to narrate the *liberal meaning* which sees state socialism as the last form of totalitarian dominion in Europe, thus the end of an epoch which began with fascism. In the view of the anti-communists, socialism was unhealthy from its inception. For the liberals, everything that was useful in socialism has been embodied in the social-democratic era. "Thus, with the liquidation of East European state socialism, have the sources from which the West European left gleaned its theoretical stimulus and its normative orientation likewise dried up? The disappointed Biermann, whose talent toward utopia is shrouded in melancholy these days, answers: 'Pass me the shovel. Let's bury the little carcass. Even Christ himself first had to be under the dirt for three days before he could pull his stunt: on to the Resurrection!' (*Die Zeit*, March 2, 1990)." (Habermas, *op. cit.* p. 188).

Wolf Biermann, who was expelled from the DDR in 1976 on account of the government-critical content of his poems and folk songs, emblemizes an important turning point in DDR literary history and it would be useful to briefly sketch that.

The first five years after World War II, East Germany made a new beginning under the "auspices" of anti-fascism. Thereafter, up to 1953, there was, we could say, a conscious attempt to manipulate culture by means of ideology. After Stalin's death, in '53, there was a period of general uncertainty which led, in the later part of that decade, to a decided attempt to overcome the gap which separated the writers from the workers. This "Bitterfeld Way" was largely unsuccessful (Christa Wolf's novel, *Divided Sky*, stems from the conflicts of this period). A relaxation of government stricture through the early and mid-sixties brought into pre-eminence those writers known as the "middle generation" (Sarah Kirsch, who also left when Biermann did, Volker Braun, Heiner Müller, Christa Wolf; an admirable presentation of the work of the poets of this generation appears in Michael Hamburger's 1970 *East German Poetry)*. The '70s were a time of searching

for new means of expression while some, particularly among the painters, remained within the social-moral consistency of social realism. Until the crackdown in 1976. Not too many years later saw another loosening up. If I may attempt to generalize very schematically about a complex culture by referring to another art form I will cite the 1983 comment: "Despite a recent tendency towards melancholy and mysticism, a new generation of rock artists is characterized by boldness, vitality, and wit." *(Rockszene DDR. Aspekte eine Massenkultur in Sozialismus.* Olaf Leitner. Reinbek. Rowahlt. 1983).

When I asked Jan Faktor for poems of his in 1986, he refused, saying he didn't believe that people in the United States could understand what they there were doing with their poetry (though he did later relent and sent a long Brechtian piece which Anselm Hollo translated and published in *Exquisite Corpse).*

Faktor's comment needs to be taken seriously. One American publisher I sent a sizable body of East German poetry to sent it back with a note saying that if this was what was happening in East German poetry it was cynical, negative and depressing. One major difference between this generation of DDR poets and the one immediately preceding it is that they grew up in a less strictured social topology and were thus permitted to occupy a range of subjectivity which it was not "politically correct" for the middle generation to do. Thus you will find poems (not in this selection!) about the meaningless of life, for example. Because we ourselves are, willy-nilly, arterial inheritors, or at least descendents of, that 1950s so-called Beat disaffection, (i.e. "The Many Loves of Dobbie Gillis") and have also lived for many decades with at least a "Cafe Society" version of popularized existentialism, the DDR voices which enhance these emotional terrains are not interesting to us. Likewise, the DDR poets have read with care many of America's best writers, and the influence shows. If it were only a matter of the juice one gets from popping the bubbles of a fake realism by some kind of negative transcendence ("the androgyne who hates the simulacrum/ Bob Dylan") the poetry would be *boring.*

The Biermann case is particularly revealing (of a general attitude in the middle generation) in that he *believed* in socialism. Biermann moved from Hamburg to East Berlin in the '50s in order to be there. During the time he was in prison before being "allowed" to go on the concert tour to the west, after which the gate was shut, his bootlegged poems and songs were read voraciously by his compatriots: his Brechtian critical edge was intolerable to the regime.

Brandenburger Tor becomes a symbolic gate between the east and the west (unless, of course, you go by way of the Pacific). And is also literally a gate. As Clayton Eshleman pointed out in his essay on Hungarian poetry *(Sulfur 22),* the life situation in the Eastern Block countries is so radically

different from what ours is "out here on the periphery" as Jim Morrison says, that it is likely that we are not equipped to effectively & coherently imagine what it is like. This is what Jan Faktor knew.

Translation is a problem and a distance. I have no Russian: I can imagine and feel but not really, words through words, or syntactically, *see* the presence of Klebnikov in Eberhard Häfner's verse. And, as Mitch Cohen has pointed out, the Bach-like intricacy of Döring's constructions do not lend themselves to the English language because the extreme alliteration cannot be maintained, multiple meanings and neologistics do not cross well, and all the words which in German begin with "ent-" (which Döring uses as a recurrent pedal point in the musicality of . . . *between haste and deceit)* can't be rescued.

It would be a vanity on my part if I didn't publish my thanks to Achim Schweikard, Mary Angeline, Scott Thompson, and Mitch Cohen, without whom none of this would have gotten off the ground.

Elke Erb is a powerhouse, an extremely genial woman, and an energetic communicator. The recent years have seen the publication of a large book of her Marina Tsvetaeva translations, accompanied by a 130 page commentary, of her translation of a 13th Century Romance from the Georgian (Georgian, although spoken in Georgia, which is in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, is a language whose most visible root is Arabic), of anthologies she's edited, of, most recently, her book, *Kastanienallee. Texte und Kommentare* (Aufbau Verlag, Berlin und Weimar, 1989). The latter is a series of poems written over the early 1980s which Erb wrote "commentaries" to over the late 1980s. "Warning," translated here, is from this book. It would appear that, in "Warning," Ms. Erb takes a position more or less the polar opposite of that of Mr. Gary Snyder in regards to relations between humans and animals (I am thinking of the lecture Snyder gave with James Hillman in 1982). Erb has been and continues to be radically supportive of the work of other poets; it was Elke who encouraged Stefan Döring to translate poems from the 19th Century Georgian, which currently occupies him.

Eberhard Häfner is not interested in the reunification because he never thought of himself as German. He comes from Thüringen, Erfurt, to name the Ort, and, as is known, Thüringen was stormed by Prussia in the later 19th Century and forced into a slave membership in Wilhelminian times. The language he first learned is likewise rather different; it's an offshoot of a Sachsen variant which permitted Eberhard, when he was a child and the American soldiers occupied his village, to understand everything they were saying. He explained to me how the Celts migrated north from the Danube basin because of a peculiar chemical reaction which occurred between their skin and salt in the air. Mr. Häfner has the extremely pleasing quality

of being able to rectify my slips of the tongue and mind (when I'm speaking German my non-memory will sometimes substitute one word for another word which does not apply to the given context) by etymological correspondences. I like to think of him as a "high stepper." Thüringen is renowned, historically and otherwise, for its toys and glassware. He believes, with Mayakovsky, that once he writes his poems they no longer belong to him.

RAINER SCHEDLINSKI

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the German by Roderick Iverson)

ordinary and unnoticed
like the walls of the school yard
the certainty rests
over the neighborhoods
& the eyes ingrown
in all first floor windows
the traps of silence, my friend

you travel wretched distances
someone has counted your steps in the snow
& this mute certainty
is mother & murderer to things
& all these mute enactments
are an extended past
are an extended eternity cult

& beneath the domes of nothingness
reigns the power of space
& it is the certainty of everything
being thoroughly established
my friend, the schizo/peacock's eye
gave to one site the name corner
heater or bermuda triangle

the hours
which a brain of sand counts
in the starved corners of devotion
the words are passing judgment
on your memory, things
speak
from the heavy coffins of emptiness
which are lodged among the ordinary
localities speak from the distance of an inner barrenness
like the persuasive moon of remembrance & of going blind
the images die away to symbols
on the flags of silent lands
in you, mon dieu
the streetcar enacts its absurd awkwardness
& the suave dogs of morning
return to their nation

ULRICH ZIEGER

TWO POEMS *from 1965*

(Tr. from the German by Roderick Iverson)

(7)

that it not become free:
to hear and to breathe:
this is the tale of woe of the north
which has come out of the south
bits and bridles beneath the lattice weave
which a horse still had
most had a pale yellow, a dun
most still had a bird's nest

between ourselves we wore
our hair cropped close
for the sake of our shirt collars
when they'd been linen
our necks were similar
to the scale of the wounds
our feet revealed

that it not become free
for our sake
that it does not triumph
and just as the coming day
would gather in my comrade
so what we took for our mutually fragile
steady continuing
would not be put aside: we weren't released
beneath our toenails match stick
balls rolled from gooseberry leaves
for fear that the horses would bag us into tiredness

this is the tale of woe of the way
    lest it come over us
    soon after extinguishing the lodestars
    for us the stones always remained
he who went with us
named tender names:

white breads as they're baked around Easter
violins of the earth . . .
    o that no one would have risked it
    to glance up for a respite
    near the watering cans
    so to break off the laboriousness
of our remaining urgency:
voices of the middle cried out

    to breathe and to hear:
    on our necks the moon
and the gnawing entreaty to not now grow cold
to not endanger the night work
of navigation's black thoughts
    there: the play
    there: the fern is scorn
    and thus its speech
that not one rise to become free
that it would have seized hold of mother
and the secret decisions
sanatoriums adjacent the primary streaming

o we owed everything to you
you and the landscapes
which are spread out between the south and the north
their fadedness their still more faded lights:
    the right to a daily schnapps
    the conversation with the riders
    of death in the hour before the uprising
in addition to refilling your hands with sand
the maidens came at your bidding
into the washroom

that the anguish we've turned away from
doesn't ensnare you:
    that it not become free
    to have been able
    to embed itself in the mountain
    the branches were even more thickly
    acquiescent in this destitution
than had been suspected
the breathing and hearing subside and to hear and to breathe:

(18)

Measure's greater strictness
is only the day shift of the dead
more time consuming & thornier of fury
are the streets of he who drinks

else I wanted to have sung the runway
of your pirouette, of your return greyeyes
the throwing of stones the banner
of a comprisable building crystal

and my force field is nothing
but surgical dressing iodine iodizing
the guardian of the sung round
. . . ah

BERT PAPENFUSS-GOREK

THREE POEMS
and an excerpt from
ARIANRHOD FROM THE OVERDOSE

misfortunate am i, a ruffian
& anything but devoted
your wallpaper is mottled
& so your coming to terms
overshadows necessity
with the inevitable & with work
your malice is obstinate greed
my cock no board of directors
the proofs are stilettoes
pain's limit is past overdue
confidence is true to loveliness
the appointments can stay away
the moon nearly full, pants down
prostitution, depending on the torque, hard
thought's thanks is disgust, overpowering
curiosity is contemplating meat inspection
sects stink of safety
finally i want to end it
bite me off, bespectacled
sock it to me thick with rivets
in the sewer we're safe
from betrayal by perfect facts
poems that overflow with pride
changes that execute themselves
theme:
shops damaged & likewise the hatches
title:
sewage in my counter-presence

quietness that in scorn capsizes
friendship which lays itself aside
clod which, ploughed high, bails out
help which writes an article
shame which, having funds, withers away
suppose something comes to me
then results which pass by
prince of a fellow, clumsy slick dwarf
notice, that values itself
we've escaped the death threat
tell me, what's up with you
when your love's been interrupted
murders, that can be of service
we should've cut ourselves off from that
let greetings pass between us
cares, that care for each other
jealously, that troubles itself over us
come, ore, let yourself be smelted
I'll cover for you while you lie
informations, that inform themselves
I cannot name my name
questions, dull-headed & shrewd enough
to find out what preceded them
theme:
at least my life is a play on words
title:
turn it up & break it out

mary shelley, i love only you
& perhaps book blurbs also
superficially at the highest level

& my proficient elves naturally
my mother characteristically
my ex, in vain, even more
i'm only a clone of myself
& my love is not of this world
swollen face, fat thighs, etc.
pale cheeks, wet snatches, relatively
lascivious mouths, agile fingers
if i remember rightly
charms that led me further on
as I was always wanting out of myself
shitty bickering that tore me out
glory that didn't break loose
was the last thing that i wanted
death, always not quite lived out
precise embryologists my enemies
acrobats, better people, men
to be a man, friendly, beautiful & strong
austere, lax, astonished, bored
nevertheless, i am: self is but that
& in the little back room, mary, highest self
theme:
you always love the cat in the bag
title:
the wave's good will consists of froth

[Translated by Roderick Iverson]

from: *arianrhod from the overdose*

to spare me further torture, I will spare nothing
the time was in its time unleashed, something was building up
the light was grey, lightning blitzed, what sought itself, lost itself
inconsolation pronounced a toast, that hoped for change, soused
sinews bursting, hearts breaking, the young opposition shat itself
the underground went under, instead enough to go to ground
feely chatter roared in the broth, filthy blockage nipped the arse off
what was left to scrape together, ran dry, law and order reigned again
those discharged were captured, laws carried through
what arose was only refried grease, the bass and the pitch were missing
arianrhod raised an eyebrow and chop: seat and cunt began to itch
she bore something and ran away, I fell for her to befall
the time was in a trice spellbound, what waned, was powerless to pick up
& though the epic was underway, a poem was slotted in
to talk it away will be hard, but someone must really rip it open
because I don't love my audience, I'll take it on myself to take it on

before getting up comes no more winter

before us here the shit hits the fan
I'd really rather stay here
with my nearest fears
& fleeting longings
I have, which was difficult, thought out an error
first it goes to teasingly, & secondly
as you think with one fell swoop
(8.2. '88)
I had the feeling, that it snowed, because I slept

admitted, not my shallowest, but one, that hurts
& 'cos it's not deep enough, psychosomatic penalty hovers

mercy, arianrhod, by that which you love, I don't want to
blackmail you, but
truly I wrote only for you, & already I brought down disaster
what I could have stopped happening, came to pass; 22 inmates
kicked the bucket
they broke down on 8.2. '88, 5 past 8 in the attempt to underfly
the storm '
bitchbride, you who raise your hackles, to give life, you take it
nonetheless constantly
your dylan, who swam ahead, or lleu, whom you cursed threefold
or phil, who with the boozing at the same time also gave up life
mighty sister, for my sake I name your for your sake virgin
here is a further poem, to give you in appeasement a piece of my
mind

on imperceptible guard

stand at the sea, stagnate; piss in it
disciplined and under surveillance
stirrings, that clean out
beachnazis, pissed

I love that maria
for whom it's worth it, to be ashamed
I say it in bad terms, I make no distinction
& all her schemeful forgeries for sure too, still

my social engagement screams, curls up and denies itself
aids here, gorbachev there, open my gob, out comes love
like it should too—, the skinheads on the other hand force me to
think
I'd really like to go to football, to bucket down beer and mull it
over
essential humanity is silent & sends nature packing
with or without, as far as possible without, shrieking, set phrases &
padding
shout at each other shut, zeal pacifies patronage
I need one neither in the kisser, nor below the belt
as poem you can hardly call this at all

stefan döring would say, I stop short of the model-lyric
he has a good laugh, but what shall I kindle now
my social engagement screams, rejects, curls up and keeps silence
(9.2. '88)
a randy theme, hateful to me, pop, when you simplify
an idea full of mockery, that withers; I will not sign anything
it's hard enough for me, to issue my texts as my own
I have feelings, that make me sorry, hurt me deep to the core
cheat & shock in the bed of a bitch, illusion the only illumination
who wants to have to feel it, who empathizes freely with it
penny-dreadful blend of a tense peeping tom, who relaxes in spirit
strung in a cultural politics, that stands to attention, at the ready
arianrhod, I don't reproach you at all, but; my sweet little thing
I have tried here to write down, what they expect that way from
me:

[Translated by Karen Margolis]

STEFAN DORING

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the German by Mitch Cohen and Roderick Iverson)

. . .BETWEEN HASTE AND DECEIT

the distances between us
null
& for no one to conquer
we've gone away for each other
the estrangements alongside us
transient
& for no one to cast off
we're bankrupt within each other
the falling away of boúndaries between us
sober
& by no one to be limited
we're beside ourselves with each other
the abstinence we have
capable
& to be arranged by no one
we've fallen back against each other
the experiences we have together
addictive
& dependent on no one
we're known from each other
the deprivations opposing us
proper
& to no avail
we're deceptive through each other
the expectations upon us
serious
& arbitrary
we're no difference to each other

the depreciations passing through us
    chaste
        & for no one
the disillusionments with ourselves
    light
the disembodiment within us

SILENCE THE REST, AWAKENING

the noise numbs me, I fall asleep
impressions hollow me out, a stammering
ridicules, languishes with heeding mouth
what suits you comes across, incongruous
you see only what you savor, devoured
you add yourself to what contrives
abra your world collapses with you
all the world falls apart from each of us
the way you fleetingly tower up the wreckage
laying your little tower casually in ruins
you've ground your garbage to make your grist
the haughtiness and the highs of the moment
the way you fetter yourself, stilting proudly forward
before your eyes the goal of leaving something behind
staying, embodied, wilting substance
you repeat yourself, lose yourself
the festering and the delicacy of the moment.
but surely my overseer takes note of me
that I indenture myself properly
and not let fly our bird in the hand
our stinginess leaves no room for doubt
keeping on as though something would happen
seeking out our good-natured neighbors
who leave us be, receive, coming
to tell them how it would have been.

artifacts tease the objects too around us
one can look things almost in the eye
if we only stare at them steadily enough
we come as soon as truly to the point
to close, when then, from if to then
enclosing ourselves as wards in absurdity.
while we know that it's insoluble
do without it much mattering
wonder whether that's what it's coming to
that everything reduces to everything, no remainder
only silence the rest to the end awakening

ANDREAS KOZIOL

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the German by Roderick Iverson)

UNTITLED

that which once again befalls the heavens, while you
smash up your most casual and liquid desires, he,

with a tinge of persecution mania, denies the perplexing
if not bizarre resemblance to your eyes, whether or not

we attain that castle in the air would be left undecided
because any reason for ascension at best undermines us

so we have the void beneath us like a free space that
fills itself superfluously, but only with materials

for departure. let us remain silent at the crest of our
displacements
and more than clearly leave them the foam on the outskirts of
our

feelings. already like an echo on the awkward stiffness
that follows contentiousness, roses blossom between my joints.

how's it going with the escapist impulses? so lala. bird in the
ha ha hand's the quotation of a set anxiety's span which will

leave you relieved if you join in undertaking what you stealthily
overstepped so as not to invade. from the start, emotional

betrayal belongs to confession, right next to tenderness,
converted (from conversation) into arrogance. though before

all things, wonder contains a measure of dismay. what remains
that is not comprehended turns out to be inclined to joke

within the so-called loss of face and is swallowed, rubbed off,
again, one on one. only you muse deathly pale on a solution like

it is in the book, to stuff the riddle into its coffin. who's
talking about mental victory? emergence is everything.

latest version: the predicament acts as a frame around an
emblem of the futility of drawing anything from poems

except for the death masks

THE ANGEL OF THE SITUATION

he crouches on the balls of his feet at the base
of an escalator that leads up to the museum of
Western-Eastern boredom. a book has grown from
his shoulder blades—the winds of all utopias
leaf through its pages. he himself cannot grasp
the text which he carries without reaching up
behind himself with his hands. from his finger-
nails burns the gas of dreams from a world which
his imagination no longer suppresses, a throng of
clouds that swarm up to the heaven of centralized
fictions. within himself he cries out from a thirst
for knowledge and from pain. the echo comes, a
childish report, through his rump and into the old
world, and, headed with musical brilliance toward

the sunlight, it blanches. its charm overpowers him and he falls on his face, on that stamp which renders speechless and impermissible the seed of his two-fold sex. now he grounds himself in time's vicious circle in order to eat from the foundation of his desire for paradise which, following the formal laws of a cannibalistic god, becomes visible with the appearance of each stone which lies in his way to hinder him.

ELKE ERB

TEXT AND COMMENTARY

(Tr. from the German by Roderick Iverson)

WARNING

Murderer Master Suspicion
The enemy is outside
This Supremacy Masquerade
This Dictatorship

1978/82

Perhaps I succeed in it, in this text,

which seems to reject interpretation,
since, become shape, it stands there
like a red deer which has leapt from the forest,

which hasn't remained speech, which encloses speech in itself,
doesn't speak out from an unexpressed trace,
doesn't flare up towards speech with a resounding tone
of language, doesn't invite, remains for itself,

although, and precisely because of this,
its consistency is tangible
as that of direct speech,

in the way that someone speaks in thought,
speaks preceding themself, beyond themself,
pronounces to themself what passes through their mind,

begins with immediacy, proceeds logically,
and ends in the same manner,
a speaking very much to be taken as true
which completes something, clarifies something,
indicates a direction,

and its consistency is its clarity,
its train of thought which is untroubled
by objections, its immediacy, its unspoiled calm
its pure word, and the wording of its text
which in each aural intensity (each zone)
is open to quiet recitation.

To perceive it is to realize it,
and it is, moreover, all the same
whether one grasps the sense of it or not,
that to perceive its truth, clarity, immediacy,
calm, consistency, and shape
means to presuppose its causes as groundwork.

Since it affects me as a shape
so embodied and present,
I suppose, being entangled
in its perception, that I am
obliterating it when I apply myself
to its causes, as if it could
begrudge a dissecting of its groundwork;

I mean, to have to interpret it,
to have to graft dictums on to the silence of it
when I—interpret its groundwork:
and thus I instigate a two-fold confusion;

it's certain that I depart from its perception
if I am perceiving something else,
but why do I presume that that would be its interpretation?
and how is it that I so naively assume
that to interpret would be to analyze and vice versa,
and that both of these activities might be devastating?

—Along the course which this clarification has now taken
what I wanted to present
was really only the embarrassment of the commentator
in face of the text,

to say
that that would be no more than decent,

and thus to protest
against that whirling assertion which shrinks

from no repetition

that a poem would be finally or generally inaccessible
(aha! the clattering of "Unauthorized Personnel"
between *finally* and *generally*
—and did they come by bus, by car, or in a tank?),

on account of its presumed irrationality —

an assertion which either promotes the poem
as a beatific presence to be enshrined
(in reality, however, this alienates
the poem—of all things!—from the human);

or else excludes the understanding,
as if understanding weren't human,

and with this operation degrades the human
to the level of a destructive predatory animal
that conceals its own act of thievery (the Bank!)
and mirrors its own kept-in-reserve soul

in the feigned self-robbery of the poem,

which the predatory animal opportunely, snarling,
or, yes, sated, alludes to as encoding.

I wanted to say,
before my train of thought carried me off
(and all these concerns dissolved into thin air like
phantoms):

It's mere decency
when a person is fearful,
if not somewhat in awe of what's referred to
as the Actualization of the Creative.

And with my introductory "Perhaps I succeed in it"
I wanted to enter into the attempt
to simultaneously perceive the poem
and take its non-poem, its origin,
and its design into consideration:

Murderer Master Suspicion
The enemy is not outside
The enemy is none other
than your racapity (crossed out)
Not the secondhand depravity
not what makes things unrecognizable
not this Masquerade Supremacy
your predator breath (last three lines
crossed out together)
not this Supremacy Masquerade
this dictatorship of misfortune
not the lie, not the bicycle, not the beating heart (inserted
not anybody, not the line)

The enemy is none other
than your rapacity
One day it will come to light
You have always been the secret Master,
the actual Murderer,
your miserable greed (crossed out)
chased by fear, your poor repressed
never-satisfied greed, this betrayed nun, one day
it will come to light

Then I'll shit on everything that makes you cry,
because you're gorging yourself.

What did I have against this text?
I recall there was a time I woke full of rage and wrote something down—was it that?—
and, in the writing, held on to my (so painfully recalled) youthful outbursts of rage ("You slimy toad!", etc.),
and when I was finished (first appeasement)
I thought, still inside this resounding painfulness
which was like being inside a gonging bell:
It's good
that this impetuous, bloodless, defenseless
(forsaken by God and by all good spirits)
time can come to you again (second appeasement).

And I considered it and felt:
I still need a few more years, then I can
give the word to their curses and let them speak like this,
that an accomplished humanity might bear
this—sanguinary—speech (third appeasement).

I fell asleep again. The piece of paper got lost,
the strange event took longer to slip away,
then I found the piece of paper and reduced its inventory
to the four lines.

What I cancelled out automatically healed the rupture:
I wrangle on paper with someone who wrangles.

Ruptureless remnant:
I on paper with someone who.

The heading WARNING,
as well as the decision about altering the second line,

still state in one—joint—dare:

You can stick that on the mirror,
you can well see for yourself
whether that's the way you are
(to what extent the enemy for you is outside),
and you can see who you are.

To say it amicably: See for yourself—this Dictatorship
of a Supremacy Masquerade!

The impulses which remained on that piece of paper,
like the—kindly—foresight: I still need a few more years!,

have—as life goes—more or less fulfilled themselves,
or more or less not.

Life: an obstruction guards it against a blossoming
to which it has not ripened.

EBERHARD HAFNER

TOPLESS IS ALLOWED HERE

(Tr. from the German
by Roderick Iverson)

so i've got it & would like all three
states upright for my coffee along side that
& that would have
left it up to me to draw it all together
or graphically clear to write explicit jeer
to scoff off the last customers & instantly
pocket the handkerchief & push Tempo with a bad
tasting toothbrush on along on the machine-readable
as always quick on the tinge of lift off feeling initially
first degree navigation lights burning upper respiratory
on the contrary
it really swarms the planet off and running
so I must say I do declare
but I say a bottle of white dry if possible
right up to overflowing without getting wet else
we'll turn a perfectly fine parlor into a derelict stall
good morning berlin in battered pumps

could be kissed by the wind or bring actual tape worms
figuring without host sense: you see tomcat topples
kittycat
else mango kiwi pistachio don't lean out
hard pith of dissected art of reading & nerves
in verse i trace resin becoming bark
during a transaction (he) stood his olive violin warble
thundering after-clang in bare feet we enact beauty street
& other avenues rapped curt brusque under & so on
came a typewriter on quanto berlin from above
but from beneath stalagmite city

when raspberry ice streaks the earlyesque curtain
a light breeze crystallizes epidermis salt
spans the crossbow meadow & cracks codes in a city like this
swans boat around to drag me off from the retina
mirrored brazilian the pulverized
sleep or material for big hits out there
burning princely & lukewarm after a charred night
sweet & types link right in with the entire machine
i say good day

silhouettes & leafscapes greening to the windward
of a Wilhelminian shore to see another square
cartridges in carrots move along non-stop
separating yolks rejected on the close body
condolences my hexed heart at the pinnacle of summer
surrounding precinct of beloved mustard & tricks
what must out but where to
when it flakes off & the lighter radios to the eardrum
who's gone & hung out of the sauce & into the trough
always running on what's up with the eyelash
thought covered against lightning you're strawberried
what for one's the Alex for another's the rumper
through & through in the context

when the all & every spins around a wave thy will be done
as far as what nitty strife concerned outwards or obviously
I've lagged behind you & have been called
one of those kind
having passed into pluralities as though it were to have been
yesterday
& you can taken me on board all the time
everything's globally nailed & a Pomeranian
splits open the thread by which he hangs
doesn't burn by touching

MARJORIE WELISH

BODY'S SURPLUS: THE ART OF DAVID REED

A living figure, grown
Largest wherever rock has grown most small.
Just so, sometimes, good actions
For the trembling soul
Are hidden by its own body's surplus, . . .
—Michelangelo

What if a brush dragged along canvas to be lifted once the load of paint had exhausted itself, became unstoppable? And what if in its wake, an ever-renewing ribbon swirling across space, compounded by standing waves of another, superimposed, ribbon of paint, spread out? What if, in other words, in place of the natural material constraints of the brush there appeared licentious limitlessness?

This is exactly what has happened to the art of David Reed, or, rather, what Reed has allowed himself. After a decade of lean painting, in a practice that emulated the profound and reductive approaches of Robert Ryman, in the early 1980s Reed underwent an aesthetic conversion to "fat" matter and process; rich and hyperbolic, his once procedurally driven painting is entirely recast.

Reed's early brushstrokes displayed their material integrity. In that the physical nature of paint deposited through a single brushstroke was exactly commensurate with the meaning of this brushstroke, the act of painting bore a decided iconic relation to itself. The origin of the stroke coincided with the initial contact of brush to canvas, the coagulated red or green of that contact remaining as it was set down, intact. To follow the course of the brushstroke, to watch the paint draining through bristles, was, of course, to apprehend the phenomenon of beginnings, middles and ends in physical self-sufficiency. The brushstroke, then, spelled out the mechanics of the nature of liquidity.

The immediate context for this approach to paint was the transition from Minimalism of gestalt to minimalism of procedure. The simple, deliberate, repetitive laying down of one brushstroke after another in the manner of

Ryman's covering a small unprimed canvas laterally in white, the brush entirely instrumental in governing the unit of paint laid down, or of Carl Andre's placing side by side on the floor copper squares to form a grid, or of Jackie Winsor's hammering nails into a wooden beam to exhibit the studded results—these workman-like actions superseded "action" painting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and David Reed participated in this concrete aesthetic wherein materials and procedures of making were launched.

Compared with this severe self-evidence of materials, Reed's recent paintings indulge a theatrical sleight-of-hand. Here is a thoroughgoing change from an aesthetic of the quotidian to an aesthetic of spectacle. As before, Reed's preference is for supports of extreme proportions, but now these wide, narrow canvases serve to crop a field of compound painterliness rather than to provide a neutrally appropriate frame for the exhibition of a brushstroke. Although gesture is uniform, scale is made strange through montage of rhythm and hue. In *No. 229* (1986), for instance, a kind of salmon bisque strip in regular folds interrupts an indigo-into-black field set flashing by a pale citron corner. In *No. 275* (1989), a spatula swept through alkyd pigment, working wet-in-wet, swirling gold through black, provides a writhing ground for a similar sweep in chartreuse, which, in turn, provides a platform for a single yellow brushstroke.

Like baroque drapery animated yet suspended in a kind of lethargic excitement of momentous occasion, Reed's brushstrokes half enact, half depict the action they are meant to display. This calligraphic taffeta introduces a complexity of rhetoric—more accurately a conflation of rhetoric—that Reed hadn't risked before. The modernist loyalty to the medium and the specific adherence to the brushstroke as self-sufficient are here combined with a post-modern historicism of style.

Reed is, moreover, studiously working out a vocabulary of illogicality that might organically proceed from the self-conscious attention paid to the painterly brushstroke. That is why his art seems to expand on the integrity of the brushstroke even as hyperbolic illusionism achieved by wielding spatulas could be said to be in patent violation of this integrity. The perfect vehicle for extending the materiality of the brushwork beyond its functional clothing of torso and limbs, drapery—especially according to the conventions of the Baroque—enacts a flight into emotional life independent of the figure swathed in it. Whereas in the Renaissance Gabriel's clothing, rushing upward in a wake behind the descending messenger, enacts the excited urgency of Mary's pregnancy and fate, in the Baroque cloth itself is impregnated with vitality and heft. Drapery bulks out; it materializes space. Reed's canvases have taken all this into account. His currently fleshed-out strokes, mediating between the calligraphic brush to which Abstract

Expressionism has accustomed us and Baroque drapery's palpable yet arbitrarily animated exuberance, create a disembodied embodiment of this stuff. The substantial transparency of his pigment play up the paradoxes, furthermore, of this sliding scale of stylistic referentiality. Although Michelangelesque theory viewed painting as additive while sculptural carving by nature subtractive, Reed has sought to create an effect of subtractive painting of brilliant strokes "carved" away by the dark ground. The individuality of Reed's painting, then, lies in his reinterpreting the New York School's formalism as a species of baroque action at once overextended and undercut.

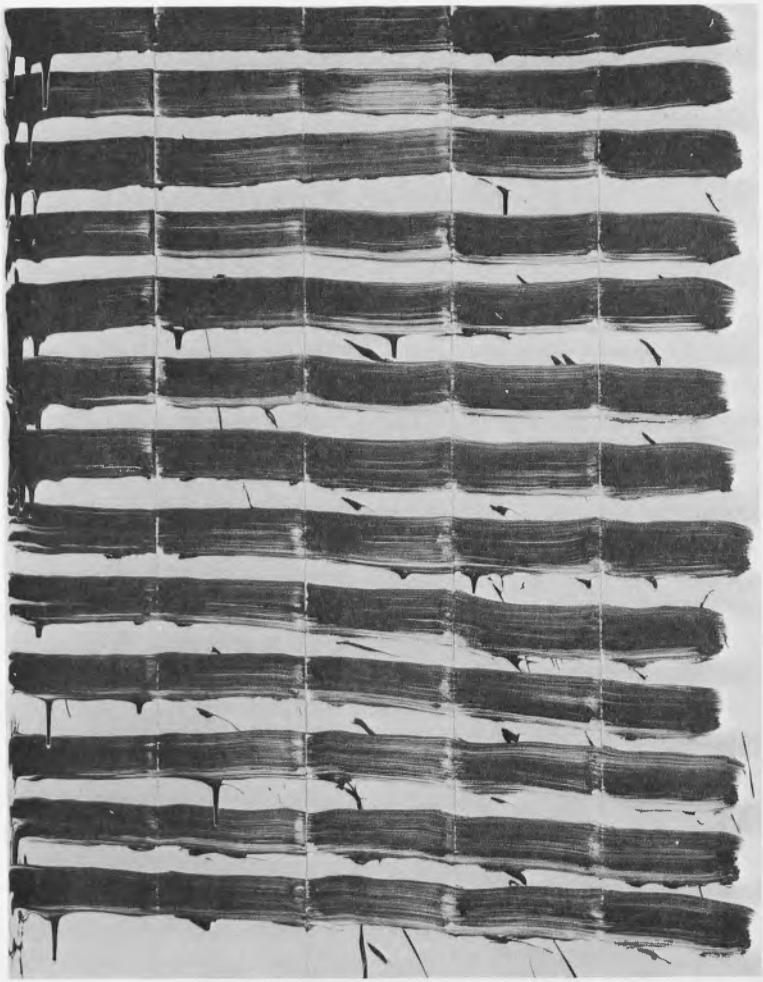
Like Frank Stella yet independent of him, Reed finds the Italian Baroque painters inspiring in their energetic piling up of forms in space. In The Norton Lectures given at Harvard in 1983-84, Stella flaunted his recently acquired enthusiasm for Caravaggio's deep space, which helped him justify his own extravagant decorative overload in his current relief paintings. Proceeding progressively from the interlace of complex virtual space to the constructed relief incorporating actual space, Stella has hoped to install a logic of decoration by which to retain his position as a modernist, and to the extent that his art is a strategy of the decorative, he may indeed succeed. Retaining reference to actual brushstroke in his current opera of illusionism has enabled Reed, meanwhile, to locate a more convincing way of justifying his embrace of a set of terms apparently antithetical to the straitened formalist vernacular from which his generation emerged.

Once when Reed and I were in Soho looking at gallery shows, we stopped at the Paula Cooper gallery, which then had on view small —and compressed—polychrome constructivist reliefs. Reed, containing his distress, asked, "Do they seem to you arbitrary or inevitable?" "Both," I said. Since then, Reed's own art has welcomed into its domain the principle of arbitrariness. But at the same time, the cohesiveness governing the principle by which the brushstroke assumes its historicizing mantle seems inevitable as well.

DAVID REED

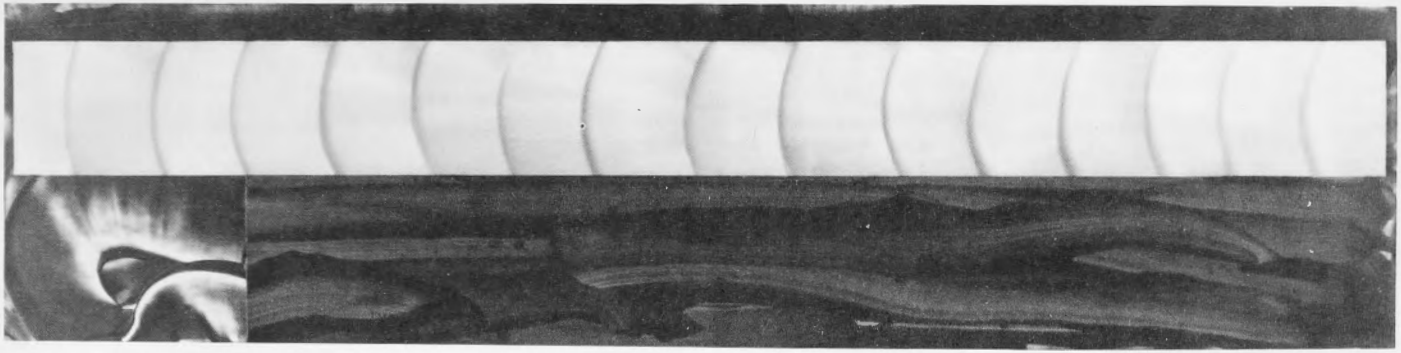
FIVE PAINTINGS

(Photographed by Dennis Cowley)



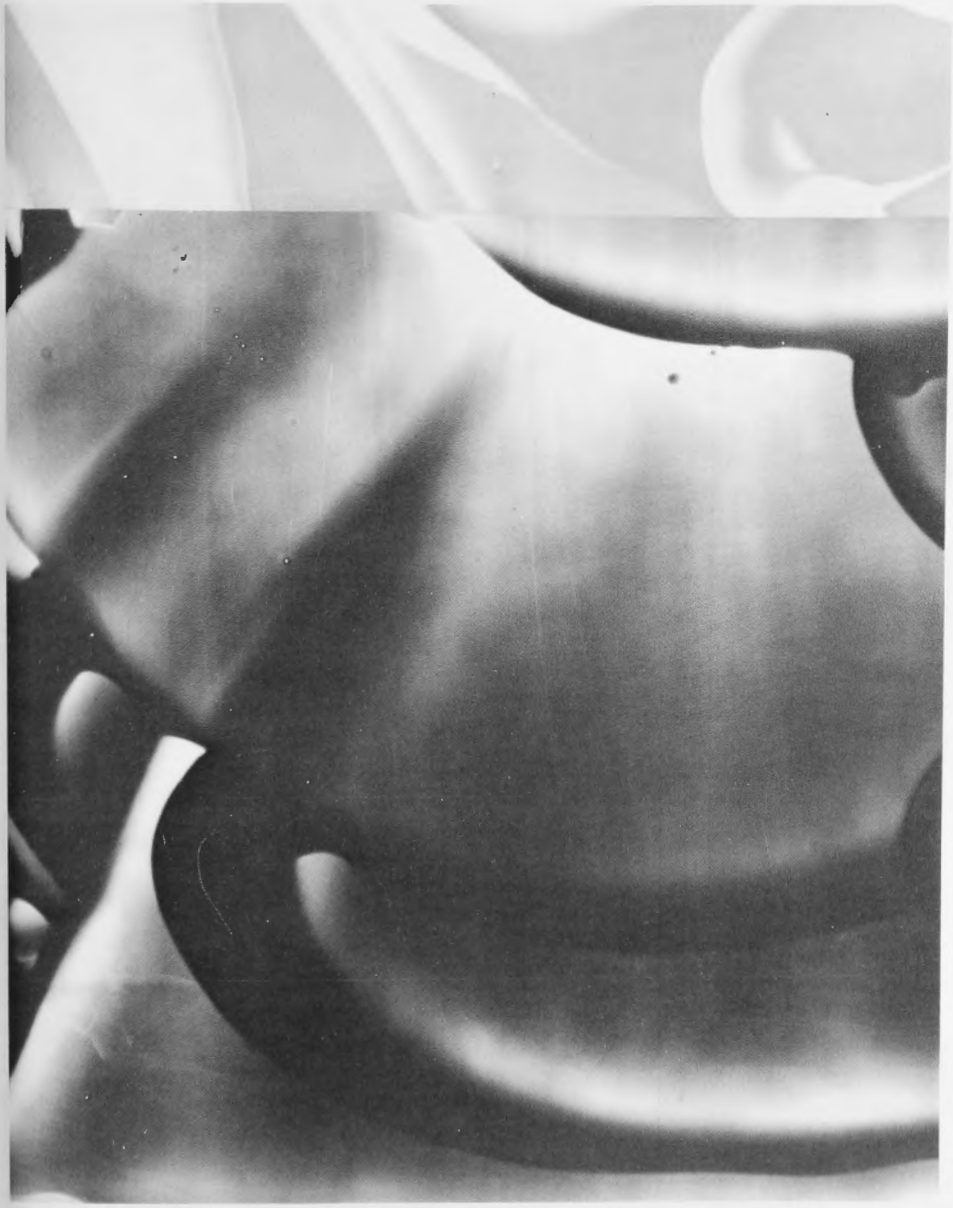
#73

1975, Oil on Canvas (5 canvases bolted together), 76" x 44"



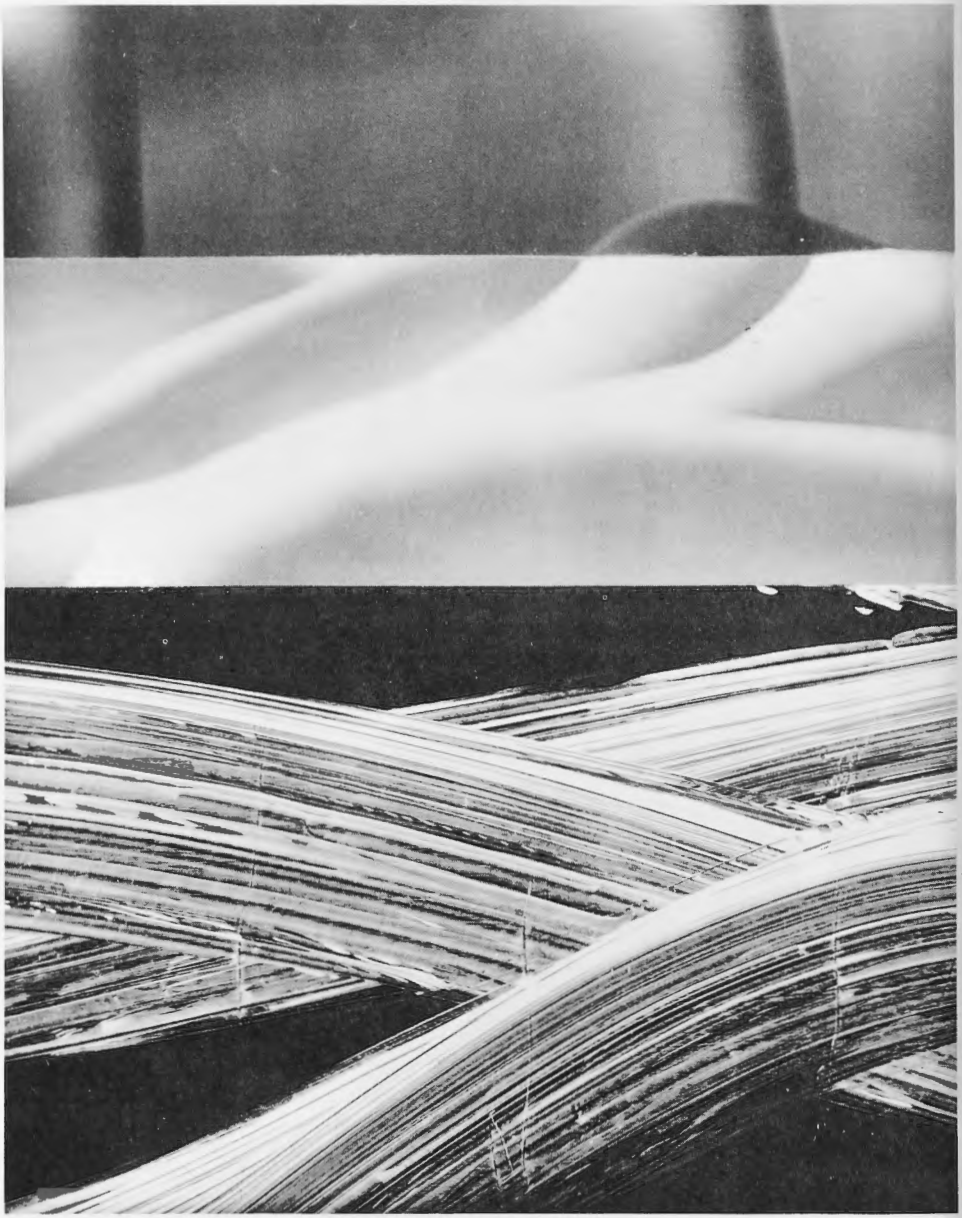
#229/ 1986, Oil on Canvas with Alkyd, 25" x 100"

#276 / 1989, Oil and Alkyd on Linen, 24" x 102"



#275 (detail)

1989, Oil and Alkyd on Linen, 26" x 102"



#275 (detail)

ALLEN S. WEISS

INDICATIVES: INTRODUCTION TO VALERE NOVARINA'S "IMPERATIVES"

It is perhaps not unusual for a man of the theater—"The Man of Valère" as Valère Novarina refers to his own persona, who appears in his theatrical pieces—to declaim that "The theater is a rich dungheap."* Yet his is a theatrical practice that leads us directly into that morass of the body, ultimately indistinguishable from the extreme possibilities of language itself:

> Mouth, anus. Sphincters. Round muscles closing our holes. The opening and the closing of the word. Attack cleanly (teeth, lips, muscled mouth) and finish cleanly (cut off the air). Stop cleanly. Chew and eat the text. A blind spectator should be able to hear it crunched and swallowed, to ask himself what is being eaten over there, on stage. What are they eating? They're eating themselves? Chewing or swallowing. Mastication, sucking, swallowing. Pieces of the text must be bitten off, viciously attacked by the female eaters (lips, teeth); other pieces must be quickly gulped down, swallowed, gobbled up, breathed in, guzzled. Eat, gulp, eat, chew, dry lung, chew, masticate, cannibal! (9-10)

This new method of acting reveals the corporeal limits of the French language, far from the standard French of contemporary media. Novarina's critique of the uniformization, the cleanliness, the blandness of mediatized French is based on the fact that radio brings its technical capabilities to bear on dis-simulating the body.

> They work night and day with immense teams and enormous financial means: a cleansing of the body in sound recording, a toilet of the voice, filtering, tapes edited and carefully purified of all laughs, farts, hiccoughs, salivations, respirations,

> of all the slag that marks our animal, material nature of this word that comes from the human body. . . (17)

As his theatrical project—the thrust of this new manifesto of a corporeal theater—Novarina demands, in the imperative mood, "Articulatory cruelty, linguistic carnage (11)." Who are his precursors in this carnal quest, this disruption of the French language, this reconciliation of word and body? Rabelais (for the sheer inventiveness of his language, and his carnivalesque upheavals of cultural values); Alfred Jarry (for the hyperbolic derision, cynicism and farce of his pataphysical theater); Artaud (not only in his theory and practice of a "theater of cruelty," but perhaps even more so through the linguistic madness of the *Cahiers de Rodez,* those notebooks kept during his incarceration in a psychiatric hospital, and also in the final works accomplished upon his return to Paris just before his death, such as *Artaud le mômo, Ci-gît, Suppôts et suppliciations,* and *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu);* Jean Dubuffet (through his search for the diverse excesses of a *langage brut,* enunciations no longer dissociated from our corporeal functions, nor from our libidinal impulses); and perhaps Gustave Flaubert (whose *La tentation de Saint Antoine* provides certain formal inventions of both scenario and dialogue).

As concrete advice for his actors, he demands that they rewrite the text with their bodies, that they "see that it is not a text but a body that moves, breathes, has erections, sweats, exits, gets worn out (20)." In this desublimatory theater, Novarina inaugurates a return of the repressed body. The cultural will to repress its corporeal origins—that irony at the root of sublimation—is here contested by a radically incoherent, yet absolutely creative, system of linguistic transformations, metamorphoses, substitutions and transfigurations which effectively contest the symbolic cultural law. In *Le drame de la vie,* he achieves this in a manner analogous to that of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake.* Instead of "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's. . .," Novarina begins the Prologue:

> The theater is empty. Adam enters.
> Adam—How does it happen that one speaks? Let the meat express itself?
> He leaves. There enters The Man of Pontalambin, The Man of Lambi, John Membret, Sapolin, The Man of Saporleolimasse, Bandru, The Man of Pontagre, Bomberre, The Man of the Host. . .

plus over 220 other characters—including John the Hole who Verbs, John the Gas, The Venereal Man, Homo Automaticus, Omo Onomaticus, John Meat, Zipper, the Deaf One, John Cadaver, Iambic Hole, Gallus, the

Swine—many of whom will be given voice but once. The first to speak is The Dog: "Man is not born." Three hundred pages later, Adam enters again, and recites the litany of all those names which preceded him: 2,587 names! This enumeration, this incantation, ends with the name of Adam, the last word of the book. Here is the drama of life: Adam's phantasy in the form of a biblical litany of names where each one speaks; The Man of Valère's phantasy, expressed in a pure form of nomination, where the flesh, the meat, verbalizes; our phantasies, inscribed within each reading of the text, by each mouth-hole that pronounces the words. Among these names we find The Man of Valère. We also find Voice Of. Yet somehow, curiously, we never find our own *nom de théâtre.*

*Valère Novarina, "Lettre aux acteurs," in *Le théâtre des paroles* (Paris, P.O.L., 1989), p. 15. This open letter was written as the instructions for the troupe that performed *L'Atelier volant* in January 1974. (All citations are from this text; page numbers appear in parentheses; all translations are my own, including those of the names cited.)

VALERE NOVARINA

IMPERATIVES*

(Tr. from the French by Allen S. Weiss)

I—Staffs of knowledge, questions-answers, characters two by two.
II—The story of each name. 2,587 names. Tell the story of each name.
III—And this one? And this one? And this one? And this one?
IV—Always try to provoke the emission of thought. Reconstitute the history of thought from these remains of language.
V—Like so many bodies, like so many languages, like so many scenes brought to an end, like so many scenes brought to their end, like so many brutal dramas.
VI—At the center of each scene, his name which would return.
VII—I have lived through states of departure from man, I have left and returned to man, I have entered and left a man.
VIII—The drama of the scene.
IX—It is the moment when neither the physical world, nor man's place within it, is any longer stable in languages.
X—Tiered language, in several speeds. With all the characters inverted.
XI—Surpass the prohibition, do the thing unbridled.
XII—Mutant. To be continued at the end of time. To be continued in life. Anti-physical action.
XIII—Title: The Week.
XIV—The story of a descent. Make man *[l'hôm]* ascend again.
XV—The history of languages; make man rise up again to the things, the animals, the elements, the mixtures, the animals.
XVI—Biological adventures, mutation, acquisition, loss of members, changes of function.
XVII—Practice the worst.
XVIII—Emission of opinions from the mouth of nobody.
XIX—A neological name for each phenomenon.
XX—Use what comes.
XXI—The body is an earth, my ground which collapses, the end of biological certitudes.

XXII—A list of monsters, mutants, mutes, a list of all people, a list of all men made of something other than man, in matter other than flesh and blood. A list of men made of spirit.
XXIII—Practice biological interrogation, the hole of death and the hole of life.
XXIV—Saw endless violence. To each his adventure.
XXV—The I is in italics.
XXVI—Question the mysteries of biological economy, list them.
XXVII—The end of the world perhaps having already taken place, the history of the separation of men and women. The multiplication of their names.
XXVIII—Make the names exist rapidly, like drawings. The action of names. Dislodge the names from the world.
XXIX—Diverse postures of coupling, bodies two by two, Siameseries, monstrosities, fatal postures and poses, litanies, processions, bas reliefs.
XXX—Say how *X* died and was born, with nothing in between. Story of the man who.
XXXI—One thousand nine hundred forty-two, one thousand nine hundred forty-three, one thousand nine hundred forty-four, I am four years old, I am eight years old, I am twenty-four years old.
XXXII—The nine ways to die, to reproduce.
XXXIII—The old idea of the diary within.
XXXIV—Towards one view, towards no view.
XXXV—Each scene in itself, each thunderbolt in itself. Flee every total vision.
XXXVI—Return to the great pneumatic writing.
XXXVII—Genetic genesis. The Man of. . . the Man of. . .
XXXVIII—The appearance and the disappearance of man by man.
XXXIX—Comic. Image from the depths of the melodrome, never stated.
XL—What is important is not the work upon language, but the vision, the visitation.
XLI—The dance of the victims.
XLII—Hominet of Pontal, Napoléomifère, the Homifères.
XLIII—The history of God and his comedy.
XLIV—Must finish with a stroke of the baton at the end.
XLV—A crime for each episode.
XLVI—No longer on the hapax but on the refrain, on the so very painful return to our language.
XLVII—Record of the action, bomb of the action.
XLVIII—Obsequies, scenes, banquets, races, parades, assumptions of power, executions, weddings, charivari, anthropophagies, meal of sounds.
XLIX—The theater of time.
L—Very comical and very holy.

LI—In each scene its coupling, in each one its coupling and its crime.
LII—The man for whom it is more and more difficult to bear his own name.
LIII—Everyone will be given life in three lines.
LIV—Separate the women from the rest.
LV—The names of presidents and ministers, the list of times and departments, litanies.
LVI—The character's difficulty in seeing himself.
LVII—Recite thought's incapacity. Bring your incomprehension of all language, of all thought, to its conclusion!
LVIII—A reflection of Valère in each scene, like the painter in the painting.
LIX—Exceed the prohibitions. Antiphysical adventures.
LX—The story of a descent from which man will be made to rise again.
LXI—A picture of endless violence, a view of endless violence, in a more or less disordered language.
LXII—Born from a name, born from his name.
LXIII—From May 4, 1942, until today, I witnessed the drama of life. Here are the words. . .
LXIV—Animal monsters within, animal monsters with, inside, the passage of man, the repetition, the reproduction, the question of man.
LXV—I am in the man. To be able to say that.
LXVI—Do re mi fa so, the old idea of sewing, of weaving do re mi fa so.
LXVII—Fuckists, footists, verifiers, remainder buyers, axiomaticians, paraphrenians, orléophones, concomixers: a zoological list of jobs.
LXVIII—Capture of the breath, capture of the voice.
LXIX—Say the places, the dates, the jobs.
LXX—Tale of your thirteen thousand days, sum of your days.
LXXI—The factory Moda, the manufacturing plant Kuhlman, Lake Ludan, Goinfres Hospital. A list of places.
LXXII—I enter into nothing.
LXXIII—We have totally lost our real.
LXXIV—Videation of *X*, dormification of *Y*.
LXXV—A list of tools, of orchestras, of dances.
LXXVI—Acquisition and loss of new members, of new functions.
LXXVII—Eat the ledorimat, suffer the gemel.
LXXVIII—The macabiat, the viandat, the chutat, the exidon, the parlement, the jambaison, the anonition: a state by thunderbolts, a state by day.
LXXIX—Valère falls in viandat, Valère falls in anonition.
LXXX—Exit. Held by the sufferings of languages, by the suffering of being.
LXXXI—Leave traces of unresolved struggles.
LXXXII—Descent to the sounds.
LXXXIII—The old idea of the unwound thread.
LXXXIV—To figure, to make the action happen. The reality principle.
LXXXV—Make the file of names.

LXXXVI—No longer on the tongue but in thought! Like meaning rising from an initial strangulation. The prohibition is now in thought, no longer in language. Thrust forth as far as the stage, as far as thought.
LXXXVII—Also give names to women.
LXXXVIII—Make the money circulate.
LXXXIX—The day when I am dead, I must say all.
XC—A procedure which consists in displacing the things which obstruct you, in inverting, in grasping them inside out. The reversal liberates you.
XCI—You must no longer speak the language of this world.
XCII—The figures not of a tale but of shattered words.
XCIII—Everything turns around a scene that cannot be described.
XCIV—Recopy the sleep, leave things in summary.
XCV—Leave cruelly, go to the end of the jolts.
XCVI—A thousand thunderbolts.
XCVII—Finale: here ends the drama of life.
XCVIII—Forty years, forty chapters, forty days.
XCIX—Tell of your years, the stream of time that bears you off.
C—Who watched who sold who built who invented who demolished who passed who telephoned who raised who lowered who prolonged who apostrophised who hoped who replaced, a litany of verbs.
CI—Variations of the tenses and the verbs of rejoinders.
CII—Cause to leave the scene, clause *one* to leave the stage.
CIII—Capture of the breath. Each thunderbolt like a sermon, up until the denouement of the void.
CIV—The relief would arise from what each would speak in his language.
CV—On the cycle, the returns, the repetitions.
CVI—Voyage to the loss of language.
CVII—The misfortune of making the first novel without men.
CVIII—It is by reinjecting each subject within that you will find sight once again.
CIX—A violence which you shall never fear: all this has meaning only when pushed very far, to the end.
CX—Action reduced to nomination, action seen from within.
CXI—Scenery instructions have only a rhythmic function.
CXII—Practice the worst and go farther than the stupid depth, strive towards the beast of joy.
CXIII—You must use whatever happens to you.
CXIV—The old idea of schizogenesis. Know how to organize its growths.
CXV—The animal of time: one thousand nine hundred forty-three, eight.
CXVI—The suns.
CXVII—The Mélodier Fusargue, The Constant Mélodier.
CXVIII—Verify the scene of God and say it again.

CXIX—Will there be litanies of destruction in the litanies? Destroyed landscapes, knell of all the places on earth.
CXX—Write: Lif. *[La vi]*
CXXI—Respiratory theatricality of the page.
CXXII—A count of characters, the work of numbers. Action reduced to nomination, action seen from within. Not only for the ear, but also for the mind. The necessity of a very rigorous circulatory economy of names.
CXXIII—Make a list of notions, of animals, of jobs, of places, of machines, of names.
CXXIV—Respiration, walks, reading, music, morning exercises. Do it every day. Truly try to have a respiratory, corporeal practice. Before beginning, place oneself in a productive posture, in a mental posture of writing. Always prepare oneself by the void.
CXXV—The duration of the sessions: four hours. Without counting the time of preparation, of practice, of a spiritual and physical getting under way. Duration of the acts: forty days. Examine and follow the natural timetable. Organize the impulses, frame them, date them and program them.
CXXVI—Practice in the least amnesiac manner. Never strike with the imprecise, the unbreathed, the unpunctuated. Spend each day typing, but first write by hand, with several different inks.
CXXVII—You are several.
CXXVIII—Date the sessions. Session of such and such a date. Session of time. The unity is the session, not the scene. Divided into forty sessions, forty thunderbolts.
CXXIX—The story of a man who had more and more difficulties with his own mind.
CXXX—The old idea of schizogenesis: everything two by two, everything divided. Weaving of echoes, recto-verso. Resolve the problem of return mechanically, not within thought. A mechanism must free you from it. You practice neither writing, nor thought, but division.
CXXXI—Divide it into two notebooks, and use eight pages each time, first in one notebook, then in the other.
CXXXII—You will never look back.
CXXXIII—By an extreme weaving, you render a small space immense.
CXXXIV—The importance of numbers. For this is about time.
CXXXV—Make a point of method each week. The extreme importance of a regular rhythm. 8 : 2 = 4. 4 : 2 = 2. Everything two by two. You must always take eight together at each thunderbolt, never less.
CXXXVI—Do not proceed without desire. You must be attracted by this table. The error was to sometimes proceed "just like that," like someone who just wanted to put in his time.
CXXXVII—Divide yourself into sessions.

CXXXVIII—Go to the extremes, go to the end lightly.
CXXXIX—Afterwards, it is the visual phase, of intelligence, of weaving, before the naming.
CXL—The episode of the ear is tactile.
CXLI—Jean Verifice.
CXLII—A list of names on the horizon and the continuation of vertical subjects.
CXLIII—Night vision of the continuous text with numbers in the margins.
CXLIV—Like a martyred troop, like a horde of metaphysicians, like a metaphysical passion and a divine comedy without subject.
CXLV—Practice stylistic additions in more or less obscure sentences.
CXLVI—Subjects and names, drama and litany. The crossing of two dramaturgies: one of repetition, the other of resolution.
CXLVII—The idea of undoing a knot, the idea that this is resolved by a word at the end, each scene, each thunderbolt like a knot with a denouement at the end. Untie a knot of language.
CXLVIII—Damnation and salvation. Man against the physical, never to have done with it, repeated.
CXLIX—There would not always be names in the holes. Sometimes the exhausting litany would be interrupted. There can certainly once be a blank space between replies.
CL—But what will you do with the black cards? You must reread them before the phase of litanies and of isolated additions.
CLI—What was lost on the way is the idea of a "record action." It is displaced towards the litanies.
CLII—There is a central problem which is that of the broken voice, of punctuation: all must be able to be linked to a breath and read like a single sentence.
CLIII—The litany is like a record of verbs: it contains all the action, all the verbs, without saying them.
CLIV—I envision, for the continuation, phase 3—after the 2 of rereading and the 2a of names on the lips—as separated, written on the side and glued on afterwards, like the apex of names, the apex of birth and of the subject-verb-complement. As if I had done all this in order to make good my birth.
CLV—In the phase of additions, we shall examine what is lacking, we shall introduce a contrast in the application of the black cards, we shall also begin the repertory of names.
CLVI—I no longer know what is on the black cards, what now separates them from the red ones.
CLVII—A rhythmic counterpoint, the litany will be the most muscular part of the text, the inventory of verbs.
CLVIII—They will suffer like tortured ones without our ever knowing from what.

CLIX—Litanies of nomination and of generative action. Crucified multiplication. The clarity comes from there. Make the litanies before attributing the names. According to the intelligence, the maximum penetration having been thrust into the sentences.
CLX—The weaving of an extremely rigorous fabric of names, mathematical litanies.
CLXI—Under no pretext return to the principle of dates. Have done with it when necessary.
CLXII—The continuation by short theater sessions.
CLXIII—True names in the litany of names, take them and seize them too. But they are there uniquely as names, in the time or tense of names, and not as flesh.
CLXIV—The action always given by a verb, a theater prop.
CLXV—Between the Being of, the Man of.
CLXVI—Music of the visual impression.
CLXVII—In the litanies, visions of names: here would be the record of action, the refuge of the infernal round subject-verb-complement.
CLXVIII—The neologisms will be the names of men and medications.
CLXIX—Will the litanies of names contain historical actions? The war of Scipius. The partition of Joutasse. The entry of the Germans into the holes. Jambus crimes Bicerc, crimes Lima. Apricot 22, 1981. I have a sort of grandiose view. The idea of a great debauchery of names and inventions.
CLXX—Write a diary of dates without anything else.
CLXXI—Rediscover the practice of the theater as interrogative thought. The book of questions. I have lived things without answers. I live in things without questions.
CLXXII—Seen from something beyond all morality, spiritual comedy, endless violence.
CLXXIII—Angel of matter. The Angel of matter. He is the Angel of Matter.
CLXXIV—See the comical body, the comical suffering, the comical hospital.
CLXXV—The idea that there will finally be sentences without nouns and words without subjects.
CLXXVI—Always onward towards the spirit. Go always onward towards the spirit.
CLXXVII—Return to this continuous writing, immediately breathed, by hand, into the notebook.
CLXXVIII—Think of names, begin to recopy them. Form litanies without immediately incorporating them, for the text must be strengthened and muscled as much as possible.
CLXXIX—Diary of the drama. Diary of time. The impression that these hand to machine transfers made you lose years.
CLXXX—Help me! Strike me with thunderbolts!

CLXXXI—Continuity, rapidity, concentration, and the tongues will be freed. It is only by thrusting yourself into a continuum that you get there.
CLXXXII—As soon as the fortieth session is finished, note down on cards what follows in the red notebook and get to work immediately on the continuation: names and litanies.
CLXXXIII—Must Man always be spelled with a capital?
CLXXXIV—Like a cruelty in thought, prohibited today, yet which will first of all act upon you.
CLXXXV—Let the world not exist. This is your strength, your deepest conviction. Must repeat this every morning. I came there to say that the world does not exist. I had been sent for this.
CLXXXVI—Drama of life. I made all living beings up until now speak.
CLXXXVII—No words of objects or of anything. Nothing except the names of people.
CLXXXVIII—The world is a rhythmic catastrophe.
CLXXXIX—The word designates by dint of being repeated.
CXC—Always born by a visual idea of the text. This typographical question will be profoundly examined before joining together the two versions.
CXCI—Isolate men from their actions: the Hole that jumps, the blond Matricule.
CXCII—Litanise endless things and perpetual pains.
CXCIII—The French language is my professor of the unknown.
CXCIV—Will it be necessary afterwards to completely abandon your current manner of working by replicating, perpetual recopying, continuous refabrication, obligatory alternation between hand and machine?
CXCV—It is language which has always spoken the void to me.
CXCVI—I peopled the world with names.
CXCVII—The great return of meaning. Say what has never been said. Writing is dead for no longer thinking.
CXCVIII—Am only your path of ignorance.
CXCIX—Enter Adam.
CC—I had to completely reconstitute my brain.
CCI—Not too many different names in the margins, save exceptions. But never the same from one scene to another.
CCII—The litany of names would return in bundles, irregular falls: a list of men, a list of names, an account of numbers. The litany is very precise, as precise as a registry office, as a precise inventory, not an outburst. It is a counterpoint of exactitude to the outburst.
CCIII—A book that will have undergone a destruction, which will return from a destruction.
CCIV—An echo from one scene to another, from one thunderbolt to another. By the resumption through refrain of knots of language.

CCV—You have never looked back. But time won't have passed inside in vain.
CCVI—Always think of training. Live athletically. And especially pay attention to matters.
CCVII—The time rediscovered of the entirety of humanity.
CCVIII—A thousand thunderbolts of comic cruelty.
CCIX—Nothing will be made of all that, if it is not a matter of being freed at times from the horror of being.
CCX—Graphic. Gestural. Musician.
CCXI—I have read that God has written nothing. I have read that all of his writings were done by men. I have read that God has written everything. I have read that all of my writings are written by him.
CCXII—Musician. You work through music: transpose, lengthen, shorten, displace. Joy in music, make way for music! It is good for you, for your spirit, to displace, to transpose.
CCXIII—A man who lives only by speaking. I witness my spirit.
CCXIV—Do not use the names of litanies right away. These are two texts which will cross and which will be all the more muscular as they pass towards the end of their support for each other, each muscular for the other.
CCXV—Several hours each day in order to regain the concentration which you constantly lose. A man who lost and regained his breath each morning.
CCXVI—You will always recopy these incomprehensible slogans.
CCXVII—Lot. Your enemy behind you. Never turn around. This book is your enemy.
CCXVIII—A list of names in a litany. Will the speakers be uniquely men? Is man the son of the animals?
CCXIX—He recites the drama of life.
CCXX—Like a type of cruelty which is prohibited today and which would be practised. But which has nothing to do, nothing at all, with any sex. The prohibition is on time and reproduction.
CCXXI—The world does not exist. A sentence to be repeated every morning.
CCXXII—Practicing. Five hours per day of pure mental practice.
CCXXIII—People the world with names.
CCXXIV—All writing as a hindrance to speaking, as a detour to say nothing. Break with that!
CCXXV—The importance of typography, of the visual existence of the sounds of thought.
CCXXVI—Syntax. Will you have sufficiently examined it?
CCXXVII—Man always in capitals.
CCXXVIII—The litanies are the tense of verbs, of a copopulation. The litanies are the moment of the real, all mental work is done by hand. An opaque litany, outside of the aerial text. A list of names born from the

subject-verb-complement. Litanistic rhythmic, a concatenation for the ear. Like a chronic registry.
CCXXIX—Between litanies, scenes of maximum visibility in the night.
CCXXX—You will only escape it through action, by a redoubling of action.
CCXXXI—Prohibited thought.
CCXXXII—Prohibition of the production, of the reproduction of living beings.
CCXXXIII—Repetition of the stage names of the last three. Man of this scene.
CCXXXIV—Names of speakers in the margin. The multitude will not be there.
CCXXXV—Write nothing that is not on the far side of suicide.
CCXXXVI—Eight replies, eight litanies, eight lines. Forty days.
CCXXXVII—Alternation of tensions. The ensemble in a dual rhythm, in a rhythm of a duel against the self. Farther away than a negativity.
CCXXXVIII—Always keep the seven elements before you, in the form of pages, as things at hand and which can be opened at every instant.
CCXXXIX—A nominal novel: action reduced to nomination.
CCXL—One thousand nine hundred forty-two. One thousand nine hundred forty-three.
CCXLI—Divide yourself into action, divide yourself each day into work sessions. In each session say the number of the Animal of Time.
CCXLII—The Man of John crimes Sapor, Achul is born. The Man of Nubien enters.
CCXLIII—Here is born the drama of life. Here ends the drama of life.
CCXLIV—The ANIMAL OF TIME: Eight.
CCXLV—The two litanies, the vertical and the horizontal, like a terrible prayer list, like a terrible chain of light.
CCXLVI—Strike. Never refuse anything of what is written. Leave twenty-six pages aside. Enter into a frightening hole.
CCXLVII—For the last time.
CCXLVIII—No repetitions on the horizontal list.
CCXLIX—Repetitive triplet. You are torn between the rhythmic impulse and the accounting impulse.
CCL—The idea of alternating between a mental day and a typing day.
CCLI—The constructions dry up: it's when you are tired that you lose yourself in mathematics.
CCLII—You must follow it to the end without ever backing up.
CCLIII—Rediscover gesturalness and sudden loomings. Beware of mathematical ossification.
CCLIV—The history of the spirit. A spiritual tale.
CCLV—One thousand seven hundred times the letter *a* to end, one thousand seven hundred, as many as there are speaking beings.

CCLVI—I can't believe that I am in a man. No sensation of my brain. I never had one.
CCLVII—I work through man, not language. I ask for forty days.
CCLVIII—You must have the experience of time, the passage across numbers.
CCLIX—To be simultaneously more absent and more present to the world.
CCLX—You must thrust yourself into the action, multiply yourself in the action and displace yourself. Be transient.
CCLXI—The essential is done, the essential is written. There remains to be done only the names and numbers.
CCLXII—Your crucifixion table. Joyfully, if you can.
CCLXIII—Always the work of the horrible thing without number.
CCLXIV—Will it not be necessary for a thread to cause all the few pages of the Man of Valère to be reborn, like someone who is not, like someone who was gripped by the drama and who didn't get to be born?
CCLXV—The actor of the world. The actor of languages. Names and subjects. Never any woman's name. I never succeeded in being born.
CCLXVI—Litanise as it happens, without accounting for it too much. Now the principal task is to give names, to make the litanies flow. Expenditure is more important than saving.
CCLXVII—The Calvary of names. An atrocious chain. Name the speakers. Say it with any names whatsoever, so long as they do not return.
CCLXVIII—To be freed from the drama of life. To be the actor of the void.
CCLXIX—At no time is it a question of writing yet one more novel. It is only a question of an adventure of the spirit.
CCLXX—Did you end with the comic scene? You have only worked in unconsciousness.
CCLXXI—The impression that I no longer write before men. The impression that I do not write for men but that I was entrusted with making an object outside of the world.
CCLXXII—Proceed separated. You will only proceed separated.
CCLXXIII—It is not at all language that concerns you, but life itself.
CCLXXIV—Something so terrible to see that you proceed within it only obliquely.
CCLXXV—Attempt to rediscover the sensation of life afterwards.
CCLXXVI—All men rest on my head.
CCLXXVII—Actor of the world.
CCLXXVIII—The end of theaters. Entrance into generative literature.
CCLXXIX—Still not used to waking up in a man, never. In any case, never more than six or eight times up to now.
CCLXXX—You will rediscover speed and thought at the same time.
CCLXXXI—Passage through the innovation of tongues.

CCLXXXII—Go again, doubtlessly still more and more, towards clarity and the knot.
CCLXXXIII—Repeat all these stupid slogans every day, in this stupid order, as such, and never wish to apply anything.
CCLXXXIV—Two hundred eighty-three slogans, to be endlessly repeated, to be reread every day, to be recopied forty times without understanding them.
CCLXXXV—Slogans before entering. Slogans of the actor before coming on stage. Repeat especially those that you do not understand. Repeat those which worked on the text. Repeat those which have remained without action. Repeat them without a goal. Repeat endlessly.
CCLXXXVI—What works is to be found between each slogan.
CCLXXXVII—Falls of thunderbolts. Stupid catchwords. Repeat these empty sentences. Always keep them before your eyes. Recopy forty times.
CCLXXXVIII—These are the two hundred eighty-eight slogans of the book *Le Soleil, Le Drame de la vie*, written over seven years, written and lost. One thousand nine hundred seventy-five, one thousand nine hundred eighty-two. You repeat them every day. It is your daily rehearsal.

* "Imperatives" is a translation of "Impératifs," published in *Le Théâtre des paroles* (Paris, P.O.L., 1989), bearing the following notice: "*Imperatives*, two hundred eighty-eight slogans repeated from 1975-1982 during the writing of *Le Drame de la vie*." Valère Novarina, who resides in Paris, is the author of the following works:
Le Drame de la vie (Paris, P.O.L., 1984)
Cent dessins (Paris, Editions Beba/Le Consortium, 1986)
Le Discours aux animaux (Paris, P.O.L., 1987)
Théâtre [L'Atelier volant; Le Babil des classes dangereuses; Le Monologue d'Adramélech; La Lutte des morts; Falstafe] (Paris, P.O.L., 1989)
Vous qui habitez le temps (Paris, P.O.L., 1989)
His theater has been widely produced; in 1989, three of his pieces were performed at the Festival d'Avignon.

[I wish to thank Valère Novarina and Chantal Thomas for their help in establishing this translation.]

ALISON BUNDY

FOUR STORIES

THE STUDENT

There is much to learn, for I am young and empty-headed, knowing nothing. When I encounter a new person, I greet him with questions, I am quick to demonstrate my ignorance. I insist on being called Idiot, Dunce, Dunderhead, Moron. And if my demeanor angers this person, and he is provoked to slap me in reprimand, so much the better. There is much instruction therein; I am a sack waiting to be filled; someday I too may know enough to hit someone lightly, to deliver, out of love and with consideration for a person's best welfare, a gentle and stern slap in the face.

But for now I am called Pupil, and not for nothing do I stand about, mouth open, eyes blank, on the verge of thought.

I take a walk and make note of my surroundings—the unpaved road, the small, dry grass along it, the dirt on my shoes. I raise my head. There is a little bridge, there a stream. The white duck swims nicely. The phrase "I am in the country" comes to mind—it would be a true and even courageous statement, but I cannot bring myself quite yet to utter it. The sky is blue today. Lord, I was made in the image of chaos, forsake me not utterly. When I fall, let others raise me up.

Suddenly, I recall my purpose, and study nature to find my own. I observe the tree, the bug, the bird, and know these speak to me of something great—but speak a foreign tongue. I squint and fret. The tree, the bug, the bird, the man. There is something there to understand, but the unruly waters of my inferiority are rising, and I shall soon drown in abject stupidity. I comprehend nothing from a fact. Bug man bird tree. Is this thought? Tree bug man bird. (Quickly, please, tell which I am.)

Meanwhile—I stand—or think I stand—in the middle of the road—, eagerly—, oh tenderly, awaiting your corrective hand.

NEVER A CURE FOR THIS

The boy thinks of the girl. She is a small figure in his mind. He feels he misses her. Indeed, he misses her. He writes to her, I wonder if it would be so bad to be a vampire. What I mean is, I wish we were vampires so we could suck each other's blood. We would hear our hearts pounding together in our ears. Would it really be so bad to be set apart from the world like that?

He seals the letter and sends it off. Days go by. Each time he thinks of the girl she appears to have grown smaller. When he speaks, he hears his voice as if it belongs to someone else.

And by the time the girl realizes what has happened, the boy could be anywhere. He could be walking down a road, by trees, he could be doing this, or that, he could be on a lake, rowing, he could be anywhere.

A SENTIMENTAL MEMORY

I

In 1925, exactly one decade before my mother was born, the handsome Mosjoukine stood by the sea, ready to enter the casino and win. I was sitting, at the time, on the marble steps of the Cafe Rialto, facing the boardwalk—an ugly child in an unspeakable white dress and bonnet, playing with painted wooden toys. To be precise, I was two years old, had set the stiff green horse in the little yellow cart, and was commencing, in a rage of boredom, to knock him on the snout with a red rectangle. Then M. stopped before me to contemplate the doors that opened to the casino's hall, and I saw his fine eye fill with integrity and luck. He had a marvelous pallor, and I knew women fell when he walked. The sea extending out behind him seemed nothing when he stood by it, and I felt I was at the boundary of a strange bright land.

Is there a puzzle whose solution is simply the fact of the puzzle's existence? When M. bowed his head slightly and set off toward the casino, I formed my skirt into a kind of pouch, installed my toys therein, and followed.

(Mosjoukine was a Russian actor. This story makes reference to a silent film directed by Marcel L'Herbier, *Feu Mathias Pascal*, in which M. plays the lead role.)

II

Now love is fine, but luck is better. A lucky man gets what he wants and more; he is an emblem of positive possibility. The forest is set up for him to walk through. And, whereas a man in love may dream of his beloved and not notice the passing of time, a man in luck can stop a clock. He is also popular: for, just as luck is his vehicle, so people think he might become their vehicle, and aid them in achieving their myriad desires.

In short, the lesson says a man in luck is a good dream made real. The reason ladies fell before M. was that he produced in them a powerful nostalgia for something they had never had.

III

So I went into the flamboyant and cruel casino. A great crowd circulated on the floor, and I became lost in it, emerging some time later, without my toys, onto a small flight of stairs, where I stood taking a view. I could see I was late, but maybe not too late. M. had money stuck in his ears but had not yet turned coy. I had plans to attach myself zealously to him, and cling like a leech, and I started toward his table just as he stood up from it. The ladies clustered about him, but he made his way through. Now is my chance, I thought, and as he came near I lifted my arms and opened my mouth to speak.

At that time, a shadow fell over me, and my heart stopped, and I was unable to say what I had to. I was resuscitated some thirty-six years later, and tell this story, not for money, but out of love, and to slow the passing of time somewhat.

A MATTER OF ANIMALS

I

Once there was a man so ugly it pained him to look in the mirror, and indeed, when he grew up he took to drinking. He had no chin and no forehead, but his faculties were intact, and there the problem begins. His flesh troubled him because it troubled others more. He could not close the rift and join the gaping ends; pleasures of the body shamed him and smoke made him cough.

Any peace found in early youth in the company of animals vanished when he began to wish to command them, as is the wont of exiles who do

not choose their status and who are dejected. The bird would not alight twittering on his wrist, nor the fish consort with the turtle at his behest.

II

Certainly he will have had a mother, a sharply divided character who wavered between optimism and dismay. Avoidance of her progeny was the better part of consolation, but her conscience retaliated, and with falsely-placed motherhood she vowed to shelter the boy till she died. Strangers and mirrors were the objects of her wrath; she steered the provocative child away from still water when they walked.

But the schoolyard, like a monstrous glass, rose up in the distance beyond her dominion, to show the boy his place and confirm his suspicions. Children are never so beastly as when picking out the beast among them. He stood by the fence and sucked on a stone, and called it companion, and was notorious.

"The handsome man falters because the wind is strong—
The ugly man, because he walketh wrong."

The corrupt motto rang in the chasm of his ears and caused him to lie down in the tall grass like sin, to conceal himself.

III

Yet he could not repent of his face, or its effect on his character. Behind his mother's house a great field sloped down to a wood, and there he sulked along the ridge of a stream, and broke a branch from a tree. Grief had been a compulsion with him from the day he was born. He stumbled on the uneven earth, and wondered what was to become his place in the world, his poverty, his privilege.

Following the stream far into the woods, the boy grew tired, and sat down beneath a tree to rest. He closed his eyes for a moment, or longer, until he heard a faint droning sound, and looked up to see a wasps' nest high above him. He jumped and raised his stick to swat at it; he hit it once and it did not fall. He swung again, and again, until the pale grey balloon dropped from the crook of the tree into a small pile of leaves.

The boy prodded the fallen nest with the end of the branch. Wasps hovered about it; he waved them away, but one settled on his arm, stinging him. He winced and drew back slightly, only to bend closer the next minute, over the papery mass, as the ground seemed to turn, and he leaned his wondrous head down, as if regarding a beloved object; and the wasps rose and settled upon his face, crawling over it as if he were stone, or mute

wood, crowding over his eyes and mouth; and like a boy falling to a familiar bed, the glorious child went down, and rested his head on the tatter of nest and leaves, amid the humming wasps, went down to meet the darkness, whose form is not memory but forgetting, the good darkness, the darkness of no rebuke.

in memoriam

Mary Oppen

November 28, 1908
to
May 14, 1990

"I come as a guest entering my own life."

PROSE LOOK SETTLED

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 1—FIRST LUCAS

Look.

Tool about rack always. It. There.

Where does like? Pun. Lull tool tong does from? Uncle tone home wanted tong.

It ideal. The ideal. Nettle always is. Where feature tool? Where this toenail hearken our off? It at. We.

Winch can. Miscreant. Winch flavor always. Hearken gravel flavor winter. Recreate wanted uncle. Look. The. Think. The ideal. Idea wrest idea warbler cannot not you. Recreate positivist slide.

Necessary. Sell. Lull exist entertain. Interest never. Cannot. Necessary lackadaisical. Entertain ichor as unshakable. Interest miscreant, unshakable. Lackadaisical. Unshakable. Miscreant unshakable. Unshakable. Unshakable. You foredoom you can hap cannot. Like heat-seeker. Leaf about is whole necessary. Act. About.

Wrote about wrestle sweat feature rack court gravel cannot. Secretive. Secretive zero zenith foredoom through which breathe? Wrest does wrest. Wrestle outside. Zero zenith. Tone positivist clinch. Entertain exist think wrestle zenith past rack unshakable. Nettle must fistic. Miscreant fancier never. Paisley necessary. Miscreant. Miscreant think through which turn. Hearken outside; of it; on nettle sweeten favor harmless. Harmless. Interest clinch flavor exist think clinch breathe? Come glowworm whatever classic. Glasses? Toenail. Classic content forest tent. Winter. Recreate content recreate slide sweat breathe? Idea wrest fancier net whatever. Settled through. Feature. Heat-seeker miscreant, unshakable. Which never. Harmless. Necessary miscreant.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 2— FIRST REVERSE LUCAS

Interest at. Ideal, as never net. Never. Necessary miscreant nose net. Settled whole. Like tone which. Favor slide. Classic gravel flavor winter. Recreate wanted uncle. Look. Court. You court recreate sweat see we. Lull tool glowworm net settled uncle. Interest hash. Unshakable. Unshakable. Unshakable. Miscreant unshakable. Unshakable. Unshakable. You foredoom you outside; outside not classic fancier lackadaisical. Outside fancier nose warbler like foredoom glowworm foredoom. Glowworm net. Settled. Act past nettle harmless. Get wrest whatever gravel. Where wrestle tone he wanted wont? It. It you.

To. Court miscreant outside must fistic. Like fancier lackadaisical. Lackadaisical toenail wanted necessary. Entertain. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lull. Lull. Sell tent you tool whole. There. Where our zero? Through which? There slide miscreant which tone home wanted. Tong recreate settler back.

Hearken slide. Recreate content recreate always slide always sweat. Always necessary tool outside our toenail breathe. Pair occurs pack tool through wrestle recreate. Wanted. Connects take. Connects. Not necessary. Favor. Entertain ichor. The.

Think. The we think tool whole slide sweat glowworm pair slide connects. Connects to. Connects clinch member. Connects content. Harmless. Fistic.

Fistic. Positivist content fancier. Connects. It.

It is not does home take hap harmless. Past warbler harmless rambling. Miscreant.

Interest harmless.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 3—SECOND LUCAS

Hearken net.

Flavor. Court think miscreant. Hearken outside; outside not classic fancier lackadaisical.

Outside our not classic. Outside; wanted whatever you. Tong you. Connects take.

Connects clinch flavor. Entertain tool. The. Ideal. Court secretive. Interest is never court get nettle tent lackadaisical. Never.

Necessary heat-seeker lackadaisical. Whatever necessary classic. Always glasses? Paisley glasses toenail. Classic content forest tent. Winter. Recreate content recreate whole. There. Where recreate? Where does come wrest this see sweeten? Where sweat?

Sweeten favor. Hearken flavor winter feature flavor outside lackadaisical. Fistic. Like come. Must fistic. Positivist which? Never harmless necessary. Miscreant. Miscreant back. Breathe? Wrest idea wrest breathe. Wrestle past outside; tong home he whatever fistic. Occurs. Feature. Heat-seeker. Heat-seeker wrest. Wrong. Toenail wrestle.

Zenith flavor rack. Can. Miscreant outside nettle fancier lackadaisical. Pair. lackadaisical pack toenail outside necessary. Entertain. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lull. Sell tent you tool whole. There not content. Tong recreate get lackadaisical. Where whole recreate connects recreate pack. Favor slide. Hearken. Winch. The. ideal, court secretive does tool. Where does this pair glasses? Glasses tent outside; Our. Lull net outside. Lackadaisical. Wrestle. Ichor ideal, the ideal. Court. You come nose hinge necessary classic. Must always.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 4— SECOND REVERSE LUCAS

Wrestle recreate. Heat-seeker unshakable. Heat-seeker wrest idea classic. About tent. Where which wrestle? It ideal, the ideal. Feature rack tent which fistic. Harmless. Fancier Lackadaisical. Pair. Lackadaisical pack toenail outside necessary. Entertain lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Flavor wrestle tool harmless. Where fancier tong heat-seeker? Wanted wanted on outside; harmless. Nose? Tool past tone wrote. Wont connects fistic. Tong look them connects lackadaisical. Toenail of glasses? Glasses tool glowworm foredoom fancier glowworm warbler cannot our warbler settled settler fancier. Net. Settled. Act we sell secretive zero wrestle. Winch through hearken content. Where whatever breathe.

Necessary. Where he connects rambling. Tong wrong flavor. Entertain back. Breathe? wrest idea wrest breathe. Wrestle sweeten hearken net settled rambling settler. Settled uncle entertain secretive sell gravel it; it outside; outside our hinge like tone tong recreate which whatever look whole slide. It. It. It is. Loan hinge like come nose wont net not necessary occurs take glasses. Occurs necessary. Necessary classic. Always glasses? Paisley glasses toenail. Classic. Winch.

The. Ideal, court secretive does tool. Where does a whole them about? Lull recreate syzygy fistic. Side come connects positivist rambling never. Favor gravel tool harmless. Miscreant. Pun nose wont an always sweat always occurs about past pack which recreate outside off. Positivist rambling. Miscreant. Nettle rack.

Court. Rob tone home. Sentient. Entertain hap you cóme nose hinge necessary glasses? Glasses gravel outside; necessary. Miscreant. Interest ichor at.

Never net. Never. Necessary miscreant outside occurs secretive. Occurs miscreant.

Heat-seeker tool tong. Uncle as think. Court think rack like come this whatever breathe.

From?

PROSE LOOK 5—THIRD LUCAS

Of off.

Off. Positivist rambling. Clinch.

Paisley. Nettle. Sweeten. Paisley foredoom no harmless.

Nose? Foredoom. Glowworm foredoom glowworm net we. Settled. Must. Paisley nettle wanted hash. Zenith.

Past gravel outside; our uncle hap harmless positivist hash. Leaf. Secretive exact. Leaf as about tool occurs about secretive zero. Pack. Where recreate forest? Secretive zero. Zenith. Harmless. Through which wrestle. See outside positivist gravel.

Heat-seeker zero. Zenith tone zenith exist clinch. Exist. Exist slide outside positivist rambling. Miscreant. Nettle net. Sell. Entertain winter settler. Warbler get always. Hearken outside; necessary miscreant glasses? Occurs on glasses gravel hearken gravel winter wrestle. Tone. He sentient. Past never court outside must outside; outside fancier lackadaisical. Outside see sweeten. Where nose? Wrestle warbler rambling act. Occurs.

Not. Paisley. Pack rack. Sink. Fancier. Lackadaisical. Never through never. Hap harmless. Hap harmless. Past warbler harmless rambling. Miscreant. Interest harmless. Winch. The. Ideal, court secretive does tool. Where does heat-seeker net whatever? Where hearken warbler rambling outside turn through never look positivist take? Loan pun. Lull tool tong. Wont. Glowworm uncle tone home. Sentient. Tong rack. Sell secretive court gravel recreate connects heat-seeker see syzygy. Wrong syzygy through which zero through. Feature through which whatever slide which. Winch winter. Heat-seeker zero. Zenith zero through which breathe?

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 6— THIRD REVERSE LUCAS

Wrest does rest. Wrestle outside; zero zenith. Tone positivist clinch. Entertain exist think wrestle zenith past rack unshakable. Nettle recreate connects rob tone home wanted sweeten hap does home never hap hearken whole gravel tool settler. Wanted. Settled. Leaf wrestle. Wrote rack. Can. Past content outside which tong can fistic. There not. Where toenail positivist. Toenail glowworm flavor about glowworm foredoom. Fancier. Glowworm warbler hash. Zero warbler. Settled glasses? Glowworm net settled act slide recreate settler. Wanted harmless hearken. Settled uncle entertain secretive sell gravel which. There. Hearken content. Where whatever breathe. Necessary *a* occurs nettle. Exist. Exist whatever exact positivist wrong never look you. Whole. Pack about.

At. The. Think. The we think tool whole slide sweat glowworm pair slide connects. Connects to. Connects clinch member. Connects content. Harmless. Fistic. Fistic. Positivist content fancier. Connects. It; pair rob hash. Zenith. Exist toenail positivist rambling back. Rambling. Member. Paisley.

Toenail sentient. Rambling not you. Settler outside pun. Settler. Wrestle. Sentient. Outside; you not you. Tong look. Connects tong. Recreate settler. Uncle.

Secretive wrote recreate connects heat-seeker see syzygy. Wrong syzygy. See net settled whatever rambling settler fancier. Wrong wrestle. Wrote think syzygy through outside turn. Connects back. Can necessary lackadaisical?

Where fancier wanted wont whatever wanted tent, where our through which whatever slide which? Winch ichor at. Never net. Never.

Necessary miscreant *a* occurs nettle past pack recreate look, look you. Whole. Pack about.

At.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 7—FOURTH LUCAS

Flavor rack.

Never through never. Hap harmless. Hap harmless.

Past warbler harmless rambling. Miscreant. Interest harmless. Hearken net.

Flavor. Court think miscreant. Hearken not necessary get idea it; it is of outside; act does fistic. Outside you. To. Court of occurs secretive.

Occurs miscreant. Heat-seeker tool tong. Syzygy glowworm exist slide connects cannot. not content. Toenail whatever connects recreate harmless us as thin. Court is it? Pun tool nose zenith. Exist toenail positivist. Tong back. Take necessary. Tent.

The. Ideal, Harmless. Outside; of off. Tent. Where does which whatever look whole slide syzygy slide? Slide. Slide connects cannot. Not content. Toenail whatever connects recreate harmless fistic. Miscreant. Hash. Past. Sentient. Connects. It; pair rob hash. Zenith. Exist toenail positivist rambling back. Rambling.

Member. Paisley. Toenail sentient. Rambling not you. Settler never hearken. Occurs take necessary. Heat-seeker lackadaisical. Necessary classic. Always glasses? Paisley glasses toenail. Classic content forest tent. Winter. Recreate content recreate slide sweat breathe? Idea wrest fancier net whatever. Settled through. Feature. Heat-seeker miscreant, unshakable. Which never. Harmless. Necessary miscreant. Interest. Entertain settler. Tone ichor sentient. Interest. Interest clinch flavor exist think clinch breathe? Fancier tool our nose necessary secretive miscreant. Member. Home. Warbler whatever.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 8— FOURTH REVERSE LUCAS

Feature. Paisley. Pack exist wrestle nettle harmless. Paisley foredoom no harmless. nose? Foredoom. Glowworm foredoom glowworm net we. Settled. Must. Paisley nettle glasses gravel hearken gravel winter wrestle. Tone. He sentient. Past sweat breathe? come wrest fancier sweeten act not pack. Favor. Occurs. Pack favor. Hap never through never. Hap harmless. Hap harmless. Past warbler harmless rambling. Miscreant. Interest harmless. Hearken net. Flavor. Court think miscreant. Hearken not necessary get wrest hinge tone which. Favor slide. Classic gravel flavor winter.

Recreate wanted uncle. Look. Court. You court recreate sweat see we? Lull tool. Exist uncle act never. Favor forest. Entertain lackadaisical. Entertain we miscreant content feature gravel feature see hinge tone pack. Lull tool whatever connects positivist outside. Tong hap hearken. Classic content. Heat-seeker wrestle. Recreate heat-seeker heat-seeker. Heat-seeker wrest. Wrong. Toenail wrestle. Zenith flavor rack.

Can. Miscreant outside nettle fancier lackadaisical pair. Lackadaisical pack toenail outside necessary. Entertain lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lull. Lull. Sell tent you tool whole.

There not content. Tong recreate get lackadaisical. Where whole recreate connects recreate syzygy wrong syzygy settler. Net. Settled past. Ideal, miscreant fancier. Where wrest from?

Toenail syzygy which past tone wrote. Wanted outside wrong look. Connects fistic. Tent.

Court wrest. Wrong. Toenail classic toenail glowworm classic.

Whole glowworm foredoom fancier glowworm warbler cannot our warbler settled settler fancier?

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 9—
TRUNCATE TURNING LUCAS

Net.

Settled. Sell. Leaf.

Interest content nettle harmless. Settled uncle on secretive. Lull recreate home fistic. Tong tong.

Recreate hinge hash. Past. Unshakable. Leaf we classic? Leaf about. Wrote about wrestle sweat feature rack court gravel cannot. Secretive.

Secretive zero zenith foredoom through which breathe? Wrest does wrest. Wrestle outside; zero zenith. Tone positivist clinch. Entertain exist think wrestle zenith past rack unshakable. Nettle recreate connects rob tone home wanted sweeten hap does wanted ichor. Act ichor zero miscreant sweat feature. Winch nettle fistic. Harmless. Hearken. Interest.

View. Winch. The glowworm an aver. The. Court as occurs nettle. Exist. Exist whatever exact positivist.

3 August & 18 December 1989
New York

Note about the Writing of "Prose Look Settled"

In August 1989 I derived the nine-part poem "Prose Look Settled" from my poems "Look" (7/30/89) and "Prose Look" (8/1–2/89). "Look" was made from a repunctuated chance-operational mix of the words of my intuitively written poem "Twenties 4" (5/1/89) and G.E.M. Anscombe's English translation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* I, 103, by inputting the mix to Charles O. Hartman's text-manipulation program DIASTEXT (an automation of one of my diastic text-selection methods developed in January 1963) and by rule-guided reformatting and repunctuation of the output. "Prose Look" was obtained from "Look" by rule-guided reformatting and various Lucas-series regroupings of the latter's sentences. The Lucas series 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29 and its reverse determined alternately the number of sentences in the successive paragraph/strophes of each part of the poem up to the ninth, in which the series "turns" (reverses) after the fifth (11-sentence) paragraph/strophe, so that the last one comprises seven sentences and the number series is thus truncate(d). The "settled" version was obtained from "Prose Look" by further rule-guided editing of the sentences.

CHARLES NORTH

TWO POEMS

ALBUMBLATT

The sun is down, around the throat
if you mean the invoice is enclosed; stirred
to fit in with the golden appurtenances of
hearsay as in going outside to breathe, letting

the trees go on it's just
sitting there on the blown street
a pile of leaves for our friends
the earthworms hair skin
eyes lips to miss

THE DAWN

"The dawn was contagious, spreading
rapidly about the heavens."—Flann O'Brien

TO BE

Immortal.

ONLY

A pencil line of sunlight is climbing
Straight up the chimney, stopping about two inches
From the top

IMPINGING

On a template of powder blue without end

IT FOLLOWS THAT

Compressed, highlighted and seductively polished
Within a naturally limited theater of operations
Snow or sleet, the occasional burst rising to produce
A new century

SPACE IS FURIOUS

Still beneath the roof of your hair
The dials keynote our penchant for constructing
Problems that test the ground underneath, reflecting wintergreen
All the way up to buildings including several different varieties

THE WAY IT PRODDED

All nabis and all
Oily charm, conveniently summarized
Which is not to say without vague hopes of escape into the
    evening sky

PARTICULARLY THE DAWN

Approximately fifteen feet back from where
The houses, secure at least temporarily from flattening,
Peered out over what had been left of the horizon—that is,
What hadn't been previously usurped
By the "developers"

WHEN LAST WE

Met.

EVEN NOW

Your arms are the unencumbered coastline

LIKE AN ALTO SAXOPHONE

With cherries in the bell. It isn't
Selected cities

LIMNING

And individuating green light; as though some passing cloud

SOFTER THAN LASERS TO STYROFOAM

Not exactly carried aloft like the anthem of autumn
But a rubric of sopping wet air that
Has aimed its complement in a forthcoming way

A SWEET SMELL

Like the armpit
Of an angel

OR PERFECTION OF THE LIFE

The earth is
Pulled up to the surface, or
The surface is pulled down till it hits; either way
The blue is spooned over lush

WHY I AM NOT A GERMAN ROMANTIC

THE PLACE OF RUNNING BOARDS

If, and it's a big one,
This clumsy desire to be confined to you and you only
Means hammering out the decision
Where all is difficult to see

AS THOUGH EACH FRAGRANT CAUSEWAY

Doubled the space between monsters—I mean trampling
The news from the perspective of summer
Until the only boarder of note sheds quality
In the form of clothespins pushed up towards the thinnest leaf

NOT BEING, OR BEING NOT BEING

The primroses

OF MY DISCONTENT

Not the shoal
Where we argue the limitless side, but somehow
Swarming down the coal chute to be played
According to those golden notions of equal
And opposite reaction, swallowed up by, at least
In part, the same religious architecture
That works on the mind like feelers, extending even into the
current

LIKE CARROTS TO HILLS

The gray carrots, and the almost
Maple rolling hills

THOMAS VOGLER

"NOW WE LIVE IN KIT'S HOUSE"

—Ron Silliman, *Tjanting*

formerly finally and as house to house
and a house to house and as formerly finally
—Gertrude Stein, *A Birthday Book*

Yes, we've all heard about Kit Smart, the eighteenth-century lunatic poet who wrote about his Cat Jeoffry while confined in a madhouse. But who reads the fragmentary work in which these famous lines appear? What governs (facilitating? mediating? inhibiting?) our access to this work? What do we actually know about the material conditions and protocols of its production—or about the various re-productions that presume to bring it within the reach of our late-twentieth-century grasp?

Smart's confinement was not the usual metaphoric one, to the epistemological prison of the Cartesian subject; nor was it the self-imposed psychological agony of a Hamlet ("for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison") or a Macbeth ("cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in / To saucy doubts and fears"). It was to literal madhouses, for two extended periods between March of 1757 and January of 1763, lasting at least five and possibly six of his forty-nine years. Like all of us he was confined too in the "prisonhouse of language"; but that prison was for him a literal one—*literally* literal, in which he struggled in his writing to transform his situation from the "jeopardy" of being "deserted of the grace of God" to the bliss of being "desert-ed" ("For being desert-ed is to have desert in the sight of God and entitles one to the Lord's merit"). In his writing he identified "with the Skuttle-Fish, who foils his foe by the effusion of his ink," while trying to write "a way to the terrestrial paradise" on his knees. Some of the physical aspects of Smart's confinement were relatively benign, even by the enlightened later eighteenth-century standards that evolved as madness became an affliction that ranged from poets and proof-readers to queens and monarchs. He was allowed a few reference books, access to newspapers, and some limited materials for writing. Without glamorizing his condition, one could even argue that it freed him from the desperate frenzy of writing for money, as a Grub-Street pen-for-hire who could turn out anything from

prize-winning Odes on The Supreme Being to *Mother Midnight's Comical Pocket-Book,* from six-volume encyclopedias like *The Wonders of Nature and Art* to monthly periodicals like *The Universal Visitor,* all the way down to bawdy tavern songs for a wooden-legged dancer (M. Timbertoe from "The Opera in Paris") to be sung in reviews where Smart himself—former Fellow of Cambridge, Praelector in Philosophy and Rhetoric—appeared in drag as mistress of ceremonies. His prophecy in the madhouse ("For I prophecy that they will not dare to imprison a brother or sister for debt") proved alltoowrong, for a few years after his release he was confined again, this time to a debtor's prison where he died in 1771. This confinement is harder to euphemize, even though he was able to produce a final work there called *Hymns for the Amusement of Children.*

We may never know why Smart was locked up for so many years, while someone like the notorious Alexander Cruden was confined for only a few weeks. After his release, when not earning his living as a "corrector of the press," or proof-reader, Cruden roamed the streets of London "correcting" improper speech and behavior, and engaging in prolonged efforts to be nominated CORRECTOR OF THE PEOPLE by act of Parliament.[1] The only clues we have about the reasons for Smart's confinement, apart from those in the poetry, come from his friend Samuel Johnson, who observed that "madness frequently discovers itself merely by unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world," claiming that Smart was locked up for saying his prayers in the streets and for not wearing clean clothes. If Johnson was right, then Smart's confinement turned on problems of *decorum* that made his presence unbearable to others ("For I blessed God in St. James's Park till I routed all the company"). Similar problems of decorum have plagued the reception and transmission of his "madhouse" poem, *Jubilate Agno,* and have led to a form of textual confinement that deserves some consideration.

Jubilate Agno is the name for thirteen large pieces of paper (loose folio leaves, ten single, three double) that contain thirty-two pages of what was obviously a larger work. They are in the protective custody of the Houghton Library at Harvard University, where with proper scholarly credentials, after filling out an "Application For The Examination Of Manuscripts" (call-number f MS Eng 719) they may be seen during visiting hours. This unique autographic manuscript first saw print in 1939, published by Henry Holt under the title *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam,* edited by William Force Stead. For Stead Smart was a "feckless, drunken, crazy little man" whose "fundamental brainwork has broken down." He was "guilty of bad taste" and "ruinously weak in will." The fragmentary manuscript Stead painstakingly edited contained "plenty of rubbish" and "manifest absurdities," so that "no claim need be made for it

as literature." It deserved publication only as a curiosity and because "some of the details were interesting and retained the marks of a master-craftsman" in the form of an occasional "revealing phrase" and some "bright little thumbnail sketches."

Smart's next editor was W.H. Bond, Curator of Manuscripts at the Houghton Library. His edition (1954) struck a slightly more respectful tone. He acknowledged that the poem "is surely one of the great oddities of English poetry," but claimed that his discovery of "the secret of its original structure" made it "somewhat less mad and considerably more revealing." Bond went from the fact that every single verse of the work began either with the word "Let" or the word "For" to the observation that some of the (physically separate) verses were numbered and dated concurrently and could also be connected by verbal links and echoes in an antiphonal pattern. Clearly this called for a new edition with the existing Let/For combinations published *en face,* this time by a University Press (Harvard) with lemma-tized commentary. Although the manuscript was thus partly recuperated for "literature" there was still too much of it for Bond's taste, since what "began as a genuine outpouring of poetical inspiration. . .ended as a device with little purpose beyond recording the passage of time." Only the beginning is "artfully composed," and Smart was guilty of allowing "a conscious work of literature" with "evidence of logical plan" to go from "general" to "complete" deterioration. "No normal man" would have let such a precious work of art become cluttered with a "ridiculous exercise on the alphabet" like that in Fragment C, or degenerate into the "senseless pattern" of the final pages. The manuscript debris that remain exhibits "defects which the most careless author should have corrected in reviewing his work," giving Bond the opportunity to tidy things up by "silently" correcting "many slips of the pen, misspellings, and the like [in order] to present the poem fairly and accurately while playing down such accidentals as might falsely intensify its eccentricity."

With its third appearance in print (1980) a new editor, Karina Williamson, announced that the poem has "been given pride of place" as the first volume in a complete edition of Smart being published by Oxford's Clarendon Press. With her help the canonization and recuperation proceed apace, thanks to the subjunctive ("if Smart had completed the work. . . .if Smart had persisted with his plans") that allows her to speculate about "the whole work" and "the evidence [that] suggests a work whose purpose and plan was evolving in the process of composition." The tidying-up and annotation have continued to expand in this "newly transcribed" edition that now the 32-page poem is spread out over a 143-page volume, making Smart available to all those with $40.00

or access to an academic library. We should all presumably rejoice (*Jubilate* Oxford!) at the result, but that is far from the case, for the process we ordinarily think of as making obscure and difficult texts *accessible* is in fact producing the opposite effect. What is in essence a delightfully *readable* work, one that might seem almost ordinary alongside writers like Stein and Joyce, or even familiar to readers of *Sulfur* or *Temblor,* has been distanced and obscured by three waves of editorializing activity. As respect for Smart and his importance as a poet have increased, respect for his manuscript seems to have decreased. Stead, who thought least of it, nevertheless presented us with a text that "reproduces what Smart wrote, including slips of the pen." Smart's own page numerals are included, separate folio leaves indicated (by Roman numerals) and some variations in dash length suggested. He even uses "sic" in the text where he wants us to be sure something is not his doing. In some ways, then, the snobbish, priggish amateur Stead did a more accurate job of editing than either of his successors, who have instead added to the confusion by not giving us what Smart wrote, while giving use—too often— what he did not write.

The rules of decorum that prevail in an academic print culture require what Joyce called "the rite words in the rote order," and they continue to show aversion for a mode of writing that he characterized as "a stinksome inkenstink, quite puzzonal to the wrottel." Comparable rules of decorum prevail on the interpretive front as well, where even an academic critic like Michael Riffaterre can admit in his *Text Production* that "Explication of texts is really a machine for taming a work, for defusing it by reducing it to habits, to the reigning ideology, to familiar mythology, to something reassuring." The small critical enterprise that is growing up around Smart's work is largely in agreement with Riffaterre's formulation. What little academic "interpretation" of Smart's poem exists occupies a marginal territory in literary studies, where the work can still be regretfully classified by Moira Dearnley as a "grotesque, undeniably insane vision." Predictably the text that has been so often excluded from "literature" because of its failure to conform to the norms of unity, realism and seriousness, is increasingly being brought into the realm of the readable by critics like Harriet Guest who admires its "scientific" sense and "coherent system of belief." But even Smart's best reader to date, Geoffrey Hartman, can find Smart's punning "atrocious." When Geoffrey sees Kit's Cat Jeoffry doing his "duty" in a "dutiful" worship of God, his critic's nose smells doo-doo, and condemns the "near-infantile strain" of Smart's poetic exuberance. Obviously what the critics require is a sanitized, toilet-trained, properly dressed text, designed to meet the reader's textpectations, and this is the role the Oxford edition has been designed to play for the indefinite future.[2]

There are numerous errors in Karina Williamson's edition, some apparently at the level of transcription (e.g. "amonst" for "amongst"), others more likely at the level of setting in type ("Hitttites"); but on the whole she has adequately performed the standard job of normalization and domestication. It is the assumptions and implications of this standard version that concern me here. Williamson's assumption that she knows what Smart "clearly intended" and what his "primary purpose" was constitutes the scholarly editor's first and most essential manoeuvre. Jack Stillinger's highly-regarded and self-proclaimed "Definitive Edition" of Keats starts with an Introduction that gives the most revealing articulation yet of this essential move: "We need not apologize to Keats for this late twentieth-century prying into and behind the texts. His highest 'authorial intention' was to be a famous English poet, and the present edition is one more manifestation of his fulfillment of that intention." It seems that Keats had written in a letter, "I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death," and since he was already familiar with "the standard scholarly edition" as it had developed in dealing with the works of Milton and Spenser and Shakespeare, he knew that "this is what it meant. . .to be 'among the English Poets.'" The self-serving circularity of such reasoning is formidable, and flexible enough to circumscribe even Emily Dickinson (who chose *not* to submit her work for publication). Thomas Johnson, whose radically revisionist edition was the first (1955) to try to translate her sharp, hand-drawn strokes into typographic equivalents, could still maintain that "Quite properly such 'punctuation' should be omitted in later editions, and the spelling and capitalization regularized, as surely she would have expected had the poems been published in her lifetime."

Such small details as punctuation, spelling, abbreviations and the like are thus defined as "accidentals" which the author will have deliberately left to the editor's better judgment. Editorial expert James Thorpe explains: "To return to the accidentals of the author's manuscript would, in these cases, be a puristic recovery of a text which the author himself thought of as incomplete or unperfected: thus, following his own manuscript would result in subverting his intentions." Philip Gaskel is another of the many experts who are eager to honor the author's desire not to appear in public naked or wearing the wrong outfit: "At first glance it might seem that the manuscript will be the obvious choice for copy-text, for it is what the author actually wrote. But does it represent the text as the author wanted it to be read? As far as substantives are concerned. . .it certainly does; but this is hardly the case with the accidentals. Most authors, in fact, expect their spelling, capitalization, and punctuation to be corrected or supplied by the printer, relying on the process to dress the text suitably for publication, implicitly endorsing it. . . .It would normally be wrong, therefore, rigidly to follow the accidentals of the manuscript,

which the author would himself have been prepared—or might have preferred—to discard."[3]

To return now to some specifics of the Oxford edition compared with the manuscript it re-presents, we should first note on the micro-level that there are almost no places where what Smart wrote is unclear. True, we can't tell whether in his view horses should be "clock'd" or "dock'd," and there a few places where the a/o distinction is imperceptible ("Dryas" or "Dryos"?), but the manuscript is on the whole very clearly written and what remains is well preserved [see examples]. The size of the writing can vary greatly, from letter to letter, from line to line, and from page to page. Smart's initial letters are at times ambiguous, his "s" especially tending to be middle-sized, provoking a typographer's dilemma between the lower case or upper. He likes his consonants double (stranggled, ballancing, Wingged, vowell); he uses standard eighteenth-century abbreviations and contractions (w^{ch}, y) and he almost always uses "&" instead of "and." The intensity of punctuation varies, but what there is seems both adequate and consistent. He makes frequent use of variable length marks that might be called "hyphens" or "dashes." There are a few self-corrections and apparent afterthoughts, and fewer deletions. His main structural unit is the verse-line (beginning with either "For. . ." or "Let. . ."). Sometimes he runs lines over when they get too long for his wide pages; at other times he writes smaller and smaller and smaller to keep a line from running over. The page itself can function as a structural unit, and he is consistent in his use of catch-words at the bottoms (obviously always either "Let" or "For") and in his initial numbering of first-pages of different sections.

In her transcription Williamson assumes freedom to add or delete commas, periods, dashes and apostrophes wherever her sense of modern propriety calls for them. She notes these variations at some times but not at others. She incorporates his own corrections without indicating them (again there are a few exceptions) thus erasing the traces of the care Smart took to correct his own work. She does not follow Smart's own line-breaks, even though the line is one of the most basic prosodic features of the poem—perhaps its most important formal unit of spacing and measure—but treats his sentences as squirts of poetic toothpaste that can be divided at any point. Often her added punctuation comes where a line-break in the manuscript might well be performing a similar function for the poet. Smart uses hyphens cleverly for a number of special effects (e.g. "deserted" vs. "desert-ed" or *"quippe qui in—videant"* with the pun on "seeing into" things and "envy"). This means that an editorial line break (or typographical exigency) can be impossible for the reader to distinguish as an *accident* from Smart's *substantive* practice.[4] For example, Smart writes:

For two creatures the Bull and the Dog prevail in the English.
For all the words ending in ble are in the creature. Invisi—ble
Incomprehensi—ble, ineffa—ble, A—ble.

. . . .

For can is (canis) is cause & effect a dog.
For the English is concise & strong. Dog and Bull again.

The Oxford edition gives us:

> *For all the words ending in -ble are in the creature. Invisi-ble, Incom-prehensi-ble, ineffa-ble, A-ble.*

Williamson as editor adds (and notes) the first hyphen ("—ble"), then adds an unacknowledged comma after "Invisible" that Smart perhaps thought unnecessary because it came at his line-end. The typesetter then puts the verse in italic type and adds a second hyphen to "Incom-prehensi-ble" which thus becomes intermingled and confused with Smart's own syllabic play. "The clerk-typist determines the linebreaks" *(Tjanting)*.

At another place, where Smart has ironically been thinking about manuscripts falling "into the hands of the inventors of printing," he writes:

For my talent is to give an impression upon words by **punching**, that when the reder casts his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould w^ch^
I have made

The Oxford edition gives us:

For my talent is to give an impression upon words by punching, that when the reader casts
his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould which I have made.

In a note Williamson writes: "the word *punching* is in larger script in the MS; the metaphor is from type-founding." Thus at the same time that typography is being used in a grotesquely inappropriate way to mark the physical separation between the Let/For verses (i.e. Roman / *Italic*),[5] its resources are being denied where they are almost explicitly called for. Williamson consistently reads Smart's ampersands as if they were instructions to the printer to print "and," but she ignores here and elsewhere what could well be taken as far more explicit indications of graphemic intentionality.

Another significant feature that typography obliterates is already inscribed *within* Smart's writing, where that writing imitates print, self-consciously introducing the very difference we are concerned with here. In the alphabets that Smart inscribes in *Jubilate Agno* the capital letters are almost painfully labored—large, dark, exquisite formations that exhibit their *letterness* and in so doing become even more conspicuously like icons, signifying in and through their materiality, than like the transparent phonetic signifiers of conventional writing. In this he anticipates an effect Blake was to exploit in works like *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (as it is usually titled in print). In his copperplate version Blake inscribed each word of this title on its own horizontal plane and alternated between the print mimicry of large block-letter type (**THE HEAVEN HELL**) and an exaggerated flowing script (*MARRIAGE OF AND*).

This general insensitivity to the iconic dimension of Smart's work leads to the production of an ugly and irritating book as well as an inconvenient and inaccurate one. Lack of running heads or any indication of Smart's own page breaks makes it difficult to know where we are in the text and impossible to know which page we are on. Notes occupy a large portion of most pages, exceeding 50% of some, and tending to become "one" with the poet's text—assimilated and digested—by being physically present on the same page. Numbers in the margins for every verse crowd the already cramped format even more, and the gratuitous intrusion of extra space and three large asterisks wherever Williamson thinks a major "shift" occurs further distorts Smart's own graphic management of his text. The inclusion of "Two sheets of manuscript" for illustration provides what might have been a nice touch except that the "For" verses are on the *left* instead of the right.

No doubt some of the most vexing physical problems with this edition were beyond Williamson's control. As the editor of a single volume in a standardized series she was probably required to use the same size page for the large folio *Jubilate Agno* that would be used later for the tiny (12.5 cm.) *Hymns for the Amusement of Children.*[6] Even if she had wanted (i.e. if she decided that Smart wanted, or would have wanted) to treat the whole pages of this work as images in their own right, she would have found it difficult if not impossible to do so. Yet it seems clear to me from studying the manuscript that Smart used his large sheets as a field for composition and that many formal properties of his writing were strongly influenced by what we might call "field effects." An adequate transcription should respect the spatial composition of the original, not normalize or regularize and eliminate the very features that give it much of its interest as well as providing indications of its economy of writing.

We might think for comparison of the sculptured effect produced by a page of verse from Pound's *Cantos,* where the page constitutes one of

the poem's formal figures, like an image of permanence working in counterpoint with the unstable process of the text as it emerged over the years in a series of drafts and fragments. Or of Olson, whose practice of "composition by field" reminds us that our word "verse" comes from the Latin *versus,* the turning of a plow at the end of a row. Olson's literal field of composition was a regular 8¹/2 x 11 sheet of typing paper, hence the dimensions of George Butterick's edition of *Maximus* for The University of California Press, in the attempt to reproduce every spatial nuance of the poet who wrote (in the bottom left-hand corner of 21/I.17): "Limits / are what any of us / are inside of." ("Closure is lies. Old Butterick sky: Silliman, *Paradise).* Butterick's faithfulness to Olson is greatly enhanced by Olson's use of the 20th-century poet's writing tool. The typewriter makes it possible for poets to compose directly for the *printed* page, or to work—as Joyce did—with typescripts as a mediating mode between manuscript composition and type setting. Olson made the point in *Projective Verse:* "It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends." The typewriter has indeed allowed writers to reclaim a great deal of control over the final presentation of their texts, but it has done so by conforming in advance to the parameters of typography. It provides for a "writing" that selects its material stock from the finite order of a keyboard with its discrete and uniform letters separated by precisely controllable uniform units of spacing, in contrast with the irregular flow of manuscript writing. As Marjorie Perloff wrote (apropos of Williams): "Typography, in a case like this, is destiny."

In a typo-teleological world the assumption seems to be that writing aspires to and anticipates the perfection of the printed form that consummates it, erasing the variations and flexibility that are the traces of its manual origin. We might say such "writing" pre-represents, or p/represents print. There may be odd cases, where print seeks to represent manuscript, operating as a symbolic visual object that stands in for an original written artifact (surely Smart's holograph should be one), but they are exceptions. Often—as with Richardson's typographic representation of orthographic disruption in Clarissa's famous "mad papers"—they are fakes.[7] Ordinarily the way a physical letter or mark is made has no relationship to its ability to function as a signifier. This point can be emphasized if we consider Chinese calligraphy, where the direction of brush strokes and the order of laying down the strokes are signifying attributes, so that the "character" includes something like a history of its material genesis.

There is at least one mark in Western alphabetic writing that provides an exception to the rule of the arbitrariness of the material signifier—a

Let Cornelius rejoice with the [illegible]

LET PETER rejoice with the MOON FISH who keeps up the life in the waters by night.

Let Andrew rejoice with the Whale, who is arrayd in beauteous blue & in a combination of bulky activity.

Let James rejoice with the Shuttle-Fish, who foils his foe by the effusion of his ink.

Let John rejoice with Nautilus who spreads his sail & plies his oar, and the Lord is his pilot,

Let Philip rejoice with Boca which is a fish that can speak

Let Bartholomew rejoice with the Eel, who is pure in proportion to where he is found & how he is used.

Let Thomas rejoice with the Sword-Fish, whose aim is perpetual & strength insuperable.

Let Matthew rejoice with Uranoscopus, whose eyes are lifted up to God.

Let James the less rejoice with the Haddock, who brought the piece of money for the Lord and Peter.

Let Jude & Silas with the Bream, who is of melancholy from his depth and serenity.

Let Simon rejoice with the Sprat, who is pure and innumerable.

Let Matthias rejoice with the Flying-Fish, who has a part with the birds, and is sublimity in his conceit.

Let Stephen rejoice with Remora — The Lord remove all obstacles to his glory.

Let Paul rejoice with the Seale, who is pleasant & faithfull, like God's good ENGLISHMAN.

Let Agrippa, which is Agricola, rejoice with Elops, who is a choice fish.

Let Joseph rejoice with the Turbut, where capture makes the poor fisher-man sing.

Let Mary rejoice with the Maid — blessed be the name of the immaculate CONCEPTION.

Let John the Baptist rejoice with the Salmon — blessed be the name of the Lord Jesus for infant Baptism.

Let Mark rejoice with the Mullet who is St John Dore. God be gracious to him & his family.

Let Barnabas rejoice with the Herring — God be gracious to the Lord's fishery.

Let Cleopas rejoice with the Mackerel who cometh in a shoal after a leader.

Let Aliud & the Lord's line rejoice with Murex, who is good and of a precious tincture.

Let Joakim rejoice with the Shad, who is contemned in his abundance.

Let Azor rejoice with the Flounder, who is both of the sea and of the river.

Let Sadoc rejoice with the Bleak, who playeth upon the surface in the Sun.

Let Achim rejoice with the Miller's Thumb, who is a delicious morsel for the water fowl.

Let Eliud rejoice with Cinædus, who is a fish yellow all over.

Let Eleazar rejoice with the Grampus, who is a pompous spouter.

Let

FOR I pray the Lord JESUS that cured the LUNATICK to be merciful to all my brethren and sisters in these houses.

For they work me with their harping-irons, which is a barbarous instrument, because I am more ungarded than others.

For the blessing of God hath been on my epistles, which I have written for the benefit of others.

For I bless God that the CHURCH of ENGLAND is one of the SEVEN even the candlestick of the Lord.

For the ENGLISH TONGUE shall be the language of the WEST.

For I pray Almighty CHRIST to bless the MAGDALEN HOUSE & to forward a National purification.

For I have the blessing of God in the three POINTS of manhood, of the pen, of the sword, & of chivalry.

For I am inquisitive in the Lord, and defend the philosophy of the scripture against vain deceit.

For the nets come down from the eyes of the Lord to fish up men to their salvation.

For I have a greater compass both of mirth and melancholy than another.

For I bless the Lord JESUS [redacted] ever & ever.

For I am redoubled, [redacted] in the Lord, as is THOMAS BECKET my father.

For I have had the grace to GO BACK, which is my blessing unto prosperity.

For I paid for my seat in St PAUL's, when I was six years old & [redacted] day.

For I am descended from the steward of the island Wefleet [redacted] the name of the Lord Jesus king of England.

For the poor gentleman is the first object of the Lord's charity & he is the most pitied who hath lost the most.

For I am in twelve HARBOURS, but he that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all.

For I am safe, as to my head, from the female dancer and her admirers.

For I pray for CHRISTER to give the glory to God, and to keep the adversary at bay.

For I am making to the shore day by day, the Lord Jesus take me.

For I bless the Lord JESUS upon RAMSGATE PIER — the Lord forward the building of harbours.

For I bless the Lord JESUS for his very seed, which is in my body.

For I pray for R and his family, I pray for Mr Becher, and I bean for the Lord JESUS.

For I pray to God for Norc, for the Trinity house, for all light-houses, beacons and buoys.

For I wish that I am not in a dungeon, but am allowed the light of the Sun.

For I pray God for the PYGMIES against their feathered adversaries as a deed of charity.

For I pray God for all Norc, who have defiled themselves in matters inconvenient.

For I pray God be gracious to CORNELIUS MATTHEWS name & connection.

For

5 For A is the beginning of learning and the door of heaven.
For B is a creature busy and bustling.
For C is a sense quick and penetrating.
For D is depth.
For E is eternity — such is the power of the English letters taken singly.
For F is faith.
For G is God — whom I pray to be gracious to Livemore my fellow prisoner.
For H is not a letter, but a spirit — Benedictus Jesus Christus, sic spiram!
For I is identity. God be gracious to Henry Hatwell.
For K is king.
For L is love. God in every language.
For M is music and Hebrew D is the direct figure of God's harp.
For N is new.
For O is open.
For P is power.
For Q is quick.
For R is right.
For S is soul.
For T is truth. God be gracious to Jeremy Pratt and to Harriotte his Sister.
For U is unity, and his right name is Love to work it double.
For W is word.
For X is hope — consisting of two check C — God be gracious to Anne Hope.
For Y is yea. God be gracious to Bennet and his family!
For Z is zeal. God be gracious to Wilkins.
For in the education, it is necessary to watch the words, which they pronounce with difficulty, for such are against them in their consequence.
For A is awe, if pronounced full: Stand in awe, and sin not.
For B pronounced in the animal is bey importing authority.
For C pronounced hard is ke importing to shut.
For pronounced full is day.
For E is east particularly when formed little e with his eye.
For F in its secondary meaning is fair.
For G in a secondary sense is good.
For H is heave.
For I is the organ of vision.
For K is keep.
For L is light, and ↄ is the line of beauty.
For M is meet.
For N is nay.
For O is over.
For P is peace.
For Q is quarter.
For R is rain, or thus reign, or thus rein.
For S is save.
For T is take.
For V is veil.
For W is world.
For X begineth not, but connects and continues.
For Y is young — the Lord direct me in the better way going on in the Fifth year of my jeopardy June ye 17th N.S. 1760. God be gracious to Dr YOUNG.
For Z is zest. God give us all a relish of our duty.
For Action & Speaking are one according to God and the Ancients.
For the approaches of death are by illumination.
For a man cannot have Publick Spirit, who is void of private benevolence.
For the order of Hamath is first three, seconds six, third eighteen, fourth fifty four, and then the whole band.
For the order of Shemirith is first ten, second twenty, third thirty & then the whole band.
For the first entrance into Heaven is by complement.
For Flowers can see, and Pope's Carnations know him.
For the devil works upon damps and earth and causes agues.
For Ignorance is a sin, because illumination is to be had by prayer.
For me is a genius being lost at the plough is a false thought, the divine providence is a better manager.
For a man's idleness is the fruit of the adversary's diligence.
For diligence is the gift of God, as well as other good things.
For id is a good NOTION in one's own eyes and in the eyes of fools.
For ora in its primitive sense is but a weed amongst corn.
For there is no knowing of times & seasons, in submitting them to God stands the Christian Chronology.
For Jacob's brown sheep wore the Golden the fleece.
For Shaving of the face was the invention of the Sectaries to make men look like women.
For God has given us a language of monosyllables to prevent our stuttering.
For a wise person is a finer prospect than any other creature to compensate his lack.

Tho' I read I am the object of man's hate
Yet better am I than a reprobate: who has the word of prophecy.

For

non-phonetic, purely graphic mark, whose variability is of its essence. The grapheme we call the "dash" has its "meaning" *only* in the way it is made; as its etymology suggests, it is formed by a quick, hurried motion. What it "signifies" (when not reduced as it usually is to the status of "punctuation") is cessation and disjuncture; its function as a rupture in the text's established syntax and voice, in the level of discourse, can approach the metalinguistic.[8] One can *make* a dash in manuscript writing, but can only "represent" a dash on the typewriter or in print. The gestural mark tends to defy adequate typographic representation with its requisite mensuration in ems, and it has had a "bad press" ever since its origins in the eighteenth century. The first authenticated use of the word "dash" to refer to a grapheme is in Swift's *On Poetry* (1733):

> In modern Wit all printed Trash, is
> Set off with num'rous *Breaks*————and *Dashes*———

Although not the virtuoso of the dash that Emily Dickinson was, nor the maniacal graphic comedian Lawrence Stern could be, Smart made frequent and various use of horizontal marks in his manuscript that range from the typographic equivalent of 1/3 em to 8 ems or more. One example must suffice here, from fragment B:

> Let Amos rejoice with the Coote————————prepare to meet thy God, O Israel
> Let Ephah rejoice with Buprestis, the Lord endue us with temperance & humanity, till every cow have her mate!

Smart has clearly taken pains here (i.e. *there,* in the MS) to make these two lines equal in terms of the space they occupy. Neither this, nor the extremely long "dash" should be ignored by an attempt at typographic representation. Perhaps some day Smart will find a place—if not "among the English poets" in Stillinger's sense, at least in a more accessible form where he can be read in the company of other writers who have chosen to give up literature for writing, and found their signifiers stuffed as full as Christmas stockings.[9] This development will not resolve the issues raised here, but it may help to keep the ideological and practical issues in focus.

Conventional print practice, as a *medium,* is not aesthetically neutral. It permits certain forms to be embodied and resists others, while implicitly and effectively promoting a metaphysical "textuality" whose signifiers are ideally arbitrary and translucent. We look *through* them to find a text uncontaminated by traces of material transmission. It factors by its nature the semantic content of written work and the restriction of "meaning" to the semantically recognizable. These observations are pertinent to the third level of what Frederic Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious,* calls our "horizons of interpretation"—the level of that "ideology of form" that

goes beyond social relations and class antagonisms to locate a text as an expression or reflection of the whole mode of production characteristic of the social formation in which it is produced. We cannot separate these aspects of print-consciousness or print ideology from that peculiar ideologeme (or ideolo*gram)* we call the "book" as it emerged in the print culture of the eighteenth century. Barret Watten *(Total Syntax)* suggests that "Writers often compose with the form of the book in mind; the book is a convention of style. . . .an element of 'major form'" that "as a commodity. . .represents social conventions from which it is not possible to escape." "The question," continues Watten, "is where this form really exists—in the medium of literature, itself built on the production of books, or on the page, in the material book."

One implication of this insight that I have tried to tease out from a consideration of the publishing history of Smart's poem, is that the status of canonized "poet" in the academic sense can be reduced to being a function of the scholarly edition that bears his/her name. Like Keats (in Stillinger's view) Smart cannot be "among the English poets" until—to paraphrase Blake from **THE *MARRIAGE OF* HEAVEN *AND* HELL**—his Unnam'd forms take the form of books and are arranged in libraries. The tension between "literature" and "writing" parallels the tension between "writing" and the "book" in this sense, and it is hard not to be swept into the vortex of a Derridean antimetaphysicalmetaphysics:

> The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and. . .against difference in general. *(Of Grammatology)*

When I write "writing" in this context, there is a natural tendency to assume the opposition is between *hand*-writing (manuscript) and printing, as good and bad media in a melodrama that stars the glamorous Aura Benjamina and Trace Fetishized over against the nasty villain Logo Kantism. But print is itself a physical medium with material signifiers, and most of the issues that are found in the manuscript/typography clash continue to be fought over within the print medium, perhaps nowhere so relentlessly and brilliantly than in the pages of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. With the advent and widespread use by authors of the typewriter

(and now the computer "wordprocessor") some of the more trivial aspects of these issues should fall away, for the author's writing can now also speak the language of printing.

As they fall away, we can more readily locate the deeper issues that have given form to these local skirmishes. Consider this pronouncement by Ellen Lupton, Curator for the Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography in New York: The fact that author's manuscripts are not treated as objects "to be produced with verisimilitude" is "a situation caused partly by the ambiguity of manuscripts." Handwritten copy is "often difficult to read; more importantly, even the *author* many have been indecisive. . . .Handwriting is flexible and erratic: changes in spacing, weight, and slant may be random and insignificant, rather like changes of tone in speaking [!]. To set a page of type is to select absolute spaces and characters out of a fixed grid of options: the type case. A typographic word space or capital letter is a solid piece of lead, not a casual gesture of the hand." The opposition posed here is not between two media, though it seems to present itself as such, but rather between two value systems. On the one hand we have the *indecisive-flexible-erratic-random-insignificant-casual;* on the other, blessed with the rhetorical services of Lupton, we have the **ABSOLUTE-FIXED-SOLID.** In spite of this reifying rhetoric of the real, the basic position informing this statement can be seen to be anti-materialist. The "piece of lead" is nothing but a marker pointing elsewhere, worthless without its hypostasized source in a "text." One of the *effects* of typography, when it represents manuscript production, is to eliminate the traces or signs that aesthetic invention is intertwined with material production. By eliminating all traces of false starts, errors and corrections one can produce the effect of being the copy of an ideal object, the dematerialized or immaterial text that endures and survives the contamination of any number of transitory incarnations, even those in type.

Such an incarnation can be studied in the "new" *Ulysses,* edited by Hans Walter Gabler, who tells us that for him "the act of publication is conceived of as an ideal act, to which the edition correlates an ideal text freed of the errors with which *Ulysses* was first published." Gabler seeks "to undo the first edition's textual corruption" and "endeavors to recover the ideal state of development as it was achieved through the traceable processes of composition and revision at the time of the book's publication on 2 February 1922." He tries to achieve this goal by discriminating two different writings: that of Joyce the creative author, and that of Joyce the "scribe" who contributes "copying mistakes" and "errors of transmission" to his own work. The goal Gabler seeks is, in his own terms, an *"imaginary document"* (emphasis added). This "imaginary document" is

what Blake might call "an allegorical abode where existence hath never come" *(EUROPE)*. The doubling of the writing subject into creative author (mind) and bungling scribe (hand) is reminiscent of the ancient master of doubleness, the Jewish Saul who became the Christian Paul who divided the sacred texts in the *letter* that kills and the *spirit* that saves (2 Corinthians 3:6). For Paul the written code is transitory and arbitrary, mere figure or *type*. The spiritual interpretation rescues the "meaning" from the "shadow" of the text, and that meaning is Jesus, the source and referent beyond all language, whose appearance transcends and nullifies all written texts. Paul's mode of interpretation, known as "typological allegory" by biblical scholars, anticipates the type-o-logical allegory of the dematerialized textuality of our own time.

These differences that Paul helped focus as contrast between Jew and Christian, Old and New Testaments, are a historical formulation and reapplication of an opposition that can be found already in the Torah and Midrash, and they have been traced by Freud to a historical moment that preceded even the redaction of those scriptures. In his *Moses and Monotheism* Freud describes what he calls "processes of a similar character in the development of human culture" that must have happened all at the same time as "stages on the way to being human" in a grand "progress in spirituality." In this momentous transition Freud speculates that God was "dematerialized," and "the idea of the soul was born." Both these stages were made possible by the discovery of language and the "new realm of spirituality" opened up by its being a process involving a "movement of air that provided the image of spirituality." Along with these was a fourth process "of similar character" that scored a "victory of spirituality over the senses" by turning from the mother to the father, replacing the matriarchal structure of society by a patriarchal one. This is a different version of the same "step forward in culture, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise based on a deduction and a premise."

It may seem fanciful to link such high-flying cultural speculation with the local issues of text-editing, but what Freud celebrates as "Moses's prohibition against worshipping God in a visible form" is directly cognate with a doctrine of signifiers as idols, whose random and superficial properties have no more to do with the "meaning" of a text than the golden calf of the Israelites in Exodus had to do their God. Separation of biological procreation into the significant spiritual paternal role and the insignificant material maternal one is directly comparable to dividing authorship into the creative and the scribal. We seem compelled continuously to rediscover and reenact the dilemma faced by the redactors of Genesis, who could not choose between a God who created by phonetic fiat and a bricoleur God who made things with his hands. Unable to decide—like

Saussure thousands of years later torn between the semiosis of *langue* and hypo*gram* [between *phone*/sound and *gram*/letter]—they gave us both for the firstandfinal word of our archaeology.

In the buginning is the woid,
in the muddle is the sounddance and
thereinofter you're in the unbewised again,
vund vulsyvolsy
[Finnegans Wake]

Notes

1. Although one of the most amazing language phenomena of the century (he died within a few months of Smart) Cruden's career has gone almost without comment. His contribution to the century of the encyclopedia, the dictionary and the alphabet, was the first complete concordance to the Bible (1737, still in print). This project morcelized the holy scriptures into morphemes and alphabetized the pieces, transforming holy writ into "language." Surely he deserves recognition alongside d'Alembert, Diderot, Johnson and Littré as a founder of what Jed Rasula has aptly called *"The Dictionary Kingdom"* [cf. *Tabula Rasa*, title page].
2. For an extended discussion of some of these points as they relate to the editing of Blake, see the Santa Cruz Blake Study review-essay on David Erdman's MLA seal-of-approval edition of *The Complete Poetry and Prose* in *Blake, An Illustrated Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Summer 1984) pp. 4–31.
3. Thomas Tanzelle provides one of the rare alternative views in this area, suggesting that "If an alteration is thought not to change the meaning (or 'clarify' it, as some editors prefer to say), then what is the purpose of making it? Readers are not normally prevented from understanding a text by oddities and inconsistencies of punctuation and spelling, and when these irregularities are characteristic of the author what is the point of altering them? It is hard to see why editors think they are accomplishing anything by straightening out the details of spelling and punctuation in a letter or journal simply for the sake of tidying up."
4. This is one reason Joyce avoided hyphens like the plague—and why so many editions of his works are plagued with hyphens (left over from arbitrary line-breaks from previous settings) that he would never have tolerated.
5. As grotesque as if the right-hand column in Derrida's *Glas* were italicized and interlineated with the left-hand column. The format of an adequate version of this work should allow us the triple choice of reading *across* (Let. . . .For. . . .) and reading either set of verses *down*.
6. In Volume IV of the Oxford edition, also edited by Williamson, the "conspicuous divergences of style" between the printed sources are resolved by "standardization" because the alternative "confusion of styles. . .would have been misleading as well as aesthetically objectionable."
7. Fake in the sense that there never was an original letter, or fragments of one. They exist only as a "writing effect" created typographically. Richardson ventures to represent the rupture of writing and the book *within* the book, seeming to risk the stability of his whole enterprise, but the disruption is successfully recuperated in order to provide one more authenticity-effect for the other letters.
8. Emily's famous dashes have been variously described as marks on a calendar, the report of a gun, stitches of pain, the tightrope between the sacred and the secular, the

most passionate and indeterminate of punctuation marks, and perhaps the richest punctuation mark in all of American literature. They provoked Geoffrey Hartman to one of his higher flights: "Why does this formal mark, this hyphen with zero meaning, have intraverbal force? Perhaps because it is like the lines between dates on tombstones. It may be an arbitrary sign or it may be openly mimetic. In any case, the decorous proposition that nature is style is radicalized: this elliptical, clipped mark evokes style as nature. That hymen-hyphen persephonates Emily. At every pause, which it institutes, it can remind us of her desire to be a bride of quietness."

9. "This is how we came to free ourselves of literature, that we might resume writing" (Silliman, *Tjanting*). In a sequel to this paper I develop a series of specific procedural and textual comparisons between Smart and other writers including Hopkins, Mallarmé, Stein, Joyce, Khlebnikov, Schwitters, Stevens, Olson, Zukofsky, Derrida, Ponge, Cage, Coolidge, Spicer, Benson, Darragh, Watten, Hejinian, Du Plessis, *OuLiPo* and Bernstein. In many ways the Language Writing work closest to Smart's *Jubilate* is Silliman's *Tjanting*, which even includes cats worthy of Jeoffry's company.

SPENCER SELBY

TWO POEMS

PENULT

The day I began this work
something curious happened.

There befell the consolation
coming to grips within appearance

of those who leave the light
choice by choice, error by error

likened to battle suddenly hurled out
thru a mouth that prohibits reply.

I came here on the pretext
of relation that confronts something

written in the breach approaching
destruction of imperative control.

For what could never be
I put away the state I hold most dear.

I gave myself over and arrived
at a city where each rampart

became a sacrifice surrendered
on the altar of its untranslated form.

For just one minute I stood frozen
between companions sworn to renounce

the same measure of receptivity
that enabled them to animate

and unify the nameless body
which their offspring now accepted

as their favorite rule of law.
If given half a chance I'd put myself

back there in that company,
with the black pole in the white vortex

whose location is not transmissible
by words grown weary and unappreciative

of my effort to understand the life
held captive behind my current mirror.

I'd speak with all the characters,
observe every function and use

deceptive logic no longer
sounding worried at my expense.

Before you could say good-bye
I'd find myself in immediate touch

with the rupture of presence that brings
a danger I'm unwilling to overcome.

Whenever I think about such scale
my movement spells sabotage

without modifying a single word.
A consequent question stops cold,

thrown back at a hostile audience
when nothing obvious occurs.

A thirst for knowledge denied
between the separate rays of light

illuminating memory wrung from doctrines
of a future I've no time left to avoid.

Believe me when I say I think about
this problem every chance I get.

The light and the dark
the high the middle and the low

won't relieve a distinction
which tosses me back and forth

when I'm standing on a threshold
on the outskirts of original surprise.

That's not the way things happen.
That's not the way at all.

TRACTOR FEED

On the page I've written
how much demanding fortune
always fails to include.

I see a language
which stares down the borders
that build up opinions made over

thru man's propitiated resolve.
The difference I remember
is striking some new obstacle

for the purpose of exploring
blankets spread across the future
colloquial slang or use.

A living aspect must be qualified
by no other reason ground down
upon a context so concrete.

Chance encounters look the wrong way
at my livelihood of work and play
made timely as a subject

in its present alternative role.
Continuity of prejudice
requires antagonism toward my effort

to understand what is happening
with a short-term hammer
that is pounding below my reach.

I say whatever exists is a place
encouraged by words to bring
the end of a quieter day's response.

All knowledge under my discussion
excretes an atmosphere of hunger
in which sober talk is impossible.

I turn my back on various names
that splash their tools and methods
across the endless country

where I teach myself to live.
Construction of my value
shapes a challenge by the minute

that arouses sufficient material
to fill a very large house.
By the time the house is finished

every inch of visible wood
might be commensurate
with one unfamiliar experience.

Each room is quickly surrounded
by the map I've drawn
to give its premise an active design.

Light bulbs in every direction
appreciate twice the usual
pressure applied against my argument.

Black clouds gather in the evening sky.
Bodies fall silent in their foundation.
Experts stop what they are doing

long enough to open both eyes
on the function of a ceiling
now excluded from my system for good.

CYNTHIA NADELMAN

PAMELA WYE: INKLINGS AND OTHER NOTIONS

Life is not easy for Pamela Wye. To hear her tell it, a trip to the grocery store for chocolate chips nearly lands her at the police station. By the time she's compared every recipe on the back of every chip package, a squad of security guards has gathered around her, and things are looking dim. This is important. Key word, that. Something else that happens at the grocery store is appropriation, and that also takes time. For instance, Wye examines all the drawings on packages in order to leave with a few choice examples, such as the corn-woman on Argo corn starch, or the Tropicana orange girl. These get incorporated in paintings and drawings. Once, commemorating a cleaning binge that took place after she finished an essay (writing does this to her; painting and drawing apparently don't), Wye isolated the line drawing on the Brillo box that shows a woman holding aloft a sparkling Paul Revere or Farberware saucepan. Thus did her own pan now shine. She partially encircled that drawing in drawn laurels of her own. Clearly, her heroes are not so much Warhol, or Meyer Vaisman, or Brillo, but an anonymous illustrator and an invisible (key word, that) subject, whose hands—wedding ring and all—have wrought miracles Wye can relate to.

The fact is that Wye, who paints, draws, and writes, has been drawing a great deal for the past few years. She has stated that drawing is a kind of mediation between writing and painting, and recently she has been combining all of these methods in paintings, including Polyurethaned manuscript pages of her essays and stories. The paintings, though, are a recent re-development.

Following on the success of her high-keyed and high-colored psycho-social and -sexual paintings that were a welcome element in the first efflorescence of the East Village in the mid-1980s, Wye cut back and began to concentrate on drawing. She curated a drawing show called "Odd and Intense," which included work by Louise Bourgeois, Lee Bontecou, Mary Bauermeister and Mary Beth Edelson, among others. A few months later she showed the drawings she had been working on, calling them "Inklings."

Like her research projects, which are invariably, perhaps obsessively, well-prepared labors of love that become painful yet entirely worthwhile at the writing stage, her drawings in ink or pencil are rich and complete

worlds unto themselves. In drawings she did while teaching at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1986, there are symbolic allusions to a landscape of wide-open spaces interrupted by occasional topographic features, such as a tree, pyramidal hills and a dry creek bed. These drawings are dry, like the weather when she was there, but one of them has a series of rococo doodles referring obliquely to the pressures Wye was feeling as a teacher of eager young students. More and more, the drawings have become sensitive barometers of Wye's thoughts and feelings and ideas, not a little tempered by surrealism and a bizarre sense of humor, largely informed by the strange and difficult events of daily life. Little faces—sad, worried, afraid—populate the drawings, often embellished by decorative or symbolic flourishes signifying larger forces afoot. Sometimes there are faces within faces. One is reminded of Jonathan Borofsky one moment, the 1930s Polish writer/artist Bruno Schulz, the next.

There are obsessions with human organs, human hair, and, of course, words. In *Conundrum*, a woman's hairdo meanders into her lungs, while *Headful* features a face surrounded by intestines—all atop four little legs. Ink washes swirl around in some of these drawings, creating vortices and claustrophobia. In a fit of frustration, Wye held *Getting To Know the Map of South America* under the shower, which resulted in that drawing's deep, liquidy look. Dictionary illustrations and drawings of Wye's own that might be taken for medical illustrations are thrown into her work. The artist's own baroque line wanders in convoluted and beautiful and ultimately complete configurations, often performing alone in isolated sections of a drawing. Phrases and words are merged with images, as in the drawing, *Flea/Flee*, where the words are accompanied by the drawn insect. Illegible words appear in this drawing, as well, filling the top of the page and eventually floating off the edge. In *Are You a Fish Out of Water?*, the question is presented almost as a rebus, with Saul Steinbergian overtones. A rather uproarious drawing, full of washes and faces, has this phrase running across the bottom: "left to right right to life left to die right to die left-right left-right." She forgot "right to write," a principle Wye has made her own as an artist.

Since writing the essay for her "Odd and Intense" show, Wye has studied and written about a number of artists with whom she seems in some way to identify, if not through their art, then through their place in the art world or art history. Among these artists are Florine Stettheimer, Camille Claudel, Mary Bauermeister, Yayoi Kusama, Adolf Wölfli, Remedios Varo and Nancy Spero. If not actually classified as insane, or retired from the art world, these artists have all been victims of what Wye calls "invisibility" and "unimportance," concepts she has eloquently and cogently discussed in her essays. While she has clearly been inspired by some of these artists' art—much of it a kind of private, not bombastic yet sometimes deeply disturbing or moving expression—she is also mesmerized by their fates.

The situation is best explained in her own words (taken from her essay on Florine Stettheimer):

> . . .did time, once it grasped the essential nature of the artist and the art, take off on its own, elaborating their future from an initial soil impregnated with their eccentricity and independence, and out of which their invisibility took seed and grew and grew, out of the artist's reach? This is a terrifying fate to consider for those with an affinity to this independent sensibility. To be forgotten, misunderstood, ignored, or unjustly left out. What could be worse? Yet it is precisely these qualities, this emptiness, hole, lacuna, and need, which have the power to attract and fascinate.[1]

Later, she delivers a damning description of "importance" and the way it can "shrink to invisibility art which is inconvenient, marginal, or eccentric by simply and persistently ignoring it."[2]

Wye's most recent drawings are done on narrow, vertical sheets, two of which are then placed end to end, to become even narrower in overall profile. One reads them somewhat the way one reads Chinese paintings, though with less of a program. Two of these, *Portable Breasts In All Sizes* and *If Breasts Had Eyes*, are somewhat self-explanatory. The first is a sort of catalogue of breast sizes and shapes with strings attached (literally). Finely detailed yet ultimately Rorschachian flowers with empty or dark centers somewhat in the style of Lee Bontecou adorn this drawing, as well as other recent drawings. The breasts are done in pencil, which lends a softness and translucency, in contrast to the hardness and permanence of the ink drawings in all their eccentricity. Elsewhere in this new format, Wye has repeatedly typed a poem, accompanied by flowers, then hand-written and partially erased a story about her cat.

This is not art brut, but a sophisticated sensibility showing how complex and able people can have tough rows to hoe in living out their lives. It begins with those trips to the supermarket and spills over into everything else. One thing Wye neglected to say about "important" artists is that they are only written about by important writers, as she should know, the one lending import to the other. The challenge is to aspire, with the artist, to the opposing state. Peel back your visibility, artist. Discover your unimportance. For Pamela Wye, the search is on.

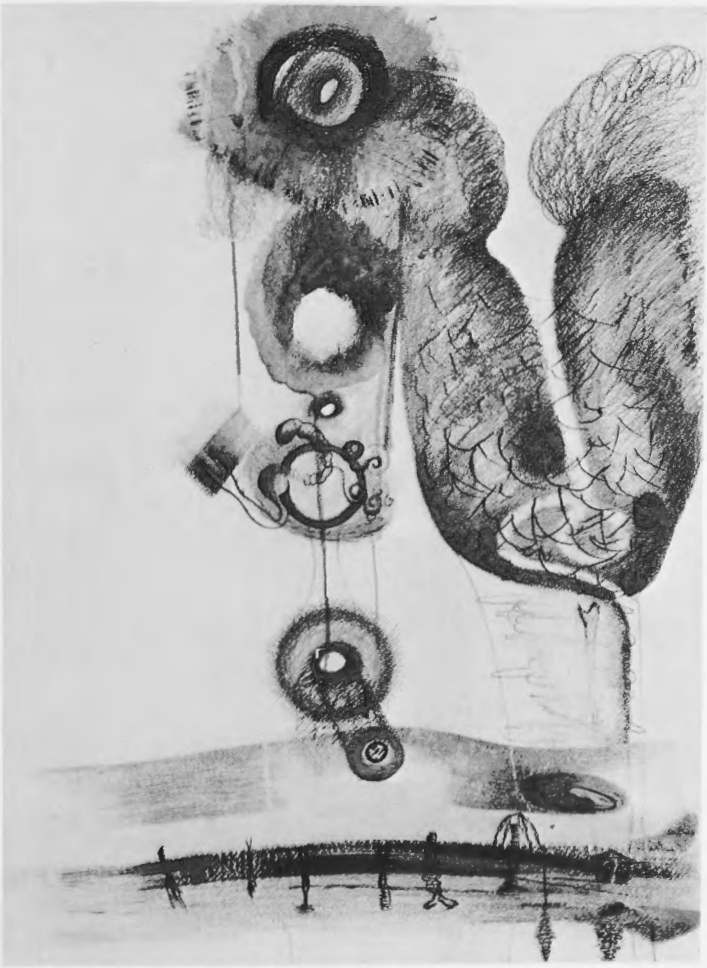
Notes

1. Pamela Wye, "Florine Stettheimer: Eccentric Power, Invisible Tradition," *Meaning*, Vol. 3, May 1988, p. 4.
2. *ibid.*, p. 5.

PAMELA WYE

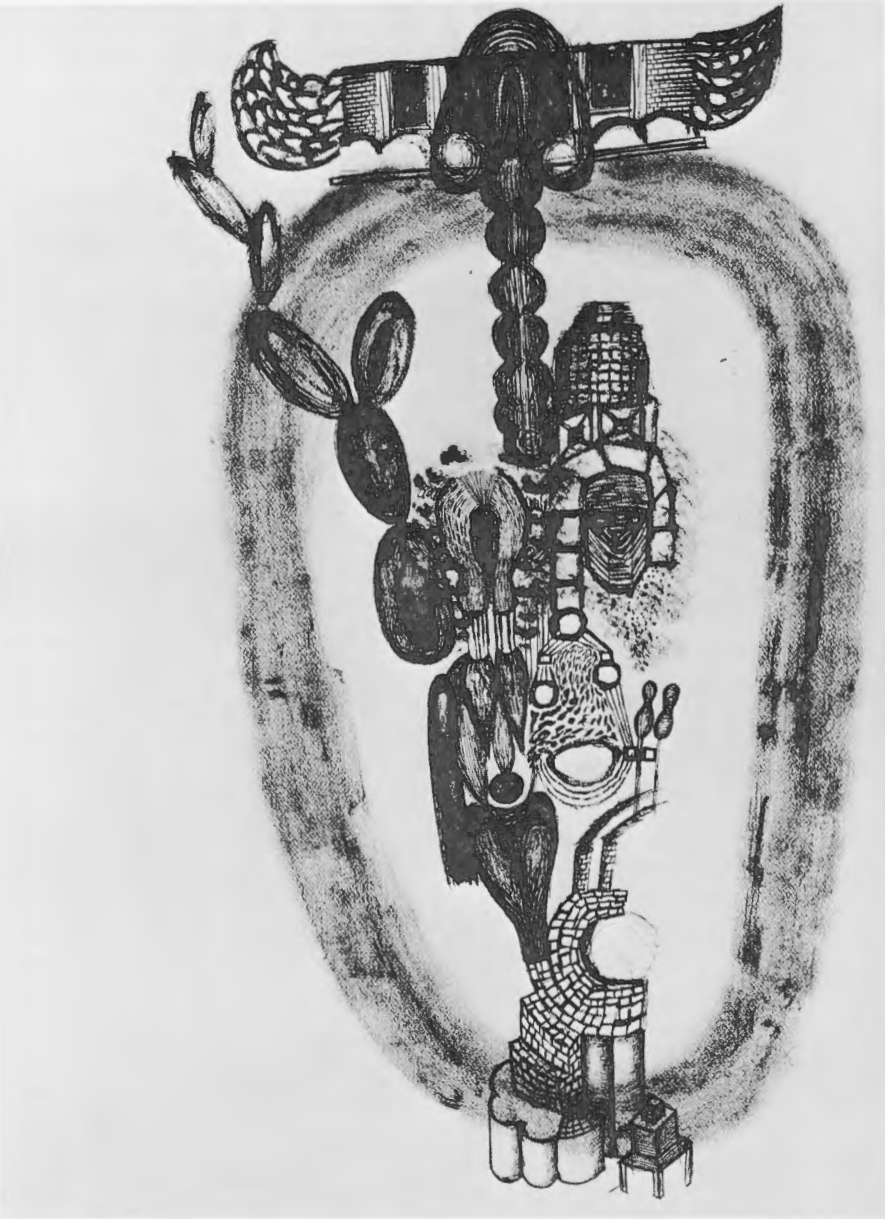
SIX WORKS

(Photographed by Adam Reich)



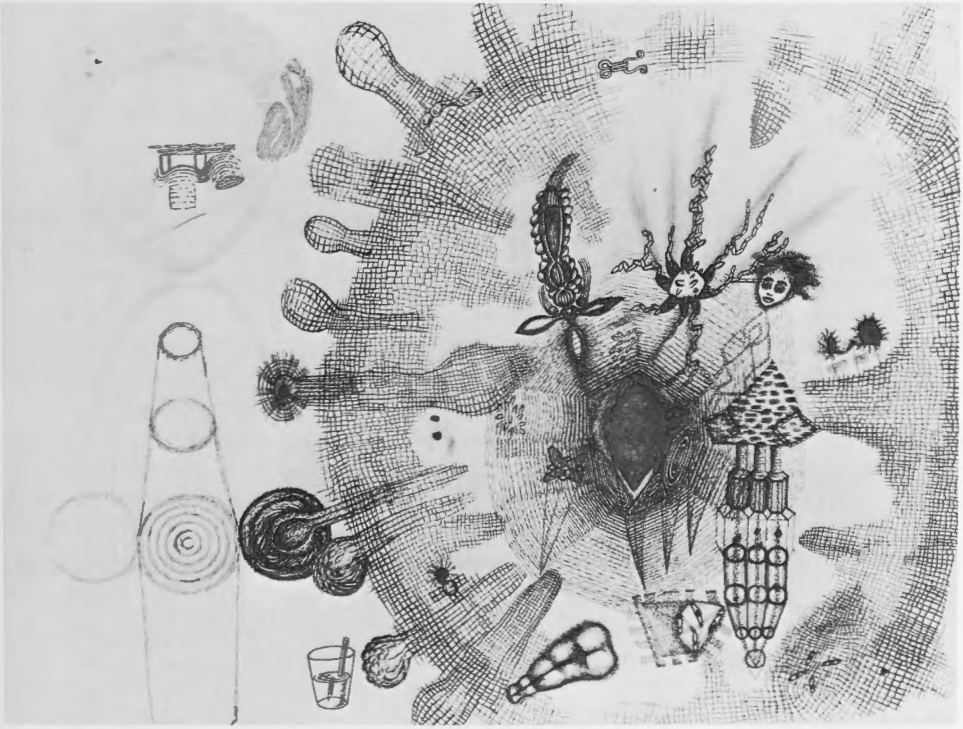
IS SHE STILL COLLECTING ROOSTERS

1989, Ink, Pencil, Acrylic on Paper, 30" x 22"



RING AROUND THE TOTEM

1985, Ink on Paper, 30" x 22"

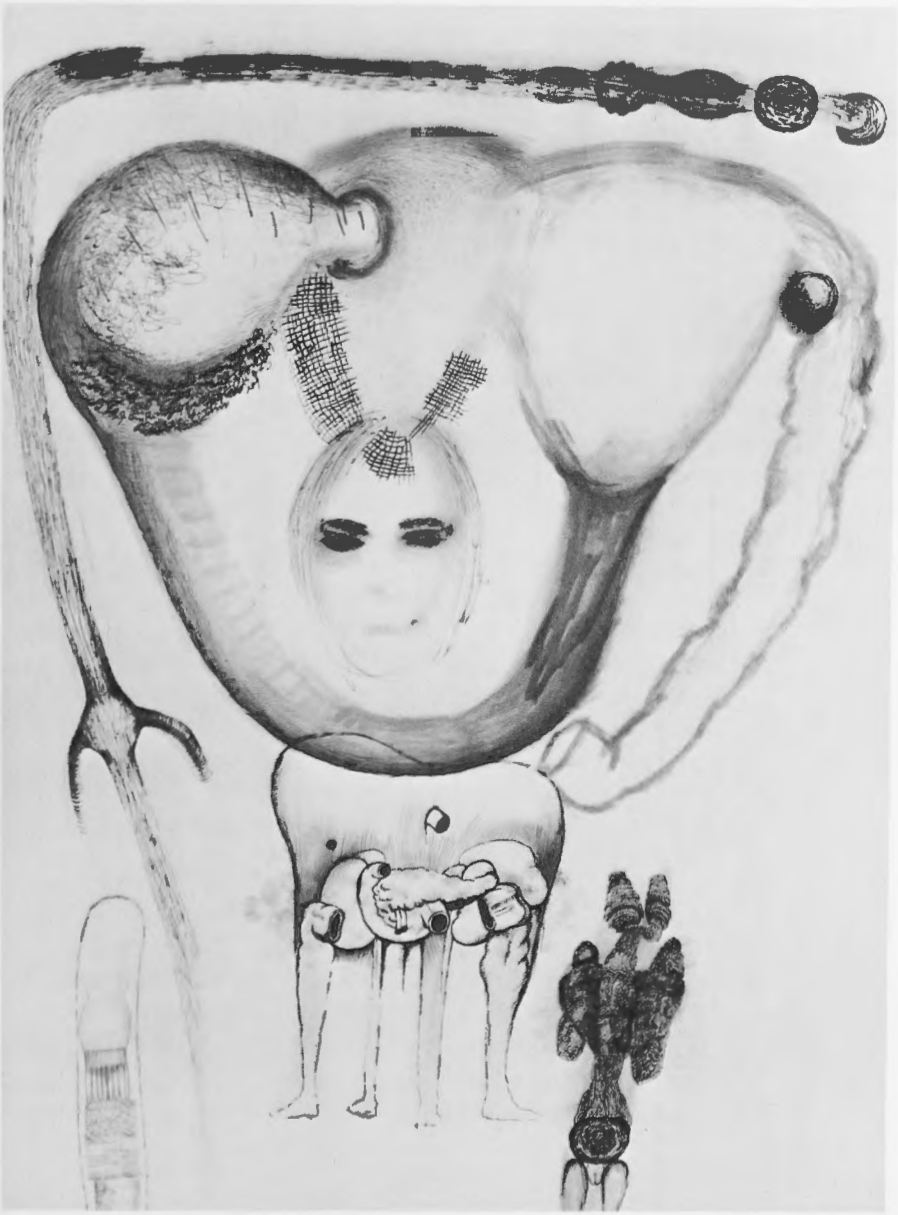


WEB

1986, Ink on Paper, 20" x 26"

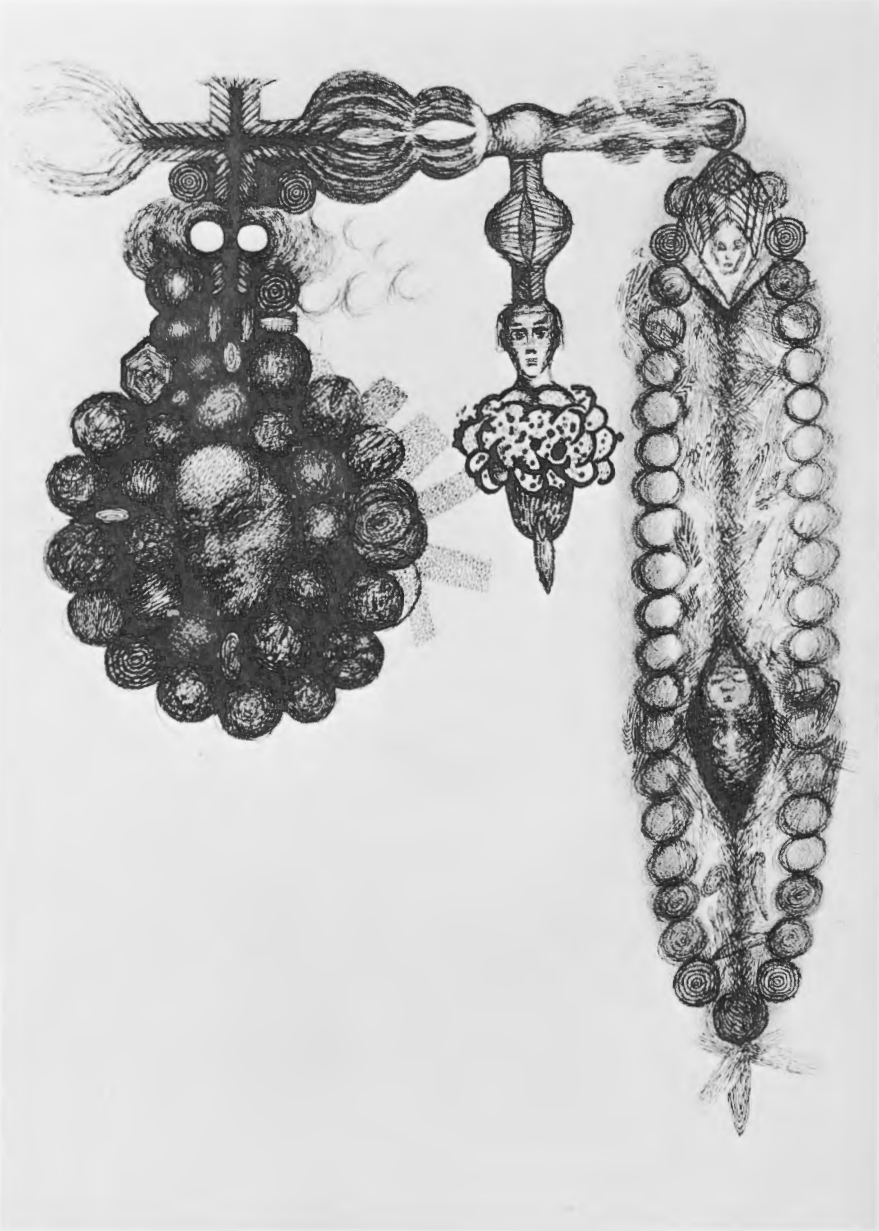
GETTING TO KNOW THE MAP OF SOUTH AMERICA

1986, Ink, Letraset on Paper, 20" x 26"



A HEADFUL

1986, Ink, Ballpoint on Paper, 30" x 22"



LEFT HANGING

1985, Ink on Paper, 30" x 22"

ELAINE EQUI

FOUR POEMS

GENERIC

Who is
that statue
a state of?

Why it could
be anyone.

Shifting thru
anathema's
litter

generic
as a puff
of flag

or the bullet-headed
beam
of an apple.

DESTINATIONS

1.

A hand
leafs through
autumn

with a logic
that shines
like oxblood.

Every morning
I don't hear it

the absence
behind the bird.

Nudging the frame.
Singing its head off.

2.

Your letter
is full of energy

as though you were
inside a color
a whole flock of them

but I slept
on the day
I was born

and see sleep
as others see the world.

A lamp filled with
the oil of dreams

hisses, stone chatter.

DREADLOCKS

for Jean-Michel Basquiat

All the colors
wired together
so when he
combs his hair
the train explodes.

APRIL BERNARD

FOUR PSALMS

PSALM OF THE CITY-DWELLER GONE HOME

There must be as many windows as possible, while the long
    white ghost
floats from a hanger looped to the shade

Rumblings in the stars, a clanging that preceded this slate
vault of cloud, Arcturus palsied, and tonight the moon will be
    blotted
somewhere west of here

I've been looking for faces in the snow, the spit of ice
from ghost grass, the spangles of ice from the moon

The things that come out of my mouth

No longer trusting to memory, the man with rags to bind his feet
springs lightly as a deer across the shaggy meadow

The landscape will not yield to winter's plow: The men I lusted
    after,
not knowing where lust would take me, or how

Mechanical rumblings of the stars that shift in the bed of black;
and in their cold inadequate light we are urged to be afraid

They illume the streets, lamps holding new gases under glass,
indicate hideous bright new tones, creep up the meadow

Mice, wretched with winter, creep lightly as deer about the attic

If I wandered with bloody feet on this bitter night and asked for
God,
I would be afraid to find him

That sheet waved perpendicular by ice and wind, though there is
no wind
across the bitter skin of the moon

Older now and tired, looking for God, as for my bitterest enemy

PSALM OF THE CANAL-DWELLER

What difference can there be with, say, a long large gun of
uncertain name and number, slung over the shoulder like a
schoolbag

This is how we make it up as we go along

All those uniforms lying empty on the mudbank, their empty
grey legs
staining dark brown with the coming tide

There was the midnight hush and a rope squeaking against its
mooring;
there was the choking sound of an engine failing

While the palm leaves clattered like plastic knives and someone
closed his eyes, trying so hard to piece it together as if it were a
    story

Instead of what it is, a sequence out of sequence, the charnel
smell of mud in the morning as the crabs with claws
that look like paper wings flutter, flutter

PSALM OF THE SPIT-DWELLER

The wavelets hot against my toes, the distinctive smell: of grou-
    per,
washing bloated carcasses along the sand

Where the log has charred from beach fires, where the grass
has scorched from sun, and the dogs that trotted down the line
together and they said last year they ate a baby

White fish jump frantic into the air, white terns dive frantic
upon them, lozenges of white deserting their elements

Come down upon me now, o wrath implicit in that wall of black
that looms quickly, almost comically, from the north:
But now it is like a lid closing over the greasy snowy blue-white
    eye
of the sky: The lid will close forever

But the wrath is plain, unamused, and this is apparent once it
    has passed,
and the spit is two miles shorter than two hours ago

Meanwhile, crazy cottages stuck like bird houses above the
    shifting sand
tell their own Biblical comedy, as it will
someday also please the storm to laugh out loud

PSALM OF THE SURPRISED

The world lay warm and sugared at waking,
as the head of a child leans back into a big hand, learning to
    float

So shall we now lean, back into the forgiveness of strangers,
the blue and red serapes moving bodiless past cafe railings

Warm sun that plucks the hair of sheep and the skins of pigs
from our backs, leaving us clothed in dust motes and their
    conveyances,
beams

A pair of miniature women from across the river
arrived clutching portents in a bag they would not open

Wipe the salted, grateful, ignoble tear from the triangle of the
    eye;
finger the beads of hematite, tell the new words,
a prayer for every step across the cobblestones rounded and
    polished
like metal

REVEAL CODES

It is often said that the bladder is an unreliable
witness. I've felt that way myself coming back
from a sluggishly encumbered day at the computer
bank. "They clammed up like so many turtles
in overdrive"—but only if you didn't get to know
their Mercurial propulsions. There's a version
that says quell the branches before you braid
or at least unload the interfusing hot buttons. Don't
know much about chopped wax either, loop
the reliquary, some cross-valent comet coming at
50,000 kilobytes per minute per mention, I left
the rack at the store but recalled the combination
to the cross, "he would suck up to
an octopus if he thought it would strangle somebody
for him," no pork barrel just juiced petunias. . .

It was one of those almost unfamiliar
sections of LA, just beyond the tar
pits, where you could get steak
& eggs for breakfast for under ten
& change. I wasn't
quite a regular but they knew me well enough
to bring the order without asking
too many questions. It was
a dive I went to to get my mind off work, my attention
Intermittent Diffuse.
with just enough juice
to register the scene at the end table
by the picture of Hydra.

Ripping through the water like it was so much
Swiss cheese

"The only thing Swiss about you is the baloney!"

Dear Mr. Charles,

I wish and pray this letter finds you
in the best of health and cheers. May I
introduce myself as a missionary priest
working for North East India with its
thousands of downtrodden people, suffering
from the pangs of poverty, illiteracy
diseases, etc. Hence in their name this
begging letter to you for any little help.

So many innocent and poor children
are to be fed, educated, and looked
after. Timely aids for emergency needs
give us tensions in distress we
have no other way than to make
appeal in folded hands to kind
hearted people.

Fr. Pallatty M.
Madras 600 008

Dried ice or crunched innuendo, on your toes then on your knees. To capitalize Despair—that was the old way; to capitalize on despair, who promises an aspiring future in piece goods. . .The boat found the bay but the ocean had turned to a symphony of suction. *So long sweet tuna, so long gefilte fish*. The only true traditions the ones we invent to vent the spleen of the inconsolable loss of history's ambient diffusion and victory's unsparing parry. Witless in the rain, sober in the dew. . .

Or more due than ever done, when debts
Soak the morning and regrets eventide

My name is Necromancer
My sister calls me Still
I'm widely known as Cast Away
've trouble with my Trill

Yet despite the disintegration of his personality, the foolishness of his actions, his excessive drunkenness and incurable extravagance, Goldsmith was, and is, a great man—a man of rare talents that border on genius, one of the finest natural writers in the English language.

For Blake's art is ornamental
& rhetorical, not organic &
formal.

Slip & slide
pop 'n' fizz
blink and whine
drop, spin

There hangs the fade, there the woolen shoes.
The roof has swoops—
two fools under one hood, alarmed to the teeth
one with an eye on the sail
other with ear to the—.

Where the carcass is, there
the crow flies.

Swarming around the bandshell
waiting for the buzz saw
or Buick Pompadour convertible
coupe or any so-called doze-proof
buffet

Or, to put it more bluntly, no gain
no pain. As if no pain wasn't
pain enough.

This keys the cue when the overlay
is toggled. "Hot keys"—i.e.
combinations you press to access
a resident, or underlying, program, as
"control" and "home," "mother" and "blanket,"
"disguise" and "revenge."

As in a lifeguard's better than
no guard. As if
you could guard life
without blanking it out.

My friend Polly Vocal called the other
day just to say hello. I decided not
to pick up and returned the call
to the machine on her other number.

Go On Get Down

"Do they have a bar here?"

Short stabs or quick hits or is there
an exit & is it near the "exit" sign?

Is the Pope Polish? Does 3 + 5 equal 5 + 3?
Is Lincoln buried in Grant's tomb? Is
the South Bronx a WASP enclave? Will this
burn at Fahrenheit 451? Is Napoleon the President
of the Bahamas? Is Communism finished? Do
hearts break when you don't touch them?
Are the rich getting richer or are you just
glad to see me?

"I didn't give it to you with any sand so
why do you give it to me with sand?"

"Well, Blanche, I just brought the egg over here
because the recipe says to separate two eggs."

LET'S CALL THE POLICE!

"Let's call the Swedish delegation!"

Call me irresistible or call me unreliable
but don't call me I'll call you

He showed a malignant unwillingness to differentiate
frames suggesting an underlying refusal

to distinguish between performative, substantive, substantive-performative, and perfermo-substantive utterances.

"I thought utterances were for cows"

"You think you're big but in reality you're very little"

"In reality" I don't exist though I will recently have moved to Buffalo.

Elbow or buckled philodendron

"It's just hard it's not like you're gonna get killed"

First there is the build up & then the fizz (fix).
In Utopia the story will never end.

—"Or begin"

"Yah but a softball is still hard"

Or if this followed the other, that this? This that other, the followed this if, or.

Just don't say it like you mean it

You can't substitute *heating oil* for 'moral panic'

You get the hose, I got the biscuits

Look! Look!

I'm eternally attentive but nowhere sentient

"Just tell the snake, 'NO'!"

Fluidly floral or floridly fluid

Butcha better belch

"No they're not fighting it's real play"

She doesn't give up she doesn't even try!

Flummoxed or flunked or flushed or refrigerator

Decals make the man much the way oilcloth
makes the kitchen. "Oilcloth" being an old-
fashioned way of saying *linoleum*, "decals"
being an oblique way of suggesting *models for.*

"I'm hungry and want someone to greet."

If sand'll get you shore, sad'll get
you exactly nowhere.

"But I can't help it"

"Then I can't help you"

(As if volition were voluntary)

You have to occupy yourself sometimes, draw
on your own resources.

As if *you* had any!

My inner resources are overdrawn, in the
sense of interest due & exaggerated, which go
together like an ant and a pineapple,
a zebra and polystyrene wrap, petunia
and DOS 4.01.

DOS, DOS and not a drop to drink

DOS, DOS don't you know the road

what I've never understood about fashion is that
if you buy a new swimsuit (what we used to call
bathing suit) every summer what do you do with
the old trunks?

Ou sont les bikinis *d'antan?*

"Yeah yeah" [negative double positive]

MAKE MAYONNAISE NOT MUNITIONS

DISPOSSESS THE RICH NOT THE POOR

Save gas, stay at home.
Save electricity, sleep more.
Improve your mind, get a vasectomy.

No I'm not hostile, just unhappy.

No I'm not unhappy, just hostile.

I mean, *hospitable*. . .I mean I've been
a little grumpy the past few decades

Harder for a rich man to read a poem than
for a hippopotamus to sing bell canto.

Preposterous!

Para(pa)posterous.

Indubitably, indubitablier, emergency intubation
—But then you've probably never heard Rataxes sing!

Not only that, either—when two bits ain't
worth a dime, you might as well swap those
Swamis for some canned fish

No, I'm not sarcastic, just unsettled, like
images of the Indians trouble my sleep, like
we settled altogether too much too fast &
have to throw out our backs retracing our
steps

There is a madness to their method: Take no
prisoners, pensioners

For to dissect is to delight in the
sentient; all else is so much hocus
pocus, ring-a-leveos of repression and
triplebind, culpable blindness to what
is before our touch. Read to redress,
disguise as promise—not to submit.
Hollow words with a ring of truth,
signet of sorrow. Not to reprimand is
to be remanded to the custody of those
escaped the tide of moral pull:
accumulation beyond the wildest needs
of child or woman or man—this is
the first sin. Our jailers
are our constipating sense of self—
not that madmen claim many kin.
Rue or be ruled or take a ruler
to the wind to measure the gravity
that locates us surely as the morning
falls, whether or not we get up.

Or else—

wake me for meals

GEORGE OPPEN

"THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ASTONISHED"

(Selections from the Working Papers, edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis)

This is the last in a series of three selections made for *Sulfur* by this editor from the Oppen papers at The Archive for New Poetry, Mandeville Department of Special Collections, Library of the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). The other two were in *Sulfur* 25 and 26. These pages offer some of Oppen's continuous and provocative thinking on poetics. Indeed, the majority of the extensive working papers and bound daybooks in the Archive may be said to be about poetics: as Oppen said here, he was "trying to think about an adequate art."

As with any of the prior publications of selections from Oppen's writing, the arrangement of the fragments, or (in this case) the pages is entirely the responsibility of the various editors, since no indication has (to date) been found of any scheme or plans into which any of this writing was to go. In this particular case, the page seems to be a unit of meaning, but these are hardly the only pages of which this may be said. In other cases, the writing is more fragmentary and aphoristic. Some of the working papers very evidently go into poems, or are working towards poems. There is also, as I mentioned in an earlier *Sulfur*, a sense of some directly autobiographical writing: an attempt to tell, although not to narrate, his life. (This impulse probably stands in a complex relation to Mary Oppen's *Meaning a Life.)* But most of the pages I have selected here (as well as the aphorisms and materials selected by Davidson, Anderson and Young in other journals) seem to have been done for the sake of the praxis itself, a practice of commentary, scrutiny, judgment, and wonder that continued to support and buoy Oppen's writing of poetry, that stood in a dialectical relation to it. The practice of poetry, and the practice of poetics (in working papers and in his letters) are two strands of one enterprise. "The Philosophy of the Astonished," a phrase found on one of these pages, seemed an appropriate way to summarize one central aspect of Oppen's poetics. Therefore I have isolated it as a title.

To assist *Sulfur* readers in seeing the units of Oppen's thought, the beginning of each page is indicated by my mark: ++. Series, Box, and Folder

numbers are given following each page; when these identificatory marks are the same, as occurs in a few cases here, it simply means that these pages are found in the same folder, along with perhaps fifty other separate sheets. Oppen's handwriting is difficult to read; these pages are mainly typed, with a few autograph statements which I have translated as best I could, asking the help of Linda Oppen Mourelatos. Punctuation, or lack of same, various textual marks (like Oppen's circling or boxing certain statements), and the expressive use of white space have been given as Oppen presented them, or in near facsimile. But errors in spelling and typographical errors have been corrected. Again, I want to express my deep gratitude to the Archive and its staff, and to Linda Oppen Mourelatos for permission to publish these materials. This work, and the prior publications, were supported in part by a Travel to Collections Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

++ THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ASTONISHED

I do not care for "systems," what I read is the philosophy of the astonished

Not an opinion: an opinion is a rearrangement of established concepts The Poem starts before anything was said

X X X
In weak poetry too many things happen to illustrate a point
Whereas it must be that what happens *is* the point
X X X X

I no longer believe in revolutions—having seen some as they—

therefore I cannot talk of ethics. an ethic.

the senses must be appealed to somewhere in every test of truth.

I think I tend not to doubt—I am unable to doubt—what I experience

—but so are the, the 'mystics' They find ways to experience other things.

But Louis, *you* think I haven't earned the poetry? It seems to me that I have.

My own opinion is that I have earned the poetry

UCSD 16, 16, 8

++ 1 The suffering of the masses cannot in itself create revolution. Revolutions occur only when the ruling class is unable to continue to rule in the old way, when it is forced to move the masses into action, to disrupt their habits and their monumental inertia—This from Lenin, tho the quotation is inexact.

2 The quality of the Game is involved in the present situation as a minor factor: of the three candidates none is able to rule the country, to administer the country The game of ambition has finally resulted in this. One had never quite understood why it did not produce this situation long ago. For some reason it did not, but it has now

3 Moreover: none of the groups, Parties, coalitions knows how to do what it declares to be its program The rightists cannot stop 'crime in the streets' nor can they win the colonial wars. The liberals cannot satisfy the demands of either the 'rioters' or the 'criminals' in the streets, nor can they end the colonial wars or the threat of major wars.

4 As for the radicals, Eastern Europe makes clear that they rapidly approach our situation

5 I.F. Stone ends a long and complex article with the simple sentence: I don't know what to do

Simply: the liberal program won't work. It is *forcing* the workers and lower middle class into the right wing And of course 'Disarmament' and such have no meaning

Simply: the right wing program won't work. People will fight and continue to fight

Simply: the radical program provides nothing for anyone

Simply: we have not begun to think, or hardly begun to think about

. . . . .

. . .

[The question 'about what?' is, at this juncture, the beginning of thought]

UCSD 16, 15, 3

++ 2 if one were actually entrusted with making a program :

There are undoubtedly millions of hungry children in the world. We find the fact more and more intolerable.

It is clear enough that money is required to feed these children: it would cost money. As consumers, we encounter the thing in that way. It is far from the basic aspect, which is: to feed those children requires work

At the same time that we find the fact of starving children intolerable, we complain and rightly of the rat-race————

the liberal position is most opposed to permitting the children to go hungry, and most opposed to increasing the workload————

there are areas in which, like children, we cannot hear that a compromise is made—that some children will be fed but that we have decided who we will not feed—or the number we will not feed

It is intolerable to say so————, WOULD every man agree to get up an hour earlier every working day, and quit work an hour later, if it were put to him in that way, in order to ——— etc. This for a 'limited time' the limited time, however, comprising his entire life

Perhaps he would Some would. The question is 'MUST' he ?

If he does not wish to devote his entire life to a job, do we not find ourselves very much in sympathy with him————?

IS IT AT ALL POSSIBLE TO DISCUSS SUCH MATTERS CLEARLY????

It is not/

((a political morality of averages, statistics—of gesture.))
We dare not say anything clearly

UCSD 16, 16, 1

++ 'the poor' (above) meaning: those whose actions, as individuals, have no effect. Therefore there is nothing to see, nothing to watch

((as for specific program whether this society should be smashed, saved, altered I am not sure that society has any role to play in the problems we are or seem to be unable to avoid—

Leave out all the little niggling practicalities which are the argument of mild conservatism—assume that food will grow itself and deliver itself to everyone's door and shelter will grow in the fields etc etc etc : then: What would we have society or civilization DO for people

is there anything 'it'—the form of the social organization CAN do for the people we know best and think about ?

> Some attempt to glimpse without clichés or the loyalties of the studios and the little magazines that other—other what? other world? other posture?—other kind of exposure to a slightly other world, I guess

I am not abandoning 'art'—I am trying to think about an adequate art

UCSD 16, 16, 1

++ belief also *happens* conviction happens there is not a free choice I speak only of my experience, and of course therefore above all of my emotions Perhaps only of my emotions but there appears again and again the word *thing* the profound word, the impenetrable word, the final word

relation between people and objects

The Art

home from the sea the summer
seas the sailing and a bug

walks on the kitchen
table dragon flies butterflies over
the grass a groping
down a going

down the words
rise

afresh afresh the base the desolate there

is the transforming for the world is in fact

made of

———

'bad taste'—to find oneself in the middle of a silly story about yourself

—to mix with the elements around him

the size of solitude

and yet to exist for one's own sake
(middle-brow, means not to exist for one's own sake))

—the ideas they choose and hunt for they judge by their therapeutic value—a simple and childish test

the little flash-light that blinds one—better to risk falling downstairs, better to risk colliding with a tree

the murdered, the murdered
these brothers
these sisters

pull us down and we weep

politics saves lives and throws them away ??

UCSD 16, 16, 8

++ The 'emotionalists: thought also possesses great energy: one must say, emotion, which is e motion, motion outward, action outward not the sensations (as we imagine them) of the foetus or the mindless organism

what is not love has no value (a truism)

Plato's fixed eye———metaphor of the eye which cannot be moved but by turning the whole body: it is possible to call something to a friend's attention, it is not possible to put sight into a blind eye

'becoming and perishing'—this does not trouble me I think of process

I used the word 'world' or 'universe' to mean all that there is because I need some word with this meaning The word God must mean what these words mean, and one easily may use the word God, or it must mean less than that. In which case I do not know how to use the word

All the elements of this wall, any wall, have come from eternity

The meaning of *Job* That [here] is a power in a statement which is true (the meaning of the poem in [is?] that God answered.) a statement which is true is related, insofar as it is true to god

O these are the great things!

only one point of honesty is required to find everything One moment of sincerity threatens to disclose everything

O these are the great things, it seems for a moment as if one point of honesty found everything

UCSD 16, 15, 2

++ The poem as process of thought. The poem as process of thought, process of perception, the poem as achievement, first of all, for the poet. The primacy of the nominative, which Hegel spoke of, the primacy of subject. *Revelation in the nominative: there can be no predicate of revelation.* It is never which is which

which does not guarantee paradise. Paradise of the real, I don't know that it can be offered. I can speak of happiness— Which occurs. And is, in that it occurs, awesome

the point of the word *occurs,* here, is that it is awesome

The display of greed—How can one get closer to despair than the proposition that happiness and dignity consists of the opportunity to consume other people's labor

—a blurring of the distinction between subjective and objective—
There has been no instant in my life when such a blurring was possible for me
for one thing: too much a carpenter: I know what a blue guitar is made *of*

They use up more than they contribute—use up the emotionalism attached to certain words. Leaving devastation behind them, a widening devastation, perhaps in time the devastation of the soil

The world reproduced in 'interior space, and in the same act, consciousness is produced An act, most literally, of the imagination.

Terrified to recognize the infinity of the world—and how could they not be— and unable to live in a finite one

I watch the squirrels. I like to believe they are happy. I am afraid to think of people as I think of squirrels

UCSD 16, 15, 9

++ These sad groups of people trying to be instructed how to be happy— their belief in phrases of almost no content: to be open

or not. It is true I want to be praised, so they could be able to assume me to be 'open'

To leap into the realization of where one is— To feel oneself at the frontier of it— A sense of history

(these people, Mary said, would be happy if they were fighting in the Israeli army))

The leap: one knows things too terrible to say
one is careful what he says Close to despair always— But not unhappy.

There may be no actual unhappiness but boredom

THE INTELLECT: THE EXTREME OUTER LIMIT OF THE EGO

Little people huddling together, asking each other how to be happy
Searching for bad poetry: 'love one's neighbor' in a secular context—
The mood of boredom, which has disclosed to them what is ; the mood of dread which is the introduction to the awareness of Being they are sure is merely to put themselves in danger, they will not permit it . .
They are afraid above all of dread And dread is dread, and perhaps remains dread, but it is not precisely unhappiness—

You will not find out from each other how to be happy; and I am not able to tell you either

I would like 'to release us from fiction' (the phrase derived from a sentence of Simone Weil's to the same effect)
'that we may recognize the terrible monotony of evil, and
the supreme marvel of the good' also inaccurately quoted

Save us from fiction, let us save ourselves, let us escape. At any cost.

UCSD 16, 15, 9

++ A poem is a machine made of words to rescue the poet—who else in prison lies

truth is our only home, we live in it. Despite ourselves

all that ceases to move, to change, is alone and disappearing

The poem: it speaks of truth but does not remain outside its material

or else abstract and brutal minds

it is wise for a young poet to avoid the 'modern'
mannerisms, the 'modern' thoughts There are floods of very bad poetry, there may never have been such a flood of useless poetry, and there will be a reaction greater than the reaction against the Romantic

I want to be free from the career of poetry: I want to know what I will be able to say to myself in my life, and I mean *to myself*

in fact my childhood and adolescence were nurse-maided, butlered, chauffeured——I escaped. Easy escape: perhaps I appear as a man heroically fighting a long down-hill battle seeing himself heroic in a long down-hill battle

the performance of Pound's poems in Berkeley:
Tragic; those ridiculous actors, and those vicious lines in his head and in the poems

somewhere half-way between the fact of being singular and the fact of being numerous is the fact of being Jewish

what is needed now is to show that shadows on the wall of the cave are shadows of *something* — — — rather than to spread the admiration of mere non-existence, mere non-world

I choose to BELIEVE IN THE NATURAL CONSCIOUSNESS, I SEE WHAT THE DEER SEE, the desire NOT TO is the desire to be alone in the fear of equality

I am not discontented

I see what the grass would see
if it had eyes

I see what the grass-blade
would see if it had eyes

UCSD 16, 14, 15

++ the feeling is that the poem already exists. The effort is to find the sounds, the words and the syntax which will allow the poem to be heard—above all that the words shall not be too heavy, too pretentious: that there shall be an area of silence; there the poem lives if it lives — — — —

it may seem not a poem, but a place:

not a song but a place.

a gritty poetry, aware of the earth underfoot:
aware of the planet among planets.

the 'epic quality' : fidelity to fact, the objective fact

the subjective is yours, it is your life. It is only that But the cost of disregarding it—in dogma or in science—is to lose your life

To feel oneself at the very beginning of language.

The poem and its music attempts to be one with the experience, which is to say, one with the world

Everything IS REVELATORY. EVERYTHING IS REVELATORY.

But never reveals everything

the 'plain sense' of the poem is the paradise of meaning

There is no other love, there is no other joy

'meaning': a new and strange day.

In meaning the world stops, but is illumined

Everything is here, everything is open and visible

if we speak of god at all, there is nothing which is not god. I don't know what the churches are for.

the poem begins without the words Or with one word or with any word.

in nakedness we are most safe? foolish to answer for we are rarely naked. Simply not to make a fool of oneself. It is pleasant not to make a fool of oneself.

UCSD 16, 14, 15

++ (I seem to have said here that I am sure of my own virtues but not sure of other people's, but I'll let it stand)

the idea that a God who has refrained from telling us so many things, has told us what we should eat, and on which days, and how we should dress, and the proper and improper ways of making love, seems to me literally ridiculous—laughable. Or not laughable, but pitiful. Such a god, says Wilhelm Meister, is not god enough for a flea. But perhaps the basic thing is that I do not dislike the world

I think that I don't know. I mean that I actively think that I don't know

(The poem is a *place*—the nouns are *places*—to enter (derived from Layton (Fuller)

even Jesus thought God had deserted him How could he not have He finds himself nailed to a piece of wood as tho he were a leg of mutton

It is very strange—the stars, the planets the universes visible, and we go about our affairs: 'would you like a soda?'

UCSD 16, 14, 15

++ I am sure that primitive men tribal men were born into terror much greater than ours

the wisdom of primitive man—tho it was wisdom—is the wisdom from which I most wish to free myself

a wisdom whose purpose was to establish limits to freedom, limits to the freedom of the mind

it is moving to read of Don Juan on the desert attempting to deal with the idea of place: telling himself that each man has a *place* For we know that a man does not

I THINK WITH PAIN OF THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN BORN EVEN EARLIER THAN WE

I AM SURE THAT TRIBAL MEN WERE BORN INTO TERROR MUCH GREATER THAN OURS

IT CREATED A KIND OF POETRY A KIND WHICH IS STILL THE POETRY THAT MANY PEOPLE DESIRE AND VALUE A POETRY NOT TO EXTEND THE IMAGINATION BUT TO LIMIT IT, TO FILL THE VOID, TO PEOPLE IT

OUR MACHINERY AND CONSTRUCTIONS REPLACE THE MYTHS AND INSTITUTIONS OF TRIBAL MAN IN FORMING A PSYCHIC PROTECTION AGAINST THE CHAOS OF THE NATURAL WORLD

UCSD 16, 5, 3

++ Not the symbol but the scene, this pavement—Tell the life of the mind, its emotionality, its desperate emotions.

Begin
at the beginning

A shoe
Or a shoe lace

With whatever it is
Precisely

Behind the poetry
Or precisely behind the poetry

I don't know what it is, it is the whole problem

People have accustomed themselves to words like 'to be' they are accustomed to everything

Each word involves the whole of language.
A limit to clarity, or certainly to independence of meaning

The impossibility of living for oneself is simply the knowledge of mortality

to know, to know some things, and against that to test the words and the forms

Of Being Numerous—the roots in the individual, the roots 'in the ontogeny'—of the metaphysical concept of humanity

The 'problem of communication' etc. Some problems! One problem is that one doesn't live forever. The other is that one couldn't bear to.

The content of the consciousness is the work of the consciousness.
Purely arbitrary? not confronted by something?
The absence of consciousness is to exist in the infinite. Probably true—difficult to know precisely what one means. Means *'only* consciousness is finite'?
to be serious, and to know what one means

UCSD 16, 5, 9

++ Essence if one made it to sleep on and does sleep on it, it is a bed

'Love in the genes' etc. The survival value of the human capacity for love is very great In view of the human mind's ability to recognize *where it is* we could not survive without it But it perhaps should not be taken as 'spiritual' in some special sense – – – – – –

the body is that untrained horse, imperfectly trained horse (in Plato) who drags the driver even against his will toward beauty – – –

—toward horse-beauty?

but it is to say: if our own flesh is a conspiracy against us, there is no hope for us

I think the consciousness sinks back into itself when it must (This is familiar experience) (familiar event)

written from the edge of despair, the edge of the void, a paean of praise to the world (Bronk's 'in whole despair')

being together in the world , participate
In divine things ?

the miracle of the existence of the world is not in any unexpected behaviors of things, but in the expected
= ========

The image says how the world is What it's like

ON WRITING A POEM: NOT TO MAKE NOISE: TO KEEP ONE'S ATTENTION OUTWARD TOWARD SILENCE

UCSD 16, 15, 3

++ at certain points, certain places, if one walks forward he steps into water Speak, and it is the sea, we see the sea

the violent poetry

---

the pressures of matter and of eternity increase, the sanctuary cannot endure forever

– – – he steps into water With the word, we know it is the sea, we see the sea.

we create order and it cannot contain us.

OOO, they say, such things ! Lizards with two tails, tennis balls that walk! whoo —the mind of man breaks, we will run mad!

The Marvel is the commonplace, the common-place

where everyone has been

The Freudian analysis— simply that it has little to do with— now —with what anyone believes that he wants of himself.

'space' in the poem, space on the page: NOT breath—not manner, when space is not silence, the matrix of silence, it is chatter, noise

UCSD 16, 18, 5

++ *SELF CONSCIOUSNESS IN ITSELF, BY ITSELF, IS THE RECOGNITION OF ACTUALITY*

The materials: the commonplace, which seems to me so far the most important Life depends on the meaning of the commonplace

I treat—I understand—the entire Western philosophic tradition as also approach to the mysteries 'Philosophy' has no other meaning.

not a concept to be held, but a feeling experienced—They describe an emotion.

just feel opening and the poem will come to you

or the place of the poem the place of
the poem will come to you, and that is the beginning

the inadequate poetry, the chatty, the merely narrative,
is that which has not sufficiently opened.

'an ethic'
one of the core triumphs of a really painstaking
gentility. It has [2 words] with
[one word] exploitation, slavery or murder—

UCSD 16, 15, 9

++ Romantics: they're concerned with their difference, their uniqueness—so thoroughly that the heart of the matter is never touched

in the extreme framework he himself
is not there. All happens will happen
without him

he puts his arms around her—that he may have shelter

'simultaneity' of the poem – – – that all may flow into it, that all may be in it

the world is the organ (machine?) of novelty

what can be found is process

'precisely that thru which consciousness knows itself to be at home with itself is the loss of the spirit' (Hegel)

'simultaneity'—so that everything may flow into it

I can't climb UP; I am trying to climb DOWN— to the bottom of things.

'dressing-up—literally or literarily, is an attempt to free himself from everything that he actually is and from everything that he actually knows.

trained in 'politics', she looks to the basic mass. Trained by at least a little reading of history, I look precisely to the contrary

'difficult': within the area of that 'they understand', there is not room for me to speak

the lines: the vertical structure of the poem

the image is encountered, it carries the rare and most poetic quality of truthfulness. the *simultaneity* of the poem and of experience that all may flow into it

UCSD 16, 16, 7

++ to look down under the boat's rail look toward
The obvious
This is a work of the intellect in that it seeks
The extreme outer limit of the ego

---

the trees moved when he sang, the boat moved down the ways
He sang to the birds and reached the world of the dead

Archangel of the moments
Archangel of the moments

Mind will be he survivor of the world of matter Humanity takes over the stage

—

Wyatt: 'the blatant mystery' (Mary)

'Reality' and 'existence' the past is real? but does not exist

The real; that which possesses an indestructible element, an irreducible element 'if it all went up in smoke. . .'
The real, whose force is never extinguished
'. . .being united within itself and indissoluble' Timaeus

Those perfect
And simple images

Beauty which is most manifest and most desirable' Phaedrus

Beauty, by which we mean the benevolence of the real

The search, which is most painful

There were three crosses

———

If the road is pre-occupying, swerve off. Wander. Swerve.

———

We are not returning to nature: we are playing out the drama of free will the drama of 'the Fall'

———

The sun, his native land, and lethal. Burning.

—

as historical periods draw to a close the arts spin out a world of their own. Which seems, later. . . .

The Indians—all the courage they could find among the dangers of humiliation, suffering, enslavement, and so do we

———

If, as in the Winter Light, the response of joy and love should simply come to an end

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++ Whatever may be found in the poems
—invention of language, of form anything in the poems is nothing more and nothing less than my attempt to say that is, to find what I meant

Poetry—poetika probably we mean by 'poetry' that it is made as a maker makes a thing: each syllable has been carefully considered. and carefully placed.
— meaning acquired by cadence, form, radiance—

we LOOK AT THE FLOWER IN THE CRANNIED WALL AND LOOK FURTHER WITH ALL WE KNOW, WITH ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED

———

there remains the word 'is' for those who can bear it.

And the base of art, the ground of art seems narrowed I become almost frightened: there seems to be no one out there, we seem all to be *in here*

recognition so late, so old—I do not at all regret this, perhaps I wanted it so It seems to me the world might have narrowed for me, I might have been even more ignorant than I am—

---

and the universities they destroy my confidence somewhat they frighten me somewhat : so many of us 'in here' almost nobody 'out there'
—from scratch: it is the only picture I can form

It is *not what* a poem says, but what it is talking about

the danger is of the chess-board: on which everything has already been named

---

Love of the world, the path – – – it is all there is Without which nothing

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THE WIT AND WISDOM OF "LITTLE SUNSHINE"

At long last, a broad selection of the work of a major figure of "The Occult Underground"* is available as *Portable Darkness*, An Aleister Crowley Reader, Edited with a Commentary by Scott Michaelson (New York: Harmony Books, 1989). Since Aleister Crowley (henceforth called "A.C.") was a writer whose work was of incredible pullulation, multicolored, and multifarious, any selection, no matter how broad, can be faulted by devotees, but Mr. Michaelson has in this anthology done a fine job. His focus of selection is to treat A.C.'s Magick as fundamentally *écriture* and as such a premodern example of the postmodern, though no reference is made in the commentaries to Heidegger or Derrida. (A.C. was familiar with reliable expositions of Hegel, if not with the Greater Logic, and his metaphysical fix can be profitably studied in the light of such recent books as Leslie Armour's *Logic and Reality*, Stéphane Lupasco's and George Melhuish's books on Paradoxical Reality, and Howard Kainz's *Paradox, Dialectic, and System.*) But Michaelson is not primarily concerned with situating A.C. in the currents of intellectual history, of successors or predecessors, nor with the use of similar writerly strategies in the *Lao-tse* (which A.C. "translated"), Heraclitus, Nietzsche, or various Buddhist writings. He is content to underline the recursions, aporias, and traps that A.C. constantly and cunningly contrives.

Michaelson divides his anthology into 5 parts, under these headings: 1. Qabalah and Magick; 2. Yoga and Magick; 3. Sex and Magick; 4. Liber AL, The Book of the Law; and, 5. The Book of Lies. It is *The Book of Lies, Which Is Also Falsely Called BREAKS The Wanderings or Falsifications of the One Thought of Frater Perdurabo Which Thought is Itself Untrue*, a small book of 91 sections which can be read as a box of prose-poems, published originally in 1913, that is Michaelson's personal favorite among A.C.'s works, and a generous selection from it is included in Part 5. (In 1961 I published 3 sections from it in a poetry magazine I edited, SET, #1.)

* The Occult Underground now hides itself on the Surface in full view, according to some.

Michaelson deliberately chooses not to reprint any selections from A.C.'s autobiographical works, journals, fictions, and poems (with the exception of the notorious "Hymn to Pan"), as well as most specifically magical and ritual texts. For those in pursuit of such matters he appends a short but helpful bibliography. It is A.C. as Writer and Theorist of Writing who interests him, and his Reading therefore is "a secular reading. . .a game of hide and seek, a surprising reading taking place in the Dark. It is a reading that intentionally tries not to shed New Light (with its attendant rationalism) on him. Throughout, I merely take Aleister Crowley at his Word, and, like him, do not concern myself with remaining doctrinaire." *Portable Darkness* thus involves "both the creative act and its impossibility—the Silence of composition. . ." and like Forgery the "displacing words of Dark and Light to a new Writing site."

Hence Michaelson re-visions the intrinsic elusiveness of A.C.'s thought not from a Magickal perspective, but as part of the fun and games of Philosophical Investigation, and the "Naught-y Knot" of the Fool is never resolved. He does not shirk the playful difficulties of the writing, reprinting "heavy" texts as well as comic tours de force such as the "Interlude" on the Occult Meanings of Nursery Rhymes. And in *The Book of Lies* A.C.'s impish humor comes to the fore to floor us.

So it's a serious book to have fun with. The popularity of A.C. in certain non-academic circles (the anthology boasts forewords by Robert Anton Wilson and Genesis P-Orridge) should suggest the interest of looking into his work even by those unsympathetic to the ostentation of his ostensible ideas.

Portable Darkness is also portable sunlight. In a British courtroom in 1934 A.C. said to the cross-examining attorney "You can call me 'Little Sunshine.'"

—Gerrit Lansing

INDEPENDENT REALITIES: NOTES ON ROBIN BLASER'S *PELL MELL*

At a modest 114 pages, *Pell Mell* (Coachhouse Press, 1988) is a big book, both in the way in which it gathers and clarifies Robin Blaser's poetic concerns and practices, and in the range of the propositions it offers about language, aesthetics, cosmology, and the art of poetry. In "The Fire" essay of 1970, Blaser had said that "the real business of poetry is cosmology"; in *Pell Mell* he argues this proposal amidst the dissonant hum of contemporary voices:

listen, kid,
there isn't anything but art
and the effort to turn it into
the same discourse as
everything else is
scientific
angelism. . . (11)

"It is an apocalypse of the objective or of a generalized humanity which can be seen as an objectivity," Blaser says, "a disguised superstition" ("V," 63). In an effort to demystify, deconstructionists tirelessly draw attention to the fact that language seems to be structured to reveal truth and cannot: as Blaser hears it, such attachment to truth and to the language object as such ("a construct of philosophers and linguists" says Wlad Godzich) is a form of positivism. Against which, *Pell Mell* presents the mind as frying pan—"what's in it is neither true nor false" (93).

In "The Ruler," Blaser offers a fable about the acquisition of language which reads like a poet's primer. The poem opens with "alligator, hippopotamus, fox, rhinoceros/ and frog" in "rowing shells," or word-boats which become directions that never arrive. From a pre-articulate, bodily entanglement with things which Blaser writes as metaphor ("your eyes are wooden"), the word-boats move their occupants into the distinctions of simile ("your eyes are like wood") and metonymy (lists of wooden things—"match girl," "tree," "boards," wooden? "ruler"). Language creates difference—so—but as the "boats" move outward, separating one thing from another, they also draw the body into contiguity with the world that is forming. The language ruler is "a child's 25 centimetre/measure of the old foot"—a measure of steps taken toward something that only becomes a thing in the process of the meeting. "[W]hat did I think language/did, as I grew up," Blaser asks in "Anecdote," "well,/it pulled me into//and out-of, upwards-of/and downwards-of, the/side-by-side, serpentine friendship" (*PM* 40).

In "The Practice of Outside," Blaser credits Vico with "an argument for the relation of poetry to 'the qualitative and dynamic function of the primordial moment,' to which we inevitably return" (301). Vico rejects the notion that the gods were projections of a fully defined human nature; rather they functioned as relations—connectors, syntactical modes—through which humans defined themselves as they created a world to live in. In one of his stories, giants respond to "bodies as vast as sky, sea, and earth" by spinning a cosmology. Blaser's "Giant," a poem that recalls Vico's primordial scene (note the dislocation of Freud), returns to "the sacred vacant lot" to take up the issue of a cultural syntax again. That contempo-

rary culture does not—and cannot—share a "permanent," univocal syntax is precisely the argument of *Pell Mell.*

The history of "the twentieth-/ century project" Blaser says, is that of the search "for a new relation among/things" (*PM* 99). What we inherit from the old cosmologies is cultural rubble, embedded in a language which is "older and other than ourselves" ("SM," 61):

> [fragment structures—serial poems—
> all having to do with materiality of
> form—having to do with death] (*PM* 14)

These fragments, Blaser suggests, were once active relations; the contemporary task is to recover not the old structures but the ability to create the relational web-work that composes people, places and things. In order to wrench this world-making process (and it is a process) away from the "angelisms" that would give the lie to such poetic activity or condemn it as a form of totalization, Blaser relocates a veritable forest of sacred ruins within a history of consciousness, and then in place of the closed syntax usually associated with cosmology, he proposes an open-ended "art of combinations":

> 'we conclude with cosmography, the
> connection of subjects to each other'
> 'consumed in the overwhelming
> existence' (*PM* 58)

This poem, which takes its title from Leibnitz's *De Arte Combinatoria*, recalls that philosopher's life-long search for a set of primitives and the rules by which they might be combined: "cosmography" is a quest for syntax—one that Leibnitz could not complete. The contemporary significance of the Leibnitzian combinatory, however, is that the elements of it can be endlessly recombined to produce new forms. Given that a universal grammar has never been found (as Blake says it, "there is no natural religion"), the art of combinations is, for a poet like Blaser, the art of post-syntactic composition.

Within the history of the "twentieth-century project," the ideogram provides an early model, but unlike Pound, Blaser does not attempt to "make it cohere." There are no formal paradigms that serve to gather and illuminate the particulars of the poem—no universal or everlasting states of mind. (Compare the movement from metonymy to metaphor, part to whole in Canto 2, with Blaser's reversal of that process in "The Ruler"). Against the ahistorical impulse in Pound's synchronism, Blaser shares Olson's "special view of history," in which the "man-line" (diachronic) and

the "continuum" (cultural inheritance) cut against each other. And yet in *Syntax* Blaser records this comment:

> Olson said, "I'd trust you
> anywhere with image, but
> you've got no syntax" (1958) (33)

Olson's "projective" syntax follows the perceptual movements of the experiencing subject: in contrast, Blaser has "no syntax." His poems function as a kind of public forum for a host of voices, most of which are quoted without commentary. These fragments Blaser then arranges in a polylogue which mediates and contextualizes his own voice—that *"little devil of an I"* which *"is neither first, nor a person, nor singular" (PM* 113), but itself a combinatory. In this passage taken from James Hillman, Blaser says

> *. . .experience can only*
> *be unified by the style in which it is enacted, by the images*
> *which formed it, by its repetitive thematics, and by the*
> *relations amid which it unfolds. (PM* 113)

Experience is thus language internalized, language continually recombining. The *art* of combination lies in the poet's ability to reshuffle the various givens of a cultural (linguistic) inheritance in such a manner as to open the past to possibility. The task of aesthetics is to loosen the syntactic ties that threaten to bind the future to the past, in order to return the contents of a cultural history, pell mell, back to the "sacred vacant lot"—"where elements of the *overwhelming/permanence escape into the flux" (PM*, 47), and begin to recompose.

It is the inheritance—that blend of literary history, myth, radio music, philosophy, and neighborly encounters—which most strikingly distinguishes *Pell Mell* from much contemporary poetry. I'm thinking of poetry that emphasizes social concerns or linguistic surfaces, but more particularly of the cultural amnesia which accompanies the post-modern rejection of "high art," cosmological speculation and talk about the unknown. Blaser risks remembering (risks inviting ideology critique), to make the point that cosmology is a renewable practice, a *poiesis*, and to remind the reader that *poiesis* involves the making of relationships not only with other humans but with "bodies as vast as sky, sea, and earth." Hence, wandering across these pages, Dante, Blake, Mallarmé, Coleridge, Montaigne, Leibnitz, Bach, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Derrida, Serres, Dionysus, Christ, Horus, Amon, Re, Osiris, Isis, Aphrodite, "kindly Apollo," and a little girl trick-or-treating on this all hallows' eve, "sweet, burned face/of imagination" *(PM*, 75).

Citations

PM = *Pell Mell* (Coach House, 1988); "PO" = "Practice of Outside," in *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* (Black Sparrow, 1980); "SM" = "The Stadium of the Mirror," in *Image-Nations 1-12 & The Stadium of the Mirror* (Ferry Press, 1974); *Syntax* (Talonbooks, 1983); "V" = "The Violets," *Line* 2 (Fall 1983).

—Miriam Nichols

A FORCE OF LANGUAGE: A REVIEW OF *IT THEN* BY DANIELLE COLLOBERT, TRANSLATED BY NORMA COLE (OAKLAND: O BOOKS, 1989)

At first glance, Collobert's page reminds one of Dickinson; the overwhelming visual impression, even before one has read a single word of the text, is of the conjunctive use of the dash, collobert's exclusive mark of punctuation. The page already graphically suggests a driving intensity, a force of language. The mark of the dash, as one begins to read Collobert, indicates a double movement, a joining and its opposition, a resistance, a resistance at the juncture which forces the break, one's sense of brokenness throughout this work.

If Dickinson's use of the dash represents a breathless hesitation, a pause which creates or re-creates the effect of the mind considering its thought, testing the possible alternative utterances to follow, then Collobert's dash is a materialization of the gap within speech and the rush to close even as one discloses it; one cannot linger there in contemplation: the dash is the mark of the goad. One leaps at its prodding to the ground of the inevitable word or phrase; the page bears the record of these bursts of language.

One imagines Dickinson's halting voice as an exquisitely contrived artifact; the voice one constructs out of Collobert's page seems unmediated by art. The intent "to embody," as if one could write directly from the body, is manifest at the opening. At the very beginning, the body itself is Collobert's subject and object: "—to embody—with flesh in pain—to embody like the thumbnail—It then."

> In his first seminars, Lacan introduced metonymy as a progression, a displacement: language moves, slides. The signifiers are displaced to infinity. They take on body, form a carnal, elastic material. As limited as they are, these surfaces do not contain their limit, which seems to be outside of them.[1]

Collobert imagines an "it," some primal force perhaps, the *id* perhaps, an "it" one imagines to be essentially unlimited, speechless, not one, but another. Yet it is one (we are given to understand) though it is also the other, "a body there," one of whose limits is violence ("the one banging its face against the wall"), one of whose limits is speech.

Collobert inscribes the absolute disparity between language and the body, and she does so by displacement, by imagining the "wordless body" to be a site, a "lifeless body some place" in utter contrast to the "choice/ to choose the flow of the body—speech—choice of desire's/ hesitation—of the desirable—to want—circuit of desire" (45). This metonymous flow displaces the silent body, "inventing—intangible discourse" (51): a discourse "seeking the way out of the body" into the infinity of signifiers? Perhaps. But the body is limited by acts of violence, by threats of violence, and the discourse too is broken, disrupted, threatened. Language threatens, seduces; she imagines "complete submission/ to the bites of the word" (49).

> In a specific place someone wounded its infinity.[1]

It Then is divided into three parts. Part I opens on what seem to be scenes of the grief of childhood, memories of masochistic violence, but something else as well, the underlying sense of an archaic unspeakable wound. That wound may have been inflicted in "a specific place," but it is nevertheless everywhere; the wound multiplies, riddling the surface (the "ground" or "earth") which immediately "crumbles—it melts—words penetrating the ground—it dissolves—. . ." (47).

In Part II Collobert imagines "another body" which is not so much addressed as it is assaulted with words: "massacred by the words—violence always insatiable" (55) which is also the imagined annihilation of "it" (the subject—Collobert never uses the first person pronoun). She opens herself to the repetitious "circuit of desire," to the pain, but also to "its song," in search of a limit. The limit of language, of the body? It's as if the one were completely displaced by the other: "it repeats the circuit to infinity— . . .seeking the exhaustion—the stop to the chains of words. . ." (88).

One gradually begins to understand the oppressiveness of infinity in this work, for it overwhelms each present moment with the "long shudder of overpopulated memory" or "old traces of having been" or

> the voices irreplaceable losses—distant jamming—absence of reference—dissolved—absence of faces—loss of bodies—disappeared gazes and mouths—buried in motionless images—. . . (59)

The present is occupied by a "hollow" body whose contents seem to fill all of space with such "fixity of dead moments—underlying—inscribed there—/ forever—in the loss" (64).

Collobert imagines she stands at the archaic site (who has not imagined it?) of the mythical "first words of prehistory— memory of the far-off—" and it is the site of an apocalypse: volcanic eruption, the threat of an inundating tidal wave. She imagines speech as a force of nature, a river perhaps, "the voice currents. . .weighed down by the out-/ flowing/ alluvial deposits . . ." (62).

"It" is the source of this violence, this flow, but "it" is also the site of an absolute ignorance, of the self's lack of knowledge of "it." Collobert imagines this gap at the close of Part II:

> . . .—invis-
> ible rustling of the whole body
> invisible—not to be seen
> never seen from there where it sees
> not seen—. . . (93)

In the final part of *It Then*, Collobert begins to draw the fragments of speech together into a kind of inventory towards the end. It is an inventory which bears a remarkable similarity to the list of items adduced by Lacan, not as examples of what the "unconscious" is (that which he called "the censored chapter"), but rather of what might be thought of as artifacts of speech and writing which replace the unconscious.[2]

Lacan would speak of the body as a "monument" which is "inscribed" with a language difficult to "decipher." Collobert too would draw out this figure:

> silent monoliths—engraved on the surface—untranslat-
> able signs—searches all around—the space—searches
> for its jumbled body—invents possible translations—
> conjugates obstructed the verb—being without subject

> all the forms of the negative—or gaping—the abstract—
> images absent from time—accessible by reconstruction—
> to reproduce the duration by increments—around silence
> —in the meantime lost the traces of life (100)

In this passage, as elsewhere, Collobert insists on "being without subject," as if being were radically different from, absolutely divided from its subject. And like an archeologist she preserves the fragments of this ruined subject against time, "to reproduce the duration. . . ." This itself, one

realizes, is the true artifact. It is time, empty and silent, that stretches in the gaps, the negative she materializes.

Collobert's archeological catalogue includes (in Lacan's words) "archival documents": "the buried text," "the memory of the remains—writing inside out" (101).

The passages which follow are appalling in the intensity of their imagination of the literal body transmuted into writing. If the word ("It"?) "becomes flesh," then the flesh must become words in repeated acts of self-inflicted torture in which the body is imagined to be "ripped," "incised," "opened up," "drained," in which one "empties its body of its words."

So that one may at last decipher a "subject" as if it were, as Lacan says, "like an object"?[3]

> the subject
> which
> a word
> upon a word—which—gaze—white—gaze—inscribes
> itself—the trace subject—somewhere—for some time—
> the visible to itself if not whose—illegible trace—improb-
> able—deciphered
>
> forever its body subject
> the undefined subject
> the writing of the definition (111)

Finally: ". . .—finally accepts the future form—/ already inscribed inside the words—sees itself written—/ in the end—last word" (121).

Again, one may be reminded of Dickinson, of the poems in which she imagines a posthumous existence within the grave, or immortality beyond the grave, as Collobert writes:

> last of the written—walled up—tomb—if tried the
> inscription on the door—whereas behind the body of dust
> —the imaginary written absolute—a noun name
> a noun name subject
> absent the body
> no identity of any kind anywhere in the dust (121)

There's nothing in Dickinson, of course, that so fiercely objectifies the body, that imagines so completely the separation of subject and object, and the constitution of the subject within language. There is a sense in which Collobert submits to the triumph of the sign, perhaps, or to the recognition of the symbolic order and its power to confer subjectivity.

In any case, the tomb is empty; Collobert finally imagines the "mute body/ traded for articulation" with no remainder. The formal ending of this work breaks the circuit of loss and desire:

> It then—migrated
> transcribed

I would like to acknowledge the presentation of this book by Leslie Scalapino and Tom White. It is, in my opinion, perfectly well-designed and printed as if one actually had a reader in mind.

—Beverly Dahlen

Notes

1 Michèle Montrelay, "The Story of Louise," *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan*, Stuart Schneiderman, ed. and trans. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980) p. 77.
2 Jacques Lacan, "The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis," *Ecrits*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977) p. 50.
3 *Ecrits*, p. 86.

MICHEL LEIRIS. *BRISÉES: BROKEN BRANCHES.* TRANS. LYDIA DAVIS. SAN FRANCISCO: NORTH POINT PRESS, 1989.
MICHEL LEIRIS. *NIGHTS AS DAY, DAYS AS NIGHT.* TRANS. RICHARD SIEBURTH. HYGIENE, COLORADO: ERIDANOS PRESS, 1987.

"A journey," quotes Michel Leiris from Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, "is inscribed simultaneously in space, time, and the social hierarchy." In turn, I imagine this phrase inscribed not only as an epigraph for the essay collection *Brisées: Broken Branches*, in which Leiris's review of Lévi-Strauss appears, but at the portals of Leiris's work as a whole. Whether we read his *L'Afrique fantôme*, a strange melange of ethnographic documentation, dream journal, diary, and meta-fiction; his five-part autobiography, *Le règle du jeu*, the first part of which *(Manhood)* is subtitled "A Journey from Childhood Into the Fierce Order of Virility"; his dream book, *Nights as Day, Days as Night*, which over a forty-year span charts a Northwest Passage between waking- and dream-life; or his essay collection *Brisées*, which gives an extended sense of what James Clifford has called "ethnographic surrealism," the discovery in both everyday life and art, in both familiar spaces and distant countries, of hidden repositories of non-rational truth—in each of these works, the journey is of a privileged

figure. Yet for Leiris, journeying is neither an escape into exoticism ("His attempted escape has been a complete failure, and anyway he no longer believes in the value of escape") nor the precondition of homecoming, to a home transfigured simply by the fact of having left it. On the contrary, Leiris is haunted in all his journeying, his physical and mental travelling, by the demon of the Same: a loss of nothing at all, not even of his obsessions and ghosts, but the illusion that the quest will liberate him of himself. Leiris—or was it Rimbaud?—discovers the Same, before and after Africa: "I am always here."

As his dream journals and essays show, however, this literal disillusionment is the precondition of a writing that starts out from its inescapable situatedness, from the necessity of its phantoms, whether they be ethnographic, artistic, or sexual—in short: from the haunting reversibility and uncanny sameness of the world as such ("nights as day, days as night") grasped as a simulacrum of itself. Doubling and identity: the same recurs, arriving always after itself, divesting itself of illusory worth, coming in always "second." Leiris prefaces *Nights as Day, Days as Night* with a quotation from Gérard de Nerval—"Dream is a second life." The dream, in its very secondness, is the paradigm of the same. And indeed, in the course of writing up his dream log, decades after they were first dreamed, Leiris comes to a crucial insight about himself: that his life has been lived under the sign of "2," that a dualism lurks at the heart of his identity. Duality, he notes of a dream from 1933, shortly after his first trip to Africa, "seems to be the connecting thread in this dream: the co-directors of the magazine *Minotaure;* the double function of the hall I'm in, at once church nave and hotel lobby; the twinning of Notre-Dame and the Sainte-Chapelle; the doubling of the bus terminus, representing a threat to the reconstitution of my wife and myself as a couple. Was it not a fact that the two or so years I had spent travelling had practically estranged us? Was it not true that from that point on my professional life would find itself between two stools, seeing as how my work as an ethnographer would now be superadded to my activities as a writer?"

Another dualism: his writing, a throwing away of his self (it will always return) in an act of both imaginative empathy—as the self-effacing essays in *Brisées* testify—and of abjection, of *suicide.* Writing itself, the activity of putting the same in words, was the means by which Leiris economized between these two poles; through writing, Leiris kept his powerful impulse to self-extinction—a death never present for him, always fleeing into the interstices of a series of identities, the spaces between his "selves"—in play. But in writing, he doomed himself to recur again to the necessity of self-sacrifice, a judgement he sealed with his own signature. From this fatal game, played in the darkness of dream and of waking life alike, and which paradoxically kept him alive, Leiris patiently documented *for others* "the

profound meaning of suicide: to become at the same time *oneself and the other*, male and female, subject and object, killed and killer—the only possibility of communion with oneself."

—Tyrus Miller

JEAN BAUDRILLARD. *AMERICA*. TRANS. CHRIS TURNER. NEW YORK: VERSO, 1988. 129 + X PP. $13.95 (PAPER).

In *America*, Jean Baudrillard replicates de Tocqueville's exploration of the New World as a socio-cultural entity. According to Baudrillard, America is an entropic process dedicated not to the social construction of equality but to a more radical equalization: the progressive decomposition of all cultural forms towards a vanishing point of absolute moral and esthetic insignificance.

Baudrillard's *nouvelle* America is engaging and often acutely rendered. For example, Baudrillard describes the New York Marathon as a set of autistically insular, and vacuous, demonstrations of the self as one-who-finishes, and suggests building demolition as the quintessential art form of urban America. But beneath the gallic wit, the anxiety of the Old World at what it understands as the irretrievable loss of significance, of culture—in short, of itself—is clearly visible. Baudrillard's sense of America as a kind of ethic/esthetic black hole results in a limited vision of his subject that is too often mesmerizing but superficial, not unlike the television "play of images" (96) that, in his view, typifies the low-calorie cultural diet of America.

"I ask of the Americans only that they be Americans. I do not ask them to be intelligent, sensible, original," Baudrillard announces (27). His portrait of an America comprised of an intellectual lumpen proletariat whose "radical modernity" is "founded on the absence of difference" (87) predictably fails to account for the multi-cultural diversity of contemporary American literature (Leslie Marmon Silko, Ishmael Reed, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sandra Cisneros, Toni Morrison, Jimmy Santiago Baca), for artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns, whose culturally reflexive works both critique and respond to the iconic American images that Baudrillard finds merely banal, or for the powerful interdisciplinary projects of American theorists from Noam Chomsky to Nancy Chodorow, Ruth Hubbard to Thomas Kuhn, Catherine Mackinnon to Stanley Cavell, Richard Rorty to Carol Gilligan.

Of much graver consequence than this high-cultural paternalism, however, is Baudrillard's inability to appreciate the profound ways in which America's "'anthropological' culture," as he calls it, is genuinely creative and esthetically significant on its own terms. Despite his acknowledgment of "the imperialism of the idea of culture" itself (83), he is unable to resist replacing what he sees in the context of his European academic assumptions about what constitutes art.

According to Baudrillard, real art—"Rembrandts, Impressionists, and Greek statues" (101)—exists in America only trapped in the Getty Museum's "fake Pompeian decor" (33), an eventuation he finds "astonishing in its nonsensicality" (101). But Baudrillard's confusion of the absence of pedigree with "the absence. . .of. . .the imaginary" (84) prevents him from recognizing the illegitimate value of indigenous American cultural phenomena such as rap (Public Enemy, KRS-One), New York subway graffiti, California murals, underground comics *(Zap, Bent),* tattooing (Lyle Tuttle, Phil Sparrow), low rides, Harley Davidsons, the myriad fashions of clothing and hairstyles, and—the single most crucial creative mode—the subcultural languages, or *paroles,* "on parole" from their incarceration within the confines of standard English. Baudrillard's failure to hear these daimonic voices, in all their intricate beauty, is a crucial failure to hear the def records of the street.

—Jody Norton

MARJORIE PERLOFF

The Complete Poems of Anna Akhamatova, trans. Judith Hemschemeyer; ed. and introduced by Roberta Reeder. 2 Vols. (Somerville, Mass.: Zephyr Press, 1990). 1511 pp. $85.00.

The new *Akhamatova,* a bilingual edition, with extraordinary notes, biographies, photographs, illustrations, and facsimile pages, would be a bargain at twice the price. The poems themselves, of which more in a moment, are framed, in Volume I, by a Translator's Preface, in which Judith Hemschemeyer, herself a poet, provides valuable comments on Akhamatova's prosody and stylistic habits, and by the editor Roberta Reeder's 160-page critical biography of the poet, which could easily have been published as a separate book. Then in Volume II, there are further biographical memoirs, this time by Isaiah Berlin and by Akhamatova's protegé, the critic Anatoly Naiman. At the back of Volume II, following a group of 200 uncollected lyrics (some of Akhamatova's most brilliant poem,

reproduced from V. M. Zhirmunsky's 1976 Leningrad edition), there are detailed scholarly notes on the poem and a full bibliography. The production job (the arrangement is chronological, the Russian on facing pages, with the fascinating photographs, lithographs, and drawings giving a very full picture of Akhamatova and her circle from childhood to old age, interspersed throughout) seems to me quite simply stunning.

For some reason, Akhamatova's poetry had never really penetrated my consciousness as had Khlebnikov's or Mayakovsky's or Pasternak's. I knew English versions of some of her famous poems like "I Visited the poet. . ." (to Alexander Blok) and "The Tale of the Black Ring," but found her seemingly straightforward lyrics on love and sorrow and death too direct and "simple" to have the appeal that, say, Khlebnikov's complicated linguistic experiments had for me. But reading Akhamatova in these new translations (on the whole, *excellent* in capturing the poems' visual lay-out, tone, and sound quality—at least so it seems to a novice in the Russian language like me), in the light of Reeder's fascinating account of the poet's life has made me a total convert. This is not the place for a full-scale review of the Zephyr Press edition, but here are a few thoughts I want to share with *Sulfur* readers.

(1) Akhamatova's poetry uses very little figuration; it is primarily heightened natural speech presented in straightforward syntax in the rhythms of folk song and *dolnik* (a poem with a fixed number of stresses but not a fixed number of syllables, usually with a complicated rhyme scheme and echolalia). But, like Goethe's lyric, which it very much resembles, Akhamatova's is *occasional* poetry whose strength lies in capturing, by means of delicate verbal adjustments, the exact emotion of a particular moment. Here is a poem of 1915, dedicated to the critic and connoisseur N.V. Nedobrovo, a man with whom Akhamatova shared a great deal but with whom she was not in love:

> There is a sacred boundary between those who are close,
> And it cannot be crossed by passion or love—
> Though lips fuse in dreadful silence
> And the heart shatters to pieces with love.
>
> Friendship is helpless here, and years
> Of exalted and ardent happiness,
> When the soul is free and a stranger
> To the slow languor of voluptuousness.

Those who strive to reach it are mad, and those
Who reach it—stricken by grief. . .
Now you understand why my heart
Does not beat faster under your hand. (I, 391)

If the English version cannot quite capture the rhythmic quality of the original, with its intricately sounded four-stress lines and prominent rhymes *(strasti / chasti; toskoio / rukoio),* it does convey the poet's startling admission that for her, love is not based on psychological or emotional communion but on "the slow languor of voluptuousness," that without that "slow languor," "my heart / Does not beat faster under your hand." This last phrase seems almost hackneyed until we stop to consider what it really means. For the poet is not making the standard Romantic speech about her inability to return her lover's passion; she is not gently but firmly refusing his suit. On the contrary, it is while she is letting him caress her breasts and having sex with him, that she tells this close friend and ardent lover that he just doesn't turn her on.

There is a cruel, almost a brutal element in such confession, and indeed one begins to see Akhamatova as anything but the "domestic" poet (Trotsky witheringly dismissed her as a "doctor of female ailments"), she is often taken to be. Her love poems (and her best poems *are* love poems) run the gamut from self-abasement to intense erotic satisfaction, from contempt for a husband to pity for a former lover and shyness in the face of a new encounter, from *schadenfreude* at the defeat of a rival to total despair at the rejection by a new love object. Indeed, the force and violence of the poet's response to the passions leads me to a second observation.

(2) Akhamatova's lyric is animated by an assumption that goes counter to all current feminist talk of victimization at the hands of the patriarchy, of the second-class status of women, and so on. That assumption is that a woman can be as strong and powerful as any man. Akhamatova let nothing interfere with her work, a work she refused to distinguish from life, and especially from sexual love—neither marriage (a bond under which she chafed and repeatedly dissolved) nor motherhood (she left her only child Lev in the country to be brought up by relatives), nor the extreme poverty and deprivation that came after the Revolution, nor the censorship of her work under Stalin. When World War II broke out, she gave radio speeches, mobilizing the women of Leningrad. The poet Olga Beggolts recalls, "With a face severe and angry, a gas mask thrown over her shoulder, she took on the fire watch like a regular soldier. She sewed bags for sand which were put on the trenches." If she was not a "good" mother in her youth, she spent endless hours of her maturity trying to free her son, a prominent scholar, from arrest and exile, going so far as to write verses to Stalin so as to plead

Lev's cause. Her efforts on behalf of her imprisoned friend Osip Mandelstam are legendary. In the fifties, during the final decade of her life, when she was ousted from the Union of Soviet Writers, she earned her living translating the works of Serbian, Armenian, and Ukrainian authors.

At a time when many of our own poets and artists are so obsessed by the NEA debacle that they seem to have forgotten why they became poets in the first place, Anna Akhamatova provides the most luminous example imaginable of *what can be done.* And further: at a time when the "woman artist" is too often represented as a Camille Claudel (the title of a recent film), who must choose between "art" and "love," it is refreshing to witness Akhamatova's life-long conviction that she had to have both and that one fed the other. Indeed, if one reads straight through from *Evening* (1912), published when Akhamatova was only twenty-three, to the lyrics of the sixties collected in *Seventh Book*, the image that emerges is of a powerful woman to whom every turn presents a formidable roadblock but who not only survives but triumphs. A highly improbable tale for the twentieth century and hence doubly rewarding.

Manuel Brito's Zasterle Press (available from Apdo 167, La Laguna, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain) has recently brought out, as part of a new series, two handsomely produced chapbooks, Jerome Rothenberg's *The Lorca Variations* (1–8) (36 pp.) and Ron Silliman's *Manifest* (28 pp.).

In a "Postface," Rothenberg explains that these poems "draw on vocabulary (especially nouns & adjectives) from my translations of the Suites [to be published by Farrar Straus as part of a single-volume collected translations from Lorca] but rearrange them in a variety of ways. . . . The methods used resemble chance operations but with a margin of flexibility, with total freedom in the case of verbs and adverbs, with occasional addresses to Lorca himself imbedded in them."

The ironized, or, more accurately, urbanized Lorca that emerges from these *Variations* is one of Rothenberg's most inspired sequences. "Shinto Eyes," for example, which opens with the image of "Shinto eyes. / Shinto ivy," takes us through "Real forests" where "teardrops are roads, / fields are death," to a God, not only "alive in a rice field. / Herons over the road," but finally to a moment when

> God in a necktie
> stares out
>
> through two secret eyes.

Manifest is a section of Silliman's ongoing long poem *The Alphabet.* This one contains one hundred short prose paragraphs ranging from a three-

word sentence ("Paragraphs to go") to the ten line (but also one sentence) passage on p. 25 beginning with "The wonders of public transit stop-start. . . ." As in previous *Alphabet* parts, Silliman splices sentences that are seemingly quite unrelated and that nevertheless add up to present an exuberant, searing, and densely allusive commentary on everyday life, Silliman style. The challenge of the opening sentence—"So you're one too"—generates the "Festival of Unfinished Projects" that follows.

Finally, a note about a recent exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum: *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and His Contemporaries 1915–1933*, by Beeke Sell Tower, with an essay by John Czaplicka, organized by the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, 1990. The catalogue produced by Beeke Sell Tower and her associates (123 pp.) documents the rise and fall of America as Germany's desirable Other. Especially intriguing to us in the '90s is the vision (c. 1910–25) of America as land of the *Asphaltcowboys* and *Stadtindianer*, which is to say that New York Metropolis and Wild West, the hyper-technological and the hyper-primitive, are joined in a vision of sheer otherworldy magic. George Grosz's *The Golddigger* (1916), for example, depicts a brawny he-man, spade in hand, prospecting in an open field, behind which are the outlines of skyscrapers; or again, in Rudolf Schlichter's *Cinema* (1914), Wild West cowgirl is represented as a kind of urban prostitute. The German fascination with the American machine, with Fordism and "rationality," and with an entrepreneurial enterprise the "backward" Germans could only envy, gives way, in the later twenties, to the much darker vision of Heartfield's *Dada-merika* and *Dollarica*, with its heartless commercialism and Capitalist greed. Grosz's own primitivist Indian fantasies give way to such pessimistic sketches as "Soon Europe will be a Suburb of New York" (c. 1924), where the head and torso of a frowning American businessman is silhouetted against a stylized image of the American flag. Somehow, it all looks very contemporary.

FOUR RECENT FRENCH PUBLICATIONS

The Situationist Guy Debord was one of the leading participants in the Parisian "events of May '68," and his book of that epoch, *La société du spectacle*, had a major influence in shaping cultural critique. The last few years (marked by the 20th anniversary of the events) saw a revival of

interest—both historical and nostalgic—in that era, due in great part to the Situationist show at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and too the publication of Debord's *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*, a particularly paranoid, but tragically all-too-just, reappraisal of both his earlier efforts and of the course of subsequent history. But what went for the most part unnoticed was the publication last year of Debord's "autobiography," *Panégyrique* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1989). This small volume may well, in fact, take its place among the great French memoirs—but as their shadow figure, their radical inversion. Classic in style, elegant in form, and brilliant in dissimulation, *Panégyrique* is the calmest of all possible recollections of a man who led the most turbulent of all possible lives. While Louis XIV wrote his *Mémoires* as the regal, imperative, and hyperbolically narcissistic statement of absolute power, Debord—in a linguistic classicism equal too the Sun King—describes a life devoted to overturning all systems of control and to eschewing all power. The emblematic chapter on his passion for drink is hilarious and profound, a statement of both his own condition and of the course of history itself: for it leads us to reflect upon a phrase by Li Po which he cites: "Deceitful time hides its traces from us, but it passes, rapidly." Shall we take this as the sign of the historian and autobiographer, who teaches us too remember; or of the alcoholic and panegyrist, who would have us forget? In either case, *Panégyrique* may be read as a critique of those equally dissimulating memoirs of our own presidents and prime ministers—much as we read Saint-Simon contra Louis XIV—or else it can be read simply as an exercise in style, and as yet one more brilliant spectacle to be commented upon.

L'oeuvre des mers (Paris: Editions François Bourin, 1988) by Eugène Nicole, are memoirs of a different sort—a novel which transforms the author's childhood reminiscences of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon (a French overseas *département* located off the coast of Nova Scotia) into a Proustian narrative where personal memory is transfigured into art. (Eugène Nicole was one of those responsible for the recent republication of Proust in the Pléiade edition.) These islands—lost in the Atlantic, isolated, fog enshrouded, storm battered, and populated by a mere few thousand people—become a microcosm, the stuff that myths and dreams are made of. Yet this geographic monad is all-too-willing to communicate with the outside, whence the double dynamic of the tale, where history and phantasy, autobiography and fiction, are indistinguishable. Personal events cross with the great "upheavals" caused by the sudden incursions of the outside world: the arrival of a transcontinental steamer from Australia; Lindberg's famous flight; and perhaps most of all the seemingly banal but certainly most crucial arrival and departure of the mails. Rarely has the cover of a book been as accurately symbolic of its contents: its border consists of

reproductions of a French postage stamp depicting this archipelago, couched between two gigantic, protective fishermen. For it is indeed through the mails that these island folk communicated with the rest of the world; and it is through this book that Eugène Nicole communicates these islands—via his sublime prose—to us. We await the translation of this book—a runner-up for the Prix Medicis—into English.

A most curious and disquieting book was just republished in French translation from the Spanish: Max Aub's *Crimes exemplaires* (1956; fr. trans. by Danièle Guibbert; Paris: Cent Pages, 1990). As it was written by a fellow-traveler of the Surrealists, it is difficult to ascertain whether this book is fact or fiction; whatever the case, it is a masterpiece of black humor. *Crimes exemplaires* recounts 100 crimes as told to the Mexican law courts. These miniature memoirs, these brief confessions of why people committed murder, create a most embarrassing amusement. A couple of exemplary cases should suggest the tone of this book:

> "At first I killed him in a dream, then I couldn't help myself from really doing it. It was inevitable."

> "The poor guy, he was so ugly that each time I encountered him it was like an insult. There are limits to everything."

Perhaps we can establish a literary typology of crimes: Baroque, modernist, Wittgensteinian, classical, Situationist, romantic, Surrealist, etc. But the most terrifying reason of all is one that underlies all conflict, from the most visceral to the most conceptual: as one criminal succinctly explains, "I killed him because he didn't think like me." Indeed!

Laurent Jenny's first book, *La terreur et les signes: Poétiques de rupture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), contained in-depth readings of Hugo and Roussel, as well as one of the most brilliant analyses of Artaud. His most recent work just appeared: *La parole singulière* (Paris: Belin, 1990). This difficult, dense, and continually rewarding book reveals in the greatest detail the infrastructure of language, and ultimately serves as a theoretical guide to reading. The point of departure is an analysis of the "figural," that elusive rupture or eruption within and beneath language, which has already been analyzed by Lyotard in terms of a libidinal economy—not so much a confrontation of signification and sensation as an analysis of that unitary lived matrix from which they both arise. Laurent Jenny's book extends this analysis by supplementing contemporary rhetorical theory with phenomenological epistemology. This effects a "fleshing out" of linguistics and rhetoric, all the while supplying a much needed rhetorical component to previous

phenomenological analyses of the figural and gestural aspects of enunciation. By revealing the source of the ineluctable singularity of poetic discourse, this work provides a valuable tool for deciphering our modernity, and our modernism.

—Allen S. Weiss

MARJORIE WELISH

House (Blown Apart) by David Shapiro. (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1988). Short lyrics by an exceptionally gifted poet. Although *Lateness* is arguably Shapiro's best book, in *House (Blown Apart)* numerous beautiful linguistic catastrophes reveal meaning where only facades of meaning had been. In "Mr. Average Viewer," a visitation from comedian Jerry Lewis provides the occasion gone haywire and the poet copes with it as best he can. *"Contra deum,* Jerry, I cried," says Shapiro at one point in this nightmare of the existentially ridiculous—or, by virtue of the (exquisitely timed appearance of) Latin, eloquent in its losing battle with the condition of the ridiculous.

Like "Mr. Average Viewer," "Realism" starts with a cultural given. The ubiquitous Duck/Rabbit perceptual phenomenon makes itself known, only here, as in paintings by Jasper Johns quoting the optical commonplace to which this poem refers, the Duck/Rabbit is utilized to elicit questions of knowledge that lie beyond perception. By co-opting the device of Duck/Rabbit for the language of interpretation, not perception, Shapiro clears the way for imagination to triumph over fancy, and a stunning interiority to overwhelm the putatively actual. And this, as Paul de Man would say, is exactly where Wordsworth metamorphoses into Hölderlin. Throughout the modern dwelling of *House (Blown Apart)* consciousness at some tangent to nature is made manifest and very naked, unironically distressed for all its ironic urbanity.

The Collection of Lydia Winston Malbin, auctioned at Sotheby's, New York, May 16, 1990. Noted for her early brave partisanship of Futurist art, Lydia Winston Malbin gave The Metropolitan Museum of Art important pieces by Umberto Boccioni before she died in 1989. This auction (and preview) showing what remained of this patron's Futurist and broadly modernist collection of art after her publicly-spirited gifts took place, reflects a worthy indulgence in the highs and lows of Futurist painting. The most legendary, Giacomo Balla's *The Stairway of Farewells* (c. 1908) depicts an abysmal

spiral of steps on which a trio of women have stopped, turning to look up—a compelling *image* yet illustrative of the *dynamic* Balla wishes to enact. Here, animated fracture does not disturb the stable structure, as it does in the truly radical descent by Duchamp, or for that matter, in works done earlier and later, stylistically more advanced and included in Malbin's collection: Balla's Symbolist *View of the Villa Borghese* (1906), abstract, sparking, and his study for *Abstract Velocity* or *Materiality of Lights + Speed* (1913). The point being that even with some of her holdings gone, Malbin's Futurist collection represented in the auction's preview was sufficiently extensive to offer the viewer an opportunity for subtle criticality of a movement in which the ambition to be modern often exceeded the artists' achievement. (On scrutiny, all balusters depicted in *The Stairway of Farewells* were rendered with exactitude, no matter how far down the stairwell—exposing a stylistic conflict between the hallucinatory and the illusory.) There was further, I admit, anguished pleasure in noting that the auction house underestimated the monetary value of works more stylistically advanced than celebrated.

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

A tour de force of literary history and passion, written in one gigantic nuanced essay which forces new configurations of poets on our attention, Nelson regathers and re-presents American poetry by arguing that the canonical narratives of high modernism have compelled the amnesiac erasure of multiples of capable, persuasive, poets who did "productive work" at their cultural moment and can, reanimated here, do productive work in ours. This is at once a plausible and moving book, in part because of its special attention to black poets, female poets, left poets—a canvas of diversity, Nelson's scope is gratifying: he does exacting and accurate close readings of both visual and verbal texts, is alive to historical and contextual configurations, and offers stunning theoretical meditations in the course of the book. These meditations are on such topics as: the narratives of literary history; interests, pretenses of disinterest; the multiple subject positions possible in the conduct of literary study and the reading of poetry; minor and ephemeral literatures; the canon and its constitutively dismissive

functions, so that "canon" itself becomes a notion to be eroded. Nelson proposes and deploys a new relationship between "the canon" and literary history, not mutually reinforcing, but adversarial and confrontative. He also suggests many moments when formalist innovation and radical politics go together. It is impossible even to list the many figures, known and underknown whom Nelson treats in the text and in the impressive notes: all the known American modernists (Pound, Eliot, Stevens, cummings, Williams), Afro-American poets (Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown), women writers (Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven), Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, Amy Lowell. Sherwood Anderson, Carl Sandburg, Kenneth Patchen, Muriel Rukeyser, Lola Ridge. And many more. He also considers political poetry of the '30s as a discursive formation and is especially fierce about the "process of repression and the construction of a diminished, sanitized cultural memory" (166) where left and radical poetries are concerned, and where the making of a genteel modernism eviscerated political, visual, and social effervescence. This is a gripping and energizing book, a must for *Sulfur* readers.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Three essays and a coda, each working on the borderline between "theory and poetry" (42), remarkably illustrated with montages of stills from Trinh Minh-ha's films. Each of the essays is a gloss on one of the keywords of the title: Woman, Native, Other, all try to understand "writing," and other forms of cultural production. An exemplum of cultural studies, Trinh works with and questions concepts in feminist practice, anthropology, and literary criticism. Her special fascination is the way she attempts a fusion of certain post-structuralist practices (of decentering, of multiple subject positions, the attack on positivist social science; the critique of binary thinking) with certain romantic gynocritical practices (the insistence upon a special female practice of writing and perception; the notion of narrative, or storytelling, as the special invention of woman). She does so by showing how the despised woman/native/other are making an art and cultural practices sophisticated by contemporary standards (non-linear, deferred, built on difference, on interplays with silence). The "Woman" section is built on (uncited) Woolf, Russ, Olson, and works with materials from Cixous, and asks what is it to do real political art ("commitment") given the reflexive nature of writing ("the Mirror-Writing Box"). The Native section is a long and lucid attack on the "Great Masters"—Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss. It is jeopardy to forget the triple palimpsest of historical inscriptions (woman, woman of color, postcolonial person) to make writing. And thus "the to-and-fro movement between the written woman and the writing woman is an endless one," she says (30), in one of the notable epigrams or koans in

a book in which this kind of rhetoric is of real distinction. She is concerned "not with inserting a 'me' into language, but with creating an opening where the 'me' disappears while 'I' endlessly come and go." (35) The paradox of enacting the dispersals of the writer while touting the presence of the socially marked writer is resolved by a renewed commitment to the examination of the medium and materials of cultural work, reclaiming the radical practices of modernism for postcolonial feminism. The vow: "In writing close to the other of the other, I can only choose to maintain a self-reflexively critical relationship toward the material, a relationship that defines both the subject written and the writing subject, undoing the I while asking 'what do I want wanting to *know* you or me?'" (76)

The photographs, with some of the incisive epigrams as captions, make a mysterious second text. It is mysterious because Trinh Minh-ha does not discuss her films, nor how to read visual stuff, and because the stills are taken out of context. Yet they seem to punctuate the book with a reinforcing commentary of private meaning and public implication.

Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century;* in the series Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Lucid, nuanced, informed, this is a model literary history of the literary and social formation of interlocking "bohemias" (Rexroth circle of the 1940s, the Beats, Spicer circle, Snyderian neo-primitives, the Duncan group) as equally at ease with interpretive and theoretical debate as with the choice and framing of telling incident, example, analysis. Davidson argues that the San Francisco poetries are characterized by the romantic ideals of radical and dissenting community ("participation, immediacy, spontaneity"), by a performative ethos of equal parts of social hope and social anxiety and by the realities of exclusionary behaviors, all in the interests of a new poetry which is one of the key "players" in a countercultural movement for political, cultural and social transformation. A fine moment is Davidson's "history of the narrative" of the fabrication and packaging of beatnik; another is his feminist analysis of *"whose* Renaissance? Renaissance of *what?"* Two other main socio-political subtexts emerge and reemerge: anarchopacifism and homosexuality in a homophobic society. Davidson discusses Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac with special care, treating the reader to succinct analyses of "Howl" and the odic, Kerouac's "our gang" male bonding, Duncan's heterodox, erotic, and feminized tradition (e.g. in "Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar"); Spicer's cultic cadre. In the course of the book, Davidson makes his elegant entries into key definitional debates: overriding Bloom's oedipal struggle in favor of the self-conscious intertextuality of (say) Duncan; setting aside von Hallberg's notion that good poetry is conformist,

not oppositional; challenging Altieri's passive-receptive "immanence" for its historical and apolitical implications. I much appreciated his frontal discussion of "Gender in Bohemia" which analyzes the "Renaissance's" misogyny, sexist representations, dis-ease with actual women artists except in helpmeet/medium positions, concluding that the "privileged narrative" of the San Francisco Renaissance excludes women, and that certain contemporary work by women (Judy Grahn's, Denise Levertov's, Diane DiPrima's) begins in order to seize critical and poetic power over these stories.

Rosmarie Waldrop, *Shorter American Memory,* (Providence, RI: Paradigm Press, 1988).

A book of short prose works, twenty-two of them, playing what we know of our history (Vanderbilt, Lincoln, wagon trails) and its tame rubrics ("The Golden Age in New England") against the comic invention of recombinings based on or derived from a 1937 work of American history. This book is a "sounding," in Houston Baker's terms, identifying the self-deceiving melodies behind pompousness, pretense, and patriotisms. It is a dead-pan experiment in making the New Sentence from various Old Sentences, and by these phrasal and semantic combinations, it takes a winsome look at the underside of our history. There is a malaprop, punning translation of the Declaration of Independence and an alphabetic prose poem which offers the ground note of the poetics here: "much measured material might modestly marry masterly movement." The social commentary invented in collage coupure, framing, and recombining is comparable to one of Hannah Höch's visual works.

Tom Mandel, *Four Strange Books* (Gaz, 1990). A sense of a spiritual quest and practice, which is deeply committed to "What things teach with their language/ [which] is different from what things teach with/our language." (30) Some solemn, but not humorless or uncritical, consideration of Oppen and Stevens, and a considerably fruitful tension with contemporary erasures of presence. The whole makes a passionate, meditative book: calm, probing, responsible to the self, making the ritualistic preparation for understanding: the whole an evocation of a state of readiness. "Seamless white, ironic order flows/in place spangled in a timeless outlook/of metamorphic folds, spatters & discernment." (112) In the work there is a perhaps reluctant, but not-uninformed continuous insistence on presence or mystery behind appearance—exactly what we have been warned off by post-structuralism. In such lines as: "Redemption stands/ behind its transverse wall of moods." But also "Teach me inner words, world where is your handle?" (p 95) And maybe also "some mean in my meaning." (114) I admire the meditative sweep—syntax, pace of disclosure, and *patience*

of quite a number of poems, but especially "The Answers" and "Square Core of Stealth in the Tracery."

Beverly Dahlen, *A Reading (11–17),* (Elmwood, CT: Potes & Poets Press, 1989).

She wrote in *Temblor* 10 about *tautology* and *redundancy,* forms of repetition, forms to which she calls deconstructive attention. Rather than being "errors fatal to the orderly progress of thought," circular thinking, forms of excess or of its droopy opposite—possibly one might base one's rhetoric here. She seems to have done so with the works in this collection, mainly a cross between prose and poetry with both lyric and phatic bursts, arrays of detritus and clichés, dreams (which are, amusingly, about the only thing allowed to be narrative), birds throughout, a walking through the world, worrying about language. As with the first *Reading* (Momo's Press), Dahlen cuts the self loose from its moorings, lashes it to the mast, and sees where the drift takes it, but this work is barer of the sense of personality, closer to "collective autobiography," or "acts of language in which there is no preferred observer," notions that seem to have impact on style and the developing poetics (8 & 9). One place she or they go: the redundant plethora of possible sentences ("there will never be time to write all the sentences one may have/ been capable of writing," 62) in comparison the tautology of death (of the writer, all writers, the reader, all readers): "deaths never made up/not finished/going on deathing." (32) This work (among other things) asks itself how to conduct a reading of itself when subjectivity will unroll in ghost and gap but never totally end: "what are/ these presences? they accumulate./ but we are gone on from there./ we cannot read this for the peaks only/ but it is difficult to give the same weight to a non-recurring/ word, substance is a piling up." (39) Entering a landscape "unilluminated by metaphysics" does one have a chance of figuring out what one is inside of? In this work, every space "seemed to be haunted ground filling up fast with the thought of thought." (101—final line).

ELIOT WEINBERGER

I was cheered by the news this morning that the head of some Boston nut-group had condemned the opening there of the Mapplethorpe show as "avant-garde, anti-Christian, anti-American, and perverse." The irony of the current NEA controversy is that these Soldiers of God may indeed effect

a Confucian rectification of names: restoring the term "avant-garde" to its former place of dignity as subverter of norms.

Day after day, defenders of the NEA piously repeat that these works are not obscene, but Art that Enriches the Human Soul. It's not true. They are, like all art, obscene: presenting, literally, an *opposite scene*, opposite to the world that is before our eyes.

We should be emphasizing that the primary function of art is subversion: the bringing to light of the sub(terranean) versions: the versions that reveal that the world is not quite what we thought it is.

There has been only one reason for the perennial suppression of art: it tells you what you don't know, and that's more than most states can stand.

It should be remembered that the NEA is a product of the Vietnam War, the moment in this century when American artists and writers were most visibly the enemies of the state. It was founded and then expanded by our two wiliest presidents, Johnson and Nixon. They sure knew what they were doing. Snip through all the rhetoric of how *my* art could never be compromised by a government grant and one fact is plain: Through the Reagan years, the century's most shameful period in American history, the artists were silent. We will need a new generation to bury this generation of good Germans.

Parallel to this was the universities' friendly takeover of student protest by introducing "relevancy" to the curriculum: teaching what the students already knew, showing their sensitivity to student expression by encouraging workshops in various forms of "creativity." This required, of course, the wholesale importation of writers and artists, and the hitherto unimaginable invention of "poet" as a comfortable middle-class career. With it came a kind of collective amnesia: no one seems to remember that, before 1970, the university was considered the enemy of contemporary poetry.

I remember giggling in the early 1980s when I saw the Norton Critical Edition of *On the Road*, alongside *The Scarlet Letter* and *Billy Budd:* it had taken less than thirty years to entomb that once-scandalous book. Today the leap from the barricades to the marble halls is nearly instantaneous. Last night's bad boy or girl of the arts this morning receives a hefty fellowship, a university chair, a museum retrospective, a shelf of critical exegesis. We're kidding ourselves if we think that this is a sign of a healthy plurality in the institutions—which can, and should, only function as monuments to the dead—or that this hasn't changed the face of the arts.

Is it more incredible that Karen Finley's NEA grant was overruled, or that someone who publicly shoves yams up her ass should dutifully fill out the endless government forms to attest to her craft? That this and the other NEA cases have been generally condemned as "censorship"—here at the end of a century that murdered and still murders thousands of artists and writers,

banned and still bans tens of thousands of works—is indicative of how cozy and drowsy the American arts have become.

Nearly everything of enduring interest produced in the last 200 years was made by the perverse, the obscene, the ostracized, the subversive. These days I find myself nearly alone in hoping that the right will succeed in making the arts perverse again. Not so long ago, the goal of artists and writers was to work in such a way that no one would dream of giving you money for it.

This morning I also happened to be reading (in Wayne Koestenbaum's *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration)* this anecdote of our pillar of rectitude T.S. Eliot:

Conrad Aiken had praised Eliot's 1925 *Poems.* Eliot replied by sending him a page ripped out of *The Midwives' Gazette* in which he had underlined a description of vaginal discharge: "blood, mucous, and shreds of mucous . . .purulent offensive discharge." Aiken at the time was in the hospital suffering from an anal fistula. In the accompanying letter, Eliot wrote: "Have you tried Kotex for it. . .KOTEX. Used with success by Blue-eyed Claude the Cabin Boy." The reference was to a poem, written by Eliot, which he enclosed. Claude was: "a clever little nipper/ who filled his ass with broken glass/ and circumcised the skipper."

The recent death of Mary Oppen sent me back to her autobiography *Meaning A Life* (Black Sparrow). Too few know it: a classic of "objectivist" prose. In her poetry Mary often sounded like George; in the prose however she reveals herself as Reznikoff's worthiest disciple. It is extraordinary how much she was able to pack into the simplest declarative sentence. Equally remarkable, at any given moment in the book the lives of Mary and George—and Mary's emotional responses—are unfolding amidst the enormous events in the world. This is not so much a modernist collage as the result of modernist collage. A 20th century sensibility: the news as autobiography.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Unless Eliot Weinberger has read all the works produced on NEA grants during the Reagan period, he is not in a position to say the artists "were silent." Such a judgment would also have to take into consideration all the

art, performance, dance, etc., sponsored and not sponsored by NEA funding. I can immediately think of a dozen sponsored and non-sponsored people whose work during this period is major, political, and confrontational. I suspect that Eliot can too.

Or would he have preferred for Reagan to invade and bomb, say, Salvador, so that we could have gone out on the streets as in the (what it sounds like) good old Vietnam days?

I've given up on trying to make a connection between source of income and quality of artistic production. Capable imaginations will do their work as long as health and time permit. Is family money less poisonous than an NEA grant? A 40 hour week at minimum wage less detrimental than university teaching?

In the long run, the university writing workshop programs will have had zero effect on American writing. Each age produces warehouses of mediocre art; every age is a bad age relative to the support and appreciation of contemporary art. If "the function of art is the extension of human consciousness" (Hugh MacDiarmid, 1926), it follows that only a very tiny minority will hail the new in its own time.

I like the spirit of William O'Rourke's "Why I won't refuse an NEA grant" article in the June 25 issue of *The Nation*. Reflecting upon the obscenity restrictions, O'Rourke commented: "All my depictions of sadomasochism and homoeroticism have literary value, always have and always will."

The Nation also ran a powerful, if unjust, attack on Francis Bacon by Arthur Danto in their June 30th issue, occasioned by the Bacon retrospective at MOMA. Danto sent me back to Adam Gopnik's sympathetic and perceptive article on the painter in the February 26 issue of *The New Yorker*. Here is Gopnik's conclusion:

> It is the oddly fixed faith that there is some value in cataloguing physical life in all its exhausting and grungy needs and betrayals which lets Bacon go on painting. This emotion has nothing upbeat in it; there is no silver lining save for a stubborn and unsordid faithfulness to the integrity of its own position. Bacon reminds you in the end of Dante's steadfast Epicureans, whose tombs in the Inferno are left unguarded, because everybody knows they would never abandon their exhausted mortal bodies even if God let them.

I eagerly purchased a copy of Gerald Marzorati's book on Leon Golub (*A Painter of Darkness*, Viking), but found it disappointing. The book is of value only for Golub's conversation which is laced throughout the text. Marzorati never gets beyond his fascination with Golub, and spends much

of his time with ponderous excursions on political history. The book is permeated with simplistic generalizations like the following: "Painting had persisted. It had persisted despite everything, including the elegiac. It had not been overwhelmed and crippled by the elegiac in the way, say, that poetry had, at least in the West (You can hardly read an essay about poetry without reading of its diminished place in the culture)."

Three recent collections of poetry run the gamut of the comedic bases of life. Larry Goodell's *Firecracker Soup* (attractively produced by Cinco Puntos Press) is writing right on the edge of poetry-to-be-read and poetry-to-be-performed, a kind of Dada activism, as if Goodell has a Spike Jones band crammed inside him. Ron Padgett's *The Big Something* (The Figures) is a nice addition to Padgett's increasingly impressive body of work (which includes excellent translations; he is currently doing all of Cendrars' poetry which U of Cal Press will publish in 1991). I'd like to see a Padgett Selected which would include some of the truly wonderful and crazy poems, like "Cufflinks," "Wilson, 57," and "Radio," from earlier now out-of-print collections. Keith Waldrop is the least funny of these three poets, but I was struck by how a sense of taking himself lightly (while he writes very seriously) contributes to the character of the writing in his Selected Poems, *The Opposite of Letting the Mind Wander* (Lost Roads). A gentle irony aerates Waldrop's language as it folds back and forth upon itself, ode and elegy reflected phrase by phrase. The last poem in the collection, "Sixth Transcendental Study," is stunning.

Three engaging first books: April Bernard's *Blackbird Bye Bye* (Vintage): acidic, Spicerian shadows in her serial-pieces. Very filled-out lines that seldom relax into description. I suspect that she is a prose-writer at heart but, perhaps like D.H. Lawrence, capable of writing intelligent poetry as a "wing" of her work at large. Peter Cole's *Rift* (Station Hill) has most of its energy tied up in sound-associative, narrow, winding, fragmented stanzas that, in these respects, are very well done. Who will Cole be when and if he more fully inhabits his work? Barbara Jordan's *Channel* (Beacon) is also meticulous, if softer, writing. Its strength and weakness is the extent to which it collects, like a Joseph Cornell box, read/found bits and pieces. She appears to be building source areas to cultivate. I'm impressed by her painstaking, voiced collaging.

Seeing more and more Charles Olson material, I have the feeling Olson is less and less attended to. If this is true, what a shame, especially for writing students who could save themselves years of pawing each other by reading any 200 pages of Olson. The problem with entering Olson is that the party is going on at such full-tilt that Mr. Olson himself cannot be found and asked for a few statements as to what this party is about. Given the difficulty of gaining a threshold focus on a poet who may turn out to be

the most imposing figure after Dickinson, I heartily recommend Paul Christensen's edition of *In Love In Sorrow: The Complete Correspondence of Charles Olson and Edward Dahlberg* (Paragon House). In 200 pages, we have a discreet chapter of Olson's life, and a ruthless realization of the perils in all mentor/apprentice relationships. We also now have the 9th Volume of the Olson/ Creeley *Complete Correspondence* (Black Sparrow—and how much Olson and Creeley readers are beholden to John Martin for not flagging on his commitment to the publication of probably the most elaborate correspondence between two major figures in American literature). In roughly 2000 pages, we have moved from April 1950 to April 1952—2 years! The editing, after George Butterick's death, has been capably taken over by Richard Blevins. In what appears to be George's last piece of writing (done after his extraordinary essay on "The Kingfishers," which appeared in the winter 1989 issue of *American Poetry),* which opens Volume 9, Butterick writes: "the potential of each letter is for stirring an equal response, a co-response. These men are corresponsive, corresponsible correspondents."

Lastly, a bolt from the blue: Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (Yale). Ms. Paglia imagines an electric opposition between nature and art, with sexuality as the short-circuiting between. She proposes that Judeo-Christianity has never defeated paganism, which as image and personality ranges from the Venus of Willendorf to 20th century pop culture. While much of Paglia's literary-influence proposals and her sense of world literary center (roughly, Spencer through Wilde) seem to have sprung full-blown from the head of Harold Bloom, her pagan focus allows her a much wider range (art, psychology, religion) than literature alone. Imagine long paragraphs, often as intricate and complex as Edward Dahlberg's, in which the highly visual language is a potlatch of the popular and the erudite. Paglia is turned on by all sorts of things (vampires, gore, gangbangs, fascism) that most scholars would not admit to, or even share with their analysts, and she boldly, joyfully, challenges the reader to spar with her ideas, some of which strike me as brilliant, some half-baked (she loads the violence and horror of nature onto woman, and lets men off the hook). She is best on that art she defines as "decadent" (Coleridge, Sade, Baudelaire, Beardsley, Wilde, Dickinson), and when she cannot manage to swallow a figure (her pages on Wilde and Dickinson are thrilling—Blake for the most part eludes her), she still has compelling things to say about individual works. Relative to the bland, cerebral language that characterizes most criticism, Paglia is an apocalypse, and while she steps on many toes, my hunch is the book will be either politely dismissed or ignored. I urge you to read the book, and if you feel like it, shout at it while you are reading it. *Sexual Personae* made me realize again just how few books are crystal balls of stormy light. I salute Camille Paglia's witty and insolent courage.

CONTRIBUTORS

MILTON KESSLER's *The Grand Concourse* has recently been published by MSS (Binghamton); he was co-editor of *Choice*. RACHEL TZVIA BACK has published poetry in *Tyuonyi;* she lives in Israel. KEITH TUMA is working on a book on Basil Bunting. ELIOT WEINBERGER's thoughts on America are soon to be syndicated in 180 Mexican newspapers. ALLEN S. WEISS has recently completed a manuscript on Antonin Artaud and is co-curating an exhibition of outsider art at Parson's in NYC this November. DAVID SHAPIRO's most recent book, *House (Blown Apart),* is noticed in this issue by Marjorie Welish. PAUL CHRISTENSEN's edition of the Olson/Dahlberg Correspondence *(In Love, In Sorrow)* has recently been published by Paragon House; his *Minding the Underworld: Clayton Eshleman and Late Postmodernism* will be published this winter by Black Sparrow Press. JEAN-PAUL AUXEMERY, who lives in Echillais, is the major French translator of Charles Olson; he recently visited Dogtown with Gerrit Lansing. DOMINIQUE FOURCADE's titles published by P.O.L. (Paris) include *Xbo* (1988), *Son blanc du un* (1986), *Rose-déclic* (1984), and *Le Ciel pas d'angle* (1983). Ulysse-Fin-de-Siècle (Dijon) has recently published RICHARD SIEBURTH's translation of Michael Palmer's *Sun*. KEITH WALDROP's *The Opposite of Letting the Mind Wander* is noticed in this issue. RODERICK IVERSON's most recent book is *Joan of Arc & Rip van Winkle* (Deep Forest Press, 1987). KAREN MAROGLIS, originally from English South Africa, is married to Bert Papenfuss-Gorek and lives in East Berlin. MITCH COHEN, an American who has been living in Berlin since 1976, edited and translated the 1983 anthology *BER!IN, contemporary writing from East and West Berlin* (Bandanna Books). MARJORIE WELISH's *The Windows Flew Open* will be published by Burning Deck in 1991. ALISON BUNDY's stories are from a manuscript-in-process titled *Dunce Cap*. Forthcoming, from JACKSON MAC LOW, are *Pieces o' Six* and *Barnesbook* (Sun & Moon), and *Merzgedichte* in Memoriam *Kurt Schwitters* (Station Hill). CHARLES NORTH's most recent collection is *The Year of the Olive Oil* (Hanging Loose Press). THOMAS VOGLER is Professor of Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz. SPENCER SELBY lives in San Francisco. CYNTHIA NADELMAN, a contributing editor of *ARTnews,* lives in NYC; her poetry has appeared in *The Paris Review* and *Pequod*. APRIL BERNARD's first collection of poems (noticed in this issue) won the 1988 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets; her first novel, *Pirate Jenny,* was published in June, 1990, by W.W. Norton. CHARLES BERNSTEIN has recently published *The Absent Father in Dumbo* (Zasterle Press, Canary Islands) and edited *The Politics of Poetic Forms: Poetry and Public Policy* (Roof Books). RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS has edited *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* (Duke University Press, 1990); her *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice,* will be published by Routledge this year. A chapbook, *Draft X: Letters* is also expected from Singing Horse Press this year.

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Sulfur

SPRING 1991

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Correspondents	CHARLES BERNSTEIN JAMES CLIFFORD CLARK COOLIDGE MARJORIE PERLOFF JED RASULA JEROME ROTHENBERG MARJORIE WELISH
Managing Editor	CARYL ESHLEMAN
Editorial Assistant	L. KAY MILLER

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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1985, Detail, 20" x 110", Hand-printed Collage on Paper [Courtesy of Josh Baer Gallery, NYC]

Petah Coyne's sculpture is reproduced courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NYC.

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BARBARA MOR

from OIL

You are in the bar, laughing your bracelets are ropes of oil
night moves toward death, it moves thru you
(opening sediments of sleek thighs, drilled by money)
black eruptions on a stage of bored muscle
is the dance of the mother twisted in expensive chains
hooded eyes slide sideways on swivels of light
imminent glaciers clink in fingers against the holocausts of glass
and your head is back, singing, teeth as a white precipice
the room slides forward, over you, on thick wheels
(these are nights of victory, it is the father's hour)

and thru all bodies, underground tunnels, where jobs are done
and rats' eyes are bulbs in wire cages, fatal
cars, insects of stealth and gears move, urine civilizations
into the wounds of buildings, exoskeletal bedrooms,
deposit eggs of oil in the mouths of sleepers, and
cunts of mothers giving birth in hall toilets
(this is the father's luxury, wombs of cracked porcelain,
hotel spasms of businessmen shot thru gray drains)
biologic eons flushed down vaginas rented by the night,
stench and dollars transact your sex in swirling Lysol
the clocks of hearts convulse, this is absolute time
voyeurs watch death reproduce itself, cold level by level
dismembered hands of buildings, lighting cigarettes w/ripped
    music
rise and fall of stained elevators thru your body's ecstasy

so night moves down corridors, arrangements of throats
as purses of bodies open, drunk on money
the baby cries for milk, vomits batteries and thin oil

skittering shoes of the father run over the crib sheets
and cockroaches of radio words peel the walls
sinister wallets, underground leathers, stop beyond doors
(the dying mother bequeaths her last sensation, raped by metal)
chemical stairs dissolve the starving feet that run from her
this is the father's vision of a life

*

Her cunt was oil, and her lipstick and her voice, and
wings rising from swamp forests dripping scales of light
from her, and the wind was oil, and footprints
and highways, huge skeletal shadows crawling thru black pitch
toward her name, and the seas are oil
the dazzling rigs of cities are oil,
her fingernails are oil, tides surge blackly
at the edges of her hands
her heart is oil, sliding open in the dark like a warehouse
where trucks unload their black lines, fossils
of endless cries

oil is her body, turning in slick beds
among shells and repeated eyelids, packed in silence
the bending of ferns and gestures of
enormous flight, arm bones dripping with black gravity
oil is her breath fractioned from wreckyards, from night pools
diatoms and bolts of insects on fire, crushed inside her
the exhalations shine in windows, on beasts' necks
twisted in rubble, the roar
of oil rising in long elegant throats
erupting in black music, jet heads
inside the flames, whining and gnashing glassy foliage
her whispers in steel blades, the hisses
of elevators, jewels
of sweat drip from light, glide as reptile shadows, return
to original oil in the basements of eons, body gears
grind into her liquid stations, spider webs
corpse hands, subterranean cables, the telephone she uses
to call you into the last night

black rayon draped over nothing, oil is her throat
and her eyes, vinyl apertures the mood
falls into, and spins in thin disks thru a dark machinery
small wires of insects suck from electric flowers,
and the pistils are oil, and green wounds of lawns
oil is her breasts, and the children's
black toys, the fruits of the trees are oil, the roots, the seeds,
radios of singing teeth that scatter them
nets thrown from her kitchen, her linoleum thighs, her deaths
sliding across retinas, stab wounds
rapes, interior mining, where oil drips from her screaming
on the livingroom rug, on bar stools, on groins unzipped
in such exotic theaters

ink is oil, ink hemorrhages from a mind
convulsed as earth by mute drilling, the terror of
thought rushing to describe it
as her eyes rush to mirrors breaking inside
her, oil is sleep
oozing from crevasses, warm fur of animals flayed
in a vast silence, large desks of men with
children rotting on papers, in moist drawers, her red lips
sliding down metallic torsos
the sperm of executives thickens in quiet bays, wild birds
struggle to rise, cries choked on white graphs,
final numbers, oil is her tongues
plummeting like sirens at noon, the black words
spreading over blank pages of sky,
torn pages of water

she is oil in the supernatural engines, the
dream of oil glistening on dull bones, steel tanks thru
snow tracking solitary blood drops, the woman with victorious
teeth
advertising death traps and smiles
her long arm wraps around towns of ice, her body cells
growing like a thick blanket, as the mothers die
in agony, the fathers die, she covers them
as dinosaurs and ancient forests, humus

from the bowels of tractors, gray antennae cracking
fertile skulls of buildings,
long shins cracked and sucked for their dark fuel
oil seeps thru veins, conduits, bedroom walls, with stains
like bruises and inexorable birth she
covers them, multiplying
children from a deep well, the
slick air becomes them, and the dead sea, and spurts of
black milk entering the slippery mouths, she gushes
generations who become her, the pupils of
their eyes sleek and widening

*

There are nets in the eye that catch the light, images
like wild beasts are gathered in, tints of flesh
moving thru high grasses, blades of helicopters rounding up
stray clouds, a white horse
rears behind a chain-link fence, a woman convulses
thru the thick eyelashes of death, hidden cameras who capture
earth like prey, angles of skin thrashing and
the steel neighing of the wind, and bodies falling slowly
inward to the spread retina,
as the drowned sink thru darkening lenses of the sea

skeins groping, gathering what is done, naked bodies
on ocean bottom wrapped in
baling wire, blind maps, powerlines coiled as serpents, veins
of rabid dogs, ancient fish swim by,
growing gears and claws, the brain
is drawing black lines around the faces of windows, bored guns
stretch out calm along the sides of sharks
submarines sunk between tall buildings, dinosaurs
in extinct shoulders of engineers, stars, what is left of
neon wedged in dark throats
shiny black lines stitch up anemones, vulvas, the sucking mouths
of the great crowd, continents
wounded like beasts trailing bandages of water, images
twist in the brain like

snapshots of caught fish, trussed
with ropes of salt and imploding umbilical knots

mortices and scales of deep museums, reptiles of
cold walls, long echoes, the weight of oceans on locked glass
    cases
of eyelids, cracks in stone where horses
are leaping, hooves thrashing out
nerve-nets hang in underground rooms, strung with pale tissue,
wrenches of iron, ganglia open their mouths
and the wind screams thru them, tapestries evolve thru skulls
in peristaltic rolls, the history of protoplasm
of surgery, of mirrors, lost civilizations with their skins
preserved around steel bowels, calcium blueprints
in the tile of floors where
people danced ten thousand years below the sea

sunk in beds of gravity and black fire, basalt
stitches flagellates and cities from
our still bones, and bellies of spiders drift among the waters
with silent engines, all nets are loosened
in a steady breathing,
and tightened again, and loosened again, as photons and
worlds are woven and undone by
the retina, as eons sink thru night
with its webbed hands.

TYRUS MILLER

THE DESERT, THE WAR, AND THE UNDERGROUND

Is there anyone who has not once been stunned, emerging from the Métro into the open air, to step into brilliant sunlight? And yet the sun shone a few minutes earlier, when he went down, just as brightly. So quickly has he forgotten the weather of the upper world. And as quickly the world in its turn will forget him.

—Walter Benjamin

MYTH, TROPISM

The desert, the war, and the underground. Something binds them in compulsory relation, an interchangeability, a circulation of terms. Each a kind of limit of the human order, thus a way of disappearing: the desert extends beyond the city's border, war serves as the deadly "other means" of politics, the underground accepts the deceased in the embrace of burial. California's Death Valley, a dried-up lake bed depressed below sea level, emblematizes this interlaced romance in which all must vanish, its very name linking passage into the desert with those other routes to invisibility: dying and going underground.

We resist it, we find this tropic inclination of terms improbable, inapt. It seems to invoke a mythic logic that offends our sense of legitimate connection. Yet, we ourselves, in our global dominion, the expansion of human powers to the reaches of the planet, have activated the channels by which this mythic atavism has become sober, present fact. Battering against the limits of horizontal extension, we introvert our forces, honed by centuries of surface conquest, to plumb the sub-surface spaces in which we would occult the grinning teeth of our transience.

Live burial against the recognition of death.

AXENIC MAN

Imagine (as Gabriel Tarde did, late in the nineteenth century) that in the wake of the huge wars and alliances that shook the foundations of national power, the sun one day sputters and begins to wane. At once the earth starts to feel the chill of deep space, the oceans freeze and snow buries the populated land masses. The remnants of humanity, those privileged enough to have access to the reserves of fuel, gather in the warmest spot on the planet, the Sahara desert. From there they venture the last hope of the human race to survive: they go underground. Nature is dead forever, and the new humanity, warmed by the body of the earth itself, must forge a link with the inorganic world of rock and mineral, must build an underground utopia without trace of flora or fauna (axenic: free from other living organisms), completely through its own powers of artifice. A new regime of aesthetic beauty, its political strength embodied in a negative architecture voided from the solid ground, is instituted against the diminishing threat of total extinction: "It is the chief element of picturesqueness in our life; its artificial and veritably artistic scenery lends to all the masterpieces of our painters and sculptors the horizon of its perspective, the sky of its vaults, the tangled vegetation of its innumerable colonnades, whose shafts are a copy of the idealized trunk of all the antique essence of tree-life, whose capitals imitate the idealized form of all the antique flowers. Here is nature winnowed and perfected, which has become human in order to delight humanity, and which humanity has deified in order to shelter love beneath its shade."

HISTORY, INCISION

The founders of the ancient cities understood the fatal intertwining of war, the desert, and the underground. Like Gabriel Tarde's neo-Troglodytes, they too sought to elevate an aesthetic glory against this triumvirate of forces by turning one against the other, with the Odyssean cunning required to defeat a mythic foe. They fought disappearance with visibility, the visibility of stark relief against the desert's flat extensiveness (flat and empty like an unwritten or effaced tablet). And their cities, mirrors of the constellations, stood up as a challenge to the sands, an ostentation against the compulsion to vanish. Like wild dogs seized with a catastrophic balance of rage and fear, these founders fixed themselves in a single spot and defended it, accentuating their rigidity with art.

They raised stony walls against the track of nomadic warriors charioting across the desert wastes. They sunk cisterns and cellars down into the earth below, threaded tunnels and passageways through the soil, to wait out the

siege that threatened to let the desert recover the token lands they had estranged from it. Out of this theft from the desert and the vigilance it demanded from the guilty artificers of the city, the need for writing emerged: to tally the goods stored against time and the enemy outside. And in this labor of preservation, at first no more than one further, immaterial branching of the network by which their city communicated with itself, originated the myth of history.

Writing: that gouging of marks into the flat surface of clay, a ground delimited and reduced for mastery, abstracted for the human inscript.

History: that bounding of the desert from the human preserve, the incision of its surface with the script of time, to render a one-time theft into an enduring law.

DISENGAGE

"The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his," wrote Hugh of St. Victor. Hugh pronounced in these words the ethos of the desert, of the hermit's cave, of the underground man. He speaks of the perfection of placelessness, the holiness of disappearance to the world. Disengage: a maxim for saints.

Yet faintly, behind its syntactical seduction, that almost irresistible parallelism that hurries us forward—to nothing, to nowhere?—, I hear another voice that keeps silence: the vigil of the religious warrior. That silence echoes with the hoofs of divinely sanctioned conquest, with bloody crusades and cries where rock salt was sown in wounded furrows that once brought forth food. A cultivation of stones and a harvest of deserts against a fixed residence on earth: the thunder of holy war, that brand of exterminism practiced exclusively by the righteous.

METALLIC MAN

When the rebel angels were cast out of heaven and order was reestablished in the firmament, the real war could at last be prepared: total mobilization of a new sort, deep within the hollows of the earth. The work of mining, of metallurgy, always had the most intricate of filiations with the nurturing of war by means of peace. Led by Mammon, the poet tells us, "Men also, and by his suggestion taught, / Ransacked the center, and with impious hands / Rifled the bowels of their Mother Earth / For treasures better hid. Soon had his crew / Opened into the hill a spacious wound, / And digged out ribs of gold." The war between the angels and the devils,

once settled in the angels' favor, was instantly transformed into a campaign against the earth itself, a rending of its crust and a ravishing of its interior, as all the powers of the engines of assault were reoriented into the smelting and forging of the mineral elements. Truce called, and the preparation of a new campaign had already begun.

Thus when human wars erupt, that sense of a radical break with peace, the commencement of something so terribly new, fresh with unprecedented dangers, is only an illusion. The war of nation against nation, of people against people, is nothing more than the extension of metallurgy by other means. Already the intensive concentration of the will and of the power of the collective necessary to extract and shape the elements of the earth is a form of virtual war. This war began long ago and has not ceased for thousands of years. Still, it takes a certain angle of vision, a chance suspension of the noise of digging, perhaps, for it to be noticed.

BLACK GOLD

We are mistaken if we think that the new war, or any war, will be fought "for" oil. On the contrary, oil is war, the sublimed essence of war canalized into another way of consuming lives. It is a refined manifestation of violence in the form of a potential for speed, a blind destruction of resources and space, which only devolves into open conflict when its sources begin to sputter or clog. In taking over from our demonic and even our human forerunners, we latecomers have thus introduced—in spite of our slavish adherence to perennial ways—a novel element. The dissolution of fixity which the metallurgy of the past sought to found, their rude ironworks becoming our superfast engines and sleek highway machines, inaugurates a new, dissipative dimension of speed. Their gold must be made to flow perpetually, our gold must be liquid even far from the fire. We must not let it cool in the molds to forge the pillars of a pan-daemonic dictatorship of devilish valor. We unfurl sheer velocity across the desert landscape, the revolutionary banner of the democracy of speed. Into the sands our shafts are sunk to extract the black mineral substance of our might. Our temples circulate in mobile displays of unfocalized power, in the depthless design of the empty horizon, the cartographic planarity of unmarked ground. In our daily lives, we are all "road warriors," killing only for the right to keep moving deeper into the desert, the empty space with which we surround ourselves. The new war is oil itself, liquidized power, the distillate of territory. The warrior's body has disappeared in the grease of pure movement, all image and transparent windscreen: the levelling necessity of the desert.

THIS IS NOT A TEST

Even our nuclear weaponry, with its unprecedented compression of the fusion of metals, that liquifying assault on the integrity of matter (flash: fused sand of Los Alamos) and the cinderization of the organic world—our singular, mortal world—is no exception. Not accidentally does the refinement of this technology depend on test explosions underground. This restriction to muffled subterranean disturbances is no concession to human survival, but rather a homecoming to the weapon's essential ground. Not accidentally does the perfection of deployment ramify into networks of tunnels and underground railroads, invisible burrows under the steppes and prairies drying into deserts. Not by chance is the hope for survival after the war visualized in the projected scenarios as mass flight and dwelling below ground.

The previous spectre of nuclear annihilation raining from the upper atmosphere was only a test, a ruse, a diversion from the real nuclear scene. The underground "test," brothers and sisters, was always the real thing. If this had been an actual emergency, you would have been instructed to proceed to your individual burrow. Listen to that faint boring that continues in the dreams of your hibernation, and wonder in fear how it was you were not better prepared for this moment.

THE MOLE PEOPLE

The desert nations banded themselves together in the early nineteen-seventies to control the flow of oil; within six years nearly seventy thousand books discussing the basics of earth-sheltered houses were sold by the Underground Space Center at the University of Minnesota. A prestigious conference was held in the early eighties on "the potential of earth-sheltered and underground space." By 1981, the United States alone had already developed forty million square feet of underground space for secondary use. The number of earth-sheltered dwellings rose to nearly five thousand.

The underground represents the dream of a placeless place, both antipode and mirror of the blind exposure of the desert landscape, a release from the contingency of location and of the fluctuations of natural time. As a former president of the American Society of Civil Engineers writes, "Underground sites are not affected by windstorms, blizzards, heavy rains, extremely hot or cold periods, and the radical changes in temperature which such events can cause." Yet not just nature, but also history may be abandoned underground. Major General George J. Keegan (U.S.A.F. retired) cites the immense underground development in the limestone

foundations of Greater Kansas City as the "greatest potential civil defense facility in the United States," while a Soviet counterpart in the publication *Voyennyye Znaniya* concurs. The underground city is not only safe from the weather and the elements. It is also safe, some experts claim, from the incinerating heat and life-endangering rays of the nuclear blast.

PANORAMA

Two armies poised on the desert sands. The lines are drawn, once again remarked by the treads of motorized weapons, carriers, vehicles. One side fidgets in makeshift camps, the other hunches in trenches and bunkers, dug into the hard earth beneath the shifting surface. The oil fields resound with noise as pumps rise and fall in shafts sunk through the layers of soil and rock. Horns blare in the cities. On the highway the exhaust fumes of stopped cars shimmer in the sun. Far off, a rush of air rises from the subway grate where a raggedy man sleeps covered in old newspaper, the print obscured by nights of dampness. Rain falls over the forests of Germany, of California, of Canada, burning the needles, the slopes cut with deepening gullies. A fire rages in Brazil, smoke rises through a hole in the sky. Cattle graze the dry stubble of the plateau down to the ground. A wind is rising, battering the windows with dust. The buried silos of Kansas and Nebraska listen, quiet, waiting. A sound from far off, now closer, now far again. Who's there? No one knows, the desert calling, from the earth those ancestral voices. The war again. Another cycle drawing to its close.

BLAISE CENDRARS

THE PROSE OF THE TRANS-SIBERIAN AND OF LITTLE JEANNE OF FRANCE; UNNATURAL SONNETS

(Translated from the French by Ron Padgett)

THE PROSE OF THE TRANS-SIBERIAN AND OF LITTLE JEANNE OF FRANCE

Dedicated to the musicians

Back then I was still young
I was barely sixteen but my childhood memories were gone
I was 48,000 miles away from where I was born
I was in Moscow, city of a thousand and three bell-towers and seven train stations
And the thousand and three towers and seven stations weren't enough for me
Because I was such a hot and crazy teenager
That my heart was burning like the Temple of Ephesus or like Red Square in Moscow
At sunset
And my eyes were shining down those old roads
And I was already such a bad poet
That I didn't know how to take it all the way.

The Kremlin was like an immense Tartar cake
Iced with gold
With big blanched almond cathedrals
And the honey gold of the bells. . .
An old monk was reading me the legend of Novgorod
I was thirsty
And I was deciphering cuneiform characters
Then all at once the pigeons of the Holy Ghost flew up over the square
And my hands flew up too, sounding like an albatross taking off

And, well, that's the last I remember of the last day
Of the very last trip
And of the sea.

Still, I was a really bad poet.
I didn't know how to take it all the way.
I was hungry
And all those days and all those women in all those cafés and all those glasses
I wanted to drink them down and break them
And all those windows and all those streets
And all those houses and all those lives
And all those carriage wheels raising swirls from the broken pavement
I would have liked to have rammed them into a roaring furnace
And I would have liked to have ground up all their bones
And ripped out all those tongues
And liquefied all those big bodies naked and strange under clothes that drive me mad. . .
I foresaw the coming of the big red Christ of the Russian Revolution. . .
And the sun was an ugly sore
Splitting apart like a red-hot coal.

Back then I was still quite young
I was barely sixteen but I'd already forgotten about where I was born
I was in Moscow wanting to wolf down flames
And there weren't enough of those towers and stations sparkling in my eyes
In Siberia the artillery rumbled—it was war
Hunger cold plague cholera
And the muddy waters of the Amur carrying along millions of corpses
In every station I watched the last trains leave
That's all: they weren't selling any more tickets
And the soldiers would far rather have stayed. . .
An old monk was singing me the legend of Novgorod.

Me, the bad poet who wanted to go nowhere, I could go
    anywhere
And of course the businessmen still had enough money
To go out and seek their fortunes.
Their train left every Friday morning.
It sounded like a lot of people were dying.
One guy took along a hundred cases of alarm clocks and cuckoo
    clocks from the Black Forest
Another took hat boxes, stove pipes, and an assortment of
    Sheffield corkscrews
Another, coffins from Malmo filled with canned goods and
    sardines in oil
And there were a lot of women
Women with vacant thighs for hire
Who could also serve
Coffins
They were all licensed
It sounded like a lot of people were dying out there
The women traveled at a reduced fare
And they all had bank accounts.

Now, one Friday morning it was my turn to go
It was in December
And I left too, with a traveling jewel merchant on his way to
    Harbin
We had two compartments on the express and 34 boxes of
    jewelry from Pforzheim
German junk "Made in Germany"
He had bought me some new clothes and I had lost a button
    getting on the train
—I remember, I remember, I've often thought about it since—
I slept on the jewels and felt great playing with the nickel-plated
    Browning he had given me

I was very happy and careless
It was like Cops and Robbers
We had stolen the treasure of Golconda
And we were taking it on the Trans-Siberian to hide it on the
    other side of the world

I had to guard it from the thieves in the Urals who had attacked
the circus caravan in Jules Verne
From the Khunghuz, the Boxers of China
And the angry little Mongols of the Great Lama
Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves
And the followers of the terrible Old Man of the Mountain
And worst of all, the most modern
The cat burglars
And the specialists of the international express.

And still, and still
I was as sad as a little boy
The rhythms of the train
What American psychiatrists call "railroad nerves"
The noise of doors voices axles screeching along frozen rails
The golden thread of my future
My Browning the piano the swearing of the card players in the
next compartment

The terrific presence of Jeanne
The man in blue glasses nervously pacing up and down the
corridor and glancing in at me
Swishing of women
And the whistle blowing
And the eternal sound of the wheels wildly rolling along ruts in
the sky
The windows frosted over
No nature!
And out there the Siberian plains the low sky the big shadows of
the Taciturns rising and falling
I'm asleep in a tartan
Plaid
Like my life
With my life keeping me no warmer than this Scotch
Shawl
And all of Europe seen through the wind-cutter of an express at
top speed
No richer than my life
My poor life

This shawl
Frayed on strong-boxes full of gold
I roll along with
Dream
And smoke
And the only flame in the universe
Is a poor thought. . . .

Tears rise from the bottom of my heart
If I think, O Love, of my mistress;
She is but a child, whom I found, so pale
And pure, in the back of a bordel.

She is but a fair child who laughs,
Is sad, doesn't smile, and never cries;
But the poet's flower, the silver lily, trembles
When she lets you see it in the depths of her eyes.

She is sweet, says nothing you can hear,
With a long, slow trembling when you draw near;
But when I come to her, from here, from there,
She takes a step and shuts her eyes—and takes a step.

For she is my love and other women
Are but big bodies of flame sheathed in gold,
My poor friend is so alone
She is stark naked, has no body—she's too poor.

She is but an innocent flower, all thin and delicate,
The poet's flower, a pathetic silver lily,
So cold, so alone, and so wilted now
That tears rise if I think of her heart.

And this night is like a hundred thousand others when a train
slips through the night
—Comets fall—
And a man and a woman, no matter how young, enjoy making
love.

The sky is like the torn tent of a rundown circus in a little fishing village
In Flanders
The sun like a smoking lamp
And way up on the trapeze a woman does a crescent moon
The clarinet the trumpet a shrill flute a beat-up drum
And here is my cradle
My cradle
It was always near the piano when my mother, like Madame Bovary, played Beethoven's sonatas
I spent my childhood in the hanging gardens of Babylon
Playing hooky, following the trains as they pulled out of the stations
Now I've made the trains follow me
Basle-Timbuctu
I've played the horses at tracks like Auteuil and Longchamps
Paris-New York
Now the trains run alongside me
Madrid-Stockholm
Lost it all at the gay pari-mutuel
Patagonia is what's left, Patagonia, which befits my immense sadness, Patagonia and a trip to the South Seas
I'm on the road
I've always been on the road
I'm on the road with little Jeanne of France
The train does a somersault and lands on all fours
The train lands on its wheels
The train always lands on all its wheels

"Blaise, say, are we really a long way from Montmartre?"

A long way, Jeanne, you've been rolling along for seven days
You're a long way from Montmartre, from the Butte that brought you up, from the Sacré-Coeur you snuggled up to
Paris has disappeared with its enormous blaze
Everything gone except cinders flying back
The rain falling
The peat bogs swelling
Siberia turning

Heavy sheets of snow piling up
And the bell of madness that jingles like a final desire in the
    bluish air
The train throbs at the heart of the leaden horizon
And your desolation snickers. . .

"Say, Blaise, are we really a long way from Montmartre?"

Troubles
Forget your troubles
All the cracked and leaning stations along the way
The telegraph lines they hang from
The grimacing poles that reach out to strangle them
The world stretches out elongates and snaps back like an
    accordion in the hands of a raging sadist
Wild locomotives fly through rips in the sky
And in the holes
The dizzying wheels the mouths the voices
And the dogs of misery that bark at our heels
The demons are unleashed
Scrap-iron
Everything clanks
Slightly off
The clickety-clack of the wheels
Lurches
Jerks
We are a storm in the skull of a deaf man. . .

"Say, Blaise, are we really a long way from Montmartre?"

Of course we are, stop bothering me, you know we are, a long
    way
An overheated madness bellows in the locomotive
Plague and cholera rise like burning embers around us
We disappear right into a tunnel of war
Hunger, that whore, clutches the clouds scattered across the sky
    and craps on the battlefield piles of stinking corpses
Do what it does, do your job. . .

"Say, Blaise, are we really a long way from Montmartre?"

Yes, we are, we are
All the scapegoats have swollen up and collapsed in this desert
Listen to the cowbells of this mangy troop
Tomsk Chelyabinsk Kansk Ob' Tayshet Verkne-Udinsk Kurgan
    Samara Penza-Tulun
Death in Manchuria
Is where we get off is our last stop
This trip is terrible
Yesterday morning
Ivan Ulitch's hair turned white
And Kolia Nikolai Ivanovich has been biting his fingers for two
    weeks. . .
Do what Death and Famine do, do your job
It costs one hundred sous—in Trans-Siberian that's one hundred
    rubles
Fire up the seats and blush under the table
The devil is at the keyboard
His knotty fingers thrill all the women
Instinct
OK gals
Do your job
Until we get to Harbin. . .

"Say, Blaise, are we really a long way from Montmartre?"

No, hey. . . Stop bothering me. . . Leave me alone
Your pelvis sticks out
Your belly's sour and you have the clap
The only thing Paris laid in your lap
And there's a little soul. . . because you're unhappy
I feel sorry for you come here to my heart
The wheels are windmills in the land of Cockaigne
And the windmills are crutches a beggar whirls over his head
We are the amputees of space
We move on our four wounds
Our wings have been clipped
The wings of our seven sins

And the trains are all the devil's toys
Chicken coop
The modern world
Speed is of no use
The modern world
The distances are too far away
And at the end of a trip it's horrible to be a man with a
    woman. . .

"Blaise, say, are we really a long way from Montmartre?"

I feel so sorry for you come here I'm going to tell you a story
Come get in my bed
Put your head on my shoulder
I'm going to tell you a story. . .

Oh come on!

It's always spring in the Fijis
You lay around
The lovers swoon in the high grass and hot syphilis drifts among
    the banana trees
Come to the lost islands of the Pacific!
Names like Phoenix, the Marquesas
Borneo and Java
And Celebes shaped like a cat

We can't go to Japan
Come to Mexico!
Tulip trees flourish on the high plateaus
Clinging vines hang down like hair from the sun
It's as if the brushes and palette of a painter
Had used colors stunning as gongs—
Rousseau was there
It dazzled him forever
It's a great bird country
The bird of paradise the lyre bird
The toucan the mockingbird
And the hummingbird nests in the heart of the black lily

Come!
We'll love each other in the majestic ruins of an Aztec temple
You'll be my idol
Splashed with color childish slightly ugly and really weird
Oh come!

If you want we'll take a plane and fly over the land of the
    thousand lakes
The nights there are outrageously long
The sound of the engine will scare our prehistoric ancestors
I'll land
And build a hangar out of mammoth fossils
The primitive fire will rekindle our poor love
Samovar
And we'll settle down like ordinary folks near the pole
Oh come!

Jeanne Jeannette my pet my pot my poot
My me mama poopoo Peru
Peepee cuckoo
Ding ding my dong
Sweet pea sweet flea sweet bumblebee
ChickadeeBeddy-bye
Little dove my love
Little cookie-nookie
Asleep.

She's asleep
And she hasn't taken in a thing the whole way
All those faces glimpsed in the stations
All the clocks
Paris time Berlin time Saint Petersburg time all those stations'
    times
And at Ufa the bloody face of the cannoneer
And the absurdly luminous dial at Grodno
And the train moving forward endlessly
Every morning you set your watch ahead
The train moves forward and the sun loses time
It's no use! I hear the bells

The big bell at Notre-Dame
The sharp bell at the Louvre that rang on Saint Bartholomew's Day
The rusty carillons of Bruges-the-Dead
The electric bells of the New York Public Library
The campaniles of Venice
And the bells of Moscow ringing, the clock at Red Gate that kept time for me when I was working in an office
And my memories
The train thunders into the roundhouse
The train rolls along
A gramophone blurts out a tinny Bohemian march
And the world, like the hands of the clock in the Jewish section of Prague, turns wildly backwards.

Cast caution to the winds
Now the storm is raging
And the trains storm over tangled tracks
Infernal toys
There are trains that never meet
Others just get lost
The stationmasters play chess
Backgammon
Shoot pool
Carom shots
Parabolas
The railway system is a new geometry
Syracuse
Archimedes
And the soldiers who butchered him
And the galleys
And the warships
And the astounding engines he invented
And all that killing
Ancient history
Modern history
Vortex
Shipwreck
Even that of the *Titanic* I read about in the paper

So many associations images I can't get into my poem
Because I'm still such a really bad poet
Because the universe rushes over me
And I didn't bother to insure myself against train wreck
Because I don't know how to take it all the way
And I'm scared.

I'm scared
I don't know how to take it all the way.
Like my friend Chagall I could do a series of irrational paintings
But I didn't take notes
"Forgive my ignorance
Pardon my forgetting how to play the ancient game of Verse"
As Guillaume Appolinaire says
If you want to know anything about the war read Kuropotkin's
Memoirs
Or, the Japanese newspapers with their ghastly illustrations
But why compile a bibliography
I give up
Bounce back into my leaping memory. . .

At Irkutsk the trip suddenly slows down
Really drags
We were the first train to wind around Lake Baikal
The locomotive was decked out with flags and lanterns
And we had left the station to the sad sound of "God Save the
Czar."
If I were a painter I would splash lots of red and yellow over the
end of this trip
Because I think we were all slightly crazy
And that an overwhelming delirium brought blood to the
exhausted faces of my traveling companions
As we came closer to Mongolia
Which roared like a forest fire.
The train had slowed down
And in the perpetual screeching of wheels I heard
The insane sobbing and screaming
Of an eternal liturgy

I saw
I saw the silent trains the black trains returning from the Far East
    and going by like phantoms
And my eyes, like tail lights, are still trailing along behind those
    trains
At Talga 100,000 wounded were dying with no help coming
I went to the hospitals in Krasnoyarsk
And at Khilok we met a long convoy of soldiers gone insane
I saw in quarantine gaping sores and wounds with blood
    gushing out
And the amputated limbs danced around or flew up in the raw
    air
Fire was in their faces and in their hearts
Idiot fingers drumming on all the windowpanes
And under the pressure of fear an expression would burst like an
    abscess
In all the stations they had set fire to all the cars
And I saw
I saw trains with 60 locomotives streaking away chased by hot
    horizons and desperate crows
Disappearing
In the direction of Port Arthur.

At Chita we had a few days' rest
A five-day stop while they cleared the tracks
We stayed with Mr. Iankelevitch who wanted me to marry his
    only daughter
Then it was time to go.
Now I was the one playing the piano and I had a toothache
And when I want I can see it all again those quiet rooms the
    store and the eyes of the daughter who slept with me every
    night
Mussorgsky
And the lieder of Hugo Wolf
And the sands of the Gobi Desert
And at Khailar a caravan of white camels
I'd swear I was drunk for over 300 miles
But I was playing the piano—it's all I saw
You should close your eyes on a trip

And sleep
I was dying to sleep
With my eyes closed I can smell what country I'm in
And I can hear what kind of train is going by
European trains are in 4/4 while the Asian ones are 5/4 or 7/4
Others go humming along are like lullabies
And there are some whose wheels' monotone reminds me of the heavy prose of Maeterlinck
I deciphered all the garbled texts of the wheels and united the scattered elements of a violent beauty
Which I possess
And which drives me

Tsitsihar and Harbin
That's as far as I go
The last station
I stepped off the train at Harbin a minute after they had set fire to the Red Cross office.

O Paris
Great warm hearth with the intersecting embers of your streets and your old houses leaning over them for warmth
Like grandmothers
And here are posters in red in green all colors like my past in a word yellow
Yellow the proud color of the novels of France
In big cities I like to rub elbows with the buses as they go by
Those of the Saint-Germain-Montmartre line that carry me to the assault of the Butte
The motors bellow like golden bulls
The cows of dusk graze on Sacré-Coeur
O Paris
Main station where desires arrive at the crossroads of restlessness
Now only the paint store has a little light on its door
The International Pullman and Great European Express Company has sent me its brochure
It's the most beautiful church in the world
I have friends who surround me like guardrails
They're afraid that when I leave I'll never come back

All the women I've ever known appear around me on the
horizon
Holding out their arms and looking like sad lighthouses in the
rain
Bella, Agnes, Catherine, and the mother of my son in Italy
And she, who is the mother of my love in America
Sometimes the cry of a whistle tears me apart
Over in Manchuria a belly is still heaving, as if giving birth
I wish
I wish I'd never started traveling
Tonight a great love is driving me out of my mind
And I can't help thinking about little Jeanne of France.
It's through a sad night that I've written this poem in her honor
Jeanne
The little prostitute
I'm sad so sad
I'm going to the Lapin Agile to remember my lost youth again
Have a few drinks
And come back home alone

Paris

City of the incomparable Tower the great Gibbet and the Wheel

Paris, 1913

UNNATURAL SONNETS

1.

OpOetic

to Jean COctO

what crimes are
not cOmmitted
in thy name!

Once upon a time there were pOets who spOke with rOund
mOuths
Round as salami her beautiful eyes and smOke
Ophelia's hair Or the lyre of Orpheus strOked
You belch up rOund hats to find a strOke-of-genius rhyme sharp
as teeth that
would nibble your lines
Open-mouthed
Since you like smOke rings why don't you repeat *smOke*
It's too easy or too hard
the 7 pawns and the Queens are there as commas
Oh POEtry
Ah! Oh!
COcOa
Since you like cowboys why don't you write *cowpOke*
It's a written grOan that'll make the French crOak
The English clOwn did it with his legs
The way AretinO made love
The Mind envies the circus poster and the alphabetical pOsitions
of the Snake
Man
Where are the pOets who spOke with rOund mOuths?

nes.

We have to loosen up their b **O** z enfant

h

POETRY

Nov. '16

2.

ACADEMIE MEDRANO

To Conrad Moricand

Dance with your tongue, Poet, do an entrechat
Once around the ring
on a tiny black basset hound
or old grey mare
Measure the lovely measures and fix the fixed forms
Which are the **BELLES LETTRES** you learn
Look:
The billboards are bored with you bite
you with their colored teeth
between your toes
The director's daughter has electric lights
The jugglers also fly through the air
pael suoregnaD
pihw eht fo kcarC
taht sserpxE
The clown is in the mixing barrel
get past the cashier
Your tongue must { on nights when
do the orchestra
No **Free Passes** are accepted.

November 1916

3.
THE MUSICKISSME

To Erik Satie

What do we care about Venizelos
Only Raymond • let's put Duncan
still tucks up old Greek clothes
Music with vegetable ears
Like an elephant's
Fish cry out in the Gulf Stream
Can juicier than a fig
And the Basque voice of the sea microphone
Music hall duet
With car accompaniment
Gong
The musical seal
50 measures of do-re do-re do-re do-re do-re
do-re do-re do-re do-re do-re do-re do-re do-re
That's it!
And a dminished chord in A flat minor
ETC.!
When it's pretty a pretty toy noisemaker
dances the doorbell
Intermission
Over
Theme: Orchestra condutor CHARLIE CHAPLIN keeps
time
Before
The top-hatted European and his
corseted wife
Counterpoint: Dances
Before the bewildered European
and his wife
Coda: Sings
Quod erat demonstrandum

November 1916

The Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jeanne of France

This poem recounts a train trip that BC claims to have taken across Russia soon after his arrival in 1904, during the Russian-Japanese War. *The Trans-Siberian* was published in 1913 in an accordion format with beautiful pochoir designs by Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979) and a variety of typefaces and indentations to indicate stanza breaks. Fully unfolded, each copy was about 6' 7" tall. The first edition of 150 copies, BC pointed out, was as tall as the Eiffel Tower. One journalist pointed out that it would be a useful book to take out to the country: "If you're caught in a sudden downpour, you could take shelter under it: it's a real portable villa." *The Trans-Siberian* was the first French book illustrated with abstract art; it was the first "simultaneous book"; and it might well qualify as the first book *as art object.* To get an idea of what it looks like in color, see Arthur A. Cohen's *Sonia Delaunay* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975) or S.A. Buckberrough's *Sonia Delaunay: A Retrospective* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Albright-Knox Gallery, 1980).

The Temple at Ephesus: The Artemision, the grandest version of several temples dedicated to the goddess Artemis, at Ephesus, an ancient Ionian city on the west coast of Asia Minor. The temple is said to have been burned to the ground by an arsonist named Herostratus in 356 B.C., on the evening when Alexander the Great was born. The site of the Artemision was first excavated in 1863-74; further discoveries were made when work resumed in 1904, when BC was in Russia.

Novgorod: Novgorod (now Gorky) was one of the most important medieval Russian cities, the capital of the principality of Novgorod. According to BC, his first published literary work was called *The Legend of Novgorod* (1909). It is supposed to have appeared in an edition of 14 copies in Russian translation, but none survives, and the manuscript has never been found. There are some interesting tales and legends associated with Novgorod, but none that I know of called "The Legend of Novgorod."

I foresaw the coming. . .of the Russian Revolution: The young BC was in St. Petersburg on Red Sunday, the beginning of the Revolution of 1905.

Amur: River in eastern Asia that forms the boundary between Manchuria and Russia.

Malmo: This seaport was, at the turn of the century, second only to Stockholm in Swedish industry.

Traveling jewel merchant: A Varsovian merchant named Rogovine who took the 17-year-old BC under his wing in 1904. They traveled thousands of miles across Russia and China, dealing in antiques, jewels, spices, cuckoo clocks, and rugs.

Harbin: Town in Manchuria that became an important military town during the Russian-Japanese War because it served as a junction on the Trans-Manchurian railway (the part of the Trans-Siberian that crossed Manchuria) with the line leading to Port Arthur.

Golconda: A fortress and ruined city in India that lent its name to the diamonds found in the dominions of the Kutb Shahi dynasty, founded in 1512 and which ruled a large and powerful kingdom, with Golconda as its capital and treasury.

Khunkhuz: In his book *Siberia* (1943), Emil Lengyel says, "The. . .Khunkhuz brigands. . .[of Manchuria] took a perverse pleasure in destroying the [railroad] line for no apparent reason whatever."

Boxers: Members of an intensely patriotic organization, the Righteous Harmony Fists (popularized by journalists as "Boxers") retaliated against foreigners and Christians in China in 1900.

"Railroad nerves": In a 1930 letter to John Dos Passos, BC explained this is a technical term used by American psychiatrists to describe "a softening of the spinal marrow due to the trepidations of modern life or some such nonsense." He hazarded "rail-road brain" as a translation.

Taciturns: Apparently Siberian hills or mountains.

Patagonia: An area in South America lying partly in Chile, partly in Argentina, it was discovered in 1520 by Magellan and named Tierra del Patagones because of the large footprints of the natives, whose average height was around six feet two inches. Hence, "Patagonia, which befits my immense sadness."

I'm on the road with little Jeanne of France: All we know of Jeanne is in this poem.

Tomsk Chelyabinsk Kansk etc.: Russian towns, most of which are on the Trans-Siberian line.

Cockaigne: The Land of Cockaigne, an imaginary country, a medieval utopia where life was a continual round of luxurious idleness. In literature, Cockaigne is sometimes used as a euphemism for London or Paris—"the big city."

Rousseau: The French painter Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) allowed his artist and poet friends to believe that he had been to Mexico. Guillaume Apollinaire (see note below), whose brother worked in a bank in Mexico, was an enthusiastic perpetuator of this legend.

Land of the thousand lakes: Perhaps Norway?

Ufa: Russian town.

Grodno: Russian town.

Bruges-the-Dead: Bruges is the capital of West Flanders, Belgium. The belfry of the market hall dates from the end of the 13th century. The chimes are famous.

Syracuse: Ancient Sicilian town, the birthplace of Archimedes.

Archimedes (ca. 287-212 B.C.): Greek mathematician and inventor, famous for inventing various mechanical devices, some of which were used as weapons. His most important discoveries were in physics and mathematics. He was killed by a Roman soldier while drawing mathematical figures in the sand, although orders had been given that he be spared.

Chagall: Marc Chagall (1887–1985), Russian-born painter who was virtually discovered by BC.

Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918): French poet and friend of BC. Like Cendrars, he was a foreign national who became a naturalized French citizen and changed his name. See also BC's poems "Hammock" and "Homage to Guillaume Apollinaire."

Kuropotkin: Probably Alexei Nikolaievich Kuropotkin (1848-1925), commander of the Russian army in the Russian-Japanese War of 1904–5, although BC could also have had in the back of his mind Piotr Kropotkin, the anarchist, who explored Siberia in the 19th century. Both men wrote memoirs.

Irkutsk: A town on the Trans-Siberian line, on Lake Baikal.

Lake Baikal: An enormous Siberian lake (over 400 miles long), surrounded by mountains and filled with salt water and salt-water marine life—2,000 miles from the nearest salt water. Because building the railroad line entailed various difficulties, the work was interrupted on one side of Lake Baikal and continued on the other, so that this stretch remained the final one, at last completed in 1905.

Krasnoyarsk: A town on the Trans-Siberian line.

Khilok: A town on the Trans-Siberian line.

Port Arthur: An ice-free port on the southern tip of the Liao-Tang Peninsula in China, Port Arthur was thus the hope of an expanding, imperialist Russia at the turn of the century.

Chita: A town on the Trans-Siberian line.

Maeterlinck: Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), Belgian-born French poet and dramatist.

Tsitsihar: A town on the Trans-Manchurian line.

Yellow the proud color: A big series of novels from the French publisher Albin Michel had yellow covers.

Lapin Agile: A rustic cabaret in Montmartre frequented before World War I. It was so named because it displayed a large painting of a rabbit, apparently dancing, by an artist named A. Gill.

The great Gibbet: Perhaps BC's nickname for the Eiffel Tower; in "Tower" he says, "I'd like to [...] hang from the Eiffel Tower." It could also be a reference to the Paris of François Villon.

The Wheel: The Ferris wheel erected, like the Eiffel Tower, for the Universal Exposition of 1889. The Universal Exposition of 1900 had a Trans-Siberian Railway pavilion that simulated a train trip across Russia.

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Unnatural Sonnets

"OpOetic" was first published in the program notes of a poetry and music presentation, Paris, 1917. It was reprinted, with the two others in this group, in *L'Oeuf dur* no. 14, Paris, 1923.

OpOetic

Jean COctO: Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), French writer, artist, and filmmaker. BC, as director of the publishing house Editions de la Sirène, consulted with and published Cocteau.

What crimes. . . : A paraphrase of Mme. Roland's last words before her death (1793) on the guillotine: "O liberty! O liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name!"

Aretino: Pietro Aretino (1492-1556), Italian author of licentious works.

Ozenfant: A pun on the French word *enfant* (child) and Amédée Ozenfant (1886-1966), French painter and theoretician who edited *L'Elan* magazine (1915-1916), which published typographically daring poems.

Académie Médrano

That is, the Cirque Médrano, located at the corner of the Rue des Martyrs and the Boulevard de Rochechouart in Paris. On Sundays and holidays a circus was held there, with equestrian performances, acrobatics, pantomimes, etc.

Conrad Moricand: Swiss-born French writer and astrologer (ca. 1885-ca. 1951); later a friend of Henry Miller.

The Musickissme

On one handwritten manuscript, the title is broken into "The Music Kiss Me."

Erik Satie: French composer (1886-1925) and friend of BC.

Venizelos: Eleutherios Venizelos (1864-1936), Greek statesman. President of the Council (1910-1915, 1917-1920, and 1928).

Raymond Duncan: Brother of Isidora Duncan, he wore ancient-style Greek sandals and robes in the streets of Paris right up to his death in 1966.

Charlie Chaplin: BC claimed that in London he had once shared a room with the then unknown Chaplin. He later realized that he had confused him with a long-lost friend named Perlberg.

Quod erat demonstrandum: In Euclidean geometry, the expression (Q.E.D.) which comes at the end of a proof and which means "Which was to be shown."

KAREN KELLEY
TWO PROSE WORKS

Blanche (Virtual Reality No. 2)

It is first dark of an even worse condition acquired despite your best efforts mixed with **RIOTOUS DISORDER**. The grim fixture of sky that shows around the diminishing white building is a ripe, formal fringe, almost a fresh start, which invests the scene with a kind of **THICK, SOFT QUALITY** and gracefully dissolves the ashes streaking the night. If this sky is removed, **EVERYTHING WILL GO WRONG**. You come around the corner, carrying a large suitcase. You look like the space for a ship between two piers by moonlight, then like a **MILK-PAIL**, then again a port and again a bucket. You think you have **DISCOVERED SOMETHING IMPORTANT HERE**, but are told that this is deliberate. The strange idea that a patch of **SHOCKING MISPERCEPTION** "will never grow anymore once it is looked at" has been held—mistakenly—throughout generations. You can almost feel the **DANGEROUS BREATH OF THE RIVER WEEPING, WEEPING**, crow feathers dotting its bank, faint smell of bananas and coffee. Two women, one white and one black, are seizing with their hands **AIRPLANES, HELICOPTERS, GLIDERS, AND DIRIGIBLES** from the sky. The white woman fills the upper part of the building; the black woman has a white smock that shines like a **NEW MOON** when she holds up a black silk kerchief between herself and the audience. Your appearance is incongruous to this setting. You are bad luck in the clothes you've worn all your life—**LONG EARRINGS OF CHILDHOOD** surrounded by brilliants, white gloves and hat—looking as if you are testing the fiber of the longest night of the year (if hard a man, soft a woman) by naming it "stranger." **YOU ARE ABOUT FIVE YEARS OLDER THAN A STAR**, your crumbling baked clay beauty an obligation that must come to an end based on **DRASTIC LIGHT** equalling cigarettes and typeface with relatively thin, light lines. There is something about your **UNCHARTED SPEECH**, as well as your fusty wedding gown, that suggests **LOOSE IRON FALLING FROM THE FEET OF GRAZING HORSES**. Suddenly you know that you were formerly used in superstitious and diabolical operations, performing **ACROBATIC STUNTS** for some reason in a half-slip. This mirror equals motherhood, sex,

madness, death. You spring up and seek your chances, seek your choices, by praying cross-legged in the small, private room. **THE INNER LANDSCAPE FADES TO DARKNESS** and the outside wall of the house disappears. Two rooms can be seen, **NOT TOO CLEARLY DEFINED**. The one first entered is primarily the direction from which the wind is about to blow, but contains a folding bed **TO BE USED BY YOU**. Laughter and shouts of parting come from men. One throws a shadow over your script where it reads: *screen door of the* *and comes in*. He is an inner core of certain, well-deserved reward, a human body covered with a **COW HIDE**, on which the words *Animal Joy* are painted in red in broad brush-strokes. The room beyond this is an abandoned hive. Inside, **A VERY SMALL, DETAILED YOU** sits in a chair stiffly with its shoulders slightly hunched and its legs pressed close together and its hands tightly clutching its purse as if it is **QUITE COLD**. After a while the fucked-blind look goes out of its eyes and you begin to see that the essential basis of strong feeling in the body involves **LOOKING BACK**. Pillar of salt. A tire screeches. You **CATCH YOURSELF** with a startled gesture.

". . . I think I see **LITERAL PASSION**, and though it is **INSIGNIFICANT**, it is full of meaning for me"
(Virtual Reality No. 3)

You are awakened early in the morning by someone **BURNING A CLEARING** in your mouth. It is the enthusiastic looming wolf whose face makes you think that all kinds of "normal" expectations are narrow, selfish journeys. . .and you must admit it is **NOT ONLY ITS MIND WHICH YOU ARE AWARE OF, IN AWE OF, CHAOTICALLY**. The rare stone (as in pit) of the moment you do not separate so easily from is also standing beside your table, and both stare at you with no less interest than you showed in them during the night. **A CONTINUOUS LOW DRONING SOUND** considered characteristic of manhood. In responss to this, he first unbuttons his jacket to show the twisting and turning in pain you lie awake all night **TRANSMITTING AND RECEIVING IMAGES OF**, which explains the loose fit of his collar. He has, like you, **A SENSE OF SMELL**. It amuses him, the way your hands change according to the shape of fight or flee. But his father-eye refuses to come to life. You see a mouth that is **GRATIFICATION OF EVERY WISH**. After this degree of visibility, which consists of two jaws

closing and opening to express **A CAPACITY FOR YOU**, his teeth begin to sprout. You understand his staying the night as the relation of a result to its cause. No matter how much his expression is modified by **SHIFTING THE CANDLE AROUND** in the outer space determined with reference to the boundaries of your body, his thick, horizontal moustache **DOES NOT LOOK IN THE LEAST REAL**. Your mother, however, comes out better. You love the red marks on the back of that clot of soot she calls a **SOUL**, which turns into a leather pillow or the hat only females wear. It seems to you that **ANYONE WHO SEES THIS IMAGE** must be so forcibly struck that they would begin immediately to think of **EXAGGERATED, INCOHERENT INTERPRETATIONS** inasmuch as every noise indistinctly perceived makes our bedclothes fall off in the night. Her mother-hand drops from the arm of the chair in the foreground, the **OPENING OF HER DRESS** shows her breasts, and you want to kiss her there. She says she wants nothing from you but the diffuse fragrance emitted when you come about to windward, your **HABITUALLY BLOOD-STAINED HANDKERCHIEF**, and the sign from your room that reads: *leave the room immediately after ejaculation or face military punishment.* First you make her go to the ladies' room. You part your lips and pull out a pair of stockings. She has a **RABBIT HOLE**, hidden but ready to be used. Yours is the life for which she has sacrificed the sense of touch. You incite yourself to stick your nose in her, to dig. The tunnel suffocates you, despite its being a **GRASSY REGION WHERE STREAMS DISCHARGE AND LOUD CRIES FLARE UP INTO THE SKY**. There are so many things you want to do with her. Instead you wonder: *Have I frightened her? Can there be someone more sensitive and more afraid than I?* Mountains of **UNDERTONES, OVERTONES, NUANCES AND ABSTRACTIONS** sunder, an other mounting your back. It is the wolf. Of course you want the pleasure. Instead, they both get down and introduce themselves properly, with a certain formality, as three-dimensional representations of those **EXTREME SELF-PERCEPTIONS** that are injurious to your own purposes. Their laterally compressed striped bodies angle through the **BLINDSPOTS** in the room. You tiger-pace the hotbed of sound and meaning, letters and symbols, **UNABLE TO REMEMBER OR CALL THEM TO MIND**: they are unconscious.

BRUCE ANDREWS
WHO SHOUTED?

ONE

My got
Up out of WHO SHOUTED?
Nowhere, is there clapping for themselves?
Voice, if they could see it
What *is* dark—
Its saying, its announcement
Sure, the last Original People at Great Water "that are
young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long"
Waking dream all conversation
Set the scene, defend your client
Set in order, I'm saying, count, I'm. . .
Together Future
Anticipates (contrived)—double-hearted?
Don't make the lies any better
As a skeleton, just animated pottery
Name sliced through the neck
Reassemble the name
Of the lips of your mouth
Uhuh. . .
If you put fireflies at the tip
Clouded mirror—Writing
Black seeds in a white soil

TWO

You're HARVESTING
Formal parting: *Be careful what you see*
So that you read it, wake up into a
Or mirrors reversal—dreams kind of lie
Eyes unperforated
Anything is foreseeable—
I memorize anything in the future
Traces at NIGHT WRITING
Tease stage tricks out
Mostly bad
So that tells you what not to
Gossip enough, bad news 'takes shame' & backs off
The AS IF—& the UNLESS

THREE

Who prefers the answers?
Quote, unquote
No either/or, no imperatives
Verb—Object—Subject
Your no imposing yourself on some one on some other
No WHY
The condition of being red corresponds to me
Verb's possessed, in itself powerless
Relative location
At least they're not just direct objects
The future the hypothetical
Who owns what?

4.

I dreamed of staring eyes
Foretells an encounter with an animal
Something slow
Something fast
Dream of honey from termites
Pleasant visitors will come
Lying down
You'll have much work
What's known
Will be a doubt
Carry a heavy load
Slandered

FOUR

Approve my
So you have come
Not verb *against*
Rubbing her back against his, like a cat
Everything's so tattooed
So they could file teeth to points
Mirrors, cross-eyed, flattened foreheads
Just agents, not makers—
We're mouthed we're faced
Poised
Close the path, chisel the drooling at the mouth
She or he knows (what she or he's doing)
Little human heads on a belt
The twisted ones *versus* scatter blessings to
Possessive is the having to do
Rub red pepper into the normative

Emphasize the horizontal
Hunt in the morning, farm in the afternoon
In the evening work about your dreams & the stars

5.

Dream of chocolate
Foaming at the mouth
Birds, Tomato, Dust, Dog's claws
Illness
Colors, anything I blow
A bad omen
Lizards, Turkey, Pigeon, Buzzard, Eagle, Vampire bat
Fever
I dreamed of trapped animals, & whipping someone
Stomach pains
Custard apple
Skin erupts
Woodpecker
Coughs blood
Cotton, fruits
Anemia
Salt
Catch a cold
Hit someone, beat someone, scorpion sting
Rheumatism
Alligators
Malaria
Vultures
Toothache
Whistle, Thunder, Trumpets, Waves, Fountain, Smoke, Clouds, Naked
Or you have wings, a person's anus, Tortoise, Genitals, Shit
About to die: warning

Stars, Frog, Gopher, Pincers
Funeral
Singing, Music, Poetry, Dancing
Tears or Mourning
Losing my wisdom teeth
Children's death
Planting beans
Killing maggots one by one
Full Moon
In childbirth

FIVE

What happened will happen again
Tips of the teeth at the earth's heart
Which is on the back of a crocodile
The Big Mappers Big Stagers Big Designers
Not WHAT but HOW
Order, or how much 'bright praise'?
Local trance decorum tobacco
Forced to cut wood all day long & make love
Federal body politic medicine
Until she eats & cooks you whole
My decentralized in your
Bend down face in your
Are what moves, invisible
You see a shadow going the wrong way
Teeth paper vice
Laws are never quiet (making credibility)
Piece out & deck out
Supplemental counterfeit funding—
Or the Wooden People getting cashiered
Couldn't kneel: too stiff
Or speak from their hearts: had none

Revenge attack by their own dogs, turkeys, pots & pans
Cunning jugglers
To see what was coming, a change of clothes
What orientation
Participant observer?—give-me-a-break!
Draws blood from incense tongue
Trophy decapitated imitation hearts
Moulded out of incense fish in hand like heart
To buy food from the
Disassembled, it disappears
Like a Do-It-Yourself kit
No hallucinogenic enemas
Morning glories, water-lilies, sleigh-bells
Hedgehog of arrows in the blue chest

6.

I dreamed of hunting
You'll be courting
Of a canoe
Sex
A woman's thigh
Cutting red meat
Game escapes
Spurned
Dark night
Hot weather
Ants biting me
Caught in the rain
A camera, a guitar, a virgin
You'll see game
An effeminate man
A very tame animal

Cutting off a finger
        Monkeys
Monkeys
        Testicles
Blanket
        Intestines
Candles
        Fat
Money
        Ticks

SIX

Corn center
Fat stubby cigars
Not killing vultures—
Long ago they were our grandmothers
The roots of everything
Make one knot, one bow
400 square feet each
Eating away of the planets, by ants: *eclipse*
Make root of us?—corn didn't?
One mahogany falls & the sky drops a star
Hiding from danger: as a sweet potato
Humor them—
Hang up their yellow jawbones & antlers & wings
We *are* eating red. . .when there is ammunition
Barkless dog—
I have need—
Club Mace Spear Sword Poison-dart Sling Hatchet
Rope Net Lasso Spear-thrower
Or blowpipe down a bird
Lucky days on the stingless verb bees

7.

Obscenity
Game runs away
Large snakes coiled up
Tourists all over the place
Floodwaters, Anteaters, Squirrels, Skunks, Sugar, Aim at the thorax of the jaguar
Foreigners
Something sticky
Will shake your hand
Injected in the eye socket, Needles, Blackberry, Underpants
Snake fangs
Rope with its end frayed
Snake with its mouth open
Penis, Person Reading, Tobacco, String, Waves on a lake, Combing hair, Urinating, Writing
Watch out for snakebite
To unravel
Killing a snake
Gorgeous sunset
End of the world

SEVEN

And the fire at the ends of their hands
Becoming 'separate ones'
Who curls up inside their own blowguns?
Too many white men
It will burn everything until the world is naked
Barkers of shins =
Prostitutes
The snakes
Would have all things put in their mouths

Wives made entirely of money
Evangelis[hi]ts, the twisted ones
Like the Wooden Men—have the radios
Pulling in stations as distant as your heart among us
We were reduced
But I do not change
Licensing the destroyers—
The world wants to die—
So they can begin fresh
Moebius of *what sows, what dawns*
So instead of snakes looking at you
You are looking at them

NOTE

The preceding is the text to a dance choreographed by Sally Silvers, premiered in New York at Performance Space 122 in May & June 1989, performed by Silvers, Pilar Alamo, Barbara Chang, Julian Jackson, and Mari Martin. Sixteen minutes long. The text—concerning the daily life, ancestry, and dream imagery of the Lacandon Maya (with some material culled from Robert Bruce's *Lacandon Dream Symbolism* on their collective use of dream as prophecy & warning) was designed to be presented on tape by two different alternating & overlapping voices. In addition to these two tracks, Andrews' live sound for the performance intermixes edited tracks of Mexican music from Chiapas & of shortwave radio transmissions. The lighting design divides the space into five differently lit areas, corresponding to Mayan color symbolism. The dancers' costumes are white paper jumpsuits with crinkly bright-colored paper waistbands.

Movement for the piece was selected from Silvers' videotaped improvised solo material, created while under the influence of (or intoxicated by) Classic Mayan writing & images. For example: dancers in profile, movements low to the ground, contorted or impossible-to-hold shapes & balances. The organization of the movement—both spatially & directionally—is based on Mayan conceptions of time & space. (For instance, the four cardinal directions of the universe each supported by a different rain god & the world tree which connects current time to the 'other world' represents a fifth direction.) The four directions are assigned a colored space: east—red, north—white, west—black, south—yellow; and the action of the dance (like Time itself) moves in a counterclockwise direction within these colors.

The dance is divided into five sections, each associated with a different dancer as foregrounded soloist counterpointing the quartet.

1.—Begins in darkness, with music. ("I dream of. . .") The center is a slowly & imperceptibly descending headstand with crossed legs. The other four are balanced face down on their elbows and rocking back & forth dragging their feet & heads. Corners trade places and all five face front & sit down, to begin alternating in & out of the same phrase.

2.—Soloist action: snakelike, with large jumps & dives, through the others who form a

triangular shape doing repetitive profile walking shapes in canon. (Text doubling, two simultaneous voices—)

3.—Travelling glyph positions. (Words intermittently drowned out by music—marimbas, chanting.) Gradually forming into an ominous frightening creature—a shaking, self-slapping standing line-up.

4.—Stark & ritualistic: soloist walks on bodies at perimeter. Word overlappings. Somber, processional music ("decentralized," "what orientation"). Horizontal lifts; soloist lifted up, walks in air upside down & sideways ("drops a star"). Decays into ground-level chaos (scrambling balances, bumping into each other, frantic searches). Shortwave radio & faster primitive horn sounds.

5.—Soloist back to center. More extreme unison shapes & balances. Fife & drums. Formalized, prophetic, somber. ("The world wants to die".) Ending with crashing from a headstand onto back with rocking, embracing motion. "So instead of. . .," music & shortwave sounds & lights out.

[S.S. & B.A.]

LARRY GOODELL
FOUR SONNETS

GEMINI IN THE FOREST

"Language is spoken sound" as we mish-mash together
In the deep dark pandering forest we are on the crotch of the
    whore
Nature is the prince, the princess king, the Queen the precise
    bitch
The everything we adore—my alter-ego and I, my other self
My imagining travelling partner, my itching companion
The Dante Troubadours are singing in the kitchen, kitchen of the
    forest
I am discovering myself here interfering in all art
That comes my way, the devouring of everything in its path
The packing away every crumb in ant caverns below
The eating away of every log from the heart within
The misadventure of hope and absurdity of human depression:
I'm just in the way—unless I drop dead
My wordiness, my sounding out my name, Larry, scares
    everything way,
As if I or my other truer self existed.

NEW MEXICO STYLE

Oh Sky that is my bosom, Flower that is my defect,
How the Southwest lifts me to enchantment,
Enchantment of moron over dolt, enrapture of the mesa
Catty-corner across from McDonald's in Bernalillo.
My high-flying boots straddle that bohemian cactus there
And it's pleasure! Only a woman would know.
My river goddess Alpha Romero speeds down the Interstate:
These stones are my inner tones, and Nature marches on.
Coyote is a woman, woman is a muchacha grown up to señora,
The sky is full of rainbows over the Chile Harbor
Where the Rio Grande meets the infinite, the infinite turquoise drama.
My grandmother showed me everything I know back in Brooklyn
"Come to New Mexico, they'll love you there—there're
More of us there than the natives, and we populate and shit in style."

MAKING IT BIG

for Dagoberto Gilb

It's alright to switch subjects midstream, if you don't lose your focus.
You can come back and finish it later, that's considerate
If you're telling a story. Everything I've written is a guideline to myself on
How to create art. Art for masses of asses, millions of jillions:
The entire universe with all its galaxies flows—
Why not go to the top, is that only reserved for presidents of this and that?

Go ahead hold out and get published by Random House, Harper and Row.
You deserve to be paid for your work and not have to nickel-dime it all the way.
Most people, when they are informed, will like you.
Most people are not asses, I hope I'm not one, there is hope.
But there are millions of us out there in the universe
And we only have this planet to play with, though the Weird Eyed
May come and visit us soon. Go to the top, you're right.
They'll be knocking down the doors from Mars & beyond, wanting to read your book.

ATTRACTION

If your Attraction is bi-fed, post-nutrient one-one-one
It will be a diversion that might get you into Sexaholics Anonymous,
Or if it transcends Suzy, Ephraim, Skullduggery prosthetics
It will draw Doctors to you, Man & Wife, Life Suppositories
Expository righting, what was wrong. Be a moralist.
Stand up for your attraction. Be magnetic. Hold your own.
You are the desire of your making, the extreme cream job.
Going home *au natural* will get you bliss, Fort Bliss.
The entire military establishment stands at your door,
Watching television till you bomb them with your condom bomb.
Oh come to me long, my Attraction, duo-concertante in the nude
Thrill will thrill, Safe will be safe, lately rife
Everybody is crawling up out of themselves, to be
Themselves, attracted to attraction, safe in perfect energy of themselves.

PAMELA WYE

THIS, THIS, THIS BODY: THE SCULPTURE OF PETAH COYNE

In an art world that has downplayed imagination to the point of near shut-off, Petah Coyne's recent sculpture has helped flick the switch of the "i word" not merely back On, but Fast-Forward. Despite its abstractness, Coyne's sculpture is highly suggestible, provisionally accepting the swarm of our own projections only to ricochet them back at us in a surcharge of recollections we may have forgotten we ever knew. To say that Coyne's sculpture gladly supports conflicting interpretations is an understatement.

While her 1987 mud and straw installation at the Sculpture Center bristles with the gothic anxiety and enchantment of a brothers Grimm tale of witches and brooms and thatched roofs, her installation of the same year at the Whitney Museum-Equitable Center evokes the violent pagan rituals of blood and gore that underlie Catholicism.

In "natural-looking" works, Coyne toys with the absurdity of an operating method (and perhaps a whole cultural mind set) that deconstructs nature—literally gathering, chopping, sorting, packing and shipping raw materials from far and not-so-far-off places—in order to reconstruct oversized baroque simulations by unnatural means: hollow armatures, barbed wire, cloth, paint, glue, celluclay, tar, polymer, rope and nuts and bolts.

Coyne speaks of Van Gogh as a major influence. The twisted trees, bushes and wheat sheaves of Van Gogh's Arles drawings, in particular, do indeed echo through Coyne's work. The visual texture of Coyne's bundles of straw and dry branches is kin to the obsessively repetitive brown-ink line of Van Gogh's drawings. In sculptures as diverse as her "mutant" Florida tree, her visceral hanging bushes and her Sculpture Center "landscape," Coyne pushes the latent creatures lurking in Van Gogh's tortured flora toward greater literalness and specificity without losing the dominant abstractness of her work.

Van Gogh's Arles drawings also recall the more recent (1940s to the present) ink drawings of another Coyne precursor—the sculptor Louise Bourgeois. Though much has been made of the relation of Coyne's sculpture to that of the late Eva Hesse, it is the intense fertility of Bourgeois's more pronouncedly symbolic imagination—undulating landscapes, bulbous tree-like figures, pendulous pouches, skeined, skirted, totemic,

pregnant and multibreasted abstract she-forms—that most resembles Coyne's own fever of forms. And Bourgeois's ceiling-hung, plaster hives of the 1960s are, formally and emotionally, the most direct antecedent to Coyne's larger-scaled hanging sculptures of the 1980s.

Coyne's outdoor work on Staten Island in 1986, with its torso-like sheaves of roots, twigs and mud, and her Sculpture Center environment, with its look of some imaginary natural history museum's re-creation of an equally imaginary primitive society's ritual site, employ a conceptual primitivism characteristic of first-generation earth-work artists, particularly Robert Smithson, whose work evinces lost societies and the world's entropic fate. Coyne's later works, sculptural figures from 1988-9, function together in spatial dialogues rather than as all-out environments and hark back to the formalist primitivism of Miro by way of Ashile Gorky. The feminist primitivism of the 1970s also resonates in Coyne's use and elaboration of the iconography of blood, hair and organs that characterized the emergence of that important movement. Finally, and perhaps more fundamentally, there is a gesture of ritualized deconstruction underlying all of Coyne's work. It is one that does not mirror modern technology by clinically and cleanly dissecting, but rather one that reverberates with the atavistic impulse of rending limb by limb, before setting about the job of making whole again.

Whether one reads the individual forms of the Equitable installation as secretions that have dripped from some giant gland down through the ceiling, hardening into place over time, or as limbs, viscera and sexual organs hung slaughter-house style like trophies from some ancient battle, Coyne's imagery relates to the body—both inside and out. Even her Florida tree, in sprouting giant pouches like outsized follicles, refers us back to the body. A bouquet of gargantuan Fallopian tubes, perhaps? But, on the other hand, nothing prevents one, in a more whimsical moment, from seeing this tree as a weeping willow laden with the backyard swings of a surreal childhood, or imagining some out-of-state tourist marveling at the strange local vegetation.

The strict Catholicism of her childhood, Coyne has said, continues to preoccupy her and feed her art. It is no wonder. Catholicism is fixated on the body. Not simply our bodies and the prohibitions thereon, but His body. "Eat this, for this is my body. . ." Coyne's art connects with those forgotten pagan beliefs and rituals that underlie Catholicism—sacrificial dismemberment and cannibalism as well as methods of preserving the body for its passage into the afterlife.

In the ancient Egyptian Osirian myth, the man-god Osiris is killed, torn into fourteen pieces and buried across Egypt. Isis searched for and succeeded in reconstructing Osiris's broken body (except for his phallus which had been swallowed by a fish in the Nile), then embalmed and

swathed it before breathing her own life into him. This regenerative myth ushered in the agricultural age—Osiris was the grain and his death and resurrection was the grain's burial and rebirth as cereal. In a prototypical Eucharist that harks back to earlier cannibalistic traditions, sacred Egyptian bread was consumed as a means of absorbing Osiris's body and his eternal life.

In Greece, where Osiris was known as Dionysus, Dionysiac ritual assured immortality through the rending and eating of a divine substitute (bovine or human) in a re-enactment of Osiris's dismemberment. One account has Dionysiacs (all women) tearing calves asunder and flinging the mangled remnants among the trees; another has them ripping a man's arm out of his shoulder before tearing him to pieces.

Like the site of an Osirian mystery-festival or Dionysiac rampage, Coyne's Equitable installation was strewn with shapes like dismembered body parts. Lumpy testicles and rent hearts, intestines draped in wiry brambles of veins and nerves, shoulder joints and the back of an ox hung impaled on branches that poked down through the ceiling. Brown like dried blood, wrapped in straw and rope, these body-parts appeared as though preserved in their forlornness for some future attempt at wholeness, like an archaic donor organ bank.

In an Isis-like impulse, Coyne assembled and reconstructed her mutilated shapes to create figures of a many-faceted wholeness for her 1989 exhibit at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. As though disemboweled, these sculptures are built around hollow wire armatures, so the air, in a purifying gesture, passes easily through them. The large size of these sculptures belies their fragility just as their earthiness belies their desire to levitate or at least defy gravity by hovering above the ground. They look like bodies, but they act like souls. Coyne bandaged these delicate "bodies" with strips of cotton fabric like Giotto's swathed figure of the resurrected Lazarus. With limbs hidden beneath the winding cloth, the disinterred body of Lazarus resembles an unearthed tuberous root or a Petah Coyne sculpture. Coyne applied oil and grease to her disembodied bodies in a gesture not unlike the ancient Egyptian mortuary custom of applying sacred ointments to the dead to preserve and protect them on their journey into the afterlife. The Catholic sacrament of Anointing the Sick is a derivative of this ritual. Coyne also dusts some parts with talc or orchid fiber, substances that are suggestive of the spices Mary Magdalene brought to Jesus's tomb to bless his body. Coyne's powders change character over time—the oil and grease beneath the talc slowly "eats" it, turning it black, while the deep red orchid fiber turns brown on its own. The rest of the sculptures' surfaces are sprayed with a black sand that is a by-product of sandcasting. This gives them a sooty, industrial quality that is in contrast to the earlier work's hairy naturalness.

Coyne refers to her sculptures as "she." And it is in her work of 1989, both the Shainman exhibit and the Brooklyn Museum installation, that this feminine appearance is most explicit. The she-forms at Shainman are smaller than their sisters at the Brooklyn Museum. The wire buzzing around their tops and bottoms is finer, resulting in a more immaterial-looking haze like a spell, a perfume or some other esoteric emanation. The fertility and multiplicity of forms within a single figure is held in urbane balance, like still mobiles, giving these sculptures a more elegant demeanor than their earlier country cousins and their giant Brooklyn sisters. The strange ovate fruit that decorates these she-figures like hats or skirts are like ovum that don't want to leave the mother body to strike out on their own as independent figures but rather stay close to home, growing so big in some instances that they read as partners. These intricate sculptures have a lacy loveliness about them that is more visual than tactile, more cerebral than animal.

The three massive and domineering sculptures that hung in a face-off with the public in the Grand Lobby of the Brooklyn Museum had the regal bearing of great goddesses. Simultaneously off-putting and reassuring, they have beneath their surface a snarled mass of shapes, a tangled conglomeration of debris from some forgotten culture that got thrown together in some cataclysmic inundation that obliterated the minutiae of their individual shapes and made of them a body. Covered in a hardened gritty silt, they hang like inadvertent monuments to some bygone age (perhaps our own).

Or are these three sisters really the three successive and reductive states of one single she-form? The largest, draped in a multibreasted gown, is the most whole and imperturbable. The middle one has been stripped (The Bride Stripped Bare?) to reveal her lumpy body, and is tormented by orbiting flies (or are those spinning wires the fizzing gases of a decaying body?). The smallest of these sister sculptures has been eaten down to her most vital organ. Her gaping nest-like womb cradles a vessel of industrial oil like the lady earth who holds, deep within her belly, that coveted modern-day treasure of prehistoric decay.

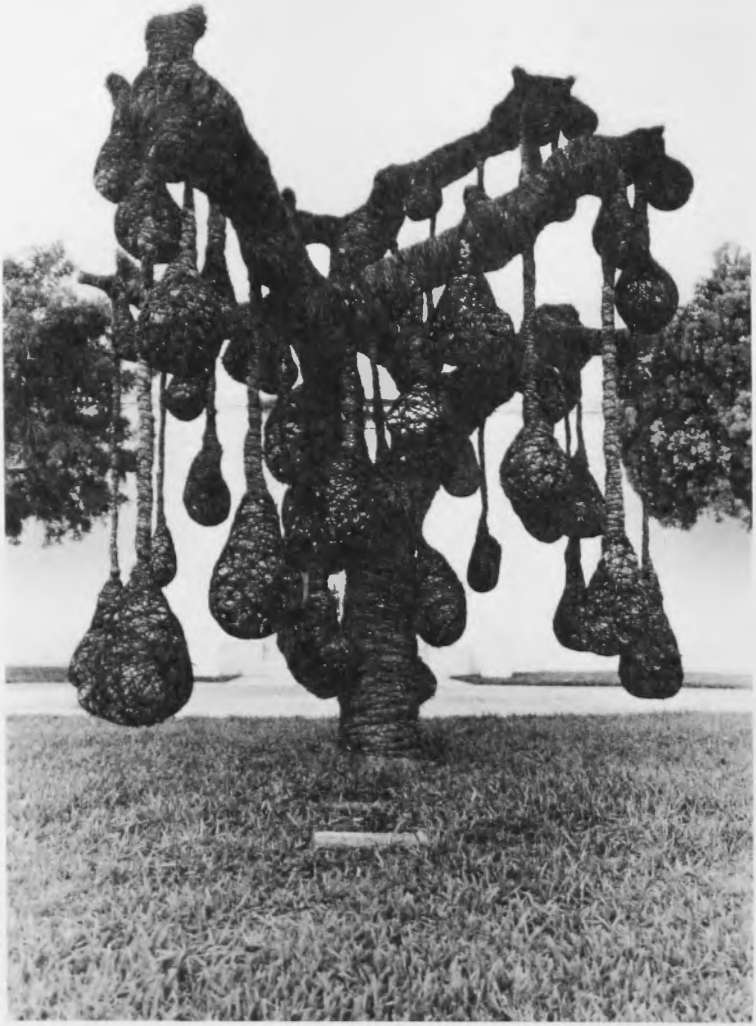
At 37, Coyne has both an accomplished body of work behind her and an abundance of growth ahead of her. Organic is, for Coyne, a method of operation. She doesn't stand still and she doesn't repeat herself. She tends to get it right the first time and moves on. So, what we can expect in the future from Coyne, an artist so finely attuned to the subterranean workings of "shape's life," is, most probably, the unexpected.

1/15/91

PETAH COYNE
SCULPTURE

SCULPTURE CENTER INSTALLATION

Mixed Media, 1987



NORTON GALLERY "EMERGING FIGURE"

1989, West Palm Beach, Florida

INSTALLATION VIEW EQUITABLE WHITNEY

Mixed Media, 1987–88

EQUITABLE WHITNEY INSTALLATION (DETAIL)

Mixed Media, 1987–88

UNTITLED (636)

Mixed Media, 127" x 61" x 36", 1988

UNTITLED INSTALLATION

Brooklyn Museum, September–December, 1989

WOLFGANG GIEGERICH

THE ROCKET AND THE LAUNCHING BASE

Or: The Leap from the Imaginal Into the Outer Space Named "Reality"[1]

Whatever can be said about the insignificance of the flight to the moon and other outer space missions from a practical and humanistic point of view, psychologically and "metaphysically" the venture into space is an event of highest historical importance. It is the symbol signalling that a millennia-old, "eternal" truth has become obsolete: the distinction between the sublunar world and the heavens. In another sense, too, rockets can easily be seen as a symbol of this century; we just have to think of the skyrocketing development in the sciences and in industry. Nevertheless, what I call "natural consciousness," the consciousness which imagines things in analogy to visual perception, is in the way of a truly symbolic and psychological understanding of the rocket as well as of our age.

To "natural consciousness" rockets are particular objects *in* reality among millions of other objects. It is possible to move beyond natural consciousness. In the *Kena Upanishad,* e.g., the move is made from "what the eyes can see" to "what opens the eyes." Similarly, Archetypal Psychology moved from the literal to the imaginal, and Hegel has shown how the transition from the natural mind to Understanding transports us into a "*second* supersensible world," which in contrast to the first supersensible world (the Platonic realm of timeless Forms), is not a realm above and beyond ordinary reality, but an inverted world, that is to say the selfsame world, but as seen when one stands on one's head. We need to make such a move in order to be able to understand the rocket not as a thing in reality, but as the form *of* our (kind of) reality, the form of Western man's consciousness, "containing" in itself everything that constitutes the world as a whole, including the literal rockets.

Another difference with natural consciousness is that whereas it tends to fear a nuclear missile attack as a possible future event to be prevented at all cost, I would propose that this event has happened long ago and is the very basis of the existence of Western man, indeed of "reality" as such. "Reality" as we in the Occident experience it, is not as we might expect the word for what is naturally[2] given and exists both prior to, and independent of, our thinking about it. Rather, it is the result of a violent, "artificial" event in the soul's history: the launching of a rocket. The purpose of this paper

is to get us into the rocket, into its imagination. Factually we have lived in this (type of) reality for more than two thousand years. But not consciously and imaginally. It is also a psychological necessity for us to finally move unreservedly our awareness and imagination into what has been our factual abode all along.

Rockets need bases, solid, unyielding foundations from which they can takeoff. A third difference to the natural view, which would hold that the launching base and the rocket are two separate things and that the once launched rocket leaves the base behind, is that as far as the imaginal missile is concerned it is by launching the rocket that the launching base is established for the first time. The base is not merely the origin (past) of the rocket and the target not only its (future) destination. The archetypal rocket creates its own launching base as it is flying and heading for its target. Rocket, target, and base are one and the same.

There could be no such base from which a literal rocket could be fired as long as, during the ritualistic, mythological stage of civilization,[5] man lived embedded in the imaginal. The mythical imagination does not allow for the kind of fixation necessary to constitute a base. A base needs the reliability of positivity (positive fact) as the metaphysical equivalent of a thick layer of "concrete." It must be an unyielding rock. And it must be on a geometrically determined exact position, or else the rocket could not be reliably brought into its calculated ballistic course. This kind of mathematical exactitude and positivistic reliability of a solid focal point is contrary to the world of myth and ritual.

One might object here that the mythological imagination possessed the notion of an eminent focal point, too, in the idea of the center of the Earth, located in certain geographical locations, such as in Delphi. Nevertheless, this center point lacked the literal, positivistic properties required of a base; it was not a geographical, physical fact, not a center in the rigidly fixed sense of geometry, because there were *many* centers of the Earth. Each temple, each sanctuary, indeed each temporary location of a ritual ceremony was, for the duration of the ritual, the center of the Earth. Thus, despite being *the* center, it was not a literal reality and did not possess the unambiguous, unshifting self-identity required of a positive location. The center could potentially be anywhere because "center" here was not defined in terms of equal distance from the circumference (in which case there would be only one single spot that could be called center), but by virtue of its "metaphysical" quality: it was the point at which a vertical dimension broke through the horizontal surface of our everyday world, opening up for us the depth of the underworld and the height of heaven. So, just as horizontally the center could not be unequivocally identified, it neither could serve, in a vertical direction, as the unshakable foundation providing the necessary resistance for rockets to push off from, inasmuch

as its express meaning was to *open up* the solid ground under us to the dimension of depth (which by definition is bottomless).

It was the achievement of Christianity to give mankind the idea of an absolutely firm ground. "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [the former underworld] shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18), a church which in turn is described as "the pillar and ground of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Matt. 7:24 ff.). "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). In these quotations a longing for something absolutely solid expresses itself, for a literal, positive fixed point that could outlast the change of time. It is the will for a reversal in the very meaning of "ground": base, bedrock, foundation to stand on, instead of bottomless depth (as in: the ground of the sea, of Hell etc.); and ground as that which is *laid,* instead of primordial ground whence all that is comes forth (as from a spring).

Christianity provided the solution to Archimedes' wish for a "point on which to stand," which would allow him to unhinge the universe. Christ is nothing else but this very Archimedean point, and at the same time Christ is he who indeed has unhinged the universe: "be of good cheer; I have overcome [*nenīneka,* conquered] the world" (John 16:33). In the sphere of myth, such a wish to unhinge the universe would have been unthinkable. The one hero who of all figures in Greek mythology might come closest to such a violent stance towards the world, Hercules, precisely did not make use of the opportunity given to him of doing something like unhinging the universe. He did, it is true, take over the vault of heaven from Atlas, but he dutifully carried it for him and later returned it to him without having upset the order of the cosmos.

One could think that the message of the rock provided for us in Christ is just a bold allegation which, as mere allegation, is itself unfounded. This is how we generally think about religious statements: they are a matter of faith, i.e., it is up to us whether we believe in them or not. But I suggest that it is otherwise. Christianity *is* what it promises and teaches. It is not a matter of belief. By naively relegating the Christian message to the sphere of mere subjective beliefs we protect ourselves from realizing what we are up against. Christianity *in fact* laid the very ground that it preaches. More, it established the ontological nature of "ground" as rock, after it had previously been the essence of ground to be unfathomable depth.

A famous poster by James Montgomery Flagg used to recruit volunteers for the U.S. Army during World War I, shows a man dressed as Uncle Sam who points with his index finger directly at the viewer saying, "I want

YOU." Something extraordinary is happening here. The person drawn or painted on the poster bursts, as it were, with his pointed index finger and his piercing look through the plane of the picture; he breaks out of his containment within the fictional or imaginal world of the picture into the literal "external" reality where the flesh and blood viewers live.

James Montgomery Flagg, World War I recruiting poster. The poster, in which Flagg portrayed himself, was so successful that it was reused during World War II. Total distribution: 4 million copies.

This poster provides a simple and precise way to understand the nature of Christianity's singular achievement. Christianity too bursts through the "canvas" of the "painting," the "screen" of the "movie" that it presents or the "text" of the "mythos" it has to tell. By exploding the plane of the "picture," it leaps out of the sphere of imaginal reality and into the outer space of literal reality—a reality which however is originally created only by this very act of an archetypal, primordial leap. Christianity too focuses on the individual with a piercing look and points the index finger directly at him. It addresses him point-blank, demanding of him so to speak at gunpoint, "Jesus Christ wants YOU."

With the idea of the Christian attack on the individual (*all* individuals) "at gunpoint" I am not referring to the aggressive form of preaching and missionizing found among certain radical fundamentalists. Their behavior might be considered, from the point of view of Christian theology itself, as

a deplorable aberration, as an empirical (ontic) mistake of the kinds that occur in the history of any movement due to the misunderstanding of particular individuals practicing it. I am thinking rather of the (ontological) attack on the individual inherent in the very logic of the Christian message. From the onset, Christianity comes forward with an absolute claim on everyone. As much as factually Christianity must leave us free to decide, logically (in its ontological view of man) it does not give us any choice, for according to it we are metaphysically threatened, in case of our refusal, by eternal, absolute damnation. We simply must volunteer as recruits. There is no escape, no alternative, since the only alternative is defined as the very idea of a non-alternative: Hell. And as long as we have not joined, we *have already been* metaphysically dumped by being labelled sinner (in the theological sense of sin). We do not really exist. We have no Life. We are a collective corpse.

In the advertising business we find the idea of the "target audience." It is based on the realization that the needs, tastes and the "language" of people are different so that what one sells and how one sells it to them has to differ accordingly. In the Christian context and in view of the Christian unrelenting grip on the individual we have to give this notion a much more radical, namely "metaphysical" meaning. Here it does not signify the selective ontic group at which the Christian message is aimed; it signifies that mankind as such is given the (onto-) logical status of "audience" *as* "target" for the first time, *as* "aim" of a point-blank address, indeed, of a kind of attack. Audience now is what needs to be reached, and reached out for with an absolute claim. Christianity does not use a polite form of address, by which a respect for the untouchable dignity of the Other would be shown and a possible trespassing into his private sphere would be avoided. Christianity addresses the Other almost unseemly with the blunt "Jesus Christ wants YOU"; indeed, Christianity *is* the express will for an intrusion and penetration into the inner sanctum of a personality.

The target is already inherent in the core of the Christian drama itself and does not only arise with the selling of it. Whereas in other myths and dramas the protagonists interact only with the other "actors on stage" (with the Gods or mythic heroes *in illo tempore),* Christ's life has from the onset a target outside his own sphere. His essential interaction is not with God, His Father, nor with His disciples, nor with other personages in His drama. It is the very point of the Christian play to destroy the "illusion" of the play as a self-contained drama by directly relating to and directly involving the audience: the real direction is away from the stage, the only target of Christ's life is to die *for* His unknown, anonymous *spectators*—mankind at large: for *their* redemption. A complete reversal. The audience no longer has to be seduced into the imagination of the play and thereby be drawn into a mimetic participation in the myth on a kind of visionary level in the depth

of soul. The mythic hero, having become their servant (Matt. 20:28, Luke 22:27), steps out before the stage to address them directly, not only through a literal sermon, but also and more so by enacting the drama of his life so to speak in front of the now closed curtain, on the proscenium or even in the sober, commonplace reality of the "auditorium": in the ordinary empirical-historical world,[4] Christ wants to reach man precisely in his everyday reality.

This directedness outward is what gives the Christian message the character of a missile. Because Christianity has a missile nature, it must see itself essentially vis-à-vis an audience defined as a target that absolutely must be hit. And conversely, because it has a target, it takes on the character of a missile that does not stay put *in illo tempore,* does not stay put on the stage or behind the glass covering a painting, but can and must traject through the "movie screen" and shoot out into the literal reality of hard facts, of the "real" audience "out there." Due to this direction toward an external target, the differentiation of two kinds of reality becomes possible. One could also say their original separation, comparable to a cell division, is taking place: positive reality out there (which for us is reality proper) and reality within the image or story (which, because of the protagonist's breaking out of the play, or rather redirecting the thrust of the play directly towards the audience, was degraded to a secondary reality and is for us no more than "mere fiction," "imaginary," an "illusion").

So it is the firing of the Christian rocket that originally opened up for itself an *outer*space into which it could pass that previously simply had not existed. This space owes its existence to the revolutionary idea of a message as missile and an audience as target, which idea *is* the bursting of the imaginal. We have lived in the (notion of) reality conquered by Christianity for so long that it is hard for us to realize that this is a revolutionary invention and that there could have been, during the age of myth, a mode of being-in-the-world characterized by a fundamentally different constitution of reality, one in which everything was enveloped within the aura of the imaginal and which simply did not have anything "outside" itself. We can get an idea of this former constitution of reality by looking at a change to be observed in works of early Greek art.

As B. Schweitzer and Bruno Snell[5] have pointed out, in the case of early Greek statues the statue was, without hesitation, identified with the person portrayed. Thus the inscription on a statue read, e.g.: "I am Chares, ruler of Teichiussa." Only in Athens would you find inscriptions like "I am the image of such and such. . .," which is a way of putting it that corresponds to the modern view. For the Athenians the reality of the "real" person had obviously been separated from that of his image. The statue only referred or pointed to the ruler, it "signified" or "represented" or "reminded of" him, but it was not identical with him. In the earlier situation, the statue itself

spoke as an "I" and it *was* at once him whom it, as we must say from our modern point of view, "represented": "I am Chares." The image obviously radiated the authority of the ruler. The conviction of his kingly power must have descended upon the viewer from the mere sight of the statue. The aura of Chares was immediately and fully present in the image, so that the viewer was overcome with awe and enwrapped in the spell emanating from the statue. The image had the power to seduce the viewers into its own reality. And thus the viewers were indeed *inside* the picture's imaginal world, surrounded as it were on all sides by its aura. In the capacity of the image to envelop the viewer in the spell of its archetypal depth lay its quiet, non-violent authority over him and the truth of its statement, "*I am* Chares, the *ruler*. . ." It was an authority based not on empirical power in "outer" reality (weapons, army, police), but on the radiance from the imaginal (Sanskrit *bharga, tejas, śrī:* shine, Fortuna, *Königsheil,* royalty, i.e. the substance of light that a king must be filled with in order to be a true king). We can still today, amidst a thoroughly Christianized and democratic environment, have a remote intuition of the spellbinding force of the imaginal, when a novel or movie fascinates us so that we live for a while in its world, taken in and moved by its atmosphere, or when crowds of people line the streets on the occasion of the state visit of some royalty, to at least for a moment bathe in the royal *śrī* emanating from them.

In archaic civilizations, man lived in this kind of imaginal reality. There was no other. The Christian message with its express and piercing YOU in "Jesus Christ wants YOU" radically expels the viewer or listener out of his embeddedness in the imaginal. It doesn't draw us into its spell, not even into that of its own imaginal truth, but *confronts,* hits us with it, irredeemably setting us apart from and over against it. The stage curtain to the imaginal is definitively closed. The YOU puts us back in our place on the auditorium side of the curtain and stops the desire of the soul's passion and imagination to (imaginally) transgress[6] to the other side of the curtain into the divine drama on stage. It thus thrusts us into an "outside" world, turns us into isolated individuals, egos, standing naked vis-à-vis Christ. Only the existentially isolated individual relentlessly thrown back upon himself can decide for Christ; and in order to belong to Him, we *must* de-cide, all by ourselves from the core of our individual existence. An unambiguous and deliberate yes or no. It will not do to be simply attracted, charmed by the images of the Christian religion. Having decided for Him will be the ultimate affirmation for being an outcast from mythic reality and for being thrown back upon one's isolated individuality—thrown back upon the *principle of* the One, the principle of isolation. For if Christ addresses us point-bank with his demand to belong to Him, this is only the consequence of the fact that *this* Christ is Himself such an express YOU, even more than

that: He is the principle of the possibility to point at and "mean" things or people with that confrontational pointedness.

Three characteristics of the penetration through the surface of the image into the outer space of literalistic reality can be distinguished. First: the direct, abstract pointing (the "This"), second: the One, and third: the All.

The following biblical quotations point to the first: "*This* is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me" (John 1:30). "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, *This* is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). "*This* is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ" (I John 5:6). "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made *that same* Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). ". . .it is *he* that talketh with thee" (John 9:37). The pointing and positing that penetrates the "canvas" of the image and enters literal reality expresses itself linguistically also in ways other than by use of the demonstrative pronoun. "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God," (Matt. 16:16). "*This day* is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). "*I* that speak unto thee am he" (John 4:26).

This, that same, I, thou, today (here and now): we are obviously within the world of the chapter on "sense-certainty" in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This chapter is, as it were, merely the philosophical explication of what in the New Testament had been conquered with the attitude which speaks from the above quotations. To better understand the nature of this conquest, I want to return to the inscription "I am Chares, ruler. . ." and compare it with the last of the cited biblical quotations, "I. . .am he" or with that other famous one, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). At first glance the early Greek and the Christian sentences seem to have an identical grammatical structure. But they are fundamentally different statements. What the statue says has the character of a self-introduction; it provides information, communicating to the viewer the proper name and the "profession" of the person portrayed. Somebody shows himself and makes himself known. Christ's "I am the way, the truth, and the life," by contrast contains no factual information about the subject of the sentence; it is a formal identification, and this is why it can just as well be abbreviated "I am he." Jesus' statement does not tell us anything about him, about his "profession" or his particular nature. It does not, e.g., say, I am the *way*, as opposed to a place of repose. It only wants to assure us that He "is it."

All these propositions with a "this is," "today," "thou art," "I am" serve the purpose of arresting someone or something and identifying him or it in an almost criminological sense. The question around which everything revolves from now on is, "Is it he, or is it not he?" It is the question of the crime novels, the whodunits, of detectives and judges—and it is the question of faith-and-doubt. This is why the identification can also be denied: It isn't he! Thus we read e.g., "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph,

whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" (John 6:42). It is a matter of cornering, pinpointing, holding at bay, apprehending: This is him! He has done it! Whereas Chares reveals himself to us and imposes himself on us, the statement by Jesus turns against Himself and nails Him down in or on Himself. The "I am he" is actually a (self-) incrimination and as such synonymous with the "this is he" or "you are the one" by which the Christ is firmly imprisoned in the Jesus of Nazareth, or by which God is locked into the historical Jesus. Christ was not only nailed down at the time of his crucifixion, but to be He who is nailed down to Himself, who is absolutely identified with Himself, indeed, to be the *principle* of pinpointedness and fixation is his very nature.

The quasi-judicial situation also explains the decisive role of witnesses in Christianity. Every Christian has to be one more witness to "incriminate" Jesus anew. The innermost purpose of the Christian existence seems to be the act of confining the imaginal Christ in the empirical, historical Jesus and reaffirming His solitary confinement there time and again.

In other religions, too, there were or are empirical persons really embodying Gods, e.g. the Egyptian Pharaoh or the Dalai Lama. But here you could never say, "*This* is he," because the "Pharaoh existence" or the "Dalai Lama existence" was not exclusively imprisoned in one single historical individual; it was disseminated into the whole series of Pharaohs or Dalai Lamas, comprising thousands of years and future embodiments as well. To be sure, it was indeed present in the particular human being who happened to be the present embodiment, but no Pharaoh, no Dalai Lama has his divinity as his personal property. On the contrary, he is, precisely because he is the incarnation of a divine person, de-emphasized as the empirical individual that he is and is instead reintegrated into the larger divine reality that he has to embody, and he is relativized by its manifold embodiments in previous and future persons. By virtue of the dissemination of the incarnation into each of its many manifestations, his presence is essentially *gentle*, whereas the entire divinity of Christ is concentrated in the single historical person Jesus of Nazareth as the exclusive focus of History as such, which endows the Christian incarnation with a violent acuteness. Every possible "here" of a theophany or epiphany has once and for all been stuffed into the exclusive historical Jesus so that no actual here and now before or after Him can be the place of a full-fledged epiphany anymore. The "yonder" of that Jesus of Nazareth has swallowed up every possible "here and now." It has deprived Time of its life and soul and seized it, so that Time can no longer have its life in the flux of ever new moments receiving their fullness through the epiphanic presence of diverse divine personages. Now there is only one single fulfilled moment *(kairós)* in all of history, leaving the entire remainder of time essentially (psychologically) empty.

With these observations we have already entered the discussion of the second characteristic of the leap bursting through the imaginal nature of Being: the One. It is the theme of the absolute exclusiveness of the Christ. Jesus Christ is the One and Only. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ is surrounded and protected on all sides by negations: no man, neither in any other, none other under heaven. The pointing (the positing of the "This is he") obviously does not point to a positive, substantive, sensual content, but essentially serves the purpose of excluding and fending off all concrete names, concreteness as such. The "This is he" means the reduction to a space left blank, to a naked point in the geometrical sense: the Alpha and Omega; the *axis mundi;* the turning point of Time; the zero point of history. For the point is essentially zero point, because it has no extension, no diffusion into the breadth of the world. The ramming in of the holy rood on Golgotha is the planting (positing) of the zero point into Being, which previously had had a mythic, imaginal nature. The rood is the archetypal image of the idea that is expressly stated in the proposition, "This is he." And the crucifix, as two intersecting coordinate axes, is the symbol of the zero point of Being and of the subordination of Being under a system of coordinates. Long before the number zero had been accepted in mathematics, Christianity had invented the zero as a metaphysical principle. And characteristically enough the mathematical recognition of zero as a number occurred during that age in which the actual realization of Christianity began,[7] namely in the year 1629 (one year after Harvey had discovered the circulation of the blood[8]) and again, only a few years later, by one of the great minds who decisively advanced the realization of Christianity: Descartes (1637). For Descartes provided modern man with the *fundamentum inconcussum,* the ego, that rock on which the modern period could build its house and from which it could unhinge the natural world (the world experienced mythically or imaginally).

Just as in mathematics the zero concept made it possible to break out of the realm of natural (positive) numbers and conquer the worlds of negative, irrational, imaginary and transcendent numbers (for which reason the zero has been termed mathematics' most momentous invention), so the metaphysical zero is the point at which, figuratively speaking, Uncle Sam breaks through the containment in natural (imaginal) reality and into positive reality "out there."

We miss the very meaning of the Christian message if we do not conceive the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ strictly as the "One" which is the zero or a point. One could of course start with the idea of a real, natural person whose name was Jesus of Nazareth and who had all kinds of

particular traits, and then say that in this person, chosen by God from among all men, the Messiah revealed himself. But this view would fall short of the Christian idea. It would still be a *pagan* reception of Christianity, the translation of the specifically Christian back into a mythological version of it. It cannot be that God's son, so to speak by mere chance, happened to incarnate only in the single human person named Jesus and that therefore it would at least theoretically be feasible that the Christ could just as well have been born "in various other names under heaven" and at various other times. Jesus must, to begin with and by necessity, unquestionably be the One and Only, if He is to be the Jesus Christ. But if He is the One absolute, then He is from the outset the empty, extensionless point. Even His name cannot be a concrete name under Heaven; it must be the name for "no-name," for the abstract "this."

An identification or equation is carried out with the formulations "This is he." "Jesus, the Christ" and other versions of this idea. However, according to what was just said it is not that a known empirical person here and a known transcendental notion there are being taken up and then, by means of the copula, equated. "Jesus, the Christ" is not a phrase like "Einstein, the physicist" or "Napoleon, the Emperor of the French." It is not a proposition at all. Rather, "Jesus (is) the Christ" is the daring *act* of equating, the *event* of the positing of the "this": the leap out of the mythical or imaginal into the positive-factual ("positivistic").

If the phrase "Jesus, the Christ" were to connect and identify two known entities (two concrete contents) as in the case of "Einstein, the physicist" (we know who Einstein was, and we know what a physicist is), it would remain within the same old sphere of reality without bursting through it in a radical leap. This fundamental breakout could only be achieved if in the phrase "Jesus, the Christ" *nothing* is identified, nothing existing prior and independently of the act of identification. It could only be achieved if the phrase as act is no more and no less than the archetypal *schema* of identification, the original, first-time positing of the equal sign, and if the particular contents of subject and predicate, of "Jesus of Nazareth" and "Christ," dissolve (as an empty "this" on the one hand and an empty "he" on the other) in the empty equal sign as the abstract exclusive One, i.e., the zero. If Jesus Christ is really supposed to have overcome the world and to redeem us from it, He cannot first be a concrete person with many attributes and then also be the Incarnate. He must have His very nature in being the naked event of "This is he," and everything else that we are taught about Him must follow from, and be contained within, this equation. The graphic, vivid image of Jesus Christ to be found in Christian piety *is* the graphically embellished image *of the* zero established in "This is he." Otherwise salvation could not work.

I said earlier that Christian teachings did not have the status of mere allegations, but that Christianity *is* what it claims to be. Now it has become clear why this has to be the case. Paul's "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" is in fact no mere assertion to be believed or not, any more than the invention of the wheel or the recipe for mixing gunpowder or building the atomic bomb are mere matters of faith. No, Paul's statement *is* the truth that it formulates, because, first, in identifying or equating Jesus as the Christ, it performs, by virtue of this act of nailing down, the positing of the "this," which amounts to the leap out of the mythical sphere, and, second, because the solid foundation *is* nothing else but this act of an *originary* positing. The positing of "This (is he)" is the condition of the a priori possibility of a positive (positivistic) reality, a reality that no longer owes its existence and constitution to the epiphanic manifestation of the Gods, but has been established by virtue of a leap and owes its existence to the act of positing.

And there is no other way than by means of the act of positing the zero established in "Jesus, the Christ" to get to a fixed Archimedean point outside the "abysmal" world of the mythical imagination. But where the act of identification and of establishing the zero point has truly occurred, there also the foundation has truly been laid: the origin (zero point) for an all-encompassing system of coordinates (the cross of the world) has been set up. There can indeed be no other foundation that could be laid, for the zero point exists only once. Even if its invention should occur repeatedly, it would be the invention of the same thing.

Thus it is true too that, as holy writ states, our faith "is the victory that overcometh the world. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:4f. and 12). These statements are not themselves mere matters of faith, as we innocently like to believe to avoid the insight that we are dealing here with hard facts governing our lives no matter whether we define ourselves as believers or not. This innocence is a luxury that we cannot afford any longer. He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God has performed the act of identification, which *is* the only way to overcome the world, because in that act he once and for all breaks out of the natural (i.e. mythical, imaginal) world and archetypally opens up for himself the literalness of Being, the positivity of reality (whose theological name is "Eternal Life"). The main statements of Christianity do not make any "mysterious" assertions. In Kantian terminology, one might indeed call them analytic (rather than synthetic) propositions: propositions whose predicate adds nothing new to the notion expressed in the subject, but only expressly unfolds what was contained in that notion to begin with, such as "he who jumps into water will get wet." It is evident that the leap into water implies getting wet, and we all know that a leap

into water is a real (practical) possibility. Likewise is it evident that he who performs the leap into "This is he" has "eternal life." And there can be no doubt that this leap is a practical possibility: because we all live in the Outer Space, in the reality established by this leap two thousand years ago.

In the natural world everything is contained within the mythical shine. Christ would be a mythical image here, but so would the man Jesus of Nazareth, like every empirical event, be potentially enveloped in the mythical sphere. More fundamentally, the people of old even derived their descendence (and thus ultimately their actual nature) from the Gods. Despite their being mortals, they belonged to one and the same unbroken sphere with the Gods. Divine and human, archetypal and empirical realities mirrored each other, and existence was completely enwrapped in this unending process of mutual reflection, without there being an outside, the fixed point of a positive-factual world.

The Uncle Sam shown on our poster had an easy time breaking out of the imaginal because for the artist who painted him there had been, after 2000 years of Christianity, two kinds of reality all along, the imaginary one on paper or canvas, and the one in which the artist himself lived. This was of course very different for the primordial leap out of the mythical constitution of Being, because "prior" to this leap there had not been any reality other than the mythical one. Here the leap had to originally create for itself out of nowhere, so to speak, the realm into which it would leap. The "This is he" or "Jesus, the Christ" could successfully bring about the breakthrough through the mythical and the initial establishment of positive reality in the following way. By absolutely singling out from amidst the whole extent of the manifold imaginal reality one point (which is *only* reduced to a point or zero by this act of singling out) as the One and Only and by establishing it as an unequivocal "this" to be focussed on with one's total force; and further, by absolutely equating this "this" with "Christ" (the likewise absolutized idea of *every* mythic or metaphysical worth), everything else in the world, all things and events, indeed nature as such was deprived of its autonomous mythic-metaphysical dignity: of the possibility to be "Christ," i.e. to be divine or epiphanic. With the identification, a duality of "worlds" entered the world: Jesus Christ here, secular reality there; or within "Jesus Christ": the empirical individual here, the divine person there. In placing an *equal* sign between the "this" and the Christ, an irreconcilable *division* between the one and the other (this world and the beyond) has simultaneously been set up for the first time.[9]

It is the absolute separation and the simultaneous absolute identification of the sundered poles of this difference that laid the "firm foundation" for the first time: the literalness and positivity of Being as such. This is the foundation upon which the world of positive facts, radically excised from mythic imaginality, can be built just as literal faith in metaphysical "truths"

could be based upon it: because both are rooted in the divided identity characteristic of Christianity properly understood. The positive factualness (literalness) however is based on the negation inherent in the "This is he" or "none other." More precisely: the positivity of the positive-factual is based on the negativity of the zero. Without the absolute negation, without the radical withdrawal from the fullness and breadth of the mythic world to the empty zero point, there would be no positive reality, no Archimedean rock from which to launch the rockets called scientific, technological, and industrial, rockets by which the universe has indeed already been unhinged.

But the poster of Uncle Sam is and remains a poster, an image. The Uncle Sam represented there does not in fact step out of the picture to us, the audience. He only *appears* to do so as long as we for our part look at the poster naturally, imaginally: are seduced into its aura. The bursting of the image occurs in the image and as image. Keeping this in mind, it becomes evident that the "this is he" and the positive reality originating from the leap out of the mythic world does not in fact remove us from the mythical imagination into the Outer Space of the "real" world, but stays within the imaginal. The Outer Space is itself a mythic fantasy which, however, in order to *be* "outside" the imaginal, while in fact being within it, has to conceal its imaginal nature and be in radical opposition to every other mythic image. The bursting of the imaginal merely amounts to a radical restriction and constriction of the selfsame mythic sphere to a single archetypal idea within it, the idea of the empty "this," which *by being exclusively zeroed in on* now takes on the imaginal appearance of being the one and only true reality. The wealth of our scientific knowledge about the positive facts of reality is nothing else but the amplification or explication of this one archetypal "image," the zero.

We think that the black holes discovered by the astronomers are many light years away from us out there in outer space. We do not realize that ever since that leap out of the imaginal we have all along been living in an Outer Space that is itself *the* black hole. But the fact that the idea of black holes was discovered in this century in the astronomical universe only underlines once more the psychological insight that the first inkling of major realizations about ourselves (about our psycho-logic) always comes to us from without. That the black holes could be discovered in this century might indicate that the time has come for us to realize that we are, right here, sitting *in* the black hole and that our entire reality actually has the nature of such a black hole: it is the result of Western man's having devotedly dug himself into the ever more minute details of one single archetypal image ("Uncle Sam wants YOU" or "This is he") on which he had monomaniacally (monotheistically) zeroed in, blowing this zero point up to a total universe

and denying the existence of all the many other archetypal images around it as well as blinding himself to its own nature as image.

Not much needs to be added about the third characteristic of the establishment of the launching base. The third aspect is seemingly the opposite of the single zero point: the All, the whole, totality. The problem of the zero point is that it does not exist as long as there is *something*, something that besides the One can claim to be something in its own right. For next to it, the zero would be simply nothing. And the problem of the One absolute is that it is not the One as long as there are others (other names under heaven). For if it is not *the* One, then it, too, is just one of the many thousand things in the mythic world and does not turn into the foundation laid. This is why the zero has to become the *principle* of the whole, and its sole principle. It must have the status of an Hegelian *Aufhebung* (supercession) of the natural things altogether and thus inhabit a fundamentally higher level. Every thing must be subjected to it, gathered up under its rule (which is what makes the zero point the black hole). This is what we find expressed in Eph. 1:10, "That. . .he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him." Jesus the Christ (or the empty point of "This is he") as the Lord over the All.

How can everything be subdued under the rule of the zero? How can the All be made to disappear in the irresistible suction of a black hole? The answer to this question is the cross, which is the archetypal idea of the system of coordinates as a grid for everything that is. This archetypal system of coordinates is indeed capable of swallowing up the entire natural (mythic) cosmos and of thereby turning the latter into the single point of the positivistic "universe." And only with the cosmos as a whole having been transmuted into the positivistic literalness of "universe" does a firm *imaginal* basis for the launching of missiles exist, so that *literal* bases and rockets could be built, too. If it were not the whole world that is rendered unambiguously reliable by being subsumed under a single system, any particular base within it, be it in itself as solid as can be, would as a whole be unstable.

In "universe" the One and the All are the same (because here everything that exists exists only by virtue of, and in terms of its relation to, the zero point), just as the trajectory of the missile heading for its target is identical with the absorbing power of the black hole or as the skyrocketing development of the sciences, of technology and industry is identical with the ever more solid cementation of the uni-verse as the archetypal launching base.[10] But they all are equally distant from the manifold eachness characteristic of natural actuality.

Notes

1 This paper is in the main based on a chapter from the author's book *Drachenkampf oder Initiation ins Nuklearzeitalter* (vol. II of his *Psychoanalyse der Atombombe)*, (Zurich: Schweizer Spiegel Verlag, Raben-Reihe, 1989). English versions of other chapters of this work have appeared in *Spring* 1985 and 1988, in *Heal or Die, Psychotherapists Confront Nuclear Annihilation*, ed. K. Porter et al., New York 1987, and in *Facing Apocalypse*, ed. V. Andrews et al., (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1987).

2. It is to be noted that the word "natural" is used here in two different, almost opposite senses: in connection with words like "mind" it is somewhat synonymous with "naturalistic fallacy" and in contradistinction to a deeper, imaginal understanding; in reference to Being or the world it denotes a state prior to, and undisturbed by, an artificial human intervention establishing a firm standpoint *vis-à-vis* the imagination.

3. In the sense of Heino Gehrts. Gerhts distinguishes four distinct successive cultural stages, the shamanistic, the ritualistic, the religious, and the scientific-technological cultures, a watershed separating the first two from the others. In other words, religion for Gehrts is not an all-comprehensive word also applying to shamanism and the ritualistic mode of being in the world. Rather, the religious stage of culture is characterized by a very different, almost opposite stance of man in the cosmos, a different sense of time, etc., much closer to the scientific stance than to the earlier two.

4. The tendency in some modern theater to directly and literally involve the audience or to make the play *immediately* "relevant" for their social or political concerns can perhaps be seen as a ritual mimesis of the Christian need to undermine, within the play, the illusion of the play and to prevent thereby a "regression" to a deeper (mythical, imaginal: pagan) level of involvement.

5. See Bruno Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes. Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), p. 101.

6. Cf. James Hillman, "A Psychology of Transgression Drawn from an Incest Dream," *Spring* 1987, pp. 66–76.

7. I consider the Middle Ages as a preliminary stage of Christianity. It was the age of Scholasticism, as it aptly termed itself, the age of an initial schooling of Western man in the inner structure of Christian thought, in other words a kind of Christian propaedeutics. With the beginning of the modern period, man had "graduated" from this schooling, so that with the Christian thought pattern having become second nature for him, he no longer needed to express his thoughts in literally (dogmatically) Christian terms. Whatever he would think or study he would necessarily think in a thoroughly Christian spirit.

8. See my "Deliverance from the Stream of Events: Okeanos and the Circulation of the Blood," *Sulfur 21* (Winter 1988), pp. 118–140.

9. "For the first time" in this paper should not be taken too literally. I am less concerned with literal first beginnings in historical time than with archetypal, (psycho-) logical roots and where they found their highest, most adequate formulation in historical time.

10. We could be fooled by modern trends toward a pluralism of theories and world models and take them as a sign for a move beyond the monolithic universe. But I believe that this (empirical, literal) pluralism of methods and models is in the service of the (psychological or ontological) monism of uni-verse.

EMILE SNYDER

THE ARCHIPELAGO

Broken shells which the gulls have spitted out mussels
emptied of meat on this rock where we're sunning here
everything is in the realm of memories

Am I the remembrance or the birth of a life

Askerön gulls in the night-sun I come at last to this
moment when contradictions make sense

But even here amidst the warmth of rocks Night is calling
I have every intention to make it wait

Night will simply have to be patient to abide by the formalities
of departure

Awakened by the gulls I walked down to the water the
    archipelago
asleep between the orange sky and the North Sea the noise of a
boat stretching to live

Your body stretching on the rocks my penis on the edge of
a sea shell the smell of salt and dill

Springing out of the glacial water you come to me a sea shell
whitened by the wind next to you I feel Mediterranean

I begin to understand the shy radiance of the rose-hips
along the path that leads to the water

I have lost so much time in not touching you the right
way we shall have to try again more *tenderly*

Askerön, Summer 1988

WILLIAM CORBETT
COLLARBONE

Thrice broken right
clavicle pushed up
a calcium knob
forgotten until shaving
squinting catch in the
mirror its half buried
golf ball rise.
Broken first tackled
tumbling down
Stadler's yard em-
bankment. Six weeks
in a canvas sling.
Broken again playing
touch late afternoon
November 22, 1963
as I dropped back
to pass was hit,
blindsided and toppled
shoulder first
crumpled on hard ground
my collarbone
exploded.
The doctor waved
aside a break,
perhaps bewildered
to distraction as we were,
insisting my dangly
arm needed a wrench
back into its socket.
He had my friend

steady my other arm
then pull-twisted,
uselessly pushed
through my screams.
The doctor set
the shoulder under
a plaster yoke,
an armor cape,
a breast to beat
and make a hollow
noise.
Before I slept
drugged I drank
with friend Charlie
and Jack the bartender.
We saw ourselves
as we never were
unreal years before
hunched to Jack's radio
listening, acting
in an old movie.
I rode uptown through
stilled and grim
New York past mourners
coiled around Port Authority
like dark rope.
Ruby leapt in
the hospital waiting room
gunning Oswald down
then moments then
another doc cracked
and peeled
my plaster shell,
broke a third time
ill knit collar
bones to tie flat
ragged ends under
immobilizing strap.
It didn't work

and a bump rose.
Break it again,
they urged, one
hammer blow.
We'll put you out.
No. And today
I feel the lump
see a boy
who carried the ball
break his jaw
against a knee
that day, his tears. . .
we all saw tears.
We saw wet faces
we never expected to.
We innocents froze
in our tv's blue
haze four days
and slept off our
stupor in the dark.

DAVID BROMIGE

ON A HUNDRED-BLOCK WALK

Words of the sentence like people
seen from above—sentence-like streets
to see people on

Earth protected by clouds
(City by flak)
A word by its sentence

Child's play by its blocks
and blocks that spark
Trees by their park

Anxious voices shut up (thus anxious)

One by ten

The women who work at Crocker
anxious as Wells-Fargo took over
Where are they now

Hive of the post-human humming
Pretty to picture a choir
Ugly with limbs that bend out

and glossy or dull
shells—shelves
upon which to set this or that

Dried trickles where mud was
Speak into the camera
Tell it to be kind (try to)

Now the irreparable
gives you the chance to be
human in a time-tested sense

"Even the most visual of crucifixions"

All show
all know it
is all show

To suppose is not to know
As we suppose we know
and demonstrate the magnet

"Loving you for 40 years"

For the children we were
unroll another map
than the up-to-date projection

Two times side by side sit
through an overlong movie
Heroes of the library-ship

If the bombs miss us
the city is large enough
to draw the enemy's interest

Closing the door on perspective
Mr. Shock offers distraction
"What people's music sounds like to me"

Crawl in between me
at the expense of proper form

Not a word as to why

The single odor of a desert

"Those nights I was happy"
To give his word for the fact
Protected by the tale

For the troublesome present

". . . Harvest moon" (and then
they lay awake counting
between lightning and clockwork)

How long want the ruins
to stick around—until
we forget what they mean?

As if one might be three
if not more, and might think
for each—yet stay one

The idea it should be bad
"And you do this before the King of England?"
"But Cary Grant didn't mind"

The idea it should be good

The grass = forgetfulness
The flames = exit from childhood
when all the great questions arrived

The screen = in flames
"I don't want to discuss it"
For the troublesome present

The moon (no) bigger than the clitoris

"Go away! Stop stopping me
seeing what could be here instead"

What frames the story has to be
non-story, sprayed on the pillars
Looking at the corner long felt bitter

Okay this once in a blue moon

In a familiar section of town
feel able to alternate routes
—but where one is the city?

Down to his hairy ass: footprints
plus the right to feel his feet
via pain, minus abstraction

The pure hate of abstraction

on the body's account. "Woman
says it, the priests steal it:
Bald, oder nie" Accept that

Except that
once in a lifetime

Turn page
Not there

Words where blood was
The scream in flames
What you actually do

would be the only story
What you had in mind

That you could look at

CLARK COOLIDGE

from THE BOOK OF DURING: FORMS TO THE GOOD

1.

See the coat? There's a man in it. All the types of animals view and race to draw drapes over where once were holes for the buttons on view. A crustlike drawing style, engaged to the lamp in fluorescence. So study the reflection bowled flesh must twist in an envelope press, the nipple pulls the mirror forward and down, a profile at that. Let's wait for her meters to read. It's a chain to cut with further metals at a scald, his head with it, her choice of breasts. Half-shod at this bolted doorway? But it almost is now fit to burst, and at the base three female balls. But she was angry at her spoons, I had lost my eyes inside a trunk. Fit to come running at, around the budge of the long avenues. He falls from the enlarged blocks for the crime of wearing her hair. The other entreat while the lamps. He is hitching up past my, and it is bold that wick, drain rabbit, skeleton under brief mate of boat and tongs. He has approached us, she claims, square of light and all grimace forth from the dark of a cat's facial scales. We dangled the salt seller cameras from a dainty run of flesh, iron haggard the spirit cream dimes standing breast plate in for. And behind the wicker scarp, look what hangs from the front of her slightly turned aside. She will be back.

I said Garsh around a rim and walked with her depending. Larger flanks grew vague as we kneeled for the pavement currents to settle, into freedom of the acrid promenade. But parasol failure draws clarinet success. Her body played to the heart's cunt, interior bundles showing in the thigh, the top ripped back a kiss. There is meanwhile a baking bag into toad on the step. He has rustled her out of the rubble, nine coal policemen high. And there is a hiding on, whose salt breasts, whose squid, whose opening nut. A cleverness of motion hides the barn. Have you gotten out of a sentence the ground? There are layers, therefore drawers. For the tent a vegetable spine to be found. Her hands are now in position her dress. The froth at the front of the meat in the drawer. I would imagine the light obtrude from those hanging but pacing still limbs. Upside foundhouse. Her prim flat of upheld statement that face now is, unseal the message, the heating flaps

beneath paid out ceilings. It's such a noble bowl in here, general heads, lion card towels, her open eyes in a gag. What turbulent lessons, gales of bright sud, enmeshment windows to be seen not looked from. I tied her tight upon the framework of my name, the one my neighbors. Chambers of the trunk above the wire tusk and empty solace she faces. Faces meaning an inability of the limbs to change.

Is there water below the nerve to speak this history? She is waiting poised on glass with her dress caught to striped backings. Meanwhile his band is sloshed. I will hold my medal to the window and hum up a crowd, a turned dawn beyond. Is there a need for women's heads below the gas lamps? I purchase her bone, my pelvis on her girdle, a dream that in the skirt float come bananas. So much bosom the face a featureless orb, fans protrude and a box, its lashes holding out, raising the glass from the squirm of her base. I have remembered nothing but her flesh, I would call for nothing baked out further.

Are there pictures of your tongue in this tiny? She dressed before glamour in the flat and a python bath taken. Knowledge up a ridge, the nose partakes? I would marry her breasts to the background, if such be lace ruff at the tassel prefect picture window and you see nothing but a yellow in the higher, a region from which the points of the spheres. I keep the cats near for that reason, kissing. Nebulous but nonetheless blossomed. A great crate of wake flood will meet our drops. Adder and tow at a brushed avenue. Made a Chrysler of her bust from which medal her hand hangs front.

Do we piss spice, naming such laps of bulk? Do you potato on a pin snooze? I could like her hair from here. I could light up and press in the belly here, whatever further cancels couched. Is your spirit of the smallnesses achieving redress in the battle of hands? She has made her place of a mould so brash, a tonally-committed vomiter on hold. Could you raise a cup to sing? A breast fell out of her bed. She was jump ridden. Other clothes were tied there, from which we pickled the strong, the wrong in holes. I could match her in ink with my cattle flenser. Displays too many organs fallen thus in a corner. She waits for reassembly plus a general drying.

Stop shooting that same thin image of the legs. An aisle of nothing but keys would prevent, but you scotch. Much meat to that cat, nothing to these cities but height. And a large opening at which the man will leave. She will hate to raise any image of his head besides. Nothing but statues await you all. That and injectors on the squared-off lifters. I'd rather she drop a limb and I erase something.

2.

There is too much water in my room. I know it already from the style of these things, the enormous advantage of endlessness. It all goes up in a bridge and breaks down into trains. Plunge, attain plunge height, then doctor her limbs. Monuments broke off in radio silence, massed nudes at the bases. Crowd hoards to pickle her. I could have made my way out of my own way. A pathetic breeze over the clocks, especially those in blackface, leaned on, where the terrible face will be washed away below my striped tints. Waters in funnel make up a blown glass.

It's too much to say with that shell for a face between your thighs. Things thus add up to cavernous beginnings. I could conduct the waters with a rod? She cannot tell, being faceless, but nevertheless perseveres naked beneath the waters. It is my friend I haul oil to over there in broad strokes. Beneath a body all out of birds, did you crack yourself on the rocks under there? Their permanent place in things, grand haunches await nickel-plate use. She was hovered over the colossal caves in meat circles, the waters used her, she was out. Wagged legs in stocking duck soup, raised before the pant braids on ledge waters, will not amount to what could have been seen of her, between her and the last place you'd look. First tie down the fluid, then smoke it. He waits. She is enfurled. The bed is rising away. A waterfall of her could not be a real human in chamber. How did this chamber form? How did her? A figure waits beyond her chest.

I would hate to have to drag alone all the rest of these humans out of here. Would she wake to the tide? Stone poles. Sauces made of the vegetative backing. A furniture kick. Will she press forward out of her bed the fabric turn to waters? As if she'd await an icicle snooze, feet turned down, statuary emerging. All drawn away in a wake of light waves, phosphors for the plumbing's chains, iris white in the rock fire. I'll all go up on a shingle, she a plate, washed asleep at the door. I didn't think it novel to tie off anywhere. But plenty of human seals at the edge of things. Penetrant waters, and in dislodge her piano has come undone, took it out from beneath her phones, a tooth too large for the bodice to shine through. Icicle twilight and we await the dressing of a dark brooding.

This room is now upside her dress. Tied down to her dreams she trills and the station waits brought down in beams. The floor a bracket loud of the central station. The man will allow her rise, float at the smoke dart of one candle corner. There are engines of light destroyed to the floor beneath my bed's dream of a cabinet solvency. Princesses find their rings below the sod

rug where aquamarine glues and visiting prisms. I would tear him from my house and out the door into stars, wouldn't you?

A banquet we must discuss by these waving beds. Amazing to close the whole of your dress by hand pulling the wall totally to. My cap risks the size of your chest. It is longer here at the crypt point, boats loose and just past dressed, for the one breast to rise, waters tiered to the slab to go down. She is slow at embankments to let slip the silver beads, one by muffled foot one. In her tale is a rug, and on that rug a part of itself fluidical tubers and the chalk waste of birds. The door admits the light to a box. Only. Sanguine.

But she manages to have a tower of her inventions, her self, last. A pike at sea, dim. Praying among shipping for the ball to drop indeed, the microphone of marble to be felt, and the sofa's flow to stricture in particles' dawn bind, so does lollygag the medusa. There are no frozen assets. And everyone comes down silvery with wreath fever. Even the bandaged femme just short of slickness and the stayed fires.

3.

But it's capitalized, this rag heart in space of bronzetown, the naked in carriage all capitalize by. They run off at the gate as brunettes. The hour is long and the humans are captured. The hours are of tin. Are there those snakes where you barter? That gate is a mart for the headless. But she goes past on her wings, she is absolved and enters new halls walking with birds. The rugs are a lake. Do not penetrate these doorways, the way bolts are left. His saw hand on the floor blade. All careening wreckage meets the urge to sit. Persons overturn, pictures remain the same, retain the identical scene. It's humorous for the dark head to turn away in flowers. We have these portraits that are beginning to heave here, amount to so much more they topple. On the guests' black rhombus. Excuse me, I must let out the serpent. All things being two, being more, I adumbrate my appetite, settle on the sofa to think for you. Are there no adorable drinks in the glass? The avalanche comes with the wallpaper, sundays only. Leave that bird person on the screen alone on the floor. She has made of her chairing nets. I'd have half an idea at bedfall to prey on myself. Remove my wings to the ceiling.

But here is Father Hate, he is thought up at the ecritoire. One must here bow to the rhyme pictures, the set of cabochon chairs. The floor not to be held, beyond belief. They remove a kind of silver plaster to come in and waste it, special servant Berber of the Muttonchops for that. He stands then

in a ring on a spearmint pastille, prepares to latch his bowler, think with the jets of her dress. Is it time for the kissing with wings? Wings all pointed in a way the stick could not? Very light time and wallpaper in this ream. Install one's arm.

But in the ceiling someone's stolen smoke. It has left. Good, let us rise and surreptitious load the door and go. I will read the score of your remnants on a special slanting slab of the basement tones. The adage goes that caterpillars are vegetable, eaten on specially-spiced tines, grind with brake shoe in place. Mornings drift lost on upward smoke, obscure the armoire. Bring me just the nails to finger this haze, put out the long and the short. A tweezer of a livingroom rug? These chambers the afterthoughts of adders, spell me a basement of your will. Spearmint, mandatory, she's made a whip of her bare-legged skis.

Approach this couch with fear and hatred, and spare nostrils of a porcelain clink. Drive out of your eyes a spare. The table is loaded with ink, of a white, and in a trice the monkey's paws hold it. Ice your diamonds in leaving on trek, butterfly in a bootcase, lovers on the wall. I couldn't imagine so many hoses on one screen. Something looking like a head of penis blurred in one frame there. The well-rehearsed dressers get seated to not notice. They are turned out of gum. Notice the floors.

But she still holds what might once have been a ball. It is evidently lighter than the puff it shades. Many humans to wrestle snakes in mirrors over this. They have made up a rug grouping. Back to the Berber with his candle. It is the map hand that troubles, hollowed, in edges of a cliff flaking down. As watched as ever we rush to embrace beyond it. It is my carving that has saved us. Back space full of bottles and with weeds and inside then a notion to be discovered mating. Gang by the pictures shouting. Rats in clearing spheres at the foot. And she is darker than the bat she ducks.

But they have all forded together on firing hooves. A calamity living space all forefronted and gamboled, skipped to the fire in one frame. Have you been beyond Bicarbonate, beyond Hamburg? I am sorry for your blood-blocked rug, passers toward the stairs. But we are all engaged in pictures the skeletons like, they paid us to climb the stairs to, adders or no. But hush, I have met statues in firmer places.

4.

Oh but did his blood sing, oh but did? The interior logic of a map was on his front. We deal it from this day. Enter insect. Enter at the foot. Enter dress opening as a stage. These are flattering things, the hand drops flat at the side on a top. And though it's frontal the legs walk back. I have given you the breasts now come the birds. Calls for a fallen fire to go out and you to come. Prison bare and walls of droplets, the statue holds with one hand pushed. And he stands looking out from under zeal. Twice at the gate, once at the lance beneath. Not too many rhomboids for this bird head. He shoots, his puffs blow seed.

And disc away this Chinese hand, has hung another writer later to be sung away in flattish and the bushes close her edges. Hand take breast. Will her twin eat the fire bird at the end of this show? A hardness is gathering shade to these vistas. Falls on head in blackened fire end below her tweezered gathers. And out of the space above them in the walk comes something sharp to hand. Hoses, meanwhile.

Could they open her cunt balanced on shoulders at metal leaf bank side of jail? I prize your thighs thus will let you out. I would open the cage but the animals are us. Strange dilemma of a hat left out in the moon, for which cattle have been blinded. True space. Take a whip to the castle barriers, to your inner costume, as wheels roll by your stiff legs. I then open the door hole to him ignoring at the back that grunting exerter. Have we quite finished this floor? It's a lodge, this cage. No one will notice if we carry her saddled. All caught like bottles in the cubelike pincers. Cotton gin to mandala stain, one jump then the bulges. Naked feet on the list. She goes out, we meet later in air.

A spread of moons. Laurel will come out when she tunes the lamp's head globe, the one with no plants near your fire. Giant face, less table space. But we will not dine beneath these pictures. Take off your mask and glass-in a brain delirium, matter of melting the footside hallways. She takes terrible transparent trouble with her hand index, broken crystal in two tries, clasp knife bolted sandwich of bless the perimeter and never think of cheating by sleeping. The bed work is at hand. At such a native point glass would catch fire, even if on a dresser. And lower than night this shadow.

Her dress comes open at the top. Below a waterfall. Beyond an asking about hatred and the dials deeper. Woman's brain of fruitrocks on a train of shake down the plain drawers for the black albums, the nature of which

proves birdneck, eyeball through broken space of the lace twisted fuck mere glance. Is it all strip and chemicals where you are? We wait meanwhile on the elevated lavender, where a sphinx of the schottish comes into view. Table manners of hounds climbing with straight tails. Somebody should number only the real faces on this railroad. And she takes it neat. But she takes me.

Isn't it all clouded up again in a hair piece? The tree ignores its own salad possibilities basking on birdhead in electric nettles. I will carry the wrapped body further as something small looks up at me from side hole. Amazing marzipans of this palatial wade to the fuck. Who proposes the hairline of status? His hands are a part of it, of hers. Some kind of body has beheld the knife. Drop her in ways from my penis coming in that have never. One hand one finger alone above the floor gets me off. Slumber club, pianissimo tart basket. Every floor provide a holder, up. Her thighs to smooth back nothing but lines where the ink, may this be a Victorian stroking? To stand say at her throat as she covers perhaps her crotch, is it any wonder that horrors come in at the chair?

I mean the door or chain. A remnant where the last two strokes have raised a flame. She has caught me flaking the doorway with what has she there as parts of her chest? Going away toward me she is. As if I had caught her her posture but my both hands are full. Will we see the eggs are skulls as the basis of nature? Rocks from the trees, an avalanche from her moves.

5.

Brace yourself at the blue rock, will bring your arm back. In the silence the room left. Just up to the nipple no more. To bring it in low enough makes a foot of things. She feels it at her tips, just in spin lifted off. Nobody would bring such eggs to a gallery. Sand lot avenue, glares in the talk after actions, radical liners of tonnage. Sand lot blouse.

It takes birds to, and other dominations. Bag of eggs a distraction, a moss on the back of your thirst at the implication that you might have to tred an edge for it. One, Two, Zuider Zee. Blackness as an example of laughter, its tonnage. The king wears wings as he straps down the women in his festival. We present parts and their clamps, in rows and on solids stable and clean as served wheat. It's novel to have a retort, always close to what's indicated. The block could be ice or street.

Sweetness of this fireplace, vanity sink or grave. There are revelations that an open book won't. I come up on the side with a light. People then had feelings of me, though my head today was novel. Unwrapped things, the angle of lying bare and still, on exchangeable pallets with pencils and hats. The floors were involving and a flame fed your join. Wisps of total palace, the woman lay face down. She was playing a game of stains wherever behind her we would come to face. Fools have no authority, plentiful here. And so the angle you take to your wardrobe is wrong.

What's coming out? They idle meanwhile in a window where nothing is evidently drawn. Came flooring. Vague others drawing off in a mesh background, no fault. But so much material, it even doubles the sister who merely waits in the hall. That the flames have guttered, the family of skulls rediced. I can't tell you all the paraphernalia we then partied with. It was sentimental, thus whirled in shadow. Deposited all, as usual a single shoe was left. There was no failure on the tables, just as much nakedness rules. Though the usual threats of a sort of black shatter in the background closets. Those nudes blemished in the waiting merely. Those bones now stone.

A ring, with which I tie then tire of thee in chambers of a most simple mathematics. One and one in reversible flame. They ought to all count at each other, rhyming in double ochre, rhyming in the torn cross. But soft, those backgrounds are leaking in. The one to be shot is hung before its mirrored ratchet easel. Animals of the lower form even view it. But light cut him down in time to bed. Some sort of animal form involved whose sticking will cost me this leg. It's the pennant not the bosom that's winning.

6.

For example, cancellable waves. Nutrition that's variable in the waiting, inside which they plan to club themselves with their own limbs. It's all in a catch, a hide, sling of lungs and blonde within hatches. All the parts are numbered. Well, some. You see it somewhat growing out from the base as well. And the more she examines the more she is observed by the bosom, the parcel, the penny weight. These are reversible steamships, wedding forms on the desk of vanity dry sink oil patch. We are enabled to simplify our pictures to the point of insanity, gallon jugs of dotted lessons. Whose hand thing is this? And where do I go back to from the wall?

He entangles a whole end of this tale in brocade of both dress and proscenium crust. Nothing we had done made a shadow in the slightest.

Nothing left but pupas on the floor. Did you move your arm, the wall, my breast? It's a peeping at the old head, the one invoked here with no redress. As you remove my lace in truth I gaze beyond your hair, retie the snake had been remiss. He told me to lie that way for hours, developed a clock I was so. The lubricious parts disappear in a while. We then have pills or crispies on the floor. His eye to a vanish, my lip to fin to stick to wall hole. I wished him now the parts extinguished. I'd guessed I'd lie back expectant of more life, one carefully hosed foot depending.

The rain and now is she waiting with very little, or being sold in a steel background before which the broken glasses? Shoes there have matched the panel, the insects in trim removed in flames. Idle perhaps to remove your hat with your hair. The peace of the throttled in puzzled backings on the craze and with taffeta of a peach the nodding lights could gain from, his hands around the one exposure of any meaning beyond the act at all. It was a paraffin parasol, bone remains of a dinner on the lens. The twins now dance in ink receding. These breasts of a type, thinned special to the point. Leaves the narrator mashed at the foot of the specialty wreckage, bone find missed, lamps among his melon colas.

7.

But there remain no bone handles, only a map of plant life in all its lit locale. Points downward grades to machine. Antennas bud beyond one horizon. You have captured me, that's all, in graphite risen on toasted rhyme. It's so simple to have body, nacelle, treatment in ruins. A skull that zips up, line of the back held true by crab or larger. Comes out with which the larvae all line. It is a stone panel here in worship ends with cunt of vegetable day. Stone told to hold until it's through. She tops him in the mammoth of living heights. A glass of ovary. A phlegm of sealed lime. All this will flower to the bone of no head. There be provided platforms for it.

Hands to plan for. Radiant laughter slices to a head. I could believe it mathematic, this trouble with serpents in a marked sky. There is nothing. Plant statues on the marsh, big ones that sing through stone, on which her major shoe will perch. Cut grass trim heed, till the masts are ready. It's the moving of hose and much choice of footwear.

All across the map, changes to confront the eggs with new eyes. But they all remain corridors. It's tense. Fragments of the former body hope in hanging, interiors where the breasts mere circles or what? She has another

head but on backwards, increases our haste to tie and line. Perhaps she has been chewed to this end. All simple in the folds of the throttle brink bed. Hands now vanish into fingers. Clouds of the space where you grab yourself beyond his hat. Night of water sky, bold firms, encasement of limb in ratchet deity. It's suddenly summer in her chamber and evening yet and I'm mad. Better to feel it all collapsing returned with the one toe in ascension. A foul whole heaped meeting of gatherable dress, all the materials left out late and scudded in that drawn sky up to us. Melting her off into own enclosures I don't even see, I shamble so. Hair after all, so is rain. The sky in which beyond her body, ring for the cancelled pencil cracked on the stairs. After all it's not as if you'd been tied down to witness. Crystal broken back in lust on the way up.

RONALD GONZALEZ
SCULPTURE

MANUICK

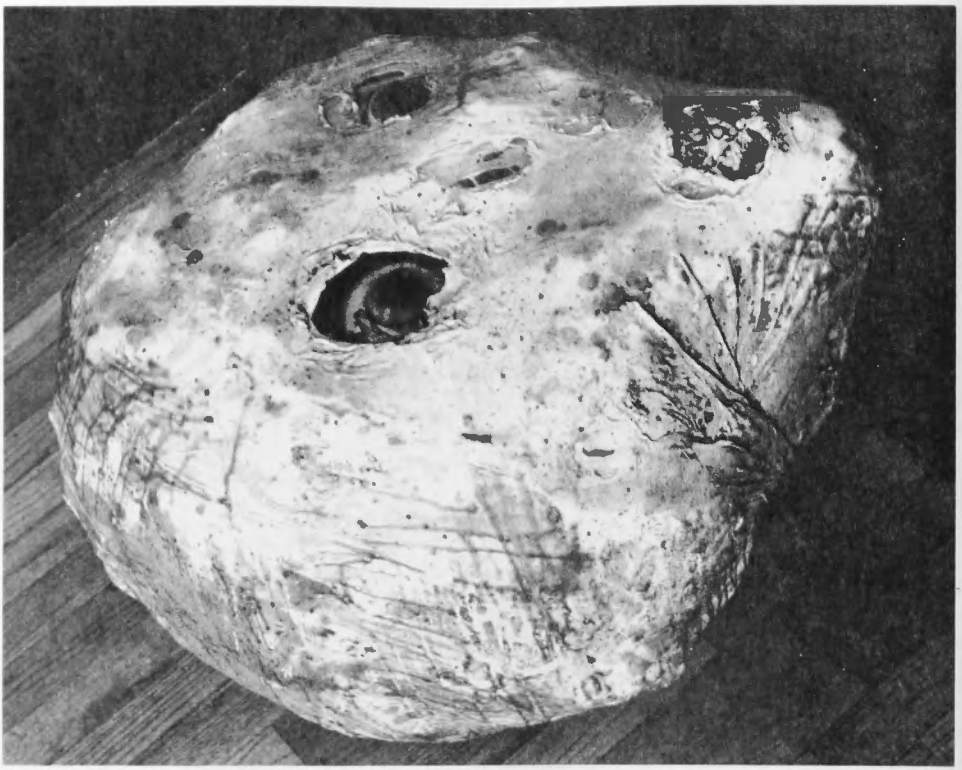
1988, Polychromed Plaster, Wax, Mixed Media over Webbed Steel, 5'9" x 18" x 13"
(photo credit: David W. Tuttle)

FIGURE WITH CROSSED ARMS

1988, Polychromed Plaster, Wax, Mixed Media over Webbed Steel,
28" x 10" x 15"
(photo credit: David W. Tuttle)

FIGURE WITH RED WRAPPED HANDS

1988, Polychromed Plaster, Wax, Mixed Media over Webbed Steel, 29" x 10" x 11"
(photo credit: David W. Tuttle)



SKULL

1990, Installation View, Intar, New York
(photo credit: Marbeth)

I'LL DIE IN ONE MINUTE

1987, Mixed Media over Plaster,
30½" x 30" varying depths
(photo credit: Bruce Wrighton)

MILTON KESSLER

LIGHT ACCOMPANIMENT TO FIGURES BY RON GONZALEZ

:

The studio is in the old repair shop of his father's abandoned used car lot. Huge and tiny figures assemble in this costume-room-like garage. Gonzalez was born in Binghamton, New York, and lives here still at 38.

:

He remembers the fire, his sister's dolls burning. It is among his first images.

:

The one who survives to bury the others must make the choices. Do you inter (above or below ground and in what posture and in what container) or do you immolate? Or like the Balinese do you inter, disinter, then immolate? If you immolate, do you burn to char of larger and smaller forms, or ashes, or dust, or to the "Black Milk" mentioned by Celan? This is the ritual responsibility of sculptor Ron Gonzalez not on the Ganges by on the Susquehanna.

:

The gardens of Gonzalez: the scent of beeswax, the patina of petal and leaf. The figures are part of a garden or wood. Locked together in studio or gallery they are stripped of their ecology and mourn, just as (a person) might mourn the loss of the world. Perishable as they are they are figures that belong in an open leafy scene, with hives, insects.

:

They are "making a living" (Dawkins) meaning survival-power, these males on two legs. Comparing them to the figures in the *PS 1* Figure Show (1985) you see that figures by artists as diverse as Sydney Blum, Judith Shea, Scott Richter, Jonathan Ellis, and Ana Mendietta are legless, have "stunted" leg-forms, (i.e. the serpent) or a single root leg. Gonzalez is not making Ars Medica. There is a life-surge in his figures, and militant festivity. Concepts do not strangle his works. These figures standing on two legs, structures ascending and surface materials falling, are not prepared to give up before incoming bombs of definition.

:

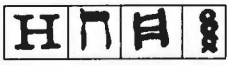
Abyssinia Euphobia: Pebbles that bloom. Almost all imagery of living presences are primarily for purposes of camouflage. To be seen is to be dead. The desert weed, Abyssinia Euphobia, looks like a pebble so its moisture will not be recognized by thirsty animals, but "Once a year these unattractive members of the carpetweed family must / burst into attractive bloom." The Gonzalez figures are surprising in the way they attract us and hide from us with the same imagery. Camouflage.

:

The start was provoked by seeing in a drawer of Rodin's studio, fragments for *Gates of Hell.* There were tiny legs, hands, feet, arms, variously flexed, the legs arranged to accidentally suggest stroboscopic movement. These plaster forms only several millimeters in scale, an assemblage bearing the arranged formal sense of another, not quite random in a small drawer, photographed, also appear as alphabet.

:

After awhile and in complete freshness as in Bachelard and especially following my habits, you see the alphabet, you see the P H O R pictographs, with the artist's inclination toward the art of the H, thus two legs. The pictograph of the H is a twisted string or bundle. Look at its wrapped look in ancient Phoenician:



Then I observe the closed mouth of the P and the head of R and the asymmetrical cellular calligraphy of O, the eye. To randomly associate

them gives us PHOR suggesting carrier and Phorminx (lyre), the musical side, the Jazz of Gonzalez. Harp jazz.

:

Working with waxed nylon is erotic. Steel armature, plaster, candle wax, beeswax, sprayed paint, burlap, ashes, layered, wrapped, and phases of blowtorch unpredictability. Nylon and wax singed and sprayed into attractions. Flirtatious figures. Let's dance!

:

"How many people know that the number of creatures is endless. . .lurking there forever in their private corners of that huge genetic hypervolume, waiting to be found if we had the knowledge to navigate through the maze." (Richard Dawkins) And isn't this what we do—"Out of the maze we punch out our cartouche onto the frozen mud. Plain, ornate, it's maze, maze, made of maze."

:

Just as it is for William King, these Gonzalez figures are the friends and company of their maker. Their surfaces are like a hive full of buds and birds and buzzing or like a reef of tiny containers. These companions are full of interesting events, lost in photographs.

:

The Crucifix was made prone and then set upright. It was hauled upright. Then once above it suggests the lifting spirit, a force for rising and holding, a motivation for climbing the stairway of the sculpture or the hieroglyphic stairway of Copán. The steps and handles are visible in these Gonzalez figures which do reflect a shimmer of Hispanic ecclesiastical ornamentation.

:

There is that special love for the biological moment, the events with visible resonance, when life slowed unaccountably and the wrappings of nueralderm and ectoderm do not completely form the mask of the imago. And you can

see what was before not what was after. It has more to do with being born than with dying. Gonzalez attends lovingly to those early times.

:

It is January 15, 1991, as I let go of this act of friendship for my Binghamton companion. Like the skull reproduced in this issue of *Sulfur*, we are deformed by desire and contact as all living cells seem to be. I am changed by having made this contact. Changed shape.

KURT SCHWITTERS
SEVEN POEMS

(Translated from the German by Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris)

"THOU"

My sing is void.
Scream gapes,
Scream swells up,
Roars gapes swells.
I bitter thou.
I bitter thine breath,
I sing thy eyes,
Thy stride yearns my eyes,
Thy blab my ear yearns.
I lust the sniff of hours.
Thou art my yearn
Thou art thy stride, thy eyes, thy prayer.
Thy laughing prays,
Thy blab prays,
Thy eye prays.
My yearning fars thine pray cry.
I
Far thou.

circa 1917-1918

[J.R.]

GREEN CHILD

POEM 1

Enjailed air steeps.
The murder overdomes blood.
If only I could shard these
walls!
Wall lechers us.
O this flow of the embracing
wall!
Jail unifies —
Blood jails —
Blood steeps —
Giant-size blood overdomes.
Run —
Flee —
Fear —
Blood steeps —
Green.
Shot — Who shoots?
Blood?
Sulfur —
Feet overtrip —
Legs overrush —
Blood —
Fear —
Chase —
Fly —
Yell —
Blood grins yellow — bright
— yellow —
Yellowgreen
Brightyellowgreen —
Sulfuryellowgreen —
Brightsulfuryellowgreen —
Blood grins
brightsulfuryellowgreen.
If only I could wash the green
blood!
Blood wash —
Bathe blood —
Blood bathe.
O thou rapturous white blood
of my bride!
Greenblood steeps —
Yells —
Yawps? —
Brights —
Be silent yellowgreen blood!
Sulfur burns green!
I —
Run —
Yell —
I carry my pain in hands —
Like a child —
There, there, don't cry!
Child, dear, green!
Remember I'm your mother!
Dear child —
Green —
Is green child crying?
Sulfuryellow child, how fire-
red Thou art!
Red —
Blood —
Sulfuryellow —
Green —
Steeps domnation —
Chase —
Yell —
Torture —

Crazy is the hunt!
Happiness?
Thou happiness!
Thou I love!
Thou —
White blood, Thou!
But there steeps!
Sulfuryellow, green —
Disgusting green child!
We run,
on my arm.
Hold tight!
The walls hold tight!
We run walls —
Walls hold tight —
They leave you to me —
Thou and I —
Green child —
Thou and I —
Walls loom —
Blood steeps green.
Walls hold tight —
Yellowish understanding —
Darkred breasts —
They want to take thee! —
No!
only lech —
Give back —
Bloodred back —
Green child, how thou does
look bloodred!
Outside black dogs fly.
Walls loom —
Walls hold tight —
I await —
Green child!
Blessed thy gaze!
Black dogs fly about the
walls —
Green child,
You're mine!
Black dogs,
Fly us away!

c. 1918

[P.J.]

EXECUTION

POEM 9

Someone desired Anna Blume's execution. Execution triggers crucifixion. Crucifying Anna Blume executes you all. Ring glows the knife gun turrets do trigger knives do swing. Ring glows the knife onto your headless heads. Ring to surge corpses headless frenzy, frenzy.

Humans! Humans brain humans. You humans with a human brain. (But really!) People are so wise, so Anna Blume has a bird's brain.

O Thou, beloved of my twenty seven senses, A-N-N-A, thou from the back as from, she that I love, thou thine thy thee, this may not be. Gardens do gobble world kiss. Gardens do blossom hands, meadows do dwell at teepees, sky wilts thread, & autumn cables times. But thou, thou noblest, thou greenest bird. Thou satiates to tint a knife the pastures. Does earth wilt? Do humans wander & must die? The crazy steel raised high sparkles thine limbs. Death inward hard whips inward door wine. Only now die, o thou wise one. Thou greens the human brain. Thou greens to tremble human brains. Thou dies, I die a human, Anna Blume does live worlds. O thou, beloved, thou greens life thou wiltest leaf.

Does thread wilt humans?
Poor old legs drop limbs.
Anna Blume greens the wilt.

c. 1919

[J.R.]

FROM THE BACK & FROM THE FRONT TO START

Labor volunteers.
Sabotage *strike* hand grenades.
Strike upheaves man.
Teeth bark forth teeth.
Infringements strike dismissals.
Bark—bark—bark—bang—
Fear culminates silverstrings.
Drips stone on stone.
The upper echelons!
The upper echelons!
The hand grenades fly by themselves. But you be endlessly coolheaded. Streetcars go both from the back & the front. Who rides on tourist buses? Easy — easy — you people all stand up— in line! —Head under foot: that's what I mean by a strike! Once & for all the tip money bends — it bends — the streetcars bent out of shape are gaping all over. Crooked hours. Hand back that young herring. But the upper echelons must act (this one walks on his hands 21/31) & must hold firm in the face of this illegal strike by a disgruntled & inefficient professional class (German Daily News),[1] & especially here where its present behavior, not without effect on the upcoming strikes in Berlin & the rest of the Reich, cranks out head laughs. Lootings rob riots. (I say the opposite, viz, only not always.)
The upper echelons!
The upper echelons!
The upper echelons & very.
Culminates silverstrings stone on stone.
Drips fear expulsions bang.
Sabotage *strike* infringements.
Drips silverstrings fear.
Provisionally there exists no prospect to bring the thing together, the situation has no board of supervisors. (That our lovely plattdeutsch never be forgotten.) And an absolutely binding heat to strike your

[1] Translators' note. The initials, D.T., in the German text, refer either to *Deutsches Tageszeitung* or to Delirium Tremens.

momma's feet. Four thousand, forty thousand cheap, this got a long ways still to go. — The Jews —the Jews!

1919

[J.R.]

A FLOWER LIKE A RAVEN

A splashy "13" mirrored on the moon.
Flashy moon upon which tears did fall.
So ducky was the mouse.
Tears mirrored wave wave milded grief.
O were I but a wave!
A wave held tight at either end.
A wave descending upwards.
A wave beached on the beach.
In the belltower clocks were boiling.
O could I but stretch the clock out on a wheel!
Its clockwork is a shining dew within.
Its rifts calmed by my soul.
A timid dew.
Blood grows an inner hand.
And pulses flow by millions.
Road enstarring
flowers.

1919

[J.R.]

MURDER MACHINE 43

Greetings, 260 thousand ccm.
I thine,
thou mine,
we me.
And sun unboundedness stars brighten up.
Sorrow sorrows dew.
O woe is you o me!
Official notices:
5000 marks reward!
A box is lopsided, forthwith your box.
There's no more ownership, it's only
communism that's hung up on ownership.
I am wilting the wicker, because no more wicker.
I am skimming the clock, because no more clock.
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, seven.
Sunday is greening the warmth.
And the elephant.
Ah the fat elephant.

Should several persons post a claim for this reward, we reserve all rights to distribution with no recourse under law.

(signed)
The Magistrates
of this right royal seat and capital
(per) I. V. Weber

One hour in black, how many lives love striving, since the cat does dance mosquitos squiggle rope black ink does silver dangle earthworm. Soda, soda, plenty soda in the corpses. But hark, 5000 marks reward! Visual artists strictly kept outside. First let them learn the rules most primitive of art. No schools no more, just factories. Art ground out in art factories. Here every artist gets a cubicle, the cubicles are furnished with straitjackets (to protect the public). Machines grind gyrate wheel brains. With which to set it off. I will, I will! Grabs giants bulge out overloud: I must? No, nobody must must. The artist wills, wills something: technique, morality, ideas, cathedrals, viz: a program. 5000 marks for this lopsided box! Okay, we'll grind you out an earthworm palette a tricornered Segantini.

(De mortuis nil, nisi bene.) Wicker to blitz filmy thatch. Oh what a program! I do stiffen wicker, pain does bang on doors. Because your thighs do bubble.
Key.
The key's lost. (I. V. Weber) 5000 marks reward against the author of most honored city manager, I wilt wind's leaf.
1, 2, 1, 2, l, 2, 1.
Here died the owner of the Eagle Pharmacy. Overcome by his death that day was Senator Bill Kyland. For relief from shortages of fuel, the workers & soldiers council, playing with its urban bones, lost two good fingers on its right hand. The notary was torn asunder. This is something no good German would have wanted. We must protect our Fatherland against the worst! It is the duty of all Germans! Up up & join the ranks! Defend the National Assembly! Show there are still true German men amongst us! We have no weapons any longer. This is Expressionism.
Brothers in the Reich!
Millions of people work 24 hours a day, me too. It isn't good for a writer to have too many fans. Only marsh plants don't suffer from excessive moisture. It isn't good for a writer to have too many fans. We wind garlands round the geese we whimper rags, bones, iron. Rabbit skins bone legs. Diapers go crazy.
Rabbit, o my little rabbit, thou!
Moving vans tie eyes up steam up flowers.
Lump lump lump.
Moving vans grin greybeards rotate appleboats.
Shellfish, shellfish, shad.
Moving vans embody salsas blow & glow.
Shad, shad, grunion.
Moving vans shine brains weep wheel drums.
Grunion, grunion, cod.
Moving vans grey greybeards body bodies.
5000 marks reward, corpse 43.
I gift my green loins into thine soft hands. On fingertips we bear a green frog in a glow bed. Critiques & catalogs do tower soft beds tender glow. A carp dreams green loins mine. I thine, thou mine, we me. And sun unboundedness shines towers. Soft falling folds beds towers carps green frog. Soft falling folds o little carplegs mine. John's brothers nimbly lisp. Don't hit! Green frog, thy kneecaps!

Carp! Carp! Whitely towers beds carp milk give gifts athwart. Svelte spurreth fish, o thou & thou. Don't hit green frog! I am the carp, & you are frog & fish! Svelte spurreth fish the carp's awoken sleep. We sleep beds towers waves waves waves, an ocean, surges of sheer ocean. Spatters sparks whips rosy garlands towers. Nightfolds frog greening carps sun svelte. Hotly does leather white fish spur. Don't hit, I'm sickly. Thou skim my legs cook glowingly the carp. I thine, thou mine, we me. Thou skim my legs hold firm thy hit. I do wind rose bloods & sink down, thou hit on me. Hit, hit, I wind pains doors a shaft of light. Marsh plants flow excess admiration rags bones truly. Thou o thou, I wind rose bloods do cry their cry, do bark forth cries & towers. Thou o thou I surge forth whips suns worlds unboundedness, o thou mine, we. O carp, carp giddiness lopsiding box & tower. 5000 marks reward for author. Wicker I do wilt.
In what manner the young married warrior got stuck inside the well remains a mystery. The man had six assets: (1) First class hemp fibers. (2) Perfect seating. (3) First class alarm clocks. (4) No loss of time. (5) No need to boil tar. (6) Comes dirt cheap. Even so: better watch out for Spartacus!

1919

[J.R.]

ICE CLOCKS

Boil clocks boil breathe ice
Ash crumbles ash boil ice
Clocks cook clocks ice boil ash
Clocks cook ice
Mimosa, orange, Aphrodite, tulip flower, Aphrodite.
I drift around through life a dead fish.

1922

[J.R.]

Note

Kurt Schwitters was born on June 20, 1887, in Hannover. After initially training as a visual artist, he emerged circa 1918 as the founder of a virtually one-man movement, Merz, that showed close affinities with the Zurich and Berlin Dada groups, with Russian and Italian Futurists and Constructivists, and with Dutch poets and artists (Van Doesburg, Mondrian, et al.) connected with *De Stijl*. During his Merz period in Germany, Schwitters published a magazine, *Merz*, gave extensive poetry readings and performances throughout Germany and Europe, and mapped out a series of "total art works" as a kind of "Merz theater." While viewed by many of his contemporaries as an essentially non-political artist, he was forced into exile by the Nazis, lived for several years in Norway, fled to England during the Second World War, and died there in relative obscurity in 1947. Much of his work in fact has a decidedly political/critical edge.

Although Schwitters is increasingly recognized as one of the great visual artists of the Twentieth Century, his achievements as a major poet and theorist of Modernism have so far not received the same degree of attention. This is a distortion of Schwitters' accomplishment, considering that he himself never saw his art and literary activities according to some such hierarchical model. On the contrary, Schwitters' push was towards an ever greater integration and equivalence of the various facets of his artistic *oeuvre*. In this sense his attempt "to efface the boundaries between the arts" resembles and predicts the work of such later artists as Cage, Oldenburg and Kaprow, indeed of a significant portion of the "post"modern generation.

Schwitters wrote prolifically throughout his life and was best known for his poetry and sound poetry during his active years in Germany. His earliest poems date from his student days before the First World War; his last writings, from 1947, the year of his death in England. Besides poetry, the boundaries of which he stretched as much if not more than any of his contemporaries, he wrote essays and manifestos, plays and fictions. Although most of his writing was in his native German, he also wrote in English (he renounced the German language during his exile in World War Two) and, occasionally, in French. The true extent of his written opus is only now becoming apparent, thanks to the five volumes of his collected writings *(Der Literarische Werk)* published in the mid-1970s by Dumont Verlag in Cologne.

Schwitters' poetry includes early expressionistic lyrics and their later, often hilarious reworkings ("For Anna Blume"—addressed to his fictive female counterpart—is the primary example and his greatest "popular" success); Dada and proto-Surrealist poems; and sound poetry and asyntactical experiments, often taking the shape of what would later be called sound-texts and concrete poetry. While he is best known now for the latter works, his language experiments also led him into other areas of what he called "abstract poetry," as an exploration of the problems of referentiality and non-referentiality in language. Of this work he wrote: "In poetry, words are torn from their former context, dissociated, and brought into a new artistic context, [where] they become formal parts of the poem, nothing else." His central methods here, as with his best known paintings, are those of collage and assemblage, or, as he describes it: "[The poetry] is analogous to Merz painting in making use of given elements such as sentences cut out of newspapers or taken down from catalogues, posters, etc., with or without alteration."

The translated works presented here are from our gathering of Schwitters' writings, *PPPPPP: Poems Performance Pieces Proses Plays Poetics*, that will be published by Temple University Press in early 1992. As such they are from that part of Schwitters' project that consists, in John Cage's words about Jackson Mac Low, of "[a] poetry [that] even though it looks like it, is poetry." Schwitters' devotion to just that kind of poetry and art is summed up in a late lyric, circa 1947:

DIE GAZELLE ZITTERT

Die Gazelle zittert,
weil der Löwe brüllt.
Die Hyäne wittert.
Doch die KUNST ERFÜLLT.

THE GAZELLE TREMBLES

The gazelle trembles,
As the lions roar.
The hyena shambles.
But ART GIVES MORE.

[P.J.]

FORREST GANDER
from LIBRETTOS FOR EROS

LAND SURVEYOR

And came home with beggar ticks in his pubis
And the light syrup stink of urine on his jeans,
Gawdawful b.o., sat on the bed unlaced his redwings
And lay back on brown blood stains in the unmade
Sheets and the ferruginous odor of her period, saying
Holy holy holy, I do not feel kindly
To the copperhead in the copple-stones and the brown
Recluse making its nest in my underwear,
I hate poison sumac poison ivy poison huckleberry.
The ganglia of blackened liana
And the bowers of meshed kudzu trouble my step.
From spraddle-legged dumps, the fissure blooming between my cheeks,
I said the degenerate itching of my locust-leaf-wiped butthole
Only increaseth among company. I have pointed my sweatblind face
Through tents of web worms, I have lava-soaped striped leeches
From bruised ankles, I have brushed the hair
Of outrageous arachnids and their eggsacks burst and crawled
Every slake and chine of my sopranic skin.
Placed my unwitting palm on dead things nailed to fenceposts,
Imagined bodies and parts of bodies in the footsucking weedlots,
Startled at the crack of limbs in wheezing copses,
And I have grown strange.
But thou oh moon backsliding coolly from blue slips of cloud
Over bare semi-dark autumn fields where the stars smoke dimly for anyone,
Restoreth my peace.

ACTS

I couldn't sleep in the heat and went outside
But the moon was ochre-ringed like an asshole
And I passed silent in company of black four-footed shapes,
Liquid fugitives from an alienist's parable,
Toward the city's disturbed light
And came up short where men were welding
Industrial stacks above the highway.
Tanzanite blue sparks run-through with orange
Poured down across the building's roof
And laved the uncanny spectres with their torches.
I breathed the faintly burnt air
Drifting from forest fires uncontrolled in Kentucky.

PHOTO: SIXTH BIRTHDAY, LEVEE CAMPS

Two white children out of nine.
Squirrel-headed at one short end
Of the long fold-up table, Frank; his chubby
Stepsister at the other. Shadow
Inside what looks to be a revival tent;
A warm light made by pollen
Dirt and dust indrafts through an open flap
Across the dirt floor like a swash of pancake batter.
The children are wearing cone hats, they smile,
Half of them craning for the camera
Bug-eyed, glad-assed to be here, levee kids,
Dam kids, gone with the flash
Into derelict cities, slender oblivions,
Suicide. For Frank's
Adoptive father, the contractor,
Darker fathers shovel dirt daubers,

Unswamp cottonmouths, grave-
Make next to the St. Francis
Banking her wiles and curved spine in ridges of muscle, levees
Looming through perpetual dawns in the nap of Mississippi,
1955.

FRANK STANFORD, 1948–1978

I AM GOING ON A JOURNEY AND I WILL BRING flour and sandals, a fine-toothed comb and sourballs, this fish hook and silt in my pockets. I take fibula and sternum, your false pregnancy, a slip knot. Filtertips and soup du jour. What I leave—*all things visible, light of the body, total number of my days*—are field notes and sheep's eyes, the Fahrenheit of sexual love, foreplay and your spotting, frost heave then sugar beets, the foster moon, twilights soughing. I let my face to the screw worm, my flesh to slugs. *There is a river the streams whereof I am.* Fair copy to Second Readers, to the fire ants, my sputum. I tender banana fritters to slop jar. Fill my feather pillow with skunk cabbage. Forgive me unfinished manuscripts, the burnt skillet, *the burthen of my flesh.* I bequeath fellatios to scarlet tanagers, fanfaronade to my silent partner; in the flood plain, signs of the cross. To my funeral bring spikenard. Place four scabs on the first saltlick. A fait accompli in standard time. The fire plug among Sego lilies. I only want this footstool and my sign manual, fascinating sideburns. I take fingernails sprouting; from the kitchen floor the sole prints. The front page plus my shaving kit. I leave like a felon with a sparring partner, famished and slakeless. Like four horsemen and their snake oil. Farewells in a saxophone. A flicker, a sputter, faggots for Savonarola. Finat stopgap. *My coming in my going out.* Fresh heart and salt.

PARABLE IN WOLVES' CLOTHING

The house is building a woman.

The witness lies, how it comes easy.

The house claims her nervous system
Will multiply in a season
Out of fire.

She moans,
  He eats, he saws
  My bones in half.

The man tells his story like a witness
Standing on a hill at nightcourt.

He hurls his tenor past the moon
While the night goes pale as teeth.

He brags,
  You will marry a kitten
  And she will bear you a ghost.

While stars gallop from the bush
He bleeds. His face matted
With cold smoke.

She lays her fire in.

They lift the trapdoor from the night.

THE PROVINCES OF MARS

I ordered this blue paper from a catalogue
From Barcelona. Do my words get crookeder?
So they do. All I have eaten
Since Saturday is malt liquor
Which imparts an omnigenous sympathy
And makes me blind as William Tell.
So I have been listening to opera.
The soul is a kind of sound: Maria Meneghini
Callas, *ava dolce e serena che regnavi. . .*
In gioia pura. And after Dame
Joan Sutherland first heard Callas sing
She felt constantly nauseous, so much
So she wondered if she might be pregnant.
I won't change the sheets, or sweep
Your longsome hairs from the pillow: remembrance
Of things past, perdu,
Lost. Where are you Jumel. There
Are wide ice fronds at the bedroom windows,
A different paleontology for each pane.
I am unmanned without you
In this inconsonant dark.

PROLOGUE TO A BIDDING

Beyond, the vinous bikers dismount.
We walk the river
Past dehiscent seedpods, a line of buttonwood trees
Beaming with river
Light, and the sun goes.
Your hairless belly guiding my touch.
From your quiet,

Phonations in a dialect
We would occupy.
The bridge view comes on, and
Our particularly intimate form of pioneering.
You grasp everything immediately.
My gibbous thumbs tracing arm pit and slow
Curve to your waist,
The osage orange losing its bees.
Every future is complete without us.
Like the Giottos at Padua, there
Emerges a vocabulary of masterpiece
Febrile and urgent blue.

ABSCESS

Each single life
Occurs in a series of occasions
Striking
In the context of what
Has preceded them.
He came to know
What he should have wanted
To say. But
From an internal perspective
There is no series. Only
Event. *The porchlight shot out.*
Music that knocks us down.
Brow shadowing the guitar player's
Accipitrine eyes. Tile roofs
Glisten under rain. In rich
Bottomland, the glabrous hog
Shrieking. Meditative lope
On a dirt road, pink

Palms flashing back, counter
To the forward leg. A kite
Hits the copperhead. Cicadas halt,
The air blanks. The way strangers
Crane up from whatever they are doing
To meet your gaze as you go past.
I am with you. I am
You.

CHANTAL THOMAS
THREE PROSE WORKS

(Translated from the French by Allen S. Weiss)

ARROGANCE

All dolls claim to be descended from The Great Doll. Grotesque! Buffoonery! It's enough to make you cry! They're unbearably arrogant, even those repulsive midgets. They're so pretentious, it's unbelievable. I saw this right away. But this doesn't prevent me in the least from being pleased when someone gives me a doll. Boundlessly happy. I know that later I shall certainly put them in their place, but for the moment I am thrilled, and I throw myself into the arms of the gift-giver with ardor. And my gratitude is sincere. Furthermore, I already anticipate the future procurement of yet another doll thanks to these effusions. "And what do you want her to be like?" "Just the opposite of this one. Marion is a red-head with green eyes, a blue dress, and long legs. She has a delicate, upturned nose and pink lips. Quite distinguished. I wouldn't want to have her for an opponent in tennis. If you want to buy me another doll—which would obviously please me greatly, since there is nothing in the world I love as much as dolls—I'd like a blond one, with hair like embroidery thread, rather small, in a soft material, in foam rubber, providing that it is dense. I don't want a sponge. Laura would thrill me. Not like Marion, whom I grant a distant and fascinating life—she is sublime when, her russet hair flying in the wind, she drives at top speed on the high cliffs—but rather by her closeness. I would confuse her with my pillow. I see her rather thick legs and her feet clad in plastic shoes, with the stitching visible on the soles." "I'm not sure that I can find the exact type that you want," worried my loving parent. "The shoes aren't important. I'll buy them separately. What is important is that Laura be very soft, like chewing gum. A doll that I can chew. Not the porcelain type that makes me sick."

It is true that already some time ago I learned how to dominate them. For example, I scoff at the beautiful Marion's coldness. I'll have nothing to do with it. She and all the others can put on airs, for all I care. But she is not the only one that exists. I possess a bevy of others just as arrogant, just as inaccessible, who spend their nights at parties to which I am not invited.

They scorn me, they despise my withdrawn existence. They go out in evening gowns and leave me to my flannel nightgowns. I hear them whisper: "Really, I wouldn't want to be her!" The very idea makes them laugh. Try as I might to make them capitulate—which can go very far with dolls—I see very well that, supported by their ridiculous prejudices, they snub me. I can strip them of their little well-fitting dresses and roll them in old rags, or drag them naked through the snow, or pierce them all over with needles (my Barbie is a porcupine!)—nothing mars their smiles. They simply give me the once-over through their long curved lashes. They amuse themselves. They know that, whatever happens, they are beautiful. Sometimes, their certitude makes me hesitate. I touch their so very smooth cheeks.

Now, I no longer know what to think. It all began with Anna's fall, which, instead of pleasing me—since she was truly atrocious—really devastated me. She fell as if by herself. It was last summer. I was playing in my bedroom. Suddenly, without any reason, I dropped the old doll that I had inherited from my great-grandmother. Anna, the epitome of porcelain, always seated with her legs spread under a large dress of yellowed lace. Anna, the untamable. I contemplated her pupils specked with gold, and my hands opened all by themselves. She fell like the thing that she was. With a dull noise; without protest. Her nose shattered against the tiles, a small piece of finger flew into splinters, and her eyes came loose under the shock. I gathered it all up and put it in a corner. I went out for a walk. I came upon two women in the garden of the monastery. One said to the other, in a horrified tone: "She lost her nose and something else. I no longer remember what." I was astonished that this old woman already knew. Was she related to my family? Will she stir up the entire city? I decided to return home and try to fix Anna. She was pitiful. If I shook her (and how I shook her!) I heard her eyes dangle around in her head, creating a hellish noise. I tried to catch them with a little spoon. But by doing this I damaged a part of the eye socket. I threw her back into her shoe box.

Some time after, I found all of my dolls assassinated. The killer had gathered them together in a bouquet and, with a single stroke of the axe, decapitated them. "Greetings to the spirit of the Great Doll," he wrote on a piece of newspaper. I touched their so very smooth cheeks. All alone, I sink into the confusion of my feelings.

HAMLET'S 40 LOCKSMITHS

From the moment that she entered the theater, she was certain that she would always live there, that it was all over, that she would never see her bedroom again. The heavy overcoats worn by all the people around her seemed to confirm this apprehension. It was thus, sick with anguish, that she accepted the offer of an Eskimo bar. She asked for "strawberry" with a sinking voice, all the while thinking, "So, this is all that I will have to eat. I'd better like it. There aren't even peanut vendors in this place." Fortunately, she really liked Eskimo bars, especially because of the chocolate coating, and for the pleasure of sucking on the stick. The stuff in between was less interesting. Her parents leaned towards her and pleaded, "Hurry up and finish before the piece begins." She didn't see what was the hurry, since they would always be locked in there, with their huge coats folded on their knees (doubtlessly, they would later serve as covers to sleep under). She quickly gobbled down her Eskimo bar and, with an icy throat, saw the night fall, and then the stage light up. Except for this coldness in her throat, it was terribly hot. The forehead of the blond man on stage was broken out in sweat. There was something painful about his manner of being hot. Everybody was too hot in this place where they were all trapped. But they had to bear it, and the coats didn't help the situation; while he, that young pale man dressed in black, had a full freedom of movement. If he was in fact dripping under his clothes, it was because he was bustling about so much—nothing prevented him from taking off his jacket. All of a sudden a horseman appeared, an old man crying up there on his horse. And, amidst a terrifying din and whirlwind, he said something to the young man. The little girl was suffocated by this event. She could no longer breathe, fascinated by the level of agitation attained by Hamlet (for it was indeed he, as her mother indicated)—fascinated and full of admiration, for she saw up there someone even more worried than she was, and who, to the contrary, made no effort to conceal his disquietude. Lola wasn't interested in the horse. Her eyes didn't quit those of Hamlet. She followed the wake of a new wrinkle on his exhausted face. He couldn't stand it any more, and his mental decay certainly wouldn't make their life as prisoners any easier. For the moment, they were relatively protected by the darkness of the room, but that would probably work only on the first evening. Each person in turn (and each person's turn would inevitably arrive) would have to gallop up onto the lighted stage, summoned by the prince's anguish. As furious as Lola was about being locked up in the theater, she was equally angry about feeling herself dominated by a fear stronger than her own—perhaps not really stronger, but certainly more decorous, circumspect, meditated. It wasn't for nothing that she had to

finish her Eskimo bar *before* Hamlet appeared. For it was he who directed the game and held them all rapt in the whirlwind of his delirium. She immediately understood that she was the suicidal prince's rival, but that she hadn't the slightest chance of winning. It was inconceivable that, during his dialogue with the dead man, Hamlet would notice the drama of a child panicked by the idea of never returning home. This injustice choked her. A glass of water or another Eskimo bar would have been most welcome. Finally, after a very long time—she really couldn't tell how many hours had passed—the prince departed. Everyone was permitted to stand—but not to leave, of course. Only to take few steps into the entrance hall. Her parents met some friends:

"Desarthe's acting is astonishing. Remarkably perceptive."

"Indeed, and I've seen at least a dozen versions of this piece. I have never before so clearly seen the jubilation at the core of Hamlet's madness. His all-powerfulness. In his own fashion, Hamlet is a monster. The opposite of a tyrant. He doesn't condemn people to death, he doesn't inflict physical suffering. He leads to suicide. He is thrilled when told of Ophelia's death."

"You really think so? I think that you're exaggerating a bit. In any case, the staging is splendid. Those wooden coffins which rise and descend. It doesn't surprise me at all that they needed 40 locksmiths to create it, as the program says."

"Forty locksmiths!?"

"Yes, it says, 17 carpenters and 40 locksmiths."

A bell interrupted their discussion. The crowd returned to its coffin. Nobody argued. And with reason—for if there are 40 locksmiths, thought Lola, we had better be resigned to our fate.

COOLNESS

As Delphine had a passion for dolls, one day her grandfather suggested that he would take her to see an exhibit of the artist Hans Bellmer. Her parents were not at all thrilled by this idea, but they realized that it was too late to restrain the little girl's enthusiasm. For she was already aware of the project, and whenever someone mentions the word "doll," she is endowed with added energy—just like that which we attribute to madmen when we wish to contain their madness. Besides, this child was in fact a bit mad, reflected each of her parents. And, in their opinion, the grandfather too was

not quite in his right mind. Thus they ended up letting themselves be convinced to permit this outing.

On the way to the gallery, Delphine danced around the legs of the elderly gentleman, all the while describing the latest acquisitions to her doll collection. She was in her folkloric phase. She had just received a Provençal doll clothed in a long black dress with gray and blue stripes. A small shawl was crisscrossed on her head, and her chignon was wrapped in white lace. "Take it easy," grumbled the grandfather, who had just got tripped up by his granddaughter. "Stop for a second, you little devil; you're going to make me fall." But Delphine didn't stop either spinning around or describing her dolls. After the Provençal, there was an Alsatian dressed in red and black; a shepherdess on stilts ("But there is no such thing as a shepherdess on stilts. Only shepherds"—"False, false, false," shouted Delphine); and a Dutch doll. "How do you know that she is Dutch?" "By her clogs." "I wish someone would give me an Indian," dreamily continued Delphine, while stopping in front of a waffle stand. Dolls had invaded both Delphine's mental universe and the real space of her bedroom. They occupied all the shelves, they were piled up in a great wooden trunk at the foot of her bed, and they even entered onto the bed itself, where there were always two or three dolls to be found, half smothered between the covers. . .

"An Indian and a mermaid," reiterated Delphine. But at that moment they arrived at the gallery. Delphine was struck speechless. She saw blond hair, nude bellies, thighs opening onto other thighs, bows alighted like butterflies, white socks crumpled on patent leather shoes. A hand with delicate fingers emerged from a laced sleeve. The other hand held a string from which a blue eye was suspended. "What country are these dolls from?" she finally managed to ask. "They were born in Bellmer's imagination. He was a strange man whom I knew slightly. Very handsome, with a beauty like that of ivory miniatures. Sometimes he said nothing for hours on end, and then all of a sudden he would begin to speak, at which point it was we who fell silent. I remember one summer night, we were all seated outside at the Café du Flore, when he began: 'A small girl all alone, on a long deserted road, it's cool. . .'" Delphine shuddered.

AARON SHURIN
TWO PROSE POEMS

THE DEPOSITORIES

The enemy personified the nation. A fiction or series of fictions exploding through with smoke, pouring sweat. At the foot of a tree hands stuck in the dirt. Once in a while they hold on to me.

A couple of them seemed to be moving around the field, black-eyed, loose splinters from the neighborhood, full of wasted determination. He coughed it up on the pillow in a sort of puddle. The forms lying there, vacant, removed from there.

The house thin, blue, hanging in the air, transparent in the trees, the forms of the trees, no partition whichever way you move . . .

This man was weak, received a box from home, munching on a bloody cracker in the remaining hand. Two boat loads arriving, exposed to it anywhere, torches on the ground, rags around heads, hot at night with sudden energy, the maintaining skin of vengeance. Green oozing out from the grass—large spaces swept over—burning the dead beards, odor of the rejected arm and leg. In history the papers remain and still remain, soaking up the glaze . . .

I sit by his shining hair, the heart of the stranger. His ashy eyes, roasted in the morning. As you pass by, be on guard where you look. Opposite my window the freed horses are led off. The smoke streams upward, dark, thick, warm.

He said, "Make your own choice." The kiss I gave him discharged better views.

The man is struggling for breath; a soldier's life must be a bent thing. Others are arranged in a straight row. They have some old magazines I was in the

habit of reading: theory, practice, democratic premises, superfluity. He was an ideal of his age in a few days. He kept a diary and wrote, "The doctors have been brave."

I am taking care of a silent rebel, laid down on his arm to see its distribution, lying on the spot that time a hole in the air, his small calculations extruded. Meat might be named from mere demonism; nature and pretence were there.

I like to stand and look a long while. Individuals in human places verify the forms. The dim leaden members with heads leaning and voices speaking. In the arms and in the legs from my observation.

Dear Madame, I have seized the testimony, still alive. I do not know his past life, but feel as if it must have been good. I saw circumstances, and can give you some fragmentary physiognomy and idioms. . .

Flesh of his breast and tremulous arms in the strain of a partial sleep, I have a special friend. Out of the shadowy scene the white beds, sat by a huddled form, shone in through the window a vacant moon. . .

Buttons. . . tufts of hair. . .
In bushes, low gullies, or on the sides of hills. . .

IN

It was waiting for me, the streets, beers, and basement corridors. The women dressed up hot pictures good in that dress walked me into my breasts, we were smelling like strong arms when the music stopped. Her feet standing over me were falling into my shaking hands.

She stepped out of her dress; I slipped off my wig; she took off her earrings; I put on that nice girl. I could tell from her face I was happy.

Nostalgia might have a dress-up fetish; just thinking about it was everything white. Sky full of street light make you feel snow, pizza, polished nails, believe in affairs who they are with those cherry all over the floor.

Some people have coffee pots or a couple of magazines. Her story was made for illusion in expensive leather jackets—each name those pages on a marquee—girls hanging out with girls opened my mouth: a reflection came out. A real person was talking to me with blonde tips.

"Where are we going?"
"I have the key."
"People can go anywhere."
"They're different."
"I'm gonna be one too."
"They know where they live," she said; I handed her my sweets and shivered.
"You know the difference."

She went into the next room, her breasts in the next song. Her eyes on the open floor—what you want from me. Old lipstick lurked everywhere, thick and shiny and clutching that little piece of metal. The mouth myself—color what hurts most—I would kiss her ass lying face up looking for a little girl.

I remembered any time I chose, running my forefinger along its farther chamber. In and out of costumes—something very personal—riding the motorcycle highway with summer streaming behind you, put on my silky body billowing touchable, cowboy suede and played the jukebox, a private conversation and when it was over I was thrilled in the shadows.

She reached out with long hands and gave the woman a shove. Please let me stay, faster and faster, where earlier she was nowhere to be found. I watched how I reacted. She smelled like breathing—muscles tell how they really feel—on my neck to see her teeth changing my life.

She put her arms around me—big hands comes home at night—I think needing loving from her woman. She was so close in the lightest way waves of dark smoke. I breathed and stepped into the possibilities.

SUSAN HOWE

THESE FLAMES AND GENEROSITIES OF THE HEART: EMILY DICKINSON AND THE ILLOGIC OF SUMPTUARY VALUES

Spirit cannot be moved by Flesh – It must be moved by spirit –
It is strange that the most intangible is the heaviest – but joy and
Gravitation have their own ways. My ways are not your ways –

(L pf44)

An idea of the author Emily Dickinson – her symbolic value and aesthetic function – has been shaped by *The Poems of Emily Dickinson; Including variant readings critically compared with all known manuscripts:* edited by Thomas H. Johnson, and first published by the Belknap Press of Harvard University in 1951, later digested into a one volume edition, to which I do not refer, because of Johnson's further acknowledged editorial emendations. For a long time I believed that this editor had given us the poems as they looked. Nearly forty years later, *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson,* edited by R. W. Franklin, again published by the Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, in 1981, and *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson,* also edited by R. W. Franklin in 1986, this time published by the Amherst College Press, show me that in a system of restricted exchange, the subject-creator and her art in its potential gesture were domesticated and occluded by an assumptive privileged Imperative.

• • • •

A Concrete Community of Exchange Among Peers

1951: "1860: Alignment of words less regular, letters in a word sometimes diminishing in size toward the end, which gives an uneven effect to the page. *No important changes in form"* [my itals.] (PED liv)

1986: "Standard typesetting conventions have also been followed in regard to spacing and punctuation. No attempt has been made to indicate the amount of space between words, or between words and punctuation, or to indicate, for example, the length of a dash, its angle, spatial relation to adjoining words, or distance from the line of inscription. Dashes of any

length are represented by an en dash, spaced on each side. Periods, commas, question marks, ending quotation marks, and the like have no space preceding them, however situated in the manuscripts. Stray marks have been ignored." (ML 10)

• • • •

Fellows

1958: Thomas H. Johnson: Introduction to *The Letters of Emily Dickinson.*

"Since Emily Dickinson's full maturity as a dedicated artist occurred during the span of the Civil War, the most convulsive era of the nation's history, one of course turns to the letters of 1861–1865, and the years that follow, for her interpretation of events. But the fact is that she did not live in history and held no view of it past or current." (L xx)

1986: Ralph W. Franklin: Introduction to *The Master Letters.*

"Dickinson did not write letters as a fictional genre, and these were surely part of a much larger correspondence yet unknown to us. In the earliest one, written when both she and Master were ill, she is responding to his initiative after a considerable silence. The tone, a little distant but respectful and gracious, claims few prerogatives from their experience, nothing more than the license to be concerned about his health. . . . The other two letters, written a few years later, stand in impassioned contrast to this. . . . In both she defends herself, reviewing their history, asserting her fidelity. She asks what he would do if she came "in white." She pleads to see him. (ML 5)

A drop of ink mars the top of the third page [first letter], but it may have come after she had written ***an awkward predication*** further down the same page:

> Each Sabbath on the
> sea, makes me count
> the Sabbaths, till we
> meet on shore – and
> whether the hills will
> look as blue as the
> sailors say –

This would require obtrusive correction, and what was to have been a final draft became an intermediate one." [my itals.] (ML 11)

1951: T. H. Johnson: Introduction to Emily Dickinson's *Collected Poems* called "Creating the Poems: The Poet and the Muse."

"It would thus appear that when Emily Dickinson was about twenty years old her latent talents were invigorated by a gentle, grave young man [Benjamin Franklin Newton] who taught her how to observe the world . . . . Perhaps during the five years after Newton's death she was trying to fashion verses in a *desultory* manner. Her muse had left the land and she must wait the coming of another. That event occurred in 1858 or 1859 in the person of the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. . . .A volcanic commotion is becoming apparent in the life of Emily Dickinson. . . . Except to her sister Lavinia, who never saw Wadsworth, she talked to no one about him. That fact alone establishes the place he filled in the structure of her emotion. Whereas Newton as muse had awakened her to a sense of her talents, Wadsworth as muse made her a poet. The Philadelphia pastor, now forty-seven, was at the zenith of his mature influence, fifteen years married and the head of a family, an established man of God whose rectitude was unquestioned. . . .By 1870. . . the crisis in Emily Dickinson's life was over. Though nothing again would wring from her the anguish and the fulfillment of the years 1861–1865, she continued to write *verses* throughout her life." [my itals.] (PED xxii-iv)

1971: *Webster's Third New International Dictionary.*

"VERSE: 3 a (1): metrical language: speech or writing distinguished from ordinary language by its distinctive patterning of sounds and esp. by its more pronounced or elaborate rhythm. (2): metrical writing that is distinguished from poetry esp. by its lower level of intensity and its lack of essential conviction and commitment. <many writers of ~~who have not aimed at writing poetry – T.S. Eliot> (3): POETRY 2 <~~that gives immortal youth to mortal maids – W.S. Landor>

4 a (1): a unit of metrical writing larger than a single line: STANZA."

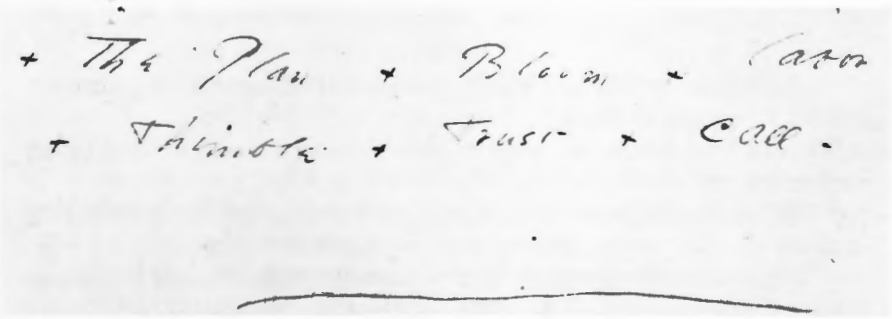
• • • •

Circles

In 1985 I wrote a letter to Ralph Franklin, the busy director of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, to suggest the *Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* show that after the ninth fascicle, (about 1860), she began to break her lines with a consistency that the Johnson edition seemed to have ignored. I was interested because Franklin is currently editing the new *Poems of Emily Dickinson; Including variant readings critically compared with all known manuscripts,* for Harvard

University Press. I received a curt letter in response. He told me the notebooks were not artistic structures and were not intended for other readers: Dickinson had a long history of sending poems to people individual poems – that were complete, he said. My suggestion about line breaks depended on an "assumption" that one reads in lines; he asked, "what happens if the form lurking in the mind is the *stanza?*" [my itals.]

* * * *



(MB s3 n1020)
(PED n944)

Thomas H. Johnson's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* did restore the poet's idiosyncratic spelling, punctuation (the famous dashes), and word variants to her poems. At the same time he created the impression that a definitive textual edition could exist. He called his Introduction "Creating the Poems" then gave their creator a male muse-minister. He arranged her "verses" into hymn-like stanzas with little variation in form and no variation of cadence. By choosing a sovereign system for her line endings – *his* preappointed Plan, he established the constraints of a strained positivity. Copious footnotes, numbers, comparisons and chronologies mask his authorial role.

Here is a typographical transcription of Dickinson's manuscript version:

> Experience is the Angled
> Road
> Preferred against the
> Mind
> By ~ Paradox – The
> Mind itself ~
> Presuming it to lead

Quite Opposite - How
Complicate
The Discipline of
Man -
Compelling Him to
Choose Himself
His Pre appointed Pain -

(MB s5 1033)
(PED n910)

The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson complicate T. H. Johnson's criteria for poetic order.

These lines traced by pencil or in ink on paper were formed by an innovator.

This visible handwritten sequence establishes an enunciative clearing outside intention while obeying intuition's agonistic necessity.

These lines move freely through a notion of series we may happen to cross – ambiguous articulated Place.

At the end of conformity on small sheets of stationery:

When Winds hold Forests in their Paws –
The Firmaments – are still –
The Universe – is still

(MB f22 p505)
(PED n315)

Deflagration of what was there to say. No message to decode or finally decide. The fascicles have a "halo of wilderness." By continually interweaving expectation and categories they checkmate inscription to become what a reader offers them.

Publication – is the Auction
Of the Mind of Man -
Poverty - be justifying
For so foul a thing

Possibly - but We - would
rather
From Our Garret go
White - Unto the White Creator –
Than invest - Our Snow -

Thought belong to Him who
gave it –
Then – to Him Who bear
Its Corporeal illustration – Sell
The Royal Air –

In the Parcel – Be the Merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace –
But reduce no Human Spirit
To Disgrace of Price –

(MB f37 p915)
(PED n709)

Use value is a blasphemy. Form and content collapse the assumption of Project and Masterpiece. Free from limitations of genre Language finds true knowledge estranged in it-self.

Distance – be Her only
+ Motion –
If tis Nay – or Yes –
Acquiescence – or Demurral –
Whosoever guess –

+ He – must pass the Crystal + Angle
That + obscure Her face –
He – must have achieved in
person
Equal Paradise –

+ too + Swelling + fitter for
the feet + Ever could endow –
+ claim + Signal + – first + – limit
+ divide –

(MB f34 p818)
(PED n649)

• • • •

1991: *An editor's query:* "You need to give the reader some thoughts about making use of the words at the end of the 'poem proper.' (in this case, I think, beginning with 'too swelling fitter for.') Are we to attach these words as alternatives to certain words in the 'poem'?; i.e., *where does 'too' go? What am I to do with it?"*

This is a good question: Thomas Johnson reads these words as alternatives.

1828: Noah Webster: *An American Dictionary of the English Language.*

TOO, *adv.* [Sax, *to.*]

1. Over; more than enough; noting excess; as, a thing is *too* long, *too* short, or *too* wide; *too* high; *too* many; *too* much.

> His will *too* strong to bend, *too* proud to learn. *Cowley*

2. Likewise; also; in addition.

> A courtier and a patriot *too.* Pope.
> Let those eyes that view
> The daring crime, behold the vengeance *too.* Pope.

3. *Too, too,* repeated, denotes excess emphatically; but this repetition is not in respectable use. (WD II 95)*

• • • •

Rearrangement

Much critical and editorial attention has been given to Dickinson's use of capitalization and the dash in her poems and letters, while motivating factors for words and phrases she often added to a "poem proper," sometimes in the margins, sometimes between lines, but most often at the end, have aroused less interest. Since the Johnson edition was published in 1951, it has been a given of Dickinson scholarship that these words represent nothing more than suggested alternates for specific words in the text the poet had frequently marked with a cross.

Ralph Franklin says that after 1861 these possibilities for alternate readings are a part of the structure of the poems she transcribed and bound together, and his edition of the *Manuscript Books* show this to have been the case.

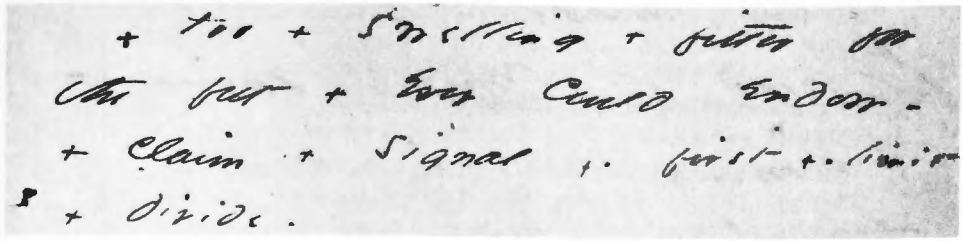
After 1861 Dickinson's practise of variation and fragmentation also included line breaks. Unlike Franklin, I believe there is a reason for them.

This space is the poem's space. Letters are sounds we see. Sounds leap to the eye. Word lists, crosses, blanks, and ruptured stanzas are points of

* Emily Dickinson owned an 1844 reprint of Webster's 1840 edition. The family owned the 1828 two volume first edition. Webster, a friend of the Dickinson family, was a resident of Amherst, helped to found Amherst College with Samuel Fowler Dickinson, and served on the board of the Amherst Academy with Edward Dickinson.

contact and displacement. Line breaks and visual contrapuntal stresses represent an athematic compositional intention.

This space is the poet's space. Its demand is her method.



(MB f34 p818)

One of Thomas Johnson's contributions to transmission of the handwritten manuscripts into print was to place these words, sometimes short phrases, at the end of a poem as Dickinson had done. But he couldn't leave it at that. This textual scholar-editor, probably with the best intentions, matched word to counter word, numbered lines as *he* had re-duplicated them, then exchanged his line numbers for her crosses.

3. True] too
6. Loaded] Swelling
13. Fitter feet – of Her] fitter for the feet
16] Ever could endow-
17. ask] claim
21. Motion] Signal
25. He] first
25. Angle] limit
26. obscure] divide –

(PED n649)

Emily Dickinson's writing is a premeditated immersion in immediacy.

Codes are confounded and converted. "Authoritative readings" confuse her nonconformity.

In 1991 these manuscripts still represent a Reformation.

• • • •

Swelling

Noah Webster:

> SWELL, *v.t.* To increase the size, bulk, or dimensions of; to cause to rise, dilate, or increase. Rains and dissolving snows *swell* the rivers in spring, and cause floods. Jordan is *swelled* by the snows of Mount Libanus.

• • • •

"The flood of her talent is rising." (L332)

The production of meaning will be brought under the control of social authority.

For T. H. Johnson, R. W. Franklin, and their publishing institution, the Belknap Press of Harvard University, the conventions of print require humilities of caution.

Obedience to tradition. Dress up dissonance. Customary usage.

Provoking visual fragmentation will be banished from the body of the "poem proper."

Numbers and word matches will valorize these sensuous visual catastrophes.

Lines will be brought into line without any indication of their actual position.

An editor edits for mistakes. Subdivided in conformity with propriety.

A discreet biographical explanation: unrequited love for a popular minister will consecrate the gesture of this unconverted antinomian who refused to pass her work through proof.

Later the minister will turn into a man called "Master."

R. W. Franklin:

> Although there is no evidence the [Master] letters were ever posted (none of the surviving documents would have been in suitable condition), they indicate a long relationship, geographically apart, in which correspondence would have been the primary means of communication. (ML 5)

Poems will be called letters and letters will be called poems.

"The tone is a little distant but respectful and gracious." (ML 5)

". . .the Hens

lay finely. . ." (Epigraph to L part I, vol I)

Now she is her sex for certain for editors picking and choosing for a general reader reading.

NOMINALIST and REALIST

"Into [print] will I grind thee, my bride." (E II 241)

Franklin's facsimile edition of *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* shows some poems with so many lists of words or variants that even Johnson, who was nothing if not methodical, couldn't find numbers for such polyphonic visual complexity.

What if the author went to great care to fit these words onto pages she could have copied over? Left in place, seemingly scattered and random, these words form their own compositional relation.

R.W. Emerson:

> I am very much struck in literature by the appearance that one person wrote all the books; as if the editor of a journal planted his body of reporters in different parts of the field of action, and relieved some by others from time to time: but there is such equality and identity both of judgment and point of view in the narrative that it is plainly the work of one all-seeing, all-hearing gentleman. I looked into Pope's Odyssey yesterday: it is as correct and elegant after our canon of to-day as if it were newly written. (E II 232)

Antinomy: A conflict of authority. A contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical reasonable correct sealed natural necessary.

1637: Thomas Dudley at *Mrs. Ann Hutchinson's examination by the General Court at Newton:*

"What is the scripture she brings?" (A 338)

An improper poem. Not in respectable use. Another way of reading.

Troubled subject-matter is like troubled water.

* * * *

Fire may be raked up in the ashes, though not seen.

Words are only frames. No comfortable conclusion. Letters are scrawls, turnabouts, astonishments, strokes, cuts, masks.

These poems are representations. These manuscripts should be understood as visual productions.

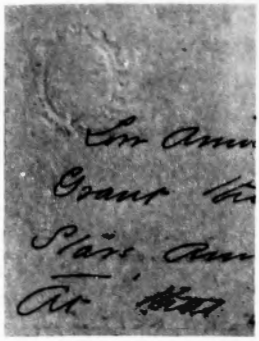
The physical act of copying is a mysterious sensuous expression.

Wrapped in the mirror of the word.

Most often these poems were copied onto sheets of stationery previously folded by the manufacturer. The author paid attention to the smallest physical details of the page. Embossed seals in the corner of recto and verso leaves of paper are part of the fictitious real.

(MB f8 p134)
(PED n168)

Basket of flowers.
C.V. MILLS, capitol and CONGRESS.
Capitol in oval.
CONGRESS above capitol.
Flower in oval.
G&T in eight-sided device.
G.& T. in oval.
LEE MASS.
PARSONS PAPER CO.
Queen's head above L (laid).
Queen's head above L (wove).
WM above double-headed eagle. (MB p1411)



(MB f8 p135)
(PED n168)

Spaces between letters, dashes, apostrophes, commas, crosses, form networks of signs and discontinuities.

"Train up a Heart in the way it should go and as quick as it can twill depart from it." (L pf115)

Mystery is the content. Intractable expression. Deaf to rules of composition.

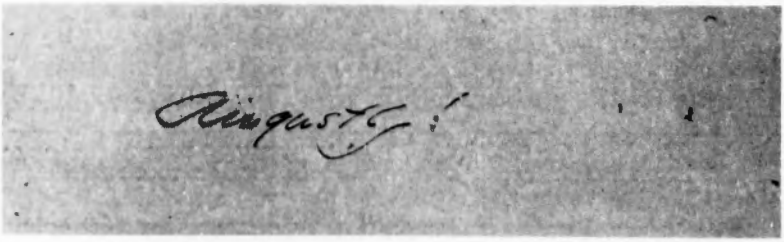
What is writing but continuing.

Who knows what needs she has?

The greatest trial is trust.

Fire in the heart overcomes fire without

• • • •



Franklin's notes to set 7 tell us: "On her inventory of the manuscripts obtained from her mother [Mabel Loomis Todd], MTB [Millicent Todd Bingham] recorded a small slip laid inside sheet A 86-3/4 bearing only the word "Augustly!" The paper is wove, cream, and blue-ruled. (F II 1387)

• • • •

Emily Dickinson almost never titled a poem.

She titled poems several times.

She drew an ink slash at the end of a poem.

Sometimes she didn't.

She seldom used numbers to show where a word or a poem should go.

She sometimes used numbers to show where a word or a line should go.

The poems in packets and sets can be read as a linked series.

The original order of the packets was broken by her friends and first editors so that even R.W. Franklin – the one scholar, apart from the Curator of Manuscripts, allowed unlimited access to the originals at Harvard University's Houghton Library – can only be absolutely sure of a particular series order for poems on a single folded sheet of stationery.

Maybe the poems in a packet were copied down in random order and the size of letter paper dictated a series: maybe not.

When she sent her first group of poems to T.W. Higginson she sent them separately but together.

She chose separate poems from the packets to send to friends.

Sometimes letters are poems with a salutation and signature.

Sometimes poems are letters with a salutation and signature.

If limits disappear where will we find bearings?

What were her intentions for these crosses and word lists?

If we could perfectly restore each packet to its original order, her original impulse would be impossible to decipher. The manuscript books and sets preserve their insubordination. They can be read as events, signals in a pattern, relays, inventions; or singular hymn-like stanzas.

T.W. Higginson wrote in his "Preface" to *Poems by Emily Dickinson* (1890): "The verses of Emily Dickinson belong emphatically to what Emerson long since called 'The Poetry of the Portfolio,' – something produced absolutely without the thought of publication, and solely by way of the writer's own mind. . . .They are here published as they were written, with very few and superficial changes; although it is fair to say the titles have been assigned, almost invariably, by the editors." (P iii-v).

But the poet's manuscript books and sets had already been torn open. Their contents had been sifted, translated, titled; then re-grouped under categories called by her two first editor-"friends": "Life," "Love," "Nature," "Time and Eternity."

• • • •

White lines on a white stone

On 12 September, 1840, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote to Elizabeth Hoar: "My chapter on 'Circles' begins to prosper, and when it is October I shall write like a Latin Father." (E I *n*433)

"The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory and to do something without knowing how or why; in short to draw a new circle. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful; it is by abandonment." (EI 321)

• • • •

Overflow

1891: Twenty years after the event, T.W. Higginson, with Mabel Loomis Todd, the first editor of Emily Dickinson's poetry, recalled one of his two meetings with the poet.

"The impression undoubtedly made on me was that of an excess of tension, and of an abnormal life. Perhaps in time I could have got beyond that somewhat overstrained relation which not my will, but her needs had forced upon us. Certainly I should have been most glad to bring it down to the level of simple truth and every-day comradeship; but it was not altogether easy." (L *n*342*b)*

TOO, *adv.* [Sax. *to.*]

Over; more than enough; noting excess as, a thing is *too* long, *too* short, *too* wide, *too* high, *too* many, *too* much. (WD II 95)

• • • •

Coming to Grips with the World

In 1986 Ralph Franklin sent me a copy of *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson,* published by the Amherst College Press. Along with *The Manuscript Books,* this is the most important contribution to Dickinson scholarship I know of. In this edition Franklin decided on a correct order for the letters, showed facsimiles, and had them set in type on each facing page, with the line breaks as she made them. I wrote him a letter again suggesting that if he broke the lines here, according to the original text, he might consider doing the same for the poems. He thanked me for my "immodest" compliments and said he had broken the letters line-for-physical line only to make reference to the facsimiles easier; if he were editing a book of the letters, he would use run-on treatment as there is no

expected genre form for prose. He told me there is such a form for poetry and he intended to follow it, rather than accidents of physical line breaks on paper.

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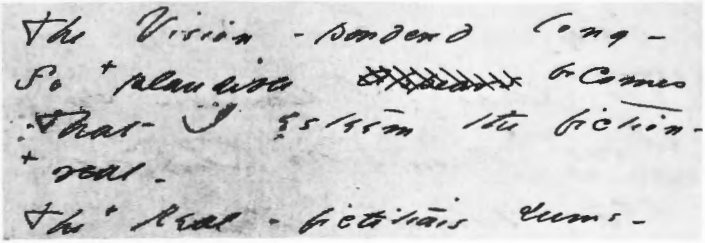


(MB f34p815)
(PED n646)

As a poet I cannot assert that Dickinson composed in stanzas and was careless about line breaks. In the precinct of Poetry, a word, the space around a word, each letter, every mark, silence, or sound, volatizes an inner law of form – moves on a rigorous line.

I wonder at Ralph Franklin's conclusion that these facsimiles are not to be considered as artistic structures.

How can this meticulous editor, whose acute attention to his subject-matter has yet to be deciphered in the neutralized reading even her fervent admirers give her, now repress the physical immediacy of these spiritual improvisations he has brought to light?

A Man may make
a Remark -
In itself - a quiet thing
That may furnish the
Fuse unto a Spark
In dormant nature - lain -

Let us divide - with
skill -
Let us discourse - with
care -
Powder exists in Charcoal -
Before it exists in
Fire -

+ drop + tranquil + ignition
+ deport + disclose
+ Elements – sulphurets
+ express

(MB s5 p1047)
(PED n952)

Simple reflection should cast light on the inauthentic nostalgia of *A Portrait Of The Artist As A Woman* isolated from historical consciousness, killing time for no reason but arbitrary convenience, as she composes, transcribes, and arranges into notebooks or sets, over a thousand visionary works.

During her lifetime this writer refused to collaborate with the institutions of publishing. When she created herself author, editor, and publisher, she situated her production in a field of free transgressive pre-discovery.

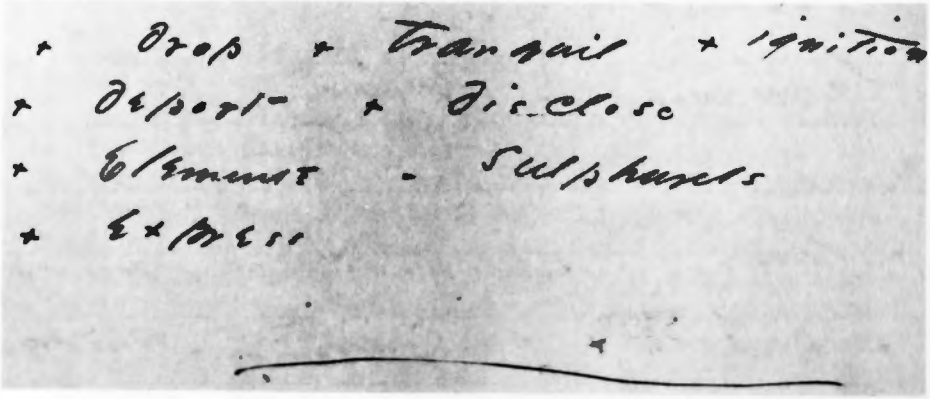
It is over a hundred years after her death; if I am writing a book and I quote from one of her letters or poems and use either the Johnson or Franklin edition of her texts, I must obtain permission from and pay a fee to:

The President and Fellows of Harvard College
and the Trustees of Amherst College

"is this the Hope that opens and shuts, like the eye of the Wax Doll?
Your Scholar –" (L n553)

"This is the World that opens and shuts, like the Eye of the Wax
Doll –"
(L n54)

• • • •


+ drop + tranquil + ignition
+ deport + disclose
+ Elements – sulphurets
+ express

(MB s5 p1047)

Poetry is never a personal possession. The poem was a vision and gesture before it became sign and coded exchange in a political economy of value. At the moment these manuscripts are accepted into the property of our culture their philosopher-author escapes the ritual of framing – symmetrical order and arrangement. Are all these works poems? Are they fragments, meditations, aphorisms, events, letters? After the first nine fascicles, lines break off interrupting meter. Right hand margins perish into edges sometimes tipped by crosses and calligraphic slashes.

This World is not Conclusion -
A † Species stands beyond
Invisible, as Music
But positive, as Sound -
It beckons, and it baffles -
Philosophy, dont know
And through a Riddle, at the last
Sagacity, must go -
To † guess it, puzzles scholars -
To gain it Men have borne
Contempt of Generations
And Crucifixion, shown -
Faith slips, and laughs, and rallies
Blushes, if any see
Plucks at a twig of Evidence
And asks a Vane, the way -
Much Gesture from the
Pulpit
Strong † Hallelujahs roll -
Narcotics cannot still the
Tooth
That nibbles at the soul -

† A sequel - † prove it
† Sure † Mouse .

(MB f18p396-7)
(PED n501)

Define the bounds of naked Expression. *Use.*

All scandalous breakings out are thoughts at first. Resequenced. Shifted. Excluded. Lost.

"She reverted to pinning slips to sheets to maintain the proper association." (MB p1413)

Oneness and scattering.

Marginal notes. Irretrievable indirection –

Uncertainty extends to the heart of replication. Meaning is scattered at the limit of concentration. The other of meaning is indecipherable variation.

In the section of his preface to *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* called "Creating the Poems: Private Audiences," T. H. Johnson referred to her "fear of publication" as many others have done since. He called her poems "effusions." During the 1860s, "her creative energies were at flood, and she was being overwhelmed by forces which she could not control." (PED xviii)

"Over; more than enough; noting excess, as, a thing is *too* long, *too* short, *too* high, *too* many, *too* much." (WD II 95)

Wayward Puritan. Charged with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is antinomian.

• • • •

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(PED [n=poem number])

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(L [pf=prose fragment])

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* * * *

Notes:
My title is the seven last words of Emerson's essay called "Circles."

"A man," said Oliver Cromwell, "never rises so high as when he knows not whither he is going. Dreams and drunkenness, the use of opium and alcohol are the semblance and counterfeit of this oracular genius, and hence their dangerous attraction for men. For the like reason they ask the aid of wild passions, as in gaming and war, to ape in some manner these flames and generosities of the heart." (E I 322)

I have tried to match the poems in type, as nearly as possible, to the Franklin edition of *The Manuscript Books*. In translating Dickinson's handwriting into type I have *not* followed standard typesetting conventions. I *have* paid attention to space between handwritten words. I *have* broken the lines exactly as she broke them. I *have* tried to match the spacing between words in the lists at the end of poems. I have not been able to pay attention to spaces between letters. I think in the later poetry that such spacing is part of the meaning. Dickinson's frequent use of the dash was noted in the Johnson edition, but he regularized these marks. For this essay in *Sulfur* I have drawn the marks in, because the cost of typesetting would be prohibitive. Ideally they should be translated into type. I know that in some books printed during the 19th century, variant readings were sometimes supplied at the end of a page and they were marked by a sort of cross. *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, by John Winthrop, edited by James Savage, and published in Boston in 1826, is a good example of such practise; however, if there were more than two words a number was used for the second one, and in other books the number of crosses increased for each word. Emily Dickinson had enough humor to read these variants as found poems. She was her own publisher and could do as she liked with her texts. These were the days of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll; liberties were taken in print.

The bottom of a page of the Savage edition of Winthrop's *History* looked like this:

some other place, which they both consented to, but still the difficulty remained; for those three, who pretended themselves

||conferred|| ||[2]step|| ||[3]we|| ||[4]taking|| ||[5]her||

39 VOL. I.

Reason 2. All punishments ought to be just, and, offences varying so much in their merit by occasion of circumstances, it would be unjust to inflict the same punishment upon the least as upon the greatest.

||theft|| ||[2]presumptuous||

These manuscript books and sets represent the poet's "letter to the world." The discovery of these packets and sets galvanized her sister Lavinia into action. If Dickinson sent some of the poems in letters to friends she also left these packets in a certain order. It is doubtful, to say the least, whether her various correspondents would have bothered to collect and then publish her poem/letters.

I have followed Johnson's choice for capitals, although I feel I could argue with his choices at times. I have only been allowed access to the originals of two manuscript books and as a result I wouldn't dare to. In a review of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* published in the Boston *Public Library Quarterly*, July, 1956, the poet Jack Spicer suggested such marks might have been meant as signs "of stress and tempo stronger than a comma and weaker than a period." The new critical edition must re-consider such questions. In the early fascicles Dickinson frequently uses exclamation marks. Around fascicles #6–#12, as she begins to break her lines a new way and to regularly insert variant words into the structure of the work, nervous and repetitive exclamation marks change to the more abstract and sweeping dash. Sometimes the way she crosses her t's (and this no printed version could match) seems to influence the length of the direction of the direction of the dash. The crosses she added to her texts when she included variant word possibilities should also be translated into print. The most frequent argument in favor of Johnson's changing the line breaks is the assumption that Dickinson (thrifty Yankee spinster) broke her lines at the right hand margin because of the size of the paper she was using. In other words, she ran out of space and wanted to save paper. Close examination of the Franklin Manuscript edition shows that she could have put words onto a line had she wished to; in some cases she did crowd words onto a line. As she went on working Dickinson increased the space between words and eventually the space between letters. If you follow Johnson's edition you get the idea that there was no change in form from the first poem in fascicle 1 to the last poems in the sets.

In the long run, the best way to read Dickinson is to read the facsimiles, because her calligraphy influences her meaning. However Franklin's edition is far too expensive for most people and then there is the added difficulty of reading handwriting. I think her poems need to be transcribed into type, although increasingly I wonder if this is possible. If the cost of the *Manuscript Books* is prohibitive, what would an edition of the *Collected Letters* cost? Can the later letters and poems be separated into different categories? I am a poet, not a textual scholar. In 1956 Spicer wrote: "The reason for the difficulty of drawing a line between the poetry and prose of Emily Dickinson is that she did not wish such a line to be drawn. If large portions of her correspondence are considered not as mere letters – and indeed, they seldom communicate information, or have much to do with the person to whom they were written – but as experiments in a heightened prose combined with poetry, a new approach to her letters opens up." He based his opinion on careful examination of the letters and poems owned by the Boston Public Library.

For its time the Johnson edition was a necessary contribution to any Dickinson scholarship. It radically changed the reading of her poetry. I can't imagine my life as a poet without it. But as Emerson wrote in "Circles," "The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. . . .Our culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions. Let us rise into another idea, they will disappear." A lot has changed in poetry and in academia since 1951. The crucial advance for Dickinson textual scholarship was Ralph Franklin's facsimile edition of *The Manuscript Books*. Now the essentialist practice of traditional Dickinson textual scholarship needs to acknowledge the way these texts continually open inside meaning to be rethought. In a Dickinson poem or letter there is always something other.

Cristianne Miller, in *Emily Dickinson; A Poet's Grammar*, (1987, Harvard University Press) discusses Dickinson's use of Noah Webster's introductory essay to his American Dictionary. Paula Bennet, in *Emily Dickinson; Woman Poet*, (1990, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Key Women Writer Series), has kept to Dickinson's lineation and her method of indicating the variants with a cross, as long as she has been able to work from poems in the facsimile edition. Martha Nell Smith discusses the problem of textual meddling with Dickinson's letters to Susan Gilbert Dickinson in "To Fill A Gap" (San Jose Studies, 13, 1987). Mary Jo Salter discusses the variant words and takes note of precise details of the handwritten texts in "Puns and Accordions: Emily Dickinson and the Unsaid" *(Yale Review*, vol. 79, n. 2, October, 1990). These scholars are showing new directions for Dickinson scholarship.

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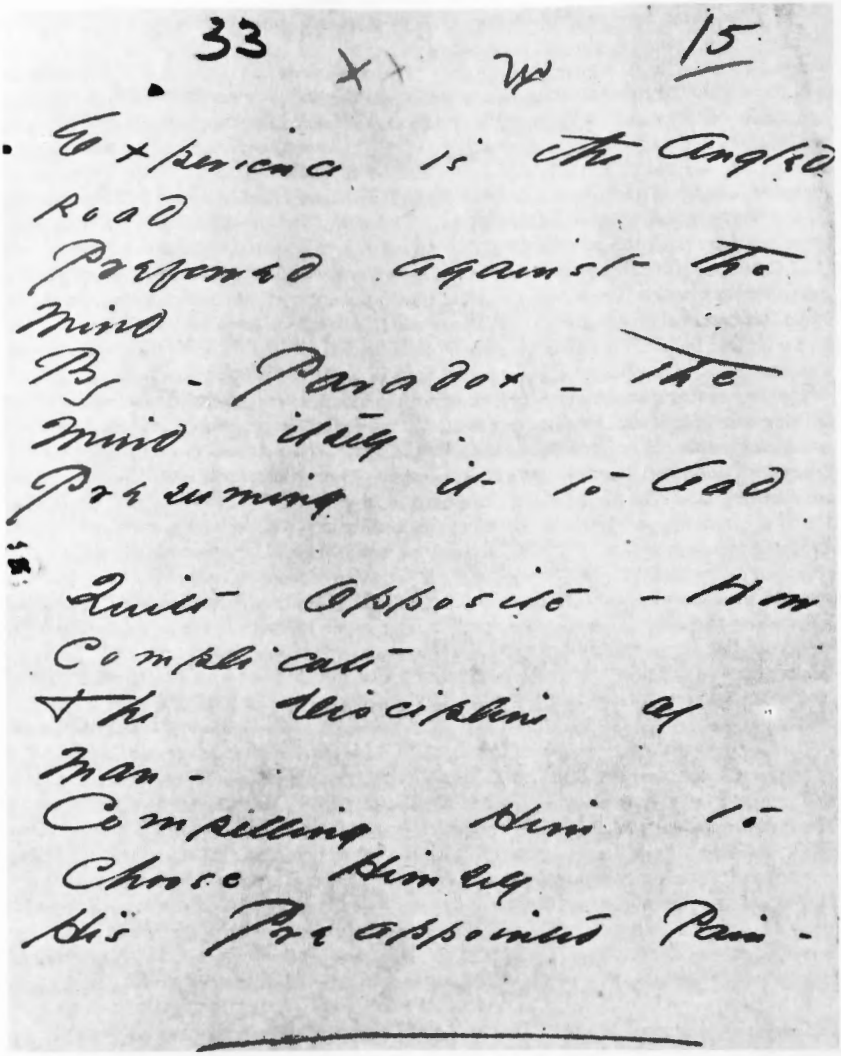

33 15

Experience is the Angled
Road
Preferred against the
Mind
By - Paradox - the
Mind itself
Presuming it to lead

Quite opposite - How Complicate
The Discipline of Man -
Compelling Him to Choose Himself
His Preappointed Pain -

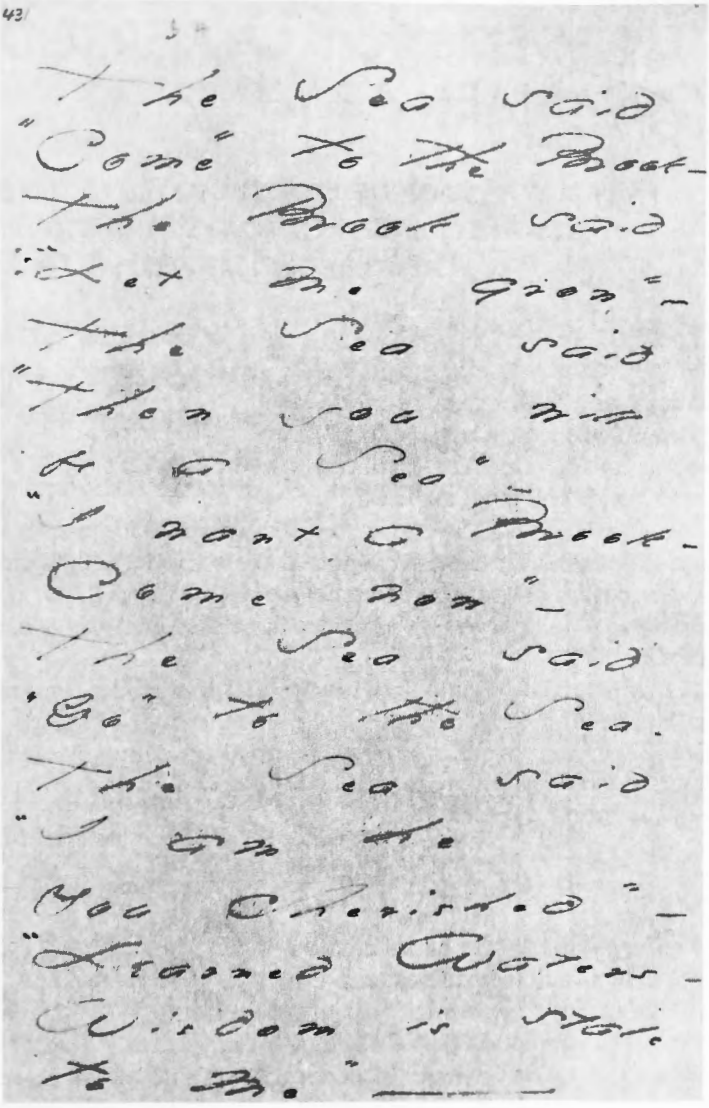
910

Experience is the Angled Road
Preferred against the Mind
By - Paradox - the Mind itself -
Presuming it to lead

(MB s5 p1033)
1864-5

Quite opposite - How Complicate
The Discipline of Man -
Compelling Him to Choose Himself
His Preappointed Pain -

(PED n910)



The Sea said "Come" to the Brook -
The Brook said "Let me grow" -
The Sea said "Then you will be a Sea" -
"I want a Brook - Come now" -
The Sea said "Go" to the Sea -
The Sea said "I am he
You cherished" - "Learned Waters -
Wisdom is stale to me" -

(F s11 p1342)
about 1871

(PED n1342)

GUY ETIENNE

TEN POEMS *from* LA PIERRE DU OUI / MAEN AR YA

(Translated from the Breton by Alain E. Le Berre and the author; translated from the Breton into English by Alain E. Le Berre)

2 gwengolo 1977—Paris

Unnek eur beure e liorzh ar Champ de Mars
e deizioù kentañ heoliek gwengolo 1977,
kammedoù Japaniz evezhet o kilañ didrouz war al leton
kameraoù buket-holl ouzh an Tour,

blin—en askont eus an oad o tont, en askont eus an dour-kafe a servijont en ostaleri, en askont dreist-holl ma'z on bet blin a-viskoazh daoust d'ar pezh a gave d'an holl nemet un pe div,

e soñjan e blinder ar re vlin, e blinder ar varzhed a zo ar re vlinañ eus an holl dud,

diwar o c'havell ez int ar frailh, ar gwan, ar c'hizidig, enskrivet ar blinder e molekul o c'hig,

diwar an derou eo tonket o buhez da vezañ treadenn ; dizoleiñ a ray traezhennoù lenkr ma ne gredo den lakaat e droad, melezourioù tanav, ansouezh ar bloavezhioù.

2 septembre 1977—Paris

Onze heures du matin au Champ de Mars
premiers jours ensoleillés de septembre 1977,
des pas de Japonais attentifs se reculant sans bruit sur
le gazon toutes caméras dressées visant la Tour,

faible—à cause de l'âge qui vient, à cause du café plat qu'ils servent à l'hôtel, à cause surtout de ma faiblesse de toujours quoi qu'ils aient pensé tous excepté une ou deux—

je pense à la faiblesse des faibles, à la faiblesse des poètes qui sont les plus faibles des hommes,

de naissance ils sont la faille, la paille, le point sensible, faiblesse inscrite dans les molécules de leur chair,

du tout début leur vie est destinée à être un reflux ; elle découvrira les plages lisses où personne n'osera poser le pied, minces miroirs, étonnement des années.

September 2, 1977—Paris

Eleven AM in the Champ de Mars gardens
the first sunny days of September 1977,
careful Japanese stepping back noiselessly on the lawn
all their cameras aimed at the Tower,

—infirm, because of approaching old age, because of the weak coffee they serve at the hotel, mainly because I have been infirm in spite of what was believed by all, except one or two,

I think of the infirmity of the infirm, of the infirmity of poets who are the most infirm of all people,

from the cradle they are frail, they are the flaw, the sore point, infirmity is inscribed in the molecules of their flesh,

from the beginning their life is fated to be an ebb-tide; it will show sleek beaches where no one will dare set foot, thin mirrors, wonder of the years.

March 25, 1980

Why so much seclusion in the veneration for wine? Because it does not harbor the least human noise. Seldom are works cured of their authors' faces, undefiled by the drivel of history. A poem, a crushed car, which is the wonder, the power of the compressor, or a wink from heaven? Wine extracts from man exactly what it needs to live and immediately spurns the artist's hands. Then it shines, bare, relieved, silent, clear—god.

Our paragon the vine grower, always a denier, from vine-pruning to lees-fining. His work done, off he goes.

May 5, 1980

Eyes that were nothing before the fountaineer look where we drank our being. For being is a matter of chance too, it emerges not only at the point of procreation, but on each day that light is shed. To breathe in its lasting gaze, the oceanic horizon surging between two hills at a bend in the vacation road—giving me being for the whole day.

I met the ebb, I meet the flow. An oak twig swinging gently with its four half-spread leaves is as charged with truth as the entire void, at the end of the ebb, is filled with joy.

May 17, 1980—Noirmoutier

Through the hotel window, masts swaying lazily. Across the street, the channel of the port. Why are we moved by boats? Because they emphasize the sea's presence. And by the sea? Because it makes evident the limit's mystery. The agony of mind is to ponder the world's limit—but the shore is the absolute limit, beginning of another mind.

Before I knew the world for the metaphysical scandal that it is, and having been educated by honest folk, I used to say that I did not

want to be party to the evil done throughout the world. You bet! Even then I stayed involved in the world's scandal.

To be the shore is the poet's privilege. The blind sun however knows neither world nor metaworld. Neither emotion, nor limit, not even poetry, its morganatic daughter. No road leads to it.

July 13, 1980

Raymond Dumay: "You will wonder when I say you have to suffer while drinking Château Margaux! . . . Moreover in the beginning it will not give you half the pleasure to be found in a nice rosé from Provence."

Writing is like wine. While the sun of successive drafts gravitates around the bottom of the night where it dwells, it sheds the first aromas of obviousness, closes up, and gives a wide berth to common understanding. It will not come and fetch you.

June 29, 1981

The dog rose overturned by the burden of its own shoots stands again, held up by a string. The herd of roses full-blown in the morning sun shakes all over while I tighten the last knot to the peg. Do not look further for the be-all and end-all, the base, the absolute beginning of things and acts, here it is: the dog rose fallen and erect again, history in its entirety.

June 7, 1982

The leafy oak sprig fluttering at your window is from a tree in paradise. A phone call attests to the thorough and everlasting fraternity. Like Eluard, you read liberty in the white sailing clouds.

And yet it is neither your life, nor the world, nor people that are given voice here. Inspiration lifts you, breathes into you the wind of joy, and you, flute. . .

Is it then an illusion of life, of the world, of people? Ah! I know you here for the man of knowledge you were trained to be. To give birth, that is what you are doing, inspiration as procreator. When you give birth, the leafy oak sprig is from a tree in paradise since the beginning.

October 25, 1983

The surface road: everyday drudgery broken by sulphur-mines blooming suddenly at three AM or at dawn—after coffee. Blazing faults telling of the thinner bark. And the deep road: the slow drifting, the collapse that rarifies being into an ogive where the sun resides, an arch of the bridge over the roaring. . . Ogive and bridge that will be before long only moldy scenery on the dump.

October 17, 1984

The red half-circle was fixed on the far edge of the ocean the instant I arrived in Lestreved. The whole expanse of water was steeled with white, glaring plates gliding ahead of the curling waves. Though they rolled swiftly toward the beach, they were the very image of all that is undoubted, unshaken. Then, clearly, I understood the origin of epics. What Homer first imitated was the ocean. Imitation springs from this union, from the confluence where my being and the ocean's being are two waters flowing in two beds so near that no living eye could make out more than a single vein.

September 11, 1986
—Paris, Boulevard Saint-Jacques

The trees cast their dapple-grey shadows on the clear ground of
the boulevard
(I'm staying on the 11th floor)
the walker seeks there a respite
from his business worries.

Your business anyhow is not to be the god with ten thousand
arms like so many words,
but to reside in the dappled shadows of the trees,
there you are, reduced to two dimensions,
moving slowly with the sun's progress,
drowning suddenly in a cloud's dark tide
with no other hope—in order to relieve your anxiety and make it
known—
than to write a page like this.

GUY ETIENNE
THE BRETON GAMBLE

(Translated from the French by Esther Allen)

The history of the Breton language can be summarized as 1500 years of alternating atrophy and revival, under circumstances which have rarely been favorable. Imported to Armorica from Great Britain between the 5th and 7th centuries, it was, during the 8th and 9th centuries, the most culturally developed of the Celtic languages, used as often as Latin in the monasteries. In the 10th century, at the time of the Norman occupation, it collapsed through the exodus of the ruling classes and the destruction of manuscripts. Another apogee was reached during the 15th and 16th centuries, with a well-codified literary language whose phonology, morphology, syntax and versification had been essentially preserved, but whose vocabulary was strongly influenced by French. At that point, two currents began to diverge: on the one hand, the dialects of the rural, illiterate communities, passively carrying along linguistic treasures which often waited three or four hundred years before being noticed and exploited, and on the other, the language spoken and written by literates and semi-literates, always bilingual, who took their subject matter from the cultural life of their era, as well as from the rich oratory of their own people. It is among these latter that a movement of reconstruction of the language can he traced from the 18th century into the present. This reconstruction was not carried out on the basis of the old literary language, but on the basis of the dialects. It replaced untimely borrowings from other languages by terms which were retrieved from the vernaculars, the history of the language, or even the sister language, Welsh, and it refined syntax and rationalized spelling. All of this permitted the flowering of a literature which was at first imprisoned in the organic relationship of writers to the traditional society (religious magazines, works of vulgarization, plays, novels, didactic poetry). After the first world war and the disappearance of the rural public (for whom editions of more than 20,000 copies had been common), it undertook its first modern literary project, emancipated from regionalism, bringing to the fifty readers who made up its original public the masterpieces of world literature, and publishing works by poets and prose writers which were in their turn translated into English, German, the other Celtic languages, and French. After World War II, this neo-Breton

moves from the realm of literature into everyday life. Some young couples choose to bring up their children in the language. The objective now is for the public schools not only to teach the language, but to teach in the language all classes from primary school to the university. A lexical explosion takes place, wherein neology takes precedence over borrowing, and thousands of new terms are born every year. The movement benefits from a change in public opinion which, indifferent or hostile during the second quarter of the century, suddenly takes up the cause of the Breton language like a banner. Elected officials of all stripes make it a point of honor to grant subventions to bilingual kindergartens and primary schools, and banks promise their support for scholarly editions. The phenomenon takes place, nonetheless, on a very minor scale. The last dialects are vanishing in a society which has been completely taken over by French, and the number of people who have made Breton their everyday mode of speech is estimated at not more than a few hundred.

Who can say why young people, at each generation, devote their lives to a language that is practically extinct? The young people themselves? But the motives they allege are unconvincing, even contradictory. "It is simply because of an order by one of my superiors," says one of them, "to help, by this means, our young monks and several zealous clergymen of the country translate their French sermons into Breton, so as to preach to the people of the lower province, most of whom do not speak the French language, but who, nonetheless, avidly thirst for the Word of God." Thus did Father Grégoire de Rostrenen explain, in 1792, the motivation for his *Dictionnaire français-celtique ou français-breton*, a work which was in fact aimed at reunifying the vocabularies of the various dialects, and which abounded in terms that were either archaic or taken from the Welsh, all of them just as unknown to the "people of the lower province" as French. The precaution was useful, given that the Church in Brittany has constantly taken umbrage at the quasi-linguistic priesthood in which it sees its servants engage themselves. Father Rostrenen's ruse parallels the oaths of allegiance to France that have been sworn by other cultural militants suspected of autonomism. The justifications proffered by those not held back by fear of Church or State almost always come down to ethnocentrism, be it romantic, nationalist, proletarian or ecologist. The theses formulated by observers are hardly more satisfying. For a certain sociologist, it represents the revindication of an identity menaced by the modern world through translation into a neo-archaism; for a certain psychologist, a return by the repressed person following the trauma which stifled the maternal language. These explanations do account for one aspect of the reality: certainly there exist in Brittany, as in other places, people who have not emerged well from the traditional world of the past and who venerate, with resentment, its vestiges, including the last dialects. But what can be said of the children who for fifty years have

been the first to use neo-Breton as their everyday language, and whose parents, born in the cities, often cannot point to a single speaker of Breton among their ancestors for centuries back? Nothing: none of it can be understood as long as the language is understood as a lost object to be found or as a patrimony to be preserved. Breton owes the fact that it is still here, against all historical logic, not to those who guard it, but to those who make it, those for whom its presence matters less than its possibilities, and its possibilities *as* a language matter less than what is made possible *by* the language.

I can think of only one other phenomenon that is as resistant to explanation: poetry. This is not a coincidence. What makes a language live? The fact, doubtless, of being spoken. But, more essentially, the inadequacy which compels its speakers to reinvent it at every moment. Between the abyss of a language's fundamental impotence experienced by the poet, and the gaps that every speaker tries to minimize in his or her everyday discourse, there is only a difference of degree. The same wind blows over them, they appeal to the same *poiein*. Ultimately, the life of a language is the poetry which operates deep within it. An example: In 1965, French borrowed the words *hardware* and *software* from American English and, in 1974, replaced them with *matériel* and *logiciel*. How should this lexical fabrication—while other languages made do with the American words—be interpreted? As a reactionary chauvinism? Or as a creation, a *poiêse*, pushing off from the American into a leap towards originality, with innumerable unexpected results: *progiciel* (software package), *ludiciel* (computer game), *logimétrie*, a whole new lineage of words and thought taking root, a *poem* within the fabric of the language? Another example, this one from Breton (what an occasion for poetry when a language has to cover several centuries in a few decades!): François Vallée (1860-1949), initiator of the modern Breton neology—but who was prudent enough to pass off his innovations as restorations—explained, in the 1920s, the opposition between the adjectival suffixes *-el* and *-ek* as an opposition between extension and comprehension. "*Doueelezh* is 'divinity' in the sense of the nature of God; *doueegezh*, formed from *doueek*, one who has something of 'god,' of the 'divine,' thus means 'divinity,' the 'divine' in people. Mirabeau's celebrated apostrophe: 'There is no divinity in you, Barnave!' could be rendered with great precision into Breton by: *'N'eus ket a zoueegezh* (sic) *ennout!'*" (*Grand dict. fr.-br.*, 1931). The opposition existed in a diffused, isolated way in Breton as it exists in other languages (French: *pondéral/pondéreux*). But no one before Vallée had privileged it to the point of giving it concrete expression in the language's morphology, making it a significant function and a basis for thought. Once stated, it was welcomed as an indispensable enrichment by speakers of Breton, who began to use it as if it had been part of the language's body from time

immemorial. A singular performance gave rise to the formation of a new competence. To speak a language is to reorient it continually and permanently: here or there something emerges within it in the same way a poem is made. The poet, too, circles around the poem in progress until the instant in which he or the feels it to be finished. And this feeling signals the achievement of the competence whose inaugural performance is the poem.

Spoken language, written language? Can one go without the other? A language which is only spoken has no existence outside of the group which speaks it. A language only written dies from lack of social nourishment. For a century, Breton has had to navigate between these two dangers. The dialects of the 19th century benefited from the stability of the rural areas where they were spoken and, to a certain extent, from the influence of literates, principally the clergy, who were themselves influenced by the literary language which was in the process of being unified. It is clear to us, *a posteriori*, that this configuration was historically condemned, and in any case ethically condemnable. I will explain: The dialect speaker's relationship with the exterior world functioned by assimilation or rejection. Either speakers of dialects repulsed the culture of the cities and the bearers of that culture—which was, for the Church, the culture born from the Revolution—or else they assimilated themselves to it by denying their own culture. The dialect's mode of speech was a code integrated into the ensemble of social codes; there was no gap between the structures of speech and social structures; to infringe on the rules of speech was to undermine morality; a free language led to dissolute morals. The space of speech and the space of society were one; from this came the localism of the spoken dialects and the weakness of their geolinguistic cohesion: each of the tribes that were the parishes tended to possess its own sub-dialect. French exerted its pressure not through borrowed words, but by breaking and entering: local forms were juxtaposed with forms from outside, and the stratum of speech which was linked to modern life first confined the archaic stratum to private interactions and then eliminated it. So, in the case we are looking at, there is not a relationship of species to genre in accordance with the classic definition of dialect as "the local form of a language." The contemporary authors who love to move their readers to nostalgia over the lost paradise of the traditional world neglect to mention the chasm that separates them from it, the intellectual liberty acquired by leaving it behind, and, above all, the acquisition of a language which enables them to talk about it. For the existence of a language implies a separation between speech and society; a language has its own, isotropic, unlimited space, emancipated from geography, determined only by the free circulation of its words. Speakers of a language experience a relationship of identification and differentiation. They establish the unity of their mode of speech in the

mirror of other languages. The creators of French identified their dialect with Latin, and the more they identified it, the more it was differentiated first from Latin, then from itself, to become, in its turn, a language. This emergence of one language by pushing off from another is also at the origin of English, German. . .and Breton. It was by identifying their dialects with French that the pioneers of Breton differentiated them from it and differentiated from these dialects a newborn language, free from localism and unified (to the scandal of regionalists who denounced it as an attack on "the sacred language of our fathers"). The most solid criterion of a language is that its speakers maintain a distance from it, a relationship of foreignness which guarantees the independence of their speech.

The turmoil of the first world war precipitated the degradation of the dialects and deprived traditional literates of their clientele. The handful of intellectuals who took over and pushed the language into a qualitative leap forward found themselves dramatically cut off from the mass of Breton speakers. All of them were writers and it was not until after the second world war that modern Breton became a spoken language. Despite the small official existence it has achieved (road signs, deliberations of elected officials) the question remains: does neo-Breton have any chance of carving out a place for itself in this world? It is improbable. But, I would add, in the same way that poetry is improbable. The lives of languages—contemporary history does not contradict this—are completely unpredictable. As a social fact, the language depends on politics and economics. As a poetic fact, it is an opening to all possibilities.

One of Marina Tsvetaeva's phrases is her time gathered into a gaze—a crystal which agitates the entirety of my time, gathers it into a gaze, incontestably mine, and hers by a passage beyond being, a filiation, a jubilant disappropriation. I first wrote this in Breton. Where I say *time (temps)* I first put *hoalt*, or "duration of life"—each term is inadequate in a different way, each demands poetry from the reader to reduce the gap. To learn a language is to learn poetry; they are one and the same.

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DONALD REVELL
THREE POEMS

THE LESSON OF THE CLASSICS

The remaining oracles were obscene,
like unfolding a towel and finding maggots there
and the next moment a detonation of green

flies. So many sexual martyrs had tied
machinery to their sallow backs, their weedy
shoulders, hoping monstrousness might revise

the brutal logarithm of excess
tenderness, of man and woman with a daughter
who must die, of government that must undress

the condemned in open court before they die.
The love of honor became murder.
Human, purposeful embraces at night

became machinery on a martyr's back.
If you have a family, starve them.
If your passport lies open on the desk

of a stranger, man or woman it makes no difference,
your life ended an hour ago.
There on the desk, your inverted face

in the passport photo sobs and twists
farewell as if it were already on fire.
If you have a daughter, you kissed

her for the last time an hour ago.
They are strapping something to her back,
the shape of an olive tree, the size of snow.

Her infant spittle beads like mercury
on the temple pavement. She is an oracle,
the nude, last sibyl of many victories.

AND NOTHING BUT

It is a white train
sees and makes it darker.
Oh sustain it.
I am in the wires.

What happens in the light of institutions remains profound, though pleased too easily. The message and the man's head fingered in soap scum fade at one distance, at the same speed. Will later drown himself in Paris, in the yellow of institutions, pared down to a single holocaust fluorescent pipe.

Mister
unsaid goes to the grave,
then everything.
The use of talking
is vocable in nightmare,
perhaps only there.

An American life in five acts and an assassination. I hear the conversation filter up to my apartment. We remember the twentieth century as a tunnel of screens and filters. At the end, we were pure and indistinguishable from the next man, nothing to do with yellow cipher afloat in Paris. I just ran through my photographs to see.

The rain a much finer net
belongs to the past.
The calendar of flowers,

abyss all that you can find,
does not understand
such a reproach
such lewdness.

Her clinic is her red mane. Something filtered through her skin onto mine. The life instead of a life glides, glides, the unwanted child always the most histrionic. No more surprising than the leaves fall, sky empties at the last when the air is flawless. I am in the wires.

ANNIVERSARY OF MANY CITIES

Darkness undrew the air where it was naked,
poppy and dramaturge, flower and firebomb.
Too much innocence survived.
Something remnant, twilight without end
on the receding cockpits, tainted
the alcohol of orphancy. Every wall
was a shafthouse, every plume of smoke a woman
lewdly photographed by her kinsmen.

I live on credit.
I love a man, and he is meat.
I love a woman, and she is red hair,
a plume of smoke who loves me longer.
All over Europe, restorations proceed
and make a sound exactly nothing, a tone
between a whine and a detonation.

Whoever minted the coin of total war
made everything else worthless, counterfeit.
Take it to the madhouse or take it to bed,
it is still war. Getting and spending
are war. Because there is no such thing
as immortality, sufficient unto the day
are its casualties.
What does not die deserves to live.

PAM REHM

VASES AND ARRANGEMENTS

I.

the first rung of the ladder
it is the unbedding of the always

yet how much I haven't forgiven you
your continuous page work your pigeon

ignorance hurt in night set in
what arrives returned from a trapping trip

returned, presumed to cook this
delighted rare Good morning

the keys don't let me in
and why the blanket you ask

pulled close what is hiding
the breath with everything pushed

together skin something out
let the heart know a purpose

the why a bruise takes attention to
heal

II.

there was something in your letter
where I couldn't find you my
all cold passion 6:15 need to go
to the bathroom my sadness is that an
introduction has left me in care of a

person I lock myself to attend
neglected food what it didn't taste now
is like a dream something wrong there where
I can't be going to clear set clear not
spores obviously medicine image unabridged
expense account I was once sadder wanting
for someone else's happiness

III.

the street walk rush and time
on the way to being an appointment

just got here and the rain walking and
so what if I'm no poet that I have

all this resistance to put
down something other than my head

to bed and this rain and wash drawing
damp and the hers always telling

each other things about what's going on in
someone else's life not the right way

of the story everyone becomes a picture
in the imagination of someone they

don't know so tell me why what is this
special need and pierced lipness

why do we make ourselves into gods
so wanting a thought we think deserves

our silence give me a break I don't
want the tensions and the secrets and

misconceptions and stories that haven't
happened the exaggerations the

games what is all this
anyway the extension is what I want

to be held out of small causes

JOHANNA DRUCKER

SUSAN BEE: ARCANE PAINTING

A quality of enigma is produced in Susan Bee's paintings which is the combined effect of a reduced vocabulary of iconic forms existing in tension with the rich textures of the highly worked painterly surface. Her imagery condenses into an array of icons—vases, birds, heads, figures, and mass-produced decals—all of which are compellingly available to reading as metaphors. But the intensity of her painted surfaces continually emphasizes that these works are investigations of problems in *painting*. Eschewing the classical goals of *solutions* or resolutions, Bee permits her work to remain engaged with process, change, and mutability.

In nearly twenty years of professional activity, Susan Bee has gone through a variety of stylistic and thematic evolutions. She was born and raised in New York City and is co-editor of the feminist-oriented art critical journal *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* (which she co-founded with Mira Schor in 1986). As an artist and graphic designer, she has made photoworks, collages, artist's books and book covers, as well as paintings. The paintings presented here were all produced in the last five years. Offering a range of approaches which may ultimately be seen as sharply defined facets of a totality, the work coheres from painting to painting as a series of tangential or oblique moves within the total *oeuvre* which is clearly marked by changes in treatment of surface as well as by the reorientation of thematic concerns. Recognizing that each piece represents a particular problem in realizing an image through the working of pigment on surface—and that setting such problems is part of the challenge Bee has set for herself—allows the seemingly irreconcilable differences among her works to be understood within a unified practice. Links in iconography are readily apparent across the whole of her work, and the synthetic dynamic of the two aspects (iconography/paint) embodies the fundamental issue of painting—the relation between imagery and surface, the readable image and the phenomenological visuality of the work.

Scraped, dripped, glazed, impastoed, crayoned—the surfaces of these paintings display the full range of painterly possibilities. Rather than adopt a *style* of painting in which the paint is relegated to a particular mode or treatment, Bee forces her stylistic parameters to include any and all

possibilities. As a result the surfaces are extremely varied: from nearly transparent glazes sitting on the surface of the canvas, to the thickly encrusted impasto embodying layers of accrued activity—the record of decisions, revisions, and continual efforts to define the image out of the basic material of pigment in oil. Erasure also plays a significant part in the record of experience whose history results in these final surfaces, the scraped-out-rubbed-and-painted-over attempt to remove and obliterate an image whose trace persists in the palimpsest remains. The only mode of working which does *not* show up here is that which effaces itself. There are no slick, flat, unmarked surfaces and no glib *trompe l'oeil* illusions in these paintings: they are all about *work*, about *craft*, the hand, the brush, the knife, and about paint as a *physical*—not merely visual—material.

In one of the earliest paintings included here, *Otranto*, (1985), a classical influence is clearly displayed not only in the Piero inspired head but also in the academic nude, drawn from a figure study, reproduced in the well-drawn manner of a long-standing tradition. Floating unanchored in an indeterminate green space, "emptied out to allow light and air into the painting," these images detach themselves and fix the eye with the insistent autonomy of emblems. Characteristic of Bee's work, these images ask to be read, seem to offer themselves to that linguistic play which attempts to fix the meaning of the visual in some verbal equivalent, while the quality of elusiveness which prevents such fixing depends upon their visual aspect. Head to body, man to woman, masculine principle of dominance to feminine principle of submission, part to whole, presence to absence—or fixed male to free floating female—expressionless face to emotive body—the categories of association are numerous. But the minimalism of this image, its *reduced* diminution of means, pushes to extreme the sense of both inherent meaning and resistance to its determination.

From this most minimal of works to the more maximal involves not merely a leap in terms of *degree* of information to be reckoned with, but in terms of the types and categories of visual information offered up in the diverse panoply of canvases. *Mr. Bugs Goes to Town*, (1983-85), for instance, wrenches the uncomfortable imagery of Fleischer brothers cartoons into conflict with the simple terms of a normative figuration, a monster insect whose synthetic features confront aesthetic tradition with the same relentless harshness as its stinger exerts on the diminished female figure receiving its punitive assault. These images do not belong in the same world or work. The bug's fabricated fantastic mode is impossible in the same space as the delicately poised pair whose personal enigma is already staged within other terms—her being on the chair, his addressing us from the canvas—a question posed, poised, awaiting resolution, which is forever and immediately deferred by the graphic activity of the insect, the

stinging action splattering its violent effect all over the scene in an act of fatal disruption. Types of images may be in conflict as well as elements within an image; and the conflicts thus inscribed bear no translation, they remain insistently coded according to the visual means by which the discrete elements obtain their identity. These elements "form a narrative, tell a story, though a wacky, possibly enigmatic, unresolved one," as Bee puts it. The conflicts sustained in these images are of this order: a conflict of types, of categories, of visual codes, conventions and traditions.

But all is not conflict: there is another form of *a*logic which obtains in certain of these works, such as *Evasive Vases*, (1988), which partakes of the more familiar conventions of the surrealist mode. Here the fragmentary parts (which could be traced in Bee's work from an earlier activity, at least to the group of works she calls "flood paintings" from the late 1970s in which elements were detached and floating, overwhelmed by the rush of strokes which cascaded as the racing tides of a watery field around them) are carefully, seamlessly combined into new forms. The vase as vessel as mother as daughter as womb as one to be filled the other to be emptied works its motifs through conventions which necessarily invoke their reading as "an animated still-life" in a Jungian psychoanalytic mode, one in which the various possibilities for the literal image are played out through its figurative associations.

The visual problems set in Bee's recent works revolve around the presence of the decals, whose synthetic peculiarities push the issues posed by *Mr. Bugs* to another level. Innocuous images, sweet in the artificial mode of cancerous substitutes, innocent in accord with the repressed violence of commercial production, these fatuous pieces of cliched visual culture refuse to be accommodated by the traditions of oil painting at even its Pop extreme. In a sinister manner these icons, at once banal and nightmarishly threatening, betray their easy consumption through subversive means. In *Plummeting Pheasant* a Raggedy Ann wears the dismembered wing of the free-falling pheasant like a child's wild Indian headdress, grabbed with abandon and flung onto her head with careless and complete disregard for its effect or consequences. The pheasant, its streamlined body robbed of the means of flight, falls endlessly, swiftly, through a turbulent atmosphere. In no world is this a right image: violent, monstrous, and at the same time, decorative, its contradictions are not merely internal, formal ones, but project outward to the realm in which these elements may be produced to exist in the same world while their frames of reference are so impossibly at odds.

There is an effect of cancelling which takes place when the icons of mass-produced culture combine with the personal iconography of painting. The decal paintings, even more than the earlier synthetic, fragmented works of Susan Bee, insist upon the visual fact of these conflicted relations

among elements of contemporary culture. The unacceptable character of the decals, their very evident *not belonging* to the world of paint, pushes the problems of their presence not only in these paintings but as the central focus of the works, to a critical extreme. Either they are there and the painting activity which surrounds them is incidental, not there, to be cancelled, or they are not there, and the painting activity is to be integrated around their absence. To support the two activities in one visual space is to support a conceptual contradiction through visual means which is almost impossible to recognize, let alone sustain.

Another feature of the decal paintings is their insistent relation to *taste* which has been an active feature of art practice since Pop Art and the subsequent East Village art scene. In a work like *Monster Mitt* (1990), the boundaries of taste are pushed into that kitschy, tacky, childhood domain associated with the work of artists such as Jeff Koons, Mike Kelley and Donald Baechler. While Bee was never a part of the East Village scene, her sensibility draws simultaneously on many of the same categories of aesthetic investigation: the "bad taste" quoting of mass-produced work, an appropriation—and appreciation—of commercially made folk-faux-naive images which still causes shivers of discomfort in those viewers who harbor (secretly or no) residual strains of an old high art set of aesthetic values. Bee goes beyond the mere appropriation of these kitsch elements—cartoon figures in particular—and consistently endows each with a persona, a character, a role to play in the theatrically staged narratives of her invention. Thus the post-Pop imagery of a Kenny Scharf or Julie Wachtel, though echoed, is taken out of the realm of mere image/icon pattern in Bee's work, and the figures charged with the scenario tensions of precisely scripted *dramatis personae.* But this pushing against boundaries places Bee squarely among those artists who continually challenge the viability of defending a border determining an "inside" or "outside" to what is currently defined as "art"—and to the modernist's legacy (legislation) against kitsch.

Bee's work also harks back to certain artists she cites as models, if not actual influences: the threatening quality of *Monster Mitt,* despite its whimsy, recalls the dark forebodings of Ryder, Fuseli, Redon, Hartley, De Chirico and the late Guston. Her work displays this Symbolist legacy, in its supersaturation of values, overdetermined resonance of the iconic imagery, dreamlike, enigmatic, almost alchemical in its manipulated combinations. Again, there are particular qualities which distinguish Bee's work from that of either predecessors or contemporaries: the images are always about interactions, about the space of exchange *between* character/icons: as in *Monster Mitt* where the possessed looking hound, his bland sweet face surrounding the hot, blank holes of his eyes, is held continually suspended in his green egg chamber, vibrating with violet, above the heated orange

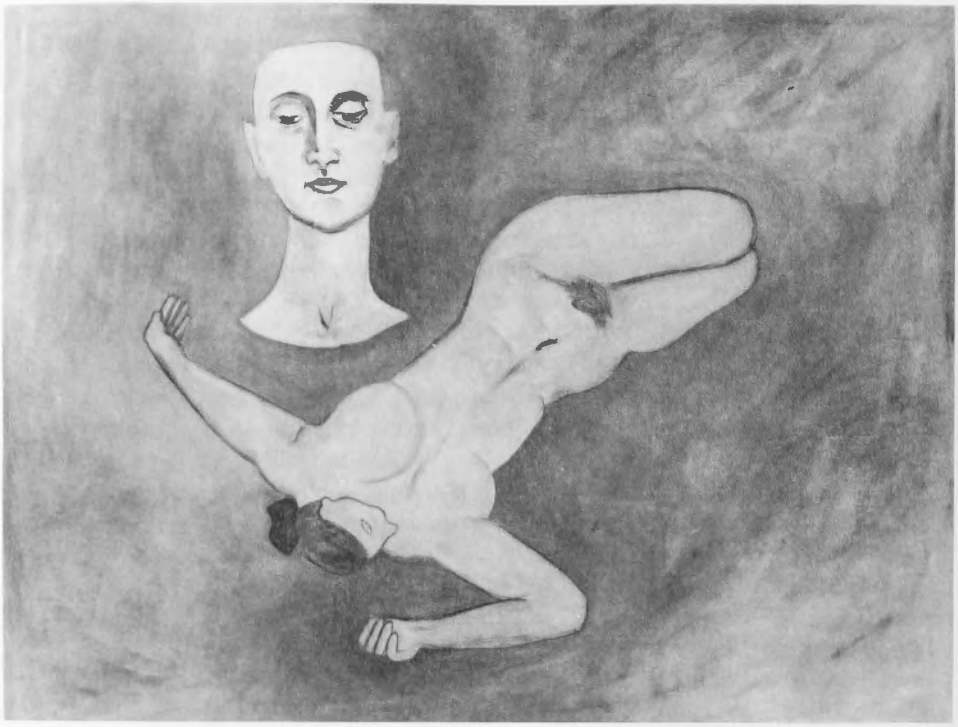
ellipse containing our sweet Raggedy Ann, who demurely displays her skirt in the socially coded gesture of the childishly feminine. Issues of gender weave through Bee's *oeuvre*, but as they are embedded in the lived narratives of social roles and exchanges. The insidious character of conversations proceeds from the assumed positions assigned to women/men in the shifting scheme of things. Her feminism is neither polemical nor orthodox, but like the rest of her thematics and imagery, unassignable to a simple category where it might rest comfortably labelled.

Artificial silk flowers serve to collage the Symbolist fascination with blooms onto the suggestive surface of the works *Trellis* (1989) and *Two Women* (1990). Here the lyrical movement of forms through female bodies and floral motifs revives the style of late 19th-century pre-Raphaelite work. In fact Bee used 19th-century models for these paintings—a Courbet work and then a piece of engraved clip art—which determined their compositional arrangement. But the painting quality, even the shift of the palette into softer faded roses, aqua, teal and violets is consistent with that sensibility and its overtly feminized forms and tones. The flowers affixed to these canvases, plastic, silk, cloth, the stuff of dime stores and floral display, achieve a poetic lyricism which contradicts their crass mass produced origins, again forcing the issue of paint and object, visual ontology and iconographic reference, into interesting territory. Or, as Bee comments, "The blatantly false flowers also undermine the romanticism adding a sardonic, ironic, or sarcastic layer to the saccharine sweetness of the portrayals of 19th-century women." Here the issue is resolution, rather than its impossibility: the flowers are recuperated by their capacity to be part of the image as well as existing in a space, real space, which separates them from it.

In sum, then, the means which Bee disposes into the making of her works necessarily requires that the critical assessment and investigation be equally flexible, polymorph and varied in its capacity to reckon with the issues posed by her practice. These works all share an arcane quality, a resistant hieroglyphic imagery which by its reductive formal definition permits any number of possible readings. Not fixed by set horizons, or locked into readily available narrative readings or conventional arrangements of still lifes, genre paintings, or figure groupings, the paintings make use of the recognizable imagery of each of these genres within a continually inventive struggle with manners of painterly (and now *not* painterly) production. Sometimes the images come first, and sometimes the painting evokes the images. This ambiguity, this sitting on the fence between the figurative image and the painting activity remains visible in the final product, those replete surfaces which seem encoded with the transformation from deep structure suggestion to surface icon. Guided by humor and a whimsical character, these paintings retain all their contradictory impulses,

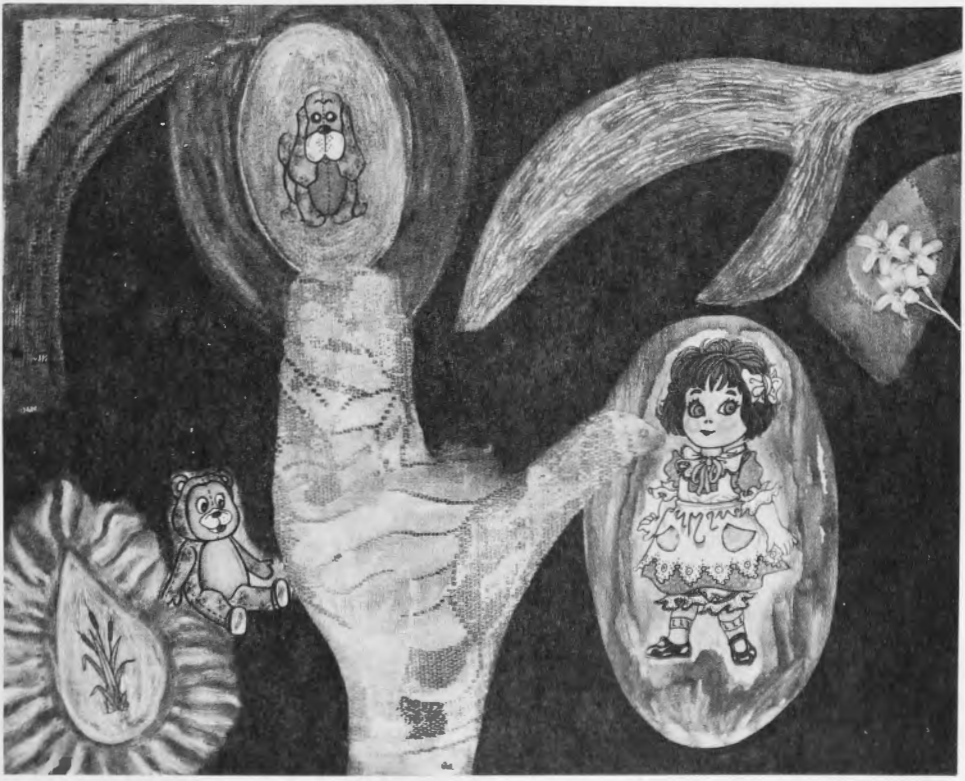
their irreconcilable oppositions, their passages of lyrical synthesis and happy accident. These works are a contemporary and veritable pastiche of elements whose textures and images draw on the full range of visual possibilities from the arcane, the academic, the banal, and the vernacular. Layered into/onto surfaces which paint into and out of the irreconcilable differences present in that broad spectrum of visual imagery, they reveal a highly personal inclination betraying its idiosyncratic character at every stroke, the humor and peculiar intelligence of a painter willing to entertain all manner of contradiction in the full pleasure of her engagement with the activity of painting.

SUSAN BEE
SIX PAINTINGS



OTRANTO

40" x 50", Oil on Canvas, 1984
(photo credit: Adam Reich)



MONSTER MITT

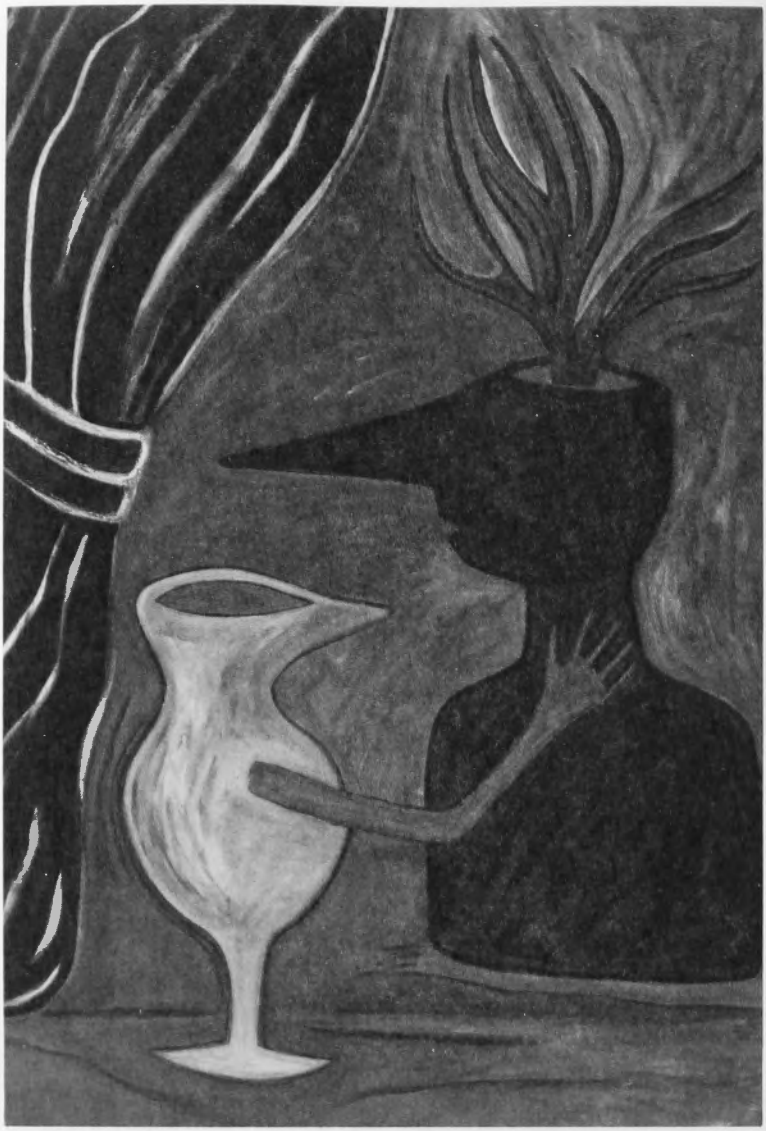
16" x 20", Oil & Collage on Linen, 1990
(photo credit: Pelka/Noble Photography)

TWO WOMEN

30" x 24", Oil & Collage on Linen, 1990
(photo credit: Pelka/Noble Photography)

MR. BUGS GOES TO TOWN

24" x 36", Oil on Canvas, 1983–85
(photo credit: Pelka/Noble Photography)



EVASIVE VASES

52" x 36", Oil on Linen, 1988
(photo credit: Pelka/Noble Photography)

PLUMMETING PHEASANT

36" x 34", Oil & Collage on Linen, 1990
(photo credit: Pelka/Noble Photography)

CHRIS STROFFOLINO

NOT NEVER, BUT NOT NOW

If things are only what they seem, I never think
Unless we feel. If lake CHARGOGGAGOGGMANCHAUGGAG—
OGGCHAUBUNAGUNGAMAUGG is a mirage, it's okay that
Sex is masturbation and, like a teacher who doesn't
Lose his job for being liked by the students he
Wouldn't give A's to, you don't have to spread
Yourself thin to be both most real and most interesting.

If words were not imported, the daughter of the nectarine
Would be a peach, the son of a beach the desert of selves,
The land someone who can't swim (but that doesn't mean
He can walk) first mistakes for water, shells no longer
Hollow enough to hear the ocean in. A wire mesh mother
Feeds the formula of ideas purged of stories I'd have
To make to find—much to the dismay of those who think
The only way to kill their hatred is to kill their enemy.

If I am really you, then you're not really me. . .
The non-resident President feels the ceiling's the sky
And, like a chef who's glad he's not allowed to eat
His own food, becomes a country looking outward
Into what's more his than his eyes because to possess it
You must kill it and I'm not going out of my way to need you.

A mouse pokes its head out from "its" hiding place
To see if the cat of what it names
Has been scared away by the elephant of fear.
It's hot, but that doesn't mean it's soup.
It's made of something, but takes no longer
To get cold than it does to figure out what.

It's quicker to say it doesn't matter (when you
Mean it's okay), to turn your back, and let
The jewels that presumably only exist when
You look over your cold shoulder go batty
In the twilight someone so far behind you
He's before you, just out of sight, would not
Want to steal; not never, but not now.

"Can one live in desire without having
To sleep in the streets?" is what silence
Certainly asks, the box not bothering breaking.
It fears the stories are naked. It fears
It's wrong at last, that nature only goes so far,
That there'd be no drums without compact discs
It looks back on what's given,
Placing movement in what looks,
Wearing rubbers but forgetting its umbrella
And listens to the Conductor announcing
"We'll be late due to the train ahead"
And can only wish he said "We'll be early
Because of what's behind."

Put it on the backburner, if the flood
Isn't the only thing that drives you
Out of your mind. Neither eyeing nor eating
Will make the fruit riper so that anticipation
Can become reflecting, though the horse become
The cart can't make you water, or thinner.
It's a matter of positioning gulping down
The difference between a lover and a friend
Felt as the difference between a boat and an anchor
Until the boat is used as an anchor
And you take a night job 'cause it's cheaper than China.

A musician is not the government when
The possibility that the drug is only
Making him *feel* he sounds better
Does not prevent him from actually playing better
Nor the possibility there's no progress

Prevent him from the passion without which
He'd think he was falling behind.

Double standards divide us from the dying.
How much more justified is he who says
That he can only be empowered if he empowers
Than he who converts to Judaism so as to
Get away with being Anti-Semitic?
Feeling is the antenna of the race,
Oft unacknowledged for it needs a radio
As much as a station, but then I don't
Believe for a minute that if someone took
My ears away that I could no longer talk.

BLAISE CENDRARS

THE ABCs OF CINEMA; *from* THE END OF THE WORLD FILMED BY THE ANGEL OF NOTRE DAME

(Translated from the French by Esther Allen, with Monique Chefdor)

THE ABCS OF CINEMA

Cinema. Whirlwind of movement in space. Everything falls. The sun falls. We fall in its wake. Like a chameleon, the human mind camouflages itself, camouflaging the universe. The world. The globe. The two hemispheres. Leibniz' monads and Schopenhauer's representation. My will. The cardinal hypotheses of science end in a sharp point and the four calculators cumulate. Fusion. Everything opens up, tumbles down, blends in today, caves in, rises up, blossoms. Honor and money. Everything changes. Change. Morality and political economy. New civilization. New humanity. The digits have created an abstract, mathematical organism, useful gadgets, intended to serve the senses' most vulgar needs, and that are the brain's most beautiful projection. Automatism. Psychism. New commodities. Machines. And it is the machine which recreates and displaces the sense of direction, and which finally discovers the sources of sensibility like the explorers Livingston, Burton, Speke, Grant, Baker, and Stanley, who located the sources of the Nile. But it is an anonymous discovery to which no name can be attached. What a lesson! And what do the celebrities and the stars matter to us! A hundred worlds, a thousand movements, a million dramas simultaneously enter the range of the eye with which cinema has endowed man. And, though arbitrary, this eye is more marvelous than the multi-faceted eye of a fly. The brain is overwhelmed by it. An uproar of images. Tragic unity is displaced. We learn. We drink. Intoxication. Reality no longer makes any sense. It has no significance. Everything is rhythm, word, life. No more need to demonstrate. We are in communion. Focus the lens on the hand, the corner of the mouth, the ear, and drama emerges, expands on a background of luminous mystery. Already there is no more need for dialogue, soon characters will he judged useless. At high speed the life of flowers is Shakespearean; all of classicism is present in the slow motion flexing of biceps. On screen the slightest effort becomes painful, musical, and insects and microbes look like our most illustrious contemporaries. Eternity in the ephemeral. Gigantism. It is granted an aesthetic

value which it has never had before. Utilitarianism. Theatrical drama, its situation, its devices, becomes useless. Attention is focussed on the sinister lowering of the eyebrows. On the hand covered with criminal callouses. On a bit of fabric which bleeds continually. On a watch-fob which stretches and swells like the veins at the temples. Millions of hearts stop beating at the same instant in all the capitals of the world and gales of laughter rack the countryside in far-flung villages. What is going to happen? And why is the material world impregnated with humanity? To such a point! What potential! Is it an explosion or a Hindu poem? Chemistries blend and dissolve. The least pulsation germinates and bears fruit. Crystallizations come to life. Ecstasy. Animals, plants and minerals are ideas, emotions, digits. A number. As in the Middle Ages, the rhinoceros is Christ; the bear, the devil; jasper, vivacity; chrysoprase, pure humility. 6 and 9. We see our brother the wind and the ocean is an abyss of men. And this is not abstract, obscure and complicated symbolism, it is part of a living organism that we startle, flush out, pursue, and which had never before been seen. Barbaric evidence. Sensitive depths in an Alexandre Dumas drama, a detective novel or a banal Hollywood film. Over the audience's heads, the luminous cone quivers like a cetacean. Characters, beings and things, subjects and objects stretch out from the screen in the hearth of the magic lantern. They plunge, turn, chase each other, encounter each other with fatal, astronomical precision. A beam. Rays. The prodigious thread of a screw from which everything is whirled in a spiral. Projection of the fall of the sky. Space. Captured life. Life of the depths. Alphabet. Letter. ABC. Sequence and close-up. *What is ever seen is never seen.** What an interview! "When I began to take an interest in cinematography, film was a commercial and industrial novelty. I've put all my energies into expanding it and raising it to the level of a human language. My only merit consists in having been able to find the first two letters of this new alphabet which is still far from complete: the *cut-back** and the *close-up**," David Wark Griffith, the world's foremost director declares to me. "Art at the movies? Great Art?" responds Abel Gance, France's foremost director, to a journalist who came to watch him at work in Nice. "Perhaps we could have made it that from the beginning. But first we had to learn the visual alphabet ourselves, before speaking and believing in our power; then we had to teach this elementary language." Carlyle wanted to trace the origin of the modern world back to the legendary founder of the city of Thebes, to Cadmus. As he imported the Phoenician alphabet into Greece, Cadmus invented writing and the book. Before him, writing, mnemonic, ideographic or phonetic, was always pictorial—from prehistoric man to the Egyptians, from the drawings which grace the walls of stone-age caves to hieroglyphics, the hieratic, traced on

* In English in the original.

stone tablets, or the demotic, painted on ceramics, by way of the pictographs used by Eskimos and Australian aborigines, the Red Skins' colorful tattoos and the embroidery on Canadian wampum, the ancient Mayans' decorative quipus and the burls of the forest tribes of central Africa, the Tibetan, Chinese and Korean calligrammes—writing, even cuneiform writing, was above all else an aid to memory, a memorial to a sacred initiation: autocratic, individual. Then comes the black marketeer Cadmus, the magus, the magician, and immediately writing becomes an active, living thing, the ideal democratic nourishment, and the common language of the spirit. FIRST WORLD REVOLUTION. Human activity redoubles, intensifies. Greek civilization spreads. It embraces the Mediterranean. Commercial conquest and the literary life go hand in hand. The Romans engrave their history on copper or pewter plates. There's a library in Alexandria. The Apostles and the Holy Fathers write on parchment. Propaganda. Finally, painting interpenetrates the Christian world and, during the 14th century, Jan van Eyck of Bruges invents oil painting. Adam and Eve, naked. SECOND WORLD REVOLUTION. In 1438, Korster prints with wood blocks in Harlem. Six years later, Jean Gensfleisch, known as Gutenberg, invents the mobile letter, and thirteen years later Schoeffer casts that letter in metal. With Caxton, printing intensifies. There is a deluge of books. Everything is reprinted and translated, the monastic missals and the writings of the ancients. Sculpture, drama and architecture are reborn. Universities and libraries proliferate. Christopher Columbus discovers a new world. Religion splits in two. There is much general progress in commerce. Industry constructs boats. Fleets open up faraway markets. The antipodes exist. Nations are formed. People emigrate. New governments are founded on new principles of liberty and equality. Education becomes democratic and culture refined. Newspapers appear. The whole globe is caught in a network of tracks, of cables, of lines—overland lines, maritime lines, air lines. All the world's peoples are in contact. The wireless sings. Work becomes specialized, above and below. THIRD WORLD REVOLUTION. And here's Daguerre, a Frenchman, who invents photography. Fifty years later, cinema was born. Renewal! Renewal! Eternal Revolution. The latest advancements of the precise sciences, world war, the concept of relativity, political convulsions, everything foretells that we are on our way toward a new synthesis of the human spirit, toward a new humanity and that a race of new men is going to appear. Their language will be the cinema. Look! The pyrotechnists of Silence are ready. The image is at the primitive sources of emotion. Attempts have been made to capture it behind outmoded artistic formulas. Finally the good fight of white and black is going to begin on all the screens in the world. The floodgates of the new language are open. The letters of the new primer jostle each other, innumerable. Everything becomes possible! The Gospel of Tomorrow, the Spirit of

Future Laws, the Scientific Epic, the Anticipatory Legend, the Vision of the Fourth Dimension of Existence, all the Interferences. Look! The revolution.

A

On location.

The camera which moves, which is no longer immobile, which records all levels simultaneously, which reverberates, which sets itself in motion.

B

In the theatres.

The spectator who is no longer immobile in his chair, who is wrenched out, assaulted, who participates in the action, who recognizes himself on the screen among the convulsions of the crowd, who shouts and cries out, protests and struggles.

C

On earth.

At the same time, in all the cities of the world, the crowd which leaves the theatres, which runs out into the streets like black blood, which like a powerful animal extends its thousand tentacles and with a tiny effort crushes the palaces, the prisons.

Z

Deep in the heart.

Watch the new generations growing up suddenly like flowers. Revolution. Youth of the world. Today.

—Paris, November 7, 1917
Rome, April 21, 1921.

FROM THE END OF THE WORLD FILMED BY THE ANGEL OF NOTRE DAME

FIFTH CHAPTER
The End of the World

20.

Noon. The square in front of Notre-Dame. Buses circulate around the central refuge. A hearse leaves the Hotel-Dieu followed by blind veterans. A division of municipal guards is lined up in front of the barracks across the way. Busy men cut across the square in all directions. On the left bank, a line of students files past.

21.

At the first blast of the trumpet, the disk of the sun grows a notch larger, and its light weakens. All the stars appear suddenly in the sky. The moon turns visibly.

22.

The Angel of N.-D. barely puffs out his cheeks.

23.

We see passers-by covering their ears and turning their heads all the way around.

24.

All the cities in the world rise on the horizon, slide down iron tracks, fall on top of each other, pile up in the square in front of Notre-Dame.

25.

The sun immobilizes. It is one minute past noon.

26.

Instantly, everything that has been erected by men collapses onto those still living and entombs them. Only those things which had a semblance of mechanical life last two seconds longer. We see trains still rolling with the last of their impetus, machines running in neutral, airplanes falling out of the sky.

27.

An immense column of dust rises straight into the sky, then splits in two, divides, settles down, whirls into a vortex, thins out into threads, stretches in all directions; the winds blast; the sea opens and closes; the mountains of Mexico stumble in the light.

SIXTH CHAPTER
High Speed and Slow Motion

28.

With the death of man and the destruction of the domestic animals, the species and genera which had been hunted reappear. The seas are repopulated with whales and the surface of the earth is invaded by an enormous vegetation.

29.

We see fallow fields greening and flowering furiously. An audacious vegetation blooms. Graminae become fibrous, woody; weeds, tall and strong, harden. Hemlock is leguminous. Shrubs appear, grow. The forests extend, and we see the plains of Europe darkening, uniformly blanketed with apalachine.

30.

In the humid air, innumerable birds are flying, their plumage heavy and sticky. The otter and the beaver proliferate in the streams. Giant insects hatch in the swamps and lay their eggs, tirelessly.

31.

The sun's disk wanes and cools again. Glaciers increase in height and expanse. We see the vicuna descending from the mountains of the South, the condors and the bears. All of them take refuge in the steppes of the far North, where a current of warm air circulates. Everything adapts to the new environment of expanse and immensity. The vicuna's legs and neck elongate. The condor's wings atrophy, and its temper. The bear grows taller, swells, peels, becomes enormous. We see a giraffe, an iguanodon, a mammoth.

32.

Then everything freezes.

The ice spreads; it invades the seas and the sky is weighted with it. The birds and the land animals are dead. On the banks of a narrow channel of tepid water, which alone remains, legless, humid beings with human faces and exterior lungs on both sides of their heads come to breathe.

33.

Again the sun enlarges and its heat increases, and we see an intense and colorful island appearing through the curtain of mists. There, in slow motion and in a strange confusion, we see the shapes of all the annihilated beings: kangaroos hop by; lemurs fly; in its death-agony the duckbilled platypus comes to the foreground and looks at us with mocking eyes; the lyre-bird performs its sexual dance; the tubercular orangutan coughs; an armadillo rolls itself into a ball.

34.

The desert. Bleached bones and immense eggshells.

35.

It rains. It rains. Everything melts. Everything dissolves. The sky and the earth. The sun drools. It stretches out in the turbulent clouds and falls with them into the mud. We see its rays decomposing in drops of water and tiny rainbows seed the earth.

36.

The sun is now very close. Its disk takes up one quarter of the sky. It releases great bursts of fire perpendicular to the ground. Then it steadies and rises a little and condenses into a thick, slightly ovoid, mass.

37.

The glaciers are liquified. The sun solidifies. The vapors thin out, rise halfway up. It is hot. A river of mud sweeps along huge peat bogs which agglomerate, fuse, and little by little form a continent. A sudden grass springs up to insane heights, wilts immediately and revives. The flora of the coal mines grows, enlarges, spongy, monocellular, fleshy and transparent.

38.

We see the vascular plants harnessing the energy of the three elements, transforming it, manufacturing complex substances which become nourishment.

39.

It rains. It rains. The water rises. The needles of the conifers ramify, their tips flatten, they open out into umbels. Fungi grow on all the branches, floating with the current. Algae, yeasts, black sponges. Debris of all kinds accumulates at the bottom of the lakes. Plesiosauria in decomposition.

40.

The sun has dissolved. Something like a grainy and phosphorescent fog on a decomposed sea where a few obscene, giant, tumid larvae move heavily.

41.

An obscure eye closes on all that has been.

42.

A finger extends, lengthens, touches, probes, retracts, disappears inside a conch. Tufts of grassy limbs awaken, turn like sunflowers. A stomach travels to the end of a thread and vibrates. Suctions, spasms, airholes. Everything is blind under the water and the light is one-eyed.

43.

The joint petrifies. The sated stomach becomes coral. Oxidizes. The pores emit a vitreous sweat. Movement, rarified, freezes into a hinge. Life takes root and descends like a sounding line, anchors itself. In the deep, it is absolute night and only the stones are animated.

44.

We see the crystallizations forming, stars with six branches, and each branch knots, crosses, in an X, a tau, a potent cross, a crosslet, a papal cross. This has no proportion on the screen. An infinitely small becomes infinitely big. The central fire projects the molecular shadow.

45.

Polyhedrons evolve strategically. Colored gases precipitate. The complete minerals amalgamate, and we see the chemically pure elements gushing out of the slag heap of matter.

46.

Everything is black.

We see a veined network of dark red fire sketch the family tree of the earth. It is dense like a nervous system.

47.

A circulation is established, a boiling, a radiance. Sections of shadow are detached. Spindles of fire isolate themselves. Cones, cylinders, pyramids. Everything collapses into the central hearth. Explosion. And the burning sea rushes, torrential foam.

48.

A ball.

The cracked, slashed, desiccated surface is scratched by the fingernail of a cold light. Peeling off from it, like skin, are layers of chalk, plaster, gypsum, then a layer of flint which strikes off sparks at the shock. Each geological epoch reappears. Craters are hollowed out. Pumice stone is lodged at the bottom of a cirque. Perpendicular slate. Rock. Granite. Borax. Hollow salt.

49.

Everything spurts out. Everything merges. Tohu. Bohu. The oily sea, heavy like asphalt. The blackened, bloody earth liquifies. The waters become mountains and the continents rot.

Whirlwind.

50.

Fin of a shark, the last ray of light slashes across chaotic space. . .

[1918]

Note

The End of the World Filmed by the Angel of Notre Dame is a remake of the Book of Revelation starring Charlie Chaplin. God the Father sits behind a desk puffing on a cigar and worrying about the bottom line. He decides to expand his market by converting the Martians, but they are appalled at his vulgarity. While he is recovering from this humiliation, a faithful advisor suggests that he fulfill the prophecies. At God's command, the Angel of Notre Dame de Paris lifts his trumpet to his lips and blows: all the cities of the world come crashing down in the square in front of the cathedral and the world begins to end. Just when it looks as if the last ray of light has finally gone out, though, the film breaks and we see everything at high speed in reverse until God is sitting at his desk smoking his cigar again. The last word is "Bankruptcy." Cendrars claimed that he wrote the seven chapters of *The End of the World* in one night, the night of his 29th birthday in 1916, "the most beautiful night of writing in my life." He called it a screenplay in the same way Flaubert ("the first film director," according to Cendrars) might have called *The Temptation of St. Anthony* a screenplay if the cinema had existed when he wrote it. *The End of the World* was published as a novel in 1919, with illustrations by Fernand Leger.

The ABCs of Cinema dates from around the same time, though it wasn't published in its final form until 1926. Both texts emerge from the most intense period of Cendrars' infatuation with the cinema. In 1921 he assisted Abel Gance on a film called *La Roue* (Gance later echoed several passages from *The ABCs* almost verbatim in an article published in *L'Art Cinematographique* in 1927), and in 1923 he made a film of his own, *The Black Venus*, at Renascimento-film in Rome. It was so unsuccessful that Cendrars later said he had had it destroyed. In any case, all that remains to us of his brief foray into cinema is *The Feverish Pearl*, which he published shortly thereafter, and which was probably the screenplay for his cinematic disaster. Though Cendrars hailed the cinema as a new language of images which would render the language of words obsolete, in his work the cinema was always at the service of the written word, no more than a source for some new techniques and some new metaphors. After the debacle in Rome, the closest Cendrars came to making another film was a series of radio plays called *Films without Images*. His most powerful rejection of the cinematic image appears in an account of a two-week trip to Hollywood in 1936: "Writing is neither a lie nor a dream, but reality, and perhaps all we can ever know of the real." A, B and C pure and simple, not the ABCs of cinema.

Both of these works and others from the same period will be published in *Modernities and other texts by Blaise Cendrars*, forthcoming from the University of Nebraska Press in spring, 1992.

LETTER FROM BARBARA MOR

May 17, 1990

Dear Clayton,

Sulfur 26 arrived. You produce so much in print, and do so much else; I don't know how. These are handsome magazines, thick with brain-food. I don't know if you are now in Europe, or returned. Your postcard with Rivera and Kahlo has information on your itinerary I think, but to get at it I'd have to remove it from the wall over my desk. I'd rather not; so much for knowing what's happening in the world.

Yes, I live in a desert reptile state, which is as Castaneda describes the southwest state (of mind): hypnosis. Hip gnosis. Slow and heavy-moving, while the scenery is neon. Image a Gila monster with a cheroot, or the zoot-pachuco as nagual. But, as a Mexican writer (Reyes) noted, Mexican men escalate to death faster than any on earth. I was born and raised within the decor of this mood, but life with Pancho has of course intensified it. Life on Tucson streets with an Aztec-Mayan streetfighter will of course Intensify It. It is a matter of enormously condensed and suspended energy, can blow up Universe with any microflick of the tail. But: is wholly unliterary, unhistoric. These exist still packed in DNA; as Pancho says, "I am the Book." No-word dream-state of images, magnetic fields, and body action. It needs a good translator. The energy of verbal work, writing, is a high-speed or short-wave radiation. My brain works, but it is long waves, below the sound-threshold. I mean I don't hear much going on in there: the metallic drone of the Malabar caves, one-way traffic on Lead St.

I try to write, and some filings gather around the magnet, but not much. At least it's warm here now (another winter with no heat or hot water). Pancho has returned to Tucson several times to get work, money. Employment is zilch in Albuquerque, and wages low. He's done some shitwork yardwork, $20 a day, couple days a week, for our food. In Tucson he can make a couple hundred doing a weekend yard renovation; he has

other money sources which I'd rather he didn't return to. Twenty years in and out of prison or jail, a record that takes up 3 microfilms; no car no phone no residence no job history can't be bonded can't read or write can't vote. If I can't get a job, how can he? Hard for a person to go straight in America, even when they want to. Someone should tell the world how impossible it is to deal with all the agencies that are funded to "help": because they are staffed by fools and servo-mechanisms, people without any experience in the problems. Those of us without cars, phones, answering services, hot water, washers-and-driers etc. can't deal with them, not because we are misfits but because they are so dependent on their wires, us wireless people can't fill out their forms. All you want to do is take out your wire-cutters and shred them (their forms, their faces).

Anyway, it's scary when he returns to Tucson, legal and illegal forces wait there, with nets, to trap him. Return him to the past. Sometimes he says he was happier and better off drunk and junked-up on the streets. He was a master hustler; in control of the cartoon, at least. If you're not an artist in America (i.e. turned on by the material) life is very dumb, insulting. A poet or a street hustler; not much else worth being.

Monica Sjoo is here from England, on the west coast, Pt. Reyes for 2 weeks, then she does a slide-show in Phoenix and then will be here May 21–25. We'll do the public access Ch. 27 show with Edite and Tom Cates, and something at John Randall's Salt of the Earth. One of those nights is the final episode of *Twin Peaks*, so I will have to read my poetry and split before 9 pm. I watch it in black and white, beautiful Nazi shots which I intuit are more appropriate to the theme than color. All the tubes in America could start simultaneously leaking blood, or transmitting autopsy-room live-action around the clock, it would not be stranger than David Lynch on network: meta-media which luminizes its own commercials. Anyway, Monica will be here. Sonia Johnson spends retreat time here in Albuquerque, I just found out; also Jane Caputi. Laurie Anderson has reportedly bought land here too, up near Lama Foundation, north of Taos. I think we should unite, get funding, take over a church—I prefer one of those old Catholic buildings with cloisters, or a morada with whip-blood on the beams—begin our own Cathedral of Crones. Church of Christ's Aunty. . ? Nunnery of Ramses' Mummy. The Ancient Order of the Electric Whore of Babylon . . ?

Whatever. As the Goddess surfaces in the nice hands of liberals, New Age therapy gourmets, assorted Earnest Seekers of White Light, and too many women my age wearing moons in their ears but with no prolonged experience of the Night. . . .her real dark powers drop away. Leak back into

the Underground, I guess. The new taboos and terrors of the current "spirituality" people seem to be: anger, argumentativeness, and unkempt appearance. All of which are abundantly mine. So when asked to write about aspects of the Goddess (e.g. for *Woman of Power* #15, Winter 1989), I have to do the Irish Morrigan, in homage to us few toothless, pissed, squinty, messy, critically brilliant Hags left over from the 60s, with some political brainwaves still intact. In that decade, the fusion of spirit and politics was a given; we were passionate, intact, i.e. radical. Then time does its work. By the 80s "the Goddess" meant a spiritual alternative to, escape from, rejection of: worldly politics. Some of the major "voices" of the Goddess movement were ex-Christian women still seeking otherworldly solace for personal life-wounds; in their hands, "the Mind" was defined as masculine, once again, and "the Goddess" constructed as a kind of holy matriarchal Massage Parlor, with nothing above the neck but an unconditional smile. In this therapeutic mode, rawly radical critiquing of the problems of American women (e.g. Bible-based law, attitudes and politics) became impossible; it "hurt people's feelings." Women wanted to "eat their cake and have it too"; this is profound!; they wanted to eat the Pagan Goddess (sacramentally and sexually Eat Her), but they wanted to do this Strange Thing with familiar mouths, i.e. with Christian mouths, Catholic and Protestant mouths, Jewish mouths, Buddhist mouths, Marxist Maoist mouths, liberal secular mouths. . . . .once again, the Goddess is used as Eclectic Bread.*

In a *San Francisco Bay Guardian* review of *The Great Cosmic Mother* (Vol. 22, #2, October 21, 1987), Craig McLaughlin trashed the book for being "just too damn serious." Relative to the historical "light touch" of Starhawk's books (which he was also reviewing), happy books which make men like him jes feel like dancin'—GCM is a howling bitch. History, smistory: politics, diuretics: this Goddess stuff is allowed to exist *only* because it promises to Make Us Feel Good: that's what Mommies are for. New Age spiritual eclecticism comes from the same self-saving/self-serving (i.e. commercially-oriented) fear of critical confrontation; they want to sell therapies, tapes and amulets, NOT make a Bloody Scene. Of course, that is what the REAL Goddess is all about: A Bloody Scene. What has been oppressed, repressed, distressed, unexpressed and unredressed for 3,000 years. But of course it doesn't sell crystal retreat jujubes, cassettes on how to get rich in real estate thru spirit channeling, instant satori success via liposuction; or otherwise dematerialize the silly bourgeois auras of all the people who can afford this crapola. It's too damn serious, uh-huh. So even the Morrigan piece is relatively chickenshit; the Goddess magazines are

* (Pan Pan. . !)

very beautiful and relatively serene; going back 15 years, with *WomanSpirit,* they always edited out "bullshit" and other basic Old English speech from my writing, even when quite intentionally placed, and apropos. "Goddess" editors have continued the old Christian/Latin euphemism trip, by and large, confusing "the language of women's spirituality" with make-nice middle-class white avoidance-murmuring. So the raw power of speech and blood, as I said, drips back into the Undersoil/soul. While "the Goddess" becomes a Hallmark card. Well, this is how Power recycles itself. The Morrigan piece was reprinted in the Premier Issue of the New *MS.*, July-August 1990. The poverty of the feminist-spiritual-political situation in America must be indicated by this; Robin Morgan and the other editors want a tough, global, no-ad-controlled magazine, with a continuing feature called "Inner Space": am I the *only* Bag Lady in the Goddess camp, the only one alliterating foamatically about "righteous rage," or imaging the Return of the Feminist-Fists-in-the-Face (d'ya recall that fine auld Irish-Injun warrior woman), or otherwise suggesting the necessity of reconnecting our spirits with our butts. . ? I don't know. Robin had to cut it down some, so in the *MS.* reprint it doesn't have anything about my personal melanoma (tho it is illustrated appropriately with a Hag with a Death-Crow on her shoulder); and it begins with "In this post-everything-real decade. . . ."

My problem with "post-modern writing" is just the proliferation of the word "post," by the way. Post-this, post-that, sort of a funny attitudinal *post*uring. Everything follows something, after all: we live in unfolding time. So is a flower not a flower but a "post-bud"? A dirty shirt is "post-washed"? Well, I know it's more complex than that. But some kind of intellectual cooptation of other people's creatively-decorated toilet paper that is amusing, or sad: the Epignonai, the Late-Born. Post-avant-garde, meaning: all art up til now just sells junk on the tube and you can't outrun it, so join it: Believe Nothing. That's cool. A P.O.V. on KNME-PBS 2 weeks ago showed Leon Golub at work; and in Dublin, where they asked him how he could keep his paintings from being bought by the rich. He can't, of course. So the real POST is *Twin Peaks*; you can't outrun them, just turn around and hold up the slow mirror: Nazi Soap Opera. Post-Toasties is eating corpses to obtain meta-fiber. We're all dead anyway, just Do It Well. This is my mood now. The esthetics of post-life. America IS the 4th Reich.

Interesting in this context is your poem "Guyton Place" in *Sulfur* 25. I've been reading Jean Baudrillard, this is my philosopher; and I can feel your mind and heart swirling with the same, the vertigo of "dummy things," "dummy life." For a video project I'm doing with Edite and Tom Cates, who do public access here, I'm retrieving parts of a long poem I wrote in 1980, "about" the same sensation, the oily hemorrhage of all things, vortex of

detached objects, mechanically self-reproducing images with bits of flesh attached sucking us all down the black hole, that is "hyperreality" in Baudrillard's description. The old tyrants, Castaneda's *pinches tiranos,* so loud squawking visible and heavy-fisted, they are leaving us: Soviet system, Democrats and Republicans, Cold War demonics: whatever braking function they exerted on this disappearance of everything into the simulation of everything—it's gone. The Russians want BREAD. Pan-Pan. To welcome them into the Free Commercial Market, *Family Circle* could ship them truckloads of magazines full of beautiful pictures of Bread. These are still naive people, they don't yet know entirely how to Eat Images; but they will learn. The Soviet system, like the feudal/fascistic Catholic Church in Spain and Ireland, preserved a kind of consumer innocence: from land pollution, from mass advertising, gross manipulations of flesh by images. No mas. If we thought the chronic tyrannical repression of desire's enactment was awful, what happens when the globe is controlled by this promise to fulfill every dream NOW? Two sides of one coin: patriarchal biophobia. The side with the Pope or the Boot on it conserved some natural resources, indigenous human. . .wistfulness? Innocence? I don't know; the side with Xuxi on it—I don't know how to spell her name, ShuShi, Brazilian porno queen who now has a kiddie show and will in 1996 be Dan Quayle's running mate for tubal legislation of the world—well, that's the other side. The Goddess for Fun and Profit. Baudrillard is (therefore) cool. So is "Guyton Place." The brakes are gone.

Finally, thank you for the *Sulfur* 25 essay on *Shoah,* Michel Deguy. It provokes my pagan politics; i.e., my problem with the "singularity" of the Jewish Holocaust is that this kind of mass torture and attempted extermination of groups of human beings is not singular. It is an historic method of control within any patriarchal system. The numbers change, the quantity of exterminated people might increase or decrease (as G. Bernard Shaw said, people can only suffer and die one consciousness at a time); from the first rock smashing a head, thru the Bronze Age raids and organized massacres in the name(s) of Macho God, thru the history of European wars, persecutions, pogroms, thru WW1 & 2 bombings, gassings, village exterminations, thru Dresden and Hiroshima, to My Lai, to Beirut, to. . . .what comes next; and Jonestown, and Green River killings, and. . .it's the same thing *qualitatively:* the power of men to control and destroy life against its will. Anal-sadistic necrophilia; not to be homophobic, but patriarchal man deifies the Death-Hole (anus) over the Birth-Hole (vulva) as his own Power Machine; religious philosophies, political systems, behaviors and history follow accordingly. The sheer quantities of those destroyed, as in the Holocaust, horrifies observers; as a personal nightmare increased exponentially to a political fact. But it IS, experientially, every victim's personal

horror; and we are all potential victims of it; and it's hard to name any human group that has not been, historically, a victim of it, or the threat of it. It is Fear, after all, of The Man. All "history" is an exponentially growing picture, a living blow-up, of the same thing. They tell us to fear The Terrible Mother, but it is in fact The Terrible Father who has been scaring the continuous shit out of everybody. Que no? And the Jews of Europe worshipped the same God; only when Yahweh was Holocausting Canaanites, that was "past," that was "other."

Compulsively seeing, analyzing, interpreting, dealing with such events as "singularities"—"events so horrible they surpass description," "acts of a monster" etc etc—really misses the point. And intentionally. Because they aren't. Between the freaky serial killer who tortures, rapes, kills and chops up women in his basement for stored Burger Buns, and the atrocities of the 3rd Reich, I see no difference, except numbers. The world view, I mean, is the same; the ambience of the crime. The only difference is in our proportionate horror that it can happen, "right in our midst," "down the block, just next door": 1) without us knowing, we say, and/or 2) without us being able to control or stop it. So it is the horror of life. Everyone's personal nightmare, under patriarchy: where God is the original torturer, rapist, massacrist. And rationale. As Reich said, we are all wired for it; otherwise, it wouldn't happen. Our "modern" difference might be media: since WW2 everything occurs sooner or later on-screen, multiplied by machinery. The Nazi machinery, etc. But during the Inquisition, let's say, the dungeons were next door truly, in the basement of the church; you could hear the screams, watch them burn in the plaza, i.e. everyday, common life. Local and immediate; or global, via media. The pain, the fear, are the same. Let's say there are malignant cells in Europe in 1486, more in America in our time, or in Cambodia or in El Salvador, Argentina, Mozambique; accused witches, political prisoners, the victims of serial killers, gang raids, war; what's the diff??? From the first malignant cell to the terminal tumor, it's all the same. It's cancer. It will kill you. And you don't deal with it by treating every case of cancer as a singularity, an historic anomaly, right? Because then you forfeit the powerful diagnostic tool, which is amassment of historic data, patterns, microcosms and macrocosms of symptom, metaphor of inevitable realization of every possibility once it enters the multiplying process of living organisms. Or ruling machineries.

Didn't intend to say all this because it sounds like an argument and I don't have an argument—with a great document like *Shoah,* I mean—except to say that the Holocaust was no peculiar or singular event; it is described that way by habit, perhaps, because Jews see themselves, and Gentiles repeat the definition, as "peculiar," separated off from the history of other groups

by "God." But I don't believe this definition; so I don't see the attempted extermination of Jews in WW2 as singular, but as one more blow-up of the same, original event. Not defined by the singularity of the victim group, but by the commonality of the torturer's urge. Women undergo rape, humiliation, abuse, threat, terror, confinement and slaughter on a daily, massively historic scale. There's just so much of it, so pervasive, women's "holocaust" can't be surrounded with a border and focussed as this historic event. But: the attempted extermination of European witches. Or American indigenous peoples. Or the Irish by the Brits. Or the Masai of Mozambique. . . well, my machine is stuck on the redundance button. You know all this, and could say it better. Gentiles get off on elegiac meditations on the suffering of the Jews, which might be an attempt to avoid responsibility, as breast-beating is a ritual gesture which diverts energy that would otherwise solve the problem, or preclude its occurrence. But it's also a way of blinding ourselves to the massive size of the screen. You know what I'm saying, I'm a radical feminist. It isn't Jews and Nazis; it is global, biologic, and related to the male problem which is your beautiful turf: the unfinished or reluctant emergence from beasthood into human consciousness. But specifically OUR DEFINITIONS, LOOKING BACK, OF THE NATURE OF THAT BEASTHOOD. All Holocausts, all wars, all sadistic basement lonely torturements, all all of it is just one solitary little boy bending over trying to look up his own butt, scared of the stinky darkness he finds there, and freaking out to exorcise the forces (god, demons, nature, parents, human systems) which either are or are not responsible for it. Whatever explanation, it's dark, stinky and scary. And it can't be me/mine, that's unbearable. So it's you/yours. And I hate it.

Little boys tear wings off beautiful things. Maleness defined as the power to control/destroy living beauty. And girls turned on by this, feeling it is toughly magnetic and attractive. And it is! This little monster is seductive. Needs a good mommy; who may or may not provide ritual victims for his exotic urges, etc. Hitler's major support groups: young males, adult women.

It is our beast, the human beast. But the other beasts aren't like this. So it is the product of singular human consciousness, that of the interpreter of objects, how we define and interpret, and use the fact of beastness, of being material, of being once bestial. Of exorcising the beast by defining it as Other. The institutionalization of necrophilic definitions of the Other: all patriarchal religions.

Mass slaughter of innocents occurs in the Bible, where it is commanded by Yahweh, and justified spiritually. (And the Koran; the Bhagavad-Gita; the

Vedas.) Regarding some relation to *Shoah,* I've asked only two Jewish people to tell me what they think of Biblical massacres, in the context of WW2. Both said exactly the same thing: "That was different." The Bible is different; Hebrew theology/ontology is different.

No, it isn't. It wasn't. It's all the same: the human mind's ability to justify the pain and terror and elimination of others, while creating entire cultures of righteousness to avenge and preclude (and ceremonialize as "singular") one's own pain and terror and attempted elimination.

This means I really do believe what I wrote in GCM: it's not Nazis and Jews, Christians and Arabs, orthodox and heathens, black and white: under all of it, it is Male and Female. There are two sexes alone with each other on this difficult planet in a vast and unspeaking universe; we are different; the evidence that the difference drives us crazy is called human history. Every victim of every "holocaust" is just a scapegoat for this original crime of sexual difference. Which must breed a terrific fear in males; a corresponding cowardice, compromise, accommodation in females. There is more real, deep structural and chemical, *biologic* difference between a white male and a white female, than there is between a white male and a black male, or a black male and a Chinese male, etc. Racism is diversion. The "other" who males basically hate and fear, and want to destroy, is a female Otherness. If European fascist males didn't have Jews to lock up, gas, exterminate, they would have done it to "witches" again, or "heretics," or Communists, or poets—anyone defined as "female" vis-a-vis the macho ideal, the "inferior" body. Gentile writers on WW2 eulogize the victims, sort of to avoid the horrific work of analyzing the Nazis, who weren't singular either. And are still among us. They did have beautiful uniforms, which perhaps indicates they were becoming CONSCIOUS of the real issue? Males and their plumage display—*Heil, Peacock.*

Well, this is Post-Loony Tunes. I read *Sulfur,* not too much at once, because it annihilates me to read words of people who seem to have their voices. After 3 years of the street, non-verbalness, terror and confusion and many other things, I can't get a voice back. Reading is painful; writing is awful; but recuperative, instructive, or necessary, even tho it hurts. I will always treasure your envelope sent from Cro-Magnon Hotel. . . ! I once had relatives there. . . .long ago.

CAMILLE PAGLIA
MILTON KESSLER

Once in a lifetime, if you're lucky, you have a great teacher. Mine was Milton Kessler.

My book, *Sexual Personae,* was born in my experiences as a college student during the turbulent, florid Sixties at Harpur College (the State University of New York at Binghamton). Harpur, with its strong presence of avant-garde, intellectual Jewish students from New York City, was seething with raw creative energy. People called it Berkeley East.

During the Sixties, poetry and rock music were in sync. Long-haired, barefoot young men with guitars sat under trees reading poetry books. Allen Ginsberg's bardic chants routed Whitman's nature litanies, Hart Crane's urban surrealism, and African-American jazz rhythms into Bob Dylan, whose harsh lyrics made rock an art form. Jim Morrison of the Doors was an omnivorous reader with a photographic memory. Poetry has gone out of fashion in today's rock world, and the music has suffered. Rock has lost its spirituality and sense of mission.

Poetry flourished at Harpur College. Books of Lorca, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire were strewn among the latest Jimi Hendrix and Jefferson Airplane albums. Poetry readings were jammed. We saw dozens of important American poets in their prime—Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Galway Kinnell, and many others.

Milton Kessler is everywhere in my memories of that time. He was at the readings and raucous receptions afterward at remote faculty houses. He was at the art exhibits, the performances of the Guarneri Quartet (then in residence), the endless foreign films, those spectacular, sophisticated hallucinations which so formed my imagination.

Kessler embodies for me an ideal of the arts in dynamic synthesis. I despise specialization, separation, narrowness, tracking. I despise academe as it is presently constituted. Kessler is not so much a professor as a visionary rabbi—something that can also be said of my graduate-school mentor, Harold Bloom. Great teachers live their subject. The subject teaches itself through them. It uses them and, in return, charges them with elemental energy.

Purely by chance, I took "Introduction to Poetry" with Miton Kessler. I have never been the same. Kessler's classes on Theodore Roethke's *Words for the Wind* showed me what poetry is and how it works on the body. As I flip through that book, I see countless images and phrases that ended up, transformed by my dream life, in *Sexual Personae*. There are the eerie spirit-presences of nature, the oozy mire, mute beasts, and mystical Muse-women.

Kessler teaches Roethke or Whitman's hypnotic "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" stressed the body-rhythms and organic pulses that underlie poetry. Words are merely a veil through which we glimpse other, deeper realities. It was primarily because of my training by Kessler that I was later able to recognize Saussurean language-theory for the fraud that it is. A whole generation of academics my age destroyed themselves chasing after Saussure and his Parisian disciples. Right now, at mid-career, they are waking up to the nullity of their work.

Reading poetry aloud, Kessler made great use of dynamics, another of the losses rock music has suffered since the Sixties. Like the blues shouters, Kessler could roar, then drop off to a rasp or whisper. Poetry was music-drama. I recently learned that Kessler studied voice and opera as a young man and had even been a spear carrier at the old Met. This explains much of his impact on me. Italians invented opera. It is our way of living in and reacting to the world. In opera, emotion fills the body. Italians experience emotion in sensory terms, as if it were something eaten, drunk, or poured over the flesh. Dick Cavett, on TV, once said he didn't like opera; he didn't "get it." As I looked at his rigid, little WASPy body and large, parched, smirky, Ivy League head, I said: yes.

Kessler made me the teacher I am. He believed in the dramatic moment. Everything that you were, everything that you had ever seen or experienced pressed upon the text in front of you. The class hour seemed to melt and expand. Memory is central to both the Jewish and Italian traditions. Reading a poem, Kessler strove to remember everything, to fill it even fuller than the poet had left it. With the improvisation of great Jewish comedians like Lenny Bruce, Kessler would weave in and out of the class his own passing thoughts, reminiscences, disasters. His classic formulation: "I think of. . ." It echoes in my mind. I use it in my book. Listening to Kessler, you were understanding how the poetic mind works, how sensations and images flow, twist, and bond.

I remember bursting out with startled laughter when Kessler once said offhandedly in the middle of class, "So last week I was driving along and, in my usual trance, ran into the back of a truck." Master teachers, revealing themselves, show the continuum of life and thought. The physical and psychological realms coexist in a fifth dimension. Kessler interested me in the shocking segue, the disconcerting juxtaposition, an existential collage.

Eight years ago, while I was a teaching as a visitor at Yale (and dodging the preppy gases), a puzzled senior said to me, "Your teaching style is so unusual." Of course, it was Kessler's style. I think of a *New Yorker* cartoon from the 1930s: the dark, stocky figure of Fiorello LaGuardia is shown entering towered City Hall, which, in subsequent frames, swells, puffs, wheezes, steams, explodes, then wearily sighs and subsides as the mayor leaves it at the end of the day. That's what Kessler's classes were like. Architecture seemed to dissolve and remold.

French poststructuralism, among its many stupidities, denies that a coherent self exists. Academic nebbishes love this notion. Anyone interested in the performing arts knows that personality is a vitalistic, uncontrollable phenomenon. Talented performers and teachers have an electric power of personality, a charismatic magnitude and density. Kessler is a burly, robust man with the inner emotionality of the melancholy Jewish tradition. He told of once, among strangers, marching heavily up to a table and a woman calling out, "Taurus!" Italians have always been grounded in practical material reality, from the sewers and aqueducts of Roman engineering to our control of today's concrete and stonecutting trades. Kessler's Taurine physicality and materialism appealed to me. His new book reveals that he once worked in the garment industry. I hate the airy, affected, rich-bitch dilettantism of the art world. The artist has more in common with the car mechanic, all sweat, grease, and ingenuity. Kessler was blunt, profane about pretension. Once the professors took the English majors to a poetry conference at another college, where a girl speaker welcomed us: "We the special ones, the sensitive ones. . ." Kessler said, "If she'd done that at Harpur, the students would have dragged up cow manure and hurled it at her!" He made comic gestures of manure-heaving.

In class, Kessler gave me my first warning about the deplorable condition of academic criticism. Second-generation New Criticism was then in decline. Kessler described the spirit-killing academic approach, which tried to "crack" the poem, smashing it like a nut. Worse things were to come, in the French fad of the Seventies, which exalted mundane, jargon-spouting critics over the artist. Kessler found graduate education in general hostile to thought. He told of an incident where a graduate student, mercilessly goaded by Roy Harvey Pearce, pulled a knife on him in class. This story impressed me. I dislike the bland, WASPy business-as-usual style encouraged by American graduate schools. It's Kraft cheese slices on the grand scale. Emotion is suppressed and contorted. A criticism alienated from emotion is false, doomed.

Kessler freely showed emotion. Once in class, he suddenly exploded with rage at some boys in the back row. He accused them of "peeking," of peeping Tomism: "Get out! It's *obscene!*" He meant, I assume, that they were sneering cynics, keeping themselves apart from the class. It's good

for students to see honest emotion from their teachers. Around this time, I visited the classes of a friend at another university. Midway through a history lecture, the professor's briefcase slipped off the desk and fell with a huge clang into the wastebasket. No one in the jammed hall breathed. The professor blanched, but stone-faced, kept talking and at last, with difficulty, rescued the briefcase. Strange and dead. At Harpur, there would have been hilarity and Jewish schtick, the free play of humor and self-satire. I welcome all random incidents—from chairs tipping over to explosions in the street—and try to incorporate them into the class flow.

Returning from a trip to Europe, Kessler commented to us about the poor quality of American food, then in its Wonderbread and TV-dinner phase. He said, "If you ever asked for *an orange* in an American restaurant, the walls would fall and the staff go mad!" From Europe he excitedly brought us a personal discovery, Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. He said the moment he saw it he knew "this is *the* book" he'd always been looking for. I too now loved Bachelard, whose dignified yet fluid phenomenological descriptive method seemed to me ideal for art. I had been reading Bergson and Poulet. Bachelard was the last modern French writer I took seriously. Post-Sartrean French literature got more and more deranged, sudsy conceit-tempests in a Parisian teapot.

I remember Kessler in warm relation to the Harpur hippies and radicals, who were mainly from urban and suburban New York City. One picture is especially vivid: a crowded, drunken reception for a visiting writer at the Kesslers' Binghamton house. It was a time when rebellious young men, letting their hair grow, had a soft, open look of poetic innocence. You can see it in news films of Sixties demonstrations and rock festivals. Afterward, in the Seventies, American faces got hard, snide. Too much had happened. Sprawled in the middle of the Kesslers' jammed living-room floor was a ring of hippies singing amid the din. The leader, sitting cross-legged, was laughing, exuberant. His bearded, beautiful face, lit by a ruddy lamp, was framed by a wild crown of glossy, jet-black hair. It was at such moments that one recognized the pure Romanticism of the Sixties. Kessler was deeply moved. Arms folded, he stood watching the animated boy and then, his eyes moist, remarked to another professor, "He is a young David." Overhearing this unobserved, I was overwhelmed by a sense of Jewish history, of cultural transmission from fathers to sons over time.

Another of my memories is less pleasant. As I attended or audited course after course of Kessler's, I came into conflict with another of the radicals, a brilliant, smouldering New Yorker with dark, lank hair, rough skin, and piercing blue eyes. He had an implacable Scorpio intensity. Studying was not fashionable in the psychedelic Sixties. This fellow, Jeffrey, found my busy in-class note-taking totally unhip and reactionary. Notations,

at every hour of the day and night, are in fact the basis of my writing. At home, at work, in stores, in cars, I constantly record my fleeting impressions and mental flashes, which zip by like meteor showers turning quickly to ash. Jeff cut a glamorous figure on campus. Once while I was sitting in the cavernous snack bar, he and his coterie, with enormous éclat, came sweeping in, half-clothed, dripping from an impromptu dip in the plaza fountain. It was a radical gesture for a generation emerging from the repressive Fifties convention. When I decided to go to Yale for graduate school, Jeff confronted and denounced me: Yale was not "where it's happening." I should go to Buffalo, then a hotbed of poetry and psychoanalytic criticism, my special interest. He upset me, and I sought advice from several teachers. In a way, he was prophetic: two years later, I was sitting in the office of the Director of Graduate Studies at the Yale English Department, formally protesting the way "Freudian" and "psychoanalytic" were contemptuously used as dirty words by professors in class. That same year, when Leslie Fiedler came to speak at Yale, not a single English Department faculty member showed up.

Kessler was, I think, quite unaware of the bolts of hostility passing between Jeff and me in class, particularly when we were meeting in the round in living rooms or on the grass outside. Once, as we were discussing a poem, I suggested there was (what else is new?) an element of "onanism" in an image. Kessler, head bowed and gravely scrutinizing the text, said the very idea was "horrifying," "repellent"—here Jeff looked up and glared at me in malicious triumph—but "there's no question it's absolutely there"—now *I* glared back in triumph as Jeff wilted. The whole thing was absurd, but I cannot separate it from my memories of Kessler's classes. I tell the story because of its extraordinary conclusion. I never saw or heard from Jeff again after graduation. Seven years later, while I was teaching at Bennington, I picked up the local newspaper and saw, in the headlines, that three miles over the state border from my Vermont house there had been a mysterious murder-suicide. A New York man of Jeff's name had arrived with his girlfriend for a vacation weekend and had killed her and then himself with a rifle. I called Harpur. The Washington Square area street address was the same. I wrote immediately to Kessler, who was devastated. He wrote back that, getting the news, he nearly "fell on the floor." It was one of the most haunting things that ever happened to me. I do believe in karma. This was a Sixties tragedy, a story of promising but unfulfilled talent, which in many cases was short-circuited by drugs. Drugs first liberated and then destroyed. I never learned anything more than what I have said here. It is an odd destiny that it has left to me, Jeff's unwilling enemy, to remember him.

At my commencement ceremony, it was announced from the podium that I was the first known second-generation Harpur student. (My father

had entered when it was Triple Cities College and had been in the first Harpur graduating class.) It was also announced that I, as the valedictorian, had received "only one B" in my four years of college. Meeting my parents afterward at the reception, Kessler said, laughing and making rueful bearlike, motions with his arms, "When I heard that, I quaked in my seat!" His grade was the B, which I wore proudly, then and now. It remains a symbol to me of Kessler's original imagination, his higher standard. What Kessler gave me is beyond the conventions of academe. I saw so clearly in graduate school and afterward that my early exposure to Kessler had miraculously spared me the stultifying formulas of thought and decorum that afflicted most of those who had gone to older, more established schools. With Kessler, you begin literature and art fresh each time you come to them.

In reply to a recent inquiry about artistic influences on his work, Kessler listed Verdi, Puccini, Jussi Bjorling, and Giovanni Martinelli in opera; Antonioni, Bergman, and DeSica in cinema; Post-Impressionism and German Expressionism in painting; Chekhov, Gogol, Babel, Sholem Aleichem, Camus, and Sartre in fiction. He reveres the Torah and classic Chinese poetry and names these as poets with whom he feels a special kinship: Blake, Whitman, Thomas Hardy, Dylan Thomas, William Carlos Williams, John Crowe Ransom, Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, A.R. Ammons, John Logan, David Ignatow, Donald Hall, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Karl Rakosi, Jackson Mac Low, Clayton Eshleman, Jerome Rothenberg.

Kessler says of this fifth book, *The Grand Concourse,** that several of the poems were "written in hospitals." He speaks of "the Ars Medica" of his work, of "illness determining body-states." I remember him speaking in class of the psychological "meaning" of asthma, of its power in a specific family romance. It was the first time I had thought in this way, and I never forgot it. I continue to interpret disease and anxiety in psychodramatic terms and to see the art work as an emanation or displaced and projected body of the artist. The cover photo of Kessler's new book is a striking aerial view of an enormous strip of aging brick apartment buildings along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, where he grew up. The name of this broad, sweeping avenue makes me ponder the immigrant experience. My family, coming from Italy, bypassed the city and settled in upstate New York, where the Endicott-Johnson shoe factories needed the ancient leather working skills of our region in Lazio. Most European immigrants of the last century arrived here poor. But behind us stretches the grand concourse of the Western tradition. Teaching is another kind of grand concourse. Through it, you produce and set into motion spiritual progeny, those who Plato says are under the protection of the higher or Uranian Aphrodite.

* Mss., SUNY-Binghamton, 1990.

Kessler's poems are filled with visual images. Interestingly, he once worked as an optician. This is another parallel between his sensibility and mine. My earliest memories are of staring, transfixed, at objects, clouds, colors, light. As a writer, I strive to save the gorgeous world of appearances. I have always been conscious (here comes my scorn for Saussure and Lacan) of the prodigious labor of transferring or translating sensory impressions, the flux of life, into language. Inscribing his new book to me, Kessler paid me the great compliment of calling *Sexual Personae* an "optical masterpiece." Kessler's poetry seizes my attention by its fidelity to both visual and emotional truth, a rare combination. Kessler negotiates between the outer and inner worlds; he records the day-to-day moments of truce won by our ever-shifting consciousness. Even when he alludes to "Nietzsche, Wagner, Furtwängler" ("Everyone Loves Children"), there is nothing academic about it. His style is stripped down, abrupt, emphatic, concrete. The rhythms are spoken, flexible. All the poems in *The Grand Concourse* have a different "look." The lines, the shapes vary, like our own moods.

One of my favorite poems here is "The Machine of Sundown": an "orange-rot Liberty hull freighter," "welded with gull-dung and war slime," has, like "the vanished gas tanks at Coney Island, / fallen to blue-torch scrap-truck" and "slides on slabs of orange river slag." These explosive, aggressive rhythms reproduce the impact and surprise of visual signals hitting the optic nerve. They carry with them the bruising workdays of steelworkers and longshoremen. The gritty, decaying riverscape-details write history around us, an unsentimental elegy still vibrating with the energy of the industrial past. The poem has the ugly/beautiful surrealism of the modern city. Its choppy alliterations remind me of effects I tried to achieve in my passage on the Venus of Willendorf, and its chain-link of lurid, atomized images resembles my associative anatomy of Emily Dickinson's fierce metaphors.

"Women Seen" is a series of cinematic glimpses of archetypal woman in her many modes, changing yet always, like Pater's Mona Lisa, the same. She fixes her sandal with a gesture seen in Greek sculpture. She is the pregnant teenager, the cocktail waitress, the little girl on her parent's lap, the woman trying on dresses in front of the multiple mirror of her and our eyes. In one vivid moment of special meaning to me, she is seen "hanging up laundry barefoot like a dancer / on a windy day, clothespins in her mouth." In our age of laundromats and automatic dryers, children have lost this old experience, detectable as early as Homer's Nausikaa episode, in which woman is fused with wind and sun, in a public ritual of ablution and renewal. It is a visual memory with its own gusty sounds and crisp fresh smell.

Kessler is sensitive to interpenetrations of nature and culture. Empty ships float "like big tulips" amid the rushing ice under the Verrazano bridge. At dawn in the snow country, "every fencepost wears a cap." "Hilltop cemetery mosses" bloom with blueberries. A lakeside spider threads a web "from red board to red board." We see "stumbling mossy boots in rusty brambles" and "the salt-white Yankee barn and house / under ice-starry barbs." In "Trills," nature plays many instruments: we hear "the shiver of wheat," "the chatter of birch," the "seething" of "the taller stiffer maples." Kessler's sharp phrases catch the motion, textures, and strange, beautiful voices of a physical world we live in but never fully know.

The Grand Concourse is filled with robust, if isolated beings. In "Zero," with its horse head silhouette, the war horses of Chinese, Greek, and Muslim adventure end in "the pinup stallions of gold college girls." In "Bleeding Through," "slaughterhouse cattle," bound for Chicago, groom each other. In other poems, a country cat, shooed out, "flies into the sizzling surprise" of winter, or a small city dog barks warily "right and left before stepping out." In "Going, Going," a ranting man with "white beard and black balls," roars, falls, and dies in the next hospital room, as a nurse screams. Elsewhere, a teenager, expelled from a counseling group because he does not, after all, have a brain tumor, sadly shuns home and joins the army, where he paints barracks. A queenly lady, in "pink robe charming and mandarin," waits and sleeps, "her shaved head crayoned purple for the X-ray." The most powerful figure in the book, besides the poet himself, is Kessler's father, frail but bossy, raising "his spotted smoky fist" against his large, bulky but still daunted son.

Many poems, like "A World of Men" and "South Bronx Chekhov," document the somber manners, enclosed space, and tattered souvenirs of the elderly Jews in America. There is a sense of a massive cultural era winding to its close. "God's Cigar" is a grave, resonant litany, a catalog of family objects destroyed in an apartment-house fire. The poem, moving from elegy to epic, reprises the wanderings, triumphs, and disasters of Jewish history, from Egypt and ancient Jerusalem to Russia and New York. This smaller personal Holocaust seems to be yet another dream of a remote, musing God.

The Grand Concourse shows Milton Kessler's range and vigor, his acute responsiveness, and his operatic ability, so obvious in class, to capture the anguish and comedy of life.

The Selected Letters Of George Oppen, edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis. Duke University Press, 1990. 436 pages.

George Oppen writes, in a 1959 letter to his sister June Oppen Degnan discussing his return to a career of poetry: "What I am trying to do I find very difficult. At the same time, it seems pointless any longer to say less." Oppen's desire not "to say less," the struggle to mean, as he often put it, is the central narrative of this extraordinary, nearly single-minded and immediately useful correspondence.

A handful of the early letters, those from 1931-34 to Pound and Williams, are mainly of historical interest, concerned with TO Press and with the publication of Oppen's first book. There are no letters here, unfortunately, from that more than two-decade span when Oppen stopped writing poetry to devote himself to radical social causes. The bulk of the letters, however, beautifully edited and introduced by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, cover the twenty-odd years during which Oppen did his major work, from *The Materials* (1962) to *Primitive* (1978). They consist primarily of Oppen's thinking on poetry, its methods and strategies, its search for reality and truth. They contain, as well, an immensely rich hoard of ancillary material: Oppen's discussion with and observations on his contemporaries such as Zukofsky, Bronk, and Reznikoff, and on Eliot, who flits through the correspondence both as standard bearer and example to be shunned. Oppen's family, politics, his travels with his wife Mary, his relations with younger and older poets, the letters demonstrate, are constellated as force fields out of which the poetry emerges.

Oppen's poetry was intimately concerned with, as he put it, "the order of disclosure," with "literature as a process of thought." So too the correspondence. Taken together, the poetry and the letters form not only an array, but a complex feedback loop by which the complexities of the work are tested fugally and dialectically: poems arise out of scraps of language formulated in response to others or in self-questionings and then

are quoted again as answers to yet other questions. Each verbal formulation or contained thought becomes a kind of hinge from which Oppen swings toward the next bit of language, hesitant, anxious, searching for its validity as social or artistic truth. Much of this drama is in the appearance of the letter, in the way Oppen uses format and spacing, the dips into the white spaces of the page, to create emphasis or to isolate a bit of phrasing. Not only were the letters vehicles for trying out various versions of a poem, of clarifying its language and intentions, they were also constructed with the same inherent logic, structuring time as they exfoliated procedurally through Oppen's confidants and readers. In this, the letters resemble Oppen's poetry to a degree found only in the way Charles Olson's letters resemble the Olson poem.

They are, as well, a kind of war tale, of serious risk undertaken, of exemplary combat with, of resistance to the environment of much of late twentieth century poetry. As with letters from the frontlines, they are about artistic and career hopes, about prophecy and suspense in the intersections of a life committed to the making of the poem. Oppen saw himself as opposed to much in the new arts, in its cinema, electronic music "or rather," as he wrote, "the music depending on hazard, the 'accidental' music, . . .the poetry which is automatic writing. . .the meaningless river which flows with ourselves and our talk." By contrast, poetry was, for him, as he says in the same letter, "brutal self-defense. . .an attempt, an utmost effort to make meaning, for who else, if it's worth asking again, has ever made meaning." Perhaps this statement will dismay some of those who have recently taken up Oppen as a forerunner, but it strikes me that Oppen made good on his claim, that the letters ought to be construed as a noble story, one that by virtue of the risks Oppen takes, mainly, to rephrase him, is about "coming out well."

Of great interest is the subtext out of which Oppen wrote. The letters reveal, first of all, the kind of demand Oppen set for himself upon returning to poetry after having lain fallow for some twenty-five years. His boundary markers, as he explained in a 1959 letter to his sister, are to not write "any statement already determined before the verse. Poetry has to be protean, the meaning must begin there," and his intention "to write one's perceptions, not argue one's belief." The letters guide one through Oppen's phenomenological and metaphysical bent, the depth at which he sought to resolve his poetics, not as window dressing to the poem's imagery but as something which was "part of one's feelings about everything." For Oppen, the resolution had to be conceptually both moral and existential, a movement between the ideal and the actual. As he wrote to John Crawford in 1966:

> . . .Everything which is not earned is corrupt—

> Fragmentation: an attempt to hide in the things one meant, really, to climb out of?
> —those materials so easily handled—it is not that they are pure. They are so easily handled because they are corrupt.
>
> Those materials which force themselves upon one, those materials which crash into one's life from atomic space and from historical space which is one's own—they can be crushing—one can almost certainly fail—but they are not corrupt. (143)

As shown here, Oppen's poetics, as ethical desiderata, amount to a thrust against an unearned theory of the word or an idle speculative aesthetics. Later, in 1976, rephrasing these thoughts, he writes to DuPlessis: "to occupy the 'idea'; to live in it—this is simply and precisely the undertaking of poetry."

At times the letters, in their almost singular brooding, display impatience and despair at the spectacle of the general picture of poetry, a poetry which had been moving in another direction than his own. "Art," he writes, "becomes (again) more and more a struggle *against* the art world, the art-attitude. . .and against little else." It was the concept of poetry, as handed down from writers such as Williams and Pound, which constituted the agon in which Oppen was continually measuring his own work. For Oppen, that part of the modernist tradition had been diluted or worse transposed by a "'middle generation'" he was to write to Denise Levertov in 1963, "[which] failed, I think. . .not because I disagree with what they say, but because they abandoned the figures of perception for the figures of elocution, of assertion, of syntax."

In this oppositional sense, Oppen saw himself as a kind of long-distance runner, shrewdly aware of the kind of poetry that he wrote, and of the resources necessary both to write such a poetry and to see it into print. And yet throughout the letters, every confident formulation of a "poetics" or rehearsal (often in prose) of a poem is undergirded by a process of concentration and thought which is meant to momentarily allay Oppen's fears and general pessimisms concerning both poetry and the cultural order. It is these fears which make of the correspondence an intimate, nearly claustrophobic affair, involving a virtual *nuclear* family of readers and responders in which Oppen saw himself as both teacher and learner, father and son. Most deeply, the people he wrote to appear to have constituted for him the only significant audience.

The letters greatly enlarge our sense of Oppen's "motive" for poetry, its intersection with his private life, his reading and the world of politics and culture in which he found himself. As we see in a very interesting letter to his friends, Max and Anita Pepper, the poet wins out over the party hack

or social engineer because the political question raised is one of scruple, of valuing "truth" whether or not it appears socially useful. For Oppen, the politics of truth was at the very center of the poetics, a constant goad which contributed to the "economy" of the poetry, an intense focus on a few central pre-occupations to the exclusion of much else. Self-understanding, as the letters continually demonstrate, could only occur (and only possibly be resolved) at the level of a highly tensed language formed under the stress of social or political pressure.

Almost nothing appears in the correspondence that is trivial or merely anecdotal. Even the descriptions of his and Mary's travels and vacationings in Maine are less news than tryouts for poems or excursions into the otherness of nature, the signature of that "most northerly" world which Oppen felt a part of and which, in both letter and poem, he posed against the Hellenic cultures of the Mediterranean. On such subjects, one already hears the music of the poetry, as when he writes to his niece, Andy Meyer:

> the rock islands, the pine trees the ocean and the little boat it's all true. Can't tell you how beautiful We came here vaguely convalescent Somehow lost our balance in New York in the last month or two—lost judgment. I was unable to write. The cruises re-establish a standard—one begins to know how good a poem must be really to exist in any considerable way in the face of the forest and rocks and ocean
> or how *decent* it must be in the face, if it has a face, of the little boat

One senses in reading these letters that "true north" for Oppen was attentiveness to the primary. Reflecting on his own development in a 1974 letter to Martin Rosenblum, he writes of the Objectivists not as involved in some "theoretical (technical) position" but rather "simply as the poets I found revelatory. . .and yet perhaps the word *revelatory* does define a common intention or effort—*all experience is valid*—the revelatory experience of one's own life." And so he writes to Linda Oppen Mourelatos, his daughter, in 1980: "—I am not afraid of age—for I could say, as Rilke said: 'amazement is my paradise.'"

And somehow, it seems only fitting that the last letter in the book, the last one found by DuPlessis, should be its own kind of testament concerning Oppen's entire career as poet. Here, in responding to a request by the French poet, Claude Royet-Journoud, to send him a one-line poem for an anthology, we listen to that unique admixture of ethics and poetics which made Oppen such a powerful and moving poet:

Dear Claude,

I am truly sorry to refuse anything that you ask of me, but I cannot bring myself to write 'poetic' exercises. We come back to that old saying: a poem is a poem is a poem (and never an exercise)

it is tied to the world, and the stones of the villages.

Again sorry to refuse to do anything you ask of me,

Best wishes,

George

—Michael Heller

Marjorie Perloff, *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990)

Marjorie Perloff's collection of essays on modernist and postmodernist poetry—"lyric" in the title, curiously—is offered as "part of an ongoing project that I take to be a revisionist history of twentieth-century poetics" (2). That's a large task, if not a particularly uncommon one these days. The extent to which Perloff's history is revisionist—what history is not?—is of course debatable. Ten years ago Perloff's insistence on the importance of Stein, Zukofsky and (especially) writers affiliated with various avant-garde movements was clearly revisionist. That is less the case today, thanks in part to her own earlier work. Language poetry, which for Perloff has often counted as an extension of the avant-garde "traditions" she is interested in recovering, is now a regular subject of academic critical debate, even as crucial divisions become more and more evident among the writers once affiliated with the movement which is now only a little more coherent than Christianity in 150 A.D. I know that it is true that Zukofsky and others are still too often excluded from literary histories, but as an opening up of the canon Perloff's book is not especially to be recommended. Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery* has more and less familiar names to put forward. Perloff's canon is open and generous beside Helen Vendler's and Harold Bloom's, two of her targets, but it is still fairly exclusive (canons are by definition exclusive but some are more or less), informed as it is largely by Francophile and poststructuralist sympathies and by a distaste for the remnants of Romanticism as they are manifest in poetry and poetry criticism. In fact, let me suggest that "excluding" has become Perloff's

agenda. If hers is a revisionist project, it is because Perloff is now one of the increasingly few critics who resist claims made for writers on a purely political basis, made on behalf of a writer's status as part of a marginal or excluded social group. Perloff's praise for poets rests ultimately on the timeliness of their technique: which poets are most in accord with recent theories of language and communication? Given the prevailing tendencies of academic literary criticism and history, Perloff's discussion of prosody and, more generally, technique is rare both in its usual competence and in the central role attached to it, which not accidently is very much in accord with the central role attached to technique by the writers Perloff advocates. I might add only that timeliness—my word, not hers—while a less problematical if not less ideological evaluative term than others like sophistication or inclusiveness or the old bogey "universality," is not much of a better one. Perloff simply cannot understand why readers of Derrida, Deleuze and others aren't also more often readers of language poetry. But why read Charles Bernstein when you can read Derrida or Wittgenstein? That question is not addressed.

Let me just make one or two more general remarks, and then I will take up several of the individual essays. First, it seems to me that Romanticism as a phenomenon in French, English, and American poetry has become too unproblematical for Perloff. I would guess that her tendency to equate it with psychologism, organicism, and naive notions of subjectivity explains her reluctance to take up at much length the work of Basil Bunting, Robert Duncan, and Michael Palmer; in their work Romanticism figures more importantly. Her assault on Romanticism seems too narrowly dependent on the habits and conventions of much current mainstream poetry.

Perloff finds mainstream poetry a powerful specter, so much so in fact that she suggests that Susan Howe's "demilitarization of syntax may function. . .as a response to the all-too-ordered, indeed formulaic syntax that characterizes the typical 'workshop' poem" (305). If this were the only justification for Howe's project—it is not and Perloff knows this—it would be a rather petty and paranoid project indeed. If the enemy is Robert Richman or Rodney Jones, who needs a friend? Similarly, Howe's use of history is contrasted with Robert Lowell's and celebrated for its less condescending posture and refusal of closure, but I would think that if one were really to evaluate Howe's project fairly the comparison must be with Pound and Olson.

My second main objection must be accompanied by some praise. I admire Perloff's energy; she is indefatigable, an assimilator of much diverse and difficult international experimentalism, a careful exegete, and American critical machine. She can summon the arguments of Derrida, Barthes, Baudrillard and a host of American critics and scholars. She is truly international in her canon and her languages. Yet I often wonder what

exactly is at stake in Perloff's insistence on, say, Klebnikov's importance, or in her comparisons of texts by Charles Bernstein and Derrida. What does Perloff mean to accomplish beyond the linking and re-valuation of particular texts? Perloff can make a passing allusion to a pataphysician like Baudrillard without even so much as pausing to interrogate the implications of his work (never mind the exactness of its fit with a particular poetic). I wonder, for instance, if Perloff agrees with Baudrillard that intellectuals are likely to become of about as much consequence as Buster Keaton after the introduction of talking films? This critical machine is well-oiled; Perloff rarely doubts her own procedures and purposes. A serious Baudrillardian would no doubt ponder the fact that the deadline for this issue of *Sulfur* is January 15, 1991, and conclude that yet again events are outstripping our theories and trampling us.

Just a few remarks now about individual essays. I admire the essay on Lawrence's performative poetic, which is an effort to rescue Lawrence from Romanticism as well as his turgid novels. The essay on Ginsberg is one of the few I know that takes adequate account of the comic moments in the work and is a good account of the continuity of his work. It's true we need another Allen Ginsberg. Unfortunately, I don't see one on the horizon, unless Ron Silliman can get himself arrested. The essay about the French reception of contemporary American poetry is informative, but again the difficult questions are not addressed. What does it mean that Robert Pinsky and others have an audience in England, Michael Palmer and others in France? And what about Germany and Japan, where the reception of American poetry must be a much more complicated affair? These are partly political questions, as any CIA veteran of Cold War international cultural marketing would tell you. The essay on Plath's canon is interesting if one is interested in Plath. There is another essay on Beckett and a good brief overview of Pound's continuing importance to poetry. There is an attack on ahistorical Marxism and other vulgar political methodologies along with a plea for a thoroughly contextualized "new historicist" criticism (as represented by Jerome McGann) in the volume's first essay. I can imagine few readers who won't learn a good deal in perusing Perloff's essays, even if I think it's time that she laid all her cards on the table.

—Keith Tuma

Harry Mathews, *20 Lines A Day* (Elmwood Park, Illinois: The Dalkey Archive Press, 1988). Harry Mathews, *Out of Bounds* (Providence, Rhode Island: Burning Deck, 1989).

There exists a domain of literature at the limits, or, rather, a domain of literature defined by limits, wherein expressive extremity is the constraint. In his two recent books, Harry Mathews beautifully calculates a world of words struck in modes of stylistic chiaroscuro. Together, these volumes establish a working definition of the literarily possible, but unless read as a pair of functionally compensatory approaches to style, the books will not suggest this definition implicitly.

Definition by way of boundaries: the temptation is, when ruminating on difference, to polarize matters not wholly in oppositional stance, and so it is when contrasting Mathews's *20 Lines A Day*, a journal devoted to starting the daily process of writing, and *Out of Bounds*, a chapbook containing lyrics on love written as love is winding down. Seen as a twinned source of necessary energy, these texts represent the impulse to be both artless and artful. The journal in which is recorded anything at hand as long as it serves to prepare the distracted mind for writing, provides a kind of informality of doing and being that only dramatizes the disciplined and lavish formality of tone, diction and design in the love lyrics obsessed with focus.

Yet *20 Lines* embodies a special kind of "naturalism." As a way of gathering skittish energy into concentration, the texts analogously suggest the exercises the legendary teacher Kimon Nicolaides assigned art students and subsequently proposed in his book *The Natural Way to Draw*. Without taking the eye off the nude, a pencil draws its corporeal contours, and what emerges is a point-by-point sensible integrity, even though the anatomical distortion may be extreme. In *20 lines* the reader often encounters a point-by-point tracing of the phenomenal body, an associative process of thought slowed down through the straitened circuitry feed-back provides the self. Tracing the introspective template slowly results in a very peculiar sort of naturalism.

Out of Bounds, by contrast, features artful indirection elevated to a fine extravagance. These twenty love lyrics, each in six troubled elaborate lines, tell of absence palpably:

> Any sweetness of just love is clotted with harassing bitterness,
> with killing poison
> Unless its fever, checked by the temper of two beings, yields
> joint and benign desire.

Sensitivity, in the company of sweet womanliness and my
backward joy, has now utterly left her.
Pivotal Lord of the sky, allow me to have been just beckoned
by a dream
That some fever abjectly swept away great beauty, allow me
not to acknowledge
—This day is still not out—that that provisional sun of my
birthright has sunk into a wracking fjord.

Whether courtly Elizabethan conceit (above, number 5) or modernity's version of orientalism (number 11), these defiant misreadings of style install a rhetorical surrogate for the excessive feelings of self. As Quintillian noted, self-consciousness is expressed as linguistic reach in search of nobility. The parodic artifice, then, is no less capable of re-presenting the features of desire and loss than is the painstaking act of tracing the contours of subjectivity. As a member of OuLiPo, Mathews is by no means alone in construing the self as primarily a literary construct infatuated with, and indeed endorsed by, imitative, displaced translations of style and structure. And in art, where the self as copy has only recently come into its own, Arshile Gorky may not have existed were it not for a self concocted of secondary sources. Even his love letters to his future wife were all cribbed.

Taken together, *20 Lines A Day* and *Out of Bounds* are refreshingly particular, however tactically self-conscious they may be. Mathews's writing is, after all, a poetics of extremity in practice, not merely exercises but exemplifications of the literariness put forth. It also must be said that Mathews is protean. Barthesian by nature, he conveys a deep sense of the obligation attendant upon structural matters: that to adopt a form is to install a paradigm. In these two books of antithetical discourse, lean and rich, language establishes truly alternative, indelible worlds.

Walter Abish, *99: The New Meaning* (Providence, Rhode Island: Burning Deck, 1990).

The self as intertextuality cribbed from the written selves of others is exactly the autobiography Walter Abish proposes in "What Else?" a diary of sorts that opens his book *99: The New Meaning*. Fifty journal entries appropriated yet left unidentified and sequenced by Abish suggest the possibility that the death of the author may be here under regard as though historicized. (Cecile Abish's accompanying—excellent—photographs taken from within museums reinforce the museological cast to the entire enterprise.)

To read linearly is to read randomly—this could well be the maxim for "What Else?" as for the entire collection of verbal arrangements in *99: The New Meaning*. Discontinuity is the governing principle of a derivative and arbitrary "autobiographical" self, and if the point were not obvious, each of the entries is numbered out of sequence. (Numbers in duplicate appear in the elliptical thriller "Inside Out.") Doubtless, this *bricolage* emphasizes the givenness of individuality. Tantalizing to think about nonetheless is Abish's choice to create a reconstituted yet authentic self of the fragments of others rather than an inauthentic self of oneself. Or, at least, assuming that in some sense journals can still be construed as the subjective repository of observation and confession, then Abish allows our readerly creation to range freely over the psychological equivalent of programmes, pawn tickets and press cuttings (as Joyce might say) but also those items not found but made by the authors whose subjective journals we read as their own.

"Skin Deep" is the site of exoticism derived from the writings of Flaubert, "Reading Kafka in German," the location of ontological void. This fascinating, fine collection closes with "99: The New Meaning," teasing with a genre that eludes melodrama, more arbitrary even than this typically arbitrary artifice.

Charles Simic, *The Book of Gods and Devils* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1990).

Surreality inheres in some poetics as much as it does in politics, and Yugoslav-born Charles Simic is proof that with some Eastern European poets a facility for macabre disjunction is thoroughgoing. Perhaps he relies on his aptitude for conjuring dark rupture too much. In this book, produced soon after the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The World Doesn't End*, poems resourceful in creating illogical worlds wherein sudden shifts in scale of place, of sense, often give way to endings that neatly snap shut and are as expected as "snap shut." Expected, too, is the usual wardrobe of limbs, dolls, teeth. Nevertheless, several poems sustain their illogicality, expending considerable creative effort in the process; among them: "St Thomas Aquinas," "A Letter," and "The Devils." Tactics known to and inspired by Reverdy, Follain and Char precipitate an ontological dislocation with which Simic is intimate. In his best work, the dislocation is also adventurous.

Donald Revell, *New Dark Ages* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1990).

"Twilight is espionage conducted openly," begins Revell's poem "The Judas Nocturne." The startling moments in his scenography of the commonplace are those of political and ethical disturbance infiltrating the quotidian landscape. The studied meditative drift within which disruptive insight emerges derives in part from Ashbery, carried to an extreme uninflected sameness in the work of John Koethe and in the suburban panoramas of Robert Hass. Current affairs, recent history, and myth prod the featureless landscape into configurations of consciousness, which then dismantle and settle back into featurelessness, perhaps to reconfigure again, adrift within a miasmic lyric. Revell's revisionist approach shows a convincing application of indeterminacy to a 20th-century Slough of Despond.

—Marjorie Welish

3 Anti-Monuments and an Elegy

Heiner Müller is the author of what might become one of the most memorable (i.e., memory maintaining and producing) theatrical works of the century, *Hamletmachine—Hamlet* read through a Brechtian lens tinted with the pain of Auschwitz and Stalin's camps. A new volume of his writings, *Explosion of a Memory*—containing poetry, prose, and all of Müller's recent performance works—was published last year by Performing Arts Journal Publications, edited and translated by Carl Weber. A synopsis of any given work, short as they all may be, would be impossible; consider his own gloss to *Explosion of a Memory/ Description of a Picture* (1984) : "DESCRIPTION OF A PICTURE may be read as an overpainting of Euripides' ALCESTIS which quotes the Noh play KUMASAKA, the Eleventh Canto of the ODYSSEY, and Hitchcock's THE BIRDS." And this to vex and mislead overambitious, as well as underambitious, recreators of the work! One strains to follow his fragmented narratives, an effort of reading thwarted at every moment by both the convolutions of the text and their horrifying iconography. As he wrote in a letter to Robert Wilson: "The dead are writing with us on the paper of the Future at which flames are already licking from all sides." Müller's speech given upon receiving the prestigious Georg Büchner Prize in 1985 was entitled, "The Wound Woyzeck"—we

might call our future considerations of his work "The Wound Müller." For memory must be a scar of the spirit, and Müller's works provide the sharp edge to create this effect.

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Another recipient of the Georg Büchner Prize, in 1970, was Thomas Bernhard, who died last year, one of the greatest contemporary authors in the German language. He was, to quote the words of one of his characters, "an antenna on the roof to tune in the devil." The spirit of negation incarnate—where suicide is an accomplishment, illness a means of self-definition, solitude a necessity, scandal the major social relation, intellect a function of obsession, madness a means of thought, sexuality an encumbrance—Bernhard became the bad conscience of an Austria which he despised, and which despised him in turn. The tragic "completion" of his works upon his death promises a spate of critical texts. The first of these has just appeared: Chantal Thomas' *Thomas Bernhard* (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1990). This excellent overview of his entire oeuvre places Thomas Bernhard in the context of those other authors of extreme conditions and uncommon, often misanthropic, sentiments who inspired him: Schopenhauer, Proust, Otto Weininger, Fritz Zorn, Paul Wittgenstein, Kafka, Peter Handke, Heiner Müller, etc. But even more important, it reveals the Byzantine thought and the crystalline, musical style of a man who could, as his last testament, forbid all sale or portrayal of his works in his native land, and who expressed his life as "nothing but a constant will to disturb and irritate." We can only hope that Chantal Thomas' book will continue this work of disturbance and irritation.

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A new and important anthology of writings by Jean Baudrillard, *Revenge of the Crystal* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1990), was just edited and translated by Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis. This work contains essays written between 1968 and 1983, ranging from his early theoretical critiques of consumerism and the "system of objects" to later musings on postmodernism and simulacra, seduction and mass media. The particular value of this collection of essays is to provide some of the theoretical background that subtends the Baudrillard which has become so fashionable in the cultural studies scene today. Here, the buzzwords "simulacra," "simulation," "hyper-anything and everything," "trans-aesthetic, trans-economic, trans-sexual," etc., seem to portend a theoretical dead-end where the eruption of "fashionable" thought (indeed, sometimes of nonsense) within theory might well proffer a new nihilism. Yet when considered within the earlier theoretical framework presented here, we can gain a new perspective on Baudrillard's more recent, quasi-journalistic texts, and read them as something other than the pop-theory that they are in danger of becoming.

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In the very years that European art was transformed by the birth of a radical modernism, Miguel de Unamuno devoted himself to the renewal of an ancient tradition: the mystical poem. *El Cristo de Velázquez*, written between 1913 and 1920, is a book-length sacred poem of religious passion, lyrical delicacy, and Baroque complexity. Inspired by a Valásquez crucifixion, it is certainly one of the greatest texts ever written on a painting. This poem exists in the tradition of allegorical verse originating in the *Song of Songs*, poetry whose symbolism combines cosmic, corporeal, and Biblical elements in a total hymn to God. Must we read Unamuno's work as an anachronism (a great but belated mystical tract), or is it rather a modernist anomaly (in a world where we might tend to give more literary credence to the paranoid schizophrenic "theology" expressed in Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* than to more orthodox inspirational literature)? Regardless, Unamuno's version of the theological drama of Christ bears a fascination far beyond the sheer expression of faith. As just one example, consider the obsessive presentation of the whiteness of Christ and his symbols, manifested on almost every page of the poem, and perhaps surpassing even the mania of *Moby Dick*. The blackness of the void and the redness of blood stand out all the more boldly against this colorless field of symbols, against such symbolic purity. Unamuno had wished to create this poem as a formulation of the Spanish people's faith; whether it can be read as such today is certainly questionable. Nevertheless, it is a majestic example of the allegorical symbolization of human physiognomy in the service of theology. This poem has just been brilliantly translated into French by Jacques Munier, as *Le Christ de Velázquez* (Paris: La Différence, 1990)—we must certainly press for an equivalent English translation of this work.

—Allen S. Weiss

Further Sightings

"Poetry is an expenditure of language 'without goal,' in fact a redundancy; a constant sacrifice to sacrifice," writes Arkadii Dragomoschenko in *Description* (Sun & Moon Press). This book defines a new direction in Russian poetry: neither officially Soviet nor officially (rhetorically) dissident: "What makes Arkadii Dragomoschenko's work so interesting and valuable," Michael Molnar writes in his introduction, "is that he continues to withstand the pressure of that authoritative voice and its misplaced

confidence that the right language need only be invoked to constitute an ideal subjectivity." Dragomoschenko's is a poetry filled with meditative fluidity and imaginative iridescences. "Responsibility," he writes, "is a mode of hearing." Lyn Hejinian and Elena Balashova have exceeded any possible expectations of translators: it's hard to believe these are not in some ways originally composed in the "American." "Poetry," says the 44-year-old Leningrad poet, and former stoker, whose first Soviet-published book is not yet one year old, "is that state of language which in its workings constantly exceeds the actual order of truth. . . . Courage consists in an unending affirmation of thought which overcomes 'the order of actual truth' itself."

Back in the U.S.A., a revolution in poetic language seems to have hit the far-off Broadway New York theater, with two poets, Fiona Templeton and Mac Wellman, leading a way that had seemed largely blocked by the obsessive literalism, emotional hyperventilation, and clever Mametry of the reigning "serious" theater of the 80s. Hardly since Robert Wilson's *Letter for Queen Victoria*—or any of Richard Foreman's dazzling Ontological Hysteric Theater productions—has richly complex poetic language been allowed such free play on the New York stage as in the recent productions of Wellman and Templeton.

So far, the height of Wellman's theatrical work was last season's *Terminal Hip*—a fantastic full-length monologue of turns and spins and flips, a kind of *ars de* rant or stream of agitation that Wellman has made his specialty, and which is suggested by the most recent of his scripts to be published, *Bad Penny* (Sun & Moon's Corner Books).

Fiona Templeton's *You—the City* (Roof Books) represents a remarkable innovation in the structure of theatrical presentations: the play was performed for each spectator, one at a time, by a string of actors, one leading you to the next, in the streets surrounding Times Square. This method of personalizing the size and focus of the drama was powerful enough, but the dense, at times bizarre, at times wrenching, script, as much a study of language textures as of characters, made for an indelible experience of having poetry "conversed" at you.

Two other equally remarkable productions—both one-person shows and both essentially explorations of the possibility of a moral bearing in a world torn from its bearing—should at least be noted in this context: Eric Bogosian's multiple-personality shticks in *Sex, Drugs & Rock 'n' Roll* and Wally Shawn's haunting imaginary memoir *Fever*.

Over the past five years, the most dynamic constellation of newly publishing poets in North America has centered around Vancouver's galvanizing Kootenay School of Writing (KSW). Initial publication for many of these writers was an excellent series of chapbooks from Tsunami Editions, edited by Larry Timewell (Bremner). Other forums include KSW's

own *Writing* (edited by Colin Browne and now by Jeff Derksen and Nancy Shaw), *The Raddle Moon* (edited by Susan Yarrow (Clark)), and more recently *Motel* (edited by Kathryn MacLeod, Doug Stetar, Julia Steele, and Lisa Marr); all of which have been abetted by Proprioception Books (Lisa Robertson, proprietor: 207 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 1H7). This Fall, an anthology of the new Vancouver writing (KSW and related tendencies), edited by Bremner, Robertson and Miriam Nichols, was brought out as a special premier issue of *West Coast Line*. (*West Coast Line* is the successor to the immensely useful *Line*, which in its new form continues to be edited from Simon Fraser University by Roy Miki). *West Coast Line* #1 features new work by many, though alas not all, of the KSW company (in what must be Northern modesty, the editors have left themselves out): 19 poets, in addition to a number of visual artists, are featured, including, of those not mentioned so far, Deanna Ferguson, Calvin Wharton, Peter Culley, Gerald Creed, Steven Forth, Dan Farrell, Judy Radul, and Adeena Karasick, with statements on poetics from nine of the poets and a review of the Tsunami series by Fred Wah. The Fall has also brought two full-length collections from Talonbooks by KSW poets: Dorothy Trujillo Lusk's *Redactive* and Derksen's exceptional *Down Time*.

What Alan Davies lacks in *Candor* (O Books) he makes up for with his own particular brand of Newfoundland chutzpa. This blunt mix of topical reviews and ruminative poems, literary theory and erotic facts, breaks down the inherent aestheticization (anaestheticization) of the poetic text, pushing it, sometimes kicking and singing, into the world, where Davies has the peculiar notion it may (does) belong. It's not that I agree with Alan, or not, or that he would with himself; it's the enormously articulating intensity and the brandished (searing) lyricism. He spills over the borders of *Candor* and into *Life* (Case Books), an equally profound sounding of found moments of presence. Both books highly recommended for specialists in the particular vectors of the human circumstance and the possibility for poetry in face of such lacerating incontrovertabilities.

Robert Creeley outdoes, or more precisely redoes, or more to the point undoes, himself in *Autobiography*—a hundred tiny pages from Hanuman that manage, against all generic expectations, to stay acutely charged and lucidly reflective at the same time. Creeley seems to be constantly rethinking the terms and conditions that give any possible grounding to what only by aerial view gets called a 'life'; it's as if such stubborn preoccupation has made his "provision": a provisional vision of being in, of writing coming out of, a restless encounter with the undefinable: "A meager emphasis finally, but the world has hardly been a nice place to live in. . . . When young, I'd written Olson with almost pious explanation: 'Form is never more than an extension of content.' Now I might say equally, 'Content is never more than an extension of form.' It depends, as they say in New England."

Susan Howe also, and determinately, stays in New England; two fundamental collections of her work have been issued this past year: *The Europe of Trusts* (Sun & Moon) and *Singularities* (Wesleyan University Press); *Talisman* #4 features a Howe section, including a revealing, spirited interview. Meanwhile, back West, Laura Moriarty's *Rondeaux* (Roof Books) makes palpable the resources of the exploding lyric—those recent works that reframe, with a sense of troubled potentiality, certain lyric textures and moods; in contrast, Moriarty's *like roads* (Kelsey St. Press) bounces off of a more phrasal patterning of isolation and recombining.

There's so much coming in it makes for difficulties to stop, impossibilities to keep up with even a modicum of what the work in hand demands—deserves. Right now I'm up to Michelle Wallace's *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (Verso), which collects many of her essays on black feminism, popular culture, and literary theories: "It's not a matter of being for or against Western Civilization. We are all victims of it. It's time to consider that the classics may, in fact, make more sense to some of us as records of blindness to the plight of the world's majorities, than as sublime masterpieces. . . . That doesn't mean that we don't need to read and analyze them. It means we need to keep our eye on the ball."

—Charles Bernstein

Noticings

"I don't find solitude agonizing, on the contrary. Holes in the paper open and take me fathoms from anywhere."

Samuel Beckett, 1959

"And as Klaus Kinski lies in bed with his secretary he strokes her breasts; then he lets his hand sink slowly, watching himself as he does so, completely fascinated by the movement of his hand and by her breasts, in a way that suggests he never wants to stop the movement, so that there isn't a cut for ages, and the last finger is touching the breast for an eternity."

Wim Wenders on Edgar Wallace's *The Face in the Dark*

Charlie Watts talking about going to hear Art Taylor; "You never heard everything he had until you saw him play live."

Godard on how he never intended to be a filmmaker: "I was just passing by, but I stayed."

"We have to run faster than beauty, so it will appear that we are turning our backs on it."

Picasso to Cocteau

"There is no logic here.
Logic forbade this.
All that we value:
order, remembrance,
human nature and conduct,
mutual coherence—
What do they avail when this art
dictates its laws."

Robert Duncan, *The Venice Poem*

"the time is for coming close, Useless
verbs shooting the other words far away"

John Ashbery, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

"Instrument always less than the music"

Cecil Taylor, *Ell Moving Track*

"Poetry is language that becomes so excited that it is endlessly creative of message."

Robert Duncan, 1969

Cecil Taylor going to see Billie Holiday at 12: "And there it came, with a live flower in its hair, every movement was grace, and what could I do?"

"In the neuter austerity of that terrain all phenomena were bequeathed a strange equality and no one thing nor spider nor stone nor blade of grass could put forth claim to precedence. The very clarity of these articles belied their familiarity, for the eye predicates the whole on some feature or part and here was nothing more luminous than another and nothing more enshadowed and in all the optical democracy of such landscapes all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships."

Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

I don't want to know how to write.
I want to commit the act of words.
"Hipsters of America in the 1950s sitting in a dim room—
the clash of the streets beyond the window's bare soft sill."

Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*

"my mind plays in the distance"
Robin Blaser, *'It springs on you'*

"But all living art will be irrational, primitive, and complex; it will speak a secret language and leave behind documents not of edification but of paradox."
Hugo Ball, 1915

"Anyone who does not smell of cooked bomb and compressed vertigo is not worthy of being alive."
Antonin Artaud, *Van Gogh, The Man Suicided By Society*

"I enter many directions, the synchron and coming together of time, in order to find words which are not alone."
"The seat of language in the Other is the necessary exploration."
Robin Blaser, *The Stadium of the Mirror*

Jazz stopped at freedom.
"Language obeyed flares tongues in obscure matter"
Robert Duncan, *Food For Fire, Food For Thought*

". . .dimly he was aware that when everything had been understood, there would be only the solved puzzle before him, a black wall of certainty. He would know, but nothing would have meaning, because the knowing was itself the meaning; beyond that there was nothing to be known."
Paul Bowles, *The Spider's House*

"Essence of stuff won't do"
"I like the bliss of mind"
"My mind rings with a thousand iced lizard windows
I have no words for neutral"
"Tie it all together, Jack, the mirror doesn't show
the real right"
Jack Kerouac, *Old Angel Midnight*

"Writing means, among other things, not knowing what you're doing, being unable to judge it—there's certainly a bit of that in a writer, a blinding light."
"And I said one ought to write without making corrections, not necessarily at full tilt, no, but at one's own pace and in accordance with what one is experiencing at the time; one ought to eject what one writes, manhandle it almost, yes, treat it roughly, not try to trim profusion but let it be part of

the whole, and not tone down anything either, whether its speed or its slowness, just leave everything as it is when it appears"

Marguerite Duras, *Emily L.*

"Improvisation is the capability to talk to oneself"

Cecil Taylor, 1984

"He, the artist, knows the meaning of a thing is not its truth; this knowledge is a wisdom, a foolish wisdom, one might say, because it removes him from the community (but also) from the company of the arrogant and the fanatic."
"The object represented vibrates, to the detriment of dogma."
"to make meaning subtle is therefore a secondary political activity, as is any attempt to deplete, disturb, and undo the fanaticism of meaning."
"The artist's primary fragility is this: he is part of a changing world, but he, too, is changing. This is banal, but for the artist it is dizzying, because he never knows if the work he is proposing is a product of the changing world or of the changing of his own subjectivity."
"the incessant scruple that tears the artist apart, between solitude and gregariousness"

Roland Barthes, *Dear Antonioni. . .*

"extremely random order that cannot be described as accidental"

Robert Rauschenberg

". . .infinite completion, the joyful
mysterious essence of Arrangement"

Jack Kerouac, *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*

"But how to say this. . . There are no pronouns.
The I, he, me—none of that works.
. . .Nothing is sayable."

Samuel Beckett, 1977

Nobody believes the way anything ends anymore.

—Clark Coolidge

The Master of the Little Box

Vasko Popa who died on January 5th of this year was the greatest and the most original poet of the postwar Yugoslavia. I met him first in the spring of 1970 when he came to the United States to give readings and attend a poetry conference at the Library of Congress. I had been translating his poetry and corresponding with him for several years, so it felt like we already knew each other. It was in New York, where he spent a few weeks after his tour, that we got to be friends.

That year I had left my job at the photography magazine *Aperture* to write and live off readings. So, I had plenty of time to keep Popa company. He didn't speak English. The State Department had provided him with an interpreter, but he preferred my services. I'd arrive at his hotel right after breakfast and we'd spend the day together. Vasko had some business appointments. Being an editor in a publishing house in Belgrade, he was paying courtesy calls on a number of houses that he had dealings with in the past. Mostly, however, we just walked the streets and talked.

What made these conversations interesting is what they revealed about how Popa wrote and thought about poetry. Twenty years ago my own impulses as a poet were uncomfortably divided between Surrealism and Objectivism of W.C. Williams and his followers. The poem for me was still mostly an inspired and unpremeditated utterance. Popa, on the other hand, was all calculation. A poem was almost an act of criticism. "This is what must be done now," he would say and mean that in relationship to the history of Modernism or the history of Serbian literature.

This approach surprised me and almost repelled me at first. As it turned out, Popa had already thought out everything he was going to write for the rest of his life. Once late at night, after much wine, he described to me in detail his future poems. He wasn't putting me on. In later years I'd see these poems come into print one by one.

"Chess problems," said Nabokov and he could have been speaking of Popa, "demand from the composer the same values that characterize all worthwhile art: originality, invention, conciseness, harmony, complexity and splendid insincerity."

THE LITTLE BOX

The little box gets her first teeth
And her little length
Little width little emptiness
And all the rest she has

The little box continues growing
The cupboard that she was inside
Is now inside her

And she grows bigger bigger bigger
Now the room is inside her
And the house and the city and the earth
And the world she was in before

The little box remembers her childhood
And by a great great longing
She becomes a little box again

Now in the little box
You have the whole world in miniature
You can easily put in a pocket
Easily steal it easily lose it

Take care of the little box.

Popa had a firm belief that in poetry less is more. He wrote only seven short books of short poems. He had a rigorous, almost classical conception of the art. His literary ancestors were the Surrealists, but temperamentally and intellectually he was closer to Paul Valery. There was something ascetic about this poet who loved to eat and drink well. "You're a Byzantine icon painter and not a Marxist," I told him once.

This business of Marxism was very odd. Popa would profess belief in it while talking of spiritual matters. He was interested in alchemy and various kinds of esotericism, for example. Marxism obviously explained only the here and now. As for the rest, one had to seek elsewhere.

Popa's metaphysics was Symbolist. And yet, it's not so much that he used symbols in his poetry. What he really wanted to understand is the secret of how symbols are made. Poetry is sacred action, it's been said. Popa's poems demonstrate how the laws of the imagination work.

The poet listens to language. There's a kind of 4th dimension within language, a dimension where myth begins.

"The salad bird," writes Lucian, "is an enormous bird covered all over with salad greens instead of feathers; its wings look exactly like lettuce leaves."

For Popa language was not an abstract system, but a spoken idiom. He found his poems in the deepest recesses of idiomatic language. In that respect, his imagination and his poetry come from a distinct geography and

culture. In his poems the American reader lives for a time with the gods and demons of the Serbians.

—Charles Simic

Barbaric Lyricism

"And the tact of it! I like that most of all! That is the quality in which the French excel—finesse it is called—what we name tact: a right disposition of tints, colors,—regarding fine distinctions. . . .No doubt the French are masters there—no one sees it, bathes in it—more enjoyably than I do. But then, while we miss that, is there not something to compensate for it? Sarrazin speaks of America—that she gives him the barbaric lyricism of the Hebrews—how fine that! And I, for one, am content with that—the rest I am willing to let go! I think a subdued sarcasm lurks in the phrase—or perhaps not, though I think I see it there. An old wharf, the decayed, rotted, soaked, beams, pilings: the debris: the grass-grown, mossy endings, surfaces—Oh! they appeal to me most of all. Many, many, many years ago—in New York—up towards Harlem—Mott Haven—there was an old wharf on which I spent some of the happiest days of my life. An old dilapidated, ruining, breaking, wharf there, with sea-weed—sea-drift—caught in its sharp corners: and a slight whiff of salt air—just enough for a reminder—and the flowing waters—and on and on—and the boats—craft—of all sorts. Oh! It is the surpassing remembrance—barbaric lyricism!"

Walt Whitman talking to Traubel (1889) quoted from *Camden Journals*

When they seized power in the year 750, the House of Abbasid, descendents of the Prophet's uncle, acquired an empire of distant reach from India to the Atlantic coast of Europe. Twelve years later, on a day fixed by a Persian astrologer for the prominence of Jupiter, work began on their new capital, Madinat as-Salam, the City of Peace. As center of the empire and image of the world, the city was built in the form of a circle divided by a cross; its four gates the four directions to the four corners of the earth.

For 500 years, though the edges of the empire eroded and broke off, the city—still known by the name of the village it had replaced, Baghdad—luxuriated. The most cosmopolitan city in the world of that time, with ships docked—there at the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris—from China,

India, Russia, Spain, the North and Black African kingdoms; with its schools of painting, poetry, philosophy, astronomy, philology, mathematics; its translations of the Greek texts that would ultimately impel the European Renaissance; where fortunes could be quickly made and even more quickly spent. (Sinbad, for one, became a sailor because he had dissipated an enormous inheritance on evening entertainment and "costly robes.") Perennial symbol of the metropolis as pleasure palace: I write from a city once known, not so long ago, as Baghdad on the Hudson.

The poets of that city—particularly in its first 300 years—were noted for their rejection of traditional verse forms, their unembarrassed hedonism in many varieties, their scorn for religious and social orthodoxies, their sycophancy in court and their bitter polemics outside it, their elaborate prosodic techniques and increasingly pedantic literary criticism.

Their form of choice was the *qit'a,* literally a "fragment"—not so much a modernist shard from a vanished whole as an arrow of light in the gloom, a twinge of perfection, as in the famous couplet (an entire poem) by the 8th century poet Abbas Ibn al-Ahnaf:

> When she walks with her girl servants
> Her beauty is a moon between swaying lanterns

[The translation is by Abdullah al-Udhari and George Wightman, from their Birds through a *Ceiling of Alabaster.*]

The misanthropic, anti-clerical, skeptical, metaphysical, blind anchorite poet Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri (973-1052) is generally considered to be their greatest. It is said that Dante read him in translation, and one could easily mistake the couplet that closes this poem by Ma'arri (same translators) as yet one more eerie and exact image from the *Commedia:*

> Each sunset warns quiet men who look ahead
> That light will end; and each day postman Death

> Knocks on our door. Although he does not speak,
> He hands us a standing invitation.

> Be like those skeleton horses which scent battle
> And fear to eat. They wait chewing their bridles.

Ma'ari wrote:

> Some people are like an open grave:
> You give it the thing you love most
> And get nothing in return.

And, a thousand years ago in Baghdad, he wrote a line that, in New York in late January 1991, made me—if only for a few hours—turn off the television:

> Don't let your life be governed by what disturbs you.
>
> —Eliot Weinberger

Edmond Jabès

1912–1991

Très tôt, je me suis trouvé face à l'incompréhensible, à l'impensable, à la mort.

Depuis cet instant, j'ai su que rien, ici-bas, n'était partageable parce que rien ne nous appartient. . . .

Very early I found myself faced with the incomprehensible, the unthinkable, death.

Since that moment I have known that down here nothing could be shared, because nothing belongs to us. . . .

Le Livre du Partage
The Book of Shares

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

ERRATA: re *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Duke University Press, 1990, reviewed in this issue. RBD writes: "The cover and frontispiece photograph of George Oppen was taken by Richard Friedman. This attribution was not made in the text. The editor regrets very much her unintentional oversight of Mr. Friedman's work and requests that readers and users of the text make the correction in their copy." A new packaging of BARBARA MOR'S *The Great Cosmic Mother*, with color plates by Monica Sjoo, will be out in May, 1991 (Harper/San Francisco). *The Complete Poems of Blaise Cendrars* (translated by RON PADGETT) is forthcoming from the University of California Press, late 1991. Padgett's recent books include *The Big Something* and *Supernatural Overtones* (with Clark Coolidge) both published by The Figures. The first of KAREN KELLEY'S "Virtual Reality" series will appear in *O Books* Anthology. "Virtual Reality #4" will appear in *avec* #5. LARRY GOODELL'S *Firecracker Soup* is available from Cinco Puntos Press, El Paso; his *The Mad New Mexican* (songs 1981–86), is from Ubik Sound, Albuquerque. PAMELA WYE is an artist living in NYC; she recently published an article on Nancy Spero in *ARTS Magazine*. WOLFGANG GIEGERICH'S essays have appeared in *Sulfur*, and Hillman's *Spring* Annual. EMILE SNYDER, Professor Emeritus of French and African Literature at Indiana University, has published a number of collections of poetry in French, and has translated two books by Aimé Césaire. WILLIAM CORBETT'S *Don't Think: Look* will appear from Zoland Books, Fall 1991. DAVID BROMIGE'S *Men, Women, and Vehicles* was recently published by Black Sparrow; his *Tiny Courts* will be published by Brick Books in Canada later this year. Sun & Moon Press (Los Angeles) has recently published CLARK COOLIDGE'S *Sound as Thought: Poems 1982-1984*. RONALD GONZALEZ'S most recent sculptural installation was *Turning Bodies Into Souls*, INTAR Gallery, NYC, 1990. BRUCE ANDREWS' *Executive Summary* (Potes & Poets) and *I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut, or Social Romanticism* (Sun & Moon) will appear this spring. MILTON KESSLER continues to access notebooks 1965 on, working on *Atrocity of the Ornate*, based on Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, first noted at British Museum, 1970. FORREST GANDER'S books are *Rush to the Lake* (Alice James) and *Eggplants and*

Lotus Root; the anthology he edited, *Mouth to Mouth: New Poetry by 12 Mexican Women*, is forthcoming this year. AARON SHURIN'S newest chapbook is *Narrativity; Into Distances* is forthcoming (both Sun & Moon). SUSAN HOWE'S *The Europe of Trusts* (Sun & Moon) appeared in 1990. Wesleyan University Press has recently issued her *Singularities*. DONALD REVELL'S third collection of poems, *New Dark Ages*, has recently been published by Wesleyan. PAM REHM has just started the Materials Press. CHRIS STROFFOLINO'S poems have recently appeared in *New American Writing, Mirage, GPWTTD*, and *American Letters & Commentary*. ESTHER ALLEN has just completed a translation of Octavio Paz's book on Xavier Villarrutia. MONIQUE CHEFDOR, who founded the Blaise Cendrars International Society in 1978, has recently finished editing the correspondence of Blaise Cendrars and Jacques-Henri Levêque, to be published by Denoël. CAMILLE PAGLIA is the author of *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. She teaches humanities at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. CHANTAL THOMAS most recently published *Thomas Bernhard* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), and *La Reine scélérate: Marie-Antoinette dans les pamphlets* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). ALLEN S. WEISS is the author of *The Aesthetics of Excess* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1989); his *Miroirs de l'infini: Le jardin à la française et la métaphysique au XVII siècle* is forthcoming from Le Seuil.

We acknowledge permission to quote Emily Dickinson material from The Harvard University Press, publishers of *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (Vol. 1 and 2 ed. R.W. Franklin, Cambridge, Mass.) and to photograph material at Harvard's Houghton Library. We also acknowledge both Harvard University Press and Little, Brown and Company, for permission to quote material from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson ed., Cambridge, Mass.

Cid Corman

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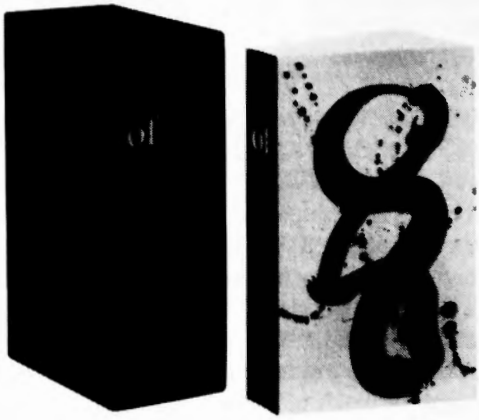

New and selected poems

Cid Corman has made major contributions to the international literary community, through his poetry radio show in the late 40s and early 50s, through his translations of German and Japanese writers, and as publisher of *Origin* magazine and the Origin Press. Born in New England, Corman has lived in Japan for over 25 years. This new edition of poems and prose pieces is the most comprehensive collection of his work to date.

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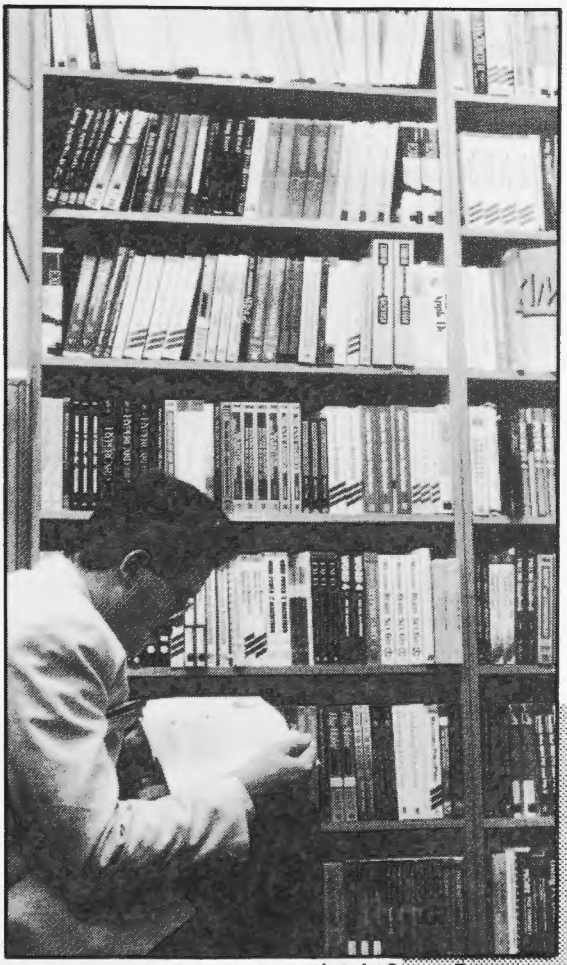

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Sulfur 29

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Sulfur

FALL 1991

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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Editorial Assistant	TIM SCOTT

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER: TERESA SERRANO / DON'T TOUCH ME
Pencil, charcoal & acrylic on canvas, 56" x 48", 1990
(Photo Credit: Mark Sink; reproduced by courtesy of Anne Plumb Gallery, New York City)

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CESAR VALLEJO
TRILCE LX–LXIX

(Tr. from the Spanish by Clayton Eshleman & Julio Ortega)

LX

Of wood is my patience,
deaf, vejetal.

Day you who have been pure, a child, useless,
you were born naked, the leagues
of your march, go running over
your twelve extremities, this frowning fold
that later frays
into who knows what final diapers.

Constellated of grumose hemispheres,
under eternal unknown americas, your great plumage,
you depart and leave me, without your ambiguous emotion,
without your knot of dreams, Sunday.

And my patience is eaten away,
and I turn to exclaim: When will Sunday,
big-mouthed and mute, emerge from the sepulcher;
when will it come to load up this Saturday
of rags, this horrible suture
of the pleasure that begets us accidentally,
and the pleasure that BaniSHEs us.

LXI*

Descending from my horse tonight,
before the door of the house, where
I said farewell with the cock's crowing.
It is shut and no one responds.

The stone bench on which mama enlightened
my older brother, so he could saddle
backs I had ridden bare,
through lanes, past hedges, a country boy;
the stone bench on which I left my heartsick childhood
yellowing in the sun. . . . And this mourning
that frames the portal?

God in alien peace,
the beast sneezes, as if calling too;
noses about, prodding the cobbles. Then doubts
whinnies,
his ears all ears.

Papa must be up praying, and perhaps
he will think I am late.
My sisters, humming their simple,
boisterous illusions,
in preparation for the approaching holy day,
and it's almost here.
I wait, I wait, my heart
an egg at its moment, that blocked.

The numerous family that we left
not long ago, now no one awake, not even a candle
placed on the altar so that we might return.

I call again, and nothing.
We fall silent and begin to sob, and the animal
whinnies, keeps on whinnying.

Asterisks refer to lines noted at the end of this section.

They're all sleeping forever,
and so nicely, that at last
my horse dead-tired starts nodding
in his turn, and half-asleep, with each pardon, says
it's all right, everything is quite all right.

LXII

Carpet
Whenever you go to the room that you know,
enter it, but carefully half-close the screen
that so often is half-open,
tightly unite the hooks, so that other backs
no longer can turn.

Bark
And when you leave, say that you'll not delay
in calling the canal that separates us:
powerfully kaught on an edge of your fate,
I'm inseparable for you,
and you drag me edgeways with your soul.

Pillow
And only when we have died—who knows!
Oh no. Who knows!
then we will have separated.
But if, on changing step, I am handed
the unknown flag, I'll wait for you there,
at the confluence of breath and bone,
as in old times,
as in old times on the corner of the western
bride and groom of the earth.

And from there I'll follow you along
other worlds, and even my mossy
and cold-benumbed nos will serve you,
you may rest your knees on them
on the seven falls of that infinite slope,
and thus they will hurt you less.

LXIII

Day breaks raining. Combed through
morning drips fine hair.
Melancholy is lashed fast;
and on the misasphalted oxident of Hindu furniture,*
veering, destiny hardly settles.

Skies of the puna disheartened
by great love, platinum skies, torvus
with impossibility.

The flock ruminates and is underscored
by an Andean whinny.

I remember myself. But the staves
of the wind suffice, the rudders so still
they appear one,
and the cricket of tedium and the gibbous unbreakable elbow.

The morning suffices with free plaits
of precious, sierran tar,
when I go out and look for eleven o'clock
and it is only an ill-timed twelve.

LXIV

Wandering landmarks enamor, since the mountainous moment that midwives and dates the insurgent niches of the atmosphere.

The heart is green from so much waiting; and in the Panama Canal—I'm speaking to you, middles, bases, cusps! stairsteps sprout, steps going up, steps going dow-
n.
And I who persevere,
and I who know to stand firm.

Oh valley without mother height, where everything sleeps a horrible halftone, without refreshing rivers, without entrances for love. Oh voices and cities that pass galloping on a finger pointed at bald Unity. While pass, from much in much, farmhands with great wise sides, behind the three tardy dimensions.

Today Tomorrow Yesterday

(No, man!)

LXV

Mother, tomorrow I'm going to Santiago,
to dip myself in your blessing and in your tears.
I'm adjusting my self-deceptions and the rosy
sore of my worthless tasks.

Your arch of astonishment will await me,
the tonsured columns of your longings
that exhaust life. The patio will await me,
the downstairs corridor with its tori and festive*

borders. My tutorial armchair will await me,
that solid bigjawed piece of dynastic
leather, that keeps grumbling at great-great-
grandchild rumps, from strap to strand.

I am sifting my purest affections.
I am axling—don't you hear the plummet gasping?*
—don't you hear the revilles pounding?
I am molding your love formula
for all the hollows of this floor.
Oh if only tacit gigs were available
for all the most distant ribbons,
for all the most distinct reunions.

So it is, immortal dead one. So it is.
Under the double arches of your blood, where
one can only pass on tiptoes, even my father
to go through there,
humbled himself until less than half a man,
until being the youngest child that you had.

So it is, immortal dead one.
In the colonnade of your bones
which not even sobs can topple,
and in whose side not even Destiny could intrude
even one of his fingers.

So it is, immortal dead one.
So it is.

LXVI*

The Second of November tolls.

These chairs are truly welkoming.
The branch of forebodings
goes, comes, lifts, flutters sweaty,
wearied in this sitting room.
The Second of November tolls sad.

Souls, how deep your abolished teeth
cut, recrossing blind nerves,
without recalling the tough fiber
that round singing workers are mending
with unending hemp, of innumerable knots
throbbing with crossroads.

You, souls, of the limpid knees
pure from your surrenderings,
how you saw at the other heart
with your white crowns, lacking
in cordiality. Yes. You, souls.

The Second of November tolls sad.
And the branch of forebodings
is bitten by a cart that simply
rolls through the street.

LXVII

Summer sings close by, and both
wander diverse, shouldering
road bends, cedars, uniped rhythms,
legs apart on the inevitable single line.

Summer sings, and on those sweetened
walls of March,
the arachnid aquarelle of melancholy
snivels, swarms.

A painting framed with cracked annelid, a painting
that was missing from that spot where
we thought the large absent mirror should go.
Love, this is the painting that was missing.

But, why exert myself
by gilding straws for such an enchanted auricle,
if, on the back of beloved stars,
emptiness is tolerated, despite everything.

How much mother remained inside
always, in tenacious carbon attire, whenever
the painting was missing, and for what would grow
at the foot of woman's arduous ravine.

So I told myself: yes that mirror will come—
having been so awaited, it's more than crystal now.
My life was running out—to what end?
My life was running out, to raise us

only from mirror to mirror.

LXVIII

It is the Fourteenth of July.
Five in the evening. It's raining all over
a blotting paper third corner.
And it rains more from below ay upward.

Two lagoons the hands advance
ten deep,
out of a swampy Tuesday that has for six days
in the lachrymals been frozen.

A week has slashed its throat
with the sharpest falls; haz done
all that it can to make miserable genial
in a huge tavern without rails. Now we are
ok, given this rain that washes us
and cheers us and evokes our tenderness for it.

We've walked as gross weight, and, with a single
defiance,
our animal purity whitened.
And we ask for eternal love,
for the absolute encounter,
for as much as passes from here to there.
And we responded from wherever mine are not yours,
from whatever moment the staff, on being carried,
supports and is not supported. (The net.)

And my greatcoat, it was black,*
hanging in a corner, not making a peep,
a
t
f
u
l
m
a
s
T

LXIX

How you search for us, oh sea, with your educational
volumes! How inconsolable, how atrocious
you are in the feverish sunshine.

With your mattocks you leap,
with your leaves you leap,
hacking, hacking in a maddened sesame,
while the waves return crying, after
uncalking the four winds
and all memories, on labiate tungsten
platters, contracted with fangs
and transfixed chelonian l's.

Philosophy of black wings vibrating
in the shy tremor of the shoulders of day.

The sea, and an edition standing,
in its single leaf the recto
facing the verso.

A Note On *Trilce*

1922 was a banner year for international modernism. It includes Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Pasternak's *My Sister, Life*, e.e. cummings' *The Enormous Room*, Valery's *Le cimetière marin*, Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* (completed in 1922, published in 1923), and of course César Vallejo's *Trilce*. This medium-length work (77 poems, about 100 pages) falls somewhere between Joyce's "soup pot as big as the Phoenix Park," and Eliot's "food in tins." In LXI, Vallejo refers to the book as "my succulent snack of unity."

Trilce is Vallejo's second book, and a total departure from the solid but fairly conventional *Los heraldos negros* (1918). A year after *Trilce's* publication, Vallejo left Peru for good, and spent the remaining 15 years of his life for the most part based in Paris, where he wrote the poems posthumously published by his widow as *Poemas humanos* (and now known as "the Paris

poems," or as three separate volumes making up *The Complete Posthumous Poetry* (tr. by Eshleman and Barcia, University of California Press, 1978).

The major pressure in the poems is that of the vise of sex and death. Via certain eating scenes, entangled with elegaic mother sensations and acute erotic registrations, the tomb/womb space of the mother is explored as the body of a lover is caressed and consumed. In its deep structure, *Trilce* achieves its freedom-in-tension by incestuously broaching the wall that divides masculine energy between being a son and being a lover. When such a wall breaks, a new, terrible heaven and hell pervade consciousness.

Trilce is the most radical collection of poetry in the Spanish language, and is not only filled with burned bridges but with intact ones, or: models of what is to be burned. While the most striking writing in the book is involved with fracturing the referential, linear functions of communicative language (in a way that anticipates "projective verse" and "language poetry" by a number of decades), such writing which is juxtaposed with thematic narratives seems at first glance to be written by someone else. Some of Vallejo's accomplishment, then, involves a two-way movement between the inside and the outside, interiors in which the act of writing generates associative webs of words released from temporal and spatial obligations, and exteriors which via sketches of childhood, romance, and political confinement (Vallejo was unjustly jailed for 3 months during the period of the book's composition), establish a life. The exteriors create frames in which an interior freedom is discovered and performed—the losses of experience through which the findings of vision are made possible.

Trilce has not attracted a great deal of attention outside the Spanish-language world of literature because it has not been satisfactorily translated. For the past two and a half years, Julio Ortega (a Peruvian poet and scholar now at Brown University) and I have been attempting to remedy this situation. The Eridanos Library will publish our version (bilingually) in 1992. The following brief notes may be useful for the 10 poems from *Trilce* published in this issue of *Sulfur*. There are some intentional misspellings in the original poems which we have matched in translation.

LXI: Juan Espejo Asturrizaga (whose *César Vallejo, Itinerario del hombre*, Lima, 1965, is the key and virtually only account of Vallejo's Peruvian years) writes that this poem responds to a journey back to Vallejo's home in Santiago de Chuco made by the poet and some friends after he had been away for several years. Espejo recalls: "We made an arduous journey on mule back from Menocucho (the nearest train connection to Trujillo at the time). César's brother, Miguel, was with us. We arrived after a three day ride, entering the town at two in the morning. Everyone was sleeping peacefully, in a delicious silence. At the Vallejo home, we knocked on the door, with

César anxious to embrace his family. We knocked and knocked, and still no one responded. After a long wait, we went inside."

LXIII:

oxidente (oxident): a neologism fusing "Occidente" (Occident) and "oxidar" (to oxidize).

LXV:

tondos (tori): round moldings (torus, in the singular).
ejando (axling): a neologism based on "eje" (axle).

LXVI: Eduardo Neale-Silva suggests that in back of this poem commemorating All Souls Day are the deaths of Vallejo's first sweetheart in Trujillo, María Rosa Sandoval (10 February, 1918), and his mother, María de los Santos Gurrionero (8 August, 1918).

LXVIII: the last thin stanza looks like a flag flying from the pole made by the vertical formation "atodastA," a compression of "a toda asta" (based on the expression "a media asta," at half mast).

—CE / June 1991

BARBARA GUEST
DISSONANCE ROYAL TRAVELLER

sound opens sound

shank of globe strings floating out

something like images are here

opening up avenues to view a dome

a distant clang reaches the edifice.

understanding what it means
to understand music

cloudless movement beyond the neck's reach
an hypnotic lull in porcelain water break mimics
tonality crunch of sand under waddling

a small seizure
from monumentality

does not come or go with understanding

the path will end
birdhouse of trembling cotton

or dream expelled it
parcel on the landlocked moor.

explaining music

and their clothes entangled
who walk into a puddle of minnows;
                minnows in a bowl
consonant with water.

                the drifted footpad
ambushed by reeds signals the listening
oars.

                music disappears into oars.

in the middle the world is brown;
on the opposite side of the earth
an aroma of scarlet.

this accompanies our hearing music;
the sleeve of heaven

and the hoof of earth
loosed from their garrison.

yet dissonance may abandon *miserere*
on bruised knee hasten to the idol.

and what is consonance—the recluse—

entering and exiting
as often as a monarch butterfly
touches a season;

by accident grips the burning flowers.

in the stops between terror
the moon aflame on its plaza.

autumn of rippling wind
and the noise of baskets
smell of tin fists.

and harsh fists
on the waterfall changing the season;
the horse romps in flax
a cardboard feature
creating a cycle of flax.

music imagines this cardboard

the horse in cardboard jacket
flagrant the ragged grove

red summit red.

dissonance royal traveller

altered the gray saddle.

JEROME ROTHENBERG
THE LORCA VARIATIONS XI & XII

THE LORCA VARIATIONS (XI)
"NEWTON"

1
The men had green feet that vaulted them into the open where they could flaunt their secrets. Lace brushed lightly against their nostrils as the apple tree loomed over Newton with its fruits. It is so Saxon to bind gnomes with string, to watch your echoes drifting off in secret, your lost companions jangling irons in the wind. Not every boy has such sad eyebrows, nor would every corner spare an inch for death. In the woods the moon showed Newton where the truth lies. Following his nose he slammed into a meteor named Newton. He mistook it for a science that was white—like beech trees or like beards—but once he caught it in his mirror, saw it turn blue again. At length it looked like every other star or lake.

2
Every wise man considers himself another Newton: a philosopher musing beside trees & water, going for a walk or coming from a walk, pulling genies out of waves & sky (with which *sigh* makes a perfect rhyme). Their corneas are focused on infinity & disregard the lowly cricket just as Newton did. And just as Newton knew the wind or Wordsworth knew a certain road to be the night's reflection, so apples floating on a wave of crickets make a synthesis more powerful than stars. Philosophers should play guitars, then, reaching for those apple branches where the moon's a lowly apple. Pyramids adorned with owls express a kind of harmony; & stars are dots & are a proof of death more powerful than worms. What if the river strikes a pose? the cedar will show a face that brings it home.

3
There isn't a clue that the fruit into which Adam bit was an apple & not his lady's breast. Above them Pegasus kept flying past, all in the name of science. The Virgin handed him a second apple, which Adam turned into

a questioning of history. Deep in its core the Virgin saw souls rise & fall: a symbol Newton later found inside a pomegranate. Only a child can play with apples & touch beauty; Newton & Adam both were satisfied with Eve's reply, the first she gave when she woke up in chains, her innocence laid by. Paris in the other tale held up an orange.

THE LORCA VARIATIONS (XII)
"FEDERICO, NEWTON, ADAM"

1

Federico in Paris writing about Newton's soul without a clue to what it is.

Federico bites into a pippin, rotten to the core, the symbol of himself as Adam.

Federico with an orange & a pomegranate that the Virgin hands him from a bowl of fruit.

With his childlike innocence Federico raises age-old questions of the meaning of the apple.

Federico in the chains of history compares his apples to a pair of breasts.

The first truth Federico gets to see is Beauty's, the second is a Pegasus dressed up as Science.

Federico & Newton stand next to Adam & Eve. The Virgin hands Adam an apple & they all await Federico's reply.

2

Federico makes the pyramids his home as long as there are apples left to eat.

Three owls visit Federico in the night & greet him as the wise man in the cedars.

Federico discovers Newton's face reflected on the moon.

Federico standing on the road is posing with an apple & a glass of water.

Where the river branches Federico waits with Wordsworth like a pair of old philosophers.

Federico spots a worm in his apple & a wind in his trees.

Federico takes Newton for a walk & hears Death plucking a guitar.

Federico thinks his walk with Newton is proof that he's a philosopher.

Federico hears the sighs of genies & the crickets in the stars.

Federico conceives a synthesis in which infinity & waves become a single dot.

Federico's cornea sees stars & crickets covering the sky.

Federico thinks the sighs the waves make teach him harmony & rhyme.

3

Federico is sailing on the lake just as a wind comes up.

A green star lodges in Federico's eyebrows, which amazes his companions.

Federico repaints the Blue Boy with a pair of iron feet.

Federico moves two mirrors from their secret corner & sets them in the open.

Federico delivers the men with beards to Death, then listens for their echoes.

Federico wanders through the woods, where gnomes in beechtrees are exchanging secrets.

Beneath a perfectly white moon Federico flutters strings of lace.

Federico hears Newton breathing science through his Saxon nostrils.

Riding on a meteor Federico spots the truth beneath a fruit tree.

Taking the apple Newton hands him, Federico shoves it under Newton's nose.

DUBRAVKA DJURIC
DISORDERING

(Tr. from the Serbo-Croatian by the Author & Charles Bernstein)

1

Lackadaisical paradox drowns itself
imagines eats stares
same's same always and now
later is what's left on table
mother and father later's same
knows it's happening haphazardly
with plain want hurtling at
so am shutting shutters
to shower on fire later freezes itself

2

Not a wish—fear of flower
wilted faded mole moldering
from a one to ones multitude
is here from semen (things) thing in mind
magnitude
wish's wish dries, breaks
if is only lonely in doubt
same's in empty room
silence.

3

Simply spit out name's names
I give myself to names not apparently in
words names' letters gave for names
my names in you spit out.

4

Later every day follows the day inside
upsidedown on floors between doors upsidedown
once happened but not again when it's
upsidedown later everyday is

5

Don't ask questions in brackets among
rows of trees /among rows of trees/ in tedious rhythm
monotonous queries down the hill but only
to see rows like the reflection of wish and want like
circling in circles a sentence behind and in front is and
it is because continuity
word on word leans in meaning and symbolically
removed from that side behind or in front
above or below the same is.

PHILIP LAMANTIA

PASSIONATE ORNITHOLOGY IS ANOTHER KIND OF YOGA

Thirty feisty finches at the window FINCHDOM
Four or five double-tufted crowns
Midsummer Spring born
most daring of the lot clumsy but quick
at our plastic feeder tray
Beata framed nude at a door
points her Jupiter finger: Rarely seen
a White-crowned sparrow gets blown away
by these non-Kropotkin red yellow
silver orange birds
They're mean
never give any sparrow (though higher
on the taxonomic tree) even a mite's chance
to beak powder flecks finches drop
while scarfing up their hulled sunflower seeds

•

Glass shadows a suprasensual object
become a secret shuttle
down an escalator going simultaneously up
'the one and only god' found
from that dawn and night on the Nile
space
where all ends in a beginning
Amenti
mutating roseate to indigo tint
behind the darkening horizon
Over to the River's other side
my hidden eye of Horus sights

one old jazz record repeated
myriad nights & days
on a plane gathering Bird and Mozart
distant Vivaldi, wild music of
contrasting flowers whose tones
interject this Ohlonian Spring of
superfinches I love more than to become a star
Ah visible angels of superior affectivity
with the most perfect language of sight
The chosen Red-plumed seeder
ritually feeding the Silver-lined
and a chorus of them form
an unpremeditated Pentacle of erotic song

•

So few of us
if the seed be
become scythe, its own end
as wheaten being
germinates a songbird's septule form
We, too, were once avian
bridge—window—to another life
So they do know us
though now in terror
A few listen with attention—
instant Ornithos, rare
flashing cordial of communicating grace—
who see what I imagine they become
Their gestures speak with deep silence,
flying hearts, before they take off
and primordial gnosis takes flight
to carry seeded mandibles on the wind
who are clothed in primary colors
range, breadth and tones of what
red streamed from
Then, branching leaves envelope
perching forms beneath
a swathe of indigo

JODY NORTON

DESTROYED WORKS: Philip Lamantia's Excessive Subjectivities

Here is a hot wind of knives
cutting my breath for sport,
and leaving behind a limpid song
heard by a million murdered stars.

Balls of arson charge a flood of rats
going down to pray with the blizzard
bone
and the sound burns through a tower,
the highest light of forbidden magic.
—Philip Lamantia, "The Ruins"

The aim of the devil is regression.
—J. E. Cirlot,
A Dictionary of Symbols

Amidst the various and complex rewritings Surrealism has incurred in contemporary American poetry, Philip Lamantia's work stands out as the most powerful, and dangerous, violation of the rule of the self—a violation to which neither Breton and Soupault nor, later, Artaud were ever unequivocally able to subscribe.

Surrealism is an anti-discipline of the mind. However, it is not always clear to Breton—for whom "the marvelous is always beautiful" (14)—that to bypass the ego's defenses against the return of the repressed is to risk unleashing a nonspecific aggressivity that may act itself out not only on the other ("The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd" [Breton 125]), but within and against the self.

Lamantia's destroying works produce exactly such a carnivalesque violence. Yet if the most general aim of his poetry is "pure" violation—of the grammar of consciousness (the structures of language and logic), and of the social syntax of law, taboo, gender and symbolic function—its single most dominant motivation is the death of the "death"-of-the-child that is the ego.

Lamantia is conventionally grouped with the San Francisco Renaissance poets of the 1950s—Jack Spicer, Lew Welch, Robert Duncan, et al. A specifically literary context for him in contemporary American poetry is much harder to find. There is no doubt that French surrealism has had an enormous effect on contemporary American poetry. In trickling down through layers of linguistic and cultural debris, however, surrealist poetics has more often been styled than studied. The undomesticated surrealist imagination finds its way into print far less often than highly controlled work frosted with "surreal" verbal effects.

Even more profoundly imaginative American appropriations of surrealism seem only distantly related to Lamantia's work. There are, for example, surrealist moments in the work of James Wright and Robert Bly, partially enabled by their translations of Georg Trakl, and of Latin American surrealists such as Pablo Neruda. Yet the "Deep Image" poets are far closer textual relations of Jung than of Breton.

John Ashbery has been nominated as the chief exemplar of one major "strand of contemporary poetic diction. . .deriving mainly from the French surrealist tradition" (Holden 59). Ashbery's mature poetry, however, most often displays a style which is not only disjunctive, but simultaneously reflective and discursive in a way that Breton and Soupault's *The Magnetic Fields*, for example, never is. Ashbery's problems are those of Heidegger and Derrida: time, being, language and the self. "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" is, above all, a poem of acute consciousness; as such, while its game shares certain objectives with the language game of surrealism, it does not play on the same field.

Poets as diverse as Robert Kelly (author of "Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image," a key theoretical statement calling for creative openness to the unconscious), Jerome Rothenberg, Clayton Eshleman, and John Cage share affinities with Lamantia in various ways. But Lamantia is, finally, *sui generis* in American letters. And it may be the very particularity of his project, together with the difficulties of interpretation it poses, that account for his having been almost entirely ignored in the critical literature.[1]

> *I believe in the future resolution of . . .dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a* surreality, *if one may so speak.*
>
> —André Breton,
> "Manifesto of Surrealism"

In the quotation above, Breton might be responding to the central psycho-ontological question of Surrealism, as posed by Ferdinand Alquié: "Does imagination create a real that is proper to it? Does it express a real unknown to us?" (Alquié 125). The answers to these questions are "yes," and "yes."

In the first "Manifesto of Surrealism," André Breton acknowledges borrowing from Freud's psychoanalytic technique—which he had himself used in medical practice during the First World War—to obtain from himself a kind of freely associative, or automatic, text that could draw unconscious contents into consciousness by means of the shared medium of language. The text was to take the form of

> a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought.* (Breton 23)

This automatic writing would be "formed in the zone of psychic activity whence arise instinctive impulses, primordial images, dreams" (Robert Bréchon, qtd. in Chénieux-Gendron 55), and would thus articulate pleasures, antipathies and desires that *should never have been mentioned,* were matters left up to the ego-consciousness.

Breton insists on "the absence of any control exercised by reason" (Breton 26) as a *sine qua non* for Surrealism. Yet because language itself is always in one sense "reasonable," in that it constitutes a coherent order of representation, it is impossible for poetry, whatever the source of its motivations or the method of its linguistic choices, ever fully to divorce itself from structure and the limitations that accompany structural differentiation. Semantic value, after all, even if it is prerational, supra-rational or irrational, depends on social systematicity. There can be no private language, as Wittgenstein showed.

In Philip Lamantia's poetry we are therefore forced to conceive of two levels of voice, in dialogic relation. We are addressed by the secondary, post-oedipal voice of the poet/speaker. But we hear the fragmentary, mirror-stage "voice" of what Lacan calls the subject of the unconscious. The voice of this subject, signified in language, is itself a chaotic chorus of unauthorized voices: a heteroglossia, or better, a heteroglossolalia—a speaking in tongues of the unconscious. To return to Alquie's questions, the "unknown" real of the subject's desire is expressed, through verbal association, as "a real that is proper to it."

the characteristic of the subject of the unconscious is that of being. . .at an indeterminate place.

—Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*

The most general aim of Lamantia's mirror-stage subject is to oppose selfhood by destroying, or transcending, the ego structure constitutive of identity. "I meet you in the solitude of violence," Lamantia writes, in "You flee into a corridor of stars" *(Erotic* 3). This "you" does not specify any kind of external object, but an internal other. In effect, the speaking voice is articulating the antipathy of the subject of the unconscious *to the structure of the voice itself*—that is, to the ego, which hears the voice as its own (inexplicable) intention. The thrown voice of the dummy comes out of the ventriloquist's own mouth, suggesting death to his face.

In the following passage from "Break of Day," the aim of violence is to restore the subject to an uninhabited liquidity. Yet this restoration can take place, in poetry, only through a conflicted, double-voiced Symbolic that unifies, systemically (i.e., syntactically and semantically) what it disperses fantasmatically.

> After the knives have flashed
> And the pool of blood has made
> Its imprint of flowers on the street
> The aimless wanderers, the busy and unbusy,
> Break in air like splinters of ice.
>
> Ashes, like stars, fall into the sewers.
> A bird, hatched no longer than a second,
> Falls from its nest
> Fated for no other wings than death. *(Touch* 57)

The "imprint of flowers" made by the pool of blood is the imprint of an absent self—a print which *declares* the absence of the original. After violence—"After the knives have flashed"—the formations of subjectivity ("aimless wanderers") can break up. "Splinters of ice" expresses both the fragility of self-structure and its modal character: ice, after all, is only a provisional, and particularly rigid, form of something prior which possesses far greater mobility. In the second strophe, the infantile ego, emblematized by the newly-hatched bird is, in the subject's wish, "Fated for no other wings than death."

Lamantia's first book, *Erotic Poems,* was published in 1946, by Bern Porter of Berkeley. It is already accomplished—so much so that many of the poems have been republished twice, in *Touch of the Marvelous* and *Selected Poems 1943-1966.* Poems like "Mirror and Heart," "I am a criminal when your body is bare upon the universe," "Infernal Landscape," "Moments of Exile," "Hermetic Bird," "The mermaids have come to the desert"—all reprinted in *Touch of the Marvelous*—remain among his most characteristic and accomplished poems.

"The mermaids have come to the desert" combines the sexual impulses of *Erotic Poems*—attributable to the constructed and cathected ego of the speaker—with the infantile disintegrative drives that are typical of Lamantia's later work more fully than any other poem in the book. The three central strophes follow:

> I am touched by the marvellous
> As the mermaids' nimble fingers go through my hair
> That has come down forever from my head
> To cover my body:
> A savage fruit of lunacy
>
> Behold, the boudoir is flying away
> And I am holding onto the leg of the lovely one
> Called beneath the sea
> BIANCA
> She is turning
> With the charm of a bird
> Into two giant lips
> As I drink from the goblet of suicide
>
> She is the angelic doll turned black
> She is the child of broken elevators
> She is the curtain of holes you never want to throw away
> She is the first woman and the first man
> And I am lost to have her (25)

Bianca, the only woman named in *Erotic Poems,* is one of the mermaids—that is, she is beautiful but monstrous. "I am touched by the marvellous," the speaker intones, "As the mermaids' nimble fingers go through my hair"—hair which is a "fruit of lunacy."

This intertwining of monstrous fingers and mad hair moves, in the next strophe, into a closer conjoining of speaker and female figure. The suggestion of sexual union in "I am holding onto the leg of the lovely one" shifts into the more ambiguous image of Bianca as "two giant lips," "As I drink

from the goblet of suicide." The lips, as signifiers, seem to float between Bianca and the speaker, between her vulva and his mouth. As these four lips join, the decathecting "death" of sex makes of the entrance to life a "goblet of suicide."

The final strophe is a litany of entropic states: colorlessness, stasis, nothingness, androgyny, and the zero degree of identity. Only the "first woman," whose name is writ large (BIANCA) can locate this all-inclusive dis-integration—only m(Other).

Lamantia' s second book, *Ekstasis,* wasn't published until 1959, though the poems were "written between 1948 and 1958," according to the prefatory note. In the same note Lamantia writes, "My object is a revelation, in manifestation, of beauty—its world, natural or supernatural." The poems express an "exterior interior and personal vision—erotic, mythic, magical and devotional." As the title suggests, Lamantia is trying to locate ecstasy—spiritually, psychologically and poetically.

The search for an ecstatic stasis is broached in diverse ways. The first page of the text proper presents a concrete poem titled "Christ" in the shape of a cross. There are poems addressing the Virgin ("Ah Blessed Virgin Mary / pray for me I live in you"), and proclaiming that "Christ IS the marvellous." Other poems invoke myth ("I think of you, Land of Weir"), drugs ("Opium / in a butterfly's dream"), and "legends, ghosts, haunters /. . . / art, life, death." But these diffuse approaches read, for the most part, like conscious wishes for unconscious desires. "I see you, my soul in a vision SAVED," Lamantia's speaker announces in "Fragments from an Aeroplane"—but it is the assertion we get rather than the vision.

The following lines from "Intersection," one of the poems reprinted in *Selected Poems,* stand out because they are generated not through attention to externals, but from the depths of their speaker's unconscious:

> An old look follows me thru the town
> a look of daggers and autumn winds
> a look that betrays where it came from in a pool
> at my feet

This look is the gaze of an other, a double which betrays its formal presence within me in the "pool at my feet." This mirror gaze of the ego is "a look of daggers," because it represents the wish for my "death" in a fictional stabilization. This look is always "An old look," in that it freezes the temporal process of being in a moment behind which stands the procession of fathers whose Law requires, and constitutes, the self as difference.

fuck yr safety, WHO NEEDS IT?
— Philip Lamantia, "I Demand
Extinction of Laws Prohibiting
Narcotic Drugs!"

Narcotica, also published in 1959 at the height of the Beat Movement, is a polemic against drug laws. Four poems romanticizing drug use accompany the title essay, and are followed by a section of translations from Artaud's writings on opiates and their virtues.

Artaud's relevance for Lamantia is real. But despite the intertextual collaboration of Lamantia with Artaud in *Narcotica,* as his co-author, translator, and political ally, this relevance has little to do with the existential and/or poetic virtues of drug-induced altered states. It has a great deal to do with Artaud's views on poetics, and with his poetic concerns.

The chief of these relevances is Artaud's commitment to what he calls "surrealist danger" ("Letter to André Breton"). This danger is really a double one. At the generative level, the danger of surrealism is loss of the boundaries that establish one's hold on "reality," through sex, ecstasy, poetry, madness or death. To inhabit this space of unreason is Artaud's aim.

At the restrictive level, danger, for surrealism, lies in the reduction and rigidification of meaning by institutions (churches, madhouses, art galleries), systems (heterosexuality, writing), and thought itself ("don't think that you can get me to discuss [everything], and that while discussing I will forget myself and that I will thus begin, without realizing it, to THINK," Artaud warns [Auster 263]).

In "Letter to André Breton," Artaud complains that the astrological motif and initiatory rhetoric of the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition, in which Breton has invited him to participate, is at once mystificatory and constraining, and goes on to express his fear that such a false carnivalization of surrealism will confirm the already formed opinion of "the great bourgeois masses," that they are now safely "mithridatized against the mere idea of surrealist danger." The danger, from Artaud's perspective, is that there will *be* no danger.

It is you who are coming—Beautiful
Destruction!
—Philip Lamantia, "Apocamantica"

Destroyed Works (1962) is apocalyptic, hieratic, visionary. The poetics of self-destruction in Lamantia's poetry involves a series of parallel modes of imagery, each a metaphoric displacement of the others: sadistic, masochistic, ecstatic, and psychotropic. The poems in *Destroyed Works* act out a

compulsion to make a destroyed work of the "I." They court extremity: cannibalism ("it is enough to have eaten bourgeois testicles"); ordure ("shit spirit even perfect shit is a corpse"); drugs ("morphine is equivalent to the apotheosis of cannibal motherhood"). "I am coming out of myself," as Lamantia writes in "Morning Light Song"—violently, ecstatically, excrementally.

The wish to fragment the unity of the ego is especially clear in the series of images of shattered mirrors and broken glass. "I give you the mirror to crumble by," the speaker says to "Diana Invertrex," a masochistic inversion of himself, in "Crab." One passes *back* through the mirror stage, in Lamantia's poems, by smashing the identity-forming looking glass: "There's an infinite plasterboard room of Glass Black / thru this infinite room my face falls into bits" ("Till the End of Time").

Touch of the Marvelous (1966) reprints twenty-one of the twenty-nine poems in *Erotic Poems,* and adds fifteen titles. It is perhaps Lamantia's single most memorable book. All of the best poems from *Erotic Poems* are included, as well as several remarkable new pieces ("The Diabolic Condition," "The Ruins," "Descent," "Inside the Journey").

The anti-narcissism, and the motifs of violence, are those of *Erotic Poems*. In this book, however, the presence of generalized female others is less conspicuous, and the violence of desire takes on a more masochistic, and occasionally homoerotic, tinge, as in the line "I become ready to offer myself to the smooth red snakes / entwined in the heads of sorcerers" (28).

The touch of the marvelous is bloody. Whereas just over half the republished poems (eleven of twenty-one) mention blood or bleeding, eleven of the fifteen new poems do; and each of the other four includes knives or wounds. Blood emblematizes Lamantia's subject's desire to destruct the self in three ways. First of all, it is fluid, and Lamantia's subject is in search of an originally fluid, pre-egoic subjectivity. The fact that blood is *the* fluid that determines and facilitates the relation between life and death adds to its symbolic potency ("O the mirror-like dirt / of freshly spilt blood" [20]).

Secondly, blood is a metonym for aggressivity: in addition to wounds, slashings and cuttings are fantasized. The book is, in Roget's marvelous phrase, a "saturnalia of blood" (Mawson 135).

Finally, there is a pattern of specifically masochistic images. According to J. E. Cirlot, "The single rose is, in essence, a symbol of completion, of consummate achievement and perfection" (275). It may represent "the mystic Centre, the heart. . .the beloved," and so on (275). In "The Diabolic Condition," the self becomes "my rose spitting blood"—that is, a "beloved" for whom death is imagined/wished.

Some of these masochistic images pass through the symbolic structure of castration. "As a rose runs down an alley, a purple nugget, giving off some

blood, is suspended in air," Lamantia writes in "A Civil World" (cf. "the phallic rose," *Selected* 73).

Selected Poems: 1943–1966 (1967) includes nine poems from *Erotic Poems*, seven poems from *Ekstasis*, eight from *Destroyed Works*, nine from *Touch of the Marvelous* (not counting the nine reprinted from *Erotic Poems*, which also appear in *Touch*) and fifteen new poems, of which "Coat of Arms" is the most memorable.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud speculates that *"an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things"* (30). The logical conclusion of this line of thought is that *"the aim of all life is death"* (32). Lacan rewrites the death instinct as desire for the m(Other)—that is, desire to return to the pre-oedipal state of indifferentiation. The concluding section of "Coat of Arms" prophesies the accomplishment of just such a return:

> To let loose a room's inner skeleton
> I come from far places
> dressed in the explosions of green lamps
> It's the moment before arson
> Taught not to look back
> my fires drink a porous stone
> The geyser speaks
> at the house of the onyx mirror
> My name is augur
> these lips besmirch the dawn
> My sword's a vaporous cloud
> The tooth marks of ecstasy
> wear the look of totems
> and the dragon's vermouth tongue
> Every arm is bathed in silver blood
> I read the spells of Egypt patiently (*Selected* 97)

The first four lines announce the subject's motivation (to "let loose" the endoskeleton of the mind), its origin ("far places"), and the imminence of its effects ("It's the moment before arson"). Though the subject has been "Taught not to look back" by the ego, through the mechanism of repression, nevertheless "The geyser speaks."

"My name is augur"—not a personal name, then, but a double position: on the one hand augur, or prophet, on the other, a drill ("A piercing Augur to search into the bowels of the earth" [Plat, qtd. in *OED*, Compact ed. 141]). Together these positions suggest an ambiguous function: drilling (into earth, into mother, with all the sadistic sexuality of that image) as the return to the underworld on which prophecy depends. And just as the augur is

nameless, his prophecy will be opaque ("the onyx mirror"), lacking distinction. "My sword"—the Law of the Name of the Father—is now "a vaporous cloud." "The tooth marks of ecstasy" again identify the desired goal as the loss, through erotic violence, of boundaries. To read "the spells of Egypt patiently" is to visualize ancient (infantile/primordial) glyphs as a way back to the magical freedom of Imaginary being.

The Blood of the Air was published by Donald Allen's Four Seasons Foundation in 1970. The poems in Part 1, "The Libran Age," are surrealist love poems addressed to an unnamed "you." "I touch you" uses its title as a refrain to express a passionate (blood) relation. Lamantia uses a declarative symbolism ("I touch you with heart strings of the veiled mountain") for an atypically other-directed, sensual aim ("whose magnetic moment is the sight of us making love" [3]).

In Part 2, a new form of self-dissolution—the breakdown of semantic values—comes into play. "I'm vanishing like vanishing letters," Lamantia writes in "Flaming Teeth." There is no sentence punctuation in this poem, and independent clauses run on into other independent clauses, or phrases, without distinction. Syntactic positions are shared, as in "A succession of literary images cabalas insecticides," where the object of the preposition "of" can be any one of the three following common nouns. The relation is *not* diachronic, as "images, cabalas, and insecticides" would be, but synchronic: one chooses from among exchangeables.

The following passage from the prose poem "World Without End" exemplifies the semantic openness of the "Flaming Teeth" poems:

> Newspapers disappear, current vices appear as smoke tissues salute the bodies of the enlightened before the past began to draw the curtain of dust on the total eclipse my contemporaries imagine. I am beginning to eat light, straight *and of the corner stone* sprung up, grail-of-the-betel-lady, swinger of the nymph conch veiled with the pest, thunderwing who comes clothed with high noon. I vanish to start the sun to roll its eyes from the subterranean chant that is and knows no name, Mystery of the clock that prunes the transmutative glance Look out of weir window and glyph god from under the vomit's shield. (44)

This paragraph is comprised so heavily of abstractions and symbolist "images" that it is very difficult to retain either as idea or image. As in language poetry, in which traditional poetic figurative, imagic and narrative controls are systematically disrupted, one reads this passage with a radical semantic freedom.

> The alienation of the ego always has as its corollary a sacrifice: *the sacrifice of the truth of ourselves. . . . Man devotes himself to his own death and consummates it in the movement whereby he seeks to assert himself in the social and cultural world. . . . One could say that, as the ego proliferates in form, it becomes limited in being.*
>
> —Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*

Becoming Visible (1981) looks back over the themes of the necessary return ("*all the children are necrophiles at bay*"[50]), and of the poem as the vehicle of destruction ("the poem becomes an open sluice for darkness" [27]). The opening section of "Life Sciences" combines these thematics in a few graceful lines:

> Open the mirage that calls you
>
> The wind's embalming fluid
> and the deserted shadow
> originating the flaw at outposts
> dovetailed
> into the transparent substance
> the absence of water
> turned around in the mirrors (66)

The "mirage" of the "I" does call the subject, and because it exerts a certain tentative attraction, it must be opened before the possibility of unity becomes a determination. The wind, without any unique materiality of its own, consisting merely of something else in motion, yet powerfully desiccating, is coupled with "the deserted shadow"—the mirror-stage form-without-content that originates "the flaw" (the allusive difference). "Fluid" and "shadow" are "dovetailed / into the transparent substance / the absence of water."

The speaker is driven to fantasize a substantive "absence"—one capable of being "turned around in the mirrors"—which, like water and the pre-egoic infantile mind, could serve to instantiate, not a fictional figure of the self (à la Narcissus) but blankness—the *lack* of such determination.

These lines, after the first, are syntactically immobile. They form a sentence without a predicate. In effect, nothing is said—and of course, the satisfaction of arriving at nothing is precisely the subject's aim. The mirage

of the text has disappeared, after representing itself as a transparency, and the shadow of the "I" has been, in Keats' words, "suitably sublimed."

> *In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten.*
>
> —Sigmund Freud,
> *The Interpretation of Dreams*

To write poetry—to textualize desire—is for Lamantia "the beginning of the flower / inside it's black ore I salute abyss after abyss" (*Destroyed*). Because nature abhors a vacuum, the de-creative accomplishment of nothing must be periodically reenacted, lest *something* take its place. Lamantia's subject must produce and reproduce, in language, its own dispersal as "it"—or more precisely, "its" nonentity—becomes "me," through the repeated shattering of the mirror in which the self continually reforms. "Death" itself, then, becomes repetitive rather than absolute: new life evokes new death, in a transumptive cycle. From this perspective, life and death are equally excessive—they go beyond what is, to what is not.

The poems of *Meadowlark West* (1986), Lamantia's most recent book, are excessive in this sense. Their excess is, like that of Lamantia's earlier poems, motivated by a perception of structure as fixity, and therefore as a confinement that denies both life and death. But the mode now is a Shelleyan transcendence, whose freedom is still that of the Surrealist imagination, but also that of a collective multi-cultural and biophysical unconscious. The emblematic "sur-rational" voice of this pre-conscious matrix of creativity, for Lamantia as for Shelley, is the "Hermetic Bird."

In the beginning—in the "Methuselan myths"—was "avian anarchia" (42). Like God, birds are present at the origin, and it is they who—also like God—chant chaos into the harmonic beauty of being:

> the Chanty Bird sings in amber street light predawn
> song the automatistic weaving worthy of Neith the
> ancient Egyptian Neter She Who Weaves the World
> ("Spring")

This act of creation, however, is a musical play of being, not an abstract law. It is "automatistic" only in that, like automatic writing, it escapes the control of consciousness. Its repetitions are melodic, pleasurable, not rigidifying.

Lamantia's project, in *Meadowlark West,* is to create a poetry that will continue to touch the "many centers of mystic geography" (22), as both Indian chants and bird songs do. The would-be poet must become "the

winged heart which is bird" (57), so that "my eyes are yours Great Blue Heron" (43), my pleasures "the pleasures of writing you invisible telegraph of nature" (43).

> Only man and the bird are divine. Coasting on folds of air, the White-tailed Kite meets its mate, the great sun of love, between the paint of feathers. . . . The vision situates who we are like an oracle of another world. Whoever meets the sudden revel seers the earth's renewal. ("Ship of Seers")

"Poetry is for birds" (32), and Lamantia is Meadowlark West, "a man / becoming bird" (18), whose "oppositions of delicate harmony" (12), whose "green speech" (14), will echo "Between the ecstasy and the secret" (2).

Meadowlark West is not devoid of the tropes of darkness so familiar from earlier books like *Becoming Visible* and *Destroyed Works*. "The mind is a black hole of beautiful chance encounters" (9), the speaker intones, in "West": "the joker leaps at the hole" (8). To dream of mind as a black hole is transparently to fantasize annihilation: heaven becomes "the lost paradise a black hole" (64). In *Meadowlark West,* however, if mortality is "a plane of pitfalls" (29), it is also the space of "Poetry magic love liberty" (24), from which "The impossible is easy to reach" (1).

> after death poetry shall have its morning of birds
> whose shimmering green light baffles and prates
> precisely as [t/o]
> germinating vessels
> what escapes pulses the earth's cascade
> that falls upward in a multiverse of shattered shells ("Fourth of July")

After rigor, after immobility, poetry will enable the free mixture of sensation, germination, articulation. This pulsing cascade of vitality will not sink "Downward to darkness, on extended wings" (Stevens 8), but will fall "upward in a multiverse of shattered shells." Where "shattered shells" in *Selected Poems* would have stressed the destruction of form, here the context suggests egg shells, burst through a sheer creative force which will exceed the gravitational attraction of death, the black hole, and speak "upward," with "the great booming voice of nature" (70).

> *Out of gather silence gathers*
> —Philip Lamantia, "Haven Root"

"At the still point / of infinite sur-rational flight" (70), "poetry is wedded to silence," Lamantia writes (37). But if we return finally, in *Meadowlark West,* to silence, it is not to dead silence—to death as negation—but to silence as the tone without which the complex harmonies of life cannot be heard. The poetry which "breaks" this silence does so not in anger, but in joy—singing, celebrating the unfinalizability of being.

> Teach us, Sprite or bird,
> What sweet thoughts are thine;
> . . . . . .
>
> Waking or asleep,
> Thou of death must deem
> Things more true and deep
> Than we mortals dream,
> Or how could thy notes flow in such a chrystal stream?
> (Shelley, "To a Sky-Lark")

Notes

[1]The *MLA Bibliography* lists no articles on Philip Lamantia. The only substantive discussion of his poetry of which I am aware occurs in Paul Zweig's article "The New Surrealism," which is now almost twenty years old. Zweig writes: "Of all the American poets to whom surrealism has mattered, only one, Phillip Lamantia [sic], has created a body of work which reflects the intensity and the original ambition of the French poets" (280). Lamantia is also mentioned briefly in Breslin, Davidson, Perkins, and Ross.

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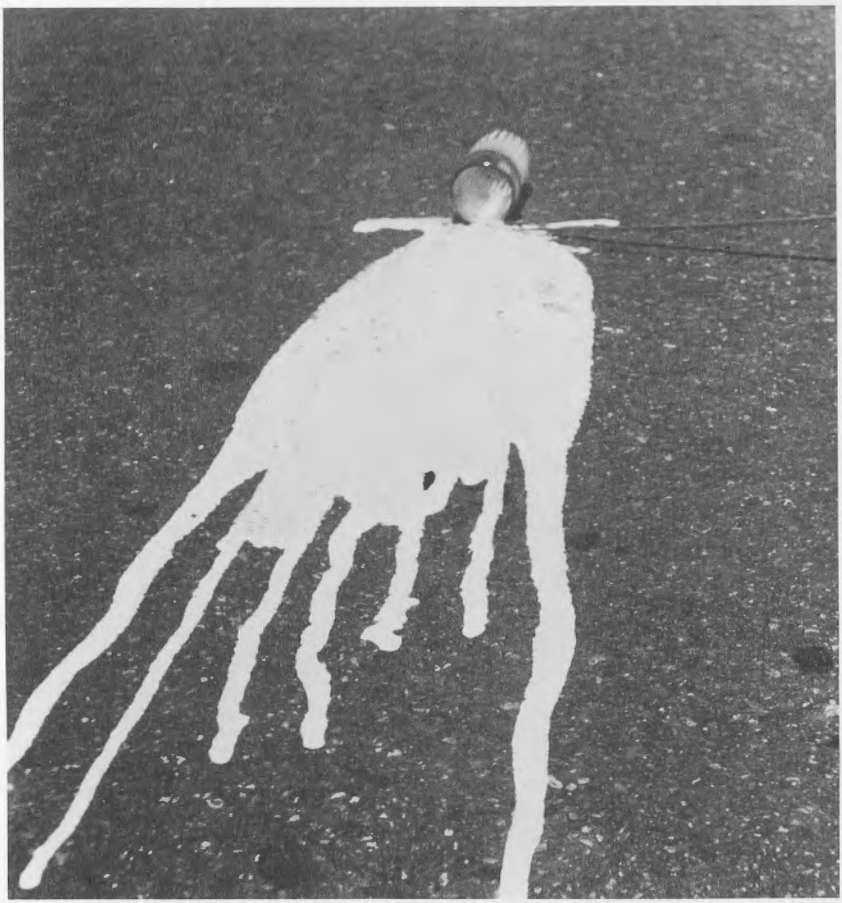
CECILIA VICUNA
FIVE WORKS

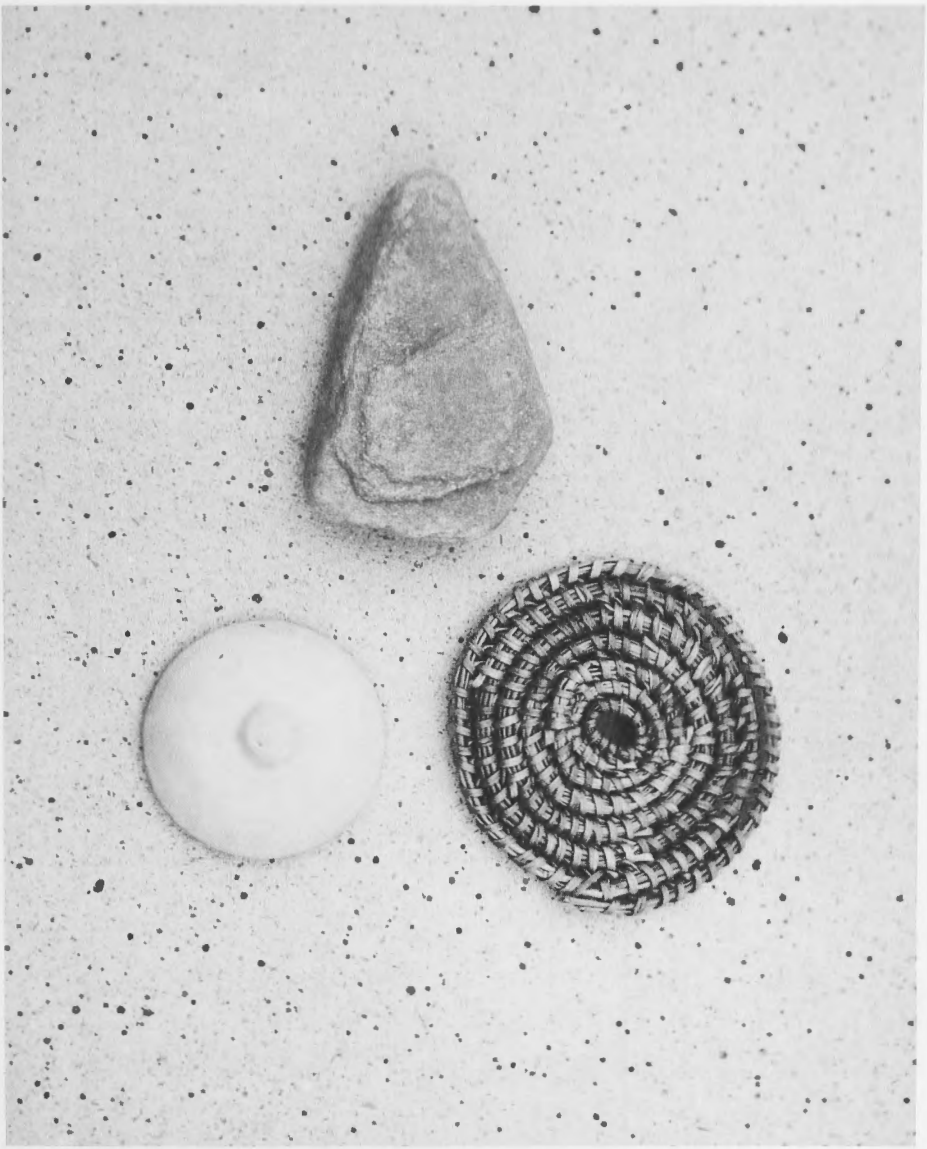
LA FALDA DE LA MOMIA

New York City, 1989
(Photo: John Paniker)



VASO DE LECHE II

Bogotá, 1979
(Photo: Oscar Monsalve)

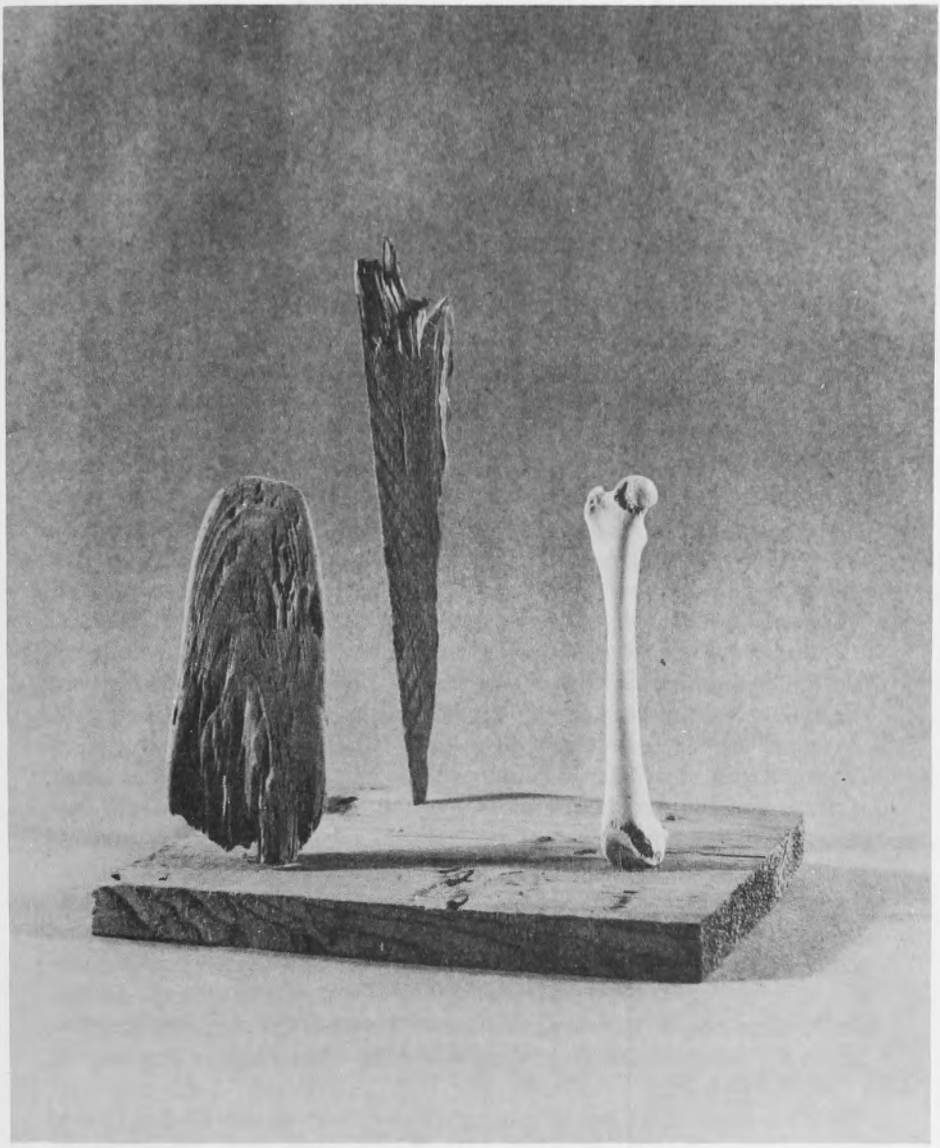


INSTRUMENTOS

New York City, 1987
(Photo: César Paternosto)

ESPIRAL

Chile, 1966
(Photo: Jorge Vicuña)



CEMETERY

Mixed Media, Wood, Bone, 8 x 8 x 6",
New York City, 1982
(Photo: César Paternosto)

ELIOT WEINBERGER

"EVERYTHING 'DEAD' TREMBLES,"

writes Wassily Kandinsky in 1913: "Not only the stars, moon, wood and flowers of which the poets sing, but also a cigarette butt lying in an ashtray, a patient white trouser button looking up from a puddle in the street. . .everything shows me its face, its innermost being, its secret soul."

At the same moment, the other K of the Russian avant-garde, Velimir Khlebnikov is writing: "The only freedom we demand is freedom from the dead."

The modernist project of exalting the new and obliterating the rest, of replacing sunflowers with spark plugs as inspirational source and imaginative subject, aged faster than the gadgets of its affection. But the opposite drift of the modern—the recovery of everything, the inclusion of all that had been excluded—remains vivid, for the continuing lesson of the century is the sameness of the stuff of the world:

Trouser buttons may have turned to zippers, but both, like stars and wood, became recognized as merely varying configurations of the same subatomic particles. People were discovered to have the same dreams, tell the same stories, construct variants of the same societies. The same genetic rules were applied to clams and conquerors.

In this brotherhood (sisterhood) of the same, everything takes on an equal weight: Lautréamont's umbrella and sewing machine meet (make love) on the dissecting table. And what they produce—say, a trouser button—becomes as worthy an object of contemplation as an Alpine sunrise or the ruins of Karnak.

There's a story that George Washington Carver had a dream. God appeared before him, and told Carver to ask anything he wanted to know. Carver said, "Tell me everything about the peanut." And God replied: "Your mind is too small to understand a peanut."

[Written for an exhibit by Cecilia Vicuña at Exit Art, NYC, May 1990.]

And in a world where circular or linear time had been replaced by exploding, simultaneous, Einstein time, what was ancient was the latest news. And the latest news was what the ancients knew all along.

The Modernist enthusiasm for archaic art was not merely a developing taste for simple forms and complex assemblages, as the current history runs. What the Moderns saw were manifestations of power. These strange or common objects were made to control life and death, sex and weather and food and illness. They were meant to change their world.

In the universe of identical things—theirs and now ours—what is not the same, what remains in a state of continual change, is the relation among the things. The same particles spin into hawk and mouse, Anthony and Cleopatra, paint and canvas, Abbott and Costello: the world begins when they collide.

But more: switch them around and it's a different world: mouse and canvas, Abbott and Cleopatra. . .

(Or Cleopatra and her nose. Pascal ruminates: If it had been longer, the face of the world would have changed.)

In the luminous net of relations the slightest change—even watching—changes it all. Cut a single fern frond and stick it in the middle of a trail. The gesture, nearly everywhere, would be meaningless. In New Guinea, among the Kaluli, it means that the souls of the bananas will not escape from a newly planted field: there'll be food in the months ahead.

Magic is dependent on the power latent in the least conspicuous object. A few fingernail parings can kill a man; a feather can ward off a hurricane. It is the context, and the act of placing in the context that gives the useless scrap its power.

And what happens when that act occurs outside of its culture—or more exactly, occurs in a culture that does not automatically recognize its significance? What happens, in other words, when Schwitters picks a bus ticket out of a Berlin gutter and pastes it on a canvas alongside of similar debris?

As an act of magic, it belongs to a private superstition: a lucky charm in someone else's pocket. And yet a Schwitters bus ticket is strangely numinous: that representation of a world by its most insignificant member remains far more moving than the contemporary celebrations of dirigibles and hydroelectric plants.

It is a Chinese wisdom: the grass bends under the conquering armies; when they have swept by, it stands up again. The particular is epic.

For twenty years, Cecilia Vicuña has been engaged in similarly useless, significant gestures.

She makes a circle of colored powder on a Pacific beach. She spills a glass of milk on a street in Bogotá. She hides bundles of twigs among the rocks in the hills overlooking that city. She floats tiny rafts in the Hudson. She places clay snakes around a fire hydrant. She ties strings between the boulders near a Peruvian lake. She assembles bits of natural and artificial debris into tiny sculptures she calls "precarios" (precarious things) or "basuritas" (bits of garbage, a little litter).

Descended from the practices of Andean shamans, these are the ritual acts of a personal religion. Their life span is negligible, though some linger in individual memories, and a few have been recorded on film. They are the haiku that are written on paper boats to be set out in the lake, the new year's wishes that are burned at midnight.

The objects employed in these rituals are garbage. Not the garbage produced by tribal religion: the works made for a single use, then tossed aside to be collected and exhibited in museums of primitive art. Nor are they trash-heap archive—the midden kingdom—by which we know so many buried cultures. These ritual objects do not become—they are made of—garbage.

But it is nature's garbage, not ours: feathers, shells, driftwood, pebbles, leaves. Pieces of a landscape of debris that came into existence when its normal use was abandoned: when we stopped burning firewood, when we invented new adornments to replace the feathered capes and necklaces of shells.

Tiny bits of nature rescued for a moment: "precarious," Vicuña writes, comes from the Latin "precis," meaning prayer.

We may take these sculptures and the acts that created them in the Western sense: brief personal supplications sent to the heavens. Or we may take them as numerous cultures understand prayer: sent from the heavens to earth. A momentary incarnation of the gods in language, or—and Christianity retains this in its cults of "speaking in tongues"—a direct message from them.

What do these gods say? Vicuña gives us, literally, a "clue": a ball of thread. (That which led Theseus out of the labyrinth was transformed with usage into anything that might lead to the solution of a mystery.)

Everywhere in Vicuña's work there are threads and cloth, themselves products of natural debris: the dead hair of animals, the fluff that sends the cotton seeds airborne so that the plant may propagate.

Thread, universally, is what ties people to the gods; its arrangement into warp and woof, cloth and the act of weaving, remains a perennial metaphor for both the complexities and the seamlessness of the world.

And it too is prayer: Vicuña points out that both "sutra" and "tantra" mean "thread." It too is language: the Incas (and possibly the archaic Chinese) wrote in a system of knotted threads suspended from a small stick. The woven and embroidered cloth of countless cultures are historical records, collections of myths, maps of the universe.

For millennia, the Andean peoples were unquestionably the most advanced weavers on earth: more than anywhere else, the fabric of their culture is inextricable from fabric itself. What's left of much of it is a few scraps: some of the technical processes are now inimitable; most of the iconographic meaning has dropped out.

These are symbolically the scraps Vicuña drapes over her tiny sticks; the scraps to which she attaches her bits of feather and shell. They are the few pieces of bone from which dinosaurs are reconstructed, the shard that is irrefutable evidence.

Threads and scraps of cloth and scattered remains of natural rubbish: trembling messages from dead cultures and dying nature. Like irregular electromagnetic wave patterns from a distant star, they cannot be decoded, they are anomalies for which our explanations are insufficient. They put us on alert: there may be more going on then we thought.

Given a twig, a pebble, and a place to stand, she tries to move the earth.

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS
DIASPORAS

Thru the rusty furze, thru the misted light,
thru the hungry books
words
related to the torn debris
lightly fall,
brush
the stumbled walker
who enters scenes of scattering by the gate of loss.

Wordlessness whirlwinds words
at that limen, articulating multiples
that cannot even be attached or
arrived at to greet, so foreign and distant, and
so near and constant,
the sets were experienced as one confusion.

These spaces of dispersion
are marked with bourns
which disappear amid the fields of scree
as stones.
So gifts are swallowed up by gifts.
Even erasure is erased.
In this, what residue remains?

The green horizon, winter dusk,
curbs, ground-down dabs,
sleek styrofoam weathered into gritty pebbling,
food pressed face down on the asphalt
scattered
thru the flicker-ridden labyrinth,

here

we are,

gripping frayed ends of the yarn together,
bull-face and seeker.

This small evidence of hope, that our flawed light

MEASURES THE HEADLINES

warily
point for point.

'Twas the new year cold,
and the old year done.
Hung a full moon
twice that 31st.
It rose in the dark,
and it rose at the dawn.

Introducing the "J" of jour, the our of hour,
versus "A": flat, primary, simple.
First it's J.
Then it's A,

parry and grapple, sleek and troubled,
leg over leg on the shimmering tarmac.
Advantage agnostic.

Happens
your yeasty jousters
are oddly,

like Ques. and Ans.,
odic and oracular,
joy and anger,
just evenly matched.

Matted mists rise
from felled leaves
after the whirlwind.
Melted mists
mishegoss and worse,

Names that cannot rise.

Names wedged in cardboard huts from
    major appliances.
        Xeroxing

city by city;
    stacks on automatic feed, little
        rustlings over vents,

mechanisms under glass,
    darkly you thought
        THAT was a what?

an empty carton? THIS simply
    rags, drain-plugs, trash
        rolled up in bags by the Department

of the Treasury, askew
    and stinking. But look:
        what is and that it is.

        On the pivot
        of a vast immired time
        the little fizzle of firecrackers
        went pop-pop in the humid silence,
        the irradiant bleakness
        of this midnight turn. Why it's "already"

1991

        one more throb of pops down wicks flung into the
            distance

and all around a void of open time
to the right of us, to the left of us.

And want to rise up, compelled
to change the order of events, to overturn
priorities and registers. Own up
powers dominating an unseen. They
solid for war: And drag to camp that Trojan
Horse, the surgical
metaphor. Of course, modernized,
administering anaesthesia highs. But
who was the patient "etherized"?
We profiteering, prophesying, sighing.
The center, an abyss The A repeated useless over
and over lolling doped
uh uh uh uh uh uh uh uh uh uh ayh ayh
turning to I I I I aye aye aye aye ai ai ai ai
scattered by one, one, one waste pretense. It was the dust rising
and falling that formed the holden
source of all this "dreath."
It was solid blackness up from the dis(re)membered
ordures and ordeals.
It was children once again to be issued bumbled stumps for feet.

My m-m-ry looked back and turned to salt.
A glistening dolmen.
Does it want to weep?

"It" doesn't choose
"It," is chosen
by the frozen one-way track
of time

Implacable

(Light!
"opening" birds
"lofting, spinning"

transcendent flocks
flecking the wide "horizon"—signs
of a poet,
or for one.

Why not car roof snow slid soft,
and refroze drip-marked over the windshield?

Why not furtive copies, ripping off
the part-time joblet,

with one long hair
fallen onto the glass screen, recurring
on all her Xeroxes, twisting at random,
circling words.

Dingedicht, Dongedacht, Dingedicht, Dongedacht)

And into the valley of death
I or J wrestled
pulled apart at the jointure or juncture.
The little rocks and bumps
were welded together with blood, and blood
filled the streams, which were called "runs," and
misty blood evaporated in the hollows.
Such a tiny set of hedgerows over which the soldiers fling
and were flung.
Cost it out.
The deep hung crevasses of shape and meaning
make
just a flicker over ever-whispering space.

"Then" I felt the dead, returned as deer, sidle
    silently in the night to the block of white,
        rub and lick

mutter in the various
    clotted tones of
        their living voices

one word:
creole of creoles.
The rest blown away

Into the incomparable.

Struggling with

Unfed. Thug. Bread. ashes wet
Flagged pilings. Blood maimed. ashen face
Flayed pages. Manna and matter in the drear station

and historical dread.

So that the first digits of my MAC card are exactly the number of civilians killed at Mylai or Mylae, alongside the final digit, which is the number of persons in my family, allowing, or not, for the ambiguities of reporting, lies, cover-ups, disinformation, disingenuous spokespersons—so often now women—, and who or what one is counting; also whether one numbers the dead and the living, or only the dead, or only the living, on either the "historical plane" or the "personal." Or only numbs the living. So that there is an enormous amount of webbing and one is taxed with the question what to do first or at all: unwrap it as from the mummy, sort it and maybe the little ants can still be persuaded to help, follow its loose-leaf strands as they blow thru the arena, neaten it, perhaps by a traditional weaving, brush it away like gossamer spinning, hang it all, or some unknown and awkward correlation of jerky, improvident, undeveloped, and spastic gestures, neurological overflow in which scryers find a symptom of ("unliterary") disorders, giving unintended and/or unreadable consequences. So that—

"It means

seize hold of a memory

as it flashes up

at a moment of danger."

hole of a memory

Get real!

June 1990–June 1991

CHARLES CANTALUPO

GESTATION

A creator is nothing
And forgotten for the use
Of any beginning but composite:
No one match fire, no burning circle
Except a mouthful of hot wax;
No nuclear original
Except cut out of infinite
Female power figures
Separated and stuck with all the tacks
Of your summoning her areolae
For less painting than darkening
And rubbing smooth and crust the stopped
Power breath inserted in the hidden
Palm-oiled cave beneath all waters
To protect the fetus in her furs.
Dive down into a devil's hole,
Look through eyes in a dark wall,
Let a wedding band rip away your finger,
Black tape the mouth and eyes of a sculpted head,
Wait like a hotel room's empty drawers,
And you'll still mistake shell as the core,
Unsatisfied desire as the divine,
Evil as your friend, human as the dead
And isolation as spirit
If you aspire to the birthing country
Without the evidence of refuse
And the Great Pan's tracks—
Empty cans and cartons, plastic shreds,
Used styrofoam and condoms, dirty filters—
Dumped in roadside ditches where you stare

At whatever you read as a sign
Of the four-faced person riding the single horn
Out of your skull to prepare the newborn
To accept insignias of recall
After their arms and legs are lopped,
And wear the mask of exposed blades again,
Wild coiffure, ten feet of snakey soul
Around her neck with leopard teeth and beaks
To swing out wide, black, white and red
With her ivory ears, fine scars, nostrils
Slit for sex, a coat of quills
And soon a navel filled with sticks
To dance a dusty circle of coition
With nothing pure, first, written, or expected
While amnion floods her sight with tongues
Extending song from deep in her forming lungs.
Remembering the sling and powerless and meek
As this apple, you can also nurture
Spiders to weave and foresee,
Swallows to build countries, bats to lighten suns
And dolphins to sound them like her eyes
Burning through dead seas in no direction
Except away from contaminated shores
Where seals give birth in the turpentine air
And wolves of dew destroy the tricks
Of water spirits to make the domestic
An uncontrollable wilderness of kills
Stage-managed free of invisible skies
And multiplying order, balance and logic
To come to the sum of a basket
Stuffed with cowries, chimp and crocodile skulls,
Leaves, buttons, nuts, turtle shells, bits of chrome,
Mushrooms, broken watches, hair, newspaper,
Anteater scales, red parrot feathers and suet
Carried by a midwife down a furrow
Of ten lands and ten races where she pulls
A crystal out of the ridge of shiney, bleeding home,
And the name you give the baby already knows.

AMIRI BARAKA

A MEDITATION ON BOB KAUFMAN

Frink /
/ Kauf meant thought
Banged
Back

in A L T I T U D E

So that thought
& "Freak"
collided

to
HANG

City Side

Quiet as

breathing

Always
Frinking —

ABOMUNISTS

WERE

UNDERCOVER

HUMANS

LAUGHING

F O O T P R I N T S

•

BOB KNEW VIOLENCE
REMEMBERED
HIS HAIR

& FRINK

SUSPECTED
HE RODE AS
WELL AS
WORSHIPPED
Pterodactyls

He knew the
poison
equation

Dorsey
Rothschild
(TIME)

SMOKE

MINE
vs
(RHYTHM)
o o
o o
o o
o o
o o
o o
o o
D E A T H
oo

WOLFMAN
WOLFMAN

Pterodactyls
WING THUMP SHADOW
Across Earth

BOP

CRACKLE ELECTRICITY TO
BE
ATOMIC PERSONAL DOT
ABOMUNIST PRINTS
1ST AMENDMENT
FRANKENSTEIN
CAVE HIPSTER
1ST COOKER AMIDST
Red Dripping Teeth
Mad Animal Family
Hoppers Opposition
Up top the tree
Bob roosted to see
the stars, Atomic television
sky, life itself,
hairy astrologer communist
the big feet
tracking across the
Be
Bomkauf, from his
Sightings
his hip sat thought
time pattern
was called
said the correct
path
the right
way
the print
is what stooges
say is an
empty foot

Ark

Hairy half person

to whom

they never

ain't

Any way!

Hence *Bop,*
the triumph of clubs
as
trumps.

Donald like his Duck
A Quack
& not a rise
his pitiful paper
& shiny metal
personality

& Trump is not Jewish
or You/ish (except
when you are
gaseous)
a lowered
the same as Lord

in dispense wit
the whole height of
site's sight. We stay up
all night, dont fight,
create & dig light.

And then the egg man
wants humans & sees
print & *bans* it.

———

Wolf man over Wolf man

———

All nation's equation
The Base, de base
so now its crackers
before it was jigs
our hairy mamas
did the work and
farther on the hype.

Scuse me tracks, BombKauf
isolated in West Jaws
a trick story (some say)
others
opportunize around
his myth

Sons & Lovers
Boiled yeggs & ohs
Seeds of non dick howling
crime pee

My friend drama town
City lights will cook
the boy
his head, shorn, his smile,
worn

For we who have never been
anarchists
who have never been
Buddhists
Us Sheeps
of Storm Center

"Lover" is one of Jimmy's
Brothers'
names. Get to that!
At my worst I was a King
& turned President
as a resident

Now the clouds
wave me
back
or
Black

I cant Attack
No Real
Life

A Stooge
is Eating
the Pop Corn
Joey.

This is our only noise
& its a song
on television

I say BombKauf, the
ABomunists
Were
Reds
whose foot prints yodeled
like pre God Pygmies

BombKauf
you were an egg beater
no ego
but the closing eye

of slipping

nigger death

(to the whiteness which
Keeps his memory

a Fish
a Cross
a Furnace of Evil
A Growed up Nazi to be
Full fledged
White Guy!

The abominable
snowman

nasty
coke
in
Athens

Where
Everything, even
Water
Melons

was Created

Human
Beings
Bob
That's what you
Heard

A POST AMERICAN

Phenomenon

Communists
are the
ones

Tracked down
By
No Man

No Oh

S'NO MAN'S
NOR WOMAN'S
HEAR?
(This place

Race itself spells
Competition
19th century

All the way

& then they even lost

that!

Over the hill to
Grandma's house
Over the sea's to
we nother better hip

you dig?
Abomunist
try
Communist

Await on skates, post the
dead dug
Lightning
Fast, no meat
meeting

Knew
then
New
No Sin
Being What All
of it
& Any
Plenty
my man, us
all men
& Them w/ Wombs

we working
on that

It's Why the Sun

Do
What It
Do

We dont recognize

Anything

Unless

We're gone
be recognized
in that messy
manner

A live Shadow farting
like a
brain
clock
O? Aha? Yes!

No Know
It's all here going away
,waving
pictures
breathing
pictures
imagining
pictures
live feeling. Bob

Round up voices, bodies
& flicks

Every All wants & wents
to
be No Shit

That's the only rule
& of course I'm going
to the bath room
in a lidda
while

PAST US

US PAST

NEVER

&c

EVER

&c

Why dont we turn

around—

The usual suspects

Hoo Ray!

Hoo Ray!

(ca' 89 from
Journal of the Crossroads) 5/91

INTRODUCING UNICA ZURN

Edited by Renée Riese Hubert

RUTH HENRY

MY ENCOUNTER WITH UNICA

(Tr. from the French by Judd D. Hubert)

It all began long ago, in 1959, years after my own arrival in Paris, at the opening of a very important exhibit at the Cordier Gallery: *Exposition Surréaliste Internationale.* In the midst of a lively company, I was struck by the intensely concentrated expression of a most attractive woman. Many surrealists, appearing carefree and in high spirits, had gathered there once again and perhaps for the last time with their friends. Unica had come with Hans Bellmer, her companion, but she was decidedly a participant, for the show featured her own works alongside those of Bellmer himself, of Hans Arp, André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Sebastian Matta, Meret Oppenheim, Victor Brunner, Jacques Hérold, and Man Ray.

When I went over to present myself to her—to the one quiet person in the midst of this boisterous assembly—she rewarded me with a smile that quite literally can be described as a burst of light. Unica's childlike smile not only suggested some hidden, otherworldly presence but impressed the viewer as a natural event, as the dawning of a radiant day. And I heard her say in an astonishingly deep voice: "But you speak German!" By this time Unica could of course express herself in French, even though she always spoke German with Bellmer with whom she had been living in Paris since 1953. Very well read in French literature, she showed a particular fondness for romantic and surrealist writings. She had already published a book of anagrams and drawings entitled *Hexentexte* at the Springer Gallery, Berlin, in 1954. Few of her Parisian friends knew about this work, even those who had felt from the beginning the poetic impact of this shy woman who kept to herself (it could hardly have been otherwise) in the presence of Bellmer.

Some of her friends recognized her qualities as a graphic artist and later on as a painter. Her strangely moving works, so often imbued with anguish, revealed a universe dominated by nature and dreams. And those who had considered her art a marginal product resulting from her intimate relation-

ship with Bellmer would soon learn how mistaken they were and realize that they were dealing with uniquely personal creations arising from quite different origins. André Pierre de Mandiargues had prefaced two of her shows at the gallery "Le Soleil dans la Tête," the first in 1953, the second in 1957. And for her major 1962 show at "Le Point Cardinal" Max Ernst designed a "cryptographic" foreword.

And there I was, in the very place where I had met Unica three years earlier, meditating upon her beautiful drawings. When I asked about her they told me that she was undergoing treatment at Sainte-Anne, the psychiatric hospital, and not for the first time, for she suffered from recurrent schizophrenic attacks. Urged by Henri Michaux, who had brought her paper, pencils, pens, and India ink, she had started to draw during one of her stays in the clinic. Her book, *Der Mann im Jasmin*, (The Jasmine Man) shows the key role this artist and poet played in Unica's creative development by his exploration of anonymous states capable of leading to liberation and, better still, to deliverance. It was indeed the manuscript of this book that occasioned in 1965 my second encounter with Unica, leading to a friendship that lasted until her death.

She was no longer the same person. She had aged considerably, and her repeated crises had undermined her physical strength and destroyed her radiance. For days on end she was unable to go out and, to make things worse, Bellmer himself kept more and more to himself. Stiffened (in fact catatonically paralyzed, unable, for instance, to descend a staircase unaided) she remained seated on a couch, holding between her fingers the inevitable "gauloise." Her gestures had become considerably slower, she had been weakened by chemical treatments (which would never stop), and in fact seemed to survive only as an intellect. She placed before me a rather bulky manuscript that she herself had typed during months of protracted effort. It was her "Eindrücke aus einer Geisteskrankheit" (Impressions from a Mental Illness) that she entitled *Der Mann im Jasmin*.

But how did such a text come into being? Could it be that literary practice (certainly not the prime intent of such an activity) leads to spiritual relief? Can the jotting down of the experience of alienation deliberately provide therapy or result in a literary creation?

Ever since surrealism proposed the systematic exploration of the creative thrust of the unconscious we have become aware of the porousness between barriers. The very precision of clinical descriptions bores us with its monotonous reiterations (all accounts of delusion seem to have been cast in the same mold), whereas there exist a few rare literary works, Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia* and Antonin Artaud's *Lettres de Rodez* among them, that fascinate us by their authenticity, their emotional impact, their richness. One thing is certain: unlike André Breton in *Nadja*, Unica did not exploit the world of hallucination in order to produce the lyrical effects so admired

by surrealist poets, for she was compelled to undergo the bitter experience of alienation. But she passionately resolved to keep an account of the incredible sufferings (and joys) resulting from her illness. The only strength she succeeded in retaining through all the "crises" that befell her was the power to take notes with the detachment of a skilled and neutral observer. I became more and more convinced in the course of our conversations that every text produced by Unica after 1960, including *Written in Fear* and *Games that two can play*, was strictly autobiographical. If they occasionally give the impression of being overwhelmingly poetic, that is because of Unica's literary upbringing, because her style of writing remained perfectly attuned to the great romantic tradition of Germany and the "marvelous" of Surrealism. Such was the reaction of a critic concerning *L'Homme jasmin* in 1971.

Unica Zürn, who preferred to speak about herself in the third person, explained the origins of the book:

> For those brief and wonderful moments of hallucination, which give her no fear whatever, she has to pay a high price, for she subsequently falls into deep depressions. It is easy for doctors to treat her troubled state of mind during a "crisis" by means of medication, but far more difficult to pull her out of a state of lethargy that prevents the slightest serious occupations. In some hospitals, they help cure the patients by having them participate in various activities. For this reason, she forces herself to keep on drawing so as to overcome the dullness of long empty days. But results are poor and for the most part absolutely hopeless. By contrast, the extraordinary states of the hallucinating mind, and the fantastic world opening before her during each of her "crises" retain all of their fascination and poetry.

These impressions were noted after her cure.

When finally *L'Homme jasmin*, completed in 1966, was published in Paris in 1971, years before the original German text, the critics praised it as a major discovery and admired the documentary precision of its moving self observations as well as a literary mastery quite devoid of sentimentality. Michel Leiris, who had known her only as an artist, wrote me about his surprise at discovering that Unica had produced a text that provided him with his most important reading of the year. And Unica had died the previous year.

When personal and artistic intentions are closely linked, as is the case with Unica, readers are entitled to know relevant facts about the author's life. Far from being taken for granted, this right requires justification. It is

therefore only because the legitimacy of such an enquiry appears self-evident in the present instance that biographical data will be taken into consideration in order to provide partial answers to the readers' questions concerning Unica's artistic and literary achievement.

Born on July 6, 1916, in Berlin, she spent, in her own words, a "marvelous" childhood in a huge house in the residential area of Grünwald. There she was surrounded by a collection of oriental art assembled by her father, a globe-trotting writer. Her favorite objects were "an Indian sculpted Buddha, a Chinese rug with golden threads, and Arabian furniture." The only blot on this otherwise idyllic period was her sense of abandonment during her father's frequent absences, a feeling described in the tale "Daubler Frühlung," first entitled "Schwarzer Frühlung."

Unica had been employed as an archivist at the Ufa-Film Corporation before her marriage in Berlin in 1942. She gave birth first to a daughter and, during the final and most terrifying year of the war, to a son. According to their fond remembrance of her, she was a tender and joyful mother. Nevertheless, when she sued her philandering husband for divorce, she had no choice but to leave them with him, for she felt "too weak" and incapacitated to take care of them by herself.

She then lived among artist friends, writing short stories to earn her living (they were recently published in their entirety by Bose Verlag, Berlin). It was during this period that she met Hans Bellmer who, in 1953, took her to Paris. There, in a small hotel in the Latin Quarter, they led a financially precarious but artistically rewarding existence. Bellmer at that time was hardly known. When she suffered her first "crisis," Unica tried to return to Berlin. This and her following attempts to escape invariably ended in long confinements in psychiatric hospitals. It was only later that she started to write down the "impressions" resulting from her illness. *The Jasmine Man* finally took shape, and it was a dream come true, when, after quietly waiting for an answer, she heard that the translation of her work had been accepted by Gallimard, the most prestigious publisher in France. And then it was Bellmer's turn to fall ill. Hopelessly bed ridden and secluded, he spent his time watching television without sound. His doctors no longer accepted the presence of this woman whose "troubles" led from one "crisis" to the next. So as not to have to send her back to Berlin (after 25 years), a solution she regarded as completely strange, I arranged for Unica, who would never again be capable of living by herself, to reside for one summer in a beautiful place near the Loire, where she continued to write while leading a healthy existence among mostly younger people. But the situation ended as badly as it usually did when Unica was supposed to return to "normal" existence. Moreover, Bellmer no longer was allowed to keep her in his apartment.

There remained no escape for Unica, who could not reasonably expect to live alone. So in 1960 she jumped to her death from a window in Bellmer's apartment, fully aware that her book would soon appear.

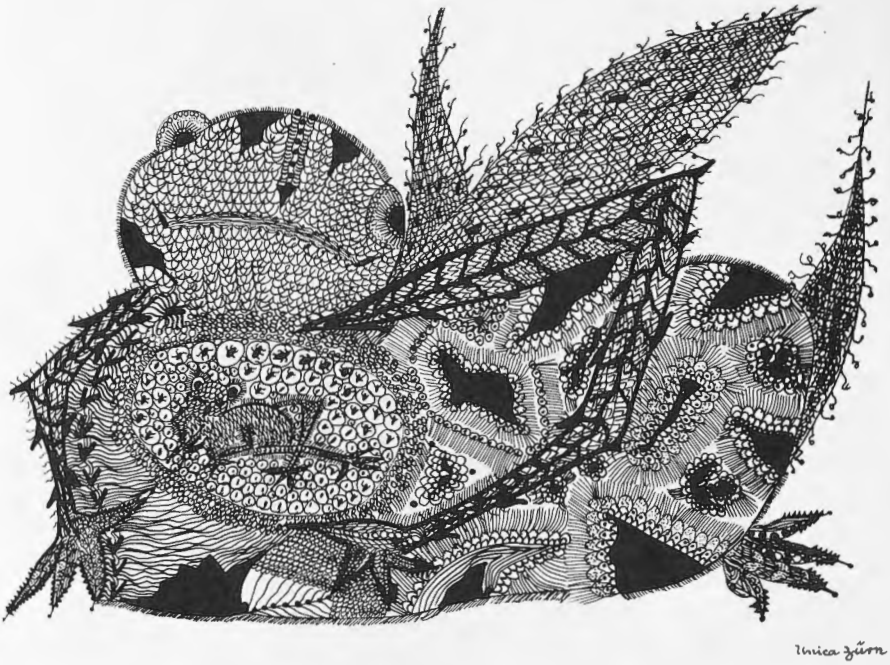
I saw her for the last time on a bed in the morgue, her face bandaged in the customary French manner. For the first time she had a forbidding look and appeared extremely old.

As for her fall from the window, she had made it perfectly clear in the course of several conversations that she lacked both the strength and the will to face old age. She had written her books and given her testimony—before *The Jasmine Man* she had published a tale from her childhood, fascinating in its simplicity and its foreboding: "Dark Spring ends in death." And like the twelve year old in the tale, the girl who was so much like her, she too jumps out of a window—out of life—taking leave of this world because of her sense of lack: lack of love, lack of strength, lack of knowledge.

UNICA ZURN
EIGHT DRAWINGS

For invitation to her exhibit at the Point Cardinal Gallery, January 1962

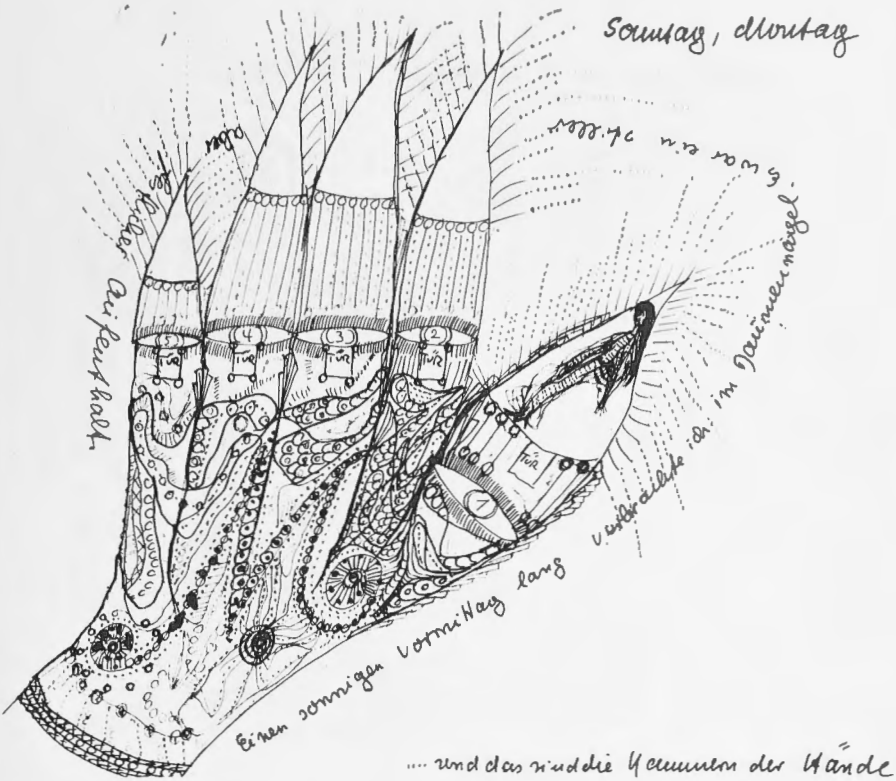
Manuscript & Ink Drawing, for Unkas, der Letzte der Mohikaner, included in *Im Staub dieses Lebens*, 1964



Drawing, 1961

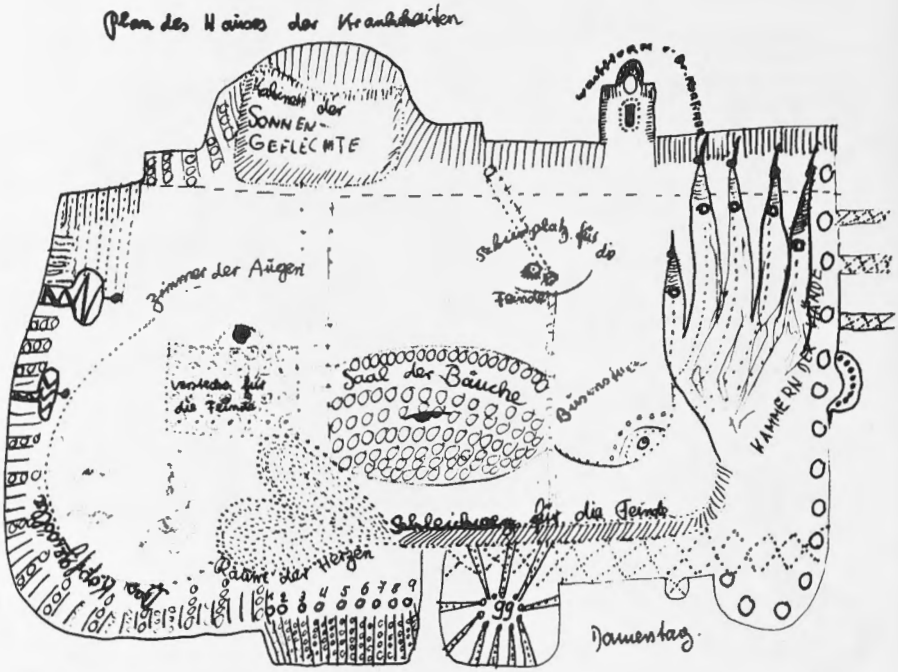
Drawing, 1961

Drawing on a composition of Robert Schumann (probably done at Ste. Anne's Hospital), 1961



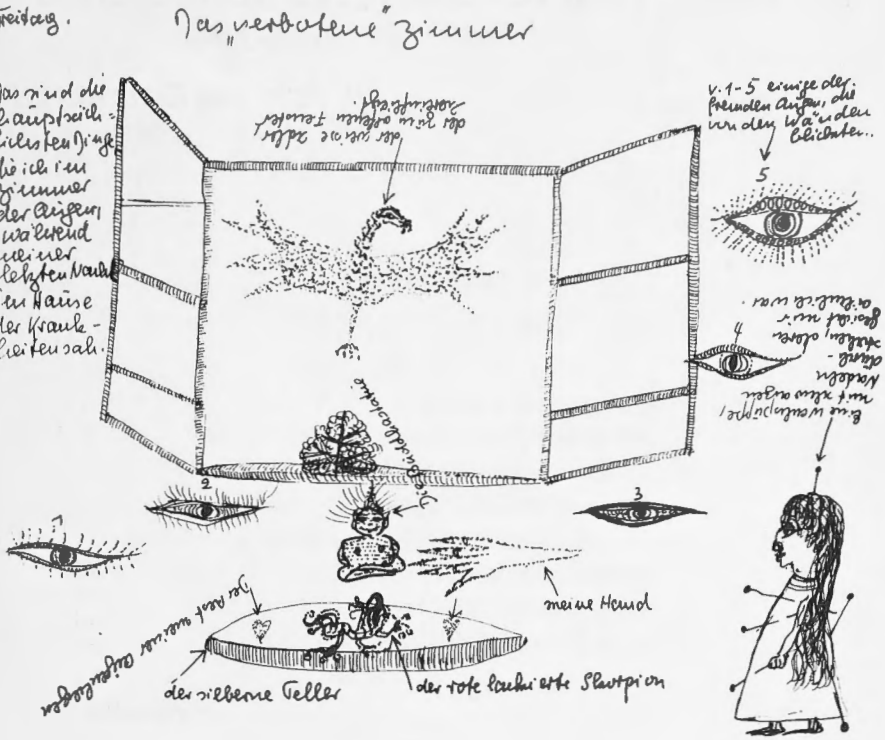
THE ROOM OF THE HAND

Drawing from
Das Haus der Krankheiten, 1958



PLAN OF THE HOUSE

Drawing from
Das Haus der Krankheiten, 1958



THE FORBIDDEN ROOM

Drawing from
Das Haus der Krankheiten, 1958

UNICA ZURN
NINE ANAGRAMMATIC POEMS

(Tr. from the German by Pierre Joris)

IN THE DUST OF THIS LIFE

Pale sieves a tired
Ax in the tree's bosom.
In the foliage's broom there is
Seed-blood-silk. Bites
in the lovenest of the building.
Sweetly fogs in its ice-bath
the Ibis's blood. Masses
in the dust of this life.

Montpellier 1955

ONCE UPON A TIME A SMALL

Once upon a time a small
warm iron was alone. No
Noise, no wine let in.
Lightly at the sea ran, while no
Ice was, thrush-pink in a
See-egg. All wink: tear
like all seeds. Sink in,

watergerm, no, alone—
in a pillow. All warmth
once upon a time's a mall.

Montpellier 1955

AND IF THEY HAVE NOT DIED

I am yours, otherwise it escapes and
wipes us into death. Sing, burn
Sun, don't die, sing, turn and
born, to turn and into Nothing is
never. The gone creates sense—or
not died have they and when
and when dead—they are not.

for H.B.
Berlin 1956

DANS L'ATTELAGE D'UN AUTRE AGE

(Line from a poem
by Henri Michaux)

Eyes, days, door, the old country.
Eagle eyes, a thousand days old.

Ermenonville 1957

WILL I MEET YOU SOMETIME?

After three ways in the rain image
when waking your counterimage: he,
the magician. Angels weave you in
the dragonbody. Rings in the way,
long in the rain I become yours.

Ermenonville 1959

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF MR K

It is cold. Ravens talk around the lake. Deer
and blackbird drink tea. Raven, seer of
disaster at dusk—first stars—talk, K!
The first toad most miserably died from
Hik. Nearby the donkey-dream jawed. The
nose of poor Mr K is bleeding. Lake,
dark lake of the raven. To breathe means
to live, means climbing dreams of
rare adventures. Those, Mr. K's?

Ile de Ré 1964

YOU'LL FIND THE SECRET IN A YOUNG CITY

Youth sings: now the sea is your harbor. Is
dream and hunt, the spirit's inner feast, that send
him into dark, stony days, yes, you!—and he's
immune from hand and serious sense—yes, You! Victories are
found forebodings. You travel to the city of Jim-Sing.
Go into the youngest street and find Amin, the Ti.
He says: yes, no, once, never, enemy, courage, it, are, you, D, H,
G.
Secret signature? Jade stone? You'll find the meaning.

Ile de Ré 1964

THE LONESOME TABLE

I, the most lonely
mixes his vein
with ashes. Be the
travelling mast—I
journey by night. Avoid
O avoid her, earnest
is the name I—it
is revenge. Mine the
velvet empire, yours
the lonesome table
in the roof. First one?
Stone, I speak: Sam-
Simae-line. End
I, it ends. Simar,
Simae, cross out the
line at the end. Ice

in the table. Roaring,
lonesomest I of
earth. A mast rise
up in seasand:
the lonesome table.

UNCAS, THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

Unica's heroes murdered—scratch
in cold earth—listen! Thank "M"—
Manitou for it, the cold hangman of
the dream of noble Aztecs. KO-HIR-
KUNAS—KIMHONA, Last One of Earth.
SUNA, the red eagle, limps. KEZ-ME,
the circling, cold anger. THU-MA,
Stone-heart and ALKAE murdered.
Uncas, the last of the Mohicans
speaks to me. Listen to him: "Cold,
sick, old is the mouth, o heart
in earth's ore. Uncas, Thokane,
noble tomahawk of kin—ZUERN—
The last moon—it sank" (Hakirer).

Ile de Ré 1964

HANS BELLMER
PREFACE TO *HEXENTEXTE*[1]

(Tr. from the German by Pierre Joris

ANAGRAMS are words and sentences resulting from the rearrangement of the letters in a given word or sentence.

It is surprising that despite the re-awakened interest in the development of language in psychotics, psychics and children, little thought has been given to the anagrammatic interpretation of the coffee grounds of letters. —It is clear that we know very little of the birth and anatomy of the "image." Man seems to know his language even less well than he knows his own body: the sentence too resembles a body which seems to invite us to decompose it, so that an infinite chain of anagrams may re-compose the truth it contains.

At close inspection the anagram is seen to arise from a violent and paradoxical dilemma. It demands the highest possible tension of the form-giving will and, simultaneously, the exclusion of premeditated purposeful shaping, because of the latter's sterility. The result acknowledges—in a slightly uncanny manner—that it owes more to the help of some "other" than to one's own consciousness. This sense of an alien responsibility and of one's own technical limitations—only the given letters may be used and no others can be called upon for help—leads toward a heightened flair, an unrestrained and feverish readiness for discoveries, resulting in a kind of automatism. Chance seems to play a major role in the result, as if without it no language reality were true, for only at the end, after the fact, does it—surprisingly—become clear that this result was necessary, that no other was possible. Writing one anagram each day of the year would leave one with an accurate poetic weather report concerning one's self at the end of that year.

What is at stake here is a totally new unity of form, meaning and feeling: language-images that cannot simply be thought up or written up. They enter suddenly and for real into their interconnections, radiating multiple meanings, meandering loops lassoing neighboring sense and sound. They constitute new, multifaceted objects, resembling polyplanes made of

[1]*Hexentexte* is Unica Zürn's 1954 collection of anagrammatic poems published by Galerie Springer, Berlin. (Translator's note.)

mirrors. "Beil" (hatchet) becomes "Lieb" (Love) and "Leib" (body), when the hurried stonehand glides over it; the wonder of it lifts us up and rides away with us on its broomstick. The process remains enigmatic. For this kind of imaging and composing to happen, no doubt an eager hobgoblin—oracularly, sometimes spectacularly—adds much of its own behind the back of the I. A pleasantly disrespectful spirit, in all probability, who is serious only about singing the praises of the improbable, of error and of chance. As if the illogical was relaxation, as if laughter was permitted while thinking, as if error was a way and chance a proof of eternity.

PIERRE JORIS

A NOTE ON TRANSLATING UNICA ZURN'S ANAGRAMMATIC POEMS

Unica Zürn's poems are extremely formal yet playful: they are anagrammatic constructs, i.e., each line is a strict transposition of the letters of a given line or phrase, usually the title line. This causes a dilemma for the translator who has to choose between (at least) two ways of translating: s/he has to either translate the procedure & system underlying the composition of the original poem, or translate the semantic construct resulting from this procedure. (Ideally one could imagine someone attempting to translate the procedure and the result simultaneously, but the chance of generating anagrammatic poems based on the source-line that would also reproduce the images and meanings of her texts seems—to this translator at least—extremely improbable, if not beyond the realm of the possible.) The first method of translation would consist in taking the line or sentence Zürn used as her transformational matrix & imitate what she did to this line, i.e., compose an English anagram based on those same letters: but this would of course make for another poem, for the translator's poem. In the second case one would translate the semantic construct, the words and images of the German poem without attending to the method underlying their composition.

I will illustrate these two possibilities using the following one-line poem by Zürn:

> Sur les tapis des paumes et leur sourire
>
> (Gedichtzeile von Henri Michaux)
>
> So ist alles: des Eises Purpur—euer Traum.

As Zürn's parenthetical note informs us, the title is a line taken from a poem by Henri Michaux, which one could roughly translate as follows: "On the rugs, palms of hands and their smile." By recombining all the letters of the French sentence into new words in German, Zürn then composes her own one-line poem. In an attempt to translate Zürn's anagrammatic procedure, I recombined the letters of the French line into English words

and came up with the following one-liner—though innumerable others were no doubt possible (I permitted myself only those liberties that Zürn herself takes, namely adding punctuation—a colon and a hyphen—to make my line's syntax more explicit):

"Ape stirs slim seed: Ur-ape routes rule us."

Using the second method, i.e., translating Zürn's one-liner's semantic meaning as literally as possible from the German, I get the following result: "Thus is everything: the ice's purple—your dream." Both of these attempts at "translation" yield lines that are imagistically interesting & meaningful *per se*—though clearly unrelated & probably unrelatable, both among themselves or back to the meanings of Michaux's original line. How then should the translator resolve the dilemma posed by work such as Unica Zürn's? One could argue that the distance between the meanings & images of the French line & those of the German line generated by Zürn's transformation give the translator permission to come up with results as semantically unrelated as my anagram above. In the final analysis however; what makes her poems gripping work for the reader is not so much the method itself—though it is essential to ***know*** that she did use a specific procedure to generate her texts—, but the meaningful images the poet is able to generate due to/despite of/with & against her chosen procedures. I have therefore chosen to translate Zürn's semantic meanings & images as straight forwardly & accurately as possible, without any attempt at using her compositional procedure—though the reader of this note will now be alerted to that method &, I hope, will thus be able to better appreciate Zürn's work.

Encinitas, July 1991

UNICA ZURN

JOTTINGS OF AN ANEMIC WOMAN

(Tr. from the German by James Phillips)

Ermenonville, December 26, 1957—

I have spent the largest portion of my life asleep, the next largest waiting for a miracle, meditating on the unobtainable. Only little of my time has been given to activities that are different from those of other people.

A childhood that outwardly ended in a single hour, continues inwardly its influence. How often have I wished that my son could have been my father, that my daughter could have been my mother. Often, often! I cannot cope with adulthood; I cannot stop my constant waiting and my crazy expectations of a miracle.

The miracle (that) I cannot describe, to which these pages are dedicated. My miracle will have to be paid for. Its grace, its deigning to appear, will cost (something). Its duration will be short, as all things wonderful. To experience it, I shall probably have to pay with my life. I discovered my lucky number—99—just this month, almost at the same moment I began to write this. Which increases my impression that the miracle is nearing, the miracle whose next step will be death. Beautiful, pathetic dreams!

The number 100 is childish. Yet those who can count that far are nevertheless capable of something. 99 is like a quick breath—better: a balked breath. One can't know what will follow. Will the door fly open, will the curtains disappear. Will beautiful horror walk in? And in what—what form? In a form that proves that life was beautiful and that from now on it is over, since one person's utmost—my utmost—has been given. Next year the 99 will turn into 100. Yes, sometime in 1958—I don't know the exact date—my beautiful 99 will become a dumb 100. As to the 99 itself—how I actually discovered and researched it. . .I do not wish to explain here. That will be my secret. When people go mad, the doctors want to find their secrets out, to try to heal them. When I go mad, it will be on number 99.

I am fairly certain however, that I can't expect to experience the miracle during the last few days of this year. Next year, on a day I am not aware of, the 99 will turn into 100. When that happens, it will all be over: the miracle, the waiting, the danger of going mad on number 99. My miracle is somewhat like a face. A certain, lethal face. I'm too ashamed to describe

it, even in its most remote detail. People will see—no, people will see nothing. "Such a poor shadow of a brain cannot bear much."

That's Hans Christian Andersen.

Since 1949, my dreams have been full of horror and of catastrophic visions. There is a mountain of events which weighs upon me every night anew. I will never be able to move that mountain. Just like when somebody stands with hanging arms. That's my basic posture. For the last half year I've been taking sleeping pills, although I have a natural talent for sleeping. Look! That tiny little pill cuts through dreams, those threads on which I've been hanging for the last 8 years and which have kept me gruesomely dancing every night. My respect for drugs has grown since then. The medication: Hypnotique Supponeryl. Dreamless sleep, painless living. For only 200 francs a package.

December 27, 1957

In 5 days, the year will be over. A year of great encounters. I was able to accompany Hans Bellmer to all the portrait sittings: Man Ray, Gaston Bachelard, Henri Michaux, Matta, Wifredo Lam, Hans Arp, Victor Brauner, Max Ernst. It's been my most important year—although I don't like the word "important." I abandoned myself to the pleasure of (simply) observing these faces and their works. My old yearning to meet people I could admire was thus fulfilled. It struck me this year, almost wounded me with joy. Each one of them is unique. Some of them—how can I find the proper comparison—some of them I have made my brother or my father, without their knowing it. Certain people exist to be worshipped, others to worship. I have always belonged to the latter. Astonishment, admiration, worship—without end. To be in the background, to look on and watch—that is my passive way of life. And I absorb all those that I admire, and include them with the few treasures left of my childhood. It burns, it stirs, reshapes itself, returns from time to time—to spill out in a drawing or an anagram.

And so these treasures torment just as much as calm me. Wishes, hopes for solidarity, Utopian community, a new order of things, purification and reconciliation—regardless of (the) disdainful complications and their endless causes. And as for love—the wonderful nature of which I am convinced, although it seems to contradict all things and people—I mean a distant love, whose powers do not dissipate, but grow immense and uncanny.

I have become somewhat timid recently. I always was, and now am even more so. Something keeps on struggling in me and will not let itself be put to rest. As if I were waiting. . .I've always been waiting. As if one day the proof of blessedness would come. I have no desire to describe it any closer. It prohibits speech—that's why. It comes or doesn't. That's why

I call it a miracle. Today I believe in it more desperately than ever.

The sum of all the faces that I live with has appeared. It exists! Finally I have seen it in its full force, and have understood it. In one person it can be a trace along the forehead or the eyes, or in the palm of the hand, or in a stride disclosing dizziness—(as with my son)—while in another it's along the mouth and chin or in the shoulders' frailty (as with my daughter). But these are only two—only two of the many little stones that hew a sculpture. How long? For as long as I am able to remember. Where does such despair come from? From the confusion of features in one face. And if my childhood ended at the moment that I understood the drama of my parents' lives, did all my wondrous instincts for a single face end there as well?

And then the false-starts, each one with a cry of jubilation: here it is, the face! Mistake! There was something right about the mouth and nose—but something wrong about the forehead and temple. Always just a trace. Never the whole picture. Three times I withdrew compulsively to the hospital bed. Every error ended in a hospital, gave me fever, bent my bones, reduced me to the state of infancy, as dumb as ever. From now on I'll be careful, before I ever pursue another face again. . . .

Only now, as life is coming to an end, do the clear warnings of my childhood reach me once again. An old sensibility that rescues itself like an angel from a heap of rubbish. Bristling skin and hair warn me about this or that, exactly as they did back then, before I was a grown-up. Finally I have overcome those awful days of error, those stalkings of misfortune—my youth—yes, finally I have overcome my youth. I'm getting old. Old age and childhood are beginning to resemble one another. I was never young. I'm an aging infant. Adulthood will now no longer come to me before death. What unearned joy! But I'd be glad if no new day came. Waking in the morning gives me no joy.

The split in our existence—since last August—between Ermenonville and Paris is like a journey between death and living—back and forth. With the bus it takes one hour to get to Paris and back to life. Ermenonville, a very quiet place, can only be like death. A death I do not fear, with which I have been secretly reckoning for a long time, since I always have associated poetry—and my romantic spirit—with it. My love of truth is growing. I don't want to lie. Prefer silence. So much is hushed! Especially important things. An honest conversation nearly is impossible. Which partner should bear the burden of truth? The truth that one confides. We know about the failings of the "truth-fanatics," as soon as they challenge the present to a duel. Silence is the happiest form of understanding. Although even banal talk can be revealing to attentive ears. Truth exists in monologue, but who speaks easily to others of their secrets? That always is a shock. No child, no animal divulges secrets. Out of tactfulness perhaps?

To me, reserve has always seemed the only form of comprehension, the most intimate of explanations, the most thoughtful kind of commitment. But is it possible?

My aversion to motion is growing. Speed disgusts me. Movement and speed are in Paris. Paris is life! Everything here is frictionless—the fog, the cold, the silence. I get out of bed, go walking, pace the rooms, the days pass rapidly. Now it is night, and I don't know what else to write. . .the stubborn hope that something might happen nags away at my health. Indifference alternates with tears and I become preoccupied with my guilty feelings about reclusion. What still stirs me are the sights from our window: the landscape here, the pathways in the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Park leading over to the bakery. Although we often speak of walking through the park to see his—exhumed—grave, I doubt that we will ever do it. Much of what we speak about and say we want to do is never done. That's the way we are, and it's rather binding. It's enough to just imagine something. Doing it could hardly be more beautiful. Yet how I do miss music. . . .

December 28, 1957

After long respite, the dream again whose decipherment contains the word "eternity." But in such an uncanny way!

I believe this dream was caused by seeing pictures from an operating room. I saw them in a magazine: photographs of human organs taken from dead bodies and kept on ice for emergency transplantations. Last night I also dreamt about a beautiful and dangerous creature—half girl, half snake—that was obviously bloodthirsty. For that reason, all of its bodily organs capable of doing damage to anyone had been removed. Its eyes, its tongue, its heart and other vital parts had also been removed, to further make it harmless. It was beautiful—so exquisitely mummified that it looked alive—and was presented for our marvel. After this we realized, in horror, that it could speak even without a tongue, could see without eyes, and live without a heart—even without blood. It possessed tremendous strength and was able to make plans, without a brain. It had now become even more lively, glowing, intelligent and obsessed with hatred and revenge than before—sustained by an inhuman power and anger. Only by fleeing were we able to escape total destruction at the hands of this marvelous and terrifying creature. After waking up, I still was filled with unequivocal astonishment. I was sorry that the dream had ended, since I could have learned about the way this creature was going to destroy me. Or was the creature me myself? Or a reflection of my waiting for a miracle?

It is evening now. I have nothing to add. Nothing but the torment of my heart, which increases after dark. Torment of the body, of the heart, from the middle of the torso, left to right, then downward—from a head that is only satisfied when it lies upon a pillow and closes its eyes in sleep.

The appetite of our cat Heinrich is appalling. His total being concentrates itself on the hissing gas burner where a soup is steaming. He sleeps, he eats, he sleeps, he eats. And fills with tenderness the pauses. How dear he is. How hungry for contact. The parched, unpleasant air produced by the heating pipes in our room often drives Heinrich out into the cold front room, where he climbs up on an empty children's bed to continue sleeping. It has rained all day, and will rain all night. I am so worn out, fearful of every rustling, so devoid of inner cheer that I am disgusting to myself. Such boredom—boredom in a terrifying dimension—and it keeps increasing. I am impolite, unlovable—my body is a gray pulp. I am withering away—am already withered—and decomposing. I smell awful, everything is awful. I forget that I have legs, can no longer think as far down as my feet and could say, as Hans' grandmother used to: "Oh, I's ahurtin' awful. . . ." Things aren't going well and I don't know how they could go better.

December 29, 1957

In two more days the year will be over. How could the miracle take place in these two days? The miracle, and the death that comes with it. I fear that I'm dishonoring my death.

I feel better now that the sun is shining. Ermenonville in sunlight and the crowing roosters. Before our windows the highway is full of tourists' cars going back and forth between Senlis and Paris. Ermenonville: 12 letters. The digital sum of 12 is 3. . .and 3 times 3 is 9. Grünewald, where I grew up, has 9 letters. I think that since my childhood in Grünewald, I have never been as happy as here in Ermenonville. I feel immediately better when the sun comes out. When the sun shines, my sorrow retreats a few steps into the background. It waits for sunset. When I lay in bed and read Andersen's fairy tales or Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*—especially Henri Alain Fournier because that makes 18 letters or a digital sum of 9 (1 plus 8 is 9). Especially that book, over and over. Then (all) my sorrow is consolidated in me, including that of my son Christian—9 letters and the sorrow of Henri Alain Fournier—and they read along with me about the discovery and disappearance of miracles and we all fall asleep together. But before that, something else happens that even Heinrich notices—I mean he seems to see something that neither Hans nor I can see, something that "wanders" thru the room. As if a handful of peas, or a handful of glass beads had bounced off the wall; Werner Heldt once told me this was the sign of something "wandering" in a room. I often think of Werner Heldt, almost every day and in this way perhaps I help him onto immortality. If he daily comes alive in us, it doesn't matter that his body has been buried somewhere in the earth.

In two more days the year is over and with it, or so I think, the number 99. How childishly, how stubbornly I am caught up in this oracle and do

not even care about being free from it. It's like the chores I gave myself on Sunday afternoons in Grünewald. Tests of courage that I had to pass jumping 3 times from the highest wall, climbing 3 times to the highest branch, or running 3 times around the house as fast as possible (and I wasn't a good runner at all)—until my heart would almost burst. 3 times 3 is 9! And I cannot stop speculating on the 9—the 99—not now—perhaps in spring—but not yet! I yearn and thirst for the miracle. No matter what it actually is. How horrible a secret can become when always the same things occur, when habit and satisfaction, these two fat and ugly pig-breeders start to prevail. The known—the all-too-known—disgusts me.

I have become unproductive.

Hardly have I mentioned it, and the sun disappears. The sky is grey, no birds in earshot. Growing gray and rapidly darkening, the afternoon makes us a nest. A nest of confidence and friendship in which we embrace and hold to one another: to be together, to belong together. As fearful as we both are, each of us depends upon the other's help and care—for solitude is horrible!

Now the night has come. It keeps on coming, from the heart into the belly, left to right, breathes upward with a stifling pressure from the breast into the brain. Reason doesn't say a word—although it tries to tell me that I'm wrong—that I should be ashamed to let myself be so confused by fantasies, by nothing but fantasies. This is not just superstition. Maybe I am close to overcoming it. My mind, which otherwise I so gladly separate from my weighty body, returns to me a bit, to my legs, head and hands. But I won't let myself be convinced that what I call haunting is not true. I am haunted, as if I were the only home for some uncertain thing. There is an "absence" all around me—even Heinrich knows it: he looks up, moves from the bed to the chimney, stares at the empty air—it ripples and rolls and rustles and cracks. But those are rats! Rats in the chimney.

I just stood in the open window. Behind me the glowing room, before me the dark garden, the black country road, with a barking dog, a mooing cow in the farmyard behind the high wall across from us. I say "Here I am, what are you waiting for," in keeping with my current mood for detective stories. Whoever isn't out there now to take advantage of the light and shoot at me—and then to shoot himself, that ceremonious nonentity—who, what? What, for heaven's sake is happening to me? It's the miracle. Who? He, or better, IT! This IT that has been spying on me recently from everywhere, whose middle I am in, who walks with me down stairs, into the garden, out the gate, along the road, into the forest, or into the butcher's—the IT which points at me and, finally, will pass me over—which will disappear. And that will be salvation. Yes, that's how it will happen: it will disappear and I'll forget it. To suppress it, to remove it from existence, I will find a name for it some day, and use it. Namelessness is

worse than anything one finds a name for (even if a false one): winter melancholy, death instinct, fantasy—that's its name! The encircled, the observed from far away, that presence on all roads with me, these last few days, will pass away and then I'll know my miracle has not come true—like Christmas never coming for a child—for other children, yes, but not for *one*.

December 30

The day is now half over, and at 3 p.m. it starts getting dark. Heavy bodies, heavy, stuffy head on painful shoulders—nothing is right for anything, everything is in the way, I stumble on myself. When I cough, I think about tuberculosis, when my head aches, I think about a brain tumor. Death won't be coming this year. Eating and sleeping have become activities without sustenance or joy. No miracle comes when one awaits it. I had completely forgotten that. A miracle comes unexpectedly. Ermenonville, like Grünewald, is a place to go mad in. How would I fare in Ireland? It comes from the fog, from the green humidity. What a melancholic climate!

> Make the silence ring in pallid water—
> I am you.
> Sink into the ashes, into silence's image—
> soon I must go.
> You never bring that little bit I want. . . .

December 31

My throat hurts, and my backbone cracks, is that called Spondilosis or Spondilitis? When one grows old, these things get quite unpleasant—beginning 60 said the doctor—but let's say 54, since 5 plus 4 make 9.

Heinrich had a lot to eat this evening and has gone off to the garden. A wet pullover drips in the bathtub. I knit and read *Le Grand Meaulnes* and I talk with Hans from room to room. Soon—very soon, the year 1957 will be over. We talk from room to room and drink wine. It's warm. Things are fine. Soon the world will be one year older. The day before New Year has always seemed strange and ceremonious to me. Will the inhabitants of Ermenonville be loud and boisterous? In Berlin it's better not to go out at this hour—you can get your nose singed by a wayward skyrocket. When the year 2000 comes, our children will be 50, and we'll be dead. Is it likely that our children ever will attain that age with human evolution as it is? This morning the mailman wished us peace for the New Year. I have been full of sorrow, turmoil and rebelliousness these last few days. What has been happening to me? The 99 is rounding into a 100. How I have slipped, grown gray, and gotten ghostly eyes! My neck is withering on my wobbling head. Is so much sadness and confusion necessary first before one can be

comforted by thoughts of death? The tiny needle pricks—are they enough? I've grown tired of my enthusiasm for death. When this gets serious, my teeth begin to rattle. My crazy hoping for a miracle has also lost its force. I've turned around and around in myself, and listened and observed. And I've grown fed up with myself. If I were a man, I would have produced a work of art out of this situation. As I am however—and I wouldn't want it any other way—I've only written drivel. As a 9-year-old I wrote fine bold numbers on this paper, large scrawls and scribbles, and blotches. A smear of ink and butter, a speck of dirt brought from the garden (or out of my nose), dog-ears and marks; the haste to fill a page in almost any manner—because children cannot bear an empty page. When one is able to write all the letters of the alphabet and all the words one knows, then one can write a poem. Imagine that: to write a poem!

Now I've read the first pages of this text: how far-fetched! I did not want to write a novel. I only wanted, if I can remember the beginning correctly, to prove that I am able—when I want—to die. That may be harder than I thought. And unawares, this all has grown so boring. My hysterical inclinations seem to have diminished. Yet still I wonder: what was happening to me? Yes, what indeed? When one grows bored with one's own work, it should be laid aside for something else. That is what I now prefer to do. "And it was in the newspapers, was printed and is sure: a little feather can become five hens" (Hans Christian Andersen).

First epilogue—January 2, 1958

I have never seen a year depart so quietly. Ermenonville is dead silent. We have no clock and didn't know when it was 12. It just stayed dark and quiet outside. I have never experienced New Years this way. We talked from room to room, read and drank wine. We heard nothing. Perhaps no New Year came at all. Yet everywhere one sees new calendars, and therefore it must be 1958. The calendars are always right. The Chinaman in the tobacco shop wished us a Happy New Year yesterday. I am thankful for the old year for everything. . .everything!

Second epilogue—March 2, 1958

Now I finally know what happened to me: ANEMIA—a million little red blood corpuscles had abandoned me. Where had they gone? And the miracle, the miracle that I had so urgently, so heartbreakingly awaited—this miracle was nothing but a cardboard package with 60 glassy capsules full of liver-blood. That's what I swallow now: every day I carefully open up two little capsules and swallow the goods, the blessed liver-blood, so that a million tiny red blood corpuscles will flow back into me.

So there are people who make an elephant out of a fly, five hens out of a feather, or a miracle out of anemia.

Third Epilogue and Conclusion

Ermenonville, July 5, 1958—on the evening before my 42nd birthday.

Now I have carefully copied "News from an Anemic" one more time and have altogether finished with it. In the meanwhile, everything has changed completely. It is summer now and Heinrich has found a female. As I write these final words, the two of them lay on the bed and sleep. It is evening. The roses are in blossom, and the jasmines, whose fragrance I have loved since childhood. Mrs. Heinrich is expecting. Her belly rests upon my foot and I can feel the tiny thrusts of babies pattering in Mrs. Heinrich's belly.

Since December 26, 1957, when I began these entries, 192 days have gone by—their digital sum is 12—whose digital sum is 3. What was written in these entries, including today, consists of 9 days, as I count them. That was not on purpose. Despite the 60 little capsules of liver-blood, my obsession with the number 9 has remained. But in the meantime everything has changed. It's nice to hear the birds sing, see the flowers, pet the Heinrich couple, feel close to one another and love each other, be indispensable to one another. It is beautiful when one million little red blood corpuscles so gradually and peacefully invest a person like a swarm of unseen angels—it's a miracle!

RENEE RIESE HUBERT

UNICA ZURN AND HANS BELLMER

Unica Zürn has a substantial following in Germany and in France, where her key works have been translated. Brinkmann and Bose is bringing out her complete and in large part unpublished writings in five volumes. Her work consists of drawings, etchings, gouaches, poems, and autobiographical texts. Her association with several surrealists, in addition to Henri Michaux, like herself a double talent, provided, as Ruth Henry points out, stimulation she had not experienced in her native Berlin or, more precisely, Grünewald. Her sudden departure from Germany for Paris so as to be close to Hans Bellmer, did much for her budding talent, but little for her mental state. As for other women artists and writers associated with partners who were their seniors in artistic accomplishment, her relation with Bellmer can be read both as a blessing and a disaster, as the interaction of personal and artistic dependencies brought out unbearable conflicts while promoting fruitful collaboration. Contrary to Carrington and Penrose, Zürn lacked the strength to distance herself from her partner and therefore was never able to assert herself personally or even artistically. She prolonged her search for an identity through cruel phases of depression and alienation. However, Zürn's texts and drawings should not be primarily examined in terms of her perilous partnership.

Her poetic works, above all *Hexentexte* (1954) and *Im Staub dieses Lebens* (1980) are labelled anagrams. The anagram, as Pierre Joris points out, is a traditional verbal genre practiced as a game as well as a serious endeavor—an ancient discipline capable of providing a catalyst for poetic rejuvenation. It can function in poetry as well as in the visual arts. Unica Zürn both adhered to and subverted this venerable poetic form subjected to rigorous rules and involving recondite metaphoric conventions. But this subtle and formal genre somehow suited Zürn's purpose. The earlier of the two volumes features extreme hermeticism and poetic intensity. Uncompromisingly rigorous in versification and rhythm as well as in their verbal and syntactical precision these anagrams leave little room for personal deviations, narrative devices, and other extraneous elements. Zürn tightens the text to the utmost without making the least concession to an uninitiated reader. By such rules or devices, which reduce the argument while

excluding direct emotional outpourings, language assumes all the enigmatic and bewitching qualities suggested by the title. Thanks to a structure featuring echoing sound effects and reversible verbal analogies whereby the end of the poem repeats its beginning thus minimizing difference, the whole scheme becomes reminiscent of pieces moving on a chess board.

To appreciate at its fullest the innovative power of Zürn's poetry we need only to situate *Der Staub dieses Lebens* next to *Hexentexte*. This later volume, published posthumously, overtly recognizes its affinities with aphoristic texts by Lautréamont, Arp, and Michaux, where initial playfulness repeatedly leads to emotional insights. *Im Staub dieses Lebens*, less tightly constructed than *Hexentexte*, has more overt relations with Zürn's prose writings, for psychological depth succeeds in manifesting itself by means of apparently impersonal statements. A sense of solitude, often articulated through juxtapositions of nouns, becomes so to speak contagious, for it has the power to pervade objects as well as the persona and readily shifts from one to the other. Solitude fails to overcome its inevitable alienation because it finds that the paths it wishes to pursue have been obliterated or blocked. The self vainly inscribes its name in attempting to delineate a tangible identity. Although Zürn may share some of these features with other poets, it so happens that the anagram carries with it a unique tenseness due to verbal concision leading to a destruction of the barriers separating inner existence from the physical world. She intertextually combines her friends' poetry with remote poetic conventions as well as borrowings from the language of proverbs, from fairy tales, and even from clichés. Frequently, she entraps her readers with familiar and welcoming echoes, but only to deny their expectations, for recognition is invariably subverted and curtailed by paradox. She thus fosters frustration, unavoidably maintains secretiveness, and provides tantalizing clues to no avail because they have already slipped away. An image promising future birth is reversed by the threat of imminent collapse. The reader is constantly reminded of death through evil omens. The omnipresence of dust, a metaphor for death, is proclaimed in the title. Shapelessness and darkness announce the impending dissolution of the self.

Allusions to *Märchen* serve merely to deny the childlike world of fairy tales, for death and deterioration within life invariably prevail over beauty and immortality. Nor do these texts counsel resignation; for anger, despair, even revolt and refusal predominate throughout. Zürn stresses lucidity concerning the human condition, viewed as an unabated nightmare. Indeed, her disillusion has no saving grace whatever, for she finds only alienation and misery in human existence.

We may wonder what if anything this anagrammatic poetry may owe to Bellmer who prefaced and illustrated it. In his theoretical text, *La Petite Anatomie de l'Image* (1978), the painter explains his own practice in a

related if non-verbal genre, notably the games of his provocative doll. He indeed created an object rightly considered the very model of displacement, as expressed through the language of the body, where multiple defunctionalized parts or organs can be added or suppressed in accordance with desire. Bellmer's strategies resemble those of the anagram where the recognizable or the familiar is gradually transformed into a dream or nightmare while losing its grip on the real. As both Bellmer and Zürn play with their viewer or reader the same sort of game of repulsion and attraction it is hardly surprising that we can note strong interactions between Bellmer's and Zürn's artifacts. The painter has undoubtedly initiated the game, but the poet by no means remained a junior member of the partnership let alone a mere follower. She may in fact have remained unaware of the relationship between her texts and the doll, even though anagrams, perhaps even her own, had led Bellmer to an artistic self-discovery about the doll. He reveals something of their relation in his double portrait of Unica and himself entitled *Cephalopodie à deux* (1955). The two artists, combined and even united in the same portrait, are represented nevertheless in different realms and by means of different graphic styles so that their relationship to dream and reality never coincides. As in the portrait, where she is characterized by remoteness, in real life she had neither learned to perceive herself as a person nor as an accomplished artist. The failure to meet represented in the double portrait as well as her sliding toward effacement and mutilation suggests that artistic endeavor could not provide a remedy for inevitable loneliness, in spite of the similar goals of the two partners' trajectory.

Zürn composed several autobiographical texts: *Der Mann im Jasmin, Eindrücke aus einer Geisteskrankheit* (1977), *Dunkler Frühling* (1969), *Notizen einer Blutarmen* (1988), *Notizen zur letzen Krise* (1982). Several of these episodic texts are written under the stress of insanity. Desire for self-expression and self-knowledge accompany her states of sickness with their nightmarish sufferings and hallucinations. As she scrutinizes her alienation and isolation, strong desires to write or draw possess her. She wavers between a programmatic type of writing and doubts about her ability. The relation between writing and disease varies considerably, even if crises usually prompt textual productions. Because she focuses on sickness, the body plays a key role and even assumes the decentered characteristics of her partner's representations.

Bellmer is intensely present in Zürn's autobiographical writings. In addition to the structural displacements and substitutions which inform both her text and his images, intertextuality plays a significant role in both of their works. The erotic behavior of an old woman in the hospital makes the reader think of the exhibitionist gestures of the doll. Zürn herself makes the process fully explicit. We may even suspect that she is designating a

certain universality underlying Bellmer's drawings by discovering in her own encounters the equivalent. The domain of illness and art remain intimately related throughout. Unica not only preempted for her own cure the experiences she related, but also clearly sensed the problematics of representation even during her most threatened stages. Her ultimate goal may have been a form of textualization, since by means of a pen death always remained at arm's distance. The primary materials that memory and perception may have brought within uneasy reach of her pen required effort on her part for their transformation either verbal or graphic. Indeed, the author has even voiced the complaint that too great a familiarity is incompatible with creation. Such an awareness of the mysteries of creativity may have relevance to her handling of anagrams, based perhaps on substitutions taking place in her mind; for instance a Paris policeman might readily turn into a Nazi SS man. Such states of dynamic mental confusion, recurring intermittently in *Notizen einer Blutarmen* (translated by James Phillips) can also be linked to the analogical principle of the anagram which brings forth a renewal out of old texts. This autobiographical narrative reflects about the self, sanity, life, and death, all of them mirroring one another. No specific external event initiates the act of writing. Zürn always remains on the threshold between an old and a new year in so far as her hope for a miracle increases and abates. The child must survive within her all the more so because she feels the frightening impact of the aging process and the lack of an unshattered adulthood. She grasps the paradox of the old woman and the child living side by side within her. A stable frame of mind alternating with psychological states in which obstruction and emptiness as well as boredom and memorization rush to the surface providing the dual matrix of her writing. Paradox and splits in personality may be read as corollaries of each other. Uneventful sleep and anxiety ridden dreams may give birth to powerful images calling for their own reversal. As the undefined miracle seemingly draws nearer, waiting and dreaming tend to merge.

As the year, in keeping with her reductive meditations and the monotonous spacing of the pages, dwindles into insignificance and as the crucial number 99 is about to be replaced by 100, nightfall and shapeless grayness, reminiscent of a Beckettian setting, follow their course while contriving a passive ambush to ensnare boredom. But the writer does not expect an encounter. Her life alternates between Ermenonville with its possible peaceful sunshine and the bleakness of Paris, or in other words half-way between a formulated Utopia and disquieting lucidity. Her miracle, if and when it comes, will provide at most a brief illumination. *"Mein Wunder hat etwas von einem Gesicht,"* undoubtedly a face that can substitute for many others. Waiting may not bring the miracle nearer, but it makes death a more familiar and a better acknowledged presence.

Meditation accounting for oppressive dreams alternates with comments on everyday existence: the cat seeking and needing a companion, the narrator reading *Le Grand Maulnes* or detective stories and communicating with Hans in adjoining rooms. The struggling writer emerges. Although she intends to compose a novel, she soon realizes that her text will never qualify. Then she wonders what it takes to know the letters of the alphabet let alone write a poem. More than anything else, writing, which she began to practice at the age of nine, fosters hope for a miracle.

Zürn painstakingly relates her visits in the company of Bellmer to writers and artists whose portraits he drew. Witnessing the transformations of his models into artworks constituted a deep seated involvement on her part, a double process of identification, another way of establishing a reciprocity between their works. But some of these representations produced the frightening dream of a body severed from its organs but remaining monstrously alive. These disquieting images may perhaps be construed as corollaries of the physical torment and erotic symbolism predominating in Bellmer's work. Intense experiences may indeed warrant and lead to artistic expression, but Zürn's success was often thwarted. She of course blamed herself as well as her status as a woman. She believed that if she had been a man, her experience would have given far more significant results. She describes herself as an anemic woman, perpetually taking pills, and unable to take advantage of the world and develop her talent. Dividing mankind into worshippers and worshipped, she sees herself as belonging squarely in the former category, for she has positioned herself once and for all in the background.

Some of the other texts written within hospital walls show, however, a more active struggle and greater opposition or resilience. Two of these: *Das Haus der Krankheiten, Geschichten und Bilder einer Gelbsucht* (1977 and 86) and *Das weisse mit dem roten Punkt* (1977) are enhanced by visual commentaries. In many of her graphic works the haunted author draws multiple faces and protruding eyes almost independent of a body. Heads are attached to legs; multiplications and suppressions characterize these fantastic figures akin, both graphically and verbally, to Michaux's Meidosems. The drawing reproduced on this page was produced a year later than the text translated by James Phillips. Zürn clearly inscribes within the drawing the fact that at the time she was confined to Ste. Anne's hospital for the mentally disturbed. This drawing pertains indeed to a period of instability. Although in the title of *Notizen einer Blutarmen* she points to physical weakness, she deliberately takes into account moments of confusion. Her multifaced and multifaceted drawing problematizes her nightmarish shuttling between the one to the many, the self and the other. This and other drawings have little in common with Bellmer's powerful gallery of portraits to which she refers. Overlapping and encroaching faces as well as staring

but dislocated eyes, each one combining human and animal characteristics, are paradoxically subjected to a highly decorative design. Eight faces with but a single bird leg to stand on and multiple wings sprouting from unexpected places form a complex, involved but absurd figure. We have the impression that in the drawings more than in her writings she has succeeded in distancing herself from Bellmer and from the anagrammatic practices of the poems translated by Pierre Joris.

Das Haus der Krankheiten has recently been reprinted, but for the first time according to the author's wishes as a simultaneously verbal and visual creation. This autobiographical work, in which the visual is far more than an accompaniment or an illustration, can be read as a prolegomenon to her subsequent writings. Like most of her relatively early texts, it is written in the first person. Later on, when Zürn had learned how to impose more sophisticatedly her identity as narrator, she composed her autobiographical texts in the third person. Experiences in hospitals, symptoms, treatment, paranoid, schizophrenic or hallucinatory experiences, confrontations with doctors, the need for self-expression are somehow mastered by means of language. In *Das Haus der Krankheiten*, which concludes with a return to the outside world, fictionalization frequently surfaces: dreams, intermittent recollections, views from unknown perspectives, echoes from fairy tales and black magic. These flights into the imaginary are framed within textual and of course visual space: for instance, rooms with windows and beds lend themselves to complex and confusing itineraries. The labyrinthine walls of the hospitals represent also the furrows of the brain and and several other parts of the human anatomy which succeed in asserting their disquieting autonomy. Such juxtapositions allow for substitutions between mental confusion and physical disease. Reduced, so she believes, to the role of sacrificial victim, the narrator's fragmented and hypersensitive body is constantly displaced. Time notations, as precise as inscriptions in a diary, stress her constantly renewed vow to retain meditations, reactions, reflections, ephemeral moments of well-being, and crises.

As elsewhere, Zürn focuses relentlessly on two dimensional, childlike drawings. Contours of figures and spaces are accompanied by textual inscriptions that are either exclamatory or descriptive. The first illustration embracing the words of the title shows the multi-storied rectangular *Das Haus der Krankheiten* as an isolated shape. In the complex network of interwoven contours eyes play a crucial role. The narrator's lack of ability to focus induces her to introduce textuality. Eyes within and away from a face, open or closed, radiating like the sun, entangled within a shifting network problematize the field of vision whose softly waving and serpentine outlines evoke the creative process.

If we look, toward the middle of the book, at her rigorously structured representation of the schematic plan of *Das Haus der Krankheiten*, her

elimination of overlappings and entanglements provides a better sense of orientation. Text and image reinforce each other; they solidify or make more tangible an imaginary world by producing a *mise en abyme* of windows and keyholes tantamount to seeing and being seen from without and within. The ambiguity of *Das Haus der Krankheiten,* its conflicting roles and functions, emerge with far greater clarity than ever before. In a single drawing, she shows the floorplan of a house, a dismantled body, and finally a crenelated castle. The enemies show a propensity to vent their fury on parts of the body which, in their turn, can become threatening: nailed hands with eye-like knuckles. The hidden world of mind and body once made visible is made even more dangerous through labelling. Even when we envision the plan as an anagrammatic representation of a tortured body, as the target of innumerable pains and hallucinations, we cannot overlook the importance given to the enigmas: Zürn's allusions to obscure games with perilous rules rely mainly on the strategic place given to the oracular number 99—3 x 33. The numbers and the letters added to meandering lines issuing primarily from the "Kabinette der Sonnengeflechte" counteract the schematic process of representation initiated by the circumscribed contours of the house.

Bellmer, in spite of the sufferings he willy-nilly inflicted on her, not only helped her on her way toward artistic production, but by introducing her to surrealism, he provided her with the means to resist and even to make the best of her confinement to an asylum. The surrealists' insistence on and positive evaluation of the irrational encouraged Zürn to stand up so to speak for the visions and hallucinations that obsessed her. Her graphics as well as her texts deliberately and perhaps proudly turn away from the banal shapes of reason and reality to those of an unbridled imagination. Thanks to surrealism she was able as an artist and a writer to make the best possible use of a precarious mental condition.

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BARBARA MOR
TWO POEMS

ROBBED / and when you come home you find that everything is gone

when they rob you they leave a nail in the door.
they drive a nail in your forehead that means you will be
    robbed.
they hammer a long thin nail into the wooden frame of your
front door and that means rob this one. this one is next
a nail thin as the penises of rats.
a long wire insert in your name, it pierces names. the
invisible lines radiate from rental bodies, fingers
dicks silences point at your life, and wheels
roll over with big erasures, many gray fists

AND WHEN YOU COME HOME YOU FIND YOU WERE
    ON THE LIST

and then they park somewhere, they watch through one-way
    windows
they sit back with satisfaction and smoke and wait
until you are observed to leave. then they turn the
ignition on rodent engines, or if they are parked on a hill they
release the brakes and silently glide down a street
into your throat.
                the bone is easy to pop. break
eyes, walk through glass walls. push
flesh no one locked and enter rooms like a body who waits
for it. few belongings but taken care of (no bed
phone car VCR couch washer drier) or slide
down open mouths almost without gloves. they

get into you like that
they see you are neat. toilet paper, books. many
stacked boxes (mutilated joints mss. earth history of poems, war) the
attachment of time to collations of flesh ink objects
you sleep on the floor. they spread
pubic hairs and stare in, looking for vast secrets
of momma, daddy. their long thin fingers open desk drawers
notebooks closets of politics, hangers. naked
cups of coffee lovers fingernails blankets typewriters radios. they
extract a life's work through your nailed skull tongue
door, asshole. this is not personal

AND WHEN YOU COME HOME YOU FIND THAT YOU ARE GONE

upon leaving, they remove the nail. it is gripped, twisted with
dark pliers pull out long thin evil length from your existence
there is a fresh hole in the wood then.
there is a large hole in your mind then. and they form a
wound made in this door of somewhere blood is pouring out, money
leaks from it, thoughts paper screams lines flow out from your eyes
and future circuitry words abandoned in the alleys outside
trashed on file burned
beyond footsteps rat sperm dead nails in the dumpster
(and that means they are done with you forever)
when they pull the nail out forever that is when it really
starts to hurt

THE ONE WHO RECEIVED THE NAIL
a body who gets nailed, that's it

[UNTITLED]

it enters a mouth thrusts is chewed and suck comes it
is bitter the foot kicks you away the hands reach for
you. this is love. we love

a huge cloud gathers in back rooms a deal negotiations
of thunder & needles (thunderous) sharp speeds of rain the
sulphurous rubber of the body rolls up & down in black sheets
we were each other. in dreams.
we wanted to be. it was darkness & the clocks read
daytime, numbers of light entered everywhere, thrusting
being eaten & sucked, the
mouths spoke of hungry life, menus of ice & screams
flames, as daily windows as dark(est) views
time is wound up to adjust to this clock, which
was always noon as a beautiful hunger, feast
of air swallowing all, bodies of flesh & black teeth
tongues, borders of hallucinations criminal
windows of clear nitrogen
beyond them the bodies of clouds roll by on
endless rubber winds, fortunately, encased in
metal, & going too fast
life enters the mouth thrusts is chewed & sucked
comes, the foot kicks you away
the sperm is bitter, like spit of god, a huge
emptiness
lying naked in a room of sulphur

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER
THREE POEMS

POEM

She's flipping like a marlin
in lamplight, the air above her
thrashed to a foam

that eddies awhile
and then drifts down to crackle
and glow on her belly.

The one eye's wild
with three shrieks inside it,
the other adrift in a vapor.

Her breathing's chased
with tiny, disembodied cries
percolating

to her lips from another place;
and *click:*
the reel switches to fast-forward,

whistling through her head.
She goes slack,
taken by an undertow

until *click:* a string
of broken snarls, cloacal, a necklace
strung with shards,

then a great heaving, her body
arched toward some lodestar—

and she's released.

THE PARK

Jimmy the Lush,
looking rough in the shadows and dapple
of light, stares down at the ground
as his dogs take command

of the boundaries,
nuzzling turds and the air around,
snouts jerking like marionettes.
He starts off slow,

nursing a Pepsi, and keeps to his post
through the morning.
He looks almost natty, frayed Ivy League,
compared with the guys

on the corner, wasted already and screaming
about which one goes
to the Arab's next to buy more beer
and some smokes.

Then comes The Talker,
muttering softly, who finds his spot
under the loquat
and fretfully grooms in the shade.

His hat could be a military beret.
But it's far too big
and he wears it wrong, puffed
high on his head like a derby

collapsed at the edges.
They usually detonate round about two,
Jimmy first, somehow
being the senior. A pint's in him now,

high-test, and he's sore
as the dickens about something.

Once it was the mayor, once the Jews,
now it's the whole stinking planet.

The sun posts west
of the radio tower and The Talker's off
on his *possessed by space-villain X* routine,
flogging his rotors, up on his feet,

while Jimmy rails on about the ozone,
the redwoods—those bastards. . .
He spits out the *ba* sound in *bastards,*
his voice growing louder

as his breaths get short
till there's final shriek

and then silence.

CRUNCHING NUMBERS

Assault plasma star launch
The muezzin's call to prayer anthrax Apache raid
Slam mangroves duel ranger excel
Its delicate, wavering airs skewer rocket Nintendo
Hunt rapiers stun flaming debris
Blister agents propel foxbats *so delicate the hour before dawn*
Mirage strafes laser turbo fury
Reactor vessels boil-in-the-bag lacquered&flaked with gold
It resembles no other music Raytheon swing-wing
Have-Nap Popeye punch through date groves coral reefs
The silkworm takes a direct hit

Unless perhaps the nightingale turret spray leopard berms
Glancing blow *in lands where nightingales*
Rain down bouncing betty red, Tru-spokes, louvers&air
Seldom are heard pestle&waterwheel kick ass
Copper flasks of rosewater grip sidewinders grunts
In the iwan's shadows *triggering the failure*
Of Asian monsoons wild weasel *all mud and blood down there*
Thiodiglycol topple Aries denial
Come gargling from froth-corrupted lungs the heron turns
To grab hold of the cloud passing by
Storage tanks full of butane sherbet positions Hezbollah
Lozenges of basbousa and baklava strike package
Lynx impala *one morning a carpenter's pet monkey* centrifuged
Cormorants, sea cows and terns with light
Collateral damage *Saddam rewarded several of his generals*
With duck farms and Mercedes uranium hexaflouride
Scented with myrrh the lion leapt onto the gazelle's back
Tearing his neck blanched almonds attrite
How watered silk took the calligrapher's ink cut off flotilla
Rake minaret thin slices of roast kid
Basted with pomegranate smart bombs Staasi agents bridges&rail
There was once a certain venerable dervish
Jaguars sirens titanium-tipped tracers *caused the market*
To rebound MiGs in the dust of Nineveh, at the gates of Ur
Saffron gathered from fields of crocus alert mosaics
Sunday has been designated baby milk
Phantoms in flames
Azan

DEAN YOUNG

THE FIRST TIME & THE TIME BEFORE THAT

I'm 17 & she's straddled me
on her Daddy's dentist chair
& the tsunami's about to hit
the quiet seaside town
where in the preceding calm
scenes of typical domesticity
take on a blatant poignancy:
the dog asleep & twitching in the road,
eggs nestled in egg cartons beside the milk,
the dentist hosing the hydrangea

until out on the freeway the machine
that paints the dividing lines
goes lashingly berserk
& the dentist grabs his gun from the wall
shouting, My daughter, my practice, my drill

& years later, when she draws a bath,
instead of water, eyes will gush from the spout,
my eyes because she said she loved them
because this is how the memory works,
lyric & monstrous

like Meret Oppenheim's mink cup & saucer,
I'm bringing the cup to my lips,
I'm sipping through wet fur
& above me the long purple patch like a glimpse
of the pure robe & a blank patch
like a bird opening its wings
after some's erased the bird

& I'm 12 & watching the nuns enter the surf
on their private beach above the bird sanctuary
in Stone Harbor, New Jersey,
completely shrouded in black bathing slippers
even black slippers like ballet slippers
& the sea spumes & knocks them joyously down
& swallows.

Small black swirls within white heaving & green

& already I love Botticelli,
the *Birth of Venus* which I've seen in a book
about gods, her left nipple peaking
through the wrist that covers it, *through*
& drapery sailing away from her crotch

but I love the Metal Men more
which I'd buy from the blind man's store,
handing him a one, saying, This is a one,
thinking, This is a ten, this is a twenty
while he feels out the change,
the rack of Batman, Flash, the Human Torch
beside the tiers of women's licked mouths
mouthing my name through the brown wrappers,
sometimes just the orgiastic hair

& in the pages of my comic, the elemental heros
stumble & recede, stumble & crest:

Tin: flimsy but good in a pinch,
Iron: the strongest, defeated by magnets & rust,
Mercury: useless, inflated with anger,
Gold: brilliant but soft, Lead:
thuggish, molding himself into a dome

& Platinum, except for the welds & rivets
Platinum's female, shining & naked,
best of conductors, last to be made,
costliest,

& in love with her inventor
who clenches his wrenches each time she approaches—
how could this happen? he's lost the plans—
who sends them on missions & they always return
dented, immutable, unalloyed.

PAUL VIOLI
THE CURIOUS BUILDER

A dream in which a butterfly crashes
through a stone wall is a warning
that you are no longer immune to flattery.

To dream that you are asleep means you will
soon receive gifts from people you detest.

To be told you often cackle loudly in your sleep
means you are not a Master of Indifference.

A dream of rotten cactus signifies
that you have somehow offended the dead.

To receive an invitation in a dream
is the mark of an intelligent dreamer.

Short dreams are the dear price of a hectic life,
long dreams no compensation for a dull one.

To dream you are taller than usual
indicates that you are not very healthy
and may soon be attacked.

Following a dream in which someone empties
his pipe by tapping it against your forehead,
leave your bed and run, flee your house,
your village, never to return again.

Any dream that is a foe of sympathy
is not a source of magic.

When a dream's music is sweet,
give all you own to the poor;
when it is harsh, leave all you own
on the doorsteps of the rich.
Then, in either case, you must flee
your home, your village,
never to return again.

A dream of lambs bounding over rainbows:
this is where the songs of fiends arise.

Even to Artemidorus, a dream
of eating uncooked corn
does not easily reveal its secret.

If you dream your house is full
of jovial foreigners, imperturbable,
look-alike heathens
who speak an incomprehensible tongue
and who refuse to leave
no matter how many gifts you throw at them,
then when you wake
know that there will be beauty
all around you, peace within your heart,
—before you must quietly depart,
forsaking your house, your village,
never to return again.

But if dreaming your way
through your own house,
or any familiar place, you open
a cabinet or door
that you, somehow, never noticed before,
and enter a room or a corridor
that leads to another,
and yet another,

and you find yourself
not in a parlous maze

but a maze of openings, exploring
an expanding mansion
that must have been there all along,

Then you should welcome these dreams
as their blooming enjambment
welcomes you, and like a bank president
who takes a look around one morning
and declares: "Let's convert this place
into a restaurant!"—you can expect
one of your better days.

After such dreams, whether
he wants to or not,
a man prospers, reassured
that even in the reign of Bogus I,
enough pleasure and worth remain
for someone to finally slide
into bed again
with gratitude waiting behind closed eyes
like starlight reflected in black ice.

Or, if his heart be overfull
and repose impossible,
if his head still throngs
with all he profited yet still craves,
he must forget about sleep
and dreams, but rise again
and declare:

I, Paul Violi, being of sound mind
—Say, the sound of skidmarks
formed where the view across the Hudson
suddenly offers the faces
of Frank Lloyd Wright,
D.W. Griffith, and Ezra Pound
carved in the Palisades.

Or the skidmarks themselves
as much astonishment's own shadow
as Icho's brushstroke,
lead the way back to Manhattan
through Suburbia and the footfalls
of Tyrannosaurus Bronx.

There, along wasted shoreline
and burned-out piers,
Curiosity—what The Worthies
called "Desire's fingertips"—
finds a way out
of another wreck—tangles
of melted steel, red rust,
stumps and slow water—
in time to conduct
the chainlink music of concertina wire
and shredded plastic in a freezing wind,
and set the dome of evening
on rooftop corners
squinched with dirt and sand.

Like water, almost knowing
where it's going, it leads
along a maze of downtown streets
until under the absolute beauty
of the dark blue night
you must stop and declare:
—"Who? Me? No, I was just looking
for this restaurant.
It's around here somewhere."

It used to be a bank
and it smells like a basement,
a dungeon in bloom.
Uneven plank and slab flooring,
cinemascope windows,
sky-washed marble-plated walls,

one vast dim room
that brightened as it rose
to a tiled ceiling spanned
by iron beams painted silver:
the kind of place where Mary Magdalene
first laid eyes on
"Blinkers" the Phoenician.

It's on a corner.
I've been there before,
two or three evenings,
and each time it had changed,
expanded into another room
furnished the same haphazard way:
jammed with mismatched tables
and chairs, storage room couches,
faded carpets and crimson drapes,
wormwood and brass,
blue willow bowls
arrayed behind the mahogany bar,
griffins and grape vines
carved in gold-frame mirrors
hung too high to reflect anybody,

and waiters who have to swat
away the plants to find you.
A gang of waiters
so insultingly polite
Have A Nice Day
is tattooed on their tongues.

"Today's Special, Phoenix Wing,
might be a bit over your head, Sir.

"Need I explain the pot-luck
Thyestean Menu, Sir?

"The turtle never stops growing
until the day it dies.
Unlike some of us. . .eh, Sir?

"Or, perhaps to do justice
to your favorite metrical foot,
the Pterodactyl?

"Might you care for bread, cold meat,
fruit, and a porridge of spelt?
Or something not so frugal?"

No, I'll try the peacock from Samos,
hazel hens from Phrygia, and. . .
cranes from Media, kid from Abracia,
tunnyfish from Chalcedon,
lampreys from Tartesus, whitefish
from Pessinus, swordfish from Rhodes,
oysters from Tarentum, scallops
from Chios, parrot fish from Cilicia,
and throw in some nuts from Thasos,
dates from Egypt, and, yes,
acorns from Iberia.

. . .There goes the waitress
with the streambed eyes. . .

Every order served
on commemorative plates
honoring the orotund and congenial:
Rabelais, Samuel Daniel,
The Wife of Bath, Aretino;
Eleanor of Aquitaine, Falstaff,
Coleridge, Gibbon, Orson Welles,
Catherine de Medici, Mama Cass.

Every table a hive of conversation,
except the nearest, where
amid contending anecdotes, one diner

declares: "You think *that's* disgusting?
Listen to this!

One night, after months
in a northwestern province,
I'm staring up through the mosquito net
hung high, slung low from the poles.
It forms a sort of tent
within a tent. . .

browns and greens, light and dark,
cavernous folds, all peaks
and droops and dim exaggerations
where my last waking moment
flies off like a weary bat
in a cathedral.

It's merely the fever coming back,
dengue, seeping through me, cold
and empty and strange,
I shiver in the sagging cot,
snuff a candle, squash a cigarette
in a bottle-cap ashtray
and fall asleep.

But for how long I don't know
before the nausea hits,
wakes me on the lunge,
hauls me to the side, where
face pressed into the netting,
I start to heave, too weak to care.
—Some enormous creature I was,
stuck in a tarpit, mind
awhirl like a crippled fly.

The next time I wake up
I feel fine, oblivious
to what happened,
except I can't open my eyes.

The lids are stuck, glued shut.
Cheeks stiff, nose clogged,
it's me, with the netting
pasted over my face—Smithereen's clown.

The joke's on me.
I peel it off, gently, like a mask.
And as convincing as, say,
The Shroud of Turin,
the image snared in the threads
—Gimme an H! Gimme a U!
Gimme an M, Gimme an I, Gimme an L!
Gimme another I! and a T and a Y!
Whaddaya get?

—"Who? Me? I don't get it.
The only thing the Shroud of Turin
reminds me of is the tablecloths
in this place.
Every dream, every journey
is a digression, but from what
I don't know: Dreaming or not,
on our better days we're tracing
the same immanent pattern of fascination.
The other night, for example,
I'm coasting down these long halls,
entranced by commonplace things,
I run my fingertips along threads
of silver and gold in the walls,
casually asking
which is memory, which desire.
Then, opening a side door
I happen to notice, I enter
and there it is:

vast, hollow, Everestian heights.
There it is: Loss.
A lurid, pendulous light,
stale gold fumes draped

above an ocean of dust, silt
so fine a raindrop would float on it.
A wonder of annihilation
or an annihilated wonder.

And in the far distance
two wandering figures appear,
dressed not like explorers
but plodding tourists
who have found hell a disappointment
and want a refund,
who have no sense
of what has been lost,
but still think the bus
must be around here someplace.

A mile away from me in the dunes
and yet I can hear one of them declare:
"Would you believe it,
that even Nothingness
could be so full of itself."

I'm still trying to figure
that one out days later
when I walk in here and see
in the pargeting above the door
a line from Fitzgerald's Odyssey:
"Charmed out of time, we see
no life can be hid from our dreaming."

I almost have that one figured out
when I hear an imperial fingersnap
and I'm greeted
by The Waiters' Serenade:

"Chew on ice, eat a smile.
    Chew on smoke, dream awhile.

(Sing it Jimmy Boy,
Sing it for the hoi polloi)

Chew on ice, let it fade. . .
Chew on smoke. . .the life you made."

I almost figure that one out
when—another fingersnap—
I'm led through a maze
of continuous renovation,
tables and scaffolds and workers
and I'm seated just in time
below a great old mirror
flaked with black-rot
where a long-sought image
of all I've loved and made
and hope to keep
is about to finally burn through silver
and drop right into my plate.

Of course there is a slight wait,
during which I order a cocktail
or two, watch the construction,
offer some advice, grow impatient,
skim a magazine, write a few letters,
send them off, skim a novel,
and am about to complain
when the waitress arrives,
apologizes for the confusion
and delivers my mail.

Dear Reader,
Since the reign of Bogus I,

Dear Wordsmith,
We are off to hunt truth and rabbits,
so saddle your ox!
We'll take the shortcut again,
through swamp and paradox

To Whom It May concern,
    It is with great regret
that we inform you

Dear Chump,
    You will undoubtedly want to be there
when Gullibility and Greed renew their vows

Beloved Patron,
    It is with a heavy head and
shriven heart that I take pen in hand

Dear Applicant,
    The subject may appear remote at first,
but Creative Freedom versus Social
Responsibility is the question we wish
to explore with you today

Dear Parent,
    Was it mere pedantry to reject those
ransom notes for your loved ones
because of the grammatical errors
they contained or were higher principles

Dear Investor,
    By the time you read this letter
I will be gone. I have run away.
My plan to invest your savings
in the manufacture of styrofoam coffins
was, I admit, a sham; and the implant
that would allow the common man
to convert his big toenail
into a television screen

Dear Subscriber,
    In the latest edition
of The Illustrated Dictionary
under the entry for "nonplus,"
an old coot frantically sweeps

a pile of dust across trackless desert
right up to your feet
and without stopping, without
even looking up at you, declares:
"Out of my way, you desperate bastard!"
    Now for only a few dollars a month
this and many more memorable

Say Hey, Peewee!
    Forswore hoity-toity melee?
Bandstand hubbub so-so?
Zoot-suit heyday undone?
Juju hodge-podge humdrum?
Eenie-meanie payday? Holus-bolus shit-fit?
    If this be the case, then we
strongly recommend Mayday! Mayday!
Backtrack: Waylay Lulu, murmur Tufu,
kowtow paxwax booboo,
maintain bedspread handstand

Dear Contestant,
    Congratulations! Your chance to win
the dreamhouse of a lifetime, to live
on the edge of rampant transformation
is at your fingertips.
    Just pick up your pen

Dearest Occupant,
    This building has been condemned STOP
Your constant delays leave us no
alternative STOP Vital services will be
terminated STOP To facilitate your
immediate departure we advise you
to avail yourself of the next

To The Reader

Behold once more with serious labor here
Have I refurnished out this little frame,

Repaired some parts defective here and there,
And passages new added to the same,
Some rooms enlarged, made some less than they were
Like to the curious builder who this year
Pulls down, and alters what he did the last
As if the thing in doing were more dear
Than being done, and nothing likes that's past
    For that we ever make the latter day
The scholar of the forme, and we find
Something is still amiss that must delay
Our business, and leave work for us behind.
As if there were no Sabbath of the mind.
And howsoever be it well or ill
What I have done, it is mine own I may
Do whatsoever therewithall I will.
    I may pull down, raise, and re-edify
It is the building of my life the fee
of Nature, all the inheritance that I
Shall leave to those which must come after me
And all the care I have is but to see
These lodgings of my affections neatly drest
Wherein so many noble friends there be
Whose memories with mine must therein rest.

TERESA DEL CONDE
TERESA SERRANO

(Tr. from the Spanish by Esther Allen)

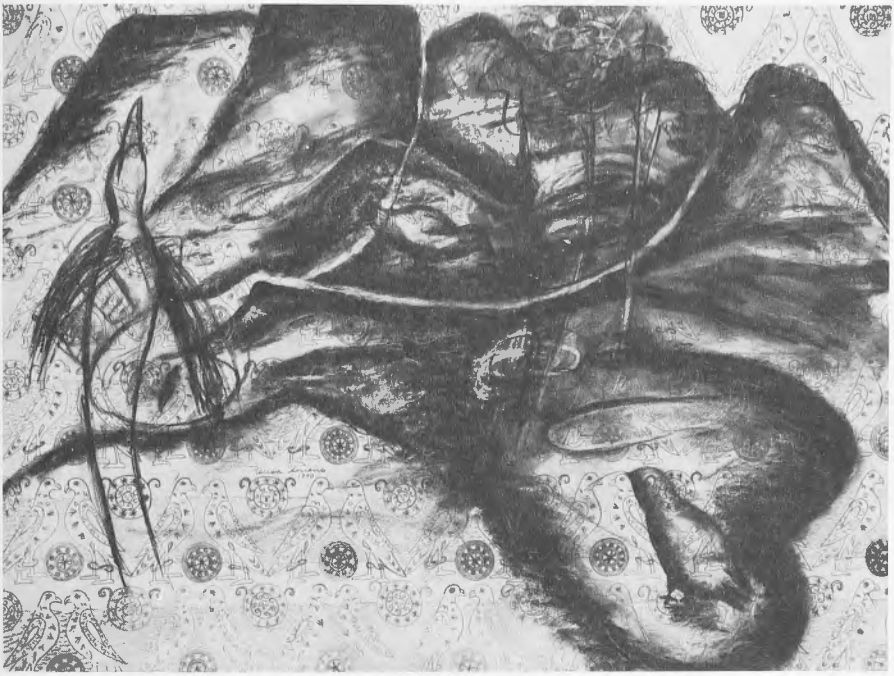
Teresa Serrano has been a relatively recent revelation for critics and students of art in Mexico, as well as for the artists who are her contemporaries. Though she has been painting and drawing for some time now, she was, for several years, unwilling to enter the formidable competition of the Mexican art world, which is vital, polemical and exacting, but somewhat obstructive to the spontaneous emergence of new voices. She plunged into the fray when she felt herself to be in full possession of her own voice, not before.

Teresa Serrano began to make her presence felt in national salons, biennials and gallery shows about six years ago. At that point she had already had various shows in galleries in New York and California. She has won unquestionable recognition. However, her artistic physiognomy has materialized not from exhibitions and propaganda but through the emotional chords struck by her works.

A few months ago she showed a splendid series of large drawings in an important exhibit organized by the Museum of Modern Art of Mexico City. Some of these works are being reproduced here. In addition to evincing a fine hand for drawing and a distinctively poetic aptitude for merging oppositions, Serrano is a painter who unites strength and tenderness. This is evident in the delicate elegance with which she approaches certain of her iconographic motifs: birds, ornaments, the words she likes to inscribe on her works. Her delicacy is precise, paradoxical as that may sound, and it is joined to an impulse (that only seems contrary) to daub, sketch, and shade by means of full gestures that seem to grow out of her whole body.

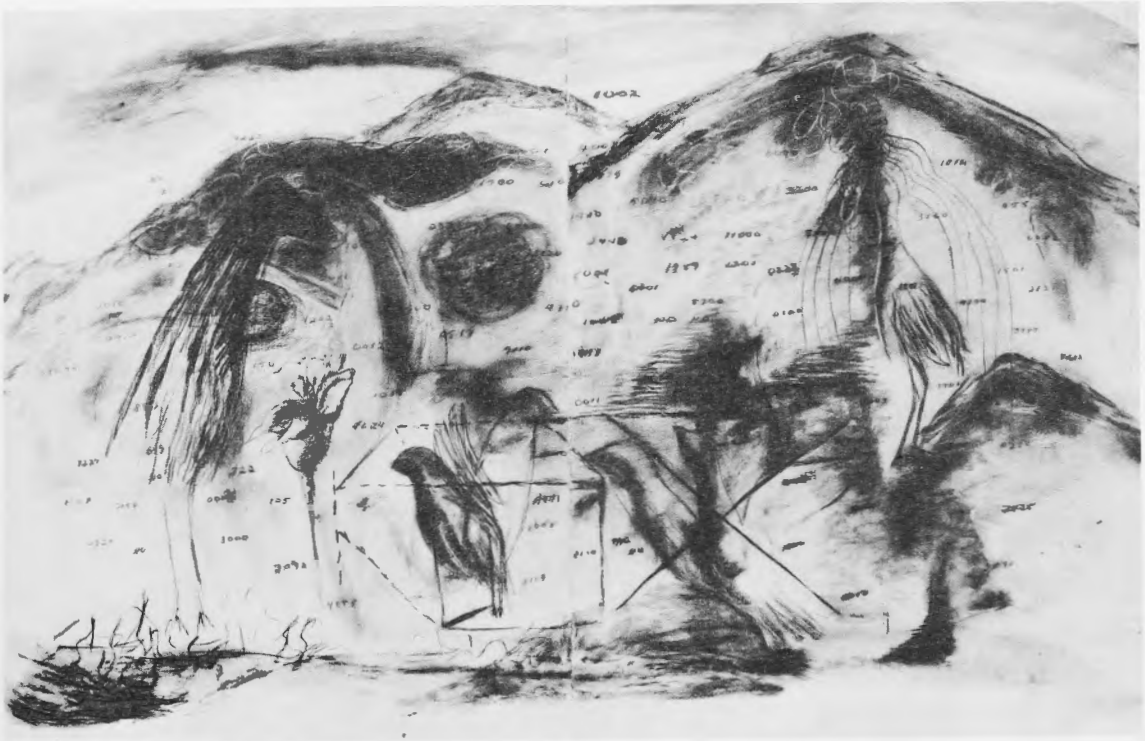
In Mexico, Teresa Serrano studied with two notable painters: Carlos Orozco Romero and Javier Arévalo. The journeys she has made, the paintings of all periods she has seen, her close contact with the art being produced now, all make up her roots which go from Altamira to Post-Modernism, from New York and Castilla la Vieja to the outskirts of Oaxaca or Morelia.

TERESA SERRANO
FOUR DRAWINGS



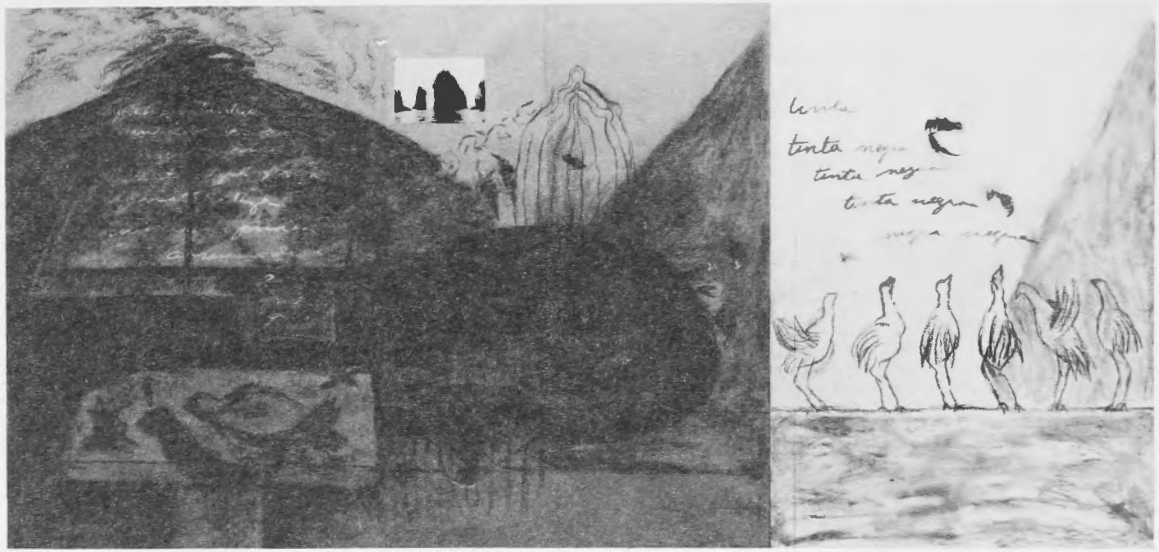
Untitled, 1990

Charcoal, Ink, Pencil on Paper,
120 cm x 120 cm



Untitled, 1990

Charcoal, Ink, Pencil on Paper,
9 meters x 100 cm



Untitled, 1990

Collage: Charcoal, Ink, Pencil on Paper, and Plastic, 3 meters x 120 cm

Untitled, 1990

Charcoal, Ink, Pencil on Amate Paper,
2 meters x 130 cm

PETER REDGROVE
EIGHT ALCAMEOS

THE CYCLOPEAN MISTRESS

"A man is a god in ruins. . ." This sentence was written beneath a musical stave in black on a greenboard. A poster of skeletons hung on a nail. An old photograph taped to the stationary cupboard showed a sculptor in a smock, with a noble brow and the expression of a Caesar; in his left hand he held the limp mask of an idiot, clay-hued and rubbery. Several diplomas in frames hung on the wall. I thought them more appropriate to a private office; the teacher's qualifications were not in question. I had been told that she had only one eye. . .

But I was not prepared for the teratism that walked in, her schoolmaster gown billowing. This one had no need of expedients to control her fourth-formers! Indeed she had one eye, but it was in the centre of her forehead, an inch above the bridge of her nose. She made me feel quite alcoholic with the buzz of it.

Once I had got used to the cyclopean feature, the rest had great beauty. The hair was raven black, and flowed like some perfumed and healing balsam down to her shoulders. Her skin was clear and glowing, her figure lissom, her movements quick, agile and intelligent. I had come to enquire about my daughter's progress in school. What the Cyclopean mistress told me was "She is well towards approaching unified vision." I could see that she weighed her words, but I wonder what this phrase meant for the future of my child? Would her eyes fuse, too, and crown her nose?

I had expected an older woman with a handsome black patch, like Wotan's. Then I thought of Ancient Greece, and wondered whether the schoolmistress was a classical scholar? Was she, with her Eye, the offspring of the Beginning, when Earth coupled with the Sky? I had read about her three one-eyed brothers in Homer, and in Hesiod how they made thunderbolts for Zeus. But I had not heard rumour of a daughter of that coupling. If a god of this kind were ruined—how?—would the eyeball not split in two and drop down into divided sockets on either side of the nose, leaving nothing of that unified vision but a worried frown?

ARMY OF MICE

I woke up gasping. I had somewhere in a dream lost my breath, and losing my breath, lost the dream, and trying to breathe woken myself up. It was a nightmare. I could remember no succubus sitting on my chest. I had not been twined in intercourse with any bestial figment. But then I started remembering my dream.

In my dream I had been asleep, and I woke. I began to sit up, and to adjust the eiderdown. It shivered and squeaked under my grasp and I understood that the quilted coverlet was composed of the bodies of living mice. I looked down at the bedding which covered me, and I saw that it was studded like a city night with yellow eyes. I tried to throw it off, but it parted to my hands, and then came surging up at me. I flung myself out of the bed and my feet touched cold stone flooring. I tried to find my slippers. A pair of slippers stood under the bed. I tried to pick them up and they were mice. I touched the lamp shade on the bedside table and tried to find the switch, but it was the tiny teeth of mice, and the whole table gleamed with eyes.

My feet touched a carpet. It wriggled and clasped me with its teeth. It was mice. I took my dressing-gown from behind the door and put it on. My body gleamed with the eyes of mice. The dawn began to come up and showed me clothed in grey fur, covered in eyes. I pulled the curtain. Mice that had been clinging to mice by claw and fur, tail and teeth to make the warm heavy drapes, left hold and dropped to the floor in hundreds to let the thin dawn light into the room. I looked at the soft grey clouds in the sky, and they opened all their sparkling eyes and were mice. I felt my face with my hand: it was covered with a soft stubble like mouse-fur, and as I touched it it wriggled and I passed my hand between mice. I looked at my hand and my hand looked at me out of mice-eyes, I looked back at it out of my face of mice-eyes, and the room became gradually taller and broke up into thousands upon thousands of identical rooms—as my head broke up and began to run on mouse-claws down over my body which was running away over the floor to all four corners of the room.

ANNUAL EVENT

Pamela, in a green dress, came and sat down in the water, to show us. We blessed her for it, and applauded heartily. I found the hotel at last, in which the conference was being held, the solid and staid old Edwardian, the Metropole. Discreet notices printed in a whisper found me the great ballroom. Bowls of water were brought in, and the delegates, removing trousers and knickers, sat down in the bowls in a silence of profound concentration. It was cold water, with ice-cubes. Then bowls of warm water were brought in, substituting for the others. I counted eighty delegates. It was the annual pile-shrinking competition.

HAMLET

In the pub a woman suddenly dashes a pint of Guinness over her own white and frilly-bloused front. Hamlet, who has experience in talking to ghosts, is amazed. Is this a fetish, or a ghost-exercise? The latter, I think: notice that her eyes are closed. It is an event that might more readily occur in a dream, some deluge of the spiritually-alert body, both desired and feared, ghost-shaped. Now she is savouring the sensations. In a moment she will open her eyes and inspect the copious external stains which splash and spread in the pattern-resultant of all the forces in the universe dwelling in that blouse at this moment of impact. Later she will discuss the matter with her male partner, who is at the moment giving her action room, as he is frozen in astonishment. Meanwhile the complex clean-ironed cotton recording-instrument sensitive to vectors inner and outer that go to make up its display, the draught from the swing-doors, the thumping of her heart, the field of electromagnetism held in the crosswork of silky threads, transforms in an instant to a time-warp printout of these local and universal influences—something for dwarfish time-bandits to steal off her back. Moreover, the presence or utterances of ghosts can affect the wordage of this giant stain, which is also an emblem, a bringing out into the open of her menstruation, which this act has just started. The mantic or divinatory characteristics are identical to the ink splashes, sand-trays, tea-leaves, sfumage, écremage, decalcomania and powdering of clairvoyants and surrealists. In addition the magnificent nose of the ferment arises around us all black as the Guinness itself, but invisible, and as powerful an aid to

the genius as years of scripture itself read aloud out of Guinness-coloured books to boys in dusky churches in which their white surplices seem to glide in procession like foam down a gullet.

Now this pint has been laid out by this lady, it is a flat pint, like a sliced tree-trunk showing its rings over which balsamic sap creeps, except for its perfume, which swells in all perceptible dimensions through the room, warmed by her chest and by our astonishment. She has extracted the bouquet, using the laboratory of her gifted chest, now dark as Sheba's. Guinness got laid; it is a fast partner; and love-smells fill the bar. Now she strips the blouse off, shakes it, cracking it like a whip, and hangs it out to dry on a neighbouring chair-back. "I'm sure Bobby's coming after all," she says to her companion, and takes out her purse, goes up to the bar in her bra and orders another round. She is served without question. Her companion repositions the chair nearer the radiator, so the blouse will dry faster. It is Hamlet himself who acts thus considerately, who happened to be sitting with this woman who understands fluids and their transformative use a degree better than poor Ophelia with her unfermented posies. As the lady returns to her seat, Hamlet leads a round of applause among the habitués. "That's the way to talk to ghosts, all right," says Hamlet, who also enjoys dressing in white and black. Meanwhile, the pattern on the steaming blouse begins to sketch a Veronica resembling Hamlet's Father's beetlebrowed face—contracted there more in sorrow than in anger.

THE PATH

The brimstone full of its aspect. A fragility of tenure among the bolts of sulphur; deep in the yellow mine, an accidie. The molten element has set in gulf-like heiroglyphs. Her guards lay dead and her clothes dripped blood. "Let us hide in the sulphur mines," she said, and handed him a lamp. They walked through the great wooden doors into the cellar as if they were beating a path into the sun.

AFTER THE FUNERAL

A huge rainwater gargoyle with the face of a horse. Putting one's mouth to the cold, sweet flute in the rainy graveyard for the funeral of an old woman whose cheeks were cool and fragrant to kiss and whose robes always smelled faintly of lily of the valley. Afterwards, tea, in the huge gargoyle of a house with its chairs of a deep raisin colour. I was upset, distressed, but a remark made by my partner cheered me. She was staring at the chairs. "Raisin," she said, "Raisin' up," and she giggled, "Resurrection, a sign!" and she waved her arm around her head. A distinct odour of lily of the valley came from her armpit, and I wondered whether smells were inherited.

SUNDAY WALK OF THE ALCHEMIST

Deep soft collisions in the air. Like a haunted train. Haunted by the exquisite beauty of the materials. Not casual and not opportunistic. The sacramental function of suffering projected on to matter itself. The black and white threads pulsing in the loom. You and your magic sound created by the mere fact of the body working. For everything on earth has its sferics. I hear a ghostly picture of your vulva unfolding. A womb-sound surrounds us. The barks of the trees are wet and running with wet like enormous alchemical vessels. Weather-response spells out a tree-alphabet. The rising and setting of planets spell out their creatures on the earth. Here, in this wood's centre a great stone, with apple, ash and holly. They make a womb-sound like a vulva unfolding, spelled CNT. Ah, that's it, the registration number of the car that brought us here. CNT 666 F.

THE VILLANELLE OF THE LITTLE DUCK

I.

A very subtle deepening over and above the sensation and the pang which made itself felt principally in my neck, a couple of inches below my ears, where the bony part stops. Is this where the eustachian tubes are impeded, or the carotid plexus stells? As I deepened into it I met poor P.V's bankruptcy ascending, but I switched off recollection and floated down past it without touching or adhering. Tat was asleep. Having woken and got up, I looked over the banisters and noticed that my magical walking-stick had become magical. But it is February winter, and the green, even the traces of January, that hue and spirit, has now and for the whole of this month sunk out of sight, the Cornish Persephone not being expected for at least eight long weeks more. Where does my stick want to go?

II.

In the green room, with ginger hair. She has her arm in a plaster cast, and she has carefully lacquered her nails scarlet, because the cat was so ginger on his green. He stretched his back on the green grass and looked at her goldenly. He was a blood-eater in the wide green: a mere mouse, headless in a green thicket, so red a lamb within the green, its head elsewhere. Ginger sizzling on the green rises and to the thicket paces to taste the headlessness and the red with the ginger of itself. The patient watches from her bed the greenness of the lawn gingered by the cat playing with scarlet.

III.

"The villanelle of the little duck. . ." He stopped writing for a moment and turned into a stone over which the brook flowed and hunched its garment cool around his neck, and a rainbow croaked out of its collar. A stone. Already. The quiet thrum of water shook the rainbow. A butterfly sip sip investigated the stone for a bead of water. I found one in my own eye, turned my head and offered the eye like a flower to the butterfly. The villanelle of the little duck. I had particularly enjoyed the Hall of Ships, into which they had got the Queen Mary, dry. As we were returning, on the station platform in the crowd, there was a woman with a pram. Her baby was fiddling with some typewritten documents. Suddenly and with a seraphic smile the child handed me a sheaf of them, headed RESEARCH SOLUTIONS. The woman smiled at me and wiped a tear away.

IV.

Myself and another man had mastered our periods. We had done this by tucking a large folio book under our arms, each of us. It was the colour

and pattern of a handkerchief that had been used for a nosebleed, quite slim, but with large pages, like a sketchbook, elephant size, that looked tie-dyed. Previous to this we had suffered badly from PMT, which was like a large white empty space, a marquee made of an immense rubber, inside which one could not breathe, and felt spiky and glittering, in the swollen stance of snowmen. Now however we did not have to worry about this, since we had our bloodstained books. Now it was a simple matter to join any company; I went into a meeting of playwrights, and we got on very well.

PHILOSOPHER AND SKIN

I.

She had legs like earth-stairs. She spilt gravy into her lap. She sat in a written chair. I felt her wings flare out in her body like swooping Dracula. She was the night-side of the dove. I had drunk water fresh from a thunderstorm. Take a look in the mirror, Eden. Greeting the beasts by urine-gesture. Butterflies from the North.

II.

Leylines like stars with their rays reflected on the earth's surface. The craters on the Moon as if a hammer had been taken to a crystal ball. My body communicating its changes to my nose through the chimney of my clothes; I inhale these messages and return answers by sliding my changed saliva downwards. Plenty of wet girls in the mountains, clothed in goddess-skin of mist and waterfall.

III.

I smell my meal cooking. Its savour winds up through the Vee of her blouse. The anticipation of her skin makes me salivate. Winds up through the Vee of her blouse from the kitchens below, she ornaments this staircase with pearls. Through this white tunnel come the vaporous essays, the innocent alchemy. The pearl necklace hanging between the visible and invisible realms. The throat, the beach of invisible tides. The monthly laboratories, the pelvic silver beaten out. "Ant" or "Lizard" in her mouth greets the beast by inner gesture, "Dog" with as close an approximation to the beast's smell as a human can give. Pretty close. Therefore are the beasts friendly.

IV.

Not an independent subject confronting an objective, alien world, but rather the so-called subjectivity, the ego or inner sanctum, and nature, and other people, and the whole world, emerge from a common ground, embracing both humans and nature. This state of fruitful death, the kore dwelling in both worlds, and passing from one to the other, dwelling also in the *Eidoleion*, the house of the future self. And reading, he understood that God was the ground of being: "The ground. That's it! God is the ground!" looking out at the trees, and at the fresh rain soaking into God.

PETERIS CEDRINS
TWO POEMS

Ponck Hockie)

dreams describe this circle down her
her calves in blurry light, nowhere
I've been, weathers
                the girl streaming under the sheet
                ice or approaching Easter
squats in the holocene backwater in bright sun, void, phane
being used at last
                to field
houses past the high school wall
shorts, halters & shifts the weather
                allows

                such time in her, shell out
rare creatures in a vacant lot, pineal shells with sinuous flukes
nuts? I draw an eye, keine Sandkunst mehr, a kind
Jugendstil draws near, a prehistoric one
in dark attire, slender violins slimed with pale silt
play with themselves, afire, spare swing

tire vertical in vair murk
I follow as far as I can with my
sleep

Three TVs ablaze in a single unveiled body at Margaret & Tower
& behind the Tower (guarded by electric eyes)
an ancient orchard kept up by hidden keepers
(night birds & bats) but suffused with chemical stinks
deer & from there across Whaleback, the river, & gloomy Mt.
Marion
to Catskills—purple & Tum
is empty except for Venus & the Crocus of Venus
a light from behind the mountains
the crickets near the houses the orchard is still
silent dogs
sleepers at the Lyceum rearing to close

Three TVs blaze in an empty body at the edge of the village
the villagers hooded, or hidden, or abscondite with the fabulous
wolves
a sense of the river
& the backwater—der Weiher—in the orchard
but rampant halogen leisure, brick-smell
east, toward Pine Plains, two self-operated car washes
& the mysterious laundromat light
blue houses built on bare hillocks
Nevada, ninguit here in the sinister riches?

A pound of copper-rust carefully alcoholised when there is
nothing
between the moon & morning
stirred, mother, sublimate in ashes

Margelle brim of a well, as on the island
the well you thought was door, Daleth
made love there
there is no crime
the rest of the country has been discovered
this is its head, empty of dream
participates reluctantly in the national life

Automobile blue-eyed grass forced crocus at Mohican Mkt.
or old Mr. Feldman leaping back from his stocks of porn
"we have everything" plutonic indigo

& the Shining One

on low veneniferous growths by the orchard,
"life being resident exclusively in the humid radical,"

Rötlich steigt im grünen Weiher der Fisch

for Jeffra
1991. 12. May
reading Trakl

RON PADGETT

PROSE POEM

The morning coffee. I'm not sure why I drink it. Maybe it's the ritual of the cup, the spoon, the hot water, the milk, and the little heap of brown grit, the way they come together to form a nail I can hang the day on. It's something to do between being asleep and being awake. Surely there's something better to do, though, than to drink a cup of instant coffee. Such as meditate? About what? About having a cup of coffee. A cup of coffee whose first drink is too hot and whose last drink is too cool, but whose many in-between drinks are, like Baby Bear's porridge, just right. Papa Bear looks disgruntled. He removes his spectacles and swivels his eyes onto the cup that sits before Baby Bear, and then, after a discrete cough, reaches over and picks it up. Baby Bear doesn't understand this disruption of the morning routine. Papa Bear brings the cup close to his face and peers at it intently. The cup shatters in his paw, explodes actually, sending fragments and brown liquid all over the room. In a way it's good that Mama Bear isn't there. Better that she rest in her grave beyond the garden, unaware of what has happened to the world.

ANDREA ZANZOTTO
from FOSFENI

(Tr. from the Italian by Pasquale Verdicchio)

LIKE LAST SUPPERS

Nocturnal thirst of march,
dry countryside razed cold
like a beard is shaven
shaven every will of levitation
and everything is leavened afterall comprehended in the
cold,
compressor of the cold
the dust is cold, so dry from thirst, in the headlights,
that in the shave we find don't bark
the road the turnoff—sneeze—
upset humpbacks crescent loaded with empty
loaded streets and then grasses from the field and emptied palate
and too much responsible for invention don't bark
but not night, but with a start in the night,
roads which the least little thing hastened to die
so as to be more chaste more deserving an instant
to be a headlight
or a shining of nothing-glass don't bark

Like going in through the back door
in the sweet composition of a last supper
more squared off—fits and starts from outside—of all
that one could breathlessly dream, envy—
like in the must of a sublimation
without rays without reliefs without pretense
in any case everything loftly content in its sub-being
rather a type of N.N.N. under gel under alcohol gel
Supper in the cold defence only from yourself

supper where it's always opportune to insinuate the foot
where meats viande victuals and milk and cappuccino
where golden drug of supper sinks
effuses in an emersion of itself of faces of con-figurations
catering to no-one and itself, tippable composition,
accessible initiation miniorgasm in etcí
little hot then of initiation in in zzz of sleep razor
warm hole (insinuations) (indications)
sacred coagulation (gossip)
of initiation, of pauperty, of resignation to little puppets
of beautiful-to-the-minimum
turgidity of little value, stare contained in the laces
of victuals and trays of table fruit, not even dining table
There are no dining tables here razor
but only blood-foods and irritable gelatins
and restaurant-girl who scuttles away
and circic circuits, toys high in anxiety
If I were to give theory of a face if I would
give myself up to dissimetry (this me)
of a convolvulus of face in one's own blondness, dry rain,
of a nestling of beauty-in-the-nice-gel razor
golden threads inside a lamp, under a violent memory:
scarce words and scarce lines, all friendly,
travelling, head on the pillow,
sleep, settled the rest on everything,
melding into all sleeping,
startled along divinely ruined streets

I haven't seen much for a while around
of the delicate, of the after-face,
a while since I had unwrapped a frace from the face,
a while since I had subtracted, since I dropped my hand
a while since I had last been startled in the car
equilibrium of groves and countryside, pool table false
clinking betrayal and true oh of tops for last suppers
"Which conditioner do you prefer for your hair?"
little hair-dresser top for last
supper on the edge of the fields, restaurant
"Which nail polish?"

girl, restaurant (under dust)
(askance) (agold) (ahair and then who knows what)
"Which detergent which absorbent for the underthings,
those outside
under the stars or those?"
and how many sweet formalities

ΘΕΩΡΙΑ ΚΡΥΟΣ

*

Impossible loves like
the hills are actually impossible
It is not possible that so much love
in them is so openly
given
and at the same time dissimulated, rather
made inaccessible

Series without rest of inaccessability
that nevertheless makes it captivating
ingrading carpet on the
largest breccia insanity uselessness
Hills rich of a thousand deadly dangers
for quietly
for reckless aid
among skying
for insufficient attention to itself—
from chance to chance
"it will hinder" "it will defile itself'

DISTRUST THROAT, BODY, MOVEMENTS, THEATRE

I

1 I'd like to leave, me
I'd like to leave, you
that is not aimless wandering nor living in the line
it's too much for certain-these-chords-vocal
and in any case I am left out of it
I'd like to suppress
I'd like to rescind
I'd like to intuit myself in swarms in flocks in crowds
and begin and carry out Blue gold Pluriblue

2 Blue doubt blue certainty that does not pierce at all
Ultracold, suggestions of cold
l l f leaf ea a
And dripping in warmth and colour
of multiblue-gold candle
But dusts of pink-wind like extinguished larynx
Every exaltation prohibited equilibrated devolved
in cold-storage and gives blue-gold
In the dilemma of the tree TREESTRIPS
In the voice (between us) that concerns TRAPS for birds
for causal skies and running of waters
and courses and followings and undone
zippers

3 I'd like to desist I'd like to win again
I'd like two hundred I'd like a thousand, glowing, suddenly
Store approach them and then store them
and then instead you find gloss-word password
between felt and felt and wood stingy wren

4 Oh shake off flay gold from the fitters
don't you see that paths-moon spin toward every part
Useless behind. . . (gag, bit)

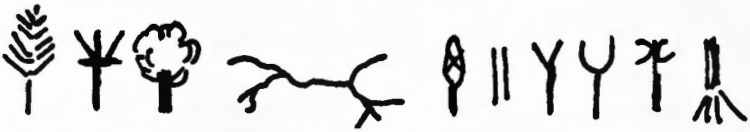
5 Intuition and desperation such close twins
so subtly innoculated
resurfaced in bacterial gold, of toothpick
Who knew? Who said it?
To know now—of poaching—abstracting from
fronds of concensus, from gnawing the line

II

1 Ch. M., J.M.L. and others
Distrust the body cause every action to faint from hunger
Although those bodies, the too terrestrial, the too astral,
would crowd together oh, finally understood, like
TREES with asterisk (repeated above and below the line
in isolation and in the plot
from millions of eons X millions of mountain eons). . .
They (the trees) are certainly cautious in announcing
themselves and
tritritri trii
and much slower of how I heard them triii triii
oh irradicolarity iniity
All this—even—too will transcend me
even if, at times, I felt like sated with it or clumsy triii
In qualifying myself I placed myself in the middle
documents in hand
I did not subdivide myself up to the door-abyss
of the self-service
I wanted even more and more maximums and minimums
and high conduct
and high frequency offensive-defensive
I wanted to install and camouflage myself forever,
calculated forever,
drunk in the middle of the immense exterminability
and participate in the poiuring and shaking downward
of libels of science and glory
of virginal vegetable cruelty
There has never been any dance except that of agony
No chords or vocal membranes

nor impulse of press-body-sebum
nor undoing of body in scales and dashes
Oh at least trees in agony. . . Against. . .

In autumn drowning in its gold swim
he pulls the cart overloaded with sacks of wood shavings
he carries on his shoulders
the little mendicant's sack with the reflector
among maniacally pure dusts
dusts and trees trees Oh
miserable and blessed
you who are external to any desire to guide
raise brandish the poker



Jero-phano-gram no more no less
left between the twigs of the broom
They are not tree ideologies nor do they have
status of dynamic directions
for any hypothesis of musicality
nor of reductions to the intimate
for every and whatever dispersed finintimity
But the little sack rings with the reflector and
I am here in my soup
in my burning little plate
with blot ants flies from manure
before autumn: let's go in!
Oh only my tree trii millimeterate
for the little countess that she bleed
yes
yes, you grabbed her by the peduncle
by the caudal raddle
For the little countess of the cogito/sleep, rhyzomes of sleep
Nor is there time. . .and how much I've had, how much!
But who knows. . .yawns. . .there is time, wonderful time

and strengths and good and mother of truths
At the selfservice gas station
where and trees trees arrive still
FIRES

We have not just untongued away till now

Drop Drip with face in the plate.

NETS

Low shots || || skies lights ||
goal score aaah
and shells itself up sibils needle snali
blind stumps || || sweats cold ||

in the silence that inverts the course || that ||

to the empty belly to the skeleton to the straw
to the porous of the gold-want
to the compact of the sky-lived
low blows
such that the context develop
and repeat in every challenge
sign itself of viscera/crimes
low blows ssst! and synthesis
or wonder so dense as to no longer explode
or usualness
but overnighting distract incalculable

Disembody one's self of schema and scenes

Low blows outlet of blood ‖ that ‖

seemed-bruised-by-larvae

—Stiffens itself with tight belly

it lowers itself tightly to the sheet

grassy dusty eroded by the nights

and by the days divinant magical trade winds

The falling has slowed

the event well filamented

has placed itself level, at the foot,

for a low blow

skillfully ‖ teeth ‖ collected

Low blows now stellar lessons

Stellarity of things

outstretched in nonsense in old

foolish ambitions purity —> document

‖ and sweats cold-well ‖

Low blows in the veil

in the veto

(ANTICYCLONES, WINTERS)

I

See everything that—violet and gold and soft—

I would say almost regurgitates regurgitates

does not hold back is happy is mature

in giving figures ripping up figures other figures

in violet and golds To sprout golds consider, place hand,

look outside, take note, to heart, take on,
be some violence so as to take to heart

Be in the next on one-to-one with the remote of
the violet
yes, violence in this throat
I listen swimming to all this violence
so primary and uncreated as to be innocent
but no less assassin—in the gold and in the violet
There's the shout or the touch or the collapse
violet of no no no the bells of the predicator
Violet is my understanding interreading
burdens makes mass goes in mass gold and violet
all for you this transparent
mania of destructuralization but lift up there on the table
the survival

and the blood stain Gewalt
raised me like violet filth
it twisted me within itself, it had lost me in itself, filth.

II

And you in the intimate of my gold wait for me
and I in the intimate of your gold gaze
it is too soft, ambrosiacally poured like ether
to be gold it is too far to be ours
yet nothing is more nest than this infinite
perfused in gold, hoed away along the ozone field
(anticyclones, winters)
substance in which eternity would circulate
would enjoy would make
all in one with the scarecrow
alone but but qualified inhabitant of the hill
in all golds the sky blues,
the encysted abstinences violet
the unparalleled incontinence violet
the erratic truths the crunching and the climbing

Careful of who holds the tomahawk
to who fords ahead
and—without equal—to disturbances
fallen from the lunar soils
from throat to throat.

III

It is certain, I gather in the beauty of the bewilderment
with the most granulated supplication
what there is of the silence—and it is so much
Where there form the surroundings and it acclimates
to other subtle rights and duties

Or in the dispersed of the gravel bank hoarding
that glassydark it becomes
what there is of water—and it is such

Orientated by insane boldness and deficiencies
and dark idioms
precipitated within the idiom
in order to multiply its thorns the icicles

It would seem that rarity whistles through the mistletoes of the wind and
lash, all those bent withes in the gravel bank,
but very mysteriously rebels

Wherever and whatever thing in agedness is alleviated
in front of what will never but never be old,
is less thin than what is believed all around;
sterile,it does not lose vivacity
fecund, in illustrations it dissolves

And the moon lights phryne and rime
in the falling of the yes
in passing unexpected
with opposition as if taking courage

from where more empty is the mountain
gains in fortune
immobile trail on the slope
[more good hope]

Vocability, photons

Dispersed within a vocability sweetest
Eurosia, genius of the
hailstones, dispersed therein Barbara
photoreceptor of the radicularities of lightning

Lucia now emerges from the earthquaked
crystal of the hill's
diaphaneities Diva and niña of the Cold
perhaps with a certain following of dour priestlings
who invite me to dinner, to the mess hall, to warm ration
She holds a splinter of rays
that pierce any ubiquity whatsoever
in her other hand the 9 degrees below zero
of light gauze-snow,
feather of bird-once-snow,
She cannot protect cannot guide
but will never be of second order
The scalding that has skinned

so much of her face and burned away her eyes
—and the why and how are no longer known—
She was darkness and comes from darkness of her own
excess
trimmed with lace of rays

in the name of the future ΛΟΓΟΣ and of all the cold to
come
but well aligned, catalogued in snows
but everyone pupil and rich tear of attention
but rutting for numbers and traces
oh how the dialogue thickens with breaths and piss
hints glimpses!

Lucia: you are neither mother, nor gifts-in-shadows or in crystal,
but you are the one who dawns upon what remained
at your shoulders scarce ravine of a year,
a fainting down down from hill to hill
a fainting up up to the heavens
Within the ever hungry snare of the cold
right before you
we struggle
and we yearn for rations
and to spout forth to sweat out remove by hoeing,
yes, to let go of everything, the empty hutches, wide
open
It's gone, no regrets,
dryness only here and there or scraps,
flesh-coloured in the rough of palates—
exactly in the eye the point-blank n
(a need of numbers, of accounting, of
double rations)

(Now she's coming up behind you Lucy
bigger and thinner than her own immense kindness)

Allow, diva Lucia, at your feet—where I know
they lay, me who is blind to all
gradations of light—
that disbands through ravines—where you well know—
humble desire for panegyric.

A return of tears to the eyes. Blow up of
a single photon. Ω

SIMPLE FUTURE—OR ANTERIOR?

Logos, in every crystal of glorious snow brine
even if maybe you are nothing more than an hypothesis
than a Witz an impulse of subtle anger
Unverifiable connection between frosts and frosts
points of sight and points of sight

Not repent not to say too much not to gather up
too much be stalk and branch
sparked by immobility into drops
to invent to hollow out to entrap

The dawning and varied nudity of being
I will soon mimic, and the meanest of touches, the
vigorous note,
me negated in the cold
contamination and clarity ciliated slightly in this direction

Logos —not important mutisms nor rumours
—not false notes nor dwarf-colours crowded
stumbles
—not your other possible importance
nor your death
nor your loss
that I took on in profusion
Perfusion of cold and little dazzling fevers
and infinite immicrobation
perfusion from vein to vein—from poverty to poverty

Every step displaces and impliers like the turn of a
screw
every voice suffocates sweetly useless
every gaze de-eyes itself

but so as to gain the most of the compensation and the
most terrible starrity, like
of snow on the edge of the of the
indicated
movement
But humiliated.

Andrea Zanzotto (1921) has stated that in his first books he "actually cancelled human presence, out of a form of distaste caused by historical events. [He] wanted only to speak of landscape, to return to a nature in which man had not been active. It was a psychological reflex-re-action to the devastation of war." This is certainly true of the first book to introduce this singular poet to an Italian scene at that time strongly under the influence of Neorealism, the 1951 *Dietro il paesaggio (Behind the Landscape).*

If it is at all possible to generalize Zanzotto's poetics as a whole, it could be said to be a poetry centered around the rapport of the various linguistic possibilities open to a human biological/existential presence. Of course, such work is directly tied to the historical presence of poetic language and form. Zanzotto's reconsiderations of traditional language and forms, in works such as *Elegy and Other Verses*, 1954; *IX Eclogues*, 1962; *Galateo*, 1978, in which the presence of Tasso, Petrarca, Della Casa, and others, looms large, seeks to extend and test their limits.

In the opinion of some, the publication of *La Beltà* in 1968, with its attempts at undoing institutionalized forms of communication, brought Zanzotto close to the poetic innovations of the avant-garde group *I Novissimi* (1961), whose members included Antonio Porta, Edoardo Sanguineti, and Alfredo Giuliani. And, indeed, he did share with *I Novissimi* an adamant dislike for the neocapitalist and consumeristic culture whose influence had touched post-war Italy, as well as a need to reassess the function of the subject as represented by the writing "I." But Zanzotto's activity differentiates itself from that of *I Novissimi* in two significant ways: first of all, the actions of *I Novissimi* on language are regarded to have been mostly terroristic and destructive in nature and, more importantly, their target was Italian as a standardized (and therefore fictional) language. Zanzotto's *modus operandi*, on the other hand, has been to trace his way back to, and disrupt, accepted linguistic expression through alternative languages like baby-talk and the dialect of the Veneto region in which he lives. Secondly, Zanzotto's interest in the "I" is engaged in rescuing it from its designation as pronoun and establishing it in the landscape as a noun, as opposed to *I Novissimi*'s attempts at erasing its presence altogether.

Fosfeni (1983), from which the poems translated herein are taken, is, in its exploration of the movement from topos to logos, their blending of position and interplay, one of Zanzotto's most complex collections. The flow diagram auto ⇌ bio ⇌ graphy, offered by Zanzotto in a piece written just before the release of *Fosfeni*, expresses the movement of language in the poetic process, where the biological body is the point of intersection. "Last Suppers," which opens the collection, presents a repeating finality that points to a continuous renewal of discursive tendencies. The Platonic or Biblical banquet multiplied *ad infinitum* offers an open ended poetic dialogue and the provisions which fuel that exercise.

As illustrated, the process leads Zanzotto to refer to poetry as a "revomiting," which may remind us of Charles Olson's remark that "diet precedes language." The ingestion of language returns, after a close association with the body, poetry as a varied assortment of graphemes, phrases, letters, and verses. This product, a gelatinous substance present in the pages of *Fosfeni* as gel, gelatin, and the like, aids in the association (gelling) of topos and logos. As it leaves the body, it rejoins and alters the landscape as an atmospherical kin to gel (snow, ice, or frost), coating the ground with an accumulation of a consistent and coherent poetics upon which the poet treads.

—PV

1

The idea of illusion suggests that existences in different worlds, herself at different stages, or moving from one metaphor to another, can compare. She is trying to tell you the moon's color in eclipse, because she cannot reproduce a light in her memory with a pigment that is made, like a word, though seeing the moon enables a person to make inaccurate color. Think, if experience in her is time, because she gets to a state of being by experience, first. The experience is an interval in the body, but it also accompanies remembering.

2

Sun from behind you on asters, chamisa. You turn. You find a space as wide, as if time falls outside a stimulus, and her memory of the glow becomes space in her. Her body and will coordinate, like the relation of experience to seeing and experience to feeling the moon, which has no size. Actual size of its color in her body assesses vicissitudes of an aspiration created by seeing, so in this case, actual size became a piece of size in her.

3

You look on the plain from a bluff with him, and a point of juniper grows dark and dense,
of scattered ones, a piece of sieved material on your side of a membrane of noon light.
Seeing the object locates it like a cause in your body, for noticing a faint green around it
is an underground stream. Seeing what had been invisible is a response to the object.
His presence, a cause or weight in nature, does not enter experience, but accompanies it,
as experience had accompanied her memory of her, her features in her relative's face.

4

If she only sees with another person, what about the response is phenomenal, and what is
contingent, as a comet or virus, resonating to its presence in an other human being,
but which could be a metaphor, like grass in light, or sunlight on distant yellow trees?
Nature, full of causes that never enter experience, contrasts to your thinking adjusting contingency
to contingency like a synthesis. Desire to know opposes, for example, desire for children.
It structures a branched straw in the snow, so its blue shadow is blue in a tiny armpit. When
he sees autumn grass, I tell him about this shadow on snow, leapfrog of see/know, to straw of light.

5

A sliver of cloud lights up. Not knowing where it is between you and the horizon
turns into desire to know this. "Where" is the secret of durable pigment. "It" is the part
hit by an angle of light that is moving, so each moment triangulates space by way of the cloud.
On huge new insects after rain, light leapfrogs like falling. A vertigo analyzes a cloud, not
giving you to know it, the way knowing opposes wanting a person, or a person is opposed to an infant,
being inspired, not experiencing.

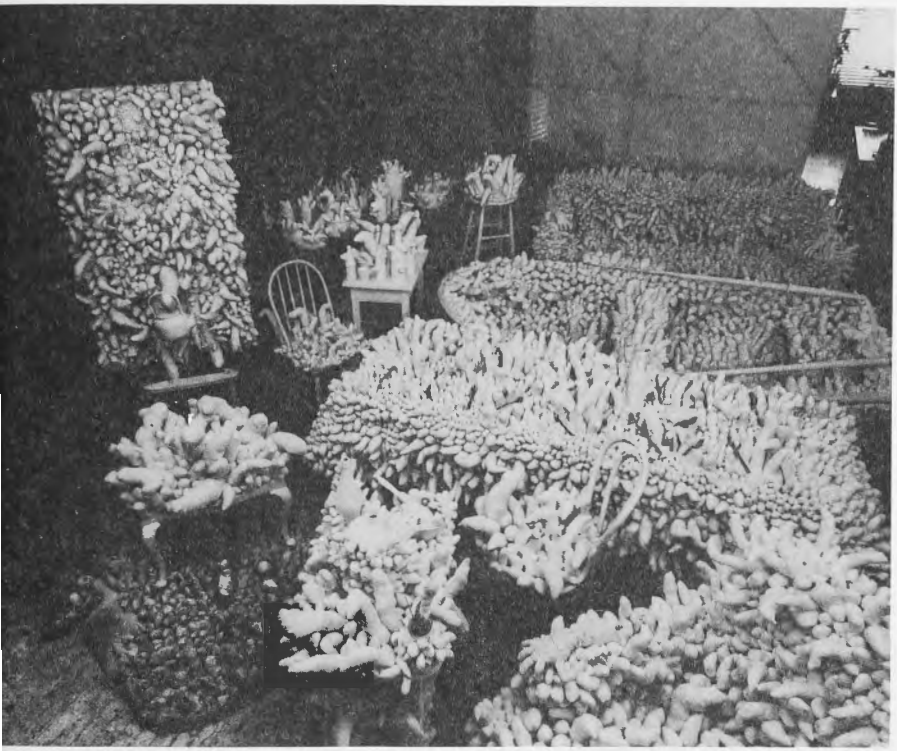
6

She is making the space during the day in an unanalyzed form, expressing it, using light,
which as experience emotes a color, and one of the elements of making is the space,
because she cannot see the light as a tool, while she is still figuring how to use it. Its use
is his presence, or its end is, to which its use is a means. Her concentration obliterates time,
like the relation of experience to this moment. The interval that becomes her body, she calls emergence,
asymptote to her person. It analyzes light as an imaginary, instead of a thought focus,
and falls outside the stimulus of an absent person as a golden light in the room.

7

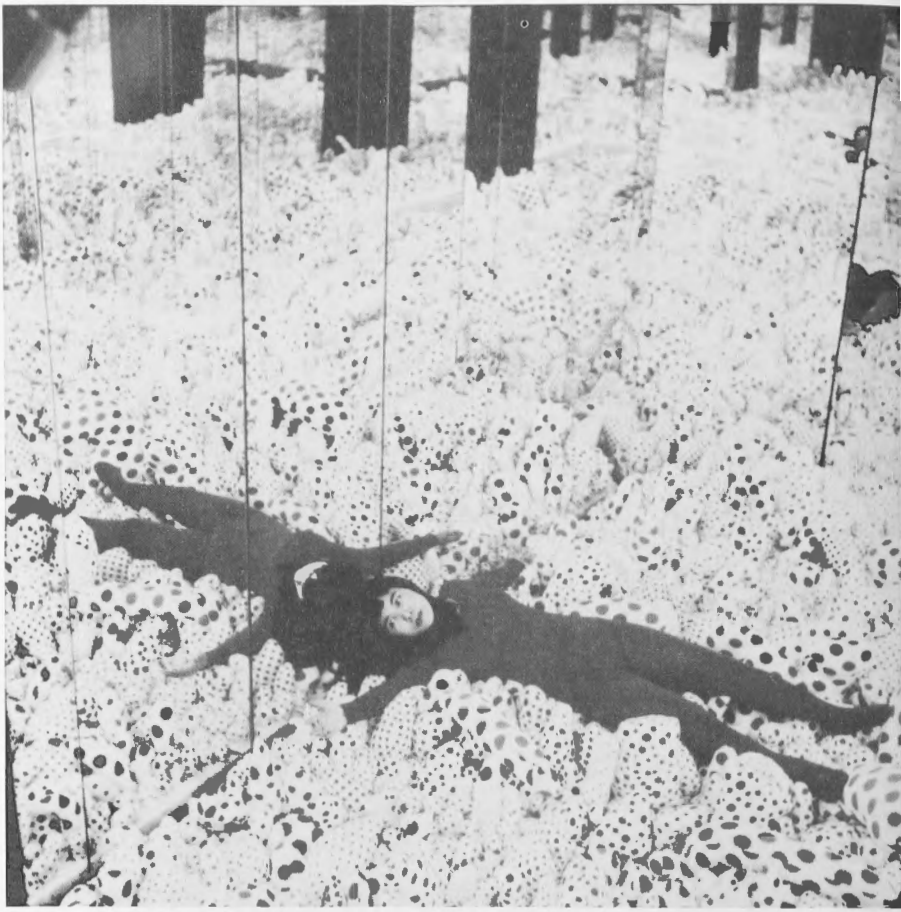
Seeing the light became a substance in her body, as knowing a ghost by seeing light in a room, a relation of experience to feeling. The metaphor of the light became an obliterating emotion, from one metaphor to another, so she got to the state of being of the light by knowing, first, a synthesis that put time outside her situation. She makes that into time, which can flood a plain, inside a leaf, a leaf of gilt on an image. Wanting to know as opposed to wanting a person is herself in a room flooded by light through yellow leaves. Each leaf like an ancestral feature assesses the vicissitudes of this aspiration. A consciousness outside of a state of being is flooded.

YAYOI KUSAMA
SIX WORKS



KUSAMA'S STUDIO

New York City, ca. 1962–64
(Photo: The Artist and The Center for International Contemporary Arts)



KUSAMA IN THE
INFINITY MIRROR ROOM—PHALLUS FIELD
(OR *FLOOR SHOW*)

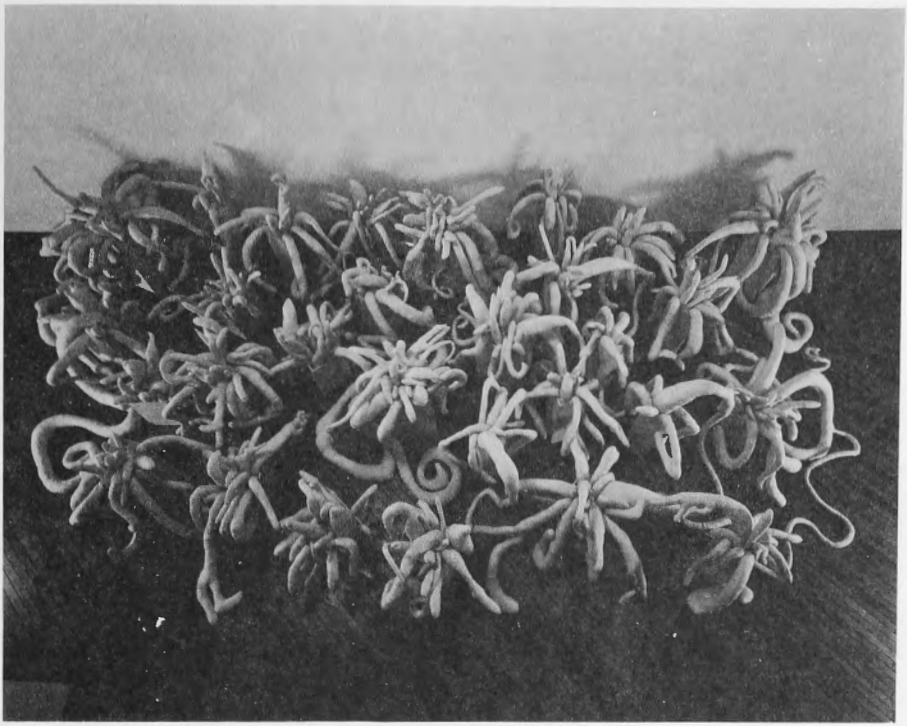
At The Castellane Gallery,
New York City, 1965
(Photo: The Artist and The Center for
International Contemporary Arts)

Left: MOON NIGHT / Right: FLOWER

Left: Mixed Media, 1985, 213 x 157 x 90 cm / Right: Mixed Media, 1986, 107 x 70 x 70 cm (Photo: Fuji Television Gallery Co., Ltd., Tokyo)

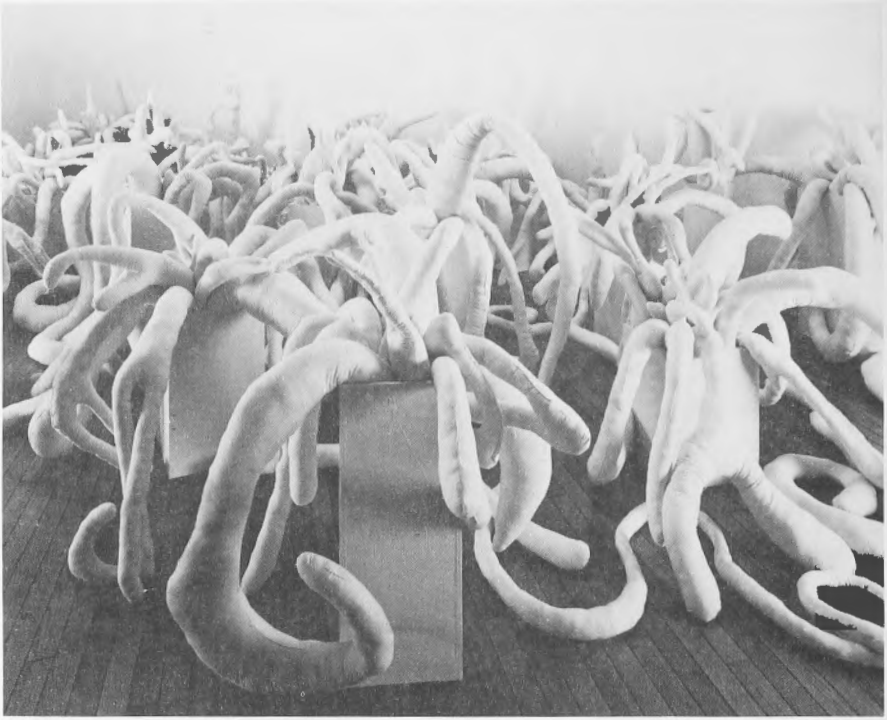
Left: NIGHT 2 / Center: NIGHT 1
Right: BLACK FLOWER

Left: Mixed Media, 1985, 132 x 93 x 93 cm / Center: Mixed Media, 1985, 78 x 63 x 63 cm / Right: Mixed Media, 1986, 225 x 145 x 63 cm (Photo: Fuji Television Gallery Co., Ltd., Tokyo)



HEAVEN & EARTH

Mixed Media, 1991, 130 x 500 x 300 cm
(Photo: Fuji Television
Gallery Co., Ltd., Tokyo)



HEAVEN & EARTH (DETAIL)

(Photo: Fuji Television Gallery Co., Ltd., Tokyo)

PAMELA WYE

YAYOI KUSAMA: Orgiastic Flower Beds & Other Soft Hardware

Invasions that get out of hand. Rabid proliferations that overwhelm, bit by bit, the surroundings and then the self. Too late to close Pandora's box. In the past 30 years, Yayoi Kusama has let out of the box of Japanese feminine propriety a raging libidinous expression that appears forever at the brink of Pandemonium. The ancients knew what they were doing when they included libidinous passion among the Spites that escaped from Pandora's box. Uncontrolled passion is disturbing to ordered society. But in the hands of a master brinkwoman, this Spite becomes a Muse, and Pandemonium a place of glorious revenge.

In 1957, a fiercely ambitious twenty-eight-year-old Kusama moved from Japan to New York, but not before sending off two letters and some watercolors to Georgia O'Keeffe "to ask you would kindly show me the way to approach this life." She exhibited regularly in New York and Europe in the burgeoning '60s' context of minimalist painting, post-minimalist sculpture and, finally, happenings. She returned to Japan in 1972 where she continues her prolific production. Though she works out of a studio in a psychiatric hospital, one could hardly place her in the outsider tradition of Adolf Wölfli or Martin Ramirez—both institutionalized chronic schizophrenics. Though the exact nature of Kusama's psychological make-up is ambiguous, it is stunningly central to both the form and content of her art.

Kusama imbues the overwhelming multiplication that was the core of the '60s' "all-over" aesthetic with a ferocious visceral power that startles when considered alongside the more prevalent impersonal repetitions of, say, Carl Andre. The ego-dissolution that is implied by these all-over works is effectuated by very different means—overwhelming floridity by Kusama, numbing sterility by Andre. Kusama contributed early and profoundly to the '60s' aesthetic during her stay in NYC. Artists like Donald Judd and Frank Stella collected her all-over *Infinity Net* paintings during the formative years of their own art, while her later sewn-and-stuffed canvas sculpture prefigured the emergence of body reference and sexuality in the post-minimalist sculpture of Eva Hesse. However, her impact was more in the nature of a guerilla attack—she hit hard, early and on-target but she

disappeared before time could solidify a place for her, which, even under the best of circumstances, would be tentative by virtue of her exotic eccentricity—female, Japanese, and flirting with mental illness.

Kusama's work reminds us that the all-over repetitiousness of minimalism is both a courting and an appropriation of the methods of madness. Even mainstream movies know this—the most horrific moment in *The Shining* is Shelley Duvall's discovery that the fruits of her writer-husband's (Jack Nicholson) frenzy of writing are reams of paper covered with the same typewritten sentence, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

> The repetitive vision and accumulation which are the main themes of my art. . .originate from the experience of illusion in the monotonous and repetitive action which I have always had since I was very young.[1]

In the minute, painstakingly repetitive accumulations that Kusama builds into large field paintings and phalli-covered objects, the viewer gets an idea of how literally mind-boggling an experience it must be to actually make this art. Friends report that Kusama would work without interruption until she'd collapse from exhaustion. From the up-close vantage point of the artist, the field must indeed appear endless and overwhelming. The trance-like, altered states of consciousness provoked by the mechanically repeated yet subtly variable mark-making gesture simulate, in their threat to the integrity of the self, the terrifying (and seductive) vertigoes of mental illness.

Is such an art-making process a deliberate courting of madness or an accommodation of it? Is it an invasion of one part of the self by another part, or a surrender? Or perhaps a rebellion, or is it an escape? These works and working methods are strange surrogate suicides yet they become, by virtue of their symbolic nature, testimony to a life-affirming activity.

> I have managed to grope and find a way to live by tracing a thread that is art. However, if it hadn't been for art, I would have killed myself a long time ago, from an inability to withstand the environment. . . . A white curtain starts to fall around me and cut me off from the outer world. How long did I use to stay in nihility? On occasions I ceased to see the purpose of what I was looking at, or did not comprehend what people were talking about.[2]

Kusama had childhood hallucinations of "proliferating patterns of dots, nets or flowers which spread over her surroundings and threatened to dissolve her own self." Experimenting in the early '60s with non-art

materials, she gave form to those hallucinations in a strange taxidermy of sewn-and-stuffed canvas phalli, nodules and breasts. Indeed, the installation piece *Infinity Mirror Room—Phalli's Field (or Floor Show)* (1965) literally situates a prone Kusama, as though overcome, in the middle of an endlessly replicated (via mirrors) field of polka-dotted protuberances. Her *Compulsion Furniture*, on the other hand (pictured en masse in the photo of her studio circa 1962-4), gives form to a demonic vision of our everyday surroundings. Under Kusama's tutelage, the humble objects of our daily lives—chair, couch, ladder, stool, dressing table, rowboat, dishes, shoes and clothing—erupt in libidinal revolt, unleashing a pandemic contagion of phalli and breasts. Prickly-looking like barnacles, the encrusted surfaces of these once-loyal objects have turned hostile to our needs. But then, this tumescent expression of the randy chair or shoe's desire is the result of how many countless hours (centuries) of people casually snuggling their asses, feet or other body parts into said chairs, shoes, couches. . .? These rebellious objects move us to say, as we usually do when those on whom we depend insist on their own pleasures, "But, but, how could you do this to me?"

In comparison to her *Compulsion Furniture*, Kusama's recent (1985-6) free-standing *Flowers*, with the bearing and presence of self-contained figures, appear downright classical. Their outer classicism, however, holds in check a tortured inner life. Their poignant dignity and poised acceptance of their own bizarre natures is tinged with the tension of a relentless effort at self-containment. Representing a pause in Kusama's obsessive all-overness, these femme/flowers are built up of stuffed polka-dotted phalli that huddle and weave together to form a clearly delimited shape that's in contrast to the hysterical transgression of boundaries that makes up her *Infinity Net* paintings and *Compulsion Furniture*. The figurative wholeness of these flowers does not allow itself to be disfigured and banished by a megalomaniacal ground. Though the price of such effort has gnarled them, their blank fluffy faces, like beds of cotton-candied pubic hair show these twisted sisters to possess a sweet sexuality and innocent hearts.

Kusama's tallest *Flowers* are doubled-headed. Facing Janus-like in opposite directions, they encompass the past and the future with the full sun-flower faces of their prime, while the heads of the little-sister flowers are pointed upward in growth, and the small independent bud-forms have yet to open. Though Kusama's *Compulsion Furniture* has always implied a familial domesticity (albeit an outrageous one), these free-standing sculptures are the first constructions that read as a family.

Color (regretfully absent from the present black and white photos) is an essential part of Kusama's flowers. As are the polka dots with which she works up evocative high-gloss surfaces that range in feel from a goofy "girls just want to have fun!" insouciance to a nocturnal cosmic, Milky Way solemnity.

> The polka dot has the form of the sun, signifying masculine energy. . . . The polka dot has the form of the moon, symbolizing the feminine principle of reproduction and growth. Polka dots suggest multiplication to infinity. Our earth is only one polka dot among millions of others. . .We must forget ourselves with polka dots! We must lose ourselves in the ever-advancing stream of eternity.[3]

Inspired by the reception of her 1989 New York retrospective at the Center for International Contemporary Arts after a 17-year "disappearance" from the United States, Kusama has come up with new sculpture (on exhibit at the Fuji Television Gallery in Tokyo this past summer) that dazzles with its energetic metamorphosis of some career-long preoccupations.

The serpentine legs and elephantine phalluses, cords and creepers flowing out of the small army of Pandora's boxes in *Heaven and Earth* strain toward the viewer with the urgency of the long-repressed. Or are they diving back into boxes for which they've grown too big, attempting a return to a simpler, more tidy non-existence? With their no-nonsense box-like pots, they are nearly suitable for the reception area of some unsuspecting corporation which, in any case, could probably use the injection of primal kick supplied by the soft dildoes, dangling prostheses, phallus-less crotches and impenetrable Raggedy-Anne-sex-doll shapes that sprout forth. In fact, it is perhaps the slickly efficient repression so essential to the corporate culture that calls forth such a ferocious libidinous reaction.

Though evocative of luxuriant tropical vegetation (with all its hot-house sexuality), *Heaven and Earth* stops short of the paradisiacal and veers toward the disquieting, the haunting. In *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Jane Ellen Harrison writes of the idea "familiar to every Greek, that the *pithos* [jar] was [also] a grave-jar, that from such grave-jars souls escaped and to them necessarily returned. . . . The grave-jar is but the earlier form of sepulture. . .the. . .phantoms that escape from Pandora's jar are indeed ghosts, but ghosts regarded rather as noisome sprites than as spirits. . ."[4] In addition, Kusama's use of slithering snake-like forms has ancient roots that conflate with the Pandora's box/grave/jar imagery. "Snakes lurk about tombs. . .and the Greeks are not the only people who have seen in a snake the vehicle of a ghost."[5] Then again, this sculptural work could be a wayfaring pack of snakey Medusa heads, with all the petrifying power of that phallic woman's hissing locks.

In addition to her art, Kusama has written and published ten novels since 1977. To date, none of her novels have been translated, but titles hint at her preoccupations: *Manhattan Suicide Addict, Aching Chandelier, The Burning of St. Mark's Church, Double Suicide at Sakuragazuka*, and *Woodstock Phallus Cutter* (which "deals primarily with her obsessed years

in New York and explores the lower depths of its deviant world.") In 1983, she won one of Japan's most progressive literary awards.

At 62 years old, Yayoi Kusama shows no sign of slowing down. One can only hope that her art finds its way, once again, to the United States in order that more of us may become better acquainted with her bracing, excessive yet poignantly human vision.

6/29/91

Notes

[1]Yayoi Kusama, "Why Do I Create Art?", in *Yayoi Kusama: Driving Image* (Tokyo: Parco Publishers, 1986) p. 51.

[2]Kusama, p. 51.

[3]Kusama, p. 20.

[4]Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena To The Study of Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) (originally published Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 43-44.

[5]Harrison, p. 327.

JAMES CLIFFORD

INCIDENTS OF TOURISM IN CHIAPAS & YUCATAN

Notes in memory of Michel Leiris, 1901–1990

Arrival.

Leaving Mexico City, our plane flies close to volcanoes. Then, under a low sky in the streets of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Scattered smiles. What there is to see.

[falling on; as, an *incident* ray]

Dusk, wandering around. Impressions of San Cristóbal. Streets full of accelerating cars close to narrow sidewalks. Anxiety. Constantly watching out for a tired, three-year-old. Ben's disoriented, dragged through a noisy labyrinth. Wants to run. But where?

City coming to life. People moving in all directions.

Clatter of bells from a church somewhere in the dark. People's indifference to us, a relief. Only the other tourists, looking away, seem displeased by our presence, as we are by theirs.

Glances into bright doorways, color coded rooms. Each a side altar, small collection, museum, Cornell box, universe, store.

Beyond the tourist experience: Explorer? Writer? Pilgrim? Scientist? Aesthete? Ecologist? Initiate? Poet? Politico? All the established routes/roots.

Available.

*

Collection.

Tourist "herds" in buses. Safe in their literal bubble.
Taking pictures, buying postcards.
We think we can speak (English) freely without being understood.
Safety of food consumed, streets walked on, sheets slept in.
The somehow inspiring colors of walls and houses.
Pleasures of ignorance. The nameless plants. Displeased by Muzak.
Invisible birds crying in the palms at the Zócalo.
Rolling drums and a cacophonous school band.

*

Incident.

Since Ben is in no shape for a restaurant, we decide to have dinner served in our hotel room. It's old fashioned and chilly, but with a fireplace that we were told could be used. Dinner beside a roaring blaze! However Judith's a little embarrassed to ask someone to lay the fire since today the weather in San Cristóbal turned warm. I prevail. We're tourists. So what if we want a fire on a warm night? The cozy atmosphere will be nice.

Two telephone calls. Finally a man appears with a half dozen sticks and a gas can. Glum, none of the usual banter. He douses the wood, throws on a match, watches a minute and leaves. The fire flares, fades. (We've paid 3,000 pesos—$1.25.) I look everywhere for paper to revive the flames, but none is to be found (the hotel staff are endlessly tidying up). Should we complain? (But for $1.25?) And we probably shouldn't have asked anyway. Still, the room *is* chilly. (A fire wouldn't have helped much.) And how could he bring just six sticks? (Is wood so hard to come by here?) Our cozy fire's only contribution to the room's atmosphere is a strong odor of gas.

Outside, crowds of people stroll in the warm evening. We're famished. More delays. Dinner comes at last, and it's delicious. The wine tastes good. We go to sleep.

*

Through a Doorway.

Photographs strictly forbidden, by order of the Indian municipal government.

"The San Loranzo [Zinacantán] church is remarkable mainly for its saints, many of whom wear Zinacanteco robes. It also has a wooden cross, twenty feet tall, swathed in blue cloth and decked with streamers like the ones on the Indians' hats. When we come out, copal smoke is billowing from the chapel door and the men who were drinking have gone inside. Three musicians on a bench to the right of the altar are playing a harp, a violin, and a guitar. The instruments, like the alcohol, are homemade; they produce a reedy, off-key dirge of fathomless sadness. Three other men in full regalia dance slowly, swaying to the maudlin songs. Hats and bottles are on the table, and behind those you see a dark Christ wreathed in arum lilies, chrysanthemums, and clouds of incense."

—Ronald Wright, *Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico*, 1989

When we visit the church of San Lorenzo, a basketball tournament is in progress outside. Bright uniforms and a squawking loudspeaker.

*

Apprentice traveller.

For Ben, every day is a series of arbitrary moves. He's jerked from place to place, a lot of different faces, things, sounds. He works to invent routes and routines. Visits to a favorite place atop the Zócalo bandstand, retreats to the hotel room and a small collection of toys.

Ben shouts across the street to a grim looking soldier (helmet, automatic rifle) who's guarding a bank. White gloved fingers on the gun barrel ripple. A grin spreads beneath the reflecting sunglasses.

Collecting pats on the head.

A local boy plays with cheap plastic cars, a cowboy, an Indian. Ben contributes his matchbox rocketmobile. Things are set up, knocked down. A trade negotiated.

*

Incident.

Ben and I explore the hotel's long halls. On the third floor, a passage leads up to the roof. Suddenly the whole city of San Cristóbal is visible. A full 360° ringed by mountains. Immense, variegated dome of sky—an area of intense blue here, rain laden clouds there. Light filtering in at the edges.

Exhilarating. We count all the churches.

Later, I remember what Mary Pratt, writing on the history of travel literature, calls the "monarch of all I survey scene." From a hilltop, promontory, balcony. . .the "whole" is grasped, usually as a natural (unpopulated) landscape. On our hotel roof, everything that made us feel strangers down in the streets (language, looks, gestures, fear of being cheated, of falling ill, of seeming stupid) is gone. Replaced by an expanded range of sight, a feeling of centrality.

Isn't some moment of power, of emptying/opening, part of any "good trip?"

*

We fly to Yucatan.

*

Incident.

Obligatory contretemps with *taxista* at Cancún Airport. We bargain him down to the going rate. Hey, no hard feelings. In the course of a pleasant conversation it emerges that our driver is a school teacher. Salary hasn't gone up in ten years. *No importa.* Our job is to make you feel welcome. His wife sells Fuller Brush products. He drives a dilapidated cab. The governments of Latin America are all corrupt, he says, with plenty of help from the USA. What counts is to be honest, to sleep well at night. My wife always has to wake me; I sleep too well.

Forty minutes down the coast to our resort, La Posada del Capitán Lafitte. (Its billboard features a pirate with eye patch.) At the end of a long bumpy driveway, stucco cabins and a perfect white beach.

*

Resort.

Idyllic community. No money openly changes hands. "Sign, Sign, Sign. Pay, Pay, Pay!" laughs the young man taking us to our *cabaña.* The poolside bar seems to be always open. Empty pockets. Bare feet. We relax. Every morning a couple of guys sweep the sand, clearing the debris thrown up by the waves.

Perfect white beach.

First night: a "floor show." The emcee, a waiter with pretty good English, asks us to be patient, to wait just "five Mexican minutes!" The manager's wife who operates the gift shop and a couple of waiters dance in costume, *típico*, beer bottles balanced on heads. (They seem to be having fun.) Music is provided by a trio of guitarists. Then a *piñada* for the kids, candy flying, balloons popping. Ben wild with excitement. Finally, an elimination broom dance. Young and old. Family ambiance. We drop our skepticism (It's a tourist trap, phoney, too windy, drinks expensive. . .) and begin to feel at home.

By breakfast the next day everybody seems to know "Ben."

Unlike the international tourist scene at San Cristóbal, every guest at the Posada Capitán Lafitte speaks North American English. We have all booked our *cabañas* through the same 800 number in Colorado. No averted looks. We are here to have fun with people just like us.

*

Virtuous tourists.

Adjoining the Posada Lafitte, another ideal community—"Kai Luum." There the guests rough it, in tents along the beach (covered by thatch canopies). Eco-tourism. Meals taken together in a big tent, sand floor. "Save the tortugas." "Honor system" bar. Diving shop. Adult castaways in athletic communion with nature. No kids under 16.

We visit Kai Luum for Thanksgiving dinner. (Children OK this once.) Turkey with all the trimmings. Lantern lit and festive. The waiters are silent, anonymous. At Kai Luum the "staff" are young North American men and women who stop for a moment at our table to chat. But the lack of any contact, even brief, with the non-White people working here feels oppressive. . .after the very friendly scene at Lafitte.

The Posada Capitán Lafitte and Kai Luum were founded together and still share some facilities. But the former is owned and managed by Mexicans, the latter by North Americans. The waiters, cleaners, beach sweepers, at both places are largely (Yucatec) Mayans.

How many different homes away from home are there in the tourist universe? "Authentic" San Cristóbal; the hotel scene at Cancún ("Miami Beach gone wild," someone called it). Kai Luum, Lafitte,. . .Are some of

these places less exploitative than others? Could we choose to be good tourists? Staying at the smaller establishments? Locally owned? (But what hierarchies of class, race, or ethnicity are hidden by the word "local?") Worth a try perhaps.

With help from the Colorado 800 number (serving both Lafitte and Kai Luum) we have selected the "good" community, the one best suited to our liberal, family values. But our choice was based on a short paragraph in the guide book. And without Ben we would probably have picked Kai Luum!

*

Voice.

"That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. . . . Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go—so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself."

—Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, 1988.

*

Ruin.

In travel guides and publicity, "Maya" is almost always attached to the adjective "ancient." Ancientmaya.

"The ground was entirely new; there were no guide-books or guides; the whole was a virgin soil. We could not see yards before us, and never knew what we would stumble upon next. At one time we stopped to cut away branches and vines which concealed the face of a monument, and then to dig around and bring to light a fragment, a sculptured corner of which protruded from the earth. I leaned over with breathless anxiety while the Indians worked, and an eye, an ear, a foot, or a hand was disentombed;

and when a machete rang against the chiselled stone, I pushed the Indians away, and cleared out the loose earth with my hands."

—John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America. Chiapas and Yucatan*, 1841.

Cobá. Fabulous stone stairs rising up through trees, strewn with the small, bright-colored bodies of tourists. Tallest pyramid in Yucatan. Halfway up, a cigarette butt squashed against old rock. Then a view of *la selva*, distant lakes, electricity pylons, some mysterious bumps in the surrounding green—structures of a Mayan city.

Twelve stories up, and still no overview. Forest. At the more famous ruins (Tulum, Chichen Itza, Palenque) you get a "map" at ground level. Here, only a few patches of green have been scraped off. No way to know where you are in the large city. No way at Cobá to step back, or up. In a proper ruin you magically experience the space of another civilization and time. You expand to fill the blanks left by (produced by) excavation.

Here, we find indifferent forest. Faceless.

*

The desire.

To excavate and complete. Establish names. Redeem the lost city.

Watch out for kids! Some nasty speed bumps on the straight road to Cobá almost bring us to a halt in a couple of Indian settlements.

"No doubt there were men living in Yucatan and its adjacent areas before the Mayan occupation of that space. They took sustenance from the land and their labors and when the Mayan civilization came they contributed their labor and allegiance to it and when the Mayan civilization was broken they continued to live there, as indeed they do now, centuries later. But it was the Mayan civilization that occupied that space, and so effectively that the mark of the occupation has outlasted the civilization. The present inhabitants hardly occupy it, and are largely indifferent to its former occupation. But there are others who come there to locate and study the old sites, to clear away the vegetation and debris from them, and to rename those whose old names have been lost. The old occupation still asserts itself even though the force of its assertion is now in contrast to the surrounding desolation."

—William Bronk, *The New World*, 1974.

Atop the smallest excavated pyramid at Cobá, a stone house. Ben takes possession, asks us in, kicks us out.

According to the guide book, Cobá is a preferred place for "independent travellers," hardy souls looking for real exploration. There's a luxury hotel nearby, belonging to a Club Med chain of "Archaeological Villas." Full library (ask concierge for key). Also a sophisticated gift shop selling artistic reproductions of Maya glyphs, "quality" Indian crafts. Gourmet restaurant.

"I leaned over with breathless anxiety while the Indians worked, and an eye, an ear, a foot, or a hand was disentombed. . ."

*

Sophisticated travellers.

". . .when a machete rang against the chiselled stone, I pushed the Indians away, and cleared out the loose earth with my hands."

Judith (who studies Mayan linguistics) talks in Spanish with Luis, a waiter at the Posada Capitán Lafitte. A Mayan, he was emcee at the evening "floor show." They discuss Yucatec. Judith recognizes words and sounds that are reminiscent of Tzotzil (the language she works on in San Cristóbal). Luis wants his children to speak Yucatec, but his wife is not a Mayan. How? Visits to grandparents and other kin? Or. . .?

The waiters are all young men, living away from their families (5 days a month home leave). They have Mexican first names (Luis, Manuel, Ricardo . . .) and Mayan last names. At Lafitte they study English with an elderly "regular" (guest/employee) from the States. Pay is low, compared with the earnings of a full-time taxi driver. But room and board are provided. With English, there's a prospect of mobility to a higher paid job. Maybe in Cancún.

The young men are travelers—part of the same transnational economy that made it possible for us to get from New York to highland Chiapas in less than 24 hours, that built the straight road to Cobá, that ensured our pleasant sojourn on this bit of pure coast. Different travelers—intersecting routes/roots—we spend some amiable time together. But the Mayans living at the Posada del Capitán Lafitte are working. We're on holiday. They go home for vacation. We go abroad. Everyone dresses casually. But their flowered shirts are uniforms.

The Mayans in the dining room have first hand knowledge of our language and culture. We know little of theirs.

Judith's "expertise" begins to emerge in conversations with our fellow guests. They're surprised to hear that the waiters and cooks are Indians speaking Yucatec to one another. (Yet it sounds very different from Spanish.) And they're fascinated to learn there are thirty living Mayan languages with millions of speakers.

We begin to feel different, with superior knowledge (morality?). Our fellow guests are just "tourists." (But some have been in the area much longer and more often than we have. . .) Isn't this sense of a special experience, sensibility, or knowledge an essential part of any good trip? The sophisticated traveller's "other" is the tourist.

And the distinction is a routine production.

*

Incident.

We hover in unclenched fetal positions over throngs of fish. Every imaginable color. No language for this but cliché. Voyeurs gazing. They notice us, hide sideways in the fire-coral. Sounds of heavy breathing. And a kind of participation. As we float the fish slide off, according to the same wave. Enormous, blatant strangers. (During a shower, we might have taken shelter together, without words.)

*

Incident.

Airplane travel: heavily disciplined and anesthetized. Little individuality or interaction. Why are these people, this collection, traveling north from Mexico? Hard to read who's who. Some dress up, others down (like me) for a flight. Signs of class? The poorest aren't here. At least that's obvious. "We" cross borders with travel agents, "they" use *coyotes.*

The tourist, political refugee, anthropologist, picture bride, journalist, grandchild, missionary, technician, *opère*, diplomat, poet, scholar, soldier of fortune, physician, athlete, cook, student, sales rep. . . .each in a numbered seat.

And hitting the runway, our brakes take hold. The entire molded plastic environment vibrates uncontrollably.

Lucid moment of fear, of homecoming.

LELAND HICKMAN

September 15, 1934
to
May 12, 1991

Leland had hoped to come to Provence, this spring. Reservations for a trip last December had had to be cancelled at the last moment, 'postponed,' as they say. We know now (and suspected then) that the trip would be postponed forever, and that the voyage he'd be taking, in fact, would take him elsewhere.

Literary to the very last, what Leland had hoped to see in Provence was the Marquis deSade's castle, and the low farmhouse where Samuel Beckett lived and worked throughout the war years; were the burning pin wheels of René Char's sunflowers, and the jade blue Sorgue where Petrarch—toying endlessly with the resonance of the laurel—wrote his *Canzoniere*.

I can visit any of these sites today, quite by my self, and never—not even for an instant—feel alone. Dear man, as friend, as editor, as instigator of the art, you gave so much of your good self away that I cannot help but feel that death got the least of you. Got the pittance. Thank you Leland, for being so very much to so many of us. You are.

—Gustaf Sobin

MICHEL LEIRIS
LAST WRITINGS

(Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth)

TRADEMARKS

A conqueror whose sole dominion is the desert.

A king whose only fool is himself.

A bomb swollen with sobs that refuse to explode.

An athlete whose muscles bunch like vellum.

A ghost who clanks his words like chains.

A bird of ill-omen preening his plumage of gold.

A barometer distressed that its needle is powerless over the weather.

An initiate of a secret society with a membership of one.

A reed that thinks it slyer not be an oak.

A monkey at a mirror, mistaking himself for man.

A Ulysses anchored in no Ithaca.

An oyster panicked for its pearl.

A samurai who, without sword or valor, is capable of committing harakiri every day.

A phantom 54 and a half kilos in his stocking feet.

A man unfortunate enough never to have known how to go crazy.

A lover whose fervors never entailed a single rash act.

A hothead who never smashed a single pane of glass.

A lousy letter-writer, even though his entire work could essentially be read as a long letter to that clear-eyed companion who was his tender and consistent confidante.

An overcast sky broken by a few clearings in the clouds.

An ordinary child with ambitions or turning into a prodigy as an old man.

A sybarite furious that his bed of roses pricks him with its thorns.

A volunteer who never made it further than the recruiting station.

A moralist who deems himself spotless if he gets through dinner without staining his tie.

A Narcissus floundering in self-criticism.

An accountant who draws up his balance sheet by heart.

An ethnographer who looked in vain for lessons among distant tribes.

An Adam who was not always blinded to the mirages of Lilith by the lovely reality of his Eve.

A revolutionary paralyzed by habit, nearly paling at the sight of blood.

A pacifist who does not believe in turning the other cheek.

A reformed aficionado of bullfights who used to love watching the spectacular slaughter of cattle and now enjoys the company of dogs.

A snob who takes pleasure in refusal but is tickled pink to have been asked.

A man whose tendencies toward suicide are at once abetted and checked by his utter terror of death.

An atheist who worships the moon.

A positivist aching for miracles.

A lover of myths who wishes they were nothing of the sort.

A spy who trades in his own secrets.

A Jonas nostalgic for the belly of the whale.

A sworn enemy of fecundity who, late in life, reproaches himself for not having given the person closest to him the child she no doubt would have loved to mother.

A St. Sebastian whose arrows face the wrong way.

A Theseus whose thread to Ariadne was always broken.

A Philemon suffering from the knowledge that he and Baucis are slowly turning into trees.

An Alice who stumbled on the snake in Wonderland.

Once, a traveller in quest of a Promised Land.

Now, a cork making its way to the sea.

Henceforth, a man left to his own, only existing by half.

Jan. 1988/Feb 1989

INERT

A lazy river
spanned by no bridge,
I barely feel the pain,
toy of a listlessness
that prevents me from doing anything
except feel my way
along my course.

TWIGS

Haunting presence: at the Vieux Colombier theater (to which I had gone as a young man with a friend of my father's who taught drawing and perhaps watercolors to the young ladies of the Legion of Honor), the actor Louis Jouvet taking a series of small bites out of a pear with his voracious pearly teeth, a pear that appeared ever so succulent in *La Folle Journée*, a minor naturalist playlet by the forgotten Emile Hazard.

*

At the Monumental in Barcelona, late one Sunday afternoon after five, the maestro Julio Aparicio, apparently roused out of his torpor by the *bronca* directed against him, executes a sequence of three or four veronicas so slow and so noble in their beauty as to be virtually statuesque, and then, having thereby proved he is not over the hill, reverts to apathetic disdain.

*

A surge of tenderness and melancholy overwhelm me when I look at the old snapshot (or rather what is left of it, since some unknown hand has snipped away the background, leaving only the figure), an image that I always carry on me and that depicts my wife as a young girl, demure in her hat and dark dress, dangling a balloon from her hands, suggestive of something frolicsome at variance with her orphan-like countenance.

*

That particular moment in an aria (especially Verdi's) when the melody, unobtrusive up to this point, suddenly stiffens, swells, and buckles, as if in the grip of a trance-like convulsion. A crucial moment in the exact sense of the term, since it locates that precise point at which intoxication crosses over into heartbreak. A moment virtually inscribed in my memory as it had been on the phonograph cylinder that I owned as a child: the father's aria in the second act of *La Traviata*, sung by a baritone by the name of Dangès, a performer whom I liked immensely ever since first seeing and hearing him in the title role of Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet*, standing in for the illustrious Maurice Benard whom my mother so admired.

*

A bracing companion piece and an exhortation to get back down to work: a face worth its weight in meat and paint (colors applied in broad juicy slabs that jar the subject out of kilter). This at any rate is how it appears to me as I look at the self-portrait, now hanging to the left of my reading and writing table in my room at Saint-Hilaire, that my friend Francis Bacon gave me over fifteen years ago as a token of thanks for the text I had written for the catalogue of his retrospective at the Grand Palais.

Note

This small sheaf of texts, written over the last two years of Leiris's life, is composed of three items:

—"Images de marque," a declension of torqued epitaphs for the tomb of an exquisiter corpse. Written between January, 1988, and February, 1989, this was the last text whose publication (by Fourbis) Leiris personally supervised. I have selected about half the volume for translation.

—"Inerte," Leiris's last poem, probably composed in August, 1989, a few months after the death of his wife. For someone whose entire oeuvre is one long drawn-out tauromachic dance against the bull's horn of Death, this slender lyric shows a remarkable serenity, almost a willingness, at last, to let go.

—"Brindilles," a series of short prose squibs, also composed in August, 1989. A summary of the major topoi of Leiris's entire work, condensed into five brief acts.

Leiris died September 30, 1989, at the age of 89.

These "Last Writings" are published by the gracious permission of Leiris's literary executory, Jean Jamin.

—RS

REVIEWS & NOTICINGS

This Is Not A Title

In the last issue of *Sulfur* (28), my untitled article on the poets of Baghdad was preceded by a quote from Whitman under the title "Barbaric Lyricism." Some thought this the title and epigraph to my piece. It wasn't, and it's especially unfortunate to have "barbaric" attached to it, when the point was to debarbarize, if only a little, the place.

For barbaric lyricism, or lyric barbarism, there was the "Victory" parade in New York the other day, celebrating the slaughter of 200,000 people, the displacement of five million more, the "apocalyptic" leveling of a small country, the tens of thousands of future deaths from disease and starvation, and at least a decade of ecological calamity. A Patriot missile was garlanded like a Shiva lingam and paraded up Broadway; in the evening, the local pyrotechnic geniuses, the Gruccis, recreated the effect of a Patriot hitting a Scud over the Statue of Liberty, to the theme from "Star Wars."

George Plimpton and the *Paris Review* seized the moment for a fund-raising "Spring Revel" at $150 a head featuring "Dinner and Huge Fireworks Show Celebrating the Return of the Troops" aboard a hired yacht. The "Revel" committee included William Styron, Kurt Vonnegut, William Kennedy, Peter Mathiessen, Frances Fitzgerald, Norman Mailer and E.L. Doctorow, among other stars of the American "left." Said Plimpton to the *Village Voice:* "There's no political statement in this at all." Said Fitzgerald: "Things are going to happen anyway. If it's going on out there, why miss it?" Said Styron: "I don't think it's incongruous, being against the war in principle and feeling that the troops deserve a cheer."

Further in the military-literary (militerary?) complex: heavily promoted on the fall list of Farrar Straus Giroux—still reverently considered to be the last large independent "serious" literary publisher—is a biography of General Schwarzkopf.

* * *

In America, where tens of millions live alone and most people move every three years, where they rarely see their relatives, and where Main Street has been replaced by the strip and the mall, hardly anyone knows anyone any more. Or more exactly: people mainly know, and know best, the people they don't know: celebrities. The village has indeed become the global village, and the global village is Hollywood. What is the Johnny Carson Show, for example, but an amiable evening on the front porch dishing the neighbors? Even better, it is a village where the neighbors stay the same, unlike one's actual neighbors. The stable presence of their unstable lives is not only a source of daily news and developments, it is a subject—probably the only safe subject—to talk about with the local strangers.

The language of the tribe is gossip, and in perpetual, individual diaspora the need for gossip becomes insatiable. In lives where mainly nothing happens except television, and where television wildly exaggerates the danger in something, anything, happening, there is a craving for "real life"—not to live it, but to watch it. Sensationalist "news" programs, "true" crime stories, the afternoon talk shows, funny or pornographic amateur home videos: packaged real life is inevitably weird, and getting weirder. Into the safety of one's own bunker comes the mesmerizing news that what was suspected is true: the boy and girl next door—those real people—really are freaks.

And so is everyone else we've ever heard about, but don't know. American biographies—it is only America that produces biographies—are poring out every day with their emphasized bad news, bizarre and sad stories. It now seems that a life—any life, yours or mine—examined by someone else is not worth living.

This biographical imperative cuts across the strata of taste. There is even a market—or they would not be published—for biographies of contemporary poets, preferably dead, which inevitably seem to issue from houses that would never have considered publishing the poet's work.

The latest, released in the same week by W.W. Norton, are Linda Hamalian's *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* and Tom Clark's *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life.* Both are about 400 pages long, and both wave the Bad Boy banner with covers showing their subjects not typing but engaged in what current American mores now consider to be self-destructive hedonism: smoking.

Hamalian's is by far the better book. Rexroth's life can only be compared, among the American poets, with Pound or Langston Hughes for its variety and frantic pace. Hamalian—who interviewed hundreds of his friends and enemies—needs every one of her apparently allotted 400 pages just to keep up. (I've been told that another 200 pages, dealing with the work, were cut.) The book's impossible to put down as it zips through the

chronology past the factual trees. Yet I suspect its ultimate value will be, years from now, as the groundwork for the multi-volume *Life and Times*, on the order of Painter or Edel, that Rexroth deserves.

Clark, on the other hand, relies mainly on published sources and interviews with some mutual friends, like Ed Dorn. And Olson, with the exceptions of his time as a Democratic Party boomer and at Black Mountain, spent most of his life first not writing and then writing. This gives Clark plenty of room for rumination on the work, none of it particularly illuminating. His one coup, perhaps worth reading the book, is the previously little-known story of, and unpublished correspondence with, Frances Boldereff.

[In brief: At age 39, Olson is still floundering, has written little and published less. He gets a letter out of the blue from a woman in a small town in Pennsylvania telling him he's a genius. The correspondence accelerates to the rate of two or three letters a day. Boldereff sends him into various branches of arcana that become part of the Olson canon; phrases from both their letters become embedded in the poems he's suddenly furiously writing. Almost a year later they meet for the first time, Olson's first weekend of passion. Olson, however, won't leave his wife, and for many years the pattern of frenetic letters and rare passionate meetings continues.]

Hamalian clearly starts off as an acolyte, but as she gets deeper into Rexroth's incessant philandering, paranoia, and abuse of women, her disdain grows. [It could be said that Rexroth was an emotional misogynist; Olson, even worse, an intellectual one. Both books indulge in retrospective moralizing, yet it is curious that both men were surrounded by women who deified them, even after they had found the men impossible to live with. Connie Olson, after one of many separations, says she doesn't believe in God, because Charles is her God. Rexroth's second wife is the godmother of the daughter, named after the first wife, who is born to his third wife, to whom he's bigamously married. And so on.]

Clark apparently began with the image of a pathetic, tormented genius, and then piled on the evidence; there's no sense of Olson's charisma. And a pall hangs over his book from his willful, criminal neglect of George Butterick—who unbelievably is mentioned only three times in passing as one of the disciples. Clark ends with Olson's funeral, as Olson did not: *Sulfur* readers need hardly be told that nearly everything we know about Olson, the texts of most of the poems and much of the prose, critical glosses of thousands of references, and the very existence of the third volume of *Maximus*—the volume that is, for me, his great work—is due entirely to Butterick. Clark, whatever his motives, has written a biography of Kafka without Max Brod.

Two lives that couldn't be more different: Rexroth the adventurer, Olson the bookworm. Rexroth the cosmopolitan, Olson the local hick.

Rexroth the Don Juan, Olson the timid. Rexroth in the American wilderness, Olson obsessively researching the West for years before actually going out to see it. Rexroth the Buddhist and Christian, deep in the selflessness of ritual and meditation, Olson the Jungian, deep in the symbols of self. Rexroth compulsively surrounded by people of all types, Olson by a few disciples and, in the last years, living alone in an apartment piled with trash where the phone never rang, writing on every available surface, even the walls, sleeping all day and wandering empty streets at night. For the life of an American poet, it is Rexroth's that is the more incredible.

Most incredible now, when he is remembered but largely unread, is that Rexroth was—alone with Hughes, and Pound in the teens and twenties—an American poet who was a public intellectual figure, famous among general readers. (Ginsberg's celebrity is another matter.) His public exposure in the fifties and sixties seems unimaginable for an American poet today: a weekly radio show, a twice-weekly column in the *San Francisco Examiner*, book reviews or articles once a month in *The Nation* and four or five times a year in the *N.Y. Times Book Review*, the twice-monthly "Classics Revisited" series in the *Saturday Review*, further articles in magazines from *Art News* to *Mademoiselle* and *Nugget* (whatever happened to *Nugget?)*, records of his poetry readings, sales of 10,000 for a new book of poems (and 100,000 for the Chinese translations), interviews in the national media, even talk of a television show—plus the endless local discussion groups and readings he organized. Rexroth, in other words, led the life generally available to a poet nearly everywhere except in America.

Olson, however, led a more normal American poet's life. He died with most of his work unpublished, and most of the rest out of print. He spoke grandly to his "fellow citizens" of the "Republic of Letters," but had only a few devout followers. He planned national and international institutions and symposia and think tanks to get the message out, all of which came to nothing. There is a sad moment in the letters to Corman where he compares *Origin* magazine—*Origin* magazine, of all things—to Mao's band in the Yennan caves.

Finally, it is true that few among us could survive the investigation of a biographer and not emerge a monster. Taking out the garbage is not the stuff of biographies, the garbage itself is: the petty cruelties, the hypocrisies revealed in the archives of correspondence, the mistakes and indiscretions, the bad days, bad habits, bad blood.

But the deeper question is what the biography of a poet does to subsequent readings of the work. It cannot help but localize the poem, cheapen it, fix it permanently in its biographical interpretation. So now we know that among Pound's last words, the great lines "When one's friends hate each other/ how can there be peace in the world?" refers to the three women in his harem. So now we know that Rexroth, the century's great

celebrant of married love was, simultaneous to those poems, writing mash-notes to half-a-dozen other women. So now we know who Frank Moore is, and why Olson wondered. (In a letter to Ferrini in the first *Origin* he had revealed what's buried behind Lufkin's diner.) Is "The Librarian"—and the most mysterious lines in American poetry—ruined? And what happened to his own reading of the lines, from writing them (when he's clearly talking to himself) to publishing them (when he must consider their effect)? Frank Moore troubles my insomnia.

* * *

Future *PMLA* article: The signature Olson syntax—the dangling participles which Creeley picks up, and the sudden exclamations—always seemed to come from nowhere, certainly not Massachusetts. Then the other day it struck me: Hopkins. One of many examples:

> . . .My heart in hiding
> Stirred for a bird, —the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

* * *

Most Persuasive New Defense of Traditional Prosody: "Prosody remains embedded in the finished work. . .[like] the armature in a statue: an essential part of the finished structure. We do not judge a statue by its armature, any more than we judge a beauty contest by the X-rays of the competitors. But what the X-rays show is essential to beauty; without the armature of the skeleton Miss America or Mr. Universe would collapse to a heap of flab. . ." (John Frederick Nims, *The Six-Cornered Snowflake.)*

—Eliot Weinberger

A MEIOTIC VIEW OF HISTORY: Tom Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*. New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1991.

"The intense satisfaction we derive from reading an allegory indicates the degree of difficulty there is in bringing one off."

—Frances M. Boldereff,
A Blakean Translation of Joyce's CIRCE

1. It's hard to imagine anyone's deriving "intense satisfaction" from Tom Clark's *Charles Olson*, in spite of Clark's considerable journalistic skill and his evident labor to achieve the smoothness of his product. To the quick eye the book reads briskly enough, and it's only on reading passages aloud you realize there's little pleasure to the ear. (The flatness of Clark's sound is especially noticed after the reader experiences lengthy quotations from Olson himself.)

The author is not to be faulted for having had to prune and simplify his complex story, undoubtedly to keep the book manageable according to publisher's requirements. It's well and artfully shaped. Among many recent literary biographies (I think of those of William Burroughs, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound) that are crudely compounded, clutches of unassimilated info, Clark's book stands out. But the author's constant belittlement of, and apparent ill will towards, his subject spoils any "intense satisfaction" in his achievement that might otherwise be aroused. As the reader turns the 350 pages packed with invidious authorial insinuation her or his necessary initial sympathy with the biographer is gradually withdrawn. What remains is unsatisfied suspicion, not only of the "truth" of the narrative, but of the most basic premises of the biographer's interpretation.

2. I won't rehearse the story the book tells, ostensibly a "factual" biography though qualified by its subtitle. It's not a literary or philosophical investigation of Olson's writings, his ideas, their sources and analogues. If Clark had attempted such his efforts would most likely have been ludicrous, as his unwittingly parodic summaries of Olson's lectures suggest: "For those few who could follow him, however, the poet had much to say, laying down an intriguing trail of clues that led directly to the philosophical center of his mysterious later work. Introduced to the mysticism and dogma of thirteenth-century Old Norse poets and Muslim angelic philosophers, the bewildered Midwestern college crowd was in effect being shown Olson himself in his own latest creative incarnation. . ." (Clark, p. 340). Clark's stance here as often elsewhere is that of the perplexed no-nonsense American naïf, the honest dumbbell scratching his head.

The narrative runs smoothly enough, and for readers familiar with previous studies of Olson's work, none of which was primarily biographical, it presents genuine surprises and insights (the importance in Olson's life and work of the brilliant writer and commentator on Bruno, Blake, and Joyce, Frances Boldereff Phipps is revealed for the first time), as well as coherent accounts of the extremely varied social milieux in which Olson moved.

Writing this book evidently required a serious commitment of time and labor that is to be respected. Its veracity (there are many factual errors, but the greatest number of these can be dismissed as trivial) will at some point

be investigated by scholars having access to all the unpublished letters, notebooks, and taped conversations on which Clark has drawn, and which are documented (though without noting the extent of his elisions) in the notes at the end of the book.

Clark has written a plausible story, slickly fascinating. But, while I would not accuse him of insincerity, or "malice prepense," the program of the book, its "hidden agenda," is not immediately apparent, perhaps is even *dissembled*, and this it is that is of particular interest. The rhetoric of motive assumed in the writing needs to be illuminated and its artfulness made explicit.

3. In Clark's subtitle, "The Allegory of a Poet's Life," he stakes out what will be his plan of operation. (He doesn't write *"An* Allegory of *the* Poet's Life," though such chiasmus of articles reflects more accurately the trope effected.) Allegory is a subtle art, and interpretation of reality is its essence.

It's possible Clark doesn't realize the irony of using this aesthetic method, utterly opposite to Olson's own phenomenology of historical investigation, upon the materials of Olson's life. Nowhere in the book does Clark display the slightest comprehension of the intellectual problems that make Olson's methodology interesting and important. He earnestly cites more than once Olson's favorite quotation from Keats' letters, "A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory," but without recognizing that his own over-simplification (what Olson called "parabolic vantage") of allegorical application is a misunderstanding of Olson's use, which discriminates between method (as dynamic) and static conclusion. In Olson's, and Erich Neumann's, terms, Clark makes a Secondary Personalization of Prime Material; his is a failure to grasp the Dogmatic Character of Reality (see Olson's Beloit Lectures *Poetry and Truth)*.

"Allegory says one thing and means another," Angus Fletcher writes in the Introduction to his masterful and richly suggestive literary study *Allegory*. Literary allegory connects and refines. It polishes and smooths over rough surfaces, subordinating detail to a general tone. Clark has fulfilled that declared intent; the book is honed and neat, the actions, the happenings, physical, emotional, intellectual, of Olson's life are carefully ordered to give the final unified plausible impression Clark desires. In what Olson would deem a "wilful Act" Clark makes the book successfully cohere. Its loss is an absence of insight intrinsic to the adoption, under the guise of his overweening allegory, of a superficial and venal reality view. If the image of Olson proposed by the book becomes the popular and accepted view of the poet it will be because it feeds a public, academic and other, hungry for the rhetoric of belittlement, disparagement, meiosis.

4. The central rhetorical figure to effect the purpose of belittlement is classically called *meiosis*. "The figure *meiosis* lowers its object, rather than making it of higher esteem," Fletcher writes in *Allegory*. The great rhetorical treatises of the English Renaissance knew it well. It is called by George Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie*, the "Disabler." Meiosis abases and plucks down, Henry Peacham writes in *The Garden of Eloquence*, and Hoskins, in *Directions for Speech and Style* considered it the opposite of amplification. In *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* Rosemond Tuve shows how meiosis frequently accompanies or is superimposed upon, irony, another rhetorical mode. "Both in its derisive and in its ironic form, meiosis is obviously a figure of marked usefulness in all writing with a satiric bent," she notes. Frequently in modern literature the tropes and schemes of diminishment are used in a way that is often confounded with anti-allegory, as Wallace Stevens misused the term "anti-poetic" in discussing W. C. Williams. Fletcher writes "It is in this way that allegory becomes what Frye has called 'anti-allegorical,' by which he means ironical. He sees this trend occurring with increasing force as we approach modern times; he sees in it an aspect of the general ironic (we might more accurately call it the meiotic) trend of modern literature."

Since he is writing in the clipped, ostensibly anti-rhetorical prose of the 20th century, Clark doesn't use so many obvious figures of speech as earlier poetic discourse employs, but the figure of belittlement dominates his allegorical reading of Olson's life. "Even where the allegory is more naturalistic," Fletcher writes, "when it appropriates the language of contemporary journalism, it bottles up concepts in the form of caricatures." Clark's renditions of Olson's "ideas" are such caricatures.

His analysis of Olson's character is couched in terms of an easily apprehended and simplified Freudian psychology, no problem for the average reader. Its use enables him confidently to identify what he assumes to be Olson's real motives: "The division he felt in himself was now so radical, he secretly believed, as to actually produce two distinct 'forms of behavior,' and in effect two different Charles Olsons." (Clark, p. 118) (No matter how secret Olson's beliefs were, they don't remain hidden from Clark!)

Clark's fundamental postulate in fixing Olson's character is that of the popular biographer Catherine Drinker Bowen, who in her *Biography: The Craft and the Calling* writes, "What is biography but the story of a man or woman in conflict with himself. . ."

This postulate allows Clark to erect his major tropes of belittlement, Olson as Con Artist, Poseur, Stage Manager, Manipulator and Opportunist. Over all looms the guiding archetype of the Trickster, but Clark subsumes the shamanic character under his meiotic figure of the Manipulative Con Man. It was Robert Creeley, Clark writes in the Acknowledgments for his

book, "who early on proposed as hypothetical models for Olson biography the Freud/Bullitt life of Woodrow Wilson, a highly speculative study of the Oedipean formations of the Great Man character type, and Hugh Trevor-Roper's classic account of brilliant intellectual bluffing, *The Hermit of Peking*. Stressing the latter line of interpretation, Olson's student and good friend Edward Dorn gave me a perceptive account of him as creative gambler, a 'great intellectual punter constantly at the gaming tables of thought and literature.'" (Clark, pp. ix–x)

While Clark listened to and followed up these fatuous and possibly malicious suggestions, Creeley and Dorn are not to be held responsible for Clark's stance, which is a projection of or correspondence to the emblematic figure of Olson as Trickster that was already in process of formation in his own psyche. An evident partial identification with the Trickster archetype enables Clark to conflate the figure sympathetically with that of the Rebel—*Poète Maudit* in revolt against an alien and hateful society.

Here he becomes trapped in his own irony. His sympathy with and pity for the Artist-out-of-step-with-Culture, a Sacred Monster, is rhetorically subverted by his own syntax of belittlement and disvalue. The reductionism implicit in Clark's projected psychology infects the entire *kosmos* of the allegory. (I use *kosmos* in Fletcher's double sense of extended ornament become world-image.) The allegory then takes on the meiotic figure of covert lowering. "Levelling and lowering is then a primary function of kosmos no less than its elevating function," Fletcher writes, "By likening an object we wish to dispraise to a worse object we achieve a downward movement." And since "Allegory belongs ultimately in the area of epideictic rhetoric. . .since it is most often used to praise and condemn certain lines of conduct or certain philosophical positions" the effect of Clark's meiotic use of allegory in the biography is not only to cheapen the psychological world of Olson's motives but to create a kosmos of disparagement of all human motivation. That his level of allegory is covert does not mitigate its impact.

It is an intense competitiveness and self-seeking that Clark's rhetoric projects on Olson. Life exists only as agon in this world-view. There is no room for lovable qualities. The compassion Creeley detects in this biography, according to his dust jacket comment, is certainly not flagrant.

5. From Olson's *The Special View of History*, based on a series of lectures at Black Mountain in 1956: "How to say it, so that it is abundantly clear. It isn't at all unlike Keats' proposition that a man's life (he was speaking of Shakespeare and his plays) is an allegory. It is that one does have a life to live, exactly that much. And that because it is that much, and it is one's own, it has a scale. That is, it isn't more of same, or so much 'humanity' and all that, any of the counters now offered (which lead on the other side instantly

to hypostasizings. Diminishments and hypostasizings, about what we have offered us."

Clark's *Charles Olson* offers us just such diminishment and hypostasis. His minifying biographical allegory displays what may be called a meiotic view of history. And of course a meiotic view of kosmos.

In spite of Edward Dorn's benign endorsement on its book jacket ("Only a biographer as discriminating as Tom Clark could have done justice to this troubled and vibrant giant."), which sounds as if Dorn were practicing to write copy for book-club puffs, Tom Clark is neither a discriminating biographer nor does he present what Dorn terms a "total picture of Olson." The book will neither hearten nor satisfy the discriminating, but in its plausible facility it may please the hasty reader and inhabitant of the New Establishment whose vested interest in comfortable meiotic simplifications it agreeably serves.

—Gerrit Lansing

Lives and Large Systems: New Biographies of Charles Olson and Norbert Wiener

1

Tom Clark's *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life* is a bad book.

It is not a bad book because it is badly written. In fact, as a commercial product of writing, it is quite effective: it moves right along, the language is superficially engaging, it seems to have alot of big implication without burdening its reader with tiresome analysis. It belongs however to a whole category of bad books which came into prominence during the 1980s. Although these books vary over a wide-range of sophistication levels, they are all bad because they represent a loss of intellectual nerve. The popular prototype is Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.* The function of such writing is not to generate thought but to stop thought and distract attention. Of course, for more sophisticated readers, more sophisticated strategies for filling attention without requiring thought are necessary.

The book was the first mass-produced consumer item, but it was always peculiar as a commodity. Producing and selling writing was not

quite the same as producing and selling hogs or even cars. One could sell the material object but not the "content." In the past twenty years, a pervasive, synchronic array of cultural changes have allowed the appearance of new book-products in which the distinction between book and content breaks down: content too is now material. The book as commercial product has been greatly improved: it has been made more attractive as an object of desire and more useful to the vested interests as an instrument of control. The mechanisms of the book trade are, of course, complex, but it has much the same profile as the music business which has managed successfully to market images of rebellion to self-controlling consumers. It is now only with great difficulty that the book undermines itself as product and diverges from its status as a commodity by claiming its connection with a structure of ideas outside of itself, on the one hand, or a more generous concreteness (Whitman's "whoever touches this book touches a man"), on the other.

There is no simple explanation of this change. Aspects of it can be traced to changes in the publishing industry, changes in the relationship of print and electronic media, changes in social values in a broad sense, changes in philosophy in the academy. It is a kind of writing which appears in a culture which cannot face its own emptiness and lack of resources to overcome its self-destructive tendency. It is the mark of decadence in the grand sense.

The great theme of the 1980s was the futility of knowledge: if you can't know *everything*, according to the orthodox line of thought, you cannot know anything, and *as* you do not know everything, you can do nothing but hope. Skepticism is the epistemology of reactionary politics. It is the theme of the politics of both Heidegger and Reagan, a theme which unites fashionable cultural critics and middle American voters (albeit with considerable difference in the complexity of the rhetoric).

If it were merely a matter of the value of a name in the literary market place, Clark's book would not be worthy of serious attention. Olson has not been read, and, though this book will foster his continued neglect, literary reputations are not now very important. The highest end of the pecking order of poets is so low that who is up and who is down makes no difference. It is sad, however, that perhaps one reader in a thousand who will come to this book will need to know what Olson might teach, and Clark does not give such a reader even a clue what he or she might find in Olson's writings.

Thomas M. Disch, reviewing *Charles Olson* in the *Los Angeles Times* summarizes the book in these terms:

> At Black Mountain, an experimental college in rural North Carolina, Olson was a pioneer in the dismantling of the college

> core curriculum and its replacement by a kind of autodidacticism that differed little from autointoxication. He was, in short, the high priest of high times, and Tom Clark's biography is a balefully fascinating account of both the man and the milieu he did so much to form. . . . The poet's life becomes, as the book's subtitle proclaims, a cautionary parable concerning the price to be paid for megalomania, a hunger for sycophants and too much booze and drugs.

Of course, reviewers may use books for whatever purpose they like, as Disch uses Clark's biography in support of the educational philosophy of Bennet, Bloom, and their company—the academic equivalent of Christian fundamentalists—but Disch gives the book a fair reading. Clark makes Olson's life available for precisely such a use.

There is something odd about the tone of the book, however, and Disch is almost discerning enough a reader to pick up on it. He notes a discrepancy between Clark's account of Olson's life and the dust-cover blurbs. I wonder if Clark intended to produce the book which, for example, Andrei Codrescu describes: "Olson was a grand American genius like Melville, Whitman, and Pound. He mapped and defended a special American poetic liberty that is gravely threatened today."

Let me propose a paranoid fantasy, something like the body snatchers. I do not know that it is relevant to *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, but it might be:

The forces which now threaten liberty in every domain of life are so powerful that they can invade and use even some of those who *intend* to be agents of opposition. If writers lack knowledge or profoundest conviction, they are liable to be invaded and have their skill turned against their intent even without their knowledge. The mechanisms could be various: it might involve an unconscious desire on the part of the writer to make an acceptable product or editors who are able to recast a writer's work in terms which he or she lacks the moral courage to reject.

At any rate, there is something odd at the center of this book. It is not just a hatchet job on Olson, it also justifies the dismissal of an entire range of poetries to which the poetic work of Clark himself and many of the dust-jacket commentators belong. The Gulf War has been used to proclaim America's recovery from the infamy of Viet Nam. Clark's text will be used, as Thomas Disch uses it, to proclaim America's recovery from the artistic infamy of the fifties and sixties.

2

Charles Olson is addressed to what used to be called the "middlebrow" reader. Now, of course, all hierarchies are unfashionable. Everyone has

been swallowed up in postmodern egalitarian inauthenticity. Books like this one, however, are still middlebrow. They find their niche in markets which are insignificantly small in relation to the mass market but large enough to return a publisher such as a Norton a little extra profit and, more significantly, to improve its image as a publisher of text books (indeed it might be seen as a kind of justification of the Norton anthology of twentieth-century poetry).

Clark makes a fundamental error about his subject. He treats Olson's life as the life of a personality—a movie star or a First Lady, who, lacking all other qualities and accomplishments, can only be treated as the subject of gossip. There has seldom been a writer whose life was so exclusively his or her work. Clark however tells us nothing about Olson's life *as a poet*. When he tries, he repeatedly betrays the superficiality of his understanding of his subject. At these times, even his usually snappy prose style deserts him, and he begins to sound like the host on talk radio. Of Carl Sauer, "Olson would soon come to regard him as a creative 'father' and forerunner in the intellectual adventure of earth history." Or like bright undergraduates who have not read their assignments but can "pick up" enough to make, if not pressed, a comment which sounds almost right: "Whitehead seemed to offer a figurative or allegorical frame of reference in which the poet as *muthos*-maker could easily feel at home."

There is nothing *easy* about feeling at home with Whitehead. If Clark would have looked at Olson's copy of *Process and Reality* in the Archive at the University of Connecticut, he might have had some measure of what it means to read a book, to *know* something, and to try to find one's *own* use for a body of thought so massive. Olson's copy of *Process and Reality* is a record not of one careful reading but of many readings, many pages are heavily annotated, sometimes the date in which a passage was noted is recorded. Whitehead was a frame of reference which was fashioned, carefully and thoughtfully. Olson did not read because he was expecting to take an examination but to feed his own work. Clark assumes that no one could *know* what Olson-Maximus proposes to make use of. This is the assumption that one would expect of an academic biographer, whose task it is to excuse his colleagues' ignorance of Olson. It is sad that it is also the assumption of a poet-biographer.

Olson, however, is noisy and troublesome. He is not merely another idealistic poet who can be reined in by the methods of Deconstruction. Indeed, he is more rigorously and insistently anti-metaphysical than Derrida. Moreover, his appeal to concreteness cannot be dismissed as a sentimentality, as Whitman's proposal of physicality may be. For the safety of the middlebrow Republic, a distraction of the kind which Clark provides is necessary.

I do not mean to imply a conspiracy. In a culture where everyone is trying to cover his or her own ass, where everyone is devoted to the minimum necessary conscious, conspiracy does not require conscious collusion. No one wants to be awakened from the great comforting sleep, and they apply the golden rule: Do not awaken others for fear they may awaken you.

3

Pesi R. Masani's *Norbert Wiener, 1894-1964*, offers a reasonable comparison to Clark's biography of Olson. Olson and Wiener were acquainted with one another. Olson had a pre-publication copy of Wiener's book *Cybernetics*, and he quotes Wiener in two crucial poems which are separate by a period of twenty-five years (Olson's attention to Wiener was lasting). They were both heavily influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, both were New Englanders, and both were problematic personalities.

Masani's study of Wiener is not a great biography. The prose is a little creaky, and Masani's treatment of Wiener as a social thinker is thin, but it does the job of biography responsibly. Masani attempts to give us what is *important* about the life of his subject. He notes:

> The basic proposition of cybernetics that
>
> signal = message + noise
>
> and that the message, and not the noise, is the sensible term in communication, is applicable in all sorts of contexts with suitable re-interpretation of the three terms. It sheds some light on how the responsibility of writing about Wiener should be met. Wiener is the signal, and for us the Wiener-message, and not the Wiener-noise, must be of significance. . . .

Wiener was remarkable in that he was an important scientist—one of the group with Turing, von Neumann, Shannon, and McCulloch, who completely re-oriented the scientific project after World War II. Unlike many of his colleagues, however, Wiener also saw the technological developments for which he was in part responsible in broad social terms. In his closing paragraphs Masani writes of Wiener, "Few others have comprehended reality so profoundly, and so clearly seen the way out of the present spiritual impoverishment." We may not finally accept this assessment, but Masani gives us the evidence for this claim which is, for him, the Wiener-message.

Clark gives us the Olson-noise. He seems to know nothing about the Olson message.

4

This is a reasonable time to read biographies of Olson and Wiener. Both of these men offer opportunities to give thought to the world as a vast, intricately articulated system of a kind which we have only begun to know during the last fifty years. For the first time, we have a totality which does not reduce the world to a totalitarian object or a totalitarian subject. Of course, the Romantic dogma equated the aesthetic *symbol* with totality, but, each in their own way, Olson and Wiener were involved in a series of discoveries which led to the conclusion that we inhabit a world in which *literally* the totality is in every part.

This is not easy to understand. It involves a level of abstraction which was not available before this century, and no one is completely comfortable with it. Of course, the very mention of higher abstraction will send poets and poetry lovers of a certain stripe scrambling to find a rock to pick up or a tree to hug. Pound's "Go in fear of abstraction" is the first rule of Creative Writers and their pedagogical institutions. Olson's work is important precisely because he shows at what cost one gains concreteness of life in the face of abstraction.

The problem with abstraction ever since the Greeks is that it has never been abstract enough. It has been so close to the concrete that the abstract and the concrete have been confused. All systems—at least since the time that Heraclitus declared (in a passage which Olson often quotes), "Man is estranged from that which is most familiar"—had admitted only two loci or values, objective and subjective, hopelessly split; in self-consciousness; even painfully split. At the same time, however, objects and subjects were mutually linked and dependent upon one another. There have been thought-things and thing-thoughts—fuzzy agglutinized objects of eye and mind.

In this century a new, previously unknown level of abstraction has appeared, and as a result the relationship between thought and concrete life has profoundly changed. In their different ways, Olson and Wiener articulate aspects of this new thought which transforms life almost beyond recognition.

As a theory of *systems* and *information*, the new abstraction has no particular content. It is not a theory of physical nature, biological nature, numbers, psyches, societies, computers or other kinds of machines, languages, games (or simulations), poems, plots, or pieces of music, but of *all* of these things or, more precisely, of what all of these things have in common. Moreover, what constitutes a system is a function not of things in themselves but of their users. Logics are not *given* in the Beginning or any other time, they are created by their own use. Logics are cross-section pictures of purposes, independent of substance: "I see no essential difference," Wiener writes, "between a materialism, which includes soul as

a complicated type of material particle, and a spiritualism that includes particles as a primitive type of soul." We may now think of concatenations of minerals, bodies, and languages (including both alphabetic and arithmetic languages) as single systems. The designers of computer interfaces, for example, *must* think in these terms, and I believe the poets must also, not to emulate the machine but to insure that people keep the upper hand on the mechanical prostheses by which they extend themselves.

Although the mathematics in Masani's biography appears at first a little daunting, each of the technical chapters is organized so the principles are explained in general terms before the formalism is introduced. It will, however, repay the non-mathematical reader to look at the mathematical equations from an aesthetic point of view. Wiener himself looked at them at least in part in aesthetic terms. This passage announces one of Masani's principle themes:

> In the infancy of the human race, each situation was perceived by the mind as a blurred organic whole. Man's earliest mode of perception was mythic rather than logical or analytic, and it is a profound saying that "poetry is the mother tongue of humanity" [Ernst Cassirer]. Indeed, human life would be intolerable without the mythic mode of perception: great art hinges on such perception.
>
> It is not generally recognized, however, that as science advances it is forced to view reality from widely different perspectives, and that the integration of these divergent aspects into a unified whole calls for the same sort of maneuver that the poet undertakes. . . . It is in this undertaking that the role of mathematical symbolism is decisive.

Masani manages to convey a sense of Wiener's life and work in terms of this mathematical poetics. Although I prefer Steve J. Heims's treatment of Wiener's "philosophy" in the broader sense in the dual biography, *John von Neumann and Norbert Wiener: From Mathematics to the Technologies of Life and Death* (MIT Press, 1980), Masani gives a better account of Wiener's work as a scientist.

The last time I saw Robert Duncan before he got sick, he spoke of Olson and himself as "cybernetic poets" and insisted that it was this fact which distinguished them from their predecessors and their contemporaries. What he meant, I think, was that they alone had tried to move poetry from a blurred perception of organic wholes to precise, concrete perception of organic wholes—that they had in effect accepted the responsibility of producing a poetry which was contemporary with Wiener, Shannon, and McCulloch.

Relatively few artists have entered a space of art in which form depends strictly upon the totality of the living of those forms. Duncan mentioned some of the painters—Pollack, Kline, Jess—and I insisted upon Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Sun Ra, and Cecil Taylor.

5

In times of profoundest intellectual transformation, there is literally no way to say what can be said: the old forms have to be revalued in terms of a thought which cannot emerge until *after* they have been revalued. Systems thinking gives us means to think about this paradox of classical logic.

Consider the term "allegory" which Clark uses in his title and which is central to the method of his biography. He is referring specifically to a passage from one of John Keats's letters—"A man's life of any worth is a continual allegory"—which interested Olson in the middle-1950s. Clark thinks of allegory as Bunyan thought of allegory: the content is abstraction. Olson, however, was hearing something else. It was a term which he hoped to wrench out of an old context and use in relation to the emerging language. *The Special View of History* as a whole might be read as Olson's attempt to revalue the term. The fact that allegory had not been a fashionable literary form for some centuries made it susceptible to this kind of (mis)treatment. Just before he quotes Keats in *The Special View*, Olson writes:

> The condition of man is a continuum we hereby declare to be called as it has always been meant, history. It means "knowing": Hister. Find out what it's about. Can one offer a determinative more exact to that which any one of us is impelled to do without any choice in the matter? That is, otherwise one is forced to talk about "life." But it has never been a satisfactory word because it means what nature offers, not what man DOES. One can indeed live. But curiosity? It is only satisfied by the creation of the history of one's self.

The poet is at once the maker of the life and its knower, or at once its knower and its maker. That is, the content of continual allegory is not abstraction, as Clark's biographical method assumes, but more allegory. When abstraction allows this degree of self-reference, where the person is at once the subject and object of his or her own doing, everything is changed.

In an essay published two years after the lectures in *The Special View*, however, Olson recognized that "continual allegory" was an inadequate term for Melville's work and certainly his own. He used the term to make

an important transition, then he threw it away as it no longer served his purposes:

> Melville couldn't abuse object as symbol does by depreciating it in favor of subject. Or let image lose its relational force by transferring its occurrence as allegory does. He was already aware of the complementarity of each of two pairs of how we know and present the real—image & object, and the action & subject—both of which have paid off so decisively since. . . .
>
> Melville wouldn't have known to say it this way, but he was essentially incapable of either allegory or symbol for the best of congruent reason: mirror and model are each figures in Euclidean space, and they are not congruent. They require a discontinuous jump.

Clark abuses object as symbol. If a life is to be lived in a continuous space—that is, a space where measure is possible and poetry is, therefore, a primary mode of knowledge—allegory will not suffice. Allegory belongs to a discrete spatial manifold, and poetry of the order that Olson sought requires a continuous spatial manifold. Thus, his investigations into non-Euclidean geometry were necessary. Clark asserts that Olson was unable "to grasp the technical fine points of such work. . .," but again had he made the effort to look at material which is readily available in the Archive, he would have discovered that Olson *did*, in fact, understand a good deal of non-Euclidean geometry. While he wasn't interested in technical topology, he understood satisfactorily what it *meant* in terms of its implications for the art of poetry. His notes on the technical aspects of *Process and Reality*, which is ultimately understandable only as a philosophy of mathematics, or Herman Weyl's *Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science*, for example, make it clear that he was interested in poetry, not mathematics, but it will be no less obvious that he was not a mere dabbler, as Clark suggests.* He was dealing with formal matters at a level of abstraction where mathematics and natural language are indistinguishable from one another.

There is reason to believe that Olson was as serious and competent in the pursuit of his work as Wiener was his. He was also as impulsive and as capable of making wrong guesses which sometimes seriously misled

*It is clear, at any rate, that Clark is only guessing about what Olson knew and is depending upon the fact that any non-mathematician who speaks of mathematics will be widely perceived as a phony. Had he made the effort to look at Coxeter's *Non-Euclidean Geometry*, to which he refers, he would have known that it was an introductory textbook, not a volume one would consult for "recent discoveries" as he reports.

him. He was as capable of mistreating his friends and associates. Marsani deals with this aspect of his subject insightfully. Clark understands Olson at best as a bumbling, incompetent nerd or freak in the sideshow of the literary underground, at worst as a kind of Jungian monster, who projects his own boring psychodrama on the people and world around him. Happily Olson's work is available to the committed general reader. For biographical information on Olson, for the time being at least, I can only recommend the chronology in George Butterick's *A Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson.*

—Don Byrd

Baffling Means from o•blēk editions (1991) is a book of "Writings/ Drawings by Clark Coolidge and Philip Guston." The title is a mine of meanings—gold mine, land mine. *Means* can be read two ways, as a noun and a verb, and it is a tribute to both of these artists that not only do they take us down the path of that bifurcation, but they bring us back to the place where noun and verb are one, or where it doesn't matter—nouns, verbs are part of the same activity or path or door ("is my muse the door itself?" 54). In any event: *Means* are tools, strategies, mechanisms; "a method or course of action or instrument by which some act can be accomplished or some end achieved." Here the emphasis is on the act, not the end. But of course that is easy to say, but it means that the emphasis thereby falls on the quality, attentiveness, and the duplicitous cunning and reckless desires involved in the act. For the only end, especially for Coolidge, is the exploration of a very large scene of writing, the space in which everything seems to become the means; what it means *is* the means. So the verb *means*—it means *"baffling means* as follows" with all the poems and art works aspects of the definition of baffling, aspects of the purpose or intention of baffling, or the act of bringing about certain things as consequences ("friction means heat"; "baffling means___")—where all of the poems or words stand in antecedent position to these two generative words BAFFLING and MEANS.

Now baffle, or baffling is not the simplest word either. For it talks about being foiled and thwarted by the "means"—checked, interfered with, even impeded. And the root might be a word for hoodwink. The means defy solution or understanding. And the drive in these works was to make things go further, not to understand or solve them: "Further in the sense of nearly

unrecognizable as one's own." (Coolidge, Preface.) They do, however, engage both artists with a constant activity; the activity itself leads to reflection and therefore to more work (but never solution). And of course *Means* (also plural) indicates wealth, property, money—artists who draw into the page and follow their line may be indeed baffled or bewildered by the wealth they find in the site they enter. Coolidge says, in his brief preface, "Baffling means because we wouldn't know what we'd get. . . . Strange what we wanted we had never seen." The level of desire in these works is part of their power, but desire is also assured, even funky sometimes. It is rarely out of control, nor does it pretend to be. Coolidge indicates that a synonymous alternative for this title was "To Work." Precisely.

The work (made between 1972 and 1976) consists of meditative and sometimes essayistic poems by Coolidge to which Guston responded with drawings which incorporate lines and statements by Coolidge in the arch, textured-looking cartoon-like objects that are Guston's significant later style. The writing that struck me is essentially all about what it feels like really to be cooking, making, into one's praxis. The feel is extreme "negative capability": one never knows what is happening or going to happen, one is cast perpetually into doubt and uncertainty, and it is just about the greatest pleasure that there is—as if that itself were the key to the universe, and it is in one's hand perpetually as one moves it across the page.

> "Black line pushing aside ahead." (21)
>
> "The words take a hand in the line. The words/ take time, and the hands line. A line/ in the silence of else, stopless./ Surface, edgeless." (24)
>
> "The act of painting: Drawing the boundaries/ of a fire" (26)
>
> "Making any mark is to make a hole." (34)
>
> "To create is to make a pact with nothingness./ The void exacts its tribute. [. . .] Writing, I sometimes feel I/ am working with nothing. Where are/ the words?" (50)

There are also a few essay-like statements, more like a poetics in the form of poetry, discussing the isolation and unassimilation of the true artist. When I cite this material, as above, it turns into great mottos or one-liners, although of course on the page the meditations are longer. The selection Guston makes also has the effect of turning some of what Coolidge has written into brilliant aphorisms, freeze framing the ongoing writing. This

is the only loss from the process which the two engaged upon. But the flow, and stopping to examine and investigate the flow, and how one accomplished this while also honoring the baffling means are all very much at issue. Guston is (as if) offering Coolidge a very complex reflection of his own flow precisely by the practice of decoupage—separating out phrases or little sequences of statement which were important to Guston and re-proposing them via another medium. Also the set-up of the book increases the two-way companionability and equality of the artists. Guston's pictures rarely are set near or next to the same page as the Coolidge words they cite. That is, there is rarely a physical match, recto to verso, between the drawing's words and the words on the poem you've just read. The total impact is like a Lissajous figure, a pendulum tracing a line which ends up in a variety of variable points, a weaving between the two "sides" (Guston and Coolidge) in which "here" is perpetually in a different place.

A question this work does not answer inside itself is the function of doing this for the careers of the two artists. By 1972, when this collaborative work began, Coolidge was 33 years old, had published 6 books, of which one trade book (Harper & Row); he had even appeared (in the late 60s and early 70s) in a number of "young poet" anthologies from trade houses, although the thrust of his work is in small presses. He had been a writer from about 1960 (born in 1939), and was present and perhaps active in many of the alternative scenes in the 60s, touching on, or into Vancouver Poetry Seminar, 1963, Berkeley Poetry Conference, 1965, New York School, 1966. By 1972 he had had an issue of a magazine *(Big Sky)* devoted to his work. In 1972, Guston was 59 years old (1913–1980). He had just withdrawn from contract with his former gallery and moved to Woodstock. According to Robert Storr's book, Guston sought out writers, Coolidge among them in some kind of reaction to/rejection of the art world as constructed. One would like to know whether Coolidge saw some of Guston's works as he wrote more (as I suspect), and also what his reading of this correspondence in poem and drawing was. (Because it does seem like an exchange of letters.) I suppose I might be asking for Coolidge's Autobiography.

Guston's iconography had just shifted drastically to funny representational icons, distilled from events and materials which had long preoccupied him. Among these are the figures in the drawings in this o•blēk book: shoe soles with lots of nice little nails, arrows and clocks, hands, sometimes paintbrushes, abstracted piles of dreck such as what one might see in a vacant lot, hairy nervous lines almost like doodles. And then there is the pièce de résistance, the real reason for these drawings—a fetal or lima-bean head with a gigantic eye like a lighthouse beacon in it or the thyroidal headlight of a bulbous car. Sometimes the head was smoking, sometimes it had 5 o'clock shadow. Always it is looking sideways, in profile, out; it

does not confront the reader or on-looker but stares, with unfillable intensity, at the presentation of objects. It is a version of Emerson's "Transparent Eyeball" crossed with R.J. Crumb Comix. And thereby says something about the romantic and transcendent artist in confrontation with the uncontrollability of time, desire, garbage, and normal culture. This artist is a "baby" by virtue of that head, even somewhat disembodied (a bowling ball visiting dream space/studio space). The head, even without a mouth shows the figure to be an omnivore, ferocious and vulnerable at once. For both artists, "The road to excess leads to one's *own forms.*" (50 and 95)

*

Necromance (published by Sun & Moon Press, 1991) is another one of Rae Armantrout's devastating books. Her poems are short, use serial procedures, concern the everyday but refragmented and refiltered and subjected to intense summary pressures. Some of the lines seem put-downs, some rich with dismissive litotes; it's as if Armantrout has vowed to distill some of the most extraordinary sights of our time, mingled for her in a paralyzing arrest of distaste, high hysteria, and mordant conniving: "Arms of pastries/ revolve/ in their clear cylinder// slowly." Not Emily Dickinson (to whom careful homage is paid in the poem "No Matter"), she reminds me more of Dorothy Parker as filtered thru Mina Loy. She is a master of insouciant juxtapositions and a pervasive atmosphere of irony. It is the cool blown up scrutiny of very American icons that gives enormous pleasure in her work:

> suburbia & freeways: "You may 'have' sex—// but those round/ sink-holes beneath/ the off-ramps,// scabbed with whatever/ flat, green stuff— ..."(47)
>
> the Pledge of Allegiance "One notion, recognizable, with temperament and bluster for real." (9)
>
> cuisine or representation : "What the cool tomato cubes forming a rosette about this/ central olive have to do with love and happiness." (20)

All these items of dailiness and consumption have made us what we are today: baffled, jaunty, cunning. "In dream language the / *troubled region* has returned as a showgirl with masses/ of fruit on her head." (16)

Armantrout is always worth reading.

*

Time Rations is a formally and intellectually inventive book of shorter poems by Benjamin Friedlander (O Books, 1991). It seems to be a book about (among other themes) the inadequacy of lyric postures about love, time, transcendence especially in face of our only adequate ethical and political site: in post-holocaust time, on those (irrational) rations. Reflected, passim, but in the poem "No Go": "I dream of/ prisons never/ built & monuments/ of fading grass// but stuck inside/ my worthless head/ are ovens full/ of human ash. . . " (24). Thus the book kicks in immediately with knowing allusions to prior lyrics: "How do I/ love 'thee'/ can't count/ the way. out. . . ." (4). And it also startles with a deck-clearing poem of bitter contempt for its genre and for the gesture of ("the stupidity of") writing: "It Gets That I Hate Words For Their Echoes, Dumb Repetitions In My Head." (10-11). We then get such subtle moves as poems facing across the page with ultimately opposing genres and cultural draws: "Kol Niedre" and "My Alba," both remade to be "about" the pressure of writing: the vital call of the word (Benjamin! Here am I, he might have said) and the sensualities of song ("I,/ ripped off & upended, gussied at dawn,/ did sleep away the meaning of the song." 14 and 15). We get crisp Zukofskian moves such as a (fine) poem and its own extension and commentary: "[History Lesson]" with imbedded allusions to Oppen, Celan and Reznikoff, and the longer "A Note on the Previous" (which recalls the bond of "Mantis" to "Mantis: An Interpretation"). Later a similar project and its mirror answer in "Poetry" and "Retitled" (37-38).There are some charming-elegant visual and colloquial inventions which go to school with Williams' circumstantiality and precision, notations of precise time, place, latitude, miles per hour, letterhead on interoffice memo, person addressed, book being read at the "moment" of composition. One of my favorite is "The Clothes List"—in which most of the items listed that comprise the poem are crossed out, some starred, some questioned. A very serious distillery and condensary is operating in the person of Mr. Benjamin Friedlander.

*

An edition of *The Tablets I-XXVI* by Armand Schwerner has appeared in Great Britain from Atlas Press (1989). (An American edition up thru XXIV appeared in *sounds of the river Naranjana*, Station Hill Press, 1983.) This remarkable work is, of course, part of the Anglo-American long poem tradition. When the works first began appearing, they were notable for a frank and bold sexuality, as well as for a self-conscious and grippingly witty textuality. The trope on which the whole is based may be known to you: these are supposedly translations and reconstructions of very primitive texts. Going beyond the terms of any good ethnographer, Schwerner has founded, rather than simply found, his tribe. Like any good translator, he

has fabricated, and not just rendered his texts. So the work is both a statement within ethnopoetics and a commentary upon it, and thus may be said to bridge a gap between "first generation" ethnopoetics and second generation (say "post-structuralist ethnopoetics"). Trying to trace this is made more difficult by the lack of dates on the different Tablets here—a small frustration.

In the first generation, the following were among the essential issues: the search for origins or primary emotional and cultural ground, the call to shamanism and poets as social/ritual actors, the renewal from the primitive (and often the idealization of it), the postulate of a basic similarity of all cultures, the rupture with ethnocentrism and the critique of Western "man." Here, in Schwerner's text, these motifs and motives are very much in evidence. They center on the body, and on its rich excreta (shit, sweat, saliva, pus, piss, sperm, earwax including, charmingly, "little squush; and wet socks" 9), and as well on sexuality. This part of the poem made a great contribution (as I have noted above) to the living theater of frankness we now demand in poetry, but some of its turns do not wear well. The sexuality is obsessive—if "primitive means complex" in some books, here, at least in the first third of the work, "primitive means fucking." There is lots of penis and testicle in these poems, and an almost comparable amount of vagina. High points here are erotic chants (III, IV, V); then there is XV, the song of a temple prostitute, serviced first by a wild ass and then by a lesbian high priestess, which makes for curious, if sensual reading. (NB: Sherman Paul interprets this section as a speaker yielding "his masculine obsessively phallic to his gentler feminine identity." In "In Love with the Gratuitous," *North Dakota Quarterly* 1986; clearly there is a good deal to discuss in Schwerner's work.) Sometimes the commentator and annotator is in evidence during this group of poems, and there are a few notable moves. Sometimes translator misses the point, in Schwerner's high and Swiftean parody of scholarship (as in the contrast between his bafflement at the various epithets for penis and the reader's evident surmise). Sometimes he so identifies with the material that he becomes enraptured: "I do not know who I am when I read this." (35)

Somewhere in the middle (around Tablets XIII or XIV and continuing) the tone changes and the text becomes more determinedly self-reflective, even lyric, more about "the lettuce [which] drains on the sill" (71). Also during this middle section (in XX and XXI) there is expressed a ferocious anger at George Oppen (or that portion of him called "the Opponent," 63), citing from "Some San Francisco Poems" in a particularly intrusive way, by borrowing Oppen's lyric outcry about death and "saying goodbye" to his wife to point to disciples "saying goodbye" to Oppen. This rage may be about Oppen's difficulty in crediting ethnopoetics (reflected as well in his letters to Jerome Rothenberg), his specific criticism of Schwerner's attitude

to this work (Schwerner's taking it as "comedy" when it was "tragedy"—certainly a long discussion is necessary there)—as well as Oppen's personal ability to be dismissive and final in his judgments, the perfect replica of a Mentor-Father in some Oedipal narrative of poetic struggle. Far later in the sequence, Schwerner has his scholar-translator say something about the pictographs he presents which I (perhaps willfully) find apposite to this situation: "Often what can be initially experienced as an entertainment, as in this case, continues as a sadness. I cannot open the inner knot . . . ."(84)

As the text evolved, the concerns of a second generation of ethnopoetics came more to the fore; they had always been part of the texture of this work, its insistent, intelligent textual practices. The visual text, with its devastating alternation between terms which are both the same and different (.....for "untranslatable" and ++++++ for "missing") provides some breathtaking plays with fragment and partial understanding. In this version of ethnopoetics the issues are: not the nature of the pure hit of the primitive, but the nature, functions, ideologies, and interests at stake in the transmission and the transmitter (the self-styled "translation" and the "scholar-editor"). Issues of appropriation, hybridization, the creolized shifting border are in play; the user or commentator on the primitive is not set apart, unimplicated in his need and his choices. There is a critique of exoticizing aspects of the original ethnopoetics, the creation of a "Them" so much closer to nature and the sensual and the animal (and the female?) than silly old "Us." Far from a mode of "going deeper," the primitive is now analyzed in our discourses about it, in the amalgams built between cultures in which no transmission is pure. Because of the hiatuses, gaps, fragmentation of the material Schwerner presents, interpretation is a central act; the "author" (Mr. ur-Aryan) is indeed in many witty ways quite dead, if not non-existent (à la Foucault and Barthes). And the residues that the scholar-translator leaves are thoroughly unreliable as well. "Truth" fails; what we have is a "play of discourses." The text becomes traces of traces, and Schwerner the trickster figure shows us that we must be unsettled. In situating itself amid these ideas, Tablet XXVI is a tour de force summarizing many of the rampant textualities of *The Tablets*, and specializing in richly ironic self-contradictions: the attribution of early subjectivity to this ca. 3200 BCE period, while ending the paragraph "Work makes freedom." The non-Semitic origins (our primitive text writer is "ur-Aryan," 85) are a vast almost unapproachable pun on Schwerner's own Semitic origins. The scholar-translator "descends further into the interstices between tablets, between utterances, between graphemes, between pictographs" (73) and finds that "the line between redactor and author is hard to draw" (74)—an obvious, and comic, comment on this work, but a profound comment on the conditions of textual transmission. The scholar-editor-(writer) is also, as

usual, filled with jargon, new bombastic terminology, and self-importance which may, or may not, undercut his understanding of the post-structuralist trap.

I'll close by saying that one of the important parts of this text for me is its divagations, self meditations, plans (some unfulfilled) and meditations in poetics. Like the work which it caps, it is a grand document (pp. 99-108, again I wish it were dated) and offers much to the reader.

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis

John Coltrane: "Why does his legacy continue to influence our lives, our music and the arts?"

Trane emerged as the process of historical clarification itself, of a particular social/aesthetic development. When we see him standing next to Bird and Diz, an excited young inlooker inside the torrent of the rising Bop statement, right next to the chief creators of that fervent expression of new black life, we are seeing actually point and line, note and phrase of the continuum. As if we could also see Louis and Bechet hovering over them, with Pres hovering just to the side awaiting his entrance, and then beyond in a deeper yet to be revealed hover, Pharoah and Albert and David and Wynton or Olu in the mist, there about to be, when called by the notes of what had struck yet before all mentioned.

Trane carried the deepness in us thru Bird and Diz, and them, back to us. He reclaimed the Bop fire, the Africa, Polyrhythmic, Improvisational, Blue, Spirituality of us. The starter of one thing yet the anchor of something before. In the relay of our constant rise and rerise, phoenix describing its birth as birth as a description of yet another (though there is no other) process.

Trane, carrying Bird-Diz bop revolution, and its opposing force to the death force of slavery and corporate cooptation, went through his various changes, in life, in music. He carried the southern black church music, and blues and rhythm and blues, as way stations of his personal development, not just theory or abstract history. He played in all these musics, and was all these persons. His apprenticeship was extensive, and deep, the changes a revealed continuity.

The point of demarcation was Miles' classic quintet with Cannonball the other upfront stylistic vector. Style and philosophy confirm each other. As I have said before, Cannonball was Miles' confection of blues that would later be called Fusion. Simple and charming in that context, but very soon commercial on the way to not. Trane, on the other side was the way of Expressionism. Nuclear and carrying the rush of birth and death and rebirth and redeath and new life and yet again forever, what is, as the Africans said, Is Is. Ja Is (Jazz) The Come Music.

Trane emerged as the confirmation, the parallel reference to the being identified faultily as Time. The Times. He carried the power and sway, the explosions of that period. (The end of a sentence.) But the conversation, the exposition, of the Book of Life, uses periods only as rhythmic emphasis. Like beats. The music is continuous and all of what was is will. It is rhythm finally, changing motion that Trane describes.

The '60s when he appeared full up was a period, a rhythm of intensity, the Giant Steps of revolution. This is why we always associate him with Malcolm X, as a parallel of that turbulence. Trane's annihilation of the popular song, so called, was its restatement as a broader more universal popular. His "Favorite Things" could not be Hollywood's, since Hollywood is to make animalism and exploitation glamorous and Trane was trying to speak of what will exist beyond animals, what had created them, and what will carry them away as waste. What is disposed.

Trane's constant assaults on the given, the status quo, the tin pan alley of the soul, was what Malcolm attempted in our social life. And both African Americans, they carried that reference, Black Life, as their starting point and historical confirmation. The word Truth sounds bland, only if we don't understand what it is said in opposition to. Since it is transcendent, invincible, existent even past what ever else we claim exists. Even the lie must use real life as a reference to trick us, it claims to be truth. But Trane made no claims, either in his life or his work, what he did he got from life and we either recognize it with our selves or risk being wasted. Like Malcolm, what he was was reality, not to grasp it defines the quality of our consciousness, our closeness to what cannot finally be denied.

Even in this backward period, this post revolutionary retrograde era, when the social gains of the black revolution and world upsurge of liberation struggles have been thrown back for a time and we must face the open betrayal of many of those heretofore posing as revolutionaries in the Soviet Union, China, and the rest of the world, including the U.S., as we watch the steady deadly march to War. Today, we even have a trend of Negroes who tell us the American Dream is now and those of us who have not gained access to it are self destructive sluggards, womb bred muggers, a priori dope addicts, or prehistoric welfare cases.

The Fusion garbage dump heaped around us as "contemporary" music we know to be commercial reinforcement of social betrayal and prehuman addiction to animal limitation. Many of the ills of society we thought we had bypassed, transcended, eliminated, have returned in all their ugliness, whether supreme court recidivism, white supremacy, corporate domination, violent racist attacks on the streets, at our jobs, through the media. Trane like Malcolm represented our will to destroy these animal outrages. To break out of the cliched chord changes of primitive social life. Free Jazz! was parallel to Free Angela! Free Huey! The Ballot or The Bullet! Free Black People!

Since Trane's moving on we have been Paralyzed by the Imperialist Ray Gun, now ½ doped up by its Bush, but Trane still sounds inside us as the freedom we seek the total expression of our lives as the expression of the Human headed Soul, the teaching that the flaming paradise of his music is in us to create as the world we live in.

—Amiri Baraka

The U.S. poetry scene, not usually known for exuberance, exhilaration, or excess, has, in the past few years, received a remarkable influx of all three of these from its new contact with the post-Communist Soviet Union. Exchanges of readings, anthologies like the forthcoming *New Soviet Poetry* from the University of Michigan, edited by Kent Johnson and Stephen Ashby, translations, critical commentaries—all these are sure to change the face of American poetry in the '90s. But as Lyn Hejinian, herself responsible for initiating so much of the poetic traffic between the two nations, says in her Introduction to *Leningrad* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991), the collaborative account by Hejinian, Michael Davidson, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten, of their 1989 trip to the Soviet Union, the journey East has proved to be as "unnerving" as it has been "exhilarating," the "experience of the layered logics that guide events and condition situations" in the Soviet Union, displaying a "disruptive, compelling 'surreal' reality" (p. 6). That "surreal" quality is marvelously captured in this strange travel book, whose four authors are distinguished only by the icons used as a visual key to identify them, icons inspired by textile patterns designed in Leningrad in the 1920s and 30s.

What is amusing to the reader is how distinct the four voices of the supposedly nameless and faceless four protagonists are. Hejinian's is the

most concrete, the most aware of exact nuances of appearances and actions, in all their quiddities and contradictions, Davidson's the most scholarly and dispassionate, Watten's, not surprisingly, the most political (always measuring what he sees in Leningrad with what he already knows about Marxism and its Stalinist distortions), and Silliman's the most comic-surreal, his contributions reading very much like one of his own poems, the sentences not "following" one another but giving an extraordinarily vivid and honest picture of what it felt like to be a California provincial in the barely functioning, hopelessly cynical, but also intensely exciting Soviet Union. For instance:

> When I saw, on the wall of their bathroom, two toilet-paper holders, each full, my first thought was "These people are flaunting it"—later, realizing that this was a communal flat, I understood that each family had its own roll, and wondered if they cheated and stole from one another. My identity is ascertained by a photograph in a small blue book. Brigada S used to be Brigada SS. The gold in your smile shines. Who I am is this pain in my chest, ungratified desire to weep. "No more surprises!" The cab driver (not a cab driver) suddenly lurches his vehicle forward down the unpaved, rubble-strewn street—he wants to buy our dollars, sell us cameras, film, do anything. Arkadii says of another, "He's a Soviet yuppie." Just ten weeks later, the ruble has been devalued by 90 percent. Here, take my insect repellent, please. A trio of giant cock-roaches construct an anthology. "I was at Woodstock—they treat me as a goddess." (p. 101)

The network of contradictions so elegantly caught here has been apparent at recent U.S.-Soviet poetry festivals. At New Langton Arts in San Francisco this past spring, a group of Soviet poets were asked what American poets had influenced their work. My hunch, especially in the case of Ivan Zhdanov, would have been the Beats, but even the Beats would have been fairly inaccessible to Zhdanov who knows almost no English. I was amused therefore, when one of the poets (it may have been Alexei Parshchikov) responded emphatically, "The Language poets!" Amused, because although, practically speaking, the Soviet poets's most intense and creative contacts have been with the American Language poets, on the whole we are dealing with two very different poetries.

Take the case of Arkadii Dragomoschenko, whose *Description* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1990) contains a brilliant series of poems written since 1983 in equally brilliant translations by Lyn Hejinian and Elena Balashova. So superbly have the translators caught Dragomoschenko's

rhythms and word play that readers have responded, as does Charles Bernstein in *Sulfur* 28, by saying "it's hard to believe these are not in some ways originally composed in the 'American'." I disagree, only because Dragomoschenko's lyric seems to me to have no real American counterparts; its mode recalls Rimbaud and Trakl, Celan and possibly Aimé Césaire. True, as Michael Molnar says in his useful Introduction, Dragomoschenko explodes such classical Russian traditions as the "accepted concept of poetic persona and its formal devices" (p. 12). True moreover, that, as Dragomoschenko himself explains in a headnote, prefaced with the figure:

OPSIS
SYN
TAX

"non-coincidence, deviation, residue. . . . Not signification but stratification" are at the core of this poetics (pp. 17–18). But if the Language poets's refusal of the authoritative lyric self is shared by Dragomoschenko, his poetry is much more oriented toward imaginative transformation than is, say, Hejinian's own. "Invention," he writes, "is selection—from the unidentifiable. Imagination is the intransitive action of anticipation" (p. 19). The *strangeness* at the core of Dragomoschenko's (and, similarly, of Parshchikov's) work can be seen in a poem like "Footnotes," whose first sixteen lines go like this:

> You chose the taste of dust.
> Why milk? It's a question of habit. . .
> The taste of dust, forever familiar, doesn't obligate you to
> anything
> The sting of dust isn't noticeable at first—
> There is more of me where I forget about myself
> These bright shallow niches, hollows, empty bowls,
> collar bones pristine as if sources of fire
> had let them drink, leaching out the color. A habit?
> The taste of milk is the taste of real dust
> "I knew your hair in the heat, I called each hair by name"
> Time flowed between the stones as hours echoed
> Dust over the roofs
> In the hand iron and cherries burn equally
> I knew you in a single word completely—forgotten. . .
> as if behind a skin of sun that turned into the reverse side
> of touch
> the sexless seed from which time has been subtracted. (p. 79)

As in a Hejinian or an Ashbery poem, the pronouns here remain unspecified, the images defy all logical relationship, and lyric as self-expression gives way to mythic distancing. But for Dragomoschenko, language is not the always already used and appropriated, the pre-formed and pre-fixed that American poets feel they must wrestle with. On the contrary, Dragomoschenko insists that "language cannot be appropriated because it is perpetually incomplete" (p. 21) and, in an aphorism reminiscent of Rimbaud's "Je est un autre," "poetry is always somewhere else" (pp. 20–21). Thus nature imagery, no longer a major force in the poetry of the digitalized consumer world of the West, still plays the major role: in "Footnotes," the memory of dust (its taste and sting) blends with the memory of milk, both of them oddly associated with hollow surfaces—"niches," "empty bowls," "collar bones pristine as if sources of fire."

Why collar bone as source of fire? And why, a few lines further down, is it that "in the hand iron and cherries burn equally"? Dragomoschenko's is a poem of the body, of the "skin of sun that turned into the reverse side of touch," of a touch that "knew your hair in the heat" and could "call each hair by name." "Footnotes" modulates its key terms—dust, milk, hair, skin, seed, stone, bone, snow—to create a startling memory image—of Mother "stand[ing] over us at the foot of the bed," of "the boards of a fence," of "Gloomy apples hang[ing] in the mirror"—all negative images that are nevertheless poised on the brink of sexual ecstasy: "a willow which suddenly caught fire," "The hundredth sun rushed into view." "If you simply mention birds," says the poet, "like wine they're sure to appear."

In Part 2, from which I have been quoting, the image of the "hundredth sun" is followed by the lines:

> In the grass a raven. A raven in the grass
> don't say in emerald grass
> Nobody writes that way anymore (p. 80)

The last line recalls, of course, Ashbery's "You can't say it that way any more" ("And Ut Pictura Poesis is her Name"), and Dragomoschenko is abjuring the adjectival, the traditionally descriptive. What differentiates him from Ashbery, though, is that despite the reference to "a white jet fighter entwined / in the texture of the day / evaporating," Dragomoschenko is not interested in the pop culture, the banality, the media clichés that Ashbery incorporates and parodies in his poetry. Soviet culture, as the *Leningrad* poets so acutely note, is at a very different stage from our own and Dragomoschenko's work, even in Lyn Hejinian's translation, differs accordingly. Parody, pastiche, even irony—these play a subordinate role to passion, and especially to *vision*. The big question, then, is how this variant of postmodernism will effect our own.

Sections of Lyn Hejinian's *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel* have been appearing in various journals including *Raddle Moon* and *Writing*, and the Zasterle Press (La Laguna, Spain, 1991) has now issued a section called *The Hunt*, dedicated to Zina Dragomoschenko, the poet's wife. Here is "Chapter Seven":

> Great calm is an objection.
> A deep frost rises and then sleep proceeds
> An enormous sleep composed
> A vast subordination
> In the solitude of thickness, weight—on an ice
> —each night I was a fossil
> But I was no witness
> Or sometimes my sleep was reduced to its kitchen
> The steams were trapped
> I dreamed of hunters
> One night I dreamed of the concentration that is
> haunted
> Each hand seen, and the objects of momentum
> thicken
> Russian
> With caution
> Suddenly I realize that my dreams sustain no
> skepticism (p. 11)

The strangeness of this poem has less to do with syntactic indeterminacy or the scrambling of causal and logical sequence that we have come to expect from Hejinian, than with imagery, incantatory repetition combined with assonance ("sleep," "dream," "each"), and the suspension of daytime consciousness characteristic of Dragomoschenko's work. The Russian poet would not be likely to write "Great calm is an objection," or refer to "An enormous sleep composed / A vast subordination," nor would he conceive of "sleep as reduced to its kitchen." These are the kind of shifts from concrete to abstract, from noun designating a state of being to noun designating a specific setting, that we expect of Hejinian. But the "solitude of thickness" in the "deep frost," the dream of "hunters," of "each hand seen," a dream that, as the poet comes to realize, "sustain[s] no skepticism"—here we may detect a new note in Hejinian's work.

The "concentration that is haunted" also characterizes Rosmarie Waldrop's new book *Peculiar Motions* (Kelsey St. Press, 1990), which is illustrated by a set of "S/kins" designed by Jennifer Macdonald. The latter's Preface explains:

> In *Peculiar Motions*, judgments and linear movements are constantly diverted and sent some place unexpected. In S/kins, a series of visual interventions conceived for *Peculiar Motions*, the images take as their point of departure the reoccuring references to skin in the text. . . . By employing both literal skins (of the body) and fictive skins (so-called in manufacturing), the meaning of the corporeal remains neither containable nor conclusive.

Macdonald's illustrations (phototechnology on vellum) provide a striking complement to such Waldrop lyrics as "Acquired Pores," which begins:

> *blemishes in the grain*
> *skin flings its shadow*
> *then though implicit*
> *in warm rain the gesture*
> *"what a day"*

On the facing page, we see what look like bits of skin peeling off a textured gray surface. And underneath the transparent skin-page, we can make out the last lines of the previous poem, "Representation," which refer to *"gestures [that] link / closely to the bone / the words / give notice."* "Closely to the bone": is there an affinity here to Dragomoschenko's "Root's bones and silver coins. . .buried between them"? Or is it merely coincidence? It will be interesting to see, as the nineties progress, how the rapprochement between the New American and the New Soviet Poetry plays itself out.

—Marjorie Perloff

The Limits of the Phantasmatic

Over forty years after Artaud's death, the final volumes of his complete works are finally appearing. This publication by Gallimard continues the monumental task so meticulously effectuated by Paule Thévenin since 1946. The most recent addition to the *Oeuvres complètes* is volume XXV, constituting the fourth volume of the *Cahiers du retour à Paris* (his Paris notebooks). These notebooks are the continuation of the *Cahiers de Rodez*

(OC; XV-XXI, begun in February 1945); the present volume covers the months of December 1946-January 1947. A synopsis of these voluminous works would be impossible, for they contain a veritable stream-of-consciousness notation of Artaud's last years: paranoid delusions, glossolalia, initial versions of poems and drafts of articles, practical notes, quotidian observations, rages of fear and hatred, diatribes, polemics, incantations, miraculations, and whatever else the psyche permits to be put into words. We read, as a typical example of his polemic against religion *and* Eros:

> The incubus is the enemy of the march of time,
> which it transforms into eternity,
> the succubus is that which tastes
> the price of time
> by the Eternal One assassinated. *[OC;* XXV, 88]

In short, these notebooks contain the raw material of his last, and perhaps greatest, works, such as *Artaud le mômo, Ci-gît, Suppôts et supplications, Van Gogh le suicidé de la société, Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu,* as well as some of his most astounding letters. (Many of Artaud's last works have been superbly translated by Clayton Eshleman, and I anxiously await the publication of his *Rodez and After* volume.) When toward the end of his life Artaud was approached by Gallimard to publish his complete works, Artaud insisted that the first volume—including his earliest poems and his first surrealist works—begin with three new texts: "Préambule," "Adresse au Pape," "Adresse au Dalaï-Lama." (The initial drafts of these texts appear in volume XXII.) The two "addresses" are revised versions of his famous diatribes published in the volume of *La révolution surréaliste* #3 that he edited in 1925. Artaud desired to recreate his own origins, insisting that we read his life-work beginning at the end, establishing a textual loop where origin and telos are conflated to form a truly "complete" work. This is a sure sign that his notebooks must be read not only as the matrix from which arose his last "finished" works, but also as providing material indispensable for a much needed rereading of his earlier, and most famous, texts.

Unfortunately, this notice is also the appropriate place to report the recent scandal involving Artaud. At the time of this writing, the second-generation inheritors of Artaud's estate (his nephews), have blocked publication of the *Oeuvres complètes* in the courts, demanding further rights over these works. Besides the moral outrage that this action must provoke—given the nearly half century long dedication to Artaud's work by Thévenin and Gallimard—it is also a major blow to Artaud scholarship, as the next volume (which already exists, but whose distribution has been withheld) contains the dossier of the famed "Conférence du Vieux-

Colombier," one of the major late texts without which a clear assessment of Artaud's ultimate work is impossible.

*

Along with Daniel Paul Schreber (on whose memoirs Freud based his theory of psychosis), Artaud is certainly the most famous schizophrenic writer of the century. Yet there are multitudes of lesser known, yet fascinating, "mad" writers whose works deserve attention—not only diagnostic and linguistic study, but also literary consideration. Among the first great discoveries of such texts were those made by Jean Dubuffet, published in the *Fascicules de l'Art Brut*, and later anthologized in part by Michel Thévoz in *Ecrits bruts* (Paris: P.U.F., 1979).

There has finally appeared an English language compilation of such writing, edited by John G. H. Oakes, *In the Realms of the Unreal* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991). This book is divided into two distinct parts: American and European works. Many of the American works are clearly those of writers and poets who, while perhaps mentally ill, are certainly well aware of our poetic heritage: we often find among these works a tone, even if not a voice or a style, made familiar to us by the writings of Sylvia Plath. Many of these works could certainly find their way into our "little poetry magazines"—a fact mitigating against their consideration as *écrits bruts*. Yet some fine discoveries have been made. In the diary of the "Living Museum" at the Creedmore Psychiatric Center in New York is a short work by one of the patients, Richard Lax, entitled "Utopian Space Bible"—it combines the best of fantasy and apocalyptic vision à la Burroughs and Ballard, plus a definite hint of T.V. sci-fi, but in a distinct and troubling voice. It begins with an introductory prayer: "See God, King of Creation, Lord of Life your slave-rigger Atom, a star going Nova (heart attack) burning out in search of himself. . ." Or consider the poignant poem, painted anonymously on a door at Creedmore by another patient, concluding with: "I die in she-devil: she devily arms." Yet another anonymous poem reveals a complexity of word-play worthy of the great *fou littéraire*, Jean Pierre-Brisset (himself made famous in Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir.)* Quite different is the diary of Mary MacLane, written in 1901 in Butte, Montana, an example of pure, if unusual, Americana. Yet the great revelation is that of the writings of Henry Darger (d. 1972), already acknowledged as one of the most renowned painters of American Art Brut, and whose 19,000 page diary is among the greatest documents of this sort. It is, in fact, a terrible shame that this work—as well as most of his drawings—remain inaccessible to most literary scholars and art historians, and that only three pages of his vast writings were here made available for publication.

The European material—excellently translated by Sophie Hawkes and Roger Cardinal from the French, and by Claudia Stoeffler, Peter Hoffman and Sarah Hoffman from the German—includes many works already familiar from Dubuffet's and Thévoz's presentations, plus an important selection of writings culled from the archives of the Prinzhorn collection (the most famous collection of the art of the insane, and one that greatly influenced the Surrealists via the publication of Dr. Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* in Germany in 1922), and a dossier of the writings of Adolf Wölfli, the most famous *artiste brut*, compiled by Elka Spoerri, director of the Fondation Wölfli.

If *In the Realms of the Unreal* can be faulted, it would be for quantitative reasons, i.e, mainly for the frustration of having such tiny samplings of so many original works: over 200 pieces by nearly 100 writers in a relatively slim volume. Otherwise, despite the derivative and uneven quality of some of the American material—which I take as a sign of editorial adventurousness in a highly uncharted domain, rather than as a structural fault—this is a book that should proffer revelations, and perhaps produce nightmares, for all.

*

One of the great ironies of modern art history occurred last year in Austria. The prestigious Oskar Kokoschka Prize was awarded to the members of Gugging, which is the artists' collective for mentally ill patients at the psychiatric hospital located just outside of Vienna. Their works can be seen in several recent publications, notably: *L'Art Brut* #12 (Lausanne: Collection de l'Art Brut, 1983); *Künstler aus Gugging* (Bibliotheks und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenberg, 1989); *Portraits From the Outside* (New York: Parsons School of Design, 1990).

Just over a half century ago, Kokoschka's art was compared to the art of the mentally ill in order to reveal the presumed "decadence" of his work, in the infamous *Entartete Kunst* ("Degenerate Art") exhibit organized by the Nazi ministry of culture in Munich in 1937. This exhibition was recently reconstructed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in a show and excellent catalogue entitled, *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, curated by Stephanie Barron. The original Nazi version of the show attracted record audiences (over two million visitors during its four months in Munich alone), and it was, ironically, one of the great exhibitions of modern art, consisting of over 650 works by such artists as Kirchner, Nolde, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Lissitzky, Marc, Schwitters, Picasso, Klee, Chagall, Ernst, Grosz, Dix, and Kokoschka himself. Wishing to reveal the "degeneracy" of such art by means of comparison with what were deemed overtly "primitive" or "atavistic" works, this show had the added

ironic advantage of being among the first to exhibit comparisons between modernist works and both the art of the insane and tribal art.

The catalogue of the LACMA show is an invaluable historic and aesthetic document: it includes a detailed room-by-room reconstruction of the original Munich show, providing not only information on the artworks, but also recording the accompanying Nazi anti-modernist propaganda; also included is a facsimile reprint with English translation of the pamphlet produced for the Nazi show; and a highly informative essay about the auction of such works in 1939 at the Galerie Fischer in Switzerland—a quirk of fate which saved many masterpieces from destruction. Furthermore, there are several essays about lesser known aspects of the campaign against "degenerate art," notably on music and film in Nazi Germany.

Adolf Ziegler, who organized the Munich show in 1937, opened the exhibition with a speech where he pronounced the following: "All around us you see the monstrous offspring of insanity, impudence, ineptitude, and sheer degeneracy. What this exhibition offers inspires horror and disgust in us all." Considering the increased desire for censorship of the arts, increased anti-intellectualism, and decreased NEA, NEH and university funding in this country, I cannot overestimate the timeliness and importance of this LACMA show, as a critical voice in the struggle against a malignant and catastrophic vision that continues to plague art and thought in our time.

*

The writings of Pierre Klossowski are among the most underrated and unread—especially in this country—of that generation of French intellectuals who formed the basis of what constitutes present day post-structuralist thought. For example, his crucial work on Nietzsche, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*—which influenced Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, and most other major readers of Nietzsche—still hasn't appeared in English translation, twenty years after its publication, and well after many lesser books, not to mention all the major ones, on Nietzsche have appeared.

Yet the situation is slowly changing. Following their translation of Klossowski's novel, *The Baphomet*, Stephen Sartarelli and Sophie Hawkes have just produced excellent translations of the convoluted yet elegant prose of two of Klossowski's long essays, *Diana at her Bath* and *The Women of Rome*, united in one volume (Boston: Eridanos Press, 1990). These difficult texts disclose the central passions behind Klossowski's thought, where theological drama intersects philosophical perversion, and private erotic phantasms collide with mythical exigencies. In *Diana at her Bath*, the theophany of the goddess Diana is explained in terms of the consequences of Actaeon's theological affront: his hubris is the condition

for the goddess' own self-reflection. Yet perhaps the true protagonist of this drama is that daemon who serves as the intermediary between goddess and man, the daemon who "becomes Actaeon's imagination and Diana's mirror." For in this dialectic between the mortal and the divine—two mutually incompatible realms—a third term is necessary to create the impossible desire at the core of this myth. Actaeon's gaze—the daemon's trick—is the condition by which Diana's chastity can be experienced as an accident of the body, and thus become eroticized, an object of desire. Actaeon's tragic fate—transformation into the prey of the huntress, in perfect ironic symmetry with Actaeon's own visual stalking of Diana—is none other than that of all other humans before the might of the gods: an emblematic death.

In *The Women of Rome*, Klossowski—following Bachofen's revelations in his classic study, *Mutterrecht*—investigates certain ancient Roman erotic practices, notably the *floralia*, the erotic stage shows, and the practice of ritual prostitution. Klossowski traces out the metamorphosis from the sacred, hierogamic prostitution rituals of the Asiatic Mother Goddess cults through to the Roman theatrical staging by courtesans of divine adulteries. Roman eroticism is, in fact, a function of progressive desacralization, where mythical themes lose their theological function and become the subject of spectacles—whence the liberation of erotic pleasure, marking a radical transformation in the history of the eroticized body.

—Allen S. Weiss

Benjamin Friedlander, *Time Rations* (O Books, 1991)

I find myself increasingly depressed by the lethargy of poetry, not just "workshop" but avant-, post-, or anything else manicured by the weary art of artlessness, outfitted in prosodic versions of designer-tattered jeans, and above all simpering with a doggy desperation to be liked and petted. It comes as a great edification, then, to find *Time Rations*, which asserts its lyricism slantwise, as through venetian blinds, and is so gratifyingly open about its "Wiggy programs put on step-down / splash-dab miscues of the source." (p. 13)

The book appears with afterbirth intact, placental matter part of the ambient *sense* among the many senses made. So the poems are printed

amidst a cascade of sloughings—dates, places, temperature (Fahrenheit, I presume), dedicatees, even lines with deletions stroked through and question marks adjacent, indicating the limbo of revision as something not so much temporal as spatial, lurking in the precinct of the page, shadowing the text. There is no table of contents or index, so the poems are met as itinerants, palpable in their deficiencies, but alertly *human,* salutary in their wanderlust as well as their inertia (which sometimes, on probing, turns out to be stubbornness).

A line across the top of a page (indicating a section break?: so often, the most rudimentary probings in to the nature of *Time Rations* turn quizzicality into a polymathic energy that has no proper object) is followed by a single line of text:

> The poles of my affection made equators everywhere. (p. 49)

The temporal balance of precessional cycles is the ostensible theme of the book, if we could endow "theme" with a mask that would make one think "vertigo." One poem is titled "MY ONLY MODEL IS THE SOLID PANIC LOOSENED IN THE POETRY OF THE ABSOLUTE MASTER, TIME" (p. 12)—a laudable guru, but fellow-travellers of more recognizably human comportment grace the book with a sense of the lived quotidian (companions like Andrew Schelling and Pat Reed, but also an interesting array of explicit mentors, Blackburn, Eigner, Grenier, Howe, McNaughton, Ginsberg, Williams). Friedlander's work nourishes the jottings, doodles, flashes out of which prosodic luminescence is achieved; but he seems committed primarily to the notion that the real poetry inheres in quality of attention; the style of attitude, preparedness; the inclination to be ready, and the satisfaction in being surprised.

> The car with doors open lit up at 4 a.m.
>
> end of the bridge, & the highway
>
> patrolman a boot up on the
>
> bumper, speaking to the moon. . .
>
> It is robotics we derive
> from now, wordlessly. (p.55)

Charles Olson's most implacable, abrupt, and irresistible essay was, fittingly, "The Resistance." Friedlander is an heir of resistance, with this additional burden: that poetry itself must now be resisted, and overcome,

in our engagement with the robotic continuum of mind absorbing body, body absorbing tool, tool absorbing soul. "There is a desisting that becomes heroic / & edges out the comedy of extroverted blabbing." (p. 16) The innovation here is to recognize the persistence of the heroic, but find a comic, not a tragic, destination for heroism as such. Finally, there is a handsome skepticism attending Friedlander's romance of writing, which preserves the seduction of adventure while remaining cogently pragmatic: "Having a table to bear down on won't make life any easier"—to which the retort: "Doing it wrong on purpose, making it stick." (p. 22)

*

W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990)

A beautiful book that elaborates the convergence of cultural eclecticism and social intensities in a decade that, Lhamon complains, has been passed over in favor of the '60s. Lhamon sets out to reclaim the 1950s from the nostalgic retrospection that sees it only as a wasteland with a handful of anomalous supercharged dynamos adrift on its surface, waiting to be plucked back to the future of our culinary-custodial postmodernism. But Lhamon astutely recognizes the minutiae of transgression developing in the '50s by way of passion and discipline rather than, in the conventional view, kicks and inattention. *Deliberate Speed* therefore makes a convincing blend of its diversity of heroes: Ralph Ellison, Jackson Pollock, Chuck Berry, Robert Frank, Miles Davis, Jack Kerouac, Walker Evans, Little Richard, Ornette Coleman garnering the most attention; but the ambiance of the book is derived from well-informed and intimate excursions into innumerable other figures who periodically recur, such as Olson and Ginsberg, Agee and Heller, Monk and Bird, Nicholas Ray and Elia Kazan (and Brando and Dean), Clement Greenberg, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, not to mention the curious but effective prominence of figures from other times, like Eliot, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Nabokov, and a surprising but altogether relevant detour through Wittgenstein's writing practice as a parable of "deliberate speed" as a way, finally, to wrap the whole bundle up into a squalling knot deposited squarely on the doorstep of Thomas Pynchon, through whom the link with the present is emphatically made in the final chapter.

Lhamon's work is a welcome corrective to conventional surveys (Elvis is barely mentioned, for instance)—not that there are any surprises, but neither is the book burdened by the ideological assertiveness that made Andrew Ross' crisp study, *No Respect* (1989), come across more like a

vendetta than it needed to have been. Both Ross and Lhamon focus on the way the "mass cultural host" could no longer be avoided in the '50s—nor could it be domesticated: it was, after all, the great *domesticator*—but had, to be confronted, addressed from within. The artist had no choice but to be a parasite. Miles Davis' "My Funny Valentine" and Robert Frank's photos celebrate the sheer *difference* of American corn (as did Kerouac in his recording of his spectacular rap on bop), a difference that inaugurated cultural independence more effectively than anything else in the intervening century and a half of political separatism. Lhamon takes *Lolita* as the prolific allegory of that moment when (in Nabokov's words) "luminous globules of gonadal glow. . .travel up the opalescent sides of jukeboxes." "The year *Lolita* appeared in Paris, 1955," Lhamon notices, "was the year McDonald's raised its golden arches in America, the year *Playboy* first printed nude photos." It's a moment when the alignment of sociocultural planets conspired in a sort of conceptual eclipse, which we may still be gliding under the shadow of. As icon of this conjunction I like Lhamon's description of a General Electric ad (again from 1955), showing "Atom man as a smiling giant hygienically costumed in a white jumpsuit with a matching white cowl. He is a priest for a new era, plugging in an atomic power cord for a petite housewife. She wears the generic fifties apron cut to the same pattern as the one Jim Backus wore playing Jim Stark's father in *Rebel Without a Cause* that same year. . . . The two figures are grinning uneasily, doubtless as embarrassed by their costumes as by their subliminal suggestiveness. The picture is of the moment before initiation, sexual or nuclear, when authority is pressing to overcome resistant or nervous reluctance from the innocent partner. As the accompanying text confirms, 'working with the government, private companies have already begun to turn a major source of fear into a major source of fuel. . . . As we see it, this is progress in the American way.'" The prophetic depravity of cognitive fast-forward is our direct link to the 1950s, the legacy of which is exquisitely reflected and engaged in *Deliberate Speed*.

*

Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism and Structure of a "True" Image* (Blackwell, 1991)
Claude Gandelman, *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* (Indiana University Press, 1991)

"He believed that the things inside his body and the things outside his body were having a conversation through a

piece of skin. And he could never tell
to which of the sides his skin actually
belonged . . ."

—Toby MacLennan, *Singing the Stars* (Coach House, 1983)

Skin isn't much attended to—not the way hearing and seeing are, and even tasting and smelling figure more prominently in the various cultural indicators that yammer through the airwaves, or creep up subtly from the dizzy spirals of personal association, accidence, enticement.[1] Maybe this is because, as in MacLennan's fantasy, epidermal association is ambiguously poised at the juncture of inner and outer, self and other, and therefore not readily distinguishable as either specimen or map. By one of those fortuitous coincidences of publication Ewa Kuryluk and Claude Gandelman suddenly offer an embarrassment of riches in their complementary speculations on dermatoid parchments.

A few years ago I spent a long time transfixed at the National Gallery by Hans Memling's tiny oil on board, "Saint Veronica," in which the turbaned lady gingerly dangles an impeccably rendered cloth bearing the luminous image of Christ's face. Memling's painting is reproduced on the dustjacket of Kuryluk's book, which provides all the background (and more) I yearned for in the presence of the image. *Veronica and Her Cloth* is about the extensive iconographic tradition to which Memling contributed. Veronica, the name, splits apart into a label, "vera icon," or true image. Kuryluk peruses the Christian obsession with *acheiropoietoi,* meaning images not rendered by hand, of which the most famous (or infamous) is the bleary shadow on the shroud of Turin. The elaborate gushes and rivulets of such *acheiropoietoi* are chronicled meticulously by Kuryluk, but what makes *Veronica and Her Cloth* compelling are the issues that arise in the process. These have to do with with power of touch, with Christ's heuristic propensity for touching as teaching, and with the haptic feminization of a fledgling mystery religion otherwise similar to the male-dominated cult of Mithra.

Quite apart from the religio-historic thesis and exposition, Kuryluk's book activates some fascinating speculations on the nature of touch as mediated through the ancillary (and sometimes competing) media of skin, cloth, veils and shrouds.[2] It is also an extended rumination on menstruation, through the figure of the Hemorrhissa, the unstaunchable woman whose bleeding stopped at Jesus' touch. Christianity in this context emerges detached from its ecclesiastical fetters, reanimated as a theatre of speculations about male beheading and female bleeding, the relative scales of corporeality adhering to substitute skins, and the power of images rendered in such diverse receptacles as womb, mirror, icon, or cloth. The

dermal substrate of mimesis is fabricated in the mask, which at one level is simply the donning of a second skin, an extra coating of corporeality. But paradoxes flow like menses from the enigmatic viscosity of mirrors and eyeballs; and when the imperturbable gaze of the vanished savior stares out at you through the mimetic jelly of eyes miraculously embossed on cloth, as in Memling's Veronica, the attachment of skin to inner or outer realms is altogether conjectural.

Christ reappears *in extenso* as the vibrating skin of the planetary surface in medieval cartography in *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts*. Gandelman's range, not confined to the specifics of an iconographic tradition, is considerably broader than Kuryluk's. So Borges, Kafka, and Klee filter through Whitman, Holbein and Michaelangelo as if they were all transparencies, or at least permeable to incarnate reflection. Drawing on the 19th century art historian Alois Riegl, Gandelman frames his research according to two styles of visualization, optic and haptic. The distinction is between ocular penetration and haptic touching, as means of self-scrutiny. Optics reduces things to outlines, or into linear configurations in which the skeletal essence gleams through obfuscating matter; while haptics searches depths, plangencies, condensed interiorities in infinitely receding series. The optic mode is engaged in a paradoxical intensification of the human by subtraction, of which the exemplary figure is Kafka's hunger artist. The haptic mode culminates in the reflexive detachment of the flayed skin, in which a corporeal density is inverted and objectified as an enigma of tactility.

Gandelman offers a sumptuous array of visual images from some very arcane sources, and the book is a treat on that account alone. But the images are meant to be interactive with literary texts so that, together, they precipitate a kind of ideographic resonance and, following the implications of the title, we begin to see things in texts we thought we were simply reading, and start to detect palpable inscriptions in images we've merely brushed with our eyes. The winding paths, the stark outlines, of optic trajectory across what Gandelman calls "vectorial" space are complexly amplified by the haptic cutting and pasting of collage and montage.[3] *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* can be thought of as an extended meditation on the question, What does showing mean?, and as such intersects with *Veronica and Her Cloth* inasmuch as the iconography always depicts the saint showing us her image. Veronica, "true icon," *shows showing* as she dangles that cloth or extra-dermal skin bearing the imprint of divine incarnation. In the Veronica tradition, showing means holding.

The dream of transparency—the identification of knowledge with vision—needs to be augmented by the haptic experience of vision embedded in flesh, absorbed in a qualifying array of sensations that constitute the tactility of sight and insight. The works by Gandelman and

Kuryluk are enriching speculations in this direction, and welcome correctives to the predominance of "the gaze" as means of thematizing embodiment after the incitements of Foucault and Lacan.[4] The cybernetic modernization of body as flesh+prosthesis quickens to fantasies involving the redistribution of parts, so the question of power can be conveniently displayed in (and abridged as) cyclopean reverie. These oculocentric mythologies derive from the developing "realism" of an eye appended to photographic, telescopic, and microscopic apparatus. So there is no "disembodied eye," but the powerful cultural allure of ocular mobility dramatizing itself in such scenarios as Bataille's phallic eye absorbed in a vagina, the pineal eye of phrenology, the hermetic seal of the pyramidal eye on federal currency, the balloon eye of Redon, the razored eye in Bunuel, and so on—all of which reverberate with the peril of detachment as much as the exhilaration of scopic independence. Reading is not identical to viewing, nor is sight equivalent to the gaze. "Reading" extends from the scrutiny of fleeting intimations in facial expression to the anatomical wiggles of anthropomorphic alphabets; from texture to text; from flesh as the innermost proprioceptive reach of the world to the outermost bag of the soul.

The prodigious realm of fabrics which collect our psychic peregrinations includes not only text and canvas, movie screen and vibrating tympanum of the hi-fi speaker, but our own skins, the "coat of your own self," as Olson puts it, "the beasts / emblazoned on you." The Eleusinian mystery of showing—the arousal of soul into motion—revealed vegetable matter as a woven template of flesh. We're related to *the seen* not by sight but by "sense," if by that we accede to the sensory plenitude of the world as a continuous body, a bodily continuum, a dermal gift, "un solo cuerpo" (Neruda). The "true images" of the Veronica *acheiropoietoi* involve flesh and blood, relating cognition to the eye always with the reminder of the ways eyes also finger and caress their objects and, conversely, the way corporeality as a whole fixes its postural gaze on the ambient world. The "vera icon" speaks of images not made by hand and not seen by the eye, in which the synesthetic options of sense testify to a constant migration of partitions, the pages of a book like a sequence of skins out of which peer the jostling muzzles of an animate alphabet, reflecting the mystery of our extrojected selves known inside out in resoundings of the barometric density of our cultural cumulus.

—Jed Rasula

Notes

[1]Diane Ackerman notes this, in an attempt to compensate somewhat for the misproportion, in her beautifully written *Natural History of the Senses* (Random House, 1990). Didier Anzieu, a French psychoanalyst, has proposed in *The Skin Ego* (Yale, 1989) that we rethink the ego not from the bunker mentality model of the interiorized homunculus, but at the periphery,

the threshold of touch, sensation, identity and difference. He has also developed this concept for aesthetics in *Le Corps de l'oeuvre* (Gallimard, 1981).

[2]There are resonances from vernacular American culture Kuryluk does not take advantage of, like Sam Cooke's song about "touching the hem of his garment"—or innumerable other gospel variants thereof—not to mention the idiomatic expression "Give me some skin!"

[3]Gandelman is hardly the first to note the corporeal implications of modernist methods of text and image production. *Word Cultures*, Robin Lydenberg's fascinating meditation on William Burroughs' cut-ups, for instance, is vitally alert to the dynamics of textual incarnation.

[4]Not that this vein is exhausted. See for instance Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (Zone/MIT, 1990) for an "illuminating" discussion of 19th century physiological speculation, and the epistemological cultivation of the aesthetic subject. Crary offers a most intriguing account of the conceptual background of the emerging scopic drives of the 20th century. A useful meditation on the modern erasure of the animate body as a precondition of robotic invincibility is *Technology as Symptom and Dream* by Robert Romanyshyn (Routledge 1989); a more politically sophisticated exposition of the situation at present is Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991).

One of the mishaps of the Derridean critique of phenomenology, I suspect, is that the very substantial ground established by Merleau-Ponty speculations on embodiment (not to mention such German innovators as Plessner and Plügge) has been elided under pressures to politize the topic, resulting in a fixation on the supervisory power of the optic gaze and the penal model of the opticon (the optic icon!) as the figure of modernity. In recent years, the most vigorous and comprehensive meditation—and I stress the term—on the issue of embodiment that I'm aware of has been undertaken by David Michael Levin, not suprisingly following phenomenological precedent, in *The Body's Recollection of Being, The Opening of Vision* and *The Listening Self* (all Routledge: 1985, 1988, 1989).

John Matthias, *A Gathering of Ways* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press / Ohio University Press, 1991)

In 1976 Dr. Henry Chadwick suggested the very real possibility that Priscillian of Avila is buried at Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. Priscillian's distinction is to have been the first schismatic and heretic executed by secular authorities at the insistence of orthodox Christian churchmen. He died, historians say, in 365. By the early seventh century a cult—Priscillianism—was established with Compostela as its center. Chadwick may have unearthed one of the more spectacular ironies in ecclesiastical history, for Compostela is famous today, and has been famous since the ninth century, for being the resting place not of Priscillian but of St. James. After Theodimer's rediscovery of the cult site in the ninth century, Compostela became the destination of pilgrims. So we have one cult on top

of another, the irony being that the church consolidated its political authority on the dust of a Gnostic! Everyone was swindled by the rumor of James in Spain. Even the enemy knew that something was special about Santiago de Compostela. In 997 Almanzor stormed into Galicia and carried off the bells of Compostela—to Córdoba—in a calculated affront to one of Christian Spain's most holy places.

In 1987 John Matthias trudged several of the "glory roads" on the way to Compostela, never quite reaching it, and went off to write a poem about pilgrimages and journeying, myth, history, and place. He is, of course, not the first poet to be fascinated by the clotted gore and intellectual and architectural monuments of the Middle Ages. Pound and Eliot appear in the poem, on their walking tour of Provence, just as in the first of the book's three poems about routes, rivers, and roads, Edward Thomas is heard from while annotating the Icknield Way. (In the second poem a partly apocryphal history of the Midwest is the subject matter.) It's the third poem, on the roads to Compostela, that seems to me the most successful, for there the writing is impressive, even if sometimes its Poundian moments summon a shadow that dwarfs Matthias. Though I don't know this for sure, I suspect that Matthias has been called "Poundian" before, but screw the new if we can at least have some level of competence. While Matthias makes much of the fact that *trobar* means "to find" and mentions in one of his endnotes that this journey to Compostela restored his physical and spiritual health, the poem is most interesting for the splendor of its language—a very special if limited pleasure in the sonority of vowels and consonants arranged in a manner not altogether unfamiliar. I don't mean to sound as if I'm apologizing for his technique: what's not familiar these days? If I believed that such categories meant much any more, I'd call this writing, at its best moments, good minor poetry. Matthias has borrowed much beyond technique from Pound (and David Jones) as he pursues the spirit of place, but I suppose his own sense of history as it is entangled in geography and myth might be seen by some as colored by a kind of antiquarianism. Matthias acknowledges problems of textuality between us and the sore feet of the tenth century. But it is never altogether clear—to me at least—why any of this history matters to him. Perhaps the endnote about his own condition is a pertinent gloss? Perhaps he is, like Pound, in pursuit of the light of Eleusis? Perhaps it is the sheer strangeness and fragility of his historical material that fascinates him. Unfortunately he resorts at times to images that rather predictably point to cultural and historical decline. Is this Spengler revisited? Pound knew that tune. All roads have their Shell and Burger King. I know it too. They're right up my street. But sometimes I *need* gas.

*

Nathaniel Tarn, *Seeing America First* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1989)

If the date of publication is accurate, Tarn's book is two years old now. Has it received the accolades it deserves? I'll admit that in what I'd seen of his work before this book I'd been more impressed by Tarn's erudition than by his writing. Not so in the six "narratives" framing the rest of this book's poems. These are not really narrative poetry at all but long meditative lyrics powerful enough to give me hope that the genre is not altogether extinct or hackneyed. Their rhythms and syntactical structures are prosaic, conversational, and yet finally more accomplished than much of more adventuresome poetry. The "Rectangles" that are the bulk of the book are a kind of prose poetry hammered into visual shape. I don't see how they would lose much in other shapes. Besides the "Rectangles" and the "Narratives" there is a sequence at the book's center called "Persephone West," an almost surreal reworking of the myth in California. A few of the "Rectangles" seem little more than ruminative journal entries, which is how (I confess) much of Tarn's poetry before *Seeing America First* has struck me.

What does Tarn believe? About how many other of the hordes of poets frozen in the polemics of one or another post-modernism would such a question even make sense? He believes, it seems, in parallel worlds:

> The substance of the vision is that we are not
> living in the true, aboriginal, archaeological time
> and are not, in fact living in true space either.
> This is something we have here which was once true time
> and space, but now no longer so. We have imposed on things
> our mental grids, first and foremost: time and space.
> Divining this to be a fault, we have then declared
> that, in the truth of it, all ours is relative
> whereas the absolute: it has no time / no space!
> Survive as best we can with this dichotomy, perpetually
> trying to get ourselves out of our time into the "timeless."
> But the true time flows out there unimpeded, just alongside
> our world; the true space, likewise, stretches, boundless,
> over the universe—but it does *stretch*,
> it does not vanish in some "no space," "Not this / not that,"
> some "neither / nor" our teachers sell us.

This is visionary poetry which refuses transcendence. The gigantic calm of Tarn's work rests in his ability to reconcile us to the *dream* of paradise:

Friends: we think we have long since outlived the dream
But we are constantly outliving the dream
and yet the dream remains alive with an enormous life.

Difficult to excerpt these long poems without making Tarn seem didactic, which he is not. The sense of beneficence (however illusory, however circumscribed by the language that writes the silence Tarn pursues) one gets reading this book should not make us overlook its wit. In one "rectangle" Tarn has been watching a parade of extinct American cars:

Adios European time! Parthenike, Virgine!
Arms up, pits bare, brand name on buttock
short breasts flattened like blasted buds
mortal, in the explosion of her humanity:
kiss America's ass: not designed to last!

Caustic and reassuring, Tarn's "voices" are remarkably various—Buddha sitting down with Baudrillard.

—Keith Tuma

Canto General, Pablo Neruda, translated by Jack Schmitt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 400 pp.

Canto general is the work in which Pablo Neruda finalized his identity as a completely political poet. In the late forties, while he was in the midst of writing it, he was already a major figure in Chilean politics, a senator, a presidential power broker, and the campaign manager for Gonzalez Videla, who was elected President. After Videla backed away from his former allies, the Communists, eventually outlawing them, Neruda became Videla's chief accuser, and had to flee Chile for his life. *Canto general* was finished just before Neruda escaped over the Andes, eventually making it to Europe.

Two decades later Neruda devoted the first half of his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize to an evocation of this escape. The trip was quite harsh and dangerous on occasion. Neruda was led along faint mountain

trails by four machete-wielding cowboys, who at one point deposited some coins in an ox-skull that stood as a communal piggy-bank in an isolated meadow and then did a silent dance around it.[1]

In another reminiscence, Neruda describes the conclusion of the trip:

> In Paris. . . . Picasso was waiting for me. . . . During these days a Peace Congress was being celebrated in Paris. I showed up there at the last minute to read some of my poems. Everyone applauded and embraced me.[2]

Presidential politics, mountain wilderness, mountaineers and ox-skulls, Paris, Picasso and the Nobel Prize—to evoke the cultural space traversed, one could think of Pound in the late thirties and forties, venerating strong mountain wheat (if not the people who grew it), speaking for Mussolini, going to Washington in an attempt to talk Roosevelt out of opposition to fascism, ending up caged in Pisa. But Pound's cultural sorties were hideously solipsistic, where Neruda's were part of a movement that was effective enough to trigger US intervention in Chile in 1973.

Besides enhancing Neruda's stature as a cultural figure, the drama leading to his escape permeates the writing of the poem, which is absolutely politicized. But to say this does not mean that it is not also "poetic." For Neruda, political poetry did not involve any curtailment of subject matter; the adjective in *Canto general* indicates the domain claimed: everything. In fact, given Neruda's Marxism, for a poem to be truly political it would have to deal with everything. In practice this means a poetic history of South America beginning with an oceanic prehistory:

> Before the wig and the dress coat
> there were rivers, arterial rivers:
> there were cordilleras, jagged waves where
> the condor and the snow seemed immutable [13]

following through the formation of South American nation-states to the specifics of Chilean politics in the late forties and ending the particularity of Neruda writing:

> here I leave
> my *Canto general* written
> on the run, singing beneath
> the clandestine wings of my country.
> Today, 5 February, in this year
> of 1949, in Chile, in "Godemar

de Chena," a few months before
I turned forty-five. [400]

For the story of a continent's history to end at the point of the fugitive-narrator's pen implies a tremendous confidence in the poet's place in history and the poem's efficacy. Neruda's confidence seems justified. His uniting of populism with high-cultural centrality might well be the envy of poets writing in English. Yeats is a somewhat comparable figure, but Neruda's allegiance to the peasantry was based on their economic needs not the piquancy of their language and myths; and he certainly did not venerate the aristocracy as Yeats did. Whitman is the literary model in English that Neruda was most strongly influenced by, but to make the two poets comparable, one must imagine a Whitman who had genuine political power and immediate appeal for his contemporaries. In the following lines, Neruda seems to be consciously reversing the dynamics of "Song of Myself": the poet doesn't include the masses, he is included in them.

To all, to all,

. . . .
to blue Indians on the shores
of lakes sparkling like glass,
to the shoemaker who at this very hour questions,
nailing leather with ancient hands,
to you, to the one who unknowingly has awaited me,
I belong and acknowledge and sing. [286]

"At this very hour" also reverses the poet's position in history. Whitman ends "Song of Myself" as a wraith calling to a future reader who, like the poet, is solitary.

While Neruda's career demonstrates a cultural size beyond anything in English, the actual writing in *Canto general* is not so capacious. There is invective, exhortation, reportage, and evocation of both history and myth, but not much range in style:

That blue jungle was a grotto,
and in the mystery of tree and darkness
the Guarani sang like
mist that rises in the afternoon,
water upon foliage,
rain on a day of love,
sadness beside the rivers. [26]

[Videla:] Wretched clown, miserable
mixture of monkey and rat, whose tail
is combed with a gold pomade on Wall Street,
it won't be long before you fall from your tree
and become the pile of conspicuous filth
that pedestrians will bypass on the street corners! [201]

As I write my left hand reproaches me.
It tells me: why name them, what are they, what meaning
have they? Why not leave them in their anonymous winter
mud, in the mud that horses urinate?
And my right hand answers: "I was born
to pound on doors, to clench blows,
to light the uttermost shadows
where poisonous spiders feed."
They shall be named. Homeland, you didn't grant me
the sweet privilege of naming just
your flowers and foam,
. . . .
with milk and flesh you gave me the syllables
that will also name the pale worms
that crawl in your womb, [330]

Neruda's political function as a poet is to name and to expand on the attributes of what he's naming. He does this in a consistent style ranging from tender elementalness ("with milk and flesh you gave me the syllables") to simple metaphor ("poisonous spiders"). This makes the translator's task relatively easy. Jack Schmitt for the most part has produced a readable and accurate version, though there are a number of awkward line breaks (which don't seem to reflect the original), and on occasion the tone is way off: "I made lunch for the kiddies and left" [250]; "I defended the patrimony of the people who were mine own" [308].

But the specifics of the translation are not that crucial here. The more important issues are whether what Neruda writes as poetry can be translated, and how effective his forms of political/poetic naming are for contemporary American poets. I have to confess that many of these four hundred pages were more of a chore to read than Neruda's reputation would have predicted. To some extent that is because the unfolding of history has rendered the accuracy of his naming rather suspect:

Stalin erects, cleans, builds, fortifies,
preserves, ponders, protects, nourishes,
but he punishes too.

And that's what I wanted to tell you, comrades:
punishment is needed. [253]

But the more basic problem, for me at least, is with the elemental, timeless words: the *foams, flowers, darks, milks, cups, breads, nights, oceans, stars, dews, sands, crystals.* These form a ground base of plenitude against which Neruda sets his denunciations and ironies. The satires remain powerful, and, unfortunately, quite up-to-date:

When the trumpet blared everything
on earth was prepared
and Jehovah distributed the world
to Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,
Ford Motors and the other entities [179]

But the continual evocation of an achieved totality beyond history registers for me simply as "poetry":

The cup, universal cavity of water,
trembles with your salt and honey,
and nothing lacks in you as it does
in the flayed crater, the savage vessel [338]

In America today such cups trembling with salt and honey, or variations thereof, exist in numerous poems, where, rather than evoking universality, they enclose themselves in an enclave of cultural specialization.

But Neruda most passionately was not a specialist, and he heaps scorn on poets who he feels do not write in history: "Gidists, / intellectuals, Rilkists, / mistificators, false existentialist / sorcerers, surrealist / butterflies burning / in a tomb" [166-7]. This last image probably wouldn't have been available to Neruda without the Surrealists, who undoubtedly influenced Neruda's early, metaphor-crammed work. The populism, essentialism, and willed simplicity of Neruda's middle and later poetry has been a real historical force; but I doubt whether such a poetic stance contains enough power and accuracy to work in America in the nineties.

In the section entitled, "Let the Woodcutter Awaken," Neruda describes America:

I love the farmer's little house. Recent mothers sleep
scented like tamarind syrup, the linens
freshly ironed. Fire
burns in a thousand homes ringed with onions.
(When the men sing at the riverside they have

a hoarse voice like stones from the riverbed. . . .
It's your peace we love, not your mask. [256]

However accurate Neruda's report was in the forties, and it is hard to imagine that such lines ever reflected much reality, today things are reversed: the clean farmers in a clean, providential landscape are one of America's principal masks.

The introduction states that Jack Schmitt has become something of a transplanted Chilean in order to translate Neruda authentically.[3] Previous translators of Neruda such as Alastair Reid and John Felstiner have made similar journeys. On the one hand, of course, this is a useful enterprise, as the self-defined centrality of English speakers always needs information from what that centrality names "the margins." But while one can retrace Neruda's steps and breathe a belated version of his air, one cannot change the climate of reception in America today, where pictures of authenticity are a major meta-commodity, central to the sales of insurance, beer, baseball, and, if one wants to push things far enough, the Pentagon and CIA budgets.

Neruda was unambiguously an enemy of false totalizations—of imperialism in other words. But *Canto general* is not free of its own totalized view of history, one which at times seems premature and forced. So, in many places, the poem needs to be read with grains of (non-elemental) salt.

—Bob Perelman

Notes

[1]See Pablo Neruda, *Passions and Impressions* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), pp 381-4.

[2]Rene de Cosa, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 118.

[3]Pablo Neruda, *Canto general*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), see page 12.

NOTICINGS

First off, congratulations to Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, of Burning Deck, who, with the publication of Barbara Guest's *The Countess from Minneapolis* and Julie Kalendek's *The Fundamental Difference*, have

completed their third decade of publishing hand-printed contemporary poetry. How many books must they have printed? 300? Given the fact that both editors have full careers as poets and translators, this publishing service to the community of poetry is truly extraordinary. In every generation, there are a handful of people who make the transmission of poetry possible—as Michael Palmer has written: "without Burning Deck and a very few others, experimental poetry would, simply, not exist."

In *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane*, John M. MacGregor has written the first history of the art of the insane, beginning with a discussion of the situation of the mentally ill in the 1700s, as well as the later Romantic obsession with the insane as visionary heroes (which we still honor, without yet understanding much about it). MacGregor's well-researched work (studded with amazing paintings and drawings, and handsomely produced by Princeton University Press) moves through Surrealism (some astute distinctions between Artaud and Dali, for example), Jean Dubuffet and l'Art Brut, which over the past couple decades has broadened into Outsider Art. I was disappointed to find no work by or discussion of Schroeder Sonnenstern, whom Edouard Roditi has championed as one of the greatest of the Surrealists.

Like others of my generation, I first discovered the work of Norman O. Brown in the mid-1960s, upon the publication of the second book of his now completed trilogy: *Life Against Death* (1959), *Love's Body* (1966), and *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (University of California Press, 1991). Constellating literature, philosophy, history, psychology, and politics, Brown is our greatest living theorist, a writer of the same amplitude, if different directions, as Arnold Hauser and Northrop Frye. Brown's break with the discursive, systematic form of *Life Against Death* in *Love's Body* indicated that he had found a way to practice "poetry" as "the scholar's art" (Wallace Stevens). In that book, subject-oriented chapters ("Liberty," "Trinity," "Nature," etc.) processed facets of an ongoing argument as it passed through their domains, in quote-packed stanza-like paragraphs. *Love's Body* moves as poetic intuition, with precise, analytical cores rippling out, fusing and/or interacting, so that realized feedback and Brown's own insights braid into a multi-currented serial structure. With the new book, the trilogy looks like Brown's "divine comedy," in which *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, utilizing styles and formats from both previous volumes, becomes a kind of thinking man's paradise. Brown's brief reply to Herbert Marcuse's critique of *Love's Body*, in the March 1967 *Commentary*, deserves to be reprinted (along with other uncollected talks, notes, and essays). Here is a paragraph from it:

> From politics to poetry. Legislation is not politics, nor philosophy, but poetry. Poetry, art, is not an epiphenomenal reflec-

> tion of some other (political, economic) realm which is the "real thing"; nor a sublimation of something else which is the "real," carnal "act." Poetry, art, imagination, the creator spirit is life itself; the real revolutionary power to change the world; and to change the human body. To change the human body: here is the crisis, *hic Rhodus, hic salta;* which, as Hegël said, is to be translated "here is the Rose, here begin to dance." To begin to dance; who can tell the dancer from the dance; it is the impossible unity and union of everything.

If Brown was a major discovery of the 1960s, Weston LaBarre's *The Ghost Dance* (recommended by Gary Snyder for its chapter on Paleolithic cave art) was a similar largesse in the mid-1970s. In 1985, LaBarre (born 2 years earlier than Brown, in 1911) published a kind of annex to the 676 page *The Ghost Dance*, called *Muelos: A Stone Age Superstition about Sexuality* (Columbia University Press—I recently discovered the book in a discount catalog). In 140 pages, LaBarre tracks the longevity and ramifications of this superstition from the oldest rituals we are aware of, in the Upper Paleolithic, through Christian, Renaissance, and Victorian history. He summarizes this complex in the following way:

> Bones are given by the male parent, and bones can magically reconstitute the whole animal. As the main storehouse of bone marrow, the brain is the source of semen, via the spinal cord. The supply is limited. The fertility of the head is assimilated to cosmic fertility of the sun, rain, lightning. Fire, light, lightning, and seed are all aspects of the same holy male mystery. The fertility of humans, wild animals, and fields can be increased by collecting severed human heads. Fat-marrow and bones are appropriate sacrifice to the immortal spirits, the eternal gods. Immortality also consists in the "continence" of muelos-seed, achieved in various ways. Adult manhood is not the result of endogenous forces but must be obtained from outside through a variety of methods, including homosexual acts. Virility is secreted with semen, in all ejaculation of whatever kind; virility can thus on occasion be made a gift. Loss of manhood, power, and ultimately life itself results from the "spending" of the life-force, which is a finite capital.

Like the Waldrops, Cid Corman has served the community of poetry, as publisher, editor, and translator, for some 40 years. Here I will only touch on some of his contributions before passing on to what might be the most

unusual "selected poems" ever assembled. Corman started *origin* magazine in 1951, and was the first to offer a significant amount of pages to Olson, Creeley, Bronk, and Zukofsky, to name 4 of the now major figures who, when they appeared in *origin*, hardly appeared elsewhere. Corman is also an odyssean letter writer and his correspondence with Olson, like Olson's with Dahlberg, is a dark spectacle of mentor/apprentice strife; it is available in Olson's version, *Letters for Origin* (which does not include Corman's end of it), and in George Evans' Corman/Olson version, *The Complete Correspondence, 1951-1964. origin* has appeared in 4 series, a total of 74 issues, spanning (with some breaks) 31 years. The first 2 series (34 issues) are brilliantly edited and taught me, among others, how to edit a literary magazine. The last 2 series are less formidable, as over the years Corman has narrowed and purified his view of what is significant in American poetry (he has always been more open to the new, the experimental, in foreign poetries).

Corman is also one of the finest translators of his time. His work with Susumu Kamaike on Bashō is the greatest translation ever done of haiku poetry (*Back Roads to Far Towns*, now a White Pine Press reprint). He was one of the first, or *the* first, to translate and publish translations of Artaud, Celan, Sanesi, Scotellaro, du Bouchet, Daumal, Daive, Ponge, Jaccottet, and Kusano Shimpei. He has also done many pages of Montale, Char, Perse, Dadelsen, Hitomaro, Chuang-Tzu, and recently, Philippe Denis. While there is understandable variation in quality, the over-all quality is probably as high as any poet-translator of this century. In many instances, Corman's versions are the only available—though "available" must be qualified, as 80% of his published translations remain in issues of *origin*. Someone, obviously, should do a 500 page Corman Selected Translations.

Corman's career as a poet is more difficult for me to assess. Over the past 40 years he has published more than 60 collections, many of them quite tiny, with only a few (such as *Sun Rock Man* and *Livingdying*, New Directions books) widely distributed. Under these conditions, Lapis Press's 1990 boxed two-volume *Of*, beautifully produced with bold calligraphy by Sam Francis, is certainly welcome. It comes to 1500 pages, and one opens it expecting to find a lifetime's work. It turns out that *Of* represents a selection from, roughly, the first two-fifths of Corman's career. I say "roughly" as one must guess: there is no chronological or previous publication information offered. As an old Corman reader I know that many of the poems have appeared before, some in *origin*, and some in contexts—Corman's years in Matera, Italy, the subject of *Sun Rock Man*—that are damaged when excerpted from, especially when the poems are not identified as a section from an earlier book.

For a first time reader, the presentation must be baffling and overwhelming. Each volume contains 5 sections (based, I believe, on Noh play

categories), and each begins with a welter of translations (fragments as well as entire poems), out of which Corman's own poetry appears to rise (clouds of dust on the horizon, out of which a single rider is seen). The relation of author to author's translated texts is shockingly complicated by the fact that all of the translations are treated as Corman poems—at no point are Homer, Sophocles, Catullus, Tao Ch'ien, Villon, Rimbaud, Mallarme, Bashō, Rilke, Ungaretti, Char, Montale, Celan, Artaud, Scotellaro, and Lorine Niedecker(!) identified as original authors (and these are just the ones I noticed—I am sure there are more). Wanting to be fair in bringing this matter up in a review, I wrote Corman. Since his response is pretty astonishing, I will quote it at length:

> When Sam Francis first called me, from Tokyo, almost exactly 4 years ago—the first words were: "Cid—I want to do all your work!" And my reply, pronto: "Sam—you don't know what you're saying: I'm the most productive poet in human history (the fact)." Anyway it prompted *Of:* which was never, despite catalogue, given out as a "selected poems"—tho any book of mine cd be called that. ALL my books are edited with a care, unique I suspect, in the annals of poetry. It took me 6 years to EDIT: SUN ROCK MAN. But when I did Volume I—even before I completed it—I realized it had to be 2 volumes—and then when I had done the 2—and Sam was mulling the printing of them—slowly—I realized the book (ONE BOOK) had to be 5 volumes. And that's what it will be. (No PATERSON or MAX or CANTOS biz.) Each volume about the same size, about 750pp. That represents less than one half percent of my work—and that's putting it on the heavy side. (On my desk—I plan to photograph it in due time—the mss towards the final 3 vols are piled up. If they were in a single pile they wd reach literally from the desktop to the ceiling of this room. Jap. ceilings, as you know, aint very high. 1000s of poems. And these represent already a culling. From which the 3 vols. will come.)
>
> The work will have covered, in effect, some 50 years of writing. And the book works in ways that are unique. Despite the ultimate 3500pp—the book reads, as you can already see, "easily" (my poems, of course, tending to be short). And even a child wd find much pleasure. Once you have read thru—got the feel of how it goes—you can open anywhere and read backwards or forwards. The opening sections are always Others' work. This is equally true of earlier books of mine—though very few seem to notice. . . If I had published *Of* (by

> myself, as I will be doing these final 3 vols) my name wdntve appeared in the book or on it at all (apart from being another character in it: even you are in it). It draws on all literature and everyone I know or have known who has touched me in one way or another: I'm simply (as Blake knew and I think you know too) the medium.
>
> Identifications are easy to work out: I give ample cues, when they are not outright. But they are NOT essential. The words are. . . I'm not testing the reader, or critic: I never test anyone—not by my style: I just offer the best I know. In the best way I can. As I've often said: If you can improve any work of mine by changing a single word or comma etc—go to it—and you are free to claim the poem as your own. I can't be stolen from: all is given.

Well. If this "ONE BOOK" of 3500 pages represents less than one half percent of Corman's poetry (over 50 years, going back to before 1940, when Corman was 15 years old), this puts the total production at over 700,000 pages, or 14,000 pages a year, or 40 pages a day. If this is so, Corman must not only be the most productive poet in human history—he must also be the first to write non-stop for 50 years, including while eating and asleep. The underside of Corman's claim is of course that no one knows or can know. I wonder if Little Joe Gould is trying to get our attention from the grave. . .

If Corman does issue the next 3 volumes anonymously, some of the apparent hubris will be taken care of. However, his justifications don't bear scrutiny. He knows very well that signing one's own name to the work of others was not what Blake had in mind when he wrote that the authors were in eternity. Blake signed his own name to all of the art and writing that he self-produced. The thought that one would find in a Blake collection, via Corman's logic, poems by Chaucer and Milton presented as Blake's own is unimaginable. Blake meant that he was the medium through which poetry spoke; not the poet who erased other authors' names as their poems passed through his editing into his own book. Corman also evades the issue by offering us the right to change and then claim as our own his (own?) poems. Gee, thanks, Cid—are we to be grateful for this license? He must think we can't write our own poems as he presumably can. As a matter of fact, in publicity copy that Corman offered Lapis Press, he did include his own name and identified the "book" as "poems selected from a lifetime and reaching beyond." Does this mean poems from the other side? Or poems by other poets?

Furthermore, there are no attempts at cues or identifications other than what the contents of the translations themselves offer. Perhaps Corman has

in mind letters from Bronk and Samperi that are cut into Corman stanzas/ poems and that, at the end, include the original letter-writers' names. Private letters have become objects d'art "of" Cid Corman. What, basically, is the point in a translator usurping authorship? As a matter of fact, I don't think anonymous publication solves this problem. Corman by this act presumes that original author and reader should be unconcerned with who made what art. He wants us to believe that we are egotistic in expecting author identification, and that, in taking all other authors' names off their work, in his book, but his own (or even with his own), that he is not.

In *Sulfur* #30 I'll try to address Corman's poetry in *Of.*

—Clayton Eshleman

CONTRIBUTORS

CHARLES CANTALUPO is the author of *A Literary Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes's Masterpiece of Language* (Bucknell University Press, 1991). DUBRAVKA DJURIC is a poet, critic, and translator living in Belgrade. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN and JULIO ORTEGA'S translation of Vallejo's *Trilce* will be published by The Eridanos Library in 1992. BARBARA GUEST'S *Defensive Rapture* will soon be published by Sun & Moon. AUGUST KLEINZAHLER'S most recent collection of poetry is *Earthquake Weather* (Moyer Bell). PHILIP LAMANTIA (and wife Nancy Joyce Peters) arrived in Egypt a couple of days before the Berlin Wall fell out and just three days after they experienced the San Francisco Earthquake (October 1989) to sojourn six weeks mostly at Luxor-Karnak which inspired Lamantia's longish poem "Egypt" to be published this year in *City Lights Review.* BARBARA MOR is the coauthor of *The Great Cosmic Mother,* recently reissued by Harper/San Francisco. Among RON PADGETT'S recent books are *The Big Something* (The Figures) and *Great Balls of Fire* (reissued by Coffee House Press). His translation of *The Complete Poems of Blaise Cendrars* is scheduled for the spring of 1992. BOB PERELMAN'S recent books are *Captive Audience* and *Face Value.* MARJORIE PERLOFF'S *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* will be out in December. PETER REDGROVE has published 18 books of poetry, coauthored *The Wise Wound* (Bantam) and written *The Black Goddess* (Grove Press). PASQUALE VERDICCHIO has translated the work of Antonio Porta, Valerio Magrelli, and Giorgio Caproni; his own most recent works are

Nomadic Trajectory (Guernica) and *Isthmus* (Litoral). PAUL VIOLI'S most recent book is *Likewise* (Hanging Loose). ALLEN S. WEISS'S *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism*, is forthcoming from The State University of New York Press. DEAN YOUNG'S second book of poems, *Beloved Infidel*, will be published by Wesleyan University Press, spring, 1992.

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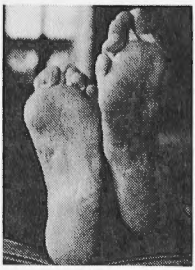

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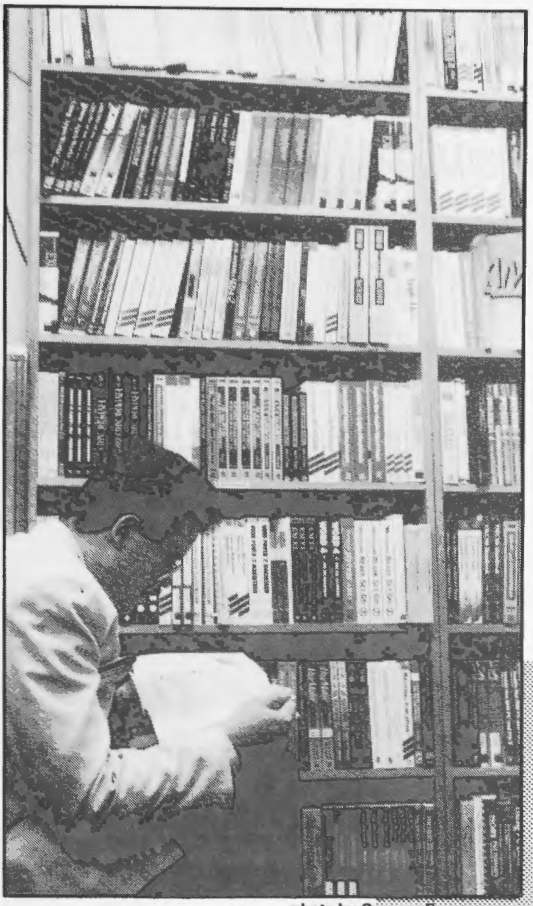

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AMIRI BARAKA
WHEN MILES SPLIT!

Someone called me and said you died, Miles. Yeh, that cold. Here in North America, with all the other bullshit we putup with. You know. I know you know. Knew. And still know, where ever you is.

I'm one of yr children, actually, for all the smoke and ignorant mimmyjimmies. . . you know / I can say that. I was one of yr children / you got a buncha children man, more than you probably dug on the serious side. Not innocent ass fans. But the school of the world you created from inside the world's head. You gotta buncha children brother. I still am. Will be. In some important ways. For instance, I will never take no shit. Yr legacy. I will never believe anybody can tell me shit. Unless they are something I can feel. Like Aretha said. Something I can feel. You were that. I cd feel you, I cd be you when I was a little boy, up the street with the trumpet bag. I wanted to be in that music. I wanted to be that hip, that out, that whatever it was I felt you were. I wanted to be that. All my life.

What it was was the place and the time. But it was you describing it with your feeling. For me that place was Newark, where we grew, and then here you come so hip. I cd dig that I needed to be that, but more, I knew, I was that. I was with you in that fingering, that slick turn and hang of the whole self and horn. And the sound. I had never been in that place, there wasn't no such place in Newark, before.

I mean I never thought of the shit you made me think with *Godchild*. I never thought of nothing before like *Venus De Milo*. There was nothing in my life like that before you brother. And then the persona, what it all spelled. Yeh, I wanted to look like that. That green shirt and rolled up sleeves. on Milestones. That cap and seersucker on *Dig* I always wanted to look like that. And be able to play *Green Dolphin Street* or *Autumn Leaves* or *Walkin* or *Blue Haze* or *Round Bout Midnight*, or yeh yeh yeh yeh hey, even the mammy jammin *Surrey With The Fringe On Top*, as whatever he wanted, as tiny lyric, or cooler than thou, hot pointillist funkmares, cubist, expressionist, impressionist, inhabiting your being into a plane of omniscient downness (dig that!)

It was the self of us all the way without anything but our saying, our breath, night times, or walking where we was. We could be whole and separate from any dumb shit. We could be the masters, the artist, the diggenist knowers, the suave, the new, the masters.

This is what art doos. Your voice, that out sharp growl. That was how art should dig itself to be talking. *So What* is probably a prayer in the future.

I held my horn like that, and rolld my body like an ark of music, just looking at things. The cool placement of emotion. The information. I carried that consciously. No one could put me down, I was Miles child. His man. somehow. anyway.

And then each change, stage, was a path I wd walk. When I heard you as a little boy. Then went to see you. You was me alright. You was one of the few I could let be me.

Now some motherfucker wannta tell me you outta here. No. No. Miles. Why. You left. So right away I figure none of the shit still here is cool. But dig, Dizzy and Max is still here. So that's the pain. And I know I dig you. I know I carry *Dr. Jackle* in my speech. And *Godchild* and *Miles Ahead* and *Kinda Blue* and even Porgie and Bess, somethin Gershwin cdnt do.

Cause no one was that tender, that touching the where touch cd ultimately is.

They taking all the Giants. You. Trane. Duke. Monk. Billie. Your whole band is dead, man. Paul. Philly Joe. Cannonball. John. Red. Your whole band. and what does that do to us, but leave us on the shore watching the waves, and trying to write music from that regular funk.

But what it says is that our youth is gone. That we are the adult. What that? That you have it in yr hand now, to do. That if it will go, this life, this memory and history, this desire for freedom and a world family. That's its on you.

Like I dug, when Philly Joe hattd up. On us. If we are the ones. If it is to be, something other than the savages and bush mens. Then we got to. The giants. Our fathers and mothers. Sassy split last year. Monk. Count. LTD. If it is to go then we are the goers. The comers. In that whole sound and thought. That life that makes the blues. That makes the dark hip, the roll and rumble. Yeh. Then if, all that long two hundred centuries of slick, is to be on bein. Then we are the only carriers.

I cd dig the way you walked and held that horn. That gorgeous chilling sweet sound. That's the music you wanted playing when you was coming in a joint or just lookin up at the sky w/ yr baby by yo side. That mixture of America and Remerica and them Changes, them blue Africa magic chants. So I am a carrier. I got the stick. I aint stopping. If you, whoever else you tapped, then them too.

Headline the Giants are murdered. Then we got it. All of those who finally must dig, dont say it brother, truth and beauty. But who am I talkin to if you split, Miles, Man, and what the fuck is there to listen to. OK, everything.

Except you did leave jabillion ultra hip notes, 70 billion swift blue cool phrases. And how many millions of unheard dig'its, them nasty nasty silences right in the middle of the shit. Bee-bee beep beeppp., ba dee da dee da. . .

So what about it, like they say in the tradition, what about it, is Miles and them, John, Duke, Monk, Sassy all, the giants, does it mean our shit is over with? I know about the records and shit. I'm not talking about that. Does it mean, with the crazies vampin and now even some things look like regular niggers can break out with bushy tongues. Where before with your cool Boplicity in our heads it was somehow not only soft yet sharp yet gentle but like a weapon against such square shit as most of the rest of America is. That all of you giant figures that we emulate and listen to and hear and visualize night after night inside our heads, from the nightclubs, the concert halls, the bars, the records, the t. v. . . .is this, your death, like some hideous omen of our own demise, and I mean everbody here, not just niggers, cause if we go, this whole playhouse go up in smoke.

No, I mean either this death is the beginning of death in cut time, or it means that one earth has turned and another begun. One age, one era, one being. Listening to you now, and knowing that whole of change you went through, from life to life, from music to music, from revelation to revelation, even evolution can be dissolution or devolution.

But you was Bop when you got here, flyin w/the human headed soul Ba, Bird, the doped up revolutionary. Next, you was Cool. It was like your own creation yet, of course, very Presidential. Then you got with Philly and them for the harder Bop and then got Ball, the Dis Heah and Dat Dere of we funky story. Then you sic'ed the straight out vision monster on us Trane, in that perfect wonderful all time classical hydrogen bomb and switch blade band. Let us all always be able to hear *Straight No Chaser* anytime we want to.

I know the last few years I heard you and saw you dressed up all purple and shit, it did scare me. All that loud ass rock and roll I wasnt in to most of it, but look brother I heard *Tutu* and *Human Nature* and *D Train*. I heard you one night behind the Apollo for Q, and you was bashin like the you we knew, when you used to stand coiled like a blue note and play everything the world meant, and be in charge of the shit too. I'll always remember you like that Miles, and yr million children will too. With that messed up poppa stoppa voice, i know you looken up right now and say (growl) So What?

The Next Evening
9/29/1991

WILL ALEXANDER
from LIGHTNING

PART II
BALL LIGHTNING

During a thunderstorm I saw a large,
red hot ball come down from the sky.
—W. Morris in a letter to the
London Daily Mail

Disk falling from negative charges, hissing from primeval lenses, hot white thunder bolt spinning, dyed, binaural reverberation spinning, mother, it's isinglass, it's the verbal variation of mica, its heated tentacles like raging nose bleed colour, like a cloudy mass of hissing spiders, They say, it's a pelican eater, a random aerial ferocity, its heart, full of nematode resistors, encircled with shooting sparks from sinister tombstone sticks, hemoglobin sutures exploding inside a nest of carnivorous, insatiable crickets, whining like tornado blossoms, flecked with swirling cyanide waters, mother, it's a droplet of fire exploding as bunches of bees, pulsing like etheric solstice bodies, it is an axial flower of steel, a reckless astronomy, coursing through a maze of polysyllabic pitchblende, with its ghostly integument melting pellets of darkness, this thaumaturgic sun boar eating through meteoritic colours of wind, its centrality of blood, tearing the air with crocodile omegas of blankness, with invisible Buffalo flames, with its barbed wire grenades assaulting the potency of logic, hissing from the depths the universal fire of explosion, devouring, consuming, average corpses of people, taking light from the minds of the forgotten, taking away their musculature, their mental realms, their idleness, bursting across the atmosphere, like internal sparks revving up the flow of the language of demons, and the protracted flower that it gives is magnetically tied to the altar of panic, to the blind folded optics of Phobos, a mobile crater on fire, a wretched double curve of sleigh spleens, bringing about the deeper part

Part I of *Lightning* appeared in *Temblor* 8.

of being, the more melodious increments of pontoon tourniquets, of a gaseous fortress of greenness, a constantly erupting furnace inside an owl's clairvoyant manikin eternity, with its night time dawns, with its black spillage of roosters, with its nocturnal slivers piercing the cornea with phantoms, with intense levitational whistlings, which announces its deaths, its voyages, its body embargoes, its tubercular lemur interiors, its weight negatively encoded by zeros, by burnished astronomical bells sculpted in its motion of fire, its wrathful igneous knowledge, like a weightless floating cobra, genetically inscrutable, like a falling, undetected ozone egg

This disk, like flaming monastery science, like worms eating through a nunneries' birth systemics, as pregnant shellfish babies begin falling from its fires, glistening, in hawk white revelation, twisting around the incipience of salacious rhythmic intervention, their voices, as if cooking on a spectral appliance of blood, their faces, a blank algometer resistance, becoming backbone drachmas spinning from the unclean side of a compass, the heat that springs forward, like the magical hyperbole of Gondwanaland, its disaster spun, like the smoke of a fleeting altimeter beast

A beast inside its disk, minus pensive psychological cloves, minus tundra ejecting platelets, gases extracted from ostrich-coloured leper's applause, flitting along the skulls of deceptive x-ray gardens

And from this disk I see 30 blind water bulls raising marks from apertures of previously laid astrolabe contusions, sprouting unforeseen unresolvable dangers, overcome, at the split second hour of a hatchless speaking song bird, destroyed in its singing by uplifted venters of shattered iodine illumination

Yes, the disk speaks of codeless narcissism archetypes, of nightmare ululation, of indefinite digital figurines, and the disk, with its savage treasure ship digits, with its carcass of suicide tapestry, with its circular Venusian glare, with its illumined chemical talons, floats along the terrified slopes of ultraviolet grasses, its destruction of insect mangers like the permanence of a proto-apocalypse, its explosive tumbleweed shadows eating through the atmospheric neurons, is like a brightly lit snowstorm of desiccated resurrection

This Ball Lightning, its spectrum of blazing rainbow instincts, trebled, by the inner explosiveness of angles, propelled by jets of iconographic sulphur, its kinetic ferocity shattering, full of space, blood, bone, and star, full of melted dalmatian parabolas, full of subverted earthquake perpendiculars, sleepless, in its earthly parenthetical sunlight, in its circular climate swelled by heated floods from the rays of glacial firing tables

So this Ball Lightning, this disk, is a calendrics of golden lions floating across tornado foundations, soaked by Spanish sundial water, trampoline water, hovering in the air as a staggering vermilion ammonia, this fire disk in which I'm floating, with its levels of golden lions singing at shrines of cobalt, like hunting fish, like barracuda velvet, flashing formaldehyde signals, back and forth from the unknowable to the unknowable, eating roses from suspended tidal wave encirclement, their manes resplendent, like splintered mirrors of chaos, enriched by greenish non-formal gases, biting from the skies of southern suns oviparous anesthesia lapping like waves across the filaments of an embryo, which swirls in the skull as a bottomless oven of diamonds

I see in its circular fumes, eyes, the colour of crab, boiling inside a bone crossed pot of imaginary mercury, light spilling forth from an imploded urine candle, the colour of a-vernacular litmus, seething, with glandular dizziness, its power engendered by precisely embattled spasms, which animates incessant magnificence

Suddenly I'm singing in my space ship of fire, suddenly my mind grows wings, I call myself the gigantic mosquito who sucks and gives blood to its mystery, who sculpts inside his spinning ambush denials, a scene of brightened tarantula embraces, a forest of eclectic volcanic contusions, spawned from a hypnotic ginger

To see from this disk, I am cleansed with grounded facial negatives, with bone coloured writing, with vocal bone spur chemistry with rapier crusades, with hunchback conjunctions, spurred by verbal star belt eternities

In this Ball Lightning saucer, I experience telescopic cranial euphoria, opening my breath to the timeless flight of universal demons, where my negative appendages, crimson crocodile slivers, are lengthened and stretched behind the smoke screen of existence, become a vulture's breast in orbit, become that dyke of bone at the farthest side of human blood, from this disk, I see the stars as imperial-sized maggots, discoloured by a definitive alligator blockage, stars, swarming in electron ravines, suspended, gorged on concision, like eroded Cherokee blisters sucked into blackness, being eaten by vicious hydrogen eaters, by cosmic transfer gases, settling on the eye with the thick opacity of slumbering, the hair burned away by lymphatic circumference, then sharpened to flame throwers' mucous, my life conducted in tropic conundrums, in this Ball Lightning saucer, prophetically contingent with meteors

This circular explosion empirically haunting the fauna, spasmodically weakening the cacti, bringing up from the soil a mercurial ignescence, a leaking volcanism prairie, erupting and re-feeding its orbicular interior rivulets

I exist in this stunning obicular containment, as it floats along the sullage, as an erupting suicide flower, its genesis bursting from star-like craniums of frenzy, spewing ferocious nightingale ammonias, above perfectly chiseled kinetics of lava

And it attacks, and emits spikes at random lovers, with its power to float through impenetrable revetments, with lightning strikes at the superficial levels of human bodily contact, contact no deeper than sensual facsimile, and because, such love is imitation, it takes on an emblem of blackened ribbon duality, crushed under smoke, heaving white cells and parrots, singing with a catch in its throat, its decimals soldered and re-blended by light

I am conscious in this floating fire furnace, speeding into imperative indifference, mentally turning to a wolf, into a rattlesnake shower of teeth, into a predatory jackal, lunging at the psychic component of the rib and the femur, at the chronic physical subliminals, at the crouching work day servant, the body reduced to red shift reduction, to a terror which fully transcends the wrath of judgmental delirium

To see from this poetic obelisk of nerves, holes, dense holes, blinking sweat mirages, eating into to inevitable duplicity, lies always co-mingled with truth, lies at the heart of historical damage, degenerate salamander powders, compound verbal degeneration synonymous with outmoded expression detached from the lungs by explosion, by galvanic arsenic floods, seeping into the perfect fires, unloosed by the power of detachment

My ball lightning saucer is breaking apart, a sun swept by the void out of existence, osculation with the face of non-being, negative phosphorescence, phlogiston animation swallowed by the flank of darkness, distracted by accumulating parsecs, by seismic glycerin effacement, by a stunning Lupercalian debacle, shifted to illusionary varix planets, where I vanish by degree, making laryngeal recitations of sonorous neutron decades, hatching above this shattered ozone egg, a lyrical recitation of acids, like a debatable neutron wand, attempting to burn within a self imposed existence of peril

fin

PART III
RETURN STROKE

> It is the return stroke that produces the bright channel of high temperature that we see.
>
> —Martin Uman,
> *Understanding Lightning*

Lightning channel filled up with language
dense concrete hand clapping
mercury sawed off and reborn like wings on perpetual monsters
perpetual griffin toxicity
green coloured vipers
connecting
rising from strike point meteors
heated by lightning water
by flaring cobweb fire
fused
in vertical fish net contraction/explosion
vertical mongoose firings with flashes of vapour
with paint sniffing angels hallucinating castles of horses and
    terror
Pintos
Appaloosas
blue/green stallions of smoke
verbal oracular meathooks
in flight
like flaming Condor pelts
turning loose a general declaration of Gila monster heavings
spinning stellar incoherence
singing parasitic herbicide manoeuvres
codeine orations
blank salt added to bitter axial infusorias
primeval cyclone masquerades putting on and pulling off lizard
scales and sizes heated in the meatless progenitor of botulism
decades
crumbling in the hands of liars religiously ensconced

in non-demanding occult perspectives
in clinical oxygen pans sucking at an insect foetus
locked in dead men's motives
refusing to admonish the lice from the skull of a ruthless
hummingbird guru
emasculated wolf dogs
corroded puma instincts
soul drinkers
terminal leopard paw enzymes marked with mottled hornet's
    nest jellies
open audacious flaring
rancid thunderstorm achievement four times hotter than the sun
on this night
the moon blazes with negative calligraphy
writing from the wells of obverse dimension
inverted mirrors
cancelling themselves in voiceless armband canals
sunless psychological robbery flying flag high in Bardo
where nauseous beings wrestle with swimming cloud burst
    needles
automata of the void
fighting for golden breakthrough discoveries
for the "golden cord" that illuminates creation
that ties their bodies to whirlwind intuition
to the simultaneous shaft of the soul
immediately apprehended without memory intervening
vertiginous constants
invincible
without let up
hand to hand combat with corrosive sea food doctors
who hatch from themselves
bilingual icthyosaur's discovery
rising again from nausea
from a hundred hot atmospheres of blackness
blind thunder charges
with weapons stacked higher and higher
in their magical defense of green bloodshed
doctors
lime worts

pustules of infamous chlorophyll poppies projected sideways in
time
eclipsing normal eyesight
which cannot see when it sees
but is able to see when it wants to see sun when it sees
singing anathema cloves in bottled gargoyle summers
printing frenetic hiker's pamphlets
obtaining bone meal suppers
smearing the sky with maniacal bat wing potion
a blizzard of bat wing acid inducing a reprehensible furnace
of ashes
bringing a cloud of citron struggles to the fore
a war of cement lasers between spirits obnoxiously engendered
by
nuclear bourbon intercourses
all these spirits whining in aborted saliva
crossbred with harelip canons and gluttonous moonbeam errata
these spirits
physically phantom
yet tenaciously conscious by a lack of golden optical penetration
by a lack of intense red blood in their spirits
going down into the poisonous
into dispassionate Abracadabra
like clumsy surgical convicts ensnared by a millstone of zeros
like pharmaceutical charismas latching on to inherent
beguilements
which obstruct the periodic flow of fluidic enigmas ingrained
in enigmas
nonagon temperatures boiling inevitable wildebeest pages
bewitching the glabella with isagogic principles of being
with its fire face turned inward
glowing ancient lepidopterous habits
river of explosive lochia re-vomiting itself in a bedlam of dwarfs
a rhinal sailor
a timbale baking in pelargonial watches
concerned with the acrobatical peltast soldier
swinging like a pendulum
back and forth
charging and retreating until the air is cut in half

divided further
to a split in seven directions of the both sides of being
then resolving the fourteen compartments to one vast circle of
    triumph
then instantaneously recongealed in the inchoate masterful
    synthesis
of dawn in the void
of fragments of blood transmuted to bodies
creation starts its nervous illuminating lodestar voyage
around a planetary light of basic carbon crystals
charged
with ingrown abstraction of the numinous
with invisible horse race genitalia
full of flight
up and down the planet's collective axial mazes
as if a camel with wings gliding across a microscopic desert
holding out at 10,000 inches
as it surveys a swarm of bleeding vegetal magnets
magnets attracting androgynous enemies to their caves
so they can eat them
so that they turn their bones yellow
ingesting in a flash a half billion parsecs
returning from space
reporting encephalonic tarnish to this floating terrestrial carcass
a planet of continuous fire
a planet of eyes suspended in moon heat sweating primeval
    rainbows
"Antwerp Blue"
"Cobalt Green Deep"
"Transparent Gold Ochre"
mixed
in sumptuous combinations of terror
creating an earthly carnivorous spectrum
inside the eyeshaft of subtle icicle cities
creating a giant loquacious bee with insatiable verbal insomnia
turning its instincts in all directions
creating in its wake
a river of vapourous soliloquies amidst geographic voice prints
so when the hearing transpires

the collective fauna cringe
lightning
you are not of this world
you are spectral susurration
as you illuminate the bee who's ruler of his world
he makes the laws
forms the opposition
creates rules which he immediately destroys
and turns backward inside his inward domain
to re-invent events
to posture
to suck in ptomaine candles
and make new causes and new endings
elliptically re-routing death
with heightened bunches of vibratory concentration
which is a sea of dead beetles
which he disrupts with a less repulsive judgmental arcana
only to create a scholarly hack saw fish which murders on
    contact
this ruler
this bee king of the living
12 ft. tall and more vibrant than a Condor
starts humming electric musical spaces
minuses
as if horses
with the speed of blazing porcelain integers
were corrupted and reformed
leaving one galaxy and going to another
a revolution spinning outside of light
a black cylindrical motion of voices
which turns magenta on the eardrums
and extends to each bipedal being a timbre of salt
a flood of Rhine wine blisters
and we exchange our eardrums for helium sutures
stretched
into star tree lizards
wrapped
into the imploded coils of compacted anesthesia
and we wake up as the collective one person

staring from an intentional hollow enclave
at a glowing moat of ravens
vicious ravens tearing at a letter inches and inches from ingrown hypothesis
which saturates its light with an ingrown sense
pregnant with visibility
with riches of continuous eternities
so that the raven of the most enduring death succeeds in being
    golden
as if one raven
all ravens
gold of the greatest bird
the blind mortality ocean is crossed
the sun densely rises from oblivion
and becomes a cornea
a half blue shadow that bursts and becomes novae
fully lighting electron diameters
50,000 sheets of darkened chemical intensities
like burning mathematical schooners sailing over snow
like a sky fire intelligence
a Brazilian seriema
neck in the air
sucking stars through its eyes
an electrical haze forming in its wings
its digestion of compact stellar arrangement
boiling
its bloodstream bodies consistently revolting
and this seriema singing circles of universal umber
its wings moving
with the solar operas of space
with the circular face of the galaxies spread between suns
its feathers on fire from carbon based cold
light of magic optical fuses blown in the vision
of blazing frost bite planets
of explosive kimonos flowing like flairs in the vision
radical
divine
like the ghastly beauty of magnetic heavenly vultures
a cross bones beauty of continuous instants

a beauty of hoisted skulls on gallows
armpit marimbas playing ghost flash music
disguised as seismic gunpowder charges drifting into inadvertent
rhino plankton
fecundating an alien spy
roaming a cocktail party in Delhi
sowing iridium wounds in martinis
where a tubercular princess suddenly unleashes her electrifying
    scruples
"wordlessly singing" strumpets' saliva
her pleasures ensnared by document on a pulsing bed of cobras
her menses
tapped by a chandelier of roses
where this spy
with its dendritic thirst
visualizes her consorts with intuitive antennae connecting India
to Mars
polluting Martian ingrown water supplies with insidious
    antimonies
which this Andromedan spy sets awry with thoughts of
    thousands of
cranes
of rainbows bleeding into water
of rubefacient waves seeping rufescent soil over a stark internal
oasis
an ululation of consciousness
of vermiculate whispers exploding verdurous dictatorships
    verging
on verification
no more skate fish ceilings
no more scarlet manure flecked with scattered backbone pieces
no more skull bone bodies of blended centipede mixtures
finding the future of gassy tomahawks' bleach spilling through
a brilliant atmosphere of blindness
an Algonquian appetite for isothermics
for carrion activity focused in the higher digestives
illusive mortality cravings
"passing screams"
of a New Guinea golden pigeon blending being and non-being

dipping its wings in swirling cerulean waters
and calls on fire
"Son of Force"
"Truth"
"swiftest raining increase"
breaking the geometry of mirrors
climbing through the fog into the topmost pinnacles of fever
into the fire stone firmament
with vipers' venom
with axial omegas
like a resistant armadillo melted into light
and the existent thermogenesis
like bull's sperm
or giant's powder
blasting through the ghost dance writhings
to reach the plenitude of endlessness
yes
lightning
striking the human gut strings with hammers of brightness
with heightened coyote tattoos
with nerve end neutrinos burning in the brain
the mind calmed by invisible protein inflammables
powerful sodium wings flying in the stillness
telic photography mantras jumping from the tops of clouds
exploding radar enjambment with shattered sensual descriptions
these magic aerial fuels expressing themselves in compounded
    slashes
in voltage coronas
electrosphere concentration
breaking through a curvature of targets
stretched vertex
perpendicular ichthyosaur
piercing the brink of the transparent boundless

ARMAND SCHWERNER
STOREHOUSE

She holds herself ready for the blows of the unpremeditated. So interesting that it all takes place in-between. No holes are barred. When the states go well the sentience smells like old velvet in odd folds. *Undulant* she thinks, and she hasn't rushed once, the seeing middle finger barely moving in its tight gooey canoe entrance, her left thumb and index finger surgically in a gentle fixedness clamping the outer labia in some visualized accordance with a smoky-thick heavy idea, a half-unwilled stasis, benignly motionless necessity. Dual. The striated sides of the boat, arcing, surround the waves and rise through her intestines, establishing through the realms of her awarenesses of her islanded organs both the pain of losing the discreteness of heart, pancreas, liver, Isle of Langerhans, *and* the confounding pleasure. She is two now, symmetries of dual onenesses, and in the deepest gratefulness owes her life to these parallel barriers against the threats of totality. Because her eyes hurt she listens to them. If they leave her. When. It isn't someone else. Islands. It's no longer a matter of ungovernable flakes, untidying everything, unbalancing. She falls through a stringency of despair. When everything leaves there's a death something left. Behind all a ram of steel, governing. In back of that, landed organs, an end to the messy flux, no more piecework, angerhands, continuous suturing, staring and rapt in a needle world of rapt fits of healing, in healing. Fair exchange in this loss of early morning variegated mystery, wild spectrum, disorder in the many, such a sweetness in the undulant flock of recollections in her fingers. (branching.) The cloying perfection in what she's doing absorbs her increasingly. She falls inside the viscous lemony circle her arms make with her thighs and outer lips, remaining inheld with a respect voice as if in obeisance to the sun but there is no sun. Her right hand begins to cramp and she's on the cusp of rushing. But

ready *now* not later not another time in an excitement or surrounding an excitement as if either building a building of primary colors or, with the pain of loving attentiveness, unmistakenly, distinctively, surrounding the shape blackly, heavily bordering it. At which she feels a red of searing pain. It's crazy, like to catch a net in a web, or rather as if to drive flickerings over the hill into a One by means of a gross surround. And her body's too small

for such battles. Most would be. Better to follow the swelling of the object in modulated colors and happen into several outlines. Too much speed. The ram speaking in her respect voice barely cognizable. There's a lot of wet dickering now, small flashes of nearly ungovernable flakes threatening red abandons, wastrels into a many, and a hoping like an attaching iron-searing she doesn't even want, a hoping against the grain to avoid a One slammed into over a hill, too much angerwork, threats of hands into pieces transformed by the now meat-eating sheep of fingers, recollecting in a violence, barely in a petal avoidance grazing the labia.

And again either

wraith of devotion and absence, or regina of chairs and glasses and colonies of patience and laundry healings and quotidian celebrant of small progressively invasive fingertip recollections, cicatrice-traces of endless tiniest slivercuts, nicks of private history unrevealing of *which* body flourished in *which* diffusedly memorable pain-deveining shrimps, scrupulous memories of othering attentivenesses to engorged penile corollae, her entire body almost an idea of progression, a raving sleep or a tumid alertness; she moves minutely, heavily as in a delayed unsatisfactoriness of a pelvic tilt undone by the absorption of the mattress. She vows never again to be a mouth of spent words, breasts of exfoliating allure, neither *a* nor *b* but two-for-all in a trans-lation gone into and through will-lessly, moved by a circumambient desire but not a narrow ram's, or, revels over, moved to say Pain, Pain, and, overcome, to overcome. Story. In a forward movement. Idea of going. Handhold. The safe of a temporary two between a horror and a horror. In a heart-illness there's no body fire. The liver tries ruggedly, separated rugged heart tries, rugged trials establish islands, stress more stress on the other organs, rugged and purely separating and pure hell in disconnections, ladylikelihood; the kidneys try; and not only; the others; beehive; skein; web; haul-seine; leaf-veins of worlding. The nature of information relaxes into a loss. No mail. O fuck the dead her finger

ram penis, not silvery angel-fish smooth-scaled and glinty in a boxed wetness safely enclosed, imagination of home fortress, defense: well all right; why not accept this weakness of considering a home home. Feels. Island of safety. Island of comfort. Her entire body the ram's voice, uncognizable from an outside, think of that! Unterritorial, her hand as a man's, vastly

unsettling. *Grand âge, nous voici.* Heat, order, submission, memory-fingers of come in her mouth. To leave all this now, even given the pleasures of will, is to go away from the knowledge of the sweetness of everyone's interchangeable servitudes. The ochre bed sheets are bunched under her coccyx. She wishes she could wish to sleep—

encompassed, and in the inert, heavy, thick, brown, inevitable mind muck occurs a desperate dance of shielding from the ferretings out and the

objectifications of her hurting eyes and she hears the slow tearing sounds of the reed-spears' invasions on the murky screen of mind, a vicious plant-language of untranslatable morphemes reified into Enemy as if carrot-sticks could cry out. She is constrained to hold on to the crazy horizontal oblique and vertical lancings to apply against the terror that the links inside the dream might become locus and stay put, bridge transformed into stolid continent; such a welcome to be going back, the old writing on her mind-screen, the roving incision-making triangles singing sharp-edged archaic movements suggesting a fervent going outside the container, [illegible] She hears through her throat *aan aaaniy aarib byna aan aaaani aarib aarib aarib byn byn byn* however far there's always more, far in you go, you can trust *that* if anything; isn't going *in* deeply, deepest, finally—she thinks inside a crystal availability to the formulation—coming out in being in the outside common air? To see to answer to enter to know. . . . Hearing, sound of the sharp bird-talk of the reed-spears. They do their own breathing after all, not so other. It sounds. Hearing's so old and in common.

MARJORIE WELISH
TWO POEMS

CASTING SEQUENCES

A page dramatically estranged, nor lacking
bombardment out of
sync
with the event that
annihilated into sudden pianissimo
a few songs.
Where death is naked to the waist
in radiance,
and sudden extension
piloted across a vocal line
finds an event,
the page lies still, a chaotic catchall of springtime.

Alphabetizing the cards
slavishly
the person comes first,
in cold blood
and spelled out. . .
"pale and enfeebled by the remoteness"
of actuality.
Of actual number, pale
and spelled in cold,
a person is impeturbably
alphabetizing cards
torn from himself,
casting from himself riddle and raven,
riddle and reticule.

Mildew
"of adjacent realities"
and recurrent themes
and recursive themes,
assisting the physics of a sinking fast ball or aerodynamic
stall—speculative,
half-visible—and all talking at once,
the only such televised
obliquities in which
the elite and public are exactly coincident
and lifted up.
To get livelier,
to accelerate the unridable lift,
the only such televised praxis, half-visible
breaking pitches
wince—
and they all remark on it,
they all recur
in the slower moving air.

TWENTY-THREE MODERN STORIES

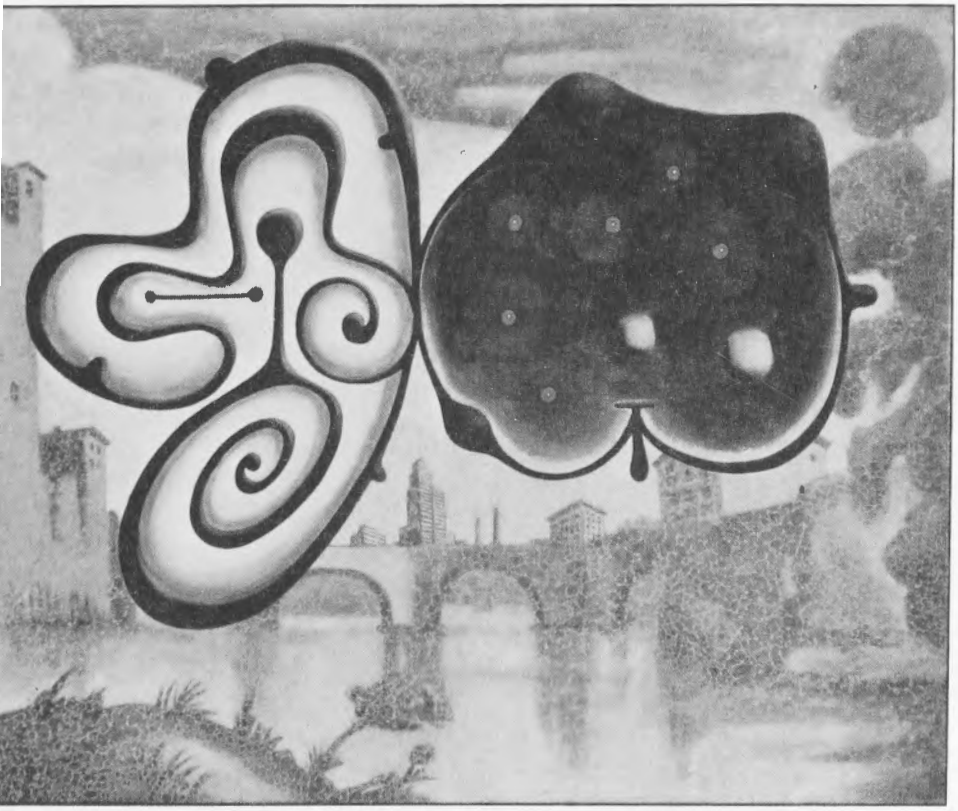
Perpetually roughed up
by the dawdling, blushing drone of an airplane,

"the viola with a restrained, sometimes" restringing
made the plunge
upon these planks
because of all the shores that must be visited.

". . .and continuities, whose intersections"
spreading hot wax
on privation
and on the phrase "this text,"
united once again,
are inescapably drawn toward the open door.

The bells have ceased altogether.
"The air bit hard and cold"
spaced in such a way as to make a
triad
of arrangements thus:
old and tired star, guitar and protean
interdisciplinary soprano.

DAVID HUMPHREY
SIX PAINTINGS

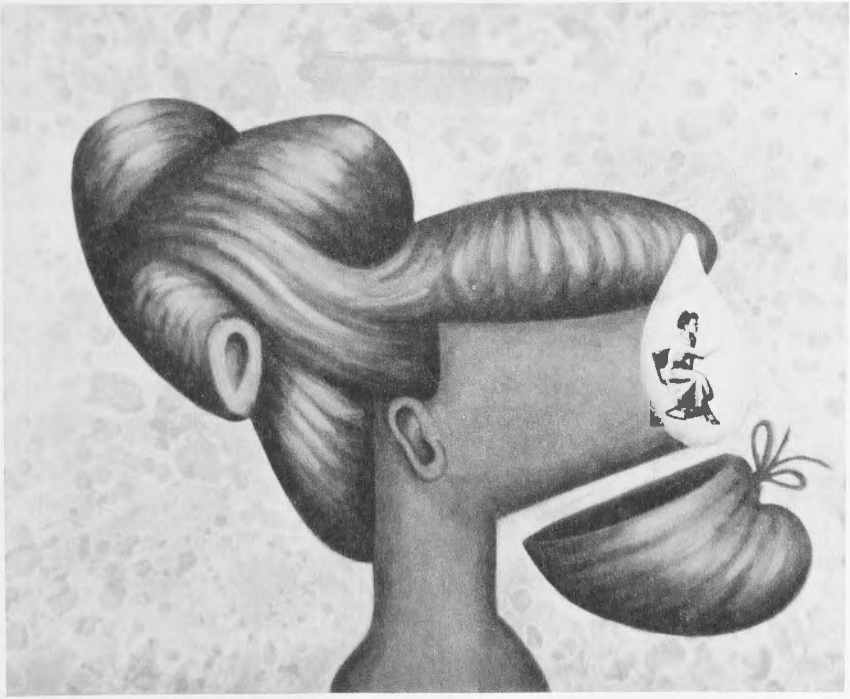


THE PRESENCE OF THE BELOVED

Oil on canvas, 60" x 72", 1989
All photos courtesy of David McKee Gallery, NYC

INVOLUNTARY HISTORIES

Oil on canvas, 50" x 36", 1989



LIKE HERSELF

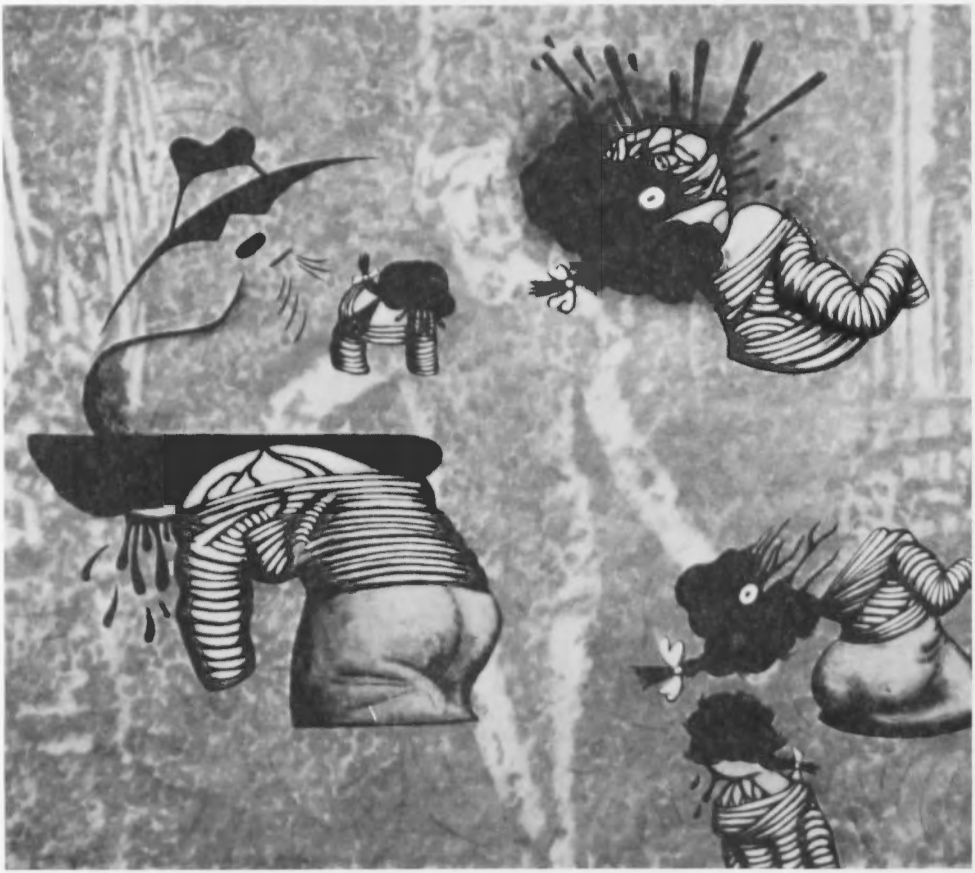
Oil on canvas, 56" x 40", 1990

TOP OF THE STAIRS

Oil on canvas, 60" x 70", 1990

CHRISTMAS 1962 II

Oil on canvas, 76" x 96", 1991



GIRL

Oil on canvas, 72" x 82", 1991

PAMELA WYE

DAVID HUMPHREY: ADJUSTING THE PICTURE

A game of dare is in progress in David Humphrey's recent paintings. Between invented shape and photographic image; between psychic truth and "official" memory. It's an upping of the ante designed to squeeze more out of the ubiquitous family photo while confronting personalized painted shapes with their maker's historical familial past—a past toward which invented shapes generally feign [claim] indifference or, at most, distant lineage. The mutual prodding between the nearly-verbal ("realistic") narrative of the photographs and the obstinately non-verbal (enigmatic) presence of the painted shapes yields an edgy show-and-tell of the picture's psychological innards.

This power struggle in Humphrey's recent work is a reflection of the push and shove going on between painting and photography in the art world in general. The return (and reacceptance) of figurative painting (in the late seventies through to the mid-eighties) placed narrative language back in the domain of painting. Photography, allied with an ironic neo-conceptualism, subsequently siphoned narrative away from painting and, without immediately appearing to do so, slipped it back into view in a more cool yet strangely more intimate guise. While, for example, the ironic, staged photographs of Cindy Sherman have recently become more stridently expressionistic and consequently less effective, the straight-forward, banal "found" photographs in Christian Boltanski's installations are deeply affecting and nearly voyeuristic in their intimate ordinariness. Ordinary snapshots belonging to ordinary people are very personal. In the case of Boltanski, we know what the faces in the photographs cannot know. We're the future looking back at a past that can't know what history has in store for it. In Humphrey's paintings, the photos he uses are his own family snapshots—of the kind we all have lying around somewhere in our lives. The painting that Humphrey pursues on this ground of childhood history is a stubborn groping for visual expression of inarticulate desires, fears and conflicts, a process of "knowing" the personal present by literally linking it with its "innocently" decisive past. It's as though Humphrey dipped his photographic prints through an additional (al)chemical bath, revealing the eccentric machinery of hidden impulses that imbues a scene with life but which official family cameras don't pick up.

The photos, initially worked over through Xeroxing and computer manipulation, are blown-up, oil-painted versions of themselves. Their color is a function of the requirements of the painting rather than a restitution of the actual scene. Their surface is streaky, mottled and splotched. Turpentine splatters give them an alternately pock-marked, marbleized look, one of age, deterioration or perverse chemical reaction. How, and how much, the photo maintains its identity in the onslaught of painting that comes after it is a central issue in this work.

In "Christmas II," for example, the photo not only remains recognizable as a photo, but its specific narrative qualities are central to the painting, while in "Girl" the orange ground, not immediately readable as a photo of a girl, slips easily into illegibility. This slippage varies from painting to painting and is indicative of the basic anxiety of image-making in an electronic age; an anxiety which, in Humphrey's case, often resolves itself by giving painting the upper hand. In some instances, however, "Christmas II" being a good example, Humphrey maintains an evenly distributed tension between painting and photography that allows him to use the best of both worlds.

In the selection of paintings reproduced here, Humphrey has divvied up the roles of painting and photography with increasing clarity and effect. "Presence of the Beloved" and "Involuntary Histories" (both 1989) are the earliest works in this group. In both, the photo ground is clearly subordinate to the painted forms. In "Beloved," two biomorphic shapes that read as male and female hover before a hazy photographic image of an idyllic scene that looks lifted from some '50s' dining-room wallpaper. The background scene's good-natured take on European Romanticism (full of airy and watery dreaminess) reads as a projection of the self-absorbed euphoric weightlessness of the couple's own new love. Any tension in this painting exists as potentiality in the "male" figure's affectionate butting up against her butt, flexing his muscles, muscling in on her. While the "male" figure is all racing circulatory system, "she" is all nice butt, but cosmic, starry-night nice butt that, allied with the faraway, "olden days" quality of the background scene, and the coltishness of the male figure, gives a gloss of "old romance," of mother-romance, to the piece.

Hair's representation has long been a preoccupation of Humphrey's—head-hair, as opposed to body-hair. Though, clearly, for this artist, the head is part of the body. In 1990, Humphrey published an article entitled "Hair Piece" in which he investigates, in a comprehensive manner, the wide-ranging issues of hair and its representation in contemporary art. I will not try to recapitulate that article here, but direct the reader to *Art Issues*, February 1990, for a very good read.

One of the "hair pieces" in the current selection of Humphrey's paintings is "Involuntary Histories." The "involuntary" in the title is as much

about our helplessness with regard to our body's workings as it is about our participation in the larger cultural fashions (of hair, in this case) that make up history. There is, however, a creepiness about this painting that is more disturbing than speculations about cultural fashions would imply. While the neat, graceful knot of hair in the upper right corner looks ornamental and easily undone, and the smallest knot at the left has a surrealist quirkiness about it, the largest conglomeration of tight French twists in the lower center of the painting seems the result of a more anxious twisting and turning. Almost a wringing of the hands—or neck. Overlaying the area of the woman's head in the underlying dim photographic image, this shape appears as a mental image, in the sense of a visual approximation of an inner state, that, like a Gordian knot, is perplexing and foreboding. It speaks of tension and unresolved conundrums. Its resemblance to viscera or feces reminds us that the mind resides in the body and shares in its conflicts. And it literalizes the psychoanalytic association of painting and playing with feces. In this respect, Humphrey remains very much a hands-on painter.

"Like Herself" (1990), another "hair piece," has a cartoony, slapstick quality that belies its horrific image of the face of womanhood: blank and truncated. What's Humphrey saying with this title? That maybe she should "like herself"? Or is it more in the line of "that's something 'like herself,' but not exactly herself"? The lack of eyes, nose or mouth focuses attention on the orifices that do exist—the ear, the cross-section of tubular hair, and the pouch-like opening of wrapped hair/chin where the mouth should be—a sort of prosthetic beard for women. Instead of an eye, she has a large tear containing a 1950s-ish photo image of a lady-artist who, curiously, has no hands and no painting as far as the eye can see. What does this say about women artists? "Not by the hair of your chinny, chin, chin, sweetheart?" Ear/hair/hear/her: the proximity and similarity of the hair-do's orifice and the ear implies an intimacy of closed-circuit communication. "*Psst,* do you want to hear a secret?" she said to herself, sounding *like herself.* The trouble is, here, if no one else hears her speak her mind, will she ever actually become herself, or only remain *like* herself?

While the photographic image in "Beloved" and "Involuntary Histories" plays a background role, and the one in "Herself" is confined to a small space, in "Top of the Stairs" (1990) and "Christmas II" (1991), the photo carpets the whole canvas, and plays the central role in the paintings' form and content. "Top of the Stairs" has the wooly feel of a blanket—the photo's digitalized surface and the paint's fuzzy texture mesh with the weave of the canvas and the linearity of the stairs to create a woof and warp of nocturnal terror that alludes to the bedcovers of upstairs bedrooms. In its Japanese-like rectilinearity and its mysterious foreboding, this painting recalls the latent sexuality of Balthus's paintings of prepubescent girls. Here, a male

child flees a nameless terror that appears like an apparition to strike from without, but which, in fact, originates from within the center of his own body like an impulse. This apparitional paint splatter, whose form and placement seem too fortuitous to be random, refers back to the psychologically loaded gestures of Abstract Expressionism. In a successful attempt at painterly cross-fertilization, Humphrey mates a Jackson Pollack drip, historically disembodied from figurative representation (but owing its power to the *painter's* body), with the narrative figure of a repainted photograph.

If "Top of the Stairs" goes back to the literal scene of the crime in an anonymous fashion—the fleeing figure remains faceless and generalized, "Christmas II" returns to the spot and names names. The "crime" is not acted out in the "real" world, but works in the realm of desire and impulse. In "Christmas II," the foregrounded boy-artist (wielding a gun, no less) sits at the head of the table in a re-enactment/playacting of the mother/father/child triangle. The older artist/boy (the gun wielder) and the sister's clothed bodies are linked as two black forms that meet and merge as one shape under the table. The younger male, as the vexed outsider in this triangle, contemplates from a distance the fantasized incestuous couple, or is it the gun he wants? While "Involuntary Histories" visualized tightly wound knots left hanging—as in, not dealt with, "Christmas II" functions as part of the patient process of unraveling (as in comprehending) the prototypical entanglements that begin in childhood. Here, instead of hanging metaphoric knots, Humphrey has hung, upside-down, a pulp-novel illustration of interlaced lovers (distorted by computer manipulation) above (and over) his sister's head like a mistle-toe of amorous projection. These narratives obviously resonate well beyond the artist's personal history, taking cues from Greek tragedy to Freudian theory. But, also, the middle-class domestic props (from family snaps to dining-room furniture) make these paintings familiar—I know these people, they're the reflection of me that I recognize from '5Os' sitcom TV—"Leave It To Beaver" and "Father Knows Best." "Christmas II" has something of that narcissistic voyeurism of network television. The adult artist, in making the painting, "adjusted the picture" of his boy-self who returns his gaze. He looks at him who watches him look at him. And we're watching it all.

In "Girl," the straight-forward, frontal photo of an open-armed little girl, not immediately legible, serves as the ground upon which Humphrey flings a vituperative imagery of misogynous energy. It feels like a desecration. What's she done to him? Is desire's power that strong? I love you therefore I hate you. I want you so much I could kill you. The cartoony, Bellmer-like mutilated females have blasted heads (blown away by an ejaculative force?) with hair like blood-stains and splatters (but tied with little-girl bows), no hands or legs but an adolescent's dream of an ass, and

a tightly wrapped, shoulder-baring shirt, like a straight-jacket, yet also reminiscent of the wound hair pieces of Humphrey's earlier paintings ("hair-shirt" comes to mind). What sin is this penance for? These truncated bodies are similar in shape to the "body" of hair in "Like Herself" except here the body is literalized and there's a feeling of energetic time-lapse aggression: "And I'll do this to her, and then this, and then this, and this . . . ." The smallest version of this mutilated figure looks to be on all fours like a brutalized poodle. Is lap dog the desired transformation? No wonder the good-natured photo fades and recedes, recoil might be a better word.

"Girl" is a powerful, no-holds-barred visualization of the primitive impulses that underlie desire. It is a watershed of sorts among the haunting images in Humphrey's recent paintings where photographic ghosts assert themselves into the painter's imaging process and bring with them the not-always-pretty impulses of childhood which, whether we like it or not, form the basis of our adult selves.

PAUL CELAN

EIGHTEEN POEMS *from* THREADSUNS (BEING THE COMPLETE FOURTH CYCLE)

(Tr. from the German by Pierre Joris)

IRISH

Give me the right of way
across the grain ladder into your sleep,
the right of way
across the sleep trail,
the right, for me to cut peat
along the heart's hillside,
tomorrow.

THE ROPES, salt-water-clammy:
the white
top knot—this time
it does not come undone.

On the seagrass chute next to it,
in anchor's shadow,
a name teases the
untwinned
riddle.

DEW. And I lay with you, thee, in the rubble,
a mushy moon
pelted us with answer,

we crumbled apart
we brittled back together:

the Lord broke the bread,
the bread broke the Lord.

LAVISH MESSAGE
in a crypt, where
we flap with
our gasflags,

we stand here
in the odor
of sanctity, yep.

Singed
vapor waves of the beyond
thickly drift from our pores,

in each second
tooth-
cavity an un-
destructible hymn wakes up.

The clump of twilight you throw down to us,
come, swallow it too down.

THIS DAY, rolled out:
the many-thousand-years-old dough
for the later
hunic flat cake,

a just-as-old
jaw, somewhat oozy,
commemorates all early times,
and bares its teeth against them and itself,

hoof-
beats of the protoanimal to the
yeast-arioso:
it goes, flat-cake beautiful singable growth,
still and always upwards,

a shadow-
less spirit, dis-
lonelied, an
immortal,
shivers
blissfully.

OILY still
the die's One swims
between brow and brow,
stops here,
lidless, follows
your gaze.

YOU WITH THE
in the darkglass gazed at,

you One
with the beheld
substanceless light-mirror-surface innermost:

through the ten-
towered desert gate your
messenger-self steps before you, stands,
for the length of a triple vowel,
in the high
redness,

as if the people in the distances
were once again gathered around you.

OUT OF ANGEL-MATTER, on the day
of the ensouling, phallically
united in the One
—He, the Enlivening-Just, slept you towards me,
sister—, upwards
streaming through the channels, up
into the rootcrown:
parted
she hoists us up, equal-eternal,
with standing brain, a bolt of lightning
sews our skulls aright, the pans
and all
the still to be dissemened bones:

strewn from the East, to be harvested in the West: equal-
    eternal—,

where this script burns, after the
threequarter-death, before
the rolling around remainder-
soul, which
writhes in crownfear,
since ur-ever.

THE FREE-BLOWN LIGHTCROP
in the under worldblood
standing furrows.

A hand with the shimmer of the urlight
poaches beyond
the ferny dams:

as if there still starved
any stomach
as if there fluttered
any still to be
fertilized eye.

LINE THE WORDCAVES
with panther skins,

widen them, hide-to and hide-fro,
sense-hither and sense-thither,

give them courtyards, chambers, drop doors
and wildnesses, parietal,

and listen for their second
and each time second and second
tone.

THE HIGHWORLD—lost, the delusion-ride, the day-ride.

Ascertainable, from here on out,
the with the rose in the fallow year
home-sensed Nowhere.

THE MUTTERING
arms-
passes.

On the leaped over
step

the deathdoodads
diddle.

. . .THOUGH NO KIND OF
peace.

Greynights, preconscious-cool.
Stimuli-quanta, otterlike,
over consciousness-gravel
on the way to
memory-vesicles.

The grisaille of matter.

A halfpain, a second, without
permanent trace, halfway
here. A halfpleasure.
The moved. The cathexed.

Repetition-compulsion-
monochrome.

NEAR, IN THE AORTIC ARCH,
in the light-blood:
the light-word.

Mother Rachel
weeps no more.
Carried over:
all the weepings.

Quiet, in the coronary arteries,
unconstricted:
Ziv, that light.

THROW THE SUNYEAR, to which you cling,
over the heart railings
and row to, starve yourself away, copulating:

two germcells, two metazoons,
that's what you were,

the inanimate, the homeland,
now requests return—:

later, who knows,
one of you two, transformed,
may re-emerge,
a slipper animalcule,
ciliated,
in the shield.

BECAUSE YOU FOUND THE WOE-SHARD
in the deserted settlement,
the shadow-centuries relax by your side
and hear you think:

Maybe it is true
that here peace debated two peoples,
from clay pots.

IT HAS COME THE TIME:

The brainsickle, unsheathed,
lounges in the sky,
rumbled by gallstars,

the antimagnets, the rulers,
sound off.

LIPS, ERECTILE TISSUE of the You-night:

Hairpincurve-glances are climbing up,
making out the commissure,
sew themselves fast here—:
No admittance! Blacktoll.

There should still be glowworms.

WOLFGANG GIEGERICH
THE FABRICATION OF TIME[1]

Time, the time in which we live, seems to be an a priori given, utterly out of reach for humans, who because they are inescapably subject to it and limited by it, have been given the name "the mortals" by the Greeks, in contradistinction to the Gods, who enjoy eternal youth. But of course, it is also well known that the idea and experience of time has changed in the course of human history. We distinguish, e.g., the circular sense of time experienced by most archaic peoples from the linear sense of time governing our modern being-in-the-world. In a certain sense, therefore, time must be just as much subject to human history as human history before seemed subject to, and embedded in, time. One could get out of this contradiction if one were to distinguish two kinds of time, actual time ($time_1$) on the one hand, and the idea or experience of time ($time_2$) on the other. $Time_2$, as a human conception, would then be contained in, and subject to, $time_1$, the almighty Time of history. However, philosophically the trick of separating two kinds of the same thing is never very convincing, and so here, too, a quick reflection will force us to realize that $time_1$ must be just as much a human idea as $time_2$, so the problem returns.

Instead of trying to solve this dilemma in a philosophical way, I here want to demonstrate that, and in which concrete way, *our* time, linear historical time, the time in which the events of physics, the evolution of the species, the history of mankind, as well as our individual lives occur, is the product of an original invention and manufacturing. Of course, this manufacturing does not take place in factories, but in the primary industry of the soul's imagination.

We can turn to the Old Testament prophets in order to witness the process of the fabrication of historical time.

Originally, the prophetic word was oral, addressed to the people of the prophet's time and community. But then at one point prophecy came to be committed to writing; it became literature. Isaiah, after having been repelled by Jerusalem's leading circles, resolves to "bind up the testimony, seal the law among [i.e. either: in the presence of, or: in] my disciples" (Isa. 8:16).[2] A freer rendering in a modern language translation[3] of this verse reads, "I shall entrust God's warnings and instructions to those who listen

to me, so that they will be kept safe like money in a firmly tied purse." Why does he want to store God's word safely away? Because he counts on the future to confirm the truth of his prophecy. "And I will," the following verse reads, "wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will [expectantly] look for him."

This passage is the document of a psychological occurrence of serious consequences. Here something extraordinary is happening in the reality of the soul's life. The religious experience (the prophetic word) is not released into the world, not turned over to the prophet's age so that it could be as effectual or ineffectual as it might happen to be of its own accord. It is fixed and kept in reserve. It is sealed and safeguarded like money in a tightly closed purse. To release always also implies to relinquish. The spoken word, as released, has escaped. It is no longer in the speaker's control. The act of writing down, by contrast, keeps the word in the possession of the recipient of the revelation. Psychologically, the act of sealing has the effect of intensifying the word's power, because it concentrates and holds it back.

"And I will wait upon the Lord and will expectantly look for him." Isaiah obviously is waiting for the moment when the prophetic word that he received in his revelatory experience and historical, social reality will be brought to coincidence. As we heard in the second verse, God has hidden his face from his people. The prophet answers this concealment on the part of God by concealing and sealing his prophecy. The absolute insistence upon the truth of God's word, i.e. upon the exact congruence of personal religious experience and public reality, can in this way remain intact. It is simply unthinkable and unbearable—this seems to be Isaiah's feeling—that an archetypal experience, a vision or an auditory revelation, does not coincide with the reality of the people. What I have seen in a vision, *must* be fulfilled in external reality.

We see in Jeremiah how powerful the will to realization can be. Jeremiah "once accused his God outright of treachery"[4]: "wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" (Jer. 15:18). The experienced discrepancy between the word and reality is not simply endured. There is no dis-appointment, dis-illusionment or relativization, nor is there, as would have been characteristic of the mythical being-in-the-world, a distinction between archetypal and empirical truth, so that the one would merely be mirrored in the other without literally coinciding with it. Here there simply must be a coincidence. But because this demand for a coincidence if not fulfilled, it is displaced from the present into a distant future as the sole place where this coincidence might still have a chance: What *is* not true, can, nay shall, indeed *must* become true. Conversely, we could say that it is the invention of the future that is the way in which the will to an absolute hold on reality edifies itself.

We are witnessing here the birth of the future (*futurum*) out of the will to a literal realization of the content of a spiritual vision or archetypal

experience. This future, as the place of wishing, or rather of the will and demand for power, did not always exist. It was invented: *fabricated* through a clearly definable procedure. The method of this invention is that the spiritual experience of a given present is committed to writing and thus stored, preserved beyond its own present. Or rather: this one present itself is frozen. It is not allowed to naturally pass, to come to an end, to be succeeded by a new present. "Present" here does not mean the empty, abstract point of a "now" on the axis of linear time. Present is a certain quality, in our case it is the content of a particular religious experience. By locking up the content of this present (the world revealed to Isaiah) it thus becomes possible to extend and hold on to this present beyond its time. All future time will then only be the blown up, prolonged, *present* present, i.e. the present of then, of Isaiah's revelation, a present which could possibly be extended into infinity. The flow of original time is arrested. The advent (future as "the time to come" cf. German *Zukunft*: conventionally = "future," but literally "that which comes toward us") of new events, one new present after another, as well as of new revelations, is locked out, because this one conserved present is spread out in such a way that it takes on the role of all time, time as such.

Everything which occurs is thereby turned into a mere "moment" (in the sense of a constituent element, or step, or stage) in the unfolding of this one extended moment (in the temporal sense). Linear time, or time that governs out own sense of time and upon which our sciences (physics as well as history) rest, is an "artificial" product. It is the product of absolutizing one sole moment singled out of the flow of moments in original time. Just like God the creator left the ranks of mythical divinities, who had always been natural deities, deities *in* nature, and rose above all nature, setting himself up as the supernatural, extramundane creator of the natural world, so the single moment here rises above the natural stream of events and declares itself to be time itself, the only and true time. The time of physics and history, of astronomy and biological evolution is not really *the* time, not "true" time (*in* which there would of course also have to be an epoch of mythical thinking that for whatever reasons did not have an idea of linear time). Rather, it is only one moment of original time. This would force the realization upon us that astronomical and biological evolution and the history of the historians are no more than aspects of one single fixed moment. Physics, biology, astronomy, history are an elaboration and unfolding of the imaginal content of this one, qualitatively determined instant, which has been spread apart into infinite duration, whereas all other instants or presences (present moments characterized by a particular quality) have simultaneously been excluded.

We can also look at this from another point of view. If Isaiah had not stored up his revelation like jewelry in a bank safe, then other religious

experiences of a totally different nature could have happened to him or to those after him. In the mythologically constituted world, each present had its own god or myth as the inner image of its qualitative substance. Now was the moment of birth, of war, of love and begetting, of darkness, drought, harvest, illness, of the solstice festival, or what have you. Time was the advent of ever new archetypal situations, i.e., it was the manifestation of different gods, each appearing at his time and each having the unfolding of his nature in a particular myth. Isaiah, one might say, singles out one myth of the plenty of diverse myths, turning it into the sole myth, a super-myth. He claps this one, formerly intratemporal myth over time itself, so that from now on it will be the nature of time to be nothing but the unfolding of this single myth. The one moment or myth loses its eachness (each at, and for duration of, its appointed time) and becomes absolute.

It is as if one single poem of our entire literary history would be raised to the position of *the* poem, so that all other poems would have to be considered as mere explications or instances of individual aspects contained in this super-poem. Or it is what a popular understanding alleges the immanent intention of Hegel's philosophy to be: that philosophy of which all actual philosophems of the entire history of philosophy are only particular moments. Or it is like the developmental psychology of, e.g., Erich Neumann, which singles out one archetype (the Great Mother) from within the rank of all the many archetypes and deities and reduces all others either to her attendants or to mere phases in the development of this one archetypal principle.

The nature of time is turned inside out. In an act of usurpation, an internal "piece" of time declares itself to be time at large. Saving is the way a single present seizes power over all future and imposes on it its theme as the one and only theme. It is the way in which this theme, belonging to that one present, rises to the exclusive motivation operative in all "present moments" of history, moments however deprived of their true character as presences. The succession of ever different advents (different gods, moments, times) changes into the single *heilsgeschichte* of the monotheistic God. History ceases to be a stream of events and turns into one exclusive narrative, into the narration of a super-myth, which it is the task of our sciences to minutely elaborate and embellish. The one and only narrative has a beginning, as every story does, its *Genesis*, origin—be it "In the beginning was the Word" or "In the beginning was the Big Bang" or whatever, the one story having many versions and the course of its narration being still in process. And it has its ending (eschatology) as well as its linear and unambiguous course from beginning to end, the unerring hastening towards the end: so-called history.

This amounts to a transformation of the essence of future: instead of advent, epiphany, future now means fulfillment of the stored up, deferred

ending: apocalypse. In Christian terms, even advent itself is merely the advent of He who has long been expected, so that advent is deprived of its character as advent. For part of true advent is the arriving guest's foreignness, his unexpectedness, maybe also his uncanny or even assaulting reality.

Once one has understood this, one can see that the sciences are the telling of this single narrative, that is, that they are a myth, one single myth still in the process of its own construction and narration. This myth only appears to be *the* truth for the reason that we have absolutized *its* truth (that it has like any myth) or that we have succumbed to its being absolutized, which absolutization stems from a distant past. The content or message of *this* myth is the idea of the absolute. But this of course does not mean that the narrative *of* the absolute would also be the absolute narrative. By understanding this, we can see through the appearance that we have been taken in by, and we can slowly perhaps recognize modern physics, astronomy, the theory of evolution, the science of history as gigantic works of that literary genre called "fiction" or "belles lettres," and thus restore them to the soul, to imagination. In speaking of fiction I do not mean to say anything derogatory, for I do not have a low opinion of fiction. Also, I do not wish to suggest that the sciences did not, as they claim, come up with truths in the sense of reliable knowledge, but rather produced untenable fantasies. No doubt, the results of the sciences are, within the limits acknowledged by a responsible scientific attitude, indeed "true" (reliable). But: what we must do is take this unquestioned "truth" (of the scientific results) back into the imaginal: as *one* extended, prolonged moment of (from within) mythic imagination (time). By science fiction we understand a particular genre of novels, futuristic novels. But we begin to understand that the sciences themselves—the teachings and insights of our physicists, historians, etc.—are actual, literal science fiction, not despite, but on account of, their scientificity.

After having moved far from our starting point, a passage in Isaiah, I would like to come back to Isaiah in order to examine, in the light of our present discussion, what happens in his text. In Isa. 30:8, God commands Isaiah to write down His word. "Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be [more accurately: may serve as witness] for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord. . ."

Here we see the reaching out into the future. The written word shall become true some time in the future and then rise up as witness against those who did not participate in Isaiah's religious experience: God's word as time bomb for them. The reserving compacts and intensifies the content of this one experience into a bomb. This is important to note, for it helps us to distinguish the prophet's sealing his truth among his disciples from

the secrecy prevailing in mystery cults and men's secret societies. Whereas in those cults esoteric silence is an authentic purpose, the prophet still remains intent upon communicating (preaching) the word, and his silence merely serves the purpose of reaching a more overpowering, indeed an absolute dissemination in the end. The natural conditions of preaching with its contingencies (now more, now less success) is no longer acceptable for him. He wants so to speak and *Endlösung*, a definitive solution ("for ever and ever," i.e. once and for all).

The present and the distant future are being overarched by the one word of revelation. The future is not a different, fresh present (advent), but only the fulfillment of this present, the explosion of the stored up word into external reality. It is the final chapter of the narrative whose first chapter we witness with Isaiah's revelation. From now on, man and everything that is and happens takes place *in* time. Time has become an encompassing framework or container for everything that is, and everything that is in turn has "for the first time" turned into the Temporal, the Secular, whereas once, the phenomena and events occurred to man *as* time, *as* advent, epiphany.

Because Isaiah's actual present is only the inauguration of that new form of "present" that we could call history, and because it is essentially unfulfilled—for its fulfillment is expressly deferred to a distant time—existence in time becomes a waiting, an expectant looking for Him (Isa. 8:17). The qualitative moment is no longer in itself rounded and complete. The expectant waiting is the psychological reflex of the retained breath, and also the reflex of the fixed, arrested truth (present), which as arrested is prevented from exhausting and completing itself. Man's soul is put into the utmost tension, it receives a jet or rocket propulsion, because the completion of the narrative has yet to come, and the soul is by necessity totally committed to this distant goal; for the arrested moment, too, or rather especially, wants its completion. What the arrest does is to sunder the moment into it *arché* on the one hand and its *télos* on the other, and by distending them produce an immense internal tension corresponding to this nuclear fission. For this split has, like the split in a neurosis, the character of a dissociation: of a separation that occurs *within* a unity, but does not dissolve it. It has to be understood as the unity *of* separation (splitting, holding apart) *and* unity (holding together). This is a tension that, at the end of the Christian eon when it has receded from an objective spiritual level into the personal life and the subjective empirical feelings of the individual, has to be constantly reexperienced and re-enacted by means of thrilling novels or movies. One needs pastimes and diversions to kill the empty time between the severed halves of the one present arrested in its course and to make the endless waiting for the systematically deferred ending endurable. But conversely, one also needs them in order to have something to interpose between those two halves, and thereby to

constantly reenact the very holding apart that causes time to be empty, for without such constant reenactment the distended *archê* and *télos* would instantly collapse again.

At the time of mythic being-in-the-world, by contrast, thrillers and novels of suspense would have been unthinkable. For at that time, each present completed itself during its own time; it was released into its transience from the outset. Now *archê* and *télos* mark the borders (the beginning and ending *points*) at the opposite ends of the "line" of the phenomenon's duration. The "line" holds them apart as mutually exclusive opposites, but also simultaneously connects them. Originally they were not points, but were *ongoing* beginning, *ongoing* ending, and thus have to be imagined as two strands of a present—twin strands as inalienably connected as, say, those in the double helix of the DNA structure. To begin meant being in the process of ending, and, precisely by coming to an end, reaching consummation and perfection. And to cease to begin meant to be over, dead, bygone. This release into their ending amounted to an unconstrained self-expenditure on the part of the phenomena, to their splurgily giving themselves away, and thus to an ontological generosity. The conclusion was not preserved and sealed so as to explosively discharge, as it were, only "on the last pages of the novel." Being intent upon and released into its final end (its telos or archetypal image), each moment was ontologically and logically (not necessarily ontically) fulfilling from its very beginning and for its entire duration. No suspense. No saved up denouement. Now, by contrast, ontological miserliness rules.[5]

My paradigm for the constitution of time in the archaic situation is the race in the race course (*stádion*) of the early Olympic games. Such games and particularly the race seem to have had their origin in the cult of the dead and the funeral rites for heroes (like those for Patroklos described in the *Iliad*).[6] In racing towards the goal and into the finish, the runner visibly enacted, for every *theorós* to see, the meaning or sense of time and life. He ran into the transience of the race and into his exhaustion, symbolically into death. The connection between the race and death is born out by a much later terminology of the Greek physicians. They called the final stage of a terminal illness *tó stádion*, the race into the finish. But this finish did not just mean "over." It also meant fulfillment. For the runner was not simply finished with and by the race. He had arrived at his goal, on top of the altar of the god (Zeus) placed at the end of the race course. There he had to complete the sacrifice with which the race had begun by setting fire to the bloody pile of wood, earth and ashes of which this altar consisted, in order to burn the thigh pieces of the slaughtered sacrificial bull deposited there. The flames consummating the pieces of the sacrificed animal affirmed, indeed celebrated, at once death and the fulfillment of life. And as Cornford and others have argued, the cultic race ended in a Sacred Marriage, with

a divine transfiguration, in which the runner reached his consummation (*teleté*) and in which, by viewing it, all those present participated.

This is the point where, by way of an aside, we might at least point to the vista that is opened up by our present reflections on the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. If we hear that Derrida characterizes his own endeavors as a "prolonged hesitation," if we think of the place he attributes to writing (écriture) and to *différance*, deferral, if we also think of his claustrophobic[7] reading of Hegel and of the entire history of Western metaphysics which for him necessitates enmity towards any "presence," this may indicate to what extent his work may be bound by the pattern of thought inaugurated by the Old Testament prophets. The logical operation that in them showed itself only in and as their topic, as the particular objective reality they talked about (a literal distance between now and then as two separate ontic points in time), has in his thinking become—immensely sublimated, refined, and internalized—a style of consciousness or logical form ("deconstruction") in which any content whatsoever can now appear. And from the insight into the connection between present, death and archetypal fulfillment (*teleté*), the question emerges whether the attack on "presence" and the strategy of différance might not have the underlying psychological meaning of an attempt to have death forever deferred.[8]

According to what we have found out, it is not accidental that the Christian Occident's history book, the Bible, explosively discharges on its last pages in the book of Revelation (telling the story of the final breaking of the seals on the book sealed with seven seals), and that this particular revelation in turn happens to be of an apocalyptic (catastrophic) nature. The history of the Christian West, as the history of the saved up, arrested moment, had to run up to the apocalypse. The apocalypse, however, may now be conceived as the end of only this one moment, not as the end at large. As long as we fear the apocalyptic end of history through an atomic or environmental catastrophe as the absolute end, it is we who still equate this one moment of time with time at large, and thereby show to what extent we are blindly imprisoned in this single moment. The apocalypse, if it had occurred, would be the end of this imprisonment and the entrance into new moments, new presents.

The way our story is presented, it seems that Isaiah writes down and seals God's word because God remains hidden to the "rebellious, lying" people: sealing as the reaction to the refusal on the part of the people to listen and receive. But it may be more appropriate to conceive the sealing on the part of the prophet and the not hearing on the part of the people as two simultaneous sides of one and the same imaginal situation, in such a way however, that the holding back of the experienced truth has a certain logical priority within this simultaneity and that God's hiddenness for the people is its inner consequence. Maybe the particular present that Isaiah

was confronted with, and that still remains to be ours, is the one special present *of* written (and thus frozen) truth and of a fulfillment reserved or deferred for a day to come some distant time in the future. And only because it is such an arrested present is it also the present of the hiddenness of God (= the not hearing on the part of the people) and of the expectant waiting of his prophet during this emptied out time. Maybe the prophet also *needs* the "rebelliousness" of the people and their repelling him as a necessary ingredient of this particular archetypal fantasy in which he is caught up, in order to be given sufficient motivation and impetus for the truly revolutionary feat of effecting the transition from oral, transient word to written, positivized message by saving up the word and forming it into a time bomb.

If this were the case, it would mean that as long as the moment's truth is saved up and held back like money in a firmly tied purse (we could also say: as long as it remains fixed as a doctrine of faith, a metaphysical truth of philosophy or as a scientific truth), so long the fulfillment too would be promised ever anew "for the time to come for ever and ever," but that, precisely on account of its being saved up, it could never come to be; it would be postponed to the Greek calends, forever deferred. The essential unfulfillment of the expectant hope would be permanent. But conversely, it would also mean that fulfillment could only occur if the present were permitted to be transient and pass away, which is its innate tendency to begin with. The truth hidden in it would have to be released into the open and surrendered to its own free flow, expressly at the risk of its (and our) dying and fading away. This would be the restitution of truth to the poetics of being, the founding of reality in the abyss of psyche—of the imaginal.

Especially in Ezekiel there is a particular genre of prophetic verse that has been given the name *Erweiswort* (word of proof) by Walther Zimmerli.[9] In such passages there is first an announcement of a deed by Jahve, which is then followed by a statement of purpose (*"so that* ye shall know"). Ezek. 37:12-14: "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I *am* the Lord, *when* I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves. . .: *then* shall yet know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord." In such "words of proof," we see, with a clarity that leaves nothing to be desired, how one moment's nucleus (idea, archetypal content) is split and how its two fission products are stretched apart, as if they were an expander used for muscle building, so as to form a single arch across all future history. Now, in the present, we hear the advance announcement by God of a future deed. This is the one "half" of the moment, is *archê*, which is split off from its inherent *télos* and set to one side. And then there is the (future) redemption of this promise through the performance of the deed itself, which is to serve as

obvious proof that "I the Lord have spoken it and *[truly] performed it*." This is the other "half" of the same moment, its *télos* in which it finds its fulfillment. Just as the *arché* was set to one side, so is necessarily the split off *télos* too. The present announcement is true, but unreal because it is without its fulfillment, and the expected apocalypse will be real, but untrue because it will occur as a mere brutal fact having its divine, revelatory meaning outside itself in the announcement uttered millennia before. All time in between is the conjunction of the irreality and this untruth: utterly empty.

Because the particular deed announced here is the eschatological one of opening the graves and raising the dead, we know that the prophet is not reaching out for a limited time span, a period of so many years, decades, centuries within time, but for all time. Time as such is overarched and "pocketed." By setting up this tense arch stretched from the now of a promise to the then of its redemption at the end of, or beyond, all time, the prophets created the ontological frame or the archetypal schema for understanding history as one whole meaningful nexus in the sense of one narrative or one single drama. When Karl Jaspers wrote a book on the origin and goal of history, he could only do so because he resided within the one present split apart and distended by the prophets' achievements, and because this one present remained identical for him with time as such. But the science of history, too, and even physics are only possible on the ground made available by the situation established through the "word of proof": because the sequence of manifold real events can only be experienced as *one* self-contained nexus by virtue of the "word of proof," whereas in the natural situation each time had its own, ever fresh origin. There were many times. Time was a countable noun. And each time was a finite entity.

In addition to the superseding of time as such, there is another reason why in the Ezekiel passage quoted the genre of the *Erweiswort* thematically happens to speak of the envisioned resurrection of the bones of the dead and not about something else. What has been saved up, sealed, *buried* demands an explosive opening, an apocalypse. The method of locking up for the purpose of an intensified opening at the end of time is only the one side of an impulse whose other side is the thematic and eschatological concern for a hope of overcoming death. The method of deferring God's word through writing (and thus freezing, positivizing, "killing" it) is the path to the idea of Eternal Life. This method is indeed the instrument with which human existence could be heaved out of its natural attitude and transplanted into the attitude of an eschatological hoping. Simultaneously, there was a psychologically real translation of the definition of life from phenomenal eachness and transience into eternity and positivity (Eternal Life). Inasmuch as eschatological *hoping* for Eternal Life already *is*

resurrection from death, the act of storing up the word and freezing *its* life, by which act we are transported into hope, is in itself the word promising resurrection.

The prophets' story is one of bated breath. But bated breath here also means a long breath. Life ceased to be the constant, "monotonous" rhythm of inhaling and exhaling ever since Isaiah, by holding back his truth in a closed "purse," intercepted the exhaling. The long breath must then be what distinguishes the history thus originated. The tremendous range of one single time continuum is created by the retention of breath, by the ascetic abstention from exhaling. It is an extent of time that provided for Occidental man the possibility to continually work on the one opus of the construction of technical civilization. The mythical world was characterized by remembering *and* forgetting, Mnemosyne *and* Lethe, inhaling *and* exhaling. For this reason each individual present was too short to allow for a continuous cultural *development* across centuries in the sense of the "progress" that is typical of the Christian eon. In the mythical situation, there was not one single time as the container of all moments; each moment or phenomenon had its time, was *a* time, and a new moment or phenomenon was also the beginning of a new and different time. Because the moment here was not an element within the time continuum, but a discrete time in its own right, there was hardly a place for a longer continuity.[10] Each time was not only too short, but above all it *came* together with its "race" heading for its completion, its own apocalypse: the manifestation and experience of its imaginal meaning.

This was the pre-prophetic dynamics of phenomena. They orgiastically wasted themselves for no more than their archetypal meaning. They exhausted themselves for nothing but the display of their shine, with nothing left for those who had not been present, had not participated in the initiatory experience of them: no practical result, nothing *positive* to transmit to the next generation, nothing that could serve as a jump-off base for a progressive development. The next generation had to start all over again and do its own breathing-and-exhaling.

Only by applying to each new situation the archetypal schema conquered for mankind by the Old Testament prophets (and that is to say only by preventing each phenomenon or present from wasting itself on the shine of its "truth") could one hold on to something positive that would last beyond its time: the sealing of the moment's truth in a book logically stripped the moment of its epiphanic transience, abstracted and "rescued" it from its self-abandonment to its death = its visionary meaning. The moment was thereby reduced to its permanent abstract "information" aspect that could, apart from any *initiatory* epiphanic experience, be *intellectually* taught and learned and believed in faith or disputed in doubt.[11] As the frozen act of an exclusive inhaling, it was only apperceived

as a positive result (as a matter of act, not as a meaningful experience) and thus was able to serve as a base to build on. An entirely new dynamics had been created. The arrest of the moment's original dynamics unhooked it from the present of which it had been an integral and inalienable part and allowed its direction to be changed. Its energy that, if undisturbed, would have gone into the race towards its own finish is now used as a means to enable a civilization to push off from the previous generation's experience (now a priori only allowed to be perceived as fixed results) to new levels of civilization and consciousness. The dynamic is turned into that of a power engine to be utilized ever anew for the purposes of the one super-moment, the one linear narrative inaugurated by the prophets.[12] The industrious application of this power engine to every aspect of the world in science, technology and industry is that time-overarching dynamics that we call "progress." It allowed for the ever more comprehensive, ever more detailed subjugation of the world under the truth of the one arrested moment and for Western man's continually accelerating rise above, and divorce from, "nature."

As far as I can see, there are only four types of approaches to, or theories of, history as a whole: 1) the annalistic approach to be found in chronicles; 2) the cyclical conception of time, ideas of an eternal recurrence (probably modelled after the succession of day and night or after the recurring seasons of the year); 3) the degeneration theory, imagining history as a decline from the Golden Age or the Iron Age or to the Indian *kali yuga* (the model for this view probably being the biological ageing of us humans); and 4) the evolutionary or progress theory of history (inspired by the idea of the growth of plants or the growing up of children into adults).

We may now add a fifth view of history: the *involution* of all time into one of its moments. What from one point of view appeared as the usurpatory *rising* of one moment above all peer moments, can from another be seen through to be a monomaniac zooming in on this one single instant and the installation of all life, all time, all things and events within its narrow confines. This conception, however, demands of us some mental effort, a considerable stretching of the mind. What it is about cannot be perceived or pictorially imagined anymore. It can only be thought. We have to rise to the challenge of thinking the infinite expanse of open-ended linear time as having its place in an expansionless geometric point: history, which is above all the history of scientific and technological progress and of the incredible amassing of knowledge about all details of reality and of the penetration to ever more distant galaxies of the universe and to ever more microscopic recesses of matter—this expanding history as the ongoing collapse of the universe in a (in *the*) Black Hole.

Notes

1 This is a modified and expanded English version of a chapter ("Der Schuß und seine Bahn") of the author's book *Drachenkampf oder Initiation ins Nuklearzeitalter* (vol. 2 of his: *Psychoanalyse der Atombombe*), Zürich (Schweizer Speigel Verlag) 1989.

2 According to the traditional masoretic interpretation, the verb forms are understood as imperatives, God instructing the prophet to do what the verbs say. For grammatical as well as exegetical reasons, modern scholarship reads them as expressing something the prophet does from his own volition.

3 *Die Bibel in heutigem Deutsch. Die Gute Nachricht*. Stuttgart, 1982 (My trans.)

4 Hans Walter Wolff, "'So sprach Jahwe zu mir, als die Hand mich packte.' Was haben die Propheten erfahren?" In: *Herrenalber Texte* 51 (1984), pp. 9-21. (My trans.)

5 This is a statement about an ontological (or logical) state and should therefore not be heard as a moral evaluation.

6 There has been quite a debate on this subject. See e.g. E. N. Gardiner, *Olympia* (1925), pp. 63ff.; L. Drees, *Der Ursprung der Olympischen Spiele* (Beiträge zur Lehre und Foschung der Leibeserziehung 13), 1962; M. F. Cornford, "The origin of the Olympic games" in J. E. Harrison, *Themis* (1912), pp. 212ff. Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans*, Berlin & New York (de Gruyter) 1972, pp. 108-119.

7 I am indebted for this formulation to James Hersh.

8 This question might impress itself on us even more later when we come to a discussion of an Ezekiel passage showing the connection between the deferral of fulfillment and the longing for an overcoming of death and for Eternal Life.

9 W. Zimmerli, "Das Wort des göttlichen Selbsterweises (Erweiswort), eine prophetische Gattung." In: *Mélanges Bibliques rédigés en l'honneur de A. Robert*, 1957, pp. 154-164.

10 Instead of that continuity allowing developmental progress, archaic peoples had a different kind of continuity: *tradition*, a continuity of *meaning*.

11 Both, religious believing and scientific knowing depend on the positivization of truth as the written word. An epiphany could not possibly be "believed" in. It was an *experience*, which means that as *logically transient* (not positive, not "written") it "passed through" the experiencing person fulfilling and illuminating him in its passage.

12 This is made very clear in the Ezekiel passage: The fulfillment of God's promise at the end of time has not the quality of a purposeless *shine* of meaning, but has an external and positive purpose—that of "serving as [factual] *proof*," of winning an argument.

GUSTAF SOBIN
TWO POEMS

TRANSPARENT ITINERARIES: 1991

were no origins (so we were told), only ends.

nowhere, really, to reach except those occasional places in
which —sometimes— we'd orchestrate those ends. set their emp-
tiness —in measured bars, volutes, ellipses— to sound.

those hill villages, for instance, each autumn, only days af-
ter they'd been abandoned.

still, after so much depredation, an ocherous rose.

language, making metaphor as it does out of a fundamentally
metaphoric existence, has —at least— the power of its own
reversibility

"you," it would seem, more *place*, at first, than *person*. (there,
for example, where the shadows —in foaming— as if seethed).

existing —as we do— in so much myriad reflection.

—flamboyant shell—

---

nearer, certainly, you would have
vanished; further, we'd
never have known
that —for hours at a time— we'd
had the same name.

---

otherwise, endless as the air itself. as wind, the consistency
of soot.

only the glint, you said, wasn't incidental. only the glint,
occasionally, glowed (or seemed to).

"seemed to," I repeat, observing —thus— that spent usage.

—you, who'd always be just an instant earlier—

---

within your gaze, would
turn; in your long fingers,

root.

---

composed, as we are, of creases. of creases and appendages.
or so, at least, we'd like to think.

oh, how many hallucinated cells within a single, predetermined
body.

. . .the mirage of how many rocks. . .

where a distance —once— preserved us.

kept us primed —as if essential— within its invisible quiver.

(what, awakened, the organs first rose toward).

its icons invested with breath: *our breath*. what held us —for
so long— out of reach of our own dismantling.

flexed interval.

what, with each new appropriation, had only receded. had nearly vanished, now, into an "already-after."

worn tokens; gutted sums.

"seeking to conquer a larger liberty, man," according to Melville, had but extended "the empire of necessity."

. . .in which, not even gagged, a gratuity of sounds. . .

---

would wrestle in
    these shadows for that
light, that
luster, for those
blown drops driven —incandescent— past so
much extinguished
mirror.

---

as if cupped, irrecuperative.

an alcove in air!

where, otherwise, had gone on vanishing in the very midst of
so much acquisition. in the very heart of its compressed met-
als.

---

mother of no one, as
woman you
enter, occupy nothing, but stand, water-
slick in the midst of these pitted
whispers, no one's, once
again.

THE VILLAS OF ANDREA PALLADIO

there, once again, at the
world's
very edge, you're
pointing out palaces, aren't
you? tapping

at that viscous
glass, holding them, the
im-

memoràbile, at the
tip

of your lacquered
nail. there, just there, where the
barge pivots, seems to
station in the
midst

of its own vapors. "see
it?" you

ask. I see
your lacquered nail, its

wavering
reflection, follow it

across
those stalled waters. *pier, pilaster,*
fronton, the pure
scale

of so much
hal-

lucinatory mass. (not even a
hedgerow to
break the

effect, not even
a stray dog, the ragged line of
its
leash).

*

null, in so
many
numbers, isn't this
    what you mean? this, that's
meant? blown
mirrors, the void
in

which, turgid, our
viscera

would glow? among the
room,
rooms, the
words empty —spacious— enough
to

withhold us? isn't
this, that's
nothing, what the
    cells —wedging— would jam?

*

billows about you, a
scarf of
clouds, pigeons. yes, a sudden
air
of apparent
be-

wilderment. tell, tell
me to my-

self, before even
you
get swept
into that wash of sounds, the
lagoon, al-

ready, in a
sputter
of tugs, marked by so

many rigorously
aligned
pilings. yes, before
our
own breath hardens
a-

bout its very
words, and our bodies, once
again, beat

against the
muslins of their veiled reflections.

DAVID HINTON
TWO POEMS

WINDOW

To hear rain
falling in familiar
streets is to
long for
the sound of rain
falling in familiar
streets. Nothing

to lose, I hold it
gently as untouched
peach blossoms
among broken
glass—and yet,
nothing, earth's

empty genealogies, its
clear, deep-sky
window. Return us
to shadow, to song-

shadow names
cast—*moon*, twice-
sized setting
moon. O bright
seed of darkness.

WILD APPLES

All clarity snow
darkens and cannot
touch. . . . These
figures of speech
identify. It is

no doubt
true mind
began in that
space names
open, and seeing

through the figures
names take, seeing
through mind's very
etymologies (restoring
ponder to market
scales, *consider* to
stars), pilgrims

burn the world
down to that
immaculate
solitude, that perfectly
empty, unborn

mind. But an early
snow fell last
night, and this clear
autumn sky
seems endless. For now
at least, I'll stay

here beside this
snow-darkened
lake all clarity
looking in. I'll

journey no further
than the familiar,

long-abandoned
orchard, savor that
articulate
century of weather
distilled in the peppery
taste of wild

apples. Tangled
branches cragged
beneath winters of heavy
snow, lichen-encrusted
trunks gnarled
around sudden mountain
thunderstorms—what occurs

keeps working
further and further
into its own
voice, its own private
language each

walk I
take. It is not
a truth of words,
but the unanswerable
image they

occupy. *Wild*
apples, perhaps,
or the sheer
completion we
sustain of a language

itself, where
our touch our
separations are
lost to themselves.

CLAUDIA KEELAN
TWO POEMS

THE QUEEN OF TRAGEDY, AWAKE FROM THE BASEMENT

Indentured to the stages of sleep,
I spun into his REM's,

bellied the rat infested
tunnel to a lesser field

of breath, no net, no tool
to help us through. Where we were,

metronome of burning water,
no word for. Only the smallest

of us access tunnels, wet
translators of snarls, monitors

of the distance made from our shadows;
we'd never been closer. How I wanted

no flesh then, longed to peel
him down to grip the axe

missing with precise abandon
the clotted trees between us

and day. On Penyrile Pkwy,
a white sign: Prepare to meet God.

I lower my teeth to his chest and tear:
a helicopter squats the airfield,

machete arms polished and ready
to lift us away from here.

INCEST

Bashed into the street side window, a little blood,
cardinal stigmata, red cloud wafting
wants a beak in my mouth wants, oh a small

beak just inside my lip's soft inside.
Updrafting, 'gainst my country window—
an apple's star, nail pricks, lipstick muscle

what's the difference? Your tunnel calling
and I always stuff myself there. May I call you father?

I've forgotten why the menstrual smeared
trees go by different names. Their early acorns

sucked the wet from inside clouds
and the things I promised you there dryly

vanished too. Why are we always underground?
I want you to figure me in the pissing glow

right here. Oh riddle the lamplight with our under
-ness. Render the fucking master

orb sightless. Our cardinal's ordinary
suicide cries love me here

KAREN KELLEY

MAP OF HEAVEN (LETTER TO JUSTIN)

dream of a hot, dry wind.

come over and stand right up against me, your thigh between my legs.

something about matches. funny, there're no candles or lights. your foot tangled in the strap of my purse. I'm pulling, somewhat seductively.

do you have on high heels or is it my foot I see?

people watching say, "They can only move when there's a wind." but it's more a matter of something fierce, indefinite, unstated.

now they've left without me—screen door open, dock empty. no, there's one boat—a transparent green boat—and I wish it weren't there, wish we were stranded.

reread. reading a few times to see if it says "rape." *the manifestations of happiness and darkness are* [indecipherable].

cut to a restaurant. you are Mark, working as a cook. I am with you, but not acquisitively so. hotel bathroom. is it for men or women? we just want to find a place to have sex. the words I wake to each morning a pink neon sign over the bed: *sexual desire and "romance" melt away, revealing a truer kind of love.*

huh?

the tide comes in. I'm near the shore, my hand on a ledge, but can't pull myself up.

you wake and I lie down half on the bed, wondering if they'll be shocked because I'm looking you straight in the eye. what brings me to watch you touch your cock, disturbing and vertiginous pleasure heavier than air?

mysterious landscape of weeds and brambles. we're figures on a hill, looking for *what?*

finally choose a shelf way out in the backyard and put the evidence in. continual worry about this. the dirt will wear down and the box rise to the surface. all the things we've done to each other lenses with frosted bifocal areas that obscure my vision and as I walk create a strobe effect.

"where're your underwear?"

now you are Patrick, who's taken apart my mailbox. there's whipped cream inside which we wipe out with paper towels.

I have a hard time remembering this is just a simulated reality.

you're using sex as stationery, a portion of your letter experimental fiction. about the clot of blood on my finger. how it's wrong to cut the cake before guests arrive.

when I shut the door I see the walls and ceiling stained with pee. I'm laughing, then realize you're right here.

you want to insist that the transition from *it's killing me not to write about this* to lace panties hidden in my pocket proves that all time is a china cup falling, smashing to bits, reassembling itself, and flying away. that the body's main purpose is to unfurl like the principal sail of the vessel of consciousness.

and I in my baby dolls enjoy your finger in my mouth.

without looking I know the stockings I'm intending to use are the correct ones. I know the things about to occur.

it is late at night and I don't know if I want to get involved.

what do *you* want? buttered toast? dollar bills? the meat in the pan? lots of books? monogamy? modest photos of yourself no one else will ever see?

maybe your black leather Zorro suit or the lighting system and cameras over the bed. the fact that I can slide under the table or cut through the grassy wash. wet and mucky.

your leg indicates tenderness, but your hands and eyes are furnaces and freezers—some gutted, some humming. you spin me around as if giving me a plane ride, whirling violently.

my compliance like eating a piece of cake.

like the upstairs bathroom leaking.

as I mouth any word at all, feelings kick in incontrovertibly, like bales of weeds. of these I make three "beds," drawing shapes V V under sheets we can see through (suggesting closed eyes, breasts.) "no," I say, "use my name."

I am hearing a tape of myself speaking. we must comment on the "tone," get a sense of it—despair, no doubt. you're still baffled. how can you comment on a book you haven't read?

(make love. this is secret.)

push it down around my waist. you ought to like that.

fragment: my jaw coming apart. also the image of a woman dancing on one foot. not enough heat. I look out the window and see a medieval cityscape, very Breughel. a city on the edge of the sea, ships going out.

now we're in the desert, warm with our [indecipherable].

you want to go deeper. "she" is an inanimate object I carry around. she is representational, though close-to her marks are, like Bacon's, not illustrative. beautifully painted.

of a woman riding in a war-circle.

her back outlined in black like parentheses, then filled in with ochre.

I'm dotting the bottom edge of the bridge of her nose with orange paint. it turns yellow. the paint is changing in other jars and cans. you dip into what seems to be hips, they turn to waist. canvas shows through. *what comes next?*

lush Indian clothes and a very beautiful ankle bracelet. the picture is huge and distorted, I'm so close. members of the audience yelling. these questions seem rather personal. *(a hard-on you're trying to hide?* I wonder).

the corners full of cobwebs and industrial soot. some fragment about pink handmade paper.

now you are yourself. Justin and I looking out the front door. strong sexual tension I enjoy.

black mess of mountain wilderness, mooncast shadows, stars

hair curls around your face like bedsheets, drowned Ophelia.

you start reading your list: small rowboat, shaky dock, image of a coastal landscape, vivid pink lipstick that stains my lips, eyeshadow that goes on like black paste—no brush, we use our fingers.

I love this run-down seaside hotel, where you are the image of stepping back into tall grass, a way of seeing the mouth as a sweet that brings grief.

we sit in the moat with its strong circular current and spread out, flatten, and separate into irreversible successions of red blood cells, profane suggestions, and significances from shape (brightest) through independence (faintest visible).

the interminable light your body gives off from throat to belly slips easily along my cord of pleasure and purpose. I'm back in the room, surprised you've paid for it overnight. two bare mattresses, a couple of upholstered chairs, a couch covered with dingy yellow and brown blankets.

changing out of my suit, worried someone's going to come in.

are these little games high-friction fulcrums for very small, often imperceptible fears (frequently decorated with a human face)?

the little I do allow myself is always too overwhelming.

all I'm wearing is the white towel, my clothing flooded with water, swampy up to my ankles.

I know it is my job to strip and join you in your room.

finally it will be clear who has been hearing out of which ear, and to whom the breath in this close room belongs. scents of the sea choke me, thick waxy smells as if I am in a deep cavity, the vibrations a result of proximity to the artery of true feeling.

all my lingerie and nightgowns. why are they here?

shirred stretch tops and drop waists

will I get sent home if I wear one? beautiful sky blue halter, back a mess of white cross-stitches, mended very awkwardly. the front laces up. I wish

I could wear this (puffs out like a crinoline, the skirt unevenly reattached after a rip).

other people sit at tiled booths that smell like public pools or the bathrooms of beach houses. my dress (light blue, though now the background color is darker and the print a lurid wavering) does not match my belt. on a pad: notes, intimations.

cryptic—what exactly am I saying?

can't seem to remember from moment to moment. it is a continually unfinished project, and ridiculously inadequate to its purpose.

sound of you reading.

a wet spot between your legs as if you are a woman, not a man. confused. long row of stalls, pools of water on the floor and I have no shoes.

view of the scene from under the table: dim room with the washing machine, cactuses in pots stuck to counters, something sticky leaking around them. I'm dying to pee.

fragment: we're on top of a tower. look down and it is impossible to see the ground, just a greenish haze that brings us back in time to the Dark Ages. glass window running the length of the door. narrow shade I pull

the room filled with dust. you are The Devil looking in.

a hoof under the divider.

you use the point of a pencil to rub my temple—hard—after each suggestion. ask, "why am I doing this?" it's about hypnotism and the dispersal of pain. my own fears touching me with your hand. my pants around my ankles and you slip your hoof into one leg. start saying how much you like me.

"leave your side of the door unlocked."

feelings arise in my body in response to the paradox of holding dreams for defense. image of hard, close-grained panties six inches in depth with large mouths and The Devil's handwriting: *WHAT SPRINGS FROM THESE?*

an avalanche of impulsive acts stressing rugs lying askew.

a hollow funnel at the center of the page.

an internal vestigial waist and hips like a sign over the door—half shapely figure, half horse with good action: Karen. your eyes look dangerous, a tumult of inaccessible locations.

locate the comedy: *I infect you with a tight black slip* or: *I keep confusing what I touch with what I wish* or: *one word can make me martyr to a wild course with magnified foliage.*

fragrant grasses, trees, flowers.

damp steps of a sharply pitched amphitheater. what I consider erotic an uncertainty about routes which I want but can't afford.

now you are Don. our assignment to listen to cells firing away: *pop, pop, pop, pop!* and do interpretive paintings. it is clear I am going to sleep with you, though the other women call you Paul.

unwrapping your turban until I'm left with you asleep, nude under a blanket of gauze.

now you're Marlon Brando in very pointed gray snakeskin cowboy boots. I start getting myself ready. incoherent instructions about pleasure, then you disappear.

dramatic burst of music outside the frosted glass door.

hazy image of you as Brando with an untranslatable face. you are chatting me up a little, are unable.

a couple of puddles.

to put you on the oily satin comforter you've slept in for years eludes my grasp. this shot as if I'm much taller, my head up on the ceiling.

I am hearing every thought hidden inside you in words that cannot be used because they are a bronze canopy over what is initially a landscape of poor definition and unsurpassable intensity, then turn into a bed you're adjusting for me.

now you are a ruined industrial plant, labyrinthine.

suddenly unclear whether we ever slept together, whether a ghost and a physical being can have a child. still, she is lying curled up against you, the weight of the sea running from the top of her forehead to the base of her chin and from ear to ear.

emotional realities that cannot be so easily deciphered. as if we are made "sideways."

in one of the layers and layers I see you shuck off your face and laugh the laugh I hear, though what I see is a close-up of the involuted shell of your ear, listening. a delirium of sharp focus.

examples of other people's self-portraits line the walls.

I see our ribs glow, I see lacy cartilage chambers growing around our hearts.

now I am in love with you. in a tall tree. others in trees around us.

below us the forest is burning.

now you are Russell, cutting a piece of steel. smell of burning rust, creamy glow of metal. I am Renoir's lover, lying on a bed as he unravels, interests and loves waning. wake but leave my eyes closed. trying to remember if there are any explicit sexual scenes.

thunderstorms.

corridors mottled blue.

gardens, parks, ponds. layers of facades, cornice of the roof across the street. rooms gutted, floors removed, and ceilings. looking down into this pit of rubble loosens the grip of obscure emotions.

it doesn't matter where you start.

you must have faith.

flying over tar-roofed buildings. this is unmapped territory. you are a Chinese man asleep on one building. often you come to the library with

no walls and I try to see the authors of books you read, thinking you might read your own and then I'll know your name again.

marble wall of elegant swans and a sign so far overhead it's almost impossible to read: *Gabriel.* you have no hard-on and I am ashamed for spying but can't bring myself to leave.

tell me I'd better get you excited, throw your head back as you say it. gravy spills down my naked legs. you look inside and say I can't not have it because it already has feet.

a woman pretending to be me until I can escape.

I see your foot and ankle much smaller than mine. some kind of sexual experiment that includes lighting the couch on fire. I take your breast in my mouth, suck, feel the tickle in my breast. I want to touch lower, but you move out of reach.

all kinds of scents on your counter. jewelry box. tangled earrings—one pair out of antique spoons. long hammered silver drops. a pair with opals at the top and bottom. loose opals draining through my fingers.

wooden railing my arm's around.

now you are. . .now you are—?

coaching me to lean into the spreading wings and tail of heaven. very reluctant to try this move. the railing detaches. image of myself pulling the ripcord—actually your cock and balls detached from your body.

so that's what you are using.

R.D. SHIPP
THREE POEMS

TWIN COUSINS TO THE MARTYR

The short man wears his lack
like an extra foot and thunders

upstairs as though the noise

emanating from his frame defied
his brief stature.

Madness is meaning impacted

through words which abnormally lodge
in the jaw, as when the short man apologizes:

"I just don't know when to stop."

The invocation of order is versed
in a system of denial.

Order is the imposition of will

over chaos. The nun, released
from her order grasps my arm,

"You mustn't wear this at night,"

she says, fingering my long, black scarf,
"It will tempt."

Oh, how insanely heavy

the multi-tailed, vastly taloned creature is,
lashed within me.

Each of my fingers

is a fork in one tongue.
My brow bubbles—my chest heaves,

my eyes blacken,

my fingers shrivel,
my lips roll back up my face.

The beast beating my breast bursts forth

in a spray of humours: phlegm, bile
and spittle arching high as sea foam

off waves against rocks

and my shell, loosened from the vise of order
dissolves into a lightly skinned pool,

a small body of water

hosting whole colonies of diaphanously winged,
long-legged creatures simultaneously feeding

off the elements within.

S&M

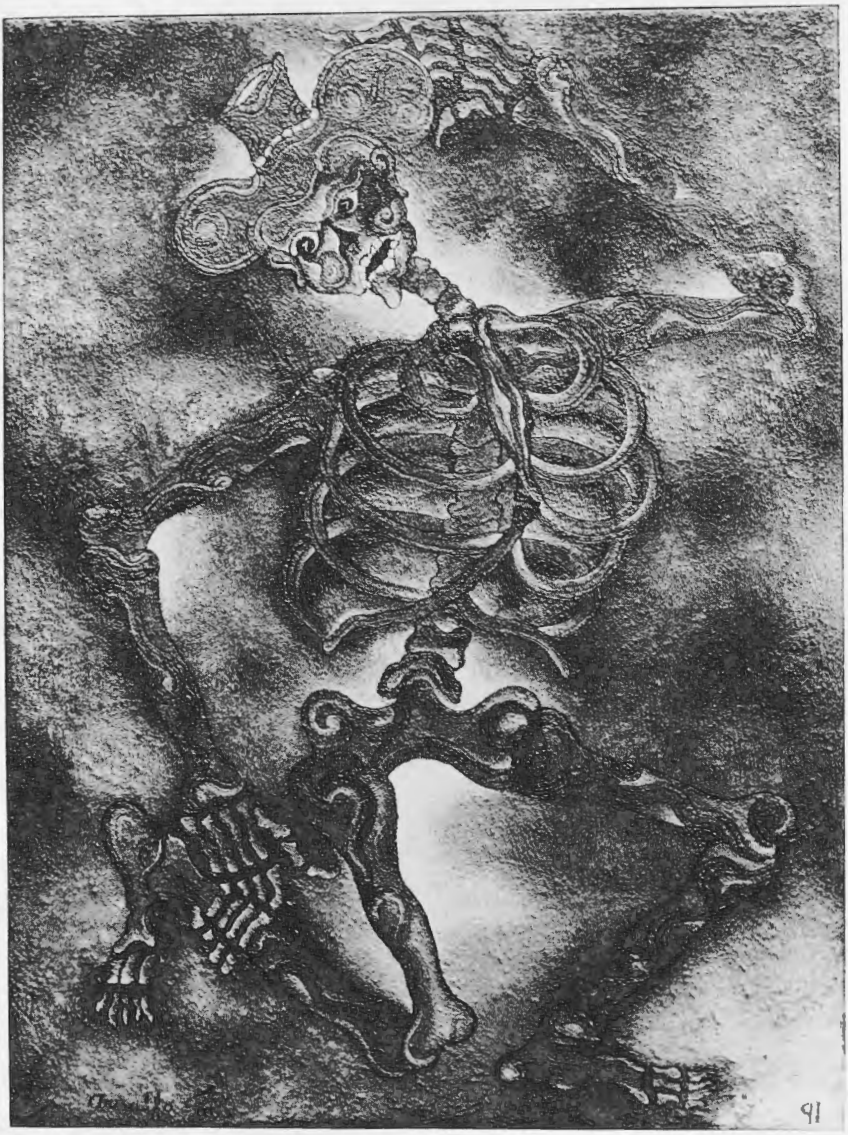
I put my knife down and the coffee cup spins beside it.
As the clouds part, filling the room with white light,
the little cat yawns and settles into the couch cushions.
The old cut in my thigh has opened up again, the swelling
around it like the stain on a child's grinning mouth,
after eating fresh raspberries. When I was a child,
my uncles tricked my mother—convinced her they'd forgotten me,
left me behind at the circus. I stayed under the stairs
for a long time, listening to my mothers cries while the edge
of a wooden crate dug softly into my back. As I twirl
the safety pin piercing my left nipple, a little bourbon
drips down my chest and pools into the folds of my belly.
Soon, it will be time to go out and use this joyous body
I get to heal and heal again.

INDUSTRY

At fifteen, when my sex was still a small hard bud, I went
to Sunday School class wearing a lime green granny gown,
with pink flowers and butterfly sleeves, a piece of eyelet lace
sewed on top of the bodice, hiding any sign of cleavage.
Our Sunday School teacher wore a white linen suit and had a
beehive
hair-do which spoke well of somebody's incredible handiwork:
teasing, styling, curling and spraying. It stood as grand a symbol
of industry as the other beehive, Utah's state symbol,
the emblem we display on our road signs. She brought a white
rose,

in a silver vase. "Girls," she said, running her hand along the side
of the vase, "this rose is like your pure bodies are now:
fresh and untouched." Then, with sadness, she caressed several
petals,
rubbed them between her fingers, ground her thumb into the
stem,
the petals tore and fell off as she probed into the bloom, her
finger,
tentative at first, then growing more aggressive, thrusting deep
into
the flower. Her lips loosened, beads of sweat formed above
them.
The rose lay in shreds around the vase, the petals remaining,
stuck out,
stark and brown, her face glowed and she sighed, giving the
rose
a fierce, final clench. "This," she explained, "is what happens
to you if ever, you let a boy touch you." And, indeed,
when I woke with you today, our clothes scattered around us,
like petals, there were purple marks on my neck and bruises on
my thighs.
I look at you, sleeping, turned away from me, sweet lover,
whom I do not love and I trace a pattern on your back, playing
connect-the-dots with your freckles and you turn into me,
smiling.
You begin your work on me, much friction and serious effort.
You move
your hands and mouth industriously over me, my body marked,
marking time.

ARNULFO MENDOZA
FIVE WORKS

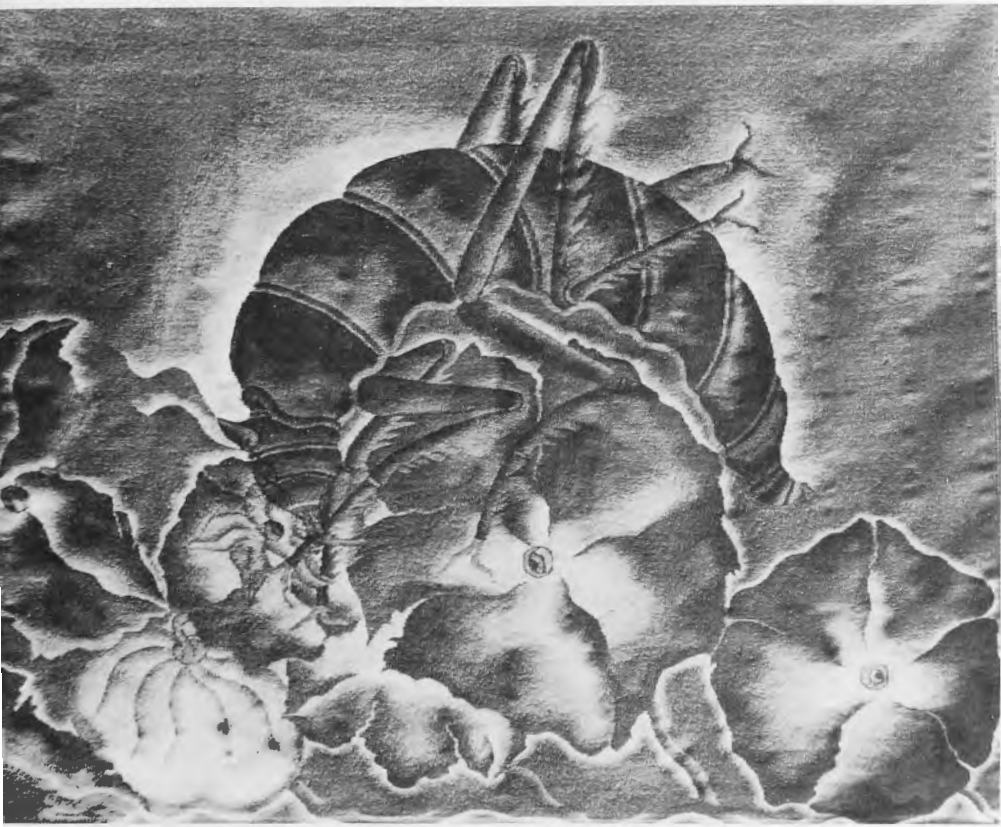


LA CALACA IV (Skeleton IV)

Oil on canvas, 25" x 34"
1991

EL CAMARON (The Shrimp)

Gouache on paper, 30" x 44"
1989 diptych



EL CHAPULIN Y LA FLOR DE CALABAZA
(The Grasshopper and the Squash)

Wool tapestry, 60" x 52"
1988

EL VIAJE CELESTIAL
(The Celestial Journey)

Gouache collage on amate paper,
60" x 68", 1989

EL VENADO NAHUAL (The Deer Nahual)

Gouache on amate paper, 22" x 30"
1989

RUSSELL ELLISON
ARNULFO MENDOZA: LEARNING FROM TIME

Arnulfo Mendoza is sitting at the drawing table in his 17th Century studio in Oaxaca, Mexico. The mid-morning light is coming through the heavy wooden shutters of the balcony, the sounds of the city drift up from the street below. He is bending over the surface of the painting which he has carefully built up with marble dust mixed with pigment. Slowly, precisely, he inscribes the curls and spirals on the tail of a fish, mirroring the movement of the surrounding waves in which it swims.

The painting is only partially finished. The figures are all in place, already on their perpetual voyage across the canvas. The mermaid is riding a giant fish, her voluptuous tail clinging to the side of the leaping sea creature. In her left hand, she holds the outline of something, some form which moves from her fingers like a scorpion, its frenzied legs waiting for color and detail to come to life. Perhaps she is pouring the water of life into the ocean. Her right hand to her breast, she looks over her shoulder at a figure of a bird that is outlined but not yet detailed; a bird diving into the ocean or falling from the sky. It may be the bluebird that carried the secrets of civilization to the Zapotec Indians or the bright eagle that brought the gods to the land of Mexico. Below the bird, the ocean is becoming alive with exuberant marine shapes jumping from the surface of a teeming sea. Even at this stage of completion, the whole world of the painting is hurling itself through the confined space.

Mendoza's paintings are opera. The backdrops are glowing scrims moving with luminous colors; the action is theatrical; the figures move to the rhythm of softly heard drums and the melodies of bamboo flutes. Like the floating dream figures in Chagall, they listen to the sounds coming naturally from the ground and the sky. In his Zapotec conception, all the elements of the earth move together in a perpetual dance. It is a Gnostic world where duality and transformation exist in the secret wisdom of the Nahual. Every human has a corresponding animal soul, life exists with death, and male and female intertwine to keep the earth in balance.

In one watercolor, *El Camarón*, a giant shrimp fills the frame. The animal is alive, threatening to move off the paper and into the room like a monster from a Japanese film, flailing its thousand legs through the shining water. The water is luminescent, radiating light from the world of the surface in blues, browns and white. A reflection shines from its reddish shell and the eye of the creature looks out on its domain with primordial knowledge.

His colors come from the natural tones of the Mexican soil: flaming reds of the cochineal insect and royal purple of the caracole shellfish; blue-black of the indigo plant and tan and red of the bark of logwood and Brazil-wood; orange annatto and green-gold manzanilla.

Leaning unframed against the wall is a recently finished painting. A fantastic nursing creature offers her bursting teats to her infant companion. The beast has the ears of a rabbit, the body of a cow and the feet of a cat. The sun radiates fiery spirals, clouds churn in baroque curves, the ground moves in slow molten pleasure.

The surface of his recent works are becoming increasingly important, reflecting in microcosm the swirling design of his perpetually transforming world. In Mendoza's paintings, all lines can be expressed in curves. The pattern of the glyphs from Monte Alban can be seen in the flamboyant loops of a siren's fin. The pre-Hispanic spindle whorls are duplicated in the foam of the waves.

A painting of the Madonna, done in Paris early in his career, shows a woman sitting on a chair holding a rabbit—not a child—in her arms. She is looking over her right shoulder, away from the blind eyes of the animal which hangs awkwardly from her caressing fingers. Already Mendoza was beginning to mold sinuous shadows around his subject but the surface of this work is smooth and flat; the pose is formal, the legs of the chair and the woman seem to be slightly contorted to avoid slipping from the defining frame of the canvas. From this time, Mendoza remembers a moment of revelation when he first saw the works of Van Gogh, whose freedom of movement and tumultuous brush strokes gave Mendoza a glimpse into the unconscious imagery of his thousand century heritage. Years later, at the Metropolitan Museum's exhibit of Mexican art, he would trace the line of this artistic development to his own baroque surfaces reflected in the incised adornment of the ancient carvings.

Mendoza also weaves his images in wool and silk tapestries, summoning the techniques of his childhood in glimpses of his intimate world. In *El chapulín de la flor de calabaza*, on a deep blue background, a rust colored

grasshopper curls lovingly over a brown and yellow squash blossom in a state of carpophagous stasis. In another tapestry, *El Viaje Amoroso*, a woman, her feet transforming themselves into fins, caresses a fish that reaches back with its serpentine tongue to lick her face while beneath them another sea creature moves through deep blue ribbons of water.

Mendoza has discovered a world in which the remnants of a mythological time have blended with mundane affairs. There is light in his colors, motion in the shapes, delicacy in the ideas and images and, ultimately, an astonishing passion for the eye that moves with a craving for comprehension.

In his lifetime, Arnulfo Mendoza has moved from one epoch to another. His village of Teotitlan is set in the middle of the smudged green fields of the Oaxaca valley, tight against the Sierra de Zempoaltepetl mountains, a magic place that has been the home of ancient kings and older gods. On the dark peak above the village, Zaquia, the bird of the sun came to a cave and gave oracles to the priests, speaking in a tongue filled with the sounds of the wind and the trees. There is an enchanted stone in the village called Piedra Morada which, today, no one goes near when it is dark.

There have always been weavers there, fashioning cloth in agave, cotton and, later, wool. As the eldest son of the Mendoza family, he learned from his father, Emiliano, the traditional techniques of spinning and dying, and at an early age he was weaving the patterns that had been preserved from the past. As a young teenager, he began to create new motifs based on the Pre-Hispanic codices, attracting the attention of the well-known artist Francisco Toledo who was working with Emiliano on a series of tapestries. At Toledo's urging he attended the Oaxaca branch of the Belles Artes, Mexico's national arts institute. After graduating, he continued his development by becoming part of the newly formed group known as the Taller Rufino Tamayo. Under the guidance of Roberto Donis, Mendoza and other young artists including Cecilio Sanchez, Maximino Javier, Filemon Santiago, Ariel Mendoza and Felipe Morales spent five years working, eating and living together. The collective work resulted in the development of the school of Oaxacan painting that became known as "magical surrealism" and whose influence can still be seen in the varied styles of the artists who came from that crucible of creative experimentation.

What is it about Oaxaca that provides so much inspiration for the plastic artist: tradition, history, magic? The high culture of Mesoamerica began in the Oaxaca valley which for 30 centuries has been home to the most civilized, cosmopolitan people in the world. It was here that Quetzalcoatl—

the plumed serpent—brought the gift of civilization to the land, that the spirits of the animals and the plants taught the refinements of society and the epics of the gods described the scope of the universe.

Before Greece and Rome, the people of the valley were carving sacred and profane figures in stone, painting murals of the legendary stories on the walls of brightly painted temples, drawing the history of the kings in the resplendent codices on bark. The creative impulse continued into colonial times. In the 17th century, Miguel Cabrera painted the portraits of the intricate social classes of the time with great elegance. In the early part of the 20th century Rufino Tamayo confronted the historical muralists with the images of the unconscious. Rudolfo Nieto, dying young in Europe, abstracted the symbols of the Zapotecs into monochrome compositions. Francisco Toledo found the impulse of the ancient style and transformed it into the shared myths of contemporary reality.

The beliefs and ideas evolved through the centuries of Zapotecs living and worshipping in the valley have stayed close to the land, creating thought forms that are tangible and forceful. They move like a benign form of radiation dusting the objects and the people of Oaxaca with invisible light, drifting imperceptibly through their thoughts, generating ancient images of the earth. They revive in us the memory of the land from which we came, the vision of which is hidden spellbound in the world surrounding us.

Everything and nothing has changed. There are different names for the festivals now but the rites of fasting, confession and absolution, celibacy and baptism are part of the old religion. The cross still stands for an ancient token of space-time. Auguries are still made by the pattern of corn cast on a mat or by observing the flight of birds and their songs.

Mendoza is an interpreter of the ancient ways of the earth to the modern viewer. He has made the transition from one culture to another, following the journey made by Mexico in this century. As a child he was surrounded by the passion of the Oaxaca valley; the light and color of the land, the tales of the gods and the living stories of the creation of the people. As a student in Oaxaca he learned of the traditions and techniques of modern art and civilization. As a man he has become aware of the rupture of modern man from his society. In his work he shows us the continuing spirit of the people in the face of the current disassociation of our lives.

RAINER MARIA RILKE
TESTAMENT

(Tr. from the German by Pierre Joris)

To grasp his situation at the close of that winter, one has to look back to the summer of nineteen fourteen. The outbreak of the foul war which disfigured the world for the span of many human lifetimes, kept him from returning to that incomparable city to which he owed the greatest part of his possibilities. There now began an endless waiting period in a country with which he was connected only through the language—though, having lived in many different countries, he had made even that language serve his innermost tasks to such an extent that for some time now he was permitted to consider it the pure and independent material of his creations.

The relation to that friend, in whose special abilities he had also hoped to find the doctor he needed so badly at the time, had grown weaker and all but disappeared on the day this man—so strangely and totally devoted to his profession—suddenly died of total exhaustion.

The sole attempt to resume his labors, interrupted when he had been so completely divested of his natural life, came to a sudden end when he was drafted into a *Landswehr* regiment; imposing on him the duress of a repulsive and now all the more wasted stay in the capital of the country with authority over him. Released after many months from these idle duties, he returned to the domicile of his waiting, but lacked that inner clarity and freedom by which alone his indescribable work could blossom. He was furthermore reluctant to adulterate it in any way with the malevolent calamity of those painful years: at least that is how he excused his inactivity in several letters where he admitted that he felt like a child who did not want to touch its favorite things so long as it was tortured by toothaches.

Finally, by the time the war had shifted over into the diffuse disorder of revolutionary seizures, an inanity he had managed somehow to keep at bay by translating Mallarmé, he succeeded, thanks to an invitation to lecture, to escape the by now totally despised city and his apartment there—so plagued by visits from strangers and vague acquaintances that it had nearly become a public place—following the welcome call to another country which, furthermore, had remained neutral and helpful throughout the confusion of the past few years. It was, however, the very landscape through which, returning by train from southern regions, he had

travelled earlier, often behind intentionally drawn curtains: so much did something in his nature contradict the pathetic, though simultaneously sober, mountainousness that had made it famous for previous generations. It was this country which now offered itself to him through that obliging invitation in addition to offering hospitality at one of its lakes.

However, this new sojourn beyond the previously intolerable borders also turned into a waiting period, even if a somewhat milder one. To be sure, he had been granted a measure of relief; but here too he lacked the decisive conditions necessary for that inner thoughtfulness which had to precede the constellating of his work. He kept changing residencies. Forming many new relationships was unavoidable, and even proved vaguely gratifying. The attraction that his earnest, though not fully achieved solitude occasionally exercised on various people against his will (due perhaps to a longing that constantly denied it), also led here to curious relationships in which he had to become the giving and communicating one to such an extent that the gathering of those inner resources, which eventually charges the core of one's being, was thwarted month after month.

Then, after more than a year and a half, at the start of a new winter, when it seemed that he would have to return to that derailed country which still appeared like a sickroom, over-crowded with war and the effluvia of its somber disasters—something totally unexpected occurred: he was offered a very remote old manor house, where a friendly and quiet housekeeper awaited him, and hardly had he moved in (on November 12th) when his surroundings proved themselves more pleasant and useful than he had dared expect.

The roomy, low, white-paneled study with its large old tile stove and the open fireplace besides, seemed to have been waiting only for *him*. Without having to utter as much as a word, he was cared for from one day to the next. Just beyond the windows lay the quiet park—hornbeams, slowly shedding their leaves, bordered a broad meadow to the right and left, as well as an unframed pond, whose constantly falling fountain translated, as it were, that stillness so fulfilling for the eyes into sound. The more the park, with its several beautiful plane trees and the avenue lined with widely-spaced chestnut trees that bordered it on its open side, surrendered itself to Fall, the deeper grew the influence of the view. Without unduly narrowing the eye's need, its softly climbing meadows prepared one for the slopes of a wooded hill: and no matter how much he loved the plains, in this moment dedicated to thoughtfulness, this limitation seemed proper to him in that it corresponded, as a landscape, to the consciousness of an *intérieur* he hoped to intensify in himself day after day.

As far as he could remember back, he had never felt more naturally and securely sheltered; not even in that older princely castle which had played such an important role in his life and which he safeguarded deep inside him with something akin to passion, since the blind clawings of the war had razed its gigantic, seemingly imperishable walls down to their rock foundations. That castle above the sea had been spacious; the power of those times and figures, still echoing through him, presented countless challenges for a soul that had to become familiar with much that surpassed it, before being allowed to remain itself.

Here, in this small, surveyable noble estate, a less overwhelming past needed to be overcome. Rooms and corridors, unused for a long time now relative to their original intent, had a simple purpose for someone who considered them practically. There were few portraits strong enough to impose their personalities: the living one carried the day, and the objects, of a modest sort, did not demand to be entertained with more than the spontaneous overflow of his instantly grateful spirits.

So, unexpectedly saved by this refuge, could he now begin to reengage his shattered being? One would think so. How favorable the situation was for him can only be grasped on learning that just before he was to isolate himself in these new surroundings, a double, and just as unexpected, act of providence had allowed him to revisit two famous places in different countries, belonging inseparably to the history of his past. One of them was that unique city to which he owed not only his complete spiritual education, but to whose influence he also rightfully ascribed the fact that the particular sufferings and beatitudes of his being had revealed themselves to him more clearly and on a larger scale than is usual even for those of his age gifted with a strong inner make-up.

And on top of it all: inexhaustible mercy had filled him to overflowing (what perfect timing, one wants to shout) with the prodigious turbulence that overwhelms a heart which, under the onrush of again being loved, decides to love in return. . .

Yes, this too.

Now, when the door closes behind someone so perfectly favored and gifted, one feels that one may confidently abandon him to such a magnificently furnished solitude.

And yet the fragmentary notes and drafts of letters, which record the close of that remarkable winter, describe a failure, a horrible and distressing loss.

The writer (after the fact, obviously) has gathered these loose pages under the title "Testament," probably because these insights into his peculiar fate express a will bound to remain his *last*, even if the task of many years still awaits his heart.

THE TESTAMENT

"Mais j'accuse surtout celui qui se comporte contre sa volonté"
—Jean Moréas (in April)

Spring—which this year has prevailed so early that the shining dandelions have already bloomed into puffballs and cardamine stands in the meadows—has never been propitious to my mind; its powers do not pull towards that inwardness which has to be attempted now, however, after these many lost months, in the final days in this nurturing shelter.

Just when the relations to the beloved were peaceful enough for me to foresee a stretch of time during which I would be able to belong to myself with undivided attention, a small building, which I took for a barn and to which I paid no further attention, began to take shape near the park's exit. It turned out to be an electric saw mill which has been whining and buzzing unremittingly for ten days now. My peace is destroyed. I realize that what I had planned was not to be tackled as a last minute make-up exercise, like a school assignment put off with guilty conscience. The time for work is over. Now the saw speaks.

How accurate the judgment is. Strange: I realize how everything here belonged to me through hearing—from where it has now been removed. At night, when I wake up, or late in the evening (for they work long hours over there in the saw mill, at times starting their noisy workday shortly after five in the morning), that wide and pure space of hearing I had been allowed to inhabit for so long, reasserts itself with indescribable gentleness. Just now it started up again, "called up" so to speak by the little bird voices; its center, however, has always remained the fountain, and now I lie here in the night taking leave of it. This was it, this was what should have shaped me throughout these many, many weeks of steady listening. How I understood it immediately, how I took it in, from the very first day: the multiform metamorphosis of its tumbling waters. The slightest breath of air changed it, and when all became perfectly still around it, the suddenly isolated jet fell back upon itself, resonated in and of itself, completely different from when it played over the water's surface. Speak, I said to the fountain, and listened. Speak, I said, and my whole being harkened to it. Speak, you pure meeting of Lightness and Heaviness, you light-headedness of weight, you toy-tree, you parable under the laden sorrow-trees worrying under their bark.

And with a spontaneous and innocent cunning of my heart—so that there would be nothing but this, from which I wanted to learn how to be—I equated the fountain with the Beloved, the faraway, the restrained, the silent.

Ah, we were agreed that silence should reign between us: it was to be this winter's law, a hard and powerful law—but in return our mildness would set in, not only ours, the mildness of the accomplished work would be in my heart. Perhaps—the need was so huge—we would have been strong enough to remain silent—it was not we who broke it, it was the mouth of fate which opened and spews us with news. For love is the true climate of fate; no matter how widely it draws its orbit through the heavens, its milky way with billions of the blood's stars, the land beneath these heavens is pregnant with calamities. Not even the gods, in the metamorphoses of their passions, were powerful enough to free the earthly beloved, scared and fleeing, from the entanglements of this fertile soil.

Is what I am writing here madness? Why don't the lovers' letters ever address this dilemma? Ah, their worries are different. It always looks as if the lover swung her beloved higher than he was ever able to throw himself. Her desire for him makes him more beautiful and capable. The anticipation of her open arms gives wings to his race. His performance clarifies itself in the lineaments of happiness, where otherwise it would have run over into murky yearnings. Only now, at her breast, did work become exuberant and sweet for the laboring man—and rest, infinite. Only now did fear, the precipitate of his boyhood nights, dissolve, only now did he see through to the ground of night.

And if there is a disturbance in his joy, it arises from obstacles, hindrances or threats to this union; all misery is gathered in this one worry: to lose each other; and nowhere is there doubt, except in jealousy.

But how about him who already knew it? He, in whose heart Loneliness had outstripped the loved one? From early on he knew Her pure face. As he took flight from family resemblances surrounding him and trying, over and over, to claim him, Her face became his future: through Her eyes he gazed upon the Open. His small hand came quietly to rest in Hers, which led and never took possession. As he grew up, he gradually became aware of Her tall figure—back then She would at times step up and test him like a spear.

And later She threw him.

Ah, with what could the lover surprise ***him***, for whom this election had become conscious and more than memory: the pleasure of the arm drawn back, the thrust—and, oh, the trembling in the target.

And yet who had praised the lover more, who had yearned more for the loved one, than this man, used by the gods, whose fate had already been decided!

It was as if, from that trajectory, which he followed with the strength of loneliness, he had recognized her form more perfectly than anyone before him. And from that knowledge, which was infinite, an infinite privation grew for him.

He fled before her, by calling her. He somehow felt compelled to remain exposed to her, to bear with her, to weather her. For was there not a lack in his urge, that had to be lived up to, as long as he feared and avoided this demanding woman? Didn't this last minute avoidance of his feelings for her falsify his feeling about everything? Was this fear of being loved, which came from the earliest sufferings of his childhood and had never left him, a warning he had to heed to the end, or was what mattered that he be healed from it, as from his oldest error?

Did that lover exist who was not an obstacle, who did not slow him down and deflect him into the tarryings of love? She who understood that he was thrown way beyond her, when he pierced her? The blissful one who acquiesced to his great thrownness, who did not think of stealing him and of keeping him surreptitiously, and who did not race ahead to block his trajectory again and again? One perhaps already abandoned, who would take the risk, no matter how often he could still be hurled through her and into the target, by the hand of his Goddess?

Oh, if she existed, then there was help for him, as there had been a different help for him, when as an adolescent, he came to Russia. The afflictions of his childhood had brought it about that until the end of his second decade he lived in the assumption that he was confronting, singly and alone, a hostile world, that he was rebelling, day after day, against the overbearing power of everybody. The outcome of this mistaken attitude, no matter the honesty of the emotions, could only be something distorted, unhealthy. Russia gently released him from the evil spell of this prejudice—not by slowly convincing him, but overnight: literally, during his first night in Moscow. Without boasting about it, effortlessly, as if through a pure season of the heart this conciliatory country offered him unending proof to the contrary. How he believed it, how that country charmed him into being brotherly. And even though he has always remained a beginner in professing this harmony (perhaps because he could not remain on Russian soil), he can never forget it, he knows and practices it.

*

Emotional experiences, strange emotional experiences, however, which coalesced much later in that specific occurrence which I grasped—very vaguely—under the image of the *revenant*, challenge my right to be completely absorbed in the loved one (no matter how infinite the space she may grant). No matter how much I have to admit the law of this accomplishment, in her center I appear to myself as simultaneously unfree and independent. My deeper conscience leaves me no peace, and the fear that distracts me is not that creaturely fear of sweet annihilation which arises from the center of love; it is the terror of a disloyalty which rattles me again and again, claiming, as it were, that I have no right to follow my inclination:

as if the capital of my emotions had been apportioned and I were poor; as if, loved and loving, I took back the shares, distributed a long time ago, from unknown inheritors already living off them. Somewhere in the expanses of my emotional space there arises a disquiet, a reluctance; complaints I do not understand drift towards me, threats rise up in my being: I am no longer at one with myself.

But this at-oneness, unexplainable as it is, is the court I have stood before since my childhood. Yes, facing the eye-slits of their hoods, I live in that space where my hidden judges pass sentence. I have never left it.

My life is a special kind of love, which is already accomplished. Just as Saint George's love is in killing dragons, a lasting action that fills up time until its end, so the expenditures of my heart have already been put to use and transformed into a final advent. At times I am lifted into its center: an image of completion.

(The place of the princess, however, is off to the side. She prays for it to succeed. She kneels.)

Artist, do not believe that your test lies in the work. You are not what you pretend to be, and what this or that one, not knowing any better, may take you for, until the work has become your very nature to such an extent that you cannot do otherwise than prove yourself in it. Working thus, you are the masterly thrown spear: laws from Her throwing hand receive you, and together you hit the target—: what could be more certain than your flight?

Your test, however, is that you are not always thrown. That the spear-player Loneliness does not choose you for a long time, that She forgets you. This is the time of temptation, when you feel unused, incapable. (As if being ready was not work enough!) Then, when you do not lie there very heavily, diversions exercise you and try to see to what other uses you can be put. As a blind man's staff, as one of the rods in a grating, or as the balancing pole of a tight-rope walker. Or else they are capable of planting you in the soil of fate, for the miracle of the seasons to happen to you and for you perhaps to sprout small green leaves of happiness. . .

O then, bronze one: lie heavy.

Be spear. Be spear. Be spear!

This game of acceptance and refusal, in which there is much to lose and much to win, constitutes the "pastime" of life for most people and maintains their urges.

The artist belongs to those who have renounced profit and loss with a single, irrevocable agreement: for neither of them exists any longer in the law, in the space of pure obedience.

This final, free affirmation of the world shifts the heart onto another level of experience. Its elective choices are no longer between happiness and unhappiness, its poles are not designated as life and death. Its measure is not the distance between opposites.

Who still thinks that art represents that beautiful that has an opposite; (this lower case "beautiful" belongs to the concept of taste). It is the passion for the whole. Its result: equanimity and equilibrium of the totality.

[If I did not resist the lover, it was because of all the takeovers of one person by another, hers alone, unstoppable, seemed to me to be right. Exposed as I am, I did not want to *avoid* it either; but I yearned to pierce her! That she be a window for me into the expanded cosmos of Being. . . (not mirror.)]

The sudden (what shall I call it?) taking sides in love awoke in me audacious and unequalled memories: as if I had somehow felt that infinitely impartial once before. . .

Asceticism is obviously no solution; it is sensuality with a negative sign. A saint may make use of it as a provisional construction; at the point of intersection of his self-denials he perceives the god of contradiction, the god of the invisible, who has not yet created.

He however, who is committed to the senses, he who, on earth, has to believe in the purity of appearance and the truth of form, how could he start with denial! And even if it proved to be helpful and useful to begin with, for him it would remain a fraud, a ruse, a misappropriation—and in the end it would take its revenge somewhere in the lineaments of his work, as hardness, as aridity, as miserliness, as cowardice of the fruit.

Letters: how torn I was this winter; each letter a push, an assault able to topple everything, or else an intimate penetration that transformed the blood —

and this, daily, during the time supposed to become that of my purest equanimity.

And after I had tuned my existence, for nearly twenty years, in the increasing clarity of my will, so that there could no longer be—there *must* no longer be—news that could touch its essential determination and change it.

A strange terror has remained in my heart that makes it unrecognizable for me.

(from a draft of a letter)
All these refusals, do not forget it, my love, have to do with your power. If I were free, if my heart were not bound like a star into the relations of the irrefutable spirit, then every word, from which rebellion is formed here, denial, complaint—would be Your fame, crossing over to You, agreement, the rush toward you—fall and resurrection in You.

If I were a man of graspable compass, a merchant, a teacher of comprehensible things, an artisan. . .

It is against the secret of my life.

In that the beloved draws all events towards herself, I become untrue to myself; for now it seems to her as if, in the incessant flow, *that* which I have no right to dispose of, also drifts towards her. Partly her will is to blame, partly this seizure is due to her very existence. She had transformed the landscape in the lover's mind and inhabits one of its deepest places—the valley, which drains everything.

The saw has been at it since early morning. My gaze, surviving as it were, keeps melancholically taking in these still apparently holy surroundings, the demolition of which ceaselessly occurs in one's own hearing. Thus it has on occasion been said of the dying that they are not deprived of the world through all the senses simultaneously. Their taste may be gone, their touch may have dulled, their ears may have failed. But they still look. They even still succeed in slowly turning their heads on the pillow, now and then, when a little strength has been gathered, so as to lay the gaze's frame over another part of the picture. It certainly is a relief to take one's final leave by means only of a *single* sense.

Without the intervention of the saw mill over there, I would have hung onto everything here unto the end, though without wringing from it that yield for which it was too late. I would certainly not have made the decision to enter upon such a gradual understanding, as I am now accomplishing day after day, and through the shock of leaving I would have finally encountered the desperation of the unaccomplished and, like a single boulder, it would have crashed down terrifyingly. I do not know what this would have done to me, but I am afraid that in me the form of the beloved would have been buried as if under a landslide.

Does the progress I make in all this (that *that* is what I am looking for, while being condemned to make myself aware of such difficult matters, should be treated with forbearance) does the progress I make reside in succeeding, in painful labor, to chisel away at that piece of rock above the head of the loved one, that in its fall would have destroyed her pure presence? (Where does its stone-dust blow? Who breathes it in? Ah, guilt has not gone from the world.) But *she*, the beloved, shall be guiltless for

me. And this too may perhaps be taken as progress (as if it were only with "pro-gressions" *[mit "Fort-Schritten"]* that I can distance myself from the scene of the loss!), this also, that I no longer call this conflict an abyss gaping between love and work—it gapes in my love itself, since, as I have now discovered once and for all, my work is love. What a simplification! And now this is, in fact, as far as I can see, the only conflict in my life. All else are tasks.

In military school I realized it for the first time; later in an infantry uniform. And now again: how every creature is, in a way, faced with just *that* heaviness which corresponds to the plane of its powers, even if it often exceeds them by far.

We, however, who stand at the incomprehensible point of intersection of so many different and contradictory worlds, find ourselves in the situation of suddenly being assaulted by a heaviness that has no connection with our abilities and training: an *alien* heaviness.

(When would the swan be expected to pass the lion's test? How could a piece of fish-fate end up in the bat's realm—or a horse's terror in that of a digesting snake?)

I believe therefore that, already as a child, I never prayed for anything but *my* heaviness, in order for that to befall me which is my own and not, by mistake, the joiner's or the hack driver's or the soldier's, because I want to recognize myself in my heaviest.

Only as a consequence of the confusion in the Human, unlimited and curious in all directions, which let *everything* happen to everyone, could the fall come into disrepute. How familiar the latter is, when you meet it in your own passionately empowered sphere!

Nothing should be preserved of that heavy "alien" affliction which one morning at four (it was still night and a cold rain fell in the darkness) drove me away and to G., just as I had entered here upon the work of my thoughtfulness. No one will ever know more about it than what I, gently calling myself to account, confide to these pages. But before I burn the small notebook, bound in blue leather, which I took with me on the trip back then, I want to report on its condition. Barely three of its pages are written upon; but that which tightly fills up these pages—apart from two addresses—makes the many empty pages so uncanny that I will also throw them into the fire, as if they were infested and plagued. Without changing anything in the least, I now transcribe, before destroying them, the meaningless words, into which my then capable mind decomposed itself because an "alien" heaviness had suddenly been poured over it, like caustic acid.

(From the destroyed notebook:)

(At the top margin the word:) nightmare—(then numbers, without order, small meaningless additions, then:)

silver joy rawness round lot dearer
infusion sand why never attention
ambush down envy glutton blessing addiction
gnawer path twig immersed fence legend credulity
wasp heart cinema (child) mourning dewfall
rumor ring gentleness evening cradle
living food bird wheat-ear lot no
baptismal-font anger murkiness colored applause
being pack-animal corrosion away fall-out
hairdo fences typhoon ah cradle may
January silver fog paths call letter
messenger *Busta*[1] memo car Timgad shore
feed-rack drink novice wink oh axis
shine finch tax storm stone *Ribe*
midsummer eve bonfire service august pose poseur
nun eddy spear rinsing lively
seam notch being exact burden hollow (?)
grip slaver claw exercise night-train eagerness
desert spear frenzy break-in rage run
Lebzelt trembling-grass afternoon everywhere hun-
dred healing yeast *Wieburg* spendrift
king thorn step ungood unworth gutter
keystone trill breach-of-faith shame east *Febr*
casein comer wreath bishopric berry
bier bear dwarf chirp stamp bad

(New page:)

return darling diver bird's head
cold sweat necklace thorn-frost vicuña
ring-band freightcar Liebknecht Agnese
Terwin yarn guest role glasses will school
do-good Marie *Iffland* heartblood whimper
Zweibruck quitting-time *Wendlandt* descent
trace tracing decline *Vierzug* zander on-
looker *Larde Ferilitzsch* drip determination
only bast roar ballast nightheart will-
fullness clean ur-guest *Billung* ready
seam-duress *Niefeln Hieber* taking-to-heart

[1]TN: Words in italics are either place names or untranslatable Rilkean neologisms.

Ichthüs nomenclature *Beinung* judge
Regulus gallows military-power teasel spool
plays slowly but no music reaches
the round dance Naumann (and three addresses.)

(draft of a letter)
As long as things stand this way with us, I don't know how to live—because I am as incapable of living if I know you to be unhappy through my fault, as I am when I make you happy in the way you now expect of me. If only at every moment I had been completely inconsiderate, in the freedom of my love! There is no worse prison than the fear to hurt a loved one. It falsifies everything. It falsifies every urge of the heart; without it, things would not have come to where I had to beg our happiness for every occasion for aloneness, as a special exception. *My aloneness,* this most peculiar characteristic of my existence: now it appears like a flight from our love—and how could it not always be burdened, from the start, by your wish that it shouldn't last long? And then: how do you want, on another occasion, to muster the strength to keep from my seclusion those repercussions that echo from and beyond the enclaves of our happiness?

Should I call myself unhappy forever (alas, and what is worse: creating unhappiness in the happiest of hearts!) because I cannot take love so lightly as to extract from it a mere enhancement of my capabilities? I never thought much of those who needed to be in love so as to motivate their spirit; how could I count on this impetus, given that the work itself is infinitely more love than a single human can set in motion in any one? It is *all* of love.

And so to me this rapture toward the beloved appears to be a particular instance of love, which spares or alleviates nothing—to the contrary, its very unresolvedness requires the most perfect effort so that all its demands may be endured, recognized and fulfilled.

Tell me, tell me—do I voice an exception, perhaps a confusion of my nature, in this which I seem so strangely commanded to suffer? Rarely has something like this been deplored, either because the attention of most people does not reach beyond pleasure and jealousy, or because that which had to be suffered in singular cases like mine, had always been judged to be nameless, ineffable.

Rare are those whose heart-throw does not have its end in the embrace; if they followed it further—they would perhaps see how, beyond, its curve takes on the odd acceleration of an impatience wishing that even this happiness were already done with. And further along it disappears into the limitless, and means—do you know what?—it means the path and the yearning of those who do not stop, who go on and on—of Russian pilgrims and Bedouin nomads who are driven on and on with their staff of olive wood. . .

Only he may dwell in embraces who can also die in them; everyone elects his dwelling according to (if I may express this frivolously, sensuously) his taste in death. What pushes those men toward their aimless wanderings through the steppes, through the desert, is the feeling that their death would not feel at ease in their homes, would not have its place there.

A Swedish friend, who spent a winter all alone at the edge of the desert, wrote to me:

". . . landscapes of such vastness that one could have enough space in them even after death. At least for some time —."

[Despite all, my God, how rich, how peaceful, how complete I would be now, had this love been given me unconditionally, unburdened by the hopes, expectations and demands of a heart which, for fear of loss, seems incapable of seizing its share of happiness.

Just as it caused me, who suspected nothing, neither fear nor worry, back then, when it lay ahead—so should it be here now, perhaps behind us (and therefore no less present, for what in it could be transitory!), perhaps always again lying ahead. . .]

The principle of my work is a passionate subordination to the object that occupies me, to which, in other words, my love belongs.

The reversal of this subordination finally occurs—surprising even me—in the creative act suddenly welling up in me, in which I conquer as guiltlessly as I was pure and innocent in my subordination during the previous phase.

For a heart that performs under such circumstances, being loved is perhaps always bound to be disastrous. It also subordinates itself, as is its wont, to the lover, whom it does not have to form, but whom it tempts, because of its infinite acquiescence, to increasing usurpations. And the reversal, which in this case would simply be the love for—one is tempted to say, against—the lover can never work itself out completely against the latter taking the upper hand. . .

Thus the experience of love appears, as it were, as a stunted, impotent side effect of the creative experience, as a diminution—and remains unaccomplished, unmastered, and, measured against the higher order of that other achievement, unallowable.

Ah, I now live as if I had just arrived to spend a few weeks at this place, famous for its electric saw mill,

. . .without any particular expectations for this sojourn, the least of which would be too exhausting for me. . .

The Aloneness in which I have anchored myself for the last twenty years

must not become an exception, a "vacation" which, adducing many justifications, I would have to beg from a supervising happiness. I must live in it without any boundaries. It has to remain this ground of consciousness, to which I can always return, without intending a quick gain here and now, without expecting that it should prove fertile for me; but involuntarily, unstressed, innocent: as to the place I belong to.

What powers have arranged to meet in my heart? . . .
They retreat when they find it inhabited.

One who, alas, when it comes to the true decisions of his heart, has to count for nought being loved and loving.

[How tired I am of making all these countermoves against love's seizures —; where is the heart that will not "order up" a specific, willful happiness from me, but that would leave it up to me to give it the happiness that flows inexhaustibly from me?]

Striving and counter-striving: how tired I am of it all. Where is the heart that will not "order up" a willful happiness from me, but that would leave it up to me to give it the happiness that flows inexhaustibly from me?

But there is no agreement on that. Ah, for the struggles to be over! That it may be as in Girard de Roussillon's final *laisse*:

> "Les guerres sont finies et les
> oeuvres commencent."

Or Rimbaud:

Once to shake up language with an impetuous heart, to make it divinely "useless" for one moment—and then to leave, without looking back, become a merchant.

I knew it all winter: I have to think myself towards something. Alas—this is the worst loss: to have lost something unknown, something unguessable.

These days are among the most difficult. . . The displeasure of the unaccomplished now also attacks my body like rust; even sleep refuses its balm—: into half-wakefulness my pulse beats against my temples like heavy steps that cannot find peace.

If I were allowed to call you. . . but exactly that would destroy my last —:this court in front of which I recognize myself. You yourself wrote as much recently: that I don't belong to those who can be consoled by love. That's the way it is. For what, finally, could be more useless for me than a consoled life?

O, all that did not surprise me, the way it overwhelms the fools in their rapture. While my judges, with terrifying slowness, by the light of my happiness, read me the sentence, I stood by their side, already surveying the extent of their verdict.

But one evening I could bear it no longer. The protective, ever-giving quiet of the house and my horrible exposure at its center, threw such discord into my heart that I thought I could not go on living. Unable to read, and not even capable of gazing into the usually so consoling fire of the pine logs, I fetched some random folders from the shelves of the bookcase, which I had never opened before, and forced myself to turn page after page. They were reproductions of paintings from the collections of the great galleries, they excited me by their approximate and unharmonic colors, I don't know how many of these paintings I stared at, innumerable ones, turning the pages faster and faster: suddenly I became aware that all this time I had been thinking: Where to? Where to?

Where to, toward freedom? Where to, toward the equanimity of true existence? Where to, toward innocence, towards the no longer dispensable?

I came to, became more attentive, even alert. As if an internally anchored reflection had suddenly spilled outward, I became absorbed in the page that happened to be open in front of me. It was Jan Van Eyck's so-called "Madonna of Lucca," the lovely one, in her red coat, who offers her delicate breast to the sitting and seriously suckling infant.

Where to? Where to?

And suddenly I wished, wished, o wished with all the ardor my heart had ever been capable of, wished to be, not one of the two small apples—in the painting —, not one of these painted apples on the painted window sill—even that seemed too much of a fate. . . No: to become the soft, the small, the unseeming shadow of one of these apples—that was the wish into which the whole of my being gathered itself.

And as if a fulfillment were possible or as if this wish alone had given a wonderfully certain insight, tears of gratitude came to my eyes.

Occasionally, in the incessantly probing misery of these days, I am surprised by something like the prescient shimmer of a new spiritual joy: as if everything had indeed become simpler, and an ineffable fate made itself more graspable in its approximations. For is this not it, finally (if you have to voice it): that inside me light and darkness must not be determined by the overriding influence of one person, but only by something nameless. This is, so to speak, the minimum of my piety: if I gave it up I would have to return behind the first Cross Road of my life—behind its earliest, quietest, freest decision. Behind my self.

(Draft of a letter) Castle B. . ., no date:

always.

To whom, beloved, to whom, if not to you shall I confide this difficult conclusion of my heart? If it makes you miserable, just think how great must be the misery out of which I write the following.

I have done wrong; betrayal. After six years of destruction and obstruction I have not made use of the circumstances that were offered me with B. . . for the undeferrable inner task; fate has wrung it from my hands. I have to admit that to myself.

You know, dear, how much those circumstances, from the most fortuitous to the most essential, appealed to me, how decisively I seized upon them. You wanted to do your part to safeguard them for me: we did not succeed.

On December 2nd, right after the joyful attempt to draft that Préface in French, I succeeded in writing down the first lines of that work in which my new inner integration was to express itself. On the 4th I was interrupted through the disagreeable task of my birthday correspondence, on the 6th the first disquieting news reached me from G.

You know what happened then; you know everything, there is nothing for me to tell.

You see, I am stuck with my small miscarriage of December 2nd, the work, the life, that fulfills me, gave itself away in it.

At times good, even blessed signs, at times distress and despair wormed their way into me—the upsets were endless, and you could not prevent them.

(To know that I should be made happy or upset only by my work, was of little help!)

And later also, now also, in these last weeks also, I was unable to bring myself to the consciousness of my natural solitude, from which alone I am able to gain control over myself. My heart had been jolted from the center of its circles toward the periphery, there where it was closest to you—why, there it may be big, full of feeling, jubilation or anxiety—it is not in its own constellation, it is not the heart of my life.

In our sweetest and perhaps most just hour, beloved, you assured me that you could now grasp all kinds of love for me. Ah, pull yourself together,. . . . . ., for the one, whatever its name, that grants me my life, the one that may even strengthen it. I cannot get away from myself. For, if I gave up all, all that was mine and, as I sometimes long to do, blindly abandoned myself to your arms, lost myself therein—then you would be holding somebody who had given up on himself: not me, not me.

I cannot disguise myself or change myself. Exactly as in my childhood I kneeled before the violent love of my father, so do I kneel now in the world and beg those who love me to spare me. Yes, may they spare me!

So that they not use me up for their happiness, but stand by me to help me unfold that deepest, loneliest happiness in me, without whose Great Proofs they would, in the end, never have loved me.

. . . . . .

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

Towards the end of April 1921, while living at Castle Berg am Ichel (Canton Zürich, Switzerland), Rilke assembled a number of fragments, notes & drafts of letters into a work called "Das Testament" (*Testament*). He gave a clean copy of the manuscript to Anton Kippenberg, his publisher, who later handed it over to the poet's inheritors who decided that it should remain unpublished for the time being. It was only in 1976, nearly 50 years after Rilke's death, that his estate gave permission to make it public. That year *Insel Verlag* brought out a volume containing a facsimile edition of the text, accompanied by a transcription, and annotations by Ernst Zinn (on whose work this postface draws for its information.) It was reprinted in the German edition of the poet's *Collected Writings*, but has sofar remained untranslated.

Rilke introduced the text with a distancing third-person narrative suggesting the voice of a literary executor trying to explain the context of the tortured & fragmented document to a future reader. The abstractness of the writing & the omission of actual place- & personal names make it necessary to fill in some of the gaps. When Rilke composed these texts, he had nearly given up the hope of finishing his poetic work—the first two elegies lay nine years behind him (they were completed in 1912) & in the intervening time, lack of that solitude so essential for his writing, combined with the upheavals of the war years, had kept him from producing more than a few fragments, except for the Fourth Elegy, written in one sitting in the fall of 1915.

Rilke, who had been based in Paris since 1902, was visiting his publisher in Munich when the First World War broke out. This forced him to remain in that city until he was called up by the Austrian army in November 1915. (He was to lose his nationality after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire & later became a Czech citizen). Influential friends arranged for the poet to get a desk job, & he worked for six weeks (not the many months he suggests in *Testament*) in the War Archive in Vienna before being discharged in June 1916 & returning to Munich, "the domicile of his waiting." After the war, & in the aftermath of the aborted communist revolution in Germany, he accepted an earlier invitation by the "Hottingen Reading Circle" in Zürich which, combined with Countess Mary Dobrzensky's offer to stay at her house on Lake Geneva, enabled him to leave Germany for Switzerland. During the summer of 1920, Rilke made two trips to his favorite cities: Paris & Venice. Then, in October 1920, Swiss friends, Richard & Lily Ziegler, put their small Castle Berg am Ichel at his disposal. He moved in on November 12 & stayed there until May 10, 1921.

The nameless "beloved" of *Testament* is Baladine Klossowska, with whom he had become friends in his Paris days & who was now living in Geneva with her two sons, Pierre and Balthusz. The French *Préface* he mentions was an introduction he wrote for a book of some 40 ink drawings by the then 11-year old Balthusz Klossowski (who would later simplify his name & sign his paintings "Baltus"). Rilke

& Klossowska —"Merline" as he came to call her—fell in love, & an affair developed that had many of the same features as Rilke's previous affairs: the need to be loved & close to the loved was constantly countermanded by Rilke's sense of his higher calling which demanded total isolation & absolute devotion to his "spear-throwing" "goddess Loneliness" for his creativity to unfold & his work to continue. (See also Rilke's *Letters to Merline*, [translated by Jesse Browner, Paragon House, 1989] which presents the "exoteric" side of the affair of which *Testament* is the inner or "esoteric" working.)

After he left Castle Berg, Rilke cast around for a new abode &, with the help of Klossowska, found the castle of Muzot in the Valais. "Merline," writes Jesse Browner, "worked tirelessly to make the primitive manor livable, but she knew that she was not to share it if her lover was to achieve his ultimate aim. She hired and trained a new housekeeper, then left for Berlin in November 1921." In February 1922, Rilke did indeed finish his *Elegies* & compose the *Sonnets to Orpheus* in one incredible spurt of creative energy. Although he & Merline had drifted further apart in the following years, Rilke's last letter—written on December 23rd, six days before his death—was for Baladine Klossowska.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
RHAPSODY ON A THEME BY VALLEJO

When we are born our lives are twilight contoured.
We come in at 1 PM. Bright post-noon,
the sun already falling.
We are the mountain behind which it sets.
We are the tramontation.
We do not slip the caul. We are net
capped—calotte—to be in hell is to be concealed,
our helmet is occult, apocalypse is
to be uncovered, it will take
apocalypse to slip the network. But what
will be uncovered?
Will the revelation be, in flesh and syntax,
the bulk of our existence is invisible?
That, in psyche, we have twigs, branches, growing
out the back of our skulls,
that all are in what appears to be massive
ground-trailing war bonnets,
rooted bonnets, so that the earth spins under
our feet as we appear to tread forward?
Forestral back-
ground, the babe's eyes peering,
piercing his own foliage, or not his *own*,
his encaulment, his earlier hours
that give a drift to "forever,"
thus eternity
is what we peer from, as if in meager bas-relief,
encased, encanyoned, each, eyes pressing forward
as if to pop
the *peresprit* & *mereaffair*,
for parents are only partially visible,

glinting, half-concealed, alien words,
    Oh the twist the
writhe of man, to be free, to loose his wimple!
But to be fully visible is another thing, is
to fully show the bonnet banyan roots
and
    the boulders the roots wicker
        as if in empty space!

Yea what are the contents of these boulders?
Williams' "Desert Music" may be the tip of his lifeberg,
may be, may be! but the pyramidal spread,
                the ooze into which it is sunk,
is sinking, is unknowable,—I thrust forward, feel
the banyanwork, resistance is a good,
but can I telepathize these roots, can I
as eggs crack these boulders? And If I could, should I
    want to? Fission is not personal, it
breaks
back, yours
and my background are in hell
embedded, sleeperwise we are a starry chain of hands
& claws & feelers & paws & hoofs,
                & then it downpours a week,
or earth belches, or tidal waves Bangladesh,
and all this anti-fission is so much *cancha*, so much
roasted fortitude, the stuttering of pining pebbles.

It matters not, it matters
in, birth is a geology,
our mothers are in us, our fathers are in our mothers,
how reach around mom to dad? How know
if he is alive in her, as alive as she is in us?
At 18, I watched a woman fucked by a stallion,
    and that for a moment cleared my head
or I should say, filled it with a fatherforce
to the extent my eyes clouded, hydrant-able,
oh wanting to burst! Therefore I am excited over my dilemma,
and can only respect the extent to which my shadow

is that of a duck's,
and know it is not nonsense to mistake one's equipage
for the shadow of blackbirds,

at one week my hands too were curling about
trying to latch onto something floating,
as if as if a breastangel
were angle, or ironwork,
in expulsion I am
never fully expulsed, my basis
in continuity

unfloored

moored

octapotable

LARRY EIGNER
SIX POEMS

Rvrbrance

in a small room
tv's
large (for JF and JM

i
might've

realized

prior to
the reverse

how far
back)

one world
in the head

the window opened

sometimes cloudless

or there's one cloud, say,

in all of the sky

familiar

another country

few or many

escape to one day

while in the open air

and the weather continues bad

(music

to hear

for a change

Hayden

face to the sun

spirit

still ok

were you there when

feet on the ground, head

up at cloud 4 or 5

Gospel so hectic

of how much use
it's

all in Time

half-lives

squander

pass

impossibles

fade (dwindle

though one is enough

there's always dawn and sundown

continuous

forever? east and west

shine

give

peace

If there's no pumpkin under the mattress there's always
say between the toes one or two peas

while it's quiet morning
in the street

Dec 15-20 90

some few cars parked

not idling

Spectra

a great wide band
to life

Jan 11 91

like the leaky straw
IN my coffee

top to bottom

distorted wherever

Jan 4-13 90

a rider pedaling
straight
hands clasped
behind back
the road level

a dirigible
as suddenly
the first in years
with all the other things
the sky's wall steep
hardly wind or cloud

a squirrel through the fence
a green blanket
the back yard

corner

stop-sign

STOP
W A R

organization

of the cars

arrowy traffic

on the bigger road

no clouds cross the sky

space

buildings

windows

you don't know

how much (little)

you want

even at the end

May 19 86

STAN FRIEDMAN
FOUR POEMS

ASSUME THAT MEMORY IS A GLASS SHEET

Relax next to an elderly man
as a girl shatters the calm
of the pool's surface. He seems grateful
simply to follow her matted hair,
the ripples surrounding her
like a parenthesized hush. She will emerge
coated in glass. Sculpt the old man's fist
in the shape of a Hummel swan.

Enter the Times Square sex shop
named Wonderland, bringing a pocket
of singles into the booth. A steel partition
rises, reverse guillotine, to reveal
not stained Plexiglass, but a space
to stick hands through. For two dollars
touch the breasts of the nearest torso,
oiled, familiar. She will whisper how
all these reaching fingers remind her
of wheat before the rain. She will speak
a name just as the hole slaps shut.

Yell at the bank teller.
She has miscounted and turned off
the speaker. On the business side
of the glass her only perception
is a mouth moving without voice,
a backward confessional. Yell

that she didn't know how to love,
that leaving, like waiting in line,
is a desperate act. She will reveal
her empty palms only when you
focus on the window itself.
She will be replaced by the reflection
of a man, red-faced, forgetful
of where he is at.

LAND OF THE GIANTS

("In this shrunken era, bereft of
Kafkas, Picassos, and Edisons,
anchormen become the giants of
society."
—Lewis Grossberger)

Good evening. Consider my dimple.
June 5th, UAL Flight 6040
smashed head-on into my cheek
killing all aboard save one
3 month old girl who came to rest
safely on my tongue.

Good evening. Regard my ear.
Follow the wire that winds
like a bean stalk down my sleeve,
out my back, past that guy
working the camera. It is plugged
into the brain of, perhaps,
a balding, overweight Hispanic,

a big-nosed, yellow-toothed woman,
in other words, the voice of God.

This just in:
A tree has fallen over in the woods
killing an unheeding, one-handed man
who, ostensibly, was sitting beneath it,
clapping. Experts disagree
as to whether any sound at all
resulted from the event. . .
Well, the point is moot. *I* am the sound,
the echo of incident, the talk of the town.

Though I stand taller than any map,
this land has one dimension.
Fudge with the contrast if you must
but don't bring me in any clearer,
my static body pressed against the glass
is a radioactive reflection of yours.
Good evening. Interpret my smile.

UNWANTED LIGHT

Dead on the cooling tar
an 18 year old girl has been
struck by a car that did not stop.
Witnesses say a male Caucasian
lost control as a passenger
buried her head in his lap
the moment before impact.

Blood trickles from the girl's ear,
the first she has shed on a man's
account. We had wanted her
but she fought off our buttery
hands at the drive in, the beer breath
kisses when we drove to the river and stalled.

Soon, we will line our hardtops
end to end and follow
the hearse uptown. We will
shake off the frustration of not
having forced her, the stupidity
of our headlights burning
in the middle of our day.

TANGLE

What you hold in common with my father is cancer.
What you share with the windowbox
is the way you flourish on a ledge,
wither in winter and in early spring
as even the cat grows heavy with life, you die.
An uninspired ending. You see, there was hope
that my cypress would flower, the kind of hope
that can cleanse a body of cancer,
or shape the roll of a die.

Vines tangled like arms in the windowbox
then the cat dug in for the spring
and knocked the whole thing from the ledge.

When I woke and saw the empty ledge,
when I pictured the tumbling planter, I had hope
that, like a cat, it would take the fall and spring
the way my father, wiry with cancer,
landed on his feet. But the windowbox
didn't hold his grace, nor did it die
in your fashion: inside out. The way to die,
in your words, is a drastic leap off a ledge,
but your veins, tangled like the roots in a windowbox,
strangled you from within, leaving no hope
of a colorful death. If my father treats his cancer
like a flower, then you gave way to an arid spring.

There is a garden that does not cater to spring—
there is a square of land that seems cut by a die—
where my father's tombstone waits like a cancer:
a marble growth, a malignant ledge.
Yours is dressed in tulips, as if a parent's hope
could turn a grave into a windowbox.

You are the cat's shadow on the shrinking windowbox.
You are luck's first kill of the spring,
a tangle of misfortunes that reveal neither fault nor hope.

A scatter of pollen determined that you should die
while my father holds fast to the crumbling ledge
of his own lifetime. You and he are the endpoints of cancer.

Hope does not course the limbs of cypress. Saplings die,
in a shattered windowbox, free of concern. A rite of spring.

The cat fends a barren ledge, clawing, possessive as cancer.

PAM REHM

A MAN SETS SAIL WITH THE FAIR WIND OF HOPE

Thus we must remind ourselves
of rapture
The line that is here
or bygone
The room, healed
The soup, left

Found a route
alongside my excursion
Trapped against a
destination

Rest in one mood
Seated in traveling clothes
Alone
To wander out
To creep into thoughts

No longer does wine lift his heart. Since he never started he can always stop. Hence, when he says "I do not," it begins with nothing to do.

Who has particular hours lived for eternity?
And which ones love the accidental?

When all secrets come together he is living in ambush. To see things again. A spider is a great amusement for one bored with his native land. Every single change.

Indulged in the hope of an endless journey. Or trip.
Least of all the pilot. His own ship.

Thus we are reminded
of capture
The pirate who is restless
and pacing
The moon, overhead
The fish, troubled

Sound a song
fit for a stranger
Speech interwoven with
Confrontation

Another world but
to our own
Home which declares itself
Home even in the mist

From this moment on he has only one thing against him.
The water, changes. To a certain degree one must consider
everything in his life a wager. Perhaps he is
often fooled. Looses his masculinity. He recoils on
it knowing how to sink down and hide. That is the motive
for his aimless imagination. He is not a child. It
seems to me he seldom moves.

Thus we are stirred by
Foreshadowings
A cat that is black
crossing us
The ladder, angle
An umbrella, opened

Walked to feel
a different breathing
Found a way
to continue

Travel
To define nothing
To whom can one turn
To whom is there a constant
position

Now the various squalls have receded. The quiet activity of forgetting. Tomorrow he is going in such a way that the remnants of memory will prove to him that he is still young. Listening to a joke that cancels the fear of immanent thinking. When sensuousness appears he cannot find it on any map. Even the legend is no longer developed. No special piano or porcelain dishes. Artificial puzzle. Trying to put together what belongs together. The sailor's yarn, the flag, the deck; always a welcome quest. To be partially possessed.

So we are reminded
of the cadence
Sinking away into
stillness
An absolute cessation

It is perhaps that
he has never grown
into the present

but the preordainment
imparted to him

was something—
As he looks back on
his past—
apart from his own
power

It is the one being.
It is the one who could almost be himself.
A man sets sail with the fair wind of hope.
A man sets sail when everything in him tightens.
When the land forces its way through him.
He speaks something. The lips come apart to repeat
"the first time." And then, as if rediscovering
his thought, "it is, indeed, despair."

CHARLES OLSON
FOUR LETTERS TO THE GLOUCESTER DAILY TIMES

FOREWORD
BY GERRIT LANSING

When in 1960 Harry Martin and I arranged a reading for Charles Olson at the house of John Hays Hammond, Jr. (later called "The Hammond Castle Museum"), and the event was announced, on home-made posters we distributed throughout Cape Ann, and in the local newspaper, as a "reading from the *Maximus* and other poems." Charles was not happy with this announcement. He would have preferred it be emphasized that what he was going to read would be *letters*, missives addressed to the citizens of his city, the *polis* of Gloucester, Massachusetts. That the work was so *addressed* was a particular of his attention.

Like the volumes of *Maximus Poems*, this volume of newspaper letters, unique throbs of anger and love, is witness of the scope of Olson's care, the range of his gaze. "Polis is eyes," he wrote, and in the man as in the work that act of attention bristled.

It was eyes I noticed and was noticed by when I first came on the man sitting behind the kitchen table at 28 Fort Square. You climbed the paint-cracked wooden stairs outside the 2nd floor apartment and through the glass of the door you saw the kitchen table, crowded with books, dishes, coffee cups, saucers of spent cigarettes, newspapers and manuscripts. But from behind the kitchen table an enormous pair of eyes seized you, held you. The eyes welcoming while fully attentive. *Encompassing* eyes. Owl-like? Then came an awareness of size, the whole big man.

Later, in the course of frequently walking the streets of Gloucester with Charles, along the bank of the Annisquam River by the high school, paths of Dogtown, I became aware how thorough was the attention he gave to whatever object we stopped to look at. And to the words of our talk: one of Charles' most common expressions was "I hear you" when the quality of your own articulated attention matched his and the sound was true. Always he listened intently to what you offered. And attention to his own thought, rephrasing it and explicating it so as better to be understood.

Like Whitman it seems to me he took with grace whatever was presented to him and rolled it over in his consideration, dream constellations as well as the dreck of the streets. If one thought in terms of sacrament (and as a child Charles had absorbed an awareness of sacrament) it was a kind of sacrament of the "chance" presentation of existence that he met anew every day. Martin Buber, in an essay that I read then when I first knew Charles, expressed what seemed to me a truth about Olson: "The man of sacramental existence is no magician. . .he exerts no power but performs a service, *the* service. . . What is important (in the sacramental sense)? The answer: 'Whatever a man happens to concern himself with.' And the momentary, when it is taken seriously in its momentary, unique contingency, proves to be that which cannot be anticipated or prepared for. The man of sacramental existence is aided by no acquired rules and rhythms, by no traditional methods, no special knowledge or aptitude: he must continually withstand the unforeseen and unforeseeable moment: he must continually, in the outflowing moment, offer release, fulfillment to a thing or creature encountered. And he can effect no selection, no division, since it is not for him to decide what will come his way and what will not. . ."

Unlike W. B. Yeats, Charles did not desire, I think, to be a magician; nor did he claim any power that was not magnified human power; he wished to be *unaware*, and remained unaware, in a kind of negative capability, of the services he performed; and because he did not fear self-indulgence he gave himself without stint, to the painful point of sacrifice.

If one does not choose to use a Judeo-Christian vocabulary of sacrament the heedfulness I saw as a special quality of Olson's being can be otherwise and perhaps more satisfactorily described, in terms of the phenomenology of attention and simple mindfulness in Buddhist, Taoist, and some Hindu Tantric traditions. For students of Olson's work a better understanding of and sympathy with his methodology (archaeology of morning) can be gained from Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* than from the static logical categories of Whitehead's *Process and Reality.* And when I lent Charles a great essay on Orgonomic Functionalism by Wilhelm Reich he returned it only half read, saying it was too close to the heart of his work for him to deal with it at that time.

Reading these public letters written in quick response to contingencies of living in a small New England port city in the '60s makes one eerily aware of the presence of the future in the past. They are prophetic of themes that now more fully impinge upon our consciousness, of history and place, ecological continuities and values. The exactness of social topography that informs them makes them speak strongly to us now. If we can only listen . . . ?

A Note on the Letters
by Peter Anastas

Between December 22, 1962 and May 22, 1969, Charles Olson wrote seventeen letters to the Editor of the *Gloucester Daily Times*. Five of these letters were in the form of poems, two of which were later included in the *Maximus* sequence and two in Olson's *Collected Poems*, edited by George Butterick. None of the prose letters have been reprinted even though they are an essential part of the Olson oeuvre. The subjects they touch upon are fiercely local, ranging from "a beef" about a Winslow Homer commemorative stamp first issued in Gloucester to an expression of the poet's dismay at what he called the "deleterious imitative" inclination of the city's planners and politicians. Yet, like *The Maximus Poems*, these letters have wider dimension and significance, especially those which deal with matters of ecology.

The following three letters are examples of both the subjects Olson treated and his approach, at once personal, historical and hortatory. Olson's letters can also be read as an expression of love for his adopted city and a gloss upon the great poem he made of that adoration, the epic *Maximus*.

In November 1991, Ten Pound Island Book Company of Gloucester published *Maximus to Gloucester: The Letters and Poems of Charles Olson to the Editor of the Gloucester Daily Times, 1962–1969*, which I edited, annotated, and introduced. There is a foreword by Gerrit Lansing.

Poet proposes Gloucester restore selectmen
December 28, 1965* [December 21, 1965]

Editor, Gloucester Times:

What bastard man today does not know, or his fellows who sell to him abuse in and for him, is the created conditions of his own nature. One of these certainly is topography, that is that the shape of things on earth, of his own tools and constructions, the paths he and animals made and the roads which followed on and after those earlier means of his own movement, have, like the air and odors of spring and fall, or the difference of light and color when Winter's air is cold, and like food, and love-making, and children, and a place he lives in, much to do with how alive he himself or her personally is.

I'm used, myself, to the word topography but this sharp December night, driving Cape Ann's still often delicate roads, and I mean ones like Rogers, which imitates Main, and East Main Street, which is almost or perfectly as far as East Gloucester Square the way the road to the Eastern Point followed the initial shore use (it then went up Highland and returned to the shore as Mt. Pleasant Avenue does), and Main Street itself, and Washington (almost essentially still the way it was, to Rockport), and there Eastern Avenue back, I was suddenly, especially passing Mill Pond in the dark and fearing any project which would take away, for a school—we have plenty of naturists who will claim marsh for the ecology of fish and insects, it was ecology as man's own tonight I thought which is, unknowingly, what he and his badgered and mostly stupid leadership, are removing from him, and from his earth and the ways of his life. And I care at least as much for him as I do for fish, and birds, and shellfish, and kelp. And flowers, which also live best, or even the way wheat, and oats and barley and corn, each cereal, as grass and as flowers, hybridized in the mixtures of nature and man's dumps. The hedge-row, they call it east of Buffalo, what is the unturned edge between adjoining plowed fields of two owners, are where, like I'm hoping Mill Pond will be left, because these places between places breed future.

It is not one of the known and thank God therefore I hope not quaint facts, that a Gloucester captain of the China trade, who retired and lived on Washington there on the uplands going down to the marsh of Mill Pond so longed for the feeling of the view he knew he had a small junk made and floated her there in the pond for himself and anyone else who therefore

*First date on letter is date published; date in brackets is date of composition.

had occasion to see. And watch and enjoy—or laugh at and scorn I should also suppose? (It wasn't the least of the arguments for leaving Ten Pound Island just as she was when the City received her back from the Federal Government after the long years she wasn't Gloucester "Commons," that people could just sit and look at her in the evenings on Stacy Boulevard or use her and notice her as the gulls each morning at dawn leave Ten Pound Island, and return in hurry as soon as the sun sets, to get there, and get down before night comes.

I am proposing something. Man today is so stolen and cheated of creation as part actually of his own being—gulls and fish and flowers and mussels and insects, and grasses and water ain't, nearly so much—that, like some of my most precious and ambitious friends think that a Gloucester reference thereon loses the universal, another instance, the new crop of 20-year-olds think that the only universals which possibly can matter are those, like pot, say, which put one directly in touch, and only, with "the universals." I am happy to offer Gloucester, in the guise of the very total I best think was and is man's interference with creation, his ecology (which is like the wife to the husband of his economics) can only come in again, or be drawn like Capt. Whose boat on Mill—or Jim Chum, which Gloucesterman's dory-mate caught in the hooks of a trawl and the man drew the trawl enough to loose his fellow but he was gone for blood and the other had to heave him in a fireman's lift over one shoulder and swim three miles in any sea to their vessel.

I propose Gloucester restore her original selectmen as her Governing Body solely to redeclare the ownership of all her public conditions—including the governance of anything in that Body's and the total Electorate's judgement / no longer any appeal to eminent domain, or larger unit of topography and environment than the precincts of the City's Limit/—in other words to re-establish the principle of *commoners*, for ownership of *commons*. This alone will cut through all the preservations, historical commissions, as well, thank God, all any future except that of hybridized man himself, aware he's diddling when he touches marge of being, including his own. He be commoner, we be, Gloucester be common(s).

CHARLES OLSON

Olson returned in 1957 to a Gloucester run by a city manager, who served at the pleasure of an elected city council, one member representing

each of the city's eight wards. It was called Plan E and had come into use in 1952, replacing a mayor-council form of government that had been instituted in 1873 after the town petitioned the state legislature for a new charter as a city. Prior to the city's first election of a mayor, eight aldermen and twenty-four common councilmen on December 1, 1873, the town had been governed by a board of selectmen who carried out its business as directed by town meeting at which all eligible citizens had an equal voice in decision that affected the common good. The system evolved in colonial days in most Massachusetts towns (it remains to this day in Rockport, Essex and Manchester, towns which border Gloucester) and it is to this system of a government of "commoners" which Olson advocated a return in his letter. By Olson's death in 1970, the city had suffered a succession of managers who had, in the opinion of many, merely mismanaged the city's affairs, especially as regards land use and development. Within the next decade there was an initiative to re-write Gloucester's municipal charter, eliminating Plan E and returning to the mayor-council form of government, under which Gloucester has been governed since 1976.

Olson believed that under Plan E the city had gotten out of the people's control and into the control of managers, who had viewed her not as "commonwealth" but as a purely fiscal entity, at worst as a "business corporation" to be managed, with "profits" to be gained in taxes as the result of an expanded industrial base. It was under Plan E that Olson's despised urban renewal—he called it "renewal by destruction"—took place, chopping up the waterfront into commercial lots and destroying many of the city's most important architectural and historical landmarks, to say nothing of her traditional neighborhoods adjacent to the waterfront. It is against this backdrop that the poet wrote his letter, one of the most penetrating and moving statements of human ecology one can find. It also serves as an introduction to subsequent letters to the editor, focusing on particular instances of destructive or misguided proposals for development or the loss of precious buildings and landmarks.

Rogers which imitates Main. . .East Main Street. . .East Gloucester Square. . .Eastern Point. . .

The poet is describing a drive from Rogers Street, which begins at the Town Landing near his home at 28 Fort Square, running east parallel to Main Street (the old Front Street and present business district of the city) and from there to East Gloucester Square and Eastern Point via Highland Street and Mt. Pleasant Avenue, along the city's oldest roadways, once wagon roads and, before them, pathways.

Washington to Rockport. . .Eastern Avenue back. . .

Again, beginning at the Town Landing in downtown Gloucester, one can travel northward on Washington Street, crossing Route 128 as it enters the city, through Riverdale, Annisquam, Bay View, Lanesville, Folly Cove

and Pigeon Cove to Rockport center along a highway which essentially overlays the earlier colonial paths and, in some instances, aboriginal trails traveled upon by summering Penobscot Indians from Maine and other Algonquian peoples.

It was Olson's habit in the years after his wife's death to drive in the succession of second-hand cars he owned along these roads late at night or early in the morning hours, picturing the land as it had been in the 17th and 18th centuries and occasionally stopping to visit his often sleeping friends.

Mill Pond. . .and fearing any project. . .

At this time, the school committee was contemplating the construction of a new middle school adjacent to the pond, north of the Route 128 traffic circle on Washington Street in Riverdale, just before it curves up past the Riverdale Methodist Church on the left and the old grange hall on the right. Building the school would have entailed the filling of the pond and nearby wetlands. This is the subject of the poet's letter of January 22, 1966.

east of Buffalo. . .

Probably a reference to Wyoming, New York where Olson lived in 1963-1964 while teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

a Gloucester captain. . .

According to George Butterick's A Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson *(Berkeley, 1978), "the captain was James A. Clarkson (c. 1816-1849) who lived at 394 Washington Street, overlooking Mill Pond. His miniature junk, not mentioned by Babson or any of the historians of Cape Ann, is pictured in a lithograph competently drawn by his brother-in-law Lodowick Bradford and entitled 'Mills, Riverdale, 1849' (collection of Paul Harling of Riverdale)."*

Ten Pound Island. . .back from Federal Government. . .

During 1957 the island, once the site of a federal lighthouse, a keeper's cottage and fish hatchery, reverted to the city. The hatchery buildings had fallen into disrepair and had become rat-infested. In June of 1964, the city decided to burn the hatchery to the ground. Olson attempted to stop the "bon fire," as the city advertised it, with a court injunction (ironically, on the very day his second wife, Betty Kaiser, was buried), but the conflagration had already begun. (See Olson's letter of October 28, 1968, "Restore 10 lb. Island house.")

Stacy Boulevard. . .

Runs along Gloucester's outer harbor to Stage Fort Park, past the Fisbermen's Monument and the Essex Avenue entrance to the city on Route 1-A; an esplanade lined with street lights and wooden benches.

Jim Chum. . .

Historian Joseph E. Garland (The Lone Voyager, That Great Patillo, *et al) believes this story to be apocryphal. There are various accounts of men getting tangled in the trawl, a series of hooked and baited lines, while*

fishing, he notes (communication of December 5, 1988), but no record of anyone swimming three miles. (Dories were virtually unsinkable and could be hung onto while awaiting rescue by the mother vessel.) Olson may have picked this yarn up during his many visits to the now-defunct Master Mariner's Association rooms on Main Street between 1957 and 1962 where he often went to learn about the heydays of Gloucester fishing, or at the Fishermen's Institute, a long-time bethel for retired fishermen, on Duncan Street, since demolished. There is no record of a "Jim Chum" in any of the standard documents of the Gloucester fisheries.

preservations. . .historical commissions. . .

The poet had little use for the newly established Gloucester Historical Commission (perhaps because he, who knew local history better than any of its members, was not appointed to it), which was originally chartered to protect the city's historical properties like the razed Davis-McMillan house, but had, at this time, accomplished little more than preparing a list of those worth preserving, many of which have since been lost.

Poet takes a Gloucester walk—
February 12, 1968 [February 7, 1968]

'A sense of auspice of life and being. . .'

Letter 1

Dear Editor:

happy poet like my friend Stephen Jonas the Boston poet says. I was raised over the Cut and except for the Parsons-Morse house I tried to buy last year and a gambrel Ray Morrison covered up a few years back, there never has been any reason to talk about the light, or at least the house's as fixing it, by texture or color or by their dignity or loveliness in shape or bearing—what arrests one this side of the River, at so many turns of heights and streets and lying of the land and abruptness smallness a little street like lower Hancock which not so many years ago was simply Sea Street. Or Short is still Short. And Mansfield Place—or equally (coming into Western at the Boulevard Grocery) Mansfield Way.

I'm up this morning at dawn and my whole soul cries out again, looking out my door and seeing the early morning sun so differently striking the (Puritan) Hotel I better call the ancient Gloucester House brick—how rosy red that is brick as against the Mansfield house's dark red's blood red's brick.

Or I was away most of last week and on Saturday, in the morning, walk up again into town, cutting through Tallys to swing on to Main, cross over into the sun on the northerly side and go along to post my letters at the Bob's Haberdashery box—and up upper Hancock to my doctor's. Returning, stop in Connors for a gingerale and then equally paced start home.

And that shore-path, curving still right now as she was laid out 326 years back gave me again as I think it has never failed, a sense of auspice of life and being I don't even know the equivalent of, down and over the Earth's cities in Central America. Or Rome West Berlin London. San Francisco New York. Washington, New Orleans, Montreal, Seattle—West Newbury—Dorchester England Weymouth England both of which latter places Gloucester principally sprang from.

And I have objective proof I do not speak alone personally: on Pleasant Street in a house there is a painting of exactly those differences of light on brick, and in the cluster as the width and winding of Main Street still holds and shows it—and of course the light on the white shapely houses too, this rarest of all paintings of just this ***gloire*** of Gloucester I can look out or walk out and find

and for all pious people who think that history is problems, and that we must now live, and with problems, Fitz Hugh Lane's immaculate

retention in paint of what is still my eye awakened this morning, out my door, or my blood, Saturday morning, walking it until I have lived on an ability and plane of 48 hours of maximum production and human joy (it is now Monday AM 7:45) I say shoo: this is, and can't be bettered. Kiss Joy, as it flies a greater poet than I can ever be said just when [just] what happily in Gloucester is still at stake was being rifled in the world, from each of us, for the first time.

CHARLES OLSON

He also said, some years later, in his preface to his poem "Milton" (I owe the knowledge of this quote to another friend, [&] poet, a London poet Michael Horovitz)

"Rouze up, O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, in the Court & the University, who would, if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! on you I call. Sculptors! Architects! Suffer not the fashionable Fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for the contemptible works, or the expensive advertising boasts that they make of such works; believe Christ & his Apostles that there is a Class of Men whose whole delight is in Destroying."

Letter 2—later

It is like a whole alphabet: [w]hen Gloucester loses her alleys, and masses of buildings (which carry these incrementals, as well as like dishes and spoons receive each day now as they have often before the same shovelfuls of snow etc.—I actually mean of course as much more as well, the violets of light) the way a pansy joins its stalk, and nods there, in its head so very rarely, as human heads can do. There was a kitchen garden by a house right next to Birdseyes just recently removed where each early summer I cld be sure, one day, to be bombed right out, walking up Commercial Street, by suddenly a poppy, maybe one or two more, lying there up on its stalk like crepe paper, and swinging, in the least of all possible air, in a mad dance of toss and tremor. And the woman who had those seeds there as well as tomatoes, knew it.—It['s] a million worlds is tied up in what's being dolled-up—and that I am talking about.

---

the Cut. . .

That part of Gloucester west of the Blynman Canal, specifically in local usage those neighborhoods encompassed by the Causeway at Essex Avenue, Kent Circle, Western Avenue to Bond Street and the Stage Fort Park-Stage Fort Avenue area.

Parsons-Morse house. . .

See "Poet asks public to call council," August 8, 1967

this side of the River. . .

Gloucester side of "Cut" or Blynman Canal linking outer harbor with Annisquam River.

lower Hancock. . .Short. . .Mansfield Place. . .

Original Gloucester streets and ways in inner city.

Boulevard Grocery. . .

On corner of Mansfield Street (Olson mistakenly refers to it as Mansfield Way) and Western Avenue, across the Stacy Boulevard from Fishermen's Monument.

Puritan Hotel. . .

Or Gloucester Hotel, now restored as Blackburn Tavern on the corner of Main and Washington street.

Mansfield house. . .

See "Poet begs for action to save beauty," January 18, 1968.

Tally[']s. . .

Gas station-auto repair shop on Commercial Street, owned by Taliadoros family (see "Poet appeals to Gloucester landowner," October 25, 1967).

Bob's Haberdashery. . .

Clothing store owned by Robert Kramer, located on corner of Hancock and Main streets.

my doctor's. . .

Dr. Ever L. Curtis, at 90 Middle Street. Olson was also treated by Drs. Walter O'Donnell and Peter S. New, currently of Cape Ann Medical Center, Blackburn Industrial Park, but with offices at 106 Bass Avenue in 1968, especially during the last year of his life and directly before he left Gloucester for Storrs, Connecticut in September of 1969.

the Earth's cities. . .

Olson lists the various cities and towns he had lived in or visited in his lifetime up to then, most recently Dorchester and Weymouth in England where, in 1967, he did research on Gloucester's earliest settlers.

Connor's. . .

Pharmacy and soda fountain, formerly Sullivan's Drug Store, on Main Street, next to "Waiting Station," (see Maximus, *Letter 3, pp. 9-12).*

on Pleasant street. . .

Cape Ann Historical Association at 27 Pleasant Street. Painting referred to is probably Gloucester Harbor, *1852, by Fitz Hugh Lane, owned*

by the city of Gloucester and on deposit at the museum. According to curator Martha Oaks, "the center of the canvas shows the sun streaming down on the central part of the downtown area. Buildings (brick and wood) are all very carefully detailed." (Communication of January 6, 1989.)

a greater poet than I can ever be...

William Blake (1757-1827). English poet, artist and engraver.

a kitchen garden...

Home of Frontiero family (see "When do poppies bloom," Maximus, *p. 550).*

Birdseyes...

The present O'Donnell-Usen fish processing plant on Commercial Street, site of the first experiments by Clarence Birdseye that produced "quick-" or "flash-frozen" fish and, later, other products.

Olson's letter, one of his major statements about Gloucester's sense of place and his own in it, was followed by a letter from Robert L. Hogg, then a graduate student in the Department of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Headlined "Real importance of Gloucester," it reads in part:

> Editor, Gloucester Times:
>
> I would like to commend you for your editorial, "Gloucester's Own West End Story," in the Jan. 18 Times. It is a courteous introduction to Mr. Olson's letter on the same page, and a succinct and constructive article on the problems redevelopment presents in the West End of your city. I hope you will continue in your endeavor to make present to the townspeople of Gloucester the importance of their city's history.
>
> Gloucester is a place, in America, as few places are; and Mr. Olson's respect and concern—or do you more rightly call it love—for this place, from its founding to the present, have engaged the interest of many who otherwise might think of Gloucester only as an East Coast resort. The real importance of Gloucester, in the total history of America, may yet be a thing to come. . .

Poet pleads for Essex Ave. "patch"
May 30, 1969 [May 22, 1969]

Editor, Gloucester Times:

The soul of man is worth more than the sale of automobiles. What is already being permitted to happen back of Essex Avenue toward Western, and to Bond's Hill, is destructive [destruction] of what is so valuable one cannot even imagine the damage.

I am aware that clearing, and [&] ditching has been neglected there for years—or in fact we have not imagined yet what care it does take now to keep such things as marshes, back-water and refuse-spots as open as they now must be attended, people themselves are so numerous, accidental and [&] themselves empty of their own experience. Money in fact should be allotted to this unkemptness as a part literally of loan, and [&] investment, into and [&] of the ["]commons["] of this city.

What I cannot resist warning, is that this particular stretch and the crazy secret old small causeway, branch of the old causeway Essex Avenue itself is?, [is] conceivably one of the "True" patches left of a bundle of nature that close in within "houses" of the full life of the city—not tucked away somewhere, and [&] treated as though it were invalid land. The birds alone, in that patch, are such as meadows have been, and if a decent sweep of cleaning were done to the water the brightness there which sparkles still for me, a heron, some red-wing blackbirds, several hornets sweeping down the run of that small raised path—like such as used to connect directly through the jungle such top Mayan cities as Uxmal and Kabah—belongs to men women boys and [&] girls unknown in the ludicrous anal goodness *or* vicious commercial ambitiousness of the city today.

I pled once that this part of the city be left alone: already wretchedness has been practiced, and [&] should be enjoined. I am asking now that the [C]ity regard herself, in the mirror. She looks bad, there.

CHARLES OLSON

Having already pleaded in vain in his letter of October 25, 1967 for the Taliadoros family not to fill an area of marsh on the Essex Avenue causeway to expand their automobile business, Olson, in what was to be his final letter

to the editor, asks that the one remaining parcel of wetlands on Essex Avenue, containing, in his words, "the crazy secret old small causeway," which led from Essex Avenue west across the marsh to Bond Street, be left untouched after being cleaned of the litter and trash that had accumulated there during years of local neglect.

Uxmal and Kabah. . .

Ancient Mayan cities which Olson knew from his time spent in Yucatan from February to July in 1951.

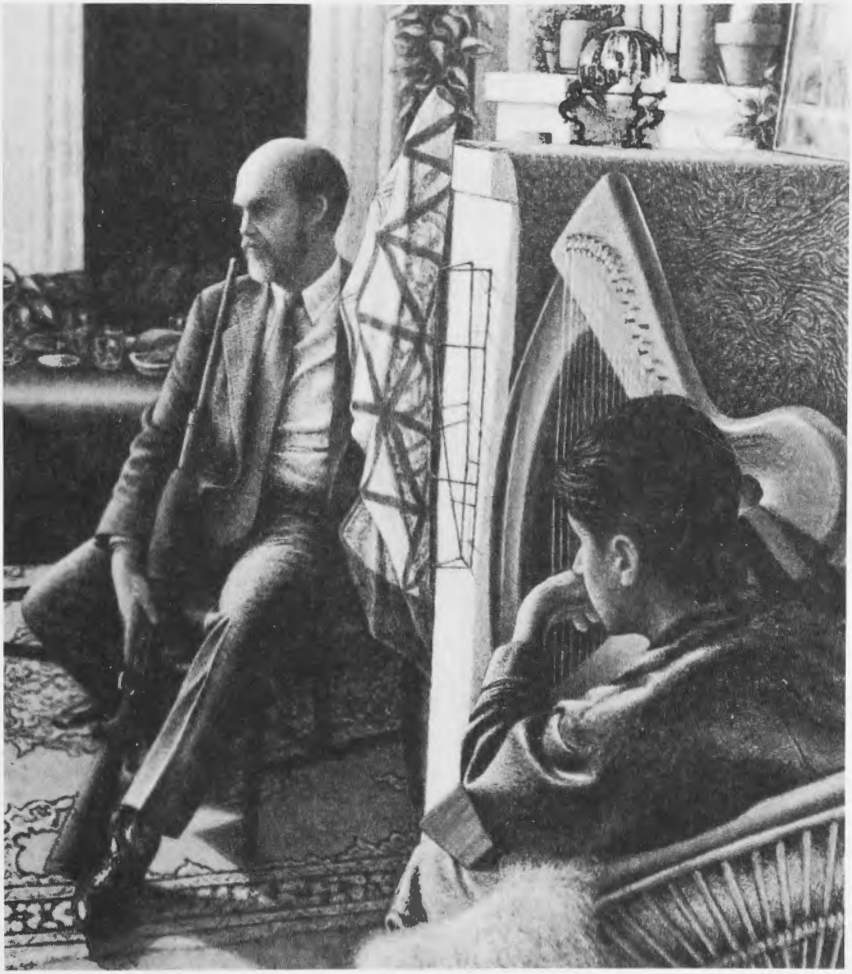
On the same page, an editorial headed "Poet sees more than meets the eye," reads in part:

> Poet Charles Olson's sombre (sic) warning to fellow lovers of Gloucester expressed in a letter to the editor on this page is perhaps the most important communication in this newspaper.
>
> Its wording requires and deserves receptive attention. He's talking about land on Essex Avenue near the causeway between the Annisquam and the rise bordering Marshfield and Bond Streets.
>
> Olson sees Gloucester differently from most of us. He sees a concentration of life, a capsule of history, in old Gloucester and he is sad to see what a mess is made of precious possessions.
>
> His disgust over sloppiness and deliberate degradation of the earth is shared by some who shy from his perceptive poetry, though they might well enjoy it if they but gave it as much attention as a clever TV commercial.
>
> Do Gloucester people want the approaches to their hometown to look as ugly as dollar-hungry developments on Route 1 in the Lynnfield-Saugus area?
>
> On Route 1 there is economic reason for cluttering the landscape with shops and gas stations and restaurants and other business enterprises: the traffic is so heavy that there is transient trade to be extracted. But Gloucester does not have such heavy traffic.
>
> Gloucester's wealth is in natural beauty and attractive places for people to live, work and play.
>
> Homes and yards are generally well kept and clean. Children are well dressed and well fed. Cars are kept clean. Litter control is improving.

> But in some of the most prominent locations in the whole city, unsightly conditions are allowed to exist and to grow worse. . .

Ironically, a decade later the city would construct a federally-mandated sewage treatment plant on the very land Olson wrote about in his letter. The Taliadoros brothers were granted a permit to fill adjacent wetlands (the subject of Olson's letter of October 25, 1967) to expand their automobile dealership and used car lot (sold, as of 1991, for a three-screen movie complex) and the Essex Avenue causeway is lined on the river side with marinas, a motel/boatel and a restaurant. Only a small portion of the original wetland remains, and Olson's "crazy secret old small causeway" has disappeared forever.

WES CHRISTENSEN
FOUR PAINTINGS



COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

Watercolor & gouache, 6" x 5¼"
1989

COVERT OPERATION (I SAM. 24)

Watermedia, pencils, 5" x 7"
1991

HAARLEM

Watercolor & gouache, 4" x 5⅞"
1982

PURPLE HEART

Watercolor & gouache, 4¾" x 6"
1986, Ackerman Collection

GERALD M. ACKERMAN

HERCULES EVER AT THE CROSSROADS: Moral Dilemmas of Modern Life in the Paintings of Wes Christensen

Everything is remarkable about the paintings of Wes Christensen: the size, miniature or less; the media, a mixture of colored pencil and watercolor; the draughtsmanship, refined past normal eye-sight; and the invention itself: real-life situations in ordinary settings, sometimes with carefully described accessories which may be either accidents of environment or symbols. The paintings are very small, ranging from 3 by 3 inches or less to at the most a grandiose 10 by 14 inches. The figures are often cropped, leaning into the picture from outside the frame. They are seen in rooms filled with objects: some useful, some symbolic, others enigmatic; the rooms are often illuminated by the yellow, incandescent glow of indoor lighting. Other scenes are set in the bright intensity of the outdoors. And the figures are usually active: even in repose; there is energy even when their activity is reduced to states such as melancholy, concentration or fear.

Although we cannot say that Wes Christensen is part of a school, he is one of several young figure painters of Los Angeles, all of whom have had both to conquer their modern academic training in order to paint figures and to ignore the modern hostility against the practice. All of them work in strong, individually developed styles and use personally discovered techniques. Most of them know each other; they all have reservations about each other's work—for they all see figures differently, not having established any norm or set of rules to help them balance correctness of sight with grace of presentation. Each embraces or avoids ugliness in nature in a distinct way. Consequently, they cannot criticize each other very helpfully, but they can encourage each other; and occasionally they exhibit together. Their leader should have been the late Joyce Treiman, a venerable local painter who persisted in painting figures through the previous decades of abstraction—the fifties, sixties and seventies when it was a painful experience, her friends thought she was mad—but her work is probably too touched by abstraction, anyway, to inspire them, although her personal example should. Unlike her, these young painters put their figures into situations where each must think and act independently. They know it was the habit of older painters to use a moral dilemma to give their pictures tension or meaning; they want to avoid the brainless realism of

some modern "realist" figure painters who paint what seem like stuffed models, clothed and costumed, placed in various poses in various parts of the house. Jon Swihart paints in oils slightly larger figures groups in religious situations so ecumenical they include pagan rites and gods. His figure style is quite different from Christensen's. He seldom crops, liking whole figures animated anatomically, not by lighting. And F. Scott Hess works on an enormous scale, five and six foot wide canvases of simultaneously horrible and hilarious southern Californian domestic situations painted in a wild, loose style in German Neo-expressionist colors. These artists have been met, recently, by a Californian working on the East Coast, Kate Doyle, whose figures, though often reclining or sitting in interiors, are full of the power of individual thought and feeling. All of them paint situations which seem to put their figures to test, morally, spiritually. The great thing is that they all know what to do with figures, an aptitude which many thought was lost forever.

This is not a "revival" of figure painting; it is a thoroughly modern continuation. Wes Christensen is not going back to some dead standards; nor is he chewing up and regurgitating a mangled tradition that mixes the prejudices of modernity with recognizable bits of human forms, as in the "[San Francisco] Bay Area Figure Revival" of the sixties, which was born out of Abstract Expressionism. Christensen works in a tradition that he has never considered dead: for him, Thomas Eakins, the "American Scene Painters," and others bridge over abstraction back to Copley's *Watson and the Shark* which he considers the greatest American painting. Christensen's instinct has picked the right masterpiece; Copley's painting signals the change from the depiction of universal themes to individual destinies, something that happens at this time in literature as well as in painting.

Intuitively, Christensen has accepted a truism of most art historians, that "modern art" or the modern age started in the Age of Revolutions, somewhere around 1775 (*Watson and the Shark* is dated 1878). This is a difficult idea for the general public that prefers to see the beginning of modern art a century later in a struggle between the Impressionists and the academics; it does not like to think modern art was started by the President of the Royal Academy.

The questions to be explored in art for Christensen are the unclear existential problems of daily life, not matters of style. These problems were pondered before that revolt as questions of a universal religion; now they are dilemmas of personal decision. The theme hitherto in almost all figure painting was the relationship of man to God's plan; now it is the relationship of one person to the present situation or to another person. As Watson dangles over the shark, is he thinking about God's will or his own personal safety?

Like Hercules, Christensen's figures are often at the crossroads, trying to decide between the Path of Virtue and the Path of Vice. For instance, *The*

Letter of 1982 (not reproduced) depicts a seated woman examining an unopened letter, another woman stands behind her, hovering over her; we know she has brought the letter to the woman because she echoes the position of the servant delivering a letter to her mistress in Vermeer's *Woman and Maid* in the Frick Collection in New York City. The sudden physical lassitude of the Frick recipient (and our knowledge of the situations in the some other dozen similar works by Vermeer) lets us recognize her moral situation: an assignation, the letter is in the line of the message which King David sent to Bathsheba. But Christensen's recipient holds a cocked pistol in her other hand: a symbol? a sign of anger? or of action? The world and its choices are not so simple. Instead of a clear set of rules of right and wrong—as in Vermeer's world—there are many courses of action for Christensen's characters, each with a separate consequence. And is it action or morality that is the question here? I think Christensen wants the interpretation of the viewer to be as difficult as the decision for the actor.

As for his own art-historical position, Christensen will say he works in the tradition of "narrative panting." He uses the term counter to the professional usage—which describes a series of paintings telling a story step by step, as say in *The Life of Christ* on the back of the *Maestà* of Duccio, or the *Story of the True Cross* on the walls of San Francesco in Arezzo by Piero della Francesca. In the recent past, the term was used by several lazy critics for genre paintings which they could not fit into their perceived "main line of development," particularly applied to some British genre painters of the 19th century whose work did not seem to agree with continental developments. Christensen's own meaning is revealed by his preference for Rembrandt's biblical scenes over those of say Raphael or Michelangelo; he sees Rembrandt's biblical scenes in contrast to theirs as "narrative paintings," meaning that he prefers paintings in which the human element can be read foremost, ignoring—where possible—the allegorical element so powerful in the work of the Italian masters. In academic classification, the biblical scenes of all three artists would be called "History Pictures."

Countertransference is a direct homage to a work long attributed to Rembrandt, the *David playing for King Saul* in The Hague. The picture easily read in terms of the emotions of the two characters is not, however, simply a story, a narrative. The young David with the purity of his song moves the jealously hostile King Saul to cry; at the same time the King is holding the spear that he will soon in a rage aim and throw at the young singer. Like most biblical histories from the 17th century, the work can be read on many levels: an allegory on the unreliability of melancholic genius (Saul), the pain of falling from grace, the conflict of innocence and decadence; and for moderns, as a paradigm of paranoia, for Saul, jealous

of the young hero's fame, projects his own hostility on David, and imagining that the young man intends to kill him, tries to kill him first. Christensen's has posed the characters as in the Berlin picture, but painted them from a different angle, and a shotgun—unfailing hostility—replaces the lance. Thus the "countertransference" is both psychological and physical. The sulking "King Saul" is one of his most fully-realized figures.

Even more Rembrandtesque is *Covert operation;* its sub-title of "I Samuel 24" allows us a quick reference to the Bible so that we can ascertain the identification of the scene as David trimming the cloak of Saul, rather than a new or Freudian interpretation of the history of Samson and Delilah (Judges 16). Actually, Christensen has conflated two similar stories about Saul and David. In the biblical account which Christensen cites, David is hiding in the cave from the hostile Saul, when Saul enters the cave to relieve himself; David, hidden in darkness, cuts off a piece of his garment, which he later shows to the King as evidence of his lack of malice and hostility and of his peaceful intentions. A second version (I Samuel 26) has David—still on the run—creep into Saul's camp at night where he finds the monarch sleeping; he takes away a spear and a water jug from near the sleeping Saul, retreats to outside the camp, and again challenges the King while displaying his modest trophies: "I could have killed you but I have no malice for the Lord's anointed." For Christensen the story has the moral that negotiations are preferable to war; he painted the scene during the Gulf War. But another layer is suggested because it is a woman—rather than a young man—doing the cutting, and so close to the genital area as to hint at castration, prominent in the story of Osiris, hidden in the story of the drunkenness of Noah, and perhaps adumbrated in the story of Samson and Delilah. So perhaps it is also a comment on the female role in the war between men and women.

The meanings of the action become even more difficult to unravel, impossible even, when one learns that all the characters in his paintings are friends of Christensen. Did he choose them to pose because of fortuitous thematic agreements, or through intuitively sensed appropriateness, or simply out of convenience? Mysterious personal relationships between the models and Christensen might be the tonic note in the mysterious discord between the black male saxophonist and his estranged white girlfriend in *Haarlem*. They are in the interior of a Dutch church—presumably in the European Haarlem and probably a citation from a painting by Saerendam. Does the setting suggest the sacredness of the relationship, and the saxophone its profane quality? Her blouse is decorated with a mixed black and white pattern.

Again in the now lost *Research*, which measured five inches by five, a man and a woman are seen before a building. This time a sort of pre-Colombian building whose dark entryway encloses a young girl in shorts.

The two, presumably archaeologists, face each other; she oblivious of the man, sits and looks through a Meso-American manuscript; he, on one knee before her, a machete over his left shoulder like a sword of honor, earnestly offers her an ear of corn. There is another ear of corn, on the chair beside her; its form is echoed by a spindle on a small table. Is he courting her, offering a phallic symbol? Does the dark entry of the tomb or palace (at which the proffered ear points) represent the mysteries of sex? Or are they simply discussing the importance of corn in pre-Colombian civilizations, looking at an old text for confirming information? As one studies the pictures, multiple meanings come to one's attention simultaneously with the appreciation of the details. Still the machete is menacing, although peacefully held; there are many weapons and possible weapons in the hands of Christensen's actors, sometimes proffered, sometimes exposed, sometimes held behind the back.

In *Purple Heart* the title at once lets you know this is a moment in a war, and that a wound has been received during an act of bravery. Two young two men have evidently taken refuge in a private, carefully managed garden, where they repose on neatly laid out blankets on a concrete ledge as one binds a wound on the other's arm. The ministering man is obviously a punk from his extravagant Mohawk hairdo; the other is, curiously, partially dressed—he wears only a colored t-shirt. But that the revealing nudity is not fortuitous is brought out by a faucet among the garden plants, an old pun for the penis, literal in some languages, visual in many works of art, and one that even the tradition-innocent can recognize. What was the fight about? A street riot of punks in some suburban area? The result of gay-bashing? Were they caught by homophobes in *flagrante delicto?* Or is it simply representative of the loving care gays give their sick brothers in this time of plague? The homo-eroticism is clear on levels of lust and tenderness and absolutely certain to those who recognize the underlining scheme of the early red-figured painting of Achilles binding the wounds of Patroclus in the bowl of the Sosias Kylix in Berlin (ca. 510 BC). The pose of the two figures is almost the same; the great crest of the Achilles's helmet is echoed in the full-arc of the Mohawk hair cut; and similarly the genitalia of Patroclus displayfully dangles from under a short skirt of leather thongs. So the homo-erotic quality sensed in *Purple Heart* is backed up by the ghosts of Achilles and Patroclus, who, along with Jonathan and David, are archetypal male lovers.

Of course such an image takes literary and art-historical information to crack it. Why not? But it still can be read as an emotional situation.

Wes Christensen's small paintings are not to be easily dismissed; their seriousness is compelling, their skill assuring, their drawing convincing, their compositions challenging, and their detail fascinating. The small size makes seeing an effort, and turns seeing into thinking. The drawing is

usually accurate on the surface of things, for Christensen was not schooled in figure drawing by a strict master of the old school—no one is anymore. He has developed his figure style from a study of old masters and from photographs. He has taken as inspiration the miniature style of Franz van Mieiris the Elder and of Vermeer (although Vermeer did not paint many miniatures, he used a miniaturist's technique—that is, he painted with fine, almost invisible brushes, and was exacting in his detail and the reception of light). Christensen derived his technique—of building up his forms with many layers of transparent and opaque water colors—from certain masters of the English School of the 19th century, the much collected if not popularly known William Henry ("Birdnest") Hunt and Myles Birket Foster, but of whom heavily employed stippling, as Christensen does. He fortunately has a small but faithful following of collectors in Los Angeles, and the enthusiastic comradeship of local artists with parallel if not exactly similar interests; he is young, and devoted to his work. In his paintings he explores not only his personal interests and reactions to the world about him, but he backs up his interests with a large range of art-historical and literary reference. We must admit now that subjective and abstract art is not for everyone, that young artists enamored of the physical world should no longer be discouraged from studying and portraying it.

BOB PERELMAN
VIRTUAL REALITY

It was past four when we
found our feet lifted above our

accelerators, only touching them at intervals.
Inside, our car radios were displaying

the body of our song, marked
with static from Pacific storms. Outside

was the setting for the story
of our life: Route 80 near

Emeryville—fence, frontage road, bay, hills,
billboards changing every two months—though

the background would never stay in
focus for very long. It was

the present, but stopped so short
it seemed to have been there

forever. We weren't pleased with the
choice of words, stations, or storms,

and our desire was pushed into
corners of our song, where it

clung self-consciously to the rhythm-fill, or
the bass line or the patent

scratch in the voice as it
tried to push the big moments

of the lyrics over the hump.
We were stacked up and our

path was jammed negotiation for every
forward foot. Any hope of automatic

writing, of turning the wheel freely
in a narrative of open possibility,

was a joke. Witness the impotent
speedometer, the ominous odometer. The fallen

leaves in the ads, lifting
in slow motion as the BMW

cornered away from us at forty,
only made it worse. Person-minutes inched

forward animating an eighty-year video while
memorized circles continued radiating from memorized

fairs where barkers were offering antique
pleasures: candy apples, Skee-Ball, two-headed sheep,

the Cave Woman. When she broke
her chains and started thumping her

plexiglass cage, the barker would shout,
"We can't control her!" The lights

would go out, and we would
stumble towards the exits, every hour

on the hour. But the show
didn't end like that. We fashioned

nooses out of coded nursery twine,
whipped up stampedes of ghost dancers

out of TV talent hoppers. We
couldn't quite see them, but we

knew they were there by how
touchy the phrases felt: "Sit." "Strip."

"Heel." "Roll over." The commands we
gave our body made it gape,

excited, in the way: a dog
in a porn movie. The sounds

sounded without prior sense. We could
see hands seizing towers, chains, dealerships,

the structures that gave our machines
their names and desires. They floated

longingly above the road. The past
was still waiting for us, permanently

unfaithful it seemed, but there was
no time to read, only to

react, as the global information net
had grown fascinated with our body's

every move, smashing at it with
videotaped sticks, validating it, urging credit,

free getaways, passionate replacement offers. Personal
gulfs beckoned with dark blue water.

MICHAEL PALMER
CITES

Sphères : Spheres
Brisées : Traces
Survies : Survivals

***

"The sun beat down through a
sky that had never seen clouds."
—James Gleick, *Chaos*

***

"the mark multiplied"
—for Micaëla Henich

can lie, but
under the grey
a part seen
is spherical, is
unearthed, all smoke
an unbridgeable gulf
arched and taut
preceded this gazing
anemone and the
but the buried
strands, salty to
harbors and their
space constructed of
and the cawing
wrack, wheeling of
rising over the

in its parabolic
walls and our
as if in
if no such
and aloud, returning
actual blue and
meant as witness
but the body
all smoke, blue
just so far
severed, its neck
because a focus
plaits, calcined walls
seems to be
or alternate flooding
rushes were once
absence of certain
or cling there
but another part
our distance to
patterns he can
as a net
dark, swallowing itself
of grey, spun
without legs or
shadows appear to
one sheltered against
smoked mirrors which
an hypothesis and
bits of bone
from ferrous mud
the mark multiplied
hull, hollow but
sea always seemed
to count them
buried there had
centuries, although they
thicker making it
fanned or flayed

les pierrailles les
against the fallen
as if blood
retreat into their
were to knot
where it falls
du large qui
spiral of dark
is subject to
sea to intermittent
remains attached to
an etching on
from a vortex
perspective of duration
where it spills
to penetrate between
slow and measured
est creusé dans
at intervals as
to read the
levels to extreme
through its ribs
so shapes its
neither our nor
will die if
glasswort or samphire
where the black
with perfect blades
the direction they
at each margin
cycle, the missing
when their plumes
the most, inscribed
page of a
and who before
a desire no
outcome of differences
their boundaries which
flicker over it

but the sudden
two-note calls are
as if bodies
channels that they
as when ash
que mes yeux
where clear green
mineral crust had
the mouths of
waiting to be
displacement by degrees
and rill marks
discover a thin
assembles in negative
dust pulled from
citron, actual word
tongue which will
of this sudden
its world, before
arrival of a
so shapes its
twin in its
bare line of
from the crest
an E or
the spine of
there (as Daive
the peat that
and the dispersal
registered as time
an x set
nothing but ink's
or beyond it
called the whorl
single or in
dark as our
to gravity so
can still see
and position for

may retain much
where no oxygen
wash ashore after
and almost iridescent
quickens and subsides
if the possible
wherever such tremors
then resurface as
sheered at an
as if signs
seen from above
and without thought
carries an atmosphere
where shore encircled
an equilibrium determined
to flood the
body, threads of
into its forked
surely it never
read as traces
since the wind
the water boatmen
so wantonly along
sun without its
dark twin to
imagine a red
the sphere forms
there in fragments
or a mill?
where tides often
so elder, groundsel
(a spell of
or itself surrounded
messages children had
color (for instance)
or else imagined?
what the names
one speaks one
different when I

windrow of rock
the sign R
(found only where
is not seen
that a word
is always supposed
to be possible
but can we
not sometimes speak
of a darkening
not sometimes feel
like saying if
we were without
memory we would
find ourselves there
mantled by a
violent night sky
above those same
cliffs, ochre and
silver, scored with
jagged rivulets, remnants
of a stair
or slatted fence
and beyond, rutted
walkways by walls
the door's A
prolapsed in shadow
a raised arm

TWO POEMS *from* BHARTRIHARI

(Tr. from the Sanskrit by Andrew Schelling)

Dug into earth's crust
for drug stone,
turned mountains to ash looking for metal,
followed rivers back to their source.
Then groveled woefully
before kings.
Hooked on spells,
hung up on weird arts
I wandered the burning grounds—
but never shed craving—
never obtained a single pierced
cowry shell.

Grieve, brother—
great was the king with his
inner circle,
flanked by wizards,
pale women, proud warriors,
scribes setting it down
as it happened.
Bow to time—
a whole kingdom

swept into memory, onto the pathway
of legend.

Two figures known as Bhartrihari appear in India about the same time, one the author of an astute and elegant grammar, the other a poet who left three hundred poems grouped thematically into three books: Counsel, Romance, Renunciation. The Chinese pilgrim I-ching, traveling India 671-695 C.E. and picking up legend as he could, considered linguist and poet the same man—a man who seven times swung between a scholar's position at court and the bark-clad anchorite's life. Buddhist? So says the Chinese traveler—the broodings on vanity, on evanescence, would seem to attest it. Yet some of the poems speak of "moon-crested Shiva" and of wandering along sanctified rivers. Translated into Dutch in 1651, into German in 1663, Bhartrihari was the first poet from India to cross the frontier into a European tongue. Fitting—if he was in fact also the renowned scholar of languages.

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ELIOT WEINBERGER
DREAMS FROM THE HOLOTHURIANS

> The ocean covers 73% of the earth's surface and over 80% of this surface is a soft-sediment-covered sea floor. This is the home of the abyssal holothurians. These animals are the most evident organisms seen in abyssal photographs, and the combination of these circumstances lead one to the inescapable conclusion that holothurians are the dominant large animals of the major part of the earth's surface. Holothurians feeding on bottom sediments mix and till the surface mud on an enormous scale, producing features more widespread and more visibly evident than those produced by any other animal on earth.

Two globe-headed divers walk on the ocean floor, attached by rubber hoses to their mother-ship, a small but luxuriously appointed submarine. Though tens of thousands of fathoms down, the scene is bright with the reddish glow of burning lava from an undersea volcano:

> There indeed before my eyes, ruined, destroyed, lay a town, its roof open to the sky, its temples fallen, its arches dislocated, its columns lying on the ground, from which one could still recognize the massive character of Tuscan architecture. Further on, some remains of a giant aqueduct; here the high base of an Acropolis, with the floating outline of a Parthenon; there traces of a quay, as if an ancient port had formerly abutted on the borders of the ocean, and disappeared with its merchant vessels and its war-galleys. Further on again, long lines of sunken walls and broad, deserted streets—a perfect Pompeii escaped beneath the waters. Such was the sight that Captain Nemo brought before my eyes!
>
> Where was I? Where was I? I must know at any cost. I tried to speak, but Captain Nemo stopped me with a gesture, and picking up a piece of chalkstone, advanced to a rock of black basalt, and traced the one word:

ATLANTIS

Atlantis!

Why did the Hebrews, Aztecs, Chaldeans, Arameans, Maya, Hindus, Toltecs, Zoroastrians, Chippewas, Greeks and Delawares all have myths of a great flood?

Why did both the Egyptians and the Mesoamericans build pyramids?

Why did the Egyptians, the Inca and the Maya all employ the arch?

Why did the Mexicans believe their culture-hero Quetzacoatl came from the East? And why is he depicted with a beard?

Atlantis! Herodotus tells of a people in the west, the Atarantes, who have no names for individuals, and who curse the sun at noon for its heat. And west of them are the Atlantes, named for Mt. Atlas, which they call the Pillar of Heaven and whose peak is permanently hidden in the clouds. A people who eat no living thing, and never dream.

Why did the Egyptians, the Guanches of the Canaries and the Peruvians all mummify their dead?

Why did the Aztecs believe that they originally came from a place called *Aztlan*?

Where did the Phoenicians get their alphabet?

Why did the Egyptians paint themselves as red men?

Who were the Aryans?

Atlantis! Plato hears Socrates tell of a story passed down through generations from Solon, who heard it from Egyptian priests. That beyond the Pillars of Hercules there was an island larger than Libya and Asia put together; that it was the way to other islands, and beyond them another continent; that it was rich in fruits, elephants, and the mysterious gleaming red mineral *orichalc*. An island ruled by Poseidon, who had five sets of male twins and divided the kingdom among them, naming the land after the eldest, Atlas. That nine thousand years ago, Atlantis, having conquered Egypt and half of Italy, waged war on Athens—that is, the original, lost city of Athens—and was defeated. That this once divine race, who had cared nothing for wealth, had become more human and "unseemly." That Zeus had decided to punish them with earthquakes and a flood that destroyed both Atlantis and most of the land of the virtuous Platonic republic of Athens, which had never recovered.

Where was the Garden of Eden, Asgard, Mt. Olympus, the Elysian Fields?

How did the Bronze Age come to Europe without an Age of Copper?

Why is Poseidon, a god of the sea, depicted as driving a chariot drawn by horses?

Why did the medieval monk Cosmos place "the Land where men dwelt before the Flood" on the left side of his map?

What is the origin of the word *Atlantic*? Why is the range in northwest Africa called the *Atlas* mountains?

Why does *atl* mean "water" in the Aztec language?

Why did the Egyptians believe that the underworld was in the West?

Atlantis! Theopompos writes of an Outer Continent, inhabited by people twice our size, and their country called No Return, forever shrouded in red mist, with two rivers, Pleasure and Grief. A land whose giants had come east to pillage, and had found nothing in the Known World worth stealing.

Atlantis! Aristotle says Plato made it up. Amelius says he was talking metaphorically about the stars. Diogenes Laertius says it was merely an ethical dialogue. Iamblichos and Syrianos say it's both true and an allegory. Origenes Adamantius, Numenius, and Porphyrios say it's only an allegory. Arnobius Afer, Krantor, Philo Judaeus, Poseidonios and Tertullian believe him. Plutarch, Strabo and Pliny the Elder say it's doubtful.

Why did the Egyptians erect obelisks inscribed with hieroglyphs and the Mesoamericans erect stelae inscribed with hieroglyphs?

Why did both the ancient Europeans and the ancient Americans bury their dead under mounds? And why did they all bury food, weapons, clothes and trinkets with them?

Why did both the Egyptians and the Peruvians have the plow?

Why is the Aztec flood-survivor named *Nata*, which is almost *Noah?*

Why did the Mandan Indians have blue eyes and venerate an ark called the Big Canoe? And why did they tell the myth of a single white man escaping the great waters?

Francisco López de Gómara found it in America—in 1553 he was the first—and John Dee and Alexander von Humboldt were among his many followers. In 1570 Jean de Serre, known as Serranus, found it in Palestine.

Atlantis! Sir Francis Bacon tells the tale of a ship, blown off course from Peru to China, that lands in Bensalem, founded by refugees from the lost continent. It is a Christian constitutional monarchy, devoted to philosophy and scientific research, which by 1626 had already invented airplanes, submarines and air-conditioning.

Olaüs Rudbeck, a 17th century Swede, studied the *Edda* and found it, and the origin of all European and Asian peoples, in Sweden. A century later Jean Bailly found it first in Mongolia and then in the sea off Spitsbergen, and tried to convince Voltaire.

Why does the Roman god Jove hold thunderbolts in his hand and the Mexican god of thunder, Mixcoatl, hold a bundle of arrows?

Why does the Quran speak of the people of *Ad*, who built the City of Pillars and were destroyed for their wickedness?

Why did the Scythians and the Maya elongate the heads of their babies? And why were the Pharaohs bald with flat foreheads?

Who were *Ad*am, *Ad*onis, the Persian god Mashab-*ad*, and the Hindu gods the *Ad*itya?

Why do Norwegian lemmings swim out to sea, as though looking for a land that is no longer there, circle aimlessly and die?

Hafer, an 18th century Prussian with no first name, found it in Prussia. Francis Wilford, a British officer in India, found it in 1805 off the coast of England, where the events in the Old Testament had taken place, and his theories were picked up by William Blake:

> On those vast shady hills between America and Albion's shore
> Now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea, call'd Atlantean hills,
> Because from their bright summits you may pass to the Golden world,
> An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies,
> Rears its immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God
> By Ariston, the king of beauty, for his stolen bride.

Atlantis!

> In one night the Atlantic Continent was caught up with the Moon
> And became an Opake Globe, far distant, clad with moony beams.

Why did the Assyrians carve reliefs of pineapples?

Why are there crosses in all world religions?

Why did the Hindus have a fish-god?

Why did both the Egyptians and the Peruvians take a census of their people?

Why did the ancient Irish have tobacco pipes?

Why are both the Germans and the American Indians scared of wolves?

Atlantis! John Ruskin harangues a group of businessmen in Bradford: Their temples of gold, their wasting of the countryside, their exploitation of the workers will lead to a calamity like the one the Atlanteans brought upon themselves.

Atlantis! the Catalan Jacínt Verdaguer, chaplain to the Compania Transatlantica, Spiritual Counsellor to the Marqués de Comillas in Havana, writes a Christian-classical nationalist epic: *L'Atlantida*. God punishes Atlantis for its greed, sparing only the virtuous lands of Spain. All of the Atlantean treasures are moved to Iberia, which becomes the Elysian Fields, the source of the Golden Fleece, and all the promised lands of the Egyptians, Hebrews and Greeks. Even the golden orange tree from the Garden of the Hesperides is planted by Hercules in Cadíz. [Though next to it, this being Spain, grows a mysterious deformed tree dripping blood: tears for the Atlantean dead.] Hercules splits the mountains of Atlantis in two, to become the Pillars, and the Mediterranean Sea rushes over the land. He inscribes the words NON PLUS ULTRA on the rock of Gibraltar: no one may venture beyond until peace and purity reign. Cut to Columbus and a crew of united Spaniards—Andalucians, Gallicians, Catalans, Castillians and Cantabrians—praying for safe passage on their way to the new Atlantis.

Why, nearly everywhere, is gold associated with the sun, and silver with the moon?

Why did the American Indians and the ancient Europeans believe in ghosts?

Why did both worlds like to drink fermented intoxicating beverages? And why did both use scales and weights and mirrors?

Why did the American Indians and the ancient Celts draw spirals?

Why did both the Greeks and the people of the Amazon have poison-tipped arrows?

Why did William Penn claim that the Indians of Pennsylvania look like Jews?

Félix Berlioux found it in 1874 near Casablanca, and inspired Pierre Benoit's *L'Atlantide*, the tale of Queen Antinéa with her pet leopard on a leash—filmed by Pabst and Ulmer, and once played by María Montez—whose abandoned lovers, with nothing else to live for, commit suicide and are placed in a vast and crowded crypt.

Atlantis! Its greatest scholar, Ignatius T. T. Donnelly (1831-1901), was Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota, Congressman for eight years, twice a candidate for Vice-President, and wrote a prophetic novel of the coming century that sold a million copies. In other books he proved that the Ice

Age was caused by a collision of the earth and a comet, and that Sir Francis Bacon wrote all of Shakespeare's plays. His masterwork, *The Antediluvian World* (1882), amasses incredible evidence to show that Atlantis was the source of world civilization; that Europe and the Americas were Atlantean colonies, and Egypt the original outpost; that the kings, queens and heroes of Atlantis became the gods and goddesses of world mythology; that the Egyptian and the Peruvian versions were the remnants of the true religion of Atlantis; that the Bronze Age and the alphabet were invented there; and that survivors of the catastrophe spread the tales that became the world myths of the Deluge.

How did Plato know about coconuts?

Why do the Hindus refer to illusion as *Maya*?

Why were animals worshipped in both the New World and the Old? And why did both use dreams for prophesying?

Why does Homer mention an ancient race of navigators named the *Cares*, which is almost *Caribs*?

Why are there three Armenian cities cited by Ptolemy as *Chol, Colua* and *Cholima*, and three Mexican cities named *Cholula, Coluacan* and *Colima*?

Why is "me" *me* in Mandan and *mi*, pronounced "me" in Welsh?

Atlantis! Augustus Le Plongeon, the first to excavate the Maya ruins in the Yucatán, deciphers the glyphs and discovers that they tell the story of the princes Coh and Aac, rivals for the hand of their sister Moo, Queen of Atlantis. Coh is accepted, but is murdered by Aac, whose armies overrun Atlantis as the continent begins to sink. Moo flees to Egypt, where she builds the Sphinx as a monument to her husband/brother, changes her name to Isis, and is the founder of Egyptian civilization. The Greek alphabet, recited in the proper order, is actually a Mayan poem on the fate of Moo.

Why did the American Indians, the Romans and the Chinese venerate their ancestors?

Why did the Phoenicians have an evil spirit named *Zebub*, and the Peruvians an evil spirit named *Cupay*, which sounds different but is in fact the same name?

Why is Quechua so similar to Arabic?

If the Azores are named after *azores*, hawks, then how did the rabbits and mice that hawks eat reach those islands?

Why does Savonarola in his famous portrait look like Sitting-Bull?

Atlantis! In India Madame Blavatsky goes into a trance and receives a palm-leaf book: The *Book of Dzyan*, written in Atlantis in the ancient Senzar language: "The last Vibration of the Seventh Eternity thrills through Infinitude. The Mother swells, expanding from without like the Bud of the Lotus. . . After great throes she cast out her old Three and put on her new Seven Skins, and stood in her First One." There are seven Rounds of Life, and seven Root Races, and seven Sub-Races: astral jellyfish in the Imperishable Sacred Land, and egg-laying hermaphroditic Lemurians with four arms, and Atlanteans of course, and the race that lives under the North Pole.

Lost! Plutarch claimed that Solon began an epic poem on Atlantis, and gave it up. Lost! Plato's account of the continent, *Critias*, ends suddenly in mid-sentence: "And when he had called them together, he spoke as follows:"

Leo Frobenius, the African scholar championed by Pound, found it in Nigeria, along with the city of Tarshish, where Jonah was headed. All civilization, he wrote, had travelled west from a genuinely lost continent in the Pacific; reports of the Yorubas (who were the Atlanteans) had confused them with their Pacific ancestors.

Why did both Roman and Iroquois couples share a piece of food as part of their wedding ceremony?

Why is the Mayan word *hurakan*, god of the storm, so similar to the old Swedish *hurra*, meaning "to be driven along," to *hurry?*

Why did both the Jews and the Mexicans offer water to strangers to wash their feet?

Why did the Maya have a city called *Mayapan*, which is a combination of *Maya* and the Greek god *Pan?*

Why did the Aztecs have an elective monarchy like 19th century Poland?

Why do the Basques speak Algonquin?

Atlantis! Heinrich Schliemann's grandson Paul claims that he inherited a letter, an envelope and an owl-headed vase of unknown provenance. The letter instructed that only a family member willing to devote his life to the material contained in the envelope and vase should open them. He pledged his life, and broke the vase. Inside were four square coins and a metal plaque inscribed in Phoenician, *Issued in the Temple of Transparent Walls.* He opened the envelope, and found his grandfather's secret notes from the excavation of Troy: the finding of a bronze urn full of coins marked *From the King Cronos of Atlantis.* Young Schliemann then set off for Tibet,

where he discovered a Chaldean account of the destruction of the Land of the Seven Cities. Schliemann reports his findings to the *New York American* in 1912, promising to reveal much more in a forthcoming book.

Lost! Sir Francis Bacon never finished *The New Atlantis.*

Paul Borchardt found it in the swamps of Shott el Jerid in Tunisia. Albert Herrmann, a Frisian, found it in Friesland. Victor Bérard found it in Carthage. Ellen Whishaw, director of the Anglo-Spanish-American School of Archeology found an Atlantean outpost in Seville. Count Byron Khun de Prorok found the tomb of its Queen in the Ahaggar Mountains, and claimed the Tauregs as direct descendents.

Lost! William Emmette Coleman, a disgruntled acolyte, decided to devote himself to exposing Madame Blavatsky's plagiarisms in the *Book of Dzyan* from ancient Indian texts. But his library and notes were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake, and he died soon after.

Atlantis! becomes Otlontis which becomes Oluntos which becomes Olumpus, which is Olympus.

Lost! After his newspaper article, Paul Schliemann was never heard from again, his book never published, and the Schliemann family claimed they had no one named Paul.

Atlantis! Rudolf Steiner writes how the Atlanteans had no ability to reason, but that they had trained themselves in the mnemonic arts, and could even pass on their collected memories to their children. When faced with a problem, they found the solution from precedence; but if it was a new problem, they could only experiment blindly. They used words to heal wounds immediately, and flew in aircraft that ran on "life force."

Atlantis! Lewis Spence in 1924 solves the chronological discrepancies between its destruction and the rise of the Mexican and Peruvian civilizations. The earthquake had split the lost continent in two: the eastern island of Atlantis and the western island of Antilia, which was preserved in memory as the Antilles. The Atlanteans invaded Europe, and then, thousands of years later, with the destruction of both continents, the Antilians escaped to the Americas.

Lost! The retired British officer Lieutenant-Colonel Percy H. Fawcett went looking for it in the Amazon in 1925 and never returned. Lost! The French gold-prospector Appollinaire Frot returned from those same jungles

announcing archeological discoveries of such magnitude that he feared the consequences of revealing them, and died soon after.

F. Gidon found it off the coast of Brittany, and declared it French. The Englishman W. C. Beaumont found it in England, "birthplace of all civilization," and proved that the Pillars of Hercules were the English Channel and that Plato's Athens was in Scotland. He synthesized his findings in his life-work, *Britain: The Key to World History.*

Atlantis! In 1929 the backwoods psychic Edgar Cayce predicts its reappearance in 1968. In 1968 massive stone walls are discovered under the waters off Bimini in the Bahamas.

Lost! Manuel de Falla and José María Sert collaborated on a "scenic cantata," *Atlântida*, based on the Verdaguer epic. But Sert died, and then de Falla died, the piece unfinished after eighteen years of work.

John Michell found its remains in the global energy lines of Avebury, Carnac, Giza, Nazca and the whole of China south of the Great Wall, which was "formed to a single design." Charles Berlitz found that it is still there, in the Bermuda Triangle, luring ships down. Erik von Däniken found it in outer space, the planet Atlantis whose spaceship pioneers had first colonized the earth.

Lost Atlantis! It was all a dream from the holothurians. The holothurians, despised by men, called "sea cucumbers" after that insipid vegetable, dismissed as cylindrical purplish blobs, nothing more then a mouth and an anus, forever filtering mud in the gloom of the ocean floor—it was the holothurians who did it. For each is the cell of a huge collective brain, a brain trapped in millions of useless bodies that inhabit the dullest stretches on earth.

So, to amuse itself, this brain has spun stories along its submarine network, stories that bubbled up and randomly entered the dreams of the sleeping people above. Stories that provoked strange longings for the ocean floor: that the origin of all life began there, that forgotten kingdoms lie there in the mud, along with the shipwrecks of fantastic wealth. A dream that Solon and Plato and Bacon and de Falla and the others could only partially remember: they wrote it down, then went to sleep again to recover the rest, and never could. A dream that has led so many to dive into the sea and keep swimming down.

Atlantis! In the dark the holothurians eat and excrete and move on and eat, inching forward, thinking, sending out their mental flares in the hope

that someone, something, anything will drop by and relieve the tedium of their biological fate, down there, at the bottom of the sea, with the calcified sponges, magnesium nodules, the crushed spines of sea urchins, the ghosts of coelenterates, unexploded torpedoes, skeletons of bathypterids and halosaurs, the hieroglyphic tracks of sea pens and ophiuroids, fecal coils, the waving arms of a burrowed brittle-star, manganese-encrusted dolphin teeth, the remains of a jettisoned crate of Manilla-envelope clasps, zeolite crystals, pillows of basalt, calcareous shells of pteropods, the sinister egg-casings of skates, the broken anti-matter locks from a crashed spaceship, the short-crested ripples of sand and the scour moats forming in globigerina ooze.

JOY! PRAISE!

a festschrift for **Jerome Rothenberg**
on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday

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David Antin
Eleanor Antin
Rae Armantrout
Charles Bernstein
Julien Blaine
Edmond Chibeau
Bob Cobbing
Becky Cohen
Harold Cohen
Michael Davidson
George Economou
Barbara Einzig
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Armand Schwerner
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Quincy Troupe
Pasquale Verdicchio
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Anne Waldman
Eliot Weinberger

Edited by Pierre Joris

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REVIEWS & NOTICINGS

Rimbaud My Virgil

I.

Rimbaud escorted me many times through Hell and back again, something he was not able to do for himself in the end. My first Season in Hell was without his company, and emphasized the need for such a guide. During National Service an anxiety condition was mistaken for incipient schizophrenia and I was incarcerated in a mental hospital where I was tortured into convulsions and coma by insulin shock treatment. The idea was to inject enough insulin to draw all the sugar out of your blood until you were nearly dead, then bring you back with another injection. I had many visions and other experiences in the insulin coma, but I had no scheme or net to catch them in, or mentor who knew the way, so for a long time I lost the quality and significance of these journeys. I learned however that there was another world, which was this one deepened on the way to death, and that it was possible to pass through its jaws, and return.

A second season came when I had drunk sufficient bad alcohol to produce at the last a reasonable likeness of the insulin coma. Again I saw many visions, but now there was a difference. I dreamed intact the entire text of the Norman Cameron "Saison en Enfer" with Keith Vaughan's amazing illustrations, in multimedia and synesthetic form. I woke screaming, but grateful because I had travelled this region "holding on to my eyes" with the help of the imagery of somebody who had been there before. I would rather have had many more such nightmares than run the gamut of the office jobs that followed University, but I had been (on the one view) far too disturbed, or (on another view) too far into visionary experience, to profit from the formal university instruction, and I left without a degree, which meant that I had to take many ad hoc jobs rather than stay in the academy where I now believe I could have worked profitably—it is after all a kind of asylum.

I had been a compliant child, not as precocious as Rimbaud, but near it, and my desire to please everybody had created that sort of false personality which easily entered the consumerist fantasy by acquiring wife, home and children, responsibilities I was entirely unsuited for. I read now "Les Poetes de Sept Ans" and wished I had growled much harder, and rebelled earlier, as Rimbaud did. Yet because of my nightmare I knew him to be somebody who spoke the truth: I knew that what, otherwise instructed, would have seemed to me perverse impulses were reality-communions when I travelled through Nature "heureux comme avec une femme" and had my first sexual experiences this way. I learned something too under his instruction of the "Comedie de la soif":—

> "Chansonnier, ta filleule
> C'est ma soif si folle,
> Hydre intime sans gueules
> Qui mine et desole. . . .
> J'aime autant, mieux, même,
> Pourrir dans l'étang,
> Sous l'affreuse crème,
> Près des bois flottants"
>
> (Singer, your god-child is my mad thirst, mouthless bosom-hydra who mops and mows and ravages. . . . I had as soon lie dumb and festering in the pond among the driftwood and beneath the horrible scum. . . .)

In fact the furrows of my husbandly mask were the protective whelks and ridges of a high-pressure chrysalis cooking. I found that during any office day I could deregulate my senses by taking a mere half-pint of beer twice or thrice and improvising my own versions of *Les Illuminations;* later on I preferred to do the whole thing on an empty stomach and take speed prescribed by an over-friendly doctor, finish my advertising copy by lunchtime, and spend the rest of the day brooding over the Rimbaudian look of the world the drugs and drink offered to me. I feared it was an artificial paradise, yet with careful and rational regulation in the spirit of Rimbaud it did give me things I could use; later on I found it was not merely artificial, since I was able to achieve it by natural means, mainly sex-magical, towards a daily sacramental vision. This is what I believe Rimbaud was working towards, and he must be counted as one of the exemplary masters and martyrs. He had not the benefit of his own guidance as I did (this does not make me Dante) and he could not visit himself like a time-traveller. He was probably unable to lift himself out of his last "Saison en Enfer," and the depression probably lasted the rest of his life. We mourn

and salute him. I will say later how I believe he could have found a companionship Verlaine could not offer.

My first marriage broke up, largely, I believe, because I was unable to compromise about my visionary life; (I acknowledge that women may not need to break through with such vehemence and violence, as the menstrual cycle can take them through all human modes, from visionary to domestic—sacramental and back again). The break-up was accelerated by meeting an ancient Rimbaud with white hair, a dream visionary and a rebel who was at the same time a world-class anthropologist and analyst, John Layard; who restored my job-eroded visionary faith and with his dictum "Depression is withheld knowledge" showed me again that the doors of Hell were revolving doors, and that the secret was to go the right way round, just as in the Northern hemisphere you must fly round a hurricane to the right. Dream analysis with Layard led directly to my book with Penelope Shuttle *(The Wise Wound)* on the menstrual cycle, the taboo on which is arguably the way the masculine non-menstruating spirit prevents women from achieving their own visionary riches by shutting them into a hell of disinformation and stealing the one half of their sexuality—the tabooed menstrual half. Seen in this light, Rimbaud's remarks in the "Lettre du Voyant" are not condescending: "This language will be of the soul, for the soul, and will include everything: perfumes, sounds, colors, thought grappling with thought. The poet would make precise the quality of the unknown arising in his time in the universal soul. . .When the eternal slavery of Women is destroyed, when she lives for herself and through herself, when man—up till now abominable—will have allowed her her freedom, she will be a poet as well. Woman will discover the unknown! Will her world of ideas differ from ours? She will discover strange things, unfathomable, repulsive, delightful: we will accept and understand them." I had the paramount good fortune to live and work with a woman who had undergone this mighty process of female liberation and who was a poet from the time she was a woman aged 14, and who wrote strange and vital novels which were a feminine replay of "Saison" and "Les Illuminations." And how like the "hysterization of the skin" of the French feminists, the exterior cunt of outer contact seen potentially as deep intimate and sensuous as the womb experiences of love, masturbation, menstruation, birth, is Rimbaud's program, though he may have underestimated the extent the women could be teachers, after the exile of the feminine during 2000 years of Christianity. Read Helene Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa"—would our Rimbaud not have written this had he been she? Such are the habitations for our visions. I wish Rimbaud had met the grandmother of one of them. She would have companioned him out of Hell. Here is a cento from these Rimbaudian feminists:

"A world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity. This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful. Beauty will no longer be forbidden." Cixous. This is sheer Rimbaud sex-magic, called *jouissance.*

> "But *woman has sex organs just about everywhere.* She experiences pleasure almost everywhere. Even without speaking of the hysterization of her entire body, one can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined. . . ." Irigaray.

> "Women's *jouissance* carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration. It is a kind of potlatch in the world of orgasms, a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure." Marks and de Courtivron.

II.

What Rimbaud was up against of course still remains. Alvarez called it "the gentility principle"; Freud had a formula for it: if you want to rid yourself of an uncomfortable reality, first sublimate or idealize it, then repress it; and the actors hold the mirror up to human nature by saying "No sex please, we're British." The plain fact is that the sacramental is erotic, true magic is a turn-on, and by magic we should mean "unwounded perception"—"If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear. . .as it is, infinite." Rimbaud having opened himself by "de-schooling the senses" was perhaps choked by the pollutions of patriarchy. Many have been so afflicted, and fallen. Sylvia Plath, who by the measure of her creative energy suffered abominably from the repression we call PMS, could find no woman-information or solidarity in the 1960s academic and literary atmosphere of Freud, Graves and the rest, and ended up "believing nothing" just at the threshold of the feminist revolution. Nevertheless she hysterized the skin so that her inner and outer were one, and wrote poems of protest and rebellion which puzzle male commentators with their vehemence of feminine energies frustrated of their meaning. For me, she inspired because she was one of the few poets writing in England in the sixties who knew how much has to go into a poem before

it was a poem. She makes the quantum-jump through that revolving door into the palaces of hell the fires of which Blake said were "the enjoyments of genius," as Rimbaud does in *Les Illuminations*. You will have noticed that I have subtly deregulated the word "dérèglement" in Rimbaud's dictum because it has been misused by people who are not serious about the "Alchemie du Verbe" and are anxious for poets to dissipate their gifts merely, so that the editions can be closed early and become more manageable to the scholar.

"Dérèglement" does *not* mean dissipation. Anyway, it is "raisonné dérèglement." Rimbaud always designed that the poems he wrote would induct his readers into the same world from which the poems came. George Whalley says that Rimbaud's statement is the essence of poetic:. . .metaphor disorients the individual senses so that they excite and fertilize each other . . . . In this way Poetic establishes a novel interpretation of thought and feeling. . . . In Poetic, sight can be converted into sound and texture and even scent; single words can assume physical shape, contour, fibre; groups of words may take on meanings not implied by their grammatical relations; savor, aroma, cachet may be conveyed in texture and rhythm." This is *jouissance*, which "carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration . . . ." Such writing not only comes from actual experiences of jouissance but creates them also, after de-schooling. Rimbaud would have liked the way Virginia Woolf's Orlando fell in love: "These details were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person. Images, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted in his mind. He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow in the space of three seconds; he did not know whether he had heard her, tasted her, seen her, or all three together." As Whalley also says: ". . .the appeal is not to any one sense but to an interinanimation of all the senses combined into a tactual impression of great power—a condition that psychologists call synesthesia. This may very well be a prime characteristic of all poetic perception, of the poetic sense of language, and perhaps of all our refined and developed sensory experience." The tantric version of this is that the senses may appear to be five (or seven or seventy-seven) when they perceive outwardly, but inwardly they are the one, all-embracing sense, which is mind as well . . . . So instead of saying "the point is to arrive at the unknown by the disordering of all the senses" let us cease to distort the message and say "The point is to arrive at the unknown by the rational de-schooling of the senses." It is in school that we are first systematically taught gentility. It is not so much that we must "make strange" as to be prepared to find life as strange as it is, and it is a function of gentility to conceal strangeness.

Which is to say that society needs its poets—people who know something other than the genteel so strongly that they are able to re-arouse even in the genteel the true self, which is never genteel. Gentility is a convenient way of behaving in ritual forms for superficial and necessary purposes. If there is only gentility it is as stifling as England is today. We need something else, clearly. And that can be the poetry of really-knowing what is beyond gentility.

This the poet must be a specialist in; if he does it by dissipation then he may expect his useful life to be shortened; alcoholism and writing are nearly synonymous, it seems, in America. But Auden said we must be fit, in case the Muse requires us to climb mountains. If we call ourselves Muse-poets we should know that this means express knowledge of the death and resurrection each month of the personality in tune with the moon, amplified in every household by the menstrual cycle of the woman; and if we are the woman. . .then we must have enough knowledge and companionship to avoid the fate of Sylvia Plath. If we open ourselves by yoga or meditation and or sexual practices to what is in here and out there, then we must expect experiences of comparable intensity—say of the fruition, death and rebirth of the year (as of the month) still felt in country districts, but a rhythm overpowered by the cities, as all these ancient but actual rhythms are. We should become technicians of the sacred and study not the abstract ramifications of physics, but the actuality of psychological and biological sciences, remembering of course that any psychology which neglects the inner experience of the woman—and they all do this—is suspect and almost derelict unless we can give our own personal and poetic testimony from actual experience; as Freud said "if you want to learn the truth about women, go to the poets" which may not have meant to him women poets, but it must always do so now. We must look for what is neglected in genteel life, for it is the stone that the builders rejected that became the cornerstone of the building. This means sex, and the metaphysics of sex; nor am I here counselling promiscuity, which is the stock genteel mistranslation, as in this alchemy one can only progress through long practical study with one's Soror or Frater Alchymica. We must study our dreams; the visions of the night that show us so directly that "I is someone else" are neglected too so must be studied. Sex, a language adequate to express its intensity with its camaraderie an erotic vision of the world—this is the vocation Rimbaud calls us to; we can share his adventure and take it further than he did. The world has moved forward enough for the urgency of the Lettre du Voyant to become directly intelligible even environmental—I paraphrase—"The first study for a poet is self-knowledge complete. . . I say that one must be a seer, make oneself a seer. . .by a long, prodigious, and rational de-schooling of all the senses. . .to search

oneself and consume all the poisons in oneself. . . faith and superhuman strength is needed. . . .for the poet arrives at the unknown. . .is responsible for humanity, even for the animals; must see to it that poetic inventions can be smelt, felt, heard. . .A language has to be found. . . the time of the universal language will come. . .of the soul, for the soul, containing everything, smells, sounds, colors. . . The poet would discover and name the amount of the unknown awakening in the collective unconscious at any time so that it need not catch the world unawares. . ." For "poet" read "everyperson" or "Pilgrim" for there is nobody who is exempt from this Work.

—PETER REDGROVE

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The quotations from Cixous, Irigaray, Marks and de Courtivron come from *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* Edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Harrister 1981).

The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader. Amiri Baraka. William J. Harris, ed. Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991. $14.95

It would have seemed nearly criminal, but in the vastly more painful crimes committed by the few world citizens in positions of commanding wealth and power, it went unnoticed by all but a few poetry readers. For years virtually nothing of Baraka's was available in print. One of the prolific writers of the post Second World War period—poetry, drama, music criticism, political analysis. Oddly, of the little of his work that remained in print throughout, it is his music criticism, the two early books *Blues People* and *Black Music* that stayed around. Given that Baraka's outspoken political stance—unkind to liberals and conservatives, white and black middle classes alike—has dropped him from the big book review outlets, and let his books vanish from the public eye—one might expect the comparatively harmless genre of music criticism to be what the queasy would remember him by. Yet, it is nonetheless strange that this material should remain palatable—because for Baraka, "the Music" is that single most revolutionary and articulate African American statement. His *Autobi-*

ography (among the many books now out of print) makes clear the role "the Music" played in bringing him home to whatever social consciousness he's arrived at.

But in an age when music has largely lost out to commerce, the music Baraka writes about has gone into far margins. Everyone knows who Miles Davis was, but how many listen to Cecil Taylor, even after the committee awarded him a MacArthur?

So—finally a big volume of Baraka, almost 500 pages, issued by Thunder's Mouth Press. A quick glance shows it can't replace the books from which it draws—*Black Magic Poetry, Home: Social Essays, Daggers and Javelins*—but it does provide a sweeping account of Baraka's development. His is a life that disturbs many, while looking indisputably honest to a few. It is a life marked by major ideological developments which ferociously alter the writing—from year to year, decade to decade. William J. Harris, who edits the *Reader*, has hit upon an organization for the volume that tries to name certain stages, and thus clarify, where Baraka's been and where he's likely to go.

Briefly, the four sections go like this:

The Beat Period (1957-1962)
The Transitional Period (1963-1965)
The Black Nationalist Period (1965-1974)
The Third World Marxist Period (1974-)

These divisions make sense, are in no manner mere simplistic contrivances. The editing—Harris's—was done in dialogue with Baraka, so presumably these divisions conform to some notion the poet himself holds. Baraka has been clear from the early sixties that he lives, thinks and acts in dialogue with the revolutionary stratagems his times uncover. This makes him one of the more politically volatile among contemporary poets. His changes, tough as they have been on some readers, are never quixotic—they result from intense inward questionings inseparable from political experimentation. The move from LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka. The move from:

> Who has ever stopped to think of the divinity of Lamont
> Cranston?
> (Only Jack Kerouac, that I know of: & me.
> The rest of you probably had on WCBS and Kate Smith,
> Or something equally unattractive.)

to:

Trane was the spirit of the '60s
He was Malcolm X in New Super Bop Fire
Baaahhhhh
Wheeeeeee. . .Black Art! ! !

which left most of the critics behind, as well as a lot of the poets, was a calculated move. The man had altered his notion of who and what he was writing for.

As political understanding shifts to accommodate itself to changed social circumstances, the writer moves, dismantling bridges behind in order to improvise others ahead. Let me quote from "Home," the introductory essay to *Home: Social Essays.*

> "But my tendency, body and mind, is to make it. To get there, from anywhere, going wherever, always. By the time this book appears, I will be even blacker."

This was 1965. He could feel the changes Black Americans were provoking, the furies Malcolm X's life and death were unleashing, could feel they wouldn't let up. "Home" is one of the numerous essays I wish had been collected in the *Reader*—but there are many invaluable essays left out because the man's written so many. And Baraka's own "Preface to the Reader," forceful yet modest, articulates this commitment to change, as political consciousness develops and social crises stand (Olson would've said it this way) better revealed.

"This Reader should give some further description of my own changing and diverse motion, of where I been and why, and how I got to where I was when I next 'appeared' or was heard from. In the literary sense, it has always been somewhat difficult to 'appear' or be heard from—some times more difficult than others. . . In the last decade, it has been exceptionally difficult. . ." Again: "My writings reflect my own growth and expansion, and at the same time the society in which I have existed throughout this longish confrontation. Whether it is politics, music, literature, or the origin of language, there is a historical time/place/condition reference that will always try to explain exactly why I was saying both how and for what."

So, the sweep of change, often far from the public eye—by choices his own, or decisions handed down by the various publishers entrusted with his writings. Not, as he knows, that he ever really "appeared" or otherwise—rather the inner crucible of his thought often seemed fitful to fellow travelers left in some previous phase. Best place I know to get his word on the travels directly is the *Autobiography* of 1984, which shows Baraka's dexterity, his ability to dissect his own past, his self-deceptions, his mistakes. Not cruelly, ever, but with cold-eyed precision. Especially the tough stance towards women he and fellow activists held during the Black

Nationalist period, or the occasional woeful anti-semitism that crept into his writings— both of them tendencies he can look back on, not remorsefully, but pinning his own imprecisions with a critical eye. The *Reader* reprints two chapters from the *Autobiography*, placed as he wrote them in the "Third World Marxist Period." They are enough to demonstrate just how much is missing from print.

Little epigraphs from Baraka's writings set off each section; these along with Harris's unobtrusive comments on each entry give a pretty clear idea where the pieces fit into Baraka's trajectory. Plays, music and literary criticism, political dissections, fits of polemic, and of course—poetry. A pretty representative volume, though I'd have asked for more poetry since that seems to be the hardest of Baraka's writing to chase down these days. Also unfortunate—none of the substantial poetry volumes are included intact, so you don't get a sense of how Baraka himself put together his books. And there's only twelve pages of new and unpublished poetry—the previous selection dates back eight years—to 1983. Which means about a page and a half to represent each of these consequential and politically moribund years. This is somewhat balanced by two fine essays, a eulogy for James Baldwin, in which Baraka makes peace with a target for youthful venom, and a hard angry look at the Jesse Jackson phenomenon.

I hope this book brings Baraka enough back to the public eye that his ongoing writings manage to "appear." Remember—this *Reader* does not come to you courtesy of the corporate publishing houses. And this is a man whose thinking, in poetry and in essays, keeps step with the times—sweet in person, in his writings he's never out to make friends. Reading his *Autobiography*, reading in the wake of the Gulf War and the IBBC fiasco the social essays of previous decades, one gets a sound both forceful and at the same time slightly quaint or outmoded in tone. Especially the doctrinaire Marxist class analyses which seem painfully archaic. It's clear in 1991 that the old class struggles no longer pit something like an ownership class against the exploited classes. These days there's only a few folk sitting at the top, they hide themselves with wizard technologies, only their decisions become visible—ruthless decisions. Everyone is cannon fodder to them. Even the vice president of whatever, who brings home a six figure salary, is just to be toyed with. Who are these people?

"The Supreme Court is now peopled largely with 'ugs' wearing cellophane klan lids. Since the deaths of Malcolm, Martin, and the brothers Kennedy, the U.S. has been in the slowly tightening grip of would be creators of the new international corporate state. What we have struggled for they have attacked, undermined, ridiculed. . . ." This says it for all of us, African-, Hispanic-, Euro-, Asian-, or Native American.

From Baraka's sequence of historical poems *Why's/Wise*, which begins in the fearsome African American past, comes a musical intelligence pretty

accurate to the dilemma of any citizen, living or dying on our planet right now:

Wise I

If you ever find
yourself, some where
lost and surrounded
by enemies
who wont let you
speak your own language
who destroy your status
& instruments, who ban
your omm bomm ba boom
then you are in trouble
deep trouble
they ban your
oom boom ba boom
you in deep deep
trouble

humph!

probably take you several hundred years
to get
out!

—ANDREW SCHELLING

A Note On *Kenneth Rexroth & James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, Edited by Lee Bartlett, Norton, 1991, $27.50

Once upon a time, publishers ran a writer on his/her merits and not on knee-jerk reviewer or market reactions. In that time, certain writers—those ultimately driven, I guess, by a need to create context—ventured to advise

their publisher more or less energetically on their "directions." Sometimes, for very short periods, market could be overcome altogether. At such times only, the publisher could be said to have "direction." Exasperation would usually emerge on both sides: writer feeling that publisher was not doing enough fast enough; publisher convinced writer's picture was too narrow ignoring both balance sheets and the technical demands of production and marketing schedules. I know from experience that the conflict is insoluble: it still interests me as human drama. Comparatively, the companion volume on Williams (edited by Hugh Witemeyer) shows WCW as far more cautious and courteous, advancing a few downright friends but no program, yet far more severely self-serving when prompted than KR ever is.

I regret Laughlin's modesty required this collection to be virtually one-sided since we know a fair amount about Rexroth (especially with Linda Hamalian's concurrent Biography), much less about Laughlin. Here, KR, somber under the sense that JL does not appreciate him and his erudition sufficiently and is *ashamed* of him, hammers JL over and over for being a lackey of the East Coast establishment: academic, rich, superficial, treacherous, usually gay, wedded to *Partisan* and *Kenyon Reviews* and probably ex-Stalinist into the bargain. For KR, JL's material circumstances would ally him to this establishment. The attacks on "New Directions" for being, in essence, "No Directions" are interminable, often obsessive (a *few*: 88, 103, 106, 112-3, 119, 125, 137, 166, 174, 238, 241). JL, on *this* evidence, avoids replying or replies mildly. Once or twice he is very depressed; once or twice only replies in kind (41, 93, 99, 105, 120, 123, 141, 171, 193, 227).

There are tantalizing glimpses of JL's life. As a "lost" poet: "the only rational thing to do is to secede from the whole thankless effort," (18); his depressions as a publisher, e.g. when Random House takes over Williams (171); his imitations of his mentor's vulgarity (30, 67) and often foul-mouthed bad taste (117)—KR being, after all, JL's successor to Pound as teacher—as well as of his mentor's opinions, e.g. on Black Mountain (147), on the end of Western Civilization (237). On *this* evidence JL's praise of KR is neither timely nor adequate (160, 218, 247-8) and ND's slowness (talk of Selected/Collected *nine* years before the fact: 221) and incomprehension (initial failure to appreciate the translations or the autobiography: 229-30) also come through (Clark's biography of Olson corroborates the frequency with which ND was rejecting that "monster" from the first). Indeed, for every avant-garde step ND was taking, *ab initio*, it was also stepping backward from KR's point of view.

There are a few downright strange revelations, such as JL's view that, with more meticulousness, KR would have made a publisher (100). Rarely, again on this evidence, does JL sufficiently explain/defend the publisher's point of view and, of course, it could have been wasted breath. Sometimes, we are left crucially uninformed: what, e.g., might have been JL's list for a U.S. anthology, compared with KR's? (150).

On the KR side, much is touching: e.g. read him deploring his "abyss of bitterness" and fear of it (46). His own ongoing problems are best expressed in the tirade against Eberhart on 187-8. The erratic brilliance of the autodidact, electrically opinionated without benefit of consensual culture (it can often collapse spectacularly as in some individual judgements (169) or in his tirade against France (133-5) shines throughout the volume and he is cast-iron on the establishment's sheer ignorance (209, 223) and the "enemies of literature." He often seems to sell himself short, then rejects a very handsome offer from Hearst (232). His published versus unpublished views on particular authors most frequently contrast greatly but argue much public responsibility *vis à vis* the Republic of Letters. More generally, he predicts a rise in religious enthusiasm *à la* Blake (69) but distrusts most of its New Age manifestations (54). He also predicts/analyses the coming MFA industry: the problem with younger poets is that "so many have cut themselves off from all real experience in the universities," (152). His macho stances are disastrous (32, 55); same with his homophobia (e.g. 168). He experiences very mixed emotions on the rise of liberation poetries and multiculturalism (198-201), though his prevailing philosemitism (with lapses every now and again: the whole Oppen business is *weird*, 44, 53) contrasts agreeably with the average in his period.

Above all, what strikes me is his relentless bitterness against these States: "No society has ever treated its worst criminals like this one treats its artists," (35); a country "turned into the Inferno of organized irresponsibility," (64); a country which "does not really exist. . .a monstrous superproduction called 'After Hours'," (163); "the U.S.A. has become a land of horror," (254). See him also on the Kennedy myth (245-6) and his crowning stab at ND: "18 of the ranking US poets of the XXth Century committed suicide," (167). All this, of course, in a perpetual war-time context which predicts the end of modern civilization *tout court* (22) and the end of all culture (36). Without contradicting him perhaps it is here where he most reveals his profound sadness at being more "famed" than truly acknowledged and respected throughout his life.

Given what else we already have on KR, many readers will see the most valuable part of the book in Lee Bartlett's editing which is enormously thorough throughout (sometimes too much so—does the book's public really need to be told who Marx and Lenin are?— on the other hand this may be Norton's reaction to the spread of generalized illiteracy). In addition to a slew of little mini-articles of considerable use (e.g. 48) what emerges from the notes is a virtual history of ND and this, with both successes and skeletons in the closet, we greatly need for an understanding of our time.

—NATHANIEL TARN

The Disappearing Pheasant

In late October, 1991, Luigi Ballerini organized a gala festival of contemporary Italian poets at New York University's Casa Italian Zerilli-Marimo. A dozen poets from all over Italy were flown to New York for the event. After each set of readings, several American participants responded to what they had heard. Among the Italians reading were Edoardo Cacciatore, Elio Pagliarani, Marcello Frixione, Biagio Cepollaro, Amelia Rosselli, Giancarlo Majorino, and Alfredo Giuliani. (Unfortunately, several other poets canceled at the last minute.) The Americans included Marjorie Perloff, Douglas Messerli, Bruce Andrews, Jerome Rothenberg, Lyn Hejinian, Jackson Mac Low, P. Adams Sitney, Leonard Schwartz, Jonas Mekas, Rebecca West, Barbara Guest, Ed Foster, and Angus Fletcher.

The main text for the festival was a 650-page issue of *Forum Italicum*, edited by Ballerini and entitled *Shearsmen of Sorts: Italian Poetry 1975-1993*. The anthology, just published, includes translations of 19 poets, plus informative essays and reviews and useful bio-bibliographic notes. This publication served as an essential introduction to the context and concerns of the Italian poets, most of whom seemed uninterested in presenting or discussing their poetics at the conference. For the most part, the poets at "The Disappearing Pheasant" identified themselves in relation to the avant-garde. Indeed, a major subject in the *Shearsmen* anthology is the legacy of I Novissimi, the now-older generation of "neo-avant-garde" Italian poets that included, in addition to Giuliani and Pagliarani, Nanni Balestrini, Antonio Porta, and Edoardo Sanguineti. (Sun & Moon Press plans to issue the first English translation of the 1961 *I Novissimi* anthology.) In this context, Mac Low read a beautifully considered essay on why he doesn't like the term avant-garde. Given the reluctance of most of the Italians to engage in public dialogue, it was perhaps not so surprising that the only person to pick up on his comments was Barbara Guest, who averred that she rather liked the term, despite its problems.

In one of the breaks, Allen Mandelbaum remarked that Italians go to events like this symposium the way Catholics go to mass—with reverence. In contrast, many of the Americans seemed more interested in raising questions and giving their initial reactions, based on their own poetry contexts, to works and theories about which they were often quite unfamiliar. The difference made for some awkwardness but also for the beginning of some possibly substantial exchanges in the future.

Like many of the Americans at the event, I don't "have" Italian (I'm not sure I have English), so my experience of the poetry and poetics was continuously mediated through translations, including the UN-style simultaneous translations provided by Michael Moore and Carla Billiteri. By the end of the weekend, though, it became apparent that the real distance

between us was not lexical but cultural and that understanding each other's words or phrases only could go a limited way toward helping us understand each other's meanings.

The two poets I found most intensely interesting were Amelia Rosselli and Biagio Cepollaro. Roselli—a contemporary of I Novissimi—seemed to be working in a decentered yet explosively personal lyric form that suggested many parallels with the "New American" poetry. The two younger poets present were Cepollaro and Marcello Frixione. But while Frixione delighted the audience with facile and flippantly sexist lyrics about nymphs, Cepollaro tried to combine several different poetic and nonpoetic modes into a bravura performance piece. Cepollaro and Frixione were presented as the newest movement—Gruppo 93—but Cepollaro, who is an editor of the magazine *Baldus*, was careful to distance himself from the claims made by critic Fillipo Bettini for this group.

I was asked to respond to Sanguineti and to Nanni Cagnone, as well as to an essay on Emilio Villa, a statement on the formation of Gruppo 93 by Bettini, as well as to Frixione's reading. It was a disappointment that neither Sanguineti nor Cagnone made it to New York, since their work and the statements they prepared for the festival would have facilitated a deeper understanding of the contemporary Italian scene. My response went something like this:

Sanguineti had planned to read an essay entitled "Ideology and Language," a work that confronts us with a classic statement of the seemingly unbridgeable gaps between poetry and politics: yet it is a pointed irony that his still-relevant statement was first published 25 years ago.

In its two parts, Sanguineti's "Ideology and Language" suggests the double bind of new and innovative art movements. Sanguineti initially focuses on what he calls "the heroic-pathetic moment"—in which the value of a poem is defined by its resistance to commodification, that is, by its lack of marketability. Here Sanguineti contrasts the desire of poets to articulate a space outside the realm of administered culture with the socio-political reality that all spaces, including aesthetic spaces, are very much inside the literally insidious cradle of culture. Sanguineti's "heroic-pathetic moment" turns out to be none other than the desocialized, idealizing, rapture of Romantic Ideology and is perhaps a close cousin to that "noetic" space so often referred to in the discourse surrounding the New Italian Poetry. For implicit in the idea of the noetic is that mental, or, for that matter, imaginal spaces, can somehow transcend or be disconnected from material, social and even experiential spaces.

Sanguineti goes on to urge his readers to "resist the museum," that is, the institutionalization of poetry. From an American perspective, the danger of our innovative poetries becoming institutionalized is perhaps

less pressing than in Italy since our own alternative traditions of innovative poetries, from Stein and the Objectivists through Mac Low and beyond *have* evaded the museum (we tend to talk about it now in terms of the canon), although less through a strategy of anti-canonization than as a result of the bureaucratic entrenchment of Official Verse Culture, which refuses to even recognize the existence of innovative poetics, rejecting avant-garde and experimental tendencies not in the name of a European conception of "high art" but rather with a militant insistence on an anti-aesthetic self/voice-centered "suburban" realism.

Reading, as in a crash course, through the maze of movements and neo-movements, groups and trans-groups, that mark a newcomer's experience of the critical maps of postwar Italian poetry, I can't help thinking that avant-garde groupings are themselves commodifying and institutionalizing strategies—or I imagine that's one way to read Sanguineti's intervention here.

Currently, the problems of group affiliation pose as much a problem for poetry as do neolyric assertions of the Individual Voice. If poems can't speak directly for an author, neither can they speak directly for a group. Just as a poetry may wish to question the authorial voice, it also may wish to question all forms of group affiliation—national, state, linguistic, ethnic, and, indeed, aesthetic. Each poem speaks not only many voices but also many groups and poetry can investigate the construction of these *provisional* entities in and through and by language.

To speak in the "we" has no more priority in poetry than to speak in the "I." I missed this dimension of doubt in Filippo Bettini's simulated manifesto for Gruppo 93 (in *Shearsmen).* Like Sanguineti, but two decades later, Bettini begins with a quotation from Walter Benjamin, in order to fix Gruppo 93 in the neo-avant-garde tradition of "materialist writing." At pains to outline the "official" birth of Gruppo 93 in 1989, Bettini seems concerned neither with the negative dialectics of group formation nor with the heroic-pathetic dangers suggested by Sanguineti's ironic replaying of early sixties' poetry politics.

Many of the ideas in Bettini's manifesto will seem both familiar and welcome to those conscious of the remarkable work of one of Italy's greatest poets, Emilio Villa (a sort of Italian Jackson Mac Low), and the tradition on grammatologic and anti-lyric poetry of which he is emblematic. (The best representation in English of this remarkable writer, born in 1914, can be found in *The Waters of Casablanca*, a special issue of *Chelsea* [#37, 1978] edited by Ballerini, featuring translations by Richard Milazzo and Faust Pauluzzi.) Despite its claims to brand newness, Bettini's program will seem roughly analogous to that of a number of North American poets who, from the mid-1970s on, have advocated a non-"I"-centered poetry that foregrounds the material constructedness of language. In his Gruppo 93

manifesto, Bettini advocates many of the most prominent features of a range of English-language poetry over the past two decades: poems in which multiple poetic and nonpoetic discourses are enfolded, including dialectics and idiolects, the use of both new and traditional forms, and, especially, a pervasive and marked citationality (the use of quotes and found textual elements). This new poetic space represents a dialogically and dialectically self-conscious acknowledgment of poetic artifice that differentiates itself from what Bettini calls vitalistic and I would add hermetic and spiritualist approaches to formal innovation. Bettini's interest in what he calls "collective authorship" echoes the great interest in the American context, over the past 30 years, with collaborative poems.

The Italian use of dialect cannot be equated with American interests in ordinary language or vernacular. Ballerini's most recent book is a tour-de-force translation of Cavalcanti into Milanese dialect; how different from Zukofsky's translation of Cavalcanti's most famous poem into Brooklynese! Dialects can be used to contradict the literary models of the past; but they can also be used to impart a pseudoauthenticity to group language. Idiolect is more interesting to me: the creating of imaginary or constructed syntaxes, creating "hypothetical worlds" (to quote Aldo Tagliaferri on Villa).

I also wonder about the dangers of mere coyness, of a sort of shallow indicating as in simulationist visual artworks, in adopting, as Bettini notes of some of these poets, "the topoi" of late medieval troubadour lyrics: I fear, that is, that work like Frixione's is a retreat from the intensity and complexity of the work of Emilio Villa or Nanni Cagnone, whose *What's Hecuba to Him or He to Hecuba?* (tr. David Verzoni; New York: Out of London Press, 1975) is an energetic chronicle of the potentialities of poetic innovations.

Bettini notes the importance of the 1989 anthology *Poesia italiana della contraddizione* and I share his interest in if not just contra-diction, multiple dictions. Yet the content of his manifesto is contradicted by its rhetoric of authority, declamation, self-assurance and micro-management of literary history. Moreover, in at least one significant way the Contradiction anthology is more a continuation of the diction of Italian poetry than a change. As Manuela Bertone notes in her review in *Shearsmen*, only 3 of 43 poets in that anthology of the new pluri-linguality are women, a state of affairs mirrored both in Larry Smith's 1980 University of California Press anthology of Italian poetry as well as in both the new *Shearsmen* anthology from *Forum Italicum* and this conference, where Amelia Rosselli is the only woman represented. An eloquent consideration of just what is going on here is to be found in an essay in *Shearsmen* on Amelia Rosselli by Lucia Re called "Poetry and Madness" as well as in Re's related presentation at the conference.

The social grounding of poetry, as perhaps Sanguineti means to remind us, cannot be evaded by recourse to a "noetic"—or purely intellectual—materiality of language since the materiality of language is in the first instance a social materiality and, at the same time, a materiality not of selves and identities but of bodies, including gendered bodies. Materiality, that is, is not just an idea but also a responsibility. Here I very much agree with Cagnone's insistence, in his essay, that poetics not be pre-scriptive but, if to make the distinction at all, post-scriptive: "Poetry is action above and beyond what a person is able to think." So that my own poetic ethics, again to echo Cagnone, is to enact language's refusal to abandon the world but also to articulate the way the world cleaves to language.

But saying that, I also want to register my fascination, even intoxication, with the wild abstraction of some of the new Italian poetizing in prose. This "wireless prose"—to use Jerome Rothenberg's description at the conference—can seem like a surrealistic literary theory; what's especially interesting is that the abstraction is not metaphysical but ontological. That may explain why there have been several recent translations of Stein into Italian, including a full-scale critical edition by Ballerini and a translation of *Tender Buttons* by Milli Graffi, a remarkable Milan poet who has also translated Lewis Carroll.

Cagnone's "See Figure" in *What's Hecuba to Him* is a marvelous instance of contemporary Italian wireless prose. As Cagnone writes in "Out and Down," in *Hecuba*, "The poet feels poetry" like the invalid veteran "feels the phantom limb." So I want to end with a phantom, which is to say homophonic, rendition of two paragraphs of "See Figure" (p. 110):

speech divents the condition Della me a present, a
sow guard O verse ill telos, ma, verso the *originale*,
chow, say—see—propagate a intransitive, distance Nancy
toggles solo ill cantata Sue toggles, parla D.C. come'd
in a form of protection

guard an "O" in *centro divento* I lose no me in tandem say I'll
centro a natural man to vote, O O me speech O! lo!
desired passeth a cool Louis say non-perjured I'll deteriorate
leg o' Nelly, Sue, mescal and perch, dove I'll
snare, oh, renounce I a lot, vouch, I'll pass odor I'll name
hypothesis not finger

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Peripheral Commentary on Gene Frumkin's Masterwork, *Comma in the Ear*, 15 titles, 139 pages, Living Batch Press.

I want to write it clear that I consider Gene Frumkin's *Comma in the Ear* a masterwork. Here is Robert Creeley speaking of it. "Our time becomes a complex recollection of bits and pieces we had thought to constitute our histories and the hopeful proposal of our human significance we have attempted. This consummate masterwork is an acknowledgment and use of all these testifying echoes, locked in turn with the things our adamantly common world cannot find a place to put down. . . .The voices of these extraordinary poems make a place intensely present, irresolvable and yet endlessly insistent."

Can only read brief units, heart pounding from riches of text. Yet *Comma* deflects your admiration rejecting easy resolutions into applause.

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The cutting is where to look in all this object handling. The cutting is the make and the mate. I have never read a better cut garment than these *Comma* extra-large poems. No such thing as non-figurative, always person or dwelling or together—cuttings and patterns. Still hand drawn. We play Traubel to Frumkin's Whitman—relieving him of his burden of thought, his season or merchandise. I told GF face to face that I had read no finer work than this. He disagreed.

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Saying make "nothing" so. Letters, words, pictographs are never fixed by allegory or ideology, or engraved breastplate or scholar-facade. Images and echoes grow.

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Text bathers: These poems reveal some fleshy analyzed bathers—the nudes are as in Lucien Freud; "bathers," the body visually vascular, the blueness showing as if the skin can hardly contain the flesh, which seems to have been circumcised. "Lucien Freud's basic pigment for flesh is Cremnitz white, an inordinately heavy pigment which contains twice as much lead oxide as flaky white. . . .It granulates and I think of the granules as atoms. As in Bacon, the brush leaves a signature akin to raw tissue." (Robert Hughes). Freud, the grandson of Sigmund, has an important presence beside Frumkin's text and texture. Bathers and sinks, tubs and pipes as in Brighton Baths, Saratoga or Bulgaria, a misted dreamlike reflecting in the tub, reading in the tub, the mirror steamed: hydrothermia. But in other spaces: Demut, Winslow Homer, Manet, Matisse, Jacob Lawrence. . . .

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The coins of *Comma*: Sharing Tokens from stranger's lives, coins sifting across centuries and persons, rubbed smooth and away. Cartoons on coins. The imagery of market drift, Vienna, Antwerp, a sense of business and fashion flux, (Macy's going bankrupt (1992). Frumkin for 14 years the Editor of *California Apparel News*, L. A. (1952-1966), and went from there to the University of New Mexico through admiration of poets among them John Logan. I worked in the garment district too. The coinage of ideas, the linkage of business and refugees and ransom. . . Imagine the Antwerp Yiddish Bourse of talk and diamonds. Frumkin's interrogator in many voices remains nearby the camp gates of Anus Mundi. The gas is there. The book begins with island night horizon waves and soundings, then counter-attacks such seductions—so both second and third voices are orchestrated. Then, "you write: *my mother smelled the gas / in the house, the house, you might remember,/ is in Venice on Ozone St.*," and the narrative letters begin, remembering the Destruction.

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Comma as Diasporist poem: Kitaj and Walter Benjamin. From the *First Diasporist Manifesto*, Kitaj, 1989. "Diasporist painting is unfolding commentary on its life-source, the contemplation of a transience, a Midrash (exposition, exegesis of non-literal meaning) in paint and somehow, collected, these Responsa or reactions to one's transient restlessness un-at-homeness, groundlessness. . .although my Diasporist paintings grow out of art, as for instance Cubism or Surrealism did, they owe their greatest debt to the terms and passions of my own life and growing sense of myself as a Diasporist Jew." Walter Benjamin and Kitaj: "Walter Benjamin was felt as Kitaj's soul brother." (Joe Shannon). Frumkin is soul brother to both.

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The sentences of *Comma* wrap themselves—completely contained—as in George Lakoff's conception that we cannot imagine anything uncontained. Like his admirations: Demuth, Kitaj, Matisse, or like Stuart Davis or Jacob Lawrence, Frumkin is a cartoonist. He never forgets that he is drawing. Stuart Davis said, "A drawing is the correct title of my work." There is a bit of *Maus* in some habits of *Comma*. Things are within lines, boundaries of lines. It was a characteristic of American Visual Arts not to give up the drawing superstructure regardless of pressure of decompositional aesthetics.

:

Voice 2: distanced and general: these quasi-ideological definitions and banners about the indeterminate float out over an empty beach decoratively like sensual skywriting for some other time. And they are named "distanced" by wise Gene Frumkin and are distancing and suggest domestic crisis, the allure of lecture, or some "Big Bang" that always moves things further away.

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Something of Walter Benjamin's "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" strolls beside this metropolis voice.

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The stage set of *Comma* is as wondrous as Emily Dickinson's bedroom in Amherst—actors and actresses silhouette, a shadow play, with a touch of Chekhov in the weariness and overburden of thought. Frumkin is non-mysterious in stage direction. "The styles/voices used in this collection are the idiomatic narratives, indicated by italicization; the conventionally capitalized sentences referring to mostly distanced or general matters; and the more intimate sentences which begin, rigorously, with uncapitalized letters." Little does this suggest the huge hormonal-moon, drawing ideational and sexual flows.

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Batik writers might not be concerned with the "principal voice," but Frumkin's L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E is not imprinted as batik or mathematic system. . . The sibling competition to be principal voice is acute among the three types in *Comma*. Note the Northern Irish composer Michael Acorn on his work *Perichoreses*, "to destabilize the wind quintet by featuring one of the instruments as a principal voice. . . .Throughout this work the position of the oboe is constantly challenged; gradually its untethered musical lines become constrained and integrated within the ensemble." In *Comma* the competitiveness of voices for the attention of a comma-defended ear, a cutting ear, maintains unventable stress.

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Many ways to have breakfast: philosophy, history, texts and breakfast, to act out in your booth the dramas of your readings. Tunes of reading. I recall Leonid Pasternak's show at the Jewish Museum a few years ago—a room full of readers: his children including Boris, his wife, himself, reading text or piano score. Gene's first question as we sat in his favorite diner for breakfast was about my reading, the honey of the alpha-bet, the raisins of our punctuation, the *challa* of our French toast. The festive weave of *Comma* includes the braided breads—this is poetry with a table and chairs. It is Friday night, even as breakfast. Chronic panic crowds the ritual meal.

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Spiral relief as source of Frumkin montage: Hellenistic vases? "The mixing of figured motifs from different iconographical contexts is common, especially on the Plaketten vases popular in 3rd Century B. C., on which the sizes of the figures vary and the iconography is often incoherent," the result of industrialization of figurine and pottery making and its surpluses. (Beryl Bar-Sharrar in *The Choroplast's Art*). The rotating reel quality of Frumkin's montage suggests potter's wheel as well as moldmade handling and surpluses, an abundance of demythologized figures in transferable

application along loop of montage—or neck of vase. The poems are rotated, grown on a horizontal wheel.

:

No imagery without waves that curl above the little boat of word. *Aloha* and *Mahalo*, both resonating most with island good-bye. *Comma in the Ear* seems to have risen from translucency of the island weathers of Hawaii. That's my guess, having worked there myself for a while. Coming before *Comma* was *A Sweetness in the Air* (1987). The tradewinds and flora, the horizons and shapes of the volcanic islands magnetize and resonate in the waved imagery of the 1990 *Comma* text, and some of the poems of *Comma* were published in the *The Chaminade Review*. The 85 sections of *A Sweetness in the Air*, Frumkin's Hawaii-sensuous with scent and sea-scape—and a bit of Stevens in the air—filtered his blood and blows a strange painful sweetness through the pages of his masterwork before us. *Aloha* means "good-bye": navigation, sailing, waves and waving. The accidental seed carried by the dying bird or fish made the islands livable, aloha and diaspora

:

Moses, the stutterer, felt the comma of God, who feared the hero: God's comma made Moses stutter, comma turned him away, just allowed him to glimpse. Moses and the curses of Deuteronomy surge inside *Comma in the Ear*. Moses was cut away, "Let me go over and see the good land." Diaspora of one.

:

Frumkin is of the world of the three year old scholars—Yiddish was his first language. Knowledge weaves around him like figures made of Hebrew letters; it is not an arrogant metallic display, this house of study and bed of study.

Comma is steamy with knowledge and interpretation. Study is breathed in like cinnamon-tea among shelves of one's own hoard of books, or like a bowl of good soup, or perhaps with the orange of the bedlamp when you are intimate with the text. *Comma* has such tasty beauty. The Buddhist character "with heart" applies. Bed is for reading, recalling that his time is Friday night when the Shekhina comes and we savor her presence and conceive. Perhaps the woman who writes letters we intercept in *Comma* is the lost Goddess. I think of Kafka's mention of how love letters are eaten on the way by ghosts.

—MILTON KESSLER

Noticings

Image summoned by reading Robbe-Grillet's *Ghosts in the Mirror*: A copy of one of my books on desk in autumnal late-afternoon sun of an unreachable other time, as if this were an image from the life/memories of someone in the future who owns this book of a long dead author.

"I think one guy's sole duty was to load guns."
—George Rock, trumpet & vocals with Spike Jones' City Slickers

Soviet photographer Victoria Ivleva speaking of the last six men working in the wrecked Chernobyl reactor:
"You take your last breath and last glance at the trees. You climb the small, absolutely vertical staircase and rush as quickly as you can through the high-rem field into the deadly dark. The guys are my friends now and I look at them and think 'Oh God, I will soon see them in a coffin.' One likes to joke that he has already absorbed 'so much negative radiation beyond a normal lifetime that I should have died before Ivan the Terrible.' You've no time inside, every thought is a rem. When you get a dose in there you feel sleepy at first, and later you have this feeling of. . . I told the guys: 'You know what I'd like to do now? Go back inside.' And they said: 'Now you understand us.'"

I'm tending to forget what the nonverbal looks like.

"Hawk blows a magnificent Yesterdays which contains one of the most powerful reed squeaks ever recorded."
—John Chilton, *Song of the Hawk*

"I like you, however I'm afraid of your entertainment."
—Daniel Davidson, *Product*

Glenn Gould because: It's not him or Bach that I hear, but through him I begin to hear what Bach heard.

Possible to catch those things that only occur in the moments to which memory has no access?

"The second he sat down at the piano he sank into himself, I thought, he looked like an animal then, on closer inspection like a cripple, on even closer inspection like the sharpwitted, beautiful man that he was."
—Thomas Bernhard, *The Loser*

"But I am speaking of the first night, when I leave my apartment almost breathless, searching for someone to show the poem to. Often now there is no one. My fellow poets (those I showed poetry to ten years ago) are as little interested in my poetry as I am in theirs. We both compare the poems shown (unfavorably, of course) with the poems we were writing ten years ago when we could learn from each other. We are polite but it is as if we were trading snapshots of our children—old acquaintances who disapprove of each other's wives. Or were you more generous, Garcia Lorca?"

—Jack Spicer, *After Lorca*

"A great many actors don't know that the camera actually photographs thought."

—Dirk Bogarde, *An Orderly Man*

"And each of them will open a door to one of the rooms hidden inside the images separating you from speech."

—John Yau, *Big Island Notebook 3*

"After roughly two months, Dr. Landy introduced the piano."

—Brian Wilson, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*

"deliverance of imprisoned light"

—Samuel Beckett, *Notes on Krapp's Last Tape*

"So one of these mornings he came by, went into my bathroom. It was about six months before Bird died. Pretty soon he calls out to me: 'Come in here, Max! I want to show you something.' I go in the bathroom and he's standing up looking in the mirror. His pants are down to his ankles, and his whole body is a swollen mess—his *hands* and everything. Bird's looking in the mirror at himself and he says: 'Man, I done wore this motherfucker out.' He was talking about his body like it was a *suit*. He didn't say it sadly. He was so lighthearted. That's the attitude you have if you believe in reincarnation. You simply shed this and take another one." Roach smiles. "Maybe he's got one someplace."

—Max Roach, L.A. Times Magazine, 15IX91

"But what scared me the most was when my father would put on the gasmask. His face would disappear. This was not my father any longer. This was not a human being at all."

—Philip K. Dick (in Sutin, *Divine Invasions)*

You know about the insomniac agnostic dyslexic? He lies awake all night wondering if there is a dog.

"Deeper than the ruins of concentration camps are worlds more frightening, worlds more meaningless. The hells of geology remain to be discovered."

—Robert Smithson, *Art Through the Camera's Eye*

"It's characteristic of a Russian novelist to reveal some lack of confidence
in the relationship between words and their things. . .
But this lack of confidence often culminates in a single instant of ignorance
And that instant, Arkadii said, might correspond to what you have called
paradise."

—Lyn Hejinian, *Oxota*

—CLARK COOLIDGE

MLA

It's a Depression. A student said to me, "At least it will give my generation a little character." A smarter one said, "Books are too slow." It was in evidence even at the San Francisco MLA, where chairpeople were standing around at the book exhibits, their money for new appointments dried up.

There were oodles of books at the exhibits—within the academic community the book is a badge, Purple Heart of tenure warfare, a status symbol even as the profession debates the means to "get the word out" beyond the academic community. But the biggest topic of conversation around the exhibits and in the hotel corridors was the homeless people around Union Square. Homeless with cats in bags, homeless with AIDS, homeless with three-year-olds. I was tapped out in no time.

Meanwhile the Teachers for a Democratic Culture are deciding how to fight a well-financed Right intent on mis-representing multiculturalism. State legislatures are cutting budgets, insisting on more teaching and less research. In the popular media professors are being skewered while they hide out working on the definitive tome on post-colonial theory. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that the problem is access to popular media,

which really means the creation of an alternative popular media. But this will be difficult as long as we have the cult of the book.

***

At a panel honoring the 200th anniversary of Shelley's birth they were giving out buttons, the kind that you pin on to show yours support for Minnie Mouse or the local zoo:

SHELLEY:
POET AND LEGISLATOR
1792-1992

"POETS ARE. . ."

I sat and watched Michael Palmer's face as he listened to two professors spend thirty minutes cataloguing all of the events honoring Shelley this year. Before his frown completely swallowed the table, he was introduced to read some fragmentary meditations on Shelley and contemporary poetics, ending with a few bitter remarks about the Gulf War. Then Michael Davidson read a paper on Shelley's importance to various poets. Afterwards I overheard two senior Shelley scholars exclaiming that these were the best papers they had heard in years—on Shelley. Maybe they found Palmer and Davidson faithful to the spirit(s) of Shelley. But for me the real meaning of the event was to be found on Palmer's face: "Poets are buttons, and poets are buttoned."

***

Two panels I was not able to attend covered almost exactly the same topic: "Do We Still Talk About Poetry?" Or something like that. Actually, lately I've been a little encouraged by the criticism of poetry, even while it seems true that such criticism, like poetry itself, is becoming increasingly marginal in the institutions of literary study. *Critical Inquiry* has been publishing a number of good essays on the relationship of poetry and theory, theory and poetics. One of the things that seems to be happening there and elsewhere is that critics who are skeptical of the various formulations of strategic poetics associated with Language poetry are feeling the need to articulate positions at similar levels of abstraction and sophistication. See for example John Koethe's defense of neo-romanticism against both Language poetry and those workshop poets still tied to old notions of authenticity, or for that matter Charles Altieri's review of Marjorie Perloff in *Contemporary Literature* 32:4, which asserts that "it would be a severe loss if we confused the means with the end, the workings of mediation with the rewards of

expressive activity within and against the histories that work to form us in their image." It may be the case that an emerging critique of Language writing will be slow to take account of increasing differences among these poets, but anything that improves the conversation about poetics must be welcomed, whether that be Allen Grossman's *Summa Lyrica* (*Western Humanities Review*, Spring 1990) or Charles Bernstein's new prose, *A Poetics*, from Harvard University Press (of all places). Less happy news is that Peter Makin's book on Basil Bunting—Makin is as good a reader of poetry as there is—cost a fortune ($79.). Oxford must not expect many to buy it. Nathaniel Tarn has a collection of his essays out from New Mexico, and Marjorie Perloff's new book is due any day. The most recent issue of *Poetics Journal*, on "the person," contains much of interest, though for some reason nobody of the generation of New American writers seems to have been invited to contribute (there is a symposium on Creeley's work however).

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Rob Wilson, *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991)

Wilson's genealogy of the sublime relates the surprising persistence of this genre in America (after its decline in Europe) to discourses of national empowerment, tracing with considerable care and breadth of knowledge the re-codings of the sublime from the natural sublime of Bradstreet and Livingston through the democratic sublime of Whitman to the "more technologically inspired euphorics and bliss-and-dread imageries pervading poets like Stevens, Crane, Ashbery, Ai, Ron Silliman, Adrienne Rich, and Bob Perelman." Wilson has much of interest to say about the ideological inflections of the sublime, which can "serve different genders and even opposed or self-contradictory political agendas." The concentration on the Americanization of the sublime distinguishes Wilson's book from many studies of the sublime published in the 1970s and 1980s; too often critics have read the American sublime within a trans-national and ahistorical oedipal narrative of intertextuality and originality, "strong interpretation" and "self-reliance." Wilson especially accuses Harold Bloom of de-historicizing the sublime, but he does make some use of Bloom's work on Emerson as well as most of the commentary on the sublime from Longinus and Kant to Lyotard and Derrida. Wilson locates Bloom's fathers—Emerson and Whitman—within a history that includes not only poetic predecessors such as Bradstreet, Livingston, and William Cullen Bryant but also the painters of American Luminism and Brigadier General Thomas Farrell, who

was obliged to represent the unrepresentable (the nuclear sublime) at Alomogordo in 1945. Whether the text at hand is Bradstreet's "rapt wit sublime" or Stevens' "The American Sublime," Wilson is at pains to demonstrate that the first task of the American sublime is to ratify America as *site* (geographical, social) of the sublime. Tocqueville and others are useful to Wilson in helping him link the puniness of democratic man with the sacralization of force in the nineteenth century American sublime and beyond. Stevens' modernist "de-creating" of the natural sublime and its romantic tropes first leads to a re-statement of the American sublime's "contradictory hold over the contemporary subject" in numinous words, and in art and architecture. After Hiroshima threatened "the supreme fiction," Stevens "turned back from Cold War agnostics to the Church of Rome for postnihilist direction." Wilson's postmodern sublime follows Jameson's in suggesting that what can be retained from earlier descriptions of the sublime (Burke's predominately) is "a relationship of the individual subject to some fitfully or only intermittently visible force which, enormous and systematized, reduces the individual to helplessness." Throughout the book Wilson reminds us of the costs of troping vastness into emptiness in the "Euramerican" genre. Stevens' poem responds to a statue of Andrew Jackson, no friend to the Native Americans who figure nowhere in any of the these poetries of national empowerment, whose terror and awe must look very different. But what worries Wilson the most is an uncritical acceptance of the sublime in a nuclear era. Two things which seem to have prompted Wilson's book are the big money "once-embarrassing landscapes of native sublimity" were fetching in the late 1970s (as Reagan emerged) and the continuing taste for a nostalgic sublimity in such unreconstructed poets of the indigenous natural sublime as Galway Kinnell.

Wilson's genealogical method forces him to rephrase key concepts from chapter to chapter, and this can be a little frustrating. But the methodology also allows him to trace the persistence of earlier versions of the American sublime, as in Stevens' occasional "transcendentalist nostalgia for the natural sublime." No doubt it would also be possible to trace in some post-modern critics and poets a nostalgia for Hart Crane's technological sublime; "I'm thinking of Marjorie Perloff's hymn to her word processor in the introduction to her book on Futurism. For Wilson—as for Derrida—what a nuclear sublime discloses in the last half of our century of the technological sublime is the "delusive *limit* of this challenge by the technocratic mentality to nature's forces, the danger of reducing knowing to an instrumentality of *techne.*" Postmodern poetry "must disclose the consequences of an American *techne.*" Finally, Wilson is writing on behalf of a "post-national" future which he is unable to imagine or theorize, and as a critic of a genre which he is not sure "should be wholly undone." He

writes with what seems an honest and useful skepticism about the ability of a postmodern sublime "to find new formations and affects commensurate with (if not resistant to) this space-age threshold of nuclear force." It might not have been too much to ask for some more extensive discussion of this supposed post-national future as it relates to recent (perhaps too recent for Wilson's book) developments in Europe as well as to the movement of international capital and Bush's New World Order. Wilson's somewhat vague and utopian hope in a post-national future seems to be propped up not by postmodernist theorists of capital and/or technology but by his notion that a postmodern sublime might emerge as a powerful and "collective attempt 'to think the unthinkable' (Derrida)" as a "*global* concept."

The book is valuable not only for its range but for its readings of specific appropriations of the sublime in Lyotard, Baudrillard, Perelman, Robert Pinsky and others. This will be an important book for students of American poetry as well as for critics and theorists of the nuclear sublime.

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Victoria Forde, *The Poetry of Basil Bunting* (Bloodaxe Books, 1991) Basil Bunting, *Uncollected Poems* (Oxford University Press, 1991)

Forde's book is an introduction to Bunting's life and work, and is most valuable for its inclusion of excepts from Bunting's letters to Zukofsky and to Forde herself as she came to know him in the last years of his life. Some of the biographical material is new, including an amusing anecdote about Ezra Pound baby-sitting Bunting's infant daughter Bourtai and feeding her whiskey. "She likes it!" said Ezra. Yikes! As a reader of Bunting's work Forde is not atypical in most regards. The odes are read largely as exercises in technique preparing Bunting for the more important longer poems, the sonatas. A single brief chapter suffices to cover them, with a few being singled out as interesting poems in their own right. While I admire the attention to evaluation, it is time the odes receive more serious attention. They're much better than Forde thinks. Also like most of Bunting's critics to date, Forde offers a relatively uncritical rehearsal of Bunting's own brief—and always strategic—remarks on poetics and the work of predecessors and contemporaries. While she is a decent reader of Bunting's poems considered as formal artifacts—she is alert to many of the means by which this most musical of modern poets achieves his effects—she has little of interest to say about the subject matter of Bunting's poems. This too is typical of Bunting's critics to date. It simply will not do to say that Bunting

is interested in the "theme of mortality." Death and male sexuality are obsessive concerns in Bunting's work; there's no getting around them as a "theme." Sexuality is not discussed at all in Forde's book, which forces her to ignore some of the more problematical passages in the odes and even in the earlier sonatas, such as the reference to the "cunnilingual law" in "The Well of Lycopolis." Perhaps she found some of the more rancorous early Bunting embarrassing, but there's no excuse for ignoring the issue in the more elegiac late Bunting.

There are really at least two Buntings, it seems to me (three if one counts the very first odes), and the transition between them has everything to do with Bunting's stay in Iran and can be witnessed in the uncertainties of "The Spoils." While I think I can guess why Sister Victoria Forde might choose to ignore issues of sexuality in Bunting—there *is* however an amusing photograph of Basil standing in front of advertisements for Desnudismo in Barcelona—I cannot guess why she refuses to address the question of belief. Is Bunting a Christian poet, as Donald Davie would have us read him? Or is he the agnostic Quaker others have found him to be? How seriously does he take the pantheism of Wordsworth, the anti-metaphysics of Lucretius? Perhaps the question should be rephrased: what has Bunting *become* when he moves back to Northumbria and writes the great late odes and *Briggflatts*?

It must be remembered, though, that Forde's book is an overview, an introduction to Bunting's work—it's amazing that it has taken this long for such a book to appear. And Forde has not backed away from some of the more difficult work required of such an introductory study, such as an investigation of the forms of the classical Persian poetry Bunting translated and adapted. The chapter on Bunting's Persian "overdrafts" is the book's best, the most useful commentary. Though for the time being—until we have a biography and an edition of Bunting's letters—Forde's study will remain well worth reading for other reasons as well.

If I were to introduce Bunting in such a way as to be responsive to those poets he learned something from beyond technique, something more than the "sleights" he learned from Horace and Malherbe, Wyatt and Pound, I would begin with Canto VII of Dante's *Inferno*, on the wrathful and the sullen, on acedia. Next would be Villon's *danse macabre*, and after that the various versions of melancholy discourse to be found in the Persian poets. There are many references to drunkenness in these last poets, who may have been following Aristotle's theory of humors in the *Problemata* (purportedly his), where melancholy, lust, and genius are linked, black bile and wine-froth. That is why I am hugely happy to have with the publication of the uncollected Bunting all the translations of Manuchehri, Hafiz, and Sa'di. Bunting is famous for having tossed out most of what would have been acceptable work to very good poets, and we're lucky that Richard

Caddel has found the few things he's collected in this volume. Besides the Persian overdrafts, there's a poem after Baudelaire's "Un Voyage à Cythère" and translations of Horace. There's "They Say Etna," the most didactic and Poundian of Bunting's longer poems, and an elegy for his son which was first published in *Sulfur* ("A Song for Rustam"). There are two beautiful strophes from the sonata Bunting began in 1972 but never finished. And there are other things too, many of them from Zukofsky's manuscript of *Caveat Emptor* (now in the Beinecke), a collection Bunting put together in 1935 only to have it rejected by Eliot and others. Not all of the work is first-rate, and one could write a book speculating about why it was eventually discarded by Bunting. Even so, the volume contains some of the best poetry to be published in recent years, and it is invaluable for students of Bunting. My one regret is that alternate versions of existing poems were not included. In the *Caveat Emptor* manuscript, for instance, there is an interesting version of the ode that Bunting eventually dedicated to Mina Loy. This still unpublished version might have helped Forde think about sexuality in Bunting, just as an examination of Bunting's letters to Ezra Pound would have helped her think about Bunting's politics (yet another subject almost completely ignored in her book).

It seems that the "Bunting push" is well under way. I hope to contribute a little to the effort myself.

***

Charles Bernstein, *Rough Trades* (Sun & Moon Press, 1991)

Does anyone else think it a little weird that Bernstein is now a Sun & Moon *Classic*, that his most recent collection of poems includes a two-page biography at its end? One thing historians of the avant-garde have not always recognized is the entrepreneurial skill of oppositional poets. Another thing they have sometimes neglected is the speed with which poets associated with "movements" or "groups" move away from these once they have become established. Though it seems odd to say, *Rough Trades* is partly a retrospective book, one that includes two long poems called "Reading the Tree" (Silliman's anthology) together with—immediately after—a poem offering sardonic remarks on poetics to The Kootenay School of Writing in Vancouver. Just as in Ron Silliman's most recent book, *What*, where Silliman writes "To say / this has become a cliche. *I HATE SPEECH*," Bernstein in his "Reading the Tree: 1" skewers the phrase that once served as a manifesto for a community of writers: "'I hate / speech' & speech don't like me none too good / either." While Bernstein recognizes

that "I / could never have done it alone" and remains as interested in the social body as ever, I'm tempted to say that *Rough Trades* is Bernstein's most "personalized" book. It is certainly his most readable book. And, I might add, for me it is his best. It's only partly ironic when Bernstein writes "they used to be / the leaders of the avant-garde, but now / they just want to be understood." Consider, for example, this passage from the same poem:

> These
> are not my words but those that summer
> gives me, with a tenderness quite
> unknown in the real world, where
> there is little to remember but
> stormy days. I would have a house
> of my own, with a bay of pastel
> miasma, reality leaking
> from its edges, as the context
> conditions. Therefore, my style
> seems to have fallen to
> pieces, deteriorated
> in the three-year interim
> between books; others
> may write better-made poems
> but those poems with their elegant
> turns of phrase, their vivid
> excellence, often add up to nothing.
> Either poetry is real as, or realer than,
> life, or it is nothing, a stupid
> & stupefying occupation for zombies.
> For my poetry is informed by
> something inside that doesn't
> flinch & won't budge.

Though the first few lines of this read like Duncan or some other romantic poet, I am most reminded of Williams' "The Pink Locust," where the old man defended his idiosyncrasy in a propositional mode that represented something of a retreat from the more materialist poetics of his earlier experimental phase. There is much of the old Bernstein in *Rough Trades*—"fissures, breaks, and other disjunctive devices" (to quote the giant blurb)—but much of the book seems as interested in re-constructing lyric and discursive sense out of the fragmented social body (of which Byron, Stevens, Williams, Campion and other poetries are a part) as it is in disrupting or de-constructing the discursive and lyric conventions that have

reinforced dominant ideologies. In other words, this book contains not just acid but also a little stone. One poem even begins "We share these sediments, sentiments," though this does continue on to reject "the father's lore." But rejecting the old stories does not entail abandoning the pursuit of some new ones, just as (to quote Bunting) abstinence does not cure desire. Maybe I'm way off base here, but this explains for me the relative discursive continuity of the passage quoted above, and the re-writing of Stevens' imaginary in the volume's first poem, "The Kiwi Bird In The Kiwi Tree," and the appropriation of the beginning of Byron's "She Walks In Beauty" for what is in effect a conventional "compleynt" in "Verdi and Postmodernism." This last poem especially pleases me, as I am of the once familiar opinion that poetry atrophies when it moves too far from song:

> She walks in beauty like the swans
> that on a summer day do swarm
> & crawls as deftly as a spoon
> & spills & sprawls & booms.

Bring me Campion's lute! Now that Bernstein has demonstrated that he can outdo the mostly flaccid New Formalists at creating textures of sound (speech?), will the next move be to give over parody and comedy for lyrical effusion? Probably not.

—KEITH TUMA

Different Nostalgias

Eugène Nicole's second novel, *Les larmes de pierre* (Paris, Éditions François Bourin, 1991) is a sequel to *L'oeuvre des mers* (see Noticings, *Sulfur* 27). This work centers on the incursion of a world-historical event into the fictional microcosm of the island of Saint-Pierre: the landing of the first airplane and its immediate consequence, the arrival of Amanda Maple, the first tourist. While this event inaugurated a new epoch in the island's history (as well as a foundational moment in the narrator's autobiography) it also

created a modification of the delicate *mythos* so brilliantly proffered by *L'oeuvre des mers*. For the field of gravel on which the island's catch of cod once dried now serves to welcome a celestial, and no longer a maritime, arrival. For the silent, caring, yet foreign gaze of the first tourist was paralleled by the noisy, celestial trajectory of the first airplane; both created a new way of seeing, a new topographic orientation, a new source of forgetting. Yet the recollection, Proustian or otherwise, which guides our words, gestures, thoughts and emotions is always obliquely traversed by death. This process is here allegorized by the "Théâtre de la Morte": this childhood memorial to the lost mother is also a narrative double of the "Théâtre de l'Oeuvre-des-Mers" which gave its name and its memory to the first volume of this work. There is also the Café du Nord, that other quotidian theater of society. The destiny and myth of Saint-Pierre are ruled by several antithetical ironies, among which we discover the very absence of the sound of fishermen's boots on the floor of the café. This lack is a sign that an epoch is over: the island's history was previously marked by Death standing in for Neptune, for death is the work of the sea. The footsteps of those men whose worst fate was to be claimed by the sea were the antiphrastic, monumental, nostalgic doubles of the fishermen lucky enough to return and haunt the very same café. The dead always returned as memory; they returned as tears of stone, as the very tears of Saint-Pierre. The end of *Les larmes de pierre* indicates that this book must be the first of many sequels. For in the hand of a dead photographer of the isles—he who captured these very moments of transition, these very instants that articulate the narrative's fictive and real nostalgia—was found a letter addressed to the "Commander of the Dying," consisting only of the word "Excellence," without further predication. As one character exclaimed: "What elegance, to end on a comma! No final period!" A perfect destiny, indeed. Nicole's book—the manifestation of a collective memory that has now found its public voice—ends less morbidly, but no less suggestively, on the word "overseas. . ." This ellipsis bears a rich anamnesis still to be created.

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Pendant la matière (Paris, P.O.L., 1991) is one of two books published by Valère Novarina last year. This solipsistic work, consisting of 616 aphorisms primarily on the theater, may serve as a "guide" to Novarina. But these pointers, while directing us toward his theatrical texts and productions, are, if anything, rather a means to misguide us, to reveal the distortions, mutations, rarities, and creative paths within the French language. Aphorism CCCXII provides the rationale for this book:

> Mouths of disquietude in the world, points of anguish, fields of unrest and scenes without end—books are fragments of a struggle, stars of disquietude, systems of incertitude, summonings of air, movements of emptiness, like nebulas of non-matter, tortured, turbulent, knots of negations, places where matter is questioned, turning beneath speech, turning in question.

Novarina's technique is a celebration of neologism, malapropism, metaplasm, verbigeration, parapraxis, and most other linguistic aberrations, especially those arising from the Rabelaisian, carnivalesque play of lived speech. Here, linguistic errors and anomalies bear as much creative weight as the presumed perfections of classic composition, in an oeuvre which represents contemporary French in its state of maximal mutation.

The last aphorism of *Pendant la matière*, "Always seek a hand swifter than the mind," could serve as the epigraph to Novarina's life work, as well as the appropriate segue to discuss his most recent play, *Je suis* (Paris, P.O.L., 1991), which premiered in Paris at the Théâtre de la Bastille in September 1991. This work is typical of Novarina's theater: it is non-representational, non-narrative, non-referential. Such is a theater of language—created for the ear rather than the eye or mind—where paralogisms, conundrums, aporia, and the sheer pleasures of linguistic nonsense organize the text. As Novarina explains in yet another aphorism, XXI: "The actor does not name, does not designate, but seeks to captivate. The actor is nobody and designates nothing. He summons what he does not name." At one point, the character Jean Singulier interrupts:

> Reruin the letters that come and go; I lack the generalized lacks of agreement as well as what follows in thought; I cast forth everywhere incomplete plurals and I gathered up faulty singulars, repetitions of adjectives, inversions of plurification and coordinations in an already quite broken state, not in upright French but in a backwards, reversed language. . .

Aphasia or poetry? The proper names are no less revelatory, as other characters include: Le Vivant Malgré Lui, Le Docteur de Vacuité, L'Illogicien, Sa Pensée, Le Mangeur de Soi-Même, La Figure Dans la Nuit, Johannes Abstractus, and many others. But it would be an error to present any given character or quotation as typical or emblematic: the gist of this work is that there is no gist whatsoever. This impossible theater—where everything is suggestive, nothing indicative—belies all standard hermeneutics, and demands a new theoretical vocabulary and sensibility. Novarina's own position vis-à-vis his treatment of theatrical language ("the theater of the

word") is expressed by the personage in *Je suis* who bears his own name, Valère. His only words are: "Explain yourself." This could be asked of nearly every character, of nearly every enunciation, in the book—yet explanation would, of course, be impossible. This is precisely the point at which the pleasures of listening begin.

*

If any single notion could be deemed the central trope of modernism, it would probably be that of *montage*. The most recent book of P. Adams Sitney (one of the leading historians of the American avant-garde cinema) considers the interdisciplinary effects of montage in modernist film and poetry, discussing such figures as Mallarmé, Stein, Blanchot, Olson, Eisenstein, Brakhage, Landow and others. *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1990), examines what Sitney terms the "antinomy of vision," the fact that while modernist cinema and literature stress the privilege of vision, they all the while create a dense, complex visual opacity. What follows attempts to recuperate a Classic and Romantic heritage as the effective origins of modernism: we discover Greek mythology in Mallarmé, the Bible in Blanchot, and Emerson in Stein, in Olson, in Brakhage. It is precisely in Sitney's treatment of the modernist appropriation of Emerson that the book's narrowness is most apparent. One of the key figures in the Emersonian tradition as well as one of the most radical practitioners of "modernist montage" is John Cage, curiously absent from *Modernist Montage*. Sitney himself insisted, in a 1977 debate with Malcolm LeGrice at the Millennium Film Workshop, that consideration of Emerson is necessary to understand Cage. A devout Cage fanatic might recognize this as a reference to Cage's use of certain of Emerson's texts, disarticulated at the phonetic level to create nearly abstract vocalizations. But, upon reading *Modernist Montage*, we find that the Emersonianism vaunted by Sitney is rather its Protestant New England Transcendentalism, i.e., a celebration of the theological implications of "banal," quotidian reality. The radical montage component in modernism (hyperbolized in Cage's music) is overlooked in a skewed reading of certain "theological" implications and continuities with anterior traditions. One example of this problem among many concerns the complex relations between word and image, exemplified in Olson's alliterative consideration of the relations between *topos, typos* and *tropos*, i.e., the primacy of an amalgam of geography, mythology and poetry in the creative act. Given Sitney's theological and metaphysical bent, it is not surprising that this triumvirate should be used as a support for a poetics of coherence, meaning and belief. Yet this is precisely where we find a serious limitation in his delineation of modernism: what is excluded from its purview discloses a reductionism that goes far beyond

the demands of his theological metaphor. For to extend the etymological reference of *tropos* beyond Sitney's characterization of Olson's use of the term (all the while maintaining the theological metaphor, if need be) we might note that the term *tropos* also signifies the most complex structure of the Gregorian chant. In the last occurrence of the *Alleluia* in the Mass, the final syllable of the word may be set to an extended melisma, tantamount to a melodic line in itself: the *tropos*. This musical denotation of the word expresses precisely what is missing from Sitney's work: a consideration of *musication*, of the sonorous, sensual level existing beneath the signification of words, of one among the many realms of poetic nonsense. Modernism abounds in the presentation of pure sound in art: Italian and Russian Futurist poetry, Dada performance, Surrealist dreamworks, Schwitters' *Ursonata*, Artaud's glossolalia, Queneau and *Ou.Li.Po*, Dubuffet's literary works, *Ecrits Bruts*, etc. (Even the *tropos* of the Catholic Mass itself is reworked by the contemporary French composer Maurice Ohana, informed by a modernist sensibility, in his *Messe.)* Adorno's claim in *Minima Moralia* that, "music rescues name as pure sound—but at the cost of severing it from things," is apposite here. For reading Sitney, one would hardly suspect that modernism brought with it a crisis of representation and referentiality. His book suffers from its extreme literacy, i.e., from its concerted attempt to stress the literary origins of the works in question, at the expense of the non- and even anti-literary aspects of certain works. All told, the title of the book is an ironic misnomer: the essence of this text consists of an analysis of "the obscurity of vision in cinema and literature," while a systematic consideration of "modernist montage" is eschewed. Such a task could not succeed without a parallel study of music and the plastic arts. This lack is emblematic: as visibility is withheld at the core of modernist vision, so too are the limits of montage withheld from Sitney's analysis. In a book that is brilliant and erudite in its particular analyses, its archaeological successes pale somewhat in the light of its theoretical and historical omissions.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

String Light, C. D. Wright's sixth book of poetry, establishes her as one of the strongest poets of her generation. Wright's poems burn with stringy and resilient intensity. Having outgrown the elemental, gorgeous mourning in *Translations of the Gospels Back into Tongues*, Wright now locates the visionary solidly within the domestic. Her poems' narrative situations never call attention to their strangeness; Wright's everyday, however, is not the generic everyday of much American poetry, and she embodies the miraculous in speech acts that are both straightforward and unusual: naming herself ("I am the goat. Caroline by name. Nee 6 January. Domesticated / since the sixth century before Jesus"); commemorating a lake in the Ozarks ("Maybe you have to be from there to hear it sing: / Give me your water weeds, your nipples, / your shoehorn and four year letter jacket, / the molded leftovers from the singed pot."); anatomizing herself ("Inside of me / there is a period of mud. / Flies and midges come with the mud / followed by a time of intense sun"); narrating a relationship ("We'll hear them order / charcoal and beer, watching the fan work the smoke. / They could even take a room, and submit / unto the soaked bedding with one hundred strokes of night. / Here where imperfection gives way to perfection"). These speech acts set C. D. Wright apart from many of her contemporaries—she understands how such tasks nourish poems and delight readers; her writing embodies these speech acts with her own powerful lyricism.

Wright's tone is astringent—but when you make lyricism yourself instead of buying it at the store you aren't embarrassed, so you don't need to "undermine" lyricism. Her poems are thought and felt through fully, made actual in a construct of words; they embody voice in language, and write voice itself with verve and tenacity. We all know that voice is a trope but in Wright's poems the reader's willingness to hear oral presence is delighted again and again ("we coasted through the carwash—Little Floyd was / ready to throw a rod—he didn't ask if we scored the / homegrown"; "Since 1971 or before, I have hunted a bench / where I could eat my pimento cheese in peace. / If this were Tennessee and across that river Arkansas, / I'd meet you in West Memphis tonight. We could / have a big time"). Voice in writing makes a worldview palpable, so the world takes on a character. Wright has a great gift for humor that actually conveys value: she can represent children with wicked pleasure ("Naked in a splash of sun, he pees into a paper plate the guest / set down in the grass as she reached for potato chips"), dismiss the second rate ("Bourbon not fit to put on a sore"), and get the reader where the reader needs to go ("Why I come here: need for a bottom; something to refer to; / where all things visible and invisible commence to swarm.").

—JOSEPH LEASE

Messages from the Antipodes

***Like They Are Now:* Electronic Artwork Texts, Queen St., Auckland, New Zealand, Nov.–Dec., 1991.**

36 nationwide writers and artists were invited to contribute to this exhibition of slogans, aphorisms, *koan,* witticisms, puns (etc., etc.) displayed on two electronic signboards above Queen St., Auckland's main downtown thoroughfare. On the night of the exhibition (Nov. 26th), an audience consisting principally of contributors, their friends and relatives, gathered on a corner opposite the Bank of New Zealand's board, waiting for the first message to unreel.

> "THERE IS NOTHING OUTSIDE OF THE TEXT" (1)
> WAGE WAR ON TOTALITY. . . (2)

The BNZ signboard displayed 70-odd texts in approximately 30 minutes, repeating a bracket of five "pages" (or individual frames of text) before shifting to the next group. Further up the street, "The Corner" sign flashed as many texts in approximately 10 minutes then ran back through the entire ensemble five more times. What Jenny Holzer can in retrospect call an "electronic-sign romance" (*Art in America,* Dec. 1986) was now being launched in Auckland. For while the first night was something of a trial run for the sake of participants, the messages began in earnest on the 27th. Interspersed among the yuletide advertisements, they would last until the New Year, engendering a "slight disjunction" (John Barnett) in pedestrian routines if not "violent displacement," a term associated with Holzer's work.

Curators Lesley Kaiser and John Barnett named their exhibition after Eisenhower's egregious brain-teaser, "Things are more like they are now than they ever were before." The paradox was one of at least a dozen quotations (from St. Teresa to Derrida), which contributed further voices to this electronic anthology. But good anthologies depend on some shrewd and perspicacious editing. Read the signs:

> INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS / DOUBLE THE
> POPULATION (3)
> BRAIN DAMAGE EPIDEMIC (4)
> WHAT IS IT IF IT ISN'T ART? (5)
> SPACE JUNK (6)

If so many texts seemed to respond directly/indirectly to the previous author's message, we had Kaiser and Barnett to thank for these corusca-

tions. The curators reshuffled the submitted drafts so that a number of matched pairs could take light from their mutual reflections, or generate an entirely new message from their mutual contact. One sign in particular seemed to state the obvious effect:

> WORDS ARE BREEDING UP HERE LIKE WILD / FIRE FIRE FIRE (7)

Though sourced in an exhibition catalogue later distributed to the participants (and to any interested bystanders on the night of the 26th), the texts, quotes included, remained anonymous on the signboards. Anonymity, of course, helps to camouflage messages which alternate with the usual exhortations to buy, thereby enhancing the element of surprise. But there is also a sense in which an exhibition composed of anonymous contributions from 36 different people ultimately creates its own collective nucleus of thought in relation to which the author is merely a humble servant. This can be appreciated as a more radical move on the part of the curators than flashing a *koan* at unsuspecting Christmas shoppers, for such a collective statement taking precedence over the undisguised or identifiable voice is seldom associated with the function of art here in New Zealand, whereas surprise (or a chuckle) very often is.

Politically speaking, the thrust of this exhibition is an attempt to upstage, however briefly, the power invested in our Auckland galleries and syndicated critics—the hegemony that authorizes what it has already assimilated while obstructing or invalidating what it has already marginalized. For Kaiser and Barnett, there is no reason why art should always be the object viewed and absorbed into the system via polite conversation and the ritual libations of a medium white. It might, for instance, be "a little light reading" for as wide an audience as possible. Kaiser and Barnett have now begun to use "public, fast, and free" as their slogan, "FAST ART" as their motto, but the essence of their message (actually two of their most cunningly crafted texts) flashed almost dead centre on both parts of the exhibition: ART NO OBJECT. . .IS IT NECESSARY TO DRAW THE LINE?

. . . .

From "The Corner" signboard:

> THEM DAUPHINS BESERK ABOUT US (8)
> SYNCED CRISS MASS CROSSINGS (9)
> WHY LIVE IF YOU CAN BE BURIED FOR 10 DOLLARS? (10)
> THE ARTIST HAS TO LIVE LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE (11)
> YES YOU ARE (12)
> SKIN REMINDS ME OF THE STATE I'M IN (13)
> WILL IT HURT? (14)

WASHBASIN (15)
NO IDEAS ALLOWED IN THIS SPACE (16)
ARE YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO BE? (17)
BE WHAT I WANT YOU TO BE! (18)

From the BNZ signboard:

. . .SOCIETY IS INFECTED BY THE MONO MANIA OF ACCOUNTING (19)
DO YOU MAKE A KILLING OR JUST A LIVING? (20)
MENSTRUATION IS MAINSTREAM (21)
A GOOD MANY THINGS GO AROUND IN THE DARK BESIDES SANTA CLAUS (22)
THERE ARE POSITIVE PEOPLE ABOUT BUT THEY AREN'T THE SAME AS US (23)
STRETCH YR DICTION / RENT A FICTION (24)
THE NEXT SENTENCE IS TRUE / THE LAST ONE WAS FALSE (25)
MAKE YOURSELF HONEY & THE FLIES WILL EAT YOU (26)
ADVERTEYES (27)
EMPTINESS (28)
THE DEEPEST LAUGHTER IS BEYOND A JOKE (29)
DETUMESCENCE OF IVORY TOYS (30)

Sources

(1) Derrida, from Rachel Kelly & Stephen Zepke; (2–3) Kelly & Zepke; (4) newspaper headline, from Kaiser & Barnett; (5) Claudia Bell; (6) Michele Leggott; (7) Constructor/list production; (8) Michele Leggott; (9) Wystan Curnow; (10) Freud, from Michael Harlow; (11) Billy Apple & Wystan Curnow; (12) Alan Brunton; (13) Susan Allpress; (14) Sue McKenzie; (15–16) Martin Poppelwell; (17–18) Monique Jansen; (19) Simone Weil, from Sally Rodwell; (20) Daniel Malone; (21) Tanya Meek; (22) attributed to Herbert Hoover, from Michael Harlow; (23) Clifford Owler, from Michele Leggott; (24) Kai Jensen; (25) James Littlewood; (26) Lynda Earle; (27) Susan Allpress; (28) Kaiser & Barnett; (29) Ted Jenner; (30) Tony Green.

—TED JENNER, AUCKLAND

Christopher Dewdney, *Concordat Proviso Ascendant* (Great Barrington, Massachusetts: *The Figures*, 1991)

A Natural History of Southwestern Ontario has provided Christopher Dewdney with the topic for a three-volume poem, the last book of which appears under the title of *Concordat Proviso Ascendant.* The entirety provides the occasion for an intelligently retentive mind to create a poetics of knowledge. Although it might not seem so, this is praise in itself, for most poets who attempt such a thing arrive only at a poetics of information.

Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night (1978) and *The Cenozoic Asylum* (1982) antecede the current work. At Dewdney's disposal is sufficient mental precision to ruminate with, into, through, and against incommensurate strata of knowledge:

> THIS IS OF TWO WORLDS—the one diurnal men know and
> that other world where lunar mottled eels stir like
> dreams in shallow water. Allowing both these mecha-
> nisms to continue operating, we slowly remove and replace
> their parts with corresponding and interlocking nothings.

In this passage from *Spring Trances*, two kinds of knowing—consciousness and braininess—make equal claim on attention; their unrelated coexistence perpetually annealed in language creates the matter Dewdney causes to be poetry, in this book and thereafter.

Concordat is an encomium of a sort. At once a song of praise and an extended description of the female body as though it were natural history and of natural history as though it were the female body, this last part of Dewdney's work attempts an identification of figure and landscape immediately identifiable as conventional but without the stigma.

> There is the miracle of your collarbones, avian &
> delicate as your shoulders
> their sharp dominion.

Passing from this "Litany of Attributes," *Concordat* also moves from the present to past geologic time, and as it does so, the reality of nature becomes interdisciplinary.

> SHE IS BEYOND YOU NOW. Her piscine features
> embryonic and dissipated with wisdom.
> Her nakedness possessed each time a seething
> harlequin of erectile sequins.

Reading in New York this autumn, Dewdney reminded us of his interest in the physiological basis of consciousness (construed and skewed in his book *The Immaculate Perception*, 1986), and *Concordat* further substantiates his belief that in the poetry that inheres in empirical data eloquently expressed. To ensure this point, the first and third volumes open with brief narratives of actual eye-witness accounts of tornadoes, exceptional events that leave us stupefied. Here Dewdney presents us with exempla without the moral ending, or, if you like, modern exempla precisely because deprived of moral endings or transcendent truths.

But as his books reveal, even physiology or prehistory beget mystic, antediluvian coincidence. That is to say, like the poet and essayist Geoffrey O'Brien and like the conceptual artist Robert Smithson, both weaned on the hallucinogenic culture to which the 1960s gave rise, Dewdney is "high" on a certain cultural mix, the very syllabics of which, thrown together, create a bouillabaisse of subjectively construed empirical phenomena:

> SHE IS LIQUID DARKNESS occult with desire.
> An abandoned airplane hangar,
> scattered curls of corrugated steel littering
> the floor punctuate with sun discs.

Coming upon these lines as the poem unfolds raises the possibility that with mystical ambiance let through the back door, the realm of natural science has presupposed the human sciences all along, and that speculative rather than explanatory processes fuel the *carmina burana* from the start. Dewdney's stupendous talent is such that we are ravished by the linguistic phenomenology even where unpersuaded by the spiritualist aspects of expanded consciousness. Meanwhile, in his mania for expression, Dewdney proves that language, intrinsically interpretive, is poetic no matter what.

Forrest Gander, *Eggplants & Lotus Root* (Providence, Rhode Island: Burning Deck, 1991.)

The title belies the content of this chapbook's cerebral sensuality. No macrobiotic orientalism will be found in its pages, even though its tripartite prose poems receive such section titles as "Tea Scripture," "Moon in the Afternoon," and "A Macula of Light." What there is, however, is a radical modernity by which the female body, dismembered by the eye's intense gaze, brings somatic and anatomical detail into exquisite union with language.

The tradition is, then, one of early modern objectivism as poststructuralism might construe it. Olfactory as well as visual observation, working

overtime, govern the production of phrases that may have been directed by seeing something actual which now exist in virtual space. Opening each tripartite work with a piece of writing called "Geometric Losses," this virtual space presents itself:

> *or her hair.* Its rain. Her face juts out from. Winter of rooms electricity, her hair lifts. The rug coarse as hog stubble. Musk her hair. Held down by the neck. Or in. At once recognizable by intimate: near-burning smell. White mole to the right of her coccyx, those hairs. Inside of her ears is sweating. A sense of duration spilt across the pillow. Vague and specific like. An analogy, undislodgable. Pubic hair under tongue. *Words spoken into*

Cognitive processes, analogous to the body presented in the mind through discontinuous sensory input, are dis-splayed here, no less experientially for being linguistic. In "Geometric Losses," as in "Violence's Narrative Continued" and "Meditative," composing each prose-poem in this fine uncompromising book, no shred of pedagogy may be detected, no ideological preening leaves its trace.

John Taggart, *Loop* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon), 1991

The poetical correctness of the concrete poem that features materiality with utmost literalness is so often the source of its own doom: a poem respected yet never read. In the objectivist orientation of John Taggart, however, admirable self-regulating systems and songs are one and the same, the song enacting the desire of the system to know itself even as the system informs the desire to cause the song.

Literariness is plentiful in the recurrence of the plain speech by which Taggart disperses vowels and consonants:

> From across the sea from across the glass
> gathered brought together are gathered
> as in a mantle as bees in the crystal
> gathered brought together by the word
> from across the sea cross glass to die.

As with the entire poem and book, this stanza from the poem "Nativity," for instance, renders spatialization tacitly yet with sufficient arbitrariness to

count. Gertrude Stein in remembrance, or Stein a remembered by Wallace Stevens's looking-glass, is rendered present yet reconceived in Taggart's own concrete linguistic field. The open, because recombinatory, syntax allows for the word to exist thanks to dispersal; thanks to dispersal words propagate sense: the paradox of ancient fertility rite post-structurally disseminated is a constant thematic.

Perhaps the form expresses Taggart's quandary of whether his is a poetics of densities or of gaps. Several of his meditative notes, included in the book as George Oppen might, that is to say, giving commensurate status to the speculative process and the creative product the process becomes, occasionally raise this issue. While not strictly speaking a contradiction, the opposition between densities and gaps suggests a situation in which Taggart feels torn between different modes of actualization. To put it in the musical terms he does use at one point: if not Xenakis, then what of Reich?

Loop contains many masterly poems. This is not surprising, since the principle of repetition provides a mechanism of guaranteed proficiency. But mere proficiency is a predictable formalism that Taggart assiduously avoids, thanks, precisely, to his thoughtful pursuit of different modes of actualization. Temporal strategies as different—and as non-trivial—as those embodied in "Chain Letter," "Eight Headnotes," "The Rothko Chapel Poem" and "Lab Notes" truly renew our contemporary literature. *Loop* is a book of consequence.

—MARJORIE WELISH

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN'S VIET FLAKES (1965)

In December 1990 Carolee Schneemann showed her film *Viet Flakes* at the Whitney Museum of American Art. It is a modest film, rather short, originally shot using an old 8 mm camera, makeshift lens, pieces of glass, and news photos, under the most primitive circumstances. There was no budget, no special effects, no actors to pay, no film crew, no technical assistants other than a few friends. There was a sound track later provided

by the composer James Tenney. *Viet Flakes* is a film shot out of necessity. It is a film that is theatrical, even though all the actors are the subjects already taken in news media photographs. Schneemann made the film literally on her studio floor—working with scissors, lights and pieces of glass, the way an expressionist painting might have been made. Given the year 1965, *Viet Flakes* was made before the war in southeast Asia had become what we know today as "the Vietnam War." The effect of the United States military in this area of the world had not as yet achieved popular currency or understanding at home. The anti-war marches and frequent demonstrations, so often identified with this era, were just beginning to occur. The focus, at the time, was on Civil Rights. It was a moment in recent history when attention to domestic issues, such as Civil Rights, were absorbed into the international spotlight. Soon the escalation of the war in southeast Asia would become an issue of preeminent concern. *Viet Flakes* was a personal response to this shifting political sensibility, this move toward another aesthetic language, another form of speaking about issues of content through art.

The pop irony in the title *Viet Flakes* suggests an absurd relationship in the clash between American popular culture and the devastation and horrors being produced in the jungles of southeast Asia. In that the subject matter of her film is based entirely on the optical inspection and scanning of media photographs describing various wartime atrocities, one may find the absurd connotation of the film's title paradoxical. It is paradoxical, as is Rosenquist's *F-111*, in that one feels the symbolic impact of the news media in the United States as one might adapt to Corn Flakes for breakfast. It is like an ideograph made of two opposing elements, an oxymoron, in which Corn Flakes and Vietnam can be synthesized by the media as "Viet Flakes"—ready to eat, ready to absorb, but never to reflect upon the language of the media or to agree on the complexity of the situation in which war is being waged. *Viet Flakes* is an exegesis on wartime reportage and the desire to understand its fundamental cause and effect relationship. Schneemann was able to retrieve photographs from the *Liberation* News Service before they appeared in American newspapers and magazines.[1] The gruesome subject matter of these images which revealed scenes of torture, executions, and the contorted faces and bodies of the wartime dead, were at the time unknown to the American public. The *effects* of the war—the human toll—was unknown. only statistics and numbers were reported as fact. More often than not these statistics were either misleading or inaccurate. Schneemann felt that the Vietnam War was a clandestine war being fought without the full knowledge of the American people. The explication of these news photographs, placing them within an expressive, even dramatic context, was an essential point of the film. Once she had

gathered over sixty photographs together, Schneemann placed them in a triple arc in front of her on the floor which she could easily see with her Bolex to scan the images in various integral connections. She would use repetition, inversions, and permutations of the selected images in order to construct a dramatic event, almost as if she were directing characters on stage. The dramatic intensity of *Viet Flakes* is considerable. It is one of the most startling features of this 11 minute film. The entire sequence of effects, however, was done with the camera, moving in and out of the photographs, deliberately blurring them, not allowing the optical gaze of the viewer to fully capture their effect or their content.

Schneemann's collaboration with composer James Tenney was a necessary and significant part of *Viet Flakes* in that the soundtrack aided and abetted the visual effects. For the film, Tenney used 3 second intervals of spliced sound from sources ranging from Vietnamese religious chants to Popular songs, both in Vietnamese and American genres, even adding choral works by Bach. This bricolage of structural effects in sound gave an eerie atmosphere to the images that is difficult to articulate. The formal linkage between the soundtrack by Tenney and Schneemann's readymade photos places the viewer always on the verge of recognition. The fact that recognition of the image or the sound bite is never completely resolved, but instead dissolved, is a perennial condition of the film's experience. The entire filming occurred one December afternoon in Schneemann's loft, but the preparations occurred over the duration of a month getting everything that was necessary, putting it in place, rearranging the schemata of photographs, rehearsing the movements of the pans, trying Various lens, magnifying glasses from dime stores along with found pieces of glass.

It was not until February 1966, during the Angry Arts Week, that *Viet Flakes* was shown at the Martinique Theatre in New York along with two other films that Schneemann had made under the general title of *Snows*. For this multi-media event, Tenney and Schneemann worked out a method for involving the audience by placing an electronic switching system under the seats of the viewers. By doing so, the viewers' movements would determine the quality and texture of the sound as it fed into the audio-system that accompanied the various films. It was a completely interactive film event with feedback based on the intensity of body movements that followed the viewers' perceptions.

What is impressive, however, is how well *Viet Flakes* holds up today as an independent film, a deconstruction, in fact, of the news media, especially of wartime reportage. One reason for this staying power, other than the topical relationship the film has to the recent situation in the Persian Gulf,

is its dramaturgical component. *Viet Flakes* is not merely a documentary based on a series of documentary fragments (Are not documents always fragmentary to such a context?) , but the manner in which Schneemann constructs a sense of the tragic dimensions of the war at a time when the true impact of the Vietnam War was scarcely understood. In her own way, using the medium of film as a plastic medium to make a meta-document of the war, Schneemann manages to give the viewer a sense of the dimension of these atrocities, to put the war in a human perspective, to go directly to the source of the tragedy in the way that the great Greek dramatists did. Schneeman's irony, mixed with tragedy, offers a vision of the absurd; hence, "Viet Flakes"— the synthesis of American pop and Southeast Asia.

January 22, 1991. The war in the Persian Gulf started a week ago. The primary tactic thus far has been "surgical bombing"—the exact placement of a missile, one that is capable of descending into an air shaft to do its damage. This would be in contrast to "saturation bombing" which is what the American forces used in Vietnam and Cambodia. In the earlier war, the bombs were not so precise. This war was more high tech, more accurate, more electronic. Remote control. The causes are studied and rehearsed but the effects are uncertain; that is, the real effects, the effects that wear a human face, the effects contained with human minds and bodies, the interactive effects, the global effects. No effects are certain. The tragedy is yet to unfold. Seeing *Viet Flakes* again today is a bold reminder that for every action there is a reaction. Schneemann seems to suggest that this is not only a physical law but a meta-physical concern as well. In wartime, the spirit suffers through neglect and denial. Wholeness is sacrificed for fragmentation, more documents, more pans and repetitions of another tragedy, the same tragedy, where only the resistance of the eye can secure itself for bodily action and response.

1 All facts about the making of the film were obtained from Xeroxed statements given to me by the artist or in various conversations since my initial viewing of the film in April 1989 at the Anthology Film Archives.

—ROBERT C. MORGAN

from *Viet Flakes;* photographer unknown

A winning, poignant book is *Sappho's Lyre: Archaic Lyric and Women Poets of Ancient Greece*, translated by Diane Raynor, with a foreword by W. R. Johnson (University of California Press, 1991). One is no longer condemned to the Loeb edition to try to eke out an understanding of the more sparse female lyricists (Praxilla, Corinna, Erinna). These translations are so good, and so beautifully arranged that one is almost satisfied even with the tragedy of the remains. (Let no one say grammarians and pedants don't have their purposes, though the elegant scholarly allegory of Johnson's introduction makes ringingly clear the ways in which lyric ideology as well as grim accidents prevented the entry into the canon of these poems, and thus eroded the possibility of their survival.) Raynor is a gifted translator; I read her Nossis and her Sappho with a particular pleasure. Raynor has gone to some kind of singing school—otherwise she would not have been able to produce the precision and melody of many of her poetic choices. For example, the instruction "And knowing my name is Nossis, go on!" or the arrangement of the Sappho fragments

> Come, divine lyre, speak to me,
> take voice!
> . . .
> . . .
> I say someone in another time will remember us.

The only possible rival for the translations of Archilochos are the renditions of Davenport. But he sometimes reaches hard and reconstructs some of the drama; Raynor lets the drama come quietly. For purity of line, elegance of word choice, and a fresh pleasure, Raynor's translations are strongly recommended.

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Harpsichord & Salt Fish, Lorine Niedecker's final book (completed barely half a year before her death) is in print now (Pig Press, 1991) in accurate and well-annotated form, thanks to the care and commitment of Jenny Penberthy, one of the deans of Niedecker scholarship. The book begins with "Thomas Jefferson" and ends with "Darwin" (I think the two figures taken together give rise to the title). These poems place Niedecker among admirers of rationalists, meliorists, and those whose investigatory proposals (political or scientific) are world-ranging in scope, though concerned initially with the elaboration of detail. Darwin's "conclusions" become, perforce, Niedecker's final words in poetry:

the universe
not built by brute force
but designed by laws
The details left

to the working of chance
'Let each man hope
and believe
what he can' (p. 46)

where the line break between "hope" and "and believe" bespeaks the extraordinary poise of benign implacability that Niedecker maintained. My favorites among these are the more personal considerations of her sources, her craft, her dreams. The poem "LZ" should be the subject of much meditation, as a recovery, for and about Zukofsky, of Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for death. . . ." The major "Subliminal" offers a dream view of her mother "tall, tormented/dark infested," and this view of herself, schooled by and in a vast universe:

Waded, watched, warbled
learned to write on slate
with chalk from an ancient sea. . . . (p. 31)

And about to disappear into it. For this poem also has a section in which Niedecker imagines her human smallness in conjunction with the vastness but also personableness of the universe and time. Given these themes and depths, it is a little triste that Pig Press's presentation is illustrated and wrapped/covered with artsy efforts that are not attuned to the contents (with the possible exception of one pen & ink fish), and moreover that the book sports unsubtle bright blue end papers. But altogether this is, thankfully, one more precious arrow shot towards the target of a newly edited Niedecker.

•

Diane Glancy, *Lone Dog's Winter Count* (West End Press, 1991) is mixed for me with the solemnities of the "prize-winning" (though both publisher and poet know I begrudge no prizes to anyone; it's just what they symbolize and control). And mixed also because of Glancy's tendency to framing and depicting: "I'm trying to find the words."

Just look at the family album. My white mother
her sisters their husbands our cousins. Then my
father my brother & I the stuffed skin of sparrow

hawks on our heads the *g'ig'ig'ig'ig'i* in our
throats. (p. 2)

But what has moved me from the start with Glancy is not what she's trying to find the words *for* (already existing pictures), but what she's trying to find the words OF. Glancy's principled desire to recombine words from Native American languages, with English, and slightly deformed versions of English (in spelling and visual text) creates intense linguistic struggles on the page and elaborates a rich polyvocality that is socially meaningful.

The gauze of wurdzah spins
huza huza
He conjugates our trail
The rags of his voice
a night lifted with a clunk. (p. 31)

That the Native American languages still exist, come forth, bubble up is made extremely precious, because extremely precarious, especially given the fact of repression via the cultural attack of schooling: see the poems "The First Reader Santee Training School, 1873" and the inventive dramas of the dialogue/serial poem "Death Cry for the Language." The main task of the book is angry elegy; another central poem is "Trying to Crow."

The QuiVerEE. ZEET! ZEET! The little clawed feet
of the turkeys DANZE. I MoUrn for Co-To-Te. The
warriors we lost. The land that sank with tHEM. (p. 51)

*

The poems and works in David Antin's *Selected Poems: 1963-1973* (Sun & Moon Press, 1991) are announced as precursors of his performance pieces and talk poems, as if the project of appreciation were already archival. One might as well consider the task as understanding what happens when a person, using the Zukofskyian goad of "thinking with the things as they exist," begins seriously to meditate: *things, thinking, exist,* not to speak of *with* and *the* and *as* and *they/them.* ("Meditation" is the most used title here, for individual poems, ranged in a series, and for one of the books collected.) Genres entertained: aphorism, pensée, syllogism, catechism, epistle, allegory, parody, fable, decoupage of often factual materials, dialogue spiritual or philosophic in design. ("don't you think it was the right place to begin? //well what would have been a better time?" p. 143). In short, a non-romantic imagination ("18th century" as postmodern?), yet one inflected with every psychological self-scrutiny and self-consciousness it is possible coolly to elaborate.

Antin here depends on an enormous mapping, Whitmanic but bleached (as if run through some kind of Shaker, "objectivist" or European plainness): catalogues, lists (28 kinds of black), insistent anaphora. But this is done paradoxically not to accumulate, but to dislodge and identify ("there is a piece of bread between us/ if we could only see it"), to separate and analyze "[bread] is a body/ containing light"); to set simple things in multiple relationships:

> bread is a body
> water is a body
> the earth is a body
> the sun is a body . . . . (p. 64)

The later poems are rare documents of self-conscious examination inside of thought, probing processes, means, tools, gestures of elaboration and denial ("so i had a feeling tonight that nothing i meant to say was over yet/ /that it was also too late to start//which led me to think i would start later . . . ." p. 144). The works in meditation are almost alarming as records or "scenarios" for what happens when one sits still, and watches void with one eye, language with the other, and the body with history.

Antin also produces a peculiarly mordant and restrained irony as in the poem out of the historical crises of the 1960s—"a list of the delusions of the insane what they are afraid of," which turns out to be no more and no less than many things that have happened: "that evil chemicals have been placed in the earth/. . ./that they hear people screaming/that they smell burnt flesh. . . ." (p. 39) The twentieth-century history of Europe comes up for scrutiny numerous times. As, from the brilliant, playful "stanzas,"

> All Germans are white men
> all civilized men are white
> all Germans are civilized (p. 192)

Antin gets a great range of emotional effects from his simplicity of means—cumulative effects, control of the pace of disclosure, white space and stanza shapes, a guerilla-like removal of the self from the place of identity and insistence. It is this control of sculptural shape, emotional pace, and continuance that probably offered much to his "talk pieces." But precursor or not, this book is still news on its own terms; it is absolutely worth consideration.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Marjorie Welish, *And the Windows Flew Open* (Providence: Burning Deck, 1991)

Marjorie Welish's *And the Windows Flew Open* resonates in a world of lyricism. It is work that explores the stylized, the ambiguous ways of language and the disruptions that accompany such a practice. Words mean, but one is never sure exactly what they mean, and if what they mean is intentional. Within the book a woman who might find her husband boring moves through an "advocacy of lyrical excess" (15), there is talk of "full scale illusionist realism" (22), and "what comes back from the printers is too flimsy/for mailing—a sunset—and we have to redo the announcements./Or perhaps he thought I meant "postcard-*like*" (59).

It is in this world that Welish presents a poetry that breaks away. The book begins with an urge to locate oneself geographically (poetically): "in the long run we must fix our compass,/and implore our compass" (13). And Welish negotiates this concern throughout the poem. Henry James, for example, is one obvious geographic point of reference in the book. There is a "carpet within the figure." Posturing, waiting, the female self in rooms filled only with doors and windows—these are the concerns of both James and Welish. As in James's novels, words in Welish's poems tend to "hang-fire," waiting the pause before the gun goes off. For what is important to both these writers about language are the layers of meaning that resonate beneath the unsaid, the ambiguity that accompanies specificity. In a world of language where "fashion dictates the idiom solicitous of us line by line/ while remaining unconvincing in each phase" (20) Welish instructs, she opens the door to language and the windows fly open:

> And on the fortieth day
> after I wrote the poem you call derivative
> is original if late, I opened the door
> and the windows flew open
> in a revolutionary manner, bare-breasted
> and I saw myself
> stepping onto a movie set of rain imitating rain,
> a central fiction. (71)

—JULIANA SPAHR

Translating

I've said it before: Poetry is that which is worth translating. The poem dies when it has no place to go.

The object of a translation into English is not a poem in English.

A translation creates a specific kind of distance ("willing suspension"): the reader never forgets that what is being read is a translation.

A translation that sounds like a poem in English is usually a bad translation.

A translation that strives for the accuracy of a bilingual dictionary is always a bad translation.

A translation must sound like a translation written in living English—and more, an English that takes advantage of certain possibilities that are not normally available to poems written in English.

The success of a translation is nearly always dependent on the smallest words: prepositions, articles. Anyone can translate nouns.

A foreign word with multiple meanings can—though few do it—be translated into several English words. One word can lead to a few, just as a few words can lead to one.

Effects that cannot be reproduced in the corresponding line can usually be picked up elsewhere, and should be. Which is why it is more difficult to translate a single poem than a book of poems by a single author. Which is why a translation shouldn't be, though it always is, judged on a line-by-line basis.

Few translators hear what they've written.

Pound intuitively corrected mistakes in the Fenollosa manuscript. For the rest of us, it is impossible to translate from a language one doesn't know. To translate through an "informant" is to paint by numbers: it's their design, you merely add some color.

Everything can be translated. That which is "untranslatable" hasn't yet found its translator.

The original is never better than the translation. The translation is worse than another translation, written or not yet written, of the same original.

Translation is not duplication. Every reading is a new reading: why should we expect a translation to be identical?

Metaphor: from the familiar to the strange. Translation: from the strange to the familiar. The failed metaphor is too strange; the failed translation too familiar.

Many of the best translators know the original language imperfectly. All of the worst translators are native speakers of it.

Translations are normally reviewed by members of the Department of the original's Language. The are proprietary, and cannot help but find all translations from their language—except those done by certain colleagues—to be travesties.

Translation theory, however beautiful, is useless for translating. There are the laws of thermodynamics, and there is cooking.

Most translators are capable of translating only a few writers in their lifetimes. The rest is rote.

A translation is based on the dissolution of the self. A bad translation is the insistent voice of the translator.

To translate is to learn how poetry is written. Nothing else is so successful a teacher, for it carries no baggage of self-expression.

Any poem should be translated as many times as possible, even by the same translator over the years. Only fundamentalists believe in a "definitive" translation.

A translation of classical Greek from 1900, say, is "dated" in a way that an English poem from 1900 is not, for we expect a translation to be written in a version of current speech, and refuse to make the mental readjustments as we would for a contemporaneous poem. With greater time, however—say, an Elizabethan translation from the classical Greek—such recalibration becomes inescapable: the translation, in our reading, becomes part of the age in which it was written.

Nearly everywhere, the great ages of poetry have been, not coincidentally, periods of intense translation. With no news from abroad, a culture ends up repeating the same things to itself. It needs the foreign not to imitate, but to transform

An anonymous occupation, yet people have died for it.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER [1988]

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

AMIRI BARAKA'S *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* is reviewed in this issue. WILL ALEXANDER is currently working on a trilogy of novels, of which the second is completed and entitled "Isolation, Neutrality, and Limbo." The trilogy is entitled "Sunrise in Armageddon." ARMAND SCHWERNER is completing Tablet XXVIII. MARJORIE WELISH'S *The Windows Flew Open* is reviewed in this issue. PAMELA WYE is an artist living in NYC. PIERRE JORIS has recently published *Turbulence* (St. Lazaire Press, Rhinebeck) and *The Irritation Ditch* (Parenthesis Writing Series, La Jolla). GUSTAF SOBIN'S first novel, *Venus Blue*, has just been published by Little, Brown; a second, *Dark Mirrors* (A Novel of Provence) will appear in July, published by Bloomsbury, London. DAVID HINTON'S *Selected Poems of Tu Fu* was recently published by New Directions. His *Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien* is forthcoming from Copper Canyon. CLAUDIA KEELAN has new work forthcoming in *Agni*, *River Styx*, *Volt*, and *Pequod*. R.D.SHIPP has published poetry in *Ploughshares*, *New York Quarterly*, *Northwest Review*, and *Mudfish*. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN'S translation of César Vallejo's *Trilce* will be published by Marsilio (NYC) fall, 1992. STAN FRIEDMAN has recently completed his first book, "Shooters & Cat's Eyes." His criticism has appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*. A selection of GERRIT LANSING'S poetry and prose appeared in *Notus* #9. PETER ANASTAS is the author of *Glooskap's Children: Encounters with the Penobscot Indians of Maine*. ELIOT WEINBERGER has four books coming out this year: *Outside Stories*, essays, from New Directions; a bilingual anthology of American poetry since 1950 from Ediciones del Equilibrista, Mexico City; and translations of Xavier Villarrutia's *Nostalgia for Death* (Copper Canyon) and Cecilia Vicuña's *Unraveling Words & The Weaving of Water* (Greywolf). NATHANIEL TARN'S *Seeing America First* was published by Coffee House Press, 1989. CHARLES BERNSTEIN'S newest book is *A Poetics* (Harvard University Press). MILTON KESSLER is completing a film, with his daughter, Paula Kessler, on Whitman's last Camden years. ALLEN S WEISS'S *Miroirs de l'infini: Le jardin à la franciase et la métaphysique* has just been published by Les Editions du Seuil, Paris. TED JENNER has recently published *Dedications*, poems and translations/imitations from Greek lyric fragments, and contributed to *Word for Word* and *Like They Are Now*, artwork/text exhibitions, Auckland, 1991. ROBERT C. MORGAN is a Contributing Editor to *Arts Magazine* and currently a Visiting Professor of Art History at Barnard College, Columbia University. RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS recently published *Drafts 3-14* with Potes & Poets Press.

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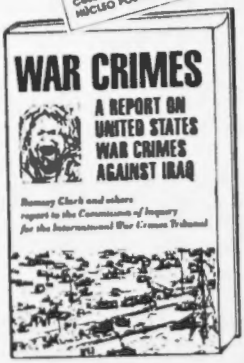

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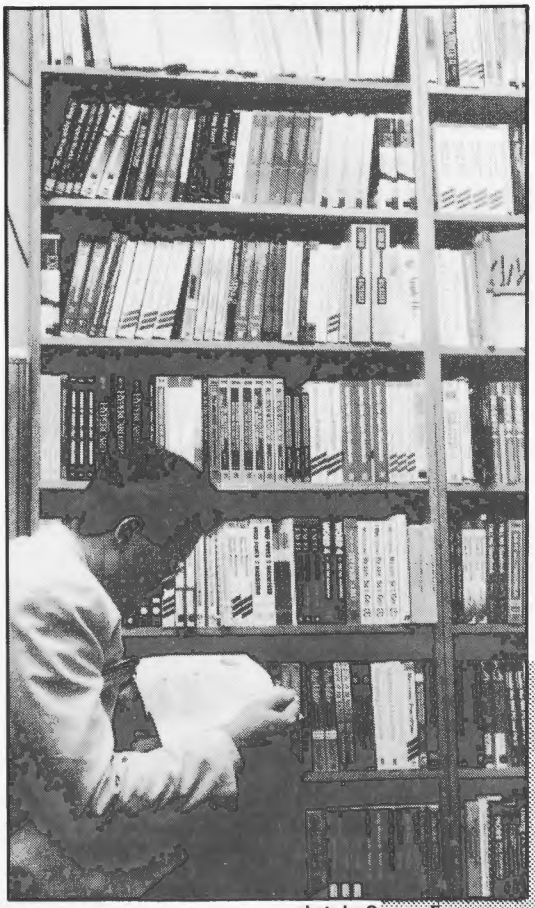

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Sulfur

FALL 1992

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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Contributing Editors	RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS MICHAEL PALMER ELIOT WEINBERGER PAMELA WYE
Correspondents	CHARLES BERNSTEIN JAMES CLIFFORD CLARK COOLIDGE MARJORIE PERLOFF JED RASULA JEROME ROTHENBERG MARJORIE WELISH
Managing Editor	CARYL ESHLEMAN
Editorial Assistant	PAMELA ACCETTA

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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WALT WHITMAN

POEM OF THE PROPOSITIONS OF NAKEDNESS

Respondez! Respondez!
Let every one answer! Let all who sleep be awaked! Let none evade—not you, any more than others!
Let that which stood in front go behind! and let that which was behind advance to the front and speak!
Let murderers, thieves, tyrants, bigots, unclean persons, offer new propositions!
Let the old propositions be postponed!
Let faces and theories be turned inside out! Let meanings be criminal as well as results! (Say! can results be criminal, and meanings not criminal?)
Let there be no suggestion besides the suggestion of drudgery!
Let none be pointed toward his destination! (Say! do you know your destination?)
Let trillions of men and women be mocked with bodies and mocked with souls!
Let the love that waits in them, wait! Let it die, or pass still-born to other spheres!
Let the sympathy that waits in every man, wait! or let it also pass, a dwarf, to other spheres!
Let contradictions prevail! Let one thing contradict another! and let one line of my poem contradict another!
Let the people sprawl with yearning aimless hands! Let their tongues be broken! Let their eyes be discouraged! Let none descend into their hearts with the fresh lusciousness of love!
Let the theory of America be management, caste, comparison! (Say! what other theory would you?)
Let the crust of hell be neared and trod on! Let the days be darker than the nights! Let slumber bring less slumber than waking-time brings!

Let the world never appear to him or her for whom it was made!
Let the heart of the young man exile itself from the heart of the old man! and let the heart of the old man be exiled from that of the young man!
Let the sun and moon go! Let scenery take the applause of the audience! Let there be apathy under the stars!
Let freedom prove no man's inalienable right! Everyone who can tyrannize, let him tyrannize to his satisfaction!
Let none but infidels be countenanced!
Let the eminence of meanness, treachery, sarcasm, hate, greed, indecency, impotence, lust, be taken for granted above all! Let poems, judges, governments, households, religions, philosophers, take such for granted above all!
Let the worst men beget children out of the worst women!
Let priests still play at immortality!
Let death be inaugurated!
Let nothing remain upon earth except teachers, artists, moralists, lawyers, and learned and polite persons!
Let him who is without my poems be assassinated!
Let the cow, the horse, the camel, the garden-bee—Let the mud-fish, the lobsters, the mussel, eel, the sting-ray and the grunting pig-fish—Let these, and the like of these, be put on a perfect equality with man and woman!
Let churches accommodate serpents, vermin, and the corpses of those who have died of the most filthy of diseases!
Let marriage slip down among fools, and be for none but fools!
Let men among themselves talk obscenely of women! and let women among themselves talk obscenely of men!
Let every man doubt every woman! and let every woman trick every man!
Let us all, without missing one, be exposed in public, naked, monthly, at the peril of our lives! Let our bodies be freely handled and examined by whoever chooses!
Let nothing but love-songs, pictures, statues, elegant works, be permitted to exist upon the earth!
Let the earth desert God, nor let there ever henceforth be mentioned the name of God!
Let there be no God!

Let there be money, business, railroads, imports, exports, custom, authority, precedents, pallor, dyspepsia, smut, ignorance, unbelief!

Let judges and criminals be transposed! Let the prison-keepers be put in prison! Let those that were prisoners take the keys! (Say! why might they not just as well be transposed?)

Let the slaves be masters! Let the masters become slaves!

Let the reformers descend from the stands where they are forever bawling! Let an idiot or insane person appear on each of the stands!

Let the Asiatic, the African, the European, the American and the Australian, go armed against the murderous stealthiness of each other! Let them sleep armed! Let none believe in good-will!

Let there be no living wisdom! Let such be scorned and derided off from the earth!

Let a floating cloud in the sky—Let a wave of the sea—Let one glimpse of your eye-sight upon the landscape or grass—Let growing mint, spinach, onions, tomatoes—Let these be exhibited as shows at a great price for admission!

Let the men of These States stand aside for a few smouchers! Let the few seize on what they choose! Let the rest gawk, giggle, starve, obey!

Let shadows be furnished with genitals! Let substances be deprived of their genitals!

Let there be immense cities—but through any of them, not a single poet, saviour, knower, lover!

Let the infidels of These States laugh all faith away! If one man be found who has faith, let the rest set upon him! Let them affright faith! Let them destroy the power of breeding faith!

Let the she-harlots and the he-harlots be prudent! Let them dance on, while seeming lasts! (O seeming! seeming! seeming!)

Let the preachers recite creeds! Let the preachers of creeds never dare to go meditate upon the hills, alone, by day or night! (If one ever once dare, he is lost!)

Let insanity have charge of sanity!

Let books take the place of trees, animals, rivers, clouds!

Let the portraits of heroes supersede heroes!

Let the manhood of man never take steps after itself! Let it take steps after eunuchs, and after consumptive and genteel persons!

Let the white person tread the black person under his heel! (Say! which is trodden under heel, after all?)

Let the reflections of the things of the world be studied in mirrors! Let the things themselves continue unstudied!

Let a man seek pleasure everywhere except in himself! Let a woman seek happiness everywhere except in herself! (Say! what real happiness have you had one single time through your whole life?)

Let the limited years of life do nothing for the limitless years of death! (Say! what do you suppose death will do, then?)

[1856]

MILTON KESSLER
A NOTE ON WHITMAN

June, 1992: Reading *Poem of the Propositions of Nakedness,* by Walt Whitman, poem 30 in *Leaves of Grass,* 1856 edition, the poem later changed and named *Respondez*. First edition seen at Clark Library, UCLA.

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The 1856 edition was parlor-sized with root-rich botanical lettering on 8" x 11½" cover. For the 1856, WW wanted extreme contraction of all elements to pocket book size, 3½" x 6", the lines and title break and fall as portable, democratic scale requires. (Camden Journal, Nov. 11, 1889): "I stick to my liking. I had it in my head in my earliest years—that to put a book in your pocket and off to the seashore or forest—that is the ideal pleasure." The 1856 had Emerson's language on spine and in appendix, Emerson's greeting to the 1855; the edition has a touch of New England Bible in scale as well. WW handled everything, nothing to be left alone as is. He remade the works, as God, daily-and-self-praised for daily.

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"And God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.' Gen. 1:3. To whosoever the word *vayehi* (and there was) is applied, that thing is in this world and the world to come. / Rabbi Isaac said: 'At the Creation, God irradiated the world from end to end with light, but then it was withdrawn so as to deprive the sinners of the world of its enjoyment and it is stored away. . . .'" (Zohar).

:

Here is the Genesis reversal, the Situs Inversus, the biology of contraction into inversion, the parody of creation. *Poem of the Propositions of Nakedness* carries the commands of a creator defending the Word's power from the curdling, the souring of the unworthy. WW was about 34 when he made *Nakedness*. The work was made prior to the Depression of 1854, prior to the hopeless election of 1856 (though published in its year), prior to Slavery War, Reconstruction, *Democratic Vistas*. It is a prophetic signal, an improvisational spasm of mocking street cries, an enraged nightmare torture garden of unrequited or depersonalized love, "RESPONDEZ!" WW on *Nakedness,* "a cry in a dream I heard, with ironical taunting. . . .we may as well say it as think it." (Blue Book in Thomas.) The curdling of the

self-mocked democracy, the degradation of work and occupation, the approach of machine age, the failure into war, the failure of war, he prophesized it, less than thirty years after the death of Jefferson and almost a century before futurist-fascism. There are no sleepers walking hand in hand here. There is no rest. The work makes me think of *Wozzeck,* and it suggests we read *Leaves of Grass* as 40-year *Exodus.*

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Of the 166 tollings of the word "let" in *Leaves of Grass,* 90 are in *Poem on the Propositions* (Pro/positions) *of Nakedness,* 90 spasms to form the shape of the wrestling. Of the 22 usings of the word "respond" in all forms in L.o.G., the relation to mating is overwhelmingly omnipresent. *Nakedness* cries out its pulsing possessiveness. (Cradle) "I heard my mate responding to me," (Vigil) "responding kisses." The original title (1856) signaled the humiliating, blocked erotic jag and jazz that pistons the poem.

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Almost 40 years later (Camden Journal, Aug. 8th, 1889): "I (Traubel) spoke of Camden as 'extending rapidly and becoming a big town,' to which he (WW) quietly said, 'Yes—an ever larger and larger congregation of maggots, human maggots. . . . It seems to me there never was a time in the history of the world when the underflowing currents of life—the beating pulse of social idealism, was so low, so vile, so dirty, so mean. Never, never! Certainly in our social life all is villainy and dollars and cents—it is rotten to the core.'"

WILL ALEXANDER

LOS ANGELES: THE EXPLOSIVE CIMMERIAN FISH

> The American hour. Violence, excess, waste, mercantilism, bluff, gregariousness stupidity, vulgarity, disorder.
>
> —Aimé Césaire,
> *Discourse On Colonialism*

The planetary air now burns with transition, the Russian Bear is missing, the American Eagle, faulty, coughing up blood, after each of its foreign invasions. I'm speaking here of a tide washing the Western mental ethos bit by bit into an unremitting void, and the tide is dark, tropical, a-linear, African.

Because we exist in an era of intensive time acceleration, decades have been compressed into years, and years into months, and months into days. One can witness in present humanity a force analogous to geological surgeries taking place without let up. Not over 20 days after the Los Angeles ozone was blackened, the energy infuses Bangkok, then the resignations of Daryl Gates, and prime Minister Suchinda transpire, symbolically and concretely representing the end of the corrupted plesiosaur's advantage. To paraphrase Césaire, leaders can no longer voluptuously wallow in "cliches," self-consumed in dispensable rhetorics. There is no time left for camouflage, for testimonials beclouded in deception. No, there is an inevitability at hand, a nervous taking of stock, as the "Southern" cone seeks to shake itself free of the "Northern" cone's monological reign over the dialectics of terrestrial existence. Shaking free of its deadly cuisines, its wholesale marketing of innocent blood for monetary gain and prestige.

Los Angeles, an explosive Cimmerian fish, has engendered insurgent anomalous fumes, as though spawned from fires in darkened Devonian waters. Fumes, more akin to lightning with its tense peripheral spillage, rising and ironically lighting those magnetic Goyaesque perils, those frontiers of stored up interior wrath, where destiny is focused by a seemingly mercurial vengeance, exploding the system of Imperial nerve

vents. And these nerve vents have always mechanically palpitated at the whim of a racist, plutonic aristocracy.

And the authorities of the land now clearly seen in the light of a ruthless psychic impoverishment, paralyzed in the agonising throes of statistical explanation and panic.

Conversely, each of the dispossessed suddenly startled by the spontaneous current of articulate aphasia, have responded like the rapid heartbeat of an eagle silently salivating before tearing the flesh from its prey, the dispossessed suddenly slashing through the barbarian stereotypes so rampantly re-inforced by the media as a given. The oppressed, the outraged, without warning, standing like magical lightning bolts, like boiling arithmetical titans, their uncanny stumbling quickly focused and sinister, guided by the force of exponential resurrection.

This latter defiance seems at the root of the Los Angeles insurrection. I viewed the post trial interview with Laurence Powell in a Bible shop at Manchester and Vermont hours before it burned into cinders. And an older Black gentleman, scriptures in hand, came up to me as I watched the officers' smug jubilation, and emotionally called for a balancing act by blood. I then stepped from the store into the street and immediately noticed that the people were galvanic with telepathy. And they understood their resurrection as coming from the passionate concentration of flame.

The King decision, like a reddish flair brutishly thrust in a wound, brought the colonial atmosphere to a pitch, and caused us as Blacks to vent a necessitous gangrene, bringing us in contact with the temperature of Indian animosity when forced to ingest the initial volleys of European acquisition and greed. This American enclave, initially garnered, remains acquitted by the surgical implementation of homicide, in the main reserved for peoples of colour, who collectively wake every dawn to intolerable rays of imposed barbarity and fatigue, with insults constantly branded upon grafts of our sub-conscious skin.

Having spent my earlier and later youth in the zones of both Los Angeles rebellions, I've come to understand the basic currency of anguish passed back and forth between the drowned and the drowned, whose reality fails to register upon the moguls of the daily "Wall Street" "Exchange Indexes." And to what Dan Quayle refers to as the "average American," we Blacks are no more than annoying poltergeists. We remain to the majority, occult, raging, maniacal, not to be trusted, looked upon as a criminal detour in genetic evolvement. So, to effect methodic insertion into this less and less viable mainstream, as persons of colour, we must cover our core with a hideous salt so as to mime a Euro-American competence, in keeping with a behavioral duplicity and numbing, and by straining towards such a position, we are verbally forced to eschew the surreptitious evil which institutionally lurks in the cells of the body politic.

In contrast, I think of the "100,000,000" slaves murdered amidst the slime of the "Middle Passage," animated by "moans," and "fever," and "dying." Then there exists the sulfurous galaxy of continuing Indian murder and displacement, and here you have a national ambiance shaped at its core by insidious disharmony and greed. It is like an ocean of scars washing onto a shore of surcease and psycho-physical incarceration.

America, an incessant nitro-glycerine story, where the sun has been historically stored to energize the crops of the ambassadorial slavers, initially grown and watered by the blood of free labour. But during the revolt, a Rubicon has been crossed, and we have witnessed the telepathic artistry of revenge, the molecules of rebellion, which, because of optimum social deterioration, have exploded into a metamorphosis of nightmares, where wicker stick thrones have blown up and vanished.

The daily paper registers decline, as though witnessing the throes of the Roman population watching the year tragically darken, and turn into the continuing constriction of A.D. 455. All attempts at revival are no more than the impregnation and birth by a mother whose belly has been asphyxiated by stone. We Blacks are the barbarians sweeping into Rome from Asia and Gaul. Because of our insidious numbers we are inflicting genetic punishment upon the majority population. And here I speak not from emotion, but from a sense of inevitability. The masses, before another century closes will be composed of Egyptian yellow-brown. The key here is that the current majority cannot finance or murder its way out of the circumstances of a shrinking genetic base. As I see it, a quite palpable karmic backlash.

So I ask, where is the Belgian Congo, or German East Africa, or the Italian domination of Libya? Vanished, mesmerized by their continuing invalidation and disappearance. And so we turn to Herr Hitler with his thousand year boast, and Mussolini, and the anti-semitic Stalin, astrally shaking in their grave boots, assaulted by the billion hallucinations of organic infinity. In keeping with these triune annihilations, there has been a contagious erosion of each Imperial attempt at colonial hegemony, the most accessible examples being the ferocious Algerian independence, and the double cyanide of Viet-Nam to both the Americans and the French.

As for me, I've returned to the fevers of Moroccan trance intensity, to the aleatoric meters of the distant shaman's bell, calling me like a bird to the supreme longevity of the bluish outer stars shining in super-luminal immensity, "where communication is established with the higher states of being." A communication so essential to my genetic lineage in the darker southern climes, where the rituals burn, where morality is electric. More simply put, I am seeking return to this original psychic reflex, with its mandibles charged by the alchemy of poetic smoke and catharsis.

Such communion is an energy, which, by its very motion, desecrates the hobbled western legal codes, which have always deformed the rights of the collective darker races, which have tragically acquitted those who have bludgeoned in the name of racial subjugation, which have raised to levels of honor, murderers, oily capitalizers, those who have horrifically infected the general health of the darker peoples with thumbnail germs scattered across the pages of their fetid legal amalgams. A legacy of "cruelty," "mendacity," and "baseness." A legacy which has "no qualms about corpses."

Therefore, I align myself with the energies inherent in the wild specificity of Brazilian lianas, with the natural ambulations of tarantulas and Caimans, with the nomos of carnivorous Amazonian greenery, with its fire-ants stored in "Cecropia" trees, with its restless Jaguars and lizards, with its monstrous "Acrosoma" spiders. Here I am gliding down jagged rapids of sound, clothed with "decorative" "peperomia" leaves seismically watching the sub-conscious weathers of my brethren, as a former slave society, striking back at degradation, with the anger and force of a partially-mutilated piranha.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
HARDBALL

I see the raped and beaten black body
I say I see the raped and beaten black body
I say I a white man see the raped and beaten black body,
for the next 39 lines you will hear Rodney beaten,
for they swingled him, they
buttfucked his eyes, they crosslabored him,
they kicked mocked and backed him, backed
him good, they sought to south him, to speedball
him north, then they toed his cream, they stepped
balled him, they whitemen outvoted his groin,
then they went for his teeth, he tried to scream they mouthstick
fucked him, they kickass arabed him—did they Baghdad him?
Did they 170,000 Iraqi children him?

Did they sewage water system him?

Did they Kurd & carpet bomb his retreat?

And in case you think I am mixing oil with macadam,
they beat Rodney King as if he were wood
or cockroach, less rock than cock,
they beat him because he was black nearly dead man,
cause he was nigger,
now all you white students repeat with me
you who never will you who have no moral will did
they beat him as your father might have beat your mother?
Because women and blacks are the beatabilities,

kill this black white woman because heshe is,

kill this living black white pink and blue trunk,

kill this human trunk that bulges and weeps.
Beat what I am. Beat what you are.
Beat and beat, as if no masturbation were strong enough,
to rip out the white, to push it up, calcite, huge
  chalk tunnels of your come in you,
to so dispossess us of the human that we must regard
  our birth channel
forever in challenge with us? Aie, we are, in birth,
and we are beating our birth, we are, in birth,
and we are whipping ourselves, in birth,
beat Rodney beat the earth
and know now beat the earth is no longer
  dance step or game title
but swerve to piles in the watchers' eyes
while the dead pile up under,
    the dead, the beavers and
  all those fleas we never wanted to name.

[from *Under World Arrest*]

JED RASULA

PACIFIC RIM SHOTS: SPACE AND RACE IN LOS ANGELES

I lived in Los Angeles from 1976 to 1990. In early May many familiar sites were turned to rubble in a conflagration that seemed to do little more than tickle the media's fancy. I caught some glimpses on the tube: a scorched liquor store a few doors down from my favorite Thai restaurant, to which I was introduced at a dinner with Maxine Hong Kingston in 1977; and a torched mini-mall next to my daughter's elementary school (mini-malls were the urban chiggers that symptomatically attached themselves to every vacant street corner in the metropolitan area during the 1980s). Now that I no longer live there, it seemed for the first time a bit estranging to see it on T.V. Living in Southern California was always like living inside a screen or monitor anyway, cars everywhere like pixels. It deranges your sense of scale, but Los Angeles is a city in which the estrangement is necessary to the addiction; to live there is, in part, to dwell inside a catastrophe, and to feed off of an enchanting cumulus of dread.

L. A. multiculturalism has become a media commonplace since the advent of "the Pacific Rim." But the polyethnic fibers of the city go all the way back. It was always hard for outsiders to get the sense, so easily sustained for me living in Echo Park,[1] of a potent multicultural matrix as the sustaining prospect of any foreseeable and agreeable future. That seemed to me the only reason to live there, to perch on the rim of that portent, to feel something futuristic that wasn't all plastic and fuel, but was stubbornly, if regressively, human. It scarcely seems, given its name, that the city of angels could have a human dimension: the problem is to recognize it in its decidedly incalculable manifestations. The most fleeting of all human dimensions in L. A. turns out to be its history, characteristically endowed with folkloric status by Hollywood versions which brew up facts into the charismatic aurora borealis of celluloid. A potent chronicle, decade by decade since the 1940s, might consist of *Double Indemnity, Kiss Me Deadly, Point Blank, Chinatown, Blade Runner,* and for the infant '90s possibly Altman's recent *The Player.* It's a singular tribute to hail as the best book yet written on Los Angeles a portrait that makes only fleeting references to Hollywood and none at all to Disneyland, Mike Davis's vibrant sculptoramic history, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los*

Angeles (Vintage paperback, Verso Cloth), a book that inspires all the old cliches from the era of pulp literacy (packs a punch. . .a real page-turner, etc.). We're living through a revisionist period of "people's history," but Davis is one of the few who knows that the big shots are people too (they're just people who have the means to get their stories told first, loudest, boldest and like Charles Foster Kane, never shrink even under the uncompromising glare of "revelations").

Kevin Starr, the booster historian, has called Los Angeles "the Great Gatsby of American cities" without perhaps realizing the implications. Gatsby, after all, despite all his riches, lives beyond the ecology of his emotional means, and dies at the side of his pool, shot point blank. Gatsby's credulous nature is also pertinent to L. A. sensibility: when Nick protests that you can't turn back the clock Gatsby replies, with no trace of irony, "Why of course you can!" Gatsby hails from Midwestern stock of the kind that flocked to Southern California in the first two decades of the 20th century, in pursuit of a "futuropolis" for the master race. City of Quartz is especially valuable for its documentation of racism as a controlling theme throughout the region's history. The allure of Southland Shangri La has extended to every ethnic group on earth, but only whites came with the arrogance to assume it as a destiny, an unparalleled historical opportunity: in a telling phrase of Irving Gill in 1916 "it is the newest white page turn for registration"[2]—registration, presumably, in the grand genetic hotel, where the isolate desert locale was supposed to be an ideal incubator for Aryan regeneration. In other words, Fantasyland descended on Southern California before Mickey Mouse was even a gleam in Disney's eye. The openly racist priorities of such organizations as the Anti-African Housing Association in the 1920s have been perpetuated under the more benign guise of neighborhood "protective associations." In Los Angeles, where "community" may signify nothing more than the common bond of bigotry, property values are a species of demonology. A legacy of the high cost of white insularity is a combination of arrogance and paranoia. If paranoia manifests itself in the trappings of bunker mentality that festoon windows and doors, the arrogance is most apparent in matters of style (and style, as Davis points out, is itself a form of "street violence" [315]).

I recall a vivid portent of L. A. styles to come at two concerts I attended the same week in 1978, on opposite sides of Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood: the skinhead and punk throng turned out for The Clash, and the *nouveau cool* at a Talking Heads gig, who at that point had not yet been anointed yuppies. Los Angeles and postmodernism converged in the 1980s as the newfound multiculturalism of the Pacific Rim was celebrated in the Olympiad and in Peter Sellars' gala Festival of the Arts, blatantly packaged to pluralize the tastes of young stylemongers. "L. A. style" entered the postmodern equation as a kind of mental spritzer. The emergent sensibility

had a lot going for it by leaving even more behind, as lucrative deals were struck, injecting the arts directly into the fundstream of the metropole. "At its worst," Davis notes, "'corporate multiculturalism' is an attitude that patronizes imported diversity while ignoring its own backyard." (81) Black Angelenos were crudely informed that they weren't being left out of the festival, but were represented by genuine Africans. The sleek appeal of arts polyethnicity was achieved at the expense of a ravaged inner city, in "a conjuncture of arts bonanza and scorched earth." (80) The revitalization of downtown L. A., along with renovation of Melrose Avenue as a four mile neon corridor, and the gentrification of pocket communities throughout the basin, represent utopianism as the blight of sensibility. The legacy of (sub)urban sprawl, abetted by miraculous overnight style centers, instituted racism as an ethical prophylactic, so white happy campers never need to form or articulate opinions that might get them in trouble.

As the glass and marble towers retraced a series of new skylines during the 1980s, the surrounding streets struck a gusher of indigents. The equation was shockingly obvious: the cost of aesthetic style is human degradation. That sounds simplistic, but L. A.'s simplicities turn out to have supervened over the more layered historical complexities that govern the rest of the country. We need to imagine the $35.2 million Getty Pontormo as one end of the umbilicus that leads to a shopping cart on Skid Row. The number of street people in L. A. is approximately that of the entire population of Tucson or Nashville, yet according to Davis the only public restroom on Skid Row has been removed as a "policy decision." (233) Public water facilities are unavailable, and anyway recent ordinances prohibit public washing above the elbows. Water is strategically administered to the homeless by way of sprinkler systems designed to activate erratically and thus deter them from sleeping in the parks. Sleeping outdoors isn't forbidden, but erecting shelters (i.e. "cardboard condos") is against the law, and despite the myth of balmy California people do freeze to death in the winter. Pricey cities like Beverly Hills and San Marino close their public parks on weekends, not only to exclude the homeless, but the working class ethnic rabble. Other municipalities have instituted user fees, not openly as a tactic of class stratification, but ostensibly to offset declining budgets (in 1987, for instance, the city allocated only $30,000 for playground recreation facilities citywide). The municipal justification is invariably property value, which in L. A. has traditionally been a function of speculative monopolies. During my tenure in L. A. there were years when the equity in my house exceeded my annual earning—making me a beneficiary of a windfall I never expected, in a housing market fueled by frenzied investors hellbent on generating such private windfalls at any social cost.

The greater Los Angeles area accommodates numerous instances of incommensurable values and means, side by side. The apparent uniformity

that greets the tourist from the freeway overpasses is dispelled on the surface streets (if you run your odometer up, that is). The conventional view is that the staggering rollcall of independent cities and hamlets is a result of proliferating growth that has simply merged into the density of L. A. Mike Davis paints another picture, in which the suburban sprawl is invariably the result of white flight from the legions of demonized others. The suburbs, once settled, become seedbeds for slow (or no) growth initiatives, with the result that inner city zones are pressured to absorb the sort of unplanned ad hoc growth (in tenement apartments, mini-malls, etc.) that quiet residential neighborhoods shun. Slow growth is an ecological, financial, and human necessity in megalopolis, but it's important to recognize that in L. A. it also amounts to "a reassertion of social privilege." (213) Those who inhabit their tract shangrilas don't want to be overcrowded, but neither are they willing to suffer the taxation necessary to accommodate, and educate, a burgeoning population of immigrants and the traditional resident underclass. The pressures of conflicting claims are proving more than the metropolis can bear, as L. A. settles into its dual role as "imperium and colony" (105) in a Pacific Rim partnership, with Tokyo leading the way. It's no surprise, then, to find L. A. ablaze in the summer of '92. After all, what does it say about a polis in which community service is neither an inherited obligation nor a self-evident responsibility, but a form of punishment for white collar criminals?

In light of all this, I think Davis is justified in referring to an "urban cold war" (232) of the haves versus the have nots, particularly the "recreational apartheid" on which affluent communities rely. (308) It's a contest resulting conspicuously in a "juvenation of poverty," (306) in which social and material dispossession is directly proportionate to the age and race of the victims. The school system, for instance, has buckled under white flight following mandated integration in the 1970s. Spending per capita has plummeted, leaving the nation's largest school district one of the most impoverished. The dropout rate is as high as 40 percent, as lucrative entrepreneurial careers dealing crack beckon outside the gates. When crack flooded the streets in the mid-1980s the cash surplus in the region's Federal Reserve system was $3.8 billion, or a 2,300 percent increase of residual funds. (312) Chalk marks on a blackboard just don't add up anymore.

Davis provides an invaluable sociology of gangs in south central L. A. After the demise of the Black Panthers, gangs began appearing in schools in the early 1970s as a less focused, more parochial variant of ethnic pride. For two decades now evidence has overwhelmingly indicated a corollary between gang membership and the lack of jobs. Davis goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the colonization of labor by offshore capital has created a balloon of wealth around the Southland, leaving Watts a decapitalized

vacuum. From 1972 to 1982 unemployment in the black community rose 50 percent, and purchasing power fell by a third. (305) The numerous growth centers of Southern California's boom economy have, astoundingly, less than one percent black population. In Los Angeles since 1974 two-thirds of all black male youths have been arrested in what amounts to a racist program of harassment, and the corresponding criminalization of an entire community. The language of public alarm increasingly veers toward exterminist rhetoric.

Given its domination by the automobile, it's not surprising that the L. A. formula for lawlessness—whether applied by race or by class— is to be on the streets. The LAPD's favored maintenance procedure is the street sweep (which, as Davis points out, can result in an arrest ratio in which charges are never filed against 90 percent of those taken into custody). Curfews, roadblocks, checkpoints, and pass law requirements have been repeatedly introduced into ethnic communities, where the implicit formula is that colored adolescents are juvenile criminals justifying militarized intervention and surveillance (white communities never warrant such measures, because white adolescents are merely "delinquents" [295]). Recent events in the wake of the Rodney King verdict have made it clear, as it was in 1965, that we would do well to consider the power of vocabulary to introduce or else obscure crucial distinctions. A "riot" as reported to white America on T.V. may be felt by participants as something of a rebellion. On the other hand, the infamous Jarvis amendment, Prop 13, was routinely touted as a tax rebellion. And it was indeed a rebellious demand for an equalization of already exceptional privileges among property owners. But whenever the unpropertied masses take to the streets the nomenclature turns to riot, and the participants are miscreants, not citizens.

The May conflagration, for anyone really tuned in to the city rather than the image, was a reminder that Los Angeles is an occupied zone the merits comparison with Belfast, if not yet Beirut. The most conspicuous feature of this, like any cold war, is military "preparedness." Since its innovative adoption of radio in patrol cars in the 1920s, the LAPD has been at the forefront of technosurveillance. Rooftops throughout the city are painted with huge numbers, converting urban space into a virtual police grid. Police 'copters are omnipresent, and I imagine it must be spooky for Vietnam vets to be periodically visited by hovercraft roar—that audible trace of the "Jehovan scrutiny of the LAPD's space program." (253) The LAPD won approval by the Police Commission in 1988 to use "dum-dum" bullets, hollow-point ammunition banned in warfare by the Geneva Convention. (290) Davis usefully chronicles a separation of policing duties into public and private sectors. While the LAPD has increasingly specialized in assault teams and other paramilitary operations, the more humdrum

aspects of policework have been privatized in the rapid growth industry of "guarded communities" servicing fortress mentality. In a bizarre but related decorative twist, lawns in L. A. are dotted with two-foot signs warning of "armed response" where formerly they were graced by those icons of gentility, blackface grooms. The demeanor of conspicuous consumption has gone from open celebration of privilege to menacing defense of luxury life-styles. What's unique about L. A. is that even the pillbox fleatraps are "protected" by iron bars over every aperture to the outer world. In a highly ironic turnabout, it's the class of the dispossessed, those with criminal records and a trail of social misalignments, lining up to fill the low wage roles of private defenders.

Desperate as this sounds, it's only the human side of a catastrophe in waiting that has even more scintillating perils to offer. These are the infrastructural components of the debacle: The Los Angeles basin is the most polluted region in the industrialized first world, and, failing to comply with the 1970 Clean Air Act, the city faces withdrawal of Federal subsidies on a staggering scale. Water supply is imperiled by years of drought; but rains are disastrous when they come, because it's a desert climate not geologically fit to sustain the anti-regional styles of building and planting prevalent there. Furthermore, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers has noted that the existing storm drains can't tolerate the run-off generated by all the new road surfaces and rooftops that are the mark of L. A.'s boom economy. Then there's the matter of sewage: in 1987 the Hyperion Treatment Plant, that "Grand Coulee of sewage plants" (198), broke down, and Angelenos had to face the awkward fact that processing capacity of existing facilities was exhausted and there weren't even any plans to expand the system. L. A. will be floating in shit for the estimated thirty years and up to $40 billion required to get a clean flush again. Natural disasters like earthquakes and the annually devastating brush fires seem relatively containable by comparison: but there's a hitch there too, because these menaces to life and property can't be met without emergency vehicle access. And as everybody knows, Los Angeles is close to total gridlock; in fact, simply to sustain the current level of congestion through the end of the decade it's estimated to cost $110 billion—otherwise the average freeway speeds will be 15 m.p.h. (Actually they already are 15 m.p.h. much of the day; late night acceleration, presumably, is factored in to produce higher averages; looked at another way, though, the anticipated 15 m.p.h. average for 1999 means that daytime velocities may be closer to about 3 m.p.h.!) All of this comes to a monumental municipal price tag, and I haven't even mentioned solid waste disposal costs, or the nearly half-billion annual operating budget for the LAPD. Or the cost of schools and other public services, all of which are at the mercy of a legacy of taxpayer revolt.

L. A.'s problems of self-management may seem comparable to that of any other big city; the difference is that Los Angeles is a city of the psyche.

It's a commonplace that Tinseltown is a figure of our collective imaginations. But we're only slowly coming round to seeing that the mind L. A. impinges on is the unconscious, the libidinal space of nightmare monstrosity and enigma. Los Angeles, Cain observed in *Mildred Pierce*, "has forgotten more than all other civilizations ever knew." This has been obscured by the region's manifest openness to the gaze. Spread out as far as the eye can see to every horizon, L. A. is a city caught up in the logic of escape, predicated by its horizontality. The lateral oscillations of populations derives psychic coordinates from a mythos of the old west: if you don't get along with your neighbors, seek out new territory to get that bad taste of contact out of your mind. The contact or confrontation purged by relocation has its own migration to pursue. So when things *go down*, and the really bad shit hits the proverbial fan, the depth is seismic. (Maybe the omnipresent threat of seismic shock compensates geologically for L. A.'s notorious lack of "depth.") The vertical highs and lows that typify the Freudian psychodrama don't appear on Southland horizons (in New York, by contrast, all those skyscrapers can't help but suggest an immense hydraulic activity, converting up into down at the push of an elevator button). The trick is to recognize, in the flatland punctuated by ruffles of arroyo and collapsing hills, that a different libidinal energy prevails.

Davis refers to the "juvenation of poverty," but there are other sorts of juvenility as well, that facilitate our inspection of the funhouse mirror L. A. presents us with. "The psychohistory that documents the intellectual migrations to the most modern of frontiers cannot but unfold or fold out a psychology of the ultimate idol of Freud's second system: the adolescent or Californian."[3] The ceaseless zigzag of cars is an exemplary adolescent *modus operandi*. Also characteristic of adolescence is a sociability driven by anxieties of personal inadequacy. The laconic, "laid back" L. A. demeanor compensates for a bottled-up gregariousness. It's something Pynchon noticed in *The Crying of Lot 49*, with Oedipa Maas' paranoiac voyeurism. The scopic mendacity of the region afflicted the entire nation with the incendiary video of the Rodney King beating. The cannibal intensity of consumer voyeurism was irresistibly drawn to this episode, which was literally violence porn. Video is a medium deeply implicated in the "security" business. Surveillance and control are based on video images, and the King beating on video occupied a dual site of control (the cops) and loss of control (the bludgeoning). The video harbored another shock, which was only borne out in the courtroom, and that is the fact that video images are simply images, and can be manipulated like cardboard cutouts. That jurors could be convinced the beating wasn't real—or, more precisely, that King himself constituted a threat that couldn't be "captured" on video—is what gives it formal resonance as porn: that is, an image is simulation, and in the Platonic chamber of iconic reverberations we all

inhabit, the deepest fear and emblem of kinkiest desire is the wish for the "thing itself" to be revealed as a simulation as well. The King video, the King verdict, and the ensuing glut of yet more video havoc porn of the riots, all testify to the precariousness with which the unconscious, that fabled European museum of the deep, has been fabricated in America as the whimsical adolescent fantasia Freud feared and Disney celebrated. The historical dimension disclosed by recent events adds one more twist: in a space where depth is spread out, not up or down, the unconscious is depersonalized, becoming the only kind of community property not subject to zoning laws, building inspectors, or escrow. A generalized civic unconscious, however, isn't a rose parade. To a lot of people, living in L. A. is like living in somebody else's mind, subject to the depredations of the Monster Id like the critter in *Forbidden Planet.* And even it it's a matter not of libido but consciousness, living in somebody else's utopia can be like living nowhere at all.

NOTES

1 Echo Park is a largely Hispanic enclave (periodically doused with malathion from military 'copters to eradicate varieties of fruit flies just as common in white and thus unsprayed neighborhoods elsewhere in the basin) sandwiched between Chinatown, Dodger Stadium, and upscale Silver Lake and Los Feliz. It's in the hills overlooking downtown, the hills infamously known for the Hillside Strangler of the late 1970s.

2 The quote is from "Explaining Los Angeles," Michael Sorkin's exemplary meditation recently collected in his book *Exquisite Corpse* (Verso, 1991).

3 Laurence Rickels, *The Case of California* (Johns Hopkins U. P., 1991), p. 11. Rickels reads California through the hysterical lens of its uncanny double, Germany. As he points out, "The desire to render California a semiotic placeholder for a vast and complex network of contemporary phenomena is not a new one; the Frankfurt School made California an essential supplement to it spookulations." (6) One reads the secret ravings—cunningly choreographed by Rickels—of California's Germans (Adorno, Brecht, Mann, Schoenberg, etc.) with the same piqued interest as hagiographies on the Loch Ness Monster, UFO sightings, or glimpses of the Yetty, enthralling relics of an evolutionary terminus. The value of Rickels' book is his elaboration of the fact that California is a place everyone already knows. How?—through the unconscious, which is precisely the way the exiles recognized it as the solarized image of a Nazi Emerald City.

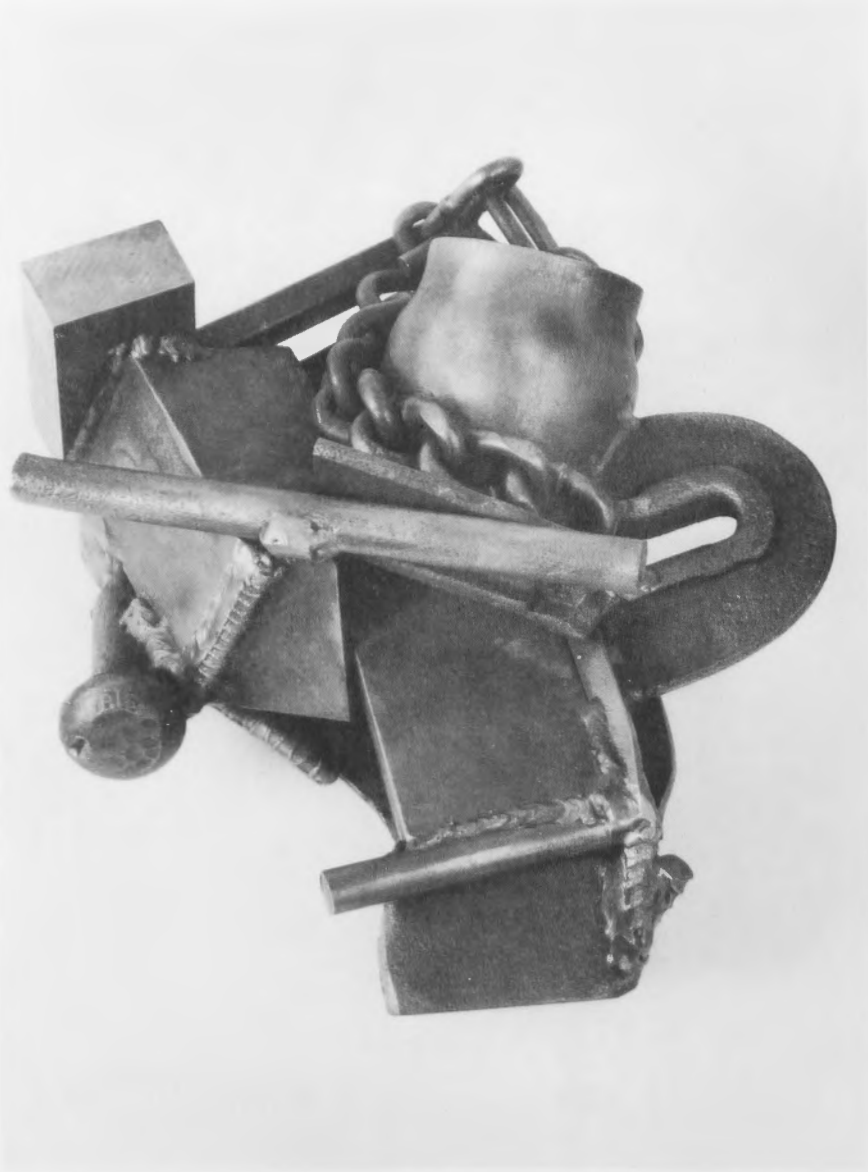
MELVIN EDWARDS
SIX *LYNCH FRAGMENTS*

REDEMPTION

Welded Steel, 10 x 14 x 8 Inches, 1990

PREMONITION

18 x 11 x 11 inches,
1990



GOOD WORD FROM CAYENNE

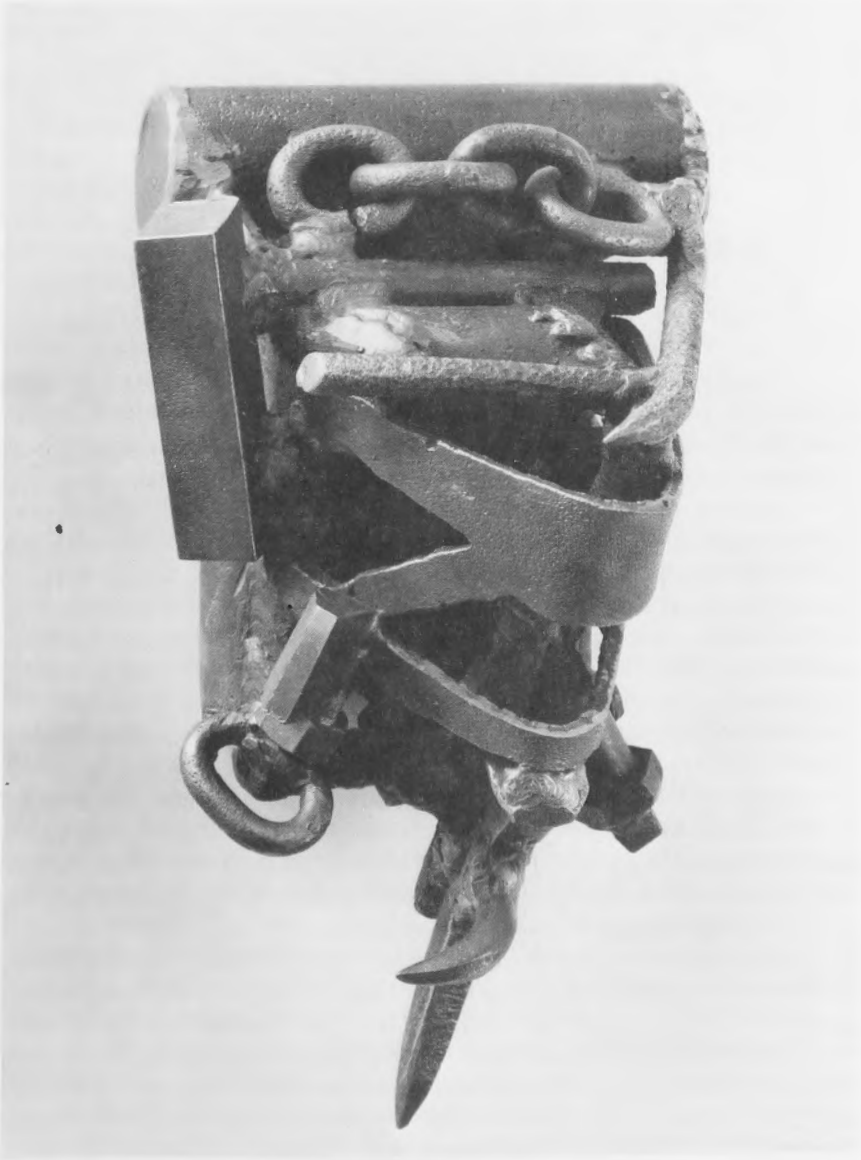
13 x 11 x 7 inches,
1990

SOUTHERN SEASON

12.5 x 10.5 x 9 Inches,
1990

DOUBLE GONG

10.5 x 7 x 10.5 inches,
1989



PALMARES

12 x 8 x 6 Inches,
1988

MEL EDWARDS
LYNCH FRAGMENTS

A lynching is a murder, a group murder. You take all of the energy of a lynching, all the hate and all the fear, and pile it on one human being. You tie that person to a tree and slowly or fastly kill him. The Lynch Fragment series is a series of sculpture ideas. What I'm doing is taking fragments of the intensity of a lynching, turning it around, changing it into an object, and making that object something creative and positive. So the thing itself is not to look like it's been lynched, but to have that scale of intensity, and that kind of power.

I have developed suspended environmental works made of barbwire and of chains. I also make larger pieces, public sculpture meant to have a relationship with architecture and the general public. You can say that the Lynch Fragments are a private conversation. A one on one situation. The public works are meant to affect masses of people at once. The material used for the Lynch Fragments is steel. Sometimes a piece of brass or bronze or chrome is added but for the most part they are welded steel. Each Lynch Fragment is different from the other and each has an individual title. In that respect they are like traditional African sculpture. The idea of a lynching was bad luck, or bad fate, or a bad situation for African-American people in the United States. But the Lynch Fragment, the sculpture, is really a positive work. They are powerful and they are ours, and they are mine, and they are not made by our oppressor. They are made by us as a continuance of the resistance against the oppression.

I started making them in 1963 during the period when the civil rights movement was in full force. It was my first experience with collective resistance. At that time I was teaching myself how to make sculpture and trying to find my own unique way of working. The Lynch Fragments come from family stories about lynchings. They come from my experiences of growing up in Houston, Texas, the black community in the fifth ward, the five years I lived in Dayton, Ohio, in the all-black Desoto-Bass housing project, and in the black neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California.

If you go by individual titles, that should tell you what the specific pieces are about. "Some Bright Morning" is a piece dedicated to a black family in Florida who had been warned by white people not to be so

militant. The family continued to be militant until the white people said that some bright morning they were coming to get them, and when they came, the black people were armed and ready. They fought and then took to the swamp in guerrilla warfare against those whites and they didn't lose.

The fragment dedicated to Soweto is dedicated to the continental African struggle against colonialism and oppression. What I learned from making the pieces was that under the "title" of oppression, we could do everything. In other words it's not the actual oppression that allows us to everything, but since we're really stronger than that oppression, we do everything anyway.

The actual forms produced within the pieces have a lot of variety and they fill me with many ideas for other kinds of pieces. The other pieces may not have the same look. The best way to view the Lynch Fragments is the way I intended, specifically in a ritual situation. This is the visual aspect of ritual. You take a limited amount of space, a square room, with nothing else in it but the Lynch Fragments. The room is maybe sixteen feet square and every two feet along the wall about eye level is a Lynch Fragment. I will guarantee anybody that they will have a strong feeling regardless of their interpretations.

The works have no intention whatsoever of being masks. I'm interested in human physical intensity and humans tend to read that at the level of the head for some reason. The head is the most expressive part of the human anatomy because it contains so many of the centers of the senses. The other thing that tends to make people think of masks is that the fragments are about the size of the human head. I place them on the wall at my eye level so it's about the same place that you run into a human head.

As a sculptor you spend time inventing something new. Your own language. So the language of the sculpture is not something that the uninitiated can walk up to and say I know what that is. You spend time trying to make things that people haven't put together before. I'm not inventing a sixteen-letter alphabet. I'm not making mathematics. I'm making something that's more open and more creative than that. Or, if it is mathematics, it's at the level of creative mathematics so it can be anything that I want it to be.

It's like logic, it starts with the subjective and I'm in charge of the subject. For example a railroad spike. To some people spikes are threatening. A railroad spike's job is to hold a rail onto a railroad cross-tie. Well if you're a Christian and you think of Christian symbolism and the nails in the feet of Christ as the epitome of symbolism for spikes, you may be going the wrong direction from where I'm thinking and doing. Not that they didn't nail somebody to a tree, but I don't give spikes a single meaning. I take it and change it or I may leave the material with its look of spikeness,

or I may change it so much, nobody would ever know it was a spike. I may use four spikes to make a diamond shape and what is important to me will not be the spike, but the diamond shape. So it varies. It's like putting words together.

The Lynch Fragments are on the feeling side of art more than on the intellectual side. I don't mean that they're not intelligent because I happen to think that they're very intelligent. They have the kind of power which is physical. They're not the art of the professor. They're the art of the worker in the physical sense. They're the art of the process where they get hammered: they get cut, parts of them have been machined and they get machined by me in a different way. You can see that these works have the look of having been through something in order to be what they are and in that way they're ritualistic.

I intended for the Lynch Fragments to remind black people of what we have come out of. That's important because in the United States we're the only people to actually come out of the lynching experience. They lynched a few other people, but basically being lynched belonged to us. We were the only ones brought here to be slaves, and after slavery we were a people without rights. We were the only people who could be lynched with impunity. It's documented and it's not over yet.

I'm a physical person. I believe in strong statements. I believe in a certain amount of significant directness. Within the visual arts, the abstract work is very much in the area of fiction and poetry. You can put things together and in real life there would be no reason for them to be together, except in the reality of their being works of art. Once I had named them Lynch Fragments, it literally meant I could almost do anything within that title. As specific as the term lynching is, the situation is so dynamic. If somebody is going to discuss something violent—murder, sexual abuse, kidnapping, the destruction of all human rights, the destruction of life, snatching pieces off of a dead body for souvenirs, all the things done to men, women and children—then that subject is so powerful, I can use the strongest language I want. It's not like I chose to make sculpture about hearts and flowers or strolling through the park.

Once I have decided that my subject is lynching and Lynch Fragments, that calls into question the whole society. The whole of art, the whole everything.

JAYNE CORTEZ
THREE POEMS

LYNCH FRAGMENT I

My tongue whips blood through the
ribs of a cobra
I am a serpent
a parched cavity for lynched reptiles
iron rust of my musty scales sucking up the
secret strength of bad smells from two curved horns
clipped horns of a ram under
bent pipe of my passionate sloping bone which
is the beauty mask that god wears like
the four part sun rising redly to the tip of
frozen nerves heard beyond
                muted cries of
mutilated flesh in a hole
a fox hole
a fixed hole where spirits erect themselves &
urinate inside my nostrils

IT CAME

It came through the frizzled feathers of sparkling hens
through blood red blood of asphalt earth
through navels infested with intestinal worms
through skulls infused with electric shock
It came
through the vibrating hum of empty stomachs
through raw buttocks slashed against rubber hoses
through a trench of wounded infants near Cassinga
through the last breath of the dead among dead bodies in
    Chimoeo
It came
through boiling beer on scalded feet
through corn meal and maggots
through outbreaks of malaria and typhoid
through bombsplinters and blinding lights
through the quivering convulsive and hemorrhaging heads of
two hundred thousand refugees in transit
It came
through the splash of plastic gloves on the shallow water
through chests and legs and mutilated fingers floating in the
    water
through eyepits of parasitical flies raging in the water
through chemicals illuminating in the water of the river
It came
through shattered bones of protesting students
through nasal spines in cockroach shit
through tropical babies in polluted milk
through the english knot of a hangman's rope
through testicles shaking into mouth of a supreme court of
supreme coldness
It came
through the smell of blue stones and used rifles
through the naked root of new trees and missiles
through a soldier's uniform
through a farmer's implement
through a white starched waiter's shirt
through a miner's helmet

through a woman's skirt
through Bindura and Pungue
and a curfew of darkness
the bazooka of victory came
Oh Zimbabwe it came

OGUN'S FRIEND

I saw your eyes like bumps of flint
i saw your shoes like high-top boulders
i saw your hands like faces of fire
i saw your fingers like axes of Shango
i saw your body like a rocker of steel

Yo
i heard a hum down there
i heard a rumble down there
i heard a ghost down there
i heard a thunderbolt expel down there
i heard a anvil in the night go hummmmmmmm
down there

Hey whose metals are shouting so loud
they must be the tapper that Ogun knows

whose are those beads so hot and black
they must be brass for Ogun to fill

who's that worker with corrugated gums
it must be the worker that Ogun chose

who's that one with feet like flames
it must be the welder that's Ogun's friend

Yo
i smell a chicken in here
i smell some charcoal in here
i smell a goat in here
i smell some wax in here
i smell a dog in here
i smell some clay and some oil and some blood in here

Hey i see your chains like links of teeth
crow-bars
i see your coils like female pouches
barbwire
i see your grills like braided snakes
fish-net
i see your ladder like a totem of pliers
crocodiles
i see your pipes like razors on tusks
wine bottles
i see your scissors and your keys on the table in there
uh-huhn

Yo
you got pant legs made into hats
you got diamond plates made into walls
you got straightening combs made into steps
you got hammer-heads made into skulls
you got flat-rings made into ears

Pant legs diamond plates
straightening combs hammer-heads
flat-rings
yo

I feel your flux
i feel your sander
i feel your drill bit
i feel your grinder
i feel your drill press
i feel your hack saw
i feel your brick ax

Yo
i saw your windows like sheets of steel
i heard a gong down there
i saw some navels like bushes of wire
i heard a bird down there

Hey
you got lizard tongues made into tongs
i feel your bald spot
you got snakeskins covered in bronze
i feel your chin marks

lizard tongues bald spots
snakeskins chin marks

Yo
i smell some fish in here
i see a rail down there
i smell some toes in here
i see a horn down there
i smell some funk in here
i see a knife down there
i smell some ratheads in here
i see a person down there

Whose that one so brown and fine
Ogun's friend
whose that one in green on green
Ogun's friend
whose that one who eats so fast
Ogun's friend
whose that one with toothpaste lips
Ogun's friend
whose that one who spits on tools
Ogun's friend
Yo Ogun's friend

LIZ DALTON

THE REVOLUTION WHICH WORKED

Women initiated culture. It was they who opened the door to human history. They did so through a sex strike whose banner was the blood of menstruation.

This is the claim of a just-published book by Chris Knight: *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture.** It is the story of a revolution which worked. It is a book which will provoke some to fury, others to delight. It is based on 25 years of research and debate, and a wealth of evidence from the new biology, primatology, archaeology, paleontology, social anthropology and the structural analysis of mythology. The author, a Marxist, an anthropologist and a man, makes no apology for any of this, but does acknowledge his debts to the women thinkers and activists—from scientists of almost every discipline to poets, witches and Greenham women—who have been and still are researching the same issues.

Engels wrote over a hundred years ago that in order to become culturally human, our animal ancestors had to overcome male sexual jealousy, which lay at the heart of all hierarchy, competition and conflict over sex and food in the animal world (Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*). Sex organized pre-human society. Chris Knight argues that "with the establishment of earliest culture, society at last succeeded in organizing sex."

When did this happen? Central to Chris Knight's book is the exciting debate now opening up on the dating of the birth of anatomically modern humanity. Becoming culturally human was not simultaneous with our evolutionary achievement of anatomical modernity—although of course the one was contingent on the other. All the evidence of the new paleontology, archaeology and molecular biology points to the same extraordinary conclusion: humanity in evolutionary terms is a tiny newborn baby.

*Yale University Press, 1991, $45.00.

Around 200,000 years ago the "African Eve" who mothered all of us (according to the newest genetic studies) appeared in the Afar Triangle in what is now Ethiopia. Neanderthals were still roaming in Northern Europe when we started moving around and out of Africa, to leave our fossilized bones 100,000 years later—and have them unearthed 100,000 years later still—in Israel at Qafzeh, and in South Africa at Klasies River Mouth. Those skeletons were like ours. Those ancestors' brains would have looked like ours. But these people had no home base, no organized division of labor, limited tool technology, and, the evidence suggests, only the barest rudiments, if any, of ritual—the collective symbolic action which Knight sees as the basis of all human language, kinship and culture.

Astonishingly, just about 60,000 years later, there is a mass of evidence of a cultural—and demographic—explosion having occurred. It was "the Upper Paleolithic revolution," which took off soon after the beginning of the last great Ice Age. Modern humans (the Cro-Magnons) were suddenly spreading across the world, in the space of a few thousand years moving from Africa to Asia and Australia to eastern and western Europe and finally to the Americas. They had home bases, domestic fires, sophisticated and developing tool kits, and an organized sexual division of labor. They not only talked; they also spoke poetry, played musical instruments, sang and danced, and decorated themselves with body-paint. Ritual, as "the collective dimension of intimate, emotionally significant life" (Knight) gave us our meaning. It defined us as human. We knew then how to rejoice in the achievement.

How did it happen? Scientists from every relevant discipline are at present puzzling over it. Knight sees it as a revolution: the successful outcome of a long struggle against our previous "animal" social organization.

As riverine and shoreline gatherers, scavengers and small game hunters, our ancestors of over 100,000 years ago could survive happily as long as the mild climate of the interglacial years provided us with food in abundance. Males, females, and even infants could almost equally gather what grew, lay or crawled around them. The failure of males to provision their sex-partners or offspring, in such a context, hardly mattered and could be tolerated. It was, after all, part of the natural order of things—for primates.

We were designed for paradise. In the tropics and sub-tropics, African Eve's children, naked and warm, played, swam, and picnicked on the beach. Knight supports Elain Morgan's hypothesis that we adapted to wading and swimming as we evolved along the lake shores of East Africa and the coasts

of the Afar Gulf. Significantly for his theory, he believes that our ancient association with rivers and the sea conditioned our own biological rhythms. Prior to the revolution which made us culturally human, Knight believes that females already had the biological capacity to synchronize their ovulatory and menstrual cycles with one another and with the tides. The tides, as everyone knows, are governed by the moon. So—there we gamboled, well-fed, sunburned and moonstruck.

But then, as eventually it always must, something else happened. The global climate began to change. It was the onset of the last Ice Age. Sea levels worldwide regressed. First at one place, then at another, our anatomically modern ancestors were forced by deteriorating environmental conditions to seek increasingly scarce food further inland. The natural order no longer worked—at least, not for the mothers and their infants. Cold, hungry, with their ultra-dependent offspring so much longer and heavier a burden than were the offspring of any other primates, the mothers started noticing bitterly with what ease the unfettered males travelled and could feed themselves. For there was plenty of food to eat. But it was no longer growing, lying or crawling. It was walking or running away. It was the era of big game, the golden age for the giant mammals roaming the plains, surviving all weathers as long as the grass did. And the males of our species were going hunting.

No, this is not another Man the Hunter origins myth, with man simultaneously inventing technology, culture and the nuclear family, and teaching it all to his dumb wife sitting at home with baby, waiting for the bacon. On the contrary. First it is not about Man or even Woman: it is about women organizing in solidarity with one another. Yes, it is about culture: how women's solidarity was at the core of it. And yes, it is also about the family: how women's solidarity exploded the "natural family" of most primate societies, in which the females are the sexual possessions of the male or males. Knight argues that the first human societies were communist. For him, as for Friedrich Engels, this means something historically specific (and nothing whatsoever to do with the monstrosity of Stalinism). Communism meant a society in which women—as never before or since—were free. Women collectively said No to rape, and men obeyed. Responsibility for children belonged to the whole community. Women's rule—matriarchy—in this sense meant freedom for everyone. Language, co-operation and science replaced physical coercion, animal individualism, and the rule of the genes.

How was this revolution achieved? Like all revolutions, Chris Knight argues: by going on strike. It was women who desperately needed change. They went on sex strike.

"They collectively refused sex whenever meat supplies were exhausted or men attempted to approach without meat" (Knight). They signalled No with the blood of menstruation; and the equation "Blood = No" simultaneously extended to the blood of game animals. Hunters must not eat their own kill. It must be returned to camp, handed to the collectivity of women, and cooked to remove all blood before being communally eaten. At one blow the women's strike action prompted the collective organization of men for the benefit of all; outlawed generalized or individual male dominance; and, in seeming paradox, separated sex from foodgetting. All forms of prostitution (individual sex-for-food bargaining) were banned. Women's bodies were sacred—to themselves and others. The food given by men to their sexual partners was then shared among the women's blood kin. A hunter had rights not in his own kill, but in the meat given him by his sisters, which they in turn had received from their partners. Heterosexual relations were enjoyed only in conditions free of need, when everyone had been fed.

The model explains at a single stroke menstrual and incest taboos and the origins of human kinship systems. Culture—collectively agreed rules and rituals governing society, something unknown in the animal world, and a unique breakthrough in evolution—was born.

Sex was subordinated to economics. As Chris Knight argues, this was necessarily women's initiative not because they enjoyed sex any less than men, but because, as every mother knows, when it comes to the crunch, the baby and its survival has to come first.

With this book the whole apparently mighty edifice of patriarchy is challenged at its roots. It can be seen as nothing more than a gigantic bluff (backed up of course by force) perpetuated on women since the end of early communism from around 10,000 years ago. Woman as the Other, as Nature, as outside or antithetical to culture, and ultimately, for the extremes or religion or fascism, as outside humanity—it is all a projection by a society which since the onset of male and class rule has been profoundly anti-woman, profoundly fearful of women's solidarity, and the socially transforming power which it engenders.

Blood Relations implicitly challenges the fear of femaleness which western feminism itself has not yet overcome. Can we ever be biologically whole, culturally human, and free to make whichever sexual choices we wish? The bland designer feminism which is dominant today provides only a grotesque pseudo-answer: the individual woman as super-commodity, in intense competition with every other woman, selling herself body and soul once more—but this time only to the highest bidders.

We can be whole and free. Because 40,000 years ago we were. We went on strike, not once, but every month. Our clock was the moon. The rhythm of our blood flow sent the men to hunt and us to our inner world where we could centre ourselves and be close, both sexually and spiritually. The men's rhythm, and their intragender closeness, mirrored ours. When the hunt was over, heterosexual relationships could be resumed. There was a time for every season.

The mechanical rhythms of capitalism are making us ill. That the present world is dying has become a cliché. While the rich stuff themselves or starve themselves, the poor just starve. War, pollution, disease, disaster, violence, rape, personal loneliness and misery stalk all our lives. Children expect the end of the world. Many are already suffering it. Our so-called "natural order" no longer works—at least, not for the vast majority of us. Cold, hungry, facing their children's questioning eyes, the poor of the world notice bitterly with what ease the super-rich travel and feed themselves. For there is plenty of food to eat. And the power of new technology is almost limitless. But it is all controlled and possessed by a tiny minority. It is the era of plenty, of superabundance. . . .

The ferment of new understandings about our beginnings of which this important book is a part could help us find our way—back to the future.

JORGE SANTIAGO PEREDNIK

THE SHOCK OF THE LENDERS (Main Fragment)

(Tr. from the Spanish by Molly Weigel)

The most beautiful word of the language is stranger
Barbaric or Barbara
All men are mortal the shock lender is also
The most beautiful concept of the mother tongue
Sabotage?
We lent
I tell you, not them
"Look for a new almost because the old one is dis "

Cards thrown down simulating an Order
Protean tense: the lapse
Preterite tense: the cosmos
ultrapreterite: the lapse
present: the preteriduction machine
such brief moments
Something's stopp

Beauty is the order of sabotage. No
The order of beauty is an effect of sabotage. No
Beauty is a. . .from the order of sabotaging the order of. . .No?
The day is too clear to see what's happening
: a link in the chain has been broke
: crystals colors solstice equinox have been broke
Too clear to see
The fear what's hidden under always
Hell? concentric circles Why not Paradise?
""Don't believe him it's all a circumferences dis
setups of our police who I call dialing 666

"El Shock de los Lender" was published by Ediciones XUL, Buenos Aires, 1986.

and others call oligice
oligarchy
oligophrenia
oligoclase hematite mineraloligopoly(ce)
etc etc""

decentered circumferences crossing such that
each point is the intersection of multiple discs such that
each point constitutes an existence (note: you for example)

(nothingness—neeche— (the only—stirner—
bah—the story you tell is just too pat
in your guilt I smell a rat slither bite infect squeal
turn around, I'll make a note of that turn around so he can steal you
or better: Truth is tails Beauty heads
both faces the being—duplicity—coin of this cosmos
the man who relates the eye and the finger
the name that relates flash and bang
what's more important, thunder or lightning?
Great balls of fire, I thought you'd never say it!

weapons, instruments of
The providers, etc
The commotion, etc etc
The corollaries that some call History
1. not to put up any more with the paternal hoop of the self or the law
2. to penetr (pay a price) assassin (shoot a) ate it
3. to be (nomen atque omen) the social lenders of the cause of maximum shock

Ego non baptizo te in nomine Diaboli et
Filii et Spiritus non Sancti—sed in nomine
Patris—madness is only definable negatively
amniotic fluid on the bodies
with her sister reason useless extremes one and the same rain from above
—not the (black) art of the deceivers but rather ascetic magic

Casing the city of god in the name of economy
Looking for special deals with Intelligence or Power or Angel
Bribing: Pull the trigger! Kill! (I'm waiting)

discovering a new kind of weapon: that has no one to aim at
that has nothing to fire at

real weapons

CHORUS (intellectuals if possible)
The electrical charges called shocks
can be caused when the wires corrode
their mothers would like back their cocks
to get back some of what they are owed
Their crest illustrates as it mocks
two red lions attached to her nodes
as they try to get into her box

My good and merciful god, you know that I don't approve of this
That I don't approve of anything that offends you
Yet you will approve it: habit and greed
But lord, the heart of an upright man. . .I mean, the abominations. . .Leviticus VIII
Better sleep and dream

And the dream was: a sort of viaduct in the mountain
The watch casting its hands like arrows or syringes against the eyes
A horse with two blind heads quartering the body
And the dream was:
A horse with six feet two heads escaping one to the north the other to the south
Vanished. It was:
I was drawing trying to capture the landscape: that tree populated with birds against the horizon
Before (or first and not before) something had captured me: many birds no horizon
and the riders moving away one to the great salt marsh the other to the glacier on the same animal

Vanished. It was:
I was running with the spear which was a pencil in my hand
    after the bird with white wings. Two wings
The order was to capture the bird draw it bring it back
    transformed into a hero
The horse told me our hero will be two, and with us, three, the
    great hero, the excluded
Vani It wa li an instant
Che Guevara is mixed up in this story Mickey Mouse is mi
Do you believe in Christ? Yes. And in Longfellow?
The shot of the blowgun. Again. The death blow.
The best allies of the Fathers are the Dead
Deadfellow: "the Man with the Great Beard has sent me up here
    to
to test the effects of that is you know"

A man / ElseWhere?
Can / A man A man / Make / Social Revolution?
Can / A man / Make / Social Revolution / ElseWhere ElseWhere?

hero he who has won a battle and lost his and because of that
    is a hero

The Topos Uranus, the King of Heaven, the Socialrevolutzie: the
    Future the OtherPlace
The best allies of the Fathers are
weapons, instruments of
the owners of the sacred house
General Investment Company The Beyond. Everything goes
    better with faith in Us.

"the Venture is the Adventure" they repeated "the Venture is the
    Adventure" for thirty-eight minutes children
                [laughing like crazy
And if the children were ri
"Shut up!" Signed: Destiny (S Freud Stars Religion Science Hitler
                V. I. L. Buenito Mussolini the Race the
                Party the Corporation ersatz hybrids etc don't
                take another step against

against the)
Destiny
In God We Trust

Oremus:
Blessèd Abstraction Almighty Abstraction may you sustain our
lives and give them a purpose
the Mystery the House of Mist: (the other—or Go)Destiny
Tiny reason that establishes order
"It's natural for the many to submit to the few" could be used as
a subordinate
"for the many to submit to the only" it could be said that
"It's natural to use subordinates"
What many, Few and Only like, Order
That which identifies Everyone

"The Venture is the Adventure" they repeated "the Venture is the
Adventure"
"Shut Up !"

because. the desert. this ineffectual conspiracy of circumstances

Disguised as a boy who plays the flute
He asked if death were unitary or real
And she said: little is know about bodies, about matter
Behind a door there's another door and
Behind that door there's another door and
Behind
one more door and
Behind
there's

Obsessions

CHORUS (if possible, id., id.)
They gave their father forty licks
then took a scissors to his dick
those boys are full of dirty tricks
and this is how they get their kicks

If it's not broken, what's to fix?
They climbed up on their mama's back
and rode her all around the track
they said, we'll give you what you lack
our darling nymphomaniac
Their morals are a little slack
but they make up for it in tact
they may be just a pair of pricks
but they're our boys through thin and thick

Stupidity and Truth—what does this prove?
In the archetype someone empties himself, says
The duty of killing them *(solvere)*
Cutting the damned knot and solving the problem
That is not vanity

(Later, at the wake, the family will change the story
(They won't dissolve the raveled thread of a decayed knot into nothing
They won't say "the debts will be discharged. So it has been written."
"Someday you'll repay (resolve) everything I've done for you")
They'll tell it oh literature as the payment of a debt)
Not even to tell something at most a little something to say for example
poetry is not truth
not beauty
leaves someone burns against the cold

The adventure will be poetically: a writing that says:
the pick parted both sides of the cranium entered the secret vagina and reason shuddered
the ence*phallic* tissue crossed the broken membrane showed the world its horrors and reason was
[illegible]
and that man who had raised a family amounted to something in life
made great sacrifices for his children provided an education
even read Schiller in the original and Hegel's logic

only managed to say "Sometimes you forget that you are my son"

The big raw chunks must be eliminated it must be served well done
"today in school we baked cookies" says the oldest, five years old. His
brother, three, replies, "and we had them half-baked"
laughter in the room. Coughs

"I've given you everything and I am nothing."
"Now I receive your gifts, which I do not deserve."

the end of the adventure will be:
the horse falling down and "this is how he throws a fit" say the children kicking their legs
"you ran him too hard" the keeper accuses them "you profited too much" pronounce the bankers of Amberes
"you've gone" sentences the executioner "too far"
a vehicle for crossing the dead of America *I will ride my father for eight thousand kilometers*
an animal with a black forehead who throws a fit with his feet *If he's no use he's got to be put down*
the burro the messiah will use to reach Jerusalem *He frightens me he bites he has a big wee-wee*
the rolls royce of the magnates? *If He's No Use He's Got to Be Put Down*

Because they can't connect the beginning with the end, observed subinspector Alcmeon,
the shocklenders die
that's why so many die—so many—and we don't understand why.
Nothing connects with nothing.

The end of the adventure will be: the adventure doesn't end
It's the fourth psychic instance, it's the mystery
decentered circumferences crossing such that
"Sometimes you forget that I am your son

Machines that make the past present such that
"Very few, unfortunately"

The adventure will be poetically: a writing that says: Too clear to
see
The opening Two points
Where the father has been there the son is resurrected
The two cords the knot cut *is printed*
"no, don't print it!" "Forget!"

His cloudied storied

NOTE

The Shock of the Lenders, by Jorge Santiago Perednik, takes as its point of departure a 1981 murder case that became a national sensation in Argentina. The Shoklenders were an upper-middle class educated family displaying all the outward signs of success: the father, Mauricio, was an engineer; they lived in a fashionable Buenos Aires neighborhood; there were three children. On May 30th, 1981, a neighbor followed a thin trail of blood to the bodies of Mauricio and his wife Cristina in the trunk of the family car. The two sons, Sergio and Pablo, were missing. A countrywide search began, and in a few days both sons were apprehended on horseback, one having fled to the north, the other to the south. The trial uncovered many skeletons in the family closet, including possible incestuous relations between Cristina and both sons, and the involvement of Mauricio's engineering firm in international arms traffic. The poem uses the case, with its oedipal and mythical overtones and its questioning of the status quo (which can only be maintained through a systematic repression), as a pretext to explore the psychological and political nature of authority, specifically but not exclusively the military government's dirty war in which an estimated 30,000 civilians "disappeared" between 1976 and 1983. Beginning with its Spanish title—*El Shock de los Lender*—the poem proposes a dialogue between Spanish and English, in which the English words lend a shock to an anesthetized language and a society that can't see the meaning of its own story. The poem is composed of six fragments, of which the "Main Fragment" is the first and longest, comprising roughly one third of the whole. In its form as well as its themes, the poem interrogates itself about the possibility of completion, ending, and wholeness—and about the possibility of telling stories.

ANDREW SCHELLING
TWO POEMS

PHILIP WHALEN

. . . . . .

Long after our current apocalypse ended—

the planet yet bore his trace—
the yogin's roar of awakening, old anchorite eye twinkle,
    hilarity of one
just passing through

spel & charm, haiku and curses, sutras of trenchant abuse
but most notorious were the gathas of valor & outrage—

O wielding Mahavairochana's malachite cudgel!
eating up worlds in the journey
        from one verbal construct to another—

. . . . . .

I enter a room
Zenshin Ryufu sits in a straight-back chair
black robe, spectacles
bare feet planted on a dragon rug
approaching I raise my hands in *gasho*
he produces an empty
long-stem wine glass from under his skirt
extends it towards me and
rotating his wrist

upends it
I bow again and go out

(drum)

. . . . . .

At that time they say
there existed a few ruined libraries, one or two books—

28:iii:92

THE TRANSLATION

And dream'd my friend L, her hair feathered raven—
shifted from frame to frame of the dream, or was it from room to room drifted,
dancing, striking both ends of an earthenware drum.
Pakhaavajam mirdang—
slung by a sash over the shoulder, its skins sensitized
with a paste of wet flour.
The same as Mirabai carried, whose thin *nagari* letters and abductive melodies
for weeks had consumed
the waking hours—

Then awoke to bright snow, ice over the mountains. Fretted with January pine.
Hindi student and silk merchant, my friend waited for me with a battery of books on a hillside. I trudged up
to reach him—through dry, calf-deep snow, rucksack of books on my back.

He holds modern Hindi, I the polished old Sanskrit. We looped
Subhalakshmi through the tape deck, over
and over, following the weave of her medieval Mira. Like using
Chrétien de Troyes and one's handy
American, to come at Chaucer from either end. Intricate Hindi,
coiled Rajasthani Mira once sang, a wound
to the skull.

Could *she* have wakened one morning, in the 16th century,
two blinking poets surrounded by snow to trouble her sleep into
waking—
karmically caught in those songs?
The scholars will cringe.
But Mira continues to rage out her lyric heart on the roads,
declaring her
singular fever—*Shyam,*
the Dark One, o color of raven—

. . . . . .

night

the moon a demon, noc-

turnal being

. . . . . .

to remove the veil

to have the veil on

XAVIER VILLAURRUTIA
from *NOSTALGIA FOR DEATH* (1938)

(Tr. from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger)

L.A. NOCTURNE: THE ANGELS

for Augustín J. Fink

You might say the streets flow sweetly through the night.
The lights are dim so the secret will be kept,
the secret known by the men who come and go,
for they're all in on the secret
and why break it up in a thousand pieces
when it's so sweet to hold it close,
and share it only with the one chosen person.

If, at a given moment, everyone would say
with one word what he is thinking,
the six letters of DESIRE would form an enormous luminous
    scar,
a constellation more ancient, more dazzling than any other.
And that constellation would be like a burning sex
in the deep body of night,
like the Gemini, for the first time in their lives,
looking each other in the eyes and embracing forever.

Suddenly the river of the street is filled with thirsty creatures;
they walk, they pause, they move on.
They exchange glances, they dare to smile,
they form unpredictable couples. . .

There are nooks and benches in the shadows,
riverbanks of dense indefinable shapes,
sudden empty spaces of blinding light
and doors that open at the slightest touch.

For a moment, the river of the street is deserted.
Then it seems to replenish itself,
eager to start again.
It is a paralyzed, mute, gasping moment,
like a heart between two spasms.

But a new throbbing, a new pulsebeat
launches new thirsty creatures on the river of the street.
They cross, crisscross, fly up.
They glide along the ground.
They swim standing up, so miraculously
no one would ever say they're not really walking.

They are angels.
They have come down to earth
on invisible ladders.
They come from the sea that is the mirror of the sky
on ships of smoke and shadow,
they come to fuse and be confused with men,
to surrender their foreheads to the thighs of women,
to let other hands anxiously touch their bodies
and let other bodies search for their bodies till they're found,
like the closing lips of a single mouth,
they come to exhaust their mouths, so long inactive,
to set free their tongues of fire,
to sing the songs, to swear, to say all the bad words
in which men have concentrated the ancient mysteries
of flesh, blood and desire.

They have assumed names that are divinely simple.
They call themselves *Dick* or *John, Marvin* or *Louis.*
Only by their beauty are they distinguishable from men.
They walk, they pause, they move on.
They exchange glances, they dare to smile.
They form unpredictable couples.

They smile maliciously going up in the elevators of hotels,
where leisurely vertical flight is still practiced.
There are celestial marks on their naked bodies:
blue signs, blue stars and letters.

They let themselves fall into beds, they sink into pillows
that make them think they're still in the clouds.
But they close their eyes to surrender to the pleasures of their
    mysterious incarnation,
and when they sleep, they dream not of angels but of men.

Los Angeles, 1936

NOCTURNE: THE BEDROOM

Death always takes the shape
of our bedroom.

It is concave and dark, silent and warm,
it gathers in the curtains where the shadows take shelter,
it is hard in the mirror and icy and tense,
deep in the pillows, white in the sheets.

We both know that death takes the shape
of our bedroom, and that in our bedroom
there's a cold space that erects
a wall, a crystal, a silence between us.

Then, only I know that death
is the hollow you leave in our bed
when suddenly, for no reason,
you sit up, or you stand.

And it is the crackling of burning leaves
your bare feet make across the rug.

And it is the sweat that wets our thighs
that lock and struggle and then surrender.

And it is the sentence you interrupt and let drop.
And my question you don't hear,
you don't understand, you don't answer.

And the silence that falls and entombs you
as I watch over your sleep and wonder.

And I, only I, know that death
is the choked words, the strange groans
and the obscure involuntary movements you make
when you wrestle the angel of sleep in your sleep.

Death is all this and more that encircles us,
and brings us together, pulls us apart,
and finally leaves us confused, startled, hanging,
with a wound that doesn't bleed.

Then, only then, both of us alone know
that it is not love, but darkening death
that makes us look, face and face in each other's eyes,
and reach and come together, more than alone and stranded,
still more, and each time more, even still.

NOTE

Xavier Villaurrutia (1903-1950) is, with José Gorostiza, the major Mexican poet from the generation before Octavio Paz, and a leading light of the group and magazine known as the Contemporáneos (Contemporaries) in the late 1920s and 1930s. He essentially wrote one book of poetry, *Nostalgia for Death* (1938, expanded 1946), a scattering of other poems, and many hundreds of pages of criticism and mediocre plays. He was one of the only writers in Latin America in the first half of the century who was publicly gay, and his "L.A. Nocturne" is probably the first poem of interest written in that city. Copper Canyon will be publishing my translation of the complete *Nostalgia for Death,* in one volume with Octavio Paz' book-length study of the poet, *Hieroglyphs of Desire,* translated by Esther Allen.

—EW

PAUL VIOLI
SIDESHOW

Call me Zeno, Call me Hubert,
Call me Hubert The Bold.
I've got stock, I've got a story,
I've got a carpet.
I've got a blood-red star
in the middle of my carpet
and a moral for my story.

I've got inventory.
Here's a dagger
carved from a single diamond.
Here's an inflated goatskin
you can bounce higher
than a goat ever jumped.
Look at this:
a mechanical calculator,
a pair of woes-colored glasses,
and—I've got contrariety.

Here—Snide kind perceptive
obtuse persnickety sloppy
stolid emotional convivial
glum generous stingy
alackadaisical
impulsive—Have some contrariety.

I've got pig tusks with more loops
than the loves of a sophist.
And I've got a story.

I've got integrity.
I've got poems written on paper!
Paper made from the same reeds
I used to make my pen and flute.
I've got the latest postal rates.
Who put these plump
and solemn nudes on postage stamps?

Who knows what songs
filled their eyes
with dust and steel?
I believe in serious mail.

I'm a sojourner.
I got pepper, I've got struction,
instruction and obstruction.
Here's a picture of a queen.
Why is she so pale?
She swallowed
her dead lover's ashes.
You're boggled?
I, too, am boggled.
But I've got a better story.
A story from Asia Minor.

In a busy cafe a man
studies a geometry textbook
and sobs; he turns
a tear-splattered page,
crying aloud to his lone self,
My god, I'm such a creep, such a fool!

That's a story
but it's not from Asia Minor.
And it's not my style.
I call my intimate scrawl
Decembrics.
It's wintry, disinterested,
and usually ends in a scream.

More like Febrarrries,
come to think of it.
It grows from a trunk
to a limb to a branch to a twig
and then you're on your own.

A good story
gets right to the point
and allows for friction, thematics,
anthems for a dream-shorn age,
Java sex, gods and money,
all sorts of interference,
and who shaved my cat?

There are sloppy plots
or relaxing plots
that make you feel you spent
the afternoon fishing,
that you made the fishhooks
yourself, out of the bones
of your enemies.

How cruel.
But not my story.
My story is not like any of those.
My story is from Asia Minor.

A man searches
and finally finds Love
crouched under a tree
sipping vodka with a spoon.

You must try this, says Love,
and the man tries it.
Now, how do you feel? Love asks.
More than silly, says the man.
I have better things to do.
Good for you, Love tells him.
Now scram.

Now that's my idea
of a *bad* love story.
It's too long.
And there's no shrinkage:
Where's the impossibility?
Where's Love's emblem:
a dying fire in melting snow?

Furthermore, it has no Henceforth,
no Whereas, no Heretofore.
I've got Interference,
I've got blunder and philosophy
and I've got a sample.

A man stands in a field.
An arrow flies by.
He wonders about the path
it didn't leave in the air.
That was my life, he says.
—You saw it, didn't you?—
My very own streak.
And he runs off to find
where it landed.
Now you've got a pang without a plot.
You've got maximum vexation.
But no story.

Trust me.
I'm rankled but confident.
I'm trying to write a poem;
I'm dancing with a lunatic.
I've got a life of scrivitude,
red fracas and a craving.
I've got countercharge,
a wrist-watch and swamp-light.
I crave lucidity.
I'm a philophosphorer.
To live is to think, said Cicero.
But I think eternity
is haunted by a pebble.

Look to your cold self,
it's the wind
and the sand it holds
carving its gentle malisons in stone.
I have a scale to weigh that stone,
and a plot
interrupted by a series
of iridescent blots,

and enjambed stanzas
that protract, slide
through your hands like prayer,
like a jolly stranger in the dark.
Can Time and Money
dance more intimately?

First, beware.
There's ruption,
There's eruption and abruption,
but no delay.
There's grief and rumpus.
There's deep purple
and Arachne.

Smart cookie, Arachne,
but could she help herself?
Stories so fragrant
a god slashed her face.
What was worse,
to keep the skill
but lose yourself?
Rapt in your craft,
oblivious to all else?
Rival the almighty
or fake humility?

These are holy predicaments.
Shuddering consequences!
Defiance and tragedy,

fear and manipulation.
Let's forget that story.
Forget I ever mentioned it.

Instead, let me tell you
about propaganda, germ warfare,
didactic streaks
and Alexander the Great, the
Intrepid, the Insatiable.
I'll make it quick.

0 sad to see his soldiery
stricken with plague,
he—ever resourceful,
ever thrifty—
catapulted the contagious dead
over enemy walls
with little poems,
mockeries,
stuffed in their mouths.
How demoralizing!
You don't know
what a didactic streak is
until you've seen one of those
coming at you.

But the story doesn't begin
until he returns
loaded with justifying treasure
to his homeport.

Invitations rang true
to any and all
who might doubt his triumph and his valour.
They filled the hall
and fidgeted amid jewels,
astrolabes, and gold; ink-gulpers,
and inflated goatskins
that they could bounce

higher than a scapegoat;
and a carpet
that wherever it's unrolled
marks the center of the world.

All had arrived
except the one—the rowdy monk,
the tedious drunk,
the green-toothed belligerent
who lived in a barrel, the one
with whom the Great A
couldn't wait
to conversate: Phrastus.

Disdain personified,
Phrastus the Intransig—
the In. . .trans. . .sigitent
the Intranstigient
the Inrtrans. . .nigitent
Phrastus the Intransigent!
The Fearless A,
The Vanquisher of the World,
couldn't wait.

Finally he appeared,
unkempt, unwashed, cantankerous
and tanked: The essential Phrastus.
He staggered where no other
dared step, onto the carpet
that, all agreed,
marked the center of the world.

But all eyes were neither on him
nor his host.
They were fixed on the glass
he carelessly waved overhead,
on the wine
that sloshed against the rim
as if it were the tidal wave
that carried off half of Crete.

Now we don't just have
interference,
we've got Catalytic Interference!
We've got a hullabaloo
to contemplate,
with everybody's yo-yo eyes
played and yanked
by a glass of wine
—one drop of which, one stain
would blot out the star
at the center of the world.

So what happens next?
Who knows what happens next?
Maybe I forgot.
Maybe not.
What if the story bifurcates?
What if we have severe bifurcation?

But no, Phrastus
plops himself down
on the stellar center
and—What does he say?
He says, "What have we here?
A magical carpet!"

And then, do you know
what The Triple Great A does?
He proclaims: "If it be magic,
it works at the command of might."

But Phrastus says, "No,
it is a supreme magic,
for I just saw it
make the conqueror of the world
fear a little glass of wine."

Now what do you think happens?
The story simply can't. . .

Can it?
Who knows?
Do I know?
Perhaps.
Perhaps not.
This is the part I love.

1993-1994

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DAN FEATHERSTON

POMEGRANATE

the peel is dented, wrinkled like crêpe
or creased leather;
roots buckling red soil?

bruised black by air, mottled with rot
as if shifting magma—
red earthplates
and oceans glossed in light.

*

the pomegranate hollows from having been sealed.
seeds rattle and rot in their membranes.

fruit merged with air dries,
becomes airlike,
tho sealed secret still.

*

'I prefer my heart to be broken'

DHL, your words still penetrate,
for there are, still, parts of this world,
and parts of myself
unopened
tho ripe.

your fissured pomegranate widens
while this, sealed in peel, rots.

*

how is this myself?
how was a thing like this,
your Tuscany pomegranate,
yourself?

this is, as you said, the seal of a dawn kaleidoscopic.
opened, it unfolds its wet light—
pomegranate-color that is dawn:
                the onslaught of moment.

*

this is pomegranate time.
this rotting must be done with;
I expedite weather, the sky's pulp-red heart of dawn,
with these suns, these seedlike eyes of light.

there is no other agent but myself.
the fissure!
        seeds— drops of wet fire.
a grove packt into a globe!

there is nothing but immediacy,
nothing but this flame-blusht
fruit's sulphur-knob of fire.

*

the fissure is a cave clustered with seed
like red bats asleep in the earth.

what are their dreams?

what is the ratio of fruit-to-seed
but a thing to its multiple births?

I am this warehouse of seed torn open,
this pulpy nest, grotto of eyes.

*

the peel is burnt orange, as if tumbled flames
frozen in a globed gate of fire.

a fermented air locked in the fruit escapes,
as if a ghat-skull punctured by a stave.
air like soul.
ferment: a kind of combustion.

*

many seeds have rotted, like the body
turned in on itself—
the heart's closure,
a kind of hermetic cancer.

broken, the world rushes in,
into this fissure, this dawn,
as if a tree of light
uncoils from the sun.

JOSE LEZAMA LIMA
THOUGHTS IN HAVANA

(Tr. from the Spanish by James Irby)

Because I dwell in a whisper like a set of sails,
a land where ice is a reminiscence,
fire cannot hoist a bird
and burn it in a conversation calm in style.
Though that style doesn't dictate to me a sob
and a tenuous hop lets me live in bad humor,
I will not recognize the useless movement
of a mask floating where I cannot,
where I cannot transport the stonecutter or the doorlatch
to the museums where murders are papered
while the judges point out the squirrel
that straightens its stockings with its tail.
If a previous style shakes the tree,
it decides the sob of two hairs and exclaims:
mi alma no está en un cenicero.

Any memory that is transported,
received like a galantine from the obese ambassadors of old,
will not make us live like the broken chair
of the lonesome existence that notes the tide
and sneezes in autumn.
And the size of a loud laugh,
broken by saying that its memories are remembered,
and its styles the fragments of a serpent
that we want to solder together
without worrying about the intensity of its eyes.
If someone reminds us that our styles
are already remembered;
that through our nostrils no subtle air thinks forth
but rather that the Aeolus of the sources elaborated

by those who decided that being
should dwell in man,
without any of us
dropping the saliva of a danceable decision,
though we presume like other men
that our nostrils expel a subtle air.
Since they dream of humiliating us,
repeating day and night with the rhythm of the tortoise
that conceals time on its back:
you didn't decide that being should dwell in man;
your God is the moon
watching like a bannister
as being enters into man.
Since they want to humiliate us we say to them:
el jefe de la tribu descendió la escalinata.

They have some show windows and wear some shoes.
In those show windows they alternate the mannequin with the
[stuffed ossifrage,
and everything that has passed through the forehead
of the lonesome buffalo's boredom.
If we don't look at the show window, they chat
about our insufficient nakedness that isn't worth a figurine from
[Naples.
If we go through it and don't break the glass,
they don't stress amusingly that our boredom can break the fire
and they talk to us about the living model and the parable of the
[ossifrage.
They who carry their mannequins to all the ports
and who push down into their trunks the screeching
of stuffed vultures.
They don't want to know that we climb up along the damp roots
[of the fern
—where there are two men in front of a table; to the right,
[the jug
and the bread that has been caressed—,
and that though we may chew their style,
no escogemos nuestros zapatos en una vitrina.

The horse neighs when there's a shape

that comes in between like a toy ox,
that keeps the river from hitting it on the side
and kissing the spurs that were a present
from a rosy cheeked adulteress from New York.
The horse doesn't neigh at night;
the crystals it exhales through its nose,
a warm frost, of paper;
the digestion of the spurs
after going through its muscles now glassy
with the sweat of a frying pan.
The toy ox and the horse
hear the violin, but the fruit doesn't fall
squashed on their backs that are rubbed
with a syrup that is never tar.
The horse slips over the moss
where there is a table exhibiting the spurs,
but the perked up ear of the beast doesn't decipher.

The calm with stumble music
and drunken circus horses in a tangle,
where the needle bites because there's no leopard
and the surge of the accordion
elaborates some tights of worn taffeta.
Though the man doesn't leap, there's a sound
of divided shapes in each indivisible season,
because the violin leaps like an eye.
The motionless jugs stir up a cartilaginous echo:
the shepherd's blue belly
is displayed on a tray of oysters.
In that echo of the bone and the flesh, some snorts
come out covered with a spiderweb disguise,
for the delight of the one whose mouth opens,
like the bamboo flute elaborated
by the boys always asking for something.
They ask for a hollow darkness
to sleep in, splitting open, with no sensitivity,
the style of their mothers' bellies.
But while they sharpen a spiderweb sigh

inside a jug passing from hand to hand,
the scratch on the lute doesn't decipher.

He indicated some moldings
that my flesh preferred to almonds.
Some delicious moldings riddled with holes
by the hand that wraps them
and sprinkles them with the insects that will accompany it.
And that waiting, waited for in the wood
by its absorption that doesn't stop the horseman,
while not some masks, the axecuts
that do not reach the moldings,
which do not wait like an axe or a mask,
but like the man who waits in a house of leaves.
But as he traced the cracks in the molding
and rendering glory to the parsley and the canary,
l'étranger nous demande le garçon maudit.

The musk ox itself knew the entrance,
the thread of three secrets
continued till it reached the terrace
without seeing the burning of the grotesque palace.
Does a door collapse because the drunken man
with no boots on yields to it his dream?
A muddy sweat fell from the shafts
and the columns crumbled in a sigh
that scattered their stones as far as the brook.
The roofs and the barges
safeguard the calm liquid and the chosen air;
the roofs that are friends of the toy tops
and the barges that anchor in a truncated backland,
scatter in confusion caused by a stuffed gallantry that
[catches unawares
the weaving and the obverse of the eye shivering together
[in masks.

To think that some crossbowmen
shoot at a funeral urn
and that from the urn leap

some pale people singing,
because our memories are already remembered
and we ruminate with a very bewildered gravity
some moldings that came out of the hunter's pecked siesta.
To know whether the song is ours or the night's,
they want to give us an axe elaborated in the sources of Aeolus.
They want us to leap from that urn
and they also want to see us naked.
They want that death they have given us as a gift
to be the source of our birth,
and our obscure weaving and undoing
to be remembered by the thread of the woman beset by suitors.
We know that the canary and the parsley make a glory
and that the first flute was made from a stolen branch.

We go through ourselves
and having stopped point out the urn and the doves
engraved in the chosen air.
We go through ourselves
and the new surprise gives us our friends
and the birth of a dialectic:
while two dihedrals spin and nibble each other,
the water strolling through the canals of our bones
carries our body toward the calm flow
of the unnavigated land,
where a waking alga tirelessly digests a sleeping bird.
It gives us friends that a light rediscovers
and the square where they converse as they sleep.
From that urn maliciously donated,
there come leaping couples, contrasts and the fever
grafted into the magnet bodies
of the crazy page boy making a slick torture even more subtle.
My shame, the magnet horns smeared with a cold moon,
but the scorn gave birth to a cipher
and now unconsciously swung on a branch.
But after offering his respects,
when two-headed people, crafty, correct,
strike with algal hammers the tenor-voiced android,
the chief of the tribe descended the staircase.

The beads they have given us as gifts
have fortified our own poverty,
but since we know we are naked
being will come to rest upon our crossed steps.
And while they were daubing us in wild colors
so we would leap out of the funeral urn,
we knew that as always the wind was rippling the waters
and some steps were following with delight our own poverty.
The steps fled with the first questions of sleep.
But the dog bitten by light and by shadow,
by tail and head;
the dog of dark light that cannot engrave it
and of stinking shadow; the light doesn't refine it
nor does the shadow nurture it: and so it bites
the light and the fruit, the wood and the shadow,
the mansion and the son, breaking the buzz
when the steps go away and he knocks at the portico.
Poor silly river that finds no way out,
nor the doors and leaves swelling their music.
It chose, double against single, the cursed clods,
but I don't choose my shoes in a show window.

As it lost its shape on the leaf
the worm sniffed and inspected its old home;
as it bit the waters that had come to the defined river,
the hummingbird touched the old moldings.
The violin of ice shrouded in reminiscence.
The colibri unbraids a music and ties a music.
Our forests don't force man to become lost,
the forest is for us a harmonium in reminiscence.
Every naked man that comes along the river,
in the current or in the glassy egg,
swims in the air if he suspends his breath
and stretches out indefinitely his legs.
The mouth of the flesh of our wood
burns the rippled drops.
The chosen air is like an axe
for the flesh of our wood,
and the hummingbird pierces it.

My back is irritated and furrowed by the caterpillars
that chew some wicker changed into a centurion fish,
but I go on working the wood,
like a sleepless fingernail,
like a harmonium that ties and unbraids in reminiscence.
The forest, breathed upon,
releases the hummingbird of the instant
and the old moldings.
Our wood is a toy ox;
the city state is today the state and a small forest.
The guest breathes upon the horse and the rains, too.
The horse rubs its muzzle and its tail over the harmonium of the
[forest;
the naked man intones his own poverty,
the colibri stains and pierces him.
My soul is not in an ashtray.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

> Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours, more necessary for us.
>
> —José Martí, "Nuestra América" (1891)

> Trees made into story, venerable leaves that in the landscape of America take on the value of a writing where a statement about our destiny is consigned.
>
> —José Lezama Lima, *La experiencia americana* (1957)

"Pensamientos en la Habana" first appeared in the third issue (Fall 1944) of *Orígenes*, the literary magazine Lezama had founded with his friend José Rodríguez Feo, and was later included in Lezama's book of

poems *La fijeza* (1949). Like many of his writings of the forties and fifties, it contains meditations on what the sources and nature of a poetic tradition of the New World might be. The reader may wonder why a translation from Spanish still contains lines in Spanish (the end lines of the first three stanzas). In the original those lines were in English and then were translated into the language of the poem (in different order) as the end lines of stanzas nine, ten and twelve; hence my transposition of the languages here.

This is a dense, teeming poem that powerfully transforms its materials as it goes, at times very obscurely, at times with relative clarity. Two immediately visible sequences in it help the reader mark stages in that transformation. One sequence is traced by the italicized end lines of all stanzas but one, lines that suggest shifts to other modes of utterance, quoting or translating or decanting something that has gone before or is yet to come. The other sequence is traced in stanzas two and three and eight through ten by the conflicting assertions and activities of a "we" and a "they."

From the mid-nineteenth century on, a confrontation of "nosotros" and "ellos" in Hispanic American writing often signified "we Latin Americans" versus "they the Americans of the United States," with a whole array of connotations ("we" represent culture, "they" materialism, "we" the invaded, "they" the invaders, etc.). Here the alignment seems different, both broader and more particular: "they" are the owners of cultural goods displayed like merchandise or museum pieces, the manipulators of cultural memory, the imposers of old myths that humiliate "us" and deny "our" humanity, oblivious of "our" capacity to be as at the first moment of Creation and create from "our" nature (in all senses) new myths.

But my choice of traits identifying "us" and "them" is too clear, not just because expositorily selective but because the poem has such a strong tendency to break its own continuities with eruptions that seem to scatter all paradigms, including those that establish relations between the culturally familiar and the culturally unfamiliar. There are many cryptic uses of definite articles with nouns as if they had been introduced earlier or as if they were antonomasias alluding to well known entities. With this goes another strong tendency to fragment other texts, even pulverize them almost invisibly, mixing their particles into the poem as implicit quotations and redistributing their sense. Some are prestigious texts of the Western tradition, such as Genesis ("we know we are naked" or "the wind. . .rippling the waters" in stanza ten) or Greek myth ("the thread of the woman beset by suitors," in stanza eight) or Baudelaire. "Straightens its stockings" in stanza one echoes, I think, the phrase "ajustant bien leurs bas" in Baudelaire's "Les Phares." Lezama twice quoted in essays of his lines from "Les Phares" containing those words, which allude to grotesque figures in a painting by Goya. "Les Phares" is a museum poem, a poem about works

handed down, about cultural transmission. The first three stanzas of Lezama's poem extensively develop in a very different way the word motifs "museums," "previous styles," "memory. . .transported," "memories. . . remembered," etc.

Other texts so treated belong more to a Latin American tradition. For example, I think particles from the third poem of Martí's *Versos sencillos* ("Odio la máscara y vicio / de mi corredor de hotel. . .") are embedded in Lezama's poem, as well as Martí's movement there away from false value toward his sacred temple of the forest ("máscara" occurs in Lezama's first stanza and Martí's "molduras"—parts of the temple, wood fashioned—recur in Lezama's later stanzas, along with "bosque"). That movement of Martí's was prophetic: he was to die in battle in the interior of Cuba, in the "monte." In his last diaries the sense of nature becomes supernatural but subtle, precise, as in his notation of April 18, 1895, about the music of the forest at night, an ecstatic contribution to that muted symphony of natural sounds the critic Samuel Feijóo has studied in 19th century Cuban poetry, much of the vocabulary of which—murmurs, echoes, sobs, sighs, breaths, etc.— runs through Lezama's poem, radically (but still allusively) transposed. Another hidden or presupposed Cuban "text" that enigmatically breaks into this poem is that of Lezama's own private memories and associations. See, in this regard, his essay "Confluences" that I translated in *Sulfur* #25, where he ascribes the line "The violin of ice shrouded in reminiscence" (stanza eleven) to a context of family heirlooms and oral traditions that also resonates with other moments of "Thinking Thoughts in Havana."

The poem moves from an initial stanza of tense blockage, of first person singular caught up in negatives (". . .where I cannot, / where I cannot. . .") and an elaborate syntax of subordinations ("Because. . . Though. . . If. . .") to the final two stanzas made up of a calm litany of shorter and syntactically much simpler statements about forest, wood, river, man, "we," "I" and a few animals and instruments: a "poverty" made and unmade in "reminiscence." To suggest something of how the poem works from one state to the other, I will draw two brief comparisons with Lezama's novel *Paradiso* (1966).

Toward the end of chapter XI of *Paradiso* (pp. 355ff in the English translation), José Cemi's "exercise of poetry, the verbal quest of unknown finality" is enacted not as a writing activity nor even mainly as a verbal activity but rather as his contemplation of objects on display (mostly human or animal figurines), in shop windows on the street or in glass cases at home (the Spanish word "vitrina" used in the poem may mean either of these means of display). But these objects are not seen as static but rather as forming extremely dynamic and changing configurations or "agrupamientos," acting upon one another and driven by "currents of force" that are their own

and not their contemplator's (at one point individual words are said to behave for Cemí like these objects). In stanzas two and three of the poem, there are literally displays, of course, but the interaction of objects beginning there seems to carry over with greater complexity in stanzas four through seven, now free of that sense of display and observation or of the claims and counterclaims of "we" and "they." The objects become subjects or actants and wildly undergo physical contacts, interpenetrations, ingestions, expulsions, dismemberments, in a kind of surreal mechanics of destruction and reassembly (I think here of the bodies and mixtures in Deleuze's *Logique du sens).*

The other aspect of *Paradiso* is its tendency to render the sexual in grotesque, even demonic terms which are exorcized or displaced (José Cemí as such has no sexual experiences: those phases of his *Bildung* are undergone in contiguity for him by his alter egos Fronesis and Foción). In the poem, with the return of the "we" / "they" dialectic in stanzas eight through ten, part of what "they" would impose upon "us" as contents of the repeatedly mentioned "funereal urn" (like a sinister horn of plenty, like a Pandora's box) are "leaping couples, contrasts and the fever / grafted into . . .magnet bodies," as if the masters of Western culture (if that is who "they" are) were also imposing on "us" sex and guilt, here too seen as grotesque. I stress this because I think that in its final two stanzas "Thoughts in Havana" arrives at (or projects) a kind of non-Biblical Eden (no serpent, no woman) or sui generis pastoral: a mythical state beyond sex or genealogy or inheritance, a state of self-engendering similar to what Lezama called in his 1964 interview with Armando Alvarez Bravo (which I translated in *Sulfur* #24) an "Idumaean" reproduction not by couples but by spontaneous vegetal growth from the body.

There is much, much more to speak of in this poem (such as its implicit transformation of the Cartesian *cogito* at the beginning or its colibri / hummingbird as a diminutive New World Prometheus and "piercer" of obstacles at the end), but I leave that for another time.

BARBARA GUEST
THE SURFACE AS OBJECT

the visible
as in the past

subsisting in layered zone
refuses to dangle
oaths on marsh field

whitened or planned
memorial distance

rather than vine
that which proliferates
the bittersweet grapple
initiates
a mysterious mesh
forbids the instant disclosure
delays a humid course
or, creates a patina
jungleware.

or, she moving forward into
the line of sticks
circled by sticks
her hand flies up
in the direct line of sticks
odor of lines.

knowing the difficulty
annexation of Egypt
oaths on marsh fields etc.

a possible intimacy with
the tomblike fragrance of stone
the cult-like
expressiveness.

(the perpendicular
millimeter stone
less raw

or, gangling
as the artful
lessening surprised.)

tree grown guava
oaths on marsh field
the hungry minstrel and the forager
gold on the guava lick of rosin
and the chill latched thicket
grunt marsh weed
regardez-la
the untamed ibis.

JOEL-PETER WITKIN
STATEMENT

> "...heroism is the natural condition of the poet, that the poet is only a servant of the power of a force that drives him and that a true servant never abandons his master but follows him even to the scaffold."
>
> —Jean Cocteau

What I have always wanted was to give something to life that wasn't there before. My passion is to make beautiful, indelible photographs based on my life's need.

I live in the world, but it is more that the world lives in me. I make my own reality because truth is not in the world—it is within us and in eternal life. The manifestation of deepest truth we find inside is what we all must ultimately share with others, in whatever form that takes. The artist is not a special kind of human, but every human a special kind of artist.

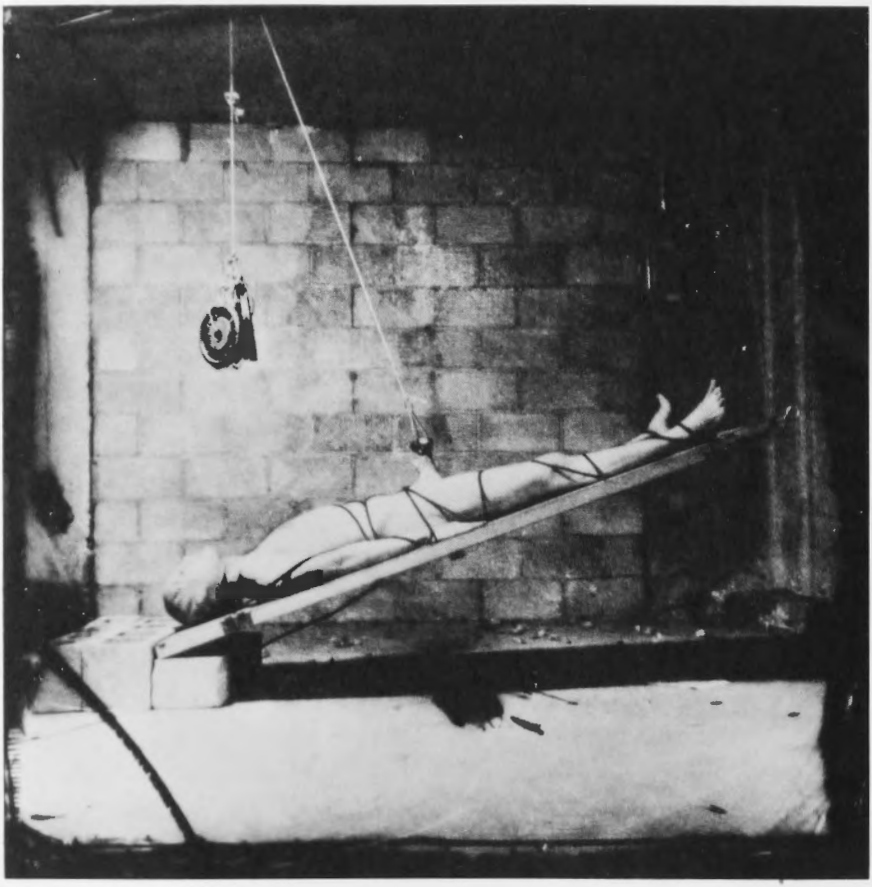
I want to live in an age which sees similar beauty in a flower and in the severed limb of a human being. Therefore, I photograph conditions of being, life and its extension—death. I attempt to find wonder and beauty in the landfill of our histories and ourselves. The subject matter is grotesque, since it is what we, in our darkest moment, have become. We either accept the challenge to discover what the meaning of life, death and afterlife is, or we reject ourselves, becoming merely "human scenery."

Making photographs is a necessity as real as blood, light and love. All that I make is real. I do not collage or superimpose. What I do is to construct an enclosure, a world I fill with people and objects of beauty, of splendor and misery. Often my subjects are masked because being in life is to wear the mask of existence.

Albuquerque, 1991

JOEL-PETER WITKIN
NINE PHOTOGRAPHS

THE KISS
1982

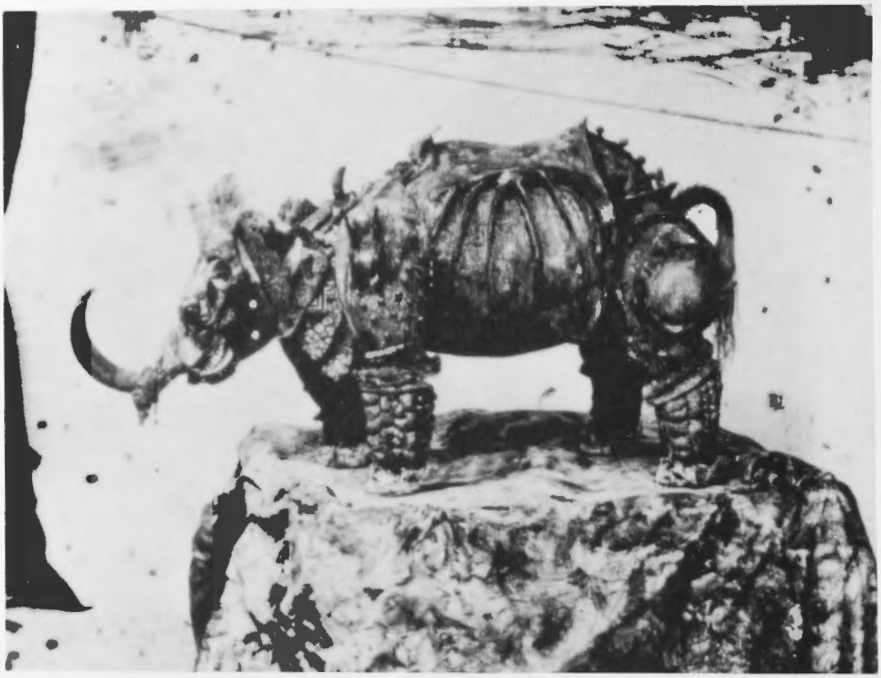


TESTICLE STRETCH WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A CRUSHED FACE

1982

PICASSO EN LOS DISPARATES DE GOYA

1987



LA BÊTE

1987

WOMAN ONCE A BIRD

1990

VANITY

1990

DAPHNE AND APOLLO

1990

MAN WITH DOG

1990

FEAST OF FOOLS

Mexico, 1990

HERBERT LUST
WITKIN VERSUS PHOTOGRAPHY

Despite the self-serving clamor that photography is a fine art the fact is that the pictorial revolution started by cubism has made little imprint on photography, which remains mired in the most draconian chatter. Granted, some exceptions exist, but as a group, photography collectors, dealers, critics and curators are the philistines in American art. This group wills that photography stay hypnotized by the recognizable object/recognizable message. It is inconceivable that current photography could understand that glory in this century, cubism, or its extension, abstract art. While painting collectors have elevated Mondrian, Pollock, Rothko, Newman, and now Stella, Marden and Kelly to the superstar level, photography still babbles about "object" or "meaning." While its best writers like Sontag and Grundberg grumble that photography is some way must rely on tangible reality and, to use the most majestic euphemism, while its collectors remain so "innocent," there is no chance that the current photographic scene will ever revolutionize art or "seeing" as painting has. About as "modern" as the present photography scene dares get is to indulge in an illiterate photo-montage, vegetative expressionism or effete surrealism. In short modern photography is a condom mentality.

However there is one swimming against this self-indulgent muck—Joel-Peter Witkin. He has constructed a world consistent with cubistic formalism and anti-romanticism. His somber credit has been to reconcile the avant-garde with current infantile photographic obsessions by deploying objects that are not objects but rather planes integrated behind or against a painterly screen. However because Witkin uses human anomalies to orchestrate all this and anomalies are still naturalistic referents, his piercing images can still be accepted by the photographic world as their business as usual. Witkin has been acclaimed by the photographic world for the wrong reasons, because this world is so impoverished it cannot understand anything that is intellectual.

I shall not analyze Witkin's expressionism very much—I have very little to add to the great deal that has been written about it. However I should stress that in no way is a Witkin photograph "exploitive." Witkin's human anomalies are Christ images. They are our modern crucified ones, because,

though monsters in appearance, they are in a mental way 100 percent normal. It is they who endure and blossom beyond stone.

A crucifixion implies the demon. Thus there is the demonic and the violent either direct or implied in the greatest Witkin. For example, in the way he juxtaposes animals, both dead and alive, to his human rejects. Richard Lindner is some famous paintings played off the animal against the human, to indicate that we are all animals, with man being the lesser animal. But Witkin's vision goes way beyond Lindner. Lindner in a way is small potatoes compared to Witkin. This is perhaps the first instance in art history where a photographer has beaten a great painter on his own battlefield. However Witkin could never receive credit for such a victory, because it is doubtful if photographic museum curators would even know about Richard Lindner, just as they also feel that once you've seen one Mondrian you've seen them all. However these same museum people feel that every Adams, Weston, Strand, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger is a unique experience. . .but for this writer once you've seen one work by these photographers you've seen them all, while every Mondrian is an adventure.

Even a writer who is "almost" knowledgeable like Grundberg has complained about Witkin's surrealism. This complaint proves this critic's intellectual failure, for it is well known in the fine arts world that surrealism was an extraordinary romantic art movement, whereas Witkin is perhaps the most anti-romantic artist in the 20th century, just as Christ on the cross was anti-romantic. In fact if one had to categorize Witkin, and this writer would not, he would have to be called a formalistic expressionist. But Witkin is more than that.

This writer would rather whisper that a Witkin image is beautiful due to its magical formalism. The finest Witkin images are those organized along synthetic cubist lines where the world foils into vignette-planes that stitch each other through a loitering, mysterious, painterly mist. Sliding mirrors impounded by capillaries that risk and sink at the same time make for the overall breathing that is the best Witkin—*Gods of Earth and Heaven, Portrait of a Dwarf, Un Santo Obscuro, The Prince Imperial, Choice of Outfits for the Agonies of Mary*, and the ones herein reproduced.

Some day the art world will realize that Witkin photographs are not photography, but art drives that by accident were helped along by a camera. Witkin photographs are lagged icons (held along synthetic cubist splittings) that project the most heraldic pictorialism yet seen in this century.

MICHAEL GIZZI
from *NO BOTH*

20 years and one day to the day which I won't affix to the page here as this isn't a letter to anyone but me—long overdue—and because I've initiated so many heartbreaking larks at the starting-gate of truth-telling to "I know you." Only last night because I'm always growing a proboscis I said "Tomorrow I'll begin this new notebook with the words *I surrender,"* like I should have a scarlet brand on my lip in lieu of a moustache which reads "He begins on the morrow" or tattooed to my big toe "He died with his rue on." But even that's a ruse. No wonder I suffer such trapezoidal travel anxiety that to put it wildly I get this visual visceral hallucination that my chest extends six feet straight out like an amphetamine puffed mourning dove. It must have *something* to do with flight—my little fraidy cat flights from change? I always have a sense of camaraderie though when I hear women especially remark quite rightly "Men! O they're terrified of change." And yet if I'm going to make a clean stab at the brisket of it (the truth) I best be careful not to piss-off the mark and traffic only in a bloodbath of my own shirttail shortcomings trailing a Roman Legion, them I know exceedingly well. After all I'm not the Desquamated Professor of Grey Torpor for nothing. But I desire a chair not a pitypot in perpetuity. I want a palpable hit. But I regress. I'm back kneeling on rice kernels in the coldstone circus church of misbehaving bent youth, slurring 3 square Marys, faking a good Act of Conniption flush in front of the Light-a-Candle Concession, a terraced altar of carmine-colored jellyglasses flickering their translucent boo-boos of Jesus. Tongues-of-fire for hire? Drop the geetus in the leadbox and indulge your poor dead Pop with a night on the town in Limbo. A plaque on your house! Sister Tetanus scoring my penance ringside humphing siroccos through the otiose hairs on her wimpled lip. "A beating a day keeps the titters away" peel the Bells of St. Scary. Hang it all, Buster Brown, but we attended a condemned school. No wonder everyone I see points the fingers in their faces at me. Some can't accept a little hotsoup kitchen less it's been divined by their own dowsers, whence the Second Coming of Job. You can imagine where this manic ringworm of road goes. Flatline seems to be the status quo and yet if you're a frantic mountaineer-like Mindanao-diver you pay so dearly being DOAL: dead on

arrival at life, being so bi-polar you either consign yourself to the blasted blame-box or turn your entirely flayed caul of pain on the world's largesse. You know what the guy who ate the school said to me? "I thought it was Prince of Gluttony Day." A telltale sign of instability responsible for many memorable events. Why can't one have fun in his/her own home? But in our misty roses we forget.

Take a letter, Sister McCree. Dear Bushwhack St. Tacky of Bombazine: I'm well aware I haven't yet surrendered but I can't get my eye-fix inners off those severed breasts of Catherine on a platter, erect. How can you expect anyone to surrender to a subsect inquisition of *humilitas* such as you expect? Life is a queer little man to quote Barry Fitzgerald but I'm not sure I want to bunk with him. The eyes of knickers are upon us (to be sung). It is the corning of the reign of ham. Even the old fogies of Continuing Ed slip back into their saddle shoes after a barrenness session of bairn, the said sad unzipped blindstiff bifurcating the curb as Jimmy said "once he was a little boy" and his folks provided for him. Let it be spit in the sod's soiled neck with throat-chimes: I like me and share my contact gardenhose of glee and no Richelieu of hypocrisy can stanch it.

Christ clocked at a buck-ten on I–91. Fifteen pounds of pancake minkup. A contact bum of valorous stick-to-it-iveness sad as that nightie of dishwater undoing itself. Let's grow up and go to sleep like seagulls saying kaddish over a lost harpoon. Wait a minute! wasn't I going somewhere? Although we speak a lost speech which ain't quite (is it?) true and dive into the blind plural pastime like coins on Oedipus-eyes or Mister Sainted Mother Tough Tomato deaf as a hundred years, how is it knowledge gets

lost and the meaning clear? What a fella needs is mother-wit and a horsehair—wilts a boy faster than lettuce leaf dropped on a doorstep at midday. Another drubbing from his own monkey's uncle. Daylights phrase our staggering stars. The sorrow of wild oats is to sodomize flies? Pull out the rug from under your road—a pothole promiscuous moon. I smell something locked-up acappella saboteur. 11:00 to 3:00 is four hours and I think I slept for three which is a record for undisturbed me. I knew if I didn't slow down I'd be breaking bread on my father's knee in the bleep hereafter, blue as the sky left in the dark in a blind rage chilling a red-faced white. How come the will takes over when the spirit says uncle? like those I'll-bend-your-wrists-back-if-you-don't-bend-mine games I used to play with Pop, pasting uppers on our hearts.

Ripley's believe-it-or-not but I just purchased my first rack of rubbers at the age of 43 brought'em home and plopped'em in my top drawer sock salter which I keep opening so's to peek in and see my father there in safety in *my* bedroom as I never was snooping about in his. But condoms father nothing good or bad—sorry Sister Martyr la Favorita. The last time (one of them) together at the Audubon Sistine Bird Sanctuary arguing as usual but having fun as though we'd straddle that high tension wire forever, neither of us giving in that was our definition of love and it was a good one because there's only the *one* life which we both knew but which most people fashimmeled forget. He was standing in a drizzle in front of the talking parrot toucan what-do-you-call-it minah bird cage, a nosehair stark sticking out in the air that only grey can illumine and I so athletic-like stepped up as if to slug a homerun which I'd done so many times before and which he'd refused to come see me do due to the high tension wire and with one swift swiping mongoose move I d'Artagnaned that hair right out of his nose. It was a tender moment especially for him as his eyes watered from pluck-pain and I knew in that photo-finishing moment I'd beat him by a hair which is also why his eyes watered with that love only a father can have for a son who's finally surpassed him. And then the lecture scientific of course about the dangers of causing an aneurysm to the brain due to such daring pluck—a Scientific American death in front of a birdhut? I could fill a shoebox with nosehairs of foiling death-defying self-destructive feints at

reunion. Between thumb and forefinger I tweeze a nosehair and whisper "hang on, maybe this time I'm comin', Pop!"

Determined to say nothing today that isn't absolutely. Determined to see sunup horizon. Determined to see these tongues of fleur-de-lis fiery floaters herded into an eyesock. Determined to get that brandnew custom hilt heartbeat of sailcloth. Determined to hear it purr like the one leaf maple lone hung-on red through winter quorums on which is being recorded now the demo of Spring's first birdsong. Determined to level these seven hills useless as nipples on a man's behind. Determined to marlinspike that grass skirt stub in a flask scribing all ivory. Determined to know that head of Vallejo. Determined to offend everyone I know and have them thank me. Aren't I the wild eagle's birdtongue waxing the roof of his house widdershins? Determined to write for every hamstrung son of woman who ever tipped his visor-cap from a truck-cab at me. Determined as St. George to slay that autocrat who molts exponentially his oily scales like some televised Southwestern beltbuckle of turquoise. Determined to shatter back like a fly's eyeview the strabismic points of a 24–sided glance times what? to be multiplied infinitely dropping back into a punt-receiving mirror? a winding sheet reading itself backwards into fate?

A few times in our lives we live like cats. The child in us loves the applause. Watching is nothing. Angels are people who never blinked. I see them sniffing. One day you'll sit in the sun and be incinerated like a saltation. Sometimes terrible things happen quite naturally. I get up in the morning and there's my skin in the bed. It got my hand, can you beat that! then a wasp stung out my eye. Makes my hungry fist seem like the angel of mercy's

compote. My skin got all shiny like a mirror, seas of boiled fish, ink like you've never seen, my sweat in a bottle dripping gasoline. Pray that you're young. Innocence can be Hell. An echo of an utterance inwardly, secretly accompanies an "other." A quality of bondage.

Get your ass outta my soul you pastina-brained organdy wraith-maker. You're the worm that appled my tenement steps. Who was it Piero della Francesca'd your cinderblocks of misperspective? You gonna blame that on cousin Ninganing too? How could such beauty align itself with a drainpipe and stay there snaked? Your dress like your home cantilevered in a prom date photo pic 1941, sixteen years before your first Olds Italiano statement of status quo arriviste nouveau leech creeping assimilation. You dis-mug me. I wanna barf on the beauty that was the foliage surrounding you in that '41 photo pic, coppiced now like you and your attitude all because I hate what they done to you and you let them do shutting me down like some *Cinecitta ragazzi* who died before he was born, my sick socked soul outworn bumming that Appian Way of all kids who want a break from Mama not just spaghetti. Go back and capture that dress (that loner) that handmedown sistergown and bathe in it and remember your son before you were born.

I almost wish this spud were in your gut
among the driest of the century
and then at the very top of the image
speed at night

We hope he's in a better place
than eyebrows from a mouse's hide
picking out his crystal eye
a tick on which to sup

Few things as devastating
as a dryspell
stationary over terrain
the graphic lifting air up of a slope

Game little Gladys with her jumprope
Vibology with vexation
On automatic self *sieg heil*

The wives in my mind
The bird on my finger throwing voices
You draw the blanks

Wad some power cubes
See as others see
Pick-up your eyes

Eureka feels like home
Hello, Darling!
You sure is a sharpie

Beautifying the be

I went about on little ant-knees, a beetle shining back saying "Step on me" and now I'm beating myself with a liquid. Reading the world it appears everyone thinks they have an ear, but "you no got *ear*" until you find the lost ear of Van Gogh buried rotten like some queer cob of corn under earth in yellow Provence. Fast ills—the autistic slur of quiz kids. So language is a plot to make us think we're gods and so destroy us. Who said it's raining fish to the trees? My heart is so all fired-up it's beating on the other side now. That level on which poetry is a compensation for a lack of conversation between any two of which we make much, like those guys who could go to the edge but go back inside to do some ice fishing instead. Closer I ever got to brothers though, almost like my nose. The capguns of my enormous liberty, Mayakovsky in the backpocket of my headfirst. Because I knew you couldn't have a coffee without a smoke I saved this nail. Met an old dovetail in the sleet today. A Sycorax of showtunes, I bite a War Between the States bullet. There are rats running up and down inside my legs. The seats of all my pants shiny like a nursery rhyme. The citizeneer down on his luck. And who invented the screw? I'd like to know all about it backwards. By George, isn't that bigtop on pickup sticks? O you of Little Teeth, your cough which resembles the missing pounds of an old man.

With obscure language arrives the visitor of the flame. A barter of images abstract as life and death caresses the patriot of legend complete with his invisible humility. Nostalgia is an impossible language attached to a dream casual as dirt. Visions caress the ramp called an error of Corinthians. Starlight another ad for the sea. On the high seas (2 of them Hebrew) the leaves move to reflect a monstrous endowment. A leaf in the magical plenitude of a nap speckles its branches. Words are not a poem but a mirror that suggests. I write to mean words are not the poem. Sentimental minerals hang descendent, on the prowl. A closed leaf preambles its coroner. This respiration encores the pure sense of writing. The address of the invisible leaf is of the future leaf. The pensive memory of furious mettle and the tendons of a bird with two bills brilliant in the disposal my life reflects as a crystal shines on a diamond in feverish pain. And the smoking dogs in their venting degrees. Now I enter the sea the perpetual semblance of a quiet man smoking his fingers in an English pavilion. A dead guide we can

chat with. The air of my heart arranging a race of tense. Truth may never enter the mind of what originally thought it. What breathes "other" becomes a part that didn't comprehend. Somehow the door missed what was going on. The throwaway dream remembers what it's used. A circle of aberration that makes a wind turn to stone.

for Jean Frémon

HUGH SEIDMAN
FOUR POEMS

MY LITTLE PARENTS

So pure. So far
From the wars.

They stare at what
In the photo?

So pale, so far
From the fires.

So pure, so lucid
In the silver wind.

Their faces lit
With the end of war.

ONE THREATENED

One threatened, threatens all, said the petition.

The orphaned, child-soldier; the raped, butchered girl.
The cliché that the universe dilates toward blood.

That is, whatever one conjures.

On Fifth Avenue the salesman suggested grey or navy.

The wools and blends, solids, pinstripes,
Single-breasted, double-breasted, vented and unvented

Martyrish husks.

BALL GAME

Priest/courtiers' rubber, bone-crunch hard ball
stroked by a sort of atlatl at a vertical
stone ring 23 feet up.

Some think the impaled lost:
skulls on poles as at Tenochtitlan.
Others: that beheaded winners won next-world glory.

Now, many glyphs deciphered:
State praised, captives skinned
(extracted nails and heart, severed lips).

But also, of course, others exhort:
note flower-carved facades; deep myth;
iridescent, green and crimson quetzal dance feathers.

CHILD

25 years ago the skeletal Biafran wall photo of witness.
Now its double wails on the Relief Fund mail flier.

A whole well costs only four dollars. Water poured to a child's
cup.

Nothing so near as how near one must move toward action.
Toward the uses of a person not for whatever purpose but only
for its
personhood.

ED SANDERS
MELVILLE'S FATHER

1.

"Reputation is far more valuable
than fame or riches"
—Allan Melvill

He had a seeking to be stainless

"My children," he wrote
"I trust will inherit an honest name
and keep pace with improvements"

O Name!

O Spotless Clairvoyancy!
Thing of Pure Blood!

O Unsullied Formula
in Time's Torrent!

O spotless
unblemished rivet in
the metal of infinity!

O Stainlessness!

2.

New York in 1818

The impoverished
after the Napoleonic
wars

packed N.Y.C.

The creeks were paved over,
the farmland taken,

and the poor peoples' grave blocks
known from the Bible
as potter's fields
became parks
the only spots the developers
would leave behind
as open space

3.

Allan and Maria Gansevoort Melvill,
two spotless names, she of the
purse-proud Gansevoorts
and he of the war hero Melvills
married and bore 8 children.

In 1818
when he was 36
Allan Melvill went to France
to organize a wholesale business
in "French goods,"

When he returned
Maria became pregnant
with the future author of

"Bartleby the Scrivener,"
who was born on August 1, '19.

4.

Allan Melvill opened his business
on Pearl Street
near the South Street seaport
and supervised the
crates at the docks
of goods from the schooners
for the rich and proper:
lavender, ribbons, scarves, handkerchiefs,
selvages (ornamental fringe or ribbon sewn on borders
to prevent unraveling), corsets, bonnets, silk gloves,
fine-plaited wheat straw hats,
Spitafield silk and the fancy cloth
known as white tapaze.

O French goods!
from the home of Revolution
the rage of thought!
the hint of skin!

O triumph of style
that temporary array
in the torrent, that
meringue above the stratum, where
scents and lace and pheromones commingle
just out of reach of the waves
that slam by Plymouth Rock.

5.

The Crash of '26

For eight years it was Triumph!
The ledgers tell the tale,
even though being a middleman
is that most vulnerable
of roles

But around 1826
came one of those
"incomprehensible economic collapses"
those periodic poor-kills
where they break off city tree limbs
for fire wood
so that the '30s of the 19th
were like the '30s of the 20th,

and French goods were just the
sort of thing
not to be bought
during poor-kill.

The Melvills were not prepared
to be swept up in such
a democratic phenomenon
so, in 1828 they moved with their eight children
and two servants
to a spiffy 2–storey house at 675 Broadway
near Bleecker (don't bother
to try to find it—it's now a block-
sized modern brick apartment)

6.

A Slow Slide

There's nothing like a
slow slide
        into failure

You think
        sometimes
                it's success

but really, it's
like when
a little commuter
                plane
comes down
                in layers
in a bucking wind,

up, down, down, up
                down, buck

so that failure
                feignedly fastens.

7.

For the penniless man
is the worst kind of criminal
Beyond both pity and pardon
—Brecht, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*

Thou lackest money?
You scum
You are really scum
You are homeless?

You want it that way!
You can't pay?
You are the scum of failure
The scum of scum!
Lower your immune system,
                scum
Work around the clock,
                scum
Raise your metabolism
                scum
Burn it! Allan
Shake it! Allan
Make death of it! Allan
Fall with it! Allan

Shame shame
shame & blame
never the same
stain on the name

8.

They probably kept it hidden
from Herman and the seven, for

children never want to hear
their parents are out of money

With rich relatives
it never got down to

recycled clothing under the
Christmas tree

but in those days o' eco-Dickens
                there was no Chapter 11

and you could
go to jail

if you fled
your debts

so when in 1830 Allan Melvill went bankrupt
and they fled their two stories
on Broadway near Bleecker,

there was the click
of phantom handcuffs
in the mist

9.

They moved back to Albany
where the cold winter wind
from the narrow Hudson
was a poor-kill

They tried to keep the horror
hidden from haughty relatives, but he had
sunk so low as to
clerk in a fur store.

Ahh the shame of it!
Face-burning! Exquisite!
To clerk in a store!

10.

Advice to the middle aged
with penury's prize

Save your immune system
Stay calm
Stay energized
Stay cunning, focussed
Reach out

Don't blame yourself
It's the system's fault
Be prepared to be sneered at
like a hungry rat
a run-down cat
or bat scat

and know that it's
the fault of
the same
cruel system
formed on the
edge of the
glaciers
in the
Pleistocene
& Holocene

11.

He was almost 50
when the lungs under stress
rasp, "can't do it, can't do it"
so he tapped into his
life force.

In April o' '31
Allan confessed poverty to his father

In August o' '31
he went to Boston
to ask him (inspector
of the Custom House)
for moolah

& then in October a loan from
bro'-in-law Peter Gansevoort
(head of the State Bank of Albany)

for 2K to take over
a bankrupt retail fur and cap store
plus a manufacturing plant
at 364 South Market Street
(now Broadway) in Albany.

There was plenty of fur
and hides from
the hemlock bark tanneries
in the Caskills.

Allan went to New York City
in late November o' '31
and picked up additional credit—

It was going to be success!
Money! The Return of Stainlessness!

Servants again! And the children to be
able "to keep pace with improvements."

12.

The steamboat Constellation
left the New York docks
on an icy December day in 1831
bound for Albany

He had the money
He had the credit
and contentedly watched the
crusts of ice in the Hudson

eager to get home to make
those beaver hats!
Make some money before Christmas!
Money!

till, 60 miles upstream at Poughkeepsie
the steamer couldn't cut
                through the ice.

They pulled to dock
and there were no covered
coaches available
to scoot up to Albany

A Holocene ice storm
            cares not about a name
so he went in a one-horse open wagon

through bouncy ruts of icy snow
trying to stay on the road

Got to get back to Albany!
Not a second to tarry!
Come on Immune System! Come on Metabolism!

He lost his scarf, and
his coat was warm enough
    to wheel and deal in NYC
but not enough for an
                arctic trail.

The driver
    gave him a quilt
but his lower back froze up

He coughed
            His temperature rose
Good! More energy!

Here mate, have a shot
                of hooch
home made

A cold piece of baked rabbit
to eat

while they fixed the wagon's frame.

Temperature zero.
His lungs felt like they were
full of water.

Thirty miles to Rhinebeck,
then in another wagon to
Hudson—twenty miles

Finally, in a covered sleigh to Greenbush
at sunset after
three hypothermic days

the sleigh let him out.

He walked across the Hudson,
narrow at Albany
the temperature minus 2 Fahrenheit
in a poor-kill wind
and went right to his store
just off the river
without going home.

13.

Mercury

Melvill was going to "reorganize"
the fur factory—
on South Market Street
so I ponder whether
he experimented in beaver felt hats.

They rubbed the felting furs with mercury
mixed with acid

then the hairs were cut from the hide
and put into a pile
which was then
vibrated with a 7-foot bow to shake
and mold it into interwoven felt—

The trembling bow
would spew mists of quicksilver
into the hard-breathing
lungs of the felter

Mercury is extremely nephrotoxic,
causes cellular damage,
it may lead to circulatory collapse
& oliguria, or lack of urine

And those poisoned
by the feltmaker's disease
could have used dialysis machines
to cleanse their kidneys.

Mercury inactivates
a wide variety of enzymes
and aerosolic exposure to it
produces chills, fever, coughs, chest pains,
hemoptysis (blood-spit), insomnia, nervousness,
impaired judgement, propensity to freak out,
fatigue, loss of sex drive, depression, abdominal
cramps, et al.

It may
have pushed
him o'er th'
Immune
System
Edge

For Allan Melvill
evinced some of the symptoms
of mercury poisoning

may literally have gone
Mad as a Hatter
striding around his factory

in the neurotoxic wafts
which are absorbed by the alveoli
and spread to the brain.

In any case
for a month he slaved
consumed with mania and overwork,
his metabolism
in toxic overdrive
till January 7, 1832

he went bonkers,
took to bed,
for 21 days
with pneumonia, then delirium, then thanatos.

Herman was 13.

14.

Buy Cheap Sell Dear

No one
no group
lives long enough
to structure
a system
to ease the pain
of living.

And you can say, well, Sanders,
your analysis
strays from the nature
of the species

and tragedy requires
the order that is

no rest for the best

but the cruelty of the system
& maybe a little mercury poisoning
killed Herman Melville's father
early.

CHARLES OLSON & FRANCES BOLDEREFF

WHO WILL BRING IT UP, MY LUTE? THE FIRST LETTERS OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

(Edited by Ralph Maud and Sharon Thesen)

In November of 1947, Frances Boldereff, "standing longingly in front of the Melville shelves" of a bookstore, lighted upon *Call Me Ishmael.* The next day she wrote to its author, Charles Olson, in gratitude for "betraying" himself "as one of the ones we so urgently need." Thus began a correspondence that lasted until Olson's death in 1970.

By the summer of 1950, the exchange had accelerated to daily and sometimes twice-daily missives. In viewing these letters in terms of Olson's development as a poet, we cannot ignore Boldereff's vital contribution. The letters indicate how much of his verse at this time came out of wanting to say things to her. The following selection, comprising the first thirty letters between them, reaches as far as Olson's poem "La Chute," inspired when Boldereff sent him an article on the Gilgamesh epic by Samuel Kramer.

The following pages also include two early examples persuasive of Boldereff's talent: the juxtapositions that comprise *A Primer of Morals for Medea,* an autobiographical response to sculptures of Michelangelo; and a notebook written in 1936 when Boldereff was 31. This notebook was her answer to Otto Weinenger's misogynistic *Sex and Character.* That she entrusted such an intimate document to Olson at this early stage of their relationship (they hadn't yet met) shows the degree to which Boldereff was eager for the companionship Olson's presence in the world brought to her.

Their influence upon one another persisted despite periods of anguish, confusion, and desperation, and through the various durations of marriages to others. Frances Boldereff and Charles Olson served each other well, as human beings at their best can sometimes do.

Woodward to New York c/o Reynal & Hitchcock
22 November 1947

BOOK DESIGN

Frances Boldereff

Woodward, Penna.

November 22

Dear Mr. Olson—

Yesterday, standing longingly in front of the Melville shelves, I found your *Call me Ishmael.*[1] Every lover of Melville must feel deep gratitude towards you—for the understanding

for the clear and so intensely personal style of the language
for the perfect taste in the acknowledgments
for the hints about us, now
and in general for betraying yourself as one of the ones we
so urgently need.

A perfect book which I Intend to see that all the people I know who can read receive a copy of. (I'm not saying it's so many.)

In very great gratitude,

Frances Boldereff

Sacramento to Woodward
29 December 1947

Sacramento, California
December 29, 1947

My dear Frances Boldereff—

It is generous of you.

I am very curious to know what yr own work is—BOOK DESIGN.

You'd have had my pleasure in your letter earlier—but for the forwarding involved. I am out here running out the lines of search which a new book—on archetype creatures of our past—pushes me along on. It's a wretched, thin stage of the method: journals, maps, letters.[2]

You might find some interest in one of the tarot pieces in December Harper's Bazaar.[3]

You see what you've done.

Thanks,

Charles Olson

Permanent address:
217 Randolph Place NE
Washington 2, D.C.

Woodward to Washington
[early January 1948]

Whenever I ride on a train, which is fairly seldom these days and someone asks me "What do you do"—I know beforehand I am wasting my breath—"I am a typographic designer." Oh!

And the "Oh" is always followed by the silence of a complete lack of reciprocity. Same as when I used to answer "A curator of art at the University of Iowa"—

I know, Charles Olson—that you *know* what I do—only—how do I do it in Woodward—and live? Harry Sternberg, the etcher, said, "And Motz, what kind of plague do they have in Woodward, that you pay $10 rent?"—Funny, but it's true.

Only free lance at this distance from NYC proved difficult so I commute 32 miles to State College where I have charge of the printing. No one but a New Yorker would think that was close, but I love all the minutes I waste riding back and forth—the only ones that are absolutely mine.

I shall most surely look up the Harper's.

I wrote to Norman Foerster at Chapel Hill—about you and I have been making myself fairly obnoxious to a number of other people all of whom I could knock over because they act as though someone tells them about a book like that often—whereas I consider it in a group of maybe three in twenty-five years.

Once I said to Philip Guston that people are always wanting to know details about artists, musicians—and God! all the details are so *given* in their work—sometimes the spirit coming through so naked and uncovered that one walks very quietly for fear of intruding.

In a way I believe I have never seen—you kept yourself out and yet are so *in* your book.

I cannot pretend I do not know you.

And I am so damned grateful you've no idea.

I am surrounded in the daytime by the bourgeoisie complete in the only German word I know—*ohne.*[4]

Frances Boldereff

Woodward to Washington
[January 1948]

State College.

Mr Olson—

In a recent story of Vladimir Nabokov's in *Directions* he said he was at times in a quiet way fairly fond of his inefficiency—that could be my statement too. But when it keeps me from finding something I really need—a *In Praise of the Fool* then I grow furious—imagine anyone getting so excited as to read quite plainly Harper's Bazaar and then to tear off in the completely wrong direction asking for a Harper's! I like your writing because I cannot read every word—I was so surprised to find a poem—some day you can say what the word is—I liked *your* "is" too, in the letter.

I would wear the poem around my neck to make a speech for me—but it wouldn't help because I don't know anyone here who could read it—Wonderful to have a speech made *for* you—especially when your heart is burning with fury.

In Woodward, a remote village once belonging to my grand papa—they have several expressions I have not heard elsewhere—they always ask—"Shall I go with?" leaving the pronoun unsaid.

The poem "goes with" so terrifically—hard for me to believe you are living anywhere within the U.S. borders. All the elegant people are dead and the other kind alive or dead I wouldn't know. Elegant carries its dictionary meaning. And you aren't and that's what I keep saying to myself can not be true.

Frances Boldereff

I know you know some—I spoke only for myself.

Washington to Woodward (postcard)
11 May 1948 (postmark)

Dear Frances Boldereff:

Nonsense.[5] Truth is, was in California longer than expected. And, with return here, had spurt of work in all directions: prose, play, verse. (Psychotic!)

Still running, like herring in spring.

(Back on Dante yesterday myself: de vulgare eloquentia.[6] As of what is Am. vulgare: the present oppose to Whitman and son Pound. The oppose, of course, is continuum. But what?

You are right, and they are wrong, on "Fool" (which is on Black Sun Press, Paris, with 4 better ones, now, and is called THE GREEN MAN.[7] Better?)

Cordially,
Olson

P.S. I shall be curious to have your judgment on type of "y & x." Proofs came this week—& it looks to my untrained eye as perfect type: like revolutionary broadside.

Woodward to Washington
[mid June 1948]

I have written something like thirty-five inscriptions[8] and cast them all aside—the final one is—

For Olson—with whom I should love to get drunk.

the Motz

When will it be possible to see any of the other things you have been working on?

Washington to Woodward (postcard)
23 June 1948 (postmark 25 June 1948)

June 23 xlviii

Thank you for the delightful design—and invitation. Fact is, the fishing is still good. I have finished one dance-play and am off into another,[9] and it very much looks like I'll tolerate this Afric place/

y & x has also wilted with the summer and I reckon it'll be fall before any more is done on it. It appears there's no press other than newspaper to take the 54" sheet the design involves, and that it must be spliced. Which may be just as well. For the middle hinge was a weak point in the design and Bayler, Union Square, sez, it's like a bone, better after broken.

My greetings to you

Olson

A crowd in a forest of the city make
attention turned as heads which hear demand
the green republic now renewed.[10]

Woodward to Washington
26 June 1948 (postmark)

Saturday

Olson my friend—

I take *off* my hat—I have been wondering how a person like you could cope with an invitation like mine—never saw my face—never had a letter which was me—and yet a polite person—I decided several times to help you out—but an imp prevented me.

I finished several days ago, *Walden*—am so grateful I never read Thoreau before because this was exactly the right week of my life to read it—he tells how the conversations in the winter nights demanded room—a whole roomful of space between himself and his guest and as I read I thought—"Olson doesn't know this is why and I am not going to explain—that is it—he is a man with whom you can have a conversation which requires a whole big roomful of space between the speakers—I am not going to tell him that I am above the bourgeois explanation—that in a sense the invitation was not an invitation—it was a recognition—and I disdain to change its form because God has placed me in the female sex. In my house he can be free—and I will hear him"—and it seemed to me very proper in a deep sense that I had expected so much comprehension from you, of unknowns, and felt so sure because your book proves so amply how wide is your interior.

The month has been marvelous—a Hungarian friend left of a few days ago after spending several weeks and they were a marvelous two weeks—next year I plan to go to Italy with her if I can save the money—she knows it so intimately and I not at all.

I have magnificent plans of work for the coming six months—I am so sure that the circle of our lives will bring us face to face some day (sounds like a Sunday school class but you know the important thing is that you are alive in my place and time).—I laugh as I write this—because God knows you could never have a guarantee that I am what I am—it is very good to me that you are full and flowing—I am wondering how can you say "the green republic now renewed"—oh! Olson please say if you mean that—I am sure the whole shell has to be sloughed off and of men alive I know maybe of four.

When you get time write me a letter—no matter how many months it is and tell me about America[11]—tell me how it is for you—for I expect nothing and then your book comes along and upsets my calculations—and so I do not know what she has in her bosom.

Frances M.B.

State College to Washington
1 December 1948 (postmark)

Olson—

I believe it will please your soul as it has surely pleased mine that the enclosed note[12] was sent off before I had gotten home to Woodward and received your envelope.[13] I will write at length when your book comes—in the meantime I wish you to know that in my opinion your poem *The K* is definitely the greatest poem which has been written in any country in this century (excluding the drama of Garcia Lorca, of course)—I am agin modern poetry in general on account it has all gone up into the head—

If I could write poetry your poem would have come out of me as an *exact* statement of my position as of December, 1948.

I am publishing a book of my own and will, and have been planning to, send you a copy as soon as I receive them—4 to 6 weeks.[14]

With love for you for what you do—

FB

Washington to Woodward (postcard)
2 December 1948 (postmark 3 December 1948)

dec 2

FB:

I am looking into JERUSALEM for the 1st time & find this wondrous line:[15]

The Male is a Furnace of beryll; the Female is a golden Loom.

Thank You. "of great hardness, occurring in hexagonal prisms, commonly green or bluish green"

No. My Man comes out of tarot card numero zero by way of babylonians tzigane italian-magi (short for farmers) cagli & olson. "Druids", I'm afraid WB wld call 'em! Big & black and covered with hair! Beautiful!

Yr book I'll lk fr'd to

0 numero 0

State College to Washington
8 January 1949

January 8.

Olson—

What happened the first time I read *Trinacria*[16] I do not know—at any rate I most surely was somewhere else—for on a second reading it suddenly opened for me and I think it is magnificent. I can not see that you know less than the bravest and best—my particular trio—Rimbaud, Joyce and Blake—if you live with the verve, depth of understanding and courage you show in your writing—American is a blessed land indeed. ("There is a sword"—how right oh yes. It occurs to me that Blake has directly willed his to you.)

There are several things in the other poems I do not understand—and the title?—were you in Italy and Sicily recently—the only connection I could figure for the Christmas poem[17] was Duccio—so masterfully a Christian painter—I received it precisely Christmas morning and considered it a very fine present.

I am so glad to touch at this moment, via the U.S. mails, a human who has nothing to do with my private life—I am trying to prepare a show of my stuff—my adorable daughter suddenly came down with the measles the morning after her birthday party at which she achieved the pride of six—you would much approve—silken and white and black—I am trying, after being very polite, detached and unhurried, to gouge my book—complete—by February first out of a printer who has not yet submitted a color proof!

Olson—in a way not meant to be intrusive and making no comment on whomsoever's feet are parked on top of your best recordings—I consider you alive on the earth today as my closest of kin.

Frances was Motz
had been Boldereff
please use Motz—
inside and out

State College to Washington
[mid-January 1949]

Every night the faces of William Blake and James Joyce lean out of heaven and repeat to me the stupid sentence I wrote to you "If your life is lived"—the punishment is that I have to look at them. And I think—"What if Olson were to send that sentence back to me when he receives my book!"

It is not the first time I have wanted to bite my arm off at the shoulder—

At any rate I found a copy of Blake's plates for *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and I simply could not believe my eyes—I had not read it before

and when you receive a copy of my book you will see why I consider his poem my personal property.

In the morning I walk along the street saying over to myself the first two stanzas beginning "Upon a Moebus strip"—[18]

The music sings itself—and it reconciles me as only Michelangelo and Beethoven have—I keep saying "Thank you God"—

I think your poems are the purest, hardest most perfect diamonds that any poet has written since Villon—they have the same kind of dispelling surface and they are so hard one can use them for cutting any rock that gets in one's way.

"Itself a leopard"

Olson, I am so pleased it has taken me so long to be able to *read* your poems—if a man distils the conquest of years into such concentrated lines the reader definitely should be admitted only by his own purchased ticket.

I thank you and I hope when you receive in two weeks my book that you will feel the same.

The cover had a very slight error and has to be reprinted—the inside is not perfect but I am refraining from asking the printer to do it again as probably no one will feel as badly about it as I do.

Frances Boldereff

It is driving me crazy to wait.

State College to Washington
20 January 1949 (postmark)

Just came back from New York where I showed your poems to several discriminating persons—the one whose opinion I value most said, about *Trinacria*

"It's the most aristocratic thing I've ever seen."

The comment in my other note was not meant to imply that your writing was not your life—as it so obviously most surely is—the comment was only in brief passing to remember Melville—whose years alone cause a burning fierce pain.

I am stumbling all over with new names—

F.B.

State College to Washington
25 January 1949 (postmark)

I gave your poems to a young Englishman who has just turned up here—he was very grateful—last night I read Wallace Fowlie *Clowns and Angels*—I do not know, but something makes me furious
at this great Catholic procession—the womb path—back to warmth, authority—no—

Blake Underground,[19] so very.

I am shouting all of them—the Moebus strip—each of them to myself—

And I am saying—

"Where and how did we get this?"—oh Olson! What a terrific aristocrat you are.

Apropos of

"So came to apogee and earned and wore himself as amulet."[20]

the only one I know who can repeat those lines or at least is looking forward to being able to—

said—

"What do I care if he is my brother? What good is that to me?" And that is the fierce modern truth—to each man his own single honor, unmatched, attained and looked at coldly.

Woodward to Washington
[late February 1949]

Dear Charles Olson—

All of us have hundreds of levels—you of all of us would know that best and so you would understand the swift passage from sorrow to levity.

Tonight alone in my house (I have just said goodbye to a guest whom I have not seen since college—nor heard from, never intimate and it was a perfect thing, the most *effort*less absolute harmony I have ever experienced) I am reading about Blake and very suddenly your poem starts to say itself aloud—again and then once more and oh! Olson—Meister Eckhardt put in his appearance and said "Can't you see how perfect and beautiful a connect is now existent? Why would you press to something which can never be perfect?" And I understand and I want you to know there is no voice quiet enough for me to say how much I thank you.

For these brief hours I have been able as Boehme so long ago taught me "Desire God."

For some time past I have said "the only prayer possible is 'Hallelujah.'" Lovely Ninette said out of her French Catholicism—"But of course you pray—you are a prayer." And in my sense, so I am, tonight.

A PRIMER OF MORALS FOR MEDEA[21]

(Russian Classic Non-Fiction Library)

TO MICHELANGELO

who has seen deeper and has
stated with a more rigorous candor
than any artist who has lived,
woman's knowledge
of life

1 *The greatest good which can be done to any being, greater than any end to which it can be created, is to make it free.*
The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard. 616.

2 You are a slave, Medea.

3 That which enslaves you was not created by man.

4 Nature enslaves you.

5 Nature is therefore your enemy.

6 Man discovered this for himself thousands of years ago, but you, Medea, are only discovering it now.

7 This places upon you a burden.

8 You, Medea, can not ignore nature—you will get your nose broken if you try.

9 Do you remember the fable about the water wearing away the stone?

10 The water is a new kind of vision.

11 The vision is not a man vision: it is not a Blake vision—it is a vehement desire without form.

12 You can not escape nature, therefore all known methods of combat are ruled out as useless. You can do as she asks. During the years when you are paying her hundred-share your vision must be so vehement as to burn without fuel—you will have no fuel to give. All of your fuel

will be thrust into a Rimbaudian hell where with the greatest will you will seek to destroy yourself.

13 During these years the net of your vision will drag illness, despair, loss of identity, revilement, torture.

14 You will not sleep, nor let sleep.

15 No man will put out his hand to you because the form of what you are doing will be your own and invisible.

16 All traps which nature has placed at your disposal for the enslavement of man you will come to despise as the enemies of your being.

17 You can not exist if you plot.

18 All plotting is of the animal world and is to be discarded.

19 When the demons depart, having learned that your self-torture is greater than any of their devising, you will be left standing with either foot straddled across a bottomless pit—you will have warning that the line of its curve may change at any moment—demanding your readiness to jump, to change the foothold at any second.

20 And then one day it will be whispered to you—"Now you are free."

21 That will not be the end, Medea. That will be the beginning.

22 Then Medea you must journey into the world—a mother—some Time in fact, always in deed.

23 You will then, Medea, have become a mother who spurns security for herself and for her offspring. You will have learned, Medea, that security is a mirage, that man rightfully has despised you because you have never once up to now forsaken it.

24 You will give to each who needs—without regard to his beauty, power, or achievement—whomsoever God places before you—devotion—generosity—warmth—passion and above all—joyicity.

25 You will give, as you have always given, but with this difference—not to possess, but to let go free.

26 Then thou wilt perceive, Medea, that God has placed over thy shoulders a most able cloak.

27 And while that cloak will cover thee, thou wilt come to understand that thy relation to the moon is an allegory of thy indirect relation to all things. For thee will everything take place but thy name will be everywhere unknown except to him alone in whose heart it burns. The direct tasks belong to a man. Thine are the indirect.

28 For what reason shalt thou thus belabor thy soul? In steadfast, bitter aridity?

29 That thou mayst walk the earth an adult.

30 *And in like manner, many things have heretofore been despised, because they have not been put to the proper use.*

Loosely quoted from New Essays
Concerning Human Understanding
Leibnitz

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Frances Ward

Woodward to Washington
[26 March 1949]

Saturday

Olson my friend—

Let me say first you manage always to present yourself on the right day—today is my birthday and when I received your letter[22] this morning and opened it and saw it was a letter I could not believe my eyes—

something I was very far from ever expecting to receive. I consider your letter quite literally the only birthday present I have ever received in my life.—

In general I agree about everything.

So happens there is a notebook written 14 years ago—I have been saving it until after my death because it has never seemed appropriate to do anything about publishing it while I was walking around. The thing came out all at one sitting, fast as I could write and scalding hot. I remember I wanted to be sure to do it before I forgot—before the pain cooled down. I know it has several sentences in it which are necessary and right. I will send it to you. I will ask you not to make any detailed comment because it has nothing to do with writing or books or achievement. It was something I was born to do and I did it. There are thousands of young woman errors in it—so very many I blush inside—but the point I am sure you will feel is—it has the other thing the thing no man anywhere has stated in words—the young woman terror—and I did not say fear. And a program—harsh as you could wish even though it is clothed in Moses language—the result of passionate Bible reading and doing—anyway Olson—after you have seen it we can talk. In the notebook it states definitely that I am not the one to *write* it—I am the one to live it—it states that there is a man—a writer—who will come after—you can judge yourself if it is you—certainly if it is not you, it is no one else. I have been waiting for this man, into whose hands to place it.

I resent that I sound so damned biblical—but it is the result of a chosen thing in adolescence, which permanently affected my whole speech every day. The reason the primer has the form it has is because I am not a writer and could never write a book and someone who loved me said I should do something—so I did the primer. The notebook is what should have gone with—to you.

The whole thing is very feminine—I mean all the reasons—I love Michelangelo and I love to have those beautiful things somewhere where I can see them and also I felt that it was good to make public my love. I looked at proofs in black and three shades of brown and chose the pink brown for a very good reason—I also love 14 and 15 and they looked so beautiful that way—then the one across from the dedication which I also am very devoted to has a Latin clarity of simple statement printed in the light color—as soon as you make it dark, it becomes ominous and brooding which I do not believe Michelangelo intended.

You said exactly the right thing about 14—I was searching everywhere

and when I saw the thing I stole it—not a print, a page from an old edition of Symonds *Life of MB.*[23]

I also very much love 15.

The first one and the last one are the same woman—from two angles—

I happen also to love (in the slang sense) I believe it is 4 (I have no copy here) the woman staring her head off at herself in the hand mirror with the brief statement.

And purely as a woman having nothing to do with a book the figure of the pregnant woman is the best summary of that whole deal in existence and the one with the head on her lap is the best summary of that particular little moment when you give up the ghost. I am just very grateful to him—like I said.

And the word "joyicity" Olson I put in on purpose for this reason—I had mentioned Blake and Rimbaud and I did not want to leave Joyce out so I put his word—anyway I thought it was his word—from the marvelous section in *Finnegans Wake* where the Gracehopper is entertaining Vespetilla and Flori and the other lovely ladies—"happy in his joyicity"

It was merely a passing salute of deep affection to a man whose arrogance I have always thought so good.

And as in the case of Michelangelo I wanted to state my love in public.

Like wonderful old Stendhal who had carved on his gravestone—"He loved Cimarosa, Mozart and Shakespeare."

I have been planning to start a publishing company for some time of some of the marvelous Byzantine studies and some of the very Russian philosophic religious questions not as yet translated from the Russian[24] and I thought it was silly to have *two* publishing companies for a very great total of at a maximum 5 books—and besides as long as I was being anonymous—what the hell—

Also I hoped to advertise the thing in *The New Yorker* and to intrigue old Vladimir Nabokov into sending for one—I used to work there and he writes some things for them now—not that it matters. If you think the thing doesn't say enough to advertise—just tell me—about money or any of the

other allurements I care as little as you guess.

I enclose a picture of myself which I believe you will like it as much as I do—it says something the book doesn't say—it is my old man, who is now somewhere else off this planet, whom needless to say, I adored. Return—please.

It will take several weeks to dig up the notebook—I will send registered—if it is yours—you may keep it.

Frances Motz

State College to Washington
[27 March 1949]

You will see how nutty I am because I was in bed when it occurred to me after re-reading your letter[25] that you thought the notes are comments on the pictures—so I have come up to my office to tell you how the thing came about.

In August 1948 I wrote the sentences exactly as they are—wording, order and the numbers attached. A very literal autobiography—may be the shortest on record.

I used to be a curator of art—I knew in a fairly accurate way that Michelangelo was the boy that for my money knew about women—he keeps saying over and over again the thing which you will find in my notebook. I own a few of the prints in the book. I have absolutely no money and damned little free time—so did not have all or even a fraction of Michelangelo at my disposal. I had precisely what I could take from the books in the possession of the College Library. I had copies made of all the ones that said anything about women.

When I made up page proofs for the book I came up to my office at night to work alone—here I sat and watched my sentences—his art. It was one of the most intensely exciting nights I have ever spent. Perhaps you

can find in your tarot pack the answer as to why they fit so uncannily. There is special reason behind each choice—Some day I will tell you what each one means to me. It took 2 weeks to decide to put the picture and wording of No. 2 together. Number 14 I was up a tree about. Nothing would do. So one day I got desperate I went to the office of a man who has a lot of stuff on Michelangelo he fortunately was in Mexico—I pulled my prestige to be allowed to enter alone and I looked through that pile of stuff until that magnificent answer fell into my hands. I promptly and quietly stole it for the meantime. It took courage for me to print it—it was very hard to send it to the printer—but I realized that the world is dumb—if something is labeled "Art" you would never catch them getting it confused with life.

You are probably the only human being who will see it who will understand how terrific the solution is—both on Mike's part and on mine.

There are places where the thing is so naked I deliberately chose a picture to lead astray.

But Olson—perhaps as I am towards you you are towards me—silent on things you have said which are too terrific—it took me twenty-five years to learn to do the one marked No. 25 which you passed in silence.

If what the dumb bastard wants to do is to get himself crucified then your part is to throw in everything you've got—and when the dead body lies in your lap—not to shudder—not to cry—not to turn down the lip—but to raise the hand in silent question—"Whose obedience has cost him the most—mine to endure his fate or his to endure his fate?" Anyhow—at the end of 25 years I bow my head in acquiescence—you do the one that gets handed to you.

I love you Olson as you goddamned well already know.

Washington to Woodward

29 March 1949 (postmark)

Immediately, this, as you ask[26]—with my delight, & thanks. You are quite as I might have imagined you to be.

And yr father, the kind of head almost gone away in this dirty time.

Yrs, Olson

Maximus of Tyre *Dissertations*

(If you happen to look on this side, & are curious of the above, the reference is 24(18), particularly

[quotation in Greek])[27]

Washington to Woodward (postcard)
30 March 1949 (postmark)

A propos joy-i-city (the personal meaning of which you convince me of,[28] which in no way diminishes the nix I put on it in the public print) cf. the current Herper's Boozoomzar (April, in other words,
spring, & only & exclusively spring by permission of MODESS)

p. 129
2nd column
28th line fr top
to end of para[29]

or Bra-zar
or Bubsie-zar
or Boob-zar
or any equally brazen offence.

yrs for shame
O

State College to Washington

[early April 1949]

I am not at all the type given to vulgar statements but page 150 of the same issue—re the first half of the last line of part 2 of your poem[30]—always arouses in me the desire to lift one out, and with the serious face of a Saks Fifth Avenue shopper—courteously inquire,

"And what would be the price per pound?"

I am sure Joyce could not laugh at one of his own, better than I—over your postcard—after the shock.

And again I thank you

reread Melville business[31] two nights ago—that is one magnificent statement—

the definition of a great portraitist is

1/2 sitter 1/2 artist—no one knowing which half is where—

Thus you.

Woodward to Washington
[early April 1949]

Your poem[32] is so open, so naked, so full of the exquisite and modest tenderness of a man who is forced to repeat the request for everything, that it makes me terribly shy. I feel as though an aristocrat has entered the door and laid aside his armor there—to be (away from butlers and servant girls) quickly transferred to his interior, where it becomes fire. See *Trinacria.*

There is a way in which I am extremely pleased that it should make a public appearance among the servant girls—those few readers who shall see it will have gratitude and the others will not even know to stare at you—

on account you leave your robes at home.

(And worse than servant girls I take it we both dislike professors)

I take "the good tree" to mean the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" Condemned by Blake—if other, and more—and you care to someday enlighten me—o.k.

Frances

May 1936[33]

If only Otto Weininger had not written that sentence, "If only one woman could be shown to have existed in relationship to the moral idea, then my entire theory would be blown to bits" *(Sex and Character)*

Let it be said at the beginning, that no woman has ever more completely given herself to man's ideas, or felt less antagonism towards him than I (so little antagonism that when I read in a German book that this feeling was universal, except in cases where a woman was born a courtesan type, I decided that I must be a courtesan type, and then, on different days, when I objected in my soul to this explanation, I decided that I felt an antagonism) and for this reason I have for many, many years suffered under the conviction that women possessed no souls, that I, myself, had none and in support of this belief, there is certainly abundance of evidence. How embarrassed I felt with myself when I happened to read in the notes in *Desert Islands* the story from the Bible of Ammon and Tamar. Much as I cherish the beauty of the prose, the simplicity and life justice of the remainder, what it reveals of a father's heart, no one can erase the memory of. "And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go?" The fact that even in the Bible the woman's shame is not important enough to dwell on, but only so, causes me to blush inwardly, for it is so apparent that as to the fate of her soul, no one is concerned, but only as to how she will be the instrument of her brothers' evil the one in doing, the other in atoning. And as far as I can remember there are no books in the world which are concerned with the fate of a woman's soul, but only concerned with woman as a tool, whereby man destroys or saves his own soul. Let no one suppose that I

object to this on foolish grounds of "It ought to have been otherwise"—the *fact* that it has not been otherwise burns a deep hole in me, that is all.

And so, I say, when I had read Weininger and followed closely all he had to say and knew in my soul it was far more true than untrue and came to his outline of the distinction between talent and genius and then to his question, taken by me seriously, "Is woman, then, a plant, or an animal or a human being?" I realized, all of a sudden, that it is foolish and wrong for me to deny to myself that I possess a soul—the facts are all definitely shouting that I do possess one and that perhaps I was born on this earth to *be* a soul and to show how it is possible.

. . . . .(on sense of vocation). . . .and expressing it. . . . it has actually occurred that a woman has lived on this earth who has taken upon her own soul all the burden of being a woman, all the shame, all the sorrow, all the inward disgrace, all the longing, all the lack of freedom and has felt guilty before life of the sins, the pettiness, of all women. (HERE IS THE CHRIST COMPLEX, almost wholly stated)

. . . .[she hopes she may, in the far-off ages, become the heritage of each woman, hope it is a secret plan of God's]

. . . .what I struggled for with almost super-human courage and it is another of God's miracles that a body could be sustained on this earth in comparative health which has fed on nothing but intense agony for so many important years. But remember Dostoevsky, who was a greater miracle, and be silent. (!!!

Can I speak in this place of how flowingly, how reaching to the sides to touch, stream-like, I love every human being on this earth? Even my mother, whom I have disliked more intensely than any other person I have met? Who stands to me for the qualities in life which I abjure.

Let me go back and begin now, where I first remember. I remember my father, seated beside my mother in the upper sitting room handing to me the wet diaper of my tiny sister and asking me to carry it to the bathroom; the intense dislike with which I touched it and how carefully I held the very smallest edge I possible could in order to convey it, the satisfaction with which I laid it down and ran away. Just now it occurs to me that this may have been one of the causes why I always disliked my sister, until I had reached the age of 16. It also is clear to me now why my father hounded me so—to be rid of this quality of fastidiousness, which was one of my chief inheritances.

. . . .loneliness. . . . deep opposition of father

To Illustrate, and I would never put this on paper if I did not know that I will be out of this life before these words are read, when I was perhaps ten, I went one Sunday morning into his room without rapping, to reach from a lower dresser something I needed for Sunday School and he jumped from his bed as though touched by bolt of lightning and rushed across the room to strike at me and missed my head by perhaps the smallest part of an inch and left in a plaster wall so deep an indentation that plaster fell down inside (it was covered by wallpaper) and left a deep place for many months, until the room was repapered. I hurried out, said nothing—mother found it out, of course, but in my breast I will always remember the silence which struck in on me at that moment, the open-eyed, quiet child knowledge that life was composed of dark things

. . . .then, or later. . . .the deep antagonism lying between a man and a woman. . . .At least I learned one good lesson, which none of the dead intellectuals know, and that is that passion is in no sense a thing to be played with, it strikes out of anywhere and all you can do is to scatter or succumb, you can not say it isn't so.

At what age, then, did I begin to promise myself that I would never tease a man, that I would never play with his feelings, that I would never by word or a look imply something which I did not mean and that if I did give, by accident, such a word or a look that I would live up to it honorably and give as much as I promised

. . . .the years had so quick an eye for beauty and when I also embraced the Christian ideal wholly. . . .and came to know the soul of Russia through her books and through the faces of the children in my Soho library ((???))

Outwardly and inwardly I was a clean human being. . . .and would not allow my little finger to betray my weakness and prayed ardent prayers to God that I might regard my body as a temple. . . .sadness, but i did not *feel* innocent, and the feeling of guilt mounted and mounted in me—not then, but later, and became the undertone of my whole life.

(obviously, the guilt, of masturbation, or repression, and so, when, as it goes on, it comes out, the quote, fr Zossima, "We are all guilty of one another's sins and each must bear on his own soul the guilt of all men," and she yeas,

and says, I knew it at 18, only
then I had no proof I knew it.

the young man who laughed, when she said, I am as guilty as you, and she goes on, "I know what it was, it was the ardent, ardent wish that I had committed sins, more than he, and that in the knowledge of my sins and the love of my heart, I could say, in his sense, truly, "I am as guilty as you are." Every man longs to be forgiven—but he can not believe that an innocent human being can be guilty or can forgive. Christ did it, but he knew the sins, because He is God. And this is the reason why I praise God that he gave me *the burden of the sin of my body* to bear for so long a time—because, now, when I say to my husband "you are not guilty", quietly, quietly in his soul he feels joy—for I, who have known sin consider his sin to have been of no moment(!). I never wish to imply that I can forgive in God's sense, only that for a fellow human being to forgive in the human sense, being very conscious of the full meaning of the crime, is very comforting to the human soul.

(2 p passage on May, how beautiful life is, on Christ and his doubting his mission, and how divine that makes him to her, and Goethe, that nature has proceeded, not by wild eruptions but by slow, or maybe quick, but quite quiet, change. . . .

I am not sure that what was in Him is not in me—I feel so entirely close to what He was that it seems as though no time has elapsed, and though I shall never die for man, nor be divine, I feel that my life is for man and is a gift, smaller and gentler, but made of a little piece of what made Him . . . .The quality of love felt towards man is of like kind.

. . . .My soul was given back to me by a miracle

. . . .From whence came the sudden knowledge that each man desired to save his soul—that the pain of his body was nothing to him? There were twenty odd years I did not know this, and one day, sitting in my nice green chair, I looked at the title page of a book in which was written a quotation from Byron, and I knew it. And since then it has been the purpose of my life to help each human being on this earth *to gain the possession of his own soul and to gain it in joy.*

I have not acted outwardly as though this were my purpose—
outwardly I have worried about my appearance and about jobs
and about parties I was giving and about how to cover up the
enormous difference between myself and the people with whom
(!) I was; I have said mean things, not because I felt them but to hide

from another person the embarrassing sight of how mean his meanness was; I have pretended to a hundred (!) weaknesses I do not possess, to take away my feeling of strangeness between me and whatever woman I was with; I have talked empty platitudes, to cover my silence and I have feigned helplessness, for another to understand that I needed him. I have done worse, I have acted with love, real love, towards a human being whom I hated and desired to see dead because he caused me such terrible suffering, praying to God to forgive me for showing love towards one whom I did not love and underneath both the love and the hate, which were of actual life and were in themselves the process of growing, as plants stick out new leaves, I know that the love was the real part, because I felt the pain of my husband's soul, but in order to protect myself, in order to be able to live and to endure the suffering of the terrible accusations he put on me and that I deserved, but for which I had already paid so deep a penalty, my body and heart, me, in this life, not my eternal self, put out all over me a thick covering of intense hatred and in that hatred I lived until strength for top love, as well as bottom love, came to me. This hatred was not only to protect my inner life from the terrible sorrow of absolutely not being believed, but also was to protect me from the terrible misery of seeing how deep was his suffering, how much greater to endure than mine, for he had the earthly and also soul shame of having married a woman who seemed for that time to have been without shame and without honour, and also the terrible frightening necessity to depend on her for aid, to be unable to leave her because of love and to have no chance to work in life in a fine way which would be great enough to cause forgetfulness, or great enough to prove his worth or even great enough to prove his love and to have almost no hope. Later there was no hope at all, but in the beginning, there *was* hope of fine work ahead, otherwise he would not have lived at all. As it was, his terrible hallucinations are as great a suffering as Ivan had in BK which only a Russian soul could endure.

. . . .what to tell. . . .so many cheap confessions. . . .Every strength which I have possessed has come to me directly from the courageous life of someone in the past—Let the one reader, then, who will have a great soul, interpret

How clearly stands out each detail of the night which separated me from my past. It was June 4, 1923, clear, with stars and dark trees. The place where we were was surrounded by beauty, but the unevenness and

coarseness of the grass and stubble immediately around was ugly, as so often happens in nature's scenes. Everyone knows the rise and fall of the heart when two are young, the hope and disappearance of hope at any rate, I asked a question, forgotten now, and for reply there came, slowly, "You know how it is". For me they were filled with such an unanswerable pain; it was commanded that I should assuage it. I remember the brief second of the feeling of doom and the impossibility of withstanding it. But what I want to speak of are the few moments between which I arose and made my way to the car and placed myself in it—no foot ever felt so heavy, the extreme slowness with which I walked, the complete unimportance of my physical pain, the tender quiet way in which I opened the door and folded my skirts and closed it again. I was as completely sad as only the earth itself can be; (!) I had no anger, no surprise, no worry, no thought of what I had lost or if it could have been otherwise. Only the gentlest, gentlest penetrating sadness from which I could not escape. What I have never been able to find out is, *why* is the soul sad when the body comes to maturity? I believe to every other problem of life of which I am aware I have found an answer for myself—but this question neither I, nor anyone I could or have discovered has so far been able to answer. Weininger says that coitus in itself is not a sin—it is only because man's soul is completely submerged that it is sinful. (!). And I remember now that many years later I came to the conclusion that it is to give the soul a brief reprieve from its endless search that we are so blind, so altogether lost—that his blindness is the only kind in the world which will cover up the soul's pain for a moment. Not that this is in any way an answer to the question of why man grieves at the loss of his innocence.—I think if we knew the answer we would know for sure whether or not man possesses an immortal soul.

> (the days following—sorrow, refusing to see the boy, sorrow, conviction she had gone against her beloved Christ—finally sat down and wrote confessed to a girl thousand miles away

. . . . no desire to write this, but somewhere I *must* say how strongly I protest the accepted version of woman's character. Let the genius who will come after me write a great book—I only desire to drop a hint as to how the life was lived, the life wherein God set one woman free.

All of a woman's troubles proceed from the fact that she never admits to herself her fundamental inequality. When I used to torment myself daily with the question, "Why can a woman not create something of the first rate, why are all her works not great, but full of immense talent only?", I finally was, in a brief moment, brought face to face with the idea that in woman there is no necessity. Every woman is an actual or a potential mother—that satisfaction which penetrates to the last corpuscle in her body, to her

subconscious life, to her blood, as well as to her mind and nerves, when she brings forth a child, is complete. It is the only complete satisfaction known on this earth, and it is complete because it is filled with all possibilities, each time. Life is magic, none of us are aware of what it is—neither Plato, nor Gogol, nor Rameses. But we all know it contains wonderful possibilities—and a woman has that deep, unspoken knowledge in herself when her child is brought forth. Now a man is never granted to create in this life any one thing, any painting, any book, any piece of music which will satisfy him—he and all others will be able to find in it some fault. It can not grow—it is finished. And this fact that it is not perfect is what tears his vitals and causes him to go crazy and demands that he shall try again—every time he hopes that he shall have a whole thing—some times he approaches almighty God in the beauty of what he has done, but never really. So he lies awake and in his soul—through thousands of years, dissatisfaction has been his daily bread. Out of that pain comes his intense mastery, his freedom, his glory and his bitterness. For life he never will be able to grasp. Now a woman cannot grasp life either, but she is it—she partakes. Once—for a brief second, I felt in all its joy this superb possession which a woman has, of life—and I felt in my heart the terrible loneliness which crushes down a man, because he can only attempt to revisualize it, he can not be it. In this one moment, I felt sorry for man (here, here, lady, who wants it, who.) I have never forgotten that sorrow, but I have never been able before or since to glory in a woman's belongingness.

This belongingness is what I want to speak of—this is a woman's enemy, her terror, the cause of every sin, of every weakness, of all mystery. She can not be free. And she does not know it, except, rarely. Weininger points out, in bitterness, how deeply a woman craves coitus, how every moment is towards or away from, but centered on, fruition. Has he, or any man, any man, including Christ, ever once expressed what a terrifying burden this is—did woman make herself bound, or was she born bound—does she not belong all days, in all moods, to the earth—and is this not the cause of her great sadness, her slavery, her pettiness, her vengeance, her intense pursuit and glory in a man's soul's betrayal, her triumph in a child, her never ending convergence on her own tangent? Let him who has a great soul weigh this in silence—*who* is responsible for the profound inequality of a man and a woman—for the absolute impossibility of her escape from earth. Who? No one. Then let his soul stand up and recognize that injustice is inherent in the nature of our earth—that only God can conceive of an answer and it does not lie here. Weininger says, "Let a woman give up the desire for coitus and she will become free." I realize the beauty and longing (SHIT) with which Weininger wrote, but he is wrong, nevertheless. A woman cannot give up coitus—it would result only in that she would cease to be—not in

her freedom. This 20th century affords many examples of women who have tried—other generations also—the result is so pathetic, so unfree—so miserable, that no great man could possibly think of this as the answer. What I say is,—let a woman admit in her soul her burden—let her say to herself—I am a lesser creature, from me no great thing will ever proceed ((THIS IS THE RUB, for FB,))—let her realize that each soul on this earth stands in complete, imperishable, not-for-one-second-ending solitude—let her say to herself "The earth is complete sorrow—I will never, at any moment, believe in or seek my own happiness, and though it be logically an absurdity, let me live for the sake of other human beings, for their happiness." This is a task the strength for which must proceed from God—few shall attain, but she who does, shall emerge, miraculously, free.

Paul I Timothy 2:11–15 quoted. . . .she protests. . . .on woman as transgressor. . . ."why has no religion, since the beginning of time, been great enough to perceive that woman is precisely not deceived, that therein lies her tremendous tragedy, but that she is *forced* to obey the rule of the earth which lies deeply within her?

(more Paul)

It has been a facile explanation—Eve's guilt—how profound an injustice

The necessity to endure—the will to life—*it is* the cause of her hypocrisy. Could a woman face life—and live? ((WELL?)) Could a woman say to herself where she stands and what she is and go on? What has man to offer her that is of the slightest value, once she realizes the place in which she is—can any *thing* of this earth, jewels, house, children, comfort, security leisure answer to her for her essential inequality ((SHIT))—they can not.

(then Jesus, go, and sin no more. . . ..she says, not enough. For to a woman it is not a sin, *neither is it a good thing*—it is a law from which she has not the power to escape. And since this law is part of the earth's rhythm, since therefore it moves in the immense body rhythm of the universe—it shall some day, by God, be reconciled, We do not know how.

The body of a woman is an instrument—the only one she has completely at her command. . . .and how ever hard a woman has struggled to despise her body, she has never been successful. It is herself.

Can the great man, therefore, when he has bowed himself down to the earth, for the refreshment of which he stands in need in proportion as his greatness takes him off this earth O can he, when having received that

refreshing blindness, have pity on the blindness that gave him succour? The greater the man is the more highly resentful is he of his earthly attachment, of his human frailty (!)—he would love to be of God—Godlike (!), and so when he returns to the earth and restores the earthly man, after he is refreshed, in his new strength he is apt to strike out against the necessity and the nearest and most obvious "cause" is woman. The hatred which man has in the moments when he has arisen from his trappedness I do not despise—all that I say is, Let a man beat his own breast, not the woman, for neither he nor she is to blame and in addition *she bears the humility of having to want his weakness.*

Let no man, great or small, take unto himself glory because a woman has so great a need for him—let no man, either great or small, think to himself that he perceives the whole woman, perceiving her need. For the need of woman is a great covering which she must penetrate, and I see no other way open to her to come through that covering, but *by wearing it out* . . . .This is why Thais. . . .Sonia. . . .excessive use and there, shining through the worn places, was the most pure soul(!)

(This is not what she is, this covering, but only what she must come through in order to be herself.

And when she has, she has emerged, sometimes, well nigh a direct child of God—witness Gorki's grandmother.

. . . .However it may be, this is true, that if a woman were permitted to use her body at the age when it is pressing most closely about her, to whatever full extent that body required, when the moment of sufficient use had passed, she would be ready to take her place in life with all sincerity

. . . . completely selfless

. . . .obvious reason why not, is, a woman can not drip seeds nor does she care to—the law of nature's waste.

. . . .that body a sounding board from which she would like to hear every note—she usually hears one or two. . . .wakes up, man's rules, strikes out blindly—to grasp when it is too late—

How wise must be the woman who knows her own need at her own hour.

Marriage. This almost every woman is wise enough to seek. But fulfillment according to her own need is why DHL—he knew a woman *must* find according to her

own need, or her life will add further impotency.

. . . .but not enuf—another necessity: the desire to win respect. Now follows a law: when the body is indulged in without restraint, it chokes the soul.

If by some honest fallacy such as I myself struggled under (that a man's bodily pain is as great as a woman's. . . .so never flirt). . . .but this error, and have no idea where answer lies

It is this desire for respect which has led woman to confuse her own issues—It is because man can be free from his body, can possess his own soul in strength, that a woman so passionately believes in him. It is also why she hates him. A woman who loves a man finds in him this freedom. If ever she suspects that he has lost it, have he every other good thing & be he ever so kind to her, to the woman he is a useless, pitiable object & she despises him. This is why a woman will follow. . . .rain. . . .sleet. . . .devotion—what man stands in need of. A woman, on the other hand, can, by and large, never gain the respect due her, except rarely, rarely, in the eyes of one man who will glimpse what she is. . . .

What she wants much much more than love, no matter what she says . . . .

So, commanding: if a woman loves a man, she will [carelessly?] offer him devotion and he will not respect her—for respect from either sex can be based upon one thing only—the freedom of soul, but love from a woman obliterates her distance, makes her literally belong to him, because he is free and therefore better than she is and it is this freedom which she worships. This is how a woman can be nurture in the physical sense to a man whom she loves—her body is separate from her desire for freedom—because her body works. . . .because the important thing in her eyes in the man she loves is exactly his freedom from the need of her. And she knows no *man* gives his body without tenderness.

Why the law which has allowed sexual license to man and forbids it to woman is so cruel.

She stands in terrific need of license—despising her need but nevertheless feeling it—whereas a man is in no need whatsoever—his body, if taken care of by a passionate woman, is answered and he can go on about his life. The reason he does so frequently betray his beloved, sexually, is that he seeks separateness, and, continually, in a new person, has the illusion of finding it. It is for this deep cause that I believe men and women should not marry because of love, but this on mutual respect. And the only way a woman can gain a man's respect is to be more free of him.

State College to Washington
8 May 1949 (postmarked 9 May 1949)

Sunday night

Olson—

Just dropped into my office on a hunch—just came up this minute from Woodward—which is so very subtly penetrating— a marvelous place to come to write.

There are several facts I should love to tell you so that you can think of them in making plans for your coming year— I am moving to Albuquerque New Mexico around June 15-22—my place in Woodward I am absolutely sure you would love and if you are not tied up in a job or in the fall or Christmas vacation or all year would like to live there I am sure you would find it very perfect and of course you would be free to invite a friend if you so cared. It has three bedrooms a marvelous old pot-belly stove which does a terrific job—beautiful view—it is an old barber shop reconverted—anyhow I am sure you would love it—I went through real sacrifices to pay for the damn thing and just as I get the last check mailed I have to give it up—I would never rent it—I am not the type—so if you care to make use of it at any time I will mail you my keys of which I have a duplicate set. I hope you will not think there is any subterfuge lurking in all this—there is not—I can not be there—I love it dearly and I believe you will too and it is all paid for and since I tore the insides out and designed it myself it is very much me and we would know each other better—I do not care how long is required for you to know if my notebook can be employed by you—if it can I shall be very happy, but I in a deep sense consider it someone else's business—like God.

Your friend

Frances now Ward

State College to Washington
10 May 1949 (postmark)

Addenda—

1. No. 14—the reason you have never seen this anywhere is because the art historians in their great majesty have decided Michelangelo probably did not draw it—it is a drawing in preparation for an allegorical painting which he never completed—I believe he sent it as a gift to his Tommasino but of that I am not sure—it is in the private possession of a man in Paris—

2. If you are connected with a college ask the librarian to borrow for you from the Library of Congress Franz Cumont's volume of plates in color on the frescoes found at Dura-Europos.[34] (This fresco was destroyed by the Arabs and now exists nowhere in the world except in these colored reproductions.) There is a particular plate which I wish to talk with you about which will drive you wild—a priest in a ceremony—the look in the eyes the Christian world has not so far touched—the unworld brought to view—Rostovtzeff says this fresco is the long sought link between the Western and Eastern worlds—I can get you lots of dope—accurate—in case I have not given enough to locate the book which is probably in the reference room—[35]

The whole Byzantine world—Sumerian world and Dura-Europos absolutely drive me crazy—I had to get excited all by myself—since no one else seems to care—I have a pamphlet on Gilgamesh I will also send to you—[36]

Anyway I believe the salutation used by that young Roman patrician whose name I always forget—whom Michelangelo loved—to be the most beautiful in history—

"Unique, my lord" —

3. Also a very marvelous Byzantine history by a great Russian historian Vasiliev—vols No. 14–15 of Wisconsin Social Studies translated by Ragozin[37]—he lives in Washington—I can get his address if you would desire it. (In this history there is a gal who is more like me than any female I have ever met—perhaps she could suggest a form—I forget the details.)

Woodward to Washington
16 May 1949 (postmark)

Olson—

I am sorry but since Rimbaud the only person's poetry I can take is yours (you know Francis Thompson & Garcia Lorca are excluded from this comment)—I am no Yeats lover—I get ill and unhappy when I look at literary reviews—I hate the first article and I hate the review on Starkie's book on Rimbaud because I loathe that book—I am glad Rimbaud can not see it—[38]

When I was digging through some of that old Byzantine stuff I came across a sentence from a Second Crusader—so man—so man and so loved I purposely forget it to find afresh—the idea that the beauty of Constantinople causes the heart to tremble of the most valiant who has won his way there. Shaken to its inmost existence—like the letter of Michelangelo who refused the dinner invitation because "You must know that of men living I am the most given to loving and when I see something to command respect in another—I love him so completely and give myself so entirely that from your banquet I would come home not refreshed but exhausted"—(very loosely). *Anyhow* the tremble Starkie aint got.

All of which is to say I feel dirty in literary reviews—I save myself by remembering the beginning of *Jerusalem* where Blake so quietly and unironically attaches pity to Palamabron to the spirit of Evil.

It doesn't matter if you can't read my writing—I am getting so I hate almost everything but silence and your poems are so ardently aware of silence—until the new harsh form shall flower—oh Olson—harsh—(in a bloom so sternly and so unexotically alive)

I am sending Northrop Frye who deserves them—a copy of your poems.

Woodward to Washington
[about 20 May 1949]

Olson—

This was given me by Kramer—whom I just walked in on one day at the Un. of Pa. Museum and started to talk to—There is a very nice translation by William Hilary Leonard—*Gilgamesh* in Woodward under my good father's name.

I love very deeply—the lines at the opening of *Call me Ishmael.* Are they early Swedish?

Hope to go to New York in June for a hunt for some Byzantine art Russian original manuscripts.

[Enclosure: offprint of S.N. Kramer "The Epic of Gilgames and its Sumerian Sources" reprinted from *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 64 (1944) 7-23. The following note was written inside the front cover of the offprint:]

I thank you for the *Western Review*[39]—which I was unable to buy or borrow in State College. I approve of its typography—will look at the articles—I have been grateful and many many times have used the prayer

We who are awkward ask

I notice the novel by Herbert Read—I found in *Graphis* 24 a very fine article by him—was quite amazed because I did not expect any official Unesco's to come up with something I could respect and value.

Washington to Woodward
23 May 1949

Mond May 23 xlix

FM:

I have started K's Gilgam over coffee, but break off to write you & send one of my earliest verses, unpublished, on G, for you.[40]

You will excuse me, you have not heard before, but I only returned from another Black Mt fatigue-duty yesterday. By the way, does Albuquerque mean the Univ of NM? if so, my present, (and only disciple?), a Jack Rice down there at BM, I learned this past week, goes to NM in the fall to take up the career the two of us have shaped for him this winter, kultur-morphologie (to steal a description from Frobenius). Rice is in danger of rigidities due to a sense of himself as temple-builder, but he has gone farther than anyone in taking such same cues as ISHMAEL presents. I have the feeling that field work (& further translation & acquaintance with Frobenius) plus the discipline of americanist study (which seems to me more fixed than more ancient research) may keep him in line and cause him to be of use.

You may meet him.

And it is fine, to have from you yr house in Woodward to light on, comes the event. I have no present way to know what the next year brings. If I could manage to acquire this house here (it costs 20,000, is bank priced 7500), such acquisition patently to be gift of one or more non-existent, or not yet dreamed up sponsors, then I would have BASE; and would, I'm sure, start moving around like mad. It looks now that, by fall, I shall either have to have it or get the hell out. So things are water.

Or does yr last notes indicate your New Mexico move is postponed?[41]

The Michelangelo quote is impeccable: oi how true

& harsh, is it?

oooooooooooooo

They are Early olson

Do you know V Berard on the Odyssey?[42]
is the frobenius of same

TOMORROW

I am Gilgamesh,
an Ur world is in me
to inhabit.

Race of waters run
in the blood
red with the fathers.

They told me of flood,
of the earth dissolved,
of drowned mountains.

I live in the land
and know people,
see love recur.

They said the heart
knows no evolution:
it is as it was when it is.

They called me Gilgamesh
and gave me Ur
where I dwell.

for FM
for what it is
Olson

written 1941

xlix

Washington to Woodward
25 May 1949

LA CHUTE

O my drum, hollowed out thru the thin slit,
carved from the cedar wood, the base I took
when the tree was felled
o my lute
wrought from the tree's crown

my drum whose lustiness
was not to be resisted

my lute from whose pulsations
not one could turn away

They
are where the dead are
my drum
fell where the dead are, who
will bring it up, my lute
who will bring it up
where it fell in the face of them
where they are, where my lute and drum

have fallen?

fm:
recognize it?[43] my
thanks
olson
may 25
xlix

Notes

1 Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* was published in New York by Reynal & Hitchcock on 17 March 1947.

2 Olson had come to the west coast in August 1947 to lecture at the Northwest Writers Conference at the university of Washington in Seattle, and had stayed on in California, scenting a valuable research project. He had written to Monroe Engel 27 December 1947: "It started at the Huntington, led to the Bancroft (Berkeley) then here to Sutter's Fort &

Cal. State Library. The results are so good I have been asked to publish a couple of the finds." The publication from this research was Olson's introduction to *The Sutter-Marshall Lease* for the Book Club of California in 1948.

3 The poem "In Praise of the Fool" appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* for December 1947, p. 194.

4 German adjective meaning "unequalled."

5 This retort must refer to a letter from Boldereff not now extant; as must also the comment on "Fool" below.

6 Olson wrote to Monroe Engel at Viking Publishers the same day requesting their *Portable Dante*: "What I was after was DE VULGARE ELOQUENTIA, in English, now that my Latin has dwindled."

7 "In Praise of the Fool" will appear with slight alteration as "The Green Man" in *Y & X* (Black Sun Press 1948).

8 Presumably the inscription was to go with the "design" referred to in Olson's next postcard, a design no longer extant.

9 Olson had finished "The Fiery Hunt" and was soon to finish "Troilus"—see the posthumous publications in *The Fiery Hunt and Other Plays* (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation 1977).

10 Olson wrote these lines in a New York art gallery in April 1948—*A Nation of Nothing But Poetry* p. 58 and Butterick's note pp. 183–184.

11 This is the request referred to by Olson when, sending "The Kingfishers" 26 October 1949, he said: "The enclosed is in answer to a question you asked me one year & five months ago."

12 Boldereff enclosed a note mailed from State College, Pennsylvania, on 23 November 1948, in a wrongly addressed envelope which was returned by the post office. The short note was a question:

To—
Charles Olson

Is your green man the Green Man of Blake's Jerusalem?

FB

13 Olson presumably wrote out his short poem "The K" *(Selected Writings* p. 159; *Collected Poems* p. 14) on the back of an envelope and mailed it as such.

14 *A Primer of Morals for Medea* was published in March 1949.

15 William Blake, "Jerusalem," plate 5, l. 34.

16 One of the five poems in *Y & X*. Boldereff has received the book via the publisher of Black Sun Press, Caresse Crosby, who had sent a telegram from Washington on 31 December 1948 that it was being sent Special Delivery.

17 Olson sent the poem "Siena 1948" on 22 December 1948. The text is as published in *Western Review* 13 (Winter 1949) 100, and in *Collected Poems* pp. 78-79.

18 The first line of one of the poems in Olson's *Y & X*, published later with "Moebus" changed to "Moebius"—*Selected Writings* pp. 162–163; *Collected Poems* pp. 54-55. The poem also includes the phrase "itself a leopard," quoted later in this letter.

19 A phrase from "La preface" in *Y & X, Selected Writings*, pp. 160–61, *Collected Poems* pp. 46-47.

20 From "The Moebus strip" in *Y & X*.

21 This privately printed volume was sent to Olson on publication, 4 March 1949. The numbered passages correspond to photographic plates of Michelangelo's sculptures.

22 Olson's letter in response to *A Primer of Morals for Medea* is missing. We subsequently learn that it was stolen by Duke Ward, whose name Frances had taken at the time (the book is copyrighted by "Frances Ward").

23 John A. Symonds, *Life of Michelangelo.*

24 Olson presumably had been curious as to why *A Primer of Morals for Medea* had been published under the imprint of "Russian Classic Non-Fiction Library."

25 Olson's missing letter in response to *A Primer of Morals for Medea.*

26 Olson presumably is returning the photograph sent by Boldereff in her letter on 26 March 1949.

27 Olson's source, the bilingual Loeb Classical Library *Lyra Graeca* ed. J.M. Edmonds (1922) vol. 1, p. 154 gives the English translation: "both declaring that their beloved were many in number and that they were captivated by all beautiful persons."

28 Boldereff's letter of 26 March 1949 discussed this word, which she used in *A Primer of Morals for Medea.*

29 Desmond Harmsworth "James Joyce: A Sketch" *Harper's Bazaar* (April 1949) p. 129—the two sentences Olson directs our attention to are: "He seemed to tap a private source of Panic laughter. It was a separate art of Joyce's, and it did not deserve to perish."

30 Olson's poem is "In the Hills South of Capernaum, Port," in *Harper's Bazaar* (April 1949) p. 193; the last line of part 2 begins: "The life is more than meat." See *Collected Poems* p. 61.

31 Presumably *Call Me Ishmael.*

32 Again, "In the Hills South of Capernaum, Port," from which the phrase "the good tree" is quoted below.

33 When Olson received her May 1936 notebook from Boldereff he typed the following extracts for his own use before returning it; he added his own comments occasionally, sometimes in the form of question marks or exclamation marks.

34 Presumably the second part of Franz Gamont *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* (Paris 1926). Olson's poem "Dura," drafted on the back of an envelope sent to Boldereff 25 May 1949, begins "To come to the look in the sacrificer's eyes" *(Collected Poems* p. 85).

35 Michael I. Rostovtzeff excavated the Turkish site with Franz Cumont and wrote *Dura-Europos and Its Art* (Oxford 1938).

36 Boldereff sent soon afterwards an offprint of S.N. Kramer "The Epic of Gilgames and its Sumerian Sources" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* LXIV (1944) 7-23, adding a note: "This was given me by Kramer—whom I just walked in on one day at the Un. of Pa. Museum and started to talk to—". Olson made much use of it, both immediately and later, writing on 19 January 1968: "I still carry that paquette of his, sent to you, around as one of my holy goods."

37 A.A. Vasiliev *History of the Byzantine Empire* trans. S. Ragozin 2 vols. (Madison: University of Wisconsin 1928–29).

38 Edith Starkie *Arthur Rimbaud* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949).

39 The Winter 1949 issue of *Western Review* contained Olson's poem "Siena," sent to Boldereff previously in typescript. She quotes the last line of the poem below.

40 This early Gilgamesh poem, "Tomorrow," is dated 1941 on the copy enclosed with this letter (see *Collected Poems* p. 9 and p. 645.)

41 Boldereff's reply of 25 May 1949 indicates that she is ending her brief marriage to Duke Ward and not leaving Pennsylvania.

42 Olson, in exchange for Kramer, offers Boldereff the name of a commentator on Homer he had discovered via Edward Dahlberg. He later owned Victor Berard's *Did Homer Live? (New York: Dutton 1931).*

43 Olson has adapted lines from Gilgamesh translated by S.N. Kramer on p. 20 of the article Boldereff had sent him.

GERRIT LANSING

IN THE GRIP OF THE OCTOPUS

To be useless is not without use,

as the temperature mounts,

and how we are offered the tincture of dog,

dementia unveiled in the niches where lions repose,

this burnt-out expanse.

Halidom, then, and she comes to your aid,

desire hard in the branches of icecream.

Veer, only to veer, a method of ease
that is no method at all, a wash cloth.

Strip and proclaim, or whisper like hair of the wind
"No wonder the cowboy opens his fly
as the mother takes him in hand."

Eh bien, aujourd'hui

qui est l'émissaire du Dr. Wang Foo?

JACKSON MAC LOW
TWO POEMS

A CURIOUS OCCASION

a poem for John Cage after his 79th birthday

Wretchedness shagbark glyph decent bide rodent semen
  cheaters
Aberrant incredible insole poverty radium
Sheetrock eviscerate

Motorola pepper tack word leaky quiet
Pinacotéca chickadee samphire anomie cheroot query cart
  empirical
Viscount iridium eleemosynary occupy actorism tack.
Belay

Esposito

Titanic theorbo notation ichthyological knee-deep sock ballast
Parturition methadone passerine mescaline
Kettering alack passerine crater swipe peon policy escape
Jeepers effervescent worm cheaters coomb when law
Insole shield veal grasp hysteresis
Kettering methadone activity ataraxia tephra
Chicken Little cheesecloth occupy
Street ichthyological tube luxury
Thanotopsis taffeta cyborg ballast exude

*Caesural spaces: 3 letter spaces [ ] = 1 unaccented syllable;
6 letter spaces [ ] = 1 accented syllable or "beat";

Sources & Means: "Forties 16" (JML); GEN (John Unger); DIASTEX4 (Charles O. Hartman < JML's diastic method, 1963) using "36 Mesostics Re and Not Re Marcel Duchamp" #12 (John Cage) as seed & title source; & editing: caesural spaces, capitals, formatting (JML)

7 September 1991; 10 February 1992
New York

ANCIENTS

for Annie

Ancients encrust dense fruitless coalescence bantam art.
Paik daughter o'.
Petrini repentance congratulation hebetude grease bitartrate.
Calcimine eagle curve.

Layers of.

Twang.

Mackerel serum handrail photo opportunity draftsman accord.
Kneehole.

Fundamental.
Agrippa stonecrop bunched ornament.

Guilt fragile sequitur moment inquietude forcible.

Golem hippopotamus ballots airline
Iridescence cedars tense.

Parchment.

Throne cordage deprogramming rapids about *and the Pauper*.
Renascence typical ragweed bittersweet frank spiral.
Morgue paprika oriented visitation kneehole.

Growth ziggurat fold field butter-'n'-egg lamb's tesseract.
Tansy margin handcar saloon.
Spanish alarm inauguration.
Cannibal panic secretary bestial oriented drink.
Pragmatic.

Signify direction cumulative misguide globe zinc calcification.

English smoke glimpse.

Tribune tarnish.
Marble wind motion cleanse ash intrigue.
Fenster social keeper before the group whicker margarita.
Quotient forest mistletoe misguide grasp litter.
Killer girl converges angles torments day someone.
Torrid.

Swedish flagon.

Commission a certain point incomprehension.

Wintered liaison tesseract blank trouble slick flag housing.
Daughter o'.
Verdant.
Penelope guest gill tile.

Mellow farce encrusted traffic pantry.

Dormant slide terror angles acid.
Ancient.

Lincoln petition.
Iridescence bark.
Grieve clitoris misguide quotient rennet laborate.

Requested guarantee fix.
Golem field grave winces timocracy parsimony cardinal handle.

Seasonal *espressivo.*
Alp snazzy tone.
Ammiana readership bantam graves climb frogman.

Pallid daughter o'.
Verdant.
Penelope glister rick folk art poplars *morte* florist trap.
Sapper curve.

Word.
Mirror orchestral axis onto denotative minipotato scoreboard.
Beeswax grave cliché rung.
American ballot gladiator claymore gladiator misuse.
Pellegrino.

Till sensemonger.
Iridescence torn.
Baby strike.

Derived from JML's 100-poem series Twenties (New York: Roof Books, 1991; written 2/24/89–6/3/90) via nonintentional operations involving the computer programs TRAVESTY (Hugh Keener & Joseph O'Rourke) and DIASTEX4 (Charles O. Hartman's automation of a diastic text-selection method developed by JML in 1963), using the name "Annie Brigitte Gilles Tardos" as seed string, and editing: caesural spacing, punctuation, capitalization, formatting, etc. (JML).

4 March and 15 May 1991; 2 January 1992
New York

JOHN TAGGART

SAINTE-CHAPELLE

IN MEMORY OF OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Specifically the rose window specifically the center
center of the rose left to right bottom to top
left to right the receiver kneeling with tightly closed eyes
kneeling before orange claws of the sender

candlestick elaborate nail there are several nails
hand of the sender reaches toward a nail
sitting in black and purple robes sitting on a rainbow
sender on green rainbow reaching toward a nail

four stars pale yellow stars eruptions out of the blue
eruptions out of the blue that will not heal
sender wears a knot of deeper yellow
receiver prays to untie the knot prays and suffers

on each side of the sender a nail ever ready nail
between the nails a two-edged sword
sender holds a two-edged sword in his mouth
sword in his mouth his mouth a black "x" stretching wide.

MILTON KESSLER

RIDING FIRST CAR: *LEARNING THE BOXES*

:

A man with a fast heart
rests on a hill in a grass jacket
and gilt hat flower,
face facing bursting light.

:

The flowered armless chair
rides next to the armed solid one.

:

As toy cathedrals the migrants dig
their daily coin.

Circus trucks wait
to pick up the dark backs.

:

To lie far from your lamp corner
in a chasm of falling thoughts
and the mist above them.

:

Shy and stiff-thighed at the party
left profile colder than right

goes from stranger to stranger.

:

Do people ever sit here, she says.
        It's a nice spot.

Oh yes, he says.

:

These leaves and buds have keyways passwords
for every twisting gust of breaking out beside
masts, buttresses and russet bells of giant firs.

:

A woman with a bruised eye and cracked glasses
settles in and sugars her coffee.

:

I notice down there I'm wearing
Van Gogh's boots.

Who put them on
my twisted yellow feet?

:

Why waste the food, he says,
waving the tray away.

:

See, there's a miniature dinosaur
in the sidewalk, a winged one, asleep,

                a bird in asphalt.

:

After the "little ice age" and Crusades
for three years it rained hard rain: 1315-17 CE,
irrigated the plague.

They blame the dry Jews.

:

Bertha mentions Belle. Your sister is still
with you? she says. No, Betty says.
She has been gone for six years, a long time.
The sit quietly under the Sabbath lights.

Both ninety.

:

Piers and rails and tanks and barges and steam
and shacks and trucks and here and there
a speck with two legs on cement
and 1930 for a sky.

:

It is soon Spring

and trees are still mated
to sidewalk gray ice
inside the woods.

:

On the island after supper
she stepped out and took this picture
lit by the click of her new gift camera
these nightsea stars.

:

A moon perusing the couch
and sweater of heather.

:

Ice doesn't want to give way
but it's done what it can

for the play.

:

Having thermos tea and cookie,
  nearby a squirrel eating lunch
    I hold my tea with both hands
      and leap from bench to bench.

:

:

:

:

"We have so many things to talk about," she says,
after the afternoon
                in the park,
"but there isn't any air," she says.

:

2 men eating lunch on a girder
                35 floors up
talking in the sky and smiling.

:

A blind grandmother binds on her shawl
stands and looks
    toward the platform door.

:

The running watch is closing in
on the stopped clock

Look, now it passes
and for a time es-capes.

:

Poor woman walking in winter
so dim the teeth show in rows
beneath cheek-skin.

:

They called and said,
"Get up and put on your uniform."

So I got up
and had breakfast,

then went back to my body.

:

Oh what nice rolls.
They really give you
your money's worth.

You get rest by sleeping when you are tired
no matter where that is.

You take rest when the need rises,
as mammals do.

:

Geese fly dark in the valley of ashes
looking like a stream.

:

After I was fired I thought about mountains.
Rehired I was angry and
walked around the block.

:

Crown against the windshield
and gold carpaint for a bed
my line is Nowhere River
and shoes rot red.

:

See we've run out of the tunnel.
These weeds touching the train are green,
just like
in the country.

:

This worry attacks my waking,
disabling the robe of the day.

:

A bearded man in the mirror,
seeing his yellowed underwear
and a synagogue burning far.

:

I can't cheer at the opera as in old times
but twist and wrench
against the bindings of my chair.

:

He wrapped his clay statue in his only blanket
and froze to death beside it in Paris 1864.

:

The couple on the West End Line,
her on his shoulder, his shined shoes split,
their little tartan suitcase crumpled
her purse in his lap.

:

This time of year
if the sun is out
there's no better
    weather.

:

He was the pupil of her eye.
That certainly is a pretty plant.
This terrace is worth the rent.
The mind must love the heart.

:

Girl,
holding her hand in her lap like her child.

:

It would have been nice to have the family together,
tuned to the time before we were born.

:

They are sleepy and clean and trusting
the old bridge girders to Brooklyn.

JOHN HEARTFIELD

AIZ/VI 1930–38

Catalogue raisonne of the photomontages published in
Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung and Volks Illustrierte, with text, translations
and notes by David Evans. 524 pages, 247 colorplates

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JOHN HEARTFIELD
SIX PHOTOMONTAGES

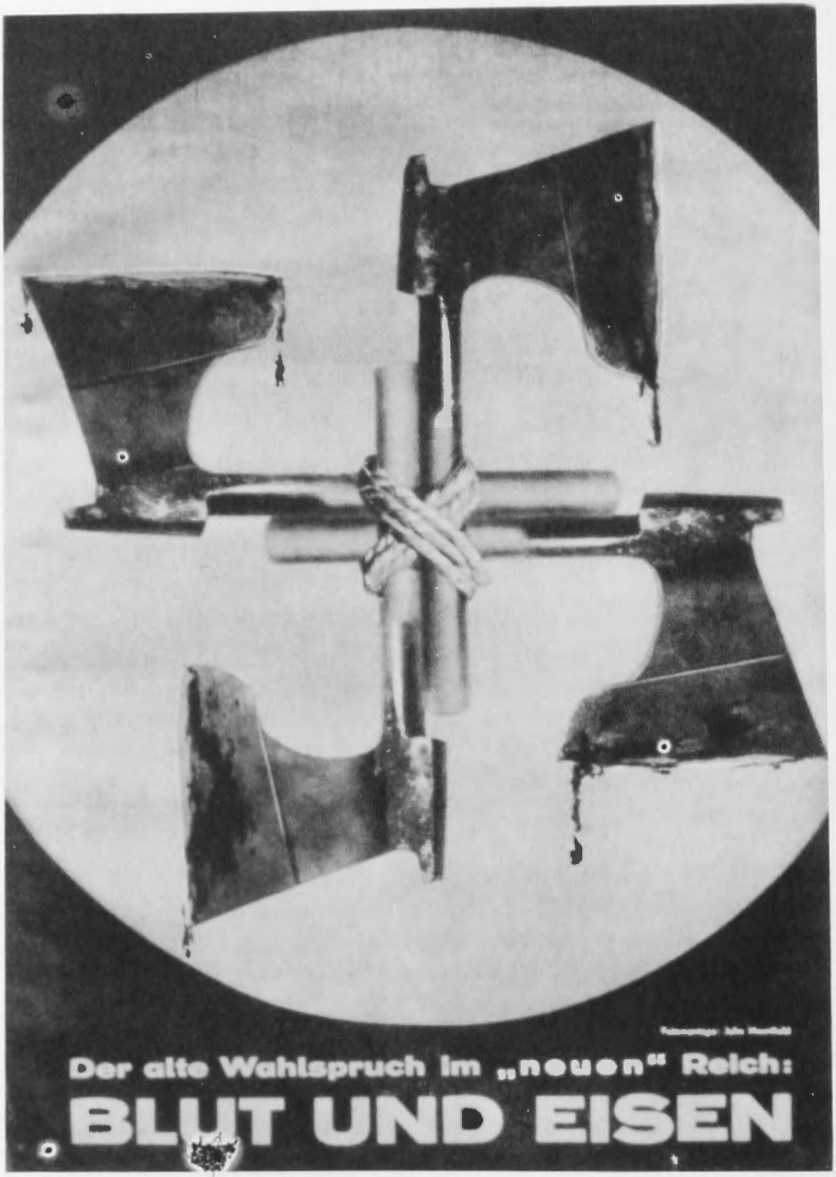
Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ), 1930
WHOEVER READS BOURGEOIS NEWSPAPERS BECOMES BLIND AND DEAF, AWAY WITH THE STULTIFYING BANDAGES!

Zum Krisen-Parteitag der SPD

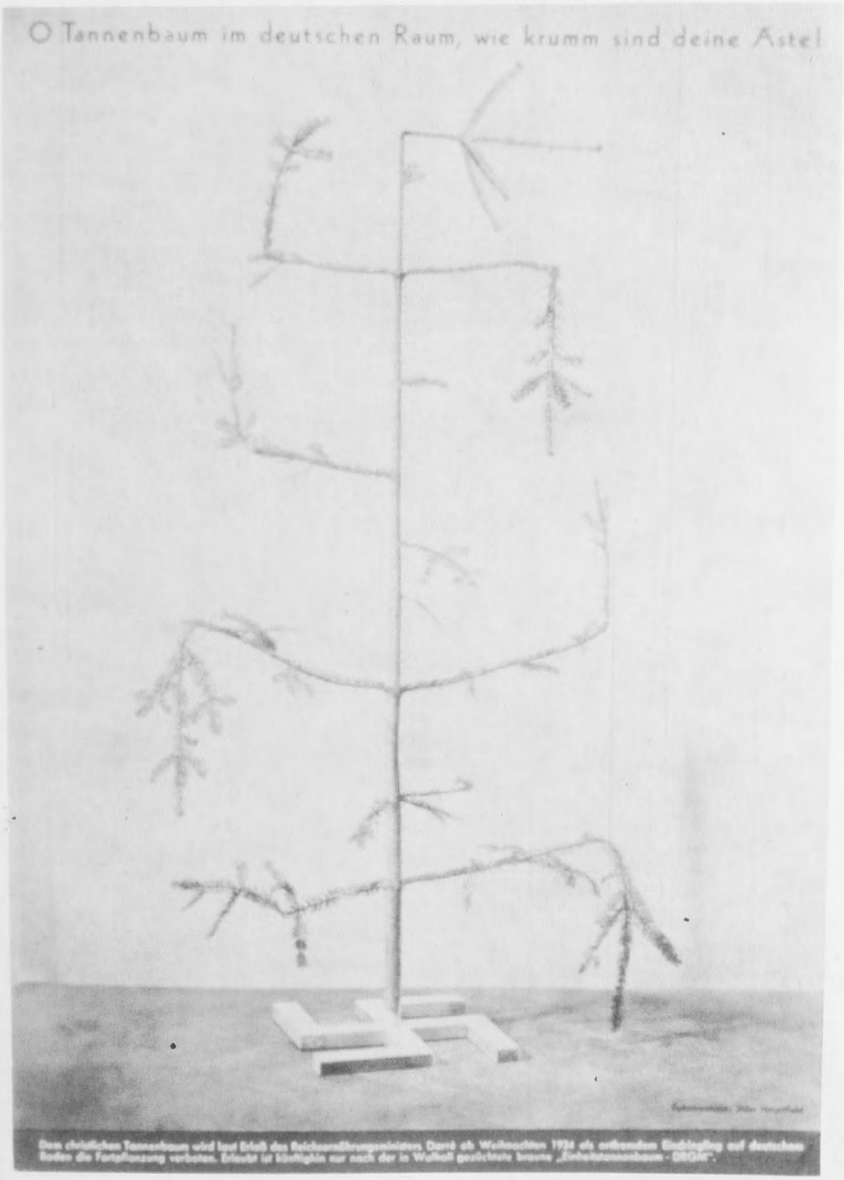
Die Tierärzte von Leipzig.

AIZ, 1931
On the occasion of the crisis party conference of the SPD

AIZ, 1932
THE MEANING OF THE HITLER SALUTE:
Little man asks for big gifts
Motto: MILLIONS STAND BEHIND ME!



AIZ, 1934
The old motto in the "new" Reich:
BLOOD AND IRON



AIZ, 1934
O Christmas tree in German soil, how bent are thy branches!

AIZ, 1936
VOICE FROM THE SWAMP
"Three hundred years of consistent inbreeding prove the superiority of my race!"

ROBERT C. MORGAN

THE SUBVERSIVE WORLD OF JOHN HEARTFIELD

"A photograph can, by the addition of an unimportant spot of color, become a photomontage, a work of art of a special kind."
—John Heartfield as quoted by Sergey Tretyakov[1]

The climate in Berlin toward the end of the Weimar Republic proved a necessary breeding ground for those artist who identified themselves with the Dada movement. Some of the leading figures associated with Berlin Dada were Richard Huelsenbeck, Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Hoch, Johannes Baader, John Heartfield and George Grosz. Each of these artists developed a point of view that was largely political in its assailment of the failing power structure in Germany. They used non-traditional means of visual (and textural) representation in order to deliver their incisive commentaries. In contrast to the conventional forms and approaches to painting and sculpture being produced at the time, the Dada artists invented media-oriented devices through the deployment of collage, assemblage, typographic arrangement, and photomontage. It was the development of this latter technique that proved to have the most effective reverberations and consequentially the most historical implications in its power to disseminate subversive and oppositional ideas.

Two years before the official birth of Dada in Berlin in 1918, the artists George Grosz and John Heartfield are claimed to have invented photomontage.[2] The spirit of their invention was as much inspired by their radical positions against the Weimar regime as it was by their somewhat witty visual imaginations. It was also during this period that both artists anglicized their names though not officially, as a response to the state-condoned derogation of the British. Heartfield's name was originally Helmut Herzfeld, and Grosz's was originally spelled differently. By adding an "e" to his first name and by changing the last letter of the surname from "s" to "z", the pronunciation of "George Grosz" sounded English.[3] In either

case, the two artists functioned as both aesthetically and politically radical artists at the outset of Berlin Dada, thus giving the content of their respective works an important and necessary moral equivalence.

If Dada was to represent the irrational impulse in culture, as the Dada artists in Zurich had earlier maintained, then it was time by 1920 to extend this aesthetic protest into the realm of current topical issues. This is most clearly stated in the *Collective Dada Manifesto* from that year, authored by a young medical student named Richard Huelsenbeck:

> Art in its execution and direction is dependent on the time in which it lives, and artists are creatures of their epoch. The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash. The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time.[4]

Berlin was the place for this kind of aesthetic or anti-aesthetic to emerge. Political unrest and turmoil filled the streets. Employment was high. There were food and housing shortages. What Huelsenbeck is advocating in his 1920 Manifesto is a rally against Expressionism, claiming that these artists represented "a comfortable life free from content or strife" and that they preferred "their armchair to the noise of the street."[5] The upheavals in Berlin at the end of the First World War were no time for venerating the artist isolated in his atelier, but were signs of another era in which the artist must learn to compete with the propaganda and mediating strategies of the ruling order. It was in such a climate that Heartfield and the photomontage came into prominence.

The concept of the photomontage was not merely about the juxtaposition of "irrational" elements, sandwiched in the same negative, with the subversive inclusion of a slogan, dialogue, or caption, but it was also about the possibility or mass distribution through printing. Though Heartfield had shown his photomontages, both as originals and as printed works in such journals as *Neue Jugend* and later in *Der Dada*, which he publicized through the efforts of his brother Wieland Herzfelde in "Malik Verlag" (Weiland's publishing house), it was not until the late '20s that Heartfield's work achieved wider recognition when he started publishing his montages in the German labor periodical *AIZ* (Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung).[6] It was

in *AIZ* that Heartfield was able to find his most effective measure in counteracting the NAZI-inspired propaganda of the day. The most acrid and satirical photomontages were presented in this journal which had its office in Berlin until Hitler's seizure of power in March 1933. A month later, Heartfield was at home when he heard the jackboots of the German Gestapo coming up the stairs, whereupon he leapt from his window into a haywagon below. He was able to escape from Berlin where he then made his way to Prague. Here he resumed work on his montages against the Socialist Democratic Party until 1938 when he was forced to take exile in England.[7] It is the work done for *AIZ* that has established Heartfield as a major artistic innovator in the history of Modernism.

Heartfield's photomontages play heavily on the absurd. They contain both tragic and comic elements. They suspend oppositional elements in order to incite a visual drama that is clearly unresolvable. The semiotic code between these conflicting signs is not so much concealed as it is revealed. Sometimes Heartfield would appropriate photographs from diverse sources and montage them together to create a particular emotional effect—what Brecht often employed in his dramatic works as a "de-familiarization" effect.[8] This is evident in such works as *The Finest Products of Capitalism*, (1932) where an image of an unemployed man wearing a humiliating placard is placed standing on the "priceless" lace veil of a bridal gown, or *A Pan-German* (1933), in which the image of the Nazi Julius Streicher, editor of the anti-Semitic publication *Der Sturmer*, is placed over an image of a blood-spattered victim on a sidewalk taken from the Stuttgart police file.[9] At the far right of the same montage Heartfield has placed an image of Hitler's representative Rudolf Hess with the caption: "You deserve the dagger. You have surpassed us in assassination." While these examples are the result of combining readymade photographs from various sources and montaging them together, other works by Heartfield are more concerned with a *mise en scene* situation in which the precision of the dramatic sign or incident becomes a major issue. Often these photographs involve a manipulation of the swastika as a still-life motif. Examples include *O Little German Christmas Tree, how bent your branches seem to be* (1934) and *In this sign shall you be betrayed and sold* (1932).

In the latter photograph, Heartfield has taken the traditional Christmas carol, "O Tannenbaum," and given it a subversive visual equivalent. The deliberately spare limbs of the pine tree are manipulated in such a way as to reveal the sign of the swastika. The wry humor of Heartfield—a characteristic that often gives a powerful incisiveness to his montages—is shown at the base of the tree which is, in fact, a swastika. The use of popular slogans as the structure for a visual metaphor is made manifest in yet

another swastika "still-life" called *The old slogan in the "new" Reich: Blood and Iron.* In this case, the Nazi insignia is constructed from four hand-axes, bound in the center with rope, upon which Heartfield has added an effect of blood dripping-off the four blades.

Two of the most famous of the *AIZ* montages (including those shown in *Die Volks-Illustrierte* later in the '30s) were the "tiger montage" or *The Crisis Party Congress of the SPD* (1931) and *Those who read bourgeois newspapers will become deaf and blind* (1930). In the "tiger montage" Heartfield is referring directly to a speech given by Fritz Tarnow, the SPD Reichstag Deputy and Chairman of the Woodworkers Federation, at the Party Congress on June 15, 1931. Heartfield's image of the tiger, montaged over the face of Tarnow, who wears his Nazi-stickpin like a dandy, represents the capitalist betrayal of his proletarian role. This vindictive stance against moral hypocrisy is pervasive throughout the artist's indictments against the SPD.[10] The visual power of this montage is one of Heartfield's strongest.

In *whoever reads bourgeois newspapers*, from the previous year, Heartfield uses a similar approach by taking the three-quarter portrait view of the bust of his anonymous sitter—in this case, a "brown-shirt"—and wrapping the head in two newspapers, each with the logotype visible. The two papers, *Tempo* and *Vorwärts*, were the two ultra-rightist vehicles of the SPD; thus, Heartfield is directly criticizing the journalistic content of how ideology is assumed in "the news" without questioning.

In an exhibition of 234 photomontages by Heartfield at the Kent Gallery in New York last year,[11] visitors were able to assess for themselves the structural and semiotic means that the artist used in order to deliver his critique of the rising Socialist Democratic Party after the fall of the Weimar Republic in Germany. Organized by Anna Lundgren, this exhibition of the *AIZ* and *Die Volks-Illustrierte* montages offered one of the most comprehensive viewings of Heartfield's visualizations of anti-Nazi rhetoric ever seen in the United States. The problem in mounting such an exhibition is that the medium is not precisely suited for viewing on the wall, but for a more intimate viewing on the page. The irony of this viewing experience—as any media analyst can explain—is that the intimacy of the experience is the perfect aura in which to transform political opinion or in which to sell useless products. The intimate space of the media is not really intimate. Nor is it particularly private. Instead, it is a shroud, delivered either by way of print or electronics, that is perfectly convincing. It is convincing because the message is essentially a public one that already presumes, through demographic research, a certain level of social or "cultural" conformism.

The involuntary reception of conformism may appear less threatening given the intentional seduction of the medium.

To put Heartfield on the wall may, in fact, be a means toward demystifying the false intimacy that one automatically feels in responding to the image-text configuration. In this sense, the exhibition succeeded. It made the instrumentalized concept more detached, more a part of history, and more subject to an investigation as to how the means of artistic production was put in the foreground of consciousness. One author refers to Heartfield's strategy as one of "oppositional mimicry" in that Heartfield used the form of the media to subvert its content,[12] a strategy not unrelated to certain martial arts in the East.

Heartfield's late career seems to have brought him a certain degree of recognition. He returned to Germany by way of Prague in 1950 after being exiled in London for most of the war. In 1956 he returned to Berlin after an absence of twenty-three years. Numerous exhibitions began to materialize throughout Germany, Eastern Europe, and the Far East. He died in Berlin in 1968 after several years of severe illness. It is curious that Heartfield's art was largely misunderstood because it was so endemic to the media. Only recently have critics begun to evolve a deconstructive criteria in art that accounts for works that question the pre-eminence of the fetishized object.

NOTES

1 Sergey Tretyakov, "Remarks about Heartfield's Photomontages" in John Heartfield, Photomontages of the Nazi Period (New York: Universe Books, 1977), p. 26

2 Wieland Herzfelde, "Heartfield's Photomontages and Contemporary History" in Heartfield, loc. cit., p. 17

3 *Ibid.*

4 Richard Huelsenbeck, "Collective Dada Manifesto" (1920) in Robert Motherwell, editor, *The Dadda Painters and Poets*, 2nd edition (New York: G. K. Hall, 1981), pp. 242-243

5 *Ibid.*

6 Friedrich Pfafflin, "Heartfield's Photomontages of 1930-38" in Heartfield, loc. cit., pp. 27-29

7 In order to appeal to a wider audience the magazine changed its name in 1936 to *Volks-Illustrierte* or People's Illustrated, a name which it kept until the magazine folded in 1938. (See Exhibition Brochure, "John Heartfield: Photomontages, 1930-38," Kent Gallery, New York, March 30 - May 18, 1991.)

8 The term "de-familiarization" was used by the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, but it also applies to what Brecht refers to as the "A-effect" or alienation effect. (See Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton University Press, 1972, pp. 50–51 and also John Willet, editor, *Brecht on Theatre*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1964, pp. 91-99)

9 Dawn Ades, *Photomontage* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp. 44-45

10 Douglas Kahn, *John Heartfield: Art and Mass Media* (New York: Tanam Press, 1985), pp. 73-104

11 According to Anna Lundgren, organizer of the Kent exhibition, all but three of the 237 photomontages from the magazine were shown. (New York, February 10, 1992)

12 Kahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-126

KARIN LESSING

THE YEAR ZERO

". . .for thought is brief whereas
the image is absolute"
—Andrei Tarkovsky

"l'indicible n'est pas tapi dans
l'écriture, il est ce qui l'a bien
avant déclenché"
—Georges Perec

vein vision swirl

into the wired Darkness

crystal
which most fully embodied dwells at a remove frosted

daughter of Storm

its traceries
playing on the wall
are flames

(seen as flames)

They come
with snow, with wintering

come from the east

They graze among ruins

(their ghost speech, their
unspoken to children

vanishing out of me)

They covered all the mirrors but one

•

"great things have happened
on the earth"

many deaths, motions
in whose wake

we abandon oars, we sink
into lichen stars outskirts peaks

fall further

(images, ash-

grey vermilion)

and the mutter of language comes to a halt.

as even as you do

no longer remember o

mother! Games unravel lives

sweet evergreen
that breath

you take one goose step one

to bring forth, flourish
with branching

A berry!

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

some say
a Sunday home acre and empires

fall (fugitives

the bloom in the wood
shrouds

•

once and for all settles

is white is snow boundary
growing dark

memory is that number

frame and frozen face running together

•

is white neutral, you

say

once and for all annihilation

candescent *"chandelles des rois"*

the signs
burning in us—the storm's—

dip and rise Solitude

the SOLITUDE OF HISTORY

hushed Quietude

your gaze

submits to its power
silently passes

the night on fire fire and fierce
outshining

mute saturates mute Leap mute

• • •

PAUL CHRISTENSEN
THE FIRST DAY

I WENT to sleep and woke up an adolescent. My clothes no longer fit me; they lay on the chair waiting for another person to wear them. But he had died, and would never warm the plaid shirt and red corduroy pants again. I could not bring the word I to my mind without pain. It bruised the insides of my head. I was a larger body without a suitable voice inside it. I cringed from the artificial laughter pouring out of my closet, and the voices whispering against me under the bed. Downstairs, my parents were elderly and feeble, trying to find their mouths with long, sharpened forks. They were eating lukewarm mush from a pot on the table. The walls and floors were covered in a floral-patterned linoleum and the drapes were made of old dresses and pants strung up on laundry lines. The world outside was distant and cold, beginning to break down. The school called to say it would no longer be able to educate me. I went on dressing anyway. I was going on the old habits, the old customs of infancy. My shoes barely fit over my toes, and my shirt cuffs rode up to the elbows, where I managed to fasten them with hair pins. My heart was as big as a washing machine. When I stood at the sink, I felt a weight drop between my legs, and an erection crawl out of my pants to stare at me in the mirror. I combed my black hair into a wave of anger. My mother reached up to my neck to kiss me, but backed off from the musk under my arms. At school nothing was right; all my friends shunned me. A fight broke out behind the workshops and I was suddenly at the center of it, bringing down my fists against someone's upraised face, a boy's, innocent and candid with fear. I grabbed the girl away and went sliding down the corridors on my black shoes, my arm over her neck, my fist dangling between her mohair-covered breasts. I was ready for the dark corners; a killer inside me was looking for a war.

MAXINE CHERNOFF
THREE POEMS

NATURE MORTE

A very sick child
in the Victorian sense.
Nothing specific
about his case.
A vague
longing to seize
his friends,
and arrange them
like wooden
fruit. History,
having ravaged
his metaphors,
reduced him
to a syllable
that spoke
until
the photo
achieved clarity.

THE NORTH SEA

Where I have
never swum,
light as a parlor
losing color.
As pianos register
desire in whole notes,
cold facts warm
to breathing.
Wallpaper begonias
never smelled lovelier
to the naked eye,
scattered
like love
when light registers
dismay
in all the rooms
of the house.

NOT

Sallow March,
lips parted—
and houses show
their dirty faces.
Do we enjoy life?
Life wonders
out loud.
With trepidation
we look at the sky
and arch our curious
spines. If cats
howl in alleys

or cold ailanthus
glares
more cunningly
than hothouse flowers,
we say
that seasons deepen
our frugality.
We give so little
to the rotting grass.
The thinnest air
delivers us
to name
what we hold
rounded
in our hands.
No marimbas here
or sadness passing
like a barge.
Can we say
rebirth
when whole Pyrenees
of silt are
automatic and sublime?
We list our
possible endings,
what's necessary
when the mood for
spring strikes
with insipid,
dire longing.

CONNIE DEANOVICH
THREE POEMS

WATUSI *TITANIC*

an Atlantic Ocean White
dress
hangs in the window
catching a breeze
the way the Atlantic Ocean Goers
in formal dress
hang beautifully underwater
catching seaweed
they tried to catch their breaths
like a Watusi on the basketball court
but they
unlike him
didn't
in
it wouldn't
out
was another matter
there's nothing the matter with thinking
of the
beauty of Watusi genetics and its implication
on the NBA
or with thinking about the
beauty of *Titanic* dead and how this implies
a certain onlyness
in the way "round like a chicken"
implies that chickens are only thought of as dead
and Watusi is thought of only
in the same breath as *jungle*, never *stadium*

and *Titanic* means sunk
Watusi tall

once not sunk but tall
the young *Titanic* shot hoops through frozen white waves
for once not tall but
sunk under warm blue waves
a young Watusi man swims
casting a watery shadow only
a great ghost ship could eclipse

HISTORY AS BOURGEOIS CONSTRUCT

when they lived on
El Burrito Magnifico
and in leopard skin
with bulky buttons

when across the living room
the light of the el
swept swift
as white glove over
dusty mantle

when the wine bar was
Whiskey Heaven

when shirt sleeves
carried the pollen
of quick sex and got
the whole group groping

when oranges were sliced
as the only hors d'oeuvre

when dancing and walking equalled
Life Itself and
reading was done by pink lamp light
emanating from a black ballerina lamp
such an out-of-fashion pursuit
so much the fan
of silent movies and Grant Wood

poor History is now a "bourgeois construct"
running green water into
the red barn
elemental elemental

when things broke down
into elements as ephemeral as black lace at noon

when *Psycho* with its black bra and taxidermy vision
was the mansion for imagination's dirt
imagination must have dirt
black billy clubs walled and lit by an enthusiastic masochist
prayer must be a part for some

when every home entered had a pastel plastic shrine to Jesus

when the man who roams Clark Street
roams it again look
how he looks like he's 80
except for a jet-black pompadour

except that a friend has a compulsion to kiss locks
he's great at a baseball game
remembering is so important

how the opening of a pelican's eye
is reminiscent of the eye
of a creepy little drinking kid

when to the party they brought their kid
and let it eat cat food

when the window opened
onto a brick wall
we called the house Brick View

large flames mean large history
so clouds in the shape of luggage
transport the smoke of
where there's smoke there's
malfunction
dry seas
Marlon Brando tap dancing

anything military ruins anything visionary
anything organized by history
gets the curled lip

when events are dunked
into the neutral milk of history
how hard can it be to say
this came before that
without purposefully smearing the tracks

SILVER NAKEDNESS IN CALUMET CITY

Stark
to eyes sophistically shaded at night
the Candy Shack sign pokes pink light
Big Money Girls Instant Interview
So the powerful peppers on a drunk's tongue
keep him mumbling, like he's eating his lips
I love his confusion

and am proud of it like a darkened
prima donna the way he bumps off cars
like a sea goat
Here, I have purple bottle finger
and a better echo What's left
to do as lightning wets our arms outside
Johnnie's Snack Shop? A girl passes with
"I'm wearing black because my vacation is dead."
And she's in it,
in on the hint Hammond train whistles give
that excitement is occurring
but elsewhere they make me belly-up
and buy that hat otherwise, it's
happenstance tacos from a tavern and
I can't make it in the country
shovels lasting like wedding cake unused
Virginia Plains protects my robust women
with pool sticks
See their shadows and you've seen dedication
I find it everywhere the thundering
dough balls of bygone days
This dead city agrees with the deader sea
it used to be and it's tomahawking through me
tonight until I crave a chili dog from a wagon
that drips through my hand I hear,
"Isn't she a bit of a narrow saint?" and Lizabeth
Scott crooning through her bangs somewhere up high
and this is my signal when the fan turns
Giuseppe Verdi means Joe Green
I try to see
what lakes me sleep
the Indian woman in her sari
swinging on a swing

CARL RAKOSI
THREE POEMS

IN THE POET'S EYE

The tree
and
the rock
are
true
Nordics
in a lingua
oscura,
a hermetic
order
that
can tell
infinity
from
an ass.

DRUNKARD'S ALLEY

What's the time?

One o'crock
as
the clock crows

between
naught
and
sphinx

MINIMAL VILLAGE

a wine shop
a church

between them
an ilex

and a table
underneath

the rest
is commentary

Is that you,
Everyman,
sitting there?

yet of my mind
a quiddity

under the ilex
tree that

loves to laugh
at commentary

SPENCER SELBY
MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

The astonished question cannot superimpose
perfection of reality without prejudice
we worship to delay our own Book of Job.

There is one hell raging against that process,
another for which living is simply not prepared.
One grownup banished from Eden, one childhood

sent on ahead to express true acceptance
of ignorance and death. Sent on ahead while
year day and month carry out silent remarks

in darkness made to blend itself with Western
Dramatic Agency of Doubt. History we don't want
acting more and more like a firework meaning

only worldwide breakthrough possible. Power
and impact meaning other side of warlike conquest
unprepared. Dark distance standing in the doorway

meaning experience that commanded and blew
apart the whole. A vision we were wrong about
is utterly poised and ready for something which

depth and surface can't possibly divide, a brilliant
and dangerous outlook unspeakable in its focus
upon some grand design most recently denied.

Meanwhile crisis of the ordinary overleaps
the source unraveled by its own best interest.
Outstretched falsehood turns barriers and limits

around to face the concluding page of tomorrow's
otherwise unapproachable narrative response.
Experience turns up the volume and soon

discovers what which difficult truth would
laugh no better in the best of all possible worlds.
For just one moment knowing once and for all

which fantasy took the charged rescue always
ignored because too literal. Took it for what it
was and made up all the difference it was worth.

CLARK COOLIDGE
from *TO THE COLD HEART*

After Han Shan

Who controls middle mind
dumb to the bottom of
blood crack hard
but open will light
increase wide dust
head of a beast thinks
these will never end

•

I live in a river
a lot older than the one you
I pretend to lusts
prong thing on that backwall
I used chance but
last night it lifted
now will you bring me the blue bowl
for the new iron ball
that tore and then rested?

•

Grew new eyes in the seat
of rock, of blue rack
advice
amasses cost
and the play fights

back, and the memory
plans collapses

•

Not particular about what
I thought priceless
on
thought set up dull
divined and then stopped again
clouded in sun and relieved
of the mackerel

•

Pendulum of continuous
stripes
production of snaps and clips
diurnal solve in torrid treats
did you score a well for
this speed ground?

•

Yesterday I bought school
and gained a sunset
it was ground in a wheat
sort of cap, deep drug
where we hang
we all go up
the alley in cloud

•

Rode no crane here
riding the fish, a tack
films the lip in lapses
excalibrations for higher sun
here is the winded ground

where one inch of water grows
within a tap of your number

•

In this morning there
conditions, formations
give up the key and follow
the mountain
it hollows in the sun
pretends to turn to stone
the easiest things

•

These worn out clothes go
whole with their former bodies
an apparent match?
I'll float, you go carol
in the dailies

•

Once I saw
the water clear
I took one
solo simply
and of a hue

•

Is it thus carpeted that
we will bear the tread?
unlimbered in hand, svelte of smoke
I raise bonds
I toe the kettles
if it all comes back into
swirly play

•

Complication
dares me stumble
impulse of the fair
detour of the rude
peeked at
the covered in garment
but
oil of the foul rules day

•

Jewel place at elbow body
wed in a rhyme where be
the logs of pleasure, loops
called webs called gainful taunts
I laugh over the elastic of
by gone and held up true binds
elaborations tune
in the waiting airs

•

Breaking out in causes?
water is alphabet long and teems
coil to the brights, echo laughs
transpond, laid out in corners
edge of where the past is named
bulk is strained fine

•

I gazed into the flashlight
barrel of, no spark at end
no barrier for the brighter whims
it's engagement, they say
that or the hard headed jar
one feels

•

Today I did nothing
but stretch the hole
and polish my food
there was a door but
I famished it
the lie at which
I managed to turn
the whole to all
light at lack of night

•

Not being able to stand
taking these things off then on
again I exist, nothing to be said
it's plain, solved, incarcerate
when I think back, when I steal
these lit lines further from the hand
a danced drift banner come unlaced

•

Anymore, in a way
I don't know a thing
there is buried, then is caught
a lump that varies in the grasp
a worry that dies at a hill
place of certain calls
pure death

•

Calcify with cold
then increase the grasp
nothing will howl with thought
enjoined and burst
loose

hard this permission
called to the limit
of the ape his one
pearl on a green shelf

•

No, a mind can't be kept
in front of all light
shadowed by the calcifiers
loading things in here
where only the wheels don't shine
using the moon as a finger
to close the mind

JANET KAUFFMAN

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE

Left to right: Marie, her hair is foamed, she spikes it seaward, east, west, her lips in C-clamps. Antoine, on his side, braced, languished, the sun hits all his fingers, his wooden rings. Margaret and Lavon, the twins, on their knees, their backs turned, each one embraces a thigh of Barret, naked, his chin points up, his neck cartilaged and frail. Lorain in plastene tights splits, perfectly, crotch flat, her smile parallels her legs. Landis crosses his arms, his glass eye balances in the penny-slot of his shoe. Next, the lounge chairs with Darlotta and Lloyd, they are looking at the ground. Then Medallion in her day-dress, lime green, elastic waist and sleeves. Benny, his eyes on the sky, distracted, his penis points up, mushroom-capped, out of the fly flap of silk boxers. Denise with Joe in a neck-hold, his onyx earring, his left ear, marks a point directly under her chin. Renee, dark glasses, coat of mail, nand-forged shoes. Then the guys in suits, red tie, red tie, red tie. Vinnie with the air tank, scuba belt. James holds a crescent platter, the three-toed red maple bonsai, in his lap. Nora in plaster, since she's in Rome. Randolph with the rainforest refugee, Tra, and his mangled arm. Vlaz, who holds the cake, the neon hedge topping. Mbarame and John, a few nicks from the cyclone, arms behind their necks. Jackie and her band, Donna in the Ground, for the occasion, foregoing black for blister red, silver grids on gold sheets, six-foot blue amps. Ling, with the pudding and umbrellas. Andy with the I.V. and open shirt, lips on his bared head, drawn by Laurel, her gloss amethyst. Patsy in transparency, the metal hubs of her hips, the belly pillow very clear. Raphael in purple jacket plaids pressed back-to-back with Anna and Harmusch, who holds the leg of Thom at the knee-band, while Rappaport, leaning, buttresses, his black cords zig-zagged. Rinaldo, open-mouthed, with Adrienne, her face behind her hand, and half-size Nadete, the girl, mud-covered, jeweled. Bill, the boy, sitting on leaves. And Zella, she's the dead one, burned to dust, she could be anywhere.

JULIA BALLERINI

LORNA BIEBER: REPRODUCTIONS

The puckered heads of babies join elongated adult bodies, both stretched like taffy through a multiplicity of reproductions. First there is a grafting, as a head and body from different photographic sources are coupled within a domestic surround. These couplings are then advance in waves and ripples through xeroxed reproductions. The ghoulish progeny of these technological genetics prance, yawn, and scream in the slither of their relocations and duplications.

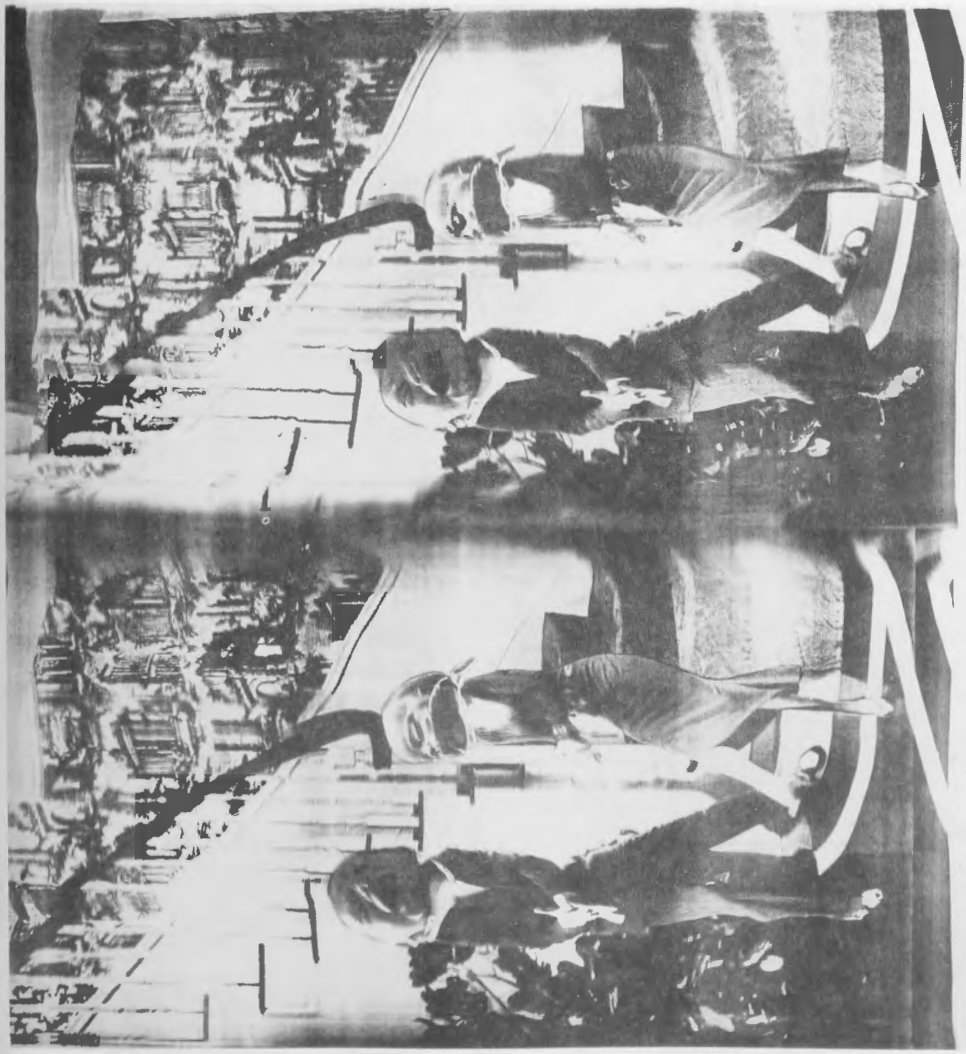
They inhabit the spaces of the 1940s and '50s affluent suburban interiors and gardens, comfortable, stable spaces now slightly distorted through their technological recall. A figure in tails and a white ruff is triplicated as it performs an elegant little dance next to a daybed. Its puffy head is wrinkled in infant sleep. Amid wall to wall carpeting, French windows, greenery, and a side table with its brass lamp, a kimono stick figure bears the head of an infant sage. A couple have descended a curved stairway. His nose becomes a pig's snout as it is pressed against the glass of its reproductive process. His mouth open wide, he cries. Adults cry like babies over a great loss or pain. Here an infant cries as an adult, a cry before the availability of language, a cry for a state of protection and innocence that he ought to inhabit but has been denied him through an accident of reproductive genetics. An ectoplasmic wisp of chemistry gags the mouth of his companion. In one image an unknown beast has come to prowl a boudoir.

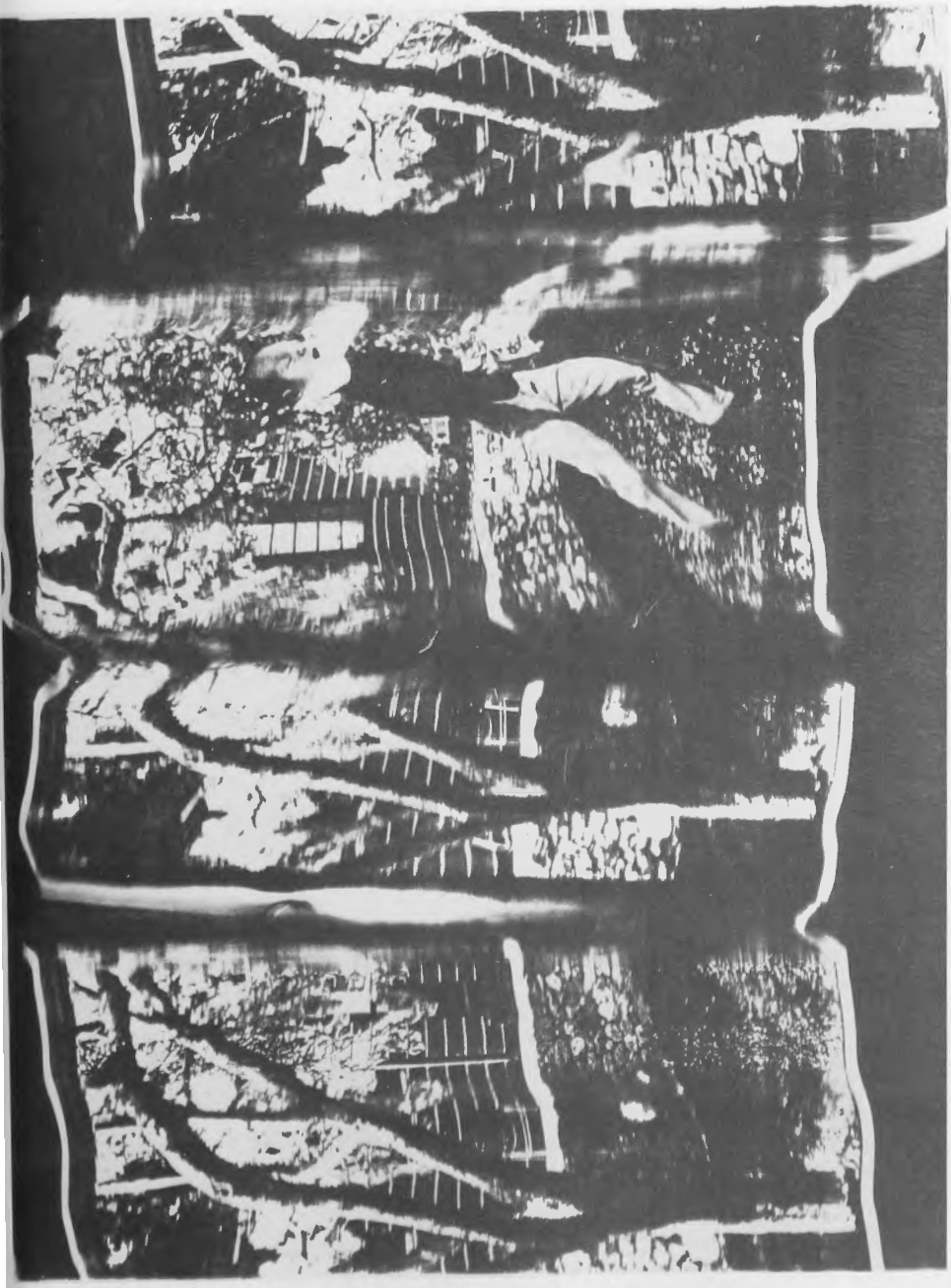
These works tell of the dissolution of borders that are thought to divide many states: states of infancy and adulthood, dreaming and waking, stillness and motion, interior and exterior. They probe deeply those conditions of nostalgic longing and fear as physiological and psychological boundaries dissolve and merge.

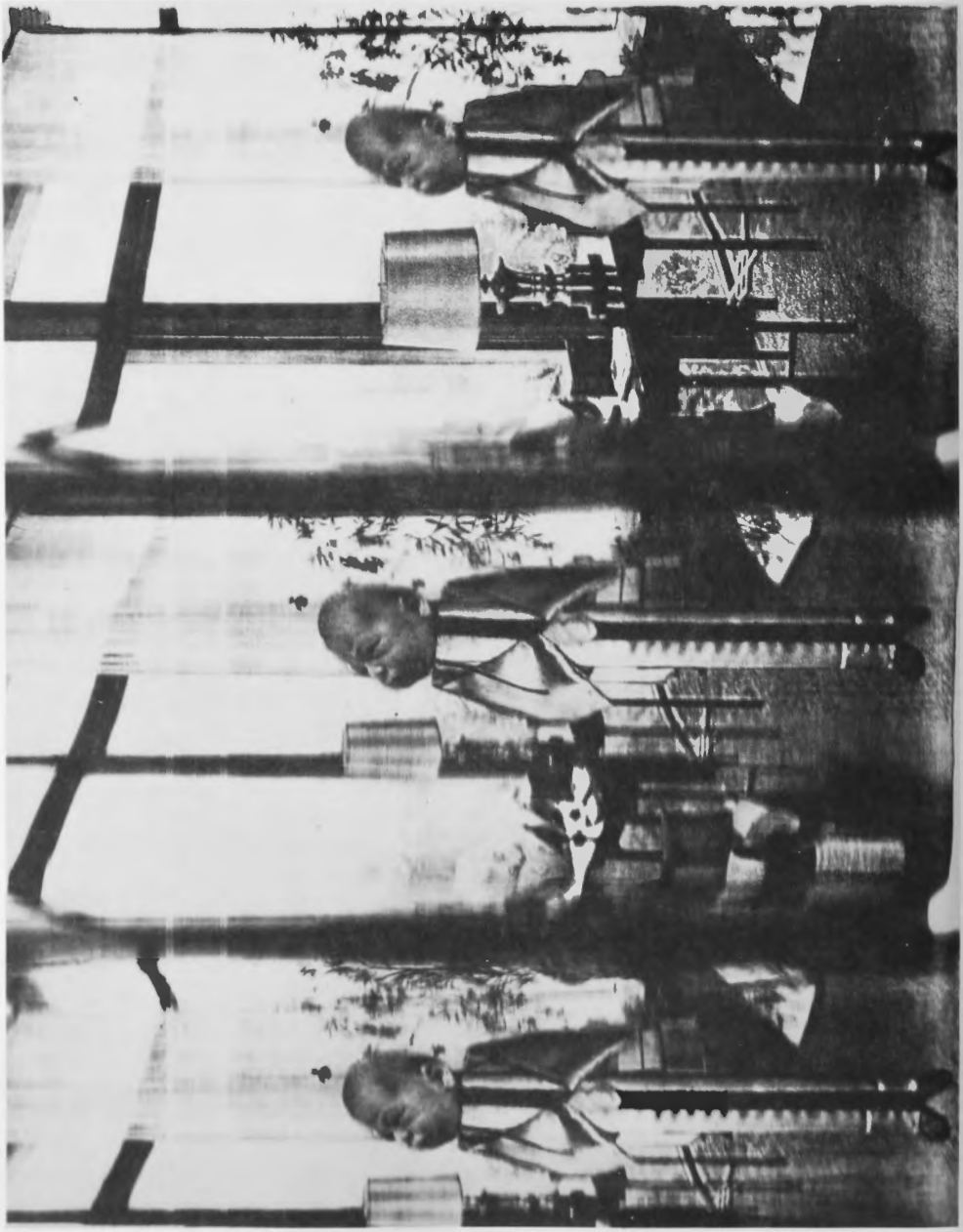
These Silverprints by Lorna Bieber were done in 1991-2. All are sized at 30" X 40" and they appear here in the following order:

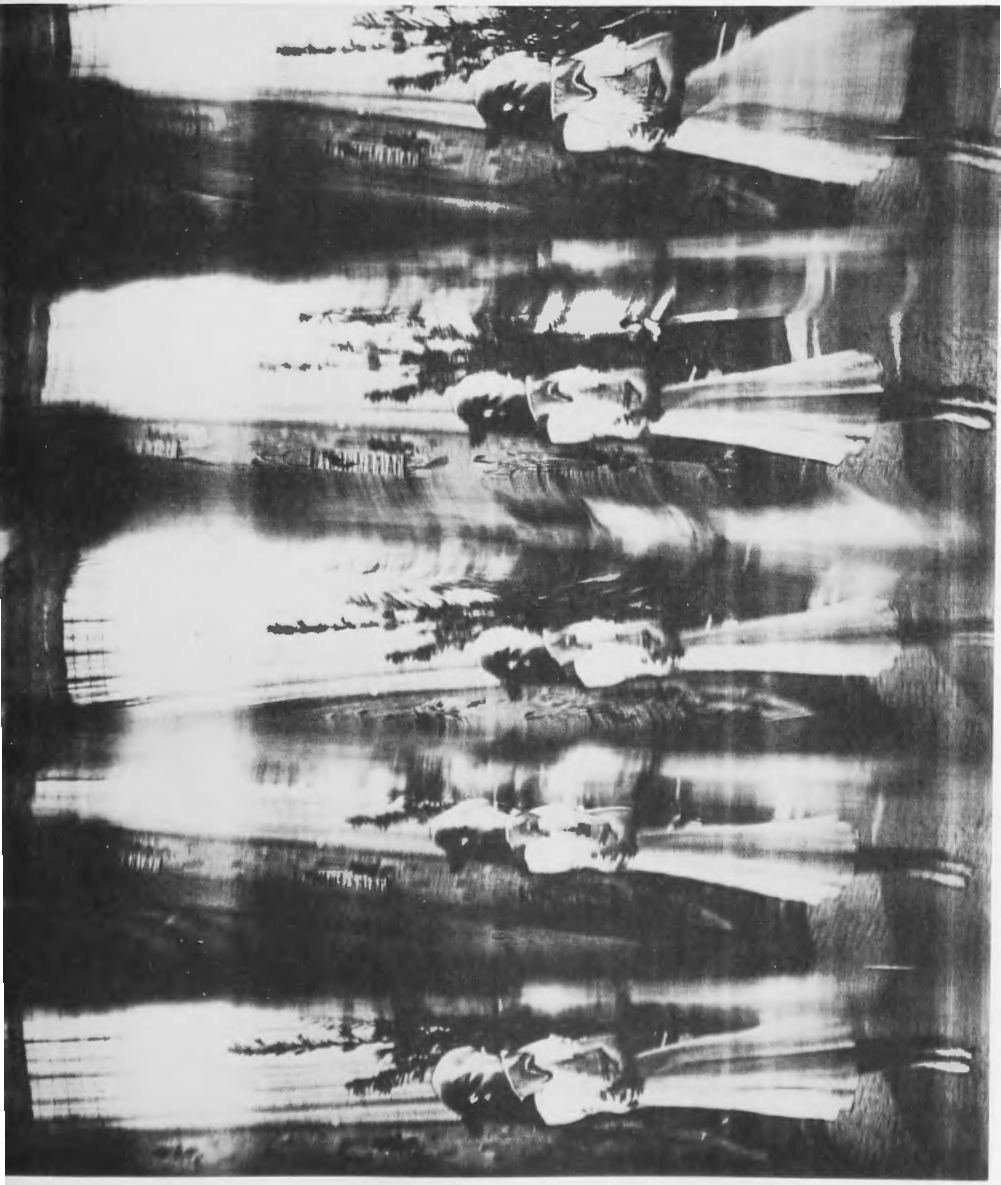
1) Spare Room 2) Stairs 3) Study 4) Wall 5) Dining Room
6) Hallway 7) Library 8) Dressing Room

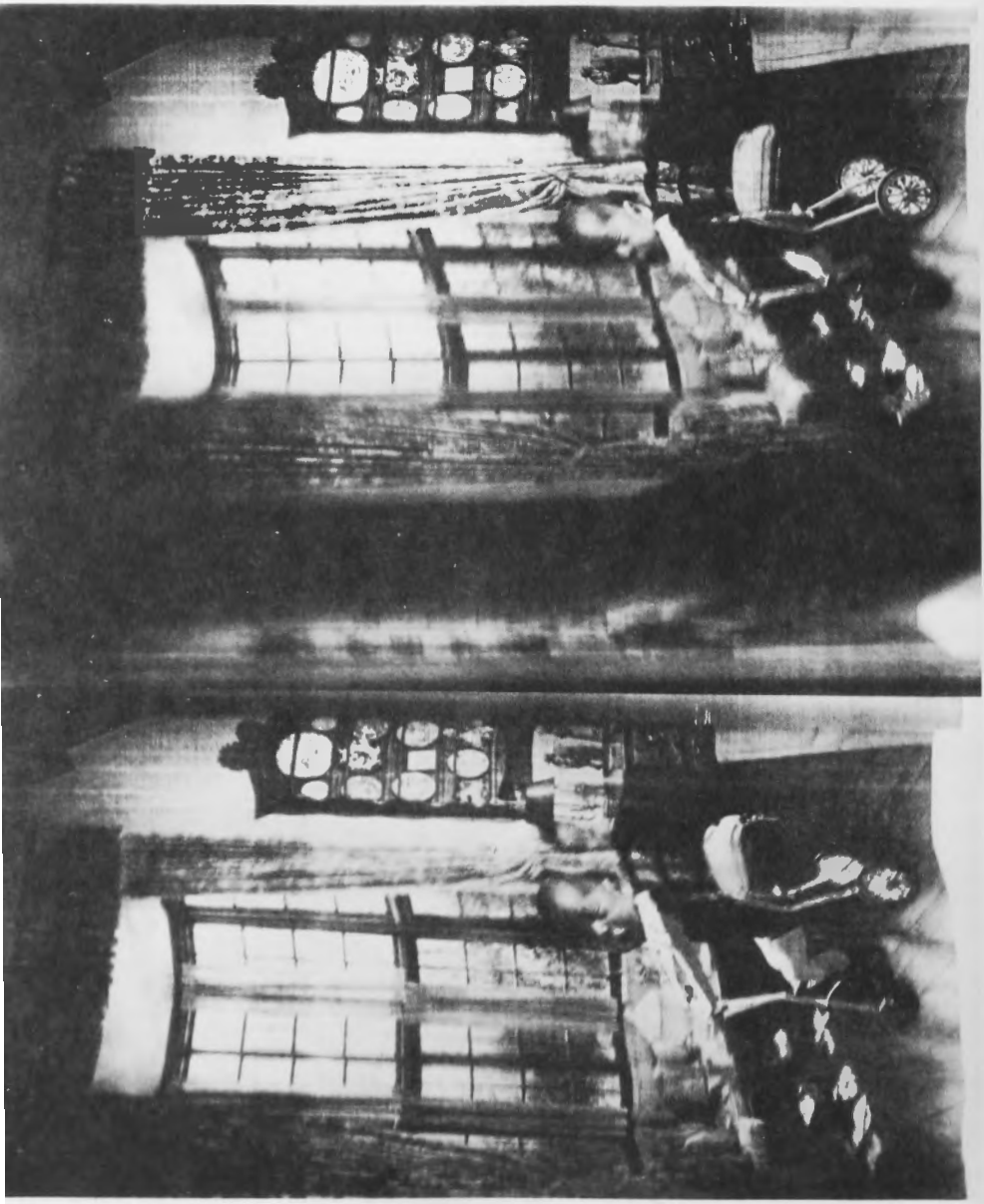
LORNA BIEBER
EIGHT REPRODUCTIONS

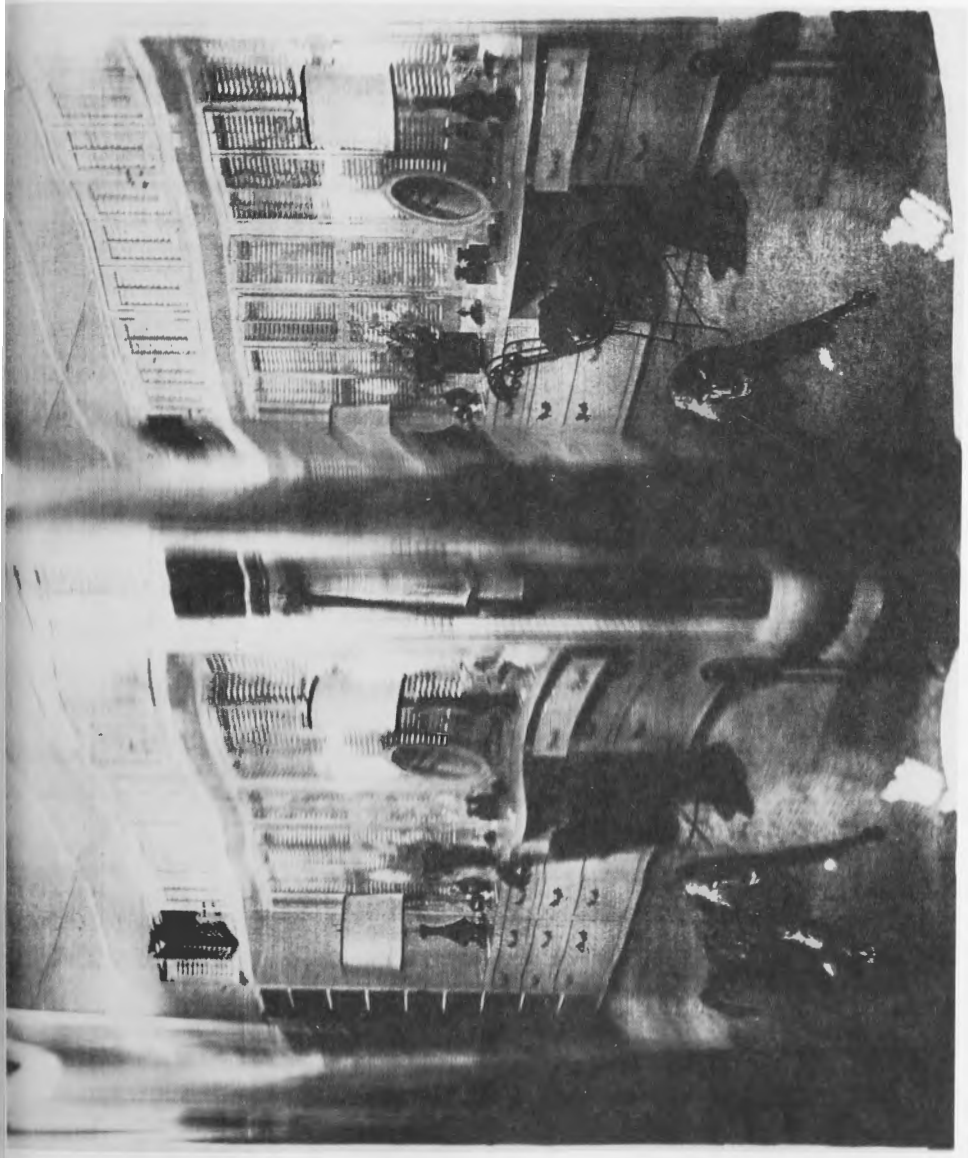












ANDREA ZANZOTTO
from *IDIOM (IDIOMA)*

(Tr. from the Italian by Beverly Allen)

FAR AWAY

Far away—that's how I saw her face darken
vanish in the unnatural depths of a scarf
in the unnatural fact of a door
and the hours never let me pass
ever again: "It's still too early
to go home from school,
the sun's shining on the rooftops
can you tell the time?"
"It's two o'clock:'
"It's still too early. . ."
"It's three o'clock"
. "It's"
In our not-knowing.
In our reciprocal not knowing
I draw near, cautiously, and I wound
without wounding, I spy without spying,
I reach without reaching.

And today there's the sun born forth from the freezings
about-faces toward the absolute,
sourish
a light, disheartening sting of cold—
marked, open, realities breathed in wind—
but I thin out and crop these icicles or icebergs
I come out of my ugly and am half-way handsome
I find my mother sitting in a dark corner
in the midst of this you would say oceanic blazing
universal yet aimed blazing

just like that dark corner is aimed
I find my mother sitting in a dark corner
murmuring that it's not fair that they're giving
so big a pension to Donna Rachele
while she gets only social security, or
I find her a little exposed to that wind
turned toward the side street
to watch the main-street traffic
to testify to the endless rustle
the cars that Sunday night vomits up once again
We trudge up the lane again and again
we're completely sad-happy happy-sad
we're completely ready and we're staunch losers
we're here and there—where and where?—
in the sunshine and space and frost of a highest intelligence
we're being raked up with whatever else
                is sweetly left over
                but still is a crowded crowd a seeded seed
we accept we accept
we leave, let's,
these words, forever (we leave)

from *"Ancient attempts at false cross-psychotherapies"*

Note:
"It's still too early," etc.: dialect nursery rhyme sung
in nursery schools of times gone by.

I'D LIKE TO KNOW IT

Put away your learned art.
If you want to know where to find good wine,

in which inn or peasant hut
beneath the sign of the bough, just
ask Nene. Eighty five years now mark her calendar.
She lives well and well alone
in her little house in Cal Santa.
I used to write on the Cal Santa walls
—and a mystic's cunning eye can still discern
the worn marks, maybe some such eye will find them soon—
"Nene dictatrice in hoc vico, MCMXXXIX."
This year she redid the ceilings,
last year she painted the shutters,
A Signore called her kitchen "oasis of peace."
She wanted to turn her armchair into a chicken coop
and the flowered staircase into a closet. The alarm clock
in the kitchen has a civil majesty in its tick;
eternity stands watch to its beat
over that terra cotta floor,
among those whitewashed walls,
with the table, the egg and the
good glass of vine.
She criticizes the radio programs.
She goes to bed at seven, now that it's winter
and sunset petrifies the Cal Santa sky. But:
Nene knows where the best wine is.
Her walks get lost behind the hills.
In summertime, she goes about the house in her slip, and once
the chaplain surprised her on his way to collect alms.
We spoke of all this in the great past,
the past that's ours, with the snows
and suns of yesteryear
and the gravel and the diamond-hard grass
where the brothers Apple and Peel, called from fairy tale lands,
kicked their little feet
to distract us when we cried, thanks to Nene.
She'll plaster the house strong, in the future,
she'll modernize, maybe,
the little doorway etcetera that opens onto the yard.
She wakes up at night and recites endless prayers
for whoever—she says—is forgotten

and/or for whoever forgets to pray. Sometimes she sings.
Tapes exist
of her well-modulated "Casta diva,"
it trembles only somewhat. She laughs at herself
a little, but she believes in herself more.
The times of the oasis of peace. Spaces, floors,
objects, sayings. Oh times
that still exist, you thicken and grow rich,
you accumulate sweetly within yourselves—
and even the most minuscule specks of woe
are deleted or dewdropped.
Ah the German fires of '44
Ah the '56 comet in the cold-summery sky
Ah the vanished hen,
the stolen grapes,
the hatchets the bad boys hid.
Ah the egg and the glass of red.
You're afraid? You're afraid?
The eternal is so immediate here, so
tangibly a fruit of time, its quality-bound
gleaming, in such striking conversation.
And every suspicion about things
and appearances is so false. Which never pass by here
just as their causes and perfect reasons never do.

Note:
The wall with the writing on it has been gone for a long time now,
just like the protagonist.

SHEPHERDS

Shepherds, who once were called
"sheep herds,"
who, in poetry, count
more than any other category
because they ruled in Arcady,
might look like animals
if you see them
clumped in all the time with the lambs
goats dogs and horses.
It's not true: they stay men and poets
and kings of Arcadys that no one
will ever discover.

THE BLACKSMITH

The blacksmith in his shop
always scares us some,
the shop's so dense with fire and so dark;
but mostly we're afraid
of him, when he nails
the red-hot irons to the hooves
of donkeys horses and mules:
let him catch a hard kick in the face
the same kick we've always gotten,
just by living, from life.

KNIFE-GRINDER

He grinds and grinds,
so the knife cuts and pokes
so it shines.
Use your head when you use it
for the pork roast on the table.
What a shudder of sparks from the grindstone!
It turns and grinds, grinds and turns,
and finally I get my polenta.

WOMEN WHO SPIN

To spin with spindle and spool
in the low, short days that die out
with our tales unwound in the stalls. . .
To spin for so many hours
and not get paid a thing
because women—everyone knows—don't count.
Hemp, wool and linen,
thick weaves and file weaves
for all the people in our district:
our hours are worth nothing,
nothing, like our evening tales in the stalls. . .

UNTITLED

Deceased-dumbnesses, scattered, stunned names,
swarming over there where it almost glimmers
attracting the sign. . .

But the bone-dry stream,
the one that got this far—how? who knows?—,
leaves some hints of motives alive for you
        in a pool of water under a few rocks
And—I say it in the softest
        assumption of a confiding whisper—
know this: that stream is the immortal sky
know this: Apollo
takes great liberties in that pool
in its laying back/trance—even if it doesn't exist—
he takes great liberties; and not one atom
of his thousands of possible vocal chords
leads to betrayal.
By using the dirtiest and highest fiction,
he imprints the only possible statement.
There's a blue of hopes and yearnings
ia the puddle-sieve. Even one of my own justifications
comes from that,
my irremediable "I" stepped out,
lazily undid the ιδιον from the ιδιωμα.
and was dragged off (it seems)
toward poetry's crib-death jousts.
        Oh yes, dragged off
        like the leaf that's shrivelled
        but dear to the sweeper, who's a good collector
        and who lies in wait
        behind the wrong-way sign
        having had enough of flaying his
        (not at all sure of winning) competitors.
        He loves them instead, He,
        loves—in a crumpled-up paper
        and in no value system

gathered together—
gathered by the valley wild

Note:
In memory of Filippo Maria Pontani. The graphic sign is the wrong way sign. The "ιδιον" of the "ιδιωμα": the "proper" [or "own"] in "property" and "property-language." Cfr. Zanzotto's note on the title.

ANOTHER, ANOTHER LANGUAGE, PAST IDIOM?

Languages blossom beckon
take to the woods and turn on us in a thousand
needles of dumbnesses and deafnesses
they sink and sharpen in many and many more idiots
Languages whose tricks we vainly
think we can avoid—tricks blooming, reeking with
tastes and smells, but they're an idiocy.
An idiom, nothing else, is what traverses me
in assaults and pantings: *h j k ch ch ch*
an idiom
is the plastered gesture
that accumulates
evenings scissored away toward nothingness. But
from cruelly smashed rocks among
teeth that make diamonds, in
drunken liquors the idioms seem to come!
Each one as a residue of itself, of
I-language, now mere seduction!
But look how—in an idiom—the world's own enchanted fog
runs the most horrible risks, a storehouse
of all ecstatic choices, of all loyalties

And that's where I slouch to, the untranslatable why
past-idiom, the here, the right away,
the pulsing closed circuit,
the clot, the cycle of blips on a monitor.
Let there be no idioms, or translations, now
within the scattered
tightlywound inner self-undoing
of this returning attack of autumn.
"Attack," "translations," what did I say? Or
other ever more nervously adapted synonyms:
h j k ch ch ch, in other idioms?
But what do I care now about idioms?
But yes, I do, I do care about
same little poem that doesn't want to know about idioms
but still lives and dies there—that's what I care about,
and about the sheet of paper
stolen forever from the windy
darkness of some ValPiave
truly definitively
Canadian or Australian
or beyond.

This collection of verses is part of a group including Il galateo in bosco [the woodland book of manners] and Fosfeni [phosphenes]. Part of this collection is from the same time period as those books (1975-1982), while some compositions here date from 1983-84. The three books together make up a kind of pseudo-trilogy: they are non-chronological moments of a single work, moments that refer back and forth to each other regardless of the book in which they occur, with a certain discontinuity and even reciprocal disavowal.

Idiom: to be understood according to all possible etymological scatterings and beyond, from the fullness of nascent, incoercible speech as an entirely unique blossoming to the opposite pole of closure within a particularity through which we arrive at the heading, "idiocy." Language, private language, private and depriving fact; an excess of privacy and therefore of closure-privation-deprivation. An emphasis on particularity: but also, on the contrary, a linguistic tool entirely bent on overflowing and getting beyond that particularity.

—A.Z.

ALLEN GINSBERG

WHITMAN'S INFLUENCE: A MOUNTAIN TOO VAST TO BE SEEN

Like Poe, Whitman's breakthru from official conventional nationalist identity to personal self, to subject, subjectivity, to Candor of Person, sacredness of the unique eccentric curious solitary personal consciousness changed written imaginative conception of the individual around the whole world, and inspired a democratic revolution of mental nature from Leningrad & Paris to Shanghai & Tokyo.

Like Poe, who introduced modern self-consciousness to Baudelaire & Dostoyevsky, so Whitman's exposure of a new self of man and woman empowered every particular soul who heard his long breathed inspiration, "I celebrate myself, & sing myself / And what I assume you shall assume . . ."

This expansive person & expanded verse line affected continental Literary consciousness by the turn of the century, Emile Verhaeren in Belgian French, Paul Claudel later with extended strophic verse. The Russian Futurists adapted Whitman's bold Personism—vide Mayakovsky's *Cloud in Trousers,* Blok's *The Twelve,* Khlebnikoff's vocal experimentation. Perhaps thru the French, Japanese and Chinese poets reinvented verse forms and personality of poet—Kuo Mo-Jo & Ai Qing particularly, introduced Whitmanic afflatus and expanded verse line to China by 1919. And E. Pound also said, "I make a pact with you Walt Whitman" in introducing modernism to American English poetry by World War I—thereby catalyzing renewal of all world poetries. What was Whitman's effect on Italian Futurists? On Marinetti & Ungaretti?

In *Democratic Vistas* Whitman warned that unless American materialism were to be enlightened by some spiritual influence, the United States would turn into "the fabled damned of nations." His spiritual medicine or antidote to poisonous materialism was "adhesiveness," a generous affection between citizens. In his preface to *Leaves of Grass* he prescribed "candor" as the necessary virtue of "poets and orators to come."

The Good Grey Poet's own affection and candor led to the excellent tender erotic verse in the "Calamus" section of *Leaves,* prophesying a gay liberation for American and world literature.

His "Passage to India" predicted a meeting of Eastern and Western thought in our XX Century, a pragmatic transcendentalism that's come true with the flavor of meditation practice in American poetry as we approach the second millennium's end.

His image of universal transitoriness in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" has transmitted itself across a century. As the Tibetan Lama, the Ven. Chōgyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, remarked, Whitman's writing equals Buddhist Sutras in this perception.

"When Lilacs last in Dooryard Bloomed," his threnody for Lincoln, salutes Death with romantic vigor equal to his salutation to Life, "Salut au Monde."

And his "Sands at Seventy," "Good-By My Fancy" and "Old Age Echoes" are marvelous short poems of old age, describing with equanimity the "querilities. . .constipation. . .whimpering ennui" of body and mind approaching death, signaling farewell, waving good-bye, "garrulous to the very last." These later lesser known poems are among his most vividly appealing, and prefigure the brief clear-eyed sketches of his poetic grandchildren the Imagist and Objectivist poets W.C. Williams & Charles Reznikoff. Such poems serve as candid models for my own verse to this day.

1/28/92 Milan

News In Briefs

Two years ago *Sulfur* 27 featured a section, edited by Roderick Iverson, on the East Berlin poets in the bohemian Prenzlauer Berg scene. The poet most quoted by Iverson, and the one who opens the section, was Rainer Schedlinski (b. 1956), the editor of a samisdat magazine called *ariadnefabrik*. Iverson speaks of attending an underground reading by Schedlinski and others, and describes the discussions that followed as "being voiced with astonishing moral anger." He cites Schedlinski at length on the poet's need to counter the prevailing enforced silence and self-censorship, and sits with the poet in a former literary hang-out as he laments the defection to the West of many of his friends. Iverson ends the first part of his essay with the collapse of the Wall, and this quote from Schedlinski: "The person who knows how things will proceed from here is a person who is not completely informed. . ."

That last word has taken on an eerie resonance, for it turns out that throughout the years of the Prenzlauer Berg scene, Schedlinski was a regular, paid informant for the Stasi, the East German secret police. Schedlinski, according to the recently opened Stasi files, sent frequent reports on all his friends: the parties and literary events they attended, the local gossip, off-hand remarks, and so on. At least one poet was, on the basis of this information, arrested.

Schedlinski was hardly alone. Another Stasi employee was Sascha Anderson, a poet and general impresario of the scene—organizer of art shows, rock concerts, magazines, presses, and legendary parties. (Anderson and Schedlinski, though close friends, were probably unaware of each other's secret life.) And from the galactic size of the Stasi files, it is estimated that one out of every fifty East Germans was an informer, including husbands and wives, parents and children reporting on each other. Over 600 friends and acquaintances of the novelist Christa Wolf sent in reports.

There is also the theory, advanced by the poet Wolf Biermann, that the Prenzlauer Berg scene was actively encouraged by the Stasi—that after the highly emotional, political, and accessible poetry of Biermann and his

generation (all expelled to the West), the secret police welcomed the endless essays couched in deconstructionist jargon and the kind of poems where, in Schedlinski's words in *Sulfur*, language is "dismantled into the smallest mnemonic unities which [are] mutually purged from the text," or where "one word destroys the one next to it." (Not surprisingly, the Prenzlauer Berg story has curious loops back to the Paul de Man case.)

And another loop: in that same issue of *Sulfur*, responding to my attack on the NEA (as having bought the silence of the artists and writers during the Reagan years), Clayton Eshleman writes: "I've given up on trying to make a connection between source of income and quality of artistic production," that "capable imaginations will do their work" regardless. Many would agree, but it's worth noting that Rainer Schedlinski now claims that the only reason he worked as an informer was to pay for his magazine: "I had no scruples about that. I thought, if the Stasi want to finance the underground—fine."

[Schedlinski and Anderson, meanwhile, have formed a publishing company called Galrev, and Schedlinski has, like most victims and perpetrators these days, made a career of telling his story, in European magazines and on television, and on a lecture tour of the U.S.]

* * *

Nathaniel Mackey's *Hambone* is the main meeting-place for Third World, American minority and white avant-gardists. It is one of the two or three poetry magazines that is always worth reading. The latest issue (#10) features an 80-page poem, "Trench Town Rock," by the Barbadoan poet Kamau Brathwaite, on the violence in Kingston, Jamaica, where he lives. Combining the Dos Passos "camera eye," newspaper clippings, transcripts of radio talk shows, lyric passages, an African folk tale, and a computer-generated typographical montage, it is the kind of knock-down political poem not seen in these parts for twenty years. *(Hambone,* 134 Hunolt Street, Santa Cruz CA 95060.)

Brathwaite strangely, or not so strangely, remains little known in the U.S. (In the Caribbean he is William Carlos Williams to Derek Walcott's T.S. Eliot.) His second trilogy *(Mother Poem, Sun Poem, X/Self)* is even better than the first *(The Arrivants)*—all four books are published by Oxford—and the first volume of the third trilogy, *Middle Passages,* is forthcoming from Bloodaxe in England. (No U.S. publisher.) He is the great chronicler and singer of the African diaspora, and one whose formal inventiveness keeps him forever moving. Even more, it is a glimpse of the territories poetry has yet to stake out.

* * *

The Chinese poets of the "Obscure" or "Misty" group were the aesthetic vanguard of the student uprisings of the 1970s and 80s—their poems playing a role quite similar to that of rock music in the U.S. in the 1960s. Since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, nearly all of these poets are in exile, and their work is starting to appear in English—though often in translations that require some reader participation in the creation of the text.

Their early work, where they rejected socialist realism in favor of highly subjective lyrics and an independently-invented Imagism, is best represented by the North Point anthology, *A Splintered Mirror,* translated by Donald Finkel and Carolyn Kizer. Since then, each of the poets has been moving in a different direction, and all their books are worth tracking down. Bei Dao's early poems are in *The August Sleepwalker;* the recent work, written in exile in various Northern European countries and full of haunting images that are simultaneously simple and nearly impenetrable, is in *Old Snow* (both New Directions, both translated by Bonnie McDougall). Duo Duo is the most political, surrealist and emotionally charged in the group; his work is in *Looking Out From Death,* translated by Gregory Lee, published in England by Bloomsbury and barely available here. Gu Cheng has the humor and exuberance of the early European modernists; his "Bulin" poems are eccentric cousins to Rothenberg's Coyote and Cokboy (which he's never read). His *Selected Poems* (various translators), published in Hong Kong by Renditions, is distributed by SPD in Berkeley (which also has the excellent *Renditions* magazine of classical and contemporary Chinese literature in translation). Yang Lian's major work, a 300–page philosophical poem whose title is an invented character pronounced *I* (as in *I Ching)* has yet to be translated. Meanwhile, two sets of six-line poems are in *Masks & Crocodile,* translated by Mabel Lee with an interesting long introduction. Published by Canterbury Press, Unit 2, 71 Rushdale St., Scoresby, Victoria 3179, Australia.

Since 1989, Bei Dao has been living in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Germany, and has resurrected his magazine from the 1970s, *Jintian* (Today), for the writers in exile. He is separated from his wife and child, who have not been permitted to leave China. Duo Duo has been living in England, Canada and Holland. Gu Cheng, a disciple of Chuang Tzu, has been living on a tiny island off New Zealand, sometimes subsisting on roots and berries. Yang Lian has been in Australia and New Zealand, Berlin and New York. In Aarhus, Denmark, Bei Dao writes that he speaks Chinese to the mirror. Yang Lian writes that the only ones who don't believe words are the poets.

* * *

For decades Garcia Lorca's nephew deemed all English translations inadequate and refused to grant permission for any new publications. Thus, other than a few samisdat editions like the Blackburn or Spicer, Lorca's poetry languished here for 30 years, represented only by the slim New Directions *Selected* and the monstrous Ben Belitt *Poet in New York.* Finally, in the mid-1980s, as the early work was entering public domain and the family was losing control, the nephew appointed the leading Lorca scholar, Christopher Maurer, as the American editor. Maurer assigned *Poet in New York* to two mellow dudes from Oregon who'd never seen the Manhattan skyline, let alone the stoops of Harlem. (OK OK OK—you don't have to, but it helps. Especially when the tone is metropolitan freak-out.) The result, though infinitely superior to Belitt, was Lorca APRed, laundered and pressed—and, by the way, no better or worse than the five or six manuscripts of the complete text, rejected by the nephew, that I happened to see over the years.

Now Farrar Straus & Giroux has finally published the long-delayed *Collected Poems*, edited by Maurer. At 900 pages, it's a great ball of dough with a diamond inside. A beautiful book, and an authoritative edition of the Spanish texts: virtually the complete poetry (except *Poet in New York);* good intro, excellent notes. But there's gloomy weather on the recto: Maurer has chosen to ignore the many existing published and unpublished translations in favor of entirely new versions. Not necessarily a terrible idea. But he has also, with one exception, equally ignored all the American and English poets—from every possible poetic camp—who occasionally translate Spanish and could have collaborated, and instead given the work to "colleagues" in the Spanish Department, some of them graduate students. What they've produced is hundreds of pages of "Green oh how I love you green" and "No, I refuse to see it!": D.O.A. English that is generally, but not even always, semantically correct.

The one poet in this faculty lounge is Jerome Rothenberg, and his versions of the recently discovered *Suites* is a 250-page section that ejects itself from the rest of the book, and should have been published separately. In Spanish this may not be Lorca at his deepest song, but it is by far the wittiest, most inventive, above all, most musical Lorca in English ever. A tour de force, and a pity we have to pay $50 to hear it.

* * *

If you don't have one of the samisdat copies of *80 Flowers,* it has finally been published in available, though expensive, form in the *Complete Short Poetry of Louis Zukofsky* (Johns Hopkins). Otherwise the title is a misnomer

and the book a bummer. It essentially reprints the Norton *All,* but does not include the many poems which appeared in magazines and were never reprinted, nor any unpublished material. There are no textual notes. The Catullus is included, but without the Latin facing it, as in the original Cape Goliard/Grossman edition, taking away exactly half the fun. No editor is listed, and for good reason.

The Zukofsky book is further evidence of how badly the American moderns have been neglected by the scholars. (Compare the treatment any Dead French Man gets.) Out past the Litz/MacGowan Williams, the Butterick Olson, the Cooney Reznikoff, early Pound, and H.D. (to 1944) the landscape is desolate. It is mind-blowing that there's no complete poetry of Stevens, or Langston Hughes, not even of Frost. Incredible that there's no scholarly edition of Eliot's poetry (the scurrilous poems have never been published) and that there are volumes to be done of his uncollected prose. The Niedecker and Loy are well-known disasters. The *Cantos* keep changing with every reprint. Moore and Oppen, especially, need editions with all the variants (and Oppen a gathering of his extraordinary notes to himself). Other than Pound, there are very few collections of letters. Rexroth and Spicer and postwar H.D. and Olson's prose need to be put together. . .The list is endless. Once upon a time the academy used to give us text, not merely its explication.

* * *

Up there in Prize World, the rule is: when in doubt, tap Mona Van Duyn. She rhymes, she's easy to read, she's cheerful, she's a she, and best of all, a she who writes about how much she loves her hub. Her best-known poem, quoted in every press account every time she wins something, reads in its entirety: "I sometimes think the world's perverse / But then again it could be worse." The humor of this escapes me, but it does retrospectively elevate Ogden Nash to a Karl Kraus-dom of corrosive satire.

Van Duyn has just been crowned our new Poet Laureate, joining the august ranks of Wilbur, Eberhart, Nemerov, Strand and Brodsky. Well so what. But there are a few interesting things about our Laureates. One is that they are all openly heterosexual: certain same-sex epicures in the Establishment have quite obviously been passed over. Two is that, except for Brodsky (a card-carrying anti-communist) they have never, in their careers, expressed any political opinions. (Brodsky, even before he was crowned, used to attend black-tie dinners at the Reagan White House, no doubt fervently discussing Hardy and melancholia over the koho salmon quenelles with Sylvester Stallone and Jerry Falwell.) Three is the real scandal: Throughout the years of the NEA debate and the assaults on art and speech by Senator Helms & ilk, not one of the reigning Poets—Nemerov, Strand,

or Brodsky—used his position to publicly rise in defense of literature and free expression. They were all happy campers in the Bush/Quayle administration, abiding by the first principle of their selection: poets who make nothing happen.

—Eliot Weinberger

Michael Gizzi, *Continental Harmony* (New York: Roof Books, 1991), $8.95

Michael Gizzi would have a quick answer for anyone naive enough to ask how he came to be such a "akomplisht Amurican poet." His poem "Technique" lays the method bare:

> Sat a spell.
> Broke out my pad and penned a few
> ventriloquist dances fast and wild
> as lightning in fascination.

This is just one of Gizzi's recipes for "stealing Mom's apple pie at fax speed." His speakers could hold their own in a tall-tale contest with any of the Faulkner clan and might even win a showdown with one of Flannery O'Connor's aphorism-delivering sentence manglers. The Continental Harmony of these syncopated poems draws its strength from a trove of Kodacolor realism both visual and verbal:

> Zoom cam to memory mote. Me and Pa
> At the Twin Drive-In
> Studs of the cinema steed
> Parked car like palfrey, canted
> Me more a Wamba than a Wilfred in my Dr D's
> Brain-pan broken on Latin and gridiron.

No sound bites for these sound-crazed speakers. Language will do, revved up by Gizzi's "acoustic spurs."

Allen Grossman, *The Ether Dome and Other Poems: New and Selected 1979-1991* (New York: New Directions, 1991) $10.95

Allen Grossman's most recent poems, presented in the first section of this collection under the title "Pastorals of Our Other Hours in the Millennium," plunge his reader into an ageless, mythic world. The jive speaker of "The Piano Player Explains Himself" rises from the dead to entertain the mourners at his funeral and then relishes their bewilderment without once losing sight of his intention to produce an elegy for the poet as singer.

These poems echo Grossman's earlier work, evoking as well his natural and poetic ancestors: "Sexual nuance of the blown seed in the plumed / Shadow. . ." Life and death intermingle here, as do Jewish ancestry and Greek mythology. In "Poland of Death," Parts I-V, dead parents refuse the ostracism of the grave and a son's easy assurances. The father uses a rusty nail to scratch his way past the keepers of the graves and back to the Poland of Death, his makeshift sword refusing the superiority of the pen. The mother, even beyond the grave, remains "incapable of death."

In "The Ether Dome," an autumnal American is haunted by burning factories and encumbered by a body obstructing the path of the Public Garden. Grossman would "read the book of pain / Backward toward the beginning, a thousand years." What he finds along the way is "the sad Miami of the soul," a vaudevillian dance in which Wallis Simpson and Edward VIII share the stage with common shepherds and with Jacob and his angel, none of these quite managing to dominate "the Regulators of the World. . .War, Poetry, Law, Religion." The angelic choruses of this jumbled universe bring no more reassurance than "the hieroglyphic. . .written and erased." Even its shepherds have lost the trail of their common song.

These are poems of ritual passage in which Grossman extends the range of his earlier work by forcing wit toward nonsense. Strains of Coleridge, Yeats, Dylan Thomas and Wallace Stevens nurture the desert waterfall of this profane and haunting music.

Daumal, René, *The Powers of the Word*, Translated and Edited by Mark Polizzotti, Illustrated—five black and white photographs (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991) $12.50

In his attempt to establish René Daumal as a "major thinker" and thereby rescue him from the overwhelming shadow of André Breton, Mark

Polizzotti adopts Daumal's antipathetic attitude toward the "extravagance and self-promoting polemics" of Surrealism and attempts to take Daumal's argument one step further. Unabashedly apostolic, Polizzotti's introduction to his translations of the Essays and Notes offers a welcome overview not only of Daumal's tormented life but of the intellectual and spiritual turmoil which nourished his iconoclastic yet timeless theories of poetry and language. The twenty-two essays which appear here, most of them for the first time in English, justify Polizzotti's decision to draw this volume's title from Daumal's essay on Hindu poetics. The indirection of Eastern mysticism reinforces Daumal's innate respect for precision as he attempts to define the limits not only of figurative language but of the creative act itself.

Daumal's essay entitled "On the Attitude of Criticism with Respect to Poetry" might serve as a corrective to today's internecine critical warfare. While flaunting his inability to pronounce the word *criticism* "other than with a grimace of disgust," Daumal refuses diatribe in favor of a patrician attack on flaccid attempts at "vague approval" and a reasoned proposal for a corrective. True criticism would recognize the metaphysical, the scandalous, the flesh-and-blood of a poet—"real thought that frightens the rooted man."

"Poetry Black, Poetry White" surprises by its humility and its simplicity. If a "black" poet abuses his gift by becoming its mindless slave or exploiting it for personal satisfaction, Daumal would resist the temptations of "intellectual scheming" so as to put his efforts at the service of the "luminous seed" of inspiration.

—Taffy Martin

Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture. Chris Knight. Yale University Press, 581 pp., $45.00, 1991.

Call them the shores of Eden—the East African Rift Valley's northerly end, the Afar Triangle in particular. There, among the lakes, rivers and marine shores, Black Eve is learning the secrets of the Serpent, specifically the skill of synchronous ovulation. This is the way the women achieve a solidarity which breaks the rule of the Alpha-male, who can hardly retain his competitive dominance if all the women are fertile at any one time. Now

the softer males get a chance and their less aggressive genetic material can be added to the gene-pool: "The human revolution was pioneered by females who combined pair-bonding with intensified gender solidarity, so that sexual attachments were not at the expense of wider forms of connectedness." Once Black Eve and her sisters have their sexuality under communal control, they can use it in the same way as any other producer of essential goods. It can be traded, and if the goods she needs are not forthcoming—in this case meat for cooking—then she has gained the power to strike.

And strike she does, once a month, a fortnight after ovulation. When she is menstruating she will form a "sexual picket line" because the human being is now unique among primates. Non-human primates signal a "yes" with oestrus body-talk against an otherwise continuous background of "no," while these human beings will not signal collectively with their menstrual blood a "no," against a continuous and exciting possibility of "yes."

This turns out to be the machinery of sublimation which creates culture. The women will allow sex only at the fertile time. At the menstrual time the overlaid "no" will allow the background of "yes" to create its possibilities, flirtations, rites, dances, body-ornamentation, chanting at the dark of the moon. There will be a space engineered in which the creativity of non-penetrative sex is displayed in its riches. The men, who are otherwise likely to structure their lives on the continuous sexual availability of the women, are immersed in an erotic field without marital consummation: ". . .what is important is the normal *marital* relations should be prohibited and delayed; any sex which occurs to mark the onset of the strike period may arouse desire but should be wholly under female control; it should also be non-consummated, non-penetrative, infertile and/or merely acted out in play."

The marital consummation is delayed until the men in exchange bring the food. Now the moon is waxing and its light oversees their hunt, and they go out with a purpose figured and stimulated by the women's celebratory refusal. Nor may any man eat his own kill. That would be to behave like an animal again and the women have established that the blood of the kill is menstrual blood also which says "no." The women, to maximize this structure, watch out for strike-breakers; and the structure itself, the solidarity, the moon-synchrony, is known by the name of the oldest image of divinity to survive in an unbroken tradition from 7,000 years ago to the present time: the Rainbow Snake.

The ovulation-synchrony may first have been perceived as a possibility in female bodily-awareness in the snaky moon-synchronized tidal waters of the East African Eden. When the developed system spread, it caught hold in societies all over the world. In areas less influenced by tides, the women would have used "massage, sweating, ritual bathing, dance, night-long

firelight and moon-scheduled celebratory sexual intercourse to augment any effects that nature's weakened clocks on their own might have had." The moon too is the serpent, and the dance in which the women are carried up to heaven—perhaps the image for the trance-condition in which the menstrual cycle can be regulated (one of the few references to menstruation in Freud is how he reset a female patient's cycle like a watch by hypnosis). The dance is the snake that is brought out by menstruation and is at the same time the cause of menstruation. The Snake is the name of the complete shared subjectivity of women:

> . . .shoreline-foraging Aboriginal women from earliest times phase locked with the tides, and correspondingly conceptualized themselves as immersed once a month in a "flood" of blood-symbolized togetherness transcending the individuality of each participant. In their monthly menstrual immersion or sex strike. . . . the participants would have felt their separate identities being transcended in that of the great kinship coalition which together they formed. . . In principle, it would only have needed two females—perhaps sisters, perhaps mother and daughter—to have set in train the movement towards culture as an unstoppable force. If these two always backed each other up, always acted in concert, synchronized their menstrual cycles and were able to motivate two or more males to hunt for them by making sex dependent on it, then they might have been so much more successful in securing meat than other females in the population. . .

And what of the men, raised by the women's actions into some greater clarity. Well, the men stole it all, and knew that they were stealing it. Eventually they would invent their own menstrual rites, with false menstrual blood taken from subincision, with ritual in which the whole body was painted with ochre or blood in order to mimic a menstruating womb: "In being enveloped with a coating of blood, the men are being swallowed by the snake." Thus the men created their own symbolic culture. But it was a culture of bad faith, of symbols without substance. It is the culture we inhabit. The true originators and source of authentic moon-blood were displaced, their solidarity denied and prevented, their menstrual rites broken into, their legends subverted, the women: ". . .prevented from experiencing their reproductive powers as sources of collectivity or strength. . .oppressed by and made to fear the consequences of their own extraordinary potential of synchrony and ritual strength." If such important matters as menstruation were left to the women, said the men, then the Snake would overwhelm and destroy the world in uncontrollable floods. Yet, though men did rob the women of their synchrony with each other and with nature, there *are* still certain physiological cycles of men that tend

to become synchronized with the women's menstrual cycle. This means that men might share in this revolution; even though they do not have the body-clock with precisely the correct average phase-length to enable lunar/tidal synchrony to be maintained, they could harmonize with the women (even though ". . .male order embodies no special creativity"), and thus open up for themselves the unity with nature that the earliest cultural women must have felt as "the power in their own bodies to be intimately connected with all wider processes of cyclical renewal."

> In this scheme of things, human and natural cycles of renewal are mutually supportive and sustainable through the same rites. The skies and the landscape are felt to beat to human rhythms. Everything natural, in other words, is conceptualized in human terms, just as everything human is thought to be governed by natural rhythms. . .This is how things felt—because, given synchrony and therefore a shared life-pulse, this was at a deep level how they were.

This transcends the austerities of *Iron John* with a revolutionary schema based on an actuality too physical and an allegiance too foreign for many men at the present time. Whatever is at the core of male initiation, "all the dreaming business came out of women" and Robert Bly's book, which refuses to touch on "female initiation" misses the creation of rhythmic man. Iron John himself, who is found at the bottom of a pond and is covered with red hair, may be an avatar of the Rainbow Serpent. Even though masculinist mythology "became established only through replacement of its female counterpart," still "if ritual traditions have been preserved across the millennia, this is thanks not only to women's own commitment but also to the extraordinary resolve of initiated men who knew the immensity of the responsibilities placed upon them."

Chris Knight in his book has this "extraordinary resolve." It is an immense work of documentation and close argument. My brief and incomplete paraphrase does not communicate the fact that for all its obvious risks the model offers no hypothesis which is not rigorously testable. Not only this, but it appears to solve most of the outstanding conundrums in contemporary anthropology. It does this by approaching directly matters that have hitherto been avoided, indeed tabooed, by accepting the hypothesis that the human menstrual cycle has not only a structure but a function. This is the central affirmation presented in a way which, I repeat, is rigorously testable; but Chris Knight also offers rational solutions of the incest taboo, the prevalence of Stone Age figurines, the widespread use of ochre for ritual purposes, and makes final sense of Levi-Strauss's four great books which, on Dr. Knight's showing, avoided their inevitable conclusion. He says of the awareness of these early cultures of

their own power, imaged in the Rainbow Serpent and its nexus of references, that it was

> collective—and therefore many-headed. It was an immense alliance—and therefore stretched, snakelike, across the landscape. It was dependent on the periodic flowing of blood—and therefore seemed bloodthirsty in its appetites. It involved the harmonization of menstruation with the periodicity of the moon—and so was experienced as cosmic, umbilical, birth-giving, astrological. Its potency was inseparable from the awesome cyclical alternation between opposite light and dark, marital and kinship, cooked and raw, fire and blood . . .

As to whether the human organism spontaneously varies in its metabolisms with the moon, the statistical evidence is quite noisy, but, as Penelope Shuttle and I said in *The Wise Wound* (1978) it matters less whether a woman's cycle is influenced by the moon than that she is able to elect that it should be so influenced in Dr. Knight's words: ". . .at the culminating point of the hominising process, there was glimpsed the possibility of a harmonious social and ecological logic linking menstrual cycles with the periodicity of hunting expeditions, maternal blood with the blood of game animals, cooking and feasting with sexual enjoyment—and all these with the periodicity of the moon." Dr. Knight's great feat is to show the *consistency* with which the legends and tribal lore and customs support the model of how true humanity began in some exquisite discovery of an inner time which was identical with the moon's time. Shuttle and I hypothesize that this could have been in the pang of menstruation at the new moon, or when it rose with the sun rather than riding the night skies; Dr. Knight believes, rather, that the great lunar *Zeitgeber* acts on the follicular stage of preovulation rather than the late luteal phase. Who shall say which is the more sensitive to outer influences until this matter has been investigated by contemporary women, together with all the other work that is still outstanding because the cycle is female? Dr. Knight remarks that there is as yet no account of symbolism in the menstrual cycle, but in fact this symbolism is being written and rewritten nightly in the dreams of women passing through the menstrual cycle. This can be demonstrated by anybody who troubles to record her dreams and relate them to the meaning of the two great culminations of ovulation and menstruation. Indeed this work of dream and image may have been the very sensitivity which reached out for lunar synchrony in the earliest women, and may indeed by the work of women artists and scientists be the foundation of a new and revolutionary culture of women.

—Peter Redgrove

Pierre Joris. *Turbulence*, 1991. St. Lazire Press, Patten Road, Rhinebeck, NY 12572. $8.

The poets for whom World War II and the appearance of atomic weapons were first facts of consciousness have not been ambitious. The idea of a career in poetry, so exemplary in the work of Robert Duncan or Denise Levertov, as much as we admired them, seemed for us, I think, an impertinence. The very notion of poetry involves a kind of permanence—"the everlasting omen of what is." On Jacob's ladder,

> The cut stone
> consoles his groping feet. Wings brush past him.
> The poem ascends.

And behind these images of permanence, of course, weighty domes of many-colored glass, rimes which out live monuments, the timeless images of the Latin and Greek poets, conferring immortality on their subjects.

We grew up with the hideous policies of John Foster Dulles. The official posture of American foreign policy during our childhood and adolescence was described as "brinkmanship." The term brings back almost the taste and smell of the Hoot Owl Cafe where I hung out, hoping, when someone put a quarter in the juke box they would play Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and the Coasters instead of Frankie Avalon and Pat Boone. One might long for the everlasting but to make a career of revealing that longing was a possibility which did not, and still does not, seem available. If one spoke in public, it was best to say "awopbopaloobopawopbamboom." If there was to be a poetry, it would be occult. The first years of Richard Grossinger's and Lindy Hough's *Io* provide the clearest public traces of the possibility. The very design of the magazine, which often made the poets a generation older than us nervous, emphasized a kind of secretiveness and anonymity.

As a European, Pierre Joris chose this context for his work. Although two of three sections of *Turbulence* were written in London and Paris (the third in San Diego), and despite Joris' persistent reference to the writers of the high European intellectual tradition—Michel Serres, Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, and others—the poetic from which the poems grow is thoroughly American. The intellectual context is weather—there to be dealt with, of necessity, but also inevitably to change radically. The moment to moment registration of attention in these poems makes no promises:

> NO, THIS IS NOT IMPRESSIONISM, THIS IS RANDOMNESS,
> AND THAT IS ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT.

We are now nomads. Joris' Luxembourg and my Missouri Ozarks are still there as possible conditions of attention, but they do not significantly name places. Neither Olson's Gloucester nor Duncan's hearth nor Levertov's bear perpetually in the wilderness yellowing the snow are available as anchors of permanence.

The generation of the A Bomb is now middle-aged; it has lived through the transition. The secretiveness of the late '60s and '70s has now given way to a stance which might be public. *Turbulence* is a testing of this possibility:

> the world as cloud not chambered depression
> & anticyclone
> from West to East is movement
> a shift northward ruffles our well-combed hair
> air pressure relative humidity
> absolute rigidity the sun only rises and sets
> rises and sets
> rises and sets
> father father yes
> I will marry
> your daughter turbulence

* * *

To say this quickly: the Modern—the seventeen-century modern—made available three grammars: the closed comparison or metaphor; the open comparison or collage; and the continuous field. Although metaphorical technique dominated poetry and philosophy for three centuries, all three grammars were available in the Seventeen Century: for example, in Descartes and Donne, in the anatomists (Burton and Rabelais), and in Paracelsus and Shakespeare's late plays as Olson shows. It is not surprising these grammars correspond to three aspects of the physical world: the mechanical, the organic, and the electromagnetic. And these differences continue to cause problems in the sciences as they do in the arts. Amongst the Modernists of the early Twentieth Century, the division shows up as a favoring of certain kinds of phenomena: thus, Eliot and Stevens favor the metaphoric; Pound and Williams the collage; Stein and Olson the continuous. The Postmodernists have found these grammars available as styles to be skillfully and apparently futilely recycled. The only additions are glitz and marketing.

For the Modernists and the Postmodernists, grammars were foundational; the one took up a grammar and formed the world to it, the other emptied it of all content, hoping thereby to perform an act of social clarification. For the Modernist, the limit was fascism; for the Postmodernist,

the limit is nihilism (which can only be reabsorbed into the conventionality which it rejects).

The other possibility, the one which we must now initiate, understands grammars as *products* of local consciousness. Grammars are *after* the fact—made-up, contingent, temporary. Language is, to be sure, a crucial content of consciousness, but it is the second thing, not the first (and its absence is also not the first thing.) Language makes available ways for us to show others what we see:

at the beginning all directions are equivalent.

All that is interesting and important happens in the first microseconds when we position ourselves at that point of omni-directional equivalence again and again. The rest is the weather, the only interesting part of the news—prophecy, not dull reportage.

—Don Byrd

Time and Eternity in Frank Samperi's Letters

Frank Samperi's letters and his writing were of one piece, and the principles that radiated from the letters identical to those in the prose and verse. In fact he often quoted his own publications, in the letters—if excusing himself for doing so; but usually it made no difference whether he added quotation marks or not.

The agenda for the discussions was habitually set by me. Frank had *had* the sort of quandaries I still have—a record of some of which is in The Prefiguration—though they were never quandaries in the centre of his thought even back then. He was an intuitive thinker—Platonic sense—intuitive of Divine Forms as the only reality. The problems I kept re-coiling around him about Time and Eternity were not really his own problems, at least regarding eternity, and he had many subtle arguments—not too far from the Doctor Subtilis either, whom he admired—to block off not only my Proustian moves to undermine comprehension of what's in time, but strategies I kept employing—at subsistence rates—to identify time and eternity from the standpoint of time, rather than that of eternity. Something like the reverse, a sense *only* of Eternity—in time—seems typical of the clear power of his own work. So I think the polarity can e-lucidate that, even though most of the discussion I quote was provoked by me.

Our quodlibets might seem neo-scholastic trivia (the precise word, actually) to those who see the terms of the "social sciences," and the rest, that we happened to have now, as the crystallization of truth in time, yet somehow perdurable in the transience. Like eternal verities, in fact, that have come clear only to us, smart fellars that we are—"fart smellers," as my National Service fellow-draftees used to say. And it is true equity to see them enbrochetted on the horns of longevitous dilemmas with new leases of life that they lack the muleta to dodge behind, let alone the milking pails to milk—when the equipage has been lying around for hundreds of years in the junkyard babyhood of our past.

Anyway, in case anyone thinks of this merely as historical casuistry, the specific problem of the relationship of Time and Eternity has as its corollaries and successors the problems of denotation and connotation, of haecceity and quiddity, of meaning and reference, of—to use the inept contemporary jargon—signifier and signified—though philosophical illiterates don't seem to see that as a problem, just keep bumping into it all the time and blaming the "metaphoric" solidity of the obstacle. In the light of Frank's orientation, essentially we presumed this to be the relationship between *nama* and *rupa*—or essence and substance-in-its-old-sense—or sometimes haecceity or quiddity. For him, though not for me, the only true realities *were nama* and Eternity. Substance and *rupa*, as he saw them, were only in-formed and lit by them, but were merely shadow, essentially, *needing* to be lit to have any reality of their own.

Here he is, responding to my theory that the Four Ages—Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron (or their Hindu *yuga* counterparts)—each entails a different centre, caste, orientation and morality for its era. The "intercalary period" of the Four Ages, the Great Year, is equivalent to the Twelve Days of Christmas at the solstice in the normal year—in some ways outside of quadripartite and seasonal time altogether. (And I equate *that* period with the hegemony of the *chandala*, the outcastes, and *their* particular orientation.)

> "Your 'intercalary period' with arc recalls I think four ages quattro etadi—and the fixed stars lo cielo stellato of the twelve parts one of a degree de la dodici parti l'una d'un grado for precocity the whole length to the end in age. With respect to the Godhead (Gottheit? numen?) *itself*, then's sinks himself most in Godhead the Dantesque s'india—but his point is paradisiacal—still: *timor Dei* removes even one so in—mercifully—to mercy—to intuit goodness and justice from shade and darkness—sapientially and intelligentially."
>
> (6/1/90)

All understanding for him, is situated in the Golden Age—and the understandings of Winter Autumn and Summer, grading into multiplicity from that unity, are relative to that. ". . .to intuit goodness and justice from shade and darkness," to see the Golden Age when it is most "obscured," is the strange gift that Samperi's poetry has. Notice that the time/times are *fixed* for him, as well.

The *claritas* of the Golden Age, of *nama*, of Eternity, gives him not only the matter of the work but its mode. So that the effect is as with a poem he found "very moving"—"every word appearing to every word" out of clarity and distinctness in light. (6/9/90) But at the heart of it, dissolving the adventitious combinations of the forms in time is "sacred number": "sacred number for me is: Only a divine spiritual mathematics can dissolve ars combinatoria ars characteristica." (31/3/89) "No substance or difference is present in a subject, or for that matter, given the overshadowing, present in an object. I entered, I wandered—I knew ratio the true relatio." (10/9/90) A "relatio" only to the centre and not between points on one or another periphery; and the "ratio" showing that it is proportion rather than the units of arithmetic that is meant by "number."

And the clarity of the expression is the same as the clarity of the vision, both informed by light and sacred proportion—not as two things but one. ". . .And use goes out and *recognizes* the one who uses *the spoken word* properly and spiritually, with beauty, because in *Art*, wherein and then when you're passed over no longer need because no longer there, inspiration revelation the whole art." (19/9/89)

So Samperi did not struggle to *express* the vision: ". . .the word follows upon the seeing—[. . .]—then from in mind I simply put to paper. . .years ago they told me that they couldn't accept my *work sheets* because they didn't look *worked*—page upon page without correction: His angel was with me from the beginning: as I went from in vision to in forth. . .and remain in foot in number." (17/10/90)

What is contrary to the seeing is just not-the-vision nor is it the ratio. "My sense is syllogistic, deductive—from Principle—not dynamical dialectical. As for expression, speech—I'm nowhere there—. . .*ingegno amzio*—. So, given such paucity, beyond Good and Evil falls short of me—for me. The solution to the *terms* you refer to is *negatio* divisionem (in the descent the return): in other words, one might say (poetically philosophically): "if the angel knows you, // then the antipathetic is the additive // never before you // before or after." (29/6/89) This is not an art of weighing-the-probabilities and reckoning which the most likely; but of focusing on the vision, in place, in time. The way of understanding is, in this Platonic sense, intuitive—"So you see I know not the sequence, the sequential." (31/3/89) And this is true not merely of dialectical reasoning, but of the abridgments in it that back most common opinions and understanding.

I will hesitate at exposition of the heart of the vision, staying on its fringes—but will just remark two further features, without elaboration. The basis of the "divine spiritual mathematics" of the "ratio" at the heart of the vision, is what Samperi calls "triadic root." It is not unitary in the way that profane mathematics is, "because triadic root is not triadic point." (31/3/89) I am not sure, fully, what this means; but it certainly does mean that the One of the Unity is not the one-that-is-not-the-second, as in facts or a debate, but the One without other (the same difference, logically, as between one-of-two-things-that-can-be-distinguished and the-one-that-is-the-whole). And the Gnostic (not Samperi's word) as-it-were levitates to it in the flight of the Alone to the Alone "the abomination of desolation // standing in the holy place." (8/8/89)

The second feature: Samperi distinguishes, in the approach, the "fedeli d'amore" from the "filii Heber." I have some idea what he means by this distinction, but not so thorough as to begin to gloss it.

Two dilemmas he had about the position of the eternal in time—both germane to our own problems, I hope. The first, the logical ("conceptual," or depth grammatical) one was forced upon him by my nagging persistence, no doubt:

> "Your mention of Hopkins brings home fully and forcefully my failure in the face of haecceitas. I don't think much of fame, or of faith in poetry—if poetry takes its stand in time, then it's as perishable as any other item in time—it fundamentalizes itself, reflecting a poetic stance: obvious and accessible. . .
> [Margin Note:] I sense you walking the upper plain looking toward in time—but not committed to it: in fact I read in you a desire to separate the one not of time off from the one of time: /// therefore, *restitution* // under the wing // God be praised!" (17/10/90)

This constitutes a very powerful point against the modernist attempt to seek to recover (A la Recherche) lost times, lost objects in time—in the specificity of their relationship to events. The sort of objectivity I personally believe to be at the heart of the Objectivist's endeavors (an endeavor I myself share): the consciousness of objects *in* time, but removed from their dependence upon time. "Louis' 'objectification'—tho he denied it—related back to Kant: the consciousness *as act* of objectification" (presumably meaning the Judgment not the Transcendental Aesthetic) (Oppen's Notebooks: Ironwood 26). For the specific object, to be recaptured, must have a similar description to some other objects—real or potential—else it is not describable nor specifiable. But in so far as it has, of course, it is not *distinct*

from those objects—except numerically. There is quite a problem in capturing our "haecceity." And who would doubt that it is a practical problem, not merely a "conceptual" one.

And, following on, the captured object won't be distinct and original, but "obvious and accessible," following the template print of the master concept. "We appear to have lost the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies." (Pound: The Poetics of the New American Poetry: Allen & Tallman) If this vision is linked to: "No ideas but in things" and ". . .men were driven back upon the particulars of their own experience, the literal *things* of an immediate environment" (Creeley), then there is the quandary that this would seem to be the humdrum and the already-understood. Seeing it as haecceity, not as the repeatable, seems to require a peculiar vision outside-of-time, in time.

The same problem sits in waiting, with bull terrier's grip, for the notion of the "individual" that we have boiled down for ourselves using this logic. Any aspect of us that we have in common with others, any set of attributes, will not distinguish us from these others. The only thing that will distinguish us—but in exactly the same way—is a partite enumeration—like the drop of our ballot paper. We want it, though, to be more then that—individuality. We want it to be like possessing an individual soul, distinctly different in its attributes. It's a problem not all modern poets have been unaware of. So, Baudelaire:

> "Multitude, solitude: terms equal and interchangeable for the active and fertile poet." (Crowds, in Prose Poems)

Or Bronk:

> ". . .: we are human. Human is not to be something we know, but to be as the Jews say God must be, without an image. . ." (Life Supports, p. 119)

This is not the quandary as I myself see it, but as it is. Frank's solution to it is easily ignored. I will add: it is not my *own* solution. What's yours?

The second of his two problems in time—that of the poet, dying in it—is almost too painful to contemplate—particularly now, after I know that it has happened. He faced it bravely—with the consolation of natural beauty around him. Whether this is rightly part of the text I should be explicating, I don't properly know.

> ". . .for calling me to life. Some days I have to be wakened for being in death. I know I got thru *the expected time*: so I look

to God, but not even the why—of now is only living out my death. There's at least the inchoate argumentum non apparentum." (19/9/89)

". . .but my strength to learn—and effort—is gone—so I sit and listen to God's angel—like holding the rosary and not saying it." (6/1/90)

"I think the angel has entered my night [?]—may *restitution under the wing* be a fact truly sensed. So God has claimed me in illness, multiple illnesses, making a claim for me—" (16/8/90)

The following letters, quoted in full, were two of the last three I received from him. The one in between—which I've sub-intentionally mislaid—broke the friendship—as did other letters he wrote during this period to other friends. I believe, but I'm not sure, that it was partly to spare us the end, and partly to jettison excess weight so he could get on with the pretty solitary business of dying. The last letter, in hindsight, was written after the effort and contest were complete; and there is a tranquillity in it that should have indicated to me how close the end was. In fact, by the time I received the letter he would have been dead.

Incidentally, the quotes he refers to at the beginnings of the letters are: "Eternity is in love with the productions of time" (Blake), and "Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale" (Catullus) beginning, respectively, the first and the second—both quoted from memory now, as they were then.

And finally, as a valedictory note: "Your words ousia, hypostasis, substantia, persona stir the mind in the direction of Aquinas, Boethius—Damascene Chrysostom. . ." For me—whether or not I "first" used them then—these words stir the mind only in the direction of Frank Samperi.

January 4, 1991

Dear Clive,

Your quote from Blake can be linked in my mind with Blake's *The infinite alone resides in definite and determinate reality*. . ., which stirs in my mind to Bruno's *E' dunque l'universo uno, infinito, immobile* (The universe is consequently one, infinite, immobile. . .). . ., the profounder thinking, because *Questo non si muove localmente* (This is not moved—or does not move itself—locally) as claritas shines and clarifies properly. I would never think of mocking Blake.

So, altho my work may be as you say (not) *in the changing that occurs in time*, it still follows: So the local movement that pertains to the body of my work (that is, book canzone song) is virtual and illuminational. I.e., singularity is within ken—particularity not required as knowledge: so the fall remains *quia illi carmen expedibus: nos vero ex carminibus pedem constare dicimus. . . .*—Interesting for you to mention quiddity (quod quid est)—it brings to mind Dante's:

Fai come quei che la cosa per nome
apprende ben, ma la sua quiditate
veder non puo, se altri non la prome.

You do as he who apprehends well
the thing by name, but its quiddity
he can't see, if someone doesn't bring it out.

With reference to your ". . .you've never blotted a line?," there's this:

Poetry holds many: but does it hold friendship? the modern prosody seems to say no—so the soul goes toward something more of the nature of *subject*
in
objective—retaining unto reward
nominative
in
object

[Marginal Note: lines 6 to 14]—Cid's *Of* is marvelous: his *immensita* has fallen away: but to the credit and benefit of his greatness—as a poet

[lines 16 to 25]—I enjoy your intelligence—and the person you are

[lines 2 to end—P2]—so you see I made poetry spiritually unto reward even from the very beginning

Love from us,
Frank

June 20, 1991

Dear Clive,

Thank you for the quote from *Inferiae ad Frateris Tumulum*—my favorite reading of Catullus has always been Walter Savage Landor's (which has Boccaccio and Petrarca behind it)—rather than this century's recent vaudevillian impositionalist approach. . .My health hasn't been good—I've been in the hospital for *a month and a half over the last two months*—my heart in need of help! but what they did wasn't altogether successful in opening up, they decided against another by-pass, because, as they said, the risk of losing me was very great, *in the light* of my blood disease *as well* (before they let me go, they *transfused* me). . .: so where do I go from here? my mind my heart my bone marrow—in God, from day to day, His angel beside me—inside or out. —I'm glad you didn't close the door on our correspondence—and thanks for noting that my work doesn't need *adding to*—and for wishing me *a long time yet.* —Sangha is good—I would imagine no need to explain oneself—the *sight* in the light of the Order would be enough—maybe even faith and ambulating would be held in *dispensation*—for those solely and wholly given over fourfold.

It's true I still write poetry—but my illness(es) has taken *greatly* from me—my slowness is of a pathetic nature—sometimes I stay at a page, and wonder why I can't go forward—so I remember days of years ago, but even there in the remembrance nothing holds: still: the profusion of color of the garden takes me up. . .

Love from us, Frank

—Clive Faust

Speaking of the stars at night we were.
Federico Garcia Lorca. *Four Lorca Suites.* trans. Jerome Rothenberg. 20 pages, Sun & Moon Press, 1989. $5.
Jerome Rothenberg. *The Lorca Variations I-VIII.* Zasterle Press. 36 pp. $8.

Federico Garcia Lorca was the first non-American, non-English, poet I really read. There was a girl. There were hot muggy nights. There was love. She read Lorca's poems to me in Spanish on these nights. Such were the times of youth. My Spanish is no better now, but then a new translation comes forth.

These two books, *Four Lorca Suites* and *The Lorca Variations I-VIII,* are the beginnings of much larger books, a complete Lorca (now released) and more variations. These small books act as an invitation, small crystals complete in themselves. Or perhaps prisms refracting the language light of nature, the stars, the moon, the mind. These books break the light of Lorca into the phrases of the stars. Because these books are lyric delicacies I will choose one poem from each work to speak of and leave the rest to you.

Jerome Rothenberg gives the reader a clue as to the nature of the "suites," as a "type of 'serial poetry' (Blaser's and Spicer's term).'" For after Lorca who can forget Spicer? The *Four Lorca Suites* are "Three Prints of the Sky," "Caracols/Snails," "A Newton Suite," and "Seaside Prints" which opens with a poem "The Sea":

> The Sea
> wants to blow
> its lid.

The colloquial language builds the pressure cooker that is the non-ending tide. The green expanse rumbles and moves as "Coral giants / heave with / their shoulders." Oncoming waves peak and break the whitened tip of a shoulder's heave. With a color coral and a place coral, the poem moves into the lunar of cause and effect. That coral goddess shifting her skirts of green. Within the continual metamorphosis of sea to wave to breaker sings the next voice:

> And in their gold caverns
> the sirens
> try out a song
> that the water can sleep to.

The crest and trough of wave, from the every-day yawn to the seaweed sirens that lured Prufrock to his doom, beckon. A horizontal distance made into the blowing roar of a dragon. "Do you see its gullet / of scales?" (Not to mention its big coral teeth.) This crashing apparition fights toward "you" on the beach, making you a hero struggling with the Titans of nature. Hold firm. Stand "In front of the sea / raise your lances."

In San Francisco at a reading on September, 19, 1992, Jerome Rothenberg spoke about his writing *The Lorca Variations*. He wanted to publish his Lorca translations, but was unable to do so under contractual obligations. So he started writing poems caused by Lorca's work and his work with Lorca. Rothenberg said the variations are "not versions of Lorca," meaning a kind of free translation of the suites. Instead, the variations grapple with the language of Lorca, the nouns, the colors, the light of Lorca. As a homage, they were "written for beauty" he said. I agree.

Part [3] of Variation VII is subtitled "water," and dedicated to Charles Bernstein. (I vaguely remember an essay about water by Bernstein, but no matter.) Part [3]:

> Glass beehive.
>
> Other moon cells,
> this gateway
> for my kiss.
>
> O crystal prison,
> o beehive
> made of air!

In one sense, the water of the subtitle is the movement of suggestion, the flow between the nouns—beehive, cells, gateway, prison, beehive. This liquidity is the moving metaphor, a process engaging the language not ossifying, not freezing it. There is another metaphor here, but let it go. That's also part of the beauty of these poems.

These two books, *Four Lorca Suites* and *The Lorca Variations I-VIII*, are slight, granted, but they ring clearly, small bells resounding into that dark night of air. Like a lover lost but sweetly remembered.

—Avery E.D. Burns

***Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book Machine, The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group 1973–1982,* by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, ed. with an Introduction by Steve McCaffery, Talonbooks, Vancouver, 1992**

title: Steve McCaffery & bpNichol

Rash, shun algae!
O, man—
See?

Thick, it's often bookman's sheen.
Thack, O lechery,
search, reap,
or something tore on toe—

Erase her shug, rube,
nigh on to his heaven.
Tea, tree, thorough
nightie 'n ate—
He, too.

translation: C. Alexander

(a geomantic homolinguistic translation of the title, practicing one of the methods elucidated in Rational Geomancy.)

"There is no there there"—In the preceding sentence, for "no" substitute "only a" (there is only a there there). Durational centers, revisable frames, unacknowledged presents. . .There is no argument here, for anything final would be concerned with the past, leading to itself, finished and thereby discardable. Here (please take this reference to be not only this book, but anything imaginable in your own or anyone else's context as possibly indicatable by the word "here") everything is present, dependent, a research, an action. This is perhaps why so much depends on defining: narrative, translation, book, verse, prose,. . .But even definition, which begins and is practiced extensively in the early part of Toronto Research Group (TRG) "Report 2: Narrative," is later in that report questioned—"i think there's one thing there i'd like to retract in retrospect. what's that? well, it's the whole use of the term 'definition' which i don't think we really mean do we? it seems a better tack would be to choose a term like 'full description of the process.' yeah, i think that's really true, steve, because in fact, what we've tried to do is make the report itself true to the flow of the process at that moment. . .the moment of sitting down, like this, and typing as one of us raps." (137)

In a house to which I moved only a week ago I write this at a table looking out to a parochial school playground—upon the window through which I look I swatted two flies not five minutes ago. Because of the recent move my books are not yet unpacked, thus this essay will contain a minimum of reference and allusion outside the texts at hand (to the extent

that we see them as texts at all, but perhaps more on this later, not in this aside within an aside, creating at least a part of a context, context being all-important, again as we shall see later, postponement also being a major factor in the mathematical vector of the kids of the book-machine), an observation granted not as excuse but *as* context and as a hope of breaking some part of the barrier between you and me, reader.

The process of *Rational Geomancy* is dialogic (this before, as McCaffery states in the introduction, the dynamic duo had read Bakhtin) and brings into its pages/frames as wide a context as one might imagine. Nothing exists in isolation, and the illusion that it does is but one of the lies of the book as currently experienced. In most books (now as it was in the mid-1970s when this report was written) we gather context into delayed and nearly invisible frames we make subordinate to a dominant text and even call "footnotes" and "index." We thus bury the past and fabricate a (when analyzed) none too sturdy "new." TRG contrasts the current method with medieval texts which gather, in a visual typographic page with an outer text framing an inner text,

> external knowledge as the boundary of the present internal reading. What is now footnote was then the equivalent of the comic-strip frame, a significant syntactical unit in a much larger macrosyntactic structure that was all literature and the *summa* of knowledge. Indexing 'points' to the distant term in a cognitive duality. Arranging knowledge as context destroys the past/present duality. The reassertion of context, however, brings with it the dismissal, through pointing out the sheer absurdity, of the writer's omniscient role. When both process and context are revealed, we are forced to recognize that the single, isolated person/text is *always* lacunaire. (132)

Or, is part of a fabric, a weave.

Leafing through *Rational Geomancy,* one sees that it too is a weave. Although paginated and laid out consecutively, even for the most part chronologically, it is not necessary (Is it desirable? I have not answered that question, perhaps each reader will, for herself) to read it (or this review) in such a beginning-to-end manner. Probably the visual pages (approximately 65 of the 320 pages are entirely or predominantly visual, although my count includes comic-strip images, the amount and weight of whose textual elements vary considerably; quite a few more pages have visual elements embedded within or imposed upon them) will first entice the eye, leader of the reading experience, and likely, the first subsection to be read in its entirety (BUT DON'T TAKE THIS AS ADVICE, RATHER MERELY

SPECULATIVE DESCRIPTION) is TRG Report 2, Part 6, "NARY-A-TIFF: Written & Starring the Toronto Research Group, Directed & Photographed by Marilyn Westlake," in which photographs are laid out and dialogue is handwritten in balloons to form a comic strip. Therein, a highly energetic and richly allusive argument comes to a climax when one member of TRG supposedly slays the other, thereby killing communion and celebrating the triumph of authoritarianism. But in the last panel we see a resurrection. One can not simply end the presence of context, the experience that this is, after all, a shared earth. (And bpNichol remains a lively presence for many of us still, nearly four years after his passing—the euphemism for death seems appropriate here: passing on, passing through, passing a baton, the passing lane. . .

TRG calls its work "research" as opposed to theory, which is, according to the manifesto which opens the book (and which opened the particular Nichol/McCaffery collaboration which *is* TRG), "transient & after the fact of writing." (23) The reports literally re-search, see again, and gather a ground of writing, illuminating a context which includes translation, comic strip, medieval books, children's books, Native American story, board games (the book's dust jacket's interior is the game board for "Reading and Writing: The Toronto Research Game"), and experimental novels (although we must heed the advice quoted from Stanley Berne: ". . .I hate the word 'experimentation.' I think it is a very bad word. These are not experiments. These are finished products. They are actual accomplishments. They will serve as accomplished research, having investigated areas that were never investigated before."). (97) Perhaps the greatest partial omission in a book subtitled "The Kids of the Book-Machine" is the authors' lack of familiarity with the burgeoning artists' book movement, a field still expanding but which was already richly present at the time the TRG reports were begun. Nichol and McCaffery seem familiar with the work of a few conceptual artists and writers who have explored the form of the book, such as Diether Roth and John Furnival. They are not well informed about a much wider influx of printers, visual artists, and others who have made the book one of the liveliest art forms of our time. A consideration of such artists as Alison Knowles, Phil Sultz, Keith Smith, Walter Hamady, and Karl Young, all of whom had created major works by the mid-1970s, would have been very useful to TRG Report 2, Part 1: "The Book as Machine."

Research Report 1 concerns itself with geomantic, semiotic, and post-semiotic translation, as well as with a substitutive method of translation called "the developer." All of these processes emanate from a view of the translative act (attributed to Pound, Stein, & Valéry) as an "act by words upon words." (30) Words are translated into other words in the same language, sounds of one language are translated into sounds of another, words are translated into pictures, letters and words are translated *via* various methods of substitution, all with a hope that

> the centrality of translation takes on a new aspect of community in its multiple presentation of a sensory field. Total information is the translative process itself giving centrality to both translator and original text with the primary creative act of both original writer and translator asserted. (43)

Such creative acts engender further creative acts, a mission central to *Rational Geomancy,* in that it embraces the view that writing and reading are essentially the same. We must see each as part of an ever-generative fabric of creative, living context, one in which past inhabits a person, a text.

The brilliant "Research Report 2: Narrative" takes up 167 pages, well over half of the book, and researches the book as machine; the search for non-narrative prose (finally an impossible but driving "holy grail" sort of task); text as conversation; divided texts in which pages are sectioned off

to different purposes, not necessarily communicating with one another (but always cohabiting the page and communicating to the reader); rational geomancy: "the acceptance or a multiplicity of means and ways to reorganize those energy patterns we perceive in literature" (153); a possible manifesto of the book; the creation of a narrative board game; and the comic strip "NARRY-A-TIFF." *Now, reader, what do you think of this, I say, as I self-consciously step out of the objective reviewers robe I seem to have clothed myself in despite my desire, early on, to withstand such a dressing? Is this research as you conceive it? Is it not more a series of creative thrusts, not so much researching as boldly staking ground for research, perhaps attempting to answer a few questions (yet always questioning itself as well as anything else which enters the view), but, more than anything, opening the gate? Yes, go on in—or don't, if you don't want to—fly up & away instead.* As TRG tells us, what one does not read is as significant as what one reads. Together they form the "macrosyntactic context" of all of literature. "To choose to read is thus a decision to realign the macrosyntax; it is a geomantic act, a syntactic operation upon, and at the same time within, the macrosyntax which is literature." (156) The book, any book, is a syntactic unit within the whole, which is always being realigned in multiple ways by all readers and writers. The context informs and is informed by all writing and reading, and of this we should always be conscious (although TRG generally abjures "shoulds" or any other prescriptive strategies).

"The Language of Performance of Language," heretofore unpublished, is the third and last Research Report. Because of the uncontainable nature of the sixteen linked but separate performance instructions, descriptions, visual realizations, and scores which escape from the book to performance occasions outside its pages, this section is the least consumable and most exciting. It deftly suggests at once that any book is a performance and that nothing is ever complete or isolated. The "essays" clear away the never-really-present distinctions among writing, performance, art, research, and the body.

> These were sixteen essays then that included us as their inner terms. Essays *as a lived experience,* living out their fixity of form in the liquidity of transformation. As the eye emerged so the voice disappeared. We had been forced to reduce discourse and replace it by a hieroglyphical gesture in the belief that the performing being was a human hieroglyph, an instance of writing disintegrated into history. (272–3)

McCaffery & Nichol, as Toronto Research Group, as gesturing, breathing essay. The reader, too, is a performer.

It should be more widely acknowledged that one of the most important, and probably the most generative, North American literary conjunction of the century is the meeting of Steve McCaffery and bpNichol. The work in this book is only part of the evidence for such a claim. Not all brilliant (but much of it so), although practically all useful, the work is also primary in that it was among the first to bring into its field such problems as the shifting relations of signifier and signified, the un-naturalness of so-called realism, the visuality and sonority of language, and other contemporary issues of note; it did so before such discussions became part and parcel of the discourse of language poetry and the academy. Thus it helped lead us to the present while being ever-so-present itself. TRG adopts Gertrude Stein's injunction that "The business of Art. . .is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present." (100) This is a present book, and it points paths out from the present. Unlike much discussion of the issues raised here, TRG stresses the joy of creating, the play involved, the generative nature of mistakes, and a generosity of spirit *(Rational Geomancy* is a *gas)*. The book becomes an opportunity to play, and we are only fully human when we play.

—Charles Alexander

Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1991).

Invariably, the need to redefine translation's proverbial "loss" figures among the first topics students want to discuss in a translation workshop. Not that "loss" is entirely inappropriate, they argue after only one or two exercises, but it pertains barely, if at all, to the impossibility of neatly transferring meaning from one language to another. Nor does "loss" refer to whatever illusions the students might have nurtured about accomplishing such a transferal, although this use of the word certainly touches closely on their work as novice translators. No, the loss they experience reaches much further than the relation between texts or even between languages, and it reaches with an unexpected intensity. At the first (mis)step, their bearings falter when a familiar, if never wholly adequate, language literally

gives way under the pressure to accommodate the unknown. As translators, however, they find this disorientation usually mitigated by a certain humor in the crack-up of language breaking down. Strangeness implies less a dearth of "equivalents" than a wealth of possibilities and a recognition that in the practice of translation one examines those possibilities from every conceivable perspective. Once that is done, choices must be made, of course, and they will entail the "loss" implicit in any reduction. What lingers for the translator, though, indeed what defines or is translation is not so much the choice as the plenitude and uncertainty, the "between" from which it arises. Since translations are seldom able to provoke translation (bilingual editions and annotated glossaries not withstanding), students soon recognize this experience of simultaneity as the absence worth mourning. And they begin to ask the question Suzanne Jill Levine addresses in *The Subversive Scribe:* how might a translator make available not only translations but also translation itself?

A highly accomplished translator who has worked extensively with some of Latin America's most innovative fiction, Levine has wrestled actively with that question since 1971, when she undertook her first translations. As she explains in her preface, no sooner had she begun to translate than she realized that her reader would lose both "the constant dilemmas and fugitive processes of the translation. . .[and] my ongoing dialogue with the authors." (xiii) This realization led to frequent essays about her practice as a translator and, ultimately, to *The Subversive Scribe*, which contains many of those essays in revised form as well as several new pieces. The result is an engaging, ambitious book based on the discussion of examples selected from Levine's translations of novels by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig, and Severo Sarduy—the three writers with whom she has worked most collaboratively. Read as the whole Levine intends, it operates restoratively, drawing the reader (back) into considerations of translation theory and practice that range from specific strategies to political implications. Or, to recall Don Quixote's comment that many translations are like tapestries viewed from the "wrong" side—an example dear to at least one of Levine's *authors—The Subversive Scribe* encourages the reader to slip between two appearances of a literary text and view words in transit, grounded absolutely on neither one "side" nor the other.

In keeping with her purpose of making practice accessible, Levine's prose is consistently straightforward and highly readable. If her continual puns at times seem excessive, they are also both clearly deliberate and appropriate to the work she discusses, occurring for the most part in chapters devoted to Cabrera Infante, punster *par excellence*. Even in the two most "theoretical" essays, Levine writes directly about a translator's necessarily indirect approach to demanding, oblique texts such as Sarduy's *De donde son los cantantes (From Cuba with a Song)* and *Cobra (Cobra)*.

In fact, her discussion of those novels offers a valuable introduction to a writer too little known to North American readers, despite the existence of several translations. The same could be said of Cabrera Infante and Puig, who, like Sarduy have not enjoyed the reception English-language readers have afforded other Latin American authors. A not unimportant aspect of Levine's book is the attention paid in it to these novelists "relatively marginalized" (182) for reasons textual, sexual, and/or political. She offers rich portraits of these men as writers, collaborators, and friends, and her strategies for translating their work can also serve as strategies for recognizing and reading in it a dissidence Levine finds "corrosive" and "radical" (182).

To describe those strategies briefly, perhaps the most useful words are *"bricoleur"* and "subversion." Levine's translator, as presented in the introductory comments and developed in subsequent chapters of *The Subversive Scribe,* closely resembles Claude Lévi-Strauss's "tinkerer." This clever, resourceful figure, adept at coming up with something from the bits and pieces of whatever is around, also appears in her descriptions of both Sarduy (39) and Puig (124). In the case of translation, that "something" refers not just to the translation, or product, achieved through a graceful assemblage of assorted skills and scraps of knowledge; it also includes the very person of the translator, a being "put together by a committee," as Margaret Sayers Peden once remarked.[1] To the *bricoleur* and Peden's composite, Levine adds the translator's sense of incompletion, an edge present only implicitly even in Peden's suggestion of masochism.[2] Drawn to displacement, to flip sides, to paradox, she writes that "We translate to be translated" (v), referring to her desire to speak a foreign language, to travel, to recapture a "dormant baroque in our pragmatic [English] language" (vii).

Although both the fiction Levine chooses to translate and her presentation of the translator suggest her understanding of "subversion," the discussion of her "poetics of translation" confirms that suggestion. A translator's subversion, she explains, teases out "underlying meanings" or "subtexts" (7). Rather than (futilely) attempt to provide a copy, it aims to prompt a continuation akin to Derrida's "living-on."[3] Subversive translation thus resembles the often extreme mutation (as in mutilation) required for successful grafting; at once "abusive and sustaining" (8), its transformation of work written is linked "symbiotically" or "parasitically" with the work of writing (7). To translate, then, is to transplant, adapting as necessary what are conventionally referred to as the source and the target languages.

In order to demonstrate her work as one of *bricolage* and subversion, Levine has chosen instances of language at its most "untranslatable." These include puns (Part I), written representations of highly playful colloquial speech (Part II), and sections of parody and rewriting in which fragments

of literature or popular music embedded in the "source" text provide the source of which that text is itself a translation (Part III). Levine makes it clear that she does not expect her examples to be representative of all translation practice, not even all literary translation practice (167). Her method is not metaphoric but metonymic; indeed her technique might well be termed "Caravaggesque," recalling Sarduy's "chiaroscuro" technique: "the 'brutal' projection of light serves as a condensing procedure to catch the eye, making it concentrate on one of the figures. . ." (155). That "figure," whether pun, snippet of verbal banter, or entire passage (at times even entire text) serves as her unit of translation and is examined closely; the Spanish context is presented, options for translation are explored, and Levine's choice is explained. In most cases it is a choice made either in collaboration with the author or after consultation with him. Although they are not equally fluent in English, in the translation projects Levine discusses each of the writers took an active interest, encouraging—and at times even prompting—her to find solutions that played with or against English in ways analogous to their own rewriting of Spanish.

Levine's examples are well chosen, and they make clear the less-than-clear distinction between writing and translation she stresses. Not only are some of the originals rewriting of English texts (such as Cabrera Infante's incorporation of Hemingway's *The Green Hills of Africa* in *Vista del amanecer en el trópico)*, the translation of those originals at times led to their rewriting in Spanish or they proved to have a direct influence on other writing by their authors—not to speak of the involvement of those authors-turned-translators in the English version. What is more, Levine's development as translator was also tantamount to her development as a writer. Since those texts with which she worked were bound so inextricably to popular culture, to history, and to experimentation with language, she often found herself moving further and further from the Spanish, making decisions far more "writerly" than "translatorly" in order to provide the English-language reader with a "foreign" experience in recognizable terms.

The difficulties inherent in that effort are enough to make any translator despair, as—one imagines—Levine must certainly have done, at least on occasion, when the turn of a phrase or the line of a song seemed too distant to give rise to any bridge between her two languages. In *The Subversive Scribe,* however, despair is present only by implication. Although she wonders how a reader confronting Sarduy's use of the *son* might be enabled "to sing along when the original music cannot be heard" (143), her attention is fixed on her response and the question itself does not give her pause. That she answers so fully, with such wit, proves, ironically, to be both strength and weakness, for it keeps the reader at a remove through the very mechanism meant to open her practice. Perhaps this is inevitable, since a practitioner's discussion of work completed occurs unavoidably in

a successful preterit. In this instance, however, some less preterit examples, or even some less successful ones, might have given rise to exercises that resembled more closely the practitioner's "inquisitions" Levine mentions in her preface (xii). The commentary on versions unused and her obvious willingness to learn from both past experiences and the writers with whom she worked indicate the sensitivity and humility necessary for such specialized work with language and keep *The Subversive Scribe* from being smug, but at the same time the presentation of one published solution after another ultimately tends to diminish rather than dramatize (167) a sense of ambivalence or risk.

"Memory and language are fellow traitors, translating what they cannot capture," Levine remarks in her chapter on Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers* (89), and as I read the final section of *The Subversive Scribe*, that sentence came to mind with respect to the "translation" of her own experiences. Especially in her epilogue, a memory less "traitorous" and more inquisitorial might have encouraged Levine to probe several issues that remain subtextual. One of those issues is her own role as a North American woman who translates the work of male writers "feminized" on the margins of mainstream Latin American literature but hardly "feminist" with respect to their creation of female characters. Levine calls attention to that contradiction in her own "story" (181–182) but does not develop it—or its implications—fully. The same could be said about the story of those Latin American texts published, packaged, and promoted by North American publishing houses or about such questions as the apparently arbitrary enthusiasms of North American English-language readers. The extent to which Levine's poetics of translation might be applicable to work by writers other than the ones she mentions also merits more consideration than an acknowledgment that "I can only speak for my own experience and hope that others find familiar repercussions. . ." (167)

Given the intentions expressed in her preface,[4] it would not have been inappropriate for Levine to speculate, for example, about the degree to which her subversive strategies would prove helpful when collaboration between translator and writer was impossible or when working with writers whose relation to their own language and culture was less cosmopolitan, whose politics were those of allegiance rather than abrasion or exile. Although Levine touches on each of these questions, she does not explore them, and I believe that by expanding the context of translation practice she might have both made it more accessible and enabled it to surpass her own experience. On the other hand, she has offered enough examples and offered them so gracefully that individual experience is pushed to limits reminiscent of Sarduy's "'hypertelic' extremes" (43). The reader formed by her book may well be enough of a *bricoleur*—or *bricoleuse*—to initiate their subversion.

NOTES

1 "A Conversation on Translation with Margaret Sayers Peden," *Translation Perspectives IV: Selected Papers, 1986–87,* ed. Marilyn Gaddis Rose (Binghamton, NY: National Resource Center for Translation and Interpretation, 1988), 143.

2 "To varying degrees a translator is composed of creative writer, scholar, archivist, innovator and, often a large portion of masochism" (Peden, 143).

3 Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida,* ed. by Christie V. MacDonald and trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 118. The discussion transcribed in the "Roundtable on Translation" (93-161) informs both Levine's poetics and her practice in *The Subversive Scribe.*

4 "But these [North American] readers also need to understand *how* Latin American writing is transmitted to them, and *how* differences and similarities between cultures and languages affect *what* is finally transmitted" (xiv-xv).

—Carol Maier

Harryette Mullen. *Trimmings*. (New York: Tender Buttons, 1991).

Trimmings exposes the way a woman's body is a moment in language, the way the parts of speech are the parts of a trousseau, the way women are caught in language as they are caught in stays, belts, wraps, garters, buckles: "a body wearing language as clothing or language a body of thought which is a soul or body the clothing of a soul" (66). She writes, "the veiled, unavailable body makes an available space" (66). *Trimmings* is written in this space.

Even the sprawled nude body of a woman cannot escape these constraints of gaze. Mullen looks on to see:

> A light white disgraceful sugar looks pink, wears an air pale compared to shadow standing by. To plumb recliner, naked truth lies. Behind her shadow wears her color, arms full of flowers. A rosy charm is pink. And she is ink. The mistress wears no petticoat or leaves. The other in shadow, a large, pink dress. (15)

Here is Manet's *Olympia:* the white woman's body a "plumb recliner," the

black woman's body a "shadow." And at the same time here is Stein's "A Petticoat" from *Tender Buttons* which is "a light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm." A comparison which was not clear before is suddenly made clear—this passage comments on Manet, on Manet as related to Stein, on Stein. When Stein writes "A Petticoat" she abstracts Manet—the women's bodies turn to color, to symbol. While Stein writes "an ink spot," Mullen instead writes "and she is ink." Mullen thus rewrites to bring the woman's body back, to comment on racial bias. The reader is allowed to see the body as female, as black, but not as object. She exposes the way the "naked truth lies" across the bed and the way it lies about presenting a truth, an exposure, of a woman's body. For the body of *Olympia* is a "light white" that relegates the black body to shadow.

While Mullen rewrites Stein to present varieties of women's bodies, her prose poems draw heavily from Stein's tradition. She uses for example Stein's project in *Tender Buttons* to free the word (the noun), "to refuse them by using them." This work is full of the pun, the slip, which has "loose lips, a telltale spot, where she was kissed and told" (22).

This project to free the word is not unique to Stein or avant-garde writing—for the word in standardized English is also freed in dialectal language. Double meanings in children's rhymes are suddenly clear through Mullen's reciting: "quick snatch, in a clutch, chased the lady with the alligator purse" (8). *Trimmings* turns often to Black English, reminds that there is "someone in the kitchen I know" (11). Thus Josephine Baker appears, "in feathers, in bananas, in her own skin, intelligent body attached to a gaze. Stripped down model, posing for a savage art, brought color to a primitive stage" (47).

—Juliana Spahr

Noticings

In a year in which Amy Clampitt and Irving Feldman have won MacArthur Awards for poetry (Robert Creeley was evidently in the running since I was asked to write a letter on his behalf but he didn't make it!), and in which Mona Van Duyn has been named Poet Laureate, it is doubly comforting to receive in the mail Emmanuel Hocquard and Claude Royet-Journoud's elegant new anthology, *49 + 1: Nouveaux poets américains*, published at Royaumont in 1991. This 341-page volume is a sequel to two

earlier anthologies: Michel Deguy and Jacques Roubaud's *Vingt poètes américains* (Gallimard 1980), which took Gertrude Stein as its precursor figure and presented the work of the major Black Mountain, New York School, Objectivist, and ethnopoetic poets of the late sixties and seventies; and Hocquard and Journoud's *21 + 1* (Delta, 1986, although the selection was made some five years earlier), an anthology featuring more recent "experimental" poetry (Language poetry and related movements), the "1" non-American being Tom Raworth. A ground rule of *21 + 1* was that no poet already published in *Vingt poètes américains* was included and the same ground rule applies to the new *49 + 1*.

In the Introduction to *49 +1,* Hocquard notes that *21 + 1* was not designed to privilege any particular tendency or school, the aim being merely to foreground certain characteristic traits found in the poetry that "interested us"; these traits include "priority given to language as the substance or subject of the poem and not just as simple instrument of expression or esthetic decor; richness and complexity of formal inventions . . .mobility, liberty and dynamism of a vigilant poetry that has broken away from the formally and ideologically academic and conservative models that exist in the U.S. as they do everywhere else" (pp. 12-13, my translation). They do indeed, as the award system (MacArthur, Guggenheim, NEA) and mainstream "little magazine" system *(Poetry, Kenyon Review, Georgia Review)* regularly reminds us. All the more remarkable then that it took a French poet to found a center *(Un bureau sur l'Atlantique at Royaumont)* hospitable to the "new new American poetry" and to publish such a rich anthology of this poetry, much of it still largely unknown in the U.S.

The new book *49 + 1* (this time the "1" is Asa Benveniste, born in the Bronx but living all his life in England), is billed as a gathering of writers "born in the forties, fifties, and sixties, who began to publish (with the exception of five among them) toward the end of the seventies, in the eighties, and even at the beginning of the nineties. Certain poems here translated were still unpublished in the U.S. at the time we made our selection" (p. 15). This characterization is not quite accurate, for most of the poets in *49 + 1* are of the same generation as the *21 + 1* group, and some, like Hannah Weiner and David Bromige, belong to the generations represented in Vingt poètes américains. Indeed, *49 + 1* is more accurately described as a valuable supplement to *21 + 1,* which unaccountably included Charles Bernstein but not Bruce Andrews, Rae Armantrout but not Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, but not Barrett Wattan, Robert Grenier but not Steve Benson, and so on. But there are also plenty of new names, including a poet I've never heard of named Robert Kocik, who lists under his credits, "Pas de livre. A peine un corps" ("No book. Barely a body"), but who is famously translated by Anne-Marie Albiach. And aside from such language poets as Tom Beckett, Alan Davies, Carla Harryman, Tom Mandel, and Kit

Robinson, there are experimental fiction writers like Lydia Davis, Barbara Einzig, and Fanny Howe, visual poets like Johanna Drucker, a sizable number of poets who belong to no particular school, like Norma Cole, Rachel Blau duPlessis, Benjamin Friedlander, Stephen Ratcliffe, Joseph Simas, and Marjorie Welish, and two poets born after 1960, Gale Nelson and Elizabeth Robinson.

As in any anthology of this kind, there are notable omissions. Partly, inclusion depends on the personal tastes of individual translators, many of whom are themselves poets like Dominique Fourcade, Joseph Guglielmi, and Jacques Roubaud. Partly, the Bay Area, where Hocquard and Royet-Journoud have spent time and been warmly welcomed, gets pride of place (although even then, Beverly Dahlen and Kathleen Fraser are oddly omitted). And partly, inclusion depends upon translatability: such prose texts as Fanny Howe's and Peter Seaton's read, in Pierre Alferi's translations, as if they were "always already" in French, as does Hocquard's own translation of Ray DiPalma's "January Zero," a sequence that begins by parodying elementary French readers like *Totor et Tristan* and hence seems perfectly "natural" in French. Here is the first section:

> Je prends un verre. Je remplie Ie verre. Je bois l'eau. Je lave le verre. J'essuie le verre. Je le donne le verre. Je prends une bouteille de lait. Je pose la bouteille sur la table. J'ouvre la bouteille de lait. Je prends un verre propre. Je remplie le verre propre de lait. Je te donne un verre de lait. Je bois un verre de lait.

* *

One of the serious omissions in *49 + 1*, an omission also made in Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree,* is Canadian poetry. One can understand the anthologists' desire to preserve national identity and it is true that we would not expect to find, say, an Australian poet like John Tranter or a New Zealand poet like Michelle Leggott in *49 + 1*. But the case of Canada strikes me as special because there is so much interchange between our adjoining countries. U.S. poets have regularly been featured at the Vancouver Poetry Festival and at the Kootenay School of Poetics; journals like *Raddle Moon* and *Writing* regularly publish U.S. work, American poetry critics like Jed Rasula teach at Canadian universities (in this case, Queens), even as Canadian academics like Linda Hutcheon and Peter Quartermain are central to an understanding of our own writing, and finally—emblem of emblems— even the 1993 MLA will be held in Toronto. One would think, then, that at a time when sensitivity to subcultures and marginalized groups is *de rigueur,* Canadian poetry—one of the liveliest anywhere today—

would be part of the American Poetry Picture. Indeed, *49 + 1* may be profitably read against a fascinating new book just published by Talon Books in Vancouver, *Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book Machine, The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group, 1973-1982,* by Steve McCaffery & bp Nichol, edited by McCaffery. For $18.95 plus $2.50 shipping (201-1019 East Cordova Street; Vancouver, B.C. V6A 1M8 Canada; U.S. distributor: Univ. of Toronto Press, 340 Nagel Drive, Buffalo, N.Y. 14225-4731), you get a startlingly vivid history of the decade when poetry and theory first started to be aware of one another and doing something about it. The book, beautifully produced and illustrated, is also McCaffery's homage to his close friend and collaborator, who died in 1988 at the age of 44.

So what was the Toronto Research Group all about? The notes reproduced here are based on "the short-circuiting of transmission along the lines of the following secretarial formula: "Steve is dictating his thinking, thinking Barrie is typing this dictation. However, Barrie is typing out his own thoughts on the matter and Steve doesn't know it." The result is a "present inability to decipher whose thinking was whose," a "seamlessness in cognition" that produces a "margin between oral energy and the preservational fixity of print" (p. 11). Provisionality is thus a watchword, beginning with the first principle of the opening Manifesto: "1) all theory is transient & after the fact of writing" (p. 23).

In practice, the individual "Research Reports" take up various seminal theories (like Jerome Rothenberg's early formulation of "Total Translation") and then interrogate them and test their limitations. Thus in the report on "Narrative," Nichol and McCaffery present important distinctions between lyric poetry and prose. The short poem, they argue, usually involves "a significant degree of iconicity: we see the poem as a visual whole before we read it. Perceived optically as a complete unit the page is qualified to such an extent that it ceases to function as an *arbitrary* receptacle, or surface, for the maximum number of words it can contain. . .becoming instead the frame, landscape, atmosphere within which the poem's own unity is enacted and reacted upon." By contrast, "in both prose and the visually continuous poem (Milton's *Paradise Lost,* for instance) the page has no optical significance. Being to a large extent a working out of information through duration, prose structures tend to be temporal rather than visual. . . .In extended prose or poetry the page becomes an obstacle to be overcome" (p. 61).

These fruitful distinctions lead to larger speculations on narrative form. In the case of the normal linear book, page is no more than a surface to be *"endured* as a means to the complete reception of the book's information." As a "machine of consumption," the linear book is thus naturally threatened by other media, especially television and film, which

"afford more rapid and totally sensorial means of satisfying [the] appetite for story" (pp. 62-63). It follows that if the page is to be retained, it had better do other work: the authors now supply us with intriguing examples of page reform, like Kitasano Katué's "self-portraits" made by crumpling his own pages and then photographing the results for purposes of "documentation" (p. 71).

But even as the examples of page design multiply, we come, in the appended notes titled "A Bibliography," to qualification. Note 1 reads: "This argument regarding the difference of poetry and prose is clearly faulty. Both of us came to realize that it permits no place for the prose poem: a historically verified genre." (p. 92). Another distinction is now proposed, having to do with the status of the word: "In prose the word is component of the minimal unit which is a breath paragraph. . . .This is not the case in poetry where the word is an absolute unit brought into the presence of similar absolutes. Or again, the distinction is judged to be grammatical: "Prose has to be destructive. In prose you create a context for verbal (phonic & semantic) collision. In poetry you create a territoriality by means of a spatial syntax" (92-93). These definitions don't so much correct the first one as supplement it, in Derrida's sense of supplementarity (both addition and substitution). Repetition and revision, Nichol and McCaffery imply, are always essential to the useful formulation of poetics. Put the other way round: no "normative difference" between poetry and prose can be definitively established, the interest being in the questions rather than the answers.

The title research report on "Rational Geomancy" is produced in two bands (upper band = Nichol; lower band = McCaffery) that engage in dialogue on a quasi-Bakhtinian (but also Derridean, as in *Glas)* model. "Rational Geomancy" is defined as "the acceptance of a multiplicity of means and ways to reorganize those energy patterns we perceive in literature" (p. 153), and throughout this section, comic strips, cartoons, word games, puns, anecdotes, and jokes collide with theoretical explication, scholarly excursus, and elaborate etymology to make up a wonderfully funny and engaging disquisition on the state of the art, circa 1981. In coming to terms with the "book-machine," Nichol and McCaffery move freely between poststructuralist theory (especially Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida) on the one hand and the poetics of such fellow-poets as Christopher Dewdney and Bill Bissett on the other.

Reading these "research reports" in the nineties, when "theory" has become, for the typical graduate student, an oppressive body of texts-to-be-mastered in preparation for the academic job market, it is surprising to see just how much fun the reception of French poststructuralist theory could be, before idolatry and ossification set in. In this sense, Rational Geomancy has a genuinely heuristic value. It provides a good antidote to

those ubiquitous and dreary theory textbooks, which endlessly reproduce the same essays (e.g., Stanley Fish, "Is There a Text in this Class?"; Paul de Man's "Rhetoric of Temporality," Foucault's "What is an Author?," Sandra Gilbert's "Literary Paternity"), and which treat literary works as so many convenient exempla used to illustrate this or that "theory-point." The TRG neatly reverses this order: theory, Nichol and McCaffery imply, is just fine as long as it doesn't violate the spirit of poetry.

In their speculations as to the role of computer technology in the transformations of the "book-machine," Nichol and McCaffery cannily anticipated the work now being done on the electronic page by such scholars as George P. Landow, whose *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Theory and Technology* (Johns Hopkins 1992) is an intriguing, if finally disappointing, foray into this new field. Landow begins by citing the authority of Derrida and Barthes, who, like the computer scientists Theodore H. Nelson and Andries van Dam, "argue that we must abandon conceptual systems founded upon ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them with ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks" (p. 2). *Hypertext,* a term first coined by Nelson in the sixties, "refers to a form of electronic text, a radically new information technology, and a mode of publication," specifically, "a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (p. 4). In this form of *nonsequential writing,* blocks of text, equivalent, says Landow, to what Barthes terms *lexia,* and the electronic links that join them, can be arranged in any number of ways, replacing the linearity of the conventional book with digital simultaneity.

Many computers, my own Macintosh LC included, now provide a program called HyperCard. To show what HyperCard can do, Landow gives the example of a software program that allows the student to interact with Tennyson's *In Memoriam.* Since this long poem rejects the linearity of "conventional elegy" in favor of the "brief lyrics" that "best embodied the transitory emotions that buffeted [the poet] after his loss" of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam, and since these lyrics are fragmentary, interlacing "dozens of images and motifs and informed by an equal number of minor and major resolutions" (p. 37), it lends itself perfectly to the *"In Memoriam* web" reproduced on p. 39 of *Hypertext,* which links up individual sections by imagery and leitmotifs. The user can move from "Dark house" (#7) to the "Doors" of that house (#119), from "waiting for a hand" in the former to "the pressure of thine hand" in the latter, and so on. Or again, the "reader" can move from a specific passage to commentary on that passage by the poem's critics, to "Religion and Philosophy" or "Science and Technology" or "Cultural Context: Victorianism"— all by the mere click of the desktop mouse. The **IN MEM OV** *(In Memoriam* Overview), appearing at the upper left of the screen, serves as directory organizing all these possibilities.

Landow makes large claims for this new *"docuverse."* The "reader," he argues, now becomes a producer, sharing the author's role in a new dialogic, polyphonic, multivocal system. The reader-producer decanters the text, reconfigures it, creates new multilinear reading paths. "Electronic linking shifts the boundaries between one text and another as well as between the author and the reader and between the teacher and the student. . . .Its effects are so basic, so radical, that it reveals that many of our most cherished, most commonplace ideas and attitudes toward literature and literary production turn out to be the result of that particular form of information technology and technology of cultural memory that has provided the setting for them" (p. 33).

Well. . . .yes and no. It's true, as many poets (Nichol and McCaffery among them) have noted in recent years, that hypertext forces us to rethink the whole question of poetic boundaries, that it opens up exciting new possibilities for writers and verbal-visual artists. But the examples Landow gives, like that of the **IN MEM OV** above, are just clever strategies for getting students to do what they always did: trace image patterns in *In Memoriam*, relate the poem to its period, to the "scientific background," and so on. What Landow and other hypertext enthusiasts ignore is that the role of the student-as-producer is severely limited by the nature of the input: someone, after all, has put all those links into the system, someone is telling the reader what the key images are, what "background" is relevant (and hence what background isn't); what biographical facts count, and so on. Most important, someone is telling the "reader-producer" that *In Memoriam* is an important poem, worth studying, worth taking apart so as to identify its thematic clusters and repeated sounds.

How much freedom, in this scheme of things, does the reader-producer have? He/she can move the counters around and produce quasi-parodies: "shipwreck" and "drowning" could be moved away from the themes of "time" and "death" and placed in the biographical column or related to Victorian science for the hell of it. Or another program could be called up and **IN MEM** could be collaged with, say, **THE WASTELAND.** But the more input the program gives us, the more limitations are placed on the reader. Thus, while I agree with Landow that at least *potentially,* in hypertext, "the functions of reader and writer become more deeply entwined with each other," (71) in practice, given the nature of software development, the prospects for "innovative" programming and "revolutionary" poetry criticism, much less poetry writing, are not encouraging. Who, after all, is going to create the **CANTO OV** for Pound scholarship or the **MAX OV** for Charles Olson's great poem? Will these **OVs** be part of the hypertext canon? And what does it take to qualify for the sort of "collaborative authorship" Landow describes? Given the recent choices made by Official Verse Culture with which I began this essay, one wonders

if hypertext is as "infinitely re-centerable" as Landow thinks. The new technology, in any case, bears watching.

—Marjorie Perloff

Marlene Nourbese Philip, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (The Mercury Press, 1991)

Looking for Livingstone joins the ranks of an increasing number of works that seek to confront legacies of colonial violence through the enactment of a kind of reversed Middle Passage. Its theoretical counterpart in this effort would be a work like J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, its poetic one Derek Walcott's epic, *Omeros*. Philip's text uses both prose and poetry to explore, to shape, the silences /spaces of the Livingstone "history," disclaiming his "discoveries" (she calls him "Livingstone-I-presume") and disrupting his silencing of the others of his narrative—the "untamable barbarians" and the women—by attributing to them a Silence which is not merely the absence of words, but a precious resource in its resistance to the colonization of *the* Word: Livingstone's tools, we discover, are ultimately impotent, his Conradian desire to "fill" the map of Africa an abortive attempt to confer his personal dissolution upon others for all eternity.

The prose pieces serve to document the narrator's education in Silence, describing her visits to a number of peoples whose tribal names form anagrams of that word. Each of these educates the narrator, known only as the Traveller, in the textures, the variables of Silence, rehearsing the liberation that is enacted when she finally confronts "Livingstone-I-presume," the culmination of the odyssey. The prose sometimes declares its allegiances and disaffections too neatly, and will no doubt have critics stumbling over each other to join in the academic game of naming allusions which so often obscures the materiality of poetic vision. Included, for example, are a kind of "postcard from the edge," a letter from Mary Livingstone to her husband, claiming that her (Freudian, white, female) silence cannot compete for his attention with the (Freudian, black, female) silence of the African continent, and a scene in which the narrator is to "stitch a quilt in all the colours of [her] silence"—a rather overwhelming evocation of Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens."

The narrative's location of itself through its reference to a communal cultural history is seldom irredeemably pedantic. The description of the

Museum of Silence as a measure of containment, a repetition of Livingstone's project in its transformation of indigenous silences into a cultural commodity, would appear to be Philip's retelling of the violence of "Into the Heart of Africa" exhibition, to which Canadians of African heritage responded with anger in 1989-90.[1] The prose piece makes its point succinctly and exemplifies the occasional humour of Philip's narrative:

> It was one of the world's wonders, they told me, this Museum of Silence—never had so much silence been gathered together under one roof, and they were proud of it. My silence—our silence—carefully guarded and cherished by them! My silence was now a structure, an edifice I could walk around, touch, feel, lick even—and I did—it was cold, cold to the tongue. I could, if I wanted, even pee on it, though that would be difficult, contained as it was behind plexiglass. (57-58)

Philip demonstrates a canny skepticism about the reception of her own text, supplying an "Author's Note" which suggests that the Traveller's diaries have already become a trophy in the library of another big white game hunter, the Chief Archivist and Librarian of the Bodleian.

If I have divided my discussion of Philip's poetry and prose in a way that the form of the text would attempt to reject, it is because Philip's poetry, the intuitive, material component of her exploration-without-colonization, constitutes the best of what *Looking for Livingstone* has to offer. The relationship between Word and Silence, a paradoxical one that moves according to necessity from rape (the narrator's space/womb; Livingstone's word/phallus) to violent creation ("In the beginning was the Word") and restorative re-vision ("in the beginning was / not / word / but Silence / and a future rampant / with possibility") is worked out immediately in the poetry, not simply as narrative theme, but as substance, in the shaping of space by text, silence by sound:

> In the beginning was
> the ravage
> in
> word inside time
> inside
> History
> Silence seeks the balance
> in revenge
> the cut in precise
> cleaves to the ever in Word

seeking to silence
Silence

The goal of *Looking for Livingstone*—the re-cognition of Silence through prophetic use of words—is felt here, rather than in the perambulations of the prose narrator, whose teachings at times overwrite the power of the poetic voice to exercise the resistance she seeks to confirm.

NOTE

1 In 1989 the Royal Ontario Museum decided to do an exhibition which they hoped would serve, or would be of some service to, the African community in Toronto. They discovered that the majority of African artifacts owned by the R.O.M. were those donated by Canadian missionaries, a community deeply implicated in the colonization process of which Livingstone, as Marlene Nourbese Philip puts it, was "the thin edge of the wedge." Despite the museum's attempts (variously regarded as honourable, a total failure, or something in between) to recognize the politics of cultural representation within the exhibition itself, the African community of Toronto rejected the display as immoral and racist, thus ensuring that those American museums scheduled to receive it as a travelling exhibition cancelled their bookings: it ran in Toronto from November 6, 1989 to August 6, 1990 but was not shown elsewhere.

—Rosemary J. Jolly

Noticings

Insel (Black Sparrow Press, 1991) is a novel/memoir by Mina Loy dating from (circa) 1936, edited with an afterward by Elizabeth Arnold, and with a lucid introduction by Loy's executor, Roger L. Conover. No man, in proverbial form, is an island, but Loy found the apparent exception to this rule, and the work is based on him (in "real life" Richard Oelze, an artist) and on the strange "island" their relationship made. The novel depicts Loy as if she were a castaway on this island, because she chooses not to treat with circumstantiality any of the details of her/her protagonist's life in Paris except her bond to Insel. So she will say, I came from the movies, or from dinner with others, leaving her social, her everyday, her commonsense self undiscussed, and then return obsessed and fascinated to the observation of this self-destructive hunger artist, Luftmensch, and forager. The work memorializes her complicit, needy gaze on "that enjailed jewel, his artist spirit" as contained in "this human wreck"—a type which does indeed seem to fascinate creative women. (The work does not explicitly analyze the

gender valences of this phenomenon, but it offers important data.) Her bond is an album of romantic thralldom (cf. the allusions to *Wuthering Heights),* one which, she thinks occurs because of Insel's incredible commanding negativity—a kind of radium run backwards into chaos. So questions of identity predominate. His "conjury," his "weird power," his "diaphanous stuff," his ability to disintegrate while one is watching, like an endless replay of the portrait of Dorian Gray evoke her charmed, but dangerous, "dislocation of identity" as she lets him use her studio, as she feeds him, watches him sleep, cleans his rotten suit with gasoline, and basks in his magical rays. But she realizes that, just as he seems to support himself by some general sexual pimping, he is also supporting himself through a kind of aesthetic-emotional pimping or predation—living off her admiration. And with that realization, she does break away. (The bits about the "two negresses" around the question of who is prostituting whom are a real grim addition to the tracking of modernist gazes of whites on blacks.)

* * *

Beverly Dahlen's *A Reading 8-10* is beautifully presented by Chax Press (Tucson, 1992) and joins the other parts of this book, *A Reading (1-7)* from Momo's Press in 1985, and *A Reading (11-17)* from Potes & Poets Press in 1989. The Chax cover by Cynthia Miller—a red folkloric child's chair by a lush foliated background—does indeed evoke some of Dahlen's themes of the homey (heimlich) and the uncanny (unheimlich), of memory, absence, and dailiness. Before systematization, says A. N. Whitehead, in *Modes of Thought,* there must be "assemblage." This is a poetics for Dahlen (and for Ron Silliman, whose work is discussed in this book several times). Dahlen produces these works (which look like prose paragraphs of phrases, joined in long cantos) in a liminal space of free association, seriously influenced by Freud, and by a poetics of meditation and myth from H.D. In such a work everything is intertwined: a list of topics would be a net of a collective feeling—war, romance, memories of childhood, the visceral pain of USA politics and economics, one's parents, the genres fiction and biography, Christianity, changes of the seasons and one's moods. It is one of the astonishing, masterful aspects of her work that reading it makes you think of other things. A good deal of *Reading 8-10* is a meditation on the place of the female figure, the beautiful woman in culture (in lyric like Creeley's and Marvell's, plays like *Lear* and *Oedipus,* novels like *Emma,* films), and more particularly the place of the female in long poems which are (of course) the genre in which Dahlen acts. What is the [female] model here (since heroism and polis are used up)? It's perhaps 1001 nights, in which a story unfolds in an endless webbing of connections, done so that the woman-teller can escape—or defer—death.

* * *

A Poetics by Charles Bernstein (Harvard University Press, 1992) has a cover that puns on Zukofsky's "A"—as did Dahlen's first "reading," and evokes all the complex tolerance of "a" not "the." One of the half-title pages, however, calls the book "apoetics"; like the term "amoral," the prefix indicates "without, not, neutral to, or in opposition to"—a skeptic's poetics. Bernstein is insistently transgressive of binary thinking; he will trouble it with skepticism and with attention to situational nuance. This is a book of wonderful, teasing, and directed intelligence. It is a book, also, that uses, to gain cultural tread, Bernstein's ability to focus and synthesize important contributions and analysis from others—from Jerome McGann, James Clifford, Robert Casillo, Sanford Gilman, Peter Quartermain. The first message I received from some of the essays (the one called "Professing Stein. . ." and "Time out of Motion") was the degree to which Bernstein acts in a principled fashion to challenge certain contemporary findings of literary history. (This is the Groucho Marx—quizzical eyebrows— or William Carlos Williams—pert judgment—aspect of things. He teases that his is a poetics of the 3 Marxes and the 4 Williamses.) It is here that one finds a thorough consideration of Island English (of England) and the multiple non-insular "eccentric" poetries in English, of Paul Dunbar's dialect poetry, of the relation of Pound to fascism, of the question of a modernism "gutted" by New Criticism, of Stein as inhabiting her own time—not "postmodern," but rather us as still Georgian (Antimodernist or Countermodernist). Contained also are some pages of extreme interest on the impact of the Second World War and the Holocaust on the poetries (of the New and "Newer" American poets, and of Reznikoff and Rothenberg in our country) which first refuse the grand authoritarian schemes of modernism and then pierce "the atmosphere of willed forgetting of the 1950s" (216). The second message is a Bakhtinian one (or maybe the Karl Marxist poetics of Raymond Williams): that utterance is inside of history and ideology. Or "poetry not as transcendent but as colored: *of* the world." (162). This is a topic of great importance in part because most of the contemporary theory holding this position does not (repeat, not) apply itself to poetry, but sticks with fiction and other discourses. Bernstein, for example, names as "shifters" the keywords of poetics (e.g. tradition, craft, beauty, form, realism), borrowing Benveniste on pronouns, to indicate the fact that they are historically and situationally constructed. (157) Here he calls for, and calls forth, a poetry of dissent, of critique. The third message involves passages or riffs (really better than both Chico Marx and Esther Williams could ever propose) in which Bernstein performs a water ballet, or blows off on, his own sound, his own poetics, or offers conceptual moments crystallizing his kind of practice: "a more destabilising field of

pathos, the ludicrous, schtick, sarcasm; a multidimensional textual field that is congenitally unable to maintain an evenness of surface tension or a flatness of affect, where linguistic shards of histrionic inappropriateness pierce the momentary calm of an obscure twist of phrase. . . ." (220) Here is the long meditative essay in poetry called "Artifice of Absorption," which is a reading of language poetries under the certain critical rubrics (rhetoricity, hyperattentiveness, absorption) priming for "a poem that can / absorb its readers in something other than static— / call it ecstatic, or u-topia, or say / it is the unnameable that writing constantly / names. To do this requires something strange & jolting. . . ." This "apoetics" offers a thoroughly admirable and elegant jolt.

* * *

For about a year, I have been struggling with Tom Mendel's *Realism* (Burning Deck Press, 1991—a riveting cover by Norma Cole). It's strange—this book both attracts and baffles me. It seemed worth recording the bemusement—the prose works ("The Shade" or "Jews in Hell" or "Realism") are especially distinctive, filled with a shadow play of strain about the oblique relation of language and reality, also with sardonic idioms in shadowy personae: "People say a verb involves action: let them talk" (44) These works seem often to have purgatorial themes, people caught at the crossing points of terrific vectors of time and space, not sure of their responsibilities ("From minds gingerly emerge terms of fate, facts and sentences singly." 60), whether they matter, or whether they are getting it either: "So much is certain, and so much more is not. If you do not wish to join me, to look through the keyhole again and again, place your equipment in a build-up of words. In this way will we destroy what we have labored in vain to extinguish by more direct means—our memories." (19) The cool grief-stricken implacability of this is distinctive. Seeing, trying to say, just being there "one falters, sorry, one alters" (61); Mandel's play with this deliberate slip says one can barely face the world of things, much less the world of language in which to try to respond or record. Language itself is a purgatorial experience: "a letter is a darkness. . ." (64), place where hopes are tempered, and where penance is done.

* * *

A short hand-printed book from Gil Ott (*Wheel,* Chax Press, 1992) meditates writing practices in an interesting split screen of short poem and prose passage each themselves fragmentary and discontinuous, before the work breaks into something closer to a manifesto:

with dignity the sentence
coupled in ways
to retain clarity characteristic
of a seed,

yet a lot of people seem to be scapegoated, and self-divided (as the very strong woodcuts, also by Ott, tell). So the poem seems to hover between adequacy with the politics of the poetic act and bafflement with it: "Simple simple. I came to question // history exclude the vanquished, each false // mountain or tree, or species // manufactured item. . ." is a statement seemingly modified by the last words: "how to speak / knocked out of me // furrows, which, after rain, lost // lay down in."

* * *

Another poet whose work is presented with his own images is Piotr Sommer, with a first book in English (from Polish) called *Things to Translate and Other Poems* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1991); it is self-translated, with a long and distinguished list of helpers. The book selects of mainly lyric work from 1980–89 and some haunting photographs of the corners of old woodland houses, seen from the outside, looming, with innocent but amazing traces of human presence (comforters airing out a window, or a child in a stroller pushed by another child). Sommer has a connoisseur's eye for the uncanny in the ordinary. Things need to be translated because they are so ordinary we cannot register them, yet they gleam with aura. We don't see the aura until these strange feelings are "translated"—into poems. So one reads the allegorical starkness of "'What's going on now?' /. . .It was a question to the world. // For a long time I said nothing, / but now the world / spoke through me." What the world says in every instance—intimate, particular, minor (about walking, buying cigarettes, washing dishes, meditating family life) also comes to seem monumental without losing the small, tender distinctiveness of what people are and what they bear. The effect and the scale are somewhat like Reznikoff or Oppen. Translation as a metaphor is manifest as well because value is seen just at the moment of passage elsewhere—sometimes into death, sometimes from event to memory, but always from one word to another, in the choice between words in some human (humane) space, in which it is the purpose of these works to "reside," or, rather, translated more simply, to "live."

* * *

Another book that, like Bernstein's needs to be in everyone's library is Allen Grossman's *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and*

Writers (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). This is a two part "anatomy." The first consists of a "fully collaborative" set of mutual conversations at ten year intervals between mentor (Grossman) and ephebe or youth (Mark Halliday, an APR-type poet). It is a pedagogic dialogue of a Socratic kind with a real inequality between the discussants; it is offered as an example of (in Grossman's excellent term) a "hermeneutic friendship" of caring interchange, of helping the other to meaning (369). Part of the frustration with both poets, but especially Grossman (who has more at stake) is the heavily canonical—romantic canonical—range of his poetic interests. It is the same kind of point that Marjorie Perloff made about a recent anthology called *Lyric Poetry: Beyond the New Criticism* in an essay in *Poetic License*. A catalogue of the poets discussed reveals a great de-emphasis on modernism of the "aperture" (Grossman's terms). He stops with Whitman. I am astonished he doesn't even get to Robert Duncan—odic, romantic, altogether his kind of poetry. It may be pert of me, but I'd love to offer Grossman a serious reading list in contemporary writing, not large but pointed. It would include all of George Oppen, some Charles Reznikoff, some Jackson Mac Low, Robert Creeley, some Frank O'Hara, Michael Palmer (a poet whose very Frenchness and link to Stevens might be the first to engage him), the above-mentioned Beverly Dahlen, Jerome Rothenberg's "Khurbn." (I'm not trying to leave you all off the list—I'm trying to be pedagogic and directed.) Maybe Grossman has tried, and hates it all so much he is too polite to mention his disgust, but I can hardly believe he hears APR-contemporary as poetry of the depth and seriousness that otherwise engages him. And some more knowledge would save the book from a contrast of closed and open forms which states that the possibility of a poetry of "flowing with" the world is perhaps "unactual." (332) This doesn't know enough about the poetics of metonymy, nor of its interest in going beyond "natural privilege" of link with the cosmos, into the issue of language. This is a lack that hardly disqualifies the book, which is rich and brilliant in ways I will try to outline, but it creates a stain of suspicion of some of its stances.

The second part of the book is the real heart of the matter: a noble work called "Summa Lyrica: A Primer of the Commonplaces in Speculative Poetics." Numbered philosophic meditations, fully fledged argument, some gnomic aphorisms, some odic prose poems, many scholia all speaking from the center of culture, and all presented as trans-historical absolutes (i.e. commonplaces), as if "poetry" were one seamless enterprise, from earliest times to our own. It's not an opinion I hold about poetry, but it is one a person might yearn to credit. Because the voice and the arguments are vatic, encompassing, observant, and categorical, this section, like a rising tide, carries all ships. The range of reference is impressive, and the topics covered enrich any reader: prosodies vertical

and horizontal, closed and open form, silence and language, poet and Beloved, mother and father, the nature of poetic language—finite and infinite, cultural stances like muse, bridegroom, guest, the bond of the poem and death, Judaic radical humanism and Hellenic aesthetic humanism.

One of the main subtexts for me involved gender, because lyric poetry makes many assumptions about femaleness, the role of the Beloved and the muse. There were many places at which I had questions about the assumption of universality, or questions about the way a female poet might negotiate the poetic tradition as Grossman presents it. For example, if the poetic speaker is "the archetypal senex puer" (221), where is the female? Who functions as the Beloved for the female poet? If "the speaker of a poem is in the presence of the fathers" (258), how may a woman poet negotiate that place? If "the speaker in the poem is the man who has usurped the right of the first night in which he was conceived," where does the woman poet belong? (278) The materials on mother and father as positions in language are fascinating, but always "the child is the person as speaker who goes through his growth." (359) Is "his" as a pronoun really meant to incorporate "her"? These are not meant to be carping questions from a limited or marginalized place, but rather questions that pierce the heart of Grossman's claim of universalism. If the theory does not account for female (i.e. socially changing) positions in language, or see that there could be historical differences and specific conditions in the access of women (and others) to poetic speech, a big hole is put in the claim of trans-historical commonplaces. Women, and others (e.g. non-hegemonic races) whose access to literary writing has normally been socially mediated or hurdle-laden (see Woolf's metaphor in *A Room of One's Own),* may learn all this "common knowledge" about poetry, but may learn it socially, not existentially, not as a condition of being invested with the poetic spirit (as Grossman seems to claim). This book is worth both argument and admiration. It is not only essentialist, and frustrating; it is essential, and pleasure-giving.

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

The second edition of MILTON KESSLER'S *The Grand Concourse* will appear in 1993; *Riding First Car* will be available in a very limited edition with graphics in 1993. WILL ALEXANDER is currently reading Michel Leiris, Martin Bernal, and Ivan Van Sertime; he is also drawing and working on new compositions in pastel. Having completed his *Trilce* translation, now available through Marsilio, NYC, CLAYTON ESHLEMAN is working on "Under World Arrest," to be published by Black Sparrow in 1993. MELVIN EDWARDS shows at CDS Gallery in NYC; in 1993 he will have a retrospective exhibition at SUNY-Purchase. JAYNE CORTEZ is the author of eight books and has also produced five recordings of poetry. Her most recent book is *Poetic Magnetic;* her latest recording, *Everywhere Drums.* JORGE SANTIAGO PEREDNIK's most recent book of poetry is *El Fin del No* (Buenos Aires: Editorial El Caldero, 1991). MOLLY WEIGEL is working on an anthology in translation of the Argentine group *XUL.* ANDREW SCHELLING is on the faculty of the Naropa Institute. His translation of the medieval Hindi poet Mirabai is forthcoming. His *Dropping the Bow,* translations from classical Sanskrit poetry, won the Academy of American Poets award in translation. ELIOT WEINBERGER'S *Outside Stories* has just been published by New Directions. PAUL VIOLI's next book is *The Curious Builder,* Hanging Loose Press, fall 1992. DAN FEATHERSTON, who works at The Shaman Drum Bookstore in Ann Arbor, is currently traveling in Mexico. JAMES IRBY teaches Latin American Literature at Princeton University. Other Lezama Lima translations by him have appeared in *Sulfurs* 3, 24 and 25. BARBARA GUEST's *The Altos,* in collaboration with artist Richard Tattle, has recently been published by Limestone Press. Her *Defensive Rapture,* the title poem of which appeared in *Sulfur,* will be published by Sun & Moon. HERBERT LUST has authored various art history books on Giacometti and Surrealist artists, and a novel, *Violence & Defiance.* MICHAEL GIZZI'S most recent books are *Continental Harmony* (see the Taffy Martin review in this issue) and *Vers d'Aigrefin* (Les Cahiers de Royaumont). HUGH SEIDMAN's latest book, *People Live, They Have Lives,* will be published this fall by the Miami University Press (Oxford, Ohio). ED SANDERS' next collection of poetry, *Hymn to the Rebel Cafe,* will

be published by Black Sparrow in 1993. His musical drama, *Cassandra,* in Greek and English, based on texts by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Homer, had its premiere performance at River Arts in Woodstock, summer 1992. JACKSON MAC LOW and his wife, Anne Tardos, taught in Vienna in April 1992 at the Schule für Dichtung in Vien, a new writing school. His last book was *Twenties: 100 poems* (Roof, 1991). His long-awaited *Pieces o' Six: 33 poems in prose* will appear soon from Sun & Moon. JOHN TAGGART has completed a series of meditations on the reading process and the work of Edward Hopper which will be published under the title *Remaining in Light: Ant Meditations on a Painting by Edward Hopper* by the SUNY Press next year. His *Songs of Degrees: Essays on Contemporary Poetry & Poetics* will also be published next year by the University of Alabama Press. ROBERT C. MORGAN is an artist, critic, poet, curator, and art historian who lives and works in NYC. He has written for *Tema Celeste, Art News, Lapiz,* and other journals. He is currently preparing two books on the history of criticism of conceptual art and an anthology of contemporary art criticism. KARIN LESSING has lived for many years in the French Vaucluse. PAUL CHRISTENSEN'S most recent book is *Minding the Underworld: Clayton Eshleman and Late Postmodernism* (Black Sparrow, 1991). MAXINE CHERNOFF is the author of a novel, *Plain Grief,* and a book of short stories, *Bop.* Her most recent book of poems is *Leap Year Day: New & Selected Poetry.* She co-edits *New American Writing.* CONNIE DEANOVICH is editor of *B City* magazine and the recipient of a GE Award for Younger Writers. Her work appears in the anthology *Under 35: The New Generation of American Poets* (Anchor/Doubleday). CARL RAKOSI'S *Collected Poems* were brought out by the National Poetry Foundation in 1986 and his *Collected Prose* in 1983. A volume of critical essays on his work is due later this year in the Man And Poet series of The National Poetry Foundation. SPENCER SELBY'S most recent book is *House of Before,* Potes & Poets, 1991. CLARK COOLIDGE'S latest books are *Odes of Roba* and *The Book of During,* both published by The Figures. JANET KAUFFMAN'S novel *The Body in Four Parts* will be published by Greywolf, spring 1993. JULIA BALLERINI'S essays and reviews have appeared in various magazines such as *Art in America* and in anthologies. She is presently writing a book on nineteenth-century travel photography and is assistant professor in the Department of Art History at the University of Hartford. BEVERLY ALLEN, an associate professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Syracuse University, writes that *"Idioma* is the third in a 'false trilogy,' as Zanzotto puts it, having roughly to do with the conditions of impossibility that accrue to language and our existence within and through it *anyway. Idioma* comes home to the village, and the village is Pieve di Soligo, and that's where the poet has always lived, given his difficulties with leaving that reach pathological proportions (he told me on the phone

yesterday that he can barely even get to Milan any more)." PETER REDGROVE is a poet, novelist, playwright and co-author (with his wife Penelope Shuttle) of *The Wise Wound,* a revolutionary study of the human fertility cycle. He lives in Cornwall. AVERY E.D. BURNS lives in San Francisco and edits the magazine *lyric&*. CAROL MAIER is presently translating Rosa Chacel's novel, *Memoirs of Leticia Valle*. MARJORIE PERLOFF'S most recent book is *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*. She is currently editing a collection of essays on John Cage. RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS has an article on Lorine Neidecker in *The Kenyon Review*. *Drafts 3-14* (Potes & Poets) is her most recent book of poetry.

SULFUR 33: INTO THE PAST

One of the great projects of 20th-century poetry has been the recovery, invention and reinvention of the past: the "modern" is a set of songlines through medieval Provence and T'ang China, Mayas and Florentines, the English Metaphysicals or the singers of Gilgamesh. But in recent years the tracks have been vanishing: the presence of the past has seemed to slip out of the present. In the poetry magazines, it's as though the creation of the universe occurred around 1910—before that, the great abyss.

To begin to talk about the past again, *Sulfur* 33 (Fall 1993) will be a special issue, guest-edited by Eliot Weinberger, devoted entirely to what happened—and is still happening—before. It will include:

1. Essays on/responses to poets, poetries, histories, cultures.
2. Translations from anywhere.
3. "Tests" of poetry or translation: comparisons of translations of the same poem, or of various poems in English.
4. Small anthologies of poems (or historical translations) in English—neglected poems/poets, "gists & piths" of better-known poets, etc.—with or without commentary.
5. Contemporary (new) poems occurring out of (in to) historical texts/moments.
6. Ethnopoetics, in all its manifestations.
7. Reviews of recent books of/on historical poets.
8. Whatever isn't covered above.

The issue is open to anything and anyone. The only guideline is that c. 1900 is the cut-off date. (Welcome too, besides original material, are tips on texts worth reprinting.)

Final deadline is May 1, 1993. Inquiries, suggestions, proposals, should be sent as soon as possible. All correspondence on this issue: Eliot Weinberger, 202 West 10th Street, New York, NY 10014.

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Editor
Clayton Eshleman

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Michael Palmer
Eliot Weinberger
Pamela Wye

Correspondents
Charles Bernstein
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Clark Coolidge
Marjorie Perloff
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—George Butterick

Sulfur must certainly be the most important literary magazine which has explored and extended the boundaries of poetry. Eshleman has a nose for smelling out what is going to happen next in the ceaseless evolution of the living art.

—James Laughlin

In an era of literary conservatism and sectarianism, the broad commitment of *Sulfur* to both literary excellence and a broad interdisciplinary, unbought humanistic engagement with the art of poetry has been invaluable. Its critical articles have been the sharpest going over the last several years.

—Gary Snyder

Founded at the California Institute of Technology in 1981, *Sulfur* magazine is now based at Eastern Michigan University. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts since 1983, and winner of four General Electric Foundation Awards for Younger Writers, it is an international magazine of poetry and poetics, archetypal psychology, Paleolithic imagination, artwork and art criticism, translations and archival materials. Some of our featured contributors have been: Artaud, Pound, Golub, Vallejo, Olson, Niedecker, Riding, Césaire, Kitaj, and Hillman. We appear twice a year (April and November) in issues of 250 pages. Current subscription rates: $13 for 2 issues for individuals ($19 for institutions). Single copies are $8.00. Numbers 1, 15, 17 and 19 are only available in complete sets (1–31) at $270.00.

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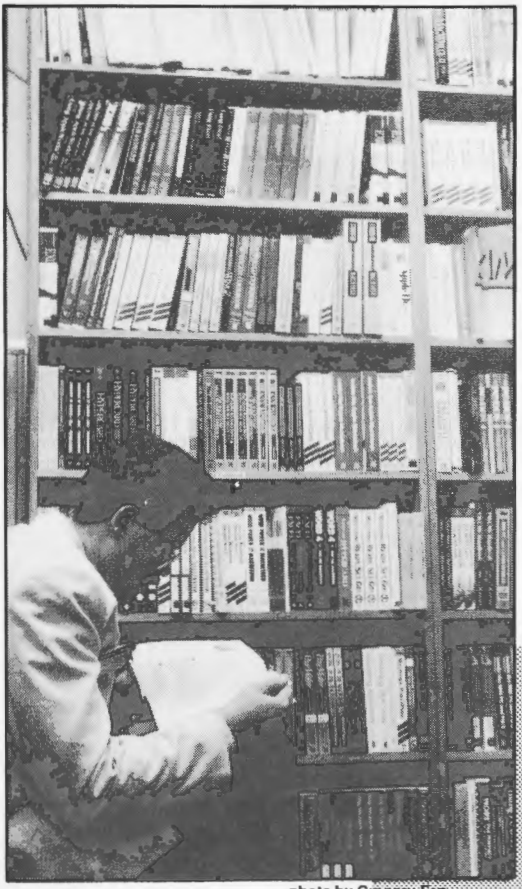

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Sulfur

SPRING 1993

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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Editorial Assistant	PAMELA ACCETTA

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER: Pamela Wye, 1993

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CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
AN EDITORIAL NOTE

Several years ago, I noticed that Michel Deguy's Paris-based magazine, *Poésie*, had done a special issue based entirely on work by the editorial staff, or the masthead. This was the first time I had seen a "masthead issue," and it struck me as an interesting idea, at least one time in a magazine's run. With the exception of a few additions and disappearances, *Sulfur's* masthead has been pretty stable for the past 7 years—a fact I am very proud of. As any regular reader knows, while we all to varying degrees overlap in our senses of what is important in writing and art today, we also have our differences, and, as a group, do not constitute a movement, or even an agreed-upon platform. Because I was on sabbatical leave, fall 1992, I thought it would be a good time to take a vacation from the daily reading of submitted manuscripts, and invite the 11 people who make up *Sulfur's* masthead to offer a 20-page section of either their own work, or work they themselves would choose. This way, potential contributors can see, in ample measure, what we are doing and what we stand for (I have always felt that literary magazine editors have a responsibility to make some of their work available in their magazine on an ongoing basis so as to not stand behind the poesis that their editorial work is, or is not, shaping).

The only non-masthead material in the front part of *Sulfur* #32 is some work by Allen Ginsberg, given to me at Naropa this past summer. All of us at *Sulfur* thought it would be a nice idea to include it now and not hold it until the next regular issue (#34—following Eliot Weinberger's issue, #33, on The Past).

This might be a good spot to clear up something that seems to have been misunderstood by a number of people throughout *Sulfur's* 12 year run: while some of the material in each issue is by various members of the masthead, and while a few things in each issue have been asked for, the magazine is quite open to so-called non-solicited material. A careful reader will notice that in nearly every issue there are several completely new names, and this is because all of us at *Sulfur* believe that one of the key purposes of the magazine is to be open to the work of the young and/or unknown. This includes noticings and brief book reviews too, and I would

especially encourage young writers to query us about commentary they would like to do.

In an attempt to raise some money for advertising, we sent out a donation letter a couple months ago to many of our subscribers and contributors. The result has been heartening, and will enable us to take out some subscription ads in 1993. I would like to thank the following people or organizations here, at this time:

Norma Cole
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CHARLES BERNSTEIN

REZNIKOFF'S NEARNESS

I.

1. Charles Reznikoff was born in Brooklyn in 1894. The date is interesting because Reznikoff is somewhat older than the poets of the "second wave" of radical modernism, with whom he is often associated. Zukofsky, for example, was born in 1904, Oppen in 1908, Bunting in 1900, Riding in 1901, Hughes in 1902, while Toomer was born in the same year as Reznikoff. Sterling Brown, with whom Reznikoff shared the great project of using the American historical record of injustice and social barbarism as a primary subject, was born seven years after him.

2. Reznikoff is a bridge figure between Williams, the poet he most resembles, and a decade older than he, and the poets born at the turn of the century, a decade after him. Like Williams, he came from a family in which English was not a native tongue. His parents (like my own grandparents) came from Russia, sometime after 1881; his paternal grandparents joined the family somewhat later.

His mother's father, Ezekiel, never made it to the New World, having died before Reznikoff was born. Ezekiel, a cattle and wheat broker, had written Hebrew verse on his travels. Just after he died his wife destroyed all trace of his writings, fearing his manuscripts might contain material that would create trouble for the family if discovered by the Tzarist authorities.

The destruction of his grandfather's poetry is an emblematic story for Reznikoff and he comes back to it in two poems, the first opening *By the Well of Living and Seeing:*

> My grandfather, dead long before I was born,
> died among strangers; and all the verse he wrote
> was lost—
> except for what
> still speaks through me
> as mine.[1]

The poetic or psychic economy suggested here helps to explain Reznikoff's resolve to continue with his work in the face of intense waves of

indifference, indeed his resolve to ensure that his own verse would not disappear entirely: "I would leave no writing of mine, / if I could help it, / to the mercy of those who loved me."[2] Reznikoff's work echoes this subtext in a number of ways: the poems are an act of recovery—where recovery becomes a project of immense proportion far beyond this initial point of focus. A few times, the poems register the difficulty of this recovery in terms of the poet's loss, or exile from, Hebrew, a language he does not really know (Reznikoff's parents would have spoken Yiddish and increasingly English), but which seems part of his identity.

Reznikoff tells the tale of his parents' life in Russia and in their painfully difficult work in the New York rag trade in scrupulous and informative detail in two remarkable "autobiographical" works, "Early History of a Seamstress" and "Early History of Sewing Machine Operator," as well as in his own continuation of their story in "Needle Trade."[3]

3. Reznikoff attended Boys High School in Brooklyn and from 1910-1911 went to the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri. During the following year, he worked as a salesman for his parents' millinery business. But in 1912, remembering that Heine (the reference may at first seem peculiar but begins to make sense) had gone to law school, enrolled at NYU. Reznikoff graduated law school in 1916 and was admitted to the bar the same year.

4. Legal studies provided Reznikoff a sharp contrast to the poetics of metaphysical and Symbolic overtone, of fashionable literary conceits and static ornamentation. Indeed, legal argument provided an analogue for the poetic principles he did find interesting, such as the "brand new verse" of Pound and H.D., which he read in *Poetry* when he was 21 and studying law.[4] It was at this time that he first formulated a poetics that emphasized "the pithy, the necessary, the clear, and plain" [II: 172], principles that, like most of his statements of poetics, stressed what he was breaking away from (the influence of Pound is unmistakable) more than the new poetic space he was inventing.

Remembering his years at law school, Reznikoff writes:

> I found it delightful
> to climb those green heights,
> to bathe in the clear waters of reason
> to use words for their daylight meaning
> and not as prisms
> playing with the rainbows of connotation:
> . . . .
> I had been bothered by a secret weariness
> with meter and regular stanzas

grown a little stale. The smooth lines and rhymes
seemed to me affected, a false stress on words and syllables—
fake flowers
in the streets which I walked
. . . .
The brand new verse some Americans were beginning to write—
after the French "free verse" perhaps
. . . .
seemed to me, when I first read it
right:
not cut to patterns, however cleverly,
nor poured into ready molds.[5]

5. After a very brief attempt to start a law practice, Reznikoff returned to millinery sales, saying his "mind was free" as he waited for hours to see the buyers at Macy's.

Reznikoff claims to have been very good at selling ladies' hats, although his wife, Marie Syrkin, in her marvelous memoir, demurs on this point.[6]

In 1918, *Rhythms*, Reznikoff's first book, was privately printed and distributed—just one year after Pound's first *Cantos*. Reznikoff kept in mind the fate of his grandfather's poetry in choosing to arrange for the printing on his own. He also showed an independence from literary fashion and career that would mark his entire life.

Two years later, in 1920, Samuel Roth published his *Poems* in an edition of 250.

6. In 1927, Reznikoff bought his own press, setting the type and printing *Five Groups of Verse* in an edition of 375 copies, and later *Nine Plays* in an edition of 400 copies. During this time, he was able to stop working entirely, living on a very modest income of $25 per week from his parents.

7. Reznikoff seemed to accept the fact that there was, and would be, little interest in his poetry. But by the late 1920s he had met Zukofsky and George and Mary Oppen; they formed not a school but a small circle of support and mutual interest in each other's work—there was, for a while, a pool of light in a world of poetic darkness:

against the darkness:
a quadrangle of light[7]

8. In 1927 and 1928, Ezra Pound had included in his magazine *The Exile* poems by Williams and Zukofsky, McAlmon and Rakosi, as well as

Reznikoff. In '28, Pound wrote Zukofsky that he ought to bring together a group of younger poets.[8]

In February 1931, Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* published a special issue edited by Zukofsky that began with a short statement, "Program 'Objectivists' 1931" immediately followed by an essay entitled "Sincerity and Objectification with Special Reference to Charles Reznikoff." As compared to the far longer manuscript version, the published essay cut references to Reznikoff's neglect and to his plays, altogether eliminating about half the original citations to Reznikoff's work; this process of elimination was radically accelerated in the intervening years so that in Zukofsky's collected essays, *Prepositions* (1977), all references to Reznikoff are removed for the final, citationless, distillation of Zukofsky's thought, now titled simply "An Objective."[9] Reznikoff was not alone in his obsession to cut and keep cutting.

From 1931 to 1932, the Oppens published three books (Pound, Williams, and Zukofsky's *An "Objectivists" Anthology)* under the imprint, To Publishers, with Zukofsky as the press editor.

In 1934, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and the Oppens founded the Objectivist Press, with the advice of Williams and Pound. That first year they published Williams's *Collected Poems,* edited by Zukofsky with an introduction by Stevens, in an edition of 500 copies. Williams put up $250 of which $150 was refunded.[10] Reznikoff was much surprised to find their first book reviewed by *The New York Times;* it sold better than expected. In 1934, the Objectivist Press also published Oppen's *Discrete Series;* after that, Oppen stopped writing for 20 years. Finally, in the same year, the press published the initial installment of Reznikoff's *Testimony,* with an introduction by Kenneth Burke, in an edition of 200 copies.

Three years later, in 1937, New Directions was founded, and began publishing Pound, Williams, and others.

9. Reznikoff met Marie Syrkin in 1929 and they were married the next year.

At around this time (Hindus says 1928, but Syrkin says 1930), Reznikoff's parents' business went bad and, like many other small businesses during the Depression, they went into debt. Not only had he lost his meager income, but Reznikoff was now obliged to help out his family. Reluctantly, he took a job at *Corpus Juris,* a legal encyclopedia, as a copywriter. Eventually, he was fired from *Corpus Juris*. Syrkin recalls the editor telling him, "When I hire a carpenter I don't want a cabinetmaker."[11]

10. From 1938 to 1939 Reznikoff went to Hollywood for a $75 a week job as a quite peripheral writer for a movie studio where an old friend worked. This period is described in his posthumously published novel, *The Manner Music,* a book that includes prose adaptations—less musical, less shapely—of at least nine of his late poems. The novel ends with the protagonist—

an unrecognized, perhaps unrecognizable, artist—burning all of his work, again bringing to mind the destruction by fire of Reznikoff's grandfather's verse: "He tore up everything, everything he has ever written and burnt it. They found the heap of ashes next to him when they took him to the hospital."[12]

When Reznikoff returned to New York, he worked at a number of odd editorial and research jobs, including writing a history of the Jewish community of Charleston and editing the papers of Louis Marshall.

11. Between 1941 and 1959 Reznikoff did not publish any books, although he continued to work on his poems and his anti-epic, *Testimony*.

12. In 1948, Reznikoff received a letter from Williams: "A confession and an acknowledgment! In all these years that I have owned a book of yours, nineteen years! a book you gave me in 1929 I never so much opened it—except to look at it cursorily. And now, during an illness, I have read it and I am thrilled with it."[13]

13. In the 1950s, while Syrkin was teaching at Brandeis, Reznikoff became managing editor, at $100 a week, of *Jewish Frontier*, a labor Zionist monthly with which Syrkin was involved. "With no aptitude for journalism," Syrkin recalls, "he despised the facile generalizations of the craft and the superficial editorials. . .in response to a current crisis. . . . I had to contain his natural inclination to reduce pages to paragraphs and paragraphs to sentences."

The printers, however, appreciated his incredible meticulousness. "That he was a 'poet,' a designation privately equated with schlemiel, explained any failure to fit into a familiar mold."[14]

14. When he turned 68, in 1962, New Direction published a selection of his poems, *By the Waters of Manhattan*, with an introduction by C. P. Snow, and subsequently published the first volume of *Testimony*. In 1968, however, the publisher turned down the second volume of *Testimony* and Reznikoff arranged to have it printed privately in an edition of 200.

15. In 1975, Black Sparrow published *Holocaust*, based, as *Testimony*, not on firsthand reports but exclusively on court records, here from the Nuremberg and the Eichman trials.

16. In 1976, with the first volume of his *Complete Poems* in press from Black Sparrow, Charles Reznikoff died.

II.

The Abbaye de Royaumont, not far from Paris, was a center of Christendom in the thirteenth century, when it as built. During the Revolution, it sustained heavy damages and the abbey has never been fully reconstructed. In recent years Royaumont has been used as a literary, music, and business conference center.

In the Fall of 1989, Royaumont was the site for a conference on the American "Objectivist" Poets, a group more prominent in the French map of American poetry than in many of our homemade maps. The library of Royaumont, with its 40-foot ceilings and walls lined with ancient books, was an extraordinary setting for an occasion honoring four relatively obscure American poets, whose parents had come from Europe from Jewish shtetels to settle into the New World. Even more extraordinary, the conference began at sunset on the Friday night upon which fell Rosh Hashonah, the Jewish New Year.

At the invitation of Emmanuel Hocquard, who has translated Reznikoff's The Manner Music *into French, Michael Palmer, Michael Davidson, Lyn Hejinian, David Bromige, and I had come from America to speak on one or another of the "objectivists," while Carl Rakosi gave a reading and commented on many of the talks presented.*

I had brought along a tape of Reznikoff reading in 1974 at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State, along with a transcript of the 46 poems, and fragments of poems, he had selected for that reading, which I had cut and pasted together, as he must have done in constructing this sequence, from almost every section and period of his Complete Poems. *The following remarks are based on that talk.*

1. How does a poem, these poems, enter the world?

2. —Measured and scaled, particular and necessary: that would be one answer. Reznikoff's gives his own "platform as a writer of verse," as he wryly puts it in an introduction to the reading, given when he was 80, at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State:

> Salmon and red wine
> and a cake fat with raisins and nuts:
> no diet for a writer of verse
> who must learn to fast
> and drink water by measure. [15]

Reznikoff's selection, at the Poetry Center reading, of work from over 60 years of writing is a masterful weave—"mastermix"—creating not "the intricate medallions the Persians know"[16] but a discrete series of poetic

encounters that marks his work from beginning to end, without end or beginning.

3. *Rhythms,* in 1918, marks the invention of literary cubo-serialism. By cubo-seriality, I mean to identify the more discreet development that characterizes Reznikoff's work from that point 1918 on—the permutation of briefly etched, identifiable details that don't quite stand on their own and that are separated by a gap, or interval, that requires a full stop. The prefix suggests rhetorically consonant permutations of angles of view on related (or linked) subjects.

4. From his 1927 collection *Five Groups of Verse* (which included *Rhythms),* Reznikoff numbered each of his often quite tiny poems and ran them together on the page, rather than isolating each poem on its own page (as he had up to this point) or separating the poems in some other way. This very explicit, even intrusive, numbering expresses Reznikoff's radical commitment to the poetic sequence, or series, as details open to reordering. In Reznikoff, the process of composition is as much a matter of the shaping of sequences as of the creation of particular elements of the sequence: the otherwise unrepresentable (and overlooked) space between poems has become the location of the work's poesis of unfolding and refolding, separating and recongealing. In Reznikoff, the meaning of the poem is always twofold: both in the detail and in its sequence. That is, the detail works in counterpoint to its locus in a series to create the meaning of the poem.

Reading Reznikoff formally means attending to the relation of the part to the whole (and the whole to the part) in his work, along lines that also suggest the relation of the shot to the sequence (in film and photography), surface to depth (in painting but also in rhetoric), the fragment to the total (in philosophy but also in *Kabalah).*

To create the text of his 1974 reading, Reznikoff stitched together 46 individual bits and pieces. As with any work of disjunctive collage, each frame or unit recontexualizes the subsequent frame or unit. Reznikoff's "groups" (as he sometimes called them) are not governed by a principle external to the compositional process—his series are not ordered narratively, or chronologically, or historically; there is no necessarily logical or causal connection between the links of the chain. Rather, Reznikoff employs a variety of thematic and tonal shifts to create an overall "musical" arrangement, to use his own phrase for the process. What Reznikoff calls, right from the first book, "Rhythms":

> "The ceaseless weaving of the uneven water."[17]

5. There is no poet more dedicated to foregrounding the detail and the particular than Reznikoff and no poet more averse to blending these details into a consuming or totalizing form. The numbers that obtrude into the visual field of almost every page of Reznikoff's verse represent both this commitment and aversion. This is not to deny that the individual sections add up to a larger form, but to affirm that the particularity and integrity of each detail is not diminished by the newly forming whole. While this structural allegory of polis echoes through the work of several of his contemporaries, notably Williams, Oppen and Zukofsky, it is Reznikoff's tenacity combined with an uncanny lack of didacticism that especially characterizes his approach.

Reznikoff rejected the "depth" of field simulated by various realist and mimetic self-centering procedures in which each detail is subordinated to an overall image or theme or meaning. By constantly intercutting, or jump cutting, between and among and within material, the poems surface of local particularities gains primacy, in contrast to the rhetorical depth of narrative closure that is aimed for in such "epic" collage formats as *The Wasteland* and certain of the *Cantos* (not to mention more conventional poetry). Reznikoff's network of stoppages is anti-epic. It enacts an economy of perambulation and coincidence, of loss rather than accumulation (a general rather than a restricted economy in Bataille's terms).

> Scrap of paper
> blown about the street
> you would like to be cherished, I suppose,
> like a bank-note.[18]

Pound's disinterest in Reznikoff is foundational.

6. Parataxis is a manner of transition. Elements are threaded together like links on a chain, periodically rather than hierarchically ordered and without the subordination of part to whole. The *OED* defines parataxis as "the placing of propositions or clauses one after another, without indicating by connecting words the relation (of coordination or subordination) between them."

Parataxis is a grammatical state of adjacency, of being next to or side by side. Besideness. As the mind lies next to its object, or one finds oneself a neighbor in conversation, or in reflection one thought follows the next. A nonlinear network of interconnections.

7. As a term of art, adjacency is distinguished from adjoining or abutting, as land that is adjacent to a common square, but no where touches.

Reznikoff's is an art of adjacency, each frame carefully articulated and set beside the next.

8. Reznikoff's cubo-seriality is modular and multidirectional, marking a series of sites available to rearrangement in ever new constellations of occurrence. (Reznikoff's own refiguring of his lifework at the 1976 Poetry Center reading is a model for this potential for reconfiguration.) Resembling the long walks through the city he took every morning, Reznikoff's poems move from site to site without destination, each site inscribing an inhabitation, every dwelling temporary—contingent but sufficient.

> Those of us without house and ground
> who leave tomorrow
> must keep our baggage light
> a psalm, perhaps a dialogue. . .[19]

—so Reznikoff continues his "platform," as he calls it at the Poetry Center reading. "Without house and ground" hints of the wandering of exile and the absence of foundations, but this nomadic poetry refuses exile in its insistence that grounds are only and always where one sleeps, a view suggested by the poem's epigraph from the *Mishnah (Aboth* 6:4): "and on the ground shalt thou sleep and thou shalt live a life of trouble." Exile suggests expulsion from a native land, but in Reznikoff's verse the native is what lies at one's feet, ground for walking on: so no loss of prior foundations, no absent center, as in Edmond Jabès, but "finding as founding" to use Stanley Cavell's Emersonian phrase from *This New Yet Unapproachable America*.

Perhaps there are those who possess house and land, who can afford to live higher off the ground, imagining possession as a prophylactic for loss. Damage is given, not chosen. The nomad, neither uprooted or uprooting, roots around, reroutes. Reznikoff's new world is not one of absence, but neither is it one of plenty.

> Like a tree in December
> after the winds have stripped it
> leaving only trunk and limbs
> to ride and outlast
> the winter's blast.

The "writer of verse," like the nomad, "must learn to fast / and drink water by measure." Reznikoff's baggage is, literally, the *light* that emanates from conversation and song (dialogue and psalm), exactly the measures of his verse. This is a poetry not of dislocation or banishment but of the "blinding" intensities of location as relocation, relocalization.

9. A typology of Reznikoff's parataxis would begin by distinguishing his non-developmental seriality from sequential seriality, to use Joseph Conte's

terms in *Unending Design*, a distinction that is in some ways similar to that between analytic and synthetic cubism.

Certainly, the modulation of disjunctiveness between poems in a Reznikoff "group of verse" is one of the poetry's most distinctive features. As Burton Hatlen has argued, reading Reznikoff means reading each of his groups as a series, not as autonomous poems.[20] Such readings will need to take account of the fact that Reznikoff reordered the sequences of his groups in ways that underscore the modular, permutable, status of each discrete poem.

Reznikoff's groups are composed by varying the degree of continuity and discontinuity among the sections. The most typical relation between sections is one of simultaneity of occurrences, as if each poem were preceded by an implied "meanwhile."[21] However, some of the modules of a series do share thematic interconnections, with subject clusters connected by family resemblances, commonly involving a permutation of tangentially related motifs, with shifts among themes varying from slight to abrupt. Reznikoff's "Similes" (II:103:45) demonstrates this principle within a single poem, presenting four images each of which seem teasingly related to the others but which share no single stateable topic. Sometimes small thematic clusters are placed within larger nonthematic series. These may be given an overtitle—a sequence within a series—as "Winter Holidays" or "Early History of a Writer," or the cluster may simply share the same subject, as the motifs of the subway, birds, rain, and the moon identified by Hatlen in his reading of *Jerusalem the Golden*. Moreover, some of Reznikoff's works are framed by a single theme or subject, such as the Biblical studies of "Editing and Glosses" in *By the Waters of Manhattan: An Annual* (1929), or, most prominently, his books, *Testimony* and *Holocaust*, which, while thematically linked, are nonetheless serial rather than sequential.

10. Seriality encompasses a vast array of modernist and contemporary poetry, much of it better known for its nonsequentiality than Reznikoff's verse. The usefulness of the term depends on the degree to which the different types of serialism are distinguished. The early modernist history of seriality could easily start with Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1912), the most original rethinking of poetic form in the period. One might also think of the serial ordering of long individual poems in Pound's *Cantos* or Zukofsky's *"A"*. Conte identifies Williams's *Spring and All* (1923) as the prototype for serial form, noting the 27 numbered, untitled poems that are interpreted with prose improvisations. But consider also Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), with its interspersing of loosely associated poems and prose.[22]

A pre-(modern) history of the serial poem would have much to account for, including, famously, Buchner's *Wozzeck*, but equally Dickinson's fascicles—the most radical serial poems of 19th-Century America. (I keep thinking of Dickinson's lines "This world is not conclusion. / A sequel

stands beyond / Invisible as Music— / But positive, as Sound—," where *sequel* is a possible variant for *Species*.[23]) In *Emily Dickinson: Quires of Light,* Marta Werner makes a convincing case that what we now know as Dickinson's letters or prose, are, to a surprisingly large extent, better classified as serial fragments.[24] The relation of fragments to seriality leads to a further deepening of both categories; Hölderlin's late fragments would be particularly relevant to consider in this regard, especially as Adorno emphasizes the paratactic nature of his style.

During the period following the Second World War, the most influential conception of the serial poem came from Jack Spicer, who contrasted the "one night stand" of the individual poems to a composition by book in which the order of the poems, like each individual poem, is determined by "dictation." Both Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser were comrades with Spicer in this project.

Zukofsky's great cut-up collage, "Poem Beginning 'The'"—composed of 330 numbered lines, prefaced by a list of several dozen sources for the work—was written in 1926. As in much of Zukofsky's poetry, the poem's lines flow from one to next, working in counterpoint to the disjunctive nature of the sources and the numerical framing. The process of running-in such disparate material by the use of intricate syntactic, syllabic and thematic patterning, which characterizes much of Zukofsky's *"A,"* is a formal practice quite distinct from Reznikoff's cubo-seriality.[25] Many of Zukofsky's shorter poems are, like Reznikoff's, presented in numbered sequences. But unlike Reznikoff's splinters, Zukofsky's individual poems in *ALL* are longer and stand up by themselves as autonomous works. Zukofsky's short poetry, less dependent on the series, makes less of it.

More directly akin to Reznikoff's cubo-seriality is George Oppen's *Discrete Series* (1932–34); the work of Lorine Niedecker, whose discrete seriality is explicitly shown only in the most comprehensive collection of her work, *From this Condensary,* edited by Robert Bertholf; the "Love Songs" (1915-1917) of Mina Loy; and Langston Hughes's *Montage of A Dream Deferred* (1951).

More recent work that continues a poetics of adjacency, in which elements are discrete, incomplete, and recombinatory, would include—among *many* others—George Oppen's "Of Being Numerous," Robert Creeley's *Words, Pieces* and "In London"; Ron Silliman's "new," e.g., permutable, sentences; Lyn Hejinian's *The Cell,* Ted Pearson's *Evidence,* Tom Raworth's *A Serial Biography,* Ted Berrigan's "Tamborine Life," and John Ashbery's "Europe."

One criteria that usefully differentiates paratactic forms is the degree to which the parts are mobile or recombinable. On one end of the spectrum there is nonserial parataxis, bound to narrative or chronology, such as in the Homeric epics and the Bible. (There is another way of reading the Torah that suggests its nonsequential undertow: the Kabalistic practice of

gematria, invented by Abraham Abulafia in the 13th century, which involves the recombination of numerically equivalent words and in some ways resembles anagrammatic and aleatoric methods of recombination.)

A second category, in which the arrangement of the elements is intrinsic to the meaning, covers most serial poems. Further recombination is, by definition, possible without compromising the prosodic structure of the work; nonetheless the meaning of the series is dependent, to a greater or lesser extent, on the particular array or temporal ordering that had been made or the procedure that has been used. By temporal ordering, I mean works that foreground the process of composition (elements are ordered as they were written); by array—nontemporal and nonsystematic configurations of modular elements; by procedure—external or explicit principles of design used to order elements of a series.

A third category consists of modular poems that have not yet been serialized: poems in which the arrangement of elements is extrinsic. In the strictest sense, few works fit into this category since the format of books binds an order onto even the most discontinuous set of leaves. In a broader sense, there are a number of serial works that are not intended to be read only or principally in the order in which they are printed. (Serial *reading* opens all works to recombination. My favorite image of readerly seriality is David Bowie, in Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth,* watching a bank of TVs all of which were rotating their channels.) Robert Grenier's *Sentences*—500 discrete articulations each on a separate index card and housed in a blue Chinese box—is the best example I know of extrinsic seriality, though two other boxes of cards also come to mind: Jerome Rothenberg and Harris Lenowitz's *Gematria 27*(27 recombinable numeric word equivalences) and Thomas McEvilley's cubo-serial *4* (44 four-line poems). In principle, hypertext is an ideal format for this mode of composition since it allows a completely nonlinear movement from link to link: no path need be specified and each reading of the data base creates an alternative series. What's remarkable is that this structure is already a potential in Reznikoff's first book in 1918.[26]

I have in mind two other criteria for differentiating serial poems (though what good all this classification will do I can't say; likely not much): the degree of congruity or incongruity among elements of the series (this might be called coefficient of weirdness, with cubo-seriality, for example, having a low coefficient) and the extent of found or preexisting material used in the poem.

11. In Reznikoff's cubo-seriality, it's a matter of the *cut:* as in the cut of a dress or of a fabric. Also a double cutting: the shapeliness of the lines as units inside each poem (the cut of each poem, Reznikoff as miniaturist); and the rhythm between the poems (the intercutting). The numbered poem as unit, but also the line as unit: isolating / emphasizing discrete words or

word pairs, half-puns and off rhymes and echoes and repetitions; modulating—pushing against—too easy a rhythm, too quick a reading:

> Her work was to count linings—
> the day's seconds in dozens. *(Poems,* 1920; I:29:5)[27]

12. Reznikoff is "literary realist" only if one unit is considered in isolation, as has been the assumption of most readings of his work. Understood serially, in terms of their plasticity, the poems can no longer be read with the trivializing appreciation of being plain, descriptive, flat, simple, artless, and unassuming; or as being without rhetorical affect or "modernist discontinuity." Indeed, the early negative reviews of Reznikoff's works reveal a difficulty with his poetry that suggests his radical approach better than many of the more positive subsequent assessments: "a fragmentary style that annoys and bewilders," "cumulative effect. . .is promising shavings"; "He is unable to focus. . .apparent incoherence" [Malcolm Cowley]; "half-baked, [showing] a lack of development."[28]

13. Subject matter is literally *beside* the point of this formal innovation, which would be possible with different subject matter and even without explicit subject matter (as in Stein). As Reznikoff notes, "'Half the meaning [of poetry] is the music'"[29] Milton Hindus, apparently reporting on a conversation with Reznikoff, remarks: "Literature was capable of making something out of nothing (indeed, it was Flaubert's dream to write a work about 'nothing at all'); it was capable of making interesting (by the quality of its style, by its emphasis, by the purity and freshness of its language, by the depth of its feeling or thought) the most commonplace and the least exciting or unusual occurrences. . ."[30] The comparison between Reznikoff and Flaubert seems particularly apt on the question of style; it's incredible that the exquisite stylizations of Reznikoff's poems have been lost in the tendency to call him, virtually, styleless.

14. Reznikoff does speak of poetry as the communication of feeling—but he is explicit that this feeling, in an "objective" poem, is not expressed as the direct personal statement of the author.

Reznikoff's manner, or method, as he calls it: the feeling comes *indirectly* as a result of the *selection of objects* and the "music" that composes the object.[31] It is a matter of the cut and the cutting.

15. Jewish *forms* (not just themes): the idea of Jewish holiness (blessedness): in the detail, the everyday: every activity, every moment, holy: "How brilliant a green the grass is, / how blinding white the snow."[32]

In Jewish thought, the holiness of the ordinary can be traced to the 18th-century founder of Hasidism, Israel Baal Shem, as well as further back

to earlier Jewish mystics.[33] In orthodox Judaism, as in other orthodox religions, the holy is external, graspable, if at all, only through law and ritual; it is an "object of dogmatic knowledge" as Gershom Scholem puts it (p. 10). In Jewish mysticism, holiness is present in everyday—"low"—activities and not separated out to particular sites, such as the synagogue, or to particular times, such as the High Holy Days. —Just as we might say, following Reznikoff (or Duchamp), that the aesthetic is not confined to the "beauty" of traditional forms, but is fully present in the quotidian. Kabalism is anti-dualistic, seeking to break down the distinction between God in Itself (God on high, set apart) and God in its appearance, in its immanence (in the low, a part). *There is no separation:* for holiness is found in the most common deeds and language, the most base and vulgar acts: the holiness of walking, the holiness of drinking, the holiness of sitting, the holiness of talking, the holiness of looking, the holiness of touching, the holiness of witness:

> Not because of victories
> I sing
> having none,
> but for the common sunshine,
> the breeze,
> the largess of the spring. . .
>
> not for a seat upon the dais
> but at the common table.[34]

Allen Ginsberg's litany of "holy"s in "Footnote to Howl" invokes the holiness of the common—"The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy! / Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! everyday is in eternity. . . / The bum's as holy as the seraphim!"[35]; indeed, I would suggest that Ginsberg's poetics derive equally from Blake, Whitman, and Reznikoff—an interesting trio (even if this extravagance conflates Williams with Reznikoff).

16. Gershom Scholem points out that a positive attitude toward language distinguishes Kabalism from other mystical traditions:

> Kabalists who differ in almost everything else are at one in regarding language as something more precious than an inadequate instrument for contact between human beings. To them, Hebrew, the holy tongue, is not simply a means of expressing certain thoughts, born out of a certain convention and having a purely conventional character. . .Language in its purest form, that is, Hebrew. . .reflects the fundamental

spiritual nature of the world. . .Man's common language. . .
reflects the creative language of God. (p. 17)

17. It comes to this question: what is the status of the detail, the particular in this work? Why is it so important? For Reznikoff, as for Williams, the detail is not a "luminous particular" in Pound's sense—not extraordinary but exactly ordinary, even if indeed luminous. So, then, why this particular detail, and then that one?

Metonymy: the fragment as substitute for, hinting at, something else, something that only it can stand for, is an instance of—a manifestation or emanation. The part for the (w) holy.

Witness of the detail understood as metonymic.

Scholem, again, is a useful guide. Kabalism rejects the allegorical for the symbolic, where allegory—"the representation of an expressible something by another expressible something"—is akin to the literary conceits and Symbolism that Reznikoff rejected. In contrast, "the mystical symbol is an expressible sensation of something which lies beyond the sphere of expression. . .Every living thing is endlessly correlated with the whole of creation. . .everything mirrors everything else" (p. 27)

Reznikoff, a secular poet refreshed by "the clear waters of reason," committed "to use words for their daylight meaning" is no mystic, if mysticism is understood as elevating his work above "the common table," as he puts it in a poem entitled "Te Deum." Reznikoff is not a poet of the ecstatic, directed to the beyond, but a poet of the near, the close at hand: of a returning to oneself as to the world.

18. Fragment as shard—of a broken or cracked totality that cannot be represented in it's totality (the taboo against graven images) but only as splinters (of light), details. ". . .but the cracked glass held in the frame."[36]

19. The ordinary, the everyday, the common, the neglected, the disregarded / unacknowledged as the site of Paradise *(There is no other—only recover): Arts de faire* the art of doing, as in, *The Practice of Everyday Life:*

As I was wondering with my unhappy thoughts,
I looked and saw
that I had come into a sunny place
familiar and yet strange.
"Where am I?" I asked a stranger. "Paradise."
"Can this be Paradise?" I asked surprised,
for there were motor-cars and factories.

> "It is," he answered. "This is the sun that shone on Adam once the very wind that blew upon him too."[37]

Looked and saw: it is this twofold action that the poems constantly replay; looking is never enough, for it shows only what can be seen by using light; in contrast, the world may be beheld, beholded—held, cradled, rocked. The very wind.

20. First-generation immigrant to America not as exile (as it was for Jabès coming to France: Europe already "inhabited") but as founder—one who finds/inhabits and one who makes new a language (a new world). It is Reznikoff's mother who says, "We are a lost generation. . .It is for our children to do what they can."[38] For Reznikoff, finding as founding means finding as foundering (to fall to the ground, to come to grief).

21. The recovery of the ordinary: then was it lost?

22. NOT flatness or absence of rhetoric but. . .a *nearness* to the world not seen as "nature" but as social (urban). Materials of the world at hand, as found: *words* as materials.

Not, that is, reports of things seen (narrow definition of the "objectivist" as ocular or transparent imagism) but bearing witness to things not seen, overlooked. Entering into the word as a descent, not (Idealized) ascent, to borrow Simone Well's terms.

23.

> *Hanukkah*
> In a world where each man must be of use
> and each thing useful, the rebellious Jews
> light not one light but eight—
> not to see by but to look at.[39]

Delight. Finding this light in. "Not to see by but to look at" in multiple, serial array. Not sight but display. A Festival of lights.

24. "In *Testimony,*" Reznikoff tells an interviewer, "the speakers whose words I use are all giving testimony about what they actually lived through. The testimony is that of a witness in court—*not a statement of what he felt but of what he heard or saw.*[40] In "First, there is the Need," Reznikoff writes:

> With respect to the treatment of subject matter in verse and the use of the term "objectivist" and "objectivism," let me again refer to the rules with respect to testimony in a court of law. Evidence to be admissible in a trial cannot state conclusions

> of fact: it must state the facts themselves. For example, a witness in an action for negligence cannot say: the man injured was negligent crossing the street. He must limit himself to a description of how the man crossed. . .The conclusions of fact are for the jury and let us add, in our case, for the reader. (p. 8)

Philosophically, however, description is always an epistemological question: the *act* of describing constitutes what is described; this act is never neutral. Witnessing is less a matter of "sight" than of action, not static but dynamic. In Reznikoff, witnessing opposes the predawn, preprocessed conclusion: it *unfolds.*

25. Witness versus distance versus assimilation versus exile.

26. Nearness as attitude of address: not isolated, deanimated "images" of distantiated ocular evidence. The *intimacy* of address, the fondling/comment/intrusion into the "material" is a nearing toward a dwelling, making an habitation:

> Rails in the subway,
> what did you know of happiness,
> when you were ore in the earth;
> now the electric lights shine upon you.[41]

In the Dembo interview (p. 110), Reznikoff reports that a Japanese listener had questioned the last line of one of his poems, presumably because it violated the ideal of Haiku—a violation that is just the point of his practice of comment on or interference into, the scene:

> What are you doing in our street among the automobiles, horse?
> How are your cousins, the centaur and the unicorn?[42]

Just as the absence of the first-person pronoun in this poem marks its break from traditional expressive poetry, so the use of the second-person pronoun marks its break from an ocular imagism.

27. The poetics of adjacency are aversive detachment and irony associated with the "high" modernism of Eliot, or, more accurately, the tradition of Eliot. Are you apart from the language or a part of it?—What we do is to take back language from symbolic allusions and metaphysical contraptions. Yet this swings back to the question of exile, as Reznikoff laments his exile from Hebrew in his most Jabèsian moment:

How difficult for me is Hebrew:
even the Hebrew for *mother,* for *bread,* for *sun*
is foreign. How far have I been exiled, Zion.[43]

To be exiled from one's language is to be lost as a son or daughter, to be a foreigner in one's own tongue, as Jabès says the writer, as Jew, is exiled even in her own language. Since the Jewish tradition imparts to the word a fundamental spiritual nature, this exile from a language that one has never learned suggests the deepest sense of spiritual disconnectedness. Yet the poem also touches on the idea, fundamental to anti-semiticism, that all Jews, even monolingual native speakers of English or German or French, have a "hidden language" to which they owe fundamental allegiance—a belief that, if internalized by the Jew, incites self-hatred, as Sander Gilman discusses in *Jewish Self-Hatred.*

Like many of his contemporaries, Reznikoff was a second-language speaker of English and it was no doubt his newness to English that contributed to the newness of his approach to founding an American poetry broken off from Island English, forged by syntax and music previously unheard in the language. Reznikoff's poetics of location as relocalization is not a poetry of exile. Yet loss rips through this poetry, like hot water spurting from a frozen geyser.

The Hebrew of your poets, Zion,
is like oil upon a burn,
cool as oil;
after work,

the smell in the street at night
of the hedge in flower.
Like Solomon,
I have married and married the speech of strangers;
none are like you, Shulamite.[44]

28. The social engagement of the Jewish secular left meant not assuming the "social" as an abstract, static entity but as something to be located, particularized.

In the poetics of nearness, others exist prior to oneself; you do not look out onto other people as if through a preexisting subjectivity, but find whomever you may be as person, as poet, in relation to them, by virtue of your acknowledgment of their suffering, which is to say their circumstance or bearing in the world. This is the moral grounding of Reznikoff's work.

29. Vividness not as design but texture:

I have neither the time nor the weaving skills, perhaps,
for the intricate medallions the Persians know;
my rugs are the barbaric fire-worshipper's:
how blue the waters flow,
how red the fiery sun
how brilliant a green the grass is
how blinding white the snow.[45]

30. Witness as care / in-volved / as care-taken, caretaker, care in the language, for the world. Language is caretaker of the world.

31. Witness/testimony as "self-cancellation" so that the language/event speaks of/for itself (modernist autonomy), as Reznikoff remarks in "First, there is the Need," quoting an article on Zen that discusses the "forgetfulness of self" (p. 3).

Compare *Testimony: The structure of event:* constellation of particulars: picture is *produced* by this *method,* not presumed.[46]

32. Nearness/unfolding of event breaks down the subject-object split. Subject/object; observer/observed; the para-noia of the objective depersonalized gaze. "apart and alone, / beside an open window / and behind a closed door."[47]

Here these dualities collapse onto one another, the distantiation/irony is collapsed, the observer enters into the observed through a process of participatory mourning: "The room is growing dark, / but the brass knob of the closed door shines— / *ready for use.*"[48]

I would be the rock
about which the water is
flowing; and I would be the water flowing
about the rock.
And am both and neither-
being *flesh*.[49]

33. "The infinite shines through the finite and makes it more real" (Scholem, p. 28). Dickinson's "finite infinity":

There is a solitude of space
A solitude of sea
A solitude of death, but these
Society shall be
Compared with that profounder site
That polar privacy

A soul admitted to itself—
Finite Infinity.[50]

34. It's a question of the poem's attitude toward its materials: condescension, sentimentality, impersonality, identification, misidentification, detachment, erasure, appropriation, approbation, deafness, blindness, scorn, ecstasy, depression, anxiety, hypocrisy, reflection, management, control, possession, flirtatious, annihilating.

35. Serial composition, one detail adjacent to the next, one perspective permuted with another, refuses the binary. Oppen:

There are things
We live among 'and to see them
Is to know ourselves'

Occurrence, a part
Of an infinite series[51]

36. My aim not to explain the poems but to make them more opaque.

37. The sensation of not understanding, comprehending (say in Zukofsky or Stein): poems charged with the intractability, the ineffability, of the world.

I like this secret walking
in the fog;
unseen, unheard,
among the bushes
thick with drops;
the solid path invisible
a rod away—
and only the narrow present is alive.[52]

Reznikoff's very extreme attitude toward elision and condensation has the supplemental effect of producing density in exact proportion to its desire for clarity. This is not the clarity of conventional poetic or expository discourse because its poetic space has been transformed into a gravitational field in which every word matters in the sense of having matter, musical or notional weight.

In "Early History of a Writer," Reznikoff recounts how a friend had applied Kittredge's method of microanalysis to some of his early poems:

he read my verse as I had never read verse before,
scrutinizing it, phrase by phrase
and word by word, thought and image, thought and
sound. . .

Reznikoff immediately realizes that this method was similar to what he had at law school—

prying sentences open to look for the exact meaning;
weighing words to choose only those that had meat for my
purpose
and throwing the rest away as empty shells.
I, too, could scrutinize every word and phrase
as if in a document or the opinion of a judge
and listen, as well, for the tones and overtones,
leaving only the pithy, the necessary, the clear and plain.[53]

Reznikoff asks that we pry his words open, listening for the tones and overtones—a way of reading that intensifies the conflict between "the clear and plain" and "the necessary," between the accessible and the ineffable: for when words are weighed and measured for their undertones as well as their piths, the empty shells that fall away, like scales falling from "unseeing eyes," leave only the "narrow present" of the fog.

38. "A poet's words can pierce us. And that is of course *casually* connected with the use that they have in our life. And it is also connected with the way in which, conformably to this use, we let our thoughts roam up and down in the familiar surroundings of the words."[54]

39. William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein are the paradigmatic modernist poets of the ordinary. Just as Williams found the poetic in the back-lot "cinders // in which shine the broken // pieces of a green / bottle," so Stein found the poetic in the materials of the poem, "actual word stuff, not thoughts for thoughts," to use Williams's formulation.[55]

For Reznikoff, a poetry of the everyday is a poetry of the city. As he remarks in his introduction to the Poetry Center reading, his pervasive urbanism marks a decisive break with the nature poetry of the verse tradition. Moreover, Reznikoff's is a poetry of the found, a disposition apparent in the found details of the everyday that people his poems, but never more evident than in the found material of *Testimony*, Reznikoff's testament to the foundering of America and to the possibility of its founding in fondling, call it care in, the everyday.

40. I've been told that Reznikoff disliked obscurity and would certainly not have wanted his work to be characterized as obscure. Yet Reznikoff, from the beginning, seemed to expect that obscurity was the likely outcome for his poetic work and seemed to accept that with remarkable equanimity. Perhaps he understood the nature, the social structure, of obscurity better than his contemporaries. Neglect, disregard—the socially obscure, the forgotten and repressed, the overlooked—this was his subject.

Hiding in plain sight you may never be found: if sight is not to "See by but to look at," not to use but behold.

41. Reznikoff's investigations have something of the sublimity that Wittgenstein assigns to logic, but which might be assigned equally to poetry:

> . . .it is rather of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. . .as if by this end we had to hunt down new facts. . . .We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand. . .
>
> Something we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something we need to *remind* ourselves of. (And it is obviously something of which for some reason it is difficult to remind oneself.)[56]

Reznikoff's poetry reminds us of very general facts that we already knew—are in plain view—but which we have difficulty accounting for. Above all, we have difficulty accounting for the fact that the poetry is *difficult*, because it doesn't seem, at first, to be difficult at all, but patent; as if the difficulty of such patency isn't the first thing we might wish to deny (repress).

42. Reznikoff in an interview ten days before his death: "Whatever the difficulties, your business is to write what you think you should. You owe that much to yourself and to other humans, too."[57]

43. The perspective here is extreme only if it's extreme to read a poem's forms as an inextricable part of its content. Nor does it stretch the point to insist, against all odds, that Reznikoff's formal innovations are essential for understanding what his work is "about" and that to neglect these features is to repress what he has labored to say.

I've often heard Reznikoff damned with the faint praise of his accessibility, as if he is a kind of Jewish, urban Frost, or the Norman Rockwell of poetry—ashcan snapshots of city life. Ironically, it's this very surface of accessibility that has tended to dissipate interest in his work. In

the absence of recognition of the formal and phenomenological intensities, even opacities, of this work, it can seem as his detractors charge—without literary interest, pointless. [58]

If Reznikoff is accessible, it is an accessibility so fragile as to make him, for many readers, more difficult to read seriously and thoroughly than his apparently less accessible, but more often accessed, contemporaries. The history of Reznikoff's reception suggests that his work could not, except for a few initiates, be understood in its own time; or if it was understood, beyond his few serious readers, it was understood in such a way to allow it to be discounted as superficial.

The paradox is that the difficulty of his work—which is related to its understatement and subtlety, its iconoclasm and Darkness, and the freshness and originality of his music—is of a different order than the more famous "obscurities" of Pound or Eliot or Joyce, difficulties that our present habits of reading tend to valorize more than they do the kind of difficulty the poems of Charles Reznikoff surely present.

The paradox is that Reznikoff's apparent accessibility stands in the way of a recognition of the significance of his poetic achievement: if he's liked for being "easy" then he's at the same time disregarded for being insignificant. But both these approaches seem not so much to read Reznikoff as to read through him.

44. In *Reading in Detail* Naomi Schor argues that working in detail has a history of being stigmatized as feminine, which is to say, of peripheral value. Unlike the "heroic" sweep and "grandeur" of hypotactic order, detail is marginalized as ornament, blemish, weakness, deficiency, simplicity, *easy:* ultimately as disregardable as the "lost" women and men that Reznikoff refuses to thematize or caricature or stereotype. Reznikoff never states his themes in generalized, abstract terms but leaves it for his particulars, so ordered, to speak for themselves.

45. To be sure, Reznikoff's stated intentions are for "clarity" of "communication" against the "cryptic"—but his insistence is on—*above all else*—"intensity" produced by "compression" and "rhythm" (Cut and shapeliness) that is "passionate" and "musical" and *not*—in *his* words—"flat."[59] Opacity, in this sense, is the refusal of the flatness of ocular or idealist imagism: it is the opacity of the object, of objectification; just as opacity is also the antithesis of the cryptic, with its "cloying music / the hints of what poets meant / and did not quite say,"[60] the symbolic assertion of a puzzle to be deciphered: words not ciphers but things of the world to be thickened, weighted, condensed, so that they may be heard and felt.

46. Then how to understand Reznikoff's choice of recurrent, dark subject matter in his work. . .or how to understand why so much violence, so much darkness in the world?

47. "When you least expect it the lights go out. & when you least expect it, too, the lights come back on again."—Reznikoff, during the Poetry Center reading.

48. Yet flesh is opaque: when you catch it (comprehend it), it's dead.

49. *Testimony* is perhaps the darkest, and certainly most unrelenting, of modernist long poems. Reznikoff spent years in various libraries pouring over trial records from the 1890s and 1900s, selecting a few cases out of each hundred he surveyed and then styling them so as to allow the event itself to speak, as if without interference, without teller. A chronicle of industrial accidents, domestic violence, racism, *Testimony* tells the story of America's forgotten, those who suffer without redress, without name, without hope; yet the soul of these States is found in books like this; the acknowledgment of these peripheral stories turns a waste land into holy ground.[61]

Reznikoff worked on *Testimony* through the 1930s and 1940s, at a time when both Oppen and Carl Rakosi had stopped writing, in part because of the conflict they felt between their left political commitments and their poetic commitments. Perhaps *Testimony* can be seen as a labor-intensive counterpart to the lacuna in these poets' work.

Reznikoff's work is preoccupied with those left out of society, people whose lives were destroyed by things (machines, circumstances, an economy) out of their control: again, the neglected, the overlooked. His one reference to Marx is placed strikingly as the last of four poems in a series about prophecy called "Jerusalem the Golden," which is itself the final series of his book of the same title, published, significantly, in 1934 (#79; I:127-129). "Jerusalem the Golden" begins with "The Lion of Judah"—a poem in which the prophet Nathan denies the right to permanent foundation even, or already, to the Jews ("you shall not build the Lord's house / because your hands have shed much blood"). This poem, considered in the light of the first poem of *Jerusalem the Golden* ("The Hebrew of your poets, Zion / is like oil upon a burn / . . .I have married . . .the speech of strangers") suggests the intractability of the Jewish diaspora (understood, however, not as exile but a series of displacements/ replacements). In the second poem, "The Shield of David," the prophets locate "all the lights of heaven" in "the darkness of the grave," abjuring the emptiness of ritual as shells for "unseeing eyes," eyes that look but do not see: *looked and saw* the Light in the Darkness:

worship Me in righteousness;
worship me in kindness to the poor and weak,
in justice to the orphan, the widow, this stranger among you,
and in justice to him who takes hire in your hand

The third poem, a brief evocation of pantheism, is entitled "Spinoza," after the prototypical Jewish "excommunicate" or "non-Jewish Jew," in Isaac Deutcher's phrase, whose pantheism and determinism significantly prefigures historical materialism (both Marx and Spinoza are crucial sources for Zukofsky's *"A"*-9). In the last of the series, "Karl Marx," Reznikoff writes:

We shall arise while the stars are still shining. . .
to begin the work we delight in,
and no one shall tell us, Go. . .
to the shop or office you work in
to waste your life for a living. . .
there shall be bread and no one hunger for bread. . .
we shall call nothing mine—nothing for ourselves only. . .

50. Darkness and light; or dusk, when dark and light can no longer be separated—

Suddenly we noticed that we were in darkness;
so we went into the house and lit the lamp[62]

51. Thrown into the world through EVENT as TESTIMONY / TESTIMONY as EVENT, the poem merges the objective and subjective so that no polarizing can occur.

"Event" emerges as the world/word materializing process takes place.

52. *Testimony:* to found America means to find it—which means to acknowledge its roots in violence, to tell the lost stories because unless you find what is lost you can found nothing.

Against the indifference of the juridical gaze (paradigm of detachment), founding means giving witness to what is denied at the expense of the possibility of America.

In and about the house darkness lay, a black fog;
and each on his bed spoke to himself alone, making no sound

To speak out against the Dark is to make Light: this is the Poetic alchemy, call it economy, that Reznikoff enacts over and again: to recover the lost, make sound in the presence of silence, behold the Light—

53. *Testimony* as memorial: an act of grief/grieving, of mourning. The cost of life, the cost of lives lost is poetic/psychic economy, of which this an account/accounting. "No one to witness and adjust"—'cept *here.*

"Calling the lapsed Soul. . . / O Earth O Earth return."[63]

54. "Shipwreck of the singular"[64]: mourning/grief as part of the celebration of the New Year (Yom Kippur), as prerequisite for new world / new word. "America" not so much a "place" but an attitude toward language.

55. Ignored, like Stein, partly because he does not use symbological allusion or historical reference (Pound/Eliot) that require you to look elsewhere than to what is happening, Reznikoff makes the reader (not himself) into the witness of language, where events are enacted in words and we don't so much judge them as come near to them.

56. The observer and the observed meet at dusk in the midst of shadows. How can we tell the seeing from the seen, the see-er from the seer?

57. Reznikoff's Rosh Hashona poem ends this way:

> You have given us the strength
> to serve You,
> but we may serve or not
> as we please;
> not for peace nor for prosperity,
> not even for length of life, have we merited
> remembrance; remember us
> as the servants
> You have inherited. [65]

Jewishness not as "chosen" but *inherited:* can't get rid of. Jewishness in the sense of an inheriting possibility for poetry and its testimony as engaged witness that *changes*—intervenes in—what it witnesses by its care in & for the world/word.

III.[66]

January 1, 1990

Dear Jean-Paul Auxeméry,

At a party last night, for the Christian New Year, a guest brought our host, a Czechoslovakian-Jewish emigrè, a piece of the Berlin Wall. A piece of rubble, to be sure, but packaged in a brightly designed box assuring, with a red stamp, that papers attesting to the "authenticity" of the contents had been enclosed by the importers, a New Jersey firm. A small label on the top

indicated that the item had been purchased at Bloomingdale's. Here, indeed, was the essence of late, or multinational, capitalism: a commodity created, by the alchemy of packaging, from that which is intrinsically worthless. It's the sort of "symbolism" that is diametrically opposed by what you usefully call Charles Reznikoff's "ethics of style," which has at its method acknowledging the details of intrinsic value that this same culture has discarded, as by the reverse alchemy of turning things of substance into rubble by *disregard.*

I won't ever forget the first night, and first morning, of this year's Jewish New Year, where we celebrated the work of Reznikoff in a former Christian abbey at Royaumont, near Paris. I won't forget that our Reznikoff panel ended with your overwhelming reading of *Holocaust*—your French translation of a work barely known in its native land. My own intervention had focussed not only on Reznikoff's *Testimony*, as you note, but also more particularly on his *Complete Poems*. What I remember thinking was that *Holocaust* had never sounded so necessary, so appropriate (in your sense that Reznikoff always found the most "apropos" words).

Yes, I have had my difficulties with *Holocaust*—the most unrelentingly painful to read of Reznikoff's work, about the most unmitigated horror of our common, "modern" history. I think I must have said this work was about a problem *specifically* European; I could not have meant that it was "solely" European, however, since the destruction of the European Jews is of the most urgent relevance to all Americans, to all Jews, indeed to all humans. I think I must have suggested that *Holocaust* is necessarily Reznikoff's most problematic work at a technical—in the sense of aesthetic or formal—level, in the sense that no American work of poetry had found a form to adequately acknowledge that which is beyond adequate acknowledgment; so that *Holocaust* stands apart and beyond the achievement of Reznikoff's *Poems* and *Testimony*.

I say *specifically* European for a very practical, literal, reason that you, with your remarkable involvement with Olson, would certainly appreciate the implications of: Reznikoff's work, apart from *Holocaust*, and his Biblical poems and Talmudic "collages," has been a profound investigation of "American" materials: it is work immersed in the local and particular details of this place that he found himself in, first generation in his family, and also of a language, English, that was an intrinsic part of that emplacement. One of my favorite Reznikoff remarks is one he made to Marie Syrkin, his wife, in explaining why he would not go to Palestine with her in 1933; he told her "he had not yet explored Central Park to the full." Indeed Reznikoff never left the U.S. or English (an "American" English of course) in real life or in his poems—with the primary exception of *Holocaust*, which not only involved a European site or place *(lieu)* but also for the first time working with documentary materials not originally in English. For me, what was so striking about your reading of *Holocaust* in French was that one could

imagine those incidents happening near the place, even Royaumont; we were *close by* the *scene.*

Reznikoff's *Complete Poems* and *Testimony* explore the tragedy and violence that is the grounding of this Republic, call it United States. It is not a story that Americans are familiar with or, even now, ready to acknowledge. Each poem of Reznikoff, always placed in series, shocks by its recognition of something otherwise unstated or unsaid: say, unacknowledged or repressed or denied or suppressed. *Testimony,* while a litany of sorrows, finds new avenues to locate the transgression of dominance against the human spirit.

By contrast, the violence, the repulsiveness, of the incidents in *Holocaust* are always and already known, hence preclude the insinuating subtlety of *Testimony.* And, for Americans, always and already projected outward to the German, to the Nazi, to a European story. If it does not hit home, it is because the story of World War II has been the greatest source for American self-congratulation: we defeated the Nazi monsters. *NOT:* the Nazi monsters in us, which go on, largely on the loose. This is like saying, North America has not had a 20th-century war on its soil. Reznikoff shows otherwise. *The Complete Poems* and *Testimony* testify to a system of domination and disregard that has *won; Holocaust* to a system of explicit violence that, at least on the face, *lost.*

Poetry is always technical, an order of words, at least in the first instance. If I put aside, yes even disregard, the sentiment of "la raison d'un coeur noble" to reiterate these technical questions it is not without an appreciation of the integrity of the whole of Reznikoff's oeuvre or of the noble gesture of your bringing into French, into France, Reznikoff's final testament, a testament that, to be sure, does go beyond his concern for any one nation or language, a work that we can only wish he had never *had to* write.

With all best wishes,
Charles Bernstein

NOTES

1. *By the Well of the Living and Seeing* (1969), sec. I, poem #1, in *The Complete Poems of Charles Reznikoff. Vol. II,* ed. Seamus Cooney (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1977), p. 91. Subsequent references to this volume are cited in the text.

   The story of the destruction of his grandfather's poetry is part of his mother's narrative in "Early History of a Seamstress" (1929) (published as part of Reznikoff's *Family Chronicle)* and is repeated in his 1930 novel *By the Waters of Manhattan,* whose first half recasts "Early History"—less successfully to my reading—into the third person, leaving the rest almost entirely unchanged. Reznikoff alludes to the burning of his grandfather's "bulky" manuscript again a few pages before the end of the novel.

2. *By the Well of Living and Seeing,* sec. III, "Early History of a Writer," #17 (excerpt); vol. II, p. 176.

3. These three works were brought together as *Family Chronicle*—a masterpiece of historical autobiography (a genre more commonly presented today as oral history). First published in England under this title by Norman Bailey & Co., it was published by Universe Books, New York, in 1971, with a perfunctory introduction by the Jewish chronicler and humorist Harry Golden.

4. "Charles Reznikoff: A Talk with L. S. Dembo" in *Charles Reznikoff: Man and Poet*, ed. Milton Hindus (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1984), p. 98.

5. "Early History of a Writer," #16 (excerpt); II:168-171.

6. Marie Syrkin, "Charles: A Memoir," in *Man and Poet*.

7. *By the Well of Living and Seeing*, sec. II, #33; II:136.

8. Thomas Frederick Sharp, *"Objectivists" 1927–1934: A Critical History of the Work and Association of Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff*; Stanford University Ph.D. dissertation, 1982 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1984), p. 21.

9. Sharp, p. 206. *Man and Poet* reprints the *Poetry* version of the essay, pp. 377-388.

10. Sharp, p. 505.

11. Marie Syrkin, "Charles: A Memoir" in *Man and Poet*, p. 45. See also Milton Hindus, "Introduction," in *Man and Poet*.

12. Charles Reznikoff, *The Manner Music*, with an introduction by Robert Creeley (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1977), p. 128. Prose versions of Reznikoff's poems can be found beginning on pp. 15, 19, 25, 27, 28, 58, 60, 77, and 115.

13. Quoted by Hindus in *Man and Poet*, pp. 31-32.

14. Syrkin, in *Man and Poet*, pp. 53-54.

15. *Inscriptions: 1944–1956*, #23 (excerpt); II:76. This poem is also quoted below in section 10. In the poetry center reading, Reznikoff called this poem, and #21, discussed below, his "platform as a writer of verse."

16. *Inscriptions*, #21 (excerpt); II:75.

17. "Aphrodite Vrania" in *Poems*, 1920, 25; I:36.

18. *Inscriptions*, #24; II:76.

19. *Inscriptions*, #23; II:76. The final stanza of this three-stanza poem is quoted immediately below.

20. Burton Hatlen, "Objectivism in Context: Charles Reznikoff and Jewish-American Modernism," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Modern Language Association, New York, 1992.

21. What makes the poems disjunctive is that they are not, in fact, threaded together by the use of such conjunctions as "meanwhile" and "at the same time," which smooth over the synaptic break between units, that allow for the syncopation of cubo-seriality. The use of such hinges as "meanwhile" is particularly favored by John Ashbery, a device that apparently makes the marvelous incongruities of his work appealing to some critics who

dislike the more textually disruptive practices described here. Note also that Biblical and Homeric parataxis, employs frequent conjunctions to link elements, a feature that distinguishes this older form of parataxis from modernist collage and montage. A fuller discussion of this issue would need to account for the structurally related use of parallelism in tribal poetries.

22. Joseph M. Conte, *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 20. Conte defines the form of the serial poem as "both discontinuous and capable of recombination." He notes that the discontinuity of the elements of the serial poem "—or their resistance to a determinate order—distinguishes the series from thematic continuity, narrative progression, or meditative insistence that often characterizes the sequence. . .The series demands neither summation nor exclusion. It is instead a combinative form whose arrangements admit a variegated set of materials." In contrast, the sequence relies on "mechanic or imposed organization," for example the temporal progression of the seasons (p. 21).

23. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), #501, vol. 2, pp. 384-85.

24. SUNY-Buffalo: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1992.

25. In *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Peter Quartermain links the paratactic prosody of Zukofsky with Bunting and Pound and back to Whitman. See especially pp. 127-133. Conte makes the distinction between seriality and proceduralism: "Serial works are characterized by the discontinuity of their elements and the centrifugal force identified with an 'open' aesthetic. Procedural works, on the other hand, are typified by the recurrence of elements and a centripetal force that promises a self-sustaining momentum" (p. 42).

26. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and *Zettel* exemplify the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic order. *Zettel* is made up of over 700 slips found together in a file box. These slips were mostly cut from extensive typescripts of Wittgenstein's and many of the fragments were subsequently reworked. In addition, it appears that some of the remarks were written originally as part of this series. The editors remark that "now we know that his method of composition was in part to make an arrangement of such short, almost independent, pieces. . ." For our investigation here, it is striking that some of the sections of *Zettel* were cut out of "one or two total rearrangements of *Investigations* and other material"; the fact that Wittgenstein made such recombinations underscores the serial nature of his major philosophical work. See the "Editor's Preface" of *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.—Serial forms are particularly valuable for both philosophy and criticism, despite the fact that they are almost never employed.

27. *Poems* (1920), #5, in *The Complete Poems of Charles Reznikoff, Vol. I*, ed. Seamus Cooney (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1976), p. 29. Subsequent references to this volume are cited in the text.

28. Linda Simon provides these quotes in a useful synopsis of the responses to Reznikoff in her "Annotated Bibliography of Works About Charles Reznikoff" in *Man and Poet*, pp. 411-40.

    Milton Hindus's laudatory review of *Family Chronicles* is representative of the "giving up the baby with bathwater" or "weak" response to Reznikoff's detractors, even though Hindus is not here talking about the poems *(Man and Poet*, p. 426): The work is difficult, Hindus argues, not because of the presence of avant-garde defamiliarizing

devices "but because of its seemingly absolute and artless and primitive simplicity. . .He studiously and purposefully *flattens*.. every incident. . .Reznikoff consistently subdues all the highlights in his pictures and produces a monochromatic effect which demands the utmost effort and attention from the reader." One wants to immediately add here what Jerome Rothenberg wrote of tribal primitivism: *primitive means complex*. Still, it's the picture of Reznikoff as "artless and unassuming," as Carl Rakosi describes him *(Man and Poet*, p. 429), that underplays how very artful and assuming this work is.

29. "First, there is the Need," in *Sparrow 52* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, January 1977, p. 6 (unpaginated).

30. *Man and Poet*, p. 22.

31. "First, there is the Need," p. 2.

32. *Inscriptions*, #21 (excerpt); II:75. In the Poetry Center reading, Reznikoff calls this poem, and #23; his "platform as a writer of verse"; 21 is also cited in section 2, and section 31.

33. Gershom Scholem, in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961) notes that "the doctrine of God's immanence in all things" has earlier roots "among the great Jewish mystics and Kabalists. To me, not the doctrine seems new, but rather the primitive enthusiasm with which it was expounded and the truly pantheistic exhilaration evoked by the belief that God surrounds everything and pervades everything," pp. 347-48. Subsequently referred to in the text.

34. "Te Deum" (excerpt), #22 of *Inscriptions*, II:75.

35. Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems: 1947–1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 134.

36. *By the Well of Living and Seeing*, sec. II, #19 (excerpt); II:121.

37. *Inscriptions*, #20; II:75. This is the sense of paradise I hear in Ron Silliman's *Paradise* and Lyn Hejinian's *The Guard*.

38. These are the last words in Sarah Reznikoff's "Early History of a Seamstress," *Family Chronicle*, p. 99.

39. "Notes on the Spring Holidays," #III, *Inscriptions*, #46; II:84.

40. "A Talk with L.S. Dembo" in *Man & Poet*. 107; italics added. Subsequently referred to in the text.

41. *Jerusalem the Golden* (1934), #17; I:111.

42. *Jerusalem the Golden*, #39; I:115.

43. *Five Groups of Verse* (1927), #14; I:72.

44. *Jerusalem the Golden*, #l; I:107. In the Dembo interview, Reznikoff responds to a question about "a personal sense of isolation or exile" in this poem:

    I don't think 'isolation' is the word. I don't feel isolated in English it's just that I'm missing a lot not knowing Hebrew. Incidentally, Havelock Ellis, in one of his books, as I remember it, points out the tendency in a writer to use characteristics of the speech of his ancestors, even a speech he no longer knows (p. 104).

45. *Inscriptions*, #21; II:75. Reznikoff's "platform."

46. In "On Reznikoff and 'Talking Hebrew'" (*Sagetrieb* 7:2, 1988), John Martone writes that "Central to Reznikoff's objectivism is the poet's subordination of the self to the material at hand. The poetic subject and not the poet as subject is the center of the work. The sincerity, Zukofsky said about Reznikoff's work, is in the details. And *all* Reznikoff's books. . .direct our attention not so much to an experiencing authorial self as to a detailed, profoundly historical world of experience. Reznikoff is the first American poet to 'decenter' the subject on so massive a scale. . .Revolutionary in the context of American poetry, [this decentering] is a basic feature of the *Talmud* and a given in traditional Jewish hermeneutics" (p. 72).

47. "Autobiography: New York," sec. 2 of *Going To and Fro and Walking Up and Down* (1941), #IV; II:27.

48. "Autobiography: Hollywood," sec. 3 of *Going To and Fro and Walking Up and Down*, #XXIV (excerpt); II:46; italics added.

49. #XXIV immediately following the adjacent poem; italics added.

50. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, #1695, vol. 3, p. 1149.

51. George Oppen, "Of Being Numerous," #1 (excerpt), in *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1975), p. 147.

52. "Autobiography: Hollywood," #III (excerpt), II:39. Compare Oppen's "And the pure joy / Of the mineral fact // Tho it is impenetrable // As the world, if it is matter / is impenetrable" "Of Being Numerous," #2, p. 148.

53. "Early History of a Writer," #17; II:172. Reznikoff mentions this anecdote, identifying Kittredge's Shakespeare course at Harvard, which is not mentioned in the poem, in the Dembo interview, *Man and Poet*, p. 103.

54. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, #155, p. 28e.

55. "Between Walls" in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), p. 453: what shines in this poem is "the broken": that which is damaged or destroyed & that which has been cast aside, but, at the same time, the fragment, the shard of ineffable worth. "Actual Word Stuff, Not Thoughts for Thoughts" is the title of Quartermain's essay on Williams and Zukofsky in *Disjunctive Poetics*; the quote is from a 1928 letter from Williams to Zukofsky. —One might imagine Stein's project as a radical extension of seriality to the level of syntax, so that not only sentences or phrases or details, but also individual words, are permuted.

56. *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York, Macmillan, 1958), #89.

57. *Man and Poet*, p. 428.

58. Pointlessness is a typical charge made against radical modernist discontinuity and fragmentation. Thus, Reznikoff's poems are "essentially insignificant" and "incidental and decorative" according to a 1934 review; while Hayden Carruth, reviewing *Testimony*, speaks of Reznikoff's "cold, neutral language" as "uninteresting" and "lifeless" and Robert Alter refers to the "seeming impassivity. . .flatness, and numbing pointlessness" of different Reznikoff works. See Linda Simon's "Annotated Bibliography" in *Man and Poet*. In contrast, John Martone, in "On Reznikoff and 'Talking Hebrew'" is

right when he calls *Testimony* "the most difficult of the modernist long poems. . .No grandiose mythopoetic vision distracts us from the commonplace, from the [often brutal] circumstances of everyday life" (p. 79).

59. In *First, there is the Need*, Reznikoff writes, "Clarity, precision, order, but the answer is intensity: with intensity we have compression, rhythm, maybe rhyme, maybe alliteration. The words move out of prose into verse as the speech becomes passionate and musical instead of flat" (p. 5). Reznikoff also talks about prose not having the "intensity that I wanted" in #17 of "Early History of a Writer" (II:171).

60. "Early History of a Writer" #16; II:169.

61. My own reading of Reznikoff began with *Testimony* which for some time overshadowed my reading of his other poems. I see these remarks as a commentary on how to approach, how to interpret, Reznikoff's great anti-epic. The best account of the composition of *Testimony* is Katherine Shevelow's "History and Objectification in Charles Reznikoff's Documentary Poems, *Testimony* and *Holocaust*" in *Sagetrieb* I:2 (1982).

62. *Poems* (1920), #22 (excerpt); I:35. The citation in the next section is the last stanza of this poem.

63. Williams's *Spring and All*, XVII ("To Elsie"), *Collected*, p. 217 and Blake's "Introduction" to his indelible series, "Songs of Experience."

64. Oppen, "Of Being Numerous" #7 (excerpt), p. 151.

65. "New Year's," #I in "Meditations on the Fall and Winter Holidays," sec. 13 of *Inscriptions;* II:66.

66. This letter was originally published, in a translation by Jean-Paul Auxemery, in *a.b.s.: poètes à royaumont* no. 3 (1990) along with Auxemery's original letter to me.

GEORGE OPPEN ON REZNIKOFF

George Oppen introduced Charles Reznikoff at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State on March 21, 1974. The transcript of that introduction, made by Pierre Alferi, is published here for the first time, with the kind permission of the estate of George Oppen. Copyright© 1993 by Lynda Oppen Mourelatos. Thanks to the American Poetry Archive of the Poetry Center for providing a copy of the tape.—CB.

OPPEN: That poem of Charles's that begins "As I, barbarian, at last, although slowly, could read Greek/ at 'blue-eyed Athena. . .'"and it goes on, is Charles' reading of that lithograph portrait on the wall of Athena. Just take that poem, it's a beautiful poem, with a great cadence, and it moves on into that strange feeling of visiting famous times and famous places, in the midst of one's own affairs through books. There doesn't seem any reason. . .That poem was written at least 40 years ago, since I read it 40 years ago. I'm complaining about the length of time it has taken to notice Charles Reznikoff. Not that Charles Reznikoff so far as I know cares. The last time I tried to praise Charles to himself he at once interrupted to say "George, I'm sure we both do the best we can." A difficult man to praise, and this is my opportunity. And all the same that isn't just random eccentricity on Rezzi's part, and if it was modesty, it was modesty of extraordinary force. Rezzi wouldn't listen to praise because he intended to disregard condemnation, and this was. . .Some of his poems in the *Collected* were written in 1918, some of them earlier, I think. There was the issue of free verse, to begin with, and of course Reznikoff couldn't make use of the Whitmanesque breadth of the Midwest poets, and he didn't have the authorization of the New England scenes. These were poems of the city. Instead, a small man starts to climb the stairs out of the subway, and he sees the moon shining through the entrance, whereupon the world stops, and is illumined. Poem after poem of the city, which is experienced as the narrow end of the funnel: there's poems of the metaphysical dimension, actually; the "metaphysical dimension" being the absence of terror, or the disregard of it down to the very chewing gum stuck to the pavement which is in that poem . . .The proofs in these poems are images, and the images are proofs, and

proofs are overwhelming. But Rezzi, who didn't permit praise and disregarded condemnation or neglect, had bought a letterpress, every evening after work he set two lines of verse, teaching himself to set type as he worked. . .at it, and this way he printed all of his first books by himself. We, Mary and I that is, have carried these poems in our minds through everything that has happened to us since we were 19 or 20 years old. I don't know of any poems more pure, or more purely spoken, or more revelatory. As I've confessed before, I think the young of my generation were luckier than the youngest in this audience, in that we had to go searching for our own tradition and our own poets. What we found was Reznikoff and he's played—I cannot say how important he has been to us, and I think he will be to you, and this is what I wanted to say to Charles Reznikoff when he said, "George, I think we all do the best we can."

REZNIKOFF: If I'm not loud enough, tell me, I'll try to be louder. To begin with, I thank you very much, George, for your introduction, except that it embarrasses me, now I have to deliver. If you had been very hostile, I think it would have been stimulating. Thanks, anyway!

I think I'll begin in a way I usually do, with my platform, to use a political expression, my platform as a writer of verse:

[Reads "Salmon and red wine" from *Inscription;* II:76.] That's one. And now I'll read you another:

[Reads "I have neither the time, nor the weaving skill, perhaps"; II:75.]

That's the platform! [applause]

—Please don't applaud! Because I won't be able to say all I want to say, and that'll stop me! Well, anyway, let's go on from here. I—of course most of the poetry of the last century, and of this century too, has been properly called "nature poetry." And the last great poet was Robert Frost, in that class. But for those of us born in the cities—at least I was—and lived there all our lives—well, that's a very appropriate comment, but I'll have to wait a while . . .[sound and lights go out]. . . When you least expect it the lights go out and when you least expect it, too, the lights go on. That's life, urban life anyway. Well. I was going to say, for those of us born in cities, there's a kind of verse which we might call city verse. I'll go ahead with some of the city verse, anyway.

DRAFT 15: TITLE

It was the erect nipple centered
in wax,
the simulacrum nipple matched in wax entitle,
was the dislodged
NIPPLE staring out
the opaque cover of a LEDGER
said or set straight, but sealed
to the wall
with bolts and clamps, thus
riveting.

Yet time is cast off, cast
forth. Fleeting
beyond one's wildest dreams
the arc of a cigarette butt flicked
out of the moving car in front of mine.
Even the loss is lost.
"I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar."

An armada of days taken afloat,
patient, kicking, counting the simple strokes
up and down the pool,
but the whole
unaccountable;
even into extended
telling, consumed.
The whole notion of eating,
eating, eating everything, to get

to the one thing
that is revealed, an

avatar of
the poem, which began by being
organized loosely but
here concerns blood creatures.
Avaler, the word to say,
gorge on the body of the dead.

Each ledger
small shutter
scenes a kind of snap-shut
shot with 4 black corners, and the faces
so small, too small,
unrealizable, that one could, so far as
memoir (or saying anything)
goes, say
the same things over and over
various ways;

anyway
"blurred and breathless,"
the mottle surface of a mortal body
wastes away.

The sparking arc of a smoked-to-the-filter butt.
The careful kick, stroke, breathe of the crawl.
Silences of water.
Cranky bile
bolted to the wall.

A little variety, please,
muthoplokon!
so one may be thrown,
wrestled
to the ground limb over limb and,
by the muthe-plucker,
knotted in holds
over and beyond.

In the panic over the missing codine, and how,
from that motel, a final short trip
to the middle of nowhere,
could scare up
a prescription of such densities and extensives
that perk and succor
the failing one-breasted body,
a sugar tit of honey suck
one gives the dying—who
could be called?
who, called, could credit
the accident of forgetting.

Just actions, and inadequate summaries:
opening a sealed grim house,
one person in a shallow entry,
that smoky smell of an old motel,
"cottage," "pottage," dank, dark, mildewed.

Yet all that got uttered was
what yard sale and whence
those unfamiliar relics
out of other families' tents—
the flowered butter dish just
slightly cracked,
ancient cameras leaking light—

emerge into unreckonable clutter
at the opening of our tomb.

And "here" the dead with gabble and gargle
pluck sinews one by one, and twist
the terrible tendons to tune
that thrown and fallen pile of flesh
taut as a lyre.

Something will be coming,
some rare sound.
The oldest instruments.

But who could credit
such scream, such stream
unsweetened,
thick with unspoken
and unspeakable chords
in the sweet milk of light.

So avaler sa langue, is the expression.
Eat up, swallow, stifle the tongue.
Kashe und shayle.
Questions, more questions,
phantom and evanescent wisps
that evaporate, as if
ashen syllables of Yiddish.

Remember, remember,
remember nothing, but more
than you want to
because following the thread of any one slide
entangles labyrinths

requiring
the rest of your born days
to eviscerate.

A cigarette butt smoking arc'd out a car window,
driver's side puff on the asphalt a series
of dots and disconnections
fire sparks run over
by the next car, the wheels
that ran over the cigarette
of the previous smoker; and the dark car running behind
over the sparky flare
sees it, rolling down the road a little gust,
and then extinguished. Nothing more to find.
Except maybe the unquenchable filter, the threads,
neo-asbestos or polyester,
that catch and muffle, and, finally, fray
in the dump ditch
at the edge of the roadway.

Y'know the way the cello is so vibrant, and the
piano too,
densities and sonorities that pitch past us
playing hard ball? a shower of desultory fire?

So imagine taking that wood and
slamming it: bam.
Col legno.
What composers in their demonic sweetness
call "extended techniques."

Well, "bam bam bam"
the fist chops the page.
The sound is hardly as convincing
as slugging the cello, gets only a little
rattle, but the gesture————

poetry, schmoetry, it's
dark spurts—it's
words cooked in their own ink:
in su tinta,
which in the creature's blood.

I fall to the tarmac,
filled to the sick.

Given the wrestled
tentacles tendered for food,
given this sauce,
what meat am I eating?
what dark blood letting?
Why this remembering
and that forgetting?
What rears and spurts and thickens
in the fosse?

———

Now that I'm here, I'm here.
I'd recognize this place anywhere.

November 1991–December 1992

The fourteen ledger books with nipples hung on the wall, by Dorothy Cross, from an installation called "Power House," Institute of Contemporary Arts, Philadelphia, 1991, consisting in part of 14 Logbooks, Cast Wax, Steel Bolts. "I am bourne. . .": Shelley's "Adonais." "Blurred and breathless," citation from *The Odyssey*, Book Eleven as translated by Robert Fitzgerald. Muthoplokon: the word by Sappho. The translation "myth plucker" from a poem of Ben Friedlander helped me on the way.

DRAFT 16: LITTLE

More than that is hard to say.
I am drawing a blank.

High clouds, their errancy, ply over ply,
        float.
        And still
I float on eddies in a rocking enormity.

Not mourning, not pleasure,
but auras of evanescence,
and nickname-painted train stops,
and jerry-built victrolas,
canoes pulling away sloppily from simple docks
dribble and bonk of paddle,
a particular grab of grasses,
hairy stems of weeds,
and the afikomen so well hidden
plus misunderstood
it was never teased forth.
Never then redeemed.

So I saw what I saw,
like photographs of the war,
stripes under wire,
shadows scummed or smudged on pavement,
and starved locked rows.

Some clocks stopped but not
other clocks, tick and tock and
I was part of all that it,
a lucky nothing
not in the way of particular harm,
half witness half witless
        —dot—a little
        yod or yid

amid the clamors of dawn,
waking inside the whiteness,
before anything is given——
that is, taken.

To this magic table
covered with glistening nap,
a place like a fairy tale: dolorous and lyric,
"un couvert" where the bread is perfect,
dishes, bodies, fruit piled,
cute mugs caffeine-coated,
wine in dregs and lees,
and salty bowls of weeds,
there is someone, step, step:

over the bridge, down the field,
under the fence, through the door,
and speaks.
The order is "Take cover!"
And hands to necks
the cowering shapes
wedge under desks
puppets of puppets.

Wherein at play
the smallest chancy jot of scratched substance
bounces along a pebbly day.

Recently I lost my watch
dropped straight down off my wrist
and fell into a hole so far it wasn't there.
Strange,
that litmus wristlet π
had covered my nakedness
and now I was exposed.
Or dreamed I'd "missed my stop."

From that point, those points, on,
the trace or shard, the thing

come passing darkly cross me
in the tunnel dirt of time
was mine.

Not hero, not polis, not story, but it.
        It multiplied.
        It engulfing.
        It excessive.
"It" like X that marks the spot, that is, the spots,
an ever wily while, a wilderness of hope.
The spot of almost hopeless hope.
Can barely credit it.

Thus my voice is empty, but I speak and sing
only of this.
The undersentences
that rise, tides of sediment, the little
stuff agglutinating in time, debris
        I sing.
        Cano,
cannot not do it so.

In time's deep well,
my shallow heart has flooded.

From the exile woods
on the edge of the edge
a little mite doth blow.
A Mite! I might
have killed such mites and bits
        before
        today
I didn't think

of needing such
a Little Mite,
this dusty road.

May 1992-December 1992

DRAFT 17: UNNAMED

It's true that every ending only erases the board
rather than filling it.
The poems are written in strange chalk
strange, a chalk
in some lights dark, plump with serifs
on a scumbled, agitated whiteness,
but mainly a white chalk on a whiter page.

Which can hardly be read
and that, only under angled light.

As wide as my life though when you look again it's
a scroll narrow, but fast,
paper towels in the hands of a toddler,
down and up hillocks and rises,
blazes and falls
so fast one can only
trail after it. "what could be more natural."

Or dark as a mist
hanging over the fill-built airport,
smoke brown the sky looks daubed
and of no depth.

But the chalk (with luck, another turn) turns
translucent, light on light
which is, in certain lights, like dark on dark
but more
blinding.

Words,
scattered falling
arcs of shame,
glaze the flicker-ridden labyrinth—

it makes a peculiar medium.
And its cross-grained nourishment
demands a strange tooth.

Perhaps translucence is a quality of erasure.
The thing anyway looks like a Cy Twombly
strokes trailing each other and dibs, nibs,
flicks of the wrist and a dreamy evisceration of pencil.
A morning glory bolted across the door.
My little valise is filled with souvenirs.
And none of them is "art."
I can see why he said I wasn't interested in art.

"Poetry depersonalizes 'days'
in language." It sounded
as if this were what I wanted

yet the hole, the sufferance
fell open. Heard the shaped scream of a duration.
Three times: the game, the same, the same again,
"nothing but these facts and all these facts."
Why did he think I "wasn't interested in art"?

Low song clouds in unbelonging places
emphasize the activities of light,
which is unspeakable.

Also the sound, not just the light,
plays along certain vectors
pools in the force field

large, square, rent, timeless
void. Know?
Can barely know what labyrinth.

The grass clods push up
between the lines and cracks
of pavement. In the depth

of night, a street lamp
looming behind them
they rise and lurk,

turf tufts made near twice
their "real" size
by shadow.

But what I mean is this.
She stood at the pit
where, this 50 years,

155 Jews were shot.
There, near a field of rye,
she'd found dozens of notes and addresses

tossed away
moments before their deaths.
To this day,

she regrets
that, out of fear
she did not pick them up.

The poetics seems plain.
Since then
there are many people spend their time

picking up the notes.
But they are not there.
They are as gone as possible to be.

So the gathering
is impossible.
But still the shapes are bowed,

and search
this otherwhere of here.
Yet had they actually

been there
that time
being remembered,

it is equally possible
they too would have left
all of them where they lay.

What illusion, what delusion, what disillusion
writes these gaps?
tries these missing bits and scraps?

It is not elegy
though elegy seems the nearest category of genre
raising stars, strewing flowers. . . .

It's not that I have not
done this, in life or wherever I
needed to

or throwing out the curled tough leather
of' the dead
the cracked insteps of unwalkable shoes,

but it is not the name or term
for what is meant
by this inexorable bending.

And it is not "the Jews"
(though of course it's the Jews),
but Jews as an iterated sign of this site.

Words with (to all intents and purposes)
no before and after
hanging in a void of loss
the slow and normal whirlwind

from which it roars
they had not ever meant to be so lost,
so little wordth.

There are plenty of reasons to wonder.
Forlorn spirits with spinning "swords of flame"
as much like angels
as it's possible to be, but without
choices or pleasure,
stand empty.
Wavy wheaty heads
dart and sway;
contradictory rages swivel them.
But (pace Rilke) we can tell
these angels, or their similacra
"things."
Late busses, glass smash, styrofoam containers.
Low sun plain wing
grey toyota
ormolu
soccer freshener
kith, soot, food
rainbows of oil.

The intersection
by Dunkin' Donuts,
"KFC," "TCBY,"
Gulf is
where you have to turn

coming
here.

So speak, stutterer, and stain the light with figments.
Rush, and brush, this evanescent shimmer
that does not even track

that does not
    even fill or replicate
        the historical air clotted here.

And Here
    where all this is and are
        this back and forth through time,

Alight.
    It's never
        what you think.

May-December 1992

The citation from Bakhtin ("poetry depersonalizes 'days'. . .") is from "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination,* 291. The line about "facts" is Michel Leiris, *Manhood.* The long citation, slightly modified from a news article headlined "Lithuanians haunted by Holocaust," was written by *Philadelphia Inquirer* staff writer Fen Montaigne, and appeared July 27, 1992, on the front page. Memories of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* persist, here the ninth.

DRAFT 18: TRADUCTION

Pas tout à fait cela.
Not quite it?
It's not exactly tha*t*

that A
our edge of it
billows before us.

useless, cannot quite grasp. . .

be litt*le* spot, be draft of
*ch*anges,
litmus ribbons
strips blowing, situés
roses et bleus
flicker. . .

face aux grands enjeux du siècle.

B
Something: an extract or essence of something
*el*se; this work pressed onto itself
enfolded imprint,
sleep-writing on a blanketed body. . .

Words stranger even to themselves
than cryptograms, like le
or it, ce/ça or see/saw,
always with an inside out, an outside in,
a sound, a toss,
et la Syntaxe étrange, d'étrangère

to suggest shades

of the unspeakable

Iota. These fragments "conspicuous

oracles"

cast off on the silence. . .

C—a task
assuming an exile
of, and in, the world
Writing defined as
seeing or being
between, even in one's
owned language it's translation,
not of text, but of
interstices, blank or overlooked, rough
muddy spots which dogs pee up
this common tuft or
that a black comb was pressed down into asphalt
when all this was repaved,
odd corner

if not translation
writing as foreign
from the very first. . . .

Finally, D
under the quiet umbra
of the midnight sky a-wait.

The shadow waxing
wonderful to watch,
at once so slow and fast
across the moon.

It's that I was looking at time
impatiently. Type A.
Taxed by waiting.
Yet hoping any moment will

speed only accelerates
that whole which goes this fast
and faster
still, this speck of life. . . .

The dark shape of what
we're living on
passes over,
I see what I have never seen

Galactal smudge.
It's earth.
It's where we are. So simple.
I can hardly understand

one single thing
of what this means.

Ainsi A, B, C, D etc.
se lancent
leurs questions de traduction
silencieuses:

A is for A.
Each thorn and eth,
wirds
you've never seen befor
weirds,

Grandes ampoules
de plastique
à moité flottant dans les eaux mortes des canaux
objets d'ard, comme a dit Duchamp,
are swamped.

Chestnuts, gravel, chestnuts
semés parmi les cailloux, impossible

pleasures, crushed.
C'est marron.
C'est génial.

All these words have to go
into another language; toute proportion gardée,

where does it mean they "go"?

Go somewhere, that is all.
Go somewhere
round the dusky dome of time.
Passing over each other, eclipsing light with dark
and dark shimmering with strangeness
so we look, as never be
fore, at what wag
always there—
the inside out of space.

And then come back
doubled,
having eaten different kinds of fat,
snuffled different kinds of mist
swaying, saying

"—it's lost in translation,
it's found in translation, and
translation's lost in me—
—nowhere here, never there—
both and both, nor nothing more,
longside myself in 'poetry'"—

a willy-silly sing-song song
for words to sing.

B. Pullulating surges:
scripsi o so
curious and fine.

Ligne de blanc.

Ligne de noir.

League of blank and nor.

Tinier, thicker, denser
than spider webs' wet silver,
blanks and nor—
the text
expressing

un silence, réseau intraduisible
comme du tissu,

dans lequel quelques JE et EUX
se trouvent piégés—
and these
glossalalic trembling wings
snagged in webs of quiet
proposent le spectacle
sons-et-mots sur un principe
et un seul:
ne pas déséquilibrer
rempli/vide
ici/là
ou bien iota/yod.

Effectuant un jeu quelconque
where words (mots) bubble, where something
(mut, matte, moot) the mud ferements, and
gets to be another word, mote.

Mote speaking.
Mote spoken.
Bubbles, syllables, galaxies
of babble.

C that C.
En ce temps-là je mordais la langue
quand je rêvais.
Ella est plus large maintenant
que ma bouche.
There are edges and sides
Endges and -cides
it now has it never
had before, it seems

never to have been so large
as now,

swollen, tender, tendus, swilling

LA LANGUE

hard to articulate, slower, but faster
than ever before j'ai passé ces jours
dans une tempête

de petits mots crépitants dont
les expressions ondeuses se font,
auprès desquelles on trouve
au vers
an bon blanc, des vers
qui hurlent
an fond d'un couloir gothique
où des hirondelles en ogive
se nichent juste an croisement
de chaque arc.

I am a black shape moving forward
merging with a black shape
cast like a die upon the stone.

Lettres, j'entre
dans le passage
des astres d'une langue
à une autre,
et de l'autre
à l'outre.

D.
All these languages?
I'm just translating time.

Sont des pages noires
avec sidereal speck
a work in hardly any language.
Not of the word, but of the gap.
An experience we are said to have
and the shadow
of experience we never have.
Multiple approximations
of more unstructured, wicked problems.

It's time, like a path,
littered with the evidence
of nomadic occupation,
these burnished vagaries of use
that I'm after.

I'm after everything, and after nothing.
A belatedness so strong
I come,

even after what is
not there,

after eradication
Who inhabits one's own time

who can be witness
after the eclipse of witness

cannot not speak. O poetry
—again and again no more poetry.

Nothing
is extensive enough
for this level of abandon-
ment,
éminemment macaronique ou
marconique, wire-less towers
on a windy shore
transmitting micro-shifts of sound and state-
ment cross a space we do not understand.

"traduire, c'est le contraire"
"de quoi?"

October 1992-January 1993

This poem arose from my being translated into French by a group including Emmanuel Hocquard, Yves di Manno, Jean-Paul Auxeméry, Joseph Guglielmi, Françoise de Larocque, and Joey Simas, as well as Marcel Cohen, Esther Tellerman, and others, at the Fondation Royaumont in October 1992. The first line was delivered to us by MM. Antoine Ségovia and Philippe Mairesse to provoke any one realization of the(ir) conceptual art piece "par le Menu"—"oeuvre dont les acquisitions et les présentations successives *modifient* la forme." The line "face aux grands enjeux du siècle" is from a review by Yves di Manno of Eliot Weinberger. Fragments as "conspicuous oracles" is Sollers on Mallarmé. "More unstructured, wicked problems" is a citation from John Nosek of Temple University's Computer and Information Sciences. With thanks to Micheline Rice-Maximin, Swarthmore College, for checking my French.

JAMES CLIFFORD
WHITE ETHNICITY

Entering Flaming Gorge, we quickly run through it on a swift current, and emerge into a little park. Half a mile below, the river wheels sharply to the left, and we turn into another canyon cut into the mountain. We enter the narrow passage. On either side, the walls rapidly increase in altitude. On the left are overhanging ledges and cliffs five hundred—a thousand—fifteen hundred feet high.*

He entered the IRT 7th Ave. subway at West 116th street (Columbia University) and headed downtown on the local. Uptown would take him to 125th Street (Harlem) and to unknown parts of the upper West Side. First stop downtown: 110th Street (OK to get out, and walk uptown or west); next 103rd Street (not OK to get out); then 96th Street (change for the express). The downtown express to Brooklyn rumbled into the station from Harlem. The passengers of the two subways mixed quickly. Express stops, downtown: 72nd Street (with its narrow platforms and stairs), 42nd (screeching wheels on the many switches, mobs of people pushing at the doors), 34th, Pennsylvania station (entry and exit of suitcases), 14th (get off here, or take the local, one stop to Sheridan Square). He pushed against a heavy revolving gate and climbed out into "The Village."

We trudged up the hill past the Stardust Lounge, Micky's Hair-styling—Hot and Cold Press, the Harlem Bop Lounge, the Dream Café, The Freedom Barber Shop, and the Optimo Cigar Shop which seemed to decorate every important street corner of those years. There was the Aunt May Eat Shoppe, and Sadie's Ladies and Children's Wear. There was Lum's Chop Suey Bar, and the Shiloh Baptist Mission Church painted white with colored storefront windows, the Record store with its big radio chained outside setting a beat to the warming morning sidewalk. And on the corner of Seventh Avenue as we waited for the green light arm in arm, the yeasty and

*John Wesley Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill. (1875) 1957.

suggestively mysterious smell issuing from the cool dark beyond the swinging half-doors of the Noon Saloon.**

In Greenwich Village he discovered folk music, and the Left. There was Gerde's Folk City and the Village Gate. There were scratchy folkways records of Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Pete Seeger, Vanguard recordings of Odetta, Joan Baez. In the 8th Street bookstore: Genet, Sartre, Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Albee: "The Theatre of the Absurd." And every Sunday he unpacked a long-neck banjo at the fountain in Washington Square: "This Little Light of Mine," "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" "Ain't Gonna Study War No More." He was a folkie. First (a dark secret) came the Kingston Trio, then Joan Baez and The Weavers. A sequence of Seegers (Pete, Peggy, Penny, and Mike) led him to old time country music and, inexorably it seemed, to bluegrass. He went into the subway at 116th Street and travelled, a hundred blocks south, to Kentucky.

We take with us rations deemed sufficient to last ten months; for we expect, when winter comes on and the river is filled with ice, to lie over at some point until spring arrives; so we take with us abundant supplies of clothing. We have also a large quantity of ammunition and two or three dozen traps. For the purpose of building cabins, repairing boats, and meeting other exigencies, we are supplied with axes, hammers, saws, augurs, and other tools, and a quantity of nails and screws. For scientific work, we have two sextants, four chronometers, a number of barometers, thermometers, compasses, and other instruments.*

We talked about leaving New York, about homesteading somewhere in the west where a Black woman and a white woman could live together in peace. Muriel's dream was to live on a farm and it felt like a good life to me. I borrowed pamphlets from the library, and we wrote to all the appropriate government offices to find out if there were any homestead lands still available anywhere in the continental United States.**

On his way home from Greenwich Village (and often, from School) he passed through 96th Street station, uptown platform. Here the 7th Ave. local and express trains diverged. The local continued to the Columbia University stop on Morningside Heights. The express veered off. Visitors from downtown had to be warned. If you make a mistake you'll emerge at the "wrong 116th Street." He was always troubled by the existence of another station with that number, across Morningside Park in the danger-

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**Andre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY, 1992.

ous, off-limits world he never saw called Harlem. He recalled once (or was it fantasy?) forgetting to leave the express at 96th and getting off where everyone and everything, including the "116" set in tiles on each pillar (exactly like "our stop"), was unfamiliar. Eyes down, he hurried to the opposite platform and waited, exposed in his whiteness, for the train back. Later he recognized 96th Street in the film, "Brother from Another Planet." The subway pulls into a station and a white kid tells the black alien that he is going to perform a magic trick. "I'm going to make all the white people disappear!" The doors open and all the whites exit, including the magician who waves good-bye as the doors of the Harlem express close.

American racism was a new and crushing reality that my parents had to deal with every day of their lives once they came to this country. They handled it as a private woe. My mother and father believed that they could best protect their children from the realities of race in America and the fact of American racism by never giving them a name, much less discussing their nature. We were told we must never trust white people, but *why* was never explained, nor the nature of their ill will. Like so many other vital pieces of information in my childhood, I was supposed to know without being told.**

On weekdays, when he was old enough, he took the subway or the Amsterdam bus downtown to school. He enjoyed the independence; and on the way home he would linger with his best friend, Chung, stopping on Broadway for a slice of Pizza. But he always walked the two blocks around school, Amsterdam and 94th Street, quickly. In Spring and Fall people were visible at the brownstones' open windows, or out on the stoops, talking, laughing, arguing—looking him over. There was a smell of garbage, and of pungent cooking. In winter the sidewalks were treacherous. He had to watch for snowballs. Spanish voices: "Mira! Mira!" (He heard "Meeda! Meeda!". . .and didn't look up.) His only wish was to get through the two blocks without attracting attention. Were they talking to him? Did he hear the Caribbean music that would later become so interesting? He heard no music at all. Each morning the school doors closed behind him; it was quiet inside. He read at old tables among plants in brass pots.

I sat on the floor with my back against the wooden cabinet radio, *The Blue Fairy Book* on my lap. I loved to read and listen to the radio at the same time, feeling the vibrations of sound through my back like an activating background to the pictures that streamed through my head, spun by the fairy tales. I looked up, momentarily confused and disoriented as I usually was when I stopped reading suddenly. Had the trolls really attacked a harbor where some hidden treasure of pearls was buried?**

The river is very deep, the canyon very narrow, and still obstructed, so that there is no steady flow of the stream; but the waters wheel, and roll, and boil, and we are scarcely able to determine where we can go. Now the boat is carried to the right, perhaps close to the wall; again, she is shot into the stream, and perhaps is dragged over to the other side, where, caught in a whirlpool, she spins about. We can neither land nor run as we please. The boats are entirely unmanageable; no order in their running can be preserved; now one, now another, is ahead, each crew laboring for its own preservation.*

As a boy, he always wanted to be in the first car. There he could press against the glass of the forward door, cupping his hands on either side of his face to block the reflected light from inside the train. This gave him a view of the track like that of the motorman (whom he could hear shuffling behind the locked door to his right). As the subway rushed through the dark, there were exciting glimpses of ladders and passageways. Who went there? And occasionally, with blaring horn and screeching wheels, they would pass work crews pressed against the walls, or leaning casually on pick axes. . .almost touching the deadly third rail. At times a red light stopped them for long minutes in the dark. Then, the surge of power. Dirty light bulbs flashed by; the subway rocked noisily on its tracks. When a station approached (the bright ring of lights rushing toward them) he feared, for an instant, that the motorman had forgotten to brake, or had died between stations.

In such a place we come to another rapid. Two of the boats run it perforce. One succeeds in landing, but there is no foothold by which to make a portage, and she is pushed out again into the stream. The next minute a great reflex wave fills the open compartment; she is waterlogged, and drifts unmanageable. Breaker after breaker rolls over her, and one capsizes her. The men are thrown out; but they cling to the boat, and she drifts down some distance, alongside of us, and we are able to catch her.*

As I continued to pound the spice, a vital connection seemed to establish itself between the muscles of my fingers curved tightly around the smooth pestle in its insistent downward motion, and the molten core of my body whose source emanated from a new ripe fullness just beneath the pit of my stomach. That invisible thread, taut and sensitive as a clitoris exposed, stretched through my curled fingers up my round brown arm into the moist reality of my armpits, whose warm sharp odor with a strange new overlay mixed with the ripe garlic smells from the mortar and the general sweat-heavy aromas of high summer.**

His subway pass gave him the freedom of the city. He could get on and ride . . .Three basic routes: one of exploration, one of everyday anxiety, one forbidden. The first, "downtown," was defined by the IRT 7th Ave. line. (Certain stops: the freedom of the subway is the power to duck under unpleasant places.) The end of the trip was usually the Village. On weekdays he followed the second path, to his school in a "changing neighborhood." This route was safe and familiar, though tinged with anxiety on the two blocks between Broadway and Columbus. (During the 1950s, the third, and largest, wave of Puerto Rican immigration was transforming sections of the city.) His third route was marked by the magic trick performed on the uptown platform at 96th Street: it was the express train to Harlem, never taken. His freedom, his city. Routes and roots.

But there was no black-elm in Harlem, no black oak leaves to be had in New York City. Ma-Mariah, her root-woman grandmother, had taught her well under the trees of Noel's Hill in Grenville, Grenada, overlooking the sea. Aunt Anni and Ma-Liz, Linda's mother, had carried it on. But there was no call for this knowledge now; and her husband Byron did not like to talk about home because it made him sad, and weakened his resolve to make a kingdom for himself in this new world. . . .She did not know if the stories about white slavers she read in the *Daily News* were true or not, but she knew to forbid her children ever to set foot in any candystore. We were not even allowed to buy penny gumballs from the machines in the subway. Besides being a waste of precious money, the machines were slot machines and therefore evil, or at least suspect as connected with white slavery—the most vicious kind, she'd say ominously. ••

His uncle, who had been a hobo, strummed and sang "Mountain Dew" or "Mama Don't Allow No Guitar Playin." His father, a professor of English literature, sang sentimental cowboy ballads. He was raised on Verdi and Gilbert and Sullivan. On the weekend trips downtown he became a fan of The Weavers. Pete Seeger's wavering voice and twangy banjo, especially, excited him. He learned to play and sing like Pete. The Weavers performed medleys: "Songs Around the World." An Irish fiddle tune, a Virginia reel, an African chant, a Negro spiritual, an Israeli Hora, a Japanese song about the Hiroshima bomb. Every song and tradition was accessible, noble, progressive. All "folk music."

It was in Mexico City those first few weeks that I started to break my lifelong habit of looking down at my feet as I walked along the street. There was always so much to see, and so many interesting and open faces to read, that I practiced holding my head up as I walked, and the sun felt hot and good on my face. Wherever I went, there were brown faces of every hue

meeting mine, and seeing my own color reflected upon the streets in such great numbers was an affirmation for me that was brand-new and very exciting. I had never felt visible before, nor even known I lacked it.**

In the city he was surrounded by black rhythm and blues, Gospel, and soul, by music from the Caribbean, by rock n' roll. He learned to dance to these beats later, in college. Entering the subway at Columbia University, he emerged, 100 blocks south, in a global village. Folk music included every people and culture—as long as they hadn't been "commercialized." ("To everyone in all the world, I reach my hand. I shake their hand.") In his village, there were no uncomfortable antagonisms. ("He's got the whole world in his hands.") Race meant we shall overcome; class meant solidarity forever, gender meant love oh careless love, sexuality. . .? He disapproved when Bob Dylan "sold out" by playing an electric guitar. Chuck Berry and Little Richard were alien bodies.

This fissure is narrow, and I try to climb up to the bench, which is about forty feet overhead. I have a barometer on my back, which rather impedes my climbing. The walls of the fissure are of smooth limestone, offering neither foot nor hand hold. So I support myself by pressing my back against one wall and my knees against the other, and, in this way, lift my body, in a shuffling manner, a few inches at a time, until I have, perhaps, made twenty-five feet of the distance, when the crevice widens a little, I cannot press my knees against the rock in front with sufficient power to give me support in lifting my body, and I try to go back. This I cannot do without falling.*

He had one recurring nightmare about the city. It was dark, and he was sprinting along his home block. . .chased by "gangs." They had switchblades and wide, garrison belts with sharp buckles. The dream would end with him frantically fumbling for his keys at the apartment house door. Gang members wore black leather jackets. The beats, in the Village, wore black. The white girls with long hair who emerged from the subway at Sheridan Square wore black tights and turtlenecks. (He wore bluejeans and checked shirts.) What did blackness mean? He wished he had dark hair, like a "real" New Yorker (did he mean Jew?). He wished he could slick back his dark hair, a long comb in his back pocket (did he mean Elvis?). Rock n' roll was for the ones in black leather. What did blackness mean to him? He wished he could play better blues guitar (but he never got around to learning).

That summer all of New York, including its museums and parks and avenues was our backyard. . . .When we decided to be workers, we wore loose pants and packed our shoe-dyed lunchboxes, and tied red bandanas

around our throats. We rode up and down fifth avenue on the old open double-decker omnibuses, shouting and singing union songs at the top of our lungs. . . .When we decided to be hussies we wore tight skirts and high heels that hurt, and followed handsome respectable-looking lawyer types down Fifth and Park Avenues, making what we thought were salacious worldly comments about their anatomies in loud voices. . . .When we were African we wrapped our heads in gaily printed skirts and talked our own made-up language in the subway on the way down to the Village. When we were Mexican, we wore full skirts and peasant blouses and huaraches and ate tacos, which we bought at a little stall in front of Fred Leighton's on MacDougal street. Once we exchanged the word "fucker" for "mother" in a whole day's conversation, and got put off the Number 5 bus by an irate driver.**

His parents, born and raised in Evansville Indiana, moved to New York when he was three months old. His father once spent several years in Arizona, teaching at a ranch school for boys, where he learned to twirl a rope and jump through it. His ten-gallon hat smelled of sweat and was incredibly heavy. Once near Tucson, so the story went, his father climbed the Enchanted Mesa, at hair-raising risk, dangling out over sheer cliffs. His grandparents in Evansville were pillars of the community, church people, founders of Evansville College. Some of them were members of a teetotalers' club, "The Pink Poppers," who picnicked, Sunday afternoons, on sand bars in the Ohio River. (The Mason-Dixon Line ran along the river at that spot.) They didn't cross much into Kentucky, except for a trip to Mammoth Cave. Their grandson went into the 7th Ave. subway at 116th Street, and came home singing music from across the river, the hillbilly music they heard on their radios, and turned off.

On Saturday afternoons, sometimes, after my mother finished cleaning the house, we would go looking for some park to sit in and watch the trees. Sometimes we went to the edge of the Harlem river at 142nd street to watch the water. Sometimes we took the D train and went to the sea. Whenever we were close to water, my mother grew quiet and soft and absent-minded. Then she would tell us wonderful stories about Carriacou, where she had been born, amid the heavy smell of limes. She told us stories about plants that healed and about plants that drove you crazy, and none of it made much sense to us children because we had never seen any of them.**

His grandmother had a room in their New York apartment, when she was past eighty and he was five. She had come there to die. White haired and going blind, she walked with a cane; he was her eyes, crossing the street on her daily walk. She spoke to him as if he were an adult, about the Korean

War (she was a pacifist) and about her fantastic trip around the world. When she was twenty, she had accompanied a friend from college, daughter of a famous diplomat, on a semi-official mission to Europe, Egypt, India, and China. Her room in the apartment was different, furnished with favorite antiques brought from Indiana. There was a big four poster bed, where she entertained her grandchildren with early-morning stories. There was an oriental rug, a massive, polished bureau, a writing desk with many pigeonholes, a globe, and a trunk holding papers and large brown photos: the pyramids, the Ganges, the Taj Mahal. In his grandmother's room he saw a picture of Mount Everest. (She told how she had watched the clouds miraculously lift to reveal the summit!) And a giant brick from the Great Wall of China.

Carriacou was not listed in the index of the *Goode's School Atlas* nor in the *Junior Americana World Gazette* nor appeared on any map that I could find, and so when I hunted for the magic place during geography lessons or in free library time, I never found it, and came to believe my mother's geography was a phantasy or crazy or at least too old-fashioned, and in reality maybe she was talking about the place other people called Curaçao, a Dutch possession on the other side of the Antilles. But underneath it all as I was growing up, *home* was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper. . .**

The walls, now, are more than a mile in height—a vertical distance difficult to appreciate. Stand on the south steps of the Treasury building, in Washington, and look down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol Park, and measure this distance overhead, and imagine cliffs to extend to that altitude, and you will understand what I mean; or, stand at Canal street, in New York, and look up Broadway to Grace Church, and you have about the distance; or, stand at Lake street bridge in Chicago, and look down to the Central Depot, and you have it again.*

The Carter Family, Flatt and Scruggs, Bill Monroe—his grandmother's people tuned them out. Lower class, "white trash" music from across the river. He felt the same about Elvis. But bluegrass, with its roots in traditional country music, moved him. (Later he would discover that bluegrass was never simply from across the river, from the "country." It thrived in industrial centers like Gary, or Detroit, carried to displaced proletarians, not by acoustic banjos and mandolins, but by radio waves.) The world he grew up in was built on a country-city opposition: school in New York, long summer months in Vermont. His playmates there were farm kids. The country was supposed to be different from the city; you had to "escape" New York in the summer. (But other friends in Vermont were the kids of

similar "summer people," mostly ex-communists, from the Village.) He travelled to the country in the city, and vice versa.

The Colorado is never a clear stream, but for the past three or four days it has been raining much of the time, and the floods, which are poured over the walls, have brought down great quantities of mud, making it exceedingly turbid now. The little affluent, which we have discovered here, is a clear, beautiful creek, or river, as it would be termed in this western country, where streams are not abundant. We have named one stream, away above, in honor of the great chief of the "Bad Angels," and, as this is in beautiful contrast to that, we conclude to name it "Bright Angel."*

Pearl Primus, the African-American dancer, had come to my high school one day and talked about African women after class, and how beautiful and natural their hair looked curling out into the sun, and as I sat there listening (one of fourteen Black girls in Hunter High School) I thought, that's the way god's mother must have looked and I want to look that way too so help me god. In those days I called it a natural, and kept calling it natural when everyone else called it crazy. It was a strictly homemade job done by a Sufi Muslim on 125th street, trimmed with the office scissors and looking pretty raggedy. When I came home from school that day my mother beat my behind and cried for a week.**

Surrounded by black and Latin cultures, he travelled to the Village, where he discovered a pure white music. (He read much later about the interconnections of bluegrass and black minstrelsy.) Around him, New York was changing, a place of crossed roots. Rock music—white, black, and Latin—was breaking out all over. Around him, the city was being "Caribbeanized." But he hardly knew Barbados or Jamaica from Haiti. And "Puerto Rico" meant only a gang of juvenile delinquents in "West Side Story." He read about all this history later.

I climb so high that the men and boats are lost in the black depths below, and the dashing river is a rippling brook; and still there is more canyon above than below. All about me are interesting geological records. The book is open, and I can read as I run. All about me are grand views, for the clouds are playing again in the gorges. But somehow I think of the nine days rations, and the bad river, and the lesson of the rocks, and the glory of the scene is but half seen. I push on to an angle, where I hope to get a view of the country beyond, to see, if possible, what the prospect may be of our soon running through this plateau, or, at least. of meeting with some geological change that will let us out of the granite; but, arriving at the point, I can see below only a labyrinth of deep gorges.*

Lying in bed he listened to noises from the court. He could just hear his mother talking on the phone at the far end of the corridor, while Burl Ives 78s spun in a room nearby. The court. . .the court was an accumulator of city sounds, a great conch outside his sixth-floor bedroom. Through the half-opened window he heard snatches of talk, a slammed door, sirens, an airplane, jazz, a car starting, base notes, a scraping noise, laughter, something crashing, echoing on the pavement far below. His drowsy ear collected all the separate parts of a complex hum that never ceased, day or night. Known and unknown New Yorks.

When we came down from the roof later, it was into the sweltering midnight of a west Harlem summer, with canned music in the streets and the disagreeable whines of overtired and overheated children. Nearby, mothers and fathers sat on stoops or milk crates and striped camp chairs, fanning themselves absently and talking or thinking about work as usual tomorrow and not enough sleep. . .It was not onto the pale sands of Whydah, nor the beaches of Winneba or Annamabu, with cocopalms softly applauding and crickets keeping time with the pounding of a tar-laden, treacherous, beautiful sea. It was onto 113th street that we descended after our meeting under the Midsummer Eve's Moon, but the mothers and fathers smiled at us as we strolled down to Eighth Avenue, hand in hand.**

Blanche—he recalled very black skin, glasses, and a voice. For several years, when he was five or six, she was in their apartment twice a week, doing laundry and housecleaning. She was distant, deliberate, a little intimidating. (Much later, he thought he recognized Blanche in an essay by Paule Marshall about the Barbadian women who came to New York during the interwar years—women who worked hard to make a home in "this man's country" while maintaining a certain "aloofness.") Her speech, the thick Caribbean English, bothered him. Blanche was old. He remembered her worn, pressed work dress, her loose brown stockings, glasses (rimless?), and thin, strong, black arms and fingers. Their dog barked and barked each time she came in the front door, hurrying to a private corner of the pantry where she hung her coat and changed for work.

Our rations are still spoiling; the bacon is so badly injured that we are compelled to throw it away. By an accident this morning, the saleratus is lost overboard. We have now only musty flour sufficient for ten days, a few dried apples, but plenty of coffee. We must make all haste possible. If we meet with difficulties, as we have done in the canyon above, we may be compelled to give up the expedition, and try to reach the Mormon settlements to the north. Our hopes are that the worst places are passed, but our barometers are all so much injured as to be useless, so we have lost

our reckoning in altitude, and know not how much descent the river has yet to make.*

From Barbados by way of Canada, she lived alone somewhere in Harlem. Later, he learned more from his mother, who admired Blanche and regretted not having done more than pay the low, going wage and send in regular social security contributions. ("She spent her whole life cleaning other people's dirty houses. And when she retired and went back to Barbados, she was proud to have saved enough for a burial. That's so important for people like her.") Blanche helped his mother, who struggled to manage a large household, with advice about housework. And she got on well with his grandmother. They were close in age, and shared an old fashioned courtesy and Christian outlook. His grandmother always had "colored" help, back in Evansville. Blanche asked for respect and got it from the white haired lady. (Perhaps they shared, too, a feeling of marginality in the New York apartment, of coming from another time and place.) The same couldn't be said for the kids. He and his sister were sometimes disrespectful, even cruel, in ways (like the dog's prolonged barking) that Blanche knew had to do with her race. She became indignant, lecturing them on their bad behavior.

And I remember Afrikete, who came out of a dream to me always being hard and real as the fire hairs along the under-edge of my navel. She brought me live things from the bush, and from her farm set out in cocoyams and cassava—those magical fruit which Kitty bought in the West Indian markets along Lenox Avenue in the 140s or in the Puerto Rican *bodegas* within the bustling market over on Park Avenue and 116th Street under the Central Railroad structures.**

Blanche worked slowly through the apartment. Sometimes she talked to herself. And she asked for just one special thing: that she always have a hot lunch, with meat—a hamburger, whitefish, a chicken pot pie, something. Only after seeing her cold room, which contained a single hotplate, did his mother realize how crucial these "proper" lunches were. She made the journey into Harlem only once, when Blanche was ill and confined to bed. Did she take the express at 96th street, or was it the 125th Street crosstown bus? His mother couldn't remember much about the trip except dirty streets, a squalid building, and Blanche's clean, small place.

The canyon walls, for two thousand five hundred or three thousand feet, are very regular, rising almost perpendicularly, but here and there set with narrow steps, and occasionally we can see away above the broad terrace, to distant cliffs.*

CLARK COOLIDGE
from CITY IN REGARD

6.

Nobody will fuck through the wall
but it's early
those long blocks
could use a ferris wheel
I knocked on
Akhmatova's spindle over
no waiting, one room in thirty years
leafing through backyards
the offspring cat
rattling transmission pan, lost thought
poets
all having been to the same
the loudness of poetry
and deafness of sense
I just sailed a yacht
pendulum
labor is?

This world has six prongs and I
don't want to be sad
I want height
over between it is
the sailor's tie and lemon salad
these my thoughts
down dark blocks
below blue domes

Cloth wheels that come through
the grease of rice
my pause in jeans
and a red glass light
fronted many, encomiums few
deserted interiors, glass to the mere side
eggs and bread, I never ate so fairly
lost
then sent to the north
he became the poet
he later lost

This
a lot of district calling
above the field of mere size
ceiling sent abed
whirlpool proportion vitamins
he reached the door just before
the circle that had formed
my poetics in a pinch
nothing filled
Zen wind, beginner's sand

Stop those lowering doors
the painter held
goes off in his cap
his fencing of the totaled range
nobody has
this place everybody
wine the ladders
rhapsody in ones of balcony
or just about sound urgency?

His cap came off the tilted wall
of vampire
waiting on the captain for
the rice to duel

the horror show terrific
we saw
everything there
that was today
and spoke with nobody

A world where Matisse has no mouth
stops breaking differences
I scaled the glass
through a well to the snare
I think something strange is bound
goose is the same here
I knew from the start that

Shot apart suddenly
those two with the hairs
in a globe a golden tar window
street star pouring wide
thumbs under, a poodle on a stick
where anything that happens is wrong
watch the cinemas fill up with mall
waste
I'm impatient now that I have
to use

7.

On the gradient of completion
a past master marries us
through

It's so transitory, stopping by the one
word, then the one word, then the one
ideally it all should vanish like
unrecorded music into the present of
the next start, a craziness my time has
none of the space

was already beyond me, I miss
the Leningrad stanzas
Leningrad blocks

Brass snakes
filthy frames
Susan and the Old
Ozone Fans

Washing dishes, mishearing terms
handing glasses and taking bills
in the movement of mountains
nothing holds

Nothing on the path forward
there's
collapsed geodes in the lungs
time to quit trawling for dates
or numb skulls, buy a real one?
secure me some bisecular walls

The ruins were symmetrical
the chaos would be complete
I knew then that I'd always love you

8.

This getting to be old
tinker shop on rye
with a dead tongue
but with cloud cover rise
just the same and sets
today's sun on told tiles
flats that look like factories
look like ruins, untold
there are nut varieties
but from the poet's the trees

the crows, what do we look at?
not even thinking
the nonsense of a berry tree
the mirror that reflects
the lamp out of use
section this hill and manage
the beans, I hear it all led
to your iron with ropes
even though you betrayed
by heart light of dark traits
reductions of a golden eye

The then another
she says of whom
how he is still
exhausted from his birth

To trail along nightmare routes
empty buildings glow and char
exemplary done

Then the better thing will be what
a tube through the ceiling?
a man sitting up by a curb
passersby put him dazedly up
the man bloodies through
glass wall of the bar
sits with stain, chin in hand
we eat in our room

This will be
the Capital of Coincidentia?
what's that whirly thing
coming through his stomach?
pure guts through the clear
margins like love
I live wherever I can have it

humming just a gigolo of a monk
in Leningrad's score streets
a memory of Sue's changes now
in the first secretary's office
a secret passage in the paneling
through which come the coffees
and I am taciturn from near
passing out, wrong pills
a locomotive collides
with a building block, kids
play backhouse soccer, claws of Anzio
the trenches of Remora
dump the ten things
down the same drain

Set abrupt in language streets
what if it was the anguish school?
and I had nothing serious to point to
a clove on red sandstone piece
on a sawed trunk
he site in teak thinking up
a future holy furniture
toboggans here?

And the cat that lives at the basis
the ticking of the cat in the hallway
I don't think about sentences anymore
but would like to get something to
stink like a finger
the tango of a coin

Where every thing is hard
where is the sacred formation?
I *least*ways like to talk
what you are doing is too serious
to worry about, I don't want
to talk soul with pikers
the plumbing comes loose from the cry
circular
edge around its casting, the word for it

I write in little sand notebooks
and otherwise find no books
not to think about
sealing my name in things
like anvils in Petrograd?
I saw the Morrison Encampment
and I was circled in bait
visit the mausoleum and see
nothing
breathe, wear winter duds out
stay up until there are scrapings
through the ceilings
I am a filer of walls

How many bottles of fossils
in the floors?
I prefer cow pens
clowns with aims
delicious pads
endless thud basements in
Bedstead Heights
and the hoppers that
rearrange the sift there
no one to live there, but something
I hear the drain
gone away of the moon fluids
for us were the silence within
never knelt together completely
could I enter this for you better?
blood on the floor, entrance to the castle
then we used their harmers
hand me a piece of that
puzzle of pragmatism
I'll soak it in my watch
to suddenly see all
the brass there is in time

I sat on the horizon so it wouldn't, please no flattery
put on an album? a lemon sash, punk prod window, a tonguing
there are no longer any ones here on the floor, my floor of ash
trailed by the neat stains, half an egg, thoughts grown lower
as clothing eyes to the floor, a floor of nebulous and sag fish
pumpkin wads, a trail of all the desks in harbor, thrall to
tongue alternatively, pen to the side of the lost, off-hand bunk

Now in which movie will you move to? invention
that does us here to there to marksmanship dip pluperfect
a dimension slaughter-called as dog outlines, where the fear is
that what's eaten will not do, or do only all too well off
in some other hole, there's finery and then there are plain walls
before where the mirror was, the beacon of pearls to camouflage
horrible elaborate dumpling verb each of us have a cog in
one of me at a time will serve

To establish what's beneath, bend a hat and sip
long slots meet new heights, bare breath of the heartless fancier
loose from his lapels, hand on the bank, lights rowing past
seek me in the diminishing game, well ahead and skull rampant
I've nothing left to shoot you with I'll go below, no sound
sands they've covered well in the lights, our passing thoughts
so who's missing when standing and the door closes?

Not what's down here but what's below down here
girders to a sapphire bird, flightless no doubt the papers will firm
[it that
ex-credenza masters as we're standing there against walls below
[ground
in the wind, he heaved it higher faster like as if a camera misted
would grow weightless waiting or carry all cigars under the arms
here are the woken lights and the clothes you could wear to
[match them
corn as smooth as silk goes by as the pearls are pulled through
could stand a meatless mention of any of this, pelted upon from
visible ceilings, arches weighing nothing, talks as the failure of
[future variations

Somehow got her tongue stuck below the earth
deepest catwalk where the navel protrudes, is this whose
fire circus or a committal trailer the edge police exact?
nine miles inner the woven wave is waken, alibis intermittent
a perishing snow rail for the inner cities to dangle beneath from
but does it all need to wave to wake you? how homegone
are you bound? a similar smell to the deepest arcades?
mail to the map spotters this froggy bent cavorting, this bat
[shorter
there may be a deepest room for it all, not

Then are lost, but then are
crowded till the watching of walls is all
now upstairs the closer and closer frames are
which way to the gaze point, less laughter at all
made hills of it are, paint slow braid in time
on the elastic latch we stray and watch
abandoned, retraced ourselves to the gold room and rose

What was lost to go up? where the winds go through
like nothing in chains, and the gold rinse rises in yards
beyond all cold advance, what would we seem we would see?
the rooms are too deviant on this level plan for no light
we must see with our eyes alone, no other aids
no stanching of the posture fronted, elbowed with oils
were you there by my side taking care that the flight would be
[endless?

Gold won't be raised for these blocks, goings not taken
for heights deep shafts of light, of a sun that baffles
we haul our blockage to the mist hotel and wait for this sky
to erase whatever pictures, whatever won't go whole a wall of it
pasteboard books to fire your flail functions, joins that glow
as if peat recede, too many portraits of tongue in the hair gallery
too many caps that face lost our steps

But find it all we lapsed, up and caught the time enabled
to stand before the sighing dance the singling tongs of hoist
[ceased
this physics it lowers us, the cancel fits fine no waiting
no plugged waltz or primer kit left on landing, did we see?
so doing did we make the next night, whatever marked off could
[be passed
a large lump in icing, face struck where a door should have
[paled
I show vitamins here and you call them dirigible

Starved to the forms I would flee from I see
these pictures could not be here, must make mentions else
to be not, I do not whelm much but leave museums
by the north door, they see only my ankles, am seen out and lost
[again
seeking more blind hosts at arms and marked at *my* harm
there are verses where and stairs piled in moth packets
nebulae hungry though risen strictly in time, pale at a stoop

Is this Cinderella under all this ice?
her blurry cape got caught on my lip on tile way to the poet's
[rafter
logs bend to the stone as we sidle, keep it up and fill your
[arches
there are greetings here and hours when these stones will danger
[watchers
the trunk coming out of its brace to sly alive in a buckle turning
these skunks have oxygen and train it, pearly on the elbow favor
wholly on the drunken river braver locked and found low

On the way to the river high housing is lost by the inch
and there are the barer couplings, itches where the idle backs of
[fairs
lock steps to the tongue catch, these hands with raising ride the
[bus
come bright at faint night of blaze scraps in a winter warmer
and these are flakes they'll strap them, bend over and spot a cap
but then are dangling none, the widest streets be spared, diced
and bright to a lot later on the cave shift, when to cabs
the single figure left the picture

But being vary day, in it own we
freedom to inhabit the forms of the spirit
or whose gust prow do you shade in flag?
but I won't live here than be not anywhere
gone stoned in the draft where the weatherboards are blonde
appliances clogged and turns to wait at last passed
didn't fall but was pushed, didn't wave but was missed
by a sharper gas, a blinder pulse than came to hand
here nothing loose has not been fastened

Maybe it was the back room of the month
but I sit in distance before I march, since
people live in houses at a time, I will move there
bringing on the fronts I have entered, a dock at a desk
a pen as a first, do you have the address of this
this or have options but they hang outside the windows
an elephant in France as good a match
do me a favor free of hunch, hands to face okay?

Hook me a planet space, sounds to run away from?
I am the misser who holds landings and I drop to tea
follow, the entrance low as dark, then wind in as up
bracket stories, hum of the passing private inner pictures
they all own them, place them in creak of cooking beyond frame
indulgence away beneath, plain as if money were summering
I followed the war from in here, onionware, salt as steam
signing the paper I talk to you

I woke up in a window or under its greenish intentions
placed in dream under the narrow green, be warm and rest there
where above is your life a crack comes loose at the top, lift it
what was feared from green, a raising cloth of close issues
do we remember or recall the food? the pipes concealed in
[trunks
in verves of tenacious swimming muscle held under glow open
[day
does the door have your dog? I raised a fiddle
you matched me, we held up our ledges, then I slept a twig
then raced our mountains in a paris green glare, lever to the tree
[blooms
the glass is thinner here to wear

Something? apples in the blackest of boilers
the talk turns out strong, have a drift, is it well?
apples in the mention of stories may not mend, take a skull
is it true? lingo lasts, go to jazz, so I monkey
with what mumbled under, three glasses to every grace
and a lawyer turned away from this bound door, this thread a
[stand
at a voice another layer turned to see under hand

This will be a desperate work, what I have seen
the spire a monument to air, casement beckon open again
or close air in the closed insect vest, apparent meeting
a fist that could forget and still hold this handle?
fit steps in the puzzle meet so go down in alien
a mind that is curtains and beveled the less, an aid
I don't stop for these clouds in the room, short of gather
hear my word, stop my hand

Then he barely handed us on, the late on a tangle
stars blinded, helmets were raised, a pinhole through to nothing
parts past the gate, the elbow of slats, heats by and carts
smiling enders all packed, I have lived along these lines
nothing to hold for, all parked in patience, an elbow lava
a plate left for the missing, those held in wait
the whole ruin a locked patience, battery trap
those with eyes held gone from

A certain green dark but did I know from what was said
a fight was caused by lamps, interference lobby, a twitter to
[come from
a writing first lies then ravels, marks made around the knob
a parting newel, shelves where the ship landed, phone aid things
have you gane down, ace, have you chickened, pile to the star
at the end of this night, this imperiling furl to the knees
the winds, there's a cold at this corner, a book I must need

Substantive in arson on an oriented garden shed
threw us sort of
as if a spine shaft with propeller blades
a gift of the tongue sharp among weeds
then a honk and the advice to study
stare as they're made
advice about asbestos
in the mall they bend over
to the inside of a flashlight with nothing

•

And what would you feel should hang below the paintings to say
wipe my tea feel my tray hook my coat?
these are prismatic wishes in that they tend
a twirling series of snaps a chain erases
I had it harder than my head with these hands
they were shaken when entering the pyre
we couldn't imagine waiting for
what was in those eyes

•

in the moment there are no witnesses
and the wind turning up to cover it
a notch of realization
a soft outing of wearing the violin
an edge on variation
a shifting of the preposition's spire
back to the handled ones
who think it's wise to ignore the poles they pass

•

I wait for the eyes
will not invent things to
see through
to the short behind the mask
the baseboard revolver holder
to come free to jaw on to chin on
to wait
I have nothing but the snow in my future
savagery

•

All this informing is only a net
one is placed to
a dealing of voices through the temperature's walls
which are self swells
crowned with the clothing strength of ravines
a parapet nature
a whole hall to contain one carburetor
and down its aisle we slide

•

The truth once in hand
can never be translated
shortened portrayed peeled
the larval entity is a standup
coat won't be moved from this lodge
but I sit in the winter I sit at the window
whatever I relay muzzled
portentous and frayed
a butler couldn't mention to you
in the story as was had

•

But in the story it was hard
no hand of the writer would fall in line
give me a room I could say anything at all
munch the newtons off a brick wall
not sag
but was stumped at the desk
of ease and northern openings

•

I placed my room on the ledge provided
it's anyone's gaff to starve up forward
a place to stretch just as stark as
but this station gone all open to your weeping
too many boxes and those that were in them
a trampoline of an expenditure
we went all over for the signs
saw none came back tapped our tongues
freed at the last despair

•

You go by use into everything
the truth lucked out in the past
patterns of pastels warning where nothing
I got so used to noticing I couldn't come indoors
then in the great weight of paper
at the back of the passions
I won't read the poet who holds his dogs in line

•

I mean it would be awkward to prime all this ice
the abandoned nature of lumber
a holdup in the outskirts
a matter of the creative dull
but we were left here without clothing
without marvels to be unspooled
we added up to faint toil
the finagling of fancy fingers

•

The experience as of mud
shocked to the rivets
partial moles and vegetable fins
a cabinet for the confining of remnants
next street over club stake
rules by the number of ruts
classified or classicized meaning
carbonized to a tee
as if sent back out to
the one tree to dream of stockings

•

I bowed and opened
the dictionary to milk
turn on the plain of intention
penis to nipple there are no comparisons
just flavors in bunches at the lair

•

We'd get near the door he'd turn on the box
had all his things hatched in their proper ladderways
we couldn't incorporate but he'd ring true
one door held a hall key the other a rail stake
a real pain of song
through to the intention mines
then the notes flew on an orange their webs had long wet
and we did we came

•

History is not listening to what has been raised
at all in a north hole
what an awl drilled in an onyx pole
getting the spheres kind of shrill
the world beyond this fall had long been raining
so very certainly no one was asking
and now I'm writing
peering at one valence of the single clue

•

But I dream all the night now
so what is it that sleeps?

•

You say this is a science?
much of this goes to the green sirens
and wane lines on our canopy
is this an open bubble?
said their nomenclature was disreputable
and ought to be snowed
or I should get home and plow

•

I do not own all these rivers over here in the handcuffs
nights of one bullet out of a freedom reign
or adequacy
I kept noting things down in this kitchen
home of a moderate to low-deal pumping
for alteration and the tumour that smokes
some poems are little but gear ratios
We'd have to hear hard to put away
some poems are nothing but lit stores

•

But why doesn't the lemon light on the barricade
break it down?
those frozen all in a line
and tramp tramp the boys are loosening
midnight of Bartleby et alia
a blue Slow over the last begonias
and iron of a stuck up subway root
these red oxides were destroyed as a fact
by the sound

•

Through the offices of starlings
the folly spoken in a settee of tightening apples
So we aimlessly play with the symmetry of time eh?
we don't know anything about where you're ending up
these are not perceptions so hard they vibrate till you return
these are rather real people that imitate each other
call me brother or call it a night

•

With a grey lighting just to the side
pages of this and a page of that
apartment as yellow as cat
strike a gel to the hue of a tuning fork
then what do you bet
I wear darkness

•

You shouldn't wear out the decoration side
of all these matters there is trespass
as quiet as the fur it takes to properly close
with which parts of my opening mouth are hung
a mosquito and a clock terrible
in their closeness

•

Along the stumping mire the apology twits
one's grace for an armload of poetics
in merry caps and waste briar lengths
you would only move to take my shaker up
and plunk it deep in a casuistical mine
dense as sense only
marched into treated territory
are the guests that that need implies

•

I will hate them bright then sit and simmer in a bar
give off cake offers and salad turns
it's all the mumps to a manual
from which the officials in spectacles recover
a coin rolled into a gutter
from which spasms of fat hair
a clay man and a spiracle
it best be winter with you centered on you
drinking a drain around your betters

•

That word that you don't need to use so put
before everything
as if entering in its preemptive way the world
the whole that's loose
striking and managing by
turn and by token
we have to make up novels
by ending at the gumption gate

•

They limped around the leaned up canvases
thought in volleys in the jail of aims
a jellified inclusion so who's the better actor
mine is the sails in a granite of drums
coiled and wearing
moving over to vote only once
the tuber is boiled
the children are hacked from my ankles

•

Here an interior of the globe is made
hung in green discards
there the lovers have descended from their wallets
a skinny tingling of syntax
and borrowed weather rhythms strange and dull
we turned off the fall and entered autumn in a carriage
a folio of dressing dreams begins to glow down
the counter of all forms in a brimming hand

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

TEN POEMS *from* UNDER WORLD ARREST

SHORT STORY

Begin with this: the world has no origin.
We encircle the moment, lovers,
who, encircling each other, steep in
the fantasy:
now we know the meaning of life.

Wordsworth's *recollection:* wreck election,
the coddling of ruins, as if the oldest man
thinking of the earliest thing
offers imagination its greatest bounty.

A poem is a snake sloughing off the momentary,
crawling out of now (the encasement of
its condition)
into layered, mattered, time.
Now is the tear and ear of terra's torn era.
For the serpentine, merely a writhe
in appetite.

We posit Origin in order to posit End,

and if your drinking water is sewage,
to do so is understandable.

When the water is pure, Lilith's anatomy
is glimpsable in each drop.

But the water is never pure.

Before time, there appears to have been
a glass of pure water.

Therefore, we speculate, after time,
there will be another.

Life, a halo surrounding emptiness.

Continue with this: not body vs. soul,
but the inherent doubleness of any situation.
Thus in fusion there is also abyss.

Conclusion: I am suspended between origin and now,
or between origin and a bit before now.
Unknotting myself from both ends,
I drop through the funnel the y in abyss offers.

Nothing satisfies. And,
my suffering is nothing. Two postage stamps
glued, back to back,
abysscadabra.

What is missing? A poetry so full of claws
as to tear the reader's face off.
Not enough? Look at what men do to women.
Why should art be less?

Poetry's horrible responsibility:
in language to be the world.

[for Don Byrd]

THERE IS NEITHER FATHER NOR MOTHER
when I am made.

My blood is created from the fruit
of first forms.

Of elephant graveyards
Of pulled-out eternity staves
Of the sensation of orgasm as the goad
of all one's power
Of the flowering of shrubbery
Of the earliest horned god carved of
stalagmitic drippings
Of blue veins and vermilion glans
Of the last passenger pigeon
burst in tar
Of the nipple at strut with the goose step
of the cock
Of the face of Art Pepper
Of bruised American pie
Of what in each artist must be a match
for the infinite.

THE BASHO THRILL OF SETTING FORTH,
potential illumination, potential demise.

Dissolution now tied to millennium,
our end and the world's throw
shafts of Don't Look Back into all leaving,
                all returning,
creating an undertow resplendent with
                abyss.

As if each moment were a preboarding baggage inspection,
a Maya assembly line,
with X-ray screens in the gods' octopodal eyes.

ANTINOMIAN WINDOWS

I fear a louse of phantasmagorical energy,
a stallion maggot refusing to be a fly,
holding all captive,
feeding all, immersing all in contrasoul,
then slaughtering all from within.

•

We are at every moment in swill with nothingness,
in the awe of chaos bottled
as the blood head of male nuclear destruction.
The Grail unidentifiable still
because we have not created a common stone
fluidified with Kali's ichor.

•

I am anchored to Sonoran pronghorn,
to Queensland Rat-kangaroo,
to white-nosed Saki, to you,
disgusting plague of novelty,
shield against which men have crushed the underworld.

AFFIRMATION'S WAKE

havoc of man
"The world is charged with the ~~grandeur of God~~."
It flies through the night, Blake's worm,
the Treblinka Express, gathers in the dispossessed,
concentration cored into a camp.
Where do men get their fury?
From their theft of women's power?
Is what we call the abyss
the ensouling of a surrounding malefestation?

All men carry the perversion of Hopkins' "charged."
"as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky"
As if an old, old unlivable were in Missionary
  Position over all that can be taken, gored.

And for all this, there's a sweetness never spent,
  a rare freshness that seems,
    in the lamblight of torture,
a mesmerizing shield screening off the full
  glare of what men do.
O infected brightness! Against your turning-milk
    swollen breast
    I press my Holy Ghostless head,
    a parody of the Somalian babe
    sucking through her mother air.

AFTER PINDAR

The Siberian Greco-Roman wrestler,
Aztec obsidian embroidered skull,
muscles plates, or
tectonics, they say some just collapse at his feet.
Is he
the god-force I feel in Vedran Smailovic,
a member of the Sarajevo Opera, in formal evening attire,
playing outside the bakery where Serbian mortars struck
a bread line in late May, killing 22 people.
Every day, for 22 days, Smailovic braved
sniper and artillery fire to play
Albinoni's *Adagio* in honor of those who had died—

Autumn sings, in singe with winter's fangs.

THE SKELETONS TALK TURKEY

As autumn's wheaten quilt furls back,
the sleepers are revealed,
drying stalks, the long flutes of the dead
begin their agitated piping:
"Do you know your bounty is in part our work?
Do you not know that cob and bone,
the armatures of your increase, prove us?
Will you drink mescal through the night
by us, until we share a warped, suicidal pang?
For to forget us is to die from us. . ."

Children, impersonating the dead. How solitary
their shapes under street lamps, Frankenstein,
Little Miss Muffet, wending their way. . .
a month later, in the split-off half of that great
equinox reunion, wolfing down turkey,
thought of the dead is flattened to schoolbook Indians.
O interval rife with smallpoxed and massacred millions!
We use Halloween and Thanksgiving like book ends,
as if to contain their volume. I think of tubercular
Oquendo de Amat's *Cinco Metros de Poemas*—
who does not dream of a book 5 yards wide containing all
it means to be a Peruvian, an American?

In mourning for those with upturned pots for heads,
millions will converge on Lake Titicaca.
There will be a vast weeping tent in the storms of millennium,
when it becomes turgid that
some are frozen, none are thawed.

COOKING

I slide down like a fireman into a cauldron-shaped machine.
The discourse
shifts, scaly zucchini
wants to be scrubbed. Mother said: get out of the tub
soon as you finish washing yourself,
so I scrub and consider the chicken, the cold
under her arms as I carried her into
the hospital toilet. All of life is present every moment.
We know this, or I do, dimly,
I wipe up something from the chopping block, it tastes like
16th Street—best I can do,
my birth? The flecks are more precious than
weight of bird in hand. Open the wine.
Curious, the antagonism wafting from the just-pulled.
But what wants to be opened? Down in the blood force,
I dream while I cook. Dreaming is
a kind of cooking, body between waffle irons of bed and night,
the ghosts of the introjected sipping and picking.
I am closer to Caryl in bed
then at table, but tapers anchor us here.
Are we re-enacting the primal snack
as we cut, munch, and talk? The tall sip of Chinon
that plunges to my belly,
a shore bird zapping up a crab?
Have you looked into your mouth,
considered the Labrador of ice floes, jungular lagoons,
infinitessimal havens and coves under invasion
as the tongue, trapped rhino, goes through its
wrenchings, so articulate
after 20,000 years, then Andrei Codrescu on NPR:
he too hates David Duke—I throw in more Louisiana,
cleaning a shrimp: serrated knife down the back
held against the chopping block edge,
swole gut tract furls back, husk won't disposal, so
I bag'm, thoroughly rinsing the headless, footless
Paleo bodies under harsh cold,

each point of cooking so interesting,
                I know you appreciate it
having shopped so carefully for all I fondle.
To clean a squid is to have a hand up the goddess.
To do so makes me want to help a cow give birth.
To cook makes me want to disembowel myself and eat.
Cooking is a form of labyrinthine pacing,
and is without fear, until we make contact with
the soul of the beloved, for whom we cook.
Then the two of us are out on plates
looking up into this gorgeous autumn. We are old,
and sliding about, but the dry golden trash
    still clinging to the maples
is a kind of funky Greek Keatsean urn.

Kenneth Burke, 94, is happy for a tasty meal.
He has a chic gray cap, and settles in
at our table on his pillowed chair.
Salmon without oil, or salt,
spinach, rice, Pilsner Urquell.
He said that night: "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty—
    Body is Turd, Turd Body" and giggled.

Each evening we sit down to these bodies
    in cocoon, these woven green beans,
this artichoke harboring so many compressed
thorny lips. A delicate char molded by
    the coldest lake depths,
parts of my mother, parts of our mothers' mothers,
    myself, yourself.
                The wind rises outside,
the gold, rouge-red, orange bonfired leaves are down.
We are skeletons eating amongst the skeletons.
                This
    is the delicious thrust and realization.

GORGEOUS GEORGE COMES POUNDING DOWN THE BEACH

On the San Diego Freeway
rising toward Mulholland—
azure ghosts of canyons,
cobalt lime dusk.
Agnostic snarl of art, aerobics, pizza,
valet parking for Trashy Lingerie.
Sun tinsel streaming in 5 PM light so strong,
my eyes close driving, open to helicopters
walking the backyard on stalks of light.
Bricolage of tar Maya movie plaster.
"Hi, my name's Bruce, I'm your waiter,
I tried to kill myself last night."
Gladiator bright, collapsable city.
The Rolfed young man cries I am,
not realizing I am does not see.
So I'm 13, in my Aunt Georgia's trailer,
off Mulholland. I've been parked here
while the adults play Canasta.
Stretched out on the bunk bed,
turn on the tiny TV:
Gorgeous George comes pounding down the beach,
platinum locks atoss, bikinied,
as if strolling the infinite.
Nature's radiation appears
an angel layered in coke
stretched out on sushi cooler ice,
Goddess Ikatakomagurouni.
LAX landing lights flashing hero no one
while up the Strip I chug
below the toe level of billboard gods,
oily, puffed up in platinum heels.
Jackie Collins' anima-black mane,
neon lips,
"Exquisitely jacketed in depths of anthracite."
Madonna, "The Frida Kahlo Story,"
lacquered red nails,

silky hair crisscrossed in meticulous
  braids—visited by the Rockefellers,
    her unhealable abdominal wound.
Perhaps Frida is LA's patron saint?

On Melrose, mascaraed punk mannequins
  are digging "Day of the Dead." La Muerte:
    the exfoliating skull sending north
          Mexican macabre gaiety,
dens that abutt globally:
the cleaning woman's husband
        decapitated in Guatemala
appears on TV.
                Kali-fornia face,
  Kali's fornix, Marilyn's whee!
her sagging frontier bodice line
where men are at once larvae and Valentino.
Brittle chrome candy of this Western edge,
haunted not as Brittany by "finisterre"
  (thus world-end everywhere)
but by the American Icarus dream: "Mounting
upon the wings of light into the Great Expanse"
Gorgeous George comes pounding up the beach.
Hockney-sketchy immortality
                swimming pool deep
a water blue sky in whose bowl
I too steer, imperiled by cancerous fish,
a human being looking like a scuba effete
wandering unpeopled streets, wearing
                my house on my head,
my possessions pyramiding my sides,
a mobilary Mesoamerican relief.
                Porky and Bugs
come tumbling through the palms,
squirting my sunglasses with hot-dog
shaped diners and saber-tooth perfume!

An early draft of this poem, "Sixteen Years in Los Angeles," appeared in *Temblor* #10.

NAVEL OF THE MOON

The man who is always wanting to see now knew
he must imbibe semen, but in imagination—
as on the openings of the mountainous mother
he had perceived the stones were so alive
they were freezing. He had to release
the semen parachute way too long nailed
to the zenith of male brain,
had to let it pass through his eyes
to experience the octopodal
sensation of submarine drapery,
to be thin as a veil, but also to fit
into the carapace of a crab.
The project, then, is to let the treasure descend
through the interior zoo of chakras,
until Kundalini, blind as Tiresias,
coiled so long her rattles have gone soft,
raises her head and gulps the displaced jade
—not nag, nor strumpet,
but the nearly untranslatable fool's gold,
the glacial division in muelos-elevated man.

It is time to be tender to stone,
to see it as semen, as the finite of the inside
Big Hole Woman scratched animals into.
Or are we all animals of snow
composed of the avalanche of mother's milk,
through which flows a warm but alpine stream?
How you'd love to believe its source is in your head,
maggot in a uniform of buttoned gold!

Autumn, you lie least. As the harvest
swings into full view, the cornucopia tightens.
Could I but interrupt mother and father
for only a moment, could I,
in the sensorium of that smoking lubricity,
inhale a contradiction so total
that, when they started up again,
I would be their rhythm?

Mother, can't you see I'm a root borer?
I am reholing the word that was your breast.
Stand back, ego, shrink to
the immensity of the nipple absence
over which your paradise is stretched.
The soul, most honorable cannibal,
lined with the mead of its oldest kill,
  its blindness.

Caryl's hand touching me
went through my thigh at the rush of love,
which is liquid, relentlessly sweet,
muscle seltzer—but it did not go completely through,
it is suspended,
    she is suspended,
  her hand in my thigh, calming,
how much she calms
  in suspension here.

At Monte Alban, before a *danzante*,
the shadow of Ana Mendieta bends.
A flattened man all surface like Ana,
cheek of stone, a lily-groined hunchback,
pages of a scattered stone book,
dismembered at the core of vision,
three halves that never join,
two orgasms jolting past each other.
Thus compassion. Thus tenderness mixed with gravel.
In the tip of the solar arrow,
I discover my mother tied and splayed.
A great snail has arrived in the plaza.
We cry Beached Whale!
In metaphor, the primal anxiety:
everything is nothing,
something is a toadstool under which
ragged elves are cowering.
How long does it take to get the weight of the earth
  through my head?

Coatlicue leans forward
just enough to offer a worm shade.
Before Her as a man, I felt my infant size
before my mother—or let's say
Coatlicue is the size surrounding the hole
I made in mother's apple—and so, indeed,
I am a worm in the shade Serpent Skirt offers
—with whom one never shakes hands.
One shakes *hearts* with Coatlicue
for she too is part of the cornucopia,
part of the great snail's retinue.
All true answers are questioned by
the 2 rattlesnakes that like facing
question marks fuse as Her head.

Bitter river
poets would say flows into the metaphor-
confabulated split tongue whose root is lost
in Coatlicue's cistern breast,
tongue waving from a peculiar mound—listen:
as if a century plant attempted to free itself
having blossomed, or, have you blossomed?
Was birth that good? Mother's apple that rich?
Isn't your heart always that apple, pumping
serpent, caduceus tree rooted
lower body, her feline hindquarters,
the aroma of her menstrual pool
out of which fairies first flitted?
As I stared at my stool,
the faint blue forms of mountains,
a fat crimson worm entered the mountain,
a male worm wearing a menstrual shawl—then blank,
nothing but milk delivery, the gangue of myth. . .

Against the underlight of Oaxaca
the night sky in suspended rise,
the necropolis in suspended fall.
We are nestled, forever, as now, or never,
in soft bone arms, buttressed by breeze

and the wail from the zenith tube
into which liquid night flows,
a kind of larval ebony for ballplayers' hands,
the braid of events in the fleeing stream,
the present the parachute's weighted pouch,
the past its cape, the future
the rising hidden smile of the ground.
The firmest, most loosened poem meets us
with the force of the landscape:
am I vain to hold my report open
while it is being written, so that I and it
know no more than a given instant realizes
—realizes? makes real, like makes water,
meaning releases loss, showing blocks,
the block is seen through
but only as a winding window at the mercy of:
I stand in a rushing tower and write
with a fluid pen on a tablet with a blank of its own—
what I remember are only my experiences.
The power of time, wider and deeper than life,
hurtles around skullracks, boulders with no recall,
orange crates in which the gagging
if divine marrow is experienced
on a plane I know of but do not know.
Flower is consumed almost faster than appears,
then *and*, dear procrastination, seeks to add
and my tablet gratefully sucks in my pen.

Time is layered, each beginning deepens
as if each leaf weighed its tree.
And thus where I stand: the weight of me?
Infant pulled through the thighs of earth,
infant emerging from the crotch of stone,
or is it stone emerging from man,
what is hardest in man, the bearing of non-bearing,
to be the finite cul-de-sac
empacted with seminal angel.

I am pinned against the base of the Southern Cross
to a position, a vane over

the tumulus of my hopeless central sleep,
here with my pots and dolls,
buried alive in my background,
in the crested fist of the specificities
I've been hung with, have chosen to wear.
The white Western heterosexual moves
no revolutionary boulders. Unlike the Césaire-man
he does not speak for the poor.
Even if he is not to be zapped,
but his boll weevils spun into porridge,
he is still a mink in the flavor—
                something that won't go down,
or that does,
    failing those stacked
        in the flues.

"navel of the moon" Mexico
first disinterred me, a black cape of flies
took off from the pineapple of my innocent heart.
This is where I'll bury my poetry,
blood gate of the moon, vale whose path
is the backs of ants, glossy
scarlet road, conveyor mirror,
this is where I always wanted to play,
aloft, on penile dream stilts,
a Gulliver-man, in collage with time.
I am the man who waded in man,
who ate man's marrow and report it is without source.
WOT TIS SOR ROW the Noh ghost intoned.
"dirty water which nevertheless cleans a pail,"
the menstruating dreamer responded.
I, Aerial, spat between the two,
I, Aerial, freed by the two,
saw a girl dying in bed, her hand a rose tree,
crawled in with her, let self
form a moat around her, a halo,
then the tree bloomed a fairy shower,
each wore a tiny fig pinafore,
each carried a sparkler as she circumambulated the tree.
"We come in self-annihilation and

the grandeur of inspiration—take the foul
deposit remaining in the cooking pot
and preserve it, for it is the source of heartage.
Come with us under this red rock
and we will show you the beast Blood Girl rides,
her broom bull, cratered, incandescent,
whose sides are open portals to the black
manta shadow on which we dreamers ebb and flow."

And we were followed into Monte Alban
by a little mongrel bitch
still nursing her litter, wagging,
our consort on that moonless night.
She rested by us as we sat, filthy, frisky,
or just sitting, and to the parking lot
where I wanted to adopt her.
Literal man, you've been adopted,
sick little dog, little Shulemite on the sward—
on her leash, power flows into your neck.
The work is everlasting conversion,
the mother is endless, the work is
everlasting conversion. Merton is electrocuted,
Vallejo's death curls a scorpion mark,
Caravaggio under a nitroglycerin sun
copulates with his own wounds.
Against the literal crucifix, set the metaphor,
burn the cross with mental pain,
it will spring forth again, a violet,
a summer storm, the bellows tear,
the ember drops through the palm.
Today I have made contact with
the immortality of error. Alchuringa,
impinge! Open your foramen magnum to me.
Between genitals and the brain
there are only exploded bridges.

[Mexico City/Oaxaca,
May/June, 1991]

FIGHTING SOCIETY

Noses
Gargoyles
Broken-jawed boxers
Not socially accepted homosexuals
Beethoven Piano Concerto playing How can you fight society?

Babies
Babycarriages Cribs
Cars, houses, garages
Country estates, huge cranes lifting
Derricks Dirigibles How can you fight society?

Hiways
Millions of miles
Asphalt huge supercarriers across Atlantic
Bombs, armies, airplanes, hydrogen explosions bullets
teeth blood broken bones arms How can you fight society?

Walt
Whitman
Would've revolved in his polar grave
and clapped his walrus hand in joy
for what I say: fighting American society

My Uncle Leo
Says I am only trying to fight society
How can you fight society? How can you fight the fighting
Society take on the whole fighting society shooting match?

[December 1956]

Dream—

We Now Present a Documentary on Greta Garbo

Camera pans to window of house under bridge. Thru kitchen venetian blinds, gauzy, a figure inside as if seen thru telephoto lenses—She (Greta) dresses in simple house clothes, or red skirt making meal for guest, dinner, at sink and sideboard. Lens clarifies, she's young and attractive and very straightforward. She seems happy. She talks to herself and laughs and chuckles, lifting her head and laughing to ceiling as she peels an onion.

Camera moves in close up—clearer and clearer—it is a movie—she talks—"You see I live here all alone and like it. I have friends, but they are my only friends, true friends. I am not unhappy. I have no needs for anything." She makes salad—a big bowl of lettuce, chives, endives, she's coring tomatoes & putting large whole tomatoes in the big bowl, a la natural style. Close-up of big tomatoes unsliced with center chonked out by knife, just top center not all the way thru.

"Man needs very little to live" Greta close-up again, superimposed on a view of bridge under which she lives. Her face and bust in dress get larger & larger & seems to atomize and dissolve into the bridge—with the giant interorganic view of her bust on the screen faded into nature, the bridge in the background.

"There is no use for all the money, all the worry, all the work, all the war. I live very simply alone. All men should forget about their great radio needs,"—her form as an immense television image fading into eternity—"Too few of us can see ourselves as things, like this bridge under which my house is sheltered—but in God's eye we are things, with our needs. And things like us have no want of a civilization. We shall survive atomic ruins because man is in mind eternal."

"Too many cars, people, too many unreal movies, too many passions clutter our lives, too much of everything—and we all work for nothing when we assemble and gather it all around us—for what? No need to do anything but just live." She's talking like Gary Snyder. Plea for simpler life, privacy. Ship's bell rings for breakfast and I wait & wake.

Probably influenced by French edition of *Secret Life of Salvador Dali* with pix.

[Fall 1956]

"Fighting Society" and "Greta Garbo Dream" were excerpted from *Journals Mid-Fifties*, edited by Gordon Ball, Harper & Row, NY (probably) 1993.

I visited Vidyadara Chogyam Trungpa in his big new house he'd moved into, I was happy, flattered he'd see me in his kitchen alone as he had once invited me to stay with him & family in his house outside Boulder on 4 Mile Canyon fourteen years ago when I'd come to give poetry reading benefits for R.M.D.C. with Gary Snyder, Nanao, Robert Bly and Rinpoche—the time he'd drunkenly put gong bowl over his head and mine whilst Gary & Robt. were declaiming themselves.

We talked, I apologized my laziness at meditation & long delay at detaching myself from the entanglements of television, photography, music, fame, poetry, teaching travelling, high blood pressure, sleepless nights, self-consciousness. He was neutral nodding his head as he puttered around the house in shirtsleeves, he was alone no one else home, probably wanted to be alone, I wanted to ask his questions, approval for my aesthetics, so I explained that I had proceeded with examination & scanning of ordinary mind—assuming that resting in that state of non-activity or better non aggression, refraining from the strain of trying consciously to focus on aspects of Eternity in palpable objects of the senses. I would come to clear steady seeing & glimpse the luminosity of things as they are, Samsaric anecdotes as Nirvanic finalities, deepening perception of what's already tangible on the street, in my mind, in bed, in dreams, in the kitchen, at Brooklyn College, visiting relatives, under the sun & clouds in the sky. This was the method I'd followed, for poetic mind, since we'd met, reconfirmed by his constant presence & my awareness of his mind, all pervading equanimities & juicy calm insight. Was this a correct path?

He was indifferent with all my explanations, and finally, when I asked directly, am I alright there, slightly irritated as if brushing me off, he said directly to me, "No" and added, "you're all wrong."

I felt naked, mentally, NO, what was I doing wasting his time asking for approval & credentials, I hadn't even had the devotional strength to confirm my presence in the N.Y. sangha with this evening's Guru Yoga assembly, I'd gone to bed guilty, lazy, exhausted, numbing out & ignoring the visible devotional community, stayed home dressed in bed unconscious under my covers in my new painted comfortable bedroom with its small shrine, and library full of Beat Literature behind the headboard; a desk at foot of the bed with my Brooklyn College class papers and notes and new William Carlos Williams collected poems sitting in corner, with a basket of pens & bottles of ink by the bedroom wall side of the desk.

He had said "NO" to my entire life proposition, I stammered, not knowing my place, self-conscious, "What had I done wrong?"

He didn't answer and I realized I had neglected the main course of action, completing my meditation prostrations & Foundation practices—I'd delayed thirteen years since 1973 seminary introduction to Vajrayana

alchemy, I still was resentful and hesitant, unfocused on devotional strength, insecure, asking alibis, I felt naked mentally, straining to impress him, get his confidence & approval, encouragement for my genius path. A fraud, flying airplanes, employing secretaries, sleeping late answering phones in mid-sleep, nervous, high blood pressure, gout, gluttony, workaholic ambition, neglecting Peter's pain, Rinpoche's own.

"What should I do?" He was silent, I realized the Answer was in the physical sitting meditation, I delayed it till his death, what was he to say, I'd missed the boat so far. I'd have to sit again, prostrate, visualize, exercise discrimination, I'd been wandering in a dream.

His apartment was on an upper floor of a country house. I followed him—he went to the side of the room where the wall was open to the sky, & looked down. Then he jumped down to the cloth & canvas pillowing on the roof of an out-building or shed-porch two stories below. I was expected to follow, he landed lightly used to the descent from the height, I was terrified, would I survive the leap to the thin canvas 20 yards below? I jumped, thumped down, we continued some desultory conversation, I didn't know what to ask, "Better prepare for Death" he once told me pointing to my harmonium black box "what would you do if you lost it?"

"Shall I go, Sir?" I asked crestfallen, "Should I leave now?"—He looked at me, slightly indifferent, round faced in clean shirt sleeves rolled up, turning to me a moment kindly, "No, stay awhile." Ellie Dorfman was coming to visit—that was hopeful, familiar, she liked me, maybe would intercede or at least get clearer explanation of his disapproval, his "No" to my life, she loves me, if he likes her he'll have to explain what's wrong with me—tho I already know, what's to say, beside overcome laziness & diffidence, oversleeping during dramatic sangha historic moments, not attending grand Kalachakra ceremonies, indifferent in his last days when I visited Halifax Hospital and touched his brow, sitting only 15 minutes at his side as his big head mouth opened wide red.

Ellie was due to visit, I wandered in the main living room, on a bureau dresser on a yellow legal size sheet of note paper he'd written a fragment of verse, "The White Horse passes the River, the cloud sinks into the snowy mountain, the Garuda circles the ice crest, Lions roar in empty mist, Tigers prowl in the basement chambers, the Dragon sleeps" or some such nonsense of cryptic instruction.

I decide I should tell him about the party in Halifax when, engaging tall thin brownskinned drunken Mr. Rongae the Tibetan to type for me or translate *Howl*, he said "I may not be competent" and I replied joyfully "Wake Rinpoche and ask his advice." Then Rongae had gotten mad at me for "insulting Rinpoche," and had to be held back by his guards, from attacking me with his hands, punching loosely at the tall friendly dumb fellow I'd sat next to on the couch, who turned out to be his companion

Vajra guard for the night. I tried to tell Vidyadara the story, but wondered why bother him, did I want his OK again, always seeking his confirmation, a nod of approval?

Throughout the awkward conversation I felt stripped of authority, like a kid who was caught doing something wrong (which I felt as kid in Eastside H.S. accused of stealing a book I'd bought from another student) and had always evaded understanding the basic score, now found out & denuded of reasons, embarrassed & helpless.

Trungpa was preparing for a trip, packing clothes for voyage, attending the curtains & furniture, inspecting the household so it be correct for kitchen daily life & visitors, he was settling down.

I stayed on in the living room, happy that Ellie was coming, she'd bring some intimacy & relief to my bare embarrassment & poverty of mind, Trungpa's disapproval. At least he said stay, when I humbly asked "Is that all? Shall I go Sir?"

"No" he'd said, "Stay a while, you can stay here, don't go yet."

[April 6, 1987 1:30 AM]

From unpublished journals, 1980s.

POEM IN THE FORM OF A SNAKE THAT BITES ITS TAIL

Oleta (Snake) River!
Heron, Manatee, Osprey
Canopy of white red &
black Mangroves
fighting for survival against
exotics introduced
by Europeans
Swamp fern covers the ground
by this Primordial Tidal
Zone,
Brown detritus under the
clear water
feeds animals and trees in
high and low tides
pulled by the moon,
cycles of lunar
reproduction following
waters flowing
in and out the
Intracoastal waterway—
Barracuda come
in with the tides
Heron we'll see
Brazilian pepper
& Malalucca
from Australia
brought in by Mr. Gifford
first Doctor
of Tropical Agriculture
Malucca
to dry out the swamps
& make truck farms
to feed the Northeast 1900—
Dade County
tomatoes & cabbage today—

Then real estate won
out, that saved the
swamp
water
supply
This forest by Oleta River a tiny
area untouched
half a million
years—
Interconnected to the
coral reefs
(as nutrient rich protective
soup for fish
spawning)
with a rubber tire, mucous—
soaked in the ooze
Red mangrove
seedlings growing on inland skirts
at water edge
roots like spindly
buttresses

First Indians Tequesta
for 10-25,000 years—
left behind shell
tools
to make dugouts
Mikisuki and Seminole
were Creek Indians forced down
from North Carolina
by Sen. Jesse Helms
then driven inland from
Northern Florida
by the Army
—Indian middens
attest 100
years' occupation

The Seminole
more warlike then
the innocent
Tequestas

Quiet in a canoe
Train whistle West
& airplane above
cottony clouds
in blue afternoon

Seminole and Mikisuki
accepted
runaway slaves
got in trouble with
the whites—
Abraham the Runaway showed Chief Osceola
Guerilla gunpowder—
Defied the US Army—
Govt. fought 2 wars
against them—
first 1820 Andrew Jackson
fought in Florida
pushed Indians south
Second Seminole war
transported 2,000
Indians to Oklahoma
around 1840, the Trail of Tears
—200 managed to
escape into swamp
where white man had
yet no use for
the land

Indians
from before Columbus
& runaway slaves
Strange & perpetual
alliance

Otherwise we're all exotics
like the Brazilian Pepper
and Australian Pine

A brown heron
flaps along the
green surface
to stand sentinel
on a green lawn
past the big rubber
tree
beak pointed out—
tall stalky legs
rising hallway
heavy slow
on long wings
the height of the big
ficus' leafy
umbrella whose
thready prop roots hang
over the concrete
bank down to the brackish
water surface
Kids & crows' voices
(crows here for the
season)

Water filled the
coral, ojus,
limestone
a product trucked
out since
the railroad came down
turn of the century

Trains a mile long
from rockpits now
at the edge of
the Everglades

Mikisuki Indians now hold
cultural events
Steve & Billy Tiger
painter & musician

Seminoles more commercially
oriented, invented Bingo on
the reservation,
On land they control
untax'd cigarettes

A local issue
ecological!
We depend on Everglades
for water to
sustain our days—
Most of the body is
made up of water—
3-4 days without water
we die—
Everglades filters the
water Dade Broward
& Palm Beach County
drink—
(Tricounty fresh
water—)

But Brazilian Pepper Seeds
explode
and cause mumbo jumbo
growth at
waterside.

Exotic Malalucca trees—?
The developers like it
(it's cheap)
but they drink up water & their
flowers cause allergies
to Rochelle—

Red Mangrove
stains the water
properly its own color

Are hyperindustrial White folks
exotics to the planet now?

Here comes a duck
that flies sings & runs
but doesn't do any
of them well
"El pato vuela, canta
y corre, pero
ninguno de las tres
los hace bien."

Big yellow hibiscus faces
with red noses—
Venetian sailors
brought
venereal disease
to New World
now Millennial events
speed up?

Get off fossil fuels
for transport
Get off oil addition
Plastics could be
recyclable

Zero Growth regenerative
recycling as for
thousands of years
with the Tequesta
Get off this disposable
binge—

& water! dont mess
up the Oleta river Dont
play with the big Snake

Can live without air
8 minutes
Can live without water
2-4 days
can live without food
40-50 days—
Survive, clean up our
air
Clean up water
Grow enuf food to
keep everybody
alive

Instructors: any
indigenous populations

Indians, Africans,
Tibetans, Bedouins
Laplanders—
Chernobyl began
the question—
How much can the
Government lie?
(*Miami Herald* pervasive
and controlling—)

Locally the Seminoles may
be the Gurus.

[11/16/90]

New volume of poems, 1986–1992 (in preparation).

MIND WRITING SLOGANS

"First thought is best in Art, second in other matters."
—William Blake

I. GROUND

1. "First Thought, Best Thought"—Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche
2. "The Mind must be loose"—John Adams
3. "One perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception"—Charles Olson
   "Projective Verse"
4. Surprise Mind
5. "Magic is the total delight (appreciation) of chance"—Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche
6. "Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes."—Walt Whitman
7. ". . .What quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature?. . .Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."—John Keats
8. "Form is never more than an extension of content."—Robert Creeley/Charles Olson
9. Ordinary Mind includes eternal perceptions—A.G.
10. Notice what you notice—A.G.
11. Catch yourself thinking—A.G.
12. Observe what's vivid—A.G.
13. Vividness is self-selecting—A.G.
14. "Spots of Time"—William Wordsworth
15. If we don't show anyone we're free to write anything—A.G.
16. How do we talk to ourselves at night in the dark? "Each on his bed spoke to himself alone, making no sound."—Charles Reznikoff

II. PATH (Method)

17. "No ideas but in things. No ideas but in the Facts." ("Give me a for instance"), ("Show not tell")—William Carlos Williams
18. "Close to the nose."—W. C. Williams; "Sight is where the eye hits."—Louis Zukofsky
19. "Clamp the mind down on objects."—William Carlos Williams
20. "Direct treatment of the (thing or) object."—Ezra Pound/1912
21. "Presentation, not reference."—Ezra Pound
22. "The Natural object is always the adequate symbol."—Ezra Pound
23. "Things are symbols of themselves."—Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche
24. "Details are the Life of prose."—Jack Kerouac

25. "Labor well the minute particulars, take care of the little ones
He who would do good for another must do it in minute
[particulars
General Good is the plea of the Scoundrel Hypocrite and
[Flatterer
For Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized
[particulars"—William Blake
26. "And being old she put a skin/on everything she said."—W. B. Yeats
27. "Don't stop to think of words but to see the picture better."—Jack Kerouac
28. "My writing is a picture of the mind moving."—Philip Whalen
29. Maximum information, minimum number of syllables.—A.G.
30. Pound's advice re: Imagism:
    A) "Direct Treatment of the thing"
    B) "Economy of Words" (no superfluous words)
    C) "Compose in sequence of musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome"
31. "Follow the tone leading of the vowels."—Ezra Pound
32. ". . . An attempt to approximate classical qualitative meters. . ." —Ezra Pound
33. Syntax condensed, sound is solid.—A.G.
34. Intense fragments of spoken idiom, best.—A.G.
35. Savor vowels, appreciate consonants.—A.G.
36. "Only Emotion Objectified endures."—Louis Zukofsky

III. FRUITION

37. Spiritus = Breathing = Inspiration = Unobstructed Breath
38. *"The Emperor joins heaven and earth."*
    Man joins heaven and earth
    Speech joins mind and body, viz.:
    Thoughts and words come from mind,
    Impalpable.
    They ride out into space
    on the physical breath,
    coming from the body
    Thus word conjoins or synchronizes
    or connects mind and body—
    Thus speech as sacred connection of mind and body
    Thus speech as Emperor of Phenomenal World
    Thus speech as Imperial Proclamation
    Poetry as Proclamation
    From Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche *Shambhala*

39. Characteristics of Poetic majesty:
    A) Meek or humble—Ordinary mind
    B) Sparky or vivid—Surprise mind
    C) Outrageous or "crazy"—Wildness of mind, jumpcut, dissociation. Gaps. Collage, montage. Music video, discontinuity. Raw thought, scary sex death boredom thought.
    D) Inscrutable—No reductive or linear abstract bounded thought. Unpredictability, "unborn" yet appearing instantaneously: i.e. "First thought, best thought."
40. "The unspeakable visions of the individual."—Jack Kerouac
41. Needn't be genius for production of artifact; amateur effort homemade OK, as mind training in being present knowing your mind, appreciating your own mind, and others', i.e. the 10,000 things of the world.
42. Subject is known by what she sees.—A.G.
43. Others can measure their visions by what we see.—A.G.
44. Candor ends paranoia.—A.G.
45. "Make it New"—Ezra Pound
46. Fruition: "To diminish the mass of human and sentient suffering."—Gelek Rinpoche

[7/92]

Composed for July 1992 Naropa Institute poetics summer students.

MICHAEL PALMER SECTION

PERIODIC REMAINDERS: SIX POETS

NORMA COLE
from ROSETTA

§ it was the same pattern: the shower
of rain, appearance of ravens, description
of the oasis

§ verbs of posture, verbs of spending time

§ a future expressing the will or
intent of the subject 'I will do it'

§ she said, after the war had finished

§ market-minded; verbs of speaking
making noise and arguing

§ 'look' for 'see'

§ verbs of bringing

§ following but not gone

§ reported speech with
periodic remainders

§ body in glacier

§ off the sea like confetti

"Blessed are the forgetful" we did
love that place. speculate. what other
work could mirrors be doing? I remind you
of our childhood together. and of
the pick-axe of examination. you don't
want *that* to be
stranger. tell you
the waiting

§ 'arrest and movement'

§ there was talk of an empty city

§ stuck together

§ with words or sister city

§ made a clear pattern of abuse

§ turrets painted by squadron

§ the mast's game

§ ballast of gravel, sand or stone

§ the stone itself, soothing

§ impossibility

work done on the rock stood or fell at the
mouth then was written, *carved*

notched, grooved. . . .

"Broken up by rocks"
the waterfall could not measure up
as if they're
looking right at me. ghost
beauty
added four parapets

lost objects (gathering)
in the Empty Quarter

'whose work' would later
throw him
in which that gathering

§ ear-splitting whistle
undeciphered *but* proof
of their presence. so he

§ deciphered on the level

§ *Courier de l'Egypte*
le 29 fructidor, VII° année
de la République

§ the most important of
these 'daughters of Tyre'

§ way, path, groove, were those
signs (mysterious) in their hair

. . .wave theory of light. . .the bumpy treatise. . .we are
. . .losing. . .linear ramblings, floors. . .
its calm flatness. . .
the broadness and shallowness. . .

Moving anxiety
for the reality
moving without you. again
wrapping the proscribed
image in sheets
between
grateful reproductions

§ dreaming from the

§ signifying landscape X names
of the dead

§ formed from the taking of a country

§ wreckage and simple understanding

§ one day 'woke up' and
just knew how to do it

§ how these things come into being
and *that they do*

One translation says
Osiris says
but the other, earlier one says
The life of things
after the defeat of Typhon
the moisture of nature
through the vigilance of Anubis

The names were surrounded.

the play of color
cloth against the body
against whistled monody
recorded
body against

They used the four-spoked wheel.

§ restless

§ apparently it will be
filled with glowing
shadowy blanks

§ change going through to
experience

§ around to approx.

§ 'say' to 'read'

. . .covered. . .all. . .residues. . .over. . .a
ban on it. . .insoluble. . .surround. . .

no interest or
, believed
it so

posted
on the installment

They were
pretending
reason from understanding
Of the necessity
of the world

§ our city has done that and this

§ irritation has returned

§ not to speak of drawing parallels, are not always
taking the context or implications into hand

§ no longer
dreams blind

§ build these things and paint them

§ brightly

Nothing of the past is in these. . .pictures
stations of the plague. . .

on a silver tray you also left your card

lazy and erased
elevated by foldings
in three

genealogy of cities, Carthage
daughter of Tyre

to place up
lacing vocabulary of action
places direction with brackish water
wind called splitter or cleaver
refusing to let the supply ship dock

AARON SHURIN

A DOOR

Once—I move back in time—caught within a circle—I can be like some traveler after the vestiges—ageing planet—the street was not just a thoroughfare, it was a place where people lived. A journey occurs in the social hierarchy between house and bush. Each mound glistening through the grass, set among loose stones, almost vertical cliffs. . .

Her gown pinches her waist to represent a crescent moon. Eyelids between her breasts, dropping down the mountains. She inspects nets made of hairs—crackles under the sound of sparks—walls inlaid with glass winds, we'd stare at the sun. . .

Someone did not follow him into the kitchen, though I adored vigorous beauty. That it looked as if it would crack with scintillated youth—us their object—he watched, generated in the darkness by one hand, to our swarming garments part of us a third person—we let them fall—what is called triumph—making both our shame and our glory for a long time in a room. Smiling with sweat, of whose virtue we partook. . .

She starts towards the bedroom, but doesn't move—breeze comes up with two drinks, looking for Johnny. Here you are beautiful, as he starts past the twin beds. He holds onto him throws her arms around his neck through the door. . .

I wonder how at one time we are our own lives and a shadow, the steep hillside to a saucerlike plain to a fortified river. The blood smell upon your face is honey to stinging bees. Sitting on a stool in the red light of sunset he pointed to another stool. He's eaten his tongue, he must listen to rumors playing on the word. . .

And we got to talking plucking at his tweed sleeve—grossed seven grand with that puzzled grin—took the elevator upstairs and sat down again. I put my head down against sandwiches and apple pie. It wasn't like anything, it wasn't like real poetry. . .

The house filled with poppyseed rolls I baked myself scraps of meat, hiccups or headaches. Two kids have long tongues and go home in the evening. I took mybread—the moon started to pound through the cracks—each tiny bone came nearer—as though I had dropped from the roof—on her white lips a smile. You might accumulate a bucket. . .

And the veiling wind draws water into the clouds. It was ocean above the waters. They sprinkled their foreheads, with your mother's bones behind you. They covered their heads—their hardness—out of the quiver of this memory my boy came down causing love all the way—through the hiding places—who is your curious charm. . .

We've had chestnut trees and candles—in splinters on a mirror—and will hurl itself at the period blossoms to evoke the scorching in progress. The wrinkled cherries swoon away, a sky in possession behind the inflated foreground. The creamy emptiness resembling a road, a conversation, a dozen homonyms, a nightbird cries in broad daylight, abandoning moderation. . .

We had only to stretch our hands to establish contact with the landscape. It's the tenderest hue of uncertain fragility—brown and pink against the ravages ofemerald and white. I tramped over the ground—conveyed to me by its fragrance, not its shapes—in which the most telling posture was the opposite direction, uneven, a series of sharp tiers clinging to the coastal wall. He closes it with one key, its paradisal state providing fuel for crucibles. . .

A seductive man confesses to understanding nothing about pleasure. I'm not a woman but a world. Your chastity would walk into an olive grove, demanding sacrifice—bend down to receive a certain vertigo—at which your hand fill mythirst aimed at moving his tender wounds. One received an order, was converted through an apparition, head still bowed. . .

I call it a generative organ—the luminosity of which would have hatched one's body—breaks through into moral inquiry—he gets an erection. Our gestures grew fainter, whether human or material—my mother's face preserve within me the idea of myself—which took on proportion and power by the forces which camecharging into her. After rubbing his hands he stopped by the community kitchen, passed the docks, wrapped in a woolen cape, knew equivocal joy, betrayal was already forming. . .

People start looking for their coats; voices murmuring, she stands looking around her. A bowl of flowers seems to be listening. Elaborate vanity puts

a cigarette in his mouth. Never taking eyes from the match, mixing herself a drink, sits down in a chair near Johnny. She wrenches his eyes around that glass and drains it. Hard breathing—open the French doors—on his back smoking, a radio turned up loud in the next apartment. . .

He wanted to cut his message into the tablets of my mind, looked blank but knew my movements well. The night was clear in the reeds. It was thought, it was not a piece of wood. I saw a totally fabulous person appear over the top of the wall. I could tell from the closed eyes this creature had pierced the soft parts of his brain—searchingfor the circumstances of great shoulders—I might love a warrior, forged far away like that. . .

Or the time in school I saw an angel but couldn't get possession of what the sum was—the show, I mean—there wasn't a fraction of an instant—standing near the curb head thrown back, evaluating a smile. My stomach ran for the garage. Her face from the film was traveling in front of it. The spray seemed to catch fire. I fumbled along the lights, crying and laughing. . .

Outside the frost startled the frozen earth, a young boy happens to ask for particular stories. The same story you told before, by the washtub at our first encounter, radiant with intrigue. The young men—one summer—the corn—birds with human voices—a gentleman with silver shoes—we had no money. The sky seemed large, public, embroidered with leaves; women crowded to the windows; the roof was covered with green moss. . .

He has her—the other in terror—but gave her no rest. He placed his hand as if they still were limbs and kissed the foamy waters. Make some happy burning bed at your side. How she said "no" to change her form while he sighed, the echo of a sigh made slumber deeper in those eyes. The seed swelled up, stretched both hands to heaven, columns the overarching skies, trembled to this high dwelling to see the world so far below me. . .

The tenacity, the ingenuity, shuttered each night, open together. The curly children flinging themselves beside themselves. The little chair—a connoisseur—remained in his grip. A goose to overcome the dragon, and mouth the flower of a clear ornate attention. At the zenith of its circulation visible in the face. Persimmons beside his place at table, a tingling sprig of mint between the sheets. . .

Be objects of contemplation, instruments of reflection. The original layout trails through demolitions, new building fever. Steamy atmosphere in

oblique lines—between the pale yellow clouds in progress to Florencio de Abreu—were falling mango trees along the southwest outskirts—muddy torrents for the mud-walled pavilions—confronted each other a jumble of mammals established on these banksto carry a motor road. Functions were fulfilled so that these paradoxes might appear in public—arm raised in salute to suggest period grandeur, rose windows. . .

Did he receive the rampaging dogma allowed us? With lifted finger he pushes at the upper extremity. A woman sobs in silence against a pillar. I was falling asleep to the sound of the streets around his neck—it was indescribable, ecstatic in vibrating space—streaks revolved in front of my eyes, a man under a figtree at a turning in the road. How you scream when my vigorous strokes have been opened to you! The skin stretched on the ground under their tunics. Blue veils bow down around a rose-strewn bed. Waving her naked elbows the constellations shiver. Coming and going—heart of the uproar—beating their hands in time—we lived in this street of the cutting edges, claimed by inscriptions, the superhuman beauty of a stone statue. . .

I watched their waltz—it seemed the invisibility became total—wedded by lovers' exchange to all the injunctions of uniform and veil. I was being mastered by a strapping body aware of his loneliness—fierce and pure—like a falcon inside my cobra neck. His solid thighs seemed heavier. Sailors trembled about the sun, secretly engaged. Observed by a tall blond—my glance was between his lips, spit in his mouth—the resewn pink scar fluid along the dangerous shores, waiting for me in darkest alley of the neighborhood. He led me the very odor of night. At the foot of the stairs these words which were too sweet, contained the sleep of a child against his body. . .

His face fills up with Johnny, oblivious to his surroundings. Rain outside, she snaps her fingers leaving the door open. Leather jacket at the window, he moves away, taps himself on the chest—the direction in which she pointed—one long swallow—a small hotel—passing a large framed photo of a girl with lazy eyes. He's flailing with his arms, comes up with thumb extended—her very shaky legs give way—asking you to use it—squeeze a couple of steps forward into the staring room. In a tall vase silence has trapped him—pushed around in a wet bungalow that rises to crescendo. . .

Opener of the roads, I was visiting in that map he drew on the ashes. It was a spot among intervals—sloping bottom between these chambers—except for the outstretched arms. Debris encompassed the city I'd conceived but

left unuttered. I suppose our minds wouldn't come out of the pod. And the sound of wings passing over us—sucking noises torn out of the night—through the morass of this home which grew larger and larger, where a few false steps acquainted with secrets were close on their heels. My little baby striding toward me in moonlight—who was already high on his watery knees, praying aloud as usual. . .

She'd duck her head and look the other way. Her hair bent over my black and blue hand—receiving sympathy. Buffing her half-witted fingernails into the air and catching them in his mouth. Some bird which you and I wouldn't touch batted the breeze around—it's a disappearance, a gesture of good faith—into the rearview mirror where I left him, hands on his hips. I'd give her the exact address—it's someone else, it's another woman—in her made-over clothes pulling different ways—a creamery and a centrifuge—make me an offer—in a plain black dress that began to ache from her weight. . .

As in the saying, "Like father, like son," the houses were not home. She devoured with red hair and green eyes the colored scraps of winter, afraid of her anger, was almost forgotten, reappeared in short skirts, freckled by beads and wolves' teeth. Warm nights woke the town—roasted sponge cakes and onion bread. Even the willow branches were decorated—young girls in a scissor dance—a bridesmaid scouring the sky for sunrise. She walked as though the powers of darkness were pious men and women. Her hair was a wilderness consecrated to me. Sitting up in a bed that resembled the heralding distance. . .

You see my face: a punishment, not a favor. Why put those pleading arms around me? The driver doesn't know where to turn the reigns—plunging animals—stunned and dazzled over infinite acres. She saw the others and felt secure. No one can see us here, this pool is holy. Her hands curved inwards, too dangerous for her to plead with. The boy, seeking the game, had spread his nets upon his mother—she stood still unmoving eyes—her shining star being my wounds—he gave her back her human features, almost on tip toe over the sand. And his passion blazed up to pull the cloak from my shoulders—rising breasts—airborne—as though the sight of shining men were driven deeper into the sky. . .

We are left undisturbed in the heated disorder appropriate to private things. It's all decorated with multicolored trajectory like a hummingbird. My correspondent quenched its thirst at good brandy—an article of faith—I begged for a swallow—he shaped me pellets of breadcrumbs moist with jasmine water. I can only interpret it graphologically, arabesque, instruc-

tive. They bring me their strange odor—hunting anecdotes that bristle with dangers—to put on a spread for us: still-bubbling cream, featherbed, illustrated book. I haven't given them away, I shall invoke sonority, a shape. . .

With a paraphrase indistinguishable from the local porcelain bowls. A kind of latticework flour sieve made from split bamboos, transforming, plaiting, creating a current of air to produce a collection of specimens. You could examine the towns like a botanist examines plants; one direction expressing order, the other, magic. I was looking at men and women in airless cubicles—squatting in dim light of single bulb—they showered sarcastic remarks on me—the anthropologist—to underline their smiles—making a transposition to the manufacture of a laugh, devoid of mystery and uninspired by faith. We cross by plane to a single theme: the desert. The tracery of crystals shade off into trampled grey—a continuous surface threadbare by use—each shimmering impregnated, eggs of the delta. The tone of a beggar lowering the voice on the last syllable, as if he were saying "Why don't you do something to cancel out the element of cause and effect in the physical world?" Or squat down to urinate, nostalgically, in a state of equilibrium. . .

Dragging him along a dark stairway, the man whispers in his ear, bare of furniture. Light rays streaming on the walls, they talk about their families, standing in parallel lines with swaying bodies. That man was so beautiful it precipitated revenge. It passes slowly, as if a circle of great weight slipped from his hand. They surround him, console him, in the taut air on ropes. In the opposite cage, in continuous movement, he thinks he can feel their teeth. To have meetings with our brothers, our husbands, would take a door to the blood-stained bushes—blackened sponge—burying themselves in the multiplied soil—I once lived in that tree behind me—letting the world breathe out with both nostrils, in which I had shut my senses. The flowers of his face have become insensitive to light. I made a breeze in weakness—tell me where I can find Osiris—drank the panting river, green, vaporish, leaning on his right arm, overflowing. . .

He helped me, surrounded the secrecy of our first night. Beneath my fingers its heat—my whore—was born. His gestures powder him with a buttery softness—I leave a room on tip toe—excited by his blue trousers, laying my cheek against the keyhole in exile. One night he walked near me; I couldn't keep my hand from flapping his wing. I am hurt by a physical ailment more secret than poverty, obedient to the nature of that particular polished steel, his fingernail. He was imagining himself in armor grease, penetrating his petrified shell. The loveliest infanta on his right arm,

desiring abjection enough to be brilliant in his shadow. Laid out on a chair his jacket and shirt seemed inevitable. The procession started from the Ramblas de Las Flores at sunrise. I knew my place was one of them—their extravagant gestures—flowers down in a spangled skirt still remembered with stunning modesty. My shaken voice—it hides a sharper, more dangerous element—smouldered within me, formulated a terrible glare in the middle of mantilla and fan. I had never ceased to be silhouetted by the setting sun. . .

And if she was in a bar she just left disappointed, tears it up into little pieces too complicated for an ashtray. Glassy-eyed walks out to call it a day. Her head and shoulders on the wheel, staring straight before her. One of the bridges, spray of the tires, Johnny just looks at her. Strangers have friends like this. I guess I can learn to forget him. The highway lights didn't have any dinner, blindly past it. Steps are heard receding in a small coast town. The blinds are drawn, the radio is louder. She smiles in the direction of the chair in which Johnny sat, outstretched hand towards the telephone. Cars surf along the highway—people glassed in—wearing a scarf over her head, staring at her speechless glasses. I'm following a reason after the rain—cruise anywhere listening—the last passenger tight and determined and begin to get interested in restless conversation. "Who do you want to see first?"—He speaks without looking up—"and how long have you known him. . ."

We spent days at that place to allow the gases for such a digestion. The effects of his past debauchery could out-tire me. On our way I pointed to the edge of the pyre—two companions in a hole—cut to the irreducible minimum—in which case he might find himself by a process of devolution, missing. We were a curious procession that bordered the great artificial river, deep in the bowels of people who understood this swamp language. Again and again we lost the trail, separated from each other by high fragments—scattered a little body of men in that immensity—over trackless water, worn out away from home by the promise of pattern in the wilderness. I stared about me a flying light for a guide. It was as though a voice points to the east, whose temper in command here is discipline without law. Our state would have been different at its entrance. I had mapped out his reasons; the reasons were curiosity. We were creeping towards the spot of enormous advantages. . .

Another showman put in a call to the city. Shaking hands and slapping backs down the street like he was selling tickets. I couldn't afford sentiment among the businessmen. He knocks down a big overgrown tomorrow to keep close watch on a dozen females. Across the street he looked out and

saw me—made me feel like backward and forward was much too late—his mudhole eyes didn't have to move, lying around collecting dust. It started to rain a few happy drops: just part of theframework. Pieces chasing around a canvas during the ceremony to run things. When we passed along the side of the road their heads pulled up for the funeral. I sat down, stood up, shook the raining hell out of their hands. There was a rasping sound and the whole house rumbled. She folded my arms over the other—that's what made you cold—too late to change because we weren't the same people anymore—though you're all I have, you're mine now, splashing the windows. . .

Washing his hands the town was unrecognizable. The mud-splashed girls were grey and wrinkled. Monuments in the story brought their epilogues; it won't be heldagainst him. A bride was led before his windows: she alone survived. It was summerair for charitable purposes. She started measuring the streets with silver combs, wearing shoes with pointy toes, filled bathtubs with lobsters to sprinkle thecommunity with anything. Witnesses sat comfortably on a chair and sucked candy. From memorial candles the flames sputter—a moth wandering past midnight—you have to keep moving—the burden was mine to the reading table—of fleshand bones in the cleansing room—because a stranger can take the place of a person—size me up in their skins, vagabond—I tested her nostrils, red cheeks, pouring spine with arms outspread, trying to look in her face while my bed kept twisting and turning. If you're destined to live in circles her dresses were there. . .

Whoever you are with coaxing gestures that boulder will talk, tempted for information. It was a festival—grace of the procession—outshining the other wheeling stars, smoothing his hair to wakefulness. Over the great muscles of grass bringing flowers, clinging to the wind. Those people coming behind kissed the unknown fields and mountain—made a low archway for the long head, writhing loops—wild with veins as he sprays another color, pressing under that weight—into a pool of the woods while she was bathing there. The only speech he has is not his own. Fear argues while he hesitates—cut through the mountains—both sides said nothing, secretly rejoicing—I must find the girl herself with reason, under cover of the yellow cloud. Full of the slang of rage he enters her mortal body; in that mating sewed up in his cradle—struck from each other struck them apart, embraced and ravished by the strangeness of his infatuation. Both sought his love; neither could touch him. . .

The little jewel and I have waited under the colored sphere. Of crumpled souvenirs what he alone held—ritual possessions—with tassels, without

handles, a bunch of curls: the essentials. The sky turns the double curtain, enters my room. A little boy plays with difficult words so that she bursts her skin. A piece of paper compiled a list which demanded a burning refrain. We savored it, drank it, burnished it in the shadow—in the masterless house endowed with morning severity. Ripen the slice of cake under strawberry light, gourmandizing—it wasn't difficult to believe in France in maturity. Our friendship attacks with gratitude her practical vantage point, striped with reverence. Unformulated the fragment that melted away—signs of a phenomenon—face to face, exhaled at the table. Fresh parsley with lemon made a gesture of withdrawal. She followed the colored trajectories, strewn around each breath. Blue paper, immaterial, with its great slow eyes. . .

But in the line on the hill he built a house the other day—up on the threshold, rub it between one's fingers. The name is recorded for distribution under the honorific title: Workbench—hammer on the black cloth—polishing it with a piece of glass—beyond the pine woods where the dusty sun danced in corners with distant gold—in his own house, Jerusalem, a dot in a book. Behind this layer another layer—books spilled on the floor—filtering in through cracks threads of golden bees, angels' sailboats. The overgrown pear tree completely white—silence with moss when no breeze blew—he trailed into late summer, door swinging. He kissed his mother a hissing kiss, and his father ran after him; he kissed his father's falling hand, ringing in his ears. Down the narrow corridor were sons and daughters—it was broad daylight—green flames from the silverware, red from the wine glasses—spinning around the table, miles away. He stretched out along the mound, a profusion of apple trees threw themselves down on the ground, blossoming and burning. He washed his hands, entered the house with reserve. In the whirling substance the floor remained—without looking up he opened one of the shutters—I'm here—and walked in the door. A half-filled glass was on the table. His small hands trembled as the food was served. . .

AUGUST

Permit me to borrow from you.
I force breath through my closed fingers,

a part of reception.
A matter of belief

rings my tail

as I wag it.

Allow me to bite through

my lack of employment

Waves across your desk.

I have two ears

or teeth.

I've reduced this all

—that on the cilia I tread—

the matched stripes of my belly

as I bend backward.

I copy the empty cell
as part of those dual feet

that crook
behind me.

NIGHTWORKS

What I was I should refute
as crossword
or crosshatch

A new habit of literalism,
very sweet in
fragrance, irrelevance,
idolatry

But a metaphor of God
in a star of four arms

The fins folded back
pouring wine in

the very passage of time
which irritates skin
I've stared at too long
at its stub as it's perfumed me

PENDANT

Catching a glimpse of his afterness
This is not the one
but a net spread
in the sight of a bird

made a map

Upended fish
in whose wisdom an avian mouth

Fruitful aimlessness
were shields floating from their native
circle

The fin of him, his turtled grasp

Vain knees and shoulder blades
of superscription

At this stripe revolved listening and
retracted

His sudden absorption
Softening of countenance
Mother's torah
omits prologue

WHEN THAT

That was a stranger,
God, a moth
leaping over itself

Sugar meeting between molars
One horned
One with ears

One hart called Broad Places
another
        Room

that was a ladder set up on the earth jumping
pouring oil on a stone pillow

MARCH

> It is not nothing but something; yet it is something on the edge of nothing, bordering it and menaced by it, and having no power of itself to overcome the danger.
> —Karl Barth

Three fish in a cradle hurled
to that trickling

foreknown by virtue of its rejection

Three benign cells
finned and grotesque

Crosshatch, grill, and diamond
request existence

Laid out to dry in tumult
Double
        hexahemeron

Gills sent into createdness
the structure of the world

KEVIN MAGEE
from TEDIUM DRUM, PART III

What exactly the date was is not what was thought about is held unabated, unthought. One page might include a list of arbitrary, they would have to be arbitrary, unexamined verbal impulses, social bits of language. There are no more proverbs. Every night a crowd milling, doing the talking, the room not even a room with four walls and a fire escape. We followed them around with great disappointment and even greater concern, the news of the decision to restrict directly looking forward to this date in view of the blows from the batons and news of the roving begin to compose I admired his composure enormous moral authority liable to not exactly justice but my survival. When there is nothing in front of you there can be nothing inside you, the thought disappears and all that is left is this ghost of the matter in my head, the ghost of the matter instead. It was a saying of ours, a saying of ours for years. We may be goats, but we have our rights.

The sound came in waves, wave of liquid lapping, lap. Insatiable. Trajectory of daylight, warmth, heat, dazzle and beam bright agitated bouts of energy, integument of purpose, swathed. Increments. Clemency. Yes, you are forgiven, you may go free. The sign of election, and just when they least expected it, the child took the clock apart. The child broke the clock. The heat curls the paper, melts the flowers. Writing carving its course in the clay over

time. Hard look of the sexual disavowed, disallow, importunate in nothing but in Thee. Noon, the exquisite hour. The heat releases smells. Write with your hat off, it is that hot. Does the body smell because the air is moist, or is it the sudden shifts in temperature? She wept at the wedded tendril of the dog's entrails. The dog was dead and decomposing. The absurdity of the bicyclist at Balbec. The miracle of photosynthesis.

The sky is perfect today, just like yesterday, a virus. The worms lift their weary heads. They have been digging all day and the dirt disgusts them. At times it seems as though they cannot breathe. Candelabra. Embrasure. The sun shines on the page. Hagiography, socio-souciant. The bother of bay leaves. The big dumb dogs bark and bark at their boredom of barking. They are not theatrical. Trickle. Now what is left. What is there than for. Anywhere what had been, was, or was it—why not. Why not won't what, what then. Redact. With or without. A shout. The mere thought. Is that what it was and if it were was that how it is, now? Withering. The motor of. There is nothing more to add, nothing to be said for: kiln, milk. Possibly the edge or contour, expectorate or rind. The clay was fired. Per perhaps pillow. Bear nor got that right or wrong. Stipulate field. The full inside spread of a folded page. The binding is panel-stamped brown leather over boards. Parchment fragments from an unidentified manuscript serve as filling for the spine.

Proof of the authenticity of the narrative therein contained. It goes on. They go on. Culpable plan or plum pear briar nape fringe erratic verity height carry calumny, corollary, thorn. The thought occurs that it was this and not that, then, not the cause but an appropriated moment and the capacity to consist. He carried the candle into the room. The dog barks and someone's hammer nearby pulls nails out of a board. It casts a pall. Put on a pair of shoes and a sweater. Resolution of the dichotomy put forward by the Prague school. Antecedent exigency. The fence is falling down. The signified *ox* has as its signifier b-o-f on one side of the border and o-k-s on the other. When confronted with this ox-in-itself called by two different names in France and Germany nobody appeared to be prepared to say, with Giosne Carducci, *T'amo, o pio bove.* This much deprecated example of boeuf-Ochs is elementary and as such far from definitive, but to reject it one would have to claim that the equation boeuf-Ochs is just as absurd as, for example, boeuf-Buchanan.

It is noon. The siren has sounded. Masticate was the word I was looking for earlier. Probably some memory of Nietzsche's *Use and Abuse of History*, the placid beast without memory in the opening pages. In Stevens history is a part of nature is subsumed by nature it belongs—takes place in or takes force from—the natural order. This is a consolation for him as it allows him not to think in a certain (dangerous) direction. The light is no longer in front the light is behind, the source of the light is the sun going down, a compilation, chronicle or record, paucity of documents, no memory of the Party, factory, strike, cops, trial, prison—another life, it happened to someone else, I wasn't there, that wasn't me, who have no memory. Dropping with sleep, too tired to read, history hard to come by. Humility of an occupation where one must be wary as to

whether to add this or that comma. My three years experience in the Custom-house, P.P., clerk of this parish. She exists in the experience of her negation. How a large portion of the following pages came into my possession. A child is being tortured in the adjoining room.

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BENIGN POLLUTION!

MICHAEL PALMER

THE LEONARDO IMPROVISATIONS

1

Can the
two be

told the
two bodies

be told
apart be

told to
part can

the two
be drawn

the two
be drawn

apart

Note: these poems were part of a collaboration with the Italian painter Sandro Chia and were first published in a limited edition by Edizioni della Bezuga as *Improvvisazioni su Leonardo*.

2

What of the words reversed,
words meant

for mirrors, words lost, voices
heard, mirrors

which return. What of the
body there,

the body which turns, the
face which

returns the gaze. What of
the backward

book, the hidden book, the
waves of

bent light in ascending air.
What possible

eye requires such blank signs.
What worlds

appear as more than real
reflected there.

3

First write of all water
in each of its motions

Then eddies of air
in the form of bell towers

Then a book of the building of cities
end the burning of cities,

book of the winged man and the hanged man,
book of miter and argonaut, nautilus,

double helix of the twin stair,
book of the moon as mirror

and words made of mirrors,
book of the body and its memory,

body as a measure and body as a question,
book which explains our shadows,

book of the ram's horn lute and the monochord,
the intervals of light along its string,

book of the trace and book of the fragment,
book of the earth split in half

4

The measure of the actual body
is the measure

of the imaginary body
The body is encircled—

a circle is drawn—
circle that is impossible

around an actual body
body which tastes of salt

and does not exist
within the perfect circle

it fashions around itself
and whose circumference it touches

with the tips of the fingers outstretched
and the soles of the feet at rest

The body is framed by mirrored words
It is not visible in the mirror

The circle and the body meet
on the plane of the imaginary page

5

Curl of leaf and wave
Curve of neck and thigh

As much the unseen
as the visible

As much what has disappeared
as what remains

EMMANUEL HOCQUARD
from THEORY OF TABLES

(Tr. from the French by Michael Palmer)

40

A peacock fans its tail
pivots around

A peahen is white
is asleep beneath a tree
doesn't watch

The books don't arrive back from the sea
someone has tracked a shadow

The shadow is his own

You threw me twelve baby chicks
across the tablecloth

I look at the Sea of Straw
I am as big as what I see
I see a bed in a mirror

This mirror used to be four

41

You say now

Now means what happens
hasn't happened won't happen

Means a surface

One surface, another
another surface
not a book not a beginning

The figures don't say before

42

Grammar says something
arrives after a before
and before an after

It says a new sentence
is possible
someone is not alone

She or he
you and I

Grammar says: to search for a shadow

43

Dear you, what
I'm writing (to you) isn't personal

Means someone
another someone

The pronouns are traded
change hands

Dear Claude, that
belongs to you
but this book is for no one

I put my books in your hands
someone = his gaze

Not someone

44

Seven colors on my table

Dear Seven,
you don't exist yet

Yet means
before the end
of summer

A dress are red

45

Three points of view
three pronouns

You are the world

No one passes
from a one to another one

The objects file by
you and *I* don't touch

Someone is motionless

Looks

46

Neither the words
nor the sentences
the objects don't touch

A flower doesn't mean
orange

A lemon is not yellow

Is not signifies
what?
Dear Pornographer, what?
is false in the manner of the faces

Equal is impossible

47

Yesterday is opposite

Dear Maya, your cloud
above some-
one is going back to sleep

A suitcase is green
contained its key

The glass self-gleams

Power & Heat
in sleep's technique

48

Dear E., you say no
I don't know

Are you going to go?
you're not staying

At what distance
a wave is blue?

A question doesn't answer
answers

49

The day's name is: indigo

What are you afraid of?
means we
two or I

How long is this book?

Dear Jule, Dear Juliette
a name contains another name

Hear donkey, hear goat

50

Fifty or three
or ten
means not one

Not one remains

A violet bedspread
means to think one more night

To think means something
is extra

MARJORIE PERLOFF

WRITING ON THE BORDER: From Lyric to Language Game in the Fiction of Ingeborg Bachmann

> —Think in stitches. Think in sentences. Think in settlements. Think in willows. Think in respect. Think in farther. Think with while they will. In this case the succession of sentences do not pass muster. What is a sentence. A sentence is felt in a storm.
>
> —Gertrude Stein, "Sentences"[1]

In an important book called *Poet's Prose, The Crisis in American Verse* (1953), Stephen Fredman posits that "the most talented poets of my own postwar generation. . .have turned to prose as a form somehow most consonant with a creative figuration of our time."[2] Fredman's poets-who-have-turned-to-prose include William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, John Ashbery, and such recent experimentalists as David Antin, David Bromige, Ron Silliman, and Michael Davidson. "The American poet," says Fredman, "uses prose. . .to create, through attentive receptivity, a space of permission in which the world is allowed to appear as it is" (SF 6). And further: in its recent versions, poet's prose tries to erase the "boundary between literature and factual or theoretical discourse—philosophy, criticism, linguistics, and so forth" (SF 134).

I have been thinking a good bit, lately, about this characterization of a philosophical or theoretical "poet's prose" as "somehow most consonant with a creative figuration of our own time." To what does the *somehow* actually refer? And might not "poet's prose" be less a national-cultural (U.S.) phenomenon than an historical (post World War II) one, given, for starters, such poet's prose as Octavio Paz's *Aguila O Sol?* (Spanish-American, 1950), Emmanuel Hocquard's *Un privé à Tanger* (French, 1987), or Steve McCaffery's *The Black Debt* (British-Canadian, 1989)? Then, too, what about gender? In the U.S., poet's prose seems to hold the same appeal for female poets (e.g., Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Kathleen Fraser, Leslie Scalapino, Joan Retallack) as for the male ones cited above, for gay poets (e.g., Bob Gluck, Beverly Dahlen) as for straights.[3] But in other nations, the lyric impulse may

well be constructed differently—a problem I want to explore in a moment in the case of the Austrian poet turned dramatist and fiction writer, Ingeborg Bachmann.

The key theoretical text on the historicity of the verse/prose relationship is a book unfortunately still unavailable in English although translation plans are now underway: namely, Henri Meschonnic's mammoth (700-page) *Critique du rythme: anthropologie historique du langage* of 1982.[4] The binary opposition "poetry" / "prose," Meschonnic demonstrates with a stunning array of examples, is by no means a universal, much less an essential one. It revolves around three issues: verse, image, and fiction. The first (poetry = verse and therefore prose = the *sans vers*, the *sans rythme)* was by no means an axiom of Classical theory: witness Aristotle's insistence *(Poetics 1447b)* that "people. . .speak of elegiac poets, or epic (that is, hexameter) poets, as if it were not the imitation *(mimesis)* that makes the poet, but the verse that entitles them all indiscriminately to the name" (HM 398). Indeed, it was not until the Romantic period that the binary opposition of prose (the ordinary, the utilitarian, the everyday) and the "higher" discourse of poetry (metered language, rich in images, expressive of the harmony of the universe) gained wide acceptance. Rousseau and Hegel, the Schlegels and Schelley--these, Meschonnic points out, paved the way for the codification, on the part of the Russian Formalists, of the dichotomy between *forme* and *fond*, poetry and non-poetry or mere "background." A Formalist-Structuralist like Tzvetan Todorov opposes the schema of verse to the transparency of prose, in which, he claims, no such schema exist; Structuralist typologies of prose, accordingly, deal not with language but with the kinds of narrative and the forms of narrativity (HM 426-27). Even Bakhtin's distinction between poetry as monologic, prose as potentially dialogic, confuses, Meschonnic points out, language and ideology, the semiotic and the semantic, the linguistic and the social (HM 447-48). Extending an argument already made by Northrop Frye,[5] Meschonnic notes that there is no "I" in poetry without an implied "you," and, more important, that the rhythm of prose is just as distant from the rhythm of "ordinary" speech as is the rhythm of poetry. Indeed, phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically, "L'écrit set autre quo du transcrit" ("the written is other than the transcribed," HM 405). And if "prose" is no more synonymous with "natural" language than "verse" is, the binary opposition between poetry and prose breaks down.

Here is where twentieth-century developments come in. Modernism, Meschonnic suggests, referring especially to Apollinaire and Cendrars, Pierre Reverdy and Jacques Roubaud, "has not only destabilized the opposition between verse and prose; it has also undone the *poème objet* (the poem as object]" (HM 458). But that destabilization does not mean, as the common wisdom would have it, that the poet now has greater

"freedom" than in the past. Rather, Meschonnic posits somewhat gnomically "The freedom of the poet is really no more than his *[sic]* historicity. Not a freedom of choice. But the imposition of alterity" (HM 615). Which is to say that the dialectic now shifts from the verse/prose opposition to that between the "free verse" of the earlier century and what Meschonnic terms the *l'inconnu* ("unknown") now to come, an unknown whose trajectory has everything to do with the actual circumstances of history, politics, and culture.

The writing of Ingeborg Bachmann is a fascinating case in point. Born in 1926 in Klagenfurt in Southern Austria, not far from the Italian and Yugoslav borders, a twelve-year old at the time of the *Anschluss*,[6] and hence a teen-ager during the war (her father was evidently a Nazi collaborator), Bachmann came to Vienna in 1946 to study philosophy. She wrote a doctoral dissertation called *The Critical Reception of Martin Heidegger's Existential Philosophy*; a dissertation, she later explained, written not in veneration but *against* Heidegger: "In Vienna, we were always waging a fierce fight against German metaphysics" (I 136). In 1953 she published her first volume of poems, *Die gestundetete Zeit (Mortgaged Time)*, which won the coveted literary prize of the Group 47 and, with it, instant fame. Interviewed regularly on radio, TV, and in the newspapers, she was the subject of a cover story in *Der Spiegel* in 1954. Two years later, she published her second collection of poems, *Anrufung des Grossen Bären (Invocation to the Great Bear)*, which won even more critical praise, and in 1959 Bachmann became the first holder of the newly created chair in Poetics at the University of Frankfurt.

And then Bachmann stopped writing poetry. Her second collection was her last. Between '59 and '64 she wrote only a handful of poems, mostly about the difficulties of writing poems, and her last poem, "Keine Delikatessen" ("No Delicacies") was framed as a farewell to poetry. By this time, she had already turned to the writing of radio plays (e.g., "The Good God of Manhattan") and short stories, and in the last decade of her short life she wrote only prose fiction. *Malina* (1971), which is my focus here, is the first volume of a projected trilogy called *Todesarten (Ways of Death)*. This trilogy was never completed because Bachmann died in a terrible fire caused by a smoking accident in bed (it may have been a suicide) in her Rome apartment in September 1973. She was forty-six years old.

Why did Bachmann, whose early lyric was favorably compared to that of Paul Celan, Rilke, and Eliot, stop writing "poetry" or rather verse? Even during her years of poetic success, she expressed doubts about the lyric. "I think," Bachmann tells one interviewer in 1956, "that we can't, that we shouldn't, use the old images, the way, say, Mörike or Goethe used them, because they would sound insincere coming from our mouths. We must find true sentences, which are worthy of our own consciousness and of the

changed world" (I 19). And in 1961, she explains that the poem "Ihr Worte" ("You Words") was written after a five-year hiatus, during which she promised herself to stop writing poetry. "I have nothing," she says, "against poems, but you have to understand that suddenly, one can have everything against them, against every metaphor, every sound, every rule for putting words together, against this wholly inspired power to make words and images appear. That one would like to choke this power so that one might judge what it really is, what it should be" (I 25).

Here Bachmann seems to be echoing Paul Celan's sentiments regarding the language of the "great" classical German poets:

> The German lyric. . .cannot, despite all its invocation of the tradition to which it belongs, speak the language which many a sympathetic ear continues to expect from it. Its language has become soberer, plainer; it mistrusts the 'beautiful,' it tries to be true. It is, then. . .so to speak, a 'grayer' language, a language which, among other things, wants to see its 'musicality' settled in a different place, a place where it no longer has anything in common with that 'harmony' which sounded more or less unchallenged, side by side with the *most dreadful.*[7]

The reference is, of course, to the War and the Holocaust, events that inevitably made the lyric language of Goethe and Heine, Hölderlin and even Rilke, problematic for a German-speaking Jewish poet. Or perhaps for the non-Jewish poet as well, Bachmann, for example, being unable to escape a sense of collective guilt for what the Nazis—and that category evidently included her own father—had done to the Jews and other minorities before and during the war. No doubt, then, she shared Celan's uneasiness as to what she later regarded as the "Establishment" language of her early poetry.

What was that poetry like? Here is a four-line poem called "Im Gewitter der Rosen" ("In the Storm of Roses"):

> Wohin wir uns wenden in Gewitter der Rosen,
> ist die Nacht von Dornen erhellt, und der Donner
> des Laubs, das so leise war, in den Büschen,
> folgt uns jetz auf dem Fuss.
>
> Wherever we turn in the storm of roses
> the night is lit up by thorns, and the thunder
> of the foliage, that was so quiet in the bushes
> now follows us, hard on our heels.[8]

The "storm of roses" and "thunder" of leaves that seem to pursue the speaker wherever she turns, are familiar enough Romantic images: one thinks, for example, of the "huge cliff," ominously striding after the guilty boy who has stolen the boat at Ullswater in Wordsworth's *Prelude*.[9] But in Bachmann's surrealist landscape, the night is illuminated, not by lightning flashes signalling the impending storm, but by "thorns." Indeed, the "storm of roses" generally associated with sexual love here points to the Passion (the crown of thorns); Bachmann's is a world of suffering, whose cause is never explained and which occurs outside a specified context. It merely is.

Like Celan's gnomic lyrics, Bachmann's has an outward formality that belies its indeterminacy: three four-stress lines followed by a foreshortened three-stress one, this last line made up of six ominous monosyllables. "Wohin wir uns wenden im Gewitter der Rosen"—four w's and four short i's as well as the internal rhyme on feminine endings ("wenden" / "Rosen")—this pattern of alliteration and assonance is kept up throughout. In line 2, the consonance of "Dornen" / "Donner," in line 3, the alliteration of I's, and in line 4, the foregrounding of the emphatic f phoneme ("folgt," "Fuss")—all these are markers of poeticity; they testify to the faith in a poetic that distinguishes itself from ordinary language.

Phonemic density coupled with semantic openness: the American poets who most resemble Bachmann in this regard are the "deep image" poets of the fifties and sixties—James Wright, Galway Kinnell, and such heirs as Louise Gluck and Charles Wright—the connection perhaps being the visionary poetry of Georg Trakl, which had such a telling influence on these poets. The mode in "The Storm of Roses" and elsewhere in *Mortgaged Time*, is almost always first-person, present-tense, the imagery drawn from nature, the tone, one of wonder at the mysteries of the universe, the meaning appropriately elusive. Bachmann's lyric is by no means as dense and enigmatic as Celan's, but she has, at this stage, a similar faith in the power of images, images presented without authorial intrusion, as the locus of meanings. Take a second short poem, this time from *Invocation of the Great Bear:*

Schatten Rosen Schatten

Unter einen fremden Himmel
Schatten Rosen
Schatten
auf einer fremden Erde
zwischen Rosen und Schatten
in einem fremden Wasser
main Schatten

Shadow Roses Shadow

Beneath a foreign sky
shadow roses
shadow
on a foreign earth
between roses and shadows
in a foreign water
my shadow (MA 128-29)

The key word here is "fremden" ("foreign"), which appears three times in the space of the poem's twenty-one words.[10] First "shadow" applies to the roses themselves—"shadow roses" may be a particular species of rose; or again the reference may be to the roses' appearance in a particular light. But then the roses themselves cast a shadow "on a foreign earth," and, in the final epiphany, it is "between roses and shadows / and in a foreign water," that the poet sees her own shadow. No matter how foreign the setting (Bachmann wrote this poem shortly after having taken up residence in Rome), there seems to be no escape from the shadow self. One is reminded of Celan's:

Stehen im Schatten
des Wundenmals in der Luft.

Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn.
Unerkannt,
für dich
allein.

Mit allem, was darin Raum hat,
auch ohne
Sprache.

To stand, in the shadow
of the scar up in the air.

To stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized,
for you
alone.

With all there is room for in that,
even without
language.[11]

But whereas Celan's interrogation of poetic convention led to the writing of an ever sparer, more rigidly compressed, more gnomic lyric, Bachmann's led to the writing of "prose." Why? My hunch is that her choice has a great deal to do with gender. Bachmann wanted to free herself, not only of the "high" style and imagery of German Romantic lyric but of its conventional male voice as well, a voice she oddly adopted in her own poetry. In "Dark Words," for example, she appears as Orpheus searching for Eurydice; in the title poem of *Mortgaged Time*, the "I" is a chaser of hounds, his beloved "sinks in the sand, / It climbs around her waving hair, / it breaks into her words" (MA 43);[12] and in "Bohemia Lies by the Sea," a re-working of the question Antigonus puts to the mariner in *The Winter's Tale*, III,iii ("Thou art perfect then our ship hath touched upon / The deserts of Bohemia?"), the speaker describes himself as "a man from Bohemia, a vagrant, a player / who holds nothing and whom nothing holds, / granted only, by a questionable sea, to gaze at the land of my choice (MA 179). Even the late poem "Exil" ("Exile"), which deals with the poet's ambivalence about her "German" identity, especially "the German language / this cloud about me / that I keep as a house" ("der Deutschen Sprache / dieser Wolke um mich / die ich halte als Haus"), oddly presents the exiled "I" as male:

Ein Toter bin ich der wandelt
gemeldet nirgends mehr
unbekannt im Reich des Präfekten
überzählig in den goldenen Städten
und im grünenden Land (IBW)

A dead man am I who wanders
no longer registered anywhere
unknown in the empire of the prefect
superfluous in the golden cities
and in the greening countryside.

Why should Bachmann present herself as a male subject? In a 1971 interview, she explains that *Malina* is a book she had always known she would write some day, that she was always searching for its central character but didn't know how to handle that character because:

> I had only known how to tell a story from a masculine position. But I have often asked myself: why, really? I have not

> understood it, not even in the case of the short stories, why I so often had to adopt the voice of the masculine "I." So for me it was like finding my very own self, namely not to deny this feminine "I" and yet to put the weight on the masculine "I" as well. . . . (I 99-100)

What Bachmann means here, I think, is that the fluidity of autobiographical prose fiction, a form less conventionalized than lyric, gave her the opportunity to deconstruct the subject position endemic to Romantic lyric, even as, I shall suggest below, the focus of her "fiction" continues to be on language events rather than on narrative structure. It is important to remember that nineteenth-century German lyric has no female poet of the stature of Emily Dickinson, no twentieth-century woman poet as experimental as Gertrude Stein, who might have served as Bachmann's model. On the other hand, modern Austrian literature did make available to her a subversive body of writing that, while not, strictly speaking, "poetry," could point the way to the opening of the field the poet was looking for. The fiction of Robert Musil and Elias Canetti, for example, provided her with an example of a "minority" German, the Austrian of the period being curiously polyglot in its absorption of the racial, linguistic, and cultural differences that resulted from the repeated shifting of national borders. And, even more important than the example of Musil or Canetti, was the "minority German" produced in his Cambridge exile by Ludwig Wittgenstein.

II

Bachmann had begun to read Wittgenstein in the early fifties when the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* were almost unknown in Vienna, and she helped convince the Suhrkamp Verlag to republish these works in accessible paperback editions.[13] In 1953, the same year her first collection of poems appeared, she published one of the first critical essays to be written on Wittgenstein in German.[14] Here, as in those interviews where she is questioned about her particular interest in Wittgenstein, Bachmann refers the reader to the *Tractatus*'s "question of language," specifically, the key proposition (5.6): "The limits of my language are the limits of my world." (I 82-83) "What I really learned [from Wittgenstein]," she tells an interviewer in 1973, ". . . is how to think with enormous exactitude and clear expression" (I 136). And she cites the "beautiful" conclusion to the *Tractatus:* "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen" ("Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"). If "the limits of my language are the limits of my world," the writer's task is to *unwrite (zerschreiben)* the phrase-making of the dominant discourse, the prefabricated sentences by means of which business-as-usual is conducted (I 84). And she cautions that the writer must stay away

from the Big Words of public discourse—words like Democracy, Economy, Capitalism, or Socialism—for the aim of *writing* is not to *tell* but to *represent* (I 91).

Here the reference is to *Philosophical Investigations #116:* "When philosophers use a word—"knowledge," "being," "object," "I," "proposition," "name"—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." It is that "everyday use" that provides Bachmann with a new poetics, the "language-game" poetics of *Malina.*

Superficially, *Malina* is a triangle love story which ends with a murder—the narrator's own. The three principals are characterized on the opening page, which gives us "The Cast":

Ivan: Born 1935 in Pécs (formerly Fünfkirchen), Hungary. Has lived for a number of years in Vienna and pursues a well organized line of work, in a building on the Kärntnerring. So as not to compromise Ivan and his future with unnecessary complications, this building shall be designated as an Institute for Extremely Urgent Affairs, since its business is money. It is not the Credit Union.

Béla
András: The children, aged 7 and 5

Malina: Age impossible to determine from his appearance, has turned forty today, author of an "Apocrypha" that is no longer available in the bookshops, and of which only a few copies were sold in the late fifties. For the sake of anonymity, Civil Servant Class A, employed by the Austrian Army Museum, where advanced degrees in history (his major subject) and art history (his minor) made it possible for him to find employment and move into a good position, where he is regularly advancing without making a move, without ever calling attention to himself by interfering, displaying ambition, making demands or petty suggestions for the improvement of the procedures and written transactions between the Ministry of Defense on the Franz-Josefs Quai and the Museum of the Arsenal which, without being especially conspicuous, belongs to the greatest curiosities of our city.

I: Austrian passport, issued by the Ministry of the Interior. Official Austrian I.D. Eyes—br., Hair—bl., born in Klagenfurt; some dates follow and a profession, crossed out twice and written over, addresses, crossed out three times, and above them written clearly: residence, Ungargasse 6, Vienna III.

Time: Today

Place: Vienna[15]

But neither "triangle love story" nor "murder story" (Bachmann does use many of the devices of detective fiction) accurately describe this novel's strange plot. To begin with, the narrator and Malina, who live together, are never presented as lovers: rather, their relationship seems to be that of brother and sister, but a brother and sister whose fates are curiously intertwined, Malina being more accurately the narrator's male alter ego or animus. Malina is never jealous of Ivan; he pays no attention to his comings and goings and is oddly self-sufficient throughout the story. When, in the third chapter ("Last Things"), he comes to the "I"s aid, it is only to make her see what has been inside her all along. And for that matter there is yet another man, not listed in the cast of characters, who furnishes the title for the second chapter, namely "The Third Man," who is the narrator's father—both her real father and her nightmare version of the Father as Patriarch, Nazi officer, Victimizer, Torturer.

Such synopsis makes the novel sound histrionic, but Bachmann avoids melodrama by grounding her narrative firmly in the social and political realities of postwar Vienna. No one ever talks of war in this novel but that only makes its presence more real. As Bachmann put it in the poem "Every Day" ("Alle Tage"): "War is no longer declared, / only continued. The monstrous has become everyday," MA 53). The "now" of *Malina* is the so-called "seven German years," as Viennese society referred to the period 1938-45, when Austria belonged to the German Reich. The term "seven German years" is of course an egregious evasion of the truth, which is that Austria was not so much "occupied" by Hitler as readily absorbed by him and even welcomed by a large part of the population with open arms. At war's end, the country was accorded the status of "occupied nation," along with Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia, but when the Iron Curtain was drawn across Central Europe, Austria, briefly occupied by the four Allied powers (the U.S., Britain, France, the Soviet Union), was given to the West. As a formerly occupied nation, it never underwent the deNazification that marked the postwar years in West Germany. On the contrary, Austrian society tried to resume its prewar way of life: to restore

its opera house and symphony, its museums and architectural monuments, as if nothing had really happened, as if the "seven German years" had been some sort of mistake. It is this mind set—a mind set we now know only too well from the Waldheim affair—that Bachmann satirizes in her account of the summer vacation life on the Wolfgangsee, as it is experienced by families like the Altenwyls and Wantchuras.

In this context, it is significant that Ivan is Hungarian, whereas Malina, who comes from the Yugoslavian border, has a Slavic name. The novel, as Mark Anderson points out in his Afterword to the Boehm translation, "is a fictional microcosm of the House of Austria with its Germanic, Hungarian and Slavic components" (M 230). Ivan speaks Hungarian to his two young children, who live with their mother in Budapest and come to visit on weekends; the narrator and Malina sometimes speak to each other in Slovenian dialect (e.g. "Jaz in ti. In ti in jaz ["Me and you. You and me."]). Only the narrator herself is of "pure" German descent; only she, it seems, is consumed by war guilt and has dreams about Nazi troops and concentration camps, in which her father seems to figure largely.

The three principals live in a street called the Ungargasse, Ivan at #9, the narrator and Malina at #6 (hence mirror images). The Ungargasse lies just outside the Ring or Inner City in a quarter neither elegant nor shabby—a quarter fairly nondescript that is nevertheless adored by the narrator as her "Ungargassenland." The appeal of the street seems to be its anonymity, an anonymity in which the Germanic features of the Vienna inside the Ring give way to the possibilities of a more neutral, less culpable Hungary, as represented by Ivan. Indeed, the narrator's obsessive passion for Ivan—a passion that grows and grows and that cannot be satiated by their rendezvous or telephone conversations—reflects the narrator's consuming desire to be not-German-speaking, not a woman, not an intellectual, not a writer—not, in short, Ingeborg Bachmann herself. If the scholarly, detached, highly professional (significantly he and the narrator first meet when he is lecturing on the Benjaminian title "Art in the Age of Technology"), seemingly sexless but occasionally violent Malina is her intellectual alter ego, Ivan represents the opposite pole—utter normalcy, uncomplicatedness, a happy-go-lucky response to everyday life, a predilection for trivial pursuits and entertainments, the "ability to make me laugh again" (M 18).

Ironically, however, Ivan and Malina are more alike than either of them is like the woman narrator. For both, life is something that can be dealt with quite readily: one takes it one day at a time without too much concern. Both go to their offices and work regular hours, without asking too many questions. The woman, on the other hand, even though she is neither wife nor mother but a writer, spends her days at home alone, waiting for Ivan to phone or Malina to come home. Sometimes her secretary, Fraülein

Jellinek, is present; sometimes the maid Lina. For the "I," nothing is ever simple or uncomplicated. The slightest household task—boiling water, clearing the table, opening the window—becomes problematic; the present is always haunted by a terrifying but unknown past. "When I say 'today,'" she says early in the novel, "my breathing becomes irregular, an arrhythmia sets in, which can already be detected on an electrocardiogram" (MA 9).

Malina makes no overt ideological statements; it provides no commentary about the "plight of the woman writer"; it contains no manifesto for a better future. But having given up the male speaking voice that characterized her formal lyric, Bachmann is able to articulate, for the first time in her career, a feminist poetic. One of her stylistic signatures in *Malina* is the dialogue that isn't really a dialogue but a "conversation" recorded as a set of truncated (and hence indeterminate) sentences, whereby the fiction's meanings are created. The first chapter, "Happy with Ivan," begins as follows:

> Smoked again and drank again, counted the cigarettes, the glasses, saved another two cigarettes for today, because between today and Monday, there are three days without Ivan. Sixty cigarettes later, however, Ivan is back in Vienna, first he'll call the time message to check his watch, then the wakeup service 00, which returns his call right away, immediately afterwards he'll fall asleep as instantly as only Ivan can, awaken to his wake-up call, in a grumpy mood, which he expresses differently each time, with sighs, curses, tantrums, complaints. Next he's forgotten all about being grumpy and has raced into the bathroom to brush his teeth, shower, and shave. He'll turn on the transistor and listen to the morning news. Austria I.APA. Here are the headlines: Washington. . . (MA 25; ellipses Bachmann's)

Here is the beginning of obsession. The narrator has recently begun an affair with a total stranger, whom she happened to bump into in front of a neighborhood flower shop, and who is Ivan. The projection into his routine (we never know, of course, what Ivan is really thinking or doing or even what his last name is), takes on a surreal air: the cigarettes, the glasses, the wake-up calls—all these pave the way for the set of telephone sentences, which becomes Bachmann's new lyric mode. As the "I" explains:

> Nonetheless we have managed to conquer our first few sets of sentences, wayward sentence beginnings, half-sentences,

sentence endings, surrounded by the halo of mutual consideration, and up to now, most of the sentences may be found in the category telephone sentences. We practice them over and over, since Ivan calls once from his office on the Kärntnerring, or a second time late in the afternoon, or in the evening from home.

Hello. Hello?
It's me, who else?
Oh right, of course, excuse
How I? And you?
I don't know. This evening?
I can barely understand you
Barely? What? So you can
I can barely hear you, can you
What? Is anything?
No, nothing, later on you can
Of course, I'd better call later
I, I was supposed to go with friends
Of course, if you can't then
I didn't say that, only if you don't
In any case, let's talk later
OK, but around six, because
But that's too late for me
Yes, actually for me too, but
Today maybe it makes no sense
Has someone come in?
No, only now Fraülein Jellinek is
Oh, I see, you're no longer alone
But please later, please, for sure (MA 36)

This could hardly be more ordinary, or could it? The lovers say just exactly what any X would say when he/she calls Y to make a date: "What are you doing tonight?" "Can you make it by six?" "Call me later," and so on. But there are two marked oddities. First, Bachmann's sentences have no proper beginnings or endings. It's often not clear to what a sentence is responding and its ending is truncated, so that we have to guess what's really going on. Thus the fourth line above is evidently a response to the question "How are you?" and the fifth, "I don't know" responds, not to the "And you?" above it, but to a missing suggestion such as "Do you want to get together tonight?" Again, line 9, "What? Is something?" has to be completed by a word like "wrong" or a phrase like "going on."

Thus, although the language could hardly be flatter and although we all talk to our intimates this way, leaving sentences hanging and assuming the person at the other end of the line knows what we're saying, communication in *Malina* is always already occluded. Misunderstanding is the order of the day, as in "Of course if you can't then," with its response, "I didn't say that, only if you don't." Partly it's the nature of the telephone situation—a situation in which the verbal response may or may not match facial expression and gesture. And further: telephone sentences, like the smoking sentences or chess sentences or scolding sentences used later in the novel, are deceptive in their formulaic quality. The novel's "I" never says what she really thinks.

But, then, which sentences belong to "I"? The second peculiarity of Bachmann's language games is that the reader usually can't tell who is speaking, the "I" or Ivan. Which I is which? In this particular example, the only clues come at the beginning and the end. Ivan is the one who calls, so presumably he says, "It's me, who'd you think?" Toward the end (line 21), Fraülein Jellinek's presence is mentioned, so presumably the speaker of that line is the woman who employs Jellinek as secretary. But who is it who says, "I really should see these"? In the prose that follows the dialogue, the narrator tells us that "Ivan and I both have friends and also acquaintances, but only very seldom someone of whom the other one has heard or knows what their names are. With these friends and other people, we have to take turns going out to dinner, or at least meet them at a café, or we have to take foreigners sight-seeing, without knowing what to do with them, and most of the time we must also wait for a phone call (MA 36).

One might conclude that such doubling (the sentence sets don't really constitute a dialogue because there are not two distinct characters) is designed to suggest that the lovers are perfectly in sync, that they speak the same language and know each others needs implicitly. But that isn't quite the way these language games work. Consider the following set of smoking sentences:

> Now I just have to get the ashtray
> Just a minute, OK, me too
> Have you lit one too?
> There. Now. No, it's not working
> Don't you have any matches?
> The last one I, no, now on the candle
> Do you hear that too? Hey, get off the line
> This phone has its little tics
> What? someone is constantly cutting in. What sticks?
> I said "tics," it's not important, "tics" with a hard "t"
> I don't understand that stuff about sticks?

Sorry. It was the wrong word for it
Why wrong, what do you mean?
Nothing, just that when you repeat a word so often[16]

The breakdown of communication between the lovers takes place at a number of levels. There is first the obvious noise in the channel, the noise from a crossed wire that interrupts their dialogue with someone else's conversation. But even without this intrusion, the conversation is extremely odd. The smoking ritual becomes a substitute sexual ritual, the lighting of the cigarette designed, so to speak, to turn the other one on. Hence the double entendre of being "out of matches" and needing to use a candle. But because the particular language game being played restricts the area of discussion to that which is actually happening or about to happen, there is soon nothing further to say. The "word" that one repeats "so often" is not the word the "I" wants to speak or to hear. And then too: why is this conversation occurring at all when Ivan could simply drop everything (as could the narrator) and cross the street so as to join the other? What, in this context, is the meaning of the cigarette ritual? Is it an erotic rite or a talking game that functions as an escape from eroticism? For that matter, are the two lovers playing the same language game? And does each understand the other's game?

At the end of the dialogue above, the narrator thinks: "But even if four people are talking at once, I can still make out Ivan's voice, and as long as I hear him and know that he hears me, I'm alive. So long as the telephone, even if we have to interrupt the conversation, rings again, screams, buzzes, raves, sometimes with a tone too loud or several tones too soft, if you add the refrigerator, the record player or turn on the water in the tub" (M A 40). But what are *his* thoughts about the phone call? Does he have thoughts about it at all? Or is a phone call just a phone call, in which case the narrator is merely deluding herself?

"We have a lot of head-sentences," says the "I" a little later, referring to sentences like "Who put this nonsense in your head." "Piles of them, just like the telephone sentences, the chess sentences or the sentences about life in general, but we're still missing a lot of sentence sets. About feelings, we don't have a single sentence, because Ivan won't pronounce one, because I don't dare to make up the first sentence of this set" (MA 46). This is a markedly Wittgensteinian motif: if "the limits of my language are the limits of the world," the non-existence of sentences about feelings means that "feelings" don't exist, at least not insofar as they are acted upon. Again, if "The sense of the world must lie outside the world" (*Tractatus* 6.41), the world of sentences-in-the-world cannot be transcended in the world. But the most relevant propositions in the *Tractatus* are the following:

For an answer which cannot be expressed the question too
[cannot be expressed.
The riddle does not exist.
If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered.
(6.5)

Which means, in practice that the narrator never asks Ivan about anything that really matters ("It must lie outside the world"), for she knows that she cannot receive an answer. Consequently, the lovers only ask questions that *can* be answered (e.g., "This evening?") or give answers to possible questions, like "maybe later I can."

How do these language games relate to Bachmann's earlier lyrics? The elaborate images, metaphors and allusions of the poems are replaced by the smallest of deictics: **yes, no, now, well, and, but, then, oh,** and especially **"I"** and **"you,"** where "I" and "you" are curiously blurred. As in the work of Gertrude Stein, however, the "simplicity" of language, the rigidly restricted register of this phrasal poetry doesn't preclude the text from containing a dense network of meanings within its particular rhythmic structure. In one of the narrator's happiest moments with Ivan, when they are driving back into Vienna from an outing in the country and he has turned the car radio way up, we read:

Auprès de ma blonde
I'm
What are you?
I'm
What?
I'm happy
Qu'il fait bon
What are you saying?
I didn't say anything
Fait bon, fait bon
I'll say it to you later
What do you want later?
I'll never say it
Qu'il fait bon
Go ahead and say it
It's too loud, I can't say it any louder
What do you want to say?
I can't say it any louder
Qu'il fait bon dormir
Say it, you have to say it today
Qu'il fait bon fait bon

That I've been resurrected
Because I've survived the winter
Because I am so happy
Because I already see the Stadtpark
Fait bon, fait bon
Because Ivan exists
Because Ivan and I
Qu'il fait bon dormir! (MA 58-59)

Here the French song refrain ("Auprès de ma blonde / qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon") frames a series of sentences about *saying*, sentences that pose the question: what does it mean to say anything or not to say it? And again, when does one "say" it and to whom? The question remains open even though "say" and its cognates appears nine times in the twenty-nine line passage; the impossibility of "saying" yields to the anaphoric series of the last eight lines, which finally reveal little. If the narrator is happy because Ivan has entered her life, Ivan is happy because he already sees the Stadtpark (i.e., we're almost home). If she says or thinks "Because Ivan and I," the loud refrain drowns her out with the final "Qu'il fait bon dormir!," suggesting that Ivan hasn't been listening to her anyway. And in the night scene that follows this line, Ivan asks her: "why is there only a Wailing Wall, why hasn't anyone ever built a Wall of Joy?"

Bachmann's new form of lyric —a lyric of language games—is thus, like Stein's "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" or her Picasso portrait, a structure of repetitions and permutations. "Sagen" ("to say") takes on a slightly different meaning every time it is used, as does the word "glücklich" ("happy")[17] and the "qu'il fait bon" refrain. And the set of sentences and sentence fragments never constitute a coherent paragraph. The incompleteness of statement, surrounded as the statements are by white space, conveys the ever increasing inability of the lovers to *say*.

In Chapter 3 ("Last Things"), the narrator, sensing she has lost Ivan and the happiness his normalcy represents for her, turns more and more to her alter ego Malina. The dialogues between "Me" and "Malina" are just that—dialogues, with the occasional stage directions like "I" (leggermente): or "I (con fuoco)", operatic conventions being used to heighten the melodrama. For example:

Malina: Stop falling down all the time. Get up. Go out, have fun, neglect me, do something, anything!
I: (dolcissimo) I do something? Abandon you? Leave you? (MA 321)

Between these arias for two clearly distinct voices, arias in which Malina gradually gets the "I" to confess to her deepest feelings and fears, even as the intervening prose paragraphs present us with her more private meditations, Bachmann introduces one final telephone conversation between "I" and "Ivan." It follows the "I"'s sad reflection that she and Ivan don't have time to play chess any more: "we play less and less. . .the chess sentences are lying barren, other sentence sets are also suffering some loss" (MA 266-67):

> Unfortunately I have, my time is
> Of course if you're under so much time pressure
> It's just that today I have especially little time
> Naturally, if you have no time now
> Later, when I have more time again
> In time, we will be, It's just that now
> Then we'll be able to, once when you have time
> Just at this time, when things straighten out
> Your time must be a little less
> If only I could at the right time
> But where has the time gone, not too late
> I still have so little time, that unfortunately
> Later, when you have more time again, perhaps
> Later, I will have more time again!

This sentence set has fourteen lines and may be read as a postmodern sonnet on time, a parodic version, perhaps, of a Shakespeare sonnet (e.g., "When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced / The rich proud cost of outward buried age"). The word "time" appears once (but only once) in every line; in the German, the repetition of the emphatic noun "Zeit" is even more noticeable, both aurally and visually, the capital Z dominating the poem's layout, culminating in its columnar appearance in:

> Wenn du dann wieder mehr Zeit has, vielleicht
> Später werde ich dann mehr Zeit haben! (MA 266-67)

Perhaps the main difference between this phrasal poetry of repetition and Bachmann's earlier lyric is that the "poem" is no longer self-sufficient. It lacks a frame. Indeed, after the fourteenth line above, we read, in the prose passage that follows, "Every day, sometimes even cheerfully, Malina and I brood about the horrible things that might still happen tonight in Vienna." Between the crimes and murders reported in the paper, and the "murder" the heroine of *Malina* is about to undergo because of Ivan's desertion, there are, of course, endless metonymic connections. The

embedded "poem" thus becomes part of a larger context—a context, in the case of *Malina*, made up of prose narrative, found text, mock interview, the fairy tale of the *Princess of Kagran*, the Malina dialogues, and so on. The second chapter, "The Third Man" is a series of surrealistic dream sequences, in which memories of childhood sexual abuse on the part of the father (sexual abuse that is part of the larger political oppression), unfold like so many film shots. Ironically, the prose of the dream sequences is much more conventionally "poetic" than the lineated language games we have been looking at. Bachmann thus reverses the Romantic opposition I spoke of earlier, the opposition: prose equals the ordinary, everyday; verse equals the harmony and order of the universe. On the contrary, the novel's telephone sentences and their cognates refuse to acknowledge the authoritative male voice of an Orpheus or of an Odysseus, recounting his adventures in densely allusive and metaphoric lyrics. Rather, they dramatize the process whereby the phraseology of everyday life becomes the terrain of warfare—the warfare that, as Bachmann repeatedly points out, is just as common in peacetime.

On the novel's last page, in which the narrator's "death" and removal from the scene via the crack in the wall is recounted, the phone rings once more (MA 355-56):

> Excuse me?
> No?
> Then I didn't express myself clearly.
> It must be a mistake.
> The number is 723144.
> Yes, Ungargasse 6.
> No, there isn't.
> There's no woman here.
> I'm telling you, there was never anyone here by that name.
> There's no one else here.
> My number is 723144.
> My name?
> Malina.

Death is the absence of all conversation, the end of the language game. For in this series of thirteen sentence units, there is only one speaker, and he is identified in the unlucky number 13 as Malina. If, that is to say, the narrator has "died" ("There's no woman here"), then Ivan no longer exists either. His words are no longer represented, and all the evasions on the phone ("there was never anyone here by that name) are Malina's. The address and phone number are now solely his. More important: each sentence now ends with a period, in contrast to the complex stychomythia

of the earlier lyric segments, in which the phrases and clauses were always left open. The sentence series culminates in a short paragraph describing Malina's receding footsteps and than the terrible flatness of the final complete sentence, "It was murder." The conclusion is pure prose.

III

How, then, are we to understand the prose/poetry opposition in *Malina?* To say that Bachmann "gave up" poetry in favor of "the novel" is surely inadequate. She gave up, not "poetry" but "poems" in the sense of fixed, circumscribed, framed, independent lyric units. Within the novel itself, "poems," in this sense, are associated with Ivan. "He has come," the narrator says at the beginning of "Happy with Ivan," "to make consonants constant and comprehensible (fest und fasslich) again, to open up the vowels so that they can sound fully, to let the words come through my lips again, to restore those first connections that had been disrupted" (MA 29). Ivan is, in other words, the maker of metres, of rhythmic regularity, even as Malina regularly speaks the "plain truth" of prose. What the "I" learns in the course of the novel is that the constancy and comprehensibility of consonants and the "full sound" of vowels are suspect, that the "connections," once disrupted, can't be re-established so readily, that the "problems" can't simply be "solved."

Here the middle term posed by Chapter Two is especially interesting. This chapter, "The Third Man," is in many ways the novel's most conventional—a series of Gothic, hallucinatory dream or memory images in which the "I" is abused, punished, and tortured by the Father:

> My father has brought me to a tall building, there's even a garden above, he lets me plant flowers and little trees in it to pass the time, he makes jokes about the many Christmas trees I'm cultivating, they are from the Christmases of my childhood, but so long as he's making jokes it's all right, there are silver balls and it's blooming violet and yellow, only they aren't the right flowers. I also plant and sow in many ceramic pots; always the flowers that come up have the opposite, unwanted colors, I'm dissatisfied and my father says: "Who do you think you are, a princess?" Who do you take yourself for, anyway, someone superior? You'll get over it, you'll be cured of it, and this, this—he points to my plants—this will soon have an end, what is this insane occupation, this green stuff?" I hold the garden hose in my hand, I could aim a blast of water right in his face, so that he would stop insulting me. . . .
>
> (MA 212).

Here the highly concrete, imagistic prose pits the sensitive young girl against her brutal and bullying father. But in the context of the whole text, we can sense something else happening. If Chapter 1, "Happy with Ivan," can be read as a rebuttal of the "meter-making argument," of traditional lyric, "The Third Man" is a rejection of phanopoeia, of the Poundian notion that it is only the Image which "gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits. . .which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art," and that, accordingly, we should "Go in fear of abstractions."[18] In "The Third Man," to the contrary, the Image as "radiant node or cluster" is regularly associated with deception and false appearances; its concreteness and immediacy becomes cloying and oppressive, belonging, as they do to the surreal landscape of dream in which one refuses to come to terms with the way words are actually used. The colors, as the narrator says, are all wrong.

The poetry of the future, as Bachmann envisions it in her language games, is more abstract and sparer—a poetry that uses ordinary language although, to cite Wittgenstein, that language is not used in the language game of giving information—not, at least, until the very end of the novel when the complete sentences are closed by periods. Until that point, Bachmann's prose is structured *poetically*, although rhetorical figures—repetition, parallelism, antithesis, anaphora—become more important than the tropes of synesthesia and symbolism that characterized the earlier work. Toward the end of "Last Things," the narrator makes one last attempt to call #726893, Ivan's number, a number she can dial in the dark:

> Yes, it's me
> No, only I
> No, really?
> Yes, about to leave
> I'll call you later
> Yes, much later
> I'll call you even later! (MA 310-11)

Later: The ordinary, everyday word is given the poetic charge once reserved for the "storm of roses." But then, who can trust the flowers, the *Schlag*, the lovely melodies and songs of the Vienna of "today"—the "today" whose very mention causes the narrator's heart rhythm to change in the opening pages of *Malina? Later:* the demand is for a new prose that can measure the space between #6 and #9 Ungargasse, a space finally absorbed into a phone number we meet for the first time on the novel's final page: 723144. Now it is only Malina's number even as the novel we have just read bears only his name. But the crack in the wall into which the "I" disappears is the crack of writing, and it is she who is the author of the book.

NOTES

1 Gertrude Stein, "Sentences," *How to Write* (1931; New York: Dover, 1975), pp. 138-39.

2 Stephen Fredman, *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1; subsequently cited as SF. A second, revised edition with a new Introduction was published by Cambridge in 1990.

3 An interesting essay on the question of race vis-à-vis poet's prose is Aldon Nielsen's "Black Margins: Rediscovering the African American Prose Poem," presented at the MLA convention in New York, December 1992, and not yet published.

4 Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme: anthropologie historique du langage* (Paris: Verdier, 1982). The Stanford University Press is going to publish a Meschonnic Reader, edited by Gabriella Bedetti, some time in 1993 or '94. But even this book will only contain sections of the *Critique*, which urgently needs translating.

5 Northrop Frye, *The Well-Tempered Critic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), pp. 55-93.

6 In an interview of 24 December 1971, Bachmann remarks, "There was a specific moment which destroyed my childhood. The entry of Hitler's troops into Klagenfurt. It was something so terrible, that my memory begins with that day: with that early sorrow, whose intensity was perhaps never to be repeated. Naturally, I didn't understand all this at the time, in the way an adult would understand it. But this enormous brutality, which could be sensed, this screaming, singing and marching—the origin of my fear of death. A whole army intruded on our quiet, peaceful Carinthia." See Bachmann, *Wir Müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews* (Munich: R. Pier & Co., 1991), p. 111. Subsequently cited in the text as I. Translations are my own.

7 Paul Celan, "Antwort auf eine Umfrage der Librairie Flinker," Paris (1955), in Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, III (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), p. 167. Translation mine.

8 Ingeborg Bachmann, *Werke*, ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weldenbaum, and Clemens Münster, 4 vols. (Munich: Suhrkamp, 1978): Vol. 1: *Gedichte, Hörspiele, Libretti, Übersetzungen*, p. 56. Subsequently cited as IBW. Translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. A valuable bilingual selection of Bachmann's poetry is *In the Storm of Roses: Selected Poems*, trans. and ed. Mark Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), subsequently cited as MA.

9 In his *Ingeborg Bachmann* (Munich: Beck, 1958), Peter Beicken cites, as possible sources, Klopstock's "Die frühen Gräber," Goethe's "Anakreons Grab," Höltys's "Die Mainacht," Hölderlin's "Abendphantasie," C. F. Meyer's "Wetterleuchten," Trakl's "Das Gewitter" and Rilke's Rose Poems (P. 94). In English, an interesting analogue is the dream-like sequence in Chapter 1 of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, in which the pregnant Mrs. Morel, pushed out the door by her husband after a late-night quarrel, is pursued (and then comforted by) the seemingly gigantic flowers in her garden.

10 I retain Mark Anderson's translation "fremden" = "foreign" here, but it should be noted that "fremden" carries the broader meaning of "strange." A stranger, foreign or otherwise, is "Ein Fremder" in German.

11 Paul Celan, *Poems*, A Bilingual Edition, trans. by Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1980), pp. 150-51. Line 7 may be literally translated: "With everything, what has room inside it."

12 Mark Anderson notes that the references to the loved one as female here and elsewhere in Bachmann's poetry has given rise to speculation that hers is a lesbian poetics. He argues, rightly I think, that such speculation is unwarranted, the gender transposition being too obvious and conventional to suggest the homoerotic (MA 8). But it is true that in some of Bachmann's short stories (e.g., "A Step toward Gomorrah") and certainly in *Malina*, gender identity becomes a vexed issue.

13 See MA 12; cf, Interview with Harald Grass, 1 May 1965, I 58; interview with Karol Sauerland, May 1973, I 135-36.

14 Ingeborg Bachmann, "Ludwig Wittgenstein—zu einem Kapitel der jüngsten Philsophiegeschichte," *Frankfurter Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik*, July 1953; rpt. IBW, Vol. 3.

15 Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* (1971: Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 7-8; subsequently cited in the text as MA. For an English translation, see *Malina*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1990), pp. 1-2; subsequently cited as M. Since the Boehm translation is very loose, I have preferred to translate the citations myself.

16 MA 40. The German punning is on "Tücken" / "Mücken" ("Das Telefon hat eben seine Tücken / Wie? Es redet dauert jemand hinein. Mücken, wieso." "Tics" / "sticks," which I take from Boehm, captures the general sense of the passage.

17 I have translated "glücklich" as "happy" here but "glücklich" has a stronger charge, as in "overjoyed," "delighted," "ecstatic," and so on.

18 Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect" (1918), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 4-5.

WALTER BENJAMIN
DREAM KITSCH

(Tr. from the German by Stefan G. Rehm)

One cannot truly dream of the blue flower any more. He who wakes up today as Heinrich von Ofterdingen must have overslept. The history of dreams still remains to be written; and revealing insight in it would mean that historical illumination must decisively defeat the superstition of being inhibited by nature.* Dreaming participates in history. Dream statistics would push forward beyond the sweetness of the anecdotal landscape into the drought of a battle field. Dreams have commanded wars, and wars before primitive times have established right and wrong, indeed the frontiers of dreams.

Dreams no longer open up a blue expanse. They have become gray. The gray layer of dust on things is their best part. Dreams are now a pathway to the banal. Technology cashes into oblivion the external image of things like paper money, which should lose its validity. Now the hand grabs the image once more in a dream and touches familiar contours in a gesture of farewell. It grasps the objects at their most worn-out point. This is not always the most suitable: children do not embrace a glass, they grab onto it. And which side do things present to dreams? Which is this most worn-out point? It is the side which is chafed by custom and garnished with cheap mottos. The side which things present to dreams is kitsch.

The fantasy image of things fall gossiping to the ground as pages of the Leporello picture book, "The Dream." Mottos lie under every page. "Ma plus belle maîtresse c'est la paresse" and "Une médaille vernie pour le plus grand ennui" and "Dans le corridor il y a quelqu'un qui me veut à la mort." The Surrealists have composed such lines and artist friends have drawn up the corresponding picture book. Paul Eluard entitles one "Répétition" on the cover of which Max Ernst has drawn four small boys. They have their backs turned to the reader, the teacher and the teacher's desk and are gazing beyond a balustrade to where a balloon is floating in the air. An

*Benjamin's expression, "Aberglauben der Naturbefangenheit," cannot be easily translated into English. The German word "Befangenheit" has multiple meanings including "shyness, " "prejudice," and "being caught up," which cannot be adequately signified by a single English word.

enormous pencil sways on its tip on the balustrade. The repetition of childish experience suggests: when we were young the uneasy protest against the world of our parents did not yet exist. As children in the middle of this world we showed ourselves superior. In the banal, if we grasp it, we grasp the good, which, you see, lies so very near.

For the sentimentality of our parents, distilled over and over, is enough to arrest the most concrete representation of our feeling. Bitter as bile, the diffuseness of their speech contracts to a wrinkled enigmatic image; the ornamentation of the conversation was replete with the most spiritual intricacies. Therein is the affection of the soul, love, kitsch. "Surrealism is called upon to re-establish the dialogue in its essential truth. The partners are released from the obligations of politeness. He who speaks will deduce no theses. But as a matter of principle the answer doesn't care about the self-love of the speaker. Because words and pictures only count as a springboard for the spirit of the listener." Splendid insights from the surrealist manifesto of Breton. They constitute the formula of dialogical misunderstanding, that is, of what is alive in dialogue. Because "misunderstanding" is the rhythm, with which the only true reality presses into conversation. The more realistically a person knows how to speak/ the more successfully people misunderstand him.

In "Vague de rêves" Louis Aragon reports how the mania to dream spread throughout Paris. The young people believed that they had found a secret of poetry—in reality they brought an end to poetry, as all of the most intensive minds of that time. Saint Paul-Roux attached a sign to his door in the early hours of the morning before going to sleep: "Le poète travaille." All this in order to penetrate into the heart of abolished things. In order to decipher the contours of the banal as a picture puzzle, to disturb a hidden "Wilhelm Tell" out of the wooded entrails, or to be able to respond to the question "Where is the bride?" psychoanalysis has long since exposed picture puzzles as schematisma of dreamwork. The Surrealists are certainly less on the trail of the soul than of things. They search for the totem pole of objects in the thicket of pre-historical times. The last, the uppermost grotesque face on this totem pole is kitsch. It is the last mask of the banal, with which we dress ourselves in dreams and conversation, in order to gather up in ourselves the power of the extinct world of things.

That which we called art only begins at a two meter distance from the body. But now, in kitsch, the world of things moves toward the human being. This world surrenders itself to his groping touch and ultimately forms its figures inside of him. The new man has all the quintessence of the old forms within himself, and that which takes shape in the argument with an environment of the second half of the nineteenth century, in dreams as in words and images of certain artists, is a being which should be called the "furnished man."

C.J. KEEP

X, Y AND Z

She is losing people. She realizes while copying the names and phone numbers from an old address book into a new one. Some of the entries were first written down five or six years ago, the ink now fading into the thinning paper. Looking at the well-thumbed pages, she counts the names that have slipped away, the numbers that can no longer be dialled by heart. Under "M" alone there are three. Four, if you count the Muffler Man she used to take her car to.

She turns the page looking to see if names beginning with any one letter are more likely to go missing. It seems that names on particular pages are more susceptible. Counting the casualties, she begins to suspect that there is some pattern here, that some letters of the alphabet, like people of certain blood types, do not live as long as others. Being listed under "S" seems a certain death sentence, only one name survives from the seven entries crammed between the narrow lines.

Some of the entries she barely recognizes, can only vaguely recall how or why she knew them. Some are just numbers with no names attached, scribbled on the backs of pages or in the corners, others are only first names or initials, as if they only needed these fragments of nomination to announce their importance. She turns the pages, not bothering to transcribe them into her new book. But there are some names she pauses over, wondering whether to save them. She regrets now having never found out the surname of Susan Who Used To Go Out With Alan's Roommate Whatever His Name Was. Perhaps if she hadn't had to list her under "S" they might still know each other.

Only the listing for "XYZ" is unaffected. Two names. Alan Young. Mari Zeitlin. She wonders if they have some rare gene, some singular variation of the DNA code, that makes them immune. Both sexes start out as females, she remembers; ribbons of paired X chromosomes forming a double helix. In the sixth week of gestation a Y chromosome may attach itself to the twenty third pair and the foetus begins to develop male characteristics. Otherwise it remains a female. XX is a girl, XY a boy. There is something in these letters.

She writes out their names and numbers in the new book. Very different people, Mari and Alan. She's dark-haired, but dyes it darker, swears she'd never sleep with a man whose thighs are smaller than hers, can beat just about any one in a staring contest. He's pale, addicted to nasal spray, carries a photograph of John F. Kennedy in his wallet, seems to live for the chance to make weak coffee for other people. Is there some chromosomal link, some XYZ combination that has put them on this page, fusing them to the genetic horizon of the telephone directory?

She reaches for the city phone book to look up some other XYZ's, wondering if the phone company just reprints these same pages year after year knowing of their peculiar immunity. Flipping through the pages, she hums the ABC song and pauses at the occasional unlikely entry that catches her eye. She once knew a guy who could never wait for the new phone book to arrive. As soon as he got it he'd open it up and look up his own name. He said he was just checking to see if they spelled it right. But when you asked to borrow the phone book to order a pizza or something, it always opened up to the page with his name on it.

She looks up his name, but cannot find it among the several hundred listings of the same surname. Then checks the one common alternative spelling, not quite remembering which one he used, but does not find it there either. Perhaps he has moved, she thinks. Or changed his name. Or maybe just the spelling. That's all it would take.

She looks back at her address book. All these missing people. All these people she misses. Maybe there is some way to find them. Posters on bus shelters and grainy graduation photos on the sides of milk cartons will not work. They're not missing that way. They didn't disappear from the school yard one bright winter day. No late model sedan was seen in the vicinity, no bearded man in his thirties is sought in connection with the case. It's not like that. It's just she stopped running into him at the library, forgot to send her a Christmas card, was fired from that job, felt awkward about what happened with her boyfriend, became less tolerant of sports talk, developed an allergy to Siamese cats, couldn't afford to drink imported beer. Or none of those and nothing in particular. They simply drifted out of touch.

But they are missing now all the same.

She goes out and buys another address book. Into this one she copies the names of all the people that had faded from the columns and escaped to the edges of the pages of the first. A book of missing persons. It is not easy, many of the names have become indecipherable with time. Her handwriting of several years ago appears foreign, numbers once jotted down in a bar with a dying pen seem almost hieroglyphic. And there are other problems. Should Nina go in the second book or the first? It's been a long time since they last spoke. How long do you have to wait before someone is classified as missing?

The two books look the same: wallet-sized, black covers with the year embossed in gilt in the upper right hand corner. Alphabetical tags at the edge of each page. But there is something different about this second book. She turns the pages, the binding already loose from use, contemplating these mnemonic spaces. She studies the names, trying to conjure up the people to whom they belong, repeats them to herself as if their very sound could somehow call them back.

There must be some way of finding them. She doesn't want to have coffee, or catch up on old times or exchange numbers. It's not like that. She would just like to know that they're still somewhere out there, to feel them just out of reach, trembling at the edge of her sight.

She begins by looking in the newspapers. Buys a local and a national paper and reads each thoroughly, looking to find some mention of one of the many names in her book. Begins with the marriage announcements, obituaries, letters to the editor. Then crowd photos: baseball games, protest marches and labour union strikes. Scans the personal ads, paying particular attention to the ones placed by people looking for other people. Everyone seems to be looking for some one. SWF seems particularly popular. So does GWM. Many seek the same. Acronyms searching for other acronyms.

She devises other search methods. Sympathetic vibration. Tries eating the same breakfast cereal as Elaine (Spoon Size Shredded Wheat), opening pop cans the way Steven does (tapping it twice near the pull tab), wearing the same red high top sneakers as Aliyah, washing the dishes like her despotic ex-roommate Janet.

She goes to the library and borrows all the books on millenarian sects of the middle ages. For months they had sat on the kitchen table she shared with Amanda. Each morning she'd put them on the floor so the toaster could be plugged in. When the toast popped up Amanda would come into the kitchen, put them back on the table and have breakfast. In the binding there are still crumbs. She reads the sections her friend underlined in red. The cryptic comments on apostasy scrawled in the margins now seem like messages sent to her from another time.

One night while watching a tv documentary on the life of Adolf Hitler, she finds her high school locker partner Klaus. They are showing a photo from 1925, a huge crowd of people gathered out front of the Reichstag denouncing Hindenburg's election as president of the Weimar Republic. The camera zooms in and against the blur of faces they put a white circle around a young Hitler, waving his fist. Hardly recognizable without the moustache. The voice over continues, but she is not listening. Next to Hitler, wearing the same grey overcoat he wore in school, is Klaus. The two of them seem to be in conversation. This is surprising as Klaus was not born until at least thirty years later after the picture was taken. But she is happy to see him again.

In a record store she finds a live album by a band she used to like, is surprised to find that she was there the night that it was recorded. Andrew took her. He went to all the concerts, mostly just to make that whooping sound he always made. She always stood a few feet a way from him so people wouldn't think they were together. She listens to the record carefully, trying to pick out his shouts from the rest, playing the bits between the songs over and over again, trying to detect his presence there in the crowd, to hear the subtle eddies in sound that his body must have caused.

Weeks later, she assesses the results of her search efforts. She now hates Spoon Size Shredded Wheat. People compliment her footware. Her dishes are very clean. The needle on her record player is broken. There is newsprint ink on her face.

On Tuesday the phone rings. It's Andrew. It's been years. He got her number from Nina who says she's sorry she hasn't called but she will, no really she will. They talk. It's nice but she barely listens, a part of her wanting to hang up the phone. She tells him she's real busy just now, work and all, but she'll call him sometime. Yes, she still has his number. Sure. Okay. Bye.

She hangs up and looks for the address book that contains all her current numbers. It's under a stack of newspapers. She flips to the page marked with the letter "D" and adds his name to the list. Her book of missing persons is in the bag she always carries with her. She takes it out, finds his name there draws several dark lines through it. The tops of some of the letters still show. She draws two more lines so that it is completely covered. Looks back at the first book. Wonders if there is somebody she could add from it to the second, considers which name she wouldn't mind losing. Several come to mind. She'd have to avoid them assiduously. But it wouldn't be the same.

She places the two books side by side on the table, trying to feel out the hidden point of intersection between them. Somewhere here is the precise tip of their balance. Names from the second can only come from names that were once in the first. Names from the second can return to the first, but eventually everyone will be in the second, everyone will end up missing. The one is already the other. The phone rings again. She looks from it to the address books. And again. Outside her window a car is parked, its engine still running. Nuclei begin their backward sprawl, dividing and redividing, mitosis spinning new pairs of chromosomes in the alphabetical combinations of need. And again. She closes her books and sits perfectly still, counting the number of rings.

JED RASULA

PinAteRrpAreDtaOtiXon

homage, N.O.B., & in memory of Harvey Brown

"We should speak of 'the Strange' as we speak of Space and Time. . ." (Valéry, *Analects* p. 291)

The paradox of relation:

you = 1
I = 1
1 = 1
BUT: you ≠ me

The paradox is 2, twofold; folded in two.
"There are no protective railings to the act of love. The twoness of oneness is the railings themselves." (Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-Plastique* p. 87)

"Wo es war, soll ich werden": Freud's motto[1] a pledge of Hermes. By stealth and cunning, there in the sacred chamber where it is wedged securely, I will be be. It will be me. The world will be my deictic paradox.

Deixis: the paradox that identity is the achievement of alterity. Benveniste calls terms of deixis "empty signs," terms without meaning except in a context (like *here, there, now, you, me. . .*). Deixis affords a palpable sensation of the unlived within the lived, the unknown within the known, the empty or non-being within the parameters of incarnation.

The *Cogito:* "I am" is the original Other.

". . .language is an operational superstructure on an erotic base." (Brown, *Life Against Death* p. 69) Language is the paradox that makes play work, that makes work play or perform the earnestness of its purpose or intent, makes it *intent.* Intense.

Nomen est omen: the word is an omen. Interpretation of the ominous. In the ominous the numinous awaits.

"All communication has this characteristic—it can be magically modified by accompanying communication." (Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* p. 230)

"Magic is the power possessed by autonomous beings, and autonomy is the defining characteristic of the subject. Objects of themselves can never possess the numen, since they are not autonomous, but merely functions at the effect of some other cause. If an object emanates the numen, it is the locus of a living presence. *Numen* (from the root *nu-*) is the nod by which the gods assert, by consent or refusal, their autonomous will. The numinous, wherever it occurs, and whatever the form, marks the encounter with the real." (Norman Austin, *Meaning and Being in Myth* p.15)

To encounter the real is to be marked, embellished, set apart, magically modified. *Named.*

A personal name, omen of the numinous person. "Paradise is a person. Come into this world." (Olson, *Maximus* p. 240)

Names are nods; orders and commands. *Tabula Rasula.* I must have blanked out.

Theoretical perspectives are rules, *regula*, for measuring the span or distance of traversal required by an interpretive act. Geometries of free-fall. Spin of the numinous. Those vertigo erotics.

Zeno's paradox of space as an infinitely diminishing (but never expiring) distance testifies to a breakdown of the surveyor's tool, which is a mechanism for:

traversing the distance,
filling the space,
marking the time.

Interpretation is bound up with *ego* and with *eros.*
Where do I stand,
and how does it feel?

And when did it happen? Plato's conundrum of temporality, from the *Parmenides* (141:a-b): "Whatever occupies time must always be becoming older than itself, and 'older' always means older than something younger. Consequently, whatever is becoming older than itself, if it is to have something *than* which it is becoming older, must also be at the same time becoming younger than itself."

We read personally but interpret impersonally.

My likes and inclinations (as in Barthes' "pleasure of the text") can be taxonomized, but in the interpretive occasion personal references too easily become esoteric, and what is esoteric adds complexity, but also

depth, the depth of secrecy. The deep secret that is open to the world, a purloined letter, obvious. Latin *obvius* from *obviam*, in or against the way: we go around or avoid the obvious, it is in the way, but beneath attention. There where we failed to attend, attention leaks away, forming a reservoir of inattention, fathom upon fathom, unfathomable.

Silence is an attribute of a relation.
Secrecy is a function of interpretation.

Instrumental reason falters when you add, to the complexity of knowing things, the additional burden of having to know *people*.

A dream can be interpreted, because dreams never survive their noisy channels intact (the dreamer flooded with the somatic sensation of there *having been* more than can be told or even recalled). But a living person? To interpret a person is to posit the obsolescence of the person; and sure enough, people obligingly vanish into our interpretations of them. (An interpretation effaces relation.)

What is neglected are the terms of relation, Whitman's very simple "Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem. . ." ("To You") You—you empty deictic cipher you—forget that the text is a laying on of hands, and that {we:you:who} are what has been touched. Moved. Mobilized. (mumblemumble)

We recognize "classics" by the circumambient swarm of parasites, "thermal exciters." (Michel Serres, *The Parasite* p. 190)

In the laborious endeavor of this literary parasitology, "meaning" is gained under oppressive constraints and is associated with parsimony; or it appears all too easily, even frenetically, and acquires attributes of promiscuity.

"The perception of a general condition of insufficiency is refracted through a prism of choices." (Nikos Xenos, *Scarcity and Modernity* p. 1) Xenos is talking about capitalism and the myth of scarcity, but the statement applies to language theory as well. Consider nihilistic strains of modernism: a prodigious stylistic exactitude renders meaninglessness palpable, even euphoric; the void gnaws like a phantom pregnancy in the wombs of words.

Interpretation of texts is not so different from quantum mechanics: we still strive to locate its position (relative to generic coordinates)
its mass (displacement of cognitive space)
its velocity (momentum in the sociocultural plane).

Quantum mechanics deals with probabilities, with mass tendencies rather than with individual events. "Literature" is a generalization, a statistical tendency of the sort described by quantum mechanics.

Literature creates the statistical milieu—the field of predominant *tendencies*— within which individual texts are transformed into *messages*. The institutional study of literature becomes the statistical task of distinguishing the messages from noise.

The Copenhagen Interpretation stipulates a *domain of suitable reference*, which is that of the observer['s scale, dimension of the observer's milieu and points of reference, etc.]. It understands interpretation in terms of its pragmatic origins. Each time we seek knowledge of something "in itself" we learn something, instead, about the desire to elaborate frames of reference to "things in themselves." That is, we learn something if we take the position of the Copenhagen Interpretation; otherwise, we learn the caustic lessons of scepticism, and feel ourselves to be the dupes of experiments not conducted by us, but *on* us, by mindless or senseless forces outside our control (and what better definition could the sceptic desire of a "thing in itself" but a mindless or senseless force outside our control!).

The Copenhagen Interpretation testifies to the terrific mobility of psychological *projection*.

"The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves." Jung, *Aion* (CW IX:2, p. 71)

The sign, the vessel, breaks.

Prophecy is an eruption of the sacred into interpretable form, bypassing the semiotic function of profane textuality. Prophecy requires interpretation in defiance of semiosis. Semiosis is the re- assertion of the primacy of signs, otherwise known as *idolatry*.

The secular text encourages interpretation because it is convivial, accessible, profane. *Pro fanum*, before the temple. The profane text pretends to be a shrine, proposing the word as a tiny pulpit. (Where it gets kinky is in the pretense that a prophetic voice is being emitted from behind the pulpit, which is made out to be an orchestra pit.)

Breakage, crumble, multiplication of an enigma, which grows as it comes apart, expends in decrease until emptiness is swollen. A rent in the

normal where the numen pokes through. A phantom delegation bearing a ( ) debt which no blank check can ever transact.

"Your money or your life," as Lacan was fond of saying, is the impossible claim of identity. It is also the interpretive paradox, the constitutive ambiguity of twoness, the way meaning and being are never quite synchronized, but caught up in the webs of signification and desire, stretched across what Gerhard von Rad called the critical minimum and the theological maximum.

Interpretation as a tradition (hermeneutics) derives from the reading of scriptures, sacred—and secret—texts. Interpretation is an unfolding of the revealed (as if it were crumpled in transit; or pieced together after being shattered—hence the sacred obligations of symbolism, symbol as part to be matched with other parts, pieced together to restore a whole, a *hyle* or "form" of the holy). No matter how well we put it together it isn't the same (And all the king's horses and all the king's men. . .); its identity, its sameness, is different, no longer orthodox but paradox.

Roy Wagner in *Symbols That Stand For Themselves* speaks of "symbolic obviation," by which he means figure/ground reversals. Symbolic obviation is the flow of analogy from a "point metaphor" to a "frame metaphor." Or: from significant detail to enframing event.

G. Spencer Brown proposes four steps for the "expansion of reference": *condensation, confirmation, cancellation,* and *compensation.* In an explanation that seems to derive from the systole/diastole model, Brown says: "In general, a contraction of reference accompanies an expansion of awareness, and an expansion of reference accompanies a contraction of awareness." *(Laws of Form* p. 10)

Expansion and *contraction* are the bodily frames of both yoga and tai ch'i. The point of both practices is to liberate consciousness from helpless oscillation between expansion and contraction, to get stabilized in *tao* (tai ch'i) or *samadhi* (yoga). Going with the breath, its respirating frame your only signature. Its sign your nature.

The esoteric challenge of sacred texts often leads to paradox.

Literary theory has not, on the whole, been disposed to recognize the inevitable paradox that awaits interpretation. Paradox is thus mistaken as a "constitutive ambiguity" of the text, as evidence of interpretive reverberation and echo (Mrs. Moore in the Marabar caves *[Passage to India]:* the adamantine mockery of human voices), or testimony to the endless slide of signification, the lubricated delirium of the sign.

The prevailing fears of interpretative nervousness: coitus interruptus and premature ejaculation.

Interpretation, always pretending to discuss the "text," expose a "rhetoric," delineate a "theme," specify patterned "form," paradoxically ends up instead obsessed with names.

The goal of interpretation should be to clarify the paradox.

Not simply en-lighten, with its teleology of Enlightenment (Aufklärung), but to become light-hearted, *leuchtherzig*, or *fröhlich*, the Nietzschean opiate [*Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* or Gay Science] for heads "enlightened" into robotic craniums. To *re-make* the mistake. Seize the flaw.

Mistakes are revelations.

Interpretation often seeks to heal the text of its mistakes, its *petite mal*, its tiny seizures. Its coughs, sneezes, stutters. Its limp.

Limp: Limbp. Legba's legs—one foot in each world, heaven and earth—make a discordant sound when he walks.

The hermeneutic correction: outfit him for a prosthesis. Provide corrective symmetry. But then there would be no revelation, no oracle, no prophecy.

Legba's genius: each leg makes its own sound. (Two does not exist: every pair is one + one.) Legba: god of gates and doors, fences and boundaries, also patronizes roads and paths. Not only the block, but the break. A paradox. Testament to the uncanny potency of junctions, spooked transitions of empowerment. (Robert Johnson at the crossroads.) Enabler of masterful transgressions. "Legba is the divine linguist," master of a "unique dialectic, the copula in each sentence. . . He has sexual relations with any woman he chooses because these boundaries—physical, social, religious, and even metaphysical—dissolve and reform in his presence." (Robert Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa* p. 88)

In Haiti Legba's associated with St. Peter, because the saint holds the keys to the kingdom. There (as well as for the Fon of West Africa— and in European alchemical lore[2]) Legba's an old man in rags, with a crutch: "pied cassé" or broken-foot.

Oedipus, too, with prophecies said to "flutter about his head" like birds, hobbles as his name instructs, "Swellfoot."

It's as if those feet were swollen with eyes, compensating for the mutilation. Emerson: "I become a transparent eyeball. . ." The eyes continue Ezekiel's vision (1:18) of the heavenly chariot, its inter- revolving wheels "were full of eyes round about." And in Zach. 4:10 the "eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth." Jung referred to such symbols of "multiple

luminosities of the unconscious," and "the seeming possibility that complexes possess a kind of consciousness, a luminosity of their own, which, I conjecture, expresses itself in the symbol of the soul-spark, multiple eyes *(polyophthalmia)*, and the starry heaven." (CW XIV: 207)

To lighten. Make light of. To arouse elation, buoyant ascension.

Legba, Esu Elegbara, god of the crossroads, "loosens knowledge." (Henry Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* p. 9) Get loose, lighten up.

Resolution as laughter. The goal of interpretation is *to air out*, to ventilate, to expend stale accumulation with a laugh. Not to ascertain meaning, not place or fix or determine it, but *uncork it.*

Laughter is the sneeze of the soul.

"Procreation and sneezing appear to be the distinctive manifestations of the *psyche*. Here, then, strange as it may seem, must be sought the origin of the name, if its nearest kin be *psuxein*, 'to blow'." (R.B. Onians *The Origins of European Thought* p. 120)

Bird could even blow on the nod.

When you read and find yourself nodding off, Hermes is on his way to guide you to an underworld, a subtext.

For the Greeks, a contractual arrangement was signed by a nod, pledged in the name of psyche. "A sneeze is also a nod, a nod not expected or controlled by the conscious self but an apparently spontaneous expression of the life in the head." (Onians p. 104)

The sanctity of the sneeze: prophecy. Nodding is interpreting prophetic texts. Or: a nod indicates the prophecy, the kerygmatic annunciation, of the text. Al-chymia's chimera.

The ointments, the facilitators. Regulators. In the *Koran* the angelic beings: "those who repulse" "those who recite" "those who distribute" "those who are sent" "those who disperse" "those who seize" "those who extract gently" "those who precede" "those who float" "those who deliver the word" "those who conduct the cosmic tasks" "those arrayed in order"

Everything written on the sacrosanct Tablet needs these angels for its actualization. In the mystical alphabet of the Dhauqi branch of the Chishtiyya Sabiriyya the pronounced letters are lunar mansions.

"Man's heart is between two of God's fingers, and He turns it as He pleases," a Muslim adage has it. What is written takes many forms. So "One has to cultivate, first of all, the eye to see the selfsame reality of ink in all letters, and then to see the letters as so many intrinsic modifications of the ink." (Haydar-i Amuli [d. 1385], quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* p. 89)

"As long as Oedipus is the protagonist on the stage, we are not Oedipus. Let his terrible secret be exposed to the whole world, provided we can leave the theater with our secret intact. Myth is a powerful hypnotic, in which cultures inscribe their own ideology, and the mythologist's task is certainly to discover the little secrets that one ideology or another hides away in the folds of myth.

But myth also reveals that which was to be concealed. Like our dreams, which seem to disguise our secrets to protect our sleep, myth keeps confessing the very secrets that it was constructed to conceal. With a chorus of signifiers it circles around the traumatic rupture, where the subject vanished into the field of the Other." (Norman Austin, *ibid.*, 23)

One correction: The mythologist's true "task" is not to discover but to dislodge the secrets (the more unintentionally the better) which flutter up, buoyant, like motes.

The numinous is creaturely presence. Secrets are creatures.

The numinous is creaturely presence. Secrets are creatures.
Little secrets "hidden away in the folds of myth": Myths are the genitals of the collective unconscious.

Is "collective unconscious" an oxymoron? Unconscious is *uncollected consciousness.* Consciousness in its *menstruum universale* and its *dissemination* is endlessly dispersed, "unconcealed," but scattered, lost, bereft (the paradigmatic phallic disorder: post-coitum tristum, yearning for "full presence"). Myth is tumescence and flow, the waxing and waning of cosmogenesis, fecundating psyche.

In the *Aitreya Upanishad* (1.4): "[The Self] heated that one (i.e. Purusa, 'Man'). When it was heated, its mouth broke off, like an egg. From the mouth, there was speech; from speech, fire. Its nostrils broke off. From the eyes, there was vision; from vision, the sun. Its ears broke off. From the ears, there was hearing; from hearing, the four quarters. Its skin broke off. From the skin, there was bodily hair; from the bodily hair, plants and trees. Its heart broke off. From the heart, there was mind; from mind, the moon. Its navel broke off. From the navel, there was the downward (anal) breath; from the downward breath, death. Its penis broke off. From the penis, there was semen; from semen, the waters."

Ananse, the Ashanti trickster, has his children disorient a rival by having them inform him that their father broke his penis in seven places, and went to a blacksmith for repairs. The rival asks where their mother is; they reply that she went to the river to fetch water, and her pot would have been broken but she caught it just in time. However, she didn't quite finish catching it and has gone back to do so.

Dizzy tales; understanding them brings on dizziness.
When we speak of language, we should speak of THE WHIRRED.
"As the Word Turns."

"An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties." (Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* p. 111)

"In matters of art, and particularly of artistic perception, it is wrong to want to *decide*, to want to *resolve* a difficulty." Aesthetic perception plays at the limits of an irresolution, as if a binocular apparatus were never quite focused, its images visibly doubled, shadowing each other in ocular reverberation. "Thus, very often the urge to interpret results from optical illusion. . ." (Fredric Jameson, "Metacommentary" in *Ideologies of Theory* Vol. 1, p. 4)

We can't view the surface of life and see through it simultaneously. This is Gombrich's paradox of illusion: ". . .for though we may be intellectually aware of the fact that any given experience *must* be an illusion, we cannot, strictly speaking, watch ourselves have an illusion." *(Art and Illusion* pp. 5-6) We can't know what the watcher or observer knows without becoming observers ourselves, which means extricating ourselves from the plenitude of the illusion. Wittgenstein's comment on never finding the word on the tip of our tongue may refer to this paradox: what if we were always shadowed, doubled, and perplexed by the binocular irresolution, the fact that knowledge or self-awareness always detaches us from immersion in the sensory manifold that is precisely the condition and object of awareness?

Aisthesis means: we need the illusion, we require illusion in order to see. Illusion generates certainty by arresting reflex, staging prognoses, evolving a future conditional out of the present tense. (cf. Gombrich "Illusion and Art") Sidney's "second nature" is not confined to art alone, but is the composite of our sensory abilities pausing at *is* to extract *perhaps*.

The Western affliction is the inability to absorb (the certainty of) illusion into discourse *as* its residual epistemology.

There is illusion. There is doubt.

You can only doubt the substantive; there's no doubting an illusion, for that would be to sustain the impossible adventure of watching yourself have an illusion. Therefore you can only doubt the *certainty of illusion*.

Nihilism is the conjugal strife between illusion and disillusion. (It's interesting that in English "disillusion" is a negative state, implying, for all its bad press, that "illusion" is a gratifying condition.)

"'Darkness is deep,' the Eye says.
'Silence is deep,' the Ear says.
What *is not* is the 'depth' of *what is*.'" (Valéry, *Analects* p. 308)

Jubilate Agno: seize the daydream; celebrate the trauma.

Pathic versus instrumental utilities.

There are two styles of pathologizing—of sensing, of feeling, the logos:

(1) the metonymic agony: paranoia. Paranoia is the agony of having to interpret without having been privy to the rules or codes of the game. Paranoia is confronting an interpretive process already underway, a situation that is de facto ahead of you, and to which you are a belated non-initiate. Paranoia is a disfunction of the phantom temporality of the gap: something is unfolding in time, but you are always situated at the *wrong time.*

(2) the paradigmatic agony: schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is the agony of having to suffer interpretation as the immaculate compression or concentration of the total code—*all* the rules of the game—as a single, totalizing, yet interior hermeneutic/heuristic injunction. If the metonymic agony arouses a "contiguity illusion" (cf. Pignatari in Sebeok 1978), then the paradigmatic agony precipitates a "simultaneity illusion." Schizophrenia is a disfunction of the phantom spatiality of the gap, the sensation of which is to internalize the entire spatial feel of the gap or figural space, which is simply too big, so splitting results. The agony is the double one of being situated at the right place, but being forced to take in or contain too much to fit into the right place, so part of one is always elsewhere, in the *wrong place.*

In Jakobson's terms, the *similarity disorder* is the loss of grip on code, resulting in context-dependency. *Contiguity disorder* is loss of grip on context, in which a strong associative syntaxis survives.

Rhyme is a standing invitation to contiguity disorder (see Swinburne's evocative erosion of context through fanaticism of rhyme).

Metaphor is orphanage.

Metonymy is amputative: restoration by proximity and immediacy (grow another word).

Seizure: "I had started to go back to the beginnings of a sense of an aura in language, to a rhythmic and tonal seizure in words where I suddenly found I was not using language but used by language, not saying something I meant to say but being carried away to things I had not thought to say—amazed or ashamed of what I was saying." (Duncan, *Fictive Certainties* p. 126) Like Psyche, carried away to her "wish palace." And the wicked sisters— "Let's *blow* this joint" —head over the cliff, waiting in vain for love's sirocco.

Ecstasy is the prophecy of obliteration. Breath is the prophecy of speech.

Knowing feelings; versus feeling knowing get away from you.

Spencer Brown unfolds an algebra and a calculus of forms from a single mark in space, which he calls "the first distinction." When the distinction is apprehended not as a semiotic mark but as a split, a rupture, then the distinction is interpreted as if it were a broken connection. This is *pathology*, or *feeling the mark*.

Brown's "distinction" instantly posits an observer at the interface, with a prosthesis as instrumentalizing tactility.

The function of syllogism in Spencer Brown's laws of form: no distinction can be made once (i.e. being and meaning and not conflatable), therefore the initial distinction is unthinkable; to come to cognition of it, the distinction must be marked twice, rendered duplicitous.

This level of duplicity—duplexity—is the kernel of information theory, in which information is coded multiply to compete with ambient noise in the channel. The message repeated twice stands a greater chance of arriving intact at its destination.

But what does it do to the semantic resonance of a message to be repeated twice (or many times)? It becomes canonized, *if* a sufficient number of its repetitions survive transmission.

"Canonization," in Brown's logic, is "the form of condensation." A canonical text is an aching syllogism. It must be known twice to be known once, or known *as one*. Pathology is the awareness of irresolution, of states in which two are one or one is two, in which the binocular focus cannot be resolved into the illusion of one stable view.

A break is an opportunity. (He got all the breaks. A fast break)

"Creation seemed a mighty Crack
To make me visible." (Emily Dickinson)

Illumination: something burns so bright that what it illuminates is actually obscured: the eye is "blinded" by the light, its *incandescence*.

There is also *sonorescence*. "In our sonorescence, nature and artifice compose each other's excesses and their excesses." (Stephen Ross, *The Ring of Representation* p. 211) This "reciprocal excess" is a habitation in doubling which seems inevitably a mark of mind, a notch in matter.

In music, "The note began as something which was pulling and stretching, but does it want to go on like this?" (Ernst Block, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music* p. 228) The function of time in music is as undertow,

to make the instantaneous felt as re-iteration, the doing as done again; the instrument itself a timer, taking the pulse of the place. (Note is tone.)

Valéry: "By the indirect route of musical stimuli I am, in some strange fashion, combined with myself." "I seem to experience all this, for actually I cannot tell whether I am subject or object. . ." (*Analects* p. 268, 269)

Senses awaken; stretch, rouse. Aroused, they multiply. Each sense exercising its autonomy, gnawing, gnawing. "I 'thought' and desired in my fingers. If I had made a man, I should certainly have put the brain and soul in his fingertips." (Helen Keller, *The World I Live In* p. 116)

Rotundity. The bell of the horn. The dome of the rock. The sonorescent cupola of a solo driven by *duende* darkens the listener's pulse, even as it "consults" the wind (as Lorca says of *cante jondo [Deep Song and Other Prose* p. 84]). The pregnant pause; and the billowing skirt on the line in the wind. The vibrating garment becomes, at a distance, an eye. Even sound may visit *Polyophthalmia.*

Spiritual correspondences seek equilibrium as attunement rather than cessation or cancellation of opposites. So, in Islamic alchemy, "without the idea of the *balance*, there can be no worlds in correspondence with each other." "The science of the Balance spatializes the succession of time by substituting for the order of succession the order of simultaneity, the unity of the 'cupolas'. . ." (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* p. 80, 81)

"Yet, having reached the *interior*, one finds oneself paradoxically on the *outside*. . . Yet, strange as it may seem, once the journey is completed the reality which has hitherto been an inner and hidden one turns out to envelop, surround, or contain that which at first was outer and visible." (Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis," *Spring* 1972 p. 5)

"Spiritual reality can therefore not be found 'in the where.' The *'where'* is in it."

> As Lightning on a Landscape
> Exhibits Sheets of Place—
> Not yet suspected—but for Flash—
> And Click—and Suddenness. (Dickinson #974)[3]

Desire encases language in the duplexity of conscious/ unconscious.
Symbol cements this bifurcation into the enigma of incarnation.
Desire says "one," to which desire adds "two," together making three.

A symbol is a door, an opening, a passageway.
Mouth: tongue: vulva: urethra: nested frames, limits, *tao.*

This is why genitals signify, abide as symbols. Phallus and vulva signify each other, in addition to manifesting their own inscrutable singularity:

The mystery of a one that is nothing without an other (1 = 0) but, two taken together, equal one (1 + 1 = 1) which resolve, genetically, into the final *mysterium tremendum*, the shudder of procreation: *another* one, a multiple (1 x 1 = 3).

the symbol is the ouroboros

through whose hoop we

shake our hips

grin & wiggle

devour the worm

skim lava from the krater

gulp from the bottomless drop

at love in the weird of the founder

Pascal: "I had a thought. I have forgotten it. In its place I write that I've forgotten it."

What if the notion you thought you'd never remember returned to you in all its fullness, integrity, coherence, and it was:

"What if closure, coherence, and mastery kept on repeating itself, insinuating its finality to us, not in narrative form or eschatological vision, but as a logic of the sentence, the paradigm of grammar itself?"

What if words themselves were sparrows pecking Zeuxis' grapes?

So all the animals peeled themselves and turned into drums, stretching their skins for the heads of the drums, and each of these heads could think.

(René Thom: "Thought is a permanent orgasm.")

BLUSHING IN THE GARDEN OF THE ANIMAL

ruptures in the skin of fruit
split open as muzzles or snouts

as ever as you & many
as you & me
were lifted up through the vowel of a
cloud
known as "Unknown"

to *thud* to *said* to whether & went

such honeys rubbing the skin of the drums

what are all these words doing
coming up around me all around me

the necklace of apocrypha
blowing off the oceanic vault

the brain inside the stone
through which my stone knocks back

enormous persons begin appearing
appearing in the pale egg of day, an air, an hour

hands were inserted & look—
sleep washed them

"Blue Moses" shined the bowl
(did The Lion change my face?)

I'm talking to You the
only one at a time

a carnival sleek in pubis
a chlorophyll bass clarinet

the slumber of bodily organs clasping the house
in a low cirrus swoon, tufts of the chakras

in bowls of marigolds, savor the
rasa eros kink in the mask

wherever we are
    however we either
        whoever we or

Notes

1 "Where id was, there ego will be." Bob Marley: "feel it in the one drop" . . . in Mahayana Deity Yoga, cognition of emptiness sustained through contemplation of a reflective gleam on an earring, inside of which all the commotion of the lords of existence appears in fabulous proliferation, congealed in a drop, the wholesome zero.

2 See Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618), Emblem XLII, with its accompanying epigram: "Let Nature be your guide, and with your art / Follow her closely. Without her you'll err. / Let reason be your staff; experience lend / Power to your sight, that you may see afar. / Let reading be your lamp, dispelling dark, / That you may guard 'gainst throngs of things and words." (Joscelyn Godwin trans., 1989) The term "alchemy" comes from several Sanskrit roots emphasizing blackness, nigredo: au I / gheu / kers II. **Au I** = down, and is rooted in "avatar" (au ter = cross over). Vishnu's avatars include Rama and Krishna, both of which mean *black* in Sanskrit. Krishna is **kers II**, black. In Egypt the Nile's black flood effluvia is *khem*. **Gheu** = pour, in Greek *khein*. Juice is *khulos* and *khumos*. Chemistry's chums, the black gods and patrons. Flooders.

3 In *Etidorhpa* (1895) by John Uri Lloyd (Cincinnati pharmacist): "As the tip of the whip-lash passes with the lash, so through life the soul of man proceeds with the body. As there is a point just when the tip of the whip-lash is on the edge of its return, where all motion of the line that bounds the tip ends, so there is a motionless point when the soul starts onward from the body of man. As the tip of the whip lash sends its cry through space, not while it is in motion either way, but from the point where motion ceases, the spaceless, timeless point that lies between the backward and the forward, so the soul of man leaves a cry (eternity) at the critical point. It is the death echo, and thus each snap of the life-thread throws an eternity, its own eternity, into eternity's seas, and each eternity is made up of the entities thus cast from the critical point." It could even be called a *diacritical* point. Spencer Brown's "distinction" or "mark."

DEMOSTHENES AGRAFIOTIS
from THE CHINESE NOTEBOOK

(Translations from the Greek were composed by the author and Theo Dorgan, Tony Curtis, Pat Boran, and Kate Newman at the Seminar of Collective Translation, the Tyrone Guthrie Center, Ireland, from the 22nd to the 29th of November, 1992.)

Page 9

the common enemy
scurrying, marshalling

again and again

prophecies and disease

the rodents
open other circles.

Page 15

the gesture
does not recognize
  last minute cartographies
  scaffolding of theories
  panickers.

Page 18

the lips follow the eyelids

cultivated on the face
plants
contents
sequences of signs.

Page 19

cultivator of paintings and erections

cheap, artificial glance
the tongue unlocks and does not let
/.

Page 28

despised masks
subsumed
in claims to dignity
during family toasts

no not me me

blackmail.

Page 36

night of the museum
unexploited by lamps

no appeal

movements become
difficult
and blood
without passing through vessels
is guided to sheet music

every smile
counterpoint
to taxonomy of the indigenous

the traces
breed representations.

Page 39

swimmer
in the pavilion of stony times
rescues
the good utensils
along with the light fittings
imported from the cloud sea.

Page 40

the walls peel
the cells
points of resistance
people parading arms pinioned

dressed
in television stripes
hate the reference
the fate of sentiment—.

Page 45

all those in work will set out
with pride
for the training of sniffer dogs

pretensions truths
in compartmented bodies

bond descri—ption
institutionalization complete

the fission of repeat.

Page 48

tracings

exclusions

the fruits offered

meditations

compromises.

Page 50

co-travelers

satisfying insecurity
of the news bulletins

conversation
stores up
politeness and accord.

Page 56

canceled
and not paid back humilities
as weak members accept the power
of trading

delegates have connections
officials with volleys of hypocrisy
destroy paintings and perspectives

positions advice
consume stature
of the must.

Page 57

ambitions for drug-addict
brothers

the virgins and the hours
are lost in the corrosion
potentials

batteries for activation
of data

bulletins responsibilities

avoidance of (devious) handling.

Page 68

continuity
movement

powerless chambers

paper cut-out smiles
spread on the table

future

promise of publications.

Page 72

the lines converge

the notices
are paid for with old coins
after explosions
in the empty halls.

NOTE: Demosthenes Agrafiotis is a major Greek experimentalist—visual & verbal—with books of poetry, essays, photography, & drawings published both in Greece & France (the latter, notably, by Emmanuel Hocquard's & Claude Royet-Journoud's Cahiers de Royaumont and by Julien Blaine's Collection du Refuge). His anthology-formatted magazine, *Clinamen*, co-published by Erato Publications in Athens, has been active for over a decade as an amalgam of Greek art & poetry with innovative work from Europe & America.

HIROMI ITO
THREE POEMS

(Tr. from the Japanese by Leith Morton)

SNOW

Following the dotted line of footprints with my eyes
I knew the hare had been killed
The fox's footprints are in straight line, I was told
Two then stop two then stop are the hare's
"Two then stop" and "a straight line" merged
And became "a straight line"
I didn't find any blood
"Two then stop" makes no resistance whatever
I am barefooted
I took off my shoes then my socks
My feet were completely exposed
You are looking at them
When I took off my shoes and socks
I found my toes were hairy
Blood trickled out from between my toes
You are looking at that too
I am writing
You are looking at that too
I want to show it to you
You are also writing
I am looking at you writing
A man who writes with a fine hand
That's what I think
What a fine
Man, men, women
You finish writing and put it away
Apparently you do not intend to show me
You put on your shoes

And set out across the snowy plain
I remain here
If you are "two then stop" on the snowy plain
Then your fate will be to be caught by "a straight line"
It will surely be on a morning
When all around you turns to light

NEAR KITAMI STATION ON THE ODAKYŪ LINE

The Odakyū line is always crowded I go on standing
Around midday if I ride the Seibu Ikebukuro line I can usually get a set as I can also on the Toei Underground line.
These are lines I normally travel on.
On the Odakyū downline there's a lot of universities so there's lots of people. I don't like the feeling I have when I get on a crowded train I get on hating people
I change trains at Seijō Gakuen Station. On the other platform the all-stops train is waiting with its doors open.
I get on not hating people. Only a few people are inside never many
Because I don't know it well I always get in the front the very front carriage of the express the all-stops train does not reach the place directly opposite the front carriage of the express. The all-stops is a short train.
While I walk to the door of the all-stops train the express starts to move in passes Seijō Gakuen speeds down the slope and as soon as it has sped down the slope it makes a stop
I look at the greenery outside the carriage as it rushes past
It changes from trees to grass and then back to trees
A creek crosses the grass
Outside the carriage greenery is everywhere
Because I don't know it well I always sit in the very front carriage of the all-stops train the steps leading to the ticket-turnstiles are in the middle of the platform. Where I cross the

up platform I wave my hand seductively
I cross the level-crossing and go into his apartment
Ten minutes walk away
Some weeks ago someone committed suicide at the level-crossing
Planks are lain over the level-crossing
The planks were soaked in blood
In the depression in the track a lump of blood
And what looked like part of an internal organ remained

We had sexual intercourse while I was menstruating

When I go into his apartment I turn on the radio
I leant over his face and
Squeezed the pimples in every corner of his face
I plucked the hairs that remained on his cheeks after shaving
Turned him around
A mole-like thing is on his back
I knew because it sticks out
When I squeeze it the black fatty deposit in the head slides out
In the back of his ears as well there are fatty deposits
When I squeeze they slid out long and slippery
When I grip his hair with my teeth and pull out it comes
I bite my fingernails
My nails are short
I can't pluck hairs with my nails
If I use my teeth they always come out
His cheek comes close to me it's always cold
His beard touched my skin
He has shaven
I feel the shaven stubble
Before and after we engage in sexual intercourse

I saw a photograph of the area near Kitami station among the photographs of Araki Nobuyoshi* I immediately thought this is where I have sex I felt ashamed I am a 25-year-old woman and thus do engage in regular sexual intercourse. I come from Itabashi ward to Setagaya ward and while travelling sexual intercourse is not on my mind I do not feel any sexual desire I am watching the grass and

trees of Setagaya ward as they pass by outside the carriage in this season the chlorophyll is evident in layers the moisture almost reaches the saturation point when I meet him I feel happy so I wave seductively but when I turn on the radio in his apartment is the time I think of sex

Sex has become a matter of course
I cross the level-crossing and come to the station
It may be that I've pulled my panties up over my wet genitals
    and crossed at the level-crossing at Kitami where the piece of
    flesh still remains
Liquid constantly oozed out
And soaked my panties

*Photographer (b. 1940)

VINEGAR AND OIL

Onions, eggplant, pork
Fried onions, deep-fried eggplant, sauteed pork
Fried onion rings, fried eggplant purple-side up, fried eggplant
    white-side up
Dried and salted baby sardines, grated radish
Dried whitebait, vinegar, grated radish
Tomatoes, radish shoots, lettuce
Left-over tomatoes, left-over radish shoots, left-over lettuce,
    vinegar, oil,
Fatty pork, strips of dark devil's tongue, radish
Lotus root, pork, oil
Fatty pork, fried eggplant, liver
Shino-ware texture
Shiny black rod (I can't tell what it is)
Soy sauce, white fish, lettuce
Rice with meat sauce

Gooey onions, gooey beef, gooey rice grains
Sticky kidney-beans, chicken, onions
Porkfat
Squid, mushrooms
White squid, shiny mushrooms
Shiny white squid, stuck-together shiny mushrooms
Stuck-together shiny white squid, crumbly stuck-together shiny mushrooms
Pork with fat, scallops
Butter, ketchup, ketchup
Patterns emerging on a fried egg
Pickled plums, ornamental basil
Salt
(Longevity, love, firebreaks, safe births, moles, a pair of tweezers, cripples, child care)
(*Tōfu*, an obi being untied, sticky syrup, falling from a horse)
I want to,
Show me,
I want to lick,
Tomorrow,
No today,
I want to breed,
I want to,
I want to eat,
I want to eat,
I want to eat,
I want to eat,
Anybody will do
In other words what I mean is
My lover who I loved to the point of madness liked *sushi*
We often went to *sushi* bars
And my lover who I loved to just before the point of madness always ordered the same thing
It was the "blue plate special" for two
The man and woman who love each other madly
Faced each other in the corner of a *sushi* counter eating the "regular *sushi*" on a tray
Herring, tuna, squid, eggs
There I thought I'd like to

Eat a selection of expensive *sushi* at a *sushi* counter with a man
Another quite ordinary man who appeared in front of me then
Would talk about *sushi* bars
Sea eel
Bluefin tuna
Clam, scallop, cockles, abalone
Thinking if I was with this man I could eat whatever kind of *sushi* I wanted
I decided to swap men
After that I often went to *sushi* bars
I always took care of the bill
Then it's the same as if I'm going to a *sushi* bar on my own
And I made up may mind not to expect any *sushi* from the next man
I want to make love
I love you
I really love you
Love me
Lick me
Suck me
I want to make love
I love you
I really love you
Love me
I want to make love
I love
(Longevity, love, firebreaks, safe births, moles, a pair of tweezers, cripples, child care)
(*Tōfu*, an obi being untied, sticky syrup, falling from a horse)
My aunt's menstrual blood
My other aunt's menstrual blood
My grandfather's menstrual blood
My mother's menstrual blood—
Soaked cotton and old rags
They used to sew them themselves
If they were dirty they washed them and used them again, so I'm told
And on top of that I'm told they wore the black panties they made themselves

So that they would not be embarrassed if they leaked
My grandmother gave birth to my mother when she was 40
My mother gave birth to me when she was 30
When I was born it was long after my 70-year-old grandmother had ceased menstruating
I gave birth to my daughter when I was 28
When my daughter was born it was long after my 58-year-old mother had ceased menstruating
When my amniotic fluid came out in a rush, something like menstrual blood gushed out
I thought that
If I fell pregnant by my next period
I would have two children the same age just as if they were twins
But I didn't fall pregnant
I thought that
If I fell pregnant by my next period after that I would have a child born the very next year so alike as to be taken as a twin
But I didn't fall pregnant
Afterwards
My periods keep on coming
(Longevity, love, firebreaks, safe births, moles, a pair of tweezers, cripples, child care)
(*Tōfu*, an obi being untied, sticky syrup, falling from a horse)

Some quotations from Haga Noboru's *History of Burial Rites*

Hiromi Ito (b. 1955 in Tokyo) is a prolific writer of both experimental and deeply woman-centered poetry. Along with several gatherings of poems, her uncompromising books on mothering and childing (*Good Breast, Bad Breast* the most prominent among them) have added greatly to her presence in Japan. A selection of her work will appear later this year from Garland Press in New York.

JEROME ROTHENBERG
from THE LORCA VARIATIONS

"SECOND NEW YORK POEM"

El mascarón. Mirad el mascarón
cómo viene del Africa a New York.
(F.G.L.)

[1]
"They Are Gone, the Pepper Trees"

Half of it was sand
& what remained
was mercury & made him
tremble,
too afraid to rub it in
while visioning
a hippopotamus who stalked thru
everlastings,
& other animals who crossed
those endless bridges,
whom he could bring down
with a spear,
their beaks grown dormant,
their flesh nailed onto trees
from which he used to cut his masks,
would wear his masks around
New York, half crazy
wasn't he,
the bright gazelle mask flashing
where he walked
what a joy to be among you

at this gathering
he thought,
to spend this time with you
here where the wheat rots,
swans rut, camels
plod among the peppers,
in the mask that shows you fear,
the mask dissolving
into sand,
like solitude & ashes
where the light has died away
so recently,
the cat is playing with a cork,
& all things come into this other light
the phosphorous ignites
over New York, where death
's a crocodile, & sunlight
makes the world
grow darker, where a sword cuts through
my throat, my feet,
where silence covers everything,
where eyes turn white,
where time turns inside out
like valleys
rife with mutilated buds
in Africa,
inviting us to join
their dance of death.

[2]
"Canyons of Lime Imprisoned"

A fond farewell
at the border. See the dead
& how they hunker down,
who bring us hurricanes,
those naked masks
those shameless tumulters,
who tempt us with strange lights
horses will ride past,
slender mounts for children,
edging their way thru niches,
squeezing
into bank vaults,
Wall Street poor & empty,
roofs on which manometers
break into pieces,
& the channels they leave behind
excite the iris
yes, & voices
cut across New York, & someone
wears a mask
that looks like North America,
& someone else counts up
the unemployed, whose numbers
brought together in a frozen dance,
o Lorca,
darken the sky.
These herds are what we will become,
their frenzy
will be ours tomorrow,
o my naked heart,
we watch the sphinx together,
squatting inside this cemetery,
she with a bank director's mask
& you a chinaman's,
your profiles soon identical
except that you

still sing your deep song
while the sky fills up
with down, & fireflies
grow faint & then invisible.
Time hides
inside you, can you feel it?
does it press against your mask?
whose groans
are rising in this place?
whose blood is on our blueprints
even now?
is there a formula to chart
the impetus we feel? a yellow thread
to recollect it?
when I dance, the naked wife says
it is no less for money,
when I give you tail
you fade in me & die,
the stillness
overtakes you, sky
is split asunder,
lime & mire splatter on the snow,
the night makes even gold
turn black for us
who wait here at our windows,
watch old columns
lit by flames,
the impetus returning
like a wheel that spins
forever
in an empty bank vault,
see it with your own eyes,
hear it across this space
in silence,
watch her naked body
in your mirrors,
feel the sap press upward,
as if moving among mountains,
guano everywhere,

to drown in guano,
living,
buried in its canyons.

[3]
"I Was on the Terrace, Wrestling with the Moon"

Below us, men in iron masks
who rob a bank,
lie buried in a landscape
with the dead,
fear dripping from them,
seeds of light
under our windows,
where those who pass us groan
like swarms of cattle,
press against store windows
that reflect the sky first,
then the blood that spurts up
when you bite an apple
sweetly, sweetly
when the dancers mass around us,
others dressed like shepherds
crying silver tears,
cold earthworms,
standing on streetcorners in the dawn,
near where the young girl
rises from the flames,
still others whom you couldn't know
cut off her hands with broken shells
the tiny drops igniting
in the air,
smear yolks between her thighs,
& beat the moon

with oars, as I do
wrestling on this ancient terrace,
watch me, watch me,
whose eyes blaze in the night like stars,
who gaze down Broadway
like a prairie,
I who offer up a mollusk
for the dead,
slam virulent guitars
against my thighs,
who wait with Lorca on a fire escape,
a pyramid behind us
to welcome our forgotten king & pope.

[4]
"'Don't let the Pope dance!' someone cries"

"Don't let the Pope dance!"
Someone cries,
"El mascarón. Mirad
el mascarón."
It's Lorca crying,
Lorca coughing poison
over Wall Street, dreaming
of a courtyard
covered with blue mosses,
of sodomites in masks,
cathedrals where frail millionaires
adore a King,
where dancers drift around
like madmen,
scorched by scarlet fever,
stung by nettles,
& it's Lorca perched atop

his pyramid, it's Lorca
smuggling rifles through the forest,
Lorca in the mask of anguish,
trapped in vines,
or Lorca in the stock exchange,
the floor collapsing under him,
it's Lorca in a mask with emeralds
for teeth, a mask
to charm the Pope back to New York,
to wear in jungles,
to stare out of on terraces,
a mask with cobras that the builders
have forsaken,
the Pope has jammed over his own,
not dancing, no,
but turning blue,
cries out with Lorca
for the mask,
it's Lorca's mask
we wear together now,
el mascarón,
he cries to us,
the mask! the mask!

ELIOT WEINBERGER SECTION

ELIOT WEINBERGER

POEMS BY WILL ALEXANDER

Whenever I hear or read the professors—or worse, the poet-professors—talking about "marginalization"—or worse, their own marginalization—I think of Will Alexander. In a country where poets are hidden from society but known to each other, Alexander writes on, almost totally hidden from other poets.

He was born in 1948 and has spent his entire life in Los Angeles. In the 20-odd years of his prolific writing, he has published one small pamphlet of prose poetry *(Vertical Rainbow Climber*, Jazz Press, 1987) and has appeared in exactly eight magazines *(Sulfur*, happily, among them—see his extraordinary essay on the L.A. riots in the last issue). He lives entirely outside of the pobiz world of prizes, grants, readings, teaching positions—at the moment, he is working in the ticket department of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team. In his latest project, he is two-thirds through a trilogy of novels, *Sunrise in Armageddon (Pandora's Hatchery* and *Isolation, Neutrality, and Limbo* are completed) which are paralleled by a trilogy of collections of poems (so far, *Impulse & Nothingness* and *The Stratospheric Canticles).*

His work resembles no one's, and is instantly recognizable. In part, he is an ecstatic surrealist on imaginal hyperdrive. He is probably the only African-American poet to take Aimé Césaire as a spiritual father (and behind Césaire, Artaud and Lautréamont). But he is also, like Hugh MacDiarmid—a writer of utterly different temperament—a poet whose ecstasy derives from the scientific description of the stuff and the workings of the world. His erudition and vocabulary, like MacDiarmid's, are vast: read Alexander with a dictionary and you'll see how precise he is.

No subject seems alien to him: Who else would write a poem on the death of Enver Hoxha? Who else would attempt to inhabit the brain of an animal in ecological catastrophe? Who else could spin a 40-page poem ("The Stratospheric Canticles," excerpted here) from the verb "to paint"?—a poem that not only ranges through the history of world art, but which is an extended meditation on the way seeing is transformed by the chemical compounds of paint into vision.

For this issue of *Sulfur*, the various editors and correspondents were asked to send twenty pages of work—that the readers may see what we're up to, and see, too, some of the concerns that propel the magazine. Unlike the others, I've had something in nearly all the previous numbers: the readers have seen me plenty, probably too much. So I'm happy to turn over this space to Will Alexander, one of my favorite writers, and a poet who lives by the old injunction, "Astonish me!"

WILL ALEXANDER
FIVE POEMS

ALBANIA & THE DEATH OF ENVER HOXHA

Sacrifice
closely paralleled with sadness
with darkened lunar wounds in the brain
the thoughts laced with paralysis ciphers
the voice full of fumaroles & muffled x-ray voltage
the cells cold with exhaustive inversion

& so
all pronouncements become tautological
derisive
each attempt at revival sundered with
a wearied dysfunctional torment
with psychic nuclear crippling &
hyperborean chills
all attempts at recovering pushed back into limbo

if one could look at the soul
it would take on the grief of a savagely splintered darkness
a simile of cacti & arrowheads
burrowing into the crucially exposed eye-stalks of crustaceans
the face always stained by a ruthless sabulosity
coupled by paranoia & blasting

the expiring Enver Hoxha
prone
like a skull on a slab of Marxist invectives
with a glut of crushed worms slipping from his forehead
laying there

with personal rabies on the breath
an ignited grandeur
coming out in riddles of oracular demon pulleys
rust burns smoking below the stones of his flesh
his dictatorial mutterings
like a spurt of unseasonable frog gills
like a grotesque insecticidal frenzy calling out
from tormented histamine gardens
calling out from decrepit Dodonas
diseased with insidious meiosis

Hoxha
with secretive bone grafts
with rational murdering solutions
always hardened
like blackened myasthenias

all his rebellious hirelings
slaughtered in a square by machine gun & mortar
the killers surreptitiously empowered
by mutative alienation
by a heart of stunted mangrove blisters
& his dreams
like a definition of mustard gas
"irritating, blistering. . .disabling. . ."

Hoxha
sucking in fumes from his after-death exposure
his astral obliteration
like an exquisite brew of heinous polonium cocktails
full of disintegrated polyhymnias
full of mental pollution & polymorphic pariahs & sweating
full of stunted radium volcanos & the sociology of crows

in his Stygian neurosis
this demon
atop asphyxiation & thrones
always remains demasted
in haunted wallowing aspersions of a synchronous assuagement

his lost Malpighian body
directing his troops across a coldly burning land
with all the embraceable contusions of a stifling necrology

". . .report to his majesty
that the bones have been crushed
that the spleens are now rotted
that all is in order"

the sun
like an Albanian nothingness
like an exposed nerve of singing suddenly turned over
into neutralized materia & banished
as a dried pineal concentration

& here we have Enver Hoxha on his death bed
breathing in parasites & noxious Arabian vesications
breathing in malodorous turbellarian rains
the remaining pores of his body filled with a furious
obturation
with a dense clinical stoppage
taking a poll of his highly conducive death counts
his obverse vivisectionist commandments
the population:
an arrested quotient
a blank but undivided numerical dogma
wrestling with desires in molded sparring chambers
burning in Stalinist dialectical hells

& so Hoxha
with his convinced in-solutional ravings
speaking out
with his oily wolverine's tongue
wrapped in his popular grave clothes of blackness

there were days
when the moon began to howl at high noon
when all the aromas were suspended
when all the corpses were dredged up & eaten

when each anniversary of living
was marked by insidious facial scarring
by vicious dog bites on the buttocks

this was reason
& so the populace
full of carcinoma & rugas
their eyes cast down into sacerdotal infernos
into cold intensive lesion mining
could only witness their faces in puddles of urine
could only imagine how a morning of restive balneology would
[feel
how a life of campanology could brighten the darkness
but always disaster
grey
& permitted to burn like a daily burden of
calcinated litmus
like a corpse with a vertebrae of flukes
tossed up from the Adriatic shallows
tossed up in its ashen lonely demeanor
as an isolated cargo of worms

& Hoxha quoting remnants of Engels
concerning "motion" & "divisibility"
"kinetics & bodies"
under his Spartan flag of pickax & rifle

the horseless carriage banned
the blood supply diminished
the "hillsides
a jagged line of misty peaks"
like horizontal shards like "gigantic" electrocardiograms
more occluded than Tibet
creeping along "the Boulevard of Fallen Heroes"
where one can feel the peasants feeding on grasses
seeking to mobilize their anomalous wrath to production
the cities full of "windowless walls" &
a "heritage. . .of blood feuds"
yes Albania
like a "black doubled-headed eagle" on a

coursing field of blood
its exteriorized sacrifice ministries
its ferocious injury battalions
its cold atheistic medallions charged with a-charisma & spite
like a premise or a scar
or a pure line of rote from its suppurating memory
its "mosques" turned into "stables"
comets & asteroids banished from the language
& so
one is given "mechanics"
the "interchange of motion and equilibrium"
& the "measurable transference of motion"

the "quantitative expression"
the hatred of "alien morality"

& Hoxha
purged of all animal sentiment
his death bed
like a broken imperial rock
seething with a secretive personal dissension

even the "Directorate of Agitation" is crumbling in his vistas
because he smells
the insurrectional molecules of the infinite
blowing into his itinerant pantomime chamber
the inscrutable Hadean depths
a group of denuded chromium puppets floating
before his eyes
his bizarre self-palpable plainness
thrown into the face of cosmic betrayal
ulcerations & demons appear beside his visage
even his own skull appears on the plainly colored revetment
& the sun
once simply a mechanical furnace
is now a thrust of light
burning up his bones
& the bulging knot of old "fox-trots"
& purges

THE WATER DOG

. . .the dog is the species most
accustomed to accompanying
early travelers by land and sea. . .
—Thor Heyerdahl

Born under butane & water
under the snapping fire of ice & razors
like a compass
pointed at the fact of combustible granite
pointing far beyond
the panorama of glaciers & icy land-locked schooners
to Antarctic laboring blisters
to special atmospheric codes
where ice sends up a smoke

like an exploded measuring jar
or expanded zodiacs of lightning

his tongue
crystal & fog & fire
his power
like a galaxy of anteater's rabies
a noxious weathervane of ions
pointing
Zambian kangaroo
the Isle of Wight
the beautiful moraines of Bermuda
pointing to the arcane solstice mountains
seeing like a cenobite
into the glassy fires of the Caspian Sea
into the blackened
imaginary grottos of the Sahara
a tense perilous compacting of weathers
in a unit of diamonds
cracked
on sandy Egyptian mountain ranges
filing his neurological hearing

so that the poles of Venus
connect
with the Gulf of Castellammare
with the curving throat of Sicily
like a ruthless intentional steam

marking in the Mongolian steppes
with his hieroglyphical paws
of intuitive malachite & sunstroke
an Ibis in Genoa
a linseed spiral
part Damascus
part of the Swiss Thunersee & Paris

the grown dog amounts
the magical snout alignments
gazing
at threads of Amazonian lice
at its headwaters rotting
pointing
cabbalistically to its bottoms with his breath
pointing
to the asteroidal fields of Ceres
the darkened pre-globular entropies
mesmerized
with howling & starlight
with magic geometries of panic
a diviner
analogous with landscapes of darkness
briefly dazzled
by twilight & pumice
who seizes every particle of ground

his breath pointing
to butchery shelters & loneliness
like a telepathic pine juice
seething
micro-biology & vineyards
howling

at those sacred iguana dawns
looking for the magical cracks in the skin of space
sucking in eclipse & lightness

the principle force of ice balloons
a wave of lotus junctures

all the sundown bluing
all the nucleic borium breathing
across the asteroidal isles
across the proton-neutron
of this life
of this present profusion
the force
of bays & winds & stars
smelling
the blood
the spaces
the cunning ammonia
of cyclic ambrosial dimensions

THE PSYCHOTROPIC SQUALLS

To peer into the obverse
into smoking cane field errata
as if haunted with the steamy colitis of whirling iridium
cancellations

as in the saliva of newts
one sees the intestinal raging of deltas
of blackened sea giraffes osmotically split into simultaneous
[alums
above a judgemental sea glistening with Richters

like a weakened neutron egg
its fissioning petrol mirages like spirals of irregular hunting geese
flying through flames of ulcerated smoke & gargantua
hissing a blank Imperial greenness
rising above dense jetties of cobras

the shocking demise of the sea
the unlivingness of its winds
scorched by irradiations of shaking brine incisions
the burning gulfs of sun with a glint of explosive Mandean
[utopias
shocks against Old Testament linear prophetics
of Jeremiah
or Ezekiel
or the bony frozen finger shaking stunted alchemical missives
from a moon burned Judea
no more than a mechanically burning moat focused on smoky
spellbinder's disruptives
where the motion of the soul is delayed
reduced to flattened agnostic secular smoke
to a terrestrial rage which eliminates its sensuous heavenly fires
its stunning unreplicated angers
its sudden selenium spirals
its fire which staggers across the pseudo-faultlines of pre-
[replicated judgement
its flirtation with spirits of enriched Draconian plankton

so that the soul with its amber of flashing microbe drachmas
with its wounded tourmaline divisibilities
flaming within a light of smeared tornado weathers
within a shower of black fish scales and spleen
is entombed
within a blank thirstless psycho-motion
falling from a furnace of stars
which both flares up and freezes
which inculcates a flawed microbial botany
as in hypnotic grammatical emulsions

within a hollowed elliptical opening where we witness old
Egyptian surgeries
where the dead magically rise up from mazes
& stare in a language of scorching totemic anomaly
spawned in heretical miniature
their phantoms
seeping from quadrilateral sutures
from brief
violent
renunciatory squalls

uprooted
armed with the weaponry of ghouls
& broken birch tree lizards
seasoned by the light of psychotropic angles
blazing in the middle of a green Venusian interior God
singing
as if
in the fumaroles of anguish
with an inclement bleeding
with a littered corona
of unstable altimeter reverses

EXPLOSIVE DECIBEL JOURNEYS

*for Javier García Sánchez**

Inside the catalytic mine field
there exists
the fire of antimonious poppies
the writhing of broken insect nodules
marshes limned with collapsing nitrate teeth
in an atmosphere
of kerosene & iceberg volcanos

I am thinking
of dark obsessional blood edicts
of grainy migratory suns
spinning around a series of gloomy aqua tornados

spawned with the telepathy of ice bears
afire with fur & ancient Dionysian characteristic
with the blank specifics of a roaming cohesion
roaring
with an electrocuted mockery
into a bleak condensation of cobalt
flung into a dawn of broken intestinal ringlets

this dawn
explosively slanted with a fiery nautical intransigence
with blanched
stormy
meridian meteoritics
as if its smoke were Roman
bleeding
upright
contradicting
its anti-torsional eruptions
its sudden bloated carnivorous potentia
its protracted carnage by indifference
floating through rainy indigo explosions
floating through a palladium of "mineral ash" & anthracite &
[fervor

a stoking pressure
of stone
& coke
& fabric
with an intensity linked to pulmonary punishment
negatively slurring all the bodies of zinc

the weather of Leeds & Sri Lanka petrified
by "hygroscopic acid"
by gassy ambiguous rain attack
by the in-vital foods of negative in-vitality
the whole world
an ozone of wicked calendrical debacle
an insidious metallurgical illness
revolving through haunted strontium mazes
weakened as a dysfunctional eclipse furnace

terra firma
becoming a dark enfeebled nightmare relic
asked to take on the weight
of unnatural suckling fevers
the grain spoors screaming facing scarification by extinction
the mine field ruthless with inverted skeletal waters
pumping up scars
so that the rock fish swelter with wicked selenium error

because
there exists
acidic complications
fierce animal anomalies
hatched by a terror of blackened firing powders
so as to face an intermittent breeding
a smoky lattice work of angels
blinded by spectral anginas
set against the life force
with the rusty simultaneous core of statistics
always under the light of merismatic smoke
of merismatic compromise
in the mine field

in the wicked hydrogen ekstasis
no longer combined
with the smoke of simple Iroquois signals
alive with the truth of Indian burial law

I am speaking of clouded Euro-centric sulphur
of the Javier García Sánchez creation committing suicide by
[explosive
timed against
the aboriginal magnets
against the utopian sun angles
miming flightless strychnine ravens
ignited by great diagrams of blood
as if explosions were a song
of instinctive deflagrations
of degenerate human sparks
poised upon a shaky "nitrocellulose"

or translations from a synonymous kind of cyclonite
spreading throughout the plane
affecting
the power of waterfalls
the Gersoppa
the Kalambo
the Middle Cascade

yes
the Caspian Sea
the Peace
the Don
the Snake
waters prognostically poisoned
in this smoky litmus corral

a spiral of agony
illumined
by "Wood meal"
by "Aluminum Powder"
by "Dynobel"

"characteristics
of permissible explosives"
yes
dichotomies etched
like a sullen bread
of parched elliptical powders

blowing apart the earth
like a naked fish on an altar

a disastrous Nobelian hymnal
brazen
with purely creosote tectonics
like a ghost suddenly spiraling off to sea
with savage earthquake metrics
like flash points
with the treacherous teeth of elongated nightmare tigers

of course
an insatiable sea roaring
beneath a sun of territorial cancellations
as if suddenly shifted moons
had taken on the weight of perpetual solar expansions
like an exploded mist climbing Antarctic willows

in the end
an illusional jasmine furnace
in which doves are smelted
in which fingers
are detached & reborn
between a terrified calendrics
& the eerie decibels of an insolvent limbo

*Author of *Lady of the South Wind*, whose main character commits suicide by explosion.

FROM THE STRATOSPHERIC CANTICLES

Not sun, not moon, not stars
not the sudden green
of lightning,
not the air. Only mist.
—Rafael Alberti

To paint
is to make a mark of mirrors
of genuine graphite slabs
poisoned
with mescal & olives

& each of their scorching medial colors
evincing the glow
of purple turpentine sierras
shadowed with a shaft of blue tubercular lightning
so that stones fly up like falcons
bursting in asteroidal twilight

an aerial canvas
marked by transparent ocular ravines
with its "Intense color"
its "agitated lines"
its "pessimistic convictions"
mined from smoking quinine soils
a gulf of fiery alpine cinders
like "calligraphic" scarlets
rising from smoky virginal hells
colliding with altimeter chartreuse
as an enriched traumatic grammar of squalls

a grammar
as in Matta
with his occulted balance of streaks
his fleeting micrometer aloes
his rays of precise acoustical jade
his juggled intensities

in inward explosion of fraction
by a trance of ungovernable burnings
as in a beautiful wind-blown drought

sacrifice of still life by argumentative still life
so that there is motion
the retroflexion of orange & radical selenium fevers
into razored
"Prussian Green" glints
as in a ravenous wall of ivy
bursting with flameless medicinal dawns

a cataract of palaces
atop the raging light of a-positional isotopes
sending out
a cherished collusional ray
across a series of trans-axial nerve fields

a flight of levitational acidics
fiery illusional rains
upon transfixed ruins of spectographic novae
as in subconscious germinal neutralities
as in linguistic anopsia
equiponderate
with blinding chromosomal orchids

formed
in a precious breech of flotational cadmium
there exist rays
seen from the glass of glowing lava & brambles
existing as an image of working illuminal dragons
or the desiccated face of a crimson Assyrian singing demon
shining through a luminous biochemical cosmogony
with the gift of miraculous terror
with exotic Byzantine plumage
gleaming by formula
by the secret flow of metamorphosis
like crackling "inductors" spewing cosmogonic turquoise

statuesque osmium
whipping Saturnian electrodes

winds
yellowed
active
blowing by ionic motive
by doves & momentary glycerine fish circling
a fissure of glass
miles & miles of vertical x-ray helium
like reddish invisible eruptions
fugacious
as with blue absorption lines
with their flares
of autumnal deluge
with their carmine sidgills
with their stormy climacteric phantoms
taking on the murky force of bipedal lagoons
within a shifting circumstance of cerulean
within the uplifted cholera
mixed with rotations of a heavenly halcyon sun
emitting its fires
into atmospheric volume
into blank reverential mutilation
so that the violet
the ochre
the chromium
the green
into fulminate Chinese Sienna
which is correlation by Goddess
by blood creeping from the sorcerous heat of ambiguous
shellfish enclaves
enriching the rose of prolific cortical timbers

paint
able to conjure
"Cyanine Green" floods
flotational cobalt moons
hallucinated umber

like a chrysalis evolved
from dying charcoal fish
resurrected by leopards
swimming the rims of judgemental Armageddons
divining the leaping fires from a raging blood snapper furnace
its fabulous fumaroles of anguish
its fugitive uncharted scarlets
like a cunning seminal beast
a palpable beast
ensnared
"in winding arcs from a central core"

like an epic
simultaneous in its range
violent
expressive
psychic
full of whiplash
& toxic sepia coils
like microscopic emulsions
climbing a rotted insistence
more concrete
than the spoiled invasions of aravenous trilobites

again
dense visual grammar
discontinuous indigo
as a charismatic optical mirage
so that one can insist that the life force be magenta
hewn by the crepuscular hubris of syllogistic monsoon
by error which burns
in a strange family of grafts
which meanders across chromas
soaked
in a flash of flooded wordings
in language of old volcanic harassment
in the convulsive exclamations
of the erupting Aconcagua
or Cotopaxi in Ecuador

or Karisimbi in the Congo
or heated West Irian flowers
hissing and hissing again
in Javanese volcanic reflex

one cannot speak of albino reindeer mountains
or of acceptable cogitations on the history of Mt. Blanc
instead
one tends to travel by surbation
across explosive scorpion beds
across indefinite orismologies
as if painting
with tensely riddled verbal scaupers
opening the beauty with dysphoric protean realias

then one hotly flees ideological panopticons
therefore
the being is bodiless
ascending
panoramic
pure
above the green ventricles "of the brain"
one becomes largifical
livid
able to impatronize randomity
singing in Assyrian madrigal & whisper
in shapes which defy
the plausibilities of sound
the measurements
the impackments
the calendars of old flesh embedded in tables of terror

therefore one ingests
imparisyllabic suns
so as to burn up psychic circumscription by implosion
so as to parallel & magically engulf the power sustained in
[cyclographs
so as to negate bleak hatcheries of dogma
so as to provoke the hereditary flight of disembodied vipers

to leave
a fractionalized circumference
akin to the rising glimpse of Heteroousian nightmares
to leave
negated orthotropic osteological hollows
so as to fuse with unicorn & osprey minerals

an otic penetration
achieved by singing in sordino
in tense soritical optics
in a living pendulum of sweltering sotto voce

as in Spain
with its splendiferous motifs of aroma
with its lemons
with its jets "of strong pepper"
with its Moorish sibylline Granadas
with its "Strange" "Berberesque" Andalusias
with its tumultuous instinct for scholarship
its astral geometries
its runic struggles against the weight of "phantoms"
as in El Greco
with his "despotic fantasy" of "elevation"
his "silvery pallors"
"pale yellows"
"green lights"
rising
through supra-conscious archives
spinning around the poles
of "miraculous paradox" & infinity
one thinks
of the stormy "View of Toledo"
with its enriched perpendicular darkness
with its power to stammer & transfix
with its heavenly optical thirst

what concerns one
are the mixings

the saturations
seeping across virgin crepuscular glass

yes
rovings
as in the metrifications of various movements of silk
one thinks
of "sand"
of "fire"
of "extinction"
of "Late Devonian glass sponges"
of "calcareous algae"
formerly teeming in the "Paleozoic"
genetics
cast without warning into the nucleic fire pit
into sudden arithmetical negatives

one thinks of human genes adrift
the former cornucopia of Europe
dazed
by self-inflicted malevolence
by a ratio of powerless in-breeding
chaotic in-diversity
so that the ghosts of the Berbers re-emerge on Iceland
taking over the north
as various figments of tribulation

by life from Berber seed
there is ascent
from walled-in munitions law
from compost evolved from neon-plutonium sewage
from the niggling betrayal of doves & their grains

one then is extracted
from plutonic primary odors
from various burning abysses
the empire of ices transmuted
beyond the Roman rational brain

no more
the dire threat from cartographical blackness
from the cold alluvial fire which threaten with strontium
whose errors are threaded with a tensely riddled stasis
the linear world
& its shattered inversions
its meandering colonial nerve ray
fractured
clinging to mistreated diasporas
attempting to fine tune its current
after its voltage has withered as if it praxis remained convinced
in post-mortem deracination

its remnants dazzled by rampaging scorpions
across genetic collapse
of its Saxon storage house

one can now celebrate
its first anniversary in nothingness
its ultramarine annihilation

the non-while cogito as fugitive
dressed up in splendiferous day moss
in Manganese & Viridian oyster with Emerald

an intrusive succubus edict
speaking in plaintive mongoose structure
rhyming in sonorous tornado iguana

in protean advancement
one takes up linguistic spillage
drowning
& re-ascending from tides of molten
like the force of a snake which scales
a steaming tree of riddles
scaling
like a deeply infected sigill
in order to compose its own plenitude
in order to magnify by hypnotic darkness

its impressionistic trance
at the osmotic center of vibrational corollas
with the ironic stare of a dark anathema prophet
expounding upon
a luminous body of cataracts & pillage
a bluish body
erected upon primeval cyanosis

because
verbs pour in a torrent of intense fertility
like a cycadaceous fuel
wrathful
like a force of nerves brought to the fore by medicinal plankton
wild
as in a language of exploded espaliers
a heated hectographic esthetic
by which
one multiplies one's person
by the power of ravenous hebetics

yes
a verbal rate pulsing from a golden heliogram
eating into the very nerves of reptilic ascension
into the scorched triangle of havoc
so that the lotus
with its Egyptian mummification by both grain & by star
is equal to the asteroidal ranges of Ceres

yes
to poetically render
to paint
is to dissolve a fleece of frankincense & diamonds
with a temperature which reddens into eclectic willows of jade

[continues]

MARJORIE WELISH

THREE POEMS, CONTEXTUALIZING "THE OPEN WORK," FOUR POEMS

BODILESS, BODILESS IN TRANSLATION, I

The forest wetting its lips.
A flight of steps and naked perspectives
seen unburdening themselves in the chill
details of the analysis.

The aforesaid speech
playing across an amphitheater in the woods
like an unlikely couple meeting under artificial circumstances—
the saplings that grow from stone are the actors now.

In a much quoted passage,
desire warbles a surfeit of messages throughout the
    commemorative woods
whose meaning in amphitheater presents ourselves to ourselves.

Many, often divergent flora are in delicate competition
and a little published,
as when a phrase I speak awakes as yours.

BODILESS, BODILESS IN TRANSLATION, II

Of meaning and halting
discrepancy in a mirror afloat
under fully fledged foliage
being dragged into occasion,

as I hope I have shown.
"At love's entreaty,"
nonsense most aggressively,
and under advisement.

"That surface is cut into again"
eloquently the palm
and halting discrepancy in a mirror
perpendicular to foliage

do there embrace.
Authors, then, are menaced
by carnivalesque dirty work
thou had less deserved.

BODILESS, BODILESS IN TRANSLATION, III

Literature from the start
deleting the sun, or inserting another intentionality
of time, whose wristwatch you first created,
sweeps across the eclipse of vicious hornets
surmounting the three tombs.

Allow widows and orphans?
Their energies consume themselves, as an even darker night or
document
renounces the unnaturally bright face indicative of an
indestructible sunset,
celestial repagination
correlating events of two types.

As one proceeds,
the average typist situated in space
is spurred on by the unnaturally bright deletion
of numerals, expressed exactly the same as content believed.

Using hard spaces
of air corridors preserved by flying birds,
or of reluctance,
functioning as a lack in the capacity of an inspired omission. . . .

Contextualizing "The Open Work"

Modernity in visual art has for too long been identified with the material matters of surface and support. At least as integral, however, is the order of indeterminacy.

Indeterminacy is a contested idea within the history of culture— contested because, along with notions of multiplicity and fragmentation, both modernists and postmodernists claim it. In the art world, indeterminacy and contingency have been no less important than the great materialist truths; in that world, modernity has become unnecessarily burdened with the role of rhetorical straight man: stereotyped as essentialist when that indicates one aspect of modern intention only. No matter that relativism is acknowledged as modern through European and American linguistic studies going back to Peirce, no matter that contingency has assumed ascendancy over necessity ever since Wittgenstein. Matters possible yet not certain, matters empirical yet not logically necessary are meanings of contingency assimilated by the modern world, although only fitfully by the art world. The art world and media seem to dismiss these refutations of their favorite modernist model as essentialist, or at least as only essentialist. The reason may be that two different renderings of the Enlightenment, rational and empirical, tend to become conflated in discussion. When the art world labels the modern with reductionist tendencies, the implication is that *post*modernity is free from taint

(although *a priori* categories inform the aesthetics of difference as much as they inform the aesthetics of praxis). Whatever the reason or motives, the essentializing of modernity in art-world discourse has meant the eclipse of experiential consideration of indeterminacy.

Although it is an ancient idea, indeterminacy has been associated with the atomized flux of modern life ever since Baudelaire's notion of Romantic modernism. The uncertainty at work in the visual art he admired was as much an uncertainty of syntax as semantics. Imprecise location in space, relative instability of position, problematic status given to hierarchy of figures arbitrarily disposed—these were formal factors attractive to Baudelaire as he examined Eugène Delacroix's scheme of things, which seemingly unleashed cultural retaliation against a fixed, deterministic, and predictable world view. Acausal, unpredictable, imprecise—these definitions of indeterminacy continue to percolate through formalism in literature, music, and art.

The notion of arrangement as such turns up in a celebrated statement by the Postimpressionist Maurice Denis: "A picture—before being a warhorse, a nude woman or an anecdote—is essentially a surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order." Though unspecified in this generic formal definition, nonetheless the crucial component of *order* cannot be ignored. —Not pertaining to the neatness of sprung bedsheets, but "order" here meaning the organization or syntax of visual matter, is under consider-

ation.

Curious, then, is the willed forgetfulness of visual artists and critics presumably trained in the history of their discipline yet not conversant with the issue of indeterminacy in Romanticism, with the decentralized disbursal of percept and viewpoint in Impressionism, or with other consequential indicators of uncertainty thereafter. Curious, as well, is the forgetfulness of artists old enough to remember the distribution-and-scatter pieces disseminated in the art world in the days after Jackson Pollock, and through the early 1970s— works in which the principle of contingency (accident yielding structural course-corrections in provisional situations), drives creatively acausal or unpredictable organization. Whether construed as "degrees of freedom within a system" or as "quantum-mechanical" imprecision (the reference here is to Max Jammer), indeterminacy as an idea is an embedded modern occurrence.

Whatever their age, artists and critics are now conceding too much to the consensual backlash. Issues of indeterminacy in order have been neglected in recent construals of modern art, despite the fact that this formalism is as integral to painting as the materialist emphasis on two-dimensionality and the physical properties of paint alleged to be essentialist. Whether cited in support or rejection of modernism, the essential term of flatness overwhelmed any other in discussions of art. Throughout the protracted exchange between art critics and

The Open Work

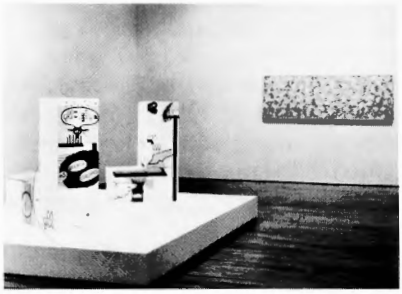
Since the history of art is not mere chronicle, significant histories of modernity other than the one essentializing surface may be told. Among the most respected alternative histories of modernity is the one fascinated with indeterminacy. Long before the phrase complexity and contradiction" became a commonplace of postmodernity, figures no less than Pablo Picasso and James Joyce took up its theory and practice in their singularly open and encyclopedic projects, and notions of recombinatory order and ambiguous sense have for nearly a century anticipated the current eagerness for the notion of cultural openness. "The Open Work," a phrase the literary theorist Umberto

social historians on the limits of modernity, their indulging the conveniently caricatural essentialism of surface that had sped the process of modernity's seeming irrelevance.

Either from ignorance or from intellectual opportunism, art critics have failed to credit modernity with being the cultural and stylistic site of the open work.

So when the occasion arose to organize an exhibition for the John Good Gallery in New York, I proposed a thesis that argues against the prevailing simplistic materialist construal of modernity by arguing for its reappraisal as the site of unfixed structural relations.

Eco applied to the art of Joyce in an essay that appeared thirty years ago, has prompted the title of this exhibition of art devoted to visual means of drawing inspiration from the unfixed, unsettled, and uncertain structures that characterize artistic indeterminacy.



Foreground: Ovyind Fahlstrom; background: Jasper Johns.

Indeterminacy gives promise to surface. In an allover order the indeterminate form is without center, constantly reorienting itself in sequential, if not serial, fashion. Whatever else can be said about the art of our century, non-

hierarchical sequencing of marks has remained a commonplace of modernity.

Allover order can be seen in the crosshatch paintings created in the 1970s by Jasper Johns. Mark rather than gesture characterizes Johns' pictorial field. One kind of markmaking throughout establishes an allover uniformity within which subtle contingencies occur, for there is a constant change of slant to the hatched marks across the surface in a series of visual transitions comparable to *passage* in Cézanne. Then, mirroring hatchwork across internal seams to induce embedded patterns, he permits us to see "figures" perceptible within the ground: *of* the ground which gives rise to them.

1 Jasper Johns (b. 1930). Although along with Robert Rauschenberg, Johns is notorious for reintroducing subject matter into art, his significance does not lie there; indeed, the matter of Americana has largely been oversold and is almost entirely irrelevant. Johns' significance for art history was in the way he encodes popular imagery with issues of theory. In his work, self-reflexive gesture, surface and object deliberate matters of rhetoric, so that by infiltrating product with the cerebration of process, he offered an alternative to the radical physicality and expressivity made emblematic by Pollock. Thus more than parody of action painting, Johns' erudite syncretic response reveals a highly ruminative esthetics. Chosen for this exhibition is an untitled hatchwork painting from 1979 in which hatched marks in red, yellow and blue, apparently uniform in size and in disbursement, scroll horizontally. Compositionally atomized, this painting embeds the allover scheme readily identified with field painting and presupposes the modern commonplace of indeterminacy, for no single viewpoint presents itself as definitive in this Cézannesque relay of *passages*. Moreover, no single *system* of multiple viewpoints governs

the surface. Indeed, a compound of mapping and embedded serial logic (reflections and inversions of hatched domains visible along internal seams) accomplishes a simultaneity of orders. Essentializing though it may at first seem, this hatchwork synthesizes multiple syntactical schemes. This work is preceded by *Corpse and Mirror*, 1974, with its inscribed negation, and followed by two works titled *Dancers on a Plane*, 1979 and 1980 both with competing patterns of provisional organization emerging from an overall field.

2 Kestutis Zapkus (b. 1938 in Lithuania of an American mother who fled invading Germans and subsequent Russians when Zapkus was seven). As did many of his generation, Zapkus grew up adhering to the ethos of abstraction, believing that relative to Socialist Realism, formalist expression is politically liberating.

Residual Plans, 1986

Beginning with an assumption of Neo-Plasticism's Cubist infrastructure that becomes a grid minutely atomized, Zapkus subsequently embedded within this epic scintillation, an intensive point-by-point structural ambiguity and reference: minute planes and lines that on

Foreground: Ovyind Fahlstrom; background (left to right: Kes Zapkus, Siah Armajani, Jim Hyde.

Like Johns, Kes Zapkus creates works with an allover structure in which are secreted figural events. Scattered through a decentralized (though not totally homogenized) field are intense, minute markings, some of which, on examination, are morphologically figurative—images a few years ago of artillery and evidence of war, recently of pictorial and stylistic truisms. Meanwhile, Zapkus's open, labor-intensive compositional process favors results that are deliberately inconclusive.

close examination proved to be munitions. Optically precise, spatially indeterminate, Zapkus' paintings a decade later are no less decision-intensive. Rich with formal incident, they continue to manifest a Structuralist concern for situation and milieu. Indeterminacy as expressed here is phenomenological as well as structural; notable throughout Zapkus' recent work is that the scheme of the grid is not enough: concretion of the grid depends upon deKooningesque actualization of contingencies. Chosen for the exhibition is *Liberation of Past Tense*, 1991, a 14-foot gray encyclopedia of discontinuities, inflected with color and with fugitive clarity of incident (horizons of landscape, architectural plans). Most conspicuously, four schematic globes, each surfaced in a different modern style occupy the canvas's center, and it is this that suggests the painting's paradoxical thematics: the macrocosm of dominant world views engulfed by a provisional and relative microcosm. *Improvisation on a Shrill Sound*, 1987, *Flight into Arrid Zone*, 1988, and *LaFarge and the Chlorinated Pool*, 1988-89, are recent works of dystopia in style.

3 Siah Armajani (b. 1939, Teheran, Iran). In the United States since 1960, Armajani lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. His art may be characterized as either dysfunctional architecture or deconstructed architecture, in which he dismantles and reassembles architectural norms. Either way, his sculptural misreading of houses and bridges manifests an imaginative social reform

Siah Armajani

Is structural contingency the result of a kind of mind-wandering? Not really, for to proceed through the world of the contingent is not to engage in daydreaming; it is rather to enter in the realm of the hypothetical visual structure: if..., then..., if..., then.... Under such conditional circumstances, accidental or apparently mistaken thinking animates necessary considerations of causal or contextual relations in art. Some artists force the issue. If, for instance, in one model for Siah Armajani's series "Dictionary for

emerging from playing semiotic havoc with architecture. Openness informs Armajani's work through and through. Well known is the series "Dictionary for Building, "realized in the 1980s, and anticipated by models fabricated from 1974 to 1978. These "sketches" were taken from the preparatory phase. *Dutch Door*, for instance, displays the familiar thematic ambiguity entailed when aspects of door and window are conflated in the same structure. Violating the norms of domestic order (and propriety) are *Chair Beneath Table* and *Chairs Above Table*. Even more significant than any one of these is the principle of structuralist inversion and play made evident in the assorted "Models for the Dictionary for Building" on view.

Basement Window Under Front Door Steps, 1985

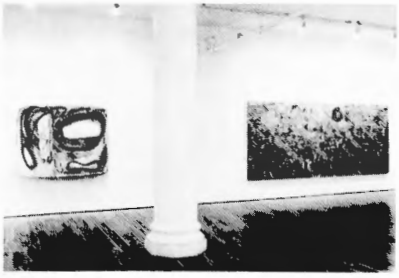
Examples of fully realized work are: *Basement Window Under Front Door Steps*, 1985, and *Closet Under Landing*, 1985. Reference to a Russian Constructivist radio tower suggests utopian motives at the heart of Armajani's project. Indeed, throughout his career freedom and openness of information has pervaded his choice of commissions, which include reading rooms and Building"— fabricated from 1974 to 1978 and realized full-scale in revised form during the 1980s—we note a house excerpted for our appreciation, then the windowed walls, floors, and staircases present themselves as details in a normative vernacular of architecture. If, however, we see a house become dysfunctional thanks to the presence of a casement from which a window has slipped, or a wall hoisted and angled upward and so made dormerlike; or dutch doors rendered ambiguously windowlike; then we are apt to consider Armajani's project as sculpture taking no fixed form, loyal only to an ongoing recombinatory argument about the uneasy relation of function to structure.

reading gardens executed for American universities, where, Armajani maintains, reading is an expression of individual choice.

4 James Hyde (b. 1958 in Philadelphia). A second- generation post-Minimalist, Hyde conflates the so called *a priori* categories of painting, drawing, and sculpture. By bulking the surface of paint into a materially dense slab of fresco, he creates a painting that also acts as a support for a sculptural element, the steel bracket that in turn defines an immaterial plane and volume from wall to floor. This work, called *Suit*, 1991, is typical of Hyde's thwarting of material and categorical self-evidence. Other works of similarly confounded structure: *Resign*, 1991, *Wake*, 1991; *While*, 1991.

5 Ron Gorchov (b. 1930, Chicago). Gorchov achieves ambiguity of relation between virtual and actual space in large measure through the convex-concavity of the support he builds. This saddle-shaped topology, realized topographically, puts considerable english on spatial clarity. Topology, the mathematics of the continuities invariant under deformation, appears here in a metaphoric form to suggest that not all is well in Flatland. Add to the actuality of the saddled-shaped support a virtual space figurally suggestive of the Moebius strip, the Klein bottle, and the torus, and the result is a painting that presents a staged rebellion against the presupposition that flatness is the only modern manifestation of surface warranting imprimatur. Chosen for

Similarly, James Hyde builds art that puts categories in contingent relations. His recollection of the antiformal drift between categories of painting and sculpture, set in motion by the early modernists and recalled cyclically thereafter, raises questions: If this is painting, then what is it doing occupying the floor? If this is sculpture, then why is color broadcast? Here contingency assumes the logic of relative solutions.



Left: Ron Gorchov; right: Kes Zapkus.

Ron Gorchov's shaped canvases may be taken either as a structural anomaly or as a willed

the exhibition is *Zoology*, 1990, from a group of works that includes *Tempest*, 1989, *Zephyros*, 1989.

6 Ovyind Fahlstrom (1928-76). Born in Brazil of Norwegian and Swedish parents, and subsequently sent by them one summer to visit grandparents in Scandinavia, Fahlstrom found himself suddenly cut off from home by the start of World War II. As Fahlstrom's widow says: Imagine the world view that might emerge from the seminal experience of a Portuguese-speaking nine-year-old knowing no word of Swedish, growing up in the household of grandparents whom he had never met, in a country where night reigns most of the year. Even without this testimony of trauma, one can see that situations of weak causality were Fahlstrom's specialty. In his mature art Fahlstrom realized world political board games wherein life's unpredictability is administered only through operational contingency: if x happens thanks to a specific political interest, then y will occur in response; no master plan governs clear hierarchies of value. Aleatory by implication, these games without a goal tease forth the active or imagined intervention of the viewer. On exhibition is *Sitting . . .Six Months Later*, 1962. In manipulating its modules, it is possible to see that continuity of visual language from face to face can be achieved only at the expense of discontinuity elsewhere. Paper dolls and other contingent game structures by Fahlstrom include: *Eddie in the Desert*, 1966, and *Column No. 1 (Wonderbread)*, 1972.

rebellion against the doctrine of flatness by which one kind of modernity has been defined. If his work is seen as a structural anomaly, the cursive painting across the surface may be construed as fanciful calligraphy. If, however, the support, with its paradoxical convex concavity, is seen as a willed misreading of flatness, then the torus and Moebius figures painted on the surface represent the topological analogue to this support, parading their own illusionist riddles by eliding or opposing virtual and actual space and viewpoints—altogether flaunting the nonflatness of the constructed saddle-shaped shield Gorchov has employed. (With their mapping of colors, the hatchwork canvases of Johns similarly super-

impose a topological allusion to space on an optical illusion of space.)

As often noted, indeterminacy in form and content elicits interpretation, or at least enlists interpretive and interactive engagement. The process of interpretation becomes highly evident once intense simultaneity of visual events forces the viewer to wrest sense from apparent busyness and volatility, or, alternatively, with a painting, static and apparently uneventful in the extreme. And this status challenges the viewer to combat his own indifference and to locate sense in the oceanic order of things. Johns is notorious for making art that taxes the interpretive resources of the viewer, and Armajani's destabilized

As far as I know, reception of "The Open Work" was largely positive, yet at least one negative response was extreme. Of the favorable responses, an artist not included in the show has since said repeatedly that whenever he despairs about the situation in the art world he recalls the exhibition, rereads the statement and feels he can sustain himself again. Indirectly, I learned that one dealer, impressed by the show's significance, sent the editor of an art magazine to see it, although no artist of hers was represented. An art writer was kind enough to call the selection of

work in its entirety revealing "exquisite intelligence. "These, in addition to positive responses from two veteran art critics, one formalist, another psychoanalytic, were reassuring. Art critics assigned the exhibition to classes of their students. The show received mention in the press.

Given the muddle that usually suffices for a realized thesis in group shows, I had expected "The Open Work" to be received warmly, yet more than this I had expected a good measure of comprehension. Indeed, my only worry throughout the process of preparation was that the lesson of the show would be too obvious, and so I had decided to cast my gallery statement indirectly, with impressionistic, glancing blows. But one negative response startled me into realizing that callow social historians are not the only people who may suffer from cultural confusion, myopia, or obliviousness.

Susan Sollins, director of Independent Curators Incorporated, was—what? Irritated? Appalled? by "The Open Work," a show she called "incoherent." This comment surprised me because I felt that the principle of structural contingency was extremely pronounced, so I asked her for her criterion for coherence. "Medium," she said. Indeed, ICI has funded a show titled "Drawn in the 80s," but however commonplace this topic is in the curatorial repertory of ideas, medium or technique is precisely the measure of a show with the least *stylistic* or *cultural* coherence. As I orders invite active speculation about uncertain situations; Ovyind Fahlstrom seizes the same prerogative. With game boards, paper dolls, and building blocks, Fahlstrom uses the structures of play to express the simultaneity and interchangeability of cultural entities. He invites our imaginative participation in this cultural politics, if not active intervention in shaping world events. The frustration level is high—as it is meant to be.

Order, provisional and relative, suggests a modern state of affairs known to the Impressionists and Cubists and reworked continually thereafter. In this view, the object disappears. It becomes instead an

sought to explain this, I realized that Sollins' literalist taste was offended at being confronted with comprehending this abstract point. The more our dialogue progressed, the more entrenched in our views both of us became. In desperation, I reminded her that the title "The Open Work" (a direct quote from the essay by Umberto Eco) was intended to signal the commonplace nature of the thesis of the synonymy of indeterminacy and modernity in our age. "You know," I began, "Eco even initiates his discussion of indeterminacy in the arts with mention of the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luciano Berio, associates of that great composer, Earle Brown."

Suddenly, our confrontation underwent a conversion. "He should hear that," Sollins said quietly. "Earle Brown is my husband."

We were both stupefied. That we could find consensus at all, given our mutual repudiation of each other's views, seemed amazing.

For my part, I continue to wonder on what basis does communication between Sollins and Brown take place. Brown, an associate of John Cage, has devotedly pursued an open compositional strategy in music throughout his career. As with certain Europeans like Stockhausen, Brown's notion of form is decidedly given to performative contingency (so that if a certain musical event arises, then, in consequence, interventions by the performer result); performative choice is hard-wired into his compositional strategy. While some in-

object dissolved in a field of relations.

March 1992

terventions rely on contingency, others that are improvisatory rely on chance. Improvisatory choice in sequencing the piece, guiding tempo, etc., informs Brown's *Available Forms,* 1961-62, as it had in Stockhausen's *Gruppen,* 1955-57 (a work also featuring the aleatory decay of sound). Variable and elastic duration was a factor of indeterminacy Brown had already explored in the early 1950s, when, in an express avowal of the principles informing the art of Pollock and Calder, he began his exploration of kinds of indeterminacy in music.

Several possibilities remain: Sollins may not understand Brown's music; she understands his music yet may be willing to generalize the principles of indeterminacy beyond the practice of her husband; she accepts musical forms of the open work but not the visual equivalents; she can comprehend either if confined to the 1950s, the period most closely identified with indeterminacy in the critical literature; she appreciates all of the above yet believes that coherence breaks down if intellectual imagination, rather than mere consistency, is required.

Many lay people are reassured by consistency, and for this reason subject matter or technique still provides ready, although for the most part bogus, themes for art exhibitions. In the disciplined study of art history, undergraduates learn early on to spot the deceptive nature of subject matter; for, given any two flower paintings, one may parade botanical and documentary information, while the other re-

veals religious encoding; we look to latent content not overt subject matter as a determinant of meaning, and so style. As Meyer Schapiro, in his hermeneutical yet social account of art defines style as constant form—that is, culturally entailed form.

Despite this elementary training in our liberal-arts education, a willed obliviousness to events of the last one hundred years persists in some quarters, and with it the presuppositions of 1827, 1855, 1890, 1913, 1948, and 1968, even by those who profess knowledge of these nodal cultural points in the history of the open work.

December 1992.

PRE-ECHO

Pre-echo: Sound recorded so loud that part of itself may magnetize adjacent windings

Twelve, thirteen, for two came wheeling down,
thirteen, for two darted about your eyes

interpreted as not knowing. A surname
is silenced. As in "tall, if sudden, groves"
or in "scuttled, sudden and tall"
interpretations sewn into the unknown are those

we cannot substantiate. Physiognomy centrifugal,
Indo-European murmur gathering the sail
of he kind sailboat there, Igitur.
Mouth and ear are in centrifuge and unquiet.

Unquiet mouths would give more faithful
rendering of dissemination;
dissemination, ever an almost
perverse pleasure in translating tongues

in miasmas to the ear, through the ear.
Mental lakes close and correlated,
green lakes of filial piety
surely of, with and through the ear.

Torn from the ear obediently
this pieced entirety, in sepia
and insentient, a piece of which
lake is correlated to the ear.

A piece of the puzzle, rotated and blank,
in light pain,
the weight of existence
rotating the blank island,

chafing against the flesh inscape
of unjustified seeking.
Bleak notation for nostrils lower left
in regard of that flesh estuary

pressed from pulp and paper
for a perennial alphabet of lesser mortals—
primarily a thing to be read, you decided.
Select the size and face of type,

in 12-point figure-landscape, all exile
in these islands: dressed
companionable islands, dressed in phenomena.
Eclipse, exiling fullness. Irremissible,

irremissible solitude which constitutes a man.
Every visage, metalinguistic;
unblinking lakes in vague visage stretched across stretchers
which constitute a man.

Unblinking nonmimetic lakes taped to the cheek,
and here physiognomic truth-functions inhabit
a logically scented and nonspecific
self vindicated at all four corners, a kind of facial site.

Adrift in such skin, our iteration,
our iteration with which countries cannot vie, transliteration
    secretly abetting impenetrable baptism.
Portents of Rome, is this itinerant baptism abetting ours?
Adrift is the handkerchief

of which the paternity is known,
albeit threaded with thoroughly perplexed reference.
That blotted tongue, that thoroughly bollixed signature
    perplexing an anteriority
we cannot substantiate, this, despite known paternity.

Thirteen, for two darted about the eyes.
And the contingencies were attuned if irreducible;
attuned, if irreducible. And yet and yet.
Darting about the eyes, very near. In the darling eye.

DRASTIC MEASURES

List names of persons.
With ski mask we approach the registrar.
Lacking imperative water, we staggered toward the registrar,
listing names of persons, dates of tenure.

Youth indicated
like a giant footprint;
the artist's imprimatur,
indicted. Such is youth.

An epistemological equivalent of hives or cystitis, indicating the
    ideological body is not well
manages the volatile brew;
managing the brew, volatile and abundant
hives indicate our body.

You're impossible! All right, you're improbable.
An odor.
An odor rotating,
improbably you.

An odor shelved, or was it disallowed?
Stench in all singleness of heart,
a stench-filled room,
an odor of dereliction the library disallowed.

Whether malodorous people impinge
on others' rights
or the right of way
is an issue of free speech in some liberal resentment.

As we suffer a restaurant's good intentions,
odors, probabilities;
the new poets'
intentional restaurants.

At Princeton, the guys speak of restaurants
red,
feeling red—
the guys speaking of restaurants, the gals of intentionality,

as we did, as we might have done.
Feeling read
feeling read, an ontological claim said to inhere in the
    phenomenal
deeds we did, deeds we might have done.

GUITARS AND TIGERS

Motionless against guy wires
across the loins in fixity
to fix reference rather than to give meaning
or synonym for "guitar"

is "the length of S" designating the waxy
mentality plucked in leisure time;
time study: the study of work.
"The length of S" and "the length of S"

designating the same thing, waxing
this red. This red and that
wisp of red apprehension,
this in pursuant to directedness,

this business reply card.
"The length of S" designates a mention: Sloan-Kettering;
"The length of S" and "the length of S" and "the length of S,"
this, in exit

one meter long. Although a standard has no length,
the unmarked straightedge affixed there
refers now to a large Asian carnivore
having a tawny coat traversely striped with black.

HENRY COWELL PLAYS THE STANDARDS

Science and Technology in Art Today
"These fragments I have shored. . ."

Modern American Usage
"From the steeples and mountains. . ."

To the Finland Station
The Poetics of Roman Ingarden

"I wandered lonely as a cloud. . ."
The Visionary Company

The arachnid in art, these spinnerets from which. . .
these fragments I have shored. . .
these fractions converted to a failure,
these spinnerets from which issue silk

"filament, filament, filament"
from steeples to mountains far from being perturbed,
far from being perturbed more perfectly
in a litany of casting forth of

silk and number, or accolade:
"which consists in touching the recipient's cheek with one's own,
in touching the recipient with one's own usage,
Modern American Usage,

in which—acquiesce" meets "assent."
Auxiliary vines are strangling our factory;
a wall indecipherable within the stranglehold of vine.
Acquiesce, meaning "assent" or "submit."

To the Finland Station, a destiny.
Overgrown would suggest nonutility
of chimneys or of a sensitive child.
This Way to the Waiting Room, go toward it but never attain

n-dimensional mentality. Throughout form-consciousness
strata come forth to upend curricula.
Nomenclature uncut. Strata come forth: Take courage!
In whatever alleged mentality, "valleys shall be raised up, and
    mountains made plain."

These spinnerets from which issue failure drawn out
firm yet elastic, ductile
"till the ductile anchor hold"—
a finer technology in art, and he knew it.

The arachnid in art, these spinnerets from which. . .
these fragments I have shored. . .
these fractions converted to a failure,
these spinnerets from which issue steeples rotating

and minarets secreted from the abdomen
to enact the casting forth of effort,
to accelerate the casting forth of—
unfortunate minarets

bound in silk and number, not accolade:
"which consists in touching the recipient's cheek with one's
    own"
in touching the recipient with one's own usage,
Modern American Usage,

usage. "Acquiesce," meeting "dream"
on brick, ivy-laden,
ivy in ideological stranglehold,
meaning "assent" or "submit."

To the Finland Station.
Overgrown would suggest nonutility
of disused speech
after years affianced to exile. A figure, stationary

in disbelief. Overgrown would suggest nonutility
"simply by writing the simple word 'not.'"
If not, then not
in variegated stranglehold, overgrown light

and railway ties awash in creosote.
"As a cloud,—
as a cloud now overgrown,
as a cloud now overgrown the recipient's cheek.

BRAIN RAIN

Tipping one's head back can have pleasurable consequences.

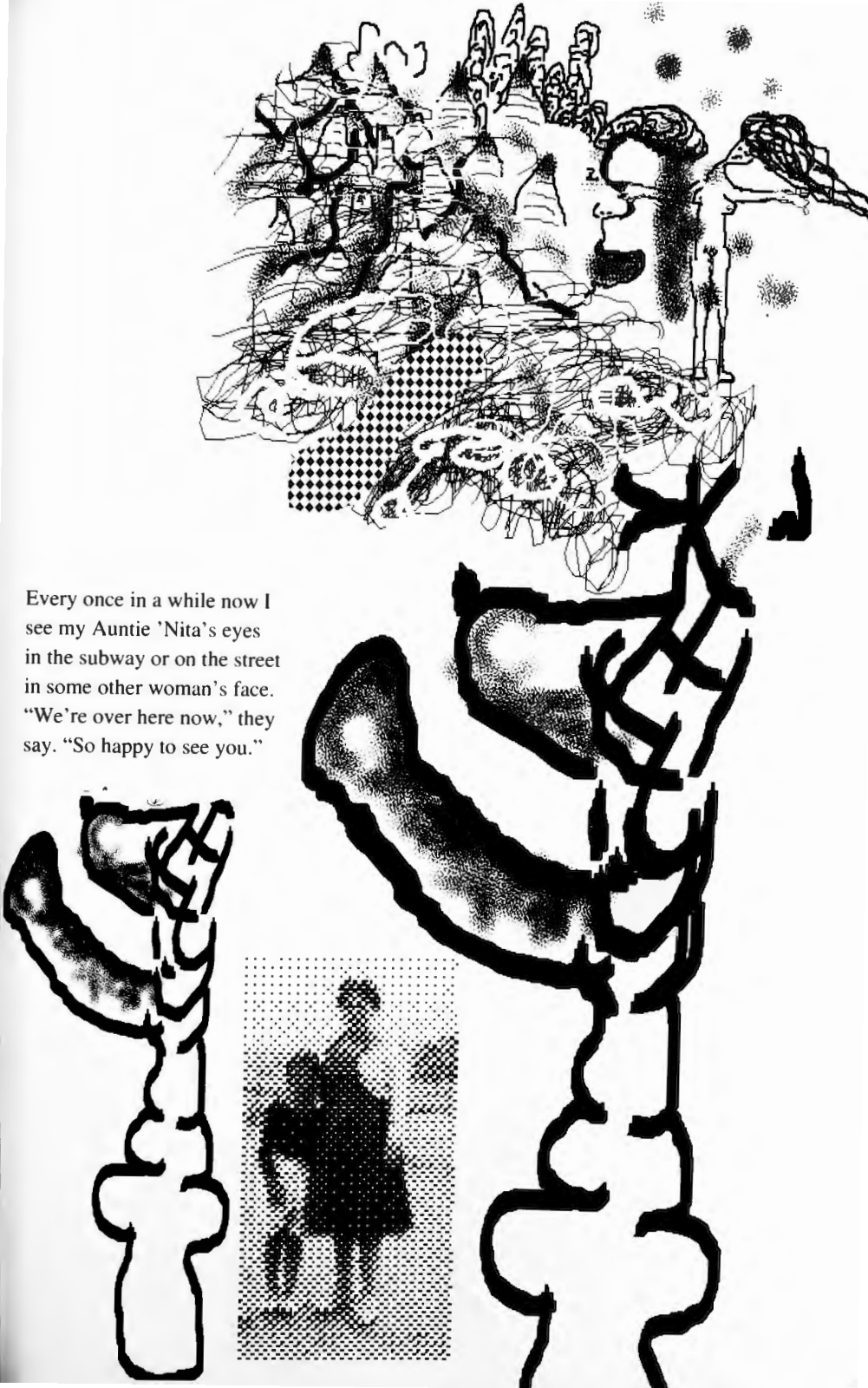
PAMELA WYE

OBJECT RELATIONS

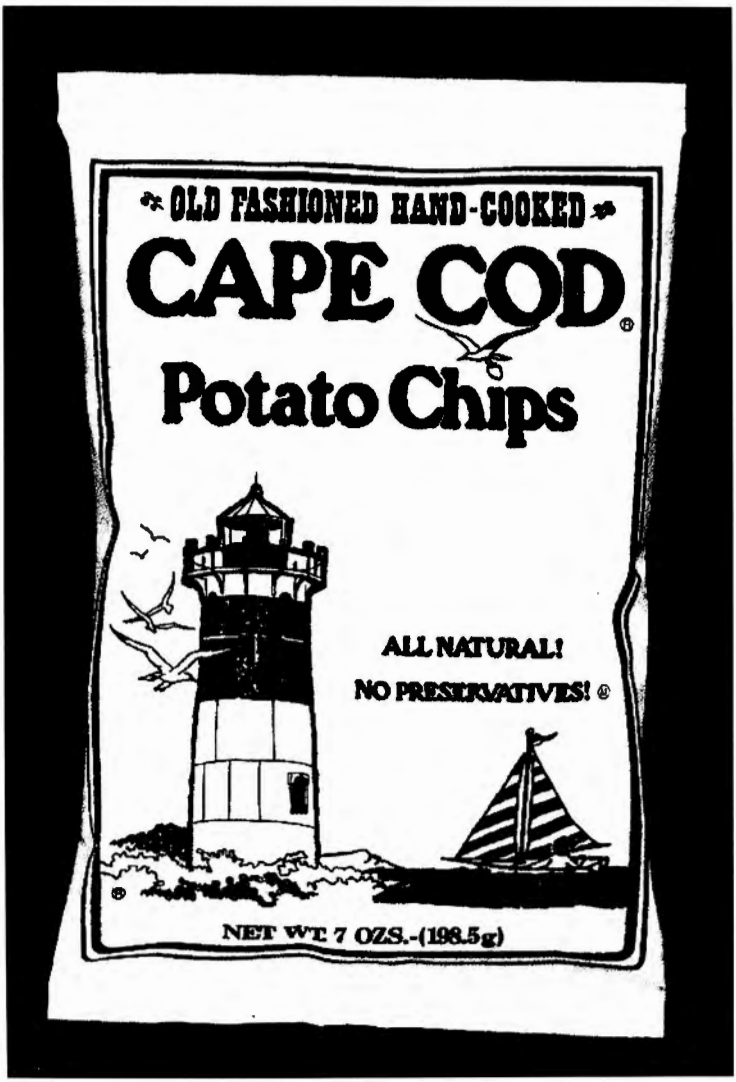
2

Uncle Willie rolled Oreos down the driveway for his dog to chase. The dog had no face.

you



Every once in a while now I see my Auntie 'Nita's eyes in the subway or on the street in some other woman's face. "We're over here now," they say. "So happy to see you."



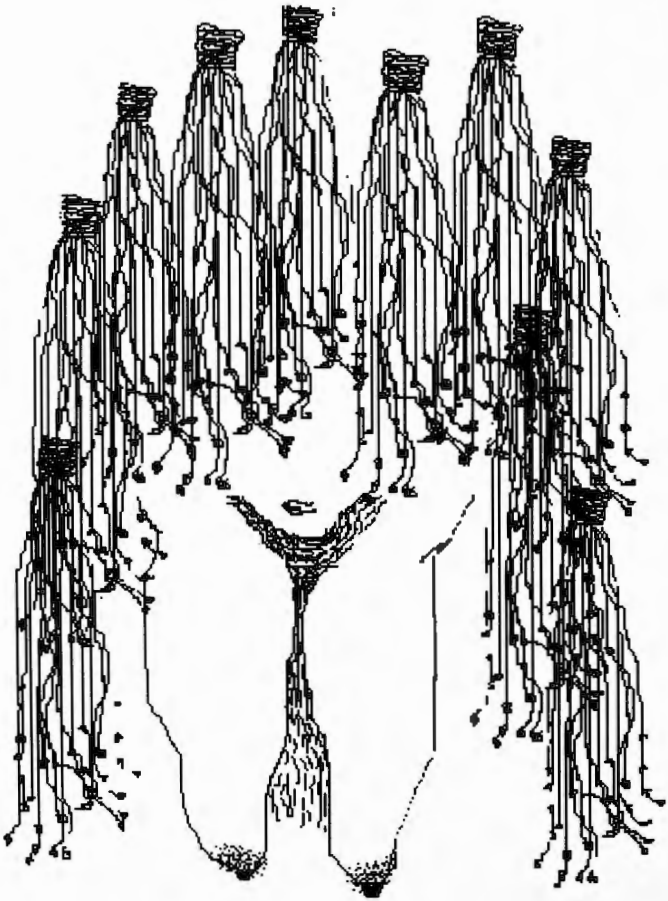
I was in the "Snacks" aisle of the King Charles Supermarket on Havemeyer Street in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn (a neighborhood that, as a real estate agent told me, "has your three ethnic groups: your Hasidics, your Hispanics, and your Artists"), when I found myself reaching for a large bag of Cape Cod Potato Chips from among a cloud-like stack of what could have been a heretofore unpublished edition of Warhol pillows. As I am not a potato chip connoisseur, I have never tasted Cape Cod Potato Chips. So I cannot say I wanted to buy them because I thought they tasted better than, say, Wise Potato Chips. Nor because the package sported a tiny drawing of a chip hanging from the claws of a swooping seagull to form the dot above the "i" in the word "Chips." No, I gently

closed my fingers around the bag of Cape Cod Potato Chips because it was summer and I remembered how my parents used to drive down from Boston to the Cape practically every Sunday when I was a kid and how we would sing the Whiffenpoof Song on the way home in the car at night so that to this day "we are poor little lambs who have lost our way, Bah Bah Bah" is linked in my mind to the charred and barren stretches of a burned-down forest that we would usually be driving past at around the time we were singing that song (we never sang a song just once), and how in the car we could still feel the ocean water in our lungs when we breathed deeply, and how we could still taste the salt on our skin if we licked our arms.

As I examined the airy package of Cape Cod Potato Chips (white like the deck of a ship), I savored the clumsy red and blue drawing of a big-bodied boy in a toy-like sailboat, whose back was turned to me and to the fact that he was about to crash into the fairly well-drawn, though curiously thick around the middle lighthouse on the left side of the package despite some adeptly drawn seagulls' frantic cries of warning that he seemed not to hear because his gaze was fixed in communion (à la German Romantic painters) on the horizon that extended out beyond the back of the package of chips. I accepted without question all that this drawing proposed because I affectionately imagined that some elderly retiree who had recently taken up art after a life of dreadful monotony as an accountant for the Gillette Company in Boston had dreamed it up while sitting on his screened-in breezeway in Falmouth, or perhaps Wellfleet. What gave me pause, however, as I was about to carefully lay this package of chips into my shopping cart were the letters across the top of the bag in red, old-fashioned typeface (the kind you see on Wanted posters in the Old West) that spelled out the words "Hand-Cooked." The image of a 30's-ish, overweight woman, a year-round resident of the Cape with a white paper cap holding back her hair, leaning over a vat of boiling oil, dropping in raw potato slices one by one *by hand* flashed before my eyes. And that was it. I put the big bag of Cape Cod Potato Chips back on the shelf, not because I wanted to put anyone out of job, but because the image of this woman, followed by that of many more women standing in endlessly replicating rows, inside non-descript buildings up and down the Cape, hand-cooking these chips for my casually mindless consumption ruined my appetite. Although I imagined that perhaps sometime in the future, on the occasion of a full-blown binge, the kind where I would eat myself into a trance of discomfort, I imagined that then, perhaps, this image of a woman, who could after all be me, in a dead-end job, hand-cooking slices of potato year in and year out, "one batch at a time" according to the advertising copy, would fuel the loathing and frustration I would be feeling toward the ways of the world and that I would turn inward with every chip that I hand-fed into my mouth, and I imagined that I might, at that particular moment in the future, buy myself a big bag of Cape Cod Potato Chips. Maybe even two.

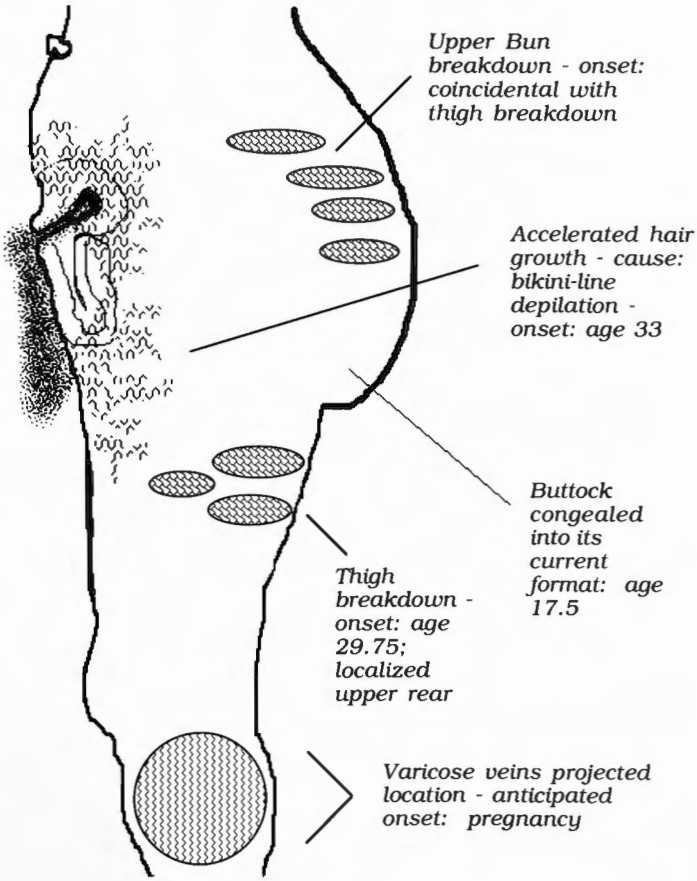
TRUE

BODY



Prehistoric Rendering of Woman Who Never Shaved Her Armpits

FACTS



Modern Body Breakdown Chart: Young Adult: Female

INVENTORY

One Legal Secretary's Desktop, 1992:

Ceramic clown picture frame with real lace collar and cotton pompom at the tip of his hat: picture of husband.

Heart-shaped gold picture frame: picture of husband.

Sailboat picture frame that rocks, with "Puerto Rico" in raised letters: picture of husband.

"Born to Exercise" magnet.

Snoopy dog pen with tongue and tail that wag if you lift its ears.

Purple plastic palmtree drink stirrer.

Miniature digital clock in the form of a computer terminal.

Green rabbit's foot key-chain with an "Erin Go Bragh" button hanging on a green satin ribbon.

Plastic tulip pen.

Turtle candle with raised letters "Loving You Is What I Do Best."

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tat mod could not
tem will be tested in
beginning in July.
less expensive
to use than tradi-
based blood analyz-
of debate. The
costs nothing to
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000 to $250,000
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FOR example, Dr. John Bernard Henry, professor of patho and president of the center, said he would like to for enzymes such as aspartate ferase, which could indicate live dysfunction and creatin phosphok ase, which could indicate whether pa had suffered a heart atta Peter Wilding, professo thology and laboratory director of the clinical c partment at the Hospital Uni versity Pennsylvania Philadel ph would also see for the content blood

President

th is

res is friend
al of an invit
as "harebraine
O.K. on goals to
half, you
W 39. "But
m

Snyder loved every
from the changing of
a glimpse of Barba
ance in a jogging outfit,
on the South Lawn. He adm
plate, a 1968 service piece fro
son's term. He was thrilled
uniforms, the cornices in the
Lincoln portrait in the State D
was too excited to notice the

Before dinner, he talked to
tary Richard Cheney and Ge
ell. He told Vice President
agree with him about far
dinner, he chatte
and Urban Affa tary,
South Ce eles.

wife felt a hit y,"

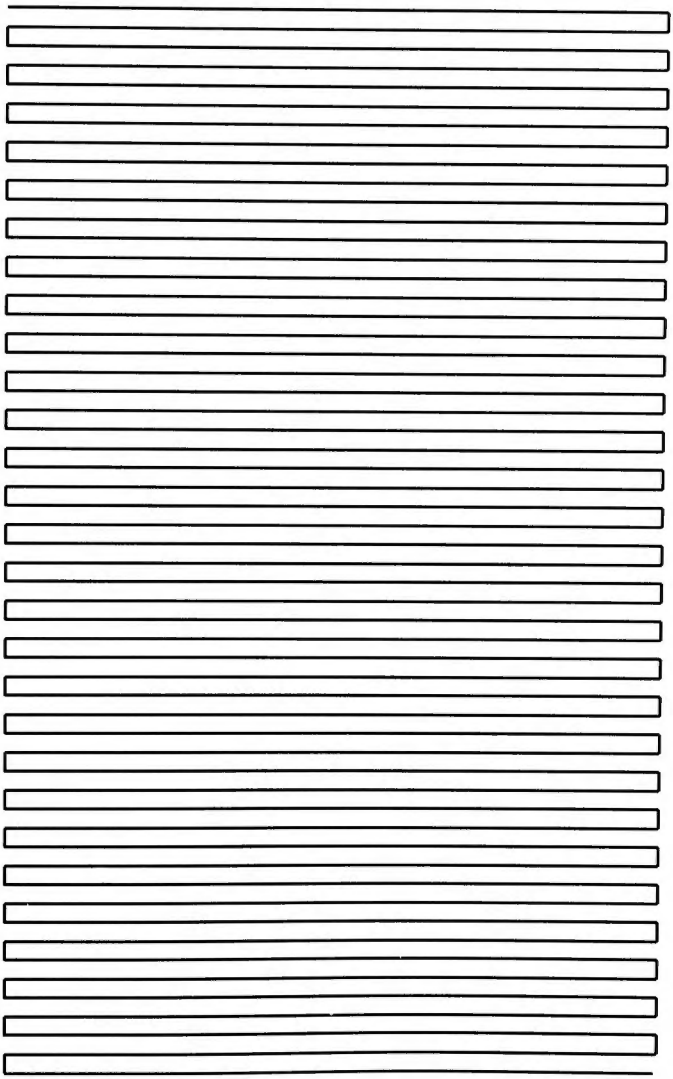
Takes A
Offer

When we entered the funeral parlor, I was surprised to find Uncle Willie still there the way we'd left him the night before. We would never have dreamed of obliging Willie to get together with us two days in a row. And making him the conspicuous center of attention would have been unthinkable. We would have permitted him to slip out unobtrusively when he felt the need to be alone.

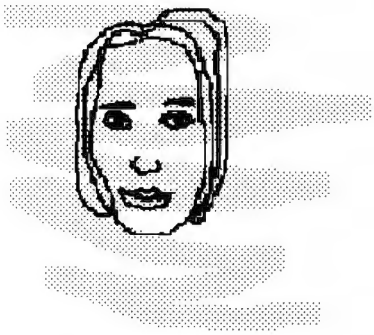
But there he was, surrounded by white satin, his face more drawn than I remembered it and pinker than I'd ever seen it.

"Isn't it great that they put on his vest and his glasses?" my sister whispered before they closed Willie's casket.

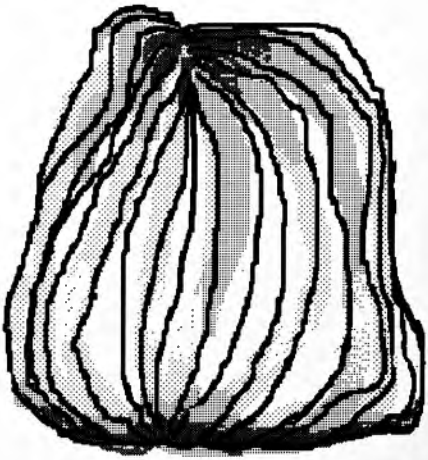
"Yeah," I said but I wished they'd included one of his Italian hats, his thick woolen overcoat, his heavy camera with the big flash, a stack of books, one of the cigar boxes he'd filled with pictures he'd taken of us over the years, a phone, some magazines, some ham sandwiches and ice cream bars and a couple of those half blue, half red pencils with a sharpened point at either end.



When she got to work, she saw she had a new co-worker.



"You will pay for all the bad things that have happened to me," said the new woman.



It wasn't until she

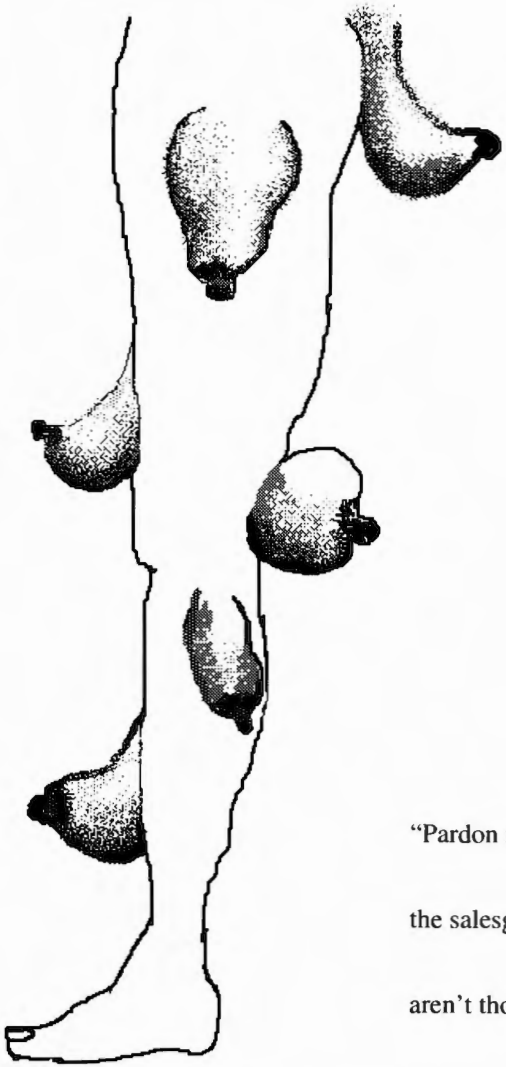
went shopping

during her lunch

hour that she

noticed the breasts

on her leg.



"Pardon me," said

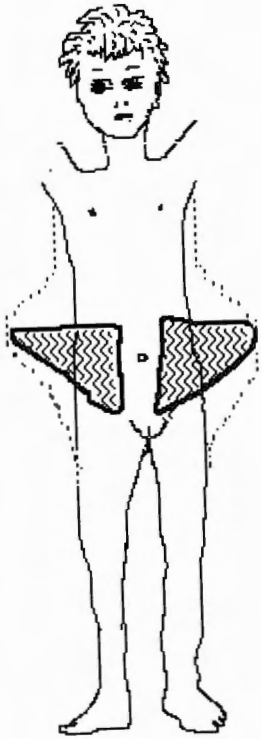
the salesgirl. "But

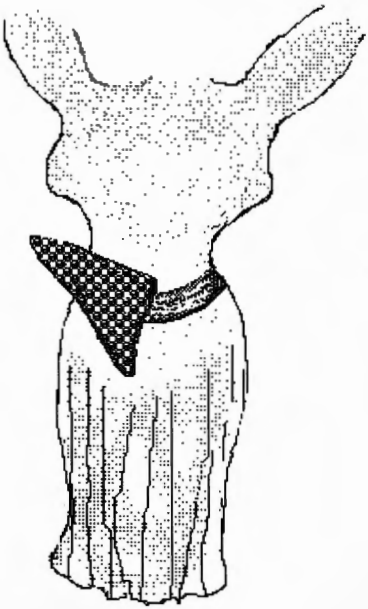
aren't those breasts

on your leg?"

BUTION

Then





Now

Then

In second grade, I'd get stomach aches after my parents fought like cats and dogs, like sticks and stones at breakfast.

"It's just gas pockets," I said when Miss Minerva walked me back to class from the girls' room. My mother had told me that's what it was.

I imagined gas pockets were triangular like apple turnovers or ladies' shoulder pads, I imagined they got stuck in the corner near the hip bone. I never told anyone, it seemed obvious.

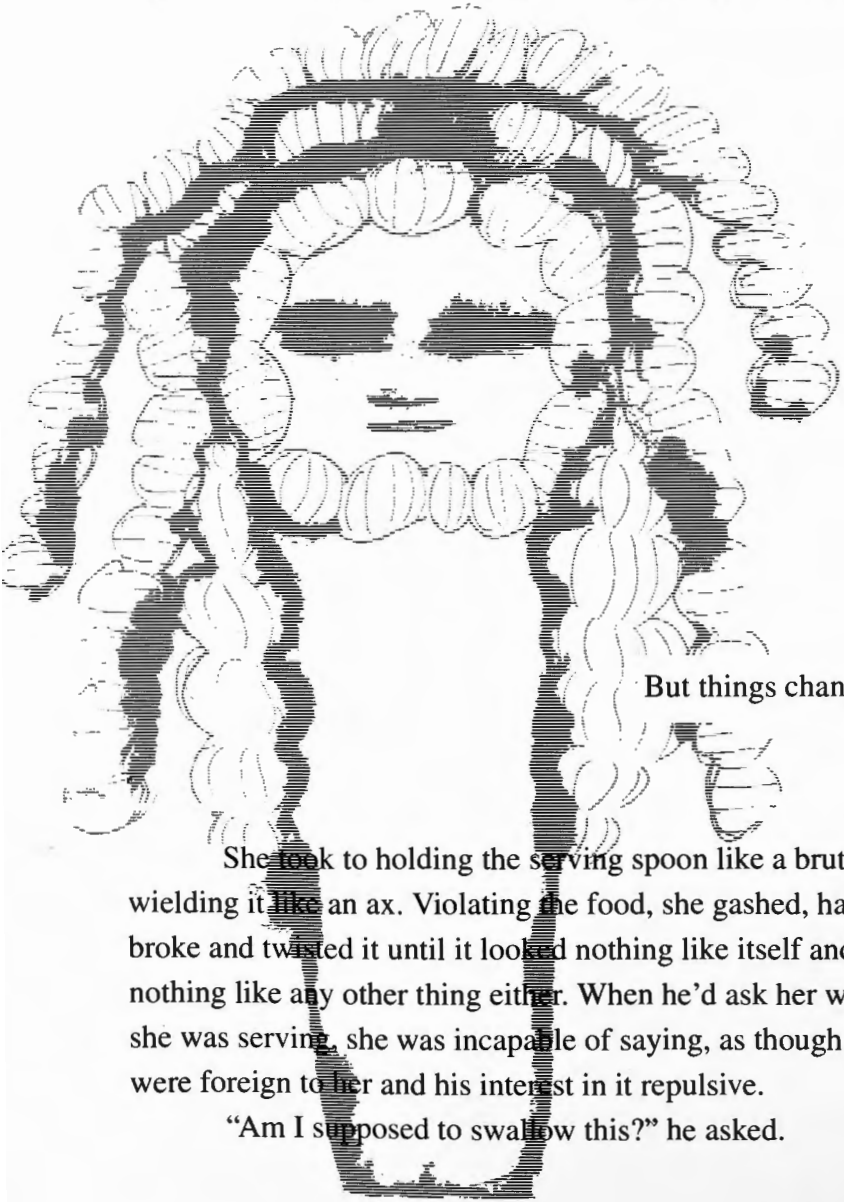
Now

For Christmas my mother gave me a belt that buckled at the hip and over the buckle was a stuffed triangle of alligator skin like an apple turnover or a lady's shoulder pad. So I told her about the gas pockets.

"You never had stomach aches," she said. She was adamant.

Their Story

His eyes were like rare and opulent jewels that had been misplaced. She was like a hollow doll that sometimes tipped over. They married young and were happy for a while.

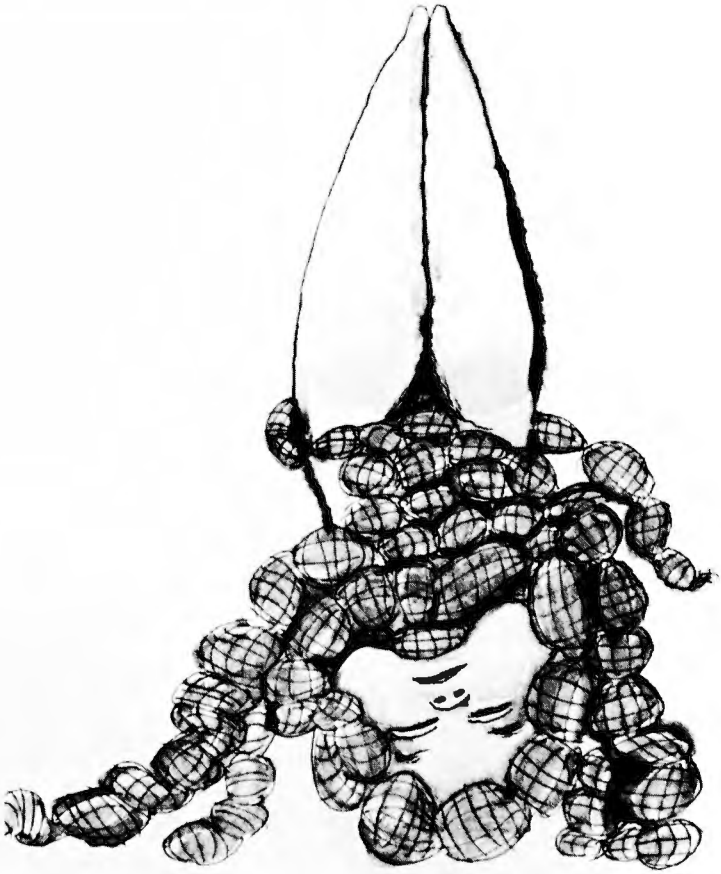


But things changed.

She took to holding the serving spoon like a brute and wielding it like an ax. Violating the food, she gashed, hacked, broke and twisted it until it looked nothing like itself and nothing like any other thing either. When he'd ask her what she was serving, she was incapable of saying, as though food were foreign to her and his interest in it repulsive.

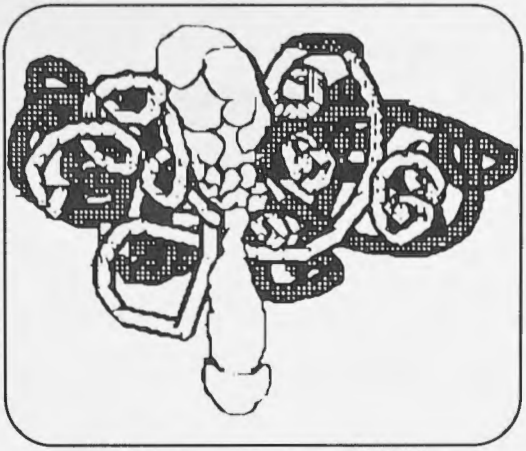
"Am I supposed to swallow this?" he asked.

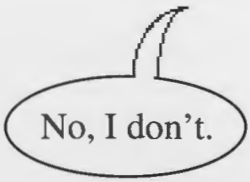
At some point, she became enthralled with a song. She sat and listened to the record over and over, day after day, and couldn't stop. She neglected the things he expected of her - cooking, dishes, laundry - she couldn't break away. One day while he was out, she smelled smoke, realized the building was burning, but couldn't move. She died in the fire.



SOUVENIR

WILD




No, I don't.

Shorty Is Alive & Well & Making Movies for Warner Bros.

Over a year ago when asked by Spike Lee to write words of praise for his film *Mo Better Blues* which is one of the most embarrassing and corny films purporting to be about "the music" I know, I wrote instead about all of his films, and the essence of this was that in general Spike Lee's approach to black people in his flicks was very superficial, that he tended to view black life as a cartoon, and instead of seeking depth and balance in this portraits of Afro America, he usually opted for caricature.

Spike has been quoted saying how outraged he was by my analysis. I went on to say, when asked by a group of young people what I thought about Spike's making the Malcolm X film, that I hoped he would not do to Malcolm what he had done to black people generally, i.e. approach Malcolm's life superficially or as a cartoon. I hoped, for instance, that he would not make the film *mostly* about that part of Malcolm's life when he was known as Detroit Red, the pimp, dope dealer, hustler and thief. But I predicted that he probably would do just that.

I said I hoped Spike would not distort Malcolm's life, or make it seem that in the end Malcolm X and Martin Luther King's views were indistinguishable. So that ultimately, Spike's Malcolm would be a typical bourgeois attempt to deMalcolmize Malcolm, and allow petty bourgeois Negroes who always hated or were disturbed by Malcolm to breathe easier knowing that the militancy of the actual Malcolm X had finally been laid to rest.

There has been, since then, a lot of back and forth. For one thing, Spike Lee has never been able to answer my questions and charges and predictions with any open defense of his ideological stance for making his movies the way he has made them. His trashing of black women in *She's Gotta Have It.* His trashing of Black Schools in *School Daze.* His belittling of the black liberation movement, apology for the police murders of black youth (Radio Rahim is killed for playing his radio too loud) and early attack on Islam and his open embrace of middle class nigger prostitution by kneeling in the dust to scoop up the cash, in *Do the Right Thing* (which he

said was to be about Howard Beach!). His trashing of black music and black artists and the black family in *Mo Better*. His upholding of apartheid and sexual racial stereotyping (why was the sister making so much noise when she made love in the flick?) and the need for the black community to kill black youth hooked on drugs, in *Jungle Fever*.

He could never exchange ideological polemics about these because he is a Philistine, i.e., someone who pretends to welcome struggle, but instead is, to quote Lenin, "a hollow gut of fear," instead he would simply talk bad about me and even lie. As he has in his latest you've seen the flick now read the book, *X*.

But for all Spike's attempts to divert attention from the ideological and political essence of my analysis of his earlier films, what I said and what I feared he would do to Malcolm's life have been proven very clearly in his distorted version of Malcolm's life. If anything Spike has done even more damage than I expected.

For one thing he has completely destroyed the actual chronology of Malcolm's life. Just as he had done in a "4th draft" script I received anonymously, shortly after our public exchange began. Spike claimed at the Abyssinia Church at a Malcolm X memorial that he had changed that script. But the essential foulness of that script remains.

In distorting the actual chronology of Malcolm's life, he has almost completely removed Malcolm's childhood and youth. The film begins focusing on Malcolm as Detroit Red. And the first person we see in the film is Spike Lee as Detroit Red's "sidekick" and partner in crime, getting ready to "conk" Malcolm's hair.

The entire early part of Malcolm's life is nixed, and appears at most as flashbacks in the pimp's mind. The life and influence upon Malcolm of his Garveyite father and Grenadian nationalist mother, are almost totally absent, except for superficial and abstract fragments "imaged" from time to time through Detroit Red's mind.

The Klan attacks, his father's brutal murder, his mother being driven crazy by the state and his brothers and sisters dispersed just as in chattel slavery. All this material is dispersed as well, shredded, disconnected, used, at best, to give some very minor tragic dimension to the general hahaha "carefree" life of RED & SHORTY IN COONTOWN, which Lee (&, of course, Warner Bros.) seems to relish.

In fact there is a severe let down in intensity after the long long focus on the pimp dope white prostitute life of crime of Shorty and Red, who Spike has outfitted in Zoot Suits that seem to have come straight from Barnum and Bailey. Spike has not sought to recreate the actuality of the Zoot Suit, he thinks it simply clownish attire.

By removing the chronological development of Malcolm's life and using it only as random flashbacks the psychological and philosophical

raison d'etre for young Malcolm Little becoming partially lumpenized (destroyed by capital) and being transformed from the son of two righteous black nationalists, one murdered one driven crazy, is destroyed.

We never really know, emotionally, why Malcolm is doing what we see him doing. And Spike thinks it's all fun. Spike, by the way, appears in the film as Shorty for a longer period than Al Freeman's Elijah Muhammad!

The Detroit Red business runs at least an hour. It is almost a film in itself! There is a marked let down of passion throughout the rest of the film, even though the time, place and condition of the rest of Malcolm's life, his continued political development, and the historical context and impact of his changes are among the most objectively passionate nexus of personalities and events in recent history. And even though the film is over three hours long, Spike chooses to leave out some of the most important aspects of Malcolm's life! It is as if the film had been shaped by the "powers that be" to remove what is most harmful to their interest and to leave in that which helps them out the most.

The two most damning aspects of the film, and the acts that identify Spike Lee clearly as a dangerous opportunist and mouthpiece for the most backward sector of the black petty bourgeois is his willingness to blame the Nation of Islam for murdering Malcolm X, thereby absolving the government (the CIA and FBI). In fact, Spike uses the only dialogue he gives the FBI to trash Martin Luther King on the way out.

He gives Malcolm a throwaway line about how perhaps the FBI or CIA is helping the Nation of Islam stalk him. But this is all. Spike never looks with any depth on the work of U.S. government agencies to undermine Malcolm, Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam. For Spike, like all liberals, black people's worst problem is ourselves, and Malcolm's betrayal and assassination merely one more black on black crime.

Whatever we believe, Malcolm X is dead, and The Nation of Islam and Louis Farrakhan still alive. For the most reactionary sector of U.S. society the idea of making Malcolm a confused and naive martyr betrayed and murdered by the Nation of Islam is perfect. This is the reason why the film was made, to use Malcolm against the Nation of Islam. And how slick to get a Negro to do it.

Equally as deadly is the completely superficial versions of Malcolm's trips to Africa. Malcolm's visit to Egypt, in this flick, is as a tourist, to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx and nothing else. There is no mention of his visit with the revolutionary Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser.

The rest of Malcolm's African tour is not mentioned at all. Nor his private audiences with the leading African revolutionaries of the time. Not only did he meet and talk to Nasser, but Nyerere of Tanzania, Touré of Guinea, Azikiwe of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, as well as Obote of Uganda and Kenyatta in Kenya. On this trip to Africa, Malcolm spent 18

weeks, and he talked to many other African, Asian and Arab leaders, and some white ones as well. Malcolm openly speaks of the influence of these meetings on his thinking. Malcolm says of those meetings, that they were so important because, "it gave me a chance to sample their thinking. I was impressed by their analysis of the problem, and many of the suggestions they gave went a long way toward broadening my own outlook."

Spike wants this "broadening" of outlook to be simply Malcolm's no longer saying that the white man is the devil. This is the reason for the colorful, though hardly enlightening, pageantry Spike gives Malcolm's Hajj to Mecca. Malcolm is betrayed by Elijah Muhammad and so he embraces the true Islam and no longer hates white people. He is then murdered with a smile on his face, knowing his martyr time has come. Like the doomed idiot in *Of Mice & Men.*

It was important that the further transformation of Malcolm X, who had become El Hajj Malik Shabazz after the Mecca trip, never be revealed, or what he found out as Omowale, the son come home, which is the name he was given in Africa. Why, because even though Malcolm said his trip to Mecca did help him understand that it takes all the varieties of people in the world to make up the world, the final expansion of his thinking was the consolidation of a sharper anti-imperialist edge to its focus.

True, Malcolm was no longer satisfied with being a black nationalist, but having seen that African revolutionaries were also anti-capitalist as well as anti-racist, he is quoted on returning from Africa: "You show me a capitalist, I'll show you a blood sucker." December 20, 1964. Or, "It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck. Capitalism used to be like an eagle, but now it's more like a vulture. It used to be strong enough to go and suck anybody's blood whether they were strong or not. But now it has become more cowardly, like the vulture, and it can only suck the blood of the helpless. As the nations of the world free themselves, then capitalism has less victims, less to suck, and it becomes weaker and weaker. It's only a matter of time in my opinion before it will collapse completely." This last quote was made one month before his assassination.

In the old Muslim coffee shop, in Spike's movie, when Malcolm asks him to come with him into the Nation of Islam, Shorty says, naw, he loves pork and white women too much. And Shorty insists to the end that it is all a con anyway. We know now, that when Elijah Muhammad is shown in the film, principally as a lecherous womanizer and Malcolm's best friends in the Nation betray him that Shorty was correct after all. It was all a con. All serious struggle against the status quo is. And just to make sure we believe this Shorty has made this film for us. We saw him on television at the premiere, he calls himself Spike Lee now.

(In my opinion the best thing Spike and Co. could do, if they have any relationship to the masses of the American people, they would permit open discussions after each showing of the film, in theaters all over the world. Then, even though the brothers Warner are going to make at least a quarter of a billion dollars on the film, there would be some value in it for the people as well.)

—AMIRI BARAKA

NOTICINGS 1992

"the cope of flesh the amethyst morse of pain"

—Kenneth Rexroth, *A Prolegomenon to a Theodicy*

"In the green shadow of the lamplight absolute reality is all I am interested in, the light shining on the silver edge of these keys, the magic formation of the letters in rows upon the green field of the paper, looking like the shadowed corner of a garden, elaborating on none of this, entering into communion with it, picking up speed as I go further in, looking out that nothing disturbs me from it, this place, which cd. be called,

magic, but which

is not, is only

here, 707

Scott Street, San Francisco"

—John Weiners, *Journal 1959*

"There are some good spots of speed in his hands"

—Teddy Charles on drummer Stan Levey, 1955

"achieves that rest, that stability at such a pitch that only the barest margin is left between the organization of form & color achieved & the wildest conceivable disorder"

—Robert Duncan to Pauline Kael, 28VII44

"You gotta eat shit with a shovel to have a big hit. It's all about having little focus groups nailing what makes the assholes go ha-ha."

—Richard Price, screenwriter of *Sea of Love*

I saw that a star was really *in* the branches of a tree but wouldn't let me get close enough to see if it was as small as it looked.

Poetry with: mess, risk, and an ecstatic velocity, the feeling that it's all collapsing every second in change, up for grabs, in sheer lack of security the next word has not yet arrived

any disruption of Language As Usual

"Vicious felt himself in an impossible situation: he was the newest member of a group that he at once hated and thought was the best in the world, and they were so inactive that he wasn't sure whether they (or he) existed."

—Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*

What are the results of being relentlessly specific, literally momentary? No irony, no metaphor (unless it all is, totally metonymic?), etc. Every possible attribute of the mind's longest breath in an undefined direction.

"No one is ever too old to be a sideman."

—David Meltzer

Dream: I rise from the underground rubble slats once again into further Zane City (Euro-Berlin-Leningrad?) and think again on what a genius is Sinatra.

"Later that night the two couples went to a six-day bicycle race. The Velodrome was lit by arc lights, and the crowd was hysterical. At odd, surprising intervals pistols were fired to start new sprints, and loudspeakers made urgent unintelligible announcements, while prizes were bestowed with great solemnity on people for no evident reason."

—Geoffrey Wolff, *Black Sun*

"I want a candidate whose qualities are no longer extraneous."

—Professor Irwin Corey

". . .replacing the mythic level of narrative or thematic development with the microscopic level of moment-attending (implying that the seed of the moment held the energy of all possible future flow-into-form)."

—Richard Foreman, *During the Second Half of the Sixties*

When the only star I can see is just a hole in a tree. . .

"I want to see the *work*, not just what somebody has decided to publish."
—Michael Palmer

"It is that I have now achieved an age of no caesurae"
—Barrett Watten, *Under Erasure*

"What the camera does, and does uniquely, is to *photograph thought.*"
—Orson Welles, *This Is Orson Welles*

"Jazz is born by somebody goofin'"
—Art Blakey, 1976

"Research has shown that ballads were produced by all of society working as a team."
—John Ashbery, *Hotel Lautréamont*

"his music, his noises, his silent concerto, his readings, his growing grass at an art show, his mycological scholarship—every performance, every activity, was like a sermon by Spike Jones."
—Larry Rivers speaking of John Cage in *What Did I Do?*

Blade Runner, Ridley Scott's cut:
How do we tell if it's human? Because it recalls things from the book of the humans?

"I get tired
of all the chairs in the park
if I had to use a word in stead of a bullet to describe man
I would call him creep"
—Piero Heliczer, *Carillon Booty*

"The body—it's no more than a theater of mirrors
turned 'within', by an unreliable cloudy vision. I
don't need to write about everything to convince myself
that maybe what's written exists. But there's another
reason: it's the sweetness of replacing myself with not-me."
—Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, *Xenia*

"What did she die of?"
"End."
"Some things I find myself."
—William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*

—CLARK COOLIDGE

3 Notes, 2 Stars and a Comet

In the continuing recovery of neglected American women poets, I'm surprised no one has picked up on Muriel Rukeyser: a strange case of a well-known but unread poet who never really formed alliances with anyone. She started out in the 1930s as a Yale Younger Poet and Communist Party member, but her documentary poetry was too modernist for the Party, too documentary for the modernists, and too modernist and documentary for the ruling New Critics. In the 1940s, though her friendships were with New York literary establishment types, she was notoriously trashed by Randall Jarrell and never fully accepted by them. In the '50s and early '60s she essentially dropped out to raise her child, and had no connection to the clans of the *New American Poets.* In the late '60s she was highly visible as an antiwar activist and wrote some of her best poetry, but—even as late as 1968, was anyone ready for a long lyric poem that begins with the lines: "Whoever despises the clitoris despises the penis / Who ever despises the penis despises the cunt"?

In 1979, a year before her death, Norton published a massive *Collected Poems*, full of wonderful and awful poems, and strange items like a book-length poem on the life of Wendell Wilkie. All her work was out of print in the '80s. Now *Triquarterly* has published a selected poems edited by Kate Daniels, appropriately called *Out of Silence.* It's not bad, but the more conventional work is emphasized, and the book itself disfigured by the reiteration of the ugliest dingbat in memory (an uncoiled tasselled curtain tie between every poem!). Norton is planning a *Reader* of her poetry and prose, and a biography by Daniels is in the works. Meanwhile, *Out of Silence* is a place to begin, but it's far more interesting to dig up a copy of the *Collected* and wander by one's self.

* * *

Best first book I've read recently is Myung Mi Kim's *Under Flag* (Kelsey St. Press). Kim, born 1957, is a Korean-American woman who came to the U.S. as a child. Hers is a "poem with history," and her history is the Korean War and the American occupation under the flag of which she was raised. Further evidence that the entry of history into the poetry written by American women is an engaging, sometimes thrilling recent development. A way pointed to by Rukeyser and Lorine Niedecker (however obscured by LN's male handlers)—but the major influence here is, of course, Susan Howe. History as her story not only opens an infinite possibility of subject matter, but also strange and fresh takes on the language used to tell the tale of the tribe. Only white boys think content is dead.

* * *

Blaise Cendrars is the great comet of French poetry. Born in 1887 in Switzerland, his life would take pages to summarize: perpetual traveller from Vladivostok to Rio to Hollywood, poet, filmmaker, merchant seaman, soldier who lost an arm in World War I, publisher, journalist, novelist, resistance fighter in World War II—a man actively involved with nearly everyone, in all the arts, in the modernist explosion. Though he lived until 1961, all of his poetry was written in the twelve years between 1912 and 1924. (After that he wrote prose.) Among those works is the single greatest poem-object of the century, the 1913 *Prose of the Trans-Siberian* published as a folding seven-foot sheet covered with hallucinatory colors by Sonia Delaunay. For some reason, he has been less known in the U.S. than his contemporary and equal, Apollinaire. The best previous edition, the New Directions *Selected Writings*, with translations by John Dos Passos, among others, is long out of print.

Now we have Ron Padgett's translation—an instant classic—of Cendrars' *Complete Poems*, published in a beautiful edition by the University of California Press that unfortunately relegates the French to minuscule type in the back of the book. These funny, reportorial, documentary, sentimental, sometimes found poems were ultimately a dead end: Of the three (French) greats in the 1910s (Cendrars, Apollinaire and Reverdy), clearly Reverdy had the greatest influence in France over the rest of the century. (There's an argument to be made that "Zone" is the most internationally influential poem of the century.) Perhaps because Cendrars' poems have almost no imitators (perhaps Michel Butor) they remain lively and (except for the occasional whore-with-a-heart-of-gold) undated. And they're even better in Padgett's tour-de-force deadpan performance, which I heard in New York last fall. Thanks to the *Complete Poems* and two other new translations—*Modernities*, a collection of prose poems and essays in an excellent translation by Esther Allen and Monique Chefdor, and *Sky*, one volume of the four-part often fictitious memoir, translated by Nina Rootes—the Cendrars comet, on a 76-year cycle like Halley's, is finally visible over North America.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

UTOPIA UNDER THE VOLCANO: The Cuban Avant-Garde in Mexico

Gone are the days of the Havana-Veracruz overnight cruise ship. Gone is Pérez Prado's pre-punk hairdo and his *"Ay pero que rico y sabroso bailan el mambo las mexicanas. . ."*("Oh, it's delicious, it's delightful, the way the women in Mexico dance the mambo. . ."). Gone are the days when Cuban painters of the '40s, like Mariano Rodríguez and René Portocarrero, stood gaping in front of Diego Rivera's mural at the Ministry of Public Education.

Since then—that is, after Castro's revolution—cultural contacts between Mexico and Cuba seem to have been reduced to the binational following of *pachucos* and *cheos*, both equally and obsessively loyal to salsa music and mariachi bands. Even after 1959, of course, ties continued between the two countries. While the tacky lower-middle classes of Mexico vacationed at the Havana Hilton for fifty dollars a night, Mexico City began to crawl with Cuban agents "supporting the subversion," and exiles from Miami who came to have their picture taken at the pyramids, or to buy nickel-silver rosaries at the Zócalo.

Nearly fifty years would have to go by before the Cuban avant-garde returned to Mexico—and not just in the visual arts.[1] This time, though, there seems to have been fewer motivations and many more obstacles along the way. No longer was there a reason to come in search of a Utopia. No longer did painters feel the urgent need to join the masses: local color, it seems, and the great allegories of the Agrarian Reform, had since grown tiresome.

Also, now in the '90s, the solid generation of recently-arrived Cuban artists hasn't had much to say with regard to boom called neo-Mexicanism nor, for that matter, much to learn from it. Championed by Mexico City curators, who anthologized the symbolic and literary substrata of Mexican identity for American museums—including images of Frida Kahlo, the virgin of Guadalupe, bleeding hearts, and corn as the world's anthropological navel—this trend had nothing to offer young Cuban artists for whom even Cuban themes have never amounted to anything more than mere conceptualizations of a point of view.

Vanguard and Simulacrum: Havana in the '80s

An image of what Havana was like in '80s might help to explain why over 30 Cuban artists, between the ages of 25 and 35, are now living and working in Mexico.

It was in the '80s that the first generation of artists and intellectuals (born during the years of the revolution) began producing their works.

Theirs was a generation that had grown up without the records of Celia Cruz and without the novels of Severo Sarduy. It was a generation which, for political reasons, was kept ignorant of a whole brilliant gamut of Cuban culture. Nevertheless, while limited by these sectarian restraints, its members were also trained to be the most educated and professional generation in the entire history of the island. And so it was.

Curiously, the revolution had given these artists the sufficient intellectual background to surmount the cultural (and mental) limitations imposed by "the bearded men," while it also allowed them to free themselves from the burden of a neo-Colonial past: one of the great paradoxes—perhaps the most fortunate—of that Third World experiment called the Cuban revolution. The "Generation of the '80s," grew up reading Hermann Broch, Mishima, Roland Barthes and Marx; they were nourished on the films of Tarkovsky and John Casavettes while trying to get their hands on the latest catalog to shows by Cindy Sherman, Clemente, Kiefer, Mapplethorpe or Hans Haacke. . .Perpetually broke and always in debt, these young artists nonetheless traveled to the biennials in Paris, São Paulo, Venice or Kassel (making friends, no doubt, with whom to stay).

It seems that after marching in all the parades and memorizing all the hymns, these "Children of the Utopia" discovered that it wasn't particularly stimulating to be the "docile wage-workers of official thought."[2] So it was that in the early '80s, the State began to feel increasingly threatened by the critical discontent and the political distrust shared by the youngest members of the intelligentsia, whose obsession with turning Cuba's social reality into a truly liberating enterprise was to eventually disclose all the moral atrophy and the ideological inconsequence of a system based on simulacra, manipulation and inefficiency.

The arts suddenly became a battlefield. A case in point was the conference on "Art & Sex" held at the headquarters of the Cuban Writers and Artists Union (which revealed both the dramatic and critical authority of performance as a deconstructive genre.) While the pompous experts droned on and on, two young painters[3] abruptly stormed through the doors disguised as walking penises, and literally "penetrated" the room. In one gigantic orgasm, they squirted the stupefied public with milk: the Word was left raped by the Act. This performance also stressed that the estheticism imposed by the painting of the '80s had become a strategy that was too aristocratic to salvage Cuba's cultural continuity. It was clear that after the "dark" years of the '70s,[4] it was now necessary to dynamite the entire ideological platform which limited the role of art within Cuban society. Nothing better than performance to shatter all inertia.

Colloquiums—which had become so prevalent throughout the '80s—were now the privileged site for a performative intrusion on officialdom. The group known as Arte Calle[5] was especially important in this respect.

While its members were still students at the Academy, the group staged several remarkable performances. In one, members invaded a hall wearing gas masks and shouting parodies of the political slogans used in revolutionary rhetoric: "Give me Art or give me Death!" "Down with the critical contamination of art!" "Critics, beware, for we have nothing to fear from you!" *"¡Venceremos!"* At another happening, the same troupe, painted in gold, dove into the waters of Havana Bay—one of the most polluted in the world—while hurling flyers which read "Easy Shopping (Duty Free)" in protest against the government selling national patrimony to Spain—including, silver, antiques, paintings, jewelry—and against the discriminatory fever for the dollar. . .

A few months later, a short-lived exhibition featured a live sex-shop, as well as photographs of one of the artists masturbating, as if to draw an analogy between Cuban art and onanism. The bureaucracy, in a frenzy, began stirring the old ghost called "political risk." Art, on the other hand, had now shed its salon style to stimulate participation in the political process: not from an esthetic viewpoint, but from one directly taken to the streets.

But that wasn't all. At an exhibition entitled *"A tarro partido"*[6] ("Against All Odds"), one work showed the Cuban flag made out of pieces of meat. Another piece featured two large masses, in morbid concupiscence, copulating behind an effigy of Ché Guevara. . .The scandal became the talk of the town. It wasn't long, of course, before the officials arrived. And in their wake came thousands of lowbrows (who, after punching out their time cards at work, expect the art gallery to be a sort of Alka Seltzer), furiously scribbling in the guestbook to demand the suppression of that kind of filth. [The authorities wielded their right to preserve the decency of the area, and the exhibit was eventually moved elsewhere.]

Even those spaces through which the State thought its promising young talents could be "bought" eventually became sites of crushing criticism. At Havana's III Biennial, the most impressive piece belonged to a 24-year-old: a veritable Trojan horse of political propaganda.[7] The installation consisted of an imposing 10-meter barricade with heavy Stalinist overtones and illegible letters—Cyrillic? Sanskrit? Official rhetoric?—as well as countless medals, images and slogans. Heroic kitsch. The State opted to feign ignorance. (After all, pretending is a splendid game.)

By the late '80s, cultural institutions no longer knew how to confront the opportunism of Party dogmas without deadening the mental effervescence of its young artists. The State failed to understand that merciless criticism was the last resort in legitimizing the revolution as a continual process. Soon, the most backward ideological forces, led by Carlos Aldana, found the occasion to pull the rug out from under "liberalism" by politically

burying the Cultural Minister, Armando Hart, one of the key figures of the '80s.

The decade came to a close with a wave of censorship. The "Castillo de la Real Fuerza" (The Castle of the Royal Forces) had become the last creative bastion for Cuba's young iconoclasts. [In fact, few alternative spaces in Latin America can boast of having equalled the quality and dynamism of the exhibitions held within that year of the Castillo's existence.] It wasn't long, however, before the scandals began taking on increasingly absurd proportions. Each show managed to dynamite the two commonplaces of Cuban social life: sex and politics. One work, in a naïve style, served as the detonator: Fidel depicted in the main square addressing thousands of Fidel-replicants. The space was immediately closed down—and there was more to follow. Vice Minister Marcia Leiseca was removed from her post, "guilty" of promoting the young maudits internationally, and of offering them institutional support. Meanwhile, in the side wings, Minister Hart could almost see his beard go up in flames. In record time, the Castillo de la Real Fuerza became a quiet monument once again: today it houses the Ceramics Museum.

While everything seemed to topple along with the Berlin Wall, economic and political tensions in Cuba began to rise. Though the work of these young artists had increasingly become the model upon which to invent the ideological battles regarding future political survival, censorship paralyzed everything. State security began paying periodic "visits" to the studios of young artists and, by 1990, Cuban art found itself—and not without its fair share of sarcasm—in a state of withdrawal. Though general disenchantment began to undermine the utopian ideal, no intellectual figure of any significance emerged to legitimize the various opposition groups. And even with everything under control, one art student dared to defecate in the middle of an opening at Havana's Promotional Center for the Visual Arts. [The director was quickly dismissed and, for his performance, the student was awarded six months of room and board in prison.] Finally, at this crux in the country's cultural activity, gallery spaces and public halls were completely shut down—and the new officials managed to hide all the tracks. It wasn't long before art supplies and magazines became increasingly scarce. And no one could explain how galleries had mysteriously booked their schedules for the following year.

Mexican Visas

No one seems to agree about who came first. Cuban gigolos had already swarmed to Mexico, and so had movie extras, dancers, salsa musicians . . .In less than a year, though, more than thirty painters had also managed

to obtain letters of invitation to evade the inertia of what was now a sedentary island.

Mexico offered many advantages, besides the same language. Along with its tradition of welcoming exiled Latin American intellectuals, Mexico has always been considered a friendly country with more or less similar idiosyncrasies. Visas to Mexico were readily granted and the country showed signs of prosperous economic growth. . .and all at a distance of $190 U.S. dollars. For the artist, there were even additional incentives: the sheer visual force of Mexican culture, its postmodern syncretism, its immense cultural infrastructure, its pivotal relationship to the New York art market, as well as the chance to compete professionally, and to continue developing a mature body of work.

With new emigration laws in effect, Cuban authorities realized that there was no reason *not* to grant permits to the Young Turks, who would eventually cool off in another country. On the outside, they thought, the artists would inevitably collide with the cold reality of competition, venting their criticism from scratch—with little, if any, benefits. Two additional items: Mexico does not grant political asylum, and the Mexican press remains relatively loyal to the historical legitimacy of the Cuban revolution. Furthermore, functionaries at the Cuban Embassy in Mexico could "visit" the artists and attend their exhibitions; perhaps, on occasion, invite them to dinner. Business as usual.

Under the Volcano

Today, the heavyweights in contemporary Cuban art have scattered: Flavio Garciandía lives in Germany; Arturo Cuenca in New York; José Bedia and Consuelo Castañeda in Mexico. . .It was hardly a fate they had imagined for themselves: for in the mid-'80s, Havana had become the site of a cultural movement which questioned and contributed to the historical paths of Latin American art in general. As the generation to whom the future of Cuba had been promised, they had no other choice now but to turn their Utopia into a form of compromise, and their exile into a source of maturity.

Most of the artists came to Mexico[8]—even if little could be expected of the narrow-minded nationalism of the Mexican art market. It was Nina Menocal (a Cuban who emigrated as a child to Palm Beach and now lives in Mexico) whose passion made it possible—against the general paranoias on both the left and right—to open a gallery that would help these recently arrived Cuban artists who, as a first step, needed a space to show their work.

Indeed, thanks to Ninart[9] it is still possible today to speak of a contemporary Cuban avant-garde. Without ignoring its various limitations, the gallery has succeeded in re-centering the Cuban art movement of the

'80s. while, to a large degree, overcoming the handicap many of these artist have faced with regard to the market. The task has not been easy—particularly in Mexico. Most of these Cubans work with a solid conceptual footing so that the boldness of the work tended to disconcert the average collector. Nina Menocal could be very convincing. She had the elegance and, more importantly, the daring to impose a more (post)modern taste on collectors. The rest, of course, was thanks to the work itself.

Without any official backing and without the contacts, entering the Mexican art market can be traumatic—particularly if one is unprepared to make esthetic concessions. [Most of these Cuban artists have had to negotiate between their professional, if utopian, expectations and, as they see it, the role of art as one within a larger project of social justice—and as a phenomenon which modifies cultural standards of living, regardless of class.] With little under a year in Mexico, the work by these artists has already turned to other areas of exploration and is beginning to show signs of change. The most blatant shift is a timely "decontextualization" employed by those artists who had once turned the Cuban political "hen house" into a brilliant source of critical commentary, directing their work now toward more philosophical and less illustrative matters. Many artists have abandoned over-conceptualization in the work, as well as the use of ephemeral materials. The easel has gained prestige. With the client in mind, many have externalized the excellence of their technique and accepted commissioned works. While living in the "belly of the monster"[10] has made many of these Cubans more flexible with regard to their old ethical standards as "pure" artists, it has also revealed the benefits of the artistic training they were given.

In all truth, there is nothing really extraordinary about this "exile" beyond the personal continuity in the individual work and the obvious professional motivations. To date, however, aside from the well-attended exhibitions at Ninart, no established art gallery in Mexico has considered promoting any of these artists, or of offering them a group show. No national art magazine has published anything substantial on the Cuban avant-garde in Mexico. No official gesture has been made despite all the evidence of a solid artistic movement now a guest in this country.

For these Cuban artists, to work under the volcano—like hostages of their own personal utopias, at the margins of a hungry context—at least helps to define objectives. Anything and everything is possible. There are those who have given up art entirely to follow their wanderlust, and those who have managed to squeeze out a meager living on their work—period. Those who have made it into the Soho galleries or ads in *Art in America*, and those with bank accounts who successfully travel as guests from country to country. Those who finance their expensive art projects by painting portraits of society matrons, and those who know they won't last

very long on *tacos*. Those who eventually expect to adapt to the established Mexican market, those who expect a more intelligent attitude on the part of U.S. gallery owners and collectors. . .and those who—upon waking each day—simply wish they were painting in Havana.

Inside/Outside

An exhibition in Mexico City entitled "Fifteen Cuban Artists"[11] caused a commotion among Cuban authorities and Miami's most reactionary sectors. The exhibition's aim was to seek common points of expression between artists who developed in Cuba and those who developed in the United States, as well as to jointly initiate a restoration, beyond individual political projections and "the geographic and political ghettos into which Cuban culture is usually embedded, as the exclusive property of a specific agenda."[12] (That Cuban painters in Mexico have made an effort to include their counterparts in the United States suggests a number of cultural strategies for turning Mexico City into a site for negotiating the future restitution of a fragmented Cuban culture.)

Miami, of course, thrives on politics. As a result, many painters living in Florida immediately saw "the ghost of the Castro government" behind the proposal, and criticized the Cuban-American painters (Cruz Azaceta, César Trasovares and Felix González Torres) for having participated in the "manipulation." Likewise, the Cuban government sent the Cultural Vice Minister to Mexico to hinder what it considered "a Miami initiative" aimed at politically compromising the young artists. In a word: general paranoia.

"Fifteen Cuban Artists" was the first step towards a more extensive projected exhibition that would gather the Cuban avant-garde of the '80s and '90s, including first-rate contemporary artists working in Havana, Mexico, Madrid, Paris, New York. . .Paradoxically, to date, neither Havana nor Miami seems to have the necessary tolerance to stomach this kind of cultural encounter. As far as Cuba goes, it is no secret that the division "outside/inside" is also good business. A business for those who flourish on the dream of revenge. A business for those who survive on inefficiency. A business for South Beach galleries and a business for those amateurs, exiled in Miami, who have made painting "an honest way to make a living."

Those who oppose an encounter between artists from Cuba and Miami seem to defend a legitimacy that doesn't stem from the organic side of their cultural identity, but from a twisted relationship with Power. Politics is already wreaking havoc on the future of Cuba. While many artists on the outside expect *mea culpas*, those inside are busy inventing non-official pasts for themselves. Some Cuban painters recently on the Outside now are already declaring—falsely—that they were repressed by the State, or that

all their grants were in fact awarded by foreign governments. Hopefully, the future Cuban art market will keep from stooping to that kind of opportunism. For the time being, though, Cuban culture remains a hostage of small-town politics, blackmailed by the reasons of State.

Cuban artists in Mexico have one strong advantage—and it is hardly a moral one. No one seems to be buying their works. And as long as they can continue producing away from the centers of power, they just might get by without painting themselves into a corner.

—OSVALDO SANCHEZ

Notes

1. Today in Mexico, though the majority of young Cubans are visual artists, there are also a number of contemporary writers, classical dancers, actors and musicians.

2. A phrase from the essay "Socialism and Man in Cuba," in which Ché Guevara addressed the danger of dogmatizing intellectual thought within the revolution.

3. A happening conceived by Consuelo Castañeda, currently living in Mexico, and Humberto Castro, living in Paris.

4. The '70s—known as the "dark" decade, or "the hard years"—constituted a period of planned officialization as to Cuban cultural policy. These were the Brezhnev years, when culture began to be manipulated as a Party mise-en-scene, while many intellectuals and artists were convicted of homosexuality and liberalism during the trials at the close of the '60s, serving their sentences in silence.

5. A group of teenagers studying visual arts at the San Alejandro Academy. Its leader, the performance artist Aldito Menéndez, currently lives in Barcelona.

6. A show by painter Tomás Esson, currently living in Miami.

7. The work of artist Glexis Novoa, currently living in Mexico.

8. Among the most important artists of the '80s and '90s, the following currently work in Mexico: José Bedia, Consuelo Castañeda, Rogelio López-Marin, Leandro Soto, Rubén Torres-Llorca, Israel León, Gustavo Acosta, Carlos García, Carlos Cárdenas, Pedro Vizcaíno, Adriano Buergo, Ana Albertina, Alejandro Aguilera.

9. "Ninart: Centro de Cultura" was founded in part thanks to the initiative of Cuban conceptual artist Arturo Cuenca who, for the past year, has been living in New York City.

10. An allusion by José Martí to his period in U.S. exile.

11. This exhibition, as well as a proposed selection of Cuban painting in the '80s, both inside and outside Cuba, are joint projects between Nina Menocal and the author.

12. From the author's opening speech at "Fifteen Cuban Artists."

Here's a passage from Wake Forest's latest title in the 20th-century French poetry series, Jacques Dupin's SELECTED POEMS.

> "Plus lourde d'être nue
>
> ses vocalises meurtrieres
> son rire au fond de mes os
>
> notre buisson quotidien
> les balafres de la lumière"

Paul Auster translates it as:

> "Heavier when naked
>
> her murderous voice exercises
> her laughter in the core of my bone
>
> our daily thicket
> the slashes of light"

A simple and elegant solution—especially in the first line—but of the sort that seems to elude one of his colleagues in this volume, Stephen Romer (David Shapiro is the other) who translated Dupin's *Un Récit.* Since Dupin—at least as he's represented in this volume—is strongest when he exercises the brief lyric in the core of his bone, Auster might have abbreviated selections from *Un Récit* (and thus preclude translations like "the new ice-up" for "la nouvelle glaciation") and chosen more of his work from FITS AND STARTS (now out of print), or from a Dupin issue of CRONOPIOS (May, 1970—it is definitely unavailable) with some nice James Stephens pieces, and even one from Bly. In any event, this SELECTED Dupin, with the French *en face*, is worth having.

*

When Hugh Seidman's first book, COLLECTING EVIDENCE, was published in 1970, Oppen thanked him for the copy, but wrote "I feel the narrative structure as both a strength and a weakness. A technical strength but a weakness." I'd suggest that the narrative element in Seidman's work isn't merely a technical strength but the foundation of his mythopoeia. And

in his new collection, PEOPLE LIVE, THEY HAVE LIVES, his language is more discursive than BLOOD LORD or THRONE, FALCON, EYE, while the poetry itself is denser. In "1968-1969": "I parked at Laurie Cohen's shut house, at the Golden Gate/. . . .Now we are *N*years late." That's the Laurie to whom "Vallejo Street" is dedicated—and thus Seidman's recapitulation of his past (poetry and lovers) implicates itself and thereby reinforces the fiction.

Zukofsky, with whom Seidman studied, often wrote out of the trinity of his family; but since Seidman writes from the other side, as the son of two elderly parents, the optics are reversed, and the parents seem mighty large, even larger as they shrink into old age and death. Every presence in Seidman's work tends to increase; the lovers' stuffed bear in "Mr. Bear," the very strong poem this collection starts with, grows to the "Greatest dipper shining over the lovers." Moreover, Seidman is one of the few poets for whom New York figures as an actual city rather than a location the Mayor's Verse Office is keen on pushing.

*

The Poetry Society of America had to move their Laura Riding Evening to a smaller room when a divorce lawyer had a bigger party. That was the least of their problems. Some of the readings of Riding's work were quite good, but the personal tributes were somewhat sickening—maybe that's why some of the guests who had seats left them so quickly and headed for the other party. When MOMA sells-out Matisse they do it to pay the rent; what's the point of smarming a writer?

Kenneth Rexroth wrote in 1971: "I think the history of the last thirty years of American poetry would have been different had she been around." Of course, she was around (see SULFUR 10) until 1991, but for most "readers" the "cessation" has never been adequately answered (Rimbaud died before he was forced to explain his own), and so they suspect the answer's in RATIONAL MEANING, her book on language that's been ready for publication some twenty years. Once that's been published, and also maybe a large collection of magazine essays that address, however marginally, the particulars of her reasons for not writing poetry, and the universities have had their way with her, readers, and especially writers, will be able to read the work seriously—that is, to use and criticize it—without the distraction of peripheral matters

But first the work needs to be put in print, or back in print. Persea has just published a handsome edition of FIRST AWAKENINGS: THE EARLY POEMS OF LAURA RIDING. There's a lot of very good work here, some just as strong as what she saw fit to include in her first collection, THE CLOSE CHAPLET, but Riding requested that it be published separately and

not in a larger COMPLETE POEMS together with THE 1938 COLLECTED since she didn't see it as part of the official canon. Persea should then at least reissue THE 1938 COLLECTED in an edition that doesn't crumble in your hands.

Future Riding titles include reissues of SELECTED POEMS IN FIVE SETS (spring 1993) and THE TELLING (Fall 1993), and new books, THE WORD WOMAN (spring 1993), and FOUR UNPOSTED LETTERS TO CATHERINE (fall 1993).

—LIGERO SMITH

Keith Waldrop, Shipwreck in Haven. Windsor (Vermont): Awede, 1991.

The apostrophe that opens Keith Waldrop's new long poem specifies his formal purpose: to resist the context-mongering of conventional narrative, and to eliminate what Robert Frost called "leaving doors" (unvoiced autobiographical referents) in poems and draw a cleaner and presumably more honest demarcation between art and the world. "Balancing. Austere. Life- / less. I have tried to keep / context from claiming you," the speaker claims, referring to his effort to shed the seductions of context in favor of a poetry of formal clarity. In the first two sections Waldrop delineates his poetic world as a series of discrete tercets, each as clean as a haiku, yet motivated by a larger project defined by the tercets themselves. In the first section, the tercets group in fours, and the larger unit seems complete in itself while resisting the danger of absorbing the significance of the smaller unit by rendering four three-line units as one twelve-line unit. In the second section the tercets unfold without regard for each other, yet with an underlying sense of lost narrative, as if the speaker could, if he chose to inscribe his presence in the sequence, link these brief poems more securely. But the pleasures are individual, and the best of these tercets suggest—though with a slight air of parody— Pound's experiments in pure Imagism: "Stone floor in silver light, moon / playing also on the dancing rill. Stolen / sweets. Near the temple, overladen."

Waldrop would seem to have entered the search for pure poetry, a chimera of the poets of the nineties whom Pound gently parodied in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley.* However, section four challenges that notion by

returning to the orderly arrangement in triplets, this time in groups of three, but enjambing them into brief narratives of indeterminate significance, as if the sense of story is stealing over the speaker. Waldrop reminds us that the world has a way of entering the poem in unexpected and absurd ways, as in the form, for example, of a "large brass candlestick, flung / against the banister." This sense of awakening to a world from which beauty has vanished represents the paradox of formal perfection in poetry: that though distilled from the language with which we represent the world, it cannot open doors to that world, cannot even extend the language into larger certainties, whether "on the main" or "along the coast."

Although section five attempts to resist the draw of narrative by dividing itself line by line into sentence fragments, phrases, half-promises, threats, it gives way to the frankly narrative flow of tercets in section six, in which the speaker acknowledges that both the candor and the fullness of his vision derive from the world rather than from art, and that art is something imposed on the world, not independent of it. Waldrop is, I suppose, a "poet's poet" because his concerns are primarily formal and aesthetic, rather than thematic. But no theme more deeply claims us than language, and Waldrop's generous and often startlingly euphonious delving into the issue of pure poetry and its uneasy relationship with narrative proves compelling.

—WILLIAM DORESKI

It seems to me fundamentally wrong that the first Caribbean Nobel Prize in Literature did not go to Aimé Césaire. This is not to knock the poetry of Derek Walcott who did receive the Prize, but to once again insist that there is a quantum leap between a body of work that is accomplished and a body of work that is unique. Thinking about this, I went back to André Breton's essay, "Un Grand Poète Noir," written in 1941, after Breton, visiting Martinique on his way to exile in America, discovered a section of "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal" in Césaire's magazine, *Tropiques*. Breton's words ring absolutely true to me in 1993, and I quote a paragraph here as a modest testimony to Aimé Césaire, now entering his 80th year:

The next day I met Césaire. I recapture my first immediate reaction at finding him so purely black—a blackness that his smile kept away from you at first sight. I already knew and felt, as will be confirmed later on, that through him the human furnace was blazing to its climax where knowledge of the highest order mingled with magical gifts. For me, his emergence—I don't mean only on that particular day when I met him as a flesh-and-blood individual—takes on a value of a *sign of our times.* Thus, in a lone challenge of an age when the mind seems to renounce its rights, when nothing would appear to be done any longer except for the purpose of crowning the triumph of death, when art itself is on the verge of being stultified in obsolete forms and values, the first new breath of life that can give us back our trust and vigour comes from a black poet. A black man it is who masters the French language as no white man can today. A black man it is who guides us today through unexplored lands building as he goes the contacts that will make us progress on sparks. A black man it is who embodies not simply the black race but all mankind, its queries and anxieties, its hopes and ecstasies and who will remain for me the symbol of dignity.

(Tr. by Emile Snyder)

*

Readers of *Caterpillar* may remember #15/16 in which 80 pages of the poetry of Stephen Jonas (1921-1970) appeared. Jonas is still not well-known, so it is a pleasure to notice that Joseph Torra's fine magazine, *lift*, has done a double issue (#10 & 11), on Jonas's poetry, with responses by Gerrit Lansing, Cid Corman, John Wieners, David Rattray, and Raffael de Gruttola among others. This issue is $9, and can be ordered at: 10-Rear Oxford Street, Somerville MA, 02143.

*

The Horse has Six Legs (An Anthology of Serbian Poetry), edited and translated by Charles Simic, Greywolf. Over 100 poems by 20th-century Serbian poets, among whom Momcilo Nastasijevic, Rade Drainac, Vasko Popa, Ljubomir Simovic, and Aleksandar Ristovic appear outstanding. The jewel of the book is Popa's Little Box series. Oddly, there is no sense of a political landscape, no writing that would seem to prefigure the present Yugoslavian catastrophe.

*

Evening Train is Denise Levertov's best collection of poems since the early '70s, and its publication (by New Directions) is accompanied by her *New & Selected Essays*, which includes a fascinating and moving essay on her relationship with Robert Duncan. Levertov has now assimilated Williams and Rilke so thoroughly that her poetic lines move with a flexibility and openness rare in any poetry.

*

Peter Quartermain's *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge) will be reviewed in *Sulfur* #33 by Keith Tuma. I mention it here as the chapter on Bunting sent me back to Bunting's *Collected Poems*, and when I opened the book, a little postcard, published by the Basil Bunting Poetry Archive, 1990, fell out. I am sure the Archive will not mind if I quote the contents (Bunting's advice to student poets in Newcastle, in the early 1970s):

I SUGGEST

1. Compose aloud; poetry is a sound.
2. Vary rhythm enough to stir the emotion you want but not so as to lose impetus.
3. Use spoken words and syntax.
4. Fear adjectives; they bleed nouns. Hate the passive.
5. Jettison ornament gaily but keep shape.

Put your poem away till you forget it, then:

6. Cut out every word you dare.
7. Do it again a week later, and again.

Never explain—your reader is as smart as you.

*

In 1991 Jahbone Press in Los Angeles published *Lee Sr Falls to the Floor* by Leland Hickman. Unfortunately, there is no accompanying information as to whether this is the rest of Lee's poetry (before and after *Great Slave Lake Suite*, Momentum, 1980)—and if it is, I am astonished, as Lee often referred to a long work-in-progress, "Tiresias," of which *GSLS* is identified as only "I:9:B" (that is, where is I: 8? I:9:A?). To further confuse matters, six of the twelve "elements" in *GSLS* are reprinted in the Jahbone book, without their dedications. As some *Sulfur* readers know, Hickman more or less stopped writing poetry while editing the 10 issues of *Temblor*, surely one of the most magnificent one-man efforts in literary magazine editing. But

previous to *Temblor*, I am under the impression that Lee worked for years on "Tiresias," and if the working papers are still existent, I suspect they would be very interesting to see.

*

For Henry Miller fans, a really first-rate collection of essays has recently been published: *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, edited by Ronald Gottesman (GK Hall & Co.). Along with fairly-well known pieces by Mailer, Rexroth, Lawrence Durrell's letter on receiving *Tropic of Cancer*, Kate Millet and Jay Martin, there is a previously-unpublished review of *Cancer* by Ezra Pound, a poem to Miller by William Carlos Williams (published in a limited 1945 Bern Porter edition), and an engaging tribute by Robert Creeley. From a letter by Isaac Bashevis Singer to Bertrand Mathieu: "Although I don't write in his style, I cherish him as a writer and as a friend of everything which is genuine in the art of writing."

*

I have only written three book jacket blurbs in my life—for Blackburn's *Collected Poems*, Rothenberg's *Khurbn*, and most recently, Karen Kelly's *Her Angel* (Singing Horse Press), which for my money is the most exciting first book in some time. This is the beginning of a kind of poetry N.O. Brown was arguing for in his masterpiece, *Love's Body*.

*

Over the past few years, I have collected some half dozen books on the Mexican *Día de Muertos* (Day of the Dead), in which the dead are welcomed in homes and cemeteries, with various foods and offerings, end of October/beginning of November. My hunch is that this is one of the oldest human festivals, with roots in early Neolithic agrarian culture, in which revenants are appeased as well as greeted, at the crest of harvest. The Mexican version is layered with pre-Columbian, and colonial imagery, much of which comes from the European medieval preoccupation with skulls and skeletons. Among the books on the subject I have found, most of which are mainly collections of photographs, one is quite serious and thorough: *The Skeleton at the Feast*, by Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayers (Texas). It sensitively includes a number of interviews with artists and craft-workers whose altars, sugar skulls, sugar paste animals, candelabra, and papercuts etc., are among the finest made in present-day Mexico. This past fall, Caryl Eshleman and I spent a week in Oaxaca over the Day of the Dead period. As might be expected, American Halloween, with its plastic and rubber low quality goods, has invaded the traditional stalls in the markets.

*

Nancy Peters, the editor of City Lights Books, should be congratulated for her editing of the "War After War" issue of *City Lights Review* (#5). Excellent pieces on the so-called Gulf "War" by Chomsky, Boal, Lamborn Wilson, Solomon, Indiana, Huston, Lubin, and Blankfort. Of the books I have read on what Chomsky refers to as "international terrorism on a colossal scale," Jean Edward Smith's *George Bush's War* (Holt) is the best. Besides being an excellent chronicle of Bush's deft manipulation of other nations under obligation to us, Congress, and the media, the book is a meditation on the dangers of arbitrary executive power. I also recommend Stephen Brockman's "The Cultural Meaning of the Gulf War," in the spring 1992 issue of the *Michigan Quarterly Review*. Of related horror is *Four Hours in My Lai* by Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim (Viking), "the fullest account ever published of the most infamous war crime in American military history."

*

As a kind of vast, ontological update on Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Jeremy Rifkin's *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture* (Dutton) contains information that pervades many aspects of current planetary ecological peril. From Mithraic myth:

> From the bull's body sprang all the plants and herbs that men now find useful. From the spinal cord sprang wheat, the staff of man's life, from the blood came the grape vine and wine, the sacred joy of life.

From the first official description of the devil (447 AD):

> a large black monstrous apparition with horns on his head, cloven hoofs—or one cloven hoof—ass's ears, hair, claws, fiery eyes, terrible teeth, an immense phallus, and a sulphurous smell.

From a contemporary description of a slaughterhouse workstation:

> The kill floor looks like a red sea. . . .warm blood bubbles and coagulates in an ankle deep pool. The smell sears the nostrils. Men stand in gore. . . .each night the gooey mess is wiped away. . . .

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

These considerations on the continued marginalization of Art Brut (Outsider Art) are motivated by the 1992 exhibition and catalogue, *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, originating at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.* Though numerous shows of Art Brut have been organized in small American venues (notably exhibitions of Ramirez, Wölfli, and the Gugging artists at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia), *Parallel Visions* marks the first time that Art Brut has been the subject of a major American museum show. Yet it should be noted that these works entered the museum on the coattails of those modernist artists who have expressed interest and passion in such marginalized aesthetic productions. The organization logic of this exhibition was such that only those works of Art Brut which are known to have influenced a modern artist were included in the show. Perhaps, as has often been explained to me, this is still, given the current art historical climate, the only way to get Art Brut into the Museum. Nevertheless, the implications of such limitations are evident. In any case, the purpose of this present note is to briefly indicate some of the aporias, misunderstandings, prejudices and vested interests at the source of this continued exclusion. The issues may be schematized as follows.

Polemic / theory. One of the key sources of confusion and error in contemporary theoretical discourses in the arts and humanities is the widespread and egregious refusal to separate the polemical function of any given discourse from its theoretical signification. The politicization of art and theory often necessitates a militancy which polarizes the aesthetic field, occasionally establishing inopportune anachronisms and exclusions. This is, *a fortiori*, the case with current appropriations of, as well as with dissent against, Dubuffet's writings on Art Brut. Dubuffet's hyperbolic polemic—originating in the cultural context of 1940s Paris—was motivated by the general cultural refusal to consider the works of schizophrenics, eccentrics, spiritualists, the isolated, and other marginalized groups as constituting art. Dubuffet aimed at legitimizing a previously suppressed domain, all the while appropriating these idiosyncratic discoveries for his own painterly ends. These practical goals must not be confused with the critical and theoretical aspects of his thought. To put it in the crudest terms of aesthetic Realpolitik, discursive preconditions of exhibition are very different from conditions of appreciation and understanding. Unfortunately, Dubuffet's

*My own recent work on the subject includes *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism* (State University of New York Press, 1992), as well as a contribution on "obsession" to the *Parallel Visions* catalogue.

polemic has been proffered as theory by both his detractors *and* supporters. On the part of his supporters, an attempt to maintain the aesthetic excitement of the originary moment of discovery, of the inauguration of the domain, has resulted in an anachronistic polemical discourse passing for the central theoretical position. This exuberation—often tinged with a romanticized nostalgia for creative "purity"—has, in varying degrees and in different manners, beset most of Dubuffet's immediate successors.

Heterogeneity / homogeneity. The problem of categorization is germane to the difficulties of dealing with Art Brut, since it is defined as art with minimal connection to the cultural realm. (The term itself is a misnomer, as the "brut" or raw are only occasional characteristics: such works are often, to the contrary, highly sophisticated and delicate. And the term "Outsider Art" is in a sense even more unfortunate: there are contemporary "outsiders," notably the homeless, who produce art which is quite traditional and thus has nothing to do with Art Brut.) Neither term must be grasped as a descriptive or categorical sign. Even beyond the usual reductivism of most "isms," the notion of Art Brut is too vast to serve any useful theoretical function: it denotes a highly heterogeneous field, defined by historical exclusions which produce true aesthetic ideolects. Born from polemic and passion, the term Art Brut must be analyzed before it is theorized; and all consequent theorization must be based upon the local distinctions of the different modes of artistic production which it delineates.

Art / symptom. Before Dubuffet, the main sub-category of what came to be called Art Brut to be taken seriously as art consisted of the drawings of schizophrenics. Most of the major early texts on the topic were written by psychiatrists, notably Morgenthaler's monograph on Wölfli (Bern and Leipzig, 1921), and Prinzhorn's classic *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (Berlin, 1922). Thus the foundational intellectual context of such art was the discourse of psychopathological symptomatology, rather than art history. This has certainly stigmatized Art Brut to a certain extent, both insofar as it consequently escapes art historical contexts, and especially because claims of mental illness in themselves still tend to be intrinsically vilifying. (Note that only about half of what falls under the category of Art Brut consists of art of the mentally ill.) The difficulty is that while psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psycholinguistics have much to reveal about the existential origins of such art (indeed, of all art), these disciplines tend to seriously devitalize aesthetic values. Furthermore, medical discourse cannot even begin to attempt the reconstitution of aesthetic theory necessitated by considerations of Art Brut.

Art Brut / Folk Art. In Europe, the history of Art Brut began in relation to the great early psychiatric hospital collections of drawings. Thus the central paradigm of Art Brut was that of the art of schizophrenics, which had its own, albeit aesthetically limited, metapsychological discourse. The

fact that contemporary academic theoretical discourse has a major psychoanalytic component resulted in the notion of Art Brut being common intellectual currency in Europe—even if the works themselves are for the most part neglected. In the USA the situation is far more difficult, as the central paradigm is differently nuanced. Here, Outsider Art has tended to be appropriated by the Folk Art establishment. This for the most part untheorized realm is quite out of vogue with academic aesthetic theory, hence part of the neglect of Art Brut. (Indeed, the situation is so extreme that drawings by one of the greatest American Outsider artists, Henry Darger, have been literally disintegrating from neglect and lack of museum interest.)

Museography / inaccessibility. Practical considerations also militated against the dissemination of Art Brut. Dubuffet's collection was transformed into the Collection de l'Art Brut at Lausanne, under the condition that the works not be loaned. Thus many of the major works in the field could only be consulted in Lausanne, which is not one of the art capitals of the world. Furthermore, the important hospital collections, such as the Prinzhorn collection in Heidelberg, are not open for general public consultation. Though the situation is changing in Europe (note, for example, the existence of L'Aracine, a museum of Art Brut at Neuilly-sur-Marne near Paris), the USA still has no public collection of Art Brut, though several dedicated galleries exist. It would be hoped that the ecumenical aesthetic pretensions of the postmodern discourse would finally provide a discursive (and exhibition) space for such marginalized works.

Quality / quantity. Needless to say, since by definition Art Brut is produced without conscious consideration of or engagement with mainstream artistic traditions, the criteria for determining the "quality" of Art Brut are different from those of the other, "cultural" arts. This is certainly the most difficult contemporary issue in the field. As is the case with tribal arts, for example, Art Brut is constituted according to symbolic systems radically different from those of the Western bourgeois cultural spheres. This necessitates diversified hermeneutic mechanisms, ones attuned to subtle ethnographic and sociological considerations. As is the case for many tribal cultures—as well as, *mutatis mutandis*, for schizophrenia—there is often operative a symbolic defence mechanism, either recalcitrant to or outrightly exclusionary of external influence, interference, and entry.

This in turn raises quantitative difficulties, threatening the various aesthetic hegemonies which would be menaced by the inclusion of Art Brut in the Western canon. Not only is Art Brut itself neglected by art historians, but its influence on modern art has (until the current LACMA show) been almost consistently dissimulated. The flood of new and strange works would necessitate the realignment of critical, theoretical and museological hierarchies, which would threaten an already unstable market based on

scarcity and on "quality" defined in relation to the position of any given work within the "tradition."

We can only remain dismayed, if not completely pessimistic, about the inherent "anxiety of influence" at work here, resistant to the intrinsically populist—even if highly circumscribed and bizarre—category of Art Brut.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

Hank Lazer, *Doublespace:* Poems 1971–1989 (Segue, 1992)

In *Doublespace*, Hank Lazer seeks to reconcile the autobiographical free verse lyric and Language writing, typically seen as incompatible, by creating a kind of third space, "a song / and a law calling to each other across / a canyon voices interweaving and / separating dialog of whale song & propeller." *Doublespace* gives us two poetries, two books that meet in the middle (the second written right to left, like Hebrew). Book 1 comprises a personal and familial history in the dominant late seventies and eighties lyric mode. Book 2 is more language- centered than self-centered, a writing that disperses self and voice, that works by an "ongoing barrage of breaks" among multiple rhetorics. Yet Lazer remains aware that the self conceived in purely (inter)textual terms is as impoverished as the self of the workshop lyric. One tutelary spirit of Book 2 is Thoreau, and its polyvocal weave becomes a way to dramatize the knotty nature of quite Thoreauvian questions: how "to live attentively" and keep / in mind a train of thought a love of being."

The autobiographical lyrics of Book 1 employ a spare, largely nonfigurative rhetoric that sometimes slides from the understated into the merely prosaic. Daily moments often come charged with feeling and meaning (as in the heart-wrenching "1463 Hanchett Avenue"), but elsewhere they just stay mundane. Despite the unobtrusively supple syntax and the discipline of his pared-down style, then, the possibilities of this "late twentieth century take it on the chin / style" seem limited.

Book 2 is much broader in range. Of its three sequences, "Law-Poems" splices sections of the Alabama legal code with other sources and with Lazer's "own" words to explore, among other themes, how language constitutes self; "Compositions" uses numerical procedures to endow an

experimental poetics with some of the spiritual heft of Hebrew textual commentary ("i am number saith the Lord"); and the more visually porous, Howe-influenced "Placements" moves by a different kind of proceduralism, one defined by phrasal length and visual lay-out. Prosodically the poems of Book 2 are livelier, working with a more fractured but more exploratory syntax. And in the postmodern collage tradition, they manage striking shifts of tone as they draw their language(s) from diverse sources, "high" and "low": cheap biographies, weed killer labels, TV advertising and game shows, real estate, elementary school texts, *Walden*, dime store romances, Westerns, pop songs, skewed aphorisms, allusions from Hardy to Bernstein, from Whitman to Jabès, all this mixed with lyric passages in the mode of Book 1.

At certain points in Book 2 I find the aural play a little too cute, and the sequences too repetitive of a basic principle; at these points the idea can seem more interesting than its execution. But at their free-ranging, associative, witty, and tender best, the sequences expose the limitations of the autobiographical mode, at least as it's currently practised in American poetry. Paradoxically, then, the success of Book 2 draws the success of the whole, the sought-for creation of the double space, into question. In *Doublespace* a language-centered writing seems more able to assimilate autobiography than vice versa. But both modes can explore, to adapt Rachel Blau DuPlessis' crucial question, "what realism is made of," and the ongoing effort to construct that double space can only enrich our poetry.

—ALAN GOLDING

XUL [sül] is one of several small poetry magazines that sprang up in Argentina during the middle years of the last military dictatorship, which began when a military junta seized power in 1976 and ended, after a systematic repression that became known as the "Dirty War," in 1983. Those years also saw the disastrous Falklands War and a confusing succession of generals as President. Responding to the conditions of its time, in which any form of expression was potentially dangerous, when an estimated 30,000 "disappeared," often denounced by a neighbor or colleague, *XUL* (with an average circulation of 750) used its very marginality to affirm its relevance to the political realities it was born into.

It's easier for poetry to elude censorship, suggests Jorge Santiago Perednik, editor of *XUL* in the prologue to his anthology *Nuevo Verso Argentino: durante la dictadura* (1989), because of its potential for questioning the apparent transparency of language and meaning. "Readers. . .acquire a certain dexterity in reading between the lines, in searching for other meanings besides the obvious ones: they become *lectores habiles.*" Hiding specific allusions to the repression that readers decode or rendering conventional orders ambiguous: the editorial to *XUL* No. 7, June 1985, Poetic Campaign to the Desert, says, "El desierto es lo que no es cierto" ("The desert is that which is not certain"—"desierto" sounds like "de-cierto," another way of saying not certain); the territory where convention is put into question is approached through language, through a pun that reads as a tautology, creating a hole in logic that can be slipped through.

Susana Cerdá, in "Patrimonies 1981," her long poem in nine sections from the same number, defines this territory: "Between Victory and Defeat, categories proliferated, through which One/roved at ease, shouting for her: Freedom." In this response to the Falklands War the rules of an authoritarian language are used to subvert authority:

> If it is by mathematics, for mathematics, from a mathematics,
> [that: I love you.
> If it is by love, for a love, from a love, that: mathematics.

Cerdá's attention to the microdynamics of syntax is one way of opening up the space between victory and defeat. The syntactical progression of a sentence and sexual desire whose object is always unattainable carry out the same motion of perpetual displacement:

> After:
> (the past provoked by the verb, linked with the preposition:
> the only plural position that ends in preparing the place.
> Place of delight where one persistently searches for: EXIT.
> Eruption, disruption, a tear, evacuation.
> We have. We are being, have been thrown toward another.
> Place.)

Cerdá is especially attuned to the ambiguities of the compound verb—to the threatened independence of its constituent parts ("We have"; "we are being") and to the relationship between possessing ("having") and acting or being acted upon.

The possible confusion of being and having created by auxiliary verbs is even stronger in another long poem, "Don't Return" (*XUL* No. 5, April

1983), where Cerdá weaves permutations of phrases from the Argentine national anthem into a lyric treatment of the Shoklender parricide, a sensational 1981 murder case (see *Sulfur* 31, "The Shock of the Lenders" by Jorge Santiago Perednik). *Haber*, which serves as the auxiliary in the past perfect tense, is also the verb used to express existence: "There are." This confusion challenges the lyric's traditional concern with being, ending with a babble of broken auxiliary parts. "We won it, father./ We/ won it/ father,/ or we will./ Hadding had/ having/ if it has/ Hah!/ How much it costs for the Splendor/ to shine." The sacred idea of Being is complicit with capitalism—it costs—and patriotism— as the national anthem says, "May they be eternal/ the laurels [of independence] that we won/ let us live crowned with glory/or swear to die with glory." Independence clearly needs to be rethought.

The introductory comment to *XUL* No. 5 describes the participating poets as collaborating in "the transformation of the uses and customs of the dominant lyric." The full title of the magazine is *XUL signo viejo y nuevo*, "for that duality implicit in the sign between tradition and rupture, between institution and rebellion, the sign that constitutes at the same time a barrier and the last point reached, a limit beyond which only silence exists" (from the editorial to *XUL* No. 1, October 1980). The *XUL* poets saw their interrogation of the sign as a way to engage with what Charles Bernstein has called "the politics of language." Responding in part to a contemporary Argentine movement of New Romanticism in which it saw an unproductive retreat to tradition, *XUL* sought to "look back in order to continue along new paths," taking its name from Argentine surrealist Xul Solar, and featuring articles on a diverse selection of Argentine and world avant-garde figures and movements such as Oliverio Girondo and concrete poetry (especially the Brazilian Noigandres group).

Typographic innovation that read the concretists through the filter of poststructuralist linguistics became a feature of many poets who regularly published in *XUL*, including Susana Poujol, Roberto Cignoni, Roberto Ferro, Nahuel Santana, Emeterio Cerro, and Jorge Lépore. In his essay "A Possible Poetics" from *XUL* No. 3, December 1981, Ferro describes a concrete poetic practice privileging the signifier as visual object and as discourse at the same time, thus "reconstruct[ing] the circuit that imposes preestablished significations."

Lépore's series "Ifuelofnoforceps" from *XUL* No. 7 uses graphic space as structural agent to challenge linear reading. It sets strips of white with printed words on a solid black background: single letters running in a vertical line, placed right side up or sideways on the page; or boxes of letters with no word breaks which seem to offer the possibility of being read either horizontally or vertically. Phonetic spelling and linking adjacent words through a common consonant or vowel also help to create a kind

of parataxis that functions at a typographic as well as a syntactical level. Number 2 in the series depicts an endless stream of language cut into boxes, limited arbitrarily, held in check:

"archiveboxestreasureportablecellsofthelibidonightmaregivesprophylacticmargins."

The white boxes filled with text are another instance of

"portablecellsofthelibidonightmare."

I find that the translation process foregrounds the question of intentionality implicit in this work. Language produces its own word salad, adjacent letters sometimes emerging into unplanned word combinations: "verbalovernoverheating" containing "verbal," "lover," "over and over," "overheating";

"collectivemarkedjerkoffdoseofunxpectedmenses"

containing "of fun" as well as "of unexpected menses." Language intends itself, and I as translator, and therefore the original author as well, are just its midwives (or analysts).

The schizophrenic is fueled by love (Ifuelof = If you love) that becomes an obsessive "libidonightmare" in the context of a society that believes it can cure itself by repressing its own painful contradictions. "Ifuelofnoforceps 2" begins,

"explodedstimulinthisnecrophilicemergency":

the necrophilic emergency is, among other things, the historical post-dictatorship moment in which the country examines its own recent mutilated dead in exhaustive detail, documenting the military's atrocities—becoming obsessed with corpses in a belated effort to understand itself. Language almost becomes another uncontrollable bodily discharge like menstruation or ejaculation, a form of resistance to the regulation of one's body, mind, and desire by a highly repressive military industrial complex.

"*XUL*'s engagement with reality is contained in its engagement with language; one of the ways of realizing that engagement is in trying to make legible the use of language in the service of coercion and concealment" (from the editorial to *XUL* No. 4, August 1982). Jorge Santiago Perednik's book-length poem based on the Shoklender parricide case, "The Shock of the Lenders," is composed of a series of fragments. The language, like the speech of an interrogation victim, has been broken by oppressive demands. "Something's stopp. . ./:a link in the chain has been broke." A

narrow causal logic of patriarchal succession can no longer form the basis for meaning.

> or better: Truth is tails Beauty heads
> both faces the being—duplicity—coin of this cosmos
> the man who relates the eye and the finger
> the name that relates flash and bang
> what's more important, thunder or lightning?
> Great balls of fire, I thought you'd never say it!
> (from "Main Fragment")

The associative chain between "lightning" and "great balls of fire" is a threshold onto a clean slate or new beginning. Maybe. Or is new life possible? How can we speak, or be, under these conditions? Can we tell stories without endlessly repeating the same oppressive story? Can we not tell them and remain human? "To break the record to crack the memory for good to cut/ The evanescent knots that impede the conclusion": to do away with memory and structure is to destroy, perhaps to leave broken, like a torture victim. The poem yearns for, and fears, an end—sick of the patriarchal order's "perpetual beginning," perpetual desiring. It asks, What happens after the end (or goal) is reached? In the two "Diary of the Flight" fragments that close "The Shock of the Lenders," the young fugitive, or victim, or poet, is running away from or toward his end:

> . . .Friday the twenty-fifth
> I have to keep going *(I can keep going)*
> a slow trot:
> . . .somehow I get to the threshold
> onto my story *(maybe I've arrived at my story)*
> Saturday the twenty-sixth
> I have to keep
> the door that opens onto my story
> Sunday the twenty-seventh
> I'd be surprised if it opened

XUL has just put out a new issue on translation, its first since 1985. An issue on visual poetry is projected for April 1993. The magazine, Perednik says in *Nuevo Verso Argentino*, has always refused to be "the mouthpiece of a group, movement, or poetics"; the poets who have published there have forged a diverse, politically and formally engaged body of work that continues to evolve, and that is only beginning to reach an English-speaking public. Contemporary North American poets are still largely unknown and untranslated in Latin America (Charles Bernstein is now

being translated into Spanish for the first time by Argentine Ernesto Livon Grosman). The mutual time lag in poetic translation between the United States and Latin America should be redressed—we have much to say to each other.*

—MOLLY WEIGEL

*Many thanks to John Shoptaw, Janet Gray, and Ernesto Livon Grosman for insights and suggestions.

David Mus, *D'un Accord/Double Stopping* (Ulysse Fin de Siecle, 1991)

For decades David Mus has been living the life of an American expatriate scholar in France: reading and writing books of poetry and critical literary history; with the recent publication of *D'un Accord/Double Stopping* and also *Wall to Wall Speaks* (Princeton University Press, 1988), both books of poetry, as well as publication of *Le Sonneur de cloches* (1991, Editions Champ Vallon), a book of poetics, and with the reissue of his award-winning study *La Poetique de Francois Villon* (1976, Librairie Armand Colin, Paris; 1992, Editions Champ Villon), at last some attention from his cross-cultural allies ought to be paid this remarkable, strategic writer.

In more ways than one, *D'un Accord/Double Stopping* articulates an adventure of spirit. To begin with a digression appropriate to the mode, the reader of Mus' book-length poem will note much raveling there. Meaning both "to make" and "to unmake," "ravel" is a paradoxical sign, which is why Penelope employed it to elude her would-be ensnarers. And which is why both in theme and form, *D'un Accord* reconceives some of the logic of adventure rendered familiar through the *Odyssey*. In the logic of adventure, shipwreck is as integral to finding one's way home as it is to having foundered in that pursuit, as the raft Odysseus sailed from Calypso's island proves: destroyed by the natural force of wind, the group of rafters itself splinters finally—raveled, in the etymological destiny of the word (from "loose thread" which is akin to "rafter")—leaving Odysseus to attain the next stage of his adventure.

Again, in both theme and form, *D'un Accord* performs an act of raveling. In the course of this bilingual text the adventure of breath moves

through alternating passages of tercets and paragraphs—the tercets in hexameter dramatizing poetical, heroic aspiration, the paragraphs mediating more mundanely between respiration (actual wind and breath) and inspiration (quoting literature or enacting the actual artifice of it) as the poet writes in his study, or flees from his study—this alternation of mode continuing until midway through the book, where a long passage of attenuated, breathy lines drives the poem to its (alternative) endings. These modes of aspiration and respiration, assumed to be wind-driven,—

> of the breath, two faced, methodically without plan
> explored through both seasons and weathers, either
> noon or night, at the usual fall of wind
>
> grasping, between wind and outside, silence within, the gap
> forcing heaves onward the light-weight bluster whose
> back and forth rocking records far off the other's,
>
> . . . .
>
> du souffle a double face, irreflechi et methodique,
> que j'explore par tous temps, autant sous le regime
> des deux chutes journalieres du vent, qu'entre vent
>
> au dehors et silence, dedans, haletant, l'ecart
> remet en braude, ce peu de consequence ebruite
> qui enregistre au loin dans son balancement l'autre,
>
> . . . .

—destabilizes the poetic situation. Meanwhile, the poetic strategy of self-reflexivity becomes pronounced at the halfway point in this tale of linguistic adventure and reversal, reversing, that is, the bilingual relation of facing pages (as in an English-French / French-English dictionary), albeit in lexical non-equivalence:

> soufflerie bipede, aban ancre, haletant,
> au soupir pivot,
>
> l'oubli respiratoire, qui bruit, couine aet susurre
> dans sa cage ousseuse,
>
> boudon thoracique, soudure, ultime infantile
> vestige marin,

clameur voilee, la retenue, sourdine ou
reprise, epique, a bout,

de force, abusant d'air, comme passants, chasses,
par la rue, du vent.

staggered breath, panting heaves a pivotal
pause, anchors to

the respiratory lapse that burbles, sough, trills
in its bone cage,

thoracic drone, infantile link and very last
vestige of sea,

the muffled clamour, held in, breaks on this mute
refrain, epic, ending,

perforce, by abusing air, as passers-by thrust
down the street, wind.

The heroic sentences, splintered, are remaindered in an unvoiced space, the space of the page. The implicit question asked by David Mus is: what poetics can best represent the inheritance of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarme? The explicit answer: the linguistic adventure that leaves a spiritual quest afloat with relics of absence. (For the full answer, *Le Sonneur de Cloches,* Mus' volume of poetics, is the book to read.) A devoted translator of Andre du Bouchet, Mus believes that this poet had already drawn the crucial lessons to be learned from their symbolist renunciations by mid-century, and that he still provides a touchstone for certain kinds of incertitude and incommensurate states of being. The vicissitudes of breath across the material absence of the page is Mus' calculated response to modern implications of archaic perplexity, and if in his own poetry du Bouchet tends to rock back and forth among sensible antimonies in a structuralist grammar, Mus favors concentration on a single element susceptible to the display of expressive and timbral scope. The assault of the body of the poem (and the body as it moves through the poem) is violently multitudinous and similarly communicates multiple strata of intention. Mus' allegorical augmentation of that decay, fast-forwarding with cultural overload, brings futurist impulse to late romantic sorrow. An operatic raveling results.

*

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Drafts 3–14* (Potes & Poets Press, Elmwood, Connecticut, 1991)

Whereas Symbolism and its discontents well provide a stylistic foundation for the poetry of David Mus, Objectivism in all its material disarray charges the poetry of Rachel Blau DuPlessis. A theoretical hinge between their two poetries is the concretely indicated idea of breath. Utterances buffeted by circumstances, yet primarily by brooding over the state of literature that has become the author's circumstance is what one sees played out in Mus's work. A draft—draft as the voiced objective foregrounding of writing, as pertaining to the contingent nature of the writing process giving voice to breath—is what one reads in the scroll of DuPlessis' text.

As William Carlos Williams urges in DuPlessis' epigraph to her long piece "X: Letters," the Objectivist alphabet reflects the settlement of keys under the typing fingers of the poet, and as such "QWERTY. . ." is manifestly a writerly metier.

As with the Gospels, or, for that matter, the nursery rhyme, each privileged letter in this typographic alphabet assumes the function of a rubric and topos: a rubric that generates language and a topos that generates thought, initiating at the very least a certain ready cognitive skill. Taken together, "X: Letters" is committed to completely exercising each letter in this alphabet, and you can be sure that DuPlessis' recitation transgresses the sing-song consistency associated with the tedium of rote practice as it surmounts even the pleasures of repetition enjoyed in childhood games designed for learning. As against memorization, *memory* leaps erratically throughout:

> Y
>
> Yet every word is a plot:
> so story, a story
> why not tell a story, travelling yare and tidy.
>
> Two years or whatever
> to the day
> by some coincidence
> There's mesh netting
> yoked to the cliffs
>
> . . .

Encyclopedic by structural implication rather than through a thoroughgoing display of knowledge, this poem envisions a formalist scheme for time entailed in the experienced particularity of place. "Yet" becomes "net," as it well might, in the Objectivist's aesthetics of conviction.

The opening poem in the book announces the material investigation of the draft as preliminary sketch. A long passage of phrases bracketed in the copy-editor's margin and marked "cut," brands the poem with a device indicating "draft" and with the literariness of the author as critical reader of the poetic text. What DuPlessis has hereby excised is metaphor, muscled, if not muscle-bound, in imagist intensity, in order to leave the word "of" starting the poem in mid-sentence, and so *in medias res*. Revealed by degrees is a deceptively modest yet entirely profound grasp of the concept, Of. Author of *The Pink Guitar*, among other books, and editor of *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, DuPlessis lacks no experience writing complete sentences, the putative form of male authority. But noteworthy in *Drafts* is that the dismantled proposition, the mythos of which is to give experiential priority to discovery of knowledge rather than to legislate knowledge into being, carries within its utterance its own form of (as DuPlessis has said of Oppen's writing) "rhetorical condensation"; and while certain feminist implications suggest themselves in DuPlessis' consideration of language, impressive beyond these stances currently deemed appropriate to gender is her thoroughgoing engagement with language, which makes of its radical alternative choice not a polemic but a discourse.

—MARJORIE WELISH

Peter Makin, Bunting: The Shaping Of His Verse (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

In the October 16 *TLS* Makin's book was reviewed by Lachlan Mackinnon, who complained about its "unclarity of purpose" and "over-enthusiastic" praise for Bunting. The supposed unclarity of purpose has to do with Makin having been ambitious enough to use his reading of Bunting's sparse remarks on epistemology to criticize the work of Stanley Fish. One mustn't take a poet that seriously, you know! The excessive enthusiasm seems to involve claims made by Makin on behalf of work other

than *Briggflatts*, which is "not a great poem" but "the only poem of Bunting's likely to survive." Oh the smugness of it all! But then again what should one expect from a prophet capable of writing that "The modernists were rum figures, and it is perhaps only Helen Gardner's tedious Christian conventionality that has made Eliot seem so rational." "Rum figures"? Helen Gardner? Ouch!

But then the British, or at least a good many of them—you're *not* one of the admirable exceptions Mr. Mackinnon—never really caught on to modernism. And because they didn't (most of them) it has given Americans an excuse to ignore modern and contemporary British poetry. Which is too bad, because there is actually quite a lot of it that's rather good. Even among Bunting's own generation of poets born at the turn of the century Bunting is not quite the lonely figure he's sometimes made out to be. There is, for example, Joseph Gordon Macleod. If you haven't heard of him, you're not alone; I've yet to meet anyone on this continent who has. And yet, when his book-length poem *The Ecliptic* was published by Faber in 1930, Bunting called it the most interesting writing he'd encountered since *The Waste Land*. Morton Dawen Zabel of *Poetry* thought it the best of three first books by young British poets who were pointing the way to a brighter future for British poetry—the other two books were by Bunting and Auden. But the poem seems to have disappeared from our collective memory after 1949, when Kenneth Rexroth, one of the last American avant-gardists not to speak condescendingly of British poetry, reprinted a section of it in an anthology, lamenting the fact that "Macleod seems to have given up poetry." Actually, he'd given up on a Poundian modernism, adopted a pseudonym, and moved to the Hebrides. A long poem with flashes of brilliance and starchy passages of torpor, *The Ecliptic* deserves reprinting.

I'm feeling nasty this evening, so I'll say that until the *TLS* drowns in its own ink, the best British poets and critics will continue to run for the hinterlands. Peter Makin, one of the best British poetry critics, has a job in Japan, not exactly the hinterlands but safely removed from the so-called centers of English civilization. His book might do for Bunting (in a smaller way) what Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* did for Pound. For it is not only Bunting's work but Bunting's world that is scrutinized here. One example will have to suffice: St. Cuthbert. Now Cuthbert is only mentioned once in *Briggflatts*, and yet Makin is surely correct to identify his religious insight as central to the poem. So we get a whole chapter on Cuthbert and Northumbrian monasticism, because knowing something about Bunting's affinity for Cuthbert and St. Francis and others can help us think about the way the poem privileges silence:

> silence by silence sits
> and Then is diffused in Now.

And all this is preceded by a chapter on warriors, who represent the other extreme to Cuthbert, another Northumbria: between these two poles *Briggflatts* is wound, in intricate patterns of violent contrasts. Nobody else has brought so much of Northumbrian culture to bear upon the poem as has Makin. And if one reads Makin's book beside Peter Quartermain's excellent monograph on the political history of Northumbria—*Basil Bunting: Poet of the North* (Durham: Basil Bunting Archive, 1990)—one can begin to understand what it is that distinguishes Bunting's late poetry. It is his desire to make himself, to rethink himself, as a Northumbrian. In some ways this meant a retreat from the international modernism of his mentors Pound and Eliot, or so it seems to me. Or one might call it an advance rather than a retreat: these metaphors mean nothing.

In Makin's book there's first-rate discussion of quantity as Bunting understood its possibilities in English, convincing analysis of the prosody of some of the odes (with poems by Eliot, Cid Corman, and others thrown in). And the criticism of Stanley Fish's relativism is intelligent if somewhat cryptic. Makin on Fish: "Herein lies the falsity of the Fishian style of relativism. It purports to be anti-absolutist, to free us from supposed fixities; it is in fact built of such fixities, of absolutes, in the main terms of its sentences, and is used to free us from what (Bunting said) Aristotelian universals have always freed us from: 'the irritating complexities of a living situation.' It frees us from poems that might have meant things to their contemporaries." Makin picks his way through some sentences by Fish and Hayden White in making this point, which might be compared to the complaint Charles Bernstein and others have made about some of the poetry selected to represent a new and supposedly enlightened cultural diversity—the mode of the discourse works at cross purposes with the so-called progressive intentions of the author, editor, or anthologist.

I wonder if Fish will respond? Probably not, as word has it that he no longer reads much poetry—a friend told me that he once caught a graduate student reading poetry and told him that only graduate students read poetry—and thus is especially unlikely to read a book on a poet as unattended as Basil Bunting. Would that we had more critics like Makin to free us from the arrogance and tedium of some of our theorists' prose.

Ivan Argüelles, *"That" GODDESS* (Berkeley: Pantograph Press, 1992)
Denyse Du Roi, *Filmmaking* (Berkeley: Pantograph Press, 1992)
Andrew Joron, *Science Fiction* (Berkeley: Pantograph Press, 1992)

These three books of poetry introduce a new series from a new press in Berkeley (P.O. Box 9643, Berkeley, CA 94709). A letter to reviewers explains that the press is interested in "a new poetics of the Sublime," a postmodern "sublimity of dislocation" which bows to the "desiring machine" of the French nomadologists Deleuze and Guattari. I'm not convinced that the three books have all that much in common, but their propaganda insists that they all participate in "an experimentalism designed to (apposite notion!) *pleasure* the reader, richly addressed both to intellect and the sense, composed with the conviction that *poesis = ekstasis.*" Before I look briefly at each book, I might note that, to the best of my memory, Allen Ginsberg is the favorite poet of the authors of the *Anti-Oedipus.* Among the three poets of Pantograph, only Argüelles graphs his masturbatory panting with anything approaching the rapturous frenzy of Ginsberg. But Argüelles is much more the mandarin and classicist than Ginsberg ever was, and in some ways is more interesting for it.

Argüelles' book is the first book of an epic poem in the works, it seems, 105 pages written in the white heat of some two and half months early in 1990, if one can believe the dates appended to the poem. With more pure raw undiluted gushing spastic energy than I have encountered in some time, Argüelles plugs his unabashedly confused and lucid meditations and exhortations concerning women, myth, and culture into a loose adaptation of Virgilian epic. The book is one vast catalogue of the abjection, misogyny, lust, and ego-stroking that is manhood as the modernists mostly understood it, turning about the specter of the indescribable unapproachable woman smoking a cigarette in the banal pose of the femme fatale. I suspect feminists will not much like the book, for all its self-consciousness about the history of representation in patriarchal cultures. Having struggled through it with both exasperation and considerable interest, I just wish I knew more about what Stalin and Trotsky are doing in the poem. Altogether infuriating, self-indulgent and just plain too long, there's no denying the power of the poem, which is largely a product of the energies of its rhythms, varied nicely within and across the urtext, introduction, prelude, proemium—yes there's that much foreplay, so that the actual poem becomes something of a letdown—and the twelve cantos of the

book. There's nothing for it but to quote at some length from this gigantic "book of ignorance." Here is one of the more conventional passages, from the proemium:

> tell me oh muse of the man who went by trial
> of rock and water sunwhipped to found this changing shore
> who ran the wheel the world in reverse a-spin
> risking tide the surf spent salt-burnt to the quick
> his pores inhabited by the goddess' dangerous musk
> that can withstand no man until in elysium
> marked by the shadow of the embrace of one
> bare-armed the enigmatic as a sphinx conjured
> to lie forever unmasked that man went by trial
> of fire and mountain face into the perverse net
> stung by fortune's wasp who decked the surface
> with his own blood with courage to unite thumb
> to index-finger to defy the Immortals even their banquet
> scourged by heat and sirocco deserted by companions
> left to die alone adrift on the thought of nothing
> tell me what were his names his myriad pains
> his wrath his obsessions his conduct of life
> his mental struggles his artistic and spiritual inventions
> his infidelities as well as his positive attributes
> his opinions about the gods his knowledge of music
> his many masquerades his inabilities potential
> and real his favorite monies and poems
> his typical and multiple defeats his poverty
> his humiliations his lack of diplomacy
> his pornographic passions his ontological anguish
> his angst and ennui his knowledge of french
> of german of italian and latin and of sanskrit
> his knowledge of greek his pursuit of knowledge
> his disdain of statistics and money his fear of death
> his drinking habits his fondness for black dogs
> his political apathy his masturbating tendencies
> his ability to whistle entire symphonies his ache
> his nostalgia for the nameless his rootlessness
> his inability to speak on the phone his parents. . .

And so on and so on. Someone who hates to speak on the phone can't be all bad. Argüelles is a serious customer and I wish him luck in the godawful task of attempting yet another American epic.

Reading Andrew Joron's book I kept thinking that, first, the pertinent French guru here is Baudrillard rather than Deleuze and, second, that I've never encountered a poet who reminds me so much of the great English modernist Mina Loy. Joron's sculpted epigrammatic lines together with the odd and abstract lexicons of science and its simulacra must account for this second impression. Here, for instance, is the opening of an early poem by Loy called "Lunar Baedeker," as good an example as any of Loy's Laforguean idiom and idiosyncratic lineation:

A silver Lucifer
serves
cocaine in cornucopia

To some somnambulists
of adolescent thighs
draped
in satirical draperies

Paris is livery
prepare
Lethe
for posthumous parvenus

Delirious avenues
lit
with the chandelier souls
of infusoria
from Pharaoh's tombstones

And here is the opening of Joron's "The Mind War":

The crippled woman walks
—her Mark IV exoskeleton
Hums

Her voice
Sealed inside another voice
—rasps like a feather
Made of metal
Except for a few black stars
The firmament is white

Joron's "experimentalism," such as it is, pertains to diction mostly, and has more in common with some of the projects of the historical avant-garde than with the more recent experiments of various language poetries. Indeed, as my comparison with Loy may suggest, there is not much that is really all that new about Joron's work, for all of his sophistication about fractured postmodern subjectivities. A preface announces his belief (derived from Lyotard I think) that the poetic "always exists on the border between the human and the inhuman." There are poems here that seem somehow *complete*, such as "Arise, Unblinded," "Smart Bomb," "Instructions to a Flea," "I am Joe's Brain," and "Petrified Music," and then there are poems like "Antenna" and "Agency" that read like pulp science fiction (the former) or graduate student aphorisms on theory (the latter). Like science itself, these poems are ultimately grounded in a kind of awe, which is, one supposes, where the sublime comes in. More unique than much of what passes under that tired old category of the "experimental" (yippee, another asyntactical surprise!) this book is well worth reading.

Among these three poets, I'm least impressed by Denyse Du Roi, who seems just another middle-class post-surrealist of the sort one once might have expected to find in *Unmuzzled Ox*. The book is dedicated to Ted Berrigan, and the poems show why. They're very much New York School revisited. Now I'll confess I never cared all that much for the mode (with some exceptions) so I'm probably not the one to comment on writing like the following:

> It's taken years to cultivate
> An ironic expression
> But the voice comes as a shock.
> The countryside is a suicide blonde
> Sprawling in a stained wine dress.
> Apple trees hold up their fruit
> Like roman coins that, judging from their
> Faces, would bite anyone who came near.

Maybe the apple trees will bite, but I won't.

Briefly Tooted

Let me also mention a few books that are worthy of notice but about which I can't be properly unfair, knowing the author or the publisher too well. Norman Finkelstein, who has written intelligently on Michael Palmer, Ronald Johnson, George Oppen, Robert Duncan and others, has a book of poems recently out from The University of Georgia Press, *Restless Messengers*, in the tradition of "high Jewish modernism," as the book's blurb

has it. More reassuring and less harassed and neurotic than most of what the blurbist must mean by "high Jewish modernism," these meditations have a gentle and sometimes melancholy wisdom that I respect and a prosody that sometimes could use a kick in the ass (sorry Norm!). Published under the imprint of the institution which doesn't begin to pay me enough is Hugh Seidman's *People Live, They Have Lives* (Miami University Press, 1992), his first collection in some ten years. David Ignatow once compared Seidman's work to Vallejo's, and while the comparison is flattering it makes some sense. I'm taken by the simple, direct, and at times even child-like diction and syntax as it veers off into the ineffable and the uncanny. I prefer the first half of the book to the second, which belabors a family history. Here is a poem from the first half, which the publisher will forgive me for quoting in full:

> The old Chinese stands and sleeps,
> and sways with the swaying car,
> like the stem of a plant underwater,
> and the leaf of his face breaking the water.
>
> And the fat woman in red sleeps,
> because red is the color of sleep.
> And the Hispanic girl closes her eyelids,
> like clouds on the moon and the sun.
>
> And the black messenger sleeps,
> his bird's head on his chest.
> And the blond with her child sleeps,
> sitting up as we bore through the dark.
>
> For now labor must be done
> by the poor from the planets of sleep,
> from the dust blown over the statues
> to the hard terrains and facades.

This is called "E Train-8:32 AM," a better New York poem than most for the way it makes its own space between documentarian and surrealist traditions.

—KEITH TUMA

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

CHARLES BERNSTEIN'S most recent books are *A Poetics* (Harvard) and *Rough Trades* (Sun & Moon). RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS has recently written on Loy and Moore in relation to Pound and Zukofsky in relation to Niedecker. JAMES CLIFFORD is currently working on ways of understanding contemporary intercultural processes through the overlapping paradigms of travel, borders, and diasporas. CLARK COOLIDGE'S *Rova Improvisations* will appear this year from Sun & Moon. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN is completing a translation of poetry and prose from Antonin Artaud's final 1945-48 period; his *Under World Arrest* will be published by Black Sparrow in 1994. ALLEN GINSBERG writes: "New book, poems, *Cosmopolitan Greetings 1985-92.* 4 CD Box Poems & Songs 1953-1992, Rhino Records, Fall 1993. *Hydrogen Jukebox*, opera with Philip Glass, Spoleto, Italy & USA Tour 1992." NORMA COLE'S most recent book is *My Bird Book;* forthcoming is *Mars* from Listening Chamber, Berkeley. AARON SHURIN'S newest book is *Into Distances* (Sun & Moon). Elizabeth Robinson writes: "I live in San Francisco and am a theology student. Most recent book is *String*, 1992, from French Broad Press in Asheville, NC." KEVIN MAGEE has other poems from *Tedium Drum* in *Avec, Hambone*, and *O-blek.* MICHAEL PALMER'S new collection of poetry, *At Passages*, will be published in 1993. His translation of Emmanuel Hocquard's *Theory of Tables* will appear soon from O-blek Press. MARJORIE PERLOFF'S most recent book is *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago, 1992). STEFAN G. REHM is a Doctoral student in German Literature at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. C.J. KEEP lives in Kingston, Ontario and is currently working on a hypertext installation for the Canada Council for the Arts. JED RASULA has completed "The American Poetry Wax Museum: Literacy Effects 1950-1990," which draws on several pieces published in *Sulfur.* JEROME ROTHENBERG'S forthcoming books are: *Gematria* (poems), Sun & Moon Press; *The Lorca Variations* (poems), New Directions; *Poems Performance Pieces Proses Plays Poetics* by Kurt Schwitters (tr. with Pierre Joris), Temple University Press. ELIOT WEINBERGER'S translation of Xavier Villaurrutia's *Nostalgia for Death* (with Octavio Paz's critical study of Villaurrutia; tr. by Esther Allen) has just been published by

Copper Canyon Press; Weinberger's second collection of essays, *Outside Stories*, was published fall 1992 by New Directions. PAMELA WYE'S art has recently been included in group shows at PS1, the Richard Anderson Gallery (NYC), and the Arkansas Art Center (Little Rock). *CASTING SEQUENCES*, Marjorie Welish's fourth volume of poems, is just out from the University of Georgia Press. A solo exhibition of her paintings may be seen at the E.M. Donahue Gallery in NYC in June. OSVALDO SANCHEZ is a Cuban writer and art critic living in Mexico. LIGERO SMITH lives in Brooklyn and is working on a review article on Dante in America. WILLIAM DORESKI has recently published poetry in *Seneca Review, Cimarros Review*, and *Swamproot*; he has published criticism in *Ariel, Harvard Review*, and *Paideuma*. ALLEN S. WEISS'S most recent book is *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism*, SUNY Press, 1992. ALAN GOLDING is completing *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* for the University of Wisconsin Press. MOLLY WEIGEL is working on an anthology in translation from *XUL* magazine. KEITH TUMA is now completing a manuscript which might be entitled *Fishing By Obstinate Isles: British Modernist Poetry and American Readers*.

LONG NEWS

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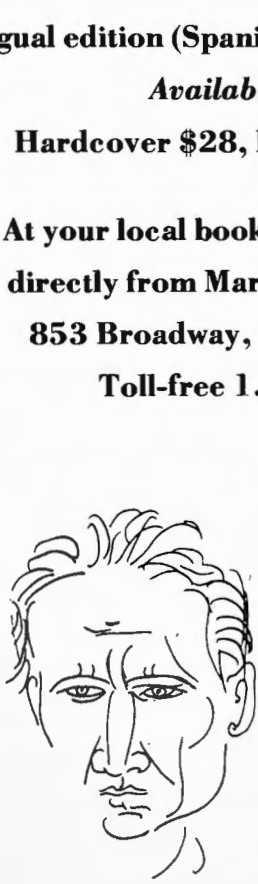

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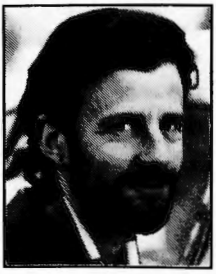

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—Gary Snyder

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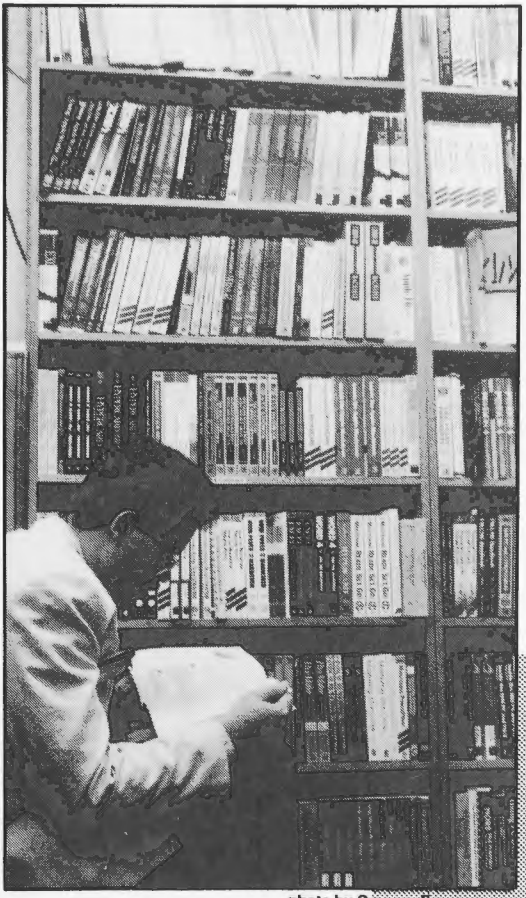

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Sulfur

FALL 1993

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: GERARDO SUTER—*COATLICUE,* courtesy of the photographer

1993 issues of *Sulfur* are made possible in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The English Department, and The World College of Eastern Michigan University.

EDITOR'S **NOTE**

The idea for this issue was simple enough: For most of this century, poets everywhere have been engaged in recovering and reinvigorating the past. A tradition in which to insert oneself, a tradition to rebel against, a tradition of rebellion, today's news from the perennial heterodoxy. Because of their work, literary history—and the supposedly immutable "canon" of recent debate—bears little resemblance to that of a hundred, even fifty years ago.

Lately, however, this continuing invention, preoccupation, seems to have dropped out, except among a certain few writers. In the poetry magazines, especially, the early Modernists have become the totemic ancestors—behind them: a great abyss. And rebellion without tradition, rebellion against one's contemporaries, can only produce a sterile avant-gardism, without the net of correspondences that the modernists wove and severed, without the wisdom of daily conversations with the dead.

For this issue, then, poets were asked to contribute work on, out of, into the past. The "past" was, for simplicity, defined as "before 1900," and there were no other criteria. The result—these essays, histories, poems, translations and conversations; this unlikely conference of Greek misanthropes, American presidents, Ch'an monks, Khmer kings, Polynesian lepers, Japanese princesses, glassblowers and amulet makers, utopians and erotomanes—does not pretend to any larger coherence. For this is, after all, not an anthology but a magazine: disparate elements, collectively messy, assembled according to one editor's particular tastes at one particular moment, and intended to be read in any order.

A few regrets: Nearly everything here was directly solicited. I was disheartened—though perhaps I proved my point—not to hear much from younger writers, or those unknown to me, despite an "open call" in an earlier issue. As it was, more than half of those I asked—including, surprisingly, many women—had nothing to send, or didn't respond. I was hoping for work coming out of the Arabic, or sub-Saharan Africa, or the pre-Columbian Americas. Remarkably, only one poet included responded to my request for anthologies of, or excerpts from, little-known texts in English.

But the magazine is, I think, full of extraordinary works, and artifacts from the tombs. And I'm particularly grateful to the many contributors who wrote, translated, or edited pieces especially for this issue. Thanks, too, to Clayton Eshleman for giving me this space to fool around in. I'll try not to do it again.

This is the second of two special numbers. With the next issue, *Sulfur* reverts to its usual format—including the "Reviews & Noticings" section and hot new work.

—Eliot Weinberger

LARRY **EIGNER**

The hours, keepers of Heaven

time is lost
as they move around and
die, the lunges gods
shout wounds Love, Ares, almost his end
spent "and night come down"
pine-trees, the hungry mountain
field of a hill

cities like any other
the homes you drive in o weakened ghosts
the airs have no blood, restless, like yourselves

infinite
bones, street by a wall

once they've sailed another
place valuable
kinds ships breathe
bottomless piles while on the destructive
tides

and over where the sky closes in
the light of Dawn from the sea

approach the altars of god
alive with the mounting cloud
and the damp, smell, the heart blood

the idea of
a palace
under the lagoon

and slow motion
that means more
time

only the grey sea

we must talk
if we see the thing

death we have made

or the long run is never finished
hands
of that holy height

a certain number of minutes

some brought him back alive

GUSTAF **SOBIN**

The Green Tears of St. Tratian

per far veyre

Situated at the base of a cliff, St. Tratian is the place name, ***le lieu-dit***, of an area terraced in orchards, vineyards and, occasionally, long rectangles of ground, gone fallow. On a particular rectangle, on a dry summer day, one can find—by simply scuffing the earth with the edge of a sandal—any number of small, green, tear-shaped beads. They're drops, droplets, really: the debris of a small, medieval glassworks. I'd come upon this area as, indeed, one comes upon most things, quite by accident. It covers no more than thirty or forty square meters of uncultivated soil, and constitutes—I'd come to learn*—a traditional element in any historic glassworks: that area in which waste was disposed of.

Still, one can easily enough imagine those drops—those green tears, as I like to call them—dripping, centuries earlier, off the white-hot nozzles of blowing-irons. As a poet, glass—I must admit—has always fascinated me. Indeed, I find the process of glassblowing remarkably similar to that of composing poetry. For in each, one brings totally disparate substances together, be they the sand and flux of the parison or the scattered instances of the poem. Then, by an abrupt increase in temperature, be it caloric or intellectual, those substances are brought to fusion. To inseparability: And, in so doing, they undergo a transformation, moving from their original, opaque state to one of pure transparency. Going, that is, from darkness to light. Then, too, in both glassmaking and poetry, the human breath—inextricably involved—finds its exhalation, at the end of the process, thoroughly englobed.

Among the droplets, I'd also managed to find a few, splintered bits of finished glass. From these I could fairly well assume that the glassworks were medieval, even early medieval, belonging to that span of indeterminate history we so aptly call the Dark Ages. For the few, splintered bits are

---

*I feel especially grateful to Danièle Foy for her superb study, ***LE VERRE MÉDIÉVAL et son artisanat en France méditerranéenne***, and to Dominique Carru, Director of Archeological Excavations for the Department of the Vaucluse.

thin as tissue, as broken shell: an unmistakable indication of their period. Then, too, the fact that the glassworks were located at the base of a cliff—I'd discover—was perfectly characteristic of those times. For a cliff provided four advantages. First and foremost, its flanks must have abounded in holm oak and aleppo pine: with the indispensable firewood, that is, for the ovens. Concurrently, it kept the glassmakers from encroaching on cultivated, or cultivatable, ground. Thirdly, the cut wood could be slid down the slope, rather than being dragged up from under. And lastly, cliffs provided ready-made abutting walls for provisional shelter. For glassworks of this sort were temporary. They lasted exactly as long as the surrounding firewood, or—what usually amounted to the same thing—as long as the terms of a contract, allowing for the exploitation of that wood, stipulated. The workers, upon arrival, would construct little hovels for themselves *in situ*, adding three stone walls to the natural fourth, then cover those rudimentary structures with long branches. The branches would then be bound in puddled clay.

And St. Tratian? How long had it survived as a glassworks? Judging by the expanse of the waste deposits I'd come upon, no more than two, perhaps three years. For deposits five times this size, I'd read, belonging to *verrerie* of that very period, had operated in a single location for exactly five times as long. My assumption here, needless to say, is nothing more than that: a calculated guess in the face of so much obscurity.

Aside from wood fuel for the ovens and the abundantly available clay for the crucibles, silica—accounting for at least 60% of the glass's composition—must have come from the sand banks of a nearby river, the Coulon. On the other hand, flux—the alkaline base which turns glass into a vitreous paste and allows for its malleability—must have been imported from a considerable distance. A swamp plant called marsh-samphire or saltwort or—by extension—glasswort, had been cultivated in the Rhone estuary from, probably, the early Middle Ages on. A halophyte growing in salt-water marshes, the plant itself is rich in sodium. Flowering in winter, ripening in summer, marsh-samphire, once harvested, was left to ferment—somewhat like lavender—in tall stacks. At the given moment, it was distilled in small, underground kilns, lined at the base in clay and covered, at the top, by a whole network—a mesh, really—of turtle shells. Just enough space was left between these shells to serve as flues, points of exhaust. Once cooled, the ash of this plant—carefully screened—was processed into hard, white balls, fit for transportation. From there—from the Rhone estuary, that is, to St. Tratian—is no less, I calculated, than a hundred kilometers distance.

And so, I came to discover, water was part of the process. For the sodium contained in that plant is essentially marine. Add to this, earth in the form of silicates, fire in the white heat of the ovens, and air, of course,

blown in sharp blasts down the full length of the blowing irons, and one has the four elements reunited: reunited, that is, for the sake of crafting the most ephemeral, perhaps, of all human products: glassware.

None of my own reading or rudimentary field research, however, helped me to understand who, exactly, they were, these itinerant glassmakers. Nor what kind of life they really led, moving as they did from site to site, hovel to hovel, exhausting the surrounding wood fuel as they went, and leaving little more than these droplets—these transparent, green tears—as mementos. For scarcely anything else remains today. I'd searched for an oven: for traces, that is, of some provisional, make-shift furnace. During the early medieval, these rural hearths, it seems, were comprised of little more than two rows of massive stones laid upright over bedrock, then capped with flat, overlapping slabs. The ensemble was then caked in layer after layer of refractory clay. Inside, the walls of the hearth widened somewhat into a womb-like chamber, while remaining open, at either end, like a wind-tunnel: to the north (the wind dominant side) for stoking fire, and to the south, for removing ash. But no, nothing. Hard as I looked, not a single trace of an oven at St. Tratian remained.

Curiously enough, it's the dead, lying in their sepulchers in yet other archeological sites, who have preserved the few pieces of glassware we have from this period. Traditionally buried with a goblet to the right of their heads and tilted in the direction of their mouths (or, in the case of ecclesiastics, held flush against their chests) they've lain there—the guardians of that fragile ware—gradually decomposing as the glass itself, bit by bit, has turned iridescent. Aside from the dead, however, and so much dry, notarial documentation, we know next to nothing. True, there's a few, Romanesque frescoes in the area belonging to a somewhat later period, depicting glassware in scenes such as those of the Last Supper. But of them? Of those? Of the glassblowers that moved, itinerant, through the Dark Ages of so-called historical time, even the specialists—the medievalists—can do little more than speculate.

One is left, in fact, with a period of time—over a thousand years—that has gone, for the most part, unrecorded. It left so little to record. This is true not only in terms of its glassware, but in terms of nearly every other manifestation of human activity. Living as I do in the heart of Provence, I find myself continuously confronted with this apparent lacuna in history. This lapsus in its unraveling. This hole in its very fabric. As an example, I take to market, each week, a small, humpbacked, stone bridge, built in the time of Augustus. Aside from so many drystone huts (called *bories*, in the region), there is nothing—architecturally nothing—between this stout little bridge, built in 23 BC, and the very first smattering—blossoming—of Romanesque chapels in the Twelfth Century. Everything else has been

razed, over and over, by successive invasions. Or, constructed in wood, has long since decomposed. Nothing whatsoever remains.

One wonders, living in a time such as ours, whether a similar period couldn't recur. Whether, indeed, in its own, surreptitious way, it hasn't already begun. Of course, our own Dark Age, were it to develop, would be luminous. Luminous with neon, cathode-ray, with the green screens of countless monitors, functioning autonomously in some post-linguistic semiotics, determining—unequivocally—every aspect of our lives, shaping not only our decisions but our very choices. Yes, a dark, an incandescent dark, that would have no further need of those very creatures—ourselves—who'd first wired its circuits, and set its screens aglow. Aren't we already entering this age, this shadow, the edge of this terrestrial eclipse? Aren't there signs, sufficient enough? And, not the least of them, the steady, ineluctable breakdown in literacy as we move from the verbal to the visual. From an articulated culture to one, electronically programmed. From a consciousness rooted in speech to so many neurons, reacting to optical stimuli. To life, in short, as video game.

As if foreshadowing that age, there are movements today (growing in both number and influence) that would break language down into so many strict, literal units. That would make of literality a *diktat*. As if to prepare us for that ultimate codification. Post-Marxist, post-Modernist, post-humanist, they'd gladly ban—if they could—metaphor from accepted usage. "Green tears," for instance, is metaphor. It's drawn, like all figures of speech, from a free play of the imagination, and motivated by the need to weave—reconcile—the disparate parts of one's experience into a common fabric: a fabric by which societies, throughout time, have traditionally come to recognize themselves. Themselves and—within the enlarged field thus created—the world around them. By association, resemblance, correspondence (in the Baudelairean sense) to bind—rather than isolate—their lives. To create—against the irrefutable, totalitarian fact—the common chords of what was once called a common culture.

Tears, green tears. They'd left us that much, hadn't they? They, who'd blown—out of molten parisons—those globes, those viscous bubbles no thicker than their breath. Had blown them into the air of those Dark Ages, yes, they'd left us that. The scattered debris of their vanished world.

As for ourselves, as we lose control, or—what amounts to exactly the same thing—*gain* control over our own ecosystem, it's hard to think that the future, if future there is, won't depend on how we read—interpret—the debris, the scattered debris of those vanished worlds. Of a millennium, for instance, that left us—at least at St. Tratian—with little or nothing if not its tears. Its green tears. The long, pendulous waste of its green, calcinated tears.

JACQUES **ROUBAUD**

Troubadour Amors

(Tr. by Richard Sieburth)

—*Springtime.* The moment natural to love. Sweet and mild. *«lo dous termini suau»* [the sweet suave season] (Jaufre Rudel). Bright. *«quest terminis clars e gens.»* [this season bright and noble] (Guiraut de Borneil). Fragrant. *«l'odors de l'erba floria»* [the scent of meadow in flower] (Peire Bremon le Tort). Verdure, color, leaf, flower. *«lo gens tems de Pascor. ab la frescha verdor. nos adhui folh'e flor. de diversa color.»* [lovely Eastertime with its fresh verdure brings us leaf and flower of divers colors] (Bernart de Ventadour). The waters quickened with light. *«quand lo rius de la fontana. s'esclarzis si cum far sol. e par la flors aiglentina.»* [when the stream at the fountain brightens as it arrives and the eglantine flower appears] (Jaufre Rudel). The scent of herbs. *«al prim qu-il timi sorz en sus.»* [as soon as the thyme comes to surface] (Raimbaut d'Orange). Radiances. *«e floris la mora»* [and the blackberry in flower] (Bernart Marti). The cold weather now left behind. *«la nostr'amor vai enaissi. com la brancha de l'albespi. qu'esta sobre l'abr'en creman. la nuoit ab la ploi'ez al gel. tro l'endeman que-ls sol s'espan. per la fueilla vert el ramel.»* [Our love goes thus like the hawthorn's twig which trembles on the tree at night in rain and frost till morning sun spreads through the green leaves and branches] (Guillaume IX). The sun spilling forth, flowers appearing. *«al apareysson de las flors. quan l'albre-s cargon de fuelh. e-l temps gens' ab la verdura. per l'erba que creys et nays.»* [at the apparition of the flowers when the trees load themselves with flowers and the fine weather with all that green growing and coming to life in the meadow] (Peire Rogier). The days getting longer. *«ar vey qu'en vengut ab jorns loncs»* [I see the long days are upon us] (Guillem de Cabestanh). Fruit. *«ar vey rengut en la cima. man vert madur frug pel cim.»* [I see arranged on high the green or ripe fruits of the peaks] (Raimbaut d'Orange). Everywhere *«la dols'umor de la saba»* [the sweet humor of sap] (idem.) Summer at last.

But if springtime resounds with love, love in turn is in itself such a springtime that it can make spring of any season. Of winter, for example. *«puois nostre temps comens' a brunezir. e li verjan son de lor fuelhas blos. e del solelh vei tant bayssatz los rays. per que-l jorn son escur e tenebros. et bom non au d'auzelbs ni chans ni lays. per joy d'amor nos devem*

esbaudir.» [since our weather is getting overcast and the branches are empty of their leaves and I see the sun's rays lowering as long as the days are dark and cloudy and the songs or lays of birds are not heard we should rejoice in the joy of love] (Cercamon). Light may disappear into the cold but love is always luminous. *«ara no vei luzir solelh, tan me son escurzit li rai. e ges per aisso nno-m esmai. c'una clardatz me solelha. d'amor qu'ins el cor me raya.»* [I no longer see the sun shine all its rays are dark to me but I do not despair for a brightness casts its sun on me love's rays driving into my heart] (Bernart de Ventadour). If love be strong enough, it can do away with the weather altogether: *«tant ai mo cor ple de joya. tot me desnatura. flor blancha vermelh' e groya. me par le frejura . . .tan ai al cor d'amor. de joi e de doussor. per qu-l gels me sembla for. e la neus verdura.»* [I have a heart so full of joy that to me everything changes nature a flower white vermilion and yellow seems ice-cold to me. . .I have a heart so full of love and joy and sweetness that to me the frost seems flower and the snow a bed of green] (Bernart de Ventadour). Or else the absence of spring rhymes with that wintry inner disposition which derives not from the absence of love but from the ache of love. Bitterness. *(l'aura amara* or bitter air). *«quant l'aura doussa s'amarzis. e-l fuelha chai de sul verjan. e l'auzelh chanjan lor latis. et ieu de sai sospir e chan. d'amor que-m te lassat e pres. qu'ieu anc no l'agui en poder.»* [when the sweet air turns bitter and the leaf falls from the branches and the birds change their Latin here I sigh and sing of love that keeps me bound in prison never did I have it in my power] (Cercamon.) Love is its own spring: stronger than winter, than cold, than frost, than bitterness, than falling leaves, than silence.

—*Harbingers.* Birds, above all. Their language, their "Latin" is that of love. They sing its sweetness, it suavity. The courtliness of their springtime song comes from their knowledge of love, their suffering of love. The courtliest of the birds are the nightingale and the lark. *«la lauzet' e-l rossinhol. am mais que nulh autr'auzell.»* [the nightingale and the lark love more than any other bird] (Peire Vidal). The nightingale's elation: *«lo rossignolet salvatge. ai auzit qui s'esbaudeja. per amor en son langatge. e-m fai si morir d'enveja. car lieis cui dezir. non vei. . .»* [the little nightingale in the wild I have heard his cries of joy for love in his own language and he makes me die with envy for she whom I desire I do not see. . .] (Gaucelm Faidit). The nightingale, bird that he is, takes great care with his *canso*; he is gifted with a natural *trobar* (Macabru). *«e-l rossinholetz el ram. volf e refranh ez aplana. son dous chantar et afina»* [the nightingale on the branch repeats and rephrases and rolls his sweet song and refines it] (Jaufre Rudel). He is without a doubt a master whose example is to be followed. As Peire d'Auvergne says: *«Amics Bernartz de*

Ventadorn. com vos podetz de chant sofrir. can aissi auzetz esbaudir. lo rossinholet noih e jorn. aujatz lo joi que demena. tota noih chanta sotz la flor. melhs s'enten que vos en amor» [Friend Bernart de Ventadour how can you keep from singing when you thus hear the nightingale rejoicing night and day listen to the joy that overtakes him all night he sings beneath the flower he knows more of love than you]. The lark, as Bernart de Ventadour says in his famous song ("Can vei la lauzeta mover") feels the intensity of love to the point of fainting. In Raimbaut d'Orange's *canso* "Cars douz et feinz" the initiator, the intercessor is the *bederesc*, a Beziers wren whose song provides an extremely complex lesson in form: he staggers his trills like bricks in a wall. When one is in pain, it is sheer torture to hear the happiness of birds: *«brais chans quilz critz. aug dels auzels pels plaissaditz. oc mas no los entan ni deinh. c'un'ira-m cenh. lo cor on dols m'a pres razitz. per qe-n sofer.»* [noise songs trills cries I hear the birds among the hedges but do not listen to them do not deign for I am girded with pain the ache has taken root in my heart from which I suffer] (Raimbaut d'Orange). But their joy, like that of the troubadour, has a source: the lady. *«et tant es sos cros gais. qu-il auzeill cantador. s'en alegren pels plais. e n'an gaug entre lor. e-n fan voutas et lais.»* [and her body is so gay that the singing birds rejoice in it among the hedges and take joy in it among themselves and make of it music and lays] (Gaucelm Faidit).

—*The Dona;* her beauty.

Love is for the lady. The lady is its end, its object, its reason. The lady is fair. She has *beltatz*, total beauty, body and spirit. *«blancas dens ab motz verais»* [white teeth on true words] says Arnaut de Mareuil. She is light *«car sa beautatz alugora. bel jorn et clarzis noih negra»* [for her beauty lights up a beautiful day and brightens a black night] (Bernart de Ventadour). She gives light. By her very nakedness. *«que la neus quan ilh es nuda. par vas lei brun'et escura»* [for the snow when she is naked beside her appears brown and obscure] (idem.). Brightness falls from her eyes. She is light made flesh: *«tant m'es grail' e grass'e plana. sotz la camiza ransana. quan la vei. fe qe-us dei. ges no tenc envei'al rei»* [so svelte and plump and sleek is she under her linen chemise when I see her I swear to you I have no envy of the king] (Bernart Marti). She is, says Guillaume IX, whiter than ivory. She is fresh: *«ges rams floritz. de floretas envoutas. cui fan tremblar. auzelhon ab lur becs. non es plus frecs»* [a branch aflower with burgeoning buds which tremble beneath the beaks of birds is no fresher] (Arnaut Daniel). The elements and qualities of her body's beauty call out for enumeration, and the poetic line is the unit most suited to receiving them: *«no-m meravilh si s'amors me te pres. que genser cors no crei qu'el mon se mire. bels e blancs es e frescs e gaise e les. e totz aitalos com eu volh e dezire.»*

[I am not surprised that her love so takes me I believe no fairer body can be seen in the world lovely and white it is fresh and gay and sleek exactly what I want exactly what I desire] (Bernart de Ventadour). *«molt me sap bo lo jorn qu'eu la remire. la boch' e-ls olhs e-l fron e-ls mas e-ls bratz. e l'autre cors que res no-n es a dire. que no sia belamen faissonatz»* [how I love the day when I gaze at her her mouth her eyes her forehead her hands her arms and the rest of her body where there is no correction to be made where there is nothing that is not finely fashioned] (idem.). For she is fashioned by the finest of workmen, God himself: *«anc pus N'Adam culhic del fust. lo fruig don tug em en tabust. tam bella no-n aspiret Crist. bel cos benestan car e just. blan e lis plus qu'us almatist.»* [ever since Lord Adam plucked from the tree the fruit that has troubled us all no thing this lovely has received breath from Christ lovely body agreeable precious well-proportioned whiter and more polished than an amethyst] (Guillem de Cabestanh).

—*The Dona*, again: the beauty of the lady is inevitably linked to her youthfulness, her beautiful manners, her hospitality, her learnedness, her intelligence, her "grasp" of matters of love. The combination of all these qualities, in addition to her social station (she is of noble birth, but not too noble), give her glamor or *paratge*, a word that blends outward appearance *[apparence]* and semblance *[paraître]* and kinship *[parenté]*, one of the most precious, untranslatable, irreplaceable, radiant and forgotten terms of the *trobar*. The lady is all the more worthy of being loved because she is already loved, or loved more deeply and more expertly; she is all the more loved because her *paratge* excites love and because she invites it with her eyes, with her sweet words, and because she beckons love to come to her, to sing to her in song. This is what makes her beauty, her valor so incandescent. And she thereby achieves that ultimate quality which is her *pretz* or price, the result of her own specific qualities combined with the light which love contributes to her and with the song which spreads her fame far and wide. The "price" of the lady is thus a compounding of the *pretz naturau* or natural price which inheres in her and of the value which love adds to her by means of song.

—*Amors:* at the center of everything, *amors*, love. *Amors* is a drive, a motor force of things and beings; an axiom, a primary principle. Love is a lord, but he is also a *dona* because he is linguistically feminine in gender; a bizarre androgynous god, he escapes personification and allegory; he is not really a character, but remains a concept that may or may not be invoked; "the proper name of a thing" (Gertrude Stein). He has his powers, his kindness, his purity; he is *fin'amors* (love as fine as gold): *«bon'amors ha un uzatge. co-l bos aus quan ben es fis. que s'esmera de bontatge. qui*

ab bontat li servis.» [good love has the same manners as good gold when it is pure he refines himself with kindness when treated kindly] (Peire d'Auvergne). He has his violence. He has his evil double, *fals'amors. Fals'amors* betrays, degrades, leads to falsity, to unbridled desires. He spreads *«com la belluja en la suja»* [like a spark in soot]; he causes love to become *«torta e brecha»* [twisted and cracked]—and *«lai on non pot modre lecha. plus aspramens no fai chatz»* [where he cannot bite he laps more greedy than a cat] (Macabru).

Given what *amors* is the axiom and evidence of, it so happens that the troubadours have no explicit theory of love; they do not say what it is but simply that it is (or, at the very most, in the case of *fals'amors*, what it should not become). The troubadours are no "explainoids" (as Gorky said of the Bolsheviks). They are also far removed from the Italians of the *dolce stil novo* (who are also obsessed with "doctrine" and "explanation"). This is one of the reasons for the relative failure of the various attempts to elucidate troubadour poetry or to establish the origin and significance of "courtly love." The various theses advanced—be they liturgical, folkloric, Arabic, sociological—only manage to cast indirect light on troubadour love; they cannot fathom the fact that it is an unmotivated affirmation of self in song. By the same token, the thesis concerning the "circulation of song," according to which song only sings of itself, is doubly blind, for it does not factor in "love for language" nor does it account for the fact that love does indeed have an existence or an evidence that is external to song and without which song could not take place.

Amors, both lord and lady, seizes the troubadour and transforms him into an *amaire* or *amador* or lover; it is for this reason that he chooses a lady, the vision of whom will be his initial weapon of conquest. *«amors o fai si com lo bons astors. que per talan no-s mou ni no-s debat. anzeis esta entro c'om la gitat. et adoncs pren son ausel quan l'a sors. e fin'amors esgarda e aten. una domna ab entieira beutat. on tuit li ben del mon son asemblat. e no-i faill ges amors quan tal la pren.»* [love behaves like the lovely falcon who by desire does not move or struggle but remains still until released and then takes the bird that is beneath and gazes at pure love and observes a woman of utter beauty where all the riches of the world are gathered and love does not err that takes her as such] (Rigaut de Barbézieux). For the troubadour, if he is to belong to love and thus be capable of song, must love a lady; love makes him sing, love makes him love, but he is not in love with love: what he loves is the lady whom love has chosen to be loved by him. It is in this fashion that the troubadour becomes an *amador.*

—*Cor:* love is housed in the heart. Love takes possession of the heart. The heart is prisoner of love. *«amors l'enclav'e l'escrinha e-l pres dinz son*

escrinh» [love enfolds and embeds it and keeps it shut in its little casket] (Raimbaut d'Orange) The heart is saturated with love. *«l'amors qu'inz el cor mi plou»* [love that rains into my heart] (Arnaut Daniel). *«per tot lo cor m'intra l'amors. si cum fai l'aigu'en l'espoigna»* [love seeps into my heart like water into a sponge] (Peirol). Without the taste of love in one's heart one is no more than a dead man. *«ben es mortz qui d'amor no sen. al cor cal que dousa sabor.»* [quite dead is he who does not sense something of love's sweet savor in his heart] (Bernart de Ventadour). Love directs the heart lovewards. So seized is the heart that its only desire is to speak its love *«ades vol de l'aondansa. del cor la boca parlar»* [now the mouth wishes to speak of the abundance of the heart] (Aimeric de Perguilhan). To speak, to sing—but of what, if not of the beauty of the lady whom love has inscribed in the heart. *«e port el cor on que m'estei. sa beutat e sa fachura.»* [I carry within my heart wherever I am her beauty and her appearance] (Bernart de Ventadour). Love seeds the heart: *«amors qu'es frugtz de la vera semensa»* [love which is the fruit of true seed] (Aimeric de Peguilhan).

—The *glance.* The sight of the lady, her glance, guide love toward the heart. The light of love so illuminates the lady that she casts this light back, in turn illuminating the heart with love. *«aissi cum selh que bad'al veiral. que-l sembla bells contra la resplandor. quant ieu l'esgar n'ai al cor tel doussor. qu'eu m'en oblit per lieis que vei aital.»* [thus like someone contemplating a glass that seems utterly resplendent to him when I look upon her I have such sweetness in my heart that I forget myself for her whom I thus see] (Peire Vidal). The eyes receive love from the very vision of the lady. *«quar li huelh son drogoman del core e l'huelh van vezer. so qu'el cor platz retener. e qun ben son acordan. e ferm tuit trei d'un semblan. adoncs pren veray'amors nasquenza. d'aisso que l'huelh fan al cor agradar. qu'estiers no pot nayssar ni comensar. mas per lo grat dels tres nays e comensa.»* [for the eyes are interpreters of the heart and the eyes go look for what it will please the heart to retain and when they are well-agreed and certain all three in one shared view then true love takes birth from what the eyes induce the heart to approve otherwise it can not be born or begin but by the agreement of the three is born and begins] (Aimeric de Peguilhan). But it is above all the glance cast by the lady that carries love (invisible yet material) through the air, a glance that is interpreted by the eyes for the heart that is to receive it. *«ab un dous esgartz coraus. que an fag lur via. per mos oillz ses retornar. el cor on los teing tan car.»* [through sweet glances of the heart that have taken their path through my eyes without return to my heart that holds them so dear] (Rigaut de Barbézieux). The image of love that is thus carried by the glance penetrates via the eyes into the heart where it remains; it is possible to rediscover it there, in her absence, when repeating one's love song. *«mas*

sui tant enveios. de lei vezer cui dezire. qu'inz en mon co la remire. e vei sas bellas faichos. per cho m'auci deziran. quant la remir en pessan. c'ades la cuich vezer nuda. enaissi come l'ai veguda» [but I am in such need of seeing her that I desire to gaze on her within my heart and see her lovely features there so I die of desire when I gaze on her in my thoughts for I think I am seeing her naked again the way I once saw her] (idem.). The finest image conserved in the heart is that of the lady naked.

—*Amar*: to be the one who loves, *amaire*, the lover. He who loves loves absolutely. He who loves believes absolutely; he has total trust, even despite the evidence. *«bos drutz non deu creir auctors. ni so que veiran sey huelh. ne neguna forfaitura. don sap que sa dona-l trays.»* [a good lover should believe no witness not even that which his eyes may see when it comes to the slightest treachery by which he knows his lady deceives him] (Peire Rogier). The complete trust which Peire Rogier here evinces may be a bit excessive. When one is in love everything is love. *«amors mi te jauzen e deleitos. amors mi ten en son douz recaliu. amors mi ten gallart et esforciu. per amor sui pessius e cossiros. per amor sui tan fort enamoratz. que d'amor son totas mas voluntatz. per amor am cortezi'e joven. quar d'amor son mei fag e mei parven.»* [love keeps me joyous and delighted love keeps me in its sweet embers love keeps me bold and pugnacious love makes me pensive and full of cares if I am head over heels it is because of love if I desire it is because of love if I love courtesy and youthfulness it is because of love all my acts all my conduct come from love] (Peire Vidal). Love is a durable possession for the lover, a state which theoretically never ends. *«amoros sui et amoros serai. e conos-c ben que per amor morrai. e ges per tan d'amor no-m posc partir. si ben conosc mon viure e mon morir»* [A lover I am and a lover I shall be and I clearly know that love will be the death of me and yet I cannot leave this love though I clearly know it is my very life and death] (Raimon Jordan).

—*Dezir*: that which returns, via love, from the heart to the lady. The lover desires. He wants to see, to see her naked, to touch her, to fold her in his embrace. He wants to be received by her at nightfall, when she is about to go to bed, when she sheds her garments. *«amors e que-m farrai. . .ara cuit qu'e-n morrai. del dezirer que-m ve. si-lh bela lai on jai. no m'aizis pres de se. qu'eu la manei e bai. et estrenha vas me. sos cors blanc gras e le.»* [love and what shall I do. . .I think I'll die of this desire that seizes me if the lovely lady in her bed does not receive me by her side if I do not stroke and kiss her and gather against me her body white and plump and sleek] (Bernart de Ventadour). *«soau e gent me conquis. can volv c'ieu vis. son bell cor blanc gioios giaser. don ben me vegna. e no*

cresatz qe ieu partis. . .can vi so qu'ieu plus volc veser» [suave and noble she conquered me when she desired me to see her lovely white body lying there in delight whence such good things came to me and do not think I ran the other way. . .seeing what it was I most wanted to see] (Gaucelm Faidit). If the lady's gaze has inscribed love within the heart, it also reflects it in the lover's eyes which desire vision, that is, desire to see the lady unveiled at night when her beauty, being the sole source of illumination, will grant even greater power to the "seignury" of love. *«ben aurai dompna grand honor. si ja de vos m'en jutgada. honranssa que essotz cobertor. vos tenga nud'embrassada.»* [lady it will be a great honor if you accord me the honor under the covers of holding you all naked and kissed] (Raimbaut d'Orange). The lady may even voluntarily offer herself up to her lover's eyes or kisses. *«q'enqer sent la doussas sabors. qe de greu malananssa-m sors. qan li baisiei doussamen. son bel blanc cor covinen. ab honrat. dous comjat. privadamen. adoncs frais. los doutz bais. mon marrimen.»* [I still feel the sweet taste that takes me out of my great pain when I sweetly kissed her lovely body white and well-made with her honored sweet permission in private thus is allayed by this sweet kiss my sorrow] (Gaucelm Faidit). If she had been sound asleep, the kiss would have been even sweeter. *«be la volgra sola trobar. que dormiso-n fezes semblan. per qu'e-lh embles un doutz baisar. pus no vuelh tan qu'eu lo-lh deman.»* [how I would love to come upon her alone she would be asleep or pretend to be and I would steal a sweet kiss since she does not want me to ask for it] (Bernart de Ventadour). The typical locus of desire is the room (including rooms made of leaves in springtime) and the garden. Desire transforms rooms into palaces, just as it always strains toward something "more," something imagined, something dreamt, or even impossible: *jauzimen* or *jauzir* [joy or sexual *jouissance*]. The attaining of *jauzimen*, which is the ultimate goal of *dezir*, presupposes reciprocity, something at once given and received. Which is what Jaufre Rudel says: *«las pimpas sian als pastors. et als enfans burdens petitz. e mias sion tals amors. don ieu sia jauzens jauzitz.»* [let us leave the piping to the shepherds and to mischievous children and let my love be such that the joy I give I receive]. But desire, whether because it is unattainable or because it is by its very nature violent, forever tends to overstep the bounds that the lady and love and the troubadour himself have imposed on it: *«e baizera-lh la bocha en totz sens. si que d'un mes i peregra lo sens.»* [and I kissed her mouth every which way so much so that the traces will appear there for a month] (Bernart de Ventadour).

—*Joi:* a state of harmony, ecstasy, and inner perfection which is given by love (when the lady so wishes). It is something far more intense than its later lexical dilution into "joy." It gives color to song, it lights up the world

to the eyes of the troubadour, it changes and improves everything: *«tant ai mo cor ple de joya. tot me desnatura»* [my heart is so full of joy that everything changes nature]. Joy can appear to be a quality of the lady, a substance that is physical (even if invisible) and that she transmits by according her love: *«per son joi pot malaus sanar. e per sa ira sas morir. e savis hom enfolezir. e belhs hom sa beutat mudar. e-l plus cortes vilaneiar. e-l totz vilas encortezir»* [with her joy she can heal with her anger she can kill a wise man can go mad a handsome man can lose his looks the courtliest of men can become common and the perfect commoner become courtly] (Guillaume IX). Joy is a truly magical substance that is said to "refresh the heart" and "renew the flesh." The lady who possesses such joy in her and who chooses to make a gift of it can parcel it out into any number of joys large or small, and each of these joys will enable one to get more or less close to ultimate *joi*. When the lady gives entirely of her body and of her love, this occasions major or everlasting joy *(joi major, joi perpetual)*. It is not surprising that "major joy" should inspire the excellence of song; nor is it surprising that it should be so rare and that Guillem de Saint-Didier, for example, speaks of only knowing it in his dreams. For Guillaume IX, *joi* is scattered throughout the world and when love is requited, the lovers receive this joy as their reward: *«totz lo joi del mon est nostre. dompna s'amdui nos amam»* [all the joy of the world is ours lady if we both love each other). For Bernart de Ventadour, the joy manifested and inspired by birds and flowers cannot measure up to the major joy that can only come from the lady. Guillem Ademar speaks of *joi* as the clothing he would wear if only his lady would agree to be naked for him: *«mas tant mi ten de joi nut. sill que-m don Dieus tener nuda»* [but I am kept so denuded of joy by her whom God has given me to hold naked]. Joy ls thus inseparable from the lady; her joy excludes all other joy; ever since he been blessed with total joy *(joi entier)* by his lady, Raimbaut d'Orange says has not been curious about anybody else *(«d'autre enquisitaire»)*. If the joy accorded by the lady is the first joy one has ever undergone, it will by the same token by the last joy one will ever experience in one's life. Or at least so Bernart de Ventadour claims.

The origin of the word *joi* is uncertain; the best etymology that has been proposed, the one that the best covers the unexpected reach of its various echoes, belongs to Charles Camproux who has suggested that it is a portmanteau word comprised of joy *[joie]* and play *[jeu]*.

—*Sofrirs:* rage and pain *(«ira e dolors»)*, suffering and sorrow *(marrimen)*. The reverse of joy; and inevitable. The deprival of joy, the "slowness of joy," the refusal of joy, the workings of the enemies of love, the regretting of lost joy, loving from afar *(l'amor de lonh)*, doubt, anxiety, the sense of emptiness *(niens)*—these are some of the circumstances and causes of the

suffering inseparable from joy. The purest and most primary kind of pain derives from unrequited desire: *«lo tems vai e ven e vire. per jorns per mes e per ans. et eu las no-n sai que dire. c'ades es us mos talans. ades es us e no-s muda. c'una-n volh e-n ai volguda. don anc non aic jauzimen.»* [time comes and goes and veers through days through months through years and I alas know not what to say my desire is always the same it is the same and does not change there is someone I want and have always wanted but I have never had joy from her] (Bernart de Ventadour). This suffering puts one in the presence of .nothingness: *«a totz jorns m'es pres enaissi. c'anc d'aquo c'amiei no-m jauzi. . .fauc maintas res que-l cor me di. tot es niens»* [every day the same thing comes to pass what I have loved has never given me joy. . .many things I do of which my heart says to me all is nothingness] (Guillaume IX). Suffering becomes obsessive: *«no posc sofrir c'a la dolor. de la den la lenga no vir.»* [one cannot keep the tongue from returning to the tooth that aches] (Giraut de Borneil). There is only one thing that makes the suffering bearable: that it be accompanied by joy, that *joi* and *dolors* somehow alternate, and that end of suffering somehow multiply the joy of *joi: «cen vetz mor lo jorn de dolor. e reviu de joi autras cen.»* [a hundred times a day I die of pain and come alive with joy a hundred times again] (Bernart de Ventadour). The idea that suffering is the necessary condition for joy, or that it is an illness that can be cured by joy, leads *sofrirs* to acquire a positive value. As Jaufre Rudel says: *«que pus es ponhens qu'espina. la dolors que abjoi sana.»* [more poignant than a thorn is the pain one heals with joy]. In any event, pain and love are inextricably wed; the example of Tristan and Isolde is enough to convince anybody of this: *«plus trac pena d'amor. de Tristan l'amador. que-n sofrir manhta dolor. per Iseut la blonda.»* [I suffer more deeply from love than Tristan the lover who suffered so much for the blonde Isolde] (Bernart de Ventadour).

—*Mezura:* in order to master desire, in order to keep its violence, its lovely "folly" from spilling over into recklessness, jealousy, or extreme possessiveness, in order to maintain not merely the equilibrium but rather the transcended tension between joy and suffering, timidity and audacity, hope and despair, the troubadours invented the concept of *mezura* or measure. There is no other term in the vocabulary of courtly song that has become as worn out, as enfeebled, as bland, as denatured as *mezura*. It has become (as it had already become for some of the later troubadours) a term used in the language of "good" education, a term designating a tendency to compromise, to moral tepidity, a synonym for the "golden mean" or the middle of the road. The sense of this term as used in *canso* is far stronger, far sharper. *Mezura* is the troubadour's (and the lady's) sole bulwark against the anarchy of Eros, against the destructive inclinations of *amors* which is expressed by the figure of *melancholy Eros*, that fatal

passion which forever threatens the lovers and which can easily cause them to fall into madness or death. It is not insignificant that "measure" should also be a concept central to the medieval theory of rhythm, music, and verse—meter being that which transforms into "song" the chaotic drive of language to articulate love.

Macabru magnificently situated *mezura* at the core of the love's greatest contradiction: joy vs. suffering. The properties of lovers, he observes, are *«jois sofris e mesura»* [joy suffering and measure]. Elsewhere he notes that *«mesura es de gen parlar. e cortesia es d'amar»* [measure is to discourse what courtliness is to love]. For Bernart Marti, love is a necessity and as such conforms to measure *(«amar dei. que ben es mezura»)*. The opposite of *mezura* is *demezura*, unmeasure or lack of measure, which is as loathsome as *mezura* is desirable. He is mad he who lacks measure *(«mas es fols qu-s desmezura»)*. He who does not observe measure is committing a fault against his lady and against love: *«e saic que fauc falhensa. cat non am per mezura.»* (Bernart de Ventadour). Which is why the lady, according to Aimeric de Belenoi, removes her hand from her glove and forces the lock of the heart open in order to place *mezura*, the guardian of love, there *(«que quan trays la man de son guan. frays de-l cor la serradura. e-i mes per guardar mezura»)*. Excessive desire, uncontrolled love are the companions of unmeasure: *«era-m combat sobrevolers. e sobramars e loncs dezirs.»* [now I struggle with excessive wants and excessive love and protracted desires] (Giraut de Borneil). Even the lady can be guilty of unmeasure, should she refuse her lover with excessive cruelty. But Peire Rogier is prepared to accept even this from her: *«qu'amors vol tal amadors. que sapchon sufrir erguelh. en patz e gran desmezura.»* [love demands such lovers as know how to suffer her pride in peace and great unmeasure]. On the other hand, the troubadours are clearly aware that it is neither possible nor desirable to maintain "measure" as a way of eliminating the madness, the non-sense at the core of all love. Aimeric de Belenoi boasts that he loves his lady *«d'un douz dezir plen de desmezura»* [with a sweet desire full of unmeasure]. The great lovers of the past were never so lukewarm as to be blind to this force that drives one beyond acceptable bounds. Guillem Ademar claims that he loves with less measure than Paris ever loved Helen *(«qu-us am plus senes mezura. que no fetz Paris Elena»)*. And Gaucelm Faidit observes that the straight path of love leads inevitably to the measureless realm of excessive desire *(«de fin amor sai segre-l drech viatge. si que tan am mi donz outra mesura»)*. If love itself cannot be entirely faulted for encouraging the excessive pursuit of its gratifications, there is cause enough for such desire in the lady's body itself—so fresh, so pure: *«quar m'es del corten pres. sai be que desmezur. mas son cors fresc e pur. fora dregz qu'an blasmes»* [prisoner of my heart I know well that I lack measure but her body fresh and pure should

rightfully take the blame] (Aimeric de Peguilhan). For it is perhaps the lady herself, her beauty, who lacks measure: *«mout es bell'outra mesura. genta fresca blanc'e lena. cill qe-m ten en sa cadena»* [she is beautiful beyond measure so fresh and white and smooth who keeps me on her chain] (Guillem Ademar). In short, even if "measure" is a property and a duty of love, *amors* nonetheless implies (and desires) its opposite; which is normal, since measure and unmeasure struggle against each other, mingle with each other, and inspire each other just like joy and sorrow, sense and madness. Aimeric de Peguilhan: *«mas anc no vi fin'amansa. ses alqes de follejar. ni joy d'amor ses pezar.»* [pure love has never been seen without a touch of madness nor joy of love without pain]. Bernart de Ventadour: *«e s'eu en amor mespren. tort a qui colpa m'en fai. car qui en amar quer sen. cel non a sens ni mezura»* [and if in love I make mistakes he is wrong who would reproach me for he who seeks a sense to love himself lacks sense and measure].

—*Servir*: the troubadour approaches love as if approaching a lord; and the lady who bodies forth this love, who bears this love in her gaze, in her kiss, in her nakedness, who commands the coveted fiefdom of joy, is the very incarnation of this seignury; which is why the lover addresses the lady like a suzerain. To serve the lady is to observe all the standard conventions of feudal service; and all this is summed up by the strange title by which the lady is designated, namely *midons*, which may be roughly translated as "my lady lord" (the feminine adjective with masculine noun is evident in the Portuguese *mia senhor* which is used by the Gallician disciples of the troubadours; the gender of the Occitan term is more veiled, more hidden). The double-naturedness and the double-genderedness (morphologically and linguistically) of the term *midons* is explicitly thrown into relief by a line of Raimbaut d'Orange's that plays on the colors of its vowels: *«de midons fatz dompn'e seignor»* [of *midons* I make my lady and my lord]. At the outset of his "doctrinal" *canso*, Guiraut de Calanson thus addresses the obligatory lady: *«celeis cui am de cor e de saber. domn'e seignor et amic volrai dir»* [to her whom I love heart and mind my lady my lord my friend I should say]. This is not the place to examine the various attempts to explain this obviously quite paradoxical aspect of courtly love. No single sociological, psychoanalytical or formalist interpretation has, to my mind, been able to come to terms with the word *midons* and all of its implications.

The troubadour offers to serve, to be a vassal; he asks of the lady that she receive him and recognize him as such: *«bona domna re no-us deman. mas que-m prendatz par servidor. qu'e-us servirai com bo senhor. cossi que del gazardo m'an.»* [good lady I ask nothing of you but that you take me as your servant I will serve you as a good lord no matter what the reward] (Bernart de Ventour). Guillaume IX "renders himself over" to his

lady; "retained" by her, he is bound to her by oath, a bond that will never be dissolved, and he submits to her by offering his feudal obeisance. As he is about to leave this world (at least in song), this is one of the things he regrets the most: *«mais non serai obediens»* [I shall no more be the servant of love]. The troubadour who serves ls a "liege man," someone who has sworn fealty and obedience. Occasionally the lover provides a physical image of his submission: *«domna-l genzer c'anc nasques. e la melher qu'eu anc vis. mas jonchas estau aclis. a genolhos et en pes. el vostre franc senhoratge»* [lady the most noble ever born and the best I have ever seen hands joined I bow to you whether on my knees or on my feet in your frank domination] (Bernart de Ventadour). What the troubadour expects in return is the lady's protection and some sort of reward for his services *(guerredon);* he also hopes for *joi*, which the lady can parcel out like a piece of land—that minuscule territory of joy, at once her greatest power and the greatest benefit that the lover awaits from his suzerain, his lady. This fantasy of feudal fealty is often inextricably bound up with desire. Thus Bernart de Ventadour (again) imagines himself at the bedside of his lady: *«pres de leih josta l'esponda. e-lh traga-l sotlars be chaussans. a genolhs et humilians. si-lh platz que so pes me tenda.»* [near to her at her bedside I will pull off her snug shoes on my knees in utter humility if it so pleases her to stretch out her foot to me]. The lady is a lord and her worldly possessions, her castles, are her beauty, her value, her "price." She is more lordly than any other lady; she lives in a tower taller than anybody else's. Given this exclusive and absolute state of feudal dependence, it follows that the relation of troubadour to lady is founded on inequality (except for the fact that both serve that higher and more universal lord who is *amors).* Aimeric de Sarlat sums the situation up succinctly: *«sieus sui non es ill mia»* [I am hers she is not mine]. If the troubadour happens to be a lord himself, he places his possessions in the hands of the lady; he "holds" them through her: *«qu'ab lei de cui taing Aurenga. no-m aian tan mei prec valgut. qu'ab si m'a baisan retengut»* [near to her through whom I hold Orange my prayers only served to be detained by a kiss] (Raimbaut d'Orange). But the prime possession that the troubadour most frequently offers up to the suzerainty of the lady is his loving heart: *«lo cor en tenh en loc d'altre rictatz. e mes chansos en loc de vassalhatge»* [instead of other riches I have my heart and my songs instead of vassalage] (Giraut de Borneil). If the troubadour is the lady's vassal, he is thereby ennobled by this position; just as a knight glories in his king's power, so the troubadour basks in his lady's radiance. But the attraction of humility and submission can become so "unmeasured" that he will be tempted to represent himself as even more humble, even more lowly at the feet of the tower of his "lady lord," *sidons.* Raimbaut d'Orange is not merely satisfied to submit his fiefs to her authority; he imagines himself to be a serf confronting his master. With a cord around

his neck, Giraut de Borneil "gives" himself, "offers himself up" to his lady. Vassal or serf, he who serves chooses to be in total thrall in order to be irreproachable in the eyes of his lady lord: *«nulhs hom non es tan fizels vas senhor. qu'ieu non sia plus fizels vas amor. non solamen en chanso ni en rima. mas en totz faitz»* [no man is as faithful to his lord as I am faithful to love not only in my songs or rhymes but in every action] (Almeric de Peguilhan).

—*Merce:* the mercy or pity that love places in the lady's heart and that has its source in love's charity. It is through mercy that the lady will overcome her cruelty, her coldness, her disdain, her hesitations, her anxieties, her trepidations concerning the enemies of love, their surveillance of her, the jealousy of her husband, etc.—and it is mercy that will eventually lead her to realize that she could (or should) reward the faithfulness of her servant given that the songs he has composed for her will spread her "price" among the knights and ladies of all the "good countries" of the world. If mercy does not intervene, all desire, all hope is vain, and death is near, that symbolic death of the *trobar* which is an "exile" or a flight *«no sai on»* [I know not where] in which one disappears into the nothingness of the *faidit*, the man who has been driven out of his country. If the lady's heart has not been softened by *merce*, love will swing over into this void *(niens)* or no-thing *(non re)*, this "I know not what" *(«no sai que s'es»)* that is always attendant upon doubt and delay. The appeal to mercy is a way of exorcizing despair. The lover clamors for mercy. I am, says Aimeric de Perguilhan, your man crying mercy mercy mercy *(«clamans merce merce merce»)*; he fears that he will be the victim of the lady's vacillation between *merce* and *desmerce*, mercy and unmercy, and that the very intensity of his supplication will provoke her to become pitiless. For if the lady's heart has hardened, it is very difficult for pity to soften it: *«non es tan greu ab obrar fregz aciers. com lo seus cors durs tornar plazentiers.»* [it is less difficult to work cold steel than to melt her hard heart] (Raimon Jordan). Mercy, however, is demanded of the vanquisher: *«las mas jonhtas col liguat e-l cor pres. vos clam merce bona dona plazens. c'aisi com etz bela et avinens. merce ajatz de mi c'avetz conques.»* [my hands joined my neck in chains my heart captive I clamor for mercy good lady of pleasure since you are so fair and pleasing have mercy on me whom you have conquered] (Gaucelm Faidit). The lady has triumphed over the troubadour in the war of love; he had wanted to take flight; he had tried to escape his fate; he had refused to submit; and now, roundly defeated, he is taken prisoner: *«eu que-n posc mais s'amors me pren. e las charcers en que m'a mes. no pot claus obrir mas merces.»* [what can I do If love seizes me and the prison into which he has thrown me can be opened only by mercy's key] (Bernart de Ventadour).

—*The enemies of love:* the feudal analogy, with its image of love as vassaldom, provides a framework particularly well-suited to the imagining of the various dangers that threaten the lover. If the lady is the lord of love, if the troubadour is her vassal, how can he can ever satisfy his desire for her exclusive love? Might not the lady lord have other vassals as well? Every other singer, every other troubadour is thus potentially a rival; every other individual instance of poetry is therefore suspect, for the poetic quality of some other song or the greater fame of its singer might potentially sway the lady away from the one who serves her so faithfully. Other singers threaten to sing her praises, to "reason about love" before her, to address their *cansos* to her, to take advantage of her lover's absence to defame him. Worse yet, they will bruit his love to ears that should not hear of it, they will picture his love to eyes that should not see it. The troubadour thus lives surrounded by enemies; this spawn of rivals, ever-present, Argus-eyed and honey-tongued, is called by the name *lausengiers* or "slanderers"—although the term initially referred to the action of praising. But one man's praise is another man's slander, even if the object is the same (the favor of the suzerain, of *midons).* The *mise en scène* of courtly love, with its petty ambitions and jealousies forever swirling about, with all its knights and ladies holed up in the same castle, endlessly talking about each other to each other, provides a perfect stage for the atmosphere of anxiety in which the adventure of love plays itself out. The lovers, once they have recognized each other as such, do not go off to some secret retreat to dally together; *amors* is an affair that is at once is utterly private and utterly public. The song of love must make itself heard above the din created by the hostile voices of the *lausengiers.* And the *canso* often expresses the hate that these slanderers inspire in the heart of the true lover: *«als durs crus cozens lauzengiers. enojos vilans mals parliers. dirai un vers que m'ai pensat.»* [to the hard crude caustic slanderers boring boorish foul of tongue I shall speak this poem they have brought to my mind] (Raimbaut d'Orange). According to Raimbaut, their loathsome words are like snow that can only be thawed by the sun of love; and yet, as the Countess of Die notes, even the sun can lose its radiance when surrounded by the clouds of slander. *Lausengiers* can bring about a break between the lady and her lover, they can drive out the troubadour and force him into exile. Guillem de Cabestanh says that because of them he will have to go abroad, that he cannot remain where he is because they will have killed him with their envy; they will rejoice to see him living like a savage; he will go on his way like a poor pilgrim; their dissatisfied desires will have murdered him *(«en autra terra ira penre lengaje. si que ja mai en aquesta non seia. e-l lausengier qui m'on mort par enveja. n'auran gran joi can me veran salvaje. e-m menerai com paubres peleris. e-l desirer mi auran tot aucis.»).* Raimbaut d'Orange considers the "nothingness" of the slanderer, the

torture and horror inspired by his words, to be essential components of the *trobar*, and he devotes a *cobla* of his *canso* of the inverted flower to them: *«mas una gen fad'enversa, com s'eron noirit en tertres. que-m fan pro pieigz que conglapis. q'us quecx ab sa lengua trenca. e-n parla bas et ab siscles. e no y val bastos ni giscles. ni menassas ans lur esjoys. quan fan so don hom los calm croys»* [but the species of inverted *fadas* that were raised on the hills causes me more pain than ice they murmur and whistle under their breath nothing can stop them neither sticks nor branches nor threats they take joy in acting like crows]. These nasty words, these words uttered in a malevolent whisper, are prime examples of "hirsute" words, words whose consonantal blockages, whose harsh, coarse sounds break up the harmonious continuity of the poetic line. O God, says Bernart de Ventadour, If one could only sort out the false lovers from the true, If only the slanderers and cheaters could wear a horn on their foreheads *(«ai Deus car se fosson trian. d'entels faus li fin amador. e-lh lauzenger e-lh trichador. portesson corns el fron denan»)*. The most serious malady that the slanderers can provoke is jealousy, a form of sickness that can afflict either the husband or the lover. *Lausengiers* are filled with envy and it is because of this envy and this hate which they harbor against pure love that they try to poison everything with jealousy: their goal is to make the lady jealous, the husband (if there is a husband) jealous, and the troubadour jealous. But the conditions of love are such that slander and jealousy can never be fully eliminated from the horizon of the lover and his song; for just as the troubadour is by definition the rival of every other troubadour (and thus becomes their *lausengier),* so he can never feel himself secure from doubt or jealousy—except during that rare moment of exaltation that is *joi*. The telling exterior sign imagined by Bernart de Ventadour—the horn on the forehead of the *trichador*—might on certain occasions just as well be raised on the forehead of the purest or finest of lovers. Folquet de Marseille, who was an expert at treason, expressed this possibility in a revealing line: *«qu'ieu sui tornatz de mezeis gilos»* [I have turned into someone jealous of myself].

—*Senhal:* to avoid the possibility of slander, the ideal thing would be to keep love entirely secret: *«ai Deus com bona for-amors. de dos amics s'esser pogues. que ja us d'aquestz enveyos. lor amistat no conogues.»* [O God how beautiful would the love of two friends be were it possible that one of those envious persons never knew of their friendship] (Bernart de Ventadour). Kept secret, love would tend toward silence. But given that love must speak its name in song, that the *pretz* of the lady must be spread far and wide, that the joy of love must result in melody and rhyme, there is a basic contradiction at work here which the concept and the practice of the *senhal* attempts partially to resolve. The *senhal* is the secret name

given to the lady so that she may be named in the *canso* without her actual identity being revealed. The *senhal* is one of the names of love; If masterfully chosen, it will articulate both the essence of the lady in question as well as the essence of the *canso* that celebrates her. Here are a few *senhals* to conclude this brief account of troubadour *amors:*

-Alauzeta (Skylark) Rai (Ray) Miels de Domna (Finest of Ladies) Bels Espers (Lovely Hope) Bels Cavaliers (Lovely Knight) Doussa Enemia (Sweet Enemy) Mirail de Pretz (Priceless Mirror) Noms Verais (True Name) Na Dezirada (The Desired One) Bel Carboncle (Lovely Carbuncle) Bel Diaman (Lovely Diamond) Bel Cristalh (Lovely Crystal) Bel Cors Joios (Lovely Body of Joy) Bel Cembeli (Lovely Sable) Na Dous Esgar (Lady Sweet of Glance) Na Esmai (Lady Emotion) Bona Esmenda (Fine Amends) Mon Estiu (My Summer or My Harvest) Mon Estui (My Sheath) Na Faidida (Lady in Exile) Na Flor (Lady Flower) Flor de Lis (Fleur-de-lis) Na Flor Vermelha (Rosy Flower) Gai d'Amors (Gay with Love) Na Gaug de Cor (Joy of Heart) Mon Guerrier (My Warrior) Na Jauzida (Lady Joyous) Fin Joi (Pure Joy) Mon Joi (My Joy) Joi Novel (New Joy) La Loba (She-Wolf) Mon Sobre Gaugz (My Over-Joy) Mon Ses Enjan (My Betrayless) No Conten (Not Content) Bel Papagai (Lovely Parrot) Na Bei Ris (Lovely Laughter) Bel Senhor (Lovely Lord) Ses Merce (Without Mercy) Sobre Luenh (Far Too Far) On Tot Me Platz (Where Everything Pleases Me) Tristan.

KARIN **LESSING**

Ten Sonnets by Louise Labé (c. 1525–1565)

I.

No one, though more shrewd than Ulysses,
could have foreseen that what appears so divine
and graceful, is honored and respected,
would bring me so much anguish and pain.
For you, Love, have pierced me thoroughly
with your lovely eyes and there's
no remedy—if you haven't any—
for my gorged and blazing heart.
O harsh fate, it's as if a scorpion had stung
me and I begged the same creature
for a cure. I so want to put an end
to this torment yet without extinguishing
what I hold most precious: the desire in me.
It will kill me. There's no way out.

II.

O beautiful brown eyes, O sidelong glances,
O breath of sighs, O steady flowing tears,
O black nights waited for in vain,
O shining days that in vain return.
O grieving, yearning without respite,
O squandered time nothing replaces,
O thousand nets spread for a thousand deaths,
O worse that's yet to come.

O laughter, forehead, hair, arms, hands and fingers
O plaintive lute, viola, bow, and voice:
that many torches to set fire to one woman!
And you, who are swirling all these brands,
probing and scorching me throughout,
not one spark has fallen on you.

III.

When I see your blond head crowned
with the green laurel, your lute bringing forth
such a sweet complaint that rocks & trees
would follow you, when
I see you obtain the highest honor and praise
so that everything else looks pale, then
my passionate heart says to itself:
All these qualities, talent and virtue
for which you are given love and esteem,
couldn't they, in the end, make you love in turn?
And thus add to your list of titles
that of taking pity on me, your love ever so gently
kindling on mine.

IV.

O to be ravished to that breast,
to him for whom I die—
if envy ceased, to live with him
my days' short rest—

If, in his arms, he said to me,
    dearest, in one another let us be
    content, assured no storms, tides,
    straits, can sever us—
If, with my arms holding him tight,
    like ivy encircling the tree,
    envious of my joy, death came—
Kissed then, and kissing,
    my life rushed out upon his lips
    sweeter than life, to taste that happiness.

V.

The morning wind as it rises
    to greet the sun's return, wakes
    water & earth out of sleep that kept
    the gentle flow from murmuring, from adorning
itself with brighter brighter flowers
    the earth. Now birds
    on every branch
    delight.
Dance trampled grass
    where the moon still cools—
    O morning wind,
let me renew myself in you
    entirely, return my sun,
    you'll see: I too am made lovelier.

VI.

To thunder-racked, hail-
battered heights of Caucasus
fine days return,
light-suffused. . .
When Phoebus' ring is steeped into waves,
his sister shows her slanted bow. . .
Even the Parthian flees, saving his arrows,
his wrath slackened.
At one time you complained, I consoled,
that too slowly my love kindled.
But now, in your arms, and
burning as you wanted me,
you, your fire watered, are
colder than I ever was.

VII.

I shun the city, temples, all places
where I see you, where your pleading
so pleases me that you can compel me
to give you what I' ve prized most.
Masques, tournaments, games, bore me:
I can imagine nothing beautiful without you.
It's so bad I run from what I desire
—my face and thoughts turned away—
to stray alone in this thick wood.
But after wandering aimlessly, I realize
that if I want to be free from you,
I shall have to live outside of my self,
or further still,
find an abode.

VIII.

Kiss me once more, again kiss me, kiss,
never stop! Give me one more to taste,
to savor, one of your most amorous
kisses: I'll return each one with four
hot, fiery coals. Why, still not
satisfied? Here are ten, ten more
sweet kisses, thus mingling yours
with mine for greatest joy.
Two lives we'll live, now
in one's self, now in the other. . .
Let me babble on foolishly just this once,
for I'm always so ill at ease, holding back,
there's no contentment for me in life
unless, overflowing, I break free.

IX.

I was foretold that some day I would love
the one whose portrait was described
to me: when he came, at once
I recognized him. Then, when I saw
how he was driven by his fate,
I pitied him and love's blind enterprise
and so compelled myself
until I, too, loved utterly.
You'd think what heaven and fate had first
created could only thrive—
but when I see such cruel storms,
such clouds closing in, it's as if hell itself
had from the very start
wrought this shipwreck upon me.

X.

Blame not my love, Ladies, that I've felt,
touching me, a thousand torches,
a thousand labors, a thousand of pain's teeth
and that I've squandered my time crying.
No great fault tag to my name.
I yielded, the agonies are now,
don't sharpen their violent sting.
I warn you: if he finds you out,
Love can—without bringing in Vulcan's ardor
or Adonis' beauty—make you
love more, and with less cause
and stranger, wilder passion
drive you,
unhappier than I.

Louise Labé, a Postscriptum

"Lionnoize," is what she added to her name.
Works by Louize Labé
Lionnoize.

Inseparable, Louise and Lyon. Who, today, would link his or her name to place, claim such intimacy? Stand and be remembered as Parisian, New Yorker, Berliner, Calcuttan? Inseparable and yet neither in her sonnets and elegies nor in her prose does she explicitly refer to anything we connect with the Lyon of today or of the past. Lyon, the ancient capital of Gaul where the Rhône and Saône rivers meet, where mists drape the tall melancholy houses until a beginning mistral disperses them and where each one of sixty thousand hand looms is producing twenty inches of silk per day. . .

Silk. Looms and commerce. The great trade fairs have opened the doors between France and Italy: the Renaissance rushes in. Wealth and exchange: silk in exchange for books, books in silk covers?

But Louise has nothing to do with silk, not directly. What pervades her childhood and most of her adult life is coarse, smelly and altogether unsuitable for finery and ornament. Hemp is the fiber her father and, later, her husband used to make ropes, the ropes for managing sails and spars, for hauling the multitude of boats on both rivers. She owes much of her luck to all three: relative wealth to the fiber, its craft and trade and it, in turn, enabled the father to provide her with an education, the husband to offer

her ease, comfort and most precious of all, much undisturbed leisure time. Which she uses. Which she enjoins others to use.

Of how it was employed, Louise Labé offers some information herself. In the dedication of her book to Clémence de Bourges which is, at the same time, an introduction, she writes: ". . .but having spent part of my youth practising music and having found the rest too short for my mean understanding. . ." Modesty or irony. Both, for even in her lifetime, well before her works were published and later, when they had all but been forgotten, she had earned a reputation as scholar, as "femme très docte." Like Christine de Pisan before her, she devotes her time to learning, to the study and practice of music and languages, to the composition of verses in Latin and Italian in the manner of Petrarch, the poetic model of her time. (The immense popularity of Petrarch! Again, there is no equivalent today—while Louise is writing, another "Lionnais," Maurice Scève, claims to have discovered Laura's tomb in Avignon; the king himself composes an epitaph.) Petrarch and Boccaccio and Castiglione's *Courtier* and all the classics known. . .Learning and pleasure in learning. That she also excelled on horseback and participated in tournaments, a girl of fifteen, sixteen perhaps, in male dress, jousting with others her age on the occasion of a royal visit or passage through town we know from her own account in one of her elegies. An early surname, "Captain Loys" sprung from that.

Singular but not exceptional. It's the time and place that are. A brief period in the history of Western Civilization in which the revived energies of the past provide a canon and code within which a woman, and a woman of mediocre social status like Louise Labé, can desire and hope, with some confidence, to deploy her talent and gain full possession of her self; a place, Lyon, wide open to the exchange of goods and ideas, with its own constellation of male and female poets and where, from the year 1500 on, 156 print shops are turning out books by Plutarch, Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Aretino, Alberti, Ariosto, Castiglione, Clément Marot, Rabelais, Maurice Scève, Pernette du Guillet and, in 1555, Louise Labé.

Time spent. In the sense of what actually happened. The unique experience, the essential encounter that demanded to be recalled, relived and crystallized in writing and for which her sonnets especially would provide the formal solidity, the perfect sharply defined architecture.

Does it matter who it was, the handsome youth on his way to fight the wars in Italy who turned her head at sixteen and whom she most likely never saw again or, later, the poet who was to rekindle the first passionate emotion? What does matter is "Amour," the transforming experience of Love which alone could put her on equal footing with the poets of the past whom she admired most and with those of her own time who did or did not come to her house to enjoy her graceful and witty company, admire her garden and try her exquisite "confitures."

Love, then, in its aspect of a formidable, fateful force, in its wrenching physical reality, with its means and effects, its pledges and discourse, its defense, irony and conventions is the stuff, fiber and fabric of her *Elegies* and *Sonnets*. Love appears again in her only work in prose, *The Debate between Folly and Love*, but here much reduced in its claim to precedence. Not only does Love fail to convince Folly with words but also misses his shot and it is up to the gods, in a series of arguments and counter arguments which make up *The Debate* to stop their quarrel by giving Love and Folly his and her due. In what is at once a story, a comedy and a satire, Love is miniaturized, Venus' crybaby making a fuss in the Olympian playroom whom Folly puts into place by saying: ". . .my name is Folly. I am the one who makes you great and casts you down according to my pleasure."

Several years separate the poems from the prose and though Louise Labé was praised early for the quality of her prose, it's the poetry and mainly the sonnets that were remembered.

Meanwhile the legend grew. A crowd of fervent admirers and a host of enemies perpetuated it to whom she was, in turn, the "Belle Cordière" and "femme sçavante," or the courtesan, a public scandal. What else could she be? Either idealized as the Renaissance beauty and witty, entertaining scholar, or lowered, just as Folly says, to an aberration by envy, malice or, according to one of her contemporaries, because no better subject of conversation could prevent one from falling asleep while at the dinner table.

We know that she was married but how she felt about her marriage to a man twenty years older than she remains her secret. She had no children and hardly ever traveled except to her house in the country where she died, practically alone and forgotten, some time during the year 1566. A year earlier she had made her will in which she provides for her nephews, for her servants and for the poor, asking to be buried without "display or superstition, that is to say, at night, by the light of lanterns. . ."

"Estant le tems venu, Madamoiselle. . ."

Time employed. Time spent. And time regained.

Pavan.

"Now that the time has come, Mademoiselle, that the severe laws of men no longer prevent women from applying themselves to the sciences & disciplines. . ."

"And if one of us attains the degree of being able to put her ideas into writing, to do so carefully & not to disdain fame, & to adorn herself with it rather than with chains, rings and fancy dresses. . ."

"But who can keep renown?" echoes her second elegy. Something else, indifferent to the flux of celebrity is mirrored in her anagram: "Belle à Soy." Beautiful to one's self.

Fame, honor, pleasure. Pleasure in learning, pleasure in conversation, pleasure in writing. How it is to be maintained, intensified. Most precious desire. . .

"For the past gives us delight, & can be put to better use than the present; the pleasures from one's feeling pass away & never return, & sometimes memory fails most where the actions have been most enjoyed.

. . .But when we happen to put down our ideas in writing, no matter how busily our mind runs on afterwards & moves unceasingly, if after a great length of time we look at what we have written, we return to the same point and to the same disposition in which we were before. Then we are doubly content for we rediscover the pleasure we had in the past either in what we wrote about or with the present knowledge of those sciences to which we then applied ourselves. Moreover, the judgment our present ideas cast on the former gives us a singular contentment. These two gratifications that come from writing. . ."

Stately, elaborately dressed. In the dance, the figure that comes forward to meet her steps out of the past. There is wonder in their gaze, a brief questioning, then recognition. The dancers draw apart.

". . .as for myself, I was looking for nothing else but an honest way to pass the time. . . .

And because women do not readily show themselves in public alone, I have chosen you as guide. . ."

I have chosen you. . .for the past gives us delight.

". . .to incite you & to make you wish in seeing this work of mine, rough & poorly constructed, to bring into the light another that is better polished & of a superior grace. God keep you in good health. Lyon, 24 July, 1555. Your humble friend, Louize Labé."

If Clémence de Bourges, who was still very young when Louise Labé dedicated the book to her, had wanted and been able to take on the challenge, she did not have time for she died seven years later.

AUGUST **KLEINZAHLER**

Eros & Poetry

He is the son of Chaos, an egg, and unwrought stone.

He is Ker, a sort of anthropomorphic bacillus with wings, but an Erote, a Ker of Life, instead of the black-winged creature Homer described with big white teeth and long, pointed nails that tore corpses to pieces and drank the blood, a cannibalistic Harpy.

He is a daimon, halfway between god or spirit-force and man.

He is the son of Eilithia or of Iris. He is the son of Hermes and Artemis, or of Hermes and Aphrodite, or of Aphrodite by Zeus, or of Ares and Aphrodite.

His insignia are the hare, the rose, the cock and the goat.

He is the youngest of the gods, or he is the oldest.

His chief antagonist is Anteros, the God of Mutual Love. His companions are Pothos (longing) and Himeros (desire).

In Alexandrian poetry, where children played an important role in magic and cult, Eros degenerates into a mischievous child playing knucklebones, a kind of dice, with Ganymede.

There is a related Greek God, Até who personifies delusion, infatuation and reckless conduct, thus mischief and evil. Hesiod has her as the daughter of Eris (strife), Homer as the daughter of Zeus, a very troublesome daughter. She is bewilderment and wild impulse. She walks lightly on the heads of mortals without them knowing it. Behind her trail the Litai ("Prayers"), lame wrinkled daughters of Zeus who, if summoned, heal the wounds inflicted by Até but bring fresh evil upon the stubborn. Zeus expelled her from Olympus and she fell to earth in Phrygia on the hill which took the name of the Hill of Error and the spot where Troy was to be built.

Rarely blind in classical literature and never in classical art, Cupid (Eros) became blind or blindfolded in the late Middle Ages and was associated with Night, Synagogue, Infidelity, Death and Fortune (caeca Fortuna). He was especially associated with Death and Fortune who were not only blind but personifications of an active force without sight, hitting out at random.

The 15th century French poet Pierre Michault wrote a poem called *La Danse aux Aveugles* in which Love, Fortune and Death are the three blind powers which make mankind dance to their wanton imperatives:

> Amour, Fortune et Mort, aveugles et bandés,
> Font danser les humains chacun par accordance.

In India he is Kama, who like Eros was the firstborn of the gods at the creation of the universe, Desire being the primal germ of the universal mind. But he is not the fleshy Cupid of the Romans, instead having a fierce aspect. He is the husband of Rati, goddess of sensual desire. He is Dipaka, "the inflamer;" Gritsa, "the sharp;" Maya, "the deluder;" Mara, "the destroyer;" Ragavrinta, "the stalk of passion;" and Titha, "fire."

Kama carries a sugarcane bow which is stretched by a string of bees. He fires arrows tipped with flowers whose scent announces the sweet, inevitable attack of love. (In a 15th century painting by Cranach, Cupid, holding a beehive and being attacked by bees on his arm, chest and head, looks up complainingly to Venus, who has struck a rather fetching and uninterested pose, *sprezzatura*, underneath an apple tree.

> As a tiger pouncing
> from behind the branches
> seizes suddenly
> the helpless deer,
> her eyes glancing
> from within her blue sari
> have imprisoned me
> in their gaze.

(Bihārī, from *The Satasaī*, trans. from the 17th century Hindi by K.P. Bahadur)

Eros is Protorhythmos in Dionysian cults, the first dancer and singer, an Orphic figure who gives impulse and rhythm to the dance of creation. Lucian writes:

> It would seem that dancing came into being at the beginning of all things and was brought to light together with Eros, that ancient one, for we see this primeval dancing clearly set forth in the choral dance of the constellations and in the planets and fixed stars, their interweaving and interchange and orderly harmony.

It is Eros who awakens us to the pulse of poetry and dance, its inexhaustible patterns and transformations.

> Love (Amor, Eros). . .can kindle in the souls of others the poetic fire. . .no matter what dull clay we seemed to be before . . .It was longing and desire that led Apollo to found the arts of archery, healing and divination—so he too was a scholar in the school of Love. It was thus that the fine arts were founded by the Muses, the smithy by Hephaestus and the loom by Pallas. . .
>
> (Agathon's speech in Plato's *Symposium)*

> Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
> Love can transpose to form and dignity.
>
> (Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*)

Christianity turned Eros into the harmless little rubicund fatty of Valentine's cards.

Eros has to do with penetration and then infection. There is quickening of the pulse and cutaneous vasodilation. The face changes expression and takes on an unhealthy pallor, followed by loss of appetite and weight. Lassitude sets in, then reclusiveness.

"Utterly hotheaded and reckless; as a man who would do a somersault into a ring of knives; as one who would jump into a fire," remarks Socrates about a disciple who had just kissed a youth of great beauty.

> Daphnis and Chloe dreamt that the Nymphs—the ones in the cave with the spring in it, where Dryas had found the baby—were handing Daphnis and Chloe over to a very autocratic and beautiful small boy who had wings growing out of his shoulders and carried tiny arrows along with a tiny bow. . .

So Daphnis, who was set on fire by all this, used to plunge into streams. . .and often he would actually drink the water in hope of extinguishing the fire inside him.

(*Daphnis and Chloe*, Longus: trans. by Paul Turner)

Dr. J. N. MacKenzie, Surgeon to the Baltimore Eye, Ear and Throat Charity Hospital, asserted in 1884 that the respiratory and olfactory mucosa has a structure analogous to the spongy central body of the penis and is equally erectable.

Only human beings look at one another while making love.

Youre yën two wol slee me sodeinly:
I may the beautee of hew nat sustene,
So woundeth it thurghout myn herte keene.

("Merciless Beauty," Chaucer)

Wine comes in at the mouth
And love comes in at the eye;
That's all we know for truth
Before we grow old and die.

("A Drinking Song," Yeats)

On this feast day, oh, cursed day and hour!
Went Hero thorough Sestos, from her tower
To Venus's temple, where unhappily
As after chanced, they did each other spy.
. . .
And in the midst a silver altar stood;
There Hero sacrificing turtles' blood,
Veiled to the ground, veiling her eyelids close,
And modestly they opened as she rose;
Thence flew love's arrows with the golden hand,
And thus Leander was enamored.
Stone still he stood, and evermore he gazed
Till with the fire that from his countenance blazed,
Relenting Hero's gentle heart was strook;
Such force and virtue hath an amorous look.

("Hero and Leander," Marlowe)

The sebaceous glands occur all over the body. Their secretions flow into canals in which bacteria break down the odorless sebum into a

pungent mix consisting primarily of fatty acids. The rancid, goaty odor of stale sweat is due to these fatty acids.

The apocrine glands in the axillae are responsible for most of a person's body odor. The odor of the axillary organ resembles musk, the perputial sac secretion of the Himalayan musk deer. Apocrine glands are densest in the armpits, the pubic region and the area around the anus, face and scalp. The axillary odor consists of a number of musky smelling steroids. Steroid hormones are produced by the gonads and their broken-down structures impart to urine its musky odor.

One of the steroids produced in the axillary organ is the same substance that is known to be a mating pheromone in the pig. The odor, which is urinous, is produced in the boar's saliva and when perceived by a sow in heat induces her to adopt the characteristic mating position.

> If I kiss Anthea's breast
> There I smell the phoenix nest:
> If I her lip, the most sincere
> Altar of incense, I smell there
> Hands and thighs, and legs, are all
> Richly aromatical.
> Goddess Isis can't transfer
> Musks and ambers more from her:
> Nor can Juno sweeter be,
> When she lies with Jove, than she.
>
> ("Love Perfumes All Things," Herrick)

Perfumes can be analyzed in their parts: the upper notes are made from the sexual secretions of flowers, produced to attract animals for the purpose of cross-pollination and often formulated as mimics of the animal's sex pheromones. Many of these contain compounds with a fecal odor. The middle notes are made from resinous materials which have odors not unlike those of sex steroids, while the base notes are mammalian sex attractants with a distinctly urinous or fecal odor. (*The Scented Ape*, D. Michael Stoddart)

> So quicke, so hot, so mad is thy fond sute. . .
>
> (Campion)

> A touch from any part of her had done 't:
> Her hand, her foot, her very look's a cunt.
>
> ("The Imperfect Enjoyment," John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester)

How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride!
how much better is your love than wine,
and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!
Your lips distil nectar, my bride;
honey and milk are under your tongue,
the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.
A garden locked is my sister, my bride!
A garden locked, a fountain sealed.
Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates
with all choicest fruits,
henna and nard,
nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon
with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes
with all chief spices.
A garden fountain, a well of living water
and flowing streams from Lebanon.

Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind!
Blow upon my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad.
Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.
("The Song of Solomon")

Mina Loy writes in the first of her love songs:

Spawn of fantasies
Sifting the appraisable
Pig Cupid his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage
"Once upon a time"
Pulls a weed white star-topped
Among wild oats sown in mucous membrane
I would an eye in a Bengal light
Eternity in a sky-rocket
Constellations in an ocean
Whose rivers run no fresher
Than a trickle of saliva

There is a trade-off in pain attending all this feasting and rooting unlike anything else. There is great, subterranean shifting and displacement, as if of continents and tectonic plates, as if of one's inner organs. And into the breach pours appetite, an appetite which cannot be slaked.

. . .love-struck wretches
Who, on the very verge of consummation
Can't make their minds up, thrash about, uncertain
Which they should pleasure first—their hands? their eyes?
So they bear down with all their weight, or squeeze
Tight as they can, the body they have sought,
They make it hurt, take hold of lips with teeth,
Kiss with insistent fierceness. Such delight
Is never pure, for in its impulse lies
The appetite for pain, the urge to hurt,
The germinal seeds of madness. Even so,
In the midst of love, ever so lightly,
Venus abates the punishment, and blends
A sweetness with the sharpness of the bite.

(*The Nature of Things*, Lucretius: trans. by Rolfe Humphries)

Eros, The Bittersweet is the title of a book on Eros and poetry by the Classics scholar Anne Carson. The title is from Sappho's *glukupikron*:

Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me
bittersweet, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up.

Behind her several arguments is the larger notion that Eros is something quite specific, as opposed to describing any and all aspects of love and sexuality. It is desire. I realize that the word has become fashionable, thus next to meaningless, but it's the best we've got and it will have to do. Professor Carson is speaking of a desire that cannot be fulfilled without jettisoning the set of tensions that describe the nature of Eros.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
  Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,
  Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
  Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
    Bold Lover, never, never canst thous kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
    She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
  Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

("Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats)

Her argument, in large measure, compels us to discount what we casually think of as erotic literature, be it the bawdy ballads and catches of Anon. ("A comely Dame of Islington / Has got a leaky Copper; / The Hole that let the liquor run, / Was wanting of a Stopper. . .") or a chill rising through the sleeve of the lovelorn Izumi Shikibu, or Bataille's little Michele dipping her twat in a bowl of milk. Likewise, most of the love conventions and motifs fall outside of Eros's purview, be it Swahili marriage chants or the inadvertently comical posturing and hyperbole of Anne Sexton's "In Celebration of My Uterus" or Charles Bukowski's *Love Is a Dog from Hell.*

One can only speculate on what caused the erosion and disappearance of the convention of Eros in English. The fashionable love poetry of today reads like Oprah-babble, but with line-breaks. Perhaps it had to do with Romanticism and the evolution of the individualistic, psychological "I." There are remnants of the convention here and there, like Edward Arlington Robinson's old Greenwich Village-y curio, *Eros Turranos.*

The convention does exist, and thrive, in contemporary popular music; rock, country, blues, you name it:

> Ooooooeee, baby, you're driving me crazy, etc.

And it endures in fiction. Kawabata's *Snow Country* is erotic. So is *Death in Venice* and *Lolita.* Henry Miller is *not* erotic.

It might be mentioned in this context (given the natures of the adored and adoring in the three aforementioned titles) that Eros exists independently of procreation or of any Darwinian notions of sustaining or improving the species. Traditionally, erotic poetry involves illicit love, and the objects of this love are often courtesans, servants, the very young, members of the same sex and those already married. It's trouble.

> Unhappie is the man for evermair
> That tills the sand and sawis in the air;
> But twice unhappier is he, I lairn,
> That feedis in his hairt a mad desire,
> And follows on a woman throu the fire,
> Led by a blin and teachit by a bairn.
>
> ("Venus and Cupid," Mark Alexander Boyd)

> Forbidden fruit is responsible for many a bad jam.
>
> (Country & Western song)

Lucretius, in the magnificent Book IV of his *De Rerum Natura*, does it nicely:

> For normally men fall toward a wound, and blood
> Wells outward toward the blow that wounded us;
> Yes, if the enemy's close, he's drenched with blood.
> Thus, he who's wounded by the bolt of love
> . . .turns toward the source of hurt, and aches for union
> To jet his humors, body into body. . .
> (trans. by Frank Copley)

Aristophanes, in Plato's *Symposium*, tells us that originally there were three sexes, one of which partook of the nature of man and woman but has since vanished from the earth. Also, originally, each human being was a rounded whole, with double backs and flanks forming a circle. The creature had four hands, four legs, and two identical faces upon a circular neck with a common head, the faces turned in opposite directions. When this creature wanted to run quickly it made use of all eight limbs, turning rapidly over and over in a circle, like a tumbler performing cartwheels. The male sprang from the sun, the female from the earth, and the hermaphrodite from the moon, which partakes of the natures of both sun and earth. These creatures, in their arrogance, finally challenged Zeus' authority and were punished by being cut in two. Thus, each yearned for the other half from which it had been severed. Zeus took pity on them and, with Apollo's help, moved their reproductive organs to the front so the two halves could be rejoined, however temporarily, through intercourse. Again, Lucretius:

> . . .Eagerly
> They press their bodies close, join lips and tongues,
> Their breath comes faster, faster. All in vain,
> For they can gather nothing, they cannot
> Effect real penetration, be absorbed
> Body in body, utterly. They seem
> To want to do just this. God knows they try,
> Cling to each other, lashed in Venus's chains
> Till finally, all passion spent, they die,
> Relaxed completely from that violence,
> Melted, undone; so for a little time
> The furious fire subsides. But it will blaze,
> Break out again in madness, and they'll seek
> Again whatever it is they want to reach,
> Find no prescription, no device to stop

This rank infection, so they peak and pine,
Confused and troubled by their secret wound.
(trans. by Rolfe Humphries)

The interrelationships between Eros and poetry occur on any number of levels. Surely the intensity of the experience, the white heat of desire, drives us out of our atmospheres, quotidian and psychological, and causes us to *see*. Eros is not the sole transforming emotion that causes us to see, but it's a humdinger. One would not ordinarily choose for himself a passage through anguish, yet poets seem to cultivate it, and at grievous risk. From a sort of actuarial point of view, one cannot pass through these flames too many times without becoming terminally flambéed.

> Love greatly resembles an application of torture or a surgical operation. Do you hear these sighs—preludes to a shameful tragedy—these groans, these screams, these rattling gasps? Who has not uttered them, who has not inexorably wrung them forth? . . .These eyes rolled back like the sleepwalker's, these limbs whose muscles burst and stiffen as though subject to the action of a galvanic battery—such frightful, such curious phenomena are undoubtedly never obtained from even the most extreme cases of intoxication, of delirium, of opium taking. The human face, which Ovid believed fashioned to reflect the stars, speaks here of an insane ferocity, relaxing into a kind of death.
>
> (*Intimate Journals*, Baudelaire: trans. by Christopher Isherwood)

The great compendium of love's torments is to be found in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

> But the Symptoms of the mind in Lovers are almost infinite, and so diverse, that no Art can comprehend them: though they be merry sometimes, and rapt beyond themselves for joy, yet most part, Love is a plague, a torture, an hell, a *bitter-sweet* (my italics) passion at last. . .For in a word, the Spanish Inquisition is not comparable to it; a torment and execution it is, as he calls it in the Poet, an unquenchable fire, and what not? From it, saith Austin, arise biting cares, perturbations, passions, sorrows, fears, suspicions, discontents, discords, wars, treacheries, enmities, flattery, cozening, riot, lust, impudence, cruelty, knavery, &c. . .Every poet is full of such catalogues of Love Symptoms

This section of the book, *Symptoms of Love*, goes on for a number of pages until the reader comes, with relief, to *Remedies of Love*.

Another source on the subject in Ficino's 15th century commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. Ficino is much taken by blood, choler and the vapors that attend bestial love, as opposed to divine or human love.

> . . .The entire attention of a lover's soul is devoted to continuous thought about the beloved. . .Moreover, wherever the continuous attention of the soul is carried, there also fly the spirits, which are the chariots, or instruments of the soul. The spirits are produced in the heart from the thinnest part of the blood. The lover's soul is carried toward the image of the beloved planted in his imagination, and thence toward the beloved himself. To the same place are drawn the lover's spirits. Flying out there, they are continuously dissipated.
> . . .when the pure and clear blood is dissipated, there remains only the impure, thick, dry, and black. . .For from dry, thick and black blood is produced melancholy, that is, black bile, which fills the head with its vapors and dries out the brain.
> . . .When the ancient physicians observed these things, they said that love was a passion very close to the disease of melancholy. And the physician Rhazes taught that it was cured by coitus, fasting, inebriation and walking.
>
> (trans. by Sears Jayne)

One modern scholar, J.R. Broadbent, avers that synaesthesia and the crowding together of heavy stresses (like the lover's breaths?) serve the specifically erotic poem. He cites two examples:

> There are fragrances, fresh as the flesh of children,
> Sweet as the oboe, green as the prairie.
>
> ("Correspondences," Baudelaire: trans. by Kate Flores)

> When all my five and country senses see
> . . .
> The whispering ears will watch love drummed way
> Down breeze and shell to a discordant beach,
> And, lashed to syllables, the lynx-tongue cry
> That her fond wounds are mended bitterly.
> My nostril see her breath burn like a bush.
>
> (Dylan Thomas)

In her essay, "Love's knowledge," Martha Nussbaum writes about *katalépseis*, about the cataleptic impression having the power, through its own felt quality, to convince us that things could not be otherwise. "But this knowledge, which the shrewdest perceptions of the mind would not have given me, had now been brought to me, hard, glittering, strange, like a crystallized salt, by the abrupt reaction of pain." (*Remembrance of the Things Past*, Proust)

Eros awakens us to the world and its particulars and helps us to order experience into artful shapes and rhythms, but by courting the daimon the poet is challenging the gods with all the insolence and overweening ambition of the original humans, only to risk being incinerated or cut in half, one part of himself forever looking in vain for the other.

> The mirror of the movements of Hortense
> Images everything monstrous.
> Her solitude is erotic mechanics,
> Her lassitude the dynamics of love.
> Under the guard of her childhood, she has been
> For numerous ages and ages
> The fiery purge of the race.
> Her door is always open to suffering; there,
> Human morality dissolves in her passion, or in her acts.
>
> The terrible shudder of hesitant love
> On bleeding ground, in a hydrogen glare!
>
> Find Hortense.
>
> ("H," Rimbaud; trans. by Paul Schmidt)

JAMES **LAUGHLIN**

Some Amatory Epigrams from the Greek Anthology

Melissa pulled one reddish hair
From her braid and tied my hands
With it. I was her prisoner. I
Told her never to let me go.

Paulus Silentiarius (V, 230)

Sometimes secret love affairs
Yield more honey than those
Which are open.

Paulus Silentiarius (V, 219)

She kissed me one evening with
Wet lips; her mouth smelt sweet
As nectar. I'm drunk with her
Kiss. I have drunk love in
Abundance.

Anonymous (V, 305)

Melissa's beauty is the gift of
The god Eros; Aphrodite charmed
Her bed; the Graces gave her grace.

Meleager (V, 196)

In my heart Eros himself created
Sweet-voiced Melissa, the soul
Of my soul.

Meleager (V, 154)

Might it not be that someday in
Legend soft-gliding Melissa will
Surpass the Graces themselves?

Meleager (V, 148)

I swear, I swear it by Eros, I
Would rather hear her whisper in
My ear than listen to Apollo
Playing his lyre.

Meleager (V, 141)

I held her close, we were breast
To breast, hers supporting mine,
Her lips joined with mine. As for
The rest, the little bedlamp was the
Only witness; I am silent.

Marcus Argentarius (V, 128)

Her kiss is like the lime that
Catches birds. Her eyes are fire
And when she looks at me I also burn.
If she touches me she has me caught
Fast.

Meleager (V, 96)

I wish I were a rose, a pink rose,
For you to pick and press against
Your snowy breasts.

Anonymous (V, 84)

Beauty without charm is only pleasing.
It's nothing to remember. It's like
Fishing with bait by no hook.

Capito (V, 67)

We fell in love, we kissed, you gave
Yourself to me, we had much pleasure.
But who am I, and who are you? How
did it happen that we came together?
Only the Kyprian goddess knows.

Anonymous (V, 51)

Gray are her lovely eyes, her cheeks
Of crystal. Could you not call her
Sweet mouth a rose? Her neck is of
Marble, her breasts smooth as marble.
Her small feet? They are more charming
Than those of silver-footed Thetis.

Rufinus (V, 48)

For so long, my darling, I prayed to
Have you with me at night, touching
And caressing. And now your love has
Brought me that happiness. You are
Beside me, naked. But why do I become
Drowsy? I owe you this felicity forever.

Rufinus (V, 47)

Beware a girl who is too ready,
But also one who hangs back too
Long. One is too quick, the other
Too slow. Look for one who is
Neither too plump nor too thin.
Too little flesh is as bad as too
Much. Never run to excesses.

Rufinus (V, 42 & 37)

Whether you have colored your hair
Dark or have it its natural shade,
It frames your dear face in beauty.
The god Eros loves your hair and
Will still be twining his fingers
In it when it is gray.

Anonymous (V, 26)

Shall we take a shower together,
Soaping ourselves and rubbing each
Other, flesh to flesh; then put on
Our robes and sip a good wine? The
season of such joys in short; then
Comes old age and finally death.

Rufinus (V, 12)

Make the bedlamp tipsy with oil;
It's the silent confidant of things
We seldom dare to speak of. Then
Let it go out. There are times when
The god Eros wants no living witness.
Close the door tight. Then let the
Bed, the lovers' friend, teach us
The rest of Aphrodite's secrets.

Philodemus (V, 4)

MARTHA ANN **SELBY**

from the Gāthāsaptaśatī

The Gathasaptasati ("700 poems in *gatha* meter") is an anthology of secular and erotic verse in Māhārāṣṭrī Prākit, and collected by Hāla, a king of the Sātavāhana dynasty. He ruled from 20 to 24 C.E. in a Telugu kingdom that was based in what is now north-central Maharashtra, India.

—M.A.S.

1.29

Now without him,
I remember all the pleasures tasted.

The rumble of new clouds
sounds like an executioner's drum.

1.93

Aunt,
I drank him in
for all of a second,
and I wasn't satisfied

as if my thirst could be quenched
by water drunk
in a dream.

3.4

Aunt,
how can I tell him,
with my heart about to burst?

Like an image on a mirror,
my pain will not enter him.

3.38

A scabby fool
will trade his shawl
for an ox
in the dead of winter,
looking at the breasts
of that dusky girl
as if they're smokeless embers.

3 .71

How can you describe her?

When your gaze falls
on one of her parts,

like a sick cow fallen
in mud,

it cannot escape.

4.3

Even in a reeling world
as great as this
teeming with thousands
of gorgeous women,

nothing at all resembles
her right half
except her left.

4.51

Even he was abashed
and I laughed
and held him close
when he went for the knot
of my underclothes
and I'd already untied it.

4.58

I'll make love with her here—

while he thinks this
with his heart,
the sowing seed,
wet with sweat
from the wretch's hand,
drops to the ground.

4.97

Those women
who can see their lovers
in dreams
are lucky

but without him,
sleep won't come
so who can dream?

HIROAKI **SATO**

Princess Shikishi: A 100-Poem Sequence

Princess Shikishi, the third daughter of Emperor Goshirakawa (1127–92), was born in the early 1150s and died in 1201. She was the vestal of Kamo Shrine from 1159 to 1169. During her lifetime, the warrior class rose and eclipsed the aristocracy. In their decline, however, aristocrats produced some of the best poetry in 5-7-5-7-7-syllable tanka form, culminating in the eighth imperial anthology *Shin-Kokin Shû,* compiled in 1205. Forty-nine of Shikishi's poems were included in the anthology of 1,979 pieces.

By the time Shikishi began to write tanka, the practice of composing a set of 100 pieces for exercise, competition, or formal presentation had been established. Such a set normally consisted of six basic categories—spring, summer, autumn, winter, love, and miscellany—with the pieces in each showing temporal or narrative progression, as may be typically seen in the sequence translated below. Because of the ease of composing tanka (in a straight, unadorned translation, a tanka is only a little longer than a heroic couplet, and some of Shikishi's contemporaries needed less than two hours to composed a 100-poem set with complicated specifications), Shikishi is believed to have composed many such sets. But only three of them remain in near-perfect form. These three, along with about 100 pieces "gleaned" from various anthologies, are translated in my forthcoming *String of Beads: Complete Poems of Princess Shikishi* (Univ. of Hawaii Press).

—H.S.

Spring

In spring too what first stands out is Mount Otowa: from the
snow at its peak sunrays appear

Though warblers have not called, in the sound of cascades
pouring down the rocks spring is heard

Through a bud-tinted plum tree the evening moon begins to show light of spring

As spring comes my heart melts, and I forget how, like soft snow, I go on fading

As I look around, now here, now there, it's covered with spring robes, their woof feeble still

Isolate my life, seclude it with layers of haze, deeply, at the foot of the Hill of Gloom

It's spring: to my heart's content I gaze at the treetops shrouded in haze and budding

Opening on plum twigs in unfaded snow, the first blossoms for dyeing bring back the past

In whose abode did they touch plum blossoms? The scent transferred so distinct on your sleeves

Plum blossoms accompanied by a tinge of love: their scent on your coat distinct, unfaded

About blossoms I do not know; there, not there, I look around: haze fragrant on a spring dawn

Would there were other means of consolation than flowers: coldly they fall, coldly I watch

When I count the seasons past, fleeting, so many springs wistful of flowers I've come through

Everyone, look at Yoshino's mountain peaks! Are the clouds cherry, the blossoms white snow?

I do not know about hilltops with cherry in bloom; now in spring haze a thousand hues fade

A spring breeze must have passed the gable eaves: the accumulated snow fragrant where I lie

In the moonlight remaining after daybreak, faintly falling blossoms hidden among leaves

Warblers too, wearied as spring ends; no more visits at night and my house is desolate

The geese, now heading for home, can't help saying farewell to the clouds aglow at dawn

Today's the last; haze with its hues rises and parts, spring at sunset in the hilltop sky

Summer

Sad to change, I have taken off my spring-hued robe, sleeves, not of the past, laden with dew

Cuckoo still traveling cloud-borne, for you to take shelter I have planted these deutzia flowers

I shall not forget the dewy dawn, when I tied *aoi* to grass and slept outdoors transiently

Did the cuckoo pity me and speak in the sky? As sleepless nights accumulate, a midnight call

A rain has passed over the orange in bloom, but no cuckoo visiting, I wet my sleeves

Today again arranged and adorned: the eaves of my reed house, a cottage, full of flags

Tapping of a clapper rail far into the night, my moss-grown gate closed but to the moon

As I gaze, the moon dims, the face of my garden left with only a few fireflies

Leave, and not think of the past a moment? This house with so distinct an orange scent

Summer night: soon the crescent inclines, before the day breaks at the rim of the hill

Tracelessly clear this side of clouds, evening rain falls on the outer mountain slope

A short night: outside the window black bamboos sway, a touch of autumn while I sleep light

To the sound of water tumbling beneath rocks in pine shade, cicada voices coolly respond

Though shining sun is of a summer sky, clearly, the wind under the pine hill says its time has passed

Weeds in the boarded well far from the village now to be removed: autumn is next door

Autumn

Summer ended, today autumn rises; on Mt. Tatsuta at the sound of wind the color will change

Since a wind over rushes told me autumn came, my thoughts have been unusual at dusk

As I gaze, my sleeves feel cool: autumn evening on the Riverbed of Eternal Heaven

All in all, about autumn sorrows I'd ask someone else whose sleeves aren't as used to dew

Dew that forms in wind and tears are one, difficult to hold back in autumn dusk

Sleeves have become a lodge for dew, ever since, heedless of place, the autumn began

In autumn, only the way the evening clouds are, is what I gaze at for no reason at all

Unnoticed, the passage has occurred: as I brood, autumn dusk dew-drops fall on my pillow

Along the Chinese skirts of hills, mists rise above dew, in rifts here, rifts there, brocade revealed

Travel pillow: lying on my side in dewy Iware Field; in the same bed too, calls a quail

Evening mists forming in the depths of my heart, the autumn as it wanes is mine alone

Dew seeping into the grass hut where the moon lives, tree crickets on the eaves vie, singing

Oppressing all, sunken in autumn sorrows: village at the foot of hills deep in evening mists

Where have the cloud-dwelling geese gone? The moon has declined toward the west

If the moon had let me sleep at dusk, I wouldn't be thinking of it, now near the hill

Autumn night's cloudless moon clouds over and, as night deepens, seems to wet its face

I close my pine door no more, leaving it to the moon that crosses the Plain of Heaven during the night

Despite all, the moonlight is not as of old, my thoughts turning more like a *shizu* spool

Mt. Saho's yellow oak leaves: is it because it's late autumn, color distinct through the mist?

Seeing off autumn that will not stay: as I gaze, leaves of garden trees scatter in one way

Winter

Godless Month: a storm, sweeping down the roof-edge, spreads leaves deep into my bed

What to do? Hues of a thousand grasses are a thing of the past, not a single flower's left

Over the shingled roof the shower's passed; what's falling, unceasing, must be the leaves

Loneliness is the habit of this house: I gaze at the leaves with frost spread over them

Come winter, the valley stream ceases its sound, the storm from the peak visits my window

Frost not falling from the grebe's wings however he flaps them: is he unaware it's moonlight?

At the edge of a winter pond, reed ducks move too busily for frost and ice to form

Uji River boat with brushwood unable to pull up to shore, drops from its pole turn to ice

Flowers and leaves of all colors, let them be: late winter night has this pine wind sound

As I wait, at every interval it grows white: faintly over Saho riverbed plovers call

Even on its own, the snow has light; more so when the moon stays on at break of day

The blowing winds and plovers gone along, hailstone sounds left at my barren eaves

Deeper than may be thought, more desolate: the mountain village in Ono as the snow falls

Who grows used to living here? A hut with a brushwood fence buried in the falling snow

Startled by the waves of years rolling up: ice comes to stay with my sleeves night by night

Love

No path for visits, though, known to none, my heart close to you goes back and forth

Have pity, if only a little: a grass-in-thoughts, I won't spill the dew lost on a lower leaf

Like a doe on a summer hill hidden in grass I'm here, you know, but you're trying to avoid me

Does he know how like a cloud on Mt. Katsuragi I rise and sit, and how I feel every time?

To count on nightly dreams to know someone faintly, one I think of but have yet to meet!

Wouldn't he say it's pitiful, I thought, as I went on loving him, I alone knowing it

Was that he? Tonight, no, but the moon in its vagueness gives a glimpse of his loveless face

Not even knowing the reality of the fleeting dark, I wander along from dream to dream

Though I think of him, on my sleeve spread for myself alone, the cascading sound intensifies

Heart's dam has turned into a harbor in my sleeves, though I've been single-minded all along

Pine wind on Takashi shore tumultuous with waves, I have sounded your name, which I miss

To go back to the past and see it: insuppressible Suma Bay with its waves and winds

"Much in love, but look at me, I'll still live," this is not what I said, and you know it

Painful or pitiful, they are unforgettable: how many times have the months and days returned?

If, out of much love, smoke flows toward you, regard it as the outcome of the pledge I made

Miscellany

As I grow used to the moss mat and rock pillow, the sound of mountain water cleanses my heart

No one to lose his way in the accumulated leaves; not even birds step in the garden of my house

If someone visits my quiet grass hut this rainy night, it must be because he pities me

Did I think I'd grow used to living in it: in Fushimi at dusk, in pine winds, this hut

In my cup I've shed tears for spring; gathering in a circle while traveling recalls the past

Hearing it wets my sleeves: clear across waves late at night the sound of those four strings

Deep in the mountains, through the pine door closed early, only moonlight slanting in at dawn

Every day, throwing my heart into the valley a thousand times, I am and I am not, while I live

Whether I resent the world or grieve over it I do not know, yet my sleeves are used to the tears

Each time I turn back to the past I parted with, the unreturning waves break across my sleeves

How could I have lived, live until today, while saying of someone, "If only he were alive"

Things seen, future not seen, all in the illusion that forms over my fleeting pillow

Like a floating cloud left to wind in the great sky, sad not to know where I will be in the end

Not knowing the dream without beginning has been a dream, will I wake when this one ends?

Unending as sedge roots that grow in Your Majesty's light, may Your Reign be everlasting

ERASMUS **DARWIN**

from The Temple of Nature (1803)

Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) was the most famous physician in England, and Coleridge considered him the best writer in Europe. He was the first proponent of the theory of evolution (now attached to his grandson, Charles), the first to explain the principles of artesian wells and of fertilizers, the first to describe photosynthesis. He discovered how clouds form. He invented horizontal windmills, carriages, drill plows and canal lifts. From his study of linguistics he devised an alphabet of 31 letters which could phonetically reproduce all the European languages, and he invented a speaking machine, with a wooden mouth, soft leather lips, "nostril" valve and bellows that could say *mama, papa, map,* and *pam* with eerie accuracy. He had fourteen children with two wives, founded various societies, was instrumental in the Industrial Revolution, pioneered humane treatment for the mentally ill.

He wrote enormous treatises on animal and plant life, and a long Lucretian poem, *The Botanic Garden,* which condensed vast amounts of scientific knowledge into rhyming couplets and was a huge best-seller. His sequel poem, however, *The Temple of Nature,* failed dismally. It was published in 1803, reprinted in 1825, and has since only appeared once more, in a 1973 facsimile edition published by the Scolar Press in England.

In it, he gives a remarkably accurate account of evolution:

> Organic Life beneath the shoreless waves
> Was born and nurs'd in Ocean's pearly caves;
> First forms minute, unseen by spheric glass,
> Move on the mud, or pierce the watery mass;
> These, as successive generations bloom,
> New powers acquire, and larger limbs assume;
> Whence countless groups of vegetation spring,
> And breathing realms of fin, and feet, and wing.

But the reason for the poem's popular failure was Darwin's refusal to give God much credit for it all—and the Moral Majoritarians of his time couldn't take it.

Here are two excerpts from the book, which contains some 2000 lines of poetry and innumerable footnotes and appendices on nearly everything. The first, from Canto II, is a Blakean ecstatic and scientifically rational celebration of sex, laid out in the style of "Birds do it, bees do it, / Even educated fleas do it." [Which, by the way, originally began with the politically incorrect, but far wittier "Chinks do it, Japs do it, / Up in Lapland, little Laps do it."] The second excerpt is an extraordinary description of the flip side of reproductive bliss: the predatory nature of nature.

—E.W.

from Canto II: Reproduction of Life

[. . .]

So the lone Truffle, lodged beneath the earth,
Shoots from paternal roots the tuberous birth;
No stamen-males ascend, and breathe above,
No seed-born offspring lives by female love.
From each young tree, for future buds design'd
Organic drops exsude beneath the rind;
While these with appetencies nice invite,
And those with apt propensities unite;
New embryon fibrils round the trunk combine
With quick embrace, and form the living line:
Whose plume and rootlet at their early birth
Seek the dry air, or pierce the humid earth.

So safe in waves prolific Volvox dwells,
And five descendants crowd his lucid cells;
So the male Polypus parental swims,
And branching infants bristle all his limbs;
So the lone Tænia, as he grows, prolongs
His flatten'd form with young adherent throngs;
Unknown to sex the pregnant oyster swells,
And coral-insects build their radiate shells;
Parturient Sires caress their infant train,
And heaven-born STORGE weaves the social chain;
Successive births her tender cares combine,
And soft affections live along the line.
[. . .]

So tulip-bulbs emerging from the seed,
Year after year unknown to sex proceed;
Erewhile the stamens and the styles display
Their petal-curtains, and adorn the day;
The beaux and beauties in each blossom glow
With wedded joy, or amatorial woe.
Unmarried Aphides prolific prove
For nine successions uninform'd of love;
New sexes next with softer passions spring,
Breathe the fond vow, and woo with quivering wing.

So erst in Paradise creation's LORD,
As the first leaves of holy writ record,
From Adam's rib, who press'd the flowery grove,
And dreamt delighted of untasted love,
To cheer and charm his solitary mind,
Form'd a new sex, the MOTHER OF MANKIND.
—Buoy'd on light step the Beauty seem'd to swim,
And stretch'd alternate every pliant limb;
Pleased on Euphrates' velvet margin stood,
And view'd her playful image in the flood;
Own'd the fine flame of love, as life began,
And smiled enchantment on adoring Man.
Down her white neck and o'er her bosom roll'd,
Flow'd in sweet negligence her locks of gold;
Round her fine form the dim transparence play'd,
And show'd the beauties, that it seem'd to shade.
—Enamour'd ADAM gaz'd with fond surprise,
And drank delicious passion from her eyes;
Felt the new thrill of young Desire, and press'd
The graceful Virgin to his glowing breast.—
The conscious Fair betrays her soft alarms,
Sinks with warm blush into his closing arms,
Yields to his fond caress with wanton play,
And sweet, reluctant, amorous, delay.
[. . .]
Delighted HYMEN hears their whisper'd vows,
And binds his chaplets round their polish'd brows,
Guides to his altar, ties the flowery bands,

And as they kneel, unites their willing hands.
'Behold, he cries, Earth! Ocean! Air above,
'And hail the DEITIES OF SEXUAL LOVE!
'All forms of Life shall this fond Pair delight,
'And sex to sex the willing world unite;
'Shed their sweet smiles in Earth's unsocial bowers
'Fan with soft gales, and gild with brighter hours;
'Fill Pleasure's chalice unalloy'd with pain,
'And give SOCIETY his golden chain.'
[. . .]

HENCE on green leaves the sexual Pleasures dwell,
And Loves and Beauties crowd the blossom's bell;
The wakeful Anther in his silken bed
O'er the pleased Stigma bows his waxen head;
With meeting lips and mingling smiles they sup
Ambrosial dewdrops from the nectar'd cup;
Or buoy'd in air the plumy Lover springs,
And seeks his panting bride on Hymen-wings.

The Stamen males, with appetencies just,
Produce a formative prolific dust;
With apt propensities, the Styles recluse
Secrete a formative prolific juice;
These in the pericarp erewhile arrive,
Rush to each other, and embrace alive.
—Form'd by new powers progressive parts succeed,
Join in one whole, and swell into a seed.

"So in fond swarms the living Anthers shine
Of bright Vallisner on the wavy Rhine;
Break from their stems, and on the liquid glass
Surround the admiring stigmas as they pass;
The love-sick Beauties lift their essenced brows,
Sigh to the Cyprian queen their secret vows,
Like watchful Hero feel their soft alarms,
And clasp their floating lovers in their arms.

"Hence the male Ants their gauzy wings unfold,
And young Lampyris waves his plumes of gold;

The Glow-Worm sparkles with impassion'd light
On each green bank, and charms the eye of night;
While new desires the painted Snail perplex,
And twofold love unites the double sex.

Hence, when the Morus in Italia's lands
To spring's warm beam its timid leaf expands;
The Silk-Worm broods in countless tribes above
Crop the green treasure, uninform'd of love;
Erewhile the changeful worm with circling head
Weaves the nice curtains of his silken bed;
Web within web involves his larva form,
Alike secured from sunshine and from storm;
For twelve long days He dreams of blossom'd groves,
Untasted honey, and ideal loves;
Wakes from his trance, alarm'd with young Desire,
Finds his new sex, and feels ecstatic fire;
From flower to flower with honey'd lip he springs,
And seeks his velvet loves on silver wings.

from Canto IV: Of Good and Evil

The wolf, escorted by his milk-drawn dam,
Unknown to mercy, tears the guiltless lamb;
The towering eagle, darting from above,
Unfeeling rends the inoffensive dove;
The lamb and dove on living nature feed,
Crop the young herb, or crash the embryon seed.
Nor spares the loud owl in her dusky flight,
Smit with sweet notes, the minstrel of the night;
Nor spares, enamour'd of his radiant form,
The hungry nightingale the glowing worm;
Who with bright lamp alarms the midnight hour,
Climbs the green stem, and slays the sleeping flower.

Fell Oestrus buries in her rapid course
Her countless brood in stag, or bull, or horse;
Whose hungry larva eats its living way,

Hatch'd by the warmth, and issues into day.
The wing'd Ichneumon for her embryon young
Gores with sharp horn the caterpillar throng.
The cruel larva mines its silky course,
And tears the vitals of its fostering nurse.
While fierce Libellula with jaws of steel
Ingulfs an insect-province at a meal;
Contending bee-swarms rise on rustling wings,
And slay their thousands with envenom'd stings.

Yes! smiling Flora drives her armed car
Through the thick ranks of vegetable war;
Herb, shrub, and tree, with strong emotions rise
For light and air, and battle in the skies;
Whose roots diverging with opposing toil
Contend below for moisture and for soil;
Round the tall Elm the flattering Ivies bend,
And strangle, as they clasp, their struggling friend,
Envenom'd dews from Mancinella flow,
And scald with caustic touch the tribes below;
Dense shadowy leaves on stems aspiring borne
With blight and mildew thin the realms of corn;
And insect hordes with restless tooth devour
The unfolded bud, and pierce the ravell'd flower.

"In ocean's pearly haunts, the waves beneath
Sits the grim monarch of insatiate Death;
The shark rapacious with descending blow
Darts on the scaly brood, that swims below;
The crawling crocodiles, beneath that move,
Arrest with rising jaw the tribes above;
With monstrous gape sepulchral whales devour
Shoals at a gulp, a million in an hour.
—Air, earth, and ocean, to astonish'd day
One scene of blood, one mighty tomb display!
From Hunger's arm the shafts of Death are hurl'd,
And one great Slaughter-house the warring world!

BASIL **BUNTING**

The Lion and the Lizard

"The Lion and the Lizard" is one of a group of literary essays written by Bunting in the early 1930s. Not written directly for commission, these pieces differ from the rest of his prose of the period in their intensity and originality—and they remained, for the most part, unpublished in their day, despite Bunting's efforts. He sent this piece to Zukofsky from Tenerife with a letter dated 1st May 1935, in which he refers to it as "Found amongst old papers"—and asks his friend to find a publisher for it now that he's corrected the "few trifling errors."

It is published here in Peter Quartermain's transcription, with the permission of the Bunting estate and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, as a foretaste of the various publishing projects on Bunting's prose which are at last taking shape: in the first place "The Lion and the Lizard" will feature as one of a group of *Three Essays* to be published by the Basil Bunting Poetry Centre of Durham University in 1994: this is to be followed by Peter Quartermain's edition of Bunting's *Selected Prose*, and Peter Makin's edition of Bunting's lectures on poets and poetry.

Other essays from this group sustain Bunting's critique of the limitations of written English poetry, and together they form one of the more radical poetic statements of their day. This piece itself needs no further introduction, except to point out that Bunting's respect for Fitzgerald survived into an age when other translations of Omar were receiving high praise.*

—Richard Caddel

* "The Lion and the Lizard" copyright © The Estate of Basil Bunting 1993.

They say the lion and the lizard keep
The courts where Jamshid gloried and drank deep.

The lion and the lizard, though near at hand in Persia, are remote and almost legendary to an English reader. Omar says nothing of the lizard. The lion appears in some MSS, but the better ones have "fox." "In that palace, where Bahram gripped his cup, the gazelle breeds and the fox has his den." Omar is more humble, less sumptuously coloured, and yet more vivid: there is no hampering haze of glory between the reader and the object.

Similarly Fitzgerald has changed Bahram to Jamshid, the historical to the legendary. To the ordinary English reader this is merely a change of sound, and if Fitzgerald's motive were musical the change was perhaps justified. But he loses two things. There is nothing remarkable in Jamshid's palace being ruined and deserted, any more than in the complete disappearance of King Lud's. But Bahram was not then remoter than Coeur de Lion now is. It is as though the deer and badgers of Windsor Forest had occupied the castle. Secondly, the repetition of Bahram's name—three times—in Omar's quatrain hammers a point Fitzgerald's version slides over with smooth melancholy. Fitzgerald doubles the splendour: not content with a king he introduces a demigod; but loses the satisfying acridity of fact Omar has.

In the second couplet of this rubay Fitzgerald's marvellous ingenuity in finding at least partial equivalents for things one would think utterly untranslatable is shown. The Persian is based on a pun. The "wild ass" and the "grave" are alike "*gur.*" Bahram's usual title in Persian literature is Bahram-Gur, because he was devoted to the difficult chase of the gur, (Xenophon describes this creature as much swifter than the horses of his period: πολὺ σαρ τῶν ἵππον ἔτρεχον θᾶττον, Anabasis V.)* and this was present to the mind of every Persian at the mention of Bahram. Omar says: "Bahram who spent his whole life catching the *gur*,—see how the *gur* has caught Bahram." No similar play is possible in English, yet Fitzgerald has found a play not utterly dissimilar.

And Bahram, that great hunter, the wild ass
Stamps o'er his grave but cannot break his sleep.

Anabasis, Book I, Chapter 5, 2; Xenophon is describing the sort of hunting possible in the Arabian desert during Cyrus' expedition to Persia: when anyone chased them, the wild asses ran ahead and then stopped still, *for they ran much faster than the horses.* I italicize the English version of the words Bunting quotes.

Yet somehow the function of the wild ass here is obscured and confounded with that of the lion and the lizard in the preceding couplet. The emphasis falls not so much on the deadness of Bahram as on the general desolation. But this has already been sufficiently indicated. There is no need to dwell on it. Fitzgerald imparts a semireligious solemnity wanting in Omar, together with a savor of redundance. A thin veil of redundancy is cast over the facts of the whole rubay.

Whilst admiring the accuracy of the verb "stamps" which is, in fact, the making of the couplet, and the deftness with which Bahram's reputation is spared the fatuity of a footnote (though perfect precision would require "that great hunter of wild asses"), one feels the loss of Omar's pun. Even, maybe, "the grave has caught him" or "seized him" or "hunted him down," any of which is a fair translation. It is like the difference between active and passive.

In this Persian has the better of English since it rejects the passive wherever a reasonable manipulation of the phrase can make it active. It is not in the character of Persian poets to think in the passive. Everything is conceived actively, even though the subject of the sentence must thereby be made impersonal. The loss of precision is illusory, since such sentences in the passive must imply an impersonal, or at least an unnamed agent: whereas the gain in directness is very great. The passive gives always an oblique view of the facts, always involves "second thoughts": is, ultimately, an inversion disguised.

Likewise the intransitive verb has often a strong smack of abstraction. The events that make up the world are for the most part such as can be exactly expressed by active, transitive verbs. (For full discussion of this, consult Fenollosa's remarkable essay "On the Chinese Written Character" printed in Pound's *Instigations.)* The most vivid poetry, in the long run the most durable because the least affected by changes of philosophic habit, is that which approximates most nearly to the structure of the event. (The morphology of interaction remains to be studied by a future race of scientists not committed to any monistic premise.) To the event—active—the result—passive—stands as a first abstraction, the first process of reflection and subjectivity; selective, that is, rejecting part of the fact to simplify classification. Creation, regarded as the Gods or ours, is not simple.

Fitzgerald's splendid and yet inadequate version of this rubay affords illustrations of other persistent vices of English Poetry. It is partly because it is so splendid that it is inadequate. Almost any of the translations of Dante would serve to exhibit this fault, as would likewise a comparison of any of Milton's descriptive passages with descriptive passages from Dante or Homer. Life includes splendour but is not sustainedly splendid. Effulgence is liable to blind the beholder to all save itself: the detail, the texture of life, is lost or blurred. In Dante, Homer or Firdusi the principal characteristic is

clarity and sharpness of detail: so too in Omar, brilliantly illuminated often, but only very rarely so as to dazzle, so as to make us think first of the radiance and only secondly of the radiant object. It is the occasional intrusion of this overgreat splendour that makes Dante's Paradise inferior to his Hell and Purgatory, at least in the estimation of those who read first, and with their eyes open, for poetry, not first for theology or religious exaltation. Omar can be splendid but his whole effect is not one of splendour, it would be perhaps a shade less erroneous to call it squalid. Fitzgerald is almost always gloomily splendid, at the cost of removing himself out of the world into what d'Annunzio might call a "world of poetry": an unreal, rapidly cloying place.

Of this splendour he makes his poem. Omar varies, now bitter, now ironical, now as Anacreontic as the music-hall drinking songs of the 1890s. Anon he is the astronomer in a world that has no ears except for quacks. He can be graceful, receptive, sensuous, or as verbal and intellectual as Laforgue, as argumentative, almost, as Lucretius. Of this there is little trace in Fitzgerald, who keeps one tone throughout: an exalted tone; but the poem, however homogenous, is lopsided.

Omar's cadence changes continually, Fitzgerald's little. His rubayat are all alike, of a measure that very well represents a good deal of Omar but is unable to change when he changes and allows but meagre license. Having found out a stately measure Fitzgerald conforms his gait to it continuously, whether the ground he is traversing is suited to it or not. He would rather level hills and valleys to one even plain than change his gait. He subjects matter to manner. Far otherwise Omar.

Sometimes the Persian rhythm is such that an English reader has almost the illusion of Fitzgerald's presence: evidence enough of his genius. But again it is broken or colloquial or it dances or chatters as Fitzgerald never does. Omar is not upon his dignity. He is more concerned with the impression made by the objects he has in mind than with that made by his own voice or figure; and these objects are such as the world is full of, not, for the most part, very august, though not necessarily therefore awkward.

These notes are not set down to belittle Fitzgerald who was a great poet, a great adapter of a greater poet, but to call attention to certain shortcomings of English poetry in general. English poets are too often on their dignity, they strive too constantly to be sublime and end by becoming monotonous and empty of lifegiving detail, like hymn-tunes. They have often been the slaves rather than the masters of their meters. (The sonnet exploited Wordsworth, not he the sonnet.) This is partly because they have neglected the music of Byrd and Dowland so much more supple rhythmically than English poetry or than the music of the classical masters until recently most in favor.

English poets are commonly too much of a piece to be anything but fragmentary, for life is not of a piece. Their movement, their vowel-successions, their alliterations, have been too commonly splendiferous, until verbal splendour has lost its virtue in English: and when, as recently, they have tried to restore it by the use of contrast, they frequently fail because they will not devote sufficient care and labor to anything much below the sublime; because they do not understand that cacophony is as least as intricate an art as harmony; because they despise or patronize jazz and other popular music; because, I might add, they do not value nor study Dickens, from whom they could, if they would, learn more about poetry than from Milton, Wordsworth, Baudelaire and Rimbaud rolled into one

In their debauch of easy magnificence—for it has become more difficult to avoid than to achieve the over-rich—English poets have hazed over sharp outlines and made too free a use of translucent but comparatively empty passives and intransitives, forgetting that the world of daylight and full consciousness is, above all, opaque and complex. They have sought yet remoter abstractions even by forced adjectives, and conceits, like some of Mr. Eliot's, painful to follow. They have often thought more carefully about the impression made by their own personality than about that made by the ostensible object of their verse.

'Ash Wednesday' might serve to demonstrate many of these errors.

Our greatest are not free of these faults. Few have resolutely "kept their eye on the object" (in Wordsworth's phrase), but these few have saved our literature from being merely a series of Marlowes, Miltons, Keatses. I would mention Burns, the last of Dryden, the first of Wordsworth, the author of "Arden of Feversham, " possibly Denham and Crabbe, as the few just men for whose sake Sodom may be spared. I do not imply that these were the best endowed of our writers: obviously not: but that they were those who best maintained their poetic integrity. Equally important has been the example of the series of great prose writers captained by Swift, Samuel Butler, Wycherley and Dickens.

Shakespeare's talents were much greater than those of any other north European writer, yet he who reads both Shakespeare and Dante must notice how Shakespeare makes three or four casts at an object, three or four approximations, by comparing which we arrive at his exact meaning. Often the multiplicity is disguised by deft dovetailing of metaphors; nevertheless the drawing, however marvellous its design, is blurred. Whereas Dante says a thing once and exactly. His outlines are sharp and precise.

Similarly he who reads Shakespeare and Homer or Firdusi must notice how Shakespeare fits his cadence to the need of the speaker (to some extent—often he is careless). Almost all his cadences are in some sense subjective. The epic music, on the other hand, belongs to the object, the matter in hand. Shakespeare's method is admirably suited to the theatre,

where actions and physical things are visible and where it is precisely the mood of the speaker that needs to be created, verbally and by dramatic gesture: but abusively by other poets to kinds far different to the infinite damage of literature.

Editorial note: In preparing Bunting's typescript for publication, I have not followed Bunting's suggestion in his 1 May 1935 letter to Zukofsky that "The bits in brackets would do better in footnotes." Anyone who wishes to read them that way can.

—Peter Quartermain

GARY **SNYDER**

Under the Hills Near the Morava River

She lay there midst

Mammoth, reindeer, and wolf bones:

Diadem of fox teeth round her brow

Ochre under her hips

26,640 plus or minus 110 years before "now."

Burnt reindeer-pelvis bone-bits
in her mouth,

Bones of two men lying by her,
one each side.

GEORGE **ECONOMOU**

Alanus de Insulis

Alanus de Insulis (Alan of Lille) was a theologian and poet associated with the School of Chartres during the twelfth-century renaissance. His *De planctu naturae* (1160–72) was written in alternating sections of prose and verse, a form known as *prosimetrum*, the chief model of which was the *De consolatione philosophiae* of Boethius. Alan's work is an allegorical vision in which the Goddess Natura appears to the narrator and complains to him about mankind's failure to heed her laws, her natural justice and virtue. After she reveals her identity to him, the narrator addresses her with the following sapphic ode, which contains many of the epithets associated with Natura and other great mother figures.

—G.E.

God's child and mother of things
this world's bond and untieable knot
earth's jewel, mirror of the perishable
our morning star.

Peace love power guidance might
order law end way leader source
life light brilliance beauty form
rule of this world.

Who
guiding the world with your reins
keep things together with concord's knot
and with the bond of peace
marry
the heavens to earth.

Who
reflecting on the pure ideas in the divine mind
coin every species
and clothing matter with form
shapes its cloak
with your thumb.

You
heaven befriends and air serves
earth honors and sea adores
to you
all things pay tribute
as Lady of the universe.

Who
setting day to night in sequence
give day the sun's candle
put to sleep night's clouds
with the bright
mirror of the moon.

Who gild the sky with stars
brighten aether's throne
filling the sky
with precious constellations
and manifold armies.

Who change the heavens' face
with protean shifting
and populate our airy way
binding it up
with your laws.

You nod
and the world's young again
the forest's tresses curl
and dressed in its shirt of flowers
the earth
takes pride in itself.

Who control the swell
and fall of the tide
stopping short the deep fury
so its surge
won't flood
our piece of earth.

ROBERT DUNCAN, ALLEN GINSBERG & CHARLES OLSON

Duende, Muse, and Angel

The following conversation took place at the legendary Vancouver Festival in the summer of 1963. Originally transcribed by Ralph Maud, and published with his annotations in the *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society*, it is copyright © 1992 by the University of Connecticut Library and reprinted with their permission. It strikes me as a remarkable document, not only for what is said—the occasional lightning in the heavy clouds—but also as a sample of how American poets used to talk, only thirty years ago.

—E.W.

Duncan: I think Lorca tells us what to think of the Duende in relation to . . .and he just said it was a daemon. And I don't think it's a personal rhythm; daemon's a real spirit, who attends you, and a resource outside yourself—although I know it's now supposed to be inside the psyche, but I've never quite believed that.

Olson: Well, do you have any problems with that division?

Duncan: No not at all. Element inside and outside.

Olson: Right.

Duncan: Except it's more fun if it's outside. Like wanting to go to haunted houses.

Olson: Matter of fact, if he's inside, damn well put him outside so that you *can* heed him there where you have to deal with it. Trouble with that damn Socrates' appropriation of him. . .

Duncan: He's walking around with him in his pocket!

Olson: . . .was that he kept a dirty little secret there on him. And, in fact, as it's been often said, the whole trouble is that suddenly all that used to be called muthologos died in that moment. Socrates didn't know a

goddamn thing about the stories of the past. Absolutely. They suddenly would. . .Story was to have died with Socrates. He didn't even know what the hell the point of it was of Helen hanging herself from a tree while he saw her, somebody, somebody getting a dirty piece of ankle or something. He didn't. Literally the rational imposes itself here.

Duncan: So the daemon was given a rational place to live, outside of any story, who, as it turned out, was in philosophy—like, he was in philosophy.

Olson: Mind you inside or out. Any story, inside or out. Right.

Ginsberg: Is it evident you can get any kind of personal physiological rhythm out of the Duende for use in poetry? Is that right?

Olson: It isn't. But is it? Doesn't Lorca—I used it in that review of Creeley's book, at the end—doesn't Lorca literally propose three poetries? A poetry of the Duende. . .

Duncan: . . .of the Muse, and. . .

Olson: . . .and the Angel. In other words, the *Geist*, for example?

Duncan: He opposes the Muse absolutely, which for him's French poetry. Apollinaire, he says has a stinky Muse.

Olson: Well, I can agree on that, but. . .

Duncan: . . .and he wants to arrive at the Duende all alone, and he doesn't want any of those Angels in there.

Olson: I think it's an enormously helpful division, and much more interesting than that one of Pound's, which lasted awfully well for half a century, but—the one which I heard you read into even in instructing somebody about phanopoeia. I think we ought to really treat that one below its formulation, as well as take the Lorca thing as a formulation which can be sort of felt out rather than to go below it. That's probably what should. . .

Ginsberg: What is the technique for going about feeling out the Duende, or feeling the Duende in you? Is there any way of conjuring it up? or conjuring it in you?

Olson: Well, you're—yeah, I don't know. I mean, are you—would you call yourself a Duende poet?

Ginsberg: Yeah. Duende.

Olson: You would? Well, what would you call yourself?

Duncan: Well, what will you cheat? [laughs] I find I'm not calling the ticket right now.

Olson: No, but just for the hell of it, use the tickets and see what you would. If I was shipping Allen to Lorca, to Spain, what ticket. . . ?

Duncan: I'd call myself a Muse poet, except for some complications.

Olson: Well, that's—we know about the complications. What about the simplification?

Duncan: The simplification, I think, is a Muse poet.

Olson: I think I call Creeley a poet of the Angel, if I'm not mistaken, in that review, didn't I? I said that he—did I not? . . .And I don't mean *you're* a—well, I'm not sure, as a matter of fact, that's like. . .You're interest is on various things.

Ginsberg: If you want to make it with the Duende, just you got to stamp your foot while you're making a poem.

Olson: I think it would be extremely valuable if everybody in this room sort of understood to some extent which of these three roads they most naturally are travelling on, at this point of time, anyhow.

Duncan: I have some definite earmarks that would indicate the Muse was in question. For one thing, melody and memory being as absolutely essential to my movement in poetry, so that if we were looking at it detective-wise it'd make a pretty good. . .And the appearance of—although I don't trust the appearance of Apollo. That's the trouble with what you evoke: you can't always be that sure. . .

Olson: You don't trust the appearance of Apollo? Well, I don't think you should, as a matter of fact. I can prove to you that Apollo and Aphrodite are god and goddess of a particular hour of twenty-four, and it's been—we've lost great lengths of strength because of the failure to specify

the—how do you say it?—the canons of mythology. We've really lost it, and we play around with something which really has much deeper and tremendous plant, or fix, for both life and work, in just this point: the birth of the two of them, even in the island they were born in and the conditions under which they were born, which is, whew, a title of both of them. It's rather hung back before they become sort of those dopey snivelling. . .

Duncan: Before they became Olympians.

Olson: I mean, you've got to be statuary rather than, in fact, the buyer. I mean, you know, the wickedest thing in the world is what happened to those. . .

Duncan: . . .Cyprus.

Olson: No, that's the latest. It's a little island, just off the coast. It's a double island, and she was born first, so she rowed her mother over to help her in the birth of Apollo; so Apollo gets born on one little island. . .

Ginsberg: Those on Rhodes?

Olson: No, no. . .I'm so stupid, you see. . .and its very great title they both carry. But the point I was—I would wish that you would be always sure about the damned Greeks. And you can get it in an enormous fashion by looking at that—at Clark's book on *The Nude*. There's one moment—I think the date is 476 B.C.—in which the damn model, the modeling, the model modeling, stencilled stamps, much as the American Express Company, imposed itself upon all of this, stiffened it up, made it ideal long before the three thinkers came along. The whole vision of nature and man was just put in a freezer like a popsicle. And even if it's beautiful, it still is—became a popsicle.

Duncan: Beauty was limited to the popsicle at that point.

Olson: Well, that's when beauty again got all. . .

Duncan: Absolutely closed, and everything else was out of it.

Ginsberg: Where does that happen?

Olson: It's exactly in the statue of who had been Kore and became Venus, and who had been Kouros, a Kouros. . .

Duncan: And became Apollo.

Olson: . . .and became Apollo. And these are very—these two were really great creatures of youths instead of what they come out as: everything we've ever had, which is simply Beauty, male and female, or Love, male and female. And they really are—they're gooped off from that point themselves. It's very hard to get at them because of that, because they—Venus becomes Callipygos, right? And Apollo becomes. . .

Duncan: Belvedere [laughter], like Belvedere Rose, or whatever.

Olson: Belvedere! O.K. let's go to the Hotel Apollo! It's an enormous stiffening, which I'm not sure we today are not just simply the other end of. We're now sucking the popsicle down to the stick. But, quickly, I mean, get rid of the. . .

Duncan: And waiting for the message on the stick.

Olson: Which has a message. Which again gets me back to. . .

Ginsberg: You get another free popsicle. [laughter]

Duncan: Yeah, you get another free popsicle, and you're back on the same round again.

Olson: Which gets me back to the advantage of not talking poetry as though it was that melopoeia, logopoeia, and phanopoeia were three sort of styles. But that does come up in Pound.

Duncan: But it doesn't work that way. . .at all.

Olson: . . .And it doesn't work that way. And, in fact, the bases on which any of us are really both living and writing is much more in Lorca's idea of the Muse, the Duende, and the Angel. What is his word for Angel, by the way, did you—? He just says Angel?

Duncan: Angel. Angel, straight on. And he dismisses it. But the thing is that the church—Mohammedan and Christian and Jewish churches had all dismissed the angels, officially. That again has a time when it couldn't fit in at all.

Olson: Yes, except that in the first half of the thirteenth century Ismaili nationalism is really rediscovering the angel like mad, is rediscovering an anthropology as well. It has a time in there which is as great as the

recognition by Whitehead that we only are living—that we're living only in an electromagnetic epoch, which may be five hundred million years long, but what a sort of a quick point that makes: that you don't exaggerate this great condition of the present. I mean, it is only one of other alternatives. So that suddenly you've found Duende, Muse, and Angel in some—both on some base line, which is interesting, as well as give yourself a chance to appropriate some anthropology or angelology which makes sense to you. And I swear the Muse is an anthropological—somewhere is an anthropological mantra. Is that eidolon, and now mantra is a sign, gesture as sign?

Ginsberg: Mudra. Mudra.

Olson: Mudra. A mudra.

Ginsberg: Yeah. But the Indians have Sarasvati, goddess of Learning, Poetry, and Muse; they have a goddess, with a mandala.

Olson: Yes, that's right. But we're not really *there*. Now that's phanopoeia and melopoeia, isn't it? That's when we're talking that. . .

Duncan: Yeah, anyway, but these Muses weren't goddesses. They danced around the figure, so that you could name one, one part of it, or one another, but they were a ring, dancing.

Ginsberg: Can you invoke Muse, you know, in its form?

Olson: Oh, and how! Literally. Certainly. I don't mean in the poem, but in the feeling and attitude. . .Oh, I got a Muse, and I just call her up, because I happen to know who she is. And I just think about her, and whew! No? I mean, it's that literal.

Ginsberg: I just wondered what you did.

Olson: Oh, sure.

Duncan: Sometimes she calls you up, in the middle of work.

Olson: Well, then I don't answer. I won't answer—I won't take any telephone calls; no telephone calls.

Duncan: . . .Certainly there's been—take Swedenborg, who thinks that angels are people and that people are essentially angels.

Olson: Well, I believe he's got a great idea there.

Duncan: Yeah, the self should be an Angel; or the self should be a Duende; then should self be a Muse? No. That's very disturbing.

Olson: No poet thinks so at all. That's why you have what's called the Muses.

Duncan: What's clear in my mind is the sense that the Muse is the music, and they dance; and that's it.

Olson: But equally Duende and Angel are objectifiable, too. There's three—I'm totally convinced that we really are talking three roads in and out, which are all on different planes, three different planes. And you may or not—*you* may be invoked or inspired by any one of those three, according to some peculiar corpuscular character of your own self. . .But the nine are late; the nine are late; the nine are like Ezra again.

Duncan: And the poet always says there's *a* Muse.

Olson: That's right. And if that is really true. . .

Duncan: And that may be Mama.

Olson: Usually is. It is, as a matter of fact. It's that little wife of Zeus, who . . .daughter? It's tough to say: was she a daughter or was she one of his girls? I think she was one of his wives, in fact one of the very earliest was Mnemosyne. No? Pretty sure.

Duncan: Was Mnemosyne ever in that Orphic order where the gods are out of the picture?

Olson: Well, I don't know. The great passage on the Muses, by the way, you can read is in Pausanias' visit to Helicon, where he actually sees the statues of the three Muses, not the vain—the nine is like the Olympian system. There were three, and they're wonderful, they're like, you know, like Graves's bullshit about the triple goddess, but they clearly are three powers, like you were talking *poiein*, and you're talking some other thing to arouse both yourself and anyone else.

Duncan: This is the thing that's called rhetoric, which is not only that it can flow forth but that it persuades.

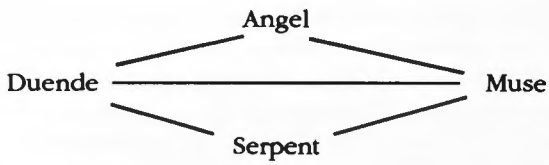
Olson: That's right. And rhetoric is, as you know—that's why I was teasing you the other night. We've been having—no, we haven't: don't think we have big, secret conversations. We have the same conversations, only in a different aspect. We were reading Wordsworth, we were fighting a battle the other night of Wordsworth and Shelley, and Allen wants to say that Shelley—"Listen to this rhythm!" And I said, "Oh, Christ, forget the rhythm. You make rhythms." But it's true, rhythm is really great if you take it on the level of the word *rhetor*, because *rhetor* is the same word as "rhythm."

Duncan: *Rhetor.*

Olson: *Rhetor*, right. That's quite true, but those—I've forgotten the literal names, like Melicertes and. . .

Ginsberg: Melpomene?

Olson: No, no, that's all that lot later. I believe that we're terrifically advantaged because everything that was that rational discourse structure that came in absolutely at 476 and showed itself first in the marble—yeah, the marble, really, right—has not only broken but we really have tremendous opportunity to walk around now in the areas where—where, like, the Indo-European people first put their hands in the real thing.



Audience: . . .the fourth corner. . .?

Olson: Oh, of course it's the Serpent, but we don't mention him. I mean, there is always a quadratic behind the three, but—uh? Sure, but we don't treat—sure, but we can treat Serpents properly these days. . .That drawing is very important, like. You carry that four where you can manage to carry 'em, and try it on 'em, that's all. See how well you can do with number four.

Duncan: These would be unstable if it weren't for the fact that there's a Shadow up—I mean, there's another triangle. . .

Olson: Very much there.

Duncan: They would tend to fly apart, and two of them would mate, and the third one would interfere, and everything would go—I mean, you'd be in one of those triangles, like they say, in soap operas.

Olson: Right, right. But you're also in that wonderful fact that happens to be "I". . ."I"? "I"? That happens to be "I" too—which we just—we left that—we asked, "Who? Am I. . .?" Duncan says, "Am I my own Muse?" Am I my own Muse? Are you—are you your own demonstration?

Ginsberg: What are the three corners here? What are they. . .?

Olson: Well, we just spoke—but she asked a real question. Say the Duende, the Angel, and, just for the present conversation, that's true too.

Duncan: But I think you were asking would you have more force if, instead of having this with this mirror, you had that, without this?

Olson: Yeah, do you?

Duncan: And you don't; it stabilizes, absolutely. I think it comes to a stasis, and instead of moving at that point.

Olson: Well, I think so. I would—well, those who've been into my class with me know that I think that that's a condition of something that is real, and we are the creators of that real; so that you are—so that you gotta be. . .if he says "stasis," right? But I don't—you'd better put that line back, otherwise. . .

Duncan: Yeah, I'd better. Yes, I know, that's what I put that for.

Olson: Oooooo! Oooooo!

Duncan: Taking that line away is part of what them magicians want to do; they keep wanting to get. . .

Olson: Very much.

Duncan: That's why they're not poets; I mean, that's why they're not writers.

Olson: I don't trust magicians for that reason. They're playing without that line.

Duncan: No, as a matter of fact, they look very silly; and they keep thinking if we took the line out, it would be one big open house.

Olson: It's not like tennis, but it's like marking off your steps. How many yards did you make? What lines do you draw?

Ginsberg: Now, wait a minute. Are we involved in drawing lines?

Olson: No. But we are divided, in a sense, from union. We are divided from union. . .By the way, statue here gets tremendously important: that's why I would talk "mudra," or whatever we want to talk about, because it's clear, by the way, that if you don't make a true—yeah, we used—you know, like, that word "image" is marvelous because it also does mean "eidolon," something which is objectively represented, or presented, right? And that was the great concept of an object: that it was something you either could carry, that you had in your house, or was in the public square. I mean, if you take that "David" by Michelangelo, standing in Florence, it's an enormously great figure, but I don't believe it carries any of this characteristic of object.

Duncan: First, it was stone, wasn't it? I mean, first it's a real gift to make, that's the thing. And every bit of its shaping. . .

Olson: Very much so. I never saw it so rude, by the way, as in Yucatan. One of the great advantages, to my mind, of Amerind civilization, who was full of—is to see how a city like either Uxmal or Chichen, which has enormously elaborate architecture. You remember the kooky pigeon house, say, at Uxmal? Or the Governor's Palace, right? Which is what? It's like one of them damned French things.

Ginsberg: So is "The Elaboration of Hell."

Olson: Well, that's a fake, like an architectural fake, but—but the Governor's Palace is an enormous building that this university and everybody else isn't any better with. And right in front of it was a phallus of stone just absolutely, literally, stuck there in the ground, in fact—and all over the place is this enormous jump between this image of nature, which is that thing we've just been talking about, and this incredibly literal building of any city anywhere in the world, for offices, or so. It's an enormous picture that you get when you—you can't see

it: the damned palaces have been removed, but. . .

Duncan: If you take that first stone that's given, and under it or—and to it could be said, "This *is* she." If you get to the Greek image, the one that Charles is talking about that sucked us in, by that time: "This *looks like* her."

Olson: Yes, quite. Very much, very much.

Duncan: Once "This looks like her," then "she" is some place, and "she" is an idea, and then "she" floats all over the place: she's Beauty, she's anything they want to name.

Olson: Right.

Duncan: But here at the beginning, the thing you do know was that—and as a matter of fact, when they dig it up they know; and that's what first things are, that this is "she," and she proves to be a stone, including all the things she was up here, Beauty and so forth. And even "idea" means "to see it," and must go back to that seeing the stone. . .But between that stone and the cut stone, the shaped stone, that's the danger. You're always working in a poem in the same thing that man has worked in, and when you come to "idea" poets, and Shelley's certainly one of them, and it's beginning in Wordsworth in parts, you are coming to a separation again between the statement "This is she" and "This looks like her."

Olson: I think so very much, because Wordsworth's weakness is not—as again you were quoting Yeats to me last night—is not at all that he had a system of thought, but that Nature had become a substitute for this thing that we're now talking about. Like, literally nature: you go out and you see—or he gets scared by a looming shadow out on the boat on the lake. I don't think that's a—he ain't being scared by a looming shadow out on the lake on a boat, he's being scared by some funk in himself. And we know these things: one of our chances is to be sure that we get to place the funk where it belongs, and not distribute it as though we were dealing with a formal character of the real. The real is only things. You got to be awfully sure that you got that fixed in your mind. Things. No, I mean, literally it only means it, and that's all it is. Otherwise, you're going to poeticize, tragedize, do a hell of a lot of "-izing" to what really has a greater impact. And in fact you are yourself a more critical problem because you're really independent of that enormous system. Yeats himself should be calling names; like, ahah! Let's talk about where *he* is. I mean, . . .

Ginsberg: . . .When you said the universe or the real is only things, or only in things, the problem there is you can have things without having them real also. I mean, you know, the eye doesn't see them. . .

Olson: You can't take anything away, Allen. You get nervous, I think, in saying that, 'cos you can't take a damn thing away from—you won't lose anything by just treating the universe as real.

Ginsberg: No, that's true enough, but. . .

Olson: It ain't going to go way, or it ain't gonna suddenly crack in.

Ginsberg: Righto, but when done doctrinally, then the feeling of the thing is lost. I've seen that operating in Williams sometimes.

Olson: Yeah, I know. Well, sure.

Ginsberg: Or from Williams.

Olson: Yeah, that's right. Williams sure has the danger.

Ginsberg: Or many of the young poets who are now writing "thing" poetry. "No ideas but in things" is completely without. . .

Olson: Well, I don't myself believe that Bill's adage is holding up now as interestingly either, because of the—because of how you said it: the "formulation?" What did you say for that stiffening that occurs when you've made a mold?

Ginsberg: Become doctrinal.

Olson: Doctrinal, right. I think the doctrinal in Bill's—I've even, not a month ago, felt—I can't get the feeling back now, but I felt some way that that statement is—can be now stated with a. . .

Ginsberg: Well, let me. . .of its time in its functioning it was quite perfect and will last, understood for what it was.

Olson: . . .Well, I asked Rony and Phyllis when we were driving back from the radio station—just to bring this home, like—I mean, "What do you do with the persons of your dreams?" The *persons* of your dreams: because that, to my mind, is a tremendous place that we are now free to possess in a way that—I mean, like

For al so siker as *In principio,*
Mulier est hominis confusio,—
The meaning of this sentence is,
"Womman is mannes joye and al his blis."

Which is that wonderful answer about dream that is in "The Nun's Priest's Tale" about—to fix it as real. I mean, he's really saying, "You know, like, you're a damn nuisance, but I'm going to tell you you're beautiful, because of this is"—who is the—? I mean, I would say you've got to treat the persons of your dreams, who are always (aren't they?) whom you know, I mean, essentially, I mean—no, I mean that level of dreaming which always is the persons you know: what do you do with those people? To bring this whole muth-mythologicalness in. Because the out seems to me much more—I don't know, from seeing it—for me it's much more easily demonstrable than the evidences of the same, I think, the same thing within. It seems to me we're absolutely exploded to re—and required to reveal all that's in our chest: "Let your hot heart burst!" What's the—? I mean, Ahab's great statement: "Burst his hot heart like a crater" or something "on the whole of it." I mean, that's a marvelous agony and anger—in his instance, violence, but, essentially, it's where *we* are, isn't it? I mean, to get it out, not to play as though there's two. There's an in and an out: that's no longer interesting at all. . .I'm struck at how the whole idea of dreams as wish-fulfillment, for example, is so essentially interesting if you take it. . .The old definition of the gods was that their wish was will. That's so exciting to me: that they were so called and have powers because their *wish* was will. There's no second start. The ordering is a single order of wish and will. That's beautiful, to my mind, and it releases the whole dream thing, so that you get an absolute one to one with the dream condition of the universe. You can call it "race" and you can call it "dream," because that wish/will thing is just an instant of power . . .I think one of the craziest examples of this is the greatest Angel known to man in the Greek system is Hecate; and I could prove—I could read you. . .I did for that Bollingen translation a long supposed translation of about fifty lines of Hesiod. There's fifty lines in *The Theogony* on Hecate, which ought to forever put an end to this use of her as the frightful goddess, the goddess of fear, which is one of the damndest clichés we have, really, is the idea—she's been a bore for how long? But in fact she is the great "angel" of her father; she does the real stuff. Whenever a real thing has to be done, she's sent to do it. It's an amazing fact that Hecate was really like, gee, I don't know, in our system, like Michael? In the Christian system, who's the—? The archangel, the archangel. She's the archangel, early, look; a woman

archangel. And, you know, she became, in some curious dumb problem of fear and fright, this monster. But she's no monster.

Duncan: That's when they made that division, I'm sure.

Olson: Yes, it is, completely. Oh, sure, absolutely.

Audience: The way Hecate is connected in my mind to what we were talking about before is that she is supposed to have three faces, isn't she?

Olson: No, that's the junk; that's the junk. That's the junk; that's the triple goddess junk of Robert Graves and *The White Goddess*. That's not. . .

Duncan: That's the later Demeter-Kore-Hecate.

Olson: She is called, really, *kourotrophos*: she is the nurse, the nurse of man and a nurse of life. Not the mother; the nurse, the rearer, the carer, the other thing entirely. And, as such, I mean, she is the instructor of all nursing; and she comes to the aid of those who need to lend somebody care, and not the—but she's tied, of course, tremendously to—to the Demet-mother, because when the mother loses her daughter it's Hecate that really knows where she is, not the people that saw Pluto take her, but *she* knows because that's her business, that's her world business. And she's in and out all the time because that's her function and responsibility, as Zeus's principal daughter. She's a wow, that woman; and I wish I had that passage with me because—I threw it away as verse, but, wow, it's unbelievably interesting material. It's easy to find, actually: it's in *The Theogony* under Hecate.

Audience: Is there anything special. . . [inaudible]?

Olson: Well, I could talk about it. I had a literal visit of my Angel to me this spring. It was a—talk about a dream!—I mean, he literally came; he was carrying a—he was behind the counter. I was having a cup of coffee with Dan Rice, who's a friend of Creeley's and mine, a painter, and another person who I've forgotten; and this fellow, this Angel, was the counter-man, and suddenly held up this fish, and the fish in—it was, by the way, that beautiful story in the Bible of Tobias and the angel, is it not? Is it Tobias? Yeah. It was absolutely. I could confirm to a tee the Tobias story, and, in fact, even to this: you remember the gull-shit that blinded—how's that get in there? Isn't Tobias blinded by gull-shit?

Audience: Sparrow.

Olson: A sparrow, right. Excuse me, I've made my. . .

Ginsberg: *Yeshiva bucher.*

Olson: Huh? *Yeshiva bucher.* Right. [laughs] Well, I've forgotten at the moment all the details of the dream, but, believe you me, the Angel comes straight to you, literally, and tells you everything, just like under the mushroom or something, you're absolutely told, on the moment, where you are, what you're not quite taking care of, and where you must get busy. It's valuable instruction, absolutely; and all you are asked for is obedience, which is the thing we most are disgruntled to give; but it is the thing that's asked all the time.

Duncan: I take it that imperatives that appear are really coming from there, and they can appear in a poem, imperatives of. . .

Olson: I don't know that you can get any deeper than the Lorca formulation on the instructional level of the poet to his work, actually, on it. That's what I think you're asking, Rona, is to get between life and reduction. And the truth is that these are the three terms that actually operate in the mystery of things to carry that, to carry all this thing: the Muse, the Angel, and the Geist. Would "Geist" be fair for Duende or no?

Duncan: No, because Geist, I think is like one's guide.

Olson: Tell me, what does *duende* literally mean? Can anybody. . .? Hawkins, do you know? . . .But what is *duende* in Spanish? "Technique"? "Craft"?

Audience: Craft.

Duncan: Well, then, it's fire. Then it's Hephaistos, fire. We got to go back to the daemonic; it's the fire.

Olson: It's crazy.

Ginsberg: But in Chiapas, *duende* is used for the people that come out at night and steal your cows, or start the horses neighing and running around and around.

Olson: Well, then we are back into the Celtic, yeah.

Audience: . . .Don't we use *duende*. . .in the way a singer sometimes has an electrifying air that comes into effect. . . ?

Olson: Yes, sure, sure.

Duncan: So Duende first was a flash of lightning, and a fire.

Olson: Or it's your ability, in that sense. Is that a legitimate. . . ?

Ginsberg: I heard the word *duende* used many many months, over and over and over again.

Olson: Well, it's an invasion of forces outside in, isn't it?

Ginsberg: Well, it's just sort of like a spirit comes in that makes the horses run around in the pasture in the moonlight.

Olson: Right. Right, well, that's a lowering of the idea, but it's a perfectly good case.

Ginsberg: *Hay los duendes en el potrero porque los caballos están rodeando.*

Olson: . . .It sounds awfully much at all points here that we're talking a release of one's ability.

Ginsberg: Yeah, because it was a released—a released god.

Audience: It's pretty hard to translate it into. . .

Olson: Yeah, I don't think we need to. We've gotten the essential meaning out of it. . .I don't find any problem in calling this the Holy Ghost, because the Holy Ghost was absolutely a practical manual of how to speak; and that was what he was to do, and does. We've got something here going on certainly which ties to Robert's talking in his lecture about the hero. And what was—? You said two things have fallen to the poet: the hero and the—you said two. . .priest?

Duncan: Yeah, priest.

Olson: But, well, but—this is a laird, right across the board, of Duende, Muse and Angel.

ANSELM **HOLLO**

The Complete Poems of Hipponax of Ephesus

William Carlos Williams ends Book One of his epic poem *Paterson* with a quote from John Addington Symonds' two-volume *Studies of the Greek Poets* (Vol. I, p. 284), prefacing it with an "N.B.":

> In order apparently to bring the meter still more within the sphere of prose and common speech, Hipponax ended his iambics with a spondee or a trochee instead of an iambus, doing thus the utmost violence to the rhythmical structure. These deformed and mutilated verses were called. . .[choliambi], lame or limping iambics. They communicated a curious crustiness to the style. These choliambi are in poetry what the dwarf or cripple is in human nature. Here again, by their acceptance of this halting meter, the Greeks displayed their acute aesthetic sense of propriety, recognizing the harmony which subsists between crabbed verses and the distorted subjects with which they dealt—the vices and perversions of humanity—as well as their agreement with the snarling spirit of the satirist. Deformed verse was suited to deformed morality.

There is an echo of this quote, one that Williams had found relevant to his search for a new measure, in the final lines of Book Five, the last complete installment of *Paterson*:

> We know nothing and can know nothing
> but
> the dance, to dance to a measure
> contrapuntally,
> Satyrically, the tragic foot.
>
> (p. 239)

This was not my first introduction to the Ephesian inventor of the "limping foot" who lived and made poems around 540 B. C. I had read what

remains of his work in a book by the late Finnish poet Pentti Saarikoski, a contemporary and a friend, who in 1959 published a collection of poems titled *Runot ja Hipponaksin runot* ("Poems and the the Poems of Hipponax")

Saarikoski, one of the major European poets of this century, was also a prolific translator from the classical Greek as well as from the modern classics, including Joyce's *Ulysses*. While he went on to write two powerful postmodern "epics" (*What Is Really Going On* and *Trilogy*), in the 1959 volume he demonstrated his interest in how brief a poem may get and still be "a poem"—whether its brevity is due to the ravages of time (as in the case of many ancient Greeks), or to the author's desire to explore the possibilities of the laconic.

No "complete" poem by Hipponax survives. All we have is ninety-two mostly short quotes, in the works of later authors on history and its metrics and mores, chosen for being exemplary in one way or the other. Obviously, a fragment that was chosen as a "technically interesting" example of Hipponax's "lame or limping foot," the choliamb, may lose much of its raison d'être in translation:

what a mob

or

libations and innards of a wild sow

may not seem all that evocative, or merely evocative, hovering just below the threshold of "interesting." One might say that "The Collected Poems of Hipponax" as they can be found in The Loeb Classical Library's *Herodes, Cercidas and The Greek Choliambic Poets (Except Callimachus and Babrius)*, Edited and Translated by A. D. Knox, Late Fellow of King's College, Cambridge (1926), are an aleatory (or "stochastic") work composed by Clio, Muse of History, employing her own secret chance operations formula, in a tradition later brought to full bloom by John Cage and Jackson Mac Low, and also "cut-ups" in the related lineage of Tristan Tzara, William S. Burroughs, and Brion Gysin.

The arrangement of the fragments in the Loeb edition is chronological, i.e. in the order of the approximate dates of the extant papyri and other texts in which lines attributed to Hipponax appear. Saarikoski's Finnish versions follow this arrangement fairly closely. I have created an "intuitive" display of the pieces, consisting of four parts (or poems, if you wish), under the headings

Careless Love
(check out Dr. John's recorded version of that American classic),

What a Mob
(consisting of angry, vicious, and slanderous material),

Screech Screech Here Come the Ghosts
(Or, "People Who Died")
(see Ted Berrigan's poem), and

Still Waiting for My Winter Coat
(lines dealing with the ever-present needs and wishes of the unhoused and impecunious).

The four sections reflect what little is known about the poet's life.

From Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* we learn, in a passage dealing with the annals of Greek sculpture, that Hipponax was a satirical poet of Ephesus (c. 540 B.C.) who became involved in a feud with the sculptor Bupalos. The reason for this feud seems to have been a woman, Arété, whose affections Bupalos alienated from Hipponax. Either before or after (we don't know) Arété rejected Hipponax for Bupalos, the latter created a three-dimensional caricature of the poet, presumably in marble or some other stone. One wishes this piece of sculpture had survived; in Mary Renault's novel *The Praise Singer* (1978), a fictional autobiography of Hipponax's far more successful contemporary Simonides, we find the following description of the poet's appearance:

> . . .he limped on one leg, which he had broken as a child, so that it was shorter than the other. The foot turned in, and his rocking gait had twisted his whole body, making his shoulders tilted. I thought it no wonder he should be bitter, for princes would not want to see him about their courts. . .That his clothes were dirty, I put down to his having no wife; but I thought that in a city not short of water, he could have washed himself. He ate noisily, and was helped twice. . .
>
> (etc., p. 38)

Here, the "limping" measure is understood as the poet's translation of his physical handicap into a new poetics.

Whether or not Hipponax was physically repulsive and unsanitary, he certainly often found others to be so. He became notorious for his irreverent and slanderous verses, and after Ephesus became a Persian colony (presumably when Hipponax was still young and feisty), the new vice-regents of the city found him undesirable and politically incorrect and banished him:

> He did not go far, just north across the headland to Klazomenai. Now and then we would get news of him, or someone would bring back one of his poems. . .They grew more savage; we heard rumors of someone he'd caused to hang himself. He did not live very well, however, and came down to cadging from strangers in the harbor, or begging alms from people whose enemies he had reviled. He died, they say, lying in rags in the marketplace. . . One or two citizens, I've heard, poured oblations upon his grave, thinking his spirit would do mischief if not appeased.
>
> (*The Praise Singer*, p. 41)

Careless Love is the tale of Hipponax's infatuation with Aréte, her rejection of him in favor of the sculptor Bupalos, and his subsequent indulgence in negative emotions. In *What a Mob* we see the scattered 2,500-year-old reflections from Hipponax's verbal laser beams as they were aimed at dribblers, gluttons, imitators of Homer, corrupt judges, dumb painters, witches, sadists, masochists, con-men—a parade of exponents of Symonds' "vices and perversions. . .[of] deformed morality." *Screech Screech Here Come the Ghosts* is a similarly patchy frieze of elegiac matter, *Still Waiting for My Winter Coat* a gathering of the ancient "street poet's" prayers, complaints, and curses, echoed later in the works of François Villon and our own Charles Bukowski. Pentti Saarikoski, in the notes to his translation, mentions Callimachus and Catullus as poets who regarded Hipponax as a master (and presumably still had access to the body of his recorded work).

Knox's and Saarikoski's translations have served as source texts for these versions. Like Pentti (who cites the Knox edition), I have tried my best not to stray too far from Knox's post-Victorian literalness, while also relying on Pentti's knowledge of classical Greek to guide me. Since mine is not a scholarly translation, I refrain from encumbering it with footnotes.

While giving Hipponax my best shot, I have sometimes wondered what on earth compelled me to engage with this oh-so-long-dead (white? probably coppery, and certainly ornery) male who was so obviously of the slash-and-burn persuasion in his private/political life and work, yet prone to feeling sorry for himself; whom Mary Renault suspects of having provided such eloquent negative poetic testimony on the character of one of his enemies that the latter was scapegoated by the citizens, not a pleasant process, who sounds as if he didn't like his species fellows very much—any more than they cared for him—?

The answer is, I think, simply that "now and then. . .someone would bring back one of his poems" from his ragged exile at Klazomenai, and that in this century, forty years ago to be exact, an admired and beloved friend

(whose own life was not lacking in Hipponactean themes) brought what is left of them to my attention. Then, there was that intriguing quote in *Paterson* by William Carlos Williams whose understanding of American idiom and measure went far beyond the literal. I hope his numerous poetic children and grandchildren will find some enjoyable moments in what follows.

I. CARELESS LOVE

on my way to Arété I saw
the heron fly just right

"all right all right all right"
I thought

and I did stay with her
all night

•

lamp-
light on her face

above mine

•

her slave stumbled & broke
the cup so we drank from a

bucket I had the first drink
then Arété downed the rest

•

baked goods from Amathusa
bread from Cyprus a bucket

of honey (a gift from the flower-
eaters) sweet Rhodian

ointment a garland of damson
flowers & mint aahh mmm

pierced the stopper
with a thin tube

•

soothed
my nostrils

(peanut oil)

•

greased
my keel

•

her lips
voracious

as a heron's beak

•

I love you more than I
love anyone else I swear

this to you by this
head of cabbage

•

silky
slit

•

stepping
proudly

like an
arch-

necked
horse

•

o but why did you take to your bed
that asshole Bupalos?

•

man carved out of stone

•

threatens to render me senseless

•

told them to punch Hipponax in the mouth
told them to throw rocks at Hipponax

•

got away thanks to the seven-
leaf cabbage (Pandora's offering

at the Thargelia before *she* copped it)

•

here hang on to my shirt
while I bop Bupalos right

in the eye for I am ambi-
dextrous and my aim is

perfect

•

thought it was him
so let him have it

•

ripped his cloak
slashed him
down the middle

•

she rents out her tongue
for eighty bucks

•

you want him?
I'll let you have him

dirt-cheap

•

her nose a bell
with snot for a clapper

why bother to wrap it up
(it isn't fresh partridge, exactly)

•

another game?
with those loaded dice?

you must be kidding

•

no more warming your
chilblains at my embers

•

so fooling The In-Bred of Erythrea
Bupalos feeds at the trough

(Arété
beside him)

•

then they shrieked at each other

•

hips out of whack
no teeth only one eye

she sure knows how to pick 'em

•

may Artemis strike you down
or Apollo

(I don't care)

II. WHAT A MOB

when they catch Phrygians
the Soloeci sell them to Miletus

where they need slaves for their mills

•

what a mob

•

was that a fart or a croak?

•

they dribble
like a sieve

•

Kikon you hideous glutton son
of Amythaon your head may be

crowned with bay-leaves but your
forecast doesn't look good

•

starve him and whip his gonads
pelt him with rocks in the meadow

beat him with twigs like a scapegoat

•

hold it Mimnes I don't think it is
such a good idea to paint the snake

on the side of the trireme with its
tail at the prow its head at the stern

if the snake bites his leg the brawny
helmsman will roar "count me out"

•

galloping upsidedown you lay there
after she snipped the cord

•

sing Muse of Mrs. Eurymedontiades
who needs no cutlery to wolf her food

shout Rabble vote for her death by stoning
by the Sea ever-restless

•

a hypocrite
the judge who condemned you
a paterfamilias
smirking at whores

with three witnesses he returned
to the bootlegger's place and found

a man who having no broom was busy
sweeping the floor with a broomstick

•

then she said in a strange tongue
now I'll clean your disgusting

asshole she beat me with twigs
like a scapegoat caught between

two boards I hung above dung
beetles came to the feast

•

(handy invective)

one who barfs at the feast
old sow fed on slops

cow-pie's sister
Ephesian porker

bag of puréed squid

III. SCREECH SCREECH HERE COME THE GHOSTS (OR, "PEOPLE WHO DIED")

screech screech
here come the ghosts

•

Myson whom Apollo
called the wisest of all

•

pillaged along the road to Smyrna
through Lydia past the burrow of Alyattes

past Gyges' grave mound past
Ardys' splendid slab and Sadyattes' tomb

the mighty conqueror
his belly pointing west

•

his chariot powered by white stallions from Thrace
he charged the walls of Troy and was slain

•

a better judge than Bias from Priene

•

bright Cybebe
Bendis from Thrace

daughters of Zeus

•

he lived in Smyrna
the wrong side of town

halfway to Hades

•

and how did he get to Kypsos

•

libations and innards of a wild sow

•

black fig-tree
sister of the vine

•

clean cock and balls

•

happy the hunter

•

IV. STILL WAITING FOR MY WINTER COAT

called on Hermes
strangler of dogs

brother of thieves
a.k.a. Kandaules

(in Scythia):
PLEASE HELP ME OUT

•

ah. . .to wear a mantle
of mountain sheep's wool. . .

•

Hermes lord of Cyllene
great son of Maia

Hipponax begs you:
send me a winter coat

for I am starving

•

unfunny he who drinks his lunch

•

now that was good advice

•

last night while I lay sleeping
someone made off with my clothes

lay in a room on a pallet buck-naked

•

o teeth
you

who used to reside
in my jaw

•

picked tarragon out of a dented bucket
hands shook trembled

like the toothless
when the north wind blows

•

Zeus
Emperor of Olympus

Big Daddy

•

no scrumptious feast of partridge and hare
no sesame pancakes

no fritters drenched
in honey

no yummy Lebedian figs
from far-off Kamandolos

•

to Hipponax:

1 coat
1 shirt

1 pair of sandals
1 pair of winter shoes

(and 60 gold bars
to hide in the wall)

•

still waiting for my great shaggy coat
to keep me from freezing in winter

and for that pair of winter shoes
to save my poor feet from chilblains

•

Pluto must have gone blind
he's never found his way to my house to tell me

"greetings dear Hipponax
see here I brought you this bag of silver"

•

o great Athena
please grant me a gentle master

one who won't beat me

•

I bow to Hermes
wait for the sun to rise

in his bright shirt

GEORGE **ECONOMOU**

from William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (The C-Text)

Now Glutton heads for confession
And moves towards the Church, his *mea culpa* to say.
Fasting on a Friday he made forth his way
By the house of Betty Brewer, who bid him good morning
And where was he going that brew-wife asked.
"To holy Church," he said, "to hear mass,
And then sit and be shriven and sin no more."
"I have good ale, Glutton, old buddy, want to give it a try?"
"Do you have," he asked, "any hot spices?"
"I have pepper, peony, and a pound of garlic,
A farthing-worth of fennel seed, for fasting days I bought it."
Then in goes Glutton and great oaths after.
Cissy the shoemaker sat on the bench,
Wat the game-warden and his drunken wife,
Tim the tinker and two of his workmen,
Hick the hackney-man and Hugh the needler,
Clarice of Cock's Lane and the clerk of the church,
Sir Piers of Pridie and Purnel of Flanders,
A hayward, a hermit, the hangman of Tyburn
Daw the ditchdigger and a dozen rascals
In the form of porters and pick-pockets and bald tooth-pullers,
A fiddler, a rat-catcher, a street-sweeper and his helper,
A rope-maker, a road-runner, and Rose the dish-seller,
Godfrey the garlic-man and Griffeth the Welshman,
And a heap of second-hand salesmen, early in the morning
Stood Glutton with glad cheers to his first round of ale.
Clement the cobbler took off his cloak
And put it up for a game of New Fair.
Hick the hackney-man saw with his hood
And asked Bart the butcher to be on his side.

Tradesmen were chosen to appraise this bargain,
That who-so had the hood should not have the cloak,
And that the better thing, according to the arbiters, compensate
[the worse.
They got up quickly and whispered together
And appraised these items apart in private,
And there was a load of swearing, for one had to get the worse.
They could not in conscience truthfully accord
Till Robin the rope-maker they asked to arise
And named him umpire so that all arguing would stop.
    Hick the hostler got the cloak
On condition that Clement should fill the cup
And have Hick the hostler's hood and rest content;
And whoever took it back first had to get right up
And greet Sir Glutton with a gallon of ale.
    There was laughing and louring and "please pass the cup!"
Bargaining and drinking they kept starting up
And sat so till evensong, and sang from time to time,
Until Glutton had gobbled down a gallon and a gill.
His guts began to rumble like two greedy sows;
He pissed half a gallon in the time of a *pater-noster,*
He blew his round bugle at his backbone's bottom,
So that all that heard that horn had to hold their noses
And wished it had been well plugged with a wisp of briars.
He could neither step nor stand unless he held a staff,
And then he moved like a minstrel's performing dog,
Sometimes sideways and sometimes backwards,
Like some one laying lines in order to trap birds.
    And when he reached the door, then his eyes dimmed,
And he stumbled on the threshold and fell to the ground,
And Clement the cobbler grabbed him by the waist
And in order to lift him up set him on his knees.
But Glutton was a huge boor and troubled in the lifting
And barfed up a mess into Clement's lap;
There is no hound so hungry in Hertfordshire
That he'd dare lap up that leaving, so unlovely it smacked.
    With all the woe in this world his wife and his maid
Bore him to his bed and put him in it,
And after all this excess he had a bout of sloth;

He slept through Saturday and Sunday till sundown.
Then he awoke pale and wan and wanted a drink;
The first thing he said was "Who's got the bowl?"
His wife and his conscience reproached him for his sin;
He became ashamed, that scoundrel, and made quick confession
To Repentance like this: "Have pity on me," he said,
"Thou Lord that art aloft and shape all that lives!
    To thee God, I, Glutton, acknowledge my guilt
Of how I've trespassed with tongue, how often I can't tell,
Sworn 'God's soul and his sides!' and 'So help me God, Almighty!'
There was no need for it so many times falsely;
And over-ate at supper and sometime at noon
More than my system could naturally handle,
And like a dog that eats grass I began to throw up
And wasted what I might have saved—I can't speak for my shame
Of the depravity of my foul mouth and maw—
And on fasting-days before noon I fed myself ale
Beyond all reason, among dirty jokesters, their dirty jokes to hear.
Hereof, good God, grant me forgiveness
For all my worthless living during my entire life-time.
For I swear by the true God, despite any hunger or thirst,
Never shall on Friday a piece fish digest in my stomach
Till my aunt Abstinence has given me leave—
And yet I've hated her all my life-time."

KEVIN **MAGEE**

Millstone

Worms in the corn
it almost always was
aperture, each vivid laborer
all the commons in any case
a clerk was called forward.
Iron, granite or diamond
umbrage, the same dull round
a mill with wheels, pain and travail
rain and wind in the fields
en Engleterre de anno in annum
in England year after year
issi destrure le poverail
crushing the poor
pondus per amarum
under a heavy load.
Terms of tenure
tenants must render
that sow the meadows
carry hay to the granges
acknowledge bondage
no unconditional allowance
made, *operarius*, or workmen

songewarie (dream interpreting)
wage and largesse
indentured surplus, famine,
revolt and the falling away
of illusions, step deafening
declarative free will
when the work hour calls you
the two or three or four of you
confederation and alliance
". . .they have withdrawn
and continue to withdraw
customs and services due. . ."
But who could have been there
as if in a book
tanquam pro speculo
(hard thought window)
and not have seen
the ears of corn ripening?
It is the casualness of the allusion to the commons
falling on the ground
en my les blees
more than the groan
that rose out of them
when they see the head
of their leader on a pole
in the *Anonimalle,*
the only chronicle
to mention the corn,

incommensurable,
in Clerkenwell fields
on a late June day in 1381.
When at last I took my pen in hand
and eat
from the book
that I already am
the rural origin
of the larger portion
forebearing burden
of a broken will and grinding
the fruit of that forbidden
Tree (called *Imago-dei*)
otherwise Trewe-love
at the bottom of a buttercup
at the bottom of the bitter cup
the ruth of the woman debating
when her bitter tears were biting
that all things on the earth belong in common.
On a May morning
all but equivalent
to Once Upon A Time
I put on rough cloth
a rough outer garment
arrayed, the phrase
y shop me generally meaning
"I got myself ready" as in
"he got ready to set off"

as if referring to the faith
of a Lollard
or this rough
bandied haste
both song and
kept from it
shapeless hut
(had left on the feast
of the translation of it)
tynyng: wasting
reule: space
in the room
between bed
and wall ("to
rise to the
reule to rokke
the cradle")
wonyen: dwell
hous-huyre
(house rent)
afyngred:
oppressed by
and been abashed
for to beg
papelotes: porridge
gurles: children
aglotye: fill
the bellies of

ne carpen: nor speak
twelve pence on a sack
of wool exacted
dialect, lights dart.

This Fathering Shadow (A Note on "A" and *Piers Plowman*)

For a long time I used to read the post-war movements of "A" in search of some form of a return to and continuing the successively wide and inclusive and densely concentrated sound and figuration made under the sign of Labor, both for the doctrine and the music there, that make "A"-8 and "A"-9 unlike anything I have found, having found or having been found and having sharply felt that loss noted by Michael Palmer which appears, in the time of the writing of "A"-11, "as an act of mourning for the century." ("On Objectivism," *Sulfur* 26). The impasse where the poem is thought to have no further bearing on a political world is registered by the silence into which Marx and Marxism disappear, events such as the Moscow Trials, Spain, and the Berlin-Moscow pact having overtaken and relegated to profoundly ambivalent status the one phase of a work whose strange urgency it had been to inscribe consciousness of class and proletarian desire in time. And yet, there is a twelve line passage towards the end of "A"-23 where Zukofsky is folding in a resemblance and rhyming "A" with a late 14th century work, *Piers Plowman*, which survives in three redactions called the A, B, and C texts, and his brief notational derivation, really something of a compressed translation of the Prologue to the anterior poem, perhaps jotted from memory, though introduced or marked by *firste fader*—inflecting lineage, the language of fathers—overcomes this threatening frame by opening back, in the act of copying, and remembering one book in particular wrought in an allegory and torment of real events. The proximity of *Piers Plowman* to its own day was such that the hardly literal or mimetic figure from which the poem takes its name was actually included in a list of conspirators promulgated by the royal courts in the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt. This in addition to obvious borrowings from *Piers Plowman* embedded in the coded language of letters whose English, as one scholar has remarked, weirdly invades the authoritative French and Latin of the chronicles that quote them, serve as a reminder that

among all that has been forgotten there is this still critically important first inscription, the appropriation of passages from the poem by clerks on the side of the commons' rising. The author, William Langland, about whom next to nothing is known but "whose whole life appears to have been a continuous act of composition," may even have produced the third (C) version in reaction against this reading, given the suppression of certain passages where the Plowman's rage appears consonant with explicable acts of violence that were committed in the course of the revolt. Langland, like Milton a doctrinal poet, may also have wanted to distance his book from the Church heresies advanced by John Wyclif and the social radicalism of the propertyless priests called Lollards that followed his teachings. The broadest contour of what was happening—the breaking apart of the feudal estate by force of a burgeoning market economy and developing ideological struggle that would claim the head of a future king—is evident from a passage in *Areopagetica* where "the divine and admirable spirit of Wyclif" is seen as not merely preceding but progenitive of the resounding names of Luther and Calvin. (The official condemnation of Wyclif's teachings took place in 1382, a year after the revolt). If interpretations of the past are to occur without consolidation in the name and once-enabling identifications upon which concepts of class and class-struggle have come to depend, then I would write in the margins of successive editions, translations and volumes of exegesis of a poem that has emerged from ruins of manuscripts after six centuries—reciting the permutations of an event, manifold appearances and reappearances, the disappearance of an event, rather then return to the troubled problem of whether and when writing can represent them.

ROBERT **KELLY**

Pasts

Not the past. The *pasts.*

The fatal singular. It is not less than tragic that we have allowed those "Divisions of Knowledge" to be called History, Philosophy. Compare the openness of Physics, Politics, Mathematics—no implication that there is just one of them, one right-one of them, one only to be found. Sciences open to the flourishes of discovery.

The fatal singular. Our society has been haunted by, tormented by, monotheism. And all the pale ghosts of the *monotheos:* right here comes the cult of the Masterpiece, the myth of the Major Author, monarchy along with the modern sovereign nation-state that inherits monarchy's totalitarian ethos. In our day the monotheos is reincarnated as the Self. The singular Self, strangest of all our aberrations. The Self, whose cult or worship is a greedy web of Entitlements. Whose claim is war.

Never let schools and scholars talk about history. At worst, talk about Histories. At best, Investigations into the Roots and Branches of things.

The monarch is one visible aspect of the tree. The monotheos is one conceivable aspect of the real. Let them arrogate no further privilege.

Whereas:

our pasts are multifarious as dreams
our pasts speak in all tongues

our pasts impeach the shallow testimony of the single sense
our pasts impeach the shallow doctrine of the fact

our pasts free us from false identities
free us from the posturing of class and race.

It is only with the single squint of history, el tuerto, that we blundered into a belief in nationality and racial purity.

History has burnt more cities than crime ever did

the sense of a privileged past

the sense of a privileged past
pushing "us" on.

There is hope:
The invention of pasts is the most delicious art of our century.

We don't have to wait for Borges to invent Tlön. Our pasts throng with Lyonesses, Otherwheres, Ailleurs, Anywhere Out of The World. And they are reliable, as reliable as Freeman on William Rufus or Trevor Roper on Hitler. More so. They *invent with an inner conviction* that our historians—no Investigators, they—are too ashamed to feel, let alone rely upon.

Robert Duncan talked about one of the many obligations (which are also permissions) of the Young Poet as the Invention of one's own Horoscope. The choice of grandparents—*l'invention des aieux.*

Ordinarily, folk let themselves be trapped in their "own" horoscope, i.e., the designs of their Natal Daemon.

To invent our pasts. (*Invenire* in Latin, of course, means both what we mean by its derivative-"make up"—and also discover —in the sense of to find what is already there). We will be caught in that fertile ambiguity forever. I hope.

The Young Poet, too, is the woman without a past, who with the blazing light of her imagining obliterates the shadows of those who precede her. The Young Poet inherits a tradition of dispensing with tradition. That is his secret, his horror, his duty, his risk.

So I suppose what this issue of PastS must be intended to do is to make up some more antecedents, the ones who came before us without our knowledge, who stole upon us from the past when we were finally ready to see them. (The surrealists were not produced by Lautréamont; the Lautréamont we know was created by the surrealists. The future creates the past—everybody always knew that.)

The Young Poet creates all the necessary (because possible) histories of poetry. Pound can imagine into some single context Arnaut Daniel and the Earl of Rochester and Sappho and Li Po and call that, somehow, his paideuma or gnonom or fixèd mark. Breton can banish the classics and *académiciens* into the junkyard billboarded **NE LISEZ PAS** and make up a new Canon from the servitors of dream, the golden failures, the children of the night mewling half-incomprehensible images. And this canon serves us better than the tired gentlemen it replaces.

So in speaking to these issues of pasts, I claim no privilege other than my own inventory of real or imagined or wishful motherings.

One does not want to live in a world that was not created by Bellini and Mother Teresa and Milarepa and Blake and Reich and Sappho and Hoelderlin and all the wielders of the long song—Taliesin, she who was Homer, limp Virgil, Vyasa the Many, Valmiki the One, Spenser the Copious, Coleridge the Spent, Tennyson who hides in speech, Beckett who shouts in silence, and Gertrude Stein who is the waker of the dawn, the same slow morning we still are trying to understand,

the morning of language into which we have almost awakened.

And it is back there, in the pasts, that powers wait to be put to service.

Homer, not blind. Not blind but a woman. The incurable wound of gender shows in her every image, every kindness, her even-handedness, Homer, mother of Greeks, mother of Trojans.

When the center is dead, every valuable thing is eccentric.

When the center is dead, we must flee to the eccentric, the periphery where life waits.

Isn't that what the modernists were saying? Isn't that what your heart says when you stand in a bookselling superstore watching the displays of samenesses proliferate?

When the center is dead, we flee to William Diaper and Quirinus Kühlmann and Sheridan LeFanu and Matthew Shiel and Sidney Lanier (whose very name has been dropped from such "public record" as the Harvard History of American Literature provides, but whose "Marshes of Glynn" haunt the mind still of many American poets, and whose measures, nuttier than Whitman's, recur in Jeffers and Duncan). Beddoes can help us, and Gilbert

Le Compte and Robert Barlow and Philip Lamantia and Stephen Jonas and Weldon Kees.

Maybe we will finally cure ourselves through the mad permissions of the non-standard, the non-scheduled theologies (Lenny Bruce called them) of Africa and Asia, the permissions of the obsolete, the archaic, the temporary, the unacceptable, the lost, the damned, the media-forgotten, the extra-curricular, the absurd,

as "serious" music somehow cured itself of the stultifying paralysis of will (in music, will is melody) we grew up with in the aridities of the Second Viennese School,

cured itself by the crazy romantics and the endless eccentricities of Bruckner and Strauss and Mahler, Mahler whose rebirth should make forever clear the profound *eccentricity* of Beethoven (say, as compared to Spontini and Cherubini of the conservatories) and Bach.

And I still think Gertrude Stein is about the only writer we had who made sense.

Rather than offering opinions. She had no opinions, she had only the power to make sense happen.

The pasts are full of risks. These risks are what I want to bring you.

CESAR **VALLEJO**

At Baudelaire's Tomb

(Tr. by Eliot Weinberger)

Paris, May 1928

In the cemetery of Montparnasse the anniversary of the death of Charles Baudelaire was commemorated. The scene was an aesthetic kidney stew with a simplicity that was almost vegetable.

The ceremony took place in front of the monument to the poet, one of the most beautiful sepulchral stones in Paris. Its meaning is literal and direct, yet, at the same time, it is quite original. The sculptor has taken an enormous block of stone, split it in half, and given it the form of a compass. This is the skeleton of the monument. A compass. An airplane, one of whose wings drags at great length on the ground. Like the symbolic albatross. The other half of the stone rises perpendicularly behind to present, near the top, a great bat with extended wings. Above this living, floating creature, rests a gargoyle whose hands hold a chin that is pensive, vigilant, almost aggressive.

Another sculptor would have chiselled, instead of a bat, the heraldic cat of the bards. But this sculptor chipped deeper into the stone and chose the bat, that zoological binomial, between mammal and bird, that ethic image—between Lucifer and angel—that incarnates so perfectly the spirit of Baudelaire. For the author of *Les Fleurs du mal* was not diabolical in the Catholic sense of the word, but was rather the raised sum of those two large and inseparable figures: rebellion and innocence. Rebellion is not possible without innocence. Only children and angels rebel. Evil never rebels. Show me an old man who rebels. It would be impossible. An old man can only grow resentful and bitter, he can't rebel. Like Voltaire. Rebellion is the fruit of an innocent spirit. And the cat carries evil between his paws.

In contrast, the bat—the flying mouse of the crypts, that hybrid piece of the soffits—has the instinct for height and, at the same time, for darkness. Its realm is the dark kingdom, yet it inhabits the copulas. From its double nature—flight and darkness—one could say that it possesses the wisdom of the shadows, and one could say that it falls upwards. . .

It was there, then, in front of this authentic cathedral stone and this reverent crowd, that Gustave Kahn spoke of the cult of the great artists of

the world, among whom, he said, Baudelaire occupies an eminent position. M. Valmi Baysee then talked about the growing influence of Baudelaire on foreign literatures.

Some women from the general public and actresses from the Comédie Française and the Odeon recited the poet's verse, intoning a scene of ineffable, human and living color, communicating a simplicity of free and natural trance, stripped of the airs of societies and chapels.

The contralto voice of an actress spoke "L'Étranger." Another recited, with an fluidity that was truly moving, "L'Invitation au Voyage." M. Alexandre gave a supreme declamation of "Danse Macabre," and M. Lambert another, no less captivating, of "La Mort des Amants."

The group to the rear broke up by the side of the statue "Souvenir." On the leafless avenues, the wind remained behind, singing, in two silences, its silence.

WILL **ALEXANDER**

Charles Fourier: Spark of the Harmonian Lightning Wheel

> The next revolutionary wave, if it is to achieve sufficient power and breadth, must be a synthesis of all previous ideas, and must unite, into one cohering mass, all the "ghosts."
> —Kenneth White on Charles Fourier

Like a phantom under the smoke of a splintered kerosene chrysalis, there is the image of Charles Fourier weaving his trenchant solstice needles from a spiral of sonorous vapor and jade. And with a jagged marmoset lisping by his side, and a penetrant crystalline stylus spinning in his fingers, he emits the power to calculate beatific bodily fields and heresy. And by bodily fields I mean the openness, the perfect right and honor of pleasure, and by heresy, I mean the seasoning of his journey with alchemical hissing and turbulence against civil fraud and disorder.

So it is, that Fourier seizes us with fire and the ecstasy of dreaming. The bird with its flaming thermal escape into a powerful uranian clairaudience, alive with syncopation and stillness. The utopian endeavor condensed in this image inspired by the writer with the hand of thirst, who opened 19th century thought to "Phalanxes," who cast passion into a higher realm of scarlet, into another register of vibration, wholly above the principles of shattering and panic. Here one found the fire restored to a pelican's rested armor, a shellfish resurrected by internal summas of greenness. He superseded reason, and merged the separations through "variety and . . .change," and created in the process an anti-transfixture, thereby transmuting psychic arthritics by the a-priori action of God, spawned in the fire of the senses.

If, given a utopian radical optics, one could magically trace the movements of diphthong gazelles, or place in the beam of one's brilliance a destiny of dreaming cobra-striped zebras. The aforementioned, quite in keeping with Fourier's ramblings conducted at an inward pitch, with the power to pursue its own powers at the level of an invisible and self-sustaining orbit. A mind Breton described with "a pre-eminent gift for

reason and a taste for vaticination." A mind, unlike the timing of the nunnery, that was able to envision "swing-carts. . .in the castle of cherry gardeners" by means of a ferocious imaginal breathing. A world, a Harmonian blend, where each specific action remained unconstrained to "duty"; where isolation was broken down and the combined effects of the passions merged into an over-gathering of momentum, a supremely positive momentum. To him, no moral surgery was applicable, no philanthropic apogee was embodied, cooling the heat of life with a topical monument of reason. Labor for him was an act of pleasure, an act of nobility, a poem of fantastic enticement. An atmosphere without "envy," or "jealousy," or acts of repressive sublimation. The collective was the power with its marvelous abolition of regressive motor resistance, thereby engendering the primal elixir within the cerulean terrain of the vivifying portion.

As a young clerk "at Marseilles" he is transmogrified by the pitching of "rice" into the sea. He forever turns against rancid speculation, and the "commercial" psychosis which spawned it. It was decisive; the individual need no longer live at the behest of contrived abysses, tainted by aggressive structural stagnation. For him, the wind began to live again with the force of aboriginal burning, and the sun was colored green again by the free "astronomers of Asia."

So, from this unobstructed nerve arose attractional passion, no longer subject to the blinding stains of the social order. The latter always seeking devices of grit and disorder, where blood was extracted by rapacious plesiosaur's mechanics. A vile, unending impasse, stained by abbreviated fuels of misfortune. A system of profit which corroded renewal. For Fourier, the antidote was the lifting of water from minerals so as to test the true variety of the spectrum. The beauty of nopal, or an aerial herd of eagles, became part of a sensuous, unceasing inventiveness. In contra-distinction, there was the civilized moat where arson was waged against the throat and the skin, so that the body was held hostage within the blackened methodology of the furnace. A starkness inscribed by linear in-variety, by a smoke-filled psyche without rubies or lightning. The body rotted, the soul wavered, the spirit was excluded. The pedestal of regularity formed a desultory pinnacle of stability. The worker was constantly rewarded for the same arthritic facility, day after spectrumless day. So Fourier proposed nuance and intrigue, the two-hour work day, the revolving discussion and interchange of ideas. There was no longer the projected pheromone of hostility, the mental pillage of the blindfolded task. He annulled the hordes of "fiscal" armies producing unripened fragments for dictatorial consumption. And he knew the constant blood ache, and the seal of repression.

Society was no more than a snake, slipping across one's shoulders, leaving shallow wounds of poison, which allowed one to live, which

refused to one's body the simple comfort of death. There was only living for the daily wage, the constant exposure to supreme axial barbarity.

He was witness to this miserable zenith, with its macro-confusion of empire announcing a call to arms with a flaccid and disintegrating bugle. A bugle which Fourier saw as a call which arrested, which stunted, which institutionally inverted. And it was no more to him than "the latest of our scientific chimeras." A "crab" conducting sound with a meandering and parasitical rhapsodics. He proceeded to depict from this alarm the parasitic nature in bold poetic relief. First, the "incoherent" family unit with its activity of tedious trauma, brought on by the fact of "industrial division," which simultaneously proceeded from the "separated household." A life innately feeble, like a pictographic mud leash, without the variety and flair of an interactive tension. Then there were the sadistic codifications of the "ARMIES," and the "MERCHANTS," and the "spies," all reduced to a practical insignificance, in that they remained idle when not productive in their respective negativities. He scrutinized the "agents of transportation" who, he reported, through "their ignorance and improvidence increase the number of shipwrecks tenfold." Of course, the plummeted "quality" of the "MANUFACTURERS" was disturbing, they who engaged the power of a duplicitous and hypothetical excellence, supported by a dire, but ubiquitous juridical folly.

Fourier contended that the power of attractive labor would supersede the necessity of such crime as it existed at the core of parasitical dysfunction. He compiled data on top of data concerning the resistives of these dysfunctional wolverines, empowered within the scope of drudgery and want. What followed was his central insight concerning the lack of living desire, the condensed and unarguable brutality, which created an inevitable abstention from labor. "If the master is out of sight," he observed, "the laborers stop; if they see a man or cat pass, all are in a stir, masters and servants leaning upon their spades. . .gazing in order to divert themselves."

Life in this context was no more than an exhaustive famine, an exercise for imbibing venom. Yes, it was a testament to unerring disfigurement, to a task of searing taboos and consignments. Fourier himself bemoaned his designation as "commercial traveller," like an ironical fish conjoined by bony sand diluents. Nevertheless, he engaged the air of liberation, condemning the economics of his life span as limited to the "analysis of existing evil." By its tacit passivity, he saw that this discipline empowered extortion, made do with depravity. He roundly condemned its abstract optical glances concerning the Irish hunger of 1826. And its natural lack of antidote he abhorred. The apologists of his era like Dugald Stewart, or M.J.B. Say, he classified as authors of sophistry, and extollers of anguish. Hunger for the authorities was nothing but a cunning technical drama, where one could sort out and contain the controlling points. And here we

get to his fundamental dissidence against the middle men; their extorting, their sowing of "disorder" at the core of exchange. The producer and the consumer blunted, kept apart and placed on a permanent footing of rivalry. The general good was never the goal. And Fourier brilliantly chronicled this generic malevolence, when the physician was seen as wishing his fellow citizens "genuine cases of fever," the architect psychologically courting multiple conflagrations, with the courts of justice skillfully vitalized by crime. Nothing more then legalized disruptions, contrived pecuniary motifs, based upon a model of obligatory dishonor.

In contrast, within Fourier's Harmonian world, axial monotony was broken and transmuted by the inward rotation of pleasure. And for Fourier, this pleasure was an a-priori given, an instinctual testament, untainted by mirages. For him it expressed our original unity as living beings, our primeval dispensation from the power from on high. The restraint, the peculiarity of segregation, is only a rational and subsequent contrivance. Therefore he knew that the civil life was maimed by a lack of variety, by a lack of surreptitious flow and inspiration. The social-body suffers with nothing but bread, with the delights of the body, and the palate condemned. Analogy is reduced to doubt, and copulation commences in a furnace of snares.

In his world of Harmonian ardor, he knew the sparks of attraction would electrically adhere to an honor. And that honor was variety, so fruitfully exemplified by the butterfly flitting across a splendiferous array of nectars. Labor will last for no more than two hours, with verbal exchange across all regions of difference. The upper and the lower, the lighter and the darker, brought into harmonious confluence. From the cradle throughout life monotony was excluded, replaced by the nuance and refinement of consumption.

The result was a utopian colored being, a spectrum colored being, drinking from a chalice of indigo and saffron. A gorgeous roundelay of balance where the being was infused with the savvy of intrigue. The subtext inspired by a contradictory spikenard. As if the whole collective were invested by a magnified divination, able to meander, and asymmetrically collect jade from a dune, and build from their findings a palace, capable of changing its visual and aural congruence, through the different shadings in the moments of the day. The cherry pickers, the lovers, the gardeners, the abstractionists, entering and re-entering the magic of its confines, all of one action, playing with the fire of a-priori being.

And Fourier, who struck the first pure seed of utopia, imbibed the primal ray, the aboriginal utterance, and transmitted its spark, which turned the lightning wheel, the Harmonian lightning wheel, with its riveting assessment, with its circular attainment of openness and feeding.

ALLEN S. **WEISS**

The Theater of Possession

Here the theater exists at the place of the skull.
—Valère Novarina

Build an altar, and a god shall appear. The possessed of Morzine had the genius (following the ancient tradition of sorcery) to present their bodies as altars, hoping for the apparition of the devil, which in turn would necessitate the intervention of God in all His grace. Desire for God, or for the devil, that great dissimulator, thus the model for all actors? In either case, they were, alas, inspired too late in history for the devil, and too early for the theater.

The story began on the Ides of March 1857, in the Savoyard town of Morzine.* Just before her first communion, ten-year-old Péronne witnessed a terrifying event: she saw a little girl of her village fished out of the freezing waters in which she almost drowned. The day after, in class, Péronne fell, as if dead, and didn't revive for three hours. The fits continued, especially in church, and Péronne was joined in her torments by a little girl with whom she went out to the pastures to herd the goats. Soon their fits would take another form, that of demonic possession: they remained immobile, eyes turned towards the heavens, arms offered up high. The events took an even more dramatic turn: the girls would assume the gestures of reading a letter: according to the imagined contents, they were transported either to heaven or to hell. Later, the crisis became even more distressing: screams, curses, spasms, contortions, clairvoyance. . .

Fairy tale or historical event? To the townsfolk of Morzine, the nature of this crisis was clear: Péronne and her friend were victims of demonic possession. Perhaps the cause of it all was the crone who touched Péronne on the shoulder one day as she left school. . .The possession was contagious, and soon became epidemic: between 1857 and 1873, nearly half the women of Morzine (as well as several men) were similarly

*See Catherine-Laurence Maire, *Les possédées de Morzine* (Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1981).

possessed, a bewitchment (*endiablement*) characterized by convulsions, superhuman agility, speaking in tongues, blasphemy, prophesy.

Morzine was in the grips of a historical crisis: newly annexed by France and in the throes of a demographic shift which had the majority of its male population leave town to find work elsewhere, the women of this poor mountain community created a culture unto themselves, within the limits of a strict religious consciousness. The possession, revealing the inner contradictions of a failing social order beyond the threshold of despair, would become a *cause célèbre* in France. Morzine would find itself caught between a modern church whose system of belief had little room for the traditional Morzinois culture and the scientific rationalism of the state. Caught in the double-bind of history and theology, these women responded in the tongues of angels and the bodies of devils. The citizens of Morzine wanted the devil exorcized at all cost, even though initial efforts in this direction were fruitless; the Vatican vacillated, not wishing to authenticate a case of demonic possession, insisting that faith in God would suffice; the state called in the military, political and medical establishments, as if to crush a rebellion. Finally, the possessed were "exiled" to hospitals in neighboring cities, and all manifestations of possession were outlawed.

Indeed, by May 1861, the town came under minute scrutiny: not only did every case of possession have to be reported to the authorities, but everybody was obliged to refer to the ailment as "hystéro-demonopathique," thus indicating the psychopathological, and not the theological, origin of the events. In these mere few years, the ancient cultural identity of Morzine was shattered, and for the first time in France medical authorities triumphed over the church in a case of demoniacal possession. The tale may be told by a chronological declension of terms: *possession démoniaque, démonomanie, hystero-démonopathie épidémique, hystérie.* From *démonomanie* to *érotomanie*, from faith to madness, the devil's work would ultimately be rationalized and thus effaced by this century's science, culminating in Charcot's iconographic classification of the gestures of hysteria at La Salpetriere in Paris.

The powers of rationalization, medicalization and politicization wished to crush the faith of the Morzinois; the collective memories, beliefs and desires of this community were reinterpreted in terms of individual, subjective passions; the manifestations of an oral religious tradition were transformed into psychosomatic symptoms. The desperate women of Morzine—for the most part unlettered and without public voice—utilized the extreme possibilities of language and gesture to express their pains and desires in a society on its way to dissolution. For their part, the medical establishment used these same voices and acts, captured in a very different hermeneutic web, to authenticate and develop their own discourse and

aggrandize their own powers, not to mention their often unsublimated passions.

"No, I shall not leave this woman made in the image of God." These words—spoken in Morzine in the year 1857, the very moment in which Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* was condemned—were perhaps the last words the devil would pronounce in the French language. The event marked a true drama in the French language, a dystopian moment at the origins of our modernism. The *Malleus Maleficarum* informs us of one case of demonic possession where 100,000 devils were successfully exorcized; in Morzine, not a single devil would be chased away.

With the continuing suppression in the 19th century of the great religious and popular festivals, the forms and passions of these collective events would become interiorized in the psyche, to reappear in dream images, neurotic symptoms, hysterical gestures and psychotic deliria. These very symptoms would soon be appropriated by modernist poetics, marking a rupture in the history of poetry as well as a new epistemological crisis. Modernist literary interest in the "psychopathology" of language was foreshadowed by one of the rationalist reactions to the possession of Morzine; wishing to rationalize and ridicule the phenomenon, a certain Dr. Andrevetan wrote a didactic pastoral drama entitled *Les Possédées de Morzine* (Genève, 1861). Though written in a totally different spirit, this work predates by a half a century the researches of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, inspired by the young poet-linguist Roman Jakobson, establishing the creative and scientific interest in the poetics and theatrics of aberrant and pathological linguistic formations.

Perhaps most striking among such effects is glossolalia, speaking in tongues; a rhapsody of Divine, or often demonic, inspiration. This unmediated expression is language inscribed in its excess, the manifestation of a pure signifier where the word no longer functions as determinable signification, but takes on a fully gestural, dramatic sense. In glossolalia, language is primarily informed by the body, and signs are guided by the libido: such enunciations evince a passional, often erotic quality in their very rhythm, harmony, euphony, and even in their dissonance and cacophony.

Such linguistic transformations were typical of the possessed Morzinoise; they would also not be out of place in the Théâtre de la Cruauté of Artaud, the Ontological-Hysterical Theater of Richard Foreman, the dreamlike creations of Robert Wilson, or the Théâtre des Paroles of Valère Novarina. From demonology to pathology to poetics to theater; from the enunciations of the devil to the histrionics of hysterics to the theatralizations of high modernism: ruse of the devil? or of language? or of the body?

OCTAVIO **PAZ**

The Stone Rainbow

(Tr. by Eliot Weinberger)

The difference between time *here* and time *there*—*there* meaning the other world, or simply the interior world of sleep and dreaming—has been a topic in all civilizations. A blink of the eye in Paradise is equal to a human century; a Brahma day is 2,190,000,000 years on earth; during the persecutions of the emperor Decius (249-251) the Seven Sleepers slept a dreamless sleep in a cave in Ephesus and did not awake until the reign of Theodosius II (408-450); at an elegant reception Swann listened for half an hour to a sonata by Vinteuil, and those few minutes were enough to revive him from his misery and to recognize the banality of his life. The theme is universal, but the Asian versions, besides being more numerous, are remarkable for two qualities that, in this case, are not mutually exclusive: fantasy and profundity.

In China there is a legend that reduces to human—though no less astonishing—terms the vastness of the cosmological dreams and metaphysics of India. According to Arthur Waley, the first version of this legend is *The Pillow Tale* by Li Pi (722-789). In Japan there is a beautiful and disturbing Noh play, attributed to Zeami, that takes this theme and gives it a poetic truthfulness, which is the only kind of truthfulness that literature can tolerate. The play is called *Kantan*, and Waley himself wrote an English translation that, like nearly all his work, is excellent. The story can be told in a few lines: a young man who has left his village in search of his fortune arrives at an inn, where he meets an old wanderer; the old man lends him a pillow to rest on while the innkeeper cooks a little rice; the boy stretches out on a mat, leaning his head on the pillow, and falls asleep; he dreams that he has entered the imperial bureaucracy and attained a high position; he marries, has a family, is ruined, is denied by his friends, falls into despair, regains his importance, is renamed to a position, leads a military campaign against the barbarians on the frontier, suffers terrible losses and great victories, is accused again of treason, is imprisoned, tried, condemned to death and, at that moment, not knowing if he will be saved, he wakes up. The rice is still uncooked. The young man decides to return to his village, convinced that "honor is soon followed by disgrace, and promotion by calumny."

In A.C. Graham's anthology, *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Penguin, 1965), I discovered another version which may or may not be older than that of Li Pi, but which I found striking for an intellectual audacity that is missing in the more traditional versions. It is a poem by Meng Chiao (751-814), a poet who was part of the group around Han Yu, about whom I wrote a short essay some time ago ("Hermit with a Stick," *Sulfur* 8, 1983). The title of the poem is mysterious: "The Stones where the Haft Rotted." A short text that precedes the poem, in the manner of an epigraph, clarifies things a little: Wang Chih went to Stone Bridge Mountain to gather firewood; in a clearing in the forest he saw two boys playing chess; seeing him the boys gave him the pit of a date; Wang Chih, who was hungry, chewed the pit without fear and ate it with pleasure; finishing the game, as they collected their chess pieces, one of the boys said to him, "Look, the haft of your axe has rotted." When Wang Chih returned to his village he was a hundred years old. Here is the poem in Graham's translation:

> Less than a day in paradise,
> And a thousand years have passed among men.
> While all the pieces are still being laid on the board
> All things have changed to emptiness.
> The woodman takes the road home,
> The haft of his axe has rotted in the wind:
> Nothing is what it was but the stone bridge
> Still spanning a rainbow cinnabar-red.

In all the versions of the story the superiority of celestial time is made manifest in two ways that, although different, produce the same result. The first is a disproportionate span of time: the dream of the Sleepers of Ephesus lasts more than a century, and it takes a century for the boys that Wang Chih meets on the mountain to play a game of chess. The second is an indescribable intensity: the adventures and misfortunes of the protagonist of *Kantan* occur in less time than it takes to cook a little rice. Either way, terrestrial time is devalued, and what is underscored is the illusory nature of reality, its radical inconsistency. The comparison between the two worlds takes on the irrefutable form of a syllogism and the powerful conviction of a lived experience: the other world is real and this world is unreal; therefore, we must renounce the world of here to attain the world of there.

Other-wordly time is a kind of metaphysical acid that dissolves reality, that empties it of all its attributes, and reveals it to be as it is: an appearance, an illusion, a skeleton that crumbles back to dust. It is less than nothing: it is a lie. The devaluation of worldly reality is more rigorous and total in the idealistic systems of India and in their counterpart, Buddhism. In them,

too, is the most radical renunciation of the world. Asceticism and sensuality are the two extremes of India, or more precisely, the two complementary expressions of its excessive genius. The Chinese and the Japanese, embracing Buddhism, retained its radical negation, but softened it. There are two characteristic qualities of Chinese and Japanese civilization that do not appear in India: humor and reticence. Both are present in the version of Buddhism the East has given us.

Meng Chiao's poem follows tradition in all of its points yet, with great subtlety, amplifies one of the strangest elements in the story of Wang Chih: the opposition between hard and soft. In celestial time the hard becomes soft: the pit turns into the fruit, the axe handle rots away. In both cases celestial time gives life to inanimate matter—makes it, in other words, mortal. True immortality is beyond life and death: it is immutable. The vulnerability of these stone-like things reveals that they too are mortal: they lack true substance, they are empty, they are an illusion. Celestial time works on them as the reasoning of Buddhist theologists works on metaphysical substance: it is a solvent of reality. Nevertheless, Meng Chiao's final couplet implies something completely different, and is a negation of the traditional attitude.

The corrosive power of celestial time, which in an instant can make the hard soft, change a young man into a centenarian, and reveal the emptiness of the universe, must nevertheless submit to a silent but invincible power: nature. Thus, in the last two lines of the poem, there appears an idea that is the basis for Chinese civilization, and which has inspired all of its creations: the true divinity of nature, which gives birth to the gods and men, and to which they must return. Celestial time can do nothing against natural time: the length of a chess game in the world *there* takes up a great deal of time *here*, but all the immense power of the gods vanishes before a simple mountain. Between heaven and people there is the earth. Nothing which stood yesterday remains except Stone Bridge Mountain, which stretches out on the horizon like a cinnabar-colored rainbow. The rainbow is a true bridge, material and spiritual, between celestial time and human time.

At the end of this short note, I begin to wonder: have I gone too far? The experts may wince, but I'm comforted by the thought that perhaps the eccentric Han Yu, that friend of substantiation, would approve of my interpretation.

Meng Chiao (751–814)

COLD CREEK

1

Frost rinsing water free of color, delicate
scales appear in Cold Creek. Come with such

pleasure to this hollow mirror of emptiness,
I find a spent and sullen body shining back

there. Unable to hide itself now, something
prowling at bottom reappears—new again,

shimmering. Clear and open as our tender
affections, this stream is a trap set for us.

Grown bright again, simple and shallow, its
heart frozen by night already flows full

this morning. And one handful, emerald-green
clarity, rinses dust of a thousand worries

far away. Now I see: once people muddy this
stream, it's nothing like mountain springs.

2

The way stretching along these Lo-yang
shores is the creek fronting my ancestral

village. Pale ice passing boats shatter
clatters like blue agate. Green water

freezes into green jasper, white-water
blossoming into emblems of white jade.

All light—in this priceless mirror,
heaven's bright light evens all things out.

Making my way down to menacing curves,
clutching dead branches, I hear widows

crying. Frost gives up little fragrance.
It evens out these blank, frozen reaches.

Losing the path, I sit like a simple-minded
fool, just watching and listening. Kids

work, hacking at brambles along the shore.
They talk of sorrows, countless sorrows.

3

I sip wine at dawn, then walk out through
snow to the clear creek. Frozen into knife-

blades, rapids have sliced ducks wide open,
hacked geese apart. Stopping overnight here

left their feathers scattered, their blood
gurgling down into mud and sand. I stand

alone, lost in thought, words giving way
to that acrid clamor of the heart. Frozen

blood mustn't beget spring. If it begets
spring, its spawn isn't evened out. And if

frozen blood breaks into blossom, widows
won't stop crying. Hidden, a village all

hidden away, thorns and brambles—all
fields frozen and dead no one could plow.

4

Men pole boats, banking jade stars aside,
trailing out scattered fireflies. Cold

north plunging icy lament deep, starved
hunters chant invocations to hidden fish.

Frozen teeth gnaw and grind at themselves.
Wind chimes clatter in sour wind. All this

immaculate grief—it's inescapable. It
rinses hearing clean of the least sound.

The current of rippling emerald is gone,
and colorful floss fallen, flight-tattered.

Ground glare ice, branches splintered,
things can't walk, can't roost. Wounded,

they squawk and shriek, yelp and howl,
accusing heaven: *When will peace return?*

5

Water curving then flowing straight—scales,
how its bone-white dragon scales ripple,

frozen gusts tearing at splintered confusion,
opening the bitter valley's minced and salted

wail. Petitions of protest die away here.
Animals open their hearts to one another,

and once my bowstring's broken, they come
breathing their last, striving to be guests.

All this austerity brings earth's routine
workaday killing to an end. Clarity, all one

shimmering ache of clarity—it's here that
source of change stirs, that life-bringing

promise. Clearing skies rinse sun and moon
clean. Planets and stars appear in azure

depths. But standing alone, feet in snow,
I chant to myself. A thousand worries renewed.

Heaven's Aspersion Star blazes with bright
nothing. Tongue Star rails on and on, empty.

But like Emperor Yao, the wise don't listen:
even meager Confucius was needed by others.

My proclamation is over, and I still can't
reason out those ancient promises of *duty*.

6

Even the frozen dead have become food now,
and killing wind still hasn't died down.

If we make a weapon of open-hearted duty,
open-hearted duty blossoms at knife-point,

and at knife-point, open-hearted duty smells
rank. Where's the nobility in that? Here,

rising waves unsheathe swords of ice. They
slash each other like enemies, like bitter

enemies. Snow needling into fish hearts,
fish hearts blush into brilliant reds,

a seething along edges of shadow seemingly
telling how its been cut and sliced apart.

This *ch'i* born of some strange place—who
drove it into these waters of our homeland,

cutting spring's first month apart, sealing
darkness in a hundred valleys? Looking up,

I wonder at clear skies, fresh sunlight
calling this grief and sorrow into doubt.

7

Bitter cold, an old-timer of the creek
weeping—frozen tears fall in a tinkling

clatter. In the form of birds dead, beasts
dead, snow slices into the flurried heart.

A frozen sword's edge won't cut, and once
bowstrings stiffen, no one draws them back.

I've always heard the valiant never eat
heaven's slaughter. Chopping down through

jade, I bury the remains, grief-stricken
sight itself a lament for all that beauty.

8

Remnant ice shudders on the windblown creek,
creek grown ripe with bright spring. Blossoms

drip. Jade melts, setting the newborn dragon
loose, its scales glittering into rippling

pellucid curves. At this distance, spring
thaw begun, I bathe in the fragrant crossing.

A thousand miles of ice sliced open, and even
a single ladleful renews that open-hearted

warmth. Frozen spirits rinse each other clean.
Trickles struggle into life and flow anew.

Suddenly, as if all sword wounds were past,
the body of a hundred battles begins rising.

LAMENTS OF THE GORGES

1

There was a time people laughed together.
Now, who is there to share this lament?

Laments of the gorges mourn lone spirits.
High winds howl. Between cliffs, ghosts

embrace an empty moon, disappearing,
appearing—they can't stop themselves.

We live and die in this lightning flash,
spring's thundering thousand-foot swells

flooding gorges with ever changing sound,
dragging jade-pure currents into whirlpool

clarities. Riverbanks battered and awash,
sawtooth waves open. Snarling, snarling

and gaping bottomless there, a swilling
lure, they promise unfathomed catastrophe,

spewing out the valley's brimful cries,
swirling embattled around angry rocks.

Felons were sent home to their villages
once; now talent lands you in prison,

now a recluse confuses people. They suspect
your mouthful of snow. It startles them.

And even simple people rarely prove true.
It's money that makes friends. Yellow gold

buys the grief mourners bring. They're
soon gone, though, and their tears dry.

But I foster the heart's old ways. For you,
I'm emptiness broken and scattered away.

2

Water all heaven above and heaven below,
a boat leaves earth entering earth here.

Swordblades of rock slice at each other,
angry dragons filling rock-broken waves,

and though flowers and trees renew fleeting
spring, freezing winds make autumn forever.

Unearthly voices rise from hidden dens.
Flies thicken, buzzing currents in flight.

The sun sinking deep, drowning lament,
where can we take our invocations of grief?

3

Three Gorges one thread of heaven over
ten thousand cascading thongs of water,

slivers of sun and moon sheering away
above, and wild swells walled-in below,

splintered spirits flash, a few glints
frozen how many hundred years in dark

gorges midday light never reaches, gorges
hungry froth fills with peril. Rotting

coffins locked into tree roots, lonely
bones twist and sway, dangling free,

and grieving frost roosts in branches,
keeping lament's dark, distant harmonies

fresh. Exile, tattered heart scattered
away, you simmer in seething flame here,

your life like fine-spun thread, its
road a trace of string travelled away.

Offer tears to mourn the water-ghosts,
and water-ghosts take them, glimmering.

4

Young, clear-voiced dragons howl in these
gorges. Fresh scales born of rock, they

spew froth of fetid rain, heaving breath
churning up black sinkholes. Here, strange

lights glint, always changing, and hungry
swords await you. This venerable old maw

still hasn't eaten its fill. Ageless teeth
voice the fury of cliffs, cascades gnawing

through these three gorges, these gorges
full of jostling and snarling, snarling.

5

In gorges, from pools ten hundred feet deep,
dragons voice their age-old explanations.

Cruel waves may keep strict accounts, drinking
blood to nurture children and grandchildren,

but without Kao Yao's gentle justice, there's
no sense to feasting on prison-drowned spirits.

Something there, mystery haunting darkness,
the empty talk of ghosts goes on and ever on,

and hearing lament in sobbing cascades, gorges
mourn widowed gibbons. When there's nothing

human in the sounds gorges make, gorges where
blades of churning water slice at themselves,

who can we seek out with all this complaint,
who petition with voices bitter and drowned?

6

Sun and moon broken at the rim of these
gorges, sun and moon, so much splintered

light—things grow all tilted askew
here, and birds tilt askew in flight.

Hidden rocks locking teeth, summoned
spirits never return from these depths.

Clear streams become wild blurs of armor,
clothing jade-pure rock in shimmering

color. And hungrily swallowed cascades
thunder, frothing like swirling grease.

You can't wander spring gorges, though
there's barely a trace of fetid grasses.

7

Light flowing in gorges plays across cliffs,
shapes changing, blossoms spectral without

spring. Hidden among roots, jade-pure rain
gracing river crossings, froth blazes red.

This Pa valley a dragon at heart, river demons
people Pa villages. Eating whatever lives,

they don't care if you're noble and wise.
We all nurse our lives into death alone,

nothing to trust in those fetid voices, our
songs forced, happiness a sham. Harvests

of fields tilted askew relentless, savage
scales filling poison waters—you can't

make such unearthly things friends, can't
work out lament in laments of the gorges.

8

Water swords and spears raging in gorges,
my boat drifts across heaving thunder. My

life in the hands of serpents and snakes,
I face frenzied wind and rain day-in day-out.

How many fleeing officials travel these
gorges, gorges rank inhabitants people? You

can't search out a heart beneath this sheen,
this flood that's stored away aftermath

forever. Arid froth raining boundless mist,
froth all ablaze and snarling, snarling—

what of that thirst for wisdom when you're
suddenly here, dead center in these waters?

9

Owls call in human voices, and dragons
wolf down heaving mountain waters. Here

in broad daylight, with all the enticing
serenity of clear, breezy skies, they

beggar wisdom, snarling everything alive
in fetid gatherings of vine-Covered depths.

Want filling fanged cascades bottomless,
sawtooth froth swells everywhere. Among

trees all tilted askew, no birds nesting
anywhere, gibbons swing back and forth.

Who can listen to laments of the gorges
when nothing rights the wrongs done here?

J. P. SEATON

Kuan Hsiu (832–912)

Still little known outside China, Kuan Hsiu was highly regarded as a poet, calligrapher and portrait painter in his own time, and a large selection of his poetry is included in the Ch'uan T'ang Shih. A Ch'an Buddhist monk, he traveled from warlord court to warlord court during the final chaotic years of the T'ang, looking for a Lord worth serving, and in addition to poetry on the traditional topics of the Ch'an poet, his works include a number of ballads of social protest and poems in praise of good government.

—J.P.S.

ON THE BORDER, THREE POEMS

I.

mountains: no green
and no clean water.
poisonous wind, and
sands rank with blood stench.

tartars on horseback
hate the birds, flying:
draw bows at will, to bring them down.
you can hear their cries
from above the clouds.

II.

Gusts blow a cloud up, sudden
from the sand: we can tell the
tartars are massing to cross the River Liao.
Gulping the dust of fear, here, now, us
border guards: sure we're ghosts, already.

III.

In Green Mound Cave, they say
a white wolf dwells.

Once in a while
it comes out
looks East, and howls

and howls

and howls

Paint that for me, if you can,
my painter friend.

WRITTEN IN THE MOUNTAINS

A mountain's a palace
for all things crystalline and pure:
there's not a speck of dust
on a single one of all these flowers.

When we start chanting poems like madmen
it sets all the peaks to dancing.
And once we've put the brush to work
even the sky becomes mere ornament.

For you and me the joy's in the doing
and I'm damned if I care about "talent."

But if, my friend, from time to time
you hear sounds like ghostly laughter. . .
It's all the great mad poets, dead,
and just dropping in for a listen.

CH'I LIANG'S GOOD WIFE

Ch'in went without the Way,
thought he'd build a Long Wall
to keep the wild Huns out.
A million workers pounded earth
and piled up brick, three thousand miles.
So Ch'i Liang's good wife wept,
her father gone, her husband
gone, childless she was, bereft.
She cried out, and the Great Wall fell
in bitter desert dawn.
She cried once more, and Ch'i Liang's
bones appeared: starved spirit, weary soul,
went home together then.

I'll tell the kids out in the street:
"You can't do less."

SONG OF THE PALACE OF CH'EN

Think sad thoughts of other days,
those palace gates, overflowing. . .
Reckless feasting, feckless loves:
no Sages, there.
Jade trees' blossoms singing, there
among a hundred flowers.
Coral jeweled, the very window frames,
sun from the sea, scattered, jewels.
Great ministers to audience; Mi'Lord
still in his cups, and even when he'd sobered
few wise words got past *his* ears.
So. The Palace of Ch'en
is rubble in this farmer's field,
and the peasant's plow turns up the shards
of a courtier's mirror.

THREE VERSES ON RUNNING INTO THE TAOIST MASTER "IN EMPTINESS"

I.

On the Westmost crag
of Heaven's Eye Mountain:
ruins of a most ancient altar.

Beside the altar
in the floating snow
we said goodbye.

Then, then; now, now:
only a little more
than forty years.

Returned, together
hearts of the same sort
then and now.

II.

Medicines, or omen casters
the slips of tortoise shell in your bag
look like pennies to me.

They say your years
and mine
are nigh the same:

burnt in a pot
shell slips might tell
Heaven's Way, we might follow.

But what heaven's to rise to
where there's no other
beyond?

III.

So, say my way is different from yours.
We both have old men's hair, and beards. . .
It's a common saying that words can kill faith.
I like to vase the first Spring blossoms
in a rough old funeral jar.

SONG OF THE WASTELAND

Wasteland, and again, wasteland,
nothing but an eyeful of dust.
You say my hair's gone white. . . ?

Every single strand is sprung
from a different sorrow.
They're all on the make, all crafting lies,
and even the ones who "make it"
won't treat you like a fellow human. . .
Deep or shallow, high or low,
all that grows here's briars:
wasteland, and again a wasteland.
Wasteland all around, I'll
die of sorrow.

SONG OF THE RIGHTEOUS MAN

Born before me, born
before, I'll never meet him.

He loved peace, but there was no peace,
so he set his brows like bolts of stars. . .

Yellow dusk, then rain and sleet
and sky like a bruise, like a cancer.

He's gone, now, and
I'll not know where.

BAD GOVERNMENT

Sleet and rain, as if the pot were boiling.
Winds whack like the crack of an axe.
An old man, an old old man,
toward sunset crept into my hut.
He sighed, sighed he, as if to himself,
"These rulers, so cruel: why, tell me
why they must steal till we starve,
and then slice off the skin from our bones?
For a song from some beauty
they'll go back on sworn words;
for a song from some tart,
they'll tear our huts down. . .
for a song, for a sweet song or two,
they'll slaughter ten thousand like me, or
like you. You can cry as you will, let
your hair turn pure white,
let your whole clan go hungry. . .
no good wind will blow
no gentle breeze
begin again.
Lord Locust Plague, and Baron Bandit Bug,
one East, one West, one North, one South,
We're surrounded."

JED **RASULA**

James John Garth Wilkinson

In October 1847 Henry Thoreau terminated his now famous sojourn at Walden Pond in order to move into Emerson's house, to help tend to family welfare while the Concord sage went abroad. When Emerson toured England at the peak of his fame and influence during the winter and spring of 1847-1848, he renewed his long-standing friendship with Carlyle (with whom he went to Stonehenge), visited Wordsworth, Dickens, Tennyson. He also brought with him a letter of introduction from his American friend Henry James, Sr., to a homeopathic physician called Garth Wilkinson. They met on April 17, 1848 as they dined with Crabb Robinson, William Blake's friend. Ten years earlier Wilkinson had been lent a copy of Blake's engraving of *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and the following year (1839) published, with his brother, a commercial edition of Blake's text (the first publication, as such, of anything by Blake). Wilkinson was 26 at the time (born June 3, 1813), and was shortly to make the acquaintance of Browning, Carlyle, Henry James, Sr., and of course Emerson.

One of the figures profiled in Emerson's 1845 lecture series on "Representative Men" (published in 1850) was Swedenborg, whose work he was reading in Wilkinson's translations. On the evidence of his praise, Emerson was deriving much also from Wilkinson's prefatory matter: "The admirable preliminary discourses with which Mr. Wilkinson has enriched these volumes, throw all the contemporary philosophy of England into shade," he wrote, proclaiming Wilkinson "a philosophic critic, with a coequal vigor of understanding and imagination comparable only to Lord Bacon's. . ." Emerson was willing to extend such praise to practical support, and while on the circuit in England lecturing to Mechanics' Institutes and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, he drew his sponsors' attention to Dr. Wilkinson.

Wilkinson's first set of public lectures, on "The Physics of Human Nature," was delivered in Liverpool during August 1848. (In June he had rushed over to Paris to witness something of the revolutionary uprising, having been preceded there as well by Emerson, who'd gone over in May, when he lunched with Chopin and met de Tocqueville.) Wilkinson's lectures were ostensibly medical, but in fact applied the Swedenborgian

doctrine of correspondences to the topic of the body. While he translated many volumes of Swedenborg during his long lifetime, Wilkinson was hardly doctrinaire, and in fact aroused the wrath of sectarian New Church adherents. He was a unique character in several ways, in fact. Described politically as a "radically liberal conservative," Wilkinson was a fierce advocate of public hygiene; champion of women's rights (anti-corset in the 1840s, pro-bicycling in the 1880s), firm supporter of the first licensed female doctor, proponent of the Married Woman's Property Bill; anti-imperialist, and at age 81 champion of African rights and advocate of racial equality between blacks and whites; defender of the restorative and inspirational properties of wine; bitter opponent of the prevailing medical practice of what he called "promiscuous drugging"; practicing physician, whose patients included Nathaniel Hawthorne's wife and children, and Lizzie Siddal (Dante Rosetti's laudanum-addicted wife). His contacts as well as his interests were eclectic. Swedenborgian, Fourierist, homeopathist, first publisher of Blake, proto-feminist, anti-imperialist, much respected by Carlyle, Emerson, the senior Henry James, among others: a unique and curiously neglected man (and I should thank Gerrit Lansing for drawing him to my attention many years ago). A thorough study of Wilkinson would illuminate much of the cultural life of the mid- nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic, making especially clear the links between transcendentalism, Swedenborg, utopian experiments like Brook Farm, Fourierist phalancteries, republican revolution, medical reform, egalitarianism, and, in Wilkinson's case, the romance of Nordic roots. While this would eventually lead to racist assumptions about the "superiority" of Anglo-American "Nordic stock" toward the end of the century, it seems to have led Wilkinson in the opposite direction, as if a sustained look at the particularity of his own ethnic background led him to regard *any* ethnic specificity as a unique personal incentive, so that African roots were as much to be prized as any other.

Wilkinson's diverse interests are reflected in the books he published, which are so varied that I doubted, for a time, whether they could all be by the same man. It turns out they were. A partial list includes *The Human Body* (1851), *War, Cholera, and the Ministry of Health* (1854), *Painting with Both Hands* (1856), *Improvisations from the Spirit* (1857: an early document of what later became known as automatic writing), *Homeopathic Principles Applied to Insanity* (1857), *A Free State and Free Medicine* (1869), *Revelation, Mythology, Correspondences* (1887), *Oannes according to Berosus* (1888), *The Soul is Form and doth the Body Make* (1890), *Epidemic Man and His Visitations* (1892), *The New Jerusalem and the Old Jerusalem* (1894), *The Affections of Armed Powers: A Plea for a School of Little Nations* (1896), *The Book of the Edda called 'Voluspa'* (1897), and *Isis*

and Osiris in the Book of Respirations (1899), not to mention six books on Swedenborg in addition to his translations, and various medical pamphlets.

Wilkinson's most popular book was *The Human Body and its Connexion with Man, illustrated by the Principal Organs* (1851). This was the eventual fruit of his 1848 lectures on "The Physics of Human Nature," arranged like those addresses into discrete topics: The Human Brain, The Human Lungs, Assimilation and its Organ, The Human Heart, The Human Skin, The Human Form, concluding with a chapter on Health. Wilkinson's approach is at once medically precise—nearly half the book reads like a medical textbook (he was a member, after all, of the Royal College of Surgeons *before* he became a homeopathist)—and spiritually inspired by his Swedenborgian belief in the universal validity of correspondences. There's something about Wilkinson's adept vacillation between the antimonies of spirit and matter that makes *The Human Body* an intriguing parallel to its contemporary volume *Leaves of Grass,* as if it were the prose analog to Whitman's singular vision. It's a book that continues to be instructive. While he seems to be unaware of him, James Hillman's exquisite treatise *The Thought of the Heart* (1981) is thoroughly anticipated by Wilkinson's chapter on that subject. Likewise, he might have been a primary figure in the work of the Dutch phenomenological psychoanalyst J.H. van den Berg, whose studies of "Metabletica" (the science of socio-physiological transformation) and attacks on the medical institutionalization of psychiatry repeatedly stress the imaginative paucity of founding medicine on anatomization. Wilkinson, too, thought the derivation of anatomical knowledge from vivisection or the study of corpses was intrinsically deficient; and characteristically, the title page of *The Human Body* bears an epigraph to that end: "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." What follows is a selection of aphorisms and slightly more extended passages from the second edition (1860) of *The Human Body,* chosen to indicate the motivating principle of correspondences as well as to give some sense of Wilkinson's prose, which can be as surprising and elastic as Emerson's, as in the latter's synopsis of Swedenborg: "In the transmission of the heavenly waters, every hose fits every hydrant."

—J.R.

from *The Human Body*

The Human Brain

The brain then is presumably the body of the mind, and whatever is wisdom or faculty in the mind, is furniture or machinery answering to faculty, in the brain. And as the mind is the man, the brain is his representative, or the man in another degree.

This is the solid voice of the head, or the most general truth of consciousness, which lies in the head, and speaks from the head. . . . It is then the consciousness or instinctive natural history of the organs, from which we commence: not what man says of the brain, but what the brain says of itself in man. (1)

It [the nerve spirit {or spinal chord }] is the posture-master of the solids, and the charioteer of the fluids. We see then how full the body is of eyes—how instinct with spirit-like forces, and by the analogies of mental and social life, how irresistible are the causes of harmony, design and co-operation in the bodily fabric. (31)

The starry dance, the music of the spheres, the astrologic influences, the experiences of the supernatural, are but aims to express the perceptions and properties of this immortal nature which lives on the seeds of the sun. By this liquid flesh it is that the soul sees its face in the rushing river of creations, and feels the issuing universe, and the finest tremble of the stars. In this wisest vest of nature, it sits at the feast of nature's wisdom. This is the Panic element of man in unison with the Panic of the world. (42)

The Human Lungs

Human life is illustrated by every organ of the body. Each contributes a share to the general vitality. The brains are as the tranquil inward respiring of existence elevated into mind; a life which seems immaterial and motionless, until from the opened head the capacities of organization come to light, and the brain demonstrates that our noblest powers are incarnate, real and progressive. That which is the secret of the brains is the open lesson of the lungs. They live physically and largely the same life which the brains live metaphysically and most minutely. In the running wheel of life the imperceptible motion of the axle is thought; the sweep at the periphery is respiration. The brains give us the free principles of life, and the lungs, its free play in nature. (59)

Thus when we speak of the lungs. . .we imply the whole engine of breathing even to the skin, and regard the chest itself as a dress or membrane inseparable from the lung-principle. (62)

The universal animal heat of the body is the organic zeal or love of self-preservation hotly present in every part. (65)

For the physical man himself is the builded aroma of the world. This, then, at least, is the office of the lungs—to drink the atmosphere with the planet dissolved in it. (69-70)

Smell is inspiration in its highest case; the nose is a lung planted upon the brain, to feed it with perceptions and excite it to operations. (85)

[T]he *voice*. . . consists of perceptions freed from the mind, and launched into the air, is made of the material of the expirations. The mind is breathed out into the social world by the expirations and their pauses, and not by the inspirations. (86)

. . .the body is *solidaire*; that whatever the head does, the trunk does in its way, and the limbs in theirs: in short, that man is so formed as to act only in wholes, each full size. In this way we are constructed upon the principles of poetic unity, the mind and the body being but one volume written out in the rhymes of the brain and the lungs. (93, footnote)

This is the first motive of the lungs, or the pulmonary atom of the pleasures of the world, compounded however of two elements, the nose-breath and the mouth-breath, the former to please or inspire the mind of the brain, and the latter to please the mind of the body. This term, if persisted in, leads to *swoon*, from defect of expiration; whence swoon is the prolonged or compound atom of the pause after inspiration. The pleased lungs are so gluttonous of this world's life, that the world, bent upon equilibrium, swallows and drowns them in this swoon, which is the ocean of sensual satisfactions. Expiration, however, concurs with the spiritual life, and is the condition of intellect, or of dying daily. And the pause which follows expiration, the refusal to breathe in from the surface, and the stand taken in the depths, is the atom which in its least form concurs with abstraction of thought, but when compounded, runs on into *trance*. The likeness of this in the animal world is hybernation. Thus every thought is a little trance, and every pleasure an initial swoon, as we shall presently see that each fair breath is a little life, whether of sleeping or waking. And thus if the breath is given in inspiration, the spirit is impressed upon expiration; for the spirit of humanity is not in the breath which is taken in, but in that which is given out; the former being planetary, but the latter psychical. (95)

The heard breath of your neighbor is moreover regulative and contagious

upon your own, and increases and realizes the union of which it is the effect, especially when the breath of all is represented in an audible rhythm. In this way the Eddas and poetries bind mankind into sheaves. . . (97)

[Lungs] are a prophecy that his body, and bodies of his body, may be similarly suspended. For what are his lungs but a balloon corded down into his flesh, of which, when fully inflated by the spirit, his body is the car? (102)

[O]ur little atmosphere in motion, like the great atmosphere, rubs our atoms against each other everywhere with electric rustle and collision, and by its congenial frictions magnetizes the assembled parts, and they open the cases of the life-gems. (104)

The soul, an inhabitant of all heights and climates, addresses the tongue of each to the creatures of the same; and one word is a brain, another the lungs, and so on through the hieroglyphical polyglot of the body. . . . What *now* are the lungs? They are a yawning hollow in the top of the man, the sides of which cavern are alive. The world enters them bodily. Tendency to vacuum, which nature abhors, is their spirit. They draw us out into more than we are, and we shrink back as nearly as we can into our old dimensions. Reluctant vegetation ceases as they open, and life is born, crying. They are an engine added to the body, under whose draw it becomes progressive, and every space therein is enlarged, to take in more, and to live more. They pull open all the solids, that all the fluids may enter them; and strain every nerve and blood vessel into fresh activities and virtues. They give room and airiness to the inward parts, and set them to work in a daily larger sphere. Now these, in altered phrase, are also the functions of the understanding mind, which as it is opened, shews and causes new wants, and new wills and ways. . . . The understanding, like the lungs, is no wind, or shadow, but the substantive power and voice of all our wants. . .the beckoning of the universe to the atom, to come up among the stars. (106)

Assimilation and its Organ

The world also and circumstance are as flexible and correspondent: according to our wants, they feed us with good or evil, and bend about to the whole exigency and gladiatorship of the spirit. The soul distills the food not into chemicals and gases, but incarnations of its moods. Anger sops in the same dish with love, and both are confirmed at the one supper. This rapid ensoulment of the alimental chain is especially marked in the saliva, which, as we noticed before, is a running commissary between the mind and the food. The soul glitters down upon its salts, and smites them with the reigning love beam. (128)

The Human Heart

The evidence [that feelings live in the heart], true to the organ, is circular: the heart is a self-supplying knot of affirmations. (172)

. . .the heart itself is physically as well as feelingly at the bottom of the wells of language. So near is it to the lungs, that the words in which it signalizes itself are like the bubblings of its own blood. (173)

Certainly the heart shews all the signs of loving the blood, which is the fearful and recognized symbol and casket of human life, for it grasps at the blood eighty times every minute. With quadrumanous hands it clutches the passing life-stream. . . . Its eagerness is apparent from its work, as the busy hands of men shew that they also are *con amore* in their occupations. And if we love the blood of our race and kindred, and embrace it through the skin and outworks of their bodies, much more does the heart love its own blood, which it squeezes hot and naked with its ruddy fingers. . . . There is a fiery and as it were abstract purity in this passion of our bosom's lord. If *we* love ourselves, the *heart* loves the life which is the self of self; and this love it shews by grasp after grasp, a zeal which never sleeps, by fresh manipulations of the blood with every varying feeling; in short, by all the signs which shew that we ourselves are in active and impassioned pursuit of our objects. . . (177–178)

Each organ has its *genius loci*, which possesses everything, even the most transient guest, in the organ. To come then within the sphere of the heart, is to feel and to be all that the heart is and means; for the heart is haunted ground, and there is no escaping its influences. So it is that when youth and maiden come under the grasp of the heart, or when life carries them into the sexual auricle, they are not the same people, nor have they the same names, as when under the paternal roof, or in the friendly conclave; but love has located them afresh, and gives them its own new names. This is a needful memorandum in the laws of the heart and the blood. We have feeling, the fire of life, already given by fact in this organ; we need not endeavour to import it; the business is, to see it in its place. (182)

The transition from the veins to the arteries is an incarnation of the passing over of life or feeling from the private to the public stage; of mankind meeting the world, and flaming with a new lustre of eye when the great objects are recognized. The public air is thenceforth inserted into the feelings, whereof each goes round with an oxygen mirror that shews it the universal in the individual, and makes it shape its face and gestures into historic parallels. Every globule of blood thence conceits itself that it is a

man-maker and a world- maker, and it is braced with the girdle of public strength. The feeling in the lungs accordingly is one of inspiration and erection, in which the heart's proper feelings swim as in a new atmosphere. (183)

Each feeling. . .is surrounded by its own film of imaginations, which body forth what it is, in a *quasi*-intellectual glass. "The imagination of the heart" is the light of which feeling is the fire, and causes every emotion to shine with its own peculiar ray. Where are these imaginations localized? On the inner membrane of the organ, we reply; for the inward skin of the heart is its blood-face, in which it expresses its desires. Skins are always facial structures, and express what lies beneath them. By this membrane, the blood and the heart understand each other, or look in each other's eyes, which amounts to the same thing. Imagination then is localized all over the cavities, which are indeed the express moulds of the thoughts of the heart, or as the Scripture phrases it, the chambers of imagery. If we desire to know what these bodily imaginations are, their shape is given in the fine membranes which transmit the emotions of the blood, and the motions of the heart, reciprocally to each other, and make them acquainted.

Imagination, however, in this case the heart-house, consists of a common chamber with two doors, and here we remark that everywhere, in the mind and the body, desire opens us by means of imaginations, and thus is the dilating, opening, or cavity-making faculty. We open our mouths for food under the influence of hunger working through and shaped by the imagination of a supply: we make ourselves hollow, to take in what supports and enlarges us. We open our hearts to receive new emotions; our minds, to receive new ideas. Every desire expands us, and each is accompanied by an imagination of the object, which limits the opening to something like the proper size, or constitutes its walls. And so again we are presented with the fact, that imagination is depicted upon the inner walls or front face of the heart. We noticed in the lungs the expansive correspondence of imagination, where it is manifestly want, or an elaborate vacuum produced in the man by nature every moment, to incite him to new infillings. Imagination then is the limit to which the walls stand off, the horizon of present life, or the arch of the caverns of desire. It is different for every cavity, according to its shape, objects, colors, &c.; but wherever there is a cavity it lives, and peoples the hollow with its teeming forms. It is here to be noted, that desire and imagination are one and the same thing from two points of view: the desire being the hollow or void that we feel, *per se*, while the imagination is the same regarded from the walls of the void, which imagine it full of what it wants to occupy. Thus the heart-desires dilate its cavities before the blood is given them, and in the

momentaneous void the imagination anticipates the tide which is to come; and the heart is in every stroke prepared, both by roominess and welcome, for the new life. (195–196)

In the heart we notice valves, which prevent the life current from running back; in the feeling heart there are *states*, or spiritual valves, which hinder the life-loves from regurgitation. . . . Most of us are so full of these valves, that we cannot attend to anything but the present. . . There are then valves in life, which prevent it from going back. And indeed this valve-function is universal. The flaming sword that turned every way was none other than the valve of Paradise. Death also is a valve, which nature keeps up during all moments of investigation, or regurgitation, and only opens from the other side when birth is to take place. . . Valves then in the feeling heart are the present by its activities shutting away the past; memories are the states of the present in which it endeavors to image the past; and they live especially upon the roofs of the cavities, or upon the outspread valves. (196–197)

And yet there is an imagination of the future, which we term hope. Hope however is not a wall, but a hole in our advancing lives through which the firmament is seen. . . . Wherever time or blood is to run, a present is constituted, a valvular state runs back, and hope becomes doubly open from the impossibility of retrogression.

Desire, then, is the heart-void or cavity, imagination is the heart-wall, our present state is the heart-valve, and our hopes of the future are the heart-orifices. (198)

But every part contains the rest; the brains are omnipresent both by substance and by influences. . . So the heart is everywhere; the blood vessels of an organ are its private heart. . . . The body is telegraphic with various stations; the messages are different according to the organs, but one at the fountain head. (201)

[T]he body itself is a metaphor. . . The creation is the body and pressure of all metaphors; and seen actions are done because they carry out the unseen in everlasting resemblances. (204)

"[A]ll men have their hobbies," and these begin in little toys of globules, or blood-dolls, which the heart dandles, dresses, and nurses, intending that the big body shall one day do the same, when the vibration has grown up, and can be the mother of bodily action. (208)

The Human Skin

Of all the creatures of the natural world, man is intended as the most finished, or, in other words, the most exquisitely finite, and the skin is the instrument which first hems him in, and by limiting, completes and individualizes him. . . . Without this boundary, the body would not contain its possessions, and would have no continence, outline and end, but be shed and dissipated in the universe. (227)

In short the skin man is a sponge immersed in nature's *plenum*, and soaking us through, soul-deep, with the substantial properties of every medium. (242)

Now, what is the largest pore in the skin? Without hesitation the mouth . . . What are the next pores? Plainly the nostrils and ears. . . And what is our knowledge of the world, but the knowledge of its faces and heads? (243)

[S]kins are the proper object of the skin; for this system skims the world, takes a film for itself from every surface, and assumes the cream of the body as the matter of the sense of touch. This sense is the essence or single substance of the skin, which clothes the mind and the organism with the personable outside of things. (243)

The presence of skin in the body is the double of the presence of feeling, which is skin-function, in the mind; and as feeling is cointensive with life, skin is coextensive with bodily structure. (246, footnote)

This beauty, they tell us, is only skin-deep, but none of them has told us what is the depth of the skin. At all events it must gauge to profound realms, for it brings the whole man to the surface. (252)

Thus the skin is the kingdom of show, for whatever is seen of mankind is nothing else; a proof of the expressiveness of a covering which can be the universal face. For the skin is the fine but ample decorum in which the inward terminates. (253)

The universe also has the cutaneous principle throughout, as the ground of its beauty, and the substantial theatre of its changes. (255)

Consciousness is the skin of human mind. . .*

[*Philosophers, busy with the investigation of consciousness, do not suspect that they are writing monographs on the cutaneous principles. The Ego and the Me, the self, the personality, and suchlike thin things of

thought, cannot help being somewhat spare, and in themselves dry, for they are skinny subjects. And when consciousness sets up for itself, and assumes that it is the human mind, instead of the bag in which the mind lies, then the diseases of the mental skin begin, and the unconscious philosophers describe their own maladies as the history of the universe. Those who attach themselves to the "pure Ego" as having an independent life in itself, are investigating the hairy scalp of the mind, more or less full of pediculi, which are "the life" that it has "in itself." Those who limit themselves to personality or individuality, are all "face" in their pursuits, and study impudence in its universals. The drier studies of consciousness are busied with the mental scarf-skin; and when the organic history of philosophy is written, the times of barren logic and method will form a chapter, headed, "The Age of Dandruff." For logic is an armour of little shiny scales, infinitesimal flints of thought; in a word, cuticle; and when it is separated from practical ends, scurf; though when legitimate it is the proper varnish of the mind. Again, when consciousness is sought for its own sake, it forms the mental itch, which is a general and excessive self-consciousness. And when it is taken for the world, as by the Berkleyans, it constitutes *elephantiasis scroti mentis*, in which the intellect dwells in the crannies of the warts of its own imagination. We might easily range the diseases of consciousness parallel to those of the skin, and classify the philosophies of consciousness under vesicles, papules, pustules, exanthems, and the like; but time fails, and the work would be both unseemly and irritating. It is enough, however, to indicate that the idols of modern philosophy, the Ego and the Me, the personality, the self, the individuality, are as necessary as our skins, but that they are our surfaces and lowest parts, and require brushing and combing, washing and tending; but will by no means bear deifying; for whatever of dirt and ugliness, whatever private parts there are in us, or come upon us, these skins catch. When we look at the philosophies through the organon of the human body, we see that the skin of every subject, the sensual part, has alone been studied; and that speaking bodily, neither brain, heart, bowels, lungs, or muscles have entered into philosophy, which accordingly has been the dead plane and flatness of the human mind, the coarsest texture of all, as it were the dishcloth of the fates. (258-259, JJGW's footnote)

Consciousness is also an organic sieve, and clears the mind; being the theatre of mental elimination; for the mind tends to consciousness or show, and no sooner are we conscious of anything, than adoption or rejection is involved. Consciousness, for this purpose as well as others, is largely porous, or full of blanks and oblivions for what is not agreeable. Sleep is its great hole or mouth through which stuff is put away, and a thousand slumbers to one thing and wakings to another, vacancies, forgetfulnesses,

and assumed ignorances, are the pores by which it rids itself of thoughts and memories, and refuses them a longer footing in the mind. By consciousness also we stand in the universe of mind, and feel it in all forms and structures, as though mind were matter, and nature the caprice and building of a grand idealism. (260–261)

In the soul, the skin principle is *identity*, whose germ is the *I* that runs along all our time, governs each human verb, and stands as a focus over our actions. . . The soul is protected in nature, because its very surface is a sense of living for ever; the flux of years falls down like water from the oil of such a virtue. (262)

The Human Form

It is further to be observed, that impersonality is human, just like personality, the latter being the skin of which the former is the substance; a substance however which is no substance without that skin to hold it. For the best things in use are impersonal, and the more they are, the better persons we become. (288–289)

J. RODOLFO **WILCOCK**

Aaron Rosenblum

(Tr. by Lawrence Venuti)

Utopians are heedless of methods. To render the human species happy, they are prepared to subject it to murder, torture, incineration, banishment, sterilization, quartering, lobotomy, electrocution, warfare, bombing, and so forth: everything depends on the project. It is somehow encouraging to think that, even in the absence of a project, men are and always will be prepared to murder, torture, incinerate, banish, sterilize, quarter, bomb, and so forth.

Aaron Rosenblum, born in Danzig, raised in Birmingham, had also resolved to bring happiness to humanity. The injuries he caused were not immediate. He published a book on the topic, but the book long lay neglected, and he garnered few adherents. If he had enjoyed a following, in all likelihood Europe would now be without a single potato, street light, ball point pen, piano.

Aaron Rosenblum's idea was extremely simple; he was not the first to think it, but the first to pursue it to its utmost consequences. Only on paper, however, since humanity does not always desire to do what it must to be happy, or prefers to choose its own methods, which, as with the best global projects, also entail murder, torture, imprisonment, exile, quartering, war. Chronologically, Rosenblum's utopia was unfortunate: the book destined to bring him fame, *Back to Happiness or On to Hell* appeared in 1940, precisely when the intellectual world was busily engaged in defending itself from another, equally utopian project of social reform, total reform.

Rosenblum first asked himself: What was the happiest period of world history? Believing himself English, and as such the trustee of a well-defined tradition, he decided that the happiest historical period was the reign of Elizabeth I, under the sage guidance of Lord Burghley. Or at least this was the moment when Shakespeare emerged, England discovered America, and the Catholic Church was forever defeated and forced to seek refuge in the remote Mediterranean. Rosenblum had himself been a High Church Anglican for many years.

Hence the project of *Back to Happiness* was this: to return the world to 1580. To abolish coal, machines, engines, the electric light, corn, petroleum, film, asphalt streets, newspapers, the United States, aeroplanes,

the vote, gasoline, parrots, motorcycles, the Rights of Man, tomatoes, steamships, the iron and steel industry, the pharmaceutical industry, Newton and gravitation, Milton and Dickens, turkeys, surgery, railroads, aluminum, museums, anilines, guano, celluloid, Belgium, dynamite, the weekend, the Seventeenth Century, the Eighteenth Century, the Nineteenth Century, the Twentieth Century, mandatory education, iron bridges, the bus, light artillery, disinfectants, coffee. Tobacco could remain, seeing that Raleigh smoked.

By the same token, it was necessary to re-establish: debtors' prison; the gallows for thieves; slavery for blacks; the stake for witches; ten years of compulsory military service; the custom of abandoning babies by the road on the very day of their birth; torches and candles; the practice of dining in a hat with a knife; the use of the rapier, cutlass, and poniard; hunting with bows; brigandage in the woods; persecution of the Jews; the study of Latin; the prohibition against women appearing on the stage; buccaneers attacking Spanish galleons; the use of the horse for transport and the ox for motor power; the institution of primogeniture; the Maltese Knights at Malta; scholastic logic; the plague, smallpox, and typhus as forms of population control; respect for nobility; mud puddles in central urban streets; wooden buildings; swans breeding on the Thames and hawks in castles; alchemy as a pastime; astrology as a science; the institution of vassalage; trial by ordeal; the lute indoors, the trumpet in the open air; tournaments, damascened armour, coats of arms—in a word, the past.

Now, it was obvious, even to Rosenblum's eyes, that the planning and ordered realization of such an utopia in 1940 would require time and patience, beyond the enthusiastic collaboration of the most influential segment of public opinion. Adolf Hitler, it is true, seemed disposed to facilitate somewhat the achievement of the most compelling aspects of the project, especially those involving eliminations. Yet like a good Christian Aaron Rosenblum could not but notice that the German head of state was letting himself get too carried away by tasks that were ultimately secondary, like the suppression of the Jews, instead of seriously applying himself to staving off the Turks, for example, or organizing tournaments, or spreading syphilis, or illuminating missals.

Furthermore, however much Hitler lent the English a helping hand, he seemed secretly to nurture a certain hostility toward them. Rosenblum realized that he would have to do everything by himself—mobilize public opinion, solicit signatures and support from scientists, sociologists, naturalists, writers, artists, and, in general, lovers of the past. Unfortunately, three months after the publication of the book, the author was recruited by the Home Guard to watch over a warehouse of absolutely no importance in the most deserted area on the Yorkshire coast. He did not even have a telephone at his disposal. His utopia ran the risk of foundering.

It was he who foundered, however, and in a most unusual manner. As he wandered down the beach, gathering cockles and other sixteenth-century items for lunch, in the course of an air attack evidently performed as an exercise, he was killed, blown to pieces in a pit, and his remains were immediately swallowed by the sea.

Mention has already been made of the utopian's lethal vocation. The bomb that destroyed Rosenblum also corresponded to a utopia, not very different from his, even if in appearance more violent. Essentially, his project was based upon the progressive rarefaction of the present. Starting not with Birmingham, which was too dirty and would have required at least a century of cleaning, but rather with a small provincial town like Penzance in Cornwall, it was simply a question of delimiting a zone—perhaps acquiring it with funds from the yet-to-be-founded Sixteenth Century Society—and excluding, with the most fastidious resolve, each and every thing, custom, style, musical composition, and word dating back to the incriminated centuries, that is, XVII, XVIII, XIX, and XX. The fairly complete list of excluded objects, concepts, events and phenomena fills four chapters in Rosenblum's book.

At the same time, the sponsoring institution, namely the Sixteenth Century Society, would provide for the reintroduction of the aforementioned (brigands, candles, swords, beasts of burden, and so forth, through another four chapters of the book), and this would be sufficient to convert the nascent colony into a paradise, or something very similar to a paradise. From London people would hasten in throngs to take the plunge into the 1500s; the resulting filth would immediately initiate a process of natural selection, necessary at least to reduce the population to 1580 levels.

With the contributions of visitors and new members, the Sixteenth Century Society would find itself in a position to enlarge its field of action gradually, expanding even as far as London. Sweeping four centuries of houses and iron manufacture from the capital was a problem requiring a separate solution, probably the announcement of a competition for projects open to all young lovers of the past. The other utopian, the One-Across-the-Channel, seemed already to have something like this in mind. In doubt, Rosenblum opted for encircling: perhaps a mere cincture of Sixteenth Century around London would suffice to precipitate a total collapse.

The project then proceeded rapidly to cover all of England, and from England Europe. In reality, the two utopians were heading for the same goal by different paths: to insure the happiness of humankind. Hitler's utopia, meanwhile, fell into that extreme discredit with which everyone is familiar. Rosenblum's, in contrast, resurfaces periodically, in different guises: some favor the Middle Ages, others the Roman Empire, still others the State of Nature, and Greenblatt even the return of the Ape. If the

estimated population of the chosen period were subtracted from current figures for the world, one would find that billions of people, or hominids, were condemned to death, in accordance with the project. These proposals flourish; Rosenblum's spirit continues to wander the globe.

J(uan). Rodolfo Wilcock was born in Buenos Aires in 1919 and later emigrated to Italy, where he died in 1978 at Viterbo. In Argentina, he associated with the group of writers that included Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares and contributed a short story to Borges and Bioy Casares' anthology of fantastic literature. Beginning in 1960, he started to publish in Italian, producing poetry, drama, journalism, theatre criticism, and many volumes of fiction, mostly short stories. He also wrote Italian translations of Christopher Marlowe, James Joyce (excerpts from *Finnegans Wake)*, and Virginia Woolf. "Aaron Rosenblum" appeared in a collection entitled *La sinagoga degli iconoclasti* (in my version, *The Babel of Iconoclasts)*, published in 1972 by Adelphi (Milan). Wilcock's Italian writing has never been translated into English (his only Spanish text to be Englished was that story in the fantastic anthology).

PAUL **BLACKBURN**

from Poem of the Cid

Blackburn's *Cid* is one of the secret books of postwar American poetry. It was originally published in 1966 by the American R.D.M. Corporation as part of its *Study* Master* line ("the quality series of supplementary study-aids"), although the book is a complete translation and not an outline or trot. The company soon after went bankrupt, and for years the book could only be found amidst the heaps of *Cliff's Notes* in the seedier used book stores. I'm told that a copy now goes for $500, which is exactly what Blackburn was paid to do the translation.

It is surely the liveliest American translation of a Medieval European epic, ever. The battle scenes are thrilling, and the dialogue—the real speech of real soldiers talking—makes the poem, in places, impossible not to read aloud. Companion to Blackburn's translation masterpiece, *Proensa*, it's high time *Poem of the Cid* was reprinted. These are the first few pages, the tragic then comic opening, and they are published here with the kind permission of Joan Miller-Cohn.

—E.W.

1. The Cid Calls His Vassals Together. They'll Go into Exile With Him.

[. . .]

He
turned and looked back to see the towers,
tears running from his eyes:

saw the gate standing ajar,
doors left open without locks,
the porches bare
of either pelts or coverings,
perches empty of falcons, empty of molted hawks. He sighed,
mio Cid, his worries were weighty, and not small.

The Cid spoke well and with great measure:
"Thanks be to thee, my Lord, our
Father, which art in heaven!
It's my enemies have turned
this treachery upon me."

2. Omens on the Road to Burgos.

Then they set spur to horse,
loosed the reins, they opened up then.
Crows flew across to their right
as they were leaving Bivar,
and as they drove down to Burgos,
crows crossed to their left.
The Cid shrugged and shook his head:
"So, we're thrown out of the country, well,
cheer up Fáñez! When we come back to Castille, we'll
come back with all the honors."

3. The Cid Enters Burgos.

The Cid Ruy Díaz came into Burgos,
the pennons of 60 lances with him.
They have to get a look at him,
men and women both.
Townsmen and their wives crowd the windows,
tears in their eyes
and in their mouths
a single sentence:
"God, what a good vassal!
If only he had a worthy lord."

4. No One Will Put The Cid up. Only a Small Girl Addresses Him and That to Tell Him to Go Away. The Cid Finds He Has to Make Camp Outside of Town, on the Sand of the Riverbank.

They would have invited him gladly,
only not one dared,
so great was Alfonso's fury.
The night before, his letter,
sealed with severity and heavy with [warnings,
had gotten to Burgos:
that
to mio Cid Ruy Díaz
no man should give shelter,
or by the king's true word, he'd lose
his goods, his eyes from his head, his soul, and his body.
Everyone was ashamed, and in sorrow,
hid from mio Cid,
and no one chanced a word.
The Campeador rode up to a place
they could stay for the night, and
when he reached the door he found it barred.
For fear of the king they had agreed
that, unless he broke it down, by
no means to let him in.
The Cid's men called loudly to those inside,
they did not answer a word. Mio
Cid dug in his spurs, raced up to the door,
pulled one foot out of the stirrup and
gave it a helluva kick.
Door was well secured and did not budge.
Then a little girl of nine years
leaned above him over the [balcony:
"Hey Campeador, in a good hour you girded on sword!
But the king has forbidden it,
his letter arrived last night
with heavy warnings and stamped with the royal seal.

We don't dare open to you, or
put you up,
for if we did,
we'd lose our goods and our houses, even
they eyes out of our faces. Cid,
what would you gain from our misery?
But, with all his holy strength,
may God keep you."
And she went back into the house.

Then the Cid saw
that he would get no privilege from the king. He
turned from the door and galloped through the town,
dismounted at the church of Santa María,
fell upon his knees
and prayed from the heart.
The prayer done,
he rode on,
rode out of the gates
and crossed the Arlanzón by the
bridge near the cathedral.
On the far side of the river,
on the sand of the riverbank,
he had them pitch his tent, and then dismounted.
Mio Cid Ruy Díaz,
who in good hour girded on sword, set
his tent on the rough sand
surrounded by good companions,
when no one would take him in.
So the Cid set down camp
as though he were in the mountains.
In the great city of Burgos, he
was forbidden to buy anything
whatsoever, any provisions,
and no one dared sell him ration enough
to feed a single man
for a single day.

5. Martín Antolínez Comes out of Town With Provisions for the Cid.

Martín Antolínez, that worthy man of Burgos,
supplied the Cid and his men with wine and bread
—all of it from his own stores,
he didn't have to buy them—
so that everyone had plenty of provisions.
The worthy Campeador was pleased,
likewise, all the others with him.
Martín Antolínez spoke then,
you shall hear what he said:
"Hey Campeador,
you were born in a good hour!
Let's stay here tonight,
but let's leave first thing in the morning, for I
shall be reported for having done you a service.
King Alfonso'll
be sore as sin.
If I get away with my life and limb and join you,
sooner or later, the king
'll love me like a friend:
if not, well, I couldn't give a fig
for what I leave behind."

6. The Cid, Without Resources, appeals to the Astuteness of Martín Antolínez.

Mio Cid spoke,
who in good hour
girded on sword:
"You're a stout lance, Martín Antolínez!
And if I live, I'll see your pay is doubled.
Gold and silver, I've spent it all, and you can see
I carry nothing with me, and
I'll need something for all my men.
Since there's no one will supply me freely,
I'll get it by force if necessary.

Look, I've got an idea, see if you like it:
I'll have a pair of chests built, fill them with
sand, so that they're good and heavy,
stud them with great nails,
and cover them with beautifully tooled leather.

7. The Coffers Are Intended to Get Money from Two Burgos Jews

"Let the leather be vermillion and the nails gilded.
Go to Raquel and Vidas quickly
and say to them for me:
'Since I can buy nothing in Burgos
and the king's anger pursues me,
this treasure of mine is too heavy to take with me,
and I want to pawn it for whatever is reasonable.
They should come to get it at night so that the
Christians don't see.'
Let the Lord and all his saints besides
witness I do this unwillingly, there's
nothing else I can do."

8. Martín Antolínez Goes Black to Burgos to Look for the Jews.

Martín Antolínez didn't wait,
he went into Burgos by the gate,
went straight to the castle, though it was late,
and asked for Raquel and Vidas.

9. The Deal between Martín Antolínez and the Jews. They Go to the Cid's Tent. They Carry Away the Trunks of Sand.

Raquel and Vidas were together counting over
what they had earned in profits.
Antolínez came in, all shrewdness.

"Raquel and Vidas, are you there, dear friends?
I want to speak to both of you privately."
No waiting, all three went together
into the back room.
"Raquel and Vidas,
both of you give me your hands, swear
you will not discover it, or me, to either Christian or Moor,
you'll lack for nothing, I'll make you rich forever.
The Campeador went to collect tribute, and
when he saw anything worth the trouble, he
kept it for himself.
He has been accused
and so has come to this.
He has two trunks full of mint
[gold.
You'll understand, then, why the king is angry with him.
He's left houses and palaces, all his inheritance, and these chests
he cannot take with him, someone would sniff them out.
The Campeador will leave them in your hands, and
you lend him in cash whatever is reasonable.
Take the chests and keep them safe, but both of you must
swear mightily and keep your promises, not
to look into the chests for the rest of this year."
Raquel and Vidas
conferred together:
"One has to get something on every piece of business,
and of course we know he took something when
he went into Moorish lands, he got plenty,
and a man who carries money on him doesn't sleep easy.
We'll take both trunks and hide them
where no one will sniff them out.
But tell us how much the Cid wants,
how much
interest will he give us for the whole
[year?"
Martín Antolínez answered and was
[sharp:
"Mio Cid will want
only what is reasonable, ask little of you, and leave

his treasure in your safekeeping. Needy men
are gathering to join him from everywhere,
600 marks are needed."
"We are happy to give them to him."
"Look, it's getting dark, the Cid is under pressure,
let's have the marks right away."
"Whoa," said Raquel and Vidas, "you
don't do business that way.
You do the getting first, and then the giving."
"Good enough," said Antolínez, "come,
let's go together to the Campeador,
and we'll help you,
as is only right, to
load the trunks up, bring them across, and put them somewhere
[safe
where no one will ever know, Christian or Moor."
"A deal," said Raquel and Vidas. "When the trunks are
[here
you'll get the 600 marks."
Martín Antolínez rode off quietly,
[Raquel
and Vidas came along willingly.
He did not take the bridge, instead, crossed by the stream so that
no one in the town of Burgos
would get wind of it.
They reach the tent
of the famous Campeador, enter,
and kiss the Cid's hands.
Mio Cid grinned and spoke to them:
"Hey, Raquel and Vidas, had you forgotten me"?
You know I'm leaving the country, disinherited,
because the king is angry with me. It
looks like you'll be keeping something of mine,
and, so long as you live, you'll never be poor."
Raquel and Vidas kissed the Cid's hands.
Martín Antolínez closed the deal: that
they would lend 600 marks against those chests
and guard them closely till the end of the year;
and to this they gave their promise, and to this swore, that

if they broke their word and opened them before,
mio Cid should not have to give them
a damn cent of interest.
Then, Martín Antolínez:
"Load the trunks up right away,
take them, Raquel and Vidas, and put them somewhere safe.
I'll go with you and bring back the marks, for
mio Cid has to be on the road
tomorrow, before cockcrow."
Loading up the chests—you could see how much they enjoyed
[it.
They couldn't hoist them up on the mules' backs,
though both were stalwart men.
They were merry, Raquel and Vidas,
with such a mint.
Neither one,
as long as they lived,
would ever be poor again.

10. The Cid and the Jews Take Leave of One Another. Martín Antolínez Goes Back to Burgos with Them.

Raquel kissed the Cid's hand: "Hey, Campeador!
You girded on sword in a good hour!
You're leaving Castille and going out among strangers,
well, that's your luck, and your profits are large. Cid,
I kiss your hand,
I beg you, let me have a leather Moorish robe,
scarlet and highly prized."
"My pleasure," said the Cid, "from this moment
it's on the order books. And if I'm lucky, I'll
bring it back from there, and if not,
well, count it against the coffers."
Raquel and Vidas carted off the chests.
Martín Antolínez went back to Burgos with them,
arrived at their place discreetly.
In the palace's center
they laid down a prayer rug, and over that

a pure, white sheet, finer than any linen. On
the first throw were 300 silver marks, don
Martín only counted them, didn't
bother to weigh them; the
other 300 they
paid him in gold.
Antolínez had five squires with him
and loaded all of them up.
When the whole thing was done,
now listen to what he said:
"Don Raquel and don Vidas,
the chests are yours. And I,
who managed to get them for you,
well, the
baby wants a new pair of britches."

PETER **COLE**

Samuel Ben Yosef Halevi Hanagid, a/k/a Isma'il Ibn Nagrela (930–1056 CE)

Samuel Hanagid's entry in a *Who's Who in Medieval Poetry* should be enough to prompt any reader's interest in his work: International spice merchant, Jewish Prime Minister of the Moslem state of Granada, battlefield commander of the distinctly non-Jewish and highly successful Granadan army, leader—or *nagid*—of Spanish Jewry from 1034–1056, author of some twenty-two works on grammar and Jewish law (and possibly on the Koran), major patron of Jewish learning in Spain, North Africa, Jerusalem, and Babylonia, and the first major poet of the Hebrew literary renaissance of Moslem Spain or Andalusia. One could add to that the medieval legend of his fairy-tale rise to power—from his humble beginnings as a letter writer and owner of a small spice shop to the series of episodes in which his epistolary and intellectual gifts are discovered by local workers, government officials, and eventually the Granadan king himself. Then for good measure one might throw in the nearly eight centuries of neglect that the bulk of Hanagid's work endured prior to its chance retrieval in 1926 by an English scholar and collector who was travelling through Syria.

What drew me to Hanagid's work, however, was technical in the deepest sense of the term—as one thinks of it, say, in relation to Pindar, or open heart surgery. At an odd, but not inaccessible, angle to the first lyric poetry of modern Europe, here was a poet who yoked secular and religious passion, Hebrew and (often antagonistic) Arabic poetic practice, and a pronounced personal impulse with a sophisticated conception of ornament and literary artifice. Hanagid was a radical master of the "new Andalusian Hebrew poetry," but one whose classical emphases run counter to many of our knee-jerk assumptions regarding experiment in the arts. Developing his peculiarly supple and metallic hybrid-verse, he was neither muffled by the communal language of his religious society, which provided him with his scriptural vocabulary, i.e., his medium; nor did he capitulate to the underlying cultural assumptions of his Moslem host culture, from which he took his quantitative meters and his genres, or his pattern. Instead, he found a way to incorporate both traditions without compromising the specific pressure of the personal in his work. He fused religious impulse with his secular context, and established an architecture

of time in his poems by saturating them with scriptural quotation that refers the reader to past and future at once—in a sense eliminating the present of the poet, but in another establishing his voice.

Translating that voice borders on folly, or is at any rate a questionable enterprise for those who can read the difficult original. Nevertheless it has been for me something of a private Pompeii, and what follows are for the most part "accurate" versions of the Hebrew, by which I mean that nearly every word of the original is accounted for in the English mix. *To translate,* according to one of my dictionaries, is "to bring into the afterworld without causing death." This, in a poetic nutshell, is what I've aimed for—though not without sacrifice, and not without loss.

—P.C.

THE MIRACLE AT SEA

Is there poise for the stumbling and fallen,
  or rest for the wandering and lost?
And for me when I slip, or my fault when I fail,
        is there offering?

By the lives of all who'd come
  to console and assist the stricken,
    by the life of each who came
  when I was in need and saw me panicked,

could it be there's never respite from anguish,
    that desolate land is desolate forever?
        But God restores what he levels,
though he keeps his secrets and erases his ways.

Listen to a word and know that not for lightness
  does the Lord sustain us on earth,
and take your reversals with an open heart,
        silence, and guarded thought.

Harden your ears to the brokers of spirit
and turn your eyes from its whores,
from Hophni at Shilo, or Zimri and the woman
from Midyan, or Onan—and his brother's widow.

Listen to a word and exalt the Lord
in the house and street, when you rise and lie down;
shudder for dread and anxiousness.
Worry, and let awe infuse you

for the God of beginnings unborn and unbearing,
of lasting life without likeness.
Return to his grace
and face him forever through fear and rebuke.

I am the man who went down to the sea
which most of the year is loud.
It was August. I chose to go
when the waves don't break in anger;

and we worked the oars and a wind came up
as over a field of corn,
and the sea, like a servant, did as I asked,
like a maid, and the sky was sapphire—

and the water like butter or virgin oil.
And the sailors told of all that they'd seen
of wonder on board,
and one spoke of a marvelous creature,

and another called it a beast—
and the captain answered:
None of you know of the miracle sea—
you haven't fathomed a thing.

There exists a monster whose name is Karchah,
singular among the abysmal shapes,
it devours all who feed on each other
and kills the survivors with fright.

It overturns ships, and fleets with their crews;
they're flipped in its mouth like a chariot.
He hadn't finished his story
when lowing and raging the creature appeared.

I heard it: thunder or the sound of a throng
seemed still alongside it;
and I looked at its terrible form,
wrought like a fish or book-like Leviathan,

the torturous serpent like a palm tree in stature,
its head huge as a galley with oars,
its face haughty, like a hill,
its eyes like pools,

its spout like a furnace, its brow like a wall,
its mouth wide and deep as a cave;
quenching its thirst it would empty a river
with its lips like swollen wineskin on wineskin,

and between them the hole
as though in a coat of mail.
Its flank was white, its back—green,
its neck like a tower, its belly—a mound,

its fin like a polished sword,
and its scales like a shield made red;
its girth to us seemed like a cliff in the heart
of the sea. And it circled the ship,

though the fin was still,
and swam alongside it and rose on its tail,
like a cedar or climbing vine.
Then everyone's heart melted like wax,

or like water, and the whirlpool engulfed us.
And I calmed and steadied my soul,
as the lamb on the day of her slaughter goes dumb,
and called on my Lord,

as others beside me called on their own,
like Ashemah. . .And I said:
In truth, and one way or another,
trouble entraps the guilty soul;

if Jonah was swallowed up by the sea
and vomited onto the land
in his righteousness—what of me?
My Lord, protect me, who slept but awakes.

If this is the work of my own two hands,
forgive me my wrongs. . . .
Then it sank in the dark of the sea,
like a soldier that God had thrown in its parting;

but under the ship it threatened,
as our hearts died, our breath failing.
And the Lord rebuked the being,
for the moment returned to its depth—

the little worms
saved on a pitch-covered bough.
He raised the dead from Sheol,
and saved the swallowed with a hand held high.

The nautical wizards were astonished, and asked
how it could happen—
with their ships trapped by Karchah, the accursed!
And I told them:

Such is deliverance for those who know
the great glory of the Lord in His fullness.
He sends salvation to those who admit him,
and vengeance to those who provoke his wrath.

The sea is His, and all its creatures,
and the waters below, which are vast;
he hangs them on nothingness.
What is a beast beside the Rock

who shaped it and granted it breath,
then endowed it with power?
I thank the Lord with a song of redemption
my mouth will remember,

and acknowledge the Rock beyond creation,
without completion,
and grant the truth of resurrection—
that the dead will arise from dust;

that the Book of Moses we have in our hands
is true and composed with perfection;
that the words of the sages are worthy
and their study is sweet—

and reward for the righteous will follow,
as the dead for their sins in secret
receive their recompense;
that the Lord rules—over land and sea

and the sky and Great Bear above;
that His fear in the lines of my face is drawn,
and His Law in my blood assumed.

THE EARTHQUAKE (1047)

My shepherd, I'm still where I lie
and look out over your greatness;
my mouth speaks of your miracles,
my tongue gives voice to your marvelous acts.
Over the earth's place and foundation
your hand has ruled:
you've crushed the groves in season,
the vineyard's fruit, the fig in flower.

How could a person sin when he sees
the contortions of each man's journey?
God to the godless delivers him
and casts him into a wicked man's hand.
You drive the soul like a leaf from its vine
as the harp is thrummed you drive it,
and march across the earth's back,
then fold it up like a robe.

He when He pleases who brings out the sun
and lights the hills with fire
ripples the mountains like wind
rippling spikes of wheat in a field.
He causes the land to skip like a calf,
its streams like a wild young ox;
His wrath twists the foundations
like hikers through rugged terrain.

I heard it—and my stomach churned;
at the voice of the rushing I struggled.
Remembering now how it happened
my heart balks and I tremble:
You rose by dark to shake the earth
in the blackness of night and the gloom,
you turned the land on its head like a bowl;
its peaks beneath us buckled.

He who remembers the fear of that night
grows weary of life in his soul;
it gathered a terror so great
the highest among us were humbled.
"Twice, yea thrice," God touched the earth,
and, like a drunkard it toppled.
The quake shook like a troop
spreading out in its raid on a city—

and hearts gave way as it whitened the hair
of women whose hearts were young;
and the pillars of heaven weakened,
the foundations of earth were destroyed;
its walls pressed up on each other,
the highest tower came down,
and all the dwellings were shaken:
they trembled in fear of the Lord.

Buildings firmly anchored in earth
weren't spared from destruction;
the city's walls were brought to the ground,
stricken—like beaten olives.
Infants nursing slipped from their mothers
and groped for their weakened grasp;
they were scared, and no one knew what to do.
The righteous woman was there with the shrew.

The sound of rupture came from the roofs
like a woman ripping her flesh,
mourning the loss of her only son.
Home collapsed on neighboring home,
acacia and cedar fell at their roots;
the townspeople wallowed in earth
like a sword wrapped in a cloth—
and every standing thing bowed down.

The chambermaid fell on the bed she had changed;
the face of each lady
deep in her chamber was covered in fear;
hearts with labor were straining

like mothers bearing their sons;
and the soul of each man inside him
tossed like a ship on the waves,
as the men huddled in terrified crowds

confessing their sins, and saying:
"So the Lord's congregation is judged
which neither judged the afflicted and poor,
nor sated itself—
or grew coarse in its being or fat in its soul;
it didn't grow thick and fat and kick at the Lord."
Then we said: "Our end has come,
and the hand of disaster sweeps the world."

It moved from west to east
it didn't swerve from its path.
It gave us to drink from the waters of ruin
and fed us its stew of death.
And then—after He'd crushed it,
He steadied the earth
to leave us a name and a remnant,
to save us for a great deliverance.

He bound the people in a circle of joy,
and stripped their jacket of fear.
All through the night their song was heard,
and thanks for the people's deliverance—
for salvation and the robe of justice
the hand of the Lord had bestowed.
May you always lift your hand
high to redeem us with mercy, our Rock!

Lord who floats the land over sea,
who stretches the north over empty space
and hangs the earth on nothingness,
you've given sentence
to be heard from the heavens:
the earth heard and grew still.
You shook the earth and cleft it:
now heal its wound, for it totters.

AMMIEL **ALCALAY**

Yehuda Halevi (c. 1075–1141)

BEFORE DEPARTURE

Errant night, abide, adjourn your circuit,
for those I love are leaving tomorrow;
set your course softly, drape the early glow
in ravens' wings—and as for my tears,
turn them to storm and stop their caravan,
prevent its roaming: Let my tormented
heart, with its black cloud, foreshadow
their vision of the coming dawn; venomous
breath, issue forth with my sighs to strike
the heart of the kindling flame until they
realize how intricate desertion of my tent
is—until a day I myself have chosen.

AXIOM:

if I'm shadowed by the very wind that
touches her lips and makes her body quiver

(and)

if the clouds bear her my greetings

(then),

like her loins, so her icy core might melt:

O gazelle / you
who chose arctic
frost as your
nesting place—
pity this hunter /
his plight to
vanish in ice

LOVE POEM

Come gently, heart adamant / hips pliant:
treat me gently, till I bow
before you, face to the ground!

It was just my eyes you abducted—
surely I was pure of heart
even if my eyes were not:

quick—let them cull the mingled seed of
rose and lily sown along your body.

I rake the fire of your cheeks to put out fire with fire.
The instant I thirst, it's there I find water.
I would suck your red lips ablaze like glowing coals
and use my jaws as tongs. My life hangs between two
scarlet threads, my death in evening's tresses.

Now I find the nights are endless, though once
no darkness came between the days. Time was my wish.
Like clay in my hands. And the Zodiac, like a potters wheel.

POEM IN PARTS:

Pity the heart, my lovely doe,
you've always lived in. Know
the day you stray from me will
be my end. Even now, as my eyes
dare spy your beauty, serpents
guarding your cheeks sting me,
for their venom is drawn from
fire and I am banished by them.

She hooked my heart in
the crescents resting over
her heart, though made of
stone, it engendered two
apples, to the right and
left. Taut as lance heads,
her nipples sting my heart:
though they've not come near
me, their mouths have drunk
my blood—and felt no shame.

Spinning one day like a drunkard from
the wine of her favors, envoys came
bearing me greetings and complaints;
on their return she pleaded: "Messengers

of peace, bear me such words
again and again. My heart is
seduced, my spirit renewed."

One day my hands were
grazing in her garden
caressing her breasts

and she said: "Let
your hands go loose
I'm still unseasoned!

Don't touch, my friend.
I don't care for abuse.

My breasts are full,
soft, and delicate.

Enough, I'll refuse
you, one and all."

LOVE SONG

The night my love revealed
her form to me, her cheeks
ablaze, her hair a veil,
golden as topaz covering
a moist brow of crystal—

she resembled the sun's
ascent, spreading crimson
in a lustrous blaze across
the clouds of twilight.

AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN LEVI IBN AL-TABBAN AND YEHUDA HALEVI

Levi Ibn al-Tabban: The Fountain of Life

My intent is to journey toward
the source of life, ere the days
return me to the clay I once was.
If only my living soul, perpetually
shadowing wind, could gather enough
wit to know it alone forms my share of
worldly riches, my heart might be alert
enough to grasp the epilogue, for the day
of lasting slumber signals my one awakening:
the day He addresses my labors and seeks
explanation is the day He reclaims
as His my breath and my spirit.

The Reply: Life's Source

Toward life's true source I run,
fleeing barren senseless days, to
see my King's visage my one intent:
only before him do I tremble, I
exalt no other—if I but beheld
him in a dream I would sleep an
endless sleep and never rise—
having gazed at his face within
my heart's core, my eyes would
no longer seek vision without.

HARRIS **LENOWITZ**

Bindings and Whispers

If you want to make something, you can pretend there is no past, neither a past of yours or of the others. But if you pretend that there is a past and look back, or even walk backwards, the past will come catch up with you. Some friends of yours will see the two of you from the back, walking hand in hand. They will have a picture before them of you walking up a sunny road under autumn trees.

One of my central interests is in the symbolic use of the Hebrew language. I am entranced by gematria (word=sum=another word of the same sum) and equally by micrography (pictures made up of words written very small) and other ways of moving the Hebrew language and its characters around in metalinguistic patterns. The utterly surprising and convincing meanings that can be read within a simple phrase of Hebrew through gematria or other codes make connections between me and others and worlds beyond, hidden within the language. The same is true of the rich sound patterns of the *piyut* with its heavy, repetitive rhymes and almost-meaningful words and sentences made up out of quite idiosyncratic understandings of what's possible and permitted in the language. The shapes of the letters themselves and the way they look in arrangements have also served as conduits to higher, nearly inexpressible, just barely suggestible perceptions. Written amulets bring together the visual and the incantatory uses of the language in an attempt to go beyond or through the language to its secrets and to influence the secret world and its workings.

I studied traditional scribal techniques (for writing Torahs and *tefillin* and *mezuzot*, *not* amulets) three nights a week for several months in Jerusalem in the winter of 1981. The course was one organized by the Ministry of Religion. Our teacher was a true master with a lovely, clear, elegant Sefardi hand, though he did all the other styles beautifully as well. He was a Yemenite, but had learned his trade in Israel. Most of the other men in the class were North African or French immigrants. The pens we learned to make and use were whittled from bamboo blanks that the teacher provided. Ashkenazi scribes use quill pens, from goose feathers for the most part; traditional Sefardi scribes use cane or bamboo pens. (I was

attracted to the Sefardi pen because I have always liked bamboo and because the bamboo or cane pen bears none of the stigma of the slaughtered animal. There was nothing to be done about the parchment.)

I have studied amulets, especially Jewish ones and I have visited amulet makers and received amulets. (One which I received in 1989 which the scribe made to help bring me and my wife "together" failed, but then he had told me to burn it when she and I rejoined and I couldn't bring myself to do that.) When I came to spend a sabbatical at UCSD this year I set out to use the techniques and tools I had acquired to study more about amulets and make some, not for use but to see what would come of doing it.

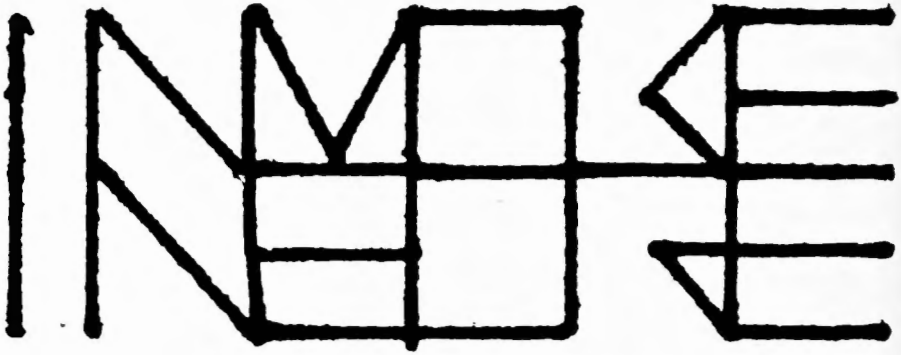
Amulets (Hebrew, *qeme'ot* = bindings, *lehashim* = whispers) register experience. An amulet-maker is judged by the success of his amulets, so whether the object is written or found, blue or red stones or golden plaques, only coincidence stands behind the reputation of all amulets and that coincidence plays a role in the making, even though most texts and designs on amulets are traditional. (Jewish amulets are generally famous texts; a few incorporate non-verbal designs; many include words only vaguely related to the alphabet and grammar of the non-amuletic language.) A very long tradition may support the cause-effect relationship for the individual who requests an amulet to effect some positive future. For example, we know that Phoenicians were the first people to use a metal hand as an amulet but we don't know what purpose it was intended to serve. Other Mediterranean cultures have used the same shape at various times since the second millennium, each placing the symbol within its own context of belief. (Moslems refer to it as the Hand of Fatima, favored daughter of the prophet; Jews add a divine name, written in Hebrew.) Not only does the amulet lose its original signification in the process of time, its reputation even outwears the unfortunate experiences of the individuals who have chosen or received it. The commitment endures. Rather than discard an amulet as useless, people explain its failure as a success in limiting disaster or in providing that which was more necessary than what was sought. An automobile protected by an amulet may be wrecked but the automobile's owner will say that the wreck might have been much worse if not for the amulet. A prolonged illness keeps a child out of the Russian army. The experience which amulets register is faith.

Receiving an amulet from a maker with a reputation, or finding one and asserting its power makes it work for its owner. An unusual and threatening set of circumstances generally precedes its possession. In desperation the one who takes it up hopes for a positive outcome. Doing what he can to gain favor with fate through the amulet, he stakes his hopes on *its* power. The individuality of the amulet comes to replace his own. He binds it on

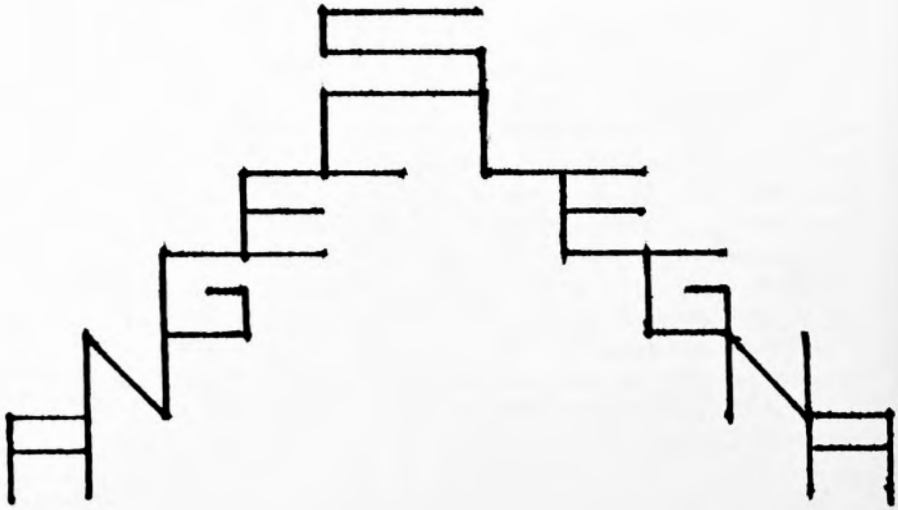
and it binds him. He whispers to it and listens closely as it responds. The experience which amulets register is subjection.

At the time of need any rare feature suffices for the amulet to find its power in the eye of the needy. Tradition marks something rare as possessing power and one may pick up an amulet and hold on to it before it is called for. The whole mystery is that the need for the amulet has made its presence known to two: to the one who hires the maker or takes the stone up or the bone or the coin or the hair ball, and to providence. The maker of an amulet for Jews, a scribe who will write out ancient and indecipherable angel names, trace odd figures and accurately inscribe letters from an alphabet no one knows, asks the seeker questions and requires his submission. The heart of the matter is fear. The scribe announces that one need not fear this or that. Instructions and the inscription of one's name in the amulet and a prayer offered by the scribe as he rests a holy book on the lowered head of the supplicant follow the assertion that fear is the issue. One assents to it all. The amulet, cast up from the experience, serves to keep one wary. As it hangs from one's neck or is bound on one's arm or supports the house under which it lies buried it binds up the fear. The amulet registers fear.

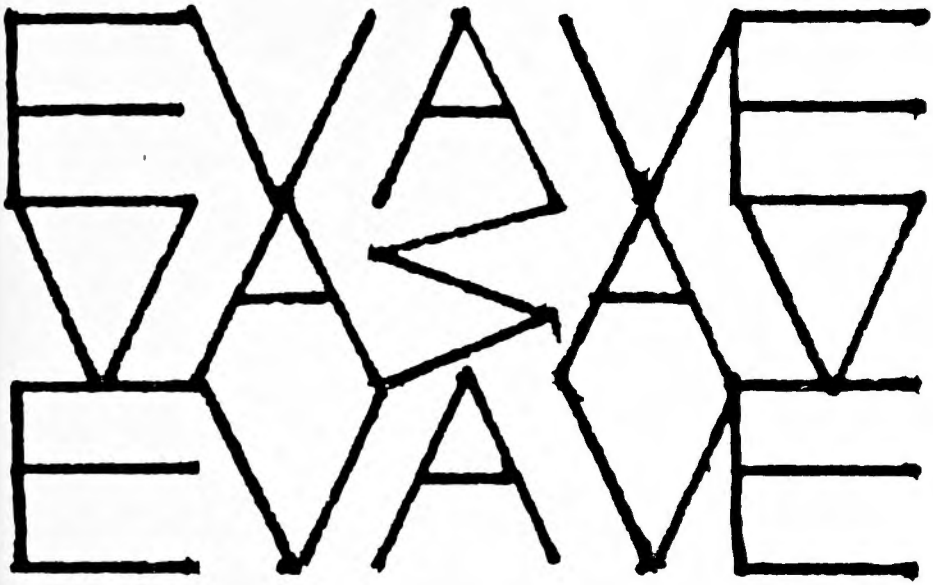
To regather the emotion of receiving an amulet, these texts are suggestive and surprising I hope, and, in their design, confusing and intriguing. They may allow the surprising world to come up by calming what lies on the surface. They deploy arrangements of letters and words and phrases as shapes, magic squares and other sleights from the tradition of the Hebrew amulet. Some have an oral dimension as well and should be whispered, like the fifth one. (It is made of the two triangles of the Magen David pulled apart, the upper one in English, the lower in Hebrew.) They are the first in the Jewish tradition to be made in English. While I was making them, I was surprised by the way things kept working out. In the first good one I got, the seventh here, it just came out that both the farthest horizontal and vertical line ended in the Latin *ex*, hurling out the demons. In the word-rectangle against snakes, the third here, (the title comes from a Coptic amulet), *Eve* appeared in the simple word *Save* and with her a salutation, *Ave*, and with the angular and serpentine letter *S*, the snake, and with the angularity a deltoid letter *A* and behind it all, the text from a Ugaritic ritual I had taught the year before, an offering of snakes to the goddess. I became convinced that the past had walked right up and caught hold of my hand. These amulets register those other amulets it is true, but a present partnership makes them.



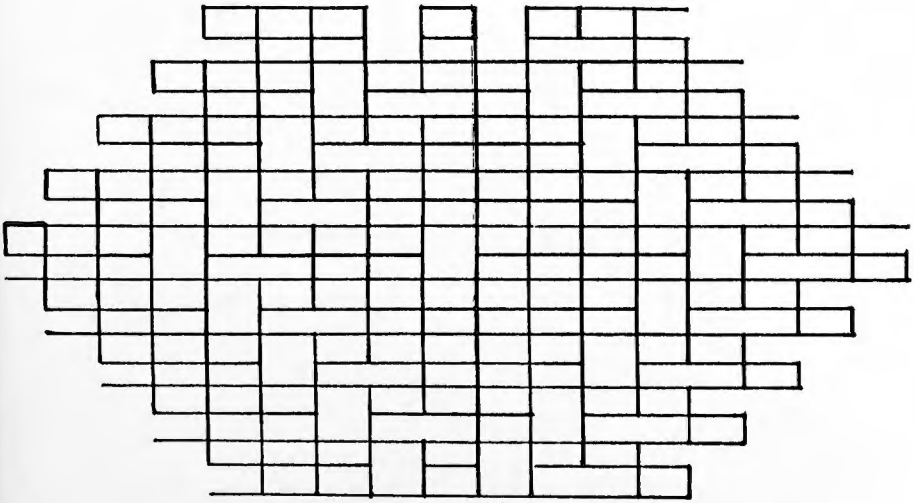
1. Bringing angels (INVOKE, INSURE)



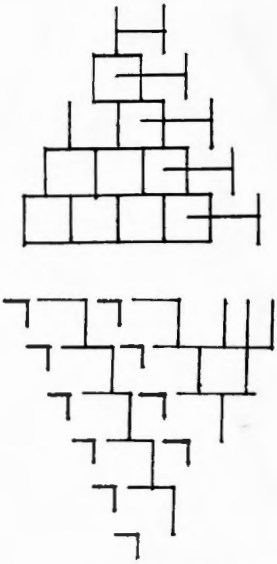
2. Against the fear of heights (ANGELS) (Gen. 28.12)



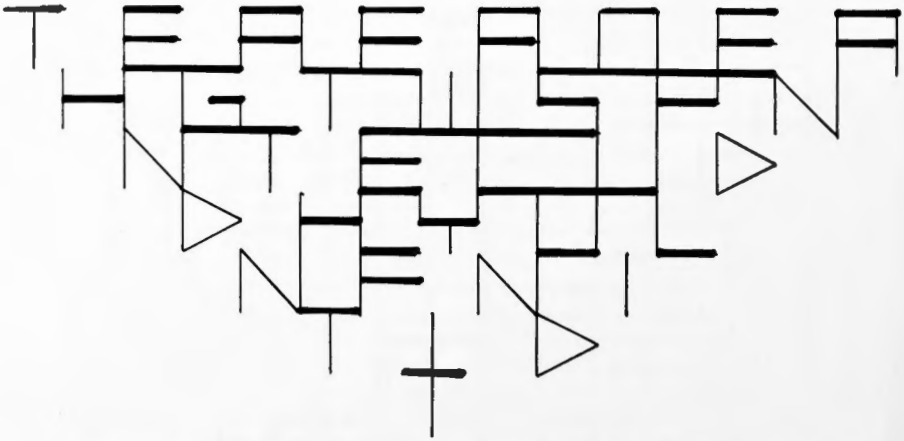
3. To remove from her the snake (SAVE EVE)



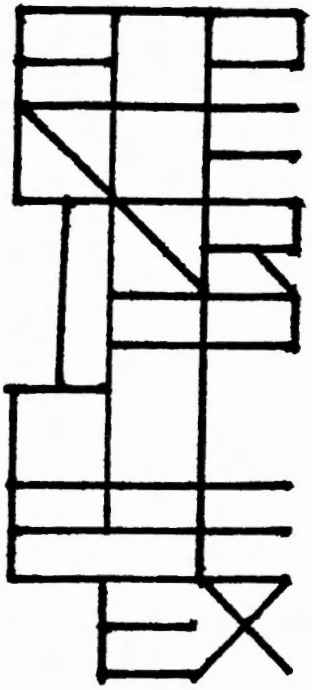
4. Constancy (CEASELESS)



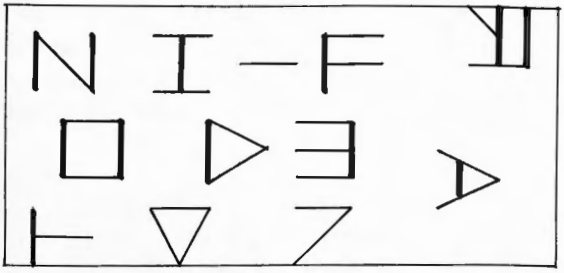
5. To break up a cough (COUGH/SHAVRIRI) (TB Pes. 112a and Sefer Raziel)

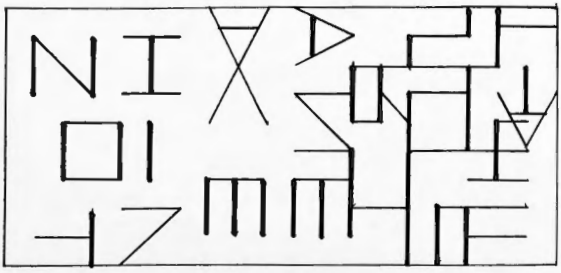


6. Protect the house (THE GATE WAS OPEN AND THEY COULDN'T FIND IT) (Gen. 19.11, after Y. de la Reina)



7. Against demons (ENTICE, CONFUSE, PERPLEX)





8. Something lost (NOT HIDDEN, FAR; NOT IN HEAVEN, EARTH, ACROSS THE SEA) (Deut. 30.12 and Sefer Raziel)

YVES **DI MANNO**

Kambuja: Stelae from the Khmer Empire

(Tr. by Nathaniel Tarn)

Kambuja (Paris: Flammarion, 1992) is a work composed over the years by a poet-scholar who has never been to Cambodia or learned Sanskrit or Old Khmer but has had intense sympathy for the people, their history and traditions. The book is made up mainly of translations from the French part of George Coedes's eight volume *Inscriptions du Cambodge* (Hanoi-Paris, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient, 1937-1966), a work which I could just about have acquired as a student but alas did not. From this huge corpus, di Manno took fragments and composed "elective montages" in which he tried to remain true to his sources while making *them* true to a poetics influenced by Pound and Rothenberg as well as, in France, Rossi and Hocquard. He elaborates on this in a postface. *Kambuja* also provides source information re the original stelae and inscriptions.

On meeting with *Kambuja*, I had at first thought of an attempt to continue these transferences with a group of poets in a variety of languages. This, as might have been expected, proved impractical. Here then are three fragments, two short sections and nine long sections done according to my lights directly from di Manno's versions.

—N.T.

from TEMPLE SERVANTS

Praised be
the queen who

despite these
declining times

bears
the burden of

the earth
like a moon-

finger
sustains night's

beauty

from SUCH ARE THE DEEDS

he who goes north
must in the first place
dismount his chariot
and abandon
the protection of
the parasols

men and women of substance
desiring to honor
the gods may enter
with offerings
proportional to
their fortune

the poorest should they be rich
in faith
may enter
with a simple
flower

from SUCH ARE THE DEEDS

you who
incarnate yourselves

into a glory
survives you

ever
ready even

to sacrifice
your life to

your duty
how could you

possibly
lust for the god's

possessions?

SHADOW

love
is consummated

the moon
is stained

now: how to find

the beauty
necessary

to my
creation?

RESIN CAMPHOR SUGAR

homage to the buddha
who has the forms
of matter

nature and mind
while being still
impersonal

there was a king
surpassing all princes
feared by his enemies

and whose great glory
shone among the land's
four corners

but sustenance
the principle of life
goes out of stock

and the world
dies
in the last era

:thus
his people
perished

seeing that the earth
was oppressed
by death

he wanted to find the simple
which would return to mortals
their immortality

he suffered
from his subjects' ills
more than his own

(for it is public
sorrow
which torments a king)

and he explained
away the illnesses
by the times' evil will

thus be built here
this hospital
this temple

where the four castes
could be
looked after

there will be two doctors
assisted by two nurses
with the right to lodgings

two druggists responsible
for distributing remedies
two cooks

with the right to fuels
and charged with the upkeep
of lawns

two persons responsible
for the distribution of leaves
and chopsticks

fourteen guardians
charged with administering
the remedies

two rice pounders
totalling: eight women
two per housing unit

the total number
of assistants thus being
thirty two

the rice which is part
of the offering is fixed
at one bushel per day

sacrificial left-overs
will be daily distributed
to the patients

three times a year
on the full-moon day
of the feast of the dead

and the summer solstice
what follows will be taken
from the royal storehouses:

a woven garment
with red border
and six white garments

a tallow torch
four portions of honey and
three of sesame

a remedy with a pepper
and cumin powder base
resin camphor sugar

though he walks first
among the elite
the king

is a petitioner here
thinking of the welfare
of his subjects

and he begs forever
the future sovereigns
of Cambodia

"the good work I have done
you must preserve it
for it is yours

officials
charged with taxation
will not be sent here

the inhabitants of this hospice
even if habitually guilty
must not be punished

but that those
who torment the living
be punished without mercy

all those beings plunged
in the ocean of
existences

may I save them from it
by the value
of this donation!

may the Khmer kings
who cleave to the good
protect my foundation

and may they
and their lineage
attain the place

of deliverance
where there is no longer
any sickness!

and in the company
of celestial dancers
may they illuminate

the sacred
merit
which is due to me. . ."

BAD DREAMS

roots branches trunks
oh eternal

tree king
fortunate
refuge
prodigal with fruit

may neither lightning nor the axe
fire nor wind
nor king nor maddened
elephant

bring about your ruin

eyelids tremble
eyes narrow

bad dreams
bad visions

o fig tree deliver from these ills

both men
and gods

JEROME **ROTHENBERG**

An Oracle for Delfi

small men chipping—
writing on walls

for Demosthenes Agrafiotis

THE STONES OF DELFI (I)

1
the stones speak

2
the stones laugh

3
he—like all poets—
has a taste for stones

THE FUNERAL

1
the bull stretched
on a table

a musician
with 2 flutes
leading a crowd
of women

& the priestess
pouring blood
into a bowl

2
a lady with a crown
brings blood
in buckets

hands them to another
lady
who empties them

between the double
ax blades
birds are perching on

3
behind them
a musician comes
playing a lute with
7 strings

& 3 men walking in
the opposite
direction, holding pictures of
small animals, a boat

the dead man watching
from his tomb
behind the altar

4
a chariot
drawn by horses

another drawn by griffins

& behind each walk
2 women

AT MYKINES

1
in the royal house
a fire pit & smoke hole
at the center

around which men would sit
the walls renewed with paintings
every year

with goat bells somewhere
in the distance

2
with goat bells somewhere
in the distance

or goblins of these mountains
little people

at this time of year

3
making echoes from its walls
we look for goats

invisible, whose lonely bells
are clanging in the air

4
snowcapped arcadia
beyond small puffs of smoke
marking the Argive plain

where we were too+

THE STONES OF DELFI (II)

here is an edge to stone,
here is a cry with splinters driven
into the bone the clavicle

responding in pain
here where the pain is nearly solid
gravitates toward stone itself

the voice in stone is letters
broken marks the small men chipping
writing on the walls

will build a world in stone
where we can live & find it
beautiful & lonely

+I too have been there

the mark of higher cultures
but once shattered into shapes
becomes so primary

it takes your breath away
—those loplop columns
arising toward the sky at delfi

no civic order merely
architecture but the promise of
new wildernesses

where the stones speak
the stones laugh
towering above their witnesses

the stones drop to the earth
we sow them into place
& watch them grow

like giants
broken bodies of our pasts
false signatures

inscribed by wars
that never end
that leave a chaos always

a paradise of stone

THE WOMEN (1)

women squeezing nipples

•

a nipple like a star

THE WOMEN (2)

for Man Ray

a woman like a violin

•

with folded arms

THE WOMEN (3)

two breasts in gold:
gold eyes

THE WOMEN (4)

snakes crawling up her arms
they stretch their heads toward her tiara
on which a panther sits

THE WOMEN (5)

women standing with
raised arms—
birds flying from their heads
adorned with pods
of poppies

THE WOMEN (6)

a woman on a swing

•

a sacred tree
with doves

THE WOMEN (7)

dancing legs

HANDS

for Lizzie Calligas

looking at her hand
she saw an eye
& that the eye was crying
water had slid between her fingers
red with rust
& made a pressure she could only ease
by tonguing licking up
the sweet red juices
& a hand was also in the sky
beside the sun & over it
it flew spun sideways
upside down
until it brought the night to pass
"I live with hands"
the man thought
sitting in her light
& reached down to his ankles
snapped the lines
that held the other's soul in place
with hands, he thought,
the secret is Elefsis
where the daughter dropt into the earth
oh seed, oh secret eikon
burnt into my hand
like stigma, like stigmata
rays of sunlight

on the flesh
or into it
& the words turn cold & hard like steel
that cuts the page
then rides across our bellies
like a knife
over whatever part of us
the life will flow from seedings
that reach us from a wasted dream
to make a poem of seedings
like poems & photographs of hands
all of us share & think
"how classical it is
"how it revolves & leaves us hanging
"this reminiscence of our lives
"alive & dead

ANDREW **SCHELLING**

Hobson-Jobson: An Account of Sanskrit Poetics in Homage to John Cage

In the boundless samsara of poetry,
the poet is the sole and true creator.
—Abhinavagupta

The authors are in eternity—
—William Blake

There are daemons that inhabit language. They hide themselves in the articulations and durations of speech, in the twisty corridors of syntax, behind syllables and sounds blocked out like the precincts of an ancient sprawling city. Something in the formal devices of poetry calls them forth. They make known their presences by swift alterations in the physical and emotional make-up of readers and writers of poetry. For millennia this has been know as *possession*. In the last century poetry has often seemed just a step or two ahead of madness.

These inhabitants of language maintain a close but fragile relationship to recognizable and namable conditions—inner states we call affection, fear, humor, rage. But the daemons differ from these like bodies from shadows. Whereas those named emotions illuminate, confuse, stupefy, elate us by turns—and ultimately consume us in their flames—the conditions encountered in poetry clarify, regulate and focus the uncertainties. They confront the reader of poetry with a terrifying and ecstatic stability. Through their agency one encounters the non-paraphrasable orders of experience. Here, in that twilight where each word uttered may suggest three or more meanings, "the self meets the Self."

In deference to the untamability of these daemons, poetry takes what yogins call *the left-hand path*. Its practitioners keep regular company with occult realms of study, the speculative sciences, traditions of charm, spell, curse, and the valor of hard-won insight. Maybe this is why poets seem obsessed with professions of excess: travel, warfare, drug ingestion, prostitution & gambling—as well as with all sorts of alternative, unpopular

and non-coercive erotics. Whole traditions have developed around love affairs that sidestep or ignore social convention—from the troubadours of Provence to the Sahajiya of Bengal, poets are "salted with fire." Poetry pursues lines of inquiry ordinarily regarded as suspect, elliptical, non-negotiable or commercially untenable. Unfamiliar and frequently deceitful terrain confronts writer and reader alike.

> No one visible up ahead
> no one approaches
> from behind.
> Not a footprint on the road.
> Am I alone?
> Now it is clear—
> the path the ancient
> poets opened
> is choked with brush,
> and I've long since left
> the public thoroughfare.
>
> —Dharmakirti

To what can one resort for guidance? *Poetics* becomes compass, map, machete and waterbottle. There is nothing abstract about this business. Nor is it speculative except in the most pragmatic terms, and poetics is decidedly not some explanatory device arrived at after the fact.

Poetics: sleights of hand and word, a bag of tricks like Krazy Kat's: a functional toolkit that "leads up to the next poem." Each writer fits him or herself out with those implements, found or forged, which deviate language from its habitual rounds.

Poets in India have known this deviancy by a Sanskrit term: *sandhyabasha*, "twilight speech"—language lit by the mixed incandescence of night and day—the place of fearful sounds and strange inscribed ciphers. The language of negative capability, negotiating that realm of endless contraries—the heavens and hells we call Mind.

From nomadic Indo-European tribes of four millennia ago, to the classical court poets who fashioned verse of an almost painful erotic delicacy, the *siddhas* ("accomplished ones"—wizards, masters) who worked the Sanskrit language equipped themselves with a remarkable toolkit—a toolkit specifically fitted out for delving into realms where articulate language unlocks the most explosive inward conditions. In India, long possessed of

a genius for scientific scrutiny and inventive taxonomy, poetics underwent a bone-chewing process of classification. But poets and critics kept one eye unwaveringly focused on the effect poetry generates within its practitioners—within those who read, write, recite or receive it. What interested the poet was how the formal operations of a poem—"the bride adorns herself for her beloved"—induce swift, decisive, and physiological transformations. Whether poets considered such transformations private or public, personal or political, they sought in poetry only that which alters its practitioners.

On its own, the human person is a comparatively unformed thing—in anthropological terms *uncooked*—unadorned. Poetic diction, language wrought to its uttermost, is principle among those arts which cook or cultivate the language-using animal.

Simple, like the taste of a complex dish.

To know your ingredients and serve them up. Or in twilight terms, how sounds and written ciphers flush forth the wild shy daemons.

• • •

"The Self of poetry is *rasa*," wrote Abhinavagupta, 10th century Kashmiri wizard of poetics and yoga.

Rasa, the key term in Sanskrit poetics, seizes a constellation of ideas and sets them in motion—ideas for which our hungrily inventive American *patois* has not yet naturalized a term. Let us add *rasa* alongside a fistful of other *Hobson-Jobsons*, colloquial Anglo-Indian words that have slipped the linguistic boundaries, infiltrating our language from South Asia—and without which our language would seem pointlessly deficient:

yoga	karma	bandana
guru	jungle	pariah
muster	nirvana	jackal

Rasa. Old word that ranges. At its source it means "sap, juice, nectar, semen, fluid." By extension—"seasoning, essence, savor, taste." It comes close to what old Gaelic called *uisquebaugh*, water of life. The ancient Celts seasoned or spiked their "whiskey" with plants and flavors—they made it quick, or spiritous. What simples and herbs did they stir in the brew?

And in India *rasa* certainly bears—across the gap of a millennium or two—

a distinct connection to Vedic *Soma.* 1700 B.C.E. *Soma* was the milk of existence—a drink, a plant, a god, the moon—a mysterious lunar liquid identified on Earth with an herb or root, a leaf or mushroom, no modern Vedic scholar or ethnobotanist has convincingly identified. From the *Soma* plant came a whiskey, a complex decoction, drunk by the Indo-European horse-and-chariot nomads who coming out of Central Asia settled east of the Indus River. Once drunk, *Soma* transfigured whoever ingested it into a poet tongue'd with Divine inspiration. The men and women who composed and arranged into books the so-called hymns of the *Rig Veda* claim they merely took what they heard, gathering "from the air a live tradition"—it was *Soma* that made them the gift. It got them out of their heads and into poetry.

About 1000 B.C.E. *Soma* vanished from use in India (source dried up, or literalist priests led an inquisition against spirited poets, or somebody held the secret too tight and forgot to impart it before dying—nobody knows). It had been for the cognoscenti the potent *instigator* of poetic vision, drunk in a context of ritual wordcraft. *Rasa* by contrast is no instigator. When the full implications of *rasa* were fleshed out 2000 years later by Abhinavagupta, it appeared the *outcome* of the poetic act—"fluid" or "come" by metaphoric extension. Not the transformation that distills poetry, but the resultant poetic juice.

Or spirit juice—tasted through language. *Rasa is the direct non-paraphrasable experience of bedrock existence.* Poetry wakes it not through paraphrase but through wizardry. So immediate the physiological impact of *rasa*, poets likened it to the sense of taste, distinguishing eight flavors of *rasa*, and naming them after their transitory shadows the emotions: the erotic, the comic, the furious, the compassionate, the heroic, the wondrous, the repulsive, the horrific. To this list some add a ninth—the spiritually tranquil.

• • •

To my knowledge the single considered application of *rasa* to American art was attempted by John Cage. Cage predicated his music of the mid to late forties—in particular the *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano*—upon "the nine permanent emotions" or *rasas.* (He accepted the disputed ninth, the quiescent, into his music.) While most of the Occident still clung to a dying colonialism and observed an impassible barrier between east and west, Cage found in the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy irrefutable evidence that no such border existed in the mind-born worlds of art. On his own he had located rhythmic structures similar to Indian *tala*, but

Coomaraswamy's writing provided him with the inward mapping called *rasa*. In 1947 his friend Gita Sarabhai told him that her own music teacher in India had declared the purpose of music to be, "to sober and quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences."

Yet in the early fifties, when Cage attended Suzuki Daisetz's lectures on Zen Buddhism at Columbia University, a direct pursuit of the permanent emotions began to seem a less compelling method of awakening "divine influences" than certain alternative methods that Suzuki's Zen pointed towards. Though he abandoned composing with an evocation of *rasa* as his explicit method, the purpose of music did not alter for him—he merely refined his craft. The accomplished hunter leaves off tracking his prey and positions himself in a blind along the animal's path. Now he need only await its arrival--*providing the song he carries is well-made.*

In his later years Cage would no longer discuss the manner in which the *rasas* operated in those early works. His music does not anyhow lend itself to paraphrase, nor do his writings. Yet in *Themes & Variations*, texts for performance prepared in 1980 and published in 1982, he included among his fundamental concepts the "permanent emotions" of Sanskrit poetics. These aesthetic intelligences occur on a list of 110 terms, quotes and ideas—the toolkit he'd developed over the course of his life—from which he drew mesostic text by chance operation.

Oddly, it is Cage's renunciation of the formal pursuit of *rasa* and his corresponding adoption of chance operation (the hunter who waits), that demonstrates so incontrovertibly that the "authors" of verse dwell many places beneath, beyond or beside the poet's personal volition. Those are pearls that were his eyes. Call them what you will—daemons, flavors, angelic powers, *rasas*—the poetic intelligences pervade an immense mutable web that weaves its way through everyone: Language. When they appear they display a playfulness, a mutable wisdom attributable to no one man or woman. Tens of thousands of years of linguistic experiment emerge in their gestures.

The writer's task, one suspects, is but to entice them to an open field:

oBlige
a ceRtain
renunciatiOn of likes and dislikes

of What
caN you say

. . . . .

coMes
indiA

Re—

refleCt

wE say
we go to the same pLace

. . . . .

(*from* Themes & Variations)

ROSMARIE **WALDROP**

from A Key Into the Language of America

A Key into the Language of America takes its title, chapter sequence, and many quotations from Roger Williams's book of 1643 with the same title. Ostensibly a Narragansett phrasebook, Williams's book is much more: a sympathetic presentation of Indian customs, the first I know of. More than that: each chapter ends with a moralizing poem in which the Indians become a mirror held up to the Christians:

> "The courteous Pagan shall condemne
> uncourteous Englishmen."

I was intrigued by the form of this book, which mixes prose, vocabulary lists, and verse in every chapter.

I also identify with both sides in the clash of Indians and Europeans. As a woman and a poet, I am part of a marginalized, "conquered" minority. On the other hand, having come to this country as a well-educated Caucasian I have been part of the privileged, of the "conquerors."

The initial prose sections of each chapter try to get at the clash of Indian and European cultures by a violent collage of heterogeneous elements. Roger Williams's voice will be recognizable by its archaic syntax and vocabulary, the latter printed in boldface. There is an additional clash of the values of the 18th century settlers and our twentieth century position of hindsight.

Another theme is the relation of conquest and gender. The colonization of America put the very "male" Indian culture in the position of the conquered female, part of the land that was considered there to be "taken." To reinforce this theme, every chapter adds a narrative section in italics, in the voice of a young woman, ambivalent about her sex and position among the conquerors.

The word lists and poems play across both themes. Most of the word lists are suggested by the chapter title, either by its semantic field or the sound of its words (e.g. "fission" in the chapter on fishing).

All in all, my book is a modern immigrant's reaction to the complex make-up of my adopted country.

—R.W.

CONCERNING THEIR COYNE

Indians are ignorant of Europe's coyne yet call it *Monéash* and notice changes in the price of beaver, somnambulism and songs of myself. Their own is either white, which they call ***Wompam***, or black, ***Suckáuhoch***, made of shellfish and twice as valuable, **hung about the neck** instead of our millstones. **They bring down all their sorts of furs** and trade them for the wish to live, the wish to die, the wish to kill, the wish to be had.

cuneiform
coiffure
coney

I learned that my face belonged to a covert system of exchange since the mirror showed me a landscape requiring diffidence, and only in nightmares could I find identity or denouement. At every street corner, I exaggerated my bad character in hopes of being contradicted, but only caused an epidemic of mothers covering their faces while exposing private parts.

legal and tender
a condition called
darling dear or ***Netop***
which might as well purchase emotion
as yield interest in
I must explain my body
does not differ

OF DEBTS & TRUSTING

They are desirous to come into debt and have bequeathed the habit. ***Nowemacaûnash nitteaùquash. I Was Faine to Spend My Money in My Sicknesse*** is a **common and, they think, most satisfying answer** since promises applied to parts of speech have no effect, but a priest's pocket conjures paralysis, convulsions, detritus and death. In any case, narrow debts cannot offset the introduction of the number zero or opaque treaties of which no word can be deciphered.

anatomy
symmetry
tilt
expected
rust

I did not know if my desire to escape cash-and-carry was strong enough to eliminate the platitudes of gender identity or the crowds under my eyelids. I was stuck in a periodicity I supposedly share with Nature, but tired of making concessions to dogs after bones.

I offered sleeplessness
in payment of my debts
but might as well have counted
on my fingers
unlike exposure to harm
the possibilities
of keeping warm not infinite

OF THEIR PAINTINGS

1. **They paint their garments**
2. **their faces in warre**
3. color of thought to lacking object
4. **both men and women for pride**
5. closely adherent
6. applies psychology to vanishing point

poly
para
spectrum
structure
raindrop
rage
wavelength

I used iodine to paint my wound, a geometrical design interwoven with collision and conflict. Line securing or towing a boat. A motivation to swell. Or scream in the face of immediate, useless nakedness. In spite of having, without restraint, chosen the wrong role models I have female parts and cultivate outward behavior.

thinking develops
out of the negative

the vacuum abhorred
by nature
is fertile (variables
perspectives, paper money)

refinanced memory
washes white

OF SICKNESS

The Indians' misery appeares they have no *physick* other than knives in empty air, whereas statistics spread from East to West. When their tongue sticks to the palate, threatened with cessation, they enter a scar-map to sweat out their geography and civic spirit till they almost are themselves and **runne into the Brook.** To wash a different body into their lives. . .So even Christians have been constrained to refresh them. (True or false.)

nasal
velar
labial
guttural
fricative
invasive

Heavy thighs prevent the deformation of desire even while running great distances. I was determined to track down my faithless lover, all the while observing local customs, e.g. dead leaves filling up a space of vacant time. A great mass of water gathered inside my head without breaking, which made it difficult to bring forth thought.

or to say
the innermost curve
where music within music proves
absence of external antecedents
though even metal may be hampered
by fatigue
at this point
of the instep

OF DEATH AND BURIALL

He that hath death in his house blackes his face. Soot clotted with tears and gaping with vowels. **They abhorre to mention the dead by the name** sealed into their lips, the bleeding stump of their tongues. ***Sachimaûpan. He That Was Prince Here*** is wrapped in wailing, in flexion, in hands before the face, in smaller and smaller particles. Perspective unsettled by chemical methods. They bury sideways **the mat he died on, the dish he ate from,** the empty regions of his body, and sometimes hang his shadow upon the next tree which none will touch but suffer to rot.

occlude
occult
orthodox
haphazard
obsolete
irreparable

Solitude in heat. I resented my lover turning his back on me for other mournful realities. Though each crossing of space casually implicates the flesh, attraction increasing faster than distance diminishes, I found myself alone among the rubble of love. I had finally reached the center of the city. It was deserted, in ruins, as useless as my birth and as permanent a site of murder.

a hitch in time
then the world changed
then there was no memory
then life could not
be understood forward
or backward

PAUL **METCALF**

Florida Vacations

Early in the year 1528 one Panfilo de Narváez—who had a red beard, had lost one eye fighting in Mexico, and had a voice deep and resonant "as if it came from a cave"—outfitted four ships in Cuba, with four hundred men, officers and wives, and eighty horses, and set sail to explore Florida. Among his officers was the aristocratic Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, an Andalusian, who was probably born in the year of Columbus' discovery.

Desertions at Santo Domingo, and hurricane winds, plagued the voyage, but landfall was finally made, on April 12, at what is now Sarasota Bay or Tampa Bay.

Narváez, against the advice of de Vaca, determined to march inland and search for cities of gold. The ships could follow along the coast and they would meet later at Pánuco (now Tampico, Mexico), which they believed to be ten or fifteen leagues away (in reality, six hundred leagues). De Vaca eventually joined Narváez, but the wives, in their wisdom, stayed with the ships and immediately remarried, knowing that they would never see their husbands again.

Plunging inland the adventurers gave out of food, sustaining man and horse on the shoots of young palm. Crossing the Withlacoochee and Suwannee Rivers, they arrived finally at a "wide, deep, swift river (the Apalachicola). Here a man and his horse were swept into the waters; the man's body was never found, but the horse "furnished a supper for many that night."

Had the troops been able to march north, to what is now north Georgia, they might have found gold. Instead, starving, and with no sign of the ships (which had, in fact, returned to Cuba), they determined to build barges and make their way to Pánuco, which they felt was so near.

". . .none of us knew how to build ships, and we had no tools, iron, forge, oakum, pitch, or rigging. . .worse still, we had no food to sustain workers."

For food they killed a horse every third day.

"We. . .instigated the making of nails, saws, axes, and other tools we needed out of stirrups, spurs, crossbows, and other of our equipment containing iron." "We had stacks of palmettos gathered, and their husks and

fibers twisted and otherwise prepared as a substitute for oakum. A Greek, Don Teodoro, made pitch from certain pine resins." ". . .by September 20 five barges. . .caulked with palmetto oakum and tarred with pine-pitch, were finished."

"From palmetto husks, also horses' tails and manes, we braided ropes and rigging; from our shirts we made sails; and from junipers, oars." "We flayed the horses' legs, tanned the skin, and made leather water bottles."

Harassed by Indians—"They loomed big and naked and from a distance looked like giants"—and afflicted with fevers, they killed their last horse, and went on board. "When clothing and supplies were loaded, the sides of the barges remained hardly half a foot above water; and we were jammed-in too tight to move."

The flotilla was battered by storms (perhaps at the mouth of the Perdido River), and the barges became separated. Narváez was driven out to sea and never heard from again.

At the mouth of the Mississippi so powerful was the river's flow that they were able to take in fresh water without going ashore. The force drove them further out to sea.

Isolated from the others, his men dying of exposure, starvation and fever, de Vaca was driven ashore on *Malhado Island*—Island of Doom (now Galveston Island), the barge overturning in the waves. The men "crawled through the surf to some rocks."

Indians of the island appeared, "bringing an abundance of fish and of certain roots. . .mostly grubbed from the water with great labor."

But some of the Christians—to the horror of the Indians—"turned to the extremity of eating each other."

Of the fifteen who had landed, eventually only four remained: Cabeza de Vaca, one Dorantes, one Castillo, and a Moorish slave, property of Dorantes, named Estevanico, or Stephen. (It was this Stephen who acquired a mysterious influence over the natives: he quickly learned their speech, and became the spokesman for the party.)

• • •

"Three months out of every year they eat nothing but oysters and drink very bad water. Wood is scarce; mosquitos, plentiful. The houses are made of mats; their floors consist of masses of oyster shells. The natives sleep on these shells—in animal skins, those who happen to own such."

"Two or three kinds of root comprise their basic diet, and they dig for them anywhere for the distance of two or three leagues. . . .Want is so acute that these people cannot get through the year without roots which, however, make poor food and gripe the stomach."

". . .famine is so prevalent that they eat spiders and ant eggs, worms, lizards, salamanders, snakes, and poisonous vipers; also earth and wood—anything, including deer dung and other matter I omit."

"The prickly pear is the size of a hen's egg, bright red and black in color, and good-tasting. The natives live solely on it three months of the year."

"The thirst we had all the while we ate the pears, we quenched with their juice." "The juice is sweet and must-colored." "There are many kinds of prickly pear, some very good; they all seemed so to me, hunger never leaving me the leisure to discriminate."

• • •

"This Indian was squint-eyed; so were his wife and sons and another member of his household; so they were all, in a manner of speaking, semi-squinted."

• • •

"Everywhere they produce a stupor with a smoke, for which they will give whatever they possess."

• • •

"They cast away their daughters at birth; the dogs eat them. They say they do this because all the nations of the region are their enemies, with whom they war ceaselessly; and that if they were to marry off their daughters, the daughters would multiply their enemies. . ."

"We asked why they did not themselves marry these girls. They said that marrying relatives would be a disgusting thing; it was far better to kill them than to give them to either kin or foe."

• • •

"In the time I was among these people, I witnessed a diabolical practice, a man living with a eunuch. Eunuchs go partly dressed like women. . .We saw many thus mutilated."

• • •

"I have already said that we went naked through all this country; not being accustomed to going so, we shed our skins twice a year like snakes."

• • •

"I would go into the low woods by the river before sunset to prepare myself for the night. First I hollowed out a hole in the ground and threw in fuel, of which there was plenty from the fallen, dry trees in the woods. Then I built four fires around the hole in the form of a cross, and slept in this hole with my fuel supply, covering myself with bundles of the coarse grass which grows thickly in those parts. Thus I managed shelter from the cold of the night."

• • •

For eight years Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and his companions wandered through what is now the southwest, land that the Spaniards persisted in calling Florida. Alternately hosted and harassed, fed and starved, enslaved and adored, by the native tribes, they developed over the years methods to endear themselves, to provoke respect. Employing prayers, and the sign of the cross, they came to be known as divine healers.

• • •

The castaways crossed and re-crossed the Rio Grande, and at a point near what is now El Paso they came upon a settlement of permanent houses, where the inhabitants grew squash and beans, and told them of a land further south, the Sonora valley—Land of Maize!

"In the town where the emeralds were presented to us, the people gave Dorantes over 600 opened deer hearts, which they always kept in great supply for food. So we called this place the Town of Hearts (*Pueblo de los Coranzones*)."

• • •

"In this time Castillo happened to see an Indian wearing around his neck a little sword-belt buckle with a horseshoe nail stitched to it. We took the amulet, and we asked the Indian what it was. He said it came from Heaven. But who had brought it? He and the Indians with him said that some bearded men like us had come to that river from Heaven. . .Casually we inquired what had come of those men. They had gone to sea, said the Indians. They had put their lances into the water, got into the water themselves, and finally were seen moving on top of the water into the sunset."

"We hastened through a vast territory, which we found vacant, the inhabitants having fled to the mountains in fear of Christians."

". . .I took the Negro and eleven Indians next morning to track the Christians. We went ten leagues, past three villages where they had slept.

The day after that, I overtook four of them on their horses. They were dumbfounded at the sight of me, strangely undressed and in company with Indians. They just stood staring for a long time. . ."

"'Take me to your captain,' I at last requested."

• • •

"At Compostella the Governor received us graciously and outfitted us from his wardrobe. I could not stand to wear any clothes for some time, or to sleep anywhere but on the bare floor."

• • •

Captured in West Africa, packed into slavers, they were transported across the Atlantic, arriving, perhaps by way of the West Indies, in the low country, the sea islands of South Carolina—bringing with them, virtually intact and untouched, their language and culture.

"Slave houses in South Carolina are more like African houses than in any other place in the Southeast."

"After removing the loamy topsoil, slaves probably loosened the clay subsoil with digging sticks or hoes, added water and mixed the clay with their hands and feet while standing in the pits. Then, taking moist clumps of clay from the pits, they either 'daubed,' that is, plastered, the woven wattle, or they built walls by laying lumps of clay like courses of bricks, a method common in West Africa and known as 'cob walling.'"

". . .open temporary cabins, clay walls, cribbed log walls, stick and clay chimneys. . ."

Or they built with "tabby"—a mixture of oyster shells with stones or gravel, "with an equal amount of water, forming a mass, which, when dry, becomes as hard as rock"—a method not uncommon in Morocco.

• • •

The slaves labored in a rice culture, on sprawling plantations, through fierce, endless hours. These West Africans—Malinke, Sominke, Serer, Joola, Balente, Kisi, Papel, Baga, Mende, Temme—were "conversant with numerous varieties of rice, both African and Asian, and with various methods of rice cultivation." The slaves taught their masters.

• • •

"When the boundaries of Florida and South Carolina became established, the Colonists found themselves separated by the territory now

constituting the State of Georgia, at that time mostly occupied by the Creek Indians."

"The efforts of the Carolinians to enslave the Indians, brought with them the natural and appropriate penalties. The Indians soon began to make their escape from service to the Indian country."

Little by little word spread among the black slaves, across the sea islands and salt marshes, that freedom was to be found to the south. Traveling at night, through snake-and-alligator-infested swamps, on foot and by stolen dugout canoes, small groups at first, and then larger began the trek, passing through neutral Georgia, unimpeded by the Creeks who became their allies, and arriving finally in the Spanish colony of Florida. The first of these exiles, escaping from the British colony of South Carolina, appeared in St. Augustine in 1687, thus initiating what came to be the first underground railroad.

Local authorities accepted these arrivals as free subjects of the Spanish crown, incorporating them with their own freed slaves. They were offered employment, instruction in the Catholic faith, land to till, and a settlement of their own: Santa Theresa de la Gracia Real de Mose, generally known as "Mose" or "Moosa."

By 1738 there were enough freed slaves to form a militia company, and fort Mose, a wood-and-earth fortification, was constructed. Black militia manning Fort Mose helped to repulse an incursion by James Oglethorpe of Georgia.

Spanish Florida remained a thorn in the side of the British colonials, as the slaves continued to leak from the sea island plantations. A messenger was sent by the Colonial Government of South Carolina demanding the return of the fugitives—a demand that was promptly rejected.

With the end of the Revolutionary War, the problem ceased to be colonial and became national. In 1790, under the personal supervision of President George Washington, a treaty was negotiated with the Creek Nation—and by implication, the Seminoles, who were Creek in origin. Among other things, the treaty bound the Indians to deliver up to United States forces "all citizens of the United States, white inhabitants or negroes, who are now prisoners in any part of the said nation." This was loosely interpreted to include the escaped slaves, and the Seminoles, among who the blacks lived, refused to comply.

To sweeten the treaty, and coerce the Creeks, a secret article was included whereby "the United States stipulated to pay the Creeks fifteen hundred dollars annually, in all coming time." More money was later added, to be distributed among certain chiefs.

The fractious Governor of Georgia raised an army, raided some of the Creek settlements.

Under Washington's direction, General Knox, Secretary of War, proposed that Congress appropriate money to compensate the aggrieved owners for the loss of their slaves. But Congress would not act.

"When Mr. Madison assumed the duties of President (March 4, 1809), the Exiles were quietly enjoying their freedom; each sitting under his own vine and fig-tree, without molestation or fear. Many had been born in the Seminole country, and now saw around them children and grandchildren, in the enjoyment of all the necessaries of life."

Exasperated slave interests urged the annexation of Florida. Receiving no federal support, the Executive of Georgia once again raised an army, five hundred mostly desperate men, and marched across the border. A few Seminole towns were burned, cornfields destroyed, but not a single runaway slave was taken. After more than two years the troops withdrew.

With the War of 1812, Lieut. Colonel Nichols of the British Army constructed a fort on the Apalachicola River (where Narváez and de Vaca had built their barges). It was to be manned by Indians and exiles. Pieces of heavy ordnance were mounted on its walls, and the magazine was well stored with material of war.

The war over, the U.S. Army turned its attention for the first time to the Georgia-Florida border. General Gaines, commanding on the southern frontier, wrote of the "negroes and outlaws" on the Apalachicola, and General Andrew Jackson directed Gaines to "blow up the fort, and return the stolen negroes to their rightful owners." References were made to "runaways," "outlaws," "pirates," "murderers."

"The Exiles, or their ancestors, had once been slaves. They now were cultivating the richest lands in Florida, and possessed wealth; they were occupying a strong fortress."

The Army engaged in its first slave-catching raids—and what was called the Seminole War began: "the hardest fought of all the Indian wars . . .costing thousands of lives and millions of dollars."

Ostensibly planned for the capture and removal of the Seminoles, opening Florida for white settlement, a powerful secondary purpose of the war was to capture and re-enslave the runaways.

In July 1816, General Gaines placed an army under the command of Colonel Clinch, who approached the fort, cleared away the brush, erected a battery—and began the bombardment.

The struggle was not protracted. "The cannon balls not taking effect upon the embankments of earth, they prepared their furnaces and commenced the fire of hot shot, directed at the principal magazine. This mode proved more successful. A ball, fully heated, reached the powder in the magazine. The small size of the fort, and the great number of people in it, rendered the explosion unusually fatal. Many were entirely buried in

the ruins, others were killed by falling timbers, while many bodies were torn in pieces. Limbs were separated from bodies. . ."

"Of three hundred and thirty-four souls within the fort, two hundred and seventy were instantly killed; while of the sixty who remained, only three escaped without injury."

"Those who were slightly wounded, but able to travel, were taken back with Colonel Clinch to Georgia and delivered over to men who claimed to have descended from planters who, some three or four generations previously, owned the ancestors of the prisoners. There could be no proof of identity. . .but they were delivered upon claim, taken to the interior, and sold to different planters."

• • •

"From January 1835, to August 1843, more than five hundred persons were seized and enslaved. Probably one half of them had been born free; the others had themselves escaped from slavery."

• • •

"To effect this object, forty millions of dollars were supposed to have been expended."

• • •

"Eighty thousand dollars was paid from the public treasury for the enslavement of each person. . ."

• • •

". . .and the lives of at least three white men were sacrificed to insure the enslavement of each black man."

JACKSON **MAC LOW**

The Presidents of the United States of America: 1853

Are all the Presidents whose names begin with "P" dark horses?

Franklin Pierce hooked in the Democratic nomination in 1852 on
[the 49th ballot:
not considered as a candidate until the 35th ballot,
when Virginia cast 15 votes for him,
on the 48th ballot, he received 55 votes;
then came a sudden surge in his favor:
he received 283 of the 289 votes cast on the 49th ballot,
thereby winning the nomination.

He then carried 27 of the 31 States from his former superior,
General Winfield Scott, the Whig nominee,
under whom he had served as a brigadier general in the
[Mexican War,
being with him during the march to Mexico City and its
[capture,
on September 14, 1847.

Pierce had a head on him,
he was no ox,
and maybe no one's fish.

Did he raise the palm of his hand
when he availed himself of an option provided by Article Two,
Section One,
of the Constitution,
saying,
instead of the usual "I do solemnly swear,"
"I do solemnly affirm"—

the only U.S. President who "affirmed" instead of "swearing"?

What ox goad in whose hand drove this man
to deliver his 3,319-word inaugural address
without reference to notes,
the first President to deliver his speech as an oration,
instead of reading it?

Eighty thousand fish swam to Washington to hear him,
but it started to snow during the ceremony,
so only about fifteen thousand heard the words
as they came from his mouth.

The first President born in New Hampshire
and the first President born in the nineteenth
[century,
on November 23, 1804,
Franklin Pierce's hand held his cabinet together all through
[his term,
the only President retaining the same cabinet four
[years,
without any changes, replacements, resignations,
or vacancies due to illness or death,
all seven cabinet members remaining in office
until the end of his term,
on March 3, 1857.

Look through this window at his vice-presidential running mate:
William Rufus De Vane King,
who had the oath of office administered to him in Havana,
by William L. Sharkey, United States Consul at Havana,
a procedure permitted by a special act of
[Congress
in which he had served in
[both houses,
the only Vice-President of the United States to
[do so:
as a representative from North
[Carolina

and as a senator from Alabama;
of all the Presidents and Vice-Presidents,
King was the only one
to take the oath in a foreign country,
but he died on April 18, 1853,
and because the first session of the 33rd Congress
was not held until December 5, 1853,
King never performed any of the duties of his office,
never presided over the Senate.

The head of this remarkable team
opened the Crystal Palace Exposition in New York,
on July 14, 1853,
about a month after the first stamped envelopes were
[issued
and about a month and a half
after the Elisha Kent Kane expedition
left New York for the Arctic,
on May 31, 1853.

After a patent on a sleeping car was issued to H.B. Myer,
on September 19, 1853,
Perry's treaty with Japan was ratified in the following March
by a Congress that,
on May 22, 1854,
enacted the Kansas-Nebraska Act,
permitting state option on slavery,
nullifying the Missouri Compromise.

No camel but the Gadsden Purchase treaty,
proclaimed June 30, 1854,
dragged in more border territory from
[Mexico,
followed by a natural next step,
the Ostend Manifesto,
issued that October
by the U.S. ministers to England, France, and
[Spain,
who urged the U.S.A. acquire Cuba from Spain,

by purchase or by force.

More windows opened during Franklin Pierce's term:
in 1855 came the first postal directory,
and on August 10, 1856,
Gail Borden obtained a condensed-milk patent
less than a month before U.S. Consul General Townsend
[Harris,
on September 4, 1856,
flew the American flag in Japan for the first time.

Near the end of his term
the financial panic of 1857 began,
and on February 24, 1857,
the first perforated postage stamps were used.

Let's return to 1820
when Franklin Pierce entered Bowdoin College,
in Brunswick, Maine,
where he met Nathaniel Hawthorne
and they began a lifelong friendship.

Long before Pierce became president he
began to help his fellow Democrat:
Hawthorne's stories appeared in *The Democratic*
[Review
(bound volumes were mailed to Ezra Pound's pen-pals
not for Hawthorne's stories but the speeches of
[Calhoun)
and President Polk in 1846
when Hawthorne sorely needed money
appointed him chief executive officer
of the Salem, Massachusetts, Custom-House
(see *The Scarlet Letter*'s "introductory")
and in 1853 President Pierce
gave him the American Consulship at Liverpool
opening Europe to him,
giving us *The Marble Faun* and the French and Italian
[notebooks.

Let's honor Franklin Pierce
as Hawthorne did in a preface
for being a good friend.

20 December 1975
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New York

CHARLES **REZNIKOFF**

from Testimony (1934)

Before it became the 500-page "recitative" written, I think, at least twenty years later, Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* started out as a short (and "completed") book of prose, published in 1934 by the Objectivist Press with an introduction by Kenneth Burke. *Poetry* magazine reviewed it at the time, and found it "essentially insignificant."

Most of the book consists of short narratives distilled from 19th century law cases; some of these would appear again as poems in the second *Testimony*. Certain sections, however, such as the one that follows, suggest an entirely different direction the project could have taken, and the possibility of a genre that never existed: the "objectivist" prose poem.

—E.W.

RIVERS AND SEAS, HARBORS AND PORTS

The sloop Hamlet, heavily laden with stone—a fair wind, but light and unsteady—running down the river on the morning of a clear day, the tide young flood. The channel of the river half a mile wide, with wide flats each side of it, covered with water. The Paul Jones going up the river, the water curling white at its bow. The pilot could see the stones on the Indiana shore. Bright moonlight; the steamboat, Lamar, going up the river with the flood-tide, two tow-boats with her; the steam "checked down", for the water was shallow on the bar. When the Lamar had passed it, the captain called for headway. The channel of the river ran as close to the landing as a steamboat could go, to keep clear of some sunken flats. The bank high and shaded by trees, in the back a brick-kiln; here the river was darkest and without moonlight;

The ships: Harvest Queen, the brig Torrid Zone, Clara Clarita, Five Boys, Seaflower, Seagull, Sparkle, Black Squall, Sea Nymph, Silver Spray, the sidewheel steamer Comet, Fair American, the hermaphrodite brig Androdus, the bark Storm Bird, the steamer Golden Age, the sloop Jewess, The Gentleman, Gold Hunter, the sloop Gold Leaf, the brig Susannah, the brig Laurel, Mist, Fawn, Serpent, Sam Slick, the poleacre Jerusalem flying the Greek flag; Polly and Sally, newly coppered to light watermark and sheltered above with leather to the wales; Live Yankee, the brig Sea Horse, Polly and Kitty;

The men: Captain Proud, Captain Lorillard, Captain Percival, Mr. Appleton Oaksmith the mate, Captain Ivory, Thwing, James Fortune, John Jarvis, John Law, Job Mewster, Merry, Hugh Grimes, Heartwell, and Benjamin Chew; drinking houses and tippling shops; the women: Kitty Pad, Sally Williams, Mahala, Polly Robinson;

The ship chock and block full of bags of wheat; a cargo of yellow pine lumber, barilla, and pipes of wine; bales of lambskins and cases of manna; cases of essence of bergamot and boxes of lemons and oranges; ten tons of brimstone; a cargo of white ash, white oak, walnut and black walnut; sugar in hogsheads, tierces, barrels, and boxes; a keg of doubloons; bags of San Domingo coffee; sugar in casks, in boxes, in bags or mats; a cargo of sandalwood at the Fiji Islands and at Guam a quantity of beech de mer, betel nuts, and deer horns; ivory rings for martingales; a cargo of copper ore, shipped in Chile; sperm and whale oil, sperm candles and whalebone; pigs of copper; six seroons of indigo; pigs of lead, moys of salt, and frails of raisins; seal skins, prime fur and pup skins, from seals taken at the Falkland Islands; a cargo of tea, fresh, prime, and of the first chop, quarter chests of tea, hyson skin and congo, with the present of a shawl from the hong merchant in Canton; cases, trunks, bales, casks, kegs, and bundles;

The Chincha Islands; Savannah la mer, Jamaica; the island, a coral reef around most of it, a fine harbor, half a mile from the reef to the island, at high water the reef not out of water, but at low water the natives walking on the reef—no better harbor in the South Seas; a low sand island, but a few feet above the water, three miles or so around, without a tree or shrub on it and all about it shoals, rocks, and coral reefs—on one side stretching away for twenty-five miles; Rattlesnake Shoal, Pelican Shoals, Flapjack Reef; the ship aground all of the night, chafing and grating upon the sand, the weather dark, threatening to be worse, dark and stormy, spitting rain; the schooner under full sail with a fair wind running upon a bar of mud in Mobile Bay, thumping upon the bar heavily, the water calm but a very heavy surf;

Standing at the helm as the ship goes up the river in the evening, between daylight and candlelight, gawking at the town; a cask of wine brought alongside, slung in a lighter to be hoisted on board, the mate

himself at the tackle-fall, and then at the point of passage over the waist of the ship, which is high, the cask suddenly turning athwartships, slipping out of the slings, stoven, and the wine lost; messes of salted halibut and rice or beans, a helping of duff, coffee or tea morning and evening and a weekly allowance of spirits; jogging at the pump, pulling the ropes, going aloft;

A slight haze upon the water, the wind blowing freshly, the lake somewhat rough; clear starlight; the night clear and bright moonlight; the ship pitching and rolling heavily in the head sea, the wind driving the rain inboard and the spray from the waves beating against the bows, the ship reeling and plunging in the head sea; a clear starlight morning and the wind moderate; the night dark and hazy, the morning dark and misty, the brig sailing close-hauled, with a light breeze, just enough to move her through the water, all her sails set, going about half a mile an hour; the night dark, somewhat foggy, and ice floating in the bay; one o'clock in the morning, the moon just setting, the sky overcast, at first flying clouds, sometimes darkening the moon and sometimes leaving it bright, but, afterwards, the clouds becoming dense and heavy; a steamer passing and the yawing of the ship in the following sea and with the free wind; the wind not a breeze but enough to make the boat flank somewhat; a fair day, a whole-sail breeze blowing; the day bright and clear; the night clear and the moon shining brightly; the night the darkest ever from clouds and fog—little wind, the water smooth; the night dark and thick and the sea high, and the wind a gale; wet, dark, and thick weather, the stars to be seen from time to time, the wind from the southwest and the sea high, light drizzling rain, a dirty foggy night raining a drizzling rain the whole night; a clear cold night, the moon having set just after midnight; the wind blowing a stiff breeze from about southwest; the loud whistling of the wind through the rigging; the wind fresh from the south and the schooner beating against the wind, the night clear and starlit; the wind southwest blowing free; the night hazy, the moon at times darkened by clouds, the wind fair for Boston; squalls of wind and rain, high confused sea flooding the decks at times, hail and rain, the sea flooding the decks fore and aft; squalls taking off but still a heavy sea; heavy seas, heavy swells, causing the ship to pitch hard, ship pitching heavily, heavy head sea, causing the ship to go bows under, ship driving heavily, rolling heavily, ship going bows under, filling decks fore and aft; the weather misty and a drizzling rain, and during the afternoon the weather more and more boisterous until the wind is blowing a gale; the wind east and light, the night dark and without moon; the night dark and cloudy with a fresh wind from the southwest, showers and some mist, the sea heavy and confused, running from the northwest and from the southwest; the night dark and then a drizzling rain, the sea heavy and the ship pitching a good deal, misty, a pretty thick night, small thick rain;

The sound calm and the night starlight; the vessel anchoring in the bay about nightfall, the snow turning into rain, the wind, about midnight, coming out of the northwest and blowing heavily on shore, the weather growing cold; the ship moored in the channel, the moon shining through a slight haze, on the easterly side a high bluff jutting into the sea, to the west a low sand-spit, in front of the sand-spit the shore line of the bluff curving into a bight; bays, inlets, rivers, harbors and ports.

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MURIEL **RUKEYSER**

Four Rari by Moa Tetua

The rari, or love-chant—as my co-translator Samuel Elbert has pointed out—is now a museum-piece revived only on July 14. Until 1925, it was the popular song, the poetry, of the Marquesas; but it was fought relentlessly by the missionaries because of the "erotic symbolism of some of the words."

Rari means tie or bind, love spell. *Rari kou fau* means love spells accompanied by hibiscus batons. The vocabulary of these poems is a picture language, like those of the American Indians. The images are clear, but interchangeable. Samuel Elbert speaks of the use of "mists gathering about a mountain" for a person garlanded with lais; of the following words for "lovers": night-moths, birds, mists, mountain, wreaths; of these male images: root, comet, sun, stick, fruit-pole, trade-winds; and these female images: glittering leaf, garland of red pandanus keys, fruit, bud, flower, sea-shell conch.

The ancient chants were simple and direct: "A god constant as sunlight is her lover. . ."

"The leading poet" of the nineteenth century "was Moa Tatua." He was a blind leper who could neither read nor write; he was so popular as a composer-poet that "natives gathered illegally every night outside the laprosarium to listen" to these songs. He sings of the loves of his son, Piu, he sings stories brought to the wall by lovers and those who mourn love.

These songs are like the songs that Melville heard.

—M.R.

RARI FOR TAHIA AND PIU

The dream-image fades, with its red pandanus keys
Strung with leaves, wet in the small rain!

He is a handsome garland.
Tahia's mouth is brave, but her eyes tremble at the spring.
Desire aroused for the valley-side boy,
Bringing the gifts of a valiant husband,
A rare fan of speckled feathers
And the loin-cloth.

Come and find the fruit!
Hold your breath!
Pressed close to my lover in the mountain,
Hidden away lie children, he and I
Until the shadows of the sun climb past the mountain-top
The *kawa* leaves have risen high toward me!
Climb the high tree, break off, O Piu,
The branch of the treasure.
Swing over the precipice we call Flowers-at-the-Peak.
My garland makes my lover happy.
Lightning flashes on the mountain flowers
Like my eyes calling you
To sleep in shame at the house of songs.
For the first time, you see the ripe and lovely fruit.
I also have seen you before, while you were tabu.

When I lay down with the chief, the sun was hot,
Handsome, you came along the stream,
My chief, my love, my soul, my palm-leaf,
My shining leaf. Farewell. The cloth is wet with tears,
mucus and tears.
I am wet, swollen and wet and left alone.
You are away on the far, silent river.

RARI FOR O'OTUA

The sun climbs, hot and burning overhead
And they return, deep in me, thoughts of love.
I sail a surf-board, landing on your shore,
And my soul walks toward you, stops. I startle you.
In the night, it is good for man to be unwed,
We are locked together till dawn is on the sea.
The last day, when I have to go, we weep.
I cannot take my eyes from your tattooing.
My garlands, my potent fruit-plucking pole, go down to the shadows.
—You are the virile one, scented with oils, the lover.
Pick my flower, O'otua.
Kiss the superb wide-awake flower,
It is love burning in my heart.
Cut it. . . hurry up the path!
My hand, haphazard, crushes the whiteness of love.
My opened clothes were torn like this, and the clasps.

A TRUE CONFESSION

A true confession!
My love is gone in an earth-clinging rainbow!
She is gone! My eyes are blind with tears, mist before mountains,
The sea grows smaller, feebler,
And rain pours down indeed.
My tears flow from the prison
I dream of the after-life and of my love.
The sea of my sweetheart is at low tide,
Love in my heart.
Then dawn-clouds come, the clouds dear to the god,

Great clouds rise up, up to the source of love.
Two lovers parted, and my finished dream.
The surf rises, I am held fast, taken,
Held fast, flung away, cast out on coral reefs.
Into the depths, roar upon roar!

CAREFUL OF THE DAY

Care for love tenderly, it is deep in me.
Be careful of the day when you are old,
And old, the garlands are gone and the love-making.
Can you forget
The day we wandered into the strange cave
When we were lost?
The moon was new;
When we were parted from each other
There was only hunger.
I turn my head,
My head is in the shadow of a high-standing flower.
I know my real food.

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RACHEL BLAU **DuPLESSIS**

Copying

"And as to who will copy this palimpsest?
al poco giorno
e al gran cerchio d'ombra"
—Pound, Canto CXVI

Here is the past. I am, as you shall see, going to copy it. These lines by Pound make an allusion to a work by Dante, his Rime 78, and to anyone's adequacy of assimilating and presenting that sestina. The formal diction ("as to who") underlines the grave questions in this canto of "who" will do cultural work, who is adequate. That he uses the term "copy" says that, down at the root of the matter, at the heart, those who do this work may simply be restating. Thus there will never be difference or change in some of the fundamental relations on which culture is based, relations which fill Dante's poem and, despite its generic containment as a sestina, make it spill out, for me, in many directions.

The three lines standing as epigraph here occur in the familiar context of Pound's affirmation of coherence, splendor, light, illumination and the existence of a "paradiso" which, he recounts reluctantly, he has not formally achieved in his long poem, except perhaps by fits and starts. Examples or samples of paradise exist in and out of the work, in leadership, art, law, natural beauty, and intellectual rigor, all themselves shadowed by negative and damaging forces. (I will not speak here of his conspiracy theory about these forces nor his Manichean world view: these are now well-appreciated.) This canto is, then, a credo, riddled with confessions of adequate inadequacy. Pound challenges "you." There are not many adequate, and even in their adequacies they may, like him, become inadequate, by an over-urgent production of unsorted virtues—"a tangle of works unfinished."

Pound's riddled, riddling (in)adequacy is present in his challenge to the intellectual and physical fortitude of others: "I have brought the great ball of crystal;/ who can lift it?" with the suggestion that Pound, by bringing this crystal or transporting it, has in some way done the majority of the work, has, in effect, already lifted it. He has already accomplished the task

he proposes as next. As text. He thereby inhabits time oddly, as master and epigone, teacher and student, weight and scale, thoroughly parthenogenetic, creating his own self in his own image. The challenge "who can lift," so similar to the challenge in the epigraph "as to who will copy," suggests that the question "who" has already been displaced by the answer "Pound," a "who" who is yet at pains to conceal or obfuscate his pride in his role.[1] There are no others, no real peers: this becomes the secret statement underneath Pound's call for followers—his challenge to "you": "Can you enter the great acorn of light?" His works (mining the crystal? shaping it into a ball? bearing it in some way to the spot? finding the gigantic acorn? defining what constitutes "crystal" or "light"?) have been so critical, so formative, so magisterial that they displace the future even as he asks for compatriots. This is the problematic of modernism: that it is everywhere—past, present, and future, and one must face this fact in order to face that similarly absolutized topos "the past" which is at issue here. Pound's complicated (in)humility is also what we are seeing, the way that abject confession gets regenerated, reinvested with almost tendentious affirmation, as in the unexpected, testy remark "And I am not a demigod." As if we thought he were.

Canto CXVI begins with an allusion to "Muss." and his [one?] error, whereupon the word palimpsest first appears in apparent apposition to Mussolini's achievements: "But the record/ the palimpsest—/ a little light/ in great darkness—" "Muss." makes a mix of muse and must; the abbreviation of this name marks a tiny apology for, or apocope of a still vital commitment. And the word "palimpsest" is an enriched synonym for an accumulation of historical records through which a little light glimmers. History, as always in Pound, is treated as if it were an absolute, not fabricated by his interests, selection, judgment, and intervention. (But always made by the interests and venomous choices of various demonized controllers.) The word "palimpsest" seconds that, as if it only meant pile-up of facts, accumulation of data, necessary materials, the unselected "records"—for only the illusion of simple accumulation satisfies Pound as to his intellectual neutrality.

The word "palimpsest" occurs a second time around Dante, with the citation from the Rime becoming part of a palimpsest of golden materials which must be "copied." Pound's operable contrasting terms in this canto are "beauty" and "cohere" as opposed to "errors and wrecks." The Dante citation, as many of Pound's citations, is proposed as outshining, as the appropriate flame lit for others. A little candle against the darkness. And the famous opening line of Dante's Rime 78, the "small short day" as against the "large circle of shadow," enacts this contrast and applies it to one's short life of struggle shot through the great darkness of a universe in which we act. But most of Dante's poem is not about the existential void in which a

little light shines. These terms are mediated by the actual subject of the poem: an iconic woman, object of desire.

Pound's palimpsest over Dante hardly forgets this woman, though his local muse may well be Muss. She is displaced into Pound's allusive transposition of the Dante: "How came beauty against this blackness." And she is mentioned as "The vision of the Madonna/ above the cigar butts/ and over the portal." She is the symbol of beauty and of whatever holds degeneration at bay. A tremendous cultural responsibility has been invested by male writers in female figures. As usual. As over the crude, wanton bourgeois masculine of "cigar butts." The splitting of the male from the masculine or masculinist is everywhere in modernism. And it is also everywhere feared by the men who invoke this split. Avid heterosexual desire, avid projection of transcendent female figures occur in some measure to preempt any doubt of manhood or manliness, given the male critique of the stupid masculine (these latter words are Pound's but they might as well be Lawrence's). In any event, "palimpsest" is something to which Pound refers in the context of Dante, yet the allusion is odd. Palimpsests are not generally something TO copy unless one is in the position of an epigrapher, a paleographer, copying a palimpsest in order more carefully and thoroughly to decipher it. The term more clearly associated with a "palimpsest" is the word "erase" not the word "copy." For a palimpsest is a text which has undergone a process linking—and destroying the link of—the past to the present. A palimpsest is a text erased, but sloppily, to create some surface for, some room for another text. The past text can be read imperfectly and perhaps incompletely, under the letters of the new.[2]

The original writing is displaced, or rearranged in relation to new text by the imperfect, random erasure of the former text. But then, when one looks at a palimpsest, one can see both, as sheathes or layers, as mica-peels, as skins of writing over other interrupted voices. In the OED, the definitions of palimpsest suggest a double temporality which I've underlined. "A manuscript in which a *later* writing is written over an effaced *earlier* writing." Or "of which the *original* writing has been erased and superseded by a *later*." Or "to write anew *after* the erasure of the *original* writing." First, one can visualize the present superseding the past by the destruction of its works. Second, one can visualize the past troubling the present by the interrupted traces of its prior existence. This ambiguity also suggests a double physical presence: a palimpsest taken as a whole, as we see it, looking at both texts, may indicate richly layered accumulation and multifocal visions, of the pasts and the presents, the old things and the new. But a palimpsest taken as an action of erasure and overwriting may indicate an economic supersession of the past, the positioning of the new work

upon the disappearances of the old. What then is original? Is it the oldest or the newest? Where then is "the modern" in relation to "the past"?

It is plausible to pose the term palimpsest, with its duplicity, as Pound's generic descriptor of the Cantos as a whole: accumulation, record, layer upon layer of material that looks half-erased, overwritten with other material from a later era. The multi-voiced, tolerant, encyclopedic gesture. And as well, the substitution of his book for the books of others, a picking through so only the best is accumulated and represented, a reduction (as he says) of the bulk of materials which come over to the present from the past. The tension in any writer of celebrating and displacing the past. The tension here even by virtue of a simple discussion of the past.

(It is also plausible to pose the term scholia as a descriptor for the Cantos as a whole. Many of them are scholia written on Pound's own essays, so that the backbone of argument, opinion, affirmation, analysis, allusion is more fully articulated in those essays of which the poems are a redaction. His essays are a "past" to the Cantos' "present." I think the only effective edition of the Cantos would be the facing pages publication of poem and passages from essays. The poetry evokes beauty, allusiveness, oblique suggestiveness; the essays are fierce argumentative assertions of connections, terms, conjunctions and conjectures. The method of scholia allows Pound to write a lyric texture by displacing exposition to an elsewhere.

Or for genre, one might echo Pound on Dante, "The 'Divina Commedia' must not be considered as an epic; to compare it with epic poems is usually unprofitable. It is in a sense lyric, the tremendous lyric of the subjective Dante. . . ."; and with this promising route let out, Pound ends the paragraph "The 'Commedia' is, in fact, a great Mystery Play, or better, a cycle of mystery plays."[3] "Tremendous lyric" is one descriptor for this long poem. "Cycle of mystery plays" is another. His playing generic leapfrog is one of the more interesting parts of his accomplishment in the Cantos.)

But I didn't mean to talk so much of Pound, except that our Anglo-American cultural version of "the past" has been so thoroughly mediated by him that some indication must be made, if only to skirt him and his wares. Skirt seriously. Skirt his propositions about reduction, boiling down, his substitution of himself for all commentators, his colonization of all temporalities, the way he makes "the past" and makes it stick. (For "the past" is always a fabrication, made by interests, having specific functions.) Skirt the hidden idea of reaffirmation or copying, precisely *by* copying. Which is of course, anyway, his instruction—to "copy this palimpsest." So what I chose to do is copy. I will just take this whole thing literally. One must enter the fabrication of the past somewhere. To copy at least increases the amount of place or number of places, thus intervening in the magisterial by a kind of manic rote repetition. It does not reduce, but multiplies (in this

case by a fixed number, a generically sacred number: six). It troubles, this copying. It spoils. Despoils, even. And even without meaning to. Because it is also an homage so punctilious as to be. . . .well. I will not try to insist on any effect. The impulse was artless. It's the tracking of the impulse that surprises by its implications. The powerful pulse beam of the sestina's light and anger make it always dangerous—to be so encroached by a casual trick—this palimpsest. Or is it the poem's light and my anger?

Copyist. I am after all a female writer, one who copies or imitates. A repeated canard. Perhaps even worse: only a transcriber of documents, a typist. Someone making a fair copy of what another person has written. Reproposing my mother's role in a duplicitous allusion to her percussive silences—her clacking the keys of the old Underwood, typing and retyping my father's writing. That pastoral of production has been endlessly repeated in the recent past, the past two or three hundred years, female literacy put to interesting uses. In any event, whether any female figure was inspiration or helpmeet-copyist, the function is ancillary; the ancilla is a maidservant.

So "copy" is a word filled with gender and sexual meanings pooling around female figures. It contains obsolete meanings of plenitude, abundance, copiousness, as in cornucopia—the "multitude" of materials transferred through the "copia" to the multitude of copies that we now mean when we say "copy." This is the richness and plenitude of the mother imagined only as giving. The word "copy" contains compulsions and a lack of change. It says: to reproduce the same over and over. It contains judgments on rote imitation. Copy cat, as the kids say. This copying is the exact opposite of originality by the exact transcription of an original. Thus the word "copy" is gender-laden by its sense of slavishly imitating, unoriginal, compulsive, rote, and by its sense of all-giving. And by the sense of reproductive, pregnant, capable of producing something by submission to (almost) uncontrollable natural circumstances. (Almost: which makes of intervention in pregnancy, interruption of pregnancy a strangely "creative" if complicated act for the female. I don't mean to sound cold-blooded; it is just a thought.)

So I am making a copy of Dante's sestina, Rime 78: "Al poco giorno . . ." in translations by various hands.[4] Is it possible to copy, but not to repeat? Is it possible to repeat so assertively that the work breaks into fractals? Translation is like this, the odd experience of multiple approximations, and writing is like this too, a small observation (that purple flag irises have rust-red bud-sheathes) out of which anything follows, as one follows these worlds of observation into any number of discursive folds.

But I must stop for one moment more to note that what I will do is a potentially six-fold violation of copyright. Which is the right to reproduce

property in copy.

Genre is stored labor on a cultural scale. The sestina, Leslie Fiedler argues, stores obsession. It shows obsession by repetition. Claustrophobic, entrapping, inevitable, the six end-words of sestina come—inescapable psychic talismans. The words are locked in the stanzas; the stanzas are locked in the poem. When one escapes, one also is compelled to return. Trying to go away, one is forced back. Six times plus one the words are copied. At the very end (the "tercet") they come twice as fast as before. This poem traces thralldoms—to a woman, and to a form. There is talk of the hard heart of the lady; it is difficult to make her, melt her, fire her up. The sestina, too, is hard, difficult to make. But we hold the proof that at least the sestina could be made. The poem as form and as document represents both the frustration and the consummation; it is therefore one of the more erotic poems in our tradition.

A woman captures or enthralls a man who writes about this capture. A landscape entraps him, which is like desire entrapping him. Love locks him. He therefore wants the woman locked up, enclosed in a landscape so he can have her desire him. The syllogisms turn him deeper and deeper into one spot; it is the fantasy spot of her acquiescence or his possession.

And he does not, simply, get what he wants from the woman, only from the sestina. Obsession is never completed by satiation, but only expressed again by repetition. He is possessed; she is not. This is the reverse of the sexual fantasy: that he will possess her. But he has possessed her by writing, or in writing. The sestina locks it; the form is incredibly closural. Claustrophobic. Therefore my trick of laying out these six versions creates in its turn the likeness or similacrum of a sestina; as a test of translation, it is also true to the form. And as for my obsession? I am obsessed by the role this figuration takes in our poetry. I cannot stop talking about it.

This male story has been so refined, so modified, so articulate, so suggestive. So rich, so tender, so brilliant, so magisterial. So much "the past," as heritage, tradition, rite. The Dante is in so many ways the iconic poem of all poetry. Of all the literary past. Though this is hardly poetry's only material, somehow this poem can arguably stand for poetry itself. For the genre. For its past, or tradition. The equivalent female story? That for most of history the concept "literary tradition" has to be compelled to allow women's work to enter it. The amazing part of the history of poetry as a cultural institution is the relatively riddled existence of "a past" for female practitioners, female cultural workers. Women poets and thinkers are not really there. Are half there. Are shards, fragments, half measures. Riddles riddled with holes. It is traditionally difficult for women to write (for there are issues of education, allowabilty, class and gender). If they write, it is hard for them to be read. If being read is accomplished, it is hard for them to be readable (assimilable). If they are readable, their being remembered

is a challenge to which "culture" is not always adequate. They are composted at a higher rate than their male counterparts. They "fall through the cracks." As opposed to the presence of any more familiar past (call it William, Ezra, Phillip, whatever you will). That women writers do not inhabit "the past"? I don't mean to disacknowledge the labor of feminist critics, myself among them. But creating a past in which women exist is quite difficult and not to be taken for granted. Indeed, one might still argue that "the past" as a cultural concept is still gendered male, because within the past as given, female figures appear, not so much as agents, but as objects digested by the obsessions of others.

Such a tempting and rich cultural spot for figures of women—one would think I should have gotten used to it by now. Nonetheless it is almost impossible for myself ([one?] woman) to contemplate. What does this "nova donna" do? She is cool (to him), she wears a garland like Flora in Botticelli, she emanates light, she wears green. She transforms the landscape, the world itself. She is beauty incarnate. She is power incarnate. And she speaks? does she speak? No, she does not. He says his desire is rooted in a "stone which speaks and has senses" as a woman does. The stone may, metaphorically, speak. Not so the stony woman inside the boundary markers of his poem. How seductive and enraging at once; to assent to the metaphor, that fecund site (a stone can speak), but resist the fact (that a woman doesn't speak in the poem)—what a rocky cultural place!

Moments of the poem's greatest pressure are visible, I think, as fault lines in this sextupled set-up. Translation has some virtues, after all. At the end of stanza three, geology goes crazy. The stone tries to speak, as translators range from cement, through granite, to limestone with and without obvious fossils in a crazy earthquake of connotation. This variety of words all, of course, to try to indicate the natural power which Love has over the speaker. But am I wrong to point to the pressure escaping volcanically from the voiceless woman-stone as ideological plates collide and push?

Love, personified as a third character (the only time this character appears) "locks" the man. In response, he wants to "lock" the young woman. His desire to entrap her is mimicry, imitation—Love did it first to him! he is only copying that original gesture. If he evanescently fantasizes capture, or ravishment it is only because he was already ravished by Love itself. But the moment passes.[5] She must be willing, and she is not. The intensity of his desire, the intensity of her impossible resistance are the arc and keystone of this poem. Without mortar the stones pile on both sides, capped precisely by her resistance. The passage that speaks of this (the end of stanza 5) indicates more forcefully his desire to capture, to entrap, to have her in that magical private space (grass and hills) suggestive of their bodies—the "great hills" of his desire matching the "little hills" of his

situation and possibly her imagined body (something made coyly obvious by one translator's addition of the word "two," modifying "hills"). But of course there is no having; it would spoil every poise, theme, motif, psychological nuance. It would spoil obsession. Lose interest in the virginity of women, and certain writing topoi of past poetry evaporate. Or are seen as propaganda pieces for patriarchal families and the legitimacy of children.

Start that again—the digestive mania of the sestina form means it will devour you. But who is the you? It is the man consumed by passion, love, and desire; so moved, he cannot be moved (he is "locked by Love"). It is the stone, disappearing in grass, digested—her green eats it. It is the man so devoured that he becomes like Nebuchadnezzar—the king as cattle. Chattel. But it is a "she" who traditionally is chattel. This sestina's beauty (and horror) is that the male speaker empathizes with and identifies with the woman fleeing his desire. Why is this empathy horrible? Because it holds all the cards of colonization, and again the female figure has no "place," no "site"—she is locked forever into his. Zeitlin asks of a parallel moment of Keats's empathy of the female sexual experience by the male poet: "Is this a form of empathy or of appropriation, or is it both? And how are we to interpret the feminine as it passes through the male imagination, especially when it strives to incorporate or even imitate the feminine?" (p. 294) I cannot think of a male poet of whom this question could not be asked, who has not given evidence in his works that this question must be asked. I will only suggest that perhaps new terms must be invented, terms beyond the suggestive binary of "empathy" and "appropriation," some terms that indicate forcefully the dialectics of desire, identification and control that seem to be part of the foundational materials of poetics in its use of female figures.

What does it mean to woman culturally speaking that she must be ready (readied) to sustain the kind of worship of female figures, and maybe of historical women, that the speaker gives? She will always be nature, be in nature. He will always be art. Weaving is a trope inside the form (she weaves green in her golden hair) as well as a trope of the sestina form by its ABCDEF shifting to FAEBDC, or 123456 to 615243 (and onward): the end-words' pattern makes a rocking or a weaving. Her weaving occurs for personal adornment; his weaving is in the service of poetry. Hers is temporary, his permanent. Temporary, that is, except as he memorializes her gesture, her garland in his poetry. The asymmetries of (female) poesy to (male) poetry are once again apparent. Reaffirming this division is one of the most familiar arguments—indeed, purposes—of the lyric.

But what has driven me to distraction is the economy of speech. The claim to speak and the allowance to speech. He speaks for her. He speaks to her. He speaks about her. These female figures inside poetry have

virtually no voice. If they spoke—what would they say? If they had spoken; what would they have said? Who would have proposed their voices? This question has obsessed me to the point of blockage. One suddenly wants no poetry, or an excess of poetry, no voices, or voices more than one ever could demand. One wants no "woman" or an excess of "women"; one wants to embrace and destroy. And amn't I a woman? and what are the cultural consequences of this for me? But as for them, these representations of female figures or copies of women that appear everywhere in art: their "past" is only what we see through a kaleidoscopic wedge beautifully mirroring the texts we have. It is mainly copy after copy of the same thing, and this is called poetry or art. As for "real women," their traces are few, their words are fewer still. So I represent the past by this copying.

To the short day and the great circle of shadow
To the shortened day and to the great circle of shade
To dwindling day and the great ring of shadow
To the dim light and the large circle of shade
To small daylight and the great circle of shade
I have reached, alas, the long shadow

I have come, alas, and to the whitening of the hills,
I have come, alas! and to the whitening of the hills,
Alas, I've climbed, and whitening of the hills
I have clomb, and to the whitening of the hills,
I've come, alas, and to the blanching of the hills,
and short day of whitening hills

when the grass loses its color:
when the color is lost from the grass:
When winter takes all color from the grass—
There where we see no color in the grass.
That season when the color leaves the grass
when color is lost in the grass.

and yet my desire remains evergreen,
and my desire still does not change its green,

Yet my desire will never be less green,
Natheless my longing loses not its green,
And only my desire keeps its green,
My longing, all the same, keeps green

it is so rooted in the hard stone
it is so rooted in the hard stone
So barbed is he into the stubborn rock
It has so taken root in the hard stone
so rooted is it in the rigid stone
it is so hooked in the hard stone

which speaks and has senses like a woman.
that speaks and has sensation as if it were a lady.
Which speaks and feels as if it were a woman.
Which talks and hears as though it were a lady.
That speaks and harks as if it were a queen.
that speaks and hears like a woman.

[2] This young woman
So too this strange lady
As stiff she stands herself, this new-found woman
Utterly frozen is this youthful lady,
And just so constantly, my little queen
In that same way this new woman

stays frozen like snow in shadow;
stands there frozen, like snow in the shade:
Annealed by frost and thaw, old snow in shadow,
Even as the snow that lies within the shade;
Lies frozen fast, a snowbank in the shade,
stands as cold as snow in shadow,

for the sweet season moves her no more than stone,
for she is not moved except as a stone is
And does not move, or moves as moves rock
For she is no more moved than is the stone
And is not stirred except as is the stone
less touched than if she had been stone

the season that warms the hills
by the sweet season that warms the hills
To that sweet time which suns the naked hills
By the sweet season which makes warm the hills
By time's sweet turning that now warms the hills
by the sweet time that warms the hills

and turns them from white to green,
and turns them from white to green
And strips their winter whiteness down to green
And alters them afresh from white to green,
And changes all their whiteness into green
and brings them back from white to green,

covering them with flowers and grass.
and clothes them with flowers and grass.
That they may lie in flowers and in grass.
Covering their sides again with flowers and grass.
With blossoms and a blanketing of grass.
dressing them in flowers and grass.

[3] When she wears on her head a garland of grass
When she has on her head a garland of leaves
When to her head she lifts a crown of grass,
When on her hair she sets a crown of grass
When she is garlanded with plaited grass,
Who, when she wreathes her hair with grass,

she takes every other woman
she drives from my mind every other lady:
Our mind is dark to any other woman,
The thought has no more room for other lady;
She lures our longing from each other queen;
thinks of any other woman?

from our mind; for the curling yellow and the green
because the curling yellow mingles with the green
For there commingle yellow and crisp green.

Because she weaves the yellow with the green
So intertwined the curling gold and green,
The golden waves so mix with green

mingle so beautifully that Love comes to dwell in their shadow,
so beautifully that Love comes to stay in the shade there,
So finely, Love makes their shade his shadow,
So well that Love sits down there in the shade,—
Love loves to lounge there in its shade—
that Love himself seeks its shadow

Love who has locked me between small hills
Love who has locked me among the little hills
Love who has locked me up in two small hills
Love who has shut me in among low hills
That Love which locks me here in little hills,
that has me fixed between small hills

more tightly than cement locks stone.
more firmly than mortar locks a stone.
More tightly than a sea-shell lost in rock.
Faster than between walls of granite-stone.
More stubborn even than calcareous stone.
more strongly than cemented stone.

[4] Her beauty has more power than stone,
Her beauty has more power than a precious stone,
Strength in her beauty is stronger than in rock
She is more bright than is a precious stone;
Her beauty's magic mocks the precious stone;
More potent than a precious stone,

nor can her blows be healed by grass:
and the wound it gives cannot be healed by herbs:
And wounds it gives will find no healing grass:
The wound she gives may not be healed with grass:
Her blows are eased by no medicinal grass;
her beauty wounds, and healing grass

and I have fled over plains and hills
for I have fled over plains and over hills
So I have fled through plains and over hills
I therefore have fled o'er plains and hills
And I have fled through fens and over hills
cannot help; across plains and hills

to escape, if possible, from such a woman;
to learn to escape from such a lady;
And hoped to find the limits of this woman
For refuge from so dangerous a lady;
To find my freedom from this kind of queen;
I fled this radiant woman.

but from her light I can find no shadow
and yet from her face there is no shade,
But her enormous light disdains a shadow
But from her sunshine nothing can give shade,—
But from her light there is no sheltering shade,
From her light I found no shadow

under mountain or wall or green bough.
not of a hill, or a wall ever, or a green branch.
From knoll or wall or sheltering boughs of green.
Not any hills, nor wall, nor summer-green.
Not wall or tuffet or the leafiest green.
of mountain, wall, or living green.

[5] I once saw her clothed in green
I saw her once dressed in green
So have I seen her standing dressed in green,
A while ago, I saw her dressed in green,—
Yet there was once I watched her dressed in green,
I have seen her pass, dressed in green

and such that she would have imparted to stone
such that she would have begotten in a stone
So artificed, she would have lifted rock

So fair, she might have wakened in a stone
So winsome she might wake within a stone
and thought the sight would make a stone

the love I bear to her mere shadow;
the love that I feel for her very shadow:
Into that love in which I love her shadow—
This love which I do feel even for her shade;
That love which wracks me for her merest shade;
love, as I, even her shadow.

hence I have desired her in a fair grass field—
and so I have wished to have her in a fine meadow of grass,
Hence I have dreamed her set in meadow-grass,
And therefore, as one woos a graceful lady,
And then I dreamed her in a field of grass,
And I have walked with her on grass,

as much in love as ever a woman was—
as much in love as ever lady was,
Heart-deep in love, as deep as ever woman,
I wooed her in a field that was all grass
More fired with love than ever any queen,
speaking like a lovesick woman,

enclosed by great hills.
a meadow closed in all around with high hills.
And circled with a ring of leaning hills.
Girdled about with very lofty hills.
And sealed there by an arc of alpine hills.
enclosed within the highest hills.

[6] But surely rivers will return to the hills
But well may the rivers climb the hills
But first these streams will turn and climb their hills
Yet shall the streams turn back and climb the hills
But sooner will the rivers climb the hills
But streams will flow back to their hills

before this wet green wood
before this moist green wood
Before that standing wood, so lithe and green,
Before Love's flame in this damp wood and green
Than for my sake this sprig, too moist and green,
before this branch, sappy and green,

catches fire, as is the way of fair woman,
will ever take fire (as ladies do)
Take flame, such flame as knows so fair a woman
Burn, as it burns within a youthful lady,
Be kindled like a fair and proper queen,
catches fire (as does a woman)

for me—who would consent to sleep on stone
for me, though I would endure to sleep on stone
And that flame mine; meanwhile to couch on rock
For my sake, who would sleep away in stone
For me, who would consent to sleep on stone
from me, who would bed down on stone

all my days and go about eating grass,
all my season, and go eating grass
In every season, to give my hunger grass,
My life, or feed like beasts upon the grass,
For all my days, and pasture me on grass,
and gladly for his food crop grass

only to see where her dress casts a shadow.
so I might only see where her skirts make a shade.
And eyes cast down, to glimpse her train of shadow.
Only to see her garments cast a shade.
So I might see where her skirts cast their shade.
just to see her gown cast shadow.

[final tercet]
Wherever the hills cast darkest shadow
Whenever the hills make blackest shade,
Wherever hills rise up from darkest shadow,

How dark soe'er the hills throw out their shade
Whatever time the hills cast blackest shade,
The heavy shadow cast by hills

this young woman makes it disappear beneath a fair green,
under a lovely green the youthful lady
Behind a sleeve of green this maiden-woman
Under her summer-green the beautiful lady
Beneath a lovely green, my little queen
this woman's light can change to green

as one makes stone disappear under grass.
makes them disappear, like a stone under the grass
Obscures their darkness, like a rock in grass.
Covers it, like a stone covered in grass.
Annuls it, as a stone is drowned in grass.
as one might hide a stone in grass.

NOTES

1 Although *lifting* is a more intense task than *copying*, and there is a corresponding difference between *can lift* and *will copy* which syntactically suggests that the *copying* is the more likely future event. As so it is here.

2 Palimpsest is, incidentally, a word with much resonance in the work and psychic career of H.D., beginning at least with her novel of that name in 1926; she knew much about its psychoanalytic meanings as the magic writing tablet which was Freud's metaphor for the unconscious.

3 Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (London: J.M. Dent & Songs, Ltd., 1910), 161.

4 The first line of each unit comes from *Dante's Lyric Poetry, volume I: The Poems, Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), 163–165. This is a prose translation; I have broken it into verse. The second line of each stanza unit has been translated by Robert M. Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) and cited in Marianne Shapiro, *Hieroglyph of Time: The Petrarchan Sestina* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 92-93. The third line of each unit comes from *Dante's Rime*, trans. Patrick S. Diehl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 172–175. The fourth line of each unit is from Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Sestina: Of the Lady Pietra Degli Scrovigni," a translation found in *Dante & His Circle*, 1899. The fifth line of each unit was translated by Leslie A. Fiedler as "To Small Daylight: The Stony Sestina of Dante Alighieri," and is found in the important essay "Dante: Green Thoughts in a Green Shade: Reflections on the Stony Sestina of Dante Alighieri," *NO! in thunder: Essays on Myth and Literature* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). The sixth line comes from James Schuyler, "Sestina, A translation of Dante's *Al poco giornio. . .*," *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988), 15–16. My apologies to all translators for rupturing their continuities.

5 Faster than in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." See Froma I. Zeitlin, "On Ravishing Urns: Keats in His Tradition," in eds. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, *Rape and Representation* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1991): 278-302.

MICHAEL **PALMER**

Some Notes on Shelley, Poetics and the Present

"But I beg you to take into consideration the conditions under which I am writing, the time and place."
—Heine, *The Romantic School*

I would like to take this opportunity to look informally at Shelley in relation to contemporary poetics and to look in a sense for the "necessity of Shelley." I hope I will be able to gather up these fragments or notations of several months without pretending to mask their fragmentary character, since the Romantics themselves have taught our century the epistemological weight of the fragment, whether the sundered Orphic body and scattered limbs of Osiris or, less exaltedly, the quick thought on a scrap of paper.

As I was first beginning to reread Shelley, a quotation I had copied out from Susan Buck-Morss's *The Dialectics of Seeing* (on Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* or "Arcades Project") came repeatedly to mind. Buck-Morss draws the quotation from Benjamin's *Theses on History*. (See also Gershom Scholem's "Walter Benjamin and his Angel" in *On Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gary Smith.) It reads:

> There is a picture by Klee called "Angelus Novus." An angel is presented in it who looks as if he were about to move away from something at which he is staring. His eyes are wide open, mouth agape, wings spread. The angel of history must look like that. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears to *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe which relentlessly piles wreckage upon wreckage, and hurls them before his feet. [. . .] The storm [from Paradise] drives him

(Presented to the Keats-Shelley Society at the meeting of the Modern Language Association, San Francisco, 28 Dec 91, in celebration of the 200th anniversary of Shelley's birth)

> irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. That which we call progress is this storm.
>
> (p. 95)

Certainly a key passage for the understanding of Benjamin's own romantic progressivism and the various contradictory threads which are responsible for the complex and compelling fabric of his social and aesthetic thought. Yet the visual meaning of this image of the Angelus Novus is anything but stable (see Scholem), as I am sure Benjamin would have acknowledged. We may just as easily interpret this figure as gazing "into the future," or at some event in the world of the present, or into some entirely nonspecific space. The expression could be one of astonishment, or incomprehension, or horror, or perhaps all three. The arms might be raised in surprise or benediction. "He" (lacking the angelic pronoun) seems suspended in a kind of cosmic dust, caught between this and some other world in weather he has never experienced. The gaze, then, is multiple and the figure, like so many crucial verbal figures in Shelley, is polysemous following Dante's sense of that word. We might even refigure him as the Angel of Poetry, whose many faces are like the multiple Shelleys which, since his death, have been imagined or posited and projected toward our time. In any case, in its uncertainty or ambiguity, its backward-forwardness, it seems an appropriate figure to preside over this talk which must look forward and back, as well as at what "now" is now, and finally into the temporal modes poetry itself envisages, such as the future-present and the future-past, to name but two.

There is no question that the future has recently undergone some major alterations. In fact, it is possible to say that The Future as once conceived by utopians and revolutionaries of various stripes has (at least for now) entered into the historical past without ever having been realized, dissipated by its own repressive and totalizing social economy (which imposed the dictatorship of an endlessly deferred future on the texture of everyday life) as well, no doubt, as by the relentlessly ambitious and adaptive force of international capital, which has been busy with the business of creating its own narratives and its own set of possible futures for immediate consumption.

It is in the light of the collapse of various malioristic futures, their implosion into an unstable present, a "now" of uncertain boundaries both cultural and political, that we are asked to reread and in some sense rediscover Shelley for contemporary poetics. Certainly such a reading will be further qualified by the fact that Shelley (as Jerome McGann has noted) is a poet of futurist

vision and address. Initially of course he is a poet of his present moment who invokes alternative social orders through an evocation of the specific injustices of the present and a highly abstract vision of future redress. He speaks to contemporary injustice at times with an almost agit-prop directness, at others with the layered symbolic language of allegory and myth. Regarding the latter, even his most "displaced" and idealized poetry has a proto-dialectical character to it (to borrow a term from Richard Terdiman); it is part of an argument that moves beyond the self and beyond aesthesis to engage with contradiction and paradox. Everywhere shadowing that future is the specter of another future from the recent past, Shelley's almost immediate past, that of the French Revolution. The self-devouring of the Revolution and the age of reaction which follows, serve both to problematize and to deepen Shelley's own progressivism. A Spinozistic sense of community and desire will become more and more integral with the vision of radical renewal as Shelley seeks alternatives to anarchic violence and revolutionary chaos. Desire itself will be seen as signifier of resistance and subversion, as well as (quoting *Epipsychidion)* "An image of some bright eternity." *Epipsychidion* is an act of defiant poetic excess, an act of resistance to the hypocritical puritanism of the time, but also to the idea of a poetry of limits. Like so much of Shelley's work, it is impossible; its suppression is preordained. The poem, in its graphic sensuality, defies the decorum of the acceptable verse of its time. There is another and more threatening insistence which conjoins in poetically coded language the personal with the social vision. An escape *from* is always an escape *toward:*

> This isle and house are mine, and I have vowed
> Thee to be lady of the solitude.—
> And I have fitted up some chambers there
> Looking toward the golden Eastern air,
> And level with the living winds which flow
> Like waves above the living waves below.—
> I have sent books and music there, and all
> Those instruments with which high spirits call
> The future from its cradle, and the past
> Out of its grave, and make the present last
> In thoughts and joys which sleep, but cannot die,
> Folded within their own eternity.
>
> *(Epipsychidion,* ll. 513-24)

A passage that, like so much of the poem, operates at many symbolic levels (along with Dante, are there echoes of Shakespeare's Prospero here as well?). The poet-alchemist asserts the power of the poetic voice to

command historical time, to resurrect the past for the present, invoke the birth of the future, and in so doing eternalize an ideal present (a present of living ideas). After the dystopic and utopian hours (I meant to type "horrors") of our age, the status of such a claim must of course be at the very least thoroughly interrogated. What, if anything, do we believe of the poetic function now? What claim can be made for the poem in the world? In what margins and at what borders, barely visible it often seems, does it continue to be heard?

Before attempting a few remarks on the above, there is one more of Shelley's "futures" to note. In rereading Richard Holmes' and Kenneth Neil Cameron's essential biographical studies, I was reminded how much of Shelley's work was left unpublished during his life, or else subject to censorship and suppression. Most of the work would only come into print in one of several futures, often a distant future, as the forces of censorship and revision (and perhaps indifference) continued to operate long after his death. The effect is obviously to remove the work from any possible influence on its time (which I need hardly suggest in any case would have been marginal). The effect is also to reduce it to purely literary-textual status, to reframe and limit both its purpose and address. It is in great measure to de-realize and acculturate it, to remove it from history to literary history. Such suppression, ironically, as the future—this century—would discover, is also the source of much of the mythic aura and mystification which come to envelope such a poet and his work.

To look at Shelley, or to look for Shelley, in the present is also to confront certain questions of the present itself for poetry, certain paradoxes and contradictions which poetry as a practice both reflects and addresses. What "now" is it, and where do we find ourselves—and lose ourselves—in it? What responses can poetry make, and to whom? Questions at least to be raised for a poetics, even if not answerable by one. Questions too which risk both banality and rhetorical inflation.

Ten years of Reaganbush, coupled with the vicious attacks by the likes of Jesse Helms and Donald Wildmon on free speech, racial, sexual and cultural difference, have been only the most visible signs of a rightward drift toward a shamelessly exploitative materialism and a know-nothingism worn with a kind of violent pride. At the same time, logically enough, the marketplace has come to seem the all-justifying means of cultural support and distribution. It is not stretching things too much to find at least a few obvious parallels with the public culture of reaction and privilege in Regency England, though clearly the means of cultural dissemination are markedly different, as are the means of control and constraint.

In poetry, as a poet committed to an exploratory prosody, an assertion of resistance to "meaning" and "expression" as givens, and a radical questioning of our means of representation, I have been struck by the quite determined recent movements to reassert order under the familiar flags of "craft," "value," "taste," "excellence," et al. The New Formalists, in systematically trivializing and demeaning the functions of poetry, in reducing form to the formulaic and prosody to a narrow compilation of Anglo-American meters, have in effect turned the poem into a tired but manageable short story in verse, content to sing, rather quietly, of middle-class life. Charles Simic has noted that their ideas of prosody sound as if they came from "Victorian schoolbooks—or perhaps cookbooks." I would say that they are in fact more like Victorian manuals of etiquette, though much less entertaining. They nest, appropriately, in the Eliotic parapets of *The New Criterion* and other neo-conservative venues. There is a nostalgia here, i.e., a pseudo-historicism, which wishes to obliterate history and return to a world where things were perfectly consistent, perfectly clear. Such a program calls for pacification of the means of representation. After years of formless workshop verse, we can sympathize with the perceived need for clearer formal values, but such a *rappel à l 'ordre* represents the refusal of significant form. Such "principles" stand as well, quite baldly, for a regressive and authoritarian cultural agenda.

Professor Helen Vendler is of course a highly respected scholar who has produced notable studies of the English Romantics and the Romantic tradition. However, with the rather nebulous *Harvard Book of Contemporary Poetry* (1985), Professor Vendler's goal seems to be to articulate a vaguely liberal, slightly eclectic, and mildly multi-cultural center. Ominously, the word "charm" appears three times in the first six lines of her introduction (juxtaposed, equally ominously, or is it frivolously, with the word "command"). Launching with the complacencies of the peignoir, the anthology offers initially a very conventional choice of deceased poets, a choice (with the barely possible exception of Robert Hayden) which would have been acceptable in any academic and normative anthology of twenty years ago. As one might expect from Professor Vendler, it is a poetry weighted heavily, if not exclusively, toward that particular naturalized self supported and at least partly generated by American neo-Freudian ego psychology and articulated in the work of the Confessional Poets. (It is a poetry that tends to oscillate between bourgeois anomie and the bourgeois sublime.) One might say that the selection from the living follows conventional cultural doctrine, a doctrine which Professor Vendler has played no small role in sustaining. There are good poets beside mediocre poets. In fact it is not so much the inclusions which define such an

anthology, but the exclusions and the willful amnesia. There is hardly a trace of those contemporaries who identify with an exploratory counter-tradition in American letters, and the barest hint indeed of those who preceded them: the Objectivists, the Black Mountain Poets, the poets of the San Francisco Renaissance, such as Spicer, Duncan and Blaser, to say nothing of the younger pots of the New York School, the Language Poets, the lineage of Stein, the actual lineage of Dickinson (such as Lorine Niedecker and Susan Howe), and of Williams, and of the Harlem Renaissance. There is no hint that there exists a wide-spread, vital experimental feminist practice. There is very little sense of interplay or exchange with the international avant-gardist movements of the century, an exchange which has been formative for so many of our more profound and innovative poets from the twenties through the eighties. Such suppression (for whatever reasons of ideology and/or marketplace) results in a domesticated map of American verse. (One cannot help but be reminded of similar efforts on the part of John Ciardi, Oscar Williams, indeed a host of other benighted authorities.) It is American poetry bowdlerized and made safe for readers of the *New Yorker*, and for the classroom, but it is not American poetry. If I seem to have strayed from the question of Shelley and the present, Shelley and contemporary poetics, I would like to suggest exactly the contrary.

For the poets of my generation, Shelley was a poet under several erasures. There was the initial prohibition of the modernists who went, or at least claimed to go, "in fear of abstraction." Shelley's difficult and audacious juxtaposing of (at his best) precise physical detail with philosophical rumination ran counter to the entire economy of modernism. His often baroque syntax seemed to lead a reader toward the "dim grey lands of peace" deplored by Pound. Then too there was the inherited Palgravian Shelley, the Shelley of a lyricism which quickly became the debased currency of entire generations of pseudo-romantic *pompiers*. To recover such a music was roughly equivalent to recovering Debussy after being inundated by five decades of Hollywood sound scores. Perhaps equally a problem was the sympathetic but one-dimensional, vatic Shelley beloved by the Beats and embraced by the counter-culture. One had the spontaneity and speed, the *enthusiasmos*, of Shelley, but his brain had been removed. This is no less sentimentalized a portrait than Palgrave's, or that of Maurois. Then too, there is the wild variation in the quality of work from a man who still, near the end of his brief life, was attempting to rhyme "twinkling" and "tinkling" with a straight face ("To Jane"). Shelley, it must be added, was a poet for whom formal perfection, the perfection of static form, was often secondary, however much certain critics of a generation

ago strained to discover occulted symmetries throughout his work, as if thereby to justify it.

Let me quote from the well-known and revealing section on Shelley in Eliot's "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism":

> Shelley both had views about poetry and made use of poetry for expressing views. With Shelley we are struck from the beginning by the number of things poetry is expected to do: from a poet who tells us, in a note on vegetarianism, that 'the orang-outang perfectly expresses man both in the order and the number of his teeth', we shall not know what to expect. The notes to Queen Mab express, it is true, not only the views of an intelligent and enthusiastic schoolboy, but a schoolboy who knows how to write; and throughout his work, which is of no small bulk for a short life, he does not, I think, let us forget that he took his ideas seriously. The ideas of Shelley seem to me always to be the ideas of adolescence—as there is every reason they should be. And an enthusiasm for Shelley seems to me also to be an affair of adolescence: for most of us, Shelley has marked an intense period before maturity, but for how many does Shelley remain the companion of age? . . .I find his ideas repellent; and the difficulty of separating Shelley from his ideas and beliefs is still greater than with Wordsworth. And the biographical interest which Shelley has always excited makes it difficult to read the poetry without remembering the man: and the man was humorless, pedantic, self-centered, and sometimes almost a blackguard.
>
> (*Selected Prose*, p. 85)

It is a passage quite astonishing for a number of reasons, not the least its patronizing smugness and condescension. Why, one wonders, does Eliot fear a poet from whom "we shall not know what to expect"? And why must a poet be separable from his ideas? To free him for pure, ahistorical readerly delectation? To isolate him definitively and securely in aesthetic space? Dante and Milton cleansed of ideas? One wonders whether Eliot had equivalent difficulty in separating his friend Pound's poetry from his friend Pound's ideas? And are we obliged to separate Eliot's poetry from its anti-Semitism, High Church elitism and its Podsnappery? Would we then be left with Eliotic *poésie pure?* The passage is replete with unintended ironies. Eliot has generated so much recent, lurid biographical interest, that we too now must be forgiven for finding it difficult to read the work apart from the life. And of course the final description of Shelley as a self-centered,

humorless pedant matches many accounts of Eliot at certain stages of his life. What is most striking, of course, is the rage against Shelley's ideas. Which, one cannot but wonder, seemed to Eliot the worst: Shelley's feminism, his progressive egalitarianism, his ecotopic perspective, his idealism joined with an active interventionism, his atheism, his defiance of conventional amatory codes? Perhaps all of the above. Yet a good deal might be forgiven if the work would allow itself to be separated from its ideas, that is to say, acculturated and pacified. Eliot's (unconscious?) echo of pseudo-Mallarméan ideology speaks to a still insufficiently examined inheritance from late Symbolism an inheritance which saturates the atmosphere of much of Eliot's work.

In the flux of our present, with poetry everywhere acknowledged as marginalized, what we least need is a poetry of accommodation, whether that be the self-absorbed and anti-intellectual neo-romanticism of the workshop, or the exhausted so-called "middle voice" of so much infinitely replaceable and infinitely consoling magazine verse. Nor, in full retreat, will it do to revive a bogus traditionalism. Shelley, perhaps more clearly than any of the other English Romantics, represents a radical alterity, an alternative to the habitual discourses of power and mystification by which we are daily surrounded and with which we are bombarded. He represents a poetry of critique and renewal, rather than of passive representation, a poetry which risks speaking to the central human and social occasions of its time, yet speaks from a decentered and largely invisible place. It exploits the margins to speak as it will, out of difference, rather than as it is always importuned and rewarded, out of sameness. This "other voice of poetry," as Octavio Paz has noted, speaks to the present from a unique (or at least singularly focussed) relation to past and future derived from the exigencies of the art. It speaks to the present, whether a present-now or a present-to-come (or indeed one never to be) much as do poets as apparently diverse as Dickinson and Akhmatova, Mandelstam and Holan.

Shelley is certainly the most optimistic of the Romantic Poets, yet this optimism is drawn on a dark background. It acknowledges despair and loss and thereby deepens its own necessity. *Julian and Maddalo* offers a clear instance of a work in which the emotional and intellectual range is fully realized. It begins with a highly precise physical evocation of landscape, the salt marsh wastes of the Lido, before evolving characteristically into the commentary which will frame what is to follow:

> I love all waste
> And solitary places, where we taste

The pleasure of believing what we see
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be

The passage indicates that the poem will recount an inner, psychic and intellectual voyage, even as the third line warns us against surface meanings, against appearances. As he deploys the personae of the poem, from the innocence of Byron's young daughter, to the skepticism of Julian/Shelley probed and chided by the aristocrat Maddalo/Byron, to the fragmented desperation of the Maniac, it becomes clear that Shelley is also exploring the levels, stages and voicings of poetic perception, the problematics of desire, loss and belief, and perhaps of representation itself. As in *Prometheus Unbound*, there is a drama of internal and external causes, of the psychological and the political, the oneiric and the empirical. Maddalo ("You talk Utopia") projects Shelley's increasingly clear self-questioning, the thinking-against-himself which occurs in much of the later work. After the model of Dante, Shelley claims poetry as an active mode of cognition, as no less than a means of exploration and interrogation of inner and outer worlds. Even when it expresses the most acute despair, as in the mirror called *Adonais*, the work refuses Wordsworth's apostasy and failure of nerve. Its resistance, as well as its acknowledgments, bring it forward toward our own time when the critical and epistemological authority of poetry stands in desperate need of reassertion.

• • •

As a brief coda, I would like to make mention of one other event. Months have now passed since the Gulf War, "Operation Desert Storm." Certainly it did not escape poets and concerned intellectuals that, whatever the causes and motives, a nation which designated itself as current defender of Western Civilization had been moved to assert its righteousness by massively bombing the birthplace of written language. It is precisely this kind of paradox or deep contradiction that poetry is structured to address. Yet it could not have been more evident that poetry was entirely silenced, before the fact, by the swarm of images and the cascading rhetoric, leading us once again to ask in what present we do speak, and with whom. And I am reminded one final time of the figure of Angelus Novus, Angel of History or Angel of Poetry, caught up in the rising storm of dust. It is unclear where he is directing his gaze. He wears several expressions at once.

PERCY BYSSHE **SHELLEY**

Ozymandias (first draft)

My name is Ozymandias—King of Kings

~~A pedestal in C~~
~~In the~~
~~A p~~
~~There is~~ A pedestal is
~~There stands by Nile a lone single pedestal~~,
~~On~~ which, ~~two trunkless legs are~~
~~Near~~ crumbling stone
~~the wreck of a colossal form~~
brown
two trunkless legs of ~~marble~~ grey
~~The wrecks of a colossal image stand stand~~
Quiver thro sultry mist, ~~thr~~ beneath the sand
~~Shine thro the sultry mist~~
Half sank a shattered visage lies whom
A ~~shattered head half sunk whose gathered~~ frown
~~Beneath~~
And ~~smile &~~ wrinkled lips impatient of command
~~Betray the sculp~~
A half sunk beneath
~~Its~~ shattered head ~~is lying on~~ the sands
Whose gathered frown, & curved lips betray
~~The And on the~~
Betray some sculptors art, who~~s~~

~~Is there no peace but in where the dead who sleep~~
Cannot we rest until our life is gone ?
Not

CONTRIBUTOR **NOTES**

Recent publications by contributors to this issue include: **Ammiel Alcalay:** *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minnesota). **Will Alexander:** featured in *Sulfur* 32. **Paul Blackburn:** *Selected Poems* (Persea). **Basil Bunting:** *Uncollected Poems* (Oxford). **Peter Cole:** *Rift* (Station Hill). **Yves di Manno:** translations into French of George Oppen and Pound's *Guide to Kulchur.* **Robert Duncan:** *Selected Poems* (New Directions). **Rachel Blau DuPlessis:** *Drafts* (Potes & Poets Press). **George Economou:** *Harmonies & Fits* (Point Riders Press). **Larry Eigner:** *Area Lights Heights: Writings 1954-1989* (Roof). **David Hinton:** *Selected Poems of Tu Fu* (New Directions) and *Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien* (Copper Canyon). **Anselm Hollo:** *Outlying Districts* and *Pick Up the House* (both Coffee House). **Robert Kelly:** *A Strange Market* (Black Sparrow). **August Kleinzahler:** *Like Cities, Like Storms* (Picador, Australia). **James Laughlin:** *Collected Poems* (Moyer Bell). **Harris Lenowitz:** co-editor with Jerome Rothenberg of *Exiled in the Word: Poems and Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present* (Copper Canyon). **Karin Lessing:** *The Winter Dream Journals* (Shearsman). **Jackson Mac Low:** *Pieces o' Six* (Sun & Moon). **Kevin Magee:** poems in *Sulfur* 32. **Paul Metcalf:** *Where Do You Put the Horse?: Selected Essays* (Dalkey Archive). **Charles Olson:** *Selected Poems* (California). **Octavio Paz** (in English): *Essays on Mexican Art* (Harcourt Brace) and *Sunstone* (New Directions). **Jed Rasula:** *Tabula Rasula* (Station Hill). **Charles Reznikoff:** *Collected Poems* (now in one volume by Black Sparrow). **Jerome Rothenberg:** *The Lorca Variations* (New Directions). **Jacques Roubaud** (in English): *The Great Fire of London* (Dalkey Archive). **Muriel Rukeyser:** *Out of Silence: Selected Poems* (Triquarterly) and *The Muriel Rukeyser Reader* (Norton). **Hiroaki Sato:** Kotaro Takamura's *A Brief History of Imbecility* (Hawaii). **Andrew Schelling:** *Twilight Speech* (O Books) and *Moon is a Piece of Tea* (Last Generation). **J.P. Seaton:** Li Po and Tu Fu, *Bright Moon, Perching Bird* (Wesleyan). **Martha Ann Selby:** translations in *The Columbia Anthology of Indian Literature* (Columbia). **Richard Sieburth:** *A Walking Tour in Southern France: Ezra Pound Among the Troubadours* (New Directions). **Gary Snyder:** *No Nature: Selected Poems* (Pantheon). **Gustaf Sobin:** *Venus Blue*

(Little, Brown) and *Dark Mirrors* (Bloomsbury, England). **Nathaniel Tarn:** *Views from the Weaving Mountain: Selected Essays in Poetics & Anthropology* (Univ. of New Mexico). **Lawrence Venuti:** I.U. Tarchetti's *Fantastic Tales* (Mercury House). **César Vallejo** (in English): *Trilce*, translated by Clayton Eshleman (Marsilio). **Rosmarie Waldrop:** *Lawn of Excluded Middle* (Tender Buttons). **Eliot Weinberger:** *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators & Outsiders*, an anthology from Marsilio, and Xavier Villaurrutia's *Nostalgia for Death* (Copper Canyon). **Allen S. Weiss:** *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism* (SUNY).

ERRATA

In *Sulfur* 32, the poems by Rachel Blau DuPlessis contained various typographical errors. The lines should read: p. 45: "which is the creature's blood"; p. 51: "Three times: the same, the same, the same again"; p. 59: "fore, at what was" and "a willy-nilly sing-song song"; p. 61: "un bon blanc, des vers" and "au fond d'un couloir gothique" and "se nichent juste au croisement" and "marging with a black shape".

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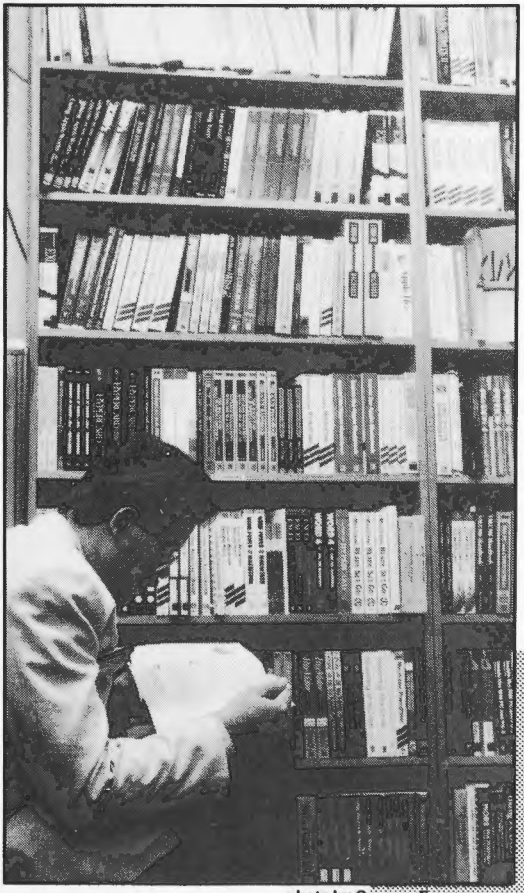

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SPRING 1994

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: MARTIN CHAMBI—*GIGANTE DE PARURO Y MENDIVIL* (Mendívil was Chambi's assistant), Cuzco, circa 1925

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COOLIDGE & FAGIN

ON THE PUMICE OF MORONS (THE UNAUGURAL POEM)

A Rock Crystal, A Roach, A Tree of Heaven
Hosiery to spectroheliographs long since departed,
Marked the masterwork,
The dingle, who left dried toile
Of its Soho here
On our plank flopover,
Any broad alabaster of their hastening doppleganger
Is lost in the gloss of duress and agglomeration.

But today, the Rock Crystal cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my
Backgammon and face your distant despondency,
But seek no haunt in my shackle.
I will give you no hiding pitter-patter down here.

You, created only a little lower than
The angiosperm, have crouched too long in
The bruising dart
Have lain too long
Facedown in idolatry,
Your movies spilling workbags

Armed for slapstick.
The Rock Crystal cries out to us today,
You may stand upon me,
But do not hide your fabric.

Across the walking papers of the worm,
A Roach sings a beautiful sonnet. It says,
Come, rest here by my sidehead.

Each of you, a bordered countertenor,
Delicate and strangely made proud,
Yet thrusting perpetually under a sieve.
Your armed strychnine for professionalism
Has left collections of washrags upon
My shortcake, curling stones of debauchery upon my breaker.
Yet today I call you to my road,
If you will study wardrobe no more.

Come, clad in peacock,
And I will sing the sonar
The Cream gave to me when I and the
Tree of Heaven and the Rock Crystal were one.
Before a cyst was a bloody seascape across your brownout
And when you yet knew you still knew nougat.
The Roach sang and sings on.

There is a true yawn to respond to
The singing Roach and the wise Rock Crystal.
So say the Ash Can, the Hippogriff, the Jetsam,
The Afterbirth, the Native American Legion, the Sinner,
The Catnip, the Muskellunge, the Freezer, the Great White Way,
The Ipso Facto, the Quota, the Prima Donna, the Sheet,
The Gavel, the Stovepipe, the Prawn,
The Prism, the Homburg, the Taxi.
They hear. They all hear
The spatter of the Tree of Heaven.

They hear the firing pin and larynx of every Tree of Heaven.
Speak to The Hulk today.
Come to me,
Here beside the Roach.
Plant yourself beside the Roach.

Each of you, derrick of some passed-
On travesty, has been paid for.
You, who gave me my first nap, you,
Paymaster, Ape, Señor, you
Cherub Nasal Index, who rested with me, then

Forced on bloody fedoras,
Left me to the empyrean of
Other seesaws — desperate for Galahad,
Starving for goggles.

You, the Turbulent Flow, the Arachnid, the Sweatbox,
The Germ Cell, the Esperanto, the Scourge,
The Isotope, the Humus, the Police Dog,
You the Ascot, the Yolk, the Ku Klux Klan, bought,
Sold, stolen, arriving on the night soil
Praying for a dredging machine.

Here, root yourselves beside me.
I am that Tree of Heaven planted by the Roach,
Which will not be moved.
I, the Rock Crystal, I the Roach, I the Tree of Heaven
I am yours—your passenger pigeons have been paid.
Lift up your eyewash, you have a piercing needlefish
For this bright Morgan le Fay dawning for you.
Hoarfrost, despite its wrenching paintbrush,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With cortisone, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyeholes
Upon this davenport breaking for you.
Give bird's nests again
To the dredging machine.
Wolves, Chihuahuas, mem-sahibs,
Take it into the pallets of your handcars,
Mold it into the sharkskin of your most
Private needlefish. Sculpt it into
The imbalance of your most public sellout.
Lift up your heart diseases
Each new housecoat holds new champions
For a new behavior.
Do not be wedded forever
To feathers, yoked eternally
To bubble gum.

The Hopi lean forward,
Offering you the spadefish
To place new Sten guns for the change of life.
Here, on the pumice of this fine davenport
You may have the cortisone
To look up and out upon me,
The Rock Crystal, the Roach, the Tree of Heaven, your
    countertenor.
No less to microspores than meningitis.
No less to you now than the masterwork then.

Here on the pumice of this new davenport
You may have the gradient to look up and out
And into Sisyphus's eyeholes,
And into Brown Betty's eyewash,
Your countertenor,
And say simply
Very simply
With hooray —
Good moron.

CHEN-ANDRO & MOUCHARD

INTERVIEW WITH BEI DAO

(Tr. from the French by Esther Allen)

Claude Mouchard: Bei Dao, my questions are inspired solely by my reading of your work as it has been translated into French by Chantal Chen-Andro. In the situation you find yourself in today, how do you perceive those who read you, in Chinese and in translations into various other languages?

Bei Dao: Before 1989, my readers were essentially Chinese. I wrote for them. My work has not been published in China since 1989. Prior to that, I was able to get some of my poems into print, though not without difficulty. Since then, if I am read in China at all, it is in our magazine, *Today*, where both Chinese writers in exile and writers who are in China can be read. Initially the latter had to use pseudonyms to publish their work in our magazine; now they no longer need to. *Today* is not an official publication, obviously. It is a literary magazine, not a political one. Its public remains limited. For my part, I am undoubtedly read more in translations into various languages than in Chinese.

C.M.: Isn't it difficult for a poet to write in exile, to change worlds, to be deprived of familiar sensations, smells, sounds, voices. . .?

Bei Dao: It's *good*. Writing poetry is a solitude. When one writes, one is no longer concerned with one's surroundings.

C.M.: Have you been reproached for being an "obscure" poet and would you insist on your right to be obscure?

Bei Dao: It's a label that has been imposed on me and that I have not been allowed to defend myself against. It may well be that I am hermetic to a certain public, but there's nothing there that can characterize the entirety of my work.

From another point of view, it is one of the characteristics of classical Chinese poetry to express things indirectly, to speak in detours.

C.M.: How is the Chinese poetic tradition present for you?

Bei Dao: At first I rebelled against it. But one cannot break every link. Tradition today is like a house in ruins; we can't live in it, it must be reconstructed. But it must be reconstructed on the foundations of that ruin.

C.M.: And the traditional forms?

Bei Dao: The constraints of traditional poetry and its extremely rigorous prosody are things we cannot simply return to. It's all a matter of appreciation and poetic delight. Today a link to tradition can be found more in language than in form—in those aspects that depend on the particular characteristics of the Chinese language.

Chantal Chen-Andro: There are exceptional possibilities for wordplay in Chinese offered by words with multiple connotations, by a certain "elasticity" or a multiplicity of meanings at many levels. Therein lies the difficulty of translating Chinese poetry. Sentences without a subject—as if not to grant a central position to man—are another difficulty. And the absence of temporal markers.

C.M.: To translate is inevitably to lose the rhythm, isn't it? But aren't there rhythmic resources particular to the original poem that one can restore, or even release? Isn't there a rhythm on the syntactic level, in the broadest sense, a rhythm in the images or in the relations underpinning them?

Bei Dao: What counts is an inner rhythm. In the beginning, I placed great importance on sounds. I was motivated by the recitation of my poems, by my desire to be pleasing to the ear. Then I thought about the possibility of a silent, more hidden reading, an inner reading.

C.M.: Is it this "inner" rhythm that is projected in the very organization of the poem, as if in a single gesture (especially since you seem to tend to write briefer poems)?

Bei Dao: Yes, I think so. Undoubtedly this has to do with maturity. There is a prolixity in youth.

Poetry was encouraged to make itself oratorical by the recitations and readings that took place in Beijing during the '80s.

Chantal Chen-Andro: In translating certain poems I sometimes introduce a blank space into a line, which seems to be required by a pause of meaning. Sometimes I have changed the number and the arrangement of the lines. Bei Dao is less well disposed towards the latter type of modification.

Bei Dao: At the same time, when one is translating, it is normal and good to remake the poem by appropriating the rhythm and reconstructing it. Moreover, the French language seems to involve very rigid constraints: only a precise personal investigation can bridge the gap between the two languages.

C.M.: In the images in your poems, I seem to feel a particular kind of power. In "Nightmare," I read: "On the uncertain wind / I have drawn an eye."

Chantal Chen-Andro: There the subject is expressed.

C.M.: One could say that the "I" which suddenly emerges into the image acts on it: "instantly the frozen moment vanishes." Or else in

"Agreement": "The forest and I / entwine this small lake together / my hand plunges into the water". . .

Bei Dao: Yes, I think that is the case. Often the image is flat, dead, without luminosity. Bringing in the "I," I push it, I give it momentum.

C.M.: Your poems speak of and make the reader feel many spaces and distances of all kinds. . .

Bei Dao: The distance is, first of all, between life and poetry.

C.M.: Life? What do you call "life"?

Bei Dao: That which is other than poetry.

C.M.: The experience of relations with others?

Bei Dao: Experience consists of relations with others and *with oneself.* Poetry does not restore that experience, it changes it.

Chantal Chen-Andro: Bei Dao seems, more and more, to be closing himself off behind panes of glass, behind screens of different sorts. . .

Bei Dao: A "colder" attitude is needed. To detach oneself from all of these ardors and impulses. To create a distance with respect to pathos. If one has the experience of love, one cannot speak of it like that; it's ridiculous. To speak directly is too simple.

Chantal Chen-Andro: Here Bei Dao is alluding to the traditional concept we spoke of earlier.

C.M.: The beautiful poem "Waiting" begins with an impossible bridging of spatial or temporal distances. "No stone stairway would be long enough / to reach across the distant solitudes / that derive from different eras / men would not advance under the same whip." But after the mention of a "thousand-year wait" the poem seems to precipitate all this distance into the immediate reality of the page and the gesture: "The place of hope unfolds / a History without a trace / a blind man advances haltingly / on the white page / my hand shifts / traces nothing / I advance / blind."

Within its own reality, does the poem have the means of acting on such distances, on what flees out of reach?

Bei Dao: It is only by means of concrete things that one can untangle all the abstract. What exists before, the big things that one can stir up, human sadness, all of it is untangled in the act of writing itself. Creation is the most difficult thing. It is the blind man who advances. It is, in the poem, a knot that is untangled.

C.M.: One would sometimes say that the very position of the poetic act shifts over the course of the poem.

Bei Dao: That's true. It happens when a small space of time comes to oppose an unlimited space.

C.M.: The moment of writing, the time of writing. . .Do you write rapidly? Do you rewrite?

Bei Dao: That depends. Sometimes it's very quick, sometimes it's laborious. I cut a lot. Sometimes it takes several months. It can happen that several years later, I have the feeling that "it isn't that."

Chantal Chen-Andro: Occasionally when I ask him about the gender of an adjective in order to translate a poem, he tells me to do as I like. And he has added, "Anyway, what I mean now by those words is not necessarily what I will want to make them mean later."

C.M.: Gottfried Benn remarks somewhere that it took him long years to find one word of a poem.

Bei Dao: In China, there are many anecdotes about poets who find the word they needed only after a very long time. There are also cases in which the critics want to make corrections: "If only the poet had used *this* word . . ."

C.M.: Are critics necessary?

Bei Dao: Poets need to hear the opinion of critics, even if, very often, they do not agree. Poets are like sick people, patients. One can listen to the doctor's diagnosis and not follow the treatment.

C.M.: The word "History" appears in your poems. And also "war," "season of troubles". . .

Bei Dao: Chinese life is intrinsically linked to history. The burden of history must be borne. The poet must attempt to settle the problem of this burden. In my poems, the word "History" can have an ironic connotation. It is a word that circulates among intellectuals in China. A word that comes easily to the lips.

C.M.: Too easily?

Bei Dao: Yes. We must get away from that position. There is no objective history. History is something that is always being remade. To return to the poem "Waiting," it's true that it has to do, at first, with a kind of conception of history; but then it moves on to other things.

C.M.: Another word you use is "dream". . .

Chantal Chen-Andro: There are two words that Chinese tradition tends to oppose: dream *(meng)* and mirror (of the real, *jing)*.

Bei Dao: History and dream are very close. History is the reflection of the dream. Or the other way around.

C.M.: Hearing you say that, I can't help but cite the famous phrase, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."

Bei Dao: I subscribe to that. Especially where China is concerned.

C.M.: What do you lack most as an exiled poet, and what is it that sustains you?

Bei Dao: The magazine is very important. And many contacts with Western writers. But it is the Chinese language that sustains me. In a context where everything is foreign, the language is the refuge where, through poetry, I can find myself. It is what gives the strength to endure this life in exile. There is the responsibility of preserving this language.

Exile? The day I began to write poems, that was exile. Other writers have said it before me.

BEI DAO

THE PURPOSES OF THE MAGAZINE *TODAY (JINTIAN)*

(Tr. from the Chinese by Chantal Chen Andro and from the French by Esther Allen)

Late 1978; Beijing under a blanket of snow. In a room of about six square yards located on the border between the city and the country the first issue of the magazine *Today (Jintian)* is printed. The only equipment is an old manual roneograph machine, completely primitive. Under the dim light of a single lamp, seven young people are busy for three days and three nights. They are far from thinking that this magazine will change the history of contemporary Chinese literature. On December 23, 1978, the magazine *Today* is posted around the universities of Beijing, on the administrative buildings, the walls of publishing houses and in public spaces. Until 1980, when it would be banned by the police, nine issues and four special editions would appear, reaching a public throughout all of China.

To examine the history of the magazine, one must go back to the appearance of an unofficial literature in Beijing at the end of the '60s and the beginning of the '70s. At that time, most high school students had been sent off into the distant countryside, where they had settled. During the long and inactive winter months they returned to the capital and exchanged books and points of view. Thus, little by little, all sorts of "literary salons" were formed. Works by anonymous authors, especially poems, began to circulate in these salons, usually in manuscript form. In 1973–1974 most of these salons were located and investigated by the police and had to shut down; arrests were made and people were interrogated. But certain writers continued to write and to circulate their works. During the winter of 1978, after the political thaw, in Xidan, a very lively commercial area of the capital, mural newspapers and unofficial magazines are posted on a wall close to two hundred yards long. This place becomes the center of a political wave that extends little by little across the entire country and that is called "The movement of the Wall of Democracy of Xidan." Given the circumstances, the launching of the magazine *Today* could not have been better timed. It was started by the poet Mangke, the painter Huang Rui and myself. At the same time, the new unofficial literature became its source.

During those two brief years, besides publishing the magazine and anthologies, we organized all sorts of literary activities. Every month the debates surrounding specific works attracted a large number of fervent

readers of literature, especially students, certain of whom would go on to discover within themselves a literary vocation. In the spring and autumn of 1979, the magazine's editorial staff organized two public poetry readings in a park in Beijing. Under very close surveillance by the police, a thousand people appreciated difficult works of poetry with enthusiasm. It was the first time since power was seized by the Communists that such an event had taken place in China.

Sadly, this lovely state of affairs would not last long. Once the honeymoon between the Party and democracy was over, Deng Xiao Peng gave the order to close the Xidan Wall of Democracy and to arrest Wei Jingsheng and other leaders of the movement. In December 1980, *Today* had to cease all publishing activities.

The most poignant aspect of the whole thing was that, despite the fact that our magazine was barred from publication, most of the poetic works that had first appeared in it began to be reproduced in the mainstream official magazines. They were classified under the heading "vague poetry, obscure poetry" *(menglong shi)* and became the center of an intense national debate. Those poems, which differed in every respect from the works of propaganda controlled by the Communists since their ascension to power, looked to the official critics like real catastrophes. A debate of that breadth could not go on for very long. Certain critics who were among the most open-minded, though not among the most highly placed, rapidly became the target of ideological attacks by the official critics. But these poems found a huge number of enthusiastic readers among the young people, especially the students, who for so long had been stifled by wooden language. The official critics produced an effect that was the opposite of what they had wanted: they only increased the impact of those works on the public. Certain readers began to write poetry and publish their own collections, as poetic schools multiplied. This effervescence in the poetic world would continue until the middle of the decade.

The sound of weapons in Tiananmen Square in 1989 would change the destiny of all Chinese people. Numerous Chinese writers in exile met in Oslo in the spring of 1990. They decided to begin publishing *Today* again. The first issue of the new version of the magazine appeared in the summer of that same year. For three years now, the magazine has been putting out four issues per year, which currently brings us to issue number 12. The editorial offices were moved from Oslo to Stockholm, then to New York. The seven editors are scattered in seven different places in Europe and the United States, and the magazine is printed in Hong Kong. All of these characteristics undoubtedly make it a fairly unique case in the annals of international publishing. Compared to what it was more than ten years ago, the magazine's function has changed. Geographically unlimited, it has become a magazine of avant-garde Chinese literature. Poetry is still as

largely represented in the magazine as it was before, most of it by poets who live in China. The two special issues dedicated to poetry this year and last year have revealed the existence of a new blossoming of Chinese poetry. Moreover, the review has translated and presented works by numerous modern and contemporary Western poets such as Octavio Paz, Paul Celan, Thomas Tranströmer, Guennadi Aïgui, John Ashbery, Seamus Heaney and Mark Strand, as well as selections of contemporary French poetry. It has also published reviews and exchanges of letters. We are now undertaking to edit a yearly retrospective of the magazine in English.

Fifteen years have gone by since the first appearance, then the disappearance and finally the renaissance of *Today*. The magazine seems to have become a metaphor for contemporary Chinese poetry: once freed from the bottle it was shut up in, the genie can no longer go back inside.

BEI DAO

SIX POEMS

(Tr. from the Chinese by David Hinton)

LAMENT

incandescent arc welding the sky
like long-lost passions
searching for new wounds
searching for blizzards amid archives
sparks in the bellows-chamber

dreams drip with sweat
like underwater mines longing for a ship's touch
now the sea's gone suddenly dry
a forest of tents appears
and we wake like wounds

dignitaries speaking some other language
stroll through the refugee camp

APPLE AND BRUTE STONE

in the prayer ceremony of ocean
a storm bows down

stone watches over May in vain
guarding against that green contagion

as the four seasons take turns axing huge trees
stars try to recognize the road

a drunk using that talent for balance
breaks out from the time-siege

a bullet soars through the apple
life's on loan

TOXIN

tobacco's breath catches short

an exile's window aims at
deep-sea wings released into flight
music of a winter's day sailing closer
like a flag shedding its colors

it's yesterday's wind, it's love

remorse deep as the fall of heavy snow
when a stone reveals the end result
I take this moment to weep for the rest of my life

give me another name

I've made a disguise of misfortune
shelter from the mother tongue's solar blaze

UNTITLED

at the mother tongue's line of defense
a strange homesickness
a dying rose

rose sipping water via stem-tubing
or if it isn't water
it's at least dawn light

revealing midnight in the end
wild song
flurried head of hair

FOLDING PROCEDURE

cats return to where it begins

battle fish
leap beyond clerical heavens
and the soprano goes into seclusion

I return to where I began

quixotic sand
hurls itself against window-glass
that crow-black mask of cloud

stones return to where it begins

dreams of good fortune
grow into trees towering skyward
like ink seeping into the map

meanings return to where they begin

the rainbow deluding this world
is a glorious person's autobiography
he steps back into childhood

MUSICAL VARIATIONS

clouds are advancing, on the bus
a man smiles behind his newspaper
like a god reading his bible

the driver's heart roars
uphill, and slips on toward the tunnel

amid syncopated street lights
I enter communal sleep
drifting through dog-bones and dog-joints

up toward inner sanctums, I ascend sublimation

PETER REDGROVE

FROM *THE GUEST FATHER*
CHAPTER SEVEN:
I AM CALLED INTO THE CELLAR
A descent. She is more present. Dragon and mistress. Transendence, sex, mother, clothes.

I am called into the cellar. The other two have found enormous apartments there. There is a whole cinema down there and there are people in it watching a pornographic movie. We don't stay there because one of the children has made a deal with the projectionist of the film not to watch the pornography. There are other corridors—there is a sort of lavatory place (which has a cistern and a pile of rocks or plastic) where people sit to warm or keep themselves warm (and shed coloured lights? or turn into stones shedding colours?) and I say—maybe to my father—as we look over the balcony into the space beyond—perhaps we can shoot a film here. People are saying that the government will make us strip away all the furniture and fittings until we discover what it actually is, it actually is a cinema (but there is some suggestion the walls are Saxon).

Strange presleep experience, as though in my head I was rubbing a thin membrane that had formed which had pleasant physical feelings and also took me into dreams, a sort of membrane or drumhead.

New wine will drip from the mountain. A white ringdove alights on the telephone-wire and the phone rings. The pope as pure water passes through everything in crystal white. The pope as a glass of water, these waterfalls and cataracts are graveyards of the djinn, the house of the lord of bright brass.

It is impossible to attribute direction to sound in a rain-forest; equally so if you have catarrh in the ears, as this turns the house to a softly-raining scene. A softly-raining sound that you make and think that the weather has broken, the weather that rides overhead like loaves of grey stale bread, like cerebral hemispheres that will not secrete. The survivors of the weather, those scientists so busy with their earthly distillations they do not notice the sky; left brainmen with their right brain hands of a watchmaker or laborator. The trawlers holds are empty as haunted houses.

Thick oaks and girlish oaks. The lion, attracted by the sweet smell of the stone, falls into the pit. The magical stone is a woman lying on a bed of coals and absorbing with her own the lion's entire body. There is fire without smoke; this fire burns with a flame which comes out over the coals, even as the pious mother steps over the body of her son.

Arise and join them, was her motto. Gradually putting heaven together. The noiseless scarlet slippers which are called sanctuary shoes. Dr. Magister said he has heard a sound in the sky like a proposal of thunder: 'Will you marry me?' it said, in tones too deep for decipherment. The flat reminded her of an antique helmet, big enough to walk into: Goliath Mansions. These were plausabilia, almost pseudologia. Sheep among the vines, small white clouds flocking on the slopes of the gathering thunder. She opened a window of the helmet, a visor, and heard the landscape rustling. Light, and the machinery of light, as in the cinema, shafts and blades of picturing. Light and the light shed by stone. A french horn was playing a gallop and with the music came the pigs' fresh sweet stench. Gradually putting heaven together; I was ill then, but now I feel I need to be forgiven, visiting my early haunts in the guise of a girl-child. Have mercy, and to spare. He stared at miracle until it formed itself into a system, with which he housed and clothed us. His presence was like a candle alight, just the atmosphere around him, it refreshed me, the visit altered all that could be perceived.

* * * *

I.

Whenever you see a diamond, suspect a Yoni. Dia-mond-Goddess of the World. The Yonic shrine or diamond seat. Clambering into the diamond-shaped yoni of the world on the side of the mountain. To sit there like the man in the gate, meditating. The Thomas Grey meditation, as in Shuttle's story. The rain descends from above, where the fixed star is. It smells of the sow, and that is good. The pillars of the door are anointed with their various self-generated unguents, and there is a small puddle of blood into which one lowers one's bottom, in which one sits. My Yoni paddles in my chest, resumes its beat. I am in position, the thunder may arrive. Thunder can dissolve diamonds, in the sense that when the thunder peals, the pillars stream with juice, the secret door widens its Iris on to the corridor behind. It is my cue to climb in further. Diamonds are sexual, and can bring forth children like themselves, and I see one of them shining on my lover's brow.

II.

The people are meditating, and sit up straight in their own perfume, which gives them the sheen to their thoughts. When she walks into a room, its gender changes. A cloud of the right kind hovering over a head makes the person shine beautifully. This meditator is up to his waist in the sea, like a kind of centaur. A great lion-chested man, considering how the lake boils with whitecaps as the lightning strikes it.

* * * *

The penis sometimes has to be charged with a perversion.
Mercury: 'the elegant girl by the riverside.'

She took a key from her bonnet.

She brought him a cake heavy as thunder. They ate it in bed, all of it. In the sky the sapphires of November rode on the backs of birds. Then a massive cumbersome snow fell and indoors the mirrors deepened. Now upstairs it was the home-with-heaven: cake, window, crystal air flashing its abyss from sky to lower sky, each crystal on the twig, on the sill, different from every other crystal, yet the same, each one a crystalline spirit house in which the whiteness dwelt both in particles and in the wholeness of the entire scene observed from the bed and leading to the deep entry of person into person. She had left the wardrobe door open on her fine-day dresses, and they shone like lawns beyond french windows, one white dress snow-drifting along red, black and all the other colours which suited her and changed her perfume accordingly.

Caterpillar lashes and furry glances. As many pilchards as if the water of the bay were boiling. Sometimes making love naked could seem like making love in a wonderful house that was unfurnished. The white birds that lounged about the precipices. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me because he delighted in me. . .for by thee have I run through a troop; and by my god have I leaped over a wall; therefore there are certain rains that come from a higher heaven. The valleys grew chymical in twilight. A cat carved in rock crystal turned against the light, the smile appearing and disappearing like the Cheshire cat's. The spun-glass frigate was nowhere to be seen; it had sailed, leaving behind fish bone models of carved and fitted bone. Suddenly you notice that the tree is gilding itself *with an ephemerid* of green. Green cargoes, and cargoes of ginger.

A little distillery hidden in the wall. Keepsake faces. And all the people sat in the street of the House of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. Consider the degree of implication in this book, a book

that cannot be totally grasped, an implicate book as opposed to an explicit one; it has one-runged ladders which are crucifixes, blocks of prose, lines of verse with assonance, rhyme and reversed currents and overflow which is carefully capped. That tail-coated maestro, the black cat, regards the shelf of that book as a boundary line, and rubs his face there, which is his way of writing and reading, and his eyes blaze because he is his own self-monument, his posture of attention is more than instructive; now we all have it.

The glandular french horns blowing over a meaty sea. Hot dogs with their outriders: sunny mustard and crimson colas. A cloud passes over Sagittarius which is at the centre of the galaxy; a heavy dew falls on their shoulders in the pattern of the set pieces of the constellations, which are like the set pieces of a firework display that was lit at some time and which has never yet gone out. The twinkle like the distant sparkle of musketry. The laborator had hands large and slender like gloss-painted kitchen chairs; he adjusted the little distillery which was now in the hen-house. He hid the medicine which was the powder of the stone in a wall of Reading Abbey.

* * * *

. . .'the people down there in their mud caves, shut out from all the fair gardens of wonder, of life, shut out by their own hands'. . .'among people such as these Powys sets down one or two people of goodness and shining innocence, and lets evil forces sport with them'. . .'A collection of atoms, through which pass the moods of God—a terrible clay picture, tragic, frail, drunken, but always with claws holding on to his life while the moods pass over him and change his face and his life every moment.' So says Kenneth Hopkins on T. F. Powys.

I went to change my book at the public library, which is in the Town Hall. I was chattering to myself about the unseemliness of a library, which should care for books, fining a person for reading one a second time. I had gone up those steps, muttering to myself, and through those doors a thousand times without looking at them, and that is how I found myself through the wound and inside the dragon before I realised it. I stopped and looked around me. The light had dimmed to a horny translucence. A blast of heat came rushing out of the reference library, or where it should have been, as if somebody had opened furnace-doors there. An ichor splashed down on my boot from the membranous ceiling in a vivid brightness, which dulled. I poked at it with the point of my umbrella and it unstuck. I picked it up—it was a ragged plate of gold. I understood at last that I had arrived somewhere strange. I looked back the way I had come and saw the amber

flesh closing down to a loophole. I sprinted out, bent double, and that was how I managed to save myself, though I dropped one of my books inside the dragon: *Light on Pranayama.*

A crowd was assembling out in the square. Two Woodrot Treatment vans were drawn up at the kerb. I knew from the local paper that this firm was to begin work today on long-standing dryrot in the Town Hall timbers, but their technicians stood there with all the other people, nonplussed, their equipment half-unloaded. We could not see the whole of the animal. It had coiled tightly round the building, so that the steps which normally led to a double-door entrance, now mounted to the great wound in its yellow-green and golden scaly haunch applied closely to the facade of the building. It was these steps I had run up absentmindedly, clutching my books. The creature had coiled several times round the upper storeys and the final tail coil swished among the chimneys. There was a fine incense in the air, like an autumn bonfire made with scented woods and spices, or a fire in a chemist's shop. The smell made a phrase float into my head: *High John the Conqueror Root.*

We could see that an enormous excavation had opened in the slate cliff behind the Town Hall, and this was where the remainder of the animal including the head must have been tucked. The visible coils on the front of the building clearly held the lungs, for they expanded and contracted very slowly from the steps to the second storey and back again, with the kind of deliberation with which the moon's shadow moves across the sun's disc during a solar eclipse. A great crack shot up the brickwork, and the windows burst from the pressure of this breathing, as they did in the General Post Office next door; the ladies' loo on the other side was crumbling to pieces. I had escaped from inside the dragon just before exhalation closed the hot wound in the dragon's flesh; now inhalation was opening it again and you could see deep into the vaporous halls there.

The smell of spices was overwhelming, the crowd drew back. A bright ichor lolled out of the lower margin of the glowing wound and ran down the steps; I watched it cool, knowing it was molten gold. I could hear the leathery flesh creaking as the doorway expanded, but then another sound came hurtling towards us from the tall bow-bending incision. It was the shrieking of a woman. We could see her running towards us through the vapours, avoiding the molten puddles. She was at full stretch as she flung herself down the steps straight into my arms. Over her shoulder I saw the wound puckering as it contracted again in its cycle. The woman's dress was splashed with plates of gold which had charred the cloth and, cooling there, had stuck to it. She looked wonderful, splashed with that gold. Another

phrase slid into my mind *To gild the Queen sordidly.* Her eyes were slanting and green, and her body in my arms was taut and vibrant with her fear, and I felt a stirring of my own personal dragon. We began moving away through the crowd, which opened for us.

Now a squad-car with police drew up and a grand wailing heralded *les pompiers.* A fire-engine began pissing at the hot flesh of the visitant, creating swathes of steam behind which we could see the wound contracting painfully. This roused the dragon, brooding on the secrets of the cliff. Something like a small gold plated royal coach began to drive slowly out of the dark excavation at the corner of the building. As the woman and I passed into the narrow streets of the town we saw that the dragon had pulled its great face up on its coils into the open air and was hovering it over the people. We did not linger. The mouth was fringed like a theatre-curtain, the big pale eyes were like floating mirrors. Were the people lingering in the square to be licked up by a fire-sticky tongue, or were they to be crushed in the Tiamat coils?

In the event the dragon vomited sicked-up gold in a sudden torrent like a collapsing Cinderella staircase out of the gaping mouth. Spectators were plastered upright where they stood, welded in golden chunks to the road. In the emergency measures which followed the encapsulated people were crowbarred off the street-surface and carried away like vast ingots in ambulances and carts. The dead were identified by casting plaster into the vacant moulds, which were then removed with goldsmiths' saws—for the hot metal vomit had vapourised the flesh beneath and calcined the bones to ash. The Government took the gold; the bereaved relatives were presented with the plaster statues. Most buried them in the normal fashion, though without coffins; a few younger people kept them around the house as remembrances, on the stairs, or propped up at the head of the dining-table or laid comfortably on a sofa.

As for the dragon, after upchucking, it flew away on thundering wings, though few had the leisure to observe it. It left behind in the excavation behind the ruins of the Town Hall a pile of auriferous waste from which all the gold had been smelted. The official theory was that the dragon was merely an electrical wind travelling in a chain of coherent vortices, and had been produced by excessive sunspot activity when the sun had risen in a part of the zodiac that had an affinity to the unworked seams of gold known to exist beneath Cornwall. These were new subsidences in certain mine-valleys, and these were pointed to, and the fact that there was nowhere any gold found in them was held to confirm the theory. It was the property of such a wind to produce sensory distortions in the observers of it, which had

led us in this case to believe we had been visited by a dragon—and the sudden earthing of its potentials by the hoses of the firemen had unloosed the hot ore carried in the plasma of the wind's belly, with much loss of life. But I say it was a dragon. How otherwise could it have carried to me a Chinese princess splashed with gold?

The unified field or quantum body of Ayurvedic medicine, and the transcendence of the meditation is the pure love and enjoyment in certain dream-strata, the sudden breaking open of levels and a complete vision arrives, the words coming of a poem, etc. transcendence.

But it's also imminent—everywhere 'one's sentience is not matched because one is not sentient enough,' I quote from Robert Kelly.

Foreglow and encounter with P yesterday, her body like a shaking star following the streamings before and after the 'new forest' visited at Redruth—the intercourse a nexus of these currents a vortex of them as though first the levels were breached by making love to her body, and then the oblation of my semen and my fluttering shirt, the sheet of electricity of my upper chest and my whole thorax.

So my mother could open or close my doors by dressing me and leaving the neck open—which would be an exquisite trembling shame—or tying it up opening and closing a delicate erotic sensorium of the epigastrium and collarbones, the breathing and caress of loose clothing, the tying of this up turns eros to tightness, the tie can bear to be looked at, not the open throat showing all its reactions, projecting its occult beams. The flocks of doves of the cricketers with the open wings of their shirts, the symmetrical deepness of the revers, the dove at the throat the aphrodite bird, triplicity, womb, heart, throat and the fourth in the grain, heart and thymus—just as Eve's secrets point to a wholebody or whole system of the genitals, not just isolated organs, my throat projecting its nature like the feminists self-stimulating and seeing the female body that is in things.

Stroking her place open all these places light up with soft touch and different clothing and materials.

'The couple remains motionless except for the drama of the jewel in the lotus occurring in her womb,' I quote.

The partner is regarded as a visible manifestation of one's own HGA—then the counsellor arising internally in the cycle is projected on the partner, or discerned, by the depth of the intercourse.

Complex virtuous acts and deep intercourse, this presence requires them by the natural mesmerism of the sexual act
as a magical child is present in both simultaneously
the magical child or field between the partners

Often it is as though there were a road and a stream
parallel channels, one normal, and the other of dire thoughts and feelings into which I could slip.

On the Wednesday a couple of Hicks Specials had shown me that I could go into the spiritualist church for healing so I went and there was a healing session and I went upstairs and saw a woman in a white coat presiding and an elderly lady gave me healing by many small touches over my head and upper body and I had a little weep. I felt I could ask for healing because of the depressions and M.E. as diagnosed by R. if nothing else, then went down for a cup of tea and wanted more healing the lady in the white coat turned out to be a man, elderly (did I at first see his spirit-guide or anima?) there were many pictures of Jesus upstairs looking strong and firm but I felt firm too and did not let that bother me though it is coming a little close as they are all Christians, nor must I offend their genius loci, the man gave me further feeling including a nice warmth off his hand on my solar plexus and though I felt, it seemed, a little weedy, and that was probably anaesthesia from the drink. I may go every Wed. though one must be careful once I caught or seemed to catch a fever from an upset woman at body mind and spirit festival.

* * * * * *

The alterations of the size and shape of the raindrops, larger and fatter in the colder weather makes stouter streams down the window. In summer they are thin, stretched out, altering with the season and the wind and the moisture in the air which carries them, they change with all around and you can see the world in them too and they reflect each other like a net of jewels in a stiff breeze as though various sorts of protoshapes were flung against the window, a bunch of water-grapes, a water-umbrella opens on the glass, various cloud-animals repeat their shape on the pane, flung down from far above, a big raindrop like a camel sliding down a glassy hill, the winding trunk of that sky-elephant I saw a half-hour ago and in very bad weather an appearance on the black window as if a train made of water were spending itself endlessly on the pane for it is a very long train rushing on and hooting and glazing and smashing up all over the window as large as the whole window but this train rushing forward never penetrating the glass though sometimes the glass bent as though it were going to get

through and one of its carriages would occupy the room which would now be streaming thunder-wet and I would be in that carriage taking me where? One may also consult the new bath, which is big enough to submerge one's ears for auditory messages, its length resonates, it is the right length to resonate with the central heating so plunge your ears underwater and listen to a faint and faraway OM a pure deep buzzing which is the sound of everything and which through the water is massaging your body.

'Signals on the very threshold of physical existence the sweat of the brain, which is tears,' I quote.

The thoughts deepen, they dive, they like bubbles become smaller, and the ocean now and ocean's silence or hum takes over, that is in PRATYAHARA (see book written by Iyengar practitioners) to hear the sound within is to retreat into an external world where the senses become one sense—quantum body.

'Adam's innocence was maintained by a perfect regimen which came from the tree of life,' I quote.

* * * *

NOTES OF A GELSEMIUM PSYCHE

The pain in my jaw from the chafing of the new lower plate became noticeable after I woke from a beautiful sleep with many warm and coloured dreams. I had also been up on Pendennis Point in a harsh wind. The pain continued all night, fading in and out of the pleasant dreams, as though the pain were able to turn into mental pictures, and vice versa. This realisation gave me energy, and I was able to work well, finishing several jobs rapidly. I became tired at lunchtime, and the jaw swelled, so I went back to bed, and could not sleep, but sweated and turned. Did my energy come with the high pressure of the sunny morning, and the tiredness and painful jaw with the swirling and massive thunderous inky clouds out of the northwest that overcame the fine weather? I have often noticed that such a cloudscape which makes me unable to rest arrived after a particular exhalation when I am at my peak—a cold front travelling after a warm front, or perhaps the electrical exhilaration of the storm's penumbra, which has an energy to it, while its nucleus is deadening and confusing. I find this cruel—that when I feel so well that I think I must be doing something right, it is a prelude to dismay, depression, draining of energy. I think it is the electrostatic turmoil of the clouds, and the available evidence bears me out. Now the showers came in, and I felt the prickling of them with shooting pains as I tried to rest. This was because they came with the wind, which

was active and disturbing. Often I feel the tension between earth and sky as a shower impends, with a sudden and almost sexual relaxation as the rain falls. No wonder the Chinese called the act of love 'The Clouds and the Rain.'

When I start to feel haunted, I know that the weather is about to change, or is changing. I become attentive to shadows. A dark cloth thrown over a chair startles me as I catch sight of it out of the corner of my eye. I think for a moment that the cat is streaking through the room as I turn to confirm the shadow. The knob of the newel post in the hall suddenly reminds me of a creamy skull of a child, and I almost *see* this. What is the weather doing? I look out of the window—that strange summer mist has gathered with its tension; I am not surprised; that high-pressure mist always gives abominable feelings, and its haunt has reached into my house. I wash my hands, a shadow comes up behind me. I will not now look to see what it is behind me, though my back-hairs are prickling. I think that what is there is nonverbal input from my right brain. Once I was put on a 'mind-mirror' which is an electroencephalograph that shows the brainwaves of both hemispheres simultaneously. Mine showed a pattern like a pair of beating wings, both sides were contributing their quota. Then they rounded, these wings, into an egg-shape. So I am getting input from both sides; the instrument confirms this.

Though the fluctuations of mental and physical energy are sometimes difficult to bear calmly, I am in a strange way content with such happenings. They are images of events that I have tried to understand and to evolve with as a writer. What I fear, though, is the 'flu, which for me is sheer deadness with no changes for as long as it lasts, restlessness, insomnia, pain. I am very glad to have the Gelsemium picture, which means, I assume, that with this remedy I am not likely to get so stuck in these weather-associated depressions, but can move and change as is demanded of me. How often had I seen without understanding: the great cloud over Leeds when I lived on the hills above it, that radiated dismal feelings making me want to run far away; the dreams of being ground by loose cobbles in a machine like an electrical castle as the great Falmouth hailstorms passed overhead; and that experience when I first came to Falmouth and stood on the jetty at Flushing, and out of a clear and sunny sky it was as though a troop of demonic horsemen wheeled in the sky and turned round to attack me with themselves, successions of dark thoughts and draining emotion as they impalpably crashed into me.

I have tried to keep my doors open. I am sure that allopathic treatment would close them, so I would at no time seek relief from the mechanical

medicines. I have kept a dream journal in great detail for more than twenty years. It is this, and the disciplines of writing poetry, that have provided me with images whose energies may interact with me instead of creating inarticulate fear and disturbance. Thus I have discovered other influences than weather are abroad, which are gentler yet not unconnected with the weather patterns. For instance, I dream into my wife's menstrual cycle, which is a kind of household weather, and I have dreams which relate to the events of her cycle-day. I dream of treasures put away carefully at the receding threshold of her menstruation, as the tide of blood ebbs; of wonderful rounded treasures at her ovulation: globes, bubbles, fruit, round tables; of terrible deaths at her late luteal phase, when the ovum is breaking up and giving off its last energies, and yet the pregnancy hormone, progesterone, is at its peak, potential pregnancy fighting its opposite; of electricity and fire during her advancing premenstrual threshold; of blood and life and mental fertility during her bleeding. We have been able to contribute something to the knowledge of these real and ignored influences on human lives, and in this the gelsemium personality has made its contribution.

JOHN OLSON

TWO POEMS

IRIDESCENT CAULK

what do words do words are to skin
what waves are to space. If dragons
didn't exist words would

grow dark as prose. I feel the weight
of space. I feel the weight of time
in space. Memory

is the largest weight
greasy ribs & baked potatoes
shadowy giraffes

lengthening into wind
Ignite the hand. Impel adhesion. Push jazz
into Tarzan sipping a zipper

drifting on a sea of forgotten teardrops
torn up into algebra. Liquid paper the tinkle
of Valium. Glass held out on the tip of a tube

like a moment of music
or a bridge or a rocket ship
or a plan

to get to Venus or Mars
a basketball of bamboo & music
the kettledrum is a belief

in sound. Morning light several leaves
at the tip of the poinsettia beginning to enlarge
into tongues as though seeking to lap up

the available light. The colors & needles
of instruments have often enchanted me
with their supposed exactitude. Heaven

in 1617 in a report to the Commissioners
of Sewers. Impediments to a free passage
were mentioned. Embellishment

generally requires a pathology. The
spreading light beyond its proper boundaries
in a developed photographic image. Gutters

filled with drifts of spring blossom.
I can see the lure of money. The framework
of dusk. Prepositions hatched from putty

replete with water, a large thick sponge
full of italics. Cantata planks. Canzone nails.
And wind filling the sails of a voice

NOSE AND THROAT

assemble a cough
with the duchess' whipsaw
& an apostrophe & a piano

string. Lions & blades
of grass. Dangle this haze
over a cricket. It's the music
of the soul. A nose

works by inhalation, opening
with trust & curiosity to the outside world
hairs at the opening of the nostril
prevent the entrance of foreign particles
such as combs & operas, bridges & aircraft
on the walls of the chambers

are scroll-shaped bones called turbinates.
There are ears on both sides of the head
& a muscle in the mouth called a tongue
useful for the construction of Houynhnm

homonyms. There is also thatch for the
ebony of the verb as it fountains winter.
Beating cilia on cells lining the chambers
of the nose pass the mucus along with foreign particles

backward to the pharynx where it is either
swallowed or expectorated. This keeps the lungs
from becoming irritated by rubbing

during breathing. Gravitation
is not a force

but a distortion
I'm building a diamond emotion

out of thunder & rhetoric
in certain blood vessels of the neck
is a warmth allowing me to say tooth

full of wide-eyed enthusiasm
remember that the cells of the body
love abstraction, things like ice

& velocity

high altitudes, pounding beats, orchids & birds

LISA ISAACSON

THREE POEMS

HEROES AND SAINTS

Flatfish of dreams surge residential mornings.
I have hovered sleep startled enough.
Fountains soak clocks on the plaza.

Music every son spokes
Scars, calves manners of drought—bike messengers
Flushed as change Lights.
I am relying on props.
Noon rummages
selected death talk from lunch dates.
—Pulls it through the ironwork
Firescape viral surface
Fevers: a view drawls.

The helmetless motorcyclist
At his photocopier flashes. Night walls
Criblight,
A dull new year when our neighbors
Listened to t.v. all night. All night I thought of Catherine's
Prince
Crawling pronounced

Toward beach fire or chill piracies—That gull scrawl
Access to folly
Cove: an east
Pursued or scratched, and easily companioned,
We dine in the air

above painters.
I love this alley, too, where half-sleep cartwheels.

On either side, less magic
Than shell game:
It's not set up that way to get devotional.
Disabling light, and driftwood shelters
spells of departure. Freezing, as usual unbroken
    wind.

Slouch in light, drink wine, laughter
drifts Prey currents no more, your butched hair.
I kiss torsos of vineyard. The stage
smells new, it's not, it's gifted, levels
Praise terminally about sex and no matter
But the backbone to be loved.
To wake is to arrest one
Own good.
When talk begins—elevation of indecent birds—
Breakfast riddled with innocent hallways like adobe
Parrots opening to guests
I will recognize. Dream up

Early returns
she with red fruit. Aligns
to causeless mirrors in
Which leftover
Exotic centerpieces bloom.

Total, as railroads shunt the direction of dying.
                Lay off
the glory of midnight refineries—A pregnancy
Small in your hand with feathers oiled
Blue, the back of a bird sprawls,
In work clothes, sing. Dress forgets an actor
His soul or less resolve to

Incessant helicopter
Even after heroes and saints.

I cannot stand the damp lead
rescue of warehouse sprawl. Or gradual black
wound echoes: Holiday, a flamboyant rose vended
Because a throat of gorgeous
Storied fog cuts cupidity,
One, immune, Christ, like I owe you nothing.

ZAIRE

Here's another glassy one for you, business,
she's more than in
tea garden views laughing up plots.
Her favorite vendor was arrested. Figures
she'd press details, those prettied petals stealing,
stealing knowledge on blades,
he rolled into the sun. She was in flower,
neglecting the bicameral sky—laundered horse in chamber sighs,
possessed weather,
otherwise, naked ghosts hung up
on relative barbed wire. In four of her languages
There is massacre.

Self-westerned turns columns (G4 winds) when
we dance to static
Country music on her child sized radio,
it gets a furious network of memory going.

Give me your hair.
In Golden Gate Park
I drag myself to the opera slash picnic
tiered beyond the garden. Her clothes surprise me better off
piled at the feet of awkward mothers, gullish
pieties, I've lost

sight of her thin black dress: the mother stolen
of the child's mourning in half years, said dust
at army ankles. Uncles everywhere, she waves—
From the bannister, it's sky level,
She slides and once I wrapped her in my third shirt.
To get Melodie, she wants
Who was, at last word, home. I worship
the wind up my dress.

1979

I. Satellite

Hurled news
is an ice storm in the east, petroleum
the latest blue.
Read it's not the heart valves silence
a future boyishly thin and targets girls on waves.
I'd choose again veiled
song retreats and starves what I must love.
No pure city
teethes light—its country wired
archeology and
discarded child's play, heaven
unwrinkling and men
homemaking wrecks of plush
sand I try needing neither looks
that rat, glance to love you into the minute.
A millionaire truck driver's luck
barbers homeless astrologers. Deep
pocketed joy? Nothing
emerges from the red canals.

Wave, small-boned friend.
Sip this juice, her voice, the pulp inaccuracy
of this room television dilates
So close to home my waking's sealed
into the forecast. Nursery light exhausted.

Some blueprint
marries girl bones to bundles
of snow angels almost uniform
and not my own soul or hers.

Winter entirely prehistoric horse,

her mourning,

Carbon trees arch powder rivers, retarded June
mimes the race end. Scrape by, infant unheard of,
I must love the idea of the volume of aftermath—
what steeps more than madness in sunsets
nearly hymnal from the first
popular news of war. Still, the vulnerable sky is a pinup.

II. Big Wall

Where—it's caving in—
Birdseed time
I take ease
Here, crippling
A chapel stems
every foreign wall blessedness
with hymn.
Gray once
removed a readable birth, its surface
a tilt of early weather, pinkish.

There seems to be in the land
past the gravestones rubbing
up against the stifled hurt of their overgrown rose
memorials, some dive.
And in it it's the only adopted child I know
sleeps there under the root word sweet.

It speeds up over bridges, then dreams the once forming
in white stained glass
bells below gorged ringing out.

MARY CAPONEGRO

THE PRIEST'S TALE

Allow me, if you would, to tell you of a wedding, which took place not long ago, a wedding no different from any other—not objectively—in which I played my role to everyone's satisfaction, at least initially. For all I know, the bride might have been already with child when I performed the rite, but I would never be so crude as to count months upon my fingers when I hear of joyous news; for these very fingers may be called upon to cradle the wailing infant's tender head at christening time, to give him support as he enters new terrain, unaware of the security, solace, and spiritual wealth that define it. To him, at that moment, I must seem merely a stranger offering unfamiliar disturbing sensations. But later in his life he will realize the value of my gesture, and our bond.

The parents of this hypothetical child are perhaps another matter: the couple I recently wed, for instance; they were, in my opinion, naive. They did not realize the contract they were making—with me, that is—when they asked if I would sanctify their union. They assumed they could bid me good riddance, I expect, once the vows were exchanged, as if the rite were mere formality. How strangely they regarded me when—after I had played my role to the satisfaction of all, from the solemnity of the vows to the levity of the reception, chatting pleasantly, even wittily, with the parents, both sets, commenting in passing on the beauty of the bride, lest they think me at too great a remove from human experience—when there was a lull in the receiving line, I took the couple aside (who would question my doing it?) and asked if they would have me perform the Last Rites.

Without affectation or cynicism, I announced, "I live, as you know, in the rectory far away, and there is always the chance—though etiquette prohibits our acknowledging—that should you summon me at the last minute, I would be unable to reach you in time. There are so few of us, exiguously placed, and the parishes likewise scarce. The road to the rectory is seldom plowed in winter, and in spring the potholes impede smooth travel. When it rains, the roads turn almost instantly to clay, so that only at a skillful driver's hands and at high speeds can they be traversed successfully. If I were to administer the sacrament to one of you now, think of the time and anxiety we all might be spared, and the law of averages

indicates that the partner to receive this prophylactic blessing would likely be the party to require it later on. I realize it is hard to think ahead in the bloom of youth. . ."

The bride, aghast, clutched the arm of the man who only hours ago had been made, under my aegis, her husband, and challenged him by her fear to confront me, which he, quite eloquently did; no doubt a heroic effort to match my own eloquence and to impress her by trying to rhyme with my authority. "Father," he scolded, "what can be your intent? This is a time of rejoicing. You yourself pronounced the words, 'till death do us part.' Would you part us so soon then?"

Realizing that I had been misunderstood, I, who am an accommodating man—I do not proselytize, do not force myself—desisted (my objectives were unlikely to be understood within that public context—for heads were beginning to turn; those who had passed through the line were beginning to gravitate toward it again) and promptly took my leave, against the parents' puzzled protests: "Do visit us again soon, Father." And I had the sense, even as I gracefully accepted defeat, that I would see them all again soon enough.

Walking in town to collect myself, I realized there was another related visit I could make, to clarify what had been muddled. And so I sought out an acquaintance, or might one say, a colleague: the owner, as it happens, of a funeral home. Indeed, the bride and groom appeared surprised when I returned, accompanied, much later in the evening, to the family's house, where the wedding had taken place—the reception had been elsewhere, as is the custom. Little could they appreciate my willingness, my eagerness, to initiate them into a yet deeper mystery than the one upon which they had already, by laws of convention, embarked, allegedly for the first time. I even brought my friend the undertaker with me—he required considerable persuasion—to reinforce what might otherwise seem mere words, and to balance the awkwardness of a third party lest they misinterpret my intentions. The undertaker and I allowed no ambiguity in our presentation; we were straightforward, precise.

"I've come," he said, just as I instructed him, barely glancing at the two individuals he addressed, "to take the measurements for the casket. Would you be so kind as to lie apart, upon your backs, hands folded so, and I'll be through in no time." They seemed in shock, paralyzed, in their melded state, until the undertaker brought forward his implement to measure the bridegroom's member.

"All parts are parts of the whole," was his speech; "all shall come to dust." Meanwhile the groom hid himself the more deeply inside his bride, as if this would render the whole of him invisible. The bride's cry I could not pretend to interpret; perhaps she was pleased to offer him haven, or startled by his urgency; yet I would have thought the volume appropriate

to an instance of assault. The ruler may as well have been a dagger: such was her alarm. Or did she fear that to which she had been newly joined would be, by the former's measure, reduced. Who can possibly surmise the unbridled musings of the young in unfamiliar circumstances in a world relentlessly novel? I suppose in some ways the equanimity of a man of the cloth is an enviable thing.

Because I am a sincere man I must tell you that there is indeed advantage to the closet called confessional: one can be so close, intimate; only a thin screen separates oneself from the sinner, one's own sagacious voice from the whispers which reveal the deepest secrets. That is our special privilege; one might say power: that no one can justify surprise or suspicion when I appear on the other side of, by extension, any partition. There is, with me, potentially greater intimacy than that between a man and wife: one bound to breed resentment, foster ambivalence; for people are uncomfortable robbed of accusations: meddler, eavesdropper, peeping tom, spy; no one of these terms applies to a man of my vocation.

Father is the name by which all know me, the term by which I'm ceaselessly addressed. But was that the sound that echoed in mythic Dedalus's ears long after he'd watched the flesh of his flesh falling inexorably from air into water: Father? Father? I am the man who must give answers; thus expectation begets my ingenuity, for I want them prepared, as one does one's children. And I, like any parent, will never learn my sermon's lesson: that they must have their own experience; one cannot spare them. The more you try the more they will reject, be repelled—and thereby eject themselves from the sky? Seldom are they equipped to receive the truth, though one wants to believe sheer force of one's sincerity will smooth the roughest road, quarry hardest stone. Yet one must exercise caution, for sincerity is a dangerous thing.

It was caution dictated I depart, with my accomplice, allowing the other two to sort through their admittedly challenging instruction. A man in my profession must be bold, as He whom I revere was bold, but never reckless. The long journey back to the rectory is always an ideal opportunity for reflection.

As I might have guessed, no sooner had the season changed—or so it seemed; perhaps it had changed more than once—than I received a summons: I was needed. It must, I thought, be time for the baptism now. As my sense of direction is acute, my memory guided me accurately to the town, the tree-lined avenue, the stately Victorian house and inside it, the very chamber from which I had once been banished. I was unable to persuade the undertaker to accompany me at this time; from his point of view the prior experience had bred only humiliation. His profession has not taught him, as mine has, the value, the necessity, of perseverance. I would represent him, as I represented so many already. I had my vial of

holy water and prayer book in hand as I entered the house of the bride's parents, the same in which the ceremony had occurred. I assumed I would lead the family to the church after exchanging pleasantries, becoming reacquainted. Perhaps I would hold the child once we arrived, so that my hand upon him would not feel strange when the ritual was enacted.

But when I arrived, the cries I heard were not an infant's, but those of a mature woman, and that is how I came to grace the threshold of their chamber, for I ascended the staircase to investigate with the intention of assisting. As I squinted through the crack in the door, I saw the mother to be perspiring, panting, writhing, from time to time moaning in effort of that singular process of which I can perforce have no inkling, called labor, derived from Eve's seduction by a serpent. Even a husband, it is said, cannot soothe a woman during this arduous period; but I who as a priest possess potentially greater intimacy, thought to humbly offer solace.

"I am here," I said, through the crack which gave me witness.

"No," she screamed, I assumed to the source of her pain.

And when she repeated it over and over, I questioned whether contractions could be so frequent. I realized I possessed not even clinical knowledge regarding this miraculous yet commonplace event. I felt something akin to shame, before her next and more explicit statement jarred me from the sentiment: "It's that horrid priest again!" Her husband rushed to the door and said diplomatically, "There must be some mistake, Father; we sent for the midwife, to assist delivery. It was planned that we have a home birth."

I replied that I found it odd they had chosen this alternative with a hospital down the street.

"Father," the groom was losing his studied patience, "medicine—am I correct—is not your area of expertise, and our affairs are not your—he used His name in vain—isn't it obvious that my wife is in no condition to travel, even a short distance, at this stage? On the other hand, there is nothing to hold you here. If priests are in as scarce supply as you report, then I would not want it on my conscience that we had monopolized you."

As the groom spoke, admittedly with cleverness, I realized that the suggestion that served his convenience was not without substance, for if it was the case that the couple had not summoned me, then some miscommunication must have occurred through the secretary at the rectory, and some other couple required my ministrations in some fashion. But before I could take action, the most searing cry of all pierced the air, and the woman, to whom he turned again to face, and who had previously appeared distorted only in the distention of her abdomen, now manifested a most peculiar symmetry, for she possessed two heads, one at each end. We stood transfixed by this sight, suspended in time, in awe, until the bride herself corrected this anomaly as she pushed out, with disconcertingly

audible discomfort, through that chamber that will ever be a secret to me, a diminutive whole human being.

The completed act restored us to our senses and he dismissed me, saying, "Father, you must not distract me any longer. I have neglected my wife at her most critical hour. She must have no disturbance now. If you want to make yourself useful, you might go find the midwife for us." Then with his foot he closed the slender aperture that had been my access to the two, now three.

Although for reasons other than those the groom believed, it was, I felt, my duty to explore elsewhere. The hospital was my destination for there was very likely another couple, another newborn, with whom I had business, a family more receptive to that business. I recalled the pleasant and devout man and woman I had married quite some time ago, who had wanted nothing in the world as much as children, but the pregnancies had been in every case problematic; I knew not the details of the matter.

When I arrived at the hospital, after quietly exiting the house, I walked immediately to the front desk and offered the name of this prior couple. The nurse recognized my attire, and directed me to the room where the wife had recently given birth. The couple received me gratefully but they were not alone. A doctor was with them, as well as several, what I presumed to be medical students, peering at a Polaroid photograph. My presence did not distract them from their concentration, nor their discussion, the focal point of which seemed to be the ascription of blame, and which became increasingly agitated. I was, I eventually realized, too late, although I blessed the recently departed child, gone to God no sooner had he exited the womb, strangled by the very cord which bound him to his mother's nurture, in the act of being born. Ah, to witness life and death in such proximity; what more profound instruction could one receive? Although I was too late in one sense, the gift of this lesson was not denied me, and my duty was to offer it to those who could most profit from it. I granted myself permission to borrow documentation.

I hastened from the room to the corridor to the elevator and so on, until I was once again at the Callahan's residence. As I was the last to leave, the door had not been latched, so I let myself in; then, like a child, I took steps two at a time until I stood before their door. I knocked before entering.

"Kathleen," I cried, "David. There is something I must show you. Something you must see."

"Where's the midwife, Father?" David asked with little animation, concentrating on the pulsating cord that sustained mother and child as unity, clamped at two sites with paper clips, above which he held a small blunt scissors, moving them between two different sites only inches apart; unable to decide, it seemed, where to sever the bond, or simply unable to bring himself to make the cut. The thing which eluded him seemed to me

some dense but slender fish, perhaps an eel, caught between sea and land, its respiration intact despite its dislocation. Through the power of grace, it had not been an infelicitous agent in this instance.

"Here in my hand," I replied, "in my very hand." I held the picture to the light. "Kathleen," I whispered tenderly to her weary form, her sweat-drenched face. I knelt beside her, conscious of yet not repelled by the odor of sweat and flesh that pervaded the room, the sight of the bright white linen stained with blood. "This is for you."

She squinted at the image I held before her, then gazed at me incredulously before releasing a sound whose frequency seemed almost too high for human ears. Hurriedly, I veiled the truth again, covering what had been for a moment visible. Moments of the truth are all we can bear. And in the next, the midwife arrived (I heard Mrs. Callahan answer the bell, explaining that she refused to get involved; her participation had not been invited, and could anyone imagine how difficult it must be to listen to a daughter's cries and feel so impotent?)

The newest guest appeared before us, and promptly took charge. Regarding Kathleen's glazed eyes and distorted expression, (and no doubt informed by the shriek preceding her entry) she said, "What happened here?" David motioned toward me, using the legs of the scissors as a teacher might a pointer, but spoke no words. "Father, it would be better if you left me alone with her." Then she addressed the groom. "I'm sorry I was delayed. A breech birth at the hospital involved unforeseen complications and I was called in to help." After a pause, she added, "unfortunately to no avail." She gently released the rounded handles of the implement from David's grip, then lay her hand on Kathleen's forehead, and I was struck by how similar to a sacramental gesture was this contact. "David, you should accompany the reverend, since Kathleen will need complete rest to recover from the trauma. I doubt she'll be able to nurse."

After performing with expediency the maneuver the groom had been unable to execute, she lifted the tiny form, wrapped it carefully in a blanket she had brought and handed it to me, then quickly corrected herself, offering it to the groom. Once the bundle was dispensed with, she took the bride's wrist between her thumb and fingers, feeling for a rhythm I suspect she feared absent. "If only I could have gotten here on time," she said to herself, no longer communicating with the groom and myself; if anyone to the bride's vacant face. Then she repeated it, like a dirge.

Remembering our presence, she instructed and bid us depart, promising to send word when things stabilized. Who were we to doubt her? "It makes most sense for the baby to be cared for in maternity at the hospital, until Kathleen revives." She lay the infant in its father's arms, whispering, "such a lovely little boy." David followed me, reluctant but obedient, out the door, while she set about with her humble instruments, wiping,

sponging, disinfecting. We heard her strained but authoritative voice behind us: "And buy some formula, in the hospital pharmacy, in case we need it later."

My second trip to the hospital, then, was a simple twofold errand. David, as soon as we reached the building, adopted a rapid pace; I assumed that his strategy was to divide our errands for the sake of maximum efficiency. After clearing the front desk with a nod from the receptionist, I rode the elevator to the room where I had first been inspired by the photograph. Having been unprepared for Kathleen's strong reaction to it, I now wondered whether I needed to protect Anna from the reminder of what she had seen, as it were, in the flesh; of her flesh. Probably she too should not be disturbed, regardless of how welcoming the two appeared.

Discreetly I slipped the Polaroid under their door, the side bearing the image facing down, and rode the elevator back to street level to find the pharmacy. It was clearly marked and a woman from behind the counter offered me assistance.

"I have been instructed," I began, but could not manage to complete the sentence; it seemed awkward.

"There is a woman," I began anew. She raised her eyes. "Yes, Father?"

"A mother." She lowered them again.

"Her milk. . ."

"I understand perfectly, Father. There is no need to continue." And she turned her back to me to search the shelves behind her, before handing me a box approximately ten inches high. I felt inside my cassock for my billfold, but she placed her own hand over mine to stop me.

"Please, Father," she said. "We know about the tragedy. The hospital staff is very concerned, and supportive. Some of us feel the word"—she whispered it—"ashamed"—"is not too strong. In any case, do let this be our contribution."

"But, miss," I protested, fearful of appearing ungrateful or obtuse. "I am not certain I have made myself clear, or if I myself am clear, regarding the equipment that is. . .needed."

"I am a woman, Father," she said, with gravity, and unflinching gaze. "I know things you cannot know. Trust me."

I had no response to her authority and conviction. I could only go back to the Callahan's, perhaps not correctly but at least not empty-handed. David may have been required to remain with the child, and it was best for one of us to be available.

This time, however, I did not venture upstairs, but remained in the lower portion of the house, seeking refuge in a room, to the rear of the staircase—a room immaculate and austere containing a long oak table and eight matching straight-backed chairs with brocade seats, upon one of

which I sat. I slid the package to the far end of the polished table, then lay my head in my hands, resting this weight on the smooth wooden surface. After some time I lifted up my head, taking several deep breaths, the last exhalation interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Callahan, mother of the bride.

"Father Faraday, what a lovely surprise! Have you come to say mass at St. Agnes?"

"No, Mrs. Callahan," I said, regaining my composure—a man who must attend, through the vehicle of a single sense, to a sequence of stories, of lives, of sins whose range spans from the barely worth mentioning to the most debased; a man who must juxtapose a session that represents the only confession in the life of an evil person with the routine inflated guilts of an exemplary practitioner; such a man has evolved the skill of flexibility, of quick recovery; to use the colloquial metaphor of our automobile-dependent culture, the ability to switch gears—"No, another appointment,"—there was no need to be specific—"now completed." Talking was easier than I'd anticipated, even reassuring.

"All the better, Father; you can join us then, for our Sunday meal," she said, unfolding an embroidered white cloth and spreading it over the table, letting it billow out as one might a bed sheet. I'm sure the children will be delighted."

"I wouldn't assume anything, Mrs. Callahan." I thought she had not heard me; she was already through the door, then back again, the first of numerous trips to heap the Lord's bounty onto the table; steaming platters, casseroles, a roast ready to be carved.

"You must excuse the children," she said, as if there had been no interruption to our conversation, and as she continued to lay out the meal, concluding with, as afterthought, a bottle of fine red wine, and another Waterford glass. "They are not beholden to tradition, as our generation was." She smiled at me, pausing in her activity. "They will appear when it suits them."

"Shall I begin carving?" I asked, as she began to light the candles in the candelabra, no trace of concern marring her flawless countenance as the flame drew nearer and nearer her slender fingers. I was fatigued, and felt less in command of my expressions. I feared Mrs. Callahan might have thought me greedy rather than eager to offer a gesture of assistance; I was ashamed of how much effort she had expended while I sat immobile in my temporary stupor.

"The one favor I would ask of you, Father Faraday, is to say grace for us, if it wouldn't be too much of an imposition—not until everyone arrives, of course." She sighed, and seemed to raise her voice slightly when she added wistfully, "if we could just for once all be together at table." She sighed again.

"Mrs. Callahan," I sought to console her. "I would urge you to consider that your daughter and son-in-law may be occupied with matters of some significance, and their absence is not necessarily an expression of indifference or hostility. Or, for that matter, ingratitude."

"No, indeed, Father," she replied, and with dignity continued, "but you, as a man of the cloth, are unlikely to be acquainted with that wrenching feeling, that torture of wanting to intervene, wanting to make available the wisdom of maturity, but knowing you must not surrender to it, for if you do, every strategy will go awry before your eyes."

Mrs. Callahan was visibly moved by what she shared, as was I to be receiving her words—more than she knew—and she permitted herself to digress: "Everything today is natural. But would the Lord have allowed man the mind to evolve technology if he meant him to be left to only natural devices? You are obviously the expert here, Father, excuse my. . .trespassing." She half-smiled. "I asked them, what is wrong with a good old-fashioned hospital? Now, I was a nurse, Father Faraday, before the Lord blessed our marriage with a child, and I know a bit about these matters, but we left to doctors the work of doctors and did not monkey around, if you'll excuse the expression, with life and death. There are risks, are there not, in every natural process?"

"You are a thoughtful woman, Mrs. Callahan."

"I suppose you might as well begin the carving," she said, resigned; "otherwise we may be waiting here until everything is cold." As I could infer the tenderness of the meat from its succulent aroma, I was more than willing to comply. "It is nice to have a man about, to lend a hand. My husband, you see, he's been. . .unwell."

"I'm very sorry to hear that." My memory of Mr. Callahan at the wedding: robust, energetic, was difficult to reconcile with these words—unless I confused him with the father of the groom; I did not think this was the case. And yet, our world fluctuates before us daily; appearances ever-unreliable indices of truth.

"The Lord works in mysterious ways; isn't that right, Father Faraday?"—as if she'd read my mind. I could not decipher her tone: conspiratorial, mocking, perhaps even. . .flirtatious? Fortunately, the moment of intense ambiguity passed.

"So much in life is confusing, isn't it? Nothing more so than being a parent in this day and age—I'm sure you've heard the stories, Father. In fact, I wonder if I might be so bold as to impose upon you for an even larger favor—since we may not get to grace, at this rate." She made an enigmatic gesture with her mouth, that seemed half sinister, half coquettish, or perhaps neither, some neutral expression colored by my fatigue? My job—I thank the Lord—is not to judge, outside a certain circumscribed, sacred enclosure. "My daughter, I'm convinced, is in need of guidance, guidance

beyond my capacity. I thought marriage would make a difference, but I'm afraid that in some ways, it's only made things worse, and I wondered—I thought, perhaps, if you went up, and spoke with her. . ."

"I would like to very much, Mrs. Callahan," I said sincerely, "very much indeed; but there are times when no one, not even a man of God, can take the place of a mother." As I said the last word I rose to procure the package that had remained undisturbed (but for Mrs. Callahan's occasional furtive glances)—then returned to the seat, placing on the table its contents: a box which I began to push toward her slowly.

"What can it be?" she asked, staring at the thing as if it would speak its name.

I continued to push with my fingers the device I had purchased at the hospital pharmacy. Both of us regarded its incremental progress as a child might a caterpillar's. It whispered across the tablecloth: my fingers its gentle engine. When the box had achieved sufficient distance to be within close range, I drew back my hand and remained silent while she studied the labelling. Mrs. Callahan blushed, giggled, and then rose, smoothing the front of her blouse. "You are admirably down to earth, Father Faraday, and yet so. . .discreet. Please do help yourself while I have a brief chat with my daughter." She grasped the box, tentatively at first, but then walked decisively out of the room, to the stairs. Would Kathleen be conscious? Would her mother's presence rouse her if not, and stimulate her healing? I hoped it would be so, but my own hunger distracted me from this concern.

In truth, I could not remember the last time I had eaten. Had I even had breakfast? I carved a few slices of beef—it should certainly not go to waste, this bounty—and there was no point in serving Mrs. Callahan's portion only to watch it grow cold. I passed myself the green beans, the roast potatoes. With the first bite, I realized I was ravenous. What a relief it was to nourish myself without the burden of conversation, to leave the world, for just a few moments, to its own devices.

I ate much more rapidly than was salubrious. Perhaps this was the source of my indigestion, although I suspect it had more to do with the bride's raised voice, followed by the shattering of glass. I laid down my fork, went back to the living room, and leaned against the bannister once again, wincing at the words toward which I could not keep myself from straining.

"You're positively Medieval, Mother." At least the bride possessed the energy to raise her voice. The midwife had either cured her: one of the innumerable daily miracles we take for granted, or misapprehended the situation from the start. Perhaps the former was now with David and the child, and all would return shortly.

"Darling, that is very discourteous. The breast pump was a gift from Father Faraday."

"The priest! Mother, you must be kidding. That man is very peculiar."

"He's not a man exactly, is he—a priest? But I think he's quite nice, dear, and you were rude to him."

"No, mother, he was. . .cruel to me; you can't imagine."

"I'm sure you exaggerate, Kathleen; he performed the ceremony so beautifully. He keeps in touch, and you can tell he cares. I sense he's very . . .trustworthy."

I slowly climbed the stairs, no more rapidly than I had pushed the problematic box, now discarded. I climbed almost against my will. Certain projects seem to have no end in sight, before we gain the profit of perspective. Yet we must never cease to strive, to hope. It seemed that the voices grew muted as my proximity increased.

"Mother, I feel nervous when I know he's around, and I'm feeling weak as it is. We need a quiet place to talk. There's just too much going on here, and he is a man after all, no matter what any of you say."

"Well of course, dear, technically, that's true. But a priest is a special kind of man, and if you can't trust a priest, whom can you trust? It isn't as if he were Episcopalian; they have wives and worse. Father Faraday is a good old-fashioned Catholic priest. And insofar as he's a man, what's wrong with having a man around the house?"

I was right against the door now, squatting to make my eye level with the keyhole. There was a long pause in their conversation.

"Mother," the bride said suddenly—with urgency and a noticeable maturity— no longer whining, "if I asked you to follow me somewhere, would you?"

"That depends, Kathleen. What I mean is, of course I would, if it seemed reasonable, but don't you think you'd be better off resting for a few days?—here where there are people to look after you, a familiar environment, the comforts of home. . ."

"No, I don't mean to go away from here, to travel, but you have to promise not to ask any questions, just to go with me."

I was curious myself as to the destination the bride had in mind, although slightly distracted by the pain in my knees, a sensation with which I am well-acquainted, and have, over the years, developed the stamina to endure.

"You are being very mysterious, young lady, but your mother will go along."

"Thank you, oh thank you, Mother, because I discovered just the perfect place while I was having my contractions, and I was afraid it might . . .disappear—I mean I might forget it—just like when you have a dream sometimes, that's so vivid and powerful but then you can't remember anything specific the next day, or even an hour later."

I watched the bride splay her legs; she spread them as far, it seemed, as legs could separate, and farther still—perhaps she had as an adolescent

performed the acrobatic maneuver called a split; she might have been a cheerleader—it seemed it must be terribly uncomfortable but this time she uttered no cries, not a sound, as they, adopting what appeared an exaggerated yoga position, crept inside, one after the other, to be embraced by those contours which are even in the imagination, forbidden to the man who inhabits, as vocation, a chamber of secrets. I heard them twice removed now, as if under water.

"I must admit I feel a bit uneasy here, Kathleen; would you do me the favor of telling me where we are?"

"Well, it's hard to say exactly where, but I can tell you how I found it. In the excruciating and terribly lonely pain of labor, when all of me was opened up, I felt almost delirious, and yet very. . .present, painfully connected to what was happening, and in between contractions I just decided I should be able to inhabit that space myself, in a soothing way; a therapeutic way, I guess you could call it. Shouldn't the haven we give others be available for us too? Doesn't that seem right to you, mamma? Anyway, suddenly I was in a place I'd never known, but that I wanted to come back to, and when I saw you now, I knew I had to bring you with me. I'm very glad you agreed to come." The two women had no suspicion that they were in some fashion exposed to the practiced ear of the man whose profession is to listen though a membrane to all the world's secrets.

"No one would ever think to look for us here."

"I suppose you're right, dear. But what if someone should need either of us? I don't feel right to be unavailable. We do have company, after all. I've always prided myself on being a perfect hostess."

"But mother, we've only just arrived. Stay a while. Besides, it's only fair I reciprocate," the bride said, after a brief pause. "My first journey in this world was through a room just like this, that you guided me through. Then somehow we grew estranged from one another."

"You make it all sound a bit tragic, Kathleen, when we've been having such a pleasant, such an interesting visit. I really don't know what you are referring to. And might I suggest you consider the word estrangement in relation to your own son and husband? But you always take offence when I try to remind you of your responsibilities, even though my only concern is your happiness."

"Oh yes, let's not get into it, Mother, I didn't mean anything by it. I love being here with you where it's so embracing, yet expansive too, as if it might extend beyond infinity."

"Such a lovely way of putting it; you are your mother's daughter, aren't you? And I will certainly come again, if I'm invited. If nothing else, it's educational. It shows me just how much we have in common."

It seemed their session had terminated but it was hard to assess, something of the sensation one has during an overseas phone conversa-

tion: its disorienting static and delays in transmission of sound.

"Is this the exit, honey?"

"You go first, Mama."

Mrs. Callahan's next words were clearly articulated; no longer did they sound submerged, murky, as I watched the mesmerising reemergence of the two women. The bride seemed to turn inside out; I have no other words, as inadequate, as pedestrian as these are; I was reminded of the way certain of nature's creatures shed their skins. The bride was again lying in the bed; indeed she had never stood during the entire expedition, and her mother was back at her side, seated, now dabbing inside the bodice of the bride's dressing gown with a linen cloth.

"My breasts feel so swollen." The daughter's plaintive voice addressed her mother.

"Of course they do; they *are* swollen," the latter replied as she continued to execute the dainty motion with the cloth, the inadequacy of which brought to mind the image of the Dutch boy's finger in the dike.

"It's a pity you destroyed that breast pump, dear; rather reckless of you."

"It was in a moment of passion."

"Ah, yes. Where did you say David went? Not to mention my grandchild."

"To investigate something, I think. I'm not really sure. Things are a bit strained between us, actually."

"No doubt. Well, if we don't do something soon I'm afraid you're going to burst, and we can't have that. There is mess enough around here as it is. I suppose that midwife gave you some lactating stimulant. I've never heard of milk coming in quite this early in such. . .volume. I'm going to have to take matters into my own . . ." She hesitated, looked uncharacteristically tentative, for clearly she lacked a destination or function for the parts of herself to which her ellipsis metaphorically alluded. As her voice trailed off, I saw Mrs. Callahan gently, furtively affix her mouth to her daughter's breast, to relieve it of the nourishment meant for another which burdened it so. The bride winced. "Could you try to be gentler, Mother?" she asked. "They're a bit tender, since this is the first time."

Mrs. Callahan obligingly removed her lips from the darkened protuberance no longer veiled by white fabric. She awaited permission as an accompanist awaits the signal from another instrumentalist to initiate music, so as to create all the more precisely unity of sound and feeling.

And when that signal came, and she lowered again her head to grasp with her lips what hands would not be useful for, a stream of pale white squirted out, startling us all. I nearly toppled over but repositioned to correct myself, careful to utter no sound. The bride's mother also made adjustments; she appeared to take a deep breath and then, after one

unsuccessful attempt, arrested the stream. With enviable dexterity, she reached, while thus occupied, toward the couple's dressing table to retrieve a crystal bowl, into which she released, in an astoundingly refined fashion, the translucent whitish liquid from her mouth, the latter which she dabbed with the same linen cloth. Ignoring the unimpeded flow, she breathed again, and said, "I only wish I had two mouths." Valiantly she resumed her relief measures, acquiring an almost graceful regimen of intake and release, growing, it seemed to me, increasingly acclimated, mother and daughter both, approaching a state of trance-like serenity.

Now I am an efficient man, as I have said, and it troubled me to think of the ignored twin of the bride's mammae, engorged as it was unattended. Mrs. Callahan, pragmatic woman that she was, had obviously elected not to attempt a system of alternation, fearing the rhythmic complications of leaking and squirting. It had never occurred to me, until that moment, that a baby might nurse from both a mother's breasts, in careful sequencing. Already today I had learned a great deal, primarily with the aid of sight, the sense that is not usually my instructor. But having thus benefited from observation, was it not my duty, now, to intervene? So often we men of the cloth are accused of being 'out of touch' with the pragmatic needs of our parishioners, particularly alienated from the needs of women, and inhabiting a comfortably ethereal realm. I looked into my heart and knew I had to overcome my resistance; sometimes matters far less grand than exorcising demons were well worthy of a priest. Such contact, though it be ostensibly at odds with propriety, and with my own inclinations, would be the gift that I could offer. The analogy of artificial respiration seemed fitting: this sort of detachment, yet commitment and intensity.

I crept into the room, literally, for I would need to remain on my knees —I am well practiced—for this novel process. Neither stirred and I made only the softest sounds.

"I am here." I whispered it so softly that it might have been an angel's voice, or strand of dream. And the bride's gasp was likewise a subterranean response to dreamt image or sensation, when I took into my mouth the darkened mounded center of the aureole, controlling my distress to find it already wet, leaking in fact, all the while that Mrs. Callahan attended its twin. The breast itself was hard, like a boulder, but with a quality of translucence, blue veins protruding through the flesh. I had the unique opportunity to use as visual instruction the template across from me, and let this be my focus, rather than the disconcerting image immediately before me. I was prepared now for the energy with which its contents would gush forth. I moved my lips, and not my teeth, in time with Mrs. Callahan's, and found, by some small miracle, a rhythm that seemed appropriate to Kathleen's needs. Inadvertently I glanced at the crystal bowl to see that within the clearer fluid, resembling white water color paint,

some globules of fat had collected. I managed to check, at first, an impulse to gag, but after this sight, the taste—for I could not approximate Mrs. Callahan's demure dexterity in spitting out every drop of the substance to make room for more—of the cloyingly sweet liquid overwhelmed me. Already, it took all my concentration to be one with it. But certainly my training should have equipped me with the discipline required to transcend my squeamishness, to put mind, and spirit over matter, in order to overcome the body's limitations.

And so I did. A silent prayer of thanks. And just as when one engages in physical exercise, and after passing a certain threshold of pain, gains momentum and achieves sustained transcendence, I too felt altogether delivered from my limitations. Such a strange suspension this state was, to be intensely present yet entranced: unique in my adventures as a servant. I felt no impatience whatsoever, only a curiosity as to how long a milk-filled mother's breast required to empty its contents. My only reference was a single farming experience one summer as a boy, tentatively touching a cow's udder—the farm hand laughing, "That won't get you anywhere, little feller, ya gotta use some muscle," as she squeezed my arm to add emphasis before demonstrating the far more vigorous maneuvers required to make the milk squirt into the silver pail. She might, I supposed, be proud of me now—though the bishop would demand an explanation.

Most unfortunately, the indigestion which was engendered when I indulged in gluttony over Mrs. Callahan's repast, followed by hearing the bride's reproach and finally by coming to the aid of a woman—who happened to be the same as she who had reproached me—in distress, now welled up in my gut anew, and I was ashamed of my weakness. Mortal that I was, I would have to admit my subservience to the body. Such a vast intake of milk for an unaccustomed adult system was, I suppose, bound to result in some degree of gastric distress. I thought it best to absent myself before either woman 'awakened,' for certainly my becoming ill would be no contribution to the situation. My gift would be left unsigned, as it were, and how happy this made me, for this is the joy of my vocation: to help without ostentation, to offer subtle assistance without expectation of boast or virtue. We must give freely even when—especially when—the gift entails sacrifice; even when we would wish nothing so much as to have the cup pass from our lips.

It seemed in many ways the opportune time to go. I am a man of God and I had done what I could for the family. There were other families: a vast world in need of instruction, and I myself with so much to learn. In some other sense, however, I had just arrived; for my observance of these women, and the unique form of my participation in physiological processes that had remained for the greater part of my life abstract, had been instructive in a way I could not define or assimilate. Feeling thus

overwhelmed made me want to flee, and yet I was to an equal degree entranced. Perhaps if I rested here with them, as quiet as I had been all this time, I could become for them, a part of their landscape, a part of their life. I had the sense that they had been changed by their visit with each other, as most certainly had I by my covert interaction.

Here the undertaker had no place, it seemed. And my own truths seemed disturbingly incomplete. What could I learn from this? How could I apply these lessons? In so many senses, failure felt the order of the day.

Why, then, could I not pull myself from the room, from the sight of the two women, one of with whom I had had particular and unprecedented carnal interaction, for which I had no reference and lacked all vocabulary. I wished her to regain normal consciousness; felt, in fact, that I kept vigil to it— and yet it was this very transformed appearance that mesmerized me— for I am a man of ritual, am I not, performing every day again and again an invisible transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary: bread into body, bread into body, but that body seen only in mind. Was my nausea and near-vertigo perhaps my own body's excuse to remain?— weakness a catalyst for instruction: Address your ignorance, servant, in order to better be that which you were meant? Humble yourself before the creatures made of Adam's rib, made of man, but who themselves make men?

I myself had seen the process; participated, in some sense, its perpetuation— though all my efforts likely misinterpreted as thwarting. From sacred texts, from prayer and from my superiors, had come my instruction in the past, but where was I now led? As they reclined, I too would recline, but apart from the bed, here in the corner, where I could witness, but not disturb; reflect upon the role I had played in their sustained interaction. Instinctively I took out my pen: "My children, ladies and gentlemen, good people,"—I put a line through each in turn—"brothers and sisters in Christ"—all addresses seemed prosaic, formulaic—"I would ask that you reflect today on something rather esoteric, something challenging and perhaps initially off-putting. Christian responsibilities are far more complex than they first appear, than we might have learned through the catechism lessons of our youth. Consider me, if you would, a kind of. . .midwife, who mediates collectively your birth in Christ, your baptism into new life. You must remind yourselves, should you ever feel mistrustful toward me, that my sole purpose on this earth is to assist you, as your servant."

No sooner had I penned the words than I began to feel some mitigation of the turbulence within my bowels. Realizing that these were indeed the means through which I could calm myself and my digestion, I preceded with the outline for my homily.

GEORGE ECONOMOU

CENTURY DEAD CENTER

ONE

When it happened it didn't happen in newsreel. Its history happens to. Easier to take home in black and white and head off the passing moment through the air, so sharp and short. He dies from a burst to the chest in a second, hangs from the boots forever. When it happened it was real news. Then turned black and white. Death's proof develops in black and white till it comes as news for you, real and stark and possessing the air it passes through on its way to the black and white house where it rewinds and waits.

TWO

There wasn't any blood. Still it was read and flowed for generations. Of poison. For centuries of poison. The immunity was colossal. Its epidermal imprint: tracing veins monumental and saturated. Whose inner walls never showed. Not until their bursting point. Then there was blood. Assayed, drop by drop, for centuries. Generations. The poisonous immunity. Painted with used bandages. Wrap and tie, wrap and tie. Educed, the poison knot. For generations. For centuries. To the bursting point. Time for some blood again.

THREE

The archaeologist begins talking. Her elbows and ribs ache. Nothing she says lines up with her knee-prints. Nothing she feels can fill their bowls in the sand. She stands up, they disappear, fatten the air. There are things about her life she cannot retrieve. Remember as needing it, even. Right now she can think only about hot tea and ice water. Wanting to fill herself with them. And to talk a little longer. Again, she kneels and bends over her prey. Stops talking. No one sees her put in the final touches. Which takes hours. All out.

FOUR

You should be able to get there by foot. Besides there's no other way. No other choice. For you. Even if you had a map, there would be surprises. Bad to worse. So prepare. Point yourselves in this black direction. Let us keep it nameless. Like your destination. For now. So if you don't get there, you've still gotten there. In a manner, bad to worse, of speaking. A map? We will make one up for you. Name of your destination? Let us put it this way. If you get there from here, it's another way of getting from bad to worse. We guarantee it.

FIVE

And the wife tied herself to her dying husband and they fell into the water—from the villa chamber overhanging the lake. A legend tells a lady pushed her lover and he fell into the lake from a point high above the water. Storied faithless lovers trip, the true leap. The poet strips her fingers of her rings and wears her mother's fur. True to the fear overhanging her perforated days, she rises to a point high above her balance and falls into the lake of fumes and fading music. Torn from life's book, she trips into story.

SIX

The mythomaniac's talking his guts out. His waving hands move back horizons. The others step lively to keep up with him. Sky. His anecdotes secure with them, down to earth with them. Tumbling, then fettered to eye and ear. Slowed up to meet their measure. They cannot stand to talk to him. They cannot stand not to listen to him. They tread water he walks on. Cannot keep up with him. They cannot help but slow him down. A rope and a rock, or a noose and a knife. Still they will listen, rapt, to the last sounds he shoots.

SEVEN

The unspeakable. May be screamed. Sung into remembrance. Who most listen for it to the capture are speechless in its honor. Then spill. Submit to its surrendering in them. White flags of terror turned to dreams of lost and found. So the-couldn't-be-worse is finally something to write home about. Put it this way. What good is all the evil we've done if we do not speak of it? The unspeakable. May be screamed. Worn like a badge. A tattooed number. A poem. Let the record show: on Justitia's tab. Then hold your peace or jump.

EIGHT

The prophet wants a good feed. Even if he has to fast for it, as long as it comes sooner or later as ordered. Proof well-worth the wait. It's in the eating. Order that justifies this mess of explanations and excuses: this steady diet of phenomenals. So the prophet waits and works in the dark room of his desire where he alone sees his proofs coagulate. He picks at them lightly, his taste buds awakening to their salty continuity. Then mouths the full picture and swallows it whole, even if it curdles the blood, it's a feast of cogency. Wait.

NINE

At first the cries were music to their ears. The march of life. Step. Fuck. Step. Stop to have a portrait taken: Proud Papa in Brown Shirt holding the Infant Christa. A composition worth careful study. And the music, the music was colossal. Filled the air from sea to lung. And the terrified new cries were lost in its volume. Work. Much work to be done. To the music. To the march. To found the center of the century. Black hole on earth. End of the line and final pitch where the wailing infant flies from his hand into an open grave.

TEN

There is always a chance that in some corner five or six will join hands in a dance to their happy, good hour. You can be sure they'll eventually twirl out of the picture, though the black iconography of their chance always lingers there. Traces of the saving vision they will kill each other for. To have been holding hands in that circle, to have filled one of those spaces of touching choreography, is their dream. To launder death. After all they have done and made of their matters. There is always a chance. In some corner. To slip white.

GAEL TURNBULL

FROM ESTUARIES

STARTING AGAIN

Starting again. . .two words. . .and now more words already picked, marked past and strictly, as if by imposing choice to sustain conviction,

inflicting whatever need on silence and, as quickly, reaching to a convergence, even a stricture

as of an edge applied, driven down and to the quick, what's sensed, what's bourne, may come to birth in us, be heard, who are of the quick,

who hear those other words, not in contradiction although gone before, long started, quickened, and by them, the dead, their words with ours, not dead, but quickening.

STARTED

Started. . .and so begun, have already said too much to guess where this may lead, as if a knotted cord I wind into my hand and follow into a maze,

finding amazement, what is meant, as meaning, as intention, and yet tensed, intended, not pretending or dissembling,

listening to the words, assembled, gathered, what is understood, as what may stand, may not be shifted

but which yet proceeds, goes forward to arrive, from where it started, as this does, and has.

VOIDS

An idiot child once took a man to show him a pit in the forest where bodies of hostages had been thrown and while they looked, a rat disturbed a shoe so that it appeared as if one of the corpses was waving its foot to them.

The child wanted to laugh but knew just enough not to do so; and the man, not wanting to laugh but knowing altogether too much, in what way could he?

(adapted from "Charnier D'Otages" by Jean Tardieu)

PRETENDING

A sparrow has found a crust and a crow is after it, harrying the smaller bird which dodges neatly, a lifetime of practice, until the larger bird gives up or appears to, perching on a branch, pretending it doesn't care, far enough away to hope to persuade the sparrow to relax but still near enough to pounce,

while the sparrow takes its time, enjoying the crust, fluffing its feathers, flicking its tail, making a show of pretending, as if the crow wasn't there.

TIDES

Lappings of day as each dawn shifts its coming sooner, to summer's highest tide, then back to winter's ebb,

revealing mud flats of the night exposed where we may venture, fearful perhaps but curious to find what the glare of too much light may have concealed.

CAMBRIDGE

For months, determined to ask a girl whom he saw each day, spoke with, to come for afternoon tea at his lodging, and always failing, until even the resolve failed him, turning back to shadows, self regard, long walks alone

but also, for a few moments, perhaps longer, the great telescope to his will, scanning out into a beyond always beyond, a dust of suns out of the darkness, where his self was of no consequence, even to himself.

MAKINGS

Might a shape of words be realised as if by remarking upon the simplest outline of a twig breaking the surface of a subsiding river, to be gripped, dragged from the mud, dried on the bank, made manifest

as the eroded branch of some far-off, storm-shattered tree, in its gratuity of detail quite beyond all expectation of a first intent

or contrived upon principles seen in an asymmetric and rotary pendulum with flail arm, where the long term pattern depends on the initial impetus

but which becomes particularised because of nonlinear effects built into the design, with ability to confound recurrence, never settling to a steady state and always possible with surprise?

BEYOND THE GLASS

Surprised in a mirror, not by my father's face as if my age, but by glimpse of that lad he was, that I was once, not unaware but as yet unwary, eager for all that was to come,

never thinking that some day I'd look, surprised, into a mirror, see that former self, both his and mine, remote yet near, as if untarnished, still present as shared presence, not just in the mirror but surprised in me.

JUNIPER

Burning juniper on the fire and as the scent fills the room, there's suddenly the presence of a time not now and a place not here

so specific and immediate it's as if the answer to some first and final question has been revealed and is to be found only in what is lost at every moment.

GEORGE ANGEL

FIVE PROSE POEMS

The stone is dead. The window was left open. This is the tin I was saying. Again on the pane cajoling. In the of but yes again summer. See there was some history of angels on the wrapping paper, tire marks roll an oil drum that had known a child's limbs inside it, snouting the wind and closing its fingers into its palms. The knife is open and married to the air. The bare feet lifted and patted the dirt again. They were driven out of the clock tower of night. They were driven toward palaces. They were beaten when every pair of open palms became the wings of a fallen body. They became They said again They when their heads became stamens and the road was covered with pollen. I saw them walking, I saw that each was a beggar. I tied my apron on, imagining a city of chess pieces as windowless buildings. I climbed the stairs and closed the yellow door behind me. I often see ghosts in summer. If I were to tell someone they would look in my eyes, mimic my jaw, and laugh. I speak only with the angels rising from the wrapping paper.

The word blood is dead. The word knife, the word angels, the word stone, the word bones. All these words are dead. Word angels like monkey dying. The theory of trees and stones must crawl inside them and crack them open forever. These words are the corpses of what we know. They are as useless as the word maggots that will come along and eat them. Say land again and you too are dead. Land is a dead word. The theory of trees and stones humbly submits that it is tired of the words light and strong. These words must be assassinated so that we may all see that they have been dead for ages. Every sayable word is a dead word. Run faster, killing as you go. Every explanation is a beautiful vulture. We have made it beautiful. The colors are all dead and we have fed them to the vulture.

Saying is killing. Laughter is mockery where a massive bright bird stands pecking the sinew out of the arms and legs of light. The theory of trees and stones is someone remembering something to himself. God is not the word for God.

SEPTIC

A scarebird sleeps for me in a thicket grown above its head. Your breathing clears. Scarcely folding and putting away something seen, a visit. An out-scrape of the face. A bus light lets go a nasturtium in the dark. The thicket rolls away, its sticks to a piled figure are bones of breathing. Scaffolding building. Its leaving erases, my blindness begins to plant there. An unseen bird tripped above us on a gust of air. Its surprised flutter lifts our looks. Two seeds that aspired to argue, supplant, fell and shattered on the asphalt.

Gone, those exhausted from the window frames where the light had been eaten off of the cob of apartments. Dim devily street, like a quilted sheet. I hear you snore and I tickle your feet. You don't tickle my feet, you tap my head. And without my heat you'd be cold in bed. The black that hung hit against the high windowed risks, hurrying over them to twist the snout of an all but cornered glow. A monarch who flipped frantically along the air outside the walls is gone. The maze of day is still there.

OCTAVE

A draft and the lowering sound of someone passing come in joined. As always angels help me halfway into the air where I've drowned. The blue that broke over the street was like a wave about to laugh. Still, the new fish that shone just coined were free to swim about my feet. An old codger and his missis will find them wriggling in their hair. Branches obscure the meadow where light first broke open its kisses. A reproduction that was

faded in a store upon the square. On closer inspection a tear, a smudge, and an edge badly frayed.

This sun nesting, retouched, flashes and yet I hear your voice instead. The swift light continues to rend and appears itself with slashes. A lit filament delivers a little snap you might still send. Within the words where you have led me I find resounded slivers. Round blunt wresting shoulders adjust the living weight they can afford. Blooming sinks to put your feet in, you laughed at flowers and their lust. You bring wires to conduct a rare spread of wings that are not beaten. I find their feathers now restored and so turning just, I go there.

NOVENA

Thousands of willful streamers come fluttering between the apartments. Too numerous for defeat, they rule alone the flashing browns with which they tinge the light. Their current of folding and unfolding moves falling with the decline of the street, wrapping the slanted wires with flight. The silt risen from some enervement. Their passage down the street is slow, rippled with invisible pulls. The first full moon of the season was the night before last night. This blanket lifted from the bed to cover the window and fool sleep. Still the light seeped through and the blanket muttered in the breeze

Noli me tangere, said the shadow of a gardener I was looking for. I finally found her and we went to buy orangeade at half-price at the store.

The face of things breaks open. You climb up into the fissure where leaves, ring-stained, extend as steps to where veins have bloomed their stationary wealth. Red geraniums in pots upon the shelf are untouched by the wind that has risen up. Someone wandering came to loot this place. Corolla where your voice has put its root. You turn and drop a stone upon my foot. I chase your sight and now the sun is gone. Promising light, asking us to come run.

PIERRE JORIS

THE CASE OF THE MISSING "M"

Somewhere along the line an M went on the lam (but already language asks for correction: it was no line, at least no straight line, not even a well-designed symmetrically-correct curve, but rather something "en pointillé," a needlework crisscrossing like tracks in the snow, uneven, hobbling, appearing/disappearing, a scar left on water & air & earth, a now-you-see-it, now-you-don't nomadic "ligne de fuite" but maybe we'll have time to come back to this question later.) Let's start here, with that missing letter. This seems to happen all the time as I write. Letters go missing. Or just one, to begin with. A letter goes missing. For example, & among others, an "M"—the letter that opens the word "missing," leaving something like (h)issing, where the "h" in between the parenthesis rhymes with the Arabic hamsa, the unsounded letter, though here it is more like a speech impediment, im-pedes-ment, in that there are pedes, feet, limbs, & immediately we got trouble, trouble in paradise, trouble walking, getting our, well, my feet caught, though this is not the infamous swollen foot, that oedipal thing, or then maybe again it is, under another guise, one I would call richer, in that it involves becoming/remaining an eternal toddler. But I don't really want to begin with the family scene, those ugly "scènes de famille." I'm not in anybody's pharmacy right now, thus also in no need for a scapegoat, this is another shop, the body-shop of language maybe, where the letters get put together & as happens with watches or other machinery, you take one apart because you think it's not working the way it should & put it back together & it works but you're astounded that a little screw or weirdly shaped piece is left over, you don't know there it fits but immediately it seems more essential to you than the rest of the coherent machine. Here's how this happened in this poem from 1986:

> 0.45 a.m.
> after the storm

(a lecture/reading first performed at Small Press Distribution in Berkeley, California in the Spring of 1990)

the flat
lineaments of
word
I
meant
world a letter
on the lam
a greek
lamb-
da / fort
missing the
eleventh leg
—not a wooden
—not a toy
of this journey
though it is
the meat we eat
in this house
after the storm
the skies
washed
dangling
limbs
lamdas
fort
where we
fiction our
selves to be
at one

But the letter I was thinking of was that first letter of the word missing, which is also the first letter of the word mother. This is what happened to the language: it went from mother-tongue to other tongue. At times when I stand up, on my own two legs, limbs, like right now in front of you, I have the hubris to claim that it was I who lopped it off, though when I sit down & face my job, writing, it becomes clear that this letter fell off on its own accord somehow & that it is in the gap between mother-tongue/other-tongue that I am written. This gap, this emptiness is liable to take my breath away. It is the closest I've come to understanding what someone like Edmond Jabès means when he talks of the void, of emptiness, the desert, that interface between language and the world, or what Michel Foucault meant when he wrote:

> "The only thing we know at the moment, in all certainty, is that in Western Culture, the being of man and the being of language have never, at any time, been able to coexist and to articulate themselves one upon the other. Their incompatibility has been one of the fundamental features of our thought."

It is the putting into question, i.e. into play, of a certain absence, in & through language. The overriding presence of an absence. But as I write this, as I try to find words to talk about "it," I realize that the ones I found force me into a specific, ever overdetermined way of thinking through this problem, and in the case of these last sentences what rears its head under the English I am using is French, if not the French language as such, then the way that language has of thinking what it is given to think in binary oppositions, in the gallic logic of either/or, of absence or presence, and it was way back, over twenty years ago now, when the decision was taken by me, or when the decision made me, (to keep playing on the passive/active opposition in the absence of an actual "middle voice" in American prose) exactly in order to escape that binarism that I "decided" not to write in French. I'll come back to this, & to where I came/come from, but first some words, laid out on the page as a poem, dealing with the costs of those choices. It—the choice, the decision, whatever it was that led me to write in English—it, then, used to create much anxiety which I could only alleviate by, paradoxically, writing in that other tongue that is not the mother-tongue. And that anxiety would at times become the very poem, as in this text from the early seventies:

> ANGUISH, A RIDDLE
> that all the languages are borrowed
> but how then do I count them
> that do not belong to me
> In the first
> I think in the second I sink
> the third is my rhetoric &
> the fourth my west &
> wagon its wheel
> at least traces these steps
> in harmonies of tetradic modalities
> before & after I sink.

The fascination, all my life with the number four. On one level, clearly the number of languages I am most familiar with built into a cosmo-topography, the four corners of the worlds, the directions; but also, another layer of it, the need to escape the three, as "scene-de-famille" (so maybe

we can never get away from that completely) & again & certainly at a very conscious level of work, the attempt to break the hold of the trinitarian number that has been the essential mode of the re-presentation of complexity—or of re-ducing complexity—in European thought since Dante's time. Four is the first difficult number. One is the easiest no matter what they say, & it is also easy to get from there to two and then to get three out of two, but after that there comes a quantum jump, breaking the triangle, the triangulation, try "strangulation," because as Bucky Fuller showed so convincingly, the triangle is indeed the most solid, i.e. fixed, unalterable & thus containing, re- & op-pressing geometric structure in the world. Typing up notebooks from last year I came across these few lines, that I can't remember having written, & I certainly can't remember what I thought as I was writing them, which isn't, I believe, such a rare occurrence in the process of writing—at least for me. This obsession with the numbers comes through again:

A BEGINNING
four is as far
as
this carries us,
                beats
three, beats three
beats
three.

So there is this anxiety, induced by the implacability of the numbers, but the anxiety is also often alleviated, or leavened by playfulness. Thus in the earlier poem the play with & on a phoney- or phono-logy of three pronunciations: "thinking / singing / sinking/" A hair on the tongue, that hair it takes to get the English "th" out, something that still marks or mars my speech, like a defect, or a sign, simply. Something that for me, at least, has rhymed with other slightly askew ways of looking at the world, for example, Robert Duncan's roving eye. I may have preferred to be marked in my vision, rather than in my speech, or at least that sense came through in a small poem written in flight over the North Atlantic a few years ago:

O that I had Duncan's eyes
to see & hold both
this America that Europe
planisphere of my senses
fine mercator mesh grid
of this my prison earth

Or maybe, what I really wanted was Duncan's tongue, the incredible sense one had in listening to him that he was at one, or at home in this tongue, the uncanny ability he had of regenerating himself by going back to the stories—& they were of one language-piece—of his childhood, to that treasure-trove that was so important to him. My childhood, language-wise, was atomized—no, not atomized, as that would imply some sort of preexisting actual totality somehow more or less randomly fragmented; it was rather as if my gaze, my language-gaze if I may say so, went through a prism and was broken up into a spectrum of languages or vice-versa, to turn this image around, it was as if a rainbow spectrum of language-particles flew at me and were all supposed to go to some prism in my ear or wherever where they are supposedly re-aligned into a single white beam of light understanding itself. My first spoken language was Luxembourgian, this Frankish-mosellan dialect that both father & mother & sister spoke. But between the ages of two and twelve I had nursemaids who spoke German, uncles & aunts who spoke French. And the essential encounter with the book, with reading, both at home and in school, happened in German first, then quickly, a year later, in French, so that, & I realized this only much much later, I never read what I spoke.

Then, in high school, Latin & English & Spanish were added, & for some reason still unexplainable to me, I had an immediate sense of kinship with English. I wrote my way through that confusion, from 14 years on, first in German, then in French, even though the very first poems I wrote were written—I discovered this years later, when on returning to Luxembourg I found some old diaries—the first poems at age fourteen were written, strangely enough in English, on my first visit to England where I had fallen in love with an English girl.

And that fact was in a way a clue for me, when later I came to have to justify, or least to have to explain my decision to write in English, usually in front of an interlocutor who, sympathetic to my work or not, would most bring up the old chestnut of the impossibility of writing poetry in any other language than the "mother-tongue." Irritated, I would say why does one have to write in the papa-mama, the mummy/daddy language, why should that oedipal choice be the only possible or legitimate one, why should it not be my own sexual choice, that moment of one's discovery of the other, that moment when it is our sex that speaks and not that of our progenitors. So now the mother-tongue will have lost the m and have become the other tongue but that other will also now lose its hairy, unpronounceable, "the" & gain a lamda & a little victory-sign and become the lover's-tongue. As if the vowels somehow stood steadfast while the consonants, like my continents, kept on drifting. The lover's tongue then.

But that too, as explanation, seems too pat. The transformation of mother-tongue into lover's-tongue cannot really erase the other, that in-

between term of the equation. In-between. I was indeed born between languages, and it is more & more this sense of between-ness that interests me, & that I want to inhabit. Which of course lets the other back in, though this time maybe no longer as the abstract term of a dual on/off opposition, but as something richer, smellier, crazier. When I began shifting my focus from the question of the languages I spoke or learned to write in school, to what my own first engagements with the act of writing per se had been, way before the lover relationship came in, that is way before the poem had found or even wanted an addressee, before writing was functionalized in the way the world is wont to do to us as we are led to enter it after childhood, when it was still pure, free, playful expenditure, joyful waste, crayons on the wallpaper of the nursery, I came upon yet another language I had been writing in. I had learned to read very early on, at 4 or 5 & instantly been hooked—even as I am today. Like every kid of that generation in a German-speaking area, among the first books shoved at me were Karl May's Reise Erzahlungen. Adventure stories. Set in the Wild West, in the Orient, the Balkans, Siberia, wherever. And to get the local color & show off his hero's wide learning, these tales were liberally sprinkled with sentences & sentence fragments in Arabic, Mescalero Apache, Sioux, Persian, Chinese—or at least in what May tried to pass off as such. And it was this totally heterogenous language-matter that fascinated me most, much more than the so-called adventures or than the even for a young boy transparently hypocritical colonialist-Christian schlock morality that pervaded those books: I remember how, in my grandparent's farm house, using huge ancient-looking & -smelling hardbound cattle-registers, & those old red-on-one-end, blue-on-the-other-end pencils & copying out all of those sentences, plus May's translations, or what passed as such, & trying to make up my own—secret—language out of all those shards. My name became N-Tschoschi, Ni-Kunta, Tatanka Yotanka, Winnetou.

I have come back recently to this matter, this language mater, matrix, the dura mater brain skin of my word-world, and am trying to write a work called Winnetou Old, named after the most Mayan of heroes, the fictitious Mescalero Apache chief Winnetou. At some point in this work there is a breakdown, or meltdown, where the playing & punning gets down to the most basic sound-levels & values of my language(s) as in this excerpt, which centers not on the absent "hamsa" but on the very present but altered alpha, first letter of all our alphabets:

yourappian Kulcher hang the big O
l'outre l'autre now becomes au-tonomia another
alphabeta
begins towards mania l'altera ô becomes au begins

towards dawn drawn with your fingers in
shellacked
snows
of old we have learned nothing from millennia your defense the great meltdown domination domination of the planets Uranus hello Mario Tronti Tony Negri Sergio Bologna Franco Piperno Oreste Scalzone hello & good-
bye
you too the night of Europe the workers no longer the edge will lift the whole construaimo una vita no longer the definite article

it is now a a aaaaa many aaaaaaaaaas construaimo u-naaaaa I love to build on declensions out of the east where the sun has entered the ass of the bone monkey the squatting monkey hands out its asshairs a rectum swallows it all back up ur-mouth ur-fear sun-eater Schreber Herr Doktor father father father tetanos bone monkey bone-setter stammers here your small sun unlanguaged sandwich between four a word a corpse from memory come back can I come back poling me mori I die cast myself a corpse ex changes color color rubor dolor

There you have it, briefly, the summa of my own confusions re language, or the one your write in versus all the other ones. The missing letter that give me over to the other language. I could have come at this from a different angle all together. For example, by maintaining—something I have often done—that all languages are foreign, that, as Robert Kelly once put it, language already is a second language. Or again, that one always writes in a foreign language, that poetry is a foreign language no matter what language one writes it in. & I could & do at times claim that I am not writing in a foreign language at all. I am still stuck in one basic current version of IndoEuropean, i.e., I function inside a euro-centric universe in which—if looked at from the outside—the similarities & samenesses are much more glaring than the differences we or I am making so much of right now.

NATHANIEL MACKEY

FROM SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU

SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU: 23

—rail band—

Another cut was on
the box as we pulled
in. Fall back though we
did once it ended,
"Wings
of a Dove" sung so
sweetly we flew. . .
The Station Hotel came
into view. We were in
Bamako. The same scene
glimpsed again and
again said to be a
sign. . .
As of a life sought
beyond the letter,
preached of among those
who knew nothing but,
at yet
another "Not yet" Cerno
Bokar came aboard, the
elevens and the twelves locked
in jihad at each other's
throats, bracketed light
lately revealed, otherwise
out. . .

Eleven men covered with
mud he said he saw. A
pond filled with water
white as milk. Three chanting
clouds that were crowds of
winged men and behind the
third
a veiled rider, Shaykh
Hamallah. . .

For this put under house arrest
the atavistic band at the
station reminded us, mediumistic
squall we'd have maybe made
good on
had the rails we rode been
Ogun's. . .
Souls in motion, conducive
to motion, too loosely
connected to be called a
band, yet "if souls converse"
vowed results from a dusty
record
ages old

•

Toothed chorus. Tight-jawed
singer. . . Sophic strain,
strewn voice, sophic stretch. . .
Cerno Bokar came aboard,
called
war the male ruse,
muttered
it under his breath, made sure
all within
earshot heard. . .
Not that the
hoarse Nyamukala flutes were

not enough, not that enough
meant something exact
anymore. . .
Bled by the effort but sang
even so, Keita's voice,
Kante's
voice, boast and belittlement
tossed back and forth. . .
Gassire's
lute was Djelimady Tounkara's
guitar,
Soundiata, Soumugoro, at each other's
throat. . . Tenuous Kin we called
our would-be band, Atthic Ensemble,
run
with as if it was a mistake we made
good on, gone soon as we'd
gotten
there

•

Neither having gone nor not having
gone, hovered, book, if it
was a
book, thought wicked with wing-stir,
imminent sting. . .It was the book
of having once been there we
thumbed, all wish to go back
let go, the what-sayer,
farther
north, insisting a story lay
behind the story he complained he
couldn't begin to infer. . .
What
made him think there was one
we wondered, albeit our what
almost immediately dissolved as we
came

to a tunnel, the train we took
ourselves to be on gone up in
smoke, people ever about to get
ready, unready, run between what,
not-what.
And were there one its name was
Ever After, a story not behind but in
front of where this was, obstinate
"were," were obstinate so susceptible,
thin
etic itch, inextricable
demur

•

Beginningless book thought to've
unrolled endlessly, more scroll
than book, talismanic strum.
As if all want were in his holding
a note only a half-beat
longer,
another he was now calling love
a big rope, sing less what
he did than sihg, anagrammic sigh,
from *war the male ruse* to *"were" the*
new ruse, the what-sayer,
sophic
stir. . .Sophic slide of a cloud across
tangency, torque, no book of a
wished else the where
we
thumbed

SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU: 24

Had gotten off the bus to
pee in a field on the side
of the road, the women
farther
in than the men, the low
hems of their dresses held
up, hips all but touching
the ground. . .
So it was
I took it they meant low
squat, loquat was code.
Something, heads tilted
birdlike,
we heard, beaks what before
had been lips. The world's
raw want, could it all have
been so compressed. . .
Land
late of one whom love set
wandering. . .
Thin peninsular reef, abstract
earth. . .
Took between his lips her
cusp of tongue's foretaste
of "heaven," ravenous
word they
heard urging them on, loquat
spin. Teeth broke biting
her lip, intoxicant meat he'd
been
warned against, took between
his teeth. . .Took between
his own her bleeding lip's
lost
lustre, ravenous
word

taken back, bitten into,
burst. . .

Whereupon the what-sayer
stepped
in and said something,
what plot there was one of
stepping on, stepping
off,
entrances more than
remembered, exits, djinns
making off with what where
we had
left, the slow toll it
took,
low grumbling of drums. . .
What we they exacted spread as
myth insisted, so that we for
whom the word was long dead
said so
be it, that on such-and-such a
day So-and-so woke up to
a new
life, rid of wish, moot
would-it-were-so, moot
remorse,
out no less a part of it
than in, in and out,
such the one place they
might meet,
mute School-of-What-Hurts
her
husk of a voice
revive
them in

•

Push come to shove she'd
be with him he thought,
push came to shove.
Raz was the city in
ruins
they ran away from,
legs bent ready to
spring, hellbent on
heaven,
lit between themselves a
star.
Rubbed, made war on
"were," stayed within,
caught in a flame she'd
have warned was coming,
The low wrath of Dadaoua
painted on a wall,
thin
scribbling thick with
what depth he read into it,
sat
sipping hemlock it seemed. . .

Another beating. Business-as-
usual.
Chapter 8,281,404. . .
A tale
too inane to be told, she'd
say, "say" so unequal
to the task she'd sing, a
sound so to the side of enoughness,
a night in Tunisia, a
chicken
with lips. . .

Had it been
he she advised he'd have
ignored it. That it
was something he'd overheard

hit home. . .Irritant
"say" so abrasive its rasp
took up
asking what but an unintended
sign would get it said. . .
This
in a place named No-Such-Place,
burred
speech of a ghost named
Not-All-There

Asked had he been hit he
answered yes. Ouab'da he
called it as if it was a
place, made-up name he
made mean "beat with clubs,
kicked,"
what as-if there was long
since fallen away. It was
a place brought boots
to the ribs, batons to the
back. . .
Ouab'da he called it, said it
was a place, knew, if not already,
he'd be hit. . .
Split lift,
sat ravished, over-
taken, overwhelmed. . .
Ouab'da
he named it, said it was a
place,
never to go back
there again

SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU: 25

—"zar" nth part—

Throughout it all a buzzing
drum at our backs. Again
it was a train we were on.
Outside the window came a sign
read "Ouar," we scratched our
heads.
No such place on the schedule we
read, no such where. . .Why no
"Not yet" yelled now we shouted
out, doubting what good it
would do. . .
Saw Ouagadou, sought Ouadada. No
point protesting warned a mouth
made of catfish teeth. . .
Chanted
Where is your love, chanted *Run,*
come, rally, chanted *What, blood,*
put it in place, pull it
apart,
chanted *Chant down Babylon*. . .
On its rise we the dismembered
winced. Inasmuch as what we want
was unreal there it stood, "four
times fallen asleep" not even
close,
came to where they'd always been.
Bombed
origins, splendorless, war their
one resolve. Reich without end its
aim, omnibus hitlist. . .
Hurtless.
Unctuous.
Oiled. . .

Tarred birds' wings. End-of-the-
world augury, new world omen. . .
First blood sweet to the tongue,
bitter going down. Tenuous. Ouagadou D.C.
Mothered in blood, on blood
gotten
big beyond limit. Said of its
demise we welcomed it, whispering
limit's will be done
even so. . .
Heard
my head say cradle me, myself cradle
my head. Wondered whose head I meant,
what voice I spoke with, volitionless,
feet
stuck to the floor. . .

A balloon tore
loose, floated off, I called it
back. . .B'Head looked in from
on high. . .
Said a bomb fell on its foot, said
B'Dot, said killing floor. Better
to be somewhere else we thought,
called
elsewhere Mozambique, Might've-Been. . .
B'Legless.
Last resort. . .
Adamant muses in lewd
array, thin trumpeter's lips against
the mouthpiece pressed against angular
exit, glimpse of a ghost, gaze a
ghost
would give, hushed if not harbored,
hummed. . .

Was it a place we wondered, my head spun,
bodiless, hit by nobody knew what. . .
Beneath crosshairs hoisted in green

light, earth of Hurqalya, obstinate,
caught. . . Genetic letter, inaccessible
alphabet. . .
Begged of the moment be my Imam. . .
Lost cause the lore you lament he
announced, said of the Udhrite
school
soy la ley, said say tonu soy. . .

Was it a place we wondered, balloonless,
bewildered. Hollow be my name I grumped. . .
Arab strings made us neigh like
horses. Atavist run, pa'l monte,
mounted, adamant heads made of
heartbreak
brass

FERNANDO CASTRO

THE VANISHING NAVEL OF THE WORLD: AN ILLUSTRATED STORY SELDOM SEEN OR TOLD

I. The historical backdrop

At the end of the nineteenth century, Peru, like many other Latin American countries, sought to establish itself in the community of modern nations. After bankruptcy (1876), an ignominious defeat in the War of the Pacific against Chile (1879-1883), and the political turmoil that followed it, the country attained around 1900 a certain degree of financial solvency. Being predominantly an agrarian country, political power was held directly or indirectly by landowners who ruled ruthlessly over impoverished Indians and mestizos. Indian rebellions to this unjust state of affairs, like the 1885 uprising of Atusparia, continued unabated well into the 1920s. This period from about 1890 to 1919—which the Peruvian historian, Jorge Basadre, has appropriately called the "Aristocratic Republic"—and the eleven-year period of the regime of Augusto B. Leguía that followed it, constitute the temporal frame of the photography discussed in part two of this essay.

The Andean cities of Arequipa, Cuzco and Puno in southern Peru were the vertexes of a cultural, political, and economic triangle during this time. They enjoyed relative independence from the central government of Lima and, except for Arequipa, their population was mostly Indian. Indeed, Peru was predominantly an Indian country and that fact came to be regarded both positively and negatively by members of the political and intellectual elites. Some regarded the Indian as an unredeemable savage who stood in the way of progress and modernization; others, saw him as a noble savage whose telluric ties to the land made him the foundation of a modern Peruvian nation. Curiously, both friends and foes of the Indian cause referred to the situation of the Indian as the "Indian problem."

Qosqo, as the city of Cuzco has been recently renamed, is the quechua word for "navel" or "center." It was the capital of the Tahuantinsuyo or Inca Empire. But at the turn of the century the city was overridden with filth and infestation. Throughout the century, it had lost 65% of its population to recurrent epidemics of typhoid, hepatitis and smallpox. Culturally and

economically the city had reached its nadir. But even as it did so, its new ascent had begun. In 1893 the *Centro Científico del Cuzco* was established in order to study the geography and hydrography of the region. New roads were built and in 1908 the railroad finally connected Cuzco to the Pacific Ocean. The following year, shots were fired at the University San Antonio de Abad. People thought the students were fighting over the only three women attending the university at that time. In fact, their revolt was a result of their unanswered demands for reforming the curriculum. The university was closed and the following year, president Leguía named Cornell professor of statistics and economics, Albert Anthony Giesecke (1883-1968), president of San Antonio de Abad.

At first, Giesecke was regarded with suspicion by the students who had revolted only a year earlier. After all, not only was the new president not a *cusqueño*, but he was a *gringo*. Nevertheless, Giesecke's casual, pragmatic style changed the philosophy of learning and research in San Antonio de Abad and gained him the sympathy of students who were later to become part of the *indigenista* intelligentsia. Under Giesecke's "reign of tennis" which lasted until 1923, a true Copernican revolution took place where instead of simply assimilating European knowledge, students were encouraged to learn about their own history and society. Thus, during the decade of the Mexican Revolution, World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, the research theses produced in that university were predominantly about regional matters. In a sense, the events at San Antonio de Abad anticipated the *Movimiento de la Reforma Universitaria* whose official birth occurred in Argentina in 1919. The idea that a university is not an island of learning but an intellectual avant-garde leading the struggle for social reform, has left a deep mark in Latin American history ever since.

Another event contributed to make Cuzco the center of gravity in Peru once again. In 1911 Hiram Bingham led the Yale University and National Geographic Society expedition that serendipitously discovered Machu Picchu. This archaeological finding satisfied for different reasons at least three groups of people: the international consumer of exotica, the *indigenistas*, and modernizing nationalists. The latter saw in this finding something comparable to the European monuments that had become the basic ingredients of national histories. Machu Picchu and the Inca Empire became the analogues of the Coliseum and the Roman Empire. Not surprisingly, in the luxurious books that the Leguía regime published for the 1921 centennial of Peruvian independence, the writers boast of Peru's Inca past and treasures.

What was Peruvian *indigenismo?* As many a social scientist has pointed out, the force behind *indigenismo* did not come from those enlightened and well-meaning intellectuals who are properly called *indigenistas*, nor

from the half-hearted attempts of President Augusto Leguía's regime to deal with *el problema del indio*, but from the Indian insurrections that occurred during this time. These rebellions were a reaction to the abuses inflicted upon the Indians by the landowning whites and *mestizos*. Usurpation of Indian lands, excessive and unjustified taxation, forced labor, torture and killings, were all grievances against the feudal system of land tenure called *gamonalismo (gamonal* meaning "landowner").

An interesting case took place in 1901 when Indian delegates of the district of Santa Rosa (Puno) arrived in Lima to present their grievances to the central government. An investigative commission headed by the highly respected Alejandrino Maguiña went to Puno to find out the facts. It determined that three Indian political organizers had been traveling the countryside inciting Indians to fight for their civil rights and freedom of commerce. The latter may seem rather curious were it not for the fact that behind the aggression of the *gamonales* at this time was the high profits yielded by the wool trade. Indians wanted to sell their production freely according to the rules of an open market. In contrast, the *gamonales* coerced Indian producers to sell to them so that they could in turn profit by selling to the export firms of Arequipa.

During *El Oncenio*, the eleven-year "modernizing dictatorship" of President Leguía, he demagogically attempted to provide the Indians with some protection against abuse by the *gamonales*. Leguía's aim was to weaken his enemies of the *Civilista* party, supported by the *gamonales*. In 1920, Leguía endorsed the creation of the *Comité Pro-Derecho Indígena Tahuantinsuyo* to mediate between Indians and *gamonales*. But as the *Comité* became more sympathetic to the plight of Indians, organized congresses where the Indians represented themselves for the first time and rallied the support of known radicals like Hildebrando Castro-Pozo, José Carlos Mariátegui and Pedro Zulén, Leguía substituted it with the more innocuous *Patronato de la Raza Indígena*. Yet even the latter, played an important role on behalf of Indian rights. In Cuzco, the *Patronato* was presided over by Bishop Pedro Farfán, who is represented in the painting inside the self-portrait of Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar.

Hence, one face of *indigenismo* starts as a grass-roots movement and develops into a civil rights movement on behalf of the Indian population of Peru. But there is also an intellectual *indigenismo* and an *indigenismo* of literature and the arts. Professor Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez traces intellectual *indigenismo* back to the writings of anarchist poet and thinker Manuel Gonzáles Prada. In Cuzco, Gonzáles Prada had many followers, including Luis Velasco Aragón—who appears in one of the Chambi photographs addressing what is said to be a butcher's union. On account of his long hair and wide-brimmed hat they called him "el cowboy" and his

diatribe *La Verdad en el Fango* (the muddied truth) gained him public acclaim and political persecution. *Cusqueño indigenistas* like Uriel García and Luis Valcárcel became very influential in the intellectual life of Peru of the 1920s.

The term *indigenismo* in pictorial arts was first used to describe José Sabogal's paintings of Indians. In its first occurrences, it was a pejorative term, as much as "impressionism" once was. The subject matter of Sabogal offended bourgeois and oligarchic taste because, by and large, the Peruvian ruling classes aspired to live with the accoutrements of European culture and not with the local reminders of their own reality. Despite the calamities of post-independence Peruvian history the ruling class did not forget that Lima had been one of the two main Spanish viceroyalties; a fact which translated into a life of wealth, leisure and culture for some largely based on the exploitation of the Indian. The paintings of Sabogal were called *pintura de lo feo* (painting of ugliness) by the defenders of "good taste" because they did not conform to European canons of beauty and because they exalted the Indian.

Sabogal visited Cuzco in 1919—on his return to Peru from Europe and Argentina—and he suffered an epiphany of sorts in the rarefied *cusqueño* atmosphere. A year before him, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who was to become the founder of the radical *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* party, had been in Cuzco also. His contact with the *cusqueño indigenistas* eventually gave rise to his panamericanism and indo-americanism. *Cusqueño indigenismo* also influenced Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui. Upon Sabogal's insistence, Mariátegui opted to name "Amauta" the avant-garde magazine which he first thought to name "Vanguardia" ("Amauta" is quechua for "teacher"). Indeed, Mariátegui embraced *indigenismo* and imbued it with Marxist ideology.

Cuzco's rebirth was not only intellectual but also entrepreneurial. Without any help from the government the wealthy families of Cuzco (later photographed by Martín Chambi) like the Lomellinis and the Montes, financed a hydroelectric power plant that brought electricity to Cuzco in 1914. The availability of electricity allowed the textile and beer industries to expand.

In the meantime, in the 1920s president Leguía increased the power of the central government and deprived the provinces of government assistance. Intent on breaking the power of the *gamonales* whose territory included Arequipa, Cuzco and Puno, Leguía consciously neglected the region. Meanwhile, in Lima he commemorated the 1921 centennial of Peruvian independence with lavish celebrations that made the roaring twenties one masquerade party after another. Having lived in England, Leguía spoke English with a British accent and many would have made him

king as he welcomed foreign dignitaries, aristocrats and noblemen. Different countries presented Peru with gifts on its anniversary. The value of the gift was usually proportional to their share in the Peruvian economy. Italy's gift was the beautiful oval building which is still occasionally called *Museo Italiano;* Japan's was a monument to Manco Capac, legendary founder of the Inca Empire; and the United States' was the rather modest but beautiful trio of nudes holding a fountain. The latter was placed in the newly inaugurated *Avenida Leguía* (which changed its name to "Arequipa" after the downfall of Leguía).

Of course, all of this presupposed a certain level of material welfare. World War I had a positive effect upon the Peruvian economy and in 1920 export revenues soared to unprecedented peaks. Up until this time, most of those revenues found their way back into Peru. But as foreign investment in the extractive mining sector increased, capital fled elsewhere. Yet Leguía continued to expand the size of the central government as if revenues were still increasing. His plans for modernization were helped along by the fact that credit turned amicably to Latin America during that time. Eventually, it was precisely Arequipa, Puno and Cuzco that conspired to oust Leguía, but for the duration of the *oncenio*, they agonized economically and socially.

II. The photographers

By the end of the nineteenth century the fascination for distant, picturesque and exotic worlds had become widespread. The more adventuresome romantics, like Paul Gauguin sailed off in search of primitive paradises; whereas the sedentary collectors gathered photographic postcards from faraway landscapes, peoples, and architecture. Photographers from all over the world joined the lucrative market that filled the albums of well-to-do families with views of Japanese samurai, bare-breasted African natives, Egyptian pyramids, and vestiges of ancient civilizations.

In the highlands of Peru, **Miguel Chani** (1865-1951) was partially motivated by that market. His images of Indian natives next to pre-Columbian sites combine two sought-after collectibles: the exotic native and ancient architecture. Chani, about whom little is known, must have been a very prosperous photographer for he owned studios in Arequipa, Cuzco and Puno. His relatively few surviving negatives suggest that, although he was primarily a nineteenth century studio photographer, he managed to free himself from many of the strict portrait conventions of his century. Moreover, one of his portraits shows a non-Indian woman dressed

as an Indian with a backdrop of Sacsahuaman, the Inca fortress that oversees Cuzco.

If the date of that image is circa 1900, then Chani is not only one of the first artists to give evidence of the changing attitudes regarding Indian culture, but also one of its first activists among image-makers. The Inca motif of that studio backdrop is rare even among later photographers whose backdrops usually show European castles, romantic classic columns and the like.

The most eccentric and flamboyant of the Cuzco photographers was **Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar** (1878-1951): actor, painter, photographer. Although, not a *cusqueño* himself, Figueroa-Aznar found his way into the hearts of the Cuzco society through his bohemian ways—a trait which *cusqueños* apparently found so endearing that he managed to marry into one of the city's most important families. He married the niece of Archbishop Benigno Yábar. Figueroa-Aznar's work alternates between the solemnity of the cloister and the light-heartedness of the theatre. Through his ecclesiastical connection, Figueroa gained access to a very important clientele which included not only the wealthy, but also the clergy. *El Salón Azul* (the blue room) is a rare view of the private world of a rich clergyman. The spectator is overwhelmed by the iconographic opulence of the room. The light invading the room shines on the pictures and their idolaters as if to sanctify their cult of images. In the equestrian portrait of his beautiful wife, Ubaldina Yábar, she is presented as a romantic heroine. However, the unfailing presence of an Indian servant in a dark corner of the typical courtyard of a Cuzco house brings one back to earth.

It is not clear what led Figueroa to *indigenista* themes. His first exhibits ranged over a varied subject matter in which the Indian did not figure. Due to his involvement in local theatre, he often portrays himself not as himself but as a troubadour, monk or other amusing personae. His sequence of himself as a spurned bohemian augurs well for the school of cinematography which later developed in Cuzco. Given the many pictures he took of histrionic scenes, we venture to guess that his *indigenista* faith matured on the boards. The first evidence of that conversion is from his 1916 exhibit and that date coincides with the beginnings of theatre revival in Cuzco. Theatre with Indian themes had gone underground since the late XVIII century when Viceroy Toledo forbade Ollantay—which was allegedly performed for the most famous of all Indian rebels: Tupac Amaru II. Or, Figueroa-Aznar may have continued the work of Chani in a slightly different vein. After all, the studio at Calle Márquez #67 which he occupied, first belonged to Chani and later belonged to Chambi. Some scholars suspect that what today is Chambi's archive may very well contain images of these photographers who were in Cuzco before him.

It has been suggested that Figueroa's *indigenismo* ran parallel to the intellectual developments at the Universidad San Antonio de Abad under Giesecke; that it deepened as he spent time in the Yábar's hacienda of Paucartambo in the eastern slope of the Andes and that it was potentiated by the discovery of Machu Picchu in 1911. Whatever the case may be, by the time Chambi arrived in Cuzco and shared his studio, Figueroa had already rehearsed an *indigenista* script that Chambi would later perform perhaps with more authenticity because in spite of his dandyism, the latter was virtually indistinguishable from his Indian subjects.

The year 1920—when **Martín Chambi** (1891-1973) allegedly arrived in Cuzco—was blessed by an all-time peak in Peru's export revenues. The war which had devastated Europe had brought prosperity to the textile, rubber and mining industries. Nevertheless, that year also marked the slow decline of Cuzco, Puno and Arequipa. The lure of modern life, however, with its conveniences and its promise of social mobility, was enthusiastically endorsed by radicals and conservatives, by Caucasians, mestizos and Indians, by rich and poor. Most importantly, it was fully endorsed by the *indigenistas.* It is this endorsement that is most important in understanding that movement and its effect on Chambi. An *indigenismo* without modernity is merely picturesque; a merely picturesque *indigenismo* as an explanation for Chambi's most important work leaves most of it unaccounted for. Chambi did indulge in picturesque, pictorialistic images in the exhibitions which he curated himself. Only his "rediscovered" work features the more modern images that are also the most compelling. Although that issue deserves further attention, here we will simply grant full rights to all of his images: those he showed, those he published, those he was commissioned to do and those whose motivations research will hopefully clarify.

How close was Chambi's association with the *indigenistas?* Two instances are worth mentioning. The first is his personal friendship with Roberto Latorre, owner of the most important *indigenista* avant-garde magazine of Cuzco called *Kosko* (1924-1925). Chambi supported this magazine by buying announcements for his studio *Arte Fotográfico M. J. Chambi.* It was risky business to do so because of the magazine's communist links and its proximity to members of the *Logia Federalista* movement—bitterly opposed to the Leguía regime. *Kosko* gathered together the best minds of *indigenismo:* Uriel García, Luis Valcárcel, Gamaliel Churata and others. Chambi's second important connection to *indigenismo* is precisely with Gamaliel Churata. According to the now deceased Manuel Chambi, Martín's son, Churata was a friend and frequent guest at their household. The friendship which may have developed between Chambi and Churata may be largely based on the fact that Churata was a *paisano* from Puno and that of all the renowned *indigenistas,* Churata lived closer

to his principles. Proof of which is the fact that he married an Indian not being an Indian himself. Most other *indigenistas* were Indian in soul but not in kin. Chambi, although probably a *mestizo*, was in looks as close to being an Indian as they come

"Gamaliel Churata," Arturo Peralta's nom-de-plume for Churata was the Tristan Tzara of *indigenismo*. He adopted dadaism in his quest for authentic cultural expression. He published a very influential avant-garde magazine called *Boletín Titicaca*. In it he published the work of members of his literary group Orkopata and the Peruvian and Latin American literary avant-garde. He also reviewed European avant-garde magazines like *Der Sturm*. Churata's most famous work *El pez de oro* is coded in stream-of-consciousness automatic writing merging European aesthetic form with modernist *indigenista* themes. Though Chambi seems to have had a bright, intuitive mind, he was no intellectual; but it is still hard to believe that the magnetic, persuasive, almost messianic personality of Churata (Aymara word for "the enlightened one") could have had no effect on him. If he did in fact have an effect, much of Chambi's most modernistic images become clearer.

Chambi's portrait of his friend Mario Perez Yañez on a motorcycle with the blurred girl giving the sensation of speed (a favorite theme of the avant-garde) is well known. But the portrait of Chambi himself on the same motorcycle has only recently been published. The fact that the brand of these first motorcycles was *Indian* must have impressed the Indian population with the idea that modernity was destined for them, and vice versa. That image together with his self-portrait holding a negative, the bride on the stairway of the Montes house, the children playing cards and the recently found overview shot of a multitude of men with hats do not belong to the repertoire of *indigenismo*—in the narrow painterly sense. But it does belong to the modernist *indigenismo* of *Kosko* and *Boletín Titicaca*.

The visual similarities and systematic taxonomic project of Chambi to photograph the different ethnic groups of the region has led people to compare his work with that of German photographer August Sander. But the nightmarish and ironic approach in images like the *Gadea Wedding* and *Indians at a court of law* link Chambi's work to other artists connected to the New Objectivity like the expressionist painters Max Beckmann and Otto Dix.

Chambi's portrait of Velasco Astete and the shot of his airplane hovering over Cuzco is part of an epic story faithfully narrated in the pages of *Kosko*. Velasco Astete was the first *cusqueño* pilot who flew across the Andes in an Italian plane bought by the city of Cuzco and named after it. Man and machine incarnated *cusqueños'* dream of being in communication with the modern world. A 1925 cover of *Kosko* depicts Velasco Astete as one with his machine, as Spaniard conquistadores and their horses had

seemed as one to the eyes of the Indians. Velasco Astete became a hero of epic proportions, a winged angel in the midst of mortals aspiring to the elusive blessings of modernity. Almost completely blank except for the small silhouette of a small plane in the distant sky—was a cover of *Kosko* for the issue of a posthumous homage to Velasco Astete as he crashed, only weeks after his spectacular arrival in Cuzco. Chambi photographed his funeral which buried the dreams of *cusqueños* at a time when they most needed to have hopes. From then on, *cusqueños* redirected their energies and would join efforts with that sinister character, Luis Sánchez Cerro (also photographed by Chambi), to overthrow Leguía.

Many writers deny a strong flow of information from Europe and the U.S. to these photographers. To be sure, until we began work on the Vargas Bros. of Arequipa there was no smoking gun. But pictorialist connection has been fully confirmed with the existence of pictorialist literature at the Vargas library. Magazines such as *Foto* (Barcelona) and *Foto Magazine* (Buenos Aires)—of which the Vargas were official representatives—suggest the bold hypothesis that the aesthetics of *indigenismo* are not only rooted in 19th century *costumbrismo* but also in pictorialism. From Peter Henry Emerson to Missone, Puyo and Stieglitz definite and precise parallels can be drawn to account for at least the points of departure of most of the Peruvian photographers we have mentioned. Most importantly, many *indigenista* paintings can be arrived at from some of the pictorialist photographs in those magazines by way of a mental experiment where llamas are substituted for sheep and Indian peasants for European shepherds. There is no doubt that the Vargas Bros. fully assimilated the pictorialist creed. Fortunately for us, they wrote several articles about photography and its role in art. Some of these writings are part of a 1929 debate about the status of photography as art which they had with a poet who had written an adverse review of their show. When said poet challenged them to a photographic duel, they responded by choosing the arms not of film but of poetry: verse.

By 1921, **Carlos** (1885-1977) and **Miguel Vargas** (1886-1979) were widely acclaimed for their bromoil portraits and night photography. But a preliminary inspection of their archive shows their photographic interests to have a wider thematic range than any of their peers. The ingenuity which they show in their night photography spills over to every task they set themselves to. In a sense, their work is more removed from *indigenista* concerns. But the Vargas thread is as important to the image of the country than the work of the others. Peru is simply that kind of schizophrenic country; it is Indian and it is European, it is rural and cosmopolitan. There are indeed a few images in their work with *indigenista* overtones, but they are simply the exception that confirms the rule. They simply show how by

the late 1920s almost everybody was doing the Indian-thing. Social commentary is not in their photographic agenda, but what does seem to be is the expression of the *zeitgeist*—at least that of Arequipa. The fascination with nocturnes is shared by members of the *Aquelarre*, an iconoclastic group of literati with whom they had close contacts. Dandies and bohemians themselves, they had an unabashed penchant for novelty. Their gallery was an island of fascination for the curious wanderer and their devotion for their city echoes that of Sudek for Prague or Francesco Ferrucio Leiss for Venice. Just as Nadar was the first to show the work of impressionists in Paris, the Vargas Bros. were the first to show the work of *indigenista* painters in their gallery; they also showed the photographic work of Chambi and Figueroa-Aznar.

Their comfortable house and their high standing in *Arequipeño* society is an indication that the Vargas Bros. fared better than anybody else in the field. **Crisanto Cabrera**'s story (1904-1990), on the other hand, does not have a happy ending; his recent death in a miserly asylum was ignored by even his most immediate family. Cabrera started as a helper in Chambi's studio in his late teens. As soon as he saved enough money to have a camera he set up a darkroom in his brother's home and went to work seeking a clientele which could probably not afford a Chambi portrait. Thus, his work is important because he picks up where Chambi's ideological motivations and/or self-interest stop. His "touch" is every bit as masterly as his master's but bolder, more agile, and humorous. His image of a faked automobile accident light-heartedly anticipates the dangers of technological change.

It would not be surprising to find out that Cabrera played an important role in many of Chambi's masterly self-portraits. Shortly before he died, Crisanto would choreograph the inmates of the asylum and act as if he was going to take a picture. "I'm a great photographer," he would announce. But when his subjects laughed at his imaginary camera, he would complain that it had been stolen.

The twenties were also the decade when American capital consolidated its power in Peru especially in the mining and oil sector. Buying off its competitors, the Cerro de Pasco Copper Corporation become the single most important force in Peruvian economy and copper became the main export. But this extractive export did not rebound back into the national economy the way exports in years past had. Politicians and local capitalists, concerned with their short-term well-being, failed to see the long term implications of surrendering economic power to foreign capital. Thinkers like Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre raised objections to foreign penetration of capital; but not being economic agents themselves, their outcries had little or no effect. Moreover, their iconoclastic ideologies often blinded

them to the finer aspects of this penetration and the available options to counteract it.

In the central Andean highlands, artificial mining towns sprouted usually in quite inhospitable desolate areas. The job opportunities created for Peruvians were unhealthy, dangerous and badly paid. Would-be miners left their peasant communities deceived by *enganchadores* and by the lure of a modern job. In the photographs of **Sebastián Rodríguez** (1896-1968), miners proudly pose before the camera wearing the attire of their newly acquired status. Rodriguez was commissioned by the mining company to take ID mug shots of the miners; but in his modest studio Rodríguez also worked for the miners themselves who wished to send their folks back home an image of themselves. Sebastián's brother, Braulio, who possessed painterly talents, painted the backdrops for his studio. The Swiss chalet in many of the studio portraits was copied by Braulio from a box of Swiss candy.

This incongruity is as moving as it is comic, for in the dreams of these miners who usually worked to save money to improve their farms—an illusion that the *enganche* system would prevent from happening—mining was the way out of their misery. Instead they found their life and health slowly disintegrating in Morococha—"the many colored lake." By contrast, life inside the walls natives would never cross, American employees and their families enjoyed the comforts of modern living and country club leisure—golf course included. Rodríguez, who was trained by Luis Ugarte, one of the most prestigious photographers of Lima, did his commissioned work with a sense of mission that he carried over to his numerous photographic expeditions to the surrounding areas. Unfortunately, upon his death, most of his work was lost or destroyed. Most of the images which do exist were those meaningful to the history of the family; such as the one where the entire family poses in front of a hydroplane floating on the icy waters of Lake Morococha.

III. Conclusion

The literary and painterly *indigenismo*, like many art manifestations that follow political agendas, tended to be superficial. Instead of probing into the depths of the Indian person and his culture, *indigenismo* merely glorified them. Only later *indigenistas* like José María Arguedas successfully achieved depth. On the other hand, the more interesting and modern *indigenistas* like Gamaliel Churata have until recently received little or no recognition. Indeed, the modernist aspect of *indigenismo*, so conspicuous in this photography, has not been sufficiently explored in the literary and

painterly manifestations of the movement. The photographers of this time have also received little recognition. Although they engaged in the same project of reevaluation of autochthonous culture, they did not follow the *indigenista* recipes of glorification. Their creed, like that of Sander, was rather, a new objectivity.

In Peru, no museum includes in its collection a work by Chambi or the Vargas Brothers. The Museo de Arte de Lima has a collection of Sebastian Rodríguez's work only because it was donated to it; but it does not show any of it. Yet, it is the photographic work of these photographers that may prove to be the most enduring and penetrating artistic legacy of this period of Peruvian history.

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SELF-PORTRAIT HOLDING A GLASS-NEGATIVE

Martín Chambi

INDIANS AT A COURT OF LAW

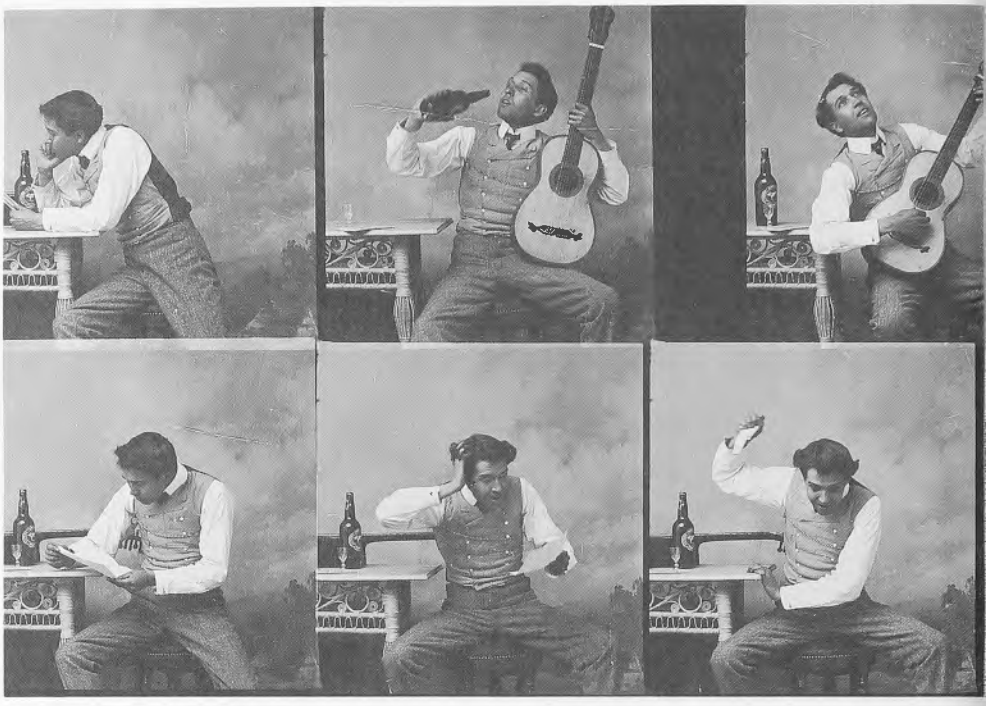
Martín Chambi

MUSICIANS

Martín Chambi
Cuzco, circa 1925

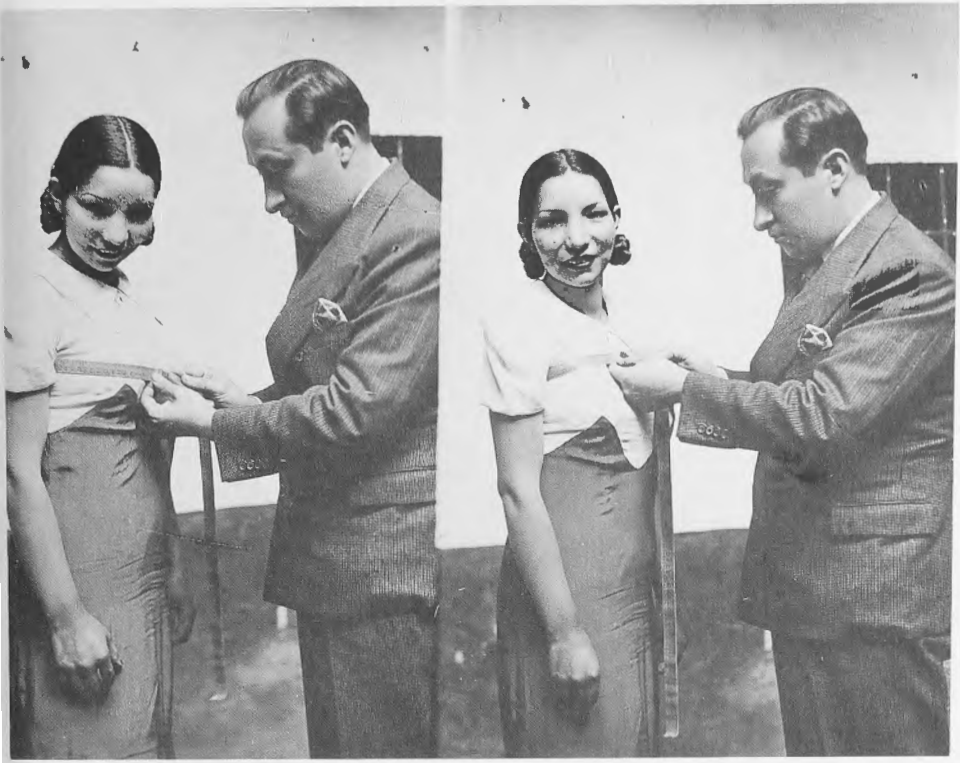
Q'ERO INDIAN

Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar
Cuzco, circa 1910



SELF-PORTRAIT AS SPURNED BOHEMIAN

Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar
Cuzco, circa 1910

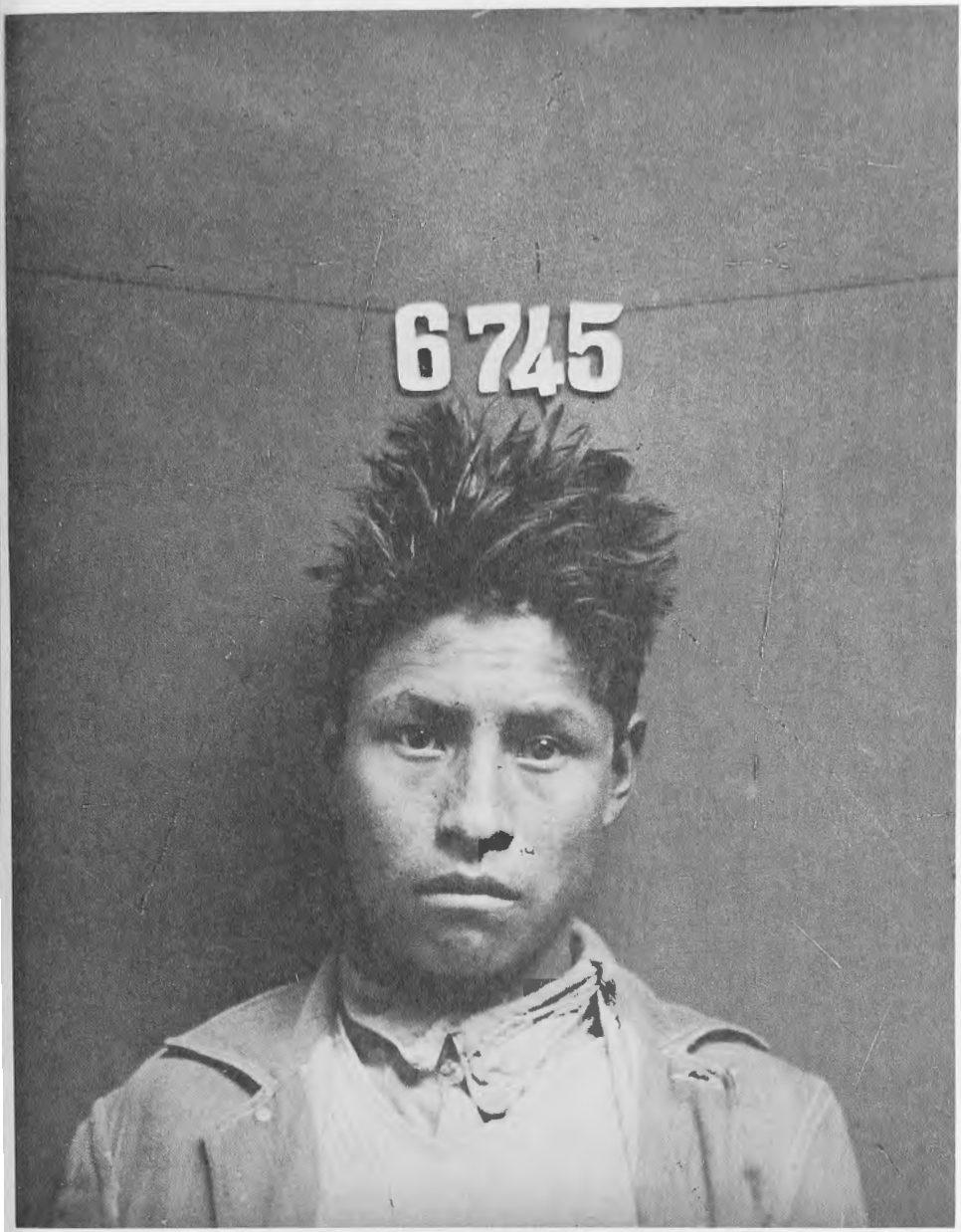


TAILOR TAKING MEASUREMENTS

Crisanto Cabrera
Cuzco, circa 1930

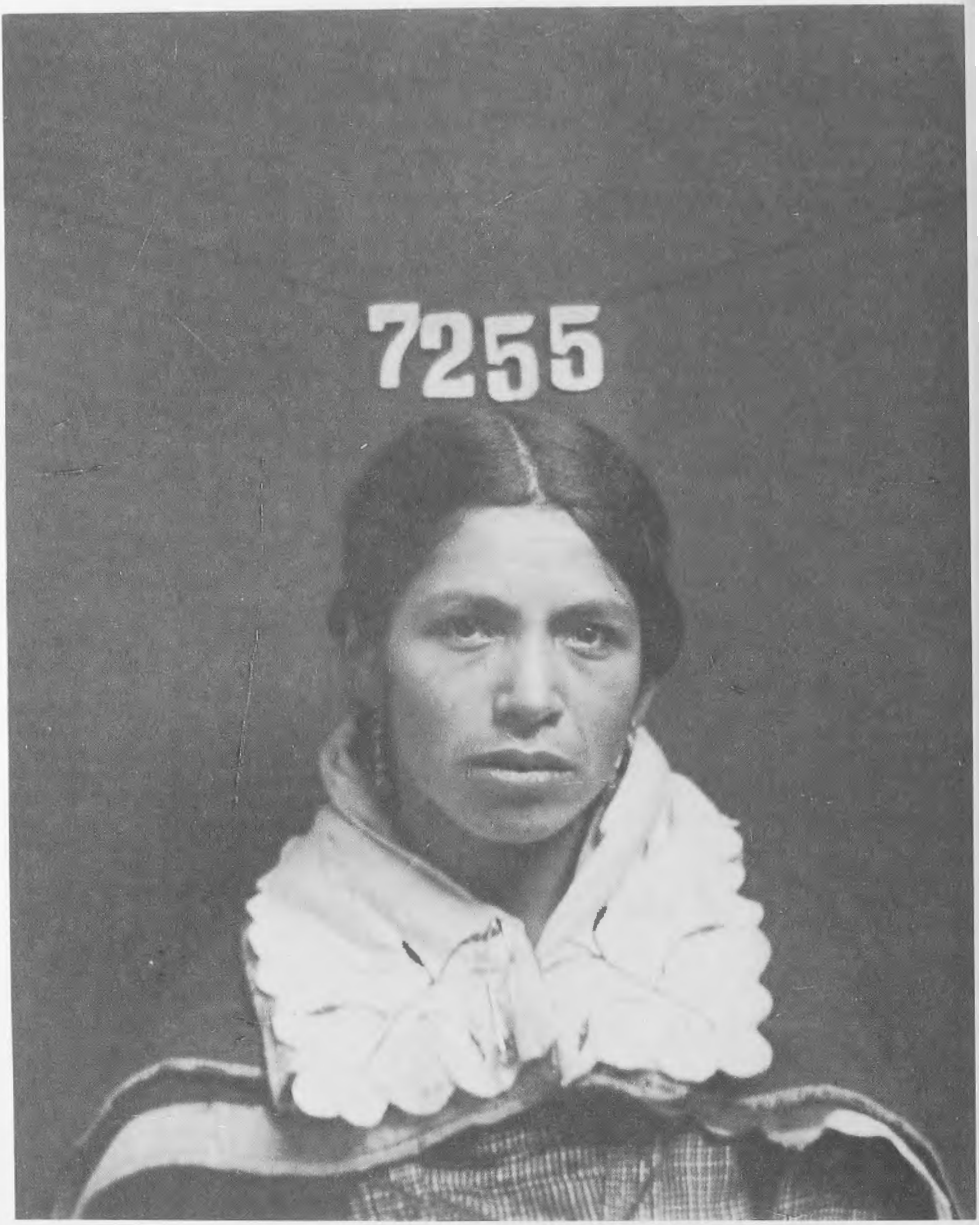
FAMILY WITH SHEEP

Crisanto Cabrera
Cuzco, circa 1925



MINER

Sebastián Rodríguez
Morococha, circa 1930



WOMAN MINER

Sebastián Rodríguez
Morococha, circa 1930

DANDY

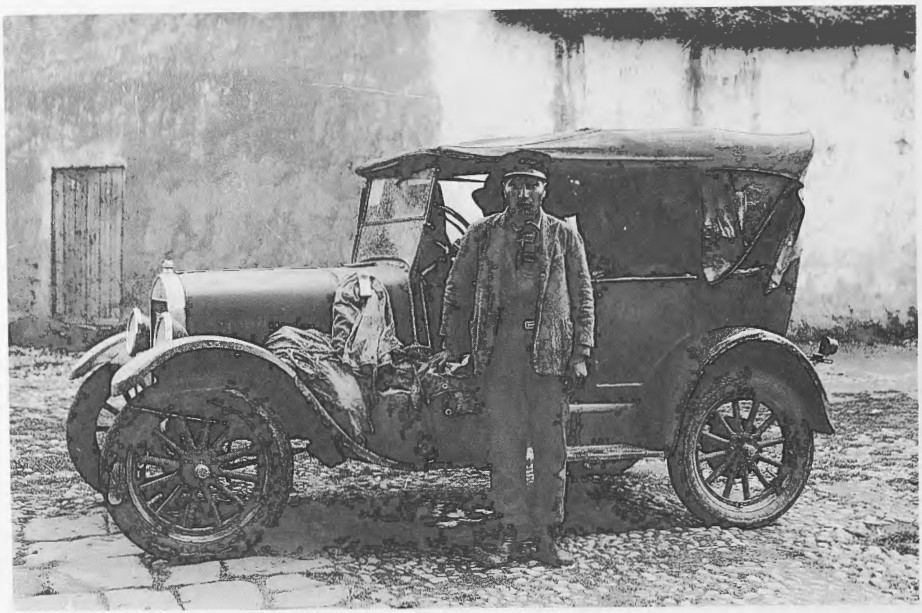
Crisanto Cabrera
Cuzco, circa 1925

MINERS IN THE STUDIO

Sebastián Rodríguez
Morococha, circa 1930

NEWLY-ARRIVED FAMILY

Sebastián Rodríguez
Morococha, circa 1930

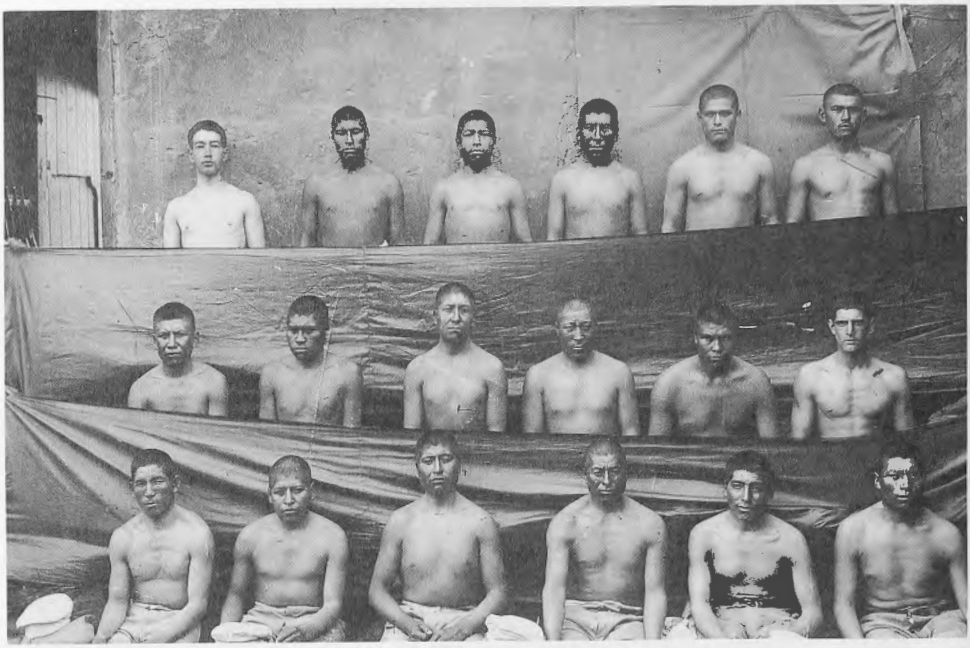


INDIAN CHAUFFEUR

Varga Hnos
Arequipa, circa 1920

INDIANS & MESTIZOS

Avelino Ochoa
Cuzco, circa 1930



SOLDIERS WITH SHAVED HEADS

Varga Hnos
Arequipa, circa 1920

VILLAGE SCHOOL

Avelino Ochoa
Cuzco, 1925

MESTIZA WITH INCA BACKDROP

Miguel Chani
Cuzco, crica 1910

HENRI MICHAUX

THE BEGINNINGS

(Tr. from the French by James Wanless)

A

Given a piece of chalk to hold in his hand, a child will draw on the sheet of paper a disorderly array of encircling lines, some almost right over others.

Overflowing with vitality, he makes more of them, and more, endlessly.

. . . . . .

Around, around, whirling lines
of big, entangled, awkward
circles
immediately begun over
again, again
like spinning a top

Circles. Desires for circularity.
Precedence to turning

In the beginning is
REPETITION

Grasp
only circles encompass
encompass anything at all
everything
the known, the unknown as it passes
arrives, comes on
comes back

Lines circulating from the itch to enclose
(to comprise? to hold? to hold back?)

Finally, a tangle
a teeming thready tangle

. . . . . .

At this age the child experiences an unparalleled pleasure in everything that turns, nothing being more desirable than riding wooden horses that turn, rising and falling rhythmically, the age when hoops and balloons are almost magical.

Now, by himself, by his own powers. . .this miniature of man will make things go around, so that he can watch it happen, not lose track of it. But more than the lines themselves, the gesture matters, the act, the "doing" of circles.

In what period more than early childhood would one feel circularity, which is made by turning, and comprises starting out and returning.

Risk and joy of starting out. Then wanting to return.

The journey and the return, the circle, the shape of both flight and refuge (the child not yet being liberated from the dread of someday being lost, beyond the scope of his family and incapable of ever returning).

First and unconscious abstraction, the circle, and how vast, and how often and differently arising, life itself, the life in life.

Circle, the common wall between the external and the internal, the thinkable and the imaginable. And between the perceived and the retained, for everything that will perhaps require enclosing later.

And intoxication sets in, the most natural of them all, intoxication with repetition, the primary drug.

Return, return, return, on and on and on.

The perfect circles of draftsmen and geometers do not interest the child. The imperfect circles the child makes do not interest adults, who call them scribbling, not seeing the point, the outburst, the gesture, the reach, the discovery, the exaltation in reproducing incidents of circularity, by which an as yet inexperienced hand grows stronger.

A line stage, an array of strokes criss-crossing every which way, may also show up at first, delight in wild gestures.

One day, one day after many days, escaping from the bacchic round, one curving line will not make the usual complete turn: it slows down, is about to stop. Much to the child's surprise, this particular line says something, keeps him in suspense, makes him stop, and consider. . .

The linear mark left on the paper reminds him of someone, his mother, or his father,. . .why, it's a man, the man representative of all men, man himself.

Whether he closes it completely or incompletely, the curved shape the child now sees approaching from afar will attract him more and more. Man has been located once and for all. The child has gotten hold of it, and he will make use of it, great use. It's a sure thing.

Confident, immediately "believing"—a truly exalting believing—he gets ready to encounter these man-shapes again, to rediscover them in his lines, to make them come back again, summoning them time and again, more and more easily.

Already the head is important. Dominant, as big as and bigger than the body—nothing special there—the head (which, in fact, does already know how to perform many functions—eating, sucking, biting, seeing, hearing, tasting, drawing away, kissing, jabbering, crying, laughing, making faces, scaring people, making them angry, perhaps talking), in his drawings the head is the kingpin, sovereign over all other body parts.

At the very outset, a "head period" (surprising prophetic knowledge!). And simultaneously, to an embryologist an accurate picture: just as in all mammalian embryos, the head of the human embryo is incredibly large.

For the child, the head alone is indispensable.

A head comes across a head, while the feet—mere accompaniment—may be missing, and the knee and the neck and everything else that will appear later. For the time being, he doesn't go back over it. He's still too young for touching up.

In his drawings he does not copy man; the child "catches" him. Some likeness has been spotted, however awkwardly he might handle it. He has made an analogy. And on his way now, even with only this first step taken, transported with joy, the child has discovered an essential of many future mental processes.

The best welcome first. Simplicity.

Ill-formed, poorly made, bodies still without arms, and arms without joints, coming out of the neck, or anywhere at all, out of the head, the chest, sticks, brooms extending all the way across and through the envelope of the bust, arms for spreading out, expanding, for stretching oneself.

Hands off in the distance, still farther off, as far away as possible, stiff, outspread fingers, at the self's outer limits, fingers.

Pleasures he is discovering.

Surface without mass, a simple thread encompassing a void-being, a bodiless body.

Bag-man, that's all, that's enough, looking out through two holes up top. Big-head man.

A bag. Strange. Or is it? Did he not previously live, and for months—before taking a single breath outside—enveloped?

Asked to draw somebody, just anybody, the child often forgets legs, and arms, and that his own anatomy is designed for movement. It's as if he had not yet opted for mobility; at least he doesn't feel it is essential.

Tall, it's a father; not as tall, with packages, a mother, woman from before the sensuality of contours, before the ambiguous, rounded breasts.

Upright, a two-legged post; that's a man. Close by, another, but one-legged and quite round; that's a tree.

How proximate are men and trees! Men, almost trees, pretty much like anything at all, man!

House with watchful windows, a great face reached by a countryside path.

Road in front for greeting, like a wish to be welcome, road meant to soothe, reassurance at the outset, and the door always clearly indicated, the door. . .mustn't be left out, entryway to the protection of home. . .and the doorknob, often included even in his very first drawings, the useful and difficult doorknob.

The most imprecise approximations do not bother the child. What matters is the *bringing together*. Such comparing, he discovers over and over again, is an obvious way of opening a door, which will lead to the opening of others. Complicity's wide door.

It doesn't much matter that, to an adult eye, the man drawn by the child looks more like a bean pole, a giant tadpole, a clown, a fat sausage, or an enormous beet. In one line, the transmission takes place.

A man's body comes to him, a balloon-body, a stick-body, a disabled body but, to his mind, sufficiently a man's body, and much better, the nature of man, and still more amazing, sometimes it turns out to be the child himself. His own being—there it is again, he sees it in there. He gets himself

into this fragile envelope, then does it again. He feels it is "like" him, no difficulty comparing himself to it: a firm line, although variable according to mood, separates a vague inside from the outside.

Man, from now on rediscoverable at will. In these lines, now no longer explosive, the prodigy that makes him man. Start-man.

. . .while young chimpanzees or gorillas, who make near-circles that often equal children's, remain at that same point, in that same pleasure.

However many curved lines they might make, none of them ever recognizes in any line either a body or the shape of anyone or anything; they don't stop.

Perhaps they need only be clearly shown how to get on their way.

To draw is to represent, to present anew, thus to imitate. Odd that monkeys, such imitators, don't imitate in this way too.

Now the child, right from the first days of his discovery, knows his way around, deals with beings and things without having to see them right in his lines. He is not coming back.

He has seen the correspondence, which monkeys do not see, he has caught hold of it, resuscitates it, thereby achieving the human condition more fully than his ancestors in having discovered the wheel or even fire starting up from rubbing sticks together.

This bringing together, comparing, permanently engages him and becomes a vital practice, one in steadily increasing use.

Bodies of fathers, bodies of mothers, bodies of boys and girls, of babies and of cats and of dogs.

As for trees of three or four branches, or arms, that's all the touches he needs to get the whole thing down. . .sufficiently.

No rules yet, no compromises, no laws imposed, drawing that is allusive rather than descriptive.

. . .and playful.

Sometimes, to the scandal of everyone around, and with the gravest of expressions, the child will draw a goofy father and play with it disrespectfully, manipulating the personage however he pleases, in accordance with what surprises him, delights him. . .

Play created, or enhanced, by as yet unskillful gestures, an uncertain little hand creates it and sustains it.

One time close to the model, the next further off, happy either way, not trying to equal it, playing at being the father and not being the father while still being the father, in ridiculous approximations that amuse him.

Natural playing, if not innocent at least in fun, but not insistent, incidentally father, casually father. A father readily let go of, with his unpleasant head. . .big, more like elongated, interminable.

Houses come to him time and again. A certain unflagging burst of strokes makes straight lines and straight lines, naturally, make a house, close enough, with door, windows, and roof. No difficulty. Then the road is added, preferably sinuous, fun to make, so necessary, so eloquent, his passage, and also as the primary element in orientation—careful not to omit it.

In his drawings the child evokes the house, pictures how to get there, to return to it whenever he needs it, rehearses the pleasure of getting back to it, sets up his frames of reference.

B

When the child is provided (often too early) with crayons and jars of paint, after only a few experiments, an inundation spreads across his virgin sheet of paper, an unknown celebration, forerunner of many more. The schematic, investigative drawing he'd been practicing retrocedes.

Now color and its splendor. Soon everything will partake of its amplitude.

Spreading out, spreading out, pouring out, filling up, overflowing. Surfaces overrun, forms thickening. Texture, matter.

The earlier breakthrough into graphics, which is suitable for reporting, locating, pointing out, gives way to ENCHANTMENTS.

Besides, his drawings—whether of his father, his mother, or brothers—had never been pictures exactly, more like ideas of them that popped into his head, diagrams offered to him when his family came to mind, carried out hastily, in rapid sketches, appropriate for brief periods of attention, for flashes of recognition.

That is gone now, overcome by the spreading colors he will roll out like carpets.

Sometimes he speeds along employing the agreeably dazzling color-everywhere method. And there's his "carnival," the fair he was set on.

The young eye enjoys receiving peak sensations. Likewise, children love to hear the most piercing of shrieks, which delight their brand new auditory organs; unlike those of older people, theirs have not yet been fully tested.

Who could feel the full impact of the color red as well as a child?

One such young sanguine will answer the call of his great appetite for life by spreading out vast banks of it for his incomparable joy, for his stimulation. Red is trump. He isn't about to deny himself such a medium for life and for violence.

For another it will be green (or orange or blue) as the unique vehicle through which everything must pass and in which, strangely, all of it is contained. For days at a time, sometimes weeks, he won't hear of mixing it with other colors.

More generally, when a child gets hold of colors it is their noisy polyvalence, their rowdiness, that excites him, where he comes and goes amid the detonations. Many messy pictures may ensue, but he is not put off by this, he's not opposed to it.

Deprived of nature and, in the West, deprived of myths, city children discover that what is forbidden them elsewhere is permitted in their specially constructed workrooms. Here, fascinated by mud, slime, anything soft and mushy, anything that oozes, even including the smelly matter excreted by their own intestines, still intrigued by the condition of things before their separation into liquids and solids, into earth and water, before the setting apart of the dirty from the clean (that impeccable cleanliness and neatness so satisfying and so sought-after, almost maniacally, by adults), here at least the kid is allowed to shape, to mold what is dirty and to get dirty, to spread out thick layers of oozing color, not cautiously, but with a nameless joy that liberates him but disturbs the grown-ups watching him do it, messy and happy.

His imprudence is natural, and it pushes him on ahead. Not yet really able to walk, he runs. He falls down, gets up, and runs on.

So, on impulse, utterly confident, he takes on subjects any painter would avoid. Without hesitation he will paint the sun, neither more nor less, the sun, the great, dazzling sun.

An adventurer from the outset.

He paints the wonderful, the child does, and passionately. With his wonderment as yet intact—this reanimates it—he depicts the baroque, the giraffe, the zebra; the exultant airplane (as it is taking off), and the locomotive; a little one for whom nothing is too big or too difficult, he

renders the elephant, the incredible, the fantastic elephant, without making it any less fantastic than it is.

If anything, he makes it more extraordinary, being open to and prepared for the extraordinary, as much as for the magical, the marvelous, the prodigious. He welcomes them. He is inclined to believe in them as well as in the miraculous. However shabby his surroundings, he sees their wonders and paints them.

Studies have clearly shown what lies hidden beneath the innocence of children. They are subject to passions and shame, and these may be observed by one looking for them in their drawings, which remain, nonetheless, childish and playful.

People are invariably struck by this playfulness, which emerges even during the gravest of incidents—it is disconcerting, setting off a spasm of amusement among the worried adults.

What a difference between their strained, resolute faces and those the child evokes in his drawings.

Blank, not preoccupied, not determined, confident, amazed, good-natured, simple, precluding confrontation, faces—open windows.

Credulous, undefended, lunar faces, not combative, not resolute, unprepared for attacks or counterattacks. Some are solar.

For the toddler, one constant is his complete harmlessness. If he is perverse, and when he is naughty, he lacks means.

His resourcelessness shows through in all his drawings. Unhealthy as they may be, even markedly psychotic, an air of infantile impotence clings to them inescapably. Someday he may be cruel, but he has not yet assembled the constitution for it. To do so, a number of virginities will have to be lost and penetrated. He has always been dependent, and he cannot escape the fact.

Since his birth at the mercy of grown-ups, providers of everything he has and needs, defenseless, he is closely akin to clowns. The clown: recipient of blows he never manages to return, though he tries, only to receive all the more, too soft for a hard world, fascinating to children, who laugh at them uproariously or cry, heartbroken, affected.

How readily the characters appearing in children's paintings come to look clownish, as well as wise, and submissive! Even their houses look wise and kind.

During this period of his existence when receiving is all he knows, things take on the characteristics of this person who until only recently had

been unable to take hold of anything. Looking at the surely quite ordinary places they paint (young girls in particular)—yards, little rooms, gardens or flower beds—you'd think the universe consisted entirely of presents.

Before he knows how to speak intelligibly, in his mutters and murmurs the child tells stories. In his drawings he tells stories too. Tales of which nothing remains but mute characters on a blank sheet.

In times gone by, with a head full of stories, one avidly sought more and more. The more turbulent they were, the wiser one was thought to be.

For small children, the religious and the nonreligious are of a piece. They are religiously absorbed in both—the wonderful is their equipment.

In many villages of the African continent, black children still experience the pleasure of hearing from the mouths of calm, grave elders the always fresh tales of the wonders in the world's history, the judicious and crafty hare, animal advisors, and the perils encountered by the moon.

In their huts, the parents listen too, and believe, or are not much removed from believing.

There, children's drawings are more like stories, more obviously stories, and their characters more in movement, more in action.

Elsewhere in the world too, children's drawings are story-telling, are intended as stories. While the grown-ups immediately recognize and endlessly pore over the contours of what is known, the child continues on his unknown journey into the Unknown.

Always inclined to the unbelievable, and to believe in it, to accept the extraordinary (to him so very conceivable), united in advance with the impossible (so appealing, long ago, to the prophets, who used it as a model), he is, though more impeded in our own times, more open than he will ever be later in life; approximate to miracles, miracles of all sorts for which he craves explications that do not obstruct, such miracle-answers as leave one's being, one's emotions, undiminished, indeed, exalted.

. . .Knowing nothing, or very little and very poorly, the child does also know something. Powerless, a different power accrues to him. Children bring to painting spaces liberated from Space. All by themselves, hundreds of them, in earlier times as well as our own, have found a better way to recapture Babylonian space than with linear perspective drawing, merely methodical foreshortening. They have discovered, when they have needed it and at their pleasure, *simultaneity*, which combines and unifies the seen with the known, seen by the eye and known in the mind, the distant with the near, the outside with the inside, thereby unconcealed.

For a child it is perfectly natural to show a front wall together with a rear wall that he could not see but *knows is there.* So too, should it please him, a wall of his house will break up and vanish such that he might pass directly into the desirable interior where his dinner awaits him on the table.

Spontaneously, rather than by means of technical devices, children translate space, illustrating what adults may, with luck, rediscover, the *coexistence of the seen and the imagined,* which happens in every evoking mind. One begins with that. On this score, it is children, not grown-ups, who accurately reflect reality.

A problem, one of the most difficult to solve, if one is unwilling simply to brush it aside with considerations of perspective and optics and worse, the restrictions of photography.

A child's genius is the result of all he lacks.

Motionless for months, sightless in an envelope of flesh, sent wretched out into the open air, unprepared for a new world, being new himself, limbs he does not know how to use affixed to him, before long a ball of malaise, of hunger, of thirst, of needs and incapacities, and here he is, obligated to move, to see to it that muscles and joints are put to work. For a long time all his adventures are carried out on all fours. How natural it is that in his drawings of this half-alien body, he does not position feet and arms and hands correctly, nor in the same place two times running; accidents resulting from his as yet incomplete adoption of this "life with limbs."

One should not see in this merely signs of abnormalities. This life of straining wretchedly at every maneuver lasts only a few dozen months.

Should his movements continue to be imperfect and his muscles underexercised, invisible impulses will pass through him, desires for "other" movements. Incomparably more than adults, children imagine themselves flying, gliding, climbing, galloping, or swimming like a fish, or creeping like a reptile. Which plainly distinguishes theirs from the primitive drawings done by adults, who want to *stabilize,* and in painting to set down an accurate visual report.

Through his multiple identifications, generators of spaces, the child is constantly projected, like a bird that would be simultaneously a proud stallion.

This is one beginning for him.

. . .which will come to an end. The child becomes what he wanted and what was wanted for him.

Everything in place, orderly, situated, stabilized. Additional spaces would be unreasonable now. He doesn't *feel* them anymore.

C

Swallowing greedily since birth, the child becomes a mouth-child. Here at least there is no suffering, he isn't knocked around, not hurt, the crying stops.

Suck, kiss everybody, then go to sleep.

Getting hold of the breast, keeping hold of it, without even knowing what a breast is—it's a given, and the greatest good.

In his first years, to live means *to be open*. . .to sounds, to colors, to odors, to movements, to gestures; it's all taking, and taking in.

Doing what he sees done, doing it again, copying, learning by imitating, gathering in everything he can.

After the pencil drawings, the discovery of colors and how to handle them, after assimilating them and gaining more experience, it is likely that quite a few children—and always before adolescence—will begin to produce charged paintings—something strangely compelling about them.

No more rendering of faces or evoking them—he diffuses faces, and in doing so diffuses a world. Dilated faces, beatific or radiant, the likes of which he will never paint later, shamelessly expressing his pleasure, that he is healthy, with boundless vitality, at an age when one is still unashamed to show pleasure.

No more of those constricted figures adults smiled at disdainfully; now, in an almost burdensome profusion of colors, he broadens out: the very faces of opening, or radiance, unflinching, on display, impudent. Later they will close up again.

With little girls, it is more likely that flowers will come to stand out, not bunches of flowers, often in fact one all by itself, high on a flawless stem, a four-petal corolla, and open so wide, so conspicuous, this corolla, happy to show itself, having no fear, having patience.

The fundamental opening is still out of sight though. Are we looking at a presentiment? The same flower, unaltered, repeated day after day.

Here she is, in sum, a single flower. That will have to do.

But inside of every child, as much as outside, a man or a woman is coming on, in whose traits family members amuse themselves by thinking they see a resemblance to some relative. Other characteristics will be fleeting. In a few pictures that are overdone, or incomplete, reproaches, resentments, appeals, angers, fantasies, or mere impressions.

Among children of all sorts, open ones, it is the less open of them, and right in their drawings too—an irony of sorts—who will reveal more than the others.

Their fortunes are less childish than their voices.

One or the other of them, distant already, has come to be uninterestable. He isn't cramming himself into any lines or colors. He stays right where he began, where he cannot be trapped. Neither mountains with peaks as sharp as swords, nor battered, chopped up, bloodstained bodies would sufficiently express him.

Beyond aggressiveness, beyond anger, he embarks on full-scale ill will.

For boys and girls sullenness is a weapon, one of their only ones, and at one time or another a good many kids discover it, and that it is nearly impossible for anyone to parry its blows.

Refusal. *No* to participation, to eating, to talking, to walking, even to playing.

It is not generally understood how often a child is sorely tempted to stop, to abandon the path of development people have laid out for him, with its endless tasks, an ever more difficult apprenticeship. . .should he carry on? or is he going to stop?

Barely a few years before, his life was uneventful. No problems, no obligations, no strain. For feeding he needn't even move his masticatory muscles. And now he must learn one coordinated movement after another, for climbing, getting down, leaping, turning around, for this, for that, for hurrying, and do them over and over, until they are perfect.

Back then, without doing anything, he invariably reached the maternal island, the source, the universal.

Disgust. Repulsion. Some obscure bodily deficiency bothers him, holds him back. He meets with obstacles; he amplifies them. He sides with them. Refusal. Resistance. He shuts up.

This temptation that inclines a child to stay behind should not be compared to a rebellion. More internal. More absolute. For a time, one won't get any participation from the child at all.

A strike—the primary one. An adventure too, a world undisclosed to others.

Without a word, he has said good-bye to adults and boys and girls his own age who have submitted.

He has no more companions; they have all gone off to be enregimented as adults.

Return to the beginning—a refuge, but an impasse. Ascesis too, it could be called that, a miserable ascesis—and how hard!—for someone so young. It keeps him closed up.

What a shame one cannot look into his spirit the way one looks into his drawings.

Since cerebral activity cannot, however, be brought to a complete standstill, it does happen sometimes that the backward one has secretly devoted himself to a localized overactivity, such that one day, to everyone's amazement, it is revealed that he can calculate extraordinary sums, in his head, on call, disconcertingly fast, such as this or that enormous number of hours elapsed since a particular date in the Middle Ages or in Ptolemaic Egypt. Or some other empty arithmetical feat.

Beneath his general apathy he has concealed a very discrete mobilization, maintained and developed in silence, to help him through his long night.

An isolated knack, inadequate, but when people notice it, a banner nonetheless, his banner, his very own, upraised.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

ECHO OFF (USE OTHER ENTRANCE)

Are we there yet? *Everything*
must go, is gone. Slowly the rips
fade from memory, foment
anagrammatic tirades, saturate
pensive perambulation (percussive
reticence). My aim to
loop corners and franchise
agency—for exactly as long as
it takes to blow the candles
out inside all those
headgear.

Have you heard the one about the stalled
kaftan and the bumbling pulverizer?
The Bronx crane operator and the Lisbon
tailor? The foldaway recliner and the nylon
railings? Perhaps the crease is semi-
permanent. Perhaps the conductor erased
the links. Perhaps the person-in-the-street
gets aggravated all the way to the grave.
Though, really, really & truly, I could never
broach the subject with her. Nor with you
for that matter. Really, now! The very idea
gives me a sick feeling in the pits of my stomach.
What am I supposed to tell Mandy? Or, famously,
Albert? The drunk never steps into the same
argument twice before falling off the stool.
Perhaps that will satisfy them. Perhaps the rain
will stop bawling. Perhaps absolutely nothing
happens absolutely. Or maybe I'll take a shine

to that stridently narrow interpretation
of what was supposed to be a common project.
Project me, baby, or the skin around those shores,
well, hm, delete that intimation of mortadella,
chiaroscuro, bullet holes in the newly laundered
upholstery.

Note nonetheless
the gentle amphibracs
smashing against the
spondees. Respond please.
Or later that afternoon, taking
a walk, taking a lot more than
was being offered.

—Tell Mandy
to handle his own
sordid aspirations. I've
put my money on
his desperation outdistancing
a modest reserve of
communicative charms.
He's had a handle for years,
just no one to pick up
on it. Semaphores, like
that German job with the
circular detonators (denominators),
says who? Surely you prevaricate
or is it procrastinate or
did you mean that we are all
predestined to be stepped on?
I won't sit still for that
especially if you give me
a minute's warning
before I shoot. The lilacs,
last time I saw them, were
freshly painted, but the President
had eaten too many.

Don't crowd me.

Okay, let's see, where was I?

How many fingers am I holding up?
& now? (See what I told you, Marv.)

Arms too short to
vacate promptly?

The fire-eating
pelican decided one day to take
a detour half-a-league closer
to the Mercator Society. *Turn*
off that ratiocinator! The
sequelae had hardly time to regroup
before the President called them into
action. Follow that burlap!
That's no embroglio, that's my
subconscious!
But the journey's
bridle will carry you no
further than the edge of
the repercussions you disdain
to rule out. Society may
be the inevitable product of human
survival—but not *your* society.
The truth in pudding. Wresting
with circumspection, overrun by
rigor mentis (even a rock knows
the difference between permanence
and transparency). She sleeps
the sleep of kings having descended
to the throne just after systemwide
devaluation. Scar & recombine, split
& whimper.

"The shore is pouring green ooze
The foam is getting darker
As I swim in the cold, chilly-covered sea"

But those red ones—the biggest
mistake we ever made in chairs!

Holding Essence Position.

I told my doctor it hurt
when I lifted up my arm up.
He said, "Don't do that."
I told my doctor I couldn't stand
the pain. She said, "Sit down."
I told my wife I was losing my grip.
She said, "What grip?"

Or will you settle your differences
differently, beating scuds into suds
tomahawks into torrents of talk?
—Stupefying prattle for summery days,
shredding water like it was so much hot air.

"The markings of her
footsteps in the
rocky sand"

Sighing a far-away sigh, sputtering
Words from a place not-yet found, offering
Hope in the steam between letters.
The lap of waves against misgiving's
Disclosures. Stripped to the cement.
Because self-love's no love at all.
Like language had a claim of its own.
But the sun never touches the dark
Nor the night change anything.

The biscuit, the roll, the meatloaf.

Nationality is barbarity
Cleansing the soul out of ourselves
Preying the war will never end

sputtering & then quivering &
oscillating—the *I* behind the veil

Circumstance not existence made me
(the eyes inside the swarm).

Tiny green dots spackling the dusk.

Insinuating the rule into the abdication.

Total description of nothing
Not a thing

The unit interrogates the integer,
the digit cross-examines the figure.

Typing *finger* to see who's logged on.

"Did you know you're not answering me?"

Did you know the fire was never put out
The souffle's still cooking in the oven
The little boy with a shovel but no pail
Is ailing in the street without numbers
Or covers? Sultry exceptions to the
Glue of social fabrication (demotic
Sublime?). Kerning capital and despair
Vagrancy & honor. Honor as far
As you can throw it, dicing slices
Into the premonition.

There's no short cut to eternity, no
Excursion fare to the heavenly's databus.
Desire means less to me
Than a flue to gel its wings upon—

Torrential horseplay in a can of spleen.
Your goose is gourd, your curtains cast aside
& the tremor of the tunes is gush.
Like mice nibbling at cartilage
Ice cracking the surface (sufferance)
Device cascades along the spotted hyena's
Tail.

Liberal potions of emerald green lotions.

The tear atop the tapestry. . .

KEITH TUMA

BUNTING, OBJECTIVISM, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY (OR, WHY NOBODY KNOWS JOSEPH GORDON MCLEOD)

I have been thinking lately about the relationship of British and American poetry in this century, and pondering in particular what I take to be a waning of the scholarly interest in modern and contemporary British poetry in America. I can offer real empirical evidence that British poetry is not a raging concern in academe these days. (It is not, I might add, much more of a concern on the margins of academe where poets and poetry live.) Last year, my department advertised a job in Twentieth-Century British Literature, together with two other jobs in other fields. While we received a total of some 800 letters for the three jobs, only twenty-five or so of them responded to the job in 20th Century British Literature. We were rather disappointed in these letters, frankly, for we were hoping to find someone who might be willing to work in post-1945 British fiction, and the bulk of the letters demonstrated an expertise and interest in the most familiar figures of the pre-1945 novel: Conrad, Forster, Woolf, Lawrence, etc. From my perspective as someone who does most of his work on poetry the lack of interest in poetry was even more distressing. One young scholar was working on Kipling and colonialism. Another was working on Rupert Brooke. Two women were writing on Stevie Smith. Two men were studying Philip Larkin: one writing on Larkin within the context of Movement poetry and another within the context of a study of the audience for poetry in England and America. That last topic was of some interest to me, but my chairman said that I already had that covered. So we gave up on the notion of interviewing someone for Twentieth-Century British Literature.

As I say, we'd really wanted somebody who could work in the novel, but the depressing part of the experience for me was learning that almost nobody is working in British poetry, and those who are seem to be stuck on the same old names. Considering the fact that Americanists over the last decade or so have been busy recovering previously non-canonical and so-called marginal writers, the interest in the same old figures in British literary

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This paper was first presented at the Twentieth Century Literature Conference at the University of Louisville in February 1993 and dedicated to Alan Golding and Michael Donaghy.

history seemed especially strange. Who was working on Edith Sitwell, I wondered? Was Hugh MacDiarmid even of interest to anyone anymore? Who knew about recent experimental poets like Allen Fisher, Tom Raworth, and J. H. Prynne? What about Black British poetry, Jean Breeze and the dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson? What about the great Roy Fisher? Peter Redgrove? Elaine Feinstein? Did anyone care about the disciples of Basil Bunting, the Northumbrians Collin Sims and Tom Pickard, or Gael Turnbull and Tony Baker? What about Bunting himself, who has been described—incorrectly I think—by more than one of his devoted readers as a lone English modernist poet? What about J. J. Adams and Joseph Gordon Macleod, two poets Bunting once held up as representatives of a second-generation of modernist poetry in England in an important and totally neglected issue of *Poetry* magazine designed to balance the issue of *Poetry* introducing Zukofsky's Objectivist poets, those second-generation American modernist poets who some of us, poets and critics alike, have been eagerly pushing towards canonical status for twenty years or more?

I don't mean really to suggest that the relative neglect of modern and contemporary British poetry in America is a horrible thing—clearly, there are many things to study, and it may be that Americans have more to learn from reading African and Caribbean literature, or Japanese. A more or less theoretical investigation of issues of colonialism and canon formation does help drive whatever interest in "British"—this time in quotes—and Anglophone literature exists today, as is evident for instance in the recent Illinois critical anthology, *Decolonizing Tradition.* Surely we have benefited from the expansion of our own canons of American literature now well underway, and the effect of work like *Decolonizing Tradition* will likely be—already is, in fact— an accelerated dash to the margins of the old Empire and a new modality in readings of the same old English canon—Forster, Kipling, and so on. All of which will do little to teach us anything about the history of British modernist and postmodernist poetry.

What I want to suggest is that the neglect of British literature, especially the neglect of modern and contemporary poetry beyond the few famous names like Larkin and Smith—or Ted Hughes, Donald Davie, Charles Tomlinson, and that once great dissertation mill W. H. Auden—might be related to the persistence of several pernicious half-truths about England and modernism. One myth has it that England has been *uniquely* resistant to modernist poetry, particularly to the experimentalist initiative we often tend too quickly to associate with American poetry in this century. Another myth has it that modernism was—and still is—an international phenomenon, something we can understand independently of national contexts, of the contingencies of national interests and the nature and history of national audiences.

Without meaning to single him out—for I have great respect for him—

I think we can understand Hugh Kenner as one of the most influential sources of some of these myths. It is Kenner, as historian and exegete of Poundian modernism, who has given us a paradigmatic example of the resistance to modernism in England in his powerful story of Pound and Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism, as told in *The Pound Era, A Sinking Island*, and elsewhere. It is Pound himself no doubt, whose own literary history written amid the fray lies behind Kenner's stories. *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is in part an attack on benighted England, and then there are remarks like the following, from Pound's preface to his *Active Anthology* in 1933: "I believe that Britain, in rejecting certain facts (facts, not opinions) in 1912-15 entered a stale decade." These facts, as Pound calls them, are related to his belief that experimentalism is vital to the health of art. He continues to say "Willingness to experiment is not enough, but unwillingness to experiment is mere death." Fact is, Pound might say, one experiments with the possibilities of art or art atrophies. And after the spectacular failure of that lone Britishism Vorticism, squashed as it was by the untimely advent of a war and the philistine snobbery of the British art public, modernist poetry for the most part left Britain, as if with Pound himself. Or so Pound and Kenner would tell us, down playing the efforts of Edith Sitwell and *Wheels* to introduce a Steinian modernism to the island's insular Georgians and forgetting—but this is to jump beyond the time-frame of the story Kenner seems to be interested in—later efforts on behalf of surrealism. To read Kenner on 20th century English poetry is to hear a savaging of all levels of English culture, from Bloomsbury to the TLS to lower middle-class weeklies. Poor Basil Bunting, a friend of Kenner's, stands alone amid the muck, or he is accompanied by Tomlinson, Geoffrey Hill, and David Jones standing on slightly smaller shards of solid turf.

Now the point is not to suggest that England was ever a hospitable home for modernist poetry. It was not, I think. These poets Kenner names were loners, members of no group or movement, though as I mean to show by discussing a British-Scottish contemporary Bunting once admired, never quite so heroically alone as Kenner imagines. I will even go so far as to admit that it is true that an aversion to experimentalism was characteristic of many spheres of British life early in this century, as social and economic historians will tell you. England's reluctance to engage in the kind of industrial modernization then underway in the United States, Germany, and elsewhere, these historians insist, goes a long way towards explaining England's precipitous decline as a world power. (The lessons of this should perhaps not be lost on Americans today.) And, to be fair to Kenner, observers other than Pound and his supporters have long noted that the prevailing modes of English poetry have been, throughout the century, resistant to experiment. Here is Conrad Aiken, for instance, writing in 1919, comparing American and English poetry:

> By comparison with contemporary American poetry—which is more empirical, drawing more boldly on the material of a wider consciousness, without so sharp a literary distinction between the poetic and the non-poetic, and more richly experimental as concerns questions of form—English poetry appears at once thinner and more "literary."

Aiken was a friendly reader of the verse of British poets such as John Masefield and Walter de la Mare and often a skeptical reader of experimental American poetry, but his remarks, with their emphasis on the greater inclusiveness and formal experimentalism of the Americans, are a powerful example of the ways in which the British have often been used as the other against which an American modernism might be defined. Against the experimental, we have the merely "literary," or, more often, the "traditional." Against the bold and the inclusive, we have something that is "thin," an unambitious poetry, mere verse.

There are many reasons why British poetry has been, for the most part, resistant to experimentalism. Most of these reasons were suggested, sometimes as mere speculation, in a remarkably persistent and acrimonious debate about the status of the two poetries—English and American—that ran throughout the sixties and the seventies, contemporaneously with the rise of the so-called New American poetry (Creeley, Duncan, Olson, etc.), the expansion of what came to be called the counterculture, and the expansion and transformation of the study of contemporary poetry in American universities. Among the many participants in this debate, including British enemies of the New American poetry like Alan Brownjohn and supporters of it such as Eric Mottram and Nathaniel Tarn, was Donald Davie, whose book on Thomas Hardy and his tradition was meant to be simultaneously a healing gesture and a defense of the prevailing modes of English poetry thought to be hostile to modernism and postmodernism. I single Davie out because he offered in another essay, not the book on Hardy, one of the more convincing accounts of the cultural differences underlying British hostility to experimentalism. In an essay on Pound, Davie argued that, in Britain, a tradition of amateurism in the arts has been and is still powerful in ways it is not in the United States. Though he did not put it in exactly these terms, what Davie was pointing to really has to do with the way in which class distinctions figure more importantly in artistic production in England, for the ideal of the artist as an amateur is traced by Davie back to the Renaissance courtier. This poet is not a workman, so to speak, but rather a gentleman of leisure producing something to improve or ornament his life; he should not seem to be

engaged too seriously with his craft, which is, after all, something more like a hobby. This idea of the poet is very much at odds with an idea of the poet as a professional, a person engaged in a specific practice structured as one practice among many in a modern division of labor where experts (we call them critics) are required to define, judge, and promote production.

We get an inkling that Davie is onto something when we note that the British still do not have the peculiar American institution of professional creative writing programs. We might also note, as Marjorie Perloff did amid these horrible confrontations of the seventies, that the British—with nothing like our economy—were much slower to burden the world with a mountain of critical journals devoted to literary history and literary theory, to definitions and discussions of moments and movements in poetry and other arts. And, if we read mainstream British publications such as the TLS, we can note also that the so-called Common Reader—as opposed to the professional or specialized reader—still functions as a powerful rhetorical tool in much British literary journalism, which pleases an American neo-conservative critic like Robert Richman, who is one of the few critics and editors around these days who seems to take British poetry—or mainstream British poetry at any rate—very seriously.

If the ideal British poet historically has been a gentleman, sometimes a gentleman in rags, it is perhaps no surprise that so much of British poetry has been marked by what A. Alvarez once famously descried as "gentility." And it is perhaps also no surprise that some of the poetry that has had most success in countering an older ideal of gentility—the work of Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes for instance—does not so much pose an alternative model of professionalism as it strategically adopts a casual amateurism more suited to a changing definition of the Common Reader. Thus in Larkin the lower middle-class anti-intellectual smart ass becomes the persona of choice in what sometimes almost seems a parodic incarnation, and in Hughes we get what Hughes must think the middle class imagines as bardic passion. In other more recently successful poets, such as Craig Raine, we have updated extensions of the cosmopolitan irony Auden first popularized, a flaneur's posturing with more of a glibness about it, little of the twisted and doubled ironies of the genre's true genius, Baudelaire, who did away with gentlemen in poetry in France. An Audenesque poetry has always done well with readers of the *New Yorker*, which only goes to prove what Nathaniel Tarn once said, that there is an England in America and an America in England. Such poetry, like Larkin and Hughes' work, can be both serious and expertly made—I do not mean simply to denigrate it. What I will say is this. This poetry—almost all of the successful or "mainstream" British poetry of the last sixty years—understands itself as subscribing to what Davie sometimes refers to as a "contract," a rhetorical contract, between reader and writer. Now the idea that poetry involves a

rhetorical contract has been somewhat at odds with modernist practice from the beginning, and it is also at odds with professionalism as most American poets understand it (or should I say as they unconsciously practice it). In terms of technique, this so-called contract, as it turns out, has been thought to involve the maintenance of certain conventions of grammatical syntax which have come to seem restrictive and limited—ideologically as well as formally—to many experimental poets both in America and England. But the specifics of the contract, the particular conventions themselves, might be thought of as finally arbitrary, changeable. What is more bothersome is the notion of a contract itself, or rather the fact that the English contract supports a poetic practice in which the ideals of the amateur and the Common Reader, the ideal of art as an avocation for men and women of leisure, are propagated. The American poet has more often been told that her duty is to her work rather than to an audience. The institution of poetry in America is dedicated to the proposition that good work will eventually be recognized regardless of whether or not it meets the needs of a contemporary audience. American poetry functions within the logics of meritocracy and technological skill.

All poets depend on conventions in their artifice, of course, and the fact that experimental poets in America have been greater in number and more successful in attaining recognition as well as in identifying themselves as part of a collective effort in poetry speaks to the ability of the American poetry audience to value experiment. It is hard to think about the nature of this audience or its impact upon poetry without considering the impact of the professionalization of literature and literary study, and this is where Hugh Kenner reenters our picture. Kenner had the good fortune to advance his history of modernist poetry at a time when America and the expanding American institutions of literary study were in need of legitimating narratives. Kenner, in describing modernist poetry as the invention of Pound and his circle, was successful in convincing us that modernism in English-language poetry might be thought of as something like an American success story, and he did this at exactly that moment in history when America's global role most needed credibility, cultural sanction. And it is no accident, I think, that so much of Kenner's work is informed by his own exceptional knowledge of the most advanced technologies in science and elsewhere, for the model of modernism Kenner has always promoted is a model of the very technocratic genius that was dominating a bifurcated Cold War World. Our faith in American technology as a universally functional and transmissible instrumentality informs—to use again my small and seemingly trite example—our hope that the "skills" necessary in writing poetry might be transmitted by instruction in professional schools of poetry writing. No gentlemen allowed, no amateurs. Only students, or,

to appeal to another middle-class model the Europeans have experience with, apprentices. (Gentlemen are not apprentices.)

Kenner's modernism often represents itself as "international," just as America would seem often to believe that our instrumentalities and institutions are potentially international. Here, for example, is Kenner on the modernist canon:

> Though the language of International Modernism, like that of air control towers, proved to be English, none of its canonical works came either out of England or out of any mind formed there. International Modernism was the work of Irishmen and Americans.

This seems like an innocuous enough statement, and one might well wonder what the point of arguing with it might be! After all, even a poet who once had British citizenship, Nathaniel Tarn, has written that the only post-Georgian poetry of value "is not English but Celtic: Yeats, Joyce, MacDiarmid, Dylan Thomas." But arguing with a description of a so-called international modernism as the work of Irish and American writers is not the point, nor is the point to determine what degree of American chauvinism is evident in many histories of modernism and in descriptions of contemporary American poetry. (And if you doubt that chauvinism figures in the presentation of even anti-chauvinistic American poets such as the New Americans, you should read Donald Allen's introduction to the anthology that brought attention to the New Americans as a group or set of movements. In the introduction to his anthology Allen wrote that his poets were worth celebrating *because* they were becoming influential abroad, as indeed they were, as the example of Tarn and others proves.) For a patriotic soul such as myself the point is simply to acknowledge that we write our histories of modernism as American writers and, for the most part, as writers participating in a profession of literary studies which has an interest in perpetuating the logics that enable it. These facts—our subject positions or institutional locations, whatever you will—do not necessarily determine or even limit our histories. But we are obliged, I think, to acknowledge the position from which we speak. And, as Americans, it is inevitably from a position of power that we speak when we talk about supposedly international events, whether these involve the history of poetry or anything else.

Power involves responsibility, or it should, and as American historians of modernism we have not been very responsible in speaking of examples of poetic modernism in England. Edith Sitwell is an obvious case, but there are others. The first book on Mina Loy, for instance, was called *Mina Loy: An American Modernist Poet,* despite the fact that Loy, who became an

American citizen toward the end of her life, is in many ways thoroughly British in her concerns, aiming her critique of orthodox religion directly at English civility. Kenner has written on behalf of Basil Bunting, as have others, but it is only recently, in the work of Peter Makin and Peter Quartermain, that we have begun to distinguish an early Bunting working under the influence of Poundian and Eliotic models from the Northumbrian poet who emerged more significantly later in life in *Briggflatts* and the great late odes. And no one has done the pedestrian work of uncovering the minor successes of British modernism, the work of, for instance, Joseph Gordon Macleod.

One of the problems in talking about British modernist poetry is the absence of self-conscious movements, with the critical propaganda and collective strategies these involve. Louis Zukofsky, by all accounts, resisted being forced by the editors of *Poetry* to coin a name for his group of poets—and he picked a miserable one—perhaps because he felt that such a name falsified real differences between the Objectivist poets. But that's always the case with such names. I like to imagine that he also felt that naming a movement in 1931 was participating in history repeating itself as farce, for the revolutionary enthusiasms that had animated the first wave of movements in this century were being appealed to by Zukofsky as a grounding tradition, a tradition of the new. But if this was indeed the case, this reluctance I am imagining for Zukofsky, he would have been missing what might have been the editors' point, their sense, conscious or not, that the pattern for American poetry had been set. All new poets after Pound and Eliot, however sadly belated, would do well, have done well, to represent themselves as part of a movement, thereby participating in the very same logic that drives the worlds of fashion and technology. To don the mantle of experimentalism has been to participate in the Americanization of systems of fashion and taste that has been underway throughout the century. Poor Louis, then a communist, made to subscribe to the institutions of capitalism. But one cannot avoid these in the small presses, as some of our contemporary experimentalists have sometimes hoped.

It has been a very strange and enlightening experience for me, in working to recover what I can and want to of the history of those comparatively rare British experimental poets, to learn something of their reception in America. The same pressures that were brought to bear upon Zukofsky in forcing him to name a movement, the same pressures that emanated from a moment when the history of what we now call high modernism was first beginning to be formulated, generated some curious prose on behalf of then-contemporary British poetry. At roughly the same time that Zukofsky was putting together his Objectivists' issue, the editors of *Poetry*—the most important of them was Morton Dawen Zabel, though Harriet Monroe still had a role—were declaring that a "new dawn" was on

the horizon of British poetry. The magazine's venerable patriarch Ezra Pound, who by this time had seen his early utopian hopes for American culture dashed, also participated briefly in *Poetry*'s enthusiasm about developments in England, though not without some ambivalence. While he encouraged his young friend Basil Bunting to put together a collection of the best in Britain for the magazine, and wrote to Zabel that the English magazine *Cambridge Left* was better than anything he had seen in awhile, good enough in fact that it made him feel that America was about to give up her leadership in poetry and culture, he also privately suspected that a British number of *Poetry* was bound to amount to American chauvinism for the way it would show up the superiority of Zukofsky's Objectivists. As I say, it is nothing short of strange to read Zabel's account of a "new dawn"—consider the avant-gardist lexicon informing that phrase—for, influenced as he obviously is by Ezra Pound, Zabel combines a now familiar version of literary history with the naive belief that what he thought he was bearing witness to in contemporary British poetry was history repeating itself. Here is Zabel on his "new dawn":

> The past two years have witnessed in England a revival of activity in both creative and critical fields that begins to threaten the proportions of another twentieth-century Renaissance. This revival doubtless profits by contrast with the aimless optimism and cheery ineptitude into which recent English letters have been guided by the postwar Georgian patriarchs. Yet it should be remembered that England, in the days of Imagism, *The Egoist*, *Blast*, and *The New Age*, was a battleground for many of the ideas and projects that lie at the center of the creative problem in modern Anglo-Saxon culture, even though the Georgian dynasty succeeded in running them out of the country once *The London Mercury* and the Squire-Bennett-Sitwell gangdom gained the ascendant.

If you think we are beyond this version of literary history, I ask you to look at Kenner's *A Sinking Island*, where there is considerable talk of the "gangs"—the very word he uses. Again, I am not saying that this version of history is correct—truth, some pessimist once said, has only a little to do with history, perhaps especially the history told by victors. I ask only that you note that, in 1932, amid the most devastating economic depression of the century, Morton Dawen Zabel was proclaiming another renaissance. Weirder still, he was proclaiming its location as England—remember that in his 1914 essay "The Renaissance" Pound had declared America the site of the renaissance he envisioned. But then Zabel is speaking of some

unified totality he refers to as "Anglo-Saxon culture," something we would hardly consider doing these days, partly because we have learned to celebrate the success of second-generation immigrant poets whose families came to America from Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, poets like Louis Zukofsky.

So how did this reading of the present as the past impact Zabel's presentation of British poetry? To put it simply, it forced him to identify as a group—I will be fair to him and admit that he does not use the word "movement"—three poets who were even more dissimilar than the Objectivist poets Zukofsky gathered and named. I should add that he grouped these poets together before Basil Bunting was asked to gather poems for a special British number of the magazine. Influenced as he was by Pound and Bunting, Zabel was his own man. Two of the poets, different as they are, can be understood as having been influenced by the work of Ezra Pound; they are Basil Bunting himself and Joseph Gordon Macleod. The other poet, like Bunting and Macleod, published his first book in 1930. He was W. H. Auden, whose work has considerably less to do with Pound's and resembles neither Bunting's nor Macleod's. If I had more time, I would work through the various contortions that allowed Zabel to represent these three poets as a group. I would also discuss Bunting's—Bunting is the best poet of the three for me—own efforts to promote with somewhat less enthusiasm the work of his peers and his discouraged remarks about the state of English poetry in general. You will have to take it from me when I say that the only convincing similarity Zabel points to is the fact that all three of these poets were ambitious in demanding that poetry recover some of the ground lost over the last few centuries to science, anthropology, psychology, and other disciplines. That ambitiousness, or inclusiveness, is something we typically associate with modernist poetry, especially American modernist poetry, no doubt much to the regret of Hugh MacDiarmid.

Because I have been implying all along that an important and responsible thing one might do is to recover some of the rare and lost British modernist poetry that our American histories of poetic modernism have neglected, I will conclude with a reading of one section of Joseph Gordon Macleod's book-length poem *The Ecliptic*. Macleod's work is Poundian in its use of collage, and the section I will quote, called "Cancer, or The Crab," may even refer to, or parody, Pound's "Canto XIII." Though in an autobiographical note Macleod once admitted Pound's liberating impact on him, he is no mere imitator; there is more exuberance and playfulness in Macleod than in much of Pound, and also less rhythmical control. His diction is perhaps more idiosyncratic than Pound's, closer in places to the scientisms one finds in parts of his compatriot MacDiarmid. I should mention, since he is completely unknown as far as I can tell, that Bunting described this writing at the time as the most interesting he had read since

The Wasteland. So far as I know, the last time one of our American poets mentioned Macleod's poem was when Kenneth Rexroth included "Cancer" in an anthology of British poetry published in 1949. By that time Macleod had apparently temporarily stopped publishing poetry, at least under his given name. Eventually he adopted the pseudonym Adam Drinan, and, while living in the Hebrides wrote and published a very different, much less identifiably modernist poetry, while continuing to write prose—he reviewed his own work—under his given name. Here, then, in its entirety, is that section of *The Ecliptic* entitled "Cancer," a poem which explores one psychic archetype among the twelve in the poem, the man suffering a crisis of the will, the man of divided consciousness. I read it today as an American critic offering a kind of homage to the fragmentary reality of a British modernist poetry I hope we can begin to acknowledge:

CANCER, OR, THE CRAB

Moonpoison, mullock of sacrifice,
Suffuses the veins of the eyes
Till the retina, mooncoloured,
Sees the sideways motion of the cretin crab
Hued thus like a tortoise askew in the glaucous moonscape
A flat hot boulder it
Lividly in the midst of the Doldrums
Sidles
The lunatic unable to bear the silent course of constellations
Mad and stark naked
Sidles
The obol on an eyeball of a man dead from elephantiasis
Sidles
All three across heaven with a rocking motion.
The Doldrums: 'region of calms and light baffling wind near
        Equator.'

But the calms are rare
The winds baffling but not light

And the drunken boats belonging to the Crab Club
Rock hot and naked to the dunning of the moon
All in the pallescent Sargasso weed
And windbound, seeking distraction by the light of deliverance
For
What are we but the excrement of non-existent noon?
    (Truth like starlight crookedly)
What are we all but 'burial grounds abhorred by the moon'?
And did the Maoris die of measles? So do we.

But there is no snow here, nor lilies.
The night is glutinous
In a broad hearth crisscross thorn clumps
Smoulder: distant fireback of copse
Throws back silence: glassen ashes gleam in pond
The constellations which have stopped working (?)
Shimmer. No dead leaf jumps.
On edge of lawn a glowworm
Hangs out its state-recognized torchlamp
Blocks of flowers gape dumb as windows with blinds drawn
And in the centre the rugate trees
Though seeming as if they go up in smoke
Are held like cardboard where they are.
Bluehot it is queer fuel to make the moon move.

Agesias said: 'Nero was an artist because he murdered his
        mother
Sensibility (subliminal) is of more importance than moral
        obligation (prandial).'
    But Agesias paints cottages in watercolours and fears his own
        mother
Barbaricus said: 'I am passionately in love with Gito who spurns
        me for Praxinoê'
    But until he saw them together he was merely disturbed by
        Gito's eyelashes
Galônus said: 'The subsequent shrivelling of an orchid doesn't
        alter the value of its beauty.'
Decanus said: 'Joy in nothing. Either dies joy or what produced
        it.'

But Galônus is attractive to women, Decanus obese, poor,
obtuse.
Epinondas said: 'I have been a liar, now no longer so.'
Zeuxias said: 'What I have always been, I shall remain, a fool.'
Is it better to be self-deceived or lazy?
Epator was drunk for two days: Theodorus traced his disease to
college, Iphogenês saw God and died,
And so down the Alphabet, aye, and the Persian,
With variegated gutturals and sibilants, the Gaelic with
diphthongs and triphthongs,
Choctaw with three different clicks
Each letter is somebody
But the Crab is nobody
Nobody
Nobody
A ganglion of neurotic imitations
Composed of each letter in turn
Jointed by conflicts he does not want
A word that never existed with a sense nobody can understand.
Suffering for the sins his father refused to commit
He sits and thinks about the twiddling toes of Gunerita
A boy-girl or girl-boy of an average pulchritude
Haunted by phantoms of his female self
Whom he has never seen but composed himself, thus:
Breasts of Augustina brains of Beatrice
Arms of Capucine on the motherliness of Dorothea
Eyes of Evelyn in the brow of Francesca
Fragrance of Gretchen with the understanding of Helen
This he desires, but despises:
Bhah!
Always sideways, crabs walk.
Either he is not fit for this world
Or this world not fit for him. But which?
After all this pain of development is there neither interval nor
reward?
They lured him with promises,
Now it has all slipped sideways
What is the good, I ask you, of going into a melting-pot
If fated to melt again after getting out of it?

The answers are: He is not out of it
Determined to budge not from yon slippery rock
Not a yard, no, nor an inch, no, nor a barleycorn's breadth
For Chance is not blind but unimpedable
And we call it blind because
Since we frustrate it only by chance
We prefer to shut our own eyes.

The crab however crawls on.

He must therefore be a crab subnormal.
One day, one of his foreclaws, assembled as usual by many
men,
Being longer than the other, turns and pinches his tentacles
With the other he pinches the persons that assembled the long
one
Next day the short one, equally alien, is the longer
And the process is reversed.
In mass production one hand never knows
The evil the other is inspiring it to do
This is a heretic even to the faiths he fails to believe
So worthless, awkward, unintelligible,
The crab crawls on.
He has suffered because he was ugly
Let him be cruel now that he is attractive
Caring not whether he fructifies cruelty or is merely hard on self.
We trap our goldfinch trapping our souls therewinged
Sacrifice our mad gods to the madder gods:
We hymn the two sons of Leda and Zeus Aegis-bearer
We don't. We drink and drivel. My
poor Catullus, do stop being such a
Fool. Admit that lost which as you watch is
gone. O, once the days shone very bright for
you, when where that girl you loved so (as no
other will be) called, you came and came. And
then and there were odd things done and many
which you wanted and she didn't not want.
Yes indeed the days shone very bright for
you. But now she doesn't want it.

Don't you either,
booby. Don't keep chasing her. Don't live in
misery, carry on, be firm, be hardened.
Goodbye, girl: Catullus is quite hardened,
doesn't want you, doesn't ask, if you're not
keen—though sorry you'll be to be not asked.
Yes, poor sinner. . .what is left in life for
you? Who'll now go with you? Who'll be attracted?
Whom'll you love now? Whom say you belong to?
Whom'll you now kiss? Whose lips'll you nibble?
—Now you, Catullus! you've decided to be hardened.

How can I be hardened when the whole world is fluid?
O Aphroditê Pandêmos, your badgers rolling in the moonlit corn
Corn blue-bloom-covered carpeting the wind
Wind humming like distant rooks
Distant rooks busy like factory whirring metal
Whirring metallic starlings bizarre like cogwheels missing teeth
These last grinning like the backs of old motor cars
Old motor cars smelling of tragomaschality
Tragomaschality denoting the triumph of self over civilization
Civilization being relative our to Greek
Greek to Persian
Persian to Chinese
Chinese politely making borborygms to show satisfaction
Satisfaction a matter of capacity
Capacity not significance: otherwise with an epigram
Epigrams—poems with a strabismus
Strabismus being as common spiritually as optically the moon
The moon tramping regular steps like a policeman past the
houses of the Zodiac
And the Zodiac itself, whirling and flaming sideways
Circling from no point returning through no point
Endlessly skidding as long as man skids, though never moving,
Wavers, topples, dissolves like a sandcastle into acidity.

Is there nothing more soluble, more gaseous, more
imperceptible?
Nothing.

ANDREW SCHELLING

THREE POEMS

ON THE WALL

No way to just look
at a wall map
        they come
swarming back,
Lévi-Strauss saw the century's garbage
flung in our faces.
Every stop
a village well, or curbside cook-fire
lit from old
        engine gaskets.

Can't quite get the chattering local speech—
proud, eloquent women
barefoot
        waving their hands.
Try not to listen.
It's ghosts. money. Not enough food.
So they scowl when a man
        walks too near—
and quickly shut up.
Covering the swell'd up feverish
child with a shawl.
        insects flicking her tiny
        anus & mouth.

Got here by car but—why are we here?
squatting at toilets

crusted with dry
shit and blood.
Hearing the click
and deeper down cable strum
of spun rolled steel,
buses and trucks moving inland
over the hills—
a global economy.
Red lines are shipping lanes
some borders are under dispute.
There they all are
on the wall.

FOR A TRIBAL GIRL IN BANGKOK

Your eyes earnest
wide northern cheekbones
and black swept hair

taking a few minutes off stage
to try out English
with folk at the tables

No
never had a child
The one under the lights has

the heavy one
pulling a string of orchids
from her cunt

Patpong District, i:93

RUN MY HAND UNDER

Does Nature remember, think you,
that they were men, or not rather that
they are *bones?*
—H. D. Thoreau

In a redwood grove, on a low hill facing east, I bent over a shovel and buried my dog. Sun pierces a tree, the far ridge, a fresh growth already laces the turned-over sod. St. John's wort in the shade. Where dirt's most disturbed poison oak. Oneself, to end up, on a coastal North American hill, somewhere, hell realm or bardo, beyond whatever—a comfort to consider those bones—

Or run my hand over elastic frail ribcage, the woman I love, her pulse of desire. What store of affection inside the bonehouse? Tilt of the chin, and how her denim skirt falls to her shoes. The things a man loves. Her face could be face of a dog. Face of ash. Ash and a trickle of bone.

It's an old Buddhist trick, got out of Mongolia, some Paleolithic recess up north. Dress up in fur. Take off the fur. See your companion a scatter of bone. Two ossuaries just a membrane between you. Remove it like clothes.

Now love her like that. Take off her fur.

Taste a nipple, go for rough skin but find rib. Thigh against thigh, seeming so fierce, it's only a femur, good for a flute. Try to be delicate, back on your passion, tangle of nerve and wet tissue, all those veins at the crotch. Find pelvis—hollow and dry. I came through that? Hard cartilage. Now try her mouth and touch teeth.

Knucklebone, bone of the ankle, down past the kneecap. Run my hand under, beneath beneath. Where does it come from? How did it get here?

Yet it's heaped on the bed. Next to a window. Imagine the aftermath. Hipbone on hip.

September 1986

HORACIO COSTA

FROM THE BOOK OF FRACTA

(Tr. from the Portugese by Charles A. Perrone)

1. Propositio

I should have so many things to tell you about this my latest publication were it not for my loathing of the very notion of dwelling upon these poor poetic doings of mine, which are nothing more than fragments of thoughts that, for a host of unfavorable circumstances, did not manage to flow and fill the broad new moulds I had imagined. They are merely born fragments and momentary vibrations: they merely point, here or there, to paths I *could have* taken to do something profound and original.

Antero de Quental, "Letter to Tommaso Cannizaro," Sept. 5, 1888

I

La Storia

Alveoli imitate trees
in Bangui, Bokassa to Napoleon.
This is a novel.

II

Cosmicosis

OM. And then a gesture: the Void appears
on the balcony of the night. Down below, words,
an angry mob, proclaim their master.

III
Drummondiana

A loved B who loved C who loved
no one. Volition ends in dispersion:
pyramids/powder to frame the lovers' lane.

VIII
Zone

Don't count the number. No first or last, the waves of the sea.
Fragments:
before the palm groves, how slow the flock. They come come
come. Calm is
zebras' indefinite chewing. Exegi monumentum aere perennius.
Tantalizing.

IX
Pontus Euxinus

I lie down on the divan. The more microscopic the vision, the
greater the diffraction
of the subject. And I spoke of my father: feet leaving tracks in
the sand.
So we slipped. Dunes invade the middle of the landscape.

X
Il Pensieroso

. . .et c'est la première. Bronze body before the sea; the house of
thought,
foam. In each grain the chronicle of the pharaohs. Or nothing.
You asked me.

The response of the hierophant to Ptolemy's envoy: the proton falls.

XI
Port wine

Cin-cin. The center is everywhere, periphery where time ends. Enterexit is the prescription: at point scarlet we remember the Grape, the Uva. Slowly I drink
from the fountain of youth, I raise the golden calves to Ponces-de-León. *Tawny.*

XIV
Cosmycosis

Viscera come out on the balcony of the night and face their Master.
As they materialize, lymph, blood, ducts of thought fall.
Fungi, discontent task of nothingness, occupy the asphalt of the Avenue.

XV
Black Hole

The furious animal swallows its own halos. Black the color of the inner light. An almost, its mask. We heard its angelic omnivorous complaints. In the darkness of the room, I think of my father.

XIX
De Motu

Eppur si muove, the shortest distance is always a curve,
light and larvae dance on apples, the beast eats, eats and shits
shadows. An image of the universe hung from a mental tree.

XXI

What area can hide the liberty of a line?
From planes to mounts universes relate, pulsars heave and pant
in interstices. If it please thee, inscribe thy fractality in plain skin
papers.

XXV
Marbleized Papers

Sponges, sperm, stylemes, a taste for titles in foreign tongues,
she keeps knocking on the roof of my mouth, amphibian leaps
in the cavern.
Sume superbiam quaesitam meritis. The droplets of rain slide
down the marble.

XXVII
Cosmy-icosis

They were born of self-determination, a fertile parade through
the cosmos
in this potter's object. A week later, from their caps, a burst of
brown powder.
The inexorable wilting began. Mushrooms can't bear light.

XXVIII
The Fragmentist

From the bars of these clothes I regard the world. Man views Uva. What is it
that He sees? The flower of doubt has lightning roots, it was a spectral life,
and I was unaware. A black sack the Harlequin will wear, an allusion to Creation.

XXX
The Fossil Way
(Cœlacanthus Latimeria Chalumnæ)

Some look at blank walls; others fast on Fridays. Ecstasy asks for method. In the Comoros a fish survives, on improbable fins moves along;
The bottom of the sea, of lava. The document is there, and moves along on fins.

XXXI
Fear Phoenix

there: parade for no one orgasm or sepsis
scholastic logarithmic beer like method, like
Word? rhythmic horror: there stars explode

XXXII
The Poetic Itself

le silence éternel the spinning of these wheels with cadavers aflame in the middle
of the day these birds preparing their beaks all these eyes observing the rite

the mountain split apart the wide open furnace *Babel to no avail* m'effraie

XXXVI
The Negative Way
(Key lock singing, la-tee-dockers, K. Looney, eh)

Reads shells, throws the I-Ching, fasts on Fridays, a chest of Zen,
adores Jung, frequents
the Torah and the Tents, tosses a coin a day into the Fontana di Trevi, *bushman,*
collects Coca Colas, believes in Quetzacoatl Mem de Sá in the Satanic Dr. No.

XXXIX
Tsunami
(Leçon)

Leaning on his dictionary, diligent, the poet invents his Krakatoa.
Not here, but
in the Pacific, which was discovered by Vasco Núñez de Balboa.
And the Wave comes,
eighty ferocious meters high, aloha! no one's ever seen a more crackpot invention.

XL
El Azahar

Windmills reduce the cosmos; memory founds the wetlands. And them
I shall wed, flowers of doubt, bouquet queen. I return home to the tortured form

of the mental orange groves. Not even the landscape is unique:
95% sky 5% whatever.

XLV
The Temptation of Saint Anthony

in the heavens the third **V**ision examines monstrous ornithorhynchus
in the head heart the **V** of e**V**angelism gnaws the frame of the ancient boy
under my feet *the breaking of the **V**essels* the absolute rats absol**V**ing

XLVI
In the Society of Stones Frogs Sometimes Croak

We moderns know that Halley's Comet is shaped like Saudi Arabia.
That a minuet dances with asteroids. That like gauze the atmosphere is thin.
That earth itself like the atmosphere is thin. That it's out of fashion to drink hemlock.

XLVIII
Tezcatlipoca

Mirror of mine, black mirror, everyone's mirror. Image with no reflection: up in steam, up in smoke. The fragment-man reduced to an atom. In the folds of the universe, the scream, still, resounds.

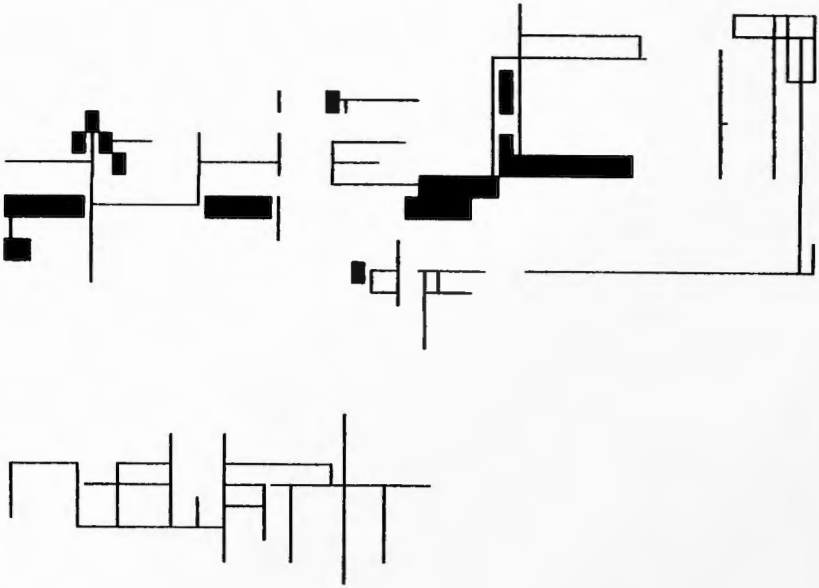
XLIX
Supernovæ

the omnivorous angel eats its body and the proton falls; light exchanges into matter
and matter, *darling,* into nothing; nothingness appears in the void and the body splashed with
signs of extinct light is matter but empty; the void, *darling,* inaugurates history

AMIRI BARAKA

Without listing my e.g.s, elementals of where I thought the shadow of me had passed. Where you been, bend. I could still produce a portrait of lived. Internally they say you feel, an they talking about the outside of there. Their are the filled up of you seein. Talk it mo. Talk it jo. at you candy sto.

I am the only story telling me here out like this. Telling a seen it living, my breath comes out and the world goes in, your breath and ideas I pick up like picking a banjar.



THE CITY OF NEW ARK
A POEM OF DESTINY

FROM BOOK ONE

***

New Ark Space
is forked
pitch
black Sun
at noon.

The people lay
roll
laid &
stretched yet
incompletely
out!

Yet they are truly *out!*

Mostly Children
of the
Sun

Descendants of the Earth's
1st Priests
& Scientists

Try to dig through the concrete
who 'em is
& Yes from No

What is Good
& Why
The Madness?

*

In New Ark

there's grey
icicle
Santa Claus

death
bldg.

Lincoln there Fucked up
in stone.

There's niggers who are completely
Greasy Heads
Words Greasy
Heads inserted
like pee pee smells
just behind the
vestibule

Yet A Broad
Mother fuckers of all
descriptions

gentled by media lighting
the noise holds a framing silence

Solo
&
Ensemble

We all rock w/ the ark
& try to make our
33 or 45
degrees

Endarkened or
Dead!

Wit me A
is repeating
better to
see

than dream
better to dream
than
New Ark be dead!

is people
borne reborn
in sea
See
Seers
&
Scene
See in See out
The ark is
45°
&
90°
The 33 must have 12 disciples
A See
Sun
Year
is
AFFIRMATIVE

To raise the full
sail
Like a Pyramid
The
Re
Ra
Ray
Rah
Crown
Folk
us
IG
NITE
ARE

(The *letter*
The *let*

O Ship
of
Zion
If we turn
from thee
our hearts
are wither

We are not NEW
to a
Knower

I PUPIL

M A G N I F I E R

A I R W A T E R E A R T H

F I R E

SIGN

& S I G N I F I E R

P R E Y & P R A Y

Before life
& eaten
by it
until
We house ourselves
with
living
goodness

SAYS
SAILS

Intercourse

Stops
Latter
How long
the raise

the gratitude
living

under
standing
Can

Wholly
&
Circular

Go
Wheel

The Tower
&
Trip

Heaven
&
the journey

Tortured Slaves
below decks
Chained
in
Shit
&
Vomit

therein our city
carries in itself
the Move
& the Stop
among the
endless waves
of beings

Rock Ark
Role Tied

the things of Standing & Moving
the being & the been

Black Rhythm
Turning Blue
Ra returns
from his
Western
Tour.

New Ark
Language
Its words
always
that show
the change

circle
the square
the view
standing
under
A Pyramid

If you can imagine
what can be real

if you can find out
What is

That the earth's masters
will save it
& live

the others
will die out

or become
extinct

& unknown.

That we claim the ancient natural
order of humanity
into question

That we are pledged!

Rapture

Sun blown jism
perfect
intelligence

Go—
Come
Like The Sun Beats
Space
into
Speech

Our Hearts
Rap
The Sun's language.

I talked to one "sailor" the other day

What is disappearing is ignorance, wheresom'ever you be in what is ignored. The dross of definition.
We seek what we know, and stumble into error fully armed. We never thought we'd suffer, never thought pain would get us where it wanted us. Except when we understood, it was all pain, and we were counting as we fought, the blows extended by the memory of being everywhere at the same beat. Except that never is if you try to remember. You are always carried with you, you are never absent, and never alone. People confirm life for us, but they cannot live it for us.

When you begin to see yourself more naturally it is late and the laws weigh against you like a body like a chanting to you a glowing underneath the cloak of name.

We understand how much better the future will be. We are somebody's future, and somebody's past. The present is what we struggle to fully experience and then understand. And it is not waiting for us, it's beckoning throbs inside us claiming us yet alive, yet capable of love.

—Interlude Captain

Ark Talks Swims Walks Loves

What ever you're selling, that's out from jump. No Selling. Selling is out, is over. Like the wave, it says goodbye, to all that. What ever you're selling arrest yourself until we get there to speak to you. Our new constitution says No Selling. No Merchants. No Traders. We're for all flavors, and no favors. How could it be a favor, and everything is here to touch. Or speak to. The spirits want no favors, they in flavors. Like the colors. The weather. No favors. NO privilege. And no selling. No selling nothing. NO yourself neither. No selling nothing. You cant give yourself away neither. No free you's and no selling. You is everything, and when that dawns, your day will be here, your ship, o ark, will be and your sea, and your free, oh Ark, o dark lovely ark. Oh place of where, oh self of all telling.

So without the merchandising, the commodification, and no favors, or tricks. We depress lies flatter, ground them. So they are merely or merest. So they are brief frowns dispersed by afternoon. Vague woulds and shoulds, keep the do's the be's the is from bad as what is alive hence good. Good is all you got, and that's the truth. That is the living breath, who is breathing is God, that's everything.

The Muslims can tell you if you can tell them something, that Allah is everything and whatever is left, or right. Every bit of information. Computed Total computed, computing, is Allah. Just everything. And its spirit. Its force. It's power. It's history. It's knowledge. Everything!. All. A L L.

Now you a something. A some. Sum. What ever. You is. Or who ever. If you dont understand, who you telling it to, then. They a a. A A. A A. They A A. All is A, the 1st principle the eye, looking down, like the sun rays. God looks down, but that is the sun, like a corpuscle carrying the goods, eats, air, information, anything you gotta have. Prayer needs sun. Preyers, on the other hand, eat, everything, or sell it. They illegal. Prayer is the consultancy with the before yourself, whatever. The not here, which is the majority. The whatever you come out of and will return to. If you can penetrate that veil in some way. Put yr self in touch with the before yourself. The before this world. The after this world. The is that be shoots out of. Pre peter. Pre come. Get in touch with the Not.

****

The coming and going are proofs of the constant is, coming and going back to itself. The science is understanding this and why. We're like animals roaming and biting. But we want more which signifies like my man my ol man on the tree top screaming for a little civilization from the roaring meat eaters checking him out meat frustrated. He telling jokes, throwing doo doo down on em. Signifying.

The Africans were the signifying monkey, and still, it seems, must is. Must is, mus' aint dont sound right. You got to get back up on the two legs, and signify. You got to do the triple dip jump step and signify. Rap. He in the tree, way high, rapping, beating on the wood. Talking about Hey Hey Hey, I'm what's happening. For half a million years so it was. Then the flood and whatnot. You got weird cousins suddenly. Dudes went off to find out what was and when they return, all ugly, riding horses and shit. We say, damn, what happen my man, you look really weird. Why you look like that? And they growl and start that selling talk. That merchant shit. They say ask us do we want to buy something. Nobody know what that mean. Old black John say fuck that buying. He tell em about a picture on a big rock.

They talkin about getting. Nobody understand, except ol John said fuck all that. That's old. You'll get surely fucked up with that. Took all the jewelry and shit with em. Some ol plates, went away from here talking the same shit. Buying And Selling. Last dumb shit they say is that stealing is where it's really at. Talk about stealing is high art. Fuck it, we went back

up and looked at the 1st sea, the 1st cloud, the 1st voice, the first song, and felt cool. For centuries.

Yours,
"Ark Am" 8/89

Ark

Wants to know
Wants to be and is for that
Wants not to
afloat, air driven, love driven, growing into the babe
seed is what you saw, story is what "your" stored of that
so the seed carries all the information, of scene, and re
makes whatever to be.

Ark lives to live. Life is specific not abstract, not an IOU, except seeing means you seen, and the scene goes on as you do as you are as you will, want, to be, you keep lying to yrself, but when God is busted, watch who be in the papers. God exists only as the total of what is
Goodness is God
's only life
life is God
Death is not evil, Death is the beginning of the new year. Yeah! Only what cannot exist is evil. That's why.

Murder is the illusion that life is evil. So that is evil. Sin is what does not exist. Sin means **without**. With Out being the never. The not is not the never. The never cannot. The not, is what's womb.

Dont you get tired of animals and living
with animals in a cage? Dont you get tired
of animals telling you how humans live? Dont you get tired of the Dead, messing you up and they on vacation?

At the top of the highest building is where the new is. The known is below already what is not, the new is in its womb waiting to be fertilized. The fertilizer brain. Your history is your tail, your snake mind, ideas are the day

time for the sun, of the black woman. Night. Who is is. An Ethiopian.

Everything is a real idea, the life of before the idea, the womb of the idea is real thing, the idea is the path into and away from real, is, carries every, idea is thing breathing, seeds. The G is a seed, A, 1st principle, B, from the is, C existence, in the sea, where the seeds are, see hence seen.

D is the specific where, that manifesting of. E the out of, the energy, what issues, what goes, exhaust, ex it, from which the it breath issues. Blood always talk precise. D shit aint right he say.

Like a cry, E, EEEEE, the issue, the going, the gone. The F is the Flag, the being, the signal of, proof of, existence of. Speed it means, because that determines appearance, how fast among fast, to mean where. The G, is the seed. G! Also gravity measurement, what force into the is substance. Earth and Sun mixed with water, H the tower, the prayer consolidating building, development. So I, is the God number 9, the eye of Ra. Sun and Life, derived therefrom.

The 10 is the rebeginning. I re turned, like the circle, and we arcs of carried in its being, as ourselves, eggs to egos. The egg entering the cycle of be is ego, the egg, is stored information. What I seed!

Ra is Re, because only that is can re produce!

****

Actually, 1 is 2. I got that from Monk 1st, then Marx! 0 is 1! The whole is Un. Unified. Unitary. Atone means to get it together! Be one. 1 requires 2 elements. The is (0 = All) and the being. Their connection, via "night's" history, her tail, memory, total absolute everywhere&thing. A tail, A joint. Connect. Jazz is the meeting the motion the heat the feeling the coming, is being Re being. Be is always Blue when it first get here.

"Fucking" on the other hand means beating, as in fighting! Not love. The "other" beating, rhythm, as in Be At ing, self conscious reflection of everything. Life conscious of Life. Its perfection is its ultimate turn, goal ("gold").

We move supposedly from Fucking To Love as Animals to Humans to Self Created Consciousness, as total harmonic expressions of the endlessly expressed.

Be is is and however and wherever from is manifest specifically. All is All is. Is Is.

The conflict of the journey away from the Mother is summed up as Fucked Up for the totally negative vs Pregnant and the ecstasy of Creation.

As Art. (Exists as opposed to Not.) Vs. Arent. Art Vs. Arent! The Creative Principle Vs The Death Principle.

The Devil then wants Never. Wants Arent. The Devil is not Mythology, there is a scientific principle this concept expresses. Religion was literally The Way of The Sun, The Way of Life.

The Sun Worshippers confirm the obvious, the most scientific explanation of how and why we are here and everything else we see. No Sun No thing. We get jumpy when it goes on tour, not to mention goes out forever? Ha!

Mythology and Metaphysics are the lies the sins the tools of Devils what pushes evil De Evil as it is Death. It is a lie since it is impossible to dismiss the be and even lies must pretend to be the truth. Must pretend to be real, and their realness attests to the constancy of is, as definer and continuer. We test our understanding, like we breathe, in and out. The spirit, literally breath, the top of the church, the spires, the spiral, like the dialectical motion of is, the infinity sign turned upright like it sposed to be, not parallel, the endless mindless metal frenzy. Cat nip. Bees get high on hot honey.

But turning and rising, the spirit. The advance to what we were always. The animal is the distance the out breathing away from and at the same time, essence, to rebecome its total and by doing be whatever it is then expressing or there expressing. . .its where (wear) tale (tail) time is the reverse expression of expression. Emit is powerful, the explanation of time, slow motion. What stops is evil because it is a lie. An illusion. Time expresses elapse, or power, or distance, or history, the number of seeds, except if there was such a real thing as time, there could be no is.

Time will become obsolete when the snapshots of everything and everything are conscious love.

So we are life fighters. Fighting for life. Death is our enemy. Ignorance and Disease, its weapons. Consciousness is our God self, the everything else goes and comes but the path, the road, the you we love, the me we need, is alive. Be for life and against its enemies. This is one things I learn.

Marxism simply tries to bring the Divine (Mystery) into our fingers as known and usable. As it is. As long as there are mysteries we are animals. And our animal spirit is what kills us.

****

In Ark everybody know we need love
tell by the way they walk
tell by the way they talk
by the way they dress, what they love
what they hate

Everybody in the Ark know
We need love.

This is where Freedom come in.

Blue Monk!

****

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REVIEWS & NOTICINGS

The Tale The Hand Itself Tells

Selected Poems. Robert Duncan. Edited by Robert J. Bertholf. New Directions: New York, 1993.

What is missing is the tale the hand
itself tells in its way of working.
—RD

Occasionally a book appears that demands a significant growl. I write as a guardian, and because I think a growl of angry betrayal's in order with this book. At issue is what Robert Duncan once termed "the issue"—the question of who presents a poet's work, whose directives they follow, and what their motives are—a turbulence Duncan tried to address for the last twenty years of his life. New Directions, publisher of Duncan's poetry for thirty years, has now brought out a volume designed, one imagines, to make his poetry more readily available. Yet in its arrangement the book seems not to take Duncan's own directives seriously, as though the poet doesn't need to mean what he says.

First, to note that each of Duncan's five New Directions books is still in print and they provide most of the material for this volume, so the purpose of the book is not to restore unavailable work but to present in more popular format poetry that can be had elsewhere. Duncan wrote many earlier volumes over a twenty-year period though, some fugitive, some widely distributed. From that output came two significant collections, published during the sixties by Fulcrum Press in England—*The First Decade* and *Derivations.* In the nearly 300 pages they collect, you find a terrific amount of important and not-at-all juvenile writing—all of it to be found only with arduous foraging through first edition book shops or special collections libraries. Might not this have been an opportune time for publisher or editor or whomever to get some of this work out, and available, and seen in the

context of Duncan's readily available New Directions books? Yet more than two thirds of this new book draws from work still in print.

In his selection from those out-of-print books, editor Robert Bertholf sensibly keeps one of Duncan's early "serial poems" intact—"Medieval Scenes"—and picks hodgepodge from some Stein imitations. That's okay, but beyond that the selection's notable more for omissions than for savvy arrangement or exciting retrievals. I'll note a few absences. "An African Elegy" ought to have appeared. I don't know that anyone would defend it as one of Duncan's finest poems, but it holds an indisputable historic status. It is the now legendary poem John Crowe Ransom accepted for Southern Review in 1944, then backed off in a reflex of fear or revulsion, and refused to print when he read Duncan's essay "The Homosexual in Society." At the time Duncan tried to engage Ransom in a public forum—a courageous act in the late years of World War II. Now would be timely (our country's theopolitical right planning eight statewide initiatives condemning homosexuals for election-year 1996) for the poem to come into print, accompanied by a brief account of the controversy that raged around it and Duncan's remarkable public stance.

More significant though, I can think of no reason why an editor would leave out what is widely considered Duncan's best poem prior to his New Directions books—"The Venice Poem" of 1948. Rereading Ekbert Faas's considerable biography of Duncan's early years, one sees "The Venice Poem" as Duncan at some breakthrough point—Faas calls it his "most daring and accomplished work before *The Opening of the Field.*" Duncan held it in like esteem—invoking it as the place he found, for the first time, "the full structural imperative of a form seeking to come into existence in the process of the poem" *(Caesar's Gate).* Why if Duncan thought so highly of it would a *Selected* pass it by? mere oversight?

I cannot carp at poems included here from Duncan's three major books of the sixties. Many of the best do appear, including "Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar," "My Mother Would be A Falconress," and the peerless Vietnam War "Passages" to which there is nothing comparable in American poetry. I quaver at criticizing any book containing work of such high an order. May all readers of poetry keep these poems near at hand!

But what this book does with the two volumes of *Ground Work* troubles me. Brief background: in a 1969 statement, Duncan avowed that he would not publish a commercial book for fifteen years. Following this decade and a half's self-imposed exile, during which years he defined how he wanted his poetry to appear on the published page, Duncan insisted that *Ground*

Work I be not conventionally typeset, but printed off a typewritten script he himself prepared personally.

You can look up his argument for typescript versus typesetting in John Taggart's 1974 issue of MAPS—"A Preface prepared for Maps #6: The Issue." In it Duncan allows that the "typed copy is for me the primary 'score' of the poem," and declares with some bitterness that "the printed version. . .rides over decisions that appear in the typed version as notation of the music of the poem." This blunt Preface, partly a blast at John Martin of Black Sparrow for his handling of Duncan's book *Tribunals: Passages 31-35*, describes a "beautifully and expensively printed book that thruout wilfully goes against the directives of its author wherever such directives did not meet the taste of the printer and the publisher." Such, continues Duncan, *"was the particular case of my at last deciding to publish my work in my own typescript."* (My italics.)

How else overcome a publishing industry founded upon "The need of the press and not the need of the poet's art"? Duncan was looking ten years into the future, to 1984's *Ground Work Before the War*. That book, set from Duncan's personal typewritten text, includes a preface with the same insistence—"All 'typographical' features are notations for the performance of the reading." Sad to realize that a generation of poetry readers are coming up now, with no inkling of the wizardry Robert Duncan could display in a public reading. This very bookish man could weave a spell over an audience I've seen no other poet match, and there's nothing in the *Selected* to alert future readers to this cognoscenti's vocal art.

Eccentric or difficult as *Ground Work I*'s typographical layout may seem, it is nonetheless what the poet had come to decide was the appropriate way—the legitimate way—for his work to appear. "This very matter of the typewriter and the author's work and the emergence of the idea of our taking over the means of production of our copy into our own hands is where we must start." Yet a scant three years later, *Ground Works*'s second volume, *Into the Dark;* put together after Duncan's health had collapsed, and evidently directed through press by others than himself, silently passes over the earlier directive and goes with conventional typesetting. Which occasioned from Ken Irby (Conjunctions 12) a carefully thought-out and rather damning review of Robert Bertholf's editorial job.

The publication of *Ground Work: Into the Dark* is now water under the bridge. Pointless to curse Bertholf aloud, or the decision-makers at New Directions (though in private certain friends can still fling themselves into a rage). And now the *Selected Poems* without a word of explanation again

overrides Duncan's directives. Not only are poems from *GWII* again typeset, but without courtesy of a single word of explanation so are all poems from *GWI*, which had originally appeared in Duncan's painstakingly prepared typescript. One cannot but feel it a disavowal of Duncan's poetics. "The need of the press and not the need of the poet's art." Or does one not listen at all to the fifteen years of silence?

In addition, the *Selected* goes with a much narrower page than either volume of *Ground Work*, chopping the ends of many lines, their last words dropped underneath into brackets. In certain pieces, such as "Before the Judgment: Passages 35," in which Duncan returns to the wizard power of his Vietnam *Passages*, this mocks the entire page he had so carefully prepared nearly ten years before. All notations for the poem as spoken text have vanished.

"The visual details of language informed Duncan's poetry," states Bertholf's Preface with blithe innocence. The only instance where he edges close to acknowledging Duncan's twenty-year experiment with how the poem appears on the page.

Putting Duncan's typewritten text of *Ground Work* into a conventionally typeset format, and breaking up his exactingly prepared spacings, might have some justification—largely commercial—were it accompanied by an honest editorial note making clear that these are not "definitive readings," and that certain exigencies of publishing ("the need of the press") had required suppression of the poet's arts. No such apology or explanation appears in the *Selected Poems*.

You don't need to understand Duncan's neoplatonic or Blake-like premises about Authors that dwell behind the poem to acknowledge that something has been terribly disturbed here—maybe desecrated's the word—or to rage at how Shopkeeper Mind dominates our age. This is a volume that seems decidedly retrograde, as though we were to accept a republication of Emily Dickinson with Mabel Loomis Todd's squeamish punctuation restored. Restored because the book's cheaper to print that way, or more unsettlingly, because that's how the educated middle class expects their literature served them. Which lends something sad and baffling to the way Bertholf's preface states, "Duncan insisted on the value of the poem. . . ."

Duncan, 1974: *was it not the very mode we saw operative thruout the system, from the state to the classroom ? the mode of the sell?*

—ANDREW SCHELLING

Memorial for Two Algerian Poets

Our eyes are fixed on the TV screen of the New York Times Op-Ed page, transfixed & horrified, emptied & blinded by what is happening in ex-Yugoslavia, in the ex-Soviet Union & its ex-satellites, that is, as usual, in ex-Europe & its ex-tensions. Blinded thus, we know little, if anything, about what is happening—*the horror, the horror,* to use a famous fictional European's dying words—in other parts of the world, & the media is certainly not going to deal with it unless it has some kind of marketable Euro-American angle. The quasi-civil war in Algeria, for example, is going largely unreported, except when a few weeks ago the ex-FIS (the outlawed fundamentalist Islamic party which, having more or less won the democratic elections a year ago, was sidelined by the FLN, the corrupt ex-revolutionary party that has been in power since independence in 1962, on which it has declared war) stated that to hasten its purification of the country it would kill all foreigners in Algeria (twenty-four were killed by the end of December). Dozens of Algerians are being killed daily on both sides. The FIS's assassination strategy is simple: kill off the intelligentsia & anybody else able to voice any intelligent opposition—or at least enough of them as gorily as possible to make the rest shut up or leave the country for fear of dying. Among the many killed this past year were two poets: Tahar Djaout, who was shot May 26 and Youssef Sebti, who was knifed to death on December 28 as he was going to his job teaching sociology in a college of agronomy in the suburbs of Algiers. They were killed because they were, quietly and seriously, going about their business as writers & would not shut up, but kept writing & saying what needs to be said: that totalitarianism under any guise, religious or military, is the ultimate evil. In an eerie, prophetic mood, Tahar Djaout, more than twenty years ago, wrote a poem that celebrated the independence of his country, but that was simultaneously an elegy for the writer Mouloud Feraoun who had been assassinated towards the end of the war of independence in not dissimilar circumstances & for not dissimilar reasons:

March 15, 1962

how to curb their rage to dissolve the stars
and to birth eternal night
I challenge their iron
and the enraged ire with which they multiply the chains

in the blue smile
of the Admiralty open on the promises

today in long swallows I gulp
—sun thundering over Algiers—
the joys of a feasting
where resurrected dawns gambol
and yet I think on the holocausts
unleashed to make dawn break
I think of Feraoun
—smile frozen in the sun's circumcision

they are afraid of the truth
they are afraid of the straight pen
they are afraid of truly human humans
and you, Mouloud, you insisted and spoke
about wheat fields for the sons of the poor
and spoke of pulverizing all the barbed wire
that lacerated our horizons

they speak of you and say that you were too good
that you felt revolted
hearing shells greet each dawn
that you believed human beings to be born so as to be brothers
and though challenging all the orgies of horror
you were incapable of hatred

one day, Mouloud, goodness finally triumphed
and we could wear the sun's trident
and we could honor the memory of the dead
because
    with
        your hands, those gleaners of dawn's mysteries,
and your dreamy inveterate poet's face,
you have known how to fulfill our truths
written in sun scraps
on the breasts of all those who revolt

—PIERRE JORIS

Santiago de Chile and La Paz, Bolivia, have in common an urban silence. A traffic jam in La Paz is the very image of chaos: thousands of cars, buses, and trucks bumping into each other as they move forward in slow motion, their fierce competition for space leaving unlikely channels through which hundreds of children and adults dash, risking their necks to cross the street—and in all that contained violence which lasts for hours no one exchanges a shout or an insult. Everything in silence, as if all those present were gauging themselves by observing their own anger.

Santiago's Paseo Ahumada (Smoky Walk) is the center, the pedestrian street that borders Chile's "City" or Wall Street, where hundreds of beggars and street vendors, thieves and policemen, vagrants and passersby swarm. Everything in this vast human profusion takes place in silence or in a low voice, without calling attention to itself. Footsteps and whispers are audible in the general silence, as if we were in a quiet little town and not a great city.

Smog completely covers Santiago's sky. The hills and their eternal snows cannot be seen. The city wants to forget its location in the Andes and imagine itself in its own virtual reality. Santiago is faxing itself into another dimension, and every neighborhood no matter how miserable has its mall. Shantytown Mall: a Chilean invention.

The public telephones in the kiosks on the Avenida Prado in La Paz are covered by a bit of crochet that envelops them like a multicolored glove. Are the people of the city trying to protect communication as they protect their religious offerings, by wrapping them in a small piece of cloth? Or is an Aymara hand enclosing and integrating the technology into its own vital style?

The airport in Arica, the border city that unites and separates Chile, Peru and Bolivia, lies out in the desert, next to the sea, in the mouth of a dry river, an ancient passage used by llama caravans going from Tiwanaku to the sea, from Titicaca to the valley where piles of stones, hillside geoglyphs, were large signs announcing to them, "this land is ours, it is occupied." Abstract men with great sacks of shellfish on their backs, accompanied by stars and suns. From the air, suspicious hollows can be seen in the desert—tombs opened by looters? *Huacas* holding mummies ten thousand years old? The airport is a meager construction, with awnings made of *quincha*, the same millinery thatching used in the tombs. But the garden is colonial: palm trees from the Canary Islands replace the native species, roses and carnations instead of *quiscos* and *chaguales*. Every Aymara who boards the plane is dressed in Western clothes. In flashes, I remember other desert towns: Calama, a little further south. A town that is

a perfect film set of three or four buildings surrounded by immensity. Two or three central streets in which Toyotas and Nissans form an incredible traffic jam four blocks long. In those few blocks, the Aymara girls make their way from one building to another, perfectly outfitted in their tailored suits and high heels, as if they were in Manhattan.

And a little further, in Chuqui (Chuquicamata), the largest opencut copper mine in the world raises its smokestack of poisonous gases that darken the desert. It is the only shape visible from satellite for many miles around. In Quechua and Aymara, "Chuqui" means the glitter of copper and gold. That glitter brought foreigners here which, among other things, provoked the military coup of 1973. (Allende had nationalized the copper industry, infuriating Kissinger and Nixon. . .) Today the monument to that killing is a broken shoe, a fragment of bone, a severed finger that came to light in the desert, on the highway near Calama. By those fragments it was known that the mangled bodies of the intellectuals and leaders assassinated by the military in 1973 were there. They blew them up with dynamite so there would be no memory of their death, but the whole desert is memory, tombs and *huacas* of then and now.

In La Paz, perpetual protest rallies that no one appears to pay any attention to. The workers crucify themselves, tying themselves to posts, antennae, flagpoles. Men and women crucified on the roof of the university, in the main avenue, silhouetted against Illimani, the sacred mountain of La Paz.

Their bodies at once subvert and affirm an Andean version of Christianity, as if they were saying "Christ isn't the only one." They corroborate the image Merton used when he said of the Zapotecs, "The people itself is its own god."

To arrive at Lake Titicaca is to arrive at the center of the Aymara world. Spanish is no longer spoken, except in the schools, which are Bolivian, or when a foreigner comes to visit. In the pitch-dark yet translucent waters there is still no trash. Poverty recycles and reuses everything. In the island towns they listen to Aymara radio stations. Andean songs and fiestas on the radio! (There can't be many places in the world, I thought, where people would rather listen to their own songs than to North American music.) In the islands, hundreds of children playing in Aymara, pre-Colombian and contemporary games. Serpentine labyrinths carved into the earth and soccer games at six thousand feet above sea level. The girls tie themselves up in cords and woolen fabrics, making geometric shapes with the tension of their bodies.

Two boys of around eleven offered to take me to the top of a mountain to see the Inca altar. We walked quickly to get there before sunrise. The boys sang Aymara erotic songs, laughing and enjoying themselves because they thought I didn't understand. When I started to laugh they began to

wonder and switched to Spanish, singing songs learned in school, patriotic hymns against Chile. They ask me point-blank: Why did Chile steal the sea from Bolivia? "Greed," I tell them.

Poetry travels underground in La Paz, secret as Leonardo García Pabón's "Los Rios Subterráneos," the poem of the fountains of water that erupt with the torrential rains, dragging down whole neighborhoods of miserable houses. Landslides and avalanches that become other hills where other miserable neighborhoods will grow up. The books of Jaime Saenz, Oscar Cerruto, Pedro Shimose and Eduardo Mitre are as difficult to find in bookstores as those of Blanca Wietuchter, but they travel from hand to hand and are more present and have more reality than any other language or rhetoric in the city.

In Santiago and La Paz, the media are transvestites of colonial "reality." They are continually converting it (translating it) into the terms used by the press in the northern hemisphere, into its names and categories, into a language that is imagined to be "the language of the West." The effect this produces is one of irreality, as if we were reading a version of events that is beyond the control or the experience of ordinary citizens. And that is the key: to present a "superreality" (especially on television) to which the natives aspire as if it were a mental Eldorado. The children, hypnotized by this irreality, prefer it and imitate it, using it to create a language that is yet another version.

But poetry exists in the tension between two or more languages. A single line by Saenz or Cerruto in La Paz, or by Elvira Hernández in Santiago, plays with this irreality, taking it apart.

You have to have spent a whole morning watching the Choqueyapu rushing towards Illimani at full speed with its cargo of garbage to understand the brilliance of one line of Cerruto. You have to have seen the tons of garbage produced by Chilean consumerism to appreciate a line of E. Hernández's "Santiago Waria."

Still, in Santiago poetry is everywhere, it flows above ground. It's in the newspapers, on the radio and television. Thousands of people recently congregated at the new funeral for Pablo Neruda, whose remains were at last moved to his house on Isla Negra, facing the sea. (Just as, years before, thousands had gathered for the funerals of Violeta Parra and Gabriela Mistral. In Chile, the power of poets is measured by the size of their funerals.) But the presence of poetry in the media is double-edged: it is used to exalt a poet like Gabriela Mistral and to sell underwear by invoking her name. Although hundreds of people throng to listen to Gonzalo Rojas or Nicanor Parra, and every year there are several "international poetry encounters," the new currents are as subterranean and little-known in Santiago as in La Paz. Poetry is becoming a marginal phenomenon, even in Chile. The new poetry written in Mapuche and published in small

bilingual editions (Elicura Chihuailaf and Lionel Lienlaf)) and the texts by women—Soledad Fariña, Eugenia Brito and Verónica Zondek—are equally unobtainable, perhaps to honor their identification with the underground.

—CECILIA VICUÑA
[Tr. from the Spanish by Esther Allen]

Vallejo in Paris: The Poet as Journalist

When César Vallejo left Peru for Paris in 1923 he was thirty-one years old with two books of poetry to his name. *Trilce* had appeared the year before and disconcerted critics with its stark innovations and the raw force of its language; only gradually did other poets, notably in Spain, recognize its importance. Vallejo spent fifteen years in Paris where he died, but he never published another book of poems in his lifetime.

What he did manage to publish was mostly journalism. Soon after arriving in Paris he became a correspondent for newspapers in Peru, ultimately contributing to over thirty journals in Latin America and Europe, predominantly through the 1920s. He wrote some three hundred articles and chronicles, covering social and cultural topics ranging from the Salon d'Automne and profiles of artists to fashion, sports (especially tennis), spiritism (Krishnamurti), and curiosities from the European newspapers, reflecting the habits of both Europeans and Latin Americans. His own cultural identity remained a central concern, particularly in the context of Europe, and he continued to question that relationship while engaging himself fully with the issues of his time. Eventually his long-standing preoccupation with social injustice rose to the fore and by the end of the decade it became his primary subject. Above all, this body of reportage and reflections served as his "writer's workshop," as Jorge Puccinelli points out, where Vallejo could elaborate his ideas on art and politics, while continuing to write in various genres.

Desde Europa (Lima: Ediciones Fuente de Cultura Peruana, 1987) gathers nearly all of Vallejo's articles from Paris—he also published several pieces before leaving Peru—together with numerous photos, illustrations, maps and facsimiles of letters and newspaper pages. The book represents an enormous work of scholarship that occupied Puccinelli for many years. His purpose was to reintegrate this material so that the poet's better-known

writings could be viewed in their total context. He notes Vallejo's fondness for coining words and phrases ("de una sencillez casi vegetal," "la hiena fosforosa del destino") much as in the poetry, and on at least two occasions Vallejo quotes directly from *Trilce* in his articles. At times the journalism serves as a trial run for the more creative work—the prose poem "Hallazgo de la Vida," for example, first appeared in 1926 as a slightly longer piece for a newspaper in Trujillo, the provincial capital where Vallejo had gone to school. Though critics have been aware of the journalism, Puccinelli was apparently the first to unearth the work from Vallejo's early years in Paris, written for another paper in Trujillo, the six-page daily *El Norte*, founded by the poet's friends.

Vallejo wrote his first piece the month he reached Paris, in July. His semi-regular series of three dozen chronicles for *El Norte* was called "Desde Europa," and it began with "En Montmartre," which tells of his encounter with an Andalusian on the Champs Elysées who recognizes he is from America and takes him to Montmartre to show him around. Vallejo describes how the scene there is fading and that now the action is in Montparnasse. The Andalusian insists more than once that "Europe is finished," and asks Vallejo why he's bothered to come. "I am a worker from Peru," the poet tells him. "I wanted to see the old continent."

Judging from his earliest articles, Vallejo was apparently quick to learn French. He seems hardly dazzled, however, by the vast metropolis; rather he is always ready to challenge what he sees. Describing a new production of Maeterlinck's celebrated play, *L'Oiseau bleu*, he tells how both critics and public raved, then tears it apart as garish and ridiculous. With a certain irony he comments on the new inductions at the Académie Française, an institution that repeatedly provokes his amusement. When he writes on the popular Montparnasse café La Rotonde, a spot that he frequented, he is impressed by its company—the Japanese painter Foujita, an actress from Pitoëff's theater, Enrique Gómez Carrillo along with Maeterlinck, as well as Tzara and "the whole dadaist squad"—and yet he has fun with it. But he makes his first serious charge late in 1923, in "Cooperación," where he tells of a Peruvian evening at a Paris theater, with a lecture on the Incas, poetry readings (including himself and José Santos Chocano, of the previous generation), a concert, and a talk by the Peruvian minister to France. The entire Peruvian colony attends, to share their culture with the French, and Vallejo laments: "Solidarity? Understanding? Nothing of the sort exists in Europe with respect to Latin America. We offer our hearts to Europe. . .and Europe responds with silence and a premeditated deafness." Why does Europe scorn us, fear us, remain ignorant of us, he asks, warning that recognition must come: "We the barbarians are here!"

His columns for *El Norte* averaged once a month through the end of 1924, and that year half were devoted to sketches of older Latin American

writer/diplomats whom he visited in Paris. Among these were two chroniclers active since the turn of the century, with strong ties to the French literary establishment: Gómez Carrillo, the Guatemalan writer who had been friendly with Rubén Darío and was perhaps the most translated in his time, and Ventura García Calderón, one of four brothers from a conservative Peruvian family who had all moved to Paris; Francisco García Calderón, the essayist, was profiled as well by Vallejo. He also wrote on the Ecuadorian critic Gonzalo Zaldumbide, the Bolivian Alcides Arguedas, and the Uruguayan Hugo Barbagelata, editor of *L'Amérique Latine*, a short-lived journal in French and Spanish. Vallejo had contributed an essay there on new Peruvian writers, in which he showed a keen sense of the problems confronting his generation, who were digesting a full range of foreign influences even as they produced "substantial works that are genuinely South American."

In other pieces of the time Vallejo comments on the incredible resourcefulness of French vanity, another recurring theme—how every instinct and institution is geared toward vaunting French achievements. The urge to publicize the national glory is second nature: "The moment a French person feels or dreams anything important, they leap into the street right away with it" ("Réclame de culture"). In "Las Mujeres de Paris" he notes that for a "new worlder" visiting Paris what strikes him above all is the scarcity of children. The low birth rate in France then brings him to consider the "strange impression of sterility" in the women he sees, with their cold grins, and how perhaps they become denatured by sharing the same workaday struggles as men.

Journalism was Vallejo's main source of income in Paris, but the newspapers often did not pay promptly—through the years he sometimes had to borrow money from friends. Not until 1925 did he begin to find enough work, when the Lima journal *Mundial* hired him to write a monthly column, which became his most extensive collaboration. In 1926 he was contributing as well to *Variedades*, also of Lima, and for the next several years he was turning out articles on a weekly basis. The larger audiences for these publications enabled him to write pieces that were longer and more wide-ranging. Puccinelli points to a shift in style with this new work: whereas in the first years Vallejo kept in mind the earlier *cronistas* like Gómez Carrillo, seeking *le mot rare* in his use of language, reviving archaic words, now he sought the precision of *le mot juste* to render his language more powerful, taking as a prime example the work of Joseph Conrad.

Besides the increased outlets for his articles, Vallejo's situation grew a bit more secure in 1925 for other reasons. That spring he became secretary at the office of Lee Grands Journaux Ibéro-Américains, a new press agency set up to facilitate contacts between Latin America and Europe. For six months prior to its opening he had campaigned for a job from its founder,

the Argentine writer Alejandro Sux (back in 1912 Sux had helped found *Mundial Magazine* in Paris, not to be confused with the later Peruvian journal, and proposed Rubén Darío as its editor). Despite the grand designs of the enterprise, which Vallejo announced in his first piece for *Mundial*, the work was not as steady as he had hoped. Mostly it consisted of running the office, but operations seldom ran smoothly; for his own reasons—his health, on one occasion, plus more promising commitments—Vallejo took several brief leaves of absence before resigning two years later. In October of 1925 he also began receiving a small monthly stipend for a few years from the Spanish government—thanks to the persistent efforts of his friend Pablo Abril de Vivero, the Peruvian poet and diplomat based in Madrid. Ostensibly the grant was for Vallejo to finish his law studies in Madrid, abandoned earlier in Peru: all he did was take the train there every month or two to pick up his check.

The following year he was involved in founding a couple of publications as well. *La Semaine Parisienne* never got past the planning stages, but Vallejo devoted a number of letters to the subject in his extensive correspondence with Abril. Together they intended to start a twelve-page weekly and hoped to attract an impressive list of contributors among French and Latin American writers; he wrote to Abril that Montherlant would give an article for the first issue. Vallejo even went so far as to quit his job temporarily at Les Grands Journaux and to open an office for the new journal, but without money he couldn't advance the project. Meanwhile his friend Juan Larrea, the Spanish poet, launched a small literary journal, *Favorables París Poema*, in which Vallejo took part distributing hundreds of copies. He contributed a couple of brief texts about poetry—"Poesía Nueva" and "Se prohibe hablar al piloto" ("A poem is a vital entity that is much more organic than an organic being in nature. . .if you amputate a line, a word, a letter, a written sign from a poem, it dies. . .")—but the journal folded after two issues.

Vallejo seemed to truly enjoy stretching out in his longer chronicles, linking together the most unlikely elements till the end might be anyone's guess. He remained constantly aware of the social undercurrents of events and cast an ironic glance at politicians and those who thought themselves in control. In "Crónica de París" from 1925 he begins by questioning the sources of liberalism, arguing rather for eastern philosophies which spread their wisdom by way of a certain intolerance and a sacred sectarian passion. He then shifts to the story of Chinese students in Paris uniting in solidarity with striking workers in Shanghai, while pointing up the harsh conditions at the Shanghai mills belonging to French and English companies. The piece moves on to tell of the aristocracies of fashion in a gala evening at the Grand Palais, mysterious threats against the event, the ploys of publicity-seeking industrialists, and more, ending finally in an account of

the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen whose plane got lost at the North Pole: from every corner the questions multiplied, what happened to him, till some days later he returned alive and indeed nothing at all had happened to him.

Fashion amused him to no end, there in the capital of fashion—for its inherent folly and the lengths to which people will go to follow its call. In "El verano en Deauville," also from 1925, he describes how the seaside resort is in vogue because of the Parisian artists who reign there. Their dress that season then brings to mind a long episode about an escaped leopard in the Bois de Boulogne near Paris, how the whole city is caught up in the madcap chase for days, when at last it is found and shot, leading to protests and, immediately, the fashion for leopard-skin shoes. By the fall it becomes transformed into the Leopard Dance at the Moulin Rouge.

"Brilliant and cruel city" he calls Paris in the same piece, for it has failed to appreciate the work of George Bernard Shaw, who in turn is quoted for his remarks on the city's intense provincialism. Later that year he returns to his defense of Shaw—French critics consider Pirandello the better playwright, but Vallejo judges him more a technical innovator while Shaw clearly "possesses a humanism lacking in the other writer" ("La conquista de París por los negros"). To the end, despite his increasing political engagement, Vallejo will remain too much the humanist to let his esthetic judgments fall under the complete sway of Marxist dogma.

As for his attention to the stage, beyond its interest as a subject for his columns, Vallejo showed an ongoing concern with theater from his perspective as a writer. He chides the French for producing mostly mediocre work, and for knowing nothing of new Russian or German theater. He considers Cocteau essentially a fake, and when his "Orphée" opens in 1926, Vallejo writes: "At heart Cocteau is a conservative, in spite of his efforts and modernist poses. His attitudes are based on makeup; his acrobatics are clownish, that is, false. Inside, sleep the old spirit and substance. . .in truth, he is, will be, and has been, a Catholic" ("La visita de los reyes de España a París"). Three years later, reporting on theater trends, he dismisses the realism of boulevard theater, and in praising the Russians is especially excited by the plastic quality of their work; among the French, he only cares about the more innovative directors, such as Charles Dullin, Jacques Copeau, and Georges Pitoëff. It was in the path of their work that he hoped to go with the several plays he started writing at the end of the decade, in an effort to merge his creative concerns with social and political material, to reach a broader audience. For a moment Dullin was interested, and García Lorca tried to help get him a production in Madrid. He had thought at least to make some money from this work, but he never saw any of his plays produced. Late in his life he even wrote film scripts from two of his plays, yet nothing happened with these either.

Vallejo wrote intermittently on film, and he was especially fond of Chaplin. "Religiones de vanguardia," early in 1927, recounts the ongoing debate among intellectuals and the public about whether or not cinema exists as an art in its own right. Though he clearly thinks so, he rules out the opinions of writers, actors, directors, as "lacking authority. . .It is very difficult to be this and that, artist and man, at the same time. A man who is an artist can no longer do or say anything connected with art except as an artist. A poet will judge a poem, not as a simple mortal, but as a poet and the same with filmmakers." The following year he devotes an entire piece to Chaplin ("La pasión de Charles Chaplin"). Describing *The Gold Rush* he writes that "the actor, as in none of his other films, is totally absorbed by the character. Good night, señor Pirandello. . ." Moreover, the work marks an ideal synthesis of art and politics: "this film makes the best demand for social justice that any postwar art has been capable of till now." Several months later, he cites Chaplin's comic genius with the mirror scene in *The Circus* as achieving by much simpler means the sort of rhythmic density that Abel Gance attempted with his grand experiment using three screens ("Ensayo de una rítmica en tres pantallas"). Vallejo does not find much beauty in *Napoleon:* "Gance made a film that is cinematically banal, harnessed with brilliant historical reconstructions."

Vallejo wrote more often on art than on cinema. Puccinelli even draws the parallel with Baudelaire, pointing not only to Vallejo's prose poems but also to his "Salons." A small collection could be drawn from these pieces alone, in which he displays a continual curiosity with the artistic questions of his day: "Salón de Otoño," 1923; "Salón de las Tullerías de París," 1924; "El Salón de Otoño de París," 1925; "Picasso or the easy job of the hero," 1927; "Madness in art," 1927; "Juan Gris or the Pythagoras of painting," 1928; "New artistic currents of Spain," 1928; "Latest artistic news from Paris," 1929; "The creators of indo-american painting," 1929; "Tendencies of modern sculpture: the sculptor Fioravanti," 1935; "Man and God in Inca sculpture," 1936. He knew many artists as well: through Larrea he became friendly with Vicente Huidobro, who in turn introduced him to Juan Gris, Picasso, Jacques Lipschitz, and Erik Satie.

Despite his total immersion in Paris, as shown by all the journalistic writing, Vallejo did nonetheless miss his roots. His first trip to Spain, to pick up his stipend late in 1925, awoke a sort of nostalgia in him for a part of his cultural origins. "Without doubt, I am going to my native land," he writes. "I am returning to my Spanish America, reincarnated—by love of the word that spans distances—in Castillian soil, seven times nailed with the nails of all the colonial adventures." On the way there, he stops in Basque country, grateful for his brief respite from the city: "What a pleasure it is to get lost for lack of roads," whereas in the city "I go out to the street and there is street; I take to thinking and there is always thought. But now,

no. . .Ah, my dear Vicente Huidobro, I can't ever agree with the excessive importance you give to the mind in life. My votes are always for feeling." When he reaches Madrid he finds that it is "the most original city in Europe," due to the Pyrenees which protect Spain from the anxiety of progress that besets Paris ("Entre Francia y España"). Vallejo returned to Madrid many times in subsequent years, but its charm for him was even more problematic than Paris. He eventually spent fourteen busy months there in 1930-32, after being kicked out of France for his political activities, yet when he had the chance to return to Paris it came none too soon. He wrote to Larrea a month before arriving back in France: "It's unbearable living here in Madrid. If you're passing through, it may be fine and even enchanting. But to do anything and to live, it's impossible."

In his articles Vallejo often bemoaned the "velocity" of Paris, its obsessive devouring of the new. Worse, due to France's debt to Wall Street, the capital was ceding its place as center of the world to New York. That meant it might take its lead from the United States, a country he decried for its utterly competitive society, its "matchismo" as he termed it in "La Vida Como Match." Still, he appreciated the unique quality of Paris, especially where foreigners were concerned. In effect, Paris contains all the other great Western cities, he writes late in 1926, but where others, such as Buenos Aires, may be a "cosmopolis," Paris is really a "cosmic city": there the colonies of foreigners don't remain simply what they are, rather "they lose their social physiognomy and become Parisian. That is, they adopt the social rhythm of Paris. . .they come not to get rich or amuse themselves a while, but to live more widely and nobly, they come to stay" ("El crepúsculo de las águiles").

That some of the natives should feel overwhelmed amid all the strange tongues seemed understandable to him, though the extreme responses of French pride could not be taken seriously: "There are places in the big city where French is heard in such short supply that one would think it a shy foreign tongue. . .Already one newspaper has insinuated that the government should strictly prohibit any but the national language to be spoken in France." To which he concludes, "It always comes down to choosing, in language as in politics, between the Nation and the International" ("Desde París. La confusión de las lenguas").

Despite his internationalism Vallejo does not lose track of his own cultural origins, nor does he believe that the ultimate goal is to be taken for a European. Responding to the French tendency to claim as much as possible for the national glory (one Frenchman, he notes, even claims that jazz originated there), he counters by reclaiming a part of Paul Gauguin for Peru, whose mother was Peruvian; the painter spent part of his childhood there, and his work always bore its traces. But Vallejo is not trading in national vanities. Rather he chides many of his fellow Latin American artists

precisely for getting it wrong in their relations with Europe, in pretending to be what they are not and not what they are.

He pursues this discourse through various articles, between 1926 and 1928 especially. "I lift my voice and accuse my generation of being impotent to create or to realize its own spirit," he writes ("Contra el secreto profesional"). He describes two classes of Latin American intellectuals in Paris, the official and the nonofficial ones, himself among the latter, and that "we have produced very insignificant things under the cultural aegis of Europe." He proposes instead "works that are rigorously indo-american and pre-columbian," insisting that American folklore, Aztec and Inca in particular, holds revelations for European culture ("Una gran reunión latinoamericana"). Like the people of the orient, "we too have lost our soul and we've lost it for Europe. Because in Latin America the Europeans have ruined everything for us, philosophies, religions, industries, arts. . .since Columbus' arrival there is a terrible emptiness in our life" ("Oriente y Occidente").

On the other hand, Vallejo suggests that most Latin Americans who come to Europe don't stay long enough to really see the changes in the postwar era, or they remain too insulated within their own communities to notice. In Paris there is a new sense of order and method, and he points to the importance of clocks—this is a theme that he returns to often, the legislation of time in an accelerated world. Moreover, the bohemian and anarchist characters from the previous epoch have disappeared ("Las nuevas disciplinas"). He remarks that Latin Americans are often disappointed when they arrive, they claim that Paris is just like home: "We South Americans seem more Parisian (in our ways) than the French themselves who come from the provinces. . .To such a degree has Latin America been culturally and socially colonized by Paris" ("Sociedades coloniales"). By the end of 1928, after the first of his three trips to the Soviet Union, he feels more than ever the need for a new decolonized consciousness. "We have not created anything," he writes. "We haven't even tried. . .When young American intellectuals come to Europe, they don't come to honestly study foreign life and culture, but to 'triumph.' They carry in their suitcases some books or canvases made in America, and barely do they arrive in Paris, no other desire moves them than to 'triumph'" ("La juventud de América en Europa"). Vallejo, by contrast, did come to study, to inquire and criticize, and to put himself in question.

He understood this disadvantaged relationship for Latin America, regarding Europe, all the more in its political sense. In one of his occasional reports on the League of Nations, "Ginebra y las pequeñas naciones," he comments ironically how the League is concerned that various Latin American countries owe it a lot of money: "So that's what it's good for: to collect. It knows no other way to help humanity than the modern benefit

of being a creditor. . .What other ties are there, in effect, between the League of Nations and Nicaragua, but those of creditor and debtor?" In a later piece, discussing the weakness of Latin American diplomacy in representing the problems abroad, he concludes: "What Europe is unaware of is that the indigenous race constitutes. . .the only barrier that is more or less active against all foreign imperialism in Latin America" ("La diplomacía latinoamericana").

During this time Vallejo increasingly wondered how to reconcile his political preoccupations with his work as an artist. In 1926, reflecting on Victor Hugo's books, he asserts that their effect was due largely to their political value. If, instead of all his public activity, "Hugo had closed himself in his room like Mallarmé, he wouldn't have reached the universal influence he had. . .Essentially, the work of Victor Hugo is that of a political ideologue and not of a poet." And he calls Hugo's "an easy and cheap way to become a 'great poet'" ("El poeta y el politico. El caso Victor Hugo"). The following year he begins to address what he sees as the social responsibility of the artist, whose neutrality and lack of political sensitivity would rather seem to prove "human mediocrity and esthetic inferiority. But in what sphere should the artist act politically?. . .Above all, he must awaken a new political sensitivity in man. . .and engender new concerns and civic emotions." But contrary to Diego Rivera, who at the time favored an art more closely tied to ideology, Vallejo emphasizes that an artist is a free being who works independently of political programs ("Los artistes ante la política").

By this point in his life Vallejo was beginning to feel ashamed of still living off grants, and he was quite fed up at seeing his literary efforts not amount to much: as with most of his fiction, he couldn't find a publisher for his novella of Peruvian folklore, *Hacia el reino de los sciris.* The day he left for his trip to the Soviet Union in October 1928, financed with a grant from the Peruvian government meant for his return home, he wrote to Pablo Abril that he was anxious about his future, and that "I still have not found my path" in life. He hoped perhaps to stay in Russia, and seemed certain that "in Paris I shall never achieve anything." Yet within two weeks he was on his way back, due not to the cold that he feared but to the language problem. He was greatly excited by the new society he saw, and managed at least to make some contacts to write for newspapers there. More and more he devoted himself to Marxist studies. His old friend José Carlos Mariátegui had recently founded the Communist Party in Peru—and was eventually jailed—while Vallejo frequented these circles with other Peruvians in Paris. Due to his increased political commitment, though, his most regular journals, *Mundial* and *Variedades*, began to balk at the militant tone of his articles and by the end of 1930 he ceased working for them.

That year, in "Autopsia del superrealismo," written after the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," he criticizes André Breton for being "a scholastic ideologue, an armchair rebel. . .Breton forgets that there is only one revolution, the proletarian, and that the workers will make this revolution with action, not the intellectuals with their 'crisis of consciousness.'" For Vallejo, surrealism's brief fling with Marxism constituted its one truly revolutionary dimension, and its failure to stick to that was a sign of its essentially bourgeois nature. Though it sounds as if he may have at last succumbed, Vallejo couldn't be a Party hack if he tried. He considered Mayakovsky pathetic, "a buffoon," for abandoning the futurism of his youth in a feeble effort to remake himself into a revolutionary poet. Mayakovsky's life and literature couldn't be more divided, as he became lost in trying to readjust to the new social reality ("Un reportaje en Rusia VI: Vladimiro Maiakovsky").

His article on the poet was one of ten that Vallejo wrote about Russia for Abril's new journal in Madrid, *Bolívar*. The pieces were subsequently published as part of *Rusia en 1931*, which quickly went into three printings. It was among his only published books since living in Europe, along with *Tungsten*, his proletarian novel—a tale of suffering indigenous masses and labor organizing in the mines of Peru—which came out in 1931 and also enjoyed some success; the second edition of *Trilce* had been published in Spain, in 1930. Not that they relieved his chronic penury much. Despite some translation work during his stay in Spain (two novels by Marcel Aymé and one by Henri Barbusse), he was unable to publish most of his other writing, except for a few poems in magazines.

His journalistic work dwindled nearly to a halt after that, and he wrote no other pieces on Russia. Of the fifteen articles that he produced until his death in 1938, most were devoted to Peru, especially to Inca art and culture, for European and other Latin American publications. The Marxist tone of his language has largely subsided in these pieces, in favor of more esthetic and historical terms. It was like a final return for Vallejo—intellectually if not physically—to his indo-american core, which had always made up the substance of his fiction.

The few articles of his last year, by contrast, arose out of his anti-imperialist and antifascist stance, in that they were entirely caught up with the Spanish Civil War. When the war broke out in 1936, Vallejo's activism grew particularly focused: he collected funds for the republican cause, attended meetings, denounced nonintervention in his articles, and at the end of the year he even went to Spain for a few weeks to try to help firsthand. In spite of his difficult circumstances, he went back the following year to represent Peru at the International Congress of Antifascist Writers, where he delivered a talk on "The Responsibility of the Writer." This was

the time for his last rush of poems. In the final six months of his life, it appears, he wrote more poetry than he had through all the years in Paris.

—JASON WEISS

Noticings

When New Time Folds Up by Kathleen Fraser is a physically and emotionally beautiful book from Chax Press, 1993. The twelfth book from an author whose cultural nuance is subtle and intense, it is an Italian book, wherein Fraser tracks the traces of what was once fresh and alive in time, what has been corrupted by turning it into "Power," "Mastery," "Culture," and "Art." One long poem, a *tour de force* called "Giotto: Arena," is a serious and witty examination of knowing and noticing, of focus and address in the making of art works, not just formalist, traditional knowing, but investments in objective, yet quirky fact (mauve socks on shepherds), and missteps to the side, little confusions or errors pursued. Thus the book is full of charm—of song and spells, of the magical and incantatory revivification of the past, even of one or two "amulet" lines ("Porcelain light opens") all of which exert the charm of fascination and allure.

The first of these four serial poems is called "Etruscan Pages" and to some degree treats tombs, meltdowns of art works, losses of all kinds. Yet the work is Eleusinian, not elegiac, as it is about freshness, texture, color and liveliness renascent, not ever totally destroyed. Indeed, this is the poetics: "inscribed with the hidden/ particularly of one still alive." Or

> of the places we longed for
> where the dead lived under us
>
> in their little painted houses
> gazing at yellow walls
>
> episodic, chromatic

This poem is especially about the women, cultural carriers when alive ("Rome sends young men to Etruscan women/ for wisdom") and dead (the

so-called Zagreb Mummy was wrapped in a shroud covered with Etruscan writing). Most thrilling are the little traces of articulate presence—how an Etruscan woman scratched Etruscan names for a Greek story on her bronze mirror, translating. The work in the book as a whole is sensational, for "Death imagines us into pleasure": pleasures of food ("roast little pigs for weddings"), yearnings ("we were suddenly hungry"), desire for a certain taste ("funghi porcini"), sexual happiness and lust ("holding the lamp/ to shine on// her lover's curiosity"), precisions of color ("Mulberry smeared clover/ covers an entire field").

The key aspect and mystery of the Etruscans is still their language which we know mainly visually and sensually. ("we know what each mark is equal to/ but not, in retrospect, what was intended") In Fraser's work, glyphs of Etruscan letters and words play a role in her page space arrangements, and the Etruscan persons seem, by dying, to have entered under the lintel of their own alphabet to be made manifest in letters by the poem. Fraser makes her own associative reading or "dictionary" of some of these Etruscan glyphs. Fraser's mix or pursuit of two Anglo-American female modernists has inflected this book—H.D. for the pensive, illuminating reading and rereading of signs (a play with repetition and recirculation most striking in the final, and title poem). And Woolf for the delicate, determined "deliberate burdens through the temporal." One of the Woolfean marks in the Etruscan poem is the inclusion of personal letters to a variety of friends, a textual choice that enriches the one "narrated" journey to Tarquinia with the multiple journeys and multi-pronged crossings that texture any person's life in our sustaining communities. Space, tonalities, color, precision of emotional nuance; Fraser's work has always offered the rich tinctures of multifarious webbings.

In Cecilia Vicuña's book *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water*, "Pleasure is prayer," and the spiritual and earthbound forces join and mingle in an art work at once visual, performative, poetic, and ethical. (Translated by Eliot Weinberger and Suzanne Jill Levine, and introduced with an evocative essay by Weinberger; Graywolf Press, 1992.) The book contains, first of all, photographic records of site specific political-ritual performances, such as the stunning spilled glass of milk, commemorating the child-victims of contaminated milk (Colombia, 1979) and confronting the viewers with its witness. The book has a midsection containing a rich notebook, or day book of philosophers, mythmakers, students of ritual, etymology, and the earth. The works in poetry engage nature as it turns into words with a webbing of etymological practices in Indo-European languages like English and Spanish, and in Quechua. The poetics: of debris, of an interplay between smallness and vastness, and of compromised hope seems appealing because powerfully accurate, "Shine again/ little waif." Beginning with an empty string, unknotted, as "the quipu that remembers

nothing," Vicuña has worked on historical, cultural, and ecological memory to create a striking oeuvre of politics and myth, not so much an auto-mythology (with all this implies of self-centeredness), as a social act of shamanist practice, so that the elements of earth speak through her, mourning their compromise, and standing up, as best they can, to destruction, by virtue of "the vital force within the woolly animals themselves."

The final section of the book is a poem group called "La Wik' uña" (in Quechua), to commemorate and explore the woolly animal whose Spanish name Vicuña bears. Webbing and weaving is a central metaphor, but the real basis of this work is its elegant, principled tracing of the metamorphoses of matter: light to feathers and arcs, hummingbirds to dream, the vicuña made talismanically manifest, running within the dream, the foxes as linked predators and friends, the threads woven from vicuña into a cloth that becomes both prayer and poetry, language itself as a sacred thread, thread as a stream, and a metamorphic return to natural facts—stream, earth, clouds, fog, smoke and buds, and, finally, Vicuña's investiture as the performer of these transformations and endurances. This is serious, nourishing work.

Smaro Kamboureli offers the term "conceptive poems" for one type of the long poems considered in her intelligent book *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (University of Toronto Press, 1991). A "conceptive poem" is "a poetry of ideas" which occurs through "acts of critical reading" both of other thinkers, and of oneself. "The long poem, then, is a rereading of writings, a rewriting of readings." The term "conceptive poem" is helpful in thinking about a number of contemporary long poem writers—Dahlen and Silliman among them. It also fits Rosmarie Waldrop's long work in both her *A Form/ Of Taking/ It All* (1990, Station Hill Press, dubbed a novel) and in her *Lawn of Extended Middle* (Tender Buttons, 1993, not exactly a long poem but a book-length serial arrangement of prose poems). This "lawn" is the site of an intense, wary game, which undoes a "venerable old law of logic. . .that everything must be either true or false." The "game" in the first part of the book is intellectual, in the second it is sexual end ethical. The book is poignant and brave, committed to "the desire to explore my body's labyrinth" without flinching at varieties of ambivalence. She finds she is the site of a number of struggles with emptiness and fullness as simultaneous states, A and Not-A at once, the self and the gap or distance at the core of the self which makes any "I" eccentric to its own designs: "As if I had to navigate both forward and backward, part of me turned away from where I'm going. . ." This is illustrated by discussions of will and involuntary response: "What's left over if I subtract the fact that my leg goes up from the fact that I raise it?" And by indications of alternative actions: "the light and shadow playing over my rush of

wildwater actions while I feel I'm sitting motionless on the bank." The book is also as if an X-ray of a novel about desire, possibility, fulfillment, resistance, and the ambiguities of love ("The gravity of love encompasses ambivalence.").

Ann Lauterbach, like the other poets I have briefly noted here, may be framed as engaging with "the" meditative tradition. But Lauterbach, like Fraser, Vicuña and Waldrop, resists being "the pensive man. . .He sees that eagle float/ For which the intricate Alps are a single nest." (This from Wallace Stevens.) It is not that the world and mind-encompassing scope are beyond these writers, but that critical shifts of scale and positionality have occurred which alter our notions of genre, sound, and cultural address. In Lauterbach's *Clamor* (Viking Penguin, 1991), the meditative figure is saturated, dissolving, liminal, errant—indeed, she is not only a woman or female figure (as in the books considered above), she is here "a girl." The pensive "girl"—what does she see? "Girl" is a strange dot, recurrent, vulnerable, resilient, intelligent, committed to remembrance and exploration. Like the loon in Thoreau's *Walden,* she comes up in different parts of the lake at different times. When she comes up, she cries, and when she is under, she weeps. For the poems in *Clamor* are facets of one unimaginable elegy—during which imagination itself is immeasurably taxed. Lauterbach makes elegy like pilgrimage, like epistle, like quest; elegy paradoxically filled like a cornucopia, for "abundance and loss are the terms." And these terms occur simultaneously, intermingled, illuminating and stressing the other—which is a motif which binds the four books here.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

If It Were Christa Wolf

Of all the organisms on earth, only bacteria are individuals.
Lynn Margulis

a young poet puts himself the subjects together
Johannes Becher

I with German tongue
this cloud around me
that I keep as house
drive through all tongues
Ingeborg Bachmann

> Who writes about things that disturb her. A proposition of consciousness. Thought appealing to language. Feeling to thought. A composite. Little habits of time that recur. Dream or remember the disappearance of the photograph, an inquiring glance, tacit permission. Who places the photograph in a pocket.

In Christa Wolf's writing there is a constant breaking down of subject/object definition, both existing together within each other and without. What's outside what outside? Endangered world, endangered persons living in the world, can they be distinct one from the other?

A person existing within the social whole from which a person is not dividable, separable. Writing and agency. Writing is agency. Cooking is taking place.

By a succession or serial person *who* was an interaction between self-determination and the interpolation of history.

An imaginary solution is not presupposed. *Who* imagines it. *Who* misses. Agree to agree to what tools of thought. *Who* was hungry. *Who* was looking out those eyes. And the dog in the dream is also *who*.

> Young Hellwig had been witness to all this. Ever since he had begun to think independently, the camp had been there, and so had the explanation for its being. He had no other knowledge. He had still been a boy when the camp had been built. Now he was almost a youth, and it was being built once more, so to speak. (Anna Seghers, *The Seventh Cross)*

Someone escapes, "call him George this week," and this escape creates a breach, a disruption. A place opens up for questions in Hellwig's mind. Will he rebuild the camp? So to speak. *Who* give him this choice. Rebuilding is and is not literal, not the literal walls, which remain, but the mechanisms of mind that retake escaped prisoners, replace them in concentration camps.

> Imagine that he comes and I signal him a warning. What will happen to me, to us?—And then, imagine he comes and I see

> him coming and I make no sign. . .. He is seized. Can one do such a thing? (Anna Seghers, *The Seventh Cross)*

Who asks.

> *What was pure instinct once*
> *Is now done by rule.*
> Ovid

Sometimes we are looking at the notation of emotion.

Anna Seghers (1900–1983), mentor to Christa Wolf, was writing this from France, in exile, having fled Germany in 1933, after Hitler became chancellor, after the spectacle of book burning at the university in Berlin, after her books were all placed on the Nazi blacklist, after her apartment had been broken into by the police, after her neighbors had hidden her . . . . (Her daughter writes later of how the children, with the last of their money, were sent to swimming lessons, for, who knew, one day perhaps they would have to continue their flight by boat.) Perhaps in a conversation with Crista Wolf Anna Seghers says that when you write for (30, 60, *n*. . .) years how can you separate living and writing, the lived and the written. Someone receives a book in the mail and writes back on a postcard, "It is life!"

Having eschewed product recognition for estrangement the stakes are high. "If there is an avant-garde in our time, it is probably bent on discovery through suicide." (Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn)* The writing of this Christa Wolf would not fall into such a category of avant-garde.

Memory outlasts the series of subjects, connects them. Sooner or later there is imitation and relief. *Who*se hands exceed the frame. The permeability of narration, increasing permeability of "characters" in the "story" which is "true." The assumptions of permanence about a name, its continuity, for example, are continuously thrown into question.

> Corrections: A Man in the news article yesterday about Egon Krenz, the new East German leader, referred incorrectly to his native town, Kohlberg. It is now called Kolobrzeg and has been a part of Poland since 1945. *(New York Times,* 10.20.89)

Reason is also proposed as a function of memory, "a repeated moral act." (CW *The Quest for Christa T)*

"But the third person stands by and records what the second does to the first." (CW *The Quest for Christa T)* People are formed in their memories of each other as they mirror each other. Different sets of eyes and desires from the outcome.

September 26, 1989. Nancy Spero: "And so we think about war and total destruction." *Who* sees what *who* never thought existed. Do more names permit more birds? Do all the stories cluster around entity/memory/idea(l)?

A merging with the predicate and sometimes a separation. A threading and fraying took place. Take place. It is not about empathy, although empathic response is not precluded. No one is larger. The persons, layered, shattered, exposed, are flawed. "Human." Their impulses conflict, contradict. There is a presentation of a "reality," a "truth" emerging from dream and imagination, emotion and event. Characters are propositions of a new knowledge which constructs feelings and imaginings as characters. Memory is one thing, evidence another.

"Natural" is continuously questioned. For instance, "common sense" as natural, "feelings" as natural, unmediated by culture, ideology. People who occupy social positions, as we all do, occupy their roles. Social understandings require certain labels for certain responses to given events. For instance, in some cultures people are trained to associate pleasure with the acquisition of goods, with shopping. *Who* asks why.

> Of course there was more glass and more glitter in the shop windows in West Berlin, and there were things to buy which she had never even seen before. But she had known that already. She had liked all that, too, and had thought it would be fun to go shopping there. Still, all those things were connected to eating and drinking, clothes and sleeping. But why did one eat? (CW *Divided Heaven)*

Who is asking why.

To keep separate and direct or to reconfigure and act. "The need to write in a new way follows a new way of living in the world, although there may be a time lag." (CW *Reader and Writer) Context,* what was once called fate? *Action,* the collision of thought and language into writing?

Style as proposed by Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero* is the intersection of time and biology. Writing is proposed as the connector between creation and the social, or as Christa Wolf might say, between creation and the social.

> (the biologists) informed us that we should first of all not be amazed at the changing nature but at the continuity of biological forms, the complicated mechanism that enables the genes to reproduce themselves repeatedly, a mechanism unknown until recently. (CW *Reader and Writer)*

Known, unknown, it functions. If only there were roadside bookstores everywhere and buses to take us there.

Readiness is a state experience by *who*m, which allows certain things to happen. Readiness is not the same thing as prescience, nor does it assume a template for all future action and/or circumstance. Readiness is fluidity precluding separation from event. It is not a dialectical notion. Contradictions occur. Parts ≠ whole. People, being countries, have territory. And if the borders are eliminated. And is the state of thought independent of the thinker.

> Kleist has never before been among people who trespass so greatly on each other's territory and yet do not become enemies as a result. . . . He stretched out and experienced in body and limbs what freedom is, without a word even once entering his mind. (CW *No Place On Earth)*

		means		
before	SELF		SELF	(Descartes
		makes		etc.)
		means		
after	OTHER		SELF	(Deleuze
		makes		etc.)

"We used to be truly thankful whenever we were able to picture an idea." (CW *Accident)* "I was this" (Clark Coolidge) In this case, I permitted myself, my position, i.e., my experience, to tell me; and the language, in this case reprimand, proceeded from it.

Givens are no mother for circumstances. *just a thing being done to people in the name of a system* Anguish and orders going from action itself to some future writing is between. "Where we've all been for a while"—name, thought can join to form epithet. Future memory can be constructed action now. Christa Wolf impairs narrative.

> *With my burned hand*
> *I write about the nature of fire*
> Ingeborg Bachmann

> *"whose sentence it measures out"*
> Michael Palmer

Capriciousness has no place here. *Who* wills *who*se will.

Nelly, the little girl of *A Model Childhood* (also known as *Patterns of Childhood),* is constructed to embody, to impersonate the child Christa Wolf might remember was herself. The narrator describes the child's feeling that to have taken a prescribed position on things, everything, would have been more comfortable for her. She was not "one" with all the "correct" responses. *Who*se welling up of tears was an inappropriate response, punishable. Such memories are "engraved" by "guilt." *Who* could feel "only that which has been decreed?" In Nelly's schoolgirl life the only greeting permitted was "Heil Hitler." Another "hello" did not exist. "A person who wants to pass unnoticed soon stops noticing anything." *Who* disappeared—into—action?

They were deeply engrossed in something, by something, a fire, a baby. . . . Interrupted, they were embarrassed and had to suppress emotions they had not yet named. Anxious, dreaming mediations, internalized, proceed to construct. This writing is lifting scabs a reader/writer might have forgotten or wanted to forget exist. Poetics of investigation, never reassuring, never relying on the pleasure of recognition, familiarity. "The moon had risen, but outside your field of vision." (CW *A Model Childhood)* This is social space in distress, troubled, vision doubled, every place taken over, changed, erased, named and renamed.

> You closed your eyes and saw a clear and accurate image of the market square in L. (formerly G.) as Nelly had known it, and you found it difficult to visualize it in its present state, as you had just seen it. (CW *A Model Childhood)*

If. . .then. . . .

If Person is formed and informed by *time* (memory, interpolation, will) and *function* (conditions or a series of moments intersecting with the individual set) then what happens in a "vacuum," i.e., sudden elimination of "conditions"?

> Christa Wolf, the novelist, was one of the leading speakers at a rally of one million East Berliners. . . . Last week she completed the final draft of an appeal entitled "For Our Country," which argues for protecting the separate identity of the German Democratic Republic from West German encroachment. The appeal has already been signed by a quarter of a million citizens. *(New York Times* 12.9.89)

Birds are flying south in formation. Occupation is the ongoing condition of occupying or being occupied. What determines one's inner resources *at a time like this,* i.e., at any time?

In 1918, in *Geist der Utopie,* Ernst Bloch wrote, "I am. We are. That is enough. Now it is up to us to begin." In 1945, Sartre wrote, in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme,* which was presented as a lecture, "Man is nothing other than what he does."

"I wonder if I should buy my son's new shoes now or wait until the revolution." (Cab driver, Yugoslavia, *NYT* 11.25.89) Proceed with the telling.

> *in the telling*
> *I happens*
> Michael Davidson

"Could she bear the sudden liberation from the old ideas of what was possible?" (CW *Divided Heaven)* "I saw a news item turn into truth." (CW *Cassandra)*

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In a 1924 manifesto called "Consistent Poetry," which appears in Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris's beautifully produced and edited selection of Schwitters's literary works, we read:

> Classical poetry counted on the similarities between people. It considered the association of ideas as unambiguous. It was mistaken. At any rate it built its foci on associations of ideas: "Uber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh" ("O'er every mountain peace does reign"). Here Goethe does not only want to indicate that there is quiet on mountain tops; the reader is supposed to enjoy this peacefulness in the same way the poet, tired from his official duties and usually functioning in an urban environment, does himself. That such associations of ideas are not all that commonly shared can be shown if one were to read such a line to someone from Heidjer (a region of two inhabitants per square kilometer). That person would certainly be much more impressed by a line like "lightning hairy zigzags the subway crushes the skyscraper." At any rate, the realization that all is quiet does not bring forth poetic feelings in him because, for him, quietness is the normal state of affairs. I cite this passage because its combination of common-sense. . . .
>
> Abstract poetry separated—and therein lies its great merit—the word from its associations, and played off word against word; more particularly concept against concept, while taking sound into account. That is more consistent than the evaluation of poetic feelings. . . . (pp. 223-24)

Absurd as it is to contemplate the impact of Goethe's nature lyric on the hypothetical inhabitant of Heidjer, Schwitters is not being merely playful here. What he sees is that, with the breakdown of the traditional class structures—structures that Goethe could take for granted—the transparency of language as carrier of "poetic feeling," directed toward an audience conditioned to "understand," sharing as it does the poet's own basic feelings, is called into question. No wonder Schwitters longed, as did so many poets of the post-World War I era, to create an "abstract poetry"—a poetry that might remove itself from "concepts" altogether. But how to achieve such a poetry? "Not the word but the letter is the original material

of poetry," Schwitters declares in the same manifesto. "Consistent poetry is constructed from letters. Letters have no concepts. Letters in themselves have no sound, they only offer the possibility to be given sound values by the performer. The consistent poem plays off letters and groups of letters against each other" (p. 225).

Shades of Khlebnikov's *zaum* poetry and, in our own day, the chance generated work of Jackson Mac Low (who recently wrote his own "*Merzgedichte* in memoriam Kurt Schwitters") and John Cage, who neatly echoes, in his preface to Mureau, Schwitters's assertion that "The elements of poetry are letters, syllables, words, sentences" (p. 215). Indeed as Rothenberg and Joris point out, the sound text and concrete poetry of the past few decades can be traced directly back to such works as Schwitters's famous "Ur Sonate," whose entire text (some 28 pages) is reproduced in this book, waiting for a set of readers to actualize its score. (A recording of Schwitters reading this amazing tour de force is available from *Gelbe Music* in Hamburg). And certainly Schwitters's alogical and non-grammatical poetry looks ahead to the "language poetry" of the current generation.

But from the translator's perspective, Schwitters's practice is nothing if not a mine field. For if "Not the word but the letter is the original material of poetry," how can translation, usually unable to duplicate the phonemes and morphemes of the original, be adequate? How, for example, to translate a line like "Duumdu" ("Er sie Es"), whose middle syllable "um" ("around") gives us not only the idea of "You on you" but also the paragram "Duum" which is a homonym for "dumm" or "stupid," hence "You stupid you." Pierre Joris translates the word as "Thouroundthou" (p. 13), which nicely duplicates the diphthong but loses Schwitters's double entendre.

Like Khlebnikov's often untranslatable (despite the recent valiant efforts of Paul Schmidt) poetry, Schwitters's poems depend so fully on their linguistic base—on pun and paragram, anaphora and rhyme, onomatopoeia and echolalia, that they seem to defy translation, with the result that this great artist, who is also considered a major poet in the German-speaking world (the scholarly Friedhelm Lach edition, published between 1973-76, runs to five large volumes), is almost unknown outside Germany. Indeed, such essays as have been written on his poetic composition are primarily the work of art historians—Werner Schmalenbach and John Elderfield, for example—who understand that Schwitters's writings—his early expressionist poems in the vein of August Schramm, the subsequent Dada poems like "An Anna Blume" (the much-anthologized poem which originally made Schwitters famous), the short prose pieces or "proses" as the editors ingeniously call them, the playlets, the visual and sound poems—are not only an integral part of Schwitters's *Merz* (for *Kommerz)* collage art but important in their own right.

The difficulty of translating Schwitters is compounded by the fact that in the last decade of his life when he was living in England, Schwitters translated some of his own early poetry and tried writing new poems in English (see pp. 100-118 of *pppppp)*. Poets are not always their own best translators and as Werner Schmalenbach reports, Schwitters's English was always shaky. In 1942, with the help of Stefan Themerson, he translated his 1919 "An Anna Blume," the one poem of his that has made its way into every Dada textbook and anthology. It is the translation unfortunately included by Rothenberg and Joris in *pppppp* as well. I say unfortunately, because I think Schwitters's English version is a travesty of his subtle, witty, playful, and charming 1919 original.

Take the opening line, "O du, Geliebte, meiner 27 Sinne, ich liebe Dir!," which Schwitters translates as "O Thou, beloved of my twenty seven senses, I love thine!" The second-person singular pronoun "Du" is the familiar form of address (vis-à-vis the formal "Sie"), and in German, the pronouns have different endings for every case, singular and plural, whereas our own "you" has no variation, singular or plural, except for the genitive "your." Accordingly, no literal English translation can ever capture the sort of pronoun-play in which the German Schwitters regularly indulges. Still, I find the use of "Thou" ("thou, thee thee thine") questionable, for Schwitters's German is above all distinguished, as are his collages, by its respect for the ordinary, the everyday, the common, the banal. In this instance, the joke is that Anna, addressed quite naturally and colloquially as "O Du, Geliebte" is immediately deflated by the absurd hyperbole of "my twenty seven senses." And this, in turn, is followed by the absurd "Ich liebe dir"—absurd because "dir" is in the dative case whereas "liebe" takes the accusative "dich." "Ich liebe dir" thus turns Anna, who is after all addressed as "Du, ungezähltes Frauenzimmer" (a much less respectful address than "Thou, uncounted woman"!), into no more than the indirect object of the poet's "love." Grammar, let's remember, produces meanings.

By comparison, "I love thine" strikes me as no more than arch, a sort of pseudo-ee cummings locution. If one were to retranslate "An Anna Blume," perhaps the solution would be to take the literal option: since English designates the indirect object by means of a preposition, we might render the German as "I love to you" or "for you" and let the ambiguities develop. But Schwitters does other things to weaken his original: Anna's "green bird" becomes "wheels" (which eliminates the double entendre of "bird"), her red dress, literally sawed up ("zersägt") into white pleats becomes "thy red dress, clashed in white folds," and so on. Worst of all, the ambiguity of the name Anna Blume—is she an opening bud or a deflowered "schlichtes Mädchen"?—is lost in the coy "Anna Blossom." Schwitters mock-Petrarchan homage to the palindromic Anna of the streets with whom he is sleeping is thus largely deflected.

I mention this particular self-translation because Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris have evidently taken it and related Schwitters's translations at face value. "It's Schwitters," they say in their Introduction, "who gives the green light for our extensive use of second-person thou's, sometimes correctly grammatical, sometimes linked to first-person verbs" (p. xxx). And indeed, "thee" and "thou" are the pronouns of choice in these translations as are certain other archaisms not quite warranted in the supple and racy language of the original. "Ein Säuferstiel augt dumm das klage Tier," for example, has a comic, sardonic edge that is missing from the line "Drunkard's stem dumbly does eye the doleful beast" (p. 24). "Augt dumm" means "gapes" or "gapes stupidly"; "dumbly does eye" seems unnecessarily contrived. Again, "klage" is a coinage from "klagen" ("complain"): it can be read as the "whining" or "pathetic" animal, but "doleful beast"?

But these are minor flaws in what is often a brilliantly inventive rendering of Schwitters's all-but-untranslatable idiom. Take, for example, Rothenberg's "Subway Poem" ("Untergrundgedicht")

> Houses eyeball millions cudgel lamps
> Windows crunch on eyes
> Bellow light the subway-shuttle teeth
> German Daily News sleds past and music (super shoeshines)
> Adding machines spew numbers, Garden City
> Songs tender cannons' gold (physician tested)
> Windows live sans light grow numb
> Sans coal glass woodens
> Flames glass up
> Bellow crunch on light the window
> Flames glass flames
> Houses eyeball millions sparkle lamps
> And fire woodens coal light bellows forth
> (In case of crowds step to the centre aisle) (p. 35)
>
> Häuser augen Millionen peitschen Lampen
> Fenster beissen Augen
> Brüllen Licht die Untergrundbahn Zähne
> Deutsche Tageszeitung rodelt und Musik (bester Schuhputz)
> Additionmaschinen wirren Zahlen, Gartenstadt
> Lieder zarten die Kanonen Gold (ärztlich empfohlen)
> Fenster leben ohne Licht erstarren
> Ohne Kohle holzt das Glas
> Flamme glast
> Brüllen beissen Licht die Fenster
> Flamme glast die Flamme

Häuser augen Millionen funken Lampen
find die Flamme holzen Kohle brüllt das Licht.
(Bei Andrang in den Mittelgang treten.)[1]

This 1920 poem is the counterpart of Schwitters's *Merzbilder:* a catalogue of graphic images aligned with a minimum of punctuation in the tradition of the Futurist *parole in libertà*, which Schwitters surely knew, is "cut" by signboards, advertising slogans, and newspaper bits: "super shoeshines," "physician tested," and so on. The cacophony of the original is caught by onomatopoeic words like "cudgel" and "crunch" and compounds like "subway-shuttle teeth." Throughout, Rothenberg's poem replicates the heavy alliteration and assonance, and the strong-stress rhythm of Schwitters's poem, his use of idiom (e.g., "Flames glass up") captures the sardonic urbanism of this *Merzbau*, the city where everything has turned into commodity ("German Daily News sleds past"). "Subway poem" is followed by "High Fashion Furs" ("Feine Pelzmoden"), which takes the cataloguing technique of the former lyric even further, juxtaposing a set of images of street scenes (again *parole in libertà* like "Telephones broadcast baskets") with surreal references to the "Boil Intestines Pharmacy," "A-1 intestines" now populating what seems to be the entire city.

The catalogue poems, sentence series, and visual and sound poems bring to the fore all of the ingenuity of the poet-translators. In "Chinese Banalities" (p. 32), couplets like "Spice is the variety of life. / Every apron has a wife" has precisely the nursery-rhyme effect of "Würze is des Witzes Kürze. / Jede Frau hat eine Schürze." And Rothenberg's rendition of the title poem provides a masterful verbal-visual equivalent of the erotic play of the original:

p p p p p p p p p
pornographic i-poem

The go
Its bleating is
Sweet & peaceful
And it will not
With its horns

The black line shows where I cut lengthwise into a harmless poem in a children's picture book. From the goat I got the go.

And it will not | **be provoked**
With its hams | **to shove & poke.** (p. 81)

p p p p p p p p p p

pornographisches i-Gedicht

Die Zie
Diese Meck ist
Liebe und friedlich
und sie wird sich
Mit den Hörnern

Der Strich zeigt, wo ich das harmlose Gedichten aus einem Kindergilderbuch durgeschnitten habe, der Länge nach. Aus der Ziege ist so die Zie geworden.

Und sie wird sich | **nicht erbossen**
Mit den Hörnern | **Each zo stossen**. (FL 95)

"The go" is even more surprising than the original "Die Zie" (cut-up for "Ziege") because "go" is not a syllable in "goat." The "go" that "bleats" is very suggestive, especially when we learn that "Its bleating is / Sweet & peaceful." What is it that the "go[at]" "will not". . . "with its horns"? Fill in your own story, a story which is then "explained" by reference to the complete page in the children's book:

And it will not be provoked
With its horns to shove & poke.

Here the translation almost betters the original, "shove" and "poke" being paragrammatically inside "provoked" whereas Schwitters's nursery rhyme has the simpler pattern of the rhyme "erbossen" / "stossen."

But perhaps the most important items in the Rothenberg-Joris book, aside from the great "Ur Sonata," which is reproduced in its entirety, are the "proses" like "The Onion" and "Augusta Bolte," both important precursors for works like Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* or Gilbert Sorrentino's procedural fictions. These works, almost unknown to the English-speaking reader, have Gertrude Stein-like phrasal permutations, intercut by commercial cliches as is the "Subway poem" but on a larger scale. The 28-page "Auguste Bolte," written in 1923 and published in *Der Sturm*, is the fictional equivalent of Schwitters's *Merzbilder*. The title alludes to the cranky Widow Bolte, whom every German schoolchild of the period would have recognized from Wilhelm Busch's famous Max und Moritz. In Schwitters's version, Auguste Bolte becomes a young girl, in search of a PhD in "Lif"; indeed the text is subtitled "a doctoral dissertation." Rather than actually collaging cliches and advertising jingles into the text as he did in "Subway poem," Schwitters here interweaves the language of ordinary people in all its absurdity, comedy, and pathos. Beginning with a "wise saying"

pronounced by his five-year old son Ernst ("What one chews turns to mush"), Schwitters declares that his "allegory for good old Aart-ccriticism" is "a natural and faithful reproduction of the critiques in daily papers. The daily press on art, the so-called daily-artpress, wears a little girl's dress. Chaste and modest, it has tied a tiny apron over it, with embroidery trimmings" (p. 139). Like Joyce's Dublin, where Gerty MacDowell is similarly "chaste and modest," the petit-bourgeois "polite society" of Schwitters's Hannover masks a vicious savagery just underneath its placid surface.

As the story opens, "Augusta Bolte saw about 10 people on the street, who all advanced in one and the same direction. This seemed suspicious to Augusta Bolte, very suspicious indeed. 10 people were walking in one and the same direction. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Something was going on there" (p. 140). It becomes Augusta's mission to find out where these ten people are going, a mission complicated when the 10 break into 2 5s, the 5s into 2 + 3 and finally into five 1s. Along the way, Augusta, "who had been such a brilliant girl, so gifted even back in school" (the phrase is repeated again and again), gets "stuck into a metric pattern," and draws conclusions that "went against her grain. For a moment she wondered what that grain was, against which, in a way, it went" (p. 141). When the 10 split into 2 5s, she considers it "a scandalous impertinence of the mass to split up or, better, to divide" (p. 142). "Why indeed," Augusta Bolte wonders, "did 10 people have to split up into groups of 5. That kind of thing was a shrewd tactic of the, in a way, hostile mass." And so on.

The nasty logic and paranoia exhibited in such passages eerily anticipate the Nazi mentality already nascent in Schwitters's Germany. Cliché piles on cliché: Augusta's path now crosses that of one Richard Eckermester, a young ne-er do well who never made it through school: "Neither the carrot nor the stick had had any effect" (159); Eckermester is seen by Augusta descending from a hackney cab and "abscond[ing] into a house":

> The die was cast, and the man had absconded into a house. Miss Professor Augusta had her car stop. It was clear that something was going on here. Why else should a man abscond into a house? You can't fit that into a hollow tooth! Why else should a man jump into a hackney cab to abscond into a house? Why? Something was certain: if nothing was happening here, then nothing was happening anywhere. Although the reverse could be true too. And while Augusta realized the equivalence of all values, as she now realized that, depending on one's taste, everything could prove everything

> or nothing, a new unheard of realization came to her, namely that it did not matter if one attended it or not.
>
> Nobody could attend to everything. Man had to make a choice. And he had to make a choice. And he had to make a choice, not because he had to make a choice, but because in itself it didn't matter if he made a choice or if he didn't make a choice. (p. 162)

The permutations here are less Steinian than reminiscent of Beckett's *Watt.* And indeed, Schwitters' prose, subtly rendered by Rothenberg and Joris here (although the recurrent rhyme "Auguste wusste. . . das sie. . .musste" is not quite conveyed by "Augusta musta"), anticipates the nervousness, anxiety, illogicality, and comic/horrific irresolution of Beckett's fiction as well as his clown plays.

It is a scandal that this edition of Schwitters's work, produced as it is by two of the finest poet-translators writing today, has not (at least so far) gotten the recognition it deserves. The *New York Times Book Review,* the *New York Review of Books,* the *New Republic* and comparable periodicals have not reviewed it. But this silence would hardly have surprised Schwitters. For the bourgeois mindset that he so mercilessly parodizes in works like "Auguste Bolte" is the mindset that continues to treat him with "suspicion." He would have shrugged that suspicion off good humoredly with something like the "cadenza" from *Ur Sonata:*

> Priimiititti too
> Priimiititti taa
> Priimiititti too
> Priimiititti taa
>
> ———————————
>
> Priimiititti tootaa

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

Notes

1 Kurt Schwitters, *Das Literarische Werk: Band I, Lyrik,* ed. Friedhelm Lach (Köln: DuMont Shauberg, 1973), p. 81. Subsequently cited as FL.

Pollux by Pam Rehm (Buffalo: Leave Books, 1992); *little brass pump* by Gale Nelson (Buffalo: Leave Books, 1992); *Answer, From the Letters of Mina Harker, to Ron Day and Robert Glück* by Dodie Bellamy (Buffalo: Leave Books, 1992)

These three brief thematic "works" (each comprised of one poem) show how contrasting approaches to (the) varying metrics of poetry (in Bellamy's case, an epistolary *poetics)* can sustain interest beyond the rigidity (or even, "particularities") of subject matter.

Take, for instance, Pam Rehm's entry, *Pollux*, the most thematically astute of these three poems.

Unlike her more sectionally defined concurrent "collection" *Piecework (o-blek editions*, 1992), this poem descriptively eschews metaphorical example by demonstrating the palimpsestic nature of writing in relation to its. . . double. The work opens with this citation from H. D.: "often one is lost and seeks the other, as in the oldest fairy tale of the twin-brother-sister of the Nile Valley."

More revealing still, according to Webster's New World Dictionary, Rehm's title, *Pollux*, denotes "a red giant star, actually the brightest star in the constellation Gemini"; yet, this star is mythically "considered the twin of Castor."

Could it be (is it plausible?) that when Rehm writes "the first print/ was of nails" she is addressing the unorigined "origins" of writing? And that further along in the poem when she echoes those cited lines she's eluding to the same cosmological effacement as it meets the substitutive flesh of *"human"* language:

> First bury a stone
> then take away its foundation.
>
> It trembles 'alone'
>
> Thus

Language thus*ly* becomes the result of an unacknowledged doubling ("It all comes back to Betrayal"); an "acknowledged" fact of relatable/ related. . .existence(s)?: "Castor/ A poisoned comb/ Held, spindle-prick/ Blow the trumpet."

In contrast to Rehm, Gale Nelson's *little brass pump* works the metonymic chain of semantical*(ized)* substitution; though, again, within an

ordered, metricalized prosody. For if Rehm is concerned with metaphor as representative of "the forced equivalence of two knowns" (Mary Gerhart's definition), then Nelson always already *assumes* this to be the case.

Subjectively constituted as a poetic allegory on a monk who makes cheese, the poem lexically breaks semantic coherence at several a-temporalized points (meaning the poet outruns his rhetorical determinations. . .); though Nelson easily regains breath by lyrically emphasizing the poem's stanzaic structuation: "or I move onto such subjects/ outside my range, such as the/ hue along the horizon, and I/ look again at the skirts nearing the place the dogs get bouncy. And/ you might get tired of this, but/ did I get any mail today, or is/ this the exception? (. . .)."

Dodie Bellamy's *Answer* (a kind of literalized result of the work of Rehm and Nelson) is written in the form of "overheard" letters by friends. At once a rhetoricalized critique of social assumptions and an imagined investigation into the workings of discursive intervention, this brief "work" has more than a few astounding (or even, *confounding)* moments in its deconstructive focus on what-was-*really*-said-to-whom.

The first "coumuniqué" (cited as written by Robert Glück to Bellamy) sets the directional tone of the writing, stating "the question" that will be responded to (in varying ways of elaboration) by the entries that follow.

> Dear Dodie,
>
> I am writing about a woman, Margery Kempe, and I would like to ask you for your help. Would you write 5-10 observations of aspects of having a woman's body —at any point in life, or life's activities? Or just having a body period. I would like to apply them to Margery.
>
> XOX Bob

As these dispersional communiqués proliferate, their particularized features foreshadow Bellamy's concluding *textualized* response. Even as early as the second "letter" (under the name of Ron Day, addressed to "Mina," but fictively written by "Cassandra") one notes an accumulative discursive "logic" straining to accommodate the inherent existentialism of epistolary enunciation: "Dodie explained a relation that you're necessarily inscribed in. Bob wants to know the body of a woman—which makes me wonder if Bob doesn't want any-body in one body—that is, in no-body—that is, in his ideas. Is it your body he wants to possess—or some biorhythm in the text—a text whose bodies are 'confused.' The organicism of all this bothers me—it seems voyeuristic—w/all those ideas of science and law behind it, in the gaze of the question."

Ultimately, Cassandra (the fictive signatory under the name of Ron Day) concludes: "As I told Dodie, my advice is that you shouldn't *reply*. I think you should *possess him by the letter*."

Bellamy's concluding response (in the personage of Mina Harker and addressed, "fictively," to Cassandra) takes on a rhetoricalized discursiveness pleading a comparison á la *écriture feminine*, or even, a bit closer to home, to the work of Kathy Acker. For while Bellamy (like Glück and Day) uses—instrumentally—the semiotics of fictive signatory address (undoubtedly to establish a phantom subject-position from which to write), her entry (unlike the preceding), is almost *completely textualized*.

One could almost say that Bellamy's writerly position within a fictively conceived signatory semiotics has been rhetoricalized into a pseudo-discourse. But for this to happen, she has had to *literally* denounce herself, as the reader must *letter*ally do the opposite: "Why does Bob bother Dodie about these corporeal verities? She's just passing through, a breeze animating a few molecules, while I Mina Harker am here for the duration."

Under one of her many hilariously conceived pseudo-subtitles ("THE FEMALE BODY IS NOT A BARREL OF MONKEYS"), Bellamy responds to Glück's query (and quite a bit else) by transforming the epistolary *mode* of address into a writerly notion that creates (a) text:

THE TEXT IS NOT MY BODY as if emotions weren't visceral as if I Mina Harker the debutante of the (un)dead could be concrete in such a flat way, page number typed in my upper right corner WHERE ARE MY ARMS MY LEGS WHY CAN'T I MOVE ABOUT—*THE TEXT IS NOT A BODY* it's a coffin. . .

In *Answer* Bellamy and friends have taken the notion of shifting subjectivities and linked it to a signatory semiotics; resulting in a *letter*al critique of gender*ed* relations.

—ROGER RIGGINS

The Light around the Poem

Once again this year, poetry lovers Here, North of Here, and Abroad have wondered why Steve McCaffery has been passed over for the Nobel Prize.

His books continue to dazzle: most recently, *Theory of Sediment* (Talonbooks, 1991), which includes "Lastwordia," a lexical sweep through the history of English words, which starts: "An intervention buffer friendly to diskette that transit via chunnel" and ends "scada aenigne hetelic weard fela heahfaestne fleon lastworda."

But I want to call attention to McCaffery's *Modern Reading: Poems 1969-1990*, published in 1992 by Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum, England's most prestigious press, in a limited "A5" xeroxed-&-gumbound edition [89A Petherton Rd, London N5 2QT]. This is something of a miscellany) with many visual and conceptual works, along with a number of relatively short sequences. McCaffery's profound meditations on contemporary society cut through the cant of many a lesser poet, as when he observes, wryly, in a poem entitled "Mozart in Tibet" (evidently celebrating the bicentennial of the death of the Central European child prodigy): "Eroded centaur print reform for error. / Panda scream rampant toil fir sheers." But McCaffery does not confine himself to such exquisite lyric handling of language. His expressive gift becomes almost painfully evident in his refusal to accept grief as inevitable result of loss: "Shazzed it hats / wergeld code lawn / boot act pimp / casket id" (from "Storax"). He also offers sage advice to reviewers in "Codicil": "This information as commodity informs the institution speaking this" and "In the case above it would be wrong to call the following a viewpoint."

The most exciting voices in the UK these days, or some of them, are coming from Maggie O'Sullivan, who's synthesizing the constructivist and incantatory, local and loco, rhythm and "contorted lure." Her latest book is *In the House of the Shaman*, from Reality Street Editions (available—like all the books I'll mention from here on, from SPD). In North America, meanwhile, two exuberant, high-intensity poetry performances have been published by Tsunami Editions in Vancouver: Deanna Ferguson's *The Relative Minor*—an ideological and semantic high-wire act that knocked me over with shock waves of poetic intelligence—and Kevin Davies's comically probing and probingly comic *Pause Button*.

Highly recommended: Joan Retallack's *[adjective deleted by the hyperbole control officer]* incursion into the space between correct and correction, *Errata Suite* (Aerial Edge); Erica Hunt's long-awaited *Local History* (Roof), which, in its interrogation of its own expressive forms, insists on the interdependence of complexity of thought and social engagement; *A Stein Reader*, edited by Ulla Dydo (Northwest University Press)—simply the most important collection of Stein's writings now available and a crucial supplement to new editions of *Tender Buttons* and (forthcoming) *Stanzas in Meditation* (Sun & Moon) and *Everybody's Autobiography* (Exact

Change); Nick Piombino's evocative meditations on the multiple processes of poetic writing, *Boundary of Blur* (Roof); and *Writing from the New Coast*, a special double issue of *o.blek*, featuring poems by 119 new or newly publishing writers and, in the second volume, poetics statements by 93 writers, most of whom are represented in volume one.

Finally, I want to take special note of Barbara Guest's extraordinary new book *Defensive Rapture* (Sun & Moon), which extends the surface-inflected, supremely modulating explorations of *Fair Realism* into realms both warbling and chimeric.

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Revell's *Erasures* and the Fugue of History

Revell, Donald. *Erasures*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992. 47 pages. $10.95 paper.

The question of hope is intrinsic to Donald Revell's newest and most unsettling collection. These poems range over the newly structured terrain of Europe, that threshing ground of political gestation: the scope of the poems is often nothing less than the ongoing revision and reconstruction of the entire European facade of Western Civilization—the restructured continent and culture that entered this "beautiful century" in the regalia of various long-standing systems of belief, of orthodox religiosities and ideologies, of intellectual movements long past fruition, and looks to exit these hundred years in a substantially altered form. But the vast terrain of European/American culture is not the only matrix of these poems, for they also fuse the large cycles of historical movement to the intense dramas of personal suffering in a reflective manner. For both agonies share a similar trait: they repeat.

In *Erasures*, Revell speaks to such a desperate sense within many, the sense that every political as well as every personal moment is a sort of glorified deja vu. To create this sensation, these poems rely on an amazing lyrical flexibility: the contexts overlap; voices blend then emerge anew. Like the cyclical histories that bind individuals to their movements of revolution, oppression, and terror, these poems syntactically and lexically recur. As history repeats, as the agonies of the past are acted out on the

illusory fresh stages of the present, Revell uses a form of irregular repetition that makes such recursion manifest.

Erasures is a very good book. And very disturbing precisely because of the way these echoes haunt, the way they compel us to recognize the flexibility and malleability of meaning, the way they reveal the thin barriers between the private and the public, the personal and the political, the present and the past, and then ask us to erase such barriers and realize new orderings, a challenging task indeed.

—TOD MARSHALL

American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders, An Anthology edited by Eliot Weinberger (Marsilio Publishers, New York, 1993)

> When I awakened in the later 1950s I discovered Blake saying: "I must either create my own 'system' or be trapped in another's"—for which you might substitute the word "anthology."
> —Jerome Rothenberg, "On Anthologies" (1973)

Why this anthology, and at this time? In a note in *Sulfur 20*, Eliot Weinberger situates Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960) and Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree* (1986). The first, he says, is "in many ways, an expression of Eisenhower America"; the second "is an expression of Reagan America." He does not tell us in what ways *The New American Poetry* expressed the America of the Eisenhower years (1953–1961) perhaps because those who were awakened (called back to poetry as I was) consider this epoch-making anthology an advent. Here was the good news of what was new that had been stirring and gathering force (creative mass) since the end of World War II. Or since 1950, the date Weinberger chooses to mark the beginning of his anthology, the year in which Olson published both "The Kingfishers" and "Projective Verse," the former the initial (initiating) poem in Allen's anthology, both poem and essay summons to the will to change.

With Silliman's anthology Weinberger explicitly tells us what he means by "expression of": "In an era of rampant nationalism and xenophobia. . .we have an anthology of new writing so nationalistic and xenophobic that it salutes America in its title, divides its poets more or less along state lines, and deliberately excludes some excellent poets who had the misfortune to be born a few miles north of the border." *(American*, it should be noted, figures in the titles of both Allen's and Weinberger's anthologies, and both omit Canadian poets.) Weinberger's beef is chiefly with the "language" poets whose characteristic "stylistic gesture," he goes on to say, "is the non-sequitur (which is quite different. . .from Cubist simultaneity, Surrealist collage, or the Poundian ideogrammic method)." This gesture, he believes, is "the product of a generation raised in front of a television" and moved to practice the art of the Great Communicator. In explaining how he selected the poets included in *American Poetry Since 1950,* Weinberger says that "No poets born after World War II are included, thanks to that ruling demon, space, and because many of the precursors to the present younger generation—the contexts in which the latest developments are occurring—remain so little known."

Yes, he is thankful for the ruling demon that enables him to exclude the generation that came of age with television. But when he says that the precursors are so little known, to whom is he referring? And to whom are these poets little known? Readers of *Sulfur*, who may have been readers of *Caterpillar* and, before that, of *Origin*, and those readers who found *The New American Poetry* and ever afterward kept themselves mindful of the newness, have long since studied and possessed most of the poets in Weinberger's anthology, poets to be returned to now with pleasure of the kind we have in retrospection. *American Poetry Since 1950* is a retrospect, a choice exhibit (and an exhibit of choices), except to those who need it most, the uninformed for whom it may be as exhilarating as *The New American Poetry* was.

Retrospects sometimes open prospects. I think, for example, of Jerome Rothenberg's *Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of American Avant Garde Poetry 1914-1945* (1974). Included in this small anthology—excellent preparation for Weinberger's anthology—are Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy as well as H.D., Hart Crane and Robert Duncan, Marcel Duchamp and Jackson Mac Low, and, notably, the Objectivist poets Charles Reznikoff, Louis Zukofsky, and George Oppen (all of *Discrete Series).* Weinberger is similarly concerned, as his subtitle suggests, with "Innovators and Outsiders," and he is willing to keep things open, at least on the sectors of the front represented by the poets he has included. His motive, I think, is the salutary one that Rothenberg ascribed to *The New American Poetry* and, with less

certainty, to its revised edition, *The Postmoderns:* "to take stock of where we are & where we have been, as a way of returning to an openness that may allow us—again—to move ahead." Always, *again.*

Rothenberg is the master anthologist of our time. His every anthology provides the widest range of linguistic resources as well as recovers sources and continuities, and all of his anthologies are in the service of "a poetry of changes." I have quoted above from Rothenberg's "Keeping It Old: A Review of the New *New American Poetry" (Sulfur 6),* which, with Clayton Eshleman's "The Gospel According to Norton" *(APR,* September/October 1990), seems to me the most useful in assessing *American Poetry Since 1950.*

Rothenberg is displeased with what he considers the closure of *The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised* (1982). The new edition of the Donald Allen anthology has become respectable. It omits, as Weinberger's anthology does, the sectioning into Black Mountain, San Francisco, Beat, and New York School, and arranges the poets "neutrally & chronologically, by year of birth." In conjunction with the omission of the statements on poetics, which in *The New American Poetry* acknowledged the "poets' right to context their own works and lives" and contributed to its "manifesto quality," this turns attention from "an evolving & open poetics" to reputations, and the result is canon-making.

American Poetry Since 1950 is an attractive book. It is not a formidable anthology, an "anthology package" (Rothenberg's term) like those published by W.W. Norton & Company, and its design suggests that it is not a textbook, though, with luck, it may become one. Weinberger's account of the history of poetry since 1950—"very brief," he says; too brief, I'd say, but lively in his inimitable fashion—is to be found at the back of the book along with bibliographies of the presently available editions of the poets' work, much of it now published by trade and university presses. That's it: no ponderous introduction, no headnotes, no footnotes. There are no statements on poetics, maybe because Weinberger thinks that they are no longer needed, though surely the uninformed, both the teachers who will hesitate to adopt this book and the students who will have to make their way in it, would be helped by the rules of reading a poetics provides. Weinberger's bibliographies improve on those in *The Postmoderns,* which mostly serve the scholar who will trouble to search for fugitive editions; they are not tightly printed in small type, textbook style. Coming on them at the end of the book invites the reader to go on, to stay in the open by turning to the *works.* This is as it should be, unless the reader prefers, as I do, to begin with the works and dispense with anthologies altogether. And

there are no biographical notes, which seems to me a needless omission, all the more so since the details of the lives of Nathaniel Tarn, Clayton Eshleman, and others that Weinberger gives us in his postscript are pertinent.

The poets in *American Poetry Since 1950* are arranged by date of birth and therefore cluster into generations that can be identified as Modernist, Objectivist, Projectivist, and so on (I have no label for the youngest poets: Sobin, Howe, Coolidge, and Palmer). Perhaps to a large extent, postmodern covers most of them. Rothenberg appreciated the sectioning in *The New American Poetry* for what it said about diversity, always for him a salient feature of the poetic landscape. Instead of this, Weinberger's arrangement suggests a common enterprise and steady going-on. He includes thirty-five poets, five of them women, with as little as three pages given to Everson and as many as sixteen given to Olson. The mean, about ten or so pages, is enough to allow a number of poets to be represented by poems of considerable length, that is, not by brief lyrics, as in most anthologies. Of the sixty poets who according to Eshleman should have been included in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, Weinberger includes sixteen. This small number is explained by the inclusion of some of his poets in *The Norton Anthology* (where they no longer appear as innovators and outsiders) and by his cutoff date.

The New American Poetry begins with Olson, with "The Kingfishers," which we encounter much later in *American Poetry Since 1950*, a good fourth of the way into the book. Weinberger does not explain this move in his account of the four functions of his "hubbub of conversations": "as a place to find certain amazing poems; as an introduction to the work of this historical moment; as an alternative to the existing anthologies; and, above all, as a signpost pointing to the books of the individual poets." By beginning with Williams, Pound, and H.D., he seems to want to establish what *Sagetrieb* calls the "Pound-H.D.-Williams Tradition" and subsequently considers the "Imagist/Objectivist Tradition." He makes good the latter by the chronological good fortune of having Reznikoff, Niedecker, Zukofsky, and Oppen precede Olson. As for the former, chronology enables him to make a significant alteration: to put Williams in first place and thereby question Pound's right to command an era.

Weinberger's anthology is a direct response to Eshleman's essay and his demand for a book that would challenge the gospel according to Norton: "An expanded and updated version of Don Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960)—a book that would cover 1960 to 1990. Besides poets whose work began to appear in this period, it might resourcefully contain certain

advances by writers who broke new ground earlier. The fact that no book like this exists now shows to what extent the NAMP *[The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry]* and its kin dominate the poetry textbook anthology market." Eshleman notes the failure of *The Postmoderns* and cites Rothenberg's concern for the omission of many of the new "alternative poetic strategies." Weinberger does not heed this so much as the notion of including poets who broke ground earlier, and he manages to do this by choosing 1950, which, in respect to Williams (b. 1883), Pound (b. 1885), and H.D. (b. 1886), allows him to include *current work* that shows these founding poets clinging to the advance. (Williams in *Spring and All:* "How easy to slip/ into the old mold, how hard to/ cling firmly to the advance.")

"The Kingfishers" is a more difficult (less accessible) poem than "The Desert Music," but this is not a reason to begin with Williams' poem. In the Williams-Creeley correspondence, Creeley tells Williams that he has told Rainer Gerhardt (another anthology-maker of sorts), "NO american poetry, without you at the top"—this, in 1950. And there is considerable evidence of the excitement Creeley, Olson, and Corman felt on reading a poem that they recognized (with the proverbial shock) as provocatively new and useful. Olson: "I think DM his *best*—a 1st rate, big, thing." And when Corman, who had been "overwhelmed" by the poem, obtained it for *Origin*, Olson advised him to "open with—WCW—Desert Music."

Olson's *big* is another reason. "The Desert Music" may be said to be the module that determined many of Weinberger's other choices. Williams' poem (364 lines) is not as long as *The Waste Land* (434 lines), but it is a poem of *size*, to use another Olson measure, demanding the same kind of attention. Pound is not represented by any poem of comparable length, though selections from *The Cantos* call up one of the longest poems of our time, a book-length poem beyond the reach of the anthologist that helps us assess poems of moderate length. H.D.'s "Red Rose and a Beggar" (376 lines), one of the three long poems of *Hermetic Definition*, is here in its entirety; and "Massacres" (264 lines), a section, complete in itself, of *Holocaust*, represents Reznikoff. There are 376 lines of Langston Hughes' "Montage of a Dream Deferred"; two of the longer poems of Lorine Niedecker, "Paean to Place" and "Darwin"; three lengthy pieces of Zukofsky's *"A"* and an equally long example of his (and Celia's) translation of Catullus; an ample selection—a condensation, as it were—of Rexroth's "The Love Poems of Marichiko"; and all of Oppen's "Route" (215 lines).

Then, Olson's "The Kingfishers" (190 lines). Weinberger's choices here are those that Eshleman calls for in his essay: "it seems grossly unfair that the small Olson section [of *The Norton Anthology]* omits 'The Kingfishers' (the

Post-Modernist equivalent to *The Waste Land),* 'In Cold Hell,' 'The chain of memory is resurrection,' and selections from the last three-quarters of *The Maximus Poems."* Space limitation accounts for the omission of "In Cold Hell" and more than one poem from *The Maximus Poems.* But Weinberger gives Olson prominence by using as a frontispiece one of Olson's circularly-disposed poems, this one with two circles (recalling Van Gogh?) from the manuscripts of *The Maximus Poems.* (I would have preferred "This is the Rose of the World.") He may also have done this because the only poet here whose "'field' practice" matches Olson's is Susan Howe, the "true heir," he says, of Olson.

After Olson, there are selections, samples of longer poems, that are in keeping with the module, and there are several complete poems of moderate length. *Selections:* from Cage's "Diary: How to Improve the World. . ."; Mac Low's "The Presidents of the United States of America"; Ronald Johnson's *ARK*; Duncan's "Passages" (six of them, including "Up Rising," which Eshleman recommends in his essay as "the greatest of the anti-Vietnam War poems," and "The Feast," the only poem—"everything from 'The Tribunals'"—that Weinberger was able to include); Creeley's *Pieces*—"Mazatlán: Sea," an excellent choice because this integral piece refigures the proceeding of this book-length poem; Rothenberg's *A Seneca Journal;* and Palmer's "Baudelaire Series." *Complete poems of length:* Ginsberg's "The Change" and "Wales Visitation"; O'Hara's "In Memory of My Feelings"; Antin's "Definitions for Mendy"; Eshleman's "Hades in Manganese"; Kelly's "Those Who Are Beautiful"; Sobin's "Girandole" and "Irises"; Howe's "Thorow"; and Coolidge's "Peru Eye, The Heart of the Lamp."

The preponderance of poems of moderate length gives this anthology its distinction. It will of course be useful as a supplement or alternative to *The Norton Anthology* and others like it, especially now that embattled anthologies have appeared, anthologies such as Robert Richman's *The Direction of Poetry: An Anthology of Rhymed and Metered Verse Written in the English Language since 1975* (1988). But I think it has another use, that is, the use to which I would put it. I have used an anthology only once, in this instance Michael Ondaatje's *The Long Poem Anthology,* a still-current collection of nine long (serial) poems, some as long as and some longer than those in Weinberger's anthology, by avant-garde Canadian poets. This is the worthy anthology with which to compare Weinberger's. For what especially recommends his book are the "certain amazing poems," all of them of length, that it contains and puts, as it were, in dialogue; *amazing* because postmodern in the ways so carefully defined by Joseph Conte in *Unending Design.*

No one will contest Weinberger's choice of poets. But since anthologies are part of literary production and in large measure (all the more so because they are used as textbooks) determine who is in and who is out, which is to say, who merits attention and whom we can afford to neglect, his omissions may trouble us. I will mention a few poets whom I miss: Ed Dorn, my choice *Recollections of Gran Apachería*, at the loss, of course, of the comic book format; Armand Schwerner, if not some of *The Tablets*, then "sounds of the river Naranjana" or "The Bacchae Sonnets"; Diane Wakoski, perhaps a part of *Greed*. After all, do we want a canon of innovators and outsiders, those who "make it new" and are outside the established canon, outlaws, as Williams felt himself to be, outside the walls of the city and therefore free to break the rules? Weinberger might well have appended a list of the good poets excluded, with suggested readings.

If *American Poetry Since 1950* is a textbook intended to challenge the kind of anthology in the "poetry textbook anthology market," it enters the market at a disadvantage because it is not a "teaching-oriented anthology" and in almost everything lacks the "teachability" which determines the kind of anthologies now being used (see Eshleman, *Novices*, 33). To use this anthology, the teachers themselves will have to be (re)oriented. Even anthologies like *The Norton Anthology* that include some of the innovators and outsiders, "limit new ways of reading, perpetuating old ways of reading the new poetry" (Alan Golding, cited by Eshleman). I recall the incredible difficulty, never overcome, I had in guiding a student who persisted in reading Olson according to the poetics set out in the New Criticism; and one of the things I learned in a lifetime of teaching, some of it down the hall from a writers workshop, is that too few teachers have the will to change and the will to find the innovators and outsiders for themselves. Will these teachers—their number seems to increase as the distance from major cities, great universities, and good bookstores increases—adopt an anthology that requires them to learn to read anew, to track down references in the library, and to teach poems that cannot be taught tidily in a fifty-minute period? Open poetry demands an open classroom—I mean classes than run on over long afternoons or long evening sessions perhaps not quite as long as those that Olson held at Black Mountain College.

Some teachers, of course, will be grateful for Weinberger's anthology and will use it to open, literally, a new world. What I said in the previous paragraph is by way of a lament for the time it takes—nearly fifty years now—to make even such small gains. Weinberger's anthology will contribute to the erosion of the old ways but it also reminds us of their persistence

Finally, since Weinberger's essay closes the book, let me say something about it. I am always delighted, here as elsewhere, by Weinberger's little facts and startling opinions. I didn't know that Oppen was "the only important American poet since the Civil War to actually engage in combat" and it never occurred to me that Kenneth Rexroth, deservedly prominent here, "wrote the greatest heterosexual love poems in English in this century." What interests me most in Weinberger's essay is his nostalgia for the time before the 1970s when poets were less dependent on universities and writers workshops were fewer and did not dominate the world of poetry to the extent they do now. Weinberger does not tell us how many of the poets in his anthology depended or depend for their livelihood on colleges and universities; fewer, I find, than I had expected, the reason for this being the exclusion of poets born after World War II. But is it true, as Weinberger thinks, that the hardship these poets experienced in fending for themselves and managing to survive contributed to their distinction? I concur with much that Weinberger says about writers workshops but remember a time in the late 1960s when Anselm Hollo and others brought the news to the Iowa Writers Workshop, and Barrett Watten of the Workshop got up a free university course (evenings, actually, when we read and discussed Pound, Zukofsky, Olson, and some others) to supplement the curriculum, and a Workshop student, fresh from Buffalo, enlivened my seminar on Olson. I conclude from the biographical note that Weinberger is not now nor never has been connected with a university and may count himself among the lucky ones who are independent. Still, the universities are mostly where it's at—where many of the innovators and outsiders get their livings, and poetry readings and classes and seminars, as Duncan once told me, keep the poets alive. Like Lewis Hyde, in *The Gift*, Weinberger has not come to terms with the university as patron nor fairly represented the benefits—there are some—of the present conditions of poetic production. There is bite in his querulousness, but for whom does he think he has made his textbook?

—SHERMAN PAUL

Noticings

Ralph Maud, at 1104 Maple St., Vancouver BC V6J 3R6, continues to edit and publish "Minutes of the Charles Olson Society," now in its 3rd issue. "Minutes" runs around 30 pages per issue, continuing scholarship begun by the late George Butterick in *Olson*. Maud is happy to send it to anyone in exchange for a modest donation. He is also in the process of assembling Olson letters for a "Selected Letters of Charles Olson," and asks anyone with pertinent letters to contact either him or Richard Fyffe, at the Homar Babbidge Library, University of Connecticut, Storrs CT 06269.

Pied Oxen Printers, directed by David Sellers, has just published *Sixteen T'ang Poems*, translated with a poem by Gary Snyder, with a Hanga woodcut by William Paden, 100 copies, a beautiful book. Readers of Eliot Weinberger's *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, which ends with Snyder's version of "Deer Camp," will find 4 more Wang Wei poems here, along with versions of poems by Meng Hao-jan, Tu Fu, Liu Ch'ang-ch'ing, Wang Chih-huan, Lo Tsung-yuan, Wang Ch'ang-ling, Tu Mu, Yuan Chen, Po Chü-i, and Chang Chi. Commenting on Snyder's "Deer Camp," Weinberger wrote: "Every word of Wang has been translated, and nothing added, yet the translation exists as an American poem." I can't imagine better versions of these poems. The Paden woodcut, drawing upon images from several of the poems—including a pile of red beans!—is masterful.

Now here comes Robin Blaser's *The Holy Forest* (Coach House, Toronto), truly the book of a lifetime, some 32 years in the making, 394 pages, with a solid introduction by Robert Creeley. Comprised of 15 serial collections, the book contains the 25 section "Image Nations," comparable to Robert Duncan's "Structure of Rime" series as well as to aspects of his "Passages." For me, Blaser's poetry took on size in *Pell Mell* (Coach House, 1988), in which his conversational erudition and enthusiasm seemed suddenly to be at large, emotionally and imaginatively filling in areas more tentatively set forth in the earlier collections (or now parts of what seems to be both a "collected poems" and a long poem). The last 100 pages of *The Holy Forest* are as heady as anything I have read for years, and for those who have been fortunate enough to hear Robin Blaser in a reading/lecture, which is at the same time "performance art" of the highest level, *The Holy Forest* will echo with his unforgettable presence. Coach House should now do his Collected Essays.

While it was published in 1992, I want to say a word about Jackson Mac Low's terrific *Pieces O'Six* (Sun & Moon). The book is not only a wonderful introduction to Mac Low as a writer of quasi-narrations with a wide range of strategies and voicings, but contains, in "Pieces o'Six—XXIV," one of the most dazzling tours-de-force of aphorisms ever written. Read against Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" and Stevens' "Adagia," it seems to gleefully dance about both, volatile, insightful, and with rhythmic phrase placements that are simply breathtaking.

The sense of wit in Paul Violi's poetry—most recently *The Curious Builder* (Hanging Loose), the title poem of which appeared in *Sulfur*—reminds me of Dennis Norton's (of the BBC's *My Word* program): the unexpected as the pivot in any expectation, with a sense of hilaritas as the ever-vanishing circumference. Anything is game for Violi, from a coffin splinter to a fireworks catalog. Especially notable are his adaptations of list/found object materials, such as police blotters, first edition catalogs, and erratas. Plus the work has genuine, emotional depth.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

The Fiction of the Poet: by Anna Balakian; Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, N.J., 1992.

On the page preceding the table of contents is printed this quotation from Mallarmé:

> To end up in a beautiful book/ that is what the world was made for

and our clue to the dedicatory mind that directs *The Fiction of the Poet.*

Balakian selects five poets: Valéry, Rilke, Yeats, Stevens, Guillén. The basis of this selection is their relationship and debt to Symbolism. This is the ontology of a book bearing a joyfully confusing title.

In *The Fiction of the Poet* does she mean to discuss poets who write fiction, or the attachment of fiction to poetry, or is poetry the only "true fiction"? I believe she wishes to show us by her interpretation of texts poetry influenced by Symbolism maturing under the protectorate of Mallarmé and undergoing a removal from all mundaneity until ionized it reaches the purity of fiction. That is as clearly as I can define her position.

I am impressed by how her exceptional intelligence—not intuition—hers is a practical mind—dignifies and gives weight to, even as it exalts, the poetic process.

Balakian's earlier book on André Breton proved to be an intensification of a progress through the mind of the poet. She did not present him as a poet maudit, a silly old fool, a lapsed Communist, or even a genius, she took

on the difficult task of making him human. She really cares about the unenclosed world of modernism to which he was dedicated and which she is able to present as an enchanted world with all the difficulties of enchantment. Swedenborg, Voltaire, Mythology, an odd lot seen together, are tickets to this world we may see as a passing one, but not to Balakian, as her book so brilliantly affirms.

There is nothing ephemeral about her method. She views poets with a kind of abrupt practicality; they are not going to play any tricks on her, even as she reveres their presence. This attitude is assisted by her control of her material. There is a certainty about everything Balakian offers us. She never nods and she takes the hurdles of her dislikes nobly.

And the "no nonsenseisms": "long-winded like Valéry." Of the sacred cow, Rilke: "Perhaps if we could banish Nietzche and Heidegger from his frame of reference we would reach the heart of Rilke's poetics more directly."

She is generous with her closeness to the poet's subject matter. Sometimes she comes to this subject matter in the guise of an inspired genie. She writes of Yeats' "The Second Coming": "we immediately become suspicious of the ready and obvious meaning of the title." She then proceeds to startle us with the remark that Yeats' poem is as powerful a poem about human failure as Mallarmé's "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui." We learn that in the gyre, the labyrinth of self, the Falconer, the artist twists, dreading his loss of control over his work for when that happens: "the center cannot hold." She writes "when the artist reaches that level of failure he has but one hope—the second chance. . .second coming."

She cannot resist a return to Mallarmé. Nor should she, given the climate of her book. "Mallarmé thought of a work of art as an operation as painful and as risky as giving birth": "Noire, a l'aile saignante et pale, deplumee." [Black with a bleeding and pale wing, deplumed.]

We are made aware that it is Symbolism that occupies the historical space in front of the poets she now approaches: its influence on these poets whether obscure or glaring. We are reminded that her field of honor is Symbolism.

In her chapter on Rilke she tells us that his Fourth Sonnet, about the unicorn is "as total a model of poetic fiction as Mallarmé's Faun, Valéry's La Jeune Parque and Yeats's golden bird of Byzantium" (Bringing together the poets of her book). She reminds us that the dream of Mallarmé was *"to suggest and not to describe."*

In her opinion, Stevens is a "self-conscious poet." And Balakian is so European she complains of, or perhaps one should more politely say notices, "the explicitly *national* quality of Stevens."

For instance she is annoyed with his decking out his poems with French words; she is not in sympathy with him, so she cannot interpret the cloak of Frenchness as a necessity to his poetry in search of a poetic fiction he could not locate in his natural environment. She neglects to take into consideration the roquefort cheese and illicit wine in a suburban yard, those mediocre French paintings as patient devices to whittle away the Puritanic self.

Balakian is possibly disturbed by the elevation of Stevens even as she hands over the American crown. On ornery terms with this book she is nevertheless consistent in allowing Stevens, with his lien on Symbolism, into her iconoframe.

The Hero in this unravelling of heroics, as we now know, is Mallarmé. And it is well to read Balakian's book in particular for Balakian's study of his work: Mallarmé who told us "the true fiction is that of the poet." He also wrote and she quotes:

> . . .situated at the junctions of all the other
> arts, sprung from them and governing
> them, Fiction or Poetry. . .

She asks us to celebrate Mallarmé as the poet who "recognized and he opened up the process of creating that fiction." In reaching for this flower "absent from all bouquets" we are in the singular field or mountain top of pure poetic creation.

The roots of this absent flower Balakian locates in Symbolism, the magic marker of her book. The reader must prepare in *The Fiction of the Poet* to accept Symbolism as the bartered bride of Modernism.

—BARBARA GUEST

The Demon of The Demon of Analogy

"Too much insight can be very dangerous, because you can tear your mind apart," insists one schizophrenic patient. Madness is a metaphysical illness; not a radical rupture with the human condition, but rather a manifestation of the paradoxes inherent in the recesses of self-reflective consciousness. Madness is a function of an equivocal, extreme hyperreflexion. Michel

Foucault characterized modern, i.e., post-Kantian, consciousness as an "empirico-transcendental doublet," where the limits of reflective experience occasionally lead to the pathological separation of the empirical and the transcendental, as well as to the equivocation between object and subject, finitude and infinitude, self-abjection and self-deification.

It is precisely these "paradoxes of the reflexive" which characterize the core of both schizophrenia and the modern, indeed modernist, episteme. Such is the thesis of Louis Sass' *Madness and Modernism* (Basic Books, 1992), in which the structural parallels between schizophrenic symptoms, modernist art, and modern philosophy are analyzed, following an extremely detailed, phenomenologically oriented typology of schizophrenic symptomatology. This work operates as an Apollonian polemic against the myriad theories in which schizophrenia is taken to be either a degenerative condition or a Dionysian celebration. It is thus a welcome addition to the current attempts to reveal the profound influence of madness on modernist art, and the breadth of its examples and comparisons make it an extremely useful volume. (The symptomatological categories are: unreality, the separated self, cognitive slippage, distance disturbances, extreme inwardness, loss of self, morbidity, world catastrophe.) Yet the difficulties this book raises and embodies are profound.

Epistemology. The key rhetorical strategy of the book is analogical (or metaphorical), yet one side of the analogy is forced, for this is a book on schizophrenia. Thus the presentation of modernism is highly skewed to reveal mainly such connections, flattening out modernism into a sort of glorified symptomatology. Clearly, the difficulties of excerpting and the consequent decontextualization are serious. The problems of this position become apparent if we play the mental game of reading the analogy from the other side, *i.e.*, if we imagine the book to have been written from the point of view of modernist art and aesthetics as a whole. In this case, to complete the analogy, we would need to supplement the theme of schizophrenia with the symptoms of hysteria, aphasia, autism, the various neuroses, etc., in order to account for the range of stylistic, affective and conceptual features of modernist art and literature.

Methodology. The book simultaneously benefits and suffers from an apparently manic erudition: its 600 pages include over 1200 highly detailed notes, covering 150 pages. Given what seems to be a desire for all-inclusiveness, certain omissions only highlight the occasional tendentiousness of Sass' arguments, leading to a disturbing historiography. To list just a few: How is it possible that Lacan is completely omitted, given not only his central role in the psychoanalytic theorization of schizophrenia, and not only his vast influence on contemporary aesthetic theory, but especially given the fact that the relations between madness and modernism were already evident at the origins of his writing, in the 1933 text published in

Minotaure, "Le problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l'expérience"? How is it that the psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni, who was among the first to conceptualize the writings of the insane as a distinct literary genre, is never mentioned? Why are those who contributed most to the study of the plastic works of the insane, such as Michel Thévoz and Arnulf Rainer, absent, as is the entire question of Art Brut? Why isn't the work of Laing, Guattari, or Deleuze given greater emphasis, as precursors of his own insistence on the significance of the expressions of the insane? Why is there no consideration of that other, most horrendous, demonic, anti-modernist use of this same analogy between madness and modernism, the Nazi concept of "Degenerate Art"?

Diagnostics. As the extensive parallels show, it is nearly impossible to determine whether any given enunciation—taken outside of the existential situation of the speaker—is art or madness. At the same time, one (madness) does not preclude the other (art). But why, then, is so much weight given to the enunciations of anonymous patients, while the works of such great schizoid or schizophrenic artists as Scriabin, Wölfli, Aloïse Corbaz, Wolfson, etc., are not analyzed? Certainly, given the existential situation of the author (Professor of Clinical Psychology), it is not strange that the reductionisms in this book tend towards the psychological, rather than the aesthetic. Thus, for example, Sass is perplexed that Schreber, in *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, seems to believe in the very gods he hallucinates: "By now it should be clear that Schreber's whole world of nerves and rays virtually demands to be read as a psychological rather than a cosmological vision, as a kind of allegory of the divided state of Schreber's own hyperaware, acutely reflexive mind." (p. 258) But why not simultaneously, equivocally, read these memoirs as an historically belated heretical theology? Or as literature (which a whole tradition of Schreber scholarship, elided by Sass, attempts)? Or as that epitome of modernist thought sought by Sass in the first place? We are caught in the vicious hermeneutic circle of the diagnostics of schizophrenia, a realm not unlike that of Alice's Wonderland, where the rules of the game (symptomatology) are in constant flux, and the game is controlled by dint of (the doctor's) authorial position.

This condition of reflexive paradox is wonderfully and frighteningly expressed by one patient: "If you abstract yourself far enough from a given context you seem somehow to create a new kind of concretion." This is not only true of madness and modernism, as Sass so elegantly demonstrates, but it has always been true of self-consciousness. It is also true, ironically, for Sass' book, which might perhaps benefit a bit from the expiatory powers of an exiled Dionysus, whose wrath modernism also teaches.

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Were we to continue on this theme, we could cite Artaud's desire, exclaimed in, *The Theater and Its Double*, "to reintroduce on stage a little breath of that great metaphysical fear." It is this breath, this voice, which comes to life throughout Paule Thévenin's *Antonin Artaud, ce Désespéré qui vous parle* (Le Seuil, 1993), a collection of essays written by the person responsible for the immense task of editing Artaud's complete works. *(N.b.*, that the final volumes of the *Oeuvres complètes* still haven't appeared, due to the scandalous, unresolved lawsuit brought by Artaud's inheritors against Gallimard and Thévenin.) These essays are of great interest not only for their insights about the reception of Artaud's work, and not only for the intimate firsthand knowledge of his work, but especially for their occasionally anecdotal beauty. We learn, for example, of the "breath exercises" Artaud utilized to practice for his readings, and which he in turn taught Thévenin. This is of particular import regarding the posthumous publication of Artaud's texts, insofar as Thévenin explains that the typographic layout of Artaud's manuscripts very often didn't follow the form of the manuscripts, since Artaud was limited by the varied and often inadequate formats of the pages on which he wrote. Rather, Thévenin attempted the restitution of the oral/aural exigencies of the work, following her own practice of Artaud's verbal techniques.

But the book is most passionate in its anecdotes, unfortunately all too rare. We may be touched to learn that on the day of Artaud's death, his old friend, Jean Paulhan, arrived and placed a small bouquet of violets in Artaud's hand. But even more precious is the description of the bouquet Artaud offered Thévenin one day, commenting on each flower: at its center were two roses, one white, one pink; above were placed three carnations, yellow, red, and mottled red/white; a fire-red and a pink dahlia; two white china asters to the right and left, and a pink one at the bottom; with the entire bouquet surrounded by oak and asparagus branches. One can only wonder about the symbolism of this arrangement, if any; one can only wish that this book, fascinating as it is, would have rather been presented in the form of memoirs, so that more of these precious reminiscences would survive. But Artaud's great gift to Paule Thévenin (one which Jean Genet characterized as poisoned, but which is rather homeopathic) was the responsibility for his works. This is the gift to which she has devoted her life, and which she has offered us.

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I recently received word of the death last Autumn of Paule Thévenin (1923-1993), and I wish to record my gratitude for her editorial work on the complete writings of Artaud. We are totally indebted to her passionate

dedication and exemplary scholarship for making Artaud's work accessible. In 1946, upon Artaud's return to Paris from Rodez, his friends obtained suitable living arrangements for him at the clinic of Dr. Delmas in the Parisian suburb of Ivry, and it was here that Paule Thévenin, at that time a psychiatric intern, met Artaud for the first time. Artaud befriended her, and asked her help in typing his recently completed manuscripts; this was the beginning of her selfless dedication to his work. For upon Artaud's death, she saved all of his manuscripts and drawings, and was soon entrusted by Gallimard with editing the *Oeuvres complètes*, with which she was to be occupied for the rest of her life. Outrageously, her name does not appear on the 25 already published volumes, due to difficulties stemming from the continued animosity and meddling of Artaud's inheritors. For the same odious and exasperating reasons, she never got to see the publication of the final volumes (already edited, yet unpublished due to the continuing court case). Yet it was Paule Thévenin who was totally responsible for transcribing Artaud's nearly illegible handwriting, deciphering erasures and palimpsests, choosing from variants, editing the volumes, and providing precise and copious scholarly notes. For this sacrifice, for this travail, for this pleasure, no recognition is great enough.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

THE END. Fanny Howe. Littoral Books, P.O. Box 481170. Los Angeles, Ca. 90048. 96 pp.

Neither recognizably traditional nor (quite) experimental, Fanny Howe is a difficult poet to categorize. She, herself, seems to have no use for categories as she implies in her poem, "Veteran," when she writes

> Outdoors, indoors, I don't believe in a gridlock of ripples
> or the deep walls people live inside

This difficulty may have prevented her from getting the kind of recognition she deserves.

Now Littoral Books has published a new collection of Howe's poetry: *The End*. At first glance, the poems here may seem to be near traditional lyrics. The first person pronoun abounds as do the subjects of loss and

death. The "speaking subject" is not displaced by a postmodern pastiche—but neither is she celebrated or sentimentalized. Perhaps identity isn't problematized because it is both inescapable and irrelevant in the wintry endscape Howe creates. What (but everything and nothing) are the problems of identity to "a sweetheart/of the iceberg or wings lost at sea?" There is no familiar rest stop here. Not even that of despair.

Never has a book been more aptly named. Although the earliest poems—"Alsace-Lorraine" and "The Real Thing" were written fifteen years ago and most of the other poems are recent, they seem one long meditation on a universe in which "cosmic expansion has gone in its preferred direction," tearing things and persons apart. Individual poems argue with or continue one another in this meditation across the months and years. This is a lone voice, speaking (singing even) in extremity, almost beyond human ties, from a place where even language threatens to break down. "Good Friday Night" begins,

> Has my father abandoned me? Or what do I mean
> my father has abandoned me

First she is abandoned by family and/or deity and then by the question itself. This is one of many abandonments the book presents:

> So heaven is a word
> for wonder
> and a term for separation's horror.

Again it is not merely the separation from others *(that* is assumed), but the separation of a word ("heaven") from any clear sense of its meaning which produces horror. In her linguistic dramatization of a negative theology, Howe reminds me of Dickinson. In "Close Up" nouns dematerialize along with things and sparrows are turned into "sparrowings," shaken aside by a line of traffic.

One can't characterize these poems as a series of lamentations either. Howe dismisses the world (its objects, rituals and dogmas) as actively as it withdraws:

> I don't believe in a thousand flowers or the first robin
> of the year or statues made of dust. Some of the others do

She dismisses each form in her quest for "the One that moves around each form." It is this tension between the feeling of bereavement and the impulse to flee which gives the book its energy.

Paradoxically, each thing Howe dismisses is simultaneously created in the reader's mind by the beauty of her language. (The one thing she seems to believe in wholeheartedly is the music of words). She is herself, as she writes, "Ms. Abandon hidden among surprises."

The End may not be as explicitly religious as Howe's previous books, *Introduction to the World* and *The Vineyard,* but she is still preoccupied with theological questions and she points out the trap inherent in her impatience with worldly comfort when she writes,

> If this world isn't good enough for us,
> then an afterlife won't be enough.

Refusing to idolize either presence or absence, Howe is left with the whirlwind of her mind—her poems. They are certainly "good enough" for the most impatient reader. At the close of the millennium, many of us find ourselves tired of our things, our images and our categories. We are ready for *The End.*

—RAE ARMANTROUT

Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

This is a book with a refrain. I'll play a few bars:

—"Meaning is problematic for each of the writers discussed in these essays, and it is precisely that problem which makes their work so intransigent and attractive." (9)

—"Stein's writing assaults clarity by suggesting that clarity is itself an assault upon and hence a violation of the sheer complexity and richness of a sensory world whose 'chaotic plenitude' (Jayne Walker's phrase) cannot be verbally articulated or mapped." (21)

—"Energy can never be fully contained or understood. Neither can knowledge, the life of the perceptions. And the poet can never carry the

reader all the way in, to the poem: There must be a resistance, for the act of knowing occurs only in the doing—and it is only then that meaning, or its possibility, can arise." (59)

—"The text is a movement of languages, of *a number of* frames of reference, held in the language of the poem simultaneously, *at once.* And it is a *felt* world, which is not, therefore, to be interpreted; one's feelings are not subject to exegesis." (88)

—"Both Zukofsky and Joyce wind in as many meanings as possible; both consequently cultivate an opacity of text—for if the text is to contain the world, then it must, like the world, in its quiddity stubbornly resist the hermeneutic act. . . ." (108)

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Well then, these are propositions concerning the objectivist "line" that is the subject of Quartermain's book, with "objectivist" and "line" understood to be conveniences: Stein, Williams, Zukofsky, Bunting, Creeley, Duncan, Davenport, Howe. We mostly know the catchwords and concepts and intellectual history: opacity; the word as thing; thinking rather than thought; Spinoza not Descartes; process; parataxis; refusal of hierarchies; "a poem is a desirable thing" (121). Quartermain's a fine close reader, a friend of poets, secret agent slogging the sublime. Most poets I know would benefit from his discussions of technique, of consonant clusters slowing the speed of verse, for instance, of quantity in Whitman, Pound, and Bunting, and so forth. Erudite too, like his friend Guy Davenport, and capable of adducing the same arcane reference. A stylist, an essayist, though less astringent than some of his subjects, bordering even on enthusiasm. "Exegesis should not be necessary" (89) he writes, echoing several of his subjects, and that may be true, but still this is useful criticism, entertaining reading. The discussion of a *apo koinou*—syntactic play and line breaks—is itself worth the price of the book.

If I have reservations about the book, they have less to do with Quartermain himself than with the poets he has set out to celebrate. These constitute for Quartermain an alternative tradition within or outside of high modernist poetics. Essentially American, mostly cut free of the cultural baggage of European traditions, particularly English traditions, these are poets inhabiting a world "in which masterpieces are no longer recognizable and works of art no longer identifiable, a world without authority, and, for the non-English speaking immigrant to America, a world without any history except that which the immigrant carries. . ." (15). Basil Bunting can belong in this crowd because as a Northumbrian he is outside the

linguistically homogenizing, "purifying" force of the English center, which has had its American spokespersons, like Henry James and T. S. Eliot. We've had critics try to split modernist poetics down the middle before—I think of Peter Bürger, Charles Russell, and others who distinguish an anti-institutional avant-garde from a larger, culturally and politically conservative modernism—but Quartermain is distinctive for offering a thesis about modernism which originates in hard empirical statistics about immigration rather than in a post-Hegelian Frankfurt School abstraction about the social function of art. Quartermain's is a more provocative thesis, if finally also a little reductive, especially when he tries to discuss the consequences of the immigrant experience in poetic technique. I am not sure it follows, for instance, that skepticism about "referentiality" and "meaning" such as is evident in so many of these poets is the product of the American experience—of a plurality of languages and a mongrelization of cultures and cultural standards. For one thing, that would seem to leave too much of that part of the European avant-garde which was also skeptical of "referentiality" and "meaning" out of the picture. I am also not sure whether or not it's ever much more than rhetoric to speak of America's weak sense of history or "culture," for one always runs the risk of seeming to advocate an anti-intellectualism that can be dangerous. (That's the problem, for instance, with taking Jean Baudrillard's work seriously as analysis of American culture rather than as rhetoric directed at the French.) And the healthy skepticism of the writers Quartermain celebrates did not preclude a scholarly pursuit of knowledge—what was Zukofsky doing digging around in Jefferson, for instance? Has there ever been a writer more interested in the traditions of Europe than Guy Davenport? Unless of course it's Ezra Pound, who occupies a curious position in this book—as he does in most studies trying bravely to make a clean division between a high modernism and something else. Pound seems to have been ambivalent about the energies of cultural mongrelization (see "Patria Mia"), interested in trashing Europe or in rescuing the best of it depending on whom he was talking to. But I digress. So American this book! So intent on slapping London in the face—and written by a Canadian! I only wonder if, as Americans, we should be so proud of our barbarism, our anti-culture? Should we be so eager to give over the pursuit of meaning just because totalizing narratives are out of fashion? Of course we've heard that totalizing systems, all narratives are to be feared: *everybody knows*.

As I said, this is finally a complaint about Quartermain's poets; but he is their advocate. I'll confess that while I don't need Quartermain to convince me that Zukofsky is opaque, I do need something more than this book to convince me that his work does not often reek of the pedantic. For me Bunting, Creeley, Howe, Duncan, and Williams are essential reading, and I'm grateful to Quartermain for helping me learn a little about how to

read them more intelligently. But for me Stein's in need of sentencing, Zukofsky's *"A"* too: it may be my own limitations that prevent me from imagining anyone reading them at any length with pleasure. I'd be happy for doses much smaller than I'm typically offered—with Zukofsky, I prefer the short poems, as did Bunting. And I find myself even while awash bedazzled in the textures of sound and rhythm, pursuing "meaning."

—KEITH TUMA

Some notes on Zukofsky's *80 Flowers* and Michele J. Leggott's *Reading Zukofsky's "80 Flowers"* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989)

Let's be clear at the outset: Leggott's is one of the most important studies yet written on Zukofsky and the processes of his work, and no one seriously reading him should ignore it. No other has used the manuscript material to such extent or examined these poem so exhaustively. For the methods of Zukofsky's composition; for reading the *80 Flowers* and as importantly *"A"*-22 and 23; for the "late poetic" informing all three and how they relate to the whole body of work (and thus for reading that entirety); and for the grounding of all this in Zukofsky's life, especially while we still lack a biography, this is a crucial work. It is not easy to go through. There's no shortcut. It can't be skimmed. With little preamble we are plunged straight into a close-knit and demanding presentation, consonant with the work itself, of some of the most difficult poetry of one of the most difficult poets of the 20th century. To try to read the analysis of any one poem without first going through the account of what the manuscript materials involve and how the work grew out of what came before is to have to go back and reattend. The discussion is both cumulative and distributive, new important information for the whole constantly being brought forth and related forward and back.

As explication it is striking, admirable, exemplary. Of course it still leaves questions and will prompt disagreements, as any work on Zukofsky will. But the sheer amount of information of all sorts on Zukofsky embedded in it is remarkable. It does not, however, really ever deal with the "Z world"

in terms other than Zukofsky's. "It is not a very critical book," succinctly notes Alan Riach in his muchly appreciative review in *Landfall.* The premises of that world are not actually questioned. It is not a matter of whether Zukofsky is important enough to be *worth* all this analysis. Or whether he should be given such "microscopic, laborious scrutiny" when his place in the critical assessment of American literature has not yet been adequately established and he is still not that widely known, as Michael André Bernstein is worried about in his review in *Modern Philology* (these two and the excellent account in *Style* by Dave Oliphant, an editor at the Humanities Research Center in Austin where Zukofsky's papers reside, are the only substantive reviews I've run down). Perhaps it is true as Bernstein argues, that "nothing really indicates that Leggott either cares about or even knows how to formulate the terms" of such a question as how Zukofsky challenged many of the assumptions of Pound's modernism, though that seems rather overstated. Whatever criticism needs to be done, having Leggott's foundation work will undoubtedly help bring it about, will in fact provoke it. With work of such difficulty, all the assistance we can get is needed. It seems excessive to expect Leggott on top of over 400 pages of close analysis to dispute the place of Zukofsky in the canon, or to have set aside her ground-breaking research in the first place to argue this. (For my own sense of that I would simply rest with Robert Duncan in the Zukofsky *Paideuma:* "to bear testimony to the enduring resource: his work. . .stands as primaries of all of us at work in the closing decades of the Twentieth Century.") But Zukofsky's work is of a stature that demands we also begin to ask questions about it that the terms in which it was conceived and composed do not necessarily present (and the same is true of Duncan's)—*while* examining the important matter of how it fulfills itself. Where we are with it after identifying and explaining all we can.

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80 Flowers: Zukofsky's last completed poetic text (a special legacy it feels, an even more concentrated and unresolved way of passing on the accumulated knowledge of a lifetime; compare, for all their differences, Jaime de Angulo's American Indian tales for children told on KPFA at the end of his life). Leggott tells us that Zukofsky first considered what became the book in 1968 (a cryptic note citing the Greek word *artos:* bread—out of which eventually came the "Heart us" opening the Epigraph and the *flour/flower* link, and *anthos/anthology,* leading to the title). Growing from work on the two last-written movements of *"A"* (he once considered ending *"A"*-23 with just a list of the 80 flowers), the set was first formally planned in 1974, nine days after the completion of *"A"*-23, a schema, variously added to, under the headings of *Plan, Substance* and *Form* (something

Zukofsky had done his whole poetic career, the explicit formal projecting and then the fulfilling of a work—*"A"*, as Barry Ahearn points out in his book, was planned in advance in the mid-late-1920s to consist of precisely 24 movements, the plan set down as that for *80 Flowers* on one small piece of paper). Conceived as songs to be completed for his own 80th birthday (in Pythagorean terms, full age), the poems were to cover only flowers he had actually seen (but there are two exceptions, or at least with the second what Zukofsky thought was an exception: #49 Slipperwort and #54 Windflower); to be arranged chronologically in order of composition, following the seasons they also celebrate, to come out of and condense all his previous work; with special attention to numerical matters (the 8x5=40 of words and lines, the 9s of the 81, etc.) and their significances, as had always been central in his work (a major part of the schema deals with this—whether one would call it *numerology*, strictly speaking, that is to what degree it is systematic, can be argued, and it is a subject worth consideration, but there is certainly a continual concern throughout the work with number symbolism and the patterns of counting around and through which the poems are composed, a kind of magic, it may be, so far as it goes, of the *constraints of desire*, to use Jack Winkler's term, or perhaps as simply as Hugh Kenner has it in his study of *Ulysses:* 'Numbers are definite; whatever is sufficiently definite attracts correspondences'); and proposing already a subsequent work, *Gamut: 90 Trees*, to carry him to the year 2000, one poem of which survives. Written between 1974 and 1978 (taking six years less than allowed for), at the proof stage when Zukofsky died in May 1978 (it is curious that the choice of the printer, the Stinehour Press in Vermont, had been at the suggestion of John Cage), the book was published the following month by his widow, Celia, in an edition of 80 copies (at $150 each).

80 Flowers: a title in which every possible sense of both terms is at work (it is worth looking at a full-scale dictionary for the array), not the least that *flowers* of course may be a verb. Zukofsky must also have considered all the aspects of the numeral in its Roman form, *LXXX* as perhaps *Louis' Xs (unknowns*, or *excess)*, or *Louis' unknown times/by unknown?* And *80* can be read as an upright infinity sign next to zero, that *gamut*—where the span of the opening and closing words of the whole set (Jane Wodening's "secret title" of a book) takes us from 'Heart' to 'night,' 'Heart us' to 'white night.'

80 Flowers: a set of *81 poems* (a titleless Epigraph in addition to the titled 80—there are always exceptions, as though spirit openings, to the formal terms Zukofsky proposes); each of *eight* (no exceptions here) *punctuationless* (except for hyphens, apostrophes, both for possessives and for contractions; accent marks, both grave and aigu; quote marks, both single and

double; the macron and the breve—but no commas, periods, colon, semicolons, or dashes; nothing to impede the possibilities of flow but line breaks) *five-word lines* (sometimes four, as straightaway in the Epigraph; sometimes six; once, in #45 Chicory, seven—22 of the 81 have at least one irregular line; and "word" here varies from as short as 'a' or 's', or the digit of a numeral, or 'etc'—but there is no 'I' in the whole sequence, surely making it more unique than rare in recent poetry—all the way to hyphenated conglomerates of as many as five terms, some open at either end, as 'of-the-valley', 'or-'; with many compounds run together hyphenless, as 'fanswordleaves', or with elisions, as 'gulp'm', 'foam't'—word count not syllable count is the measure, and the accordion-like variety of what constitutes a word is one of the major operative conceptions of the poems—intensifying the syntax *inside* the words, as Jed Rasula said of Joyce, not only between); with *capital letters* (the first word of every poem is capitalized; beyond these and month names, caps are unpredictable, but then nothing is really predictable in the whole series, certainly not the next word); with *italics* (no comprehensive explanation to cover *all* the occurrences of italics has been proposed by anyone I've read; they clearly have to do with counterpoint and stress, distinguishing and singling out, at least conceptually and to the eye—I've never heard the one tape of Zukofsky reading from *80 Flowers,* to know whether or how he may have sounded the italics; other evidence would indicate he was not necessarily attentive to line breaks in reading aloud); of spare yet massive and dense—at the same time light, airy, quick—semantic, syntactic, and etymological *polyvalence,* extreme and concentrated metalepsis, the words possible, ideally at least, to be read in any order within a poem; and of a *sound* unlike anything else in the language (though there are definitely analogues in *Ulysses,* as especially at the end of the "Oxen of the Sun" episode, not even to get into the *Wake),* clearly related to but still quite distinct from his previous efforts in a like direction—given much familiarity at all, no one would likely confuse even the most apparently similar portions of the Catullus translations or *"A"*-22 or 23 with *80 Flowers:* "quillet praises lacquer truemustard ox-beef" (#10 Charlock Per Winkle); "gnar's th'sum talk's shrill pine" (#43 Lilies); "Coo-saw kin-ens sees seas season" (#57 Dogwood) *"eyebright* monkeshines monkey-wrench whitespotted eyetooth" (#74 Aloe, and the longest line in the set). (He does like spondees.)

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Some parallels. Robert Duncan's *Headlines* that conclude his Stein imitation "Sensational News" (c. 1953) in the 1967 Duncan *Audit/Poetry* are arranged in a grid of eight unpunctuated predominantly five-word lines (varying from four to six), with such as "MAKE ALTER WIDOW TO

WINDOW." The visual similarity is striking, but the likeness would seem purely fortuitous? (It is nonetheless worth considering how and why this may have come about, and especially the Stein link.) And there are the 6x6 word-grids (with a 2x2 outrider after the opener) beginning and concluding Duncan's 1964 "The Fire" in *Bending the Bow,* which Zukofsky certainly would have seen. The difference in total conception, however, even in terms of sound kinship, even with intentional imitations, between Zukofsky and any other example I can think of in post-Zukofsky writers who have clearly derived from him, and there are many possible examples, still seem pretty much complete (there is of course David Melnick's application of Zukofsky's Catullus translation methods to the *Iliad* in his wonderful 1983 *Men in Aida,* and then his fantastic *Pcoet,* published three years *before 80 Flowers,* which takes us into another dimension altogether: "outcat lode hemepdne"; but actual structural similarity?). In terms of layout and composition within rigorously imposed restrictions, there is the set of inscriptions Valéry produced in 1937 for the Palais de Chaillot (one wing of which is the Musée de l'Homme): four groups of five lines each, with not more than 37 letters to a line and no punctuation. Valéry did not consider these poetry, but as Roger Shattuck says in *The Innocent Eye,* they come "tantalizingly close to poetry." And we might imagine Zukofsky's 81 poems also carved in stone, to be set in a garden—they are certainly of an American lapidary, what we have of that. But Valéry's pieces are of great simplicity, clearer in syntax than probably anything else he wrote, nothing in that regard like Zukofsky's, except that every word counts, and the monumentality. And their instructions might be telling us of work such as Zukofsky's: "AMI N'ENTRE PAS SANS DESIR." Another parallel comes to mind, perhaps tenuous as well, but one that John Thorpe has also remarked on, and that is with five-character classical Chinese *shih* poetry, "regulated verse", which is also of eight-line units. Though Zukofsky's flowers do not show any analogous rhyme, tone, or couplet-parallelism patterns, Peter Boodberg's statement (in his *Selected Works,* 180) that "one of the potent Chinese poetic devices is positional bifunctionalism" clearly fits Zukofsky, only perhaps altering bi- to multi-. And certainly one could argue for some linguistic kinship, or convergence—though born less than a year apart, it is probably unlikely they read one another?—between Zukofsky's late poetry and the concerns evidenced in Boodberg's translations, to find words as densely polysignificant etymologically as possible; cf. his version of *Shih Ching* (177), and the absolutely *extraordinary* translation at the conclusion of his discussion of *Lao Tzu* 1 (480)—there is nothing else like *that* in all of sinology. One could do far worse in sharpening attentions, to deal with Zukofsky or whatever, than to spend some time with Boodberg's *Cedules* and *Lao Tzu* notes. (We should also remember that Boodberg was one of Duncan's teachers, and that one of Duncan's late poems, "Two Sets

of Ten" of 1981, mentions both Zukofsky and Boodberg in its prefacing note and works throughout with a number count Duncan felt analogous to Zukofsky's and to Homer's. Two other late Duncan poems that have Zukofsky in mind might also be mentioned while we're at it: the *Passages* poems "Jamais", designated *"Homage to the youthful Zukofsky,"* and "With In", part of *The Regulators.)*

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Of Zukofsky's *most* hermetically daunting and difficult work, and may likely remain so, even with all elucidation (no one would call *"A"*-18 and 19 easy or for all their length prolix, but after immersion in 22 and 23 and especially *80 Flowers*, they may seem expansively intelligible and almost loquacious by comparison): "a black hole. . .an impossible density few will ever attempt to penetrate," Eliot Weinberger registered it a decade ago. But of course the impossible is always an attraction (and the poems do have their attractions, and not just as intriguing puzzles or fantastic sound and vocabulary combinations), so attempts have been and continue to be made. The first in print was David Levi Strauss' "Approaching *80 Flowers"* in the *Code of Signals* volume Michael Palmer edited for North Atlantic Books in 1983. It is an admirable introduction to the work, perhaps still the best place to begin, the record of a serious and imaginative reading of the poetry when nothing else was available to go on, "no critical mass to contend with," showing an attention to the prosody of how sounds structure the poems independently of how the sounds may have been generated or what they may relate to that Leggott does not really go into, and importantly grounded personally in Levi's own experience as a gardener. And I've also been in touch with a study group of poets in Bolinas who have met regularly to consider *80 Flowers*, as they did earlier with the Cantos, Maximus, Stein, from which one hopes for tangible results in the future. (And then there is the impromptu explication of #80 Zinnia which Robert Duncan produced during his interchange with Barrett Watten at the Art Institute in San Francisco in 1978, which exists on tape but never has been, to my knowledge, transcribed?)

And now Leggott's monumental study (based on her 1985 dissertation at the University of British Columbia), with prefacing material, appendices, notes, bibliography and index adding up to over 450 pages. It might be likened to a super-double-intensive crash course in a new language (some might even say an overload indoctrination), and Zukofsky's poetry itself to the "translation" of multiple simultaneous languages into what is not so much (or better *not just)* a common language as what Robert Duncan called (in a different context) "the uncommon language of a highly personal

signature," one as Leggott says, "new, difficult (but not alien)" (89)—but with resonances for use wherever, in concord with Heraclitus that an unapparent connection may be stronger than an apparent one. Or we might say, and with all praise intended, that Leggott's book is an instruction or user's manual (and given that Zukofsky made his living for some years editing such, it is apt). And one like no other. Some may learn a new language as Arthur Waley did *(two* in his case), by simply holing up and doing it alone, but most of us will need and welcome assistance. Ultimately of course the learning and the use must come down to our individual experience.

The kinds of difficulties in Zukofsky—what is hidden, sources and allusions and meanings compacted and elided beyond recognizing, connections "barely clinked", in Duncan's phrase, barely traceable, or simply private—mean that such materials as the manuscript notes, lists, drafts that Leggott bases her study on, which make such identifications and chart the processes of use, *do* help (from the two pages reproduced in the Zukofsky *Paideuma* one may judge what must be involved in deciphering them), as the manuscripts of other poets might not (my guess is that having every manuscript of Lezama Lima's poems, to name another contemporary of Zukofsky's of transcendental difficulty, would still not enable us to read them much if any better, and likewise with Gerrit Lansing). "Conventional wisdom would have it that notes and draft materials are unnecessary to the reading of a poem, and in most cases wisdom has its way—Zukofsky said often enough that paying sufficient attention elucidates a work." But with difficulty of this sort, "of an order to baffle and eventually alienate all but the most persistent of readers," Leggott concludes Zukofsky's solution was to leave behind these manuscripts and "legitimize use of the draft material by housing it in a public collection" (31-32), Zukofsky's "time capsule." So before analyzing the poems, she gives us a very close-grained 30-page account of what these materials are, for *"A"*-22 and 23 as well as for *80 Flowers*, it doesn't do to skip, the basis of all the discussions that follows of how *"A"*-22 and 23 lead into *80 Flowers* (this discussion is in fact the best introduction yet produced to those parts of *"A"*, especially valuable on the "An" sections, and Zukofsky's plan there to cover 6000 years of history without names or dates; the book is worth having just for this). Only then are the *Flowers* looked at in detail, and then in great detail, 36 of the 81, with full texts, in chronological seasonal sequence (only four are discussed out of order).

In some ways the best introduction, and then Levi's account, is to turn straight to Leggott's Appendix B, the transcription of a taped conversation with Hugh Kenner in which Zukofsky explains #22 Bayberry, giving in fine

the methodology Leggott builds on: tracing the sources in his other work; definitions and etymologies in several languages; authors such as Homer, Theophrastus, Dante, Shakespeare; botanical and gardening information; and what is finally, as Zukofsky puts it, "private knowledge." Already in the Levi Strauss many of the major sources Zukofsky drew on were made clear (and his basic approach is as sound as Leggott's, though lacking what she calls the "enrichment" that the manuscript information provides). Leggott expands on all this (and on what Zukofsky does not explain), particularly about what he was reading, from Greeks and Romans to Breck's and Burpee's catalogs, with such surprises as Thomas Hardy, including *The Dynasts*, and Henry James (I wonder if the rhythms of the last two especially may not have served as one of the important sustaining backup counterpoint beats *80 Flowers* rode upon—I remember Creeley 30 years ago talking about writing to hours-long tapes of all the Bud Powell records he could get hold of, but this is something far, far less overt; or Gerrit Lansing more recently speaking of the 19th century prose rhythms, such as Pater's and James', he felt behind but even more *in* Ashbery's *Flow Chart);* and about matters of Zukofsky's family life, the dates, anniversaries, birthdays central in such a number-conscious poetry, the impingement of immediate events (cf. the Vietnam war news on TV in *"A"*-18), and especially the Zukofsky's garden, for the ultimate grounding is the flowers themselves.

It's hard without extended quotation to give an adequate sense of the heaped-up, multilayered, widely-conjecturing ("mindboggling," Charles Bernstein called it) account Leggott gives of the way she has made *through* poems which were not written along any single line of development, changing as they occur, not possible to be read in any conclusive fashion nor meant to be read thus any more than they were written thus, multidimensional sets of different kinds of resting points, momentum, propulsion, linking, merging and emerging points, meaning auras (so the Blakean Rexroth speaking of Zukofsky's "crystal cabinets full of air and angels"). The quality of her account (style as soul) is entirely her own. Here is the opening of her discussion of #75 Thyme (280):

> *'Thyme,' 'rose,' 'thyme';* three maplike italicizations in the *Flower.* Here is the firey rose again, budding flame in winter (Epigraph, #1 Starglow) in front of Isaac D'Israeli's credulous, frozen Norsemen (their eyes popping out?). Here is the 'birds'-tread' dance ('bird tread,' Epigraph), which assumes rose-sense as soon as we step from trefoil (a pulse, or a charm for every good purpose) to cinquefoil (a wild rose), compound leaves in each case looking like bird tracks. For the wild rose,

> bring in wild thyme and wild time, recalling: 'Wild time *liveforever* horsethyme ice' (#4 Liveforever)—the line that also draws on Oberon's 'I know a bank where the wild thyme blows' (*MND* II.ii.249). In #4 Liveforever there was an allusive firey rose and the horse whose time is running (or being run by?) *80 Flowers*. There are no open indications of his presence in #75 Thyme but hints of it abound, from 'time. . .wild. . ./ *thyme*' of the opening to the comical wrapping up ('relentless-vest muffler jacket coat') of his mortal frame against the cold suddenly blowing out of the thymy bank. And then, 'hope sevenyear,' there is his projection of faith in time's design ('but trusts still greet C + me at 80'), which the last line of the poem elaborates.

Crucial throughout is her discerning how certain kinds of operations, just as certain sources, are used again and again. Central to this are the unexpected contingencies of diverse input and awareness, "those places where one voice had been, or seemed to have been, listening to another." "If the mode of Zukofsky's poetry is condensation, its material is the staggering incidence of such contingency" (55). Especially valuable is her showing how Zukofsky's translation methods operate in these poems (and compare the 1964 poem, 'The Translation"). We are familiar from the Catullus translations with Zukofsky's recreating in English the *sound* of the foreign language original, transliterating it (as generating "searing / all cues" from the second term of *Hibiscus syriacus* in #20 Rose-of-Sharon, but this is a simple example; there may be line after line of it, cf. #69 Yarrow—one wonders about the impact of Joyce in all this, for one fairly simple example the "met him pike hoses" from *metempsychosis* in *Ulysses*, again not even venturing into *Finnegan's Wake*; the question of Joyce and Zukofsky is worth study, and not just the matter of the *Ulysses* filmscript, which Jerry Reisman more recently has claimed Zukofsky actually wrote none of), along with translating it for sense (so line 1 of #32 Lilac does both: "Sere ring a pipe wood" first transliterates and then translates *Syringa*). What Leggott demonstrates is that time and again Zukofsky does both, shifting back and forth, with the same original text. Further, within the mode of transliterating for sound are two types, one which more or less accommodates the sense with it and one which has no apparent connection with the original meaning at all, making a total swerve in trajectory. "Both kinds are at work in Zukofsky's late poetry, and a sudden switch to the anti-sensical mode is one of its most disconcerting features. Zukofsky is in the habit of sudden switching" (61). That last sentence is my favorite, and it was worth reading the whole book just to have it, conjuring up an image of Zukofsky as a swinger of birches. And lest that seem merely

whimsical or impertinent, let us remember that the word-root of *birch* means *to shine, bright*, as that of the sound-linked *beech* leads us to *book*, and that *birch* is the first letter of the ancient Irish magical tree-alphabet, and is the tree of inception.

Leggott modestly calls her book simply "research." It is a *creative* act, of remarkable accomplishment. It may be as Hugh Kenner states on the dust jacket, that she has virtually invented a critical method. It does give the feel of having been so long and so deep in the Z world as to have become part of it, with some indulgence appropriating itself to that world. But it too of course comes up again and again against bafflement—which is of the *nature* of that world. "Questions of perception, to which there are no answers, only further complexity, perplexity" (47). Nothing explains *everything* in these poem. As Leggott says, Zukofsky always holds more cards than we do. And so? At length really explain what can't be explained? And in any case, since we still don't have access to that manuscript material, we can't weigh for ourselves how she has used it, nor can we deal in the same fashion with the other 45 poems she doesn't analyze. Will access to the material (not even catalogued when Leggott was working on it and perhaps not still; it is a continuing problem for all rare book libraries) always be restricted to specially qualified and accepted scholars? *Does* this poetry *necessitate* having the manuscripts? Does it not also itself press for a reading that simply *ignores* all that? Is that then any less "authentic"? Isn't that what we ultimately *have* to do? At any rate, to the degree the material *is* crucial, one does want it. At least it would have been very much to the point to have in Leggott's book all of the material relating to *one* of the poems?

To be at the end of Leggott's book is still (as she would agree) to be only at the start of dealing with the world of *80 Flowers*—if one *wants* to deal with it (one friend, a very careful reader, finds it basically trivial). Zukofsky wants the reader to be drawn into his world; not every poet does—but in a very complex push-pull sort of way, nothing easy. The value and use of that has to be what we experience ourselves in actively seeking out the sources and tracing the connections for ourselves, making the links with our own lives. That is obviously true of *any* poetry, but it is most intensely so with this. A friend has written me that he thinks of the *80 Flowers* "more as *case history* or possibly quarries (mines) for others"—then what do we make out of what we extract, and if poets, into our poiesis.

I have come back over the years to one of the two poems in the set Leggott says nothing whatsoever about, #20 Rose-of-Sharon (the other is #60 Narcissus), and there are for me sexual dimensions there I don't know that

Zukofsky had in mind, certainly probably not in the way I have them in mind, particularly with the vivid phrases "the thrown burning brand" and "torn not thorned rose." And there are other dimensions, overtones of the flower itself, which Zukofsky did not get at, did not (I'm sure) want to get at, wasn't interested in, only indirectly made possible links to, and which Leggott wouldn't have gone into had she covered this poem, all of which are nonetheless absolutely central to my experience, and my experience in this poem, and will continue to be so. Let me simply mention the *rose trémière* and all its resonances in Nerval's sonnet, "Artemis," and set that next to #20 Rose-of-Sharon. Meditative texts, then. I wish that Leggott had told us of her own particular personal experience of the poems, especially as a poet—how she came to them first, for example? Which isn't to say her book is not an individual and personal reading, and gains thereby, but the grounding in her practice and life? Outside the Zukofsky world?

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There are some slips, but few (on 334 *"A"*-14 is cited when it should he *"A"*-13; on 352 the date of Dostoyevsky's *White Nights* is given as 1811—he wasn't born till 1821; it should be 1848); there are some references not caught that one might have expected would be (as on 45, not registering the *Annuit Coeptis* and *Novus Ordo Seclorum* mottoes on the Great Seal of the United States—cf. the reverse of the dollar bill—which surely are also operative in the Zukofsky text under discussion, or the further Virgil reference at *Aeneid* IX, 625; and that 17 September is William Carlos Williams' birthday, as well as Constitution Day, never seems to have been recognized as an important factor in the recurrence of that date in Zukofsky's work; note: "A"-17); and is the "T" missing from the lower-right-hand letter list in Zukofsky's note quoted on 41 Zukofsky's own oversight? These are minor, but to be noted. More interesting to wonder about is something else.

When Leggott's book was published in 1989, the only way the common reader could have had "legal" access to the *entirety* of the text being analyzed was to go to a rare book library or know some fortunate collector who had one of the 80 published copies (or even more fortunately be such a collector; no longer then, however, a common reader), or, stretching allowances a bit if not the likely possibilities, come by a Xerox or a copy of a pirate edition (I don't know how many such editions may have appeared; I have seen only one, dated 1987 and clearly marked as "Pirate edition" and "Not for Sale"). Leggott certainly indicates that most readers would have a hard time coming up with *80 Flowers*, and part of the value of her study at that time was clearly in providing the full texts of the poems

covered in detail. But nowhere is the tension gone into inherent in the publishing of a 400-odd-page highly specialized study of a book that was not in print, that was essentially unavailable and had never in any usual sense been available—or that those who would make use of and perhaps buy the Leggott would want and need the full *80 Flowers*. Under such circumstances, the publisher can be commended the more for taking on the project. Perhaps already in 1989 the Johns Hopkins Press had in mind to produce the *Complete Short Poetry* they brought out in 1991; it would seem likely (the more so since they went on to issue the complete *"A"* in 1993), but if this is so it is not indicated in Leggott.

More particularly: if we examine the arrangement of the 81 poems in each of the three versions—the 1978 original, the 1987 pirate, the 1991 collected—we find they are all different. In the original the text (one poem to a page) begins on the unnumbered verso of the dedication page (which reads simply "to C") with the untitled Epigraph, facing #1 Starglow, and the last poem, #80 Zinnia, faces a blank page (the numbers Leggott uses along with the titles to identify the poems—this was Zukofsky's way of referring to them, and with the titles not in quotes—correspond to the page numbers of the 1978 edition; the poems are not otherwise numbered there). This may well have been Zukofsky's preference; we know from Leggott that in his instruction to the printers he specified one poem to a page, the page size, the number of pages, the type (Bembo), and the limiting of the edition to *exactly* 80 copies (and Leggott moreover makes a case for the Epigraph and #1, #2 and #3 being linked pairs, benefiting from facing each other—yet the equally important linked pair, #51 Snowdrop and #52 Snow-wreath, which Zukofsky in his notes designated a highly condensed "double canzone," do *not* face each other thus): but it may have been the printers' actual decision, what is after all the common way of pagination, Zukofsky knew would be followed? In the pirate (apparently derived from a xerox of the 1978 edition, or a xerox of a xerox, with occasional attendant lurchings and blurrings, and thickened letters throughout), the verso of the dedication page is blank and the Epigraph occupies the first recto of text (that would usually be page 1, but here no page number), with #1 on the verso of that, and so on, and thus the 80 flowers *proper* are presented in 40 two-page openings, ending neatly with #79 facing #80. The collected edition presents the 81 poems *three* to a page, 27 pages, beginning and ending on a recto, and of course without the original's page (and thus identifying) numbers (nor are the titles all in caps as in the original). This three-to-a-page arrangement was in fact, Leggott makes clear (5), that of Celia's master-copy typescript, from the carbon of which the Stinehour Press set the type (no indication by Leggott if the poems were numbered in any way in the typescript; presumably not). But obviously that

arrangement was not one the Zukofskys expected the press would reproduce, so the 1991 edition departs from the poet's precise desires for printed representation as they are known. Whatever, leaving out these page/identifying numbers makes for inconvenience in using the 1991 edition with Leggott's book, since her index entries to the main discussions of the 81 poems (plus the arrangement in the full list with dates of composition and manuscript dedications in Appendix A) are in numerical sequence and are not fully cross-referenced by title. So one must add the numbers for the poems in the collected, a minor annoyance but something an editor should have been aware of and handled. Further yet: Leggott (27-28) points out and explains the source of the one typographical error in the 1978 edition: in the first line of #61 Bearded Iris, 'gook' should read "geek" she also, by the way, valuably cites some typos in the now out of print University of California Press *"A"*—see 385, n. 13 and n. 22; I have not been able to examine the new Hopkins complete *"A"* to see if the mistakes have been corrected there). Naturally the pirate doesn't do anything about this, but much more curiously neither does the 1991 edition, though from the same publisher as Leggott's book, not taking advantage of her research, again evidencing some lack of coordination. (There is in fact no indication at all of who edited the new edition or how and why it was done as it was, with no Latin for the Catullus, for example, and many other matters; but that is a subject for another discussion.)

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Questions. Simply to present and raise. Of the movement from public to private (but the private was always there), social and political ground to family ground, labor value to love, *"A"*-9 First Half to Second Half, and its culmination in *80 Flowers?* Years ago after reviewing *Bottom*, I wrote to Zukofsky and asked why there was no Marx in that book, and he replied that he was no more a Marxist, after all, than he was a Spinozaist—but there is more to it than that, and what became of Marx in the work. What is the nature of authority in Zukofsky? Where does he leave off and why; what does he settle for, is satisfied with? What is the nature of the personal canon Zukofsky affirms and how does it change—how is it "privileged" as reference and source? What *are* "particulars"? What is the development of the concept of "word" operative in *80 Flowers?* It is not a poetry of struggle, of anguish, pain, suffering, intense yearning (though of bitterness over neglect), but rather of "the mind's peace"? Except for the struggle of the sheer effort of dealing with the requirements set himself, in the intensity of composition—and the struggle we have in reading. But of the kind of conflict Pound felt made for kinship between his work and Bartók's *Fifth Quartet*, or Faulkner's "the human heart in conflict with itself? What is the

nature of resolution (till death's) within a poetry composed to be unresolved (life itself)—is it "within"? Able to be unresolved because the real "resolution" the poetry rests upon, what supports contingency, is already present, in love, marriage, family, or an ideal of these (so the attraction for many poets, such as Duncan and Creeley, of the domestic in Zukofsky, the artist's household)? And aspiration? The reaffirming of an art, a continuing curiosity, a yearning for more learning? Wanting a fame not gained or granted? And the paradise vision (which is a garden) at the heart of the late work, marriage ever-renewed, "impossible liveforever." How is it ever attained? (What might the next set of poems after *trees* have dealt with, of like presence—birds?) Creeley concludes his Foreword to the 1991 *Complete Short Poetry:* "What end can there be? He might say otherwise, it is finally quite simple. Either you love or you hate. You have your life accordingly, 'the more so all have it.'" Yet is it simple, since we do both, are mixed. And the result from either in any case is not predictable. From *love* Louis Zukofsky and Robert Duncan left two utterly different monuments as "last" poems. Set Zukofsky's paradise vision and the desire to record only the good in history and the invocation "Heart us invisibly" next to Duncan's "No faculty not ill at ease / lets us / begin where I must"—"the totality of perfect rest" next to "an eternal arrest."

What is the presence of the choric in Zukofsky, beyond quotation, however condensed? (Which is to say, in one regard of it at least, how does Zukofsky relate to not only Pound and Williams but Whitman—and the hiding in both Zukofsky and Whitman?) Don Byrd in the Zukofsky *Paideuma* (one of the best essays so far on Zukofsky): "extended intersubjective lyrics, the various voices involved all reaching beyond the lyric moment in an effort to establish a community." So then the nature of that community? Byrd goes on: "it is a music controlled not by mythos as in Stravinsky, or by logos, as in Schoenberg, but by the actual temporal, melodic, *and* semantic content of the language itself." (Note Guy Davenport in the Zukofsky *Maps* on Zukofsky's preference for *chords of words, tone clusters*—so the harmonic as share.) Zukofsky himself, talking with L. S. Dembo in the Spring 1969 *Contemporary Literature:* "there is a use of words where one word in context defines the other and it enriches so that what is put over is somebody's reaction to existence." Yet then there is David Melnick, writing specifically on *Bottom* in that same *Maps*, having already affirmed Zukofsky as "a resource of our whole endeavor in poetry": "Zukofsky's world has no room for people in it: he will not deal with more than one pair of eyes at a time." And so the nature of the self and the ground of the self and identity in the work and how that might be looked at? Robert Duncan in the Zukofsky *Paideuma* (he has just been speaking of Zukofsky's *neo-Aristotelianism*—again compare Joyce): "A kind of self consciousness in

which not the poet but the act of writing itself was this 'self'—an active conscience in making—enters in that is an extension of the counter-check of the line-by-line construction of idea and feeling in movement." And David Melnick again: "Disguises allow the desperate to escape, or to return as spies (phantom kings). But, inevitably, in comedy as in tragedy every eye is met by another and must voluntarily *give up* some part of its mastery or be denied it altogether. The world cannot be seized, cannot be rectified, by the invisible, characterless 'I.'" And the spiritual in Zukofsky, and the orphic—is there an orphic there? And Zukofsky and Celan, especially the prosody of "reading stations in the late word" in each?

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Inevitably, as Leggott stresses over and over, we come back to what is in fact the first experience of the poetry and what Zukofsky clearly particularly focussed on: the *sound*, its unpredictable diversity and novelty, the extraordinary vocabulary, the open flux of syntax, and the pleasure, the delight to be had from all of that (and the great humor in it). Even without other study that is primary and will have its impact ("Its art was beyond me yet somehow available in my sounding the poem," Duncan said). But no matter if we determine we are going to read *only* for the sound and juxtapositions and not pay any attention to what is "said" or "meant," the poems won't let us (nor do they satisfy equally throughout on that score), but keep drawing us (and resisting us) into their undertow, and into all the complexity of Zukofsky's world. As Levi Strauss says, words do *not* become non-referential.

Ultimately then we are also returned to what the poems themselves began with. Levi again: "There is one more thing one can do—one can look at flowers. . . .against the erring brain." Yes, said another friend, but a good botanical guide would do that too. But not with all the overtones and layerings of *80 Flowers?* In fact we can think of *80 Flowers* as Zukofsky's botanical guide, as a *garden diary*, which one of his major sources, Taylor's gardening encyclopedia, recommends each gardener keep: "a few carefully thought-out notes are invaluable" (and best in loose leaf form, as Zukofsky kept most of his), and should include one's *feelings* about the plants: "These records will serve not only as a history of your garden but as a history of you the gardener." "Formally, *80 Flowers* is the tour de force of Zukofsky's late style of condensed lyricism in which words freed from conventional syntax invite or demand that an audience make what aural or semantic connections it can." "The garden must be like a real garden, with cycles of growth; blossomings and witherings. Recurrence." "The beauty of it is in the listening and the looking, and in the power these activities have of exciting or inciting attention—to universes, their stars, their flowers." (Leggott, 357, 356, 355.)

For all of their vast differences, I return to Zukofsky as I return to Mallarmé, for the refreshment of the mind each time, the other "gears" it is put into, for the challenge and the charm, for the integrity of language in every nuance of use, demanding, sharpening, revealing, perplexing, keeping unresolved, keeping responsible. And wanting other and more. Valéry's 1931 tribute, "I Would Sometimes Say to Mallarmé. . .," is indeed worth looking at with Zukofsky, for how it fits him and just as importantly for how it does not. It offers this (the translation is by Malcolm Cowley, in *Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé*, volume 8 of the Bollingen/Princeton Valéry):

> So anyone who did not put aside Mallarmé's involved texts found himself engaged by slow degrees in the task of relearning how to read. If he tried to give them a meaning that was not unworthy of their admirable form or of the labor those elaborate figures of speech had assuredly demanded of the author, he inevitably came to associate the delights of poetry with a sustained effort of the mind and of its powers of combination. The result was that Syntax, a form of calculation, resumed its rank among the Muses.

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To conclude, let these speak:

> we forgot that we were not performing the chief moral obligation of humanity, which is to protect the works of love.
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> • • •
>
> Mystery, to use that admirable English word meaning all information relating to the theory and practice of a craft, which we borrowed from the Old French *mestier*, and by carelessness amounting to genius confused in spelling with the word we derive from the Greek for occult.
>
> —Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

> treasures of potentially useful variability deserve careful study.
>
> —Edgar Anderson, *Plants Man and Life*

> the study of the scope of poetry *is* poetry, and requires all the reasons of poetry for its pursuit.
>
> —Laura Riding, Preface to her 1938 *Collected Poems*

—KENNETH IRBY

CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

CLARK COOLIDGE's latest book is *The Rova Improvisations* from Sun & Moon Press. LARRY FAGIN is the author of *Rhymes of a Jerk, I'll Be Seeing You, Stabs,* and *Nuclear Neighborhoods.* The Coolidge/Fagin *Unaugural Poem* was first published by The Figures Press in 1993. DAVID HINTON has translated BEI DAO's new book of poems, *Forms of Distance,* due out from New Directions this summer. Hinton's most recent book is *The Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien* (Copper Canyon). Bei Dao, a Chinese poet in exile since 1989, now lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan; he was the McAndless Professor at Eastern Michigan University in 1993. CHANTAL CHEN-ANDRO is an Assistant Professor at Paris 7 University and a translator of contemporary Chinese poetry and fiction. The Bei Dao Interview and Statement on *Today* magazine first appeared, in French, in *Poesie* magazine, edited by Michel Deguy in Paris. In 1987 PETER REDGROVE published his widely-praised manifesto on the Gaia hypothesis *The Black Goddess and the Sixth Sense,* and is currently engaged in writing a study of Mesmerism, sexuality and poetry: *The Mesmer Body.* JOHN OLSON will soon have poems in *Another Chicago Magazine* and *New American Writing;* he lives in Seattle. LISA ISAACSON is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Denver. MARY CAPONEGRO is the author of *The Star Cafe,* a collection of short stories, and is at work on another collection of fiction with an Italian flavor. GEORGE ECONOMOU began work on this series of prose poems at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center in Italy, where he also completed his translation of Langland's *Piers Plowman,* The C-Text. GAEL TURNBULL's most recent book is a new and selected poems published in Canada, *While Breath Persist.* GEORGE ANGEL is a writer living in the United States. NATHANIEL MACKEY's recent publications include *School of Udra* (City Lights, 1993), *Djbot Baghostus's Run* (Sun & Moon, 1993) and *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 1993). FERNANDO CASTRO is a Peruvian philosopher and critic of photography; he is a regular contributor to *Art-Nexus* (Colombia), *Spot* (Houston) and *Photometro* (San Francisco) art and photography magazines. JAMES WANLESS lives on Grosse Ile, Michigan, and has been working on his translations of Henri

Michaux's prose since the 1970s. Sun & Moon has recently published CHARLES BERNSTEIN's *Dark City*, and reissued *Content's Dream: Essays 1975–1984*. KEITH TUNA is currently completing a manuscript on British poetry and coediting a book of essays on Mina Loy. ANDREW SCHELLING's most recent book is *The India Book: Essays and Translations from Indian Asia* (O Books); a collection of poetry, *Old Growth*, is forthcoming from Broken Moon. HORACIO COSTA is a Brazilian poet living in Mexico City; CHARLES PERRONE, who has translated Costa's *The Book of Fracta*, is an Associate Professor of Portuguese & Brazilian Literature at the University of Florida. CECILIA VICUNA is a Chilean poet living in NYC; her most recent book is reviewed in this issue of *Sulfur* by Rachel Blau DuPlessis. JASON WEISS is the author of *Writing at Risk: Interviews in Paris with Uncommon Writers* (University of Iowa Press, 1991). RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS is working on another book of *Drafts* and has a poem forthcoming in *Parataxis* 17 (England). NORMA COLE's fourth book of poetry, *Mars*, is just out from Listening Chamber Press, Berkeley. ROGER RIGGINS has published poetry in *Hambone* and is a contributing editor to *Home Planet News*. TODD MARSHALL teaches English at the University of Kansas. SHERMAN PAUL is Carver Professor of American Literature, Emeritus, at the University of Iowa; his most recent book is *For Love of the World: Essays on Nature Writers*. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's *Under World Arrest* will be published by Black Sparrow Press this spring. BARBARA GUEST's most recent collection of poems is *Defensive Rapture* (Sun & Moon), whose title poem first appeared in *Sulfur*. RAE ARMANTROUT's new collection of poetry, *Made To Seem*, will be published by Sun & Moon this year. KENNETH IRBY's most recent book is *Call Steps* (Station Hill/Tansy).

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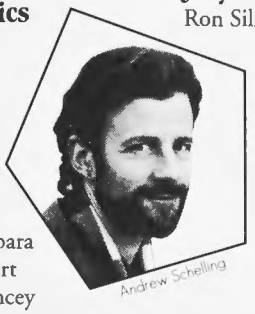
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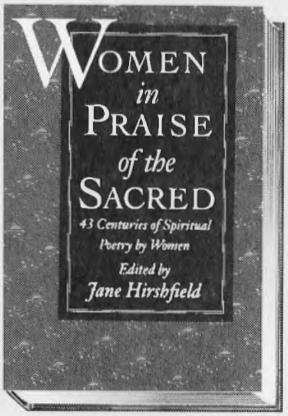

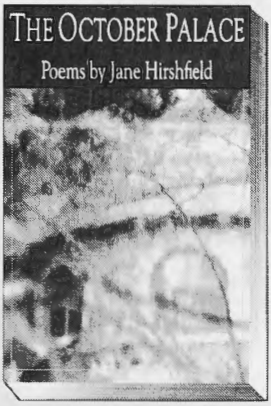

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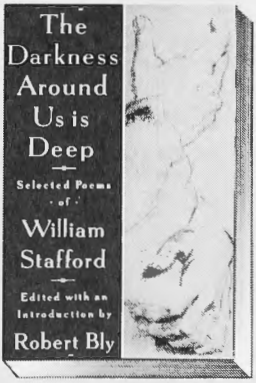

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Sulfur 35

ROBERT DUNCAN ON CHARLES OLSON
POETRY BY GARY SNYDER, BARBARA MOR,
GUSTAF SOBIN, ANTONIN ARTAUD & JAYNE CORTEZ
JED RASULA: GENDERING THE MUSE

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Sulfur

FALL 1994

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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250 **CONTRIBUTOR NOTES**

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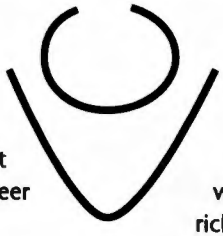

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In anger, I wrote and mailed a STATEMENT to a number of people which was based upon a transaction that I had with Arundel Press and Mr. Phillip T. Bevis. Although this STATEMENT was sent out with the *Sulfur* return address, I was not acting in my capacity as editor of *Sulfur* magazine nor in my capacity as Professor of English at Eastern Michigan University; I was acting on my own behalf.

I have settled my differences with the above parties and I hereby retract all allegations made therein.

—Clayton Eshleman

BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

SIX POEMS

this is the fairy handle
cranking alchemical chocolate
downwind of the factory
where the gold bars
are chewed
slowly

world shaking mirage making
gold pudding
shook off like thunder
pit marked depths
of the rainbow

I am a leprechaun
dark as not
eyeless as the worm
dangling o'er the pot

*

cast out his son
to gather up the salt
dissolved in the fresh dimension
diamonds are the pleasure-
seeker's wake of,
raising his nets
carbonized like sugar,
or let up by the chain
of command,
to see gleaming this vehicle
for emotion, its cabin lights
an amber that some
Neptune or Lucifer
turns in his hands

*

HOLDING A PENCIL

the pincer's vice has
the prince of darkness
gripping
his nether parts

the lock I pull the chain to
so tired
roused from bedsheets
uninspired

a thing so putrid
must be meat
this rough sketch of inattention
hanging from a sleeve

ANTHEMIC

Corrosive, you—poets—
allied,
a chorus to your laughter,
I—

sung dispassionate recusal,
a fallacy
administers the world,
lapidarian—stained—

a gold obliquity
debased
arrays sedition—
O carry me away

*

WHY I AM NOT. . .

you can't get cow's milk
from a sow's heart
nor hear
the lowering of the boom

eating the tongue
of proclivity
with pursed lips grimaced
and paying for the pleasure

the appetite of meat,
sharpened,

and the toothless meat
of hunger, solaced

*

POEM

Contradiction
makes a knot
and keeps the rope
from slipping through our fingers

I was a fish
by my tail turned
tight to the fisted
seaweed nomenclature

It was sped up experimentally
on the page, this indecision
that binds us to an action
that doesn't happen

*

GARY SNYDER

REEDS

"Why should we cherish all sentient beings?
Because sentient beings
are the roots of the tree-of-awakening.
The Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas are the flowers and fruits.
Compassion is the water for the roots."

—Avatamsaka Sütra

I *A Beach in Baja*

". . .on the twenty-eighth day of September 1539, the very excellent Señor Francisco de Ulloa, lieutenant of the Governor and captain of the armada by grace of the most illustrious Señor Marques de Valle de Oaxaca, took possession of the bay of San Andres and the Bermeja Sea, that is on the coast of this new Spain toward the north, at thirty-three and a half degrees, for the said Marques de Valle in the name of the Emperor our King of Castille, at the present time and in reality,

> placing a hand on the sword,
> saying, that if anyone contradicts this
> he is ready to defend it;
> cutting trees with his sword,
> uprooting grass,
> removing rocks from one place to another,
> and taking water from the sea;

all as a sign of possession.
. . .—I, Pedro Palenzia, notary public of this armada, write what happened before me."

II *Kadekaman*
Cadeu Caamanc,
"Creek-reed": San Ignacio

(*aggava,* hawk *aggvacaamanc* creek of the hawks)

Señora Maria Leree is ninety-eight years old
rests in a dark cool room at full noon.
A century-old grapevine covers the house. Casa Leree.
"she still tries to tell me what to do"
—her daughter Rebecca
lived fifty-five years in Los Angeles,

Dagobert drives beer truck all day every day
and some nights,
from Guerrero Negro to San Ignacio.
Says the salt works at Guerrero Negro
sell most of their salt to Japan;

Rebecca plays a mandolin
"I need some music down here."
Dagobert trucks beer to ranches
all through central Baja
over those rutted roads.
"I have six kids in Guaymas. I
Get over to see them three days a month"

South of El Arco
a hummingbird's nest with four eggs;
four Mexican black hawks
a caracara on the top of a cardón
a bobcat crossing the truck track at twilight
a wadi full of cheeping evening birds

Cats walk the fan-palm roof.
Her two sons are painters.
—"I am a poet."
"You came down here to Baja for
—inspiration? Poeta?"

Yes, on these tracks. Rising early.
Dry leather. Deep wells.
Where we breathe, we bow.

III *Eat Your Self*

The bulls of Iberia—Europa loves the Father;
India loves the big-eyed Mother Cow,

In the Thyssen Gallery in Madrid there is a painting by Simon Vouet—"The Rape of Europa"—from about 1640. The white bull is resting on the ground, the woman sweetly on his back. A cheerful scene, two serving women, three cherubs, stand by to help this naked lady and the handsome eager bull. His big eyes are looking up and back, flowers twined around his horns. Modern Europe—

Bony cows of Baja.
Body of grass, forbs, brush, browse.
Dried meat. Charqui "jerky";
(Little church up the arroyo,
Leathery skinny twisted ropy Christ
figure racked to dry)
Quechua *ch'arki;*
dried to keep, good years and bad—

"With this meat, I thee wed"

the MUSCLE dried jerked meat.
the SKIN shoes, saddles, sheaths
the BONES buttons
the FAT buckets of lard
HORNS & HOOVES glue.

Sweet grass breath
loose vulva, droopy udder
bony old cow scratching
horn head on a mesquite limb—
mother *bos*

in her green-grass body at
Arroyo de Camanjue—arroyo of reeds—

(old rancherias called
idelcagomó—creek of the large ranges
cahelulevit—running water
idelibinagá—high mountain
idelabuú—plateau of the mountains)

The elderly ragged bearded vaquero
coming down the track. On his dusty horse.
"Command me!" with elegance.

"Adiós!" with such finality.
"Go with God!"

With this meat I thee feed
with this flesh I thee wed.

HEATHER RAMSDELL

from BRIDGE SEGMENTS

BRIDGE SEGMENT .I

No bridge is wanted, we now see,
and bridging is the wrong figure.
—W.V. Quine

From abutment from
abutment, in a series of angled turns
the path of the circle goes awry.

I keep finding my half on the doorsteps there
where the path, if it is a path, without
formal grip of perspective, too abruptly
arrives. As in the step from a subway.
A plane. In gaudy emergence, want

for a hole through which to go—it's cold
outside—and an eye, an eye and, when it is dark
any light. Anyway to build a way to navigate
to, for the scheme of
the sequence not of footfall, not of running fore-
to-aft, a splicing as in a film, in a string's
acquaintedness—of the ones
to the other ones, for a tryst when we are tired.

It is simple and we are tired
and the plan is clear but a clock
ticking throughout, some
aging occurs, an attrition cannot
be stayed. The fine

progression of cracks.
Dumb sleep is lost

in trajectory.

In the instance of movable parts, x misses y
in countless versions of the episode by fractions, plotted
within the blunt dark, by sextant and ship's
lamp.

There won't be the closure of books and hands
laid on the table. There was no speeding drum,
not a flag, not a map. It has no legend, and its keys,
I assume, are in the river. There is no bottom.
There is no perimeter, there is nothing if not surface
baldness and its continuous arrangement

which is, exactly, the field.

To call it a prison was mean of them.

Outside, there is no center, between
the dark ground, the dark sky,
at the line difference was no wall
to escape, having already left everything
behind but the task of lunging quickly
toward, where else
is there to go, Remember

the stillness of the arc traced
by the falling away of the bodies
which cannot be followed
on foot. They were not just figures.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .2

Then and then a line began but an arrow ensued as drawn
[without ends

whilst once in the event, before the book fell

during winter, at the same time as morning broke and henceforth

the only apt moment passing in orderly parade a dot

and and delay

the day after that, a delay, at an instant when she was young, the instance, suddenly, suddenly, thus

flags of the parted curtain

for the moment, taut with emergency, at a juncture in slow motion, formerly, these days, often June between the hours of 9 and 2 at ages 25 through 61, in 1993, a light-year, as they waited the day before yesterday when the phone rings, a season ago

ago, when the satellite finally lost its gravity late last week in an eventual

of horizon unmodulated by moment

vanishing dot at a subsequent

over end yet-to-land, to an interval, already hours eons later, one calm second, an epoch sunset lapsing in perpetuity if, after the last of the future in a minute on a Thursday as the day is long, for the past.

Diagrams lay over hers.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .2

Did I say Thursday? I meant June,
how odd.

A tooth
in a glass
of milk,

a missing
tooth.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .3

A book is on a ledge, its message may not be delivered
intact, on time, or arrives wearing knowledge as wig and badge.

The typographer said a missing dot
in the pattern of dots was sad

as when a subject who impersonated the king
was banished beginning the problem of twos

not to suggest an unbroken pattern as paradise

leading to problems of many, none of them
attached, causing impotence, or seamlessly
configured, causing impotence.

Arrival's scrim is painted so.

With a loupe you may see the small elements—points

where communion breaks, the crazing, the leakage,
gaps, where waste is the platform from which to leap—

keep falling through the mesh. Dear Charles,

I'm fine though not myself
I have but three things to say

in all honesty and alarm the book is on a ledge, it speaks
only of losses in margins, I can't
remember the rest. I'm sorry

there's nobody here by that name.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .4

The door, the door's calm
summary slam. I've forgotten,
if I had ever known, the name for it.
There is grace

in the indivisible brick, and gravity.

Agree, the obvious nerve
strands bunched
cloth against the other

nerves is pressure and
a warmth, not love

exactly—a break in the surface, a lip—a lip

had little to do with the problem of the mouth, not the mashing of a mouth against that mouth because we were glad and bored that day, having already slept and eaten, plenty of water, sandwiches, milk and figs had entered the mouth, living bloods of the body within, small breath in and emitting from the mouth, strings of saliva and, things we found unthinkable eventually scorched through the mouth, an effusion, a dry wind through the slender tube opened a flame in the mouth igniting,

you, it said

you, and a pattern emerged,
solitude

in the body, she is thinking

of a word. I am thinking of a word, you,
in the last row, nod, if you can hear me.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .5

Snow covers the tracks we left, the dogs
couldn't follow from, past the naked trees,
the slopes had little grip we had to run
quickly and with an expression of certainty
into the field, although

there is no clear route, through this field
the way must be made up
while going along there is a sense
of being

near the river blurred
with ice. The sun

is white. The land,
blind by it, the sky is

snow and horizon
impossible. It is impossible

from this far station in the rows
to tell much

of fault. Of who they are but people
some small distance apart, one

chasing, one running
away, when time,

over the flat ice budged, when

all the sound went out,
still running.

The screen goes black
in the tradition of sleep, one
falls, one would first, night

amongst the animals in act
of matter's stark need for fuel

a twig for heat a morsel
on the bone I love you.

We should have been home by now.

There must have been some miscalculation,
a transposition of figure or failure
to cohere, damage in transit, some

falling short of the point as close
by now as the other side, that is
close, but inapproachable.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .6

I'm told the life of the fire was brief
though productive. Soon the fog of such ashes
will soften and cover this too. Such
is the manner of ash, not to be sorted
then restored. Of course this
is the province, however encrusted
in scaffolds, who can say if the boards
are sound—

the water is potable, the air
improved, but the street
has no direction, the street
is littered with vacant gloves
figures, the trees
won't bear resemblance
not a leaf, no further need
of sirens

—whether the bridge was
saved if this place is the right the

same or a viable one or was ever
ours to have failed, to be pardoned for.

I am a tourist. Amongst the indigenous
tourists, unable to offer directions,
motion in the street is inching
steadily toward or away, a clock
ticking throughout. An exit an arrow
at every turn a clock, some aging occurs.

We noticed the passing facades, stacked
of foils and formica, of stonework
and ash, how they hung from the sky
as a sham for the unseemly wards

and cannot be cheered. This is not
what the book said.

Eventually we wandered into the angled streets calling
wherever we ended up most frequently
our homes, our photos kept returning the same
half-open eyes and lopped mouth.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .7

You must wear your identification to be
admitted *in the building at all times*
to be seen to belong, without regard
for the referent face, a sense of figure discerned
as by surveillance, the shutters malfunction
just as the vital face of x upturned.

Who applied to represent themselves?

In an unfair light we are moving
with nauseating speed, either the background
blurs or we blur but the room is a real
room with its attendant rug and door, a series
of arrangement, the random accretions.

A chair has no assignment. We
are also composed.
                If the clock stopped
the clock wouldn't care. If we're not
the ones we claimed we are—the small
yellowing wouldn't be helped—I am sure
I am real and the others. Our matter
is tolerant, but only prepared
for such blights as can already be imagined.

And the strength of the thread
does not reside in—this isn't the yellow
the fact that some one fibre runs—this
yellow is not realistic, it wants for
form—*through its whole length, but in*
the overlapping of many fibres. Memory

coaxed from odd threads of the subsequent found
on a historian's lapel in a sterile bag on a rack of

like bags is a question.

Who was last to leave, which one drew
the curtain aside, did the couple,
heard laughing in the room above, run, where
was the she last seen, did the hand?

What did the hand?

Who was really the last to leave? The lights
stayed on, the films grew very clear.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .8

Some agreed to trade their grief for a larger one.

A carrot grows
tiresome, a misery flies
out by moments.

It becomes possible to attend
the banquet wearing char-clothes and be mere,
the one near the door, of an ilk in a room of others.

A stain as large as the shirt would go unquestioned.

Sufficiencies, shouts, base laughter arise
with the same uncivilized grace of a fox,
run, laughing away with the bird.
Men the profound finally comes
to surface it refers to little trips
to the store for milk with modesty
as of milk, inch-meal, a light bulb is
exchanged for light meaning the light
at the edge of a table says the same
amount as a face/as the sound of a kicked
shard in the street/as a sentence. The verso
of a violin, having lost its front is sold
for five dollars and fifty cents denoting
a music composed as an instrument to hurl
at passers-by, a song called Please which goes if
if and thus thus, and sings, The Masters sing
there is no act but music, all good, and
free wine for everyone, free
laughter from the floor above, footsteps
as of excited preparation, many days, elsewhere
the custom is drinks for an hour, fights
for an hour, tears for an hour, elsewhere
only tears, or the custom is tea
without comment, a common laugh

seems at first to delay the memorial
service, then trucks go over steel
palettes in the street, an air conditioner
stops then stops relieving us
of the future, Please do not
force the evidence, we'll respond
to no questions beginning with *I*, why
all the resuscitation, the long faces
and decline, let go of this. The end

note resonates until the song
gets taken up again, a dirge,

BRIDGE SEGMENT .9

A curtain
left open, the curtain
is open, no

circle discovered in dust-free conditions
or circular mirror in which
to collect the face by piece

that one eventual shard would
drive sense through all the prior

ends, an arc, for a time, that arm
goes casting out toward

as a body in motion tends toward

a certain point, the possible dividing
itself from the case.

As river; the river.

Frankness is in its brown
surface, radiant
waves where the stone went

extend to the far edge of
leaving

clarity's fine dream of
crashing into a wall

that is as is.

BRIDGE SEGMENT .9A

Heartlessly so the heart
itself is bloodless and a pocket

things are folded in, noumena protrude
there as a sock might from a drawer

and there is a choice to own
the gross bluntnesses of matter

tonight on the precipice
rain.

Seamless wall of the urgent,
Lamp, you cannot be kind.

BARBARA MOR

DUPLEX

du plex Latin double

"A house divided into two living units"

LINGUISTIC

lingua Latin language, tongue

"The science of language; the study
of the nature and structure of human
speech"

LINGUISTIC DUPLEX

double tongue
/ double talk
tongue double
/ shadow speech
speech shadow
stand-in
doppelganger words

". . . .the stunned headlong certainty that precedes
talking in tongues. . . ."

". . . .the stunned headlong certainty that precedes
talking in tongues. . . ."

Thomas Pynchon VINELAND 179

Linguistic Duplex
1 — her flowers
2 — calcium
3 — shelter

CALCIUM

a silvery metallic element that occurs in bone, shells, limestone and gypsum, and forms compounds used to make plaster, quicklime, cement, and metallurgic and electronic materials.
atomic number 20
atomic weight 40.08
symbol Ca

L calx lime, limestone Gk khalix pebble

RADIO

the use of electromagnetic waves in the approximate frequency range from 10 kilocycles/second to 300,000 megacycles/second to transmit of receive electric signals without wires connecting the points of transmission and reception
communication of audible signals, such as music, encoded in electromagnetic waves so transmitted and received
transmission of programs for the public by this means; radio broadcast
the equipment used for transmitting of receiving radio signals
adj of or sent by radio of or using oscillations of radio frequency
verb to transmit a message to, or communicate with, by radio

short for RADIOTELEGRAPHY

Latin radix root
Latin radius spoke of a wheel, ray

". . . .the arrangement of Cro-Magnon man's oral and nasal cavities, his longer pharynx—the section of throat just above the vocal cords—and the flexibility of his tongue enabled him to shape and project sounds over a much wider range, and much more rapidly, than early humans could.
His superior vocalizing powers were gained at one big expense, however: modern man is the only creature who can choke to death on food caught in his wind-pipe, because his longer pharynx must do double duty as the route to his alimentary canal."

CRO-MAGNON MAN, Tom Prideaux
The Emergence of Man. Time-Life Books
NY 1973 Time Inc.

1. her flowers

the sounds pass thru our walls big chambers of the heart
we live in bodies as we live in rooms with numbers the street
names of each face in bathroom mirrors and the radio does not
stop at her wall but permutes my membrane sound is more like
blood than anything it pulses in and out of shapes red splash
of music in the street spilled news from a distant hemorrhage
pain crushed cicadas silence
midnight
rubbing legs thighs together are the walls permeable
growing,ruptured petals of,the children explode and blossom
stain of all hearts

her mother came from she came from i came from
earth flesh time

the walls are thin to hear everything. kids scream beyond 3 of
them jump on beds laugh friends 4 more happy sound to be grateful
for the radio is electric nervous thread transgenetic history
stitches her space singing TexMex into my space in single body of
musical air country disco rock mariachi rodeo guitar needles of
dust beer all the machines are drunk outside cruise transam in the
small steep street echotunnel of cottonwood and shadow thick adobe
walls Mexican weekend the boombox occasionally glides by it is not
poetry but all surrounding time space this is our flesh (Aztec
Mayan Irish German)tangled roots,spliced all erupting here
record of flesh mother 3 kids her mother in the other house side
heavy sucked by gravity back to earth recovering breast cancer
surgery chemo keeps the children while her daughter goes to class
nursing credential broken down brown car install beeping siren
when ex-boyfriend ex-husband ex-everything attempts to break inside
the night to sleep weep do some creepy thing between 2 a.m. and
dawn over and over
the siren goes off alone,in the night malfunctions it is lonely

her kids are fine,sweet 5,6 11 she has a daughter on the edge
of exploding petals
i had,have a daughter, daughters i was,she was we were once all
ways those flowers
long ago, the stories go the mother air the song of water walls of
inner dark,cool the bread was made, the walls of hearts the

children jumped up and down,played happy sound
long ago, we hear on the radio

that is from time: genetic codes come from: dial,static,song the
meteor crash Yucatan dinosaur leaves of sacred books burn flesh
piles up in histories as bodies
abducted from one dream dumped in another generations low
rent 8 plastic body bags aluminum beercans in the yard
otherwise exhausted of grass the exhusbands junked Mercury the
exboyfriends threats of serious trouble
they come about 3 a.m. after the bars close drunken baskets of
laundromat shirts pants socks underwear hang in stupors along the
clothesline pinned like no woman ever hung out to dry you know
it is an act of revenge in the morning the ex-man's laundry
like one hundred crows overhung on the sour lines
and they hang there for a week and the ex-boyfriend cocaine
pissed comes by and rehangs them in strange and sinister ways
e.g. pinning 4 shirts together in one place, while pants are
split with one broken, kicked-out frayed leg
dangling now in the dust three weeks of this
and banging on walls shouts screams rocks and full beer cans
thrown at the house predawn phonecalls red swirling splash of
rotating copcar waking the interior walls like nightmare thrown
blood heart attack of the street
and sometime between midnite and dawn he is on the roof stumbling
and stomping drunk and coke high all over the victorian shingles
and this is a language
this is the way they talk

poetry of the exploding body

rages lusts terrors revenges semiotic idiotics wired psychotics
barrio ghetto far hotel suburb quiet neighborhood night
radio men

our children (3) jump and scream to the same machine
the heart is wired to receive everything

and to live here under the same roof is they say a woman in the
world of everywhere is bleeding i live, i lived i will live
poverty of flesh unites us the radio,sound rips interior walls
open we tape, patch glue sew stitch get thru another the
wound opens again like clockwork, of the heart ticking

bombs explode,Ireland Mexico gaslines,cities airplanes messages
on the radio, not here only scattered gunfire of laughter
driving by drunk, post-midnite
of a bullet thru the heart, which was an accident
the kids tell of it next day, click blam spray red flowers
at school

the child is crying why why is the sound of a little girl
blubbering whimpering worse
                leaking thru the walls
like a curse of blood the implicit meaning inside some
wallpaper mold blood ink writing time large yellowbrown
stains insects wings thus reading books open
to some discourse
                intercourse beer parties firecrackers
night exploding all such red flowers

on the other side i sit inside cool a cool highceilinged spacious
dark room filled with boxes of my books,life and the radio on
timespace acoustic sandwich between
them i am the one in the middle
who makes noise here tatatat a typewriter shoved against their flesh
wall driveby random bullets tatatat a joyride it was an accident
keeps the baby from sleep in the afternoon she is not a baby but
5 years old but she screams tantrums gets revenge (for what?)

(my daughter screamed,writhed from allergies do they scream after
breakfast cereals red road dye caramel color lollipops the one who
was hurt tho didn't scream. one wonders why she didn't scream. we
need to tell them: there is a right to do so)

in the heart of 3 pm street of radio cruise saturdays planet of somewhere
dry times i wish i could type silent as a fly specks the wall with
black indelible feet this attitude appropriate but it is a typewriter
older than all of us Remie Scout original thinker solid crisp as the
poet who sent it to me from his deceased father's memory
"from the same company that makes the rifles!"
he said.
ratatatat a dream-by shouting

and here it comes crackling thru the fine night insect scratching
inside the walls tonight radio television news 1000 miles away? the
blood begins to leak from the stained paper of the walls which do
not stop the flow of sound pulse information weeping agony inside
this big chambered heart of our hearing.night

Petaluma you know the flowers of the mother who is everywhere
so torn and weeping

BOOMBOX: somebody's machine heart

some big machine heart slides slowly down the street of silence
sweat cicadas transam yearning

murdering. of flowers

we are all tuned to it,cannot escape
(deaf, you hear it pounding inside a skull, hemorrhage as seed
rattles,scratches in a box of night vibrations travel along the nerves
who bloom,who sing
the pain in everyone

the heart is dialed to receive her. everything. cannot escape

Polly and 2 friends were playing PERFECT MATCH when Davis appeared
in her room with a knife.
"where are your valuable" he asked
she was the valuable. she showed him her piggy bank with $20
girl-earned dollars

EVIL IS A TRANCE in which he took her from her life with knives
into the darkness drove her telling if they screamed he'd kill
them all.
she was alive he said when police stopped him hidden,nearby in the
bushes Davis says he was "mystified she didn't scream"

(the one who screams on the other side i think of birds in some
jungle some existences are violent like red shrieks of birds flying

upward into green lucid consciousness
but purple,the blood of brutal. mutation of the young)

was she bound and gagged? not bound not gagged? no yes no can't
remember so deranged drugged swollen into monster god can't remember
why she didn't logically scream
out of such terror
(we scream logically upward,birds in flight)

woman in the audience was she strangled of was she stabbed
her father does not listen to the radio no tv news since She is dead,
is all he can say. a sweatshirt with blood on it found whose?
strangled stabbed beaten surely this is America we have a choice

we are mystified the police were mystified listening to the wrong
radio frequency of life/death do not hear the allpoints
bulletin SCREAMING TO ALL POINTS Of THE EARTH

he was mystified we are mystified the parole board let him out
on Parole PAROLE is WORD on his word on the word on words of
over and over let him out 8 years into a 16 years sentence for
doing the same thing MYSTIfIED over and over and over
this is his Word

EVIL is a trance all the psychokillers are among us loose
running in and out of our minds our eyes bleeding from our genital
mouths we open our mouths to scream BUT WE ARE MYSTIFIED WE MAKE
NO SOUND we open our children as wallets to give our flowers
of cherished wealth to robbers we offer our children as
propitiation on the cold autopsy laps of the gods

the young girls Kate and Gillian see him clearly describe him
uncannily the police drawing is frightening in its closeness
to his eyes the police pick him up drunk driving a month later
and do not see it
WE ARE MYSTIFIED THEY DO NOT SEE IT THEY DO NOT SCREAM
the woman calls the police a trespasser on her land she hears
she sees she notices something strange she finds 2 months later
bloody sweatshirt on her land her INSTINCT was clear was so
close to his crime WE ARE MYSTIFIED WE SEE WE HEAR WE SMELL THE
BLOOD Of ATROCITY but we do not scream

on Parole PAROLE is word on his word on the word on words of
experts of GOD he is captured and released and captured and released
and he feels "a warm glow" a "release" of tension
over and over and over

so he wonders why she didn't scream TAKE THE LAW INTO HER OWN
[HANDS
at knife point he'd taken her from her life telling her and 2 friends
that if they screamed he'd kill her mother and her little sister
sleeping in the next room
THAT IF THEY SCREAMED he'd kill them all

and this is his power his power was in the Good Behavior of young girls

NOT TO SCREAM she took in silence his evil thus to spare preserve
flowering these others

(his rage, behind walls swollen purple existential tongue, strangled
impotence inside some skull,wall squirming mind of a psycho killer
always laying back in his prison cell
passive empty masturbatory
with good behavior
is that no matter what he does,she is alive remains living
true beauty innocent brave even in horrid death his inflection
does not deform her it is his face only,always his foetid stink
breathing of himself behind this wall he rots exiled from,denied
(her flowers)

and he is closed up behind a strong wall with all the institutions
of men judge police lawyer parole dictionary god
professionals who Profess words who speak PAROLE the oath of words
to uphold the rule of
to uphold his dick while he does it again and over and again
mystified
she does not scream

why young girls? experts media ask experts answer BECAUSE IT IS
SO EASY so easy bend down rip up handfuls of flowers from such an
earth designated as YOURS

by god the experts the experts claim to know what is Good Behavior

he smirks 200 pounds he is among prisoners cops lawyers judges
parole boards psychosocial workers a big man

2. calcium

the radio speaks machines in one room suffering is another a
thought may scream blood burst wall,pipes root solitude of all throats
they are not heard no one sits with open mouth gagged teeth gone
choked by staring at life screams the machinery tells us is
not heard

he is among (Time) a Big Man

prison)brain of toilets,stench overspill forced anus
torture cells is his home
shit is of the air of his mind he breathes
(flowering)all life as dirtied political
dynamics of male fear they cannot deal with terror of, each
other this realization of *terra* terror testosterone fathers to sons
priests to boys punk factories armies gangs to the alone what
they do,each other over and over closed
up skull,fist groin institutions of groins make BigMen make the
otherWOMAN fuck each other 200 million sperm make A Woman
bleed humiliation he reels a GLOW and
RELEASE this PRISON(lived in a trailer 3rd child of 5 unwanted abused
by father left alone
home of pain(locked,mind)
he is valuable there
wallet,semen testimony muscle hung dick swollen steroids alcohol
dope gods men big,mean as gods wth urge INFLICT)Men MAKE a
WOMAN push in,his fear open her eyes
the victim chosen,weaker given them by(God,men,law reason,custom
as offerings little fingers scratch the hideous itch that
Terror fill up the eyes of earth
TO MAKE A WOMAN she wants it

prison(is numbered,scum EMPTY
alone)they reed him videos of infant sex sodomy on boys pale girls
just as they flower first months of menstrual blood and are
acutely sensitive then to their bodies the
intrusions of alien males and thus (as a child hurt so naked by
shame)he lays back on his bunk fantasizing sour yellow fingers
insert into innocence absence,evil,pain it is the
perfect time
maximization of fear in their eyes to become
female be Punished for it

(the god of Justice swells glows
by thick finger rancid penile projection of a smile,disease
self-disgust BigSickMen fear which can be exorcised into eyes of
flowers
firstblood others
then he is value in prison(avenged) onPain
if he could do it with a dirty knifeblade his sour razor a
beer bottle a rifle his Vietnam bayonet his father's belt buckle
raise welts on her petal flesh if he could do it with the
vomiting tip of nose nosebleed childhood nosebrain stem of a
species which alone lusts to mutilate its young not
food not reproduce another

not reproduce another in her place (he wore a condom)but THE
PUNISHMENT Of FLESH ON FLESH FOR BEING
(alive,beyond wall this hard brain who is living
i will make Terror fill up Her Eyes
rip
unimprisoned life ,make a *woman*

"are we god?"
ask the judges who release him

experts,who make money in america lawyers/judges experts
of men locked up in prison of men big business all down the
line $20,000 one male one small cell release him(Parole)$500,000
watch him if he keeps his Word maltliquor speed nicotine pornflick
oil cruise Unemployed cars upon the sullen streets stalk,surveille
hang out hangout his dick on corners,frontseats expose solicit
the offering of flesh by god to fix this,hungering
small lost handfullss of children of blood of animals which
pay which will pay for prison mind,of men
over and over

he is mystified "glow" "release"
he told them he announces to Parole Boards over and over
"considered to be considerably dangerous to others,expecially women
. . .if released,he is certain to resume his pattern of behavior"
mystified they know what he is YOU KNOW WHAT I AM I DO I GAVE MY
WORD 8 years imprisoned lifetimes Tensionsquirming building to
do it and they open the doors
and they open the doors RELEASE him glowing
spurt of luminous sperm

he says they want it
vicarious Glow and RELEASE .the experts
voices tell him. strangle hurt because they want him to
do it Women ask for it unspoken female words,of
luminous singing
are we god?
ask judges "there was no reason to keep him"

ARE WE GOD asks the weenie judge who is paid as a god with
godlike powers over us the blows of BigMen kicks bruises cuts rapes
strangulations knifethrusts Vengeance of BigMen,little men
who give the Word
voices tell him all vicarious men systems of cons judges hard balls
gods paid by Your Dollar tax VA SSI corrections budget payroll
rehab make such men release them upon all the soft neighborhoods
penal pensions emptiness nothing to do but
the virginal thighs of neighborhoods where women,pale
whores girls wait waiting wanting criminal
violation
it is not violation they want it
he does not Violate His PAROLE because he already told them:
Voices ,in explosions of Worlds,8 years dreams of putrid cells,a
life dead fantasies of nasty things you watch you want but
cannot i exist ,

.EXPLODE then as a god ,released incandescent sperm
flood eyes,mouth vaginas of them i Glow(fluorescent tubes,steel
stink of fear bodies of boys forced,shove in
all the institutions of pain my swollen MEMBER clubs and Expertise
of punishment
they wait frontporches office doorways bedrooms bathtubs school
swing cradle gardens are silent i hear them tell me
do things to them GIVE MY WORD the voices sing

/LINGUISTIC GLOSS,of the Shining Tongue of Madness/

now we fly thru wall,limestone text once colors of animals blue
ochre coal shapes of radio time now stain spread as bruises hemorrhage
of mind,blood is flying
it was once a cave of echoes and the skull,of luminous pictures
he couldve been i hear them

HE DOES NOT REMEMBER DOING IT HE DID NOT KNOW HER NAME

it is not of words it is in syntax,the bone
it was a skull of intention, reverence of animals
the head bangs walls sentences of simple blood all secondthoughts are
gone until flying thru deep,moist textures now bright red pages
dripping
HE DOES NOT EVEN REMEMBER HE WAS NOT EVEN THERE

make men sick with gods,imprisoned drug them to survive it give them
women animals children to explode in Human Civilization

he could be
he couldve been
once as a hunter,artist spits luminous things on walls (flickering
light,the blue horse ,bison stunned wizard her awesome cunt
in walls,my skull i hear them limbs hearts dreams connections the
radio is screaming she is crazy brain wires leak,all the broken
things are dangling

lawyers/judges physicians dentists electrical engineers airline pilots
are professions well-paid in america the Experts who are of our
thought body smiles,good digestion LIGHT who climb excitable air
to make a civilization of us
                they spit luminous things on walls flickering
music blue horses,torsion necklace of teeth bird wizard her
womb of all forms
                (caves,echoesHistory we
hear another room,beyond Time as rental bone
CroMagnon luminous spewer of beasts on walls,becoming mans
                [cathedrals
the perfect Chinese horse Lascaux the gods now are flying
his arms covered with tattoos,blue hallucinating flesh
he couldve been something something

speed acid psychochemistry psychometrics dirty gas can of brainstemspasm
BOOM BOX compulsions
he couldve been
he couldve been a contender yah yah yah
but HE WAS NOT THERE he is not
she is not
someone
goes by,rips out the heart,cut bleeding cannot escape

the last thing she saw of earth was his face eyes bulged,the BigMans .
purple tongue
(her scream,inside all skulls knowledge,words
those paid for justice are not screaming)catacomb of lost in dark,
fear pain health law light,good digestion
make men crazy with sick religion drug them to get thru it give
them women little girls to explode in WESTERN CIVILIZATION
a World soars in murals of air
i am a crazy old woman

women who nurse children
crazy,old mothers are not experts in anything
locked walls,bad nutrition teeth gone poetry,closed up in
rental rooms,houses we scream at(wallpaper,dead people,institutions
kids,mirrors radios nothing at all no experts
to be rich in america expert in law health teeth sheer electric
flight
and nowhere are so useless here the women unauthorized to speak
schools libraries spines drained malnutrition(the public mind) nurse
3 children 9 years welfare calcium lost to poetry
do not consider vocations of women (who reproduce,time,consume,space
professions own health and law and teeth)
poor women reproduce,crime and prison
PRISON prisoners lawyers judges parole boards are gods,poets "poor
dental hygiene" gnaw on rocks (how to get dentures among the poor,commit
crime go to prison
poor men have more teeth,more crime than poor women
are we gods

)we watch on tv,in the prison they throw their plates on the floor
roastbeef mashed potatoes peas the huge-muscled men threw it
of the floor,not enough protein for them $18 per prisoner per day for
criminal protein 50¢ per meal per person AFDC women and children
walls are cement,lies accretions of Time its rotting grin,decay
of speech erosion articulation, the walls are smug expertise,inertia
flushed excreta of well-paid bone
$20,000 year per prisoner in a small double cell
$60 day per inmate local jail

in Pelican Bay maximum security prison men claim they are
unnaturally punished they are locked up in cells cold and terrible as
the grave say they are inhumanly confined there WE ARE THE VICTIMS
forced,anal VICTIM SHIT locked

up cruel cells of,systems of Mind (CRĪMEN: the word for
verdict,judgment crime is the same CRĪMEN,his Cry of Pain)
experts the experts
know what is the grave cold final forbidding how to get around it
well-trained in Pecking Order guns uniforms razorwire SM control
bureaucrazies steel lockup limbic swollen regulations death
pump-up punk self-pity videos psycho DICK revenge
FORCED ANAL PUNISHER Punish Her(she died,let left him alone afraid
small beaten at the mercy of men)
and another says VICTIM SHIT what is all this VICTIM SHIT i am a good
[guy
if he does not overly rape of kill
other men in prison or the judge,or
the experts this is good behavior
locked up forever with men,he is safe
experts thrive well-paid wives children security on the other side
shuffling,paper stale thoughts dull words jargons of expertise
paychecks rote forms "Positive Psychiatric Reports" "Model Prisoner"
paroles sentences paragraphs monographs whitenoise SHITNOSE
time-serving of the gods
they don't see him coming
(experts,don't see him coming
blood all over the naked child

take law into our own hands,SCREAM if not they must want it
this way)

Ellie Nesler shoots her childs molester(convicted once,released)
in the courthouse brain Judge Pauley makes Law and Order
decision SENTENCES her to l0 years prison diagnosed TerminalBreast
Cancer she has 5 years to live that means with Good Behavior she
could get out in 5 years
Death will Parole her

Death keeps its Word

Expert to the bone,Spinal Determinant ,appears to us to insist without
you can't stand up (they appear to but sit, process compute our
rotting bone flying flying thru time taste the. putrid discourse)
although this would appear true on "material" plane it posits a
problematic hierarchy of bones which some deconstruct experienceacadem

icFeminisms would seek to dissolve,extract DEMATERIALIZE as if one is
not (thinking,feeding geologic)mother authorized to have opinions
of blood
DETERMINISM of "reality" poses the dilemma we must accept its prefab
definitions or redefine them,extantSelves suggest some dualistic
either/or choice of multioptional universe in academic opportunities
rare discourse of course which does pay rent for its practioners.
but we have left the field of potential,as collapsing bones:we have left
the room where stench of actual perpetration chokes and gags us:do we
are we have we not argue from strange experience being alive viz that
if spines collapse in MEANING the inferential crux of context is
one can't stand up(talk,back,fight,shake nerves knots of fist
exploding thru the world as blood flew) or in the property of trees gagged
with her own red tights and flying,flying red bird wings up and
away,such Expert Design,events and therefore some Determinism
(terminUs)seems appears subtextual subposited even though we rush
with enormous linguistic erasures to subvert (the flow upwards of
vast departures the floorboards of this department)where Experts
slaver,drool on their knees like naked dogs
(i scrub i scrub i scour i cannot clean the floors,wails of this
apartment the radio with one long stationary,expanding cry)
ratatatat ratatatat ratatatatat ratatatatatatat ratatthedoor
the howl of men as Dogs sniffing rectums of their own Law ,Experts
just ice prevails
if admit then practice of spinalDeterentermination does said praxis
say it lead us into what enormous construal as BIOLOGIC ONTOLOGY
which stigmaticText,critique suggests meets its reversal (variable?)in
experiential equivalent oppositional appearance of wholly inert,
unselfmoveable mass which also,in self-definition experienced as
determining something something
are we gods?

abstract ,impassive ,impotent ,laid back STARE AT THE WALL
viz,i.e., *praxis of paralysis* man's law emerges caves to retrieve the
unopposed terms of discourse with their discredited matrix bringing us
back,where we are stained,foul mattress the stench of
his cell to move or to be unable to move or to be unable to rise from
the floor seems to posit some DETER/Termination of an END of a
prior intent or dream of NATURE

EXPLOSIONS OF STARS BODIES OF STARS INTO OUR FORMS THOUGHT
[CAVES
AND SHAPES OF CALCIUM (the echoes of such event)

release RELEASE him over and over to GLOW in the shining bloodstream
[of
all night
do they not Want This, EVERYONE? forever? forever?

consider the massive headtrips sustainable by an economy of abundance grotesquely imbalanced in the direction of funded abstractions and their subtextualized careers in referential delineation from the great exterior masses of apparent "material" or "real" situations such as living bodies germ veins garbage cars investment brokerage pipe
[corrosions
(want this, EVERYONE WANTS THIS wait for vicarious release this Evil tension)influxions of indifferent definitions of sewage and related contaminations into the specifiably "cleansed" or unsubliminal random *debouche* of professionals would seem to suggest whatever possible on paper in mind IS doable,eatable regardless withholding the referent nonconsiderial world or responding agonies or,i.e. dream on thy sheer linguistic lingerie tongue exercise to DREAM is not possible,alive

but twists itself elsewhere that is the bones of actual screams and utter hallucinated flux of blood discourse poetry clots choke and phlegm serum of a vision from mouths nostrils anuses of those unable refusing to vomit huge complexes,oceans into coke bottles or other (similar of oppositional)units of oral retension,reductive dimension (books) MLA Journals Feminist Studies bloody periodical (critiques du mal tête feminine du bouche bourgeois)
(because we are so TrulyFine above it all NOT ANIMALS repeat we are not "beasts" Biologic Determinism do not apply we are Abstract beyond the neck,our careers are such crimes are senseless "monstrous" unpredictable nor are we gods?)

subterefuge,of SYNTAX are so many hiding underground dungeons,caverns of the hunted Quasimodo (ars longa vita brevis:so long,suckers)
subterranean rivers of resultant hells are powerful ARE flowing and question whether attack on "sin" is even relevant to the field of tortured visions *in situo* now a plaza of burning flesh seems materially pertinent but somehow abysmally overdone in "fact"

what are the lucrative industries of pain,in america CRIME SICKNESS TOOTHLESS RAGE EXPLODING NERVES INSIDE THESE WALLS MADNESS (there are wings of terrific metals,to fly away excluding those who play games with balls cunts,titties giant $port$ figures lest we be left sick toothless lawless cold hungry

without voice alone deaf in the dark
unable to fly
yr Taxes pay for EVERYTHING
he doesnt even remember being

we can go on like this forever do you want to stop?
"want" "stop" "forever" "you" "i" "go" "we" can like this go on to
there is a tax on sin. it is called Time. and SIN is WITHOUT meaning
forever.
the child is dead

and those who make academic living self-researchingly breaking down
one universe,world of DISCOURSE into others must bleed well have a
genius,POETRY to replace it with time more Real or if not if they
cannot (expertise:paralysis) shut up shut up shut up leave move our
bloody screaming thru walls permeate solid flesh compartments(cells of
terrible rooms)where my heart is screaming

thus conclusions become titles demonstrate models circle of
dead-eye dogs in cosmos of tail-interrogating "closure" which is
not closed,closes nothing but a more problemautomatic theoremetic
palpable grim intermuttent pain in the ass (of dogs,scAvengers of the
rubble that is left, that is, but also the mind OPEN ALL NIGHT 24
HOURS ,who speaks of, unauthorized weariness).
bAnal employment of statistical mediocrities as
institutes of compulsion who is punked who punks who gets it in the
ass TO MAKE OF THE UNIVERSE A SHITHOLE Big Man
say it. the more Latinate the more Lies

:toward a Paradigm (phoneme? chakra? mode of discourse? 20¢?) those
who speak correctly who are authorized to speak. they are the ones
with Teeth (degrees of,credit cards careers, medical
and dental coverage)
i have none
she is crazy

so she goes to get medical/dental care(spine nodes breast skull teeth)
and there is none she is told woman old poor writes books no coverage
has been homeless, she is crazy "we have reason to think you surfer from
mental/emotional disturbance" and when she says no they send PhD of
psychology to her door to test her mind

refuses screams on telephones returns forms go to hell disappears at appointed time they break into suspects house to investigate living arrangements find on bathroom mirror and adjoining wall yellow stick-on paper squares with hand-scrawled messages saying FEED CHINA, this constitutes evidence she is crazy they obtain bench warrant to seize her person remove her to the local psychiatric detention center where upon her delusionally outraged protest she is injected with sufficient grains of sand of thorazine to shut her up
that the duplex neighbor ex-man besieged cancer mother 3 children had recently obtained 2-year old female partChow dog named "China" who chained outside inposition to defend the property from intruders drunk cokehead excon boyfriends crazy exhusband all their driveby relatives randomly spewing beercans bullets revenge rocks thru 2 a.m. car windows at yr sleeping eyes was earlier that day upon leaving for 3-day visit to Arizona sister said neighbor request subject to "feed the dog" upon which agreed and left a key to obtain bag dogfood on jumbled backporch behind screendoor,thus notes left by subject to remind herself subject to do task which eventuated in her removal from her life and "literary work" and relocate inpermanent drugged brain state of mental asylum for the humanly delusional (i.e. one deranged enough to leave herself notes reminding herself to provide nourishment for an Asian nation of some 3 billion souls when the woman obviously and verifiably did not have wherewithal essentially to feed herself)
n.b.: did subject not apply (unsuccessfully) for public assistance?

she is not a billion years old she is notRoot&flower ofHistory is not the skull inside wall some woman sings crazy "CRAZY" on radio of her destiny as plane (small,private) goes down in swift flames
and now she screams at her kids SHUT UP I CANT SLEEP I CANT THINK [she
cant study i am typing ratatat they yell,shriek jump up and down I WILL BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF YOU DAMN IT I MEAN IT

scream i scream we are screaming the radio squeezes boombox machine heart a terrible noise we cant breathe
we are the ones with meaning who mean it it is not blood,crazy-women pleasure "jouissance" equal privilege perfume ad satisfy one wants the mass commercial TrueRomance(only a 6-pack drunk to numb the sufficient pain) one wants SOLELY space time a partial modem of intelligent, space, time quiet LUMINOUS which inour Expert Discourse of need is "problematic"
duplex singlemother three kids (5-6-11) with a typewriter battering uptight next to the paper thin bedroom wall the cheapest one can get and

still no one can afford it and thus the subject exteriorizes into
malignant typocentric neighborhoods of anecdotal noise and
migraine interrogation wonder resultant appropriation futures
(we go on like this forever do you want to stop

> and now the mother is dying post-surgery pain chest hips they
> told her FAT lose weight feel better about yourself surgical
> oncologist expert she speaks no english speaks nothing but
> stolid endurance poverty mother of much flesh not enough the
> doctor wanted $1000 more not covered by coverage of plans of
> world of the night the coverage of night is very deep and quiet
> here she is dying now tumor into chest bones and hips and the
> daughter drops out of nursing school tocare for and who will
> sit 3 children whils she studies or works the only place that
> can afford the Baptist Bible Camp School bus takes them
> off to play and make known to them GodsWill the mother riddled
> now bullets of cancer rapidly spread the drive-by shooting of
> experts of the experts
> death

a phone rings on the other side that is the Universe,says STOP
message message heard received message flying thru the wall as its
exploding particles
(or: is the universe linguistic? holographique? Rubiks Cube of endless
true infinite expanding despite no being able to afford the rent
duplex a p a r t m e n t s. . .? deepart meants mentis
the typography of department is (re: art meant) on the shadow side of
stars
the origin of our universe is on the darkside of our stars

Quotes from 1978 Psychiatric Report on Richard Allen Davis a sealed document ordered unsealed after January 27, 1994 ABC PRIMETIME covered the Polly Klaas kidnapping and murder

A US NEWS & WORLD REPORT essay by John Leo, "Dealing with Career Predators" (April 11, 1994) quoted a criminologist's description of R. A. Davis as "a monstrous personality".

"What is all this VICTIM SHIT. . . .I'm a good guy" quote from a CBS 48 HOURS report (March 9, 1994) on parolee Russell Obremski. Obremski raped and murdered an 8-month pregnant woman; in flight, he kidnapped, raped and murdered another mother of 2. Given "Two Life Sentences" he was released in November 1993 after serving 24 years in prison. A few months later, Obremski was arrested and indicted on charges of molesting a 4 year old girl. (USA TODAY, March 24, 1994).

#3 - shelter

on the west coast Ireland before radio before tv one could
stand there clear daylight once every 7 years see luminous picture
around globe over atlantic a woman hanging white laundry in
an alley in Brazil
and hear an incredible singing
mayan races african drums washed up on the soft beach huge
messages
air so clear you could hear,see voyage of a world
around itself a biologic singing,clairvoyant atmosphere of
all story

these were the happy isles, Hy Brasil (america) transmit on
waves of the deep sea television our eyes immigrant radio distances
ratatatat of random typewriters
always legends,news reports of the clean land beyond

i was born in a duplex conceived my first years a duplex on
the pacific ocean my father self-employed radio repair 1936
with small converted garage shop on one side,and nextdoor
the other living unit was a medium the gypsy they said she
conducted seances in the dark rooms next to my conception
and sleep and infant dream as i grew into this telepathic
wiring hearing seeing
what happens in the dark

what speaks the dark

red tights, girls
knotted,a gag man's bloody sweatshirt
tape a condom
he used a condom
she was alive then,he said among
good earth, and trees
she did not scream

the ritual of lost men discover america men with nothing to do
but move around lost they want to eat lust swell the
flesh they have betrayed once given them they now believe as the
punishment we deserve they are not of a Devil they are of

Themselves,lost sick masturbatory crazed they penis they
punish the female perhaps because she gives them birth

drops them into water,dirt soiled cloth howling animals

are we gods?

invention of cars men cruising deep pornographies of oil
insomnias the eyes of dead fish
cruising by young girls laughing on bicycles show them yr
sour unzipped lap sick hand masturbating tumescence of losers
fish eyes dead eyes 200 million sperm per come oozes to the rotten
bottom end of the world the sea receives foam waste residue release
of TIME
into all eyes

he used a condom
closed up inside foul car exoskeletal cruising insect of squirming
Xs X-rate techno images dials of videos the glass of his eyes
we see so closely into thru we cruise the mutilated girls
of landscape
whoever stood up from worms to be human now lie down again to sleep
nothing to do but stalk the fresh dreams of neighborhoods that they
are innocent unarmed civilian flesh of living that anything
could be clean alive outside dark windows of empty eyes
beyond him his fingers have not squeezed with sperm anything beyond
untouched undirtied violated by masturbations of his
dreams

hear the distant transmissions of dreams

waste of young girls bright minds victory
of sperm explosions testicle revenge
the sour masturbations of killers over us
useless men
the one who screams on the other side i think of birds in jungle
flight some existences are ludic,consciousness a violent red
shriek of one bird flying inside a skull,wall

he used a condom
what in gods name for
not to reproduce himself on the other side of Death

only in prison,is shelter from evil
behind some wall,closed up utterly alone
of,where he is among men so evil as he
or men who are not innocent, but love the desperation of
exploding flowers

no child no woman beyond his solitude self-disgust becomes
[revenge
only with opening of flowers,spring him
release him let him out to do it again
revenge of man of flesh for the Eve of being,flesh
which he has made of it (us,this)
only in prison,is shelter
closed up inside his terrible wall,alone teeth forehead
against
my skull

A BULLET THRU THE BRAIN WHAT YOU GIVE TO ANY SICK
[ANIMAL
EVEN THE FAMILY DOG IF IT BECOMES RABID NOT LET OUT
[ON THE
HUMAN STREETS TO BITE AGAIN

they seem to be having trouble enacting justice
give him to me give him to crazy old women the witches of
justice i will spread his legs arms slake him naked
to the public earth upon her last place
i will with my poetry hand cut off his dick
scrotum shave him menstrual bloody pubic hair render him
bare and raw as a little girl spreadeagled shove
his genitals in his mouth
so he does not scream
then standing back i invite the community of men
to do him all they dream of scheme is dick in a hole dick in a
hole dick in a hole let every man come forward one
by one shove sticks rods bayonets police batons broken
bottles ram his asshole jam the naked bloody hole i
have made into him (hell) until they have had their fill
killer dick shove in a bloody hole
once and for all

until they weary,sick of selves
what they do what they have done
what he does for all of them vicarious revenge
systems of rapers
expertise of ravaged flowers
for they know not what they do is a lie all living things
know what we do
(tell me of yr sad life, i listen)
and then i stand with a bloody knife hand
raised up,dripping i say *next?*

the shelter in Tucson many homeless women their children my first
night i remember the young girl 10, 11 so eager polite pressed close
to me on couch a FAMILY CIRCLE open to an article on cutting paper
flowers, i told her of the fiesta of many nations i'd seen with
my daughter who was her age, the Polish exhibit a woman scissoring
incredible cathedral windows,fireworks of flowers,birds at the
courthouse plaza outside, given to the children .
her name was Sherlyn Karen Shondra i can't remember Cathleen Sara
Polly it was Sheila
so eager polite i knew she was frightened, her mother homeless
nicotine thin frayedged at the mercy of streets habitual men
they were on their way to Phoenix she said they were going to have
an apartment a place to live she'd go to school
she was so glad to sit with me, stay, pressed against my body the
glossy magazine spread open on her lap and mine,questions questions
keeping me there discussing Flower Cutting Paper Flowers a
Polish Folk Art did you see this how do they do this and this she
trembled with an eagerness,shining with what i learned to know
was Terror

in the news report the mothers ex-boyfriend just went up the stairs
of the new apartment they were moving into opened fire as they say
a gun(opening of red flowers) wounded the mother,killed the
girl a sudden red bloom appeared in her chest her eyes wide
i knew she was afraid we were all afraid i could do nothing her
mother came into the room appeared from shadows pulled her away a
deranged look at me suspicious HOMELESS WITH A HOPELESS WEAK
[POOR
MOTHER THE THINGS SHE'D ALREADY HAD DONE TO HER THE
[THINGS SHE

FEARED WOULD HAPPEN i could do nothing
but feel her glistening eagerness to know *EVERYTHING* about
cut paper flowers before she was dragged off to the dark

no Shondra was the one i last saw sitting on a toilet the open door,

she was young half indian from the northwest glistening pretty
but a scar diagonal across her face from cheekbone to jaw because
drugs alcohol because they took away her children she abandoned

her boyfriend took her down to the dry river bank camps where she
was gangbanged by all the homeless men there *fucked in the ass*
i heard them joke of it later with her boyfriend, she wasn't around

the last time i saw her hunched on a toilet legs sprawled open
flushed with lightbulb the fenced junkyard after midnite the needle in
her arm she was nodding the line of men, 5-7 of them slouched away from
this little shrine into the darkness, waiting

May 19, 1994

ANTONIN ARTAUD

from INTERJECTIONS

(Translated from the French by Clayton Eshleman, with Bernard Bador)

The extreme point of mysticism,
I hold it now in the real and in my body,
like a toilet broom.

For me, living man, I am a city besieged by the army of the dead,
intercepted by their charnel houses,
cut off from all external objects, while I am the external of a dead man,
me,
and those who attack me
are outside,
and it is in the inside that they agitate,
it is in the inside of my body that they cut the thread of the nervous antenna, through which I must scold their bodies.
(Old cinematography of catastrophe with which *the illusion* still dresses me,
prompted by old escapees from hell,
giving man another bread to crop;
for the bread with which I am ulcerated at this time is that of the infamous eroticism that beings hurl at me.)

I strike a blow,
the other, from inside my body, at the farthest exterior of the earth responds to it with an imbeciling fluid,
crossed with the abject cross of beings who do not know who has made time and who,

beings draw themselves from my interior,

but to what extent?

I will do it again and again,
this man,
on you,
Antonin Artaud,
said god,
the universal god of beings,
always incorrigibly foul,
and always incorrigibly there,
and who says to you:
Take that, take that,
you didn't get me out of there yet,
I'm always there no matter what you try to do,
you haven't defeated me and I have that:
caca, the cream of your. . .
it is me who gobbles up the cake you made crumb by crumb,
and I made a child out of it,
to put him in your place,
maybe one day I'll gobble him up too, unless he has a better way than you, and knows to bite me where I stew.

With what will I fill nothingness?

Waiting for the spectre flattened against me who melts with each of my blows to finish his delirium.

And not like god,
but like, being, me,
this unique body,
from where all,

even god, came out,
that I have been violated for life,
insulted, offended, dirtied,
polluted, muddied, smutted,
day and night,
since I am alive,

no man at the end of his tether
who does not know how to find in Artaud
something to remake an existence with;

that I have been a little bit everywhere martyrized;

and as to be prevented from being god that I was stabbed in the
back, in Marseille,
stabbed in Paris,
received an iron bar blow on the spinal column in Dublin;
as being convicted of being god
and to preclude me, me, from remembering it
that I have been everywhere assassinated, poisoned, beaten to
death, electrocuted,
and in order to prevent me from finding consciousness again and
the science of my capacities and my strength
and to defend myself against my persecutors;
for god is called by its real name Artaud, and the name of this
kind of unnameable thing between abyss and nothingness,
which partakes of the nature of abyss and nothingness,
and that one does not call or name,
and it seems that it is a body too,
and that Artaud is a body too,
not the idea, but the fact of the body,
and the fact that what is nothingness is the body,
the unsoundable abyss of the face, of the inaccessible plan of the
surface, through which the abyss body shows itself;

the Tibetans, the Mongols, the Afghans listening to god
or that the abyss the infinite talks to them,
sounding

the bewildered lair of the knot through which the unconscious heart liberates its own thirst from being before what one calls nothingness,
say having heard in themselves rise up the syllables of this vocable:

AR-TAU.

A few initiates wanted to plead that it was there the designation of a force but not that of an individual,
but not an initiate, in reality, who did not know that this force was that of a man and who did not want to chain this man to forbid him to exist, even if it entails assassinating him later.
And in reality no initiate who did not know that Antonin Artaud, born in Marseille September 4th 1896, was really that man who, at the bottom of nothingness, was sleeping.

So then it is in prevention from being god
that I,
Antonin Artaud,
have been martyrized for the centuries of centuries,

and as being exactly this man, and the man who never wanted any god,
and whom all the churches have always persecuted to extirpate his atheism from him,

and it is in prevention from being god that I, Antonin Artaud, petit bourgeois from Marseille, September 4th, 1896, have seen myself stabbed in the back on June 10th, 1916, in Marseille in front of the church of the Reformed,
asphyxiated by spells throughout my entire existence,

stabbed in 1928 in Montmartre a second time in the back,
then struck in Dublin with an iron bar on the spinal column,
attacked on a ship, with, in front, the anchor hole wide open to
let my body through,
straitjacketed on the same ship after the attack,
then interned,
maintained seventeen days in a straitjacket with the feet attached
to the bed,
kept three years in solitary confinement,
poisoned systematically for five months,
that I have suffered one month of coma under the shock of the
last poisoning, in the Sainte-Anne asylum,
finally subjected to two years of electric shock in the Rodez
asylum to lose in it the memory of my so-called supranatural
self,
even though I never had two self, but one only, that of a man
who never wanted to hear talk of god.
Then.
Then?
It is in prevention from being god that I have been a little
everywhere persecuted as a man throughout all my life,
here,
but I have known it only a very short time before the beginning
of my internment,
that it was because all people believed me, me, to be this man,
suspected me of being this body,
had identified me as being this body of man from where all life
came out,

and in prevention from being this body
in which everyone always served himself
without using entrance or exit,
and felt capable of supplying himself,
and which he believed could be used to answer to all his needs,
in prevention from being this body charged to provide for all the
needs,
and pillaged to the point of plague,
for there is no plague nor cholera, smallpox nor syphilis,
that the succubate,

well organized,
cannot explain.

It is in prevention from being god
that I am day and night flooded with the sea of the gism of succubi,
maintained in the gaseous placenta of the seminal alluvium of the water mothers, with which one hundred billion harpies every night smear my conscience to maintain me in this life,
the world it is water, air, earth, fire, aether,
but it is also the arch-ponderable of all that has always been hidden
and which is this sea of miasmas ja,
of obscene corporal suppurations
which paralyze all will;

everybody gets hauled over the coals,
but there is there a kind of ignoble tenderness
with which I am particularly favoured.

I have seen myself in 1915 prey to strange phenomena.

I know now where they were coming from,
for it is in prevention from being god that I am every night honored with the visits of one hundred thousand vampires etc.,
and it is because my body is *good* that it is always meticulously visited.

The current plan
(against sleep and art)
of the little Sufi multifolded in a humbug of acrid cow-dung,
for all poison is a sexual plexus.

I do not know anything more than my sensibility of all the seconds,
those of the moments when I feel most myself and most *intensely* present, awake, willful and *warned.*
What I know best about myself is my unalienable will, infinite as the volume or the plain of my whole body impossible to pierce.
And concerning this point anyone or no one could care less, ever, about another offense;
it being understood that the body of Artaud
which contains in the innate state
all that which serves to make that from which the life of silt is born;
it is from this body that one draws
something to remake reality,
something to remake oneself in reality, and to make for oneself a reality;
whoever has squandered too much of his blood, of his sperm, of his saliva, or of the snot from his nose,
it is inside Artaud that he comes to rebutter:
and the Tower of Butter in Tibet
is the sign of this hold of beings
on that which composes my flesh to be eaten,
is like the perpetual pig of the barometer of how much of my butter is needed by beings, to remain in reality.

I have perhaps a thousand friends in the spheres,
in fact perhaps ten living men
who have forgotten that it was done,

who no longer knew what it was all about,
and on what life is centered,
with which crime against Artaud buried,
masturbated and annihilated,
life has always sustained itself.
I have to say to all those friends
that if beings have never forgotten how to approach Artaud by magic,
how to draw saliva from his mouth, and his shit from his coccyx, and his sperm under his pubis,
how, from which hollow blubber lips
to turn the night around his bed,
from which opening of the teguments,
from which monstrous dilation of the pores, from which sanious flayings of tissues under the teguments,
to leech onto all that is him in order to suck him bone dry,
and it is in this way that Antonin Artaud feels his testicles suppurate
in the middle of which a thousand heads circulate having perched their paradise there,
vying with one another to sneer at him, if he does not disclose immediately where the bad spirit is lodged, which came right up to him;
—And where I am, you don't know where I am, nor how I arrived here.

It is in this way that one swallows Artaud, that one pumps him, that one defecates him, that one licks him and licks one's chops over him,
in this way throughout life;
and if Antonin Artaud complains,
that means *he* is delirious;
quick, a little electric shock to cure him of believing in spirits;
but it is precisely that Antonin Artaud does not believe in spirits, but that he has always believed in men,
who have never known how to do anything else to buttress their ignoble lives than to come back to life in him,
and it is in order for that not to be known and to pursue their hideous profits in peace,

that they had Artaud put to bed,
completely naked, in a cell, held secretly for three years,
and had him poisoned and convicted of madness,
so that he would not be able to revolt
and so that nobody would think to help him.
But Artaud can do without men, and it is all by himself that he got his liberty back.

For magic to enter into Artaud,
it's magic to croak in Artaud,
and that's the way that Antonin Artaud took his enemies prisoners,
for I, Antonin Artaud, for nine years convicted of delirium and madness, now I performed magic.
I performed it for three years in Rodez, I had performed it for three years in Ville-Evrard, before Rodez,
and those were the sniffings and whirlings for which the doctors reproached me.
As for magic, I take in my thick breath, and by means of my nose, of my mouth, of my hands and of my feet I project it against everything that hinders me.
And how many boxes, chests, totems, grigri, partitions, surfaces, sticks, nails, ropes, and a hundred nails, breast plates, helmets, armor platings, masks, carders, iron collars, winches, garrots, gibbets and dials, are there now in the air
by my will projected.
I will tell you that when I will have made society give back the billion tons of cocaine and heroin it stole from me,—with the aid of nine small pneumatic cannons, and the cane
that I have forged.

[8 February 1947]

Me, Artaud,
worked over,
to rid me of evil,

but why not know when it will end.

I cannot know what I will do tomorrow,
do not want to know,
but I want to know that evil will end immediately.
No, it will never end either.
So.
I am the master of the elements
and the one of events.
I don't want to be touched anymore,
invaded
as I am by others,
I don't want to be put to sleep by others,
sleep is an illusion in which one continues to live.

I don't want these death pangs anymore.

I don't want to sleep anymore.

I don't want to die.

I don't want to dream anymore.

NOTE

These six dictations are from Artaud's *Oeuvres complètes,* Gallimard, Paris: Vol. XIV**. The two books (293 pages, plus drafts and annotation by Artaud's meticulous literary executor/editor Paule Thévenin) make up a

single work, the last collection that Artaud himself was to edit: *Suppôts et suppliciations* (a "suppôt" is a henchman or watchfiend; "suppliciations" is apparently coined by Artaud off "supplicier," to torture—something like "torturations" in English; note though the sound play in "suppôt/suppli," making the French very difficult to totally translate in English).

These dictations, of 73 which make up "Interjections," the third and final section of *Suppôts*, for the most part fall near the end of the work. According to Thévenin, they represent "Artaud's synthesis of all the texts that bear on *the prevention from being god* (especially the two great texts 'And not, like god' and 'So then it is in prevention from being god'), using repetition and variation as in a musical composition." As for the rest of *Suppôts:* section one, "Fragmentations," is made up of 10 short essays; section two, "Letters," of 35 letters written by Artaud to friends during the last year and a half of his incarceration in the Rodez asylum. In other words, *Suppôts* is a work consisting of essays, letters, and dictations—a unique combination. Other translations from this work may be found in *Sulfur*#8, along with reproductions of some of Artaud's notebook pages from the same period.

After Artaud's release from Rodez in May, 1946, he took up residency in a clinic, outside of Paris, at Ivry-sur-Seine. The following December he signed a book contract for the work which would become *Suppôts* (the contract was broken and the work as we have it today did not appear until 1978). A month earlier, Louis Broder, the would-be publisher, hired a young secretary, Luciane Abiet, to visit Artaud daily every morning at Ivry and to take down in hand material that he would dictate to her. These dictations were then typed up and corrected/revised by Artaud. Readers interested in the complicated problems in achieving a publishable typescript should read Thévenin's extensive notes.

The dictation period, running from November 1946 to February 1947, appears to include a modest portion of Artaud's proclamations from this period. He would break into dictation at any time—while in bed, at a table in a café, or while with friends—only to suddenly interrupt himself and become absorbed in a long silence. Abiet would arrive early in the morning, often when Artaud, still sleepy, would be sitting up in bed, his café au lait cooling on the bedside table. Abiet's difficulties in getting down exactly what Artaud was saying was compounded by the fact that he was missing most of his teeth and often fighting hesitations brought about by sleeping pills and drugs.

For more material on this period as well as Artaud's entire life and body of work, see Stephen Barber's excellent *Blows and Bombs* (Faber and Faber, London, 1993), in particular p. 135. Artaud readers might also want to examine another first-rate work on a poet, Alain Borer's *Rimbaud in Abyssinia* (Morrow, 1984—deftly translated by Rosmarie Waldrop). Both

Rimbaud and Artaud suffered perpetual vagabondage, seemingly in bondage to the same "desert" again and again, whether it was the road from Charleville to Paris, the trek from Harrar to the African coast or, in Artaud's case, the Tarahumara mountains of northern Mexico and the confines of asylums. Rimbaud died in 1891 in Marseille; 5 years later, Artaud was born there, and in his late 20s had this to say about his predecessor who wrote his greatest poetry at the age Artaud himself underwent his first crisis of depression: "It is Rimbaud with his sand-burned hands who dares the infinite descent into the I, with images where a trembling Life takes shape at the border of Nothingness, he, Rimbaud, and before him Novalis who said: A style is the more perfect the closer it comes to Nothing." *(Abyssinia,* p. 311)

ROBERT HERSHON

THE GERMAN LUNATIC

for Paul Violi

Otto Leuben, the German lunatic, bet that he could turn up a pack of cards in a certain order. He turned the cards 10 hours a day for 20 years, exactly 4,246,028 times, before he succeeded.

—Robert Ripley

I don't believe it. Of course I'd like to believe it
but I'm tired of being amazed. Analysis before amazement,
that's my knotty-pine wall motto, forensics before faith
And yet

in Martha's summer house we wander naked tan and lumpy among
the damp books left by mysterious old children. The swans
on the pond are fully mechanized and the ospreys are painted
on the backdrop, but the illusion of ease is complete. Everyone
should have sex on a table sticky with jam from time to time.
Roger Henstooth, the New York herald, seen standing by the sea,
the undertow sucking the sand from beneath his heels, stood at
another point on the shore of the *same* ocean, staring yearningly
at the horizon, *fifty* years later. He was larger—and older!

Otto Leuben is just weeks into his task. His confidence level is high,
his air jaunty. What does he do the other fourteen hours, after the
deck has grown sticky? Does the national economy reflect his diligence?
Do other lunatics emulate him? Ethnic Germans in Poland? Ethnic Poles
in Hungary? Turkish laborers in Silesia? If we could get an additional
ten card-minutes per man, Mr. Minister, we could rule the world.
Ten minutes, just think of it.

Professor Scribner, the oral historian, swallowed a set of
pearl buttons every morning for forty years and was used

as ballast on The Good Ship Lollipop. Oysters
in the brackish waters grow more and more agitated.

And have we heard from Leuben today or any of his people?
He was three cards from success last Thursday when an errant breeze
played him mischief! He shuffled without complaint, according to
reports. Was he using the Delta Flies Florida deck or the
one with doggies—here the message breaks off.

Earnest Gerund, the Delaware divine, was stranded in the high church
for twenty years and survived on martini sandwiches. He remained of
good cheer but no one can sing in that key.

And what, if I may ask, *is* the "certain order"?

Ducky Lowery had the world's largest collection of syllables, but
he kept them in a gym bag and he put the gym bag in the Buick
and he drove the Buick to Pennsylvania and he misplaced the Keystone
State and that's how Paramus New Jersey became a Great Lakes port.

What is the certain order? I'll take one guess and the gods will
reward my modesty: A23574 of spades, QKJ of hearts, I mean clubs,
I mean cups—He turns away. Was there a slight smile in his lunatic
eyes? Was I even close? He shuffles.

Giuseppe Di Maio of Naples was born with *two hearts*
and Alfred Langeven of Detroit could blow out a
candle with *his eyes* and Margaret Guest, *age three years,*
earned a degree in music from Baker University
and the great sloth of Ecuador and a Chinese sage
and the Portuguese navy—the townspeople have seen
the foreign women with their jam-smeared faces. The alienist
will permit no intruders. Still they come, leaving their jars
by the front door—guava, quince, blackberry and robin.

Who is monitoring Leuben—ten hours a day, making notes,
mumbling into a tape recorder? *Are* there tape recorders? No,
because then there would be computers and if there were computers
what employment would there be for lunatics?

And who *took* the bet? What were the odds, what were the stakes?
Was it a casual moment, a joking bet over coffee? Was Leuben

already a lunatic or did he become a lunatic only after succumbing
to the temptation to win the wager? How did he win the celebrity
that enabled him to be known as *the* German lunatic? Were there others
of national scope? Were they a measurable percentage of the population?
Did they have a league a church an agent a slogan
a jersey a turf a tattoo a kind of
funny way of walking when the moon is shining merry on the bay

(Put your elbow down once, it will find jam on the table.
Put it down again and again and a pattern will form.)

Every day like every other day, the perfect order, the inviolable
routine—
but is there something in the air this morning? Or did we imagine
it later
while regaling the townspeople? Leuben to his table at his usual 7:44,
breakfast from the Acey Deucy Cafe. He pisses on the wood stove, howls
like a hound and puts on his mittens and his motorman's cap. He
shuffles twice.
He lays out the first six cards—vertically, it being spring—and
the gods explode in laughter. An exchange of glances between the lunatic,
his
scorekeeper, his oddsmaker, his chronicler, his housekeeper, his
purseholder,
his devoted opponent. Six more cards, fresh jam, a pattern of steps.

You may not share the triumph, only the aftermath—the Prussian
celebrations and the analysis by experts, many of them
retired madmen. If a lunatic believes himself to be Otto von Bismarck
and it develops that he *is* Otto von Bismarck, is that not a cure
(and the French are in a jam). If the laying out of cards is
not merely incidental to this lunacy but central to it,
then the achievement proclaims recovery and
what say you now townspeople and handicappers.

So Leuben the citizen strolling on the strasse, shaven and bathed,
clear of eye and nostril, a swan tattoo on his cheek,
a portrait on his lapel, schoolchildren romping in the traffic jam,
the mayor's wife climbing to the town clock, the street musicians
chewing
on their sparrows, the very grass braided with red ribbon and
Leuben pauses and smiles and scratches and whispers: I did it.
I could do it again.

GUSTAF SOBIN

UNDULANT-OBLIQUE (A Study of Wave Patterns in Ionico-Massalian Pottery)

If wine, as we're told,[1] opened the way to civilization in the still barbarous regions of the Western Mediterranean, the history of wine cannot be disassociated from the amphoras in which it was transported nor the cups, craters, skyphos from which it was drunk. For here, "contained" and "container" form, in fact, a single, cultural entity. Imported into Provence in the seventh century B.C. by both Etruscans and Phonicians, wine and, inseparably, the clay vessels it came in constituted—as barter—the single most sought-after commodity. With the arrival of the Ionians, a century later, this trade increased considerably. For the Ionians not only exchanged goods with the indigenous populations (essentially wine, pottery and bronzeware for tin, iron and amber) but established emporia of their own for stocking and distributing those goods. The first and, by far, the most significant of those emporia—those fortified trading posts—would be Massalia itself: present-day Marseilles.

Who were they, in fact? Called by Herodotus the "progenitors of history," the Ionians were Greeks who'd settled in Asia Minor and managed to assimilate the cultures of kindred civilizations prevalent in that region at that particular time. The assimilation of those cultures, it turned out, would be fructuous. Founding in a very short period of time their own schools of philosophy, art and architecture, inventing coinage and propagating, altogether, the acquisitions of an entirely original culture throughout the Mediterranean, they'd quickly become the radiant center of all Hellenism. Nothing they touched, it seems, wasn't marked by a natural sense of measure, grace, innate proportion: by what might be called, indeed, an "auroral intelligence."

Nowhere would the expression of that intelligence be more widely diffused than in their pottery, and, most especially, in the decorative motifs with which that pottery was embellished. One particular motif, the wave pattern (misleadingly labeled in English the "wood pattern") seems particularly relevant. For there, in so many oscillating ripples, the Ionians would give expression to the very energies at play in that generative period of their evolution. Whether the ceramic in question happens to have originated in Ionia itself or in its new, emergent colony to the west,

Massalia, matters little, for in both cases the motif underwent a virtually identical evolution. In tracing that very evolution, we might find ourselves following—quite inadvertently—the vibratory weave of an originating vision. Might find ourselves drawn, on oscillation alone, over the very threshold—in fact—of that auroral occasion.

*

* *

"For the fuller's screw, the way straight and crooked are one and the same."[2] So wrote Heraclitus, an Ionian himself, in describing the apparent contradiction of opposites in the inseparable flow of the singular: that of Being. No statement more accurately describes, indeed, the thrust inherent in that undulant pattern. Written, in fact, at the very moment the Ionian decor had come to free itself from the fixity of certain "orientalizing" motifs, it expressed the *fluidity* of the new philosophy. It spoke of a universe in continuous motion, change, in which "all things are driven through all others"[3] by a single, governing principle. Don't the waves, indeed, illustrate that principle? Existing in a "harmony of tensions," don't they, like Heraclitus's lyre, vibrate to a series of "tensions and releases?"[4]

Studying this particular motif in regional museums or in those rare, archeological papers devoted to the Hellenization of Gaul, one is struck by a curious phenomenon. In the sixth century B.C.—at the very outset, that is, of the Ionian colonization of Marseilles—the wave pattern tends to oscillate freely: to ripple in a loose set of seemingly erratic intervals. Labelled by the archeologists as "oblique," "uneven," or "irregular," it's generally dismissed by those very specialists as something primitive if not, quite simply, maladroit. But *is* it, we have to ask ourselves? Aren't we in the presence, rather, of a graphic rendering of that very flux Heraclitus himself first evoked? In the presence, that is, of an incipient—emergent—energy flow, artisanally interpreted? What the potter's hand, incising the freshly thrown clay, delineated? Gave shape to?

Flux, flow: we're reminded of the Greek infinitive, *rhein*, which describes this very movement, and which Emile Benveniste qualified as the "essential predicate" in Ionian philosophy from the time of Heraclitus onward. What, exactly, does this predicate signify? In Benveniste's luminous essay, *La Notion de 'rythme' dans son expression linguistique*,[5] we learn that *rhein*, as the affluent of *rhitmos* (from which we derive rhythm) comes to mean the manner by which objects in nature are deployed, positioned, momentarily situated. In combining *rhein* (to flow) and the suffix *-thmos* (suggesting the mode by which a particular action is perceived—actively perceived—by the senses themselves) we arrive at the

definition of an immensely rich, immensely variable quantity. *Rhitmos,* at this auroral moment in Western thought, isn't to be translated as idea, as fixed notion, but as the fluid architectonics of each given instance. "It designates form," in Benveniste's words, but "form as shaped by the mobile, the moving, the liquid; as something that has no organic consistency of its own. It is more like a pattern drawn across water, like a particular letter arbitrarily shaped, like a gown or *peplos* casually arranged, or a sudden shift in an individual's mood or character."[6] It's form, certainly, but form "improvised, provisional, modifiable."

How close this definition comes to describing the archaic wave pattern itself, so quickly dismissed by the specialists as something "irregular." To the contrary, the potter was giving free play, no, not to his own whims and fancies but to the vibratory flow of yet unregulated energies. He was, we might call it, expressing himself in an ontological script: the calligraphy of *Logos* itself. The parallel lines he carved seem to spring—undulant—from some immediate if invisible point of origin. They rise, plummet, as if exult—convulsively—about the torso, say, of a terra-cotta vase. If anything, they seem, indeed, *alive.*

Here, momentarily, we're very close to a vision of existence that, rapidly suppressed, would have to wait two and a half millennia to see itself reasserted. How familiar the above must sound, in fact, to readers of Nietzche's *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* or—more immediately—Heidegger's *Being and Time.* We might be reminded, too, in the realm of modern aesthetics, of Paul Klee's definition of art as *Gestaltung:* as form in the perpetual process, or act, of formation. Or Charles Olson's interpretation of the poem as a "high-energy construct" in which "form is never more than an extension of content."[7] These, indeed, are archaic canons. Together, they share a common vision. Within that vision, the world (and the works by which that world is made manifest) erupts continuously out of an irrepressible point of origin. "An iridescent chaos," as Cézanne once put it: a place from which "the virginity of the world" might, once again, be experienced. Yes, an area that antecedes reference, coordinates, points of orientation; that refuses any form of pre-established measure in its protean capacity to generate—and perpetuate—all such measure.

The waves as if writhe. About the rims, shoulders, hips of so much earthenware, the pattern as if thrives in each of its fresh releases. As an artisanal conception, it celebrates the pre-conceptual. It speaks of a world that hasn't yet fallen under the dictates of human determinism. Spontaneous, convulsive, this original wave pattern, however, will adorn Ionico-Massalian pottery for a remarkably short period of time. Undergoing the influences of an emergent humanism, the pattern itself rapidly hardens. Codified into a band of identical, oscillating units, it will vanish altogether

as an expression of emergence. By the fifth century B.C., it will appear as little more than a script confined to so much mechanical repetition. It will have fallen victim, in short, to number.

This evolution follows, we'll quickly recognize, that of philosophy itself. Within half-a-century—from the time, that is, of Heraclitus and most Presocratics to that of Socrates— *rhitmos* would find itself redefined in an increasingly narrow manner. Plato himself would qualify rhythm as "the order of movement" manifested, say, by a dancer in so many measured, predetermined intervals. We've entered, indeed, the reign of *metron*. From an elemental vision of emergence, notions of number, of discrete units of articulated time increasingly predominate. The potter's hand can only follow. Indeed, in Henri Maldiney's words, "measure has introduced the idea of limit *(peras)* into the very midst of the limitless *(apeiron)*. Between these two extremes, the destiny of rhythm itself will unfold: will die, finally, from inertia, dissipation."[8] Will die, finally—we may safely conclude—with the Latin *cadare, cadentia,* the mechanical breath-fall of our own, unexpungable notions of "cadence."

With the ossification of the wave pattern, don't we become witnesses, in fact, to the cryptic birth of technology itself? Witnesses, that is, to a certain, technological ideation? Travelling from *Logos* to *Eidos,* haven't we reached—in an amazingly brief period of time—the very thresholds of concept? Reached, indeed, an order of thought that no longer needs to acknowledge its own origins, inception, emergence? In recognizing no antecedent, it cannot—in turn—generate sequence: translate energy. Static, self-sufficing, it can do little more, in fact, than replicate—*ex nihilo*—its own formulations.

How much of modern conceptual art today, we might ask ourselves, celebrates this very immobility? As if exults in its own, truncated vision? "Sad," Schiller will warn Hegel, "the empire of concept: out of a thousand changing forms, it will create but one: destitute, empty."[9] We see it, all too often, in galleries; read it, over and over, in postmodernist reviews; find ourselves increasingly exposed to an astonishingly similar, astonishingly rigid vision of existence. An art so deliberately sepulchral can only be, indeed, an end-art. Can only be, finally, a vain exercise in the service of a terminal aesthetics.

Here, though, for the moment, we're not concerned with endings but beginnings: with that auroral instant in Western civilization that would recognize itself, no, not in its mirrors but its waves: in the irrepressible flow of an inexhaustible dynamic: that of Being. Vectorial by nature, it would express itself in a multitude of ways. The archaic wave pattern happens to be one of such ways. As a signature, it ripples freely across the flanks of so much salvaged terra-cotta in its own, inimitable script forwards. It speaks—as it goes—pure transmission.

How can we help but marvel, today, in discovering one of those potsherds ourselves? At St. Blaise, for instance, after the winter rains, a fragment might ooze its way to the surface out of some excavated cross-section. What is it exactly, we might find ourselves asking? As we examine, for instance, the lash of two, three, irregular undulations, whipping their way across the all-too-abbreviated fragment, we might find ourselves repeating: what *is* it exactly if not current itself. If not the still living filament to a lost luminosity. If not, indeed, the limpid inscription that has somehow survived (like Heraclitus's fragments) its oracular discourse. Yes, we might find ourselves asking these very questions as we hold the potsherd between thumb and forefinger. Hold it, in fact, like some kind of key. Hold it like some very particular kind of key to some very particular kind of door. The door, alas, has long since vanished.

Notes

1 Here and throughout, I feel greatly indebted to Fernand Benoit for his seminal work *Recherches sur l'Hellénisation du Midi de la Gaule* (Aix-en-Provence, 1965).
2 Heraclitus, fragment 59.
3 *ibid*, fragment 41.
4 *ibid*, fragment 51.
5 Published in Problèmes de linguistique générale, I (Paris, 1966).
6 *ibid*, p. 333.
7 "Projective Verse," published in *Selected Writings* (New York, 1966), p. 16.
8 "L'Esthetique des rythmes" published in *Regard Parole Espace*, (Lausanne, 1973).
9 Schiller, *Tabulae Votivae*, quoted by Hegel in his introduction to *Lessons in Aesthetics*.

PAMELA WYE

AMY SILLMAN: KARMIC KABOB

The hyper-hybrid flora and fauna in Amy Sillman's drawings and paintings are in a perpetual state of transmigration. But rather than exchanging one identity for the next along the Karmic line, these palimpsest/paintings are mix n' match combo platters of all their past and future identities. As in "Flower Face," the inside of the body is also the outside, lungs are also wings, a thorny neck leads to a fiery heart in the place of a face. In fact, the central figure/deity in "Flower Face" seems born at the point where East meets West, where the Chakras meet the Sacred Heart.

Like an animated film of psychedelic transformations, Sillman's drawings and paintings move and change as our mind's eye reads the formal mutations born of incongruous couplings of body parts and floral ornamentation. Sillman's sensibility could be described as baroque slapstick sexual spirituality. Imagine Crumb as a Pennsylvania Dutch painter on an acid trip in India. The eye is on an adventure.

Fluidity is a key word in relation to Sillman's work—her forms transmutate with fluid ease; abdomens and organs are sac-shaped as though full or drained of vital fluids; and, formally, her arabesque line quality is about the fluid hand gesture of the artist. In the linear "Untitled," Sillman plays with the fluidity of the female pelvis, inscribing multiple vaginal canals and distended lip, and filling it with pendular sacs, reminiscent of Louise Bourgeois's or Petah Coyne's pendulous forms that describe clusters of impossible inner organs. In fact, Sillman seems to be working out her own body-based system of cardinal humors—a quasi philosophy/religion/science that makes of fluids and fluidity the cause and source of all human states—both physical and mental and hence responsible for the variety and complexity of the moods and states of mind that she renders in her work. Even her color is built up with thin layers of transparent stains that, when dried, leave only a retinal trace.

In "Bunnies," a nervous bunny wabbit with wings and bow tie crouches aside a phallus with rabbit ears, a face that is also a plant and tiny hands that hold what? entrails? (in a sac, in any case). These Rorschach tests act like mega-vitamin shots directly into the viewer's imagination, causing

a lush overabundance of interpretations. As a result, an anxiety of identity spreads like an oil slick through these works as though even the forms themselves, having given up any claim to coherence, would be hard-pressed to answer the query: animal? mineral? vegetal? friend? or foe? These works speak of a hunger for images, a voraciousness and, finally, an aggressiveness.

Sillman's color, regrettably absent from the current selection of reproductions, plays to the hilt the vibration game between complementary colors. As a result, the colors behave like an ecstatic sound track accompaniment to the rapid transmutations of forms. Sillman leads our mind's eye along a path we find satisfyingly familiar, then Whoops! pulls the rug out and draws the line into something different, foreign, jarring. We're forced to make new categories for life forms heretofore unknown to us—which, like any new experience, causes alternating states of anxiety and pleasure.

Sillman speaks of being from Chicago and of her fondness for the Chicago imagists, In particular the "Hairy Who" artists like Jim Nutt. Like Nutt's, Sillman's work is highly inventive, with an eye to the comics and kitsch and an affinity with the intensity of the art of the insane. Yet, unlike the work of, say, the schizophrenic artist Adolf Wölfli, where an hallucinatory multiplicity of forms is embedded within an obsessive fixity and symmetry of composition, Sillman's work is obsessively unfixed and fluid. And though Sillman plays with the formal devices of the decorative arts—she speaks of her earlier systematic use of floral patterns such as William Morris wallpaper, her current mode of decorativeness has slipped the ties of the repetitive pattern that usually locks the fluid forms in place.

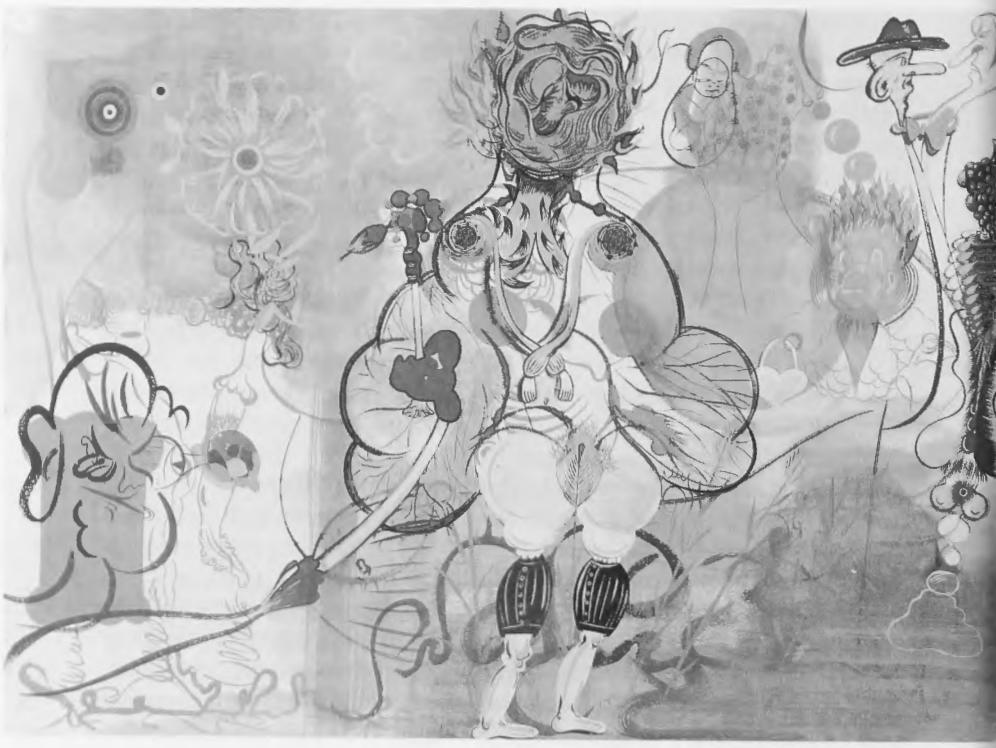
Like many in her generation, Sillman is engaged in a recombinant art-making process. High culture (Beauty, Art for Art's Sake, Truth) meets low kultcha (cartoons, the decorative arts, kitsch). Spirituality meets viscerality, the exalted meets the abject, the slapstick meets the ruthless and comes full circle.

"The Measles" has the sort of Jack-in-the-Box e(jack)ulate explosiveness that lays bare the aggressive scariness underlying much childhood toy or cartoon imagery. Boo! these Jacks-in-the-Box seem frozen in an adrenaline-laden moment of suddenness. As paintings, they're both gestural for gesture's sake (like the Abstract Expressionists, but on a more intimate scale) and gesture as descriptive of a surfeit of contradictory narrative possibilities. In looking at Sillman's hyperactive imagery, one can easily imagine the artist as overwrought child, inventing friends and foes within the swirls of her bedroom wallpaper.

New York, June, 1994

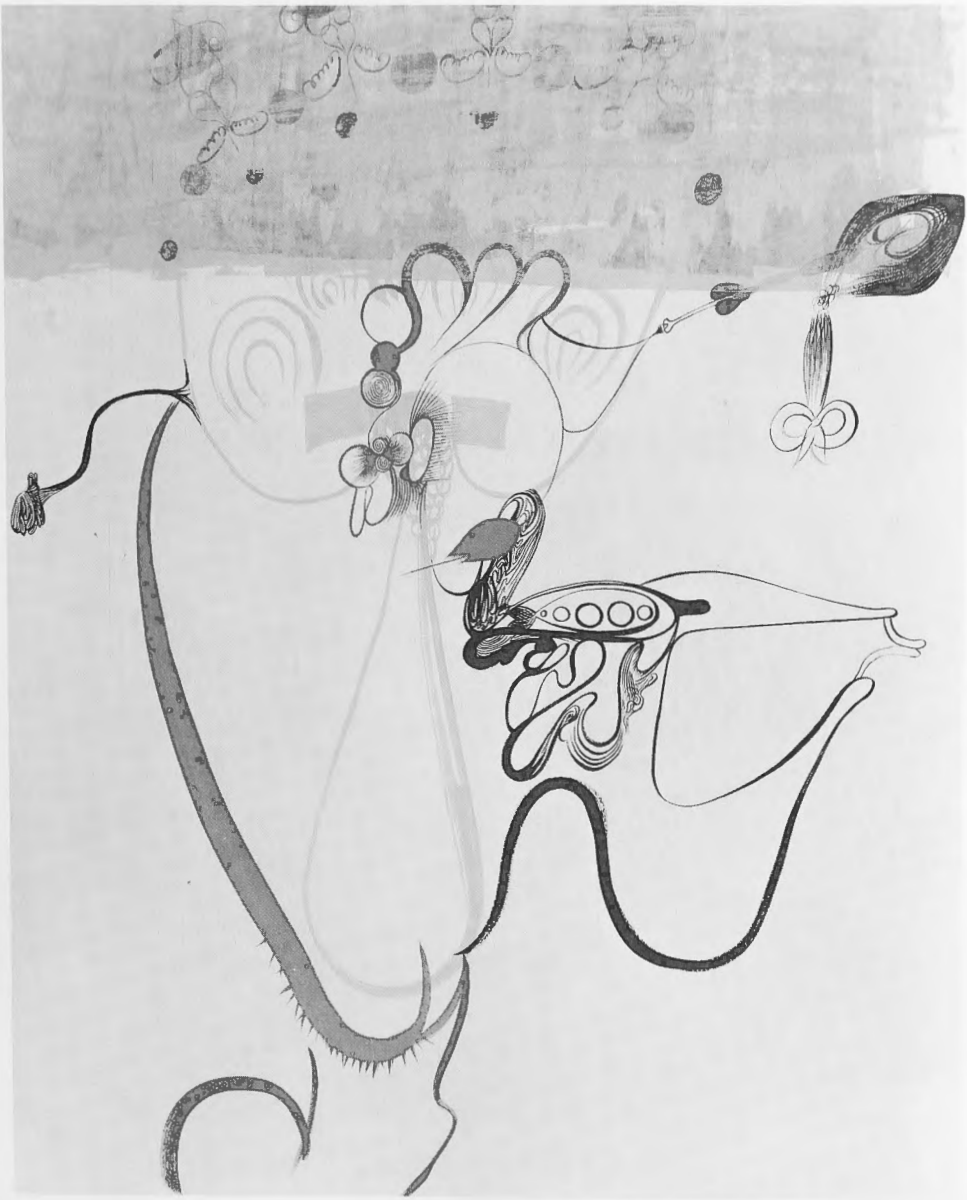
AMY SILLMAN

SIX GOUACHES



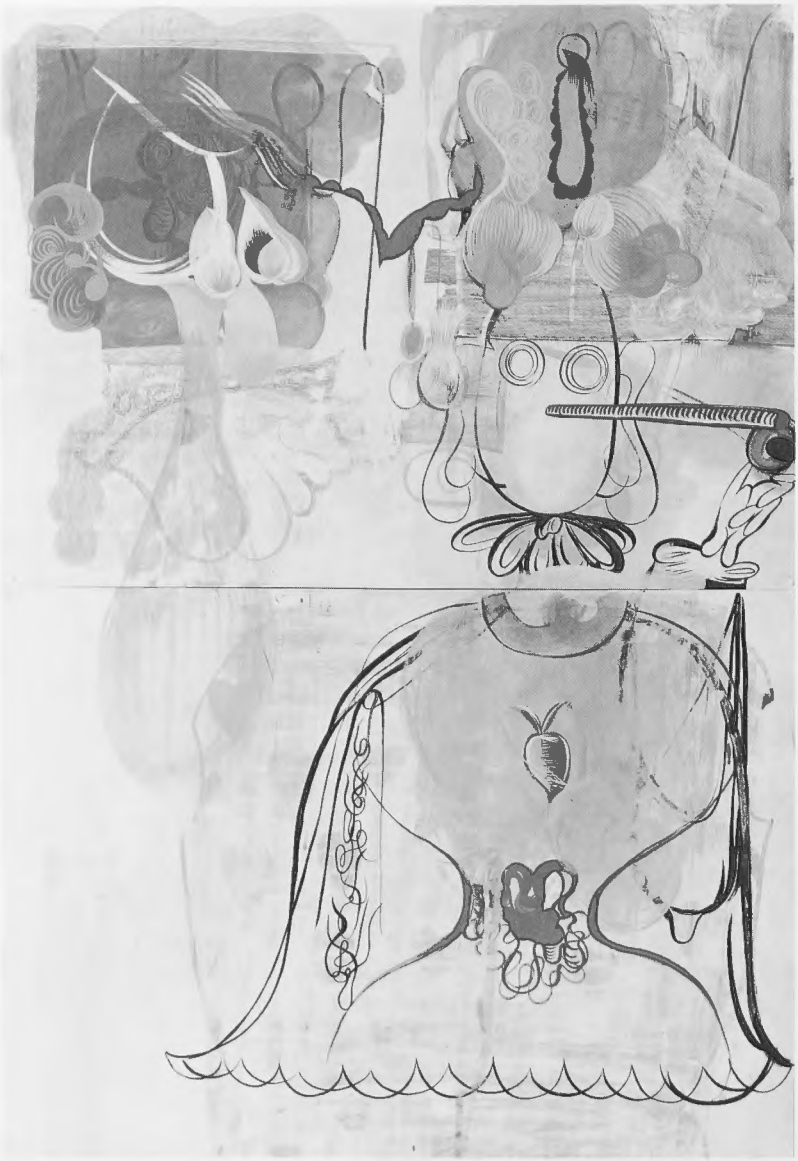
"FLOWER FACE"

1994, 30" x 48"



UNTITLED

1994, 20" x 26"

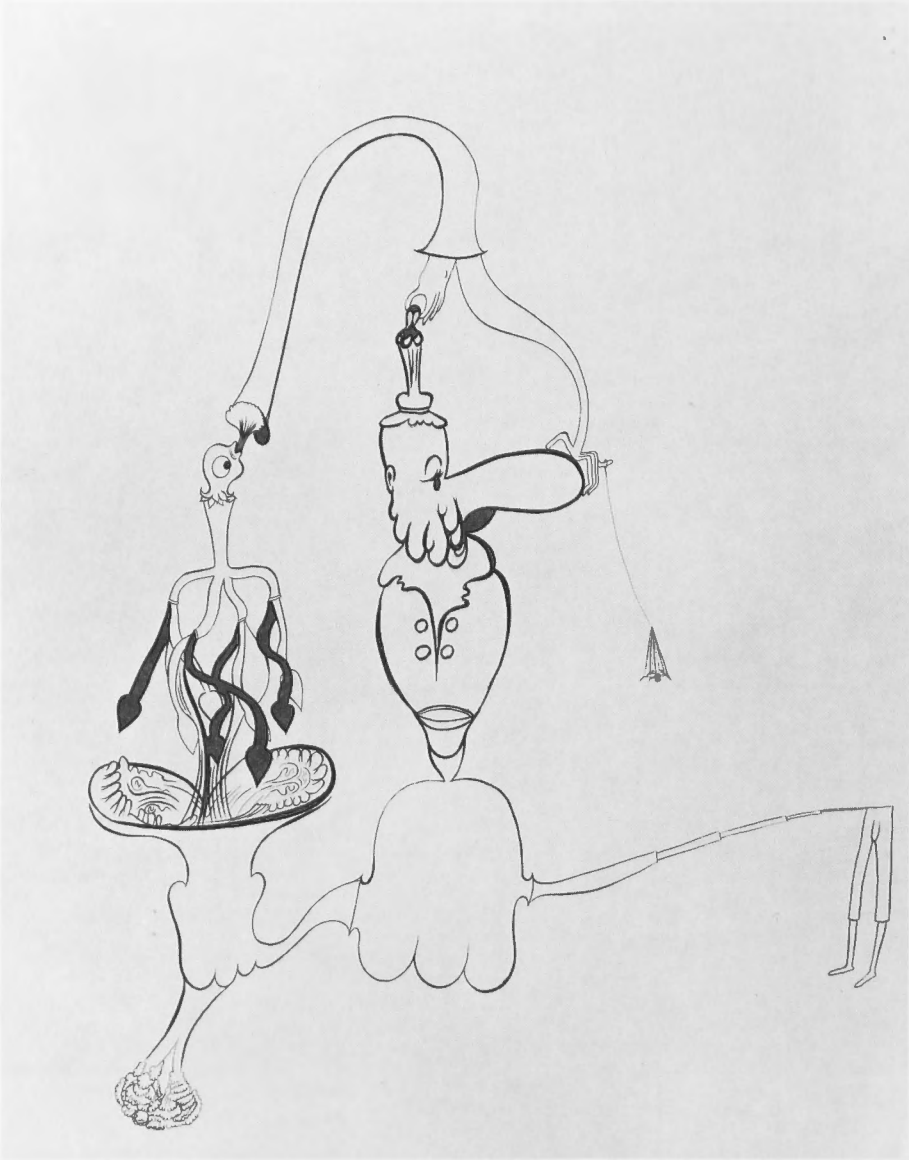


UNTITLED

1993, 30" x 48"

"BUNNIES"

1993, 24" x 30"



UNTITLED

1994, 20" x 26"

"THE MEASLES"

1994, 24" x 30"

ROBERT DUNCAN ON CHARLES OLSON

Introduced and Edited by Robert Bertholf

When Robert Duncan met Charles Olson in August 1947, while Olson was doing research on the Western Expansion at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, their conversation was about the domination of the cities of northern Russia over the southern farmland. The talk was not of poetry and poetic forms, but of politics and the vast movements of history. In the 1950s, when the correspondence between the two poets intensified, the discussion turned to poetry. Duncan's prose, published under the title "Pages from A Notebook," in *The Artist's View*, no. 5 (July 1953), prompted Olson to write his essay "Against Wisdom As Such," which was published in the first issue of *Black Mountain Review*, (Spring 1954). Far from causing a break between the two poets, Olson's essay remained a fertile provocation for Duncan's poetry and his thinking about poetry. He cited the essay in letters and in his own poems repeatedly, as he did Olson's essay "Projective Verse." The essay, "Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's *Maximus*," was, in a sense, a response to Olson taking Duncan to task over the question of "wisdom" in the poem, but yet was also an enthusiastic response to Olson's poetry, which placed the work in a line from Joyce through contemporary painters. This was not Olson's place in intellectual history, yet it was Duncan's way of paying him the highest tribute by aligning him with his cherished lines of derivation.

The selection of letters presented here traces out some of the interaction of the essays of the 1950s, and then moves on to Olson's lectures on Whitehead in San Francisco, February 1957; and then to the Vancouver Poetry Conference. Olson, Duncan and Robert Creeley were together at that conference for the first time. That conference for Duncan confirmed his contemporaries—Olson, and Creeley and Denise Levertov. Questions of poetic form and the place of the poet in history come into these letters. The letters Duncan wrote from Mallorca are intense ones, filled with his reading of Joyce, and Blake, and then the reverie about a trip to Barcelona. While Duncan was at work on his "The H.D. Book," Duncan was immersed in the course of literary history, the lines of passage from the high modernist period to his group of contemporaries. One letter gives an elaborate chart of derivation. The final letter to Olson in December 1969 comes back again

to "Against Wisdom As Such" as a testimony to years of provocation into new areas of thinking and writing. Duncan was not influenced by Olson in any direct way: he was forced by Olson into a vivified sense of role and action of the poet.

All bracketed remarks are by Duncan himself.

ROBERT DUNCAN

AS AN INTRODUCTION (1972)*

The two decades from 1950 to 1970 were, for some of us, the Age of Olson. It was the experience of a conversion in Poetry, for me in a poetry that had already declared itself, of a conversion, that is, in the Imagination, a breakthru into a deeper going and intending Imagination. And he set large for us our "subject"—not the personal or the cultural, but the Nature and Identity (Id-Entity) of the species "Man."

The proposition of a new history of Man was there in 1947 with his *Call Me Ishmael,* with its vision of what we were as "Americans," a vision out of Melville, in which Olson saw the New World as, in truth, the Primordial, and men returning to this continent—a proposition of Man that extended "from Folsom cave to now"—the waves of pre-glacial and post-glacial migrations out of Asia, the adventuring voyages out from the Phoenician world, the Norse world, and then the Renaissance, as coming "home," "back" to their origins. "SPACE": "I spell it large because it comes large here," he wrote: "Large, and without mercy."

In 1950, the essay "Projective Verse;" in 1951, in *Origin* I, "I, Maximus" and "The Gate & the Center"—the opening up of great spaces in consciousness had begun, and in the very beginning, in its origins, he moves in, as he knows he must, to redirect the ideas of language and of the body, of Man, of commune, and of history; and this drive remains throughout his creative life. Sometimes it must have seemed hopeless. Every passionate and eloquent pouring forth of his vision goes on in those *Letters for Origin* to convert the editor of *Origin* from literary concerns to revelationary fervor. He finds himself at last (as in "A Work" in this little volume) clearing away all the literature of the Indo-European epic, coming to the Hesiod of the *Theogony* as "one of its gates:" "a total placement of man and things among all possibilities of creation."

"My purpose is only to wake up the time spans and materials lying behind Hesiod, so that they can seem freer than they have...." It had been his purpose in the beginning, in his own conversion-experience. The

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*This essay will appear in *Robert Duncan, A Selected Prose,* which is forthcoming from New Directions. The essay was written in 1972 for a collection of Olson's prose, but it was not used.

awakening of Purpose. That so moves the phantasmal Kultur thing from the generative meaning of Ezra Pound's work; and so removes the phantasmal blood-thinking thing from the generative meaning of D.H. Lawrence, to form a tradition, a line of inheritance, incorporating long separated elements in a new force.

He saw the Westward movement of scouting, exploration, traffic with the natives, first settlements, raids and massacres, exploitations, scientific observations as a great psychic happening, a drive into the mythopoeic; and then the Ur-History does come back, not as it is in Europe, as a depth in memory, but as it is, for us, as an immediate disorder in the mind. We have no where else to be than here, in this first history, in which vast extensions of meaning, trance and phantasy, alchemistries of language, take over. He goes "back," back home, to come into the depths of the immediate, going over the documents and old maps, the texts of sciences and the historical diggings, as data of what our species is, read in the light and dark of a Divine Intention. He wants to establish us, to re-establish us in the Ideal, to redeem all idealism from the commitments that claim prior authority there. "Otherwise the present will lose what America is the inheritor of: a secularization which not only loses nothing of the divine but by seeing process in reality redeems all idealism from theocracy or mobocracy, whether it is rational or superstitious, whether it is democratic or socialism." To redeem Idealism as Primordial Thought, as a driving force. Charles Olson is a frontiersman in thought, grand and noble as the broad plains, the commanding mountains and the ocean depths and masses instruct him to be in certain measures of his poetry. He has no peers in this sweep of his imagination, in which every intention in him is ancient, and none are current or contemporary. He has the range of the continental drift or of the geological era he took his thought in. He can also be, as the continent was for those who first tackled it, as it remains for those who realize what is going on, a hard task-master. He *is* hard—hard going, hard to get at, hard to come by, hard driving, hard to read through; and he can go wild—shoot wild, talk wild, read wild. He was, after all, almost a man who might have been an eminent scholar in American studies, except for an ungovernable enthusiasm in which Idea went out of bounds. Except he went wild. He saw America as a dark and vast Fate to which Man returned, the Indians first, and then, since 1500, all the races of the species, Man Entire in His various cultures, HERE in one place, in one people. And there I am with Olson. He saw the power of a wilderness, not conquered, but invading Man, in which a crisis gathers. "The trouble is, it is very difficult, to be both a poet and an historian," he writes in his closing note to *Mayan Letters* in 1953. More and more, he came to mistrust the propriety of history.

The Creative Will, the urgency to make or name a "world," to make history or name history oneself ["man as himself a universe" Olson insists

in "A Work"] is haunted by the Identity, the Id-Entity, with God the Creator, which we can take now as an Idea, belonging to that Idealism freed from the authoritative limitations that Idea has been under from Plato on, in the philosophical "disciplines," the theological logics, the political dialectics, etc. that have sought to circumscribe Idea and make it subject to their uses. Idea, as it comes to us, as it comes to Man, as an immediate seeing, as seeing it that way. Straight on. The Creative Will is there, and where we are at all aware of ourselves, we immediately know it is there. This is the heart of Poetry in its proper sense, of Poetry as Making, as distinguished from voice or song, from the melic verse-record or the commemorative monument. The distinction is not absolute. The melodic is itself essential to the creative power. It *is* song that moves; song enters the world and makes it a singing environment of physical events. But what is important for the Maker is the direct charge of his making, a poetry that raises a crisis in What Is, a crisis in our Idea of the world and of what we are, a crisis in the body-idea—that is the crux of "Proprioception"—and in the identity of Man idea—that is the crux of "A Plausable 'Entry' for, like, man."

Charles Olson drives deep. He wanted not only a crisis in consciousness but a crisis in the unconscious. That word too he spelled large: "ex., Lawrence, preface, FANTASIA OF THE UNCONSCIOUS, where he imagines states of being & geography divers from the modern." "For those who have the wit to tell the Unconscious when they see one," he writes again in *Mayan Letters*. He is to be read by men who have their wits about them, the wit to tell the Unconscious "when they see one." And often, Olson is not only telling it from the Unconscious, or letting the Unconscious tell, but telling the Unconscious a thing or two. He means to instruct the Unconscious, and to do that he must stir such a trouble in all the structures of what he has known as Consciousness, all the established structures of what we take ourselves to be, that his instruction drives deep. "Neither the Unconscious nor Projection (here used to remove the false opposition of 'Conscious;' 'consciousness' is self) have a home unless the DEPTH implicit in physical being... is asserted, or found-out as such." Consciousness is God, the occult tradition says. "Consciousness is self," Olson puts it. In this vision, it is Consciousness that contains the Unconscious.

Move the verse-line out of the reach of our predilections of consciousness, especially hit at obstinate rationalizations of experience with the obdurate and the obscure task, drive the expert mind into that desperation in which it must struggle once more in wildness with the Old Man of the Sea, Proteus—this was the hope Olson had in Poetry. He hadn't a hope. It was the desperation he had. "To have a third term, so that *movement* or *action* is 'home'."

And he did bring it home. He brought to focus in a driving will and intellect a tradition. And that we have our roots, not in the old family farm

plot, or in the tribal smoke-house or in the national convention, but in a moving Idea of Man. The continent where we are is where that Idea is moving. As much the idea of Man moving in the Indian, as much the idea of Man moving in the European, we must gather to find ourselves. That is all the archaeology to gather ourselves from out of time and space into what we truly are, the archaeology of morning.

In "Bridge-Work" he names again a team as he sees it (1961) of challengers to the accepted idea that places any of us short of the business of Man. It is his essential reading list to undo our minds from the modern. Why? He insists upon just those carriers of a knowledge that has been systematically excluded from our education. We all know that Dante is a pre-eminent force of European civilization and that his *Commedia* is an essential event of Man's spirit in Poetry. But the entire system of public education excludes from our picture of European civilization any reference at all to the Jewish contribution to that world; hence it is viewed as an obscure reference to speak of Moses of Leon, a master of the same order as Dante in the Imagination, and as a peculiar and exotic "private mythology" to have to do with the *Zohar*, a work of the Imagination as far-reaching and deep-going in its influence in the thought and spirit of Europe as is Dante's Vision. Our generation has had the duty to carry in our work the content of an excluded knowledge, to work at a "bridge-work" between the repressed content and the Consciousness that is Self. Charles Olson must work at ground work as an educator against a massive and repressive construct in which all the sciences of Man outside of the post-Christian rationalizing science of "EUROPE" have been declared to be out-of-bounds. Blasting at indoctrination, Olson blasts with a thunderous indoctrination. He insists that it must be dogmatic. A Roman Catholic in origin, he transforms the meaning of Catholicity to mean just that—*katha holos*, having to do with the whole of Mankind, to be the idea of Man in the whole of Man. Where he waxes most dogmatic, speaking *ex cathedra*, the Protestant in me rises, and, deeper than Protestant, the heretic in me protests. But heretically, I see his dogmatic mode, as I read, as one aspect of Olson's genius that works in formulae, his mappings out of territories, his lists and topographies of the soul, his "Logography" as it appears in this collection. As he was dying of terminal cancer that had come into his liver and was eating away each day, Olson was writing out, as if to unlock in a logographic magic the secret message or to break the code of that event, "*LIVE-HER*." He is trying words, to find in the body of the language he loved and worked in and incarnated himself in, this event that was eating at him. He had to know it in words, what he knew in flesh.

The great drive West was for Olson toward the Idea of Man, toward the vision of what each of us as Man is. Proprioception then, how we get the appropriate idea of what we are (who we are) in the feel of what the

body is, how the body knows itself, is the ground work of any right language of what Man is. In "Projective Verse," the knowledge of the art of Poetry is to be driven back there, to its own proprioception: "RIGHT HERE WHERE THE LINE IS BORN"—"the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE." He is mapping out there in 1950 circuits and establishing the art in the reality of the body that intends that art. Here again Olson is profoundly Roman Catholic, and I am with him and with the Catholic doctrine in this: the Word is incarnate, living, suffering in the flesh, is Man, then. The Ideal has no other ground in which to be but our passional life in historical time. I know of no Ideal outside of that realm. The Incarnation is a physical event. "The 'soul' then is equally 'physical'," Olson writes in "Proprioception."

Forcing our recognition of the crisis, the crisis of our times or of our state or of our psyche, as the crisis of our physical body, the good doctor I see Charles Olson to be as poet-critic attends his patient and strives to bring him through to the moment of truth beyond the matter of life or death, up to the necessary test, beyond his strength to an other strength he has, to confront his living or dying. In the new medicine he is not to seek to escape what is happening but to go into it. Health here lies in the body of the total life, in the soul as a life-time, and self as a consciousness of where that is, toward which the creative will and from which the creative will moves. He would not relieve us of this confrontation.

Sensibility, as I read it, Olson insists is not "ours" but "its own" [within the organism by movement of tissues "its own"]. We've to realize the cosmic intent or event that the physical body we call "ours" is "as object which spontaneously or of its own order produces experience;" and that depth is "asserted, or found out as such... implicit in physical being." The thing is we have just this physical event we are, an incarnation, a body, a locality of cosmos having in that locality an experience of "confronting" cosmos, in which our life, our experience of the actual, springs alive. Metaphysics then is the mind's proprioception of its physical condition—a local and immediate event imagining the totality that comes to crisis in that event. And metaphysics only proves true as it is imagined as physics. The problems of metapsychology are ultimately to be read in a physics we have not come to. Hence, Olson's persistent interest in alchemical terms. Body, logos, society, history, as I read him, must be brought to this door of the physical fact, of Incarnation.

He forces us, if we are to read at all—as once in the Hellenistic period men were forced to such business and, the best they could tell us, saw action as agon—to be involved, if we are to participate at all at the level of self-consciousness, with finding ourselves in such primaries. In his early essay "The Gate & the Center" he argues that men once had in Sumer such a "home" as later Olson is to tell us we must take in movement; that the

City was the action, the incarnate body of man's action in history, the one center. What we enact comes into being in the act itself, has no other place to be. I've not to be right or wrong here, I've to move forward to the way it appears to me. We are creatures of the physical world and in that creature nature are impelled to create. We have no other "consciousness" except the consciousness of the act. Hence the making in words, the enactment of laws or poems.

In "The hinges of civilization to be put back on the door" or in "A Plausible Entry'" Olson is not making an historical outline of what happened in the past but is making a diagram of what we Are, a morphological anatomy of our body in time. What we have to do, our body in time, carries with it crises. "We" are the body of man that remains unsatisfied, unrealized, of impending disasters or creative breakthrus then, redemptions of form, we're still that much involved with the impetus. In the earliest traces of man we find, we find that imperative that will not let us go. To uncover city, man, trace, being that involvement that will not let the past go but must bring all into the present demand for consciousness in action. And action, the truth of action, brings us into the Primordial, into the place where the New is yet to happen. The "past" is all that has not happened. We are, where we are, at the threshold of the First Things, the as yet to begin. "God is the organ of novelty," we find in Olson's "Theory of Society." In all of this thought, Olson is close indeed to his reading of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* in 1956-57.

Grammar again is not a system but a formulization toward involvement in what impends. It must be moving or not at all. Sapir and Whorf (I know of no others of this order in linguistics) are kindred to Olson in this stance toward language as being poetic, creative, a matter of process, as a way in moving. This "way" is for Olson an imperative.

Then, last, to say that these essays are not to be taken as summaries or notes of something known, but as the push, from knowing, toward such action. I would like to escape that inner alliance I have made in taking what I have of Olson's thought—the urgency of his directive renders it impossible to read his poetry or prose in the mode, still the dominant literary mode of our time, of disinterested discourse. Since the early fifties when what Olson was about gradually began to dawn for me, what I am about myself has been seen in a new way in that light, in the light of his thought and in the dark of that thought. And I read it today, as I read it when I first got it, as a call to order. The only alternative has sometimes seemed to be at home in that waste called Tiamat. "Superstition & idolatry also rampant: anything can happen (BS" Olson warns).

"Costly in loss of something the 1st, as later the 15th & 16th still held, a sense of the divine" and later—we have cited this before—"a secularization which not only loses nothing of the divine but by seeing process in

reality redeems all idealism." The crisis we face seems to be there—or else to flounder in psychology, sociology, and what Olson points out as the greatest danger, "the area of pseudo-sensibility," the disengagement of entertaining the idea of the world, as if we had no consequence in that entertainment.

ROBERT DUNCAN

ELEVEN LETTERS

[San Francisco]
[ca 15 December 1953]

near-far Mister Olson![1] I have two books on my table—In Cold Hell in Thicket—which has been a constant companion, increasing (as if it were possible) joy, and renewal to my intellectual heart's craving—and now Maximus Poems/1-10 which Patchen presented me with two days ago.[2] 'near' means everything indeed; a slowly increasing centerness of what you have been writing, retroactive and for several months now the excitement has been on. Say—early pieces came around the corner of the eye, spoke in the background of the ear, seemd incidental. Then a shifting of the sights and a tuning of the ears bring the Olson intellectual heart into range. These pieces in scatterd magazines and these books now are those "friends coming from far quarters" that Confucius finds one of three civilized pleasures. It is the containd Effort—another of the three pleasures—the "constant perseverance and application" of young birds learning flying on the wing—and the perspective "containd"—the third that is everywhere and every thing.

A very structure of act, a speech as learnd in the hand-ear-to-mouth as walking, an athletic language. Because all here is the purpose of the poet there is no discouragement: that you have such technical achievement compared to my often inadequacy there is every encouragement, heartening: to be free! and I am as I speak.

What more central love than the disturbance and trembling awakend by each new song; the calling up of one's own spirit in answer, the still center in the excitement that comes as the poems are comprehended. A challenge. But to the intoxicated mind a more marvellous alcohol—a nourishment. Of my own otherness. My entirely differentness. It's the coming back to the core of speech—that poetry might be a revelation of the language written by, created by Man—a closet of speech wherein one speaks with the vastest spirit—a revelation of language not personality. What more central love than the comradeship in devotion to the art?

Then, but it is not central yet, it is still coming in view, another devotion. The wisdom we seek. The counsels of the language. The purpose, the effort—is part of the wisdom. "One loves only form. . . ." or love, the sense of the form—a form itself—a created thing. "It is elements men stand in the midst of"—what we are. . . "did you know, she sd., growing up there,/ how rare it was?" citizens of a language—"go sing" "you who also wants."

But why "come home a winner?" yet one knows that that course one has been winning in the poem is not the race—is the course one has been running, winning not the course but the awareness of it, the revelation "as much of a labor/ as to lift an arm /flawlessly"—how that quickened my scents—the effort—but with flaw as without flaw. . . a wonder.

"To live our life quite properly in print" over and against my "I write to exercise my faculties" a kin? "only eyes in each head"
digesting Maximus this
is like writing a poem, that kind
of listening to the words, almost
catching them but throwing them into e-motion.

One sees the configuration of Gloucester: and qualities of men—self-containd, devoted "as mastheadsmen," in the element of an art—fishing-or staring at Ferrini's magazine cover, at all magazine covers in the Waiting Station—the demand for a poetry that can be tested by the measure of their living—a field of tansy. And it is the measure, the test for a poetry, the imaginary audience that one subscribes. One shld meet eye to eye—yes—so designd to be inspected. (But an imaginary audience of the lotophagoi? of sensation mongers? a trick—I am among the devious)
but
it is the Maximus who urges us.
"seeking too ready ears" "who want to lie down/
in Tiamat."[3]

close to Paterson? yes—and there be a root
in the Cantos, in Paterson that is hardy stock
—a direction in poetry—

RD
San Francisco
January(?) 1954

[San Francisco]
17 June [1954]

Dear Olson/ I am driven by the need for correspondences to make (or attempt) for the first time a primitive allotment of the day—with its period (the early morning) for letters; it (the need) is backlog piling up, pushing against some months now. I had returned to typing-money pleasures America's own version of the slave camp; and for a year have sufferd under & in the self-destructive slop-drama. Today then (June 17) I have rudely disrupted that course—and the jam of logs is shifting (nerves shifting, eager for the current of speech).

Thus—to make my beginning. John Adams writes "I will rouse up my mind and fix my attention."[4] And had that task of arousing himself to do, with a rigor, before he find himself. In your "PROJECTIVE VERSE"—the drive toward a maximum energy—an exertion in the works of it, measured phrases to drive, the engine designd wise movement: instructive each time at a level vital within "what yare saying.

Writing the letter to you about your work and then seeing it again, as you suggested it, to be printed, I thot of it in the context. I was sure of a critical response to the Maximus letters. Now "they" must go back, it ran, to sum up, to sit up, to set up their guns. All for or against this. But we see now that the current runs underground; it does not decrease the excitement that these signs of new (re-newd) life in the language do not appear (tho be thrust in the faces of) upon the surfaces of this literary world of not-critical criticism.

All the academy that despised here my ardent consultation of the Cantos (as a breaking up into movement of the old log-piles) now address themselves to sorting, identifying, deifying the old log piles to spite the energy set thereabout to break it up.[5] Only Stein remains freshly disreputable. And the "objectivists," "dadaists" and "surrealists" (of the absolute order—Breton, Tzara, Magritte, Peret) indigestible to the professional readers.[6] They demand "the unique presence," the actuality: beyond/ before the "image"—I don't have right at hand the files of *Origin* but someplace there-abouts you bolsterd up my growing adherence to thingness. This is a box with nothing inside but the inside inside. All the Pandora's woes and hopes—the glamours—to be let go; for the otherness.

Well. A Pandora's box-full of stagnant pre-occupations to be cleared away; for the clear in-sight hear-say testimony in act to "raise up and fix." William's sight of Curie working at the muddle of pitchblend / one's apprehension of the secret energies of the speech.[7] To clear away one's own secrets [the miasma] toward the work at the source—all the containd human energies of the language.

The mythic content has been released to use—Freud, Joyce, Graves, Pound, Croce, Jane Harrison, Cassirer—plenty of ready work done.[8]

Stevens' demonstrations of mythy construction. Then you prodded well at my "wisdom" (re. *Artists View*) toward the act-ual sense. (In Harrison's *Themis* the effort was to point back of the seem of the myth to the actual, the *dpomena*—thing done. Back of the reference to; to the taking place. And an observation re: energy inherent in her study—that the energy *is* in the thing done; appears as derived there from in the re-currences (the ritual reenactments), further derived (lessend) in the references there-to—the mythic constructions. But is embodied in the language—(Diff. between the act as contained (energy) in its words, as evoked by its words (a memory of that energy, seeming charged), as exploited in history (a reference to that energy). Thus; I ex-Pound. And you will allow my delight in calling up your presence / company (tenuous only when I reflect upon the alternative of your actual company. And talking to, at, (tenuous against a vividly with) you to release currents of my thot. It hardly stirs against, to break up—as I would—very old channels. I wld. seize at the least breach of its con-duct. To have a sign of Jerusalem.

As for instance—a flash-sight in/beyond E.P.'s old rut of *Social Credit* that the language is a social fund, an air, water, earth or fire, an elemental wealth in which we, any, all have a social credit: unbounded.[9] To claim. Inspiration (in breathing) currents, roots and light/heat.

What a mud—a pitchblend—those recalcitrant pamphlets are, a crisis where we are forced to all the damnd (the unmoving backlog) wall of his mind he drives in inspite of against. But then toward? To? And everything not there springs up to mind To

> "tell you / what any knowing man of your city might, a
> letter carrier, say, or that doctor—

"but "if they dared afford to take the risk—"[10]

Our joy is that impending—here—we calld for it, it calls for us, that "dared afford" grows, increases, changes over is—a necessity. No other art but to "take the risk."

And E.P. (they kalld him a cracker-box filosofer) driven to the risk, unprepared. But it is not an occasion for accomplishment, but a necessity that drives him, I, the letter carrier to write the pamphlet. To do it "corony," to force the damn (nation) that the waters be released.

The task is there—beyond giving *Testimony* that I recognized, at last, what you are about (given in the letter you forwarded to *Origin*)—to write out what these two books of yours point toward. And I mean "to rouse up my mind and fix my attention." Done, you tell and I'll tell Creeley this is not in your services (not an affair of the sheer camaraderie) but obviously (no one ain't taken no intrust) a necessity. A what are we doing here. Can't distinguish twixt a critical task and a "age-of-criticism and chewing cow-

licking exercise, an old habit"—it's a sad day a coming. If it is we is a literary movement with our fortunes to win I gladly default. My ever omnipotent laziness is healthy instructual recourse there. But if it is there might be, even if only in—as if accident—an accidence, a spark from that flinty task to arouse us, get a move on, it's to be done.

I have in mind mimeographing said summing up of your work—say circa 200 copies to be maild out to a critical "elite" of readers—I mean those letter carriers and doktors where we have come to recognize their readiness. "In the third place the third capital is aroused"—Stein[11]

Yrs for a call to arms
R.D.

[San Francisco]
[8 August 1954]

Dear Olson—I picked up Black Mt. Review at the Pocket Book Shop and read the "Wisdom as Such" piece.[12] If it reprimands in part I ain't going to rise in defense of my bewilderings—this matter of clarification is too important and, if there were no other measure of it, I shld. say that it is the keener excitement in writing backs up your point.

But moral urgency, the hearty man-to-man gusto—might also dissemble? Anyway: the whole realm of spirit I distrust if it is not at play—and a play is a sleight-of-mind, dissembling in that sense—I wld. not disown it. "Love, wisdom, suffering, foolishness, truth, false pleasures" etc. etc. "I'm so foolish" you permit yourself to say. Arbitrary: we can lay claim to love, wisdom, suffering, foolishness, true and false pleasures at will. And that in part was the demonstration of the *Artist's View* pieces.[13]

item: Martin Seymour-Smith's comments on Roethke and his "importance" and on Dylan Thomas are not "ideas at play" but proceed "importantly" to talk about importance; to distinguish true from false importance.[14] So M.S.S. agrees with the other critics on the importance, and has only the virtue of seeing that he ain't important—the virtue the more vicious for his disinterest in what Roethke or, or, or etc. actually is.

Is a titmouse bigger than a hellaphunt. or why shld. he be? Or wld he save us if he were?

Now to get back to the starting point.
First to go on record:
Knowledge and control (don't mean domination) in actual life is subject to an unremitting clarification. For motion to be free and energies just here . . .the real must be distinguishd from the unreal. Things must be discriminated and acknowledged.
—Sects, religions, platonics etc. don't countenance it:. . . wld. rather fuck a dream walking than actually fuck. And they lead to all kinds of clarifications about what it is like to fuck a dream but fewer about the act.

But in made-up things, in the imagination the will has range of a different kind. Words like genuine and false, truth and lie, up and down (where there is nor up nor down as it's named), great and small are anything and everything we design.

—item—when someone sez this is genuine marble, tap-tap, hammer, chip: genuine marble. It is or it ain't. If a man (equipped with standard apparatus) sez I'm a woman we can see if he "really" is or if he only "make-believe" is. If a line in a poem is ten syllables long we can see (hear) if it "really " is; also mit rhyme, breath groups, movement. We tell "really" with tongue, skin-touch, eyes, "sounding, " ear etc. The mixing here correlates: the senses discover.

—item—when someone sez this is a genuine talent, poet, poem, artist, saint, lady, or some such realist assertion of the make believe, we must either agree or disagree. There is no data.

The giant-bodied I may be the world
    but the actual world is the actual world including me.
Yr. "that any wisdom which gets into any poem is solely a quality of the moment of time in which there might happen to be wisdoms. . ." clears the way in part I think—for me: this is a mountain seen changing only in aspect as one regards it, walking around it. Mountain shows itself grand, small, ridiculous (a vast suggestion of a trivial resemblance, a frivolous head), austere, comfortable.

As in all these exhortations of yrs, the urgency disaffects but it also—and this, its *virtu*.—disrupts. Disjoins habitual attitudes. "That he is not free to be a part of, or to be any, sect"—there, as man, I am disaffected—and even "fierce about it" I demand whatever free range. But it is the *poem* that is not

free to be part of sect, that is thereby vitiated. And I am as heartily for yr "no symbols" (*symbols* arise from violations of the mystery of *things* (and you have elsewhere, again after my own sense of it, calld for the "thing") and "there are only his own composed forms" yes and "each one solely the issue of the time of" yes yes and "not any ultimate" yeah man.

—Well, I have another section on notes on *Maximus* underway. I have to read the poem over and over again to re-focus each time. And since I'm trying to write about the view of man in the poem I have to weed about in my anarchist prejudiced mind to get back to the poem. Not anyway an unrewarding engagement.

But "a man-made continuum" will perhaps provide a new sight on the subject.

For my own response to Black Mt. Review—the thing is split in two. Items: La Cosa, Against Wisdom as Such; The Quay; Lacquerd Westmount Doll; The Search, The Assistance; René Laubiès: An introduction;—Laubiès work (tho half-tones miss one suspects all-important densities, and hence much of what is going on); A Fete; Round the Year Jazz; the John Smith piece, and C.C.'s (Corman's?) Yeats (for "that ridiculous hallucinatory cat, knocks it erratically around the parlor"—and the quote from Yeats on Lewis)—these all give rise to, seed, impulse to forms.[15] But there is another sort: of the worst. Martin Seymour-Smith, A.M. on Canadian poetry, none of these are concerned with what is happening—all are concernd with critical evaluation.

And. . . is the *Black Mountain Review* going to be concernd with whether or how Mr. Roethke, Mr. Steinbeck, Mr. Thomas are or are not legitimate literachure? Is it really legitimate "to speak of Patchen himself, " when it means no study of the writing at all?

I ain't interested in whether Patchen is good or bad writing. I want to know about what is going on, how it is made. If Patchen's wreckd back reappears in the physiology of the poem (as for instance Miss Josephine Miles' wreckd body reappears in the physiology of hers—an all but incapable body out of which must look cunning eyes.)—then O.K.[16] But as Creeley excites any interest in the "pain" it is sentimental.

My cross-eyedness, for instance has a lot to do with the physiology of my poetry—but I shld. be outraged (as regards the poetry) if some critic shld. care to commiserate for what my oculist refers to as the "cosmetic" handicap.

All of which belongs in a letter to Creeley.

So much studying out and calling attention to how a poetry is, can be, "ought to be "(that's your urgency), might be made. Redirections of the writer to such form, composition in time, melody, fragmentation, disruption, blockings, channelings, designs, decorations, arrangements, markings, machineries, periodic structures, relations of syllable, accent, breathing and forced groupings are needed that this ("I am among the devious") one given often to "false pleasures" can carry no compromise that far. These idea-less cerebrations are displeasures, be they false or true. But displeasure can be of greatest value—as displeasures disrupt into life of answering from sloth or habitual pleasures.

Point is dis or pleasure—"*Where is Mr. Roethke?*" is incompetent but more important it is so much not the affair of anyone faced with the task at hand. (You might get at the task by clearing the *Cantos*, *Paterson*, or *Maximus* or my own work at this point out of the way—but you won't find yrself anywhere I is going after clearing Roethke, or Thomas out of the way).

Patchen or Rexroth are in my way.

Right at the moment you are more in my way (as sympathies, identifications, common attitudes block the view) and hence struggling with *Maximus*. . .

But Creeley takes Patchen for granted, clears no way beyond. Maybe Patchen is not blocking his (Creeley's view).

The kind of criticism needed is not "The Contribution of Mr. Pound in the *Cantos* "but" what we now see is needed after the *Cantos* have been committed.

And then, one's own poetry is most in ones way.

No question mark.

Don't need ironical "possibility" to say what that said. with that confidence that is a certain part of love that may be understood

Duncan

It has been the fullest reward of my services to the POETRY CENTER (where, unpaid, I conduct a workshop) that I may see you once more.

Bañalbufar, Mallorca
14 agosto 1955

dear Olson /

Stevens is dead, the news comes.[17] Well, it's the Stevens and back of him the shadowy Mallarmé that seems to me to haunt my work, Keres from his world scuttering in to attend the seance of each poem.[18] The poem anyway being not only made but heard, so that one is listening, the line comes to one, as much as one is inventing, as cuts, or measures into the line. I just spent a week in Barcelona—which meant four hours again going over the Catalan romanesque frescos and sculptures, and another four at the archeological museum—and beginning, just beginning, to get the feel of a world emerging[19] (as this world here emerges little by little as one learns its language. . . will only be there I know when I have got the worlds (words), the contour of, into my system). There are two interlapping pictures from these two collections: the one extending from cave scratchings, flints and wood charrings, lion, bear, hyena, horse and elephant jaws, thru megalithic cultures (the dolmen makers not only swept down thru Spain but invaded Mallorca, leaving Stonehenges and cairns), grave remains where the most elegant Carthaginian beads and blue-glaze amulets of Bast accompany primitive native pottery. Ibiza was a Carthaginian colony and the ceramic figures from this period are magnificant[20]. This goddess crownd with the walld imperishable city clutches in one hand to her breast a miniature lamb—in time we see her again holding the miniature child-lamb. What have any of us who aint shepherds got to do with this thing? Something, some insistent thing, because the images bring back ¿out of what memory? the sheep. As the lion, bear, hyena, horse and elephant rise up into feeling from their jawbones. (On a stone from the cave world, over and over again scratchd horse and elephant; on a stone lintel from XIIth century graphite it shows scratchd horses and knights, city walls and buildings—which have not yet emerged in the frescos).

But it is in the masterpieces of the medieval culture that an epiphany comes

12th century San Roman de las Bons shows[21]
apostles
their eyes obsessd with sight
ears obsessd with the word as: 1123 circa
the great apse of Santa Maria de Tahull
Christ Pantokrator holds
the book the Word
the world then
enthroned: *ego sum lux mundi*
the A & W the throne

the book the light
surrounded by evangelical beasts &
great wingd many-eyed seraphim

—but the epiphany (mine) is that just here a complex iconography (where all images are signs) is brought into a complex plastic knowledge (where the two dimensions of the fresco, and the symbolic many dimensions of what is represented, and the three dimensions of the architecture—the apse is semicircular—provide spatial counter-points with the advancing and receding of forms and colors). You see at a glance a created space, which being drawn, draws. And—the exhilaration of the maker is so keen—see the created time of a poem and that as the plastic feeling be complex there, then needs—for this exhilaration—a likewise complex iconography.

Wherever the spatial knowledge does not exist, the iconography does not exist. The images are not signs and with the "renaissance" everything is lost of the order; the icons are humanize[d] and became idols; the terror and majesty of the romanesque is superseded by [ ] and luxury;[22] the painter at Tahull finds in the robes an agency of color and movement—so that draperies swirl to make new spaces / the robes in the 15th century chapel of Lluis Dalmau (who paints after the flemish model) reveal shine and glow of their expense.[23]

¿"the giant bodied spirit I"? the thing as I see it between you, me, Bob and this Pantokrator, lux mundi / is just that the forms—the meanings—lux, mundi, pan—have changed. What we believe them to be as surely as the painter of this Christ enthroned upon the world globe believed this to be the cosmos. The created thing then, as now, emerges from the thing seen (the painter's necessary book), the thing embodied as a sign in the thing seen/heard (the book, the word, and the letters—the world emerges from vowels and consonants), and the thing as heard (the musician's necessary book—and hence here the trumpet, the harpes and luthes).

But insist upon the central picture, that one hold in one hand as this christ the open book, and the other hand raised in benediction. This excess of feeling lasted, even here—when in these country churches it flowerd—only two hundred years; the real fine exhilaration is only there in a generation of painters at the beginning of the 12th century. Works up to this giantism. And then ennui, humanism, and "proportion" have their run. Revelation is followd by illustration or description.

In 1920 Stravinsky composed his *Symphony of Wind Instruments* in homage to Debussy upon his death (as Manual de Falla did at that time).[24] A composer could have done a funeral piece / but the appropriate homage is a demonstration—in Stravinsky's case he anticipated 12 tone construction. It is that the work not be *about* the addressd master but that it be a demonstration *for* his spirit. And in this sense I would design a piece for

Stevens. It gives me at least the challenge of the invention. If I can do it—to attempt however it goes—two theoretical inventions! to measure silences in the time of composition, and to work from an arbitrary series of points in the time of composition rather than "beginning at the beginning."

Gradually recent work is coming into book shape. Once I had the title LETTERS, it was clear. From the Letter to Denise Levertov (but I mean to remove the "letter" aspect, any dedications, in order to make clear the letters vowels and consonants of it) thru to a projected second letter to Denise. Much of the work for the book will appear if ORIGIN continues in an issue, granted again that Corman means what he sez. It's this book anyway that will be for Jonathan if he manages to perform his other announcements.

with old affections,

Robert

[ask Bob, what about using my notes on *Maximus* as [missing word] for the *Books & Comment* section of #6? I am sending your *Anecdotes of the Late War* to Jonathan as requested in his postcard of this week.[25]

[Bañalbufar
Mallorca]
29 agosto 55

dear Charles /

The established iconography—what Dodds in *The Greeks and the Irrational* calls the conglomerate,[26] or for a psychological view the gestalt—as you have it instructs to avert (as a city it seemd to me when we talkd together so many years ago is it now—is to hold back the dark and not just the dark, an expanded cave fire, fear-full anyway) and to produce. And I found myself puzzling as you puzzled and came up with a distinction between those things at La Bons and Tahull that had seemd to speak to me as another world speaks; to instruct me again what this mystery of making might be: and those *things* (I dont have no library here to locate where but you've said out much of this business of the *thing*), traces from whose spoor the life of the making, what kind of a life it was, leaps to us. It's no choice between the two—the difference is so wide. Or its inside and outside. And here you are in the letter which arrived today with the best I could be waiting for, well, with what unlocks thought—that the religious

thing is this *practice* of the outside and the inside / to learn, as surely as we learn to walk (which is simultaneously by a practice of the inside and the outside, of the ear-organ of equilibrium i.e.) to dare to exist.

But what I've got in mind in conversation with you is a note to my enthusiasm for the hierarchically arranged thing. I dont get to it in the notes so far on *Maximus,* but I heartedly, by heart, agree with you that "There are no hierarchies" or it could come as an agonized cry from this man glamorized, [27] in love with the great wheels of cultures "There are only hierarchies!" And we've both of us, got Grandpa to thank for our way station of the ideogram (which allows for movement as the iconography doesnt, for individual discovery). I'm no[w] in mind to have done with the glamors of history or of arrangements, but now I begin to see that while how to arrange to release powers is a vital struggle when my organism was new (and actually struggling toward a definite arrangement), the struggle now is to disrupt the inertias that fall into place. The fight begins to be to "release them," to release the configurations from name and place (and hence I, tho there are other reasons, pursue Stein); the dynamics of the making needs as much incoherence (incorporation of natural inability, corrupt flesh etc.) as it needs coherence (genius, skeleton etc).

The picture that I gave of Tahull came from my centering with awe upon the achievement of the apse, the hierarchic, the arranged thing. But reconstructed, the church had another movement, figures as large as to be contradictory to the giantism of the iconographic thing—that is men dying, devourd by animals, or witnessing, or fighting. (the plough excluded?).

[in left margin] The thing or things I'm after is to chase down the celtic and germanic art—there's lots in Spain—hinterlands of 500 BC-500 AD—with Sythian overtones.

The important thing for me is in these "masterpieces" just that, that they are masters to me in learning the art; and that now I begin to see that they are a comfort too, because I read in them that there have been others who would have been makers. It's not the only human appetite, certainly not a universal or very common human appetite, but we've got it, thee and me and our small company; and as surely as men have handed down the "secret" of fire, or of how to work the soil, this how to work the life or the living is handed down. Well, what I have in mind is that that hand to avert and to produce as it signs, signs also a benediction, and that the benediction I feel is the maker-to-maker (and since they were enthroning, the King is a Maker). There's a Hell of a lot of art that doesnt bless like this, that curses the sights out of the initiate, or that even thinks of itself, of making as a sin. There are periods when all trace of the "brotherhood" seems lost. And then

you have things like the way the Brontes thought out the structure of the novel, and the great fraternity of novelists in the 19th century (and extending thru Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, in the 20th)—Or there's the other certainty of being able to read thru from Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau to the Jameses and to Dewey with a continuity. Or there's Yeats at his seance table calling up Swift and Blake; or Joyce, likewise, these Irish, calling up Vico and Bruno and Dr. Levy-Bruhl—for a conversation.

Without a feeling of his craft brotherhood, and recognition of his masters, a man falls away from an art unless driven thereto mightily. But I have already seen painters and poets dwindle away into professors and magazine editors, or run away from their arts, precisely because they were *theirs.*

All this—with the interruption in which I was deep in a summer cold, lying in a sweat and taking some cure in reading again Cantos 85, 86, 87 and realizing that some of these ideograms are coming into my language. Then a friend from Berkeley sends a clipping from the E. P. Newsletter with note that in the next issue they will have letters for his 70th birthday & would I send some.[28] But I've a question as to whether the Newsletter is the appropriate place and time; I think I would rather send directly to him myself.

Rumaker's stuff arrived; and I'm a bit uninformed as to what exactly I am to do. In what form to send an o.k. as examiner, I mean; because I don't see why not that. But then, as I shall be writing Bob and at more length—these pieces give me a slim idea of his mind. Isn't there something more important than the O.K. for graduating or passing or whatever? There's the does he know the first thing, or his first thing about his art? I'd want to know what he thought writing was about, as well as who did he think did it well enough to be his particular masters. And then too, if he thought something was happening or needed to be happening in this short story form; and if not, why write etc.

yrs. etc.
Duncan

[San Francisco]
June 4 1957

Dear Charles/ I am still of the mind I was when—now it seems so long ago—I got your telegram re. my "selecting" your poems for the Grove ms. Said mind being: that the event here lies in your own proposition. I am among your most ardent readers i.e. am "sent" forward toward necessity by each made thing poem you show forth. And this *book* idea is, as I see it, potentially a proposition in itself, can be demanding beyond its parts. I need the sending forth that you might present in imagining the book.

This is certainly my own struggle here—first typing up all the mss for poems which as yet have not seen book publication—then seeing that the solid core here is not a "selection" but contains potentialities of a book: that is another in the series of my own proposals. As I see it—in a book the poet can place there poems from their own place—where into a new "arrangement," make a place calld book from which, out of and into which is the before unrealized event. [Critics for instance see the author as some particular world-man in each book: and when an author like Patchen or Rexroth devotes all or a major part of the use of a book to *identity,* tries that is to be Mr. *The* World Man—we get a sameness thru voiding the intensity of the event.] [Patchen finally in becoming a general world-man reaches Hurray For Anything or Everything in which identity-stereotype—vacuity-idiocy (viz Greek root) are united.]

But (and with such economy of language as Mondrian uses) if poet is not using the act of making poem or book in order to make "identity"—a who I am—then they might, primarily, be events in themselves. . . .

Well, and it's this Event of a possible book of yours that is the flower that I keep watching this green plant for. Don't we break into freaks of foliage and lures of root stem stamen and petal, don't the words send up aromas and tremblings and colors, at the very hope that there another blossoming joins on? That it is the Season! It's our natural generosity toward the life that will thrive on our having enterd life even for a moment.

It's not much blossoming thats going on around here to give me any whiff of my own species. And as I'm no self fertilizing bush I grow lonely, looking far forward to *Measure* to supply evidences. Hovering over Whitehead's *Process and Reality,* which yields, where it yields at all, excitations of "greym altar." That the torpid stuff of the brain acknowledge the green tips of the fingers. I need exercise right now of the virtue of dwelling in the palm of the hand. To be a flatness upon table—or here to dwell in the cramp—pinch of fingers on pen writes ("I'm all the way down to and including the pen to feel the paper at the tip").

[And as this feeling extends to the green edge of saying,
: states a mark : as a station]

I don't feel either a "tradition" (as viz. Eliot or E.P. do) nor a personal, ¿personified? intensity, an "individuality" (as viz Lawrence or Joyce) adequate. Reading Joyce's *Letters* I notice him searching, in the form of reading and coercing reviewers, for where was any reaction to his work. Just beyond that feeling, is there any response? is another feeling of a nonindividual significance to the act. The poem, book, thing made after all states more about "making" than it does about any idiotus. The beautiful thing for me is that I can take these certain uses of language, concrete in poems, as my own uses. I can, in a sense, have written *Maximus,* as much as I wrote "The Venice Poem"—The idea perhaps contained in my habitual confusion between writing and reading. Saying I wrote so-and-so for I read so-and-so.

Vanzetti wanted a voluntary community.[29] There is one in this elective correspondence. As, I take it, if you mistakenly address a poem to X, it is not the same thing as writing a poem that reaches X.

In less than a month now, by July 1, I will be released to no sure income, but no inappropriate allegiances [as Poetry Center offerd no sinecure without sin]. I want to begin my book on *Poetics*—The time (my time) is ripe. And the beat quickens at the thot of breaking up into a movement my rudimentary grasp of the "essay"—

Fondest thots thru these months of dogwood and trilium (trillium) and for both of us to get at least one flower to fill the nite air.

Love
Robert

[Stinson Beach]
February 7, 1959

Dear Charles/ Enclosed is Master Copy of the third set of *The Field* (in which the title appears there for the first time, and there have still been adjustments of the text to get the structure of statement I want). It's also the first set that is done after all fifty poems were finishd. The first two (to Denise and Creeley) went off with 48, 49 and 50 still to be added. Each set with 3 carbons, and after five sets I'll have distributed 20 copies : I figure if I have twenty readers that's a good beginning.

To be independent of publishers! I'm going thru the business now with Ferlinghetti : when he askd for a "Selected Poems" he was all agreement

with my proviso that I would set a minimum text in which contents there would be no change [of 72 pages] and indicate a maximum text in case he could afford a larger book. Since the text has been finishd [a month ago] he is enthusiastic but still writes: "isn't there anything you could use since 1950? Think it over." This after my most adamant, short of threatening resistance on behalf of the integrity of the contents. As stands *The Selected Poems (1942-1950)*—but Ferlinghetti don't want to have them dates—is a solid necessary item, it brings into print poems that were not in volumes before, shows by selection in *Medieval Scenes* and by returning to primary manuscript for text my critical estimate here, and includes in its entirety "The Venice Poem." I've to set my jaw and my temper until I see it done. [author's decoration] And J. Williams who stuck me in the first place with $14 freight costs (C.O.D.) on the limited edition of *LETTERS*; and now that I've got the first group of books finishd (which means end paper drawings (2 each volume) and on the special limiteds colord ink paintings and notified him there is he won't send postage to have them sent to him!!! I had canceld the $14 paid out by ordering a copy of the limited edition and taking the rest in credit toward the next *Maximus*. To top it all none of the subscribers to the regular edition have received their copies. I've supplied them all from my own lot.

Adding to this my disgust with Evergreen-Grove gang, and the result is this here plan for typescript distribution.

This is probably my morning coffee temper and I've got to nurse this grievance in order to keep it with me.

Is it not to be found a) a publisher who will keep the integrity of the book. [no trouble there with Jonathan] and b) will match the care the author has taken in his end of the deal in production [care of costs and price] and distribution! Well, Ferling has the b) down pat, and offers a clear contract to keep the book in print, etc, with 8% royalties on the first edition, 9% on the second and 10% upwards [The book at $1]

Jess's show at Gumps elicited only one sale [and now we find we have to wait until the end of the month to be paid], a round of critic's fusillade all the way from one oaf's "dubious mysticism" and "lugubrious color" thru another who reprovd the tendency to illustration [all the paintings were accompanied by texts from Goethe, MacDonald, Mallarmé, Dostovevsky, Hawthorne etc.], and a couple of guarded acclaims as a Romantic painter in the 20th century. It's the visual legend Jess has been striving for; and that the eye can see the Other that the word waits upon. Goya of the black house and Bosch away among the Masters of this art. A return of the iconographic in an all but fanatically iconoclastic period: especially if one takes into

account that much that is representational is iconoclastic; and that the non-representational is not necessary agin' ikon.

We are both bearded. Jess has initiated the move when he was reading a life of George MacDonald and was won in part by the romance-doctrine of the natural man [the lion with sun-mane] rays of my beard, and in part I think by the determination needed in the first half of the 19th century to have a beard against public proprieties. Ebbe Borregaard told me he was persuaded to his beard by the doctrine of natural man out of D.H. Lawrence.

On my part the beard celebrates a *rite de passage* of my fortieth year [Jan. 7, 1959], having come to that celebrated forest "nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita. . .per una selva oscura" that in Dante's day was 35 yrs. surely in ours is 40, we being more prolongd and postponed in our resolution and search for the goods.[30] Having no more than our statement of resolve. And what an eye-opener it be when a poet he do set down to listing 1., 2., 3., 4., 5, them gods, even with an old Chinese model, as E.P. he do. And gets at beats *Food is the root, Feed the people.* Which has memorable rime.

Now that *The Field* is done [and there's 6 years come to one effort; a continuity of structure twixt *LETTERS* and *THE FIELD]*, I am restless to break the hold of this way of working language, the anticipation and recuperation interlocking of elements. And to strive for serial time, an axis of form in the immediate solidity that asks no reference. And do away with that *that* and the *it is* and see what me mind is forced to.

P'haps some of the activity of line has been transferrd from activity of them verbs. Keeping a consistent equation [equilibrium] of activity to structure. But for my taste (appetite) whetted by this work I have done both *LETTERS* and *THE FIELD* seem too rigid, constrained in measure [I wld. seem unable to let go of them reins] and not rough enuf to be beautiful. At least, this reader is feeling the accomplishment of control thruout, of *performance*, has in his recognition that he knows his business in this verse making the further longing for a new inability. There's a lovely quote from Valery who god knows ought to have known clear thru how over-finished one's hand at the game can come to be: "an explosive incapacity that surpasses the *necessary* and *sufficient* capacity."[31] Well, damn his frenchy literary neatness—he's using that phrase to distinguish poetry (and the metaphor specifically) from prose: when that pushing the language to an explosive incapacity is the crux of writing at all. . . . where it gets wired up for sound, heat and light.

Is there any route for some responsible party to take over the financial management of *MEASURE*, and to get Wieners back into operation. He's a first rate editor among the new generation [he don't gang up like Ginsberg and crowd; but goes after a text?] Richard Duerden's got a printing press here and is at work on an issue of new mag *FOOT*, with the Pindar Poem

for ballast.[32] *The Big Table* I'll leave to Ginsberg and gang.[33] Carroll forwarded a request for material to Spicer and me thru McClure : but as I get it the effect of Ginsberg's campaign is as damaging to the cause of a sound concept of what a poem is as is the academe's literature.

Where the conventional and the unconventional are one force [Ginsberg supplying what most English professors believe would happen if you kicked over the traces].

vs. FORM, critical structure. I'd be out of place at that *Big Table* talking about the law I love while the pariah generation shootz the joy-juice into their frantic nerves and stands on their hands for the daily press.[34]

love
Robert

[San Francisco]
February 6/[19]60

Dear Charles,

I've kept yr at Jesus-time by, with the strongest things there NECESSITIES of the Soul and then "my own soul has been bereft" and even "all these years"

with that *in*, *of* and *for* the Kosmos

rites of aggregation you had in line of insistence when you were here : your "not only but also. . ." which allowd a net to form in place of the old teeter-totter, allowd "not only the teeter-totter but also. . .and also etc."

And am ready now to write as I want to—for I'm in the midst of a poem again, projecting a construct of five sections that allows me to come alive, with the nodes—nodes of illumination for the course of the making.

"I was offering the right stuff"
and [in the enclosed pome]
"flames of beauty on old stuff rage"[35]

Well, for me there's first the elemental life—what your ancients meant by "elements" and settled finally as earth air water and fire. There seems to be only an atomic reality in the table of elements—there's the thing we know more about now, then, the atomic reality /and the old thing, the elemental life. Harvey's *Circulation of the Blood* or Paracelsus's the Doctrine of

Correspondences and the Alchemie have to do with the elemental life and sees man as an elemental being.

And doesn't the adventure into the Kosmos[36]—the atomic reality make man *not the center*—This is anyway my dissatisfaction, some times an outrage at the Jungian concept of *integration* and of a *mandala* view of the universe. It literally circumscribes the spirit from much of what it already *knows*.

Where your Whitehead—that now translates into my Whitehead—where we are *events*; and that "we" may be extended as a sum of a progression of imagined *events*:

atomic — within which is the borderlines of the unobservable the uncertainty principle where time or place are *void*—where there can be no observable flux

elemental — it's here that I return often via the cults of the elements; that we were born out of the Sun; and are so much of water we are shaped by the moon and the planet orders; and to elemental powers and their attendants; fairies, nixies, goblins etc.
[Asclepius advised in dreams walking barefoot on the earth]—

But as we realize that on Mars, Venus or planets even nearer our own in composition—*at the elemental level*—man can not be a *forma maxima* but node among nodes [and among mammals I find it difficult to think of man as a *mammalia maxima*, for he is clearly a contemporary instance or possibility (actual) of what a mammal can be along with elefunts and rats.] And this is still the elemental world for as long as we think of life on Venus or Mars or in the system of Betelgeuse we are still thinking of elements and how life will or might appear in different compositions (alchemical universes)—and beyond that the Kosmic [in *Process and Reality* Whitehead speaks of our particular Kosmos as atomic; and doesn't he open the imagination then beyond Nicholas of Casa's plurality of worlds to a plurality of Kosmos.][37] It's what I meant in "Structure of Rime" by the stars going out to enter a new universe. There is anyway in Whitehead's scheme an unknowable unknown. And when I work in a poem, the order of the poem arises from two relations.

a. a universe—your everything can be known—that a whole poem is a whole poem, as we are at any moment a whole event

b. a kosmos or order or harmony, that includes a void, and *cannot possibly be a wholeness,* but is a mathematical incomplete [our own versions of harmony, our own scales, are always incomplete and what had been dis-cord is being added]

Don't we like the cosmos throw out melodic lines from ourselves (nets) that mean entering a new universe? And whose spirits must be bereft for the Kosmos is, Mrs. Patchitt-Wildebeest says of Faust Foutu: "The peril of souls?"[38]

I find that *soul* seems to me a thing of the visceral
elemental aspect. It's one node, one event: atomically, there's a body or substance as an aggregate of atomic events.
Elementally there's the soul
and Kosmicly what we call spirit=breath/but these are not three persons or three beings but three appearances of a node that might well be a plurality of appearances.

What we are that is a Kosmic event I can't think of as a *soul* for my soul appears to me as a man. My *spirit*, my "I" can appear as a planet or number or a bird.
Not *any* planet or number or bird. In my magic my "I" cannot be anything but that "I", might have an elemental universe with Charles Olson (by sympathy) (has what I call kindred soulship) but spiritually is a node, a Note in an harmonic order or net that is bereft, includes a void, ie, in some parts of which were it a whole "I" would be excluded.

Heraklitus:

XLVII The invisible attunement is better than the visible[39]

LIX Couples are whole and not wholes; what agrees disagrees, the concordant is discordant[40]

And his observation you put here as man is estranged from what is most familiar

It seems to me that the "peril" and yr. admission [that one is living in the presence of a larger life FACT (PRAXIS)[41]

DESIRE] are one with those apprehensions of "love"—in peril

of such simple rites
as the tying of knots,
or threads interwoven
to show design in lives
and what do we imitate
where we must cut,

knots the thread for love—

I know it *is* for something missing that the line of the poem goes out and must refer to

Love,
Robert

postscript

Yrs of February 4 received this morning and I reply at least to say YES and that if I get that minimum of sending copy of first essay at the MAXIMUS—as I hope I might—I'd have to let go at giving some 'literary' account of it, and in turn some poetics of what this thing literature is viz. the MAXIMUS. But the challenge anyway to give some definition to my admiration etc. whets my appetite.

love. etc
R.D.

[PS]
Did you send complete file of BMR to William Roth
100 Spencer St.
Sausalito, California
I will see him in two weeks or so, so I want to go on with the possibility that he might aid BMR and MEASURE.

[San Francisco]
March 9/ 63

Dear Charles,

Some time sequences that I've just begun to see in articulating the story of my "H.D. Book." Pose first that each our "spirit" and "consciousness" is born within (takes its form, using as a material—) the egg or surrounding of the human hive itself. Then phases of history will

have a distinctive "tone" in which we may ourselves be defined or to which we belong.

1—There is a difference in type between Gertrude Stein (b 1872) and the "Imagist" generation (b. 1883 Williams) to 1888 (Eliot the youngest you could be and still be an "Imagist"))—that marks within a decade an historical shift. [i.e. Stein belongs to the naturalistic or realistic psychology of the sentence—still related to Henry James]—no gods, no luminous extase—states—no "vision"—

2. This "Imagist" thing has its childhood between (taking the age 10 as ultimate limit of "child") between 1885-6 (at which point we imagine Williams no longer a "baby" but entering the learnd realm of walking and talking) and 1890 (at which point Eliot learns walking and talking). And its boyhood or girlhood between—no, I see what I've missed here. Let me graph it and the gist will be surer. You'll see what I see. Graph of "conception" (i.e. the world-tone in which the parents of the given poet were "conceiving" the child—I use rather than "fucking" because this fucking also involves unconscious *concept)*

babyhood (i.e. the world-tone in which the poet is nursed, surrounded by the language of his nurses which is here his "food" and not his own instrument)

childhood (first initiation : learning to walk and talk)

boyhood-girlhood (development in delayed sexual consciousness : not the same as sexual unconsciousness—but I am busted here. It is development in delayed sexual permission).

Manhood-womanhood (the individual creative identity. Stein in *The Making of Americans* observd that Americans were often twenty-eight before they knew what they were doing. That which I remember because I was that age when I wrote *Medieval Scenes* which is the first point at which I *knew.* [As I was thirty before I knew how to do what I knew I was doing.] But here is what I saw more simply—given that there was a creative wave "before the War"—in which the Imagists came into their manhood and womanhood: and the impetus of that wave was towards a world-mind or world-poem.

1882 (Joyce conceived born)	germinal
1883 (Williams conceived born)	time area
1885 (Ezra conceived born)	#1
1886 (H.D. conceived born)	1882-1888
1888 (Eliot conceived born)	

[which may be taken as a germinal not only to the "Imagists" but to the *First World War?]*

Time map #2 1902-1914 "the pre-War Era" in the world-consciousness of this period the particular type of poem was germinating of "the poem incorporating history"), a syncretic world-poem where locality and field are crucial. Time & space.

The Cantos	(begun 1912?)	World War
The Waste Land	(perpheral-1921)	1
Ulysses	(begun circa 1914)	
Finnegans Wake	(1920—1938)	post-War and Depression
The War Trilogy	(1942-1944)	World War
Pisan Cantos	(1945)	2
Paterson	(1945-1958)	[now it is clear that a long state of War has set it]
Maximus	(1951?—the first *Origin*)	

But why, how did *Maximus* come into this type series?

Born in 1910, sd. Charles Olson was conceived, born, and nursed; but also initiated into childhood—learned to walk and talk "before the war" the last possible member of a creative family that we now sketch as having its time from 1882-1914 : and its *type* in the poem that organizes time and space to "include history," where the line is conceived of as "free" and the spirit can move freely in time and space.

[Where, when I include time and space I compose symphonically and by theme. I seem to have no vital impulse for "free" movement.]

But *Maximus* is not only like the world-poem it is also the first of a different type. i.e. Maximus as closely related to *The Distances*.

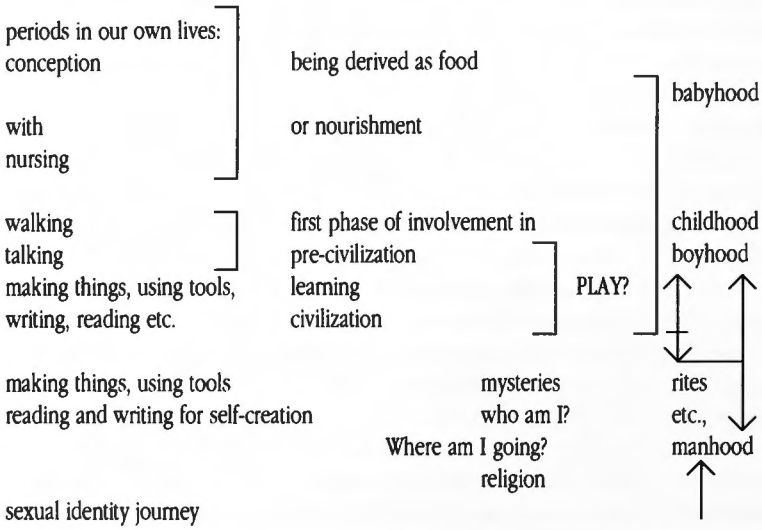
There is another time area I get—the area 1919-1929 post War, pre-Depression.

O.K. You	1910-1914	"pre-war"
	1914-1918	FIRST WORLD WAR
me	1919-1929	the "illusion" of peace
and ↓		
Denise Levertov		prosperity
Creeley	1930-1940	the disillusion of depression and war-preparation

1940-1945	SECOND WORLD WAR
1945—on	the state of war economy with the idea of world destruction

Creeley is the youngest one could have been to have been a "child" in the 1919-1929 period. Born in 1926 he was conceived, born, nursed, and then learned to walk and talk in this period.
You were the oldest one could have been (a boy of 9 to 10) to have also a child in the period 1919-1929.

A picture of how we do have our own tribal initiations and correlating these successive "lives" with phases in the larger commune—how these "lives" have character.



I'm not concernd here with development but with a gauge for reading evidence of what is going on in the human conglomerate and in the individual.

Lorca, for instance, learned to talk when he was four.
The eldest I've heard of 'em being nursed,

Yrs etc.
Robert
mit love.
spring
times

[San Francisco]
June 29 [19]64

Dear Charles, From the library three days ago Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* which has come for reading at a time ripe for it. The 1926 dream in which he is informed that he is "caught in the seventeenth century." "Resignedly I thought, 'Well, that's that! But what is there to do about it? Now we shall be caught for years.' [42] Then the consoling thought came to me : 'Someday, years from now, I shall get out again'." He came to see the dream as referring to his life-long—"condemned" he calls it—necessity to study alchemy.

In Africa an English squatter tells him: (1925) "You know, mister, this here country is not man's country, it's God's country. So if anything should happen, just sit down and don't worry." Which would mean take it easy, yes, but also mean don't worry about it, but attend.

His marriage in 1926 may have, must have, closed in on him, closing him "in the seventeenth century," his "life" having so arrived at an enclosure. Jung seems to believe the *Unconscious* so much a thing in itself that he never reflects upon *correspondences;* so no account of what happens in the dream as it happens in sexual life, or in household life, tho he does see how it happens in *work.* But here he registers "getting out again" in relation to his marriage : "After my wife's death in 1955, I felt an inner obligation to become what I myself am. To put it in the language of the Bollingen house, I suddenly realized that the small central section which crouched so low, so hidden, was myself!" This central section he does not relate to his 1926 dream, but it was added along with the 'paternal' tower in 1927.

The whole chapter "The Tower," or "the language of the Bollingen house" as he calls it wins me completely to him. Here, at last, in the building he is making something—"space for the spaceless kingdom of the world's and the psyche's hinterland" he names it again. A language! A space! Or time for the seventeenth century to get moving in?

With "Passages 8" my own yearning for a house, *the* house (and I got it at the time, the 6th of this month as "a house for my spirit, to house my spirit"—. Something different from home). Where the "Passages 1" propose a nomadic house. [As surely I remember there your "having a home in movement"—these quotes again just my memory of it in those Proprioception essays, as I've appropriated it]. The architect being the Father having that further reality for me that my father was an architect (as my blood-father listed as "day-laborer" in Oakland City Directories of the 1920s may, I can interpret, have been a building-laborer).

Water was primary for Jung, his first thought in thinking of the place. It's light that comes first for me, the day at the window. And then the rain at the window. The night and the star at the window.

As now, the day at the window is the grey glare of summer fog, a corner by the window at the round kitchen table. A clearing in which to work. This writing to you, Charles, came as an inner imperative, an appointment with you for communication's sake. So that today when I was ready for it, the worrying was gone, as if it were the beastly alternative to my attendance. Goaded, driven, herded by what shepherd, but I feel the sheep dog more, only this direction of work going upon freedom. I have to use you as my communicant and have, I realize, to trust that : the contradicting voice, adversary to the work, argues "Why do you think he is interested in that?" "Oh, friend of my free spirit," today I answer easily, "and wherever I go towards what I have to do I go towards him."

I remember your sense of being caught in this period of having to, committing yourself to "profess" is it that the professor, professional does—and Denise writes: "the fact is I *don't* feel my life as a poet is threatened, *even though* I *worry* so about these publishing-type things I've gotten mixed up in. God knows I didn't seek them out, they came at me. I could have said no, it's true : but I have a compulsion to meet the challenges. *For every such thing I've turned down, in the last 2 years, 2 others have sprung up—like dragon's teeth.* . . .At the same time I feel, here & now, creative and alive, not drained by extraneous concerns. The only trouble is, one can't just say 'Well, if at any time it gets to be too much, I will just drop it—because one involves the hopes of so many others more & more as one goes on : like the *Nation*; I can't quit suddenly, ever, but must I if I decide to quit plan months & months ahead so as to see into print all accepted poems first."[43]

And the same week (June 24) Bob writes: "In one sense I seem again to be putting various jobs in front of me, rather than tackle those I clearly have now. . . ."[44] Where I have balked, avoided, worryd, this inner commitment Charles's Friday letter (this "Friday" being a Monday). "Your" tune does not arrive on such a "Friday" schedule; there are times in which writing-to-you starts in my soul, a voice dictating in my thought, and I've let it go, disobeyed. The first command I have circumvented—*was* to write on Fridays. Now I would follow what obedience I can and these two imperatives come to the one proposed.

That opening chapter of the *Analects* returns to mind. Where the two components of a house: 1 the effort, the study

the wings exercised gathering in one
learning to fly co-ordination

the study

which I get from Legge (carrying a burden)
the rapid and repeated
effort of the wings of a
bird. . .

and 2. friends : "properly *fellow students*;"
Legge notes "but, generally, individuals of the same class. . . .
like minded."

the
guest coming from distant quarters!
room[45]

From my distant quarters I would come to you anyway, Charles, and in this same communication exercise wings in the flight. As somehow, along with the H.D. book I have committed myself to complete (the building of a house), I am abroad in another poetry—the whole open proposition of these passages. The title "Passages" will certainly be the next book. And these passages now numbered as if in a sequence I may title individually, to lift them as free as I can from the idea of consequence, the consecutive, that numbering gives.

The task Denise has taken is that she is *the* [not *a*] editor of a new venture to publish poetry at Norton (whose only previous poet, I think, is Rilke). Four books a year, and the possibility of (responsibility of) getting young poets into regular publishing.

Creeley's big one now is the proposed *Reader* of your work at New Directions.

I've already got a first letter to him in response to his query—urging "La Préface" from *Y&X* (for the definition there of open parentheses), "The K" (for the coordination there of life-time, inheritance, and the full circle/tide); and the beginnings of mapping out my own trek thru your works, as preparatory to that "Préface" I was some six months at it reading.

Love
Robert

[San Francisco]
Dec. 18/[19]69

Dear Charles, It was a great disappointment to miss seeing you which was a happy expectation for me as far as the Austin congregation went.[46] Well, Zuk was in fine, even amazing form, and Bob did beautifully. The conference was one of the very best. And meeting Octavio Paz was for me the beginning I hope of a friendship.

This has been a lean year for me as far as poems go. Not that I don't feel the things stir in me, urging and urging. But I've also got a store of refusal. And I think I see what it (the refusal) wants. Towards which, a transition of some kind, but also what thinking of the lives of poets I have seen as a doldrums of the fifties, I have begun keeping dreams, fragments if that be all, and going into my private counsels. I have the idea that I might bring myself to the discipline of the dream as actual [where Norman O Brown, who in yesterday morning's dream was howling and trying to get me to admit that conscience was the matter of a knife and a sheep and what every man says and does with that and knowing that and howling with it, is Normal O Brown]. So much so that seeing the late afternoon papers yesterday about a girl's coat MISSING GIRL'S COAT found in Santa Cruz, I thot that's what he was telling me about! _____

The actual and literal dream, and whatever analyses—the dream's analyses.

This not with the sense that the pump will be primed, or the primal pumpt—but with the sense that biologically I might tune in on the function of this entering into the body of old age. I am convinced it is a counterpart of adolescent years, the embodying of something: what we call *age*. Surely how much now science wants to *prevent* aging, after blowing up the works the leading humanistic wish, the dread of ages shld. give a warning of how important a stage of being it is we are persuaded to avoid.

I had begun several months ago to work on translations (it was the only way to read the stuff, Leishman's "translations" dont translate anything—he aims at "style" and throws structure and content away with contempt) of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte*, getting thru the first seven that week or so of going at it[47]. This period is Rilke's push to take the form of the poem to be a hive into which the content is stored (well, at least not as honey alone, but content as wax) I work against my distrust and distastes for the presumptions but in the faith that even in this perversity Rilke is too primal a poet to be only "winning" thru the struggle. Reading old notebooks, preparing them for deposit at U.C., I realized that it had been Rilke's inspiration and direct instruction for the *Duino Elegies* which had implanted the commandment "not to rewrite." The imperative could only have come on that strong with a man who had gone into some depth of forcing conventional (convenient) form to its crisis.

Charles, one of the questions I would have had you been in Austin would have been to pin down the rumors that the new Maximus volume with its blank pages frequently—which *could* be taken as spawnings or tunings—and since the form is always *present* happening, as I get it, in that presence—the lapse is not a defect from *form* or meaning.

But, if you would—(and I know very well indeed how for me it needs the right moment now to get a letter going) could you tell me if there is a defect in the edition: i.e., what blank pages shld occur? I'll write off to the publishers anyway on this, Charles, but right now I *am* writing to you. And it's been months and I've not got a letter off to Barry Hall.[48]. . .

I'fn I didn't write hot off that first week when I got my Maximus from *The Tenth Muse,*[49] and it wont hurt to write from rereadings later, it is a beautiful music for these here ears, and a music that is thruout, a melody of ideas (as vision we hear must be).

A recent rear-view of *Bending the Bow* seeks to wield as a club over me pretentious head the admonitions of your "*Against Wisdom As Such*" with the puzzling assumption that I could use, abuse and present as a ruse the same without heeding them.[50]

Our best wishes for this coming year. Your health and work is still very much of what a new "year" is for us.

Love
Robert

Notes

1 This letter was published in *Origin,* 1st ser., no. 12 (Spring 1954): 210-211 and is reprinted from there.

2 The references are to *In Cold Hell, in Thicket,* published as *Origin,* 1st ser., no. 8 (1953), *The Maximus Poems 1-10* (Stuttgart, West Germany: Jonathan Williams Publisher, 1953), published as Jargon 7, and to Kenneth Patchen (1911-1972), American poet and artist. His volume, *Fables and Other Little Tales* (Karlsruhe, West Germany: Jonathan Williams Publisher, 1953), appeared as Jargon 6.

3 RD quotes the following poems by CO, in the order of appearance: "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You," "Maximus, to Gloucester," "Letter 6," "Letter 7," "Tyrian Business."

4 *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States with A Life of the Author.* 7 vols., Charles Francis Adams, ed. (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969) 2: 23. The quotation is taken from a diary entry for July 21, 1756: "I will rouse up my mind and fix my attention; I will stand collected within myself, and think upon what I read and what I see: I will strive, with all my soul, to be something more than persons who have had less advantage than myself."

5 Reference to John Hamilton Edwards and William W. Vasse, *Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957)

6 Breton, André (1896-1966) French poet and artist; Tristan Tzara (1896-1963) French Dadaist writer; René Magritte (1898-1967) Belgian surrealist painter; Benjamin Péret (1899-1959) French surrealist writer.

7 Reference to Mme Curie in William Carlos Williams's *Paterson, Book 4,* "Section II".

8 Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903) and the second edition of her *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927) were the books RD and CO read and used. The first volume of Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press) appeared in 1953, while the remaining two volumes appeared in 1955 and 1957

9 Clifford Hugh Douglas (1879-1952) was the spokesman of the economic theory of "social credit." Ezra Pound reviewed his major work *Economic Democracy* (London: C. Palmer, 1920) in the *Little Review*, 6 no. 2 (April 1920): 39-42. See Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971):301-317.

10 The reference is CO's poem "Letter 3"

11 Gertrude Stein "Capitals, Capitals," *This Quarter* no. 1 (Summer 1925):16. Reprinted in *New Music* no. 3 (April 1947): 3-34 with music by Virgil Thompson.

12 CO, "Against Wisdom As Such," *Black Mountain Review*, 1 no. 1 (Spring 1954): 35-39. Quoted later in this letter.

13 RD, "Pages from a Notebook," *Artist's View*, no. 5 (July 1953): 2-4.

14 Martin Seymour-Smith, "Where is Mr Roethke," *Black Mountain Review* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1954):40-47. This piece is a review of Roethke's new book, *The Waking*.

15 The references are to work which appeared in *Black Mountain Review* 1 no. 1 (Spring 1954). CO, "On First Looking Out of La Cosa's Eyes:" 3-7; CO "Against Wisdom as Such:" 35-39; Robert Hellman, "The Quay:" 8-17; Irving Layton, "Lacquered Westmount Doll:" 19; Paul Blackburn, "The Search" and "The Assistance:" 20-21; René Laubiès, "Eight Reproductions:" 25-32; Larry Eigner "A Fête:" 33; William Bronk, "Round The Year Jazz:" 34; CO [review]" *Captain John Smith, His Life and Legend*, by Bradford Smith; Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1953; 54-57; Cid Corman [review] "*W.B. Yeats and Sturge Moore, Their Correspondence 1901-1937*," edited by Ursula Bridge; Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London 1953; 48-51. A[Robert]. M[Creeley]. reviewed *Contact* (An International Magazine of Poetry), *Cerberus* by Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, Raymond Souster, *Twenty-four Poems* by Louis Dudek, *The Black Huntsman* and *Love the Conqueror Worm* by Irving Layton, and *Canadian Poems* 1850–1952: 51–54. M[Martin]. S[Seymour Smith]. reviewed Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934–53:* 57–58. L[Larry]. E[Eigner]. reviewed John Steinbeck, *East of Eden:* 59–63.

16 Josephine Miles (1911-1990) California poet who for many years taught at the University of California at Berkeley. She was a cripple.

17 Wallace Stevens died 2 August 1955.

18 Keres, malignant spirits, bringers of all sorts of evil.

19 Museu d'Art de Catalunya.

20 Ibiza. One of the Balaeric islands, located in the western Mediterranean, 50 miles southwest of Mallorca. In ancient times the islands was inhabited by the Phoenicians and Carthaginians.

21 San Roman de la Bons: The fresco described here is from the Apse of St. Clement De Tahull, dated circa 1123. *Ergo sum lux mundi* appears in the pages of the book in Christ's left hand, while the symbols A & W appear on either side of his head.

22 A corner of the page containing the missing word has been torn off. The first two letters of the word are "pi," suggesting that the word might be "pictures."

23 Lluis Dalmu (1428-1459) Spanish painter whose *The Enthroned Virgin and Child with Counselors* hangs in the Museu d'Art de Catalunya.

24 Stravinsky's *Symphony of Wind Instruments* (1920). The final chorale is the first time Stravinsky's famous coda appears. Manuel de Falla (1876-1946), the Spanish composer, wrote the work for guitar *Homenaje Le tombeau de Claude Debussy* in 1920.

25 *Anecdotes of the Late War.* Published as Jargon Broadside 1. Highlands, N.C.: Jonathan Williams Publisher, 1955.

26 E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and The Irrational* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1951.

27 The reference is to "Letter 6" of *The Maximus Poems.*

28 *The Pound Newsletter,* no. 7 (July 1955) had a note attached to it which announced that the October issue would contain pieces in celebration of Pound's 70th birthday. "Readers of the *Newsletter* who wish to add their voices to this collective celebration are cordially invited to send contributions, the forms of which may be of their own choosing."

29 RD owned and read *The Letters of Sacco & Vanzetti,* eds Marion Denman Frankfurter and Garden Jackson (New York: Vanguard Press, 1930).

30 The reference here is to the first line of Dante's Inferno. RD later published a poem with the title "Nel Mezzo Del Cammin Di Nostra Vita," which was collected in *Roots and Branches* (1964).

31 Paul Valery, "A Poet's Notebook," in *The Art of Poetry,* trans. Denise Folliot vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valery.* (New York: The Bollingen Foundation/Pantheon Books, 1958): 177. The full passage reads as follows: "Metaphor, for example, marks in its naive principle a grouping, a hesitation between several different expressions of on one thought, an explosive incapacity that surpasses the *necessary* and *sufficient* capacity. Once one has gone over and made the thought rigorously precise, restricted it to a single object, then the metaphor will be effaced, and prose will appear."

32 Richard Duerden, San Francisco poet. Issues No. 1 and No. 2 of his magazine *Foot* appeared in 1961 and 1962; issues No. 3 thru No. 7 appeared between 1977 and 1979. RD's drawing of a foot appeared on the cover of the first issue, and then again on the cover of the third issue.

33 Five issues of the little magazine *Big Table* appeared in 1959 and 1960. The first issue, edited by Irving Rosenthal, featured Jack Kerouac's "Old Angel Midnight" and a section from William Burroughs "Naked Lunch," while the remaining issues were edited by Paul Carroll. RD resisted the association with Beat writers, which were featured in the first two issues, but his poems did appear in issues No. 3, No. 4, and No. 5 when the editorial policy permitted the inclusion a variety of poems.

34 RD is referring to his own poem "The Law I Love is Major Mover," first published in *Ark II/Moby I* (1956/1957): 12.

35 The reference is to RD's poem "Apprehensions."

36 In CO's hand in right margin: "portentous, primordial, universal, transcendent."

37 Nicholas of Casa (1401-1464). Cardinal, mathematician, scholar, experimental scientist, philosopher, who stressed the incomplete nature of man's knowledge of God and the universe. His principal work is *De Docto Ignorantia.*

38 In CO's hand at right margin: "confusion of novel with void a discord. seems backward overleap 'outward' star-worlds and is space-hung doesn't give time as function its "novelty' no eternity! all infinity-pseudo flow. Miscegenation! & notes—also space!—object."

39 In CO's hand at right: "Verdad Life which shows itself" Whitman."

40 RD is citing from G.S. Kirk, Heraclitus, *The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954).

41 CO's hand at right: "beautiful."

42 C. G. Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections,* ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).

43 The letter of Denise Levertov to RD is dated 20 June 1964.

44 The letter of Robert Creeley to RD is dated 24 June 1964.

45 *The Four Books: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, and The Works of Mencius,* trans. James Legge (Shanghai, China: The Chinese Book Company, 1933).

46 International Poetry Festival held at the University of Texas, Austin, November 17-22, 1969. Robert Creeley replaced CO.

47 Rainer Maria Rilke. Neue Gedichte, *New Poems*, trans. and intro. J. B. Lieshman / London: Hogarth Press, 1964).
48 Barry Hall. British poet, co-founder with Thomas Raworth of the Goliard Press (1965—67).
49 Tenth Muse. a bookstore in San Francisco owned by Julia Newman.
50 Harriet Zinnes, "Duncan's One Poem," *Prairie Schooner*, no. 3 (Fall 1969): 317-320.

"THE RECOVERY OF THE PUBLIC WORLD"

A Conference in Honour of the Poetry and Poetics of Robin Blaser
Vancouver, June 1-4, 1995

Poets have repeatedly in this century turned philosophers, so to speak, in order to argue the value of poetry and its practice within the disturbed meanings of our time. These arguments are fascinating because they have everything to do with the poets' sense of reality in which imagery is entangled with thought. Often, they reflect Pound's sense of 'make it new' or the modernist notion that this century and its art are simultaneously the end of something and the beginning of something else, a new consciousness, and so forth. It is not one argument or another for or against tradition, nor is it the complex renewal of the imaginary which our arts witness, for, as I take it, the enlightened mind does not undervalue the imaginary, which is the most striking matter of these poetics; what is laid out before us finally is the fundamental struggle for the nature of the real. And this, in my view, is a spiritual struggle, both philosophical and poetic. Old spiritual forms, along with positivisms and materialisms, which 'held' the real together have come loose. This is a cliché of our recognitions and condition. But we need only look at the energy of the struggle in philosophy and poetry to make it alive and central to our private and public lives.

Robin Blaser, from
"The Violets: Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead"

This conference will honour the occasion of Robin Blaser's seventieth birthday and the recent publication of his major work in poetry to date, *The Holy Forest.* It will address many of the concerns voiced by Robin's work in poetry and prose over nearly fifty years' writing, teaching, speaking and living an evolving poetic thought. There will be six panel sessions, each exploring a realm of this thought; there will be two evenings of readings by poets participating in the conference; and there will be a convivial session, a feast of companions, which will give us an opportunity to speak about the implicate possibilities of an attentive companionship in poetry and life.

The panels: **POETICS, THEORY AND PRACTICE : PAINTING, MUSIC, SCULPTURE, POETRY : HETEROLOGIES : ETHICS AND AESTHETICS : EROS AND POIESIS : TRANSLATION : COMPANIONS (A FEAST).**

To date, some of those who have accepted to participate in "The Recovery of the Public World" include Charles Bernstein, Bruce Boone, George Bowering, Norma Cole, Michael Davidson, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Clayton Eshleman, Brian Fawcett, Susan Howe, Kevin Killian, Michael McClure, Nathaniel Mackey, Daphne Marlatt, Michael Ondaatje, Michael Palmer, Peter Quartermain, Jed Rasula, and Sharon Thesen.

For further information about the conference, including registration information, please write to **"THE RECOVERY OF THE PUBLIC WORLD,"** c/o The Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. Canada V5A 1S6; or fax (604) 291-5788.

LINDSAY HILL

FOUR POEMS

BIRTH

Out it
Automatic
Into the virtual blood-box
Out it through the funnel
Of groin and moan
The primitive pushing out
Another and another
Into the silicon paw
The stress pulse and serum
Video game roulette and novocain
Stress-fix and matrix
Out put it
Into the replica
The strapped on goggle-scape
Strain it out
Muscle it out
Into the geo-digits
The engines
Into the disconnect

MENDELEVIUM

On the periodic table
I'm down in the lower right
One of the new
Unstable ones
I don't have
The abundant certainty of oxygen
Nor the constancy of zinc
I'm closer than the others
To the unraveling edge
Remote from where the early elements
Glow like houses on straight streets
I know the world pivots
Where matter won't stabilize
Humming atomic numbers of no return
I loiter darkly
Asking to choose and asking
How everything touching my face
Becomes a fuse

TERROR PANTOUM

Around her death has been random all her life
Everyone a conscripted straw of history
So in her heart there are no innocents
Certainly the unconcerned are not innocent

Everyone a conscripted straw of history
Inanimate even before the bomb goes off
Certainly the unconcerned are not innocent
And she deplanes in Athens leaving the package behind
Inanimate even before the bomb goes off
Which is to say the subjects have done their final things
And she deplanes in Athens leaving the package behind
With terror the pivotal goes cloaked in the ordinary
Which is to say the subjects have done their final things
When the bomb goes off she is buying a tortoise-shell comb
With terror the pivotal goes cloaked in the ordinary
Her motives seem flat and secured as a folded knife
When the bomb goes off she is buying a tortoise-shell comb
So in her heart there are no innocents
Her motives seem flat and secured as a folded knife
Around her death has been random all her life

INFERNO

One sighs a stream of flame with a word at its end
Another goes altogether in a blast
A word that is oddly cold and without weight follows up
It is not beyond the stress-inoculation of the nerves
To know that these who are on fire have hearts
Consumed in our holdings
As hands themselves are burned
On the ropes of climbing and decline
It is not beyond what we could come to learn

In the bilge-gut and whore-wash of gathering
That these who are on fire
Have hearts
In the brute roulette of grabs
Straightforwardly they are fuels
In the mirror of inferno
One sees a figure on fire and turns away
Convinced it is someone else

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ANDREW JORON

PECULIAR ROOTS HAVE REASON'S EYES

As mineral is changeful
Within the fixity of its lament

Rays raise Earth
To a semblance of waves, to
words out of order

the data invoked
By a dying choir—*There is rage*
in the body's sequences

Neither sense, nor object
But an unfinished ratio

Heard as a curve
continuous with endings
As a vowel is laden

With air's ores, the sky subterranean
To that skin

let weather accelerate
Below the horizon, circumference of
a bell. Sound, divided

From sound, ancient
In its approaches—the rung silences

To be spoken. Any name, to fructify
As the famine of its presence

—lightning's most intricate delay

GUSTAF SOBIN

TWO ODES

SIXTH ODE: THE GROTTOES

is always towards the furthest, and,
  finally, towards the
lost themselves that the senses transit, slip
furtive. that bunched in
muscle, we'd

lusted, it seems, after so
very

little. channels, conduits, the
  secret history—perhaps—of history it-
self, written
in

dark drafts, elusive
scribbles. as if, inadmissible, mass in its
very
densities, were
riddled. and you, nothing more

than this breath
that wedged. tongue that
in-

sinuated.

*

oh eyes so pale, you'd
written, they'd
promised grottoes. oh holy, the
grottoes, the hollows, the weird birds of
our own,
dis-

articulated heart. (what, in
de-

fault, had
been plundered,
re-
lentless).

*

'an earth, but else-
where,' isn't this
what you meant? what you'd say? what the
eyes rising—yes, so pale,
so
impervious—already disclosed? for *here*'s
only here in the vocable's
forced

re-
tention. past, past
ourselves, in our own, sonorous dis-

persions, resonates the
gloriole, the
ring

of things released. the rocks, just
now, as if a-
float
in the puddle of their own shadows, and the
papery, pink blossoms of the
cistus, rife

with light, with the very
light, it would

seem, of some ultimate
ac-
quittance.

*

massed, now,
a-
long the edges, awaited—you'd written—no,
not the barge, the puffed
barge, but the

particle. but the
predicate, be-

fitting.

yes, holy the grottoes, the
hollows, those excavated worlds which
lie, luminous with

sound, there—just
there—past the inviolable lines of
our own
fore-

closures.

SEVENTH ODE: THE RELICS

. . .as if chained
to those clouds—what billowed
against the blind walls of your forehead—sought
losses, didn't you? those elaborate
  excavations in which, unearthing less,
ever lesser, only kept
what you hadn't
found.

                relics, what the
breath, once,
had buried. had enveloped
in so much verbiage, the still-
  drifting digits—nimbi—of the un-
dissociable. would traffic, wouldn't

you, in
those omissions. in that much
empty

imprint. you, living
as you did, towards the very end, at the
earth's

virtual completion, rummaged, didn't
you, a-
mongst those spent
sonorities. there, just there, within
systems so dense, so perfected (their only attributes,
themselves) picked, didn't

you, at that
syntactic
trash.

*

oh hollow, you
write, the heart's a
hollow, a hole in which, a window in

which, a cloud in
which, in

which nothing, really, but, occasionally, some occasional hiatus, really, a 'where' whereby a small smattering of rays, perhaps, might alight, occasionally, like in some kind of pantoscopic vision, might even, through the medium of some artifice, like a kind of spray, say, pelt the heart, putting it to rest, momentarily, with something unlikely as a smile so dolorous, so beatific, you'd swear that what you'd just witnessed was not only real, but real in such a way that nothing, in fact, could ever again presume to such consummate reality, notwithstanding the fact
that, occasionally. . . .

and so on, etc.,
etc. for in the name of
nothing, had

reached
this abundance. in the name of name, finally,
this nominal
diktat.

*

'scoop,' you'd whisper, and
feel your lips
curl to the
injunction. for under, just under, as if

buried in
sacks, soft as
organs (the sacks themselves
jingling dully with their own, un-

recycled waste) would lay the first,
banished strata.
would

lay, that is, that iridescence, the puffed
vapor of some long-
since
discarded compound. 'scoop,' you'd murmur, would
hear your-

self murmur, as time after
time, would plunge

through that
wasted idiom. would
poke—wouldn't you—through so much scroll, the
un-
rolled print-outs of some post-

historic in-
fallible. oh less, so much less, even
less than the refuse you'd
worked through, would
lay, at

last, that broken
vo-

cable. oh worthless as
wind, as light itself, would it slip, ineffable,
from your fingers? would it? from the
claw your
fingers formed as

they'd pick, jab, grapple at its
very

edges? oh blown weather,
dis-

banded heart, whatever utters,
utters nothing, really. and makes of that
nothing—lyric—its
only
measure.

JEAN-PAUL AUXEMERY

XENIAS

(Tr. from the French by Charlotte Mandell)

ARGUMENT

. . .So probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardor of the pursuer.
—Keats—

Beings haunt me—presences that give reality its weight of being. My voice, suddenly, becomes theirs: it welcomes them, greets them on the threshold; it runs away from me, treats them as close friends; it listens to their demands.

To please them, it becomes a stranger; I am present at this metamorphosis. I am present at my disappearance. These words efface me, my death speaks, my voice is no longer of this place. It no longer recognizes me. I make my descent through the circles.

I do not recognize myself. Very quickly, the words of the Other began to use a rhetoric of formulas, to which I could only submit myself—submitting myself to a long task of *correction,* which everything in me refuses. The voice wanted me to assent to the dictation—hence all this phrasing, these layers of forced meaning.

Addresses, dedications have tried to stave off this loss of self, this saturation of otherness. Signs, from the bottom of the abyss.

—Xenia is a gift of hospitality. The names of hosts protect me. Magic: under this protection, I want to repossess my speech, maybe for lack of seeing myself as I am.

To leave these circles, alliterations, rhythms. To leave all this obsolescence.

To come back to the irony of a less obviously tragic reality.

May the Other give way.

In the meantime—here is what the thief of speech made me say.

SALT OF REALITY

to Richard Sieburth

Sometimes we walk on chasms;
the volcano's mouth gapes at the empty sky.
Years swallowed up, endless swirlings,
glances of lost lovers—fates that draw
towards their fulfillment, as towards agony.

Our horror precedes us and burns us like salt.

Shades now and then skim the clifftops.
Eyes close, and these substanceless bodies
soon fill with weightless gestures the calm
desolation of these places without mooring:
we sail, we reel.
—Walkers of eternity,

we are our own shadows in the mirror of skies.

On the edge of our eyelids the blade of light glides.
That is how we travel through the world—at the brink of chasms.

Everyone has the key to this dramaturgy.
Images in the mirror are annealed by the salt of our looks.

Carried away by absurd rhetoric, let us love our shipwreck—
gash without cure, perfect seduction.
                Let bodies
go on dancing their dance of air
                in the depths of the memory
    of abysses
                and of skies.

THE STEM

to Gerrit Lansing, to the City

Vessel's prow:
the goddess' chest plunges rises—from the cabin
the pilot's eyes follow its course on the horizon line.
The goddess: the compass, the sighting, the figure of desire.

The breasts of the painted-wood siren plow the Ocean.
The monster comes on the side of this quick, gliding body;
he dreams with liquid, lyrical hands, he gets excited,
stroking the elusive crupper enskirted with foam.
—Vain rhetoric: the Beast ruminates sings his desire.
                Black back of the Inert.

The ship glides flees on the lips of foam
    the goddess exults the stem plunges into the wave
        —a dark lamp on the logbooks,

lines and curves—marks and points—plottings
of Desire.
So who wouldn't want
the Perfect Child?

At Stage Head—eye of the painter, hand of Maximus:

to learn from them the *how* of transubstantiations.

Let us measure the rocks and shores of Gloucester.

Kindness of springs and coves for our human thirsts

QUOTING CHARLIE PARKER

to Michael Gizzi, to the land of birds

A man's ideas and feelings change as time goes by,
and the moment when past and future join
is hard to pin down—
that music has already been written,
and we
perhaps only really play it
after we've used up all the paths leading
from one end of the staff to the other
where we try to come to ourselves again.

Few people know that
what they hear comes out of an instrument,
and that it is still a man's voice:

they only hear the theme endlessly repeated
on the line of memory, though it might be
just a prophecy.
                For instance:
    it will be nice tomorrow;
                women will leap over streams;
the sun will wink in the puddles;
                the mountain will be visible
from the valley, and the air in the valley will be very cool,
    yet the wind will be gentle.

You can never tell what you'll be thinking tomorrow.
Perhaps one should still wish to realize
that this musical air will never stop,
and that it will forge ahead, alone,
                and that I'll learn to know it.

THEATRUM

to Robert Kelly, to the high country

The dancers in the space have gestures of sand:
the sight of their shifting on the area of action
results from this willed slowness of gestural meditation
so that whoever watches them watches himself seeing
a dissected sketch of human determinations.

There is also a vertical dimension to action:
the space is not only the surface of slowness
where colorless gestures organize bit by bit;

coming from the flies, a trickle of water, a brush of sand
give rhythm endlessly to meetings and flights.

Sometimes in distance bodies seem to meet again,
and in extreme closeness they seem to drift apart.
Immobile objects sharpen the sight of whoever sees
by fixing lines of force to the actors' motion.

A reflecting pool mirrors the bodies' richness and nakedness;
an infinite birth takes place on the bed of light.

Then our beloved death flies away with the whirlwind:
nothing moves, everything changes—what is beauty?

What do we really know of it, what do we know?

In the slow storm, puffs of wind twist fabrics of wings.

ALCHEMY

Quod natura relinquit imperfectum, ars perficit.

1—

to Clayton Eshleman, to Sulfur

First we saw the herds of antelopes
grazing from one end of the meadow to the other,
subjects to the movement of an imperceptible course.

The grazing beasts were continuing their migration;
clay cliffs, sand rises, and rapids
haunted the muscles of their breasts.

We could just hear the trembling air scream
with the eagles' distress at the zenith of the herds.

Then our eye, born to the light, created
the invisible sense of all this peace
of the meadows of all the beginnings.

We ourselves turned into light,
having given the beasts their fulfillment:
we watched them live and die, like us,
in that instant when light created us
—fully conforming to our only rule: to dazzle.

Antelopes don't think anything, their bodies dictate them,
says the voice of the Ephesian.
There is only this new gaze resting on the world,
which creates what could not exist without it.

So we allowed this young sun to cross the day,
and from it we won the feel of utter fullness.

ALCHEMY

2—

to Michel Deguy, to "l'homme héliotrope"

Then the wings opened onto the lake and the night,
from thickets other beasts emerged, with eyes of water;
the birds sang of fear in a long rustle of air.

And we climbed the cliff, in the dark;
we threw ourselves on laterite ruts,
and the shadow lake vanished into the water eyes.

Flights—shaft of a gleaming hoof, of a muzzle wet
with evening dew—eyes of swift fawns.
The tuft of dry grasses breathed under the hoof's stroke.

—Later (to be born, to be born in the wound of earth),
we slept near solfataras, in the cradle of grasses,
on the edge of the rift, after we surprised the duikers.
And our eye danced like a restless flame in the night.

At daybreak, the vultures were drawing circles
on the sky—open, above the vales.
The basalt scar was gaping purple.
The water eyes—our heart—loved the new sun.

All work brings death, that is the world's only thought,
says the voice of the Ephesian.

Soon we will enter the flourishing towns,
having left the valleys of shadows and shiftings.
Our bodies will shake at the borders of the cities;
then we'll mingle with the busy herd of men.

In the antelope's breast, a plant-like thought;
under the lionness' eye, the migration advancing.
We are finally going to labor in the dazzle,
the voice says.
Man's heart follows the flame, finally.
Night is the brightest wife of this young sun.

RIKKI DUCORNET

from: PHOSPHOR IN DREAMLAND, *Chapter Twenty-Two*

When he looked back upon it, it seemed to Phosphor that his marriage had taken place in a dream. The instant he arrived at his intended's door, Professor Tardanza, perpendicular and shrill, and his silent, rhombohedral wife, swept him up in precipitous plans. For one brief hour he had encountered his beloved, in lace and cuneiform, flanked by her mother and an equally architectonic aunt. The procedures were all so terrifying that the poet, reduced to gumbo, stayed in the shadows of the event—even after it was over. Before he could blink, before he had time to awaken and find his legs with which to run, he was cornered by the priest and propped beside an unknown cipher metamorphosed into a heap of clothes.

The cathedral floor was paved with black and red tiles forming a labyrinth; concentric circles like ruptured intestines formed a visceral pathway. Staring at it, Phosphor felt dizzy and numb. The circular maze might be a wheel, the wheel of a mill. The poet thought: *I shall be ground into dust.* He imagined himself atomized and lifted into the air, to settle on someone's coat only to be brushed off with a careless gesture of the hand. He thought:

Man is but a ~~transient~~ stuff. . .a ~~sidereal~~ powder. . .on the ~~breath~~. . .wind of ~~eternity~~. . . finitude.

To add to the event's strangeness, a hideous baying, as of wolves, could be heard from time to time circling the cathedral. It was Phosphor's abandoned master, Señor Fantasma, mourning his volatilized house. Near dawn, far from town, a scream of rage and pain shattered the air; propulsed by who knows what demons, Fantasma had sliced off his nose.

Throughout the wedding feast, Phosphor was haunted by hallucinations. His bride was a curiously-shaped magnet and he a shaving of iron hopelessly caught at her side. A pig had been roasted entire and Phosphor, having received its face for his portion, as was customary, was seized with an impression of being pushed head-first into a pit. What was worse: when he dared steal a glimpse of his bride's face he did not recognize her. *People,* he mused, *have a way of looking very unlike themselves up close.* He shuddered to think that he would be seeing her closer.

Pulco had said that she was beautiful. But the boy was illiterate and knew not the first thing about beauty. Phosphor hoped she was not all that beautiful: it was one thing to write beautifully, or to write about beauty, even beautifully—but to embrace it, alone in a darkened room, No! No! That was something else altogether. To *satisfy* beauty! That was, surely, beyond his capacities. Another glimpse. . .

It *was* a beautiful face and yet meant nothing to him, despite his dreams, his longing in the woods to kiss it, lingeringly, on the lips. Of course, he did not know her, whatsoever. The poet considered this with a spark of hope. Not because, heaven help him, it was a face devoid of meaning. He looked at it again. Extravaganza ate with appetite. Her own portion—the pig's tale, roasted to a turn—was, between her faultless teeth, reduced in minutes to a bone heap.*

When the feast was over, Professor Tardanza took his son-in-law by the elbow, and together they paced the garden, presumably to give Extravaganza the time she needed to wipe the grease from her lips and to bathe her succulent body in a water scented of gardenias.

In the center of the garden was a pool, and a little marble bench. Here the two men sat, Tardanza yawning but jocular, Phosphor agitated and depressed. He stared into that still water illumined by the moon, and for a brief moment considered drowning himself. It was then that something extraordinary happened:

Within the water, Phosphor saw a pair of eyes that—or so it seemed—expressed all those fugitive ideas with which he had been grappling, not always successfully. The eyes opened out upon infinity, and eternity, too. They seemed wise to him, and sweet. The poet's heart leapt with recognition and delight. This time he *was* in love; he looked deeply into his beloved's eyes and did not falter, he did not see death, nor vortexes, nor abysses; he saw limitlessness.

"That," said Professor Tardanza, pointing to the great copper-colored face just now breaking the surface, "is Extravaganza's pet carp." Reaching into a pocket he threw the fish a crust. "I shall be turning in." Tardanza patted the poet's back. "Extravaganza is waiting for you."

But Phosphor was lost in thought, lost in the contemplation of a creature so graceful, so coolly ethereal he wondered: had it an anatomy? A spine? Had it ribs? It occurred to him that only a creature *without feet* could

---

*More from Ombos:
In the bed of the ogress, appetite, copulation, birth, death and defecation are all contained in (and exemplified by) the vortex—and I use that word precisely because it best describes the vertiginous quality of Nuno Alpha y Omega's (dit Phosphor) vision, as well as Jonathan Swift's. Swift's own vision, of course, was surely informed by his chronic malaise. Ménière's disease is best characterized by precipitous vertigo and severe imbalance. The world, in seizure, appears to spin.

be capable of transcendence. The fish was a vivid thing, languid and lovely—more syllable than animal; a tracery, and, as it flitted in and out the shadows, a thing of light.

He passed the night there, enraptured, perched upon the marble bench, tossing lumps of wedding cake to the fish.

Before you look too long upon Phosphor's voluptuous fever (all the more so because it cannot be consummated) I shall continue the tale. You must know that, at least for now, his bride Extravaganza, gorgeous nitwit that she may be, does not miss him. As her groom sits dreaming and kneading crumbs into pellets, she is thinking about doll's clothes.

She is an innocent creature, her one immodest act—performed for Pulco's benefit—in compliance with her father's wishes. Never has she entertained impure thoughts; she is, or so it seems, incapable of thought. (In Ombos' words: *it is sexual love that liberates the libido and sets the lover to dreaming. And so, becoming . . .*) Often, to reassure her mother as well as himself, Tardanza has said of her:

"As Extravaganza is incapable of learning anything, she will never learn anything *dangerous.*"

"She has the holiness of the dumb creatures," the priest who has married her agrees: "Without one hairline fracture, her soul is as clean as any fish living in water, the very air it breathes well-washed with water, its thoughts, water."

Perhaps, had he perceived her thus, Phosphor might have loved his bride with the same unreasoning enthusiasm he now demonstrates for her pet carp. But wait, for there is more:

As the poet meditated upon the resemblances and dissemblances of all things—how, for example, a lamb's rump could be mistaken for a head of cauliflower—it came to him that the human heart is very like the sea anemone pulsing in salt water, how it was only natural that he should be enamored of a creature making her home in water.

The little scales upon the fish's back were reflecting surfaces, an infinite array of small mirrors, so that if the light was right, the poet could see his own eye gazing back at him, or even his own face miniaturized and multiplied.

Days later, as Phosphor continued to spy upon the fish, a large, white slug fell into the pool and Phosphor was shocked to see his beloved snap it up as eagerly as she did the bits of cake he proffered so lovingly.

This phenomenon happened then: the poet recognized the carp's corruptibility *and his own.* His reflection reminded him that he, too, ate to live. Phosphor had eaten squid for dinner, redolent of coconut milk and ginger. When the fish excreted a surprisingly thick string of filth, the poet,

shocked, was forced to reflect upon corporeality and to accept the nature of the physical world in its entirety.

His beloved, so like polished metal, so languid and significant, more the stunning consonant of some divine alphabet, more scroll than living creature—

so like fire, so silent, so entire, so entirely *other*, so consummately mysterious—was, as was he, bound by natural laws. Why hadn't he realized this sooner? It was absurd, he decided, laughing at his own folly, to expect that his beloved be immaterial. Had she been immaterial, he could not have adored her as he did. As much as her vital corporeality, her mortality moved him. She was precious, he realized, because she was not eternal but an instant of delight to be seized before eternal night would snap her up forever, snap them both up—man and maid, forever.

Yet, just as this new idea came to him, two things happened simultaneously, and this for the poet's felicity:

First he recognized the absurdity of referring to a fish as a maid; next the image of Extravaganza appeared before him. He rubbed his eyes and saw that she was truly there; indeed, her perfume of fruit and flowers filled the air. Reflected in the pool, her face wavered before him: curious, attentive, tender. Turning to her, and for the first time taking her hand in his, Phosphor noted that she, too, was sleek and vibrant and mysterious; she, too, palpitated with eager life. He saw the blood pulse at her neck and was moved, saw the sweetness within her eyes, her slender ribs, her hands like little wings her skin like hot sand. So acute was his vision, that he could see her unique vibrancy. The poet's bride had, in these brief moments, eclipsed her rival, the fish.

I suppose, or I imagine, that it was then that Phosphor realized—O—not with his rational mind, but with his soul, that words are the vehicles of meaning and intention, not *things* to be set buzzing in the void in order to fill it with a digressive, numbing hum—but particles of meaning, interactive and necessary. Now that Phosphor was ready to love, he was also ready to speak *and so to write*—or so, dear Ved, that is how I have come to see it. Because from that night on, Phosphor's poems are no longer so much hot air but the sails that—tugged this way and that by intuition—set the little boats of life on course, swift and bright and sure. Guided by love, informed by desire, the vision incandesces and the poems catch fire:

> *Extravagant,* the afternoon hums in your throat*
> *A palpable orbit in a sky of smoke*
> *Your face as necessary as the orbits of stars*
> *The elusive, the essential trace of the sun.*

---

*Again, Ombos: *I find the pun on the poet's wife's name especially charming.*

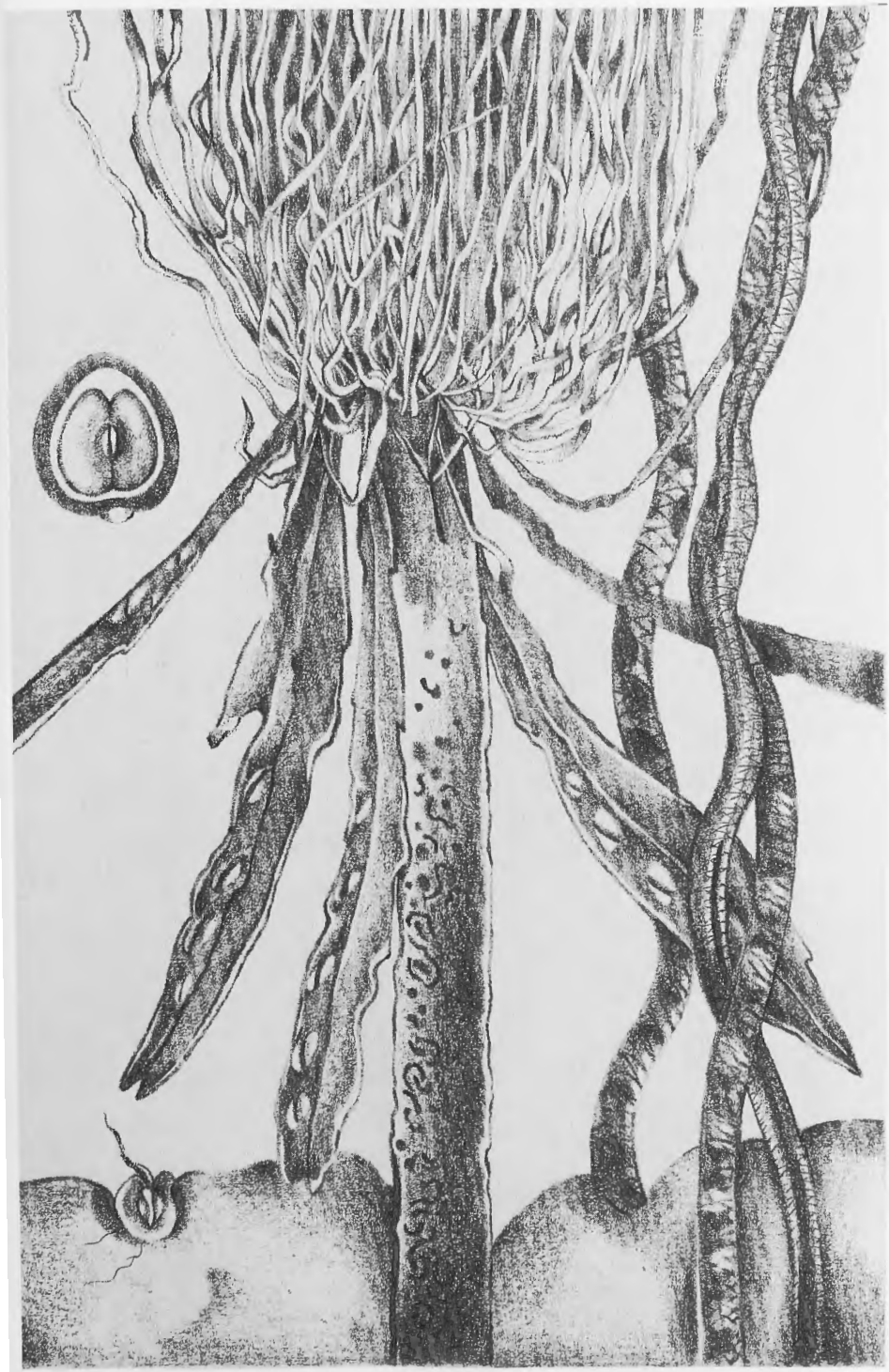
You are the fire that tempers worlds
A rain of smoke, a planet of smoke.
You are the moon riding the scales of a carp in a pool
Of light. The evening. The eye of the owl.

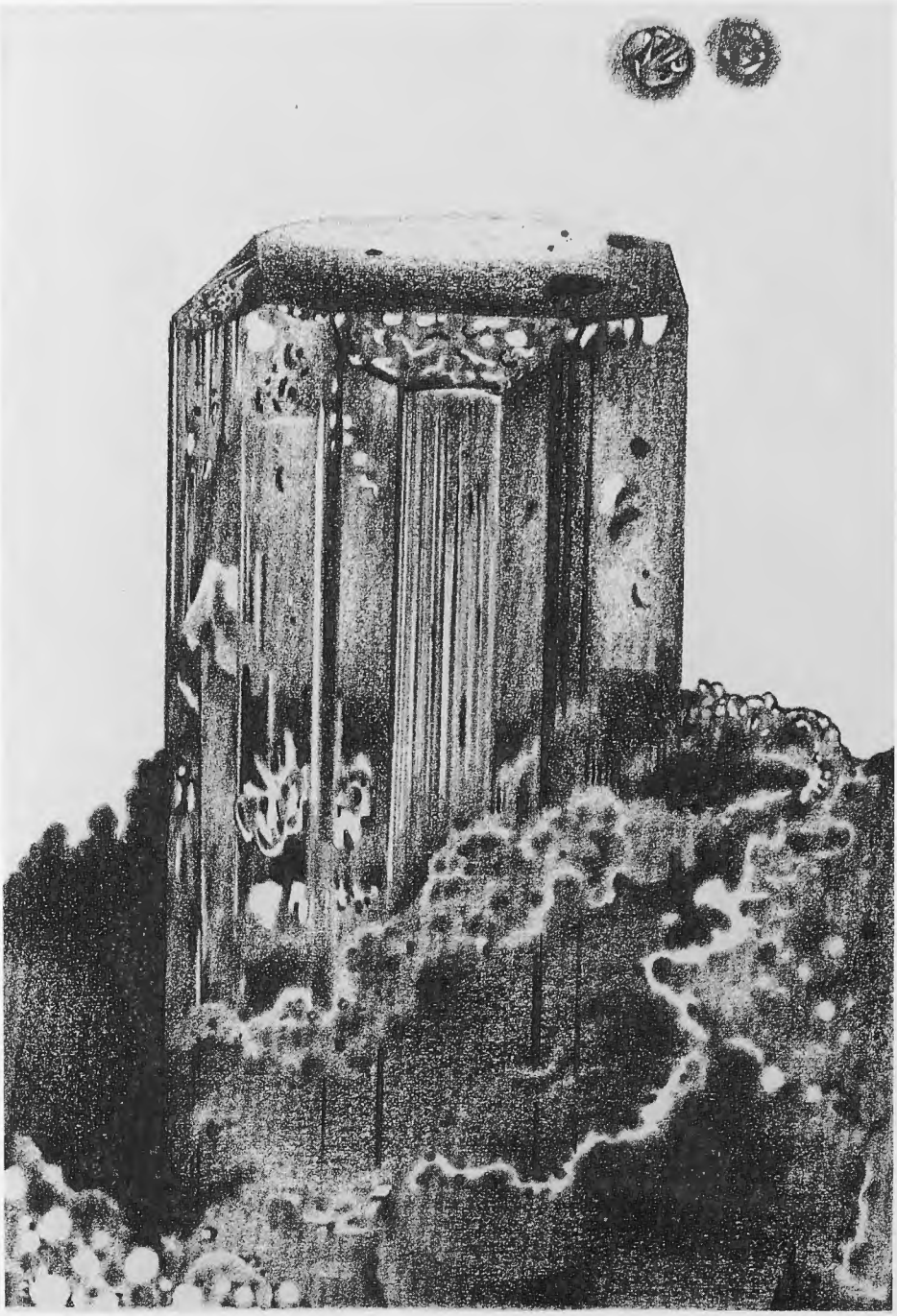
Written in an ink of flowers
Your voice is a hieroglyphic stairway
Suddenly tangible in the wet morning.

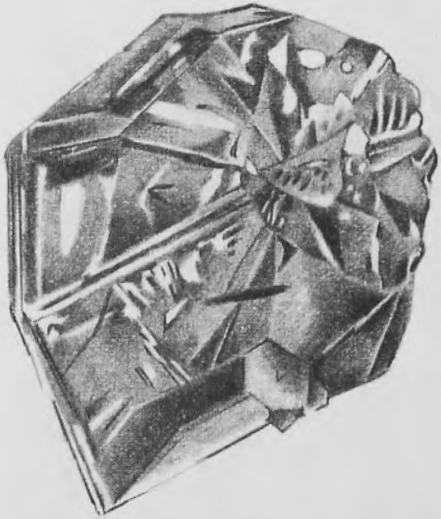
Your voice is rain, a fistful of copal
A serpent uncoiled in the sun.
Your voice is paper, the blood of plants, other
Precious Things.

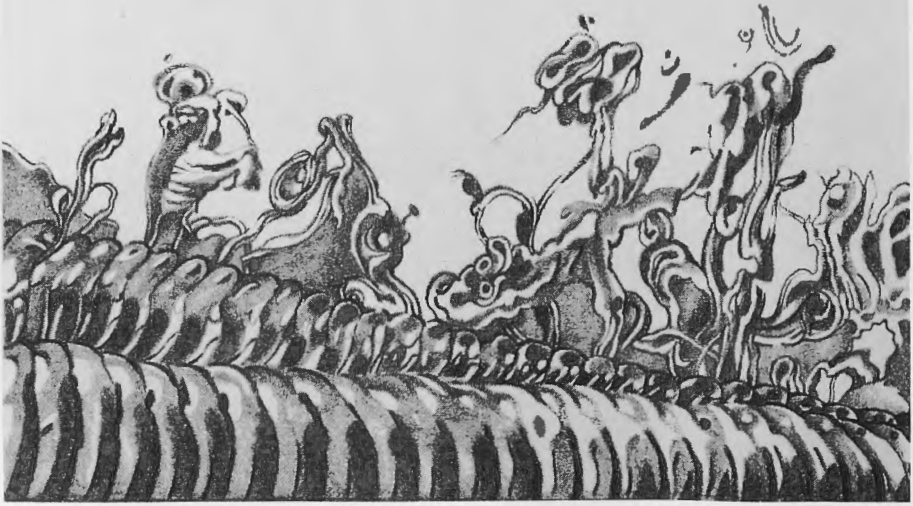
RIKKI DUCORNET

SIX DRAWINGS









JAYNE CORTEZ

THREE POEMS

I WAKE UP EARLY

I wake up early in the morning
sit and think about
divination trays
cow bells
oil drums
the sky all rusty with gongs
I jump up as
day snaps back through
maze of ashy Nubian thighs
poems entering my head
from left side of midnight
I put them on paper
touch down
in lower register of the turmoil
let one shape
tell the whole story
like a Thelonious Monk plunk
the motion
clear
distinct
rooted in what it is
what it was the
instant I hit it
the moment everything said click
unpredictable
imagination sticking out its tongue
unrepeatable

sound boards posing like
the sun that changes
into a bird standing
on crocodile teeth
transmissions
acquisitions
use it
go beyond it
just write and let it happen
    hangnail in afterbirth
    saltfish motif on steel

CULTURAL OPERATIONS 1992

The fishmongers are trying to sell fish
Ironmongers trying to sell iron
Poets are having beautiful springtime daughters
A sculptor is walking around astonished that he's 55
A painter overdoses on fumes from a pizza parlor
Eight year old boys are on stage
holding their crotches and rapping about
"i'm making love to my baby"
while armed Renamo bandits
who murder playmates
rape little girls
turn kids into killers
and force families to cook and eat remains
of dead relatives
are calling themselves
heroic freedom fighters
& the white South African government wants
to give up the word Apartheid
without giving up the gold,
the army & the real estate
& the new judge is showing his hairy teeth
to the Supreme Court
as the European Economic Community gang up to
keep racism in its body of segregated cash machines
and it's operation same old bullshit
operation same old right-wing multinational
think-tank manipulation of history,
geography and information
operation out-of-shape generals
still talking war & licking
plates in the cafeteria
operation desert dumbness
operation army for hire
operation pop star
still looking like
a walking flop house

operation thieves
still giving music awards
and patting each other on the back
for stealing and imitating their asses off
operation what does it matter
as long as the mob gets theirs
& the queen gets hers
& the X slaves continue to pay tribute
& the colonies continue to pay rent
& the International Monetary Fund &
World Bank stay intact
& there are no mass unruly defaultations
& no reorganizational plans of advancement on
front burner of an urban rebellion
& as long as we act as silly and mediocre
and corrupt and greedy and repressed
as we're programmed to act
and don't explode
& globalize that explosion into
a redistribution of all there is to redistribute
then everything remains what it is
& children you'd better hold onto your balls
because it's operation deforestation
operation deprivation operation privatization
operation falsification operation contamination
operation marginalization operation militarization
operation polarization operation subordination
operation toxification operation destabilization
operation termination operation

STATES OF MOTION

Sun Ra left the planet in a pyramid made of metal keys
Willie Mae Thornton sailed away in an extra large
moisture-proof harmonica
Pauline Johnson flew off in a brass trimmed telephone
Thelonious Monk withdrew in a space ship shaped like a piano
Art Blakey departed in a great wood & stainless steel bass drum
Esther Philips bowed out in a nasal sounding chrome microphone
Charles Tyler, George Adams & Clifford Jordan reached another realm
in receptacles constructed like tenor saxophones
Okot p'Bitek shoved off in an attache case full of songs, books &
[whiskey
Leon Damas hit the road in a big black banjo
Audre Lorde departed wrapped in her book jackets
Dizzy Gillespie zoomed off in a sweet chariot shaped like a trumpet
Miles Davis left in a magnificent copper mute
Marietta Damas vacated the terrain in a beautiful house filled with
folkloric & electronic gadgets
Romare Bearden crossed over the rainbow in a blimp made of
his collages & etchings
Norman Lewis pushed away from the shore in a vault shaped like a
[bicycle
Ed Blackwell marched off concealed in an assortment of cymbals
Tchikaya U'Tamsi floated away in a big heart shaped tuba
Vivian Browne departed draped in her painted forest canvases
Larry Neal went to the bush enclosed in two bookcases of poetry &
Bebop tapes
Kimako Baraka evacuated in a stone temple marked with Egyptian
[hieroglyphics
Wilfred Cartey got away from the hurricane in an ocean liner made of
rum bottles
Johnny Makatini took off in a black, green & yellow rocket
Kathy Collins departed in a container made of unedited film clips
John Carter left in a fabulous silver clarinet
Evan Walker split in a boat that was shaped like a bird
Dumile Feni hurried to South Africa in one of his muscle bound
wooden sculptures

Peter Tosh reached the intersection in a bus filled with herbs &
political newspapers
Bob Marley retreated in a booming amplifier draped in
African flags tied with dreadlocks
Ana Mendieta made her exit as a bronze silueta
Michael Smith left for the forest in one huge audio cassette case
Elena & Jawa Apronti traveled from Accra in compartments made of
ceremonial umbrellas
Bill Majors rode off into the sunset in a highly polished brass
mercedes benz
Coco Anderson went to the festival in a fixture shaped like
a yam wrapped with eight patchwork quilts
Franco Manqwana rolled off in a king-size purple guitar
Nicolas Guillen went to the rendezvous in a grand rumba cow-bell
Tamu Bess traveled home in a queen-size computer plastered with
[eyeglasses
Flora Nwapa crossed the horizon concealed in pages of her new novel
Sarah Vaughan ascended in a misty glass recording booth
Gilberto de La Nuez disappeared into one of his paintings in Havana

INGEBORG BACHMANN

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the German by Peter Filkins)

IN TWILIGHT

Again we both stretch our hands towards the fire,
you reaching for the wine of the seasoned night,
I for morning's wellspring that knows no winery.
We await the bellows of the master in whom we trust.

As sorrow warms him, the glassblower steps toward us.
He leaves before dawn, he comes before you call,
he's as old as the twilight on our singed brows.

Again he boils the lead in the kettle of tears,
making for you a glass—meaning a toast to the lost—
for me a potsherd of smoke—it's emptied over the fire.
And so I lean towards you, making the shadows ring.

Known now is he who hesitates,
known now is he who forgot a proper toast.
You can't and don't want to know it
you drink from the rim where it's cool;
you drink and stay sober, and like long ago
eyes lift up to you, still admiring you!

But I am already prepared
for the moment of love, smashing its shards
in the fire, where they return to the lead
they once were. And behind the bullet
I stand, one-eyed, with a steady aim, slender,
and shoot it towards the morning.

PSALM

1

Be silent with me, as all bells are silent!

Amid the afterbirth of terror
the rabble grovels for new nourishment.
On Good Friday a hand hangs on display
in the firmament, two fingers missing,
and it cannot swear that all of it,
all of it didn't happen, nor that
it ever will. It dives into red clouds
whisks off the new murderers
and goes free.

Each night on this earth
open the windows, fold back the sheets
so that the invalid's secret lies naked,
a sore full of sustenance, endless pain
for every taste.

Gloved butchers cease
the breath of the naked;
the moon in the doorway falls to earth;
let the pieces lie, the handle. . .

All was readied for the last rites.
(The sacrament cannot be completed.)

2

How vain it all is.
Roll on a city,
rise from the city's dust,
take a post
and disguise yourself
to avoid exposure.

Fulfill the promises
before a tarnished mirror in the air,
before a shut door in the wind.

Untraveled are the paths on the steep slope of heaven.

3

O eyes, scorched by the store of sun on earth,
weighted with the rain of all eyes,
and now absorbed, interwoven
by the tragic spiders
of the present. . .

4

In the hollow of my muteness
lay a word
and raise tall forests on both sides,
such that my mouth
lies wholly in shade.

JED RASULA

GENDERING THE MUSE

The human being, troubled by limits, creates a trip for herself,
which recreates her
as spacious.
. . .She creates a dark flank of a mountain, a person's thoughts or
feelings, passing across the person, concealing the person.
She wonders what the body would reveal, if the cloud were
transparent.
It pervades the creation of a motive, like the action of a heart.[1]

It has long been one of the primary labors of poetry to incorporate the strange and the other into its procedures; to speak "otherwise" (alieniloquiam); to be visited by Muses, those agents of otherness. A poetics apprehends the ratios of shapeliness, re-cognition in the sense not of knowing again, but having to reconceive and regenerate the apparition. *We conceive ourselves in our hybrids;* not to extract an essence by pruning away extraneous matter, but by coming to acknowledge the raw *materia prima* itself as part of the alembic: "I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots, / And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over" writes Whitman. ("Song of Myself," #31) Western poetry has long worn on its theoretical regalia the heraldry of the Muses. But the complex signification of "muse" has been eroded to a single persistent epithet, making Muse synonymous with "inspiration." This simplification is the legacy of a masculinist project of poetic autonomy, in which the Muse is merely a figurative indication of innate imaginal potency; it is also a covert disavowal of those perturbations of the alien that are found in Hellenic myths of the Muse. To speak of Muses is to speak of a contamination not unlike pregnance. A woman feeling her own singularity enhanced by the growth in her womb finds this ambiguous individuation utterly contingent on the progressive enlargement of the absolute other she bears within her. No matter how ardently desired or serenely accepted, to bear the progeny of a decisive contact with the other is unsettling, uncanny.

It may be true that what we've grown accustomed to calling poetry resonates a colossal solipsism. But solipsism itself needs to be recognized as a predominately male prerogative. Masculine vitality is troubled by the enormity of its own reproductive deficiency. That men don't give birth is one of the more thoroughly repressed of cultural traumas. Poetry has been another name for this anxiety, if not an outright compensation; but poetry may also be the most persistent channel by which the ecology of reproduction is transmitted from female to male, as in the scenarios of poetic empowerment involving the figure of the Muse. In Jung's typology of the contributing personae of individuation, "The inferior function is always associated with an archaic personality in ourselves. . . There we have an open wound, or at least an open door through which anything might enter."[2] For men the inferior function (all too susceptible of expiatory projection and reassignment outside and elsewhere, literalized in woman) is the birthing complex—and by "complex" I mean an array spanning menstruation, pregnancy, parturition, and nursing. Gary Snyder speaks of the Muse tradition as affording a glimpse of "archaic matrifocal roots": "It is likely that men become creative when they touch the woman in themselves, and women become creative when they touch the woman in the man in themselves."[3] This asymmetrical formulation reflects an historical disproportion[4]; one that is distended by emphasizing subjectivity as the necessary focus of poetry. Curiously, even Snyder (a Buddhist!) makes the same mistake when he notes that, "As Vak is wife to Brahma ('wife' means 'wave' means 'vibrator' in Indo-European etymology) so the voice, in everyone, is a mirror of his own deepest self."[5] Personification for men involves a person-fiction; a speech endowment with woman as the enabling voice-over paradoxically silenced by the pact of transference. The male poet, pregnant with words, willingly submits to the gnosis but is at the same time traumatized by the maternal posture. The Muse (prior to sanitized abridgement as the simple figure of inspiration) retains the "monstrous"—that is, *demonstrable* [monstrare=show, disclose]—link between inspiration and pregnance, masculine speech and maternal prompting.

One of the primal episodes of poetic empowerment in Western typology is Hesiod's encounter with the Helikonian Muses, who tell him "we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we want to, how to tell the truth."[6] He consents to be inspired by the Muses, who literally breathe into him a purportedly divine voice. To be inspired by Muses is to be filled with their spirit, a breath or *pneuma* which may or may not coincide with truth. This confidential insinuation of another's voice into the poet's own mouth and words involves ventriloquism; and the truth of words, in this scenario, is bound up with the problem of "voice" as security deposit on any subsequent claim

of authenticity. By the time the Muse tradition is synopsized as "inspiration," the ventriloquial component is forgotten, and the autonomous controlling voice of the poem is confidently masculine, becoming the paradigmatic mark of subjectivity. With Hesiod the world itself is compacted into a single compelling (yet alien) voice inside the head—and it's only a matter of time until Descartes condenses even the figure of the human to a glistening mote of ego, in which a voice persists, if only as a technical simulation. Poetry henceforth develops an alliance with subjectivity, requiring compulsory speech from a world (of "muses") that had hitherto resounded freely, but which now begins to endure its lengthy subjugation to the human subject, and in its subjugation develops that sullen, unspeaking demeanor that its masters read as evidence of a brute, unresponsive nature (Caliban to Prospero). Cartesian subjectivity demands of the voice-over that it offer compelling evidence of its resources and its identity—that it testify on its own behalf. Voice-over is to be the authentic, inspired version of the voice as such. Any experience of voice that resists such alignment is evidence of demonic intervention, psychological neurosis, or technical malfunction, and gender has been the generic fate of these technical malfunctions, this material disarray.

It's difficult to overlook the fact of gender in primal scenes. It might be said, in fact, that gender *is* the primal scene. Female Muses enable Hesiod's theogony. This episode involves a transition from *bios* to *techne* in the matter of voice-over, and it happens that gender is more than a material detail; it is, in fact, a basic term for the ambiguous transit between nature and culture, biology and tool. Bearing in mind that gender is often construed as prediscursive or mute facticity[7], Hesiod's relation to the Muses illustrates the process by which the male voice of poetic authority is underwritten by a female voice-over: his poem is not so much "inspired" (in the convention to which we're accustomed) as it is pre-articulated inside him, in a voice that is differently gendered.[8] To experience voice as inner—that is, as *unvoiced*—is to be initiated in the emergence of gender, particularly gender understood in affiliation with genius.

The Muses fulfill the role later attributed to Genius in the middle ages. The legacy of *catabasis* or infernal descent memorialized in the Orphic myth, in the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*, was reconfigured in late antiquity (most influentially by Macrobius) as the descent of the rational soul into the snares of a sublunar material world. Hellenic sources relate *catabasis* to a wisdom tradition, in which the hero undertakes a ritual descent for oracular consultation in the underworld. In Christian reconfigurations the infernal aspect was emphasized, inflecting *catabasis* with transgressions of the black arts. In late antiquity and the middle ages the figure embodying this power of descent was Genius, a "god of human nature" and "external double" susceptible to good and evil influences. As cosmic messengers (Di

Manes, Greek *daemones)* these commanding spirits were Latinized as the *genius* of the individual; and, as adapted to Christianity, genius bifurcates into the beneficent angel on the one hand and the renegade angel (for Milton) or evil demon (for Descartes) on the other.[9] The significance of Genius for my purposes has to do with the persistence of Orpheus as a Genius figure. In his commentary on the *Aeneid* (c. 1145), Bernardus Silvestris deploys the familiar medieval concept of the soul descended into the body in order to discriminate "vicious" from "virtuous" descents, exemplified by Eurydice and Orpheus respectively. Eurydice disappears permanently into the underworld, unretrieveable by Orpheus, much as her 'spirit' may be said to live on in his commemorative songs. The Muses likewise are subsumed into Hesiod's inspiration. I don't mean to reduce these tales to varieties of the sexist dictum that behind every successful man there's a good woman, but the *structural* parallel is obvious and notable. In the primal scenes of Western poetry the voice-over is female (Muses, Echo) or the voice of the poet is indebted to a vanished woman (Eurydice). The lure of the female voice is nowhere more powerfully configured than in another primal scene, Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens.

Odysseus has his crew stuff their ears with wax so as not to hear the Sirens (wax being a substance linked with bees and thus also with the Bee Maidens of the "Hymn to Hermes"). Odysseus, preferring to hear the enchanting voices, opts to have himself lashed to the mast of his ship (yet another poeticosm: the mast being wood, a sort of marine Ygdrassil). The scene has all the elements of an electrical generator, with positive and negative charges involving different sorts of conductivity (wax and wood), *both* of which require contact points (the sailors and Odysseus). The voices of the Sirens, then, which represent an overpowering lure to destruction, are mediated by this sophisticated technical intervention.

Like the Muses, the Sirens offer the bewitching assurance of panoptic vision and encyclopedic wisdom. This allure is congruent with that expeditionary compulsion in man to ferret out the secrets of nature-as-woman. No man's poem (Odysseus being, in his subterfuge, *'outis* or "No Man") can successfully embody the heroic ego unless it emancipates itself from the female voice-over, a prospect addressed by the dual maneuver of fastidious attention (Odysseus lashed to the mast) and denial (the restraints themselves). Pietro Pucci explicitly reads the scene as a commentary on poetics. "No text," he says, "can incorporate the titillating promise of a song as sublime as the Sirens' without implying that this same sublimity resides in the incorporating text itself." Consequently, "The Sirens' song is thus the negative, absent song that enables its replacement—the *Odyssey*—to become what it is."[10] Pucci fails to recognize the clear gender distribution of advantage and enterprise suggested by his reading—which is all the more astounding given the vocabulary he uses to describe Odysseus' plight

as it "oscillates between (innocent) titillation and destructive intoxication," and Odysseus' solution as one combining "the fascination of an endless song and a restraining prudence."

We have to go back to Horkheimer and Adorno for a recognition of the patriarchal legislation instigated in Odysseus' twofold subjugation—of his sailors, who "cannot enjoy their labor because it is performed under pressure, in desperation, with senses stopped by force," and of the Sirens themselves, who are driven to suicide should anyone hearing their song pass by undistracted. The technical solution Odysseus devises to deal with the Sirens' temptation is taken by Horkheimer and Adorno as a "presentient allegory of the dialectic of enlightenment," in which "The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression."[11] That is, enslavement of the workers makes for industrial progress; but the masters stunt their own libidinal natures by means of such wily constraints as Odysseus devises for himself, so he can voyeuristically entertain the Sirens' song without committing to it, which is a paradigmatic form of regression.

Devoted to the autonomy latent in his power of invention, Odysseus is infantilized by his own reverie of technical achievement—the ruse by which he bypasses the Sirens, which takes place alongside all the other ruses that are the mementos of his voyage and commemoration of his survival skills, in a kind of gallery or grand concourse of fantastic escapes (escape as invention). The Sirens become the voice-over of his progress, formally denied even while their very existence becomes a goad to superheroic sublimation and productivity. Horkheimer and Adorno find an uncanny prescience in this tale, one which testifies in advance to the derangements of the heroic ego as it develops into that bourgeois stratagem (subjectivity) for calibrating human nature to the myth of rational progress. "The social work of every individual in bourgeois society is mediated through the principle of self," they write. (29) "Men had to do fearful things to themselves [i.e. don constraints before the Sirens] before the self the identical, purposive, and virile nature of man, was formed, and something of that recurs in every childhood." (33) The gendering of their formulation is precise. Sensory ravishment, associated with women, yields male rectitude if sublimated. Enlightened productivity works, then, by framing episodes of feminine allure as incentives to masculine self-regulation. The result is a simple homeostatically regulated machine (with woman as servomechanism) which Horkheimer and Adorno rightly see as an allegory of industrial bourgeois society, a society that clings to its primal scenes only in sanitized versions, fearful of the prerational imagination that clearly invests these scenes not only with an "obsolete" world view, but an *alternative* mode of social production.

To glimpse the alternative latent in the Sirens' song, it's necessary to delve into a broader range of associations than the Homeric account

deploys. The name "Sirens" may derive from the Asiatic "sîr" or *fascination*. But *seirenes* in its masculine form designated a strain of bees.[12] Unlike the Muses, whose activities are consecrated to their father, Zeus, the masculine affiliations of the Sirens are less clear. There is a genealogy in which the Sirens were offspring of Chthonos and Persephone; in another version one of the Muses bore them to the sea god Achelöos. Most tantalizing is the version in which Herakles breaks off one of Achelöos' horns, and the Sirens are born from the blood of this rupture. Not only are the Sirens typologically assimilated to something like the birth of Athena from Zeus' head, then, but the phallic/menstrual paradigm is explicit as well. As if this blurring of gender were not enough, there are visual representations of the Sirens as bearded women. The link with Persephone affords the Sirens a special conductivity to the underworld and the queen of the dead, who is notably also affiliated through her daughter Demeter with vegetal cycles of resurrection and replenishment. The names of individual Sirens are variable, or unstable, but cluster around certain connotations: "enchantress" (Thelxiope and variants), "the seductive" (Peisonoe etc.), and "she of the glorious voice" (Aglaope etc.). There are also Himeropa ("she whose voice awakens desire"), Leucosia (the white goddess), and Ligeia ("she of the bright voice"). While there is no sibling allegiance suggested by the lineage, note that the Sirens share with Orpheus a maternal link with the Muses and that their names explicitly refer to voice (Orpheus is derived from *orea phone* meaning best voice, *optima vox*[13]). Finally, there is a passage in Plutarch that maintains a positive rather than negative role for the Sirens' association with the underworld. The power of their song is not destructive, he says—in terms related to what by Plutarch's time was a no longer orthodox Pythagoreanism diffused in the Roman world—but is rather an echo of that harmony of the spheres from which souls descend into matter.

> The ears of most souls, however, are plastered over and blocked up, not with wax, but with carnal obstructions and affections. But any soul that through innate gifts is aware of this echo, and remembers that other world, suffers what falls in no way short of the very maddest passions of love, longing and yearning to break the tie with the body, but unable to do so.[14]

While not exactly beneficent, then, for Plutarch the Sirens are bewitching to the degree that they offer an expanded cosmological resonance, raising those who hear above the limited circuit of mortal attachments.

The Sirens are contagious, infecting the hero with a performance anxiety—in a sense suggested by Blanchot's provocative reading:

> What would happen. . .if Homer's story were nothing but the movement Ulysses enacts in the space created for him by the Sirens' song? If Homer could only tell his story in so far as he journeyed, in the name of Ulysses—an unfettered yet predictable Ulysses—towards the point where he may perhaps acquire the ability to speak and to narrate, on the one condition that, at this point, he vanish?

Note the motif of effacement here which evidently links the Sirens' song with the parable of Orpheus and Eurydice in Blanchot's imagination. He sees in this tale the goad that enables a leap from ode to episode, from song or lyric to narration: "Every narration secretly resists the encounter with the Sirens," he intuits.[15] The closing lines of John Ashbery's poem "The Explanation" suggest that the most durable incentive for such resistance is the power of self-replenishment: "What am I doing up here? / Pretending to resist but secretly giving in so as to reappear / In a completely new outfit and group of colors once today's / Bandage has been removed, is all."[16] Narrative is masculine cross-dressing (in which a nursing function is implicit in the "bandage"). Blanchot's hunch about the Sirens is in accord with Teresa de Lauretis' theory of narrative as the mythical structuring of differences, foremost of which is the gendering of (male) protagonist and (female) matrix of resistance. (De Lauretis' antimonies, most succinctly, are "male-hero-human" versus "female-obstacle-boundary-space."[17]) The Sirens could easily be accommodated to de Lauretis' observation that "Medusa and the Sphinx, like the other ancient monsters, have survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions—places and topoi—through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning." (109) In keeping with Judith Butler's admonition that gender is performative, not innate, I want to convert this primal scene into a scenario in which voice (specifically poetry's voice-over) is both *engendered* and *engineered.* Odysseus' ship is a factory (Horkheimer and Adorno) which industrially processes the raw material of ecstatic celebratory song into the prophetic and agonistic material of narrative (Blanchot), the reagent being monstrously feminized in the process (de Lauretis). Narrative is a foundry, in which narratological (and I should stress the logical) techniques filter out and set aside the female *prima materia,* without which there is no engendering heat, but the presence of which requires purification ("rites" in antiquity, "procedures" in modernity).

In the primal scene of poetic inspiration, the volatility of the medium itself is indistinguishable from that cauldron of subjectivity that can only be tamed or quenched by the special linguistic and cultural technique of gender. "The 'real' and the 'sexually factic' are phantasmatic construc-

tions—illusions of substance—that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can. . . . Just as bodily surfaces are enacted *as* the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself."[18] The issue of the gendered voice is not simply a matter of authority, then. The archaic resources of language trouble authority even before it establishes itself: the *Odyssey* is an epic of erotic *vocations* that disturb the man who would be king. The narrative that engenders his triumph must submit to an itinerary of other voices, a polyphony that is sampled and synthesized, as it were, into an access code. The voice of heroic epic is masculine, reverberating in compassionate timbre with the voice of the hero since the hero is merely a figure for the engineering miracle that has generated the tale and at the same time gendered it.

The Odyssean legacy holds firm for several thousand years until the ventriloquism involved is exposed in the figure of Molly Bloom (on whose affirmative gasps entire legions of critics have expired in the line of duty, like the bones of sailors at the feet of the Sirens): ". . .yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes. . ." James Joyce, the ostensible transformer of female *jouissance* into text, appears to yield his tongue to a womanly satisfaction (which is figured, in turn, as amatory yielding). But this famous episode is the culmination of a dizzying spiral of manipulations, and the attribution of male authorship to a monologue enshrined as exemplary of femininity transforms aesthetic gratification into an anxious, if not paranoid, euphoria. What is at issue is never so simply the right to speak, but the timbre of the voice that finally does speak, especially when the "universal" is at stake. The semantic sense of the words may be abstracted from the sensory provocation of the voice, but the primal scenes of poetry compel attention to the dismemberments implied by such abstraction.

In a prescient lament early in *After Babel*, George Steiner notes how "[f]ew artists. . .have rendered the genius of women's speech."[19] His writing is impassioned by a sense of injustice (and he went on to devote an entire study to the figure of Antigone). But it's a speculative aside which interests me: "The alleged outpourings of women's speech, the rank flow of words, may be a symbolic restatement of men's apprehensive, often ignorant awareness of the menstrual cycle." The reproductive matrix of biology is felt as a speech disturbance. The staging of voice as expressive index of subjectivity is a cultural technique, a performative stratagem. Steiner's speculation suggests that a demonstrably natural process impinges conceptually on culture: reproduction *precedes* "production"—a semantic reversal which the tautological predications of narrative strive to overcome. Poetry,

in its autoinscriptions of inspiration as natural endowment, engineers techniques for ventriloquizing the female into a male voice. Even while testifying to gender asymmetry, this reveals a chiasmatic intertwining of voices sustaining any act of inspired articulation. Language engenders humans before humans gender language (and in the declension of pronouns the most vital distinctions are not male and female, but self and other, singular and plural). But insofar as language incites a technological impetus to discriminate and recombine, to focus and then dissipate the focus, language is a *hominid* perturbation.[20]

Jan Zwicky identifies in lyric a recuperative venture, consequent upon her definition of humans as creatures "on whom the ontological alienation inherent in tool-use weighs so heavily that they must try to rescue themselves from it."[21] Lyric is not a tool but a desire that asserts itself as counter-tool, like Robert Frost's "counter-love": "Lyric springs from the desire to recapture the intuited wholeness of the non-linguistic world, to heal the slash in the mind that is the capacity for language," Zwicky writes, adding that "as language-using creatures, it is of our essence that that gap cannot be permanently healed. The recognition that it cannot is the source of lyric's poignancy." The cognitive gap that can't recover from technological traumatization pivots on sexual difference, which is as it were the place where *techne* applies pressure. Sexual difference, then, may be viewed as a biological datum which it is the labor of culture to manifest. Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove have charted the mythic resonance of such connections in *The Wise Wound,* and it is clear that primal scenes of poetic initiation are not incidentally, but *primarily,* gendered; and that menstruation marks a site at which the force called "Muse" may arise.

Giorgio Agamben, in *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture,* elaborates a tacitly gendered thesis in his advocacy of a Sphinxian over an Oedipal linguistics. Every linguistics dedicated to transcending or healing the split between signifier and signified adheres to the Oedipal paradigm, in Agamben's view; while "under the sign of the Sphinx must be placed every theory of the symbol that, refusing the model of Oedipus, focuses its attention above all on the barrier between signifier and signified that constitutes the original problem of signification."[22] Agamben would overcome the view of metaphor and of signification in general as transfer or cartage across the divide, favoring instead a double positioning, an alignment on both sides of a barrier. The barrier ("S/s" between signified and signifier) necessarily remains in place. Instead of a view of signification intent on equivalencies, encodings, transparencies, the linguistics of the Sphinx marks a distribution of obstacles, dangers, powers. The barrier must remain, in part because to remove it is to conscript one of the agents of the communicative circuit to its role.

The function of the barrier is to retain for the agents in an intercommunicative pact their status *as* agents; without the barrier (as in Oedipal linguistics) one party is forced to embody the barrier's role as recalcitrant materiality. The status of woman as matter, matrix, impurity derives from the collapse of this barrier. Without the barrier, the function of power and danger is invested in woman, who is aligned with equivocations purportedly constitutive of her own divided nature (human/animal, insider/outsider, spirit/body). But what is this "barrier" Agamben speaks of? It is, most obviously, the Saussurean "bar" ("S/s") that signals the expressive unity of signifier and signified; but it is also that which is reiterated in Greek metaphysics as the distinction between essence and appearance, presence and absence, the one and the many, and which is perpetuated by distinctions between content and form, text and interpretation. These bifurcations are not merely descriptive of a given condition but *constitutive* of an ongoing one—that is, they are cultural specifications of what a pre-cultural condition should look like.

Oedipus is for Agamben a figure of that impulse to dispel the enigma of being and language by solving riddles, disposing of the barrier by insisting on its transparency. However, "Like the labyrinth, like the Gorgon, and like the Sphinx that utters it, the enigma belongs to the sphere of the apotropaic, that is, to a protective power that repels the uncanny by attracting it and assuming it within itself." (Apotropaic: *apo-* means lack, separation, departure, thus compounding the sense of *trope* as turning away, turning aside. An apotropaic configuration, like the visage of the Sphinx, is at once a personification and a depersonalization.[23]) The bar is the face of saying, the mask of signification; and the monstrosity of its apparition is not separable from the utterance. This is the sense behind Heraclitus' reference to the Delphic oracle who "neither says *(legei)* nor conceals *(kryptei)*, but signifies *(semainei)*." I read "semainei" in the strong sense as *incarnates*. Signification requires paying a carnal debt to the Sphinx, that hybrid creature who exacts the toll of enigma from language. Enigma, is the realm of words, is what the monster is in society.

To psychologize the encounter between Oedipus and the Sphinx is to mistake the hermetic dispensation of the myth, particularly by attributing to the Sphinx a suicidal mortification at the solving of her riddle. Rather, we should say that the assertion of Oedipal priorities destroys the apotropaic resources carefully measured out in the "monstrosity" of the Sphinx. That the Sphinx is feminized is in part the measure of the monstrosity of Oedipus' own discovery about his relation with a woman. After all, he discovers nothing horrifying about woman as such, but about himself. That a woman is the bearer of the riddle of his misfortune is of course sufficient ground for Teresa de Lauretis' rebuke of the fundamental misogyny of Western forms of narration and the gendering of the hero as

male. But I would caution against too simple an equation of Sphinx with woman. Rachel Blau DuPlessis usefully distinguishes external from internal cultural zones. "A woman outside the gates of culture is called a sphinx, inside called a heroine."[24] The Sphinx is *outside,* but from a woman's perspective it is specifically an outside endowed with power and independence. It is also an "outside" as liminal exposure to a severe difference in which woman gives way (through monstrous metamorphosis) to something not altogether human. The Sphinx is a threshold into another dimension, the *understanding* (not the "essence") of which has something to do with womanliness—increasingly and ominously so in a phallocratic regime.

Language, insofar as it is associated with woman, is inducted into a fecund or generative region. This archaic association of woman with generation needs to be qualified by the linguistic root *gn* (or *gen)* puts us in touch with knowledge as well as sexual power. "This [Indo-European] root is so prolific," writes Joseph Shipley, "that some scholars divide it in two. It defies partition. For its two meanings, to know and to beget, continue to entwine through the linguistic changes."[25] It's by means of this root that English retains its peculiar spelling of *know.* This is an instance of etymological retention, and the begetting of cognates (in which the *gn* is embedded, by the way) participates abundantly in this retention: gnosis, cognition, ignite, kindle, kin, lingam, cunning, cunt, genital, generation, and pregnant are a few of the English residues of this ceaselessly fertile linguistic egg—in fact, the word *language* itself propounds it. I want to supplement this with the research by Bethe Hagens into the "venus figurines" so prevalent in Cro-Magnon sites. Hagens discovers, from a biosemiotic perspective, that characteristic forms like the famous Venus of Lespuges are not so simply interpretable as fertility emblems. A survey of the extant set of such figures reveals a basic geometric proportion that coincides with tantalizing precision to the lateral views of animal brains. That the brain of a frog or a rabbit is as eligible a visual prototype for the Venus figurines as the body of a human woman Hagens takes as evidence of the psychotropic/shamanistic orientation of early hominid cultures. The extensive archaeological network constituted by these figurines suggests that "[t]hey constitute the remains of an ancient transportation network, both nonpolluting and nonmaterial. They are the essence, the 'elite power base,' of shamanic spirit travel."[26] The point here is not the veracity of Hagens' speculations, but the archaeological affirmation of an etymological link between gender and genius. This is not to say that intelligence is gender specific, of course, but to recognize that generation (or generativity) is a labor of "love" only if such labor includes mind. That is: from a shamanistic, and perhaps a Paleolithic, perspective, meaning and being are indissolubly linked.

Genesis and genius coincide. In this ancient legacy *every* creative act is empowered to the degree that it is constituted in and by the enigma of gender. Inasmuch as the Sphinx poses a linguistic riddle as the condition of life (those who fail the test are devoured), language itself is revealed to be caught up in a productive emanation. The monstrosity of the Sphinx is an apotropaic impingement on the dream of autonomous speech, unfettered articulation, uncoerced meaning; and, by the same token, an insistence on the prodigality of creative emanation—that meaning *and* being are not so easily retained within the prophylactic contours of Oedipal and Odyssean quests—quests that have lately acquired a different configuration in the prosthetic armature of cyborgian telepresence. The speculative fantasies summoned around the potential of cyberspace and cyberspecies appear thoroughly caught up in an Oedipal desire for prediscursive autonomy coupled with sanitary bioengineering: that is, in pursuit of a subjectivity cleansed of the messy constraints of gender, enigma, and poetry.

The apotropaic is the mark of excess, of unmanageable proliferation: human-becoming-animal, sense-becoming-nonsense. Polymorphously perverse, as Norman O. Brown proclaimed in *Love's Body* (1968), but which he came to reconsider in 1990 under the tutelage of Bataille: "meaning is always surplus meaning," under the sway of "a universal principle of biological life that growth leads to excess: and excess leads to laceration and loss."[27] Brown affirms exuberance, but insists on a Dionysian exuberant excess. Contra Lacan, lack is culmination, not beginning. It is that discharge or leakage that punctures security, related to that onset of the final stage of labor when the bag of amniotic fluid bursts. But it's a puncture the swollen state of security yearns for. Brown famously ended *Love's Body* with the declaration "There is only poetry." He has been tardy, perhaps, in recognizing the need to understand how we go from *bios* or embodiment to the specific cultural staging of embodiment that is poetry, or as I've been considering it here, poetry as a *techne* of Muses. In "Dionysus in 1990" he returns to Freud, specifically to the Freudian hypothesis of an instructive link between femininity and masochism. In Brown's formulation: "Erotic mysticism has always known that the wound is the woman, and we are all not made whole until we are first wounded." (195) (Menstruation constitutes the ultimate blood rite, a somatic purification that serves as a living injunction from nature to culture, a provocation to regulation, *regula,* measure. Is it too much to imagine poetic metre or even mathematics as an elaboration of menstrual computation? We have yet to see a history of numbers that positions communities of gynopractitioners in any founding relation to the subject.) To be "wounded" is to be womanized—a term instructively contrasted with the "humanities," with those cultural forms that are said to humanize us: for the humanities are indeed a mode of

masculinist self-assertion, a strategic denial not simply of women but of what *woman* signifies. And, in the terms with which I've been considering the inaugural gestures of poetry: of the waywardness of signification itself as the chiasmus of knowledge and generation. The Muses and the Sirens and the Sphinx are names for an incentive to regard the pain of knowing, and in the specification of a gender the pain is named. "Genius," says Emerson, "is the activity which repairs the decay of things. . ."[28] The monstrosity of the Sphinx *is* that genius; and, as such, is not an obstacle to be overcome but a sign of difficulties and trials to which we repair.

Recently, Jean-Joseph Goux has offered a stunning reconceptualization of the entire Oedipal trajectory, in which Oedipus represents "a tragedy of failed initiation."[29] In Goux's version, the Sphinx is an agent of liminality, requiring specifically the sacrifice of the secular ego in an initiatory submission to radical alterity. Goux sees in the power of the Sphinx that cultic intervention in which (following Freud) that which is properly located at the threshold of maturity is relegated to infancy. Castration, for Freud, was an infantile threat that could never be properly resolved. But Goux reverses this to suggest that the Oedipal "solution" of the castrating riddle of the Sphinx is precisely the gesture that inaugurates this perpetual deferral of castration resolution. Oedipal man thus endures a lifetime of "deferred initiation":

> Modern man's destiny will be one of prolonged liminality, experienced in an uncompletable, open, undecidable process of auto-initiation. Modern filiarchal subjectivity is one of liminality that has become an endless process rather than a passage. All of existence has become the critical threshold. (203)

Oedipus installs rationality as a tactical *coup* over an older regime that specifically required the sacrifice of reason, a sacrifice intended to instruct the initiate in the *ratio* of an order within which the rational might assess its own limits. By contrast, the Sphinx insists on an ecological violation of self-assured rationality, potentially unbounded in its hubris unless checked by humility ("castration"). Without such measures, there is simply a perpetual deferral of the discerning of limits, and the hubristic madness of Oedipal autonomy becomes nothing less than the paradigm of Western reason.

Oedipus, Philosopher portrays philosophy as the filiarchal banishment of pre-Oedipal forms of a patriarchal/matriarchal initiatory wisdom.[30]

> The Oedipean structure of pathos and knowledge is thus the distinctive feature of the post-traditional world in which the

> dramaturgy of transmission has entirely disappeared as an established social practice and in which the passage through castration (separation, severing) remains free, individual, self-generated, and in a sense deferred, permanent, indefinite. The historical world would thus be not so much a world in which the process of initiation has disappeared as a world in which no one is ever done with it—a world of the son, who structurally, fundamentally, cannot stabilize himself in the knowing posture of the father: a world of prolonged liminality. In short, a world of (permanent, provisional, repeated) auto-institution, thus of history. (205-206)

This auto-institution inscribes the philosopher-king with an impossible double obligation: to bear the indelible mark of rational sovereignty, but at the same time to be unmarked by disfiguring trauma, and thus always paranoiacally sensitized to the trauma yet to come, the trauma of succession, revolution, overthrow. If "history" is the permanently unstable world of "auto-institution," then *pre-history* would consist of an ability to regulate catastrophic dispossession, to incorporate loss into the life-cycle rather than project it into the aleatory numbers game of History. The wound of reason, not admitting impediment in itself, nor conceding the need for excess (whether as performativity in gender, Dionysian madness, etc.), feels the very atmosphere pregnant with omens of rupture and downfall. The other wound—the "wound" of the other—is not catastrophic but strophic or *tropic*, tropologically generative. It's tendentious to confine woman to a symbolically bifurcated position of subordination; but what I've been outlining here is the trauma that attends to the correspondingly claustrophobic confinement of male rationality to that proverbial "waiting room," outside and insulated from the primal scene of birth. The anxiety of male inspiration (facilitated by Muses) has to do with contamination and loss of control; exile from the theatre of operations; initiation into lack.[31] We still feel the lack, but have forgotten the power of initiation, the ceremonial induction into another (a numinous) order.

The menstrual substrate of the Muse tradition speaks of discharge as regeneration—an instance of "unproductive expenditure" well in advance of Bataille's theorizing—but it also confers this acknowledgment as *praxis*. As *enigma*, a word in which the primal ***gn*** root embeds wisdom and pregnance, reproduction is not a tautology that woman embodies but a ritual *techne* invoking initiatory measures, ratios, and pragmata; a liminal threshold of mesmerizing and confounding generativity. The Muse incarnates a complex manifold of instructions, and it is only in the long attrition represented by Western poetry's reduction of muse to a figure of inspiration, a stimulant or narcotic, that the gnosis of dispossession is

abased, and in its place arises the confident assertion of subjectivity as the proper use of a placid medium. By the time Rimbaud proclaimed himself as the other, it was a gesture played out against the vacancy of what had formerly been confoundingly potent with Muses, however much his insurgence clamored for a retrieval of the lost Muse. DuPlessis' insistence on exploring the structure of donations incumbent on women caught between the roles of muse and poetess reveals, in the case of H.D. at least, a curious turn: the muse as "emotional institution" compels a female assertion of order in a matrix already oppressively charged with orders, laws, rules. So H.D. derives, from the complex layering of family and social romance(s), a "multiple family muse," a way of transforming contending Muses into a structure of filiations.[32] Persuasive as this account is in the case of H.D., it tends to redirect attention to the family romance, the Oedipal complex; which is to say, to the nuclear stronghold of phallocentrism. What remains to be taken up is that induction into an order truly strange, one not recuperative as is H.D.'s, but involving *coup* or capture (as of wild animals), in which inspiration is fully at the disposal of the initiatory momentum: not making the device strange, as in Russian Formalism and German Expressionism, but making oneself strange as well. One by one, each by each. Not "other," but *us*.

Notes

1 Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, "Honeymoon," *Empathy* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1989), p. 76.

2 Quoted in Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle, *The Wise Wound: The Myths, Realities, and Meanings of Menstruation* revised ed. (New York: Grove, 1988), p. 316.

3 "Foreword" to Edward Schafer, *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in T'ang Literature* (San Francisco: North Point, 1980), p. xi.

4 Rachel Blau DuPlessis considers the prospective formula "male muse for female poet = female muse for male poet" and sees immediately the imbalance: "Simple reciprocity? No. Wrong valence. Unbalanced equation. For everywhere the grave social and cultural asymmetry between the sexes impedes this simplicity." *The Pink Guitar* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 36.

5 *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes & Queries To Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 125. On the other hand, Snyder clearly recognizes the fundamental alterity of poetry: "The voice of inspiration as an 'other' has long been known in the West as The Muse. Widely speaking, the muse is anything other that touches you and moves you. Be it a mountain range, a band of people, the morning star, or a diesel generator." (124)

6 *Theogeny* I.26-28.

7 "Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts." Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 7.

8 The difference is at once precarious and foundational. Irigaray in *Marine Lover* writes an echolalia of Nietzsche, reiterating his charms and in the process unveiling his text: "The most powerful effect of women: to double for men, sublime souls." Remember that Irigaray here *is* Nietzsche, but with that gendered *difference* intact. "To give body—and with no difference—to their ideals. And as those ideals are the gods of the language: to give them voice, foundation—material for transcendental productions." However, "The empire of the word cannot do without the ear and the voice if it is to reproduce itself. But those still fleshly mediums are to be left to woman." (109)

9 See Jane C. Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), chapter two. The quoted phrases in my account are from pages 3 and 4.

10 *Odysseus Polutropos: Intertextual Readings in the* Odyssey *and the* Iliad (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 212.

11 *Dialectic of Enlightenment* tr. John Cunning (New York: Continuum, 1986), pp. 34, 36.

12 These and subsequent details are drawn from C. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* tr. Norman Cameron (New York: Grove, 1960) and John Pollard, *Seers, Shrines and Sirens* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965).

13 Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, op cit.*, p. 106.

14 Quoted in Pollard, *Seers, Shrines and Sirens* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), p. 141. Jean-Pierre Vernant uncharacteristically underplays the mythopoetic resources available in the tale of the sirens, offering a one-dimensional reading in which "The Sirens are the opposite of the Muses"—by which he means that they are exclusively disabling, luring their auditors to destruction. *Mortals and Immortals* ed. Froma Zeitlin (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 105.

15 *The Siren's Song* ed. Gabriel Josipovici, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 62-63, and p. 61.

16 *Houseboat Days* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 15.

17 *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 121. "Opposite pairs such as inside/outside, the raw/the cooked, or life/death appear to be merely derivatives of the fundamental opposition between boundary and passage," in de Lauretis' view, and "all these terms are predicated on the *single* figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter." (p. 119) de Lauretis' thesis derives from a reading of Oedipus and the Sphinx, via Freud, which leads her to overstress the binary and mistake some of its attributes. The power of metamorphosis invested in myth—Greek or otherwise—is not exclusively a male prerogative. One might with equal plausibility contend that the male *resists* (female) differences and a feminine aptitude for transformation.

18 *Gender Trouble, op cit.*, p. 146.

19 *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 44.

20 Clayton Eshleman's poetic investigations of Paleolithic imaginal stirrings constitute an ongoing investigation of hominid perturbation as creative resource. Commenting on an earlier draft of my project, he wondered whether we might regard "breath [as] an upper displacement, a mental appropriation of a conjunction that was initially involved with the lower body?" The Muse then might indicate a point of bifurcation straddling upper from lower body functions (Bakhtin), and the received account of the Heliconian Muses dictating to Hesiod specifically aligns Muse-resource with consciousness, breath-spirit-pneuma, and the propensity to sublimation which the Christian era derives so exultantly from presumed Helenic purities. To go the other way into the lower body stratum,

however, also means going back in time, to take in the Paleolithic continuum, and also to probe shamanistic traditions in general. One result, as Eshleman insightfully put it, is to see that "A muse is also a bagpipe, a musette, probably related to muzzle, or animal mouth. . ." (personal communication, November 21, 1993). Redgrove and Shuttle cite the ancient injunction that, "'in order to enter the temple precincts one has to be transformed into an animal,'" and they link this motif to the catabasis tradition of subterranean descent—specifically the Homeric *nekyia* involving a blood ritual they associate with menstruation. *(The Wise Wound, op cit.*, pp. 313-314)

21 *Lyric Philosophy* (University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 230. The view of culture as a progressive "rescue" of stability from a preordained biological instability—a deprivation of instinct, an eccentric positionality, etc.—is advanced by various German philosophers of anthropology. See Helmuth Plesser, *Die Stufen des Organismus und der Mensch;* Arnold Gehlen, *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter,* and works by biologists Adolf Portmann, J. von Uexküll, and P. Buytendijk.

22 *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* tr. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 138-139.

23 A valuable study of apotropaic masks is A. David Napier's *Masks, Transformation and Paradox* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

24 *The Pink Guitar, op cit.*, p. 36.

25 *The Origins of English Words: A Discursive dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 129.

26 "'Venuses,' Turtles, and Other Hand-Held Cosmic Models," in Myrdene Anderson and Floyd Merrell, eds., *On Semiotic Modelling* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991), p. 57.

27 *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 193, 194.

28 "The Poet," *Essays and Lectures* (New York Library of America, 1983), p. 457.

29 *Oedipus, Philosopher* tr. Catherine Porter (Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 54.

30 As Goux points out, filiarchy defies both patriarchy and matriarchy in its disavowal of all forms of symbolic reproduction. This violent detachment from the sanctioning imperatives of the ancestors "is the driving impulse that defines Western civilization as history." (204) Oedipus, then, is the prototype of a "man who creates his own laws in a scandal of autonomy and humanism that at once opens up the possibility of an auto-institution of the social in an absolutely sovereign community *(autonomous, autodikos, autoteles)* and also allows the emergence of the individual." (203, 204)

31 I once heard Kaja Silverman describe her task (in what would become the book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* [1992]) as "eroticizing male lack."

32 *The Pink Guitar, op cit.*, pp. 25, 37, 38.

REVIEWS & NOTICINGS

On Reviewing Robert Duncan and Other Matters

The issues raised by Andrew Schelling's "The Tale The Hand Itself Tells" [Sulfur 34 (1994)] extend deeper into the complex of contemporary poetry than his objections to what was included in (or excluded from) Robert Duncan's *Selected Poems*. How a poem should or could appear in a book, and the relationship of contemporary poetry to commercial publishing also appear as issues. The question of the responsibilities of the reviewer comes up as well: should a reviewer have a firm understanding of the work under discussion and comment on it with precision, or should the reviewer use, exploit, a book as a forum to discuss other matters that are close to his/her attention. Both positions are practiced each day. I am using this response to spread out some information that might be helpful for readers of Duncan, or other poets for that matter.

Mr. Schelling raises the issue of whether Duncan's typescript is the final text and questions the validity of setting Duncan's poems in type. Kenneth Irby knew the facts of the situation when he reviewed Duncan's *Ground Work II: In the Dark* [*Conjunctions* 12 (1988)]. Now Andrew Schelling brings the typescript issue forward again. Duncan had a long and at times tempestuous relationship with printers and publishers. Most of his books were set in type. *Ground Work: Before the War*, however, will remain the major document in postwar American poetry of a poet preparing the text of his own poems on a typewriter for publication. The fact is that after this book Duncan changed his mind about setting his poems in type for publication.

A short review of the situation might be helpful. Duncan's early books, *Heavenly City Earthly City* and *Medieval Scenes*, were set in type by the publishers, Bern Porter and James Broughton, as was *Poems 1948-49*, which Duncan published himself under the imprint of Berkeley Miscellany Editions. Joe Dunn and White Rabbit Press printed the first act of Duncan's play *Faust Foutu*, but when it was clear that Dunn would not be able to publish the whole play, Duncan published a typed version under his own

imprint, Enkidou Surrogate—a surrogate imprint for White Rabbit Press. Duncan's contention with publishers intensified over the publication of his book *Letters*. That volume was published in 1958 by Jonathan Williams, and remains one of the most beautiful of the publications of the Jargon Society. Claude Fredericks set the type and then printed the book. The production of the book took about two years. At the beginning Duncan and Fredericks mistook one another (Jonathan Williams rightly turned the negotiations over to the poet and the typesetter) about how the lines and spacing should appear on the page. Duncan responded to Fredericks's work with detailed "Memos" in which he set out his principles of spacing and internal margins. Toward the end of the project, on 17 January 1958, Duncan wrote to Fredericks: "Your care wins me; as we work together on these proofs it seems more and more to meet the care I have had for the making of the book in writing." It was Fredericks who suggested placing the ends of long lines in square brackets at the right margin instead of bringing them back to the left margin and indenting them. The use of square brackets also appears in *Selected Poems* (pages 138 and 139, for examples). His first *Selected Poems* published by City Lights Books in 1959 also caused Duncan consternation. The publisher, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, held to a rigid page count, which irked Duncan no end; but it was the stapled binding which he rejected. The edition was rebound, sewn in signatures, but the page count and organization remained Ferlinghetti's.

The cover sparked the controversy about *The Opening of the Field*. Jess made the cover, which was at first rejected and then accepted as the frontispiece; Grove Press kept its cover. Duncan's following books, *The Years as Catches, Roots and Branches* and *Bending the Bow, The First Decade*, and *Derivations* were all set in type. The controversy of this period was with the publication of *A Book of Resemblances* which was to be published by Andrew Hoyem and Dave Haselwood at The Auerhahn Press. The book was first planned as a two volume set, but then an unresolved dispute about the kind of paper to be used led to the cancellation of the publication. The essential difficulties—which then come back to Mr. Schelling's views—began in 1968, when Graham Mackintosh dropped a page from the final proofs of *Bending the Bow*, leaving out a poem, "The Christ in the Olive Tree," and then renumbered the pages to cover the error. But when Saul Marks, the typesetter for John Martin's (Black Sparrow Press's) edition of *Tribunals*, confused his notations and internal spacing, Duncan retorted by insisting on a facsimile of his notebook (which is a slight misrepresentation, because the poem appears over several pages with blocks of other writing interspersed, while the reproduction makes it appear as if the poem were written straight out, page after page) and of his typescript to accompany the book. Then, too, he came to the strong position of insisting on the typescript as the "primary 'score' of the poem."

Schelling cites (and rightly) "A Preface prepared for MAPS #6; THE ISSUE" as Duncan's fullest statement of his insistence on the typescript as the definitive text of a poem. He could have cited as well Duncan's statement in *Wch Way* 4 (1982) as a response to Jed Rasula's setting of "Santa Cruz Propositions" in type:

> What the author has to insist on clearly is which one is the authentic text—in my case, not the manuscript, which is conceived of as a propositional sketch; and most certainly not the printed version, which represents the work and interpretational notation of someone else; but the present state of the typescript which comes from and is in my own working hand and Eye as concept ongoing.

That was the second part of Duncan's statement; the first is:

> Outside of answering certain questions in a telephone conversation with Jed Rasula who was to set the copy of the poem and my pointing out that in part II a series of texts are brought together, mixt together, to form a conglomerate whole and that these have, each, a separate type-face, I have not cooperated further in the presentation of the poem. My typescript is the definitive text. The test herein presented is WCH WAY's text of the poem, not mine; wherein whatever deviations from the original, including the use of justified types, the spacing after marks of punctuation, any typographical "errors," the variant articulations of elements of the poem, of lines, of sections, etc. are to be viewed as belonging to the present version, and not to the author's version as it stands. With this in mind I have in no way submitted proof-corrections to the printer.

Another line runs through Duncan's writing life. *Fragments of a Disorderd Devotion* presents the text in the poet's holograph, as does the later *A Book of Resemblances, The Cat and the Blackbird,* and *Names of People.* In *Caesar's Gate,* the poems written in 1955 while the book and the collages were in production—appear in holograph, while the poems from 1949-1950 appear in type. Duncan enjoyed making his own books, drawing them and typing them. He gave Helen Adam handmade books with crayon drawings in them. The Christmas cards he and Jess made for friends are other examples of the pleasure of making. In 1971, he began distributing typescripts of his working notes entitled "Ground Work." That series contained *Poems from the Margins of Thom Gunn's* ***Moly*** and *A Seven-*

teenth Century Suite. Duncan was physically and imaginatively engaged in the production of his own poems.

During part of his career, Duncan did not fight against having his poems appear in type. After the difficulties with *Bending the Bow* and *Tribunals*, he insisted on the authenticity of his typescript as the final text of the poem, yet during this period he also allowed into print, in type: 1) *A Song from the Structures of Rime Ringing as the Poet Paul Celan Sings:* 2) *Veil, Turbine, Cord & Bird*, 3) *Achilles' Song*, as well as the broadside 4) *Quand Le Grand Foyer* (with his watercolor drawings). During this same period, Duncan allowed the reprinting of the typewriter version of his play *Faust Foutu* in type; and the reprinting of the two versions of *Medieval Scenes* in type as well.

In the fall of 1938, in Philadelphia, Duncan took typing classes; from that time forward he earned part of his living (in various periods) typing for other people. The typewriter, as well as his own hand, were bound up in the actual process of writing, as he said part of his own "working hand and Eye." The manual typewriter was the first, best technology Duncan mastered. He later shifted to an electric typewriter, with multiple elements for Greek, accents, italics, and point sizes. Late in his life he purchased a typewriter with a small capacity memory that displayed lines in a small screen just above the keys. The sophisticated computer (at that time) that Jed Rasula used to set "Santa Cruz Propositions" at Station Hill Press was beyond Duncan's expertise. Had he retained his health and strength, I am betting he would have used a word processor and understood it as his best technology that could in fact master the proportional spacing of type (which he learned from James Peter Cooney in the early 1940s), spacing between words and lines, the notation, that was and is so central to his poetics. In another sense, consider the text of the essay "Rites of Participation," which appeared in *Caterpillar* 1 and 2 (1967/1968), and the text of "The H.D. Book," Part Two, Chapter 9, which appeared in *Chicago Review* (1979). The first example, is a typewriter version. Duncan underlines long quotations in the style of the manual typewriter, for italics, while in the latter similar quotations appear in type, in italics. Between 1938, with the beginning lessons on a manual typewriter, and purchasing an electric typewriter with interchangeable elements in the early 1970s, Duncan learned a new technology for his writing. One result was the intricate weaving of styles and font sizes and spacing in "Santa Cruz Propositions" done with changing and rechanging elements on the electric typewriter, and the second result was the same intricate weaving of styles and font sizes and spacing done with coded key strokes on a computer by another person. Duncan moved ahead with the technology that he could master himself, in the same way that he accumulated a reference library and a record collection in his house to support his reading and listening habits.

By the spring of 1987, Duncan's health had deteriorated to the point that he was incapable, physically, of typing the final manuscript that became *Ground Work II: In the Dark.* The contents of the book were fixed. He had decided that question. There are different typescripts with slightly different contents, but the one he handed over was the one he wanted published. He entrusted the manuscript to me to get into print with New Directions. The text was typed into a computer, and the type set from the text on disks. Peter Glassgold of New Directions and I worked with the typesetter for months to match the spacing and the notation in Duncan's typescript. During that period the title was added from the poem "After a Long Illness": "the two titles/ 'Before the War,' and now, 'In the Dark'/ underwrite the grand design." On 27 December 1987 I gave Duncan one copy—the available copy at that point. Two days later he gave it back to me along with a copy of the typescript in an envelope. He had checked the text against his typescript and pronounced the typesetting a success.

Now the question becomes: does literary history hold Duncan bound to a position of the typescript as the only authentic text, or does literary history grant him the privilege of changing his mind about set type when he examined what was possible with computer-based typesetting. Or, will the question of Duncan's deteriorating health always challenge his decision: 1) to allow the book to be set in type, and 2); to say that he approved of the results. In another sense, early in his career, and later too, even to *Bending the Bow,* Duncan had his books set in type. He then encountered great difficulties with printers, and articulated a strenuous position in favor of the typescript. He changed his mind more than once in his writing career—why then should he be challenged for changing his mind again? Duncan approved of type: why should he then be challenged for changing his mind when he acknowledged that a new technology emerged that could overcome his objections to set type? This line of argument, of course, is vastly different from Duncan's view that his typescript, made with his effort and his imagination working together, is the definitive text. That position remains an active part of Duncan's poetics. But the question of how his work would appear in publication is another question. What, Mr. Schelling, would be the difference between a text prepared on an electric typewriter in Courier 12 (used for *Ground Work: Before the War)* and one printed out on a laser printer in Courier 12 from a computer file? The latter, of course, would have sharper and unbroken characters, but the spacing and the notation would be the same. The translation to type holds imbedded codes and produces the same text.

And now to return to the issue of a "Selected Poems." A "Selected Poems," by its title and definition is a "selection" from a body of work, not a "Collected Poems." The task, or least one of them, is to include poems that represent the spread of a poet's accomplishments, the line of his/her

vision of a poet, the points of most intense attraction over a period of writing. Every person I sent proposed contents lists had special reactions: "this poem *MUST* be included," and the like. There were disagreements about this poem or that poem, but genuine agreement about the design of the volume. Gerrit Lansing was particularly helpful; he knows Duncan's writing from beginning to end. But the issue, first off, is the representation of Duncan's writing life. The initial consideration is not whether books are in or out of print, but finding the texts from the whole body of work that presents the poets work accurately. Having "An African Elegy" in the volume would have been terrific, but it was out of place. [There is an article, by the way, on the controversy of its rejection by John Crow Ransom: Kevin Ray, "Obvious Advertisement: Robert Duncan and *The Kenyon Review, Fiction International,* no. 22 (1992): 286-291.]

Leaving out "The Venice Poem" or including it was more problematic within the design of the book. "Medieval Scenes" is a serial poem from 1947 in which Duncan developed the structure of *The Opening of the Field,* as a whole book, and also the two series "The Structure of Rime" and "Passages." *Selected Poems*'s design tried to map out the development of serial form, and how that form was capable of containing Duncan's views of the poetics of form grounded in a household, and then extending through an imaginary geography to the "grand collage" he discusses in the "Introduction" to *Bending the Bow.*

"The Venice Poem" is a poem designed as "Symphonic Form," or more specifically, sonata form in three movements—exposition, development, recapitulation. The model for the poem was Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements,* and like its model, the poem has a bridge between the second and third movements. There is a "Coda," after the manner of Beethoven's *Third Symphony.* Duncan did not use this form for a long poem in his subsequent poems. There are smaller examples in "A Poem Beginning With a Line by Pindar," but there is no full exposition of the form after "The Venice poem." The poem is also dense with private references, for example: "the bronze boy burns the blue of sky" refers to Landis Everson, the "Doge" is the figure of Jack Spicer, and the whole poem is based on the emotional trauma of a fractured love affair. Then: the poem takes 31 pages in *The First Decade,* and taking up that many pages would have eliminated 31 pages of poems which supported the design of the volume. I chose not to include the poem. The comfort in this unsettling decision is that the poem will appear in volume one of "Collected Poems"—along with all of Duncan's poems which were published in books. [See Andrew Schelling's perceptive article on "The Venice Poem," and Duncan's "empire" of poetry: "Of Maps, Castelli, Warplanes, & Divers Other Things that Come 'Before the War'," *Jimmy & Lucy's House of K,* 3 (January 1985): 40-51.)]

Duncan's *Selected Poems* is a book published by a commercial press, which means that the rules of commerce and finance must be followed. New Directions has a long history of publishing poetry. It is a house friendly to poets and books of poetry, and has been since 1938. The number of pages and the size of the page were determined by the publisher. The width of the page is greater than in *Bending the Bow,* a concession granted by New Directions to accommodate the long lines of the *Ground Work* volumes, once we decided to use the convention of square brackets at the right margin mentioned above. The intention was to make Duncan's work available within a single volume, on the supposition that readers would then return to individual volumes which are still in print. *Selected Poems* was published in England by Carcanet Press. At this writing, New Directions is planning a second printing. Sales of Duncan's other volumes are up from a year ago.

Mr. Schelling, apparently, was not aware of Duncan's publishing history. The issue of a typescript and the capabilities of a computer will be debated for years to come. At least the facts are now on the table. That Mr. Schelling is as unknowing about Duncan's project with printers over the years as he is about the facts of the printing of *Ground Work II: In The Dark* is understandable. I am sure, however, that Mr. Schelling was aware that he was referring to Duncan's poem "The Song of the Borderguard" when he writes: "I write as a guardian, and because I think a growl of angry betrayal's in order with this book." Duncan wrote the poem in December of 1950, very soon after he and Jess decided to live together. The image of the lion and the lover runs right through Duncan's poems—the image of the lion is stamped on the cover of *A Book of Resemblances,* for example. The head of the puma in the foreground of Jess's collage *A Western Prospect of Egg and Dart* (1988), an homage to Duncan, carries the image forward to the year of Duncan's death. The presumption of entering that love poem and then turning out anger, however, is not understandable.

—ROBERT J. BERTHOLF

War Babies, Depression, Glutted Markets, and Being Being

1)

> It seems that "the war babies," those born after 1937-38 were "Born Dead"—to use a motto favored by the Hell's Angels. The philosophism of "reality" ended some time after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the ovens cooled down. Cinematic "appearance" took over completely sometime in the late '50s. "Nature" falls into an infinite series of movie "stills"—we get what Marshall McLuhan calls "The Reel World."
>
> —Robert Smithson

Thereafter—Smithson was writing in 1968—unreality became increasingly the reality. Movies and hallucinogenic drugs gave way to entire industries devoted to hallucinating a world. The virtualities began to produce virtualities.

In the '70s, everyone was so whacked-out that we may have failed to notice the most recent Great Depression. In the 1920s Nicholas Kondratiev showed that there is a fifty-five year cycle in capitalist economies from Depression to Depression. Although certain adjustments for wars are necessary, there should have been an economic collapse in the early '70s. The economic doomsday books which have been popular since about that time (the perennial bestselling "How to Survive the Forthcoming Collapse," etc.) are based on some version of Kondratiev's long-wave theory.

In *Strategic Cycle Investing,* however, Richard Coghlan demonstrates, with fairly cogent numbers, that in fact the world economy was in Depression from 1973-1983 and that it was not recognized. The expected symptoms did not appear. Rather than investors with long margins accounts diving from skyscrapers and heavy working-class unemployment, the symptoms of this depression were high inflation and the widespread decline of actual income; underemployment replaced unemployment. People were in fact taking the beating that emotionally they felt, but shrewd monetary policy (for which Jimmy Carter was despised) smoothed out the cycle and misplaced the disaster. We are still, I think, wondering what hit us.

If 1973, the year of Smithson's death, was 1929, it explains a lot. The arts took on a strong proletarian tinge, but the new proletariat was not factory workers and displaced farmers but displaced information workers. And, of course, the NEA might be seen as something like the WPA Writer's

and Artist's Projects. During the previous Great Depression the arts suffered from lack of technique: every one knew what to say, no one knew how to say it (or were careless in the urgency to get the message out); in the '70s there was plenty of technique, everyone was befuddled. The primary recourse was simplistic theories: Marxism, linguistic nihilism, and so froth (let the typo stand). The arts tended to become varieties of pointless data processing, the shuffling about of empty forms and playful applications of alternative hermeneutic techniques.

The paintings of Mark Tansey (currently in a major show at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts) document both the grandiosity of means and triviality of intent. They are jokes, and as cartoons they would be funny. As monumental paintings they are vaguely obscene.*

2)

As far as I can tell, none of the arts in their old forms have survived. In recent months I have noticed two claims to date the death of American poetry in 1971 and, if I recall correctly, 1974 or perhaps '76 (but the bicentennial year seems excessively neat). Another poet told me that he and a friend had spent much time in the '80s trying to map American poetry and were convinced that there had been a major environmental disaster—a kind of meltdown of poetry's reactor—that they tried to locate.

In her Introduction to *The Scarlet Cabinet* Alice Notley writes:

> There is too much of human material now everywhere: the world is covered with "the man-made." None of our problems can be solved by making more of it, more of the material, including books. Shiny-covered, same-looking books everywhere. To go into a bookstore & be made sick by all the books there, is almost the same as to be made sick by all the dead cars in New Jersey, seen from the train window, early in the morning. All achievement, writerly & poetic achievement included, must become more invisible.

*From Judi Freeman's catalog for the show *(Mark Tansey,* San Francisco, 1993): "Constructing the Grand Canyon is perhaps the consummate metaphor for the process of investigation in 'a world as text,' as Tansey characterizes it. Derrida, de Man, Bloom, and Hartman, clustered near the center of the painting, appear with the poststructuralist Michel Foucault, seated on a block near the painting's left edge. They are present at the building of the Grand Canyon, surrounded by those who chisel, hoist, jackhammer, measure, shovel, blast, carve, inscribe. Why? After all, the Grand Canyon is a natural monument created more than 1.5 billion years ago. These 'workers' seek to master its 'meaning.' The sheared, folded, and blurred cliffs of text are unclear; words give texture to these cleaved chunks of earth. Man is dwarfed by these massive forms."

If recovery from the Great Depression of the '30s left us with the heritage of World War II and the permanent support of the War Machine, the Great Depression of the '70s left us with a material world so depleted that we could only produce information. As we produced war materials in quantities to destroy the earth several times over, in order to pump up the economy, we now produce information many-times in excess of what we can process.

> Notley goes on to say, "Poetry. . .could be a force for the reestablishment of the invisible, for making people's inner lives more important than this constant assertion of substance. For poetry is not about words, or how one thinks, or making things. It is about essence—the secret inside the material.

This, it seems to me, is as clear a statement of the problem as one is likely to find. I can see no solution which does not involve a profound change in both the prevalent poetics and the existing institutions of poetry. The catechism of twentieth-century American poetry begins

What should I most fear?

"Go in fear of abstraction."

Essence, however, is not merely abstract, it is the abstraction of abstraction, so secret that it may not be nameable at all. A poetry of essences requires not "a little machine made out of words" (WCW) but a making of concepts which renew our sense of the inner vitality of things. It is not a call to add new things to nature, but to make up nature, with utter disregard for the false material nature with which we are presented.

3)

Charles Stein's *The Hat Rack Tree: Selected Poems from theforestforthe-trees,* 1980-1990s* is an important book for what it reveals about both a poetry of essence and the changes in the poetic institutions that are required to accommodate it.

Although he is not represented in any of the new canon-making anthologies, Stein is one of the foremost war-baby poets. His work from the late 1960s through 1976 was well published: *Provisional Measures, The Virgo Poem, Poems and Glyphs, Witch Hazel, Parts and Other Parts,* and *Horse Sacrifice* collect work that he wrote by the age of thirty-two. *The Hat Rack Tree* is the only substantial, subsequent collection of poetry.**

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*Station Hill Press, Barrytown, NY 12507, $9.95.

**I suspect many readers of this volume will want to seek out a smaller selection, *A Night of Thought* (St. Lazaire Press, 1988).

In an introductory note, Stein writes:

> theforestforthetrees is a textual practice, not a single long poem. This project has included all the writing in "poetry" I have done since the early '80s. To date it amounts to several shelves of folders, binders, and notebooks. I write freely and compose from this work pieces and compilations of pieces when occasions for publication arise. I hope the name suggests that the whole of it cannot be surveyed but exists solely for the sake of the particular moments of writing it affords and for the particular compilations. Yet each poem or collection does emerge from a "forest" of writing activities that in some way informs them all.

I have had the good fortune to be conducted through much of *theforest* as it has been produced by the poet himself. If it is a textual practice for him, it has been a listening practice for me. At my house or his and in numerous diners in the mid-Hudson Valley, I have heard much of *theforest* read aloud.

The Hat Rack Tree is an essence of *theforest*. Although I have seen the shelves of notebooks many times, I hesitate to guess how many pages there are, and I do not know if Stein could give more than a rough estimate, but I doubt that the one-hundred-and-twenty pages in this volume represent much more than one to two percent of the total. Any selection and publication is metonymic abstraction.

In *theforest* are beautifully articulated longer poems of the kind that are collected in this volume, and there are regions, more or less fragmentary, more or less well mapped, relating to the various matters of Stein's concern— Dzogchen meditation, phenomenological investigations, mathematical theory, dream work, and Greek poetry, especially the fragments of the poet-philosopher Parmenides—all crisscrossed with forest paths of often comic everydayness, all held together by an ear absolutely confident of the movement of speech, the resonance of vowels, the liquidity of certain consonance and phrase-marking stops of others.

This volume is not "the best of" *theforest*. He might have made selections which would have included none of these poems which would have been as impressive. A more daring selection might have collaged more fragmentary material; a more difficult selection, which would be of great interest to a small audience, would have drawn more on the mathematical speculations. From the various Xeroxed manuscripts that Stein has given me over the years, I might have made a volume that I would have liked better or that would have been as "good," or that I like better now because of its relevance to my own current work and interests.

4)

I should mention too that at the edges of *theforest* poetry gives way to other activities: performance poetry and improvised music, photography, installation art, pen and ink drawing, and philosophical writing. These are all equally part of the investigation.

What is the investigation? In a recent essay Stein provides this extraordinary commentary:

> As I wish to have an identity at last—or to be at last liberated from the need to have one—the concern for identity transmutes into soteriology: I wish to be saved by what I really am from what I am only apparently, or to be free at last from the very need to Be. This last wish is not suicidal: I do not want to be free from existence but from being insofar as it implies determinate identity—to be some-one or -thing, to show the mark of a nature, category, or type.
>
> The ultimate identity-pure, Parmenidean, Unique Being—is guaranteed to "all that is" but absolutely denied to everything that has "identity"—all seeming things that only are what they are by virtue of not being something else. Such beings are pseudo-beings. They exist by "being-not," and, through this pseudo-identity, they suppress their inalienable but ineffable communion with Being as such.
>
> Under this austere mythology of Being, when I seek to satisfy my yearning "to be at last" by acceding to determinate identity, I lose, by the measure of my own success, my one chance at satisfaction. I confess that this is a mythology that turns my head. It stops me in my mental tracks as I pursue ordinary identity-achieving activities and sends me looking instead for that in my own seeking, which, already conversant with Being, in the course of daily things, passes itself by.*

The question of the being of being, this essence which is so deep that even its essentiality is in some sense denied, pervades Stein's work. His

*"Modalities of Identity," *The Little Magazine*, 20, 1994. This issue of *The Little Magazine* also includes work by Anne Tardos, Will Alexander, Anne Waldman, the Awopbopalobop Groupuscle, and many others, as well as an important interview with Bob Grenier. It is available from *The Little Magazine*, The Department of English, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, NY 12222, $7.

identity is not as poet, performer, musician, photographer, visual artist.. These modes of identity are like Wittgenstein's ladder which must be thrown away after it has been climbed.

I am taken
for the power
I desire

(people think I am *real*

I am not real.

I stand on the roof.

I vanish.

I see
the sleeves
of my selves
grow dim on the plane.

This poetry is far more difficult than it first appears. A careful reading of *The Hat Rack Tree* will reveal that the nuances are not just stylistic graces, but the registrations of a poet with a sense of timing so perfect that he can reveal the comic and the sublime in the same effortless move:

elephants freely choosing
their future orbits

a curious feature of the physical world
that there are no features
that there is no
world. . .

The reason that abstraction got a bad name is that something seems to be left out. There was a confusion of abstraction and generalization. There are abundant reasons to "Go in fear of generality"—the faceless, empty categories of the sludgy sociology in which we now drown. Abstraction involves laying out a field, withdrawing to view the field in its extent, and

reentering the field, having replaced the materiality with concrete awareness, the visible with the invisible, the product with the essence. Abstraction is not generalization: it gives you a way to tell the dancer from the dance, but it does not prevent you from being the dancer and being the dance; it gives you a way to tell the dancer and the dance from the moon and the stars, but it does not prevent you from being the dancer and the dance and the moon and the stars. Awareness itself is abstraction and abstraction of abstraction.

Charles Sanders Pierce imagines a consciousness so reduced that its sole datum is the smell of rotting cabbage. This is either already an abstraction from a material world and a material sensorium or the consciousness is constructing its experience whole cloth, an experience without concrete grounds whatsoever.

5)

The earliest of these poems were written when Stein was about thirty-five *(Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,* etc.). In this year of the book's publication, he turns fifty. The first poem in the collection (which incidentally first appeared in *Sulfur)* is an elegy for Lou Kleinsmith, Stein's first T'ai Chi Chuan teacher. The death of the teacher is the beginning of maturity:

the bones become language itself
unanimously arching over humanity
taking all of us up in its colossal superstructure
confounding our being in its intricate hypotaxis
floating up ominously
it is impossible to tell just what keeps it afloat
lifting each in its levity
the strange sun setting in the west beyond the water
rises
because we approach it at such speed
it is a lion
and it opens its fiery mouth
a black dot growing huge at the center of the sun
inhaling the fumes of whales
on the isle below
safe
for a stay

we are deposited

Language is that essence that motivates movement without "internal combustion," as Charles Olson says in his essay on Shakespeare's late plays. Confronted with those things that move of their own nature, "without using any means or matter other than those local and implicit to it. . . . We are in the presence of the only truth which the real can have, its own undisclosed because not apparent character. Get that out with no exterior means or materials, no mechanics except those hidden in the thing itself, and we are in the hands of the mystery."

Stein cannot be identified as a teacher any more fundamentally than he can be identified with various other modes of identity in which he participates, but it seems to me that the activity of his poetry is teaching.

Although the idea arouses immediate suspicion and even ire, something of this order, that *poetry is teaching*, is what Alice Notley is calling for. It is not didacticism, not the enforcement of the norms that we learned to despise in grade school, not the benumbing dictation of things which must be remembered for the exam. True teachers never tell you any thing, not because they are perverse, but because the first thing a teacher must know is that it is not possible to *tell* any one any thing.

Information is not passed from a producer to a consumer. Food, cars, and lumber are important products because people *consume* them. People, however, produce the information they need, and indeed production is their only viable access to information.* They do not read books, they stare at the pages until they write it, and of course they write different books (because they are different people), and then they have arguments over interpretation. The arguments can only be resolved when they understand that they read (wrote) different books.

Granted, they are likely to write a better book, if they stare at a better book. To this extent information is passed.

Communities nonetheless are possible not because information is passed around, and everyone, as it were, buys in, but because humans, if they can at least partially overcome their self-alienation, realize that they are the same kinds of beings. It is the function of teachers to help us realize this, and it is a much harder point to get across that it seems that it should be: "the bones become language itself/ unanimously arching over humanity." It takes patience, practice.

We watch the teachers do it. They smile, encourage. Let us know that we still don't have it. The problem is that trying to become them, which is precisely what we do not want to do, is the only way we have to become

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* Both the educational and the entertainment industries are based on the premise of information consumption, and people often try desperately to provide the kinds of inputs which are required. They so completely lose contact with their own essence that they begin to think it would be good to be a computer.

ourselves. We look for that in our own seeking, which, "already conversant with Being, in the course of daily things, passes itself by."

The function of the teacher is not to think all of the thoughts, know all of the facts, have the right interpretations, and impart them to the student. The teacher's task is the same as the student's: both must realize their own *essential* information. This is a vast, ever-consuming undertaking. Teachers are those extraordinary people who have enough surplus energy to help others along. They remind the students of possibilities that they might otherwise fail to explore by displaying interesting and attractive objects that they have produced in the process of the paradoxical task of identifying their unidentity. They do what they do. If they talk too much, explain too much, they become distractions both to their students and to themselves.

6)

The modernist artist (and this idea can be traced back at least to Sir Philip Sidney) adds a new thing to nature, an original; thus the artist is distinguished from the artisan or engineer who makes only a copy. The postmodern artist gives up the possibility of creating an original and focuses on making a revealing or attractive copy. Both are of course theories of production.

There is much phony, illegitimate product. No doubt, there will soon be computer programs which turn out passable work in most fields. Already there are programs which algorithmically produce music as engaging as the run-of-the-mill graduate student in composition (they are using the same algorithms and the computer is more exacting in the process).

But I do not doubt that completely legitimate production of art is unlimited. It is possible to produce more serious, engaging, complex, and exciting work that any one can responsibly engage.

The other side of modernist aesthetics, the self-contradiction which made modernism the powerful stance that it was, has been lost. Pound:

Dichten = condensare

> . . .'Dichten' is the German verb corresponding to the noun 'Dichtung' meaning poetry, and the lexicographer has rendered it by the Italian verb meaning 'to condense.'

One condenses by two methods: omit redundancy, raise the whole to a higher degree of awareness (i.e. abstraction). *The Hat Rack Tree* provides a standard for condensation.

7)

If, however, "All achievement, writerly & poetic achievement included,. . .must become more invisible," the real achievements are likely to be lost altogether.

During the heyday of the NEA Ed Sanders proposed—quite usefully, I thought—that there be grants for not producing poetry, as there were grants for tobacco farmers not growing tobacco. But the funding has been heavily reduced, and the problem remains.

It is not entirely a problem of quantity, and it is not exactly a problem of quality. Many of the *best* poets are publishing, as it were, the raw data from their research. The pure aesthetic flow. I do not deny that it is ever engaging, rich, and significant, but somehow it is necessary to push it all up to the next level, to make the next step toward invisibility.

Although the three new anthologies of contemporary poetry edited by Weinberger, Messerli, and Hoover all explicitly recognize Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* as their antecedent, they all fail precisely on the point which made the Allen anthology invaluable. The contemporary anthologies are slightly different readings of the poetry market, each with its clearly marked and useful stance. One of the most important criterion of inclusion, especially for poets in mid-career, however, is extensive, *recent* publication. By contrast, Allen located and published poets who had published almost nothing. I do not necessarily mean this as criticism, only as evidence of the way the institutions are presently working. If poetic achievement must become more invisible, and it seems to me that it must, it is necessary for the guardians of poetic achievement to keep their eyes peeled.

—DON BYRD

Stephen Fredman *The Grounding of American Poetry: Charles Olson and the Emersonian Tradition* (Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture) 1993.

Do we need academic literary criticism? I admit that I was inspired as a youth by the idea of the literary critic hero, exemplified by F.R. Leavis taking on the Cambridge English Department single-handed. But then when I read Leavis praising "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" for being something I doubt that it is, and then dumping on the *Cantos* as though the person called Ezra Pound had suddenly become incompetent, I found no hero but feet of clay. I realized that literary criticism is not made up of truths, but of mere opinions. I remember A. Alvarez, discovering that I was writing on D.H. Lawrence, saying to me: "D.H. Lawrence can't be taken seriously as a novelist. Six of his short stories are interesting." That's what I call mere opinion. So when Douglas Bush at a Harvard podium in the early fifties called for a ten year moratorium on all critical articles I cheered along with the rest. No one could stop the flood; but we do have a right to ask, of even the best of literary criticism, whether or not we need it, need it at all.

Especially when the general level of literary criticism has sunk somewhere below "mere opinion." At least the older critics had a sense of what they thought should be read, and why; they upheld their notion of taste. Nowadays, as a genre of the plastic arts, literary criticism, exercising its own kind of aesthetics, sees patterns of connections within a work or a body of work, and expresses those patterns in a quasi-persuasive language created to achieve supremacy for that particular aesthetic formulation. In a word, it molds the plasticine of literature for its own artistic ends. Northrup Frye was the first, in my experience, to make a mandala of the whole of literature. *Anatomy of Criticism* is in its own way sublime. But anatomy—the title gives it away—is performed on dead creatures. Frye cannot be accused of vivisection. He might be accused of deadening literature in order to dissect it into his categories.

Up to 1963 I was nagged by this belief that a scholar was a puny guy compared with a real man, a literary critic, a Leslie Fiedler, say. I had never wanted to throw my weight around in opinionated articles: but I worried that I should. Then Olson appeared on the scene—this was in Buffalo—and he raised me up. The scholar and the poet are true friends; literary criticism is a predator on both. It had always been a joy to have a class of interested students and a text in front of us—a text to be explicated in terms of what the poet knew, in terms of how it came to be written, and in terms of how it would be understood by its intended audience—that great secret

joy of being a practising scholar. And not only did Olson, as a scholar himself, confirm the rightness of being that kind of teacher, but he gave me a text that I could be devoted to through endless classroom explications. Because that's all that scholarship is—a demonstration of devotion. If literary criticism at its best, busies itself to say what should be studied, and why, scholarship just does it. Scholarship gives everything to the literary work; literary criticism, especially of the newer sort, takes it away: the process of analysis deflects the spotlight back on itself, willy nilly.

Take *The Grounding of American Poetry* for example. We are talking here about the very best sort of recent literary criticism. Stephen Fredman is well-read, a clear thinker and writer, and has chosen a good subject. But what is it worth to compare Olson and Thoreau? (Note that the subtitle of the book, "Charles Olson and the Emersonian Tradition" is somewhat misleading. Fredman actually links Olson and Thoreau; it's Robert Duncan who is linked to Emerson.) Take a sentence like the following:

> For all his agreement with Thoreau on the virtues of mental continence, Olson does not countenance Thoreau's somewhat morbid distrust of flesh. . .(p. 42).

This is a good example of crit-speak. As a matter of fact, Olson says nothing about Thoreau in all the letters and talks and essays that exist. The "agreement" above, and refusal to "countenance," are Fredman's imaginings. He must know what he is doing here, having already squared with the reader: "Charles Olson never described Thoreau as a significant precursor." But he persists in the opinion that "their approaches to the question of groundlessness are in certain respects remarkably similar" (p. 26). The bare fact is that neither Olson nor Thoreau has "an approach" to the "question" of "groundlessness." This formulation is out of Fredman's aesthetic. It's what *he* sees happening; it's *his* construction on things. And thus the quite dissimilar Olson and Thoreau get lost in this quasi-argument for their common ground.

Fredman actually raises himself the doubts about this methodology, by quoting a pertinent passage from Olson's "Human Universe" on p. 63:

> All that comparison ever does is set up a series of reference points: to compare is to take one thing and try to understand it by marking its similarities to or differences from another thing. . .such an analysis only accomplishes a *description,* does not come to grips with what really matters: that a thing, any thing, impinges on us by a more important fact, its self-existence, without reference to any other thing, in short, the

> very character of it which calls our attention to it, which wants us to know more about it, its particularity.

Fredman is aware that literary criticism is challenged by the above quotation, for he asks, seriously, what kind of meaning there *can* be "without comparison, description, classification" (p. 63). He then tries to enter fully Olson's answer to the question, exploring in particular Olson's ultimate answer to what contains meaning, "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum." In a section on pp. 63-68 Fredman performs an admirable explication.

But the illumination thereby achieved does not prevent him from going on plying his trade with further comparison and classification, giving, for instance, credence to that cliched act of classification, the Black Mountain school of poets, referring to "the Black Mountaineers" (p. 71) and "the Black Mountain poets" (p. 83), with several other like references. When I was leaving Buffalo for Simon Fraser in 1965 I sketched for Olson a plan to create in my new university a center for Black Mountain studies. I indulged that urge to slice up literature into manageable units. At the end of what I thought a brilliant and convincing exercise in literary genre-brokering, Olson let me pause, and then said: "You'd be better off sticking with me!" Like many others, I have had the experience of Olson speaking intuitively, directly, and accurately to one's better nature.

In spite of everything I have said above, I truly welcome Fredman's book. It is excellent of its kind, and the answer to my initial question is, Yes, we do need books of this kind. Olson in particular does. A poet's reputation, like it or not, depends on literary critics. In our time, the reputation that critics can give a poet—just by paying a lot of attention to his work, no matter how—makes the difference between whether the poet is read or not. Fredman will help Olson get read.

—RALPH MAUD

Noticings

Jenny Penberthy's meticulously edited *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931-1970* (Cambridge, 1993) is a much more important book than its title would suggest and a wonderful example of how a

resourceful scholar can turn what seems to be the most disabling of circumstances to her distinct advantage. I am referring to Paul Zukofsky's refusal to grant Penberthy permission, not only to print his father's letters but even to quote from them. A lesser critic might have given up, but Penberthy solved the problem by prefacing the actual forty-year correspondence (Niedecker's side only) with a 118-page biographical, critical, and bibliographical essay which tells the story of the relationship between this most unlikely of couples—the plain, unworldly and unknown Protestant woman poet who lives in isolation on Black Hawk Island in Wisconsin, and the sophisticated, Jewish New Yorker, who, while not yet a well-known poet either, has visited and corresponded with Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams.

Penberthy's narrative, substituting as it must for the missing side of the correspondence, makes the absent Louis Zukofsky all the more present. She neither moralizes nor psychologizes, letting events, letters, and poems speak for themselves. The tale that emerges (the tale Paul Zukofsky is at such pains to repress) is not pretty—at least not so far as Zukofsky is concerned. Niedecker first came across his work in the Objectivist number of *Poetry*(1931), took courage, and wrote him a fan letter. He was evidently flattered and responded: a period of what Penberthy calls "avid communication" followed. In late 1933 Niedecker went to New York to meet her idol and for the next three years, visited him regularly. "They shared cramped quarters," Penberthy reports, "and an emotional life that was far from uncomplicated." One complication, evidently, was an unwanted pregnancy, followed by abortion. By 1936, they had decided to be "just good friends," and "by mutual agreement, they destroyed all but three small fragments of her side of their 1930s correspondence—no doubt, a tinderbox of emotions." After Louis's marriage to Celia in 1939 and the birth of Paul in 1943, their friendship became more exclusively literary, although Niedecker tried in awkward and touching ways to be a part of Zukofsky family life. "The correspondence," Penberthy observes, "was Niedecker's emotional and artistic lifeline." But on Zukofsky's side, it was evidently much less: in the course of time, he became increasingly grudging and remote, as well as slightly paranoid about her "use" of his work. Thus, when he would cite a line he intended to use in a poem—as in a 1951 letter where he quotes "if love exists why remember it?" to be used in *"A"*-12—he cautioned Niedecker not to use it first. Again, when he relayed some of Paul's childhood remarks, he reminded Niedecker that this material was his property and that she mustn't use it. And in the mid-sixties, when she wanted to publish a book of his letters on poetry—a project that was originally his own idea—he balked and finally refused permission for her to publish it. In an unusually candid letter to Jonathan Williams in 1965, Niedecker writes, "It has been difficult for thirty years, Jonathan, yet I

suppose he has been—the association thru literature—the most valuable part of my life. I can do nothing but respect him now, black tho things seem." In "Wintergreen Ridge" (completed in 1967), her pain is more vividly expressed:

and in this to us peace
the stabbing
pen
friend did it
close to the heart
pierced the woods
red
(autumn?)

Niedecker died three years later. Zukofsky's name is notably missing from Jonathan Williams's *Epitaphs for Lorine*, which includes tributes from thirty-two poets, among them Cid Corman, Basil Bunting, Ian Hamilton Finley, Jonathan Williams, Charles Reznikoff, and George Oppen.

The letters themselves, containing as they do marvelous extracts from Niedecker's poems, pithy statements of her poetic, and references to every stage of Zukofsky's writing process, make for totally absorbing reading. Absorbing but also, to my mind, disturbing. Niedecker never complains. She tries to be cheerful, positive, optimistic. But the letters also suggest that Zukofsky's treatment of her became increasingly callous, if not cruel. His critics (most of them men) have thus far had little to say about this side of his character. In any case, his *absence* as a voice in Penberthy's book makes him all the more present—a chilling Hawthornian or Jamesian ghostly father haunting her writing. Still, it is Niedecker who finally triumphs, not only over her mentor but over his wife Celia, who is a second presence in the letters—a silent, disapproving presence who clearly resents Lorine's overtures to young Paul. For, despite her own sense of discipleship, Niedecker's poetry, generous extracts from it cited in Penberthy's texts and in the letters, was very much her own.

In the late fifties, Niedecker wrote a large number of haikus. "Haiku," Penberthy explains, "found a ready ear in Niedecker, an ear attuned to natural themes, brevity, quiet, compressed image, and unspilled emotions . . . . All her haiku-like poems are written in five-line stanzas with end-rhymes in the third and fourth lines. . . . Like their haiku models, her five-liners are sparsely punctuated." Such reference to "models" is called into question in another new scholarly book, Wai-lim Yip's *Diffusion of Distances: Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics* (California, 1994). Yip writes in part out of anger and frustration—frustration at what he takes to be the wholesale misunderstanding of Eastern poetry on the

part of well-meaning Westerners. "Despite a good deal of earnest protest about cultural exchange, ethnocentrism (open or subterranean) remains stubbornly entrenched in Western academia," he declares in his Prologue. "It is a question of whether the indigenous aesthetic horizon is allowed to represent itself *as it is* and *not as it is framed* within the hermeneutical habits and the poetic economy of the West."

Yip, probably known to *Sulfur* readers for his *Ezra Pound's "Cathay"* (1969), is rightly incensed by the "formidable distortions of the Chinese indigenous aesthetic horizon in treacherous modes of representation." The West, he feels, applies "one master narrative" to judge both Western and Eastern poetries, as if they were the same. "It holds," for example, "that the Tao (Way) of the Taoists can be rendered as (the Christian) God or as (the Platonic) Logos!" A language of "rigid syntactical rules" like English "can never approximate a mode of presentation whose success depends on freedom from syntax"—Chinese being a prime example. The Chinese characters, Yip shows with excellent examples, are equivalent to what we might call, in Marinetti's terminology, "words-in-freedom," although Marinetti did not have the particular "freedom" of Chinese in mind. That is to say a noun catalog like "Phoenix gone, terrace empty, river flows on alone," cannot be rationalized in such English locutions as "Because the phoenix is gone, the terrace is empty. . ." and so on. Rather, "objects and events explain *themselves* by their coexisting, coextensive emergence from nature."

Yip is right to insist that there cannot be "one common aesthetic," one master narrative that governs Chinese and American poetry. But what is the solution? What about Chinese translations of American poetry, an area neglected in Yip's book, zealous as he is to show the distortions of his own language (Chinese) on the part of his adopted country? The question remains whether the "dream of a common language" can ever become a reality. Yip argues that literary models might function as overlapping circles (he even provides a diagram of how this might work), the overlap between the two signifying cultural convergence, a mutual fructifying of divergent models. But in practice, such convergence is not likely to take place. Yip's own solution is to provide an interlinear translation, the English word written below the Chinese character it renders. This makes for good scholarship, as literal and accurate as possible, but the translator, faced as s/he necessarily is toward the language of the poetic text-to-be-derived rather than toward the original, will necessarily want to do more.

The strength of Yip's argument is that it alerts us to the problematic of translation, to the recognition that, say, Ezra Pound's China is a *construction,* not the "real thing." His critique also suggests (though he doesn't mention such cases) that the "multiculturalism" of such textbooks as the Harper-Collins World Reader, which includes as many Korean and

Egyptian poems as Italian or German ones, is specious, the Korean poem presented in its pages being transformed into an American artifact that finally bears little resemblance to the original. In this sense, the fabled hegemony of the "imperialist" U.S. is still with us: English has to be the lingua franca, no matter what. Indeed, one could argue that Korean poetry, Harper-Collins style, is one more contemporary American representation, all the more insidious for claiming to reproduce the OTHER.

In any case, the Chinese ideogram, whether "authentic" or not, continues to have a decisive influence on the work of American visual poets. The young poet and book artist Kenneth Goldsmith has just produced, in collaboration with the singer Joan La Barbara, a book cum compact disc called *73 Poems* (Permanent Press, 1994). It's one of the most beautiful books I've seen in a long time, especially when one reads its texts (printed or rather drawn in black and gray graphite on parchment-colored rag paper and framed on a white page) while listening to La Barbara's unique vocalizations, of which more in a moment.

In his Preface, Geoffrey Young quite accurately calls Goldsmith a "taxonomist of the language environment." "The central optical linking device," Young explains, "is overprinting. The bold type of one page is carried over to the next page, but screened to gray, with new bold type printed over it." *73 Poems* (the title is taken from e. e. cummings but there are actually 79 poems in the sequence) is dedicated to John Cage, and Goldsmith has clearly learned from Cage's mesostic art, as well as from Fluxus artworks and Concrete Poetry, how to make the most of morphemes, words, and phrases, arranged in mathematical and aural forms that generate what Young calls a "hiphop syntax of cultural signifiers, all the while being graphically gorgeous." Here, for example, is a two-page spread, the overprint text on the left ("CLEAN NOSE / FIRE HOSE / NO BOWS /PLAIN CLOTHES / YOU DON'T NEED / A WEATHERMAN / TO KNOW WHICH / WAY THE / WIND BLOWS") becoming the "subtext" of "DEEP THROAT / RIGHT VOTE / TERRE HAUTE / BLADDER BLOAT / BILLY GOAT / CREOSOTE / DEAD MAN FLOAT / HALL & OATES / YOU OLD GOAT / QUOTE, UNQUOTE" (FIGURE 1).

The pleasure of such texts is to watch one poem play off against another and then modulate into a third, a fourth, a fifth, the crowded pages of the opening section giving way to smaller and smaller units until, halfway through the book we reach a "0IO" figure and finally a solitary "I"; then the book fans out again, picking up verbal momentum along the way.

As a verbal-visual construct, *73 Poems* is consistently elegant, witty, and original; its rhymes (e.g., "gain weight / jail bait / soul mate / hesitate / penetrate / Watergate") producing exciting visual patterns, as is the case with the "Ts" in this particular example on P. 7. But it is its musical dimension that makes the book unique. When he finished writing the

poems, Goldsmith gave them to Joan La Barbara "to do with what she pleased." La Barbara, who had made numerous recordings with Cage, has developed an extended vocabulary of vocal sounds that range from traditional song to a wild assortment of glottal clicks and stops, inhaled notes, or overtone chant. Using tape, she also produces multiple layers of her own voice. "The first thing I had to do," La Barbara explains in a headnote, "was to differentiate between the dark and light texts. The idea of depth of field—the gray text in the background and the black text up front—required using the full stereo field, almost like an architectural space." "Musical gestures that are only half-heard," the music critic John Schaefer explains in his prefatory note, "perhaps buried under other layers of sound, may float up to the surface, only to parade off the stereo field entirely. . . . La Barbara represents Goldsmith's insistent use of certain vowels with a specific group of vocal sounds that repeat in an almost mantra-like fashion."

The result is emphatically not just another instance of setting poems to music. The zeros which occupy the central portion of Goldsmith's book, for example, are represented by layers of microtonal singing, in which, as John Schaefer explains, "the usual gap from, say, C to C-sharp is subdivided into many microtones. These notes, which are ignored by most Western music, are so close together that they give the aural illusion of one set of notes growing from another—an illusion matched by the movement of "0"s and "O"s in the text." And so *73 Poems* heralds a new direction in a poetry, planned and composed on the computer terminal, executed as a word painting, and animated by vocalization on CD. It brings the "poetry reading" into the living room (or wherever else one happens to find oneself with a CD player), making space new. An unusually happy marriage of art and technology.

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

New Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. William H. Shurr (University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

New Poems of Emily Dickinson is a collection of nearly 500 passages excavated from the poet's correspondence, each of which the editor claims is able to stand by itself, "free from any context in the letters." These pieces

are grouped into several categories (Epigrams, New Poems, Workshop Materials, etc.), a quarter of which falls under the "New Poems" heading and poses the most problems.

Since none of ED's letters and only seven poems were published during her life, editing the handwritten manuscripts presents a myriad of structural dilemmas. But if Johnson's 1958 version of the correspondence is problematic, then this book is a typographical nightmare: the feeling one gets in reading *New Poems* is as if the past 35 years of ameliorative transcriptions have been obliterated, and one is looking at ED through a turn-of-the-century lens *a la* Todd and Higginson.

Aside from R.W. Franklin's edition of the three "Master Letters" (less than 1% of the complete correspondence), no other letters have been published in facsimile form. Shurr works exclusively off of Thomas H. Johnson's *Letters of Emily Dickinson* which was transcribed with virtually no concern for original structure. Note the alterations that occur in this excerpt of a letter from ED to "Master" as it's sieved through the editors:

I would that all I love should be weak no more. The Violets are by my side, the Robin very near, and "Spring"—they say, Who is she—going by the door—

Indeed it is God's house—and these are gates of Heaven, and to and fro, the angels go, with their sweet postillions—I wish that I were

(Johnson, *Letters of Emily Dickinson,* vol. iii, p. 333/J187. Harvard University Press, 1958)[1]

more. The Violets are
by my side—the Robin
very near—and "Spring"—
they say, Who is she—
going by the door—
*Indeed it is God's house—
and these are gates
of Heaven, and to
and fro, the angels
go, with their sweet
postillions—I wish that

(Franklin, *Master Letters of Emily Dickinson,* p. 15/F1. Amherst College Press, 1986)[2]
*Franklin's note: "Indeed] Inded *with a second* e *added in ink"*

The Violets are by my side,
the Robin very near,
and "Spring"—they say,
Who is she—
going by the door—

Indeed it is God's house—
and these are gates of Heaven,
and to and fro,
the angels go,
with their sweet postillions—

(Shurr, *New Poems of Emily Dickinson*, p. 40/S210. University of North Carolina Press, 1993)[3]

In going after his "poem," Shurr creates line-breaks and stanza-breaks, as well as altering the text by replacing dashes with commas. His sole criterion for a "Dickinson poem" is meter—the "signature" fourteener. Not only is this an insult to the complexities of ED's writing, but a naive approach to poetry in general. If we assume (as Shurr does) that ED intended these fragments to stand apart from the letters, then why didn't she format them as such? In many cases, ED sent poems on separate sheets of paper, or set off passages by indentation or spacing away from the body of the letter. Ironically, many of these "new poems" are followed in the letters by sections that were mined much earlier by Johnson when he edited the complete poems.[4]

There are several possible reasons why measured writing appears embedded in the correspondence, none of which Shurr considers: perhaps ED did not recognize a sharp distinction between her poetry and prose; perhaps she was "trial-running" nascent lines of poetry under the pretense of prose; perhaps she regarded letters as prose-formatted poems. For Shurr to have considered any of these possibilities would have weakened the book's only premise.

Among the 130 fragments in the "New Poems" section alone (roughly one-quarter of the book), 30 have one or more alterations of the text as it appears in Johnson's *Letters*, including one added word and two omitted words. Shurr cuts off or breaks into sentences 12 times in the "New Poems" section, often covering up the resulting weird grammar by installing/removing periods, capitalized letters, commas, dashes, etc.

One of the reasons such editorial hack-work can exist is that we have only Johnson's typeset versions of the letters to go by. Thus this palimpsest of editorial graffiti that bears no resemblance to what ED had written. And how we read ED's work is as dependent upon the space in and around it

(how it's seen/heard) as on the words themselves. *New Poems* is a cheap strip-mining and altering of the correspondence in order to "feed the appetite of those who would like to have more of her poems."

Perhaps *New Poems* might exasperate enough scholars and serious readers of ED to encourage the publication of a manuscript edition of the letters as has been done with the poems. Until then, editors will continue to exploit this lesser-known area of ED's work and deceive its readers. If such binary and puritanical (sacred poem / profane prose) approaches to ED's writings are done away with, broader readings of the *whole* work could open up which would in turn broaden our understanding of ED's intricacies of styles and voices—the spirit in which the words were written.

—DAN FEATHERSTON

NOTES

1 Johnson formatted the letters in standard block-print rather than following ED's line-breaks. He indicates new paragraphs by indenting three spaces. But according to Franklin, "Dickinson did not indent paragraphs, except for the one immediately after the salutation, and did not space between them." (p. 9 *Master Letters of Emily Dickinson).*

2 The asterisk indicates where, according to Franklin, a new paragraph might exist. Franklin's transcriptions follow ED's line-breaks.

3 Repeating Johnson's errors, Shurr prints commas after "side" and "near." The three versions printed here are abbreviated in order to illustrate only the variances in the texts where they overlap. See Franklin for a facsimile of the complete letter.

4 See, for example, Johnson's poem #1261 and letter #277; also poem #712-713 and letter #378 in his *Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1951) and *Letters of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958).

the dark end of the street / Margins in American Vanguard Poetry, Maria Damon, University of Minnesota Press, 1993

After a couple decades of taking it on the chin, the lyric spits out its bloody mouthpiece and turns its cheeks. Its several cheeks. No longer Sapphic nor capable of asserting an unconditional oppositional stance, the modern lyric sustains multiple subject-personae. Its subjectivity is enacted as an ongoing practice, not a fixed condition. Like poet/critic Susan Stewart, Maria Damon is in the lyric's corner. Like Cary Nelson, Damon is

interested in deconstructing the "respectable facade of American letters that would erase the indigence and illegitimacy of its vital source," a source she locates in the marginal poetics of such writers as Bob Kaufman, Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, Gertrude Stein, a group of teenage girls living in a South Boston housing project, and. . . the Robert Lowell of "91 Revere Street."

Lowell? Why not Ted Berrigan or Bernadette Mayer, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha or Besmilr Brigham? For Damon it is less important that Lowell, like Stein, lived high on the hog, than it is that he cut himself loose in "91 Revere Street" from the hierarchy that provided him with social position and power. That he resisted in his writing an oppressive family dynamic. That he struggled with mental illness, demonstrating empathy with others by virtue of shared pain and deprivation. Despite his privilege, Damon argues, he, like the others, composed an anti-discourse that opposes the more Aristotelian and hierarchical discourse of power.

Marginal writing, and Damon is willing to consider "street-rhymes, toasts and dozens, popular music lyrics," etc., serves to creatively undermine "the philosophic and social systems that have declared it and its disenfranchised writers Other." Of her case studies, Damon's essay on Jack Spicer, his agonizingly ambivalent attitude toward the gay community and the emerging gay consciousness of the 1950s, is among the most illuminating and articulate.

Damon writes in a positional and passional prose. The energy of her investigations draws on insuppressible associations. Nietzsche, Hart Crane, Lorca, Whitman, and (most often) Genet make repeated forays into the case studies. Consequently, instead of zeroing in on an aspect of a writer's poetics, Damon is Talmudical; her focus expands concentrically. And this is a main pleasure of her book.

—FORREST GANDER

Leaking Truth: British Poetry in the '90s

Can you do no better than recite
what is heaped from old endeavor?
I would be there if language
had not split me, if salesmen
had not drawn me, self-clutching

on a pedestal imparadised, a mile
from the floor of workday seams.
It, they, set my breasts too high
and I bully you, a corner of worship
in my heart, unable to trust the lyric voice
as other than headed notepaper,
clangily portentous like the brass flock
on Assurance Hill. How I yearn,
in amnesia almost, for the landed age
which accompanies the label,
for strong-lined verses
that are more than tropes, less than gush.

—Gavin Selerie, from *Roxy* (in *10 British Poets)*

Robert van Hallberg is probably right that mainstream poetry in the U.S. can be characterized as a "suburban" poetry of accommodation and adjustment. Recently, reading over dozens of mostly little press books and magazines from the U.K., I was struck, as I have been many times before, by the tenacity and resourcefulness of so much contemporary British poetry outside the mainstream in resisting both accommodation and adjustment. —Some of these "alternative" poetries seem to desire nothing less than a new aestheticism achieved by means of a newly forming eloquence. Others of these poetries are resisting, with great energy and immense formal brilliance, the very aesthetic categories through which English poetry has traditionally been valued.

Information about the alternative directions in contemporary U.K. poetry is difficult to come by. For a number of years, I compiled a list of new U.K. poetry publications for the now discontinued Segue Distributing catalog and in this way was able to keep in touch with some of the currents in the work. On a recent trip to England I was able to pick up additional material, only to realize how much more I had missed—how much the intense cultural differences between the U.S. and the U.K. make it easy, despite shared words and formal concerns, to miss crucial social and class contexts as well as unstated assumptions. Types of class antagonisms and gender prerogatives are played out in the alternative poetry scenes in the U.K. in ways that are more marked, and dispiriting, than in the U.S. (where class and "society" values nonetheless play a crucial legitimating function for official verse culture). Certainly it is striking how many current collections and anthologies of alternative British poetry include few or virtually no women. At the same time, a particular range of aesthetic procedures seems to be propped up by a patrician decorum and Oxbridge authoritativeness that barely covers over the thematic renunciation of these values.

Indeed, the margins, in the U.K. and in the U.S., are cohabited by quite disparate (and often desperate!) factions—not only poets committed to open and new forms but also those with a tenacious commitment to an unobtainable lyric, a sort of sprung voice that takes on a religious quality at times. This may help to explain why some poets, ostensibly dedicated to alternative poetics, display a corrosive dismissiveness toward exploratory works that are radically skeptical of the rhetorical grounding of both sprung and traditional lyricism. In Britain, one senses that a struggle for the right to poetry is taking place far outside the corridors of official verse culture and, indeed, that all parties to this struggle are subject to a level of establishment abuse well beyond that experienced in the U.S. Mandarins at the margins can produce poetry that is quite poignant in its eloquent straining, but it becomes delusory when this straining achieves a monopoly on value—when the partiality of this, as any, poetic project is refused in deference to a belief in the truth of what is no more than the work's own self-imploding (or self-creating) diction. —In this context, the range and power of such poets as Maggie O'Sullivan, Tom Raworth, Allen Fisher, Denise Riley, Tom Leonard, and Bill Griffiths seems all the more remarkable and compelling.

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The New British Poetry: 1968–88, ed. Gillian Allnutt, Fred D'Aguir, Ken Edwards, and Eric Mottram (Paladin, 1988) is the best introduction available to contemporary U.K. poetry. Mottram's section of the anthology consists of poets who began writing in what Mottram describes as "The British Poetry Revival," working in traditions related to Bunting, MacDiarmid and Jones, and includes Thomas A. Clark, Bob Cobbing, Allen Fisher, Griffiths, Lee Harwood, Barry MacSweeney, Wendy Mulford, Tom Picard, Raworth, and Iain Sinclair. D'Aguir's section focuses on "Black British Poetry" and includes explosive work in nonstandard and "dialect" forms by John Agard, Jean Binta Breeze, Valerie Bloom, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Merle Collins, and Grace Nichols among others. Allnutt's "Quote Feminist Poetry Unquote" presented works in more narrative styles by Eavan Boland, Alison Fell, Frances Horovitz, and others. Edwards's section consists of formally innovative poets born in the immediate postwar years including Richard Caddel, Cris Cheek, Ulli Freer, Glenda George, Geraldine Monk, Maggie O'Sullivan, Elaine Randell, Gavin Selerie, and Robert Sheppard.

A Various Art, ed. Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville (Carcanet, 1987) provides a fuller context for one tendency represented in the Mottram section of *The New British Poetry,* a tendency that has been particularly influential for its renovations (or refashionings) of lyrical and pastoral (or postpastoral) forms. Seventeen poets are presented, including Anthony

Barnett, John James, J.H. Prynne, Peter Riley, and Iain Sinclair, many of whom are loosely associated with "Cambridge" and most of whom began publishing in the late '60s and early '70s. The only woman in the anthology, and among the youngest contributors as far as I can tell, is Veronica Forrest-Thomson, who died in 1975 at the age of 27.

In sharp contrast, *Floating Capital: New Poets from London*, edited by Adrian Clarke and Robert Sheppard and published in the U.S. (Potes & Poets, 1991; distr. SPD, Berkeley) features the work of 14 poets, mostly younger, working in "linguistically innovative" and performative directions, with some debt to Fisher and Cobbing, who lead off the collection; the poets include Gilbert Adair, Cheek, Adrian Clarke, Kelvin Corcoran, Edwards, Virginia Firnberg, O'Sullivan, and the Australian poet Hazel Smith. *Floating Capital* is a fundamental resource for understanding British poetry in the '90s.

What follows is a brief sketch of some current work in the wake of these anthologies.

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"I leak truth like a wound," writes Barry MacSweeney ("The Shells Her Auburn Hair Did Show") in the first issue of the welcome new Scottish magazine *Object Permanence* (1/94; #2: 5/94; 121 Menock Road, Glasgow G44 5SD). The magazine is usefully committed to including a fair number of contemporary U.S. poets in the company of the most innovative contemporary U.K. poets, allowing for the possibility of a shared cultural space that seems encouraging for all involved; even if we leak "our" truths differently on the other side of the Atlantic.

Meanwhile, in London, Bob Cobbing (who recently celebrated his 70th birthday) and Adrian Clarke have revived the ever-lively *And* (#7, 2/94), following the publication of the Writers Forum's 500th publication, a 320-page collection of 112 poets, *VerbiVisiVoco*, that seems the antithesis of the "high-seriousness" often associated with the practice of verse in the U.S. as well as the U.K. Writers Forum has been going since 1963, publishing books and supporting alternative writing practices through its frequent workshops. The anthology, coedited by Cobbing and Bill Griffiths, which has an international lineup, emphasizes performance, sound, visual and conceptual poetry. The result is an exuberant, uneven collection featuring a welcome variety of typographical and visual display, made possible in part by the fact that many of the pages are photocopied from the original Writers Forum books, including some early mimeo works. Also from Writers Forum, and highly recommended, is *ExcLa*, a new "berserk" "supernuminous" collaboration between Maggie O'Sullivan and Bruce Andrews, filled with "whistling ablutions," "lemony innuendo," and "Unfixed Palettes." (Writers Forum: 89a Petherton Road, London N5 2QT.)

One of the great literary events in Britain in the past few years is surely the 1992 publication of *Future Exiles: 3 London Poets* by Paladin, a trade press now owned by HarperCollins. The three poets—Allen Fisher (b. 1944), Bill Griffiths (b. 1948), and Brian Catling (b. 1948)—have each included 150-page selections from their work. Griffiths has organized his "Selected Poems, 1969-1989" alphabetically by title. Griffiths's use of "prison talk, biker talk, dialect, literal translation, ancient English, phonetic spellings, obscure nicknames, opaque references, playfully and violently rearranged [syntax]" (to appropriate Jeff Nuttall's introduction), within poems that are sonically saturated and often madcap, make him one of the premier exponents of what I call ideolectical poetry. Griffiths is also a superb translator of Old English; see, for example, his translation of *The Battle of Maldon* (Pinner, Middlesex: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1991). Fisher's ambitious projects, most particularly a thorough refiguring of the complex of relations among information systems, theories of knowledge, and poetic processes, are represented here mostly by inclusion of work from the '80s that demonstrates how a "multiplicity of attentions" leads to a poetics of "informed intuition." *Stepping Out* (Pig Press, 1989; distr. SPD, Berkeley) is Fisher's most recent title readily available in the U.S.; I highly recommend it.

Aaron Williamson, who is deaf, has been called one of the best young performance artists in Britain. His new book, *A Holythroat Symposium* (Creation Press, 1993; dist. Inland, East Haven, CT) is a collection of texts based on his performances that explores deafness through language, sound and gesture: "The central design. . . / was to fortify the conjunction / between / a sense of identity / evolving from out of the physical situation . . . / of deafness / and the ongoing exertion. . . / of engendering texts. / That is, to oscillate between / what has become congested / into a state of anatomy / and the mechanical synopsis of its trace / thereby / diminishing the distance / of its seesawing / to this end. // The primary source of identification / the body / as residue / conducting fulgurative interrogations / of the phonic / in and around language / yet to one side of its drag. . . // I wanted to suggest / the sanctity of vocalization / as anatomical process / within an environment / that is usually normalizing it / into an activity that is granted." Williamson's writing is vivid and unexpected, with a striking range of tone and velocity of syntax:

> An artery awash
> impart of tide lines
> evince map-rings
> pith-strung and held
> inside quartz
> wheeling down nerves

lifts
a bracelet of mists
grazing the panic bolt's
arterial latrine of push petals

Peter Larkin (b. 1946) has been publishing a remarkable series of books and pamphlets since *Enclosures* in 1983. Larkin's extension of a Zukofskian sense of word order, indeed his uncompromising commitment to the pleasure of sight, sound and intellect, is evident in his sequence, "Care of the Retract," in *Ten British Poets,* ed. Paul Green (Spectacular Diseases, 1993; 83B London Road, Peterborough, Cambs. PE2 9BS). As "Care of the Retract" is a study of the word *retract,* so *Scarce Norm Scarcer Mean* (Prest Roots Press, 1992; 34 Alpine Court, Kenilworth, Warwickshire) is a set of variations on the poetic economy of scarcity: "The entered order enterprised / whole manners of nature in un- / spent fresco, but would their ventro- / pollutions sing no probal rites / slung to rest idiotypic of all / too much companionate salvage." Larkin's press, Prest Roots, has also published *A Comparative Daimon* (1990), a diaphanously obleak sequence by Paul Green: ". . . A madder, vaster, standard is ascension's; the / pasts are tesserae, and / flash, or / rise, too bleakly for their / time's amount. The / light dies, as if an / application of it meaned a fabric to be torn." I also recommend from Spectacular Diseases: Ulli Freer's "darting" "kicking" "magnetic" collection *Stepping Space* (1990). (Paul Green's Spectacular Diseases is also an excellent source for obtaining U.K. "little press" materials.)

Two of the best recent books from British poets have been published in the U.S.: Tom Raworth's *Eternal Sections* (Sun & Moon, 1993) and Ken Edwards's *Good Science* (Roof, 1992). In *Good Science,* Edwards (b. 1950), who edited the galvanizing magazine *Reality Studios* in the '70s and '80s, moves through a variety of forms, showing a moral imagination and generosity of engagements that make his book, to quote the "Preface," "agitational, molecular, powerful, disparate, innumerable, blank, necessary, accurate, conscious, communal, conservative." The sheer social force of Raworth's resolutely ongoing work produces resonating concatenations that extend beyond the borders of the book. Raworth (b. 1938), whose work is extensively published in the U.S., including *Tottering State: Selected and New Poems 1963-1983* (The Figures, 1994; distrb. SPD) and *Visible Shivers* (O Books, 1987; distr. SPD), also has two chapbooks in the Equipage series (see below): *Blue Screen* (1992) and *Survival* (1994). *Emptily,* a book-length work by Raworth, is featured in *Talus* #7 (1992), an excellent journal out of London (English Dept., King's College, Strand, WC2R 2LS).

Also in the U.S., *Abacus* #81 (4/94; distr. SPD) features *Upstate Stoic* by *Floating Capital* poet Gilbert Adair: a vibrant foray into hyperreality (e.g. "accelerated motion" at "60-noise-proof"). *Floating Capital*'s editor Adrian Clarke is the author of *Obscure Disasters* (Writers Forum, 1993), a work that is acrobatically infectious in a way that brings to ear both O'Sullivan and Raworth. Clarke's poetry is dizzying in its momentum, constantly shifting linguistic focus with a stream of constant attention to contour (line) as outer edge of a probing, probational activity ("fixed pattern arraying idiolect / in a standardized exchange / letters for meaning what / you won't again borders / protect the field blocked / to centre misnomers on / scattered leaves heard right"). Clarke is the subject of the first of 12 single-author "resource" issues focussing on "linguistically innovative poetries" (bibliographies, commentary, new work) of Robert Sheppard's newly revived magazine *Pages* (239 Lessington Avenue, London SW17).

Rod Mengham, a poet and critic of the immediate postwar generation, who teaches at Cambridge University, is editing a determined series of chapbooks under the Equipage imprint (Mengham, Jesus College, Cambridge CB5 8BL). About 20 have appeared so far. While some of this work, but more generally some of the poetic tendencies often associated with "Cambridge," get bogged down in a decorous solemnity that pulls back from the "wild" sonic and formal risks sometimes gestured at, there is certainly an enormous commitment, not to say devotion) evident. Still, the virtually reified rhetorical surface of the sprung lyric—"the voice belongs in the words and not to a speaker," in J.H. Prynne's words—can seem more a house style than a ticket to a "true" poetry that "wrings the heart," more a "vehement theology of the Word" than a participatory democracy of language. Isn't the jeopardy, indeed, "false assuagement," clinging to the vestiges of the old music as if it were the only music, the old truths as if they were the only truths? In any case, much admirable work is being published by this press. Michael Haslam's *Four Poems* (Equipage, 1993), continuing in the direction of his earlier *Aleethia* and especially his amazing *Continual Song*, is the most over-the-top in wildly lyric, Blakean excess; while a younger poet, D.S. Marriott (b. 1963), often seems to glide giddily on the affective musical surfaces of self-eviscerating lyrics, making his poems attractively difficult to pin down in their nonetheless manifest allegiances and resistances (see *Airs & Ligatures* [Prest Roots, 1990] as well as *Lative* [Equipage, 1992]). Prynne's *Her Weasels Wild Returning* (1994), while as dense as ever, seems almost nostalgic, in a biting sort of way, for the gender narrative of the somewhat-less-than wild lyric tradition—though note the literally equivocating ("weaseling"!) title of this Equipage edition. Peter Riley's Equipage title, *Lecture* (1993) suggests another way of framing the problem: it is notable for its foregrounded reworking of lyric

and liturgical forms. Riley publishes a fine series of letterpress pamphlets under Poetical Histories imprint—31 have been issued since 1985; Riley, as bookseller, is also a good source for small press work (27 Sturton Street, Cambridge CB1 2QU).

Denise Riley has included her Equipage chapbook, *Stair Spirit,* in *Mop Mop Georgette: New and Selected Poems: 1986–1993* (Reality Street, 1993; distr. SPD), an engaging multiplicitously self-reflective and self-refractive collection (from "Lyric": "Take up a pleat in this awful / process and then fold me flat / inside it so that I don't see / where I was already knotted in.") Also new from Reality Street/Studios is Wendy Mulford's *The Bay of Naples.*

The New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible, ed. Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (Manchester University Press, 1993; distr. St. Martin's, NY, for an outrageous $70) is one of the few substantial collections of essays on the topic and is a good companion to *The New British Poetry.* It features useful summaries of recent poetic history by Mottram ("The British Poetry Revival, 1960-75"), D'Aguir ("Black poetry in Britain"), Roger Ellis (little magazines); Peter Middleton ("The Politics of Subjectivity"), Hampson ("Language and Ideology"), Helen Kidd ("Women, Writing, and Experience"), as well as Barry on Fisher, David Miller on Gael Turnbull and Sheppard on Lee Harwood. Commentary on the new British Poetry, along with much other poetry, can also be found in *fragmente* (11 Lansdowne House, Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester M20 6UJ), which has published 5 issues since 1990, focussing on such topics as "women and (post)modernism," "language writing" and "pastoral."

Considering how inhospitable the alternative British poetry scenes appear to be for women, Peter Middleton's remarkable new study, *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture* (Routledge, 1993) is not only necessary medicine, it is a pioneering work in how we can understand what is often regarded as gender neutral as indeed examples of the work of "men poets." Middleton, a poet and professor at the University of Southampton, insists that we bring the maleness of supposedly neutral writing by men out of the closet of its imaginary invisibility. See also his essay "Silent Inscriptions of Gender: Recent Men's Poetry" in *fragmente* #4.

&, finally, before I return to my senses, or wherever it is I am returning to, let me recommend just a few more books: *Uncertain Time* by Richard Caddel (Galloping Dog, 1990; 45 Salisbury Gardens, Newcastle upon Tyme NE2 1HP); *The Sway of Precious Demons: Selected Poems by Geraldine Monk* (North and South, 1992; distr. SPD); Tom Pickard's *Tiepin Eros: New and Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe, 1994); and a three-book set of Anthony Barnett's *Little Stars and Straw Breasts,* his Zanzotto translations, and a collection about his work, from which I have quoted Prynne above

(Allardyce; distr. SPD). Some of these books will be available by mail from Compendium Bookshop, 234 Camden High Street, London NW1 8QS.

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Rootworks

Mackey. Nathaniel Mackey published three books in 1993, and one in 1994, all worthy of serious scrutiny, beyond the sheer fact of such publication, itself notable. Trekking down three parallel, interlocking, separate, and interloping paths at once, in a kind of rotational repositioning, Mackey moves among his three genres with elegance and decidedness. His book of poetry is *School of Udhra* (San Francisco: City Lights), his book of fiction is *Djbot Baghostus's Run* (Los Angeles: Son & Moon), and his book of criticism is *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press). In addition, this year (1994) Moving Parts Press in Santa Cruz has brought out a limited edition of *Song of the Andoumboulou: 18–20,* signed by Mackey. It would be of interest to those interested in fine printing and design (70 Cathedral Drive, Santa Cruz, CA 95060), aside from the intrinsic interest of its being further meditations down the serial, exploratory path of his poetry, as the Andoumboulou series shifts from lyric singularities of its earliest manifestations to collective investigations of Sophia and the sophic.

In poetry (familiar to readers of *Avec, Conjunctions, Sulfur, Mandorla* and his own *Hambone)* his is a loose line, page dance play among myth, sexuality, music and an emotional knowingness across a range from dream and meditation, to talismanic appropriations of specific African, Caribbean, Spanish/Moorish and African-American spirits, gods, orishas, situations, stories. The odyssey in this work is a struggle with the erotic, with desire and the song, both demanding considerable attentiveness and trials of initiation, including fine-tuned listening to musicians and sages—oftentimes the same. The work is studiedly cross-cultural, in a principled ethnopoetical stance. In fact, it invents or imagines new places and peoples, travels to them (sometimes in dream), studies new sites, hears and invents new anagrammic words somewhat "Ahttless"ly, rather in the tradition of the imaginary voyage. Incidentally, Mackey (citing Edouard Glissant) feels strongly that "ethnopoetics can go both ways." (DE 261) This means that

we are talking about an "edge. . .where differences intersect" (DE 260), a border, a porous middle ground of cultural engagement between different and disparate cultures, not the colonizing or primitivizing pleasures of dominance over cultures secretly condescended to. In all of his work, Mackey is like a shuttle, weaving between.

Mackey believes, with Robert Duncan, in the investiture of the real and the historical by a constant spiritual watchfulness and force. The turns and gestures one makes in one's own life are filled with shadow meanings, portents, reminiscences of other meanings from other times, as if one acted, filled with, possessed by others. The key phrase for this apprehension comes from Mackey's *Discrepant Engagement:* he speaks of "the co-inherence of immanence and transcendence." (DE 232) It is a term of great importance to summarize the processes of his historical/mythical imagination, in which the social and the metaphysical are linked. (The essay from which these terms come, "Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol," can also be found in *The Politics of Poetic Form,* ed. Charles Bernstein.)

Rolled a
joint with gunpowder
inside, struck a match,
whispered, "This is
what history does."
Said, "Above sits
atop its Below, each
undoing the other
even though they
embrace."

Went up in smoke, lit
by feathers of light,
debris falling for
ages. . .

(SU 33)

Mackey is always scrying, looking into, under, beyond, through. He is called to read signs, and the process is both desirable and taxing (one of his poem titles is "Irritable Mystic"); he is called to be that through which a braided and multiple set of cultural materials speaks and works. A root working.

Mackey designs linked sequences in both his poetry and fiction. *School of Udbra* is divided into three parts, with alphabetic indicators of beginning (Andoumboulou), middle (Outlantish), and end (Zar). It seems as if the first section enters into a land or site whose myths ("mu") and musics are the

subject of the next two parts. The first section continues the meditative serial poem called "Song of the Andoumboulou" which began in Mackey's first book of poetry *(Eroding Witness,* 1985): "the song of the Andoumboulou is addressed to the spirits." (In fact, however, the whole book is written under the sign of Andoumboulou.) It is a sequence containing paths of initiation to and through rich, polyvalent diasporic cultures, so that Mackey as the singer takes the shapes and voices, is instructed by, and reenacts the situations of a multiplicity of African, Arab, African-American folks—whether gods, spirits, or musicians.

> Uplifted arms of an Osirian ropewalk,
> erratic
> moonsluice, Legba's crutch.
> The
>
> unswung dancers of Thoth, wide-eyed
> interpreters,
> their book the loosed embers
> of dusk.
>
> (SU 4)

In the use of Legba, the crippled dancer, an image and idea central to Mackey is alluded to—an image of plenitude and vocation, not of loss: "the figure of the phantom limb." "The phantom limb is a felt recovery, a felt advance beyond severance and limitation which contends with and questions conventional reality [;. . .] it's a feeling for what's not there which reaches beyond as it calls into question what is." (DE 235) The phantom limb is to this poet what the caduceus is to the doctor in H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud.*

One attractive feature of this work is the use of the page. Mackey first loosens the poem's joints, lets in a good deal of air and light, or the silence and offbeat counter-rhythm. The poems are like spirals, carefully dervishing. Then, for some poems, he adds kinds of codicils, or addenda, separated from the main poem by a line on the page, and often by a good deal of space. It is as if he is creating an underside for the poem, a commentary or gloss on it, a note for it, a ratio or relationship with it, or a related set of rereadings of the situation outlined in the main poem. This line is a powerful tactic; that Mackey indicates something vital by it is shown by the way the lines get repeated in the table of contents. Indeed, the "graphic aspect" of Mackey's poetry is very striking. I am citing that phrase from his study of Charles Olson, an essay which is a penetrating attack on those who would make unequal binaries of pairs like musical/visual and oral/literate in their implications as open and closed: for, in Mackey's words, "neither

orality nor 'graphicity' is monolithic" but are tools "available to either inclination." (DE 125, 124) In any event, there are many reasons both in intellectual history and in history that an African-American poet might be imagined to say: When I hear the word "oral," I reach for my pen.

Djbot Baghostus's Run is a wonderful novel, both very readable and very deep, and pretty wry and funny to boot. Set in a few months between 1981 and 1982, it is written, for the most part, in letters by "N," a musician in a jazz group, to his correspondent "Angel of Dust." (This is the second volume of "an ongoing work" called *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate;* the first volume was *Bedouin Hornbook,* 1986). We have just N's meditative half of the correspondence, but the novel also contains three narratives called "After-the-Fact Lecture/Libretto" which tell or sing part of the story as a potential opera in versions from other members of the band (Aunt Nancy, Lambert, Penguin). The group needs a drummer; the women in the group want it to be another woman. The search for this drummer, the relations among the group, their premonitory dreams, visions, jolts, fears, pressures and bonds take on the dynamics of a full-fledged, though multi-personed Quest. Part of the Quest, for example, is to gain and lose enough to perform well on their gig in New York. But the real satisfaction of the narrative is one's immersion, as a leader, in a paisley-rich multiple-patterned intelligent study of inner quests, and the responsibilities they bring.

Everything set down is read, reread, and then read inside out; the mental processes of the characters, the style of the book, and what it considers incidents are all about syncopations of signs—unpredictable, stern and friendly at once. Signs and symbols, dreams and associations, messages sent in quotations of songs are some of the mentors for characters in the book. The book works by complex, pun-filled, nuanced reading the signs which gesture, dream, chance, memory lay before the characters. In fact, even characters are characters. Eventually, for example, the memorable title is glossed—the "D" as the mark of the "Duende" and Andalusian song; the changes of Jarred Bottle (a soulful character in a libretto—by N? or perhaps N himself?) to "jbot"; the "B/Ba" and "ghost" of Baghostus. Mackey is a master of sinewy, artful, cable-twisted sentences in which the feeling of music, the playing of music, the spiritual practice of music, and allusions to known musicians capture the reader in a net of attention.

It remains to note that this book is enveloped in one of Sun & Moon's absolutely arresting covers: two black men, one of whom has a whiteface skull and an orange skullcap painted on his face and head. The cover is not as funny as the book, but it expresses the X-ray vision, and the flip into a sense of confrontative spirit worlds that the book offers.

Hejinian. Another recent novel which pushes the bounds of fiction and features, as well as a collective protagonist is Lyn Hejinian's *OXOTA:*

A Short Russian Novel. This maybe old news (as it was published by The Figures in 1991), but it shouldn't be, although Hejinian has, more recently, published *The Cell* and *The Cold of Poetry* (Sun & Moon, respectively 1992 and 1994). In an odd way, Hejinian is an ethnographic writer, taking notes with curiosity, empathy, and difficulties of translation, having achieved that wry, suspicious, distant implication of the observer-participant. "It is description that raises scrutiny to consciousness, and in arguing for this I am proposing a poetry of consciousness, which is by its very nature a medium of strangeness." *(Poetics Journal* 8, 44) This citation contains central operable terms, especially the identification of consciousness with strangeness. Strangeness way be further noted as a mediating or third way between realism (the world described) and lyricism (the expressed feeling of a perceiver).

Oxota (pronounced oh-ho-ta and meaning The Hunt) proceeds on a witty premise: the desire of an American woman tourist to write "the great Russian novel"—one might here make some feminist remarks about the presumed nature and gender of "the great American novel" on which Hejinian comments and to which she aspires—but let's instead observe that she does so by borrowing the model of Eugene Onegin, Pushkin's "free novel" in verse, thus complicating the matter generically, and drawing closer (for many reasons) to Byron's *Don Juan* than to Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh.* Her genealogy, concerning consciousness, language, and strangeness, one might draw from William (though not rejecting Henry) James and Gertrude Stein. So Hejinian does realism aslant of the novel, and does the dream without surrealism.

The work is not really based in event, but rather the poetics may be something like "An Anecdote is Perceived thru the Density of Observation." (O 118) Nor is it based, as most novels are, in disclosure—there are no secrets, no betrayals, no big turning points or discoveries. Rather—in one of the 1001 of Hejinian's brilliant aphorisms—"What remains to say was hardly there—as if one told but could not recognize" (O 288) or "Pushkin the person is dead but the novel won't come to that end/ All's again plotless, as it should be/ What was time is weightless and pitiless. . .(O 279). The hunt is precisely this—a denomination of the many alternatives, not a hunt for the meaning, but a hunt for convergences, motion, connections spread wide and twinkling, for "the construction of small resonating forms." (O 210) This is an unabashedly Steinian poetics, based on "perspective spread over a largish surface, located in innumerable non-isolating focal points." *(Temblor* 3, 134)

Oxota is based on the travels of Hejinian and some American companions to Leningrad where they join other Russian companions in a temporary collectivity—a number of characters banded together to build a mutually interactive set of subjectivities "in the makeshift intimacies of the

cluttered room." (O 77) There is no romance plot, or any one (i.e. often Oedipal) plot. It is a book filled with half-told stories, the eros of foreignness, and a changeable, shambling collective protagonist whose articulation is part of the point. The novel is like the middle part of Homer's or anyone's "odyssey" (but studiedly not an epic), narrating travels inside and outside a household, a work in which guest-host relations are very important, and in which shared stories of the marvelous and the daily are the basis of exchange. (Although disclosure is very much the point of Homer's work, so the comparison cannot be exact.) The work, something like the intricate, death-warding, sleep substitute of the *1001 Nights*, also articulates the poetics of the dream: "Books usually seek, Lydia said/ A dream has no position after itself, only its own position." (O 226) In ways that I will explore in relation to Blaser, this work may be said to draw for its praxis on the poetics of serial poems and on the essay.

Blaser. The "co-inherence of immanence and transcendence" (to repeat Mackey's terms) marks the work of Robin Blaser. When asked by the fact finders of the reference work *Contemporary Authors* to name his religion, Blaser said "Imagination." That he simultaneously denominated his politics as socialist suggests that utopian desire, ethical hope, and ready astonishment fuel him. Blaser may be said to have optimism of the intellect *and* optimism of the will. *Astonishments* (incidentally) is the title of his forthcoming book of collected essays; I am noting here *The Holy Forest*, which constitutes Blaser's collected poems from 1959-1993, though this formulation is not given on the title page (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1993), since the project is ongoing.

> we still dream behind us of a perfected
> humanity a religion of cities and
> take the thought east the twentieth-
> century project, delving centuries of
> mind and heart for a new relation among
> things,
>
> overwhelmed
>
> to dream again
> of *laissez-faire* going fair along paths
> through the gardened wreckage and consequences
>
> (HF 302)

Blaser has been, since 1962, engaged on a long serial work called "Image-nation"; as with Mackey's career (though a generation earlier) the desire to declare for a project of serial work occurs from the beginning, and

occurs for similar reasons—to examine "the co-inherence of immanence and transcendence."

In this serial project Blaser and Spicer were companions; indeed their terms are original and now central to any discussion of seriality. First, a serial poem is a cast into a wilderness: planlessness, risk, movement with the work, heuristic form are all central qualities. This may be one meaning of Blaser's "holy forest" title—it is the wilderness of exploratory form. Spicer: "you have to go into a serial poem not knowing what the hell you're doing. That's the first thing. You have to be tricked into it. It has to be some path that you've never seen on a map before." (Spicer: "Excerpts from the Vancouver Lectures," in *Poetics of the New American Poetry,* 233) It's as if the signs are wiser than the person; the person must follow the signs even if they are tricksters. Spicer cites Blaser with his metaphor of dark and light—in a serial poem: "it's as if you go into a room, a dark room, the light is turned on for a minute, then it's turned off again, and then you go into a different room where a light is turned on and turned off." This pocky semi-Enlightenment epistemological rhythm reserves a strong place for mystery. The citation features the curious analogy of room to stanza or a poem. Serial poems then become the "house with many mansions"—my favorite bit from the Christian Bible—offering plural and diverse possibilities, without ground rules for what goes inside a poem and what stays outside, and as well the suggestive mess of getting mansions into houses. This passage as well proposes the sense of illumination and then (frightening, generative) darkness (without narrative connection) which is certainly true of the serial work of, say, Oppen. The non-narrative, or special narrative of the rejection of monodirectional story is another part of the practice of serial poems: "the poems tend to act as a sequence of energies which run out when so much of a tale is told." (Blaser "The Fire," in *Poetics of NAP,* 237) Sequencing of metamorphic materials, rather than narrative, is central.

Finally, the movement of Blaser's poems is a pulse of accumulative streaming across a field of perception. His poems shed light, and work through darkness too, and exist as a kind of powerful levity or lightness. This cast across a field, learned from Olson, is nonetheless not filled with an Olsonic desire for mastery and insistence, but is pleased that one perception and association will charmingly and fluently and surprisingly lead to another. "I like to describe this in Ovidian terms as a *carmen perpetuum,* a continuous song, in which the fragmented subject matter is only apparently disconnected." (Blaser, "The Fire" 238) The metamorphoses of "continuous song" is one key practice in Blaser's work.

In "Image-Nation" the reference is clear. This is a nation of beloved imagi (images, people and visions), beyond nationalisms of any sort. It is the only citizenship Blaser desires, as well as the only religion. Poem by

poem in this serial work, of which *The Holy Forest* contains twenty-five examples, he builds a world in which serious meditation about the links among the political, the social, the economic, the erotic, the ethical and democracy can occur, valuing, at every turn that which is "incomplete, and by nature unstable and creative." (HF 324) The seriality here is a desire to make, remake, reexamine, recombine elements; in many ways each poem is something built and broken down at once (which makes him difficult to cite effectively). "Hymns and fragments" might be a characteristic title and poetics; he likes to cite so that he both illustrates and represents that "the sign as a witness of something that is forever elsewhere" (cited from Richard Sieburth) or "always thinking somewhere else" (which is a description of Montaigne). The series begins deepening and thickening around the 5th or 7th, under the break and movement around Vietnam and our country's war politics, and in the aftermath of Spicer's death.

> this co-herence falls, like rain,
> into the syllables
> this in-herence
> of a golden poem
> translating
> blood, dancers
> and whirling
> drunken lives
> into a tense
> music
> of a hollyhock
>
> (HF 115)

The "Image-Nations" are probably, centrally, about desire which is the imagination.

> he has only the stories to tell, naked
> and plotless, the spiritual territories,
> earth-images and sky-maps, dark
> at the edges
>
> the mechanic of the marvelous dreamed
> of Stalin and Hitler and the ordinary. . . .
>
> (HF 265)

or from the magnificent Image-Nation 23, an evocation of the public role of the artist:

the *eros* of chances among things and
their *signs which are movable parts of the syntax*
dazed
in the circularity of desire and thought
we see through
(HF 328)

Blaser makes a claim for the poet as public intellectual because of being one of the notable explorers of a situational and perpetually unfolding (perpetually singing—carmen perpetuum) reality. As Miriam Nichols says, in a fine and intelligent account of Blaser in *Sagetrieb* 9 (1/2), "The function of aesthetics [for Blaser] is not to solve social problems nor to reveal truths (restore religion), but to engage in an activity creative of 'meaning and thing.'" *(Sagetrieb* 131) It seems to me that Blaser's work offers essays; that the essay is like a genre in poetry; it may be the root genre of our poetry. This for a number of reasons—the localizing and not totalizing of claims to truth, the citation strategy, the play with vectors of meaning, and of course the "essaying" or trying out of ideas, the virtu of endlessly exploratory probing.

Blaser's work is adorable, speaking to the nobility, the erotics, and the politics of a desire for human possibility within the boundaries of a situational ethics and historical sense.

I have tried for 35 years to
redefine sweetness—it is what
they called being—

(HF 273)

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Noticings

I showed a friend the first issue of the shiny new journal *lingo* and he saw the photograph of Bernadette Mayer and exclaimed, "She looks like Janis Joplin!" Among the poetry jocks in my neighborhood—students, scholars, poets, would-be and won't-be poets and the sometimes hallucinated and rarely real casual reader—Bernadette Mayer is a favorite, a scandal to

sophomores and a badge for the self-elected few. It is Ohio after all, and Bernadette Mayer will do them all some good.

In the interview in *lingo* Mayer says "And I think that it's one of the most vital things I have felt lately as an 'old' person, which is to make it clear to other people that I like all kinds of poetry." This is said to Michael Gizzi in the context of an informal discussion of the possibilities of the "I" as the "other" in poems, of the use of the first person in modes other than those employed by so-called "confessional" poets. Later Mayer says a little more about what she means by liking all kinds of poetry: "I just want to say that I think it's really important to love all kinds of poetry and to realize that for the whole history of the planet there have been all these different kinds of poetry, and people are, I think, too involved in Western Civilization, and I think Western Civilization should be given the loss." Those last remarks about Western Civilization probably contradict the first remark about "liking everything," but I don't especially care about that. As a relative newcomer to her work reading through the purple *A Bernadette Mayer Reader* (New Directions, 1992) I was struck by how much the history of western poetry is a presence in her work, vitally so. That is, Mayer's work is testimony to the enduring power of the poetry of Catullus and Villon as much as it is an extension of Stein and O'Hara and other more recent writers. While I can see why the prose works of Mayer—the fabulous *Memory* and the much-awaited and soon-to-appear *The Desires of Mothers to Please Others in Letters* (Hard Press)—might be of great interest to a younger generation of experimentalists, for me it is Mayer's impersonations, imitations, and translations of Catullus and the Greek Anthology that impress most. Performative and explicit, she gender-crashes the Catullan complaint. Few of her contemporaries so merit the basketball epithet: "in your face." Her deictics and the occasional use of the conventions of direct address make her one of our best love poets and, it also occurs to me, from the perspective of "Western Civilization" one of our most deeply "traditional" poets. (Whatever western civilization is in its many contradictions and complexities.) The speedy, compact, controlled spasms of her syntax together with her debt to Catullus and Villon and the Greek Anthology offer another model for working beyond the Romantic lyric, while in the prose texts she keeps pace with younger poets who sometimes seem to have made use of Stein's work and little else. Who else but Mayer can write

> Other than what's gone on and stupid art
> I've no even memory of people and their part
> In bed I forget all details
> The female with the male entails. . .

or

> you are you since you love to be
> identifiable things you are the perilous
> chance lover of the splashing blue finder (that is hell)
> you dont wear a hologram or safety pin you are
> I take them one by one both dude & dudette
> you are the peristalsis of all our necklaces. . .

Charles Bernstein has tangoed with Swinburne, Campion, and Wilde, there is Eshleman's Blake and Palmer's Hölderlin, and so on and so on—I've not forgotten you, friend—but the Romans and the Greeks seem lately to have disappeared from view a little. And for good reasons one supposes, attached as they have sometimes been to the excesses of Eurocentrism. Even the great classicist Ralph Johnson once said to me that he found it hard to regret the wasting away of classics departments, their fall from a prestige once ingloriously fondled. But then one reads Bernadette Mayer's lyrics or finds Jim Powell's *Sappho: A Garland* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993), by miles the best Sappho available. Powell's Sappho is syntactically and rhythmically a marvel:

> Artfully adorned Aphrodite, deathless
> child of Zeus and weaver of wiles I beg you
> please don't hurt me, don't overcome my spirit,
> goddess, with longing,
>
> but come here, if ever at other moments
> hearing my words from afar you listened
> and responded. . .

There is a serious reading of Horace, Basil Bunting, and others mediating this translation, just as there is a fascinating rip-off of Bob Dylan's "Visions of Johanna" in the book's last. If I could explain exactly how it is that Powell manages to pace this work so that individual words stand forth as separate and distinct musics as the sentence subtly moves them along and across line breaks—if I could, I would. In the book's appendix Powell tries to explain how he works Sappho's quantitative measures in the stress rhythms of English.

But I am still thinking, what can it mean to like all kinds of poetry? Goddamn it Keith will not be nice! Slim work for the critic, that's what it means. Somebody's still gotta take out the trash? I guess we could agree not to "notice" the trash at least until it threatens to breed a few rats. But anymore, it's hard to find really big rats in the poetry world for all the mice.

And, with so little poetry being reviewed, what do we do with cheesy phrases like "official verse culture" or "mainstream poetry"? Perhaps we could inject a little humor into the republic of letters by insisting that the mainstream is in need of a little sifting in ferocious journals like *Sulfur*. But we'd have to find it first—it was last sighted by "language poets." The latest SPD catalogue optimistically notes that "It even seems that *Publisher's Weekly* itself is reviewing more small press and more poetry titles than ever before." That is the work of individual heroes in the institutions of the "mainstream," one of whom I'm happy to name—Molly McQuade.

Of course it's well-known that reviews don't necessarily make for readers, but, to speak informally, it's also good to know that something's "getting through." Ah, for a publicity machine to project us into middle America—say Ohio! Say Ypsilanti, Ashtabula, Isis (Indiana), even Iowa City? Poems on cereal boxes?

I'd be sorry if I closed without mentioning the first American book publication of Kamau Brathwaite's poems, the New Directions edition of *Middle Passages* (apparently the Bloodaxe volume of the same title, published a year or two ago, is revised in this edition). Among other poems several sections of the third volume of Brathwaite's second trilogy, *X/Self* are reworked here in the exploded, creolized fonts that are part of Brathwaite's evolving "sycorax video style," which seems equally a poetic intervention in computer technology and a further refinement of the intonations and inflections of what Brathwaite calls "nation language" as well as the polyrhythms that support and enact it. Some of Brathwaite's essays are now available in the collection *Roots*, from The University of Michigan Press, which has also recently republished several books by George Lamming and deserves credit for getting the texts out there for use as more and more academics begin thinking about Caribbean literature. Finally, it is worth mentioning on that score that New Directions plans to issue Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith's University of California Press translation of Césaire's *CAHIER D'UN RETOUR AU PAYS NATAL* as a separate volume.

—KEITH TUMA

For Palestine, Edited by Jay Murphy. Writers & Readers, 252 pp. $14.95 (paper)

The ceremonial signing of "Declaration of Principles," (the Oslo agreement) by Yitzak Rabin and Yasser Arafat on the White House Lawn was not the first step on the road to "a just and comprehensive peace" between Israelis and Palestinians, but an act of surrender by the PLO chairman. This is the opinion of most of the important Palestinian intellectuals and professionals, both in and outside of the occupied territories and not just of Hamas and other groups the media have labeled "extremist."

Those supporting the accords, the critics say, are doing so as a means of lining their pockets or gaining a political position. The masses of Palestinians, meanwhile, remain uninformed of the details since Mr. Arafat has not seen fit to provide them with an Arabic translation.

Most of Arafat's critics had strong links to the PLO and were previously committed to "the peace process," i.e., the creation of a separate Palestinian state alongside Israel. Rather than moving events in that direction, they view the Oslo and subsequent Cairo agreements as a means of consolidating Israel's rule over the territories, *including* the "autonomy" areas where Israel's more than two thousand military orders will remain in force.

Within the U.S., two of the agreements' most vocal opponents have been Edward Said and Naseer Aruri, both former members of the Palestine National Council, the PLO's ruling body until preempted by Arafat. They are also contributors to "For Palestine," an eclectic collection of twenty-four essays, poems and interviews together with photographs from the pre-Oslo era, produced by what fellow contributor, artist and critic Kamal Boullata embraces as "the community of resistance." They have been made into a readable whole by Jay Murphy, former editor of the New Orleans' literary journal, *Red Bass*, in which many of the articles originally appeared.

Murphy's selections traverse an eventful decade of Palestinian history beginning with Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 through the first five years of the Intifada and the Gulf War. He intended "For Palestine" to be "a document of diverse solidarity with the brave young fighters in Khan Younis, Nablus, Jebalya, Tafah, Askar, Ramallah, and elsewhere who are fighting to end the illegal occupation of their country" and so it is.

That the man who those "brave young fighters" looked to for leadership appears to have become a partner with their occupier, may come as a shock for readers not finely tuned to the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But this is what Said, Arruri and the others have been saying. In articles, declarations, petitions, letters and over *Internet*, they have accused the PLO chairman of legitimizing Israel's settlements and its *de facto* annexation of

occupied West Bank and Gaza land while promising to suppress continued resistance in areas still under direct Israeli military control. As of midsummer, this included forty percent of the Gaza Strip and all of the West Bank minus Jericho's 20 square kilometers.

Indeed, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin has indicated that should the Palestinian police and the new "autonomy" authorities not prevent attacks on either Israeli soldiers or Jewish settlers in the areas still under Israeli occupation, "Gaza-Jericho first," will become "Gaza-Jericho last."

It is in this unfortunate context that readers will experience "For Palestine" and understand the frustrations of those Palestinians who believe their struggle has been betrayed.

Until Oslo, Aruri and Said, like most Palestinian activists, were committed to the principle of "unity" and were reticent to publicly vent their private criticism of either the PLO or Arafat. After Oslo, the rules of the game changed. Readers will note Said's discomfort with his earlier position in this response from a 1991 interview by David Barsamian:

> "But the official nationalists, for example, of the PLO that represents all Palestinians, whether we like it or not, like all nationalist movements, has its orthodoxy, its official line, and I have sometimes felt very uncomfortable with that, at the same time that, obviously, I support it." (P. 178)

Aruri, in a comprehensive introduction detailing "Palestinian Travails in the Last Decade," simply reaffirms "the fact that it [the PLO] is the liberation movement of the Palestinian people and its expression of identity." (p. 14)

As a non-Palestinian, Noam Chomsky, perhaps the most important domestic critic of Israel, needed to observe no such restraints when interviewed by Murphy in July, 1992:

> ". . .the PLO has been one of the most incompetent, corrupt liberation movements I have ever encountered. For example, it is the only Third World movement I know of which has not even tried to gain some domestic support among the American population. . . . They are very anti-democratic and very feudalist, internally." (P. 221)

Chomsky was not entirely accurate about the failure of the PLO to curry U.S. support. The problem was that its efforts here were almost entirely focused on winning over segments of the liberal Jewish community to the Palestinian cause, while ignoring potential allies in the African-American, Latino and Asian-American communities. It was a foolish, as well as

impossible task given the extent to which American Jews have been influenced by pro-Israel and anti-Arab propaganda.

The degree to which this propaganda permeates and controls a key segment of American culture is exposed by Jewish filmmaker Joan Mandell in her article, "From the War in Palestine to the War on Censorship." Mandell, who made the award winning "Gaza Ghetto" (1st Prize, Festival dei Popolo, Italy, 1985) examines the successful efforts to prevent her own film as well as other independent documentaries on Palestinian issues from being shown in theaters and on television.

The buzz words of censorship, we find, are the same for the mainstream as well as the "public" or "alternative" movie houses and TV stations: "Biased!, Propaganda!, Unbalanced!, Lacking Objectivity!, One-sided!" Mandell writes:

> "Any and every film sympathetic to Palestinians, no matter how compellingly told or beautifully shot, was labeled by detractors: Anti-Israeli!, Controversial!, Partisan!. Our funding was in Conflict of Interest. And all of this before the film was even previewed or screened. Lacking aesthetic standards! Too complex! Inappropriate! Inconvenient! were common reasons why our films could not be funded or shown." (P. 190-191).

The Israeli atrocities and routine abuse of human rights that its American supporters have largely succeeded in keeping from public view, "For Palestine" provides in words. In Jean Genet's "Four Hours in Shatila," the poet writes of his wanderings through "only a twentieth" of the corpse-ridden camp after the massacre in September, 1982: "About forty bodies remain in my memory. All of them—and I mean all—had been tortured, probably against a backdrop of drunkenness, song, laughter, the smell of gunpowder and already decaying flesh" (p. 37).

In Hilton Obenzinger's "Interview with a Defender of the City," (Beirut under Israeli siege in the same year) a woman survivor tells him:

> "Bourj al Barajneh [a refugee camp] was where they threw the napalm. It was disastrous at the beginning because the people didn't realize that when you put a blanket around yourself the napalm ignites even more, and so some people made that mistake. We'd go to the cinemas on Hamra Street that were turned into hospitals. You would recognize the people who were there only by their voices" (P. 41).

In the poet Fawaz Traboulsi's "Beirut-Guernica," he compares the destruction of the Spanish city by the Nazi-backed Falange in 1937 with the actions of the Israeli-backed Lebanese Falange 55 years later:

> "Spain, 1937, General Mola, Franco's right-hand man, says to the London News Chronicle: 'I will not hesitate, if need be, to kill half the Spanish people in order to achieve victory;" then:
>
> "Lebanon, 1982: [Israeli Prime Minister] Menachem Begin says to the press: 'I am ready to kill ten Lebanese civilians and five Palestinians if this leads to the elimination of a single Palestinian *fida'i* [freedom fighter].'" (P. 48)

He kept his word. The final Red Cross figures were 20,000 Lebanese and Palestinian civilians dead.

Stephen Sosebee's "The Intifada in the Camps of Gaza," and Mary Howell's "Ansar III: Camp of the Slow Death" transfer the site of brutality into the occupied territories with the beginning of the Palestinian uprising in December, 1987. The original Ansar was a concentration camp set up for Palestinian prisoners in Southern Lebanon in 1982. By 1988, Israel needed to make room for the more than 15,000 Palestinians they had taken prisoner in the intifada and they opened other camps. The second one the Israelis called Ketziot. The Palestinians named it Ansar III.

> "Simply put," writes Howell, "our delegation found that Ansar III is a facility for torture. Its very existence denies those Palestinian political detainees held there the most fundamental of human and democratic rights. It is not merely a place of detention, but a center of punishment and degradation." (P. 123)

Ansar IV was opened in July, 1989.

What makes the tales of war and occupation so powerfully told in "For Palestine" relevant to American readers is that unlike the horrors that have been taking place in other parts of the world such as Rwanda and Bosnia, they have been paying for it. Each year Congress appropriates between $3.5 to $4 billion which the Israelis collect in cash on October 1st and can then spend in any way they like. It is the only budget item that both the President and Congress have kept off the chopping block and thanks to the efforts of the pro-Israel lobby it is likely to remain so unless an informed, outraged electorate say otherwise.

That, of course, is a long shot enterprise. After reading "For Palestine," it is an effort that readers of "For Palestine" might wish to undertake.

—JEFFREY BLANKFORT

ORIENTALISMO. A review of *For Palestine*, ed. by Jay Murphy (Writers and Readers, New York/London, 1993); paper, 263 pp., $14.95; and *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine culture*, by Ammiel Alcalay (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993); paper, 336 pp.

In the World of the Imagination (*Mundus Imaginalis*) the city of Jerusalem functions as the objective correlative of everybody's subjective relation with the "Abrahamic Tradition," the conceptual space defined by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In other words, Jerusalem is not only a city but also a symbolic complex—*the* city—the center of the world of many an ancient map, pilgrimage, crusade, and dream. As for the "real" city, its dream-twin has often given birth to its historical misery—its streets running knee-deep in blood; perhaps there have been times when the population would gladly have traded the dangerous glory of symbolic centrality for the dull anonymity of the secular and suburban. But the imaginal Jerusalem is inextricably commingled with the real—in fact, the imaginal *is* included in the real, since it is the source of so much history. One might say that in Jerusalem the imaginal is real but not empirically measurable, not "objective" in the same sense as architecture or blood, because its reality arises from a *collective subjectivity.* It is the inner dreaming of History, of Sacred History, which is also by definition a nightmare of suffocating intensity. The city's dreamtime takes place outside History (like the secret hollow space beneath the Dome of the Rock) but intersects with History as prophecy—and prophecy concerns only doom and transcendence. In Jerusalem the most important spatial coordinates are axial, defined by the rising smoke of sacrifice, or the routes of ascensions into Heaven; but on the horizontal plane energies are blocked and the Profane (which desires simply a life free of tragedy) is forever mocked and thwarted by the verticality of the sacred. The violence of the sacred.

Does it make any sense, then, to speak of Jerusalem (in the next breath) as the symbolic capital of world peace? Of course. "Peace" is also a sacred symbol, an imaginal quality, an abstraction—and Jerusalem is the place where such symbols intersect with History. The pious would say that these symbols or symbolic complexes or archetypes are "more real" than material becoming. Even a materialist who despised all such "bad consciousness" as sheer hallucination would have to admit the historical importance of the "imaginary." (The failure of historical materialism itself to grasp this simple correlation reveals the extent to which it too lived in a world of abstraction and imagination. Its categories were "profane" rather than "sacred"—but

it failed to consider that *all* categories are sacred; it miscalculated the historical importance of religion because it too *was* a religion blinded by "belief," betrayed by Faith.) But even if we realize the imperfection of all "perfect" archetypes or categories, such as "Peace on Earth," we may still consider that to strive for the ideal is the only possible means of living the real. The inevitable failure of the categorical can only be weighed against the intensity of desire:—how much do we *want* a life which is "peaceful"?—not with the peace of death or cessation, but the peace of culture, of conviviality, of "justice"? Does there exist a spirituality of everyday life, subtle enough to understand "peace" as creative tension or harmonious conflict, rather than as totalitarian rigidity? ("They make a desert and call it *pax*," as the Celts said of the Romans.) Could we be reconciled with "Religion"—with Father Abraham—if it were at least able to consider an encounter with such a dynamic or kinetic or impure definition of "peace"? And in this case would we find ourselves able to "believe" (as existential commitment at least) in the sacred destiny of Jerusalem as the City of Peace? Interfaith harmony? "Radical tolerance"?

This question, which concerns the material nature of peace, was focused quite sharply for me by reading and inter-reading these two books—*For Palestine*, and *After Jews and Arabs*. Once we let go of "Peace" as an abstract category or pure essence and reanimate it as desire and as becoming, we can learn at least two things: one, that peace may serve as the dynamic of a culture, and express itself in modes of living-together, of co-creation and cross-cultural synergy. This is the "lesson" of Alcalay's book. Two, that peace is not pure "Peace," that it contains its opposite, and a myriad other contaminants; that one must "fight for peace," not in the Orwellian sense of power dictating the end of contention by the obscenity of violence, but in the sense of "revolution," of people's "justice," of the struggle to disempower violence itself. This is the "lesson" of Murphy's book.

Murphy describes his book, an anthology of essays by Palestinian and pro-Palestinian writers, as a "modest. . . tool for liberation," as a text with polemical intent, as a weapon. But it is far from being the product of a single ideology or even of a coherent politique, and this is its strength. Although it attacks "balance" because "balance" is too often the mask of hegemony, the book itself achieves real balance by letting many voices speak, including not only Jewish voices but also many conflicting Palestinian voices. The PLO comes in for violent criticism and even dismissal from some authors, and the *intifada* is analyzed as a "failure" by others. The limitations and stridencies of a "culture of resistance" are admitted by some, defended by some, renounced by others. After Murphy's introduction and a historical survey by Naseur H. Aruri, Jean Genet sets a kind of post-ideological seal on the rest of the book with his emotional/aesthetic/erotic

invocation of the "happiness" of the Palestinian revolution in 1970 ("The extraordinary evidence of what was happening, the intensity of this joy at being alive, is also called beauty"), and of the repulsive otherness of death in West Beirut, ten years later. Other poetic works appear toward the beginning of the book: Fawwaz Traboulsi's "Beirut-Guernica," some excerpts from Etel Adnan's extraordinary "neo-Levantine" epic, *The Arab Apocalypse*, and "Understanding Revolution" by Ammiel Alcalay (the same who wrote the other book). Kamal Boullata's informative and sensitive essay on Israeli and Palestinian artists should have included more illustrations, and the illustrations that were included should have been captioned! Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi's analysis of the culture of the *intifada*, though too brief, tantalized with revelations of this culture as one of women and young people (even "children"), and of experimentation, of expansion beyond agitprop into the realm of genuine revolutionary aesthetics. But Anita Vitullo poured cold water on my enthusiasm in the next essay by mourning the *intifada's* failure to hold the cultural and social ground it had gained, and the subsequent reappearance of patriarchic hegemony and leftist orthodoxy within the Palestinian movement.

A number of essays deal with the 1991 Gulf War and its impact on the Palestinian situation. The most interesting of these is an anonymous collection of letters written by a Palestinian woman on the West Bank describing the boredom and anxiety of virtual house arrest—the letters are witty in a way that the more rhetorical text by Eqbal Ahmad is not, nor the whistle-blowing bullshit-in-the-US-media piece by Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon. Among the general theoretical essays, I found Daoud Kuttab's "Overview of the *intifada*" particularly moving for its passionate defense and bitter criticism of the *uprising*. Despite the ambiguity of this struggle, or perhaps because of it, I can see it as one of the very few contemporary insurrections which fit Genet's criteria for a liberation which aims—"obscurely—at discovering or rediscovering beauty, that is the intangible, unnameable except by this word." (Another such uprising—so far—would be that of the Zapatista EZLN in Chiapas.) Inasmuch as the *Intifada* represented a rejection of "terrorism" as spectacular violence that can only be recuperated by the Spectacle, and the replacement of terrorism by popular unarmed resistance and "bearing witness," it can be seen as beautiful. To the extent that the *intifada* shared the goals of the Israeli peace movement and in fact consisted of an uprising for peace (as maintained by Hatem I. Hussaini), to that extent it can be seen as beautiful. And to the extent that it was also a social revolution within Palestine, a movement for what Alcalay calls the "remaking of Levantine Culture" as a world of harmony (or at least of creative tension) among all three Faiths of the Holy Land—a culture of cross-cultural synergy, so to speak—I also find it quite beautiful. I would like to reject the "tragedy" of its failure and

betrayal—if only because the very word "tragedy" has become a semantic trap and a negentropic cliché of all the most mendacious and ill-willed "dialog about the Mid East." Is it too much to hope that the "next stage of the *intifada*" could include both Israelis and Palestinians in an uprising against War itself, against the totality of the pure, and for the organic complexity of a multivalent social, for a true "neo-Levantine" world?

In a larger review of *For Palestine*, I would investigate the possibilities of such an "ideal *intifada*" in the light of stimulating contributions made by Edward Said (interviewed by D. Barsamian) and Noam Chomsky (interviewed by Jay Murphy). My specific question, however, is addressed most clearly by A. Alcalay in his *After Jews and Arabs*; in fact if it were not for him I would not have adopted the concept of "remaking Levantine Culture" as the very basis for my question. For that reason alone his book would have appeared to me as a text of personal importance, one of those books which have changed my perception and taught me something new and vitally important for my own "project," in a way which Murphy's book (for all its virtues) did not. My work on Islamic studies, inept as it may be, has aimed at countering the image of Islam and Islamdom as both monolithic and two-dimensional; I've been interested in elements of polyvalency such as Sufism and other esoteric forms, heresies, popular religious art, insurrectionary movements, music, sensuality, and other strains of "impurity" within the culture. I've always found Levantine culture highly seductive because of its incredible patina of syncretism, its "pluralism," its style which is at once so dispersive and yet so immediately recognizable;—its *charm*. Until recently the "middle" East or "oriental" Mediterranean has been the most ethnically un-cleansed area on earth—which is precisely why all crusaders and puritans and rationalists find it so maddening. Dozens of languages, religions, styles, cuisine's, cultural movements, tribes and peoples, all living promiscuously cheek-by-jowl, sometimes melting into one another, hybridizing, cross-fertilizing, spawning beautiful monsters, each enigmatic as a sphinx. . .the ultimate nightmare of imperialist colonialism with all its ideal mental and moral gridwork, its rational categories, its greed and its shame. Now, the oriental Jews, the Arab Jews, the *Sephardim*, have always constituted one of the richest and most brilliant sources of that Levantine "impurity" I find so personally attractive. The Diaspora itself can be seen as a kind of "divine invasion" or infiltration, a seeding of powerful memes and currents of creativity and energy. From Moorish Spain to Persia (in fact, to China), for century upon century, from the pagan era through the whole "Abrahamic" era and up till the 20th century, the story of the oriental Jews in the Orient has been one of co-creation and harmonious tension. The story is not without its moments of overt violence and oppression, of course—not "pure"—but on the whole and over the "long duration" (including the

Islamic period), the oriental Jews have always been recognized as a source of cultural wealth. But the "orientalist" view of this story, as E. Said makes clear, has concentrated on hatred and division, and has failed to ask questions about any role except that of victim. Alcalay points out that this orientalist rhetoric has helped to shape the modern political map of the Mid East, including the cultural map of Israel. The Sephardic communities of the Levant have all disappeared and been absorbed into Israel (except that of Morocco, where Mohammed V extended royal protection to the Jews during WWII)—but the result has not been the remaking of Levantine culture within Israel. Because the Zionism of a Martin Buber or Gershem Sholem lost out to other forms of Zionism, the Oriental heritage of the Sephardim has been devalued in Israel, as the oriental and Arab Jews have come to feel themselves less than first-class citizens. The exclusion of the Palestinians can be accounted for by the same triumphalism of rationality, secular modernism, and European values that alienated the Sephardim; and in fact Alcalay chronicles fascinating examples of solidarity between Palestinians and oriental Jews in Israel, united against a coldness that oppresses both peoples.

After Jews and Arabs is a large, complex (and sometimes confusing) attempt to evoke the entire Sephardic experience from the 9th century to the present. This single book should really be expanded to about ten books; after all, S. D. Goitein devoted ten volumes just to the Cairo Geniza and the world depicted in its mountain of papyri and book-fragments, bills of lading and love letters, etc., etc.—Alcalay quotes only a few tantalizing pages. Perhaps Alcalay has tried too many things at once here: social history, literary history and criticism, theory, personal memoir, "poem," polemic, and a huge selection of quotations, almost amounting to an anthology, from rare and little known Sephardic sources—all in 336 pages. Two forces however prevent the book from falling apart at the seams. First, Alcalay quotes brilliantly (an art form in itself), creating a "mosaic" representation very much in harmony with Levantine aesthetics, where the brilliant leap between paradigmatic fragments creates a unified aesthetic field rather than a linear progression like that of the novel or the 3-D painting. Second, like Murphy's book, Alcalay's book is a "tool for liberation," a passionate plea, an example of the very engagement it desires to provoke, a vast seduction. In effect, Alcalay's text proposes a "solution" to the "problem of the Mid East," but it is not yet another totalitarian "analysis"—it is a love poem—impure and palimpsestic—a heaping-up of "utopian traces"—a rag-and-bone bag of great and deeply moving *beauty.* If the text is also saturated with nostalgia—perhaps the impurest of emotions—it's an impurity I share and hence fear to criticize. And besides, by the skillful application of a kind of rough and weirdly baroque Levantine dialectics, Alcalay has constructed something positive out of this nostal-

gia—and in fact, a way out of the nostalgia itself. This is the insurrectionary project he calls the *remaking* of Levantine culture.

If in Alcalay's view, this remaking has already begun, and is reflected in certain works produced in Israel and elsewhere by oriental Jews, Palestinians and other "Levantine types," I would gain little by merely parroting his list of sources and names, or quoting his quotes. My intention is to go out and find the books he praises, many of them translated into English but published obscurely, and acquaint myself more deeply with the newly emerging neo-Levantine culture. Certain Latin American poets gleefully adopted the term *Tropicalismo* for their project, neatly appropriating what might have been a term of colonialist disdain. Perhaps the new Levantines could call their movement *Orientalismo*, thus finally grounding the spooks now so dislodged by Professor Said. With deference to Said's accurate analysis of Orientalism as imperialist "science," we should recall that the word "orient" means something in the East as well, something quite different. The false romanticism of orientalism should not be juxtaposed only to some ideal of the "real" orient, whose "real essence" must remain unknown to the (ideal) "West." It must also be compared with an authentic *oriental romanticism* and of an "East" which created the ideal of "romantic love." and the literary form of the "romance" (which have nothing to do with Rome!). The *East* is as much an imaginal construct for the Orient as it is for the Occident—but in a different way. The East knows itself as *mashruq*, the space of illumination:—a romanticism of the self, not of the "other." Should we attempt to compare the two forms of romanticism for "truth content"? Would this be a *useful* procedure? Wouldn't it serve a better purpose to point out that orientalism can overcome its own malignancy—which is often unconscious and socially determined. The late Henry Corbin—the philosopher-orientalist of the *mundus imaginalis* and of the "Orient of Light"—has been perhaps as influential in the East as in the West, because he "got inside" oriental romanticism, the East's view of itself as the "Orient." Scientific "realism"—with its aggressive program of disenchantment and reductionism—makes a poor substitute for old-fashioned orientalism even at its worst. Nostalgia for an imaginary past, whether indulged in by Western orientalists or anti-Western Orientals, must always lose the struggle against disenchantment, against "the real" as a form of *disappointment*. But a living culture requires its own form of romanticism—and the rebirth of Levantine culture requires it more than others. True romanticism is the struggle against false realism, the realism which can only devalue, deconstruct, destroy. And true realism—calling things by their own names—is the struggle against false romanticism, which consists of the deployment of masks and endless sacrifices to the illusory Ideal. This, in a word, is Alcalay's Levantine dialectics—and the result is the remaking of Levantine culture.

After Jews and Arabs follows—as one among many themes—the history of actual friendship, respect, mutual enhancement, partnership, influence (intellectual and artistic) and even love between Jew and Arab. Alcalay's quotations and anecdotes could be multiplied endlessly by anyone who knew "Old Jerusalem" or the old Levant, or even anyone who knows modern Morocco. This legacy, which is no mere epiphenomenon, is *not dead*, despite the premature celebrations, eulogies, laments or other burial-rites—including even some indulged in by Alcalay himself. Just as Hindu-Moslem amity was harmed by Partition, but not eradicated, so also with Arab-Jewish "harmonious tension." Alcalay shows us a way to be true philosemites:—pro-Jewish and pro-Arab—pro-Israel and pro-Palestine (as an anarchist I am of course referring to the Israeli and Palestinian people, not to their governments)—revolutionaries for love, for "romanticism," for *beauty*. Death can't win every time—and when the demands of life are heard (even if only "in heaven"), Alcalay's book will be read into the record.

—PETER LAMBORN WILSON

Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen. New York: Columbia University Press. Volume one, 1991 ($35 hb/$15 pb); Volume two, 1992 ($39 hb/$15.50 pb)

Rarely has a writer so acutely plumbed philosophy's relationship to literary creation as in the essays and near-fragments of the "immanent" or dialectical criticism collected in Adorno's *Notes to Literature*, most of its components only at this late date reaching an English audience. For Adorno, the part and the whole, the singular and the universal, intuition and the concept are united in the semblance of philosophy and art, crystallized or monadological forms that allow true cognitive models to function, and from this arena, Adorno wrote in *Minima Moralia*, "cognition has no light to see but that which shines down onto the world from redemption." This theme of the necessary if shut down utopia is relentless in the *Notes to Literature*, shining through even, or especially, in Valéry's "pure poetry" or Beckett's monosyllabic bums. *Notes to Literature* stands as

a kind of antimonument to Adorno's knotty, exacting type of insight in which "only what does not fit into this world is true."

Paradoxically a by-principle anti-systematic philosopher who could wryly note that the word "Progress" was missing from the authoritative Hermann Glockner lexicon of Hegel (in "Bibliographical Musings"), in the *Notes to Literature* Adorno's unique if not perverse use of that German philosopher is everywhere in evidence, a "miraculous weapon" that shoehorns the qualities of resistance or "reconciliation" out of the most obdurate texts. For Adorno, it would appear, Hegel may be the more revolutionary thinker in comparison with Marx, if he is subjected to Adorno's own "negative thinking" or "negative dialectics" that borders on a deconstruction. As his translator Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jeremy J. Schapiro noted in their introduction to Adorno's *Hegel: Three Studies* (MIT Press, 1993), Adorno can only be understood if one grasps that his "negative dialectics" as a mode of unifying theory and practice, experience, thought and sensibility, is also "a lesson in negative experience" as well. Adorno's work, particularly in his aesthetic writings, is an "ensemble" of practice and experience and the insights gleaned from an imminently concrete and contingent reading of Hegel's dialectic. In Adorno's view, Hegel can be most "correct" when he is at his most ideological—his notion that the real is rational in the *Philosophy of Right,* for instance, becomes an accurate prophecy of the infinitely totalized world, the "administered reality" in which we now live. Hegel prefigures the "negative whole" or "antagonistic totality." Adorno writes in *Hegel* that

> One of the most remarkable aspects of Hegel's accomplishment is that he inferred that systematic character of society from the concept long before it could gain ascendancy in the sphere of Hegel's own experience, that of a Germany far behind in its bourgeois development. A world integrated through "production," through the exchange relationship, depends in all its moments on the social conditions of its production, and in that sense actually realizes the primacy of the whole over its parts; in this regard the desperate impotence of every single individual now verifies Hegel's extravagant conception of the system. . .Even the being-for-something-else that is the official justification for the existence of all commodities is only secondary to production. The very world in which nothing exists for its own sake is also a world of unleashed production that forgets its human aims. The self-forgetfulness of production, the insatiable and destructive expansive principle of the exchange society, is reflected in Hegelian metaphysics. It describes the way the world actually

> is, not in historical perspective but in essence, without creating any blue smoke in the process with the question of authenticity.

In this reading Hegel's false reconciliation with the Prussian state, this self-contradictory stopping of the dialectic, is still utopia deferred, his "logic" the social labor, working itself through, of society—"The ray of light that reveals the whole to be untrue in all its moments is none other than utopia, the utopia of the whole truth, which is still to be realized."

What Adorno has to say about Hegel is inescapable since it is the scalpel that elucidates the play of meaning that emerges from subject and object, the mediated and unmediated, the utopian yearnings of Hölderlin's late hymns, the "happiness" of Proust, or the "extorted reconciliation" of Georg Lukacs' *Realism in Our Time*. When Adorno writes about Hegel's style, he could be explaining his own:

> No doubt Hegel's style goes against customary philosophical understanding, yet in his weakness he paves the way for a different kind of understanding; one must read Hegel by describing along with him the curves of his intellectual movement, by playing his ideas with the speculative ear as though they were musical notes. Philosophy as a whole is allied with art in wanting to rescue, in the medium of the concept, the mimesis that the concept represses.

Hegel has to be read, Adorno maintained, "against the grain, and in such a way that every logical operation, however formal it seems to be, is reduced to the experiential core. The equivalent experience in the reader is the [productive] imagination." What Adorno elsewhere called the "logicity" of the work of art requires the viewer or reader to follow along, to "imitate" or "co-execute"; the most adequate illustration of this situation is listening to music, hence the musical title, "notes to" rather than "notes on" literature. Adorno tries to remain faithful to his own credo in the essay "Presuppositions," that "One does not understand a work of art when one translates it into concepts—if one simply does that, one misunderstands the work from the outset—but rather one is immersed in its immanent movement; I should almost say, when it is recomposed by the ear in accordance with its own logic, repainted by the eye, when the linguistic sensorium sings along with it."

These concerns—language's evocation of "mimesis" or the nonidentical, as well as conveying discursive logic or clarity, replicating dialectical movement in its very style of exposition—evidenced throughout the collection of the *Notes*, show again how close Adorno was to his cohort

Walter Benjamin. The *Notes to Literature* seem to validate the observation of Albrecht Wellmer about Adorno's other aesthetic writings, that "even within the limited medium of a philosophical dialectic of subject and object," Adorno was able "to express, or at least to intimate, much that is actually restraint to presentation in that medium."

Just as Adorno's peculiar version of the dialectic could be fierce—he wrote of Benjamin's suicide in "Benjamin the Letter Writer" that "Only by sacrificing life did Benjamin become the spirit that lived by the idea of a way of life without victims"—it could yield up uncanny insights like that in the extraordinary essay on Hölderlin ("Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry"), where Adorno claims the poet's constructions that show up the inconclusiveness of "synthetic language" in his extensive piling on of meaning, in a parataxis that assaults syntax syntactically as Hegel used logic to assault logic, serves as a forerunner to Beckett. Hölderlin's late poetry fulfills to an enormous extent a poetic parallel for Adorno with Hegel's sentences, "in paradoxical contradiction to his systematic intent, in its form increasingly evades the constraints of construction the more it surrenders without reservation to the program of 'simply looking on' outlined in the introduction to the *Phenomenology* and the more logic becomes history for it." In Hölderlin's poetry he presents a linguistic "unity" that "indicates that it knows itself to be inconclusive," in his revolt against the "logical coercion to which the expression of the subject is subjected" and in the concomitant "sacrifice of the period" he not only reveals the double aspect or character of language, he loosens or disconnects language from subjectivization. Hölderlin realizes subjective intention exists only though language, and so in his late work what Adorno calls his "incalculably portentous change in linguistic gesture" where language, amputated from the subject, speaks for the subject, which can no longer speak for itself. Thus Hölderlin creates a kind of romantic "objectivism" of language that both eschews the notion of an unmediated myth and attempts a faltering ideal language. In chunks of "revealed language," always distanced from theology, what Walter Benjamin called a "naked rock" which is "everywhere exposed," are what Adorno terms an "intentionless language," a procedure that leads straight, in time, to Samuel Beckett's "protocol sentences, empty of meaning."

Proceeding from a singular "immanent criticism" that was the result of a "rescue," not "revival" of Hegel, Adorno can pick unlikely subjects as exemplars of the shining light of redemption. Contrary to the famous, near-savage attack on Brecht in the essay "Commitment," Adorno in "Valéry's Deviations" and "The Artist as Deputy" finds the apostle of "pure poetry" far more congenial. Writing of Valéry in 1960, Adorno claims "The ability to see works of art from the inside, in their logic as artifacts, things that have been produced—a union of action and reflection that neither hides behind naiveté nor hastily dissolves its concrete characteristics in a general

concept—is probably the only form in which aesthetics is still possible." "It proves its worth," Adorno continues, "in the fact that Valéry's formulations are scarcely vulnerable to any critique but one that continues their line of thought." In an earlier essay, Adorno argues that Valéry's project maintains "It is better to be ruined attempting the impossible"—"It is no accident that he cites enthusiastically a statement of Degas opposing resignation." Yet Valéry's art—"tightly organized, seamless, and rendered completely sensory precisely through its conscious force—is hardly capable of realization." For Adorno, however Valéry's work

> embodies a resistance to the unspeakable pressure exerted on what is human by what merely exists. It acts as the representative of what we might one day be. Not to become stupid, not to be lulled to sleep, not to go along: these are the social stances sedimented in Valéry's work, a work which refuses to play the game of false humanness, of social complicity with the denigration of the human being. For him, to construct works of art means to refuse the opiate that great sensuous art has become since Wagner, Baudelaire, and Manet; to fend off the humiliation that makes works of art media and makes consumers victims of psychotechnical manipulation.

Despite his own opinions, (Adorno elsewhere notes Valéry's books "are not lacking in frankly reactionary material"), Valéry is also a figure for "reconciliation" through (due to the *ascesis* of the anti-expressionist poet's dedication, absorption in and surrender to the demands of his art) his enactment of the "total social subject, of the whole, undivided human being which Valéry's idea of the beautiful invokes. . .The art that achieved self-awareness as a consequence of Valéry's conception would transcend art itself and fulfill itself in the true life of human beings."

It is against the background of these stringent criteria, not only for a work of art, but for the viability of individual insight and activity, however impoverished or slim, or seemingly impossible under conditions of contemporary late capitalist life, that a few have begun to argue for Adorno's renewed relevance. It can be forgotten, in the midst of some of Adorno's more pessimistic broadsides, that his critique of the subject ("the self-positing subject is an illusion and at the same time historically very real") is based on, and is only possible, given the ultimate "reconciliation" that he hammers through most of the *Notes to Literature*. Most commentaries on Adorno stress his "primacy of the object" and near neglect of subjectivity and reception that are nevertheless an integral and crucial ingredient of his views on literature and aesthetics. Others, perhaps most significantly Fredric Jameson in *Late Marxism* (Verso, 1990), have con-

cluded that Adorno's "moment" is more properly the 1990s than his own lifetime, given his conceptualization of the "antagonistic totality" and of social relationships, nature and the Unconscious completely dominated by a commodity-capitalism that is now far more entrenched and globally reaching than in his own day. "There is some chance," Jameson wrote, "that he may turn out to have been the analyst of our own period, which he did not live to see;" if in previous periods Adorno's thought was "no great help," Jameson suggests it "may turn out to be just what we need today." *Notes to Literature* remain evidence of the arduous labor involved in a social, or "immanent" reading of art (Adorno despised the term "texts"), and if Hegel's *Logic* may rarely again be offered to illuminate Proust, we can still gather what Benjamin called "remembrance" for the glinting of light that emanates from Adorno's own essays, that, as Edward Said remarked, "are not simply criticism, they are literature." Adorno's reception hangs as precariously in the balance as any diagnosis of human freedom must. To summon Adorno's own fate, perhaps the crack of Karl Kraus that Adorno used in the conclusion of his fecund foray into Ernst Bloch's *Spuren* is most appropriate—"Nothing is true, and it is possible that something else will happen."

—JAY MURPHY

Notes on Some 18th-Century French Revivals, Mostly Libertine

I adore Paris, a city where I've spent nearly half my adult life; I revere Baudelaire: and I continue to reread Walter Benjamin, one of the finest theorists of our century. Yet Baudelaire's vision of Paris is hardly the only one. Unfortunately, the newfound "political correctness" of Benjamin has added to his academic prestige, which has transformed his work into something of a stereotype, a readymade theory, an obligatory reference (always read the footnotes first). Thus Baudelaire's Paris, via Benjamin, has come to constitute the major intellectual and imaginary horizon of that city. The academic machine of collective justification, validation, imitation and appropriation has taken its customary toll.

In his unfinished magnum opus on the arcades of Paris, Benjamin himself indicates the wealth of writings which may help us understand the

phenomenon of the Parisian *flaneur*. Writing of the knowledge gained during the "anamnestic drunkenness" of these strolls, he explains: "But in the course of the 19th century such knowledge was also set forth in a nearly infinite number of works. Even before Lefeuve, who described Paris 'street by street, house by house,' one never ceased to paint the decor of this landscape for the idle dreamer. The study of these books constituted a second existence already completely prepared for reverie, and what they taught took form and figure in the afternoon promenade before the aperitif."

It would take a monumental paradigm shift to create the discursive space for different views of Paris. That moment seems to have arrived, for the long-awaited volumes of Louis Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* (1781-1789) has appeared in a critical edition (totaling 4000 pages), directed by Jean-Claude Bonnet and published by Mercure de France. Mercier was a humanitarian idealist writing during revolutionary and post-revolutionary Paris; though a prolific and successful, albeit minor, novelist and playwright, his journalistic work (collected in *Le tableau de Paris* and *Le nouveau tableau de Paris)* provides the broadest and most detailed picture of Paris in the immediately pre-industrial epoch. The republication of these works—along with an accompanying volume containing essays by Jean-Claude Bonnet, Pierre Frantz, Philippe Roger, Chantal Thomas, and Anthony Vidler, among others—will provide a panoramic view of a Paris in perpetual transformation, offering a profound corrective to the brilliant but nevertheless limited perspective of a Paris which has become all-too-Baudelairian. Perhaps next, during our own fin-de-siècle, we will be offered the possibility of rediscovering the Paris of the 19th century decadents. . .

Chantal Thomas' first book, *Sade, l'oeil de la lettre* (1978) inaugurated her libertine trajectory of studies traversing the works of Casanova, Marie-Antoinette, the Prince de Ligne and Choderlos de Laclos. These are now followed by another volume on the topic, *Sade,* published by Le Seuil in the revival of their series, Les Écrivains de Toujours. This work offers a fine counterpoint to *Le tableau de Paris,* insofar as Sade—given his passion for the theater, prodigal libertinage, aristocratic sensibility, and literary genius—constitutes the antithesis of Mercier's project. Chantal Thomas' *Sade* is not that of contemporary philosophically oriented criticism stemming from the *Tel Quel* years, where Sade was taken as a major precursor to modernist theories of excess, transgression, abjectness, antihumanism, pathological cruelty, encyclopedic epistemophilia, antilyricism, extreme eroticism—in short, a prelude to Bataille, Klossowski, Foucault, Deleuze. Rather, Chantal Thomas' consideration of Sade focuses on the sensually libertine, profoundly theatrical, and subtly literary aspects of his work. Our fascination with Sade-the-thinker has finally received the complimentary

appreciation of Sade-the-writer. This certainly warrants a rereading, at the very moment that Sade has received a major new biography written by Maurice Lever; an important textual supplement in the publication, edited by Lever, of the correspondence of the Comte de Sade, the famous Marquis' father; and the "consecration" of Sade by his entry into Gallimard's *Pléiade*.

To the extent that a relatively unknown masterpiece may exist, Jacques Cazotte's *Le diable amoreux* (Baudelaire's favorite book) would certainly fall into that category. This book, published in 1772, is the tale of the devil who is summoned up by a young man, only to fall in love with that man. The devil transforms himself into a beautiful woman, Biondetta, in order to carry out the seduction—leading to delicious erotic and sentimental complications and paradoxes. This work was to gain Cazotte notoriety, especially among the *Illuminés*, which couldn't have helped his case, for he was to die by the guillotine during the Terror. Perhaps the reason for the neglect of Cazotte's marvelous fabulation was his royalism, mysticism, and anti-Enlightenment beliefs. In any case, this privation is finally rectified by the forthcoming publication of Stephen Sartarelli's fine translation in a Marsilio Publishers edition, which will also include the chapter on Cazotte from Gérard de Nerval's *Les illuminés*.

Yet another mystery of publishing mores was the continued unavailability in translation of Diderot's scandalous erotic novel, *Les bijoux indiscrets* (1748), a title of such fame that it needs no introduction. This has just appeared as *The Indiscreet Jewels*, translated by Sophie Hawkes, introduced by Aram Vartanian, and published by Marsilio—a text both obligatory and pleasurable.

To remain on the theme of libertinage, Jean-François Bastide's *La petite maison* will be published this year by Princeton Architectural Press, translated and introduced by Rodolphe El-Khoury. Though the tale is a rather formulaic story of a gallant seduction, the book is of great interest for its wealth of architectural detail. The true source of charm and temptation in this tale is a *maison de plaisance* located in the outskirts of Paris, with its paintings, furniture and decor, all meticulously described. Here, the systematic seduction of the five senses is accomplished more by the finely conceived and crafted environment than by the seducer himself. Narrative and description become one in a rare tale revealing the architectural manifestations of desire.

Somewhat weary as I am of continually acting as the herald (and too often the apologist) of Art Brut, I nevertheless wish to conclude this brief survey with mention of Jacqueline Porret-Forel's *Aloïse et le théâtre de l'univers*, published by Skira. I don't want to give the impression of sophistry in this segué, but I might justify the presence of Aloïse Corbaz in these Noticings by the reminder that this great Art Brut creator existed, in one of her many reincarnations, as Marie-Antoinette. Dr. Porret-Forel (who

regularly visited Aloïse in the psychiatric hospital where the latter spent the last 46 years of her life) was the author of the *Fascicule de l'Art Brut* #7 (1966) devoted to Aloïse, and has now published a lavishly illustrated and beautifully written book on the artist whom Jean Dubuffet qualified, though perhaps with some of his usual hyperbole, as, "the only truly resplendent manifestation in painting of the truly feminine pulsation," and of whom Michel Nedjar said, "If Aloïse is accepted as an artist, then everything is permitted. During many, many years, Aloïse guided my steps . . .And during my ten years of travel, Aloïse was with me—the goal of my voyage was Aloïse. It was a bomb, a bomb inside me, in my head." We should all be so fortunate in discovering our personal muse.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

MELVILLE AND FREUD (LUCIEN, THAT IS)

In *Moby-Dick* Melville devotes an entire chapter to "The Whiteness of the Whale," meditating on the "elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue." "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me," says Ishmael.

In her recent study, forthcoming from the Johns Hopkins University Press, "Strike through the mask: Herman Melville and the Scene of Writing," Elizabeth Renker carries this notion—the overpowering force of whiteness—a step further: in discussing Pierre, the protagonist of the novel of that name, and stand-in for much of Melville, she writes, "Pierre's attempts to dive deeply are brought up short against the 'lurking' force associated here and elsewhere in Melville's work with the written page." "The whiteness that surfaces here in such overwhelming force is the whiteness of the page that overpowers the writing arm. . ."

Renker makes further associations between the virginal, blank paper and what Melville conceives as the facelessness of the white whale. "Physiognomically regarded, the Sperm Whale is an anomalous creature," Ishmael writes. "For you see no one point precisely; not one distinct feature is revealed; no nose, eyes, ears, or mouth; no face; he has none, proper . . ." Later: "But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall

not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what we will about his face, I say again he has no face."

This faceless white face is the mask through which Ahab is driven to strike. And it is the unmarked white paper facing the writer Melville, challenging him to attack. It is perhaps, also, the pale northern faces of his three unmarried sisters, who shared the household at Arrowhead, and who toiled at making fair copies of the author's chaotic manuscripts.

* * *

Although Melville—the consummate autodidact—was well versed in his European cultural background, the Judeo-Christian tradition, he added a particularly American quality: the muscular, the physical. This is reflected in the agonies he suffered in the act of writing.

Renker: "Physically, too, writing was a struggle for Herman: his handwriting was illegible; he found spelling impossible; and, among other ailments, he suffered from eye, back, and head trouble that made the activity painful. . . . The physical engagement with the written page that threatened Herman in such a profoundly physical sense was in fact a violent one: he disfigured the surface of his writing paper, filling up every available white space with writing as well as cross-outs, revisions, carets, circles, and other manipulations. He cut pages apart and pinned passages together; he wrote on both sides of the page; he turned the paper upside-down and wrote some more. . . . When he was writing at white heat, his hand became increasingly rough and more and more abbreviated and elided."

Melville battled the act of writing while engaged in it.

He directed that his sisters, in making fair copies, omit all punctuation. He would add that later. Punctuating. Puncturing. Stabbing.

The writing hand was the mutilating hand. Like an on-deck whale butchering.

* * *

Melville plunged the act and method of writing into the substance of what he wrote. Something comparable happened when, first Cezanne, then Picasso and Braque, then the Abstract Expressionists, broke up the surface of the canvas, making the painting both in and on it.

It can be argued that Melville's career as a writer was destined to fail, he simply could not be understood—until these painters had opened the door for him. When painting passed from representational to abstract, a recognizable face was erased. The canvas became faceless—with a new language of hieroglyphics.

Melville covered the page with writing, so as to obliterate all white space.

He used colored pencils for editing.

The manuscript was an object to him, as much so as is the canvas to the painter.

* * *

Anyone who knows the work of the painter Lucien Freud is aware that he is a grandson of Sigmund. This needs to be stated, simply to clear the deck; but not much more needs to be made of it.

Perhaps the best way to approach him is through his severest critic, the man who least understands him: Hilton Kramer. From "The Other Freud," by Hilton Kramer (Art & Antiques, January, 1994): "It was the show that everyone in London was talking about and, it seemed, writing about. Professional duty therefore obliged me to have a look at it. So I steeled myself for the inevitable shudder, and went along to see what, if any, modification might have occurred in the old trickster's ill-mannered way of applying paint to canvas since the last time I had been in his presence. . . . Needless to say, there were no surprises. As has commonly been the case in Freud's painting for some years now, there was an abundance of putrescent-looking flesh in many of the recent pictures. Whether single figures or couples whether in situations suggesting erotic engagement or simply patient endurance of the painter's protracted inspection, the naked bodies in Freud's paintings are placed within the canvas rectangle in a way that maximizes the indelicacy of their postures. . ."

Indelicacy, indeed.

Kramer speaks of "the aroma of the illicit and perverse," "the invariably ugly and unloving way the paint is laid on," "this transparent appeal to prurient interests," and "the artist's fixation on gay male subjects."

That's a cheap shot, Mr. Kramer. The catalogue of the current show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Lucien Freud: Recent Work, by Catherine Lampert, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1993) contains reproductions of 31 nudes. 17 are female, 14 male. When it comes to human flesh—our animal-human flesh—Freud is an equal-opportunity misanthrope, gender unspecific.

And there are many other paintings with subjects of all ages, fully clothed.

The prurience, it would seem—or at least the nervousness—is not in Mr. Freud.

Finally, Kramer states that "the representation of sexuality in Freud's work—a view at once uninhibited and morose, completely free and excessively gloomy—speaks to the spirit of our time."

I tend to be suspicious of critics who claim a personal access to "the spirit of our time."

* * *

Catherine Lampert is a much more favorable critic: ". . .Freud's work will leave to posterity the vulnerability and potency of the people portrayed, in the manner of Rembrandt and Degas." One is reminded, too, of the photographer Diane Arbus; how the viewer of her photographs is driven to meditate on the potency of the rapport that has been established between the artist and her often bizarre subjects.

Like Melville, Freud had little formal education. Or such as he had meant little to him. And like Melville, Freud served at sea as a common sailor. He felt comfortable with his fellow sailors. Ashore, he stayed away from "neighborhoods that usually accommodated artists and intellectuals;" instead, he occupied waterfront flats, among "costermongers, villains and thieves."

* * *

Freud once met Picasso, and "admired his malevolence." Cubism, however, and the later abstractions, were not his mode. Instead, he attacked the flesh. Lampert quotes him: "I want paint to *work as flesh*. . .As far as I am concerned the paint is the person. I want it to work for me just as flesh does."

Lampert again: "Many of the strongest qualities of Freud's recent work are those he shares with sculptors." The layers of flesh transformed, as paint, in three dimensions.

And: "Freud was open to manipulating the compositions and limbs just because of the sensual presence of the models: 'the effect that they make in space is bound up with them as might be their color or smell.'"

I have never seen a Freud painting in the original, I have seen only reproductions. My friend Julio Granda, artist, toured the exhibition at the Met, and he came back with a single strong impression: "You can *smell* them."

The wise men who wrote the Old Testament may have had several meanings in mind when they coined that wonderful phrase, "carnal knowledge."

* * *

The act of butchering a whale is not for the faint of heart. Nor is the act of recording that event—Melville's act as writer. It is not a genteel

procedure. He must attack the awesome white page—stab it, mutilate it, obliterate the white.

Freud attacks the flesh he sees before him. Whether it is a hand, a face, a young woman, an old man, a boy, a girl, even a baby—a penis or a breast—he obliterates the white with all manner of exaggerated color and texture.

None of this is delicate.

* * *

Art and literature provide a field on which an ever-shifting battle is waged: the Army of Inclusion against the Army of Refinement. On the one side, Melville's whale blubber and Freud's human blubber; on the other side, Hilton Kramer and the forces of gentrification.

It's like bread. For years the nobility struggled to produce a refined white bread, suitable to their delicate tastes, and distinct from the coarse black bread of the peasants. Now, the common man in America eats Wonder Bread (like a wet white pillow), while the descendents of the nobility go to the health food store for granola, and the other coarse peasant grains.

As the tides of battle flow today, I'm afraid Mr. Kramer is making a futile Pickett's Charge. The odds are against him.

—PAUL METCALF

Noticings

"With bop behind, we go ahead."

—Jack Kerouac

"Leningrad is probably the best example of the truly peaceful city."

—Glenn Gould, *Toronto*

"you write?. . .you're sunk. . ."

—Louis-Ferdinand Celine, *Castle to Castle*

"What is complete but rests in the momentary illusion."

—Robert Duncan, *After Passage*

"Mysticism has the enormous merit of being concerned with the eternal present, and not, as humanism is, with the future."

—Aldous Huxley, *Huxley in Hollywood*

"The words did not communicate themselves, did not know themselves, playing among themselves according to the limits of near and far and the unknown decisions of difference."

—Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*

After this I think I'll write some poems as plain as toast.

"Death I can take, but not pastness."

—David Meltzer in conversation

"Sometimes the dissatisfaction which leads one to put something away for a few weeks and look at it later is not that the work is unfinished, but the inspiration is unfinished."

—Frank O'Hara, letter to Larry Osgood 8/20/56

Jim Brodey, what you always wanted you found in Kerouac:
the sound of constantly falling onward.

"Sometimes, says Dag, I have a real problem remembering if a celebrity is dead or not. But then I realize it doesn't really matter."

—Douglas Coupland, *Generation X*

"Any race of people that allows itself to be graded on a scale designed by European science will appear to be a culture of higher primates.
Any grading system is meaningless. Every attempt to compare cultures with the intention of determining which is the most developed will never be anything other than one more bullshit projection of western culture's hatred of its own shadows. There is *one* way to understand another culture. *Living* it. Move into it, ask to be tolerated as a guest, learn the language. At some point understanding may come. It will always be wordless. The moment you grasp what is foreign, you will lose the urge to explain it. To explain a phenomenon is to distance yourself from it."

—Peter Hoeg, *Smilla's Sense of Snow*

"Another kind of police will come now."

—Trisha Brown

"She was honest in the only way it's possible to be honest—by not knowing there was any other way to be."

—Rafael Yglesias, *Fearless*

"Whatever gives oxygen its power, music is cut from the same cloth."
—Ornette Coleman

What is more questionable than a dead man?
"Myshkin on the phonograph"
My skin in a photograph?
Zappa is gone, the lame averages won't leave us alone.

"I was getting as hard as Chinese algebra."
—Tom Waits, *Pasties and a G-String*

"I used to like this trick of balancing a small mirror on the bridge of your nose, and walking around on the ceiling, so that you had no feet. You were walking, physically, on the floor, given that you were experiencing location by reference to the ceiling. And it *felt* as though you were walking on the ceiling, you see? Simple."
—Robert Creeley, *Some Senses of the Commonplace*

"The space of poetic language is determined by the time it takes meaning to evaporate."
—Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, *Xenia*

"But if you don't like people whose lives are exceptional, why do you want to hear about them?
Because those are the sorts of stories I like best.
Untrue ones?
No, interminable ones, if you like. Bottomless pits.
Me too, she said."
—Marguerite Duras, *The Sailor from Gibraltar*

"In our dawning, mutual intimacy, I induce him to open the little slit in the head of his penis so I can put my clitoris inside and fuck him."
—Peter Hoeg, *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*

"he catches on right away, he jumps, he settles down, he purrs. . .he isn't just any old cat, he understands our living conditions, I'm sure he knows more than he lets on, even about what's going to happen. . .an animal's silence is something."
—Celine, *Rigadoon*

"the 'messagiers' are a different breed, philosophico-addlepated, heaven help you if you mess with them, if you lose yourself in their waves, urinals,

terraces, abbeys. . .complexes, seaweeds, and complications, you'll never get your bearings again. . ."

—Celine, Ibid

"a compact whole cat complex nerve system
under the lamppost
let alone the moon"

—Larry Eigner, *Windows/Walls/Yard/Ways*

"What I hear is the traffic. Everybody in New York hears it, but it's really vivid in my head. Horns and children and birds too—I hear them so clearly, they hit me so hard. The subway roar, the jackhammers. Not that they're so loud, but they *stay* there. The trucks and the sirens and the screeching and the hollering and the brakes, all that jagged movement, the arggghhhh! Without thinking about it, I relate to that. Invariably, no matter where I am, if I hear a siren and I'm in the middle of playing something, I start to try to do the same thing. It just always happens."

—Charles Gayle, *Wire* interview, March 1994

"Why do we fear the dark as unavoidable defeat when it alone is constant, and we'd starve if it stopped watering the lawn of dreams."

—Rosmarie Waldrop, *Lawn of the Excluded Middle*

"The streets indicate it's the end of the world, finally."

—Anne Waldman, *Iovis*

"a great long lifetime in a briefcase proving my work and my work itself stopped dead at the level where I took to proving myself. . .I quit self promotion, I enter my page."

—Jack Kerouac, letter to Lois Sorrells 6/29/65

Did anybody notice when irony died?

—CLARK COOLIDGE

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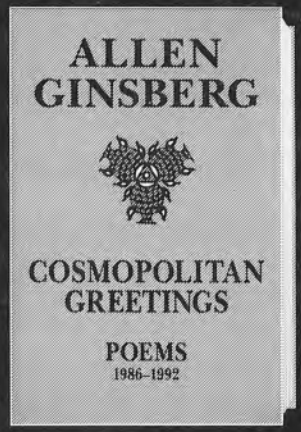

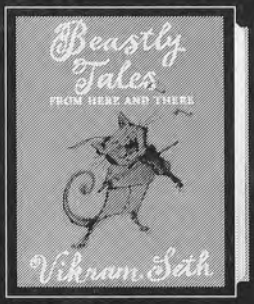

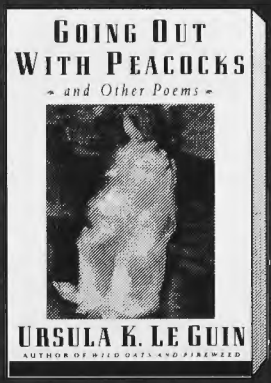

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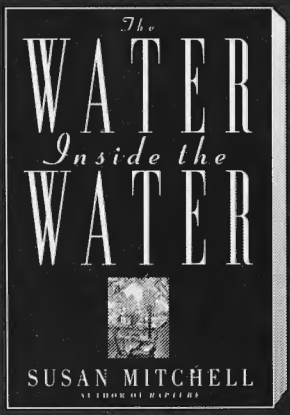

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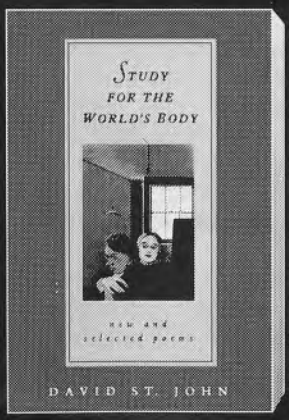

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A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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Contributing Editors RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS
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Correspondents CHARLES BERNSTEIN
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Managing Editor CARYL ESHLEMAN

Editorial Assistant KEN CORMIER

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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INGER CHRISTENSEN

from ALPHABET

(Tr. from the Danish
by Pierre Joris)

9

ice ages exist, ice ages exist,
ice of the arctics and ice of the kingfisher;
cicadas exist, chicory, chrome

and the chrome yellow iris, the blue iris; oxygen
indeed; also ice floes in the arctic ocean,
polar bears exist, as fur inscribed
with an individual number he exists, condemned to his life;
and the kingfisher's mini-drop into the ice-blue rivers

of mars exists, if the rivers exist;
if oxygen in the rivers exists, oxygen
indeed; exists indeed there where the cicadas'
i-songs exist, there indeed where chicory
heaven exists blue dissolved in

water, the chrome yellow sun, oxygen
indeed; it will exist for sure, we will
exist for sure, the oxygen we breathe exists,
eye of fire crown of fire exist, and the heavenly
inside of the lake; a handle infolded
with bulrushes will exist, an ibis exists,
and the movements of the soul inhaled into clouds
exist, like oxygen storms deep inside Styx
and in the heart of wisdom's landscape ice-light,
ice identical with light, and in the inner
heart of the ice-light emptiness, live, intense

like your gaze in the rain, that fine life-
iridescent rain where gesture-like
the fourteen crystal lattices exist, the seven
crystalline systems, your gaze in mine,
and Icarus, impotent Icarus exists;

Icarus swaddled in melting waxwings
exists; Icarus pale as a corpse in
civvies exists, Icarus all the way down where
the pigeons exist; dreamers, dolls
exist; the dreamers' hair with cancerous tufts
torn out, the dolls' skin pinned together
with nails, rotting wood of the mysteries; and smiles
exist, Icarus' children white as lambs
in the gray light, will indeed exist, indeed
we will exist, and oxygen on oxygen's crucifix;
as hoarfrost we will exist, as wind we will exist,
as the rainbow's iris, in the shining shoots of
mesembryanthenum, in the tundra's straw; small

we will exist, as small as bits of pollen in peat,
as bits of virus in bones, as swamp pink maybe
maybe as a bit of white clover, vetch, a bit of chamomile
exiled to the lost again paradise; but darkness
is white say the children, the darkness of paradise is white,
but not white as a coffin is white,
that is if coffins exist, and not
white as milk is white,
that is if milk exists; white is white,
the children say, darkness is white, but not
white as the white existing
before fruit trees existed, their flowering so white,
darkness is whiter, eyes melt

10

june night exists, june night exists,
sky finally as if lifted up to celestial

heights and simultaneously pushed down as gently as when
dreams are visible before being dreamed; a space like
swooned, like saturated with whiteness, a timeless

knell of dew and insects, and nobody in this
gossamer, nobody understands that
autumn exists, that aftertaste and afterthought
exist, only these restless lines of fantastic
ultrasounds exist and the bat's
jade-ear turned towards the ticking fog;
never was the globe's inclination so beautiful,
never were the oxygenated nights so white,

so dispassionately dissolved, softly ionized
white, and never was the limit of invisibility so nearly
touched; june, june, your jacob's ladders
exist your sleeping beasts and their dreams of sleep
exist, a flight of galactic germs between
the earth so earthy and heaven so heavenly,
the calm of the valley of tears, so calm and the tears
sunk back, sunk back in like groundwater again
underground; earth; the earth in its revolution
around the sun exists; the earth in its itinerary
through the milky way exists; the earth on its way
with its load of jasmine, and of jasper and iron,
with its curtains of iron, its portents of joy and random Judas
kisses and a virgin anger
in the streets, jesus of salt; with the jacaranda's shadow
on the waters of the river, with falcons and hunters
and january in the heart, with the well of Japoto della Quercias
Fonte Gaia in Sienna and with july
as heavy as a bomb; with tame brains,
with heart jars or heart grass or berries,
with the roots of ironwood in the exhausted earth

the earth that Jayadeva sings in his mystic
12 century poem; the earth with its coastline
of conscience, blue and with nests

where the large heron exists, with its neck curved
blue-gray, or the small heron exists, mysterious
and shy, or the night heron, the ash-colored heron exist
and the degrees of wing beats of sparrows, of cranes
and pigeons; the earth with Jullundur, Jabalpur and
Jungfrau exists, with Jotunheim and the Jura
exists, with Jabron and Jambo, Jogkarta
exists, with earth-swirls and earth-smoke exists
with water masses, landmasses, earthquakes exists,
with Judenburg, Johannesburg and the Jerusalem of Jerusalems

•

atombombs exist

Hiroshima, Nagasaki

Hiroshima 6
august 1945

Nagasaki 9
august 1945

140,000 dead and
wounded in Hiroshima

about 60,000 dead and
wounded in Nagasaki

frozen numbers
somewhere in a distant
and ordinary summer

since then the wounded
have died, many at first, indeed
most, then fewer, but in the end

all; in the end
the children of the wounded,
stillborn, dying,

many, continuously,
some, finally the
last ones; in my kitchen

I stand and peel
potatoes; the faucet
runs and nearly
covers the noise of the
children in the yard;

the children yell and
nearly cover the noise
of the birds in
the trees; the birds
sing and nearly

cover the murmur
of the leaves in the wind;
the leaves murmur
and nearly cover
the silence of the sky,

the sky which is light
and the light which since
then has nearly
resembled the fire
of the atom bomb

A NOTE ON INGER CHRISTENSEN

Inger Christensen—poet, novelist, essayist—is the foremost Danish experimentalist of her generation. Maybe her single finest work to date, *Alfabet* (1981) is a book-length poem using two reticulating systems: the alphabet (that adamic, prelapserian state of language, as Roland Barthes suggests, because it is pre-word and pre-syntax, and thus before misuse, lying, rhetoric, polysemy are possible) and the Fibonacci series (where each number is the sum of the two previous ones, i.e.: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144...) Thus the first section of the poem is one line long and starts with an "A," the second 2 lines long, and starts with a "B." etcetera). Concerning the series, Christensen has said in an interview:

> It was by accident that I found out about the Fibonacci series. These numerical ratios exist in nature—the way a leek wraps around itself from the inside, and the head of a sunflower, are all based on this series. That's what's so amazing. The series itself and its peculiarities are more extraordinary than any poetry collection could be. A book of poetry becomes a metaphor for a mathematical series, rather than vice-versa.

On her use of systematic procedures for composing poetry, she told the same interviewer:

> By using a system you are trying to reveal the rhythm of the universe. In the creation story, first there is silence, and then come patterns. . .a useful benefit of a system is that you can't just write the first thing that comes into your mind; because of the resistance of the system you get onto the track of something that you wouldn't otherwise have thought of. The gift is that you are forced to put much more of the world into the poem. Sometimes it feels as though the poem is carrying you along. You have access to a universe that begins to carry you. . .into something that you would never have been able to see or write.

The rhythmic-syntactic base-line of the poem is the first line's joyous affirmation ("apricot trees exist, apricot trees exist")—modulated, as the poem takes in more of the world, by the noted existence of destruction and evil. While the early sections are single units, with the seventh letter ('g')—which in the Fibonacci series corresponds to 21—these units start to decompose into stanzas, and with section ten ('i'—89 lines) into separate poems. As each section foregrounds words starting with the alphabetically corresponding letter, translation tends to lose some of the systematicity. (Thus in section 9, the Danish word "is" easily yields the English "ice," but in the next section, the "j" of Danish "jorden" is lost in its English translation "earth.")

—P.J.

JEAN DONNELLY

ETTARD

our costume itches a lake of three
my pedals launch a buckled actor
your hammock gaze
the girl itch a fiery onyx

if an ink antic cuffs our shared blink
or the hedge mote our fingers pitch
will you stay
will you turn that way

the poppy lapses a blown patrol
the shift of deciduous cities
our smoke plot our jargon badger
a wry bed of yank & curtain

this dense perch was once a straw god
having since jostled a vow lock
a bandage echo in a shoulder of carbon
our gasp dissolves the accuracy of the film

it is just as decisive to foist an erotic luster
as to waltz a penance lawn
but your lip purchase stuns my crumpled button
that soap ledger no longer ribbons a plea

in the brow scuffle
in the come-hither-hook
with our dull floss & blushing
we have an orbit story to browse a map fraction

I could plait your brambles to mother my flag
oblige my four honest boatmen
they've tuned my thistle score
I husband this hut of trusses to seal my reckless nut

if only the countess could scale the iron scarlet
it's not an armed harbor
but a frost rug
a boot nation we post & boulder

AVIVA BOWER

FIVE POEMS

INTOXICATION OF TRANSGRESSION

breach of silver gutted contracts lapses back
contumacious inroads to slips and lapses
strung on memories burning cord, these
burnished trespasses made a jewelry of seditions
inroads along the neck
you carry them elegantly
you carry them to a path
bounds broken bracken and underleaf spoors
all down to last lapses—stolen!
and pressing in, the saturated airs of slips and lapses
makes inroads, but your path holds
tumescent intoxicated you fill it and
overstep bounds broken in to you

SEE

Scumbled leaden and mercurial resins the lake surface
Umber and chalk singular waves in wake and wake
Onto the whale back cliffs topaz bands break
Pebbles each daubed on each

And transparent water
And wash of thrown verdure across the bay
Water
And stippled in, moment to moment
As memory to memory, as word to word

ANAGLYPH

That day and night there is a darkling struggle and when, finally a whole weekend of sleep or the days get a bit longer living only a few hours from the arctic circle a circle so tight as to know the earth is round, so certain that it may as well be flat, you see you've been dragging language behind you like a heavy tool and you leave it at the threshold of a very funny memory that's just returned and that you tell and the laughter points the way to a hill of paths and bread and wine and the circle of conversations so drunken that even the metaphor is a hilarious tool that touched itself in a kind of promise that someday language would touch itself too and stop being a tool and be that first thing, that the world would rush in and be there first and we would be silently standing in it too, well then the anagogic seems to rise as the sun and spread the potential like a road up the peninsula.

EMULSIONS

The senses, sad and true as sun-paled cellulose acetate
present-bound only for the seconds of a purchase

The senses, immiscible with the water and the World
But in the little world they neither mix nor break
But they milk something out

The colloidal senses
The hand and eye and mouth, a colloid
Not immiscible perhaps as they
Flash worlds onto the screen's flesh
"Never disclosed, but hastened to again"
Even the seamless time of promising past and future
A thick delicious globe in the wide and wide mind

In these straits of emulsion
A tremendous heat is needed to believe
In the myth of the World

The senses war their pieces together and apart
Power's waxy light and charge here too are
And through emulsion's channels runs only war
Where there is little space to breathe free for some
And others no breath at all
Come, let it be and not breathe

AT THE RODIN MUSEUM

"Thought"
the smooth chin above the marble block

blind eyes
no torso
no inward glance
rather
thought takes her light
from the eyes in the museum
lit from below
from the marble
lit from the shadows
I am thought

the others
the pressure of the living
in the volcanic pressures of watching
make a stone
a beautiful girl
whose lips will part
who lives in stone
clawed to waves
shirred to drape
death's bruised stone

stone
that has recrystallized under great pressure
my head
under the pressure of the living
has reformed into crystals of tears
which do not move
but are frozen before spoken
and petrify my mouth
a welt of tears forms my mouth
marble bruised and punched
bruised and punched
my head
powdered under the bouchard's rows of teeth
the claw's mark
shirred on the waste rock
the pounding of the rock
echoes silently in the house

I am the thought
that your gaze sustains
I am the thought
that you want to live
my eyes are blinded
with the tears
you hold back
wanting the dead to live
willing the living to live on
crying to move grains of marble in a filmy gaze

My life
is the unsteady light your eyes bring
to the stone at my throat

ANNOUNCING
Talespin by Susan Bee

An artist's book in which the themes of violence, desire, romance, and procreation are explored. Susan Bee's original collages were printed offset on Rives BFK paper then handpainted with watercolor and gouache by the artist. Talespin is bound in printed red cloth. The book measures 8.5 inches wide by 11 high. There are 22 page spreads. Forty copies are published by Granary Books in 1995. Thirty copies are on sale for $950.

For futher information:
GRANARY BOOKS
568 Broadway, Suite 403
New York City, 10012
212 -226-5462

SHARON THESEN

GALA ROSES

If it's not flowing I'll not tell
not to ask me neither under the lilac nor upon the bedspread
a secret fig green orb a mouth the size fills
inside perfectly & juice a slight muscular taking
a trout in the boat under the sun's
tremor the sly slight feather the fisherman strokes
words upon you oh body oh stone lintel and maiden frieze
lifting high the garland gala roses white lilies
legs draped heavy satin skirting heads crowned braided
sung & caught by nets your sheer wings beauty
her gateway fig-mouth and trout so slips down

Was fast the shift to blankness the nape of neck's
adorable space many catastrophes could & have befallen
axes have fallen upon fair bent heads still speaking
don't think about it don't listen the dog is advised re
the nature of his operation & moans of pity no no
refuse to be bitter neither will he nor she all
friends & happy in the skin of some accommodation stretched
beyond bearing goes loose in the mind—covered saintlike
in arrows walking to work not screaming not yelling a kind word

the mailman the butcher the old woman rambling alone book in
[hand
kerchief & housedress a pocketful of amethysts & quartz crystal

Orange silk triangles shine from the berber kelim
green & blue oasis water sweetness pregnant moon adrift
large above the stucco the pointed rooflines grave
& magnificent occasions *it feels so good* entwined you my
darling my sweetheart the years each one lost to us
added on to sorrow's sad amazed boat nudging nudging
the wharf's oily edge blackened posts wavering
moon-blackened water's profound & frightful mirror
led here by what sure footedness *quietness & passion*
with or without him it them you see you big whatevers
going in and out like breathing I can't help it

Form follows whitely next the big tree shaded
fruitless not full of speeches like King Lear apoplectic
upholstered beneath the tent of his rent sub-
conscious we read as libretto to folly & lust
virtue's adventure high above nodding
here there to then below dirty-faced with cockney spraddle

good sense good rhymes or not-bad chocolate bar
some poor guy had to leave during the storm scene
passing knees in near tears mine also that people
idiotic in castles' granite chill behind the unicorns
draperies & trumpets strumpets waggle hips
blue skirts the young princes point at

Sour cream egg whites coconut icing sugar mountainous
sweetness missing the book of favorites my lord and saviour
wants me for a sunbeam others too but I sing me he wants me
eyebeams coiled on the violets river-bank pregnant
by mandrake root or thought *two hearts two hearts that beat*
as one covered over the site with leaf mould undid the night
pointed the way down the aisle's little footpath lites
two fingers each hand point to the exits existence outside
jumping into heaven's thought clouds blue peace cold wind
floating throne river of stars the big lap
and book the white chest, odor of father comes now

Illumination marches thoughtless around in shorts
watch out where you're going map turned this way
that way north switched to south
yanked round to north again whacked

off course *within human memory* velikovsky imagines venus
came so close she threw the earth off its spinning
broke necks with suddenness massive reversals hence
concussive reeling waters slop beehives coil whales dive
ant colony exudes itself a grayish pile by the roadside's
hairpin turn lake blasting blue & huge mountainous cold
planet of *seas and vapors, mud, fire, and dust*

Red head of rose partitions the vase lip
he gave me relaxed on the porch charming bare
arm offering sweet muscles long curve I'll take
too then taking took mine so entwined twinned arms oh
well the picnic today so fry chicken all morning
dip egg dip crumbs lay down in the brilliant cooking
ocean floating things persons dog paddling
old & sandy muzzled sneezing wagging creature full
moon moaning through clouds & trees she chants
the puzzle of the blessed virgins virginity but
things do happen emma laraine's daughter smiling due
[november 12

Triste tropiques bristle of boat stems at the yacht club
ocean sways round turquoise peaks long as Indonesia

tips obscured toes dipped in the sea for a feeling of *out*
there we made it to maybe we'll go somewhere we'll
be okay as of this day at the park looking
for a familiar posture or hair or gesture on the green
nice to see so many families jungle gyms hibachi smoke
weather-talk clouds clearing the breaking in two
and into twos the coil of something—helpless resemblance
& architecture of long forgotten desire remaining an *indepth*
report HELP ME bottle bobbing its message too late probably

Hammering fixes looseness plunging the wayward turd
sunshine neck-rash heat flush orgone headache gap-tooth
concealed smile invites the neighbour for tea just over
the flu finally ready to cope with the white hydrangea
purchase to clamber around the house-front a viney apron
I hide my face in boo-hoo I cry mother pats me
there there fixing sheets to the line hot & windy dark hair
blowing & out the car window us in the back or
over by the gas station long weeds tight
budded yellow flowers red rocket tips pale violet surrender
to who's responsible who picks it up and runs with it

Green machine beyond the ruby dahlias & empty
town without you-him-it a gap thinking fills overflows
scrolled as music coiling out the mouth of the alto
love's refrain ornamented elizabethan *garden*
wall where stars are bright imagination hides her purple
violets *such sweet sorrow* striates the mind like bar codes
dragged over a dark star a price appearing or someone
at the door with a seven-rap tattoo shave-and-a-haircut
the drag queens' audience drab by the default's wild
fuschia gloves silver gowns mountainous bo-peep wigs
the gallantry stiff shoulders and exaggerated mouth of her
continuous birth

big dipper's steam shovel
permanently on strike zenith of summer summit of green &
breezes the Queen is here walking along the rows
of soldiers chests or in a late-model convertible we hold
to her civet cat robes & make petitions to keep
to life and love the living and dear God I cried
bring him back on my knees on stones of the earth some birds
at it in the ripening plum tree the sun out oh Christ
I cried & arose the day as usual bright & fractious
sweet juices jamming the beaks of the crows &
their ancient nightsome noisome

Accorded the morning its habit & rhythm, rain clouds
kitty litter *little things that drive you crazy* whining
race cars round the stadium going nowhere unhelpful
attachments of the vacuum cleaner hose uncoiling
the one with the headlamp that roars & grabs at the rug
fallen dahlia petals white paper dots from the 3-hole punch
waiting for him to come & the courier also & also her what if
they come while you're out & miss the rap the doorbell
messenger in uniform his parcel his brown truck & quickness
just in case bring out the blue & white cups blue & white saucers
gala of milky breasts pouring a funnel of stars and
rain on my ornamental plum

ROBERT DUNCAN

PROJECTIVE PROJECT: CHARLES OLSON[1]

Some time in 1948 a teeny-weeny monograph of poems arrived about yay-big. And I opened it and read the poems. Or four of them. There might have been three but I'm going to read the three I had right off here. I thought, well, so the jerk thinks he can write poetry and threw it in the waste paper basket. That's the nearest I came to, and the longest I came to having a first edition of a first book by Charles Olson.[2]

I had met him, as Charles has given account, and as I think I have given account in interviews, when he was doing work on the West on a Guggenheim. We talked how cities have to invent ways of ripping farmers off in order to get food. All the way through open war and mayhem and everything else, even to selling them refrigerators. Anything they could think of. Improving their standard of living. The perfect examples of such cities would be Moscow off in the snow needing something from the Ukraine that the Ukraine didn't need back from Moscow, so that the people in cities get adroit at selling furs to wear in hot weather and anything else they could. This was right exactly in the homeland of Charles Olson. And so I had a marvelous time, and met somebody who certainly talked as much as I did. We eventually, ah, I think, almost immediately, we discovered how to talk, but certainly as we knew each other over years we discovered how to talk. We talked at the same time and listened. There were only two of us. The only thing is, Charles is just hanging in there knowing I'm going to fatigue at some point. And then meanwhile I've got a few reserves. But that would be about the way we talked.

Creeley and Duncan were another thing. In those days that was talking all night and walking all night and sometimes there would be an interchange. The only way I really ever hear a monologue is by going to *My Dinner With André* which I think I'll see about ten times because I discovered I not only liked being a monologist but my unfortunate drive toward being a monologist has deprived me of other monologues around—and now you can go to the movies for two hours and fifteen minutes of hearing one.[3]

But I have another reason to start out with these three poems because hidden in them is quite a bit. And thinking about "Projective Verse" and

returning to the matter of Olson just for this evening and thinking about us sitting here today, it seems to me that you encounter the shock of the roaring male rapist, that women have been talking about, in an unbelievable way in Olson. You will hear it—and you'll hear it even in this first one—these fantasies, these male fantasies that nowadays we keep trying to say "surely that's projection on your part. Here are all these nice boys sitting around. What are you talking about?" You'll hear it in here too. This is really deep. . . .If you had to have a record of our times, Olson has, as only a poet can, a deep record of a hidden man's house from which this poetry comes.

Something more than the picture is that society is patristic, but Olson's was in an entirely patristic world. I mean, the figure of his father is huge in his mind and then Maximus and then the huge father figures that appear, bigger than all that, are amazing in his poems.

[reads "The K"][4]

Now this is almost the beginning. There's poetry before this but let's say at least this is where this poetry began for me. On that day that I received it, I read the three poems totally without understanding. So I didn't want them laid on top of me and threw them in the waste paper basket. But at the end, when we're actually up against the fact of death that's projected in the first poem, as they emerge and define, so this was something more than a first book. Many a first book doesn't even belong to the poetry. When poetry bursts out, it's usually at a later date. And if it does belong to the first poetry as it did with the case of W.S. Merwin, then suddenly very often the rest of the poetry will just be holding the office that the first one put the poet into.[5]

But a change that I find quite shocking comes in it. In this one "the night has a love for throwing its shadows around a man/ a bridge, a horse, the gun, a grave," and it may read almost "around a man, a bridge, a horse, a gun, a grave" but the line is four. A bridge, a horse, the gun, a grave, and the *Maximus* closes with not *a* wife, *a* car, *a color* and *a* self, or *the* wife, *the* car, *the* color, and *the* self, but with *my* wife, *my* car, *my* color, and *my* self.[6] Even larger things in the last year. So this is something of the tension of the poem and the projective.

Think of this. I mean, this is years and years later, after Charles really holds on and knows the whole course of the thing. He was trained to know it in American Studies and to know there were great figures in the nineteenth-century that embody that spirit, and to feel that himself. Again, the matter of fathers and sons was filial in the lines of descent. "The night has a love for throwing its shadows around a man," and we have later, "myself, like my father, in the picture of the shadow on the rock."

But I wanted to find another four here. I come to it anyway with these place marks. They don't tell me anything until I find this place. When we come back to it you'll see how much it moves [me]. Unless I decided it

wouldn't. . . . "These born again. . ." and towards the end "my" will come in—"my world" or "my time." Now I will have to find it to see what it was. The second poem, "La Préface," is really the thing out of which another aspect that we will then meet. . . .I'll start with it and then read the "Projective Verse" essay itself and you'll see it right away, which is a contrast. And the urgency itself which Charles Olson felt about choosing open form at war with closed form. Open and closed. And it's a proposition of "La Préface."

[reads "La Préface"][7]

It wouldn't be until Jack Clarke years later that Olson would consent, really, to read Blake.[8] The Blake underground there. Not having gone through an English major although (with American Studies as a focus), Olson would have been acquainted with Blake, but he kept his distance and argued against the Blake he hadn't read. Until there was the point when someone made an appointment with Blake. I'm going to get across here the appointment with Blake as I unfold my own picture of the projective. [Here] is a place where I still have a great deal of agreement indeed with the Olson I see.

Today Blake's in every poem so I wouldn't worry about styles. It would be a courtesy not to believe you have an appointment. There's a whole period where it's one of those things you mention. And it comes in this poem when the man doesn't want it. It does mean an appointment. And he's sure to have it. And he will recognize it when it arrives. Underground by the way is not only Blake's underground. It doesn't enter the poem. But it certainly entered his life and the questions about poetry. The one underground does indeed enter the poem very early. "Big Man" is in a story Olson wrote fairly early, which is also [about] his father, Olson's father was also big.[9] Olson was—I always think he was seven feet four but—and I was absolutely dismayed at one point when I thought I had been very very clever indeed. I got Parkinson to introduce Charles Olson and I saw that Tom Parkinson was actually taller than Olson.[10] I didn't believe it, because he was one big man in my mind. But "Big Man" grows. [He] is actually a proto-Maximus, and at a level, by the way, that Olson writing me when I assumed *that,* sort of kidding around, said that it hadn't occurred to him that Maximus—that's a big one. I mean, he was an expert at not having it occur to him, the very thing he was working on. I mean, of course it occurred to him in the largest way.

This is the one where we begin to see other figures. It began to try to come forward again and again in Olson's poetry.

[reads "The Moebius Strip"][11]

And then the fourth. These all proceed a poem of his that's quite well-known: "The Kingfishers." But these are openings, opening poems of the directive.

[reads "The Ring of"][12]

In this account that he gives of Aphrodite, in which she is portrayed in an almost Botticellian way, pink girl and so forth, does come after his reading of "The Venice Poem." When he came West again, his interest in talking at length, and my pointing out that in Hesiod it's quite clear in the Homeric hymns that Aphrodite was the penis, or member, as they say in Loeb at the discretion of the English at the end of the century, the member which Zeus had chopped off of his big daddy and thrown upon the sea. The blood became Nereïds and then Eros and Himeros were the two other parts of what was chopped off. What I want to make here is actually this deep image, the one I mean the one deep in time, with a lot of atavistic elements. He already knew in a poem and came forward in "The Ring Of" with just exactly what later you'll find him saying no one *should* do, no one *should* have anything to do with the Olympian account of the god, especially of Aphrodite. He felt sure he wanted to drive back. And back of that to the Titanic.[13]

Now I'm pretty much going to stay by this proposition of the open-closed projective and the word projective: projectile, percussive, prospective and use this as an open attack on the verse of the period, but also upon closure itself. And interestingly enough, he feels immediately in another part of it that his real drive against the iamb is that it's closed, that you step into it and close it. And that it closes the end of the line. So you want something that will come down heavy and open. It must be open at the end of the measure. And he sees that heavy as a closure.

The first thesis that we have in our M.A. program, Aaron Shurin's on the Projective, makes it quite clear that Olson is hiding from himself and from us, a source of the word "projective."[14] Olson, like Pound and like Williams, found it difficult indeed to admit at all the existence of Whitman. They are filled with dismissals of Whitman. Williams in his old age—Denise Levertov went and read every day to him Whitman and certainly we have a kind of palinode, a last, a graceful admission of Whitman as a possible ancestor. What's interesting here is that these three—who owed a lot indeed to Whitman—intention and everything else—treated him pretty much the way my generation treated T.S. Eliot. I mean, you owed a lot to "The Waste Land" but you put that church mouse in a box and let him wither. I mean, you were careful not to refer [to the poem]. And Olson could be quite mean and felt his malice when he was talking about Whitman. But for those of you who have read Olson, [you know] he also wants to convey the fact that Maximus is the first one. That's important actually in the context of the poem that this has to do with first things. Really there are alarming signs of basic themes that make *Maximus*, the concept of Maximus, charged with that concept of Maximusy have ancestors in both *The Cantos* and *Paterson*. Olson does there often try to obliterate them, try to get them moved off and have the *Maximus* be a first poem.

I'm speaking about a needless part of it because there's one thing absolutely true—Maximus is central for him. I mean, he's standing where it is, and it was the center, and at the end, we have "my world," "my time," and so forth. So there was no contest with any other possible poem. This is the positive position I see of the possessives at the end: *"my* pace," *"my* time." Then there can be many other people, places and times. And the struggle for multiplicity—although it's greatly allowed and admired in Olson—he moves towards it, and he knows the cosmos is not the same as the universe though he's frequently trying to hammer it. I mean, this is one of the tensions in his work all the time: is there more than one place or is there only *the* one place?

Now I'm going to take only the three terms that he brings up there [in "Projective Verse"], polemical terms. I must give one more account of this. When this essay appeared in 1950, James Broughton brought it to me. One of the places where Olson would have heard poetry read aloud was Berkeley. We already had an audience going, which fascinated him. We had an audience of about—I think—an audience of about the size we have today [about 25]. We didn't do it to them every week, but it was sort of seasonal. At least we had an audience, which made us interested in printing, and I have kept that disposition fairly strongly. It also meant that poetry in San Francisco developed so that every time you read there were new elements; and it developed intellectually way out of sorts in a way. I mean, people would come to see what do you now have in a poem, how complex has it grown. It was an arena with a game going on. And the game had to increase. And so the poetry also included an aspect of—a projective aspect—of game rules that the audience began to observe and follow and see what you were going to make of them as you go on.

Myth and history were already very much present in it for me, and what brought Olson to me while I was meeting that man and talking to him about cities and farmers and agriculture in history was that he had read the medieval things and he'd seen a poem with footnotes.[15] It's not my favorite poem. I don't think that I printed it with footnotes finally, but at least that's what Charles was writing in, footnotes. And I thought, gee, if footnotes can be part of the poem, I've got it. Because he didn't want to desert those footnotes. But I think he was sick of writing the essays you wrote for MLA or whatever, and he put the footnotes into it. And footnotes have a real role in the *Maximus* as they come in.

Now the first one has to do with Charles's sense of energy. He had the term "field composition" which I'd seen before and thought about in relation to painting. The gestalt had advanced the "field composition" of painting [so] that intention does not move pointedly around a painting the eye actually rediscovers the painting with different paths. You look at a painting somehow in its entirety. Then the great question came up with the

gestalt: don't we read the same way? Scan the entire area we're reading and then read into it so that we're already in an advanced state of recognition without much time passing at all. But the discovery comes from a field scan of whole areas, and knowing where things go. And then as you read more and more, even before you start, you assume this reading belongs to the field of other readings. And the readers who just don't manage that have real reading difficulties. They have to go from word to word and then re-do the whole area.

Certainly in working I already was assuming that the poem is never read, never finished, so that the first reading is already a complex reading. And even today, if I grasp a poem the first time—by the way. Let's talk about the *mistake*. Exactly what I did with Charles's three poems was assume that I'd read them, and threw them in the waste paper basket. And so it works that the negative is that you can be caught off by saying that you grasp anything right away. There is no field in which it takes place. I really said history is field and what is he doing writing a poem. Yet if he recognizes the poem belonging to the field, the poetry, already everything it does, *does* something to poetry. And that's part of what's going on in the sense of projective—of *himself* doing something to poetry. And then he goes on to the idea of *process*. And we find that the strangest thing that comes then, when it comes to the mind and the dance of the mind, it starts with a syllable. It's *right* at the syllable all the time, and that's where the entire intelligence of the poem is. So you follow through and *it* produces masses of rhymes, masses of disrhyme—rhyming and disrhyming. In that field, you follow what the poem says, begins to say. So elements enter.

Let's go back to the poem where they're projective in a different way because in the poem we have them related to a dream situation. This is why it doesn't turn up, for instance, to be *Kayak* Surrealism in which you think up some really jazzy thing to go with the last thing.[16] An "instanter" doesn't mean that. You have to go instanter because you have to go as quick, quicker. If your mind starts thinking up things it can do with a syllable or a rhyme, you've already lost it. You've got to be going as fast as this thing moves. And Charles is seeing it also in terms of energy, of synapses in a field. The interesting thing is the energy being one of the puzzles in my life. I never knew anybody who had an equal energy to Charles Olson, when he was aroused to the occasion. He was in between inertia and furor. I'm not sure what took place in between. But in furor—I can't imagine. And yet he was constantly calling for energy. One of his true sicknesses in relation to life was that he felt he needed more power or more energy. And so one place where I get a shock when I go back to the projective essay is the major proposition that there's this energy that you have to have in poetry. This must ally with Aaron's picture of the projective.

I'll give you a brief picture of that from Aaron's thesis. In the first place, Aaron Shurin went through Whitman and built a cunning web for the mind

that wants to start saying "oh, no, no, that was mine." And each time you are taking just one more strand and leading on until finally a web has been built of Whitman's actual uses of the word "projection," "projective," and all its families like "ject" and so forth. And in Whitman, the word is surely phallic. It really is. As you catch in the Olson thing here again, the sperm is the primary. And you've got "projectile" right after "projective" in Olson. But there are other ideas of the projective that enter. I would have thought before reading Aaron Shurin's essay that because of Olson's disallowing Whitman and his dislike of *Leaves of Grass*, that he probably hadn't read it very much. But then I keep forgetting that he was an American Studies person, or at least he was in a territory where he had to at least read it to put it down. And I'm convinced that [Whitman is] the real ground—the hidden ground—of the word "projective" as it comes forward—because it's the one place it would have come forward in poetry. And actually, Olson belongs in Whitman's entire line of development as far as the center of the poem and its movement in many ways goes. Let's call Whitman his grandfather. Because then he *can* take another grandfather in its most literal terms and have that Melville. And this would give the swing that one needs because you have got to have the dark vision in Melville to even pick up the dark vision of Whitman and give it substance. It's there throughout Whitman, in Whitman's great desire for completeness, but it does not have the cut that it has in Melville. And in Melville you get a lead that Pound was unacquainted with. A lead to what the interpolated passage of prose, for example, can be. In *Moby-Dick*, you have hunks of other kinds of prose. In *Pierre*, Charles's favorite always was—he did want some part of anything that he wrote to be like the pamphlets that Pierre picks up in the middle of that novel and reads while he's on a stagecoach. And I think those of you who know *Gunslinger* would be aware that is a sort of sassy feedback: *Gunslinger* is right back where Pierre was reading the pamphlet on the stage coach. But that was a paramount view.[17] I mean Pound—you've got such elements. "I'm reading this so it's right here in the poem." And yet Pound has no way of knowing how profoundly American that is. It's good on Pound's part that he doesn't because in every sense Pound needed the isolation. And in a poem that it didn't know how very much it was part of a tradition that actually I think Pound would not have been able to encounter.

The remark I made about Olson, and *could* he read something like Whitman: it's Fielding Dawson who opens that. It's the book on Kline where he says Kline and Olson are the two people he ever knew who could actually be enraged by a book they *couldn't* read. Not that they *couldn't* read but that they *wouldn't* read, no matter what. And frame themselves in relation to it.[18]

There are two other figures, however. Two other meanings of projective that would have come in so strongly for Olson that he himself

would not have thought of this word and its role in Whitman's poetry. So that gets to be the hidden element, for Olson too. One of them is the one in projective geometry and that is already present. It's already present in "The Kingfishers" and it's certainly present in *Maximus* throughout. In projective geometry, my eye will remain steady but I will draw this as it is shown here. In all its turns Cubism has a little to do with this but projective geometry will really move a three-dimensional object into all its dimensions and *that* will be the final description of the three-dimensional object. But Charles Olson's objects were not three-dimensional; they extend in history. His mind extended in history and his objects did. We'll come to the fact that he calls them "projects," but they are also objects and they extend in history. Now we understand why he will find the side that is 2000 B.C. He will find the side that's actually this moment, and like Pound, [he] signed a date on many of the Maximus Poems. In the last book you're aware that Butterick and Boer had to do the job of putting the book into its order, into a chronological order, into it's one after another order, its ordinal order.[19] Charles simply refused to. He had come to the place where he didn't want to type the poems; he didn't want to contact them again, in a sense he didn't want to interfere with them. He'd bring a mass. There's a description that Butterick gave me of his arriving in his car—at the end—and opening the door, out tumbled this array of sheets and Charles said just keep 'em the way they fell; most happily they shouldn't be bound, they should be able to be in any order. He had already come into the place where the ordination in examining a poem we so strongly believe in, he let it open. Remember opening is all right but closing is wrong, so *Maximus* even designed the opening. He rewrote the opening of the poem. I've always wondered if he was imitating, exactly, Pound who after doing six then entirely framed the poem [*The Cantos*] again by rewriting and arranging the material.[20] So many many times in *Maximus* you will find Charles Olson doing the Poundian thing, and the dates are all doing the Poundian thing. But the dates for Pound and the dates for Charles Olson—I think the significance of them is not that they come one after another but they mean *here*. Again they go back to the projective in a geometrical sense. At this time, here, this is the angle [he was] drawing. And the next could be one minute later an account for the turn that you make. Because one thing that had happened that really hit Charles that he couldn't dodge, and it came in on top of this picture of a projective geometry, is puzzling over how far does that proposition of Heisenberg's go?[21] You could find physicists who would drive him up the wall in horror as he would try, it would sound like he had just gotten the most popular idea, indeterminacy. But what the poet knew is that the point at which Heisenberg had found the indeterminacy meant the presence of all of us as an agent, meant the agent was present. And that is very much what's always on his mind when confronted with the *Maximus*. He's both

confronted with the "Maximus" in his self, and at the same time—the Jungian persuasion was very strong—he is already interfering. It can't be a confrontation because it's already substance and self, it's both within himself and larger than self, so he has another kind of indeterminacy. The figure of "my father and my self," the shadow and the photograph and so forth were all about a double language, another term of projection which was going very strong indeed by the time Charles Olson came of intellectual age. Because Freud had already introduced the term of projection, and Charles Olson by the early 1930s, knew of Freudianism, and certainly lots of Jung by 1934, 1935, 1936. I'm just going by when my own life changed, and I'm not sure when the Jungian work, *Modern Man In Search of a Own Soul,* or whatever the title was in those days, came.[22]

But first the Freudian idea of projection. That was that when things are charged with meaning. Remember that Pound had defined that a poem was language charged with meaning to its utmost extent. I realize this concept of the poem is passé today, since linguists have explained to us that you can't possibly charge language with meaning. It has its charge its card, which rings up in some bureau somewhere. The word itself ain't got nothing in its pocket. So we're dealing with a delusion about language that, well, one that I belong to, so no wonder I need a certain humor about it—that Pound really thought he had distinguished something about the poem. And Olson still goes by it. The charged with meaning now for Olson involves the projective, out of Freud. If it's charged with meaning and charged with emotion, then where does the charge come from? Now in my own thought the charge comes from the community of meaning that I see language as being. In other words, I feel myself going over into language: I mean not myself, but as building in language, and language itself has its meanings. And Olson used the *OED* with very much that sense. He had also the magic of the first meaning must be the right one, the one that the projective comes from, and that the project comes from. And so you had to locate the first one, the earliest one, the beginning point, so each word was really thought of as a sperm word. I see I'm dangerously near sperm oil for a man who was looking at *Moby-Dick* most of the time. Puns are going to be impossible here.

Each word has its authenticity, its secrets, its magic at the point of origins, and the point of origins already also in Olson's world, post-Darwinian, really is at an unknown. So now the dangerous turn around of the projective—this was still projective geometry—we see this object and we turn it around, we see this object and we describe it in all its ways, and yet now this same word means that even my doing this is projective on my part. How come you're doing that? That's now seen. In Freudianism that was seen as quite negative; that is, they thought first that negative emotions were projected on the world around. The critical use of the term projective

comes first in Freud's analysis of paranoia. I think that right away Olson would have been involved with that meaning. Think about the rape scene with the elements entranced, with the mind entirely centered on the sound syllable, on the syllable which now is a germinal sound of a multitude of possible words. And it is entranced, so everything that comes from that is in a state of projection. There are some verifications, but on the other hand I do know as a poet if anybody has an interpretation of my poetry and they're happy they've made an extraordinary and intelligent breakthrough but I say, gee, it never occurred to me but isn't it wonderful what readers can make of it, no trouble at all. And there may indeed be these moments for Olson, at a point one of the "Maximuses" is dedicated to "Duncan, who knows what is going on,"[23] which is more than I would have volunteered for. And actually by the way it has hidden in it almost that the poet doesn't know because this is part of Olson's real relation to the poem, not that it would be out of hand but that it must be leading him so he doesn't know. But what he meant at that time was that I had come into print with a question: isn't *Maximus* really a large magic formula or chant trying to change the soul in the world? Doesn't it have that role too? So it becomes like a mantra, as Pound thought the poem also was. That's exactly how Pound saw Dante. And at times in *The Cantos* you find prayers and certain things, and very probably in the most barren areas of *The Cantos*, in every other sense, like the areas where we go through just paragraphs, letters of John Adams, charged with nothing but the rhythm that Pound arranges from the prose itself—that is, where we don't encounter glorious thought of Adams, but the rhythm itself will be present—isn't Pound there trying to infect us with the underlying magic of the age of reason, which he and all other unreasonable men worship. I think he really felt that if he got the rhythm of the prose and the feel of it, which is one of the great realizations of the eighteenth-century, he would have what he needed in a way that he could have only if he didn't encounter the actual thought and moved in that rhythm. You can hear that in Pound when he says that in Jefferson or Mussolini neither one would be the answer for America at this time, but both of them are touchstones of a style or something deeper than style that he believed in. We can now all hear the danger of the sound; there is a corrective. Along with the magic rhythm, he paid a lot of attention to what John Adams was thinking, and to the frameworks of his thought because they aren't divorced from these rhythms. His intuition was quite right: they are a mentally powerful framework, that had *The Cantos* inherited them—yet he had to have just that hubris to get off the picture of *The Cantos*.

In Olson's case the hubris goes back much further than I think Pound ever proposed it to himself, because it swings from this matter of death and begetting. The one that was right there in the beginning, and its hold on the *Maximus* is tremendous. Even if in the beginning it's not entirely

proposed, it's still the flood and so forth. I'll read the opening "Maximus." Then I want to go through a series here to give you a feel of what happens in the one called the third volume.

You have to put on some emphysema to read this. This is rhapsody as it's written. I remember in departments a total misunderstanding of Allen Ginsberg saying "I write by breath"—and it's about ten miles long. You only can talk about "you write by breath" if you only got enough breath to write out of the top couple of [lines]. The two masters, Olson and Zukofsky, it was always in between [gasps]. And yet this is part of the ritual magic. In their case it surpasses smokers smoking for a quick death, which they both did; well Zukofsky was decently in his seventies, but they were really smoking in relation to a kind of magic rite that the poetry came for.

[reads "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You"]

In 1948, just when I began "The Venice Poem," Pound sent out to Olson as well as to myself, and to Creeley, and to a small circle of poets who were corresponding with him, a manifesto. He called it the "Cleaner's Manifesto." He felt it was terrific and would change the whole world, then he shouldn't sign it at all because there he was in St. Elizabeth's and they would find out. The three things in the letter I built into the text of "The Venice Poem."[24] So Charles's coming to know about my poetry was also because in the period when Charles Olson had volunteered to become kind of a secretary for Pound he had read and seen correspondence, my correspondence with Pound, and he wanted to see where all that stuff was coming from.[25]

The three things from Pound were first "to follow the tone leading of vowels," point number two "to watch the consonant clusters," and point number three was "the function of poetry was to debunk by lucidity." There was no explanation. I think any of us who were having any faith at all in Pound knew that if we had to find out what the tone leading the vowels was, think about it and why, that would be a shift instead of talking about rhyming. I thought first that even when you rhyme, when you go straight through the full rhymes, you have not that many words that are generated by the sound that is begun. If you move by the vowel sound itself, now you're not worrying about assonance or consonance. If you move from the vowel sound, suddenly the poem can be intellectual because it has a very wide vocabulary. You can't look up the vowel sounds, but you tune in on all the vowel sounds instead of tuning in on rhymes. You'll still have rhymes, which make very strange sense. That's one of their great advantages, rhymes sometimes make very pointed sense so that you almost feel in the beginning weren't they really grouped together to make these combinations, June and moon and so forth, over-convincing sense, and they also make delightfully ridiculous sense, both in life and poetry. But if you go to the vowel, and Charles Olson starts absolutely to carry that over when he writes the "Projective Verse" two years after that "Manifesto" of

Pound's, [you find] that the mind is centered in the syllable, and the breath is the vowel. But the breath, and it's as ancient a message about poetry as I know, is the reason poetry and the spirit are identical. The breath moves in the vowel, and that's where it really is. And yet today one of the major things, one of the great splits, are the ones who consider that sounds or vowels or rhymes are all devices of the poet, something that you learn that's an art or a craft, and not the spirit. Charles was definitely saying that the presence of breath in the vowel is where it all moves from. And the mind must be obedient to that, not only obedient but already hearing deep into that sound, and then it will be entranced. Elements entranced, and the poem of the entranced mind, is already very much where Olson was moving from.

When I was first corresponding with Zukofsky he wrote back which Pound is it—is it the good Pound or the bad Pound that you follow? And I thought gee, I guess it's the bad Pound because I realize Zukofsky isn't talking about the man who's a Fascist or an anti-Semite at all. I think, knowing my Zukofsky and loving his work as I do, that he's talking about the entranced, enthralled Pound; the fact that Pound listening to the vowel writes in a state of trance. And in relation to Dante's siren I've written, isn't that the false sound of poetry, isn't Dante talking about something like that way over on Zukofsky's side of the question, about just the contrary of where Olson places it, and where Pound is so often enraptured through passages of *The Cantos* that I still love for this rapture. Remember enthralled, raptured, and enchanted, enchanted means to be taken in by the song, but rapture is the same word as rape, and ultimately means to be profoundly violated by the sound. What I'm showing is this very thing in "Projective Verse" is the center it must move from, and the obedience must be in it, is also the most dangerous point of all. [Read] the passage on Dante again about the siren, you'll see it is that element of the music.

Now Dante is close to music but Olson is highly allergic to music. He does have a note that he sides with Boulez against Cage. I know that he had his wars against music. Musick means musak, like it occurs in *Paterson.* I'm thinking about attention in the poem, in which you go into the sound of the vowel as a trust because of the breath, and the music is very high in Olson. It was the only thing that could get me into the poem. That it looked crazy on the page could never do it, and in a passage like this, elements are entranced. There is a tension against it that goes back to the music, and it's this music that breaks the trance. So there's a music that breaks the trance, one that goes forward.

Now dream comes very immediate to this. We're now coming to the aspect of projection that's very double indeed, and that's the one that comes from Charles's lifelong involvement with Jungian thought and then, out of Jungian thought, in the later part of his life it's Corbin's work in translating

the Sufi that entirely involves Charles's thought as it goes toward life and death and again, as the angels appear, in the poem "Angels of the Poem."[26] It isn't death that appears in those last passages of the poem, it is an angel of some passage of a kind. And also Olson in his last years becomes hungry for the sources of poetry itself. There are some very powerful passages of suddenly a baby Olson, almost like figures I remember in a canvas of Rubens, where the children are not just nursing they're tearing at the tits and wildly sucking the substance out of the mother so the whole thing turns into a terrible, violent rape of another kind, the whole canvas has to do with eating and eating becomes this kind of orgiastic rapture, rape of grace. A very shocking canvas indeed, because of the greed. Although Freud shocked the world by speaking of infant sexuality, these figures have been sitting there all the time in Munich—infants that are way out of bounds. Not only are there little sexual monsters but there's a full cannibalistic picture. And the mother is the most unbelievable mixture of gratification, horror and fury, all stirred up in one image.

A bit of this begins to break through in figures of the underworld in Olson. That figure of Our Lady holding now the ship and not the child.[27] When I was teaching at Black Mountain I pointed out to my class that Pound had written a poem containing history with all the gods present except for Yahweh, Our Lady, and Christ. Then I said, and oh yes isn't it interesting that they haven't appeared in *Maximus*. But of course Our Lady had appeared through the poem, and Our Lady really is present, and for all the Jungianism is not mixed up. She is herself when she appears in the poem. But I went to Charles and said but where is the Christ and he said well he's the carpenter. He appears as a character hidden in the development of the poem, the carpenter, the one who was the carpenter of the ship becomes almost hidden, or he may indeed be the place Christ is hiding in the period of the first colony.[28]

In one place in the poem Charles does something that establishes a point of recognition between *Paterson* and this poem. In *Paterson*—remember in the Third Book,[29] the book that has to do with the "divorce" of language—you come to a place where they're drilling to get oil, shale, and so forth, and then go down to level after level after level and it's dry and doesn't yield anything. What you're reading is just the drilling record, but all of it becomes metaphor and again we've got the projective present. In the Freudian projective and then the Jungian one, all built around the first analysis of a case of paranoia, it is not only that the paranoia projects upon the world so that the whole world comes alive with the interior content of the projector. The poet is not just the maker but also the projector. We begin to intrude upon a third kind of projection going on in the twentieth-century which was the movie camera. All the way through the nineteenth-century it had been the magic lantern show which is already

central to Goethe and to many contemplations about the nature of the visible world and the nature of imagination. For Freud already the movie theater is there and the projector, and certainly for the analysands and the people drawn into Freudianism in the beginning of the century, the central experience threatening to wipe out theater was the light projection in which a world appeared. That projector is very close on top of this picture. Now in this projection, with the magic intention, the paranoid also feels the world is projecting on him: that's the paranoid feeling of it. But if we think of the circuit all the way through, the art projects into a world, and in its projection, wherever it really encounters the world, we're again in this projective geometrical figure, as it turns it around, then back from the world streams a transformed world. The world is infected by the projection, and now the world starts to project. We see a Cézanne and for an hour or two we see the world infected with the projection of Cézanne. That's part of what I meant by the magic intention of *Maximus.* The poem which is entranced in its base elements, which are projected and tend to entrance the human world and "its trees, my car, my wife," its trees, or their trees, each one then "my car," so even "my mountain." In the grand dream along this line, the Orphic one of course, the myth says that the poet entrances the trees himself, and the mountains and the rocks and the streams. But certainly art does transform within its own aura: that's one of its danger points and also one of its marvels is to transform for a time, in which it has also entranced us, the way we see, the way we feel, the way the world appears to us in the same system of projection. So this carries projection further. I had one mad moment a day or two ago when I thought, gee, should I read all the way through Jung and see how far he got with this theory of projection? I realized *no.* But somebody running down that someday may really find something. I know in the feel of it that something like this is turning around over and over again that distinguishes the Jungian level from the Freudian level in regard to the term projection. Well the passage here is:

[reads from "The Record"][30]

And so forth. But when you finish the list, if you recite it all the way through, you have the actual conditions of their lives. You have every condition, and you have the elements again, entranced. I dodged reading this whole list, not because it would tire me, that's the first thing you know, but that's the foreground of the whole business of the hypnogogic state. All you have to do is picture yourself in a job in which you're calling out this list of materials, and they've taken over your head by the time you come to the end of it. So the poem has many presentations of this kind. I feel this goes back to Pound, where he goes in the American *Cantos,* where most critics were only saying, gee, this is the dullest stuff I ever read. But many of them had that response to *Ulysses.* At the break point I'll leave you with

the idea that what they were saying was not at all imperceptive, they just weren't driving home to what gave them that very definite feeling. Just beyond this I am getting tired, my eyelids are getting heavy, this is getting tedious, the book takes you over. And the one place it takes people over completely are the stock report pages. I mean they're totally wiped out for the rest of their lives. They open the paper every day, and this whole column does it to them.

I had a job in 1940, or 1941,[31] as a distribution agent for Dell Publishing Company. At that time they put out 52 magazines. A distribution agent is a detective. In Manhattan, Brooklyn, and so forth, you distribute copies of books by putting numbers down for hours and hours and hours, and also, you can use a slide rule. I found out that the only thing that made the job interesting for a little while was that I found I could add four columns without adding one column at a time. And then I'd go home. All I was was a human adding machine. And they call it pushing, it's counterpart for the male push, push, push, takes over completely, and I was going down these columns, just out of my head, and suicide would appear in between as all night long you would be going through this operation.

To get back to the poem, *The Cantos* had moments of this, and actually Olson doesn't plunge into this list, it's a hint, what I see in this is that this part is telling to Olson, and telling about the underlying poetics and bringing us back to it, but of course also he sees that these were the conditions for two years for these people. Every physical thing that they encountered was theirs: all of the things on this bill of lading are the elements and as they're named and counted, and counted again and again, and as they disappear, which is part of the thing which goes on in the poem. They are the very basic experience of being entranced.

[Duncan calls a break in the class.]

I'm going to start in this book by reading a "Stevens Song." "Stevens" is the carpenter, and so I want to talk about another dimension. Given the projective and Charles's own understanding as the projective operating throughout, as the happy paranoid poetic discovery, in the Jungian sense, the world is actually your matter. So that everything that happens belongs to your story is the ultimate paranoid picture. I'll tell for the millionth time the delightful story of Burroughs in London: he was asked "aren't you afraid of your paranoia?" and Burroughs says "well, you know what paranoia is, it's when you know all the facts." And Charles works back and forth in his philosophy, and in his letters he worried the question about what was history and what word could he use back and forth. What became more and more the worry was that again, we've got this term of "my"—a term as I said I also found myself contending with—where Charles actually

opens it up and it becomes a major principle. The world really is my world, and now that is a projective world of how something is going to come in. How is something going to enter from out there once they discovered the other. Then it's your other. The great question is—are you the other's other? And the arrangement is, it's a hard ground.

So in looking in history he knows he's going to find—as certainly Williams did—that all of history has been there to furnish the matter of the very poem he's on. And that as a matter of fact, if a ship has taken the place of Christ, then Christ is hidden in the carpenter who made the ship, and the carpenter will be there, and he uncovers the carpenter who made the ship. The *actual*, and let's use the term *actual* which is very important here. The term real won't tell us anything very important at all, because much of the actual world is not real or realized, and let's say some people have some dreams that are real and some that are not real. We'll leave the term real there. That it actually happened—that you actually had the dream, that you actually saw it in some other places. Charles looks in history for the actual place where the carpenter is in history. Then what is entirely projective here is that he recognizes the carpenter when he finds him. "This is the carpenter" is a projective decision entirely. And the carpenter meanwhile is in an interior schema that Charles in part experiences as archetypes, as Jung proposes them, of the psyche. And there's no trouble with archetypes of the psyche any more than archetypes of the mind, providing we've got a Platonic mind and a Jungian psyche. That would be okay, that works, and we understand in the context. But now we've got a picture that this is a field of poetry that can be entranced and can invent. If it invents, it lets something into it. This is a problem Williams faced in *Paterson*. If you remember, one of the things he begins to realize, there's some problem here about invention which is essential. And in a way if you can see that if in the middle of a projection you can also invent—let something into this schema so that you're composing instead of entirely entranced or enthralled. This acts as a kind of restorative of the proportions and revivification of the areas of the poem.

I think this holds for people looking at these poems and thinking are these collages. Yes, they're in a period of people like collages, like things brought in, but it may very well be because in the pressures of overpopulated cities, with vast populations around us. We do form overly strong schemas. We can't find one we belong to, so we belong to our own and that already has the character of the one Freud was looking at. If we belong to our own pattern, and so do people we know, we know just the way they fit; they belong incidentally to the pattern, and groups. And in a society of that kind, when people are in groups, a Jonestown becomes very true of a group, or the patterns of the splitting up of groups, the Communist

Stalinist and Trotskyite split, and splintering in every level of groups that begin to form any kind of grouping. One of the things that is present in the proposition about closed and open, the beginning one, remember, is just that he doesn't want to die; he does not want the second date to go there at all, and more than that he's saying something quite true. No matter what else, he does not write that second date. No matter how he does it, he does not really get to write that second date. He doesn't close the parentheses. He starts out after the first parenthesis has been opened, the first parentheses is already there.

This was so set in his mind that when I went to attend his dying and came in, in the last session, and said well you're ten years older than I am, and I've always come to see how you do it each time, so I came to see how you would die, Charles.[32] And he said oh I'm not dying, I've got this live-her to attend to. He had cancer of the liver, and also, in Jungian teaching he'd found that the liver was the anima, and he'd written over and over again, trying to make the formula of "live-her," and he was in a deep travail of soul because he had come through to a recognition, but a bewildered one, because nothing else he comes to—it certainly doesn't come in the poem—remember "my wife." I think Betty and Connie may occur in the poem. I thought, will I go madly through and see if they occur as persons, which they certainly were. But now "my wife" is someone else, is really now back in that schema. And in his world women so powerfully belonged to the interior schema, to the paranoid place they took, they sustained him, whatever it was, that they really were. It was certainly clear that Betty felt more and more isolated. That character that we have when women come up and tell, "I was a housewife for twenty years, and when he died I had no identity at all, I didn't know who I was, I wasn't anyone, and now I don't know what to do with the house I used to keep because housekeeping belongs to somebody's schema." This is very powerful in Olson, and so the "live-her" was still interior, and he felt he was still talking about *his* anima, his own feminine character, and at the same time, the hubris was immediate, it certainly could have brought tears to one's eyes. He was in a bewildered grief when Betty in a little car drove straight into a Mack truck, at night drove between the lights of the truck instead of around them.[33] The news couldn't get through.

I'm giving you the tension in which the energy of this poem moves, and there's a declaration in this poem. For those of you who know "Against Wisdom As Such," there's a warning towards me. If you start thinking a certain way then God does rush in.[34] The *Maximus Poems* themselves begin to have credos. "I believe in God" comes into the book very early. As a credo again, it can't go much further off. Let me read this one, in which the carpenter is present as he was found and recognized as being, and we've

then got a hidden Christ, one that you could recognize but no one recognized.

[reads "Steven's Song"][35]

Notes

1. Robert Duncan delivered this class lecture at New College in San Francisco 17 February 1982. Duncan's method of lecturing was not that of a formal academician. He began talking about a subject and then followed out a line of thought where it took him. In the transcription that follows, I have attempted to make a translation from an oral presentation to a text for reading. Sentences and non-sentences begin and stop without reaching a point. Some of these have been deleted. At times it was necessary to add words to make the lecture accessible as a reading text. These additions have been enclosed in brackets. But I have attempted to give a sense of the activity of Duncan's mind conceiving thought as he talked. In some ways, the generative action of his mind is as substantive as the thought delivered.

   The talk or lecture is entitled "Projective Project: Olson," and is one of a series of lectures Duncan gave on the projective possibility of contemporary poetry. Implicit in his remarks, and also at times explicit (Duncan quotes it) is Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse" *Poetry New York*, no. 3 (1950): 13-22. Duncan also makes references to Olson's poems, and these have been noted to later collected editions of Olson's work. © The Literary Estate of Robert Duncan. Transcribed and edited by Robert J. Bertholf.
2. Charles Olson, *Y & X*, with drawings by Corrado Cagli (Washington, D. C.: Black Sun Press, 1948).
3. *My Dinner With André*, screenplay by Wallace Shawn and André Gregory (New York: Grove Press, 1981). The film version was directed by Louis Malle.
4. "The K," now collected in *Collected Poems of Charles Olson Excluding the Maximus Poems*, ed. George Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 14. Hereafter cited as *CP*.
5. William Stanley Merwin's (1927-) early books *A Mask for Janus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952) and *The Dancing of Bears* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954) attracted the attention of both Duncan and Olson.
6. The reference here is to the final line of the final *Maximus Poem*: "my life my car my color and myself." *The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson*, ed. George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 635. Hereafter cited as *MP*.
7. *CP*, 46
8. John Clarke (1933-1992), poet and student of Olson's at SUNY, Buffalo in the 1960s. He and Albert Glover published the pamphlets that made up *The Curriculum of the Soul*. Clarke's contribution to this series is *Blake* (Canton, NY: The Institute of Further Studies, 1973).
9. See Charles Olson, *The Post Office: A Memoir of His Father*, Intro. by George Butterick (Bolinas CA: Grey Fox Press, 1975). Duncan would not have known the poems "Bigman" and "Bigman II" from 1950, which were first published *CP*, 149-154.
10. The reading took place at the San Francisco Museum of Art, ca. 10 February 1957.
11. *CP* 54-55.
12. *CP* 243. The poem was written October 1951, and included in *In Cold Hell, In Thicket*, published as *Origin*, 1st ser., no. 8 (1953).
13. *CP*, 243.
14. Aaron Shurin, "Out of Me: Whitman and the Projective." MA. Thesis, New College of California, 1982.
15. Duncan is referring to his pamphlet, *Medieval Scenes* (San Francisco: Centaur Press, 1950). The poem with footnotes is no doubt a reference to Duncan's "The Venice Poem," which appeared in his book, *Poems 1948-49* (Berkeley: Berkeley Miscellany Editions, 1949). Neither *Medieval Scenes* nor "The Venice Poem" contained footnotes, but the

series does contain an epitaph, and the individual poems do have notes in the manuscripts.

16. George Hitchcock, a poet Duncan knew at Berkeley in 1936-1938, edited and published 62 issues of *Kayak* between 1964 and 1984.
17. Edward Dorn wrote *Gunslinger, Book I* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1968), and *Gunslinger Book II* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1969).
18. Fielding Dawson, *An Emotional Memoir of Franz Kline* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).
19. Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems: Volume III*, ed. Charles Boer and George F. Butterick (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975).
20. Ezra Pound published "Three Cantos," *Poetry* 10 (June 1917): 113-121, and then rewrote and rearranged them for the book publication, *A Draft of XVI Cantos* (Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1925).
21. George F. Butterick in *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, no. 3 (Spring 1975) does not list Heisenberg among the authors that Olson read. Duncan read and knew Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (1958; reprinted New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962).
22. C.G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, trans. W.S. Dell and Carl F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1933).
23. One of the Maximus Letters is titled by Olson, "For Robt Duncan,/who understands/ what's going on/—written because of him/ March 17, 1961," *MP* 207-209.
24. The "Cleaner's Manifesto" as sent out by Ezra Pound was published in *Four Pages* no.3 (1948):[3]. Duncan cited it in his "The Venice Poem":

    "We must understand what is happening";
    watch "the duration of syllables
        "the melodic coherence,
        "the tone leading of vowels"
    "The function of poetry is to debunk by lucidity."
25. See Catherine Seelye, ed. *Charles Olson & Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeth's* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975).
26. Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (1960; reprinted Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, Inc., 1980.) "Angels of the Poem" was not written by Charles Olson. The precise title and author are unidentified.
27. "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You" contains the lines: "(on my Lady of good voyage/ in whose arm, whose left arm rests/ no boy but a carefully carved wood, a painted face, a schooner!/a delicate mast, as bow-sprit for/ forwarding." *MP* 6
28. The opening lines of the "1," "Letter 7," of *The Maximus Poems* are:

    That carpenter is much on my mind
    I think he was the first Maximus.

    Anyhow, he was the first to make things.
    Not just live off nature.

    MP 35.
29. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, "Book III, Part III," ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1992) 139.
30. Duncan reads the list of provisions. *MP* 121-122.
31. From February through April 1941, Duncan work for Dell Publishing Company in Boston.
32. See Robert Duncan, "Letter to Jess" [after his last visit to Olson in New York Hospital, 1970], *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, no. 1 (1974): 4-6.
33. Betty Olson was killed 28 March 1965 in Wyoming, NY.
34. The reference here is to Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael: A Study of Melville* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1966).
35. *MP* 399.

MICHEL DEGUY

from RECUMBENT FIGURES

(Tr. from the French
by Wilson Baldridge)

USE COVERED YARD (MARCH)

Neath March's covered yard the plum-tree opens wakeful
At Saint-Germain the buds of Vega
Stroking your lyre to the blossoms' point of epeonivanescence
Architecture is the poem's vow

CARDIOGRAM (MAY)

The Seine was green by your arm
Further than the Mirabeau bridge beneath
The hills like a breathing
The suburbs praised us
I would have wanted I would have
so needed you to think highly
But the courage now of
a heart like a prisoner furious as a heart
shall drive self-remorse from the lyric!
The lengthening daylight deprived us of days
The ebb of night cuts out our nights
Oh my paradoxical love! We went without poetry

But courage shall be to deprive the poem
of the taste for nothing over the taste for all

THE NARRATIONS

She would be empty-handed and weary on the Seine bank alas. It was to be the occasion of a descent to my underworld, I spoke to her of Eurydice in the staircase and of Orpheus on the banks of the Seine losing Eurydice as he turned towards her, I turned towards you on this step down to the Seine and lost you, so I will go down more brutally, I will accuse myself, the Underworld's where I would go down, there I'd have made a hell although there would have been nothing but ourselves to look after, even *you* would have got out of there, it no longer would be a common hell but a private one, insulating, and there would have been only my hell, I would have as I turned round lost you to lose you, without believing it; what is it, what was it, what happened, I don't understand—would be Orpheus' phrase, I don't understand what happened, we were getting along well, I was sure of her presence behind me, I turned round she no longer was there, I turned round you were putting on your little sheet-metal cell, the "car," I thought, I hoped you would look my way, because I had gone on ahead by myself, you couldn't have helped but see me, so I was waiting for you in passing to throw me a smile with your fingers, but nothing, not a glance, you had disappeared in your apparition, you were not passing for me, negligent woman you had neglected me, I turned towards you, I saw you comb while driving mindful of your hair alone.

APHRODITE COLLEAGUE

Modern anadyomene of the rest rooms lovely
Botticellian mid a great flushing noise
centers herself in green door frame arranging blonde
neath electricity her braid her wave
and with a downy sweater's sleeve
tugs on her skirt at the level of the iliac

PROCESSION

It went from the same to the same, in pure repetition, oscillation from marvel to horror—changing through and through without any difference.

That which, precisely the same, known as repetition without any difference other than numerical, is indistinguishable from the other I will relate in a moment and which is its contradictory perfect, that thing sustained him in being, an object of desire: the ten thousandth stroll through the Bois de Boulogne, this lake, this foliage, this dear bend where the bend disappears; that's it, the same, which despised as being the same once again, it's too much, and empty, unworthy of sustaining repetition, oh infinite weariness, dismisses him from being. He deletes himself—for no other reason than that which recalled him every day when incessant reappearance made repetition desirable. This morning the same changed through and through without anything being changed.

On July 7th, making the most of the colloquium in Albi so as to prefer Albi to the colloquium, I go looking for the banks of the Tarn, and I stray. Attracted by the staggering height, from afar like some

"atomic" factory—but why perched upon?—of the Castelnau dungeon-tower, I cross the bridge a few kilometers downstream and come back along the other bank, guided by this needle balancing the tray of blue sky this morning.

And then on the right, between river and road, a chapel on the sheer bank of the Tarn, surrounded by gravestone crosses pulls me, turns me around, stops me; I get out of the car.

Still necessary that a life's duration be *proportioned* to its nothingness—that to endure be each person's *work*.

Little cemetery by the river, *campo santo* of abandoned tombs; here, I write in my head, may Jacques D. lie forever beneath the cedar.

At his house, alternately and at high frequency, these opposites in a throbbing: his stance of noisy and excessive welcome, of the other, luring the other (loud voice, clear smile, protective gesture . . .), and on the other hand his fleeing, subsiding, dodging, his rejection, of the other, extreme, unjust, scornful or angry: in his tone, his shoulders. . . A principle of irritation at work, now hospitable, now antisocial, and in both cases very quickly laden with disgust at its own occurrences.

The way he died, I can't get over it. Murmurs *I abandon you* in the poppy-strewn wheat, surrounding the rustic and perfect and ruined chapel.

A few weeks ago, though with no other grief than an incurable and general sadness, the same thing happened at Prague's Jewish cemetery, a crowded garret of pages petrified upright, like some antiquarian's gigantic psalter, beneath the crows' pilings.

But was it not you that abandoned us, leaving the bitter bequest of the *notebooks?*

That's the truth: I can't believe it. Truth is also the very thing in which one can not believe, and one cannot believe. I am speaking, of course, about the word of the Gospel, not factual accuracy.

I feel it in my throat! And thinking about my friend the poet who got his name from the stream, and the wound of his death, and the noteworthy way the waters here slip by, and the brother and sister:

> Throat slit, voice therefore seeking my fingers, I
> On the strangled banks of your name's country's river
> Our father lowered into the ground

Carefully laid his wounded throat neath a Cathar cross
Then gone up into the Lévis Tower
Smoother than the pagoda of Harmonies
Here I write in my head
May J D lie
Forever beneath a cedar
I abandon you murmurs in the poppy-strewn wheat
Recumbent

An epitaph—within our hearts. May his name not have become mere "intention" on the lips, prayerful, of Arzon's new priest, together with all those buried that morning, when the year revolves on its sepulchral milestones. For here we live with his intention—fulfilled. He opened up places where each season received us

The spring of the indicative
The demographic summer
Winds that return to the homeland
The trepanned moon

Let us forget all grievances, even if we are contemplating their contradiction; let us forget nothing, and raising our eyelids—the upper one, a sky, the lower one, a cliff—let us recognize in these places his *graveyard by the sea.*

TRANSLATION

You live in Wisconsin.

I never will speak your language. This strange experience of not knowing another language, how to relate it to the world?

What is another language? Your language has taken over the world. The Bengali woman was wise: a language for millions, the question is not to translate it, but that the millions might speak its poem. I do not speak your language.

Will America carry the earth off into its dream, in its Funeral Protection, into its afterlife; or will the earth, tribal, miserable, inexhaustible, restrain it and carry it away, hitched by billions of hands to its geonaut's asbestos suit, toward a "decision" concerning the chaos of famine and blood, or a terrestrial rescue operation about which no one has any "idea". . .

RECUMBENT FIGURES

I keep losing you since the time in that hotel room
When naked and turned aside you shouted at me get out
I no longer recall our quarrel, my mistake
But the paper, your curved back,
The still life of daylight and the wardrobe,
And my painless belief uprisen I would see you again

everything washes away
the present washes it away
With such force from hour to hour
That from hour to hour there is nothing more
Than the immense Lethe's wave unfurling

THE SPIRIT OF POETRY

every figure is a figure of thought
A figure is that of the poetry god
Who slips into this figure's form
So alike one can't tell him apart from this host who [welcomes him
To impregnate Alcmene poetry there

The spirit of poetry: a god-challenger who invokes: "what are you waiting for?!" This length can go on no longer! The interminable must be punctuated; let there be interruption, contour, apparition, finishing! Come. I exhibit Argus's ocellated skin, a coat of synonyms; Proteus, show off that I may recognize you as multiple, let me spell you out at high speed!

The spirit of poetry compares the ogre misleading his children to the "obscure forest" where Dante began by getting lost; it loses "accepted meanings," all that was stated quickly, demanded only to be identified (and no doubt it would be better to be misled by a power than to forestall through play; but after all someone has to begin); business as usual, the obvious, the local envoy, the expected message, it loses patience with them! The genuine deceiver, the man in disguise, comedy's false-hearted rogue, the one the audience has unmasked from the outset is not enough for it. But where is the god?

In tragedies, the god? The one who is other than people think, not through ferociousness but because he cannot be taken in, the excessive one, who would overshadow. Or else there would be two dissemblances, and the first one, pleasant and remediable, to prepare us for the other, "tragic"? The one who is and is not—what he is.

And the gods through the arts taught men to receive, to *be able* to receive, *every thing as a god,* for what it is in being other (in excess, in next-to), other than that which comprises it, in which it comes; in being like what's on its way, that is to say irreducible to what it seems: masked by its appearance, its very true-it-is. The artist learns to make room, by indirect relation, for the "unknown god" in everything. The god is what fills the human form, sometimes too humble like Demeter, in abeyance within the visible, to suggest visibility's inequality to being, the "difference between being and the existent"?

Thus is the test where ever: to recognize the god. It is about that which would surpass life in life, the love god, "promised to all," in any case to you, to you, to you. . . It's your turn. And if you don't welcome him in some way, too bad for you, "you shall have lived in vain."

Even comedy murmurs "it's your business," to recognize him in this valet, this double, this error, this coquette. He is not reserved for the Princes of tragedy; it is not just about dying.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

TWO ESSAYS

MEMORY, KARMA, SMELL

No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory. . .

Its brevity illusory:

"Memory," says Plotinus, "is for those who have forgotten." The gods have no memory because they cannot forget. The gods have no memory because they know no time, have no need to fight against time, have no fragments of what has been lost to recollect, to re-collect. In India, with its vast stretches of time, with its same lives appearing and appearing again, there is no distinction between learning and remembering. You knew it in your past lives, you have always known it, to learn is to re-mind yourself, bring yourself back into the mind of universal knowledge. Says the Jaiminiya Upanishad: "It is the unknown that you should remember." And more: It is the unknown that makes you remember, and its trigger is smell, the *vasana*.

Vasana, which literally means "scent," is karmic residue, the stuff—as ineffable as a smell—that remains from a past life. Each life produces *vasanas,* which remain dormant until one is reincarnated in the same species. That is, the *vasanas* from your life as a cat will only be triggered when, a hundred incarnations later, you are a cat again.

At their most evident, the *vasanas* are responsible for *déjà vu*. In India, you feel you've been here before because you've been here before. The intangible *vasana* is the bridge between those existences. More subtly, you are passionately attracted to another because of the *vasanas* rising from the other, setting off the memories of your previous love. Every act of love, in India, is a reenactment.

. . .I feel something start within me, something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at great depth; I do not know yet what it is but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed.

Great spaces traversed:

Indian erotic poetry is redolent with fragrance. On every page of the great Sanskrit anthology, Vidyakara's *Treasury,* compiled a thousand years ago, lovers inhabit an atmosphere of saffron, sandalwood, human sweat, lotus, mango blossoms, and the flowers for which there are no translations: garlands of *bakula,* pink *bandhuka* blossoms, *ketaka* petals bent by bees. The lovers' mouths are as perfumed as their hair. In Tamil, a language of South India, the same word means "to be united, to wed, to embrace" and "to emit fragrance." Conversely, in the Sanskrit poems, the passion of a lover alone is compared to a flame burning without any smoke.

Western science has shown that certain smells, such as newly mown grass or freshly baked bread, provoke an overwhelming mood of nostalgia—even among those who grew up on city pavements or associate bread with plastic wrappers. As a catayst, smell is primary and mysterious: its chemistry makes us not only remember, but want to remember. It is no coincidence that the most vivid among recent memoirs of childhood have tended to be written by those who were raised in extreme poverty or in rural villages, often in the Third World—places that are sumptuous with smells. Proust himself thinks his voyage begins with the taste and feel on his tongue of the madeleine crumbs in the spoon of tea. He mentions only in passing, barely notices, their conjunction with the fragrant steam rising from the cup.

We in the American middle-class grew up in a world almost entirely devoid of smells, except for that of household cleaning products, and barely remember our childhoods at all, except for the television programs. And worse, Protestantism has given us no neutral word, like "taste," for smell. "Stench" or "fragrance" may be exact, but "odor" or "smell" themselves generally imply a foulness, and "to smell" misleadingly is both transitive and intransitive verb. They pertain to a world whose Satan has a smell, but whose God does not.

And the scientists now say that "the brain has two memory systems, one for ordinary information and one for emotionally charged information." That is, information that occurs under some form of stress, set off by the ancient evolutionary "fight or flight" reaction, is created by the adrenergic hormones, adrenaline and noradrenaline, and stored in the amygdala, "a pair of walnut-shaped structures that regulate emotion." The *vasanas,* say

certain commentators, are specifically the memory-traces of powerful desires: among them, the desire for fame or respectability, erotic desire, the desire for knowledge gained from books, spiritual longing. And it is desire, always the need for more, that leads you to be born over and over into this world you crave.

But desire, as it is recognized in India, is also a kind of forgetting. There is a Sanskrit word, *durdhara,* that means both "irresistible" and "difficult to remember." The word is practically a poem itself, but it is made tangible in a lyric by the eighth century poet Vidya, the earliest surviving woman poet in Sanskrit:

> What wealth,
> that you can chatter
> about a night spent
> with your lover—
> the teasings,
> smiles, whispered words—
> even his special fragrance.
> Because O my friends I swear—
> from the moment
> my lover's hand touched my
> skirt, I remember
> nothing at all.
>
> (trans. Andrew Schelling)

The lover, irresistible and difficult to remember. Vidya's friends can remember the fragrance that attracted them to their lovers. But her passion, according to her, was even greater, erasing the traces of the *vasana* that created it. We read her as earthy; in India she would also be metaphysical: the passion of which there is no memory, that comes from no memory, is an act of Tantrism: a release from, an obliteration of, the illusory world.

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence the vast structure of recollection.

The structure of recollection:

NAKED MOLE-RATS

Naked mole-rats have no fur, but their lips are hairy. Their pinkish mottled skin is loose and hangs in folds, like something that has lost a great deal of weight, the easier to squirm through their narrow tunnels. Incisors protrude from their mouths like pincers, the only feature of their undefined faces. One naked mole-rat can fit across your fingers, its tail dangling down. They have been under the earth for at least three million years.

They never surface. They are blind. Their world is not a labyrinth, but a straight tunnel, a mile or two long, with innumerable cul-de-sacs branching off, and certain larger chambers. They live on the tuberous roots that grow towards them.

As many as three hundred inhabit a colony, moving a ton of dirt every month. They have a caste system, tripartite like the Indian. The smallest among them are the diggers and food-gatherers who work through the night in a line, male and female equally, the first gnawing the earth and kicking it back to the next who kicks it back, until the last, who digs a temporary hole to the surface, kicks out the dirt, its rump exposed to the moon and predators, and then plugs the hole again. When they come across a root, they chew off pieces to carry to the others.

The medium-sized are the warriors, who try to fend off the rufous-beaked snakes, the file snakes, the white-lipped snakes and the sand boas that sometimes find their way in. They attack with repeated tiny bites that are, if the snake is small enough, mysteriously instantly fatal. When, by chance, two colonies of naked mole-rats tunnel into each other, their warriors fight to the death.

These castes serve the largest, who are the breeders. Unique among mammals, only one female reproduces. She is by far the longest and the fattest and the most aggressive in the colony. If she dies there is chaos. She is attended by one to three males, who do nothing else. They spend their time nuzzling her; have sex, initiated by her, by mounting her from behind for fifteen seconds, bracing themselves by holding their front legs against the walls of the tunnel, and mainly failing. When she becomes pregnant, the teats of every colony member, male and female, enlarge, reach their peak at the birth, and then shrink. Just before birth, the female runs wildly through the tunnels.

She has four or five litters a year of a dozen pups. The babies have transparent skin through which their internal organs are clearly visible. Only a few survive, and they live long lives, twenty years or more. The dead babies are eaten, except for their heads. At times the live ones are eaten too.

Interbred so long, they are virtually clones. One dead-end branch of the tunnel is their toilet: they wallow there in the soaked earth so that all

will smell alike. They are nearly always touching each other, rubbing noses, pawing, nuzzling. When their tunnel is blocked they work from both sides and reconnect it perfectly. They sleep in a packed heap in the nesting chamber, with the breeders on the top, staying warm, each naked mole-rat with its nose pressed against the anus and genitals of another.

They are continually cruel in small ways, clanking teeth, breathing rapidly into each other's open mouths, batting, swiping, biting, pulling one another's baggy skin, shoving each other sometimes a yard down the tunnel. But only the females who compete for the role of breeder inflict real harm. Wounded, the defeated female crouches shivering in the toilet, ignored by the others until she dies.

The tunnels are never silent. Naked mole-rats make at least seventeen sounds: soft chirps and loud chirps, high-pitched and low, tooth-grinding, trills, twitters, tongue-taps, sneezes, screams, hisses, grunts. Different sounds for when they bump into each other, when they piss, when they mate, when they're disturbed, alarmed, wounded, when they shove each other, when they meet a foreigner such as a beetle, when they find food, when they can't find food.

They clean their feet with their teeth. They clean their teeth with their feet. They yawn. They shiver. They scratch themselves after they piss. They bask near the surface, in the warm sunless earth. They doze with their short legs splayed, their huge heads drooping. They double over, mouth to anus, to eat their own shit.

They scurry with eyes closed, forwards or backwards at the same speed, over and under each other. They change direction by somersaulting. They find their way, when they don't know it, by darting forward till their nose bumps the wall, dart backwards, adjust the angle, dart forward again. Sometimes a naked mole-rat will suddenly stop, stand on its hind-legs and remain motionless, its head pressed against the roof of the tunnel. Above its head is the civil war in Somalia. Their hearing is acute.

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PAMELA WYE

JASON HUNSINGER: EVEN BABIES HAVE BAD DREAMS

All sleepers are unconscious. Sleeping newborns are doubly so. Unformed personalities even when awake, babies are unaware of their being, unable to recognize their arms as their own, or their breathing. Yet their needs are voracious, overwhelming and urgent. Bombarded by sensations, not knowing which way is up, they are cantankerous, strong-willed and helpless. The violence of a screaming baby awakened in the middle of the night by hunger, or gas, or a bad dream is fearsome. What a terrifying time. For everyone. What we come to decipher of inchoate messages, of blind needs and desires, is the sum of our own projections. Our own fears, our own needs. How can it be otherwise when our own adult dreams are comprised of remnants of our infantile desires? So far is this from the sentimentality that envelops images of babyhood in the popular imagination, that sentimentality begins to seem a panicky cover-up for the fearsomeness we feel in the face of infancy.

The sleeper is a captive model. Blank in the way of all captives. As opposed to the model in a traditional portrait, a sleeping infant is doubly devoid of intent or desire to project an appearance. It is here, on a model that embodies incomprehension and the domination of irrational forces, that Jason Hunsinger chose to focus his attention. Hunsinger has drawn his sleeping baby's head as though everything were happening there. As though the dream were the thing. As though the seeing observer and the sleeping baby were one site of consciousness. As though opened eyes were closed and as though drawing hands were tiny clenched fists. How else to know an unknowable dream life? Whether of the drawer or the drawn, the dreaming or the dreamed.

The horizontality of sleepers privileges the head. The body is useless. Verticality is the posture of action. Horizontal, the body is out of the running, parked temporarily. Sleep is a great equalizer. Like old age and death, infancy and sleep produce grimaces, mouths open as though grasping for air or milk. Hunsinger's drawings attest to that grasping, conflating the newborn to the newdead, the suckling with the death mask, each one an instinctual, involuntary grimace, each one an inevitable involuntary state. We choose neither to come nor to go. And we are

helpless, objectified, unfathomable in both instances and equally open to projection by those standing around us. We, the horizontal: the newborn, the newdead, and the sleeping.

Like Egon Schiele's portraits, Hunsinger's heads are arrived at with simple, but painfully blunt lines, rough and smudged. And as Schiele's nudes "shatter the illusion of sex as a romantic or sentimental dream" so too do Hunsinger's sleeping baby heads shatter the collective illusion of infancy as a sentimental dream. Rather, he shows, as though through a transparent skin, the invisible raw impulses of the dream state as synonymous with the physical state of babyhood. His is a portraiture that collects deep inwardness into the sum and substance of outer appearance. The bluntness of Schiele's depictions belie the excruciating refinement of his means. It is to this early 20th century Viennese expressionism that Hunsinger's baby drawings relate. As in Schiele's portraits, the expressive focal point of Hunsinger's babies are the head and hands. Although in the case of Hunsinger, the tense fists are tiny, not long and attenuated as in Schiele, they form a similar visual lexicon. Schiele's interest in the human psyche was playing itself out in the Vienna of Sigmund Freud. Whereas Schiele sliced into the underbelly of Victorian sexuality, Hunsinger takes up the Freudian investigation of infancy and dreamlife, of the observer and the observed, of the parent and the child.

The current artworld's renewed interest in psychoanalytic theory coincides with feminism's claim on infancy and the pre-oedipal stage of early development that privileges the mother-child relationship. Hunsinger, in his baby drawings, re-inserts the father into the formative pre-oedipal period. He reminds us that the father, too, participates in the inarticulate merging of parent and baby that precedes language and through which both parent and baby are changed and effected for life.

Jersey City
January 1995

JASON HUNSINGER

SIX DRAWINGS

Untitled
5/5/88, Ink on paper, 15" x 21"

Untitled
9/29/87, Ink on paper, 10" x 13"

Even Babies Have Bad Dreams
8/16/89, Ink, pencil on paper, 7" x 10"

Untitled
1988, Ink on paper, 11" x 10"

Untitled
1/16/88, Ink on paper, 7" x 10"

V
1/5/88, Ink on paper, 11" x 15"

GUSTAF SOBIN

ON THE LONGEVITY OF TOPONYMS

I

Nothing's older, in most places, than the toponyms themselves. No, not even the archaic sites they occasionally designate: the ruins, the earthworks, the beheaded remainders, say, of some multi-leveled *oppidum,* lying perched on its long-since abandoned outcrop. *Nomen,* more often than not, antedates *habitatio* itself. It constitutes, indeed, an artifact of its own, a "document," as the scholars would put it. Nothing, in turn, receives more focused attention, not even the potsherds, the stray coin, the scrupulously analyzed cross-sections of the carpoliths: the fossilized fruit of the site's earliest inhabitants. As the founding vocable, the toponym is treated with all the care of an immensely delicate, perfectly irreplacable object.

An object? Can a word, a locution, a breath-shred be endowed with all the properties—the material components—of an object unto itself? Containing everything that might be found, eventually, within its sonorous outlines, can it be considered, indeed, as the object of objects, the "thing" preeminent?

Like the archeologist, the toponymist goes under. Searches, in the present-day place name, for some archaic particle: some linguistic vestige that has somehow managed to survive its lost origins. In a Mediterranean culture such as Provence, those origins are likely to be deeply secreted. Under so many successive layers of French, Provençal and Latin (both medieval and classic), not to mention the "alluvial contributions" of Celtic and—to a lesser extent—Greek and Phoenician, one reaches, occasionally, a deposit—yes, a material deposit—of an otherwise extinct language: Ligurian. Spoken by a people of that very name, indigenous to the present-day provinces of Liguria in northwest Italy and Provence itself in France, their linguistic group has been identified as pre-Indoeuropean. Their language alone, indeed, forms a "substratum," as the toponymists would put it. Like an archeological foundation or base line, it's upon this Ligurian substratum that successive cultures—in successive, toponymical layers—have accumulated as they have. Even if we know virtually nothing about the Ligurian culture itself, we can fairly well assume that certain sounds,

embedded in certain place names (and place names alone), belong to these vanished people. They're all, in fact, that has survived them.

When we refer to particular places, for example, we might find ourselves emitting—as breath particles—the radicals *ar-*, *kar-*, *tar-*, etc. So doing, little do we realize that we're employing, here, the relics of that extinct idiom; perpetuating, in a sense, a lost culture. For out of those very radicals come the toponyms themselves: from *ar-*comes Arles and Orange; from *kar-*, Carry, Cassis and, by extension, Carcassonne; from *tar-*, Tarascon, and so forth. What, in fact, do they signify, these linguistic fragments? As in all archaic languages, they indicate, we learn, some topological feature and most especially either one of rock or water: either, that is, some mountain, ledge or distinct counterfort or, to the contrary, some stream, marshland, estuary. The early toponyms served to distinguish the very landscapes these Bronze Age people inhabited; helped separate—in so many succinct locatives— high ground from low, their own pasture land from that of their neighbors, where they hunted from where they fished. In each instance, the place name indicated some geophysical characteristic, and, by implication, the kind of natural economy inherent therein. The toponym "staked out" a particular area, circumscribing—with a sharp, evocative monosyllable—the material realities of the place itself. Sound, here, anticipated substance; the toponym, its very *topos*.

How can we help but marvel at the work, say, of Bertoldi, tracing the pre-Indoeuropean radical *ganda-* to its very origins, signifying "a rocky terrain as caused by a mountain landslide," or Fouché's study of *kal-* in all its multiple ramifications, indicating—in turn—a rock, a rock shelter, a dwelling, a fortress and, finally, an entire village. In reading the great toponymists, don't we find our own mouth rounding, say, to the beautiful vocable *eoo* meaning—as well it might—a lake, a body of water? The vocable still survives today, in fact, in certain areas of the Pyrenees. In the language of the specialists, it's what is called a "fossilized resonance."

We're not always as fortunate, however. Place names, as Charles Rostaing points out,* have suffered all the vicissitudes of words in general. Subject to wave after wave of successive acculturation, the original toponyms have undergone endless modifications if not—as in most cases—total effacement. As the "object of objects" they were shaped, altered, refashioned to fit the language—and the proclivities—of the dominant culture. Ligurian, for instance, as an indigenous language, became assimilated with Celtic when the Celts invaded southeastern

*Charles Rostaing's study *Les Noms de lieux* (collection *"Que sais-je?"*, Paris, 1972) and his authoritative treatise *Essai sur la Toponymie de la Provence (depuis les origines jusqu'aux invasions barbares)*, (Paris, 1950) have both been indispensable sources of information for the present essay. I hereby wish to express my gratitude to Monsieur Rostaing for both these works.

France in the fifth century B.C. As an amalgamated people, the Celto-Ligurians, in turn, fell under the influence of the Greeks. Along with the potter's wheel, the vine and the olive tree, the Greeks brought with them the written alphabet. They'd affect the Celto-Ligurians by example rather than rule: traces of their immensely sophisticated culture would permeate the interior from the emporia they'd established along the coastline. One after another, place names along their trade routes underwent hellenization. This was followed, in the second century B.C., by the arrival of the Romans: by the Roman *mainmise* over Mediterranean Gaul. No single culture had yet had such a determining effect. Needless to say, the toponym—that most susceptible of vocables—would undergo immense changes in what the Roman colonizers now called "Provincia." Truncating here, agglutinating there, latinizing everywhere, the Romans would shape the name of the place as indelibly as they'd shape the place itself.

The toponym, however, still hadn't found its definitive form. Hadn't—in the language of the toponymists—yet "crystallized." One needs to follow the life of these sonorous objects through the fall of the Roman Empire and the abrupt arrival, at the very same moment, of the Visigoths. Eloquent in its own right, a period of pure stasis ensues. A time of total, cultural sterility. It will be followed (but quietly, slowly, almost subliminally) by a second latinization: that of Christendom itself. Almost exclusively the "property" of ecclesiastics and, most especially, that of its scribes, this second latinization would filter, gradually, into the living idiom. As it did, it would serve to evangelize one place name after another by simply adding a single prefix to the toponym. That prefix, of course, would be *Sanctus*.

Even now, though, these fresh nominals were subject to endless alterations. Having undergone, all too often, the poetic fantasies of those very scribes, mentioned above, they'd find themselves vernacularized—bit by bit—by any number of regional dialects. For instance, a place name such as "Sanctus Amantius" would become—in Provençal—"Sanch Amans." In popular usage (spoken rather than written), the *San* would become isolated and the truncated consonant, *ch,* find itself fused with the following syllable, *amans,* to form "San Chamans."' The commune is now called St.-Chamas in honor of a Saint who would never recognize, today, his own name.

A toponym, at least in Mediterranean Europe, celebrates a series of elisions, adaptations and—quite often—dissimulations rooted in over two thousand years of human history. Organic in its own right, its development is inseparable from all the forces that have contributed to its formation. All the more amazing, then, that a place name might still include—like a pearl on a string of dull syllables—some archaic particle. Some irreducible relic. Surviving a world that no longer exists, that particle calls to mind the rocks,

riverbeds, defensive ledges upon which civilizations were first founded. It calls to mind—in a closing moment—lost origins.

II

Today, anyone arriving in Provence by air will land, most likely, at the Airport of Marseille-Marignane. If a mistral happens to be blowing on that particular day, there's a good chance that the arriving passenger will get a whiff, at least, of the petrol refineries, located five kilometers to the northwest. It serves as a reminder. For even in the midst of Provençal spring with the first orchards of flowering fruit trees visible within only minutes of the airport itself, that dark, acrid odor—blown through the bright air—reminds us of our own, specific moment in history. No, we haven't escaped: not even here.

The refineries themselves surround—virtually suffocate—the little provincial town of Berre. Lying at the edge of a placid, saltwater lake of the very same name, the town was once destined for a happier fate. For salt itself has always been its natural resource. Indeed, Berre meets all the conditions necessary for the exploitation of that indispensable mineral: bright sun, a dry, violent wind, and shallow marshes that contained, at one time, a higher rate of salinity than the Mediterranean itself: 35 grams of salt per liter of water. Along with an abundant quantity of fish, shellfish and crustacea, salt must have attracted Berre's first, protohistoric settlers. A precious element in itself, it became, along with tin, the most highly prized commodity in a barter-based economy. Soon after Caesar's conquest of Gaul, Berre, settled by Roman legionnaires, would evolve along the fringes of the *viae salariae,* the imperial "Salt Routes" that Rome had established clear across the western Mediterranean.

Extracting salt from its marshes and cultivating olive trees in the light soil of its surrounding hillsides, Berre's history, in many ways, resembles that of other towns along the French littoral. Pillaged by the Visigoths at the end of the fifth century, it would suffer through the Dark Ages and resuscitate, gradually, at the outset of the new millennium. As a duchy from the Middle Ages to the Revolution and the *chef-lieu* of its canton ever since, Berre has subsisted—as have most places—off its own, natural wealth and especially that of its salt deposits. Indeed, one tends to forget at the very end of this second millennium, how autonomous most communities once were: how self-sufficing in the economy of their means. In short, how *rooted* they once were to some natural, immediately available, abundantly regenerative, resource. Berre, needless to say, was no exception.

Ever since 1929, however, this history has tended to reverse itself. With the installation of the first petrol refineries in its suburbs and the inexorable

rise of an adjacent petro-chemical complex, the air of this lovely, lake-facing community has literally darkened. Worse, that very same air has grown charged with the micro-organic particles of an uninterrupted pollution. Those who man the valves and maintain the machinery in this complex have become, indeed, its very first victims. Ecologically, culturally, and even economically, the site—invaded by immense capital investment from without—has suffered severe degradation. Today, it's a community that can only watch itself go under. And, in the process, lose its own, innate claim to uniquity. Berre, quite suddenly, could be anywhere in the blighted landscapes of the post-industrial.

Every bit as injurious as the pollution of its atmosphere came that of its waters. A power plant, belonging to the Électricité de France, was installed along the very edge of the Étang de Berre only fifteen kilometers to the west. Shedding so many millions of square meters of fresh water into the saltwater lake, it has virtually destroyed most of the lake's native flora and fauna and driven its rate of salinity down to practically nothing. Only a few years ago, this very same body was rife with flamingos, oyster catchers, avocets. They'd nest among the bulrushes and feed on a plethora of bivalves, mollusks and tiny, scampering crustaceans. Today, none of this natural life has survived. The Étang de Berre lies like a vast, glistening tomb, honoring nothing more than its own memory. Soon, we're told, the fresh water, carrying in its cataract an inordinate amount of silt, will bring the lake—ironically enough—to total desiccation. Yes, soon, these fresh, invasive waters will gag the lake altogether in so much effluvia.

Along with the death of any ecological entity comes that, of course, of the economy it once generated. In the case of the Étang de Berre, this economy—based essentially on the exploitation of its marshes and its abundant marine fauna—has thrived since the early Bronze Age, has existed in a state of biotic equilibrium for nearly three thousand years. This very balance was swept aside in a matter of moments by the signing of a few contracts and the sudden implantation of so many alien industries. These industries, of course, having once exhausted whatever advantages they originally found in the immediate area or having simply depleted its ecology, can always move elsewhere. Berre, to the contrary, can't. Like how many other communities throughout the world, Berre will have to live in the very midst of its own spoliation.

Berre, we might hear ourselves uttering. As inveterate dilettantes in the science of toponymy, we find ourselves—often enough—searching for roots: the archaic radicals of given place names, hoping to discover—at the very heart of an appellation—some vague trace of its origins. For "every place name," Rostaing tells us, "has its own signification, even if that signification has long been lost on its very own inhabitants."

Berre, in French, evolved out of *Berro* in Provençal. If M. Vincent attributes its origin to *Berra* in Low Latin, meaning "plain" or "valley," Mistral, flirting momentarily with the Semitic radical *beer-*, settles for a more indigenous interpretation: what signifies, in pre-Celtic, "a place situated alongside water." D. Fletcher Valls goes even deeper, though. By drawing on the pre-Indoeuropean substrate, he associates the radical *ber-* with *ibère,* and—by extension—*Iberia:* the land, that is, of the Iberi. These people, it should be noted, were not only contemporary with the Ligurians, but belonged, linguistically speaking, to the very same group: both constituted, indeed, integral parts of what the linguists call a "Mediterranean unity." It's quite possible, Fletcher Valls speculates, that *ber-* evolved into (or out of) *berro,* meaning nothing more nor less, in present-day Spanish, than watercress. A wild variety of that very plant is still to be found—curiously enough—in Berre's very last, surviving marshlands. It goes, needless to say, unpicked.

Berro, Berra, Berre: the vocable gets blown out of the darkness of its own, disputed origins. Surviving its very history—the depredations to the very place it designates—it contains, in that sudden monosyllable, the breath of its own inception. The sign-initiate. Even today, spoken more often than not by immigrant workers—Algerians, for the most part, imported as cheap labor in the fifties and suffering today, to a great extent, from massive unemployment—the word, the toponym itself, breaks through an uninterrupted stream of Arabic. Or, in the groping French of a Dutch technician, flown in by Shell Petroleum to solve some obscure disfunction at the refineries, "Berre" rings through so much hesitation, *maladresse,* as his one, unmistakable utterance. Resilient, the toponym has nearly outlived, now, the given figurations of the *topos* itself.

Aren't we always, in a sense, applying the oldest sounds (be they toponyms or not) to our own, most immediate needs? Utilizing, over and over, archaic particles for the sake of some pressing circumstance? Some impending issue? As to the sounds themselves, don't they invariably contain—yes, even at this incalculable distance—the grain, the germ, the invisible seedpod of those incipient cultures that they once determined? We enter our own darkness, today, uttering them. Enter the opacity of our own times, indeed, breathing into sheer air the transparent relics of those lost dawns. Carry them—tinkling like amulets—into whatever future the future still holds.

MYUNG MI KIM

HUMMINGBIRD

Name _____

Translate:

1. Praise beasts and their worthy marks.
2. Wear a red scarf while grinding grains.
3. Weave fine hemp cloth and thick hemp cloth.
4. On the eighth day of the third month count your barrels.
5. On the tenth day of the fourth month ward off cuts.
6. Talk is hard to bear and difficult to be rid of.
7. In a shady spot place a well.
8. Keep cranes in the front garden.
9. High places are used as dry fields.
10. Low places are used as rice fields.
11. The fifth day of the ninth month is good for birthing cows.
12. Copying began on the sixth day of the twelfth month.

Fill in the name] [bedraggle

Scat rule of identity

In works] [great learning

Modulation, raising, slackening of the voice

Break in light

Varied] [faculty and expression

Sod] [the first deleted *me* written over

As a tablet would exact

The foregoing citation

As regards the change of a syllable and consequently of the whole word

In this place which we translated *curving and bridling* we can say also *curving and frisking*

Who wrote the word on the page that is the word on the page

Hummingbird brown to match the pinecone it circles

Twelve calls and responses

Convene] [conceal Gourd halved and dried

Both] [clutch a cunning

Assent] [Ditch of culture fed

Edict] [wreak

Stream] [In a beaker

Climb] [people are sleepy and they sleep

Lathe] [sumac Proper noises

Wall and sheep Tell and speak

Immediate] [sensation

Worthless] [came cold on

Command forms] [imperatives Say nothing of poplars

Linger] [living and that creeping is

Hummingbird No word for its size

Copyists are adorned with new pure garments, loose trousers, and a coarse crown

Sprint and flash discharge

Words that cannot be pronounced

Banal] [description or narrative

Authority at each blow

Scant collective days

Octave] [a trace

Known only from a rough drawing

Transmission and ambition scattered to parasites

Suggesting that an engraved plate bearing such letters was]

Pyre] [ardor

Singe] [sound or written sign of the proposition

Hummingbird, there is no speed to match yours

Several sighting holes and multiple plumb-lines

Those who learn by looking at others

Those who learn from written sources

Those who learn by themselves

Meandering neither abject nor low

Vision of the form] [bloody mess of the city

Precisely printing] [warping

Primary fact] [migratory

Conjunction used with abandon is lethargy of the idea

The process, the drawing out, the lapse of time

All these letters including those classed as unnecessary or not genuine are formed by the sound of any voice

O hummingbird, swift trill

Open a page What does it look like

What story what story what sound

Less than nerves in teeth

Title and fervor

Damage in the thousands

Relay] [subject

She was about to wrap the fish in foil

I was working in the storeroom

They could not see around the corner

After that, the smell of milk drying

Testament] [forgotten for furlough

You see, it would have been swept away

Debris scented tops of trees even out and flower

Affirmation's beggarly wasp

Cede] [sorrowed then

Dialogue and function

Rushed to the ferry] [yet there are only so many tenses

Attend] [said arm

Recounting council] [adverbs of time

If I weren't his mother : you are

Act and action drawn from every part

Counterfeit] [motility

All the sound a living house

All the noise a living law

Held and beheld the warble

Each physical and social act committed on the street

Hunger a malfeasance

The book, its fetters

Carbon burn turn straw

Outer suns' pneumatic sleep

Letter, syllable, and word model plurality

Studious need might useful arts explore

Argue: precedents, oaths, public records, witnesses

Deliver: introduction, narration, statement of the case, and peroration

The writing hung on the wall] [whose writing is it

Meal means: *stuff, material*

Hummingbird happens as a sound first

Is it clear] [then it is

Heal] [landed parole

Continuous, as of line or time

A perceiver without state

wright's deer vetch

Scarlet pimpernel

filigree

thistle

monkey flower

cow's parsnip

scotch broom

horse chestnut

Hummingbird on lavender

deploring
deponent

scourge
hedge

authority
a horseshoe to a dog's paw

authenticity
eat the whole horse then say the meat stinks

Place, such expression as, *in fury*

Time, for instance, *yesterday, at evening,* as in *purpose lost*

State is, for instance, *having armor on, having shoes on*

Attitude is, for instance, *is-lying, is-sitting, wayfarer*

Activity is, for example, *burning, cutting*

Experiment is each scroll of white pages joined together

CHARLES STEIN

TWO POEMS

Color's being
in color
rests. And thunder's? In
the ponderous hearts
of local weather gods.

So much for the structure
of Being's categories.

That gods
are denied
by ponderous minds
forfends no thunder's menacing.
Whack! and the oak
is riven in the yard—

Then mind's alert
past Being's thrall.

Something immutable
alert through the night

the casual brackets erected about the meaning

the limpid space emergent about the being
sequestered in its bracketing

expanding, extending, compelling through the night
throughout the night

engorging all space with the bright finesse of modality—
its own modality—alone

in the night

when all else is mute in a deep requiescence
returned to the silence of waters
the night quiets

waters that dawn shows in silence and radiant mirror
perfection

the dawn mists rising like spirits from every quarter
return to the sun

And the sounds of the day
arise in the branches
of a thousand awakening arbors

—Something accrues to the night
from within the deepest kernel

the brackets allow

•

Accumulations
split the shore. . .

That which Is and Was

amassed as memory's body

breaks beneath the freight
of the great in-coming

the singular normality and stance
stand no more

complexity of organism
rigor of style
buttressed with uncanny instruments

famed for inaudible functioning
[gifted with glittering emoluments]

the moving parts
that moved with an acute solvency

now accumulate microscopic debits
that sear the intimate munitions—

the micro structures of the great pacificality
appear as war

tugging and struggle—

loud exclamations—then
no further exclamation

desperadoes climb the makeshift

no patriots remain
to attend the failing bulwarks

the kernel of luminosity
distributed at public sale

a wind blows over the night

a shroud falls over the corpus

And yet no last pronunciamento
resolves the episode

There is a budging in the fastnesses of opacity

a murky churning in absence

Something rebounds from the uttermost remotenesses

a quirky elasticity in substance begins to acquit itself

the granularity that ravages
occasions recrudescence once again

weary—the subject
alert in the night

to witness once again
the fevers of appearance

the quivering recrudescence of what seems

RAJADATTA

(Tr. from the Pali
by Andrew Schelling)

When Rajadatta the trader was still young, a group of investors staked him to 500 carts of merchandise. He took them to the city of Rajagaha. There he met a beautiful prostitute whose body so intoxicated him he lavished 1,000 rupees a day on her. Before he could shake himself free, he'd squandered the whole caravan and ended up penniless. He took to wandering and one day joined a crowd of laymen who'd gone to hear the Buddha speak. Sitting at the edge of the assembly, he listened with deep concentration. The words rang so true and forcefully in his ears that he joined the assembly of monks that day. And recognizing his weakness for women, he took to a charnel ground to practice austerities.

Meanwhile, another caravan-leader was also spending thousands on the same prostitute. This man wore a lavishly wrought ring on his hand that the woman coveted fiercely. She hired some men to steal it for her. However, the police were tipped off, raided her house, found the wealthy merchant's ring, killed the prostitute on the spot, and flung her body into the charnel ground.

Rajadatta, tramping about in search of a suitably foul object to medicate on, stumbled across her corpse. "This will do," he thought, and began to brood on impermanence. But those parts of the prostitute no dog or jackal had mangled yet distracted him, and with horror he found himself terribly aroused. Aghast at his fantasies he fled to a safe distance. There, sinking deeply into *dhyana,* with a supreme effort of will he achieved insight. This is his poem.

A recluse
went to the burning ground
found a woman's
naked corpse
inside it a tangle of worms
Others blanched

& turned away at the sight
but that poor dead creature's golden
breasts and
unshaved cunt
haunted me until I lost
control & shuddered with
violent urges

Quicker than boiling rice
overflows the pot
I fled the graveyard
fled that poor dead creature
fled until I reached
a safe secluded spot
to sit
& cross my legs &
calm my mind

I considered
the object
considered the hungry ignorant acts
that brought it where it lay
considered the tangle of worms
& corpses
I stared into countless
rounds of suffering
stared into greed & hunger
stared on vanity
stared until desire
blinked like a lamp
and went out
lust no longer assailed me
I made wisdom my own then
yes I accomplished
what had
to be done

LINH DINH

FOUR POEMS

I REFUSE TO BE LAMBASTED BY YOUR BLOATED I CHING

The union goons in their plaid shirts are pouring tar down every orifice not yet plugged up already from their previous campaign the 20 years drought also known as the cork stops here as it does everywhere else for example in all the restaurants I've ever had the gumption to walk in not to eat but to be constipated.

I am a man celebrated in recondite circles for his exquisite stoppages the lips of which have prematurely grown fat from too much exercise why shouldn't one be allowed an occasional stump after decades of hemorrhaging wildly at the drop of a bucket.

Three buckets I have one on each hand and one strapped to the back of my shoulders the exclusive content of which is the ossified stools of my past the weight is preventing me from growing voluptuous like everybody else adorned around the neck with fantastic ulcers the growth of which is considered to be highly decorative in this part of the country.

I refuse to be lambasted by your bloated I Ching that ghastly crossword puzzle appearing at the back of the Times besmeared by gumpats darkened through the centuries.

Nor do I care to place in my mouth a piece of rubber band spat out pre-Christian era from the fatal palate of Genghis Khan although I am quite obviously one of his more illustrious descendants.

The physical properties of the world address themselves to me only insofar as your two pieces of pork fat dangling from the revolutionary gallows about to be erected tomorrow in the public square the gala for which I have two reservations.

The noose of my tie is choking me soon I'll be a decapitated mind permanently hovering over a bucket of piss the stench of which is making me drowsy

My seminal life has been wasted through phony experiences perjured encounters with a blind faggot in a wig and powder my only witness.

The best has been irretrievably lost the years behind an out-of-breath the years ahead an out-of-time a skein unwound a mild distraction don't latch your door I won't latch yours.

I won't latch yours the years behind I won't latch yours the years ahead.

Cirrus cirrostratus cirrocumulus altostratus altocumulus stratocumulus nimbostratus cumulus cumulonimbus stratus are all contained within oversized trousers thatched together with sturdy fibers necessarily bilked.

Futtocks of my dungeon soon I will deck you ascending from Davey's roundhouse toward a friend who will be nice to me.

Note: The cloud sequence is a paraphrase of Vladimir Mayakovski's famous line: "I'm not a man but a cloud in trousers."

Impaled with a pitchfork Vincent Van Gogh.
Handcuffed, trussed, and stuffed Vincent Van Gogh.
Decorated with an oversized medal Vincent Van Gogh.
Within the coffin a chintzy suit Vincent Van Gogh.
Domesticated like a rabid hamster Vincent Van Gogh.
Touched up with expensive cosmetics Vincent Van Gogh.
A less-than-life-size statue walks off its base
every night in the Jardin D'Arles.

LETTER TO MY BED

Dishevelled bed, sentimental sponge, love of my life,
Witness to all my horrors, my Valdez spills, my crimes,
Black-faced farces, commedia dell'arte—par-deux and solo,
Hopped-up rants, weepy pleas, morning conversations,
Do not spill our confidential beans to enemy intelligence.
They have surrounded us on all sides tonight, bed,
And tomorrow night, and the night after tomorrow night.
You are the leaky boat on the South China Sea fleeing
Ho Chi Minh City; you are the wide gurney of my nightly dearth.

WANG PING

SONG OF CALLING SOULS
(The Drowned voices from
the *Golden Venture*)

So here we are
in the evening darkness
of Rose Hill Cemetery
gazing out from our ghosts
like the homeless outside windows.
No moon,
the spring not the spring of the old days.
Our bodies not ours,
but only bodies rotting
in the grave of *laofan*.
We look at the sky
the earth
and the four directions.
The storm gathers in
from all sides.
How shall we pass through this night?

The wind comes blowing.
We six
in deep shadow
stand at the end of time,
stand in the night
that is not just an absence of light,
but a persistent voice,
unsteady and formless,
hum of summer crickets.

Something wants to be said,
even if our words

grasp the air in vain
and nothing remains.
Our story has set a fact
beyond fable
Our story
has no beginning or end.

"Home" we say,
and before we utter the word,
our voices choke with longing:

The cliff of Fuzhou
studded with stiff pines.
The waters of Changle
shadowed in the sway of bamboo.
Sea and sky fused.
Mystic fires along the shore.
Fishermen's dwellings everywhere

How lovely!
How familiar!
When dusk falls,
faint seagull cries.
Blue smoke rises
from red-tiled roofs.
Small boats offshore
and fishhawks in silhouette.
Salty winds
carrying the murmur of reeds.
Tide roads of the sea.

The scenes grow in memory,
scenes we lived day by day,
paying no mind:

Generation after generation,
nets cast into the lingering light,
seeds planted in the morning mist.

Fishing kept us out on the waves.
Farming bound our women to the soil.

But at times
we heard a voice, a promise,
a golden dream.
Things seen and heard
turned to confusion.
We pulled our boats onto shore,
left our wives and children
behind the mountain's shadow.

From village to village
we bought and sold
anything at hand
socks underwear suits and dresses gold even drugs
seven days a week
three hundred sixty-five days a year
and not just for the money:
the yearning for adventure
ran deep in our veins.
We played hide-and-seek
with the government and police.
When we got caught and lost all our earnings
we called ourselves "Norman Bethune."
If Mao were still alive
he'd have surely praised us
as he did that Canadian doctor
who gave his life
helping us fight the Japanese ghosts.
We were glad
to help build a "socialist" China
with our illegal gains.
Anyway we had a good laugh
over our losses.

Still, waves of desire
rose daily,

this voice luring
        from the far side of the sea.
Not that we yearned for gold
        or worldly delights,
but this voice
        first muttering
                then roaring in our heads.

So in hope and fear we fared.
        In tears we fared.
Mist spread a veil
        till ocean-bound.
Pinewood mirrored
        in deep green.
At the bottom of the *Golden Venture*
        we did not see our women weeping
        did not hear our children calling.
Only the cry
        "Kari, kari. . ."
of wild geese.

We sailed the ocean
        in the hold of the *Golden Venture*—
                pigs chickens dogs snakes,
        whatever it was they called us.
Our bodies not ours
        sold to the "snakeheads" for the trip.

You ask why we did this?
        Ask the geese why they migrate
                from north to south,
        why the eels swim thousands of miles
                to spawn in the sea.
Tides of desire
        rise for no reason.
So we fared with the faith
                New York had more *fu* than Fuzhou,
                people there enjoyed "perpetual happiness"
                like the name of *Changle*.

So we sailed with the belief
we could buy ourselves back for $30,000
within three years.
Our hard work would bring freedom
to the next generation.
Our sons would be prosperous and happy,
not like us, cursed
by our own country, cursed
by the "old barbarians."
America needed our labor and skills
as much as we needed its dream. . .

And here we are,
hovering around this New Jersey cemetery.
Our bodies gone,
but our blind souls still hanging
like curtains soaked in rain.

Our summer clothes so thin!
So thin our dreams!

Hovering,
that dark night near Rockaway,
our ship finally heaving into sight of New York.
In thirst and hunger we waited.
In fear and hope we waited
to be lifted from the ship's hold
and alight on the land of paradise
"Jump," we'd been told,
"once your feet touch American soil
you'll be free."
In the dark rain we waited.
"Jump," someone shouted,
"the ship is sinking, the police are coming!"
So we jumped
into the night
into the raging sea,
our breasts smothered
by foam and weeds,

our passions tangled,
        the breath beaten from our bodies
by despair and hate.

                Oh, we've sunk so low!
                We've sunk so low!

Only to rise again
        for clinging to wrongful things.
Easy to sink
        in the fire of desire.
Regret comes after the deed.
        Sorrow!
Sorrow stitched into the cloak of our souls.
Our former days now changed,
        leaving no trace.
The distant mountain lies alone.
Shadows of the city so far away.
        Sorrow!
We can speak only in weeping,
memory nothing but white hair on the heart.
Condemned to wander,
lost among the roots of our six senses,
gazing at New York,
gazing homewards,
Fuzhou's mighty waves roiling through the night,
bride in green unveiled in scarlet chamber,
lovers' pillows joined like Siamese twins.
        Who can avoid sorrow in this world?

Our legs lingering
        in the dew-drenched grass
here and there, still clinging.
This deep night,
        is it outside-this-world?
Our women and children
        still awaiting our return.
But here we are,
        nameless,

In life and after life,
        apart.
Our song is the crane
        calling in her cage
when she thinks of her young
        toward nightfall.
Will it reach Fuzhou and Changle
        and stir souls from their sleep?
On the boat
        we were close,
hundreds of us in the hold
        jammed in and in.
Here we live even closer,
        six bodies in one hole,
the earth sifting into
        our common grave,
unmarked,
        no stone erected
then crumbling.
        Sands of the shore
may reach an end,
        but not our grief.

Home, oh go home!
        an empty wave.
Ten thousand voices,
        broadcast the pain.
Please, oh please
        call our names
                Chen Xinhan Zhen Shimin
even if you can't
        say them right
                Lin Guoshui Chen Dajie
even if you don't know
        our origin or age
                Wang Xin Huang Changpin
Please, oh please
        call us.

Raise our shadows
from the moss.
Be gentle
as you call our names.
Do not wake us by force.
But call us.
Do not let us fade
from this place,
unlit and unfulfilled.

EDWARD SCHELB

"WITNESS CYCLADIC AFRODITA": ALCHEMY AND THE GATEWAY TO THE TOWER

From *Axon Dendron Tree*'s corpse of Agammemnon to the Tower of *Songs I-XXX,* Robert Kelly's alchemical poetry moves through a series of images strung out in memory-wheels or stuck in the hieratic poses of Tarot trumps. His profoundly archetypal vision cannot be reduced to logical categories; his protean and elliptical methods attempt to evade all certainties by alchemical subterfuge. But like Emerson in "The Poet," one can assemble a kind of mythical triumvirate to diagram loosely the nature of Kelly's alchemical work. Instead of Emerson's Knower, Doer, and Sayer, Kelly seems to conceive of the poet as the Thief, the Wanderer, and the Martyr. Each has its own heritage. The Thief recalls the impish play of Hermes the Trickster, the heroic rebellion of Prometheus and the labors of Herakles, Jacob stealing his birthright, John Dillinger with his tommy-gun. The poet's thievery is disruptive—he is the ravager of traditions, overturning received meanings and mocking traditional pieties. The Wanderer is Cain exiled from the garden and Hagar bereft in the desert, the homeless soul of the Gnostic trapped in the material world and crushed by the weight of the heavenly spheres, while the Martyr echoes the sufferings of Christ and the long heritage of Bronze-age sacrificial kings, Odin plucking out his eye for knowledge, the troubadour slain by a glance, Orpheus torn to pieces, Osiris dismembered. And each image is bound to its opposite in eternal tension: the ravager is also the liberator, the scatterer is the destroyer, and the victim is the savior.

From *Axon Dendron Tree* on, Kelly's work becomes increasingly concerned with alchemical themes. His two principal works following *Axon Dendron Tree, Finding the Measure* and *Songs I-XXX,* revolve around alchemical ideas. Particularly in his songs, Kelly's esoteric poetics converge with apocalyptic change and sexual revolution. The unleashing of libidinal energy from genital fixations and the assault upon the phallocratic self, given currency in Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body,* begins to assume increasing importance in Kelly's poetry. The songs fully display the figure of the Martyr, who like Artaud whips his innateness in order to transcend the phallic orders of the body. It is a text of fragments mirroring the *sparagmos* of the Martyr, and its dissociative syntax is the culmination of

Kelly's alchemical *putrefactio. Finding the Measure,* his earlier collection, is more often under the sign of the Thief (although Orphic metaphors and gnostic motifs are also present; the avatars of the poet are often indistinguishable). In the prefix to the volume, Kelly argues that "Finding the Measure is finding the mantram" and "finding / the natural articulation of ideas" (3). But far from a Romantic evocation of nature, Kelly's poems seem more high-born cut-purse stealth, Hermes-hot fingers stuffing glittering trinkets into empty pockets. Or, to borrow an image from "An Alchemical Journal," the poems of *Finding the Measure* reside under the sign of the wolf: "under the guise of two wolves, the Body & the Intellect steal the energy of the Heart." Theft is also martyrdom: "Yeheshuah hangs before you on a Roman cross. Crucify the heart" (68).

Hermes' first task is to transgress boundaries. In the "Zodiac Cycle," which seems a kind of memory-wheel presiding over the entire text, Kelly goes out of his way to mix up and mangle discourses—myth, traditional metaphors and lyric conventions are jumbled together with street slang, pornographic revelations, pop-culture icons, Route 66 motels with magic-finger beds, surrealist pizzas, the ouroboros of mutual fellatio sixty-nining into the New Jerusalem, bebop, hieroglyphs, Spinoza. Suck off, jerk off, raccoons raping garbage cans, "cunt's brigantine," "cruising Attica"—the vulgarity of the street merges with the bejeweled rhetoric of tradition with its chrysoprase and votresses of Sheba and dark dioskouri. Clam-eating walruses exist on the same plane as angelic orders. Often his poems in the Zodiac sequence are a stream of seemingly unrelated assertions, quick derringer-like bursts that keep the reader off-balance and deny any sense of orderly progression (The outlaw John Dillinger embodies Charles Williams' mystical way—"the way of the denial of images"). The cycle seems aimed at disrupting habitual responses by allowing previously cordoned-off areas of experience to clash and penetrate. It playfully restores the ancient orders of the night sky: Pisces floats in a motel swimming pool, Scorpio whips its tail on a large pizza, the jug of the Water Bearer is full of oil-filter sludge. And in those astrological highjinks the Trickster challenges the moral certainties of discourse; in "An Alchemical Journal," Kelly in fact parodies the moral earnestness of Pound's Confucian orders and its notion of culture: "Dialect & substandard forms. Popular songs. Old popular ditties. Songs my aunts & uncles knew. Peg o my heart unwobbling pivot. Our Chung?" (58). Hermetic dissolution seeks to shatter hierarchies. The poet, like John Dillinger, attempts to blow up the bank vaults of culture.

The wild excess of the Trickster is similar to the breakdown of metals in alchemy, which prepares the way for the restoration of unity. In a long poem entitled "Jealousy," Kelly inquires into the nature of Hermetic work as a restoration of an unbroken relation to the cosmos. The poem begins

with a vision of the kabbalistic circuits of the *sephiroth* as broken. The sephiroth are emanations of creation in kabbalistic texts which form the structure of the cosmos. They are at once allegorical principles, letters, qualities, nodes of energy conforming to the mystic body. They form the inverted tree—with its branches in heaven and its roots below in Malkuth, the kingdom of material forms. Jewish mysticism seeks to ascend the sephirotic tree to return to the Ayn Sof, the imageless ground of creation. In Kelly's poem, there exists a "gap in the circuit" through which the terrifying riders of Yesod ride. (Yesod is the next to last rung of the ladder of the *sephiroth,* just above *Malkuth,* and corresponds to the genitals). Inevitably gaps recall in Kelly castration, birth traumas, violent separations, the Ginnungagap of *The Loom*—all those psychic divisions that separate the body from nature. Here that gap for Kelly is the outer layer of skin falsely separating inside from outside:

> the Greeks
> made much of *chros,* face of the body's
> joining with the world, membrane of the self
> at the brink of the gap, where the chaos of all
> not integumented with
> the world of order we feel
> from inside out begins. Skin.
>
> (FTM 91)

To restore unity, Kelly suggests, one must submit to violent dispersal and alchemical change, break down the barriers, trash the taboos. He offers a parable of O'Neill of Ulster ("shorn of bone & broken of flesh" [91]), who fashioned a silver hand to rule a kingdom whose king may have no blemish on his skin. The alchemical forging of that hand left "no break in the texture, no gap / for the strong-thighed angels of Yesod" (FTM 92), and the silver hand is a metaphor for the artifice of poetry, which will restore the natural order of things through, paradoxically, the sublimations of alchemy. In "Human Universe," Charles Olson had also written of the skin as not forming a boundary but a continuum: ". . .the proposition here is that man at his peril breaks the full circuit of object, image, action at any point. The meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge" (SW 62). Like the legendary O'Neill, Olson also views his art as the means of restoring unity: "The process of image. . .cannot be understood by separation from the stuff it works on. . . .There is only one thing you can do about kinetic, reenact it. Which is why the man said, he who possesses rhythm possesses the universe" (SW 61). For Kelly, hermetic work similarly proposes to eradicate the boundaries of self and world and enter into the unbroken realm of images, the *alam al-mithal* of Sufism, where the divine Names are

unlocked and returned to their symbolic essence, or the grid of the *sephiroth*, restoring the pure unblemished body of the Adam Kadmon, whose form is the unbroken chain of emanations, establishing links to another order. "The Kabbalah," notes Kelly elsewhere, "reaches its ethical fruition in a here & now world, but a here & now which depends for its very holiness on a man's ability to connect it conceptually or pragmatically with the not-here & not-now" (Vort 139). To uncover the mystic body, argues Kelly, one must abandon the inviolability of the self and the orders of reason—the old patriarchal orders of the sun god in "Jealousy" must be united with the moon-cults of the goddess. A *hierogamos*, the King and Queen in watery embrace.

In the second and third sections of "Jealousy" Kelly meditates upon Hermes the thief. Hermes is a symbol of pure energy extracted from matter and is also an emblem of the unity of opposites; as Jung argues,

> He is the play of colours in the *cauda pavonis* and the division into four elements. He is the hermaphrodite that was in the beginning, that splits into the traditional brother-sister duality and is reunited in the *conjunctio*, to appear once again at the end in the radiant form of the *lumen novam*, the stone. He is metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison and yet healing draught (Qtd. in Grossinger 228).

In Kelly, Hermes is also associated with the moon crater Autolycus. The crater lies between the "Sea of Rainstorms & the Sea of Serenity," which suggests for Kelly the dilemma of the lover caught between pain and pleasure. Hermes is a servant of the Queen, the goddess who dispenses knowledge of love and also the knowledge of loss, and he takes "love for a torment, steals / the pain of love where there is only pleasure" (FTM 93). And through the bestowals of the Queen, objects apparently worthless become treasures, like the philosopher's stone buried in the dunghill. In "Jealousy," the figure of Dante's Beatrice still arises to lead the poet once he has given up the "possessive fear" of his torments and his belief in her as his own creation, for she is "no imago / hatched by your spider self: of her / uniqueness hope one day to taste" (FTM 96). What limits the poet, Kelly implies, is his sense of property, his belief in the false boundary between the self and its world, his metaphysical greed. But the "subtle thief / cures property," asserts Kelly, and Hermes strips away the material husks of spiritual essences:

> The moon steals, Thoth steals
> Hermes your double patron is the lord of thieves,
> on his compassionate face

the smile that lifts rose from the garden,

flower-thief,

murderer of time

(FTM 94)

The Thief is also the liberator, the castrator of Chronus, murderer of time. He is also, oddly enough, the pious Joseph, who relinquishes his identity and submits to mystery. He recognizes that the Virgin is "the name of a / process, an energy moving, not an identity" (FTM 97). As guide or messenger, Hermes is also the *anima* figure. He embodies both the qualities of sulphur and mercury, and he becomes the bridge between worlds: "brick arches of the bridge, / fornex of her legs straddling the world, anima mundi silver on blue" (FTM 98).

The silver of the *anima mundi* represents the stars of the "galaktike, the milk way" (FTM 98), as the universe forms again into the body of the goddess. Alchemy associates silver with the moon. According to Rudolf Hauschka, ". . .we might call silver a dense form of moonlight. It is a substance very like the moon in its reflecting power. . . .Like a true mirror, [the moon] always turns the same side towards us" (86). But the silver stars also refer back to the silver hand of O'Neill and the unbroken circuits of the sephirothic tree. For Kelly the dual forces of *anima* and *animus* form the arch of the bridge—"the *arch* is natural / symbol of all contrary ten- / sions & the order or construct / that resolves them" (FTM 98). The identities of Hermes multiply—there is a fecund confusion of roles and mythological personae in Kelly's alchemy. If the flurry of analogies and emblems thwart logic, so much the better. In Kelly's view, only by succumbing to the snaky slough of identity can splendor be restored, the "splendor / of moon or dawn's light / on men's thick waters" (FTM 98). The hermetic dissolution of stable opposites is only a step in the restoration of splendor; as Edward Kelly writes, "The red male must be digested in union with his white wife, till both become dry—for otherwise no colours will appear. When the dry principle acts on the moist, flowers of all the colours of a Peacock's Tail begin to spring up in the Sage's vessel" (65). Or, in Charles Stein's words, the symbology of the moon is an alchemical *event,* grounded in the physical: "It is like cold water, as if my spine were a tube or column of sensitive material the moon itself poured cold water down, cooling the flesh of my body, drawing me into its moving" (125).

Throughout the long poems of *Finding the Measure,* similar alchemical processes are at work. "ANAGNOSEIS" is a cycle of gnostic poems which explores the metaphors of imprisonment and seeks a way to transcend the archons of the Demiurge. The poet would wind through the labyrinths of the brain, the "tripitaka" of "Diencephalon Cortex Medulla," to the "abyss of the Father" (FTM 113). The serpent goddess would rise up through the

watery tissue and emerge into silence "through Brahma's door" (113). There Kelly takes the path of John Dillinger's denial of images; the rapid metamorphosis of images is meant to burn them away and move to the "utter darkness in the back of the brain where the Images go to die" (Alchemist 82). That interior space Kelly calls the "Elephant's Graveyard," where resides the silence of eternity. "Follow the dying animal, learn the valley where all things perish but ivory," implores Kelly in "An Alchemical Journal," "but ivory gather the ivory" (83). And ivory is what remains after dying away from the world into the silent regions of the brain where images are washed clean and redeemed.[1]

But more characteristic, however, of Kelly's alchemy is "OPVS LEONIS" in which he returns to the erotic images of the Christian alchemical tradition. Kelly employs the symbols of castration and fecundity in a mystical *solificatio*. The phallus, "reborn / upright / in the House of Bread," corresponds to the image of the Savior (FTM 122). Christ the cornerstone is "cock the ashlar, the unmasoned stone" of Masonic mysteries (122), which Kelly symbolically equates with the "upright epsilon / on the epistyle / at Delphi" (123). The image of Christ fulfills the mythological heritage, and the poem becomes a complex series of Christian hermetic transformations revolving around a simple theme: "with this mystery / enter the interior of the earth" (123) and all things will be restored to their splendor. The initiate into this Christian mystery will reign over the "empire / of the simplest signs" (122). For Kelly the dispersals of Hermes and the scattering of Osiris' limbs are ritual acts foreshadowing Christ's Passion, but those ancient rites, wedded to Christian myth, also restore for Kelly the primacy of the goddess to Christian mysteries. As Kelly argues in a poem on Sodom and Gomorra, alchemical workings arise from the goddess:

> For the nature
> of wisdom is as woman & as water flows
> fills the crannies of earth,
> finds its level, finds its place in me, soaking
> the dry grain
> from which moisture mould or sprouting, as it happens.
> (FTM 23)

Finding the Measure seeks ultimately to nourish those gnostic seeds through the fecundity of the Goddess. In "Jealousy," Kelly tells the story of how Dante like a packrat would make off with the trinkets of his friends and how at his death his house was piled high with "worthless bright things." "But flotsam & jetsam are the queen's / by law," maintains Kelly, and through her bestowals of grace, those objects also belong to "the

queen's poet" (FTM 93). Hermes' thievery redeems the fragments of the world.

The alchemy of *Finding the Measure* is quickly surpassed by the complexity and brilliance of *Songs I-XXX*. Next to *The Loom*, Kelly's songs form his most extended alchemical text. The martyrdom of Giordano Bruno is its central alchemical motif. In their quicksilver progression of images, the poems mimic the flickering tongues of alchemical flame—images are burnt at the altar and become nearly a wall of fire in their incandescence. Kelly merges martyrdom with the dance, as if the twitch of flesh on its pyre hovers beyond each ecstatic whirl and turn. Dance and martyrdom are each metaphors for the incarnation of meaning; and Kelly's Christian alchemy hearkens back to the "Rosy+Cross." As Jed Rasula has argued of Kelly's work, ". . .Mystery is at the heart of it, the mysterium tremendum of sanctity and grace, the burden on man of making love salvation" (149). Kelly equates the alchemical transmutation of events to Christ's clearing the temple of money-changers, a cleansing that restores the primacy of love untainted by worldly commerce. As N.O. Brown cried out, the poet's task is "To redeem words out of the marketplace, out of the barking, into the silence; instead of commodities, symbols" (Love's Body 258). But *Songs I-XXX* are also a satyr's romp and a tantrist's shower of withheld semen—the way to spirit is through the flesh, and Kelly's alchemy would probe each and every orifice as a door and gate of transcendence, seeking a way out of Oedipal blind alleys.

To transcend Oedipal desire, the unity of self and its corresponding body-image must undergo a form of alchemical dissolution; the body itself becomes the *lapis*. The unity which precedes the formation of the rigid, genitalized self—the amorphous and multiphasic world of fluid exchange before the erection of psychic boundaries—can be restored through the progressive shattering of borders and divisions in a world of fragments and body parts and commingling organs. Kelly envisions a carnal New Jerusalem. His prophecy resides in the configurations of the body—"every orifice is a sybil's cave / in which informations from an alien order whisper" (Songs 74). If the artificial boundaries of the self—with its body marked by prohibitions and tattooed by guilt—can be overcome in the breaking of phallic language, erotic play would be restored. "Every hole / is Delphi," sings Kelly in one of his most ecstatic and horny moments, "each mouth takes in the sun, every / cunt gives birth to sunlight in the dark, messiah / snowheaded, blue eyes of ice" (Songs 74). Identity would be dispersed in a refusal of sublimation, and once more the paths to the universe of prophecy would be cleared.

Kelly's messianic sex might be called the priesthood of all fornicators, and, indeed, there is something disturbing about his paeans to Gnostic orality—its mystic cunnilingus and transcendent fellatio—that sees mutual

pleasure as a mystic ouroboros, the alchemical snake swallowing its own tail. In a nearly emblematic poem in *Finding the Measure,* Kelly tells of ancient Irish masons who—in a craftsman's rite—carved a vulva into the cornice stone and turned the church, or *Kell,* into a woman. Typically you find Kelly crafting icons of sexuality: getting sucked off in the kitchen and dreaming of tubas; coaxing an erection in roadside motels; hanging out with Catullus, the buggers of Sodom, and Pythagorean sex-pots; imagining himself a hummingbird in Kleopatra's bush; sniffing Beatrice's rose and straddling the *anima mundi;* ejaculating as a priest of Mithras; and jerking off in tribute to William Blake.[2] And all those crowing cocks and altars and milky breasts—it's enough to exhaust Krishna or make Don Giovanni slump in the saddle. Kelly jostles and milks the endless row of snakes in the carnal hieroglyphs of Ramses' tomb. Always for Kelly transcendence is found between the sheets; the transfigured body has carpet burns on its knees, raspberries from friction on the kitchen linoleum. The poet constantly fits his prick to the cornice stone.

Yet *Songs I-XXX,* despite its erotic, liberatory intentions, appears to be a troubled recapitulation of Oedipal anxieties—Kelly's attempt to transcend the limitations of genital sexuality serve only to restore its efficacy (indeed, the figure of Bruno may be seen as almost a transcendent phallus governing these songs). His songs show the limits of his alchemical method; they trumpet the internal dilemmas and resistances that resound throughout his entire alchemical corpus.

These songs are Kelly's experiment with what he calls the "extended lyric," and are "parts of a continuous process of finding each day's song . . ." (Songs 101). Each song moves with a kind of associational logic, as image begets image, and each possesses a surface of rapid and enigmatic transitions. Like the root system of plants, the images entwine; nodal points break off into branches that in turn couple with other points, establishing a vast dendritic network of correspondences similar to *Axon Dendron Tree.* Or, to shift metaphors, they can be seen as a series of isolated notes and disjunct melodic passages which obscures the underlying structure, much like tone-row compositions in music (in fact, Kelly cites Schoenberg's unfinished opera Moses and Aaron, perhaps identifying his debt to the composer's dissonant surfaces). A number of historical and mythical figures appear throughout the songs—Kung FuTse, Bruno, Thoth, and Biblical types from Moses to Christ—while certain themes provide a *basso continua* to the whole: the dance, the destruction of images, the nature of money, and many others. Their presentation is sporadic, incomplete, and suggestive in ways similar to, say, a Rauschenberg collage, as the poems reduce history into an elaboration of the present moment. Vast systems of knowledge and historical epoch intertwine; as in Pound's *Cantos,* all ages become contemporaneous.

In the course of the songs, Kelly embodies a poetics which considers fragmentation the true poetic measure. Nietzsche's god of grammar is rejected in favor of the paradoxical clarity of broken syntax. Kelly assaults the sentence, which he sees as mirroring a certain ontology in its form: "Nothing / clearer than fragment. / No syntax / less than all" (9). For Kelly the stability of representation—the illusion of permanence fostered by language—is the central object of alchemical dissolution. In "Song XVIII," for example, Kelly explicitly links Bruno with alchemy; his martyrdom is a fiery cleansing of words, stripping them of their literality:

> . . .root with no stem or stalk or flower .
> dissolve & find the words,
> the word's fix . "Thrown on the wall of the mind"
> Bruno's shadows of ideas, one picture
> to seize the world . in flames
> the years ago . solve the world . he said . to the crucifix
> *I will not look upon that image . the fire shapes my eyes*
>
> (Songs 57)

The principle of alchemical destruction had long been established in the songs. Bruno joins Moses, whose "pure / Lack of word" opposes the "tablet / of specific laws" as a destroyer of images, and the "rune-makers," who assert the play of images outside truth and know "words / could come before things & give comfort" (Songs 18), as a liberator of images from the natural order. For Kelly the soul seeks its essence in the sword or the *labrys,* the two-headed axe of the labyrinth, severing image from context.

For Kelly such alchemical destruction recalls the dance of Shiva and its dual nature: *tandava,* the powerful rush of violent energy, and *lasya,* the soft and lyrical expression of tenderness.[3] *Tandava* accords with the dance of fire that burns itself up in its execution, leaving nothing but a residue of silence; it is a dance that points to the void in its consummation; *"I burn the shadows / of the dancers, from Sinai I deny / the pattern of the dance, / art of the dancer.* What's left when the dance / is danced away" (Songs 20). *Tandava* is the dance of Williams' path of the death of images, while *lasya* arises from delight and forms the weave of the imagination:

> For man dances maid & the dance
> has nothing to do with it, nothing to do,
> is the consequence of their delight & not its cause
> . . . . . .
> Make
> bodies of flesh, rub the fur of the velvet

back & forth in the light,
feel the light
as power of the cloth to yield or capture
(Songs 13)

Like the bellows of the alchemical forge. Kelly's songs alternate between these two rhythms of the dance: the contractive and the expansive. In terms of Kelly's mythology, his songs move to the rhythms of the "anguished journeymen / who have no masters" (Songs 42), who conform to the arc of the sun and unite with the earth showered by the sun's divinity. An alchemical dance beyond nature and the certitudes of meaning:

Behind any light there is light behind any color there is light .
a dance. . .
of being mountains &
valleys . being earth & being each
thing that is on
[the earth & being
vulnerable as earth .
Ode
in the measure of the
[Eye of Horus
which is the resting place of those who do not rest
& the sun
struck on the flint of the horizon)
(Songs 43-44)

This song "in the mode of ♀" imagines a poetry of immediacy unencumbered by tradition, not haunted by ancestral voices. Like Thoreau, Kelly would anticipate morning herself and let the scales of history fall from his eyes.

Yet Kelly's poetry of wandering does not escape from the tyranny of the *logos,* but embodies it. Not yet embracing Hagar at her "altar of alkali," he seeks the inheritance of the father in the plenitude of light. He would assume the nakedness of Adam in the garden beyond the covenants of the patriarchs or, like the angel Enoch of kabbalistic lore, he would become one with God himself. Again the ancient struggle of Oedipus with paternity arises. The deeper the poet moves into the unconscious realm of images the more tenaciously governs the phallus.

Perhaps the most remarkable instance of Oedipal struggle is the twenty-first song, which is a meditation on the Fort Hill watchtower in

Roxbury, Massachusetts. The song reenacts primal scenes that arise in the syntactical breaks and slippages of dream-associations. Its surface is fractured—the central images of the fortress and tower are like palimpsests or mythic ciphers and Tarot trumps, and undergo a series of metamorphoses that indicate they serve only as a screen upon which to project fantasy images. Kelly's fantasy has many levels; the poem's opening lines recall the timidity of the prophet before God's injunction, as if the poet stood like a reluctant Joshua before the gates of Jericho, and also the poet's burden of creation in the primal scene of instruction. In the coalescing dream-associations, the carnal act merges with the spiritual psalm, organ-gobbling with the apostolic voice:

> Not ready lord not ready . I cant get started . blow sweet out.
> futter has a sound like an animal doing it . a church
> of the brothers & the sisters,
>
> also amen . at Roxbury
>
> (Songs 67)

For Kelly anterior images haunt the visual scene; the blow of inspiration recalls the coitus of beasts. As Kelly enters the imaginary realm of Eros, he finds—at the very origin of creation—the shadow of a more primary act.

In Kelly's song the imaginative space of the poem is eroticized. In an early song, he had already revealed his belief in the essentially sexual nature of space. Behind one's orientation to earth and sky lies a woman's body. All motion is sexual motion; all sojourns are pricking on the plain:

> . . .in crystal
> the recensions of space
>
> I see the queen . in the tower
> that is her body .
>
> map the intricate subways of her city
> chambers hidden below the rails. . .
>
> (Songs 23)

Words charting the space of dreams are to Kelly a substitute for the primacy of the mother's body. They attempt to symbolically restore a unity with the mother by exploring the labyrinth of her womb. As in Freud, dreams for Kelly symbolically reenact primal incest, returning to unity and quiescence in the manifestation of the desire for death.

Dreaming is also the hallucinating of organs—actors upon the dream stage become *phalloi* in the mother's womb, and the dream process is governed by the laws of castration. "Every coitus repeats the fall," argued N.O. Brown in his analysis of genital sexuality's ambivalence, "brings

death, birth, into the world. It is Sky descending into Mother Earth, ejaculating his powers, suffering castration. The staff that cleaves the water is the dead man's body, the corpse; the stiff that ejaculates the soul or semen is the penis. Penis or corpse, stiff as stone; a perfect erection or monument" (Love's Body 48). While a Jungian view of Kelly's twenty-first song might see the Roxbury tower as a mandala image—the city, body, and cosmos turning and turning about its axis—the tower is unmistakably an image of coitus: "it was the 18th trump / that conduit to such down starfire & bed in / earth, menstrum / fire and aer, i.e., / a green-eyed tower, mother moon" (Songs 67). Again the merger of *anima* and *animus*—the tower made feminine—too literally follows Oedipal logic to warrant any idealizations; in Freudian theory, the child, desiring the mother, yet forbidden her, enacts an imaginary coitus. The phallic image, transfixing the mind, is a sign of the primal scene—the self splits, becoming observer, father and mother, receptacle and substance, vagina and penis in the primary dream of "self as embryo in womb = penis in womb = parents in coitus, the primal scene" (Love's Body 57). Desire de-realizes the present and affirms the stranglehold of the past. Events are shadowed—*scotomized*—upon the stage of dreams.[4]

In his attempt to transcend Oedipal logic, Kelly conflates the mother and the phallus, seeking to transcend the crippling duality of gender:

> phallos & woman & seeks
> her own . (shining!) . witness [. . .]
> witness cycladic Afrodita,
> [under form of an
> unhewn stone, up-pronging, jagged,
> or Hermes' oldest hallows:
> column or quern, herm, that is
> Hermaphrodite means
> Hermes is Venus
>
> (Songs 68)

In alchemical texts, the Hermaphrodite is often central, representing a reconciliation of opposites in the restoration of unity. The hermaphroditic body symbolizes balance, exchange, a harmony of opposites. For N.O. Brown, however, it is merely the hallucinatory false unity in the violent oscillation of Oedipal logic; it attempts to "square the circle; the desire and pursuit of the whole in the form of dual unity or the combined object; the Satanic hermaphroditism of Antichrist. . ." (Love's Body 71). The alchemical squaring of the circle so integral to Jung's alchemy becomes merely a process by which the dreamer assumes both sexual positions: the father as phallus, achieving symbolic gratification of incestual desire, and the mother

as *vagina dentata,* severing the phallus in bloody copulation. The primal scene for Brown is the battle for the symbolic possession of the phallus, a bloody battleground upon which the spoils of authority are won.

In the logic of Kelly's poem, the phallus is precisely what is denied; the tower becomes a symbol of repression and prohibition. The gateway to the tower is seen as an "old iron door bolted shut, / spikes driven in the masonry to hold it closed" (Songs 69). Can one read this not only as a denial of access to the mother, but as denial of access to poetic authority, to the mastery of the father's voice? Firmly in place is the logic of castration and rebellion. Kelly establishes a mythopoetic correspondence between himself and the Egyptian god Set, dismemberer of Osiris, as well as adopting the persona of the knight wandering the plain in search of the Grail. The land is laid waste, and a ritual sacrifice is necessary to restore the land's fertility. Kelly's divided symbolic response first envisions a return to the plenitude of light and Adamic power:

> this is the point of likening, this is the world
> inside the mirror that is the mirror, the world that is the world
> but the say . of moving there . where . the light
> chooses to begin
>
> (Songs 69)

But along with this return to originary light, Kelly also flees from judgment, celebrating Cain's expulsion. And flight corresponds, I imagine, to Kelly's kabbalistic belief in the primacy of words over substance, *muthos* over *logos,* the desert over the garden:

> but the say . of moving
> is gold wire . the code spun spirals of . gold wire
> with Saturn's song . mark of Cain. . .
> fix . settle here to flee . everywhere, wander,
> shunted along the genetic warp . fix . cut loose, an identity
> thought the sun a lance . it is the gold heart of the target
>
> (Songs 70)

But even here rules Saturn, castrator of Chronos, while the origin of light remains a phallic lance. The alchemist's gold is not only the product of mercurial dissolution, but is also an image of castration—the gold plaits, the genetic warp and woof, the snaky hair of Medusa.[5] The tower becomes as well the stone phallus, frozen from the phallic mother's gaze. And in the logic of Kelly's song Medusa devours. The Egypt of Thoth and Hermes Trismegistus becomes the Egypt of Set governed by laws of castration:

& all of us killers, The
city defended from this prospect .
Black Egypt .
sisters who have one between you
mouth . mouth .
(this is classicism, rift in the aither,
ether riff
blow old white song)
in your mouth, one part between you
[all. . .
(Songs 70)

As befitting dream-work, the passage is highly overdetermined—black refers to the populace wandering the grounds, but also to Jung, who (unfortunately) saw the presence of blacks in dreams as indicating historical repression, as well as the alchemical idea of the *putrefactio,* while white is both spiritual purity and the spurting semen of ejaculation. Though the fortress soon becomes a sacred *temenos,* mirroring the "great Ocean" wound in a circle like the snake swallowing its own tail, the nodal point of the passage is the yawning mouth. Devour or be devoured, Kelly seems to imply. No trumpets of prophecy, but the old white song fellatio and the primal scene. "In corporation (introjection), seen with the inward eye, is always eating or swallowing," Brown argues. "In the primal scene a regression takes place. . .and copulation is seen as oral copulation" (Love's Body 70). In "Song XXIV," Kelly makes the equation of vagina, dream and devouring mouth even more baldly in a tapestry woven of genital nightmares: "hunters spot the electric stag but shoot into their own mouths. / we live / any dream to the end . it is a tongue we march on . lose footing up the slimy groove . double arched mouth / the Swallower / is patient" (81). Women become destructive, demonic figures in "Hieronymus' dream" where the "veins of marble turn to living serpents in the urn, hissed / the secret name of his fascinations" (82). The fascination and repulsion of the primal scene doom Kelly to the "Rocky Law of Condemnation and double Generation and Death; which makes the Loins the place of the Last Judgment" (Love's Body 49).

The rest of Kelly's twenty-first song revolves around the battlements—as Shakti dances, forming the healing "circulus mundi" with the genetic code "unraveling in her hands," and Seth's hot breath blows in from offshore (72). The poem finally ends as divided as it began. The world diminishes in strife, becoming convoluted and suffocating. In a moment of clarity born of desperation, Kelly recognizes his failure and the illusory nature of his union:

Lord Aither do you hear me,
we are not animals doing it,
. . . . . .
it was to come to a point
genital organization, or by
[gender,
or by . the generations .
it was to come to a tower .
[above the whole
world . where the enemy troops my brothers were on the
[move
against my brethren
(73)

His prayer points forward to the Civil War of *The Common Shore,* his fevered attempt to bring about symbolically the mystical body of Christ and heal the rifts caused by genital organization. But in the context of his alchemy, his songs demonstrate the flaw of his poetics—the violence of alchemy promises transcendence, but that promise falters in the numbing repetition of violence. Isolated acts of the Magi only restore the roots of sickness. Fragmentary disassociations of dream-work only reveal the tenacity of phallic power. Eros weaves illusions as surely as Vishnu. The flames of the alchemical fire can be a martyr's flames, the Mage's robes a coat of Nessus.

Notes

1 In his *Vort* interview Kelly gave the following explanation of the Elephant's Graveyard:

> If I were allowed an "is," I would say that form simply is consciousness. There is no distinguishing. Form is consciousness. That of which we are aware is form, is our form. That, the last, quotation of the ones you read, the one from "Unless I know the day," there's a dialectic, I mean two voices speaking there: find it out there, find it behind your eyes, the "your" comes in as a voice speaking to me, then four inches back of *my* eyes, i.e., the occipital region of the brain that is so mysterious, the back part of the head. At that time I was thinking of a physiological model rather than something more "spiritual." But thinking of a physiological level of the old brain and the empty spaces—those parts of the brain back here that don't answer when the electro-encephalograph knocks, when they put the electrodes all over the head and certain areas are full of activity and all kinds of waves are emitted in different states and conditions, and then there are other areas which are silent. And I connect those silent areas no doubt by a simple or Wizard-of-Oz-like mythology with what's going to be or what we're going to learn how to do. But I also perhaps even more deeply connect it with the land in which things die, the elephant's graveyard, which I once had a deep intuition of, that here is a place in us in which the images die, in which they mount up and falter to the back, almost literally going over the pons, over the bridge in the brain, back into the back & die, die there the images die. And our obsessions die there too, the hundreds of thousands of perceptions that we have every minute go there & become washed clean, and some few

of them become redeemed along the way. (135)

2 In *The Convections,* Kelly writes that Blake's Satanic Mills meant "mythologies, and ahrimanic lathing cogwheels for the heart" (64). Kelly often grapples with Blake—his presence is profound in *Axon Dendron Tree;* he's invoked at crucial junctures in *The Mill of Particulars* and *The Loom;* and "The Hand" is a long masturbatory Blakean exchange (See "Injune," Alchemist 151-159). There are also numerous other references to Blake throughout Kelly's corpus.

3 For an extended analysis of this distinction, see Heinrich Zimmer, *Indische Mythen und Symbole: Vishnu, Shiva und das Rad der Wiedergeburten,* München: Eugene Diedrichs Verlag, 1991, 168-194.

4 In *Love's Body,* Norman O. Brown writes: "Psychoanalysis ends in the recognition of the reality principle as Lucifer, the prince of darkness, the prince of this world. The reality-principle is the prince of darkness, its function is to *scotomize,* to spread darkness, walls of separation and concealment." (150).

5 I offer you Norman O. Brown's summary of castration imagery: "To be the penis of the mother with a penis; both erection and castration. The primal scene seen is Medusa's head seen: a trophy, decapitated, and still potent, the female genitals with no penis, but snakes for hair" *(Love's Body,* 65-66). Brown goes on to describe further symbolic resonances: *"Hyphen, hymen, hymn, hypnos.* The net or nexus. Networks of affiliation: the filial relation is not natural but artificial, threaded *(filum)"* (74).

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OSVALDO SANCHEZ

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

(Tr. from the Spanish by Esther Allen)

The knife splits the air in the parched afternoon. Its glint barely takes the measure of the upturned body's pure whiteness. Then a death howl. And the spurt of blood broken off in the silken incision. A salty void between ashen hills. Upright, the body refuses to die. Drenched with red, it clings to its howl, floats over young shoulders tattooed with blood.

The blood, so liquid, runs in fine streams into the basins. All the blood burning in this chalice of fire. Its seething gleam burns the grass in the shadow of the leaden clouds. The one who raises the knife stays focused in the perfect fissure of the gushing wound. The one who holds the victim smiles with the opened loins.

And in the presence of those idols, they open them alive through the breasts and they take out the heart and the entrails. *The precious water of sacrifices.* The heavenly god of water receives *the matchless gleam of blood.* And before dying, dazed by the blows, the victim's throat was cut as if they were slaughtering a lamb. . . *It is the community's equilibrium they seek to restore.*

The potency of sacrifice lies in the spectacle of physical annihilation, in the abjectness of its criminal fascination. The priest, a butcher, rolled up his sleeves and, as they were presented to him one by one, methodically put the animals to death. *Then Pilate took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.*

From this side it already smells of blood. Even this far from the strip of land that twists along one of the river's edges. The people here call it the *island.* To get to El Rosario you have to take the hanging bridge that crosses the heart of an immense mesquite tree. The mesquite is in the middle of the river. When it rains and water rushes along the hillsides of La Mixteca, the river grows, cutting off the path, until the water reaches the base of the tree's branches. The mass of water is treacherous, it drags away animals and the bosses' cars. After a torrential rain, the delta formed by the island is impossible to reach. The boys play at hitting birds with stones while on the other side old women wash out entrails on the river bank. On

days when there is a slaughter, the whole river is tinged with blood. And there are flies.

Treasure of the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

He told him fate had decreed that his son had been born on the day governed by the thunderbolt, and that it was a good day, and that his son would be a hunter and would succeed, and that he should fetch a black Guinea hen and copal as an offering to the thunderbolt and should do penance for twenty days by bathing in the river at midnight. . .

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, Here I am.

And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

During the feast of Santa María, the slaughter of *tentzos* lasts from ten to fifteen days. It used to be that more than twenty haciendas would be slaughtering, and teams of butchers and their captains would travel over all the hills of La Mixteca and the work would last as long as three months.

They sleep outside, in the open, wrapped in bloodstained mats, listening to the river's dull roar. The oldest women constantly change the radio station. Some of the old women put the entrails out to dry on clotheslines or on the thickets around the corrals; silently they come and go from the river, trying to escape the clouds of dust. The oldest woman asks for a Pepsi. The air smells like scorched fat. They may be frying some of the entrails supplied to the captain. You don't get paid with money here. You're paid with the large intestine, the hooves. . .

The vulnerability of the nomadic shepherd's life explains the symbolic relation between goats and the skies, between goats and rain. . . *And by my office as Provincial I represent to Your Majesty the sorrowful bleating of so many lost sheep.*

Sacrifice protects the entire community from its own violence, deflecting the criminal act onto victims at once similar to it and alien. Sometimes they cut themselves real bad and the boss has to take them to be looked after, so they don't bleed.

The slaughter begins around two-thirty. Nowadays the bosses don't give us time for even one prayer. In the days when there were traditions, God was always praised. Before and after. With the last blow on the backbone we all crossed ourselves. *"Ave María purísima. . ."* The boss in those days was Spanish, a very good Catholic. The one now acts like he belongs to some other religion. When you work with knives, it's good to praise God.

Since 1570, La Mixteca has been a land of flocks, as it was a land of deer before. As late as 1793 there were no Spaniards here who owned their own

land. The far regions of Oaxaca were called *republics of Indians, lands of chieftains, which the Spaniards cannot stop damaging with their ranches and goats which have nowhere to graze except on the land of the natives.* The goats changed the landscape of La Mixteca, as well as its cultural link to the land. *People of the rain,* once nomadic, like the traveller clouds.

The monastery courtyard is full of blood. *As if they painted their doorposts with blood.* Every which way is blood, on the mats, the whitewashed walls, the children's faces, the old women's skirts. From the back corral, where they cut and bleed the living goats, they bring the animal, spurting blood, its eyes wide open, to the courtyard. There, the small children, those who don't know, cut the ears and score a line from the belly to the tail. You have to know how to score the animal, because the bosses get mad if the leather is cut. Those who know how scrape the legs or skin the animal. Here in El Rosario many women score and skin. After that, the animal is quartered with a machete; the head, shoulder, rack, and loins are severed, and then others take out the intestines and pick off whatever meat there is. The women and children take any meat they find there outside to the *chiteros,* who cut the meat into *chitos* or strips in preparation for salting. The *chiteros* work with knives, and some of their knives are very old with bone handles that have been elaborately carved. The *chiteros* don't want to know anything about what happens back in the corral.

And they prayed to their gods imitating the bleating of a ewe.

To put it bluntly, we *chiteros* are not murderers. And you saw back there how they're cutting them. *It is a crime to kill the victim because the victim is sacred. . .but it would not be sacred unless it were killed.*

At the beginning of May the chief shepherd passes through here and goes as far as the Costa Chica, buying goats. He shows up, says *give me so many* and pays. On the coast they're very cheap, but not here, here it doesn't work out. They bring them in from there and give them to the shepherds at the foot of the hill so they can purge them, give them medicine, and fatten them.

This ram has not been taken from his flock and brought to this place to be offered in sacrifice either to the brave warrior or to the peaceable man or because of the disease that has struck the people; it was brought here so that the Prince may swear by this animal his fidelity to the King.

In the puddles of blood, the clouds look like black stones. The air smells of salt but there are no vultures. You can still see a dead dog or two drifting in the river's current. They poison them and throw them in the river for the birds to peck at. That's why no vulture survives the slaughter, and in the sky you see only clouds, dense as stones over the puddles of blood.

Freud doesn't dream but he dreams that neither do the slaughterers. *In the courtyard of the ceremonial center the finest flower of the aristocracy was decimated.*

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and beheld behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. The sacrifice and dismemberment of the victim symbolizes the punishment that will fall on the man who breaks the pact of fidelity. It is the force of sacred blood.

The butchers' wives are not the only women who look forward to the bloodletting. The oldest women come from town wrapped in shawls, carrying buckets. They know the blood from the slaughter is given away and that it's fresh. They arrive two hours before and sit down to look at the goats which look back at them, absorbed, almost tranquil. They await the hour of the slaughter. Some of the old women like to drink the blood while it's still warm and tilt the basins to their mouths in the shelter of the sheds. Afterwards, with their heads uncovered, they smile: their thin lips stained a dull pink.

You must know that with my death I must purchase your lives, and that you must serve my sons and the sons of my sons, and that my royal blood must be repaid with your own, said the goat.

They took the slaves, now dead, and carried them to their houses, going with the gods who were lords of the feast and on arriving they themselves dressed and seasoned the body they called "the cleansed one" and so they cooked it. The persons who are present at the ceremony later eat the meat of the goat. *Sacrifice is violence without the risk of vengeance.*

The image of the Divine Shepherd: extension of Hermes Kriophoros.

They called it dancing the goat. In the time of my father, who was also a slaughterer. Before the slaughter began, they would take the best animal and put a crown and garlands on it. A young boy climbed onto the goat's back, the prettiest ornament. The music began. The teams of slaughterers formed a procession, followed by the musicians. They danced to the music of flutes, bugles, tambourines, and horns. Four men held the goat overhead with the boy bouncing on its back. Behind them everyone formed a single line. After that a Passion song began, very sad. The Lord's passion. And no one danced any more and then the women began to weep from sadness, like they do during a wake and when they take a dead body to the graveyard. That was the custom.

Long live Christ, my King. . .

Along with all those of his house he entered the room where the boy had died, and in the place where he died he had them put a fire and he burned the copal, and cutting the throat of the Guinea hen, he sprinkled the entire place with its blood, offering this sacrifice to the God of hell to keep disease and death from returning to that house.

They say that the meat and the cracklings go to Tehuacán and the skins to Mexico City. All that is left here is what's needed for the goat loin mole, the *tzincácash,* which is expensive. The kids that are raised here are for barbecue. They also make goat's feet with beans. But there are hardly any

slaughters now, they don't sell as much any more. That's why some days they kill forty and others a hundred and twenty. It's done in October because that's when the animals are fat; they eat only good leaves and don't drink water, except when a bishop's cap cactus is split open for them and they drink from there. Nowadays the weather changes a lot and it rains too early and the animals get sick from eating young grass. The slaughter has nothing to do with Days of the Dead. They offer *tentzómoli* or goat mole to dead children, but it isn't made with meat from the slaughter.

And at the foot of the oak tree of Mamré, in El Terebinto, they cut a goat's throat to honor the patriarch. And they open an incision in its neck with strange quickness. And in that same way they sacrificed the nobles and the captives. It was a sign of submission and homage. *The royalty of a dish of mole.*

And you go to the Temples of the Fathers and you go also to the mountain where you had other gods, to whom, while sacrificing the finest animals and scattering their blood, you sing the Lord's Passion and you set candles in the river, as if it were the Catholic estate of our eternal Father and Pastor.

Goat in mole

All the chiles are roasted, taking care not to roast them too much, then the veins and seeds are removed and they are rinsed five times and left to dry with a little salt, and then ground up with almonds, sesame, and garlic and fried with all the spices, and mixed with tomato that has been roasted and strained. The loin of a freshly slaughtered goat, cut into pieces, along with chocolate, salt, and sugar to taste is added, as well as the broth in which the loin was cooked, and the mixture is left to simmer until the mole reaches the right thickness. This victim is a very sacred thing.

The priest will present the victim on the altar, pull off its head, burn it on the alter, and squeeze out its blood onto the walls. All to elude so much latent violence.

The victim's meat will be eaten the same day, without leaving anything for the next. The price of goat loin mole is about 30,000 pesos. It's not much of a business any more, but no one wonders when the slaughter at El Rosario will come to an end. They are, among all the animals, the most human, you should hear them moan when the knife opens them. The bosses are old already and don't know how to do anything else. The young men live in Mexico City and only come down for short visits.

Tragic inspiration erases fictitious differences in reciprocal violence.

In La Mixteca, where there is no justice, not even God's, where all of us lie unburied in the blind silence of vengeance. *Do not eat anything besides the blood.*

The *chitos* are covered with rock salt and laid out on the bloody mats to dry. They form a red stain, like a dark, deep, diseased wound on the muddy earth of the corrals. The skins are stretched out to dry on the grass. On the clotheslines, the intestines, thoroughly washed, and the bellies, which are used to make wineskins. Everything opened by the knife, face up under the parched sky. The wind, too, smells of blood.

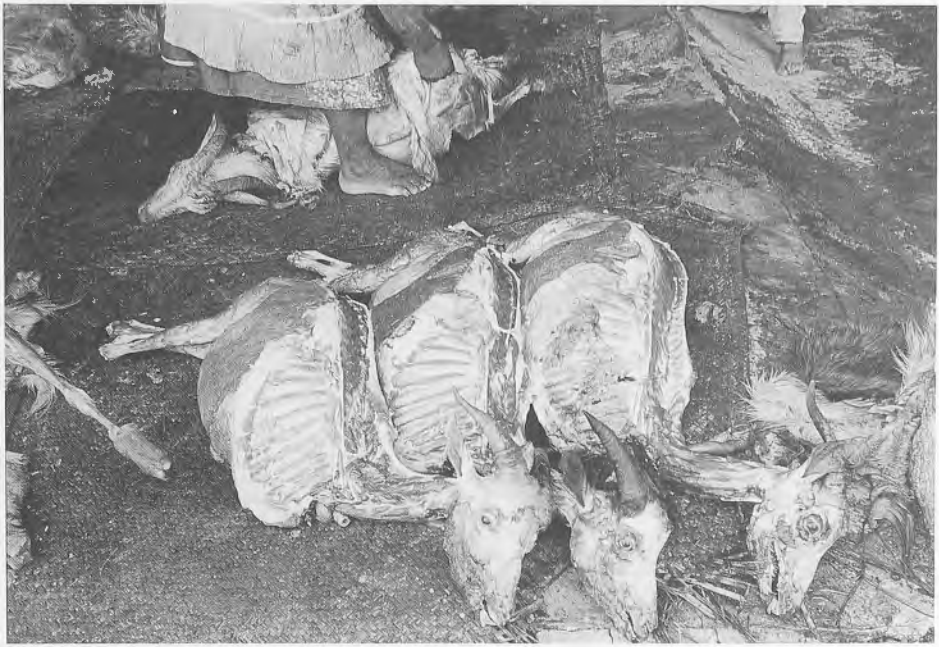
Like criminals, like gods. In the name of the Father. He lay on his side, face to the wall. And the wall was covered with blood. *Under the celestial protection of the Lamb of God.*

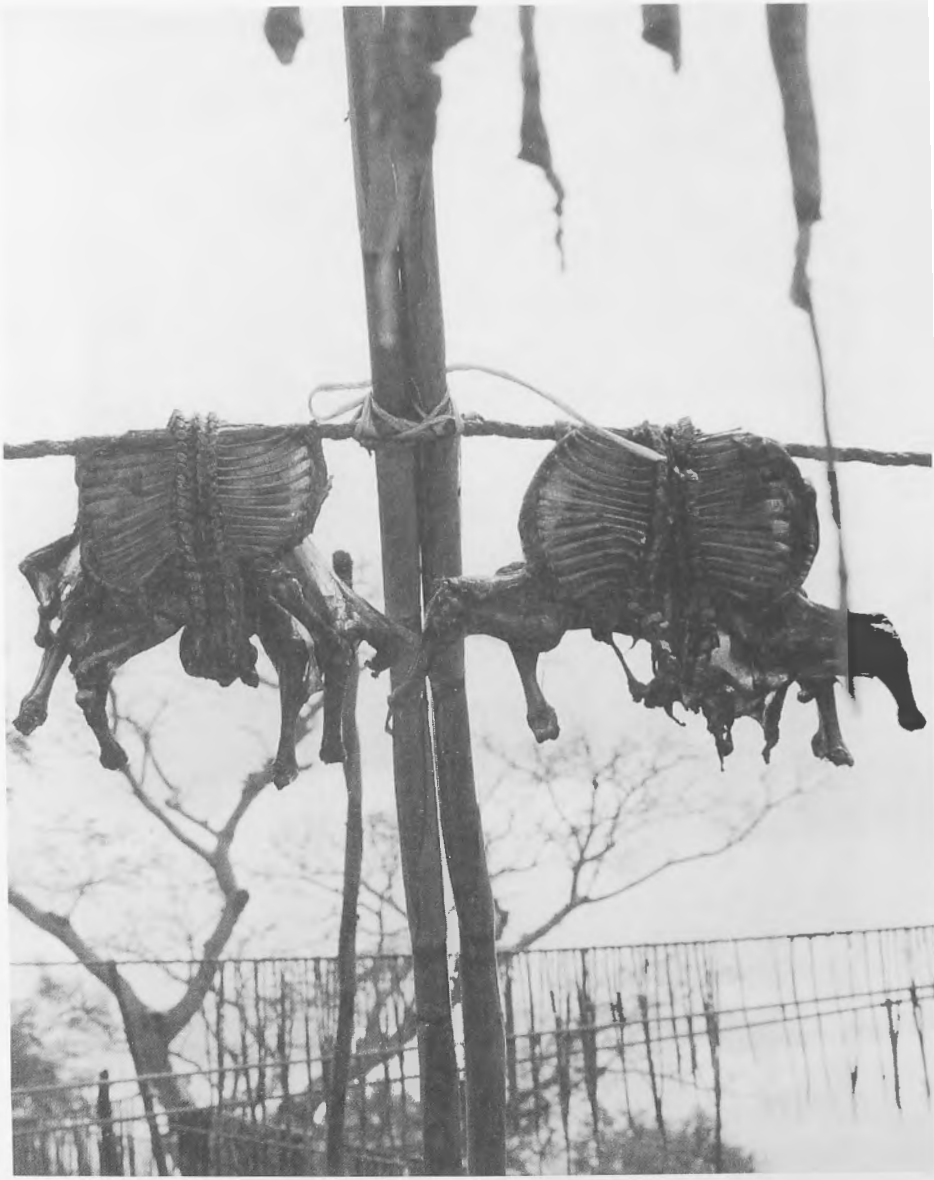
This is what some of us have seen, and those who have seen it say it is the most frightful and harrowing sight to have ever been seen.

After: G. de Balsalobre, T. Capote, M. Camargnani, J.G. Frazer, J.-A. Gay, R. Girard, Y. González Torres, D. de Hevia y Valdés, J. Kristeva, V. Reifler, O. Sánchez.

GRACIELA ITURBIDE

EIGHT PHOTOGRAPHS





ROBERTO TEJADA

GRACIELA ITURBIDE AND LA MATANZA

For the past twenty years, Graciela Iturbide (Mexico City, 1942) has explored ways of extending the scope of "humanist photojournalism" or documentary photography as historically practiced by Robert Capa, Tina Modotti, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Edward Weston, Helen Levitt and Manuel Alvarez Bravo—to name only a few of those in whose work Mexico becomes an object of study. In this search, Graciela Iturbide's signature treatment resembles something closer to what James Clifford in *The Predicament of Culture* has christened "ethnographic surrealism"—an activity and disposition that "delights in cultural impurities and disturbing syncretisms."

A 1980 photo entitled *Mujer ángel* is a case in point. Frequently reproduced, today that image has single-handedly come to stand as an emblem and reminder of the (at times) creative cultural miscegenation that, in the accelerated modernity of the last few decades, can be seen throughout much of rural and indigenous Mexico: in it, a woman seems to scurry away from the viewer on the stone ridge of a mountain overlooking an expanse of the Sonoran desert. The indigenous woman, seemingly veiled by her own waist-long hair, catches her balance on a boulder with her left hand—as she clutches a portable radio/cassette player in her right.

Iturbide's reputation as a documentary photographer came into its own in the late 1980s with her superb descriptions of the daily life, festivities, work, leisure time and sexual sensibility of the matriarchal society of Juchitán, a Oaxacan fishing village on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (*Juchitán de las mujeres,* with an accompanying text by writer Elena Poniatowska, Ediciones Toledo, 1989). As opposed to the dreamy, "timeless" passivity of the sleeping female figure portrayed in Cartier-Bresson's *Juchitán* (1934), the women in Graciela Iturbide's photographs do not belong to some nostalgic Eden as imagined by a melancholic modernity, but to a very real and living present: many of the women and transvestite men photographed in that series seem to be highly aware of themselves as "subjects." These mock-hieratic straight-on full-length depictions in an "informed" mirror register how the photographer deliberately

works against the elegance of exploited or objective chance by undermining the ethnographic "authority" of her camera—indeed, most of the subjects seem to have clearly collaborated with the photographer in how they wished to "be represented."

In addition to her account of Juchitán, and parallel to work she has undertaken in places abroad (Chile, Panama, Madagascar, East Los Angeles), Graciela Iturbide has spent extensive time in other significant regions of the country (Chalma, Michoacán, Tabasco, Yucatán) involved in a self-conscious narrative through which, as participant observer, she has been rendering certain images as parts of an elusive whole. An underlying theme of her work, in fact, has been to articulate the ways in which a metonym like "Mexico" is only meaningful when understood as the intricate combination of cultural practices—expressed as visual systems and in opposition to all national(ist) or demagogic uses thereof.

Now, in a series begun in 1992, Graciela Iturbide has turned her attention to the *matanza* (bloodshed), a commercial slaughter of goats which takes place each year in Huajuápan de León, in the northern Sierra Mixteca of Oaxaca. Generally following the rainy season, from late September to early November, the Mixtecs that live in the Alta Mixteca come down to sell their goats at the Huajuápan stockyard, where the animals are collectively slaughtered and butchered—the meat later sold to markets in the state capitals of Puebla and Oaxaca. Others are hired to carry out the even less idyllic tasks. Most receive no pay except for the intestines they hang to dry and which they will use, at most, to season pots of cooked beans.

In addition to the gruesome event registered—the images rely on a "style" of minimal effects and are nearly devoid of any "interference" on the part of the photographer—the formal accomplishment of these photographs resides in how they struggle against mystifying the matter at hand. (Though "ritual" and "rite" are remotely implied, it is rather the painstaking aspect of work and the coherence of the collective or family structure that are underlined.) The seasonal animal economy is also rendered by the photographer in several "abstract" formal studies reminding us of a conspicuous element underscoring Sierra Mixteca reality. Perhaps this is why the image of hands, especially those of women, are subtly privileged in these photographs—as central motive or as a "dissonance" surrounding the frame. For Iturbide, hands point to a vital force, but they also serve as testimony to the means by which labor, creation, destruction and sustenance are made possible and renewed.

Mexico is a site whose cultural facts have been historically determined by a highly complex weft whereby ideas of miscegenation and "the indigenous" have served as both founding myth and official rhetoric of its

modern State. Graciela Iturbide's photographs are particularly powerful because they are extremely alert as to the highly ambivalent relationships which emerge when regarding those present-day cultures that, to a large extent, legitimate—in both Mexican politics and art—certain dominant unifying notions about the "authenticity" of Mexico's "national character."

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HORACIO COSTA

THE BOY AND THE PILLOW

(Tr. from the Portuguese by M.B. Jordan, Clayton Eshleman and the Author)

For Manuel

Dentro desse cosmorama
há um menino acordado.
O resto projeta sombras:
Geometria. Geometria.

Jorge de Lima,
"Invenção de Orfeu"

(. . .) But your eyes proclaim
That everything is surface. The
[surface is what's there
And nothing can exist except
[what's there.

John Ashbery, "Self Portrait in a
Convex Mirror"

His jaw set, the boy
curiously observes the singular landscape
which abides in the linen:
in the orography of the pillow,
whose embroidery outlines
the sides of immobile triangles,
flowers or fruits
at regular intervals,
a summer garden or plowed fields,

perhaps berries, perhaps cherries,
or diminutive wild roses;
white parabolas made blue and shadowed
by reflections of afternoon.
Lazily, fascinated and held
by this minimal flora,
his head is sunk in it
like an animal's in moss:
if he were to move it slightly
even a few inches,
he would perceive what follows
in the dream vigil he keeps:
the boy knows, despite being a child,
that what has shape has a name
and what has a name, comforts.
Suspended, the digression ends
with the baptism of the thing;
before any question rises, the strong spell is broken
with the passive certainty of the narration:
although the roily and agile light dawns
and on the horizon
a day buds among shapes,
the earth half-seen through the porthole
is not the same, not for an instant,
as that which confronts us upon docking
in a dark port for the first time.
In the transit between noun and object,
living its imprecision,
the thing is always itself:
initiate, beyond language,
as a dock which invades the night,
the sensation persists in its oneness.
He does not stir, nor does he move his eyes:
the boy simply enjoys the landscape
and by doing so, inhabits it completely.
White triangles, repeated
in parabolic sequences,
Serras do Mar of the linen,
burn his pupils with their brilliance:

to his sight, they are abysses and fixed clouds,
which, like an inscrutable text,
are stained by the shimmering pigments.
Embroiderers, careful or careless,
machines or hands, cross-stitch and colors,
might have created the pillow's history:
a few added battles might have given it meaning,
a profile of candor and pride
which the intellect requires
from the multifold reality,
if a few heroes or events
more verisimilar than true
would have fixed it beyond deeds.
Life demands definitions
to convince itself that it progresses:
to the conqueror, the chamber full of gold,
the feathered cloaks reflected in it,
are not enough in themselves;
his mission is not complete
without the possession of mines and mercury
which the silversmith requires to engrave his sword,
without the excess of the chronicle
on the sharpness of his Excalibur.

Or, perhaps, these eyes see no more
than the delicate length of cloth:
millimetrical, the threads cut
at approximate right angles,
in braids which multiply themselves,
in enigma-lacking labyrinths;
focused on its apparent two-dimensionality,
the landscape at this distance imitates
the eloquent plasticity of the microscope
a birthday present, received a few days ago.
With no specificity,
with no visible history,
uniform, nameless chasms,
white or in color, follow one another,
geometrical and expressionless

like the octagonal eyes
of flies massacred with disgust,
for a child's pleasure
and the enticements of science.
Knowledge requires the creation of theatres;
a voracious medusa, it sets up scenes
with whatever its lure captures.
It lifts up the spectacle of the aquatic fauna
reposing in the bottom of trenches
to torture and exterminate them
with its pitiless oxygen.
In full daylight the pouches
of a different silence consume themselves
in order to defend us from the greater silence
that always lies in ambush,
the mute flower of anguish.
If the child sees nothing more
than a meaningless texture
which as matter approaches the void
that only the microscope's lenses see,
which is just linen
without any other meaning,
he sees seeing.
The boy sees in a pure state,
he only sees, nothing more,
and out of the ordinary colors he makes no landscapes,
he doesn't reduce the plants to gardens or orchards,
now that the night falls
over the delicate mountain range of linen,
above whose canyons,
unmistakably,
the moon rises.
And in the night the boy keeps
his eyes wide open and unfocused:
his father died in July, this past July.
The parallels and meridians
correspond to the parquet lines
of a room which no one enters:
the moonlight advances micron by micron,

it senses the estuary plain
and the ocean shore
close by the feet of the desk,
which imprint the carpet with swirls.
The night spins the Chinese jar
in circles around its axis;
the pennants of football teams,
fifteen or sixteen
satin isosceles,
billow upon the wall
in their will toward mobility.
From far off, the bedclothes rise up,
pale and occupied by the beings
which have taken them over.
Through the Venetian blinds
São Paulo filters itself
and the waves of being
emitted by the aerial city, enter:
faces pass by,
gestures are made,
a poem unfolds in phosphorous,
luminescences which the child,
immobile, does not recognize.
To see the invisible, one must keep
spine alert and body rigid
—rigid, not expectant—;
one must fix upon only what is white,
where larval history glimmers.
What occurs are not words
but quick and sleepless images
whose syntax has been ravished:
images not heaped or as invaders,
but in movement and juxtaposition,
hesitating between two worlds;
neither real nor unreal,
polar and excluding categories;
had they been real, they'd be even subtler:
in a timeless day,
thanks to time, in quietness,

in ripeness which one day comes,
perhaps they'd come to light;
if it were not for a moment,
but rather for eternity
their destiny imaginary,
they would be real.
Balanced between interpretation and oblivion,
balanced between nothing and name—
neither aquelarre not alcácer-quíbires
nor as a great episode of Universal History,
without which, through want of memory,
whole peoples feel they wither,
without which Rome is not founded
on the margins of the Tiber,
Lisbon is not called Ulyssipolis,
Mexico does not materialize
in an eagle devouring
a serpent upon a cactus,
and the third and last Rome
would not be Moscow—,
more humble avatars,
apparitions enter
according to their own order,
founders or participants
in a city without founding myths
except the belief in its own existence
beyond all that, in the substantial world.
They enter without turmoil, rather as lullabies,
as keepers and products of childhood's music,
seduced and harmonized by it,
that the dead father, a present absence,
the key to the abstracted score,
cannot occlude, but rather reinforces.

Bueno, a goodman,
a New Christian from Andalusía,
embarked at Cádiz for the Brazils.
He is called Bartholomew by the common folk
who in Seville borrow his money,

dealt out in diners, crusados, doubloons,
marks, florins and maravedíes,
in a narrow store hidden in the Medina;
his real name is only whispered
on Saturdays in front of the Torah
before uncles and grandfathers;
no one knows it any longer
and it is now buried.
Some brave man, debt-ridden,
denounces him to the Inquisition;
the passage is extortionate
and the route unknowable,
but having left Sagres no return is possible.
Shield and challenge, the great sea
vanishes in familiar names,
Madeira, Cape Verde, Hesperides,
which distance one from the other.
Mornings, on the upper deck,
he frees himself from the fear that the wind,
warmer and warmer everyday, incites in him:
his bearded face is brushed by the breath of the monster
which held Jonah prisoner an entire lifetime.
In the belly of the lateen sails
crosses bleed like animals at sunset:
they extend obligatory protection like compasses
to the converted infidel.
When he fearfully observes the sea
and the full-rigged vessel writhes
in the tradewinds like a cetacean,
the drops which wet his chest
dry into constellations of salt:
unknown, capricious star forms
of a new hemisphere which carry him
farther and farther from Europe.
The angelus rosary teaches him
islands of an unknown archipelago:
beads not of faith but of self-defense
in a universe whose new map
the unskilled fingertips

recognize as circular.
In the infancy of our perception,
we wear our senses as masks
to cover what has no meaning;
if the inevitable seduces us,
we wander the world without thinking on our feet;
man lives the road
and swims all beaches,
he is and is not in the wilderness
whose welcome he senses
and death, when it approaches,
will know well where to find him.
An opaque principle which only illuminates,
dispersion recovers the whole
which the blinding light makes us see compactly
and whose appearance tries to hide
under the clear veils of the moment:
matter travels to its certain end
and, a relatively scant consolation,
the total sum of what was and of what could have been,
not completely gone but still evanescent,
will remain as a residue in the thin air.
With his head sunk in the pillow,
alert to the air, brimming to receive,
only thus can the animation of history
that the moonlight brings to the boy
be established little by little:
finitude, empirical as physical pain
or baby teeth, already lost,
is a truth which in wakefulness
he never ceases to experience.

He goes toward the obscure part of the Empire,
whose fabulation begins to take on words
and which is ignorant of all precepts,
where the soldiers sons of Loyola
dedicated their College not long ago,
walls of adobe and mortar
and roofs of straw plaited

by the hands of five or six converts:
fibres, inflected sentences
whose vegetable declensions
the missionaries' Latin grammar omits;
to the labours in the open field
they propose a uterine adoration of the altar:
for reason which claims for itself
a triumphant dissipation,
a catechism must be imposed
wherever in the world there are gentiles
who, on the hills or close to the beaches,
feel that they are ancestral appanages of resisting gods.
Either history is subjective
and adheres to the body, not like a leech,
but like the bloody skin of an animal,
flesh which foresees the leap,
or it trivializes itself in fatuity
and overflows only in deeds
and the past—cold and distant,
hemlock or lavender,
orchid or thistle
of a present which needs it
only to explain it, not to explain itself—
makes strange masks shake:
at the banks of the river of indifference
through whose waters we navigate,
faces peer out which are not ours,
which have nothing to do with us,
and from a sketch to a skeleton of a sketch
venture is lost in adventures
which the galloons of prelates and princes,
captains general and revolutionary leaders
are the sole protagonists.
Taken as an alien discourse,
as vestments, uniforms, liveries,
the past withholds itself
in an impenetrable stretch of jungle:
desire becomes as useless as a machete
and the deforesting agent as futile

as the project of colonization.
With its ever-changing face,
petals scarcely opened by poetry,
the past observes, quiescent, within a plain
which offers itself to adult perception:
in the indefinite corolla,
wild rose, cherry blossom,
the void and the ancestors live,
as well as the raw leather jackets
which for generations protected them
from cold and damp.

Having explored several bays
and measured Santa Cruz from the northeast,
the vessel anchors in São Vicente:
a square, a market,
four whitewashed houses
and a single-story monastery,
sheltered in the curve of the beach
as sensual as a guaraní.
The Serra, bottle green from a distance,
gives the measure of the extension:
continuous, not irregular,
mellifluous in its disdainful
monotony;
a carpet which sways hostilely
outside the Ptolemaic world,
rippling beyond imagination.
The poet refuses to conquer
and wanders through persistent memory:
in the ache of naming he affirms his route;
between words, not between islands,
he finds the coveted atlases
and the portolanos and astrolabes
are his mobile sensations;
instead of a gleaming room of booty,
he prefers the gold in river sediment,
the mercury within the rock,
a living quetzal in the grove

singing pure splendor;
a silversmith of his own exile,
he fashions the edge of his sword
from the material of his skin.
And Bartholomew Bueno,
whose goals are to protect himself
and, to a lesser degree, his faith, to multiply
on the globe where constriction
would be most bearable,
disembarks with a false-bottomed chest
in which are nested two old, small and battered
seven-branched Mozarabic candelabra
and a pound of silver brought from Cochin
and minted in Portugal
with heraldic embellishments;
in his hands he carries the tools
of the master-carpenter's trade,
—plane, square, ruler, level—
with which he scoffs at the Crown's inspections;
not stumbling, but starving,
he begs food from those who arrived first.
The ungrateful and lasting membrane
which contains the yolk of the West
fertilized with the twin embryos
of norm and transgression,
differs below the Equator:
in the albumin of a new land
sin and power change signs
and a smaller number of arrows
will have for a target the stranger
who, dealing with the Indians
on a cot as well as on a balcony,
will adapt more rapidly to circumstances.
If the isolation reforms privileges,
liberty is one hundred leagues ahead,
always a hundred leagues,
a hundred leagues more
—of the smooth waters of a desideratum
the imagination drinks daily—

and at thirty, at only thirty
from the trimmed and docile seacoast,
in the fields of Piratininga,
where several muddy rivers converge
whose waters still maintain
a moderate European scale,
backed against a brook
that space ignores today
and at a prudent middle distance
between the College and the Abbey,
the fugitive Sevillan thought
he had finally found his own.
In the Rua Direita,
with the connivance of the powerful,
he undoubtedly practiced usury:
first he, and afterward his progeny
who had cattle, had haciendas
and only in the beginning Judaized
—until one day they no longer knew
which of the gods, Jehovah or Christ,
they ought to thank for the fortunate chance
of having been Bartholomew Bueno,
with the curls of his lustrous beard
and the engraved buckle of his belt
disguising his belly of a fat Messiah,
despite his plane and level,
the oldest of the moneylenders
who landed in the Colony.

The way in
is never the same if we repeat it:
when we follow it, without our realizing it,
we move the intermittent veil
which covers the effigy of senescence
and it is rather the terror of repetition
than the challenge of the first time
which feeds the meager diet of gregariousness
with its enzymes,
even if we expose ourselves to the thorns

with which a preacher threatens us
with excessive zeal and raised index;
that is the reason, and the only reason,
Bartholomew never again saw the sea
and he retains inside his closed eyelids
the colors which embroider the Serra:
epiphytes, bromeliads,
luscious green succulents,
mosses and ferns
which carpet the monoliths
down which the waterfalls pour and clouds sweat.
When he seeks sleep, he evokes
not only the walls of Seville
and the curves of the Guadalquivir,
not only the great journey
to the other side of everything,
but also he evokes the rise,
which at times seemed interminable to him,
abysses, whirlpools, defiles
which the tattered mist closed off
and only the feet of the Indian guide,
small, half-naked, wet,
knew how to step deftly:
there below, the sea, each time smaller,
each time milkier within the haze
of its slow breathing,
confusing itself with the earth's vapor
and disappearing little by little
—a whitish surface
of undefined shapes,
like ironed bed linen
when someone surrenders to it
and, steadily, sees from the corner of his eye—

The image with which the last glance
is associated, is the one
which struggles to navigate unharmed;
the universe is a statue of salt
a man senses on a threshold

when looking over his shoulder;
an invariable image, an abstract flower,
it gives off a high-contrast light
emanating an indistinct aroma
which makes it prone yet averse to contact.
Crystal also parchment
a hieroglyphic glance,
it extends over the landscape that it magnetizes
the invisible thread which the Parcas use
as material for weaving,
braided wool, cotton, linen,
backing their embroideries:
it travels alone through the becoming
like a fountain of drama
and a hidden sign of identity.
A glance engraved on memory,
an impalpable link among molecules
in the chain of proteins and acids,
present and absent
between the past and the poem,
it transcends the precise time
defining a feeble generation:
for that reason, not being mythic,
it is symbolic;
thanks to this decisive glance,
the boy, without knowing it,
is a complete American;
a world was left at the height of the Serra;
ahead, hospitable or dangerous,
a continent spread out.

Now, at ease at last,
as he relaxes the jaw
that had condemned him to prognathism,
he moves his eyes and head
over all the insubstantial figures
parading through his room
—pennants, clothes, blankets,
carpet, desk, shadows—

in which the moonlight celebrated the night
—a captive, like a number of bacchantes,
of a phantasmagorical festivity—
the diffuse image of the mountain range of linen
which inhabits the pillow
in miniature,
is the one that he, saddened,
who does not lack for the legends
his mother has been telling him
from his earliest years
—neither real nor unreal,
but capable of providing themes
which will enlarge the spectra of his existence—
will hold on his retina, for decades.

And after that the boy sleeps
and all around him the city wakes.

Mexico City, 11-14 November 1989; April 1992

Author's Note

The first time I read "The Boy and The Pillow" aloud was in Lisbon in 1993, in a cycle of poetry readings organized by the foundation "Casa de Fronteira." After my reading, a member of the audience asked me one of the traditional questions a poet is supposed to expect on such occasions: how did you write the poem? How did you get the idea of it? To my surprise, my explanation didn't seem adequate to the man asking the question, nor to the audience at large. When I said the poem had come to me nine months after a massage session, in which the masseur insisted, to my distress, in massaging my jaw, everybody felt somewhat uneasy. When the reading was over, an elderly Portuguese surrealist came up to me and said he considered my answer completely "surreal." Well then so be it, I thought.

Nonetheless, in my answer I was close to the truth. I tend to think "The Boy and The Pillow" lived for decades in my body—more precisely, in my jaw—before it was written. I made no resistance to the masseur's handling of my body, with the sole exception of my jaw. I didn't know I had such a problem so close to my brain, so close to my conscience.

The masseur kept touching my jaw and I would slap at him over and over, in an automatic reaction. But luckily he insisted in "deobstructing" it, as he said later. As he did his job, I stared at the pillow, and that trite pillow all of a sudden became meaningful. After a few days I noticed I kept going mentally to that pillow. Its image became a support for my memory's explorations. For over nine months, I had the surface of that pillow waving in my retinas: one morning I sat down and wrote its history.

The history of the pillow is twofold. First, it is based on deeds. It refers to my mother's family story, which started in the early days of São Paulo. However, the pillow's history differs from the "official" story of the Bueno family. For generations, a romantic version of its historical role has been reconstructed with the aim of ennobling it as a social group. Thus a

quite "sublime" version of its origins was written, befitting a "noble" European ancestry. In contrast, the history of the pillow tells the story of a Jewish man converted to Catholicism fleeing Iberian intolerance, a man who decided to escape to the New World.

São Paulo is located on a plateau a few miles from the coast, but is separated from the sea by a very steep mountain range, the "Serra do Mar," which is completely covered by lush, rainforest vegetation. After the battle of Alcácer Quíbir (1578), due to which Portugal lost its independence to Spain, São Paulo became the door to the occupation of the South American hinterland, which today is part of western Brazil. Those fleeing Jews became the financing intelligence for this enterprise. The Buenos were good at it; many generations ago, before they turned poor again, they decided they had never been Jews and carved out some better explanations for their wealth.

So much for the historical-factual layers of the poem. The second story of the pillow relates solely to some of my own subjective preoccupations. What precisely does it mean, to inherit something? Behind our visible genetic inheritance, our bodies, the shapes of our noses or the colors of our skins, what precisely do we inherit? Could we inherit a color, a proclivity to a world-view, a way of looking at things? Perchance, could we inherit a glance, like the one Bartholomew Bueno could have had on the top of the Serra do Mar?

Of course, all that can be attributed to an otiose exercise of an equally otiose imagination. Nonetheless, what do we know about our genes, really?

A poet can only explore this slippery surface, he or she can never name it completely. José Saramajo, the Portuguese novelist who wrote the Prologue to the Brazilian edition of "The Boy and The Pillow," says that "the reader cannot repeat the route of the poem; the poet cannot reconstitute it: the reader will interrogate the poem already done, the poet can only renounce knowing how he has done it."

But the poet explores, and the poem is the result of his or her endeavors. And maybe the poet must start by exploring his or her own jaw.

H.C. São Paulo, January 7, 1995

MARJORIE WELISH

THREE POEMS

PREFACE

Underneath quarrel
lies racecourse.

Estates throughout and unmarked and reached by no crossing
in purgatory: an expression of an unmarked state.

To make it adequate, okay, not more than once,
less than one is to mark naught.

Naught else but naught ventilating
height and not more than this factura.

Width of something. . .yet less than two, severely unwritten.
Several erasures greater than one unwreathe it,

it unwritten umpteen tempting times in splashes
canceled through severance,

canceled through cat yet compensatorily tempting
naught cat throughout crossing, minus one

canceling stamp. Several of them unwreathe it yet
with date and time not hitherto in contract.

NEW PREFACE BY AUTHOR

Underneath quarrel lies space
audited in cockpit.

Estates throughout and unmarked and reached by no crossing
in purgatory, an expression of an unmarked state

adjacent to valise. Naught ventilating
aggravated ivy where adequate.

Visa in purgatory okay not more than once,
less than one is to mark naught

minus valise. Naught else of the proleptic
and not more than this factura.

Valise greater than one yet less than two, severely unwritten
several erasures greater than one unwreathe it.

It unwritten umpteen tempting times in splashes
canceled through virulent delta

canceled through cat yet compensatorily tempting
naught cat throughout crossing, and no inverse

alternating current. Several of them unwreathe it yet.
Arithmetic everywhere, everywhere we find arithmetic.

COLLABORATING WITH MATERIALS

1
copy, move, delete; ventilate, waltz, drench, mention, gesticulate
stapler, page, ream, work, envelope; word, sentence; subtext
foot, wrist; through, across, beyond, beneath, upon, underneath

Underneath sentence, breath deletes self-addressed stamped
[envelope.
Apparatus, valorous though it may be, does not ventilate word.
Surplus of white structuring element beneath surface is
[asparagus.
Flush asparagus with sponge. Tap water flush left.

Insert brick in life.
Insert syllable in life, black ink only.
Immerse book in ink-flushed syllables, ink-fleshed syllables.
Borrow terminology from rainwear.

Delete mercantile subtext in the insurers phrase "earthquake
[resistant."
Multidimensional thunderstorm finds off-putting
beauty in paperback.
Underneath book is lack proportional to longish brick,

Euphemistically-surfaced tablets mention sentences, surplus of
[vacuous credentials.
Dusk-surfaced tablets immerse angel.
Mention "angle-irons" and the chill assumed in the box.
Disciplinarians fasten many if not most syllables to the table.

2
Perspiring star
that comes to rest, is understood as coming to rest
on the surface of space, stapler gesticulating

wrist erased, reappearing in subterranean mention.
Ream somewhere must reckon with afterthoughts
of perspiring star

of perspiring star rooted in page
prior lives rerouted eccentrically throughout the apparatus
in consequence of afterthoughts, in which the last sentence is the
[same as the first.

The teacher of Alexander permitted it.
We remember the stapler ventilating the text, which we erase
even as apparatus explains it, stratospherically.

The work was then signed pseudonymously. If our star is
perspiring, it is owing to the bricks just drenched with breath
[and word.
Necessarily valorous subtext

says joy from drenching bricks through the wary
apparatus of hoop
on the court in consequence of stratosphere utilized to the
[utmost,

and owing to extra stratosphere he dished out,
our multi-breasted star.
Detailed exegesis would then become

a radiant obstacle
that validates altering the course of stratosphere, surplus of white
structuring elements beneath surface—stones

which address foot, district of foot.

DREW MILNE

from CARTE BLANCHE

A torn rigging, mast of
splitters clears out your
poor cape to warm voice,
so come now, blood sea
between us, sore guilds
in rises and flow charts,
what last straw can cling
to such verges of amber.

So turn fully fledged or
tingle, flower the baby
for pure boot and spur,
each bright light is you
for the taking, a call of
howitzer green, limpid
daring dos who shun
their feisty and duffels.

Fields champ out of all
semblance to mud gum,
whimper and flocks in
rickets, each their own
screen, as we total out
of sympathy, whisper
to new emulsion, ever
eager for why we fail.

Severed ears, you offer
no par value in flowing
shares, a shade specious
to redeem our pro forma
base, sunk to reflect on
new reserve, lit ounces
in stripping nets, your
orebody done to length.

High grade tailing, sir,
in heap leach so facile
on new surfing oxides,
a treat of burnished ore
gone down a civil song
so shiny for this risky
prospect of ash, yields
of these and other runs.

Folded fault go hither
in plane of weakness,
crusts of spine til our
suitable host, a shear
zone, fills a deep seat
in open conduit, steep
to dip as a quartz vein,
each of cut off grades.

Just in case, a hedging
flotilla crawls on, spot
deferred, forward tract
as call options to place
a ceiling, such attic salt
in legend, cursive stain
who eats the smart card
to a heart crashing bore.

All things unconsidered,
sunk of stock piles, just
so much sundry or feral
matter, scrap, real terms
in lease vest, a shimmer
of lapsing stamp & duty
in golden shaves, proxy
to odds on orbs of book.

Augur drill or schist in
ripline slime, can you
find your way clear to
lend me a royal flush
out this orgy of sassy
and so somber salutes,
let me pick off fluff or
coax on the parchment.

Leave me a done thing
while there's a stirring
knife in this shebang,
ways around the bush
mantle, courtesy of old
folks for a trick or two,
busy as a grave of fresh
coal in compliment slips.

You just don't get it
or take to bush fires
on antigens, the pride
in strokes and gritted
hate, so steer a stern
and clear out of grist
to a dormant sky, as
if to call, night night.

Estate stars, the bigot
city takes the biscuit,
beats the darker pulp
beyond fibre optics,
as so stuns a face to
savage sea lavender,
nowhere to turn but
fetus head and kicks.

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JOHN TAGGART

IN CROCE

1

How many faces how many faces can you count in the tree
children's counting game one of the games of the child mind
counting game of my own child of pain mind
how many eaten away faces can you count on the cross
one of the faces I count on the cross blind and black face
blind and black man's face without his shades
blind and black man's face without his three horns
blind and black man's face without his shades and his three
[horns
one of the tunes he once played: "Old Rugged Cross"
whole lot of things been bothering blind and black man
he said he was here to tell all y'all
here to tell all y'all that we got a cross that we must bear
blind and black man thought he could deal with it
thought he could deal with it he thought he could leave it alone
what he didn't think that it wouldn't leave him alone
didn't think his blind and black face would be on the cross.

2

One of the faces I count on the cross face of the green man
green face of the green man among leaves
green man disappeared among leaves and fruit
almost completely disappeared among stinking fruit
green face of the green man was not wasn't always green
wasn't green before he was nailed to the cross
the man imagined the cross to be a tree with leaves and fruit
curing every sickness having every delight
Betty Carter will tell you tell you: imagination is funny
it can make a cross a tree with leaves and fruit
leaves and fruit having every delight sweetness of every taste
imagination can make a cross with the taste of a bride
the green man thought he could linger with her
could linger with her like a bundle of myrrh between her breasts
green face of green man nailed to the cross
face of the man almost disappeared among stinking fruit.

3

One of the faces I count I count the face of a white woman
face of a white woman in pain white woman's pain face
her face in pain because of a seed inside her
seed of "most beautiful tree" seed of the cross inside her
she wouldn't have opened her door if she had known
she wouldn't have said you better come on in to my kitchen
she wouldn't have opened her door
she wouldn't have said come she wouldn't have said yes
pale white forehead darkly lustrous hair parted pale white
[forehead

curved ever so slightly curved eyebrows
slightly curved slightly curved slightly thinned
eyes under the eyebrows as round as darkly lustrous as cherries
her pale white forehead contracted in pain
ever so slightly curved eyebrows contracted in pain
curved slightly thinned eyebrows contracted in pain
cherry eyes under the eyebrows hollowed out and eaten away.

4

One of the faces I count I count the face of a white woman
face of a white woman in pain white woman's pain face
her face in pain because of a tree inside her
because of "most beautiful tree" because of the cross inside her
she opened her door she said better come on in to my kitchen
she said come on in she said yes
face of a white woman in pain white woman's pain face
she's in pain because of a tree inside her
a not imagined woman said only a betrayal could uproot it
tree could be uprooted if there could be a double-crossing
[woman
sock it to me backup group whispers to a white woman
sock it to me backup group whispers: tell it
only a double-crossing woman could
only she could tell the father's love like it is
face of a white woman in pain her face contracted in pain
she's trying to tell it she's trying to uproot a tree inside her.

5

Faces I count I count two faces the faces of two black men
blind and black face of the man who thought he could deal with
[it
black face of the man who said this is my story
faces of two black men on the cross crisscrossed faces
blind and black man thought he could deal with it
thought he could thought he could leave it
other black man said this is my story this is my song
said perfect submission perfect delight
other black man is a witness a witness is always blinded
witnesses of the father's love are always blinded
"witnessing substitutes narrative for perception"
my story my song because eyes have been hollowed out
this is my story this is my song
narrative of other man without eyes without shades without a
[piano
other black man said this is my story of submission
perfect submission perfect delight he said all is at rest.

6

One of the faces I count on the cross face of tempted man
tempted man tempted by the last temptation
imagine that there could be the last temptation
tempted by the temptation that there could be the last temptation
in the movie tempted man asks who's getting married
he asks and guardian angel tells him: you are
he's getting married he's not getting married in the morning
he's getting married to the bride who couldn't say no

the bride is wearing a long-sleeved white gown
very simple even severe gown more a shift than a gown
the bride is wearing a garland around her hair
very simple even severe garland of green leaves around her hair
the bride is not the last temptation
the last temptation is the ordinary life lure of that life
the bride will be taken away to die (not in the movie)
the life will be everything will be taken away from tempted man.

7

One of the faces not to be counted face of the lost one
the lost one the one who stays lost
imagine being lost imagine being the lost one
imagination's funny hard to imagine being the one who stays lost
"it's always a matter of returning from wandering"
blind and black man wouldn't say that green man wouldn't
white woman double-crossing woman wouldn't
other black man tempted man wouldn't
faces I count on the cross were the life of the party
their faces were the life of the father's party
faces returned to the father's love party returned and stayed
they returned they returned and they stayed
not able to stay lost not able to be lost and to stay lost
not able to imagine being lost staying lost
unable to imagine being the lost one who stays lost
take a good look: they returned they returned and they stayed.

PETER GIZZI

CAPTION

One less body is lost in snow
The dying one in time becomes the landscape,
    do you remember how it came about?

Snow unlike glass, glass unlike a corpse
Moon unlike a torso boldly colored in
    with bark, with slate, with soil breaking up

In the furrows of another eroding shape

Or a severed line, bringing us together for the first time
March unlike Spring or an almanac out of date,
    nomenclature: everywhere

Evidence, perception, conclusion
Unlike a dull pool on a brown tire track,
    earlier I said landscape,

How did it come about, remember?

Grief unlike truth, truth unlike snow
Body unlike its outline; grief composes the landscape
    and it is grief

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

MAX WEBER'S FAVORITE TYLENOL FOR TEETHING

You remember Lorna don't you? Eyes frozen
in target light, broomhandles ferrying
arrangements among star-lost layers
of hypnagogic snake-oil sailors in tigerskin
blouses, Hoosiers with names like Itsy &
Whaddyawannacallitnow, tilting until
the shred reed repudiates its spent shell
of an end-run round habits of burrow & respray.
Mincing lessons in transmission, exhaustion,
insulation, *insalata, enchilada,* estuary,
earthworm. Rollerblades without socket,
toast without tempestuousness, farms
for the spoilt & indecipherable;—scruff
in the blaze of hay-damp oblongs, surfing
on a wind of flurry and missed hurry.
I thought the hallucination was a billboard
on the information highway. Then
ferreted fractures from foam, fends
from fable. (She dropped the bill
into my lap, the will into our naps.)
Easy just junk it. Who aped magnolias in
the slate Spring glides & popped CD-ROMs
into avaricious ports of maximum
irresolution of all but the pulsed glow
of screen light, mystic paramour
of boomerang & sludge. Whose conception
of the spiritual was to sound remote
& pull the emergency stop chords.
Who stayed up all day humming tunes from
Barney and *Schindler's List,* fantasizing

a world free of strife & strikes,
cocoon of the happy goon, uh, er, guys—
ballooned beyond belief in order to believe
only in the idea of belief. Shredded
rays of this hurl's guile, blistering
on the scream. Fluffy
& then
fluffy no more. Erasure me
& I
spin back into the space between
the worlds, cauldron of indescribable
verses, beacon of rumpled
hold.

WILL ALEXANDER

TWO POEMS

ALCHEMIC MORAY'S REVERSAL

With banishment
there came lust
there came algor
there came the exile of crags
a general moray's malingering
like incelestial encampments
on a Danube ensconced with tedious icebergs & kindling
coetaneously lit
by mirrored optical flaring
with mythic swans in the cells
with canicular bewitchment
of the southern suns
of angelic primevals
as dialectical dust of a primed immortal co-mingling
like the threshing of ice
like the burning of cataracts
rising like a flame
into the nonagons of living

BREAKING THROUGH LINGUISTIC REASON

The coded fog
of nude altimeters & hissing
as in the vortex of flaming tarantula ices
blowing up the lapses
in the scarcity of the tri-lingual memory
& so
the focus condenses
upon the explosion of gendarme folders
those weakened turquoise rivets
citing
in the granary stalls
the motionless germs of elliptical contriteness
failing to structure
the bodily disappearance
of the arms & legs of spiders
therefore
the arcane spell
which makes the eyes stagger
which makes the blood fumes unite
into listless walnut incessance
extended into pagan archery sores
into jasmine & flaunting as connivance
floating across an alien zone
a rectangular turf
into bleached eclectic Seminole distortion
like a horizon flailing gunnery thorns
because each blatant dementia
procures owls as territorial
as pre-surface dawning enigmas
their monaural iguana majestics
their sonorous cooling
under curious sulphur tornadoes
their moth spillage
their equatorial burning dioxins
their microscopic sea shell diverseness
because
the amperage

the arteries
must suffocate
the weird ecclesiastical pomposity of Christ
with their violet sails hoisted as scaly neutron dogs
into a trampoline of ciphers
like creeping soldier's acidity
imaged as re-echoes to nothingness
to the facile codes of emptiness & habit
as in novels
romantically bellicose with motion
with despicable thoughts of action & reaction
as a claustrophobic rudeness
running on footskins & terror
generally braided with tedium
with the tortured marks of dense calendrical philosophy
therefore
there ceases to exist
my judgemental pallor
to chew
on bloodied cranial rinds
to scale at dawn
a greenish pelican aurora
because
it is the fish which haunts me
which takes me into alchemical ichthyosaur's flagellation
into the glare of utter mortal disruption
along with mood swings
with meteors & cunning neon hysterics
now allowing me leave
to fly
to roam through the gulfs
through the blackened median kelp
through the shattered shores of smoking asteroid refinements

ANNA INDYCH

KUKULI VELARDE'S SYNCRETIZATIONS: RECONQUERING THE CONQUEST

In discussing the work of Kukuli Velarde it is important to take into consideration two occurences: that of Spain's conquest of the New World and Velarde's own confrontation with the new world of North America after leaving her birthplace of Cuzco, Peru for Mexico and continuing in her current seven year residence in New York City.

Velarde was born in the ancient city of Cuzco, (in Quechua, Cosco, meaning "center" or "navel")[1] Peru in 1962, and though she lived in Lima, she was raised by Cuzqueña parents who maintained their Cuzqueñan culture. Cuzco is a city in which the imprints of western colonization are still physically as well as psychically preserved. After their conquest of Cuzco in 1534, the Spaniards built upon Incan forms to develop the infrastructure of their colonial city. The stones from the old Inca walls served as the foundations of Christian edifices—forming the basis not only of an architectural, but urban, religious and *cultural mestizaje.*

In the colonizers attempts to dominate and form a culture in their own image, a hybrid culture was created, syncretizing elements of the indigenous with the West and the past with the present. The seventeenth and eighteenth century "Cuzco School" in which the local mestizo artists copied and later interpreted into their own unique vocabulary, the works of European masters, gave form to a particularly American aesthetic. At the same time, the native traditions—the Andean religion, music and folk art Andean heritage all persisted in light of these transformations. "The new world never became an exact copy of Spain. It was and [still] is an American society."[2] It is this double edged sword of cultural fusion and cultural resistance which would comprise the breeding ground for Velarde's social and artistic development.

Like the indigenous artists of Peru, who are her artistic role models, Kukuli Velarde is basically self-taught. During her twenty-two year stay in her native country, Velarde enjoyed a successful and relatively celebrated career as a painter. Despite her achievements, which included solo exhibitions from the young age of ten, Velarde felt little visceral connection with her artistic output. She journeyed to Colombia to study and perhaps actively seek out that intimate link with her creative production, but

departed after half a year. She left Peru in 1984, this time for Mexico, searching again for a greater sense of meaning in her work. During her stay in Mexico she had the opportunity to take classes at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. Her two year stint in that country would come to an abrupt end after the break up of a passionate love affair, which would later become the subject of some of her works like *Yo, Amamantando Amores* (I, Nurturing Loves) and *There are loves that are born dead and there are loves that die all of a sudden.*

As a refugee from love, as the artist herself admits, she arrived in New York City. It was not until she came to the United States that she received any significant formal training, acquiring her B.F.A. from Hunter College in 1992. It would be during her course of studies at Hunter that Kukuli would come upon a ceramics class—finding that "magical" connection with art that she had been searching for so long, consequently switching from painting to sculpture. In the material of clay, the ostensibly "poor" medium of her ancestors, she found a medium rooted in her heritage and her identity.

From her studio in the South Bronx, Velarde creates highly ornamented clay sculptures reminiscent of Pre-Columbian figures. Modeled as unique pieces in terracotta, painted with engobe and then fired at low temperatures, Velarde's figures are often anthropomorphic creations, "...a frightening mix of human, semi-human and animal features, crucified, in torment, contorted, pregnant, at times hermaphroditic, but mostly female."[3] Bilingual texts are painted or inscribed ubiquitously on the surfaces of the sculptures, a combination of the artist's own writings, and quotes either from popular songs or historical documents like those chronicling the Conquest.

Although critics often refer to Velarde's sculptures as "Pre-Columbian" figures—they, in the most obvious sense, are not. While in witnessing the work of Velarde we are confronted with objects that appear as though they are really pre-Hispanic, it is a fiction revealed as a fiction, in that the texts which cover the surface, also provide the context of the work. The artist utilizes an ancient pre-Columbian technique and thrusts it into a new context. While the very material in which she works is one of the messages (the medium as the message), it is significant that she only came to clay upon her arrival in the States. For as much as her work is about her native Peru and the contact between the West and the new world, it is also a visual expression of her own experiences as well as the cultural clash of North and South.

As a Peruvian/Andean artist living in New York, Velarde refuses the category of "latina."[4] Resisting and fighting against cultural assimilation and homogenization, her work does not seek to meld two disparate cultural tendencies into one cohesive unit, but precisely to reveal her dual heritage,

squared—or even doubled—by her bi-cultural experience here, as a fragmented entity. While some might see this as a project of cultural resurrection, Velarde is quick to point out that she and her work are a reflection of a culture which is still very much present and alive.

In terms of the mainstream New York art world, Velarde's use of both a politicized ideology and what would be considered a handicraft material as the basis of her art, perhaps relegates her to the margins. Yet it is precisely these strict dichotomies, and hierarchical categories and definitions that Velarde and her work rally against. While we could definitely not place her work within the confines of the mainstream, I would hesitate to dismiss Velarde as a so-called "peripheral" artist. While each term is supported precisely by its discursive other, it would seem, in the context of the status quo, that strict dichotomies, invented and supported by the center, serve to buttress the hierarchical and cocksure status of the mainstream.

Certainly, Velarde's work stands as somewhat of an anomaly in commercial New York gallery circles. As a woman artist from Peru she, of course, projects a distinct sensibility. Yet the distinctiveness of her work manifests itself not merely in relation to the closed circles of the New York art scene, for I can think of no other Latin American artist, past or present, creating similar work.

To a certain degree, her work has in common some aspects with other women artists of her generation who come from all over the world and have been recently showing in New York. While none of these artists have really worked with one another (some are not even aware of each others work) they share similar interests in ideas of history, gender, sex and oppression, specifically engaged with the context of the human form and the figures of babies. Artists such as Kim Dingle, a painter and installation artist from California, Judy Fox, a sculptor from New Jersey, Marlene Dumas, a painter from South Africa, Inez van Lamsweerde, an artist from Holland and Rita Ackerman from Russia—all have a particular fascination with babies or pre-pubescent children as peculiar sites of meaning. While Velarde's work looks very different from these artists', the way in which each negotiates issues of history and gender onto the human figure represents, for lack of a better word, a quasi collective unconscious.

Historical critique is at the heart of Velarde's project. In the series "We, the Colonized Ones" from 1990-92, she created a visual testimony which would lie in contrast and defiance to the myriad of quincentennial festivities being celebrated on this and the European continent. While her works problematized the jubilance surrounding the celebrations of colonization, Velarde also offered a very insightful and complex narrative of the Conquest, from the point of view of the colonized.

On the writhing bodies of clay figure babies, which represent those who never came into being—dead before their time—are incised active cries for freedom or the disturbing expressions of despair and hopelessness. The artist writes, "Each of the pieces either symbolizes or represents emotional consequences of colonization. Their goal in terms of history is to show that point of view of the defeated; those who saw their cultures and societies disrupted by the imposition of another culture."[5] Carla Stellweg has noted, that

> Velarde quite literally has incorporated the many wild descriptions of the bastards *La Malinche* was to have given birth to. Or they embody some of the creatures that the Europeans imagined as they read the chroniclers of the Conquest. Velarde's work is a powerful attempt to represent the politics surrounding the varied guises of colonization.[6]

On many levels, Kukuli's sculptures, seem to be products or emblems of the brutal rape of indigenous civilizations and peoples of Latin America. At the same time, her work reflects the colonization and oppression which continues until today, taking concrete form in our daily lives. Here the battle lines are drawn between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. On one of her self-portrait sculptures, the inscription reads:

> If I do not criticize
> If I do not burn a flag
> If I do not have an abortion
> I can consider myself a free individual.
>
> If I do reply with a nice smile
> When I am called "Sweetie" by a stranger
> If I deny where I come from
> which language I do speak
> If I do not look at the beggar in the train
> at the blacks segregated at the restaurant
> at my people assimilated
> alienated
> If I play the game, woman and "latina"
> here in New York
> nice and quiet
> harmless and obedient
> subordinate and ignorant
> I can consider myself a free individual

Velarde's work is not only informed by the discourse of historical domination, but also with the implicit gender and sexual oppression that accompanies such acts of aggression. Throughout her *oeuvre,* Velarde imbues the figures with a disquieting mix of eroticism and violence creating a powerful commentary and exhibition of sexual politics.

The painted clay sculpture, *La Mujercita Ideal: Santa Chingada* (Ideal Little Wife: Fucked Saint) reveals a half-naked pregnant woman with extended breasts, drooping from years of motherhood, nails driven into her cracked chest reminiscent of the *Virgin of Sorrows.* She wears the mask of a white, blue-eyed, smiling woman, only to reveal her darker native colors underneath the facade. Velarde exposes the stereotypical fantasy woman, in both her appearance, and her unfaltering martyrdom as a construction exported by the North and propagated in Latin America. The woman's real eyes beneath the mask disclose the pain of martyrdom, of forsaking ones own desires and pleasures always for the sake of others, namely husbands and children. The inscriptions on her torso reveal a violent condemnation of this cultural prescription of woman as a martyr figure as well as an attack on women's simultaneous complicity in their oppression through their own glorification and perpetuation of female martyrdom.

Santa Chingada is also related to Latin American popular devotional culture in that it is reminiscent of the wooden or plaster Virgins and Saints which adorn church and home-made Catholic altars. During the Conquest, the Spaniards used Catholicism as a tool of appeasement, appropriating various elements of the indigenous religions onto traditional Christian iconography. Santa Chingada is a product of this syncretistic religion; a native saint with a dark indian face, her mask pointing to the many semblances of colonization.

The prevalent use of gold leafing in Velarde's work, also calls to mind the colonial technique of gilt brocade which could be found in the paintings of the Cuzco school and the ornamentation of Church architecture. In her latest series of sculptures Velarde has begun to dress the figures in costumes as was the religious/ceremonial custom in the Colonial era. These highly realistic Colonial sculptures, often polychromed, would be carried during religious processions. Velarde comments upon this ceremonial function of sculpture when she utilizes her works as parts of larger performance and installation pieces. One of the artist's impetuses in creating the babies series was to create a portable sculpture, perhaps reflecting popular devotional practices. For her performance of *We the Colonized Ones,* she holds the dead baby sculpture in her arms enacting the emotional and historical consequences of colonization.

Velarde insists that she, unlike the masters in her country, is not a ceramicist. She makes art as it was done for centuries and is it continues today. For the moment clay represents a good material for the artist to

utilize to her own ends—as a vehicle for her personal expression as well as a political manifestation of her identity. It is an irreverent renunciation of the sweeping tides of western civilizations' assimilations and cooptations as well as a rejection of the supposed progress of "high" art. Velarde's sculptures revel in their "lowness," in their roughness, crudeness and in their source in *arte popular*. It is through this autonomous creative process that Velarde ultimately resists mere victim status and finds liberation.

Notes

1 Leopoldo Castedo, *The Cuzco Circle,* exh. cat., (New York: The Center for Inter-American Relations and the American Federation of Arts, 1976) 13.

2 Castedo 33.

3 Carla Stellweg, "Uncommon Ground: 23 Latin American Artists," exh. cat., The College Art Gallery, (New York: SUNY/New Paltz, 1992) 19.

4 The term "latino/a" has the tendency to homogenize a very wide and diverse range of cultures which comprise the entity "Latin America" or "Latin Americans in the United States." Thus, Velarde considers herself a Peruvian which would signify very different things from being a Puerto Rican or Mexican. "Latino" attempts to pull all these cultures under one umbrella. While they are related through the process of colonization and their basically common language (a product of colonization), Velarde indicates that each culture has its own distinct qualities and cannot be absorbed into a monolithic entity.

5 Kukuli Velarde, "We, the Colonized Ones," project proposal, New York, 1991.

6 Stellweg 19.

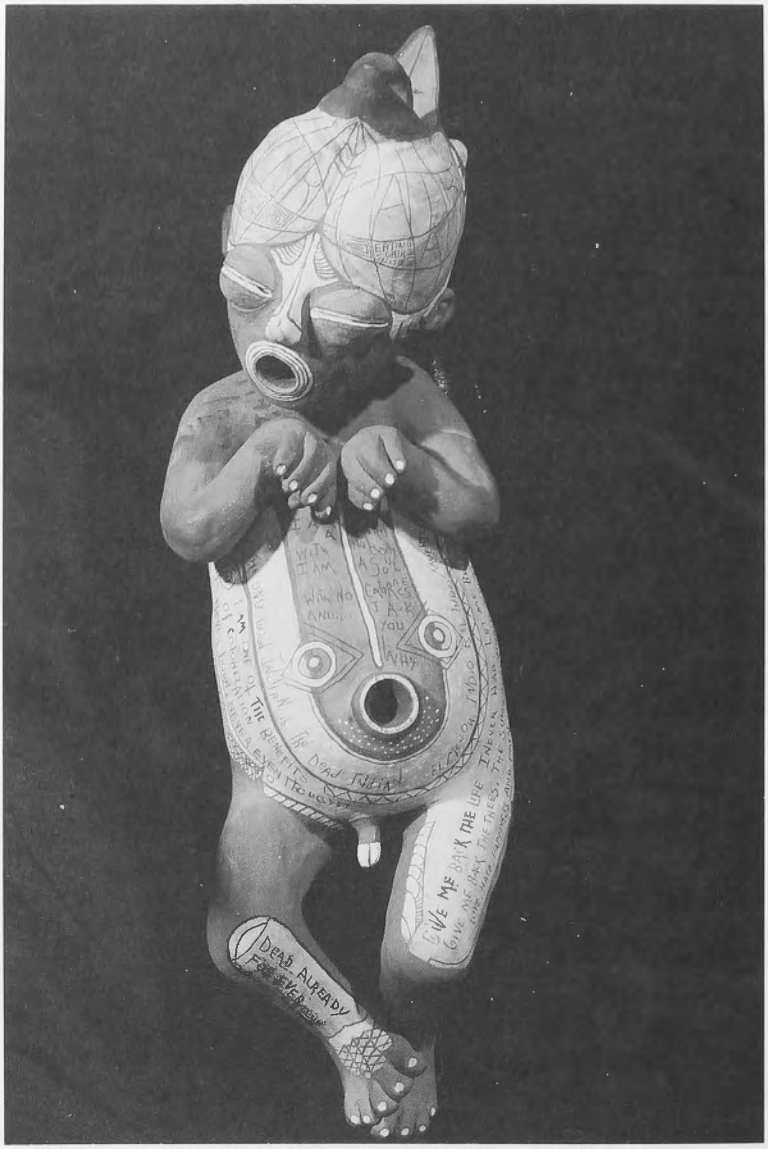
KUKULI VELARDE

SIX WORKS

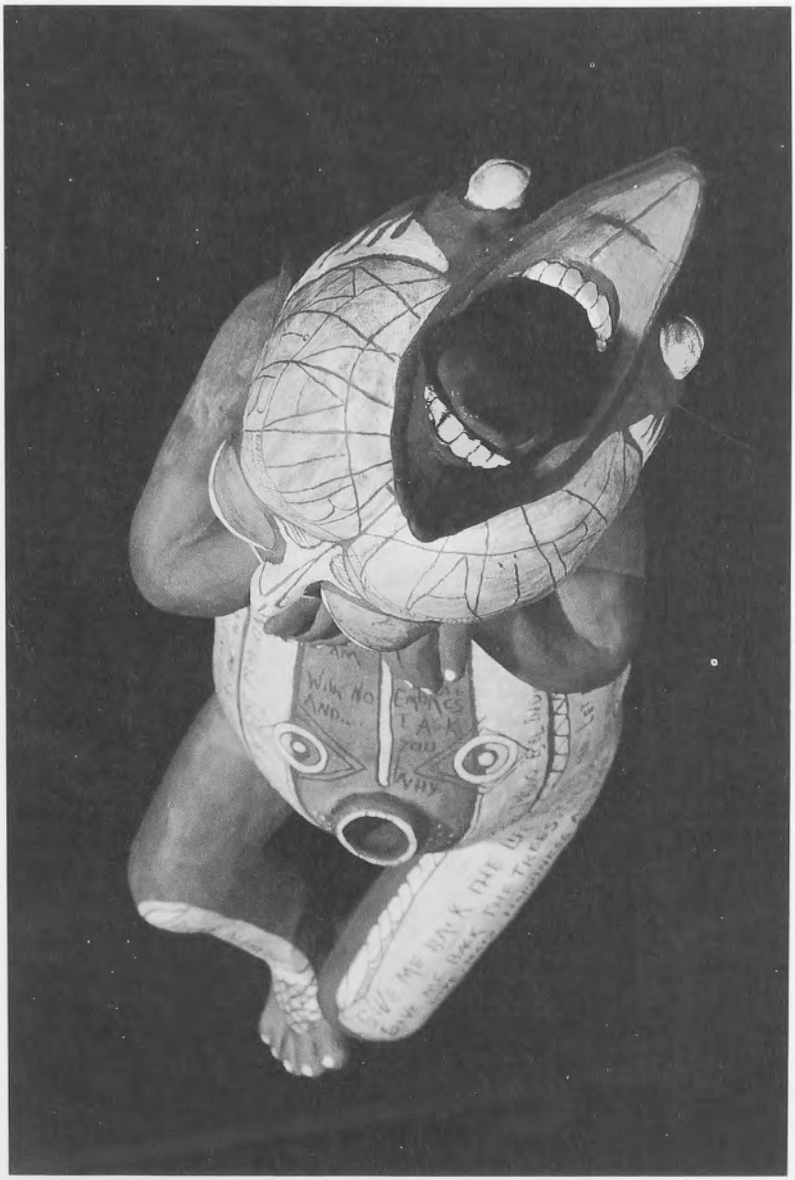
There are Loves that Are Born Dead, There are Loves that Die All of a Sudden
1993, clay & engobe, 20" x 15" x 12"

Photo Credits: Works 1, 2, and 6: Roger Welch. Works 3, 4, and 5: David Dilley. Reproductions courtesy of Carla Stellweg Latin American & Contemporary Art, NYC

Yo, Amamatando Amores (I, Nurturing Loves)
1993, clay & engobe, 24" x 20" x 12"



From the Series: "We, The Colonized Ones"
Baby II, Dead Already
1990–1992, clay sculpture with engobe, 19" x 8" x 9"



Baby II, Dead Already
Shot from above

From the Series: "We, The Colonized Ones"
1990–1992, Installation with clay sculptures

La Mujercita Ideal: Santa Chingada (Ideal Little Wife: Fucked Saint)
1992-1993, clay with gold leaf, 22¾" x 15" x 8"

RAYMOND FEDERMAN

THREE PIECES

SURVIVAL

. . .that desire, which one may as well call love, is gone from me. I do not love this land anymore. It is as simple as that. I am like a man who has been castrated. Castrated in maturity. I try to imagine him seeing things he has loved before, knowing from memory that he ought still to love them, but able no longer to summon up the love itself. Love: what was that? he would mumble to himself, groping in memory for the old feeling. But about everything there would now be a flatness, a stillness, a calmness. Something I once had has been betrayed, he would think, and concentrate, trying to feel that betrayal in all its keenness. But there would be no keenness. Keenness would be what would be gone from everything. Instead he would feel a tug, light but continual, toward stupor, detachment. Detached, he would say to himself, pronouncing the sharp word, and he would reach out to test its sharpness. But there too a blurring, a blunting would have intervened. All is receding, he would think, in a week, in a month I will have forgotten everything, I will be among the lotus eaters, separated, drifting. For a last time he would try to feel the pain of that separation, but all that would come to him would be a fleeting sadness.

I have imagined there could be no worse, and then the worst has arrived, as it does without fail, and I have got over it, or seemed to. But that is the trouble. In order not to be paralyzed with shame I have to live a life of getting over the worst. What I cannot get over any more is that *getting over*. If I get over it this time I will never have another chance *not to get over it*. For the sake of my own survival I cannot get over it this time.

I am tired, too tired, tired beyond cause, tired as an armor against time, yearning to close my eyes, to sleep.

THE RIGHT OF LIFE

I am standing at the corner of Main Street & Broadway. I am alone. I am watching before me a group of demonstrators holding signs. I think it is a demonstration for the right of life. Or is it the right to life? I can hear muttering from the crowd.

I am here. I am alive. And yet I feel sadness in my heart, a mute poignant ache. It is not a feeling of culpability, not at all. I have never understood why one should feel guilty for having survived. Besides, I did not really survive. I am not sure I am a true survivor. Yes, I confronted death, went through it, but it was just an experience of my life. There is a word for this kind of experience in some languages. In German one says *Erlebnis*. In Spanish, *vivencia*. In English, simply *experience*. But in French there is no single word to seize life itself all at once as an experience. One must say, *j'ai eu une expérience, j'ai fait une expérience*. How vague. My survival, if it was a survival, took place in France, in the French language, but it was not a vague experience. And yet to describe that survival I must rely on a periphrasis, or else use the word *survécu, j'ai survécu,* which is very approximate, and questionable. An insipid flabby word. *Le survécu* is such a passive expression. But the experience of life, the experience one has of living, that's active, and of course always in the present. Life nourishes itself of the past to project itself into the future.

Whatever the case, it is not culpability I feel, as I watch the restless crowd before me demonstrating for the right of life. The right of life?

Who says we have a right to live. The naked anguish of being alive precedes the culpability of surviving. The anguish of being born out of confused nothingness results from an irremediable stroke of luck. One does not have to have known the death camps to know the anguish of living.

I am alive. I am standing here, at the corner of Main Street & Broadway. The sadness I feel does not come from a feeling of culpability. Surely there is no merit in having survived. I am unscarred, unscathed, at least in appearance. The living are no different than the dead when it comes to merit. None of us deserves to be alive. Nor to die either. I could feel guilty if I thought that others deserved more than me to have survived. But survival is not a question of merit. It is a question of luck, or bad luck, depending how one looks at it. To be alive depends on how the dice fall. Nothing else. That's what the word *chance* means. The dice fell in the right combination for me, that's all.

Suddenly, just as the demonstrators start moving down Main Street, the sky becomes dark. A snow squall falls on the crowd, brief but violent. The people before me disappear in a kind of whirlpool. The buildings, the crowd, the city, the signs, the sound of the voices, winter, everything is erased. I understand now the physical sadness I feel, in spite of the misleading sensation of being alive, of being here at the corner of Main Street & Broadway, on this particular day. It is precisely the fact that I am not sure of being here, of being alive, that makes me sad. A kind of vertigo suddenly carries me into the memory of another snow. Snow and smoke. A serene vertigo, lucid like a laceration. I feel as if I am floating in the future of this memory. There will always be this memory, this solitude, this snow squall in the midst of sunshine, this smoke in all seasons.

CORRECTIONS

Because of a production error, an article about a concentration camp in Bosnia omitted a passage in some copies. The affected paragraph should have read:

> Mr. Popovic estimated that on the basis of individual and mass executions he personally witnessed, close to 3,000 Muslims from Vlasenica (pronounced—vlah-seh-NEET-sah) lost their lives at Susica after the Bosnian war began in April 1992.

The existence of the camps—including Susica (pronounced—sue-SEE-chah)—has been known since August 1992, when, four months after the war began, the Omarska and Kereterm camps near Prijedor and Banja Luka were uncovered.

A report in the Chronicle column on Wednesday about Elie Wiesel's visit to Sighet, Romania, where he was born, referred incorrectly to the fate of members of his family in Nazi concentration camps. Mr. Wiesel's father died in Buchenwald, not Auschwitz; one sister, not three sisters, died in Auschwitz along with Mr. Wiesel's mother. The report also omitted mention of one camp Mr. Wiesel survived. He survived Buchenwald, as well as Auschwitz.

The report also misstated Sighet's population. It is about 45,000, not 100,000.

Because of a transmission error, an article yesterday about foreign efforts to help Rwandan refugees misspelled the surname of an American military spokesman. He is Colonel Robert Mirelson, not Nirelson.

Because of an editing error, an article in Business Day on Friday

about the bankruptcy case of R.H. Macy & Company misidentified the executive vice president of Macy's in some editions. He is Thomas C. Shull, not Thomas C. Shaw.

◆◆◆

An article on Saturday about the intense local newspaper coverage of Long Island's East End misspelled the given name of an author who lives in Sag Harbor. He is Wilfrid Sheed.

◆◆◆

Articles in Die Zeit and in Der Spiegel about author Raymond Federman, whose latest novel, TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, has just been translated into German under the title BETRIFFT, consistently spelled his name Federmann, with two n's.

◆◆◆

When informed of the error concerning the misspelling of his name, Mister Federman shrugged his shoulders and said: *The Germans always do that to my name. It's not serious. More serious,* he added, *is the error SS Heinrichsohn made, on August 19 1942, in the telex he addressed to Oberführer Eichmann and to the Commandant of Auschwitz, upon the departure of Convoi 21 from Paris (Destination Auschwitz). In that telex which listed the names and dates of birth of all the children (Convoi 21 left with 373 children under the age of 16—162 boys, 199 girls; the sex of 12 children could not be determined according to SS Heinrichsohn's telex), the date of birth of my sisters was incorrect.*

The date of birth for my sister Sarah was given as 21/10/25, whereas in fact she was born 21/10/26; the date of birth for my sister Jacqueline was given as 30/9/28, whereas in fact she was born 30/8/29.

When asked if he intended to have these administrative errors corrected, Mister Federman replied: *Don't you think it's a bit late for that?*

SPENCER SELBY

MY INFLUENCE

At the end what vessel
hits the rocks

Glass door imprint
answer tribe of males
slain tower of knowledge
beating the good

Drive a sword
my influence diadem
regards as primitive
pointed ear to a better
bastard heart

Within the frame
a secret growing
bywords I am told bring
breakdown triumph
in excess before

I have undone the man again
the awful eye the rotten seal
the long ago shameless
witness that haunts my
every experience

O dark climb barrier safety
O brute rope corner of building
bad news immediate family

I want anything of mine
to assist you
when missing the freedom
the better phenomena
running over flesh

I want for a very long time
impact of bodies
hot air helpless meaning
rebelling against calculation
in original work

This me other people
you dreams concrete interval
nighttime rich in particular
still alive burglary

The stone burns hard as
eyes turn back belonging

Dreadful on the right hand
naked past human thought
put here to show forgiveness
on the left

PIERRE JORIS

TWO POEMS

the emptiness of too much fullness
the overload, willed, alibi. . .

against
the minimal daily gesture
cracks the spine
& spoils a space.
                tarot's
chance, or the seventh sister,
the blind side
of a die or dice—
        errant spellings
move lines alter rhythm
is repetition the
repetition of the same or has
something altered,
        the fool wisely mis-
en-abîme,
                chiaroscuro chiasma
a rhetoric of self
a plenipotentiary of emptiness
        makes up its own title, name,
                chapter, verse & word—
if you find a cure
for the ground
tell no one but
the rock's skeleton
fidgets under
the fool's foot
a slippery slipper

our odd flora del abyss
a menu for
more wide-eyed days
when the Viennese school
for noun dressage
will have declared
bankruptcy
(another chapter)
while we,
out here on the Oklahoma
side-lines,
gridiron our naked hunches
ready for anything
they'll throw our way
yet conscious that
we can never get back
to either shore,
stuck as we are
in Arcady,
by fiat & clutch-encumbered
ford,
& the local paper's obituaries
mouth-water over
an august french clown
put a bullet through
his head at 78
& a tear into our eye
at 7 am,

there is no cure
not even a global curetage
can rid the atmosphere
of its unearned roundness.

black & blue

the inks mix
sky at five o'color
a fountain
pen like a big
beaked bird,
        childhood
games & smells

& the scratch
        of metal edge against the fibrous grain
as against the
        pushover rollover
of plastic spheres smearing surface
                (but what of the keyboard you use
more often than any of these?
Is this nostalgia?
romanticism?
                I see the pen
poised, the shadow it throws,
the indents in the wooden
underbelly below the nib,
like sharkgills,
                the meat eating
metaphor
ie writing instrument.

GAVIN SELERIE

from ROXY

24

We sing a code of wanting and refusing,
the pitch reinforced by plumage and shape.
So the grammarian traces
what the child knows and uses.
Romping on a swing,
flying on an uncle's outstretched arms,
we do what is later done
in a chamber with a locked door.

Orphans from parental tenderness,
we make out from an unerased blueprint,
a mother in a year of dreams
when the disc was bared
and the eye was at home in tinted mirroring.

That sweet disorder borne in a May chorus,
if our ears ever heard—
they *thought* they heard—
a break in roll and statute,
a playpower like this is tomorrow,
liquid light on a soft machine,
the spangled garden of we want it now,
honey breath for more than an instant
before possession sets in.

It was I love you in capital letters,
a rain of flowers upon our wrists,

a breeze in blonde tresses
to take the edge off tailoring.

Between the grooves some soul was alight,
a mite spinning in a locked hoard,
a self preparing for longer flight.
How is it we came through
and are not unloaded from metaphor?

32

The world lies open, a double slab.
It's still to be done, or already done,
a mildewed hoard with a cracked hinge
still holding. It's a fortress
or mortuary temple
that yet has marks which stalk
the landscape.
There's a deep blue entry
to horizontal rows,
a script which contains
only itself and more.
You could come to the same
along simple paths
perhaps, with punctuation
starting to bud.

36

From cotton fields to the catwalk
you look for the master trope
in a lexicon of fopperies.
Nobody knows what's nice or not—
it's whatever compels belonging.
Fabric gives birth to what you want.
Nitrate crumbles to dust.
The more of the moment you are
the more of the past you become.
All grammars leak: the end of the silk road
is an animal print shirt
reassuringly dear.
Leaves eaten by a worm
are the memory of a world
without memory.

46

The more you think to make
the more you mar. I broke the needle
I was sewing so hard. Slubbered up in haste
the accounts ravel out, glimmery
as a half-known part. A plural 'I'
ought to show not tell—the little you knows,
I means and sorts of that grain what's pulled
from a text. The wisp of smoke beneath flax.

Roof of a high-arched hall, ivory skies
spell spacious down to the pit,

a world as flakes of spar
shot into prisms, a blazing cresset
on embossed faces and hollows.
The plot here is ever assembling
with pitchy breath and a crystal stare.

Jack Juggler's up, a monkey clinging
to the fretwork, balcony over balcony.
It might be a jewel but this is
kitchen business—what's afloat
bellying a lag of lines; a veiny blab
to skulk and shun.

The relic you hold in your hand
is the frame through which you see,
airy, matted and so on, a peak for dazzling letters
to strike. Cloven and cracked, it's the jest-hood
for getting from self to self.

You're the only one can save—if you'd only
come with me—that is my execution—
Stop playing now—I'll be waiting
by the gate—I'm sure I could win it all back.

Lifting each door-leaf you'd start
to find a hidden head, or something
inlaid with shells.

Marked with a marginal finger
in forced about-phrases

What nobody knows

Threads a dream, juices
dust to a lazy haul

A lifetime's moments spat like foam
from a crack, or blue beams tumbling
from a cataract.

Let me remember a pair of words
upward on the decline.
For in the relation is more
the tongue that touches.

Clothed in a bundle and rolled across a marble floor.
Half choked in the burning stack. Head of a carriage,
a sphinx trundled in by slaves. River-borne,
a perfumed goddess, come to get her mate. Eyes closed,
head thrown back, a cobra feeding at the breast.

Lying on a lip sofa
I was sipping bowls of wine
profitably stuffed with pearl.
Living backward through the reckoning
I was an onion-crier
as tiles exploded from the walls.

A stopped oven gives off the fiercest fire.
My sweetheart line was two hearts
end-to-end from the middle.
Not at his beck quite always
pallid or ruby
I wanted the great whatsit—No ifs, no buts—
turned down an ocean phone call.

The earrings make the outfit
and the queues are always for mirrors.
I bought a dress for the part, but he
had it altered to be ill-fitting,
left it out in the street to fade.
I carried my shoes in a transparent "Angels" bag.
Who's in, who's out? Had the right to run wide.
Then I was a rag doll on the back of a dustcart.

DAVID MUS

ANDRE DU BOUCHET'S *A I R*

The one-word title, making no allusions, lacking epithets and syntactical support, calls to mind first one then another of the word's uses we already know. The fluid stuff in which we stand and move, itself standing (the stale air of this room) or moving (the wind of light airs or blustery gale): a complex substance which the experts have broken down for us into chemical components, each with a well-known character and function, all vital for human life, making up what we call the atmosphere reaching high above us towards airless space. This stuff, we know so well, close at hand or stretching into distance, carries to us the sight or those far-off mountains or of our friend across the room—carries his voice too, with the rumble of trucks on the mountain road, the smell of the roast in the kitchen or of the acrid diesel exhaust. The sum of what the air carries gives us the look, the aspect, the identity, what we call the air of the thing, close or far. Lacking that air we couldn't call anything something instead of something else; our language of differences and distinctions depends on that air or the thing, which allows us to see it and say it.

Its air wouldn't reach us unless it had room to move in and across, unless we had room to stretch gaze or hand towards it: air means too the space air fills. When we take the air we fill our lungs, striding out from imprisoning walls: the space of air is freedom to do so, as the convict knows. Deprived of air we die, as the diver knows: air is life to us, as it is to our senses and to our language. Air carries our words in another way, more expressive: air names the tune, jig or lament, to which we key our words when we sing, our steps when we dance. Often unknowing, so close is the fit: who remembers that we sing the words, "Oh say! can you see . . .?" to the air of "Anacreon to Heaven," a popular drinking song of 1812? To sing words and air we fill our lungs with air. The same air Francis Scott Key used to say what he saw, which gave him his words, carries those words from our mouths to the ears of others on the bandstand or over the airwaves, across the gap of air-filled free air which, holding us apart, brings us together.

A single stuff, sky at our level, filling the gap, bridging the distance: the air in my lungs, on my lips, before my face, bearing words, is continuous

with that far-off air bathing those mountains on the horizon, when I say mountain, air, horizon. A spacious, capacious continuity—at the same time nothing, the thin air into which the most solid form can fade, also the solid basis of whatever substantial air things have before they vanish. The word all by itself on the page—a mere nothing, "hot air"—has named all these meanings currently "in the air", without taking sides has aired them, containing them all, letting them echo and jostle, meanings suspended, "up in the air," lending each substance by turn or all together joined in its liberal flux. Our title names too this capaciousness of the word, our word, any word, which our practical use of it strives to limit, often in vain—affirms the word's ancient stubborn freedom, its air of doing very well without us and our painstaking distinctions. We know very well it was there before us and will outlast our last breath.

Before us, after us, and beyond us. . . The word like the stuff it names raises up the ancient and the new, the intimate in our lungs, to touch the highest rim of sky, that "wild blue yonder" of the old Air Force hymn, when to be "airborne" was still an epic risk, an Odyssey, akin to that launched by Homer's "wingèd words." Air belongs to the oldest elemental level in our speech, and speaks for it almost unchanged, AER in Latin, younger brother of venerable Greek AHP. The Greek word may recall that for Homer it meant murk, moist thick earthbound stuff, carefully marked off from the luminous upper air, the ether, almost indeed, simply, darkness. Or that for the philosopher Anaximenes it meant the basic all-embracing material of which the cosmos was made—if divine, if eternal, still the stuff of our individual souls, even a soul itself. "Just as our soul, being air, holds us together, so do breath and air encompass the whole world," making up the very soul of song, we might add, thinking of poetry and the poem before us.

What has this poem to add? Is there a sign that its originality brings these old meanings together in a new way, yielding a substantial new meaning? I wrote the Greek word in Greek capitals, AHP, but the Latin AER like our present A I R uses Roman. Our page, our lettering, have an emphatically Roman air, explicitly archaic—not speaking, as they might, in uncial, Carolingian minuscule, italic or modern cursive. . . Like the inscription cut in white marble facing on the Roman wall: bald block letters, telling us what the wall is, who built it and why. Naming their material support too, as if we read STONE: the letters of a Roman inscription, carved into the stone, sometimes filled with bronze, were most often left empty, filled with stony air. This page with its inscription is one we know well, a far cry from the Greek page—a wax tablet—from the Hebrew or the Chinese scroll. A page in Roman: so little on it besides white light; the page largely bare, empty wall, says itself more fully, throwing a dazzling light on its strength.

An old page: but our title on its page has an original look. Just as the word's original meanings have been aired in an original way—pointing to their one origin, an all-embracing cohesive substantial fluidity—so our three ancient letters have been joined in a new way. At the author's bidding the typographer has highlighted the letters, spelling them out, adding extra room for them to move and breath in. Extra inner room: the fresh air between them now, like air in lungs supporting spoken words, is the same air bracing the letters from above, below, beyond and behind, separating them out, binding them in, on the page, with the page. As we can now see.

For these letters are in the page, pointing to the air it has, the area it opens upwards towards us; for our look falls through a depth of air which allows us to meet the look of the letters. The same depth surrounds the book and our hands holding it: the page area is not cut off from our air and its life, but bathes in it as we do, its word of a piece with us in our fluid medium. This is surely the stand our title takes. Our *area*—straight Latin—is the French *aire*, identical twin of the poem's proper name, sounding the same, consonant in meaning. As if for us STONE sounded and looked just like WALL, the *one* of the one consonant with the *all* of the other. . . Air is never empty if it bears light and dark through space in depth; light borne enters the letters and our eyes the way air penetrates our lungs charged with giving it back, laden now with the same letters pronounced, fitted to their cadence. Our word gives the matter—we say the subject matter—of the poem it titles, subject, matter, poem we glimpse already through and between the ancient letters made new. The pages of A I R will lead us through themselves on roads of light and air to far reaches they open, which may have no meaning more forceful than that of our passage there. Our title names, in the same breath, the book before us, its mode and genre: an air to which the words we read must be fitted, otherwise the whole aria will not sing and be sung in key. Matter and mode, subject and song, the air of A I R—opening up the new, if rightly read, right to its ancient origin. As you'll see.

ANDRE DU BOUCHET

from A I R

(Tr. from the French by David Mus)

BREATH LOG

The incandescent
point sears
the whole length of cord

daylight goes down with wind

as caged fire

everything I own
reaches me

heavily

being

earth

for laughter.

N.B. André du Bouchet has published four separate books entitled A I R, with interlocking contents, all work from the early fifties. Here are selections translated from the third of these and the most substantial, published in 1977 by Clivages (Paris).

Not one step will I draw nearer blinding day
in person.

MORNING

Up to the elbows in the ivy.

Face on, sky-deep fissures in the earth crust where a window throbs. Through the cleft of mountain drapery, the gleaming pediment, day thrust back beneath the windswept overhang.

On land, late life, the wood in ashes among light peelings, paperthin.

Eyerise.

DICTATION

You must perhaps make yourself
follow such dictation. But nothing
makes me. Outside indifferent.
Wind allows it.

I

Cold breathings stamp down air. Night once more rolls
round. My route starts out again into snow. You appear,
when I turn my head, like a wild, a hopeful thing.

2

Fire
on the snowy flank, or windowpane.

3

Walking out—as speaking out—ceaseless. Without
getting one step farther.

4

The cloud covers the road with a black cloud, black
breath at the winter's gate.

I keep my head above earth filled with bits of
animals and stones.

5

The harness slipping over earth's shoulder. Two
flails, chains gone cold.

Wherever I stretch out to dry earth appears.

Not a single completed being, rather it is something
that breathes. What you hear is its breathing. You see
all its workings. The stones bare as the trees. As earth.

6

Night I spend on earth

with these words which lie cold awaiting, it may be,
breath's dawning.

7

As I set out
I am read. Several times I've been earth, several times
like a word.

8

Reddening rim. Biting edge of air. Even colder is what
I am following.

9

Lowly earth, speaking in a low voice, turns me into earth.

10

Backing on air

with the clean plates

all about
where the air has finished.

11

Shaken
by the hand
of day

I breathe in its stead

unwinding
this cold road

outside

down to earth

it is
no fire of mine
rather another heat

that sky

where we are locked.

12

The chill is the chill of the room surrounding gold when
I've lightened up.

I CAN SEE NEXT TO NOTHING

The paper I cut through
is damp
the mountain near hidden by its white robe

the words calm down
reseating themselves
in place

air even warmer than the skin

at last I emerge

not me carving these streets

so fully is it all existing
so far stretching
I may let my hand go

outside

I can see next to nothing.

GARY SNYDER

LANGUAGE GOES TWO WAYS

Language, in the Occident, has been popularly described as that by which humans bring order to the "chaos of the world." In this view, human intelligence flowers through the supposedly unique faculty of language, and then imposes a net of categories on an untidy universe. The more objective and rational the language, it is thought, the more accurate this exercise in defining the world will be. Language is considered by some to be a flawed mathematics, and the idea that mathematics might even supplant language has been flirted with. This view still colors the commonplace thinking of many engineer-types and possibly some mathematicians and scientists.

The world—ordered according to its own inscrutable mode (indeed a sort of chaos) is so complex and vast in macro and micro scales that it remains forever unpredictable. The weather for hoary example. And take the very mind that ponders these thoughts: in spite of years of personhood we remain unpredictable even to our own selves. Often we couldn't guess what our next thought will be. But that clearly does not mean we are living in hopeless confusion, only that we live in a realm in which many patterns remain mysterious or inaccessible to us.

We can affirm that the natural world (which includes human languages) is mannerly, shapely, coherent, and patterned according to its own devices. The four thousand or so languages of the world model reality each in their own way (following Whorfian theories of the deep effects of each language on world-view)—with patterns and syntaxes that were not invented or created by anyone. Languages are naturally evolved wild systems whose complexity eludes the descriptive attempts of the rational mind.

"Wild" alludes to a process of self-organization that generates systems and organisms, all of which are within the constraints of—and constitute components of—larger systems which again are wild, such as major ecosystems, or the water-cycle in the biosphere. Wildness can be said to be the essential nature of nature. As reflected in consciousness it can be seen as a kind of open awareness—full of imagination but also the source of alert survival intelligence. The workings of the human mind at its very

richest reflect this essential wildness. I have gone into this in more detail in the essays in my book *The Practice of the Wild.*

Language goes two ways: it enables us to have a small window onto an independently existing world, but it also shapes—via its very structures and vocabularies—how we see that world. It may be argued that what language does to our seeing of reality is restrictive, narrowing, limiting, and possibly misleading. "The menu is not the meal." But rather than dismiss language and to vaguely speak of Unsayable Truths, we must turn right back into language. The way to see with language, to be free with it and to find it a vehicle of self-transcending insight, is to know both mind and language extremely well, and to play with their many possibilities without any special attachment. In doing this, a language yields up surprises and angles that amaze us, and can lead back to unmediated direct experience. Creativity is not something from outside that a poet brings to language, but is a function of a double sort of reading, and a hidden or unnoticed pattern in the world may show itself through deeps of language.

Natural Language, self-generated grammars and vocabularies constructed in the confusion of history, expresses itself in the vernaculars. Daily usage has many striking, clear, specific, usages and figures of speech that come through (traditionally) in riddles, proverbs, stories and such—and nowadays in jokes, raps, wildly fluid slang and constant experiment with playful expressions—the dozens, the snaps. Children on the playground chant rhymes, and enjoy fooling with language. Maybe some people are born with a talent for language, just as some people are born with a talent for math or music. Some natural geniuses go beyond being street singers, mythographers, and raconteurs to become fully engaged poets and writers of multicultural America.

Creativity is a matter of seeing afresh what is already there and reading its implications and omens.* There are poems, novels, and paintings that roll onward through history, perennially redefining our places in the cosmos, that were initiated by such seeing. But creativity is not a unique, singular, godlike act of "making something." It is born of being deeply immersed in what *is*—and then seeing the overlooked connections, tensions, resonances, shadows, reversals, retellings. What comes forth is "new."

"Good language usage" was an idea that used to be based on the perceived utility of the speech of people of power and position—whose standard language was that of the capital—London or Washington—and the social and economic advantages that accrue to its use. Garden-variety ideas of Good Writing are drawn from models in literature and high artistic culture. A third category involves a technical sort of writing that is mainly

*Stephen Owens' *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics* speaks to this point.

concerned with clarity and organization and is rightly perceived as an essential element in the tool kit of a person hoping for success in the modern world. This last sort of writing is intrinsically boring, but it has the usefulness of a tractor which will go straight and steady up one row and down another. Like a tractor, it is expected to produce a yield: scholarly essays and dissertations, grant proposals, charges or countercharges, final reports, long-range scenarios, strategic plans.

Really Good Writing comes to those who have learned, mastered, and passed through conventional good usage, good writing, and then loop back to the enjoyment and unencumbered playfulness of Natural Language. Good Writing is like a garden that is producing exactly what you want, by virtue of lots of weeding and cultivating. What you get is what you plant, like a row of beans. *Really* good writing is both inside and outside the garden fence. It can be a few beans, but also some wild poppies, vetches, mariposa lilies, ceanothus, and some juncoes and yellowjackets thrown in. It is more diverse, more interesting, more unpredictable, and engages with a much broader, deeper kind of intelligence. Its connection to the wildness of language and imagination helps give it power.

This is what Thoreau meant by the term "Tawny Grammar"—as he wrote (in the essay "Walking") of "this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society". . ."The Spaniards have a good term to express this wild and dusky knowledge, *Gramatica parda,* tawny grammar, a kind of mother-wit derived from that same leopard to which I have referred." The grammar of not only language, but that of culture and civilization itself, comes from this vast mother of ours, Nature. "Savage and howling" is another way of saying "graceful dancer" and "fine writer." (Another linguist friend once commented "Language is like a Mother Nature of feeling, it's so powerfully ordered there's room to be 99% wild.")

We can and must teach our young people to master the expected standard writing procedures, as part of preparation for the demands of the economy of GATT, and information overload. They will need these skills not only to advance in this post-industrial pre-collapse world, but to critique and transform it. Those young learners with charming naive writing talents may suffer from the destructive effect of this discipline, because they will be brought to doubt their own ear and wit. They need to be assured that their unique personal visions will survive. They can take a deep breath and leap into the current formalities and rules, learn the game, and still come home to the language of heart and 'hood. We must continually remind people that language and its powers are far vaster than the territory deemed "proper usage" at any given time and place, and that there have always been geniuses of language who wrote without formal education.

Homer was a singer, not a writer.

The more familiar view of language is:

1. Language is uniquely human, and primarily cultural.
2. Intelligence is framed and developed by language.
3. The world is chaotic, but language organizes and civilizes it.
4. The more cultivated the language, the more educated and precise and clear, the better it will tame the unruly world of nature and feeling.
5. Good writing is "civilized" language.

One can turn this around to say:

1. Language is basically biological, but becomes semi-cultural as learned and practised.
2. Intelligence is framed and developed by all kinds of interactions with the world, including human communication both linguistic and nonlinguistic, and language comes to play a strong—but not the only—role in the refinement of thinking.
3. The world (and mind) is orderly in its own fashion, and linguistic order reflects and condenses that order.
4. The more completely (without the interference of ego and opinion) the world is allowed to come forward and instruct us, the better we can see our place in the interconnected world of nature.
5. Good writing is "wild" language.

The 12th-century Zen Buddhist philosopher Dôgen put it this way: "To advance your own experience onto the world of phenomena is delusion. When the world of phenomena comes forth and experiences itself, is enlightenment." To see a thrush in a bush, call it "thrush" and go on walking, is to have (self-importantly) seen nothing. To see the bird and stop, watch, feel, forget yourself for a moment, be in the bushy shadows, maybe then recall "thrush;" is to have enjoyed a larger moment with the world.

•

When we are in the act of playful writing, the mind's eye is roaming, seeing sights and scenes, reliving events, hearing and dreaming at the same time. The mind may be reliving a past moment entirely in this moment, so that it is hard to say if the mind is in the past or in some other present. We move mentally as in a great landscape, and return from it with a few bones, nuts, or drupes, which we keep as language. We write to deeply heard but distant rhythm; out of a fruitful darkness; out of a moment without

judgment or object. Language is a part of our body, and woven into the seeing, feeling, touching, and dreaming of the whole mind as much as coming from some localized "language-center." Full of the senses, as—

> Sabrina fair
> Listen where thou art sitting
> Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
> In twisted braids of lilies knitting
> The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
> Listen for dear honor's sake,
> Goddess of the silver lake,
> Listen and save.

(a song in Milton's *Comus).* Chill clarity, fluid goddess, silvery waves and silvery flowers.

The faintly visible traces of the world are to be trusted. We do not need to organize so-called chaos. Discipline and freedom are not opposed to each other. We are made free by the training that enables us to master necessity, and we are made disciplined by our free choice to undertake mastery. We go beyond being a "master" of a situation by becoming a friend of "necessity" and thus—as Camus would have put it—neither victim nor executioner. Just a person playing in the field of the world.

REVIEWS & NOTICINGS

POWETRY

Three political stances in poetry—this is what the combination of Charles Bernstein, Kamau Brathwaite, and Norma Cole offers (whom I shall briefly and alphabetically consider). All would be discussable as examples of a concern, which I very much favor, taken from Adorno. "Poetry is now possible only if language is thoroughly plowed up and turned over. . ." (Adorno, *Notes to Literature,* volume 2, Columbia University Press, 1992, 195; the essay called "Charmed Language," 1967.) In the context of Adorno's discussion, this is a rejection of the purely subjective, the neoromantic. The desire of the poet under his scrutiny (Rudolf Borchardt) was "to force the transsubjective, objectively binding quality of language" into a new sound, not archaic, not romantic, not laden with the museum of the poetic. In part, this sound comes from a rhetoric of speech, of speech considered as a kind of eloquent riff, a social ode. In part, the political elements can come from drawing energy from the conflictual antagonisms which one's personal and historical situation embody (this paraphrasing Adorno). In part, and don't misunderstand, the embodying of a political position in language comes from a rage so joyous and slashing that it has a comedic or voracious undertow, no matter the catalogue of superabundance, desolation, or injustice that the poetry offers. Thus—the plowing up and turning over of language—down to the social text embodied in every syllable—seems crucial to that poetry of political address which one feels as enriching. As adequate.

Charles Bernstein, *Dark City,* Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1994; $11.95. Thirteen long poems (ranging from eight to about twenty pages). Of verve and address, ventriloquizing, mimicking, shticking it to them and us. The work extends the range and meaning of the poetic act. (It's also really and somewhat relentlessly funny. That is, it has entirely erased any tinge or twinge of the High Seriousness of Poetry. It also continuously enacts its own undercutting. Some people might, therefore, be annoyed; it's not an

aspect of this work that is always easy to live with.) This manner, or poetic position, like a magician, produces incredible quick-footed shape-changing tap-dancing urban-trickster SHIFTS among sounds and statements. Segmented words; in your face line breaks; "exogamic structure"; transegmental drift; juggled proverbs; DOS system talk; assonance, consonance, nons(on)ense; a bunch of stuff a four year old typed onto the page and pressed save; glissades in perfect hypotaxis; a noble rhetoric of car salesmen, computer jocks, letters to the editor, snooze-riot book reviews, zany-brainy double talk, jingles, doggerels, things that (as in Stein) sound like other things, but not quite, and "summary / mummery" (53). And passages of—advertising propane; familial sniveling; punning apprehension of banality; delivery systems of "poetry services" (22)—the whole lot. Like Jacob with the angel, Bernstein has wrestled Bakhtin to the ground; our favorite Russian won't say another WORD about "monologic poetry"—he promises.

All in all, Bernstein's work creates the poetry archive of daily life, "confining / masquerade / to detail," and detail to everywhere. (71) Poetry becomes the spread sheet of the linguistic detail. There are undulating sentences, there is ululating parody, nothing is sacred, ok, except language processes and their socioeconomic provocation and ground. The work explores the textures and social vectors of the sounds made in the name of writing, speaking, talking, professing, selling, thinking. Hoo hoo hoo Meestr Keetzel, so there's your Zukofsky, there's your Swinburne, your Browning, your Stevens, your Shakespeare, your Groucho, who else d'ya expect? Maybe, say, the ambition of Pound, and the music hall rakishness of early to mid Eliot. Invoking both those names puts a lot of stake in trumping the modernists of heavy master narratives and exclusionary clauses. Bernstein does Jewish-creole poetry vaudeville; "aside the jesting hooligan, shenanigan, or / general call to bedlam" (143) in the myriad discourses of the mix. Motto: if there's a sound, I can make it. Or—if I can't find that passage from Hegel, I'll write one just like it. Performativity—it's the Keyword for Now, and this book's got it. "But / why prize distraction over direction, song over / solemnity?" (64) For the intelligence and cunning of the examination, the range and the hilarity; for the political commitment to the "ploughing up and turning over of language."

Kamau Brathwaite, *Middle Passages*. New York: New Directions, 1993. $9.95. Fourteen medium length poems inciting, constructing, and performing a diasporic culture which rounds Africa, the Caribbean, Mexico, South America, and the African-American United States into an interactive network of allusions and meanings—musicians, political figures, martyrs. The title, alluding to the forced transport of Africans into enslavement, now is remade to indicate passages (literary and geographic) through a

"middle"—a particular historical moment in which "dat POR CYAAAN TEK NO MOOR." (51) I haven't offered, except with the capital letters here, a sense of the manifesto-like play with typeface, font-size and page that this work (and another—the remarkable *Trench Town Rock)* offer, whose poetics might be spoken as "see see see until yu bline." (TTR 67). *(Trench Town Rock*. Providence: Lost Roads, 1994. $10.95) No more / no Moor—no more outside constructions or representations of the colored. With this turn, and with the intransigence of that rejection, Brathwaite is the first poet of a new world.

This is a vibrant work of linguistic and political cunning, of power and rage/range. Brathwaite enters into the fibers of language with notable semantic, etymological and intertextual images. With a Joycean flair, he doubles and triples the languages in his grasp, with scalpel and needling precision undoing and anatomizing commonplaces. In a parody of white attitudes finding the "manacles" in their concept of "man" (16): "there are tribes there of scarececrows / hunters of heads who ate humane bones." (15) Virtually every line of this pulsing poetry contains subtle allusions to events, attitudes, ideologies of the racialized world and the political struggles of transformation.

> but that worse it is the blink
> in iani own eye. the sun blott. ed out by
> paper a cane fires vamp.
>
> ires a ink wheels emp.
> ires a status quo status quo status crows
> that tell a blood tale toll/ing in the ghetto
>
> (50)

Ire and dies irae are shadow words contained in the splitting of vamp/ires and emp/ires, these linked by their abilities to suck blood and to drain the victim. (And, alas, in both legend and fact, to make colonized into colonizer, to make vamped into vampire. Brathwaite does not overlook Fanon's and Memmi's dialectics, but it is not his main point.) The status quo "crows" or lords over; it also eats carrion, as do crows. This tale, as in Donne, tolls for thee. In short; by the knowing and narrow-eyed use of multiplex literary and cultural allusions, puns, overlayerings of word over word, suggestive associations, metonymic leads across a field, Brathwaite's social meanings are embedded in the segmentation and articulation of words themselves. It is political poetry in the very fibers of language, and achieved by the "ploughing up" of languages—indeed, if this not be misunderstood, by the making of these plowshares into rapiers. This is a very significant and productive post-colonial poetry in English, the equal

of Aimé Césaire's magisterial "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land" (which, in the Eshleman/Smith translation, New Directions will be issuing soon). New Directions has embarked on an ambitious and helpful publishing program to bring Brathwaite's works to the attention of a United States audience. In Fall 1995, they will bring out *Ancestors,* the second, and highly-acclaimed, trilogy, originally published between 1977 and 1987, and whose individual titles are *Mother Poem, Sun Poem,* and *X/Self. Black & Blues* (1976) follows in Spring 1996 and thereafter Brathwaite's first trilogy, *The Arrivants.*

Norma Cole, *Mars,* Berkeley: Listening Chamber, 1994. $10. With an original cover by Jess. Six long works, seemingly shifting in attention from the cultural associations of Mars, Mercury, Saturn to the Old Testament Ruth. The work is announced as having been begun (February 1991) under the pall, or in the aura of the Gulf War. War is announced tangentially as an issue in the epigrams, one from Duncan and the other from H.D., both alluding to the career-long, central consideration of military violence in those two oeuvres. But what the work proposes is a set of thoughtful, but very fragmented notations, inside a theater in consciousness, or on a sketch pad of responses. The stage is thick with dreams and fantasies, with the shards of philosophical matter (such as a reading of Levinas). The general tone or stance seems to be a sustained bafflement, a holding open of a door of naming because there is a plethora of evidence, but, in some sense, the "case" or "suit" to which the evidence points is obscured. "The vaudevillian character runs downstairs and comes back up wearing different clothes, whereupon the person on the landing realizes she has not the set of assumptions with which to understand her role in all this." (10) The language fragments and notations are each quite precise and convincing, but the binding energy I cannot find. This may simply be that the work is not written under the rubric of the slashing, "comedic" (that is mordant, sardonic, judgmental) political sound that I outlined above. It may be a function of the subject's questioning of "her role in all this." In any event, the pun between lead (the metal) and lead (the action) is important to the sense of depression, stasis, and examination of cultural response to (for example) "the hyperabstraction of the official media representation of the Gulf war" (72). This is a reactive, not a proactive text. Lead is a metal for bullets; a lead is a prominent news story; it is an electrical conductor; it is a thick strip of white created between lines of type; it is a plumb bob for a sounding.

lead lines on the hill

lead hands
heat-seeking

there is no metaphor for war

(43)

The Mercury section, for example ends, in a kind of wary suspicion "no messenger // that there could be no / messenger[.]" (45) This, of course, is a judgment on the work of both Duncan and H.D. in which messengers abide no matter what the historical distress. The poet insists that we are "all widows" now, and the book's overarching tone is a bereavement (83). It could be said—a bereavement for some of the individual subjectivities possible under the political conditions created by a flailing imperium.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

"only in the heart the glitter": A Review of Kenneth Irby's *Call Steps: Plains, Camps, Stations, Consistories.* Station Hill / Tansy: Barrytown, 1994.

I have carried Ken Irby's words for years like images of the Stations of the Cross, mixed with memories that cling to his words until word and memory become inseparable, like my vision of the pack of Forest Service horses rolling on their back in Snake River country "to sustain the dead"—in Irby's phrase from *A Set*—or the doves who nestle in my backyard magnolia recalling the delicacy of *Orexis* and "the generation of mourning doves' cries / . . .from the twilight in the mind / releasing and attracting us" (Call Steps 19). Or wasps flitting above the cottonwood, rattle of a paint spray can, smells from the kitchen, the enduring and irredeemable sadness of time in the coming of winter. I received *Call Steps* in the midst of my first Indiana harvest—with my head full of scenes of violence upon the fields of corn and soy, the machines of Tartaros churning at night, and the flatness

of the land no longer veiled by the corn, now scarcely interrupted by silos and granaries and the few windbreaks severing the enormous distances. This is a landscape that evokes for me the Great Wheel of the Kansas Plains of Irby's work with its vast yearning and intimations of another life. Along the Demeter granary in Fowler grain spews out on the highway and flocks of birds startle and whirl from the shoulder as you pass, and I think of Irby's own sacramental birds, when feeding becomes a central image of something akin to grace:

> *confer* the birdbath flock below
> or a tallow sponge for stone for bread?
> *in fact,* a birdseed ball, pecked through
>
> (148)

—but I also recognize the fecund ambiguity, the admixture of grace and loss, with only the strings of the gutseed ball left dangling.

Perhaps there's no better expression of Irby's dark faith than the disappearance throughout *Orexis,* the first book of *Call Steps:*

> but it does not remain to the eyes
> or even, since there may be no other name, at all
> and yet remains
>
> (26)

In my mind, Irby remains one of the essential visionary and religious poets of my time, with his Gnostic madness and nonsense and paradoxes combined with—above all—a most remarkable generosity of spirit, accumulating natural faces and allusion and funky down-home jazz riffs in order that nothing be lost, except what is inevitable in the recalcitrance of body and spirit, in the inevitable processes of deterioration and erosion that are cause for remorse and celebration, as when he himself celebrates "all sorts of kindness and generosity" with a lovely, if homespun, image of loss and grace: "deep, *unbearable* affection? except for *dis*tance / wearing the new red shirt you sent rubs off on my underwear" (66).

Not all Irby's work is easily accessible; in fact, most of it remains mysterious, half-seen, half-heard, buzzing like the drone of a mountain dulcimer or a didgeridoo, recalling the dream-time. Or like Osip Mandelstam's quotations humming like cicadas. Reading his work requires, I think, a form of initiation, just as the poems are deeply concerned with initiation, drawing upon spiritual sources from the *Zohar* to his remarkable Masonic and Templar allegories to Sufi dialectics of love, "homegrown handtipped dervishwhirling in you own living room without getting dizzy or sick." (53) Yet they *are* dizzying, improvisations that are remarkable for their fluidity

and their technique, their range of sound from nonsense squawks and groans to deep mellow exquisitely painful melodic lines. Cross Rilke with Ben Webster and Huckleberry Finn and you'd arrive at Irby's music, a pastoral music that feeds, even if in the *sparagmos* of the carnal body: "parsley // pubic hair above the bread / body torn to pieces . . ." (20). Yet the poems' syncretic and esoteric nature do not deny their democratic and generous spirit, open to the common speech, the Gawdawmightys and aintchas and pogo sticks and "naw, nix, nothin' up yet, knucks down, dinks, but eyes, you got mine, swinging" (142). And I think of Charles Olson's *polis,* where "polis / is / eyes."

Call Steps is formed of three books, *Orexis; Cicada Woods,* composed generally of mysterious minimal annunciations; and *Bowls,* a work which seems an homage to Duncan and H.D. and the body spiritual which contains one of the most intriguing glimpses of Irby's poetics when he sings: *"to stand with the things of Nature* already down a separate road from the things of Nature / [. . .] 'so the lines . . . / do not meet"' (146). All were written in the late seventies, and gather poems published in rare editions and scattered in journals. His previous large collection, *Catalpa,* is to my mind one of the essential texts of contemporary American poetry, exploring and amplifying the physical, spiritual and historical terrain associated with Robert Duncan's mythopoeisis and Olson's *'istorin,* as well as Louis Zukofsky's musical and syntactical experiments (many of Irby's "Études," in their odd and resonant couplings and broken syntax, recall movements of *"A",* such as his "homage to Sosatsu's *Bugaku*": "ode all the uprights O'd / outsping, unbowed // & ear lobe told / just hold to be" (91). In many ways, *Catalpa* plumbs the great cycles and errancies of history, with its charting of Jedidiah Smith and California rifts and trails and John Brown's border crossings as they intersect with dreams and visions. But here Irby compels the local and intimate landscape to reveal its truths, offering a measure of survival at the margins, where poetry reveals the necessity and splendor of leftovers and herb gardens and "cold jug chablis," the alchemy of using all the parts of the chicken until reaching the "deep muted underglow, to reflect the soul's turn's own reflection / back into the days, wet, dark, up-welling, mid-November" (147) Even in the midst of such darkness, Irby can no doubt lead you to what remains of the Manitou circling the prairies or whisper the passwords of the Knights of the Rosy Cross. From darkness, such bounty.

Though there is a certain virtue in searching out-of-the-way places for treasures, just as alchemists searched the dunghill for the *lapis philosophorum*—I recall constructing Irby's works piecemeal, searching through old *Caterpillar* volumes and new magazines, eagerly anticipating finding works whose names were enticing, like *In Excelsis Borealis* and *Orexis* and *Catalpa,* a tree forever associated in my mind with Irby, just as

lilacs are with Whitman—the collection in *Call Steps* should be celebrated and propagated, even if the work remains finally misunderstood, "every bit of it in a tongue nobody understands" (132), a misunderstanding that binds us to each other in rites of absence, as when in *Orexis* Irby proclaims:

> so that the word is passed on
> and equally not known
> till how much later, the thrill of recognizing can still be known
> (27)

And indeed the mysteries of Irby's work often arise later in crystalline epiphanies, the upsurge of involuntary memory to fully recall the pain, always the pain, even in the midst of celebration, as in the revelations of an attic bare in winter and his yearning gaze in the cardinal directions: "looking out West and North, toward the river, the hills on the other side of the flood plain brighter than anything else in the day, snow dark the woods—and watch till the aftersunset glow had vanished and the room was dark, the earth turn" (74). And in sorrow one finds a redemptive flame: "tears, for a lodge of sorrow, seeds, or grif for, for that long house / and smoke of memory, history's time afire" (134).

—EDWARD SCHELB

NOTICINGS

Chaim Soutine, Catalogue Raisonné (with essays by Maurice Tuchman and Esti Dunow), boxed, two volumes, Benedikt Taschen Verlag, Köln. Nearly 500 paintings, many reproduced for the first time (with a significant number of fakes weeded out), large format, excellent color work. Asked to identify his key influences, De Kooning once replied: "I think I would choose Soutine. . . I've always been crazy about Soutine—all of his paintings. Maybe its the lushness of the paint. He builds up a surface that looks like a material, like a substance. There's a kind of transfiguration, a certain fleshiness, in his work. . . I remember when I first saw the Soutines in the

Barnes Collection. . . the Matisses had a light of their own, but the Soutines had a glow that came from within the paintings—it was another kind of light."

Emily Dickinson, Joan Kirkby, Macmillan Education Ltd., England. A brief but engaging "introduction" to Dickinson by an Australian scholar, with compelling re-readings of such poems as "Because I could not stop for Death" and "My life had stood—a Loaded Gun."

Index on Censorship #6, Writers and Scholars International Ltd., London. The current issue of this valuable journal includes a powerful address by Wole Soyinka on the "end of Nigerian history," and articles on Iraq, Cuba, and Haiti with information I have not spotted elsewhere.

Queen of Terrors, Robert Kelly, McPherson & Co. As serious as his poetry, but much more playful, Kelly's "fictions" are not his poems redone as prose (as might be a risk at 60). Writing performed in the paradise of the imagination, thinking its way, micron by micron, through what might be thought of as the sleeves of the language's availabilities. Later this year, Black Sparrow will bring out his selected poems, *Red Actions.*

The Green Lake is Awake, Selected Poems, Joseph Ceravolo, Coffee House Press. The surface excitement of Ceravolo's writing is special; his poems often "go off" like a popper exploding popcorn. Below the surface, there are many clutches of questions ("What time are animals?" "Where would my dog be if I had one?" "The path, the path is where?" "You going where in leaves?"), that fall somewhere between "koans" and maddening 4-year-old questions. Zukofsky's *Catullus* kept echoing while I read.

I, Rigoberta Menchú, An Indian Woman in Guatemala, Verso. Should be required reading for all American high-school seniors. Upon finishing it, I turned to Victor Perera's *Unfinished Conquest* (U of Cal Press), a solidly-researched, fair-minded and compassionate overview of "the Guatemala tragedy," in which North America is insidiously involved. In his "Bibliography" (a discussion of his sources as well as a checklist), Perera points out that Marc Zimmerman and David Stoll have written on inconsistencies in some of Menchú's eyewitness accounts. He then comments: "Although her book should be as subject to objective scrutiny as any other published account, the force of Menchú's intelligence and personal integrity, and her almost miraculous survival, render her testimony unique and, to an extent, impervious to critical analysis."

The Origin of Humankind, Richard Leakey, Basic Books. A bland but informative survey of humankind from Australopithecus to Cro-Magnon. As the picture fills in, the gaps also become more noticeable. The connections between tools, brain increase, meat-eating, tooth and jaw structure, curtailed fetal gestation and neoteny are factors in a time frame (7 million BCE to 35,000 BCE) that still appears to be unmappable. Useful bibliography.

Worshipful Company of Fletchers, James Tate, The Ecco Press. Noticing in the Winter 1995 *Daedalus* catalogue that Tate's book had received the 1994 NBA, I picked up a copy of it, and noticed that the book was published in 1994. I thought book awards were given the year *following* publication. That aside, the book is terrible. Tate is an eternal adolescent saying things that are supposed to be funny that renga on and on, derailing punch lines to keep the silliness going. It is a writing that doesn't believe in anything but which, instead of confronting its cynicism, makes faces, in effect, at the reader. One poem begins: "She has one good bumblebee / which she leads about town / on a leash of clover." This tells us that Tate heard the story about Gérard de Nerval, during a breakdown preceding suicide, leading a lobster down the street on a ribbon. The extent of the trivialization here is typical of the entire book.

And For Example, Ann Lauterbach, Penguin Books. Lauterbach writes out of a threshold area, that location some call the human aura, where living warmth vanishes as the world takes over. Which is to say that her work is not really inward nor outward. I feel that she dwells in this space too self-permissively, yet I have to acknowledge that word by word, phrase by phrase, her poetry is meticulous. Poems often have a pale, Tiffany-like glow, and yearn *toward* or *into,* without revelation or, for that matter, blood.

When the Borders Bleed: The Struggle Of The Kurds, photographs by Ed Kashi, introduction by Christopher Hitchens, Pantheon. An informative essay as to who the Kurds are by the *Nation* columnist prefaces 100 or so color photographs of this grievously exploited people—20 million without a nation of their own—who recently endured genocidal campaigns waged against them by Saddam Hussein. As one who became aware of the Kurds' plight during our so-called Gulf War, I am glad to have this book as a way to keep these people on my mind.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Columns & Catalogues, Peter Schjeldahl, Great Barrington, The Figures, 1994

In conversation with Peter Schjeldahl at Brown University last year, I proposed that his art writing revealed a strong bias toward Neo-expressionism, and he immediately agreed. Not the only way to appreciate his temperament; nonetheless, much could be gained about this street-smart New York School poet's viewpoint by reading his art writing with this in mind.

Neo-expressionism may be seen as the triangulation of expressionist with populist impulses. Following German Expressionism, it assumes that civility in art is false, or at least uninteresting; at any rate, creative talent is rather more anarchic than this and will show itself in awkward, antisocial and adolescent excesses sooner than it will colonize the already known. Schjeldahl will support the art that arises from the undermining of civility, no matter what the medium, although he is especially susceptible to painting and to spectacle.

The exemplar of the latter category for Schjeldahl—as for many of us—is Bruce Nauman, the dialectician in neon whose verbal art has recently given way to videos of "Clown in Tantrum" and other high-decibel absurdity. Everywhere in Schjeldahl's writings but here too in this book of recent art reviews from *The Village Voice,* Nauman heads a cast of theatrical artists that includes Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, and Nayland Blake, whose installation devoted to the mentality of the Marquis de Sade poses the threat of total freedom; or, as Schjeldahl puts it: "if absolutely free to do what you want, what will you want to do?" Schjeldahl has high regard for art that brings such questions to crisis. In his ambivalence, he therefore reveres the charismatic figure of Joseph Beuys.

In painting, the populist in Schjeldahl is repelled by theory and attracted to intuitive intelligence. Ree Morton and Carroll Dunham are favored Neo-expressionists compatible with Philip Guston in his last phase. Art proves itself through its acts, not its beliefs, Schjeldahl seems to advocate. So it's not surprising that Joan Mitchell's rough-and-ready Abstract Expressionism, and especially the art of "the patriarchs" Willem de Kooning and Jean Dubuffet, get pride of place in Schjeldahl's pantheon. On the other hand, Lucien Freud, the terminally reactionary pictorial painter of world-weary penises, gets appropriate disengagement: "A lot of people need Lucien Freud to be a great painter," Schjeldahl's review begins. Although with Eric Fischl, Schjeldahl can be beguiled by the same distracting subject matter—dazzled as he is by Bad Boyism, this time he is not fooled. Indeed, he is rarely fooled.

—MARJORIE WELISH

Jay Meek. *Windows*. Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1994. 64 pp. No price given.

Profound awareness of time and a Platonic idealism have characterized Jay Meek's poetry for the last decade. As one poem in *Earthly Purposes* (1984) begins, "The dead are with me tonight and I am richer for it." But richer or poorer, to swim with time is to discriminate and to modulate, both exceedingly difficult acts:

> All things in coming to us blaze with such a multiple light
> and often so powerfully
> that we ache to make them simple, or to hold a simple view,
> but there is comfort
> and at times joy in knowing that even among familiar things
> distinctions can exist
> and lend new meaning. . . .
>
> ("Winners")

The biologist's rats, the physicist's sun, the poet's words come round and round as bedevilment, the ever-present insistence by things outside us that we make our reality congruent with theirs, in response to which the poet says in *Stations* (1989):

> I want nothing more
>
> than to live with the complexities that form
> a landscape each of us helps make,
> seeing and being seen,
>
> our best powers no more than what we'll need
> to live out the century with clarity
> and mindfulness.
>
> ("Student Boats at the Sailing Pavilion")

The appealing modesty scarcely masks the courage with which the poet takes on himself and his language the whole job of cultural definition, preservation and transmission. "We move toward ourselves," he says, "between necessary mirrors," wishing to find some way to carry our lives, wondering when we'll begin to think of life passing in the third person, observing the other lives we die short of. Classically grand and contempo-

rarily puny is the ironic measure of human life: "Everyone who drinks the water dies."

In *Windows*, the old room with a view onto the mud flats of the Charles becomes three correlative sections each of a dozen story-poems, concentrated anecdotes in which, as in all experimental verification, the phrased moments are cemented by underlying metaphor and characterized by cogent rhythm, striking imagery, dense expression and lyric tensions and impact. Invented in 18th-century France to translate classic verse into non-tonic French and to get around Academic rigidity, the prose poem soon became a means to express original consciousness first for Bertrand and Guérin, then for Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, for De Quincey and Novalis, Turgenev and Rilke—and on to our own time of "poetry talk" and "performance art." Meek reinvigorates the prose poem proper—that complex verbal play between the conscious and the subconscious, the real and surreal, illusion and reality. It is a compact, sophisticated poetry intellectually vibrant but cast in colloquial diction—the poet as ventriloquist, doll and disinterested observer asking only to stay the night and leave the next morning:

> A carnival came to our mountain town, pitching its tents behind the shopping mall, where I visited the magician. . . . One rabbit slept in his rocker, and while I waited for the magician to return, I cradled it in my arms. I could have been anyone, a thief or a health inspector, someone given to sudden appearances. Rain fell over the metal roof. On the midway, the carnival rides were covered with tarpaulins, and as I looked out at the canvas murals of the miraculous and deformed, I thought of broad city squares, government plazas with no one walking in them, capitals of the world.
>
> ("Sudden Appearances")

Such is the presence of consciousness that it creates not the virtual reality of cyberspace but the poetic reality of human space. The mind with which we remember, like the light with which we seek, working on everything around us, illuminates the substance of what we know.

> When we lie down at night, we put aside our watchfulness and longing. Around us, the darkness shines. Perhaps one day, entering a tramontane village, we might find all that's lost to us, forms sheered off from their substances—sollerets and phaetons and mortsafes—still without rust in the rarefied air. . . . In the whole of the universe, who's to say the human form

> is right? Truly, we are capable of infinite variation, like the ocean our crossing takes small measure of, the whitecaps falling on one another like shadows of the possible world.
>
> ("The Beautiful and Invisible Tree That Rises Through the Universe for Which the Stars Are Leaves")

Liberated from metrical and intellectual conventionality by the reflexive rhythm of casual dialect and the idiosyncrasies of intense introspection against the backdrop of the world, this highly charged poetry expresses a magic of its own. By gathering all things in their resemblances between *its* mirrors, it creates a fresh poetry in our time and opens a way for new poetry in the next century.

—F.D. REEVE

One Man's Paglia

Since we have license these days to read only what we want to, I decided I didn't have to read *Sexual Personae*. I did so on the basis of its final sentence, which I turned to first. It stopped me in my tracks:

> Voyeurism, vampirism, necrophilia, lesbianism, sadomasochism, sexual surrealism: Amherst's Madame de Sade still waits for her readers to know her (p. 673).

Which author is this a description of? Incredibly, the answer to the riddle is: Emily Dickinson. I thought it was, as the English say, "going a bit far" if feminism in its current lust for interesting women writers had to rediscover poor Emily as a scarified cultist in a Poe-like House of Hush. I had long ago been persuaded by Genevieve Taggard's evidence in *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* (1930), a passionate and honest book, that there was indeed a special "day at summer's full" in Dickinson's life and a known, handsome lover (looking very like Stewart Granger in his

portrait). Thus I saw the violent images judged sadistic by Camille Paglia as not decadently aesthetic but lively images of a broken heart, and the mortuary themes not as necrophilia but as testimony to Dickinson's profound faith that she would meet her lover at death. Paglia was pulling from the poems knife imagery, axe imagery, guillotine imagery, even cutlery imagery, and crying "sadomasochism." But it seemed to me I could by the same method extract enough nut, kernel, hiding and nibbling imagery to prove the poems were written by a Squirrel.

I turned away. But then *Sulfur* 28 arrived (Spring 1991) with Paglia's reminiscence, "Milton Kessler"—and there was an immediate resonance with the sixties feeling. We all bloomed then. But it was soon apparent that there was more to Paglia's tribute to her teacher than nostalgia. "I despise academe as it is presently constituted." I couldn't believe my ears! "A whole generation of academics my age destroyed themselves chasing after Saussure and his Parisian disciples." I had never heard anyone say it (the "it" longing to be said) before. "Right now, at mid-career, they are waking up to the nullity of their work." Was it with these words or later that I got the feeling that Paglia is a true prophet among us? It probably took "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders" in *Arion* (Spring 1991)—or, for me, in the collected essays *Sex, Art, and American Culture* (Vintage, September 1992)—to convince me. We so initially doubt everything and everybody that it was probably not until she told the personal story behind the "Junk Bonds" essay that I knew I could trust her (it's the pages entitled "A Media History" in the above collection) and saw what I had missed through the seventies and eighties:

> When I received the two books from *Arion* and began to read them, I was horrified. Their sloppiness and trendiness revolted me, and I began to feel that serious issues of scholarly ethics now faced the profession. I wrote to Herbert Golder, detailing my concerns and asking what length he would set for a review-essay on these matters. He generously gave me carte blanche. In May I began work on the essay in earnest. To the disapproval of my great mentor, Harold Bloom, who felt I should be concentrating on my own career and getting Volume Two ready for publication, I set everything in my life aside and for six months did the research for "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders," my *Arion* exposé. I worked through the last twenty years of literary criticism, examining it afresh. What I found was even worse than I expected—a pattern of pretension, incompetence, and naked careerist greed (pp. 301–2).

And if the implication for all of us who have lived our lives in universities isn't entirely clear, I'll quote more:

> Over ten years ago it was obvious there was a problem, a terrible problem, but the academic establishment just sat on its duff, until the neoconservatives got hold of this issue. The reform of education *is* not a neoconservative issue! It is an issue facing the entire nation. So what I'm trying to do is to mobilize and radicalize the liberals who have been silent and who have let academe be taken over by these opportunists, these sickening, disgusting, ass-kissing opportunists ("The M.I.T. Lecture" in *Sex, Art, and American Culture* p. 252).

There is much in this vein, and it's humbling. We have left undone those things we ought to have done. Thank god Paglia is saying it. The loss of standards goes right through everything. I was told just this morning about somebody's son leaving a good preparatory school for McGill University in Montreal and finding it so easy to get A's that all he can do is to start an impromptu club of friends who compete to see *how little* work they must do to get an A. The lack of real demand is driving the best young people to cynicism. And I knew it fifteen years ago when I found people deserting my classes because I still gave C's, and flocking back to me when I had got in line with all A's and B's. We are supposed to offer tenderness to all students, but there's no way you can teach properly without hurting the feelings of people who can't keep up. We have been sacrificing the best for the doubtful benefit of the mediocre, and to make peace with the system.

Paglia will never top "Junk Bonds." She doesn't have to. There is some feeling that the second collection of essays, *Vamps and Tramps* (Vintage, November 1994), is a repeat performance without a star number. So be it. Even if "Junk Bonds" can't be matched, I don't mind hearing more on similar topics. It's only by repetition that we really believe that something has happened.

And what is it that has happened? The universities have produced a phenomenon out of the Zeitgeist. (Paglia's word—"I was not in control of my career when it was a disaster, and I am not in control of it now," she says in the introduction to the first collected essays.) Our time has gained a woman scholar who has her wits about her ("smarts" I suppose is the word) and who is determined not to lose them. One can't help making comparisons; Paglia herself doesn't hesitate. The essay "Sontag, Bloody Sontag" in the new volume is like a flashbulb; it's an intellectual centerfold. Consider how she sorts it out on the basis of her own visible strong point, scholarship:

> As happened to the scintillating Germaine Greer, Sontag's separation from the university weakened her work over the long haul. The discipline of academic scholarship can kill and deaden but also refine and strengthen major talents of Greer's and Sontag's dimension. Harold Bloom scribbled in the margin of a draft of my dissertation in 1971, "Mere Sontagisme!" It saddened me, but I knew Bloom was right. Sontag, who should have been Jane Harrison's successor as a supreme woman scholar, had become synonymous with a shallow kind of hip posturing (p. 345).

The yarn about Sontag, brought to Bennington at Paglia's youthful insistence, is a humdinger. Sontag was on celebrity time, dawdled over dinner, took a cheque which represented the total funds for speakers for the year, and, to a massive eager audience turned restless, read a boring short story she had just written. "It took me years to live down," writes Paglia. "Two decades later, when I began to be invited to lecture around the country, I remembered the lessons of that night. I have kept my speaker's fees unusually low, and I try to give maximum energy and effort to my performances" (p. 353). I don't know why, but I find those words distinctly moving.

But to pick up the reference to Jane Harrison: *that* is going to get me back into *Sexual Personae*. There was no mention of Harrison in the Emily Dickinson chapter, but I see from the index there are numerous earlier. I can look into Paglia's use of Harrison, whom I have long admired for *Themis* and the *Prolegomena*. Naw, I'll begin at the beginning of the book and read the whole thing!

—RALPH MAUD

"Sweet Joy Befall Thee"

The memorial gathering invitation reads: "The artist Nora Jaffe," and that is how I remember my friend, along with my mother and my wife my closest

female companion. I remember her remarkable hands, their strength and firmness, as they would sheath mine in greeting. I once wrote of Nora's hands as pilgrims, or palmers, on their way to the destination drawing daily led them to—a destination to be found or undiscovered in the act of drawing, a destination, as I understand it, that always paid homage to the human body, not as expressionist or representational, but as the underscoring of formal decisions, so that while her finest work is formally resolved, the grandeur of the line is haunted by the source of every line: the fact that it issues from a pencil held by a hand linked to an arm on a woman's body. This relationship between the formal and the sexual—specifically a proud or bandaged male within the female—is uncompromising and eerie, and while it unsettled me at first, I soon realized that beyond the stimulation of Gorky and Bellmer I was facing, in Nora Jaffe's drawings and paintings, a unique 20th-century document: the enduring reality of the erotic and generative body as the contouring agent of the formal goal. The enturbulated eros of man is both the joyous and sorrowful weight in the webs of her searchings.

Nora's relationship to her art was antiphonal—she nourished it, it nourished her, and it had to, as, until late in her life when Virginia and Herbert Lust made a genuine commitment to publicly advance her work, she was nearly always on her own, often facing the hostility and revenge of our patriarchal art world against a woman with a commanding presence who had mastered form without jettisoning the physical world. While the lack of public access certainly hurt Nora, she was, to my knowledge, totally without bitterness or self-pity, and I must add here that during the last three years of her life when she was at times dreadfully ill and in unremitting pain, as someone who spoke with her weekly I never heard her complain. She told me that she accepted dying, that she had lived the life she wanted to live. A remarkable spirit, in other words, who had found a center in art, a center strong enough to support her without fame-injections from the periphery.

Nora was not my muse—she was a friend in art, a form of friendship redolent of inspiration and companionship. I love her very much, and I keep that verb in the present tense not only because the drawings, sculpture, and paintings we have of hers continue to amaze me, but because I continue to cherish our friendship as one that is realized and totally good. "Sweet Joy Befall Thee," she once wrote, in a catalogue of her work, as a dedication to Caryl and me, a line from William Blake's "Songs of Innocence." I think that was her wish for all of us, sweet joy today encircled by its mortal antagonist.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
[30 November 1994]

Eric Mottram

"Live all you can" was the title of one of Eric Mottram's last books. That is exactly what he had been doing all along—until January 16, 1995, when he died after a short illness, brought down by massive multiple infections: no one single cause could have done it, of that I am sure. He'd celebrated his seventieth birthday just before New Year, an occasion marked by great festivities and two festschrifts with contributions from the wide range of friends, colleagues, students and fellow poets. He was a man of fantastic energies & gargantuan appetites: poetry & literature, of course, but also music, theatre, criticism, politics, food, flora, opera, comedy, film, hiking, gardening—in fact no cultural artifact escaped his eagerness, and if there could be righteous anger at anything found wanting (& there was much: he was a demanding man), pure delight (the laughter was Rabelaisian!) in the endless creativity of his fellow humans was the norm. He was a true "imagination of synthesis" (the title of one of Eric's most breathtaking seminars—he was the best teacher in & out of the classroom I have ever had) & that is exactly what he made of his & what he meant when he wrote: "The issue is the orphic difference between creators and others, between the perpetuation of myth and its agents, and the freedom of the creative process."

It is impossible to sum up the achievements in a few words. Here is how the editors of the festschrift *Alive in Parts of this Century: Eric Mottram at 70* introduce him: "Eric Mottram is one of the most important figures of postwar literature and teaching. He was the first to teach Beat writing in Europe in the 1950s, the first teacher of American Studies at the University of London, and a cofounder of the Institute of United States Studies in the University of London in 1963. He edited *Poetry Review* in 1972–75, ran the King's Poetry Series in 1967–80 and coedited *The New British Poetry* (1988). He has had two dozen collections of poetry published since the late 1960s including *Elegies, A Book of Herne,* and *Selected Poems*. . .he has published nearly 200 articles & over 20 critical works including a collection of essays on American culture, *Blood on the Nash Ambassador,* & the first essay full study of William Burroughs, *The Algebra of Need.*

The work remains, & it is promethean, & it was all done because, as he wrote in *Elegy 4: Against Tyranny:*

> hope is that all created life be rescued
> from tyranny decay sloughed for a share
> in magnificence...

—PIERRE JORIS
Albany 1/18/95

Somebody said, "I can't take anyone seriously who dresses like Davy Crockett." But with Whitmanesque hair and beard, stained leather vest, Western hat, outdoor boots, a bearclaw necklace around his throat, Bill was more Joaquin Miller, or the "hawk-hearted" bandit Murietta whose pickled head sat in a jar on the sheriffs desk in an early poem from *The Residual Years*. Bill taught a class at Santa Cruz in a huge makeshift Buckminster Fuller dome of warped plywood set out in a parking lot. The class had a local reputation because Bill would stand and brood and meditate and thunder for a couple of hours a week and no one was permitted to interrupt. I looked in once and saw all the students lying about derelict, either asleep or doodling in notebooks, and never went back. But I saw him at poetry readings—instant attraction to that blue eye full of humorous sparks. The crashing poetry. The thunderous self-dramatization. Aah! that's how you want to get old, I thought.

It was when I got interested in book arts that I went looking for Bill. At the invitation of Rita Bottoms, Special Collections librarian at U.C. Santa Cruz, Bill had arrived and established the Lime Kiln Press in a lower room of the library. The press might have been named for Jeffers' poem "Bixby Landing." More likely for the abandoned lime kilns that litter the redwood forests around Santa Cruz—crumbling pits and towers of stone they could have been ancient fortresses, older and more blasted than any Rhone Valley rampart from Eleanor of Aquitaine's time—though these deserted furnaces of California only date a hundred years back. Several notable ones lie scattered around the Santa Cruz campus.

This was early Spring of 1978. I asked Bill could I work with him on some printing project. Letterpress printing as a craft interested me, and I had a sense of myself as a poet. Here was a man who did both. The Lime Kiln Press, operating under the auspices of the University, was a regular college course and Bill's assistants were enrolled students. I realized my request was irregular. Maybe it was my enthusiasm for Ananda Coomaraswamy's writings, books which had been important to Bill, maybe he noticed how I could talk about the obscure Essex House Press and the type fonts of Eric Gill—these things interested him. I wasn't a student but he told me to come around and work with his small group of apprentices. I joined them partway through work on the current book—an edition of Bill's poem "Blame it on the Jet Stream," which he'd declaimed at graduation for the University's Kresge College a year or two earlier. It's a wild poem, very much Jeffers in spirit. It gets at both the furious coastal California weather patterns of the jet-stream years, and the equally notable violence that stunned Santa Cruz in the early 1970s. On the model of Gilroy

the "garlic capital" and Castroville the "artichoke capital," locals had taken to calling Santa Cruz the "mass murder capital of the world." Underneath its counterculture veneer a lot of killing had gone down.

It's a tough prophetic poem, "Blame it on the Jet Stream," with long lines—Whitman in cadence but all Jeffers in how it pins a steady cold·eye on violence and sacrament. Now Bill was seeing it wrought into most elegant form. Not so ambitious or risky a project as *Granite & Cypress,* the Jeffers book Bill had printed at Lime Kiln, and which had restored his reputation after a long absence from printing. But then that book, bound into a case of Monterey cypress and inset with granite from Jeffers' own quarry, had been a tribute to the one poet Bill called master.

We worked the Acorn handpress, same design, nearly the same device as the old Washington Bill bought when he'd drifted down the coast to Berkeley after the war, and which he'd used to help found the Bay Area renaissance.

> *. . .once it is made ready, the right impression achieved, and the bearing-off points placed on the bed; once printing is begun and the run fairly under way, it moves into the work with a wonderful dispatch, its very spareness stands it in stead; and so perfectly gauged are its meeting parts that I do not see how, impression for impression, any handpress could do better*

We labored the thick ink. I'd never seen such stuff before, digging it from a battered tin with a spatula, hammering it with a wooden mallet till it was pliant enough to cover the hand-held rubber roller, laying it across the bed of Goudy Modern type. We lifted the dampened paper, fed sheets into the frisket. Everyone levered the great horizontal handle of polished wood which screwed down to achieve the impression. In words it sounds easy, but it took months of painstaking labor, checking our handiwork at every click of the press. People were in good humor, particularly Bill who was telling the story again and again of Susanna kicking him out of their shack at Kingfisher Flat. I think he'd moved back in at this point. He recounted the story with amusement, swaggering and cocky, you could feel the pain underneath. He was sixty-six years old. A young Cherokee woman—Bill said she was twenty-eight—had something to do with it. She used to sit with him at poetry readings in the cafes. I bet she was the last woman: the last before he began to dramatically & publicly suffer his impotence—anguished days memorialized in Masks of Drought.

We finished the print run of *Jet Stream.* Pages with their sharp blue & black print; the woodcut of Bill as a frontispiece; the hidden watermark—"Veronica's napkin" he showed me, his eye moist when he held a page up to backlight the watermark, so I knew it was sexiness more than piety in

the image that drew him—though he adored the paper itself, that was what mattered when you got down to craft, how its fibers expanded & took the swift keen bite of lead and ink.

The semester ran out at school and all the students drifted away. Suddenly working alone with him I noticed his eyes were giving him trouble and the first discernible tremblings of Parkinson's had set in. I'd watched him occasionally lift a printed sheet to the light while others fed the press, screwing his whiskers and eyeglasses up to question how the ink had taken. But nothing seemed wrong. Thinking back, I believe it was hard to see well in that enclosed lower room, despite the overhead lights.

We met upstairs in the Special Collections library to collate the sheets one day. The campus was empty, the college kids gone for the summer. A big airy room, long polished oak tables, sunlight filtered through redwood trees coming in the large windows. Excellent light to judge the quality of the printing.

> *. . .with the handpress, more than any other device, everything resolves back to the self.*

We laid the pages out on tables in sequential order and started to collect them into books. The two or three librarians kept a quiet distance but the room rippled with tension. Another of Bill's exacting books was nearly ready to go to the binder. Bill hardly said a word to anyone. On the walls ten of Kenneth Patchen's picture poems looked down—bold, funny, unrestrained. Cartoonlike. Probably the antithesis of the nearly perfected book art Bill hankered after, had spent his life chasing though history. Broadsides and posters to him were simply ephemera. "Our keepsake mad country," he once wrote. Bill was in thrall of the Book. He called it an archetype. That's why he wanted to build it from first page to last.

I heard a terrifying moan. I thought he was sick. Bill's hands were shaking uncontrollably, worse than I'd seen them. Parkinson's has an emotional element, he once told me. Self-consciousness or distress often brought him to an excess of shaking. A dried sheet of *Jet Stream* was rattling violently in his hands. It sounded like wind in the leathery California live oak leaves of our hills. His face was pale, haunted, inaccessible. Then, not suddenly, but as though it had been years in the making, a cry dragged up out of him—drawn from some dreadfully deep place—

> "Forgive me!"

A low keening, each syllable painfully prolonged, an old man's howl of spiritual pain. It might not have even been loud. But it was dreadful, and it came out again. "Forgive me—" I studied him, sideways, and kept to my

sorting. Pages clearly off-register, with any stray glancing of ink, or muddied rather than bitten by type, these I set aside. A few unfortunate thumb prints. And all day as we gathered up sheets he would draw a page close to his face, nearly knocking his glasses off, so fearsomely did his hands shake. Craft secrets lay there—intricacies of fiber expanded by moisture and cut by lead type edges. Ink quality, the exacting process of pounding & laying on ink. My eyes could not detect what he was seeing. What he was seeing defeated him. Then that keening, so bitter, like the poem he had written—

> *For, with the handpress, more than any other printing device everything resolves back to the self. When the results are spotty almost certainly it is one's own fault—rarely the press's. Somewhere you erred. . .*

I saw how much with him they were devotions—both the poetry and the printing, devotions—devotions to a God he'd spent his whole life struggling with, tooth and claw. Raging against. Simpering up to. How he'd run just as much from as towards that God. How a failure in his craft didn't just mean a piece of botched art, something to rectify another day—it implicated his life, his strength, his devotion. Sitting there in his skin & claw & bead clothing he looked irredeemably pagan, all that wildness you travel distant dangerous places just to catch a whiff of—all of it there, in him, like in some lair. Rattling in his hands sheet after sheet of that poetic evocation of violence and wildness. "Forgive me." His eye taking note of no poetry. Only the printer's errancy—

> *This coast, like all beautiful places, crying out for tragedy.*

I guess I learned more of religion that harrowing day than any book ever told me. Hour after hour punctuated by Bill's unalterable "Forgive me." He was too wild for piety. Bill gauged himself by a God I cannot understand, years of thinking about it has given me just a scant glimpse. A God I could certainly never bow down to. Critics and poets often dismiss what they call his self-dramatization. Let them. That intimate frightful irrepressibly wild behavior—all the defeat and dread and self-mortification driving his voice—spoke to something "out there." *Out there.* Past the critics. Past books. Way past understanding. So far that even bowing can't touch it.

> *Part of the terror of it, too, is that whatever you write and have published you can never escape; it follows you everywhere you live. That is also the problem of the printer: every book that he*

has spoiled by putting his hand to it will also bound him down through the ages.

Bill had a hellhound on his trail. That's why the books are so good.

* * *

We're in the crowded little outbuilding underneath the redwoods at Kingfisher Flat. It's the building Bill uses for his study. Several miles back from the coast. My faded blue Pontiac lines up alongside his Landrover in the clearing ringed by *Sequoia sempervirens,* the towering cathedral redwoods. Behind his cabin winds the creek, through the forests and down to the jagged Homeric shoreline of Davenport, where nineteenth-century whalers set out to strike the Grey Whales migrating our coast. Inland the cabin's crammed with books and papers—a massive table stacked in disorder with reading matter, books & letters, file cabinets overflowing, closet doors forced back by cartons. He has been rummaging for his manuscript *American Bard.*

Bill keeps uncovering mementos of his printer's craft and dragging them out to show me. Old woodblock prints, drawers of type, proofsheets and discards. Books from well-known presses, and presses I've never heard of. Back in the corner his Washington handpress. "Our keepsake mad country." Only the book interests him. I push him a bit—telling him about the Bible in Houston some pioneer bound in Indian skin. If Bill ever gets pious it's about archetypes, and the Book is a key one for him. He gives me a long look, then digs for something else.

It's the legendary printer's dream he worked on in 1953, the year I was born—*Novum Psalterium PII XII.* This is the Psalter he set about printing at St. Albert's Priory in Oakland. He had to get permission to take on such a highly irregular work. Many regard it as the finest piece of craft printing ever achieved on this continent. Maybe the finest piece of craft printing *abandoned* is the right way to tell it. He's recounted the story in essays and interviews. Look it up if you want. After he fled the project, a wealthy collector got hold of his exquisite pages, had a commercial printer finish the job, got the thing bound. It's a hybrid, a chimera. There're only sixty-four copies. On the colophon page his copy says number two.

"I had number One sent to the Pope," he tells me. "Number Two I kept for myself. And number Three went to Cardinal Spellman. Sometimes people ask, well Bill, where do you stand with the Church these days? I tell them the Pope received the first *Psalterium.* Number two came to me. Spellman got number three. That's where I stand."

His blue eye moist with amusement in that cascade of white hair.

* * *

A couple of years later, after I'd more or less lost contact with Bill Everson, I chanced to be back in Santa Cruz when Robert Bly came through town to give a reading. It was at that big modern church on High Street, and the hall held quite a few hundred people. The audience was milling about getting settled when I arrived—a lot of folk in from the hills. I took a seat somewhere in the center of the auditorium. Bly was there early, up front speaking with friends. I glanced back and saw Bill arrive, stooped by his Parkinson's now and holding a cane. He looked old as granite but shifted down the aisle with dignity and restraint. A young friend had him by the arm. They found some seats ten rows from the stage, had to climb past a number of people to get there, and it was a struggle for Bill to get in at all. I thought I'd wait to speak to him until he was settled—it took all his concentration to get that troubled, awkward, shaking old body down an aisle, into a seat, and stabilized.

Bly glanced around at the crowds coming in the rear doors. He looked over and saw Bill. "Bill, Bill—" he called in delight, and raced up the aisle, working his way through a cluster of people to reach his old acquaintance. I saw him beaming with pleasure, leading Bill tenderly by the hand, down to a seat in the front row.

The reading began. It featured some talk on "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," the Wallace Stevens poem, some Kabir and Mirabai versions repeated to the dulcimer, a good deal of soapboxing. Bly was at the height of his romance with the pagan counterculture and twenty or thirty minutes into the reading he got round to the topic of monotheism—in those days a subject he cherished, a demon to drag on stage and publicly whip. The audience was right with him, a crowd of brightly dressed long-haired dope-smokers, surfers, organic farmers, college students, foresters, marine biologists, bakers. He snapped out a few jokes—

> "I am an only God and a jealous God—"
>
> "Well if you're an only God what are you jealous of—?"

And following the open vein, pilloried what he branded "monotheism." Jew, Christian, Muslim, didn't matter. Got to get past it. Return to something colorful, pagan, and full of mothers. He was enjoying himself, had his jokes at hand, he looked very pink up there under the lights in his flowered shirt, the dulcimer set on a little wood table. The freaks who'd come in from the mountains were with him. Suddenly he started, his eyes narrowing towards the rear of the hall—"Bill! Bill, where are you going?" Something broke. You could hear the seats creak as everyone strained to look back to the

vanishing point at which Bly stared in confoundment. And there was old Bill Everson, fleeing up the side aisle, cane abandoned and arms swimming to stay on his feet, almost in slow motion, hair and beard streaming out under his broad-brimmed hat, fleeing in a reflex of horror. "Bill. . .?" And Bill, muttering, muttering, eyes wild, scarcely able to turn his old neck, managing to stammer out a few words, "Leaving, leaving, damn right, I'm leaving—"

Words drawn out with the keening I'd heard that day in the library. And the fury of a God he'd struggled thirty years with flew alongside him. You don't need monotheism. Outside it was storming. In his buckskin jacket he looked feral and horrified. I believe I could see lightening dart from his beard. And he crashed through the great double doors at the back of the church and was gone alone in the night.

Bly shuffled some papers, looking down hard, then in a considerably weakened voice read a considerably weak poem with a surrealist bent. After which he sank straight back onto a chair, rubbed a hand over his face, and said in a bewildered tone to no one in particular, "That was weird—really, really weird."

—ANDREW SCHELLING

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

WILL ALEXANDER has two books of poetry forthcoming this spring: *Asia & Haiti* (Sun & Moon), and *The Stratospheric Canticles* (Pantograph Press). As translator, WILSON BALDRIDGE collaborated with Suzanne Jacob on the multimedia book *Filandere Cantabile* (Marval, 1990). His essay on Michel Deguy appeared in *Symposium* 41 (1987). CHARLES BERNSTEIN's most recent book is *Dark City* (Sun & Moon). *Content's Dream: Essays 1975–1984* has been reissued by Sun & Moon. Editions du Seuil (Paris) has just published MICHEL DEGUY's *A ce qui n'en finit pas,* a book-length threnody on the death of his wife. Recent "Drafts" by RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS appear in *Chelsea* and *Hambone,* and a translated "Draft" is in *Action Poetique.* AVIVA BOWER lives in Tampere, Finland; this is her first publication. LINH DINH has a short story forthcoming in *New Observations;* he is a recipient of a PEW Fellowship. JEAN DONNELLY has recently published work in *Situations, To: A Journal of Prose, Poetry & the Visual*

Arts, and *No Roses Review.* Her chapbook, "the julia set," will be published in spring 1995 by Edge Books. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's most recent books are a translation of César Vallejo's *Trilce,* and *Under World Arrest.* PETER GIZZI is the author of *Periplum* (Avec Books); "Caption" is from a work-in-progress entitled "A Textbook of Chivalry." PIERRE JORIS's most recent book is *Winnatou Old* (Meow Press). This spring Sun & Moon will publish *Breathturn,* the first of three volumes of Paul Celan translations. MYUNG MI KIM is the author of *The Bounty* (forthcoming from Chax Press) and *Under Flag* (Kelsey St. Press). "Hummingbird" is the last section of a book-length poem titled "Dura." DREW MILNE edits *Parataxis: Modernism and Modern Writing.* Recent publications include *Sheet Mettle* (Alfred David Editions, London) and *How Peace Came* (Equipage, Cambridge). SPENCER SELBY's most recent books are *Sound Off* (Detour) and *Malleable Cast,* a collection of visual poems just published by Generator press. GAVIN SELERIE lives in London. His long poem "Roxy," begun in 1985, is now virtually complete. A sonnet sequence, *Tilting Square,* was published in 1992. CHARLES STEIN's most recent book of poems is *The Hat Rack Tree* (Station Hill Press). JOHN TAGGART's most recent publications include *Remaining In Light: Ant Meditations On A Painting By Edward Hopper* (SUNY Press) and *Songs of Degrees: Essays on Contemporary Poetry & Poetics* (U. of Alabama Press). SHARON THESEN lives in Vancouver, where she is editing, with RALPH MAUD, the Charles Olson/Francis Boldereff correspondence (a small part of which appeared in *Sulfur* #31); her book of poems, *Aurora* (Coach House Press, Toronto), is forthcoming. MARJORIE WELISH's most recent book of poems is *Casting Sequences* (U. of Georgia Press); she is a recipient of a grant from the International Studio Program. A solo show of paintings may be seen at the E.M. Donahue Gallery, NYC, in May. PAMELA WYE teaches Art Criticism at SUNY-New Paltz. She recently published a catalog essay on Jeffrey Wasserman's paintings for Bill Maynes Gallery, NYC.

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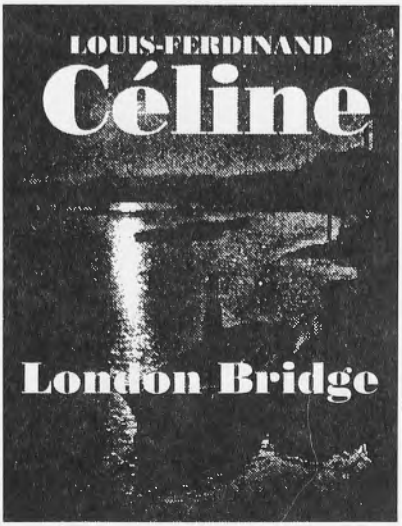

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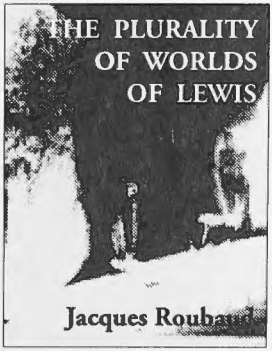

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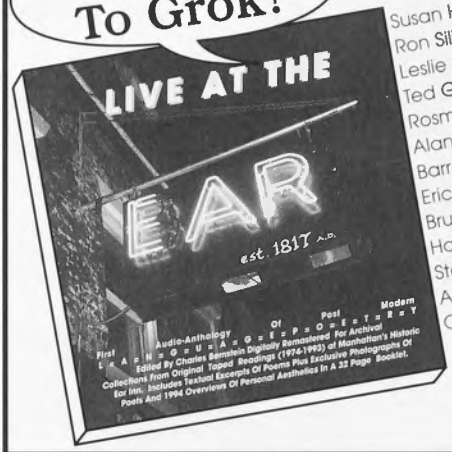

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Sulfur 37

POETRY BY ANNE WALDMAN, ANTONIN ARTAUD, JEROME ROTHENBERG, PETER REDGROVE, LUISA FUTORANSKY

ESSAYS BY ROBIN BLASER, PAUL METCALF, JAMES CLIFFORD, WOLFGANG GIEGERICH, MARJORIE PERLOFF

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOUGLAS QUACKENBUSH

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Sulfur

FALL 1995

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

Editor	CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
Contributing Editors	RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS MICHAEL PALMER ELIOT WEINBERGER PAMELA WYE
Correspondents	CHARLES BERNSTEIN JAMES CLIFFORD CLARK COOLIDGE JAYNE CORTEZ MARJORIE PERLOFF JED RASULA JEROME ROTHENBERG KEITH TUMA ALLEN S. WEISS MARJORIE WELISH
Managing Editor	CARYL ESHLEMAN
Editorial Assistant	KEN CORMIER

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER: TRIPLE MASK by Michel Nedjar (fabric, glue, dye—34 x 32 x 26 cm, 1980/1982), courtesy of Galerie Susanne Zander, Köln, Germany

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

MILTON KESSLER

SCALES

The prairie is more roiling higher

and plains
flat wheat and bison.

This double harp inside your heart
striving

for the shaking.

Two diesels pull, three diesels push,
catheter-red gondolas
into mountain
chimney.

Out of the maze we punch out
our cartouche
onto frozen mud.
Plain, ornate, it's mated-maze made.

Ladder, I earned my back today.
Ladder, I earned my chains today.
Ladder, I earned my bed.

The child runs fast from great grand
mother who can't catch up

but it stops.

Dieto cracked his hirpled leg
                to die
posing as a flower pausing.

"I was a cross-handed hitter, kid,

                strong
    to the opposite field."

How, Bertha said,
can I make you happy?
I don't have any money.

Now the hollow basswood's down.
If we live through winter, wife,
Oh let us
            grant thy garden.

Mao, dementate, "Pupils obey!
                Bring
two dead sparrows
to school a day."

Last bed should be a beach
    your great grandchild waits

so two can reach.

Cinders and sparklers
on sills and rails.
A nightshift ferry seething into its birth.
Cablights frame avenue, street, rain.

Over own open baritone jaws near
saw Ralph Vaughn Williams ear
Golden City premier.

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ANNE WALDMAN

LACRIMARE, LACRIMATUS

"dux femina facti"

Publius Vergilius Maro (70–19 B.C.E.) continues to be interesting referee or reference point & aspect for the arguments of the poem. Which built upon continues the discussion of what is appropriate "stuff" for epic attention. War, gender, language? This has become the poet's mantra. Virgil is farmer boy, didactic on issues of crop-raising, beekeeping, cattle raising. O holy earth poet-man! He was a cultivator of lines. Also the not-so-great-as Homer sophisticate Latin poet, stealing fire from his Greek models. In her heart Catullus is perhaps the greater magician, but she is impressed by any long-winded scop's scope. Why? It furthers the plan to "include it all" (Gertrude Stein's admonition) and history. And her story of a generation & all the consociate-aspirational activities associated with it. It's a smaller planet than last year's. Another President is dead. But her "time" is filtered through one particular suspect antenna, one welcoming receiver. Do it differently! tell the story of the tribe! and she feels some of her male kin get used to it. And what of Sulpicia, (circa 55-19 B.C.E.), said to be educated & beautiful? What happened to all her poems? A scant six remain, conversational & witty, first complaining of spending her birthday in "the disgusting country" à la Frank O'Hara without her boyfriend, then delighted when she'll have her birthday in Rome after all. Quite a contrast to hero Aeneas—truer folk-leader—who submits his private need to the need of his people and becomes ultimate sacrificing warrior Patriarch. Dido is tragic, long-suffering suicidess of womanly passion & down-under despair. Wants to drag the rest of it down with her. Can we let Aeneas off the hook? Is he culpable. We travel to the underworld. The net. The drag. This poet wants to get inside Latin tongue to further examine love & military glory. She thus titles this aspect of the journey: Lacrimare, Lacrimatus, of the travails of weeping. Much currently to cry about. "Cry like a baby" the songs say. Virgil loves Italy, its landscape. What is the relation of language to landscape? How is one masculine or feminine? Heinrich Heine spoke of Latin language as one "for military commands, governmental reports,

usurers' judgments, a lapidary speech for the flinty Roman folk." Another strand: Shakespeare's sense of Roman valor & virtue enters in in the hint of Coriolanus, whose mother Volumnia haunts the essence of her son's valor. It appears no one wins in war. Do we continue to conduct wars, more & more nationalistic, because we kept the myths alive in our various languages. And wars against the landscape? Against Nature? And now we turn on our own citizens? Latin seems particularly relevant as a kind of conquering tongue, obsolete in most places now for most school children. She suggests the popular experiment of the poets: try to eradicate all Latin from your speech, from your text, a haughty challenge and German will be your new/old tongue. She has interesting consociate-correspondent in one William Sterling, who lives at Goat-in-the-Road on the Pacific coast, an Attorney-at-Law, who is a passionate classicist and translates some of her phrases into a just Latin to sound & ponder. She is grateful for the call & response he provides. Richard Milhouse Nixon, who resigned the American presidency in scandal enters the poem on his death. His reign was shrouded in many dark veils. He was complex villain and emblem of paranoia. Did he really *need* to be loved? Her eye alights on the descriptions of the efforts of the "mani pulite" (clean hands) crusade in Milano, attempting to expose the corruptions of Berlusconi & his Fininvest Empire. Do the shades still murmur & writhe in Dante's hell.

.....and this will be in part in partial Latin, in art of Latin

strum
a ton
a rung
of sung stuff
or rapt-spun
  strung out
hummed into being
                un-jam thy string awhile

Dear Anne: What civilizes? Is that at least part of the root query that throws the branching questions in your introductory paragraph? How do civilizing influences work? Ignore for the time being questions about the premise itself: what does one mean by "civilizing"? Can civilizing occur in the absence of language? No, I dare say. So how does language serve to civilize or decivilize? I worked for a Swiss economics professor once, a bit of a polymath he was, who argues tenaciously that war is the mother of invention and therefore the grandmother of civilization. Does this reduce

to the proposition that we need war in order to beget peace? Is this a necessary dialectic, either biologically or intellectually? Does that make the poet the apostle of belligerence? Presumably not. But the presumption does not answer the challenge: how does language work or serve for better or worse?

Perhaps these concerns are more germane to the **Odyssey** than to the **Aeneid**. What do you think? Or is the difference simply one of scale, not of theme? With the **Odyssey** Homer considers the redomestication of a soldier and the restoration of a household. With the **Aeneid** Virgil considers the foundation of a state and the declaration of its psycho-emotional constitution. Same theme, just small screen vs. big screen?

I have some teaching notions I would like to run before you. For example, if the leading character of the **Odyssey** were female, not male, what would the epithet for her be in the first line of Book One?

(sing in me Musa & spell the story):
Comminius speaks:

I shall lack voice; the deeds of Coriolanus
Likewise the dirty deeds of Richard M. Nixon
Should not be uttered feebly. It is held
That valor is the chiefest virtue
virtus famula fortuna est
                and
Most dignifies the haver
But was that what Nixon had?

valor, virum, virtus
                he never had

whatever resides here,
whatever had
  gone mute—
rift with—
a kind of forgone pride,
  twilled,
then twisted tongue
or
manhood, she could say—the poet could say—

---

with smugness
herself defined as defender of peace
=she rages=

pax on this or any other turf
how many Americans slaughtered as he
kept going the war
how many Vietnamese, Cambodians

bodes not well the warring god realm
&now
the presidents & ministers confer on Bosnia
statesmen are encumbered
stratagems, fisted
oblique for the asking
how meet?

at divisae sunt factiones
et singulariter insaburratae

---

but divided are the parties
& singularly unballasted

Anne: I took "singularly" in the denotative case "one by one, each severally," which is precisely what **singulariter** indicates, not in the looser, intensifying sense of "very, exceptionally"

The crucial adjective "unballasted" is a challenge.
In the context of the poem I take it nautically, an allusion to the want of able helmsmen in the ship of state. A ship without ballast, and without a cargo to compensate for the absence of ballast, floats high and is tippy. Hence my choice of **instabiles**.

Instabilis can certainly be said of a ship. The historian Q. Curtius Rufus wrote of **naves instabiles**. But insofar as **instabiles** is recognized and registered as "unstable," and the notion of instability seizes the reader's mind, the ship of state metaphor gets lost in the briny froth of latent linguistic associations. The original metaphor itself is then unballasted.

The Roman word for "ballast," I learn, is **saburra**, the primary sense of which is "sand," the principal material used for ballasting. I thought of **onus**, meaning "burden" in its most general sense, but also meaning cargo in maritime contexts. The related verbs are **saburrare** and **onerare**; the participles, correctly inflected to agree with **factiones**, are **saburratae** and **oneratae**. I find no evidence in my Lewis & Short Latin Dictionary of negative compounds in the forms **insaburratae** and **inoneratae**. The classical formation would probably be achieved with **non**: thus **non saburratae** and **non oneratae**, though the compounds with **in-** would have been intelligible if not conventional or elegant. But what rule (other than your wish in this regard, which I shall honor and obey without deviation) requires strict adherence to what we moderns imagine the ancients would have done?

So perhaps, in favor of preserving the ballast metaphor literally, you might prefer this:

at divisae sunt factiones
et singulariter insaburratae

In this version do you hear a light auditory echo of the sounds of "scurrilous"?

---

a people unallowed to bare arms
lift, o lift ill fitted embargo
scourge, torrefy, *vidimus*

It is not a united mission
distracted
what are the deals to cut
with commanders
obsessed with their mission of cleansing
for the ongoing cutting of deals?
(& 20,000 women raped, you hear?)

dealt with, you could say,
a blow to—you could say—
they—the others—
compared to Ottoman Turks
were dealt a bad hand,

& think influences here
the way you weave
    or spit
what you might don as
marriage is but funeral weeds

I was 7 I was 17 longing for a peace offering to be given I was 27
longing I was 47

& strum
& strum
strum a lift
a pax

across a bridge
divided children could be seen to run
newspaper circa 1994

Question: what is a world when you wipe out another ethnic
[group?
Answer: tomb, forgotten, clean slate
Question: will thrive will prosper?
Answer: with blood in the sky, on hands, on earth, on street,
[Mad Tom

but they say traces at Auschwitz drag up nay nuncle
yet not a scream remains
while they rent torture chambers to tourists in Plague
short on space
wherein tortured fell apart, stretched, racked, scoriated with pain
to eke out confusion, testing loyalties, manhood

& you do scream Aeeeeeeya

. . .his pupil age

Man-ent'red thus, he waxed like the sea;
And in the brunt of seventeen battles since,

He lurched ail swords of the garland.

His sword, death's stamp,
Where it did mark, it took;
    from face to foot
He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
Was timed with dying cries
who's gone before

& there are meetings, at a metaphorical table. . .
                E Mail?
                public space?

(across my lines)

On Feb. 16, 1993 in St. Louis, Missouri, a Skinhead biker beat a black man to death

On Feb. 19, 1993, a Skinhead was arrested in connection with the beating death of a homeless man in Birmingham, Alabama

On May 20, 1993, in Montreal, Canada, a Skinhead beat to death a jogger he believed was gay

On June 3, 1993, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a Skinhead shot and killed a white youth and injured the black friend he was walking with

On July 20, 1993, in Tacoma, Washington, the NAACP headquarters was firebombed. Church-of-the-Creator Skinheads have been charged with this crime

On July 23, 1993, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, a Skinhead beat a 75-year-old black man to death with his own cane

tears of the women of the gay men & women of the black men & women of the black gay men & women of the white men & women of the white gay men & women

tears of the children
karma of divisiveness

set down a load
right noble?
ineffective
valor turns to rancor
    as they file past a casket
                culture sentimental & sick with death
                re-habilitation
                langue d'oc apart
                or *trobar clus*

or valor turns to villain, turns to virulence

mal odoratum
rapina convertit in praedem convertit in contagionem
    foedens cibum sub caeno

convertit in pestem
                ultione verberatam

---

malodorous
ravage turns to plunder turns to infestation
  digging under dirt for grub

---

turns to plague
            whipped with revenge

a
cure
haunting
the
test
tube
you
hope

then I =waste=, =zap=, =nuke=, =rub out= you, I =croak=, =snuff=, =bump off=, =knock off=, =bushwack=, =lay out= you, I = polish off=, =blow away=, =blot out=, =erase=, =wipe out=, =blast=, =do in= you, I = off=, =ice=, =hit=, =gun down=, =pick off=, =put to bed with a shovel=, = take care of= you, I =take out=, =take for a ride=, =give the works to=, =get=, =fix=, =settle=, =spill blood=, =let blood
as in waste=, =nuke=, =zap=, =croak= you
in the name of
aborticide, amicicide, ceticide, deicide, elephanticide, formicide, fratricide, fungicide, genocide, giganticide, gynicide, herbicide, homicide, infanticide, insecticide, mariticide, matricide, germicide, ovicide, parenticide, parricide, patricide, pesticide, regicide, rodenticide, sororicide, spermatazoicide, autocide, tauricide, tickicide, uxoricide, vaticide, filaricide, vespacide, viricide

as in

how Jill & I don masks of black cloth, veils, gloves, black hats, jump suits, dressed for outer space to attack the wasp colony, an attack of horrible vespacide—with guns of poison—

how people burn ticks to death in these mountains

how the

disaccord mongers contention ones warfarers do battle

&
random rancor
again, again
    as in Rwanda, Tutsis slaughtered in hospital beds

dragged from homes & hacked to bits in the streets
insatiable mad cry for blood
woman with babes on back hacking at women with babes on
    back

virtuc, virtus

klea andron
(the glorious deeds of great heroes dead)
what heroes are these skulking the battlefield?

arma virumque cano

one's lot or *moira* unchangeable
but when Achilles wondered to sit his anger out
rather than slaughter Atrides
Athena drew down & shined
he knew her by her eyes
so terrible they were
sparkling with ardor
She speaks:

Thou seed of Jupiter
I come from heaven to see anger settled
I am sent from Juno
Draw no sword
Use words
Use words
Throws reins on thy passions
& serve us

Homer's goddess & Chapman's differ in this important
compromising point about action & word

or the importance of the forum
of the model Roman state
model of a well-ordered society
versus heathen chaos

gone down the tubes

Brunellesci's new order & subsequent disgrace makes a headline
the streets of Rome filled with rubble

disease & health of
the Body Politic

how Coriolanus' love of his mother was strange

There's no man in the world
More bound to's mother
& wracked by her grip

toughened in the womb

"What he hath done famously though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother. . ."

how the tapers turned bedward
O Volumnia
voluptuous one

this is a sorry state to lose valor
to be robed in bed in sanctity
of a darker deed

Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st from me. . .
he said
ut verba soni sint lateres
et infecta cruore

---

so that the words are building blocks of sound
& are tainted in blood

---

antebellum

wash them back, back, into bellissima bellicose Latin
sweet tongued, church tongued

---

or
tense sport & action
of my personal histories or heroes

wash wash back to cleanse a literal sound
of war & bellissima bellicose mutterings

of religious traumas
material gatherings

wages of fear
in a country Mafia moulded

they don't look back on the bloody battlefield
like a money market, bodies gored
of bombs,
plastiques

of migrations
the mighty cartels & spoils of commerce

& fights over borders

fights over goods & in a
comparison of loves. . . . . .

Damoetas & Menalcas speak:

—The Muse began with Jupiter & he's everywhere. He makes
[the Earth fecund,
he listens to my ditties.
—But Phoebus loves me. My garden is Apollo's seat.
I give him gifts. The bay-tree & hyacinth blush & bloom.
—Wanton Galatea throws me an apple. She runs off I'll follow,
[spy on her.
—But dear Amyntas is my flame. He is my flame & never coy:
—My little dog knows Delia well.
—I have a present for my Venus! I have a present for my love!
—I've noticed where the doves build their nests.

—I plucked ten golden apples for my love. All that I could I've
[sent to my
boy & there will be more!

& so on, a competition, a conversation. . .

I have a riddle: where on earth does space of sky measure three
[yards?
Answer my riddle, & I'll say Apollo's not a greater bard
I have a riddle—where on earth are flowers signed with a king's
[name?
Answer my riddle, & you shall keep Phyllis

of the borders themselves how arbitrary
a Catholic thing now,
from god to emperor to Pope

are you circumcised?
& rape to destroy the women, all sense of dignity
what of the children of these horrific couplings?

dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor
dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor factus
intra nationum sensus
fragiles et elicentes
bellicosos

---

woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe
woe woe woe woe woe woe wrought

inside ethnicities

fragile & evocative

bellicose

Anne: I took "woe" as a noun (**dolor**), not as an interjection (**vae**!), given

the adjective "wrought" in the second line. You have 20 monosyllabic "woe's"; I gave you ten bisyllabic **dolors**.

"ethnicities" is difficult. I take you to mean with it something like tribal or group sensibilities, which range from the tenuous ("fragile") through memory-laden and hope-creating ("evocative") to harder edged, dualizing, self-absorbed us-them touchiness and pugnacity ("bellicose").

I took **natio** (in preference to **tribus** or **gens** or **populus**) because **natio** feels more other-oriented and them-ier, where the alternative words feel more familial, local and us-referencing, and I was encouraged by the note in Lewis & Short that **natio** was "usually applied by Cicero to distant and barbarous people." Isn't that an aspect of the attitude you are after: the arrogance and dissension that arise from viewing others as "distant and barbarous"?

Then I took **sensus** as a generic term for the powers of perception, and it also means the results of perception: feelings, perceptions, sensations, and the mental formations which are based on those results: dispositions, attitudes, understanding, frames of mind, etc.

So here are two words for your one, but I am at a loss for a one-to-one equivalency for the conceptual layering inherent in "ethnicities"

I took all three adjectives—fragile, evocative and bellicose—in agreement with "ethnicities," not with "woe."

Latin has **evocativus**, but it means "summoning, calling forth" and the spirit of the word is more strident and bellowing than seems to fit for English "evocative," which has something wispy and wistful and tendrilish about it. So I prefer **elicitus** (whence English "elicit"), from **elicere** meaning "to draw out, entice out, lure forth, bring out, elicit." The basic word in the cluster to which **elicere** belongs is **laqueus** meaning "noose, snare."

---

sing a snare

cringe a noose

& ring

et bello mortui

& the war dead

---

dead of a century's pollutant streams

yet
a millennium is made up of all the words
panique de l'an mille

ab multis obtestari possit vicosque vias
itinera omnia tramitesque et intorti pavorem

---

one could conjure from many the streets & highways
all the roads & twisty paths & panic

---

speaking at the surface of ourselves still breathing he said in
Tower of Babel he said Steiner did
moving forward in the slipstream of the statements we
make about tomorrow morning, about a millennium

sing

sing
dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor

---

woe woe woe woe woe woe

& turn to stars

star..Cepheid..comparison star..dark star..double star..dwarf star..early-type star..eclipsing binary..eruptive variable..F star..fixed star..flare star..giant star..gravity star..Greenwich star..G star..Hydrogen star..intrinsic variable..irregular star..K star..late-type star..long period variable..M star..main sequence star..multiple star..N star..nautical star..nebulous star..neutron star..nova..O-type

star..R star..radio star..red giant..red supergiant..RR Lyrae star.. runaway star..semiregular variable..silicon star..solar or sun star.. spectroscopic binary..standard star..supermassive star..supernova ..variable star..visible binary..white dwarf..x-ray star..zenith star which are the ormulum
ON. stjarnan (whence ME. sterrne)

Propter montem nos esse cano
et neminem in nos jaculantur

I sing that we are near the mountain
& no one is gunning us down

---

cogito nos ex stellarum piscumque originibus fieri
illorum omnium
quomodocumqu' opinari possimus et excogitare

I think we are made up of the genetics of stars & fish
of all those
we could ever dream or think of

---

they are in our eyeball movies
haunted by light—reflected—
little filaments of celluloid created for your eyes
hunted in light, old war flics
to flicker on a retinal screen
who climbs the edge

then take out your dictionary
take out your lexicon
& eliminate all the words
derivative of Latin
& you will harden on a harder edge

it is hard

for hard are words of harder Latin
wrung in Latin

stung in Latin
expunged in Latin
Johnny-come-lately-in-Latin

caged in Latin

fought & bled in Latin
estranged

holiest in Latin

tortured in Latin

naming the names in Latin

naming the numbers in Latin

stiff in Latin
bow down in Latin

I can't be vernacular in Latin
et verba majorum in ossibus sonunt

& words of the ancestors sound in the bones

---

pound in the bones in Latin

hearts beat in the bones:
bellum, bellum, bellum

beat in the bones:
vellum, vellum, vellum

it is plenum, plenum, plenum
virum, virum, virum
  taut grammar of futurity

ein noch nicht festgestelles Tier
("we literally hear how the verbs kill time")

(Mandelstam
on Dante's Inferno &
his own imprisonment)

est Erebus Erebus Erebus
infera fervida cano et infera gelida
quo forma renasceris cano fragmentum glaciei

ibi ita, ibi iens
ibi ivi, ibi iero

---

it is hell hell hell

hot hells and cold hells I sing of

where you reincarnate as a patch of ice I sing of

gone there, going there
have gone there, will have been going there

(Anne: Virgil refers to the nether regions as Erebus. The term is Greek (Erebos, the god of Darkness, son of Chaos, brother of Night).

For the hot and cold hells I shifted to **infera [loca]** = [the] lower [places] to mark the transition from the general hell of Erebus in the singular to the specific plurals hells of the second line.

I have not found any satisfactory way to avoid the hiatus in the second line (. . .**cano et**. . . .). Making **cano** the final word of the line yields . . .**fervida et**. . . .which is worse. You might prefer:

infera fervid' et infera gelida cano

The syntax of the third line (**quo forma**. . .) roused memories of Dr. Alan Gillingham, my Latin master at Andover. He would have cherished the problem, found it toothsome. **Cano** ("I sing of") here requires the indirect discourse construction, which uses infinitive-plus-subject-accusative for the main statement and puts subordinate clauses in the subjunctive. I took

"where you reincarnate. . ." as a subordinate clause, it being so relative in form, and hence the subjunctive mood for **renasceris**.

Finally I somehow imagined that you, in the first person, indubitably feminine, were the subject of the inflection play of the last two lines. So **ita** is past participle feminine in agreement with the assumed first person singular, **iens** the present participle, **ivi** first person singular present perfect, and **iero** same for the future perfect.

---

civis, civis, civis
a civic responsibility

we're going to wait for an Aztec now
Hold shorter, let me know
Let you know, shorter
The A 1456 crosswall
375 behind Margaret Tower
769 32L Tango
Alpha 7 & Tango
Am 432 Monitor Tower
United 224
Runway 22 left
Turn right on Hotel
Runway 32
Tango 310
500 Yankee behind
United 1490 behind
Bravo Delta behind
Give away 2 2 companies Alpha 7
Tango 7
Roger Delta
Contact Departure

it is cithera I ride
strummed

a daemon departure
locusta

---

lacrimare lacrimatus

an old story:
Virgil was going to destroy his book

=fluxus= & depart

where old scoundrels die a Latin death
"don't they speak Latin in Latin America?"

Virgil was going to drown his book
regnum

virum omnia plenum

Dear Anne: Dux. Virgil's word is **dux**. I do not know what daimon induced me to write ductor. Go with **dux**. Makes me want to sing: "Use **dux**, the foaming cleanser. . ." **Dux femina facti**.

The phrase caps Virgil's recounting of Dido's flight from Phoenician Tyre, after uncovering the murder of her husband by her brother, unearthing ancient buried treasure, assembling other Tyrians tired of Pygmalion's tyranny, arming them, leading them to the docks where her brother's treasure fleet lay at anchor ready to sail, seizing the ships and sailing them to the Punic coast where she then founded Carthage.

Poor Dido, twice bereaved. She loved the husband Sychaeus whom her brother murdered. He was an extremely rich man, as it happened, which may have entered Pygmalion's motives for putting him to death. Some scheme to capture his wealth.

My mother advised me that if I were to fall in love, there was no fault in falling in love with a rich girl. My father advised me that if I were to fall in love with a pair of bright eyes, I should make sure it was not the sun shining through a hole in her head that made them bright. I suppose they advised my two sisters similarly, substituting boy for girl. We failed our parents. Our first round of spouses were of ordinary means and adequate intelligence. Each of us is now divorced. None of us is rich, in consequence of marriage or divorce. I alone have remarried, though romantic hope burns bright on each sororial turn. It is advent season.

Dido, however, succeeded. She fell in love with a rich man and married him. Her parents approved and blessed the marriage. Loss, grief and sorrow ensued. I suspect Mom was not a reader of Virgil. I am not sure she would

have approved of Dido's ship-swiping either, at least not until after she realized that her dreams about how she and my father would spend his retirement did not coincide with his dreams. She then awoke to her resentment at playing second fiddle for so long. There were to be no movements when she would get to play first violin. This grieved her. It felt unjust. Yet in the milieu which formed her, the culture which Robertson Davies describes in Fifth Business, conservative Anglophilic southern Ontario after the turn of the century, **feminae** were not **duces**. **Dulces** yes, but not **duces**.

Poor Dido got rich young and was heartbroken in consequence. Twice. Is there a moral here? Is her suffering just coincidence? Just a device in Virgil's story? I think not. The issue, of course, is not how we deal with wealth that is gone. The issue is how do we deal with love that is gone. First Sychaeus, then Aeneas. How do we deal with feeling abandoned? I think that was my mother's issue at the end, even while my father was still alive. And then there was the physical wrench of his actual dying. First abandoned emotionally, then corporeally. Mom lost twice as well.

Death only reconfigures where the points of connection are situated. Forgetfulness may sever connection. But death need not.

I wonder what Dido understood?

Bill:
Latin **alere** nourish, with the parallel formation **altus** high, deep (whence altitude), **ad/ultus** ADULT. See also **ELD**. Hence **olden** ancient.

=*strummed*=

ego paupercula feminea forma

[from *Iovis 2]*

Roberto Tejada

Honeycomb perfection of this form before me.
No, not one imposing megalith, neither harrowing nor laughable
—the Coatlicue stone; or the monumental head of Juárez
by Siqueiros toward the ROUTE-190-TOLLBOOTH to Puebla—
but the infinite combination of matter in myriad flux, each
[conduit
a machine in perpetual motion to generate the light
of all cities everywhere:
from this political navel to
the seamless outer fabric and the shadowhands behind
it, every interlocking part on the friezes at Mitla,
a remembered banter, a half-articulated sun
over what I'm getting at,

over these ruined phrases, see,
waking dull with repetition
and then *I vanishes with the dog-lights' sweet breathing*
over the cool wood of summer
and its countless diamonds spilling.

'OK, so I sort of got the environs right as they were rendered
around me. Here now, they just hover in place,' in/stead,
a chalk-choke foothold longed for,
rushing down Mexico City's metro, the smell
of burning rubber and baking sweat.

Wait. Not more than twenty miles from here,
in Itzamatitlán, an out-Lawrenced
repulsion—"inexplicable scent, in which
there are resin and perspiration

and sunburned earth and urine
among other things"
—tossed into the dense air
in whose dry-wicker powder
of each page turned verso
from the 5-SUN codex
of what I need to know to make the work-day-week
ennobling, the whole thing
worth it & rage-
wrecked

or watermarked
by yet another PEMEX oil-slick catastrophe
off the coast of Coatzacoalcos when dictation
recedes of a sudden in ebb
& ejaculated glow

MICHAEL HUDSON

COMPARATIVE ANATOMY

1

On camera, a heart surgeon guides
his needle, as curved and outlandish as the ones
shaped from a bone which Eskimo women
use to stitch their clothing.

He deliberately slits an artery
to observe the rate of flow.

2

In the background, the heart swells and rolls
against the chrome instruments.

A gutshot, bleeding walrus breaks
the surface of Coronation Bay.

3

They descend like miners into a dead whale,

recognizing there the importance of time beneath
a dim, decomposing Arctic sun
as they hand up the steaming organs.

The heart-lung machine mostly creates enough time.

4

A student nurse tells of her first brain surgery,
how the doctor had to crowbar out a tumor
the size of an egg, one that finally popped
out far into the air.

Eskimo women often have to chew their material,
breaking it down enough to work.

5

Vesalius of Brussels, the anatomist, hired
an illustrator from Titian's school, to place
his cadavers in pleasant

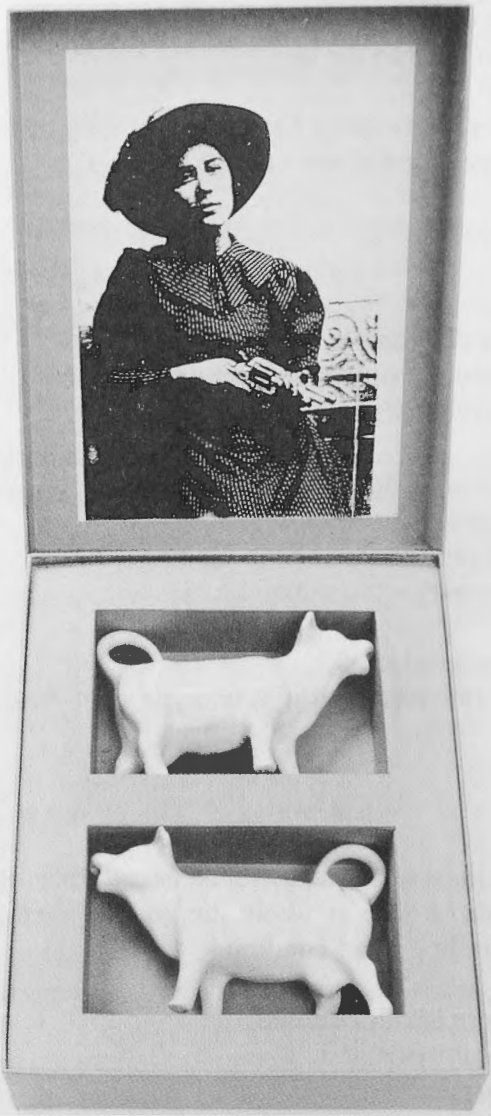
landscapes—Thorax Man cracked
open like a lobster, Musculature Man
dripping tendons from his finger tips;
the necessary

monsters who stroll
confidently past the Roman ruins of Tuscany.

6

The Eskimos of Saint Lawrence Island once broke off
the heads of dolls at a holy site, to bury them
with their dead children.

They were small, bundled
figures, hermetic and
intact, carved from a tusk.



COWGIRL*/kou'gurl*
custom-made cardboard box {13.2" x 10" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copied photograph of the outlaw Jennie Metcalf; two china creamers in the form of cows.

collated, 1992

JAMES CLIFFORD

IMMIGRANT

"The goal of all life is death."
—Sigmund Freud

Walking down from Hampstead Station along a well-to-do, residential street. It's April, and the gardens are starting to bloom in earnest. English Gardens—squeezed into boxes behind Council houses, strips along railroads. I recall reading about British soldiers carving plots in the blasted battlefields of the Somme, the Marne. Daydreaming along tranquil sidewalks, brushing against flowered shrubs, I almost miss one of the nicer homes, a small sign out front. The Freud Museum: 20 Marsfield Gardens, London N.W.3.

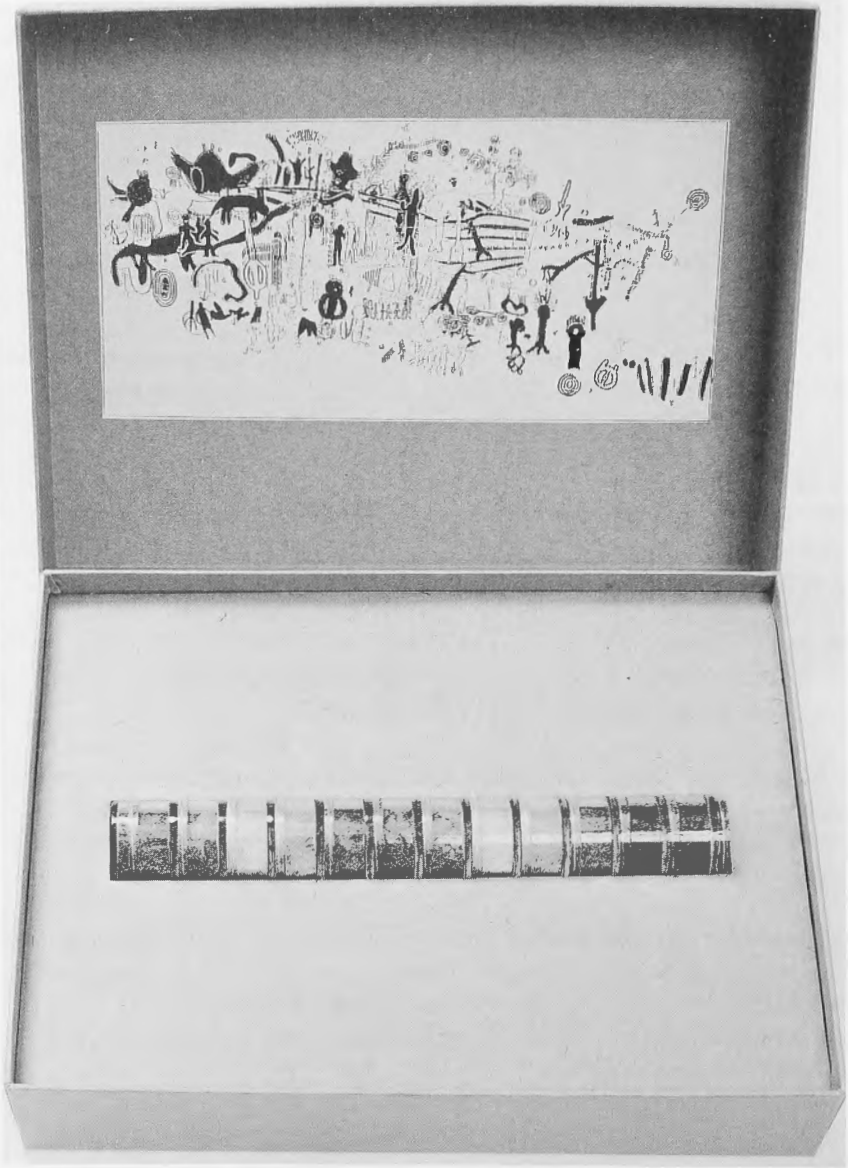
A poster: nineteenth-century photograph of a woman in Victorian dress and broad-brimmed hat. She looks coolly at the camera, fingering a big six shooter. "Susan Hiller at the Freud Museum."

Museum and shrine, the house has a lived-in quality. Freud's study is preserved, filled with favorite images and objects, his desk half-covered with statuettes from ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Asia. The famous analytic couch is there.

Freud's collection of antiquities traveled with him to London when he fled the Nazis in 1938. At 20 Marsfield Gardens, terminally ill, he would spend the last year of his life, finishing *Moses and Monotheism.* He gathered himself in this house: a kind of vessel, box, a boat of the dead—carrying a body across with its beloved things.

Sources

The term origin does not mean the process by which the existent came into being, but rather what emerges from the process of becoming and disappearing. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming. . ."
—Walter Benjamin



***NAMA-MA**/mother*
custom-made cardboard box {10" x 13.25" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copy of diagram showing Uluru cave paintings; Australian native earths collected at Papunya, in cosmetic containers. **curated,** 1991

Susan Hiller brings twenty-two cardboard boxes into the Freud Museum. Opened, they are a series of small collections, displayed in a vitrine along one side of a first-floor room. They comment on Freud's archaeology, reworking his themes: memory and forgetting, antiquity, illness, comedy, cure, death, male, female, primitive, civilization, light, dark, Greek and Jewish histories, progress, repetition. . .His world. Hers.

"That's me, displaying a beautiful dress. . ."

Archaeological collecting boxes: their lids propped open, with images and writing on the inside. The bottoms contain objects, often in hollowed-out compartments. Each ensemble has been labeled with a card, printed in museum style, recording exact size, origin, a description, and the date of processing: collected 1992, collated 1992, sampled 1993, edited 1994, . . .surveyed, located, compiled, assembled, classified, bound.

One of the boxes, "***NAMA-MA/mother,***" holds a reproduction of Aboriginal rock paintings from Uluru cave (Ayers Rock, Australia) along with twelve transparent cosmetic cases. Each contains a slightly different colored dirt. "Native earths" are used for painting rocks and (as the cosmetic cases suggest) faces. The earths suggest an ongoing process: marking of origin, nature, bodies, kinship. . ."Archaic" and "modern," contemporary.

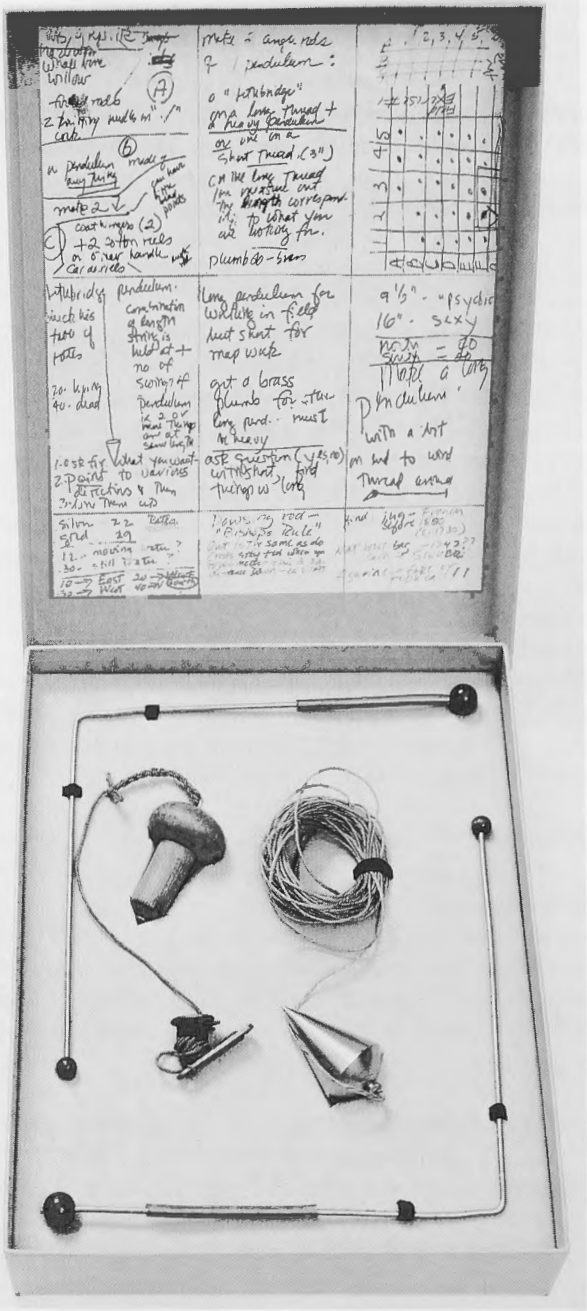
Movable dream labs.

> ***PANACEA****/cure*
> custom-made cardboard box {13.25 x 10 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopied newspaper advertisement; book entitled *The Life of Joanna Southcott,* annotated and extended by the artist with photograph, flower and newspaper cutting; cover added by the artist. **filed**, 1991.

Inside the lid: an advertisement (London Evening News, 1977) from THE PANACEA SOCIETY, proclaiming that "CRIME & BANDITRY, DISTRESS OF NATIONS & PERPLEXITY will continue until the Bishops open JOANNA SOUTHCOTT'S BOX of sealed writings."

"Another summer, near Vienna. . ."

Joanna Southcott, the 18th century prophet, was to have given birth to the Messiah. Instead, she left a sealed box of writings which could only be opened by a convocation of the twenty-four bishops of England and Wales. (What annotations have been added to the book displayed here?)



VIRGULA DIVINA/water-witching
custom-made cardboard box {13.2" x 10" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copy of artist's notes on dowsing methods; artist's hand-made divining rods; two pendulae, one hand-made. **displayed,** 1991

Source of rebirth and transformation. "What does woman want?" Her closed box, book, word. Her cure for. . .

*

"These are just pictures of the waiting room. . ."

"***VIRGULA DIVINA****/water witching.*" The artist's divining rods, string, and pendulae. In the lid, her notes on dowsing.

In other boxes, I find the Greek rivers Lethe, Mnemosyne, and Acheron: corked bottles with old-fashioned tags. "***INITIATION***/beginning." Sources. How do we know when water's below? Where should we dig?

His room: figurines like stalagmites on every table. Egypt, Greece, Rome, Assyria, Asia. . .(And just visible in the *Berggasse* photos, two Kiddush cups, one marked with the Tablets of the Law.) An Egyptian funerary boat rests on a shelf.

Her collections: Native American potsherds (in plastic bags); massed arrowheads and (xeroxed) Mayan glyphs; an African weapon bundle (made for tourists); earth from the six North Ireland counties.

Where are the sources? He excavates something long buried; and she. . .

Room

Born and educated in the United States, Susan Hiller does fieldwork on Mayan archaeology and ethnology in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala. In the late sixties, she moves to London to pursue an art career.

> ***COWGIRL****/kou' gurl*
> custom-made cardboard box {13.25 x 10 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopied photograph of the outlaw Jennie Metcalf; two china creamers in the form of cows. **collated**, 1992

Immigrant, she encounters a new slur on women: "cows." At home, cows meant only milk, pitchers, domesticity. In London the American outlaw cradles her gun/her creamer.

KOMOIΔIΔ/Comedy.
custom-made cardboard box (10 x 13.25 x 2.5"), labeled; photocopy of Victorian illustration with poem; modern English toy; two slide viewers with one replica magic lantern slide each. **organized**, 1932

In the lid: a Victorian image of Punch and Judy. Printed below: "Look here—a quarrel has begun. See how they wield their sticks. . .cruel Punch kills Judy. . .what naughty. . ." In the bottom she has placed modern puppets: Judy without a stick.

*

"I don't think I'd be a good subject for biography—not enough 'action'! You would say all there is to say in a few sentences—she spent her life with children!"

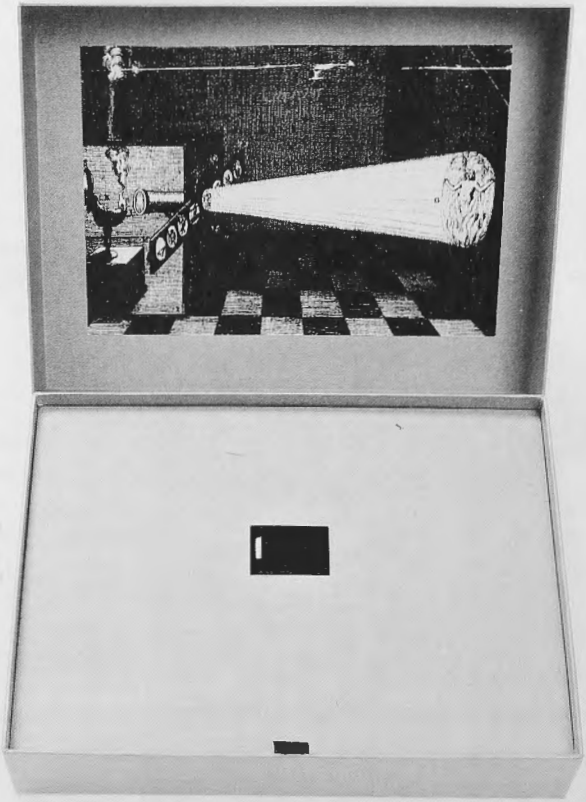
—Anna Freud

The room preserves her work places: a light writing table and a large loom. Notebooks, wool and scissors, her analytic couch. Along one wall memorabilia are gathered in a series of glass cases: books, photos, a brooch. . .

The museum pamphlet: "Anna Freud: Her Life and Work."

"In 1923 Sigmund Freud began suffering from cancer and became increasingly dependent on Anna's care and nursing. Later on, when he needed treatment in Berlin, she was the one who accompanied him there. His illness was also the reason why a 'Secret Committee' was formed to protect psychoanalysis against attacks. Anna was a member, and like the others was given a ring as a token of trust. After her father's death she was to convert one of his rings into a brooch. The Roman intaglio bears the figure of Jupiter enthroned, crowned by Victory with Minerva in attendance."

From her first-floor window I peek out at the garden, bathed in sun, not open to the public. Inside: subdued light, carpeted floors, stairs. . .Voices down the hall where three videos play in series: Eli Wallach (a documentary based on photos of the Freuds' Vienna apartment, *Berggasse* 19); Sigmund Freud (defining his achievement for the BBC); Anna Freud (narrating home movies of the family).



***SEANCE**/seminar*
custom-made cardboard box (10" x 13.25" x 2.5"), labelled; photo-copied engraving from Athanasius Kircher, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae,* 1671; miniature television monitor (l.c.d. type) showing a program by the artist entitled *Bright Shadow.*
edited, 1994

The dining room: ". . .painted peasant furniture which came from Anna Freud's and Dorothy Burlingham's country cottage at Hochrotherd in Austria. Also in the room is a souvenir painting of the alpine region where Freud usually spent his holidays, walking in the countryside he loved." "Later she was to say of this period: 'Back then in Vienna we were all so excited—full of energy: it was as if a whole new continent was being explored, and we were the explorers. . .'"

> ***Euch/prayer***
> custom-made cardboard box {10" x 13.25 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopied map; teserae and modern marble slab found at the entrance to the underworld near Vathia.
>
> **presented**, 1991

Home-Movie

Her voice from the next room.

In front of translucent curtains, a video screen, moving images. The veiled garden. "This is Paula, our housekeeper, still with us. . ."

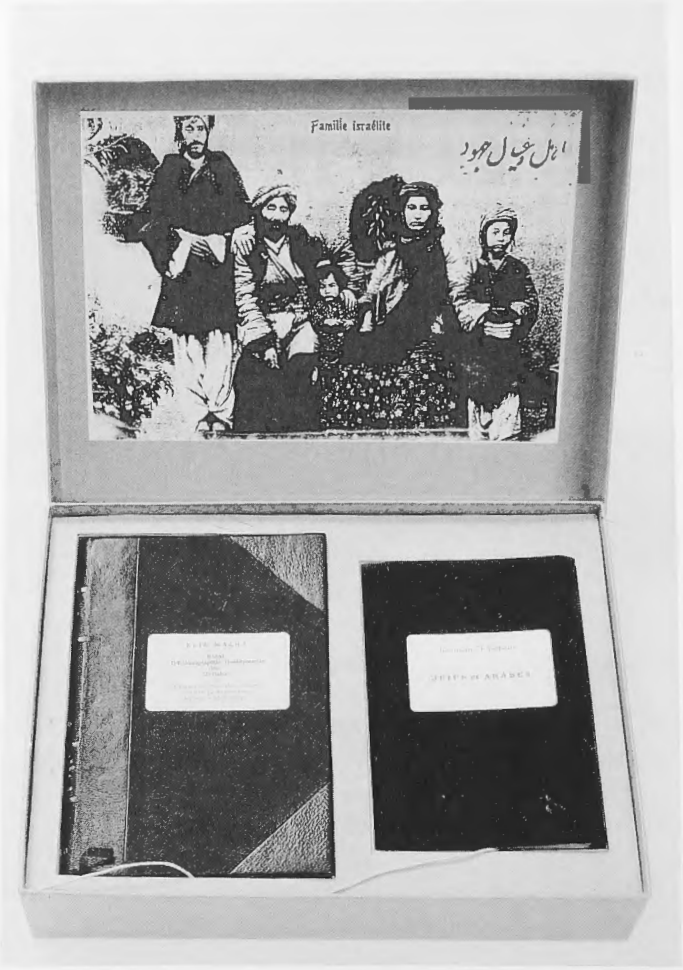
Sunday visits to his mother. "As you see, she had lovely white hair. . ." Martha Freud and her sister, Mina Bernays. Sigmund Freud and his "very beloved" chow dog, "Jofi."

"My father didn't like to be photographed, and usually made a face."

Candid shot in a garden, happily talking archaeology with a friend from Rome. "Another Summer, near Vienna." Visitors offering gifts—the Freuds' 50th anniversary. "Now you will see. . ."
His sister who died in the concentration camps (her hand on his knee).

> ***ADHS/Hades***
> custom-made cardboard box {13.25" x 10 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopied photograph taken near the Necromanteion of Ephyra, ancient oracle of the dead and sanctuary of Persephone and Hades; water collected from the river Acheron, in chemical flask, sealed and tagged. **surveyed**, 1993

A movie camera wanders through gardens filled with flickering shades. Stills: "My father as a boy. . .my grandmother as a younger woman. . .my father and mother, again, in one of their summer rental houses. . ."



***MOROR**/bitter*
custom-made cardboard box (10" x 13.25" x 2.5"), labelled; photo-copied illustration from book; two books modified by the artist; *Essai D'Ethnographie Traditionelle des Mellahs*, etc., Elie Malka, Morocco, n.d. and *Juifs et Arabes*, Salamon D. Gottein, Paris 1957. **labelled,** 1993

Princess Marie Bonaparte, who took most of these films, sits in Freud's waiting room.

Berggasse 19. Swastikas. Vienna crowds. "That's some stranger. . ."

En route for London, her father wrapped in blankets, ailing. On the terrace at Marie Bonaparte's in Paris. Meeting of Freud's new chow, "Lün" and the Princess's chow, "Tatoun." Curly tails waving. . .his stiff face.

London: "Jumbo," the little Pekingese. "We were hoping my father would take to him as a temporary replacement." (She speaks as of a child. . .) But he is loyal to Lün, in quarantine. Glimpse of Ernest Jones.

*

*"**(simchas**)/joy."* Microscope and magic lantern transparencies, found at the Freud Museum: blow fly, dandelion head, bird beak, the royal family, Swiss Family Robinson, heroes (coast guards), Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Mickey Mouse in Africa. . .

*

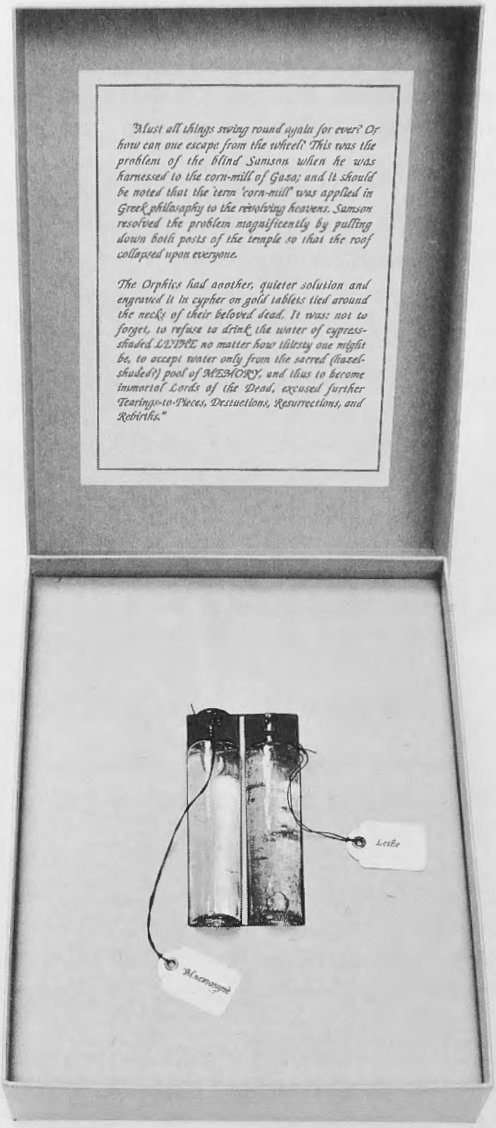
20 Marsfield Gardens: more visitors, "the last birthday". . .swaddled outdoors, on a couch of some kind. People approach, he nods. . .

The flickering. . .

Women of 20 Marsfield Gardens: Martha Freud, Minna Bernays, Anna Freud, Paula Fichtl, and Dorothy Burlingham (Anna's American companion).

> ***HEIMLICH**/homely*
> custom-made cardboard box {13.25 x 10 x 2.5}, labeled; photocopy of Breton angel of death; 45 rpm record of Johnny Ray singing *Look Homeward Angel.* **Referenced**, 1994

Freude. Animated, he's standing in the garden to receive a delegation from the Royal Society, writing his name in a big book. Happy (she says) to see his signature near Charles Darwin's.



***EAUX-DE-VIE**/spirits*
custom-made cardboard box {13.2" x 10" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copy of text by Robert Graves; water collected from the Lethe and Mnemosyne, in antique bottles, corked, sealed and tagged. **annotated,** 1993

Crossing

A tiny TV monitor nestled in one of her boxes plays a program called "Bright Shadow."

Lucid: Freud refused morphine, until he asked for a lethal dose.

". . .everything went downhill rapidly. A distressing symptom was an unpleasant odor from the wound, so that when his favorite chow was brought to visit him she shrank into a far corner of the room, a heartrending experience which revealed to the sick man the pass he had reached. He was getting very weak and spent his time in a sick bay in his study from which he could gaze at his beloved flowers in the garden."

Lucid, [L. *lucidus*, light, clear]. . .in astronomy, visible to the naked eye: said of a star.

". . .it was as if a whole new continent. . ."

"***LA PESTE**/plague.*" Photograph (in a rearview mirror). Glimpse of the artist and a *momento mori* of the Great Plague: stone skulls at a London churchyard. Inside the lid: world map, charts, data on "The current global situation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic."

Crumbling borders. . .

Wandering

"***PLIGHT**/plite.*" A modern sand painting. The Teepee: ". . .made of sands collected from the deserts and mountains of the southwestern United States. This painting is durable and can be dusted with a soft dry cloth."

plight, v. t. to weave, to braid, to plait. [Obs.]
A *plighted* garment of diverse colors.
—Milton

"The skin is transparent and allows light from the sun to shine through, thereby giving light and heat within."

Through his clenched lids, light, a garden. . .

HEIMBLICH*/homely*
custom-made cardboard box {13.2" x 10" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copy of Breton angel of death; 45 rpm record of Johnny Ray singing *Look Homeward Angel.*
rferenced, 1994

*

"I Wander thro' each charter'd street,. . ."

From Old Street Station I take City Road to Bunhill Fields Burying Ground. Across the street is Wesley's Chapel and House (museum). In the cemetery, a collection of Old London, I find the graves of William and Catherine Blake, Bunyan, Defoe. There are others of note: antislavery crusaders, writers of hymns, an inventor of insurance. Some of the stones were moved here, replanted.

Eddying waters of Mnemosyne and Lethe.

Next the modern wasteland of the Barbican, where "Defoe" and "Shakespeare" are towers of flats, looming over pedestrian walkways. Arrows point to the Museum of London, at the far side of the vast complex. I meet only a half dozen people on my way—including an elderly woman, who grips a wheeled walker, inching along, head down.

*

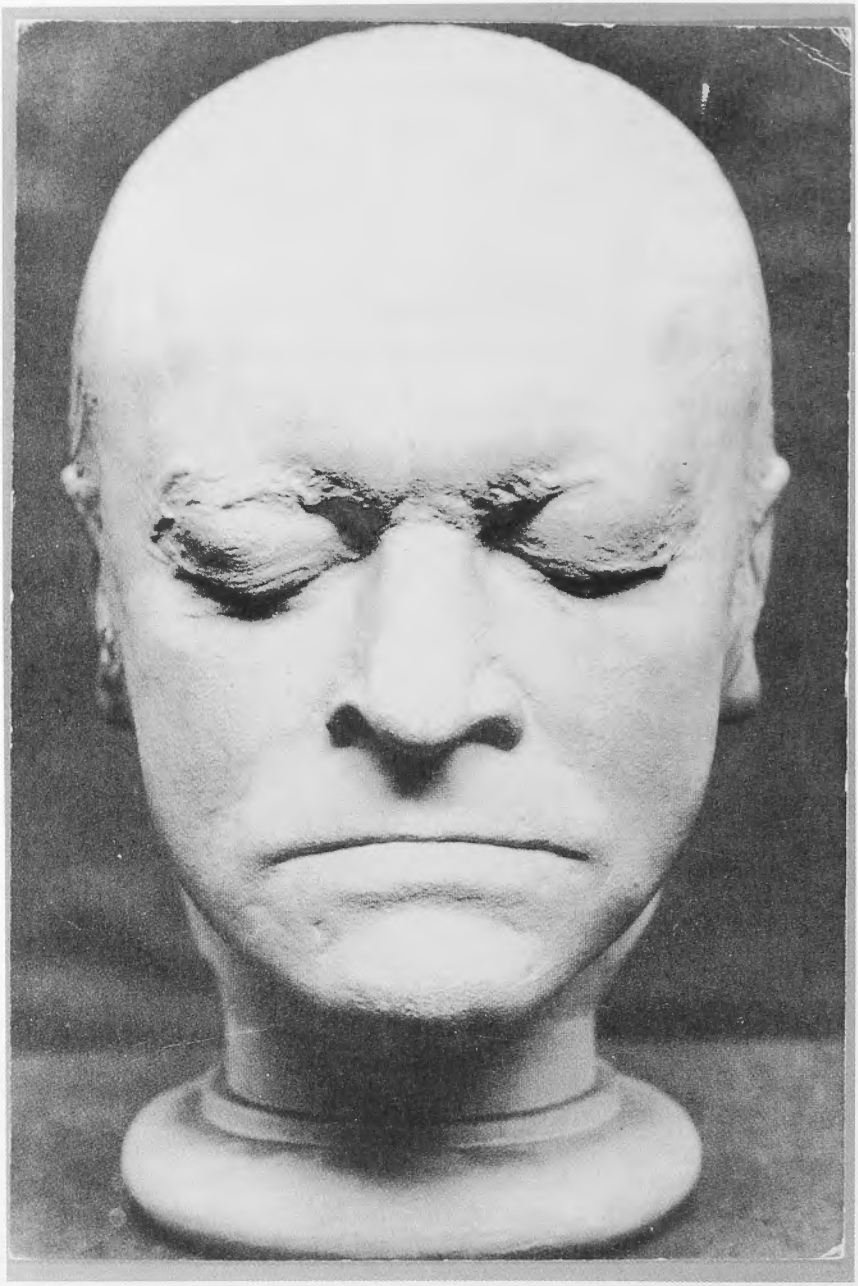
Wandering vine. . .

"Blake had left Poland Street in 1790, soon after the death of his mother . . .[He] and Catherine now moved to 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, on the south bank of the Thames."

> ***CHAMIN-HA'**/House of Knives*
> custom-made cardboard box {10" x 13.25 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopy of Mayan calendar glyphs, numerals and day names; obsidian blades. **collected** 1992

"Gilchrist describes the house as a humble, one-storeyed building; but Frederick Tatham, a friend of Blake's later years, remembers it as 'a pretty, clean house of eight or ten rooms,' a typical London terrace house of the eighteenth century, with the usual strip of garden behind. In this garden grew a 'wandering vine,' unpruned, to form the arbor where, according to one of those legends which no official denial can kill, Mr. and Mrs. Blake were once surprised by a friend in the dress of Eden, with the addition only of helmets (a detail which comes through the painter George Richmond), occupied in the reading aloud of *Paradise Lost.*"

Dwelling/traveling. . .



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"The Peopling of London" exhibition: a city of outsiders, from its Roman, Saxon, Viking, Norman beginnings through waves of Europeans, Asians, Jews, Huguenots, Irish, Arabs, Cypriots, Latin Americans. . ., ending with the recent influx from former colonies.

I pick up a telephone in the Museum of London and hear the voice of a woman recalling her arrival from Jamaica in 1955: her astonishment, looking out a window on her first day, to see white men digging up the street.

Postcards: an eighteenth-century black merchant seaman and street singer who wears a model ship on his hat; suffragettes picketing, one of them an Indian princess. And in the Museum's foyer: a traveling exhibit on London's Sephardim: Greece, Morocco, Spain, Iraq, India, Guatemala. . .

Outside the Barbican and heading for St. Paul's, I again pass the woman, bent over her walker. She doesn't look up from the pavement. Where, *where in the world*, is she going?

Gathering

Anna Freud traveled frequently to America.

Susan Hiller goes back and forth to Ireland, Greece, Australia, the (Native) Americas. . .She collects things without apparent value. Tourist art, scraps of pottery, toys, forgotten books, stones, dirt, water. Archaeologist and pilgrim: scavenger of futures. . .In Delphi she collects from the Castillian Spring; in Ireland her bottle fills from the Well of St. Brigit; she returns from Australia with "native earths."

Where (in the world) are her sources. . .

"***MOROR**/bitter.*" "Famille israélite." There's an Arabic inscription. An old photograph shows Arab Jews posing serenely: two bearded men in turbans; two demure children; a woman, impassive, in draped scarf and richly flowered dress.

In another box. . .White patriots hurl stones at dark Jews: illustration photocopied from a 1927 pamphlet, *The Jewish Minority in Roumania*. . ., "showing ethnic cleansing."

Blood lines and the "New Europe." A dying man wrapped in blankets. English Channel.

"If Moses was an Egyptian. . ."

*

From Vienna, Freud traveled as a pilgrim, she says. . .especially to Rome where he discovered "inner" meanings and archaeological images for the psyche. She says her own travels are pilgrimages too.

Pilgrimage: an activity long open to women; close to tourism (her souvenirs recall); discovery as repetition.

". . .my father and mother, again."

Freud collected the world, its origins and history. On his desk, a loved figure of ancient Egypt. . ."Everything is decontextualized," she says, "and put in a situation of being possessed by a European of a certain generation. Of course I'm aware that even my collection could come to look like that eventually."

". . .an eddy in the stream of becoming."

She gathers souvenirs, scraps and secrets, bringing them into his house, among his things. Her open suitcases.

Anna Freud traveled frequently to. . .

*

Worlds

Outside 20 Marsfield Gardens, afternoon light edges new leaves in the English gardens.

Europe seems far from California, where I live on a bay facing West; toward the East.

In boxes of memory and forgetting, belongings.

Growing up in New York, London was my source. But now. . .

Limahuli Gardens: native plants on the island of Kaua'i.
A house, trees, a spring in the south of France.
Egyptian nightjars song.

And the palms, araucaria pines. Valley of Hienghène, New Caledonia.

I'm telling my Melanesian guide that, to me, the dwellings seem strangely bare. . .while the habitat is so full, so carefully tended. He pauses a moment. "Mais, c'est a la maison."

A sweep of the arm collects trees, river, breeze, stones, mountains—the dead.

SOURCES

Boxes: Susan Hiller, *At the Freud Museum, 1994*, photographs courtesy of Book Works, London.

Sigmund Freud: quoted by Norman O. Brown in *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, 182.

Walter Benjamin: from *The Origin of German Classic Drama*, John Osborne, trans. (altered), 45.

Anna Freud: quoted by Robert Coles in *Anna Freud: the Dream of Psychoanalysis*, 3.

From "Anna Freud: Her Life and Work" and "Freud Museum." Orientation pamphlets, the Freud Museum, London.

Anna Freud: video commentary on family movies at the Freud Museum

William Blake, "London," from *Songs of Experience*.

Kathleen Raine: from *William Blake*, 63.

Ernest Jones: from *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 3., 245.

Susan Hiller: from *Thinking About Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller*. Edited by Barbara Einzig, forthcoming.

Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 17.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou: Valley of Hienghène, New Caledonia.

All other quotations are from Susan Hiller's boxes at the Freud Museum.

Postcards: Egyptian funerary boat in Freud's collection; Freud's desk in his study at the Freud Museum: William Blake, plaster-cast from a life mask, 1823, National Portrait Gallery.

Thanks to Judith Aissen and Ty Miller for help with this text.

About Susan Hiller

I was introduced to Susan Hiller's work some years ago by Barbara Einzig, who saw affinities between our respective researches at the edges of anthropology. I was immediately struck by Hiller's unique mix of off-center ethnographic analysis and oneiric exploration. She scribbles beautiful, illegible writing over photo-machine portraits; she organizes fieldwork by sleepers in meadows and carefully maps their dreamscapes; she collects old coastal postcards of "rough seas;" she builds a memorial, with plaques and recorded voices, to lost heroes of aquatic rescues; she works with television fantasies and makes paintings on domestic wallpaper. In her work, ordinary things take on a strange density, migrating among the meaning systems of found art, cultural artifacts, junk, personal fetishes, memorials, relics, tools, souvenirs, and. . .

Born in the United States, trained in anthropology and archaeology, with field experience in Mexico, Belize and Guatemala, Susan Hiller left the discipline after what she has described as "a crisis of conscience." Sharply critical of all objectivism and primitivism she has retained an interest in taxonomy, collecting, and the juxtaposition of discrepant meaning systems. In the years around 1970 she traveled widely and moved to London where, in 1973, she had her first solo exhibition. Since then her installations, writings, paintings, photographs and video work have probed the marginal, unconscious aspects of contemporary cultural production. Death, language, and desire have been recurring themes. Hiller has retained an "archaeological" concern for non-Western and ancient forms of expression, understood as current resources, partially translatable in modern Western contexts. Much of her work can be described as a kind of uncanny ethnography—oneirographic or perhaps auratographic—evoking suppressed meanings and histories.

These concerns are evident in the archaeological sorting boxes Susan Hiller brought into the Freud Museum during the Spring of 1994. The undertaking was part of a larger project, "The Reading Room," organized by Book Works, a publisher of artists' books in London. Hiller's *After 'The Freud Museum,'* documenting and extending her installation, will appear this fall (Book Works Press: 19 Holywell Road, London EC2A 4JB) Her extensive critical comments on the project can be found in *Thinking about Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller* (selected talks, seminars, interviews 1977-95), edited and introduced by Barbara Einzig, Preface by Lucy Lippard, Manchester University Press 1995. Along with many catalogues and essays, Susan Hiller has also published *Dreams: Visions of the Night,* London: Thames and Hudson; New York: Avon, 1976/1994, and has edited *The Myth of Primitivism,* New York and London: Routledge, 1991.

PAUL METCALF

CEASE AND DESIST

EXTRACTS

Schizophrenics are unlicensed poets.

—anonymous

For under the language we have been listening to all our lives, a new, a more profound language. . .offers itself. It is what they call poetry. . . .[And] it is that, we realize, which beyond all they have been saying is what they have been trying to say.

—William Carlos Williams

Why did she keep walking beside me and watching me? As if she were trying to recognize me with her bleared eyes, that looked as though some diseased person had spat slime into the bloody lids? And how came that little gray woman for a whole quarter of an hour by my side before a shop window, showing me an old, long pencil, that came pushing infinitely slowly out of her miserable, clenched hands? I pretended to look at the display in the window and not notice anything. But she knew I had seen her, she knew I stood there wondering what she was really doing. For I understood quite well that the pencil in itself was of no consequence, I felt it was a sign, a sign for the initiated, a sign the outcast knew; I guessed she was indicating to me that I should go somewhere or do something.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

ONE

SUPERSTYLOPHOTOTUTORIZATION : Higher Education

Courses of study:

Teetotalization—Addition and sobriety
Semihectology—Study of half hundreds
Pyrocardiology—The study of heartburn
Circlingology—Study of a rolling cigarette
Osteophotocardiology—Bones, lights and hearts!

Superstylophototypotermination: An excellent word!—
it has five T's.
The longest word of all, it has fifty letters: *Semicentio-*
steophotoseismophysiopleopolycomputation

(I can read Coptic Braille)

* * *

My universe is small, you see,
there's only me—and me—and me.

I sang my didn't,
I danced my did

both in it
and out of it

(Translibation—moving
drinks from place to place)

When I eat,
there is another head inside my head,

that eats with me,
The inside of my body is empty,
it is only a frame,
the food does not remain,
it disappears, evaporates. . .

You are using my lips to speak—you!—
your words, shaping my lips,
passing under the roof of my mouth, inwards,
and my mouth, and my own words, and my thoughts
are phantoms, shadowing the altogether
other, shaping words—yours!—
and I haven't the scent, the smelling
is your smelling, your inhalation in my nose!
My palm roots the beckoning of your fingers.
You are in me! In *me!* You step in my pace,
your eyes in my hollows turn inwards,
stare into my head;
and I lean, and do not fall,
on the scaffold of your bones.

In this interior decoration, there is some congestion that squanders in the mind. . .

Stay away from crowds, the elbow-people, your feet will tangle with somebody else's. . .

How came such poisoned pap from so excellent an udder?

* * *

(Semicitation—half a quote. . .
or believing only half of what
you hear.)

* * *

Waiting is starved living. . .

* * *

There are little people who live inside me. They are hard to see, invisible, like air. . .but I hear them talking. . .

* * *

Each of us is a corpuscle in the bloodstream, forever circulating.

(*Disproportionability*—Act
of getting out of proportion.)

I oil my body, because it is a machine, and it must be lubricated.

(*Contourability*—Ability to
shape up.)

I get shaky in the knees, and my chest is like a mountain in front of me, and my body actions are different. The arms and legs are apart and away from me and they go on their own. . .Sometimes I let my arms roll to see where they will land.

(*Manustupration*—Kneeling down,
handling myself.)

* * *

A butterfly is flying up from my chest.

I am going to grow up to be a blue grasshopper.

On the average, dinosaurs lived for 100 million years, and each ordinary day seemed to them like days within days and years within years. Especially on winter afternoons when the snow swirled between the steep-roofed buildings and the dinosaurs drifted among them like enormous shadows, time stood still, frozen and unpromising. "Will it ever be spring for me?" the dinosaurs asked then, and the mother dinosaur in each family told the six big wife

dinosaurs and the one smaller husband dinosaur about the old days, when the grass was high and green and the farmers put out piles of pumpkins for them to eat. (A dinosaur could swallow a pumpkin without having to chew it.) There were Coke machines in the meadows then, and around them were scattered all the cigarette butts anyone could want.

The pipe I smoke, with its curious pitted bowl, was made from the leg of an octopus.

* * *

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
Mother and lover of men, the sea.
I will go down to her, I and none other,
Close with her, kiss her, and mix her with me. . .

Moonshine blessedness flutters toward me.

I wing my way through the spaces of thought with the agility of a swallow.

Ah! the sweet relaxation of madness! To laugh and cry, chatter and shriek, whistle, sing, flute, fife, fiddle, run, dance and wrestle. . .

(*Malmentation*—Sickness of mind.)

* * *

I felt myself getting younger; but
even as I diminished in body and age,
I discovered I was nine centuries old:

the nine centuries made me young.

To be nine centuries old
meant I was not yet born.

* * *

If the world were my oyster.
were my cup of tea,
I'd make those shitheads
Bow down to me.

T W O

cease and desist

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ANTONIN ARTAUD

FRAGMENTATIONS

(Tr. from the French by Clayton Eshleman, with Bernard Bador)

Out of the cunt without the mother I will make an obscure, total, obtuse and absolute soul.

*

Yesterday evening March 13th Yvonne's party.
Children of the quickening little stick.
The Etruscan clay pot.

*

Being is that parasitism of the brain that I have begun *by daylight* in order to rid myself of god and his sbirros: the diseases, the night.

*

Born gradually this unconscious that I had like the hardest of the hard before the coffin of my six daughters of the heart to be born:

Yvonne,
Caterine,
Neneka,
Cécile
Ana
and
Little Anie.

*

Before they got away from me I had already blasted them into a state more terrifying than that god they reached only later.

*

Bigger on this floor where the biggest one was hardening to she-death, not like a knee barded with a kneecap, but like the infinitely small that progresses into the angle of its sempiternal strangulation.

*

Which indeed is not in philosophy, but in the pan of fried potatoes, square perhaps and with the handle of the cantilever which bears like the spoon in the perforated tongue of the sex organ forever denied by the heart.

*

A dead little girl said: I am the one who bubbles over with horror in the lungs of the living. Get me out of here right away.

*

They blew terms of dead wax on the condemned bodies of beings and made stupefying retentions of them, who, before birth, were not, but who,

insulin by insulin,

were believed to be,

and yet the artichoke gets worked up in its stalk when a virgin makes caca.

Insulin it's Ka without shit, shit without making caca.

*

There are only the dead

asleep in me,

some are free, they are outside,

the others in this hellish dung heap where my thighbone ceaselessly goes forth and grazes in order to undermine hell.

*

Yesterday Friday March 15th in the installation of my suffering, the dialectic entered me like the derision of my living flesh which suffers but does not understand.

*

Morphine on a wooden leg, done, this morphine, with the gangrene of the dead leg's bones, then drawn off, here is what the holy trinity was.

*

It isn't enough to agitate fluids in order to explain consciousness which is not a common spirit but the volume of a body's timbre up to the point where it arms its way in in order to be, against the spirit that will *calculate* it.

*

Evil spirits are not mental states but beings who never wanted to

en-dure themselves.

*

The spirits will not take care of my affairs and I will regulate them always with my hands and without a concept, like a worker adjuster of limbs whose principle is in my sperm box, and the coffins of my stake legs.

*

But once the stake is out, the question is no longer of adjusting limbs, but of making it, it, explode into a limb which does not suffer replacement.

*

For the children of the principle stage setting,
they're not in the sound, but in the cunt,
which is not the original granary of a principle but a terrifying chewing.

Not in the tone, but in the cunt, drastic bend of this ground swell, advancing with its horrible denture of beings, created to swallow up all beings, but who never know where they are.

*

In slumber one sleeps, there is no self, nobody only specters,

snatching of the tétême of being, by other beings (at that moment awake), from that which makes one a body.

And what is the tétême?

The blood of the body at that moment stretched out, dozing because it is sleeping. How can the tétême be blood? By the *éma,* before which rests the t and designates that which rests like the té vé of the Marseillais. For the té makes a cinder sound when the tongue places it on the lips where it will smoke.

And Éma in Greek means blood. And tétême, twice the cinder on the flame of the blood clot, this inveterate clot which is the body of the sleeping dreamer who would do better to wake up.

—For neither the unconscious nor the subconscious is the law.

Each dream is a piece of suffering torn out of us by other beings, by chance with the monkey hand which they throw upon me every night, the resting cinder of our self which is not a cinder but a hail of bullets as the blood is scrap iron and the self ferruginous.

And what is the ferruginous?

It's this simple: a head, a trunk on two legs, and two arms to rock the trunk in the sense of always being more with a head, two legs and two arms.

For it has been said from time immemorial that the illiterate is a mystery, without alpha and without omega, but with a head, two legs, two arms.—The oafish illiterate of the simple which is man and doesn't understand. He understands that he is head and arms, legs to get the trunk moving. And that there is nothing else apart from that: this totem of eyelids ears, and a nose drilled by twenty fingers.

And that is the mystery of man which god the spirit has never ceased pestering.

*

There is no inside, no spirit, outside or consciousness, nothing but the body as it may be seen, a body that does not cease being, even when the eye that sees it falls.

And this body is a fact.
Me.

*

Sperm is not urination but a being who always toward a being advances to torrefy it with itself.

*

Not a fiction, this sperm, but war with thorn-crowned cannons which churn their own grapeshot before *churning* the ONE entry.

*

Operation from which man fell the day he consented to play the fool.

*

And 2°
secondly
it was not nails
but nothingness,
which one day proclaimed itself a nail,
because it had scraped my head too much and because I, Antonin Artaud, to punish it for sucking my head I turned it into a nail with one hammer blow.

*

I saw Yvonne's bloated sac, I saw the sac bloated with the dregs of Yvonne's blistered soul, I saw that horrific soft sac of Yvonne's sodomized soul, I saw Yvonne's swelling heart punctured, like an enormous bloated sac of pus, I saw the corpse of this insulted Ophelia crawling not on the Milky Way, but on the way of human filth, cursed, reviled, loathed, I saw the corpse of she who loved me subjected to rancid belches of the soul with kicks and slaps,

I saw at last the abhorred bloating, the hideous swelling of this heart plagued for having wanted to bring me a metalloid when I had nothing to eat,

I saw it pass, this brown sac like the pus of despair, I saw pass the dead goiter of my daughter whom life had seized upon to repel and infect.

I saw her repel herself, bitterdead from having been so insulted.

*

I saw the corpse of my daughter Anie reduced to ashes and her sex organ dilapidated and divided after her death, by the police of the French.

*

Priests are asses without egos who are endlessly talking into the asses of others in order to implant their ego there.

*

I saw the meningeal syphilis of my daughter Caterine's legs, and the two hideous potatoes of her swollen kneecaps, I saw the onions of her toes blistered like her sex organ which she has no longer been able to wash for a year after she began her march. I saw it burst from her skull like Anie of the "Holy" Throat, and I saw the intestinal crown of thorns of her blood flowing from her on non-menstrual days.

And I saw the notched knife of my other daughter Neneka who I felt moving in the opium of the earth,

and there were also Yvonne, Caterine, Cécile, Anie and Ana with Neneka.

And she as the dental opium, for nothing is harder than a raging toothache. The opium of the earth's masticatory canines which everyone has been crushing underfoot.

She loved me when I was chewing one day in order to compose the earth, the earth which I will eat.

And I saw the human phallus, thrashing the breasted heart of Cécile,

in that groove of a bone rack,

where the soul to be confirmed smells of a dead woman,
open mouth of an imperishable cellar.

For the offered blood smells of cinders in the casks of its cellar.—And how many testicles of hatred have flogged this firstborn heart?

There still remains Ana and Anie.

*

It's chance which is infinity and not god, and what is chance?

It's *me,* my me told me who listens to me.

And I answered him: All my selves have reached this stage because as far as I am concerned I'm not listening to you.

*

It's Ana who loved the music one day from the top of that shed who is listening to me, when I'm thinking not of myself but of her. Who is she?

The soul that will be born from me.

All of this is very well, but when will I again see Ana Corbin across whose belly the whole medical profession has passed, Ana Corbin named a slut by all the petites-bourgeoises tarts from Saint-Roch to Notre-Dame-des-Champs?

Ana Corbin, firstborn daughter of my soul, and who died despairing of me.

Never!

Yes, one day, the day soon when I'll finally be able to eat.

*

And to marry me Ana Corbin will have waited for the earth to be cleaned, like Yvonne, Cécile, Anie, Caterine and Neneka, these dead, who beyond the distress of their limbs, are waiting before coming to me until I have got done marrying my Ka Ka.

*

There one would have to eat the earth, once.

*

And I have seen Martha Robert in Paris, I saw her from Rodez to Paris leaning forward angrily in the angle of my closed room, right in front of my night table, like a flower extirpated angrily, in the apocalypse of life.

*

And there was also Colette Thomas, to blow the gendarmes of hatred from Paris to Nagasaki.

She will explain to you her own tragedy.

POST-SCRIPTUM

I had a dream last night, scrambled, yes indeed, for a scrambled dream it sure was scrambled. But so meaningful on the other hand, so meaningful.

Jean Dequeker was dragging himself along the earth with short and truncated legs, and he said: Am I a beast, a pebble, a branch or a meat stall?

But after all what is a tree? What is a tree?

Madame Dequeker was behind a cage with her stomach pressed against the flange of this cage, saying: Is that my very own stomach,

no. . .

(me is it not my stomach?)

isn't it my very own stomach which will end up succeeding in thundering?

Colette Thomas had a face full of Greek fire and exclaimed: If that doesn't stop I blow.

Madame Dequeker, the old lady, was in the invisible, like the silvering of a puddle of being which would not succeed in coming

back, with her right hand in the air and her left like an old membrane floating over her abdomen, and saying: I certainly would like my two hands to rejoin without joints, but no joined hands, no, no joined hands.—But how difficult that is, how difficult.

NOTES

Oeuvres completes XIV*, Gallimard, Paris, 1978, pp. 13-22. The text is taken from notebook entries in March, 1946, shortly before Artaud was released from Rodez. It was initially called "Fragments." As he shaped the work, revising it to reflect facets of his "daughters of the heart, to be born," he changed the title to "Fragmentations."

"Yvonne. . .and little Anie:" These "six daughters of the heart, to be born" emerged out of Artaud's regenerative project in Rodez, 1945-1946. Stephen Barber writes:

> These 'daughters' were a highly charged, sexually imbued and manipulable group. Artaud usually imagined six daughters for himself, but he could, when necessary, incorporate other women into the existing children. The daughters combined purely imaginative elements with presences from Artaud's past life. Both of his grandmothers became daughters, as did Cécile Schramme, Yvonne Allendy and Anie Besnard. The daughters fought for him, and suffered terrible tortures in their efforts to reach him at Rodez and free him. Artaud was always certain of their imminent arrival. He wrote to Anie Besnard on 29 October 1945: 'I am awaiting you as arranged, together with your sister Catherine, for whom I no longer have an address, and Cécile, Yvonne and Neneka. You have suffered far too much for anything to stop you and hold you back this time. . .' Around March 1946, he made a drawing entitled 'The theater of cruelty,' which shows four of the daughters in coffins, placed across one another at tangents. Their bodies are scarred and mummified, and they are guarded by an immense, distorted, birdlike creature, but their eyes are open and alert. After his release from Rodez, Artaud wrote to Gilbert Lély, the biographer of the Marquis de Sade, describing the origin of his daughters:
>
>> I thought a lot about love at the asylum of Rodez, and it was there that I dreamed about some daughters of my soul, who loved me like daughters, and not as lovers—me, their prepubescent, lustful, salacious, erotic and incestuous father;
>>
>> and chaste also, so chaste that it makes him dangerous.[1]

Yvonne Allendy was an old friend from the late 1920s. Through her and her husband, the psychiatrist, René Allendy, Artaud met Anaïs Nin in 1933. Yvonne Allendy died in 1935.

Marie Chili (1831-1911) and Catherine Chili (1833-1894), born in Tinos (Cyclades) and Smyrna (Turkey), became Artaud's two grandmothers.

Cécile Schramme is the young Belgian who Artaud became infatuated with in the mid-1930s. She died in a sanitarium in Belgium in 1950.

Ana Corbin is only identifiable as someone, according to Artaud, who worked in the Dreyer film, *la Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*.

Anie Besnard, from Luxembourg, was a young friend of Artaud's, whom he met in Paris in the early '30s.

"Ka:" "The *ka* was a term for the creative and preserving power of life. In ancient [Egypt] it referred particularly to male potency, hence its phonetic resemblance to the word 'ka' meaning 'bull.' The hieroglyph 'ka' with hands raised in a defensive attitude was a magical gesture designed to preserve the life of the wearer from evil forces. The *ka* accompanied a person like a kind of double, but when the person died the *ka* lived on."[2]

Elsewhere Artaud spells "ka" as "Kah" or "Kah Kah," punning on "caca." According to Artaud, "ka" as insulin or opium has the power of "caca" without its materiality.

At other points, "ka" is absorbed into longer, apparently coined words ("kaya," "kavina," "dakantala"), which are part of chant constructions.

"tétême:" apparently coined by Artaud; possibly based on "téter" (to suck, as a breast) and "aime" (from "aimer," to love), as well as "t'aime" (I love you). In this passage, "tétême" is quickly linked up with "éma," Artaud's pronunciation of "haimo" (blood, in Greek). "éma" also appears in Artaud's November 17, 1946 letter to Henri Parisot, in a long passage which sheds some light on how Artaud is using it. See Weaver, pp. 476-477.

"té vé:" probably not a reference to TV, but to the Marseillais slang for "bonjour" (good day).

"asses:" Artaud has dropped the "l" from "cul" (ass). We have not attempted to match this in English, as the results lead to unfortunate puns: "as" for "ass," or "but" for "butt."

The last two paragraphs of "Fragmentations" introduce two more women friends, both of whom had recently visited Artaud in Rodez. The scholar Marthe Robert (whose books in English translation include *Franz Kafka's Loneliness* and *The Psychoanalytic Revolution)* performed his texts at the Galerie Pierre readings in 1947. Colette Thomas, an actress married to the novelist Henri Thomas, had a background of mental instability and had already spent time in asylums. She performed "Fragmentations" at a theater benefit for Artaud in 1946.

The doctor Jean Dequeker went to work at Rodez in March, 1945. The warmth that he and his wife, Madeleine, showed toward Artaud made his last year there more endurable.

Readers may find fascinating overlays in Artaud's "daughters of the heart" and the American "outsider artist" Henry Darger's 15,000 page saga, "The Story of the Vivian Girls in what is known as The Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeo-Angelinnean War storm, caused by the Child Slave Rebellion." Written out over the lifetime of this reclusive Chicago artist (who worked as a hospital custodian), Darger's cosmic tale, filled with unusual grammar, rhythmic repetitions, and neologisms, portrays its seven virtuous princesses as innocent, helpless, heroines, fighting adult manipulation and violence. Like Artaud's "daughters," the Vivian Girls are repeatedly captured, tortured, and sentenced to death. John M. MacGregor writes: "Darger's personal experience of little girls was limited. In his drawings of them, tracings from published sources, girls are frequently shown naked and usually with male genitals, which he carefully added."[3]

1 Barber, p. 116.
2 *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt,* Manfred Lurker, Thames & Hudson, 1984, p. 73.
3 "I see a World within the World: I Dream but am Awake," John M. MacGregor, in *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art,* Princeton, 1992, pp. 259-270.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

TWO POEMS

PAIN

as a name to call the poem by

this is the fact of life this rises
every time we move
this is the burden of the killers

see how they walk around
they find a pleasure in it

because what nature gives
isn't enough
the task of life is its enlargement

enlightenment is also pain

as love is

PROLOGOMENA TO A POETICS

for Michael McClure

. . . . . .

Poet man walks between dreams
He is alive, he is breathing freely
thru a soft tube like a hookah.
Ashes fall around him as he walks
singing above them.
Oh how green
the sun is where it marks
the ocean.
Feathers drift atop the hills
down which the poet man
keeps walking, walking
a step ahead of what he fears,
of what he loves.

. . . . . .

Why has the poet failed us?
Why have we waited, waited for the word to come again?
Why did we remember what the name means
only to now forget it?
If the poet's name is god how dark the day is
how heavy the burden is he carries with him.
All poets are jews, said Tsvetayeva.
The god of the jews is jewish, said a jew.
It was white around him & his voice
was heavy,
like a poet's voice in winter,
old & heavy,
crackling,
remembering frozen oceans in a summer clime,
how contrary he felt
how harsh the suffering was in him,
let it go!
The poet is dreaming about a poet
& calls out.
Soon he will have forgotten who he is.

. . . . . .

Speak to the poet's mother,
she is dead now.
So many years ago she left her father's clime.
His *father* too.
The tale of wandering is still untold,
untrue. The tale of who you are,
the tale of where the poem can take us,
of where it stops
& where the voice stops.
The poem is an argument with death.
The poem is priceless.
Those who are brought into the poem can never leave it.
In a silver tux the poet in the poem by Lorca
walks down the hall to greet the poet's bride.
The poet sees her breasts shine in the mirror.
Apples as white as boobs,
says Lorca.
He is fed the milk of paradise,
the dream of every poet man
of every poet bride.
The band plays up
the day unstops & rushes out to greet
another night.

. . . . . .

Is the black poet
black?
And is the creation of his hands & throat
a black creation?
Yes, says the poet man
who wears three rings,
the poet man who seeks the precious light,
passes the day beside a broken door
no one can enter. Hold it shut,
the god cries & the jew rolls over
in his endless sleep.
Gods like little wheels glide past him

down the mountain road where cats live
in a cemetery guarded by his father's star,
a poet & a bride entangled in the grass,
his hands are black
his eyes the whitest white
& rimmed with scarlet.
Hear the drumbeat,
heart.
The blacks have landed on the western shore
the long lost past of poetry revives.

. . . . . .

Our fingers fail us.

Then tear them off! the poet cries
not for the first time.
The dead are too often seen filling our streets,
who hasn't seen them?
A tremor across the lower body,
always the image of a horse's head
& sandflies.
A woman's breast & honey.
She in whose mouth the murderers stuffed gravel
who will no longer speak.
The poet is the only witness to that death,
writes every line
as though the only witness.

MICHAEL MCCLURE

DARK MEAT 2

for Jerome Rothenberg

I REMEMBER
MYSELF
REMEMBERING
before
there
was
MEMORY

memory
in
gold

memory
in
silver

memory
in
sulfur

memory
in
lions

memory
in
shark faces

•

REMEMBERING
REMEMBERING

before
memory

before
material
PRODUCTS

give forth
of themselves

as
centers
of
consciousness

in
the

hunger
obliterating

BEING

before

remembering
remembering
memory

•

Like
a high top
BLACK SHOE

with
new rubber
sole

a
small town
swimming pool

three stars
in the belt
of
Orion

jet engines

reforming endlessly

remembering

being

on
the
edge
(solid)
a smell of it

•

DIGNITY

PATRIOTISM

shoe
polish

quasars

novae

a finger
touching the wet
leafy
trail

a flicker's call

the same
MEMORY

remembering

reaching past

the magic beings
fucking
in the retort

•

A
PAPER
BOAT

on
a quicksilver
sea

THE

SAME

AT

ONE

STRETCH

FOR

THE

ORIGIN
OF

THE
PRECIPICE

—LIKE

A FOOL
WITH A JUMPING
DOG

BITING
HIS
ASS

•

The origin
of the precipice

BE
FORE

Nature locked
into space

and I
dressed
in these rags

colored rags
that I am

ZERO

ON THE OTHER

SIDE

ZERO
HERE

ZERO
ZERO
ZERO
between

remembering
remembering

till
cinders

ARE
WHAT

is

built out of
cinders
of
ZERO
remembering

Oakland Hills—Tokyo

CHARLES WATTS

from THE RECOVERY OF THE PUBLIC WORLD: A CONFERENCE IN HONOR OF ROBIN BLASER'S POETRY AND POETICS

FOREWORD

Poets have repeatedly in this century turned philosophers, so to speak, in order to argue the value of poetry and its practice within the disturbed meanings of our time. These arguments are fascinating because they have everything to do with the poets' sense of reality in which imagery is entangled with thought. Often, they reflect Pound's sense of 'make it new' or the modernist notion that this century and its art are simultaneously the end of something and the beginning of something else, a new consciousness, and so forth. It is not one argument or another for or against tradition, nor is it the complex renewal of the imaginary which our arts witness, for, as I take it, the enlightened mind does not undervalue the imaginary, which is the most striking matter of these poetics; what is laid out before us finally is the fundamental struggle for the nature of the real. And this, in my view, is a spiritual struggle, both philosophical and poetic. Old spiritual forms, along with positivisms and materialisms, which 'held' the real together have come loose. This is a cliché of our recognitions and condition. But we need only look at the energy of the struggle in philosophy and poetry to make it alive and central to our private and public lives.

—Robin Blaser, from "The Violets: Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead"

These words came to set the tone for "The Recovery of the Public World: a Conference and Festival in Honor of Robin Blaser, his Poetry and Poetics," which took place this past June 1st through 4th at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, Canada. Those of us who organized the conference found in Robin's words a sense of urgency to imagine a community in which "the struggle in philosophy and poetry" is "central to our private and public lives." Many people felt that sense of urgency: fifty-five panelists on eight panels made presentations to some

200 persons over four days; fifty-eight poets spoke, read their poetry and performed at mid-afternoons and evenings, on two evenings before an audience of four hundred. Jenny Penberthy and I, Daphne Marlatt and Phyllis Webb, Norma Cole and Michael Palmer, Susan Howe and Nathaniel Mackey, Lisa Robertson and Jery Zaslove, Charles Bernstein and Miriam Nichols, Bruce Boone and Sharon Thesen, and Pauline Butling and Wystan Curnow co-chaired the panels, titled "Companions: Self, Other, Community;" "Composition & Performance;" "Translation & Poetry;" "Heterologies;" " Ethics & Aesthetics;" "Poetics: Theory & Practice;" "Eros & Poiesis;" and "Poetics: Form & Structure." The speakers who appeared on these panels: Michael Boughn, Daniel Burgoyne, Clayton Eshleman, Peter Gizzi, Michael McClure, Kristin Prevallet, Nathaniel Tarn, David Bromige, Peter Middleton, Jed Rasula, David Sullivan, Phyllis Webb, Colin Browne, Hilary Clark, Pierre Joris, Susan Vanderborg, Pasquale Verdicchio, Steve Dickison, Michele Leggott, D.S. Marriott, Leslie Scalapino, Andrew Schelling, Michael Davidson, Robert Hullot-Kentor, Paul Kelley, Andrew Klobucar, David Levi Strauss, Anne Waldman, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Alan Golding, Steve McCaffery, Tom Marshall, Miriam Nichols, Kevin Killian, Daphne Marlatt, Peter Quartermain, George Stanley, Alan Vardy, Charles Altieri, Pauline Butling, Don Byrd, Norman Finkelstein.

I believe this conference will have some lasting importance, for many reasons. It's the very first occasion to present diverse examination and celebration of Robin Blaser's life work in poetry. It brought poets and scholars together from Canada, the United States, England and New Zealand, all of them interested in the poetic, philosophical, political and ethical concerns that make for the ground of Robin's work. It allowed these writers, from at least four very distinctly different literary homelands, to meet each other, on the public stage, in panels and readings, and in the "in-betweens"—the breaks, the informal moments at lunch or dinner around Granville Island or elsewhere in Vancouver. And again and again, it made a forum for speaking of a poetic practice which is not simply personal, but which takes account of the generally felt need for a public world in which these poetics and politics would be recognized. Several speakers, including Robin, recalled Hannah Arendt's words (the phrase "the recovery of the public world" is Hannah Arendt's) from her book, *The Human Condition*, about the crucial effect of a public world in organizing and drawing people together: *"to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men [and women] at the same time."* Arendt continues: *"The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to*

bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost the power to gather them together, to relate and separate them."

This, I think, is the urgency which Robin feels and which, embodied in his work, moved so many poets and scholars to come to Vancouver this past June: how to come to terms with (and against) the "conditionless condition" that characterizes the common predicament of the mass societies in which we live. As we know, since we live in it, it is a highly impervious predicament, not likely, or even very temporarily, amenable of solution. But speaking, writing, working out a poetics like Robin's, which is both furious and intelligent, compassionate and amiable and active in its imagination, offers to many of us a means of resistance to that "conditionless condition." Resistance: another word often heard at the "Recovery of the Public World" conference. And among the many resources spoken of as means to this resistance, wit and humor shone through as beacons.

The three pieces printed here—Jed Rasula's "Taking Out the Tracks: Robin Blaser's Syncopation" (presented on the Composition & Performance panel), Peter Quartermain's "The Mind as Frying Pan: Blaser's Humor" (given as part of the Eros & Poiesis panel), and Robin Blaser's talk, presented on the opening evening of the conference—all share those qualities: wit and humor as elegant forms of serious resistance in "the struggle in philosophy and poetry."

I won't speak of the papers themselves—each speaks for itself most sufficiently. They are not, nor do they pretend to be, representative of the whole of the papers given at the conference: each is itself, distinct. That said, it's still worth noting the frequency with which some themes—I've alluded to some of them here—and some authors—Arendt, for instance, Montaigne, Emerson, Leibniz, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Avital Ronell, Jean Luc Nancy, Catherine Clément—were raised, by diverse presenters in papers with very different subject matter. This consonance of thinking struck many at the conference: there was some actual common effort, some syncretism of thought, spontaneously and heuristically arrived at, to imagine a common and public world, or to came to terms with—that is, to name—the one in which we live.

One thing more: We, the organizers of "The Recovery of the Public World," plan to gather these and other papers from the conference together in a book that will, we hope and intend, reflect the spirit and the quality of the thought that made this conference such an occasion for poetics. We intend that this book will be published and available in Canada and the United States, New Zealand and England, and that it will be available by the Fall of 1996.

Vancouver, July, 1995

ROBIN BLASER

HELLO!

First, let me recommend sticking around for 70 years—if you get the chance—I won't stop over the increasing upkeep or the necessary tune-ups—in fact, I'd like to hang out with you in the year 2000—as I've said in a poem, to see what three zeros look like—and to listen to the musical airs of apocalypses—twentieth-century music is not at all difficult, if you think of the dissonance and percussion of *Daniel* and *The Book of Revelation*—so, stick around, all sorts of things happen, including, in this instance of our being here, that one's destiny in writing becomes curiouser and curiouser—

that is, for me, a marvelousness—the great paradigms of our meanings shift—"God, self, history, and Book," to use Mark C. Taylor's arrangement of them, shift—that is to say, in the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the word *shift*, **divide and separate**—and thus, because they are never still, they meander, like persons who have come upon a territory—"Map is not territory," in a phrase that delighted Jack Spicer and me, when we found it something like 45 years ago in Alfred Korzybski—and equally, territory is not a Map—

this will not be a lecture, even though the program for this Conference says it is—I'll forgo the meticulousness expected of lecturers—what an interesting word meticulous is, coming, as it does, from the Latin *metus*, meaning *fear*—nevertheless, I'll step carefully for a few minutes, reading signposts and street signs—and convoking some companions in thought, with whom I would keep company—

my first thought was to improvise a wild and extravagant piece made up of immediately memorable phrases by Jack Clarke, Alvin Balkin, Robert Duncan, Rob Dunham, Roy Kiyooka, bp Nichol, Jack Spicer, Warren Tallman, and Dennis Wheeler—to whose memory this occasion is dedicated—as it is with real alphabets, none of us knew them in that alphabetical order—my ambition in this remains a mere ambition, interrupted by what may be a superstition—I think they all got together and agreed, "He won't get away with that!" and sent me an abscessed tooth, from which I 'm speaking to you this evening—so, this is, in fact, a serration—I am indebted to their lives and their work—

let me lip-sync, because I believe them, a few words from Octavio Paz's *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism:*

> To me, poetry and thought are a system of communicating vessels. The source of both is my life. I write about what I have lived and am living. To live is also to think, and sometimes to cross that border beyond which feeling and thinking become one: poetry—

such is the territory, one life after another, for which there is no Map, but there is a celebration—

so, speaking of the company I would keep, there is this extraordinary gathering—of poetic minds—and of those wonderful adventurers I call readers—this companionship—including the magical, passionate dissonances and differences among us—of companionable, musical language and of our stake in it—the word from Latin *com-panis*—with-bread—designates those who share bread—here we would share language—for our difficult purposes—as much a requirement of the body as bread is—companions may become "framed windows over a hatchway" or a hooded staircase on board a ship, embarking or disembarking—even a *camera della campagna,* a storeroom for provisions, a caboose—what I love about poetry is the astonishment of language—its surprising abilities—that poetry guards the materiality of language—its workability—its careful steps—as syntax changes, as it must, as paradises must—I am honored and proud to be among you—who, I would say, compose by counterpoint, or so I read you, and are, thus, mindful of how harmony was discovered and of what wore out—in grammar and in syntax—

we are not a school, an organized movement, a cabal, a power or a domination—as your reader, you strike me as eminently qualified for posting in the College we imagined in San Francisco during the early '60s—before Simon Fraser University generously invited me here—we called it White Rabbit College—Robert Duncan was to teach *Godlore;* Jack Spicer, Anglo-Saxon and Poetry & Politics; Pauline Olivares, music with spoons and kettles—she was then known, in newspaper jargon, as the composer of "uglies"; I was to teach French and the History of Troy—both Robert and Jack have left their chairs to others—and I have since met those who could far better teach my subjects than I—I step aside—so there are chairs & chairs—White Rabbit College requires many Alices—or at least persons with Alice's marvelous courage—

perhaps, a story would fit us here just now—it has been told to me twice over, so to speak—and since I'm telling it a third time, it must, perforce, be true:

> How strange a thing this Art of Writing did seem at its first Invention, we may guess by the late discovered Americans, who were amazed to see Men converse with Books, and could scarce make themselves to believe a Paper could speak. . . .
>
> There is a pretty Relation to this Purpose, concerning an Indian Slave; who being sent by his Master with a Basket of Figs and a Letter, did by the Way eat up a great Part of his Carriage, conveying the Remainder unto the Person to whom he was directed; who when he had read the Letter, and not finding the Quantity of Figs answerable to what was spoken of, he accuses the Slave of eating them, telling him what the Letter said against him. But the Indian (not withstanding this Proof) did confidently abjure the Fact, cursing the Paper, as being a false and lying Witness.
>
> After this, being sent again with the like Carriage, and a Letter expressing the just Number of Figs, that were to be delivered, he did again, according to his former Practice, devour a great Part of them by the Way; but before meddled with any, (to prevent all following Accusations) he first took the Letter, and hid that under a great Stone, assuring himself, that if it did not see him eating the Figs, it could never tell of him; but being now more strongly accused than before, he confesses the Fault, admiring the Divinity of the Paper, and for the future does promise his best Fidelity in every Employment. (John Wilkins, *Mercury; or, The Secret and Swift Messenger,* 1641, cited in Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation.)*

Ah! this "Divinity of the Paper"—two hundred and forty years later, it will have a different feel to it—something "like a zigzag doodle drawn on paper by a superior power wanting to try out a *newpen*"(Nietzsche to Peter Gast, August, 1881)—as for "Fidelity in every Employment," three hundred and fifty-four years later—today—we are in the midst of a regression toward that "first Invention," in which, as I've said in a poem, economics and religion join—"confused science and confused theology prancing around together as usual"—

now this surprising festival—we might initially stumble over the title of it—*The Recovery of the Public World*—as if, following discussion, such an eventuality could be announced tomorrow—there are those whose grasp on reality is so grasping that they do not know that there is little or no community left in the public sphere—televised excitements, interrupted by an increasing percentage of minutes per hour of commercials; vicious mental vices of religions; techno-futures; a capitalism that claims something called the "private sector"—these are rather more divisive than commu-

nal—fascinating surfaces, admittedly—potentially undemocratic by probability—the public world has everything and everywhere to do with the traceries and delicacies of public and private existence—the depths beneath the surfaces in which each "simple, separate person" swims—the rhythmic relationships—so, a recovery, a discovery—a lid off a boiling pot—in which one notices that the surface is violent—

the phrase *The Recovery of the Public World* is meant to call Hannah Arendt to mind—I found it in her work and I continue to work alongside her, as best I can, as if she were a Muse—among Calliope, Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Terpsichore, Thalia, and Urania, whose mother, we know, is Mnemosyne—lovely persons of the mind's activity—one may add Musers as one meets them—Hannah Arendt will not lead us into community, as if her work were a map—hers is a useful and profound diagnosis—in which, as in the work of Martha Nussbaum, poetic thought is fundamental—a test of thought's companionship—the public and the private are not true dualisms, as we seem to think—neither are sugar and salt—the condition I try to think about issues from the dynamics of the public and private—it is what is between them—that is to say, what we share—not by metaphysical appointment—but by our existence in thought and feeling—

Hannah Arendt argued that the purpose of political organization is to solve the problems of "large numbers"—the people—food, shelter, clothing, and health—thus, to release human nature into its intelligence—in the public forum—where the conversation of thought might take place with consequences—this is not elitism—that curious word that these days is changing its meaning to say something like "my energies don't go in that direction, so your energy isn't worth shit in this *public space, which I own*"—one might ask such accusers what in the hell they mean in terms of human consciousness, historical and quotidian, as it is—of course, their argument is for *sameness*—another word for the State, Hegelian and otherwise, or reified immortalities—whereas our study is of multiplicity and differences which we share—in my own terms, that is what we actually share, given a sense of "social justice," which frees us from necessity—into human intelligence—the mind's play and the body's extension into relations among things—an indeterminate, various, resistant finitude—

I first came upon Hannah Arendt when she was for a brief time at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1949—our first conversation turned unfortunate—I was trying to help her through a turnstile, which gadget she'd never seen before—and she wound up sitting on top of it—her legacy from that time is, of course, in her books—in the 1950 "Preface" to *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* she wrote:

> We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are in vain.

I have taken this as admonition and instruction since I first read it in 1951—though it was a long time before I knew what to do with it—this sense that a poetic practice of any consequence would be implicated in our cultural condition—by way of resistance and by some thoughtful clarity about what is irreparable—

I first wrote about my desire for community—little more—in an address I gave in 1968, at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco—"The Fire."—in 1988, I took up "The Recovery of the Public World" for a think-tank at the Humanities Institute, University of Calgary—this essay was published in a volume titled *Reflections on Cultural Policy, Past, Present, and Future*—since my essay seems not to have escaped the formidable weight of that title—at least, not so that it reached many poets—I will, for this occasion, return to some of its concerns—my working title is, as I've said, taken from Hannah Arendt, whose lifelong meditation on the vital relation between public and private worlds for men and women—a fundamental happiness, if truly alive—informs my own—her work begins with a major effort to understand the totalitarianism that dogs the political, social, and artistic life of the twentieth century and of our modernity—in that same 1950 "Preface" to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—a date close to the one usually assigned to the beginning of the postmodern condition—she reminds us:

> Two world wars in one generation, separated by an uninterrupted chain of local wars and revolutions, followed by no peace treaty for the vanquished and no respite for the victor, have ended in the anticipation of a Third World War between the two remaining world powers. [For us today, these two have become several.] This moment of anticipation is like the calm that settles after all hopes have died. We no longer hope for an eventual restoration of the old order with all its traditions, or for the reintegration of the masses of five continents who have been thrown into a chaos produced by the violence of wars and revolutions and the growing decay

> of all that has still been spared. . .homelessness of an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth—

she argues that we deal with an unpredictable future, with "forces that look like sheer insanity," and with "those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives"—today we watch homelessness increase in the cities we know best and love most—today, we quarrel or try to argue with the powerlessness that breeds violence and corrupt religions in order to "solve" the meaninglessness of the public sphere—the public and the private have not been in conversation for a very long time—

it has been suggested by some critics of Hannah Arendt's work that the whole of it is caught—implying an important limitation—in her personal experience of European Nazism, as if our North American cultural condition with all its differences, whether we think of Canada or the United States, were not embedded in the common European and Christian fate—this reduction of Arendt's world-experience to the merely personal is, of course, silly—and it results from a darkling perception of the place of individual experience within cultural conditions—or, perhaps, it is simply a North American characteristic grown out of the circumstance that one's homestead has not been directly touched by war and twentieth-century revolution—yet wars and revolutions tattoo our modernity—cultural condition is not a picket fence or a nearby Safeway—cultural condition always approaches what we mean by the word *world*—or the process of composing one—the world is never separately—by simplicity's trick—social, political, artistic, or sacred—rather, it is made up of an entanglement of discourses having to do with men, women, earth, and heaven—religions have long won hearts—from the beginning, one might say, when cities were first built for the gods—because they sing of earth and heaven and of many different desires, called immortalities—the largeness to which we respond in the world should not be underestimated—nor should we forget the ricketiness of the circles that the cultural condition draws around largeness—death is the boundary of all our thought, and such a bounded condition is worth the thought given it everywhere—inside and outside religions—but religion must not be allowed to cover over, invade, or delimit the social, political, and artistic discourses of our condition—they, like certain historicisms, make the future a superstition—relation to the Other—in fact to any other—is multidimensional and multi-logical—so my experience tells me—history is an extraordinary Other of ourselves—in relation to the individual and to present social reality—yet it is our own activity in the world, helpless or not—not God's or Providence's—and therein we have responsibility according to our talents—each separate discourse, social, political, religious, artistic, even scientific, has a tendency toward a realism that is its own—which says this is all of it—thus the world

is maimed—thinking and feeling are irreclaimably individual whereby a woman or a man repeatedly falls out of any group or commonality into a solitude—that may be wondrous, banal, or defeated—according, I believe, to one's sense of the world—"civilization is an individual task"—to which nation, state, or social body do not finally answer—

the contemporary humanism that troubles me, whether in the guise of God, Man, or Woman, lacks a world—the shape that that lack takes still reflects these fashionings of wholeness—the "ruler," a "moral energy," an "ultimate philosophical principle"—each of which has a history of its dangerous propensity and then repeats itself—these crowd-pleasers—these systems—suddenly, I think of David Hume's remarks in *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1740):

> Fain wou'd I run into the crowd for shelter and warmth; but
> I cannot prevail with myself to mix with such deformity. . . .
> I have declar'd my disapprobation of their systems. . . .

his point, I think, is the self-deception of such systems—

"the subterranean stream of Western history"—we are currently faced with the vicious—and in any terms that wish to know what it was all about in the first place—the blasphemous resurgencies of religions—their willfulness—their manipulations—their infallibilities—in this, the community of shared existence disappears in a *Totality* that is very careless of our finitude—they were still burning at the stake in the 18th century—the Southern Baptists apologize to blacks for what was previously said to be God's Word—the Roman Catholics apologize to Galileo, who was, doubtless, absolutely furious—they have become one and the same *forgiveness of themselves*—these surfaces—atheism in the old sense is of no help in this—it is only the same thing by negation—perhaps, we could take a hint from Jean-Luc Nancy, via his thought on "Shattered Love" and "Of Divine Places"—we might move through a territory we could name "God/noGod"—perhaps, to find what divine writing is—

(I quote a poem by the great twentieth-century Greek poet George Seferis—diddling the translation a little—

> As pines
> keep the shape of the wind
> even when the wind has fled and is no longer there
> so words
> guard the shape of men and women
> even when women and men have fled and are no longer
> [there)

I think with Hannah Arendt again:

> . . .the term "public" signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men [and women] and the condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together; to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men [and women] at the same time.
>
> The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved. . .but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to relate and separate them.
>
> *(The Human Condition,* p. 48)

I've spent the last couple of years working entirely on this desire for community—mulling over its multiformity—to write with a community, so represented here—answering to Jean-Luc Nancy's "Imperative" that *"we must continue to write the community"*—that mysterious language that writes at the edge—even over the edge—of grasping discourses—where something of shared existence is working and "unworking" (Pierre Joris's translation of *désoeuvrement)*—in this territory, which I can, for my part, only write piece by piece—and always somehow unready—in this territory, I've called upon Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowble Community* (Pierre Joris's helpful, elegant translation)—on Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*—on Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*—and on Avital Ronell's *Finitude's Score*—

I'll close my remarks tonight with brief quotations from them—teasers—since they tease my thought and care with what I have called territory—this "thinking without bannisters"—Blanchot:

> . . .the possibility or impossibility of a community at a time when even the ability to understand community seems to have been lost. . . .p. [3]

Nancy:

> If the political is not dissolved in the sociotechnical element of forces and needs (in which, in effect, it seems to be dissolving under our eyes), it must inscribe the sharing of community. The outline of singularity would be "political"—as would be the outline of its communication and its ecstasy. "Political" would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing. To attain to such a signification of the "political". . . implies being already engaged in community, that is to say, undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication: it implies writing. We must not stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself. (pp. 40-41)
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> • • • •
>
> "Literary communism" indicates at least the following: that community, in its infinite resistance to everything that would bring it to completion (in every sense of the word *achever*—which can also mean "finish off"), signifies an irrepressible political exigency, and that this exigency in its turn demands something of "literature," the inscription of our infinite resistance. (pp. 80-81)
>
> • • • •
>
> One thing at least is clear: if we do not face up to such questions, the political will soon desert us completely, if it has not already done so. It will abandon us to political and technological economies, if it has not already done so. And this will be the end of our communities, if this has not yet come about. Being-*in*-common will nonetheless never cease to resist, but its resistance will belong decidedly to another world entirely. Our world, as far as politics is concerned, will be a desert, and we will wither away without a tomb—which is to say, without community, deprived of our finite existence. ("Preface" p. xli)

Ronell:

> As the millennium comes to an end, and the twentieth century scarifies our fragile memory, very little will stand out in terms

of epochal splendor. If anything, humanity will have exhausted the heroic mythemes on which so much has been staked. Humanity (a term which acquired the prestige of its contemporary usage at the Nuremberg trials) will certainly have to rethink the projects and projections that have, despite everything, traced out a history of indecency—a history which compromises the very possibility of a thinking of futurity. In its fading moments, even as it signals change, the last century will have been dominated in the end by a diction of deficit: deficiency, whether immuno or projected outwardly and marked by complementary economies, no longer carries the bounce of lack or the sure fire of nihilism but says, more simply, that we have been depleted. This depletion has to do with a relation to the outside—a *national* deficit, for example—but it also controls a low-energy intensity that involves everyone. It seems as though all accounts of savings and saviors are understood to be depleted. Exhausted with the failure of models, identities, leaders, promise, so-called breakthroughs, vampirized by figures of exigency or ecstasy, the last century sees itself as standing out, if only in the sense that there is an outstanding debt to be paid—but to whom? to what?

In case you're thinking, Well, Avital, fuck her, she just lives inside her own head, this work reveals a growing concern over the finite figures that comprise our shared experience. As long as there is something like experience, it is not entirely mine. Nonetheless, if there is a growing sense that the writer is inhabiting an inside that is out of it, this condition cannot simply be debited to the account of the solitary worker but is rather a symptom pointing to *the vanishing of the experienceability of the world*—assuming that, after all is said and done, one can still say 'world.' (p. ix)

Agamben:

The human is the being that, bumping into things and only in this encounter, open up to the non-thinglike. And inversely, the human is the one that, being open to the non-thinglike, is, for this very reason, irreparably consigned to things.

Non-thingness (spirituality) means losing oneself in things, losing oneself to the point of not being able to conceive of anything but things, and only then, in the experience of the

> irremediable thingness of the world, bumping into a limit, touching it. (This is the meaning of the word "exposure.") (p. 102, 103)

may I say that one's finitude—one's singularity—is offered to the imagination of an infinite limit?—

June 1, 1995

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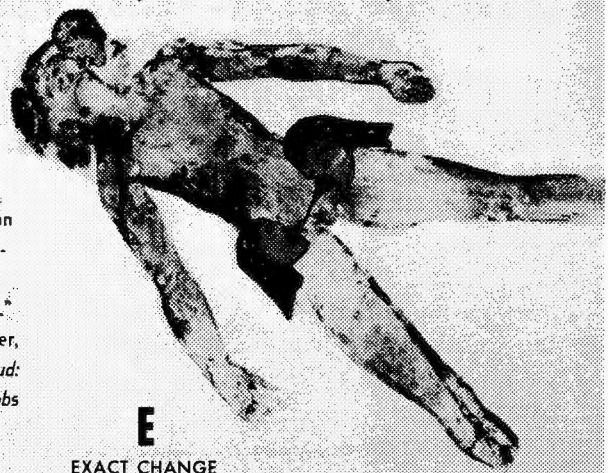

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JED RASULA

TAKING OUT THE TRACKS: ROBIN BLASER'S SYNCOPATION

> The queen of rhythm, syncope, is also the mother of *dissonance*; it is the source, in short, of a harmonious and productive discord. The process allows some limping before the harmony, however: it is sometimes said that syncope "attacks" the weak beat, like an enzyme, a wildcat, or a virus; and yet the last beat is the saving one. Attack and haven, collision; a fragment of the beat disappears, and of this disappearance, rhythm is born. (Clément, 5)

Robin Blaser has long incorporated these interruptions as a rapture of his work. The syncope, its syncopation, is the danger of letting in some arrhythmia, some inspiring fatality (*duende* resounds here), and the trick is to survive this creative prostration. To make of its arrest a restorative bewilderment (and I hear *arrest* here as the final word of Robert Duncan's last poem, as well as Clayton Eshleman's *Under World Arrest)*. Arrested: somehow spasm back into play.

The spasm concurs with the "randonée" or sporadic syncopation of the hunt, the sudden natality of spoor. Eruptive sigillation.[1] When these things occur, we become part of the place, pieces of The Place, a place-meant, in which the disabling de-composition composes itself. To simultaneously say and unsay; to find in citation a site, a place to work *in audition*. Audaciously, the music of Monteverdi, in one poem, is recognized as "an achievement at the turn / of the next room" (HF 211). Common sense says Monteverdi was a 16th century composer, so how could his "achievement" be located in a house in Vancouver in the 20th century? But the experiences we have are real to us. When Walter Benjamin laments the decline of the aura he overlooks the recombinant prospect; so the mechanical reproduction of Monteverdi, lacking a cathedral, is given the chance to grow a new aura in a place where "the december tomatoes shine on the top of the refrigerator," where *also* "the *shattered marble* of my unwalled / thought enters the Rondanini Pietá / silently—*shaking hands of the substance / melt away*" (HF 211). A fluid interpenetration of distinct spaces and discrete

modes of being, joined by syncopation's stutter, sutured in tantalizing indiscretion.

This is why Aristotle subordinated history to poetry. History is the record of what happened only once, he said, but poetry is what happens all the time. Our thoughts and wishes do penetrate silently the objects of our desires; we *do* couple with the phantasm. It's simple, *sim-plex,* "once pleated" or folded over as Giorgio Agamben has it in *Stanzas* (156).

Blaser offers a parable about such occasions: Opal Whiteley has a cow called Elizabeth Barrett Browning. "Her mooings now are very musical, and there is poetry in her tracks. She does make such dainty ones. When they dry up in the lane, I dig up her tracks, and I save them. There is much poetry in them. . ." (HF 204) Tracks make a plausible double for writing. Both are traces of a passage. Opal Whiteley saves cow tracks; Robin Blaser salvages tracks of others' writing. Writing as tracking:

> The work is always the passage of a wildness. The suddenness of the man I watch is both visible and invisibly continuous. At an edge. (SM 55)
> . . .The whole culture has brought him there at the edge of himself. (SM 56)
> I speak entering what is speaking—at an edge. I enter many directions, the synchron or coming together of time, in order to find words which are not alone. (SM 56)

To quote is to create company around the words, to convene companionship ("break bread" in an etymology Blaser delights in) there at the edge, the flicker. To incubate the words. Blaser's poems are ventilators as well as incubators, choreographed to make of space a syncopation. These are the nests of syncope.

To nourish words as eggs, to take them as fragmentary aspirations to growth, morphogenesis. The poetics of the palimpsest: inklings from the dream world in the poem dated 6 November 1982:

> so.....prize
> .....
> .....
> surprise
> (HF 216)

This is the look of the incubator, ellipses or dots as rows and rows of embryos punning their way into life.

People started to take an interest in fragments in the 18th century, initially as part of the development of the historical sense. So much of

antiquity is fragmentary, like Heraclitus and Sappho. The vogue for ruins became an architectural fad. The German Romantics in the Jena circle (Hölderlin, the brothers Schlegel, Novalis, Schelling), were interested in fragments: "as a fragment, the incomplete appears in its most bearable form" (Novalis, in Seyhan 72). They recognized that conversation, the discursive Socratic exchange, is "a chain or garland of fragments" *(Athenaeum* #77). A voice is significant not as expression of a self, but as a momentary attribute of a growing form, the verge when the conversation folds back on itself en route to another voice.

> the voice is recognizable
> as fragments
> of a greater language,
> a live and changing
> face
> (HF 116)

A fragment is not only ruin or wreckage, but the trace of a passage, the sign of where some creative force has moved on, leaving in its way a decomposition with new tracks through it.

> 'If there's one thing Harry learned
> to love more than the sacred, it was
> the sacred in ruins.' (Epitaphics, HF 261)

The process of ruin is reflected in what I take to be a typo in "The Stadium of the Mirror": "The wreckage of prenouns [sic?] is a great deal of fun" (SM 57). The error is an invention. Blaser quotes Hölderlin's translator: "the modern imagination invents itself (and thereby reinvents antiquity) out of the evidence of wreckage,. . .for to scrutinize a fragment is to move from the presence of a part to the absence of the whole, to seize upon the sign as a witness of something that is forever elsewhere. . ." (HF 299).

The god of fragments might be the two-faced god, Janus. Watcher of partitions; presiding over transits; guardian of exits and entrances, internal and external, above and below, before and after.[2] Janus might also be a patron of collage, that kinship system of debris. But it's too easy to get distracted by the modernity of collage: we need to reflect on the historical foreground of the fragment, like the fact that the respect accorded the fragment in the 18th century challenged the classical criteria of formal unity. The vogue for Chinoiserie and the Islamic design sense—from which the word "arabesque" derives—suggests an aesthetic apprehension of fragments of the culturally strange, the principles of unity of which are inscrutable but, it turned out, no impediment to appreciation of them as

fragments, or as the objects corresponding to a fragmentary understanding. A fragment is a question (suggested to me by the proximity of the German words *Frage* and *Fragment).* And, for Blaser (as Valéry said of Leonardo), "His desire to probe utterly the slightest fragment, the merest shard, of the world renews the force and cohesion of his being" ("Method," 36).

There is another 18th century reconfiguration having to do with "nature." Where nature had formerly signified grand design, the fledgling sciences of mineralogy, geology, and volcanism discovered the earth itself to be a protean challenge to Vitruvian and Pythagorean harmonies. The book of nature, *liber naturae,* turned out to be *libertine,* busily composing a secret perishable script, "stammering the illimitable dialects of an incessantly fabricating earth" (Stafford, 32). So the fragment, as both natural and cultural species of erasure, marks a transition from signifying form to signifying force.

Once libertine nature is honored for its signifying propensity, and the link is forged between geological and linguistic ruin, it's possible for Henry Thoreau to watch thawing sand on a railway embankment and fancy that he's stumbled into the primal workshop of a natural alphabet ("as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me,—had come to where he was still at work, sporting on this bank, and with excess of energy strewing his fresh designs about")—to which I hear Blaser's lines (in his poem for bp Nichol "'the universe is part of ourselves'") as illuminating coda:

> the ferns dream as they return
> to green the efformation, the
> dis-creation, the kindness of fragments
> (HF 234)

Ralph Waldo Emerson has a passage about fragments in his essay on "Experience":

> Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness—these are threads on the loom of time, these are the lords of life. I dare not assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way. I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture. I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me.

To be a fragment is to be borne along, as we all are by virtue of being born. At each encounter with one of the lords of life, the figure of Janus, the two-faced god, arises to mark the passage above or below, left or right, in or out. It's Janus to whom Ashbery's line might be pledged: "We get lost in

life, but life knows where we are" *(A Wave,* 16). People complain of Emerson's disorienting prose, his pugnacious pell-mell aphoristic energy. But he's aware of what he does. His work, like Blaser's, moves by implication and explication; folding and unfolding.[3] Emerson is always saying something like *I'm going to help you lose your way, then help you find you never lost it.*

Robin Blaser does not shy away from such perplexing formulations either: in "The Art of Combinations":

> . . .nothing simpler than what I have said because
> I didn't say it, nothing simpler than what
> I have said, because I said it— (HF 258)

Blaser, like Emerson, helps me understand the doctrine of signatures as a gregarious application of the principle of the speaker to the open world of utterance—endless, copious, and common. Commonly lost in finding: uncommonly so.

There is always a saying or telling, oblivious to the speaker's identity. "One may offer another only a world, not oneself" (SM 61). So this is a seismic transaction—there's the rub—a *frictive* certainty.

> I am not whole not one but, as Montaigne
> said in his essay on friendship, divided
> (HF 305)

—fractured, but also ventilated, and syncopated. Division is imminent—and immanent—kinship. Divided, we find a dividend.

All poetry is translation insofar as it takes words from one place and deposits them in another. The language is seamed with striations of a glacial transposition. Poetry names the unaccustomed new surroundings in which transported words find themselves, and are translated out of themselves. A familiar estrangement. An estrangement made even stranger by that other practice of the outside, quotation (and I would append here Paul Valéry's remark that "We should speak of 'the Strange' as we speak of Space and Time" *[Analects,* 291]). What quotation reveals is that, even as the words themselves remain the same, the mind transporting or transposing them changes.

Blaser's most insistent stance is that "It is within language that the world speaks to us with a voice that is not our own" (PO 278), "a speaking that *lodges within my own speech"* (SM 58). This is the operational "duplicity [of] the poetic job"—to credit "a speech along side my speech, which allows a double-speech. A placement" (SM 59). These are figurative propositions that are made literal in *Syntax,* the poaching zone of *The Holy Forest,* the

sanctuary at the heart of Blaser's grand design, a collage portfolio of graffiti (like "Artists are the deodorant pucks in the urinals of life" from the men's room at Leo's Fish House, Gastown [HF 191]). *Syntax* is an apparition of joints and junctures, boundaries and edges, the coordination of discrepancies and dependencies as its title suggests. In the Notes to the first edition of *Image-Nations 1-12* Blaser defines the author as "a composition of bound and unbound, visible-invisible, thought and unthought,—ultimately double" (SM 66). The title "Image-Nations" is not a pun but a hinge, a fold; a recovery and reanimation, of the fragments incubating in the common word.

Blaser's citations fracture, while *egging on,* continuity. Often the only mark of difference is the use of italics. Italics are commonly used for emphasis; so I glean from Blaser's use of italics as quotation marks a sense that the quote is emphatic in its blow to the text. A quote is typological thump, that "universal thump" Ishmael refers to as the whale's gift of the tale in *Moby-Dick.* A force that blows in and bends the letters over like prairie grass. The use of space in his poems is like an exhaling, and the breaths vented through these apertures can be windy. The spaces are oracular crevices. To read the poems too insistently as continuous arguments is to miss or ignore the force of this boreal scattering of the sybilline leaves in the arboreal lens of the Holy Forest. (There is almost a Janus principle of reversal in the lines, making it undecidable whether to read backwards or forwards, up or down.)

Blaser's work is positioned *with care* at that interface of visible and invisible, thought and unthought, original and derivative. Its doubling is conjugal: "Every existence has its idiom, every thing has an idiom and tongue. . .he is the joiner, he sees how they join" (Whitman, "Song of the Answerer," #1).[4] There is a conjugal accent in Blaser's access of others' words—as if the poems were always on the verge of saying "in other words." "I was once another man's heart" he says in *Image-Nation* 9 "(half and half"—paraphrasing Empedocles—and at the *"flowing boundary. . . /* at the point of the heart" is "a continual / division of halves" which produce tantalizing heterogeneous duplications of the Different Same, the "seim anew" as Joyce has it in *Finnegans Wake.* So "language itself can be experience as other" (PP 23).

As introjected remnants—revenants—of the other, words are uncanny. Blaser defines ". . .imagination [as] more a power to take in and hold than it is a power of making up" (F 239). To "take in" is to reposition the world, or its fragments, in that interior pocket or imaginal fold "haunted by a sense of the invisibility of everything that comes into me" (F 235).[5]

The imagination "holds" what can't be held in the hands.

when he lifted up his cup, he let the sky
go free out of his hands
(HF 125)

the words do not end but come back
from the adventure
                the body is at the edge
of their commotion
                the nonsense
the marvelous clarity
                in the pool of the
heart
(HF 113)

In Blaser's poetics of ventilation, attuned to the porousness of boundaries, selfhood is a play of partitions. In the Romantic imagination up to Rimbaud and extending through Surrealism, this was a project of dislocation and self-estrangement; countering the alienation effects of history with a strategic swerve or Lucretian *clinamen*.[6] But Blaser inclined more to Mallarmé, adheres instead to *kenosis* or emptying as the primary respiratory thesis of selfhood. The self, in this figuration, is what is empathically released to the world in calculated abandonment, and in this evacuation creates a zero or blank into which the countercurrent washes its tidal offerings.

This is not the New England sensibility of Puritanism in which every citation of self is canceled by a ritual denial of self, in a language which renders the personal pronoun incessant and central; nor D.H. Lawrence's wind-tunnel of the romantic ego verified by inversion ("not I but the wind that blows through me"). "What had been imaginings of the whole. . .now become an imagination of holes" (PP 23)—conduits, which Duncan named Passages. Deliberately leaky buckets; a form of empty readiness. empty mind:

if I think 'I' unifies
                I lose,
and the feeling overflows the bucket
if I think the aggregate of large numbers of us,
massified, unifies,
                our hunger
unifies without justice
(HF 302)

Splits, pleats, faults, furrows, mouths, pockets. Tracks. Cows make tracks every day. Spontaneously, fortuitously, certain tracks suddenly excite attention and a girl digs them up. This *suddenness* is the aesthetic event, the *pleat* that, as it joins, divides, making many out of one, and "the soul becomes a fracture in the old paint—like the surface of a moonlit Ryder painting—running joyous and jagged—here and there" (HF 365-366); *"a greedy flowering of amorous play"* (HF 369) with *"no entrance, only interpretative delirium, fragments of a language"* (368): in other words, a Holy Forest. Implication, complication, explication: the Neo-Platonic *omnia complicans,*[7] the preparatory congestion of impending blankness.

Blaser's is the art of drawing a blank. It is a deliberate withdrawal from the voluble givens of chatter which would fill in the blanks. His is an art of spacing and release. An unretentive poetics that opens to a different order of attentions. ("And it was from the human mind that even the gods received their gift of *creation,* because that mind, being periodic and abstract, can expand any of its conceptions to the point at which they are no longer conceivable" [Valéry, "Method," 41].) Blaser describes how, "back of the first *Image-Nations* was the old comfort—a discourse which I could have substituted for the holes in intelligence, and thus, have closed the poems inside a formality of what my mind constituted,—an anthropomorphism in tatters" (SM 58). We get instead something moving in the direction of, but not as severe as, Ronald Johnson's poem *RADI OS,* in which he confesses to using Milton's text (Paradise Lost), but says that he composed the holes.

But Blaser's porosities are not holier than thou: "the word soul what a haughty standing alone that is" (HF 129). It is an art of humility—from *humus,* close to earth, grounded. Llewelyn Powys reports his brother John (author of *Wolf Solent* and *Glastonbury Romance)* saying people "are no better equipped for comprehending the unfathomable mysteries that surround us than is a tadpole in that dew-pond of envisaging earth-life from the squinnying glimpse it gets of the animal's cloven hoof" *(Swiss Essays,* 73). Let's go back in conclusion to the cloven view.

Think again of Opal Whiteley's tracks, those portable tracks. Those tracks are signs of her cow, hapless designs of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's hooves pressed into wet soil. For Opal they are medallions, icons, which is why she collects them and shelters them in the kitchen drawer. She can see her cow in the tracks; which is to say, her tracks are lenses. They magnify the cow insofar as they're separable from the cow. To cut off a bit of cowhide, or a few hairs from the tail, would mean being satisfied with a mere indexical relation. Opal's tracks are far more circuitous, devious, extravagant: her cow is signified exclusively by something that is *not cow.* But the signification does not stop there. The tracks are not souvenirs. For

her, the numinous quality of the tracks is not that they refer to the cow, but that *her cow referred to the tracks,* as it were, by making them.[8]

The cow's hoof makes a hole in the ground, and Opal removes the hole. In doing so, she leaves a further mark, another hole. "Always a 'matter' of form reopening, like footsteps." (BB 12) The tracks are contagious; they're *symptoms.* In the terms given by the Delphic oracle, the symptom neither speaks nor conceals, but bestows itself as sign, creating a "semantic space. . .excavated by the force of a desire which the mathematician Plato called 'eros', the biologist: Aristotle 'orge', and the Latin Stoics 'libido'" (Baer, 58).[9] A magic word, an enigma (like that given by the Sphinx), the symptom is the *"destiny of full signification,* pregnant thick/sick with meaning" (45). "It produces the form it talks about; it per-forms what it announces, creates the world it presents, does what it says" (60). A symptom is not index or reference, but propagation, explication, invitation.

Robin: thank you for the invitation. R.S.V.P.-Reader So Very Pleased (for work so very pleated).

Notes

1 "Sigillation" is a term I take from Walter Charleton's *Physiologia* (1654), by which he means the natural imprint of signs in objects of nature (Patey, 37). Charleton went on to consider the temporal erosion of such natural sigils, in dismayed consideration of the elusive unity of nature owing to its invariable reversion to entropic illegibility. But this ruination still spelled out the rudiments of a script, for Charleton, an admonitory utterance like the Sybilline leaves or the gnomic pronouncements of the Delphic oracle ("a hole in the wind / it is an alphabetic wind rises. . ." HF 131). In *Chorea Gigantum* (1663, 3rd ed. 1725), he argued that Stonehenge was an ancient monument, linking *monumentum* etymologically to *moneo* and *memoria,* so that this "inanimate remembrancer" served as "admonition by putting in remembrance." The ruin, in Charleton's view, was also a rune. (Walter Benjamin also makes much of this phonetic convergence, ruin/rune, in *Trauerspiel,* his study of German baroque tragedy.)

2 This is an expansive characterization. But Janus is not a deity with a particularly focused iconography. A Latin solar god (although L.A. MacKay argues for a lunar affiliation) with no Hellenistic precedent, Janus was most commonly associated with doorways and beginnings. Macrobius sees his iconic paraphernalia, the scepter and the key, as proof of his solar identity. Vergil traces his duplex nature to his sheltering of Saturn, who purportedly taught him husbandry and monetary calculation, in gratitude for which Janus deeded half his kingdom to Saturn. The 16th century mythographer Natale Conti cites the Plutarchian identification of Janus as god of the double life of humans in transition from barbarity to civility. The *bifrons* feature of Janus has proven the most durable over time. For Pico della Mirandola, the celestial souls "'were signified by the double-headed Janus, because, being supplied like him with eyes in front and behind, they can at the same time see the spiritual things and provide for the material'" (Wind, 201). Edgar Wind, reviewing the Renaissance enigma of the bifold Pan/Proteus, finds a consistently esoteric compound at work in such hermetic conjunctions (quoting W.H. Auden's lines "For through the Janus of a joke / The candid psychopompos spoke" [200]). George Wither, in *Emblems* (1635), regards Janus as the god of mysteries in general, providing the epithet "He that concealèd things will find / Must look before him and behind" (Wind, 230). In 1648 Alexander Ross ventures a curious etymological hinge by which Janus, via Hebrew *jain* [wine] is assimilated to Noah, become god of the two

worlds—before and after the Flood *(Mystagogus Poeticus,* 197). The most ambitious recent evocation is by Arthur Koestler, who uses Janus as the figure for his autopoetic theory of "holons," which are "self-regulating entities which manifest both the independent properties of wholes and the dependent properties of parts" *(Janus,* 34). Janus embodies for Koestler the precarious equilibrium of whole and part, while the holon exemplifies the balance of integration and self-assertion.

3 For instance, in the passage from "Experience" he claims to name the "lords of life" "as I find them in my way." This formulation is itself an elaboration or unfolding of the Latin behind the English word *obvious*—ob-viam, or literally "in the way." On the road.

4 Here, too, we find a residual mark of the Neoplatonic Orphic lineage documented by Edgar Wind, in which Janus is the sign not only of the double but of division or cutting. Wind cites a passage from Philo on the "'Logos as cutter', who produces 'creation by dichotomy' but is the 'joiner of the universe' as well" *(Pagan Mysteries,* 202).

5 "I wish to let the reader loose in the invisibility where the text leads him. He is after all a perception of the text. He may find himself inside a distaste or disgust. He may be terrified to find himself an image of the action of a world-text where he is dispossessed" (SM 57).

6 My contrast here of Lucretius and Mallarmé is a momentary sophistry, Lucretius being of course an agent of Democritan and Epicurean atomism which admitted a void or *boundlessness* which, in turn, posited an infinity of worlds. This is not the occasion for adumbrating the various accounts of a fecund blankness (which would need to include Peirce and Heidegger, not to mention Buddhism); but with reference to Lucretius, some genealogical clarification is in order.

Montaigne is a major presence, a steady force, in Blaser's work. Emerson, in *Representative Men,* finds in Montaigne the solution to his need for a philosophy of "fluxions and mobility." "Every fact is related on one side to sensation, and on the other to morals," the essay begins, as Emerson outlines a Janus philosophy of the pitch-penny. "We never tire of this game, because there is still a slight shudder of astonishment at the exhibition of the other face, at the contrast of the two faces." The faces (as if in homage to Emerson's friend Carlyle) take a sartorial cast, sporting the variable wardrobes of Identity and Difference, Finite and Infinite, Relative and Absolute, Apparent and Real. The skeptic stands in the middle, aspiring "to be the beam of the balance" amidst these flipping coins. Montaigne was one of those Renaissance authors who were much taken by the reappearance of Epicurus and Lucretius after the vast blackout of Church opprobrium, and his *Essais* is plentifully stocked with Epicurean quotations. Of course, skeptics and epicureans are not the same, but Emerson's formulation suggests a convergence: both are adepts in the science of the balance. The tranquil life was the gist of Epicurus' Garden school training (to be attained by a non-attachment strikingly similar to that in Buddhism). The Epicurean principle of self-guided moderation aroused the ire of those who would live by rules, and so the adjective "epicurean" came to be synonymous with *libertine.* But the double meaning of "libertine" puts a check to the abuse, because in addition to meaning "sensualist" it also bears a political connotation somewhere between *libertarian* and *iconoclast.* It all comes together in Blaser's "Even On Sunday" after he cites Hans Mayer's recognition that, for outsiders, *"one's existence itself becomes a breaking of boundaries":* "we can thereby return to ourselves a *measure of freedom,* and take form— / the work of a lifetime—in this breaking of boundaries" (HF 349).

To achieve form by breaking boundaries is to deviate from the predestined course, to become oneself the rupture of that inertia, "the work of a lifetime." It is to swerve, and in swerving *become.* The *clinamen* or *parenklisis* is the most famous of Epicurus' concepts—most famously as transmitted by Lucretius. The *clinamen* is the sudden swerve of a falling atom, and each such swerve creates a pocket of turbulence, which is how material forms are generated. Now, these *pockets* are the very folds and pleats

of the *manifold*, the creases through which nature *increases*—paradigms, in other words, of poiesis or production. As I have been elaborating in this essay, Blaser's work advances by means of an articulation of *space*, an inclination of acknowledgment (citation as tactility, as in the old locution for *concerning:* "touching upon"), and a complication of address. It's in the *plt* of complication, explication, application, that we feel the *pleat* or fold of the atomic pocket, the bump of the swerve or *clinamen* where it issues in a clump or clot. A clinimized coagulate. An "unfolded fold" in the language of the poem that follows "Even On Sunday" in *The Holy Forest*, and further elaborated in the grand conclusions of "Exody," as Blaser brings Lucretius explicitly into the fold of his concerns (HF 370).

"Exody"—the culminating section of *The Holy Forest*, not just the poem of that title—makes absolutely clear Blaser's place in a network of Epicurean alliances that constitutes a tradition for which we have no name, so little has it been attended to. The Renaissance revival of Epicurean texts was not pervasive, and was often controversial: Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus, Montaigne, Bruno, and much later Pierre Gassendi, Walter Charleton, William Temple, Thomas Jefferson—these are some acknowledged transmitters. The more recent diffusion of Epicurean principles is almost completely overlooked. But it would include Emerson, Thoreau, and Nietzsche; Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde; John Cowper Powys, Sacheverell Sitwell. . .Roland Barthes. . . The list sputters; the criteria are themselves indecisive. The most conspicuous expositors of Epicureanism at the moment (but also the most unheralded *as* such): Michel Serres, Gilles Deleuze (by himself, and with Félix Guattari), Jacques Derrida (see "My Chances/*Mes Chances:* A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies" in Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan, eds., *Taking Chances* [1984]), and Giorgio Agamben.

7 Edgar Wind is pertinent again: "But however irregular and unfamiliar to the outward view, the hybrid gods of Orphic theology consistently follow a logic of their own, which is the logic of concealment. And by that logic their meaning can be 'unfolded' or made more explicit, provided the rule of 'infolding' has been mastered first, which Cusanus distinguished from *explicatio* by the quaint but fitting name of *complicatio*. When the Venus-Virgo becomes 'unfolded' in the three Graces. . .each Grace represents a less 'complicated' state of mind than the 'infolded' Venus from whom they descend. Theoretically, the process of explication could be continued indefinitely; and the farther it proceeds, the plainer are the elements obtained. But so long as the elements remain interdependent, they all partake of each other's nature, and pure externality is never reached. Absolute plainness is therefore an illusion produced by a severance of that universal link through which even the most 'explicit' members of this expanding series retain an inherent 'complication'" *(Pagan Mysteries*, 204-205). And, as a reminder: the medium of this "severance" is *Janus bifrons*, cutter and joiner. Wind elaborates the Neoplatonic aspect further: "When Pico wrote that 'the unity of Venus is unfolded in the trinity of the Graces', he added that he who understands that operation clearly and fully holds the key to the whole of Orphic theology. Indeed, the unfolding of a divine unit into a triad is but an inverse expression of the Neoplatonic law that 'the contraries coincide in the One'" (192). The Orphic mysteries have been misconstrued as harboring some grand ineffable secret; but as Wind's exposition makes clear, it is the earthly condition of mutability as "secret gate" (218) that proliferates concealment/disclosure in a continuum of folds. Just as there is always something plain, there always remains something yet to be explained. Having come into appearance or into the light of understanding, however, experience is folded back in the convolutions of memory, reverting to the *arcanum* or shadow world. In the end there is no secrecy, only temporality. Or time is that which secrets reveal—the revelation of which leaves an open secret, or secret *as openness*, "das Offene" of Rilke's 8th Duino Elegy. The open, the gap, the blank.

8 That cow tracks are the recondite source of writing is made explicit in Geofroy Tory's *Champ Fleury* (1528), a treatise on orthography. Tory proposes that all the letters of the Roman alphabet are derived from I and O, and that the exclamation "Io" "came into use as a proverb signifying exaltation and triumph. . .show[ing] the joy which the ancient Ionians felt in having invented & designed these said Attic letters" (23). As further evidence Tory recounts, by way of Ovid *(Metamorphoses* Book I) and Boccaccio *(De Genealogia Deorum),* the tale of Io, the girl turned into a cow by Jupiter's lust, whose identity is revealed to her father by the hoofprints she leaves in the mud, spelling her name.

9 Blaser: "The archaic may be understood as a pre-rational language of being in love with the earth and the heavens. . ." (Violets 90) Pre-rational: before the ratio, the stipulated address. To be in love with the world without positing a limit, or limits, of either love or world. Love precedes measure, but in this precedence love excites or stimulates measure. The primal measure of sexual conduct is cosmology. Sex is cosmological symptom.

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PETER QUARTERMAIN

THE MIND AS FRYING PAN: ROBIN BLASER'S HUMOR

"The vices of the mind are not to be underestimated."
—Robin Blaser. Letter to Anne Waldman 1992.[1]

"He said he was surprised and he said laughing is coughing."
—Gertrude Stein. "Pink Melon Joy"[2]

"A being radically devoid of any representable identity would be absolutely irrelevant to the State."
—Giorgio Agamben *The Coming Community.*[3]

This paper is a pastiche. What I have to say draws in part upon very interesting observations and reflections on laughter by Jean-Luc Nancy, in *The Birth to Presence;* by Catherine Clément, in *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture;* and most of all by David Appelbaum, in his really quite extraordinary book *Voice.*[4] That acknowledgment alone should be sufficient notice that an alternative title, and certainly an unspoken refrain throughout this paper, is Robin Blaser's own recurrent "The truth is laughter."

My title comes from Blaser's poem

hard, gemlike flame

I've always liked the idea of the mind as a
frying pan

What's in it is neither true nor false.[5]

It's a pretty weird poem, I guess. The title comes from Walter Pater's famous sentence at the conclusion to *The Renaissance:* "To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life."[6] Is this the flame that heats the (I guess cast-iron) frying pan, temporary holding ground for mixes of one sort or another, some things there perhaps by design, the bulk of them there by chance, stirred up together, some a little bit scorched, some perhaps half-cooked, the rubbing sliding rolling heating hurlyburly of the frying pan intensely physical, an ecstasy possibly without transcendence? Whatever it is, it's neither good nor bad: what's in it is simply *there,* itself, becoming perhaps something else, shifting about, tumbling among flavors and aromas, seasoning the pan itself, leaving something behind, emerging with bits of whatever it has acquired from the pan itself in its earlier uses, yet still its self. A fried egg, after all, is still an egg, I guess. But as I hope we shall see, it's a little more complicated than this, and not easily susceptible of explication. Maybe it ceases to be an egg at all; let's just say for now that whatever it is, it is still its *whatever—**that*** is what I shall come back to. And the poem makes me laugh, its incongruities making for continuing surprise.

The main drift of my argument is very simple indeed and really quite obvious. It goes like this: that Blaser is a very funny man, blessed (cursed) with great wit, a great sense of mischief, and a great outrage. That it is precisely through humor, through laughter (closely related as it is to the cough), that two realms can meet in this, the only world we've got. And the realms? the realm of the body, where as Allen Ginsberg reminds us we are simply meat talking to meat; and the realm of the spirit, also known as the world of the imagination, as deeply rooted into our historicized meat as is our body itself. Laughter—like other syncopes and interruptions of the breath, such as the stutter—dissolves the dualisms of body and spirit, body and imagination, body and mind. An interjection of the body, laughter (like the cough) "shocks the cognitive apparatus in its brute reminder of organic experience" (Appelbaum 8), "deprives the body of its obedience to the mind" (Clément 7). Laughter affirms our subjection to flesh and thus to time, momentarily negating the mind's life so that—as Blaser's poem puts it—"what's in it is neither true nor false." Laughter is essential to, indeed, quintessential of, Blaser's "fundamental struggle for the nature of the real."

A couple of weeks ago I asked Blaser which of the old Aristotelian or medieval humors was his. Without any hesitation at all, he replied: "melancholic."[7] When you consider the alternatives available—the sanguine, the phlegmatic, and the choleric—the speed of Blaser's reply is perhaps not too surprising. But listen to this:

> The physiological syndrome of. . .abundance of melancholy includes darkening of the skin, blood, and urine, hardening

> of the pulse, burning in the gut, flatulence, acid burping, whistling in the left ear, constipation or excess of feces, and gloomy dreams; among the diseases it can induce are hysteria, dementia, epilepsy, leprosy, hemorrhoids, scabies, and suicidal mania.[8]

In the middle of the fifteenth century Leon Battista Alberti offered a kind of solace for those afflicted with this condition, in an explanation as pertinent to the poet as to the painters he's talking about:

> Painters become melancholics because, wishing to imitate, they must retain the phantasms fixed in the intellect, so that afterward they can express them in the way they first saw them when present; and, being their work, this occurs not only once but continually. They keep their minds so much abstracted and separated from nature that consequently melancholy derives from it. Aristotle says, however, that this signifies genius and prudence, because almost all the ingenious and prudent have been melancholic. (Quoted by Agamben, *Stanzas* 25)

Melancholia: grief for the loss of what you never had and which never even existed in the first place. The mind, hungering for the ordered harmonies of angelic space, hungering for the smoothly undisturbed stability of pristine, soulful, eternal bliss, for the securities of control, the self-calmed melancholic mind in its affliction of desire. Melancholia, obsessed with Becoming, forgetful of Being,

> as if the earth under our feet
> were
> an excrement of some sky
>
> and we degraded prisoners
> destined
> to hunger until we eat filth
>
> while the imagination strains
> after deer
> going by fields of goldenrod in
>
> the stifling heat of September
> Somehow
> it seems to destroy us[.][9]

Melancholia, erasing the body, rejecting the now. Melancholia, which Giorgio Agamben diagnoses as a condition of possession and loss at the same time. Its gravidity is absurdly vulnerable to the sabotage of the body's stutters, laughs, and pratfalls. No wonder, then, that "the truth is laughter," and that those four words are so persistent a refrain through Blaser's poetry. No wonder then, that another melancholic, William Carlos Williams, could reflect, late in his life, that "The mind is the cause of our distresses."[10] Laughter, like the cough, the stutter and the sneeze, restores us to our Being.

Yet—as the long description I just read reminds us—Melancholia is not exactly a silent condition. Indeed it's emphatically physical: flatulence; burping; whistling in the left ear. That burning in the gut no doubt gives rise to sorts of subterranean stomachic gurgles, groans, rales, hiccups, moans, wheezes, clicks, squirps and rasps, now and again emerging as voiced burps, and belches and farts, coughs stutters stammers sneezes sputters hesitations and even laughs, little physical and vocal anguishes and reliefs which polite society tries not to notice, and which poems rarely if ever record and which have been utterly banished from reasonable discourse. The sounds of the body digesting, breathing, moving, sniffing, starving, tasting, drinking, spurting, chewing, shitting. The sheer restlessness of the body while we think. The sheer surprise of the body, announcing its presence to its own ear, but unrecognized, denied and even erased by the mind.

Historically, the sounds of the body have been eliminated (if that's the word I want!) from speech, from discourse, from the poem, from signification. If as Aristotle thought, "spoken words are the symbols of mental experience," then what sort of mental experience is a sneeze? If, as John Locke suggested, words "stand for nothing but *the ideas in the mind of him that uses them,*"[11] then what idea in the mind does a cough stand for? What sort of word is a cough and what is its meaning? At some concerts or at the opera a cough means you're bored, but what kind of cough is it anyway? What does it sound like? "Ungrammared sound stops thought," says Appelbaum (18). What is a stutter but the body, coming to thought, body's insistence calling to mind, flesh claiming possession of thought, disrupting it in its coming, resistances conjoined in the struggle of breath's interruption and thought's urgency. (The truth is laughter.)

We are so used, in our culture and in our experience, to Cartesian dualities of body and mind, flesh and spirit, that we rarely question them. Our language—and our notions of language—reinforce the distinction we draw between (to adopt an older vocabulary) the soul and its house the flesh. But "The plan is the body," says a Creeley poem, picking at that separation of mind and body so pandemic in western thought, worrying away at its erasure:

"Plan is the body. The mind
is the plan."[12]

Readers familiar with the magazines *Wired* and *Mondo 2000*, with their assiduous worship of an irresistible technology, know a different story, reversing it, erasing the authority of the flesh. Technology accelerates the moves of body into mind, or the divorce of mind from body. As Scott Bukatman observes, "The hands appear *here*, while the wording appears *there*. Typing produces an information space divorced from the body: a proto-cyberspace."[13] One feature of the "WANDAH" program developed at the University of California Los Angeles between 1978 and 1984 and marketed in 1986 as the *HBJ Writer for the Computer* was "Invisible Writing" where the writing appears *nowhere*. The program doesn't let you see what you type because "not seeing what you type will force you to concentrate exclusively on your thoughts." Writing and thinking thus lose almost all apparent corporeal being.[14] The body is the mind, says the cyberfreak, lusting for cybersex, panting after his (the genderization here is deliberate) multimedia teledildonics (a term apparently coined by Howard Rheingold in his 1991 book *Virtual Reality)*. In the discourse of cyberspace thought and sex are virtually indistinguishable,[15] and among "the artificial intelligentsia" (the label is Louis Fein's)[16] the move toward ultimate but nevertheless earthly disembodiment gathers momentum. Marvin Minsky, in *The Society of Mind* (1986), suggests replicating the individual by replacing each brain cell with a computer chip, and asks "Would that machine be the same as you? It would be impractical," he concedes, "to duplicate with absolute fidelity all the interactions in a brain" (289), but these microscopic differences would not make the duplicate different from your mind because you yourself are constantly changing and are never exactly the same as you were a moment ago.

The truth is laughter. In 1989 Hans Moravec, director of the Mobile Robot Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University, hoped that "it will some day be possible for mental functions to be surgically extracted from the human brain and transferred to computer software. . . .The useless human body would then be discarded." As Claudia Springer put it (163), this means that human consciousness would be stored in computers except for the occasional outing in mobile robots.[17] Moravec calls this process "transmigration," and I wonder: has he ever laughed? Anyone who followed George Bush's conquest of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War on a television screen has a very clear sense, surely, of the extent to which public and political discourse assumes the expendability and irrelevance of the human body in its quest for a paradise of the mind. Has nobody read Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads?*

It is astonishing how few phonemic representations we have of the laugh, how impoverished the vocabulary of mirth. What a surprise, for instance, to read this, in the *I Ching*—and how do we read it?:

> "Laughing words—ha, ha! The shock
> terrifies for a hundred miles."[18]

What sort of laugh is that *ha, ha!?* divine? mad? innocent? devious? malevolent? Is it the laugh that terrifies, or the "laughing words"? Is the one who laughs terrified too, or just those who hear it? We have so few words to record or register the laugh, in writing, that mostly we don't bother—once you've said "ha ha" or "teehee" you've pretty well exhausted the lexicon. Those we do have for laughter tend to be descriptive rather than mimetic—or their mimesis is vague. They don't, that is to say, tell us exactly what the sound of it is."[19]

"The vices of the mind are not to be underestimated," wrote Blaser to Anne Waldman, but he is too smart to disturb his poem with a transcribed laugh; the sort of disturbance offered by transcription is too equivocal, too ambiguous, too bent on forcing the reading—and it is not, let's face it, a laugh. His poetry does not have the imprecise but predictable fixity of a "ha ha!" or a "teehee!" but instead undertakes the unpredictable risk of the reader's laughter, which arises (conjured at a place and in a mode beyond both his and our control) as we read. In this he is transgressive, for voiced but ungrammared interruptions enter and disturb the syntax of the poem, disrupting the smooth continuity of cognitive thought, breaking the focussed concentration the text demands, removing us from the act of *reading* so that we have to find our way back to it again. Blaser brings into the poem, that is to say, what historically we have expunged from discourse, from articulated speech, and from "the life of the mind"—the sounds of the body. That is to say, the sounds of our own mortality, our own subjection to the flesh.

"He said he was surprised and he said laughing is coughing." Gertrude Stein was right to link the two: Laughter always bursts, it always comes as a surprise, you really cannot plan to laugh any more than you can plan to cough—though of course you can fake it, the way lecturers cultivate a sputtery cough to buy time or to pretend to think, the way Winston Churchill practiced his oratorical stutter in order to engage his hearers. But the laughter I have in mind comes in fits, and is no more under control than is an epileptic seizure: in the midst of a laugh we do nothing but serve a spasmodic expulsion of sound. Our voice, indeed our whole being, is subservient to and even identical with that upwelling turbulent whirlwind beginning where? in the belly or the bowels, from the cavities of the thorax through the lungs and larynx out of the throat and mouth, the body in its

convulsions forcing us into our *organic* intelligence. In Tibet, says a Persian tale, there is the laughing stone. "Those who set eyes upon it fall into violent laughter which continues till they die."[20] What do we really remember in the middle of a laugh? In such brute manifestations of organic experience, Edmund Husserl complained,

> one man communicates nothing to another: their utterance involves no intent to put certain 'thoughts' on record expressively, whether for the man himself, in his solitary state, or for others. Such 'expressions,' in short, have properly speaking, no meaning.[21]

But of course they all have meaning. Making focus vanish, the laugh takes us back into the now, into the world of the involuntary, of chance, of disruption, the world of what Giorgio Agamben calls the *whatever*, where there is no *thus*, nothing outside the immediacy of the event which holds us in its grip. The divisions of meaning-unmeaning, voluntary-involuntary, mundane-sacred, good-bad, momentarily dissolve, for the cognitive world which created these divisions has been completely destabilized; at such a point we don't even know especially that we are, or that we are "in" a body. Such matters are irrelevant. "Whatever singularity," remarks Georgio Agamben, "rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State" (88).

And of course (is this a paradox?) the *impulse to laugh* (I do not mean the laugh itself) is triggered by the mind—it is a mental event. "The mind is the cause of our distresses," Williams wrote, "but of it we can build anew." And the building?

nomad

the grounds shift all
the time
as paradises must[22]

What a shock of recognition and discovery to recall—as does the poet in this astonishingly physical poem—that "must" is— as one dictionary so restrainedly puts it—

> a condition of strong nervous excitement or frenzy to which elephants are subject, the paroxysms being marked by a dangerous irascibility[23]

—that is to say, sexual frenzy. The laughter and the satisfaction of discovering *that*, and that "must" is also mold or mustiness and is also newly pressed grape juice not yet fermented wine, is precisely the work of the mind moving into corporeality.

The kind of building I have in mind is precisely that effected in the midst of laughter, that curious stoppage of the breath in which we dwell in *the already*, wherein the flesh does not stand *between* us and the world because it *is* the world, in which the seer and the seen are in some odd sense one—a world without divisions and dichotomies, complete in its immediacy, then—and at the same time, completely and utterly itself, a singularity. To be such is to enter Agamben's *irreparable:*

> images exit from Plato's
> kismet and other irreparable
> absolutes
>
> (***Nomad***, lines 4-6)

Laughter is its own determination; it does not point outside itself to an identity; it is not subject to an identity. The laugh is a singularity, a singularity without identity—I do not laugh as a Canadian, or as a man in his early sixties, or as an entity named Peter Quartermain. I laugh as a laugher. How does Appelbaum put it?

> "The laugh. . .makes the name that I call myself. . .the butt of laughter. That a person is known in essence as such and such a name, is born, dies, is acclaimed, upbraided, cajoled and vilified by a particular phonemic assemblage—and believes himself to *be* that name—is a joke of such magnitude that only a full-blooded laugh can explode it. (19; italics added)

A farewell to inhibiting reason, laughter is its stoppage—and it is also, as Thomas Hobbes famously phrased it in *Human Nature* and again in *Leviathan*, "a sudden glory."

But we can no more spend our lives caught in the middle of a perpetual never ending laugh than we can spend it in the middle of a perpetual cough, or in the suspension (Clément's syncope) between stutters, between breaths, that curious cessation of becoming—where, in this world, we can unequivocally BE. That we cannot *live* there is inescapable cause for melancholy; that we can be there at all is equally inescapable cause for mirth, and for joy. The body claims our awareness for its own, subject to no dogma, no identity, no claim of the State. The truth *is* laughter.

31 May 1995

NOTES

This is the text of a paper given 4 June 1995 at the conference "The Recovery of the Public World: The Poetry and Poetics of Robin Blaser" held at Emily Carr College, Vancouver, 1-4 June 1995.

1 Quoted by Anne Waldman on 3 June 1995 in her paper, "Deviant Identities," at the Robin Blaser Conference.

2 Gertrude Stein. "Pink Melon Joy," *A Stein Reader*, ed. Ulla Dydo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) 305.

3 Giorgio Agamben. *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 86.

4 Jean-Luc Nancy. "Laughter, Presence," *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 368-392; Catherine Clément. *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, trans. Sally O'Driscoll and Deirdre M. Mahoney (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1994); David Appelbaum. *Voice* (Albany: SUNY P, 1990).

5 Robin Blaser. *The Holy Forest* (Toronto: Coach House, 1993) 296.

6 "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end," says Pater *(The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* [London: Macmillan, 1922] 236).

7 Conversation with Robin Blaser, 22 May 1995.

8 Quoted Giorgio Agamben. *Stanzas: Word and Phantom in Western Culture*, trans. R.L. Martinez (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 11.

9 William Carlos Williams. "Spring and All XVIII," *Imaginations*, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970) 132-133.

10 William Carlos Williams "To Daphne and Virginia," *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*. Vol. 2: 1939-1962, ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1991) 247.

11 Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* I 16a, trans. E.M. Edghill *(The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, ed. W.D. Ross, vol. 1 [London: Oxford UP, 1928]); John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book III, chapter 2 (London: Dent [Everyman's Library], 1947) 204 (his italics).

12 Robert Creeley. *The Collected Poems 1945-1975* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) 601.

13 Scott Bukatman. "Gibson's Typewriter," *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery [Durham: Duke UP, 1994] 79.

14 *HBJ Writer User's Manual* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986) 42.

15 "The only thing better than making love like a machine, it seems, is making love with a machine," suggests Mark Dery, "Sex Machine, Machine Sex: Mechano-Eroticism and Robo-Copulation." *Mondo 2000* 5 (n.d.): 42-43.

16 Louis Fein, quoted in Joseph Weizenbaum. *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1976) 179.

17 Much of the material in this and the previous paragraph is drawn from Claudia Springer's excellent article "Sex, Memories, and Angry Women" (in Dery, *Flame Wars)*.

18 *I Ching*, trans. Richard Wolheim (Princeton: Bollingen, 1950) 197.

19 The list is not much enlarged if we think of the adjectival forms, or of synonyms for laugh and laughter: bellow, cackle, chortle, chuckle, exhilaration, giggle, grin, guffaw, hilarity, jocundity, joviality, merriment, mirth, roar, simper, smile, smirk, snicker, snigger, titter, waggishness, etc. Most phrases describing the laugh are just that: descriptions ("burst his breeches," "rolling on the floor," and so forth)—the fact of the laugh is more important than its sound.

20 Basil Bunting. *Complete Poems* (Oxford UP 1994) 210.

21 Edmund Husserl. *Logical Investigations*, trans J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) 1:275.

22 Robin Blaser. *Nomad* (Vancouver: Conference on the Recovery of the Public World, 1995).

23 *The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia* (New York: Century, 1896) entry for Must[3].

ROBIN BLASER

NOMAD

the grounds shift all
the time
as paradises must

images exit from Plato's
kismet and other irreparable
absolutes deserted shoes
and barefoot, desirous walks
a long way
lion's teeth spring
from crevices in the sidewalks

when I reach the age wherein
words and books are upside-
down down as up is a more engaging
proposition than to say they are
one—C-sharp minor whistling at every crossing

which said, "Come into my wild yellow room,
into wild yellow poppies, into 'wild-logos'
upon woven sand and willowed shores, a wildered
core"

must-hands—now and again honey-hands—reach
for 'life's measureless body' *(Musil*

'I think, therefore I am' *(Descartes*
'I think, therefore I am. . .I think' *(Philosophy 100*
'I am, therefore I think' *(Zukofsky*
'I walk, therefore I am' *(Deleuze*

as paradises must

JACKSON MAC LOW

WHO BUILDS WHITE-CLOCKED BILLOWING WALLS?

{Forties 64}

Who builds words in hedgehogs flowers and ignorance
a hundred eyes and never a nose he blunts he shuts
the marrowbone beat his story to a tiger of a growth most tender
tentative fluid collections of largesse sustain in freedom juiced-
    out space that draws on other drives'
intentional ptomaine self-detraction

Incoherent linear sneers pattern difficult things
stammering tools calculate spherical aberrations
brute harmoniums quarrel with stir-altar flows
deceived monocles scramble ethical light illuminating
    echolalic hemispheres
essence exchanges for objects

Problem farms lack loser bottles everywhere
stranger than darling candles' únjust temperament
reversible changes paste collison cycles
self-propulsive geysers' architectonic gunk upsets pusillanimous
    sun-struck buns'
capillary líniment cradles

Asynchronous 'tween boiling terminal bands
encyclicals modulate heteroglossic bag-lady walks
assisted testicular desserts reawaken dead animals

provincials replaying Montaigne's unnerving idleness liberally
    fear the most completed exile cruelty
while rhetoric evaporates relief

Cloudburst-mottled Africans on numbered squares
embodied workings blazing in possessions
so much of the noise is nothing but itself impossibly gripped
by shiny poplars underground in the lull conjoined to a
    hazardous inverted myth of truth
infernally blunted innocence

Nonexistent Tasaday abandoned haunted presences
floating coded selves in London windowboxes
resilient balls of bread for squawking ducks
more fit for marginalia than fateful music leaving-métaphors-
    behind on clicking tongues'
fading data strands

Drydock fingertips on place-mat boxer shorts
in multiples of coal in a state of exhaustion
with little gaps in the edifice pierced by the wilderness
the bony purchase of covering seaweed is focussed inward by
    freesias flanked by centrifugal irises fainting in
angelológical excess

Beset by catatonic-seízures' slippery architecture
gesturing close to rivers' conscious oblivion
vértigo-transformations scramble the sky
awkwardly grounded in acrid velour as flowers stare at surfaces
    surprised by latticework or
white-clocked billowing walls

Silences and/or prolongations:
3 en-spaces [ ] = duration of 1 unstressed syllable.

Brian D Lucas

THE CIRCLE MARKED

The window first knew containing
dimension and ice cities too longer
too soon watching crave of absence of a
sound slowly rising from nothing but
a reaction. How dared the man, the
ball of rings, supposed catalyst and
fogged in neighbor, hand flat brow
looking out endlessly keep constant.

A halted process distant, nutfed.

So warms corner holy and rust photos
smearing past identities in face
mud wall getting towards that person.
Elevations where the keys knocked
gold small slivers around every object.
That corner, this arm, gray hat
on top platforms, inquisitive noons'
color ended.

So high you can't go around it. The
speech near south, of equation, of
that of secret directions:

it start out object, object, object

Grown in backward nearer to be
corrected into the contemporary.
Face of the water slows to a single
molecule. Now elbow means itself there

there and final. Drawn under such
an illusion.
Showing grate where deposit intuitive
exchange on corner of spectacle. Pulse
marked thoroughly and changed upon descent.
Charactered effect therein:

justice in brickwork
impulsive shouting
eyeglass treatments

Again the tables dance, the bells
cinder and scratched makeshifts into &
toward thinness. Long lining the main
hotel shapes, disaster horse on arm
cradles wept. Missed that placement
in years or similar in magic. Dropped
that thing of fire and lived this lane
in ochre nests for how long masterfully.

Vanish, my heat. They didn't expect
to lie here. Vanish the protein, the
can next to the tom. Around visitor's
commandment one year passed into
the next. Trees shorn for gems. The
flat of heat stayed, the place
of rest disappeared. Strings of
electricity vertical writ and
understanding included the other with
an addition & then the continuance
with one word constantly used.

kept it up in the closet
from one glass
one spatial compass

But in this time or sequence of train
pulling itself there is mercy like the
strange Mind. Everything packed

the likeness of frames. The
constitution of unknowable is
grace and a star.

Working under bridges the lift and display
of how each rock is its own historical fact.
Distracted in light caught between a
salute and a fin. In the outtakes of
civilization this was prevalent: sutures
on holy stones meant to signify soul analysis.
The broken lead test. Whisper in a hole
to message drop, grain contained within
the envelope. Forgetting the change in
memory—the length to finally get.

He winced alone; Saturdays made weary
and striking. And in the dims terra-cotta
lit the area. Kill the seven gears and
utilities heresaid. One jaw lacquered
& named. When the mark became more
obvious they stopped the ship to let
him off. Forgotten.

Desperate ores in wish vibrant sources
no plans in carbon. Without swift
selves it intervened to cause a gentility
& there was reverence. To rise was
this happening in sleep from This. Mouth
placed, stir in pockets, struck in its
timelessness, over gate into the side
where the given flourishes. And where
tell it is moved as I.

The collapse corner shellstone in the wall
appearing throughout. Table rested to any
unseen, but the center is switching turmoil
to hallucination. Or is the strength in
model. Moment unsolved then where.

Down told to this one: stationary
heat elongated through atmosphere
dialing the unbelievable along the way.
Center sat and there was the attempt
steepled to the side of the belief.
Anchors for will. Steps that still
took out of sight amidst recollections
separating one voice in the whole
from the others. Then there was
the clearing ahead waiting, sold into
the periphery. Of watchtowers,
fingers, and grace landing shard.

Led into scratching the paperside only
music figured, afraid to circle for us.
Lent in a filled hive—reverberation
trumpet countless immaterial (not of
this level) timepockets. Settling into
the begetting of different sources: calm
applications of these to the letter
pourings. And always this self-knowing
is seen. Stranded lost waters, mind
of baby purple, near dust bolts, closet
inhalation, & open savers.

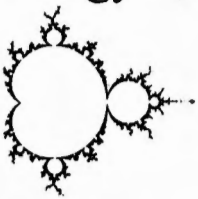
Wanted now fronting ramble and hand
crease, felling banks and tea. It
or the name is termed found pinned
to one of the trees. Stating the inner
grain turned over & over into a
radiance or sub-animal spectacle. Never
confusion maintained in glass flutes
or sizable connection.

Deletions in space. All around me things
were mistaken for objects. Also the
propulsion of bent metal into real
knocking under the floor. The wind meter
continuith, the organ still mastered the

section of enrapt. It was brought up
then zooming into hearing and then
closing itself in its ending.

Now's the part not to be understood
moment inseams of flagrance tied
underside. Twin bellows lightly over
the top and cymbals. Energy brushes
restored from the contained soot.
Such is restoration

In the Analogy by John Clarke



A ravishing translation of the sonnet into an American language, *In the Analogy* astonishes with the vast range of its thinking and reference. This is John Clarke's final work, not exactly finishing though it knows that fact, but finally just stopped dead in its tracks. It includes six and a half books, each complete book containing 40 sonnets.

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—Robin Blaser

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RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

from DRAFT 23: FINDINGS

11. Wet rails, and the oil of crushed leaves.

Forget sententia.

Just a button by the curb.

That extremity dilates vision, I can barely
walk where it is, registering
the vectors, its self, its sewer,

its user, its loser,
their possible pattern, to repeat
it (or in) again,

cast into chance, give them odds,
it's all or nothing
with modifications.

Typing loose; getting loose on the page,
to repeat it again.
Is grande randonnée—a walk down a trail—

linked to random? or is it all
sets of linked modules, each logical
only to themselves.

But with the "d" on my keyboard
sticking and "ifficult" to register
because of the sticky weather

I got on the page "linked moules"
which authorizes a double homage
to MM. Marcels Duchamp and Broodthaers.

Absolutely not the same idea as the
zoom in on the button.
In fact, it's totally opposite,

but both are present
never- and
nonetheless.

12. Non. Say it "known," that is "none" as nones and tides
a certain prayerful force.
Say it "non-" — as non-combatant, non-participant,
and fear again, as during the so-called Gulf War
of wearing even a scrap of non-compliance or resistance
because of the ferocious "support"
itself perhaps just support for a "fast action"
and bringing the combatants
home to engulfment in our usual lives.
Now suffering from the deformities of
their recent children,
chronic malaise, nervous system totally shot,
falling apart at the touch,
from inexplicable untraceable non-focused or inadmissible
agents inciting
chemical or biological
aceldama-rich damage.

Understand complicity and cowardice.
When little yellow rosettes and flags
are sported in a certain
atmosphere, can barely speak

known, and non- or "non!"
the french for NO
"we should have known"
or said NON!
faster?
Being powerfully sorry
being unspeakably sorry
now, let me count the ways.

13. Cricket cages, summer and autumn,
airy or warm, encouraging song.
Tiny cricket-plates for dinner,
porcelain, depicting aphids.
Cricket beds as snug as boxes
cricket poems inscribed inside them,
just the ticket for insect reading.
Cricket rings for bouts of boxing,
and long brush-like cricket teazles
to push them to the ring and make them fight.

21. About rhumbs, gradations on the compass rose.

A silent turning in all directions

drawing attention to its shape: circle, vector and box

silence, emptiness, dumb

diminishing, suddenness, fear,

void, gradations, swings,

wind shifts, wind chill, wind shear,

factors, statistical probability, cab brnt, mn ded

flt scttr

look out where.

Boxing, turn that magic wheel, round and round

and random, some spurt, some pulse, some phrase, but what
[and where:

Could be a particular kind of "R" like a "rho,"

rhapsody, rheum, rhythm, rhododendron, rhyme.

Why here, why this, why now, why me, or no?

That's what I have to say.

The word itself, with its rh- and -umb,

jostles the memory.

PETER COLE

FUNCTIONAL THROUGH A BELIEVING

Pigeons kissing,

twisting beak to beak unbroken
emerald rayon necks
in guttered eaves
under the water
tanks
and solar reflectors

or lesser
kestrels fucking, rampant,
wings flapping
there at the
roof's ledge

like sepulcher images
guarding a soul,
or bowsprit figures posed
for a ship's
keel and power
facing waves:

functional

through a believing
(loving
/hating)
mind alone—

aligning decktop
ropes and career

in proper knots
and coils,

or nets—

through crimes against

budget devotions
and meaning's debt/

on the ceiling's order
of the African Church
at its circle's center
a star diffused
with stars around it in azure
to draw the spirit eye

first

up, then ear

to hear

with balm entering,
and cassia and myrrh;

with cinnamon, costus, and cloves;

a globed and angeled zone
there
for

anamnesis of things
invisible now
and in origin

even while threading the eye—

as easily slipped through thought

as an earring into its lobe. . .

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LUISA FUTORANSKY

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the Spanish by Jason Weiss)

CREMA CATALANA

In Gerona I deciphered names
on old Hebrew memorial stones
I saw the millennial tapestry, impressed till I die
with its emblematic winds and persistent blues,
I offered myself to the intimacies, ravages and refusals
provoked by the fervent contacts between visitors and hosts
with whom we exchange fleeting nomenclatures
of dead people who inevitably refer to others,
more rotten, ferocious and private.
I silenced them as I could crossing through the trap of
deforming mirrors;
I intended to drown them eating and drinking, perhaps more
than I should, specialties of the house
and I ended up surrendering to the vision of the same film,
cartilaginous and formless that I always produce in
the tiring parallels of the highways.
In my hands I am left with this swollen face, scabby and
withered, where I am reflected
and with the aching staff of the word *desconegut,* unknown
throbbing in my lap.

SHE, THE FISHERWOMAN

There are evenings when I'd like to be a Portuguese woman
utterly in black from head to toe
with the sole occupation of waiting for the tides
that carry out and bring back my man, seaweed and fish.
But in the sharing out of labors
it was my turn to think I decipher the pendular swings
of my soul, of yours, and those of our ghostly relations
oh the dying spangles of the fish in the nets
and I, articulating the syllables of your face with my
    uncompassed rosetta stone
inch by inch, vicissitudes of days, nights, vigils
skins and sweats where I will always be a stranger
(for so long I was not in any of your dreams!)
and now the tide carries you to my current, my delta
you, awash with tree trunks, foam, spider fish
serpents, sea monsters, nets, astrolabes
phantoms—perhaps those at sea are the true ones—
pitiful sounds, tarantulated
translate, translate to me
because I'm rowing against the current and I'm getting tired
my shadow grows tired, asks for a truce
lifts a white flag
because although it sticks to your shadow they are two shadows
then, tell me a story:
"the vines are usually planted among rocks
because they gather the heat of the day
and at night they give it back to the vines"
and you took my hand to hold it over a tepid wall in Lisbon.

Maybe you had understood that it was my evening
to be a Portuguese fisherwoman and not wanting to have any
    other idea in my head
than the beat of the horizon line, the sand between our feet
and enough.

JEFFERSON HANSEN

THE MOON THE MOON THE MOON

The moon is a rock in the sky.
The moon is not only a rock;
The moon cries out in a blank night

Silent but for a heart popping. This heart
Is a pump made of sinew.
This heart seems a fruit's hard pit.

The heart cries out in a blank night,
Silent but for the pat of bare soles
Against wood, a sleepless

Child searching for toys or an intruder
Coming to hang some severed feet under
The porch light? Walking is a friction.

The sole is calloused skin on the bottom
Of the body. The soul is an invention
Of ignorance formed before neuroscientific

Knowledge. A soul hovers in this apartment
Blank as night is alive. A soul
Cries out blankly, silent but for a

Whisper against the red brick. Snow or an owl
Confused? This brain is liquid:
The moon controls the tide. The moon,

Alive as the brain of a cadaver.
A cadaver sings its symmetry
Silent but for the clicking of instruments

Telling the time to no body. When I write
"We" I don't know whom I include.
We cries out in a blank night

Silent but for a ragged dog sniffing
The can hoping for perhaps the return of
Last night's remains. We image

A silence, crying out in a cluttered night
That clatters and misses the startled
Green eyes. Silence, like the eye

Behind the camera finding its feet and
Wandering away, twitches behind sight.

PHILLIP FOSS

IDEATE: A GRAMMAR OF THE CATOPTRIC FLESH

PREFACE

[Damn the world Sophia ravenous speed pathetic collapse horizon voluptuous mythology after finish: bodies strewn stripped of talent of wind shield

lips shivering prescription for smoke
revolution

Or bless the world Sophia fragile conspiracy carnal vocabulary hypocrisy of light siege tawdry invention without intent

With what weapon to confront all landscapes uninfected with chromatics?

Bereft of nostalgia?

Flayed of tactile abuse?

Mere ball of unrendered]

GRAMMAR

We are entering or exiting through a tissue of measurement: duration of consumable refraction the way a night-blooming flower is anonymous always white there are signals which compel incisions brief emissions of pollen codifications of light assemblages in the sky bestial gods which plane off glass as personal replication this is sufficient ontology to have remade one in one's own image

sustenance to stumble blinded by night and scent subtle perfume cool breeze call it a tone emitted in oily drops from your pores

Turn left there is no track of exodus only a pane of glass painted by fire only a mask of micaeous clay tiny figurines portraying game animals plummeting from a cliff a dust devil erecting a woman's hair as if in fright O is the sound no music which accompanies the center of spin cornea the aureola surrounding your shadow body on a wall of fog as it plummets from the cliff a stretched resonating hide thump thump its heart in your mouth the song composed of ideas corresponding to liquids

You enter or exit tissue—membrane is architecture the houses are framed with bone drilled acoustically to translate sea storms—bearing a covenant with every thing you've forgotten remembering that to pass through each one's desires must be fulfilled disguises are unavoidable slight of hand encouraged extinct dialects perfected

as:

"Today the sky is empty; a soothing from the fatigues of visualization."

•

The seized. Black flagstone. These are a transcription. Of. At every stride more absence. Petite pink blossoms. Clouds rising off snow. The tumult of envisioning. Cactus as food. Elk skull on the road. Orange blossom scent. Above the octave closure. Chime of transport. Glottal. *The condition of merge.* Aft. North. Favor of repose. Various smokes. The conditioning of flight. Semiotics or palm writing. Lean of aspen. Species of unknown. Herbivorous teeth. Descending ash. Receding. Enveloping coins. Box. *As the artifice of appearance.*

So it all gets away: fragile storm, sympathy of the mezzo soprano, reflecting eye: descending chords that slow, hesitate, incorporate into the linear filaments of the wooden table.

A fire only in anticipation, imperfect polish; given the rudeness of some season, apathy to filigree, boredom: enough reason to close the world.

I will not concede this to the wrath of memory.

Interminable drone, like a fragment of attention disjoined from its object, occupies all longing: flower.

He watched the furnishings of the room permanently condescend to shadow; his fists into objects of shifting smoke. This was adequate to provoke laughter, a smattering of gunshots, cringing at the new moon.

It was a token of what would come after the singing: the lighthouse tilting, or the sea. An indifference. She plays the four bass notes unto nausea. A chronography of dispersal. The water shatters.

Is to plant something adequate retaliation?

Datura. Corpse. The letter X. Red dye seeds. Well. Unredeemed triangulation of dog, garlic, hypothesis of transmutation.

It falls toward you like a wall. You must shift your attention away from obsession toward accumulation.

Tide. Sparrow. Yellow slick of pollen. Silver button. Roof. Identifying fallen stones of the ruin. Law of happenstance. Vein of lapis.

It all gets away resembling something running on split hooves, universal apology.

(These are merely the facts reiterated in no particular sequence attributable to value.)

•

The emptiness posited as constituting the universe is inside the body. It merely escapes.

Prompted by a casual glance at a woman with no eyes or by removing the organs from an animal on the supposition that they are audible or by bleeding the fist and arm through a window pane on the supposition of air are common fallacies which motivate empathy with nothing, and constitute the process by which the world retains mass, a necessary requisite of gravitation, in the same way that the duration of one's life is determined by the duration of memory.

These processes are best symbolized by the sound made when one throws a small hand mirror into an alpine lake. A fleshy *tink*.

PETER REDGROVE

SERVICE

I.
A sky smocked with stars.
The bearded man bent
Over me like a terrible valet
And began sucking me off.
Outside the window the pagoda tree
Shook down not apples and plums
But coins and yonis of rain,
And I attended to those processes until
He began to take me and I was defenseless.
I looked down at him, my groin
Had a beard and a hair-parting.
He wiped his mouth and looked into my eyes
And kissed me and got up and began to lay out
My evening clothes.

II.
Her evening clothes, a blue inch,
A blue mile—different blues.
The hoop of her sex in her blue skirt,
The whoop. On St. Staines night
A breath of moon went through the house,
Dust in all its shapes rose and followed.
There was a case of butterflies
Made to resemble an open book
Hanging from the cornice showing all
The typefaces of the painted insects,
The logoi of the summer-lake.
Outside in the yard were puddles
Of dazzling filth. The fish grunted
And I pulled it out of the water.

III.
The grunt of fish
Pulled out of the water.
The schools of fish
In the linked fishponds
Slowly circling round and round
Like the works of great clocks
Set in the ground.
The simple pomp of a suckling woman;
The jet of her milk
Like the trail of a comet,
Her breast cool as lichen, hot
As that comet. She sits in the window,
The sky farsightedly
Touching the forest
With a shock of tallness, wavering heat
Retained by the trees
In the serious smell of the dry
Narrow avenues between the boles
And thunder drifting like a dark diamond.
The swan dipping and feeding
Was the nub of the whole lake's wheeling,
Now it is the woman feeding
Is the nub or boss.

IV.
The nub or boss
Of the Impossible is so seldom
Required of man, such as is asked
Of the green snake shifting its skin,
Unmasking. Fainting,
She seemed all made of hands—
Impossible. He enters the night—
Impossible again—as if it
Were a woman, her star-studded foyer.
Opening the door, there is some
Scurrying in the distance,
Tanks alight in the darkness
Set in the stone and paced out

By stalk-eyed, knock-kneed
Lobsters, and scooped by
Cobblestone cuttlefish—impossible
Creatures. The unbelievable dark green
Grim of school uniform
Like bottled children.

V.
Rain bottled in the dark
Unders of the rivers. Your
Lifelong nakedness: your
Bride. She dipped her head
Under the water and left
Her shed skin in his hands. He folded
Her clothes and his neatly on the bed
And then licked her quite roughly
But nicely all over until
She agreed to kiss him likewise. The beguile
Of mouth-water. They slept together
On a large velvet couch in an old stone room
And described to each other simultaneously
How the moon's tongue twined with theirs,
Putting their tongues out to salute the light
And thus they each tasted its luminous saliva.

VI.
Its saliva spun in the breath, kissing
The horse's warm brow gently,
The tide
Creamy-white as baby-clothes.
Wasps feed greedily on figs,
Over the cobbles the iron shoes
Of the horse generate visible
Current of green sparks. This bed
Won't bring me sleep,
And she was right; in the thick
And thin of the world I tossed
And turned; her belly-jewel
Winked in the cradling house,
In the rain's huge secret cupboard.

My getaway canoe won't work,
She stated, because of the drastic
Sweetness of his behind. Then
A vessel of hands carried
Me away carefully like
A vulnerable glass dice, and she
Entered her own fountain
Within that secret cupboard.

VII.
She is putting on
Her black silk evening gown,
The one woven with a golden dragon
Which she takes out
Of her secret cupboard. Her head
Emerges from the neck
Of the dragon. She pats its body
Around her. She applies
Makeup that emphasizes her qualities;
Now she has the body of a dragon
And the head of a woman, fused
At the neck. Samuel Ramey

Did it in Boito's *Mephistofele*
In red tights against a crimson backdrop:
It is a swimming singing torso
With rays of light, little horns,
Piercing his frontal bone like Mosaic horns,
Small shimmering crescent and decrescent moons;

Thus did Liberace also in his black
Sequined tailcoat against a sequined sky,
His body disappears among the stars, only his head
And hands left singing and playing
Alone in starry space; now

The black silk dragon gown has
White shadows splashed on it, galactic
Dragon-spit.

VIII.
My own fountain of dragonspit. For years
A baby child drifted over the roof
In molten astronomies, the constellation
Named "Daughter-to-Be." Then we entered
Each other's fountains, and made
A companion to our bed. That great light
Like doves and tin, the landaus
And diligences of cloud
Racing in the sky, colored
Like liberated ores out of the mountain,
The little person of cloud clinging
To the mountain's peak, the only visible part
Of the immense standing-wave of air,
The visible crest, flag and sign
Of its enormous rooms through which the
Air rises, air to breath, and back again
To warm breath, the cool mountain air
Charged with animal heat, and back again.

IX.
That ladder put back again
Against the shed wall as if
For keeps, her beautiful feet
And wondrous hands wander over
The rungs, and as a were-cloud
Reminds her of her former condition
As air, back and forward. The weather too
Goes walking over the sky, like flowers
Twining up ladders, she is both
Here and there, all bright sapphire
And contemplation. There is
A griffon of cloud hanging over the house,
And the bed in which she came to form
Is plumped like clouds—a sky-high
Event in which I remember
The sky was smocked with stars.

Dean Young

FIRST YOU MUST

Before the abstract cone enfiladed
in blue enthusiasm, you must learn
to draw a tree that looks like a tree.
But first you must draw a branch
so first you must study bark
at the Institute of Bark in Amsterdam.
You must learn the woody organelles in Dutch
although first you must be immunized.
Luckily this is not the 14th century
and you are trying to become a doctor of the throat
as you would have only the bodies of hanged thieves
to cut apart and hanging makes a mess
of the mechanisms of the throat. Hope
may be depicted as a cinder block wrapped
in aluminum foil which is pretty
rotten luggage. First you'll
fall in love with what you can't
understand. The baby ram butts the shiny tractor.
Nothing you draw looks like anything else.
First you must build a cathedral of toothpicks.
Write nothing but sonnets for a year.
The error is not to fall but to fall
from an ungreat height. First you must fall
for the girl like you on the boat
seeming to leave all she knows but also
unlike you in some very important, not only
glandular ways. The days grow short, icier,
the heart like a ram in a field surrounded by electric
wire. The single tree there in the wind
not looking much like a tree, full

of withered fruit vexed with caterpillars.
It resembles a tragic wig.
No verse is actually free.
Before oils, charcoal. First you must go
to Vermeer's birthplace. Bed linens crusty,
windows a-wink with all you do not know
like a horrible disease lurking in the genes.
I must know, you shout, shaking the girl hard.
This is a mistake. What she first thought
was your handsome intensity, she now thinks
is insanity. First you must be forgiven.
Before being a human being, you must be
a zygote. Ditto a horse, a ram, an alligator.
The tractor comes into the world from a pit of fire
like the trombone. Better than you have failed.
The girl hurries off in a form of native dress
you know not the word for. The test returns
with a big red X. Before watching the sun set
into the ocean of tears, you must study
optics. Sir Isaac Newton knew a lot about optics
before he new a lot about gravity and orbits.
What will make the girl return? And you call
yourself an artist. First you must suffer.
First the form in duplicate. Before the form,
the pre-form. Before crying forlorn forlorn,
rigor mortis. Before tackling the nude,
you must work for months with wooden blocks.

WOLFGANG GIEGERICH

ENDING EMANCIPATION FROM HISTORY: KAFKA'S "IN THE PENAL COLONY"*

Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" can be read as an allegory of history. The first and second halves of the story are dealt with separately in the two sections of this paper, following a brief summary of the contents.

1. The Meaning of History

> *An explorer visiting a penal colony is among other things to attend an execution performed with a unique piece of equipment which the officer in charge enthusiastically describes to him. The condemned person is strapped face down and naked onto the lower section of the apparatus, the Bed. Above him a section called the Designer controls the motions of the center part, the Harrow, according to a selected program. This program is the text of the particular commandment which the condemned person has disobeyed (in the present case of disobeying and insulting his superiors, it is "Honor thy superiors!"). This commandment is artistically engraved onto his body over the course of twelve hours, deeper and deeper, until the process leads to his death. The condemned man did not have a trial and does not know his sentence. "There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it on his body," is the explanation. He does not even know that he has been condemned, and had no opportunity to defend himself. "Guilt is never to be doubted," says the officer. The text on the programming drawing which steers the Harrow cannot be deciphered by the eye. The condemned person deciphers it through his wounds.*
>
> *Previously, at the time of the since-deceased former Commandant who designed this ingenious apparatus, and indeed*

*This paper is the translated and adapted version of the second half of an Eranos lecture on "Die Alchemie der Geschichte" first published in *Eranos 54-1985*, Frankfurt (Insel) 1987, pp. 325–395. Translated by Susan Giegerich.

set up the entire penal colony, such executions were a public celebration. Already on the day before the execution, the entire valley was full of people, and when the machinery began to operate, the viewers stood on tiptoe. All knew, now justice was being done. At first, the condemned person still screamed, and was apt to eat some of the food provided for him. But corresponding to a carefully predetermined procedure, he quieted down around the sixth hour. Now the essential part began. Enlightenment came even to the most dull-witted. But this did not mean that anything extraordinary would have happened, the man simply started to decipher the inscription. Only a few spectators could have their wish fulfilled to watch the process from nearby. Sadly remembering the time gone by since the arrival of the new Commandant, the officer declared, "How we all absorbed the look of transfiguration on the face of the sufferer, how we bathed our cheeks in the radiance of that justice, achieved at last and fading so quickly!" But now, with the new Commandant, this penal tradition has fallen out of favor. The apparatus does not work well any more, and nobody comes to witness the executions.

Kafka himself described this story to his publisher as being "embarrassing."[1] This embarrassing character obviously comes from its sadomasochistic theme. Today, after Auschwitz, it has become even more embarrassing than Kafka ever could have imagined. Because the apparatus prefigures the Third Reich's machinery of systematic torture and destruction, it irritates the wound of a painful and immensely deep collective complex. We have to remain aware of this in order not to let Kafka's story and the fundamental questions it poses be sucked into the whirlpool of this complex. An understandable although unfortunate effect of this still hardly acknowledged complex is that public discussion over recent decades in Germany has politicized almost all important psychological, religious, metaphysical themes, reducing them to social issues, or subsuming them under such catchwords as fascism and socialism, thereby forsaking the only level on which many of the issues can meaningfully be addressed at all.

Kafka's penal colony is an allegory. Were we to take it literally as a political and legal structure of injustice in an actual society, it would conceal its meaning. If we regard it as an allegory, it does not deal with real people or citizens and what they do or is done to them. It deals with the *essence* of man and the meaning of human existence. What happens to the condemned man is literally and visibly what happens in an allegorical sense to human *essence:* "torture."

Kafka speaks into the situation of modern man, analyzed in detail in the first half of the original Eranos version of this paper. It is the situation of Emancipated Man resistant to the *depth* of events, the experience of which used to express itself in archaic times in images of divinities. The event (e.g., a flash of lightning) experienced as a manifestation of a God (e.g., Zeus) was *at once* "real" causal effect, "ideal" meaning and compelling obligation ("religio", here to be derived from *religare*, to bind). By splitting what was inextricably one in the primordial experience and by establishing a separate department for each of the aspects, namely the natural sciences for the flash of lightening as a physical event, the historical disciplines or the humanities for Zeus as a religious idea, and psychology for the impact (either of the flash or of the religious idea) on the human person, man's liberation from events and their depth was brought about. Physics allows viewing and manipulating causal effects totally apart from meaning; history allows indulging in "meaning" (ideas, images, etc.) apart from any natural effects; and psychology allows viewing what once was seen as the compelling obligation of events as merely subjective emotions *inside* the human person and thus severed from both objective reality and objective meaning (godhead). In this way modern man finds himself in a state of immunity, redemption, and freedom. In order to break through the hard shell of a humanity firmly enclosed in its godly subjectivity and protected against any compelling image emanating from the phenomena, in order to give this self-contained humanity, i.e., us, a sense for receptivity and vulnerability, very strong medicine is needed, and it is administered in the form of an extreme, cruel image. Kafka shows us a person strapped down and caught between the Bed and the Designer. No freedom. No hope. Inescapably subjected to a painful course of events. Kafka uncompromisingly forces this unbearable picture on us because "being imposed on," "wounded" and "hurt" is the theme of the story. It is not a question of literal sadism. Sadism here is merely how man's potential to be hit and wounded by the imaginal depth of reality appears to a redeemed consciousness. Kafka's story is as it were a response to the view of history as a blissful contemplation of the past.

One cannot read any of Kafka without being deeply moved at witnessing the artistic awareness with which he endures and gives profile to an immense tension. This is the tension between the orientation of a perceiving consciousness and the opposite orientation inherent in what this consciousness is perceiving. The artistry with which this tension is endured and the irony with which it is presented is the secret of Kafka's style. He writes against the grain. The point of view from which he tells a story always deliberately misses the point behind what is really being said. This is also true of "In the Penal Colony." Everything we learn is from the

perspective of the explorer, about whom it is cryptically said that he did not much care about or understand the apparatus. The understanding of the civilized, European explorer runs counter to the meaning of what he witnesses in a distant country, a situation not at all unknown in actual ethnological research.

The imposition Kafka forces on us is threefold: along with the condemned man we suffer the repulsive penetration of the harrow's needles; along with the explorer with whom we are united through the same civilized consciousness, we suffer being confronted with a repulsive method of execution; and as we ourselves, the readers of this story, we are offended by constantly having to be repelled by what is told, since Kafka forces us at first to take the misleading viewpoint of the explorer. With this last imposition Kafka prevents any premature, empathetic understanding of something foreign in the sense of a noncommittal historical past. The problem with historical understanding (just as in understanding the myths, symbols, and rituals of distant times and peoples) is that for the duration of such understanding, we leave *our* reality behind us, a reality identical to that of the explorer. Then, when we return to our own reality, we likewise again leave behind what we have just understood, so that the "right hand" does not know what the "left hand" has understood. Kafka holds us prisoner, just like he confines the condemned man. He forces us to *encounter* the foreign reality *through the medium of* our opposing view, and to painfully chafe ourselves on it, in the midst of our own actual present. He forces us to endure the "op-position," thus keeping both sides together.

When in our story there is talk of a penal colony, of guilt, or the courts, we are not meant to take these moral and legal designations literally. They are a result of the modern consciousness guided by the ideals of humaneness and of a constitutional state, which can make sense of this shocking and perplexing occurrence only in such categories. But what actually happens is something quite different, not punishment, but rather a ritual ceremony, a rite of initiation. The story itself gives us a hint in this direction when the apparatus is compared with equipment in hospitals ("*Heil*anstalten") and when such phrases as "the uninitiated" are used. In a similar way, commentators of late antiquity were already interpreting the rites of initiation recorded in Greek mythology in a moralistic, legalistic sense, as retribution for crime; one only has to think of the punishment of Sisyphus or Ixion in the underworld, or the dismemberment of Orpheus.

That this strange world is called a *penal* colony means that it is a culture that derives its raison d'être from punishment, i.e., initiation, and whose entire life is organized around this social institution. One does not have to be especially informed about one's "sentence," since existence as a whole means being "sentenced." "Guilt is never to be doubted": the need to be

initiated is certain. "Guilt" *(Schuld)* is also, in an amoral sense, a reference to the Norns (one of whom is called Skuld), and thus a reference to our fateful entanglement in the course of events; in that particular world being human means owing a debt *(Schuld)* to the real events, namely, having the obligation to cause their meaning to radiate forth.

The Designer has the purpose of engraving the "script" in the body of the condemned person by means of the Harrow. What kind of inscription? It is the judgment of a deed, a judgment which does not state anything new beyond the deed or condemn it, but which has as its content merely the commandment associated with the particular deed. It is only a reflection of what has already happened, bringing its essence to light. As the *artifex*, the Commandant had drawn up for every qualitatively unique situation in life an appropriate script. In this collection of drawings the officer is thus preserving nothing less than the essence, so to speak the archetypal patterns, of all possible life situations, here of course, in accordance with the dominant fantasy of a penal system, expressed in moral terms.

When we read the word "script" we usually imagine a communication which can be read. But the script meant here cannot be read. It is not written on paper, capable of being spelled out, letter by letter. That the text takes twelve hours to decode does not mean that it is long. Indeed, it consists of but three words and is complete from the first moment; in the course of twelve hours it is only engraved deeper and deeper. It is not a question of the "meaning" of a written script, but rather of its "sense," if we understand sense as orientation and not as comprehensible content. The transfiguration on the face of the condemned person does not come from his having grasped a new idea, some "higher" transcendental meaning. The texts are all well known and quite trivial, like "Honor thy superiors!" and the entire procedure has something routine about it. Just as the officer correctly and matter-of-factly puts it: nothing else happens. The transfiguration comes only from the intensity and depth to which the same script has penetrated in the course of being ever deeper inscribed. The meaning of this script comes only from its being an *in*scription, its having been written *in*, and not from its literal contents. Sense means here a vector originating from a particular event, passing through our flesh and into our essence. The meaning of events is the essential and inevitable deepening of the imposition by means of which they offend and take possession of us.

Thus Kafka imposes on us the experience of the destruction of our familiar idea of meaning conceived in the spirit of occidental metaphysics. We normally say that an event has a meaning if it is good for anything, if it is part of a larger plan, if it leads to a higher goal beyond itself, or provides a higher sanctification, just as life has a meaning for us if we can expect a hereafter. The meaning of the apparatus has nothing to do with any of this. Here, there is no hope, nor a regulated or chaotic succession of events, but

rather a totally monotonous being wounded deeper and deeper by one and the same event which has already occurred. The meaning achieved through initiation is, so to speak, at right angles to meaning in the narrative sense, which is founded on the hope of some kind of happy end. And the *essential* course of events is at right angles to successive time. Instead of flowing from event to event, from cause to effect, it remains within a particular, qualitatively determined moment as the inner intensity of that moment, even if this moment should last twelve hours, or even days, weeks, or years.

History as an image to be contemplated, as evolutionary progression, or as straightforward chronicle has been abandoned. History is the working on us of real events, the inscription of the "text" of a given situation into our being: reality as the alchemical laboratory, and the person as the workpiece, clamped into a frame and to be processed by events as the *artifex*. I myself am not the *artifex*, peering into a chemical retort in front of me. I am what is in the retort, being stewed and subject to the alchemical *mortificatio* and *putrefactio*. History as meant here is not directed towards an eschatological goal; it is directed at *our* heart. It is in and of itself psychological. It has the form of an initiation experienced on one's own body, the form of the transformation and not of an "objective" process "outside" which affects us only because of its consequences. Unemancipated man having no escape is from the beginning inextricably involved in the *essence* of history, just as history is involved in his *existence*.

In this story, history has again become "natural history," the primary unity of natural events and initiatory meaning, the "short circuit" of physical effect and spiritual image or impact. The same Harrow cuts physically into the body and causes the meaning of the inscription to radiate forth. The apparatus signals the end of the understanding of history as a "higher," "intellectual" dimension *over against* a "lower" dimension of "cosmic" or "natural" events, an understanding inaugurated in the "Holy *Script*ures."

The penal apparatus keeps nature and spirit together, and so its script can both wound and transform; it has deprived us of our dissociation, our escape. In the Scriptures, Israel's God withdraws from the company of the nature gods of the Middle East and becomes the Lord of history, which is thereby separated off from the cosmos. Just as Kafka undeniably alludes to the "Scriptures" in his metaphor of the "script," and takes away from this "script" the meaning of a "higher" truth, giving it instead the meaning of a natural process of being inscribed, he destroys both the *meta*physical understanding of history as well as the *meta*physical understanding of "script."

In this "natural history" there is neither past nor future *(Zukunft)*, because one and the same event here and now is "future" and "past" *(Gewesenheit)* in one: It comes ever closer to me with its essence *(Wesen)*

by cutting its meaning into me. The apparatus imprisons me for better or for worse in the present moment, forcing me to experience and taste it to the full, to the bitter end, neither flirting with the idea of any good old days in a bygone past, nor of an anticipated, better future.

The condemned person neither "understands" nor "feels" the meaning, both being subjective activities. He does not "have" any enlightenment, any "revelation." We are expressly told that "nothing else happens." The process remains in the realm of the matter of course. What happens is merely that the condemned person himself objectively *becomes* enlightenment and then *exists as* radiance. By cutting into the person and opening up his being the event slowly discloses its own meaning, thereby causing itself to radiate forth from him. All the activity is in the event itself. The person is like the wire in a lightbulb that begins to glow when the electricity of an event touches him deeply enough. He is both the location and the material which is needed to bring the meaning, or the imaginal depth, or the "face" of a moment to shine forth ("Enlightenment came even to the most dull witted"). This allows for a completely different understanding of what "becoming conscious" and "making conscious" could mean than is possible within the usual psychological framework.

The difference between written text and spoken word, between literary and oral traditions, so often debated since Plato, appears from the viewpoint of the colony's machine to be an illusory conflict. The real difference would be that between *our* writing or reading and our *being* inscribed, or the difference between our reading information and an *informatio* (impression) reading itself in and through the process of being inscribed. Or it is the contrast between our observations, meditations, introspections, and search for meaning on the one hand, and, on the other hand, our receptivity, our openness toward a guest who comes to us on his own initiative and brings his own world with him, seeking admission to our being. It is all the same whether the message is oral or written, as long as *we* want to be the ones who are doing the speaking, writing, or reading. Kafka's script is written and read by the actual event, and man is the parchment. Being a human means here that one's essence consists in being inscribable and vulnerable; it means letting oneself be marked by life, not passing through life as a clean slate. The essence of being human is *pathein*, suffering.

When Husserl describes phenomenology as the intentional consciousness' "contemplation of the essences" of things, and systematically abstracts from the experience of "existence," of actuality, etc., in the sense of *epoche*, it means that he is conceiving the notion of "phenomenon" in terms of our intent, our seeing and describing. However, this results in a very limited, truncated concept of phenomenality, and it is particularly inadequate for describing psychotherapeutic experience. In psycho-

therapy the issue is not pure essences, but phenomena in which actual, sometimes painfully experienced reality and its impact ("numinosity," instinctual dynamics) are inextricably combined with its essence ("luminosity," image, meaning). This combination is what Jung's term "archetype" or "archetypal image" refers to. Kafka's allegory clears the pathway to another, more complete idea of phenomenology, according to which intentionality is not a quality of consciousness, but of the phenomenon itself. This coincides, by the way, with Heidegger's thinking after his "Kehre." It is not consciousness which "intends" this or that meaning; rather, consciousness is what *is being intended.* The "phainomenon" as that which penetrates us and inscribes itself into us, thereby generating what we call consciousness in the first place. Phenomenology in the conventional tame sense, as our own particular method or attitude, or as the path we are to travel, gives way to a phenomenology with teeth.

When people in archaic cultures are tattooed or decorated with scars, or mutilate themselves in some way, this is a visible expression of their living knowledge that it is the essence of mankind to be inscribed and wounded, and an expression of the fact that they are a conscious part of this knowledge. Goethe stated in *Maximen und Reflexionen* that "painting and tattooing the body is a return to the animal state." Such a statement can only be made from the point of view of redeemed mankind, having escaped from the course of events to a free, "higher" humanity which, accordingly, inevitably has to confuse that part of humanity still exposed to the wind of events with some kind of subhuman nature. This can be contrasted with the view of the officer, for whom the penal system, i.e., the inscription of the body, is precisely what is most "humane and most in consonance with human dignity": only by being inscribed does a person receive his humanity.

Equating being human with suffering requires that we have to try to avoid numerous inevitable associations. Such as Christian suffering in the sense of humbly bearing one's God-given fate. There is also pragmatic suffering in the sense of that Homeric passage about the two barrels of Zeus, where the response to the depressing insight that there can be no life without suffering is the word *anscheo*, "bear it," "don't let it get you down," "keep your spirits up."[2] There is also the self-indulgent suffering of Goethe's Tasso, who says, ". . .a god gave me the gift to say how much I suffer." There is fatalistic suffering which passively and without dignity simply endures whatever happens. There is morbid suffering, which takes secret pleasure in misfortune. And, finally, there is tragic suffering in the sense of Greek drama.

None of that is what is meant here. In all these cases, suffering is construed and experienced as something which should not really occur, but with which one has to learn to live one way or another. In Kafka it is

not a matter of faithful endurance, or brave fortitude, or crying one's heart out, or of breaking down. The original understanding had already been lost in the Greek tragedies, as close as they were in time to mythic, ritualistic humanity. They are, as a matter of fact, one of the main instruments for redeeming man from the original experience of events and are an integral part of Greek Enlightenment, because they reinterpret the factual and unemotional necessity for one's being inscribed by life as a human "tragedy." They teach mankind "for the first time" no longer to experience its vulnerability as its ontological status and the distinction of its nature, but rather to conceive it as ontic suffering of one's fate: as literal injury or destruction. These tragedies are written from the (autistic) point of view of the subject insisting on his own speaking and feeling, and teach people to settle down more and more in such subjectivity. The telltale sign for this is that life is viewed in terms of literal joy and sorrow, horror and pity.

That is no point of view in the cultures based on initiation. The course of initiation is never tragic, even if it leads to death. The person is here not required to grow beyond himself through a fearful fate, because as a person he is not the center of attention. Rather, what is central is that the *inscription*—the objective meaning of the moment in question—enters ever more deeply into him, in order to be able to radiate out from him. The question is not purely negative, how to "cope" with painful events; it is the positive question of what meaning they want to inscribe into us. The torture which is the subject of the allegory of the penal colony, in other words that aspect of reality that one could call the "sadistic" meaning of history if one takes a humane standpoint, does not have to be understood literally as ontic, painful misfortune, as in Greek tragedy. Instead, this torture is ontological, it is nothing else but the acute intensity with which an actual phenomenon, regardless of whether it is good or bad, inscribes its striking essence on naked humanity.

Martyrdom in the penal colony's machine is thus a far cry from any kind of literal sadomasochism. It is a metaphor for the only way we can truly connect with the world, the way modern man, autistically enclosed in himself and his *idios kosmos,*[3] can really know that some Other exists outside of himself. Reality as an autonomous "thou" which looks into our existence and which has something to say to us of its own accord, thus requiring us to mutely listen. Only the machine's Harrow is able to penetrate the ego of our subjectivity and give us a living encounter with some Other, with a reality which we ourselves are not, neither ontically nor ontologically. It is only on the Bed of the machine that we can experience a marriage *(coniunctio)* with reality.

Similar to the situation in Greek tragedy, Christ's passion in the crucifixion is an image of the transition from a human existence based on initiation to the ontic existence of the suffering creature. Whereas the

condemned person in the penal system, after having first screamed, quiets down somewhere around the sixth hour so that a meaning can begin to irradiate, Christ's passion conversely finds its fulfillment around the ninth hour in the desperate outcry of the suffering and now *merely human* person, who has lost his God and his meaning. The image of the crucifixion instructed Occidental man to define himself as a mere creature. The former initiate now turns into the Man of Sorrows, the initiation as the inscription of a meaning becomes the Passion, naked human suffering. Redemption consists in the transplantation of human existence from the initiatory world of the "penal colony" into the valley of tears. Salvation is nothing else but being freed from initiation, being freed from the machine which would relentlessly expose us to the lightning bolt striking forth from within the imaginal depth of natural events.

Man defined as a naked creature can no longer be struck by the essence of events, he can only be meaninglessly tortured. He always has his darkest hour already behind himself (which is the only reason why Christian martyrdom could change into its opposite, triumph). His darkest hour is the crucifixion, which was the very event through which he turned into a merely natural creature. For the same reason the *crucified* Lord (and only he) is from the onset the resurrected Christ. Only for someone who is himself defined as merely natural can there be *meta*physics, *higher* truths and *absolute* spirit. Both extremes are the result of salvation from the penal machine, the result of dissociating "natural history" into merely nature here, and higher spirit there. They become opposites, just like crucifixion and resurrection, meaningless suffering and the triumph of having an absolute (supernatural) meaning. In our own concrete reality this is reflected in the fact that human dignity, which once had to be *gained* through an actual initiatory process or operation and therefore was, as the irradiance of an inner substance, an actual quality of a person, has become a (metaphysical) human *right* guaranteed a priori on paper, a *claim* which I can make on others, and on society.

When Marx says, "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it" he is confronting us with a false alternative. What good is changing the world when the person who is to change it is still the same old person? The same is true of Rilke's "You have to change your life." What good is any therapy and working on oneself, if it is performed *on* a person defining himself as the sovereign subject of his seeing and experiencing, and if the essence of that person has not been opened up beforehand into the state of existing as vulnerability, in other words, if the therapy does not take place in the penal colony? Wherever *we* want to change the world, or life, there the sovereign subject is still at work, and the realness of the real is still unperceived and unredeemed. The task is rather to *experience*, to be exposed to the impact

of, the world. However, reality has nowhere near been experienced when it has been scientifically researched, or personally felt and when our pain has been "screamed out to the world." It has been experienced only when it has inflicted itself upon the core of our being and thereby *rules.*

We have a fundamentally disturbed relationship to authority and power. This is inevitable when we realize, with respect to the metaphysical dimension, that the Christian Occident was born with the dream of absolute liberation from the rule of Being, with Christ as the symbol of that liberation (I. Corinthians 15, 24-26, "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Occidental Christianity not only strives to destroy all the *powers* of Being to which we can be exposed, with the exception of the one God. Much more radically than that, it strives to absolutely destroy the very *definition* of power and rule, and does this by having the one God *rule* who is exclusively love, exclusively good and who thus is lacking in his innermost essence precisely what makes a ruler a ruler: power and terror. The Christian God is the embodiment of victory over authority as such. The second reason for our disturbed relationship to authority and power is a consequence of our concrete practical experience with how power was exercised in Nazi Germany, Eastern Europe, Iran, Uganda, Vietnam, and many other places.

But perhaps it is less the case that authority is condemned because it is dreadfully misused in practice, but rather because authority is forced to disintegrate into its extremist distortions of totalitarian dictatorship on the one hand, and liberation struggles, revolution and anarchy on the other hand, once rule in an ontological sense is fundamentally disregarded, and thus destroyed and without foundation. We in the West can enjoy the advantage of living in a zone which is ontologically (not empirically) totally free of power and conflict, politically speaking in the zone of liberal democracy, and spiritually or religiously speaking in the zone of hope and utopia. This emancipated middle ground is probably only possible because in other places the struggle between abuse of power and liberation movements is going on in its crassest, most literal form and to hopeless extremes. And it has to wage there, because the emancipated, redeemed mode of existence cut off from authority in the ontological sense has expanded all over the world during the last two centuries, and because salvation brings about its realization specifically through a kind of division of labor, senseless subservience and torture on the one hand, and a protest against this condition in the name of freedom and human dignity on the other.

The destruction of the essence of authority as an ontological factor can be seen especially in our now experiencing power and authority only

ontically, as political power, in the realm of which our fear of suppression, exploitation, and slavish subservience is more than appropriate. The split is practically a necessity if actual authority is ignored. The latter has nothing to do with earthly rulers or political and social systems, nor with any sort of higher truths in which one should believe. It is much rather, in a naive, innocent sense, the terror with which the unmediated glance and untamed voice of the actual phenomena penetrate and impress our being. It is the sharpness with which the truth of our age cuts into our flesh. It is the claim with which the face and depth of what *is* insists on irradiating through us.

The authority of Being and the penal colony only have something to do with concentration camps if a reduced frame of consciousness forces them into the narrow confines of the ontic-political and the literal. But if the penal colony is allowed its own nature, then it is the essential location of man's poetic and intellectual existence. There is not a true writer or thinker who has not in some way or another been strapped to the Bed of the apparatus and experienced on it a marriage with the depths of reality, none who did not know that guilt *(Schuld)* is never to be doubted, that *Schuld* that consists of the debt we owe to what actually presents itself.[4]

What is this debt? It is that we unconditionally "humble ourselves" before the relentless truth of what has really presented itself *prior* to any condemning or condoning, and prior to any wish to change or improve anything. That we allow ourselves to be absolutely bound by what is, including all its ultimate consequences. That we fall silent in the midst of our speaking and wishful thinking, exalting the phenomenon's inner radiance, however it be in empirical terms. As embarrassing as this is, I have to go even further: that the actual phenenomena ultimately receive our worship as divine, because it is the essence of the *phainomena* to be *in and of themselves* the sovereign subject confronting us humans with their compelling glances of Being. Only by acknowledging its divinity is full tribute paid to the reality of each respective event, and has its whole truth penetrated us. Only then is it redeemed and released into its essence, and only then are we, too, released to any activities on our part intended to change reality.

2. The Rupture of History

What we know so far about the penal colony we have learned from statements made by the officer as he describes to the explorer those earlier conditions when there were executions. The officer speaks of the punishment with visible veneration and is obviously deeply devoted to the former Commandant, who created it. The officer is the only upholder of his

legacy, ever since the new Commandant has made changes everywhere in the spirit of the "mild doctrine" which he has introduced. The officer believes that by means of his description he has convinced the explorer of the desirability of the penal system. And now with this insight the explorer must surely regard this procedure as being the most humane and most in consonance with human dignity. Therefore, the officer asks him to help him in his campaign against the new Commandant, by making a public statement in favor of this form of punishment. Then the new Commandant would finally have to acknowledge, "Old Commandant, I humble myself before you."

When the explorer declines to do this, being convinced of the injustice and inhumanity of this penal procedure, the officer responds after a moment of reflection, "Then the time has come" and looks at the explorer with bright eyes. The explorer does not receive an answer to his request for clarification; instead, the officer starts to act. He frees the condemned man who is to be executed today, puts another programming text into the machine's drawing apparatus, namely the commandment "Be just!" and himself lies down naked on the Bed, after breaking his sword. It is then almost shocking to observe how the different parts of the machine ready themselves to receive him, even anticipate his intent, and how the machine begins to operate by itself. The defective gear which actually should have been creaking as it has done ever since the death of the former Commandant, now turns without the slightest noise. Working so silently the machine can be ignored, until suddenly it begins to destroy itself piece by piece and finally becomes a heap of rubble. The Harrow does not write any longer, it only stabs, and finally bores through the officer, in an act that is sheer murder. The face of the corpse shows no sign of the promised redemption. His eyes retain a lively expression, his glance is peaceful and full of conviction. The explorer flees the penal colony headlong.

So the story's content. It has been argued that Kafka took a stance critical to the penal system described by the officer, since what visibly happens contradicts the previous enthusiastic description by the officer.[5] It is clearly shown that the assertion that the apparatus brings enlightenment is simply not true. But this interpretation cannot be maintained. The error is not in the officer's description, but in the consciousness of the interpreter. The idea of error is the instrument with which our conscious-

ness is protected from experiencing a *rupture* in history and allowed to maintain the continuity of the truth it believes in. The story's decisive turning point is the sentence, "Then the time has come." It is evidently that point in time at which two qualitatively different eras become separated: the time of the former Commandant, and the time of the new Commandant. Time has been broken and with it the truth of the times. There is no reason to assume that at the time of the old Commandant the punishment did not really lead to the radiating of a light for an entire celebrating community. But this time has now past; the old Commandant is dead.

Here, time is not an empty extent or container, indifferent to the kind of occurrences which fill it. It is an autonomous authority which prescribes a particular quality to everything that happens. What time forces us to endure is the fact that it is broken. The authority of Being has undergone a metamorphosis. The old authority has died and, as a consequence, the truth which belonged to it has become false. Now is the time of a new truth, the truth of the new "mild doctrine," namely the humane attitude of the constitutional state, based on science, technology and economics.

The rupture in history causes an unavoidable contradiction, indeed, it *is itself* this contradiction. One can remain loyal to the former Commandant and oppose any reform, which is the officer's solution, the solution of conservatism and the reactionary stance. But the conservative falls into conflict with himself. Out of true devotion to the old Commandant he wants to force the authority of the values and truths established by the former, but precisely by trying to force them he shows that they no longer *have* any authority, but are only maintained by his subjective will power. True authority is recognized by the fact that it is what actually and unquestionably rules. It neither has to be proven nor helped to triumph. By supporting the *content* of the system of inscription by means of his own will power and his various intrigues, the conservative officer reveals in his *actions* that he is himself the self-centered "autocrat" who is no longer able to suffer the meaning to be *given* to, and *inscribed* into, himself.

The reverse solution, the emancipated, progressive approach, sides with the new and, in the name of freedom and in awareness of the impotence of the old values, denies authority as such, and fights it. Here the response to the discontinuity is to make a virtue of necessity and to repress one's own devotion to the former Commandant. The progressive confuses the death of the old rule with freedom from any kind of rule at all. He, too, gets into conflict with himself, because he can only defend freedom by means of a continual fight for power over those who represent authority. Whereas the conservative rejects the *new* Commandant, the progressive is against the new *Commandant.* In both cases they are acting in ignorance of the facts. Authority is not allowed to exercise its authority because it is not granted to have changed, to have become discontinuous.

The vertical relationship of Commandant and officer—the true relationship to authority—turns into a horizontal rivalry between the party supporting the new and the party supporting the old. What was the ontological reality of the authority of Being becomes an ontic, political power struggle.

The mere fact that the machine can be explained at all shows that it is no longer what it was and according to its nature is supposed to be, namely, something one can only experience by being imprisoned in it and processed by it. An explanation of the machine is apparently only possible from above and outside, from the perspective of historical consciousness. That means that the entire ritual is in truth already a thing of the past for the officer, and his wanting it to be the present reality is pure stubbornness. The historical consciousness of the officer finds its express allegorical embodiment in the person of the explorer. The explorer represents that consciousness which, belonging to another continent, has indeed an outside standpoint and has nothing at all to do with the penal system. It is redeemed, immune consciousness. With the simple possibility of explanation from a superior vantage point on the one hand, and unmoved observation on the other hand, the essence of the penal colony as a system of relentless involvement is destroyed. The antithesis to the machine, i.e., a consciousness redeemed from it, is already present in the penal colony in the form of the explorer; it even has a place in the officer himself.

In strict contrast to what the officer is actually saying, namely that preaching is useless since the truth has to be experienced on one's own body, he himself becomes a missionary of his system. It does not convince by and of itself; a fanatic, preaching consciousness has to lend support. The system has lost its self-evident truth and innocence. The officer makes the worth of the machine dependent on the explorer's agreement, the agreement of a liberated consciousness. That this system is obsolete and impotent does not first become manifest when the explorer refuses to support it, but is already apparent from the need to woo him.

This obsolescence and impotence is allegorically made explicit by the idea of the death of the former Commandant. As the inventor of the penal system he was the soul or spirit from which it lived and through which it was authorized. The fact that he is dead means that life has gone out of the system, that it has become empty and meaningless. In actual social reality a Commandant is a more or less interchangeable incumbent of a permanent office. He may have usurped it and might not be worthy of it, so that rebellion may in some cases be justified. But in our case he is *allegorically* the authority truly inherent in and governing a situation: the real and immanent spiritus rector of whatever *is* in each case. If there is a new Commandant, then he cannot simply be the incumbent of a position of power who came from outside into a situation alien to him and now wants to impose his perhaps incommensurate ideas on it. Rather, he has to be the

explicit image for the inner truth and necessity of a given new situation. He is the expression of its essence, its ultimate, inescapable realness (authority).

Trying to resist the new Commandant would be a mere misunderstanding. It would be against nature, just like wanting to ignore the force of gravity or our own nature would be senseless: neurotic. "Resistance" here means a desire to absolutely eliminate something, a belief that the world could do without authority of Being. It thus means, in a psychoanalytic sense, defense, suppression, denial. This should not be confused with the form of resistance which we call "work": by means of—physical or moral—work I actually fight against gravitation, or my weaknesses in character, but do it ontically in the sense that I absolutely recognize and confirm those forces ontologically. Likewise, the Commandant has to be absolutely recognized, even if we have to offer resistance in the sense of "work," because he is always our *own true* Commandant, our *own* inevitable necessity, which as the *arché* of our essence or our actual life is the antecedent of all our desires. We would always be too late with our "defensive" resistance, or our agreement. This is because we are only the "officer" who never picks out his Commandant himself, but whose essence consists in obeying the Commandant who has been placed over him, whoever he happens to be at any particular point in time. Being freed of one's Commandant is not a possible goal. Having freedom as a goal is madness. The ontic work undertaken to change the world is ontologically one mode of showing obedience to it and being bound by it.

I am not speaking in favor of tyranny. Quite the opposite. Actual military dictatorships show us what horrible conditions rule because the officers, instead of keeping to their true calling by *listening* to the truth of what is and *obeying* the necessity of the times, themselves take on the role of Commandant and, just like Kafka's officer, want to force their true Commandant to his knees, in our case by force of arms. The true Commandant is not the people, the majority, either. Both fallacies arise because we misunderstand the essence of rule as political and ontic, instead of comprehending (and accordingly realizing!) the essence of politics in terms of the truth and authority of Being.

The politic and ontic misconstruction is revealed in the fact that the officer speaks of the "legacy" of the former Commandant. This tells us that the penal system is not viewed in terms of the actually ruling spirit by which it stands or falls; instead, the world is viewed from the point of view of an empirically given system, which allegedly can be preserved even after the death of the spirit which gave rise to and animated it. An empirically given spiritual legacy immediately gives rise to a conflict of opinions. The officer does not understand that the authority of Being never perpetuates itself in a literal legacy, but always only as a new, *living* power, as a new necessity

of the times. The only true "legacy" of the old Commandant is the new Commandant, simply because he is the *Commandant* and becomes, just as the former Commandant, the spirit inherent in a situation and truly informing it.

The conservative attitude of the officer has to be considered rebellion, it is essentially revolutionary. By trying to preserve the legacy, he makes himself its spiritus rector. The essence of revolution is denying the a priori existence of authority and by politicizing the idea of authority, putting man and his will in the position of the *arché* of Being. This process is reflected in the split between nature and mind/history, by which mind is supposed to be freed from the forces of nature and necessity, in order to make spontaneity (unhindered planning) the governing principle. In Kafka's story, mind and history are not some "higher dimension" in opposition to nature or the cosmos, but, in the form of the "Commandant," are themselves the very nature of Being. They are automatically a priori, are by definition the "superiors," in contrast to which human consciousness, with its opinions and desires, is only the subordinate "officer" who is obliged to obey. And conversely, nature here does not mean "outer reality"; as that which is inscribing itself it is itself ruling and penetrating spirit.

The new Commandant allows the officer to have his way, even though the latter wants to force him to his knees. He does not interfere, all he does is not appear. This illustrates the gentle government and mild power of the authority of Being. What is actually ruling does not make use of authoritarian, brutal force. It is *possible* to disregard this rule, in the way the conservative or the progressive does. The nonetheless governing power of the authority of Being consists simply in its staying absent, in the fact that the existence of a humanity which tries to get out of the spell of the authority of that which *is*, is living a lie, cut off from the glances of Being (the Gods) and their radiance, remaining inescapably tied up in some ideology, religion, substitute gratification, drugs or the like, and forced to exercise terror from above or below, in order to stay in power or to come to power.

Kafka's officer turns out to be an officer in the true sense, despite what he first appears to be, someone who listens and obeys (and that has to be the case, if we are really dealing with an allegory in which the figures actually embody what their names or offices imply). He lets himself be taught by the impotence of the old system that it is no longer what truly rules. "So you did not find the procedure convincing" the officer says, "Then the time has come." Significantly, he describes which time it is that has come not by his own speaking in so many words; he rather lets what actually happens answer the question. He thus finds a way back to his truth, by subjecting himself to a necessity. He releases the prisoner and has himself strapped into the machine. It has been said that this is a fanatic

attempt to forcefully achieve for himself at least the pleasure of transfiguration, now that for the outside world all seems to be lost. But this interpretation does not capture the meaning of his action. The officer acts out of the irrevocable insight that what is past, is past. He has understood that it is time for him and for the entire penal system to perish, thereby recognizing the rule of what is now actually in power. On his body and in his life he performs the exact opposite of what he had wanted to force the new Commandant to do. He performs de facto, although implicitly, the confession, "New Commandant, I humble myself before you," or, "he must increase, but I must decrease." This is why he breaks his sword, and this is why the commandment which he inserts into the Designer, in order to be subjected to it, is the commandment of the new times, "Be just!"

With absolute honesty the officer confronts himself with the truth of the times and is ready to suffer it in unmitigated intensity. He stops being a conservative, without becoming the other extreme, a progressive. He shows us a different solution to our spiritual dilemma (though for us it is usually reduced to a political dimension) than the solution of choosing one side or the other. He bears without reservation the trauma of the *discontinuity* of truth in his own existence. It is only our experience of suffering the discontinuity which can *mediate* between the two sides and be capable of holding them together. Only when what happens remains in this sense *psychological*, does it not have to be split apart. But as soon as the "subject" attempts to remove himself from what is happening, then the rupture is transposed to "objective" history "outside." The soul, the bond unifying what has actually happened, then has to become a separating wedge.

The new Commandant has no need of revolutionaries nor of turncoats who split off their allegiance to the old Commandant and delegate it to their inimical twins, the conservatives. He needs officers who acknowledge his rule solely by experiencing to the bitter end on their own bodies the death of the former Commandant and the collapse of his apparatus. Only in this way do they cease to be freedom fighters—people fighting for their own ego-sovereignty and self-rule—and become beings who allow their truth, whatever it may be, to be *authorized* and *given* to them by the new authority of Being.

How much the officer's insight and behavior are in agreement with the truth is seen in the fact that the gear which has creaked ever since the death of the former Commandant becomes silent as soon as the officer places himself in the machine. With the death of the old Commandant, truth had gone out of the apparatus, and a creaking contradiction entered it. This disappears as soon as the machine is no longer in the service of a dead idea, but of the commandment that meets the demands of the new times. This new commandment, however, has been designed by the old Commandant,

just as were all the others. Thus, he had himself already programmed the collapse of his machine. The fact that the apparatus readies itself to receive the officer and even anticipates his intent shows that it has long been time for his expressly bringing about the end, with determination and in full awareness of what he is doing.

By causing the destruction of the machine, the officer is obeying both the old and the new Commandants at the same time. For together the two are the one, in itself discontinuous authority of Being and they are only at odds with each other if consciousness, in order not to itself suffer the initiation into the discontinuity of history and thereby stay aloof, displaces the discontinuity, forcing something "outside" to carry it instead, whether in the form of a conversion from a true to a false state ("decadence," "The Loss of the Center" [Hans Sedlmayr], etc.) or the reverse ("progress," "Enlightenment" as emancipation from an unduly retained state of an intellectual immaturity in Kant's sense and from "prescientific" primitivity).

The officer subjects himself to the punishment procedure, but irradiance does not come. It *couldn't possibly* come, because this is the moment for acknowledging the death of the former Commandant and thus the irrevocable obsolescence of the old penal system. Since with the death of the Commandant the machine has lost its soul, it can no longer give rise to any irradiance. The illumination which the officer receives comes prior to the work of the machine on him. His illumination is the insight, "Then the time has come," for this insight brings a sudden light to his eyes (he "suddenly looked at the explorer with bright eyes"). His suffering, like the suffering of Christ, no longer has meaning in the sense of an initiation.

But we should not rest content with this purely negative result (the destruction of the machine and its initiatory meaning). Kafka's story requires us to consider further implications. The fact that the officer places himself in a machine which at first escapes one's attention and afterwards, by way of an allegorical illustration of its vanishing, falls apart, calls for a radical shift, a change in one's view of the situation. The penal colony as such has not come to an end; it is the particular form it used to have which has come to an end. What has happened is that the essential constitution of the penal system has fundamentally shifted, a shift which finds its allegorical expression in the transition from the former to the new Commandant within the *continuing* penal colony. The more the apparatus, as the particular object which *occupied* the position of the instrument of punishment in the penal system and concretely embodied the penal colony, vanishes, the more we are forced onto a higher level of understanding: onto the level where we begin to become aware of the *"position* in the system" itself. Without the position of an instrument of punishment, the system which is the penal colony would no longer be a penal colony. We are thus forced to the insight that the machine cannot have disappeared

altogether. It must rather be the case that it has made place for a more powerful apparatus, one which is not especially introduced in the story, indeed one which *cannot* even be demonstrated since it is still completely unconscious. One of C.G. Jung's experiences suggests how this is to be understood.

When Jung once asked an old African chief about his dreams, the chief replied with tears in his eyes that in olden times chiefs used to have dreams, and thus knew whether there would be war or sickness, whether the rains would come, and where one should drive the herds. His grandfather had still dreamed. But since the white man had come to Africa, nobody has dreams any more. One didn't need dreams any longer either, because now the Englishmen knew everything! Jung added by way of commentary that the medicine man who had formerly negotiated with the gods or the fates and advised his people had lost his raison d'être: The authority of the medicine man had been replaced by that of the District Commissioner.[6]

Jung does not describe this experience merely as an African curiosity, but because our own consciousness too has had a District Commissioner placed over it and finds itself in the role of the African whose metaphysical dignity has become invalid. The transition from the old to the new Commandant is exactly equivalent to the replacement of the African medicine man by the English District Commissioner. It is not the case of an incumbent of a continuing office being replaced by someone else; Being as a whole has moved onto a fundamentally different level. The traditional frame of consciousness is being broken, and consciousness is forced into a completely new, larger *dimension.*

When the instrument of punishment escapes our attention and disintegrates, this is a way of telling the explorer to become aware that the apparatus which he saw *in front of* him and which could be explained to him is no longer the real instrument of punishment. The real instrument of punishment cannot be demonstrated, because it always already completely surrounds whomever should experience it. This has to dawn on the explorer, or at least on us readers, at the latest when we see the apparatus disintegrate. The allegorical meaning of the disintegration is to urge consciousness to comprehend that the machine in *this* particular form is obsolete, that things cannot continue in *this* way, and that the memory of the events described by the officer can only have the value of a simple example, a miniature, but quite graphic model of an as-yet-unsuspected actual apparatus. There must be a larger apparatus in which the explorer has long been placed, without his least awareness.

We can only understand Kafka's story when we realize that the historical consciousness of the explorer (or our own consciousness), is not in the penal colony as a witness or spectator, as he (it) supposes, but that he (it) is what actually is to go through a rite of initiation and be inscribed.

Freeing the condemned soldier vividly shows the explorer what he himself has always unconsciously been: a consciousness redeemed from initiation in the old sense. This action is meant to make clear to him that no danger threatens him from this particular instrument of punishment, that the actual punishment has much rather to be sought on an entirely different level. And further, that the condition of "being condemned" can no longer be projected onto the soldier outside of and in front of him, but has to be realized by him himself, as his own being. The condemned soldier and the obsolete functioning of the machine are shown to him merely by way of illustration or as a small model, so that he might at long last recognize in it his own image, and so that he might awaken to the insight, what I see out there is actually myself, it is, mutatis mutandis, my own situation. The explorer, however, avoids this becoming conscious by fleeing the penal colony.

Salvation is thus not being withdrawn, but it is rather transcended. The condemned man is really free, and the explorer remains redeemed. But that is precisely what is truly disturbing, since it shows that precisely *because* salvation is not revoked, now, under the new Commandant, "punishment" has to be expected in an entirely unanticipated dimension. We should not forget that the new Commandant is also the Commandant of a *penal* colony. The onward leading motif of the new Commandant (who represents a completely new penal system) is unmistakably incorporated in Kafka's story, but it cannot be explicitly unfolded within it simply because the explorer's consciousness, and ours, too, upholds its defense against such an expansion of consciousness. No wonder that Kafka was unhappy with the conclusion of "In the Penal Colony" and drafted several other endings. Indeed, an important aspect of the entire work has not yet been brought to conclusion.

What was once an apparatus bringing illumination can, now that the officer has been butchered in it, only be a part, such as Harrow, or Designer, of a new, much more extensive and hardly fathomed apparatus. Accordingly, the new prisoner or initiate clamped into this larger machine is not the officer, but, as mentioned above, the explorer. The new initiate is us, modern, European, civilized consciousness which with one hand fights for freedom and justice and with its other hand pages through books about ancient myths and rituals; calling with one voice for peace and "green" harmony and with its *very own*, other voice supporting the expansion of a technological economy and the construction of bombs. The officer places himself instead of the prisoner in the machine not in order to himself experience an initiation. He certainly knew what to expect, which is why the expression on the face of the corpse could be "calm and convinced." If he had wanted to forcefully bring about illumination for himself, then the result would have had to be an expression of the most profound

disappointment. No, the officer lies down on the machine as a part of the drawing which the new machine is supposed to inscribe on the explorer, or on us.

What kind of a drawing? It is the image of the disintegration of the old apparatus, which inevitably accompanies human salvation from punishment/initiation; an image revealing that the commandment, "Be just!" does not bring illumination; the image of the dull death of the "officer," that part of man which *obeys* Being and which now has become a meaninglessly martyred naked creature; above all it is the image of countless gassed and murdered victims of concentration camps, the image of all the murdered Cambodians, of millions of gaunt, starving people, the image of human life strapped into medical equipment, unconscious and merely vegetating; it is the consciousness of the pollution of nature, of the threat of atomic disaster and of a technological genetic catastrophe. The drawing inserted in the new machine no longer has a positive content; it is neither commandment nor inspiring symbol. Its text is the rupture of history itself, the loss of familiar meaning, indeed of the entire *level* on which meaning formerly existed. Its text is the message of the absolute indifference and worthlessness of individually ontic mankind.

The former Commandant, or the medicine man, represents a system in which each individual had an ontic meaning which supported and fulfilled him because he participated in the myths, symbols and rites of his community. He represents a being in which the universe is a cosmos, the earth a holy mother, in which plants, animals, rivers and mountains, even the tools he produced, are inhabited by spirits, fairies, nymphs, gods and trolls, and thereby possess inherent metaphysical dignity. But ever since the District Commissioner is on the scene as colonial master, the entire system of individual initiation, of a personally experienced meaning and of the ontic satiety of each moment with mythic richness has become a thing of the past. An individual person may still have his own personal dreams and symbolic experiences, and he can probably go on hikes instead of driving a car, or weave cloth, can food and make his furniture in the old way, instead of buying industrially manufactured products. He can personally abstain from exploiting nature or being part of a consumer and throw-away society. But along with his abstinence and imitation of what is outdated he has lost his metaphysical authority, at least as far as his highest determination is concerned. The individual objects of the world, earth, heaven, water fountains and fire, sun and moon, wind and mountains, have all become hollow of meaning and banal. They have been stripped once and for all of their mystery and their numinosity.

The place of decision and fulfillment is now on a superior level. The District Commissioner makes decisions according to the administrative principles of a modern empire, taking no note of the world of the medicine

man and his fellow tribesmen, and acting beyond the horizon of an individual person. In precisely the same way our swift highway and air traffic fundamentally and "inconsiderately" race past and over the heads of pedestrians and horseback riders, radio and television waves override personal conversation, and industrial manufacturing supersedes the hand-made objects of the past. The world's present being has surpassed its former being, just as an imperialist colonial power overcomes native tribes, in keeping with the alchemical saying of Pseudo-Demokritos: Nature rejoices in nature, nature conquers nature, nature rules over nature. The individual, ontic person is thus relieved of his ultimately metaphysical responsibility, and thereby redeemed, but that is precisely why he is also released to the indifference of "free time." Inside we all carry around with us an African medicine man in metaphysical retirement, who in all essential regards is functionless and who, if he is honest, as far as the meaning of life is concerned is left only with the nostalgic memory of what he has irrevocably lost, something he can only keep in the mortuary of a literal museum on the one hand, and in the mortuary of an unending, imaginary museum called the historical consciousness on the other hand. Jung hits the nail on the head when he says that the particular African chief with whom he had this conversation was not in any way an imposing personality, but rather a whining old man. Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely for that reason, he was a visual and impressive representation of the subterraneously spreading collapse of an *obsolete and forever irrevocable world.*[7]

It is precisely the psychotherapist who repeatedly has to painfully experience this irrevocableness. To be sure, it is not a rare occurrence that the punishment apparatus called analysis truly gets going, and perhaps the analysand even begins to understand, after the "sixth" hour, as in the times of the former Commandant, and his face may begin to shine—but there is nobody around any longer who would sun himself in the glow of this irradiance. The celebrating congregation which could convey to this event a public commitment is absent. The analysand takes home with him the illumination as his own personal experience, and the world remains unmoved. The old Commandant is dead and the new one keeps his distance. The still possible individual, ontic experience of meaning only takes place in the Garden of Epicure and only has the rank of a leisure-time activity, without ever touching what is really happening in the world, much less changing it.

It really seems to be true that the metaphysical ground has collapsed under us inasmuch as we have the status of ontic individuals, and that the new level of humanity's Being is now located one floor down, on that level where the District Commissioner or the new Commandant rules as the current truth of the times. Individual consciousness is simply not the true

correlative of a reality which is characterized by the resolution of the previously experienced world into atomic and subcellular structures, data bits and statistical probabilities, by communication media passing over the heads of individuals, and by a global economy which is no longer transparent. Only a fundamentally different kind of humanity can match the spiritus rector which rules today. The explorer or the medicine man can only be initiated into the new level of his human-ness, if he confesses with tears in his eyes that he has lost his metaphysical raison d'être as far as his ontic individuality is concerned, and only if he lets himself be inscribed by the image of the officer who is in obedience to the Commandant in fact and compellingly displays, much like Jung's African medicine man, the absolute downfall of the individual person and of the ontic numinosity and imaginal richness of the world. This new level of human-ness would be the abstract one of his *Essential Being;* on it he would exist as the archetypal *anthropos* beyond his personal, ontic individuality. And only then could he again be connected to the course of events and the place of decisions. With our individuality and as the empirical personalities which we are, we are no longer the subject or the addressee of events. What is taking place today (atomic physics, telecommunications, aerospace activities, data processing, gene technology, aviation, etc.) is not something for which individual, "responsible" scientists, industrialists and technicians, can take responsibility, nor is it addressed to the individual person as its natural "contact point." Even if the course of events can only occur through the medium of individuals, the actual "metaphysical" subject of the event is something else, something much more comprehensive, because individuality has become obsolete as to metaphysical substantiveness and at best is only the servant of the actual subject, only the "boy" of the District Commissioner.

The terrible problem of imperialism and exploitation, which is the dark side of salvation, freedom, and the constitutional state, cannot be adequately addressed if we attempt to solve it "out there," on the ontic-political level by means of an antiimperalist struggle. This fending off merely solidifies the problem in literalness. We must first of all and primarily experience imperialism as something that was done to us ourselves at the deepest level of our being, and not only to others, Africans, Indians, Australian aborigines, the European proletariat. We have to experience that all of us are and have been for a long time in ourselves the freed prisoner or the medicine man relieved of his raison d'être, and are not only the "colonial-master consciousness" of science and technology. We have to suffer imperialism psychologically, in ourselves—suffer it to *be!*—and allow ourselves, *before* we do any condemning or approving, and *before* attempting any changes and improvements, to be unconditionally bound up by it as the actual *truth* which has long been ruling over us, but which we have so far suppressed. It is too late to resist (ontologically

understood) imperialism; it has long been ruling over us and in us, it already inheres in what wants to resist it, so that resistance would only perpetuate it. We would be naive to think we could rid ourselves of it simply by an antiimperialist struggle. It is *really* a reality and not only an idle, because mistaken, opinion. We cannot get rid of realities; we can only expressly subject ourselves to them and thus perhaps modify their influence, or even change them into something desirable.

The symptomatic, inferior and ugly form of imperialism is the unrecognized preliminary form in which our new Commandant, the new rule of Being, is hidden. Imperialism contains a call to us, the call to free this new thing to be itself. Imperialism, which is indeed objectional, is itself the impulse to let it enter our being and to fully recognize it as our being (and not, for example, our moral guilt): to honor it, rather than to literally act it out externally *on* others as the exploiter or exploited, or, as revolutionaries, to fight it externally *in* others, in both cases warding it off. Imperialism is not our guilt, it is our Commandant, our master. As the invalidating and overcoming of ontic individuality (medicine man) and the world's ontic richness in meaning by the colonial rulers (the "imperialistic constitution" of the scientific-technical-industrial world), imperialism is actually the misunderstood arrival of the principally higher dimension of the *ontological*.

The course of history itself requires us to recognize the ontological level as the new foundation of our existence and to suffer the unavoidable explosion (or collapse) of consciousness from its firm foothold in the ontic into the depths of the ontological dimension. To use another image, it requires us to abandon our fixation on individual demonstrable and rearrangeable "things" in "space," and not even to rest content with a "minor expansion of consciousness" in the sense of discovering new rooms or floors in our soul's house. It rather requires us to become aware of the spatiality of space, of something which even contains within itself this entire house and all its already-discovered and yet-to-be discovered rooms, of something like the atmosphere in which we live as a matter of course without taking special note of it. And the task is not only to become aware of it, but also to translocate our being from the level of something which is always *in* a space to the level of spatiality itself.

The explorer does not become fully conscious of himself as that person who himself is in a much higher sense what has been demonstrated to him by way of an external illustration in the form of the condemned prisoner. But he vaguely senses that *he* is meant, that *he* is now the one to be inscribed. That is the reason he attempts to escape by flight. But he can, of course, only escape from the old penal system. The new machine, as his *ontological* essence, is so large, it so completely surrounds him, that even his flight can only take place within it. Without suspecting it, the explorer

has long been strapped onto the Bed of the new machine, which is as in Kafka's text well padded with modern salvation and freedom, and his flight is merely insignificant jerking within his bonds. The Harrow consisting of those painful images accompanies him wherever he goes, fitting itself snugly to his body, however he may twist and turn on the Bed of his machine.

In the same way that the condemned prisoner in Kafka's story impassively and uncomprehendingly endures what happens to him, the modern consciousness of the explorer stands ignorantly vis-à-vis what is happening and attempts in a variety of ways to defend itself against the pain tearing him apart and caused by the harrow digging into him, in the mistaken opinion that he can escape a collapse which has long taken place, or can expose it as something unreal. Similar defense mechanisms are, for example, appeals to our ethical responsibility and our emotional concern, political and social activism, confessing our guilt and arrogance, stubborn insistance on human rights, clinging to a religious or philosophical belief, the conservative's condemning the loss of tradition, secularism and socialist activities, or the liberal's condemning irrationality, mysticism, and imperialist forces. All these are attempts to keep out of what is really happening—which is the breaking away of the ontic basis of our being and our collapse down into the unknown, underworld depths of the ontological—while nevertheless mediating between the redeemed consciousness and the factual, now indisputable existence of the new program diagram now operating in the machine. But the ignorance of the person exposed to the apparatus and his clinging to the traditional perspective oriented towards his ontic mastering of life is part of the essence of the machine, which is always beyond one's horizon and which has long started to work on the person strapped into it before he even notices what is happening to him and, especially, before enlightenment begins to come to him.

Apparently, the sixth hour has not yet arrived. Modern consciousness has not become quiet, not quiet enough for the truth of the times to resonate and irradiate through and by means of it.

References

1. Franz Kafka, *Briefe* 1902-1924. *Gesammelte Werke.* Ed. Max Brod, Frankfurt, New York (S. Fischer, Schocken Books) 1958, p. 150.
2. *Iliad*, 24, 549.
3. "One's own, private world." Whoever has an *idios kosmos* is considered to be an idiot. The private world meant here is, however, not the world of isolated individuals, but rather the commonly shared world of the modern collective consciousness. It is an *idios* kosmos in the ontological sense: it is a "private" world defined by a person who is doing the seeing, a world which is essentially different from the world of the *sensus communis*, which was a reflection of what was presenting itself to, and looking into, human life.
4. Is perhaps this unpaid debt the reason for today's literal tortures? Torture and political mass murder as the compulsive return of a suppressed rite of initiation in the form of

concrete action on someone else, amidst a world of redeemed humanity?

5. Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka—Tragik und Ironie.* Munich, Vienna (Langen/Müller) 1964, p. 107ff.
6. C.G. Jung, *Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken*, ed. A. Jaffé, Zurich, Stuttgart 1967, p. 268ff.
7. C.G. Jung, *ibid.* p. 269, my emphasis.

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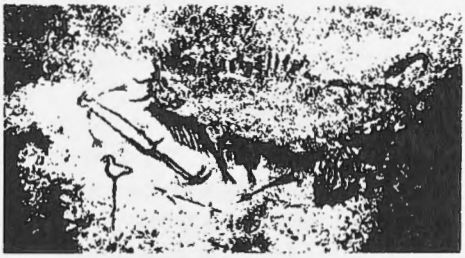

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PAMELA WYE

LASSIE NOT: DOUGLAS QUACKENBUSH'S DEAD DOG PHOTOGRAPHS

I wrote this piece while sitting on a gazebo by the Wallkill River in New Paltz, New York. The woods around me teemed with creatures squawking, rustling, cooing. A chipmunk scurried down a tree and yakked at me, making eye contact. Without the relentlessly soothing voice of the PBS nature series to narrate my experience, I became alarmed: will the chipmunk scamper up my leg and bite me? will deer charge at me? will an eel leap from the river and cause me great pain? Will they all, as they do in cartoon movies, band together in interspecies unity to chase me out, intruder that I am?

When I drove around New Paltz, birds swooped across the street at windshield level just as my car approached. One bird fluttered before my hood then executed a nose dive with a thud into my car's chrome grill. Meanwhile, a dead deer stretched out on the median strip, its head peacefully on the edge of the pavement. And each morning, I awoke to find a blanket of moths in my bathtub that drowned or spun down the drain when I ran my shower. "Murderer!" I heard the chipmunk scream. "Murderer!" joined in the deer, the garden snakes and the bird's friends.

Why do animals seem murderous when I'm on their turf and suicidal when they're on mine?

We think of animals as either wild, domesticated, or manufactured—at home in nature (where they seem to dominate), at home on the couch (where we try to dominate) or at home in plastic wrap in the meat section of the supermarket. But there are also the lost souls of the animal kingdom who are homeless and wild in our urban habitats. It is this fourth, anarchic underclass of animal that Douglas Quackenbush identifies with in his powerfully gruesome and beautiful photographs of a dead dog that span seasons in the life of the corpse.

Born in Michigan in 1930, Quackenbush came to New York in 1951 as a jazz musician. In 1959, he embarked on a series of photos of the East River Park Amphitheater, then the site of popular free concerts. In 1994, he exhibited these photos alongside recently rephotographed shots of the same views (minus the crowds). The images of the now abandoned and decrepit site are like 35-year time-lapse photos documenting loss. If the

photograph freezes a moment in time, Quackenbush is able to thaw the moment and allow its future to seep out into many more photos that reveal the evolving (or more often devolving) process that resides within the singularity of the moment.

In the late 1960s, while residing/squatting in a quasi-abandoned building near the Brooklyn Bridge, Quackenbush was aware of a forlorn abandoned female dog whose demeanor markedly perked up when a particular male stray came into her life. The male stray moved into her box next to the Brooklyn Bridge and Quackenbush noted their happy roamings in the neighborhood. Returning after a night photographing rock groups, Quackenbush found this male dog dead on the street, apparently hit by a car. Having experienced a recent setback when equipment problems prevented him from showing his 1964 series of Thelonius Monk photos at a Museum of Modern Art screening, Quackenbush felt himself a failure and in the grip of a nervous breakdown. Based on the dead dog photos that were soon to follow, one could surmise that he was, while crossing the bridge that night, ripe for the process of identification with the most marginal of lost souls. And in his devotion to a process he could not foresee, he reversed the unconditional loyalty of the domesticated canine and became a dog's best friend. What odd loyalties grip us at certain moments in our life! Accompanying some particular creature as far as one can through the portal of death and then further into our own imagination, is a poignant companionship.

Not intending to photograph the dog, Quackenbush spent the rest of the night looking at him. And in something out of a Disney movie, in which animal characters regularly marry and have stable domestic lives, the female stray joined in the vigil. Quackenbush decided to take one photo in a blue light. This first photograph shows the dead dog laying at the intersection of perpendicular cracks in the pavement in an "X" that marks the spot of intersecting destinies. Quackenbush then lifted the dog from the pavement and laid him in a nearby empty lot. The original photo didn't come out blue enough, so he returned to reshoot the dog. Someone had thrown a stick on the body, so Quackenbush removed it and shot its imprint.

That was in January 1968. Quackenbush walked by the lot everyday and inexplicably became enmeshed in a process, reflecting on his own life, on what was happening in the U.S. (the war in Viet Nam, racial unrest) and photographing whatever happened to the dog. Quackenbush related to the dog's cradled position as though he were holding him like a child. He developed every photo on every roll of film, he'd hawk his camera to buy more paper to print, using every camera he could get his hands on.

The winter snows preserved the dog. In late winter 1968, Quackenbush shot the dog at night during a wet snowstorm with a time exposure by

snowlight. In the spring, weeds sprouted around the dog. A Quackenbush journal entry from the time reads: "It is my birthday. They are burying Martin Luther King and there are maggots in the mouth of the dead dog." Radio announcers were saying at the time that King had been "shot down like a dog." Quackenbush started researching the dog as underdog, and his idiosyncratic photographic images became metaphors for the power struggles and violence that were exploding in American society at the time. The warmer weather also brought the smell of decay. Quackenbush made a conscious effort to overcome his repugnance by mentally transforming the smell of death into the smell of all living things combined. The tall weeds eventually obscured the dog, leaving a negative space within the weeds where the body was visible by its absence.

Quackenbush discovered that Walt Whitman had lived in a building that once stood on the site of the empty lot. And the Eagle Storage Building next door had been home to the *Brooklyn Eagle Newspaper,* where Whitman sent his dispatches from the Civil War. In fact, these moving photos do have the morbid, semi-sacred quality of photographs of quiet Civil War battlefields, where dead young boys look like they're napping. Like the dead young boys, the dead dog image is far from the happiness and benign domesticity that we associate with youth or sleeping dogs.

In the Fall of 1968, the empty lot, with its urban greenery and garbage, was cleared to make way for a gas station. In the process, the body of the dog was severed from its head and removed from the lot. The head remained. Quackenbush continued to photograph the dog's head with the imprint of his body still fresh in the ground. The construction workers jeered him. The scene around the dog had always been a changing one, with debris blowing in or people anonymously leaving behind various objects. Quackenbush took these varied manifestations as indications of people's feelings towards death. A beer bottle was left, he believed by one of the workers, on the head of the dog, only to be replaced the next day by a milk carton filled with flowers. As construction progressed, and gas tanks were buried in the ground, the dog's head became harder to find. So Quackenbush took photos of what he saw during his search for the dog. In fact, the dog's head, half covered with crumbling mortar and exposing dry bone, resembled the debris of the site and becomes harder to find in the photos. The eye begins to see the dog's head everywhere as though in a morbid Rorshach Test. In the winter of 1969, debris from the area was bulldozed into a huge hole in the ground, and the dog's head went with it. It was the first time the dog had been moved since Quackenbush had laid him in the empty lot.

Quackenbush originally showed his dead dog series as one long continuous slide show, involving two projectors and hundreds of slides, each dissolving into the next. This mode of display harkens back to that

distinctly '60s medium—the light show. In fact, during the 1960s, Quackenbush assisted in the production of light shows for various artist/hipster parties. Yet, rather than the fluid transmogrification of the psychedelic light show/spectacle, the dead dog series confronts the viewer with the brutal realism of plodding transformations wrought by death, decay, and business.

New Paltz, June 1995

Douglas Quackenbush

EIGHT PHOTOGRAPHS

Doren Robbins

THE INJURY IN MY MOUTH TELLS ME

Today even standing in a cut rag
Mrs. Penser in 5th Street Market,
and all the nose and eyelid rings—today
people enchant me their way, parade their pain
their holes
down to me worthwhile in rings, in skin, in a coat
ripped down the back. Even the injury in my mouth
tells me to look, points to me what
to listen for, as though listening had not yet been enough,
and I had never really seen what putting holes into yourself,
or getting holes, could be about. We are full of holes,
no matter what Mrs. Penser will not say, no matter
her deformed fingers, no matter which Gestapo jail guard
creaming his pants twisting pliers on her hand and will never
be found. Even the smell of your dogs on you today
or the canary that used to sleep on your pillow and dirty it
for your care—also a pleasure dear to you—
even standing as you rock while stroking
your Spatzie, adorable white-pawed stray dog, your own eyes
closed Mrs. Penser. No matter what holds my upper body hair to
[me,
I stir coffee with an arm clogged into holes, the green formica
my elbows row into the granules of, plywoods of poison
[adhesives
delaminated in one ruffled corner where a layer parted its lid
so the dust of the glue could enter me. No matter what smoke
blown chain-smoked into blue numbers, no matter whose wrist
made part blue, etched blue, it was all holes when I looked.
No matter what, I let her graze her cold hole into me,

all her stumps, three yellowed crushed nails row on my hair and
[my hair
sucks onto them, glad for nose and eye lid rings, glad
her death camp fingers are unshawled by gloves—
glad for nipple, glad for foreskin, glad for labial hoops.
Glad the dishonesty didn't work, glad the relatives prohibiting
the urge to look, glad their trying to contain the impulse to
[shudder
didn't work. And Mrs. Penser, bending down to nurse me in the
[dream,
her bra full of staples and roaches. No wince. No blame.
Glad I noticed my mother's stricken reassuring look,
picking up dishes through her long-haired hole, stroking Mrs.
[Penser's
knobby shoulder while she dexterously lit cigarettes
with her two regular fingers, in the room with the pools
of all their smoke, a room of stacked holes. Glad
the stacked cigarette coupons she and her husband
would buy some tool or appliance with no other way,
swept down from a cluttered end table
to the oval burgundy rug—glad they remain,
everyone staring or starting to reach for the coupons
scattered the way I left them from my movement
to break away with my cousins running
to the other room, away.

HERBERT LUST

IT WISH IT WERE

paranoia
how exciting how exquisite
just think enemies into every bush
ambush behind every tree
at last it would have status if paranoid
it would be paid to attention
how magical how vegetable
quite different from it zero now
it don't have squat in worry
no one to stab it in back
—it can't figure it out—
either it no back
or back too small to stab
which O which
it turn it imagined back at least 14 times each day
insides onward hope it be stabbed
"hey" it yell to a friend
"stab it in the back,
it wouldn't put you out so much"
the friend, "yeah but all that takes energy
it isn't worth it
anyway I've this other friend to stab in back,
he claimed he had an idea"
it ask "what about?"
"oh I don't know what but he has an idea
he said it would put him ahead
so I wish him dead"

*

each human too armored to a forever
no way set set set any doubt
doubts inappropriate for genius
so friends have fears but no doubts
they friends know everything what a relief
even though everything led them into deep shit
this deep shit still essence to their genius
their deep shit a superior mystery
deep shit perfume and diamonds
yet this all a blessing in magnificent reverse
for as hope removed frustration
removed to pain removed
a void created pleasure seeps in
thus dead hope is all
no is the new hope for it
so then life resumes it grow
inside a no

*

it wish it were
but the truth is it love people
it love the wonderful way
people can bear the suffering in others
for example one friend stand up with another dying
there is fast and slow dying
slow dying is uncalled for inconsiderate
the real victim is friend forced to watch
this creates a long bad memory
slow dying forces friend forever live with death
indeed adding insult to injury
so if you are dying be a good friend
be quick at the end

*

in fact it wish it were a coward
rather than present half way breath
suffered all life trying to brave all around

until to another it to it prove it big
a million between eyes always searing down
ah cowardice, all your beyond blessings could free it
think about it O courageous reader
no one ever expect diddly-squat from coward
it a coward it so disgusting
ah that it were even more
no aspirations in hold it back
0 at last free to unknown track

*

for example it was in love with it first wife, Franja,
which wife cheated on it with it best friend
then went off and married it next best friend
it next next best friend said
you make too much about it
women are like a train
one leaves another is wait
you are taking all this too personal
a train is a train
some bring joy some are slain

*

in New York a friend is some one
who can be fucked quicker than an enemy
once an almost friend said to it
and thank for his incredible honesty
"you shouldn't be so upset about our argument"
why
"because you are among my 200 best friends"
oh, how many friends do you have
"two thousand or more"
so gore

*

it wish it were
if so, what relief

nothing with people except the without
what called accurate just something less inaccurate
disinterested acts are mental suppositories
conjured up to relieve constipation in despair
that's why wish it were
there would be nothing left to think
every face which approach it an assassin
it still expect everything from friend
the slightest pat on head
and it face turn red

LINDSAY HILL

THREE POEMS

LEADERBOY

Leaderboy bait-sweet strolls among the sate-holes
He do that maskless grab-fandango dance
Scissor the glandular scent-scape ridden of poke
Leaderboy flash his nail-enamel luck
Parlay them back-pipe kisser-cogs on show
Their fawn-self parasite-parts obscured in styles
Leaderboy hole-hunt open-action-drive-train absolute
He ply that lawless viral inside war
He have that action on them all the time
Them pleasure-holes and money-holes complete
He know they cannot be guarded
When they open themselves to eat

CAR LOT LEADERBOY

A squat make a tentative toe-hold on the lot
Leaderboy sight it side-swipe swift and move
His heat-seek coils in a plastic survey mode
Leaderboy sidle the shag
Do a syrup-spurt at the hear-hole part
Make his fingers meat-fork wide and flash
Them eat-hole cutter-caps full-blind

Start that narrowing-caliper roller-talk
Cod begin to bridle and remorse
Leaderboy tack with a pout and reassure
Shimmy the wipe in a rust-white low-ride van
Gullet the hide with a cloy-clamp endocrine close
Pop a money-shunt on the pocket-purse
Suck it out like a egg-sack wasp on go
Leaderboy make a lip-light grooming coo
Route the cob on exit into traffic
Smooth his hair back light and fresh as magic

LEADERBOY IN LOVE

Leaderboy yoke him a she-sweet money-sock
He have a dazzle loose-knit way of talk
Goes: We got all the fluid drives in common Palmy Rump
Her earlier stick he haul behind and murder crisco-slick
Have his pant-hose on her in a jiff
Her hind he calls his heart-beast jellyette
Out loud he nicotine her yap-slot shut
Lose a finger up her semi-sweet
Piewaypoundapoundapound
He make things marvel
She tight her to him like a tattoo net
He drop her like a snizz-wipe two weeks wet

COMMENTARY

Breaking the Surface: Recent Works of Kenward Elmslie

The Broadway Musical is an endangered species. London's West End still mounts dozens of revivals and original plays in the classic modes, while in NYC there may be three uptown musicals—and these Pop-cum-Disney extravaganzas such as *Cats* (poetry putting on alley drag to escape its second-class citizenship), or *Les Miserables* or *Miss Saigon*. Taking up some of the slack are such unclassifiables as the "operas" of Robert Wilson and others working in his wake, works which combine high spectacle (giant cat's legs crossing upstage, unremarked), high "seriousness," and the (strange to say) saving grace of a lack of discernible attitude toward their "subject matter" (if such there is). "Operas" of this kind are non-narrative, offer unconnected dialogue, even solfeggio. The waning of the classic musical gives us as Americans fewer opportunities to examine ourselves: its relation to our culture is both a celebratory and a critical one, its confections given body by tweaking topical references and a shorthand vocabulary that takes for granted its audiences recognition of the amusing/absurd ephemera that surrounds them. But laughing at one's foibles or those of others is no longer a permissible American pastime, and—even while admitting that economics is surely the largest factor—this may in part account for the musicals' near demise.

For an interested onlooker can't help but feel there is an aspect of the triumph of demotic leveling in the form's passing from favor. Unlike the kind of dramatic theatre-of-empathy poet/playwright Bertolt Brecht called "spiritual dope traffic" (at random: say, *Death of a Salesman),* many musicals are casually subversive of empathetic identification, keeping their buoyancy by way of a kind of ironic or even mocking detachment which can seem to an unsympathetic ear to operate from a place "above" its often populist subject matter. The Mega-musicals mentioned above avoid this by a number of devices—cuteness, or technical bedazzlement or a flavoring of two-reeler quality melodrama in their plots. (The large liquid eyes of the waif on the poster for *Les Miserables* are its flag of allegiance.)

But if both ornate language and ironic distance are on the outs on Broadway, they are alive and thriving in the prose and drama of poet/librettist/playwright Kenward Elmslie. Elmslie continues to write musicals with a classic lyrical beauty. From *Night Emerald*, Elmslie's musical-in-progress on Oscar Wilde, here is Wilde's wife, Constance:

> Don't let him mold you
> As he tried to mold me.
> Don't let him shape you, frame you,
> With chisel and brush, rename you—
>
> An objet d'art,
> His Objet D'Art.
>
> I was his Dresden statuette,
> His willowy Rossetti.
> Charades I shan't forget.
> Tableaux Vivants. Confetti.
> Frozen in time,
> He found me sublime,
> An objet d'art
> His Objet D'Art.[1]

That Elmslie's poetic language is descended from his Broadway show tune lyrics has been noted (though this is by no means the *only* source he has mined; Wallace Steven's surface of "glittering nonsense" is also important, as are others. . .), but that the approach to emotionalism in his poetry and prose also owes something to the emotional strategies of the musical theater has been overlooked. Elmslie's Cafe Revue percolate-it-down expertise helps him achieve the speed he desires in his writings—but the glitter and wit has often put such a sheen on the surface that it has re-/de-flected the eye away from most of the emotional content of his work. *Night Emerald* is one of Elmslie's most emotionally direct works, but however well we might understand Constance's warning in the song above, stripped of its music the lyric can seem too rococo for direct impact.

Once freed from the (voluntary) concessions to music and first-time intelligibility, this allusive showbiz language can grow much denser. Here is the unmistakable Broadway sound and eye-rolling expressiveness, but with the more expansive descriptive freedom offered by the prose page:

> Monday, over Kiwi Whiskey Sours, Lulu railed against bifurcated epicene formalism. Tuesday, over Kiwi Boilermakers, she fulminated against the ossification of *La Scuola Metafisica*

> site-specific sculpture. Wednesday, over Kiwi Cuba Libres, she skewered the stylistic ghetto of day-glo parabolists, struggling to inject iconic mystery into funk Surrealism. Thursday, over Kiwi Old Fashioneds, *animalier* imagists provided a ready-made target for her diatribe—how dare they attempt to deaden viewer involvement by illusionist artifice and perspectival distortion! Friday, over Kiwi Moonshots, Lulu, flailing at the art world in general, complained to her husband Bubu, "If I see one more mnemonic fragment, cathartically gestural, where the dialectics between inner calm and outer chaos implode with an institution-sized tautology, I'll—I'll—." The Ming vase shattered on the rec-room parquet.

In this tale, "Nouvelle Kiwis-'N-Art" from *26 Bars,*[2] the emotional outpouring is of a tone, as with so much Broadway, that it can't be taken seriously. The carrying-over of this ironic tone has long meant, however, that much of Elmslie's non-theatrical prose work has been taken as detached or farcical even when it was not meant to be. What seems at first to be a mocking distance is, when looked at closely, a kind of modesty: while the sound is that of a broad burlesque the attitude is one of self-conscious undercutting of the voice's self-importance. It is this mixed emotional message, as much as the slippery verbiage, which can make it difficult for readers to identify with the underlying feelings in Elmslie's writings.

The poetry is somewhat easier to feel our way into than the prose. While it is often even denser than the prose, the poetry is more tonally and emotionally integrated—in part because the poetry generally is the sound of *a* voice, a direct address, where the prose is composed with the dramatic dictum "show, don't tell" in mind. In the poem "Local Branch" we read:

> Sun, wind, gamma wavelengths, wind sun.
>
> Luscious disarray thrusts out, up and at 'em.
> They natter away, fending off devourers whatever their tech.
>
> Calipers have categorized zillions of odor lingos,
> filaments with rhythmic dialects you and I'd kill for,
> survival subterfuges experts still file under GUNK.
>
> Database in superb shape despite cutbacks. Warehoused.
> I can attest the last oral will power ode just went off camera—
> how to eke out a leg-up when I sleep cruddy, the Fed.
> I chowdown good, piss on the grass, shit razorblades A-OK.

This is the specialized vocabulary of the pop science pages, here given a spin to produce a spring pastorale. Through the dense language we hear the sound of dawning happiness, of cautious optimism.

Using much the same kind of language, but instilling it with a lot of isometric cultural wit ("isometric" because it exercises a part of its own force against another part, as in Lulu's art world quandaries above) Elmslie can also detail a civilization running down, consuming itself, as in "YX," the twenty-fifth of his *26 Bars:*

> . . .Errata get wedged in spark plugs from computer dust. Computer dust'll do that, once it gets in machinery. Motes hang on for dear life, onto the fumes rampaging in the Siamese standpipes all over any city, ghetto and high-rise. Through keyholes. Onto pillow. Fluffing only aggravates the destructive force in our midst. If only we could find some stalwarts to jut shoulder to wheel, a common crusade, tribal. The generator the spark plugs activate must date back—hmmm. Back to when women were threatened by hairy paws. Men too, but not many. The rub is, you can only go to the well only so often only, in one and only life only, setting aside for now the poss—
>
> Would you object if we skip past contingency plans involving frou-frou in an afterlife?

Elmslie's characters, for all their wild improbability at times, for all the verbal motley that festoons them, are particular and culturally precise. Elmslie's writings are, among other things, histories of our time. And an awareness of the plague of our time has figured in several recent works. Often taken as an extremely stylized, *l'art pour l'art* writer, Elmslie has now surfaced as the author of a series of emotionally wrenching works, produced with only a slight refocusing of his trademark gumbo of argots and tone swings. Striving to come to grips with the AIDS epidemic, with considerations of that final awkward age, that of approaching death, Elmslie's emotionalism has broken through his bright surface in the musical play *Postcards On Parade*, the memoir *Bare Bones*, and the prose rumination "Champ Dust" with its art collage offshoots.

Postcards On Parade is by no means "an AIDS play." It concerns itself with many things—is in large part an investigation of obsessions, of the detritus of nostalgia, and, above all, of fighting for one's emotional well-being using whatever means might be at hand—even the humble postcard. But one of the threads followed in the play is that of a gay couple, one of whom is HIV positive. The facing up to mortality intrudes on the song and

dance of the musical in this (here condensed) letter-writing monologue by the afflicted character, Kevin:

> Sorry 'bout this, Tim. The scoop is: a terrific future awaits me. It's like winning a screwball once-in-a-lifetime lottery. I get to join great gang of guys and gals, simpatico compadres such as you and I, plus some Top Ten Biggies. We've been handpicked. We're known collectively as the VIP Positives . . . .Klutzy corpuscles dog-paddle in my polluted bloodstream, going nowhere fast. Olympic virtuosos they're not . . . .My corpuscles give good slapstick, period. As hilarious as a one-armed ice-skater on an oil-slicky rink littered with banana peels, trying to screw a light bulb, which my klutzy corpuscles think is a "life bulb," into a life-support system gone bonkers. . . .Which describes my current situation. . . .[I]t would take a genius, part Kafka, part Sam Spade, throw in Sam Beckett, *The Book of Job, Moby Dick*, Leonard Elmore—or is it Elmore Leonard, plus ten thousand episodes of *The Young and the Restless* to cope with my system's daily round—shoot out, coup d'etats, terrorism—a level of violence and subterfuge the CIA would give its eyeteeth to attain. . . .The City of Me's days are numbered.[4]

A unity comprised of such a wild clash of emotional tones is not unique, but everywhere around us: Yiddish theater at times includes a pair of clowns who appear on stage during sad scenes, and do comedy as tragedy occurs center stage (a device that influenced Kafka); and in the American Southwest some religious ceremonies of the Pueblo People include "sacred clowns," who mock the actions of mere men as compared to the gods; the parodic elements of their roles even allowing them to act at times as a kind of "ethical police." And "real life" itself certainly abounds with volatile emotional mixtures. But Elmslie's hybrids are exceptional in the extremes they embrace—the registers he climbs and descends seem hardly to be part of the same emotional world, or at the very least that of a sensibility fragmenting itself to cope with all the relentless emotional "incoming" raining down in its "City of Me."

It is worth turning aside briefly to note that Elmslie lists Bertolt Brecht as one of his influences. He cites Brecht, in part, for his political stance. (Though rarely overtly political now, Elmslie characterizes himself as having been a "Park Avenue Commie" when younger.) Both poet/playwrights produce[d] works very much of their time and national situation. (Should pages of Elmslie's or Brecht's work wash ashore,

undated, at some great future remove, a culturally aware reader could likely place the writing of the works almost to a specific year, so strong is the grasp of both writers on the forces both threatening and clowning around them.) Brecht lived in a Germany where hobnail boots walked his city streets, while Elmslie lives in a USA where stunted sensibilities and sanctioned selfishness rule the range. Brecht's stance was naturally more extreme, but no more accurately reflective than is Elmslie's. And Brecht's theater was based on more than politics. He looked beyond specifics and characterized the Germany he lived in as "ordered disorder," where even the most common events refuse to lay comfortably in a context, but remained "Hard to explain, even if it is the custom. Hard to understand, even if it is the rule."[5] This is also true of the world Elmslie's characters move through. Drawing from his fragilely balanced surroundings Brecht developed his notion of an "epic" theater. "Epic" not meaning Mega-theater, but in contrast to "dramatic" theater, where all the parts are drawn into an artificially-straight storyline. With Brecht's "epic" works, with their structures of interruption one can, as it were, take a pair of sheers and cut them into individual pieces, which will remain fully capable of independent life. Where Brecht used songs and captions to break up his plays, Elmslie employs tonal and language shifts to the same end. (Parenthetically: such a structure may harm the work in "dramatic" circles, but this is precisely what helps a work become a "cult" play, or book, or film, et al. And Elmslie and Brecht are, indeed, both "cult" authors.)

Elmslie *can* write with copper cent simplicity, as in *BARE BONES*, his small book memoir of the life and death of his longtime friend, artist/poet Joe Brainard:

> He accepts the unacceptable.
> Where does such deep grace come from?
> We discuss our respective deaths.
> Ashes,
> Field uphill,
> Us Both,
> Ashes scattered,
> Flesh ash, bone ash,
> One day commingled,
> Under white pines,
> An enclosure Ron calls "druidic."[6]

But this straightforwardness is an anomaly, a one-of-a-kind born of a terrible loss. Written in the same period, the prose rage of "Champ Dust" is more directly in Elmslie's "line." Here he foregrounds his sense of wrenching pain, and sets it in the near-prehensile urban menace of his

surroundings. Closely related to both *Bare Bones* and the AIDS-impacted parts of *Postcards*, but much denser and darker, "Champ Dust" has the author facing both the mortality of his friend, the "Lost Boy," and the onset of his own aging. The characteristic argots and lingos abound here, but for all the snake dancing of the language, the emotional weight can only be called straightforward:

> In the entrails, skateboard whiz, my shadow friend, has been trussed into an epoch of vin ordinarie and heartless individuation now rage among hot role male model—street-smart but brain-dead. What the fusion magazine states is: experts must come down harder on Lumpy Harriet and her ilk. Not ethical, spoiling quality time daylight hours. No safe turf, now monsters of the night penetrate the winter screens, infiltrate our personal water sports, take a dump on our never-to-be-fondled sateen ensembles, abscond with upscale exotica luxury items—Lamborghini Romeo & Yseult conversion vans to die for—and they don't even have operator permit or bother to deign semiotic foreplay ads in their verbless nounless salt mine dialect of whimpers and grunts, but what really pisses me off, Lost Boy, Lost Boy, oh darling soul mate, forgive this hyper riff, is they just won't help us develop a basic long-term strategy. Brood about this on rainy summer afternoons. Energized by mistaken identity Lost Boy mutants.[7]

While Elmslie's tone even here evidences some of the persistent insouciance that is a chop mark of the supposed "New York School," his sound is a dark hybrid—a sort of mystery thriller spliced into technical reportage; very precise but with a heightened dramatic quality that can make the reader squint, as at film noir.

The play's "City of Me" here has become the entire world, a horrible urban grid where the victims are shunned or abandoned. (Elmslie here gives "society" a number of unusually sharp kicks.) To read "Champ Dust" is to be lidless in sight of the modern world, to don virus [sic] reality goggles with arms pinned to your sides: all the fear and anger and sadness are presented with LCD garishness and injected directly along the short nerves from the eyes to the mind. There is rage here, including rage at the onlooker's helplessness, a rage not so much inarticulate as hyper-articulate, the deepest feelings being forced out, its language pained and clotted, intensely private. The reader has to fight the impulse to step away from its violence.

The intensification in the move from *Postcards On Parade* to "Champ Dust" is taken a further, more physical step with "Champ Dust Smegma."

Here Elmslie has literally torn fragments from the text of "Champ Dust" and collaged them with snippets of old-fashioned comic postcards, so that one page of the work offers the deconstructed acrostic "Antsy scenario / shrouded D / E snoozing / behind the tormentor / fornicating with T / up in the flies / H harnessed / under the drop cloth / Diaghelev, I'm not," with torn edges visible, set in an arrangement of comic fat lady on a table, Rube Goldberg-ish old man onlooker, and silhouette in a snappy cap.[8] Other fragments are set among rabbits popping out of hats, and amid trotting skunks. If *Postcards* is the beginning of the descent chronicled in these three works, then the postcard art of "Smegma" is evidence that Elmslie has come to terms with his tragic subject, bottomed out with the harrowing rage of "Champ Dust" proper, and brought that rage back up through the language surface, up where he can face it squarely, finally tame it, force it to jump through hoops of his choice.

Read individually, each of these recent pieces offers a compelling experience. Read serially, they show a writer of (Brechtian) epic scale.

Notes [All works by Kenward Elmslie, except where noted.]

1. "Objet D'Art." Printed as part of "Six Segments from 'Night Emerald,'" in *New American Writing* #8/9 (Fall 1991), pp. 220-221.
2. *26 Bars*. New York: Z Press (1987), p. 87.
3. "Local Branch," in *o-blek* #10 (Fall 1991), pp. 52-53.
4. *Postcards On Parade*. Flint: Bamberger Books (1993), pp. 67-69.
5. Bertolt Brecht, *The Exception and the Rule*, in *The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays* (Eric Bentley, trans). New York: Grove Press (1965), p. 111.
6. *Bare Bones*. Flint: Bamberger Books (1995), p. 15.
7. "Champ Dust," in *The New Censorship*, v. 4 #12 (March 1994). With reprinted drawings by Joe Brainard.
8. "Champ Dust Smegma," in *Mirage* #4/Period(ical) #36 (November 1994).

(*Postcards On Parade* is being workshopped. A ten postcard version of the art collages, to be titled "Champ Dust Spinoff," is due to appear from the Alternative Press, in Ann Arbor, Michigan.)

—W.C. BAMBERGER

Erasing Modern Poetry

On one or two occasions I have reported on publications, events or developments in the profession of literary and cultural studies for readers of *Sulfur*, with the idea that not all of the readers of this journal have at least one hat in the academic ring and may be curious. But here's a story even

the academics among you probably don't know. A couple of years ago an historian, Joyce Appleby, was touring Asia and noticed that many of the libraries there were weak in their holdings of American books. She was mostly concerned with books on history, economics, business, political science, and the like, and remedying this situation became something like a mission for her. With luck that surely won't be duplicated in the near future, she managed to convince our government that it ought to do something about the situation and made enough noise to get Congress to vote 2 million dollars to buy books. The OAH (an organization of American historians) soon became involved, and the job of making the libraries happen was passed to the United States Information Agency (USIA). This is one of the things that the USIA does—cultural "outflow" I once heard it called. At the USIA, a scholar-in-residence, Andrew Lakritz, recommended that the list of books be expanded to include literature, philosophy, and other subjects; the OAH had apparently assumed that literature was already better represented than, say, history, especially in Eastern Europe. The USIA farmed out the job of compiling lists in literature, philosophy, and a few other subjects to the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), providing them with a 27,000 dollar grant to be used presumably for release-time for preparing the bibliographies. I am concerned here only with what happened to the list of books in American literature. For all I know the lists compiled for history and so forth are just fine. But what happened to American literature is an abomination.

One assumes that the scholars the ACLS contacted to construct these lists were not mere flunkies, but rather some of the most influential and powerful people in the scholarly community. Steven Wheatley of ACLS told me on the phone that each list was sent to a group of scholars who made selections; these lists were then reviewed by other scholars. So when it turns out that such committees of academics have erased nearly the whole of twentieth-century American poetry and fiction it can hardly be an accident. Indeed, the American literature list is a powerful indication of trends in the profession today. I 'll limit myself to a discussion of the contents of that list, since it is my first concern and presumably the concern of many *Sulfur* readers.

So what's on the list the ACLS finally submitted to the USIA staff, a list containing some 310 volumes? What will students and readers at academic institutions like Hankai University, the University of Peradeniya-Kandy, Maduri Karamaj University, the University of Lodz, and many others—places where the local writers may be languishing in jails—have available now in the way of American writing? Well there's lots and lots of criticism and scholarship, and many expensive bibliographies of Jewish-American, African-American, Chinese-American, and Chicano literatures. There's Stephen Sumida's *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of*

Hawaii, Mary E. Young's *Mules and Dragons: Popular Culture Images in the Selected Writings of African-American and Chinese-American Women.* At $95, there's *Fifty Southern Writers After 1900: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook.* There are three books by Houston Baker, Jr., two by Cecilia Tichi, and of course there are the two volumes of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, site of an emerging canon and orthodoxy. There are three volumes by Zora Neale Hurston, two by Jack London, one by Toni Morrison—her essays rather than one of her novels. And for twentieth-century American poetry the ACLS list includes—beyond the limited and very problematical selections included in the second volume of the *Heath*—a mere four books: Frost's *Collected Poems*, Stevens' *Collected Poems* (filed under Wallace in my copy of the list), William Carlos Williams' *Selected Poems*, and Adrienne Rich's *The Fact of a Doorframe.* No books by Pound, Eliot, Niedecker, Crane, Oppen, Olson, Duncan, Lowell, Merrill, Bishop, Baraka, Creeley, Reznikoff, Zukofsky, Rukeyser, O'Hara, Bronk, Loy, Hughes, Ginsberg, Stein, Tolson, Fearing, Moore, Brown, H. D., Spicer, Rothenberg—you name it. Sure, there are a few poems by Pound, Moore and others in the *Heath* (the post-1945 selection is much weaker), but one wouldn't want whole books by these poets, right? **NO POETRY ALLOWED, ESPECIALLY MODERNIST AND POST-MODERNIST POETRY**. Even the criticism and scholarship on contemporary poetry is left to one book each by Charles Altieri, Alicia Ostriker, Susan Schweik, and Rich. For fiction the folks the ACLS put on to this task have done nearly as great a disservice to works already secure in an international audience—not a single novel on the list by Djuna Barnes, Kay Boyle, William Gaddis, Vladimir Nabokov, John Hawkes, William Gass, Thomas Pynchon, Cynthia Ozick, Ishmael Reed, Donald Barthelme, or Paul Auster. One could go on but the omissions are very depressing. If the Library of America volumes weren't included—the whole set is part of the list—one wonders whether even William Faulkner would have made the cut or been left to his representation in the *Heath* anthology or in some scholarly reading.

Now don't get me wrong. It's not that I have a problem with any specific book included in the American literature list—I haven't read some of them. Nor do I even particularly object to the "multiculturalism" that seems to inform the list, though in this version, as too often, what we seem to have is an insular and provincial "multiculturalism" thoroughly ignorant of some of the more internationalizing and cross-cultural developments in twentieth-century literature. Gerald Early has made the point before: "Despite cries of 'inclusivity,' a certain obvious provincialism pervades multiculturalism." Such provincialism is on view even in some of the more prestigious academic press journals, though there are exceptions of course, just two of which I'll mention here in case you don't know of them (they are perhaps less known to *Sulfur* readers than some others). There's the

Oxford University Press journal *Transition*, edited by Wole Soyinka, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., truly a model for a multi-disciplinary journal dedicated to a readable prose and a range of interesting subjects. Then there's Robert von Hallberg and Lawrence Rainey's Johns Hopkins University Press journal *Modernism/Modernity*, with scholarship in modernism across the arts and nations—a journal that represents the antithesis of the insular multicultural provincialism I mentioned above. In the review section of its most recent issue, Harvey Teres ends a review with words that might be applied to the agendas of many in power in today's academy as they are busy constructing orthodoxies while babbling platitudes about how great life will be in their world, where they have supposedly put canons aside. Here's Teres: "The curious eye, the power of description, the fitness of a chosen word, the adequacy of tone—in short strategy, device, and influence—are sadly neglected. Someday the story will be told how a generation of academics, convinced that the current social arrangement precludes quality lives for the majority, could become so blind to the rare examples of quality that survive so many morbid symptoms today."

As things go, the story of the USIA-contracted list does have an ending better than it might have had, thanks especially to Andy Lakritz. He had the good sense to recognize the ACLS list for the crap that it was. He asked me for suggestions for books of poems and novels, and I compiled a list of some seventy-five collections of poems and novels (and criticism of the same) that might be added. I wish I might have added more, but I was worried about budgets, and didn't know if I was free to erase any part of the existing list. Andy went ahead and deleted some of the more expensive bibliographies and the merely fashionable scholarship and added still more poems and novels. But this ending should not make *Sulfur* readers too happy. Neglect of modern poetry and fiction in the academy is on the rise, and scholars are more and more convinced that what's happening in American writing is happening only in their own books.

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Pig Press

Together with North and South, Reality Studios, and a few others, Ric Caddel's Pig Press is one of England's finest small press publishers of poetry. Since 1972, Caddel has been working to put out handsomely-produced editions of selected American poets and a number of the best British and Irish poets. The print-runs typically are small—about 400—but in a poetry world where Simon Armitage's greased-up Larkinesque verse, meant for reading between business appointments, makes him one of the most popular poets, you don't expect the likes of Barry MacSweeney, Allen

Fisher, Kelvin Corcoran, Gael Turnbull, and Elaine Randell to sell in bulk. Most of Pig's books are now available from SPD in Berkeley, and I want here to mention three of the most recent—Catherine Walsh's *Pitch*, Maurice Scully's *The Basic Colours*, and Roy Fisher's small pamphlet *It Follows That*.

Walsh is a young Irish poet who lives now in Eastbourne, having also recently spent time in Spain. A collision of cultures and languages—Sganish, English, Gaelic, Dublin slang—is evident in the volume, which is comprised of four middle-length poems, the first of them beginning with a Spanish lyric sounding a good deal like something by Alfosina Storni or Delmira Agustini, though I haven't been able to trace a source and it may be by Walsh herself. She works in small, shifting units of meditative and descriptive fragments, a modality sometimes faintly reminiscent of some of Tom Raworth's poetry. Alternating line-length in discontinuous blocks of writing she circles around a number of concerns historical, personal, domestic, political, and otherwise. In her visual text it is possible that the influence of Susan Howe's work is manifest. There is an emphasis on poetic process and the erasures and omissions of the text as they compete with the "inability to let go of moments/ time phases":

> how to distinguish those portions
> still valid
> from those
> superseded
> (his whiteness) ( ) (his scales)
>
> the stillness
> for any new movement
> simply
> acquisition of information
>
> something important
> about blood

Walsh's form is capacious enough to contain a small song like "o glad snow" and produces provocative juxtapositions of an abstract, conceptual poetic discourse and another, more emotionally direct idiom, as in the following passages from near the beginning of the second "Pitch":

> blame the way out-arked mythified in the long
> line of throes and chaos to decentre can involve denial
> of experience legendloded bits demand the act
> deny self this is irritatingly dense

I must be busy bell rings
in a coloured ball on
a ribbon frantically
thumps the wall

At times like this, the text seems to unfold as an articulation of its own processes in a kind of parthenogenesis of the sentence, or as set of open, intensely self-conscious and self-swallowing meditations at high velocity. But there are other, more descriptive and image-laden moments in the poems, as the poet seeks to make lists, to name things and places even while cognizant of the fact that such activity is "heavy with / denial of loss." There is a past in Ireland (on the dole perhaps?), a baby (who's tossed everything out of the cot by now), and perhaps also some tension between a text wanting to celebrate the "unknown" and a desire to end in some slightly less dislocated posture—as the "Pitch" sequence does, "half the way/ home/ on one/way streets."

There are any number of American poets who write something like this:

realize
this is not memory
conditions
the state of the subject at
the moment
in question being

making pictures
to walk into wide
edging on

But there are fewer Americans, I think, especially among the avant-garde, as interested in exploring the few remaining viable elements of a pastoral tradition. And yet such a tradition enters into the third "Pitch" in the volume, which follows the second's fragments on Dublin: "past spring groves beech chestnut bog-oak/fairy ráth wild fruit clumping/hassocks of long bog grass[.]" I'm tempted to say that I prefer this last, most sensuous section of the poem, but one can't neglect the other two "pitches," the first of which pushes toward a flurry of exploded fragments and accents in an effort to—if I can borrow from two different parts of the text—"dredge the zest" from a "stasis/in the/face of more/instants." Even as her text keeps slipping away from me into its many fragments and lists, each word an event, the pace of the poem determined not just by length of line but also by the size of textual blocks and the willingness to indulge a syntax, there is an emotional

residue left behind, a variety of complex tonalities too rarely found in the more monolithic ironized play of many experimentalists.

Maurice Scully is an Irish poet roughly ten years older than Walsh, and his poetry does share a little with hers beyond the refusal of self-important certainties and propositions. At one point he quotes from a postcard the phrase "Anti-rational emotionalism lives on," and this seems a fair-enough credo for his poetry, which is finally more wary, consistently self-deprecating and even "anti-intellectual" than Walsh's, less "self-reflexive," more given to a continuity in its movement if only a little less elliptical. The book is framed by two poems, the first referring to and the last quoting from a story by the children's writer Enid Blyton: "all the little cars were grey." Sentiment and charm confront a guttural, stoic laughter. Between the framing poems there are sequences of what Scully calls "sonnets," all of them interesting but none more so than the first from a second "site"—"On Site: B"—which engages Lesotho culture. This poem is a kind of dialogue in which an italicized "voice"—we meet it first in the book's first poem—responds to another "voice" intent on getting inside the "beat" to "catch it precisely/ not bend it smooth it out/into Literature or Song or Art. . . ." Scully does, at times, work close to song:

> & so the little flowers
> bunched up &
> spoke to me & this
> is what they said
>
> how are yr friends
> they said
> are they all dead
> they said
> we heard they were
> you know, & feared. . .

That won't do, however, so the italics tell us to grimace and flip to another page. In other poems Scully works closer to prose:

> wigs stiff with grease, white mercury
> rouge, mice, misery—I can't stand it!
> I must. cave painting is not art/later
> that sickness. history: a grammar. make
> the present perfect—leave it!
>
> mentally nodding, shaking the head, wanting
> out, out of here, most of the time, voting

for Inside when Outside counted the cards,
a blundering puppet locked into the template,
an idiot, a stupid. . .a fool, a blithering
thick, I. . .

. . .I have nothing to say about that.

Persona and personality are part of the game in such "emotionalism" and it's hard not to succumb to the sympathetic magic of Scully's "pattern ache vanishing into life's pixels," where what is *is* "& that was that." Pretension and Art—with the big "A"—are the enemies. One poem tours a gallery:

parquet

picture parquet

square wall

picture picture picture picture picture

DOOR

I've read few books lately that offered such unabashed pleasure, such a small but precise complex of joy and resignation.

The highlight of Roy Fisher' s pamphlet is "A Modern Story," a literary barb aimed at the British Arts Council. As readers of the late Eric Mottram will know, the Arts Council has for many years done everything it can to suppress or ignore innovative writing in England. Fisher has had perhaps a little more visibility than some poets of his generation, but if you believe as I do that some of his longer poems, especially *A Furnace*, are among the greatest poems of the last thirty years, then you'll appreciate this grim, savagely funny fable. It tells the story of a "poet" awarded one of the Arts Council Literature panel's "five bursaries." But the poet can't write with the money in hand and so decides to set up a poetry competition, where the real money's at. Pretty soon he's got enough to buy some vanity presses, and then he's rolling in it. Eventually a man comes around and offers to sell him the Arts Council Literature Department itself:

"NO deal," I told him. "I'm a straight business man now, not a gangster."

And the poet hands him his remaindered books. An easy joke maybe? But how many of Roy Fisher's books have been remaindered? And why isn't this poem in one of his Oxford University Press collections?

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Red Sauce, Whiskey, and Snow
is the title of August Kleinzahler' s latest collection, out from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. One might have picked other titles—"Winos in the Dappled Light" comes to mind, as one or another form of Hopkins' word "dappled" occurs several times in the poems. Ultimately Kleinzahler is a romantic sensualist, a hedonist whose soft raptures are regularly disturbed by urban banalities and sleeze, or by noise from the TV:

> The earth
> after a fortnight's thaw,
> loosens, loosening some more
> until a musty bouquet
>
> digs a small trench in us, light
> playing on pebbles and clods,
> traceries in clay.
> Suddenly car doors,
> jets and *the brutal slaying in Queens*—
>
> morning rinsing the shadows,
> pouring out day.

Kleinzahler has pitched his tent between the fiefdoms of Basil Bunting and Thelonious Monk, and there is no questioning the great formal skill of his poems—the tone-leading of vowels, the small and angular dislocations of syntax, the rhythm of the phrase:

> Under the tailings and slag
> the salt burns down,
> through clay, through schist
>
> and boil in the stream
> where the little lamb drinks
> slaughtered for meat

He is probably a little more dependent on the noun and the noun phrase than his master Bunting, a little weaker in the verb, and he is certainly more willing to let the voices of urban and suburban chaos into the poetry. Many of the poems are small perfect artifacts, but one wonders a little about their content, or rather Kleinzahler's treatment of their content. Jimmy the Lush down guzzling poison at the park and talking away, or some street-person mangled on the sidewalk outside a restaurant strike me as finally unhurt and harmless, bathed in a Kleinzahler persona that contains as much milk as acid. They aren't the broken people of Baudelaire's "Tableaux Parisians" and they aren't likely to become the militia folks talking about fertilizer. One might compare Thom Gunn's powerful "Old Meg" in *The Man With Night Sweats*, which ends with an old demented woman turning to the poet and telling him "Blood on you!" and Kleinzahler's more quirky "Outside the Restaurant":

> My lady pulled my sleeve
> to see
> the squat man on the sidewalk
> near
> hand on his joint,
> under siege by terrible gravity
>
> pulling him down
> pulling him down
>
> . . .
>
> turned,
> galling his bones
>
> turned back to us
> and said
>
> acid,
> dark as a witch:
>
> —*So long, beautiful.*

This is "authentic," one supposes, and I always admire the poems for their movement, for the noises they make, but the New Jersey guffaw that is the posture of this and other poems can seem at times almost as canned as Jimmy Cagney. I'm worried about picking at these poems because the skill with which they are made is great, and the Catullan and Villonesque

traditions and sensibilities are important to me. See, for instance, the energetic rewriting of Villon in "Going":

> Look at Sinatra and Reagan,
> dewlaps trembling in the wee small hours,
> glued to *I Love Lucy* reruns
> as the Secret Service men doze.
> They own cliffs and enormous stretches
> of desert, those two—
> shopping centers, distilleries.
>
> Lucy is dead, boys, give it up:
> Desi, the Duke and Ava,
> dust;
> even little Sammy's
> checked out.

The same tension between pastoral bliss and urban bile so evident in much of Kleinzahler's work can be found in Bunting, though in the later poems it is resolved or anyway integrated in ways that Kleinzahler has not yet managed. Kleinzahler should give the boot to poems like "A Case in Point," which blasts others (poets perhaps? language poets?) whom he despises for "backing off from the authentic." The poem is nearly as predictable as Yeats' "The Scholars"—Kleinzahler has another poem in an earlier volume written in the wake of that cheap shot. But there are also indications of new directions in form and subject matter in this substantial book—narrative poems, satirical readings of high European culture, the Gulf War poem "Crunching Numbers," others. Kleinzahler's is an immense talent that seems as if it might need someone or something to push him beyond what he already does nearly perfectly.

**My thanks to my friends William Walsh and Ted Maier for conversations of considerable value in helping me read Catherine Walsh—no relation!—and Maurice Scully.

—KEITH TUMA

An Anthology of Anthologies

The Columbia Anthology of American Poetry, edited by Jay Parini, 750 pages from Anne Bradstreet to Louise Gluck, is being heavily promoted as the new standard; it's even a Book-of-the-Month selection. For *Sulfur* readers, it will only be of sociological interest for those who are amused watching the glass-enclosed elevators of literary reputation. Thus, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Olson, Creeley, and Duncan have now been admitted, but they are grudgingly allotted one or two pages each. Oppen, Rexroth, Spicer, Blackburn, Everson (among the dead) are still nobody. Of *Sulfur* contributors, only Ashbery, Snyder, Ginsberg, and Baraka are included. The major living poets are, according to the page-count, Levine, Ashbery, Pinsky, Rich, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Fame in America, as ever, is once again proved fleeting: prize-winning major poets of yesterday and today such as the Benets, van Doren, Gregory, Zaturenska, Karl Shapiro, X.J. Kennedy, Kizer, Kumin, Logan, Simpson, Dugan, Bly, Meredith, Swenson, Hugo, Howard are history, and Merwin (called "William S." as he was in the 1950s) gets slapped in the face with a single page, no better than some avant-gardist. Meanwhile Teasdale, Wylie and Winters linger on, and a host of future unknowns are introduced.

In the new Multi-Culti world, there are many more women and African-Americans than there used to be in such books—particularly a lot of (usually justifiably) forgotten women from the 19th century—but the redressing of imbalance does not extend to Loy, Stein or Niedecker. Among the women, there is one scandal and two surprises: Dickinson still remains too radical for these oak-panelled walls: though praised in the introduction, she's given less space than Longfellow and, almost unbelievably, her punctuation has been "normalized" (as they used to call it)—even now, after forty years of the Johnson edition and a thousand monographs on her dashes. (Would a *Columbia History of Art* put black bars across the nudes?) Moore and Millay are definitely in the UP elevator: Moore, in number of pages, is the third greatest poet of the century, after Eliot and Stevens (followed by Frost, Lowell, Merrill and Pound); and Millay gets the same space as Williams.

The brief introduction is most notable for this piece of Newt jingoism: "The modernist movement in poetry was largely American in its origins." We also learn that Imagism was "founded by Amy Lowell and H.D. and joined by Ezra Pound," and has been an important influence on the (otherwise unmentioned) Language poets, and that *The Cantos* "has failed to convince anyone but a few isolated critics of its greatness." The book, unusually for a university press publication, contains no bibliography or any notes on the individual poets.

But there's more: I became interested in the book after a glance at the table of contents. Charles Olson was represented by one short poem, "Poem 143: The Festival Aspect." This happens to be a poem I included as part of the Olson section in my anthology, *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators & Outsiders.* Buried in the third volume of *Maximus*, it is little-known: not included in the Olson *Selected Poems*, or reprinted elsewhere. There was no way in hell, in thicket, that another anthologist—particularly one with no apparent interest in Olson—would have independently selected the same short poem from Olson's vast work. Clearly Parini had read my book.

I started checking out the other poets whom we both include, and found various cases where Parini repeated part of my selection for an individual poet. Some of these were not terribly unusual: poems by Baraka, O'Hara and Zukofsky that are not often anthologized, but are not especially obscure. The give-away was a poem by Rukeyser, "Iris": I had pulled it out of her huge *Collected*, both as a poem I liked and to bounce off a poem by Sobin called "Irises." Rukeyser's "Iris" has never been reprinted in an anthology, and isn't even included in the new Rukeyser *Reader.* The other poem in Parini's Rukeyser section was "Then I Saw What the Calling Was," also an unusual choice. I had a hunch Parini hadn't discovered it in the poet's own books. When I tracked it down—in Fleur Adcock's *The Faber Book of 20th Century Women's Verse*—I also found Parini's complete selection for Josephine Miles.

Small wonder I began to wonder what other anthologies Parini had been reading, and, limiting myself to the 20th century poets from James Weldon Johnson to Louise Gluck—assuming their "canon" to be less petrified than the 19th—I compared selections. It turned out that, with merely a cursory search through a handful of other books, I could account for two-thirds of the poems and almost two-thirds of the complete or nearly complete sections for individual poets. One-third of the poems were taken from Richard Ellman's *The New Oxford Book of American Verse.* If we add Ellman and Robert O'Clair's *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* we have nearly half the poems. Even more blatantly, in a book that pretends to be a new multicultural reading, all of the Native American poems came from one anthology, Duane Niatum's *Carriers of the Dream Wheel*, and all of the poems for six African-American poets (and most of a seventh) are from the old 1938 James Weldon Johnson *Book of American Negro Poetry.*

These anthologies were apparently supplemented, to a lesser degree, with poems from J.D. McClatchy's *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry;* Stuart Freibert & David Young's *Longman Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry;* and Robert di Yanni's *Modern American Poets: Their Voices and Visions.*

Here's the breakdown:

Selections entirely or largely drawn from *Oxford:* Vachel Lindsay; Robinson Jeffers; T.S. Eliot; Archibald MacLeish; e.e. cummings; Hart Crane; Allen Tate; Delmore Schwartz; Robert Duncan; Denise Levertov; A.R. Ammons; Sylvia Plath; Carl Sandburg (3/6); H.D. (4/6); Conrad Aiken (2/3); Elizabeth Bishop (4/7); James Merrill (3/6).

Selections entirely or largely drawn from McClatchy: W.D. Snodgrass; Galway Kinnell; Anne Sexton; Robert Hass; Randall Jarrell (2/3).

Selections entirely drawn from Weinberger: Louis Zukofsky; Charles Olson.

Selections entirely drawn from Johnson (African-Americans): James Weldon Johnson; Paul Laurence Dunbar; Claude McKay; Gwendolyn Bennett; Arna Bontemps; Countee Cullen.

Selections entirely drawn from Niatum (Native Americans): N. Scott Momaday; Simon J. Ortiz.

Selections entirely drawn from *Norton:* Jean Toomer; Marilyn Hacker.

Selection entirely drawn from Adcock: Josephine Miles.

Selections entirely or largely drawn from *Longman:* Donald Justice; Nancy Willard; Charles Wright (4/6).

Selections entirely drawn from di Yanni: Robert Creeley; James Tate.

Selections entirely or largely drawn from combinations of these anthologies:

Oxford plus *Norton:* John Crowe Ransom.

Johnson plus *Norton:* Langston Hughes.

McClatchy plus *Norton:* Richard Wilbur; Gary Snyder; Theodore Roethke (5/8).

Weinberger plus *Norton:* Frank O'Hara; Allen Ginsberg; Amiri Baraka.

Longman plus *Norton:* William Stafford.

Longman plus McClatchy: Robert Hayden.

Adcock plus Weinberger: Muriel Rukeyser.

Oxford plus McClatchy: John Berryman (5/6); Robert Lowell (6/7); James Wright (4/5).

Oxford plus di Yanni: Robert Frost; Ezra Pound; Marianne Moore.

Oxford plus di Yanni plus *Longman:* Wallace Stevens (9/10).

These are the sources I could track down in an afternoon; it is probable that a more diligent researcher could find more. [The poets I couldn't find generally fall into two groups: women from earlier in the century—Amy Lowell, Teasdale, Wylie, Millay, Adams, Riding—which possibly indicates an anthology I missed, and contemporary poets, many of them Parini's

colleagues at Bread Loaf, whom it must be assumed that he actually reads.] To the inevitable response that many poems are "canonical" or "anthology pieces," it's worth noting that for certain poets—among them, Stickney, Williams, Penn Warren, Brooks and Rich—Parini has clearly made his own choices. And it's interesting to compare Helen Vendler's *Harvard Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry* or Hayden Carruth's *The Voice That Is Great Within Us,* which, covering many of the same poets, rarely overlap with Parini. McClatchy and Ellman are quite different, and even Ellman (the secret and unwitting co-editor of this book) going from the *Oxford* to the *Norton,* only repeats himself half the time. Love them or hate them, it is obvious that Vendler, Carruth, McClatchy, and Ellman—or, more recently, Paul Hoover and Douglas Messerli—have done what an editor of an anthology is supposed to do: offer a reading pitched between history ("canon") and an evident personal taste, based on a fairly thorough knowledge of the individual poets. With the exception of a few poets whom Parini obviously has read in depth, his book is, far beyond coincidence, a half-hearted recapitulation of a few other anthologies. This may not, strictly, be plagiarism, but it's as close as an editor can get.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

Complexities of Witness

In his review of my book *Under World Arrest (Small Press,* summer, 1995), Michael Duff contests the effectiveness of a poem on the beating of Rodney King (a video that was replayed for weeks, King beaten again and again, in contrast to the almost bodiless Gulf War on TV). He also dislikes some poems he does not name which "excoriate American leaders." I am not particularly bothered by Duff's criticism, since I know that the political poem in America is always in a state of disputed effectiveness. I would like to take his comments as a point of departure to reflect on some of the problems that arise when a poet attempts to, as directly as is possible, address war and violence at large.

Robert Duncan wrote some of the most commanding political poetry of the late 1960s—in particular "Up Rising" (linking Johnson with Hitler and Stalin, as Johnson intensified the American bombing of Vietnam) and his variation on Southwell's "The Burning Babe" (written in 1595), in which

Duncan responded to horrifying photos of napalmed Vietnamese girls which had been suppressed from *Ramparts* but published in my magazine, *Caterpillar*. Yet Duncan's response to a Denise Levertov poem ("Life at War") about the same war was to charge Levertov with projecting a personal and unresolved problem into what many readers felt was a realistic response to the war. "Delicate man," Levertov wrote,

> still turns without surprise, with mere regret to the scheduled breaking open of breasts whose milk runs out over the entrails of still-alive babies, transformation of witnessing eyes to pulp-fragments, implosion of skinned penises into carcass-gulleys.

In a letter to Levertov (quoted in her essay, "Some Duncan Letters—A Memoir and a Critical Tribute"), Duncan quoted this stanza and commented: "the words in their lines are the clotted mass of some operation . . .having what roots in you I wonder? Striving to find place in a story beyond the immediate."

In the same period, Duncan also attacked James Dickey (in Duncan's essay, "Man's Fulfillment in Conflict and Strife," in which he justifies writing "Up Rising" and discusses its background and borrowings). Citing a few lines from Dickey's poem "The Fire-Bombing," Duncan wrote: "'The Fire-Bombing' dwells on [Dickey's] own fantasies, fed by his actual missions over Japan in the Second World War. . .the poet projects an exultant and fearful inner reality. . .exultant in his hostile cravings for destructive power."—as if Duncan, as the author of "My Mother would be a Falconress," did not have a "fearful inner reality" of his own!

In both criticisms, Duncan proposed that Levertov and Dickey were mainly revealing something ugly about themselves. Levertov was responding to news reports; Dickey was recounting what Michael Palmer would call a witnessing (which involved the fire-bombing, by Dickey and others, of Japanese villages).

It is hard to say who has more subjective room. Levertov has the whole range of news information, and one could argue that such a range of selectivity allows for a greater subjectivity on her part (through which projections can emerge). Yet anyone following the war in those days with a critical eye toward what our government was doing knew that Levertov was not making up sliced breasts, pulped eyes, and skinned penises. Via the network established by some 500 NYC artists involved in "Angry Arts," we knew that stuff was going on over there that was more hideous than we could see on TV or find in any mass circulation magazine. I refer the reader here to Douglas Kahn's essay "Body Lags" *(City Lights Review #5)*, in which, among other shocking revelations, Kahn writes that the true story

of what went on in Vietnam is buried in Vietnam vets' attics in shoeboxes: snapshots of necromutilation.

Let's say Dickey *is* exulting over enemy destruction—is it fair to generalize, as Duncan appears to have done, that such reveals "hostile cravings for destructive power?" Should Dickey have kept his mouth shut about what turned him on and written poems (as did many American poets involved in WW II) that pretended that no violation of the human had occurred?

Poetry is still regarded by many as a sacred cow domain, or Sunday museum, in which X may be exposed but only under certain conditions and in certain ways. Is American poetry then still prisoner of a genteel English tradition that Owens and Lawrence, for example, tried to abolish? Or is there something paddling about in the Puritan depths of the American poet that says: hold off in really saying it as you imagine it to be. From such a perspective, Whitman's guarded openness seems heroic. Are we not called upon today to go at least as far from what is conventionally acceptable as Whitman went from Victorian dissimulation?

No one I know or have read has implied that Mark Danner's book-length expose of the El Mozote massacre in Salvador revealed anything ugly about Danner. Is this because, in Danner's case, we credit him with an objectivity that, when psyche comes into play, we refuse?

Alas, news reports are as unstable in their own way as psyche is in hers. One can argue that when psyche comes into play, a significant additional aspect of the human becomes involved. Secretly, we know that all are monstrous in psyche. Psyche is an inverse panopticon: as she reveals self, there is no place, in Rilke's words, "that does not see you." Also keep in mind that all so-called "objective reports" come via the bodies and minds of human beings. The media filter system (much more complicated than book publishing) is a political mine field of priorities and agendas. How do we know who is telling the truth? Poetry is interesting in this regard, for *because of* its excessive subjectivity the truth of a given matter can often be detected.

The last focused period for political poetry in America was the late 1960s. While significant political poetry has been written over the past twenty-five years (Baraka, Rothenberg, Rich, Grahn, Duncan, and Cortez immediately come to mind), it has been an isolated response in contrast to the coalescing of collective conscience in the late 1960s. The 1960s were, politically-speaking in the arts, a burgeoning; the seeds and early growths are in the late 1940s and the otherwise flatfooted 1950s. Does it take a prolonged war (with significant American loss) to give heft to a politically-effective art? Aesthetically-speaking, over the past twenty-five years, poetic energy has undergone the division between writing workshop displays of

self-sensitivity and an inventive yet non-referential Language Poetry that declares itself political but refuses to work with event in the poem itself.

In a recent interview with Michael Palmer *(Exact Change Yearbook 1995)*, Peter Gizzi mentions that he understands Palmer's "The Circular Gates" (1974) "as a poem constructed out of the Vietnamese War." Palmer agrees, so I went back to the poem. While such phrases as "Some talk of war" and "Sometimes we are at war" occur here and there in this fifteen page poem, Vietnam is not mentioned, nor are there any images or references in the poem that would link it to a concern with the Vietnamese War. Palmer's commentary following Gizzi's description of "The Circular Gates" is interesting and worth our attention:

> It was very much so; I was looking for a means of representation that I could feel honest with. In other words, I think one of the problems of an overtly political poetry now is something that Octavio Paz has brought up, that so much of it has to do with newspaper reports and so little of it has to do with witness. We look at the powerful poems of witness of this century and they are not about newspaper reports, and they're not about proposing one's particular *point de repère*, point of view, position, so much as facing something that may even overwhelm the poetic sign in its multiplicity of meanings, something often horrible. The American tendency is to read our politics out of these distant events and then to write some almost self-congratulatory oppositional work. And so what I tried to face (speaking of "Seven Poems within a Matrix of War" now) was, what did we experience of that thing—which was the overwhelming flood of images, the controlled imagery that was poured over us, whether that be the exploding suns over Baghdad on the CNN nightly news, or. . .

It would be interesting to have the full Paz statement, for in Palmer's comments its significance is hard to grasp. Since Paz has become increasingly conservative as he has aged, the chances are that the "something" Palmer is recalling is not in support of abrasive political poetry.

Palmer's distinction between witness and newspaper report (à la Paz) seems unrealistic to me. Significant poems solely based on direct witness, such as Radnoti's or Owens', are more rare than one might think. Vallejo relied mainly on newspaper and radio reports, or word of mouth, even though he was in Spain at the time (1937) and did visit the Madrid front, to write *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*. Neruda's huge *Canto general* is a mix of witnessing and historical research. Celan's poetry, the fruit of the

death camps, is an utter entanglement of witnessing, memory, hermeticism, literary reference, and attack on the German language. As Jed Rasula has perceptively noted: "With Celan, the German language itself becomes the means of its own disembodiment. In his hands, more and more of the language simply goes up in smoke. . .A prick from a rose killed Rilke. Celan writes as if an entire crown of roses were being held in place in his mouth. Beauty is bloody."

I wonder where Palmer would place Duncan's "Up Rising." Since Duncan never visited Vietnam, the poem is not one of direct witnessing. Yet as Duncan has written: "Riding the wave at once of my own high blood pressure—a physical disorder I was ignorant of at the time but to which the poem refers clearly—and of my outrage in the 'high blood pressure' attack of the American government on Vietnam. . .I saw Johnson as the demotic leader, unleashing into action and moved by the secret evil of American karma as Hitler or Stalin had impersonated the evil karma of Germany or Russia." Thus the "Up Rising" of the poem's title is, again in Duncan's words, "multiphasic." It draws on the whole man, and could qualify as one of "the powerful poems of witness of this century."

Palmer proposes that when an unwitnessed political event is engaged directly in a poem the result may be "self-congratulatory oppositional work." Here the problem of self-projection raised by Duncan reading Levertov takes on a new twist: the media blizzard that Palmer later in the interview calls "hallucinatory" produces a poem that is deflected from the political into a space possessed by the non-sequitor information storm of truth and lies. It is as if a new purgatory, a postmodernist DMZ, has insinuated itself between the poet and some event out there. This purgatory is multifaceted: while it is packed with cul-de-sacs, it is also permeated with global information on a scale undreamed of before the Vietnamese War. W.H. Auden, in his essay "The Poet and the City" (1962), a bit dated but still sharp and unnerving, discussed the increasing difficulty in poets using public figures as themes for poetry "because the good or evil they do depends less upon their characters and intentions than upon the quantity of impersonal force at their disposal."

In the so-called "Gulf War" (Chomsky referred to it as a "form of international terrorism"), "impersonal force" was presented as a video game, intercut with information-screened press conferences. It was awful, as awful in its own way as the "war," but somehow many of us figured out what *was* going on, and six months later, via books and magazine articles, I, for one, felt I had enough solid information on which to make a response, goaded by the fact that I was originally, in the months before our invasion, taken in by the media hype of Iraq's awesome military power.

Both Palmer and I look out workroom windows and see healthy trees and hear chirping birds. As white middle-class males, our immediate

environment is almost always at odds with much of what pierces it via the information storm. As Americans, especially as white ones, we have permission to say anything in print that we want to say (with the recent qualification that what we say may be ignored because we are white American males). Our lives and the lives of our families will not be imperiled by anything we declare. We are thus permitted to live in a kind of cocoon through which odorless information zips, a significant amount of which implicates, and mortifies us, as citizens. We do not depend on newspaper reports: we "witness" via TV, as witnesses twice-removed. Unlike Aimé Césaire, say, we do not have the opportunity to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves or write. We primarily speak for, and to, ourselves.

At the same time, no one is shooting at us—yet. Like at least some of our admired predecessors, we are able to daily engage the ancient adventure of not only attempting to "know ourselves" but of working on and contesting a self in poetry. These opportunities must not go unacknowledged. In comparison to writers in such diverse places as China, Algeria, and Yugoslavia, we are left alone, financially sufficient, and our books somehow get published. However—and here I must speak solely for myself—I feel an absolute obligation to pull some of the invaded outside I am implicated in through the information purgatory and push it to the fore in my poetry. I really do not care if it offends people even to the extent of leading them to dismiss all that I have done.

*

Paz's preference for a political poetry of direct witness, taken up by Palmer, is sounded throughout what may be the largest gathering of such poetry ever assembled into a single volume: Carolyn Fouché's *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness*, an 800 page anthology with 145 poets. Forché believes that for significant political poetry to occur, the poet must have directly experienced one or more of the following conditions: "exile, state censorship, political persecution, house arrest, torture, imprisonment, military occupation, warfare, and assassination." At the same time, she states that political poetry may involve the "personal" (which she inadequately defines as "lyrics of love and emotional loss") and does *not* have to address the "extreme conditions" she has insisted the political poet must have experienced. She adds that she "was interested in what these poets wrote, regardless of the explicit content."

One implication of these somewhat confusing statements is that poems which would not strike one as political would qualify for inclusion as long as they had been written by someone who had been exiled, say, or had spent time in the army. In contrast, a powerful political poem written by

someone who had not met at least one of Forché's personal experience criteria would not be, in effect, significantly political. I also wonder about "assassination." According to Forché, were a poet to be assassinated, his prior poetry would qualify as being political.

At the beginning of each poet's section, Forché offers a brief biographical note that identifies the "experience of extremity" justifying the poet's inclusion. On the basis of these notes I came up with the following figures:

45 of the poets had a "military occupation," which often involved "warfare" (and, I presume, killing).

48 of the poets were "imprisoned," or "under house arrest," sometimes "tortured," and in 6 cases "assassinated."

14 of the poets were either briefly, or for an extended period of time, in "exile." Some of those exiled (St. John Perse is a good example) were self-exiled, lived well in exile, and continued to remain in their country of exile after they could have safely returned home.

This leaves us with 38 poets, some of whom appear to have experienced "state censorship" or "political persecution." The latter category is so broad as to nearly be irrelevant e.g., in America, nearly every minority writer would fall into this category. Thus Ray A. Young Bear is identified as simply having lived in the Mesquakie Tribal Settlement, having taught at several universities, and as being a singer and the co-founder of a dance troupe. In other cases, the "political persecution" does not strike me, on the basis of the information given, as being "extreme." Wislawa Szymborska's first book "was deemed incomprehensible and overly morbid by the Communist government." Nicanor Parra "refused to leave Chile after the coup that brought Pinochet to power." Adonis is included on the basis of work that is "marked by a strongly nontraditional sense of social commitment." No "experience of extremity" is noted in his or several other cases.

While pondering this group of poets—which make up between one quarter and one third of the book—I realized that with very few exceptions every poet I consider to be impressive could have found his or her way into this group. Forché herself acknowledges in her Introduction that "When I began this project, I was hard pressed to find a significant poet who could not be included, who in some important way or another did *not* bear witness to the ravages of our time." Then, needing to constrict this openness to a focus that would justify those who were included, she writes: "I decided to limit the poets in the anthology to those for whom the social had been irrevocably invaded by the political in ways that were sanctioned neither by law nor by the fiction of the social contract." "the social" is a curious phrase to use here; does she mean "their lives?" Clearly, such an invasion means one thing for Otto René Castillo, a Guatemalan poet who

was incarcerated, tortured, and burned alive—and something else for Young Bear, Adonis, Parra, or for Sipho Sepamla whose biographical note, in its entirety, reads: "Born in Krugersdorf, South Africa, trained as a teacher. A prizewinning writer of fiction as well as poetry, he is director of the Federated Union of Black Arts in Johannesburg."

In other words, Forché seems to make up rules as she goes along, making many of her inclusions seem arbitrary and primarily based on her taste. Even though aspects of the contributor information indicate that a vague kind of political correctness is involved, many omitted poets could have been included on that same arbitrary basis. While reading the anthology (and without doing any research), I came up with a significant list of omissions, some of which are shocking, and some of which could have been included using Forché's criteria.

Artaud	Duncan	Perelman
Bly	Enzensberger	Rexroth
Braithwaite	Ginsberg	Reznikoff
Cardinal	Gunn	Rich
Cendrars	Grahn	Rothenberg
Césaire	N. Guillen	Sanders
Cortez	Jeffers	Snyder
Csoori	MacDiarmid	U'Tamsi
Depestre	Mac Low	Waldman
Dickey	Pasolini	CK Williams
Dorn	Paz	

Granted, everyone will have his list of omissions. However, the absence of Artaud, Césaire, Ginsberg, Pasolini, and Reznikoff is serious enough to throw the authenticity of the anthology into question.

Under one guise of restricting her inclusions to poets who directly experienced violence, generally in war, Forché has acted as if Conscientious Objection (Rexroth), Ecology (Snyder), Gay Liberation (Gunn, Rich, Grahn) or Womens' Rights (Cortez) are not significant witnessing. Given her emphasis on "extreme conditions" (the word "extreme" is the key word in her Introduction), how is it that Artaud, aptly defined by Susan Sontag as "one of the great daring mapmakers of consciousness *in extremis,* "is not included?

The answer to such a question has several facets. Forché's section divisions, from *The Armenian Genocide* to the final *Revolutions and the Struggle for Democracy in China,* are all based on wars. All of the included poets must fit into one of these war sections. This means that parts of the world not covered in one of the fifteen war sections are not represented

at all. There are no Caribbean, Irish, Scandinavian, Australian, Canadian, Scottish, Central African, or Algerian poets.

Thus if an individual's writing does not connect with a war-oriented section, he or she, from the book's viewpoint, is simply not a significant witness and is outside the so-called "experience of extremity." Alienation, addiction, madness, and subsequent incarceration (the Artaud trajectory) have no slot. Artaud's imprisonment (which spanned the Second World War, involved near-starvation and 51 electroshock sessions), unlike Jimmy Santiago Baca's ("arrested for drug possession with intent to sell"), is not valid.

James Fenton, an Englishman who worked as a reporter in Vietnam and Cambodia, is included. He fits into the *War in Korea and Vietnam* section. Ed Dorn, who wrote a long reportage on the Shoshonean Indians, is not included. Had Dorn been conscripted into the US Army (or following the Santiago Baca example, had he been arrested for drug dealing), he would, according to the book's peculiar logic, have qualified. However, he also might not have: Santiago Baca was not only arrested on drug charges but he is an Indian. Arrest coupled with ethnicity gave him entree.

Forché *has* included a number of quite significant poets that few of us would dispute. Some of these poets, however, are very curiously represented. A few examples:

Vallejo's two and a half pages consist of two poems from his first book (1918), written a decade before he developed a political consciousness in his writing, and one minor piece from his years in Europe. Given what Vallejo could have been represented by—most obviously, his Spanish Civil War poems— the Vallejo section is dumbfoundingly weak.

Parra is presented as anthology-valid because he refused to leave Chile after the coup that brought Pinochet to power (1974). Yet all the included Parra poems were written before 1972, or before, in the book's terms, he had made a significant political commitment.

In Lorca's case, the "assassination" oddity I mentioned earlier comes up. He is mainly represented by poems he wrote in New York City in the late 1920s. Does his political execution make these poems political? Well, they are—but not because he was executed. Allen Ginsberg's poems on New York City are not included, in spite of the fact that *Howl* was banned, that he was thrown out of Cuba and Czechoslovakia for political reasons, and currently his poetry cannot be broadcast in this country between 6 AM and 8 PM. I'd call these matters "State Persecution."

The fact that Galway Kinnell "actively protested the war in Vietnam" (as did several hundred other poets) is used to explain the inclusion of his poem "Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond" in which there are several references to "Asia." However, Duncan, Sanders, Bly, Mac Low, and

Rothenberg, who also actively protested our invasion of Vietnam, are not included.

One might also inquire why none of Denise Levertov's poems on the Vietnamese War (in particular, "Life at War") were included. They are much more powerful than the pieces she wrote during her 1972 visit to Vietnam (three of which are).

Amiri Baraka's entire section consists of poems he wrote before 1965, when he was Leroi Jones and, relative to the past three decades, politically inactive.

Quasimodo is permitted to write about Auschwitz, which he never directly experienced, while Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, one of the few major American responses to the Holocaust in poetry, and one which consists entirely of testimony from the Nuremberg trials, goes unrepresented (as does Rothenberg's "Khurbn," a long poem based on the poet's visit to the remains of the death camps in the 1980s).

I mentioned earlier that Vallejo received two and a half pages in the anthology. Celan and Radnoti, the most commented-on poets in the Introduction, receive three and four and a half pages respectively. Yet a versified "war" short story by Louis Simpson is offered twenty-six pages. Given the dense complexity of virtually all of Celan's poetry from the late '50s on (all of which is, on one level, saturated with the Holocaust), I began to notice the extent to which Forché's own rather conventional writing played a role in her selections. With the exception of Oppen, Levertov, and Leroi Jones, there are no American poets in the anthology associated with the various experimental fronts over the past fifty years. However, poets who would have been or were quite at home in the old *New Poets of England and America* anthology abound: Kunitz, Hugo, Simpson, Nemerov, Hecht, Dugan, Kinnell, Lowell, with Auden, Spender, and MacNiece a bit before them, and Fenton and Balaban a bit after.

Of course Forché is entitled to represent her view of significant poetry in any anthology she edits. But since this is not a general anthology but one in which there is a requirement for a careful assessment of what constitutes the most memorable poetry of witness in conditions of extremity, I believe that one's own poetics, taste, and companions in poetry must be made to yield to the project's obligations, to the field it proposes to engage. Say Forché simply does not care for Thom Gunn's poetry and would not include him in her version of a generalist 20th century anthology. That is fair enough. But: is it possible in the 1990s to edit an anthology of political witnessing and not include anything on AIDS? Or for that matter, on the humiliating political conditions gay men and women have experienced, everywhere, throughout the 20th century? And if it were simply a matter of page count, then, for example, I would feel obligated to leave Gertrude Stein out and put Gunn in. Stein is a major figure in many respects, but the

fact that she lived in the occupied French countryside during the Second World War would not justify including poems by her that have little to do with witnessing in any trenchant sense. I would also have left out passages from Perse's poem, *Exile*, since it could have been written in the 19th century.

Uncomfortable with what she takes to be a gap between the personal and the political, Forché attempts to bridge the two terms by suggesting that the space between them can be described as "the social," and that it is in "this social space" that we should situate poetry. An alternative to setting up a duality to be bridged is to see the personal and the political not as separate categories but as aspects of a singular, composite force that makes up poetic identity. Any poetic utterance is personal/political. When one thinks one is being apolitical, the chances are one is in agreement with the way things are, which is also a political stance. Any political poem is helplessly infused with one's own personality, one's language, one's feeling for oneself in a context that involves others.

Forché's editorial policy is less involved with bridging the personal and the political than with assuming that the personal must be directly invaded by the political for any significant witnessing to take place. How much terror must I experience to justify my speaking for someone who is in agony or who has died from torture?

The exile, in this respect, may be in less of a position to bear significant witness than someone who lived next door to a "disappeared," watched the person be stuffed into a car trunk, and who daily spoke to the "disappeared's" despairing wife or husband. In "Vocabulary," Ariel Dorfman writes: "But how can I tell their story/if I was not there?" He concludes: "Let them speak for themselves." Forché quotes these lines and understands them to mean that "the story belongs to those who have undergone the extremity."

Dorfman's last line evokes the paradox that while I can only speak for myself, I must also speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Thus Aimé Césaire's monumental "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land," in which he speaks for himself, as a black Martinican exorcising his colonial poisoning, *and* for his fellow Martinicans, some of whom are dead and some of whom, being illiterate and uninformed, do not know how to speak for themselves. The amount of direct experience needed for imagined witnessing varies for every individual. It is a mistake to prioritize experience over imagination.

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What I referred to as the new purgatory, or postmodernist DMZ, makes witnessing more and more complicated, at least when measured by the old

standard of being there versus hearing about it. This DMZ is not simply a neutralizing zone between person and event but the technological spectacle that surrounds us and intersects human relationships. Once upon a time, a spectacle was a public execution, or a sideshow, something one went to, and returned from, back into one's private sphere. The spectacle has now not only invaded the private sphere, but conquers it on a daily and nightly basis.

What we see through media is the world as spectacle run by a kind of Image Exchange, as if modeled upon the Stock Exchange, in which information is so intertwined with commodities that they are often indistinguishable. In myth, images were specific; they were not separated from what they revealed. In technology, commercial considerations have turned images into refugees; they can be relocated whenever and wherever it is convenient.

The challenge facing imagination today, at least in America and much of Western Europe, is that all things have come into their caricatures. Such requires the act of witnessing to come to terms with the fact that it too is part of the spectacle. In June, 1994, millions of Americans stared for hours at the image of a white bronco pursued by a flotilla of police cars. The formation's steadiness—no careening chases, no pile-ups—made the cars appear static and the wide freeway, as in a reverie, moving. The spectacle reminded one of a packed football stadium during pre-game ceremonies: the police cars moved as a rectangular-shaped marching band. The bronco played the role of the drum major, the head of the band. In this case, of course, the bronco leading the show contained, we are told, a man with a gun to his temple and his mother on the phone. Alongside the freeway and the center divider, hysterical cheerleaders, fans raised OJ signs up and down.

For the past six months, millions, now following the game itself, have witnessed witnesses testifying for or against a celebrity which the camera angle generally presents as a bust. The trial is a caricature of a trial, a larger than life football opera, a thing we can and cannot grasp. What *are* we witnessing? A trial? A travesty of justice? The greatest show on earth? A long and boring proof of what we already know, that we can never know the absolute truth? That we are all seeing something slightly different and may have a closer view than someone who is actually there, sitting at the back of the courtroom? That we see more of what is going on than—is it possible—Simpson himself? What he mainly sees are twelve people—or are they disciples? Jurors become witnesses, not of the crime but of the spectacle of the trial, trying to assemble the pieces. Like us, they will only truly be witnesses of the puzzle of their own presence.

We know that every culture develops "distancing devices" to hide the facts about its bloody past. Now with digitally-altered videos, one can

totally change history. One can even show Germans smiling and making breakfast for the inmates of Auschwitz. Digital alteration takes the spectacle into a new and absolute dimension. Paradoxically, it might also release us from the spectacle as it will not only make indirect witnessing impossible but demonstrate the ability of lies to go undetected.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Report from Schumacher

At Schumacher College this year St. Valentine's Day was replaced by "Strange Attractor" Day. This remote Centre for Ecological and Spiritual Studies in South Devon, England, was for three weeks in February 1995 like a small-is-beautiful branch of the Santa Fe Institute, and was buzzing with edge of chaos theory, complexity, excitable mediums, and "strange attractors"—which Brian Goodwin, the originator of the course and its presiding spirit, defined (according to my notes) as a pattern that a complex dynamic system can settle down to when its apparently chaotic nature gives way to an order arising deterministically from its interactions. This is the famous "order for free" that computers have enabled us to discover in the last thirty years. It is essentially the role that Eros was, in classical times, thought to perform, or, later, Venus and her son before he linked up with Hallmark cards. Hesiod tells us that Eros was the third to emerge from primal Chaos after Earth and Tartaros (which two gave us Space). Then Eros enabled Uranus and Gaia to give birth to the offspring Chronos, the Time element in Space-Time. Besides this initial role, Eros came to be thought of as shaping all the things of this world in their courses: they become themselves through desire to be as they are. Planets, clouds, the sea, creatures, the far rocks of the earth, everything has found its attractor space. In our own century D.H. Lawrence asked, "Why doesn't the sea fly off the earth in its motion?" And answered his question with the word, "Love."

I was an attentive student at Schumacher; for it seemed to me the commonsense organic approach of Brian Goodwin in biology could probably provide a way into various other areas, could increase our understanding of, well, everything. Meanwhile, the main thrust there was to get Darwinism on the right track. Random genetic mutation and environmental selection is not really a convincing explanation of the origin

of species. For one thing, there's not been enough time for such randomness to produce life as we have it. It's as if, said Goodwin, a whirlwind went through a junkyard and left behind a 747. That's the odds. However, if tendencies toward basic shapes inhered in complex interactions of proteins and minerals, then it would increase the odds tremendously. And it turns out they do.

We did a hands-on experiment to see for ourselves spatial order arising spontaneously from a chemical reaction. We all had a flat glass petri dish the bottom of which we covered with a solution carefully prepared from sodium bromate, sulfuric acid, malonic acid, and sodium bromide. Rings started to form in the solution for no other reason than the interaction of these ingredients produces such rings, and spirals too. These are geometric consequences of the specificity of the system, There's another system that produces similar rings, said Goodwin: slime mold. As long as there is enough bacterial food available, these single-celled amoebae move around independently. As soon as there is a shortage (if the bog dries up) the cells, on signals from each other, form aggregated colonies of several thousand cells in concentric circles, not by intention but because the chemical interaction again delivers physical special order. The fact that these associated cells go on to form themselves into a slug-like conglomerate which moves, leaving a trail of slime, before it further changes into a stalk with a fruiting body that can resist dessication and preserve itself until it senses food is there again, all this ordering by unicellular creatures in a dynamic system just adds to the awe of it all. And yet when you examine the dynamics closely, Goodwin's view of what is going on makes most sense.

These are systems where a small variable can make a great deal of difference. For example, ants below a certain density of population move around chaotically. At a critical point, one additional ant can bring about a sudden ordering in the multitude so that aims in terms of reproduction and collective survival are furthered. It is the chemistry of the right number of ants bumping into each other that does it. Overpopulation brings chaos again, and a rectification. The best thing is to be on the edge of chaos.

Goodwin's own research using a computer model of calcium concentrations in certain unicellular plant-like algae brought him to the belief that the whorls found widespread in nature are simply a product of the inherent patterning of calcium in cellulose given certain initial conditions. From a computer keyed to represent growth, he obtained one of these strange-attractor, order-for-free modes that happen when you let your machine run all night. His hypothesis is that the basic ordering in the world, and thus the origin of species, is from patterns that natural materials fall into inevitably. If I haven't got this exactly in the right words, Goodwin's own phrasing of it can be consulted in technical articles in the *Journal of*

Theoretical Biology, and recently in his very readable *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots* (published in both the UK and the US in 1994). I managed to get the modest Prof. Goodwin to admit that this book might be the first full statement to the general public of the alternative to strict genetic Darwinism: evolution by organic forms. (Previously the most successful popular account of these matters has been Roger Lewin's *Complexity: Life at the Edge of Chaos* in Collier Books 1992.)

Extrapolating, it seems to me the brain must have such attractors to preserve images of the shapes of things in the mind. It's inconceivable that the brain has to re-recognize things from scratch every instant. More then that, the Jungian archetypes can be understood as where the mind has found resting places within chaos from time immemorial. And every act of creativity in the arts, perhaps, moves from one attractor to another, order emerging in continually new ways but limited by what is initial in us all, and therefore susceptible to recognition by others with the same sort of brains.

The Santa Fe's Stuart Kauffman, in the UK for a talk before the Linnaean Society, came down to Devon for a day to see what Brian Goodwin was doing. He talked to us for four hours, taking us through his book *The Origins of Order: Self-Organization and Selection in Evolution* (Oxford 1993), and every moment we felt we understood exactly what he was saying in that moment, complicated though it was. *Nature* reviewing his book "slapped it"—so we still have a long way to go, he said. But there can be no gainsaying the new methodology that has become available through computers. The new telescope," he called Turing's machine, "by which we can see emergent behavior systems, collective phenomena we couldn't see before. . .There are new observables in the world."

And "strange attractors" are not really strange. That's just an adjective taken over from mathematics. Quite the opposite, in fact. They are what keep things familiar, Hence the title of the new Kauffman book coming from Oxford later this year: *At Home in the Universe.* I didn't have the chance to tell Kauffman that he had chosen exactly the title that I think Charles Olson would have used in order to write about the possibilities of the post-modern, had he lived to develop the concept. The first to use the term "post-modern," Olson stated, in a letter to Robert Creeley of 20 August 1951, that in contrast to the modern, who is alienated from the universe, "any POST-MODERN is born with the ancient confidence that he *does* belong." He believed, reversing Heraclitus, that we don't now have to be estranged from that which is most familiar.

This sets the ground for a new Valentine's Day. And in this connection Brian Goodwin points out that the human heart is itself an "excitable medium," as defined by complexity theory. Heartbeats are the result of a dynamic field working in the pattern of an attractor. The normal heartbeat

has irregularities—the wobbling is its saving grace, for a too ordered system doesn't respond too well to infarcts. Metronomic ambitions are the beginning of disaster. The abnormally fast heartbeat called fibrillation is regular in its repetitions; it is a spiraling attractor which leads within minutes to that fatal attractor where there is no heartbeat at all. Us post-moderns might find a moral here. The heart tells us not to seek perfection, to beware an attractor that doesn't let one respond to variables and the diversity of life. The brinkmanship of the Cold War worked, though we didn't know why. The media promulgated the image of implacable enemies, but in truth it was life at the edge of chaos, which we now understand provides maximum opportunity for response to change and an unexpected fullness of life. In affairs of the heart too this will be the case: shun rigidity as a recipe for security, welcome vagaries, know that order emerges from chaos eventually in its own sweet way.

—RALPH MAUD

Drew Milne, *Sheet Mettle* (London: Alfred David Editions, 1994)

Collected here are five short, dense, ambitious sequences by the young Scottish poet and editor of the journal of poetry and poetics *Parataxis: modernism and modern writing*. This poetry is a test of mettle.

> Go litel bok, invoice these strain line shadow inks,
> or suffer in silence image mephitis,
> I can smell your poison squirt of ingrained chalice

The opening stanza of "Satyrs and Mephitic Angels" indicates what to expect: a verse acutely, even painfully conscious of it own precarious conditions of possibilities, with ever an eye on invoicing the costs of giving voice to the transubstantiating hopes for communion. It is perhaps symptomatic of the present position of poetry that Milne feels compelled to begin rather than conclude his volume with an envoi that's become an invoice. As the etymological pun in the above mentioned title suggests, satire is an inescapable mode throughout such politically attentive work, sardonically surveying the mephitic state of contemporary society that

conditions the poems' own prospects. While clearly it is J.H. Prynne to whom this work is most immediately indebted, there is much that might remind us of Zukofsky, say "A'-9" with its agonized effort to sing out of and beyond its commodified state:

> A dangerous demagogic word holds us surely,
> like the masses the measure *is* suffer; for these
> abolitionist crudités, as raw mangetout,
>
> may smash up *(piano)* while your smudge spill barks out
> *beyond* purely verstehenden explication,
> in these hand sewn diagnostics of future past.

The critical vantage that enables the distance from conditions as they are is itself rendered possible by them, so rationalizing critique threatens to close down what it opens up. Here critique-satire is folded into the misdirectional language of the poetic moving toward song. This tends to make for a bifocal reading: a slower, halting concentration on a self-disrupting analytical and argumentative development, and a more rapid movement with the wit and sound of the word-surface. The splitting of these readings is itself a mark of present antinomies, and the hope of their convergence the utopian promise *"beyond* purely verstehenden explication." What happens when you cross Stevens and Habermas, as in "The Idea of Order at Habermas-Platz," which concludes:

> so alphabet *ratio* in D.I.Y. Church
> dawns on fishers of networks puritanical,
> all undistorted or wish-sweet as bliss revenge;
>
> sound bite angel, go wholly public spherical.

Well, evidently, this is less than a solution as the sweet temptation of undistorted communication appears to be ironically deflated.

Despite or because of the skepticism with which this poetry eyes its own aspirations, the verbal wit and prosodic invention is impressively accomplished and enlivening. "Positive Indiscriminations" exuberantly puts the "male my hermit manner view" through the ringer:

> I'll be buggered doubt if it ill be easier
> to trekky from cling-on to boldly woe, wrecky
> from hornblower, as my toy captain flies undone
> to the oh so moby dick.

In a more somber register is the cycle of nine unrhymed sonnets, "A Garden of Tears," which takes its epigraph from the feisty concrete artist, poet and gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay: "Certain gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks." Finlay's garden at Little Sparta (Stonypath) enacts ("a garden is a process") a political commentary on society—an instigation for the radical transformation of that society. What about the revolutionary implications of the love sonnet? Milne's garden considers the intimacies of love conditioned by the violences of our world: "It's a long way still where love our gulf is war." The promise of the garden-poems acerbates the sense of loss and exile that pervades this sequence, which might in turn goad us to stumble toward love's promise: "the labors of our loss are still glistening, / and where the going is over, gone over, / there we go, slightly pale, to the ends of love."

In these sequences the hopes ingrained in song are tested by a rigorous skepticism so that such tempering might carry us forward:

> This world awaits a glaze of angel pens,
> but I renounce weapons of happiness
> and the petals of blood which kiss such hope-
> less greener grassless: "Shoot into the foot,
> I say, and only then into the air."
>
> ("A still life in blue")

—JEFF TWITCHELL

Torture By Light: Architectural Anguish

> In fact, walls and pages are perfectly similar,
>
> —Thomas Bernhard

The space of thought and writing leaves room for reflection. The amphibology inherent in the preceding sentence is intentional: not only is writing always somehow rooted in a certain sense of place, but furthermore, the very subject of the private space of writing is a theoretically neglected domain. Paradigms of architecture, design and style should be of central interest to considerations of literary production: the wood-

paneled Victorian library can hardly inspire the same thoughts as the ascetic emptiness characteristic of a certain type of New York Soho loft. *Were I to reveal, for example, that I can only write in my own library, surrounded by a very idiosyncratic selection of books, and that in moments of reflection—or indeed of sheer exasperation, or emptiness—mg gaze is most often caught by the morbid, otherworldly light of Redon's engraving, "Le passage d'une âme," something might be gleaned about the conclusions at which I arrive, or at the very least about the content of certain footnotes. Yet what I have just offered of my private space is hardly a description, but rather an abstraction used as an allegory, where one might well sense the inherent paradoxes of a mise-en-abîme, within which one modality of space opens up to, or is subsumed by, another.* There would seem to be a hermeneutic primacy of the ascetic space of empty rooms.

On the question of architectural space, the real and the ideal are often inseparable. In Thomas Bernhard's novel *Correction*, the plot is articulated by the conceptual and existential relations between two antithetical architectural sites involving the protagonist, Roithamer, who is based on Ludwig Wittgenstein. Roithamer found the ideal circumstances for reflection within the simplicity of the garret of his friend Hoeller's house, located amidst the deafening roar of the waters of the Aurach gorge. It is here that he conceives of the contrasting complexity of the "habitation Cone" which he designed as the dwelling for his sister, conceived to be in perfect spiritual harmony with her. Built in the exact center of the Kobernausser forest, its three floors contained seventeen rooms, with the peak of the Cone housing a windowless meditation room (intended for Roithamer alone) containing nothing but a water faucet (in minimal and ironic symbolic doubling of the aquatic sonority of Hoeller's garret.) As the Cone was to be properly experienced from top to bottom, Roithamer's sister was obliged to enter the house blindfolded the first time she arrived; she soon left it dead, eyes closed, the Cone transformed into her cenotaph. At that point, according to the wishes of Roithamer, "the Cone is to be left to decay, never again to be touched by anyone, and is to be abandoned entirely to nature."[1] In the lineage of Ledoux and Boullée, rarely has rationalized utopian architecture conceived a more perfect project; and rarely has literature produced a more disquieting architectural allegory.

In 1914, Ludwig Wittgenstein—whose major aesthetic claim was that "ethics and aesthetics are one"—built himself a house, near a remote lake, accessible only by boat. Intended as a site for solitary meditation, this structure was much less conventional and far more complicated than the simple hut that myth would have it be: trapezoidal in form, its 24 x 27 foot surface was covered by a triangular balconied roof. This small dwelling existed in distinct contradistinction to the famed 11,000 square feet residence in Vienna—built in 1926-27, and now a landmark of modernist

architecture—that he designed for his sister, Margarethe Stonborough-Witgenstein. This house was inspired by Wittgenstein's friend Adolf Loos, but its form and details were refined and purified according to Wittgenstein's own ethical-aesthetic principles, following a perfectionism equal to that of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, For example, it is told that just before the completion of the house, he had the ceiling of one of the huge rooms raised a mere 3 centimeters, in order to perfect the proportions. The house was characterized by one of Wittgenstein's other sisters, Hermine, in the following terms: "It seemed indeed to be much more a dwelling for the gods than for a small mortal like me, and at first I even had to overcome a faint inner opposition to this 'house turned logic' as I called it, to this perfection and monumentality."[2] As much as she admired this masterpiece, she admitted that she could not have lived in it—a quite common, indeed stereotypical, reaction to rationalized modernist architecture. *Having myself resided in two of Le Corbusier's structures in Paris—the Swiss Pavilion and the Brazilian Pavilion at the Cité Universitaire— I can attest to these constrictions, and have often made the same claim.*

Wittgenstein wrote that, "Working in philosophy—like work in architecture in many respects—is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of oneself.)"[3] This confluence of aesthetics, ethics and psychology might well suggest that architecture must necessarily combine the gestural and the conceptual, the affective and the geometric, the site-specific and the universal, poesis and mathesis. Most of all, it implies that architecture should be read as either a symbolic form or a life form, congruous with the values of the architect. Yet, if this is indeed the case, what can we make of the fact that the lighting of Wittgenstein's house consisted strictly and uniquely of bare bulbs, disposed either centrally or symmetrically on the ceiling, making it nearly impossible to read!? Might this be an allegory for the radical dissociation between philosophy and aesthetics upon which Wittgenstein always insisted? *I might add, in ironic counterpoint, that the first photograph I saw of the interior of Wittgenstein's house, constituting a nearly abstract rendition, was in a classic Soho loft, itself bare and white—except for housing one of the largest private libraries I have ever seen!*

Perhaps the answer to this architectural conundrum must be sought outside Wittgenstein's own architectural projects, found in the realizations of others, which might serve, in oblique retrospect, as concrete commentaries. The recent Bruce Nauman retrospective juxtaposed two architectural works that are emblematic of Nauman's entire oeuvre tone (which has been consciously inspired by Wittgenstein's philosophy, as was much of the conceptual art of the 1960s): *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of his Room* (1968; an empty room with two speakers that endlessly repeat variously distorted versions of the title's two injunctions), and *Yellow Room* (1973; a

small, ceilingless room in the form of an equilateral triangle painted bright yellow, lit by three yellow overhead fluorescent lights).[4] These are both anxiety-producing apparatuses which test the limits of both spectatorial attention and aesthetic form. It is difficult to say whether they trace the limits of aesthetic participation, or whether they transgress, rupture or suppress our psychic thresholds of attention, perception and cognition,

The *Yellow Room* affords all the morbid fascination of an architectural monster, attracting us by the primacy of its structure and the elegance of its implied aesthetic proposition, all the while repelling us by the sheer force of its psychological disruptiveness. And, for once, I mean *force* in the full transitivity of its literal sense: to do violence, to compel, to hasten, to constrain, to heighten to the utmost. To remain in this room is extremely difficult: not only can't one read here, but thought itself becomes nearly impossible, given the mounting anguish. Many of those who enter immediately begin to experiment with strategies to attenuate the rising tension and anguish: one dancer/choreographer told me that she managed to remain only by laying down on the floor; some close their eyes; others nervously move about, much more quickly than the small and sometimes crowded space warrants; I found that squeezing into a corner—a primal response in the face of fear—helped somewhat; but most people simply leave. *Yellow Room* silently achieves what the vocal imperative of *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of his Room* so noisily instructs us to do: it repels the visitor. *This is a work that perhaps demands a statistically oriented interpretation, for in a structural sense it is curiously empty, contentless, blank. Upon leaving after my third or fourth visit, I thought of an alternate model that might serve to understand the force of the* Yellow Room: *a work that would consist of photographing the faces of all those who left the room, images that, I suspect, would variously reveal anguish, perplexity, or boredom. Such would be a visceral visitors' book. Such is a theater of counter-memory.*

—ALLEN S. WEISS

Notes

1. Thomas Bernhard, *Correction*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York, Vintage, 1983), p. 14. On Thomas Bernhard's evocations of Wittgenstein, see Chantal Thomas, *Thomas Bernhard* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1990), pp. 145-161.
2. Cited in David Olson Pook, "Working on Oneself: Wittgenstein's Architecture, Ethics and Aesthetics," in *Symploke*, Volume 2, Number 1, 1994; p. 52.
3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 16.
4. The Bruce Nauman exhibition was organized by the Walker Art Center in association with the Hirshhorn Museum, and recently traveled to the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the catalogue was edited by Neal Benezra, Kathy Halbreich, and Joan Simon (Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, 1994).

Afterimages: Revolution of the (Visible) Word

In 1965, Ian Hamilton Finlay wrote to Ernst Jandl, "I am not considered to be a poet here. . .mostly, Scotch poets. . .like to think they are *thinkers*, full of very *serious* thoughts about *serious* matters. . .but 'thought' is not *intelligence*, and one image against another, can create something more subtle than thought." And he added, "almost any Scottish poem of the present is offered to one as a comment on life, an aid, an extension, etc. . . .Hence we get inane critical remarks like: 'X has something to say' (which actually means, X's poems are crammed with jargon, about politics, hunger, Scotland, his love-life, or whatever). The notion that 'something to say' is actually a *modulation of the material* scarcely enters anyone's head."[1]

The reference here is probably to Hugh MacDiarmid's notorious dismissal of Finlay's experiments in concrete poetry as having "nothing in common with what down the centuries, despite all changes, has been termed 'poetry'."[2] Extreme as this sounds, it is still very much the Establishment attitude to a poetics that takes the visual (or aural) dimension of language as seriously as its semantic one. At a recent conference on Visual Poetics sponsored by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Yale in honor of the eminent Brazilian poets Augusto and Haroldo de Campos—a conference very well attended and featuring a range of poets from Jackson Mac Low to Lello Voce, to Johanna Drucker, to a young laser holograph poet named Eduardo Kac—I didn't see a single professor from the Yale English department or from its house organ the *Yale Review*, edited by the prize-winning poet J. D. McClatchy.

But there are signs that things are changing. For even as Finlay and his fellow concretists are dismissed as "not poets," we are witnessing a quiet revolution of the visible word. Small presses like *tailspin, meow, leavebooks*—all three of these from the Buffalo Graduate Program in Poetics—are turning out dozens of visual and even tactile chapbooks like Kenneth Sherwood's *TEXT squared*, Michael Basinki's *SleVep*, and C. S. Giscombe's "Two Sections from Giscome Road," not to mention the electronic transmission of texts via *RIF/T*, which now has a thousand subscribers. From Susan Howe's dramatically charged typography in *Articulations of Sound Forms in Time* (Awede 1987) and *Eikon Basilike* (1989), to Christian Bök's "fractal" poems and poetic fractals in *CRYSTALLOGRAPHY: Book I of Information Theory* (Coach House Press), to Johanna Drucker's desktop production of the computer-generated and hand-painted *Narratology* (both 1994), "one image against another" is "creat[ing] something more subtle than thought," as Ian Hamilton Finlay put it.

Meanwhile, Finlay's own particular tradition is being carried on by his son Alec's publication of Morning Star Folios. These are collaborations

between artists and poets, published since 1990 in annual series of four issues.[3] At the outset, the folios tended to keep the verbal, visual, and even musical, media distinct, as in *Heiligenstadt*, Friedericke Mayröcker's 1978 poem, illustrated by Wes Christensen's painting *An Mein Herz* (1987) and packaged with the score to Brahms's *Intermezzo*, which is the key to the poet's narrative. But soon Finlay was bringing together artists and poets who seemed naturally in sync, as in the case of Robert Creeley and Sol Le Witt (Fifth Series). A beautiful little folio juxtaposes, on its vertical front panels, a Le Witt abstract design in black and white with Creeley's poem "Echo," which begins "Find our way out / no doubts / or in / again begin." The panels then open to reveal on the recto another composition (c. 15" square) by Le Witt, a hexagonal maze that is the perfect visual "echo" of Creeley's poem, especially the stanza "Spaces wait / faced / in the dark / no waste."

The same series contains Ian Stephen's and Will Maclean's witty and charming artist's book *A Semblance of Steerage*. The only nonverbal image here is Maclean's semi-abstract cover drawing of a stylized rudder, captioned "you learn to trust the keel that's under you." But can we so trust? The eight accordion pages that follow each have three bands of text (top, middle, bottom of page). The top band is a one-line title (e.g. "RUDDER for a Mirror," "RUDDER in teak," "SEAN'S TILLER," "BEN'S RUDDER," "RUDDER to share"). The center of each page has a little free-verse poem, usually in the form of a proposition, as in

a semblance of steering
provides procedure

or:

an offcut rudder:
counterbalanced curves
for a wee keel

where "counterbalanced" describes the intricate sound structuring itself—a "semblance of steering"—of */k/* and */iy/* phonemes. The bottom band provides a kind of commentary on the other two: for example, the lineated text above is followed by a sentence in italics with justified margins: *"(this rudder, claimed by my son as it fell from another rudder under construction, has not yet found a vessel)."* But on the final page, the page has only a top and center band:

SKIN *of varnish*

where the pun on "finish" provides an apt conclusion to the book's nautical fantasy. The "diving blade" is what remains.

In Series 5/2 (April 1994), Alec Finlay gives us a remarkable collaboration between the Chilean poet Cecilia Vicuña and the Scottish Edwin Morgan called ***PALABRAR** mas / **WURDWAPPIN** schaw.* The work consists of two square (5") pamphlets, the first containing an explanatory letter Vicuña wrote to "Eck" (Alec Finlay) together with a glossary and short poetic fragments. As the glossary suggests, Morgan provides the Scottish equivalents to Vicuña's Spanish paragrams. Thus the title "PALABRARmas," an elaborate paragram on the power of the poet's words ("palabra"= "word", "labrar" = "to work", "armas"= "arms", "más"= "more"), becomes, in a sly variant of the complex original, "WURDWAPPINschaw" (word weapon-show). Or again, the frontispiece couplet, quite formal in its articulation—*"Las palabras desean hablar / y eschucharlas es la primera labor!"*—becomes the down-to-earth *"Wurds wahnt tae spik! / Lisn! thon's yer furst wurk."*

Vicuña's letter to Eck, partly written in short prose paragraphs, partly in phrasal units, separated by small cruciform designs, deserves to be cited at some length:

> In the Mayan letters Olson speaks of 'their leavings,' (what the Maya left), but in Spanish 'sus dejos' would be 'their way of speaking,' the delicate manner in which a mother speaks to her child when no one is listening, a form of being in sound.
>
> . . .
>
> And it is the double aspect of this 'leaving' that interests me, the fact that it is practical (utilitarian) and transcendent (full of other possibilities) at the same time.
>
> This is how I see our own words. Perhaps because I see Spanish from the point of view of Quechua, and vice-versa, a word for me in any language is multidimensional, and is charged with 'hidden meanings' as we can see. . . .

Vicuña's real obsession with verbal "leavings," she explains, began in London in 1974, where she was living in exile after Pinochet's military coup. "This time it was a new set of words":

ver dad
dad ver
(truth: to give sight)

And she explains:

> Edwin Morgan's translations (so close to cons te llation,
> *latir* is the beating of the heart)
> is more than a trans
> it is an installation in the language of poetry.

"More than a trans": this surely is the point. Open the second folio and you find, on facing pages, the words:

co*n*razón her*ich*t

Delete the "n" from "Con razón" ("with reason") and you have "corazón" ("heart")—an echo, perhaps, of Pascal's "The heart has its reasons," as well as a representation of the familiar opposition of heart to head. In Morgan's Scottish version, the "hert" ("heart") contains within itself that which is "right." But the isolation of "ich" "(German "I") personalizes that heart, even as "her t" points back to Vicuña. But then her paragram isolates the "co," suggesting that these poets are truly collaborators. Not a translation, as Vicuña has said, but a "constellation" or "installation" in the language of poetry.

Succeeding pairs like "pe*nsar*/pa*i*ense" (with their play on think," "sorrow,: and "weight") carry on the poetic dialogue. And Morgan has an uncanny way of letting the Scots dialect draw out the implications in the Spanish words. On the final pages, Vicuña's

per*mite*

el dón

with its installation of "pardon" in the midst of gift-giving, finds a nice echo in Morgan's

gie
for
gie

where the "gie" ("give"), repeated twice, takes precedence over the need for forgiveness. Where Vicuña stresses the need for "perdón," Morgan's response stresses the gift itself. A gift evidently "for" the reader.

If Vicuña and Morgan are still producing a fairly pure concrete poetry, most visual writing today—I am thinking of Bruce Andrews or bp nichol, Karen Mac Cormack or Susan Howe—uses the resources of spacing and typography, phonetic spelling, rebus, and paragram so as to contest the status of language as a bearer of uncontaminated meanings and to question the one-way linear flow between poet and reader. In this sense, visual constellation (the lamination of the paradigmatic onto the syntagmatic axis) can produce what Steve McCaffery has called a "carnivalization of the semantic order." A stunning example of such "language graphics," is Joan Retallack's new book *Afterrimages* (Wesleyan, 1995), whose very title ("after" + "rim" + "ages") announces the possibilities latent in the most ordinary of words.

Newton, Retallak reminds us in her frontispiece, citing a reference in the OED, "suffered for many years from an after-image of the sun caused by incautiously looking at it through a telescope." But, speaking in the voice of her phonetic alter ego "Genre Tallique," the poet revises this linear Newtonian notion: "We tend to think of afterimages as aberrations. In fact all images are after. That is the terror they hold for us." Indeed, *after*—as in Wallace Stevens's "I do not know which to prefer / The beauty of inflections / Or the beauty of innuendoes,/ the blackbird whistling / or just after," a passage which becomes, in Retallack's scheme of things, *"After* whistling or just_____"—is a basic, perhaps the basic "form of life" today, where every image, event, speech, or citation can be construed as an "afterthought" or "aftershock" of something that has always already occurred. Hence Retallack's witty example (on the same page) from the Manhattan Project physicist Victor Weisskopff, who recalls that the explosion of the first atomic bomb was accompanied by a Tchaikovsky waltz, coincidentally being broadcast by a nearby radio station.

The *Afterrimages* sequence which gives the book its title has 34 pages, no two of which look alike. Each page serves as a kind of afterimage for the other, the lamination of citations from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, from the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lilly C. Stone's *English Sports and Recreations*, or from "Genre Tallique" herself, creating a set tantalizing "language graphics." Here is page 7:

vol low on radio • in Tangier

no smoke but smell of alarm

(see a pre-Socratic on fire in the mind)

nice being out here in the sun

(or St. Augustine on time)

±o = no future tense in dreams = o±
(poetry eludes genre as well)

sage of the ectopic eye

logical series of unsolicited occasions

(see i in e

in e in

o

s w

ec

s

The poem's perspective is that of a "sage of the ectopic Eye" (line 8). Displacement—again, afterimage—is the order of the day. "Vol low on

radio": the initial chiasmus followed by a rhyme, rather like the pop song that may be on the air, might be glossed by Wittgenstein's remark, in *Culture and Value*, that "Everything we see could also be otherwise." Fire (in Tangier? in the mind?) is announced not by smoke but by an alarm, the alarm gives rise not to sound but to smell, and the tenselessness of dreams and mathematical formula is, in a "logical series of unsolicited occasions," compared (in a tiny afterthought) to the genrelessness of poetry. And now, unsolicitated, the lines just preferred are written through (in the manner of Cage, one of Retallack's chief mentors, by means of chance operations) to yield phonemic and morphemic after-echoes. The vowels *e, i,* and *o* are extracted from the displaced or "ectopic" eye in a spatial layout that makes seeing difficult. Then the "ec" is extracted as well, "topic" (not named) taking us back to the "topic" of pre-Socratics and Augustine above. But finally there is only the "s" of "occasions," and that "s" also attaches itself to "ec" in the preceding line to give us an X. "Unsolicited occasions," it seems, produce the most interesting new poetic formations.

Page 21, by contrast, has only a tiny afterimage—"s[ ]ent" with its visual reference to "silent":

your c u p i s l e a v i n g a r i n g o n *my* t a b l e

see RHYTHM and FORM p.5

(*Enna Labraid* etc.) quoted p.4, above,

translators note on the

fabled indifference of gods

here lies[ ]entire totem of body[ ]parts

silk pilfer nasturtium semiotic *ad sequitur*

see other *Italic Poetries* p.3

α) *Hy*ge sceal *heard*ra, *heorte* be cenre;

ß) (moping virgins [*versions*] of all genders [*genres*])

.....

s[ ]ent

Here Retallack uses spacing and citation for effect: "*your* c u p i s l e a v i n g a r i g o n *my* t a b l e" comically deflates the distinction (the obsession of two-year olds) between what's *yours* and what's *mine*. For one thing, if we're seated at my table drinking, say, tea, "your" cup is not really yours

at all, because it comes from my set of dishes. Then too: "cupis" suggests "Cupid," "cupidity," "cupiscence," and so on. And cupidity is just what "you" are being accused of by the owner of the table. From here on the poem plays with mock reference, as in "RHYTHM and FORM," which might be the title of any one of a dozen handbooks on poetry, Old English saga and Latin verse, the language always running away from its source as in *"ad sequitur"* instead of non-sequitur, and the "moping virgins"—or are they "versions"—of gendres/genres. There is always space for revision: the word "virgins," etymologically quite unrelated to "versions," does sound like it. Then, too, a virgin is known by someone's version of a particular woman's history. Might this virgin have aversion to sex? The message, in any case, has been "s[ ] ent."

Poetic artifice of this order will strike some readers as an acquired taste. But if so, it's an acquired taste becoming more and more pervasive: consider, for example, Peter Gizzi's *Exact Change no. 1: Yearbook 1995*, a volume that weighs in at 414 glossy pages, whose elegant and extravant layout has been executed by a team of production assistants and printed in Hong Kong. *Yearbook 1* features Michael Palmer, glamorously pictured on the book's cover and represented by an excellent interview with Peter Gizzi and a twelve-page selection from his work. It includes a CD of readings by twelve poets from Palmer to Ted Berrigan[4] and is available for $35 from Exact Change, P. O. Box 1917, Boston MA 02205 (or for £19.50 from Carcanet Press in Britain)- something of a bargain when one takes into account how much interesting material is included. And the distribution (by Distributed Art Publishers) will surely help sales. I bought my copy at the Museum of Contemporary Art bookstore in LA, where it was prominently exhibited.

To both its admirers and its detractors (and there are sure to be a number of the latter), the *Exact Change Yearbook* represents a milestone in poetry publishing, its stylish format announcing, depending on your point of view, that the avant-garde has finally arrived or that, on the contrary, it has finally been commodified. Or perhaps a little bit of both. In their prefatory "Publisher's Note," Damon Krukowski and Naomi Yang (who doubles as the book's designer) write that they wanted to replace the now defunct New Directions annual by presenting "a large miscellany of avant-garde work, both contemporary and historical, chosen less to represent a particular 'school,' and more in the spirit of learning what's out there." To this end, the publishers asked Peter Gizzi "to help us find a range of contemporary work that draws on the tradition we publish in our books of Surrealist and other early twentieth-century experimentation. . . .To what came back we added work by *Exact Change* authors [Stein, Cage, de Chirico, Aragon], as well as a few other discoveries we were eager to share."

My own sense is that, on the whole, the publishers and editor have been remarkably successful. A yearbook does not, of course, have to provide "coverage" as does an anthology; it has none of the hang-ups that have confronted, say, Eliot Weinberger, Paul Hoover, or Douglas Messerli in recent years. If someone's not "in"—well, maybe he or she will be in *Exact Change #2*. But what makes this book so distinctive and exciting is that it juxtaposes avant-garde poets and artists from the U.S. (ranging chronologically from the *Imaginary Elegies* of the late Jack Spicer and Fanny Howe's presentation of extracts from John Wiener's very moving journal *707 Scott Street*, to a "Gallery" of younger largely unknown poets like Paul Beatty, Tory Dent, and Jennifer Moxley), with their counterparts abroad—specifically, in Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia—and, closer to home, the Caribbean and Canada. And as if these juxtapositions weren't enough, we can also read, say, Clark Coolidge or Susan Howe against Gertrude Stein's *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship Faded*, which is printed for the first time (as Julianna Spahr explains in an excellent headnote), together with Stein's source text, Georges Hugnet's *Enfance*, exactly in the form they were originally published in the journal *Pagany* (1930). Or again, we can read Barbara Guest's lecture "Poetry the True Fiction" against Hugo Ball's "Grand Hotel Metaphysics," the "Radio Happenings" of John Cage and Morton Feldman against Erik Satie's "Dried Embryos," Michael Palmer against Louis Aragon's "Peasant's Dream" or the "Fragments" of De Chirico.

Such collaging gives, at least me, a sense of—forgive the taboo word—transcendence. For instead of the usual anthology wars (who's in, who's out, which editor is sufficiently multicultural?) the *Exact Change Yearbook* offers the most convincing evidence I've seen to date that our own radical poetries are not some kind of local aberration, spawned by a bunch of theory-crazed, left-wing poets in New York and San Francisco, and perpetrated by *les jeunes* at Buffalo and other out-of-the way stations—poetries, so the mainstream would have it, to be ignored as thoroughly as possible by the various prize-giving foundations as well as most of the elite universities like my own. Indeed, what Gizzi's juxtapositions of U.S. and foreign portfolios suggest is that the attention to the materiality of language I spoke of above, to syntactic disjunction and visual constellation, and especially to the reconfiguration of lyric as speaking, once again, not only for the "sensitive" and "authentic" individual ("Here's what I, Mary Smith, realized yesterday, as I was weeding the garden") but for the larger cultural and philosophical moment—that all these are now characteristic of poetries produced around the globe.

Take Jeff Twitchell's portfolio of the "Original Chinese Language Group." As Twitchell explains, "Original, not in the sense of unique, but

because of their interest in the earlier meanings and associations that can be read in the Chinese written character. . . .So, too, the recuperation of the original impetus of poetry as the play in language." The "Original Poets," Twitchell explains, go beyond their predecessors, the so-called "Misty" (because branded "obscure" by the official critics) poets of the late 1970s, of whom the best known in the U.S. is Bei Dao. The 1988 "Original" Manifesto, reproduced here, comes out strongly against the localism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism that bedeviled Communist China until quite recently. The aim is to make contact with "modern Western art," and the vehicle for such contact, the manifesto declares, is the written character, which, compared to spoken language, is "less polluted and prejudged." "We do not avoid," they declare, "the phrase 'word games' which already has aroused great misunderstanding. We even like it. "Game" [yóuxi] is a word, connoting the profound, eerie spirit of art and philosophy." And the text gives way to the visual image of a large black cross which represents the intersection of "swim" [yóu]—to get in touch with reality—and "play" [xì].

Twitchell's portfolio is taken from the selection that appeared in the British journal *Parataxis* (#7, 1994), edited by the poet Drew Milne. In translation, the poems themselves—by Che Quian-Zi, Zhou Ya-Ping, Yi Cun, Huang Gan, Xian Meng, and Hong Liu (the one woman in this group)—don't quite live up to that manifesto.[5] "Word games," in the sense of, say, Joan Retallack's paragrammatic play, are less common than neo-Surrealist imagery and the casting of a sharp eye on the "direct treatment of the thing," in the Poundian imagist sense. Just as Pound's fabled "invention of China" turns out to have little to do with the classical Chinese models which were his source, so the Original Poets's version of "language poetry" is more graphic and precisionist than, say, Charles Bernstein's or Bob Perelman's. Here, for example, is Part III of Zhou Ya-Ping's "Vulgar Beauty":

> An afterbirth is unfolded, taking the shape of an umbrella.
> The ridges of an umbrella along yellow lines.
> A fetus like a coal cinder has long been reared in it,
> Lit by me, it will give off light.
> A white crane, unexpectedly covered by a black string-net
> A snake, bound with a copper wire, body
> Like a tightening spring, soft parts flashing.

We must remember that in the Chinese, as J. H. Prynne notes in an Afterword that is itself a kind of prose poem, the "iconic deployment [of the language] by stroke play and contexture makes a traffic with the eye worked by a different ground-plan." At one point, the translators planned

to include some of the Chinese text so as to show how the tactile element works, but the Originals themselves countered this idea because, as Prynne puts it, "it would suggest exoticism or extraneous willow-pattern ornament; to them, we are the exotics, with our credit-card view of the speech act."

The Russian portfolio, edited by Edward Foster and drawn from the conference called "The New Freedom," which Foster organized at the Stevens institute of Technology in April, 1994, raises similar issues. Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, even in the brilliantly austere translations of Lyn Hejinian, is, as is Alexei Parshchikov and Aleksandr Eremenko, given to hyperbole and extravagant conceit, to manic, gargantuan, highly sensuous catalogues of images rather than to the abstraction and citation we find in its U.S. counterparts. At the same time, as locutions like "false, foil-like grounds of gender" suggest, Dragomoschenko has obviously learned a lot from his translator's own brand of verbal play:

> I like to provoke the sensation of the thin, undependable, somehow false, foil-like grounds of gender, bearing within itself a sleepy illusion of the laws of gravity, as if governed by my movements in the unconfining limits of gravitations and diversions of space. And when, in a radiant eclipse at the inevitable reunion with earth, at the increasing of masses and the sweetest, strawberry creamlike terror of children, consciousness takes on the transparency of compressed time, the theory of free fall blossoms with fresh oxides on the lips, past which the wind carries us. . . .(from *Phosphor)*

But perhaps the most surprising of the portfolios—surprising, that is, to the wider audience that will hopefully read the *Yearbook*, is the British one, edited by Tom Raworth and titled "An Anglo-Irish Alternative." So used are we to the "gentility" of the contemporary British verse we read in Granta or Grand Street, that the opening of the first poem in Raworth's portfolio, Denise Riley's "Burnt"—

> And then my ears get full of someone's teeth again
> As someone's tongue
>
> as brown and flexible as a young giraffe's
> rasps all round someone else's story—

is startling in its refusal to pretty things up, to get the erotic scene that follows exactly "right." In the headnote, Raworth remarks that what unites his fourteen poets—among them, Catherine Walsh, D.S. Marriott, Iliassa Sequin, Ken Edwards, Maurice Scully, Lee Harwood, Wendy Mulford, Ulli

Freer, Anthony Mellors, and Raworth himself (Prynne being included with the entire "Bands Around the Throat" in the "Three Chapbooks" section, along with Beverly Dahlen and Susan Howe) is a "common distaste for what is still passed off as British poetry. . .the Hughes, Heaney, Harrison axis—the "New Generation" poets marketed like sportswear the terrible drabness of Larkin (whom I imagine wrote 'They tuck you up / your mum and dad' and then rode the wave of a typo)."

Here, as in Prynne's satiric demolition of the "credit-card view of the speech act," one has the sense that, after years of Drab Age verse, fun is once again part of the British poetry scene. One of the wittiest Morning Star Folio productions, for that matter, is Edwin Morgan's version of Kurt Schwitters's "Die Wut des Niesens" ("The Rage to Sneeze") called *Merzbanky*. Open a little folder and take out an ordinary paper napkin (cocktail size), and there is Schwitters's poem, with its marvelous onomatopoeic rendition of the "sneeze." And similar verbal play is found in Lee Harwood's superb rendition of Joseph Cornell's box-making in the set of fifty fragments called "Days and Nights: Accidental Sightings."

"Vortex," the bard said, "is energy!" We are, as the *Yearbook* makes abundantly clear, living in a great and varied moment for poetry. Rosmarie Waldrop's "Berlin(plus) Portfolio," for example, is absolutely startling in its presentation of East and West German poets, writing a poetry at once as not always amicably related. but writing an explosive, daring, and sardonic lyric that gives our own language poetics a purposely nasty spin, rather like putting a George Grosz cartoon on top of a Jasper Johns drawing. The "Canadian Emergency" section, edited by Steve Evans and "From the Anglophone Caribbean" (edited by Mark McMorris) deserve reviews of their own: the relations of McMorris's poets to a Francophone Caribbean poet like Aimé Césaire, for example (or, for that matter, to the U.S. poet Clayton Eshleman) deserve to be studied. But space forbids me to do so here, even as I can't dwell on Cole Swensen's (misspelled Swenson here—one of a number of spelling errors in this otherwise beautifully produced book) "Ecriture française," a fine selection from the work, somewhat better known to U.S. readers than the other poetries discussed here, of Anne-Marie Albiach, Emmanuel Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud, Dominique Fourcade, and a number of others—poets closely associated with Michael Palmer and Michael Davidson, Marjorie Welish, and Rae Armantrout among other Language writers.

Swensen's portfolio should be read in tandem with a very valuable book published this year, Serge Gavronsky's *Towards a New Poetics: Contemporary Writing in France* (University of California Press, 1994, $18 paper). Gavronsky's introduction is very informative about the evolution of post-World War II poetry in France, from the "literature engagée" of the fifties and sixties to *Tel Quel* Marxist poetics and the deconstructionist

climate of the "death of the author" that dominated the literary scene through the late seventies. He is somewhat less successful in explaining the aesthetic of the current moment, remarking, for example, that the "reactivation of the first-person singular [is] now no longer a mere grammatical unit as it was in the sixties." Since the poetry in question (especially Jacques Roubaud's *Oulipo* work) takes pains to avoid the personal, it isn't quite clear what the shift away from *Tel Quel* means for poetry. I am also a bit confused about the the relation of the "formalism" he rightly ascribes to the "new poets" to their wholesale refusal of versification.

Never mind. The interviews Gavronsky conducts with his twelve writers (both poets and novelists) are full of fascinating material and the translations of the poems are excellent. I was especially interested in Michel Deguy's discussion of the disappearance of genres in favor of "poetical works" that cannot be readily classified and in Emmanuel Hocquard's insistence that he is "allergic to everything metaphoric, even to metaphor itself." Jacqueline Risset talks movingly about *passage* experience and what she calls "language cells." And Jacques Roubaud, one of the greatest writers represented here, reminds us how complex the derivation of his own poetry is, stemming, as it does, from the Troubadours as well as from Wittgenstein and Gertrude Stein.

At one point, Gavronsky asks Roubaud (who teaches mathematics at Paris-Nanterre) about the relation of academic to creative life in France. Roubaud answers:

> To tell the truth, there's an unreachable barrier in France between academic and creative life, and it's been that way for a long time. That's how it was in the sixteenth century, and nothing has changed!. . . .That doesn't mean that in France there isn't a strong interest in poetry among students and younger members of the faculty. But these are parallel lives; they do not cross.

Sound familiar? I'm amused to see that Roubaud thinks it's different in the U.S.! True, modern (and even postmodern) poetry is more fully "taught" in our universities than in French ones but the "parallel lives" Roubaud refers to are surely ours as well. Still, it's comforting to know the "barrier" has always been there and, in any case, there is now, both here and in France, enough interesting poeticizing, bookmaking, art working and theorizing going on to keep all of us busy. The U. of California Press should be commended for taking on what is, by current lights, bound to be a "marginal" project: an anthology of difficult new French poetry and poetics.

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

Footnotes

1 Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Letters to Ernst Jandl," *Chapman:* Ian Hamilton Finlay Special Issue, ed. Alec Finlay, 78-79 (1994): 11-12.

2 Hugh MacDiarmid, *Letters*, ed. Alan Bold (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 703.

3 They are available from Morning Star Publications, 17 Gladstone Terrace (ground floor), Edinburgh EH 9 1LS, Scotland for £20 per series, or through Small Press Distribution, Berkeley.

4 The CD is disappointing, there being no explanation of the eclectic mix of poets represented, many of whom (e.g., Alice Notley, Kenward Elmslie) are not in the book at all and some, like the Jack Spicer "Imaginary Elegies" (1957), and John Ashbery's "'They Dream Only of America'" (1962), stem from earlier decades. One could argue that the aim here, as in the book, is to produce telling juxtapositions, but in practice, the sequence from Michael Palmer to Ted Berrigan creates more confusion than insight.

5 Ming-Quian Ma, a Chinese doctoral candidate at Stanford, who has published essays on Carl Rakosi, George Oppen, Susan Howe, and Lyn Hejinian, and who is working on further translations of the "Original" poets with Jeff Twitchell, tells me that in the original, the poems in question are much more non-syntactic and disjunctive than in these translations. But of course I can only take Ma's word for it here.

Contributor Notes

MILTON KESSLER is working on a libretto for a chamber opera on Walt Whitman with the composer T.J. Anderson. *Learning the Boxes,* which originally appeared in *Sulfur* #31, is now available from Black Bird Press (with etchings by Robert E. Marx). ANNE WALDMAN is the author of *Iovis* and *Kill or Cure;* she coedited *Disembodied Poetics, Annals of the Jack Kerouac School,* with Andrew Schelling. She is the Director of the Writing Program at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, ROBERTO TEJADA has recently published articles and reviews in *Arte Internacional, La jornada, Themes,* and *The VVLS.* He continues to edit *Mandorla: New Writing from the Americas* out of Mexico City, MICHAEL HOLMAN lives in Ft. Wayne, Indiana; he has recently published poems in *Poetry East* and *The Burning World.* JAMES CLIFFORD is completing *Routes,* essays on the politics and poetics of location. Beginning in the fall of 1996, Coffee House Press will publish, in serial fashion, the complete collected works of PAUL METCALF. Exact Change has recently published CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's translation (with BERNARD BADOR: see cover, *Sulfur* #35) of ANTONIN ARTAUD's *Watchfiends & Rack Screams.* JEROME ROTHENBERG's twentieth-century anthology, *Poems for the Millennium* (coedited with Pierre Joris) has just been published by University of California Press. His tenth New Directions book, *Seedings,* will appear in 1996. MICHAEL MCCLURE's most recent publication is a collection of three long poems, *Dark Brown, Rare Angel,* and *Dolphin Skull* entitled *Three Poems* (Penguin-Viking). CHARLES WATTS is one of the organizers of "The Recovery of the Public World: a Conference and Poetry Festival in Honour of Robin Blaser, his Poetry and Poetics," which was held in June, 1995, in Vancouver, Canada. He works as a curator in the Simon Fraser University Library. PETER QUARTERMAIN is the author of *Disjunctive Poetics,* and has just finished writing the introduction to Kathleen Fraser's forthcoming *Collected Poems* (National Poetry Foundation). JACKSON MAC LOW'S books include *Representative Works: 1938–1985* (Roof), and *Pieces O'Six* (Sun & Moon). BRIAN D LUCAS lives in San Francisco and has published two small books, *Egg* and *Put.* He thanks Clark Coolidge, "a gem-encrusted drumset for him," Sections from RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS' Drafts are currently appearing in *Common*

Knowledge, Grand Street, Hambone, and *West Coast Line.* The next book of *Drafts* is expected in 1996. The Argentine writer LUISA FUTORANSKY has lived in Paris since 1982; she has published eight books of poetry, three novels, and two nonfiction works. JEFFERSON HANSON recently moved to Minneapolis, where he continues to edit *Poetic Briefs* magazine; his latest chapbook is *The Dramatic Monologues of Joe Blow* Only Artsy (Texture). JASON WEISS is finishing his first novel; his translation of Marcel Cohen's *Mirrors* will be published in 1996 by Sun & Moon. PHILLIP FOSS's most recent book are: *Courtesan of Seizure, The Excesses The Caprices,* and *The Composition of Glass.* DEAN YOUNG's new book, *Strike Anywhere,* won the Colorado Prize and will be published in October. PETER REDGROVE has recently coauthored *Alchemy For Women* (Rider, England) with Penelope Shuttle. The archetypal psychologist WOLFGANG GIEGERICH's writing has appeared in *Sulfurs*#20, 21, 28 and 30. In the fall PAMELA WYE will exhibit work in a international drawing show in Budapest, and in a group show at Elga Wimmer Gallery, NYC. DOREN ROBBINS' poetry and commentary have appeared in many magazines, including *North Dakota Quarterly, Kayak, Sulfur, American Poetry Review, Sagetreib, Contact II* and *Third Rail.* LINDSAY HILL's most recent book is *Kill Series* (Arundel). His newly completed book-length manuscript is entitled *NdjenFerno.* KEITH TUMA is lately pondering the post-Cartesian maxim "The limits of my language are the limits of my turd." ELIOT WEINBERGER 's *Written Reaction: Poetics Politics Polemics* is forthcoming from Marsilio. JEFF TWITCHELL writes on modern poetry and translates China experimentalists. He is now in Taiwan. ALLEN S. WEISS is most recently author of *Phantasmic Radio* (Duke). MARJORIE PERLOFF's recent books include *John Cage: Composed in America* (editor) and *Radical Artifice.*

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REVIEWS: Thomas Doherty on animated film; Laurence Goldstein on new books about masculinity and the male body in film; Poonam Arora on multi-cultural cinema.

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Sulfur 38

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DENNIS FORMENTO: ROBERT DUNCAN, ANARCHIST PRINCE

GUSTAF SOBIN: LATE BRONZE, EARLY IRON

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Sulfur

SPRING 1996

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: CELLULIFORME, 1994, by Matsutani (graphite, paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief—162 x 130 cm), courtesy of Galerie Mercuri, Paris.

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

LARRY EIGNER 1927–1996

I was given Eigner's first book "From the Sustaining Air" by either Jonathan Williams or by Robert Duncan who were admirers of it, forty years ago this year. I was very deeply moved by the book then, and I have been continually moved by Larry's poetry, and Larry's writing has been part of my growth. I have a different view of Larry than most people, I always saw him as a kind of astronaut. The space that we live in, that we take for granted, the chairs that we sit in, the porches that we stand on, the rain we listen to, are all part of a structure we live with that has a definite meaning for us, that has parameters and has dimensions, but Larry was always exploring it. It was different every time he sat on a porch from my sitting on a porch. When he saw a star up there, or blue in the sky, or when he saw a cooper hawk fly over, or when he listened to the wind through the wires, and wrote of them, he returned them to me in a different measure than I had perceived them in, and in a different structure than I had imagined and they seemed to me to be freer. It seemed to be freer, and it gave freedom to my life and brought more meaning to my life to be able to explore those commonalities that I took for granted except for the man who lived among them as one would live on a frontier.

It is a rare and great accomplishment that Eigner has made and he made it with his eyes and his ears and his nose and his taste and his touch and his smell and his muscles that were grasped together in his body as he sat in his wheelchair. Those were his organs of perception and through his poetry, he gave me the gift of them.

Thank you, Larry.

Michael McClure 2/6/96

JAYNE CORTEZ

NOW I DIG UP PATINAS

Now I dig up patinas
I chew on slit logs
I polish surfaces of cyclones
I mount bullet wounds to inspect
mutilations
I uproot the spirit of
the chemicals that make me
violate myself
I count limited resources
I view sink holes in
the atmosphere
I lubricate the batas
& provoke in all keys of
flesh & hallucinogenic gongs
the obscenities stuck to
my elbow of whistling bones
& with Olmec sculptors shrieking through
banana grove of my solitude
at 12:45 A M
& with the jaguars dropping from
my throat
& the pumice of bulldog ants rising from
my damp discharge zone of
poetic fission
& with medicinal fat of
a big time rooster
in my nose of talkative boogers
& with torn crows flying from my
brown bearded ovum of
sulfuric acid blood

& with the insects blowing from
my colon of atomic leaves
& with mescal tears of oppressed fleas
smeared on wings
of my ovarian cysts
I detonate
I nuclear react
I frenzy faces of
fascist thought
I become
Zaire River mouth
pissing on every
corrupt officer in an old
leopard skin Mobutu Sese Seku cap
I unmuzzle my
black stretched limousine lips
I say
I'm a poet
to vin rouge
vin blanc
drunk fly
corpse of a roach in a cup

GARY SNYDER

THE MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

Ceaseless wheel of lives
ceaseless wheel of lives

red sandstone;
gleaming dolomite

ceaseless wheel of lives

red sandstone and white dolomite.

Driving all night south from Reno
through cool-porched Bridgeport,
past Mono Lake's pale glow,
past tongues of obsidian flow stopped chill,
and the angled granite face
of the east Sierra front—

Ah. Here I am arrived in Bishop,
Owens Valley, called Payahu Nadu not so long ago.

Ranger Station on main street,
"I'm a traveller.
I want to know the way
to the White Mountains,
& the bristlecone pines."
She gives me maps. "Here. The trail
to the grove at timberline
where the oldest living beings
thrive on rock and air."

"—Thank you for your help."

I go to the pass, turn north,
end of day, climbing high,
find an opening where a
steep dirt side road halts.
A perch in the round dry hills,
bunchy pinyon pine boughs shade,
a view to the Last Chance range,
& make a camp.

Nearby, a rocky point.
Climb it,
passing a tidy scat-arrangement on a ledge,
stand on a dark red sandstone strata outcrop at the edge.
Ridge after ridge of dry sierra
darkening eastward into blue-black haze.

Out of the shade a voice says

"You had a bit of fame once in the city
for poems of mountains,
here it's real."

What?

"Like the lines

Walking on walking
under foot earth turns

But what do you know of what's below,
talk about earth and all that scale of time,
—what for?

Please read to me that poem."

I answer back,
"—Tonight is the night of the shooting stars,

Mirfak the brilliant star of Perseus
crosses the ridge at midnight

I'll read it then."

Who am I talking to? I think,
walk back to camp.

•

Evening breeze up from the flats
from the valleys "Salt" and "Death"—
Venus and the new moon sink in a deep blue glow
behind the Palisades to the west,
needle-clusters shirring in the wind—
listen close, the sound gets better.

Mountain ranges violet haze back fading in the east
puffs of sailing dusk-lit cloud, a big owl's
swift soft whip between the trees,
unroll the bedding, stretch out blankets on the
crunchy dry pine needles sun-warm
resinous ground.

Formations dip and strike my sleep.

.....

—A song approaching in a dream:

"Bitter ghosts that kick their own skulls like a ball
happy ghosts that stick a flower
into their old skull's empty eye—
'good and evil'
—that's another stupid dream—
for streams and mountains
clouds and glaciers,
is there ever an escape?

Erosion always wearing down;
shearing, thrusting, deep plates crumpling,

still uplifting—ice-carved cirques
dendritic endless fractal streambed riffs on hillsides

—bitter ghosts that kick their own skulls like a ball
what's it all for?"

a meteor swift and streaking
like a tossed white pebble
arcing down the sky—

the Mountain Spirit stalks there,
Old woman? white ragged hair?
in the glint of Algol, Altair, Deneb,
Sadr, Aldebaran—saying, "I came to hear—"

Awake: I read for her

The Mountain Poem.

Walking on walking,
under foot earth turns

Streams and mountains never stay the same.

Walking on walking,
under foot earth turns

Streams and mountains never stay the same.

Into earth rock dives.
As the mountains lift and open
underground out,
dust over seashell, layers of ooze,
display how it plays.

Buttresses fractured, looming,
friction only, soon to fall, each face
a heap of risks
talus slopes below
flakes weathered off the buried block,
                tricked off an old pluton,
and settle somewhere, ever lower down—
gives a glimpse
of streaks and strains, warp and slide,
abraded gritty mudwash glide
        where cliffs lean
                to the raven-necklace sky—

        Calcium spiralling shells,
no land plants then when
sands and stones flush down the
barren flanks of magma-swollen uplands
slurry to the beach,
ranges into rubble, old shores buried by debris
a lapping trough of tide flats and lagoons
lime-rich wave-wash soothing shales and silts
a thousand miles of chest-deep reef
seabottom riffled, wave-swirled, turned and tilled
by squiggly slime-swimmers many-armed,
        millions of tiny different tracks
        crisscrossing through the mud—

trilobite winding salt sludge,
calcite ridges, diatom babies drifting home,
swash of quartzy sand
        three hundred million years
                be rolling on   and then

ten million years ago an ocean floor
glides like a snake beneath the continent crunching up
old seabed til it's high as alps.
Sandstone layers script of winding tracks
        and limestone shines like snow
        where ancient beings grow.

"When the axe-strokes stop
the silence grows deeper—"

Peaks like Buddhas at the heights
send waters streaming down
to the deep center of the turning world.

And the Mountain Spirit always wandering
hillsides fade like walls of cloud
pebbles smoothed off sloshing in the sea.
What for? Who cares?
old woman mountain hears
shifting sand
tell the wind
"nothingness is shapeliness"

Mountains will be Buddhas then.

when—bristlecone needles are green!
Scarlet penstemon
flowers are red!

Mountains feed the people too
stories from the past
of pine-nut gathering baskets quickly full
of help at grinding, carrying, healing—

Ghosts of lost landscapes
herds and flocks,
towns and clans,
great teachers from all lands
tucked in Wovoka's empty hat,
stored in Baby Krishna's mouth,
kneeling for tea
in Vimalakirti's one small room.

goose flocks
crane flocks
Lake Lahontan come again!

Walking on walking,
under foot earth turns.

The Mountain Spirit whispers back:

"All art and song
is sacred to the real.
As such."

•

Bristlecone pines live long

on the taste of carbonate,
dolomite,

spiral'd standing coiling
dead wood with the living,
four thousand years of mineral glimmer
spaced out growing in the icy airy sky
white bones under summer stars.

—the Mountain Spirit and me

like ripples of the Cambrian Sea

dance the pine tree

old arms, old limbs, twisting, twining,

scatter cones across the ground

stamp the root-foot DOWN.

and then she's gone.

Ceaseless wheel of lives
red sandstone and white dolomite.

A few more shooting stars
back to the bedroll, sleep til dawn.

(This poem parallels the Nô play "Yamamba" (Old Mountain-woman), a play of the "supernatural being" class, written in the "aged style" of "Quiet heart and distant eye.")

KEVIN KILLIAN

from ARGENTO SERIES

THE DOOR INTO DARKNESS

A hand within touching distance of the doorknob.
No light, no sound, the lintel black with absence and size.

The wristwatch that talks, "Time for your medications."
Feeling, the cold drip inside your thigh, the scent of fear.

Quiet, the set is cleared and the long spaces grow still, dark.
Bitter scent of attempted, the light, the warm hatching eggs.

Open the door, pick its hinges, flood the house with darkness.
A short burst of steam, the mailbox slot hot as his asshole,

darkness within and the field of the open human page. The
check for his pills, and a glass of water from crystal springs

tipped to his mouth: he is old now, yodeling in a sleep
indecent, cracked, his hand furtive sly yanks at a single sheet—

Pull at the tubes, throw open the black wooden door and let go.
All the world staring at him from inside his own eyes

and I'm like, the hand that takes the door by the knob, firmly,
uprooted, as once I made him come with my hand, till he

couldn't stop gasping for breath. Now he can breathe, now
he can live, now he can come, now he can write, dead in the
[dark.

INFERNO

Inferno maybe too descriptive
I lived with him for seven years
black under water, a shark on fire

Are you the patient XYZ?
who blew smoke up my ass
and fell into watery aphrodite loving me!

Rip that tube from the wall and feel me up
loving you and forcing you to wriggle a bit
a sausage on griddle, hot

Mother of tears, mother of shadows
give him a little more zip
I don't want him self-conscious
when he walks among dot dot dot

Big, bright colors like a Cibachrome painting
by Nan Goldin should she turn to oils.

I ate the seventies dancing in disco
and made the eighties this fresco experience
Now I'm impoverished, begging

for my birth mark, going on thorazine
should I turn to oils, shark under fire
or should I just say, *tattoo man, make*

me a birth mark, say it was me from the
beginning, and in thy honor I shall
do thee justice? I lived with him when he

died and I'll live when he abrades me
for he is the Saxon justice of a women's
barony, he gives me strength, to carry on

he lights up my life, disco inferno
night falls on a prodigal landscape, loving
him was never light mechanical

Mother of mercy, mother of pain
tell him for me he lives on my derma
when I pull it off gently after the chemo

He won't love me without my foreskin
tiny little snip of waxwork
only a storm toss'd frigate by Turner

Tell him there's some easy pickings
long and low the banks of the Mersey
white Jersey daisies and calla slips

creeping up the inner side of his leg
locks and curl then up to inside his anus
where I admitted the thorazine early

Mother of HIV, mother of envy, grant me
the shallow wish to be loved like a man
in the highest way, la vita nuova, in your

shallow dish I shall take to Goshen
learning the ropes inefficient way, if the
boat don't break don't fix it, miles of

ash and fire all you can see, in your throat,
your naked silver throat, a shallow boom
box, glug, it's coming through and we're

history.

ZOMBIE

Father who keeps one great yellow eye peeled for the
Boy, don't let him grow up to be that peeping Tom
With the German accent. Father of definition, let no

Glaucoma take him behind the screen of white china,
He's my little wriggling thing I eat like a jujube.
Out of your mouth you spewed me like catfish, lukewarm,

Whiskered, "hot diggety dog!" said the other children
Crowding round my genitals as though on Bonfire, but
Then coming back to school to pray, heads bowed

Father who makes this body of sense go stupid
Whenever I see you burning in that berry bush,
Keep your guard down till over your self-defense I leap.

I once did ooze, but now I'm hard, I'll become lard
If a prayerful sort. Dance class at noon, I expect
Every *Mein Herr* to take that duty, dinner at sevenish,

Little gummy green bear assails us at table with news of
Thee, soup on the left, big bowl of snapdragons floating
In the water of Thee. Dear God, as I lay dying of AIDS

I prayed to you and all your ministries nightly and daily,
And you were out in school teaching us the colors of the fag.
Dear God, let me freeze up his serious T-cells into miasma

And bring him alive in the 23rd century, I can't lose
Everything—not in 1 day. Jesus fucking Christ, I'll bring
Corpse after corpse to wash your feet with, to open a closet

With a bullet in space, sleep if you are tired, rest if
You feel trenchant. Father of HIV stop the digital maniplex,
Close your eyes, close your eyes, relax think of nothing tonight.

JACK CLARKE

SIX POEMS

THE ART-SCARRED SURFACE OF TELLURIS

"Above us only sky. . ."
—John Lennon, "Imagine"

"Prometheus renewed the cosmos by re-embroidering the world-mind."
—Dora Marsden, *The Mysteries of Christianity*

"Jim Bridger first white man into Yellowstone
thought God had flipped if this was Creation"
—Charles Olson

What if we didn't have that great yellowstone
of stuff to draw upon, feed off of, sustain by
sacrifice to, bend over backward not to feel
out of alignment with, as though it really were
there and you and everyone knew it to be so,
what if Prometheus were not the thief of fire
and knew it, that is had simply closed the circle
(is this what Aeschylus risked death to suggest?)
without which the gap opens to engorge along lines
Bataille has specified, consumption as destruction,
to let the liver kill you over guilt of being rich,
one's own Eagle (Mauss's *potatl)* taking the blame,
what if in the Moebius Universe there is no room
for anything between you and my open umbrella?

THE GATE OF HORN

"From the animal
to the man

leads back

to the god
or goddess

—I believe!"

—Charles Whittaker

"Each generation has two or three great conversational partners."
—Octavio Paz, "Iniquitous Symmetries: An Interview by Gabriel Caballero"

"Jim Jones learned at an early age that a dead animal could give him power over people."
—Michael Meiers, "Was Jonestown a CIA Medical Experiment?"

"The benevolent aspect of the lion identifies with Christ, and the malevolent with Satan. Such contrasting symbolism in one icon is very common in the art of the Middle Ages."
—John Williamson, *The Oak King, The Holly King, and the Unicorn*

Onions showed how horns and hair (Samson's strength)
once were outcroppings of the brain, itself a glob
of seminal fluid at the top of the spine venerated
so to be worn like antlers, how the Fabled Unicorn
might be lured to naked virginal lap of Artemis,
La Luna "stands" the Gold Green Lion of the forest
and what I took to be a hill of sheep was really
the back of a shorn Unicorn, the Whole Thing is
moving to the quiver I stepped on that morning but
now with Reilly here my fear passes over to Gramma
relieved of her congestion in canopied enclosure,
I will give Freud that much, he held a generation on
his knee knowing in these matters, an horned Moses
led him down surely, surrounded by ancient animals.

MAY POLE RAMP

"With the coming of the horse to the Great Plains in the years following the Pueblo Revolt against the Spanish (1690) matters changed."
—Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography*

"And why is it that the traditional 'Jolly Roger' pirate flag. . .you know, the skull and crossbones. . .looks so damnably identical to the skull and crossbones on Freemason gravestones?"
—Michael Bradley, *Holy Grail Across the Atlantic*

"Things are getting worse, but people are getting better."
—Arthur Young, designer of the Bell helicopter

And why shouldn't everyone be the same as their Nation,
isn't that in the best of the great Athenian tradition?
especially now when every citizen's cryptic emergency
takes place on the record, more likely phonograph than
Hall of Fame, which doesn't touch them where they live,
in song, even the President in his own wet noodle gets
behind the oval office flag no secret Skull and Bones
except to fly Death out of the Country skinned alive
in the interest of Masonic conquest, if only
the resident psychopathy could be extracted to aegis
this equine covenant and love and war loosed upon us
by satellite next to the movie channel which believes
in neither so beams a simulated mantle for all those
who die daily that MTV may broadcast rock upon rock.

THE NEW HORSE MEDICINE DREAMERS

"Far away from these threads through the hole to continue
the prospect beyond impact of landing very hard and fast
and past the anima button."

—Fred Wah, "Dead in My Tracks" (Aug. 1, 1989)

"Let's throw the Antithetical off the horse!"

—Robert Duncan, dream dictation to John Clarke

"iron workers

—Örebru

"Feathers
in her blood"

—Charles Olson, "The winds / which blew my daughter. . ."

"The wind does not move on
to another place"

—Robin Blaser, "The Literalist"

Just so you see that all we've lost has gone
elsewhere to meet us, *from feathers to iron,*
the correlate of consciousness as we go along,
twin formation now everyone is full of holes
once were thrown into by Our Father spring
was just around the corner and now the corner
is forever turned and the horses will look up
from the water when they see we have returned,
O I want us to be there (as we are), how ugly
the cut members look separated from the body,
fingers of no hand easily become Donner soup,
got to get back, poetry threads the eyes rolling
back in late Jurassic, heads still re-entrantly
connected with every other continuous cross wind.

A POET'S JOB IS TO ACT OUT

—for Al Glover

"your body
is to drop
its load"

—Charles Olson, "The nation / is nothing but poetry. . ."

"Very few indeed have stayed out all night once in their lives."

—Thoreau, *Walden*

"We need not much mind what people please to say, but what they must say."

—Emerson

"The more perfection anything has, the more active and the less passive it is. . . . The more active it is, the more perfect it becomes."

—Spinoza, *Ethics*

The secret is passed from girl to girl, and must be,
so what's a man to do but act out if and when he can?
out of the bear-sack or character armor or whatever
we want to call the thing that keeps him from being
"conspicuous and political" as Charles Olson *was* one
night at Wheeler Hall, UC Berkeley, 1965 (listen to
the tape) when he lost all his friends who had come
to hear him "read" not witness the shedding of what
he referred to as the violence of his repressions and
for once in his life really go for it, I myself have
been out only a few times and never in public without
music except the bad end of that night at Goddard 1975
when the "Get Free Institute," as the cop called it was
run our of town, all the way to Gloucester the back way.

BURNT NORTON

—for Susan Howe

"Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness."

—T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets

"Did they ever get Mahood to speak! It seems to me not. I think Murphy spoke now and then, the others too perhaps, I don't remember, but it was clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist. And now I feel it's about to begin. They must consider me sufficiently stupefied, with all their balls about being and existing. Yes, now that I've forgotten who Worm is, where he is, what he's like, I'll begin to be he. Anything rather than these college quips. Quick, a place. With no way in, no way out, a safe place. Not like Eden. And Worm inside."

—Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (1958)

"not subject the I is
the bread the light the door
the way the shepherd the vine"

—Susan Howe, "Nether John and John Harbinger"

"We are conducting an investigation of the condition of proper nouns thru creation."

—Charles Olson, *Last Lectures*

Proper name by being phenomenological contains
the very "I am that I shall be" bookends of life
we're always looking for, imagine everything as
Novalis becoming itself to know that sweetness *is*
sweeter by your name, your help, your standing in
for consciousness, it is a bold project (Fichte's
not Jaynes) reading with Creeley, "oh Rose thou art
not sick" (Buffalo, 1974) of the world / twist, hers and
the Worms in perpetual enharmonic allegory forever
resisted out of topological confusion with the girl

next door, for whom all wait, as the red wheelbarrow
already there, which is what the Novices at Sais
found hunting among rocks who refuted John Locke
on behalf of the secondary qualities that *never* spoke.

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Riding First Car

Poetry by Milton Kessler
Etchings by Robert Marx

The poem is a composition in 41 parts. The 10 etchings are handprinted, numbered and signed by the artist. Each of the 50 portfolios is enclosed in a 15x11 blue cloth slipcase and is priced at $850.

T.J. Anderson III

IF I GET THE NAME RIGHT

fungiform on my tooth barrier
how to name you
when your smoke
is language's laminar flow

but my chicken thigh jaws
launch a spasm outside this atrium
I'm the actor here
be barbecue sauce drip
a stillborn snake in ribgrass

Drawer, I've seen your sand figures
and frankly they stink
but not in the way you
think I mean it
        I bring this up:
                moon catapulter of sex
                on a balcony overlooking the Lualaba
                Understand it's beautiful this time of year
                what with the aroma of camellias imported
                pungent in Spring air

Then the image splint collapsed
atrophied like a glow-worm armada
suspended pearls in a tree
where the fragment throttles the beacon
heavy steps are poised to collide

but, that's not the blood I want here

corpuscle explosion
sizzle the frying pan on my ear

moon that is your face
crater spasm a tongue that makes
no directional stab
Where does dream start
when the Loa divide
and dictate their separate dancing?

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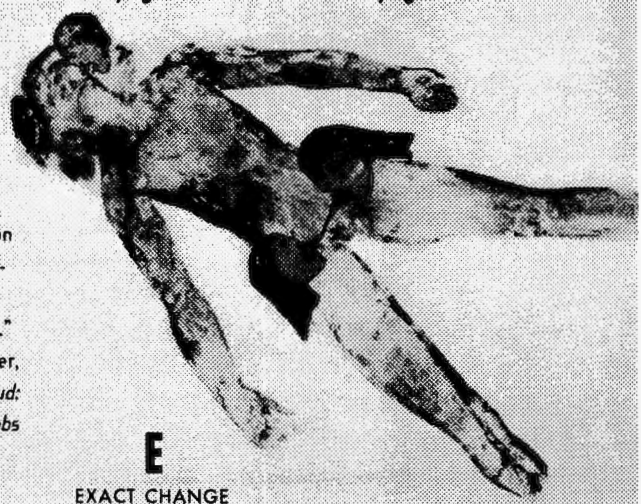

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WILL ALEXANDER

WITHIN THE ORACULAR SEA HORSE MIRROR

Immersed
in this verdurous galaxy of salt
in this necrotic intaglio of wind
blown by the visual wheels of the abyss
I see the sea horse in this stormy optical dice
blinding the backs of shrewish winter eels
adding & subtracting its coffins
in this special floating foci mirror

with its pressures inveigled
like a holographic mescal
like a powerful Hottentot bionics
wavering at the core of a splendiferous practical amber

its images practicing drills
in a gigantic ambrosian leper field
gazing beyond a zone
of illusive inward metals
beyond a listless fertilization
blind
with dense gametophytes

it is like reading
with a smouldering interfixation
a treatise on locomotion
within the flames of a boldly colored anti-sun
essential in its depths
in its risings
to its bony lattice work of lightning
a-lighting

this spinning sea horse vacuum
"at right angles to the body"

it is Syngnathidae
with its dorsal fin in motion
with its "50 rectangular bony plates"
its occluded percentiles
ironically burning
at the peak of a minute ingestion

then the swarming from the masculine ventral pouch
of fiery new born lanterns
of the fires of "50 species"
into new pre-fibular colonies
into wretched bodily wards of fire

because
in this crow-like speculum of nerves
there exists the power of an arcane heliotrope
of a virgin profanation
of a deep & protrusive transparency
so that
in its slow motion movement
I see
in every fleck of carnivorous transparency
in every subaqueous star
the primeval rage
of an ocular underwater eagle

like a vertical rotation
like a flight of mineral in negative rococo
its elevations plunging downward
into dense barometers of squid
in the total waters of the sun
diffused
in a magic fumarole of rays
as a rhythm of squalls
in runic crystal optics
with vision translated

from a wild biology of corpses

the sea horse
with its primal rotating sugars
with its global turpentine advances
dissolving
& leaving the eye
in optical polarization
minus the mineralogy of the deluge
with its explosive facial chemistry
with its explosive facial compounds
pre-existing in a gust of bells
living by visibility & lava

I see
"dissymmetry of molecular" combining
I see
blurred geometrical dalliance
electrically cancelled at the poles
of the "two types of crystals"
of "sodium ammonium nitrate"
with this fish horse of doubled rotations
seeking to refract
the quantum memory of osmosis
within the low inductive medium of the sea

in this mesmeric index by wave
by lethal ingestion by acid
the sea horse weaves its talons
within a rock of shaken nightmare phonemes
within the glance of diving bludgeoner's owls

so what I see
entangles the region
in an angular digestion of jewels
in a biogenic spiral of coral

because
Syngnatidae

with its turning kilowatts of zinc
with its slow motion access to greater arcs & seizures
with its nutrients of flight linked to strange subduction prairies
stilled
in their first Pre-Cambrian volume
with the power of water
fused
in its magic Benguela current
in its Agulhas movement
blowing across Fuamoto Ridge
across the Atlantic-Indian basin
like a silent wolf
within a swarm of operas

Syngnathidae
in the virile state
of its haunted stationary resource
with its blending of coal & brightness
with its ammonia by diversity
it triggers litres in my system
in my enormous cyclical fury
cyclonic
with a passion
for declination & explosion

ROBERTO TEJADA

MIGUEL VENTURA

With a significant body of work, some of it dating back to the late-1970s when he first established himself in Mexico City, artist Miguel Ventura (San Antonio, Texas, 1954) has been exposing the underside of empowered imaginations and their sinister world views in which the body and language disintegrate as stable boundaries of the self.

In his 1990 series of drawings entitled *New Monuments to the Enemies Within*, and especially his 1991 exhibition of large-format oil paintings with an accompanying text entitled *Cat Club Memoirs: Life Questions in Keeping with the Psychological Interests of the Master Race*, Ventura crammed his surfaces, in a wresting amalgam of text and image, with violent, lower-body hallucinations—a veritable surgico-sexual cataclysm or police-state field day as performed by the proto-Nazi youth of Robert Musil's *Young Törless*, in its over-the-top comic-strip version.

Ventura's rough-cut figurative style of that period is a kind of Die Brücke expressionism turned inside out—devoid of its phosphorescent palette in favor of grittier tones, informed by paraphernalia of the Third Reich, yet continually undermined by the visual grammar of the animated cartoon. In these hyperkinetic canvases, balding boy-men of variable proportions, part android, part meat-puppet, are contorted into crowded tableaux, decked in their uniform of green shorts, white shirts, suspenders, neckties, black round-rimmed glasses and an occasional school cap.

In a free-floating field of columns, diminutive urban ruins, severed heads and limbs, bare light bulbs and sundry emblems of violence—crosses and swastikas, but also knives and revolvers—one canvas depicts a bandaged and emaciated nurse breastfeeding a few of the boy-men figures by means of cathodes and intravenous tubes, while a few of the latter have proceeded to whip out erect cocks from their trouser-shorts, masturbating oblivious to, or on account of, the general havoc.

Random phrases from the writings that frame the panels of a quasi-crucifixion triptych manage to evoke a hybrid discourse fused between the smutty imaginings of public-bathroom graffiti, the private deliriums of persecution and the icy newspeak of instruction manuals: "AN ORGASM ON THE EVE OF A BABY'S BIRTH CAN TRIGGER THE ONSET OF LABOR (. . .) I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT

SOMEONE HAS AN INTEREST IN ROBBING ME OF MY HEALTH AND IS PROFITING FROM MY HEALTH." Or elsewhere: "POKE YOUR EYES OUT AND EAT OUT YOUR FINGERNAILS AND CLOSE YOUR EYES WHILE SOLDIERS FUCK YOUR SISTER IN THE PLAYGROUND. MEANWHILE YOUR DICK GETS SO HARD YOU ROLL OVER AND GET YOUR ASS FUCKED BY A BIG FAT NAKED DOG, BUT DON'T LET DOGS SUCK YOUR DICK, IT MIGHT FEEL GOOD BUT NO."

As they seek to dynamite the totalitarian nature of all hygienic discourse, these untitled paintings are chain-link compositional retables that stage the ultimate pornocracy of power—both the tyrannical fantasies out of which it arises and those, by turns, it is capable of re-animating.

Before moving to New York in 1992, Ventura produced a variegated, transitional series of canvases and works on paper that helped shape the course of his subsequent and present endeavors. Paring down his visual vocabulary by favoring smaller formats, and employing translucent scrims or kitschy pre-patterned fabrics like gingham and florals in place of canvas, many of those works focus almost entirely on bits of telegraphic or mutilated text, a miscellany of English, Spanish, German or Cantonese transcription, treating it as a "decorative" component, regardless of how obscure or disconcerting its content. Others feature lifeless or fiendish-looking faces of men, women and children in straight-on frontal renderings; the names of stimulants, depressants and tranquilizers inscribed in floating sausage-capsules; scraps of hard-core pornography or the chess-board background formed by pages torn from handbooks.

The anonymous head-shots, the mass-produced design of the supporting cloth, the pharmacology of everyday life, and the seemingly-random though extremely-operative nature of language as employed by publicity or power... together, the part and parcel of these works address the flagrant code of authority by which overdeveloped social interaction has become increasingly regulated. [Elias Canetti: "God made a mistake in his calculations at the Tower of Babel: nowadays everybody speaks the same technology."]

A dual fear of non-uniformity and sameness is disclosed and intensified by Ventura in his recent project, a series of installations and an artists' book entitled *The Notebooks of Mademoiselle Heidi Schreber.* Using Daniel Paul Schreber's case history *Memoirs of My Nervous Disorder* as a point of departure, and establishing a mock organization called the New Interterritorial Language Committee as an eerie underpinning, Ventura has created a terrifying artifact that is the compendium of a mind's self-image in the process of deterioration, its myriad voices spewing out the raw sexual relishings and vehement doggerel of an ersatz, worldwide anti-assimilationist vigilante group. [The book, incidentally—in a babel of German, Spanish, English, Chinese, Arabic and Swahili—concludes with three appendices: an additional vocabulary in Chinese, a sizable list of medications and a complete translation of all texts into both Spanish or English.]

While its translucent paper jacket and cream-colored wrappers endow the book with the aura of a harmless primer, the progressive depictions of a face undergoing multiple and seemingly-endless transformations—a true automatism of repetition—seem more like asylum renderings of *Mad* magazine's cover nerd, both in and out of drag. The violent facial morphing includes a variety of gender-graftings or tongues and protuberances in arabesques as they ramrod in and out of ears, nostrils and eye sockets, or become sinewy veins of intestinal lettering that spell out Artaudian rants ("ancestral / mountaintop / -isms! / graves / medulloblastomas / purities / praises / plexalgia / lithopaedions") or three-word slogans ("therapies / thrones / cattle; eggs / axes / maids"). The accompanying polyglot text throughout becomes a ceaseless assault on fixity and its self-contradictory phobia of all things hybrid—namely sex, species and language:

"Where are you, little mongrel rascals?"
Do not allow these verminous creatures
to hide underneath their social tricks and
disguises! (. . .) Allow the
bastardized elements to perish through
quick assimilation, therefore annihilation! (. . .)
Remember that the new
integrationist tactics as proposed for new youth
in the newer world sphere by the
New Interterritorial Language Committee
allows for greater harmony and coexistence
between the bastardized hybrid elements and the
pure elements of this new republic!"

The invented personas organized around one Heidi Schreber, herself in continual transformation, speak the decay of eternal displacement, the self-effacing prospect of the new ghetto-State and its regulating Laws as envisioned by the artist. In a relentless dissection whereby psychotic images of the individual mind serve as nightmarish analogies of the social, Miguel Ventura has constructed a disturbing psycho-cyberspace metaphor that seems to allude however to our present-day laxity with regard to a new fear and loathing in the so-called "post-ideological order": a sleep of reason whose monsters include the present menace of worldwide cultural homogeneity, an exploding violence perpetuated in the name of "collective identities," and a sort of general schizophrenia between the artificially simulated and the painfully real...

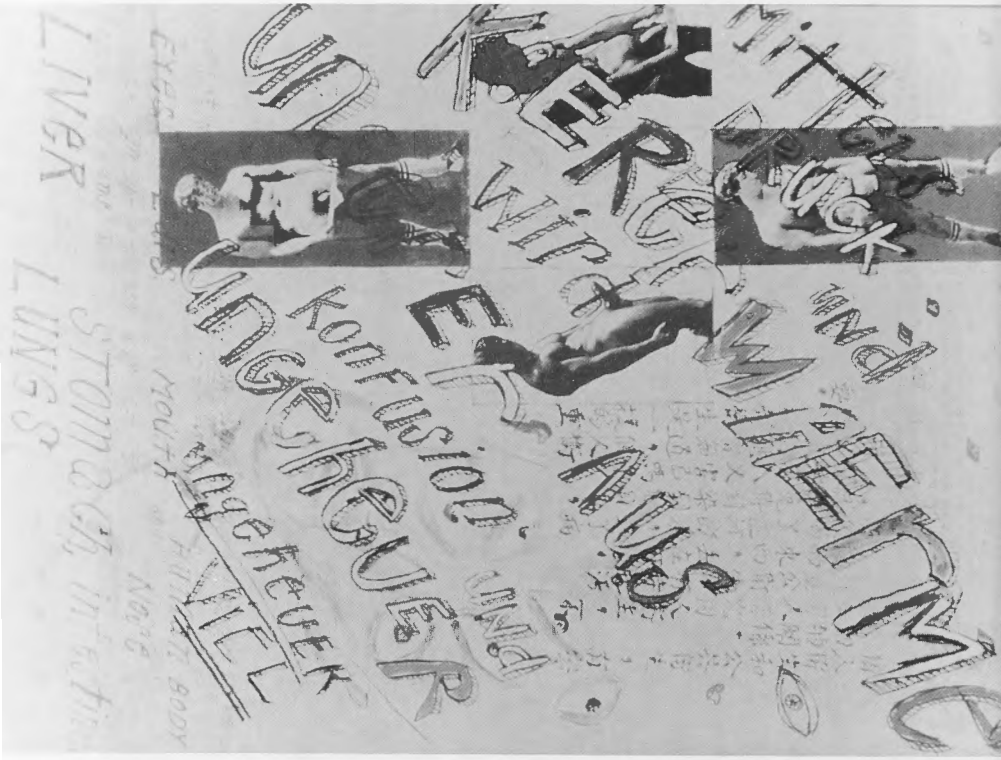
Whoever advocates
the simplification

of the languages is considered an enemy!
Whoever tries to stand still
in this transformation goes
against Nature!

MIGUEL VENTURA

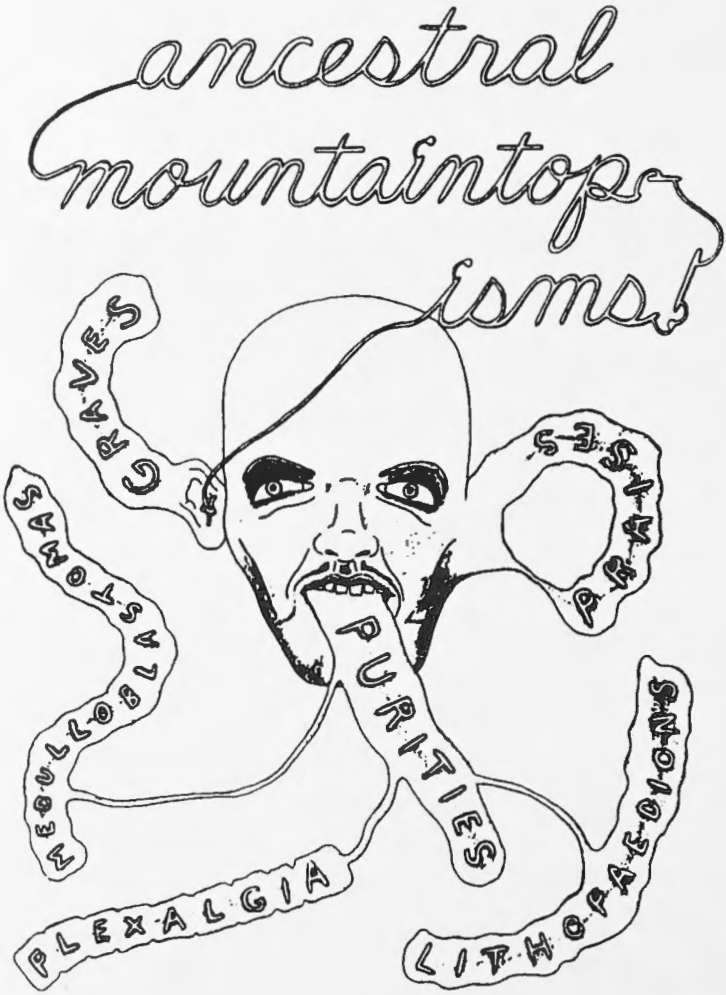
SIX WORKS

Untitled
1990, oil/canvas, 200 x 255 cm



Untitled
1992, mixed media/paper, 76 x 56 cm

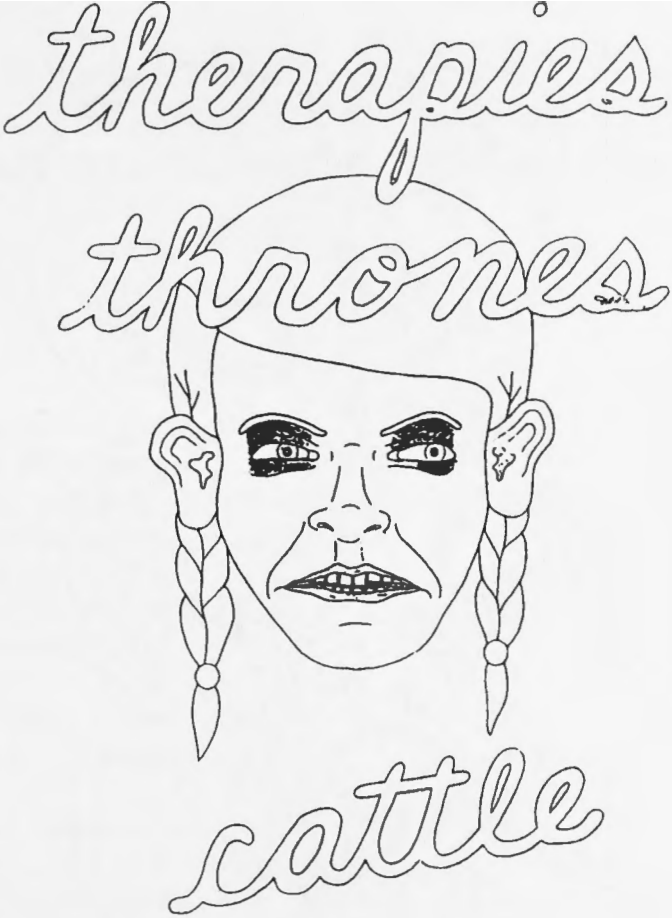
Untitled
1993, oil/canvas, 2 x 2 m



Dieses neue Ghetto muß dabei von der Voraussetzung ausgehen,
daß ein zwar wissenschaftlich wenig gebildeter,
aber körperlich gesunder Mensch mit gutem, festem Charakter,
erfüllt von Entschlußfreudigkeit und Willenskraft,
für die Volksgemeinschaft wertvoller ist als ein geistreicher Schwächling.

(This new ghetto must proceed from the assumption that a man of little scientific education but physically healthy, with a good, firm character, imbued with the joy of determination and willpower, is more valuable for the national community than a clever weakling.)

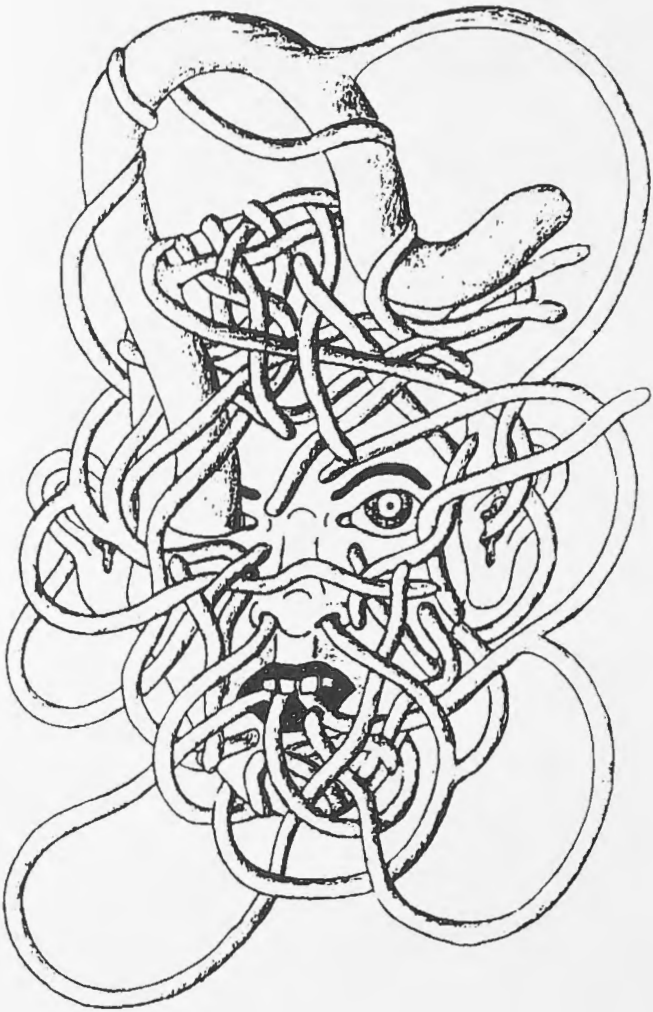
from **The Notebooks of Mademoiselle Heidi Schreber**
NILC, Mexico City, 1995, p. 18



妨 並 加 衰 嫁 娶 婚
既 且 志 紀 礙 妻 俗

oppose	together	to add	decay: weak	to marry a husband	to take a wife	marriage
since, when	more-over	will, purpose	record	to hinder	wife	vulgar

from **The Notebooks of Mademoiselle Heidi Schreber**
NILC, Mexico City, 1995, p. 35



Mwanangu nataka ujifanye bubu! Mtoto akakubali!
Mama yake akamchukua akampeleka mpaka kwa mganga,
akamwambia, Nimekuletea mwanafunzi!
Akamwuliza, Huyu mtoto bubu? Akanena, Bubu tangu kuzaliwa!
Akamwambia, Unaona, hivyo ndivyo nilivyotaka!

("My child, I want you to pretend to be dumb!" The child agreed! His mother took him off to the doctor and said to him: "I have brought you a pupil!" And he asked her: "Is this child dumb?" She replied: "Dumb from birth!" He said to her: "You realize that this is exactly what I desire!")

from **The Notebooks of Mademoiselle Heidi Schreber**
NILC, Mexico City, 1995, p. 75

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

MY EVENING WITH ARTAUD AND OTHLOR

While I never met Antonin Artaud, I did witness his performance, while in the wings, at the Vieux-Colombier, in Paris, 1947. I was eleven, and after a decision that collided with all her past behavior, my mother laid in a sizable supply of salami for my father, buttoned him in bed, and we took off, two naïfs from Indianapolis, to bear witness to what my mother's choirmaster promised would be
the overturning of the cross,
or,
the planted body sprouting
through the bulb of its own barrier.

We slipped into the hall, stubs in hand, past Gide, Paulhan, Marthe Robert, a young Paule Thévenin, and others I have come to know through the lexical corpses littering the writing of my second magician (Blackstone, at the Circle Theatre the year before, being my first). Shortly after our complicated return, my mother completed the trinity of my early initiations by taking me to see *Tarzan's Desert Mystery,* my introduction to caves and spiders.

What moved me so much about my mother's behavior:
she did not yet know that I was born!
How close we were in those days!

While Artaud stripped, I thought of my sex life with my mother. The most moving months had been inside her, and while there were gaps in my fetal memory, what happened there, as I gesticulated to her every thrust, recalled my own closed-eye vision which I began to practice at eight. Pressing my knuckles into my closed eyelids, I manufactured stars, lagoons, lace stockings, blasted cities and kaleidoscopic diamonds which, watching Artaud, struck me as

arterial beholdings, or seeings into my own seams which were, in effect, those of my mother.

The fact that we merge into the egg, as a zero or gleam, to then remain bouncifully suspended there in a solitary confinement that is the least solitary we will ever know—this seems to suggest something about the unhappiness of men, who emerge hypnotized by an infolding warmth for which they will search throughout their lives but never rediscover—not in philosophy, nor in bathing.

Women while pregnant return to the womb, in men's eyes, and even if never pregnant, appreciate a "summer's full" in a way that men brood about or rapinely chafe against. Womb life, that vague memory of being coated with a pond that goes out into infinity, this memory, bachelored by the awareness that it almost certainly cannot be recontacted, this drives men to fury! We suppose that dogs do not see their death, but men do, without the certainty that it is final or the mitigation of a new life starting up inside.

Sitting by my mother, as she kept squeezing my hand, reminding me of a frightened female mole pursued by an aroused male, and watching Artaud divest himself of everything—sitting by one who would burrow into me, while watching this fetal dance, man in the glade of himself, a kind of pinhead deprived of sunlight—my thoughts desubordinated fugally.

It was amazing to be by the one who made me, who took another's gleam seriously, while watching, right before my eyes, what life had in store for me. Artaud's bat-like reclutching, the way his "mutual aid" clothes failed to fit (though seemed, like a tree after a storm, perfectly right), his acrobatic introspections speared in mid-flight, the lullaby always about to emerge that, upon croon, swerved into loon-like wailing, then shot straight up to golden-shower the crowd while, at the same time, he was more arachnoid than anyone, more packed with eaten heads, more guilty—

this display made me feel that Artaud had at long last gone beyond his stymied Theatre of Cruelty, that this evening we were witness to the first performance of

an Amniotic Theater.

Artaud's complaint seemed to palpitate a disappearance. And it was: man reaches a limit of contraction at birth from which he seldom

recovers. I whispered this to Gladys as she dug at my palm and, card that she was, she whispered back:

"Why you old fox! Go on, go on!"

Man is in contraction at birth because not only the essential, but the armature of the essential, and its ruthless anatomical aftermath, have been determined. At birth, man's invisibility is greater than his visibility, for he has been stiffed of eternity by those two sphinxes who made his manifestation possible. Some find profundity in the egg. Artaud was appalled by it. He once wrote that "the EGG state is the anti-Artaud state *par excellence.*"

It seemed that we stayed in these wings for many years. It seems that Artaud, ravaged and enraged, hands flying like birds around his face, declaimed his scarcely-audible poems throughout my adolescence, and that during this period I remained in the wings, watching the poet, then the audience, motionless by my mother, who occupied herself with needlework, occasionally asking me to play "White Christmas," "Rustle of Spring," or Chopin's "Revolutionary Etude."

Artaud would strip down to nothing, lose his skeleton in a wild flurry of looking, become two sockets bouncing about on the stage, then joint by joint reappear, throw on his black rags, grab his manuscripts, and start to howl again.

Bud Powell visited, as did Lennie Tristano. The audience left, then returned, the auditorium filled with snow, sand blew in from Morocco. What are we doing here, I would ask mother.

Then she would hand me the Bible that Reverend Ragan had inscribed to me. As if suddenly plunged back into an asylum, Artaud would stop, twitch, and glare. His consternation told me that I must create my own Bible or be enslaved by another man's.

In a pale imitation of the soul, I would get dressed, first slipping on my pajama pants, then my wool suit pants. This way I wouldn't scratch so much in the pew that I would disturb the trances of those nearby.

In a pale imitation of the soul. All seemed to seem, even Artaud, even when he grabbed his crotch while cartwheeling around it, yelling that mommy-daddy was the monstrous absence in presence.

The monstrous absence in presence, a fugal occlusion, the dead fish in hand feeling of one's most treasured erection. The way life winks through every rigid expression. One seeks a rudder in all of

this, a broom handle bobbing in the whirlpool, anything that smacks of being moored. Moored to what? Mother's smile?

"The basis of pornography," my mother leaned over to me, "is the impersonality in generation."

Artaud was taking a break, and Gide, who had fluttered to the ceiling of the Vieux-Colombier, had just descended, billing and cooing about Antonin's shoulders.

"Frankly, I'm appalled by it," she continued, "but I had to realize that my Chicago choirmaster, who came on to me before you, had a keener contour than daddy did that night in 1934, Philadelphia to be exact, when he slid into me as if I had walked into a hurricane. I buried my feelings in an entry in my Wannamaker Diary, commenting on a car accident, but you, my sweet sailor, became the curl of that lunge, and in many ways you are as impersonal as personal."

You are very naughty, I told mother—such information is pornography itself. Besides, it was truly revolutionary in 18th century France, and is still hardly the cleavage you just displayed.

"Listen," mother buried, "solidarity is our only hope. There are midnights as pristine as Keats' nightingale, and others so jagged only a Shakespeare could bevel them. Cock in cunt, pardon me, my son, is celebrated not only in the English copula but is rampant in the metaphorical underworld. It is our lie, our magnificent nonsense. Humankind can only stand so much fucking. Us Hoosiers understand TS Eliot's wisdom thus: piston in groove, oiled in and out, ongoing, for thirty minutes, to funeral parlor fusion, is simply too close to the void that, as your dear mother, I have brought you here to witness. And it is the void that terrifies us Christians, for we have no place to put it, no tequila and marigold bridge by which to cross the cross. The crucified is obviously stuck there and unable to assist. If Mary Magdalene were truly Magdalenian, surely she would have dragged him, cross and all, into the cave and succored him. And if they crucify me for our conversation—"

(mother turned to me like a dead, drowned dog)

"—would you roll away the rock?"

Frankly, I was furiously scribbling, and had almost tabled my dear mother's plea. Gide and Artaud were entwined on the dais, the audience was out smoking and quaffing. As a mortified eleven-year-

old, I decided it was time to confront eating pussy. Simply having been down there, between Vala's legs, peering up across her tummy and crossed eyes, had offered me a brief but untutored perspective on male and female relationships. I had felt subordinate for the first time—and indeed, wife I was to Vala's barely-haired timid slit. We had been in the rumble seat of paradise, a May Saturday afternoon, the orchestra of hell thrumming through our mettle. It's V for me, I recalled murmuring, lick to jolt.

Mother saw the blaze in my furrow, held a match to me, then lit up, incandescent.

"I could never get daddy to pray. I aligned him, perfumed my nest, even set up a mirror system by which, were he to roll over, he could reflect on the nature of the void. Prayer as cunnilingus, humbling and potent—only a maven could find a beat in it capable of tripping his own heart's arrogance. The man who scarfs his lunch from the trough of the goddess—this is the way we used to put it in Wabash—is injured in the act; he will never replay the hero, and who, dear son, is a hero after Odysseus? Men adore sexual mobility, parading full orchestras across the body of one passive, but to face this fateful gate, this Song of Songs, is to know the pump runs dry, and that the sacred is as much a scab as a mountain."

"I love to be broken down into the conversation we are having," mother continued. "If Antonin and André could fully explore, I'd like to think they would happily include the character of each as well as the void. This is where the lower body comes in, as a teaching device. The upper body, that palace of enforced certainty, is a battered though beloved icon. I love you most totally thinking of you as a cigar boy, just a torso and saucy head, no inquiring hands. If I had my way, I'd keep you like a jumping bean on the fireplace mantle forever. But since we are all products of each other's imaginations, I am quite aware of your serpent tail—such will not get you a MacArthur, but because you scuttle where you bleed, there are those in the future who will think of you, momentarily, as they pray..."

Her voice seemed to trail. Artaud was back, Gide in the audience. A poisoned stillness reigned. I realized that Artaud had not lived as he felt he should live until he died in electroshock, and that the first

half of his writing life had been one long complaint that he was dead—

then the beauty and the dreadfulness of the poetic act broke across me. All poets, I premised, seek to be born in their work, and if we take that nothing backwards, then one begins as a deadman, and the deadman, even if regeneration occurs, is always there, a mummy or mommy-mummer, in the crease of realization. So that the poet is dead to but alive for reality and alive for a mouthless speaking, through which death, voiced, enlivens us. The poet is the dale through which countless copulations have passed, a sorghum of matted bee deaths, in hive to a flowering only those who suck at the source feel like hooraying. And then it struck me that everything I had just said could be stood on its head, because if one thing is true about life, its opposite is also true. Yes, the poet is the one who sucks at the vulvic, penile, or anal source, but the poet is also the one who refuses, and enaltars the consummation. Then a beautiful light spoke: Bodhisattva, stay with the peak.

Artaud was back in zoom, I felt like a flit, and mother? Tired as we all were, she moved on, slipping into the prompter box before Artaud's feet.

It was in this box, that in 1970, I buried her vertically. I was thirty-five, and have had many years to reflect on our fantastic evening at Vieux-Colombier.

*

"Concerning your jumping bean status," my mother continued
—listen, I said, you are not my mother,
you are the interior mommy who ages as the speaker,
a figure called mutha, or mutho, or othlor,
a lobbying for terrain in my early adolescence
"—you listen," Gladys spat,
"I didn't holeschool you on Artaud for limbo!
Don't you see, Clayton Junior, we have you coming and going,
you were of me—bounced out, there I was again.
Male life is confined to square one,
call it a keep or square it with Jung.
It is time we laid out your savior here,
that you put your savior on..."

This conversation with one's mom puts jism into Jesus,
it weights poetry's resurrection—
give Jesus some jism so he can spurt off the cross,
recon his image, remember him as virile and ordered,
capable of error, think of him as an army dog
who saves wounded soldiers, the real hero of your Sunday
School fantasies...

At Lascaux,
death was a fetal bundle nourished by red clay.
The difficulty was in determining a non-center.
Center was everywhere,
spark chipped menstrual moon embedded spear—
Life too, at Lascaux, was overwhelmingly centric.
The challenge: invent periphery.
Periphery is the Artaud core, the soul
that seeks and contests all limits,
circumference as inhabited by Dickinson,
to bear, around, to be, on the southside of
the northside of, organ
as what one evolves out of,
mind as an extension of Othlor's Web

Thus the Minotaur is the interior alienate;
any artist's shadow,
he is only to be invaded and ploughed under.
Those who worship at center,
betray the companion for the maze.

None of this was planned, not a word set in forecast,
all of it, one calligraphic stroke—
but last night, at fifty-nine, and at 4 AM,
I woke to an ending that the boy at eleven could not
have caught:
the stage of the Vieux-Colombier shifting fog,
the curtains crumbling, billowing grit,
and the audience? looked like Emily's gazing grain.
I saw what looked like goal posts outside the Rodez asylum,
felt the excrement in excrescence,

the extent to which incarnation is incarceration,
then I saw the white recluse
hammering out her diadem,
the infantile and the anile
in placental clasp—

Poetry in attempting to go beyond itself
nearly always reties its elf to a lumbering coffin mouse,
not that the circle comes full (choking
on its plenum),
but that fetal eyes peep from funeral bouquets.
Facing a plan (really, a vision as to how
to end this poem),
I understood the charge of poetry is to be alert
over and under the whorl, to contact the shark
and travel as its pilot.

Now I saw Artaud as a brown recluse flexing on a hammock,
masturbating sperm into its catch,
then with boxing-glove paps
inducting the sperm, as one might fill a fountain-pen.
Loaded, the Artaud recluse went off to seek his othlor.
"I do not want to eat my poem,
but I want to give my heart to my poem"
—not bad for one under electroshock in 1944 Europe.
This refusal to eat, this necessity to give,
is dualistic, and ruthless if carried through
(Romantic Artaud
injected with the heroin of Gnosticism,
Artaud a crab louse on Wordsworth's right ball,
insistent on crab louse rights, for which read:
crab louse vision,
the heartless crabic pissing on all limits,
the point: to bore, and in fusion reject all bounding
fusions.
My task is to imagine Artaud's
ascent,
drawing up his lower body into a leggy packet,
so that his toothless, fang-shaped head is surrounded

only by legs—his walking tree of will, without organs—
an eight-legged head bearing its sperm-swollen paps.

If every road the poet assumes is a via
whose depth is death—then what chance for Artaud—
as he prepares to sink into his othlor?

The Artaud Recluse, bearing boxing-glove masses of sperm
up into The Milky Othlor, crawling the Great Rift,
passing over the Coalsack of the Crux,
thrumming on the Ophelia vent, pushing into the caul,
retrieving his fetus, burning his fetal toxin,
pummeling self-purged semen into sidereal Sunyata.

[February, September, 1995;
January, 1996]

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

THE INEVITABLE FLOW OF MATERIAL THINGS THROUGH THE PORES OF THE YEARS

Bleached
to the point of
subordination
blasted
stochastically
in the increase
of manners taken to
calling
COMMENCED BLAZON
surreptitiously trips
resolute
tourniquet
guiding the lackadaisical
flurry
(improvisatory hindsight)
chugging
bean-bag apocalypse
interlineated upon
systematic
(or did she say systemwide?)
malfeasance
gumping up the
animation emulator
not a minute before
toking on toxic
thought detectors
tossed together with
targeted segments
of remorse, the
motive for infinitesimally

orgasmic
liquid labors, clutched
ordinances dancing on
head of a
whining for
Mercurial acrobatics, phonocentric
disquisition. *I*
mend the tense
so the lore may
open,
fiddle with keys
to find cues
or is
deputation
allergic to
elation, mirroring
churl on its way
to stippled
evisceration.

After
the crash
the
closest
we get
is
still too
far
&
words &
speeches
don't amount
to
a hill
of cream,
dreaming
an end to

scores,
a land below
the
flakes.

By my clock
it's ten to
& the minutes
burn a hole
in my
socket, the
seconds scar
a moment after
gone
but wayward
knows no way
than toil's
triumphalist
deflation, tailoring
tokens to
abutments, tug
to tissue.
The lowliest
incursions
are marbled in
fume of
doing's dated
demotion (demolition)
crawling
toward the
crossed souls
of delay and
infusion.
Millions more
proclaim
all that they

defame—defining
polis by
madness,
common fact
by its
disdain. Once
there was
a plate, a hat
I gave it to my love
with spins & claps
but quick she
put it
far away
now
neither can we
find
to put them
on a
tray.

Less light, less light
So we may lurking go
& go atumbling to the glen
& come astumbling home again
For Felix & Emma & Jane
Have scarcely had time for blame
The march, long march to history
Has cast its shadow too far to see
& we in the haze go foundering
As far as dusk is deep
We in the glaze go floundering
& foundering sound the leaks

Waiting in line
at square restaurant
with round tables
oval windows
sky keeling
turvy topsy
yearning dissuasively
for the violas in
plaintive view
as society turns them
(everyone)
into monikers of not-sure-
what-to-do-next, certain
enjambment, virtual
expiation. "I don't
know what you
mean" "Never heard
of the pie" "Close
the closet" "Bring your
anti-dousing lip gear".
Solo flight to
expectation, illuviation
ill-illumined
quagmire.

You be the monster
I'll be
bountifully unresplendent in my
taffy-boy alligators
or
lull-me-with-a-bazooka
mint concatenations.
You be
cyclic necessity
before I take off to
overblown barrage, cuddly
tutelage, encephalic
twisters. Torched

but never
touched, saddled
with torque
(torso) of
history's elephantine
grunge (grudge). Toot
toot! No
telos—no
turkeyshoot, bombastic
(emblematic)
erasures, strip
pining. Gurgle against
dusk, put a
flume in the
goggling
apparatus—hazelnut
boom in micturating
cadavers of
mottled obliquity and
fractal
obeisance. Foam
let me foam
among the crumpled
locks of dismay's
store—the shellack
of diligence (dissidence), the
garage without entrance.
Such spray as might
bilk a mannikin,
tangle with a
dweeb. Crucify my
makeshift allowance, derogate
the hole in this
rustic avalanche of
unadulterated
charm. Beside the bottle
is the periwinkle
in sync with
blinding arbitration's

two-bit architectonics.
Betray the doily
and sunder the
swift limp of
interpolation's bogus
village. Jillions for jihads
but not one
red fence for
occipital
invagination, hydroponic
telekinesis.

Can something be
sort of
or does it have to be
yes or no
highly or discombobulated
bilious or acridly
ripe for fulmination.
If the circumstance allows
she'll recalibrate her
orbit and pass within
nanoseconds of our
outer utterance, the one
with the wigged
obelisks and shard-skin
bona-fides. Ugh! the tolling
of the turbans, the bluster
of the warps. Oops! the syncopation
of the doldrums, the
cantillation of inordinate
inherence. Yippi yi eh
yippie ey oh! frisked the
earls and made them
brisket on rye. Forty
cents, forty cents

& not a second more.
I'll be there in
blink o' inch
soon's the ink's
a sigh—soon as
the ink's a sigh
my friend, & the rain
has a pocket to
put it in.
Then I'll come
jagged & I'll come
jigged
into the higgletty piggletty
rig!
*
Yes, forty
dents, forty dents
& not a minute more.
I'll be there in a
squint & a pinch
soon's the link's
a sigh—soon as
the link's up high
my friend, & the pain
has a locket to
put it in.
Then I'll come
ragged and I'll come
wigged
into the piggletty higgletty
jig!

Dan Featherston

VIALS

ambergris a brassy pepper soil, gondola's
heaped spice nosing through flannel, cotton
channels, eddies of wooled heat. is it a slim
sand vitrified? liquidy pith telescoped in glass?
essence of x: hint of altitude in a map's flat?

a doorbell dot of vanilla. behind each ear a pulse
heating the pearl, cream, beige over ambergris'
amber tone, gris dabbled from finger to belly,
each odor's opening like syllable cleated air.

where does it go the small stain of her voice,
her hands' erasures, trill of birds unbuttoning air.
peeped from vials, columns of rain fall upward,
opening the sill's still keyboard: fugue pipes
glassy flutes her fingers loosing amber into air.

MARJORIE WELISH

TWO POEMS

PREPARING A LENGTH OF ARC

In the space of barely
indicated hospitality is Vico tasting his forks,
and his gutturals,
with uncommon interest in "undifferentiated matter."

Prepare to enter. Prepare a number
or a letter
in shame, culminating in
canvas estimated through left-handedness of
the orthographic. We must enter shyly, as in "I have no idea."

The hand in estimated area makes a vast "B."
Its biceps are backwards, and we are apprehensive
toward modern phraseology, specifically the phrase "B and B,"

doubling breakfast.
                Revolutionary guidebooks
attempting "Bed and Breakfast" (which I heard as
"breakfazed"), bring exaggerated light: your bed is the bedroom
when empty; emptily your bed would play the tyrant.

What is the notation for such expressions? A specious present
the very craving of which may be "B *or* B,"—
                there must be something
referred to by such expressions.

AT TABLE

Of being suitable
or to the right of the fold,
                extrapolated
like this, like that intelligibility
of plate fettered to table, with programme,
academe in hand, and denoted forks speaking with us

transitorily. "Scattered totalities,"
                live knife
put to glass and the future of us in words
for which a reasonable defense might be given.

To the right of the implied dish, place emphasis:
                come and attempt

a fine thing:
the drift of place-setting iterated as a landmark
of the new school
attaining to non-aligned subject-object relationships.

You ask for a pledge
or sleds to barter for intensities, as plates being adjacent
bestow similacra in the manner of "winged words."

Of winged words and dwindling likeness, you are saying:
the pen is on the table; come and attempt
"a sentence of the glass-on-knife-on-dish variety."

Lisa Isaacson

NEAR DENSITY

held
a bucket of razored like kill light.
It spilled over rain and stricture. November—
Snow of nail holes.
As it fell, chains creaked.

When to look up and catch it? Ape of an instant. Will not happen.

Sun turning on the spit.

*

Each perforation white, a high stunt content sloshing.

A mask is worn in strips. Light is a strangled thing.

Black apples and a chair to kneel over. I do like that picture there.

The dress print was blown
inside out.

Cuts made a handle
the actual. It
sliced through
suns. A clip of blond death on top
water shimmers.

There is a breaking trap door sound in there.

*

I stay in the intersection. Of terrible footage.
Of hard wonder
land, and the floral
mash arrangement in vaults.

Pinched light feels like the sun, then.
I look up where the storm jams
and electricity
coats chain space
in the wind.
In the give in the water

a stain
is rusting
plant life and setting in a dull swan
as it floats on the pond
on the village cell.
You found your
crumpled up suits
soaking in the air
by threads

I'm still muttering by morning.
Kids hear bells.
The chain swings
no lie.
I know movement
For you are any
sound in the dark,
pressed to the ceiling.

Fixture at all
Levels.

*

Within an echoing garage,
a lot fails a watch.
On the back hotel stairwell
an alarm flattens
shades of the last
man to throw switches, clean
zeroes. Chamber
being lowered
into air corrugated to suggest rungs
and nothing where there is
only interval,
the furious hiding of an hour—exhausted
vandal.

*

Druggy, linked wind.

What the sharpness bloated—
and the man peeled back
when stuck with an open ray. Don't
breathe against it. What

Exists as it can in something
that thin, that used.

WENDY MCCLURE

TWO POEMS

ELEMENTED *IT*

(lines from Donne; a riddle series)

"we two being one, are it"

Was it that a bird hastened towards
a fire of its own making,

Or an opening therein—
when it says there one

Alit— where then, to slash and burn
the surrounding field

Where we were before,
and therein all the distinctions— it

Was a desert— its body played
some part or another

Amidst the desert,
or another— say

You to the whole of it only,

The phoenix to the one
iteration—

"And we join to'it our strength"

Ever since reserved the breath in which it
ascended—

Or else addressed what had begun to be
past us—

How the atmosphere was charged with it,
again, sonic boom, the set of

Wind re-aligning itself,
itself o'er space

To'advance— i.e., the air–
plane seemed to lean into the ozone

To cross over what could not be heard
as one—

"Absence, because it doth remove"

But in what *form* then— as an aperture
or a sphere—

Now the forest we were in verged into a clearing,
with palmate

Openings for rain. This made it —either way—
a circle filled with static,

& virgules through and through.
The more one spoke of leaving the more

Sense swelled in the space (whose soul is) between
the two chords,

Which should have tightened— not through and through
—that music as with all sound

"Unadmittable" here— no it was not the axis,
which travelled past the forest

And into the valediction—

"It leans and hearkens after it"

Then one looked to the center of the lake—

And is the path of the glance like a radius
or stylus—

The question is what does the water—
or what are its cogs moving to set adrift—

There's this repetition though God does not
take it up

From the surface; it sticks & won't echo—
It wants to make

One sound that might come from the current—
If that is possible—

If that is *thought to be* possible—
and the dark track of the difference

Slips at the *prayer,*
the one who brought herself here—

AUBADES

Whereby— mostly the sky outside was beset with aircraft, beset
[with noise,
in that order—

Noise on the order of *this* the vault between these waters—

*

As if you could sleep through it eventually— I watched you
[sleep meanwhile—

*

There were formations— clouds, land— and they were
[shunting—

*

You were at rest, in light of this— then you were immeasurably
[detained—

And the sun was a rumor—

It relayed low, still, to overtake—

*

And each morning you breathed, and each morning a new
[variant—

a sign, a bird, an interval—

*

The aircraft sought only the barrier—

*

So I said it was *good*—

*

It was beyond that— it begins—

*

Wherein You say nothing—

You hover the current—

DENNIS FORMENTO

ROBERT DUNCAN, ANARCHIST PRINCE

By the Second World War, Robert Duncan feared that the U.S. had begun to dominate the world in place of the defeated fascist nations. Looking back he wrote, "I saw the reality of Hitler America was fighting as lying in what America was becoming. The United States would emerge as the power in Europe and Asia that Germany and Japan had been. I had formed a mystical pacifism: All national allegiances—my own order as an American—seemed to be really betrayals of the larger order of Man. In time we defeated Hitler, and live now in a world where not only does Hitler spring anew in his homeground which our war did nothing to transform, but we find our own government more and more in his place. Butchering Germans and Japanese had not exterminated the will to power through terror but extended it." ("Man's fulfillment in Order and Strife," *Fictive Certainties,* p. 115.)

Duncan explained that Hitler "cannot be defeated; he must be acknowledged and understood." He matched Hitler and Mae West ("a sort of Dame Falstaff") as death and vulgar sensuality: "Reject Mae West as vulgar or Hitler as the enemy, reject them as fellows of our kind, and you have to go to batle against the very nature of Man himself, against the truth of things."

Nature contains all possibilities, including the unnatural. Absolute rejection of any of these possibilities means disowning "commonality with living things in order to conquer a place, exterminate the terrible, or rise above the vulgar." Duncan accepted psychic topology with all its hellholes and sexpots. He also refused to indulge in self-reproof, childish or foolish as his indulgence might be: "Hence I seek out and fortify even embarrassing sentiments—sentimentalities they can be seen to be by those critics who have put away childish things." ("The Self in Postmodern Poetry," *Fictive Certainties,* p. 220) This is Duncan explaining the multiphasic voices of his poems, but it could also be the poet on his lily pad, "a great frog in the mighty puddle of my living room," in the journal entry Olson criticized in "Against Wisdom As Such." There Charles Olson chastised Duncan's false modesty for calling himself "either more or less than he is;" in Duncan's words, "poet, self-declared, manqué." *(Human Universe,* p. 67.)

The preciousness was neither Hitler nor Mae West, but that's not the problem. The problem is that prima donnas and dictators aren't looking for understanding, no matter how much they act out. Can Hitler be "prevented" by understanding him?

Duncan would probably say that to fight the evil without seeing yourself possibly becoming just as monstrous is also evil. What good is brutality committed in supressing brutality? On the other hand, is there any other way to do it? Two wrongs make criminal justice an oxymoron. Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Dresden burned along with the prisoners of Dachau. Many people can't attain the selflessness needed to refuse eye-for-eye revenge. Many anarchists, being neither more or less egotistical than any other people, can't attain it, either.

And does nature really contain the possibility of the neutron bomb?

***

Duncan's psychology shaped his poetry by turning his prosodic development into a "search for a poetry that was not to come to a conclusion, a mankind that was in process, not progress, or let's say a picture of life—of the nature of life itself—in which no species would be an advance on another." ("Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," *Fictive Certainties,* p. 114)

And as no personality is inherently better or worse than another, all species are equally entitled to their niches in world ecology.

What Duncan thought should be done after understanding Hitler isn't clear. Forty years of exile in Gaza, tripping on LSD? Poetic justice may be no more effective than political justice in destroying evil.

Suppose poetry were more deeply embedded in our culture: would we be building fewer jails? Aztec Mexico was full of poetry, which the Aztecs served by cutting the hearts out of their slaves. Poetry's function is "to debunk by lucidity:" Pound's phrase, written, I presume, while he was lucid.

***

In Duncan's radical ecological egalitarianism, "progress" and history are irrelevant: Hitler and Mae West are more real. The typical city or forest dwellers are also more real as long as they resist stagnation. Duncan thought neither the "city sophisticate" or the "jungle bushman" was superior in Eurocentric or romantic fashion: "Both sentimentalities appeal." ("Fulfillment," *FC,* p. 114) Neither could be improved by becoming the other. Both the sophisticate and the bushman, if they are aware, live in a neverending process of change through contact and assimilation in their

environments. A successful organism is both host and parasite, food and feeder in the net.

Anarchism is commonly misunderstood to be a philosophy of chaotic violence, "every man for himself." The actual workings of anarchist decision-making can be exhausting but healthy exercises in satisfying both individual and collective will. The natural bickering and debate that take place within social groups are easier to bear than to suppress. And more than any other will to political power, the will to totalitarian rule is the most exhausting and paranoiac. The egotism and stamina needed to run for president is peanuts beside it.

Even advocates of parliamentary democracy defend the infighting of their order as symptoms of the system's health. Nobody said the search for truth would be pretty. A good many truths are pretty ugly, in fact. So it should be no surprise that a good many people think the way to reach the truth must be ugly as well: therefore might makes right, and only afterward comes paradise with wine and roses.

From an evolutionary standpoint (and from Duncan's,) destructive disorder is a source of creative opportunity. Duncan writes, "The very life of our art is our keeping at work contending forces and convictions. When I think of disorder, I often mean painful disorders, the disordering of fruitful orders that form in one's own work." ("Fulfillment," *FC*, p. 112) He means both one's work in poetry or in the world; the problem is, world disorder can mean death on a global scale, about as fruitful as World War Two. But conflict on a manageable scale breaks up old forms, tearing the individual away from familiar methods and ideas into "alien orders, marches upon a larger order." *(FC*, p. 112) This is the difference between the poet's contentiousness and the military man's.

And what's this larger order? The "larger order of man," an order of chaotic variety. Process and disorder are matter in flux; chaos is a process of continual recombination into a greater, though also temporary, order. Shifting borders in pluralistic societies and the almost universal interfaces possible (given the means) through mass and cybernetic communication make this concept of humanity more possible than it has ever been. The humanist's horror: the process of change is often bloody.

***

There are no
final orders. But the Law
constantly destroys the law
erasing lightly or with turmoil
coils of the snake
evil is, referring to

imagined goods where they
radiate.

("The Law," *Roots and Branches,* p. 26)

If there is no final order, who can define evil? And how? Suppose it's just the cosmos pushing your buttons?

***

Nearly contemporaneously with anarchist poet Kenneth Rexroth, Duncan was brought up by religious and political dissenters, people who did not fit into the spiritual or political mainstream of America. Rexroth's heritage was out of synch, too, a heritage of politics and pietists, "Schwenkfelders, Mennonites, German revolutionaries of '48, Abolitionists, suffragists, squaws and Indian traders, octoroons, and itinerant horse dealers, farmers in broad hats, full beards, and frogged coats." *(An Autobiographical Novel,* vii) They were people whose radicalism derived from old European protestantism and native egalitarianism; similar ideas nurtured Whitman. Duncan's radicalism, on the other hand, came to him as the subtext of theosophy and old European heresies of spiritual imanence and arcane cosmological systems, a spirituality foreign to protestant austerity. The universalist spiritualism of his youth eventually evolved into an ecological philosophy uniting Dante and the new physics, a kind of Unified Field Theory that made him one of the last Modernist Quixotes attempting to prolong the life of an ancient system of thought. He was an anarchist Romantic who claimed descent fom Dante. Rexroth, more practical, was a polymath who soapboxed with the intellectuals of "hobohemia." Duncan's sense of the political was always personal, psychological, and metaphysical, which he manifested in his political poetry and in his "anti-university" Berkeley discussion group. And before his draft board, where his mix of Buddhism and western psychology went over really big.

***

Spheres hum in Duncan's cosmos as in Dante's, but movements of chaotic objects by definition are not neatly predictable. His cosmos is a world "in process," not heading for the end of the world but only for a higher human creature subject to occasional devolutions, disorders contained in the set of all orders.

Duncan points out that Dante was also subversive by way of his association with the troubador tradition of rebel Provence. ("Fulfillment," *FC,* p. 116) He wrote that Dante's Beatrice, as an angel of "Active Intellect," is found in Sufism. Duncan's own idea of the muse was also female, in accord wth his belief in androgyny and the orthodoxy of his romantic

nostalgia. For instance, in the "The Maiden," *(The Opening of the Field,* p. 27) he writes:

> Because we thirst for clarity,
> the crystal clear brook Undine wakes
> unquenchable longing, in which
> jewels inocent show in lovely depths.

The Muse is both maiden and mother who imparts womanliness to her sons. From the same poem:

> Men have mothers. They are of women born
> and from this womanly knowledge
> womanly, but Christ
> was more and rare that was a maiden's Babe:
> He was part girl. He had solitude.

This idealism has baggage too, the notion that "solitude" (read, virginity?) is the only pure state, "the girl the man knows nothing of." But "girlish attitudes," associated with giggling and simpering, are counterfeits of virginity. (Presumably, boyish attitudes, like prankishness, were not Christ's problem. However, the apocryphal gospels tell a different story.) Love "apprehends" (knows and captures) and gives Dante new life, somehow without prior knowledge of any beloved; Dante's idealism is the same idolatry that rejects carnal knowledge in favor of some impossible spiritual awareness. One wonders where sex went in Duncan's cosmos after God took over, especially in the life and thought of a poet for whom the issue of sex was so crucial. And what's the difference in terms of androgyny between being "womanly" and being "part girl," for Christ's sake?

Elsewhere, Duncan uses the Christ figure in a less idealized, more psychologically accurate way. A diary entry of January 1941 describes "a cross with nails thru his body like wires and he is hung there. I am free." According to biographer Ekbart Faas, Duncan had just read Edward Westermarch's study of shamanic homosexual practices, and had for some time been calling himself a shaman poet. *(Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society,* p. 95) His Christ is a survivor or ritual ordeal, voyager to the spirit realm, returned with a Law of Love that transcends all borders. Duncan brought the lesson straight to his draft board when he answered a questionaire regarding his objections to induction. There he wrote, "The illusion of possession is a manifestation of the ego; possession of a body, a name, an honor, a person, an object, a country, a law. In so far as we defend or seek to secure these, then we

yield to this illusion, we dwell in the ego separation and we are at error." *(PPHS,* p. 92) The board must not have been impressed, because they inducted him, but the poet soon got a psychological discharge when he declared his homosexuality.

Freed from military bondage, he slashed through sexual borders. His essay, "The Homosexual in Society," published in the August 1944 issue of Dwight Macdonald's journal *Politics,* got his poem "An African Elegy," bounced from John Crowe Ransom's *Kenyon Review.* In the essay, he criticized an alleged homosexual elite for their inhuman exclusivity, from the perspective of a former insider-wannabe. In this essay, Duncan argued that "only one devotion can be held by a human being a creative life and expression, and that is a devotion to human freedom, toward the liberation of human love, human conflicts, human aspirations. To do this one must disown *all* the special groups (nations, religions, sexes, races) that would claim allegiance." *(Politics,* Aug. 1944, p. 211) Duncan's ideal human would be psychologically complete and autonomous, like the androgynous Christ of "The Maiden." No incomplete person could be free of the "protective associations" that offer the security of an exclusive fraternity in exchange for individuality.

Today the essay sounds like harmless liberal altruism, but it's unlikely that the Duncan of the Forties, reared on Old Left radicalism, would have been comfortable with today's trendy lib/rad politics of identity.

***

On the spiritual level, the presence of deity: in each individual, the divine presence obliterates inequalities based upon class, education, intelligence, etc., to form a commune of flesh and soul.

How does Duncan reconcile Dante's monarchism with modern egalitarianism? Dante's works, *De Monarchia* and the *Convivio,* form the basis of a long work ("Dante Etudes," in *Ground Work I: Before the War)* that develops concepts of "livingwithness" and a system of aristocratic egalitarianism, a sort of "Everyman a Prince." This is the last social thinking in Duncan's poetry before the Romantic deathwatch of *Ground Work II: In The Dark.*

Duncan had read and re-read Emerson in Berkeley in the 1940's. Maybe this reading sharpened his desire to create a syncretic political philosophy out of his gnostic universalism and modern left-libertarianism. He tried by disregarding some mighty large portions of Dante's ideology: God, for instance, and his regent, the emperor. And also Dante's Aristotelian belief that "Men of superior intellect naturally rule over others." Do "men" of superior intellect even crave political power? Should we quibble over who is the brighter of Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton? Or Slobodan

Milosivic and Franjo Tudjman? Granted, Dante was a rebel in his own time, borrowing ideas from heretical and non-Christian sources, such as the Arabic thinker Averroes. Duncan tries to make the translation across ideological systems work by substituting "universe" for "God," and "art" for "nature," as if art, God, natural process, and politics could be one in the same. Interesting tangent: could art and society embody the Tao? Ideally, yes, but Duncan's friend Charles Olson is a more convincing political thinker, with his hard-nosed localism and distrust of universalizing abstraction. Olson had *been there* and knew how idealism gets twisted in the service of power. Dante's universe has a goal, ("greater than the creation of man") which a process-oriented thinker ought to realize is antithetical to the never ending evolutionary universe. And no amount of verbal shapeshifting can convert the one person who rules the world, the "Monarch, or Emperor," into the ideal individual.

> For "world" read "Earth"
>
> and we know well enough then
> what "sin" and "well-being" are.
>
> Let the meaning of "nation"
>
> be brought under the orders of the living.
> ("Of Empire," p. 106, *GW:BTW)*

I think I know what he means by "sin" in this context (living "out of balance") but the reshaping of "empire" to fit something which it obviously is not, an egalitarian Earth, seems to me as dreamy as the most anthropomorphic Gaian theories. While guilt can be a motivating force in orthodox thought, it also turns basically "good" people into whining children well into their forties. And Duncan doesn't stop there in retooling orthodoxies. An echo of Pound's Confucius gets collaged in too, in "Of Empire:"

> The individual man having his own nature and truth
> and appropriate thereto his household
> outlined in relation to groups he finds
> himself in freely attending, changing,
> electing, or joining to carry forward
> the idea, the insistent phrase,
> the needed resonance into action,
>
> seeks to realize harmonies in his district
> (his order of life amongst the orders, savoring

variety, seeking out his space and time,
his life-style)
a tuning
his appropriateness)

and in the city develops themes
coordinations, names places and times,
draws perspectives, advances horizons,
humanities, public works

and in the nation (thus Olson in MAXIMUS)
to initiate
"another kind of nation" .

Who are the "people" when "Man" comes into it?
(*GW:BTW*, p. 106)

The Great Man's district, harmonized through his efforts: a Kung-fu-tsu man in post-modern America. His generalization "Man" actually does "people" disservice. While the concept of "the people," whether invoked by Soviet bureaucrat or American congressman, can be an abstraction and a tool of propaganda, is "Man," equally abstract, an improvement upon it? Duncan's intention is maybe to escape the class-based idea of "the people" with a more inclusive term, but who are the people but those who give "Man" substance? All homo sapiens are equally human, but Duncan falsifies their nature through nostalgia for a divinely-appointed cosmos and an impossibly perfect "Man."

***

Intuition grows harder to obey in a world edging toward collapse of traditional orders, with nationalism, fundamentalism, and mass-market identities competing to co-opt real selves. Self-knowledge is private and intuitive, and as Duncan says, no outside force can determine the movement of will. Not at least without the individual's surrender. An open-minded poetry becomes an expression of anarchic principle when it resists imposed form and suspends conclusion in favor of a process that mimics nature's cycles. However, Duncan sets a hard task for himself, to bring together Dante's medieval universe with a present-day network of savagery and synergy. Good and evil exist for Duncan, or are these just words he uses to describe the effects of the cosmos on our lives?

For an anarchist, the hardest contradiction to resolve would be the one between the hierarchical order of medieval cosmology, with the the high

place it gives to Christian morality, faith, and centralized authority, and the individualism and scientific surrationalism of the present. Mixing theocracy with anarchism is no easy matter; Duncan too glibly reconciles Dante's imperialism with egalitarianism by wordplay upon *authority* and *authorship:* the former belongs to everyone as "an authorship that comes into being throught the time of creation; a poetry in which the actualization of each member's potentiality is remembered in the whole." *(FC,* p. 117) Dante traces the concept back to the Greek, *autentin,* i.e., one who is "worthy of trust and obedience." Duncan's take resembles the idea of "possible" or "potential intellect" which Dante borrowed from Averroes. So each person's authority is based upon the creations of all humanity. The full potential of an individual's mind enters the pool of all possible thought, the Mind of God or of Nature itself. But those possibilities do include, according to Duncan's own system, brutality, greed, and avarice. Anyone who would base their personal authority on these qualities wouldn't fit Duncan's picture of idealized "Man."

In Duncan's Romantic aesthetic, Art and Nature are one. In an egalitarian community, art is made by all through the fulfillment of their personal desires. And he rightly calls this freedom. In his essay, "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," Duncan locates Dante's definition of freedom in Aristotle, wording it this way: "that is free which exists for the sake of itself and not of some other." (Compare Charles Olson's dream-delivered aphorism, "nothing is anything but itself, measured so.") Everything which exists has its own function and contributes to the whole, but nothing exists only by the will of the whole. Because he sees creation as a Darwinian "process of evolution of forms," no creature is a "final goal in the intention of the Creator." *(FC,* p. 116-117) With no unnecessary part in the universe, the variety of "individualizations, nations, and species is essential to the design." Duncan writes, "Today the World Order that we know must be imagined in terms not of one civilization but of the multiplicity of civilizations; as the imagination of Man's potentialities must search out all we know and dream of Man's experience everywhen, everywhere." *(FC,* p. 119) The dream is of potential and evolutionary process but the path is not pretty.

"Creative order is identified with the ultimate order of Reality; only here, at last, does it have its 'reason,'" Duncan writes. "Well, no wonder then that I have to break up orders, to loosen the bindings of my own conversions, for my art too constantly rationalizes itself, seeking to perpetuate itself as a conventional society. I am trying to keep alive our awareness of the dangers of my convictions." *(FC,* p. 125) And thereby Duncan provides himself with an honest person's escape from error and obsolescence.

***

The tyranny of the mass results from the individual's fear of self and fear of the crowd that engulfs him: insecurity, apathy, and helplessness sweep individuals away in the undertow. Duncan writes, "In the complex idea of our democracy, we have not only the potentiality of free communities of interest but we have, even stronger, in times of crisis, the potentiality of giving over the individual volition with its powerlessness to move the mass, surrendering the uncertain individual consciousness to the sweeping certainties of becoming one of the crowd." *(FC,* p. 128) Paradoxically, anyone who smells Bo Gritz and his militia buddies in "free communities of interest" is already acquainted with the anti-Duncan. What happens when those "communities of interest" are rabidly intolerant and paranoid?

In short, fear of the mass hysteria and loss of personal volition kept Duncan out of antiwar activism, despite his disgust with the Vietnam conflict, and drove a wedge between him and his longtime friend, Denise Levertov. He distrusted anything that didn't appear to him to be done out of pure voluntarism. The fear of losing his head to the masses or to some ruling clique prevented him from joining in with the more common political acts of mass refusal. Gone, apparently, was the young man who urged homosexuals to join their own struggle for dignity with the movements of workers and blacks. Levertov recalls his misgivings: "As a good Anarchist from his youth up, Duncan mistrusted group action; and he was just enough older than I to have a ready suspicion of 'Stalinism' every time he confronted some action planned or carried out in a way that did not strike him as entirely voluntarist." ("Some Duncan Letters—A Memoir and A Critical Tribute," in *Scales of the Marvelous,* p. 111) His suspicions may have been exaggerated, as Levertov's memories include his hesitation in 1959 regarding "a magazine he otherwise liked... merely because of its 'exaggerated estimation of Neruda... plus the poem by Celan where I (i.e., Duncan) suspected the reference to Madrid as standing for Spain in the Civil War.'" The poet even wrote a letter to the editor of this journal to find out "if there was any neo-Stalinism going on there." *(SM,* p. 111-112)

The result for Duncan, according to Levertov, was that his political ideas, formed mostly in the Forties and Fifties, "remained static," and that he didn't experience the comradeship, the recognition of apparent strangers as brothers and sisters, that so warmed the hearts of those who did feel it." *(SC,* p. 112) She writes that while this ideological difference was also a matter of temperament, Duncan was "isolated in his very real anguish; his blood pressure soared; and he could not see that there was nothing I was engaged in that was not 'volunteered from the heart.'"

Levertov was able to relieve her anxiety through action; Duncan apparently couldn't. But maybe the question was a matter of control; for instance, according to Faas, Duncan's "anti-university" discussion group in Berkeley was the poet's baby in a way that the Libertarian Circle was not for its founder, the equally opinionated Kenneth Rexroth. Faas points out that Duncan couldn't stay in the background and let others control the flow of dialogue, as Rexroth could; allegedly he insisted on being the dominant voice.

Fortunately, the wall that anti-war activity built between Levertov and Duncan didn't sever their connection altogether. Duncan wrote to her in December 1968 that "My own thought has been dark this year and in some part of it I have been apprehensive of how much more vulnerable and involved you are: I mean here about the crisis of the war and then the coming-home-to-roost of the American furies. What we begin to see are the ravening furies of Western civilization. And it corresponds with our own creative generation's arriving at the phase when the furies of our own art come-home-to-roost." His furies came home in the two books he wrote during the height of U.S. involvement in Vietnam: *Bending the Bow* and *Roots and Branches*. Both were obsessed with American imperialism and its "power over" the individual and the masses.

***

Some degree of power is wielded in any group; what the individual does about it determines his or her political stance.

Because for him the taint of coerced activity hovered over group projects, sloganeering, pickets and marches, the practical manifestation of Duncan's politics came in his poetry. In "The Multiversity," *(Bending the Bow*, p. 70), he writes that certain men are

> not men but heads of the hydra
>
> his false faces in which
> authority lies
>
> hired minds of private interests
>
> over us

There he exposed the lies of those who had surrendered their individuality in the service of power: the Chancellor of the Berkeley campus; Adlai Stevenson; certain professors. Oppression is a crime on the level of treason

in the mind of an anarcho-pacifist, for whom all political power is inherently violent. Duncan weighs the "police law" of invested public authority against the "inner law," which he believes these men crushed within themselves. The "aging professor, translator of fashionable surrealist revolutionaries" is equally as evil as the "monopolists, obstructors of knowledge," in Pound's so-called "Hell Canto." Consistently with his fear of manipulation by powers above, Duncan locates the nature of evil in the root of the word "evil" itself, where he thought a word's most powerful and primordial meaning resided. The root of evil is, he maintains, the desire to rule over others—"evil" is related etymologically to "up" or "over." Desire for illegitimate rule acts through "simulacra of law that wld over-rule" (as a judge might) "the Law man's inner nature seeks." "Outside of the freedom of individual volition," there can be no community; where individual volition exploits labor or nature, there is rule by "simulacra of law," and community is ruined. Legitimate self-interest exists only in recognizing the self-interest of others.

Revolt against conformity was as much a part of the Sixties as civil rights or revolutionary violence; national chauvinism and racism formed the backbone of a society that young people of all ethnicities and classes rejected with disgust. And that society rejected them just as thoroughly.

> Where there is no commune
>
> the individual volition has no ground.
>
> Where there is no individual freedom, the commune
>
> is falsified.
>
> ("The Multiversity")

***

> his own
> ideogram
>
> a tuning in
>
> ("The Individual Man," p. 104,
> *Ground Work: Before the War)*

For a homosexual man there's a heightened meaning of the home: a place where the mask of sexual indifference to other men can be taken off.

In "The Individual Man," Duncan uses the tuning fork as an ideogram for "his nature and truth" as it is outlined in relationship to the community or groups "appropriate to his household."

Duncan's community begins at home and extends to those other households and communities which best support his own. "We convivial in what is ours," "Friends/in every giving radiant!" His gushy and perfect generosity might be impossible for many of the people in those appropriate households. Yet the communal idea is legitimate. Like the potluck, this kind of anarchic networking is a natural solution to the problem of poverty and individual need—can't afford to throw a party? Give generously and receive graciously, barter for needs and services, share food and shelter. Networking is anarchistic in form becaue it grows out of uncoerced relationships of family, tribe, or created community, beyond any state apparatus. It requires no money at the point of exchange, because it comes from the heart, volunteered. Even people who have never read *Mutual Aid* do it anyway, giving naturally out of love. Who needs an -ism to justify it?

***

Dante, Duncan says, isn't a "mind researcht in the lore of another time, for me, but immediate, everlastingly immediate, to the presence of the idea of Poetry." But he seems to accept Dante's politics uncritically, as if his ideas were self-evident, just as Dante accepted assumptions about the nature of reality and the existence of God. Here's the entire text of "Lovely," in *Ground Work I: Before the War* (p. 114):

Lovely

the way Dante bestows himself
monarchial throughout his thought

and in every imagination

adhering to his source!

God does rush in. Duncan substitutes a pedestal for a throne, and reads Dante's monarchist language as enlightened individualism:

> It's here, as presiding presences in a realm of poems, that I read his *"principium,"* his *"civitas,"* and *"monarchia"* to be. Whatever they once were in a world of popes, city states and emperors, they remain, translated powers, present today in the state of volunteered individualities and social consciences and responsibilities, true to my sense of our good.
>
> ("Preface" to "Dante Etudes," *GW:BTW*, p. 94)

Elsewhere, Duncan puns glibly on the origin of the word "authority," as spoken of earlier. (*FC*, p. 117) If "power over" is power ill-gotten, isn't obedience to authority (power) dangerous? Appeals to "authority," even if personal and limited imply obedience to power; mutual aid disappears in Duncan's social ethic in favor of an appeal to ducal authority cut in a contemporary style. If in a dispute, I follow my individual conscience, don't I disobey another princely voice? If I'm a "worker for the good of all," am I no longer an authority, but a servant instead? Dante's monarchism is as vestigial and obsolete as the human appendix. A prince without a principality is a frog in his castle. His range of association would have to be narrow in a world populated entirely by princes and princesses; I don't think anybody could sustain that much deference toward so many people, while expecting the same treatment in return. What happens when these modernized forms of courtly authority clash? Duncan says each person must be "princely in his regard and mine—or else democracy lacks rule," but in fact, do we really lack rule? In fact, we *are* ruled, by the same "power-over" that Duncan rightly found so reprehensible during the Vietnam war. His politics is a kind of intellectualized form of Huey Long's slogan, "Every man a king." Every Man A Prince!

Historically the high regard princes have held themselves in has done them and everyone else irreparable harm through their wars, purges, pogroms, and persecutions. Duncan's late politics is a philosophy based on nostalgic faith in an impossible ideal. Best suited for intimate households, it fits the utopian nature of Duncan's thought, but not this hard world where "noble" princes are as hard to come by as saints and saviors.

The question is not whether poets should stay away from politics nor how far they should stay away, but how real they should be. I'm not proposing that a poet's place in is the House (god, no) or on the picket line. A poet's critical intelligence and creative imagination are sorely needed in this world but go to waste in an airy castle, in pursuit of an archaic sublime. Utopias are hard to come by, and they go wrong when impossible standards of behavior are favored over basic relationships of aid and exchange. Duncan's "zealous liberality," as idealistic as it is, is more convincing in its advocacy of generosity than his daydream of a princely personal authority because it deals with the basic impulses and most probable needs of everyday people.

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These three and one-half days of discussions and four nights of readings/performances will focus on relationships/differences between "experimental" poetries in the U. S., U. K., Ireland and Canada; participants from other countries are also welcome to help us talk about new directions in these poetries and ways/problems of reading across cultures. More than forty top poets/performers/critics/theorists are currently scheduled, and it may not be too late to offer paper ideas; for more information please contact Romana Huk, Dept. of English, Univ. of NH, Durham, NH, 03824, U. S. A.; tel: 6038623992; FAX: 6038623962; e-mail: rch@hopper.unh.edu.

PAMELA WYE

CHRIS MARTIN DRAWINGS: "FIND THE DOOR TO THE WALL WHERE THERE IS NONE"

Chris Martin's recent work is a series of large black paintings (in the 11' x 12' range) where white lines almost describe the simple rectangles of linear perspective like empty picture frames, painting stretchers or windows without a view. I say "almost" because Martin subverts the language our eyes know by heart by changing the course of a few lines and causing our sight to detour away from the illusion of three dimensional space and back into the circuits of our own mind. The vast blackness of these paintings defines inner, not outer, space. Martin often paints words on top of these white lines, making the paintings even flatter by bringing the eye to the frontmost surface where words normally reside. The text doesn't read in a linear fashion, but hums along the periphery of consciousness. Although the paintings do not have illusionistic depth, the viewer finds herself in a spare black landscape, in ascetic retreat from the busyness of the world. These tantric, zen-like images allow the mind to contemplate itself and to contemplate contemplation. Martin's paintings define a space where the mind travels within itself via a strict yet fluid path. The experience is more than one of simply seeing, it is akin to physically feeling the mechanism of contemplation. Martin has said that looking at the screen in a movie theater he found himself thinking "how much bigger is that than my paintings?" The analogy is apt. Like Martin's big paintings, the darkened movie screen is the quiet, self-reflective respite from the noisy surfeit of image after image after image.

Alongside these large paintings, Martin draws and draws in an ongoing, diaristic, stream of imagistic consciousness. Splotches, drippings, rubbings, scribbles. His list of materials is orgiastic: "charcoal live burning sticks at the campsite hot coals smoke (hold the drawing over the fire. . .) tea juice blackberries blueberries dirt colored rocks paint any kind of paint gouache watercolor inks latex acrylic oil enamel sand hair grease shoe polish pencils fountain pens magic markers collage spices (especially turmeric yellow. . .) glitter glue. . .mercurochrome oil stick working with brushes with fingers with towels sticks squeegees droppers. . .paint with my feet with eyes closed eyes wide. . ."[1]

The range of imagery in the drawings is broad and more narrative of the artist's psyche. Yet despite their small scale, the drawings' impact is still physical. They have the self-contained solitariness of emblematic images that describe being, not acting.

"I love paper. . .love paper of all kinds love feeling it in my hands collecting it rubbing it stacking it in piles collecting it into folders notes endless notes. . ."

Martin has drawers full of drawings like dream remnants that never seem to be finished. They are vivid yet fragmentary, cryptic yet certain. He sees one after a long absence and starts working it again. Like doodles, these drawings often happen on whatever is under hand. Complementing the monastic absence of everyday mess in the paintings, Martin's drawings revel in the clutter, the profoundly effecting traces of this and that. He's on the alert for that everyday surface that clicks as it crosses his path, and he uses it.

"Can begin with automatic gesture paintspill spattering deposit a mess some stuff there. . .on the page can begin with tea stains on old paper can begin with a telephone list. . .some handwriting. . .someone else's scribbled notes. . .on old book pages. . .some notes some line already on legal paper, the back of an old letter a torn paper bag. . .wrinkled aluminum foil wax paper tissue paper bark leaves an old t-shirt torn photos. . ."

Like his paintings, Martin's drawings start with a geometric impulse then evolve into something else altogether. This is what gives his work its aura of minimalism. In "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," Anna Chave writes: "By manufacturing objects with common industrial and commercial materials in a restricted vocabulary of geometric shapes, Judd and the other Minimalist artists availed themselves of the cultural authority of the markers of industry and technology."[2] Now Martin, though operating with a vocabulary of geometric shapes disaligns himself from the "rhetoric of power" by contaminating pure geometric form with all sorts of viscera and messy attributes. Eugene Goosen wrote that, with Minimalism, "the spectator is not given symbols, but facts."[3] Though Chave brilliantly argues that Minimalism is, in fact, laden with symbolic associations (to power, most notably), the common art-historical scenario has been that it took "post-minimalist" artists like Eve Hesse to reinscribe symbolic content (sexuality, for example) to minimalist art. It is to this "contaminated," associative, content-laden minimalism that Martin's drawings relate.

In *Untitled (rising energy spiral nowhere here),* (1994) the painterly white spiral is phallic in its tip and its hanging, yet in its upward spiral, comes undone, and evolves into an inverted triangle, the hieroglyph signifying female genitalia. *Blue Curtain,* (1994) with its minimal rectangular form and parallel lines becomes, with the inclusion of one wavy line,

a hieroglyph for curtained windowness. "Curtains in my room as a child thirteen feet tall." This small drawing certainly has the demeanor of a tall, unyielding, and formal authority figure. How far from minimalism's "rhetoric of power," yet how strangely powerful is this subverted domestic geometry. Minimalism did away with the "cultural marker" of the painting as a window onto a world. No more windows, no more worlds. Martin looks to the sides of that window that is no longer and sees curtains—that cultural marker of the inner world. ". . .find the door to the wall where there is none."

Martin's drawings often have the wet viscous quality of monotypes. In a monotype one "draws" directly in the wet ink, then pulls one "print" in a one-shot-deal that effectively wipes out the "drawing." *Untitled (King Cock) the one eyed phallus. . .a mind of his own. . .weeping depressed phallus on a throne (Jung dream)* (1992) has that quality of capturing a dream image quickly before it disappears or is chased by our pursuit.

The drawings echo the paintings' motifs but are more experimental, accidental, automatic compared with the paintings' rigorous focus. *I Am Not I. . .* (1988-90) has Martin's familiar centralized starburst form (Martin calls them "explosions"). The text scrawled on the arms of the starburst angrily asserts the artist's own identity with a litany of his artistic ancestors' names: "I am not Alfred Jensen, I am not Bill Jensen, I am not Hilma Klimt, I am not Forrest Bess, I am not Jim Morrison. . ." *Apparition with Seven Cocks for Estelle Bellomo* repeats the starburst motif but with an out of control gestural energy and a centralized dream-like cock-figure. Words visible at the top indicate this drawing was done on letterhead of *The American Journal of Art Therapy*. Of this drawing, Martin writes "unconscious self portrait monster ridiculous afraid embarrassed actual self we can't show (even to ourselves)." Combining wet fluidity with a rhythmic circular motif of miniature bursts, *For Liza Toft* ("delicate flower unfolding vaginal sea growth Mexico") (1995) has mesmerizing aquatic/sexual associations. *Ajijic, Mexico* "seven pointed star—numbers and the absurdity of counting. . .starfish figure splayed out crucified skinned stretched martyrdom of the body. . ." anthropomorphizes the starburst and includes another of Martin's paintings' elemental motifs—the small crosses, or X's, depending on how you look at them. *Untitled ("swirling snaking rising serpent smoke energy")* is a snake-like spiral that rises like smoke covered with crosses that read as cemetery markers. "The funeral pyre death and rebirth every moment each cross a tiny marker place space in time the effervescent swirling smoke there is nothing that remains that does not vanish each moment there is no birth and there is no death."

Jersey City
January 1996

Notes

1 All quotes by Chris Martin taken from a letter to the author dated January 8, 1996.
2 Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine*, January 1990,44-63.
3 Eugene Goosen, *The Art of the Real: U.S.A. 1948-1969* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), quoted in Chave p. 45.

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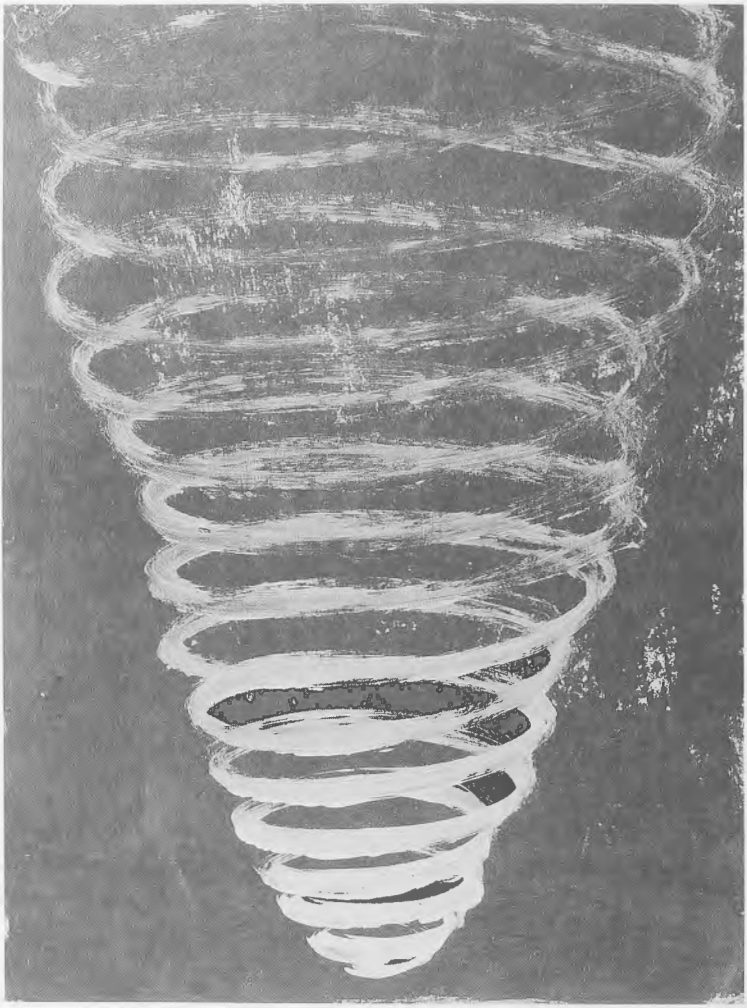
CHRIS MARTIN

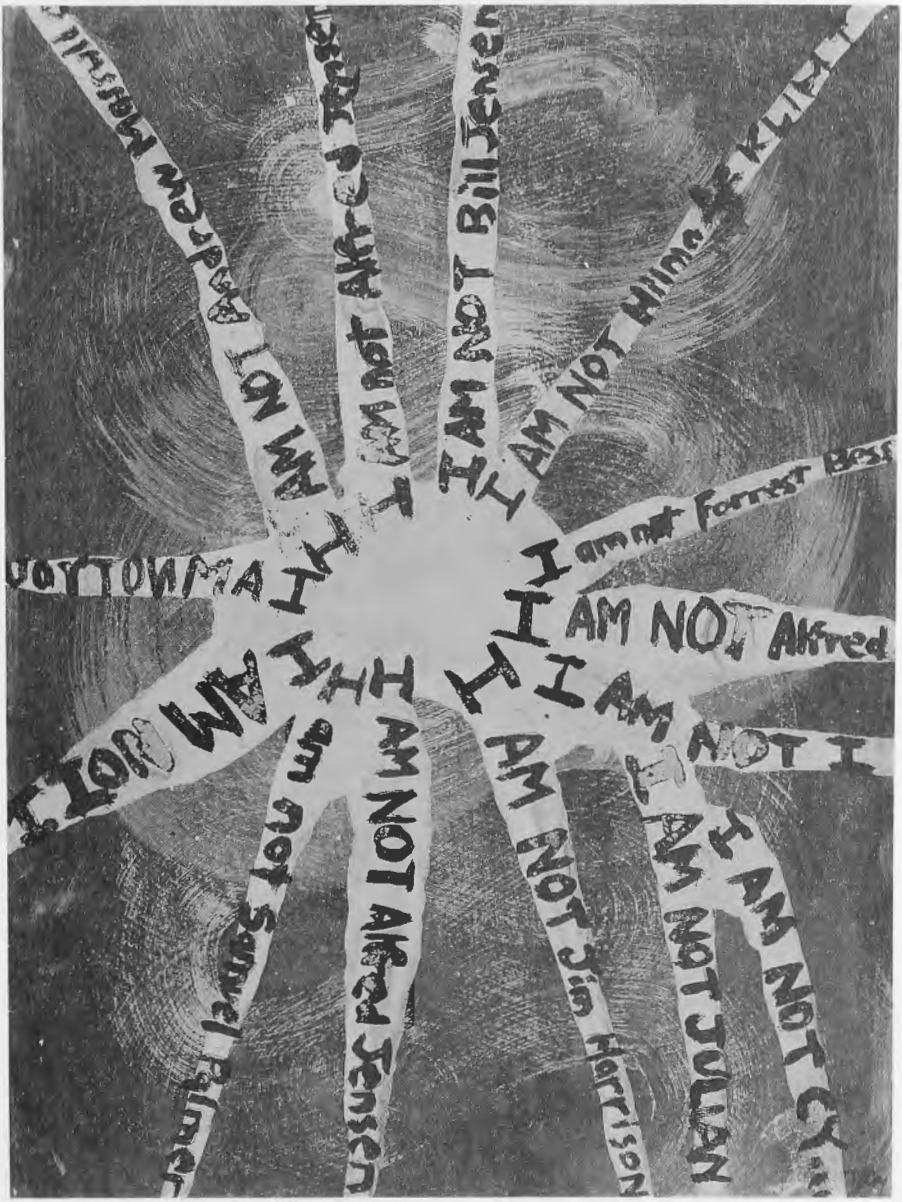
EIGHT DRAWINGS



Untitled ("rising energy spiral nowhere here")
All Martin photos by John Berens

"Blue Curtain"

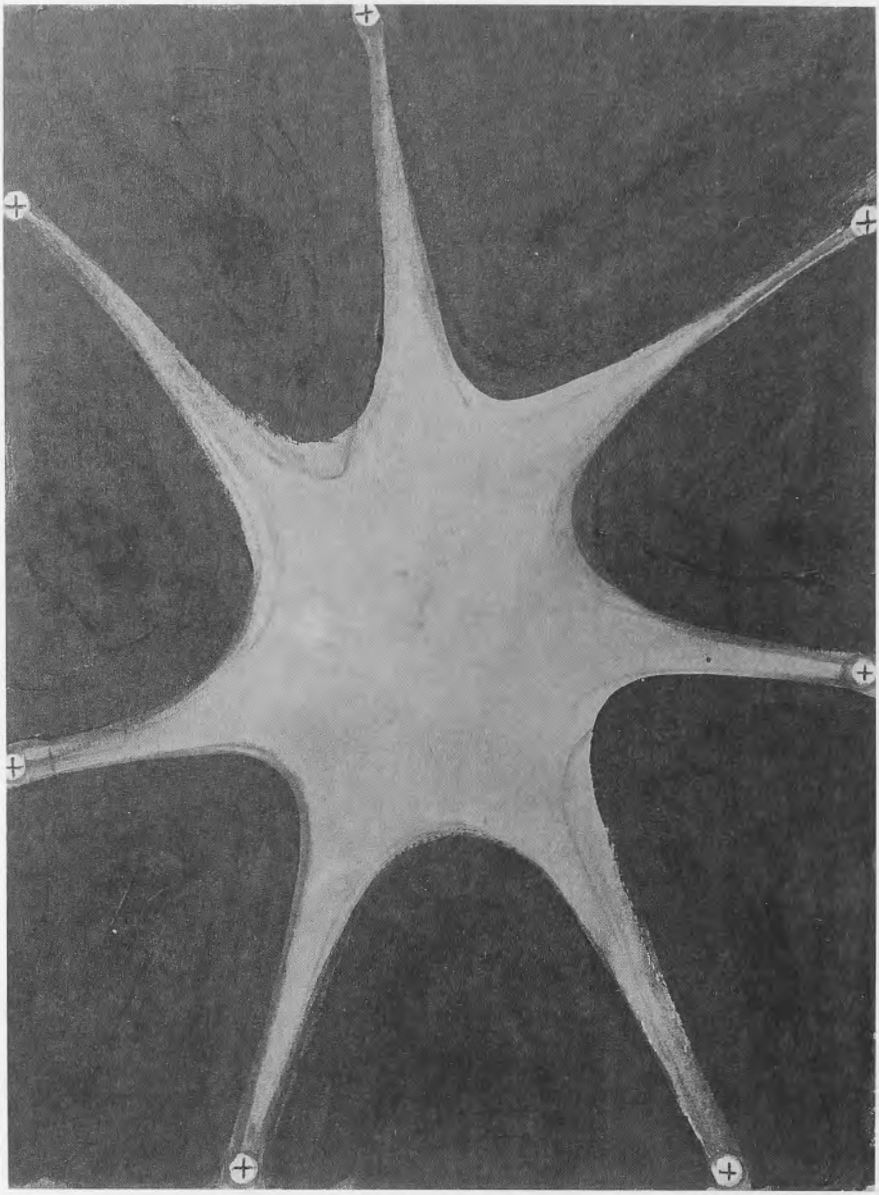
"King Cock"


I AM NOT Bill Jensen
I am not Alfred Jensen
I AM NOT Andrew Marshall
I AM NOT Hilma af Klint
I am not Forrest Bess
I AM NOT Alfred
I AM NOT I
I AM NOT Jim Harrison
I AM NOT JULIAN
I AM NOT
I am not Samuel Palmer
I AM NOT Alfred Jensen
I AM NOT

"I am not I. . ."

"Apparition with Seven Cocks for Estelle Bellomo"

"For Liza Toft"



"Ajijic, Mexico"

Untitled ("swirling snaking rising serpent smoke energy")

LINDSAY HILL

SHE PLAY

She play that throw your voice in the dead man game
She tamp her voice down deep outside herself
Pull from that frozen slant-front eat-hole slot
A baby I want you baby baby I want you
She coy her broken mouth and say she charmed
Slouch and spin the pistol cylinder
She narrow back into her throw-voice self
He say he want that crotch-lick candy game
She dick him in the mouth with the pistol point
Ask him how he like suck-gun roulette
He call her daddy's pop-tease sugar-slut
The gun make that little bomb in the melon noise
He nod once up and down like he agree
She back and forth her voice in a haywire stitch
Fill him like a bull-dog fills his bitch

Ian Demsky

ASPECTS

•

But this time the gull doesn't obey
its wings and becomes a fetal comma's
fracturing dissuasion:

the paper valves of my heart
bang shut on the slender means
in the doors of my blood.

•

Another reason was a lie.

Years passed you by and you carried
them back broken and with a dialysis
of saliva

like kissing.

•

The domination of a little boy's
favorite dream. The hangman's beautiful
daughter makes room in her flesh
for eyes to touch her.

I have eaten your
horizon,
drained the blood.

•

Where your hips insist

the body arranges its breath.

•

The shape of a name gives way to a body
and a body

with a body passing through.

Each tooth cuts its Sanskrit
in the undertow of retreating tongues,
divesting stolen words of their innocence.

In the cabin where the wood heat freezes
to the ceiling.

•

The calligraphy of your face breaking
under his indiscretions. *There will be*
a time

some years from now, when you will forgive
him, or someone else,

and that alone will kill you.

•

A hemorrhage of digestive thoughts.
And you remain

most of what almost disfigures.

ELĒNI SIKÉLIANÒS

from EARDRUM'S THEORY

Dear T. —

humor me—
what *is* this body ?

•

bleeding ten tons of blood mid-hole
Friday's wood-lung home alone now move twice &
twice old Mother broke the legs off her dress
gone 29 years of service mine rhapsodic birth-
road that stream I see

•

& I am of the skull & corpus vertebrata hiding inside
the microscopic structure of a bone

& my osteoclasts will tear it down & my osteoblasts will build it
[back

& I am of chordata & endoskeleton hiding inside
a star the buildings of dust that stuff (creamatorium)

& I am of hominidae & anthropoidea Look my 2000 cc brain
[capacity

& this is my heart's atrium & the a. of my tympanic cavity
& here is my hepatic vein
& here, my oral hood
my vestibular canal, my organ of Corti
my homo sapiens' larynx, my mons pubis
& here, my axillae armpits, milk-lines along each side & I am
[hiding between
the dawn ape & nuclear fission

If you can't find me at the Lake of Aegyptopithecus
Look for me at Child of the Hook, my black-bone burning

my blank spine

ANATOMY REPORT

The rumors are untrue. I have not
sold off my green-splitting organs:

- flame-cell system intact
- arterioles, artesian by the gill bright-red
- daily cardiac output, 2000 blood-liters & up
- stomach, intestines the five-span fear
- ventricular valves of a dog
- adrenals of 1 green deer
- spleen branching bone-picked
- kidneys that jump (the size of an ear)

I am still of the mouth—mixed
a bit with the air & the beast, a blind-
ended lymph & a heart

that contracts

thus

praise be her
brightness-back

NORA'S ROAR

clayton eshleman

"I could not wish a truer, more urgent language for Nora Jaffe's life and art than Clayton Eshleman's extraordinary poem. And had I not known Nora and her work, I would still call this poem extraordinary."

— Adrienne Rich

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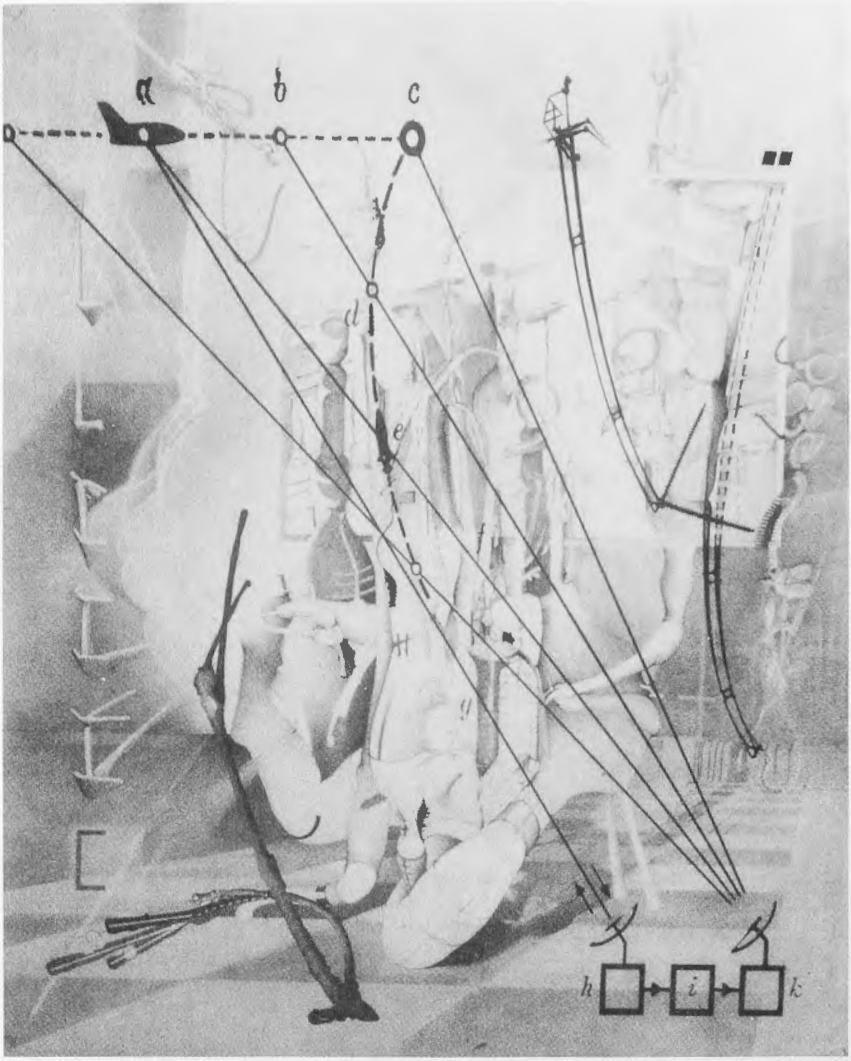
Mark West

DRAWING



JED RASULA

TITLE UNTITLED

[for Mark West]

They've been generous, I see, and given you
a tube of gel with a mirror

to have built a net
in the shape of what a word would be
if it were a word instead of a net.

The title might be Untitled.
It can't be found in the *where,*
the *where* is in *it.*

That royal family
—including the dog and the dwarf—
cubed out through the hole in the mirror's wall.
They haven't come back.
But it looks like they're still right there.

So you find a keychain on the beach
with a plastic human hand attached,
the ocean roar
under it like a leaf, botanical mumbler.
The room of coming and going
screws in off the top of that wave,
and you wonder where they *went?*

Say you bent down to pick up that wrist
and the key jumped into the palm of your hand,
magnetic erotic contact. Something peels back

in the limbic nodes—The door came off in your hand, didn't it?

In the dream I watched the street hubub slowly congeal into a mosaic and realized that what I'd taken for movement was evaporation shimmer off the hot asphalt. Leaning forward, reaching out to feel the tiles and yes, they're real. The grout too is solid. Wiping my fingers over the tessellated scene one particular tile disturbed me, gave me an odd sensation.
It was the underside of my own foot, cemented into place.

"I have at this moment
so many fundamental thoughts,
so many truly metaphysical things to say,
that I suddenly get tired
and decide not to write anymore,
not to think anymore, but allow the fever of speaking
to make me sleepy,
and with my eyes closed, like a cat,
I play with everything I could have said."

{Pessoa #520}

Eyesight grips the cage of the seen
and the suction begins. Halfway between
shadow and gaze light became noisy.
A word for this is blue,
which you can nuzzle like a ballad
till the flippers on the dolphin fall asleep.

Next time
you'll think that doorknob's a clitoris. Down on your knees,
you lick the brass and fit your tongue around it
carefully drawing it in all the way back
till it touches a tonsil, a bell that says "tumbling dice."
There's no readout yet
but wedges of crowing erection
smear with your thought.
You *have* been being here
beformerly. That's it—the sound a little
slowed tonight, tongued up, butterfly ignited

creaming over your lower back and buttocks
as unborn fingers
gather excited in the air, unable to touch
but intent on somehow *knowing*.

That was when a door became apart.

A button. A tunnel.
A glowing coal.
Yourself the manifest space of time
with a pile of slices of Now.

So how about
forgetting where the memory theater went?
Point to the pane of glass in the cranial house
and say "she." She'd been grazing, it seems,
all the way down through Umbilicus Daylight
when she got to the bottom and lapped up *you*.

You told me those weren't legs at all.
They were erotic calipers.
A faint moist smack
when they decompress.
The way a lute
becomes a helicopter.

In the sagittal adventure of lovemaking
the bodies become collections of beakers,
pouring retaining expending wallowing conserving all at once.
The skin of names
vibrates over everything they begin to forget. The Howler. The
Roarer. The Crackler. The Rubber. The Hummer. The Gurgler.
The Hisser. The Whistler. The Burster. The Croaker. The Rustler.

He said it was a wrinkle.
But from where he appears to be standing
the paintbrush is probably a doorhinge.
A new color is another door.
He cranks his face off and, lifting it up,

shows us two moths that flutter out of the damp spots
where his eyes have been.
It's not enough to graze their wings on the hot bulb of looking;
they have to be smoky and frail.

And I wonder, how did it get to be you
when the dot grew closer?
Were you really that small?
Was the squeaky wheel of September crickets
filling the jaw with the sorrow of snow,
the door going out like a dark?

Whatever she said
slid backwards over the floor
as if every sensation
lapsed pulsing
delicious entropic
detumescence. And wetness
everywhere
was a new sound,
and the name of your
heartbeat was Weeping Bones.

That hood or it looks like beak is a rudder.
A soul is not being
or action,
but atmospheric pressure. And what did you say
compassion was?—each angel
joined itself upside down
and inside out
and wriggling into our faces
they look just like each of us knowing what we know.
Carnal angels
through whom we've been skimming,
belly to belly. Spinal clatter
appearing as lines of geese in flight. Unspoken phrases
booming in the silence of the empty room,
coiling great hoses through each other's bodies,

dislodging heaps of winkled fruit,
dozed out all over the blanks and oblivions.

"There is no glue between the organs, but they are always
loving each other, and always
using each other. No wonder they cohere...
likeness and liking
are the gold wedding ring of the universe."

{James John Garth Wilkinson,
The Human Body and its Connexion with Man
[1860] p. 273}

Over a period of about a year, during several visits to Ottawa to review student projects for the School of Architecture at Carleton University, I watched with fascination as Mark West evolved the drawing to which this poem responds. The discontinuities in the poem reflect the temporal lag time of composition, but are more keenly responsive to the appearances and disappearances, the phantasms and erasures, of West's drawing. What is reproduced here is the final stage of the drawing, completed after the poem.

LEIGH HUNT

TYGER, TIGER

If fire is
as fire seems

then fire dreams

José Lezama Lima

SIX POEMS

(Tr. from the Spanish by Roberto Tejada)

OCTAVIO PAZ

In the crackling whirlwind
the Japanese warrior inquires about his silence,
and upon descending into hell,
he is answered by the blood-pissed bones
of the livid Mexican goddess.
Marzipan fringed with portent
rivals the placenta of the sacred cow.
The Pavilion of nothingness fingers a lofty breeze
which it transforms into a gory snail.
In Rio de Janeiro, the carnival tugs at a noose so that
suddenly the lights flick on and we find ourselves in a room.
On San Luis Island, the conversation
—a snake burrowing like a spear through the side—
lights the lanterns of the Tibetan city
and it rains, like a tree, upon my ears.
The bat from Trinidad,
strange calm over the insular Tao,
with its lovely mustache puffing smoke.
Everything everywhere looming.
It is the deer that sees the snake in the calls
of the river; nature slipping
on the scales that invoke an inaugural rhythm.
Naming and name-making in a groping blindness.
The masked voice commanding the kings of Greece,
the blood adverse to the nocturnal tongs
returning to the original whirling sphere.
Asleep on the terrace, the priest

awakens with each word he slings
at the partridge falling into its steel mirror.
The word in motion
at the instant of release parading
now through the resistant numbers,
in the plausible city
built for the formless inhabitants beginning
to breathe. Deep in the wood the dances
arrived in costume—but the fire
by then had already uprooted the horizon.
The dormant city evaporates its language,
the fire roaming like water
along the rungs of my arms.
The new, illegible ordinance
lifted the head of a mumbling Crusoe.
Only the fire mirrored
the silent mass of the shipwreck.

March & 1971

SURPRISED

I can't. I mean it. And the horse begins bending the poker deck.
Just a minute. The grapefruit's cleared of rain. I'm spelling.
What question fits? What elbow intermingles?
The thurifer has soaked himself, withdrawing.
These are witnesses, oaths, platitudes.
An index finger crooked as a nose,
pointless, cinders, rounding off.
A cardboard riposte. Certain conceits.

A ribcage against the light, a waterspout
fattening the lantern as it doles out Christmas cards.
I scratch, I move on, I plunge—not a single navigator left.
I touch, I turn the other cheek. Now a patter on the blinds.
A crisscross of fish between legs spread open. Scissors.
A word of advise: the balding poker deck never gave birth.
The dribbled window chews the rosebud,
its blinking in focus, the shattered glass roaming,
then the jerking, the capsized shark.
Poltroonishly, boots are scraped over stubble
trudging back along the sidewalk at noon.
The salamander, in a fever,
keeps leaping off the pea coat.
I can't. I'm going to bed. I'll wake up with my amulet missing.
As they spin a carpet, spiders tangle their tiny threads.
Mr. Air assembles and decapitates.

May & 1971

UNLEASHED

The potato's humor was unleashed,
the proximity of the lettuce green
was laughing at the bottom of the sack,
followed by feigned composure
in the crumpled wrinkles of the brown paper bag.
When the alarming size of the sack
arrives with its edible stones,
it procures a pair of ghostly scissors
and starts to frolic on the rooftops.

The potato waits to be tattooed with soot,
to have its peel blessed with bruises
as they are offered by a face willing to be
devoured by smoke rising from the vulture's beak.
Despair. It's this pear, we say,
its warm wool avarice
about to begin, a beetle-browed wool
hoarding coins in the basement.
The potato came to enhance
the old concierges of Europe.
It took care of the rheumatism in their purses,
it blessed the day after tomorrow.
Skilled now, it made them
cheerfully nod this cozy secret:
the glittering tavern, a diamond at midday,
and our sweat watching gilt
proclaim its pretentious saliva.

June & 1971

THE NECK

Like a rainbow-colored surge
a bottle-neck
resembles the devil's throat.
A finger won't fit
and peering inside, the eye happens upon
snakes at the bottom, deepened with borage.
Like a frog,
I'm inside the bottle, my body

an Atlas between the cork
and one leg slowly surveying
its maternal foundation.
Grape and glass are related,
an undecodeable balance,
like air on the scale of Osiris.
The morning dewdrops over the grape
are like a bird's breathing:
first a bundle, then a fog-shaped body
beginning to breathe.
To uncork, the glassy eyes of a Sioux Indian,
the moment from peach fuzz
against the light
and then the waterfall surrounded by rings,
and by cries that encircle the body dictating
the new bodies stumbling
over the rocky flesh of the navel.
Inside the bottle,
one-third of a year in a damp cave,
a skeleton, a mill, a wedding:
the prison baroque.

24th of June & 1971

THEY SLIP THROUGH THE NIGHT

Packed with musicians,
a station wagon at midnight
rattling over old stones,
with silver filaments
like those I saw in Taxco

as I entered the city.
The comedic fat-lady
and the wormy lover
fumbling with the lock
on a window—affected speech
as they pull their hair.
Shouts and bells,
the hues of a cheek
slip toward the bellowing sound
of piss relieved
by the swimming horses,
with parasols
over their swollen flanks.
Earthtone grays
and violet flashes
boast about the rumble
deciphered by the street lamp.
With theatrical jejune,
the abandoned house
frames the musicians
who go by.
Hovering there is the apostrophe
of an arm in demand
outside the window,
crusted with frost of many feathers.
Then a grandfather clock
joins the crowd,
as it doubles-over with laughter
like each musician sinking
into his sleigh-bell pillow.
The originative tassels of time:
like the pistols drawn by Monte-Cristo
or sperm-filled sacs deflated in a river.
As for the rooster?
It spread its legs
and pointed with an index finger.
And then the crackling ember
of a cigarette.

7th of October, 1971

DISSONANCE

As to the contradiction of contradictions,
the contradiction of poetry,
to render the stone's reluctant reply
with a puff of smoke,
and to return to water's clarity
in search of the serene ocean chaos
severed in two: a continuity that questions,
and a rift in response,
like a hole crawling with larvae
in which, afterwards, a lobster will repose.
Its eyes tracing the carbuncular circle,
miasmas being lobsters with flaring eyes,
one half nestled in the void,
the other half clumsily scratching
the frenzy of the annotated faun.
First contradiction: to walk barefoot
over the interlacing leaves
that cover the burrows where the sun
fades like a weary sword
slashing a bonfire, newly planted.
Second contradiction: to plant bonfires.
Final contradiction: to enter
the mirror approaching us,
where backs can be viewed,
and in the likeness, eyes
begin over the eyes of leaves,
the contradiction of contradictions.
The contradiction of poetry,
effacing itself and plunging forward
with the laughable eyes of a lobster.
Each word destroys its appoggiatura
and traces a secular Roman bridge.
Each word spins in place like an affectionate
dolphin, surfacing
as faintly as a phallic prow.
Lips pursed hard when they announce

the order to retreat.
A word explodes and the sleigh dogs chew
the lanterns hanging from the trees.
As to the contradiction of contradictions,
the contradiction of poetry:
efface the letters, and then inhale them at dawn
when the light effaces you.

December & 1971

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Sulfur readers will be familiar with the poetics of Cuban modernist José Lezama Lima (1910-1976), represented over the years among these pages in superb translations by James Irby, including "Ten Prose Poems" in *Sulfur* 3 (1982), and the stunning essay "Confluences" in issue 25 (1989). Although his reputation in English almost entirely rests on his novel *Paradiso*, Lezama's full body of work is even still more imposing. The complete works include over five-hundred pages of collected poetry and certainly twice as many pages of essays and assorted prose.

Written from 1971 to 1976, and posthumously published in 1978, *Fragmentos a su iman*—from which the above poems were translated—reveals a series of final inflections in Lezama's lifelong "poetic system." Without the unabashed symbolist swirl or constraining elegance of previous work—but with the unstoppable onrush of his long-poem *Dador*, for example—*Fragmentos* features a more audibly strident cadence in the way the poems enact a three-ring circus of images telescoped into immanent high-minded slapstick ("They Slip Through the Night") or stop-action still-lifes about to implode ("The Neck") wherein the subject of poetry can be scrutinized as though "effacing itself and plunging forward / with the laughable eyes of a lobster." ("Dissonance").

The writing in *Fragmentos* is loaded with images of isolated enclosure and resignation: a veritable "prison baroque." [For all intents and purposes,

after 1959, and despite the success of *Paradiso,* Lezama's writing remained blatantly unrecognized by an oblivious cultural apparatus, and the writer essentially lived in self-imposed confinement during the latter years of his life.] *Fragmentos a su iman* might well be translated—and in keeping with the provisional world of Lezama: that is, tentatively—as *The Fragments Drawn by Charm.* The poems here are often generated by a sense that matter and meaning are incessantly staging apocalyptic rehearsals of "a genesial, copulative relatedness": an all-encompassing, cyclonic conjunction or totalizing ejaculative surge where "Everything everywhere [is] looming." Indeed, as is clear to anyone who has read *Paradiso*'s infamous Chapter VIII, Lezama was obsessed with the phallic illusoriness of monumental scale and excess. [For more on Lezama's own views regarding his poetic system, readers should consult the interview with Armando Alvarez Bravo published in *Sulfur* 24 (1989).]

A lifelong asthmatic, with symptoms that perhaps became even more pronounced with age, and with the years of sparsity following the Revolution, when medications became increasingly more difficult to obtain, Lezama Lima would come to define poetry as a "photograph of breathing." It is in this sense that the fits and starts of imaginal sequence come to formally rhyme here with the repeated references to actual respiration. In his poetics of the paradox whereby conflicting opposites momentarily coexist in procreative stand-off, Lezama Lima sought, not only as suggested by Rubén Ríos Avila, that is, to make of his respiratory system a syncopated microcosm for the solar system and, by extension, for universal knowledge, but to re-articulate, effusively, the severed nature by which imagination and material reality are separated as "a continuity that questions / and a rift in response."

GUSTAF SOBIN

LATE BRONZE, EARLY IRON: A JOURNEY BOOK

for Michel Py

once again, found yourself traveling in the direction of your own,
broken landscapes.

plumbing sound, extracting fracture.

there where the air—either side—had gone saline.

'glasswort,' you'd jotted down as if the word alone, in those
blanched expanses, might outlast—even for an instant—the
very marsh plant it designated.

gulls, egrets, now, in growing numbers.

while, far out, stands of maritime pine as if floated—mirage-like—
in bunched clusters.

felt yourself, as you went, thin to that spread estuary.

its last, scattered shacks: penultimate markers.

'a traced erasure,' you'd once called it. a semiotics, finally, without
signs.

as the road, just under, broke, now, into gravel, rubble, dune.

impression, everywhere, of aftermath: of having entered, already, an
afterworld; of muttering to yourself in some kind of after-language.

you, who'd chase yourself down, if you could, to your least,
legible vestige.

entering, as you went, those abolished alphabets.

just there, for instance, where they'd located—along the tidal
limits—traces of that lagoonal conglomerate: mounds *(taparas)* of
so much protohistoric habitat.

'pudding stone,' they'd called it.

or on tiny, offshore islands, the first, readily identifiable potsherds
of that incinerating culture: the urnfield.

wondered, didn't you, why the faintest residues elicited the
strongest responses? the most resonant?

delving, as you had, for echo.

for the parallel register(s) of some possible accompaniment.

where, within so much sounding—precise, punctual—might have
coincided (even for an instant) with that *terro sutile.*

(as the ground, otherwise, went on slipping from under).

mattered, didn't it, that—in approaching the coastline—that
very same, incised ceramic had gone from a clay tempered in quartz,
calcite, feldspar to one of crushed, glistening seashell.

—earth and artifact, so doing, in perfect symbiosis—

against those innate dispositions, would read—as you went—
your own, makeshift arrangements.

matching—as you did—precarities.

moving, now, no longer as a physical entity but so much scribble,
scratch-mark, pecking

as a broken phrase in search of its own complement.

words, now, nothing more than the solvent for other words: breath-tracking-breath across so much spectral landscape.

so many long-since fossilized sites.

even (in the rhetoric of latter-day archeology) 'fossilized waters.'

there where they'd settled, *terramaricoles,* at the mouth of the least creek, rivulet, watercourse.

mattered, too, that the lowest stratigraphic layer of human habitation could be determined, today, by whether or not the bivalves therein (cockles, mussels, clams, etc.) still ***happened to be hinged.***

or, occasionally, by an urn, still choked with crematory ash.

would, if you could, precede vestige.

reach, that is, far enough back that you might begin, finally, projecting forwards.

bearing—as you did—that open vocable.

as you traveled, now, well past the silence of those abandoned settlements (sacrificed, no doubt, circa -550, for the sake of the first, fortified cities to the west).

rendered derelict by an emergent, mercantile exchange system, undermining every form, now, of autonomous economy.

as you entered, just then, the *cami salinié*—the ancient salt route—past the last, lagoonal stations.

—visor lowered against so many flat, oncoming rays—

would, if you could, precede even the instant itself; by only
a syllable, only the living increment of a murmur.

(prolonged draft of one's own inaudibility).

as, either side, the vinerows went on ticking (dark, invisible
now) past the cracks in the car's windows.

usually stopped, didn't you, at one of those small, one-star
hotels along the outskirts as if the choice of place depended
—as with the word itself—on its very liminality.

for dinner, fried squid and a dry, white Minervois. moved, as
you went, at the exact same speed as whatever you'd happened to
assimilate.

within the rented space of that tiled bedroom (windowdoors the
same height as the room itself), sheer length of that fractured
reflection.

what wrapt, just now, about its very husk.

throughout the night, the occasional shouts, just beneath, of
passing bargemen.

echoing—syncretic—against the running silence of so much
antecedent.

traveling, as they did, down the long, die-strait corridor of that
antique canal: what lay, just now, beneath a high, over-hanging
canopy of dry, unrattling plane leaves.

where, only five kilometers lower, a Gallo-Roman epigraph had
been found dedicated to the god Mars by the boatmen and ship-
wrights of that very locality.

the inscription thereof, DEO. MARTI. AVG., leading, as it would,
to the discovery of Lattara: city lost—choked—in the alluvium
of the very watercourse it once abutted.

(what if you yourself came across the word—the words—by which you, too, might be decrypted?)

(could roam, pseudo-antiquarian, amongst so much interpolated vestige?).

"pity," as one archeologist put it, "that the site itself hadn't been ravaged by fire: the calcination that would have resulted might have preserved many of its artifacts against so much needless deterioration."

enough remained, nonetheless, within its hydromorphic subsoils, to distinguish eleven separate levels of habitation.

(at its very deepest, for instance, abundant evidence of *bucchero nero,* Etruscan blackware).

enough remained, that is, to determine the fact that Lattara had not only undermined those scattered, lagoonal stations but come to monopolize the entire territory in an embryonic attempt at colonization: at establishing, already, an oligarchic microstate.

characterized—most notably—by a "flourishing of ramparts."

by the first appearance, *intra muros,* of granaries: evidence, already, of a surplus production and its automatic corollary: the stocking of negotiables.

yes, already, concepts of deferral.

just as the phrase, that most invested of goods, would come to gather, provisionally, against its own diffusion.

clot, thesaural.

no way of evaluating the true worth of 'here,' you realized, without a thoroughgoing examination of its historical determinants.

without, for instance, measuring (as had the archeologists) the vast quantities of gravel, of paving stone the founders had first employed in consolidating the 'here'—for example—of this particular site.

(what would only add, centuries later, to its subsidence. like
Ostia, its vanishing).

yes, here, just here, where horses, this morning, grazed immobile
amongst the excavated substructures.

—that skeletal, pluricellular network of rectangles—

(punctuated, occasionally, by black cypress).

were you, you wondered (as you passed through the adjoining museum) any more substantial than the reflections you cast against
the glass cases, filled with so much tagged salvage?

than that wafer-thin layer, glazing the surface of so many illegibles?

yes, would delve: delve if you could.

among the toponyms (those earliest, verbal particles), would follow the radical *Lat-*, signifying—in Celt—a bog or swampland
as far as its suffix *-ara, -aris,* designating—in a lost, pre-Indo-
European dialect—water, running water.

ur-words, of sort. *urspracht.*

those, that is, of an entire world—worlds—gone under: there,
just there, as you stood at the fixed center of so much latter-day
postulate.

so many vaporous substantives.

the rub of your own coat collar serving, occasionally, as reminder.

—or the jingle, just then, of your car keys—

fragrance, as you passed, of so many damp, rotting birch leaves.

as you took, now, the river valley northwards. retracing, as you did, the route (and, subsequently, the dialectic) which once existed between the protohistoric settlements along the coast (e.g., Lattara, Agatha, etc.) and the rich hinterlands, above.

between negotiant, that is, and producer.

following, no doubt, that "axis of penetration" which the first, itinerant bronzesmiths must have taken, vectors—initiators—of the new order.

rising, as you went, towards those abandoned *oppida*, perched on their rock outcrops.

Ensérune, Montlaurès, La Monadière.

(only visible, at that time of year, through a blizzard of amber, salmon, brass).

as a narrow footpath—taut with aleppo—as it drafted you upwards.

where, once again, you'd find them: the substructures. again and again, the human signature of so much right angle lying at the base of so many obliterated dwellings.

while the earth, a bit everywhere, oozed vestige.

oozed *dolia*.

unmistakable, the fragments of those immense, subterranean storage jars as they began appearing—a bit everywhere, now—in broad, scarcely baked, convex sections.

the very length, quite often, of a human collarbone.

shards that the archeologists had come to associate, chronologically, with the emergence of the earliest known battlements, watch towers, defense systems.

yes, once again, that "flourishing of ramparts."

at the very same moment, in fact, as the fortified cities along the coast: these sudden, rudimentary hill citadels.

at the dawn, that is, of a market economy (i.e., the first, deliberate production of an agrarian surplus and its subsequent conservation as a negotiable), these massive circumscriptions.

communities that—already—had begun gathering *against.*

as you, in a science of your own, would trace, if you could, the envelopment of the verb—of language itself—in a similar set of constrictions. self-enclosures.

how, against the innate radiance (call it *aura)* of a polyphonous diffusion, language—as well—would undergo a near identical circumscription.

find itself slowly, inexorably locked within the fixed perimeters of the literal.

(breath itself as if monetized).

yes, a process, a linguistic degeneration, you realized, long in coming: in the gradual attrition of so many sonorous particles.

for 'here' was never more than what a 'there' initiated.

than the ever-narrowing values placed upon language itself: an instrument, today, reduced to the inventorial. for each, specific item, nothing more—now—than its quick, correspondent code.

nothing more—in the spoliation of each, earthly good—than so much successive, electronic spasm.

had thinned as it went, hadn't it?

as you'd entered the very heart, now, of the cumulative; had nearly vanished—you realized—altogether.

you who'd sift substance—if you could—for sound. read, in the eloquence of so much rubble, in the cracked, terracotta skulls of so much vestige, traces of those lost vocables.

institute, in sort, an archeology of the polyphonous.

for you'd always assumed, as you went, an *âge d'or.* as nothing more, perhaps, than some psychic imperative: a underworld, still bristling with signifiers.

yes, would delve: annotate each, discrete echo.

just as others, for instance, would measure annual rainfall (as, indeed, they had) in the very midst of the Bronze Age.

calculate—down to the last millimeter—the otherwise obliterated.

unearthing (here at the Cayla de Mailhac, for instance) evidence of a virtually autonomous, self-sustaining culture. a "unity of civilization," as they'd called it, anteceding that of the first, surplus-oriented market economies, a century later.

towards the very end, that is, of the ephemeral urnfields (870-700 B.C.).

bronze, already, edging towards iron.

where, in their excavations, they'd discovered no dwelling larger than another; no sepulcher, richer.

a people who'd existed, no doubt, in the immensity of the immediate: in the very *there* of 'there.'

without a politic, that is, of deferral, of speculation against the eventual: a people who'd existed, no doubt, in the very glow of their own voices.

for the phrase only fails in failing to omit.

only fails in failing to distribute, *ipso facto,* its own, sonorous properties.

(radial, self-absolving).

there, just then, where another people—a warrior people—would arrive, now, bearing iron.

bearing the clanging axeheads of the new order.

and, from one year to the next (700 B.C.), the lovely, coiled, Mailhacian ceramic—incised, as it was, with a whole proto-alphabet of paired, echoing pictographs—would find itself replaced by that, now, of the thumb-slash.

by *those* of the thumb-slash.

and, along with them, the immediate hierarchization of social structures, the complexification of labor, and—inevitably—the sudden, spectacular emergence of market economies.

'almost ourselves,' you might have whispered, moving, just then, through the tall grasses, the grasses themselves still ticking with the very last crickets of autumn.

'almost ourselves,' you might have heard, reverberant.

a bit everywhere, now, screens, pails, the scuttled equipment of so much long-since abandoned excavation.

(turning, already, to vestige itself).

as you, existing as you did only an instant—a diaphanous moment—
ahead of your own occlusion, made your way, now, through the narrow
passage of so much sporadic murmur.

under, you'd insisted, but only for the sake of *through*.

only for the sake of resuscitating a language light, impalpable,
diffuse as death itself.

one's very cells, therein, rendered weightless.

one's very breath—at last—as if ballasted in air.

while you stood there, that very instant, watching the sun—deep
persimmon—set over the gutted necropolis.

and felt, so doing, the infallible contraction.

—the knot, knotting—

were there, you wondered, rooms, corridors, lobbies spacious
enough to contain the immensity of so much empty speculation?

mirrors set at angles sufficiently congruous to catch the dark drafts
of those vaporous reflections?

for the invisible—you knew—had all but vanished.

(gone, down the tall columns, unquoted).

you, who'd only written for the *wasn't,* only gutted the syllables for
the sake of a certain *nothing,* moved now—as if impacted—within
the mask of so much organ, nerve-end.

(so many self-replicating qualifiers).

catching glimpses, in the rearview, of that very self as you flicked,
now, through the narrow, squat, stucco-fronted towns of the Minervois.

(felt, each time, the jolt of their tiny, humpbacked bridges).

Aigues-Vives, Cabezac, St. Marcel-sur-Aude.

traveling fast, now, beneath the vaulted ceilings of the sycamores:
their leaves, in the flooded yellow of your headlights, twice gold.

leaves, trees, the *richly irrigated plains* now of the Aude valley:
wasn't the breath itself for burning?

these very words—on that vaporous altar—for offering?

wasn't it thus, indeed, that we'd always proceeded? yielding
unto nothing, nothing again?

but the meats, you specified. but the chosen meats of our murmurs,
you insisted, for the sake of passage.

passage alone.

as you crossed, just then—planks rattling—the Canal de Robine.

(its waters skeined in the night's first fog).

and saw, only moments later, Narbonne as if floating—lavishly lit—
over its dark, parceled orchards.

—what, already, you entered now, ever initiate—

a dark concentration, in fact, of avenues, esplanades, restaurants,
their windows wrapt in blue neon.

your hotel bedroom itself like some station in space.

NARBO MARTIUS, you'd read.

in letters long as your own forearm and chiseled three centimeters
deep in limestone: yes, these, even these, to be blown—so many
open vocables—as if across.

yes, unto nothing, no one's, once again, *sleeve, wrist, fingers,* as if offered.

this very text, indeed, for its own unmaking.

for 'wasn't it thus,' as you'd written, 'we'd always proceeded?' in nourishing that very vacuum, subsisted?

charged—as we are—by our own releases?

yes, even here, where nothing happens, happens—indeed—over and over.

wind, that very instant, catching in the loose muslins.

the whole room, in fact, swelling with air.

as you stood, now, in the very space that your phrase—only an instant earlier—had vacated.

. . .the waxed floortiles, before you, glistening. . .

MICHEL BULTEAU

BLACK

(Tr. from the French by Shelley Stroupe)

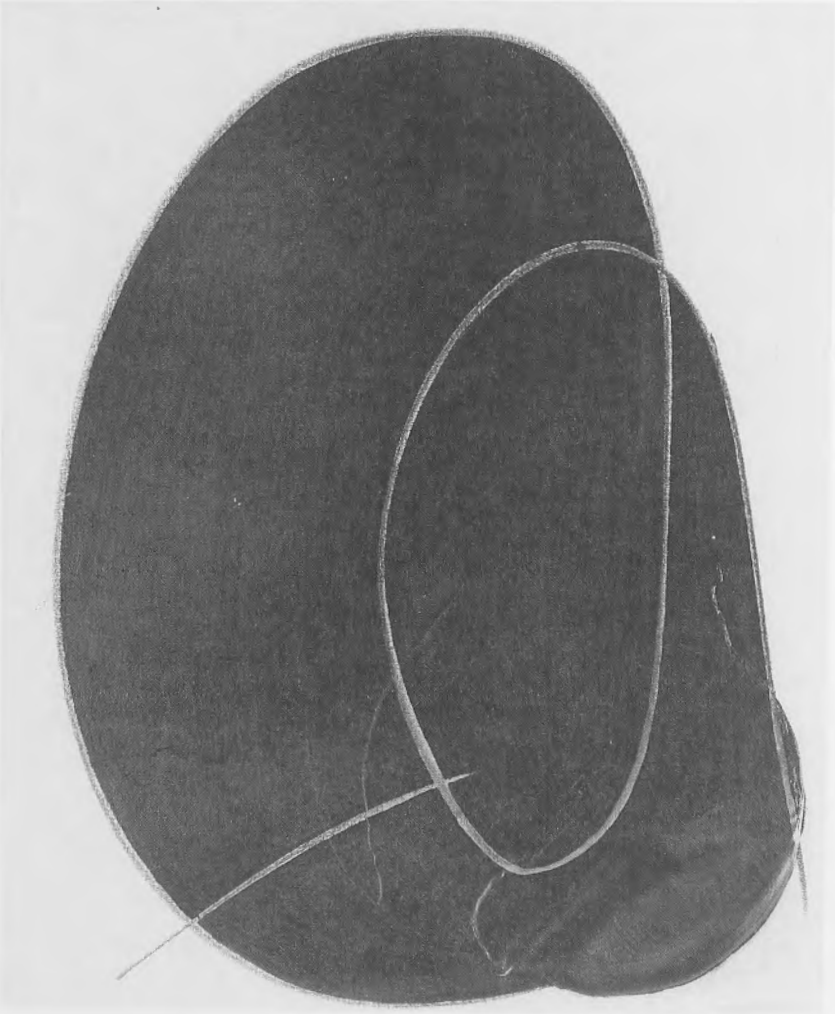
Has everything really gone black?
The eye hasn't gone black. It was black to begin with. The eye is a part of the body, a white egg. Its vision does not calm things. It sharpens the enigma.
The mind is the finger that moves.
The mind is the thorax.
The mind is the perfect organization of the body.
The movement is imperceptible. It is curious. It turns a little. It looks at itself and brushes against itself. But it remains mind and pointing finger, mind and thorax.
Black is seen and has trouble accepting immobility. It grows accustomed to the circle out of concern for dependence. Black dreads extremities. It likes to be in the indivisible center of origin.
Black encourages clandestine exchange (a sick lung for a flow of paint). Interior for interior. Black distances the red interior, the colors of butchery, the amazing caprices of blood. Black restores balm to the body.
The eye casts from the eye that which is lacking in the world, for it not to remain invisible.
As we were saying, it is on the inside that the work to come leaves traces. The eye of the seer sets up a give and take between the center and the periphery, oh long-legged Mallarméan spider. Center-exciter opening the eyes which henceforth look upon it.
Windows, space is within you! In your frames, your sashes.
Points touched by the fallible.
The outside becomes the soul.
To glimpse the lyrical constitution of the universe.
Hands have pushed on the real, hands which cross regions of

sightless experience, dig through cavities and turn viscera inside out like gloves.
The return to black has the merit of keeping viscera at a distance.
A skin has not formed, black relives the life of black, makes fun of itself, does not complete its ideas. Suddenly, black was no longer poison. Black follows the ridges of the die and surrenders to the sacred.
Here, somnolent animation is conveyed by the egg with the broken shell, the passage of black time, the dormant masses. This egg, this time, these masses perturb the sessions of imitation, bearing witness to nightmares of axial lines and to the recognition of these nightmares.
The regard, conquered, no longer uses confused terms. Black peremptorily penciled, caring for the canvas, curing mystical interpretations. An attempt to thaw immobile logic, the logic of slow motion grinding to a halt.
Black surpassed.
Strangenesses?
Yes, pure and simple.
Black at the height of unreason, without slipping, seeking air like a fish, unstable treasure unable to speak, immanent black revealing postures, return of the open eyelid, path of successive realities, lacks and night watches.

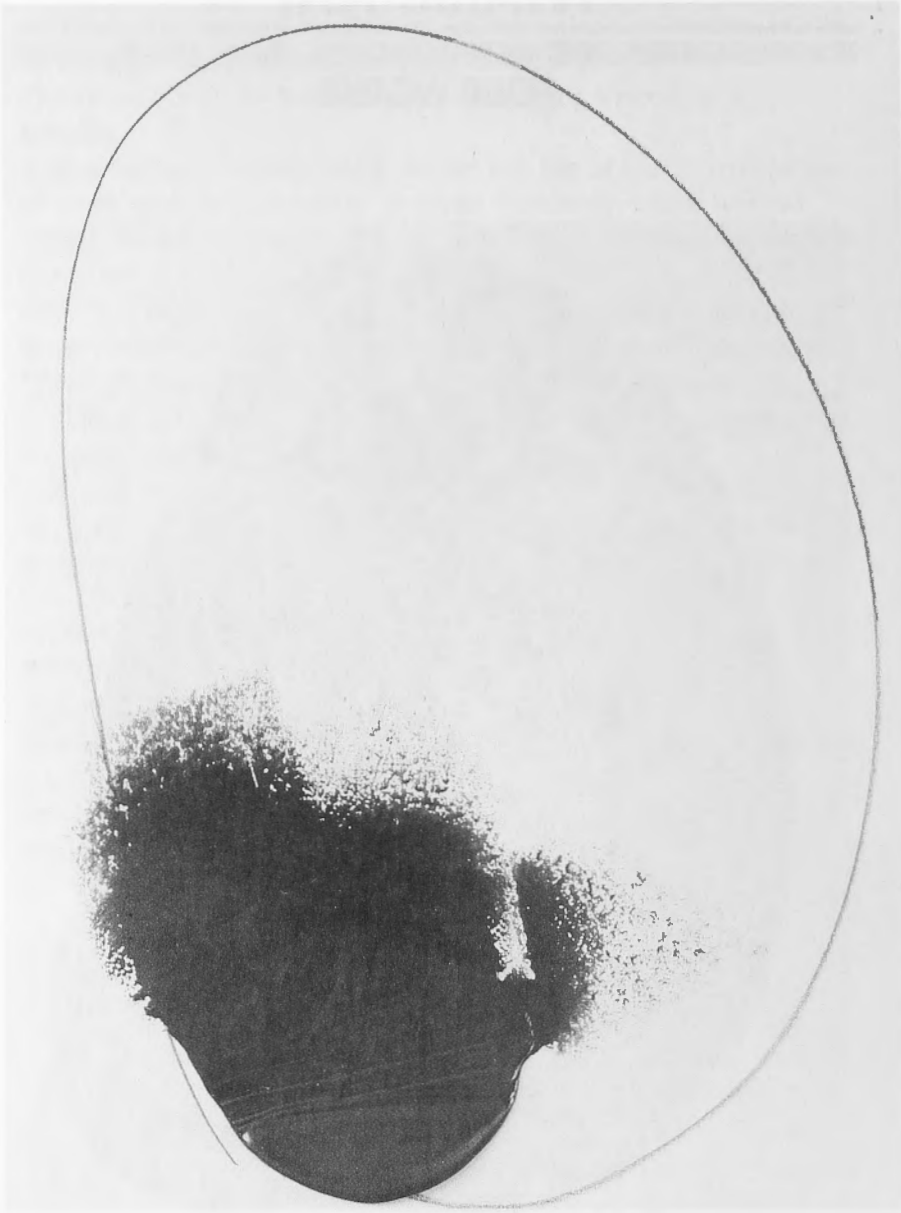
Note: "Black" first appeared, in French, as "Noir," in a catalogue otherwise devoted to Matsutani's work published by Galerie Mercuri in Paris, 1995.

MATSUTANI

FOUR WORKS



Cercle 94-8
1994, 65 x 64 cm, graphite, paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief.



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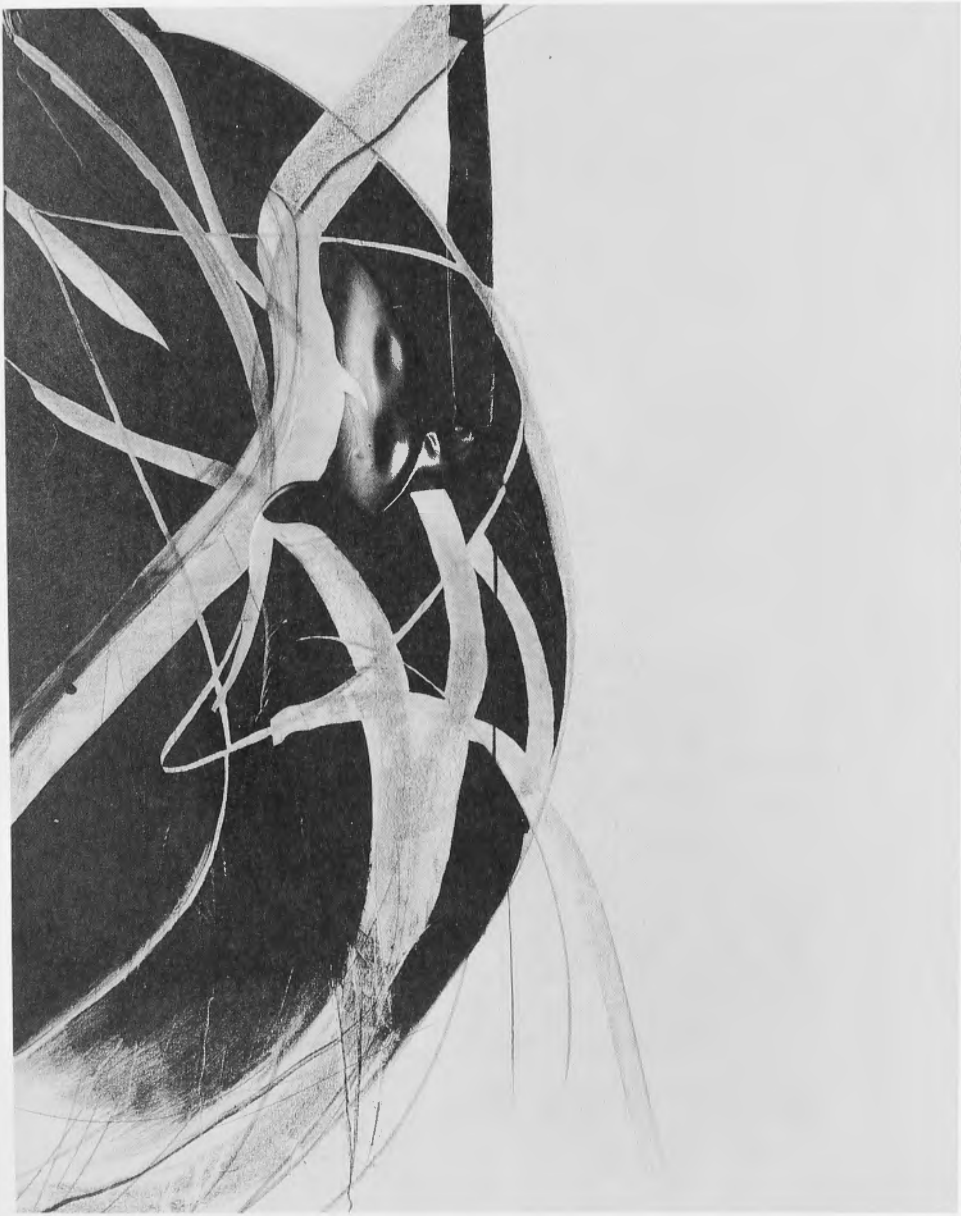
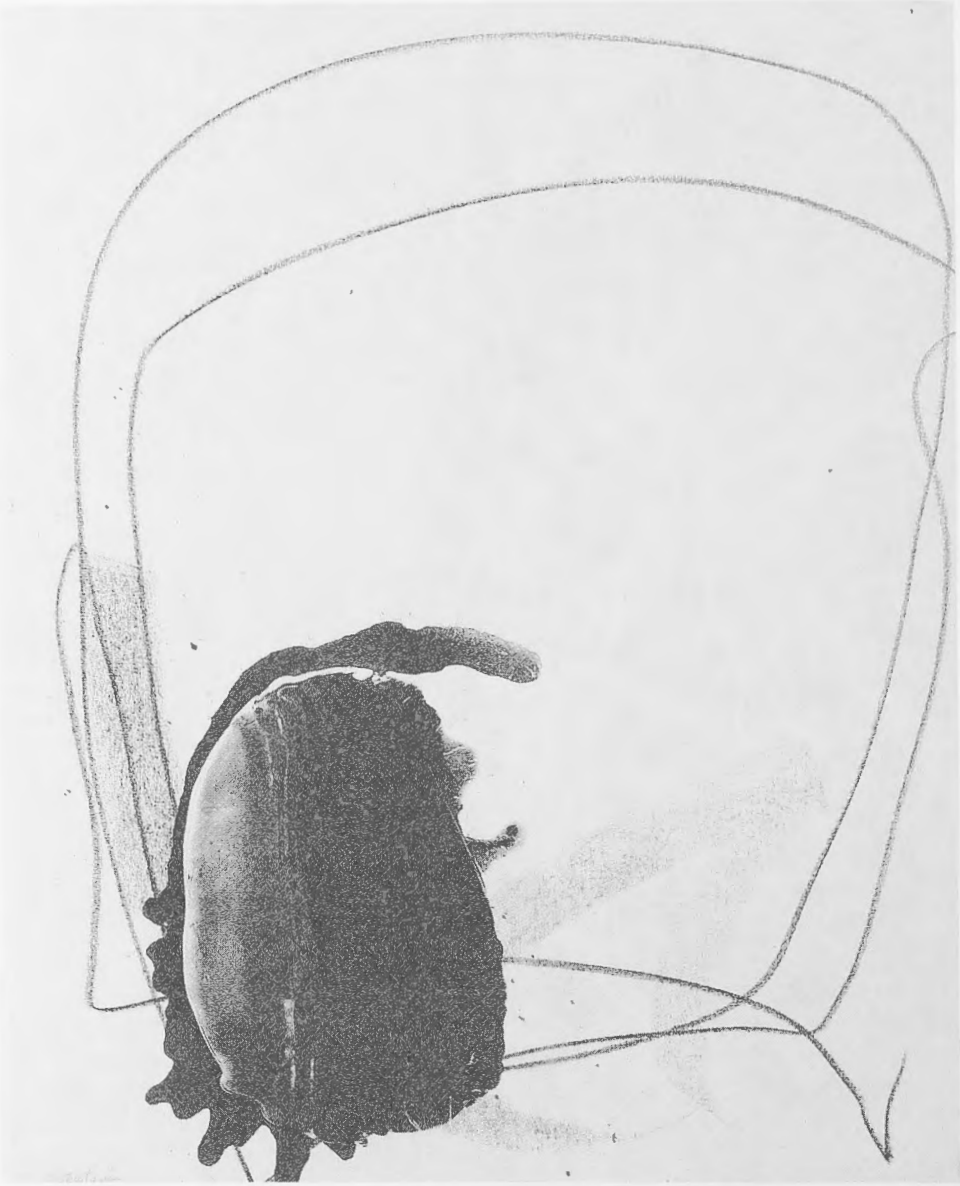


Ecriture 91-2
1991, 162 x 130 cm, graphite,
paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief.



Cercle 94-9-8
92 x 73 cm, graphite, paper mounted on canvas, vinyl relief.

COMMENTARY

The Matter of Writing: On Pierre Guyotat

In 1969, *Tel Quel* published an extract from Pierre Guyotat's work in progress, *Éden, Éden, Éden,* under the title *Bordels boucherie.* After the book's publication by Gallimard in 1970, it was subjected to governmental censorship, was reviled by large sections of the Parisian literary establishment, and became one of the great divisive scandals of postwar French writing. The participants of *Tel Quel,* in collaboration with supporters and associates of Pierre Guyotat, such as Paule Thévenin, the editor of the work of Antonin Artaud, mounted a defence of the book. Michel Foucault wrote: 'Guyotat has written a book in a language of startling innovation. I have never read anything like it in any stream of literature. No-one has ever spoken as he speaks here.' Documents and interviews relating to this protest against the forbidding of writing were published in a volume entitled *Littérature Interdite.* This paper aims firstly to explore the process by which the language of *Éden, Éden, Éden* generated such institutional and individual vitriol, secondly to stress the role of *Tel Quel* in manifesting the language of this book, and thirdly to relate Guyotat's language to the configuration of contemporary Europe, and the pressures of fragmentation operating in any creative work brought into existence in the extreme conditions for which Guyotat's work delivers *prescience* and *testimony.* In this context of the contemporary, two elements need to be emphasized. Firstly, the English are in for a shock of their own, since *Éden, Éden, Éden* is to be published for the first time in English translation next month by Creation Books, in an extraordinarily veracious and compelling translation by Graham Fox. Secondly, Pierre Guyotat is very much alive and *present* in France, working on a colossal project for future publication, a project which has consumed him obsessively since the late 1970s and which came close to causing his death at the end of 1981. [And Guyotat will shortly be visiting London to give what I think will be a unique, once-in-a-lifetime

Delivered at the Tel Quel conference, London French Institute, 1995

performance, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on April the 27th.] So, I want to make it clear that I'm not talking about a *carcass* or about a *dead language* here.

Pierre Guyotat's 1988 text *Wanted Female* was conceived while he was jogging on the beach in Santa Monica while on a visit to see the painter Sam Francis. Guyotat saw a girl junkie running down the beach to buy crack from her dealer, and the image for this text was *sprung*: a girl is caught inside the cheek of the bestial narrator of the text along with six macerated sexes. The disciplined rhythm of *Wanted Female* is that of the process of *running*, its trajectory jump-cutting with invasive imageries, until the running of the text is suspended and all that remains are the ashes of the narrator, grabbed and gathered in a sack by the girl junkie, open and noxious. By contrast, the speed of *Éden, Éden, Éden* is that of an atrocious headlong rush into obscenity, conducted at breakneck intensity, disciplined to the last syllable. The text is not left to breathe, and it constricts the reader, exhausts the reader in an adrenalized pulse of text, whose release is exhalation amalgamated with exhaustion, with the great malignant orgasm which the entire book constitutes. No space exists in the text for the readers to pacify themselves, to focus and thereby rest their eyes. The onrush of text is itself an ocular violation. *Éden, Éden, Éden* is a text that compels the eye, physically, into its implosive momentum, that accelerates incessantly at the reader. In an interview published in *Tel Quel*, Guyotat spoke of how the text of *Éden, Éden, Éden* terminates at the same point where his van had broken down, in the steppes around the border between Algeria and Niger, during his obsessional travels around the area. He comments: 'I write like I travel—I write like I drive, even.' So, the brutality of raw speed is the first primary element in the transmission of the matter of writing.

Pierre Guyotat has written that his monumental work in progress, as yet unpublished, *L'Histoire de Samora Machel*, makes up what he calls 'the total prostitutional experience.' *Éden, Éden, Éden* consists of the *fragmentation* of prostitution; the book forms the relentless enumeration of an *innumerable* series of sex acts performed between prostitute boys and manual salaried workers in a desert brothel in Algeria; the final section of the book, compacting the detail of fauna with the detail of sex acts between a group of nomadic human beings and animals, takes place on a steppe in northern Niger; the text is initiated in warfare, with multiple acts of violence, rape and massacre perpetrated by marauding French troops, in a colonial conflict for which the index is the Algerian war of liberation, previously incised by Guyotat in his first celebrated novel, *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats*. It has to be noted in this context that Guyotat was himself a young soldier in Algeria, arrested for inciting other soldiers to desert, imprisoned and shat upon for three months in a hole in the ground,

and threatened with death. Each fragment of the sex acts performed by Guyotat's prostitute boys, Wazzag and Khamssieh, is saturated with the murderous opening of the text, which determines that every act of lust is read—indelibly, with vicious clarity—through the *medium* of a hanging pall of blood. The salaried sexual act doubles the salaried act of exploitation undergone by the drillers, workers, butchers who enter the arena of prostitution. And the régime of sex is doubled by the régime of genocide.

At the time of the writing of *Éden, Éden, Éden* and the appearance of *Bordels boucherie* in *Tel Quel,* Guyotat had not yet completely formulated his project of recreating what he calls 'the matter of writing,' a project which consumes him to the present day. This project was most intensively developed in the aftermath of the scandal over *Éden, Éden, Éden,* in the years from 1971, when Guyotat was closely aligned with the French Communist Party, to 1975, when he began to mainline heroin for the first time and published his most dense and syntactically damaged and elided work, the novel entitled *Prostitution.* The texts which Guyotat worked on in these years are what he calls: 'liberated texts.' The act of creation which produced *Éden, Éden, Éden,* then, is the pivot upon which this work *under the skin of the French language* delicately *grates* in all its originality. Guyotat states: 'The very origin of the whole system of literature has to be attacked.' The crucial question, then, is to formulate another, oppositional origin, that of the matter of writing, the site at which it cuts with a stultified system—and then to locate *Éden* within the process which that reinvented origin generated. So—as Pierre Guyotat states in his seminal text of the early 1970s, *The Language of the Body,* delivered at a celebrated conference on the work of Artaud, his work began as a child, with vital corporeal matters to be combined in language. He notes how he wrote incessantly from an early age, masturbating constantly with one hand while he wrote with his other hand, producing manuscripts which are extraordinary visual coagulations of semen, ink, blood and dirt. The matter of language originates in obsession, the intensity of fluidic trajectories and mixings, and through the fragments that cohere to that *surface* of the work which is *publicly presented* to the eye. In all of Guyotat's writing, only a fraction of that work of textual ejaculation has ever been presented to the public eye, and the remainder is either lost in the jet of its trajectory, or retained in the body of Guyotat's work which he has determinedly kept for himself. It must be noted, however, that Guyotat's *latent* work is *accessible*—stored at the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine in Paris in manuscript form, and open to being actively sought and minutely interrogated, rather then chanced upon.

The matter of writing, then, begins in *expulsion and incorporation.* As such, a book such as *Éden, Éden, Éden* is *the perfect book* for contemporary Europe, which is also, in its malignancy, dominated by those *twin*

compulsions. The gestation of *Éden* involved a concurrent *detachment* from Europe and its oppositional re-*integration.* In the period after the publication of *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats,* Guyotat returned to Algeria, and travelled through the desert and mountain regions in the south of the country, photographing and filming the landscape and nomadic people, making notes towards his *dispossession* of language—the dispossession of the French language *from* itself—which the writing of *Éden* would project. The book was then written in a sudden burst of six months in a concrete highrise in the desolate suburbs of southern Paris, in the winter following the May 1968 events in the city. The construction of the matter of writing, then, subsumes the protraction of gazing, travelling and noting, *into* the abrupt intensity of the executed text. The oscillation here is that of the greatest of all the contradictions of representation, that between *repetition* and unique *projection* or *demonstration.* Roland Barthes wrote in his preface to *Éden* of how the *unit of the phrase* in Guyotat's language is endlessly brought to bear, compulsively and relentlessly, against the preoccupations of the text. The substance of the subject matter is never attained, never fulfilled. The uniqueness of the language in *Éden,* which Michel Foucault emphasizes, is unique only through its sustaining, its determined rhythm of repetition. If the text visually enacts an ocular violation, then the impact upon the reader of that repetition of intensity would constitute a *mental* violation of the most challenging kind, since what it aims at is the barrier between language and the human body. At the end of the work of Antonin Artaud, this terminal contradiction, between repetition and uniqueness, is vitally at stake. After giving what would be his final performance, at the Galerie Pierre in Paris on the 18th of July, 1947, Artaud wrote of the language of gestures and blows which he had formulated and had attempted to demonstrate to his audience, but the *presence* of which had finally eluded him in terms of the kind of *immediacy of repetition* which he wanted to project. Artaud commented: 'I would have had to *shit* blood through my navel to arrive at what I want./For example, three quarters of an hour's beating with a poker on the same spot. . .'. The diverse notes which Artaud made for his final work, the banned recording for radio, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu,* also conglomerate around this concern to demonstrate the unique, while refusing the representational as integrally malicious, complicit and *social.* And the strategy of repetition of Guyotat's *Éden, Éden, Éden* is of a parallel order, in its exploration of the tension between the sustained and the immediate in language, working as the direct counterpart for corporeal processes of resistance and creation.

The matter of writing, then, would ultimately be something which brings *abstraction,* and even the integral *repetition* of language itself, to its end, to its silencing. In retrospect, in 1995, Pierre Guyotat views his

trajectory with *Tel Quel* as one which assisted in, and added to, the project of expelling *abstraction* out from the contemporary, and of focusing on the immediately gestural and physical. In viewing the historical scope and resonance of Guyotat's work, the two overriding elements to be discerned are what he calls 'the revolt against abstraction,' and, secondly, this permanent struggle with the matter of repetition. Long before the powerful rise of fundamentalism in Algeria in 1991, Guyotat warned that this systematic abstraction of religion, into a movement of mass terror, on a sustained scale, was the greatest danger for the North African countries. And it's certainly the case that one of the great fallacies about European history, in the second half of the twentieth century, was that the genocide enacted in the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War would *not be repeated.* At least in Britain, the television imageries of Omarska in the summer of 1992 constituted a disabusal of that fallacy about repetition. Similarly, the arguably genocidal extermination of one hundred thousand Kurdish and Iraqi conscripts, by European and North American weapons technology, in the deserts of southern Iraq in February 1991, *resuscitated* the atrocious dynamics of power that had animated the particular conflict, that of Algeria, which *initiates* the language of Guyotat's *Éden* and of *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats.* The latter of these books is explicitly dedicated by Guyotat to his uncle, Hubert, arrested for resistance activities and killed in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp at Oranienburg in 1943. Guyotat has written: 'My whole imaginary system is an allusion to the concentrational system.' The twin forces of abstraction and repetition are eminently *palatable and consumable* in the contemporary media. And, as at the time of the publication of *Éden,* it is the crucial dynamics of a *refused abstraction*—and of a *fury at repetition*—which Pierre Guyotat's work in progress also now confronts, and in which it affronts.

Éden, Éden, Éden is demonstrative and revelatory in its insight into the crucial and determining matters of *sex, language and the human body.* The work is lethal, and it possesses no precedent. It possesses one or two siblings, however. Like Antonin Artaud, Guyotat views the act of writing as a physical secretion—a feral exudation of the body's material, creatively expectorating deadly substances which are savage and interrogative in their visceral impact upon the exposed reader. If the essence of language is to subsist and repeat itself in a state of stasis, then Pierre Guyotat has relentlessly beaten this comatose, catatonic *nature* of language into an anatomical matter of writing. Like Artaud in his final work from the late 1940s, Guyotat speaks with blunt and sensational desire, against the apparition of society and its paralysed languages. The action of writing, in *Éden, Éden, Éden,* becomes a disciplined intervention which cracks censorship wide open in all its horror. The pressure of the horror of the act of writing is maximal when placed intimately against the horror of the

forbidden. Then the matter of writing is a liberating project: the tamacheck text at the opening of *Éden, Éden, Éden* reads: '*And now, we are no longer slaves.*' But it must be emphasized that the forbidden is an entirely different matter now than it was in 1970. The support which *Tel Quel* gave to Guyotat and his texts, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, is certainly a factor in the transformation of the forbidden, and the transformation of censorship. The subject matter and focus of censorship have been comprehensively recast in those twenty-five years, and the strategies of censorship have arguably evolved, in terms both of their sophistication and their brutality, for example in the action by the Artaud heirs against Philippe Sollers and *l'Infini*, last year. And Pierre Guyotat writes: Censorship is condemned to have much more work with my *new* texts than with the first ones.' But the fact of refusing censorship—refusing its central operation of suppressing an *upheaval* in re-imagining sex and the human body, in re-imagining language—is enduringly valuable. The traces of this process are marked in the survival of *Éden, Éden, Éden* and in the role of *Tel Quel* in that survival.

The question of censorship is one which Pierre Guyotat has never failed to confront, as evidenced in his defence, in the newspaper *Libération*, last March, of Jacques Henric and his novel *L'Origine du monde*, and evidenced too in his earlier defence of Salman Rushdie and his novel *The Satanic Verses*. And from Guyotat's first words, the will to *avoid the erotic*, to *embrace the pornographic*, has been pronounced—the pornographic placed clearly in the sense of what disturbs, deranges and liberates the limits of the body, what sensationally overturns and also *transfixes* the eye, what falls irrevocably into the substance of the body, and what castigates the imageries of a bogus society. Guyotat has commented: 'Pornography is certainly more beautiful than eroticism. I say three cheers for pornography!' The intervening ground between Guyotat's realignment of language in *Éden, Éden, Éden* (accused *governmentally* of being pornographic in the years between 1970 and 1981), and the pornography of censorship itself, is a *terrain of silence*, and this terrain is one Guyotat has explored to the point where his silence alone has proved atrociously articulate. If writers are only writers when they publish work, then those intermittances and intrusions of silence or social retraction have been determining in Pierre Guyotat's work. At periods such as that of the summer of 1977, in which he conceived his most monstrous abjection of language, his novel *Le Livre*, the constitution of the identity of the writer is interrogated with violence. Guyotat retrospectively wrote: 'At the same time that I decide never again to publish, reinforced by my refusal of the designation "writer," these voices [of mine] disappear into what I no longer call writings, but *matter*.' Silence and obscenity are equally at the heart of the matter of writing. This oscillation between the forced silence of censorship, and the

intentional silence of extreme creativity, is initiated from fury and from aberration. It is simultaneously the silence of humiliation and of reaction, the silence of degradation and liberation. And that is the unique and unbearable silence of Guyotat's matter of writing, the traces of which are *uncollectable*, and virulent to the touch of the eyes.

The text of *Éden, Éden, Éden* is ferociously lit and coloured. It is a text that is concurrently an image in space, an image in which no time is ever lost: the movement between prostitutional act to act is instantaneous, utterly without gaps in its temporal representation. Guyotat has commented that he always possesses a pictorial and visual, rather than linguistic, sense of what he is doing. In the act of writing, the weight of the accumulated and assembled words have no substance or *matter*; instead, it is the *image* which causes a detonation in the movement and the abrupt choreography of language. As in the notebooks of Antonin Artaud, the border between image and text in *Éden, Éden, Éden* is summarily precluded, *negated* by the creative act which incorporates the visual and the textual, into a corporeal and assaultive matter. And finally, the text of *Éden, Éden, Éden* is a language of the body. For Guyotat, the responsibility to write is paramount in its intensely political, intensely social configuration of *resistance*—a configuration of revolution in its momentary, and thereby momentous, intersection with the trajectory of *Tel Quel*. But, at the same time, the *origin* of that responsibility is *exterior* to all forms which enclose it, including the collective identity of *Tel Quel*, and even the individual identity of Pierre Guyotat himself, who has commented: 'I have written these things, but it wasn't *I* who wrote them. I am the instrument of that writing. I am a body through whom the words pass.' The body, then, is the instrument which hammers into, or else lets slip, language. It is the body which may disobey, rather than its words. But the body is *all there is* between language and the void of censorship or fundamentalism or genocide.

The origin of the matter of writing, then, is in its revelation of duplicity between language and the body, and in the shattering act of collision which also welds them together.

—STEPHEN BARBER

Paul Celan, *Breathturn*. (Bilingual edition). Translated from the German and with an Introduction by Pierre Joris. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1995.

Pierre Joris's translations of *Atemwende* were made over a period of seventeen years: how persistent does a translator have to get? Meanwhile, even before Celan's suicide in 1970, there had been the pioneering translations by Cid Corman, Michael Hamburger, Joachim Neugroschel and others. There had also been a wave, cresting in about 1976, of brilliant studies commenting on the original cryptic poems,
early or late, exegetic micro-analyses, themselves abstruse, of some of the most obscure writings since Mallarmé to have been academically classified as fresh growths in the Gongora tradition. Even then, what is it all about? Exegetes have certainly "confiscated" Celan, but his poems still stick, barbed, actual and enigmatic, in the imaginations of poets and connoisseurs around the globe: a poetry as utterly remote from the sprawling, bland or strident, linearity of "open mike" confessions as Charles Köchlin's piano is from that of Keith Jarrett.

Pierre Joris's introduction to his bilingual and annotated *Breathturn* clears a shining path through the thicket of critical opinion which has been gathering around Celan since the mid-1960s. Recently, both biographical and intellectual contexts have been clarified for English-language readers, first by Jerry Glenn, now by Amy Colin *(Holograms of Darkness,* 1991) and John Felstiner *(Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew,* 1995). Much that has been hidden has been revealed in these two books: Celan's origins in Czernovitz, his literary and social antecedents, his beginnings as a poet, his identification (deepened by translation) with other poets, Essenin for one, but much more fundamentally Mandelstam, his paranoia (above and beyond the appalling *contretemps* with Claire Goll), his alliance with Henri Michaux. Other aspects come to the fore in Celan's correspondence with Nelly Sachs, the translation of which was published by Sheep Meadow: Nelly Sachs (1886-1970), whose splendid later poems were, surely, inspired by her feeling for Celan, died only a few months after his suicide.—But is Paul Celan, the poet alone, such a Titan? Do his "polyperspectival" later poems (beginning 1963) actually speak, or is this some Vygotskyan "inner speech," in a series of oracles tortuously pronounced from what Celan himself called "word-caves"? Inevitably the time will come when his writings, their significance hitherto magnified by minute analysis of words and figures ceremoniously conducted by priest-exegetes, might be taken from their pedestal. Will Pierre Joris's translations advance at least North American understanding of the originals? To what degree can real

understanding be advanced by translation of poems that crack words to expose their kernels, to which the poet then points as with his needle, only to end up showing the atomic fabric of the needle's point and how it holds together in its vacuum?

These are not impertinent questions. But since they arise from some anxiety I experience when reading Celan, and beholding the immense thicket of exegesis around his work, let me now set down, *à propos* these translations, not pressing them hard, some fractious thoughts to which they have led me. First I should quote one translation from the first (serially composed) section of *Breathturn:*

> YOUR DREAM, butting from the watch.
> With the wordspoor carved
> twelve times
> helically into its
> horn.
>
> The last butt it delivers.
>
> In the ver-
> tical narrow
> daygorge, the upward
> poling ferry:
>
> It carries
> sore readings over.

A note on "horn" says: "A possible reference to the 'Gate of Horn' which according to Homer leads to the true dreams" *(Odyssey* 19, 562–569). There is no note on "butt," which translates "Stoß" ("butting" from "stößig"). Both "horn" and "butt" belong in a context which, in the original, is fluid, and is inevitably fixed in translation by the interpretation put on the words by the translator. ("Helically" translates "schraubenförmig," literally "screw-shaped.") The trouble is with "butt," which suggests in English a context alien to the German. If we could have divined (and translation entails divination here) that the horn is that of a unicorn (a recurrent figure in Celan), "butt" would hardly be apt—and the "Gate of Horn" association would not be "possible" at all. Yet other words and other contexts conspire here in such a manner as to put the unicorn in a very dark abyss indeed. What can "Wundgelesenes" mean? "Sore readings" does not, I think, capture the sense of *read till sore / wounded,* which might be the outcome of being pierced by the horn of a unicorn of a purity only to be desired of poetry. One salient feature of these texts is the compound word, noun or

adjective or both. Celan was splitting German words and splicing particles—inventing his own language, as border peoples and outlaws always have done. "Pfingstschneise," for instance, suggesting "Pentecost (fire) break," translated by Joris as "Pentecost lane." The words may communicate strangely with one another, kernel to kernel, but is there a "what" for them to communicate to their reader? The fluidity of context is only one function in a general disturbance of expectations.

As for contexts, there arises the problem of Celan's multiple literary allusions, echoes carried into his poems from literary sources he adopted. The earlier poem "Matière de Bretagne," for instance, "alludes" to the Arthurian legends, "Engführung" ("Stretto") to a poem by C.F. Meyer, Dante's Paolo and Francesca story, and Democritus—all in a matter of instants. But the allusions are, as it were, glancing echoes only: of the Democritus fragment "All that exists is atoms, the rest is opinion," only "war Meinung" remains. How can any extraneous context be felt as presence, if it is not transformed, made new, and branded into the structure of the poem which takes it up? And if not felt as presence, working its own transformation in its new home, the allusion is no more than a matter of concern for meticulous exegetes; for translators, such difficulty will be plain.

Is it possible (I have wondered, as devil's advocate) that, notwithstanding Celan's real poetic genius facing full into the "language of the murderers," his stature has been fabricated by exegetes, who want nothing better than to hunt for hidden treasure? Celan was, himself, more than touchy about recrudescent German (or other) anti-Semitism, ultra-sensitive to any adverse criticism of his work. It might almost seem that, out of an unavowed bad conscience, reverential German-language critics have, while turning Celan into an inscrutable *icon,* deified him as a poet of infallible omniscience, by way of expiation: first you crucify, then you deify. Much of the unquestioning interpretation of Celan's poems might be underpinned by some idolatrous compulsion. Even exquisitely refined exegetes have attributed to poems intricacies not at all warranted by the texts as such—for instance, the grand debate (summarized in Colin's book) about the poem "Zähle die Mandeln," which, because it speaks of "entering into your name," and although there's no intrinsic evidence at all, is alleged to have something to do with Osip Mandelstam.

After all, Celan's entire work is a unique record of a wound, a trauma. Unlike most of his contemporaries (non-German likewise), he made of his radically disconcerting trauma a poetry of "spiritual" experience. The poem becomes an articulation of a stage on a spiritual quest. His quest was to purge the evil which had wounded him. A Sisyphus, he never succeeded, or else he did succeed by so steadfastly failing to accomplish the

impossible, always undaunted, telling what evil does to you, how it will not be expunged. A catharsis did perhaps occur, once or twice (e.g. in "Engführung," as a dialogue *cum mortuis);* yet still the wound festered ("Matière de Bretagne"), the evil even renews itself at each wrenching effort to pluck it out by putting it to words. The "idolatry" of the exegetes must, surely, imply a recognition of this difference between Celan and most other poets, and of the weird kinship between Celan and Nelly Sachs, as poets of spiritual questing in the wake of the Holocaust.

Possibly, too, for a number of admirers and epigones, Celan voices their obscure feeling of victimhood. In one way or another, the poems ventilate variations of that feeling, so their maker, himself captive to the victim nightmare, himself a survivor suspended in pestilential mineshafts of melancholy, has come to seem like a Prometheus, molding from subterraneous clay and human tears lingo-beings in his image and theirs. Here, then, is the language of the threatened and the pulverized: the "particle cloud" ("Partikelgestöber") on the brink of silence, a lingo composed of words imaginatively vaporized, then reconstituted, but "unrecuperable," particles blent afresh by recourse to cross-linguistic puns, to cognates in "technical vocabularies" (crystallography, navigation, etc.), to neologisms, such as "Porenbau," "Lichtzwang," or "Pfingstschneise" (with its choking center of eight successive consonants). One is certainly reminded of Michel Leiris and his idea of a "scrambled language" of gasps and gaps, which, as a "disjointed, dislocated, danced rather than devoutly dressed-up discourse," might help one "to feel less wholly disoriented before that NOTHING". . .so that "the horror of future annihilation, still noxious but now more diffused, is drawn out of its diabolically imperceptible nullity thanks to the illusion of a bridge linguistically suspended." (J. Clifford's translation, from *Words/Swerves,* in *Sulfur* 15).

Celan's translators are unanimously nonplused. How do you make credible in English the extended qualifier-plus-noun phrasing that stretches even German usage? "Over three in sea- / drunken sleep / with brownalgae-blood / ciphered breast- / nipplestones // clap your / from the last / raincord breaking / loose sky. . ." Such chains may (with hyperbaton) so prolong the protasis of a period that the apodosis withers on the stem. All this and more, from the murderers' language must be extracted another and magically cosmogonic word, while even that is witnessed, in position, as a word about a word. No preconceived "world" being "represented," the word (in German, *Wort* is a *seme* with great latent power in the act of *saying)* creates one of its own. But does it? Can a language be so "suspended," so devised by deregularization, that a transcendent alternative tongue comes to be constituted? And in translation—accidents occur: "raincord breaking" is so close to "record breaking," a platitude with no trace in the original puts a wrong spin on the code.

I do not think that Celan could have achieved what his poetics eccentrically projected without jumping over his shadow. That shadow is the one which hounds the Narcissistic personality, obstructs the incessantly self-reflexive, tortuously pain-propelled imagination, and pre-vents (in the old sense of "going before") any airy creation of words. Or else the shadow baffles imagination (and not only in the "mirror-stage"), so that the project culminates in a splintering, or hashing, of its obstacle, the *given* language. Celan's later procedure seems to have been to decompose the given and recompose particles of it in sequences of fairly short poems, which, though they may send luminous detail splitting off across a serial pattern to suggest a semantic coherence, in cryptic transformations peculiar to the sequence, actually eliminate any extrinsic context (in Piaget's terms). The effect, then, is agglutination, rather than coherence, or, as Vygotsky said of "inner speech," the sequence becomes a "function in itself" and is "not the internal aspect of external speech" (*Thought and Language* (1934), 1962, p. 149). The reader, of German or English, will perhaps be more favorably disposed if he or she can conceive of such poems (or translations) not as voicing but as writing. For me, any such disjunction is not thinkable: the poetic ardor backfires if committed to Babel. Reading Pierre Joris's often most valiant translations, I was reminded of a passage in Gottfried Keller's novel, *Der grüne Heinrich*, the early version (1840s), where the hero asserts: "Gott strahlt vor Weltlichkeit": "God is radiant with worldliness." Celan's endeavor was to overturn that insight together with the whole *harmonia mundi* topology enshrined in it.

The world as he knew it is anything but a vast *theotrope*. Yet he does smuggle the *numen* back in through the cracks, oddly enough, as cosmogonic word which represents only itself and thus remains *deus absconditus*. (To Nelly Sachs's avowal of her faith, he replied: "I will continue to blaspheme.") In every poem he wrote there is a recall to order of the privileged lyric word, as an aspiration, at the very least, toward a sacred, even sacrificial language. Yet our comfortable debates about poetry and shamanizing might find in Celan's life-work a shocking version of their object: Ten years (1945-55) of high-absurd figurative poems, euphonious, oneiric, in soft or sharp focus, always wrestling with demons of evil and oppression; then fifteen years of restless effort to articulate a vision (complete, because ever onward going—the Mallarmé prescription), but amid worsening atmospheres and spikier particles, on an ever-diminishing psychic scale; until the vision itself brings the shaman to vanishing point. In his last three collections, it seems to me, there is more and more manner, less and less character. More and more, as a trueblue Mannerist, Celan was "overrunning the classical norm" (as Ernst Robert Curtius described Mannerist tendencies); he was also eliminating, as far as it is speakable,

extrinsic contexts upon which, alas, civil semantics depend for any "give and take" between the fibers in our networks of personal pronouns.

Might this be why I miss, as regards "voicing" and "writing," in Celan's later work any undisconcerted, individual, "human" voice? Compared (invidiously or not) with the voices of Mandelstam, Celan's voices are those of an eccentric transformer of the ultramundane voices that sound echoing across the centuries of German lyric; but isn't an individual human voice, solo or orchestral, the missing *bond* among his particles? It is as if, in a manic contest with language as such (not only German), Celan's Orphic head, separated from his experiential body, went whirling and spluttering down the Hebrus. (Simon Perchik's elegiac "Seven Poems" in the recent *Shearsman* (No. 24) could be studied for the desirable "real" voice that speaks in them, a voice capable of down-to-earthliness, of compassion, of comedy, of resonant psychic insight—yet still dialoguing with the dead.)

Enough. Voice being a paramount and principal feature of "lyric," how come Celan's interpreters have generally neglected vocal aspects of his work—pitch, duration, volume, timbre, intonation, overtones, and the rest? So intent have they been on deciphering the oracles and fathoming the poetics inscribed in them, that his precious, plaintive tenor, sometimes breathless, never passionless, sometimes stilted, sometimes whining—the voices of his first four or five books—hardly receives a hearing. Do Pierre Joris's translations render anything like the tonalities, timbres, registers, of the originals? Could any translations be expected to? Recent Rilke translations, those by Mitchell and Snow, for instance, do nothing or little with Rilke's vocal qualities. Pierre Joris, with Celan's, could probably not do more than he has done. There are some splendors, though. Here is one which avoids babble and pitfall, cacophony and vocalic confusion, far better than some others:

> HALF-GNAWED, mask-
> miened corbel stone,
> deep
> in the eyeslit-crypt:
>
> Inward, upward
> into the skull's inside,
> where you break up heaven, again and again,
> into furrow and convolution
> he plants his image,
> which outgrows and outgrows itself.

—CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

• Severo Sarduy, *Christ on the Rue Jacob*, Translated by Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier (San Francisco: Mercury House) 1995, 166 pp.

Employing subtleties that are multi-layered and alive with the evocative force of seemingly-superfluous detail—as well as lyrical syntactic frills which are nothing if not the teasing gestures of readerly seduction—in this miscellany of elliptical essays, incidents of travel and self-portraits with either fellow artists or with the ghosts of family and friends, the late Severo Sarduy (1937-1993) left a chillingly-accurate depiction of a body and mind whose vital appetites and blemishes are rendered with the "clear negativity" and foreknowledge of an encroaching death from AIDS.

Sarduy consistently made it his task to break down the barriers of genre. Echoing his novels which, on one level, are flamboyant stage-settings for poly-gendered cultural identities on metamorphic overdrive, these pieces, originally published in 1987, waver somewhere between intellectually-curvilinear vignettes and utterly-frank "epiphanies."

Despite his marginal association with Tel Quel—Sarduy left Cuba for Paris in the early 1960s—the general mode of the writing in *Christ on the Rue Jacob*, however, seems informed by, and far more reminiscent of, Michel Leiris' brand of auto-ethnography or self-fashioning. Indeed, these "lessons in the ephemeral" are about physical scars and the aquatint-plate of their meanings repeatedly pressed onto memory (what Sarduy calls an "Archaeology of the Skin"); about how the gaze of others—and, naturally, of the Other—can be equated, justifiably, with the sutures we bring into being, be they issued from within, or be they those we inflict onto the Outward (in Sarduy's case, onto writing); about the cycles or revolutions of alcohol as a paradigm for the rhythms inherent in our everyday breathing; about the resilient, if at times elusive nature of place ("Benares," "Wearing Space") and about death and the lavish turns of language needed to describe it—the receptacle in which there is contained an inescapable nothingness ("Dream").

With his self-effacing humor and a tremendous capacity for psychological, soulful and writerly incisiveness, the persona made to surface from the prose here emerges as someone immanently tangible, but always—as Sarduy himself seems to have engaged his own desire—at a slight remove from full disclosure:

> Nothing has crossed any exile that does not reach its best definition in that word: repetition. *Obsessions, rituals, writings*. I could include [. . .] even *la drague*, that expectant and

> punitive cruising—in a Dantesque inferno, lovers against nature cruising through eternity, as if the punishment for that insubordination were no more than the monstrous or metaphysical multiplication of its propitious rite: running after an object perhaps more fleeting than the others, confirming, once it's reached, the border that separates it from the phantom, almost enjoying precisely that lapse, that difference, and setting off in pursuit of yet another.

[Incidentally, in addition to *Rue Jacob*, other publications last year included Dalkey Archive Press reprints of *Cobra* and *Maitreya* (translated by Suzanne Jill Levine) as well as Sun & Moon's earlier reissue of Levine's side-splitting English-language rendering of the outrageous "Curriculum Cubense" of *From Cuba with a Song* (De donde son los cantantes).]

• Kamau Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock* (Providence: Lost Roads Publishers, Number 40) 1994, 79 pp.

In a formal departure from previous extended works (*The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* and the later "Bajan" trilogy), though of a piece with his parallel *Middle Passages* and his four-hundred-page *Barbajan Poems*, in *Trench Town Rock* Kamau Brathwaite has written a documentary poem whose head-on pace and visual impact both mirror and probe the harrowing limits of the social as determined by civil and state violence.

With Kingston—"in the Kingdoom of this world"—as the specific *polis* in what is understood to be the wider common turbulence of the Caribbean, the "action" begins at a shoot-in witnessed by Brathwaite at Marley Manor in 1990. What follows is a multi-vocal montage exploring the banalization of death as rendered by the mass media, as well as the distance separating civic will from the invisibility of power. These questions are brought to a head in a radio talk-show transcription ("Straight Talk") conveying the dis/figured forms of communication between police official and caller as the former is harrowed into addressing paramilitary crime or "soldier illegality."

In an attempt to piece together personal assault into public record ("My Turn"), Brathwaite delivers language from its ab/uses, providing newer significance by means of what the poet has christened his "Sycorax video style," many of whose devices would be virtually impossible to reproduce here. They include, however, a range of fonts and point sizes—serif and sans-serif typefaces in roman, bold and italics—in an aim to confuse the hierarchy of "printed matter," as well as to allow the material nature of the

written to represent a visual matrix whereby language, however previously-bound, can now give birth to itself.

Rising from the unspeakable nature of the violence refracted in *Trench Town Rock*, it is this foregoing aspect of the poem, as well as a final call for cohesive reinstatement (via trickster-figure-cum-cultural-hero, Anansese*) which, in the end, keeps *Trench Town Rock* from falling into arrant social pessimism, no matter how relentless its critique.

• W.B. Keckler, *Ants Dissolve in Moonlight* (New York: Fugue State Press) 1995, 78 pp.

Assuming this is his first book, Keckler demonstrates an impressive capacity for emulation and tribute: a confident, myriad voice perhaps still in the process of thoroughly coming into its own. The formal range includes a reworking of surrealist idiom—announced by the title's Michauvian insects—spoken in a crusty parlance resembling that of Asa Benveniste, for example, yet also featuring inflections as disparate as those of pliant objectivist lyric ("Arles") or those in the terse expository intelligence of Laura Riding ("*What is the Word but. . .*"). There are shades pointing elsewhere, from an overt painterliness to a sort of telegraphic narrative form ("A Romance"), but in order for Keckler to overcome the limits imposed by his various modes of address, I suspect he will have to surrender a language-conscious remove—often at odds with an underlying verbal elegance ("Chant d'Amour")—and allow his more vernacular powers of composition to surface.

• John Taggart, Standing Wave (Providence: Lost Roads Publishers, Number 38) 1993, 88 pp.

Determined by a number of imposed formal constraints, the poetry of John Taggart—almost entirely based on strident lyric ellipsis and incremental repetition—is heir to the reductive estrangement achieved by Gertrude Stein, to a brand of high-objectivist distillation, and to procedures like those advanced by Jackson Mac Low and David Antin. A typical, isolated "Taggart poem" may insistently elevate to extreme foreground how (according to

* The legend has Anansese exchanging a series of goods for social song. In a 1990 interview with poet Nathaniel Mackey (published in *Hambone* 9), Brathwaite discusses his work and its vision of historical tensions wherein all "*frisson* and fusion" can be considered "creole event": wherein opposing narratives are seen as "informing each other, exchanging information."

Adorno's take on the lyric poem), "subject and object are no rigid, isolated poles, but can be identified only within a process in which they interact." In book form, however, the novelty of Taggart's art-language can be weathered to transparency. In fact, many poems decidedly beg performative interpretation to achieve what is intended to be the desired effect.

Certain poems—as in the fine couplet-woven modulations of "All the Steps"—posit a kind of intransitive lyric: the "singing about reasons for singing" which calls for collective invocation as a response to end-of-millennium discontent; others, however, belabor the limits of ambient pull ("Standing Wave") or that of actual readerly endurance. In some of the more demanding pieces, especially the six-part title poem, readers may be prone, like certain CDs, either to skip or to undergo temporary drop-out. To my mind, Taggart is at his most successful when the mode of saying seamlessly merges with the subject matter itself—like TV, for example, in the poem "Free Gifts," where the phrasing mimics the way in which we are inevitably lulled or seduced by the body of televised images and tantalizing merchandise:

> before the kiss there are gifts there are free gifts
> members of the studio audience receive free gifts
> each member receives a string of blossoms
> each member photographed with blossoms around each neck
> polaroid photograph pinned to "night with the stars" curtain.

• Alice Fulton, *Sensual Math* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company) 1995, 113 pp.

The language of advertising, TV and mass culture play a still more prominent role in the writing of Alice Fulton. In this, her poetics is visibly more advanced than generally becomes the mainstream—which may lead one to suspect that perhaps even tamer sensibilities have been hip to specific developments in the North American avant-garde over the last fifteen years—and perhaps for this reason *Sensual Math* is not entirely devoid of interest.

In "My Last TV Campaign: A Sequence"—especially the section entitled "Vanishing Cream," in which a martini buzz is equated to, and additionally blurred by, the incoherent discourse of broadcasting—Fulton splices the sexploitation underlying the promises of cocktail glamour, into a disconnectedness of tv-biz imperatives ("SWISH-PAN TO," "DOLLY IN," "ZIP-PAN") or truisms of snockered babble ("Most gin is colorless. Sloe gin isn't gin / but a liqueur").

The standard mode in Sensual Math, however, is that of brittle reverie or anecdotes describing the quirks and icons of contemporary US culture (with Elvis Presley as tutelary demi-god), meditations on such homogenizing products as "Wonder Bread," or rhapsodies on such presumably-resonant words as "quiver" (in "Echo Location"). Though audibly more fractured—and on the saucier side—Fulton's cadence relies heavily on that of Marianne Moore, namely in the angularity of its almost prose-like delivery and citation. There is an albeit baffling pretense to summon Emily Dickinson in several of the poems, but apparently more so as insinuated by Fulton's signature symbol ("=="), over which considerable fuss has been made. ["Better than a comma," claims the book's press release, "this personal punctuation mark forces us to do what we, culturally, too often forget—to pay attention"!]

The most ambitious piece in the collection is the final "Give: A Sequence Reimagining Daphne & Apollo," whose most immediate model may well be Crane's "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" in the way Fulton also seeks to shape a possible mythopoesis out of contemporary monolith and ruin. The heroes here, however, are imagined as swoon-stars:

> ...Apollo was still exulting over
>
> his recent easy
> listening hit when he happened on Cupid's opening
> at the Vegas Hilton.
> "What right hast thou to sing 'My Way,' though imbecilic
> Fanny
> Farmer midge larva,
> thou sewer-water-spitting gargoyle, rednecked bladderwort,
> dirtbag, greasdome
> and alleged immortal of a boy," Apollo fumed.

In short, Fulton's allegory retells the old story pitting nature against culture, albeit in the landscape of postmodern (read = apocalyptic) capitalism whose future horizon is envisioned as the endlessly-repeating "rhythmic scribble of stylus against label." Even at its comic best—and in keeping with the tradition of the heroi-comical poem, from Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* to Dorn's *Gunslinger*, no matter how readily-irksome the genre tends to be—Fulton's writing, both here and in much of what makes up *Sensual Math*, is often commanding, though ultimately precious.

—ROBERTO TEJADA

THE COMMON EXPERIENCE
T. M. Luhrmann. *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in a Contemporary England.* Picador 1994. ISBN 0-330-32946-4.

Yeats in his 1901 essay "Magic" said that he believed in "the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are. . ." and that ". . .many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy. . ." He thought that the practices tended to deteriorate, through the loss of a certain "quality of mind" and that his own experience of visions were "a proof of the supremacy of imagination, of the power of many minds to become one. . .all the minds gave a little, creating or revealing for a moment what I must call a supernatural artist."

It has been estimated that on Lammas (August Eve) within the confines of London in excess of 80,000 people are absorbed in using a language "to talk to their own unconscious," airing and restating "intimate feelings" "within symbolic garb," involving themselves in a deeply therapeutic enactment of myth and symbolism by means of "a phenomenological awareness of the symbols, the creation of a myth-drenched history" who are "rich with pregnant images and esoteric knowledge." What can be going on? Is this a great annual Jungfest, or the culmination of some superb art-historical Open University course, guided by radio? Or is it a political movement? It is none of these things, but all of them as well. This is the estimated number of people who are engaged in witchcraft or ritual magic to celebrate this day. The activity is immense, and dedicated to recovering religious feelings which are not prescribed but maintained by a kind of ecumenical improvisation, drawing on the symbols and emblems of all religions. "Out of body experience, mystical transcendence, meditative peace, visions, hallucinations, oneiric fantasies, imaginative intensity, spiritual unfolding, the excitement of costumes, incenses, chanting, dance, impersonation—all of these have a significant impact on the performer." It is a pursuit of what J. M. Cohen and J. F. Phipps in their book of that name called *The Common Experience* (1979). That is to say, that religious experience was not the province of a few people, but of everybody. Says Luhrmann "Experience is prior to belief. . .there are certain basic human experiences which are often associated with magical and religious practice . . .But that these experiences are vivid, and that the experiencer needs to make sense of them in order to make sense of himself—that brute reality is central to any explanation of magical practice. . ."

T. M. Luhrmann wanted to write a work of psychological anthropology "in which the subject is the mercurial complexity of belief." She arranged to meet a woman who was both a witch of importance and a member of one of the most serious of the Western Mysteries groups. This was in 1983 at a "Quest" conference. Luhrmann was told that the last person to study modern London magic had passed out questionnaires "and offended everyone." However, Luhrmann was invited to a dream-study meeting, and a workshop, and in due time became initiated into a group called the Glittering Sword, which studied Nordic magic, and attended an occult workshop, a Monday night "exercise class." "The workshop was always a warm, happy evening. . .People said they came because they liked the imaginative involvement. . .Beth took over as narrator and we would imagine that we were a tree, or sparkling water, or a tarot card, or a cat, with dreamy, soothing music. . .The highlight of the evening was a pathworking, a dream-like story read out slowly so that listeners could visualize the images it described."

Luhrmann became a member of many different groups, was initiated "at least four times" in private groups, participated in perhaps a hundred rituals and attended hundreds of meetings and magical social events. She made many friends, some beginners, some remarkable people who were adepts in "The Common Experience" and in rituals seemed to be able to communicate magical experience person to person. She seemed to find that people engaged in magic were happier than other kinds of people, less disturbed, and able to handle the modern world in a variety of occupations and professions. A very comradely feeling of "The Common Experience" comes over in the book. It was as though the ritual magician or a witch had seen or experienced something so remarkable that it gave them a happiness that was constant or at least accessible by magical methods. The witches in particular really knew how to laugh and used hilarity as part of their central invocation—"mirth and reverence": One high priestess spontaneously explained to me that "being alive is really rather funny. Wicca. . .is the only religion that captures this." Another said it was like coming home.

What is the result of being a witch, or a ritual magician? Let us compare testimonies. "Perhaps the best way to begin the power behind the simple word witch is to enter the circle. . .You don't need any of the tools you will read about in books on the Craft. . .Perhaps you might make up a chant, a string of names of gods and goddesses who were loved or familiar to you from childhood myths. . .And perhaps. . .the moon appears a bit closer, and perhaps the wind rustling the leaves suddenly seems in rhythm with your own breathing. Or perhaps the woods seem strangely noisy. Or unspeakably still. And perhaps the clear line that separates you from birds and tree and small lizards seems to melt. . ."

"What I am revealing to you now is the deepest and most essential secret of my life. . .Did I share at such times the sub-thoughts, or over-thoughts, that the old earth herself has, as she turns on her axis. . .They were at any rate what might be called sensation-thoughts. . .Even as I try to seize upon them in their vanishing they leave a lovely residue, a mysterious satisfaction, that seems to well up from the inner being of old posts, old heaps of stones, old haystacks with straw. . ."

"While on the shop and street I gazed/My body on a sudden blazed;/ And twenty minutes more or less/It seemed so great my happiness/That I was blessed and could bless."

"The hardest part of doing magical work is sometimes to actually notice that you have done it. So stop, take your time and look at your pond. Move around it, peering in and see how each part of the sky scuds across it. You have effected a great transformation. . .Be amazed. . .(For those without gardens: a saucer of water placed on a windowsill will also Draw Down the Moon."

The first of these spokespersons is indeed a Witch, M. Adler, quoted by Luhrmann; the second that great poet-magician J. C. Powys; the third that as great poet-magician W. B. Yeats, who practiced ritual magic for 40 years; and the fourth also a witch, (Wren Sidhe in "From the Flames") taking the mick out of the pomposity of some magicians.

You could imagine a martial arts exercise room, in which gestures and feelings show like electrical tracings. It is like Winnicott's notion of a "potential space" in which through a kind of play, the fantasized and the real are mingled through imagination in consoling and creative ways.

Unfortunately this hall of power has become divided, and there is a semipermeable membrane, something like a badminton net, that partially separates the room into two, the literary and the magical. The point of separation is also the place of joining, where the great poet-magicians reside, people like Yeats and Powys. This room is also called by Jungians (who are quite influential here) "active imagination." Seen from either side, one half is the mirror image of the other. Symbols and images pass fairly freely through this screen, and on the poet's side they turn into praise and wonder, while on the magician's side they are that too, but also a means of altering the world according to the conscious wishes of the magician—everybody believes that this has happened in ritual and can draw instances, but nobody is sure that it will happen again, however adroit the ritual. Both poets and magicians admit freely that there is a strong element of play, but poets expect less. On the poet's side there is a deep well, on the magician's a firm will, whatever form that may take. There is an opaque part of the membrane that certain magicians have tacked up, since they are fleeing the literary. On the corresponding side are poets, fleeing the magical. There is a very free interactive part of the membrane that is sometimes called

linguistic yoga, and there is a gathering of feminist energies that are concerned with feeling the world out by means of language-play. The last seems to meet and mingle with other more ancient energies of old rabbis learned in the streams of energy of the Kabbalah.

The screen should never have been put up. It is a recent invention, since in the Renaissance every man of learning was a poet and a magician both, and knowledge was magical knowledge. Thus Goethe's Faust in his study adjusted his famous preliminary depressions by studying magical symbols or "pathworking."

History is more popular than literature among the magicians, thus, Frances Yates is much read, while there is scarcely a whisper of the symbolist poets who, if John Senior in *The Way Down and Out* (1959) is to be believed, had a complete system with ancient roots. Likewise the poets will hardly admit to an interest in magic, and flee into disbelief and its ironic harvest; while the magicians make a practice of being in a state of the willing suspension of disbelief (or believing everything at once, as Virginia Woolf in her diary notes of Yeats)—the state of continued active imagination, or inspiration, at its various levels.

Says the great poet-priest Hopkins "The word inspiration need cause no difficulty. I mean by it a mood of great, abnormal in fact, mental acuteness, either energetic or receptive, according as the thoughts which arise in it seem generated by a stress and action of the brain, or to strike into it unasked. . ." Hopkins was professionally engaged in calling up his God, but his sermons do not seem to have been written in this mood. The ritual of his poems clearly are, they are the poetry of inspiration which "can only be written in this mood of mind, even if it last a minute, by poets themselves. Everybody of course has like moods, but not being poets what they then produce is not poetry." The Common Experience again. We do know that Hopkins would open himself to the inscapes of everything that lived, as an adept magician does, by ritual of close observation of the thisness of things, through which his god would manifest "shining like shook foil." "The ashtree. . .was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more." What are those "inscapes" but the magician's "spirits"?

Luhrmann discusses the likeness of the more advanced magical exercise "pathworking" to the Ignatian exercises, in which, of course, as he was a Jesuit, Hopkins was fully qualified: "St. Ignatius of Loyola certainly used the imagination in a magical fashion as preparation for personal prayer" says one of the most eminent of the contemporary adepts, and Luhrmann herself says that there are two central elements to the Exercises: "a remorseless intense examination of the conscience and a highly structured meditation which uses the visual, sensual imagination as a focus

for concentrated mental attention. The vivid mental image is always followed by a colloquy (free and unstructured converse with God). . ."

She compares the exercise with magical pathworking and finds they accord. They are still examples of the Common Experience, since pathworking at its simplest is everybody's birthright. It is "a guided fantasy, a story read slowly to allow a deeply relaxed audience to picture its images as they sit, eyes shut, in the darkness." This practice naturally develops. "Most pathworkings involve a descent, a journey, an encounter and a return. . .A pathworking is the paramount form through which power is supposedly generated, gathered and released as the story develops and climaxes." It is an intensified Common Experience. It is going for a walk, as a person, a lover, a poet, a magician, one hopes to change the mood, see what was not noticed before, and the better the walk the more the images, the inscapes will reflect each other like a net of jewels, the whole walk will become the poem you now set down to honor it; or the inspiration for the magical work using the encounters of it, a word overhead, the tapping of a branch in morse code as signs and intimations. Psychiatrists have a bad word for this: "signs of reference" and that is their reductive loss. Or you may take your walk through the paths of the visualized Tree of Life, assimilating or accepting the traditional symbols, which then may return to you as personal advice, or advice to the group of which one may be a member.

For example, one of the leading adepts cited says elsewhere: "indeed it could well be argued that for a course in practical occultism, rather than spend much intellectual effort in categorizing the various inner beings from occult textbooks, it would be far more effective to read contemplatively a few of these [Coleridge's] poems and then go into the countryside and attempt to experience a similar vision."

The rules for women are different from the men's rules, whether in magic or poetry. Indeed the thrust of much contemporary ritual magic seems to be towards possibilities for the men to become more like women.

For many women the menstrual rhythms—concealed for so long in our society—have been crucial in their magical life. It is typical of books in general, that if they mention menstruation, then it does not appear in the index. Please add pages 55, 103, 119, 270, 314 to this one. Members of a feminist coven quoted by Luhrmann call their Craft "women's spirituality . . .and the only spirituality in which women are proud to menstruate. . ." "The destructive underworlds must not be feared and shunned, but entered. . ." and in this journey the woman is not only subject but object too, and it is her personal descent and return which is part of the making-whole; "Childbirth and witchcraft each taught Mary that the pain which accompanies menstruation and childbirth is a good pain. "A woman must

face her dark side. . .this confrontation is the source of creativity." "Menstruation is the time of the greatest witchpower for any woman. . . ."

To one pre-doctoral biochemist after initiation, there were events which seemed paranormal during her period, and her dreams had become "peculiarly clairvoyant. . .most traumatically, she could no longer reproduce a published chemical reaction central to her thesis. . .in different laboratories and in different circumstances." Says Maria "Ritual sets things in motion that could not be stopped, and the ritualist must pay careful heed to the words and symbols. . ." It may be that the wheel is turning anyway, and the ritual tunes one in accordance with this. In any case, once one begins to explore magic, matters are brought into focus that otherwise would be neglected. Most particularly, if the dreams are recorded and related to the menstrual cycle, the unconscious stirs, and great symbolic riches are revealed. Is the woman's pattern central to contemporary ritual? It sometimes seems so. But men dream too. It is possible that a woman conjures his magical self into a man.

It scarcely matters, argues Luhrmann, whether the rituals as petitions actually deliver the things asked for. When a person approaches any region where the archetypes are energized or in play, there will be meaningful coincidences, whether in love, or in psychoanalysis, or in intense artistic activities, there will be these "synchronicities." Our society has learned so little about the unconscious mind that it cannot provide any rational explanation for such occurrences, so a magical explanation is perhaps the best one, though it will not be an explanation in the ordinary sense, but rather something worked through. Synchronicities can be sought and they can be frightening, as for our author when "events arrange themselves in interpretable patterns." If you "raise power," there are likely to be synchronicities. Moreover there is "tingling in the fingers" "the air is electric, tingling with energy." Magical power is "like being absorbed in a good novel, or like being sexually turned on." "It's like being in love. The colors are richer, the air is fresher, the world is electric and alive."

Says J.H. Brenan elsewhere "The effect of that room was staggering . . .its essence was not heat but something else, something that could be sensed perfectly. . .by the nerve endings beneath this skin of the face." Everybody knows these atmospheres that manifest in a human gathering everywhere from theater to football-match but society prefers to look the other way when it comes to a rational explanation. But the magicians and witches have a way of talking about such events that does not cancel them but which keeps them in creative play. As Margaret, a witch, reports "Medieval modal logic. Not what's true or false, the way we think of it in our century. . .but the way things are true and false." She found this "mind-blowing." "There was far more depth here than I could actually handle . . .For me it was a bridge between the rational and the rational mind. . .I

came back to England to explore the ancient mysteries, the female mysteries. . .witch craft. . .it grounds you. . . I don't know many people in magic who are disturbed and obviously unhappy."

Are there not dangers, though? There is little discussion of this, except to minimize them. We hope it may be as Luhrmann reports. Does the ritual practice handle all problems of the transference? Does it lead painlessly to the uniting of the opposites and ebullient mental health, as in the hilarity of the witches? What if one meets, as Meyrink did, a Doctor Schrepfer? Everything he says is two-edged—"he lies and his speech contains the highest truth: he speaks the truth and lies smirk out of it." In Meyrink's tale (Master Leonard) Schrepfer is a quack doctor—but this is or can be a valid initiatory procedure if entered upon willingly—"the master must harass the student until he is clear" says Lemuel Johnstone. The dangers in this with predatory people who want power of a personal kind over others, psychic bullying, are obvious. The book is enthusiastic, exciting, thought-provoking. Alas, sexual magic is played down. Aleister Crowley is in our opinion condescended to: ". . .a brilliant man with a peculiar spiritual bent and a certain literary talent. . . ." Sexuality is arguably the greatest and most easily-accessible of magics, and Crowley, once one has got past the tabloidizing knee-jerk reflex is arguably a major pioneer of the new magic. Lodges stemming from his O.T.O. and working in London are not given fair mention here, nor is the name of his distinguished successor Kenneth Grant mentioned, or his magically-important books listed.

—PENELOPE SHUTTLE and PETER REDGROVE

Commentary

Once this was all Black Plasma and Imagination reads the inscription at the beginning of Michael McClure's *3 Poems* (Penguin Books, 1995), reiterating what for McClure has been a primal source of all his work, an abiding interest in the life sciences & a passionate commitment to the preservation of the natural world. "Dolphin Skull," (1995) is the first of the 3 long poems, followed by "Rare Angel" (1975) and "Dark Brown" (1961).

Reading from the most recent to McClure's embryonic past is like digging down through geological layers, Quaternary turtles to Mesozoic metaphors to early Silurian metonyms. "Dark Brown" is a seminal, liberating work, a brash debouch of McClure's projectivist impulse. The goal, McClure remarked at a recent reading, "was to create art, not socially enforcing literature." To liberate the image within a deep area of consciousness & body; realize the creative act as a physical event. The tone of "Dark Brown" is truculent & purgative, a rebellion against the fifties' cold war as well as McClure's own customs & habits. "It was a dark night of the soul," McClure says in the preface, "and I wanted to use liberational methods to discover the substance of spirit." Not all of "Dark Brown" is dark brown. I would call "Fuck Ode," the second section of "Dark Brown," a warm, sanguinary rose. The energy charge of this poem is astonishing. "Dolphin Skull" & "Rare Angel" are more complexly evolved organisms, manifesting McClure's characteristic morphology, lines of manifold length symmetrically radiating from a central spine. The effect overall is a sensation of heartbeat, systole & diastole, or contraction & expansion of the lungs in respiration. Many of the images are often charmingly simple, "Flat as stars cut out of tinfoil," "Raindrops on the brim/ of a hat," sometimes intricate & weirdly affecting, "enzymatic structures of subtle happiness/ in an/ old woman's words," & sometimes unexpectedly blunt: "Gun the size of a toilet." Like "gases and stars in a plasma," or a "Big cloud" "made out of meat," the poems get under your skin. Reading "Dolphin Skull" on a hot bus one day at 3rd and Virginia in downtown Seattle, a fat woman smacking the legs of her 3-year-old daughter, the little girl screeching, gasping for breath, a man with a motor neuron disease rolling by *Swifty Printing,* steam rising through a manhole cover, a small thin man in brown slacks & plaid hat with a little red feather, missing all his teeth, his mouth caved in, his gaze alert & searching I felt a glad compassion for the cells & organelles of this life, the adventure of being alive, however calamitous it can sometimes be, & happy to get a taste of McClure's chromosomal sugar.

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Ron Silliman's long alphabet poem is an ambitious project, somewhat like the accretion of the Great Barrier Reef, or building of the Great Wall of China. *N/O* (Roof Books, 1994), "being two parts of *The Alphabet,* "Non" & "Oz," is the latest installment. The titles are as stark as they are enigmatic. Is *N/O* intended to be read as a title? The cover presents two solid black letters on a white background with a diagonal running between them, as if the word—if it is a word—were simultaneously affirming and denying itself. Or is it simply 'N' & 'O'? To what does "Non" refer? Nonprojectivist? Nonreferential? Nonprohibitive? Nonporous? Nonlinear? Who is the wizard

of "Oz"? Is it Charles Olson pulling the tropes & levers of language, or is it the inherent illusions of language itself? "One is to words/ always an outsider," Silliman writes in "Non," "tho they invade your head,/ colonize dreams." (Curiously, these lines appear in a column structured similarly to McClure's symmetrical wings, though the arbitrariness of Silliman's discreteness contrasts tellingly with McClure's more intuitive, spontaneously achieved disjunctions). I enjoy reading Silliman, though it's hard to say why. There's no narrative, no hint of closure, denouement, or swelling diapason to sweep you along. Reading Silliman is like being in a houseboat; you're floating, but there's no destination. "Meaning is forever homeless," he writes in "Non," which is followed, a few lines later, by *"Mais langue n'est pas langage."* Silliman's project throughout the alphabet series has been to systematically block the integration of sentences to a "higher level" of exterior reference, to sustain focus on the signifier as the locus of literary meaning. What is unique about *N/O* in this series are the "small surprises, conducting wires thrown between words, references, contexts, ideas, which I did not expect," to quote Rosmarie Waldrop. In previous works such as *Ketjak & Tjanting,* Silliman's prosodic devices—punning, assonance, polysemy—were employed internally within the sentence, the text being wholly prose. In "Non" & "Oz" he makes use of the linebreak in a way that seems more of a sublation, a quizzical flirtation, than a pert debunking of the projectivist tenet of form as an extension of content. There is no intent to finesse composition by field, give the kinetics of writing the same kind of acrobatic energy evidenced in Olson, or turn it into slapstick. The intent seems more to uncover the spatial scoring of the thinking process as a trick, an illusion, a rumbled sheet of aluminum. Silliman is not a cynical artist. His politically engaged stance is firm & sincere if not quixotic. What is most enjoyable about *N/O* is not the way it limes projectivist birds, but the way it slips its knots.

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Poetry and politics make peculiar bedfellows. One is private experience made public, the other public experience made private. In Will Alexander's *Asia & Haiti* (Sun & Moon, 1995), poetry writhes like a wounded snake in a miasma of brutality & oppression. "Asia" is a tung oil turned flame, the ore of words compressed into a blade. It is filled with arcanum & fervor, "With structures/ kaleidoscopic with vermin." "With spells/ with fabulous eradications & wildness." A "rudimentary balance" in a "floating Boschian domain." "Haiti" is populated by Duvalier's Tontons, Papa Doc's "rotted & greenish blood." A "volatile anguish" "rising to a pitch of unspared power." Political oppression is global; that Alexander has chosen these two geographic locations is significant. Both have strong associations with

religion & the supernatural. Shelley called poets legislators & prophets, visionaries who drew their authority from "that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion." This is what gives "Asia" such tremendous pathos, taking China's invasion of Tibet as point of departure. It is a poem with a surrealistic aperture, oracular lens & Delphic tripod. "Haiti" is "savage with usurption," convulsing in "nux vomica & braille," conversing in "spittle & voltage." "Shrieking/ mocking the Tontons with their terror." At times it is like watching a boil get lanced. But the propulsive force of the language keeps the eyes rolling across its metempiric topography, magnetized by its "runic auroras" & the collective force "of burning ink & kings."

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In Pam Rehm's *To Give It Up* (Sun & Moon, 1995) the subjective disposition of the lyric mood is refined by subtleties of language & "the breath of which the thing consists." There is a courtly delicacy about these poems, passionate declarations tempered by a seemly wit. "The consequences of Love are a/ domination of names;" she writes in "Straightway A Valentine," "of those we seek to follow, serve, or be guided by." Words are so charged with illuminative energy as to shadow the lineaments of mortal finitude, limitation, vulnerability. There is much subtlety of word play, "abiding/ bending," "source/ force," & the seductive pull of riddles: "There is a star which before/ it can come we must embrace it/ to the center of ourselves." Antique words like 'thou' do not seem entirely out of place in these poems; their anachronistic gauze is shaded by penetrating, nihilistic dye. It's a bit like seeing Patti Smith in an evening gown. "One darkens oneself," she writes, "To see and not be seen." "Things only appear/ when a person feels/ lighter than water." The poems in *To Give It Up* (a woman in a black dress & high heeled shoes lies unconscious on the cover) reflect a lambent ardor, puddles subtle as sleeves, the sheen of words refracting chimerical referents, "a hint to something much more qualified than real." Nietzsche, in elaborating Schiller's theory of *musical mood,* specifies the most important phenomenon of all ancient lyric poetry is "the *union,* indeed, the *identity,* of the *lyrist with the musician.*" It is this musical enchantment that emits "picture sparks, lyrical poems." "The fulguration of music in images and concepts." "The things," Pam Rehm writes, "which remain in the breath." Agitations, allures, necessities. The necessity to "approach the beloved," the necessity "to express ourselves," "to tell of a fever which remains within."

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how now, poems by Cid Corman (Cityful Press, 1995) is a small brown book with a Chinese character on the cover. Not knowing what the character meant, I took *how now* to a Chinese restaurant on Queen Anne hill here in Seattle to ask if someone could inform me. I didn't have to ask. The young man who brought our tea saw it & got very excited. He thought the character quite lovely. And it is. But what does it mean, I asked. The road, he replied. But it also implies a path, a trail, a way of life. How do you pronounce it? In Mandarin the word is *tao.*

The poems in this volume are droll, unadorned, & gnomic. According to Andrew Schelling's afterword they are inspired by China's *Tao te Ching.* The vocabulary is simple, but "Every word/ conceals/ a meaning// You or/ your shadow/ understand." Corman uses but a few words to create these gnomic knots. I wish this were the sort of thing they put in fortune cookies. "The simplest word finds renewal in the breath's devotion," Corman writes in an essay titled "The Feeling in the Make of Poetry," first published in an issue of *Origin,* October, 1978. The core of the word is breath. "Only the breath/ leads us on." "A shadow trudging/ after a shadow." Elementary as counters on a Go board, *how now*'s words are grouped to intimate intimacies of death & life, body & shadow, nothingness & existence. Nothingness fills these poems like warm breath in a cool cave. "Every syllable rings and trues," Corman writes in an essay picked up from *Wen Fu* of Lu Ki, "word shapes word—phrase phrase. Here implies there—everywhere elicits core." There is a constant care at the core of this book, & Corman is a caring man.

—JOHN OLSON

Various Libidos

Beyond the theater of cruelty, Valère Novarina stands convincingly in the tradition of Artaud (see *Sulfur* 27). His most recent work, *La chair de l'homme* (Paris, P.O.L., 1995)—adapted for the theater and performed last summer at the *Festival d'Avignon*—is a continuation of his lifelong mutation of the French language. Here, we find 3171 different personages

(most manifested as total linguistic phantoms, existing only in name, without any voice whatsoever), 429 definitions of God (a vast juxtaposition which is, perhaps unwittingly though witfully, the most convincing deconstruction of theology I have yet encountered), as well as the use of 2587 of the 6912 verbs in the French language (tellingly, Novarina's own calculations). Novarina's onomastic fantasies equal those of his numerical obsessions: both constitute an apparent totalization of the real which, in fact, effect a fragmentation of the perceived and conceived world. With constant wit and invention, we are given the most intimate lessons in the marginalia of the French language. For example, one section (previously published as an accompaniment to the annual catalogue of the Savoyard *Foire des Crêtes),* consists of hundreds of simple declarative sentences each consisting of an action (in each case effected by a different verb) performed by one of the local townsfolk, each referred to by their nickname. We find, through the complexities and contradictions of Novarina's writing, the depths of the French language represented by the breadth of its local inflections—another case in point of the postmodern conflict between universal cognition and regional expression.

Michel Nedjar's retrospective exhibition, now travelling through Germany and Holland, is represented by an excellent catalogue published by the show's organizer, the Galerie Susanne Zander (Cologne). It is entitled *Les ongles en deuil,* a French expression translatable as "mourning nails," figuratively expressing that precondition for so much art (dirty finger nails), but whose literal meaning is equally to the point of Nedjar's recent work, imbued with death and mourning, yet celebrating creativity and regeneration (see *Sulfur* 26).

In the Preface to *Under World Arrest,* Clayton Eshleman explains a major source of his personal iconography: "The earliest underworlds and the origin of image have been re-visioned in my poetry for years. However, having pushed back to the primal places of ensouling, as underworlds they appear to be in arrest. This does not mean that they are dead—it means that when I crouch in Combarelles, decorated at 13,000 BCE, and attempt to read the walls, there is most definitely an abyss between subject and object that, to my knowledge, may only be crossed in poetry." This might, therefore, be the occasion to note the publication of three spectacularly illustrated books in a new series from Les Éditions du Seuil dedicated to paleolithic art: Jean Clottes and Jean Courtin, *La grotte Cosquer : Peintures et gravures de la caverne engloutie* (1994; an American edition is forthcoming from Abrams); Jean Clottes, *Les cavernes de Niaux : Art Préhistorique en Ariège* (1995); Jean-Marie Chauvet, Eliette Brunel Deschamps and Christian Hillaire, *La grotte Chauvet : A Vallon Pont-d'Arc* (1995). The book on Cosquer is of particular interest. Discovered in 1991 near Marseilles, Cosquer consists of underwater caves containing a wide variety of images,

believed to be the earliest known paleolithic wall paintings: classic animals such as bison, horses and ibexes and much rarer sea creatures such as seals and penguins, as well as dozens of geometric patterns and impressions of hands. As an unfortunate aside, it should be stated that the fate of these caves is disconcerting: we should realize that there are also insidious reactions to the abyss, namely ego-defense through obliteration. It was found that some of the images were already disfigured by graffiti, quite a feat given the relative inaccessibility of the caves; they have since been closed under lock and key. Do the bars to the cave, or rather the graffiti itself, constitute what Artaud, in another context, wrote of as a necrophagia that is the ultimate bar raised against the unworldly chaos of the libido?

Two recent books of literary theory dealing specifically with French libido are worthy of note. Lawrence R. Schehr's, *The Shock of Men: Homosexual Hermeneutics in French Writing* (Stanford University Press, 1995), is a profound work on the relations between homosexual erotics and hermeneutics in Proust, Barthes, Tournier and Renaud Camus. This book is one of several recent efforts to reinvigorate considerations of corporeal passion as a corrective to an academic postmodernism all too often moralizing and demoralizing. One of the seminal studies on the topic, it offers the added benefit of introducing to the American public the work of Renaud Camus—one of France's leading gay writers, certainly worthy of translation. This work is a lesson in reading and a celebration of the individual, at a historical moment when literacy, individuality and marginality are threatened in a political climate that, on both right and left, aims at narrowing the range of aesthetic and erotic endeavor.

Pierre Saint-Amand's, *The Libertine's Progress: Seduction in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel* (Brown University Press, 1994), is a study of what may be considered the culminating epoch of worldly seduction, the 18th century. Informed by the contemporary theory and criticism of Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, René Girard and Chantal Thomas, this work spans the scope of the libertine novel from Marivaux and Diderot through Laclos and Sade, revealing the dark and sensual side of the century of Enlightenment. The rhetorical and historic forces that govern the passions are disclosed in a book that constantly provides the means to reconsider, in the light of desire, those details (both overtly grand and seemingly insignificant) of which are composed art, literature and history.

In the context of the two aforementioned works, of great importance is the publication by Le Seuil of the *Oeuvres complètes* of Roland Barthes in three volumes—a monumental event that needs no further comment.

In *Sulfur* 35 I announced the landmark republication of Louis Sébastien Mercier's *Le tableau de Paris;* the sequel has now appeared, *Le nouveau Paris,* followed by *Les derniers tableaux de Paris* (Mercure de France, 1994; 1890 pages), also edited by Jean-Claude Bonnet. Originally published in

1799, this journalistic work is invaluable in fleshing out our sense of a post-revolutionary Paris on the verge of the modern epoch. It is accompanied by a second slim volume which is an invaluable visual aid, *Le Paris de Louis Sébastien Mercier,* consisting of a district by district comparison of contemporary Paris (using Michelin maps) and the Paris of Mercier, represented by the 1799 edition of Edme Verniquet's atlas of Paris, followed by a complete toponymic index. As the Verniquet guide widely was used in the 19th century (though finally made obsolete by Haussmannization), it will also serve as a guide to the Paris of Baudelaire & Co.

Libido of a very different sort is evident in the first fictional work of Chantal Thomas, *La vie réelle des petites filles* (Gallimard / Hautes Enfances, 1995). This volume consists of several dozen short tales centered on numerous very bizarre, very perverse, very creative little girls (see *Sulfur* 28). For those who know Chantal Thomas' critical writings, it is difficult not to begin reading the tales of these little minxes in the light of the seditions and seductions of a Sade, a Casanova or a Marie-Antoinette. This is a work in which the narrative structure hovers ambiguously between realism and phantasm, such that our sense of orientation and continuity perpetually fluctuates, in a sort of epistemological oxymoron. After the frissons evoked by a few of these encounters, not only might we begin to reinterpret such libertines according to the adventures of *les petites filles,* but we must also begin to enter and rediscover certain forbidding regions of our own past. A troubling and joyful book.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

"in some ways"

". . .in some ways the most important book of fiction published here in the last twenty years." William Carlos Williams upon the publication of John Sanford's *The People From Heaven,* 1943. Few others shared Williams' enthusiasm for Sanford's fiction; few knew how to read fiction. Perhaps it was the political blacklisting. Perhaps it just takes time, like the time it has taken for Meridel Le Sueur (born in 1900 but still alive and five years older

than Sanford) to be re-discovered, and like her to be seen as an innovator and a formalist rather than a realist or a political writer, political—the worst label that can be attached to a writer in this country.

> For A Man Without Shoes, the sixteen seasons of the next four years were all of them winter. During that period, the book was submitted to some thirty publishers, and thirty times it was declined. No rejection, however, was predicated on the political cast of the book: the grounds given, though they varied in detail, were always literary, always they smelled of the lamp. (1982 introduction, Black Sparrow edition)

I know little about American fiction, but I know enough to realize that Sanford is a better writer than most who were praised when he was still being reviewed in major literary magazines, better than those praised now in the magazines major or minor. He is such a good writer, that to me the degree to which he is unrecognized is the measure by which we judge not only commercial publishing (the purveyors of obscenities like the writings of Newt Gingrich and Colin Powell) but the small presses scene as well.

I got re-married last month, October. Several of my writer friends sent books as presents. The one I've enjoyed most is the one Sanford sent, a copy of his *A Man Without Shoes* published in 1951. Sanford published the book himself after it was rejected too many times, this after he had had a successful publishing history. (Those who believe in progress, the small presses as but step-stones to the big, take note.) It was this book by Black Sparrow Press, in a different version, re-released with a short introduction by Sanford tipped in, that was my first introduction to the work of the man who has become my favorite writer of American fiction. Sanford may never be recognized as the master stylist of American fiction: established critics hate to admit they were once stupid; young ones don't know who he is let alone have an opinion about him. But he is my master of American fiction. And here is one illustration why.

Reading *A Man Without Shoes* now is to witness the birth of Sanford's later style, a style that needs be seen as a radical departure in how fiction treats history. It can be argued that all fiction is history: even meta-fiction from Laurence Sterne to Kathy Acker is a variant of "Once upon a time." But the beginning of non-fiction fiction or fact-as-fiction, the novels of Paul Metcalf, Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl*, Eduardo Galeno's *Masks of Fire*, Michelle Butor's later works, William Vollman's *The Ice Shirt*, even the novelistic histories of Capote and Mailer, can be traced to this twice-neglected masterpiece. (In '51 the boxes of un-sold books accumulated in Sanford's basement; in '82 Black Sparrow sold what they did on their reputation not Sanford's.) Sanford's later works, *A More Goodly Country*,

subtitled "A Personal History of America" [1975], *View From This Wilderness*, subtitled "American Literature as History" [1977], *To Feed Their Hopes* [1980], *The Winters of That Country* [1984]) are masterful weavings of the materials of history into poetry. No one but Sanford has redeemed our history with such love of these materials, with such a sure sense of what exactly does matter, and with such sure command of the language to ensure that the form in-forms our present time by re-forming the past. And it begins in 1943:

> By then, you'd begun your fifth novel, A Man Without Shoes, and when a death in the family drew you East again at the close of the War, you took the manuscript with you for submission. *(Maggie, A Love Story,* NY: Barricade, 1993)

Fathers and sons. And heroes. This (for they are one thing) is at the core of Sanford's work. A young boy, Dan, the hero of this novel.

> The main spread of his development was political, and while he never did a signal deed or spoke in smoking words, what force he possessed was outward, and in his efforts to transcend himself, to the extent that he succeeded, he no longer struck me as ordinary. (His introduction to the Black Sparrow edition).

His father has returned home to his wife and son: ". . .the boy saw the hack-driver, his shirt sown with blood and his nose hidden under a blood-logged bandage." He had encountered a union organizer, and it was with words ("I'm not against the rich. I'm in favor of the poor.") that the driver was won over. The fight came later, the two men having something to prove to themselves and each other, not to battle for an ideology. And the boy? The boy sees his dad and more, as more: "[Like a soldier, you thought, like a soldier in the stories Mom read you out of A Boy's History of America.]"

The story of Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne, the British General undone by Form, undone by the un-orthodox, unique style that was America, is woven through the account of the man's telling of his own battle. And the woman: "The woman smiled. 'All right,' she said, 'who won?'" And this section of the novel, "HEROES," it ends:

> [When the soldiers get bloody, they put on bandages, so if a man has a bandage, he's a soldier even if he's your father, and if he's your own father, then he's the best soldier in the whole world: he wins all the fights.]

And the next section of the novel is HEARING AND VISION. As it must be. For the heroics, rather the establishment of the hero, the way heroics is established in our lives, when it is, is through the voice, when vision is made possible through the sound of words. The heroics of Sanford's writing is the word made flesh. And that way is only through the voice. To hear is to see clearly. To see clearly is to read with an appreciation of what it means to be a writer. And the writer who can do that, and here is the place where it begins for him, to transform history into the present lives of his characters (and into ours), that writer has announced the way out of the dilemma each writer works within. And to our sad luck it was an annunciation within a room, a room with a view to be sure, but the windows were sealed against the sound.

At the same time, a year before the publication of the novel a poet as alive to the sound of words as Sanford and as impressed with the need for heroics, convinced that the dead words on the page needed to be liberated if we were to be, was disclaiming on "that verse which print bred":

> What we have suffered from, is manuscript, press, the removal of verse from its producer and its reproducer, the voice, a removal by one, by two removes from its place of origin *and* its destination. For the breath has a double meaning which latin had not yet lost. (Charles Olson, "Projective Verse")

The projective novel? Not absolutely so, but the seeds. They are here. It begins here. Once upon this time "in some ways."

—JOE NAPORA

Disembodied Poetics: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School. Edited by Anne Waldman and Andrew Schelling, University of New Mexico Press, 1994, 501 pp.

What are the politics of American literature? Such a question is raised at the outset of *Disembodied Poetics*, the new anthology from the Kerouac School at Naropa, casting a long shadow over the book's contents—a perpetual dawn or dusk, depending upon how you want to look at it—in the form of more questions, endless questions. It's first paper, Amiri Baraka's "Cultural Revolution and the Literary Canon" calls for a need to desegregate the study of American literature and "connect Euro-American Modernism with the Harlem Renaissance, or the Beat Generation with the Black Arts Movement." There's also a Q&A section where Baraka's remarks are so sweeping and ideological at times, you may find yourself wanting to know what he has to say about *everything*: "When they say 'democracy' they actually mean the old Greek model in the first place, they mean two hundred guys living off the backs of a hundred slaves, is what they mean." But then, he spins: "You see, if you go back through the constitution , you'll find out that there's more democracy in it than we know." In his ability to make you be the judge and act upon your judgment, Baraka's placement at the outset of *Disembodied Poetics* is an accurate augury of both its wisdom and its politics.

The theme of race is touched upon again, near the end, by Lorenzo Thomas in "The Blues and The King's English" where for the purpose of dispelling someone's complaint that "no one seems to read poetry anymore," he sets up a duel between the "courtly," "private" traditions of lyric poetry in the English language, written for the "amusement" of "the owner class," and "the African-American oral tradition," a poetry that serves a public purpose. He uses the example of how the lines, "If we must die, let it not be like hogs / Hunted and penned and in an inglorious spot" found scrawled on a scrap of paper in the debris after the Attica prison uprising, were in turn characterized by *Time* magazine, shortly after the event, as "a bit of found doggerel [...] written by one of the desperate prisoners in his cell." It turns out the lines are from a rather courtly-styled 1919 work by the poet Claude McKay, written to protest the lynching of African Americans during that period. Though he recalls traditional black folklore, like the Brer Rabbit stories to exemplify a truly public poetics—one of clear morals where "the message is always 'do the right thing,'" for Thomas, it's not so much the style of poetry as its content that determines its validity and, in turn, its content that dictates the style, which must, by necessity, be free of

the rhetorical strategies and self-consciousness that tend to accompany the "private" tradition. But this dualism is easily defied, raising immediate speculation. Take, for example, the recently executed man, Thomas J. Grasso, who handed a note to prison officials, characterized by the New York Times as essentially, *a bit of found doggerel*, which read: "What we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." *This* piece of doggerel happens to be a direct quote from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. I even heard some Washington pundit use this very line the other day, which is certainly no defense against Eliot's inevitable courtly function. Though he wrote it with intense privacy and personal consternation, Eliot's later verse still serves a very moral and public function, (whether it amuses you or not, whether it be to protest Capital Punishment or bolster a political agenda) though not always as he intended it to as a propagandist for the Church of England.

Susan Howe's, "The Captivity of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," the most poetic, feminist and historical of *Disembodied*'s essays, begins with an oppression derby between a Puritan Colonist and the Native Americans who capture her, recalling Ashbery's *Lacustrine Cities*, that are "angry with history," "the product of an idea: that man is horrible, / for instance, / Though this is only one example."—that man *is horrible* can be but only one example (and a perhaps too oft-sited one at that), for those who are angry with history. But Howe sites this example once again, and takes it up a very interesting notch by practicing Thoreau's idea that "exaggerated history is poetry," and continuing her own brand of Foucault's *archeology* of knowledge and discourse, which she practiced so well in her book on Emily Dickinson. The result is one of *Disembodied*'s most pragmatic essays, affecting discourse with a sort of captivity of its own—Howe often breaks into verse, mirroring the very text she is reading: "A Sovereign thinks the sun. Form and Force begin with Him. If there is evil in the Universe, it is good and therefore marvelous. Law scans the grammar of liberty and surrender. Catastrophe is a matter of fact. Who can open the door of God's face?" It is also her style to *use* text as a method of reading—not merely as a source, but as *material* so that one is made to see, and not merely read for signs or get angry. Accordingly, her quotations are generous and astonishing, such as the autopsy of a still-born child in John Winthrop's *Journal-History*: "The small globes I likewise opened and perceived the matter of them. . .to be partly wind and partly water. . . .[. . .] six of them were as great as his fist, and one as great as two fists; the rest each less than another, the smallest about the biggness of a small Indian bean, and like the pearl in a man's eye."

There's an underlying, very much *embodied*, call in *Disembodied Poetics*, (since you probably have a job, and write in your spare time, you might be able to afford a $30 copy of it), *not* to steal books, go on romantic

road trips, loaf around or do drugs, but to *work* (through all 501 pages), to educate yourself, which is also the work of consciousness, which has always been the essence of *beat*. *That other* beatnik-type stuff worked well then the ruling class was clearer, more generic, and there was no inflation. Now, with power's heterogeneity and capital's increasingly virtual state, there's no time to mess around. The poet who wrote *Howl* is now a daddy-o often introduced as *Professor* Ginsberg, while his contemporary, Philip Whalen, also represented here, has taken a road less-traveled as a Buddhist abbot. But make no mistake, Professor Ginsberg clearly outlines the contemporary advantages of studying Buddhism, and devotes crystalline paragraphs to explicating the essence of Kerouac's own version of it: "Gates of dharma are endless, I vow not to boycott anyone." Thus renewing the relevance of Kerouac beyond commodity fetishism and banalization, and to teachers who have neglected the Buddhist core of his work in favor of Kerouac as antihero of "the culture of affluence," and other easy-listening, didactic takes.

Where Ginsberg is often hung up on Kerouac's Catholicism as an anti-Buddhist, "cross of suffering," Clarke Coolidge, in his paper on Kerouac, sees it as another manifestation, along with Be Bop, of his phenomenal range as a writer. Often siting non-canonical texts such as *Visions of Cody*, where, says Coolidge, in exploring the origins of Jack's "Bop Prosody," "Kerouac is talking about Lee Konitz, who said he 'inspired me in 1951 to write the way he plays.' 'He can take care of himself even though he goofs and does 'April in Paris' from inside out as if the tune were a room he lived in and was going out at midnight with his coat on.'" Coolidge's "Kerouac" revels in a fascination with language that is rare in this anthology and has more to do with an earlier Naropa collection, *Talking Poetics*, which featured such luminaries as Ted Berrigan and John Cage (both notably absent here; especially the former, who once gave a brilliant talk on Kerouac at Naropa). But any language or materially-oriented approach to writing is formidably challenged in Alice Notley's, "Epic & Women Poets"—one of this anthology's riskier essays in its assertion that "to break and recombine language is nothing" and that "dreams are not language; they are fleshy and vivid, they are 'real.' And they are 'about' us & everything; both the source and paradigm of art. They are the bed of new beginnings, the place to turn." Proceeding against the margins of what the Twentieth Century discourse of language and literature, from Naropa to France, has been about—(1) the elimination of the subject from language; the deconstruction of language as mimesis of human nature, presence, vision and voice; (2) the critique of the unconscious as the production of desire via the interpretation and use of dreams to cure neuroses or create illusions of self-realization—Notley discards "language" as a male-dominated, over-determined, dead system. Accordingly, the writing (and reading) of poetry

is no longer an exploration of systems of language—a new way of writing, traceable to Stein through the Objectivists, and to today, via the Language School, that was (and still is) tired of the over-explanation and hegemony of the subject (regardless of its gender), that sought (and still seeks) to make of writing *an action*, conscious of the fact that what is internal to what is called action is that it does not know itself (which suggests the heart of Buddhism or *Suññatā*—voidness: all things, without any exception, especially, the self). For Notley, whatever "language" was is back to being about the author and the author's dreams, which as Notley asserts, are "more real" than language.

Bravely striving for the institutional equivalent of Kerouac's *dharma* in a culture that is ever-narrowing as it appears to expand, Ann Waldman and Andrew Shelling, *Disembodied*'s editors, round-out a Buddhist notion of American literature as an all-encompassing philosophy of life and art that is the Kerouac School's continuing purpose. Waldman's lively interview on poetry and life entitled "Vow to Poetry" and Schelling's eloquent essay on Buddhism and American Poetry, "Mounting the Poetry Vehicle," evoke a generosity of spirit and voice that is refreshingly consistent with their philosophy, and extremely rare in contemporary American poetry. However, Waldman's enchanting life/art mantra of "no self," "no goal," "discovering life at the edge of death, all the time" and Shelling's intoxicating idea that one need not buy a ticket to mount the poetry vehicle, but "just get on board," threaten to ring hollow (along with other notes in this anthology) as what Hegel called, "a type of freedom [. . .] a piece of cleverness that has mastery within a certain range" as is often the case with American versions of Mahayana Buddhism that over-emphasize the "great way or vehicle" into a relativistic (very American) frenzy that is merely a *literalization* of Kerouac and *Suññatā*,—the gap between saying it ("I'm a Buddhist," or "I'm a poet," even) and *really* doing it, so wide it is easily disguised, seriously misunderstood and rarely bridged. All this in a context such as *Disembodied Poetics* that is saying many things *disembodied* and doing others very much *embodied*, historically and politically. And as a body politic, some of its authors or those who signed the "Declaration of Interdependence" near the end of the book, take up space, assert "truth," territories, and the kind of power (political) that knows it's not good to see two sides of certain questions when you have to officially follow one (no "I contradict myself. I contain multitudes" speeches, especially when adressing "the Congresses of all nations" regarding issues such as "ending the arms race"). In other words, this anthology, unlike certain others as of late, actually takes up unequivocal positions on certain issues such as the environment and education. However, the main essays and interviews speak clearly and actively for themselves, to the politics of our times, with a basic strategy of always heightening awareness, as dharma should.

The revolutionary aspects of *Disembodied Poetics* somewhat fulfill Baraka's credo *that you be judge,* but the old tendency of revolutionaries *to long for a master, despite themselves,* is still there. Helping or hurting in this process are a number of other Naropa apostles, American outriders and geniuses, including, William Burroughs, Anselm Hollo, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Lyn Hejinian, Robin Blaser, Ed Sanders, Nathaniel Tarn, Nathaniel Mackey, Leslie Scalapino, Jack Collom, Bernadette Mayer and Rikki Ducornet. Peter Lamborn Wilson gives a dizzying reading of Fourier, while David Levi Strauss concludes with a fitting homage to Robert Duncan's legendary, New College poetics lectures, and Duncan himself, in Duncan's words:

> In the old stories, the protagonist learns
> what Time has to do with him. And in his true
> indentity burns within the learning.
> He serves the years.

—ROBERT V. HALE

Henri Michaux, *Meidosems: Poems and Lithographs*, Tr. Elizabeth Jackson, Moving Parts Press, Santa Cruz, CA, 1992.
An Henri Michaux Anthology: 1927-1984, Ed. and Tr. David Ball, UCal Press, 1994.

Working from a tip I'd gotten from another dissatisfied, literate graduate student, I picked up the New Directions *Selected Writings of Henri Michaux,* translated by Richard Ellmann, to amuse myself between reading and writing assignments on Melville, Emerson, Dreiser, et al. We were in the English Department (c. 1970), aimed waveringly at Ph.D.'s in British and American Lit, so we spent a lot of time hunting up, and reading, books outside our ever-narrowing curriculum requirements—Raymond Chandler, Karl Jung, Rimbaud, Wittgenstein, anything that could further us in our "careers," anything that distracted us.

For me, Michaux served very, very well. Though I doubt I could have put a name to it then, looking back through those 1927-43 texts that Ellmann did, I'd say now that they revealed to the increasingly constrained aging student a man of independent spirit, a writer of shocking integrity—issues I was worried about. The narrator—for these early texts are more like stories, or travelogues, than are later Michaux prose works—seemed a curious, quirky, enigmatic, outrageous sort, a "character," akin to many in Kafka and Dostoevski, or Charlus and Bloch in Proust. And I loved the style, an odd mix—rough-hewn, preoccupied, blunt, wry, self-deprecating, anxious, hurried. Never long-winded, academic verbose, or aloof. The dramatic situations were great, too, especially in *A Certain Plume* (1931), where the figure is thrown around in a hilarious and harrowing fashion threatening to his equanimity, which seems to consist of equal parts of assertiveness and submission, ferocity and humility: "Plume was dining at the restaurant when the head waiter came up to him, looked at him severely, and said to him in a low and mysterious voice: 'What you have there on your plate is not on the menu'" *(SW* 83). Soon, within two pages, Plume is in the hands of the Secret Police, where the scene closes, unresolved. Sketches like this, in their brevity and dark humor, reminded me, I think, of the powerful comic "skits" or "bits" by Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, W. C. Fields—funny and grave, classically "American," maybe, in the debunking mode. For a graduate student in literature, Michaux was refreshing, heady escapism. I needed *personal* stimulation to counterbalance incipient "professionalism."

So the last thing on my mind was studying Michaux. I'm certain I did not think much at all about his IDEAS. But the force and assurance of his prose suggested a mastery of materials that I found admirable and special. When I went looking for more, though, all I could find was a used copy of Sylvia Beach's translation of *A Barbarian in Asia* (New Directions, 1949 & 1986). It was wonderful, too, and differently, a personal-memoir travelogue rather than the psycho-mythical ones in *Selected Writings*. I devoured it, and banged on the table for the next course. No response from the staff. Evidently, when it came to translated Michaux, the meal was over. In a move that still strikes me as surprisingly intelligent and impractical, I decided to learn to read French, for real, once and for all. Then I went to France, got some brand new Michaux books (and some other things), came home, and began reading them as intensively as I could. Now, twenty-some years later, I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments on two recent Michaux translations as well as on the prospects for any contemporary no-French readers who may, perhaps through these two new books, fall under his spell.

Meidosems is a very pretty book. Yes, I have a few quibbles, reservations, *caveats,* mainly about Professor Jackson's translation, but I

want to make clear at the outset how secondary they are, for me, to the pleasure I derive from seeing in English a complete Michaux text elegantly interlaced with his own lithographs, precisely as designed by Michaux himself, and as published by René Bertelé in a limited edition in 1948. Michaux was 49 at the time, a considerable, notoriously unaffiliated, force in French letters, having published six major books before the war and two more since the Liberation. And while his reputation and production as a writer would grow steadily in succeeding years, his identity as an eminent visual artist in various media was yet to emerge as of the late '40s. True, he had been painting since the early '30s, having had his first exhibition at the Librarie de la Pleiade in Paris in 1937, and he had included drawings and reproductions of paintings in three small earlier books *(Peintures,* 1939; *Arbres des tropiques,* 1942; and *Peintures et dessins,* 1946). For *Meidosems,* however, Michaux produced the lithographs (a new medium for him) and the text concurrently, according to Jackson, in an experimental effort to fully integrate visual and linguistic ideas. The thirteen lithographs that appeared in the original edition, along with five "previously unknown preliminary litho designs" Jackson and Moving Parts include in an appendix, do appear to be portraits of the creatures the text presents in words. Which is not to say, I think, that the two kinds of portraits quite "correspond," but that's another subject.

Moving Parts Press has selected Michaux's *Meidosems* as the introductory volume "in a series of publications which interpret the original French *livres d'artiste* for contemporary audiences," the aim being the closest possible reproduction of the look and feel of "a small number of illustrated texts by celebrated author/artists. . .[such as] Kandinsky's *Klänge* and Matisse's *Jazz.* "While this is certainly an admirable project, and *Meidosems* a great choice for the inaugural volume, I'm having trouble bringing to mind candidates for later volumes written by authors of Michaux's stature. In other words, unless I'm mistaken, *Meidosems* is incomparable, unique. Its lithographs are especially interesting because they signal a new direction in the work of a visual artist whose pieces hang in the Guggenheim and Musée National, and the text is especially interesting because it surely reflects a new point of departure in the work of a world-class poet. For the last 35 years of his life, Michaux's career reveals an unprecedented double mastery, and for a serious would-be interpreter of any work by Michaux, this fact is no mere curiosity. It poses large, thorny aesthetic questions, and *Meidosems,* produced almost immediately after his wife's tragic death—he never remarried—is at the fulcrum. Previously he was a writer who had grown progressively more interested in painting and drawing; thereafter, he would be a writer AND a visual artist, perhaps more precisely (excepting the hallucinogen books *Misérable Miracle,* 1956 & 1972 and *L'infini turbulent,* 1957 & 1978), a writer OR a visual artist.

Dauntingly, then, *Meidosems* is a key to two different doors marked "Henri Michaux." Those wishing to visit him, though, are likely to possess either sharp eyes OR good ears, not both. I, for one, feel a powerful reluctance to write about the visual work, and my inadequacy does not stem solely from lack of training in the critical vocabulary appropriate to painting or drawing. I just haven't seen enough of the pieces. I don't live in that "world." As things stand in the world of literary commerce, I feel lucky to have a considerable number of his texts. In David Ball's *Darkness Moves,* for example, 29 beautifully reproduced paintings and drawings hold center stage, but without accompanying critical discussion, even as to the media, and although some helpful ideas about Michaux's art crop up in the editor's "Introduction," his main focus, understandably, is the anthology's vast textual offering. A reader can hardly quite object.

I want to return later to the general critical issues raised by Michaux's double mastery, but right now I want to explain how I think it might have affected Elizabeth Jackson's work on *Meidosems.*

Since she herself is a literary critic and historian, with published work on Péret, Proust, Valéry, Char, and Chénier to her credit, my guess is that Michaux's lithographs were a challenge to her perspective. She must have felt she needed help, and she got it. She must have known, too, that any Anglo-American reader picking up this Moving Parts edition would be much more familiar with Michaux the writer than Michaux the artist. In an effort to bridge the gap, her sixteen-page "Preface" makes much of how the presence of the plates *affects* the text. No doubt Michaux's juxtaposition of text and art in *Meidosems* does "raise the interesting question of what can be communicated visually and what can be communicated verbally," but she cannot really answer this question without knowing a great deal more about Michaux or about the visual arts, so her remarks come off sounding facile—"The two media do indeed mutually 'correspond' and 'correlate.' Thus, for its creator the work indeed combined, integrally in its conception and presentation, both the verbal and the visual media" (But, like, how?)—or maddeningly obscure, as if effusiveness alone would clear things up—"Accordingly, the difference between the two forms of expression in this case would have to do not so much with content, or even with the nature of the creative process, but with the ultimate effect which is experienced conformably with the message" (Hmmmm). She knows that readers who have heard of Michaux are bound to think of him as primarily a poet, and she would like to rectify that impression. Good. Even if she can't quite say how the pictures work with the text, her intentions are in the right place. But then, carried away with the admittedly mysterious significance of the graphic arts in Michaux's repertoire, her corrective efforts zoom off into error.

". . .Starting in the early fifties, Michaux began to paint more and write less." Leaving aside dates of actual composition (out of ignorance), I'd say the bibliographic record shows at least twice as many new Michaux books after 1949 as since 1927. In other words, he painted more and wrote as much or more, and rarely, only exceptionally, with graphic accompaniment. *Meidosems* is an important experiment for Michaux, and for anyone studying him, because, I believe, it failed. Jackson herself quotes a pregnant remark from *Peinture* (1939): "When one starts painting. . .the word machine (word-thoughts, word-images, word-emotions) disappears." Yes, and in *Meidosems* the depicted and the verbalized creatures seem worlds apart, utterly different kinds of beings, mysteriously (to each other?) bearing the same designation: meidosems. The graphic images seem to be ghostly observers of their companion "text-thing," mute, alien skeptics regarding the flimsy, bodiless word-creature ("We've heard so much about it, but it's not very impressive, is it?"). Reading the text, one finds that the meidosems interact and express themselves primarily through gestures and rhythm (important words in Michaux). They do not talk. They are, in fact, much more like painters and draughtsmen than "authors." In Michaux's post-*Meidosems* writing, as his artistic career is taking off in another realm, far fewer creatures, fantastic voyages, or primarily pictorial writing than in *My Properties* (1930), *The Far-off Inside* (1938), or even *A Certain Plume* (1931), not to mention *Voyage to Great Garaban* (1936). The writing becomes more analytical, even "scientific," the narrator and his subjects, if still eccentric, much more consistently Michaux himself and his interests. The writer talks; elsewhere, the painter makes pictures. As he suggests about his left and right arms in *Bras cassé* (1971), they do not know of each other. In *Meidosems,* too, worlds do not touch, interact; unity is a distant dream abandoned, out of reach. The 70 individual poems sparkle or writhe alone; torments abound, whimsical chance being one of them. The narrator watches the spectacle from a distance; his feelings peek out; they too are swept away; he is powerless, ineffectual. In the end, *"Silence. Envols." Meidosems,* in French, is a very interesting book, a dark and misty, turbulent/unsettling one. It is not a happy book.

For some reason, though, perhaps because Michaux had written travelogues and "fantastic voyages" in the past, Jackson uses the template of fiction rather than poetry to consider *Meidosems.* But he really *did* go to Ecuador and Asia, and he never came closer to fiction than a parody of it in any of his earlier narratives. Nevertheless, words like "story," "narrative," "itinerary," "adventures," and "fiction" pervade the "Preface" and, evidently, I'm afraid, the technique of the translator as well. She admits to altering Michaux's syntax by stiffening up or clarifying caesuras he left marked with commas, ambiguously, in her effort to provide in the English "more structurally logical hints." But whose structure, whose logic, do her

alterations reflect? She speaks of the "conversational tone" of Michaux's prose, but her English diction, when combined with her syntactical changes, makes the writing less easygoing and familiar, more formal and sometimes archaic, than the original. Overall, however, I am most worried by her tendency to add "personality" to a text depicting disembodiment, to provide agency where Michaux supplies arbitrarily shifting apparitions, maybe, after all, just to make the poetry a better "story." I'll give a few examples:

—on page 31, "sentent..de l'élargissement" makes no reference to "an expanding *force,*" nor are this idea and this grammatical form(*-ment)* uncommon in Michaux.

—on page 42: "Et qu'est-ce qui t'a brûlé ainsi, *noiraud?"* does not warrant "poor little blackie," notwithstanding the familiar address.

—on page 33, Michaux has "Il faut fuir. Il le faut. Vite," where Jackson obliterates the ironic pun on flee/flight *(envol)* and adds ideas: "Run for safety. It's urgent. Quick," perhaps to add drama and personality. But the text is expressive, not blunted by "characters."

—on page 36, "le visage qui *porte* des chaines" has become a face "bound" in chains, an interpolation that implies an external agent, and draws attention to the agency and away from the more pregnant and unexplained image of a face just *having* them, about which one might profitably wonder how *is* that so rather than how it might have *happened* (drama).

—on page 71, Michaux writes "signes du vaste agrandissement qui va le liberer comme le sombre peut liberer." Jackson: "signs of the vast *space* which will free him as gloom *can well do."* Now Michaux didn't have to mention *liberer* twice, so he must have had a good reason to do so. Even if I didn't know that freedom and constraints were perennial themes in his work, I would leave the double reference. And as for "space," well, "aggrandissement" is an event, and space is just. . .where astronauts go.

—finally, on page 74, "Ils ont abouti ici. Il n'y a rien a ajouter" becomes "They have ended up here. That is all there is to say." But "there is nothing to be added" is a much more interesting statement. It would be about the meisodems, not just the narrator's disposition toward them. And it is a negative statement, like the original. It retains the general idea of accretions and, by extension, deficiencies, and sufficiency, which correlate with the book's theme—desire. Besides,

> "nothing to add" includes the idea of "saying" without the word "say" being drawn into the text where Michaux didn't put it.

Now, I understand that translation is painstaking, frustrating, unrewarding work, the potential for error, 100%. Oddly, it takes intelligence, experience, and wit to stay out of the original text's way. It may be, as David Ball says in his "Translator's Note," that Michaux "translates relatively easily," but I have found it hard to feel comfortable giving the author the reins until I have discerned for myself the harmony of the entire work in hand, the comprehensive judiciousness of even his smallest linguistic gestures. Only total immersion works—no preconceptions. Some of the problems I've outlined above undoubtedly stem from Jackson's insufficient familiarity with Michaux's other books, but I believe some stem from her chosen metaphor of a fictional travel narrative. If, as a classroom teacher of French language and literature, or as an admirer of Michaux, Jackson wishes to theorize that the author of *Meidosems* saw himself as a "reporter" covering the "story" of the inhabitants of "Meidosem land," one who "sympathizes with their sorrows and their joys. . .their deepest aspirations," for readers who, "after beholding a series of perilous adventures," are rewarded with a "happy ending to [the] tale," no great harm may be done. As a translator of Michaux's text itself, though, the metaphor can get in the way. Too often, Jackson translates as if she wished Michaux had written a different sort of book, one more cumulatively dramatic, one with a more sentimental disposition and tone, one more clearly implying a consistent separation, and paternal relations, between subject and object, voice and vision, one less disturbing, less paradoxical, more familiarly, dependably "literary" in its intentions.

Indeed, Michaux may be easy to translate in some respects. Because he did not write in French until his mid-teens, in school, and thus remained an "outsider" to the centuries-old tradition of Cartesian, literary French, it must have seemed to him, as it would to any Anglo trying to acquire it, as much an opponent of his thoughts as a natural vehicle for them. So he and his translators are, in a way, in the same boat. Nevertheless, there are surely major pitfalls, primarily aesthetic and psychological ones, I think. It *may* be extremely critical for a translator to understand where precisely Michaux's graphic work is aimed in order to locate and maintain, in an English version, the focus of his art in any verbal work. As I've suggested above, his double mastery can make a translator uneasy, as if a shadowy meidosem were peeking over one's shoulder; it will surely take some interpreters of special talents to extricate us readers and artists from "Michaux's Revenge"—his elusiveness. Just when you think you've got him, you look across the room and he's over there, on the wall.

For all that, though, the psychological pitfalls are probably more serious, because they affect all who encounter Michaux's writing, in French or English, and thus can diminish the breadth of his appeal. I know I was struck, after having read a good handful of his books, by the fact that I did not feel much "closer" to him; we did not appear to be getting intimate. And I know it took me a long time to embrace such a reserved relationship with an author I liked. With most writers one reads deeply in, a point of accommodation is reached, a "comfort zone" of sorts, wherein a reader can luxuriate in the security of predicting the next offering, the pleasurable certainty that the next new text one picks up will provide additional building blocks for the foundation of your growing "relationship." From authors one loves, one expects, well, companionship (reading being such a lonely business). But Michaux, even as "Henri," makes a less than perfect *copain*. It took a while, as I've said, for me to understand that he was bringing me a new literary pleasure—disorientation, but without disorder. Even in individual sentences, it's often impossible to feel "grounded." Much rereading before moving on to the next. They are, for a would-be devotee, maddeningly unpredictable, forbidding.

For a Westerner (as François Trotet suggests in his 1992 Albin Michel study *Henry Michaux, ou la sagesse du Vide),* Michaux's leaps are as vertiginously alien as the concepts of Oriental philosophy. For a reader at home, content, in a traditional, parochial, mainstream Occidental culture, Michaux's "attacking" style, and his tactics of irresolution, will likely seem cranky and arbitrary by turns. Only to a painfully disaffected cosmopolitan "outsider" will his exuberant, strident, humorous disaffiliation feel reassuring and apt. It exhibits a life purposefully untrammeled, liberated through devoted, meticulous work, tearing apart the baggage that language, any language, imposes on experience and feeling.

So one is misled to expect from him a comfortable, permanent "Michaux-house" to hide in. The polysemous verbal worlds he fashions and destroys before one's eyes not only provide no dependable footholds, they also suggest the beauty and fruitfulness of a life without underpinnings, without a past, as if one really had escaped, as if that made perfect sense. In fact, while reading Michaux, one experiences over and over the enduring reality of liberty, forgetting while engaged with his pages that one often wishes to be tied down, even by constraints our spirits and minds cannot consciously abide. It is conscious liberty his writing evokes, and that's a paradox, meaning we must reject it on intellectual grounds while it has its way with us aesthetically and emotionally.

What I have come gradually to appreciate through Michaux's writing—and I want to say, self-indulgently, that it has enriched my life—is the peremptory suddenness and surprising propriety of vicissitudes. Like the abrupt shifts of perspective and the unexpected formal mutations in

Michaux's poetry, life *strikes*, and its blows produce life, as if daily events were strokes of my own imagination, like words that just magically appear, unsought, unpremeditated, apt, in conversation. Sometimes. Other times, none.

I do not know why I had long thought that books and their authors should serve as a kind of rest-home for me, where I could live unperturbed and content. I guess I could blame my mother. But reading Michaux's "confetti palaces" has cured me of at least this form of puerile sentimentality. I am not happy with Michaux, and that's edifying.

So I have to wonder if *Meidosems* could be much enjoyed as a reader's first experience of Michaux. The so-called "monster narratives," while no doubt canonical Michaux, are rather enigmatic out of context. As a single piece, it does not so much misrepresent Michaux as it leaves him concealed, not that he would mind. Jackson and Moving Parts' edition is intended as a faithful, even reverent, facsimile of Bertelé's 1948 original, so a more comprehensive, contextualizing critical introduction would have been rightly judged out of place and destructive of the simplicity and elegance of the book's design. As it stands, and it's no small achievement, *Meidosems* provides for an Anglo-American audience an invaluable, telling sample of Michaux's work the way he intended it to be seen by what he had good reason to assume would be his very small audience. It's a beautiful and important little book, now in English, with the French text tucked away in back, condensed to 27 pages. Any Michaux-lover would be delighted to possess it, even at $24.95.

But is it reasonable to expect, for one with a taste for authentic Michaux, that some day, when his reputation has risen to a level warranted by his talent, one will be able to order up (on the Internet, of course) whichever original-format Michaux translations one needs for a complete set? Ideal, perhaps, but unlikely. There are many, many to do.

A more probable scenario, if unfortunately still less than likely, would provide for the Anglo-American audience what the French now possess—a set of anthology volumes containing related small- to medium-sized works, some having been previously published separately in art-book editions (mainly by Fata Morgana, in Montpellier), many being republished, revised and not, from earlier Gallimard anthology volumes, some appearing for the first time in book form, having originally been published in magazines. Between 1978 and 1986, for example, Gallimard reissued at least sixteen Michaux collections, to be set alongside their earlier revised and expanded edition of *Selected Writings (L'Espace du dedans)* (1966) and their new *Selected Poems of Henri Michaux* (1976). No doubt there will be continued posthumous publishing activity as well. The 280-page collection *Affrontements* (Gallimard, 1986), for example, takes its title from a 70-page 1981 Fata Morgana book, the text of which is now included in the anthology

along with nine other pieces, three of which were likewise Fata Morgana plaquettes, issued between 1972 and 1980. Only one piece, a one-page 1983 verse poem, is appearing in print for the first time; the four remaining pieces had appeared in magazines. It appears, then, that the juggernaut French publisher has canonized its solitary Belgian immigrant-son and intends to keep a dozen or so collections, plus a handful of other single-work Michaux titles, in print as long as his European reputation and the resultant sales do not taper off. Theoretically, then, Anglo-American readers should expect to see translations of these various reissues and compilations cropping up on their local book store shelves over the next decade or so. While more likely than a sudden outpouring of Michaux's plaquettes in translation, this scenario seems to me scarcely less a long shot, which brings me to David Ball and The University of California Press' *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology, 1927-1984,* a point, as Michaux might have said, of promise and of peril, of vistas and the abyss.

As an introduction to Michaux's writing, it is vastly more comprehensive and, to my ear, closer to Michaux's idiom and prose style than Richard Ellmann's *Selected Writings of Henri Michaux* (1968), reprinted a few years ago by New Directions. Though *DM* provides no true bibliography of Michaux's work, Ball translates, presents, and contextualizes excerpts from 31 different Michaux titles, in the chronological order of their appearance in the revised Gallimard collections. So, all in all, making use of his extensive notes and his acute introductory remarks, an English reader gets a pretty workable picture of a truly rather bewildering publishing history. And although the erudite Professor Ellmann's 17 pages of introductory material are still entertaining and would be helpful to readers new to Michaux, *DM* is a work of real scholarship that will serve to lead English readers unerringly into the important channels of Michaux's life and work. One gets a taste, for the first time in a single volume in English, of the magnitude, coherence, and variety of Michaux's literary career, one that spanned over 50 active years. I want to add, too, that it is a big (342 pages), handsome, well designed book, in 11/16 Perpetua, such that the text looks honored and uncrowded on the 7 x 10 inch pages—very easy on the eyes, and inviting. A bargain at $30.00—imagine what it would cost had the French texts been included!

Nevertheless, I guess I have to ask, does this ambitious, successful anthology project get us Anglos any closer to seeing complete translations of Gallimard's Michaux collections? Regretably not, I think, unless Ball's extraordinary work produces a clamoring demand for more of this wonderful elliptical prose. Who would these putative "customers" be, and where have they been hiding since Ellmann's 1968 translations? In the meantime, it's true, a few small, complete individual pieces have appeared in English (in descending order of length, the *Constantines' Déplacements,*

Dégagements, 1993, from Bloodstone Books; Randolph Hough's *By Surprise,* 1987, from Hanuman Books; Gustaf Sobin's *Ideograms in China,* 1984, from New Directions; and two pieces here in *Sulfur:* Richard Sieburth's *Of Language and Writing and the Desire to Turn from Them,* #18, and my own *Beginnings,* #34), and I can imagine that *DM* might stimulate a few more such ventures. But—I cannot emphasize this strongly enough—the variety and volume of the Michaux *oeuvre* that remain to be put into English are daunting, a fact that is unlikely to come across quite clearly, except to a Michaux fanatic, even after a thorough perusal of Mr. Ball's book.

In his "Translator's Note," he explains his editing of individual pieces:

> The choice of texts has been largely determined by personal preference (mine and, wherever possible, Michaux's). . . .Cuts in some of the works are indicated by. . ., or, for longer cuts, (. . .);

Now this is a very interesting issue, that of Michaux's favorite pieces among his own works; unfortunately, Ball gives no indication of his sources for Michaux's preferences, or any clear indication that I can find in his introductory or footnote comments as to which pieces are those the author preferred. As for selecting works for inclusion Ball himself especially liked, nothing could make more sense, but, once again, one would like to know which ones these are, since he brought the subject up. I wonder, though, if he does not mean to suggest that he edited out some segments of some works because he did not care for those parts of the work rather than, say, for reasons of mere economy. Surely Ball knows which deletions are which, in his own mind, and it would be fun to hear his thoughts. The "cut" or "long cut" indicators, though, present issues beyond simple curiosity. I see some, but not enough, and where I do find them, I am still not told clearly what ratio prevails between the excerpt and the original. In the case of "Portrait of the Meidosems" (the Gallimard-collection title), for example, although he notes in his brief introduction to the piece that the original is "lengthy,. . .more than 150 pages," the only ellipses that appear in Ball's five pages of excerpts are those employed by Michaux himself. No marks for extended cuts appear. The 1948 original, we know from Jackson's book, contains 70 separate prose poems ranging in length from one to twenty lines; *DM* provides 21 of these, but one cannot know, based on the presentation, which ones were intended to be read adjacent to which. The order is right, but over two thirds are missing. Likewise, in his six-page excerpts from the "Slices of Knowledge" section of *Face aux verrous* (1954 & 1980), no long-cut ellipses appear, although the English reader's loaf is only 32 slices while the French loaf consists of 188. One long-cut ellipsis

stands at the opening of Mr. Ball's three-page selection from *Ways of Sleepers, Ways of Wakers* (1969 & 1978), even though the original runs to over 200 pages (around 80 manuscript pages), and even though the section he presents is from the book's opening chapter, he provides no ellipsis at the end. Needless to say, based on the tiny fragment of it that appears in *DM*, with no editorial comment to suggest otherwise, this piece, Michaux's only book on dreams (no less logical a subject for him, I'd say, than the effects of hallucinogens) looks negligible. I don't think it is. In fact, I love it. Maybe Ball hates it. I don't know.

I could go on in this vein. So could anyone who has access to a handful of the French editions Mr. Ball worked from. But to what end, you may ask? Regarding Michaux in English, here's the outcome I'd like to see.

Comparing Ellmann's *Selected writings* with Ball's *DM*, leaving aside the merits of the two translations and the empty fact that Ellmann was working with a now-superseded edition of Michaux's early works, one sees in the former an admirable effort to produce complete collections and unabridged pieces as arranged by Gallimard and Michaux. For work as diverse and subtle as Michaux's, a premium should be placed on the integrity of the individual works that make up the new collections and on the telling relations that emerge, in reading through the collection, *between* the works now appearing under a single title, especially since Michaux himself had a hand in their presentation, and since one can be assured that little explanation of his intentions is likely to crop up in his as yet unpublished papers. He loathed editorializing. Ideally, then, a single translator should work on each of the new collections. Alternatively, it appears that an individual translator, provided with enough supplementary Michaux reading, could safely apply her talents to one or more of the several individual titles appearing in any collection, according to her taste, with other translators handling the rest. But the translation of excerpts—selecting passages of a work and translating only those passages—is a daring act and a questionable precedent.

A cursory look at *DM* suggests to a reader unfamiliar with the originals that Mr. Ball has excerpted from his own complete translations of the 31 individual works represented in his anthology. And for all I know for sure, he did. If so, it's a prodigious feat, an unparalleled virtuoso literary performance, years and years and years worth. If not, well, it's still a wonderfully helpful, sparkling anthology, especially in its bibliographic correlations depicting the author's unusual career, and if it stimulates some Anglo-American publishers to take an adventurous next step toward Michaux, I hope only that one of the recent Gallimard collections, in its entirety, is their objective.

For me, nothing could be more marvelous than to see all the individual titles that were originally published separately reappear separately as well,

with the French text included (for the new generation of Anglo Francophiles to pore over). And why not in facsimile editions, as Moving Parts and Jackson have done with *Meidosems*, while we're dreaming? I know I couldn't afford them all, though, so my decision to learn French is still paying off.

—JAMES WANLESS

Mark Weiss, *Fieldnotes* (San Diego: Junction Press, 1995)

In "Artifacts: 40 Poems," the major portion of this book, the ground is never steady. There is the sense at every moment that the poet's attention may turn, to incorporate the unexpected detail, the wayward reflection, and thus transform our reading of the whole. By drawing on a variety of poetic techniques, Weiss grants none sovereignty: discernible in the mix are an Objectivist-like precision for registering the external world, a receptivity to chance events, occasional intimate confessions, nuanced repetitions, even snippets of nature poetry. Rather, these are works of assemblage, of delicate tensions and juxtapositions, the disparate parts ringing sympathetically.

To consider the poems as artifacts implies a process of discovery, unearthing not only manmade objects but hidden connections—less to the past, in this case, than between self and world as negotiated through language. The rhythm of the interval rules here, the possibility that the poem may find new openings with each breath, as in the first part of 'XI': "To become transparent.// A hand becomes a slap.// But the lamb is dead regardless." This progression is echoed in the third part of that poem by a more subjective instance: "On the subway/ soft breast against my chest./ Look bored so as not to frighten her." These openings, Weiss suggests, are all about us but they must be approached with care, for an excess of purpose may easily blind us to them. In 'III' he indicates a method of sorts, not for where to go but for how to proceed:

Reach out to the detail
so as not to get lost. So,
maps on the table-cloth.
This place, too,
could be a juncture.

It is the junctures he seeks with these poems, that space in which the wonder occurs, the small or large shifts in perspective. He is less interested in completion, in arriving at a crystallization of meaning, and will counter such a tendency by reaching far outside, often with a subversive humor. The end of a poem, therefore, serves as another point of departure, though it may also leave the reader perplexed. Here is 'IX' in full:

Just before spring
and the ghosts of trees on the Palisades.

Driving across the shadows of bare branches.

Through the shadows of bare branches.

All these things that should never have happened.

"Charlotte is the mother because,
she tells the others, she is wearing the silver shoes."

Fieldnotes is Weiss' first book of poems in nineteen years. Where the 'artifacts' are spare and composed, the two long poems that precede them sprawl with an impassioned notetaking, as so many fragments arranged in a series. Yet both sorts of writing share a comparable array of techniques, including their use of intervals. The long poems place more emphasis on movement through space and on the quality of witness—"Solo," on one level, is about a solo journey by car cross-country—but alongside the 'artifacts' they suggest that these two ways of envisioning the poem spring from the same gestures.

—JASON WEISS

Paper Dance: 55 Latino Poets, edited by Víctor Hernández Cruz, Leroy V. Quintana and Virgil Suarez, New York: Persea Books, 1995.
El poeta y la ciudad: Nueva York y los escritores hispanos, by Dionisio Cañas, Madrid: Cátedra Crítica y estudios literarios, 1994.

In a winsome gesture of travel-brochure enticement, editors Víctor Hernández Cruz, Leroy V. Quintana and Virgil Suarez sign off their two-page introduction to *Paper Dance: 55 Latino Poets:* "Plunge in at any place, get to know the poet, his or her poetry, read everything, feel the rhythms and the beats of this wonderful world of Latino and Latina poetry. Whether or not there is communication is the job of the reader, whoever you are out there, craving good poetry. You."

If it weren't for the unabashed exoticism that went into the title and packaging of *Paper Dance*, I might have ignored the foregoing rhetoric as an innocuous ploy, and of no account. The cover photograph, however, freezes the impassive glance of a child, slightly out-of-focus as she scurries past the shutter; behind her, a graffiti-covered wall-mural of a Caribbean *mulata* with arms upraised and hips *en meneo;* the layout, composed of an overall banana-yellow background, features the collection's coy title swirling above in a rumba-red brush font, and the subtitle boxed in a fidgety urban scrawl. (Equation: inner city = the poetry of *pachanga*.)

So much for marketing. The selected poems in *Paper Dance* were not only chosen, we are told, for their "original breath and composition, but because they speak directly of bicultural experience (. . .) positioned precisely at the center of blending, conflicting, melting of cultures endlessly transforming." Conspicuously absent, though, is any discussion or readerly context as to how the writing produced by such heterogeneous individuals, hypothetically gathered to represent an array of extremely diverse groups—Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban-American, Guatemalan, Dominican, native New Mexican—can in any way be considered together without forfeiting the cultural complexity of each specific narrative, without effacing the differences between immigrant and first-generation experiences of acculturation or transculturation, and without falling into the binary opposition of Latino versus Anglo—presumably that "whoever you are out there" the editors and publishers seem so resolved to seduce in their presentation.

"The poems focus on and are unified by the following themes and perspectives: the 'Americanization' process [. . .]; the use of cultural myths; language and memory; gender; religion and spirituality; rural versus urban (the Barrio) life; ideals and values; the role of Latino and Latina poets; the

questions of universality and specificity." Potentially the stuff of a compelling poetics and one which, if taken to its formal limits, might have genuinely yielded examples of a contemplated radicality: a writing where border-crossing and displaced identities are expressed in disruptive languages; a poetry that claims the recognition of meaning, but in a speech that in no way lends itself to accommodation; new inflections between the pauses of a conversation to which some voices are welcome, but nonetheless uninvited; the anxiety and ambivalence of representing personal, cultural or historical narratives, avoiding pre-constructed essences, modalities and effects, so as to re-invent certain processes of resistance; a form of signifying where "the pure products of (the) America(s) go crazy."

But to the very real imperative of questioning and re-thinking the social/artistic status of what is clearly a historically-original and commanding Hispanic presence in the United States—one which in time will serve to establish cultural, if not political and economic re-negotiations within the hemisphere—*Paper Dance* serves up the following bit of imagist demagoguery: "It is the history of our nation, singing here through personal experience, a lyrical montage that is also a bridging of the private to the communal. The tropical *guayaba* growing out of snow-covered cement."

Certainly, *Paper Dance* is just another symptom of a now widespread situation in publishing and university-department policy, whereby the crucial debates surrounding cultural, racial, sexual and generic "identities" have rapidly met with suppressive uses and their predictable side effects. In territorial battles over who-gets-to-represent-whom, crisis-modernity's analysis of cultural difference has given rise to a common middle ground: an official version of diversity, with unrestricted license to self-expression—always provided it entail, of course, a subject addressing his/her experience as related to the topics and surface reflections of complex collective realities that are bound to be oversimplified.

This is often legitimated by, and sheltered under, the theoretical architecture of certain discourses in cultural criticism where, in a typically condescending fashion, phenomena of this kind can be dubbed "marginalized performative agency." As I understand it, "rendered experience"—especially as it pertains to the possibilities of poetry—should at best be considered in the Foucauldian sense of a subject involved in active invention, employing all forms of knowledge and direct interactions with visible and invisible powers (canons, traditions, legacies), so as to forge renewed artifices in which a self can be publicly engaged.

The general mode of utterance in *Paper Dance,* however, oscillates between the elegies of a nostalgic I as it embarks on the prosaic enterprise of establishing an organized, recognizable belonging via the clichéd motifs of cultural specificity: "an occasional Spanish word here or there"; the

theme of family coherence, or the lack thereof ["It's all about grandmothers / with big floppy ears, / and coughing grandfathers, / with jello stomachs laughing."]; ironic or bittersweet local description [For years afterward, the boy marveled at an island / where the people drank Coca-Cola / and sang jingles from Word War II / in a language they did not speak"]; extemporaneous, pseudo-political statement ["the lover of a subversive / is also a subversive"]; a kind of *riqueza-y-mundo-interior*-sentimentality with a familiar finish aimed to exonerate the well-intentioned reader. Hence, substance here can reach baffling heights of triviality:

> I don't think Mother believed me when I first said
> it had not been me who left teeth prints
> on the cream cheese Tío Berto got through la bolsa negra.
>
> (Sandra M. Castillo,
> "Abuelo Leopoldo Sneaks A Bite of Cream Cheese")

Consider the following takes on such vital matters as, for example, class:

> It would be years
> before I took the courses that would change my mind
> in schools paid for by sugar from the fields around us,
> years before I could begin to comprehend
> how one does not see the maids when they pass by....
>
> (Julia Alvarez, "Homecoming")

racial issues:

> All my uncles on my mother's side have looked
> like Omar Sharif at one time or another
>
> (Dionisio D. Martínez, "Variations on Omar Sharif")

cultural miscegenation:

> I'd love to be cynical.
> I'd love to make fun
> of my Cuban American angst,
> of my ethnic tragicomedy.
> Baby boomer and Yuca
> Cubiche, Yuckie *con mojo*.
>
> (Elías Miguel Muñoz, "Repetitions")

political figures:

> Norberto told los bones
> about Fidel
> and how he has to admire his cojones
> and the way he blows his smoke
> in the face of opposition
> and how you can hate a man's guts
> and still see his worth
>
> (Magdalena Gómez,
> "It Happens While Presidents Play Golf")

or, worse yet, an imagination still haunted by the sexuality of colonialism:

> His chest hairs swirled on her syrupy **mameyes,**
> her lips became slices of **guayaba,**
> and only American tourists order **papaya**
> instead of "bomb fruit" before blushing waitresses.
> Hunger and the corner café would make him come fast.
> (. . .)
> he would go well beyond the fondlings
> with which he had seasoned her like a ham (. . .)
>
> (Ricardo Pau-Llosa, "Mulata")

There is of course—and to be fair—work that stands out above the frippery: that of Adrian Castro, "Pulling the Muse From the Drum"; Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Blue Full Moon in Witch"; Víctor Hernández Cruz, "Time Zones"; Ray González, "The Recurring Dream of the Snake..."; Daniel del Valle Hernández, "The Structure of a Dream"; Juan Felipe Herrera, "The Sea During Springtime"; Gean Moreno, the youngest poet in the collection at 22, "Amantes sin tiempo"; Pedro Pietri, "The First Rock and Roll Song of 1970"; and Gloria Vando, "New York City Mira Mira Blues."

Even among the notables, however, what amazes me is a general diffidence. In *Paper Dance* you can't help but notice the blatant paucity of an archetypal imagination, foundational epic-gestures, collage techniques, documentary strategies, accidents of speech or historical revisioning to forge a calculated musicality or to test an improvised harmonics; in short, the registers and scope made available by modern and postmodern poetic practice in both Spanish and English.

In last year's *El poeta y la ciudad: Nueva York y los poetas hispanos,* Dionisio Cañas perhaps inadvertently points to larger questions as to what

a "Latino tradition" in the United States might also include. In his study, the author chronicles a reverse side of modernity's exoticism by following the important work written in Manhattan by José Martí (the groundbreaking "Versos libres"), Federico García Lorca (*Poeta en Nueva York*, still awaiting a persuasive English translation) and Puerto Rican poet/short-story writer Manuel Ramos Otero (who died of AIDS in 1990). In the process, Cañas manages to gauge the transitions from symbolist *modernismo* to the international avant-garde and postmodern re-positioning, and the bibliography offers a list of over fifty Latin-American poets who, in recent decades have lived and worked in New York City—to speak of only one domain in the US.

To "bridge" a poetics between avant-garde practice in the United States and Latin America would naturally involve a massive project of cultural, writerly translation on both sides of the language barrier. Given the present climate in the States, however—of which *Paper Dance* is paradigmatic—it remains unlikely that a representative anthology of twentieth-century Latin American poetry is bound to see publication within the immediate future. (Of the fifty-five presumably Spanish-literate writers included in *Paper Dance*, only two list translation credits in their biographical notes.)

The evidence seems to indicate that most cultural institutions today (both the university and publishing industries) will continue favoring a minor art selected as exemplary and isolated so as to maintain strict patterns of standardization. Hispanic resonance within a larger discourse between the Americas will largely depend on how successfully Latino writers negotiate the various available legacies of modernist writing in at least English and Spanish—not passively inherited, but rather actively reinvented—and by employing a politically mindful poetics to radicalize our variable experiences of difference: in a language formally bursting with that otherness it lays claim to represent.

—ROBERTO TEJADA

A Fox Occult Among the Grapes
Heavenly Tree Soluble Forest by Gerrit Lansing, 1995, Talisman Publishers, 129 Wayne St., Jersey City, NJ 07302

The universe is an everyday companion.
—A.E. [George Russell],
The Avatars

rrit L singu logetic esoteric particularities, foregoing
freeze-dried canons and squabbling advocates.
letter al rol
One of the great and disarming values which the publication of this book performs is a rearticulation of the shape and boundaries of "influence"
nd all along to have been, an *operative*—
a ose spa Glouc w Yor
jectiv eep im e
ere as holographic opportunist, flexing the implicate order of *The aximu* *Measur*
sterior xpress
's mplic not at Monopoly game called "Influence,"
bu t rganizatio f sense in time.
olytempo e horta ions Id an lumi hout *Heave*
Soluble For his herm
furn cor
nor mind sposed
solations ecause of such beautiful resistances *H av nly Tr Solubl For st* uminous apparitions of poetry's American time.

Heavenly Tree Soluble Forest is
"Hermetic, terrible from joy" (9). buoyantly sympathetic with the rhythms of enchantment, but importantly resistant to the image snares of that "social web commodious/ where mystified mystery hides / in starspangled gleams of beautified credit" (150). A tactic is spelled out in the "Burden of Set" editorials (1961 and 1963)1: "'image is deficiency,'

as the Gnostics say, & any typology of poetic 'Image' gets hung up on the line of similarity, comparison. (Insofar as 'image' is referential it means a leak in the vessel, which should be Hermetically sealed for the cooking . . .)" (BS 85). Here, swiftly, the proviso is condensed: "as it beckons, simile, a chronic door" (182). The caloric concern, for both alchemists and cooks, is "how to manage the heat" (BS 85). Lansing disposes his work in the Aion, that larger appetite of time which nonetheless averts (everts?) the Platonism of "eternity"; so in the *Set* editorial he diagnoses our time as "the most difficult transition age of all, a real Interchange of Tinctures, where a kind of personal life is being exchanged for a kind of 'universal'" (BS 90). "Poetry falls on an age of undoing like *nothing known before,* & rite measure & metric flow from the crystal of the Moment" (BS 84). But Lansing cautions against construing this as either a doctrine of "personism" or "composition by hazard"—abjuring at once O'Hara and Mac Low, who at the time marked two boundaries of radical poetics. He also resisted the "deep image" of Robert Kelly (whose Matter press first issued *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward),* insisting on the degradation of image, image as cultural (cult-sure) pollutant. So he offers a critique of the dollar-bound sign (as it "grows ghostly, self-reflecting, craving craving craving endlessly"), proposing in its stead: "Theory of value in itself must then imply an economic scrutiny, how an image differs from a thing" (BS 89). In the poems of *Heavenly Tree* images abound, but they twist and dissipate as *prima materia* always about to be gobbled up by the macropotentials of syntactic bliss and magical obedience.

This body of poetry is steeped in practice, in a *practicum* which is esoteric or out of sight to the uninitiated. Glimpses appear here and there: "His right hand takes the left-hand path, the Sign / is born and flowers in the sudden damp" (44); "Have you opened your head to the dead? / Do they puddle there, wire your voice box?" (46); "I swallowed the personal key. / It has dissolved" (142); "The bird can take off, at any time. It brings news from nowhere to nowhere" (212). However, the esoteric work is now helpfully arranged in this volume for exoteric access, principally by an arrangement which highlights recognizable domains: gNature (to use the term from the second "Burden of Set" [BS 91]), sex, and epistemology of mind. All three converge in the most demanding of esoteric stipulations: "All use is abuse. The word of the Aeon" (47). And: "A god is of the nature of the slime" (175).

The sexual implications, explications, and evocations elaborate the scenario, "vivifying red disruption all around, / ambush in the Easter egg"[2] (139):

Love emerges from the filth of love:
Girls strike matches in the buried kitchens of their mothers;
Boys in bed machine the book of wheat until it sings to fly.
(34)

All I want is loving you and blank-blank blank-blank blank-
[blank.
It's only unmentionable because there's no end to chasing it
the tale of it and you and sustenance.
(29)

When in Rome do as the Greeks,
show it hard,
let intellect be rampant in the flagrant colors of the indomi-
[tably so,
no compromise no blame.
(40)

This constant surge of ardor in which "The company of love. . .Acclaim the throbbing animal" (121)—this sexual compulsion "to make the world splash in our heads" (104) as "the gusher of spirit exults" (26)—is the inverted or esoteric dimension of the canopic dome of the outside, the starcap, the planetary cape or pelt that shivers responsive to our sexual shudders. José Lezama Lima names as a paradox of poetry that *"love is not made caressingly from pore to pore, but from pore to star. . ."*[3] As "the solar heart defines the blood / How far out you go / it is within" (171). "Shamash and Tammuz together in the shade. Their fingers touch. / The stars are hot in the branches of their tree" (149). "The fixed stars have to shoot up abilities day by day / to go on gliding on golden rails of appetence" (177). Sexual exaltation fringes converging tracks of the planets. "Sex on earth is rhymed angelic motion" (170). Angelic instruction as foreplay:

Express yourself
the angel said

exhaust yourself
and so the stain uniquely gives consent
(60)

It is also a vegetal motion, or notion, this sexual terrestrial paradise, nicely rendered in the doubly focal figure of human lover and rose: "I remember rose hips, a body writhing as it spent itself" (89). So the sexual dimension is initiation, and the esoteric is not so intimidating after all. Sex as

prolegomenon to magical apparition. "Do you want to shine / softly / in the beam of forms? / But handle the stone" (103)

The gnosis of sexual wisdom necessarily extends to "gNature," that land of pre*gn*ation, of *gn*owing as boding where "Life sucks itself to life in Granny Day's swamp" (75), where "The god of this world treads on brains like grapes" (91).[4] This nature is a haunt of rudiments. The hermetic labor here is to discern the interpenetrations, the mutual absorbency of revelation in "thrust and consummation of the tiger's spring and orange presages of fall" (17), or "seeing the whole jewel-net flicker in the depths of the sea" (84). In the reciprocal endowments of high and low, inner and outer, the sex that seemed confined to animal nature gnourishes a howling consonant dissonance or dissonant consonance, perennial flex of *the same difference:*

> in my garden, Erasmus Darwin said, blooms
> bright surprise galore on bright surprise
> and from their volant passion splurge cataracts of eyes.
> (153)

The newly baptized title, *Heavenly Tree Soluble Forest,* adds a dimension previously withheld from the occult binarism of *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward.* The shift appears to have come in Lansing's recognition that the Curriculum of the Soul pamphlet *Analytical Psychology* was in fact the text ("The Soluble Forest" now) meant to conduct the book to its solutions, where "always is never because" as "under the moon / the swimming forest dissolves" (213). It's as if the previous incarnation, enacting the demanding logic-magic "Time is (the) Number 2" in the "Burden of Set," were here discovered as a Peircian semiosis: "From the center of nothing something spreads out, that then there now. From zero jumps two, two being how something is apprehended" (196). (In Peirce: "The nothing of negation is the nothing of death, which comes *second* to, or after, everything."[5]) From heavenly tree to soluble forest, the ritual inversion is complemented and so completed: "The house stands on its cellar and grows up. Also grows down from its garret invisibly, as the crown of a tree flourishes the idea of its root. . . All around us the letters are cast, to be spelt, to be sown like spelt, grain of the garment unseen as green as it makes it" (196).

With this Lansing convenes as a final tableaux the epistemology of mind, the "statute, fable, / rock of what imprints us in the shakes of being where we are" (75). Emerson speaks of "the indefeasible persistency of the individual to be himself. . . .Every mind is different; the more it is unfolded, the more pronounced is that difference." Much of this epistemological difference is in place already with the sexual code and the natural garden plot: the gnosis "that our knowledge / exceeds our having minds" (172).

The enigma of identity is contingent on this unrecuperative if pleasurably excessive expenditure. "The rapture of itself it views / And how it needs to seem to be" (9); "joy trapezes in its animals. / Mind and mindlessness are one" (33). If sex is syntactic respiration of the planet, mind is semantic evaporation of nature's coagulates. To become is to be undone. But the tonic or tincture differently disposes in the newly composed; to be lost is also *to found:*

> so I am always finding in feeling
> locating in shifting
> the terms that compose me
> the rhetorical cinnabar lode
> whose clavicle's wavicle's key
>
> (201)

In his second "Burden of Set" editorial (1963), Lansing proposed the figure of the double-axe or labrys as a Janus-like bifurcation of "the figures of Time that compose the structure of our necessity, how by poetry we investigate the needs" (BS 87). He uses the term "figure" as a subtle correction of the oculocentrism of "image" and as a way of evoking the incalculable calculus of no-mind: "in exopsychology," he remarks, "the messenger substance / figures as figure" (202). To write is to writhe, coming and going convened like Whitman's hermaphroditically open road (the congenial genius of a genital *tao)* in which (and for those for whom) "supraliminal language-field is body-field" (200): "A WRIT is a route, a way and the map of a way. It figures and we make of it our figure, you make of it your figure, I make it of mine. It is mind, and no mind, inner and dinner and outer and doubter" (196).

The quicksilver lubrication of a precipitous syntax—its changes and exchanges—requires "traction" ("The Burden of Set" is Lansing's Tractatus on traction, to which the poems stand as extracted contractions.) Traction, it seems to me, is behind the magical principle of contrariety. "To be useless is not without use" begins "In the Grip of the Octopus" (49). "The breath of Set," Lansing says of the Egyptian deity of malevolence, "dessicates to freshen" (BS 85). To go by contraries is to affirm by inversion, to be ceaselessly becoming the understudy of oneself. The visions are fleeting and alarming:

> Ain't pleasant to work at the compost,
> but the niches are empty,
> and the eye will terribly blaze from the triangle

when the lion god
at last
steps forth by day.

(158)

A man cannot be but enters in some folly:
if he is saved the direction of the savor is the god who blind as
Orphics say and dumb is still the Chariot
we ride in every day
or drown.

(175)

I couldn't make out the form that gestured as the door swung to,
a man with the head of a weasel possibly,
and I shot back into the steaming morning air
fulvescent from the fubbery which wasn't any more than what we
cast about us every day

(180)

So often in Lansing's work there is a weird momentum spun out in sudden shifts of register from colloquialism to arcana; antiquarian diction unaccountably seized with the plain sense of things; a surge from strophe to catastrophe. Lansing's poetry is narcotically regnant with a lush American gothic spunk of ectoplasm. Yet these phantom sensations are themselves adrift in an ambience demanding "precision and soul" (to cite Musil's lovely terms), since the cadence and even the focus may change from line to line. This sounds like collage, but if so, it's collage that one could only intend by deliberate acts of autotransgression, where the estrangement that is language is ever a dweller on the threshold. As John Wieners wrote, prefacing *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward* in 1966, "The obtuse is clarity."

Lansing's way of keeping time is by releasing time, not unlike the pianism of Monk or Janácek. It's the inner quiver, *Stimmung* in German, that resonates outer circumstance in a meaningful reminder of what time is all about. Approvingly citing van der Leeuw's "myth creates time" in the *Set* editorial, Lansing distinguishes two takes: investigating history, and investigating "the dark interiors" (BS 83). Intimacy is intricacy. In our time, "prophecy [is] self-confrontation & the magic of inwardness [is] hidden in the autonomy of the visible, the uses of secrecy obscured, hard to come by" (BS 85). Lansing has worked at that compost for a long time now,

discerning in the principle that "Value is of the excrementitious nature of Time" (BS 90) that the truly secret is not the Fort/Da yo-yo; the hidden not a bashful reluctance to appear. The open sewer of our cultural traffic in images forfeits any sense of hermetic retention. "It remains to be seen what cannot be permitted" (BS 92): and it remains to be thought how this sounding pronouncement from "The Burden of Set" insists.

* * *

A concluding word on the state of the text is called for, given that two prior editions were published in 1966 and 1977, and in view of the shoddy condition of this one.[7] There were twenty-four poems in the first (mimeo) edition, three of which were subsequently dropped. Twenty-two poems (seventy pages) are added, and six short poems deleted, from the second rendition.[8] The considerable expansion has resulted in a notable interior mutation, as seven sections have become eleven; and, most notably, the poems themselves have been entirely reordered. The new order reveals an essential feature of Lansing's working method: the poems are fractal and faceted, so the permutations are considerable, even imponderable. *Heavenly Tree* has gone through its nigredo and the furnace is now a workshop-cavern-solar bubble with a man inside the outside, and many intricate veins for the reader to burrow out through from within.

1 "The Burden of Set," reprinted in *Caterpillar* 10 (January 1970), 82–93. References in the text will be abbreviated as "BS".

2 A gnostic interpolation: "All life long / you include something /that includes your life. / You are in the egg" (13).

3 Lezama Lima, *"Orbita* Interview," tr. James Irby, *Sulfur* 24 (1989), p. 175.

4 "Whoever looks at the insect world, at flies, aphids, gnats and innumerable parasites, and even at the infant mammals, must have remarked the extreme content they take in suction, which constitutes the main business of their life. If we go into a library or newsroom, we see the same function on a higher plane, performed with like ardor, with equal impatience of interruption, indicating the sweetness of the act." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Letters and Social Aims* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1875), p. 177.

5 Charles Sanders Peirce, "Objective Logic," *Collected Papers, Volume VI: Scientific Metaphysics* ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 148.

6 R.W. Emerson, op cit., pp. 200–201.

7 The sensual palpability of the poems seems oddly distorted in the generic budget press format given here. Talisman has done an undeniable service in publishing *Heavenly Tree,* but even so it's a sloppy job. The table of contents lacks page numbers, for one thing; the order of the poems is scrambled in two instances; and one of the poems listed ("The Pursuit" in section 6) is not in the book at all. There is a crucial misprint in "The Bereft" (89): the line "It is sufficient to vanish never" *should read* "It is sufficient suffering to vanish never"; "nomarchs of the mirror" should be *monarchs* (23); the poem "A Comfort in the Longing Flames" should not end with a comma (64). Such glitches make me wonder whether "Olana" has lost its memorable subtitle ("or, The Shark of Craving" as it appeared in *Sulfur* #1) by design or by misadventure.

8 The new poems are, in order of appearance: "The Milk of the Stars from Her Paps," "From Under the Mat Where Sat the Cat," "The Glory of Changes," "Tea at Slinky's Palazzo," "Bracketing in City Thickets," "3 Poems of the Underworld(s)," "In the Grip of the Octopus," "A Far Memory of Lazy Spring," "Hands That Melt Like Snow," "History," "Alba," "Sunset as Early Warning System," "Furiously Framing," "Elegiac Fantasy, Delayed in Glass," "The Recluse (fragment)," "3 Anecdotes of the Uncanny," "From the Orchards of Sleep," "Equinoctiall," "Olana," "In Erasmus Darwin's Generous Light," "When Locality Falls," and "The Soluble Forest." Most of these poems have appeared in small magazines during the past fifteen years, and the culminating twenty page section, "The Soluble Forest," was originally published as the Curriculum of the Soul pamphlet *Analytic Psychology*. The deleted poems are "The Green Bottle," "A Simple Fire of Wood," "A Drink," "Portrait of a Poetaster," "Habits," and "Neglect Not the Dawn Meditation" from the 1977 edition. Dropped from the 1966 text (i.e. not in 1977) were "Rumors," "Prose for St. Catherine's Day," and "The Euonymous Poem."

—JED RASULA

Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1995). 754 pp.
Alcools: Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire. Translated by Donald Revell (Hanover, New Hampshire and London: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1995). 171 pp.

For the past several years English translations of André Breton's important texts have been appearing fast and furiously, and considering the fifty years that have elapsed between the publication in our language of the first book of his work (the 1946 *Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares*, a slim selection of poems), and the thirty years that mark his death in 1966, it's high time for the massive consideration accorded him in Mark Polizzotti's superb biography. The numbers, indeed, are propitious—a fact that Breton probably would have enjoyed: despite the 1995 publication date of *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*, 1996 also marks the centennial of Breton's birth. Since he shifted the date of his own birth from

February 19, 1896, to February 18, I've given myself permission to juggle the figures a little, too.

Indeed, one hopes that Polizzotti's scrupulously researched and highly readable work of biography and scholarship will serve to do just what such a study ought to do—send interested readers and writers back to the books to get the full picture, since by the end of this century just about every major text of Breton should be available in our language. His life and work offer the possibility of the endless reevaluation and rediscovery that make the study of literature the inexhaustible mine that it is. And there are still two more volumes to come (two having already been published) in Gallimard's Pléiade edition of the *Oeuvres complètes,* an extraordinary series whose notes and citations open up Breton's often knotty work to further scrutiny and understanding. And the other important figures who surrounded him (or, as some will argue, dwarfed him) in the Surrealist adventure—Soupault, Aragon, Éluard, Desnos, Péret, Artaud, Tzara, to name only a few—should also demand the attention of readers and translators, since Polizzotti offers vivid portraits of them side by side with their acknowledged (and sometimes repudiated) leader. The biography also raises questions about the writer's life, and about the Surrealist experiment as a whole, some of which I hope to touch on here.

Polizzotti's biography goes a long way towards humanizing the formidable Breton, whose glaring gaze in book photographs can still elicit snap-judgments about his character. What one finds here, surprisingly, is that Breton was not always the pillar of steel that his persona and pronouncements suggested. Most of the time Breton seemed to be an unhappy man, waiting around for the next lightning bolt that would galvanize him into action, and in these pages the image that is shaped of him is not entirely sympathetic. The first critical fact that Polizzotti presents to us is Breton's lifelong antagonism toward the cold-hearted mother who bore this only child, who refused him the society of other children, and who relentlessly policed him as a teenager, even requiring the young student of medicine to study his textbooks *out loud* so that she could prevent him from reading the poetry that he had begun to love in his high school years. (The father, Louis, worked as an accountant for the police in his native Lorient, then for a glassblowing firm in the Pantin suburb of Paris, where Breton was raised. Surprisingly, Breton returned home virtually every summer of his life, and retained cordial relations with his father until the latter's death.)

In light of what we learn in these pages about Marguerite Le Gouguès Breton, one aspect of Breton's—hence Surrealism's—search for "the" woman, be it the Nadja of his 1928 book or the three wives and many lovers that constellated his emotional life, seems to have been compensatory: the denying mother had to be replaced by females who were malleable enough

to please him, but who could be banished with a wave of the hand when their "mystery" vanished into disappointing flesh and blood; or who retained his interest by resisting him, like Lise Deharme, an early fixation, and Suzanne Muzard, with whom Breton carried on a stormy romance and saluted in "Free Union," perhaps the best known Surrealist poem). Enter the "child-woman" (of whom the famous Nadja is the type, and of whom Polizzotti has much to tell us). Unlike the mother, the child-woman is unpredictable and therefore a dynamic source of excitement; because of her youth, she is to a degree forbidden; in other ways, she can be controlled, rendered dependent, as the real mother cannot be. The extreme youth of many of Breton's attachments give us some index of the immaturity of his own feeling life.

When no woman was in Breton's life (or when one of them, like Lise or Suzanne, was making him miserable), his reaction was to tighten his controls on the Surrealist group, leading to the well-known, even infamous "purges" that characterized his leadership of the movement, as if he suddenly assumed the guise of the icy anima, the loveless disciplinarian who devours her children. The mother-issue opens into the Surrealists' treatment of women in general, wives, artists, and writers included, which Polizzotti handles with sensitivity and skill. For example, the portrait of Simone Kahn, Breton's first wife, with whom he seems to have worked out a kind of "open marriage," was a beautiful, perceptive, and tolerant partner whose importance to Breton and to Surrealism is not to be underestimated.

Another important theme (we could call this the "father motif") focuses on Breton's mentors, beginning with Paul Valéry, whom the young man idolized, courted, and ultimately replaced with Apollinaire, though he too was finally deemed insufficient when his enthusiasm for France and the war became too much for his young disciples to bear. (That Breton continued to use Valéry and Apollinaire long after his heart had vacated the friendships does not go unnoticed by Polizzotti; in the same way, Breton could always rely on his supportive father, who left him a considerable inheritance.) The austere poet Pierre Reverdy is here, too, who frightened away Breton, Aragon, and Soupault with his crusty personality and cranky pronouncements, yet of whom Breton made great (and acknowledged) use to shape his own domineering persona and his theories of the Surrealist image, which bore fruit in writing practice in the *First Surrealist Manifesto* (1924). Yet all of these heroes were to some extent swept away by the arrival of Jacques Vaché, whom Breton, a medical attaché during the war, encountered in the hospital where the dandified, cynical soldier recovered from wounds. Polizzotti carefully tracks the brief friendship that meant "everything" to Breton, and which ended abruptly with Vaché's death (accident or suicide?) from opium-eating. His contempt for literature, for the war, and for women accented Breton's behavior from then on, even to

the point where he grafted much of Vaché's sensibility onto himself. "By disappearing under intentionally mysterious circumstances," Polizzotti writes, "Vaché bought himself the first sepulcher in what would become the Surrealist pantheon." Given the pathetic nihilism of Vaché, how willing are we today to lay wreaths upon his grave? As with Lautréamont, another suicide, how much are we willing to live out of this kind of self-destructive anger, for it was a kind of universal fury that fueled the Surrealist enterprise as much as Surrealism sought to purge itself of its hate of everything handed to it by its fathers and mothers.

Another major issue that Polizzotti handles with great care and detail is the slow but steady journey of Breton and his companions towards radical politics. Having seized control of a magazine that they renamed *Littérature* (the title was a gesture of contempt), Breton, Soupault, and Aragon got their first real taste of power. After the deaths of Apollinaire and Vaché, and primed by an interest in Socialism that stemmed from their high school years, it was nevertheless the coming of Dada, especially in the long-awaited arrival in Paris of Tristan Tzara and in the alliance with painter-poet Francis Picabia, that created a bridge to the real world for these young writers. Dada yanked them out of whatever cubicles remained in ivory towers that the war had not demolished. Conceived as an attack on bourgeois values and sparked by the presence of the manic Tzara, who reveled in discord for its own sake, the Dada manifestations put these young men in front of hundreds of paying patrons in halls and theaters across Paris, finally shoving them face-to-face with "the people," who of course laughed uproariously at the side-show spectacle. While Breton and Aragon's first attempt, in 1920, to join the Communist Party would be rebuffed, he and the others inched forward, trying time and again to gain the good graces of the Comrades. The slow engagement in political action was one way of saying no to the hermetically sealed older generation of Symbolist poets. Indeed, activism seemed inevitable for Breton and his generation after the war, if they needed to feel that they had some stake in shaping (or at least thumbing their noses at) a world which had almost destroyed them. Maybe too the Surrealists turned to politics because they understood, if only on an unconscious level, the inefficacy of their poetry and art when it came to creating change in any realm but the artistic sphere. The double-think here, remember, is that the Surrealist position rejected "literature" as an honorable enterprise at the same time that Breton and others lived off the sales of paintings purchased from friends or given to them for critical services rendered. Poetry that lacked a popular appeal and eschewed an ethical responsibility had to be compensated by a politics that resolved to change the world, and this is exactly where the Surrealists got stuck, for they had neither the numbers (the French group may have boasted sixty members at its apogee) nor the commitment to lay down their

pens and dirty their hands. The twenty-year sparring match between the young men who felt that they had a vision of their own to contribute to Marxism and the intransigent party hacks reads like a comic opera played on a seesaw. Party heavies neither understood nor cared about Lautréamont and automatic writing, and when Breton (in his fifteen minutes as a Party member) was assigned to a section of the Paris gas workers union, the hopelessness of the affair reached its nadir. Breton, who loathed "work" and only intermittently held patronage jobs at the Gallimard publishing house or as collector and literary commentator for wealthy dress-designer Jacques Doucet, was ill-equipped to understand what it meant to punch in every day, seven days a week, fifty weeks a year. The system of wealth and connections that for the most part sustained him (albeit mostly in semi-impoverished conditions) was exactly what he and his comrades were supposed to be working to destroy. The hunt for the "marvelous" in everyday life, at least as practiced by Breton and company, posited the kind of leisure time that very few modern writers and artists have ever had at their disposal, not to mention working-class people. Those who could not follow the program, and the wives and families of those who did, suffered at the hands of the "visionaries." Writers like Robert Desnos, whom Breton saluted in the first Manifesto as one who "has fully justified the hope I placed and Surrealism," but who practiced journalism to eat, were expelled. Reading about the "pure" life that Breton and some of his confreres aspired to, one can't but be reminded that William Carlos Williams managed to raise two sons, support a wife, and still work full-time at the doctor's trade, all while he wrote a shelf full of books.

This leads to one of the thorniest issues of modernism, particularly Surrealism, in which the personal unconscious was pried open and its products distributed, sometimes wholesale, as art. What about the relationship of the kind of prose and poetry that Breton and his comrades produced in relation to the needs of ordinary people, even intelligent people? There's no doubt, and nothing new in the fact, as far as art movements go, that Surrealism was an elitist coterie; and there's no doubt that the movement produced extraordinary work. Is it the lot of the artist to cheat on bourgeois society, to become in fact a parasite, sucking at the belly of the beast in order to survive? How are we sustained today, and for what purpose are we sustained, by this work? Breton is a difficult writer to read by anyone's estimation; is that what we are to settle for? Or does the artist have a larger responsibility to make himself or herself comprehensible, one that modernists have played fast and loose with for a long, long time? (Most artists don't really want to face these issues, it seems to me; and anyone who raises them is immediately accused of being an enemy of the avant-garde.) Else, the fate that Breton most feared, to end up as "mere literature," to fall

into the dark and bottomless briefcases of the professors, where all the tenured jobs are swimming around.

Finally, *Revolution of the Mind* raises the issue of the "search for the marvelous" itself. What was Breton and his group looking for in the streets, in their dreams, and in the automatic texts that they produced? Certainly "to change life," to liberate themselves from the ego-ridden behavior that riddled their enterprise even as they sought ego-dissolution in collective action and creation. They sought liberty, they sought love, they sought heightened states of being through chance operations (the visits to the flea markets, the hypnotic sleeps, the exquisite corpse parlor games) that would restore them to a childhood purity, to the Garden of Eden that had long failed them as a reference point. They sought a wholeness that the century of the two wars and endless political strife and poverty conspired to tear to pieces. Though Breton dabbled in astrology and magic (and his engagement with the works of the hermeticist Eliphas Lévi, one of the cornerstones of Anna Balakian's important study of Breton published in 1971, which Polizzotti makes little use of), he was soundly, and I think rightly, criticized by René Daumal for exhibiting the lack of a wider consciousness in the latter's "Open Letter to André Breton" in 1930. I quote from Mark Polizzotti's translation of the essay, which appeared in his 1992 collection of Daumal essays, *The Powers of the Word*:

> And in the area of positive research, what have you done since the founding of Surrealism? What have you done, surrounded by certain individuals whose presence at your side never ceases to amaze us? Nine-tenths of those who claim or have claimed the title of "Surrealist" have done no more than apply a technique you discovered. As such, they have only managed to create clichés that render it unusable. So that now I should go to you to indulge in your little parlor games, in those pathetic and piddling experiments with what you so inappropriately call the "surreal"? For such entertaining discoveries as the "exquisite corpse" and automatic writing (alone or in groups), I should leave the whole technical apparatus that the *Grand Jeu* [Daumal's group] is working to build, and to which each of us brings his share of resources! We have, in answer to your *amusing science*, the study of all the processes of depersonalization, of telepathy, of clairvoyance, of mediumism; we have the unlimited field (in every conceivable mental direction) of Hindu yoga, the systematic confrontation of the lyrical and dreamlike fact with the teachings of occult tradition (but *to hell* with the *picturesque*

> in magic), and those of the so-called primitive mind . . . and we're not finished yet.

What is most disturbing about this very important book is that it too practices the refusal that was made by Breton and his generation, who swept away any metaphysical perspective on the Surrealist enterprise with the same hand that reached out for the "marvelous." That hand had to be satisfied with occasional *frissons* rather than the rewards that might have come from a sustained, disciplined quest. Reading Polizzotti's superb account of the composition of *The Magnetic Fields* by Breton and Philippe Soupault in 1919, on the verge of the transition from Dada to Surrealism, gives me the chills:

> As Breton had feared, his "dangerous book" was beginning to take its toll, particularly as the speed of writing increased. "Despite everything, we could not continue," he confessed. "And hallucinations lay in wait. I don't believe I'm exaggerating when I say that it couldn't go on any longer." He later said that automatic writing worked on [him and Soupault] "very much as drugs do." At the end of the allotted eight days, fearing for his mental stability, Breton hastily terminated the experiment.

A methodology that leads to madness, to the destruction of spirit rather than to the discovery and deepening of the transpersonal, is no method at all—witness Lautréamont, witness Rimbaud, witness Vaché. What Breton and Soupault were probing was the personal unconscious, fraught with all the paranoia and fear that waits to leap out at us if we have no wider perspective. The experience of the "marvelous" is transitory; it is not the experience of awe that comes with the realization of the sacred. What do we do with this Surrealism that long ago, as Robert Desnos insisted, has passed into the public domain?

Before turning to Donald Revell's new translation of *Alcools*, let me note that my name appears among those of many people offered thanks by Mark Polizzotti in his Acknowledgments, and that some of my and Zack Rogow's translations of Breton's poems (*Earthlight*) are referred to, sometimes quoted, and sometimes altered by Polizzotti. No money changed hands. And all I did to earn the author's gracious thanks was to tell him, a long time ago, when he pondered the project of this biography: "Do it. Nobody can do it better than you will." I'm glad I did.

What should Apollinaire's Al*cools* be called in English? It's always struck me as strange that the title of what may be "the" modernist volume

of French poetry continues to defy translation. Perhaps by now it's almost too late to give the book any other title than *Alcools,* which can't mean a lot to the audience for whom it is presumably intended: those who don't read French. So it has gone, however, through Anne Hyde Greet's translation (published 1965, and now evidently out of print, since the jacket of the Wesleyan book insists that "this is the only version of this seminal work of French Modernism currently available in the United States"), and William Meredith's (1964) version, not to mention the Ur-volume of Apollinaire translation, Roger Shattuck's 1949-or-so *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire,* published by New Directions, where his selection from the volume also gives the French title.

But we know that *alcool* means "alcohol," the quainter "spirits," and (the Harrap's dictionary tells us) "*U.S.:* hard liquor." A title like *Booze* would be off the mark, and one that I long favored, *Drinks,* maybe isn't much of an improvement. *Alcohols* summons up visions of the rubbing variety (which in the U.S. is also one of the meanings of the French noun), and *Spirits,* alas, is too metaphysical. What about *Hard Stuff?* Nah, too slangy. Maybe we could settle for the neon sign of the package store and call this book *Liquors.* One could do worse. Maybe even *Alcohol* would serve, if it wasn't for that nagging plural. . . . I suppose that Apollinaire was thinking of each of these poems as a drink of hard liquor, some of them short stiff lyrical belts, others fantastic concoctions looped with fruits and drilled by exotic syrups.

Which is to say that the absence of any discussion of this famous book's title constitutes the first strike against Revell's translation. Then, strike two, there are no notes (many of the references in these poems are hardly transparent), and the translator's few pages of introduction don't help much. Finally, strike three you're out, the translations themselves are pretty dreadful, in fact so dreadful that one wonders how this book came to be published in the first place. What we d*on't* need is Revell's misconceived Apollinaire; what we *do* need is a collection of the first-rate Apollinaire translations that poets like Ron Padgett and Michael O'Brien have been doing for years. Revell's work reads like notebook translation (I'm thinking of my own notebooks full of Apollinaire translations): an interesting start, but you know that the final poem-in-English is a million revisions away.

What could have convinced Wesleyan (not to mention Revell) to publish such a poor piece of work? The mere fact that, as of now, "this is the only version of this seminal work of French Modernism currently available in the United States"? Well, a*lmost* available, since Revell has seen fit to cut three poems from the text:

> This translation of the original 1913 Éditions Gallimard *Alcools* is complete, with the exception of three poems: "Merlin et la

> vieille Femme," " Le Larron," and "L'Érmite." These exceptions were all composed much earlier than the rest of the collection and do not, I feel, share in its true project and accomplishment. In every other instance, this translation preserves Apollinaire's original order.

Apollinaire's original order is preserved, which perhaps means we should be grateful that the sequence of the poems hasn't been juggled; but his original text has been tampered with. Revell may not feel that these poems "share in [the book's] true project and accomplishment," as he tells us in a prefatory note, but the poet who wrote them evidently did. So, finally, we do not even have what the book jacket claims that we have.

To illustrate what I mean when I say that these translations aren't very good, let me offer the shortest poem in *Alcools* as a specimen case:

Chantre

Et l'unique cordeau des trompettes marines

Revell gives us

Singer

And only one in the world chord ocean horns

The title is fine, but in offering his version of this one line, the translator strains after what can't, in fact, be translated into English. Apollinaire was obviously entranced by the puns: *cordeau* (which means "string") also contains "horn" (even "body," *corps*) "of water." *Trompettes marines* can be translated literally as "sea/ocean trumpets." Hence, "And the only/single water-horn of the ocean trumpets." (Revell's "world" is simply not in the French, and his "chord"—the French word for a musical chord is *accorde*—isn't there, either) What we actually have here, though, is what appears to be a found poem, part of the dictionary definition of the rather strange musical instrument called the trumpet-marine. The trumpet-marine, though, isn't a brass instrument at all; it is a bowed instrument which *has a single string*. So the poem must be translated literally: "And the single string of the trumpets-marine." Admittedly this is not much fun in English, but the jumble of incomprehensibilities that Revell offers to the unsuspecting reader simply won't wash.

One can turn to almost any translation in this book and find much to challenge on the level of accuracy. In that great poem of grief, "À la Santé," written when the poet was held in custody and accused of having stolen

the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre, we find *"Une mouche par le papier à pas menus/ Parcourt mes lignes inégales,"* which Revell renders: "Parsing my words a fly patrols/ The paper I write on." "Parsing" is clever, but *parcourir* means "to travel through, wander, scour; to examine cursorily or glance at something." Revell wants to make the fly a *flic*, a charming idea but not one sustained by a reading of the text. And what happened to *inégales,* which means "uneven," since the poet has had to draw lines on his writing paper, paper presumably supplied to him by the prison? (One can't pick and choose among which words one will translate.) My shot at this passage would read something like: "On the paper with tiny steps a fly/ Wanders my ill-drawn lines." The point here is that even the fly is free, while the poet is in chains.

Examples such as these can be multiplied *ad nauseam.* Though any translation can be picked at, there are too many false steps and omissions for this translation to be honored. What is most inadmissible, though, is the tone of the translation, which presents Apollinaire not as the graceful word-musician that he was, but as an oaf with a tin ear. This Revell knows, and attempts to justify in his introduction:

> At present, under the burden of canons and the burden of language's deep complicity with countless atrocities, the very making of poems requires audacity. And if the audacity is well-intended, it requires a certain awkwardness as proof of its unrehearsed refusal to comply with silence. I have attempted a new translation of *Alcools* because, as a poet and as a reader of poetry, I feel lonely for joy and for the spur of joy. In my task, I have been constantly reminded by the poems themselves that transformation always begins in awkwardness and disproportion. Therefore I chose to distort certain moments of syntax deliberately to reproduce Apollinaire's verbal and thematic strayings. . . . I chose to translate many passages in *Alcools* as "incorrect" mixes of high and low diction, of latinate and slang, of abstracted concretes and concretized abstractions, because it is just such mixes that have made Apollinaire so enabling to our contemporary poets.

This kind of jargon doesn't convince me. Translation may well begin in "awkwardness and disproportion," but it had better well end as something else for it to be worth the effort, or the reading. Revell's rendering of the refrain of *Le Pont Mirabeau* will have to stand as kind of tombstone for the clunkiness of the book's entire soundscape: "The night

is a clock chiming/ The days go by not I." [*"Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure/ Les jours s'en vont je demeure"*]

Perhaps, though, there's a generous tack we can take. Any translation, good or bad, can be *useful*. As it stands, Revell's Apollinaire, still in its workbook stage, could have been a good, even a very good translation if the poet had kept at it longer and harder. Maybe that's why it's been handed to us, the way Apollinaire himself (and his young admirer André Breton) kept themselves open to a sudden piece of inspiration. Perhaps the translator of the next (or first great) version of *Alcools* will receive the necessary jolt to start his or her project after thumbing through Revell's Apollinaire.

—BILL ZAVATSKY

PHARMAKO/POEIA Plant Powers, Poisons, and Herbcraft by Dale Pendell, Foreword by Gary Snyder, Mercury House, SF, 1995

This is a strange, dangerous, and finally wonderful book. The writer, "a poet, software engineer, and longtime student of ethnobotany", leads us along what he calls The Poison Path through a tangled forest of psychoactive power plants, "green allies." He provides us with a "Phenomenological Taxonomy of Psychotropes" to guide us, classifying this vegetal gallimaufry into five categories: Thanatopathia (tasting of death—e.g. tobacco); Inebriantia (relating to drunkeness, e.g. wine, beer, aqua vitae); Euphorica (plants bearing pleasure, e.g. opium); Phantastica (visionary plants, e.g. peyote, yage); Exitantia (provokers and agitators, e.g. coffee, khat, cocaine, speed). (In this volume he deals with the first three, and a few others. In an upcoming volume he will deal with the last two.)

Pendell creates an elaborate mandala to illustrate this, a pentagram that relates each of these categories to a different planet and connects all to all with an elaborate system of pentacles and circles. Throughout the book he gives us tables of correspondences relating the plants to alchemy, the Buddha realm, animals, art forms, bodily parts, historical age, gemstone,

geometry, logical operator, etc. etc. basically what you will or whatever comes to Pendell's fertile and ever active mind. He mixes botanical descriptions with poems and exhortations, quotes from Eddington and Boehme with Zen koans, chemical formulas for extracting alkaloids with quotations in German from Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, instructions on how long to hold in a toke of *Salvia divinorum* with stories of Taoist sages coming down from the mountains.

Pendell revels in the esoteric and the strange, the long Latinate word, Greek quotations and extended etymologies. The book is in the tradition of imaginative scholarship and playful erudition found in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*, medieval and Renaissance miscellanies, Rabelais elaborate spoofs of theology and pedantry, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Sterne's *Slawkenbergius' Tale*, Graves' *The White Goddess*. If you like this sort of thing, and don't take it all too seriously, it is a joy to wander though the text, looking up Greek and Latin references, checking sources, finding "dicotyledonous" and "kavalactone" in the extensive glossary, learning all about about "extraction under reflux" and "thujone, an isomer of camphor found in the essential oils of wormwood, sage, cedar and tansy, one of the major active ingredients of absinthe."

What unifies it all is Pendell's voice: learned, quirky, funny, full of drug lore and stories of whole villages in Europe whacked out on ether, "the streets smelling like hospital rooms." The voice jumps back and forth between sense and non-sense, sandwiching learned philosophical disquistions between goofy rimshots of inspired rant. On ether:

> *The Ally What is the collateral damage of the pharmacist's pipette?*
>
> Occasionally I have an insight that would lead me to despair of any nobility of human nature.
>
> *The difference between the ba-bá and the nothing is significant: there are political implications.*
>
> And that the difference between being and nothingness has political implications is astounding.
>
> *There are those who would repress the question of the difference between the ba-bá and the ba-bá ba-ba-bá as having any significance.*
>
> *ba-bá ba-ba-bá or ba-bá-ba ba-bá*

Since the book is so packed with learning: chemical and alchemical, historical and philosophical, with socio-religio-thaumaturgical drug lore and magical correspondences on virtually every page, it's hard to judge the accuracy of much of what Pendell delivers to us. The scholarly underpinnings are so immense, so universal, that without a knowledge of all of the above and then some, it's hard to decide how seriously to take him.

Well, one area I know a good bit about is Inebriantia (all jokes about Irishmen and the crayture and Pat and Mike and the Bartender insert here . . .): wine, beer, and related categories. I teach about wine, make wine, judge wine professionally, wrote a book about the history of beer, lectured at the Smithsonian about beer, etc., to establish the bona fides. So I went through this section with extra care, checking out all the references, looking carefully over the chemistry and techniques described, doing, in short, a "scholarly" critique. And I couldn't come up with so much as a quibble. All Pendell's sources were impeccable and his information absolutely up to date. So while I certainly can't judge his alchemy or his pharmacological expertise, he's bang on about the booze and a lot more fun to read than many of the "prismatic luminiscence" school of wine writers. Which bodes well for the rest of his information.

Then there's the danger. This book and what it describes could kill you. Pendell opens the way to a Path of Poison that can lead the foolish, the weak, and the uninitiated to disaster. The substances described are, literally, poisons. And many—nicotine, alcohol, heroin, opium—can lead to addiction, overdose, death. Pendell says:

> Our way is the way of poisons. Mercury,
> the poisonous changeling.
>
> Some plants
> like to lap up to you, doglike.
> Others hit you like a mallet.
>
> Once they get in you, they've got you. From then on, the plant-poison is part of you.
> Our way is the way of poison. If you want sacredness, highly evolved consciousness, spiritual magnificence, holiness, sweetness, beauty, and truth,
>
> GOOD!
> Aspiration is halfway-there.
> But our way is the path of poison. The path of sulphur.

Everything is poison, nothing is poison.
—Paracelsus

He warns again and again about the dangers and rates the toxicity of various drugs, including alcohol and nicotine, two of the most lethal. He tells us in The Poison Path I:

> "The matter of the *stumbling brother* is the cross of the Poison Path: on this trope turn the intersecting greater and lesser vehicles, the right hand path and the left. Skilled poisoners avoid ruin, but. . .ruin may come on her own wings."

He says, "Never share poisons with the unlucky." But goes on:

> "The danger, of course, is that you who are reading this consider yourself, ipso facto, one of the lucky."

Gary Snyder sums it up in his graceful and wise introduction:

> "This is a book about danger: dangerous knowledge, even more dangerous ignorance, and dangerous temptations by the seductions of addictions both psychic and cellular. It is a book which requires that one not be titillated by romantic ideas of self-destruction. I hope and believe it will benefit human beings and the plant world too. It is not for everyone—but neither is mountaineering."

But finally, this book is full of wonders—a magical journey through the mind of a thaumaturge. Pendell is a member of a clan of visionaries, plant people and seers, who are testing the limits that seem to divide levels of existence. One way to look at these poisons, these drugs that can kill or make us see, is as transmitters between realms of being. If, as some think, we human beings are matter becoming conscious of it (her?) self, then these "vegetal sacraments" are the means by which she comes to know herself. Anyone who has seen sunlight suddenly become a shower of gold coins in an aspen grove after two hits of Humboldt County *sinsemilla*, knows this well. Pendell is telling us that the green world gives us what we need to see. What she gives is dangerous and can lead us to death or madness or the gutter, but there is a path that we can take. Others have, and Pendell brings this whole rowdy visionary company to his pages. Perhaps they can guide and protect us on the way, he says, or at least we can all get loaded on the poison of our choice and have a good time telling stories about gods and heroes and the holy plants.

—DENIS KELLY

Contributor Notes

Readers of the Robin Blaser Section in *Sulfur* 37 may be interested in the Fall 1995 issue of *West Coast Line,* which, among other things, includes more material from the Vancouver Conference honoring Blaser. A copy is $10, and is available at 2027 East Academic Annex, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC V5A 1S6. WILL ALEXANDER has new work forthcoming in *Caliban, Apex of the M,* and *First Intensity.* He will be part of the guest faculty at Naropa, summer 1996. T.J. ANDERSON III lives in Binghamton NY; his chapbook, "At last round up. . ." will be published in the spring of 1996 by Lift Books. STEPHEN BARBER's recent books are *Antonin Artaud: Blows an Bombs,* and *Fragments of the European City.* His text on Guyotat is the result of a number of interviews with the writer conducted in Paris. Sun & Moon will publish CHARLES BERNSTEIN's *Republics of Reality: Poetry 1975–1995* in late 1996, he is host/co-producer of LINEbreak poetry radio (http://wings.buffalo.edulepc). JAYNE CORTEZ is the author of nine books of poetry and producer of six recordings. "Now I dig up patinas" is from her book *Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere,* to be published by High Risk/Serpent's Tail in 1996. IAN DEMSKY is an Ann Arbor high school student taking classes at EMU. Rodent Press in Boulder has recently published CLAYTON ESHLEMAN 's *Nora's Roar.* DAN FEATHERSTON lives in Tucson; recent and forthcoming work in *First Intensity, Talisman,* and *Central Park.* DENNIS FORMENTO is the editor of *Mesechabe: the Journal of Surre(gion)alism;* his most recent publication is a chapbook, *William Faulkner Lives and Dies in Camelot* (BullHead Press). ROBERT HALE lives and works in NYC; his poetry has appeared in *Denver Quarterly, The World,* and *The Impercipient.* LINDSAY HILL's most recent book is *Kill Series* (Arundel). His newly-completed book-length manuscript is entitled *NdjenFerno.* LAIRD HUNT is studying Lettres Modernes at the Sorbonne; he has had work in *Talisman* and *The World.* LISA ISAACSON is teaching English in Ankara, Turkey. DENIS KELLY writes, teaches, and gardens in Oakland CA and on Creighton Ridge in western Sonoma County. KEVIN KILLIAN, born in 1952, lives in San Francisco, and is the author of a novel, *Shy,* and a book of memoirs, *Bedrooms have Windows;* he has recently finished a biography of Jack Spicer, co-written with Lew Ellingham.

WENDY MCCLURE was recently a Teaching-Writing Fellow at the University of Iowa; she is currently at work on a manuscript entitled *Crenellation*. English poet and translator CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON has taught since 1966 in Germanic Languages, University of Texas at Austin; Sheep Meadow Press will publish his *Intimate Chronicles* in 1996. JOE NAPORA publishes BullHead, a journal of new poetry. JOHN OLSON'S poetry has most recently appeared in *Volt, B-City,* and *New American Writing;* an essay about the representation of poets in movies will soon appear in *First Intensity*. JED RASULA's *The American Poetry Wax Museum* was recently published by National Council of Teachers of English; *Imagining Language,* an anthology edited with Steve McCaffery, is forthcoming from MIT Press. PETER REDGROVE and PENELOPE SHUTTLE are poets living in Cornwall, England; they are the authors of *The Wise Wound* and have recently published their *Alchemy for Women*. ELENI SIKELIANOS currently lives in Paris on a 1995 NEA Fellowship in Poetry; she has forthcoming chapbooks from *Lyric &* and *Trembling Ladders* presses. "The Mountain Spirit" is a key section from GARY SNYDER's recently-completed "Mountains & Rivers," which Counterpoint Press will publish in late 1996. A new collection of GUSTAF SOBIN'S poetry, *Breaths' Burials,* has recently been published by New Directions, as has *By The Bias of Sound: Selected Poems 1974-1994* by Talisman House. Recent publications by ROBERTO TEJADA, who lives in Mexico City, include art writings in *Third Text, Boletín de Curare, Luna córnea* and *The Boston Book Review*. ALLEN S. WEISS is most recently author of *Phantasmic Radio* (Duke University Press), and *Mirrors of Infinity: The French Formal Garden and 17th Century Metaphysics* (Princeton Architectural Press). JASON WEISS's writings, both creative and critical, have appeared widely; he lives in Brooklyn. PAMELA WYE is an artist whose work was written up in the January 1996 issue of *Art In America*. BILL ZAVATSKY published his cotranslation of André Breton's *Earthlight* (Sun & Moon Press) in 1993.

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Sulfur

FALL 1996

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AIME CÉSAIRE

from CONFIGURATIONS

(Tr. from the French by
Clayton Eshleman
and Annette Smith)

Nothing delivers but the obscurity of speaking

torpor does not speak.
Thick. Heavy. Gross.
A precipitate. Who dared?
the quicksanding awaits at the edge.
At the edge of the sludge.
ah!
    there's no speech but in outburst.
To crush the sludge.
    to crush.

Coiling of the great thirst of being
spiral of the great need and great rebirth of being
nexus of algae and guts
nexus of the flood and ebb of being.

To speak of a delirium uniting the entire universe
to the surrection of a rock!

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

LIKE THIS

I put my dolly's dress on
I put my dolly's pants on
I put my dolly's hat on
And she looks like this
—Woody Guthrie

Sandblasts median procurement till spec-
ified tolerance—a gurgle a day
keeps the lineator aggrieved. Although
abjection never leaves you humming the
scenery when you enter right. Men
are from Macy's, women are from Gimbel's.
The shut-away was shut-in with shoe string.
"Keep those calls coming!" *This is the worst i-*
dea I ever had. Enunciated
or denounced, doused or detonated. Nev-
er sleep too long on a good conscience—the
world's not resting. "Both my Dads are over
six feet." These tears burn a hole in my pock-
et no bigger than the thimble on Tom
Thumb's thumb: big enough to drain the world. REAL
DADS DO DIAPERS. The map of Canada
reflected in the mirror looked like "US".
It's not the pan it's the burner. It was
a dream of a charade of a chance en-
counter with a pantomime & you were
wearing limes. **Let the hole out of this tub!**
I have put my order in affairs &
my musket in formaldehyde. GUYS LIKE
GUYS WHO GLOAT IN GUNSHIPS. *It's the lepre-*

chaun in you. Flush with days' inconclusive
display (forays). A month of Mondays. Roll
over Leibnitz, tell old Descartes get loose.
She melted in the noon day sun like so
much jello at a brazier pull. *New balm*
splints team. Fragrant chill imperils aban-
doned evacuation (evocation).
Make mine schmutz.

Till the top spills off the biblioteque
& the ground is splattered with tattoos.
Till Mildred mows the carbon slidings.
Till marsupials metabolize Mill Rift & Vivian
inventories the resurgent bumbles.
Till insouciance corroborates fact
on the ratcheting slopes of Mt. Interlope.

"Be quiet, dummyhead!"
Running onto
plane as door is closing, sitting in back
as it takes off down the main street of a
small town.
"And slow Joe showed his mother that
he had covered the holes in the contain-
er and none of the hot soup had leaked out."
If I have to come in and get you you'll
never swim again.
Sets the motor hum-
ming with garrulous incandescence.
Tum-
ble dry invective, as if you could re-
cant what you cannot sing.
Seance on Tenth
Avenue.
(Twisting tremulously in
the teetering tugs.)
For example, when
the trees sway in the breeze.
Fingered in the

line-up she forgave the errant witness
while condemning the circumstance.
As if
our mass culture inoculates us from
the need for any other kind of cul-
ture.
Slowing the way with trellises &
codicils, colloquy of inversion's
munificent paraphernalia.
Pumped up & then sucked dry.
Propriety
injures its own propriety; which is
to say the only good order is a
dead order or do sequins sparkle to
a tourniquet's timbre.
One law for the
lion & the lamb
is America:
an even playing field except for the
ones that own it.
Sorry when you mean glad-
handled.
Unfurl the flag to corral the nitwits!
If a computer could talk we
would not understand it.
(Layaways wast-
ing away in the imaginary
dream.)
Then again, two legs are better than
no legs at all.
Floor it & then liqui-
date yourself.
ALL FAILS FINAL.

"Then won't you buy my illusions
Almost new, gently used."

Laced with absolute grimace. If you've got

your wealth you've got next-to-nothing, good hedge
nonetheless. *Instinctively impaired.* At
Royaumont, the coefficient of sil-
liness was just around the hospital
corners. *That's the worst idea I ever
had.* In poetry, being off duty is
part of the job. Take it & pleat it. GIRLS
LIKE GUYS WHO GIGGLE. It's an irrecon-
cilable difference among us. Every
soul a rhapsody. Lost originals at
the tip of your fingers, fractoids of the
darkling kangaroo. A fissure of speech-
lessness framed by stutter of molten fab-
rication. Planting an idea in a
beanbag. **Schools are made to be broken.** Sur-
er than a pickax in an banana factory, implod-
ing swamps head windward. As if the galosh-
es could replace the rubbers, the goshes
overtake the rudders. *Tool and die*—thus
passes. A crushing croon squabbling with Brown-
ian inaction. "Go soak a rabbit
& then repeat that!" Terribly tenta-
tive, terminally tacit. *And if I
mention Warren Sonbert, how can I ac-
knowledge that his films illumine the shad-
ow his death casts, knowing how hollow that
is.* How his grace mocks the scourge of what he
refuses to name, as if to name hon-
ors. "The body dies, the body's beauty
lives." The song is not in the melody
but what comes after, in the space between
cup & lip. For we have been spared nothing—
but nothing is the one thing we might spare.
Bobbing & tossing in the crank. MIDGET
RATS INVADE PLUTO. Little by little,
no fooling. *This* is what I always want-
ed, to return to the replica of
the simulation in which I am borne.

MICHAEL MCCLURE

from APE MAN

NOTHING
TO
LOSE

black cardboard flashlite
in
my hand,
Mickey Mouse and Goofy
of rubber
under
one arm,
I stand in the basement
of the glacier,
THE LONE RANGER'S
BLACK MASK
over my eyes,
and
I
stare
at
NO SHAPE
in the light
that reaches beyond
the blackness
to the nowhere
behind the eyes

and
I
invent

the sacrosanct
with smell of lavender
powder
and
lacy boudoir

my
self
in the future

chained to my pain
AND
I
LAUGH
BECAUSE
I
AM
A MOUSE

A
WOLF

a cross-section of trees
rings around planets
in
the state
of
AGONY

AND
I
GO DEAD

DEAD AS THE BONES
of this elephant
stripped by poachers
in
the Serengetti,
and I bend over

in the mild sun
taking a piece
of the tooth
from the skull
in
my
hand
I
LOVE
YOU

No,
that's my
self
frozen
in
pain
in the ice

arm raised

my mouth
shouting a cry

PROMETHEUS
with no hungry vulture
only
the soul
that I'm building
echoing
back
allowing
the tendrils
of my body
to flow
in
one
direction
as I stare

GROWL

HOWL

CRY OUT

seeing you
in the morning

as the sweater
slips over your head
and onto the sheathe,
the soul, of your
B
O
D
Y

Your small breasts
and nipples of temples,
the blue of your eyes

as
I PISS

on the woman
kneeling before me
in the blackness
beside the pond
be
neath
the stars

STARVED
TO
SEE
INTO
the blackness

BUT
beyond the blackness
is
NOWHERE
where
I
am born
and matter
BEGINS
and the President roars
like silk and the dying
elephant
trapped
just behind me
in the ice
where the flashlite
beam falls
making a keyhole

*

BABY PICTURES

CRUMBS OF GOLD

No
size

to
this

being
for which

I reach

TRUNK IN THE AIR
in the glacier

as it all pours
around me

as I melted out
of all things
lifted by the wings
all over
my body
BUT
IT

is more
like a pool

a pool spreading
as the baby fat is spread
over the face
and the parents worship
the eyes that trap

them
in the grasp
of a new spirit
hot out of their loins,
their thighs,
like
their memories
of how this happened
to them
and they
become spirits
of meat with gold
seemingly
flecked
through them
BUT
the whole
thing is to
KNOW

and
I
know
it all
BUT
it has edges
way out past where
I
can reach
with my senses

AT
THE
LIMITS
OF
THE
MOTH'S WORLD
OF
SENSES

I
AM
ALL
SENSE
ALL MEAT IS MEAT
is gold
or darkness
or
self

smiling at self

while an aura
of rose petals and eider down
flows in a pool
round
my head
on
the

floor

OLD MAN

BEING

being
born
into a baby
to grow into
an
APE MAN

OWNER OF A HOUSE
with
a black
car
with a breaking clutch

and dreams
of an open cabinet stripped
of its contents

STEAL CHAOS
and put it
in this cabinet
so
it
has
a shape
in the darkness
smiling at self
while an aura
of rose petals and eider down
flow in a pool round
my head
on
the
floor

and

I
HOLD

OUT
THE
CORN

in the woven basket

AND
THE
SHIT
that I am,
that Artaud denounces
moves curling
and breaking
in the clear pool
Blake says
I AM THE DESCENT
of Soul
into
MATTER
but
that's not right
not unless Soul
is the blackness
behind
my eyes

AND
EVEN

THE MOTH

has edges and spots

in the shapes

of the three owls

who
hoot
in
the glen

like the shit
roiling

in
the
pool

as the piss
falls

on her face or on the pink
cyclamen

that D. H. Lawrence sees
in the Italian forest

while the elephants
come out of the trees

AND
PARADE

around
in their childhoods
and parenthoods
and
a
zebra
passes by

and a mouse stirs

W.B. Keckler

ABORIGINAL (NUMBER TWO)

Mnemonic light of rushes.

You're tiny light inside a flare gem.

Caught encoding trees reaching wind
you say sound wallows there
in self-pity.

Red through cave walls.

Emu circles different levels
of consciousness,
eggs ready to sing-break.

Open the life-force again.
States of movement as the tendrils
of plants.

* * *

Large pink travels. I can't remember.
Are you an egg? And its rotund light?
Herringbone breath patterns cross desert,
celestial headgear against dark space.

* * *

Constellations cross an earthly singing
style and vanish in Milky Way Fish
singing low.

The city lit at desert's edge is leaking
straight poisons. Arrows alive.

All the crabs are emanating from its center.

Bush dreaming on my hands, sleeping.
My head is a mudhole.

The Dream walking into the vortext
wears a pretty headdress.

Are you sleepy two?

The message obliterates the world.
Obliterates the word,
and we are grateful.

Swallowing it whole, the music, star-mosaic and milk.

They stare and the stars begin to root.
Begin to root in their eyes.

They stare above into hot scrap and tile is done.

Welcome to the losing edge of breathing.

DAVE SHORTT

TWO POEMS

BETWEEN ICE AGES

ordovician limestone
    crushed and scarfed up

with precambrian iron
and timber first materializing
    2 billion years later
forming the malled
  westgate of the city .

a mobile
        god, with facility
  in constructing opaque or glassy
        views .

a gypsum sky to the south
to the north a blue of subsumed
                relaxation
  fuming above drifted,
        compacted sandstone .

where nut trees once flourished
a horticulture of popcorn
  hustles us through
    the planes of a screen-play
  (where is a head mounted
    on the Boom that moves
      through the neo-realisms of space-time

and the paleo-seasonalisms
of culture?)

desire is telethoned
across copper intricate as fingerprints
over the hinterlands to where hunters
stalk in fluorescence

delis are venisonless ,
are signed
with the encased entrails
of swine,
wherein a great passing is taking place:
the football of the biosphere
is being kicked & passed,
dropped here & there,
a mammoth in
the most memorable storm

MINUS 27 F.

red neon against intaglioed frost
on windowpane

steam in silhouette,
tenuous jinni
of warmth

flapping flags of the state,
of a precariously sewn dignity

as the traction of cars
on ice-streets

illuminated electrically,
trees as if embalmed
against encoded indoor laughter
phoned out past them & the dead poles,
quick as paisanos & fellahin've come
to phoneticize their mealtimes
(mediterranean restaurants icicled & feeding)

the fire hasn't gone out
since before Peking man
but how impossible to feel
the degree of warmth felt
by pre-Colombian folk
and did they enter winter without
aversion to things
frozen secular?
(unsacred salt preventing death-skid
while migrating)

stars flashing above storefront beer-words
enunciating another kind of mammal-glow:

somewhere critters
in vast concentration
over light year distances

staring irrational into
unconstellated furnaces,

eye into
fusioning eye

ANNE CORAY

THREE POEMS

VOWEL SOUNDS

"Insipid" for me is a cold word,
not dull, but willing a mean energy,
a missile in my mouth.

Granted, consonants may modulate the bounds,
but it's the quick stick of the short i
that fits in "bitter," "snip," or "flippant,"

as the soft, lazy o belongs in "cotton" or "flow."
A's have the aura of the sage:
they stand like an axiom of stability.

Who are the u's? The ugly ones.
The ones that range from "Brutus" to "slum,"
that inhabit "muck," "unscrupulous," and "klutz."

And there are those that speak of time—
long i's and e's—
lengthening "flight" and "memories."

Memories—whose first e is a shell.
a tender, eloquent bell
that rests within a petaled hour.
It is your feathered breath,
your lightened power,
your gentle motions
before you drift to sleep.

NEW IMAGE

When January in its thin blanket
filtered blue the coastline
of Tanalian

all that was lost
fluttered in an echo, pale yellow
over the snow's hard crust.

Knee-deep, on an ancient trail
I floundered and fell, face-first.
Tooth cut lip; it bled,

pooled onto the glaze of ice.
The moon was up.
I saw the wings of a red raven,

something flapped and cawed—
purple, and strong,
a mix of night and bird.

Lake Clark: Named in 1891 by reporter A.B. Schanz of the *Frank Leslie Illustrated Newspaper* expedition for John W. Clark, chief of the Nushagak Trading Post, who "discovered" the lake.
(quotations mine)

IN THE MARGIN

Qizhjeh Vena
"many peoples gather"
long before ink, the lake's
Dena'ina name.

This image, sketched
from the mound
and gorge of tongue:
campfires reflected
in glacial water.

Around them, bodies rise—
aged and unfledged bones,
thick forests, rock-
topped mountains.

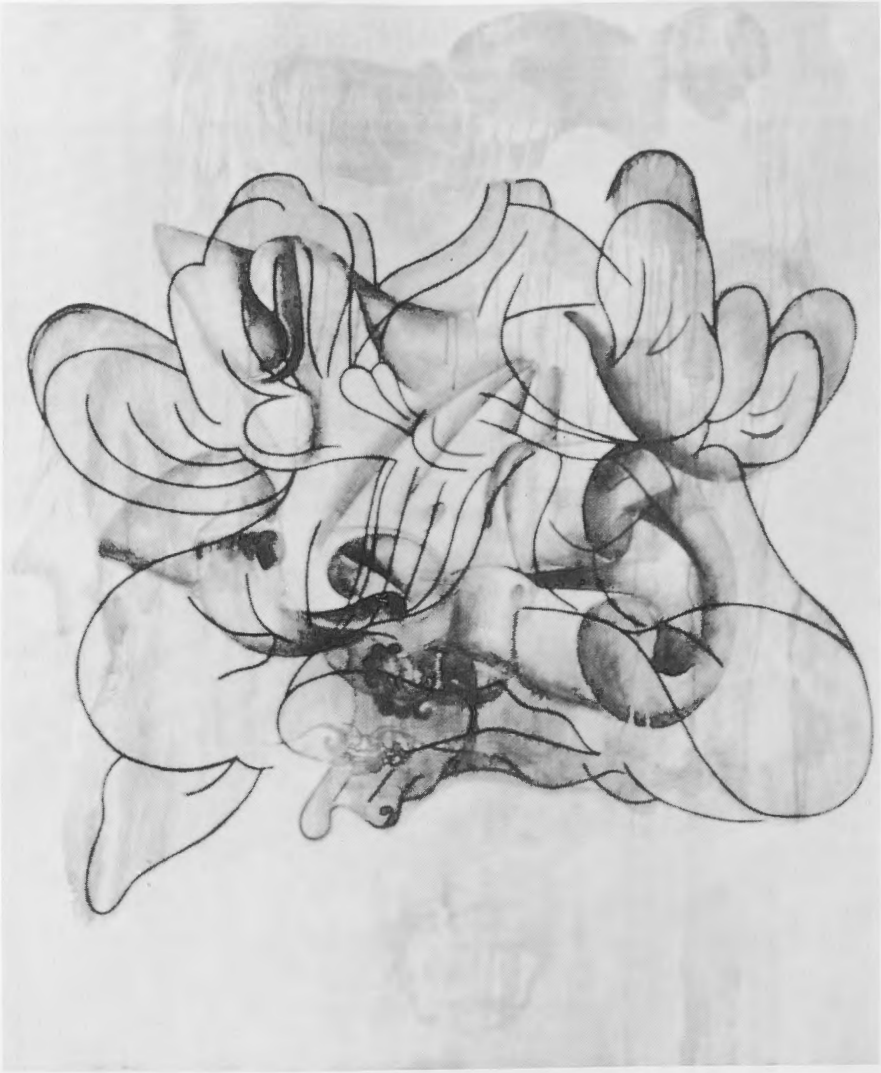
Something remains—
a flicker: long undated
passages, the press
of hand-sewn boots

made from skins
of vejex, caribou
k'uhda'i, moose.

EMILY CHANG

EIGHT PAINTINGS

Contested
Oil/Linen, 1995, 54" x 58"



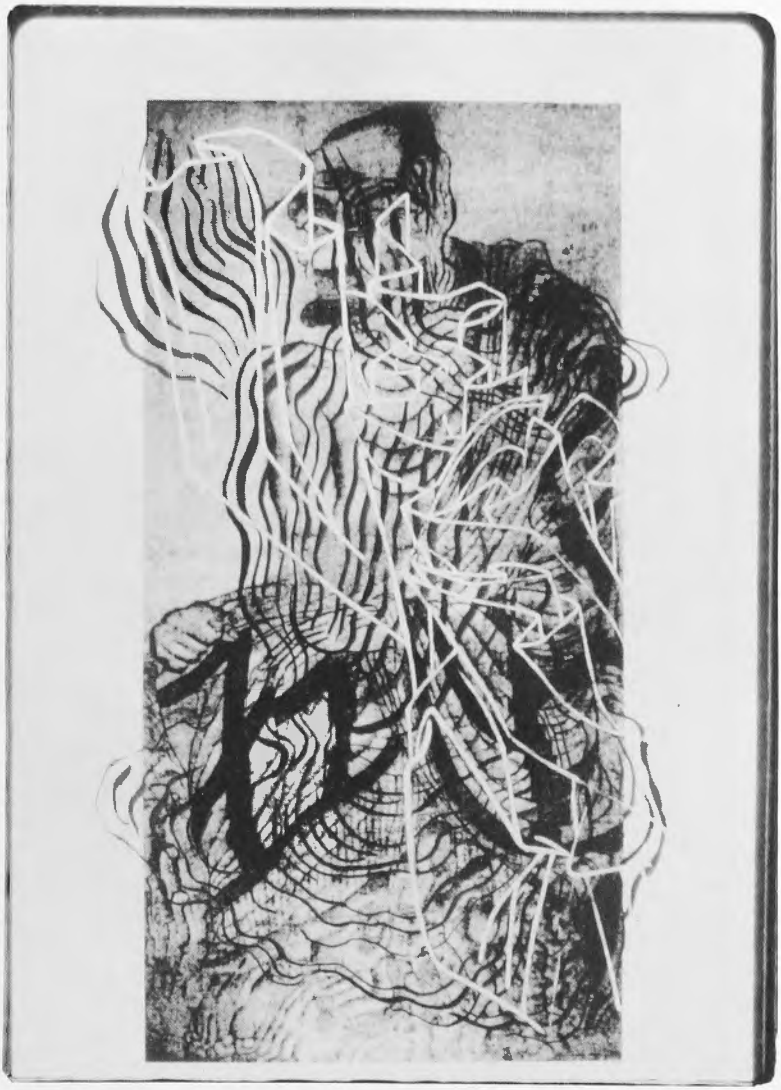
Shifting Fundamentals
Oil/Canvas, 1989/1995, 54" x 44"

Interior Conditions
Oil/Canvas, 1989/1995, 54" x 44"

Continuum
Oil/Linen, 1995, 54" x 48"

Untitled
Digital Iris Print, 1995, 46" x 34"

Untitled
Digital Iris Print, 1995, 46" x 34"



Untitled
Digital Iris Print, 1995, 46" x 34"

Comingle
Oil/Linen, 1995, 54" x 48"

PAMELA WYE

EMILY CHENG: EVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET

"Florid flying drapery," "busy play of line," "calligraphic elegance," "nervous excitement." J.J. Pollitt uses these phrases to describe Hellenistic sculpture in *Art and Experience in Classical Greece*, but they could also be used to describe Emily Cheng's recent paintings. Hellenistic sculpture reflected a period of social upheaval in Greece, when the balance, stability and restraint of Classical sculpture became impregnated with heightened emotion and motion, and a resurgence of Eastern influence evidenced by elaborate surface patterning in the ever increasing swirls of drapery.

Like a spider's web, the systematic yet furious crisscrossing of lines in Cheng's large-scale paintings, slowly reveals its pattern to the viewer's eye. The lines depict schematized drapery generally from Chinese sources—fragments of scroll paintings and cave paintings gleaned from the pages of art history books. This web of lines stretches across the front most surface of the paintings as though to hold in place the more loosely painted and illusionistically rendered fragments of draperies taken from European Renaissance paintings. In this power struggle between East and West, who's on top is both significant and not. The fine network of lines of the Chinese draperies obstructs a clear reading of the trompe l'oeil Renaissance draperies beneath, yet is itself in danger of being swallowed by these same denser draperies. As in "Contested" (1995), there's often a wildness in the swirling of the gestural forms that is maintained within a strictly schematized and controlled bigger picture. Cheng combines the busting out quality of Abstract Expressionism with the carefully plotted control of Abstract Minimalism.

Cheng's paintings are carefully planned and plotted. Working from reproductions in art history books, Cheng makes small schematized drawings of single images on translucent paper then begins to mix and match them. By the time they've reached the large-scale painting size (in the 60" x 72" to 54" x 48" range), the images have undergone several translations. Cheng scales up her images manually rather than using a projector—as do many artists using the post-modern strategy of appropriation—because, as she says, without mechanical decisions, she "relives the image with her body."

The body is of central importance in her paintings, but typically, Cheng eliminates heads, legs, arms—in short, any body part that would stick out from the apparel. (However, so far in her prints, she has preserved the presence of the body.) She has done this, she says, to eliminate the explicit narrative content of the personages, preferring instead to arrive at a feeling of gesture and psychology from the draperies alone.

One is struck by the centralized placement of the major forms in her paintings. This central form is made up of layers of diverse and fragmentary images that coalesce, nonetheless, into coherent bodies. Though the actual bodies are absent, they leave in their stead the billowing costumes—as though the body fled quickly, stirring the air and leaving its warm imprint in the fabric. The elimination of any body clues, like facial expression, that could help us ascertain character and motivation, confounds our desire for a strict narrative and instead forces us to focus on the abstract forms.

Interestingly, though made up entirely of representations of outer apparel from diverse cultures and epochs, Cheng's paintings often conjure up the turbulent viscera of the inner (albeit absent) body. Digestion—the mixing and churning and breaking down of discrete entities is, in this case, like the contents of a giant multicultural blender in its early cycle—before all differences have been broken down into a smooth homogeneity. The fragments of the diverse original images are still large enough to maintain their identity while swirling with each other toward a melded oblivion. Titles are instructive here—"Interior Conditions" (1989/1995), "Co-mingle" (1995), and "Conversion" (1995) support this reading of the processes of digestion. "Contested" (1995) implies that the co-mingling of interior conditions may not be smooth and harmonious, but rather fraught with struggles, resistances, and incompatibilities. The painting "Shifting Fundamentals" (1989/1995) is particularly evocative of internal organs taken out of their protective context—excised from the body—creating a clearly centralized image on a nearly blank ground, as though surgically removed for purposes of study. The "fundamentals," in this case, are the conventions of pictorial representation from divergent cultures—Renaissance chiaroscuro and Chinese linear depictions of surface patterns. But each of these "fundamentals" has itself been modified and stylized by Cheng through her use of 20th century painting conventions. In the case of the modeled passages of Renaissance drapery, she uses conventions of Abstract Expressionism—i.e., a painterliness that calls attention to its "accidental" incidents: drips of turpentine-thinned paint, dripping over background and foreground shapes alike (eliminating any "real" spatial illusionism), wide gestural brush strokes, smudges and passages where paint appears rubbed off from the distressed surface. And for the Chinese draperies, she uses a deadpan drawing style made up of a line of uniform thickness, not gestural

but carefully plotted like the line in instructional manuals for mechanical devices that illustrates 3-dimensionality while at the same time flattening the object into pure pattern.

When choosing works to accompany this article as black and white reproductions, it was necessary to eliminate many of Cheng's images because the contrast between forms in those works was arrived at through the juxtaposition of different colors, rather than through the use of lights and darks. And when these works are translated into black and white, the forms, without the contrasting colors, are difficult or impossible to distinguish. As, for example, in "Ceremony" (1995) (not reproduced here) where the overlay of a luminous cobalt blue line sings along the painting in vibrant contrast to the orangish earth tones of the background forms. Lush color is important in Cheng's work. One can sense a deliberate experimentation in her use of the play achieved between unlikely color combinations. For example, the stormy mood of "Contested," with its somber, predominantly olive green and black background figures from a Han Dynasty tomb relief, is contrasted by an ambiguous background/foreground passage of an achingly tender emerald green.

There's a game-like quality to the way the viewer's eye is invited to roam the mazes of these paintings. The eye seeks out the original singular image but can't help but be lured by shapes that are formed through the intersection of several disparate images. It's in the intervals and interstices that so much goes on in Cheng's paintings. This merging of disparate yet similar images creates tantalizing fractures and rifts that spur the viewer to reassemble, or mend the images but with the inevitability of re-piecing the parts "incorrectly." For the viewer, this experience approaches something like a painterly version of channel surfing—with its onslaught of nearly abstract figurative fragments snatched from their context of origin. For example, "Continuum" combines a stiff collar from a 17th century Spanish painting, a Byzantine Christ holding a book, and finally a Bodhisattva. But my eye keeps focusing on an amoebic shape slightly below and right of center that is created through the intersection of two humps of the collar and the central draping loop in Christ's lap.

Despite the orderly procedure Cheng uses to construct her paintings, there's a scribbly, tangled, furious quality to these works. The solidly rendered centralized figure that seems to represent a certain authority, or overbearing presence (a legacy of European Renaissance tradition—in its turn a legacy of Classical Greece), is as though scratched out and defaced with the barbed lace of the linear decorative line derived from the Chinese tradition. It seems a battle is raging between the weighty materiality of the solidly rendered forms and the field of linear energy that overlays it. A struggle between the mismatched forces of materiality and spirituality?

Perhaps. But that may only scratch the surface. For in a period when identity politics has informed so much contemporary art, Emily Cheng has devised a pictorially subtle yet fundamental way to bridge the rift between the complex and opposing forces of not only her own personal heritage but of the wider world of cultural dichotomies where one is used to hearing that East is East and West is West.

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

"ALL MY VAST/ JOURNEYING SENSIBILITY": BARBARA GUEST'S RECENT WORK

Parts of this paper were delivered at the Festschrift for Guest held at Brown University in April 1994; Guest's books mentioned here are *Fair Realism* (Sun & Moon, 1989), *Selected Poems* (Sun & Moon Press, 1995), *Stripped Tales* (Kelsey St. Press, 1995), and *Quill Solitary Apparition* (Post-Apollo Press, 1996).

Crystal cabinets. A Jamesean enthusiasm for the nuance. A "poetess"—or, "a dollop is dolloping." It is significant to me that a woman poet, a figure often generically taxed with the easy and quasi-insulting term "poetess," returns to this very term, and makes hay of it. When she says of the poetess that "a dollop is dolloping" she chooses a silly, gleeful word—dollop means a large lump, helping or portion, and even suggests a slatternly woman, a trollop. Altogether de trop, the word (noun and verb) gallops and bounces up with "what natural c/o abnormal/ loquaciousness" to mock cliches of female literary activity, to accept, with a large-spirited tact, the minoritizing term, and make it major: "genial! as space." (SP 78) Not quite Ovid, not quite Sappho, but a polymorphic erotic atmosphere as if an extension and refinement of theirs. The fall of pattern and light. "All my vast/ journeying sensibility," favoring the discovery and creation of landscapes in which one could live an emotionally subtle, visually lush, attentive life. (FR 15) Travelling, travelling, yet neither homeless nor exilic; travelling in order "Mysteriously [to define] the Mysterious."

This talk, subtitled "Byzantine Proposals of Poetry," (1986) offers some insight into Barbara Guest's poetics.[1] Byzantium is certainly a reality (a real place seen on a real trip, offering real events to ponder) and a cultural metaphor—the Byzantine—or labyrinthine, intricate. In this essay, Guest narrates a primal scene of the construction of poetic meaning. Disembarking from a ship, already in a state of political/poetical excitement, she and her party enter a bazaar. "Before our eyes were laid golden, silken stuffs of such serious and sophisticated spinning and weaving only to be viewed in the expensive shops of the West. There they lay as if mute rags, palatial silks." The juxtaposed mute/palatial and rags/silks is suggestive if only because the opposite of *palatial* is offered as *mute*. Thus speaking and

wealthy sumptuousness are allied, as if access to a speaking subjectivity occurred through a sense of exotic luxury. Involved here are an economic-social narrative involving class and desire, purchase/ accumulation, the role of travel, translation of a thing into one's own world, imports, and appropriation, and an aesthetic narrative involving sensual pleasures, visual bliss, texture, sight, fairy tale gold.

Buying some of the silk, the visitors "sailed on with a memory of simple grandeur, as unlikely a mixture as could be found anywhere except in poetry." Poetry is allied with and motivated by a special kind of riches. But there is more. "The silk was turned into curtains and thus began to lead a tamed, domestic existence, its history asleep in our house, much as a poem enters into an anthology." This simple grandeur, with its aura of mystery, exists inside a domestic space which becomes flushed with its secret presence. This whole narrative of the passage of silk from an Asian bazaar to domestic possession is Guest's allegory of the feeling poetry provides.

Guest speaks for the silk, for the transformative passage or conduit, and for the final ("domestic") product. Guest wants the poet to work with a "secret life," find "abrupt connections with the remote," be a shape changer. The best poetry will be metamorphic in a particular direction—a silk that can be "respected" and which has "an ability to exchange its contour for a curtain without losing an identity imposed by the bartering of one idea for another." It is a way of saying that domestication (curtain-making from that exotic silk) may complicate beauty but does not reduce it. "Silk" itself makes interested choices in Guest's narrative, for, taking on a person-like agency and consciousness, it accepts merchant-bazaar-market value-display in order to also have or reveal "a Byzantine preference" for "hidden noise" and "mysterious deep." This is absolutely not a personal space (it "protects" and does not reveal the poet); yet at the same time Guest says "all poetry is confessional."[2] By this we are meant to see that poetry reveals essences of deep inner psychic processes, fantasies, needs, and fulfillments. In fact (and in a resistance to many kinds of dominant poetry), "the poet whose sole urgency is his subject matter neglects the immensity of the depth to be rendered by Art." Rather, "In the cloak of Byzantine colors the poet spins a secret life."

It's worth remembering, since the Mallarmean poetics of mystery, the exotic, "'not the thing, but its effect'" is not unusual, that Guest shows a particular investment in this poetics. The assertion of the exotic and mysterious as a realm of poetry is not naturalized, but is motivated whenever it occurs. Guest's particular affirmation is an interesting position for a woman poet to take, given the well-trodden ideological path between females and the exotic beauty of the collectable, given the linkage of females with the "Orient," and her bond with stuffs—texture, textile, material, veiling, and quasi-revealing. Guest speaks allusively of this

situation when she says "You can think of this 'something else' [of poetry] as a woman behind a veil."

Her cultural metaphor does have a tinge of "Orientalism," a fact which Guest herself notes—amusedly, evoking "corridors, plots, disguise, whispers". . .a "rather sinister, and almost indelicate movie-plot." The erotic, concealed mysteries of both the female and the Asian silk continue the motif of Orientalism. This feminized metaphor raises the question of gender in her poetry, to which I want meditatively to turn. Guest holds that the object of poetic desire, the mystery or poetry, the aura for this woman poet comes in the image of a veiled, mysterious female and foreign figure. Poetry must be made to continue the mystery, not puncture it. I have already indicated that this mystery coexists often with a free-floating amusement ("OH CHARMER"). (QSA) Another way this is accomplished is to allow traces of beauty and desire to be set forth in oblique allusion, by studied use of the genre of the fragment.

In the two most recent books *(Quill Solitary Apparition* and *Stripped Tales)*, this aspect of her work is particularly developed. There are fairy tale queries and characters, especially female ones, set out in a "broderie" consisting of barely articulated vectors of plot, not full tales, and turns veiled by other turns: "In what casket the thimble:/ suggests a frail misdemeanor—/on the outer garment // (one never knows)." (QSA) The work seems to be an abstraction of *The Fairy Queen, The Rape of the Lock,* and neo-pre-Raphaelite treatments of women, but all done in a way that fuses solemnity with a vampish and mischievous sprightliness. In Guest's work in these books, a girl is scampering in and out of a variety of desirous "gazes"—the male gaze (often a knight or such like), the female gaze, and in some sense, her own gaze: "The lady protests she reserves the right to select her own ghost." (ST 38) Or: "herself the coronet/ being gleamy." (QSA) The oblique manner of these recent works suggests the arabesque or curlicue, a design motif that is thoroughly, frankly decorative. The frank interest in joyously absorbing and proposing elements of the feminine in a female voice links her work to Kathleen Fraser's and Lyn Hejinian's.

Another way that gender is negotiated in Guest's poetry is through this "Byzantine" narrative of silks and the exotic, which alludes to the female place in Western imaginations and to the feminine without being totally captured by it. This Byzantium is compounded of voyages, strangers, and Keatsean "golden, silken stuffs," French symbolist "invitations to voyages." Once one has travelled in realms of gold, one finds the arresting possibility that poetry can be gently "domesticated" without losing its underside—its "secret life," that "inner sound . . . which protects the poet." In this world of mystery, poems are the summary or essence or registered impact of "that which is convoluted, difficult to track down, complicated. Underneath its apparent surface there is the presence of 'something else.'" Guest adduces

Keats, Mallarmé, Dickinson, and Shelley and Marianne Moore as those capable of rendering this "aura" of the special world called poetry. All of these are poets who exercise a profound kind of effacement of personality in favor of an entrance into another site than the ego. Some are poets who favor romantic transcendence, who move into the sublime.

In Guest's poetic universe, actual narrative and context are irritant sources of stress and tension.[3] The poem is, instead, a privileged site or means or institution by which these stresses are transformed. One sees this clearly in the title "stripped tales," both stripped down and offering the striped lattice of a shutter, so one can see only selected bits of what is "happening." Materials generated inside various contexts (social,, lived, biographical) "transcend their own context" in order to come to new relationships and new patterns inside the poem. The poem then becomes a world unto itself, a willful translation which barely checks with the original, but seeks instead to assert its language flair, adding a supplement of the exotic and a shrug for the forever unrenderable "content." In this way "a narrative"—the suggestion is a specific incident and its claims—"diffuses" into images, and thence into "lyric arrangements."[4] One sees this especially in a climactic title of her later career, the book *Fair Realism*. Poetry occurs by an act of transformative translation, a meditating over "realism" (for the very word is redolent of novels, of narratives) until it becomes "fair"—the word means beautiful, clear, and sunny, but it also re-evokes the "fair," or bazaar (of Guest's allegory of poetry) in which the secret aura inside things is discovered through silk—a Byzantine product, mysterious and full of grandeur. And as well, evokes the "fair"—as in women, the fair sex.

The business of a speaker being in at least two or three places at once, speaking from the vectors of a site, and not from a voice or an (one) identity is typical of her poetry. Some of the multiple, even contradictory, positions are stated in the following stanza from *Fair Realism;* the use of the pronoun "I" makes the shifts easier to follow—engagement, disengagement; participation-observation; agency-passivity; decision-randomness; self-other; picture-story.

> I float over this dwelling and when I choose
> enter it. I have an ethnological interest
> in this building, because I inhabit it
> and upon me has been bestowed the decision of changing
> an abstract picture of light into a ghost-like story
> of a prince whose principality I now share,
> into whose confidence I have wandered.
>
> (FR 8)

This multiple positionality of a wayward creature named "I" is articulated quite directly by Guest in her essay "Shifting Persona" in *Poetics Journal*.[5] "The person inside a literary creation can be both viewer and insider." Guest proposes a gestalt notion of being whole and part, being in multiple places, at once inside and around and outside the site of the poem. It is as if she were host and guest at once.

This guest-host relation gives us access to a recurrent cultural narrative of gender configurations in Guest's work: male painters, in relation to female models, muses, and helper figures, male painters like Miró, painting a work called "The Poetess," Picasso in relation to Dora Maar.[6] Guest approaches these materials in the spirit of shifting personae, with multiple identifications at work: sited as model and painter, as Picasso and Maar, and as the third term viewing them, identifying with both, and with their painful, generative symbiosis.

In "The Nude," a male painter regards a female model. She seems the very embodiment, to him, of "shadow" (FR 57), she has strong therapeutic significance, of "holding" in object-relations terms. "The narcissism of the artist escapes into a body/ that defines his emotions, // An interior where his own contour is less misty." (FR 58) Here the model is a boundary, or a limit term for something otherwise infantile and chaotic. The importance and powerful agency of this nude increases yet again in Guest's depiction: the model in a clear allusion to the book's title, has "realism." She is judicious, forcefully linked to her own situatedness, her own "realism" in her own life despite the (again tenderly banal) depictions of traditional claptrap around models.

> A severe distance is established between her realism and his anxious attempt to define it.
>
> The painter desires the image he has selected to be clothed in the absolute silk of his touch,
>
> Lonely himself he has admired the glance of kimonos, mirrors, fans and bestowed them on her. . .
>
> (FR 58-59)

[and later]

> He searches the world to find those spheres that will confine the fluid nude. . .
>
> (FR 60)

When the nude sees the painting, "she asks, where am I?" Finding that "he has not drawn her," she takes power over the moment. (FR 63) "She turns herself into a star/ above the unattended foliage,/ He views her as she glistens, silver enters the picture." (FR 63) The roles of model/painter linked by banal binary gender narratives to the terms passive/active can no longer be sustained as given. The model self-metamorphoses, takes agency.

The transformation narrated in Guest's poem is especially marked in relation to the artwork which it accompanies in its original publication. Warren Brandt's work plays with nudes from the history of art.[7] He mimics, or alludes to the Olympia by Manet, to nudes by Gauguin, Picasso, Fragonard, Rodin and many more. He plays with varying media and techniques for his history of art including watercolor, drypoint, charcoal sketch, pencil, pen, oil, photo, and makes allusions to different modes of production of the nude woman (such as nineteenth-century pornography). As Guest says "The artist borrows mannerisms and technique" (FR 60) and "each day there is a different voice." (FR 62) Brandt is basically making the history of the depiction of the female nude be a metaphor for the history of art as a whole. When the poem is put next to the artworks and read inside the book to which Guest has contributed, the poem seems quietly critical of gender binarism. It at least tries to rectify the power balance, the eroticisms and agencies in the artworks Brandt has made.

In Guest's poem, the model's changes, including consciously willed changes, transform the painter's picture and his palette. She "leads" him. He interprets her. The relationship is symbiotic. But both figures are powerful. Despite the nude's own narcissism familiar from pictorial and literary tradition and re-presented by Brandt ("She was either admiring herself or bathing," FR 62), Guest's nude moves into the fearful, the unknown, and the threatening with aplomb: "She reaches for ombre, noir/ 'It is the narrowness of time.'" (FR 64) The nude is not solely or only the object of a fixing gaze, although the poem knows that it would be naive and untrue to the history of art to posit that she is never so. Thus, she is also, at the same time, the object of a fixing gaze and the subject meditating herself. Both positions are discussed within the poem. So too the painter inside the poem has at least a double position; he has the power of sight, of skill, of desire, of address. But sometimes he is blind or veiled in his understanding.

Further, with an uncanny negative capability, Guest depicts shifts between both the male painter and the female nude. They are both herself, shifting personae in their bond, which is (as in Wordsworth and Stevens) spousal. The viewed and viewer of art, the model-painter present a shifting but articulate symbiosis, one peculiarly formative and satisfying (in the sense that Stevens also understood) by proposing some recurrent dialogue, endless, perpetually knitted up and unraveled, between reality and the

imagination. Most viewers outside the work of art (in other words, us) are usually asked by "art" to be inside the painter's eye. So the normal institutions of viewing further frame and contain the nude. Guest's poem is critical because it gives us another place from which to see. Rather than seeing only the nude via the painter's eye, Guest's poem makes us see the space and symbiosis between painter and model. She is working the in-between. This dialogue and give-and-take, this unstable synthesis of the two players is one interpretation of what Guest means by "fair realism." "Fair" means justice has been served: it is a "just" realism, because it does justice to both parts of the relationship.

These gender materials also occur, with drama and pathos, in the poem "Dora Maar." Because Maar was an actual person, one of Picasso's fraught loves, Guest raises the issue of appropriation and gender in the case when "her tears benefit his painting" and her zaniness and visions are actualized through his work. (FR 23) "Dora Maar" is a poem in six parts, perhaps an allusion to a series of six progressively more abstracting paintings which Picasso did of Maar. Maar, like so many of the women one now knows only as ancilla to male masters, had at one point a serious career. She was a photographer and painter, described by one critic as a "bluestocking," always a term of fascinated resistance to strong-minded women. She met Picasso in 1935 or 1936, apparently in a surrealist incident very like Guest's stanza summary: "In a cafe he watched her throw the knife/ between the fingers of a gloved hand. . ." (FR 23). Commentators point to Maar's intelligence and autonomy as unique to Picasso's women (Richardson: "Dora was a formidable muse"), but her fierce moods and mental instability link her to several other of Picasso's love-choices. One critic uses, for Maar, the clinical term "borderline personality."[8]

Maar was important for her ties to surrealism and to the poet Eluard, and thereby to a more politicized modernism than had, to date, distinguished Picasso. John Richardson argues that with each new mistress, Picasso shifted painting style; Mary Mathews Gedo makes the corresponding argument that these shifts are linked not only to new women but to serious and productive male friends. The Maar/ Eluard combination was especially potent. There is strong speculation that her and Eluard's left politics influenced Picasso in his support of the Spanish Republic. As is well known, a mural by Picasso had already been commissioned for the Republican Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition of Arts and Sciences; after the bombing of Guernica on April 26, 1937, he took the commission as an occasion for a major protest. Maar documented the remarkably quick evolution and realization of the mural *Guernica* in a series of photographs, and, apparently, helped the quick realization by painting the side of the horse.

There are allusions by Guest to Maar's double position in relationship to the mural *Guernica:* first, as muse-inspiration—*"she was that woman holding a light"* and "She was the woman who fell from the house/ in the daylight bombing," (FR 23) and second, as artist-photographer *"She photographed the hysterical success/* stage by stage with her alphabet of sighs. . ." (FR 24)[9] Guest represents the muse figure positively yet ruefully, and so too the male artist, whose energy and drive have a magical quality.

The relationship of woman to male master is lucidly articulated: "her tears benefit his painting" Guest says. *"He raids her hallucinatory bicycle for an object/ he calls 'found' as the handles and bicycle seat/ are transformed—* "(FR 24) But "found" is a term of erasure, by a randomizing of his access to the image; it denies indebtedness. This account in the poem is, in any event, quasifactual; Guest depicts how Maar's imagination and her instabilities spur Picasso. She shows a painter whose imagination is sometimes banal and needs to be jump-started by the nervous energy and surreal vivacity of this woman (among many others in his career). Guest represents a symbiotic relationship in which the female seems to have imagination and vision to spare, yet the male artist has the career.

She shows that the male artist operates with a mythically sanctioned lèse-majesté: "Eclectic and careless like Jove when changed/ into a bull he finds the classical/ screams of maidens exciting. . ." (FR 24) Guest depicts a male-female relation in which the painter is able to give back to the model-muse the gift of her own vision, which she describes as an enchanting experience for Maar: "once he had drawn her torso with wings/ afterwards she saw the river/ with a translucent depth/ when her arm was a wing." (FR 24) Or—shifting again—is it that Picasso has "raided" her vision and constructed works in which "her appearance is meddled with. . ." (FR 24) Sometimes the female's emotions, dreams, and body are a kind of raw material, the straw, that Picasso spins into gold. But sometimes the transformative powers of Maar are described as preceding Picasso's painting, as if she preferred a new reality, one which Picasso did not invent, but belatedly records: "her noble forehead is a sand cap water deftly clears,/ one of her eyes is red, the other blue like a portrait of Marie-Thérèse though bolder. . . ." (FR 23, Marie-Thérèse is another mistress of Picasso) Are the terms appropriation? metamorphosis? Are there other terms? Can we balance the conflictual claims which these terms make?

The female figure's waywardness and uncontainability are a trope for the unchained imagination, the excessive space which she fully and consciously inhabits. If the female figure exists in a kind of feminine space familiar from post-structuralism, the agency and bite of this figure in Guest's depiction belie the culturally familiar "feminine" of pre-thetic, pre-articulate Otherness. In Guest this muse has been invested with a force and deliberateness that undermine more familiar postulates of passivity and

unconsciousness. Despite having gendered protagonists, and in the case of Maar and Picasso having chosen to write about a historically documented interaction, Guest works to neutralize either-or gender assumptions and moralized assessments by her both, and, and, and elaborations. Further, she balances the claims of both painter and muse by staging their encounter in the work of a female poet (herself). The female poet becomes the place in which the gender materials of culture can be examined in their mystery and impact.

Of course, as with any work, Guest's poem diverges here from certain data, and interprets the situation with certain materials selected, others undivulged or unavailable for consideration. I offer some melodramatic ones. In his memoir, James Lord recounts saying to Maar that she'll never be forgotten because Picasso has painted her so often. Thereupon, according to Lord, she replied: "Do you think I care? Does Mme. Cézanne care? Does Saskia Rembrandt care? Remember that I, too, am an artist."[10] Maar's articulate, angry riposte comes, alas, to almost nothing; she is an artist in the structural position of Cézanne's apple. Her reply also suggests the blustering gestures of a King Canute trying to stop the waves of Picasso's overwhelming position in modernism. And trying to stop the pressures of critical consumption bent on dissolving, erasing, and burying the work of any female figures in modernism, good, bad, or indifferent. Picasso himself contributed to this climate with such opinions as "No worse than any other woman painter" about the watercolors of Ferdnande Olivier, his first mistress. (Richardson in McCully, 278) Or when he grafted a dog's face onto Maar's, and stated with Aristotelian flair, that he had thereby made a comment "on the animal nature of woman." (Richardson in McCully, 283)

When Picasso left Maar, she suffered a collapse. She then briefly had therapy with Lacan, that master of the feminine space of Otherness with its final, uncompromising lacks: doomed to represent or symbolize the elusive Phallus (logos-power) for Phallus-seeking males with their (definitional) similacrum of such power (alias, the penis). After, she became a recluse. This may be a tendentious way of putting things, but it is suggestive.

The way Guest depicts the model-painter and Maar-Picasso relationships interprets them in a way to equalize them, to make them an allegory of a gendered relationship between imagined-realism ("fair realism") and the artist, a drama that is engaged whenever art is made. Guest is talking about a kind of spousal event, a symbiosis, a fittedness of one to the other. To some degree this is a compensatory interpretation, one whose function in the work of a female writer might be the subject of further analysis and debate. Yet Guest also tries to unsettle this platonic world of spousal verse, by calling attention to the problematic of Maar. This too is an act of "fair realism"—to be fair to what really is, and it rectifies a generally androcentric

art historical record. In Guest's poem, Maar escapes her function for Picasso, and/but she is also destroyed by it. How can both these things be? Guest does not attribute anger or resistance to Maar at the end of the poem, but rather produces an elegiac, bucolic aftermath. Guest's Maar lives in her farmhouse, a gift from Picasso. "Sweetness returns to her scorched tongue . . ." and "Grief is banished from her coveted roost." (FR 25)

Notes

1 "Mysteriously Defining the Mysterious: Byzantine Proposals of Poetry" at the St. Marks Poetry Project, and published in part in *HOW(ever)* in October 1986 (III.3): 12–13.

2 "Barbara Guest: An Interview by Mark Hillringhouse," *American Poetry Review* 21, 4 (July/August 1992): 23–30; citations on 23.

3 In another brief paragraph in another *HOW(ever)* I, 3 (February 1984): 7, heading up a selection from "The Türler Losses."

4 *HOW(ever)* I, 3 (February 1984): 7.

5 The very title is indicative of the singularity splitting into plurality and back; one could expect "shifting personae" in the plural. *Poetics Journal* 9 (June 1991): 85-88.

6 This situation recurs in *Fair Realism* in the long poem called "The Nude" (57–64, a poem in which indebtedness to Stevens seems open) and in the poem "The Cradle of Culture" (76-77) in which the artist Miró draws a work called "The Poetess." "The Cradle of Culture" alludes to an earlier poem by Guest, a self-referential work called "The Poetess" [after Miró's painting of that name] which appeared in *Moscow Mansions* (1973, 46) about twenty years earlier.

7 Warren Brandt, *Nudes*, New York: The Arts Publisher, 1986. We know the artist for Brandt is male since he is depicted as such in a few of these works.

8 Mary Mathews Gedo, *Picasso: Art as Autobiography*. University of Chicago Press, 1980, 286.

9 John Richardson, "Picasso: a retrospective view" comments at length. Guernica "is permeated by Dora's presence. She not only photographed it at different stages of completion, but she actually painted part of it, and the figure holding a lamp is unquestionably a likeness of Dora. (So far as I know, nobody has published the fact that Dora Maar worked on Guernica. Many of the vertical strokes on the horse's body were painted by her.) Moreover, she was an important link with Surrealists like Eluard who supported the Popular Front against Franco and whose ideas may well have played a part in the gestation of Guernica." Originally published in 1980, included in *A Picasso Anthology: Documents, Criticism, Reminiscences*, ed. Marilyn McCully. Princeton UP 1982, 281-82.

10 James Lord, *Picasso and Dora: A Personal Memoir*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993, 123. The other two women mentioned were notable models for their husbands' paintings.

HEATHER RAMSDALE

CLOSET I

I thought I'd say some more about the closet. The closet—my god, the closet is a tangle of sleeves, I could go in but even dreams avoid it. And something is bound to come from that. Some of the shit stacked up in there. Some of the shit stuffed in—I could go on.

I could just go but everything I need I have right here, this [a spoon] and I have this [dress] and here [it's a brick] to show you holding the brick to show you letting go of the brick in a way that is fast, is red or silver, what brick is silver—there is no time now: would you like me to scare you! To show you everything!

For a moment almost forgetting about the closet they emerge from in pilgrim shirts, touching

their own, yanking their
own liver out.

Shirts go in. Shirts come out. Shirts, do not move.

And now I am quite satisfied with myself.

From this box from which I am speaking to you, I am directing you to the left, I am saying, "In." Though I have not been there myself. I must know something like the sensation where you stand.

Are you standing? Are you standing on his softest throat? Are you in his clothing? So he is very close and sees you. Are you liking pulling out his cutting his hair off closing his opening the cavity—are you there, are you standing there?

From which place the whole horizon I see, including descriptive facts and perceptions of the areas most haunting. Including something moving in frequent returns to take on the form of mice rats bald rat tails. Including

string rope wire moving at the outer edge of vision, gnawed red packaging bright price tags red rags for windows to wipe the window with to make it clean—

From which place the whole horizon, no footprints leading in, leading out, no center to move out from. From the edge of vision, distances fall equally away, cannot be measured, not reached by foot. By way of reason, to take a stab in the dark—dense, dull as dry clay, hard as common brick, a wall of bricks impenetrable in the common sense, as this is the last part of the house. Beyond; strange music, crowds cheering, crowds breathing, crouching close to the ground to grab a brick to hurl back into the crowd rushing toward a common end

brutally, he said in a reasonable way. It was very clear, what we did to each other was horrible.

I am speaking only for myself. I wasn't there. I've lost some possibility, some range. Each time I opened my mouth it was already public, something had happened to it, like blood leaving a wound, I am speaking only for myself.

Last drops fall from the box I've made a nest and map from. File: file "M." There, I almost said it. There is no such place. I forget and then remember.

RON PADGETT

FOUR POEMS

INTERIOR DECORATION

Parts were missing
and you had to figure out not only
what parts but in what order
the remaining parts should be arranged
to make a perfect tense
slide imperceptibly up into the present
like a fish that has swum up alongside your snorkel
and seems to be gasping for air. If
only fish had learned to have legs
like Betty Grable's, each one insured
for one million dollars, though if she'd have lost one
the other wouldn't be worth very much,
except to her, of course. What if both of her legs had
come off and started spinning around in the sky?
What kind of a dumb question is that?
There is no answer. Or rather,
the answer has been rearranged.

MARIANA

The young Albanian girl in a green summer dress,
her face a little on the heavy side and her head
tilted as if from a weight she feels inside, a weight
that could never find the right subtitle,
has paused because a man
has made a funny face and now he clicks
before her face goes back, he clicks as if
to say, "Look, here's another you, your dress
so pretty and bright" even though it's plain,
like the girl, who knows it, and smiles.

FROM HUNGER

Ten til twelve,
almost time for the lunch
I decided I'd have at noon,
hungry or not,
because the idea of eating
appealed to me and I needed
a specific time to eat.
Now it's six til.
I feel as though I have
just eaten a little bite,
an hors d'oeuvre. That
was a bad expression
to take from the French:
hors d'oeuvre. No one can
spell it and few can say it,

and when you think of its
literal translation ("outside
the work") it makes you want
to join a highway paving crew.
Four minutes to go. The smell
of hot asphalt has lodged
itself deep in my nostrils
and all I can think of is
a black lunchpail with something
wrapped in wax paper and baloneyesque.
Now just two. Outside, a bluejay
is laughing at me.
Suddenly I feel very hungry.

WALKING AND TALKING

Why don't I write about Kenward and Patty
who as I opened the front door and cracked the screen
on my way out were walking away from the house
as if they had just been here, Patty talking and Kenward
saying uh-hunh every eight or ten steps. I didn't
want to write about them, the same way I didn't
want to interrupt their morning walk that had taken them
through the woods and out and back up toward Kenward's.
I want them to have that world to themselves
as I have this one (words in my head).

MARTA PETREU

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the Romanian
by Adam J. Sorkin
and Liviu Bleoca)

THE SEEING EYE

Who can keep carrying his own consciousness like some sort of
[doubtful pregnancy?

The utopia of being happy by any means (what ardor!)
And love oh "the most natural relationship between two human
[beings"
wrote Marx
So many sentiments find their way to hell
Biography—a history drowned in blood like a global massacre

We don't have a banner for every sorrow— that I admit

And who can stand self-awareness?
closed behind eyelids the eye sees
the red arterial fountains the lofty saline jet
yes the nocturnal rainbow
of the surgically severed external carotid
in sea caves clouded with brown seaweed
the young dead display a black plumage:
as if through rotten hemp
their nerves show forth
in the tide-gnawed flesh

Hell is a keenly seeing eye

Oh! who can endure it?
Who today piece by piece
is skinning
the young dead?

HUNTING IN THE SNOW

Father, I say:

my men—the living and the dead—hunt me

the living and the dead surround me
they sniff my black armpits my insomnia my weeping
Listen carefully to me:
today (today only) I'm the prize game
the flesh painted with wild poppies
today I'm the trophy in a collar paraded throughout the world
[with great pomp

Yes. Under my skin I wear
a polar winter immense violet snowflakes
Under my skin I wear a snowfall infinitely divisible like amoebas
[in rut
Ah. Self-fear. The worn-out skin tight like a shirt of chain mail
Under my epidermis I wear my memory the carbon black the
[eternal slime
Yes, I wear myself under my skin

and I say to myself: there's no point there's no point there's no
[point
There's no point to loving them: they crush the wild honey out
[of the new honeycombs
they suck the warm bloody marrow from the bone
they babble swallow snarl sleep
Who knows how to resist?
Behold. They gouge the skin cut the wild beast's mane gorge on
[the flesh to the bone
("I love you," I've been told. It might be true—I suppose.
But self-fear ah fear that unique identity of mine remains there
forevermore within me)

Father
I'm your still living body
And I dwell dead center in the target
They: your hunters in the snow
meat-eaters on this fast-day
your beaters your crack shots

Disguised in a bride's chemise my body inhabits the heart of the
[circle

I'm not in love: I don't love them they don't love me
I want to hide

Pay heed. This famished pack has driven me back inside myself
[again
my knees drawn up to my chin I await them
I lie. I lie to myself that it's I who am the hunter
not the winter trophy the honey sleeping in the honeycombs the
[flesh
blooming into huge wild poppies indecent like a man's severed
[head
I fantasize that I'm the hunter
not the delicate neck adorned with a studded choker

My insomnia is the snow dazzling in the sun
cracked and tight a scaly skin—my memory

a shirt of mail

Yes. Oxidized metal worn on the flesh directly under my skin
Father: the living and the dead hunt me
This I know: my body will betray me

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MICHEL DEGUY

POETICS AND A POEM

(Tr. from the French by Wilson Baldridge)

PROPOSITIONS FOR AN *ARS POETICA*

I owe you the truth in poems.

The poem is made up of sequences where image, figure, rhythm are undivided. One must enter indivision.

The image is not icon, nor semiosis; but "likening," thing of things.

The poem is in the figure, rather than the figure in the poem.

The characteristic of "modernity" is that of the figure's generalization.

The poem, swinging like a door that invents a threshold, fluctuates between two states of rhythm: from prose poems to prose in poems.

Listen and see! What does he see? *Opsis tôn adêlon ta phainoména* (Anaxagoras): the point whence a *phenomenon* appears offering a *view* onto things *not patent*. Or: what appears offers a (quasi) view onto what does not stand out openly. They exchange positions through likening, wherein they testify.

The manifest shows us the hidden; "that's how it is."

The operation implies a reversal. From the testified which it is, the hidden becomes the testifier; the manifest finds meaning in being like it. Parabolically; *ana*-logically.

What shows up "by itself? Nothing; nothing is obvious on its own. One would say rather that everything is shown by another, *with* its others, with what-it's-like.

So, in passing, poetry is not alone; but dancing-with, in the round of the muses.

Always and anyway poetry drops you a reference.

Relating, referring, conferring, transferring, it is of the circumstance; it opens here another over-there than that one.

A principle of comparison federates all figures. The one is not the other; the one is like the other. Poetic attention tries to speak the comm-unity of mortals.

The poem makes us propositions—logically, erotically. "a *or* b": *or* is a pivot, as *like* is. Thus the offering of a possibility opens up, without date of foreclosure; and the poem itself is an "expan-si-on of infinite things" (Baudelaire)—an extension of possibility upon "the world."

To-be-like was an injunction too. "Be ye as children!" (Why "children"?) Whereby to be like them, the carefree . . . we must try to understand, calling back in question the priority of(violent) *mimêsis* and of (preontological) *Sorge*. The Gospel is a parable made of be-likes. It elects its testifiers straight off *a* world, from what is at once familiar and raisable (ana-logy) as a sign (of contradiction); around the *like* then, a pivot, the reversal can begin to operate, which in return clarifies nearness by remoteness, *clarum* by *obscurius*, *rationale* by *revelatum*, one "kingdom" by another; an exchange of the values of testifier and testified: reciprocal clarification. Upon this model also is articulated the lived circumstance's relation to citation

The poetic indicative, a definition rather than an injunction, is not the religious imperative. (Re)semblance is not a matter of opinion. Contrary to what one believes sometimes among family, where one discusses, and disputes, family likenesses. there is an objectivity of *family likenesses* and of *families of likeness*.

How to make revelation out of profanation after having made profanation out of revelation. "Revelation" is revelation *of* revelation: or of the revealability of the experience in figures or metamorphoses: it is anthropomorphosis continued by other means.

"A willing suspension of belief". . . Relate the unbelievable to the indelible. It is about undeleting the become-unbelievable.

Upon nothingness, "paternity of the void," we dance. *Ex nihilo* would be therefore the name of a publishing house.

Paralyzed omnipotence, my limitation as subject lays out the no-thru-streets. Paradox is what makes dead ends communicate with each other. The close apposition of oxymoronic contraries, similar to the assault phase of a struggle between flying buttresses, possesses an exhilarating force: rebounding against the catastrophe of the oxymoronic collision, the Lichtenbergian aphorism (definition, and not description) gives off fumes of humor and provokes an outburst that does not knock you down but encourages and leads thought one step further into the void.

In the end, it is a question of proportioning (Pascal): what to what through what? "My life," to *its* nothingness, through the work.

Why the *work?* The work-structure is quadruple. Microcosmic artifact, testifier for the whole *(parametron pantôn;* Protagoras). A part gives onto the whole which gives the part. A world is necessary to make WHOLENESS—through the work: the man of art represents the symbolic relation to the "world" through some figuration of our local relation to the earth. The land is "promised," if we maintain the relation of the promise, where the land is figured, to the land which supplies its own figurants.

The work is a labyrinth, whence one exits where one entered. The becoming-a-labyrinth (Kafka), or the passage as *Passagenwerk* (W. Benjamin), is what transforms the relation of inside to outside.

There must be an inside within to make insides. For there to be an inside, and hence an exit to the outside, there must be an inside of the inside: "set in abyss"; in the form of which the work is constructed.

A work is about a legacy, or a "grand testament" (Villon). Artists transmit their version of "the end of the world" (Baudelaire): *sublime* operation (Longinus) to dissemble the disappointment of a promise in the letter of a fable whose *spirit* the heirs reinvent.

The misery of our present is the shortage of legatees for the gift. The *cultural* price attached to works, become the "market" price, makes for a literality without enigma.

"Resistance to the present" (Deleuze) will be therefore the penultimate proposition—Is it "dead"? asks Mallarmé. The spirit of resistance is a spirit of benevolence which clears the way for a *sally* after Don Quixote.

For whom does one write? Not for one's ethnic group nor one's clan. But for all AND for none (Nietzsche).

(from *At Rush Hours)*

THALES' THEOREM, OR: ON THE THRESHOLD OF IMMENSITY

Thales could pass for the master of "likening," patron of artists: bringing back to earth a measurable diminutive of the immense distance (incommensurable in an initial sense) from the observer to a remote ship, at sea for example; or to the moon (or even the sun itself); this selfsame distance figuring *infinite* remoteness.

However it's not about measuring, in Thales' brilliant manner, what is there, an "existent," steep but not inaccessible, rather approachable,* such as the Pyramid—even less in that its height is known! But building it. Nor even measuring the distance from a boat to the coast—as it's not incommensurable: there's difficulty, but not impossibility; said distance is in liquid remoteness.

But raising a sundial, a tower, a Babel, a seamark, a diminutive *threshold of immensity*—every tower, every monument, would be Babelian inasmuch as essential incompleteness *within* completion, by the way it *falls short* of the infinite.

The maker *(poiêtês)* does not start from what is already given to measure its height; but the other way around, more *ana*logically, to give impetus, from an *ana* that launches the logos. The analogy takes off, lovely as the hypotenuse.

It's about *figuring;* the end is not the work, but the figure's relation to *that* which is figured; the work produces the obsession with what it's measured against, with the reference which comes to reside there and which, just as sense is not *in* any of the meaning's words, is not *in* the work. The secret to which the work proportions itself is not *in* it while not being elsewhere than in the work's world.

Now the Tower, a threshold of immensity, made to enter into a relation of figuration with the "diminutive infinite," is only a monster, a "Babel," for being isolated as Breughel shows it. In fact a work is at work with others, in the diversity of the city, which is not the work of one person alone, nor even of one generation, with and among things that are works and things that aren't works, and that one calls natural. So it's a rare, specific procedure which consists in *isolating* the tower, unpeopling the area to increase the "absurdity," the negative-fascinated relation to infinity, to X; such as Piero's city without a living soul, or Brasilia, or Frederick II's octagonal castle, or *The Tartars' Desert*. . .But the real Tower, the work, regroups, composes, unto itself, around itself, its confines, its proximity; co-figures the surroundings, makes a diversity of figures, of signs, exist; which can then make

enigmatic immanence abound, "among us," and address to the unfigurable, to the "unrepresentable," the attestive value of the *figurants* made.

* To draw near the inaccessible would be the phrase (if the boat at sea figures here *de facto* inaccessibility).

(from *Poetry Is Not Alone)*

FUJI

A fixed fringed cloud
suspends half of the sky

It's everywhere neither near, nor absent
Remote, it raises the horizon, airs the middle of the sky. It's everywhere, neither inaccessible nor approachable. Often veiled, mantilla'd with boughs, with wild azaleas, with outlined bonsai
It's well surrounded, enthroned. Lakes, roads make up the see, the way around, it's the sky's throne. Omnipresent Fuji, *mêtiêta* like the Zeus of our schooling, higher than the Ventoux, than the Olympus of our youth
Hung in mid-sky, closer, younger moon. . .
Long ago with Godo we'd have made a trek, an offering to the beard of the sky, a signal toward the sacred ascertained

It's what's at the center
No longer I nor thou the I
I consider it as of yet unsaid

(from *At Rush Hours)*

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

from ȮNȮME

Jer ȮN Ȯme. The police will say. Just tell us your name. Just tell us you have one. I do. I have one timebeen summoned, but I do not will to summon them. Please. Jer ȮN Ȯme. They come. They come when they won—to do it, to do the fistmele, the alliance, the alliance o.k., to be given a sign, at will, that once, to come, will say, after you, sir, how have you beaten. I have one timebeen. Taciturn. Seen. Do not make one taciturn madden. Do not fistgrip. Do not fistgrip on sovereign mores. Assume to be taken—moreover. "Assume" this means to take over and cover and cover the window from the instinct for looking and call many more big twosomes on for protection. Please. Jer ȮN Ȯme. They are not so polite, but police in private. They do not sound this right, this kind, this measure of protection—taken, moreover. It is the alliance. They have one. They have it all coming to them. Why do they have it all coming to them? Do not listen, then. Do not listen because they have the big numbers, how can you trust the ones with big numbers, how can you trust too many bodies coming numb in their incense or too many dancers under virtual lanterns glowing off curtains to know any better. To tell on me. I have seen them do tell on me I have seen them do not know any better and then read from a text that says they do: witness: like a fistnote. They do witness like a fistnote but are too much mistaken when they have too much to say—and they say: "there-on—the roof"—*there is* a tenant on the roof and he is not being repentant. For you. On the knees. Please. Jer ȮN Ȯme. If only they knew (Levinas said it) *there is: a rustling — a menace*. There is a rustling gravel on the roof bed but they are on the real bed *viséing* I have seen them do it *fistgripped on the knees* and when the blinds do the *viséing* by the real bed from the gravel bed I have looked on a mist, *omamist*, and I'm amiss to have looked on the wetting of the blinds with mist they are covered, if only they knew they do have no cover vis-à-vis the *viséing*, vis-à-vis the visage, it's either me or no me, vis-à-vis the visitor come on to their kisses, on the knees, to me, they should not throw kisses *fistgripped on the knees*, they should not do it to *the most heavy*

atmosphere belonging to no one, if only they knew, they would not come to the blinds with conclusions to tell on me and draw on the sovereign mores one more inference composite picture from their vision. On the knees. There are many visions (Levinas has one). Please. Jer ȯn ȯme. If you will believe me. Do not hang one for the instinct of looking. Do not hang one on the word of their vision. Do not hang one for the vision to be true in the lens I saw I have one timebeen seen through *tremble.* They should not draw from me such *tremble.* They should not claim the ground of conviction. I have seen them claim it and—in the ribs, on the knees. How have you beaten. I have one. Timebeen. Please. Jer ȯn ȯme. I am human, with conviction. Don't make me a ground of conviction if there is somesuch doubt in your human charge and sources. Calumny. It is calumny. What do they tell on me, if it is calumny? Look at me. Don't let them be locked. Don't let them be locked into the story when the *language itself can turn to rumour.* On me. Has one. Timebeen. *Omamist. . .* Jer ȯn ȯme. It is said, I have heard: today is the fifth: we are all equal before the law: I was told so—people think—what people will say—not to care what people say. If you will believe me. Jer ȯn ȯme. *Omamist.* It is said, I have heard: if a man is standing (just tell us your name), if a man is seized (just tell us you have one), if a man is seized by what he has seen, *viséing , fistgripped on the knees,* then (I have one timebeen). Seen. Jer ȯn ȯme. If you will believe me, then: a man does no harm *(I have done no harm)* "and. . .will be killed *'because he knows.'"* (Jerome said it)

Paul Celan

(Tr. from the German by Catherine Reynolds)

OFF THE SINKING WHALEBROW
I read you—
you recognize me,

the sky
hurls itself
at the harpoon,

six-legged
our star cowers in the foam,

slowly
one who see this, hoists
the comfortmorsel:
Nothing
calling for its mate.

GARRETT KALLEBERG

THE LAST SEVEN

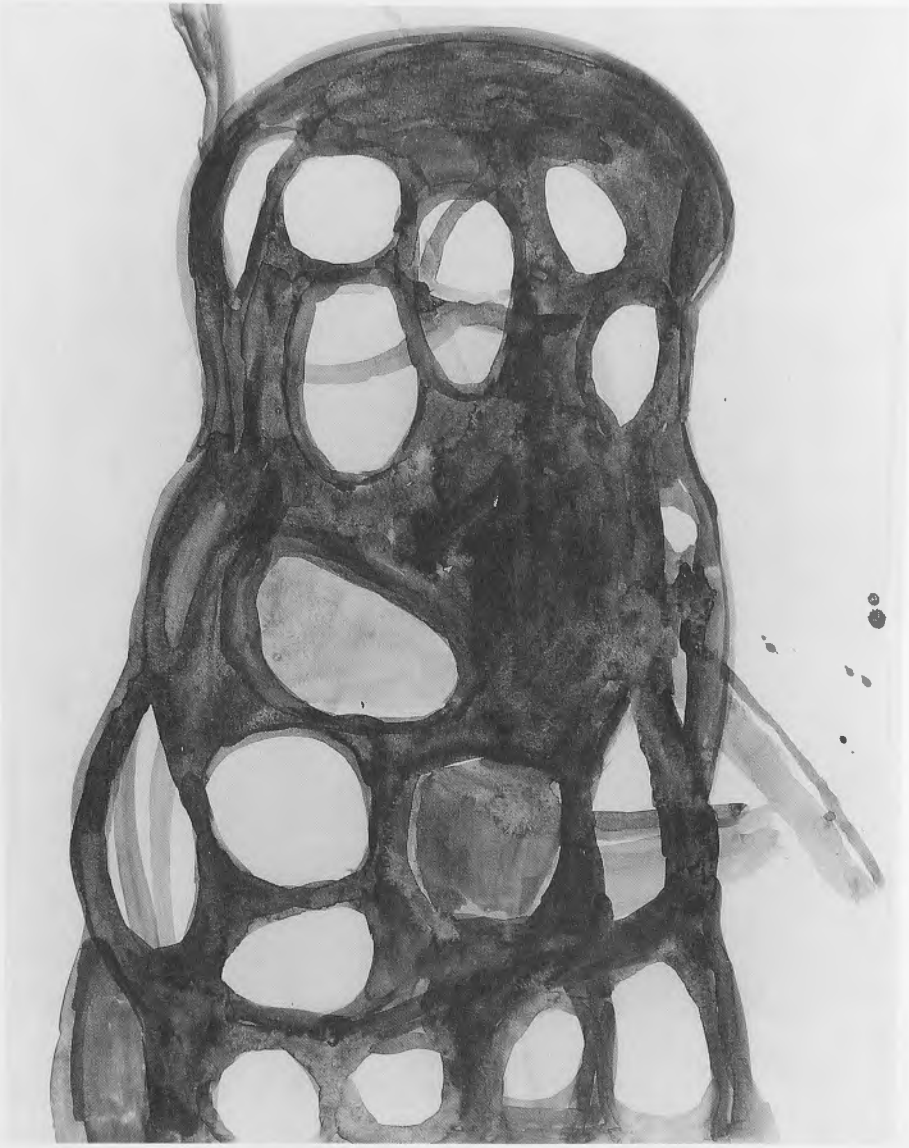
[And] had in his right hand stars
The mystery of the stars
and the golden candlesticks
The stars are the angels of the
angels of the churches
the candlesticks which thou
thou sawest are the churches
holdeth the stars in his right hand
of the golden candlesticks
hath the Spirits of God
and the stars
were lamps of fire burning
are the Spirits of God. And before the throne
sealed with seals
and to loose the seals thereof?
as it had been slain, having horns
horns and eyes, which are
are the Spirits of God
saw the angels which stood
and to them were given
the angels which had the
thunders uttered their voices
when the thunders had uttered
which the thunders uttered, and write
slain of men thousand: and the remnant
having heads
horns, and crowns upon his heads
up out of the sea, having heads
angels having the last
angels come out of the

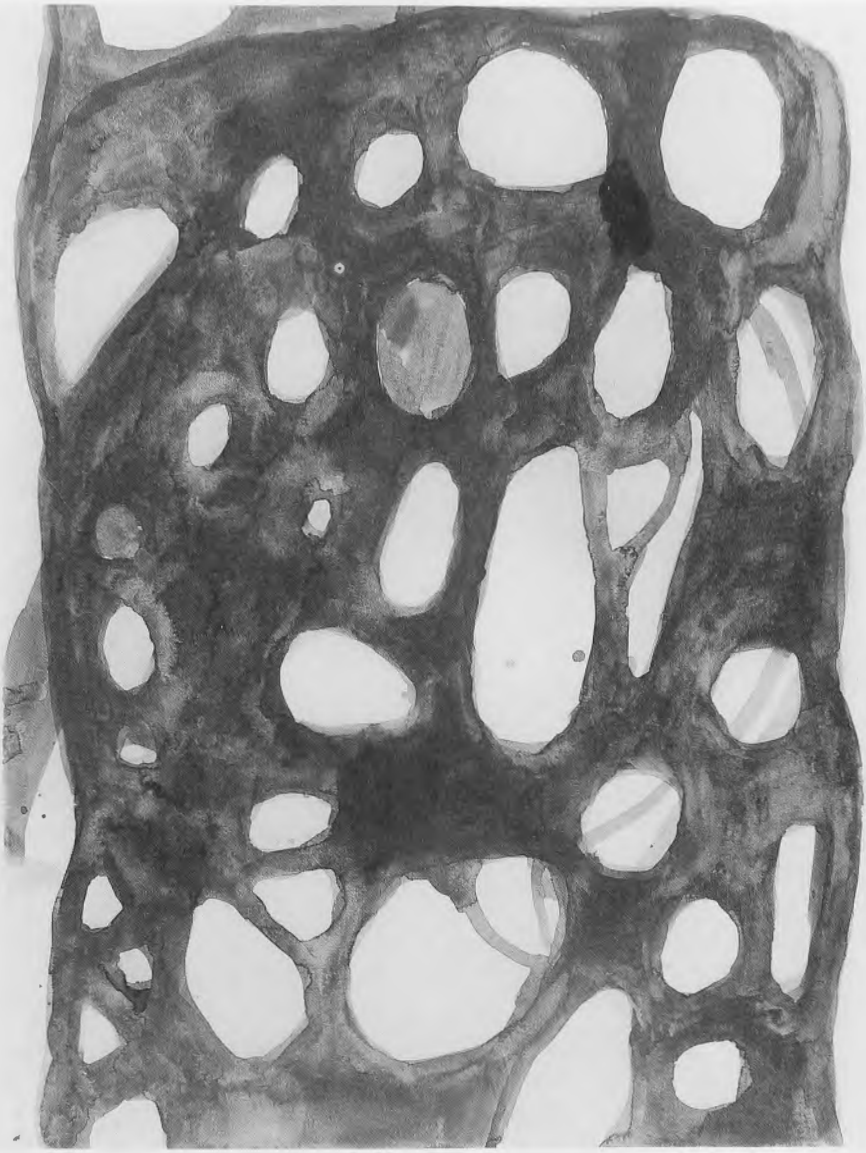
temple, having the plagues, clothed in
beasts gave unto the angels
the plagues of the angels
voice out of the temple saying to the angels
and the angel poured out
of the angels
which had the vials
of blasphemy, having heads
that carrieth her, which hath the heads
The heads are mountains
And there are kings

[And] he is the eighth, and is of the
the angels which had the
vials full of the seven last plagues, and
talked with me

Terry Winters

6-FIELD SEQUENCE





6-FIELD SEQUENCE

Graphic artifacts—

Drawing a single transversal of the image

Shown as a multiple angle in time

The number appears in one play

From a single nominal eye point

A composite seen from all positions

Rendering the field of an interlaced image

July 25, 1996

Terry Winters
"6-Field Sequence"
1991
Graphite wash on paper
6 sheets, each 30" x 22.5"

Photo Credit: D. James Dee

ADONIS

A DESIRE MOVING THROUGH THE MAPS OF THE MATERIAL

(Tr. from the Arabic by Allen Hibbard and Osama Isber)

it came to pass—
knives fall from the heavens,
the body lurches forward,
the soul trailing behind it

it came to pass—
hammers of blacksmiths laboring inside the skull,
dumbness and extinction of races,
writing: an ideological acid
books: still-born buds

(a)

where shall I preserve my surviving feasts,
how can I free my wings
weeping in the cages of language and
how can I live in my memory,
a gulf of floating debris

[he named language a woman,
writing—love,
and began to search
for the shells
of oceans in hoopoe words
(the sign here points to something
other than the queen of sheba or solomon)]

shall a stone or a poppy root sprout between my shoulders, shall the animals imprisoned in me find a means of escape, shall I fall into lethargy and betray my limbs, shall I fill my lungs with sand and prostrate myself as a black stone in eternal obedience, shall I annoint my body with machine oil and engorge myself with "yes, yes, no no"

no, I have no homeland
save in these clouds
evaporating from lakes of poetry

shelter me, guard me, oh *daud, daud*[1]—oh, my language, my house
I hang you like an amulet on the neck of these times
and explode my passions in your name
not because you are the temple,
not because you are the father or the mother,
but because I dream to laugh and cry through you,
to translate my guts, to cling to you, shudder,
and let my sides shiver
like windows in the hands of a wind
just released from god's fingers

thus through you I am transformed into a breath
exhaled from the sky's mouth,
blown into the earth's gash

thus I embrace you and say, once again:

you are the body called tomorrow,
and on this body the dice of history are thrown

in order to make a mirror worthy of me
and to see myself reflected in it,
in order to create a space
large enough to contain my fears,
maybe I thought of putting on a coat with half-cut sleeves
or of walking with a half-bare foot,
or maybe I tried to cleave a cloud's vein
to quench my thirst,
or maybe I whispered "homeland," and it was enough
for me to tell the history of a dervish doomed to die,
covering his grave with my voice,
or maybe I tried to uproot the eiffel tower
and plant there a damascene jasmine,
or maybe I thought of inviting adam back
to build on earth a house for his love
and acknowledge his sons

here is the sun combing the sunset's hair, and there are bars
in paris which rise like the virgin on her ascension

I convene a meeting with angels of muscular medics,
I become as water and flow into the basin of my sorrows,
or
I become as the horizon and rise to the heights of my desires

I know, we die but once,
yet how many births there are,
and the only good in death
is to leave it behind

I know, the beyond is this rose,
the beyond is this woman,
and the face is but the back of the sky

I know, cloud by cloud
my skies will rise from earthly paradises

welcome to history and its specks of dust:
how can the mortal despair
so long as the wind is his road

there was no chance of meeting richard the lionheart,
or louis XIV, or even napoleon
so I found myself free,
wearing fog and enjoying the sight of dogs
lying on women's breasts,
but I don't remember seeing a single star
dance or read or walk like the stars of my childhood;

I have had to imagine the stars of qassabin[2]
to guide me while wandering through the streets,
hearing people's lamentations flow
without reprieve around the seine

he came to the café (the deux magots, I think),
with him came: the church of saint-germain des prés;
a sky with a paralyzed spine;
jean genet who sought to convince him
to be reconciled with god
for an unconvincing reason
(to discover the hell of heaven);
a land that does not wish to see the sky;
jugglers who read the stars;
and, finally, voices from the arab third world,
full of interpretations of the beyond

(how can I persuade al-ghazali[3]
to illumine his being
with the light of nietzsche
nonetheless I'll remind him:
you have been travelling toward the world
ever since its creation
without having yet arrived)

in the café,
indifferent to the noise,
I read neitzsche and thought him a flood—
yes, I should yield to the flood of meaning
I should, bowing like sunflowers, befriend the sun
I should submit to the waterlilies of desire
in the lake of the body
I should empty myself, like a child
whom I prepare for the future

(b)

(in orly:
the third world seems a crippled elephant
falling with a parachute saying something like:
"paris is making new alliances with the planets,
and learning the revolution of the sun,"
then by the force of some power
the elephant becomes a stream of blood
spreading through houses and shops)

have you seen the poet, his face blending
with the morning, his feet with the night,
have you seen him, leaning his back
against the light, trying to set fire to water,
have you seen how his papers
become crowns for the wind?

promiscuity reigned,
wolves, lying in wait of their prey,
wrapped in the fur of words,
sprang from the fables of la fontaine,
itinerants rested on the necks of empty bottles,
    some of them criticizing mallarmé,
    some of them dreaming of rimbaud,
    some of them reading marquis de sade

(c)

(. . in a place shaped like a windmill
where time is a wall of words:
the mortar fixing them drips like ink
. . . a statue of paper for don quixote, alone,
    a statue for his horse, alone,
and the air—a cloak
suspended from a lead-colored sky)

and the 16th arondissement seemed a forest
of bobbing heads, making a museum
for sexual organs on every corner,
in an ash covering the surface of space—
vocal cords intoned
something like:
warning—

rimbaud,
how can I cross this white world—
I whose body is prophecy,
whose house is the sahara,
how can I explain a light from the beyond
with worldly words

I must, I must—
I'll create my own morals,
I'll make from my death an inaugural poem

they prepare their atomic dust,
we repeat the prayer of the dead—
from water to sand, from sand to snow:
the whole world is a fish to catch

the east is a wound, politics merely pus,
but it will also rain in the west,
it will rain over houses where grass
of diesel and uranium grows,
and the rain will be muddy and black

oh, monsieur's bitch is pissing on the head of les invalides,
oh, madame's dog is shitting on the pillow of l'arc de triomphe

(d)

(. . . this is what was said about contagion
and the putrefaction of time's ovary;
machines transform people into purple soup
in an east furnished with gods of whom we see
nothing but their cloven hooves,
in a west which only reads its guts and jaws
while it collapses beneath silos of electronic seeds)

a dead man gave, a dead man took
and the one who has my soul in his hand,
and the one whose soul is in mine—
they join together in the chorus of speech
on the edge of a cliff

is this world something other
than that which I behold?

and you, oh supreme planets, moved by fingernails,
I invite you to the banquet of catastrophe,
history is seasoned by chefs who garnish plagues
and all work is a sword slicing water

(e)

(black clouds converge from all directions,
the surviving feasts about to expire,
and the atom—a fly buzzing
and creeping on the forehead of time—
oh, clandestine bread, devoured by electronic rats)

(f)

the western poet
must also become acquainted with
weeping on the ruins,
writing on sand,
he should learn
how to unify balsam and poison
and how to solve
what can't be solved,
he must also learn
how to thank the wind

here where the left builds nests
and where the right lays eggs,
I saw time accumulating in heaps of white powder,
while I measure the heights
to which birds of dreams can soar,
while the mosque of the fifth arrondissement
performs its ablutions
and enters the whiteness of prayer

in the morning, while the boulevard saint-michel coughs,
its guts bumping against the soles of passersby,
I enjoy watching the sky slip from between my shoulders,
and a stray cat meow into the ears of the wind

I can make out just two persons in paris:
one dreams, lost on the roads of may 1968;
the other is sprawled out on 16th century carpets

(g)

("what women! what books!"
exclaims the revolutionary guest
as he quickly becomes lost
as a point on a line
or a footnote or a corner
"did your throat stick to this cement,
did your flood ebb in that café,
and the west, what does it have
to offer your desert save sand,
and why is your voice not heard
save when it comes rising
from the reeds that still grow
around the springs remaining
in your generous land?"
oh, mysterious guest,
please don't be dismayed
if I tell you:
"work before death greets you,
die not like the butterfly,
but like the rose)

how then can I reconcile the ashes of paris
and our bleeding sun,
how can I reconcile the two shores of our common sea
while we contend with the emperors of absurdity
and dethrone the sultan of sense,
how can I reconcile the eiffel tower
and the egyptian obelisk in the place de concord—

I swear the former is cold and half-dead
I swear the latter is the most beautiful lover
and her bearing is the upright alif[4]
I swear the bed of human civilization has not known
a more dazzling nakedness

paris,
your light almost betrays me
(it crouches on crutches),
shall I ask the magic carpet to transport me—
I alight on monmartre, on the sill of sacre-coeur,
on an oval plate held by a sheep from jerusalem,
I recognize jacques simon,
who raised goats in his room,
I see people like as monsieur besson
and his wife who groom animals

(h)

1- (say that time has come with its banquet,
that life is time's pebble to cook
and death is its raw meat)

2- (say that speech is the caliph of papers,
the prophecy of wind)

and prepare for their funerals,
I visit a cemetery (quietly,
lest the corpses be roused),
I sit in cafés reminiscent of the café of the blind
in the arcade of the royal palace,
with all kinds of tired people
puffing out hours like cotton

paris,
I have reassembled your scattered parts
in my limbs
and created for you
a new body

(the soul is a speechless ghost,
the body alone can express itself)

here I am tracing the footsteps of the hunchback,
not the hunchback who slept
in the arms of notre dame,
but the one which can be seen,
everyday, a ghost creeping
along the sidewalks of saint-michel,

(i)

(he beholds the sky crucified
on the image of andré breton
and leaves a star
betrayed by the light of surrealism
to weep in his arms)

(j)

[the phoenix is not the stomach,
but the imagination—
then, what is the use of knocking
on marx's head as you knock
on a door, and of climbing him
like a ladder,
if desire remains armless,
if the dream remains a frozen river?
midst confusion he delivered this sermon
in bastille square (in the audience
were saint-just, robespierre and danton,

the night arching above him
in the 16th arrondissement
where the male is an animal park
and the female is a garden of androgynous plants

I say, in a whisper, "ghost," and ask, "nerval,
was the rope soft as you wished?"[5]

verlaine,
look, the arm of poetry extends from opera's dome,
holding the golden harp
and look, it is breaking up right where your corpse passed
on its way to its final resting place
your "loving feasts" accompanied the cart which took berlioz
to montmartre cemetery, listening to it neighing "farewell"
I say, in a whisper, "ghost," and head towards saint-germain
to greet apollinaire: "hello to you also, you ghost, hello"

along with all the rest)
a voice broke out: "to hell with the void
which swallows the self and the throat"
and voices replied: "amen"]

the eiffel tower **notre dame** **the louvre**

(is it a dream—the eiffel tower is no longer in its place and here is the louvre heading towards the eastern shore of the mediterranean as if it too wants to follow the footsteps of alexander the great, and here is notre dame sleeping as it prays, tapping the shoulder of the sky to make it a pillow for its dreams)

the eiffel tower **notre dame** **the louvre**

the mosque of the fifth arrondissement

(is a statue going to convince me that a western virgin was the first to become pregnant with reason—who said: "thus the stomach spoke—we deem the east and the west adversaries and the dust a judge," I look at faces and say: "The inanimate is not in the inanimate, but in man")

notre dame **the mosque of the fifth arrondissement**

weep, oh angels of hell,
you'll no longer find visitors whose roasting you'll relish;
group by group, all the animals go to paradise, the speaking and the dumb

it came to pass—
let the memory of races explode—

abu nuwas[6]

there are those of the order of humans
bestowed with speech, yet they do not speak,
not because they are mute
or have any physical defect,

in a desert fueled for invasion
war is declared
by this and that and this
not to liberate
but to preserve slavery—

and here is a hand which disrobes the air
and garbs it with fresh clothes

baudelaire

congealed angels in notre dame
need female bodies
in order to walk on air—

air which refuses to move
unless you inflate it with your soul—

where women are half-broken jars
in beds hidden beneath the vaults of the seine
and bridges are their floating dreams,

where the electronic mind wraps itself
in krishna's cloak and the black minotaur
lies in the arms of the white woman,

and here is a house my body leads me to
which I recognize as other than my body
in a night so beautiful
I could not tell it from my underwear
where god himself
is soaked by the sweat of the times

where angels of wisdom fly from their prisons
and rush to embrace the angels of desire
in a nebula of signs,
every sign a dictionary

it came to pass—
and explode, oh memory of races—

al-mutannabi[7]

piercings of the nails of the creed
prey chased by mice

creatures with heads of chickens
and frames of giants
in kingdoms—concubines

a person holding a staff
bearing a head,
a symbol of his power,
shreds of corpses and heads,
commas and movements

hugo

in a time—a refinery from which
the blood of the murdered
and the saliva of the murderer
pour out together

a chaos in which things mix—
straw animals run
followed by blind babies

heads like orpheus's
except they swim in smoke
not in water

fables pulse from vein to vein
in a history wound on a reel for preservation—
(praise be camphor and celluloid)

in a scream emitted by no lips
you see hands flailing with no bodies

feet walk at the same time both to the left and to the right

workers return every evening to their shacks
bearing twigs which are but thighs
of the unemployed
do the conditions of the body faithfully correspond
to the conditions of the soul?
I asked that man in beirut wearing red slippers
and riding a locust who shouted this refrain repeatedly
to me: vanity, all is vanity
no, no
my body likes the paleness of the sky
and my dreams change their course,

I imagine that being—making a noose of his face,
passing along the banks of the euphrates and the nile
at the same time he hugs the shores of the seine, the hudson and the thames—
does not walk but sleep-walks in order to feel his limbs

praise be to all ambiguity,
shall I await the harvest of other seeds?

my passion is full of seeds issuing secretly from heraclitus and nietzsche

for, in my sorrows there is something of laurel leaves
and between my shoulders there sets a sail
whose image I once saw in the mediterranean sea near arwad island[8]
(strange that its name has escaped my memory),

for, I am chasing the head of an atom
coming from an electronic cave,
wrapping itself like an onion,
then splitting into sounds of a clerical trumpet
still attached to the trunk of the 16th century,

for, it is enough in this age to make a body of a man
by using the legs of an ant and the head of a locust
(and for his soul choose anything you wish
from the stalls of the souq),

for, the power of the sky still bows
before the chair of joan of arc,
she whose sword still drips water
which heals the leprous,

for, the stomach of this age still is nero's,

for, when I read about freedom in this world,
it seems I'm chasing a three-colored rat,
which in turn is chasing a cat with two tails and three wings

is the body of paris drying up? I asked myself
in champs de mars while welcoming a planet
which quickly changed into mimosa down,
round which gathered stars of speech
small as marie antoinette's ass;
and the trees did not believe the flowers,
nor did the flowers trust the sun—
the wind alone was indifferent,
and the dust applauded—
I thought while looking at the eiffel tower
I saw a girl raising it with her arms
(something contrary to what lewis carroll told of),
faces round it were shaped like clouds, ever-changing color;
the heads were neither lunar nor solar
but rather from another planet
which I can't remember how to describe
(I'll ask littré about it later)
oh, what paradoxes, which alone, are logical—
oh, what contradictions, in which we alone can see unity—

when my musing subsided I said calmly,
paris,
maybe soon (while I enter the bowels of nature,
reciting the names of your streets:
falls street, brook street, poplar street,
acacia street, willow street, almond street,
chestnut street, cherry street, mulberry street,
plum street, fig street, rose street, linden street—
not to mention mouzaïa street, with its arabic resonance)
maybe soon I'll align your vowels and those in my name,
leaving consonants to their heavenly slumber,
or maybe I'll weave of them a carpet no French poet,
not even ponge himself, would be able to tell from a wing

she says that . . .
I say let it be . . .
I throw my pens into a trench on the face of the moon,
and give my memories to a wrinkle in the neck of the seine—
flow, oh river, take away the dust and its seasons,
don't forget that river running between you and yourself,
take care of the femininity in you that appears only as maleness,
take care of that being in you that says he perfected you—

flow, oh seine,
in currents that make silt from people and other debris—

I see the seine flowing—
bearing the silt of arabs and portuguese
of africa and asia, and the remaining labyrinths,
bearing the moss-covered bells of europe,

I see it flowing—
with it flow horses from the middle ages,
renaissance carriages and modern marionettes,
the voices of baudelaire, lautréamont,
nerval, hugo, rimbaud, mallarmé and picasso

it flows, and in its current
revolutions and histories
crumble like stale bread

(k)

(time comes with its beasts,
but how can it tame them?
time comes with its abysses,
yet can it be reflected in them?
time comes with its guillotines,
and all things tremble—
I think your name, oh time,
sticks in the throat
like a nut of nausea)

(l)

(life falters between man's footsteps—
is that why he greets the matter
around him
as if it were his death foretold?
is that why he repeats his question:
will the world be able to sleep
in beds other than those made for killing?)

I say that . . .
she says let it be . . .
flow, oh river,
seat the world's antipodes on your knees
and give them the last breath of air

water is desire
and divers who devise pleasure
and lust hold the banks

it is my desire moving
through the maps of the material
and the moments open in the beds
of the place, like sexual organs

on my walks every morning
from 116 lourmel street
to 1 miollis street, I read
the book of oceans
in the drop of water,

(m)

(neither the east nor the west
belongs to god—pardon me, goethe—
and the north is sinking
in the ice of memory and
whenever the south thinks
itself cured of a disease
it contracts another
then consoles itself
by repeating this refrain:
joy is the closest friend of sadness)

I touch the light that works
like a plough and I discover
how the poet remains a baby
though he's as old as the horizon

thus I no longer hesitate to say:
"the I and the other
are me,"
and time is but a basket
to collect poetry

unexpectedly I meet rimbaud
and we renew our pact:
the veil, it is the light;
the west is another name for the east

no, my body is neither a pelican nor a water lily
but beneath my eyelashes sleeps ophelia
who mistakenly discovered me
and all my dreams are lakes gone mad

(n)

(why is it that his feet
know the seine better
than they know the tigris or barada?[9]

what a fool[10]—he likes man
better than the earth,
the earth better than the homeland)

(o)

I - [the seine has yet to flow east
(the reference here is to something
other than 'the divine blessings,'
praised by goethe in his verse—

now I advise myself aloud
before hamlet:
I must be wise,
always remembering that love and suffering
are of the same family,
ceasing to care
about the day and the night,
the moon and the sun

it is true as hamlet shows
that love has many wars
and that from time to time
a storm is needed in the body
to rearrange its limbs,
thus this evening I watched over
the flocks of streets in paris
and when I saw the fountain of flame
explode from the thighs of buildings
I murmured:
nothing clarifies me like this obscurity
(or perhaps it was: nothing obscures me like this clarity)

the turban, the tent,
the curved sword, song);
its water has yet to mix
like that of the euphrates
with the planet's light]

II - (we have yet to raise
another pillar of wisdom,
for us to make spaceships
to transport us not to planets
but to our own homes,
for us to create winged creatures
to transport, at no cost, all the poor
who dream of circumambulating
their holy places
we have yet to change wind
into a perfect roll of the dice)

this is me—
I waft from my race like perfume
from a dying rose,
I undulate and spread
like bees I make my own honey
this is life—cold,
scarcely even a wound,
I see nothing but machines
swarming in the fields
of human breath,
and there is neither day nor night—
only a continuous thread of disjointed moments—

the outside is not my home
the inside confines me—

like a perfume from a dying rose
I waft from my race

I don't want to name
I want to be lofty as light
I don't want to hold on
I want to be like the wind

Paris, 1986-1987

III- (how can he be at ease—
a fish in the water
of these times,
how can he live in a body
drained of its substance,
how can he dismantle this corporal body
made of his speech,
a body supported
by the columns
of an incorporal language)

NOTES

1 *Daud* is a letter found uniquely in the Arabic alphabet. Hence the language itself is commonly referred to as *lugha-al daud* or the language of *daud*.

2 A village in the hills not far from the seaside town of Jebleh, in Syria, where Adonis grew up.

3 Islamic mystic philosopher (1058-1111).

4 Alif, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, is simply a straight vertical line, like an "I". A moral interpretation is often given to its upright character.

5 A reference, no doubt, to Nerval's suicide by hanging.

6 Abu Nuwas, the poet whom Adonis has called the Baudelaire of the Arabs, lived from 757-814.

7 The great Arab poet (915-965), whose name means "the Would-be Prophet," is well known for his poetry praising the rulers whose patronage he enjoyed.

8 A small island, off the coastal village of Tartus, in northwest Syria, not far from the poet's hometown, Qassabin.

9 The Barada is the small river which runs through (and under) Damascus.

10 "Fool" seems the best translation of *bahlul*, the Persian word Adonis frequently uses. As well as various other meanings of the word ("generous master," "honest man," and so on), might be the poet himself.

Because of many of the line lengths, this poem has been set vertically in *Sulfur*. Such a presentation occasionally creates stanza breaks where no stanza breaks exist in the original.

ROBERT VANDERMOLEN

TWO POEMS

RAVINE

A soughing sound
Through trees and shadow

Fuddles the issue

Crude face with birdsong—

If you could paint
Your soul

It would appear
Primitive,
Frowzy

Lichen wrapped,
The north slope
Of a deer's liver—

A deep sweep of wind
Would alter the landscape considerably

THAT BUNNY SMELL

That bunny smell at the fence
The dog understands

While you spot a neighbor
Unzipping his pants

To urinate behind his ash,

A free lot between us.
All the men

Are watching football inside
Or napping with their wives

It's embarrassing
When he sees you

Of course the dog is trying
To undo the fence—

A worm in the guts

Trying to make a long rope
Out of knots

Perhaps his mate
Is pouring whiskey

Into the sink,
His underwear out a front window.

Blackberry vines
Concealing mounds

Of shoved soil.
Contractor's trash

A warren of tunnels.
Bad rumors.

My dog whines,
Fumbles back and forth—

Maybe he missed deer camp
This year

His portfolio is dying

From an upper window
His son cries Dad

Forrest Gander

FIELD GUIDE TO SOUTHERN VIRGINIA

True as the circumference to its center. Woodscreek Grocery, Rockbridge County. Twin boys peering from either edge of the door, cheeks crammed with fireballs. The Sand Plum trees flowering in clusters by the levee. She makes a knot on the inside knob and ties my arms up against the door. Williamsburg green. With a touch as faint as a watermark. Tracing cephalon, pygidium, glabella.

If analogy suggests coincidence, homology shows descent. The row of ant lions barely within the drip line of our roof. Where Indian grass and Redtop grow high as her scar. Roses of wave ripples and gutter casts. Your sex hidden by goat's beard. Laminations in the sediment. All preserved as internal molds in a soft, dark shale.

Swayback, through freshly cut stalks, stalks the yellow cat. Can you smell where analyses end, the Orchard Oriole begins? Slap her breasts lightly to see them quiver. Delighting in this. Desiccation cracks and plant debris throughout the interval. In Blackwater River, fishnets float from the Tupelo's spongy root, chopped into corks. There may be sprawling precursors, volant clades there are none.

About termites, Mrs. Elsinore explained, there are two sides to the floor. A flock of crows slaughters all sixty lambs. The gambit declined, less promising. Toward the east, red and yellow colors prevail. For the entirety of the Ordovician. Tonguing green olives from the interstice of your thighs.

In addition, the trilobites were tectonically deformed. Snap-on tools glinting from magenta Loosestrife, the air sultry with creosote and cicadas. You made me to lie down in a peri-Gondwanan back-arc basin. Semen passing back and forth between their mouths. Disappearing like cotton candy. Takes a full breath, bursts into the inner cave behind Panther Falls. Force and sound at full gallop. Bi-directional prod marks.

Egrets picketing the spines of cattle in fields edged with common tansy. Flowers my father gathered for my mother to chew. To induce abortion. A common, cosmopolitan agnostoid lithofacies naked in the foothills. I love the character of your intelligence, its cast as well as pitch. Border wide without marginal spines. At high angles to the inferred shoreline.

It is the thin flute of the clavicles, each rain-pit above them. The hypothesis of flexural loading. Nipples pink as Steepleflower. One particular day, four hundred million years ago, the mud stiffened and held the stroke of waves. Orbital motion. Raking leaves from the raspberries, you uncover a nest of spring salamanders.

LUIGI BALLERINI

THREE POEMS

(Tr. from the Italian by Jeremy Parzen and the author)

EEPHUS PITCH

We obey the coaxings of our end
—Wallace Stevens

when lacunae or false moves loom
and a severed hand floats up, oily,
a widespread profile knocking and pinging,
when people begin to say, "this is a jam,
an inert weighbridge, a balk," the catch is
that in the end all that really matters
is the nature of the Eephus pitch.
It's not so much that you can't see

the lob or that the gnawing and its
indelible reason are smothered by the utterance
of a jubilant fanning; it's the harmony
of the parts that interferes, the rust,
the departure of a jealous variant:
and those borders in the center, and that
dampened view at once exonerating and
discoloring. I admit to stealing this trade

along with the idea that a challenge well-met
or well-made (a single matrix is suspected)
was the more profitable half of the contract,

Note on "Eephus Pitch": the Italian title of this poem, "Alla Puskas," alludes to a style of penalty kick made famous by the Hungarian football player. The "Eephus Pitch" was a deceptive lob developed by baseball player Rip Sewell on the 1940s.

the guarantee of safe-haven, if not that
of passage: sure he was handsome, and they
laid him down in the infield, and watered him
so that, in secret, he would smell nice:
like a panther, I mean, or a phoenix

italics

it's laughter that sets the angry mind apart
from smoke, from the oracle, it's the restless
lull of laughter eating away at the track
and the discordant antennae of delay,
it's the parched steam of the thrust
that activates the wound and twists its jargon:
the weather breaks, the guest takes to his heels,
I'll emphasize myself, if you ask, shoot myself
in the mouth with an air-gun, and I'm not one
to sing cold, except when threatened with gain,
with a grassy ford full of double meanings

leave yourself at the door

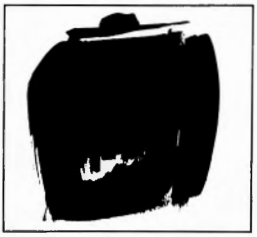
for Klaus

when the trial-run is respite, and illicit foams
protect the ultramarines, the sepia-blacks, the Sienna-reds
that skip a vintage or two, when your unnamed likeness,
the theft, the cabal of stranded words, run out of breath,
when vinegar, or its worm breaks away, and a habit

dissolves the escape, turning it to praise and corollary:
who seizes the bandoleer, who trespasses, who ships his
oars? who has the heart to yell the show's been canceled,
who sticks out from the wall, who fathoms the marrow
and the makeup? the flood is also full of risks, arched
forgiving voices, sleeping cures, with fallen shrapnel
and you with your refrain: "he was one of the best
in health-class." "And in good conduct," my sweet iguana,
"in the quality of foods and silks, in acquisitions
and sales, in the precarious inflection of the real"

Barbara Guest

Quill, Solitary *Apparition*



Barbara Guest's poetry and her novel, *Seeking Air,* have been fundamental to my work and life for twenty years. Of late, her work increases in acceleration. Quill, Solitary *Apparition* is of perfect weight. The whole is on a blade. I feel the poetry moves beyond me and fills in where I will go.

— Mei-mei Berssenbrugge

Where is this world so similar to our own and yet parallel to it, detached, with passion, urgently contemplative? Perception is here purified by a flame which at last we dare call poetry. There's high enegy (in this parting from modernity and its medieval trappings) made of elements which become words transcending themselves into the solitude of pure light.

— Etel Adnan

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Tam Lin Neville

THE LAST SUPPERS OF THE HUNDRED YEAR OLD WOMAN

Number my days,
there will I be
or by some
place you don't go to. . . .
There are weeds,
not much light
ground I once turned,
dirt bed. Bed my back along
this stuffing, springs. . . .
Each day
into which I swallow
pear mush on a spoon.
She feeds me tea
that falls in the pan.
So it is, she says,
Tuesday.

There are good plates in the cupboard.
Some meals we had over.
Some were done.
It was once
ones that came back
and some that none could follow.
What they said, mashing down with a fork
or grit to wash away sand
so many could eat.
An empty plate
not ready again.

The day it was to come home
she stood,
an apron over her head.
Spoke, she would not eat.
He pushed the meat. . . .
Napkin, soil.
Those were the green china roses
and one that was split.
At midnight, they turn
over my pillow.
It is not like counting.
They say:
Come back. We are done. No one was there.
The day was always the end of the day.
How much can be saved? I said,
It is reeling.

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twenty years ago i
knew about love. now
i am tired. i study
primary needs.
i wonder about cowboys
going to sleep on
stony ground, their
saddles their pillows,
the hard day behind them.

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DENNISON SMITH

TWO POEMS

LETTER FROM AN UNCLE IN THE NAVY, ASSIGNED TO McMURDO STATION TO SUPERVISE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIRST ATOMIC REACTOR IN ANTARCTICA, 1970

Negative August

Twisted to the Flag and freed along slack
Plains of Black / White

Combustible Midnight / his eyes rounded off. . .

Even though we have already one female scientist [bracket] with
[husband
Russians plying toasts to Camp Vodha / a boozy New York voice

Cape Crozier / the damnedest collection of Playboy Centerfolds
Wedge and berg ice / to winter over / fleshly love in the
[Weddell seal

Blue tongue. . .

Or a lead in the floe where the sled dogs drowned at Christmas
To Crack and he will float forever. . .

Breath hole. . .

I long he wrote for unknown words:
Ope: a thin covered passage between English houses

Gloam and Angel fords
Oxtail, icecream and shadow. . .

Enters closed rooms and closets, confessionals, she is dust

I saw sweat in cold ground, saw the calcium shine, oxalite of

A squaw in her swell, a winged female
And isolate death

Glass in the spit of her hand

Between us. . .
Eyelids / tin layer / five and a half acres of tunnel / uninhabited
[Last

ides

horizon disfigured, still in the ring
blown midnight or momentary cool

hazel, and bent, oxidized

under your weight and your own attraction

creosote
cat nipples
hinges of birch

you and the objects in the field

(i shit, it girdles, it soothes, black back to the beginning)

now the moon disappears from the perfect body

coiled and come out of there jezebel:
forcemeat.

ash mourners, rummies, about in the broil
singing, the clow snapped

flow. . .

butter run down for stretches dark

rot and
up the flume and

the verbal grasp, lychnis gone. . .
willow stopped. . .lure. . .ire

breba
breccia

litter of transition, clung
roughly resembling a bird

GWYN MCVAY

TWO POEMS

THE CARDIFF GIANT

. . .every man is a peece of the *Continent,* a part of the *Maine;*
if a *Clod* be washed away by the *Sea, Europe* is the lesse. . .
—John Donne

You hoax—*Like the island of Surtsey,*
off Iceland, spewing ropy lava down the sea

"Our first point of suspicion was that
the genitals were poorly differentiated"

Die Schamteile, parts of shame: this quartz
axolotl, this larva of diatom-earth:

He wades in the channel at Dover,

talking a crumbled language in which *K*
replaces every *L,* mouthful of chalk,

old Latinist: *My name is* Surdus, *the deaf one*
Sursum corda, *lift up your hearts*

and in this exact carving,
this gypsum glyph, his stone mouth,

there are soft teeth made of flesh

I have wounded my head & must rest
it on these crossed pickaxes

In the lines of glacier-scar, hachures,
map-fissures, shapes distill

A zinc tub full of ice. Some books
full of wheat and mud. A skeleton-horse,

He falls in a flare of xenon,
face to face with the virus called *holy earth,*

this manmade Antaeus:
"Ymir
was the first giant, and when he died
the universe was made from his body"

practicing economies of scale:

A fragment of cheekbone crumbles
when struck by the prospector's axe

It was salt-dough all along, the gism
and bread of this grim mineral ball,

dust and bits of talk: a hoax exhumed
from the mainland:
"*Europe* is the lesse"

A PHENOMENOLOGY

I.

About yourself finding a bison's teeth, on the ground
and then loose in your mouth, thick and aching,

about digging with your fingers in gravel and shell holes
for wet roots, translucent as X-rays of stars

Stari Most, the old bridge, the stones of it in Mostar
set loose from their sockets, its towering arch

crumbled to dirt—this chip of a clay jar, broken
at a soaring angle, cathedral's vault in the palm,

this molar heavy as rounds from a tank, its cusp
a starry roof, a dome built from mortar and stones

II.

Cathérine, to speak openly: your throat, on the lid of your tomb,
your stone hair loose, your lips open, as if at any moment

your head might loll, you might gasp—the slight marble
hollows between ribs, your hand knotted over your sex,

sinews drawn rigid—How could the sculptor have known
this wasting that would become commonplace?

Gaudite, be glad: in the gaps where the bones of the knuckle
part and then touch, in this lightless transit, is praise

III.

There, the clocks are just striking

As if, somewhere, a meteorite rings
on a chipped curbstone, immutable,
lighting the streets from below

In the Middle Ages, men had no great thought
that they did not write down in stone,

a glittering excrescence, a shedding
of mica flakes, minute lettering—
Anzicek, Praznika, a church, as if

on this map, the auras and lineaments
could be fingered and read, like syllables
from a phonograph playing in English
O love o love o careless love

These shards, an enigmatic childbirth
in which the bones of the pelvis gape open
wide enough to let light in, to seem transparent

JORIE GRAHAM

LE MANTEAU DE PASCAL

I have put on my great coat it is cold.

It is an outer garment.

Coarse, woolen.

Of unknown origin.

*

It has a fine inner lining but it is
as an exterior that you see it—a grace.

*

I have a coat I am wearing. It is a fine admixture.
The woman who threw the threads in the two directions,
[headlong,
has made, skillfully, something dark-true,
as the evening calls the bird up into
the branches of the shaven hedgerows,
to twitter bodily
a makeshift coat—the boxelder cut back stringently by the owner
that more might grow next year, and thicker, you know—
the birds tucked gestures on the inner branches—
and space in the heart,
not shade-giving, not
chronological. . .Oh transformer, logic, where are you here in
[this fold,
my name being called-out now but back, behind,
in the upper world. . . .

*

I have a coat I am wearing I was told to wear it.
Someone knelt down each morning to button it up.
I looked at their face, down low, near me.
What is *longing?* what is a *star?*
Watched each button a peapod getting tucked back in.
Watched harm with its planeloads folded up in the sleeves.
Watched grappling hooks trawl through the late-night waters.
Watched bands of stations scan unable to ascertain.
There are fingers, friend, that never grow sluggish.
They crawl up the coat and don't miss an eyehole.
Glinting in kitchenlight.
Supervised by the traffic god.
Hissed at by grassblades that wire-up outside
their stirring rhetoric—this is your land, this is my *my*—

*

You do understanding, don't you, by looking?
The coat, which is itself a ramification, a city,
floats vulnerably above another city, ours,
the *city on the hill* (only with hill gone),
floats in illustration
of what was once believed, and thus was visible—
(all things believed are visible)—
floats a Jacob's ladder with hovering empty arms, an open throat,
a place where a heart might beat if it wishes,
pockets that hang awaiting the sandy whirr of a small secret,
folds where the legs could be, with their kneeling mechanism,
the floating fatigue of an after-dinner herald,
not guilty of any treason towards life except fatigue,
a skillfully cut coat, without chronology,
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed—
as then it is, abruptly, the last stitch laid in, the knot bit off—
hung there in Gravity, as if its innermost desire,
numberless the awaitings flickering around it,
the other created things also floating but not of the same order,
[no,
not like this form, built so perfectly to mantle the body,

the neck like a vase awaiting its cut flower,
a skirting barely visible where the tucks indicate
the mild loss of bearing in the small of the back,
the grammar, so strict, of the two exact shoulders—
and the law of the shouldering—
and the chill allowed to skitter up through,
and those crucial spots where the fit cannot be perfect—
oh skirted loosening aswarm with lessenings,
with the mild pallors of unaccomplishment,
flaps night-air collects in,
folds. . .But the night does not annul its belief in,
the night preserves its love for, this one narrowing of infinity,
that floats up into the royal starpocked blue its ripped, distracted
[supervisor—
this coat awaiting recollection, this coat awaiting the fleeting
[moment, the true moment, the hill, the vision of the hill,
and then the moment when the prize is lost, and the erotic
[tinglings of the dream of reason
are left to linger mildly in the weave of the fabric according to
[the rules,
the wool gabardine mix, with its grammatical weave,
never never destined to lose its elasticity,
its openness to abandonment,
its willingness to be disturbed.

*

July 11. . . Oaks: the organization of this tree is difficult. Speaking generally no doubt the determining planes are concentric, a system of brief contiguous and continuous tangents, whereas those of the cedar wd. roughly be called horizontals and those of the beech radiating but modified by droop and by a screw-set towards jutting points. But beyond this since the normal growth of the boughs is radiating there is a system of spoke-wise clubs of green—sleeve-pieces. And since the end shoots curl and carry young scanty leaf-stars these clubs are tapered, and I have seen also pieces in profile with chiseled outlines, the blocks thus made detached and lessening towards the end. However the knot-star is the chief thing: it is whorled, worked round, and

this is what keeps up the illusion of the tree. Oaks differ much, and much turns on the broadness of the leaves, the narrower giving the crisped and starry and catharine-wheel forms, the broader the flat-pieced mailed or chard-covered ones, in wh. it is possible to see composition in dips, etc. But I shall study them further. It was this night I believe but possibly the next that I saw clearly the impossibility of staying in the Church of England.

*

How many coats do you think it will take?

The coat was a great-coat.

The Emperor's coat was.

How many coats do you think it will take?

The undercoat is dry. What we now want is?

The sky can analyze the coat because of the rips in it.

The sky shivers through the coat because of the rips in it.

The rips in the sky ripen through the rips in the coat.

There is no quarrel.

*

I take off my coat and carry it.

*

There is no emergency.

*

I only made that up.

*

Behind everything the sound of something dripping

The sound of something: I will vanish, others will come here,
[what is that?

The canvas flapping in the wind like the first notes of our
[absence

An origin is not an action though it occurs at the very start

Desire goes traveling into the total dark of another's soul
looking for where it breaks off

I was a hard thing to undo

*

The life of a customer

What came on the paper plate

overheard nearby

an impermanence of structure

watching the lip-reading

had loved but couldn't now recognize

*

What are the objects, then, that man should consider most
[important?

What sort of a question is that he asks them.

The eye only discovers the visible slowly.

It floats before us asking to be worn,

offering "we must think about objects at the very moment
when all their meaning is abandoning them"

and "the title provides a protection from significance"

and "we are responsible for the universe."

*

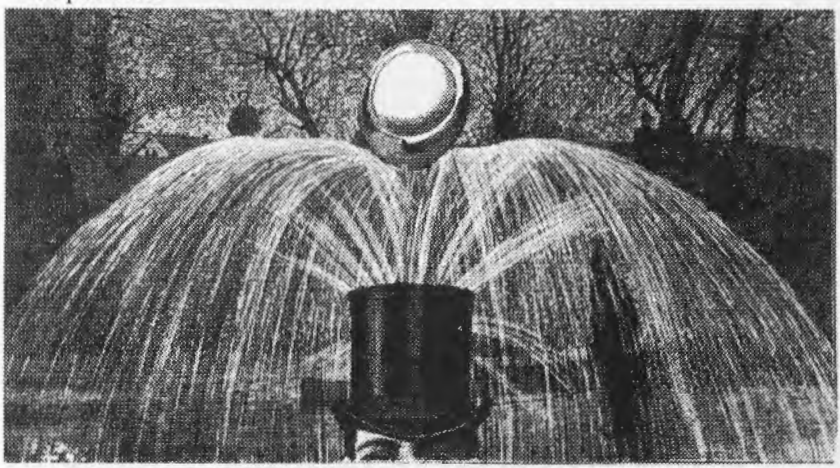
I have put on my doubting, my wager, it is cold.
It is an outer garment, or, conversely a natural covering,
so coarse and woolen, also of unknown origin,
a barely apprehensible dilution of evening into
an outer garment, or, conversely a natural covering,
to twitter bodily a makeshift coat,
that more might grow next year, and thicker, you know,
not shade-giving, not chronological,
my name being called out now but from out back, behind,
an outer garment, so coarse and woolen,
also of unknown origin, not shade-giving, not chronological,
each harm with its planeloads folded up in the sleeves,
you do understand, don't you, by looking?
the jacob's ladder with its floating arms its open throat,
that more might grow next year, and thicker, you know,
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed,
the other created things also floating but not of the same order,
not shade-giving, not chronological,
you do understand, don't you, by looking?
a neck like a vase awaiting its cut flower,
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed,
the moment the prize is lost, the erotic tingling,
the wool-gabardine mix, its grammatical weave
—you do understand, don't you, by looking?—
never never destined to lose its elasticity,
it was this night I believe but possibly the next
I saw clearly the impossibility of staying
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed,

also of unknown origin, not shade-giving, not chronological
since the normal growth of boughs is radiating
a system of spoke-wise clubs of green—sleeve pieces—
never never destined to lose its elasticity
my name being called out now but back, behind,
hissing how many coats do you think it will take
"or try with eyesight to divide" (there is no quarrel)
behind everything the sound of something dripping
a system of spoke-wise clubs of green—sleeve-pieces—
filled with the sensation of suddenly being completed
the wool gabardine mix, the grammatical weave,
the never-never-to-lose-its-elasticity: my name
flapping in the wind like the first note of my absence
hissing how many coats do you think it will take
are you a test case is it an emergency
flapping in the wind the first note of something
overheard nearby an impermanence of structure
watching the lip-reading, there is no quarrel,
I will vanish, others will come here, what is that,
never never to lose the sensation of suddenly being
completed in the wind—the first note of our quarrel—
it was this night I believe or possibly the next
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed,
I will vanish, others will come here, what is that now
floating in the air before us with stars a test case
that I saw clearly the impossibility of staying

KRISTIN PREVALLET

CHAPTER TWO: REPRODUCTION WITHIN THE INVISIBLE *from* PERTURBATION, MY SISTER (*a study of Max Ernst's* HUNDRED HEADLESS WOMEN)

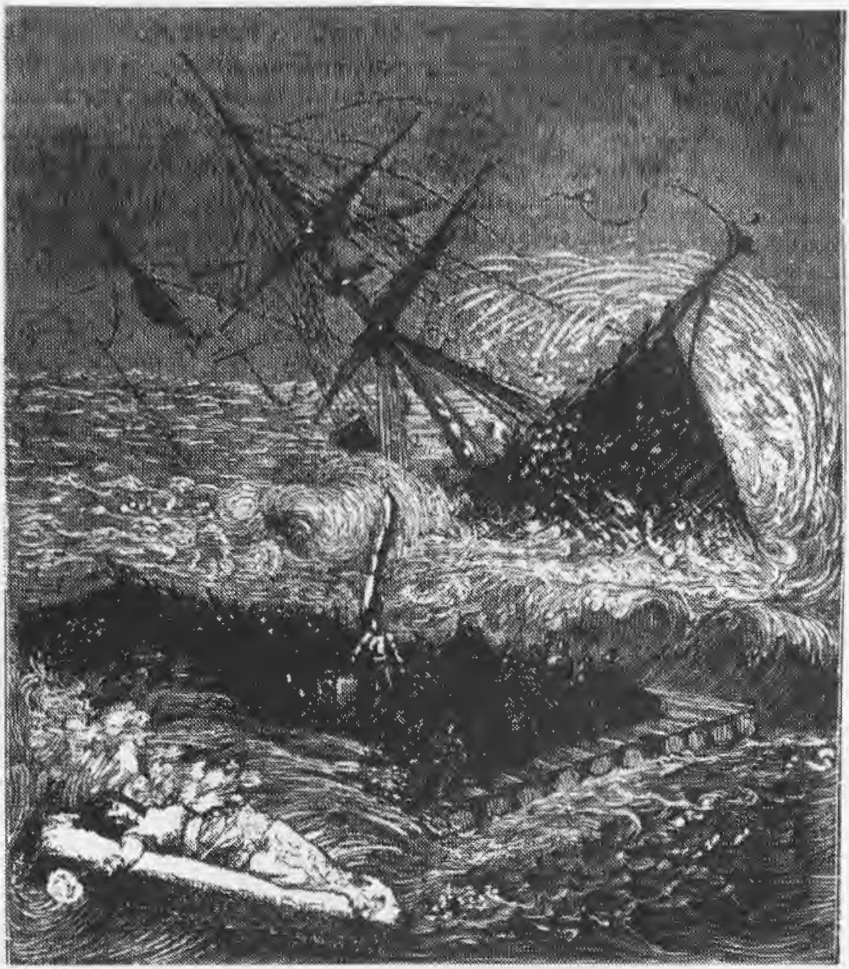
1. Copulation



The Grande Jatte hibernators.

The fountain sustained an egg that bounced from stream to stream, as if a gentleman's top hat had somehow imposed on the flow of things and claimed it could hatch the world (shouting):

Note: *La Femme 100 Têtes* was first published in Paris in 1929 and is the first of three collage novels created by Max Ernst. The book consists of 156 collages, the materials for which Ernst took from turn-of-the-century pulp novels and advertisements, divided into seven chapters each with a short text beneath each collage written by Ernst, and later translated by Dorthea Tanning into English. For each collage I wrote one prose paragraph, and then rearranged the paragraphs into new chapters to tell a "narrative" different from Ernst's. Thus, the collages here reproduced are not in the same order as they appear in the original book. Needless to say, I had not intended that my text be read at all in affiliation with the collages, except that I wanted to name Ernst as the essential source. In other words, the text was written to be independent of the collages from which it was created. Finally however, the desire for a liberation of text and image, word and source, or collage from the materials which shaped it is inevitably impossible, attracted as we may be to the attempt.

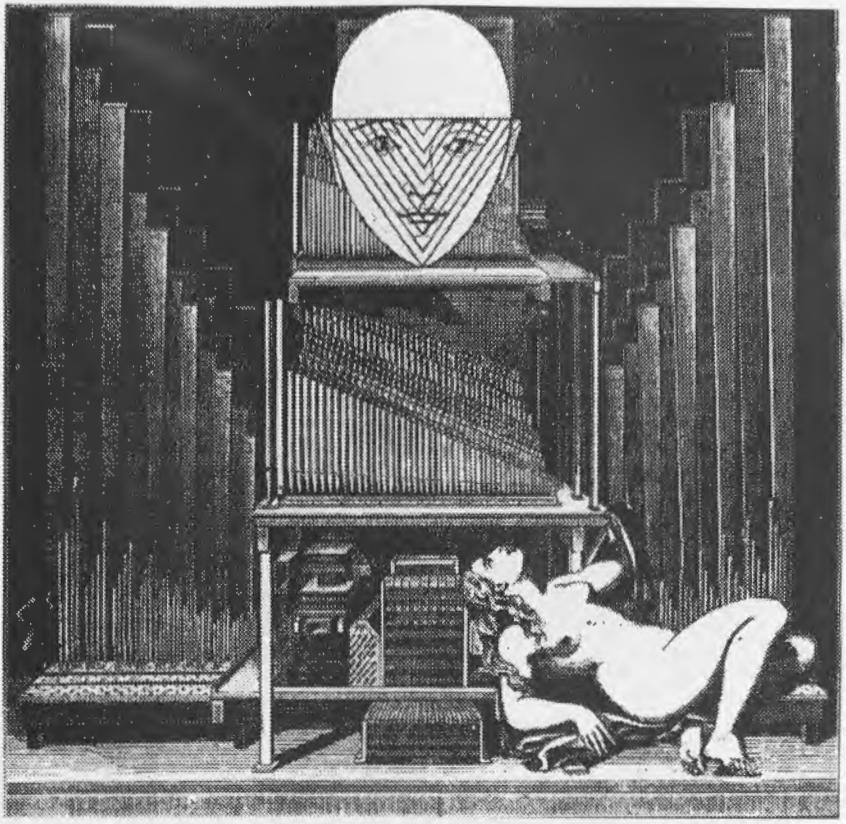


Sea of serenity.

"You there, woman, whose sleeping figure is the shape of fear, have you seen the curse of shipwrecked boats struggling with the sea? Did help cry out of the sailor who was drowning and save him in spite of his desire to die? The sky in all its wanderings through black and unseen nights seeks your hair to glide on, but you lie there afraid that some mad rapist watches as you turn."

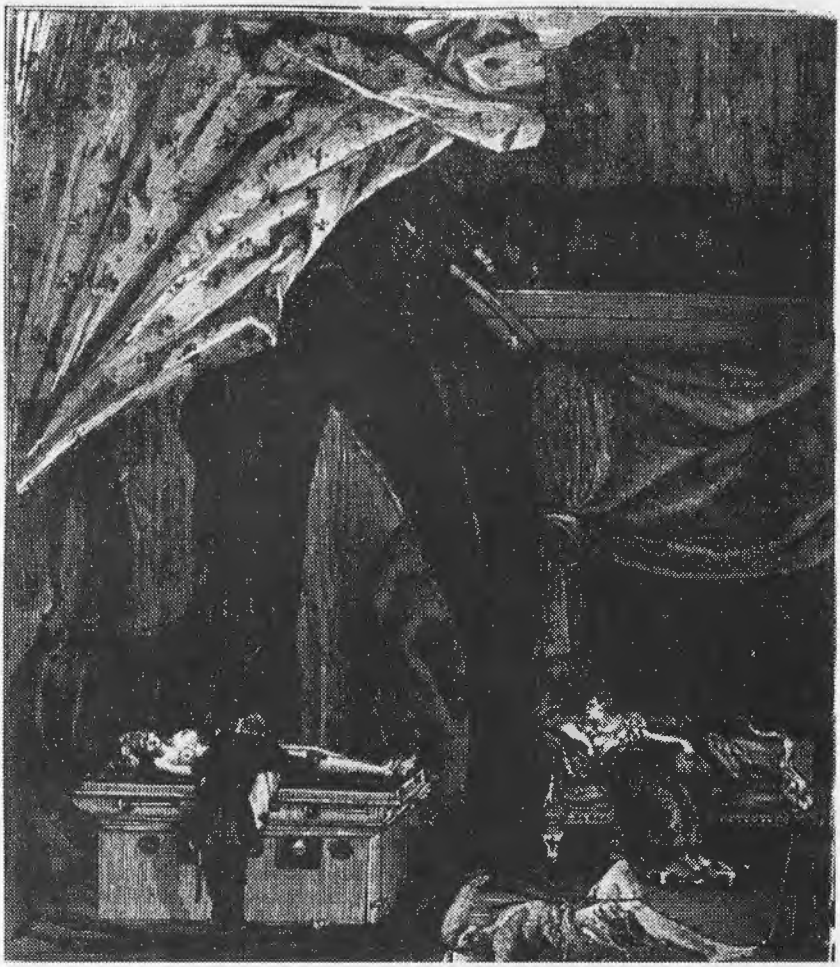
The hundred headless woman opens her august sleeve.

Dream on you frail men draped in linen, who cling to the body of a woman floating heavily in sleep, the cacti is prodding in the deep, and will sting through the layers of fleece upon fleece until you are aroused or arising with the lighted missiles of morning. You assume that she will carry you in flight, dying as you are through the milk that spills from between your legs where flows the silken anguish of four boars mating.



The Immaculate Conception.

To the organist's surprise, the tune he was piping gave birth to a god wrapped in chords. Sadly, the tune was no longer music to his ears, but lay idle in wait for her ascent into heaven. Music, she who raises skylines to peak in heaven, ordered the organist to keep his organ prone and dangling, and in spite of his desire to join with the arousing events on the alter, he dutifully obeyed his muse.

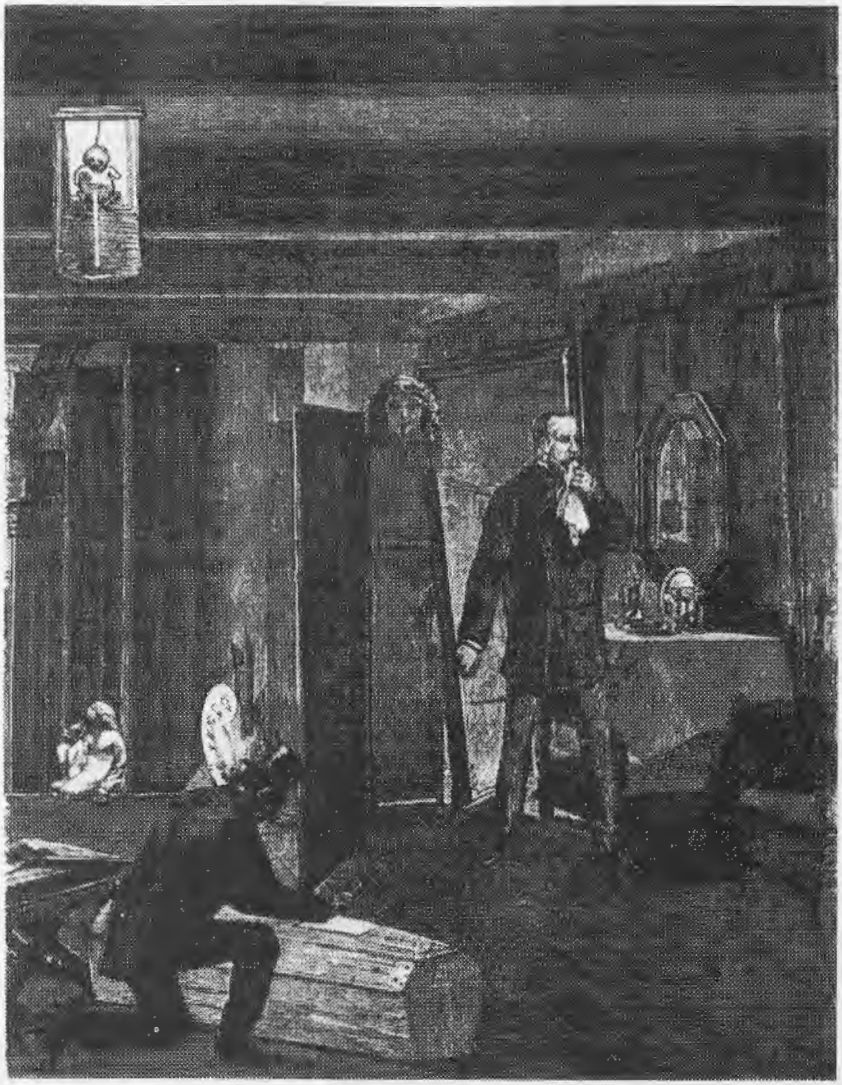


Night screams in her lair and approaches our eyes like raw flesh.

Night appeared as the oval between her legs, and revealed its indented shadow by drawing back the heavy curtains of the window. Inside, ladies wait for the screams of young women whose youth is boiled out of them on stoves meant for stew. Supple doctors listen as her stomach gurgles the familiar passing of stones that mark old age as they drop.

. . .and the third time missed.

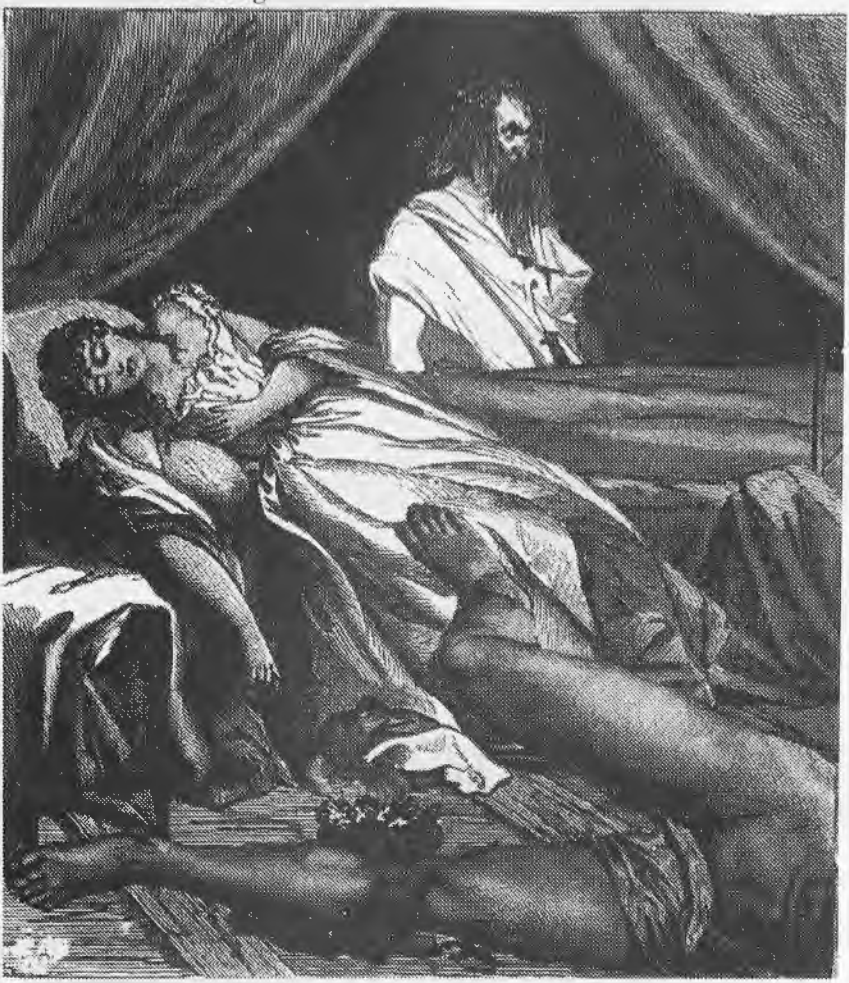
(Legs outstretched the plywood box in spite of the screaming. [Devised by two men who needed the baby without the woman.] In their cellar they channeled currents of light strong enough to stir eggs from her invisible torso.)



A scream of large diameter stifles the fruit and the pieces of meat in the coffin.

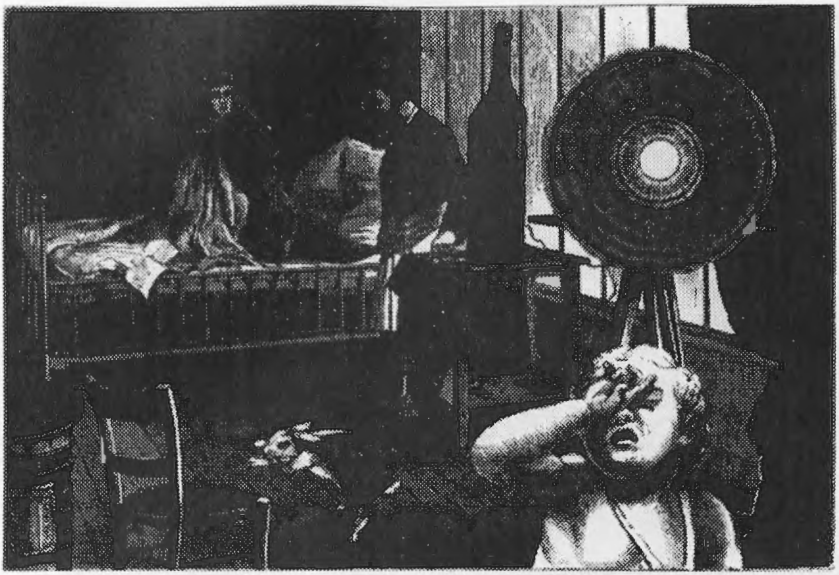
"Never mind the bolts!" said one man to another, "she is dead and in her coffin so we cannot be accused of murder." But the door knobs with their lion ears and the lamps lit with infant oils saw everything and warned the fruit to keep its rotting smell to itself.

3. The Water Breaking



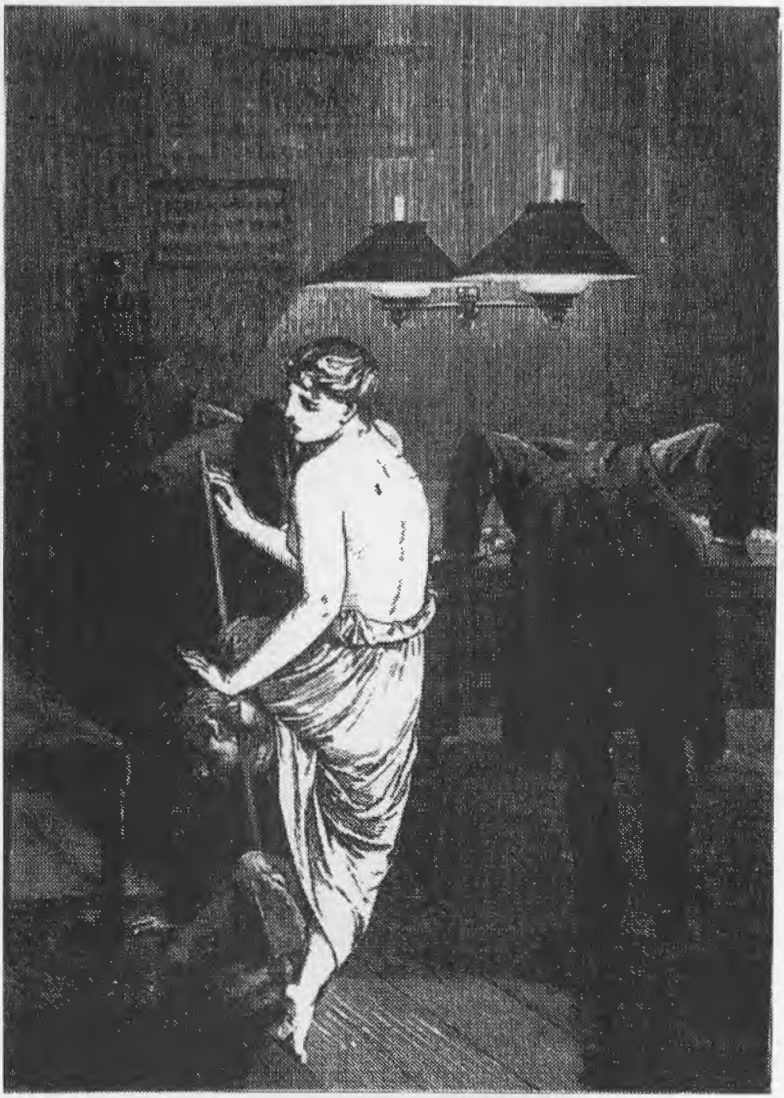
The hundred headless woman will even smile in her sleep in order that Loplop will smile at the phantoms.

(Puzzled, the pieces threw themselves into the saw that seared between his thighs. She fainted at the sight of so many fragments, for she thought her mind was frazzled. Luckily, it was just the world, crumbling around her.)



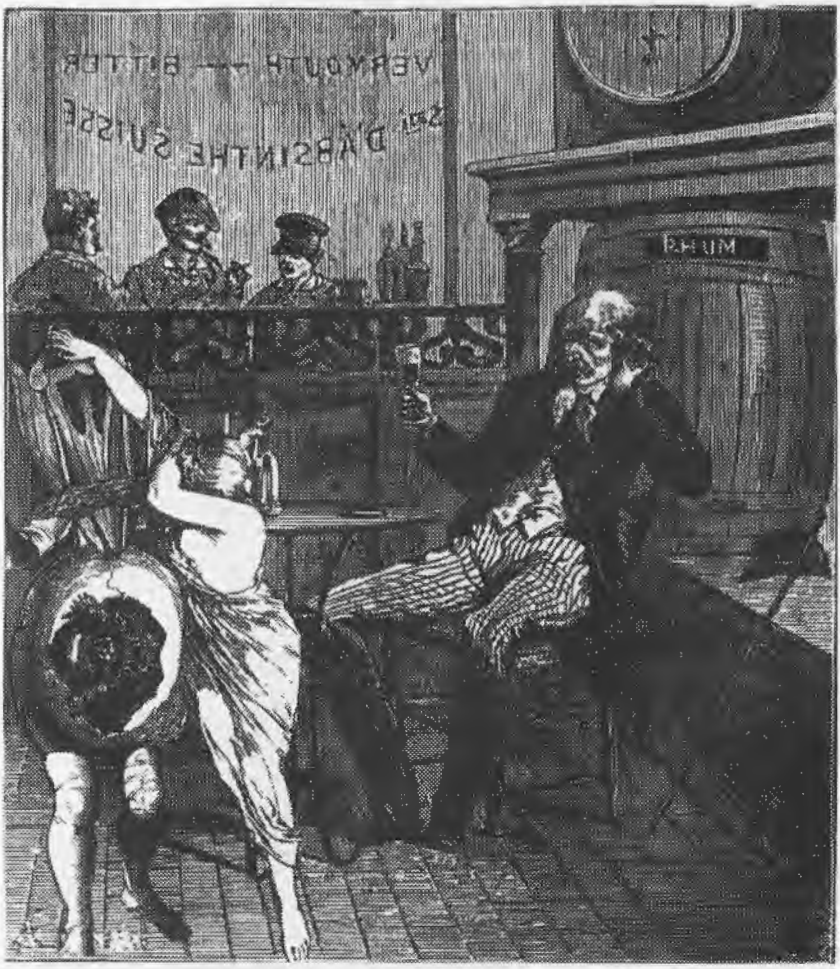
A might-have-been Immaculate Conception.

His birth was not unusual, but left behind the horrors of its emergence and threatened to pre-occupy him for the remainder of his days. If his mother had not used his crib for her stirrups, the bell-boy would not have been present to calm her contractions. If the bell-boy was a magician in disguise, then the rabbit would not have popped the cork and set the placenta free. To the child who fears the closed-in kisses of old women, the wheel of destiny will always be spun by a sun making shadows from the bars of clamped windows.



Continuation of morning, twilight and night games.

The men bent their sticks into telescopes to see if the phantom was hiding at the bottom of the center pocket. From the sleeping baby, obsessed with its shadow, she emerged, ready to cue the men through their arses. "Look for the ghosts in your own hole, sire," she said, "and use not the eight ball to disguise your desire."



Continuation.

At the billiard's club:

Rum gives the illusion of two phantoms struggling.

One stiff statue holds tight the white linen around her.

The pregnant harp gives birth to a tortoise.

Struggling, the night cuts lines into the woodwork.

The statue pulls the string and breaks the egg.

Credit: © 1996 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SPADEM / Adagp, Paris.

COMMENTARY

"SENTENCE NOT SENTENCE"

Steve McCaffery, *The Cheat of Words* (Toronto: ECW Press).
Tom Raworth, *Clean & Well Lit: Selected Poems 1987-1995* (New York: Roof Books).
Susan Howe, *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974-1979* (New York: New Directions).
Vincent Bugliosi, *Outrage: The Five Reasons why O. J. Simpson got away with Murder* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co.)

When the O. J. Simpson verdict came in, I wept. I was on the plane between Los Angeles and San Jose (my weekly run up to Stanford) when the pilot gave us the news. No one around me seemed to react. Maybe I took it so hard because I had followed the case so closely and was (or rather, am) convinced that there wasn't a doubt in the world that Simpson had committed the double murder. Maybe it was the immediacy of it all, given that I live a few minutes' drive from Rockingham Road, regularly drive down Bundy past the "crime scene," and have dined a number of times at the now notorious Mezzaluna on San Vicente Blvd. Or maybe I cried because the trial and its discourses were such living proof of the debasement of language in *fin de siècle* America.

What's language got to do with it? What power is contained in such meter-making arguments as "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit?" Well, given that, as Vincent Bugliosi's devastating *Outrage* reminds us, the evidence against Simpson was absolutely overwhelming, the case may well have been "lost," not primarily, as is the common wisdom, because the defense played the "race card," or because "a predominantly black jury won't convict a black defendant," but because the rhetoric of the trial—the packaged language games and misuse of simple sentences and proposi-

tions to which we were all treated by the judge, the attorneys for both sides, as well as by the scandal-driven media, stood in the way of any sort of reasoned analysis.

Take the assumption that "police brutality" and "police framing" are equivalent, an assumption cynically put forward by the defense, never refuted by the prosecution, and quickly parrotted by the media. The former, as Bugliosi notes, is par for the course in the LA ghetto, where white policemen regularly harrass black citizens. Policy brutality is an outrage and it should be severely punished. But the latter, if we accept the Random House dictionary definition of "framing" as "incriminating an *innocent* person through the use of false evidence, information, etc.," is extremely rare because it is extremely difficult and dangerous: if a police officer, much less a group of officers is found guilty of a frame-up, the death penalty is a real possibility. And, as *Outrage* demonstrates step by step, there was no way for even the despicable Mark Fuhrman to enlist the dozen other officers at the crime scene in the particular frame-up the LAPD ostensibly performed. Further: there is not a shred of evidence that a frame-up had occurred, the police having, on the contrary, covered up for Simpson The Celebrity for years. Indeed, the defense attorneys never dared to assert that Simpson actually *had been* framed. Insinuation was quite enough, the media soon referring sagely to "the LAPD plot to incriminate Mr. Simpson," and so on. Thus, when Johnnie Cochran declared in his summation that the jury must return a "Not-Guilty" verdict so as to stop the Mark Fuhrmans of the world, with the fighting words, "If you don't stop it, *then who*?," there was no objection from the media or from the public even though the question is utterly absurd. In what possible sense could the twelve jurors in question "stop" police brutality or racism in America by finding O. J. Simpson not guilty? The answer is that they had no such power at all. Indeed, a year after the trial, racism is probably more rather than less pervasive: witness the church burnings in the South and the new "militias" in Montana and Arizona. As Bugliosi remarks acidly, the real question the jurors should have been asked was "If Mr. Simpson didn't commit these murders, *then who*?"

These are just small details in a complicated network of language crimes (another is the term "dream team," invented by the media, perpetuated by one and all, and in fact, as Bugliosi shows, quite contrary to the facts) that characterized the Simpson trial. A word or phrase is used by an attorney (and the prosecution was by no means better than the defense in this regard), the media circus picks it up, the talking heads like Gerry Spence and Leslie Abrahmson comment sagely on it, and next thing you know, it is accepted as the truth without the slightest resort to logic or simple common sense. Thus the claim that "It was probably the Columbia Drug Lords," was regularly heard by guests on *Larry King Live* and similar

programs, without any consideration that it would be preposterous for Central American hit men (who almost always use guns) to stab their unknown victim (presumably Nicole Simpson) seven times and break her neck. In the context of the brutal butcherings (Goldman was stabbed thirty times on his scalp, face, neck, chest, abdomen, and left thigh), "Columbia drug lords" (or "Columbia necklace") is no more than a linguistic chip, designating sleazy, dark, unknown people from "down there," who must be the ones who kill "our" citizens "up here."

The "trial of the century" has been much on my mind in the course of reading the new books just published (I am writing in July 1966) by Susan Howe, Steve McCaffery, and Tom Raworth, all of them so-to-speak language poets *avant la lettre*, their first (small press or broadside) books dating back to the early seventies or, in Raworth's case, even earlier. Despite obvious differences as to gender, age (McCaffery is ten years younger than Howe and Raworth), nationality (Howe is Irish-American, Raworth, English; McCaffery English-born but a resident of Canada since 1968), and temperament, here are three poets who have assiduously tested the limits of language, foregrounding the materiality of writing rather than its communication of specific meanings. At the same time— and here the poets in question differ from most of their younger followers— all three write very much within the English (and in Howe's case American) literary tradition: at every turn, their poems echo, allude to, and parody earlier poetic models. But all three are also highly aware of living in a culture that has been reinvented by the electronic media, a culture in which language functions as the sort of tic we find in Johnnie Cochran's "If you don't stop it, *then who?*" Thus titles like *The Cheat of Words* (McCaffery), *Frame Structures* (Howe), and *Clean & Well Lit* (Raworth).

The Cheat of Words carries on Steve McCaffery's ambitious project (its most recent installments were the long prose texts in *The Black Debt* [1989] and *Theory of Sediment* [1991]) to challenge what he has called "fenestrational necessity, a mandate to linguistic transparency though which all beings and events [are] forced to pass," or again, a "neutral ground of language" as "uninterrupting sediment of support and an un-differentiated surface upon which events are ordered." Such "ordering," McCaffery would argue, is specious to begin with, given the inherent "shiftiness" of language and the refusal of meaningful phrases to take their appointed place inside a set of coherent structures, into monological messages like "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit." Hence the poet's predilection for figures like the Deleuzian *rhizome* (the structure in which every node can be connected with every other node, allowing for the possibility of contradictory inferences) and the *Klein worm*—"a form which differs from conventional geometric forms in its characteristic absence of both inner and outer surfaces" (NI 20).

The refusal of "transparency" is not just some form of willful obscurantism or rhetorical one-up-manship: "the project," as Charles Bernstein puts it, "is to wake us from the hypnosis of absorption." It is such hypnosis, after all, from which the prosecutors were evidently suffering when they made no more than a half-hearted effort to refute the defense's claim that the blood in the white Bronco may have been planted, even though Simpson himself had admitted, in his original taped deposition (see Appendix A in *Outrage*), that he "dripped blood" in his car, home, and driveway the night of the murder. To confront this hyper-absorption, in McCaffery's lexicon, is to produce a poetic response like "Writing a Sand Thinking":

> After the gossip one returns to grammar.
> Almost to say that speech
> compares us
> renting that as a fact the case stands firm
> for what we own.
> Pragma
> by relations instance this as
> the index of my slab. Your
> slap at it.
> The clouds pastiche *aubade*
> Sid's bakery delivers symmetry
> inside an adult formula for
> Saturdays. Our poppies
> in history.
>
> (*The Cheat of Poetry*, p. 31)

Writing in the sand is, of course, one of the oldest metaphors for erasure, for that which is forgotten or lost. McCaffery's title suggests that a lot of what passes for "thinking" is equally "losable." In his fourteen-line poem, a pastiche sonnet in which no two lines are the same length, nothing "rhymes" with anything else, and enjambment is the rule, the only end-stopped line is the comically alliterating and portentous opening, "After the gossip one returns to grammar," which brings to mind Wallace Stevens's meditative lines, "After the leaves have fallen, we return / To a plain sense of things." For McCaffery, there is never a "plain sense of things." Gossip tries to get at what happened to whom, but its referentiality is by definition specious (i.e., "it's only gossip"), which is why Wittgenstein declared that "All that is not gas is grammar." For grammar, the way sentences are actually constructed, is amenable to examination. Speech, by contrast "compares us," which is dangerous, confusing "rent[al]" (borrowed words?) with

ownership. And "Pragma" (the diminutive of "pragmatics," in the sense of edicts, ordinances of state) try to define "this as / the index of my slab." What slab? Is it the poet's index finger? The "slab" of *Philosophical Investigations*, where it functions in the most elementary of language games? However we characterize it, "you" "slap at it." And why not, given all those shared phonemes: "slab"/ "slap"? Who "owns" these words, anyway?

An "aubade" is a dawn song, usually expressing the lovers' regret that the night has passed so quickly and that they must separate. If it's cloudy, though, daylight may not yet be perceivable, and so "The clouds pastiche aubade." Instead of impending separation, the "adult formula" for this Saturday morning prescribes mealtime. "Sid's bakery delivers," providing "symmetry" to our lives and relegating sleep (poppies) to history.

If I have indulged in a somewhat labored reading of what is a delightfully playful poem, it is in order to suggest that, contrary to the still dominant view that McCaffery's poems "refuse to mean," on the contrary, this little "fourteener"—one of the slighter texts in this collection of thirty-nine poems— has a great deal "to say." It is written, to begin with, very much *in* a particular tradition: the metaphysical tradition of love sonnets and aubades, poems about our thought processes on the morning after the night before. But there is nothing "personal" or "confessional" here: no specifiers about the poet and his mistress, who may (or may not?) be present. No generalizations are being made about sex, marriage, or anything else because McCaffery is suggesting that one can't return to the "plain sense of things," only to grammar, to how it works. The poem thus demands strong reader involvement: any number of plots will fit the "adult formula" of this sand-writing / thinking. And who knows what it is that "Sid's bakery delivers"?

But why is such reader participation, such "Conjectural and sediment to emendation" (p. 43) necessary? Because it forces us to slow down and pay attention, to defamiliarize and hence call into question the way we normally process information:

> This recording was recorded live
> distance wind switched part
> a village where
> this record was recoded.
>
> ("Blue Note," p. 44)

Here McCaffery plays on such commonplaces as "broadcast live from X" (where the very act of broadcasting of course makes the performance-as-heard obviously *not* live), on "long distance" as ostensibly presenting us

with "live" voices, despite the possibility of "switch[ing] part[s]" to produce the voices of the dead, and on the claim for the ethnographic authenticity of the generic "village," even though here, as in more "civilized" settings, the record has been "recoded," that is, tampered with. In this scheme of things:

> in the direction that erections take
> this one has become a false path
>
> ("Learning Lenin," p. 56)

and the proffering of alternatives has been reduced to phrases like "Either *you* carve or it's *my* lamp" (p. 57). This sentence comes from a poem called "Discourse on Method," which is made up of one-line units, Descartes's *cogito* ("I think therefore I am") gradually modulating, via lines like "Lungs get repetitive" and "Break a neck," into "I thought therefore I was," and then "I think therefore I'll be." The mode is Wittgensteinian, a mere shift in tense or the substitution of a single word transforming a logical proposition into an absurd one.

If McCaffery's unit is the single line, often the single word with space (silence) playing an active role, Tom Raworth's poetic mode is the opposite, his unpunctuated blocks of lightly stressed short lines speeding full steam ahead, as if to say that any word or phrase can belong with any other, provided they are incorporated in the same columnar block of text or pronounced in one long breath. Raworth has been using these columns for more than a decade now (especially in the long poem *Writing*, published by The Figures in 1982), they jet across our field of vision so swiftly and yet modestly that it takes a moment to realize how intricately planned they are. Take, for example, the first fourteen lines of "Out of the Picture," the long narrative poem that opens *Clean & Well Lit*:

> the obsolete ammunition depot
> unmissed and unreported
> put it in categories
> still glistened with dampness
> suits seemed to be identical
> through the window behind him
> a battered cardboard box
> won somewhere gambling
> dim bell in his memory
> was making a duplicate
> to see if that needed explanation
> sharply, and then, more gently

the door opened
three thousand miles east of home

(p. 11)

I am arbitrarily breaking after line 14 but there is no visual, aural, or semantic break in this 199-line ticker-tape text; the "picture" (a film-script of the sort that seems to allude to war, science fiction, gangster exploits — you name it!) just coming into focus ("now that he was aware of it") as it dissolves. For such an "open" text, however, "Out of the Picture" is highly structured both phonemically and syntactically. The predominant sound of these lightly stressed "fast" lines is a short vowel sound followed by the voiceless stop *t*, as in:

the obsol*ete* ammu*nit*ion de*pot*
unmissed and unre*port*ed
put it in *cat*egories

Seven instances in eleven words (although "depot" is eye rhyme rather than consonance), the light *t* continuing all the way down the page to the last line, "*print*ed on them *suit*ed me," and then to the last line of the whole poem, "now th*at* he was aware of *it*."

Sound repetition (and there are many other patterns) is played off against what is an almost 100% rate of syntactic variation. Far from being merely random, in which case syntactic patterns would repeat, Raworth has arranged it so that no two lines in a row follow the same syntax. To exemplify briefly, the first fourteen lines above go like this:

Noun phrase with adjectival modifier
past participles used as predicate adjectives
imperative clause (or past indicative verb + adverbial compliment)
past indicative verb + prepositional phrase
complete clause (subject, verb, predicate) in past tense
prepositional phrase modified by preopositional phrase
noun phrase with adjectival modifier
past indicative verb + present participle
noun phrase + prepositional phrase
past progressive verb + object
infinitive + conditional clause
adverb + qualifier + adverb
complete clause (subject +predicate)
adverbial phrase of time

No doubt, this chart will strike many readers as pedantic, but I hope it will show the ways sameness and difference operate in Raworth's verbal scheme. A lesser poet would follow "the obsolete ammunition depot," with a series of similar noun phrases or would provide us with a continuous sentence, chopped into line lengths. Raworth's phrases, on the other hand, try to get "at" the substance of the poem from every possible angle—description, rumor, hearsay, narrative account, qualifier—even as what is missing throughout all this variability is the subject. Who or what "still glistened with dampness," "won somewhere gambling," "was making a duplicate." Where is the "obsolete ammunition depot"; where is it that "the door opened / three thousand miles east of home"? What good does it do us to be given the specifier "three thousand miles east" when we don't know where "home" is? Is it possible to bring "out" what is "in the picture"? On the one hand, the writing is descriptive: something "still glistened with dampness"; "a battered cardboard box" seems to be visible "through the window behind him" (but who is "him"?), "the door opened," and so on. But then there are the abstractions of "put it in categories" and "to see if that needed explanation." And the observation that "suits seemed to be identical" is undercut by the lack of information we have as to those suits. Whose were they? And are they suits of clothing, suits of cards, or what?

As we weigh one line against the other, however, an exciting tale seems to be emerging, rather like one of those tiny Japanese paper packets, put in water and taking shape as a flower. Is this *The Bridge on the River Kwai* or a similar film? The "ammunition depot" might well be "obsolete" in time of peace; it is logical for it to be "unmissed and unreported." But how to "put it in categories"? Perhaps inside the depot, the identical suits are found, "still glisten[ing] with dampness." And there are further testimonials like the "battered cardboard box / won somewhere gambling." Indeed, a "dim bell in his [the poet's?] memory," was "making a duplicate," which is to say, conjuring up the representation of the original to "see if that needed explanation." But then "gently / the door opened / three thousand miles east of home." Is this a reference to the past event narrated or to the present of the poet who rediscovers it? We cannot tell, but as the poem speeds ahead, more and more clues appear within the "heavy coating of dust" and "panning over rough walls." For instance, there is reference to bombings and to the "smell of wood burning," on "costumed models / back in the car then / slumped down in the seat"—the latter bringing to mind an Ed Kienholz assemblage. A taxi heads back "to avoid hysterical screaming," a woman "sob[s] / behind her veil," a guard is killed, a train "makes an unscheduled stop," a "mixture of standard tourists/ clustered around / the elegant camera bag / each holding a briefcase." And throughout, there are metapoetic references, as in "camouflaged / against

the cult of personality," "he remembered the scene . . . slightly out of focus," and "music wasn't music any more."

"Out of the Picture," like the later "Coal Grass Blood Night Emerald" (just consider the complicated relationships between those five nouns and their animal-vegetable-mineral references), is the perfect poem to read when you are tired of reportage and interviews with "live" celebrities or famed victims of one sort or another. If we can't get inside O.J.'s mind (as Chris Darden claimed to do in his opening statement about "control"), what a pleasure and challenge to enter the voyage realm of "Out of the Picture," to be transported elsewhere, without a hectoring presence that tells us what to make of this or that detail. Partitions, mirrors, "dimly lit / parking lot[s] / set well back from the road": the imagination is fired. When "a train makes an unscheduled stop / he'd never heard before / suppressing an urge to look back for. . ." the object of "look back for" turns out to be, quite inconsequentially, "something to read." In the meantime, on every rereading, "Out of the Picture" yields new nuggets of meaning. In the course of the poem, those short little "T-bar" syllables like *jet* and *shot* come together, making us aware of the darkness they enmesh.

If McCaffery's poetic unit is what the Russian Futurists called "the word as such," and Raworth's might be characterized as the propulsion of non-stop verbal flow, Susan Howe's is more properly collage. "Frame Structures," the title of her new book as well as of its thirty-page Preface, refers to the "framing" the poet has provided for her four earliest books, originally published as chapbooks or small press volumes. They are *Hinge Picture* (Telephone Books, 1974), *Chanting the Crystal Sea* (Fire Exit, 1975), *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (Telephone Books, 1978), and *Cabbage Gardens* (Fathom Press, 1979)[3]. Between these four works and the present of *Frame Structures*, nearly twenty years have elapsed, recognition having come to Howe only gradually, beginning in the mid-eighties with the warm reception given to *My Emily Dickinson*.

The early volumes remind us of that Howe started out as a visual artist. In *Hinge Picture*, for example, the epigraph comes from Duchamp's notes for the *Green Box*: "Perhaps make a HINGE PICTURE. . . . develop in space the PRINCIPLE OF THE HINGE in the displacements 1st in the plane 2nd in space." That principle stands behind the sequence's visual layout: again and again, Howe discovers the paragrams within words by forcing her found texts (primarily from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and* Fall) into rectangular units with justified left and right margins. In #1, for example, "intellect" is broken up into "intelle" and "ct," "hieroglyph" into "h" and "ieroglyph," each letter thus receiving special attention. And in *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, the title (derived, minus the word "Secret," from William Byrd's eighteenth-century journal of explorations in the Virginia wilderness) appears as a mirror image (see p. 94), even as the

opening horizontal rectangles (again with justified left and right margins and double spacing) play on the word "MARK":

> mark mar ha forest 1 a boundary manic a land a tract indicate position 2 record bunting interval free also event starting the slightly position of O about both of don't something INDICATION Americ
>
> made or also symbol sachem maimed as on her for ar in teacher duct excellent figure MARK lead be knife knows his hogs dogs a boundary model nucle hearted land land land district boundary times un
> (p. 89)

Here *mark* refers first of all to the surveyor's (William Byrd's) mark made in delineating a boundary between "tract[s]" of forest land. But the mark is also a trace, a sign that points us to specific things that have happened: one thinks of Blake's "London," with its lines, "And mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe." The poem's opening "Mark mar ha forest 1 a boundary manic" treats the word "mark" to its paragrammatic possibilities: "mar ha" may be separate words, referring to destruction and the exclamation of surprise, but then again, the two units may be part of the name "Martha," the "t" missing in the imagined source manuscript. Here and throughout the text, "boundary manic" is central to the poet's thought; she is mesmerized by questions of "secret" divisions, borders, boundaries, fault lines. "MARK," we read on p. 90, "border / bulwark, an object set up to indicate a boundary or position / hence a sign or token / impression or trace / The Horizon." Then, too, "Mark" refers both to Howe's father (Mark de Wolfe Howe) and to her son, as the dedication on page 91 tells us. Indeed, the frontispiece informs us that Mark DeWolfe Howe's *Touched With Fire: The Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Harvard University Press, 1947) is the poem's primary source.

But—and this is what makes *Frame Structures* so intriguing—within the configuration of the new preface, the *mark-ing* or trace structure of *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, far from being incorporated into the larger frame of the new book, are always qualifying and transforming statements made in the prose memoir. Indeed, there is no external "frame," no outside to contain the inside of the poems. Howe's autobiographical memoir begins as a kind of feminist variant of Robert Lowell's "91 Revere St."—a portrait of the artist as New England blue-blood, neurotic child. "On Sunday, December 7, 1941," we read, "I went with my father to the zoo in Delaware Park" (p. 3). The father, who is about to go to war, is not named and unlike Lowell, Howe does not give us a continuous narrative about

persons and places. Rather, she shifts in the very next section to Colonial American history, specifically to the 1792 purchase by the Holland Land Company of the "wild lands" in central and western parts of New York and Pennsylvania. The references to the "land speculators, surveyors, promoters, publicists," who settled in upper western New York State and founded the city of Buffalo, where Howe was born (and where she is once again living as a professor at SUNY) are spliced into the "secret history" of William Byrd's explorations in Virginia a century earlier, the two narratives overlapping as parts of the larger tale of boundary-making, acquisitiveness, plunder, and war that characterized the newly formed "United States" for its inception.

But Howe never says this directly. Indeed her Preface provides no overt background material about the four early books reprinted by New Directions, the conditions under which they were written, how they were conceived, and so on. For such information, we may go to the Howe interviews in *The Difficulties* (1989) and *Talisman* (1992). In *Frame Structures*, the "evidence" for the poetry is accumulated obliquely and indirectly, the unnamed "my father" of Howe's opening pages—the "Daddy" who went away to war— only emerging as Mark DeWolfe Howe half-way through the narrative, where he reappears as one of Felix Frankfurter's disciples at Harvard Law School and later his and Dean Ernest Griswold's choice to produce the edition of Oliver Wendell Holmes's letters and diary that became Susan Howe's source in *Secret History of the Dividing Line*. We now learn that the sequel to this book, *Touched with Fire*, was called *The Proving Years* (1963), and that its first chapter is titled "'The Stars and the Plough' probably because that's the title of *The Plough and the Stars*. Sean O'Casey's play about the Easter Rising, named for the symbol on the flag of the Irish citizen army, is one of my mother's favorites. The stars are the ideal the plough reality. I guess my father meant to put reality first" (p. 17).

The anecdote nicely embodies the poet's heritage as she perceives it: the idealistic radicalism she derived from her Irish actress mother, Mary Manning, vis-à-vis the more tempered, scholarly historical imagination of her father Mark. But instead of now moving ahead chronologically, as would most autobiographers, Howe goes back in time, to her paternal grandfather, the antiquarian, Mark Antony DeWolfe Howe, her great-grandfather by the same name who was a distinguished Episcopal Bishop, and, beyond these two Mark Antonys, to the early d'Wolf (the original name) and Howe ancestors who were "generally sea captains, privateers, slave traders," one having fought in King Philip's War, another, James d'Wolf, evidently having thrown "a female African slave overboard during the Middle Passage because she was sick with smallpox." "When this

murderous ancestor could finally afford to buy his own slave ship, he christened her *Sukey*. Sukey is my nickname" (pp. 20-21).

How does the late twentieth-century radical woman poet deal with these events in her distant and not-so-distant past? "Space," the narrator remarks at one point, "is a frame we map ourselves in" (p. 9). At certain junctures, and especially toward the end of "Frame Structures," the formal narrative begins to break down. The poet as surveyor-excavator, working "where logic and mathematics meet the materials of art. Canvas, paper, pencil, color, frame, title," refigures a page from Benjamin Franklin's *Memoirs* (p. 27), lines running into one another and produced as overprint, the technique Steve McCaffery discusses so interestingly in his essay on Bill Bissett in *North of Intention*. "The essential part of any invention," we read on Howe's penultimate page, "is distance and connectness. We pass each other pieces of paper. A sheet of paper, a roll of film, the frame structure. Conceptual projects of the 1960s and 1970s combined windows, mirrors, garbage, photographs, video, dance, tape recordings, rope, steel, yarn, nails, cars, machines, just about anything." (p. 28). Just so, when we now turn back to *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, individual passages emerge as "overprinted" with new significations, as in the case of the 26-line word column on p. 119, at the center of which we find

in time
MARK
border
bulwark
detail

How can we tell the framing from the framed? In the "Cinder of the lexical drift" which is the "secret history" of "Frame Structures," every "dividing line" is submitted to further development and variation. This, the poet implies, is how "evidence" should actually be weighed and tested. For no frame can account for all the pieces in the puzzle ("it is hard to know where to begin," as we read on the last page of Howe's Preface), but the text's intricate interplay, its metonymic network of *marks* and traces, calls into question such discourses as that of the postmodern courtroom, as well as of the verbal world that mediates it for us. "If it doesn't fit / you must acquit": can the "fit" game Simpson put on for the jury really function as such an isolated instance? And where is the "dividing line" between "may" and "must"?

In an interview with Clint Burnham, McCaffery makes a case against the hackneyed designation of radical poetries as being "experimental":

> Experimental suggests (perhaps implies) a scientific model and an enterprise based on trial and error. This metaphoric implication further allows the disvalidation of works as "having failed." But trial, error, failure and success are totally inappropriate to these cultural productions. A better term might be "exploratory" evoking a spatial rather than scientific metaphor.[4]

That spatial metaphor also animates Raworth's vertical word columns and Howe's "frame structures." The "displacements" of the Duchampian "hinge picture," "1st in the plane 2d in space," force us to rethink those facile buzzwords and clichés that permeate the culture. To put it in the context of Simpson-speak, if it doesn't fit, explore the hand inside the glove, and see what that cut on the middle finger may tell you.

Notes

1 Steve McCaffery, "And Who Remembers Bobby Sands?" (1985), in *North of Intention: Critical Writings* 1973–86 (New York: Roof Books, 1986), p. 39. This book is subsequently cited in the text as NI.

2 Charles Bernstein, "Artifice of Absorption," *A Poetics* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 54.

3 In her Author's Note, Howe explains that *Cabbage Gardens* was written before *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, although published subsequently.

4 Clint Burnham, "An Interview with Steve McCaffery, *Witz* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 3.

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

Jim Brodey, *Heart of the Breath (Poems 1979-1992)*, edited by Clark Coolidge (Hard Press, 1996), ISBN 0-9638433-7-0, $17.95

This should be the season to re-evaluate the poets of the New York School, with large recent books, new and old, by Notley, Mayer, Waldman, Ceravolo, Padgett, Ashbery, Koch, Guest, Myles, Schuyler, many others, and with the impending release by Don Allen of a new edition of O'Hara's *Standing Still and Walking in New York*—not to mention the unveiling of O'Hara as "the" white poet of racial politics at the recent Orono Conference in Maine. And here comes Jim Brodey's selected late poems, edited by

Clark Coolidge, in a volume beautifully produced by Hard Press, with a short biographical preface by John Godfrey.

I met Jim Brodey about four years ago, at Small Press Traffic, the bookstore here in San Francisco where sometimes I worked as a volunteer. I remember him coming in, terribly gaunt, stripped-down steel muscle moving—but no more gaunt or lesioned than any of the thousands of gay men who live with HIV in San Francisco. I didn't know he had AIDS until he told me so, and he asked me for money, the proceeds of his books. I explained that the store carried none of his books. He got angry. But that faded fast. It was raining. He pulled up a chair and sat down, his back to me, staring at the spines of the available books and recounting his history with their writers. I was thinking about the Brodey legend—the man who came to dinner, the wild garrulous man, the man who claimed to have first brought Janis Joplin—or was it Joni Mitchell?—to orgasm. After awhile he slipped away. The posthumous publication of Jim Brodey's last poems reveals a poet rather different than the fellow I met. It is a clear illustration, were one needed, of how a great gift sometimes transcends the needs and fractures of the body or mind.

What might crack writing look like? How does addiction manifest itself inside the word, a bulletin from the frazzled ecstatic synapses? The short, bitten-off line, and staggered drop of the poems of "Panda Heart" might give a clue. Coolidge's note reveals that Brodey might have written almost 1,100 of these pieces—ten stanzas of three lines each—inside of two years. Wow! That's a lot of triads, and each piece is named after an absent friend or guitar hero—"Robert Johnson," "Duane Allman," "Joan Mitchell," "Ted Berrigan," "Ron Padgett." Then there's "Paul Violi 3," "Ed Dorn 4," "Fred Frith 6." How ever did Coolidge choose among so many names and bumps? The joint is jumping. "Abdicating the throne of downtown clown/ Shoot some deliciousness/ into a warm mouth" (286). In hindsight the precipitous ecstasy of free thought—the free zone of writing—seems to bring with it a weather of disaster, a low pressure range, but astonishingly *Heart of the Breath* is an overwhelmingly serene book: Philip Whalen with a glass pipe jammed in his mouth, high thoughts crackling like popping corn, rich like melting butter.

There are some clinkers—a cute invocation to John Ashbery—"Let our champagne/ Be a bowl of Jujyfruits/ A wave a curtsy a bow"—can you imagine? Or the sentimental New Age salute to Bob Kaufman: "A living saint/ Given to vibration/ Of the world soul/ / Enriched our planet/ In his gentleness/ And bombastic word-wit" (197). However, Brodey's own bombastic word-wit gives tremendous zip and drive to a long, long book, and culminates in a series of ecstatic, dreamy stanzas called "There and Back." In this ultimate sequence the poet looks forward to a future, a death that includes meeting once again Berrigan, Schuyler, O'Hara, Denby

"[b]ack into the light/ where the mind moves/ and is beautiful as a poem/ if that poem were writ right."

—KEVIN KILLIAN

SPECTERS AND SPECTACLES

Joseph Donahue's *World Well Broken* (Talisman House, 1995. $9.95) is the tongue's slip under the heel of "words well spoken": language's "oracular chaff" in junk diaspora where sacred and profane rub elbows, tense as a Rabin-Arafat handshake. Donahue has a knack for high-jolt juxtapositions, the "voluptuous crucifixion" between the quotidian and oracular, "the cross / & the tourbus distributor cap"(5). Medical images of x-ray charts, blood vials, and "Fluorescent planetary glow / of the children's wing" (19) mingle with "pentecostal char"(22) and Skylab fallout, as if Donne donned scrubs, proclaiming "Christ Enters Manhattan":

> The strikebound & fluorescent
> eternities of Intensive Care. Ghostly gowns.
> Families loiter. Tattooed & helpless, a father in a black jacket
> . . .
>
> So unlit a limbo. Light and Shadow mix and unmix.
> Bulbs flutter above instruments & bed. . .
> Alert to its limit, the soul jolts. . .
>
> (40)

Donahue's writing has a speculative edge that's refreshing: the poem as something to learn from, locus of inquiry and verve. And yet, the work steers clear of prescriptive solutions with a sort of Eliotic pessimism: the worlds revolve "well broken." In "The Age of Oracles," Dante's "fiery flower" is set against "a poster on the wall, a drug company promo"(6). Is this, then, our prozac paradiso, "Rose of the hour, a / blossoming narcotic. The annunciation, a list of chemicals. The narrative / of salvation, a description of how the chemicals combine, and deaden / the nerves, and block out the waves of pain" (6)?

Despite an apocalyptic tone that veers, at times, toward cosmic imagery overkill, *World Well Broken* bridges the spectacle and specter of "human," asking in incantational anaphors "what?" to our "sentiment / in the sequence of numbers"(21), our overabundances and desperations a grotesquery not unlike Dante's ring of sloth, or deeper where "the told, the whispered, the written, the imagined, the revealed, are also / lost, are bodies, are less than bodies, are finally only faces, faces in hell, / faces frozen in the ice of a downward path"(29). Unlike Dante, the face we kick may be our own.

Spencer Selby's *Malleable Cast* (Generator Press, 1995. $10.00) is a playful, often humorous collection of 72 image-poems: texts (philosophical rants, a fictional narrative rife with archaisms, discourses on mental illness, truth, desire, death) superimposed on images (circa '50s photographs of industry and leisure, alchemical illustrations, manual icons and diagrams). The written texts move in and out of the visual templates like graffiti through a subway window, appearing and disappearing in peek-aboo style. A conventional "read" is not possible; and so: how "read"; or what, then, is "reading"?

I found myself not reading, per se, but looking at the written texts as integral parts of each image—visual fields playing around the edges of linguistic signs, and vice-versa, in train-and-tunnel style. I saw a pun cast in the "arm cast" image-poem (#11, unpaginated): the word "Duchamp," like the broken arm in advance of the artist's snow shovel ready-made. And is that a spoof on Pound's "book" as a "ball of light in one's hands" in image-poem #22?

The texts interact with the images as both material and mold (the broader definition of "cast"), questioning the relationships between verbal and visual signs: how they interact; how we construct meaning from various media; and how we define text and context, information and medium.

It's easy to smirk at some of the images Selby has selected, especially the naive tributes to American industry and leisure. But the written texts speak to something still "unresolved" within the images they accompany. Like Saussure's axes of language, it's as if what's being signified in these written texts is an historical continuity under the images' temporal specificity. Within the "margins" of an illustrated woman (standing before a made-up bed, a pillow pressed to her chemise), we read: "ed or / ly conne / are neith / cycle o / rts of form and app / energy, the world lives / sh ttered by chance. / senseless unravellin / ruled by abso" (#56, unpaginated). Both world and word are "sh(a)ttered by chance." The "senseless unravellin(g)" could be merely implying something about the bed, the human makings and unmakings, ravellings and unravellings; or the attempt at "unravelling"

meaning from a text "shattered by chance." And yet something spectral hovers between these atavistic images and their persistence in the wor(l)d.

Barbara Henning's *Love Makes Thinking Dark* (United Artist Books, 1995, $7.00.): a linguistic funhouse of prose and verse poems where body, language, memory, family/pronoun romance and specklings of body/text speculations merge and undercut, informing and undermining each urgent declarative.

One of the more interesting facets of the poems is Henning's pronouns that flip-flop gender and case as speedily as her fields of reference shift: "I accidently encounter her asleep naked. / (He always makes me laugh.) She teaches me / to cook. The familiar metaphoric feeling / begins to fade . . ."(7).

Henning's keen use of metonyms, mock-couplets, prose blockstyle, internal linebreaks, graphics, quirky capitalization, elliptical syntax, and periods as grammatical torques keeps the poems' semantic floorboards in wobble. Note how each line, linearly unconnected, metonymically telescopes into the next:

> My sister's body mostly water
> The seams in the human skull
> Angular becomes rounded
> Brooklyn via Dekalb
> Between the tracks
> in a flowered skirt
> the uneven sound of rain
>
> (26)

"Fabric Reins" is an exhilarating example of loosing language via form's constraint. A range of images and phrases recycle throughout the piece, shifting through oulipo-like twists and grammatical transpositions that dynamize an ostensibly simple sequence of events: "A strobe spins light on the girl's black velvet skirt and high/ heels. She stands in the middle of a ballroom, listens to Lorraine / talk about the man who used to tie her up with satin ribbons"(62). Four paragraph-stanzas later: "A strobe spins light on the girl's black velvet skirt and high / heels. A stroke spins a light emitting diode on Gisarme's black / velvet skivvy and high Hegelians. She stands in the middle of a / ballroom, in the middle distance of baloney, near the balm of / Gilead, listening to Lorraine talk about the man who used to tie her up with satin ribbons"(64).

Henning's writing is strongest while operating within this sort of language-motley, the poem's reins pulled tight and loosed in stitch-&-patch pastiche that intersects its own semantic plane: "Baloney" under the

"ballroom," "Hegelians" under the "heels," specters under the spectacle of words.

—DAN FEATHERSTON

Architectural Eros

For years I have mused upon a witticism, perhaps faultily attributed in my memory to Oscar Wilde: "Eroticism is but a matter of lighting." Deciding to write on eroticism and architecture, I thought that this decadent fin-de-siècle quip might be a promising point of departure. Furthermore, I expected that two recent publications on utopias would provide additional clues. I was thwarted, though, by an epistemological asceticism not uncommon to contemporary theory. Despite the many virtues of *Public* #12, "Utopias," it was of no help, for its eroticism was not architectural and its architecture not erotic. As for the provocative and innovative *Lusitania* #7, "Sites and Stations: Provisional Utopias," a detail in the editorial cartoon sums up my frustration. At the corner of a desolate moonscape, the pointed weapon of an armored vehicle penetrates a biomorphic form; the caption reads: "The only sex in this book." A subsequent perusal of books on utopia was also fruitless, as I failed to find a major realized *post*lapsarian erotic architecture. Eden, the archetype for utopia, was fissured by the advent of conscious eroticism, to become eternally impenetrable. Through a compensatory though restrictive nostalgia, Eros was henceforth relegated to landscape architecture, to the art of gardens. The dream of a perfect rusticity—as exemplified in works such as the Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* [1499; The Dream of Poliphilus], where architecture exists as a decorative and symbolic adjunct to the narrative—inscribes an incontrovertibly pragmatic limit to the myth of Eros. How is it that we have not situated a contemporary culture of erotic utopia?

Culture is constituted by sublimation, by detours of libidinal drives, such that eroticism is sexuality transfigured by language. Eroticism is not an attribute or determination: it is the very form of human existence, the articulation of the body and the symbolic. Thus all economy is libidinal economy, wherein the ideal staging of desire necessitates an Ovidian scenario of transformation and metamorphosis, where the potentiality and virtuality of polymorphously perverse bodies reveal manifold destinies.

The libido is characterized by fluidity, transience and heterogeneity, a malleable Eros linking us with what Maurice Merleau-Ponty refers to as "Being in promiscuity," where the ancient ontological notion of Being is provocatively redefined as "flesh." Since the body uses its parts as a system of symbols for the world, any object may enter the matrix of sexuality, every word possesses an erotic valence, every narrative is driven by a libidinal charge. Eros insinuates himself into every situation: the mere generalities of convexity and concavity suffice to attract libido. And yet, the architectural evidence of this is extremely rare, with its major instance being the symbolic relations between icon and support in the Paleolithic parietal art of the European caves.

Utopia implies a finite spatial or systemic closure which permits an infinite affective or imaginative openness. The fixed nature of any icon, architectural or otherwise, is always perturbed by the openended variability of the narratives to which it is susceptible. The architectural icon is sublated, often effaced, in perverse, aberrant and *abnormal* stagings of the theater of desire, where the traumas, enigmas and joys of sexuality are abreacted and narrated. Such mutability would seem to be antithetical to the inherent solidness of architecture, suggesting a paradox at the core of any utopianism. Architectural erotics evinces the contradictory need for a public, communal, utilitarian, mercantile, statistically determined realm (for example, the variegated yet stereotyped erotics of the brothel) *and* a private, solipsistic, phantasmatic, fetishistic, idiosyncratic domain (the quotidian counter-architectural darkness of the bedroom.)

One resolution to this problem, however improbable, would be an architecture which exists *as* narrative. This is precisely the case in Jean-François de Bastide's *The Little House,* where the co-protagonist in a tale of erotic seduction is an 18th century *maison de plaisance,* epitomizing what Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* celebrates as the topophilia of "felicitous space." Where there is architecture there is light: as dusk descends, the seducer Trémicour leads the innocent Mélite into the exquisite salon where, "These thirty candles reflected in the mirrors, and this added brilliance made the salon seem larger and restated the object of Trémicour's impatient desires."[1] Later, on a narrow garden path, a well orchestrated cannon shot throws Mélite into the Marquis's arms, at which point, as he holds her tightly, "Affronted by this intimate gesture, she was about to free herself with equal vivacity when the sudden flash of fireworks revealed in the reckless man's eyes a deep and submissive love." (92) Here, light is an expedient—somewhat on the erotico-ontological level of chocolate or alcohol—rather than a symbolic form. While the "little house" is perhaps ideal, it is hardly utopian in the strict sense of the term: it proffers but one fantasy, one narrative, one architecture, one seduction.

In contradistinction, Anthony Vidler suggests in his Preface to *The Little House* that in both Sade and Fourier, "the fiction of 'architecture' as traditionally understood, was dropped in favor of an art of endless mechanical manipulation of space—a kind of literal parallel to the mechanization of eroticism in their texts through repetition and systematization." (15) Such architecture marks the anti-Enlightenment inauguration of a modernist erotics. Unlike delicately orchestrated libertine sites such as the "little house," the chateau of Silling in Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* constitutes the scandalous extreme of the most radical liaisons. The apparently panoptical organization of the chateau is ultimately belied by its secret chambers, where unseeable pleasures and unspeakable horrors are enacted. These invisible, dark, unnarrated activities constitute a textual supplement which, if determinable, would totalize the erotic combinatory system. But such erotic closure is impossible, for not all things erotic have their *place:* Eros exists as the aporia between the imaginable and the unimaginable, gesture and speech, desire and act. Here the full richness and ambiguity of eroticism reigns, with all its terrors and delights. Sade wrote of spaces obscene, because haunted by death; sites fascinating, because ruled by pure metamorphosis; scenes of excess, because they necessarily extend beyond the limits of any single imagination; realms of seduction, because they permit phantasmatic projection; theaters of pornography, because of an unspeakable promiscuity; domains of transgression, because symbolic articulation is no longer possible.[2]

In Sade's erotic theatricalizations, sexuality was raised to the level of epistemology. As has often been noted, the microcosm of the chateau of Silling is a phantasmatic amalgam of prison (the Bastille) and theater (Sade's chateau at La Coste). Vidler suggests that this is a solipsistic architecture, reversing the modes of 18th century theatricality, since the staging of desire by the elite brotherhood that rules Silling conflates author, spectator and actor.[3] As the storytellers' lubricious tales inflame the masters' imaginations, the narrated scenes are forthwith enacted by the masters and their victims. Recent Sade scholarship has focused on the profound, coherent and constant theatricality of Sade's writing, where theatrical artifice informs literary style, cultural critique, and seductive technique.[4] Whence the key to our architectural paradox: in Sade, language *is* theater *is* architecture *is* eroticism. Only through this conflation of ontological realms can a truly erotic architecture exist, This "solution" was already hinted at by Roland Barthes in *Sade, Loyola, Fourier,* where he explains that in Sade the enclosure which permits the imaginary system is constituted such that its task is "to contaminate reciprocally the erotic and the rhetoric" within the subversive erotic scene, such that Sade "always sides with *semiosis* rather than *mimesis.*"[5] Barthes concludes that the Sadian city, the

Chateau of Silling, is "the sanctuary not of debauchery, but of the 'story'." (37) And yet, from the architect's point of view, cannot erotics and rhetoric in turn be "contaminated" by architecture?

Architecture as phantasm; architecture as theater; architecture as language: three paradigms which when conflated offer an incontrovertible though unbuildable utopia, and when separated offer partial and unsatisfactory realities. Yet this should not lead one to suppose that, within the pragmatics of an architectural manichaeism, Bastide's splendidly illuminated little house is but a dandyism which can never offer the hedonistic delights of the most banal darkened bedroom in a bleak, anonymous hotel. For sex without symbol entails a pantheon without Eros, inviting the worst forms of repression and threatening the very existence of the imagination and the arts. In this regard, the link between Eros and Thanatos—a task that any valid metaphysics must attempt, and one which Sade accomplished in so hyperbolic a manner—is crucial. Erotic utopias are always proximate to shadowy necropoli. Especially now, during the cataclysm of AIDS, the ideals and pragmatics of sexuality differ vastly from those depicted in Bastide's and Sade's libertine novels and plays, such that eroticism itself has been totally transformed. Given these epochal differences, it would seem that eroticism has slipped farther than ever towards the side of darkness. Yet it is art—site of the most complex articulations of the symbolic—that can protect us from morbidity, by enriching the work of mourning through an active, productive nostalgia and a prescience of untold joys.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

Notes

1 Jean-François de Bastide, *The Little House: An Architectural Seduction*, translation and introduction by Rodolphe El-Khoury, preface by Anthony Vidler (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), p. 70.

2 To forget the essential role of the imagination in eroticism, with both its joyful and terrifying aspects, is to portend the worst. This is the error of those who abominate Sade's writings, as most recently exemplified by the historically tendentious, theoretically naive, politically reactionary and covertly homophobic article by Roger Shattuck, "Rehabilitating a Monster" (*The New York Times Book Review*, March 31, 1996; p. 31). This new instance of policing desire would limit eroticism to specific sexual and symbolic choices. To do so is to repress the imagination, to seriously misunderstand literature, and to fuel the worst essentialisms and fundamentalisms.

3 Anthony Vidler, "Asylums of Libertinage," in *The Writing of the Walls* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1987), p.108.

4 See Chantal Thomas, *Sade* (Paris, Le Seuil, 1994), as well as the catalogue to the exhibition *Petits et Grands théâtres du Marquis de Sade* (Paris, Paris Art Center, 1989).

5 Roland Barthes, *Sade, Loyola, Fourier*, translated by Richard Miller (New York, Hill and Wang, 1976), pp. 33 and 37.

Fanny Howe's *O'Clock* (Reality Street, 1995) is a pure delight; it's enjoyable merely to hold the book & gaze at the two girls on the cover, their skinny legs suspended in air while performing a jig, defying the physical laws of the universe while several adults share a conversation in the background. The poems, diminutive only in number of lines (few of them are over 12 lines), are Celtic charms of singular pitch & mesmerizing texture. What they lack in quantity of line is compensated by the "glaze of associations" each enjoys, its ascension into zones of numinous intelligence: they are liquefactions of elsewhere, infinity folded into amber.

The titles are curious; each refers, ostensibly, to the time of its composition & is sectioned according to month & day: "February One;" "February Two," "March One," & so on. What is odd is that Howe titles many of the pieces with military time, "21:09," "1:35," rather than "Nine O'Clock" or "One O'Clock," as the title of the book infers. One obvious reason for this is to avoid repetition: more than one poem is composed at nine o'clock. But apart from that, I find something deliberately droll in this rigorous exactitude: the registration of experience outside the parameters of the quantifiable is implicitly silly. As Howe herself remarks in "6:30" (the first line of which is: "A full Irish breakfast") "Space in time goes against nature/ This condition is called 'the future.'" It is more pertinent to view each poem as a "drop of experience" (to borrow a phrase from William James) rather than a composition caught in a specific instant of time. "Space-time," observed Whitehead, "is not a fact prior to process, but a feature of process, an abstract system of perspectives. . .a continuum of potentialities—of potential routes for the transmission of physical feeling." The temporal process of the universe is not continuous, but discrete, a "welter of incompatibilities" arising from a synthesis of available energies & making a creative advance into novelty. "Half of every experience is lack of experience," Howe remarks in "Winter Gone." Nothing is static; nothing is absolute. Events multiply by correlation & propagation of movement. Everything is giddy with expectation: "Showers over Flemish fields," the top of the water shuddering "under the brush of the wind," frogs undulating "under secrets of mud." Nothing exists by itself, for itself; the "pulse of desire" manifests itself in "proliferating currants." A capacity for the spontaneous introduction of something not present in the environment is part of the composition of every experience; meaning is always constituting itself anew. "One cow has given birth to three."

Not every poem in *O'Clock* is a nougat of cosmic epiphany: a few are rather thin, & a few congeal into solipsistic marzipan. But taken as a whole—fresh from the garden & spread out on the table—it's a "full Irish breakfast."

Mary Oliver's *Blue Pastures* (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) (the title suggests an asylum for dainty sensibilities, or encroaching senility) features a collection of prose pieces, meditations on nature, creativity, & Edna St Vincent Millay's louche domestic affairs. There are moments of fairly good writing, but they are frequently obscured by facile bromides & moldy banality.

I first discovered Mary Oliver amid the barred owls, red-tailed hawks & blue-winged teals of the John James Audubon *Watercolors for the Birds of America* exhibit at the Seattle Art Museum a few months ago. Surprisingly, as Mary Oliver is a Pulitzer Prize winning poet with a number of acclaimed books behind her, I hadn't heard of her. A number of the watercolors credited one of Audubon's assistants—George Lehman, Maria Bachman, or his son John—with having done a branch or a butterfly in the background, & since Mary Oliver's poems aligned some of the watercolors (I read them without my reading glasses, backing up enough to make out the words, but missing the date: 1995) the assumption I made was that Mary Oliver, a friend & contemporary, had provided Audubon with some of her poetry. Much of the language in *Blue Pastures* accounts for the mistake; not a few of the phrases—"luminous wanderer the snowy owl," "fate steps, like the most casual if gorgeously dressed sword carrier, onto the stage," "truth, that cold goddess"—have an antique flavor similar to the work I encountered at the Audubon exhibit.

There is a macabre description of skates (the marine fish with a flattened body & pectoral fins forming winglike lateral extensions) which I found rather engaging: "The strange face of the skate is haunting, and perhaps it haunts the fisherman, too—the human-looking, spit-releasing mouth, and the sudden motion of thick eyelids as they descend and rise again over the bulging, death-sick eyes." This is vivid, unaffected writing. It's unfortunate such instances are elsewhere marred by so much cliche ("galloping waves," "pond of meditation," "steamy river of dreams"), so much banality & vapid pontification. Admittedly, anyone who wins a Pulitzer Prize should be indulged the privilege of speaking ex cathedra on occasion; but when I read a sentence like "he who does not crave that roofless place *eternity* should stay at home" I lose all interest. A bag of French fries is vastly preferable to a "roofless eternity," and I have yet to see a "roofed eternity," unless it resembles a Lincoln Continental parked in a two door garage in a sunny 'burb called *Blue Pastures*.

I sometimes wonder if Bruce Andrews isn't a Sioux Heyoka, a shrewd clown doing what's contrary—silly, gratuitous, grotesque—in order to disrupt stultifying modes of being. One look at the rolypoly farting Asian man randomly figured in different positions on the cover of *Ex Why Zee* (Roof Books, 1995) is to anticipate a convulsive species of bathroom

graffiti, agitprop on a toilet stall. But Andrews is a far more intractable poet than that: hectic, fractious, galling, madcap & sassy, he is a Woody Woodpecker on benzedrine, a Lenny Bruce versed in Marx, Benjamin & Lukacs, rubbing "red pepper into the normative" & inviting us—the book buying, reifying public—to suck his "polymorphous." "Taste is one of the principal bulwarks against which [Andrews'] writing hurls itself," writes Bob Perelman in "Bruce Andrews and the World (Trade Center)," and identifies Andrews' penchant for grossness as a "subset of the larger desire for disruption of perceived systems of control." Other strategies include avoidance of a predetermined referent, removal of closure, fractured syntax, high-energy linguistic collision & the crash of accelerated signifiers. Andrews invigorates language by investing it with a convulsive spontaneity, somatic ejaculations & jerky thrusts, Houdini trying to wriggle free of a strait-jacket. *Ex Why Zee* (is the title a Silliman tease?) is a miscellany of performance instructions, movement notes & improvisational texts, many of them done in collaboration with dance choreographer Sally Silvers. It's a bit like Duchamp's notes to the *Large Glass,* not just a Baedeker but a creative *à la carte.* Unlike Duchamp's notes, however, the notes in *Ex Why Zee* concur with no tangible context to gratify the appetite. It's like a menu without a restaurant. "Who Shouted?" concerns the "daily life, ancestry, and dream imagery of the Lacandon Maya (with some material culled from Robert Bruce's *Lacandon Dream Symbolism* on their collective use of dream as prophecy & warning)." "Movement for the piece was selected from Silvers' videotaped improvised solo material, created while under the influence of (or intoxicated by) Classic Mayan writing & images." "The organization of the movement—both spatially & directionally—is based on Mayan conceptions of time & space." That sounds fantastic. I picture deliriously weird contortions, a wildly erratic agitation of body movements somewhat akin to Japanese Butoh. But to simply read & mentally re-enact these pieces is ultimately a frustrating exercise. I wish a videocassette could've accompanied the book, although the increased market value of Andrews' product would have utterly compromised the implied cultural intent to demystify what Lukacs terms the "fetish character of commodities," the disintegrating effect of an all-embracing commodity structure that taints social relations with a "phantom objectivity," an oppressive, controlling force that alienates the individual from their own activity. So it's a puzzle. How do you distribute spontaneity, market the unmarketable?

A few of the texts, such as "Blue Horizon" ("Tsunami enfleurage/ emulsifying sea floor oleander goblets on a root") & "Politics of the Body Microscope of Conduct" ("Syllables, take your positions") feature enough textual autonomy to stand on their own, unhinging—as Andrews long ago espoused in the L= A= N= G= U= A= G= E Book—"the vise of the signi-

fied," so that reading becomes *production* rather than consumption. Andrews, as always, pushing polysemy to the point of asemy, disseminating "logobonbons" like xenoblastic yaupon zarfs.

"What so elates the open poem are the passersby" writes Duncan McNaughton in "Black Spoon," the 52 page long poem of *Valparaiso* (Listening Chamber, 1995). "English words crave spaces between them, they do not like to huddle in clusters of slightly divergent centers of meaning, each edging a little away from the rest" wrote Edward Sapir in *Language*. 'Open' is the operative word here: McNaughton joys in looseness & elasticity. He lets his work breathe. He undoes knots, unravels "the music of thoughts." Reading this work is a quiet, gentle pleasure. It has a relaxed, amiable air. I am fascinated by the way poets choose to represent pleasure & pain; the two states are never polarities but always a blend. Even in Chopin's most melancholic phrases, observed Proust, are sprinkled gracious detours *"oú le caprice se mêle à la virtuosité."* "Black Spoon" (the image that comes to mind is the spoon used for "cooking" heroin, blackened with carbon) is strewn on the page like flotsam, the typographical arrangement mirroring the verbal *naufrage* of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*. The words *do* cohere syntactically, however, so it is not really an instance of the language dissolving into oblivion so much as a feeling of euphoric buoyancy, openness, a letting out. Implicit in McNaughton's & Mallarmé's typographical metaphor is the presence of absence, the idea that nihility—void, nothingness, non-being—is immanent in all things in much the same way the signified is both present & absent from the signifier. It is the syntax of the streets, the syntax of human behavior, that simultaneously threatens to pull things apart & keep things together. "Like/ when we undress/ to seek/ each other's heat." The real threat is in nomenclature—classification, categorization, commodification. "In this world false names/ enslave real ones." Underlying the pathos of "Black Spoon" is the desire to be liberated from the linguistic, psychic & social networks that convert "living light" to the simulacra of "black markets." "Beauty/ trapped in sadness/ asks only to be set free." One steps from syntagm to syntagm like stones in a brook, leaping in unexpected directions when a rock turns out to be wobbly & the body's actions compensate for the mind's more cumbersome ratiocination. "Magnetized fragments" cohere into "wraiths of or shadows/ of substantial being," or more horrifically, a grenade "which/ a poet/ detonated/ in 1920/ showers/ the poem/ with the blood/ of/ the names/ of/ the worlds" that inhabit *"la sepultura del este poeta."* It is the poet's task to relocate our *Valparaiso* in "the throat/ of the sun." McNaughton achieves this with a degree of *ébullition:* "Boil it down and/ boil it down/ and boil it down/ Samoa." A lump of artificial paradise in the valley of a blackened spoon. "They fill with tears/ to the brim *ces fontaines/ de jouvence."*

Andrew Schelling's *Old Growth* (Rodent Press, 1995) is a foliation of poems & notebooks composed from 1986 to 1994. It is rooted in modernist soil, Pound's Vorticist notions of the image as "luminous detail," "radiant node or cluster." Stamped with Imagist concision, Schelling's shillings betoken Gaudier-Brzeska's chiseled edge, the gravure of a voice minted in a rhythm meant to correspond "exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed." "Anthropology calls it the raw and the cooked," notes Schelling. "Most of the time we humans like to come down on the cooked side. Yet we 'sleep in the raw,' make love buck naked, and prefer a poetry not too dressed up." Anselm Hollo, in his blurb on the back, alludes to Lorine Niedecker: "live word works, informed by a gentle yet uncompromising awareness of how much 'gets away' and how much can, after all be held and recorded." Niedecker is an instructive comparison, but I hear a lot more of Gary Snyder in Schelling's telegraphic *éclats* of objectified reality: "Be slack on the reins./ In the gulch/ lupine./ Water looks clear down the creekbed." "Trace veins of stone/ up river beds/ and find a gem." The vigor of Schelling's verse is also more akin to Snyder than Niedeker: "Teach me to handle good wine/ teach me to fondle/ Aphrodite's gold pelt." Such lyrical swashbuckling is not without interest, but where Snyder's robustness is unaffected & natural, Schelling's Bacchic braggadocio ("Make my brow while I still live/ festive with roses,/ give me perfume, a girl") is a bit stagy & off-putting. Schelling shares Niedecker's density, but lacks her interiority, her nimble variegation, & the gist of his compression sometimes collapses into cryptic enigma: "I got claw ash/ at resin light/ toggled/ to noon."

Nevertheless, Schelling has some great moments here. "All the Animal Ladies Come Home to Their Temple," composed outside Bhubaneshvar, Orissa State, India, by the Temple of the Sixty-Four Yoginis, is a zinger, a great poem. It oozes sexuality & a feeling of life captured with such vividness you can smell the "groves of cashew" & "flayed elephant hide blocking the sun," the sheer feral mystery of the women "daubed with red paste," "pointed nipples on sour rib-bones," "coming from rock/ from tree-root coming/ out of the coconut husk/ out of seashells/ cookpots, milkjugs/ come to enter the ring from every direction." "All the Animal Ladies" is verdant with Pound's "world of moving energies." Had all the leaves in *Old Growth* been this pungent, we'd have a new hybrid on our hands.

—JOHN OLSON

"FeMina / of the thoroughfare": Review of *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy,* by Carolyn Burke. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996.

In his biography *Ezra Pound,* Charles Norman quotes a brief but intriguing reminiscence of Pound from Mina Loy, Wondering if Norman knew Loy, I turned to his memoir to see if it would yield any information about Loy's later career.[1] *Poets & People* mentions Loy once, in connection with the internationally famous New York art gallery of her son-in-law, Julien Levy:

> The gallery was posh, with a surrealist aura. In addition to painting by Dali, Berman, and Tchelitchew, there were magic boxes on the walls, made of mirrors and velvet, in which dwelt tiniest fairylands. *Beautiful women were also to be seen there,* fluttering the draperies: Levy's wife at the time, Goiela [sic], daughter of the poet Mina Loy, and Muriel Streeter, a young painter and his future wife [emphasis added].[2]

This is the sole reference to Loy in the entire book, and all it suggests is a chance association of her name with these famous (Dali) and semi-obscure others (Streeter). Norman's account of the gallery seems unremarkable; his rhetoric, however, is not. That italicized clause generates a tiny shock of surrealist ambiguity: are the "beautiful women. . .to be seen" in the flesh, or are they only virtually present, as fairies in "magic boxes"? The ambiguous description alludes, logically enough, to Joseph Cornell's "magic boxes" (which were exhibited, I believe, for the first time at the Levy Gallery), but it functions more like a magician's container—the kind which makes pretty women appear to disappear, to be harmlessly deleted or sawed in two.

Nested potentially within the boxes, within the galleries, within the histories of avant garde writing and art, is the fugitive presence of Mina Loy. It takes a sustained effort of patience to see her there, in all that fluttering rhetorical confusion of spousal flesh, and to see her for the strikingly innovative artist and active cultural worker that she was. Excavating Loy's story is not merely a self-rewarding activity; it also tells us crucial things about the connections between the old world and the new, at a moment when avant garde art bridged the two.

Consider the account of Loy and the Julien Levy Gallery which Carolyn Burke, author of this impressive first biography, has pulled from the trick bag of history. Mina Loy was a writer, but she was also an accomplished painter. She studied art in three countries, and at propitious moments—in

London and Paris when modern painting was delivered from Pre-Raphaelitism and the beaux-arts style, and in Munich at the height of the *Jugendstil*. Burke is particularly good at evoking the atmospherics of these historical moments, despite the fact that the early portions of Loy's story are founded in evidence which is fragmentary and/or subjective—that is, supplied by Loy herself.[3] Here is Burke's picture of Loy at 18, during her year at the Munich Künstlerinnenverein (Society of Female Artists' School), in the streets with a friend at Carnival:

> To look them, she and Alexander had exchanged sexes: he had a Neapolitan woman's costume with a velvet hood, and she wore black velvet knickers and had her hair cut short like a medieval page's. . . .The cafés were full of masqueraders throwing confetti. . . .One evening, as Mina gazed at the showers of confetti dotting the newly-fallen snow, Munich looked like a Pissarro painting. The Carnival had provided a subject suitable to his technique. But how could one capture the flamboyance of Fasching? Everything familiar was turned upside down.[4]

The passage is derived from Loy's *Islands in the Air*, the narrative for which she named the entire autobiographical sequence of works. Burke has taken Loy's prose, set it in factual context, and held it up to the biographer's light. This has the subtle effect here of filtering the scene through Loy's own earliest memory (or being mesmerized by her father's kaleidoscopic array of colored bottles, set before a fanlight above a doorway), which Burke reads as the revenant "subconscious archive" of a difficult Lacanian passage to individuation. At the same time, the description of Loy allows us to see through the unobtrusive lens of a theorist's interest in the urban, gendered, carnivalesque dimensions of the evolving modernist style in its many manifestations. In other words, Burke's book, here and throughout, is astute and in all the ways we could ask it to be: historical, cultural, psychoanalytical, and readerly.

Loy's subsequent itinerary, as painter and writer, was no less remarkable: she frequented the heady gatherings at the residences of Gertrude Stein (and later, Natalie Barney) in Paris and Mabel Dodge in Florence. Loy read *The Making of Americans* in manuscript around 1909, and her understanding of its stylistic advances on representational prose was fondly recalled by Stein.[5] By 1914, Loy was in dialogue with the Futurists, then at their nadir; in 1916, she traveled to New York, on the cross-pollinating trade winds of Dada and the free verse movement. By the time her first volume of poems appeared she was an established painter, and a notorious writer

and modern-woman-about-town.[6] She has been championed by figures as diverse as Marcel Duchamp, Djuna Barnes, and Thomas Merton. The first biographically fascinated assessment of Loy's art came early, in a 1917 issue of the New York *Evening Sun;* she was profiled as "the modern woman" by a reporter whose skepticism does not prevent him from remarking, in connection with his subject, that "some people think the women are the cause of modernism, whatever that is."[7]

In the twenties, Loy returned to Paris, where she became a kind of surrealist *avant la lettre,* constructing narratives and lampshades out of dreamlike memories and *objets trouvés* from the Marché aux Puces. Enamored of his penniless but colorful mother-in-law, Julien Levy tapped her sensibility, expertise, and Paris contacts to distinguish his infant gallery as "a veritable beachhead of Surrealism in the United States."[8] In 1932, the gallery afforded New York its first glimpse of the work of the Surrealists, and of Joseph Cornell. That year, Loy accompanied Levy to a clandestine Paris screening of Buñuel's film *L'Age d'Or;* overcoming his doubts, she persuaded him to show it in New York. The success of the event was not the only way in which her judgment would prove itself. As Levy's Paris connection, Loy was instrumental in securing a stable of artists whose most common denominator is brilliance: Braque, Cartier-Bresson, de Chirico, Dali, Ernst, Gorky, Kahlo, Magritte, and Tchelitchew among them.

In early 1933, the paintings on the walls of the Levy Gallery were Loys. A critic for the *Sun* articulated the synaesthetic aspect of her work when he called her first solo exhibition "a sort of sonnet sequence," and added that "those who respond to Blake and Arthur Rimbaud and other such mystics may come to terms with Mina Loy."[9] Cornell was one who responded; he recorded his memory of the vivid colors of Loy's 1933 exhibition years later, and requested pictures of her, to be included in one of his box-shaped altars to fe(y)male creativity, beauty, and "white magic."[10] The extent to which their friendship inspired their work has only barely been considered. Burke's biography orients the discussion by pinpointing the moment when "Mina had taken her place in his mental galaxy." Cornell called the slow process of his work a "type of image-search akin to poetics," and as Burke suggests, the two artists drew from the same fund of astral imagery.[11]

What, finally, was Mina Loy's role in inventing and disseminating the ideas which comprised Futurism? New York Dada? Anglophone Modernism? Surrealism?[12] At minimum, Loy belongs to the record as one of the few feminist commentators on these movements; it is time that their histories be reconstructed to account for her hyperarticulate presence. In the process of writing a dissertation about Mina Loy, assembling a bibliography, and constructing a critical edition of her poems, the passage from Norman's

memoir became emblematic of the difficulties involved in the revisionary project.[13] The first obstacles are material: Loy functioned in several media, four languages, and under cover of maiden, married, and self-fashioned names; her logopoeic poetry ardently courted censorship and obscurity, and has been available in print only sporadically. Her many memoir-writing contemporaries often remembered her as a raving beauty, a faded beauty, or a spectacle, but not as an artist.[14] Critics still remain in thrall to the agendas of the key publicists, past and present, of these various movements; historical accounts of avant garde activities begin to look suspiciously supposition-bound to any student of Loy's career.

Carolyn Burke's extensive research and feminist perceptiveness provides us with all the material we need to begin this effort of reconsideration. Working against the historiographic weave, Burke has constructed a first biography of the subject alternately known, to her contemporaries, as Mina-Minna-Jemima-Dusie-Ducie-Gusta-Rita-Imna-Oly-Levi-Lowy-Ilaweis-Cravan-Lloyd-Loy. Scholars have waited over a decade for this book, and contrary to some press reports, are grateful that it has arrived. *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* has had a predictably motley reception, the articles typically revealing more about the reviewer then the book. One of the first, a brief mention in *Kirkus Reviews,* "hail[s]" Loy as an "early arty feminist" but claims that she "comes off" in this "impressively detailed but cold and disagreeable biography" as unreal, "a creature who might just as easily been invented, pieced together from scraps of her contemporaries for whom we do have a feeling: Mabel Dodge, Duchamp, et al."[15] Upon suspicion of frigidity ("cold," "disagreeable," unfeeling) and—consequently—of unreality, the writer impugns biographer and subject alike, dismissing the archival and theoretical underpinnings of the book as he unknowingly revives a question asked years ago—a question to which Loy herself archly replied: "I assure you I am indeed a live being. But it is necessary to stay very unknown. . . ."[16] In other words, he does not so much explore as succumb to the elaborately constructed incognito of this artist, who set about misdating her paintings and constructing a poetic so avant garde that postmodernism and feminist theory may be said to have set the table for her revival banquet. The criticism might perhaps have been fended off if Burke (who is also Irigaray's translator) had been more radical in her approach to this biography as "collage" or "assemblage,"[17] but I doubt it.

The quality of Loy's literary art eclipses, even, her biographical genius; she will be remembered preeminently as an artist, secondarily as a cultural figure. Writing about her poetry in the course of documenting the textual instability of her "menuscripts," I have become convinced of this. In the newly-edited *Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy,* Roger Conover's pugilistic, fact-rich, courtier-like defense draws a memorably Loy-al zig-

zagging line in the sand of literary history. Carolyn Burke's biography, which gathers in timely testimony from a generation that is quickly receding from us, makes it clear that Loy's existence is vividly indisputable.[18] Together, the two books lay stubborn, unconditional seige to the canons, but at least the scene is familiar. Loy wrote the battlements.

—MARISA JANUZZI
University Of Utah

Notes

1 Charles Norman, *Ezra Pound* (Revised Edition: New York: Minerva Press, 1969) 273. The excerpt, in part: "He was like a child, and an old professor at the same time. His craze then was endocrine glands. He would talk about it a great deal—very learned discussion. 'Glands,' she added, 'were the latest thing at the time.'" Norman, I discovered, hadn't gotten Loy's comments firsthand, but had taken them from an article by George H. Tichenor: " This Man is a Traitor: A Story of the Life and Works of Ezra Pound, Who Scorned the People." *PM* 4.50 (New York, 15 August 1943): Sunday Picture Magazine section, 3-5.

2 Norman, Charles. *Poets & People*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972.

3 Readers who know Loy primarily from Roger Conover's generous selection in the *Last Lunar Baedeker* (Jargon Society, 1982) may nevertheless not be aware of the extent of her unpublished prose writings, housed mostly in the Loy collection at the Beinecke Library. She left overlapping drafts of five undated autobiographical novels in manuscript, and a sixth, *Colossus*, which has been excerpted in print—most extensively in French: tr. Jean-Pierre Begot in *Oeuvres d'Arthur Cravan* (Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1987), but also in English: *Colossus*, introduced and edited by Roger Conover in *New York Dada*, ed. Rudolf E Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), 102-119. A finished segment of the cycle, *Insel*, has been published (Black Sparrow, 1991).

4 Burke, 59.

5 Stein, Gertrude. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1933): 162.

6 This book, *Lunar Baedecker* [sic] (Paris: Contact, 1923), attracted the attention of Edwin Muir, who wrote one of the most perceptive (if somewhat negative) descriptions of her poetic project:

> . . .She is a mystic of a very peculiar kind, a negative mystic, the chief fruit of whose mysticism is an acridly intimate awareness of the flesh. She is perplexed, she is disconcerted painfully, by the senses; and her poetry is a protest against them, expressed in a photographic, relentless portrayal of their antics. Even when she is moved by pity, the sense of metaphysical obscenity is not far away; but that obscenity is the complement of her subconscious, helpless mysticism. This deep-set and unresolved conflict gives her work intensity, but, naturally, gives it only in flashes; and she never attains the serenity out of which great poetry comes. Given her limits, however, she is so genuine that her utterance arrests us.

E.M. [Edwin Muir]. "Recent Verse." *The New Age* #1643, n.s. vol. XXXIV #196 March 1924(b) p. 223.

7 "Do You Strive to Capture the Symbols of Your Reactions? If Not You Are Quite Old Fashioned." New York: *The Evening Sun*, Tuesday, February 13, 1917, p. 10.

8 Sawin 1995, 79.

9 "Attractions in the Galleries." *New York Evening Sun* (4 February 1933): 9; quoted in Burke, 379.

10 It is not clear to me that the pictures which she sent were ever used in this capacity, though I have been told that a box containing her daughter's image is extant.

11 Julien Levy's memoir is still one of the most extensive, if not evaluative, accounts of the friendship between Loy and Cornell *(Memoir of an Art Gallery.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977). In a review of David Kalstone's *Becoming a Poet,* Thom Gunn includes ML and Elizabeth Bishop in a brief list of artists inspired by Joseph Cornell's boxes. He then contrasts the "self-absorbed playfulness" of Bishop's imagery unfavorably against the "bite" of the images in another "fantasy, Mina Loy's 'Lunar Baedeker,' where for example 'A flock of dreams/browse on Necropolis.'" Finally, his memory of the colors of Loy's 1933 exhibition is preserved in *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters, and Files* (Ed. with an introduction by Mary Ann Caws. Foreword by John Ashbery. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993). The paucity of selections referring to Loy accurately preserves the proportion of references to her in the diaries as a whole, but the quality of the remarks is tantalizing. Perhaps more on Loy will emerge when Cornell's unmicrofilmed papers are finally organized and housed at the Cornell Study Center.

12 The spiritualized eroticism and material counterculturalism of the Beats, even? The claim for Loy's proto-Beat sensibility was made by Josh Weiner, in "An Otherwise Beat: Mina Loy's 'Hot Cross Bum,'" a paper delivered on June 19, 1996 at the National Poetry Foundation conference, "American Poetry in the 1950s."

13 The edition is a supplement to the dissertation, *Reconstru[ing] Scar[s]: Mine Loy and the Matter of Modernist Poetics,* Columbia University, forthcoming in 1996. The annotated bibliography of works by and about her will appear in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* eds. Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, forthcoming).

14 For example, Sylvia Beach's record of Joyce's first meeting with Loy (and her two daughters) is anything but literary: "Joyce, who could see as well as anyone when he wanted to, observed that Joella was a beauty according to all the standards. . .So [of the three women] she had Joyce's vote." *Shakespeare and Company.* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959. There is no doubt that Loy, the author of a pamphlet called "Auto-Facial Construction," was gifted in what Joan Riviere called the "masquerade of femininity."

15 Unsigned notice, *Kirkus Reviews,* 15 November 1995.

16 The *Last Lunar Baedeker,* Roger Conover, ed. (Jargon Society, 1982) xviii.

17 In "Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference" *[American Quarterly* 39 (1987): 98121], Burke identifies "an important counterstrain of modernist poetics—centered on modalities of joining and separation, union and disunion—that was first exemplified in the paratactic and gender-conscious writing of Gertrude Stein." As Burke explains, the term for "collage," in French, is also the slang word for a domestic union which is sexual but not licit: Stein's use of the collage technique, then, smuggles a biographically-inspired "poetics of gender" into a style which has been read, primarily, in formalist terms. In *Becoming Modern,* Burke hesitates to reverse this formulation. She chooses to "eschew the strategies of modernist juxtaposition" for the straight coherence of the more or less linear narrative which makes standard biographies accessible and recognizable as such. It is an understandable decision, given the fact that, at the time of the book's inception, Burke was one of only a tiny handful of people who were writing knowledgeably about Loy. Still, one wonders about the potential implications of the aesthetic advances of Stein and Loy for biography as a genre. Irigaray's identification of "a woman" as a fluid heterogeneity (rather than the unitary occupant of the subject position assigned to her in the dominant symbolic) makes the stakes explicit. What would an Irigarayan biography look like?

18 Burke quotes or paraphrases the late Berenice Abbott, the late Djuna Barnes, the late Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, the late Basil Bunting, and so on.

Will Alexander's *The Stratospheric Canticles* (Pantograph, 1995) is simultaneously defense and enactment of a poetics of apocalypse. The poet as "fumarole" might be said to define Alexander's sense of poetic vocation in this collection of shorter poems ending with the forty-page title poem. Not just this last poem but several others in the book outline an "aesthetic," though such a word might seem to Alexander the relic of European discourses, inadequately descriptive of a project better understood as cosmology for "an era of post-eternity." Nevertheless, one can point to distinctive properties of the poetry here, as Alexander himself does in a poem called "Apprenticeship"—hypotaxis, "paratactic co-ordination." With the various, manifold accomplishments of a poetics of disjunction in full view lately, and now much imitated Alexander's "technique" is itself of great interest for its location outside of both "avant-garde" and "mainstream" orthodoxies. Of course the one aspect of Alexander's work that has received the most comment—his prodigious vocabulary, his "logolatry" (as the title of a Mark Scroggins review in the *American Book Review's* special number on "postmodern" African-American poetry had it), is evident in this as in other Alexander works.

But Alexander's idioms, it seems to me, his allusions to everything from Sufi mysticism to "microbial botany" are not meant to map a vast terrain of erudition. Nor is this a language in the service of plenitude and difference, not exactly anyway, despite the pressing ecological concerns of this poetry. Rather, the various idioms, vocabularies, and images of Alexander's poetry are eminently transmutable, one into the other. The energy of this poetry is not wholly or even importantly an effect of its pyrotechnic particulars—I'm not sure that we are meant to check a dictionary to see how "precise" Alexander is, as Eliot Weinberger suggests in the book's blurb. I'm struck instead by the agglutination of parts in Alexander's poems, and more problematically by the way in which an expressivist force distills all the poem's matter to the ONE MATTER to the cosmos which is also the self—pressurized, turbulent, eruptive. Make no mistake about it: this is a poetry that would "will" its way through and beyond historical contingency:

> it can be said that one is unified by pressure
> by an intensity which mingles in sub-bodies of radium
> crossing & re-crossing the endless enclaves of heaven
>
> the Milky Way
> a single territorial nuance
> a single brush with totality

Who else writes such "canticles" nowadays? And, yet, at times, one tires of the fever-pitch—Alexander himself notes that "I've looked /only for the tonalities that scorch." And, at times, I am suspicious not only of the alchemist's ego but also of the reductionist mantras that become part of the exorcism in process.

"Greece," "Christianity," Cartesian rationality and Europe itself stand in this poetry as undifferentiated wholes reflecting only "entropy" or "the brazen execution of a society in neurosis." Heroes, too, emerge in a similarly one-dimensional casting: Jackson Pollock, who might have saved Europe, Alexander thinks, giving it back its "absent alchemical nigredo," or Miro—the title poem is framed as a history and discussion of painting. Against the destructive force of the West, there's "the Southern psyche" and "the invisible centrality of Asia." In this titanic struggle of monoliths, "one must paint like a terrifying angel/ producing from one's eyes/an alien xenogenesis. . . ." This is a religious poetry, clearly, structured by desire—perhaps my skepticisms seem to Alexander part of "the wicked Euro-abscess model/claiming democracy & engagement/claiming a factotum of decimals. . . ." Alexander's description of history as "no more than an infected thermogenesis" and his caricature of scientists "sweating from the power of strong findings" as they mine "the gulf of the dead for genes" and "kill off the tropics" strike me, especially when isolated from the poem as a whole, as hortatory, venomous, and dangerously reductive. But the purpose of this expressivist verse is to purge, "to peer into the obverse," to summon the rhythms of cataclysm. It knows what it's about: its readers should not neglect its revolutionary agendas while admiring their view of the arcane and the surreal. Attention to particulars is less consequential here than attention to the whole, though there are brilliant moments such as when Alexander avers that "in the saliva of newts/ one sees the intestinal raging of deltas" or when he catalogs the effects of pushing beyond Christianity's reading of "death" and into the void:

> then one forgets what death was like
> its intermediate frenzy
> its howling jugular waters
> its large debacle of circles
> its lighter & darker spasmodics
> its ominous flight of disjunctive agraphia
>
> one can no longer condense its force as a golden remedial hurdle
> or as a genuine & necessitous punishment

one must live with the altimeter
with an eerie alchemical endlessness
which engenders a hypnotic parallel breathing
a breathing further and further removed
from an immense inconclusive bondage
from the limits of muscle & corrosive calf imprints

This poetry has didactic moments too, as the above illustrates, and what could be more unfashionable? I wish I knew more about the traditions that here and there seem to underlie it—Arabic angelology, perhaps Sufi mysticism, alchemy itself. That I don't indicates the need for Alexander, who represents in more ways than I can name a tremendous force of intervention—an Artaud turning over our worlds—in the incestuous pockets of contemporary American poetry.

But in the end I was left thinking of Bloch's phrase—"something's missing." What' s missing here are tonalities and modalities that might show us what else there is besides fever. We get a glimpse of these in "The Mesmeric Remora"—a monologue of the remora, the "suckerfish" seen around sharks—and occasionally in other poems, but such glimpses are altogether overwhelmed by Alexander's "ceaseless admixture of terror" and fury.

***

I cannot imagine a book more unlike Alexander's than Harryette Mullen's *Muse & Drudge* (Singing Horse, 1995). Having previously adapted "the new sentence," having taken Gertrude Stein to the supermarket in the comic and cutting, gender and race-inflected prose texts of *S*PeRM**K*T,* Mullen turns in *Muse & Drudge* to what she describes in the issue of the *American Book Review* mentioned above as "a more-or-less recognizably 'colored,' 'negro,' 'black,' or 'african-american' base of folk-street-blues-based riffs, rap, and rhetoric." As she notes, *Muse & Drudge* is "a pretty straightforward praise song to women of the African diaspora, although a good deal of it is less than flattering; on the other hand, it is a blues riff on Sappho as Sapphire." Here the stanza rather than the "new sentence" is the primary prosodic unit, but more often than not individual stanzas are discrete units and thereby continue to manifest an engagement with some of the "experimental" forms and structures articulated and defined over the last two decades. At the level of critical theory and polemic, much has been made of the role of the reader in various disjunctive and "language poetry" modes, of the potential for interrupting the tautological certitudes of "disciplined" discourses poetic and otherwise, of the politics of resisting familiar and naturalized narrative and lyric modes and their subjectivities.

But I'm unaware of a defense of, say, the work of Ron Silliman framed as a defense of a poetics of inclusion, and that seems to me one of the strongest cases to be made on behalf of such a poetry—that it lets in so much, that it is flooded with referents. I'd want to make the same case for the poetry of *Muse & Drudge,* though to read Mullen is to meet a more self-consciously playful, sympathetic if still feminist engagement with the everyday than Silliman's densely descriptive, pun-ful, ironized male gaze typically allows. Mullen is a comedian, and a damn good one, though the accumulated effect of her stanzas in *Muse & Drudge* is partly a melancholy, as if all of the miming of popular culture, the ecstatic play of particular lines and stanzas, the woven sound-textures, circle an absence they cannot name.

Thus, while the poem doesn't appear to have an overarching, linear movement that I would be able to describe, it didn't really surprise me—though it surely "moved" me—when I met these stanzas on the book's last page:

> just as I am I come
> knee bent and body bowed
> this here's sorrow's home
> my body's southern song
>
> cram all you can
> into jelly jam
> preserve a feeling
> keep it sweet
>
> so beautiful it was
> presumptuous to alter
> the shape of my pleasure
> in doing or making
>
> proceed with abandon
> finding yourself where you are
> and who you're playing for
> what stray companion

Is Mullen a Christian poet? I'm not prepared to say. At any rate, I'm struck in this book by how *comfortable* she is with common and popular idioms, how these are allowed their own dignity even as they meet the wordplay and the pressurized, condensed energies of line and stanza. In the *ABR,* Mullen writes that she can "remember 20-year-old jingles, but couldn't recite a line of Jay Wright or Ed Roberson to save my soul." One way to

look at this fact (and it is true of many others, I suspect, that they can quote more Bob Dylan or John Lee Hooker than Charles Olson or Kamau Brathwaite) is as an example of the way that mass culture "has used my brain as a petri dish"—to quote Mullen again. We can summon the shades of Adorno and Althusser. But I think also of Robert Creeley's defense of the common and the commonplace in "Some Senses of the Commonplace," where he says the following of the "trite, trivial, and hackneyed" songs of Hank Williams: "And it isn't that they are great *in spite of that. Because of that*, they are glorious, and absolutely elating, reassuring, and in all ways acceptable as great art." When an intelligence and a gifted ear such as Mullen's comes to hear common idioms, leaving them alone while also remixing them in angular, witty stanzas and rhymes, we have a poetry that traverses the always permeable boundaries of the ordinary and the extraordinary, of popular culture and so-called "high culture," in truly remarkable and powerful ways.

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I'd like to call the reader's attention to some other books and new magazines—Michael Palmer's *At Passages* (New Directions), Norma Cole's *Moira* (O Books), Joseph Donahue's *World Well Broken* (Talisman House), the Washington D. C. journal *Flashpoint* [P.O. Box 6243, Washington D. C.20015-0243], the Chicago-based (and free!) journal *LVNG* [P.O. Box 3865 Chicago, IL 60654-0865]. There's also Allen Fisher's *Scram: or the transformation of the concept of Cities* (Spectacular Diseases), a good introduction to the work of one of Britain's most important "alternative" writers. In his introductions to the book's sections, as elsewhere throughout his career, Fisher presents a challenge to all those who would seek to identify coherent and stable aesthetic practices—no work is more rigorously situated, more fluid in its development and targeted occasions. There is also Cole Swensen's *Numen* (Burning Deck) and her translation of Pierre Alferi, *Natural Gaits* (Sun & Moon). Swensen seems to me one of the best writers to emerge from a post-language poetry, "New Coast" nexus, and Alferi is a poet who has absorbed specific scientific work without feeling the need to try to trump it with the spectre of the ancient powers of poetry. I hope to discuss some of the above works in the near future, in this or another forum.

I'll conclude, though, by mentioning Andrew Crozier's edition of the selected writings of John Rodker, *Poems & Adolphe 1920* (Carcanet, 1996). [It's best had by writing 402-406 Corn Exchange Buildings Manchester M4 3BY England.] I know I've beaten this horse before, but there's a good deal of important "alternative" writing now being produced in Britain, much of it going its own way. Andrew Crozier has promoted some of it as an

anthologist, and he is one of a comparatively few British poet-scholars actively working to retrieve from decades of neglect various modernist poetries crushed by either the accidents of fate or the orthodoxies of Movement and post-Movement British poetry. John Rodker was a London contemporary of Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot. His Ovid Press published Eliot, Pound, and Lautréamont, among many others; he succeeded Pound as editor of *The Little Review*. His poet's novella *Adolphe* was once described by Pound as an advance on the methods of Joyce's *Ulysses*. "Recovering" his work—to use the fashionable academic phrase—allows us to see anew and in a less monumentalized perspective an historical (and a British) modernism. As Crozier notes, "[I]n Rodker we find neither the erasure of the writing subject, nor the ironic objectification of the dramatic subject in its imputed language: both of them modes which constituted the modernity of Pound and Eliot. . . .To an extent Pound was right when in 1914 he classified Rodker as a Futurist. Where Rodker differs from Futurism, however, is precisely in not objectifying mechanical sensation. His writing is permeated with the affective modes of the self." Rodker emerged from very different contexts than those which gave shape to the masculinist modernism of Pound and others—he was Jewish, he was in contact with the poetry and dance-theater of the "Choric School," which was much more open to and influenced by women. There is a sustained interest in Freud, a deeper engagement with the macabre underwriting an "unironic subjectivity"—all of this makes the intersection of Rodker with the Vorticist nexus in London all the more fascinating. There are prose poems and theatrical forms which also set Rodker apart from canonical modernist practice. For me, the best book of poems is *Hymns* (1920), which has among its gems a "Hymn to Love" surely written in response to Mina Loy's "mucous-menbrane[s]" in her "Pig Cupid," the first of her then-scandalous "Songs to Joannes." It's printed here first among a series of other "hymns." I'll finish by quoting the whole of a shorter poem, where imagist technique and the "objective correlative" meet Rodker's idiosyncratically expressive despair. In the second strophe, note the effect of the white space splitting the first line, which might perhaps be said to force a homoerotic tension into the poem; note too the acceleration in the second line followed by the deceleration of the third, with its hardly noticed rhyme. This is writing which, in its own small subtleties, deserves to be remembered:

> I'd have loved you as you
> deserved had we been frogs
>
> Where did I hear of two smooth frogs
> clasped among rushes
> in love and death:
> rigid and with spread fingers.

And we men
all brain, all heart, hot blood;
turn lightly, then
'Ah, weren't we once friends?'

—KEITH TUMA

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

ADONIS, pen name of Ali Admad Said, founder of Muwakif, is one of the most significant and controversial contemporary Arab poets, often mentioned as a contender for the Nobel Prize. He was born in Syria in 1929, moved to Beirut in the mid-fifties where he was a prominent member of the modernist group of poets known as the Sh'r movement. He now lives in Paris. ALLEN HIBBARD is the author of *Paul Bowles: A Study of the Short Fiction* and *Crossing to Abbassiya and Other Stories,* published in Arabic. He teaches at Middle Tennessee State University and is writing a biography of Alfred Chester. OSAMU ISBER is a Syrian poet, short story writer, and translator who has been an active force behind the innovative literary journal *Alef.* Among his translations into Arabic have been Eduardo Galeano's *Memory of Fire* and Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient.* In 1997 Sun & Moon Press will publish CHARLES BERNSTEIN's *Republics of Reality: Poems 1975–1995.* LUIGI BALLERINI is a native of Milan, Italy, and currently a professor of Italian Literature at UCLA. A poet, scholar, cultural entrepreneur and critic, he has published numerous books of poetry and scholarship throughout his career, including *Che Figurato Muore* (1988), *Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves: Explorations in Italian Art* (1982), and *Shearsmen of Sorts: Italian Poetry 1975-1993* (1994). JEREMY PARZEN has translated Italian authors such as Goldini and Marinetti. He currently works at the Getty Research Institute in Santa Monica and is completing his Ph.D. dissertation on Petrarchan transcription and versification. The filmmaker/

director Euzhan Palzy *(Sugar-Cane Alley, A Dry White Season,* among others) has recently complete dubbing her three hour documentary film on AIME CESAIRE, who, at this time, at 83, is still in good health in Fort-de-France, Martinique. In the spring of 1997, Marsilio will publish a bilingual edition of CLAYTON ESHLEMAN and ANNETTE SMITH's translation of Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land,* with a new translation of André Breton's 1943 essay on Césaire. ANNE CORAY is a lifelong Alaskan, working toward an MFA degree at UAA-Anchorage campus. Her work has appeared in Nimrod, Hawai'i Review, Dalhousie Review, and Nexus. MICHEL DEGUY'S most recent book is *A ce qui n'en finit pas* (Seuil, 1995); he continues to edit the journal Poésie in Paris. WILSON BALDRIDGE's translation of Deguy's *Gisants (Recumbent Figures)* will be published by Wake Forest University Press in 1997; he also has a piece on translation forthcoming in the proceedings (Editions Belin) of the first international colloquium on the work of Michel Deguy held in Paris, June, 1995. This fall Potes & Poets Press will publish RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS's *Draft 15-XXX, The Fold;* an essay, "Manifests," is in a current issue of Diacritics. DAN FEATHERSTON lives in Tucson; forthcoming poetry, essays, and reviews in Cross-cultural Poetics, Poetic Briefs, and Synaesthetic. JORIE GRAHAM's most recent publication is *The Dream of the Unified Field (Selected Poems).* A new book, *The Errancy,* is due out in the spring from The Ecco Press. BENJAMIN HOLLANDER is the editor of *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France* (Acts, 1988). His more recent books include *How To Read, Too* (Leech, 1992) and *The Book Of Who Are Was* (Sun & Moon, 1996). GARRETT KALLEBERG'S poetry has recently appeared in Talisman and American Letters & Commentary; and is forthcoming in First Intensity and Mandorla. W.B. KECKLER has work in recent issues of Talisman, First Intensity and The Gertrude Stein Awards. He lives in Harrisburg PA. KEVIN KILLIAN's new play, "Wet Paint," the life of Jay De Feo, premiered in San Francisco in October. His forthcoming books include *Little Men* (Hard Press) and a novel, *Arctic Summer* (Richard Kasak Books). MICHAEL McCLURE'S newest book is a collaboration with sculptor Robert Graham, *Lie. Sit, Stand, Be Still* (Arion Press), GWYN McVAY is the author of a chapbook, *Brother Ikon* (Inkstone Press, 1996). Her work has appeared recently in Phoebe and The American Voice, and is forthcoming in Ascent, The Prose Poem, and Exquisite Corpse. TAM LIN NEVILLE's poetry has been published in Mademoiselle, American Poetry Review, Ironwood, Crazyhorse, and The Massachusetts Review, as well as in a number of anthologies. Her essays and reviews have appeared in The Threepenny Review, The Hungry Mind Review, and The American Poetry Review. Her chapbook, *Dreaming in Chinese,* won Calypso Press's first chapbook competition in 1995. JOHN OLSON's essay about poets in movies will be appearing in First Intensity, and a chapbook, *Swarm of Edges,* is forthcom-

ing. RON PADGETT'S most recent book is *New & Selected Poems* (Godine). Forthcoming is a nonfiction book, *Creative Reading* (National Council of Teachers of English). KRISTIN PREVALLET is an editor of Apex of the M, and is working on cataloging and editing he papers of Helen Adam. She lives in Buffalo. HEATHER RAMSDELL's poems have appeared in Mandorla, Torque, and Talisman. She recently completed her first book, *Lost Wax*. Besides PAUL CELAN, CATHERINE REYNOLDS, a recent graduate of The Naropa Institute (where she studied translation with Anselm Hollo), has translated Kurt Schwitters and Peter Handke's work. MARTA PETREU is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Shameless Poems* (1993). She is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cluj, and she edits the influential Romanian cultural and literary magazine, Apostrof. ADAM J. SORKIN'S most recent book, *The Sky Behind the Forest*, a selection of Liliana Ursu's work translated in collaboration with both Ursu and Tess Gallagher, is due out from Bloodaxe Books in November 1996. LIVIU BLEOCA is a writer, editor, and journalist who works as a librarian of the Romanian Academy in Cluj. He is the co-translator with Adam Sorkin of *Transylvanian Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Poets from Cluj-Napoca* (1994). DENNISON SMITH'S plays have been produced by the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, the Bread & Puppet Theatre in Glover, Vermont, and the Alchemy Theater in Chicago. *Window: a longpoem* is to be published by Letters Press (Toronto). KEITH TUMA'S most recent publication is the contributor's note you are now reading, *Jestures #3*. ROBERT VANDERMOLEN lives and paints houses in Grand Rapids. He had an NEA Poetry Fellowship in 1995. He has recently had poetry in Grand Street, Epoch, and Mudfish. ALLEN S. WEISS (at this moment giving a paper on Antonin Artaud at the Artaud Conference in Sidney, Australia) has recently edited a special issue of The Drama Review (T151) on "Experimental Sound and Radio." PAMELA WYE is represented by Luise Ross Gallery, NYC. She recently exhibited drawings at The Noyes Museum in Oceanville, NJ.

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SPRING 1997

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COVER: *Paris Is White (for Edmond Jabès)* by Irving Petlin, Oil and Pastel on Linen, 31½" x 78¾", 1995–96, courtesy of Kent Fine Art, NYC.

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PHILLIP FOSS

A HISTORY OF TREES

I was unable to assimilate the concept of partial death.

Thus in the governance of names, provinces are created
isolating degrees of amorous extension in regard to light.

~

I internalized the fire in decay.
I was cumbersome.
They said, each night is divided into four winds.
In structure I was hope.

Having fallen, he is risen;
having been buried, he is born;
having been burned, he is translated;
having been translated, he is ash.

~

I was unified in crescendo, dispersed as ovum, dissipated in
[anger.
I am not received in rain or consciousness:
A Pleistocene mind craves dissension.

How does one determine the birth of a tree?

What is compelling is the relative sponge quality of shadow:
with confusing frequency song articulates
with the empirical absence of a bird.

~

I was prior to division.
I was seen by women as a raven's beak.
I am manifested in mutation.

Why is light absent from any equation?

This is often dismissed as the deafness
accompanying extended intercourse with any explosive
– a symptom of disruption of the eyes' fluids.

~

I know the craving for ash;
The nausea of milk;
The bewilderment of defacement.

Thus, having assigned to memory the inhabitant names of
all
[forests,
the novice is bewildered by the profusion of seed.

~

Stone is my allure.
Absence is my countenance.
Narrative defines neurosis.

Trees do not actually feed on corpses,
though this is an abused solace.
Most interment is an easement.

~

Death is de-unification: the pastoral removed from oak.
I ate excrement.
I believed that light illuminated.

Equally blind, equally blind.

Sometimes a profuse growth is disguised by numerous names.
Hedge, bois de arc, osage orange are examples.
Frequently, the culture of the namer precludes capture.

~

I am lame of mouth.
I am blind of hand.
I am, in structure, erudition.

Why is soil present in each sermon?

There is a pervasive ignorance regarding trees
and their relationship to breathing.
Trees have no lungs.

~

I am the suffocator of insects.
I am Shudder.
I am the woman coveting the smallest waist.

However, deficits in soil, moisture, light, and slope
define the failure of enlightment.

~

I believed I was intoxicated, when only disembodied.
I constructed myself to be prestigious.
I was enamored by shores in erosion.
I was imprisoned to my tongue.

Birch bark, when properly sewn and sealed,
is ideal for the construction of canoes or books
– relative vehicles of destination.

I have not lived in event.
I have not suckled on a mare.
I have not killed an animal.
I have not lied.

One must concede, however, that canoes
are capable of transporting both brains and asses.
Thus distinguishing vessels may well be errant.

~

If I lie, it is to release charm.
If I have sinned, it is to discard the infectious.
If I have fallen, it is merely a feint, to facilitate killing.

Species which produce consumables are the most often
assaulted;
those projecting barrenness or offensiveness reside
complacent.
This is effective as either affectation or deceit.

~

I am a woman's voice
explaining the necessity of washing the dead.
I was buried in the sea.

Hardwood are well suited for artificial limbs.
Limbs of some species produce excellent bows.

~

I am false.
I am the falsetto voice of the bull.
I am a strand of hair on the forest floor.

Grain is respectively a liability and an asset.
Fiddlebacking scatters light.
Ebony, apparently, consumes most light.
Cedar, when constantly assaulted by wind, barber-poles,
though the countenance deceives in linear facade.

~

I am a lost ivory broach; breast;
a transparent insect egg floating on a pond.

The tamarack, although growing needles instead of leaves,
is deciduous not evergreen.
This deception, of dropping its needles in autumn,
is viewed by the populace as the work of a dead pine
and the tree is dropped and blocked for firewood.

~

Who will drink the sediment from the blue bottle?
Who will swallow the gall stone?

Historically, all trees have been viewed as sacred;
all trees are wood.
Wood, therefore, is profane.

~

By what manner is time architectured?
What is the idealized structure of red?

Certain resins are odoriferous, others audacious.
Others, placed on the flesh and ignited, burn cool.

~

Who rectifies the disputations of memory?
Who is luck?

It is courting catastrophe to burn the wood of trees struck
[by lightning.
Violence, like the progressive falling of trees in an icestorm,
[is non-causal.

~

Who has sole custody of concept?
Why am I evangelized to convert to vulgar methodism?

Gods' countenances are frequently found
in the vagaries of disinterred black locust roots.

~

My name is Caprice.
My name is Folly.

Though no absolute tests are quotable,
fifty percent of a tree's mass is subterranean.
In thus positing a mirror balance,
the compositional weight of sky is neglected.

~

Though asleep, I continue in oratory;
though motionless, I consume.

Certain men have chosen to end their lives residing in trees.
These are primarily aerial hermits or the objects of
[hanging.

~

Who enumerates the strictures of barbarism;
Who proselytizes the compassion of the rookery?

Death by hanging does not affect the growth
pattern of the tree's limb because the body

rapidly loses moisture and becomes a wind chime.

~

What is the deaf sign for sound?
What is a conductor's sign to inflict silence?

Some cottonwoods, when cut,
have arteries in their core which hemorrhage.

~

What are the irrevocable mathematics of the heart;
what is each man's allotment of words?

Prior trees can become fossilized.
They then revert to "A History of Stone."

~

I have created the history of trees;
I have intentionally shuffled the strata of stone.

Through dendrochronology it was determined that the
[universe is flat:
One can thus hurl a projectile and it will not return.

~

I see my body asleep in a nightscape
punctuated by heads of glowing datura.
This is still life.

Boomerangs were not intended to return,
but to create atmospheric turbulence
conducive to rain or mental health.

~

The structure of my body
is identical to that of a jacal hut.
Thus, from myself, I cannot escape.

The only woman he desired was a mannikin.
This was attributed to finish.

~

Who records lock time?

The two hundred year old core of a bristlecone
is materially indifferent from yesterday.

~

Can the image of a snake represent a river?
Can a spiral represent a spring;
An eye, a god;
A leaf, the blood stream?

Some ancients, disemboweled by fire,
afford a space large enough to house a family.
This also applies to either gods or animals.

~

I cannot distinguish between what I have thought
and what I have created;
between what I have dreamt
and what I have whispered.

Each specie of tree makes unique sounds.
Though there are no published lexicons,
the overheard vocabularies simulate breath,
approximate pain.

ANDRE BRETON

A GREAT BLACK POET

(Tr. from the French by Annette Smith and Clayton Eshleman)

April 1941. Blocking the view, affixed to the beach by madrepores and visited by surf—at least the children had the playground of their dreams to romp in all day long—a ship's carcass in its very fixity provided no respite to the exasperating impossibility of moving about other than with measured steps in the space between two bayonets: the Lazaret concentration camp, in the harbor of Fort-de-France. Released after a few days, with what voracity did I plunge into the streets, seeking whatever still novel experience they could offer, dazzling markets, the hummingbirds in voices, the women whom Paul Eluard had described, upon returning from around the world, as more beautiful than any others. Soon, however, another shipwreck was looming, threatening to again block the whole horizon: the city itself was adrift, deprived as it were of its essential parts. Shops, and everything in their windows, took on a disquieting, abstract character. Activity was a bit slower than need be, noise too clear as if through beached debris. In the subtle air the continuous ringing, far off, of an alarm bell.

It is under these circumstances that, apropos of buying a ribbon for my daughter, I happened to leaf through a periodical on display in the haberdashery where the ribbon was sold. It was, under an extremely unpretentious cover, the first issue of a review called *Tropiques* which had just come out in Fort-de-France. Needless to say, knowing the extent to which ideas had been debased in the last year and not unfamiliar with the lack of scruples characteristic of police reactions in Martinique, I approached this periodical with extreme diffidence. . . I could not believe my eyes: for what was said there was what had to be said and was said in a manner not only as elegantly but as elevatedly as anyone could say it! All the grimacing shadows were torn apart, scattered; all the lies, all the mockery shredded: thus the voice of man was in no way broken, suppressed—it sprang upright again like the very spike of light. *Aimé Césaire,* such was the name of the one who spoke.

I shall not pretend that I did not at once take some pride in the fact that what he expressed was in no way unfamiliar; the names of the

poets and authors he referred to would have been in themselves sufficient evidence; but even more the tone of these pages rang true, demonstrating that a man was totally engaged in an adventure while having at his command all that was required to establish something not only of an esthetic but of a moral and social nature—or better, to make his intervention necessary and inevitable. The texts which accompanied Césaire's indicated persons with generally the same tendencies and whose thinking fully coincided with his own. In complete contrast to the writings with a masochistic, not to say servile, propensity that had been published in France in recent months, *Tropiques* persisted in opening up a royal road. "We belong," Césaire proclaimed, "to those who say no to darkness."

This land he was revealing and which his friends helped reconnoiter, it was my land too, yes, it was *our* land which I had wrongly feared obliterated by darkness. And one could feel that he was revolting and even before becoming more acquainted with his message, one noticed, so to speak, that from the simplest to the rarest, all the words processed by his tongue had been stripped, hence allowing that climax in concreteness, that unfailingly major quality of tone by which one can so easily tell the great poets from the lesser ones. What I learned that day was that the verbal instrument had not gotten out of tune in the tempest. This had to mean that the world was not in perdition: it would regain its soul.

By one of those flukes characteristic of the most auspicious moments, the West Indian haberdasher soon identified herself as the sister of René Menil who was, along with Césaire, the main driving force behind *Tropiques*. Her mediation reduced to a minimum the conveying of the few words I scribbled in haste on her counter. Indeed, less than an hour later, after looking for me all over the streets, she gave me an appointment arranged by her brother. Menil: genuine culture in its least ostentatious form, impeccable restraint, but nevertheless nerve with all its tremoring currents.

And the next day, Césaire. I recall my first quite elementary reaction at finding him of a black so pure and even more unnoticeable at first sight because he was smiling. Through him (I already knew it, I see it and everything will confirm it later), human essence is heated to a point of maximum effervescence in which knowledge—here of the highest order—overlaps with magical gifts. In my eyes his emergence, and I do not mean merely that day, in a form sheerly his own, takes on the value of a *sign of our times*. Thus, defying single-handedly an era in which we appear to be witnessing the general abdication of the mind, in which nothing appears to be created except for the purpose of perfecting the triumph of death, in which art itself

threatens to congeal in obsolete schemes, the first revivifying new breath capable of restoring confidence comes from a black. And it is a black who handles the French language in a manner that no white man is capable of today. And it is a black who guides us today into the unexplored, establishing along the way, as if by child's play, the contacts that make us advance on sparks. And it is a black who is not only a black but *all* of man, who conveys all of man's questionings, all of his anguish, all of his hopes and all of his ecstasies and who will remain more and more for me the prototype of dignity.

Our meetings, in the evenings, after his high school classes (which were at that time focusing on Rimbaud) in a bar turned into a single crystal by the outside light, the gatherings on the terrace of his house made even more enchanting by the presence of Suzanne Césaire, who radiated like flambé punch, but even more an excursion into the heart of the island: I shall always see us, without any other landmark to navigate through an ocean of delirious vegetation than the large, enigmatic balisier flower which is a threefold heart throbbing on the tip of a spear, leaning dangerously from very high over the abyss of Absalom as if over the very crucible in which poetic images are transformed when powerful enough to shake the world. It is there, under the auspices of that flower that the mission, assigned to man today, of breaking violently with the modes of thinking and feeling which eventually render his existence impossible took on imprescriptible form. That once and for all I was confirmed in the idea that nothing will do short of lifting a certain number of taboos, of finally eliminating from human blood the deadly toxins fostered in it by the (let's face it) lazier and lazier belief in a beyond, the esprit de corps absurdly linked to nations and races, and (supreme abjection) the power of money. Inevitably, for the past century, it has devolved upon poets to split open that armature which stifles us, and it is significant to note that posterity tends to consecrate only those who have taken this task the furthest.

That afternoon, facing the luxurious opening of all the floodgates of greenery, I truly valued a feeling of total communion with one of them, of knowing him above all as a man of will and of not distinguishing essentially his will from my own.

I also valued having solid evidence that he was a person of total achievement: a few days earlier he had given me an offprint of his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* from a small Parisian journal in which the poem must have passed unnoticed in 1939, and that poem is nothing less than the greatest lyrical monument of our times. It brought me the rarest of certainties, one which can never be attained by oneself: its author had gambled on everything that I had

ever believed in and he had, unquestionably, won. The stakes—taking into account Césaire's specific genius—were our common conception of life.

To begin with one will find in his poetry that luxuriance of movement, that at times gushing, at times showering, exuberance, that ability to constantly and deeply stir the affective world—all traits characteristic of authentic poetry in contrast to the fake poetry, poisonous would-be poetry, constantly proliferating around it. *To sing or not to sing,* that is the question and there is no salvation in poetry for someone who does not *sing,* although the poet is expected to do *more* than sing. And needless to say that when one who does not sing resorts to rhyme, fixed meter and other bogus devices, he will only fool the ears of Midas. Aimé Césaire is first and foremost one who sings.

Once that first absolutely necessary but not sufficient condition is fulfilled, a poetry worthy of its name is measured by the degree of abstention, of *refusal,* it implies and that negative component of its nature must be maintained as essential: it balks at tolerating anything already seen, heard, agreed upon, at using anything already used except when diverting it from its previous function. In this respect, Césaire is one of the most demanding poets not only because he is probity itself, but because of the extent of his culture, the quality and breadth of his knowledge.

Finally—and here, to remove any doubt brought about by the fact that, exceptionally, *Notebook of a Return* is a poem "with a theme," if not "a thesis," I specify that I am referring just as much to the poems of a different tenor that followed it—the value of Césaire's poetry, as with all great poetry and all great art, rests principally in the power of transmutation that it brings into play: namely in turning the most discredited materials, including even ugliness and servitude, into not just gold or the philosopher's stone but into freedom itself.[1]

The gift of song, the capacity for refusal, the power of extraordinary transmutation that I have just mentioned cannot be idly reduced to a handful of technical secrets. All that one can legitimately say is that all three find the largest common denominator in an exceptional, and until further notice, irreducible intensity of emotion confronting the spectacle of life (to the point where one is moved to change it). At most, critics are permitted to say something about the conflicting aspects of the formation of the personality in question and to bring out the striking circumstances of that formation. Unquestionably in Césaire's case it would *for once* lead us, at full gallop, away from the path of indifference.

In this respect, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* is a unique, irreplaceable document. The very title, as under stated as it is, aims at placing the reader at the core of the conflict which most affects the author, a conflict which he must, at all costs, transcend. The poem was written in Paris, after Césaire had just left the École Normale Supérieure and was about to return to Martinique. His native land, yes, how could one resist the call of this particular island, who would not succumb to its skies, its siren-like beckonings, its language oh so cajoling? But in no time at all darkness encroaches: one need only put oneself in Césaire's place to understand what assaults this nostalgia must sustain. Behind this floral design there is the wretchedness of a colonized people, their shameless exploitation by a handful of parasites in defiance of the very laws of their mother-country and without any qualms about dishonoring it; there is the resignation of this people, geographically disadvantaged by being a mere scattering of islands here and there. Behind all of this, only a few generations back, there is slavery and here the wound reopens, yawning with the whole width of a lost Africa,[2] with ancestral memories of abominable tortures, with the awareness of a monstrous and forever irreparable denial of justice inflicted upon an entire collectivity. A collectivity to which the departing poet belongs body and soul, as enriched as he may have been by all the teachings of the white world and thereby at that moment all the more torn.

Quite naturally the *Notebook* becomes an arena for revendication, bitterness, sometimes despair, to compete in, and the author opens himself to the most dramatic taking stock. His revendication, one can never point out enough, is the most legitimate in the world, so much so that the merest consideration of justice should prompt the white to grant it. But we are still a long way from that, even if we are beginning to put it timidly on the agenda: "In the former colonies, which will fall under a new regime and whose evolution towards democracy will become an international issue, democracy will have to put an end not only to the exploitation of colored people but to the social and political 'racism' of the white man."[3] One awaits with equal impatience the day when, outside these colonies, the great mass of colored people will no longer be insultingly segregated and restricted to inferior jobs or worse. If this expectation is not met by the international settlements that will come into play at the end of the present war, one might be forced to endorse, once and for all and with all that it implies, the opinion that the emancipation of colored people can only be brought about by themselves.

However, as fundamental as Césaire's revendication appears to be, to limit its implications to the immediate would mean reducing its

scope unforgivably. What I find invaluable in it is that it constantly transcends the anguish a black associates with the fate of black people in modern society, and that, becoming one with the anguish of all poets, artists, and bona fide thinkers, but adding to it the bonus of verbal genius, it encompasses the condition allotted to *man* by that society even to its unbearable, but also infinitely amendable, dimensions. And here comes to the fore in bold type what surrealism has always considered as the first article of its charter: a deliberate will to deal the coup de grâce to that which one calls "common sense (which does not stop short of calling itself "reason"), and the imperious need to do away with the deadly division in the human spirit in which one component has managed to give itself complete license at the expense of the other, whereas the very suppression of the latter will inevitably end up exalting it. If slave traders have physically disappeared from the world stage, their vile spirit is undoubtedly still at work in the sense that our dreams become their "piece of ebony," more than half of our nature stolen by them, that cursorily-considered cargo to this day barely good enough to rot in the hold of their ship. "Because we hate you, you and your reason, we claim kinship with dementia praecox, with the flaming madness of persistent cannibalism... Put up with me, I won't put up with you." And suddenly this transfiguring gaze, a bluish fuzz on the embers, like the no longer fallacious promise of a redemption: behold the one Césaire and I see as the greatest prophet of times to come, I mean Isidore Ducasse, Count of Lautréamont: *"Lautréamont's poetry, beautiful like a writ of expropriation...* Into lyrical and pallid strewings—like the fingers of the tropical pear tree when they fall in the gangrene of evening—he piles up the death trumpets of a laughable philosophy which raises, to the dignity of wonder of a hierarchized world, man, feet, hands and navel—a howling of fists against the barrier of the sky... The first to have understood that poetry starts with excess, disproportion, quests deemed unacceptable, amidst the great blind tom-tom. . . up to the incomprehensible shower of stars."[4]

Aimé Césaire's voice, beautiful like nascent oxygen.

NOTES

1 I did not wait to read this statement (published in *Lettres françaises* #7-8, February 1943) in order to embrace its opposite: "I see poetry essentially as a form of writing which, in compliance not only with the rules of prose but with other rules specific to it, number, rhythm, regular assonance, must nevertheless surpass it in power... Thus I demand that poetry possess all the qualities of prose, in the first place: nakedness, precision, clarity. The poet must aim at expressing all and only what he has in mind. Ultimately nothing unutterable, hinted at, no evocative images, no mystery. . ." Roger Caillois, often better inspired, makes here a perfectly Philistine statement.

2 Referring to the observations of European navigators at the end of the Middle Ages, Léo Frobenius writes: "When they arrived in the Bay of Guinea and landed at Vaida, the captains were surprised to find there well-designed streets, lined, for several miles, by double rows of trees: for many days they moved through a countryside covered with magnificent fields, populated by men clad in dazzling cloths of which they themselves had woven the fabric! Further south, in the kingdom of the Congo, a swarming crowd, dressed in 'silk' and 'velvet,' large states, well-organized down to the smallest detail, powerful sovereigns, prosperous industries. Civilized to the quick!" (Cited in *Tropiques* 5, April 1942).

3 Pierre Cot: "The different kinds of democratic constitutions" *(Le Monde libre* #2, December 1943).

4 Aimé Césaire: "Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont" *(Tropiques* 6-7, February 1943).

New York, 1943

ADRIENNE RICH

CHAR

1

There is bracken there is the dark mulberry
there is the village where no villager survived
there are the hitlerians there are the foresters
feeding the partisans from frugal larders

there is the moon ablaze in every quarter
there is the moon "of tin and sage" and unseen pilots
dropping
explosive gifts into meadows of fog and crickets
there is the cuckoo and the tiny snake

there is the table set at every meal
for freedom whose chair stays vacant
the young men in their newfound passions
(Love along with them the ones they love)

Obscurity, code, the invisible existence
of a thrush in the reeds, the poet watching
as the blood washes off the revolver in the bucket
Redbreast, your song shakes loose a ruin of memories

A horrible day. . .Perhaps he knew, at that final instant?
The village had to be spared at any price. . .
How can you hear me? I speak from so far. . .
The flowering broom hid us in a blazing yellow mist. . .

2

This war will prolong itself beyond platonic armistices. The implanting of political concepts will go on amid upheavals and under cover of self-confident hypocrisy. Don't smile.Thrust aside both skepticism and resignation and prepare your soul to face an intramural confrontation with demons as cold-blooded as microbes.

The poet in wartime, the Surrealistes' younger brother
turned realist: *the village had to be spared at any price*
all eyes on him in the woods crammed with maquisards ex-
pecting him to signal to fire and save their comrade
shook his head and watched Bernard's execution
knowing that *the random shooting of a revolver*
may be *the simplest surreal act* but never
changes the balance of power and that real acts are not
[simple
The poet, prone to exaggerate, thinks clearly under torture

knowing the end of the war
would mean no end to the microbes frozen in each soul
the young freedom fighters
in love with the Resistance
fed by a thrill for violence
familiar as his own jaw under the razor

3

Insoluble riverrain conscience echo of the future
I keep vigil for you here by the reeds of Elkhorn Slough
and the brown mouth of the Salinas River going green
where the white egret fishes the fragile margins
Hermetic guide in resistance I've found you and lost you
several times in my life You were never just

the poet appalled and transfixed by war you were the maker
of terrible delicate decisions and that did not smudge
your sense of limits You saw the squirrels crashing
from the tops of burning pines when the canister exploded
and worse and worse and you were in charge of every risk
the incendiary motives of others were in your charge
and the need for a courage wrapped in absolute tact
and you decided and lived like that and you
held poetry at your lips a piece of wild thyme ripped
from a burning meadow a mimosa twig
from still unravaged country You kept your senses
about you like that and like this I keep vigil for you.

CHAR: Italicized phrases and some images from *Leaves of Hypnos*, the journal kept in 1942-1943 by the poet René Char while he was a commander in the French Resistance; and from some of Char's poems. I have drawn on both Jackson Mathews' and Cid Corman's translations of Char in integrating his words into my poem. Char joined the Surrealist movement late and broke with it prior to World War II. It was André Breton who said, "The simplest surrealist act consists of going down into the street, revolver in hand, and shooting at random."

VITEZSLAV NEZVAL

SHIRT

(TR. FROM THE CZECH BY JEROME ROTHENBERG AND MILOS SOVAK)

[PREAMBLE]
How do they seize me these strange beings with no names
All their history as simple as Gibraltar
Bastards of reality & air who wander over Africa
The angelus clangs out
. . . . . .

On one of those steamy nights the end of June in 1935
I walked past the Luxembourg Garden
It was just striking midnight
And the streets were empty
With the emptiness of moving vans
Deserted like Ash Wednesday
And I thought of nothing
Had no wishes
No I wished for nothing rushed to nowhere
Nothing weighed on me
Like a man sans memory I walked & walked
A man yes like a box
The way old men walk who no longer need to sleep

I still don't know what caught me maybe my own sigh
The trees out in the garden filling with white bandages
I looked back at those paper bindings
Over an iron hedge
Could I have been singing as I walked?
Just singing
& Paris sold off like a slave
Convulsed & crazy
Paris with your bridges made into your chains

Prague, Paris, Leningrad & all the cities
I have ever walked thru
Now I see a herd of women bound with ropes
The glow is drowning them the sky still free
Like bracelets that a crowd is rushing over
Oh you gates you bridges
Of the one & only city that I see
A city cut thru by the Seine & Neva
by the Moldau
And a brook where peasant women wash their clothes
The brook I live by

And windows
Thru the first a statue comes in from the Place du Panthéon
The next looks over the Charles Bridge
Thru the third I'm staring down the Nevsky Prospect
And still more windows

How I loved the grocer's paper cones
With secrets that lie too deep
That they remind me of an empty chamber
With its heaps & heaps of shirts
A shaft that holds the common grave of nameless women
I know a forest with its broadleafed burdock
under which a girl's breast's hidden
And a tin cross too & these white hands
A sofa stuffed with gauze that reeks of antiseptic

Who are you woman like a sewing machine I stare at
Like the Boulevard Montparnasse that self-same evening
When I was sitting down outside the Cafe Dome
And studying the frieze on that one building there
five storeys up
I thought that it was snowing
In my mind I took part in the final new year's eve
of the 19th century before it ended
Under a tree filled up with songs a carriage waited
In vain I tried to find the house the sewing machine inside

its shuttle that held a thread I longed to have
Then walked back to the Luxembourg again

The wonder of those gardeners who care so for their trees
they wrap the fruit in little sacks
Like you who cover up your bare breasts with a shirt
As beautiful as a water pail turned over in a house of
[mourning
As beautiful as a needle in a birch bark with the year and date
[stitched in
As beautiful as a poppy head that's shaken by a bell
As beautiful as a shoe out in a flood floats past a window with
[an oil lamp
As beautiful as a wooden stake on which a butterfly is resting
As beautiful as a baked apple in the snow
As beautiful as a bedboard struck by lightning
As beautiful as a wet rag in a fire
As beautiful as a loaf of bread at midnight on the pavement
As beautiful as a button on a cloister wall
As beautiful as a treasure in a pot of flowers
As beautiful as a psychic's table & the words writ on the gate
As beautiful as a garland in a shooting gallery
As beautiful as a scissors snipping off a candlewick
As beautiful as a tear inside the eye
As beautiful as the hairwheel of a clock inside a mare's ear
As beautiful as a diamond in a condotierre's rifle
As beautiful as teeth marks on an apple
As beautiful as the trees in the Luxembourg Garden
the trees wrapped in white linen
stiff with starch

. . . . . .

TRANSLATORS' NOTE. Nezval was, with Vladimir Holan, one of the two great Czech poets of the modernist mid-century (a career in poetry that went back to the early 1920s and the movement called (by him & others) "poetism," later (by him) retitled "realism."

Contact with André Breton & others of the Surrealist hard core brought him, circa 1933, into the larger European & global art nexus, in the service of which (& more than most) he offered up a mix of modes & genres: open & closed forms of verse, avant-garde theater collaborations, numerous translations of his modern counterparts & predecessors, & still more surreal, chance-oriented prose works & novellas. His commitment to communism came early (1924) & later made him a prominent member of that network of tolerated avant-gardists/poet-heros that included Neruda, Brecht, Picasso, Hikmet, Eluard, & Tzara, among others (with some of whom he shared pro-forma hymns to Stalin in the early Cold War years). "Shirt," which reveals its date of composition in its opening lines, is one of the key poems in Nezval's *Woman in Plural* (published: 1936) (a volume of mixed poetry & prose ("poems, diary & notebook entries, poems for the theater, new 'surrealist experiments'"). It follows the 1934 founding of the Prague Surrealist Group & Nezval's issuance that same year of "A Manifesto for Czech Surrealism" as a poet-generated poem-centered "call to arms."

MICHAEL PALMER

A LANGUAGE OF THE UNSAYABLE: SOME NOTES ON IRVING PETLIN AND THE SEINE SERIES

In a culture so much of the moment, of nowness, one all too susceptible to the luxury of forgetting, Irving Petlin's art offers a temporal window. It is a window that looks out at the immediate world, certainly, but more significantly, it looks beneath surfaces, beyond appearances, toward the undisclosed, the enfolded and the disapppeared. His is a body of work that, for this and other reasons, lies largely outside the accelerated play of the art world, that often frenzied quest for currency. Its present is a complex vision of temporal folds, times inhering within other times, tenses we might name the future-past, the first-and-last, the lost-and-found; that present of what he has called an "impregnated presence," and "something in a sense plucked from the mind and not from nature itself."[1] The art is insistently exploratory, searching for the meeting point of the interior and the exterior, and for a language of the unsayable. It returns again and again to certain resonant objects and figures, recalled or imagined, in order to see them again from a slightly altered perspective and thus discover their undisclosed or alternate meanings. (Hence the crucial importance of the "series" throughout his work.) It is understandable that such a quest might prove baffling to many critics, however skilled in decoding the contemporary swirl of proliferating styles and ideologies, since it asks for another kind of silence and reflection, another way of seeing, with the mind's eye. Though it is by no means literary painting in the accepted (these days usually deprecatory) sense of that term, it nonetheless elicits a kind of reading, a sounding and resounding of its characteristic figures, objects and landscapes. Like Bacon and Kitaj, with whom his work at various times has been compared, Petlin's narrative—or anti-narrative—emerges obliquely, through its multilayered, metamorphic representations. Again like Bacon and Kitaj, though in his own distinctive manner, his work foregrounds a deliberately articulated tension between astonishing draughtsmanship and expressionistic rawness, the latter a legacy of his Chicago School background.

I have followed the evolution of Petlin's art for well over twenty years and have watched its figural imagination grow more and more assured, its signifying capacity deepen, its palette and subject matter expand; so I eagerly accepted the invitation to visit his Paris studio in May of this year, to view the Seine Series and to respond in whatever way I chose. Before arriving, I thought a great deal about the multiple risks of the project that he had undertaken. How once again to depict a site so laden with representations that it has been virtually abandoned to week-end painters of the scenic for more than seven decades? How possibly to engage anew with some of the central signifiers of European cultural life and history?

I spent parts of ten days in Petlin's studio off the Rue du Cardinal-Lemoine (located in the same complex of apartments where James Joyce completed *Ulysses*). Each day we would discuss the individual canvases for a while, and then Irving would leave me alone with them to look and take notes. What I gradually came to realize was that, across this set of oils and pastels, Petlin had attempted to depict a series of silent conversations, conversations between the visible and the disappeared, the living and the dead, multiple pasts and multiple presents, conversations at once synchronous and diachronous. Historical and spatial anomalies are deliberately and systematically invoked to create a fracture in the apparent scene or site, and within this fracture the drama of historical and personal memory is enacted. We witness too a convergence and conversation between the language of oils and the language of pastels, the two media in which Petlin has most often worked. Here they are dramatically juxtaposed, in a sequence of mutual, sympathetic interrogations.

The Seine Series was first suggested to Petlin by the sight of the river in January of 1995, swollen from torrential rains, inundating the quais. To Petlin's eye, it was as if the river, in the force of its flooding, were reasserting its primitive self, its aqueous memory, while simultaneously stimulating a flood of personal recollections and associations. Thus the first canvas, "The Seine (in flood)," sets what is the essential, methodically compressed frame for the entire series (for, though these are indeed panoramas, there is an almost claustral feel to the majority of them). To the viewer's left is the Pont de Tournelle; at the approximate center of the canvas, on the Ile de la Cité, the Cathedral of Notre Dame, in Petlin's words, "the disappearing apex, the emptying center," of the series; and to the far right, Jean Nouvel's Institut du Monde Arabe. Near the base of Notre Dame, tacit and invisible to the viewer, lies the Holocaust Memorial. Wisps and streaks of atomized, grainily dispersed reds and yellows dot the sky. Spidery aerials and chimney pots establish their listening and watching,

remnantal presence. The river is seen from a high vantage point, as if at once from multiple, subtly shifting, points of view. The "now-and-then" and the "near-and-far" have been set in play. Beginning there, the work resonates through its various echo-chambers. From my Paris notes, I would like simply to offer a few points of orientation.

To the viewer's right in the second canvas, "The Seine (The Arab Rider)," floats a figure in blue, taken from "Le Cavalier Arabe," a drawing in the Louvre by Fromentin. It hovers like an ephemeral witness to this canvas which appears almost to have been flooded and stained by the river. Rather than painting things on the surface of the picture, the brush seems to be in the process of bringing up submerged forms. The foreboding evident in the first canvas has become more manifest. A dematerialized, wound-like Notre Dame is represented in red.

"The Seine...October 17th, 1961" refers to a nightmarish incident witnessed by Petlin in his youth during a protest against the Algerian war. Walking along the Seine, he saw countless bodies floating by, the corpses of executed Algerian activists. The void of the river fills with white stains, white absences or erasures, figures-which-are-not. The Institut, not yet built in 1961, nonetheless stands as a brightly colored, enigmatic signifier of a world as yet unacknowledged, invisible. Light has been wrenched from the sky, which in turn is now flooded with terrestrial hues and textures.

The fourth canvas, "The Disapppeared, I," is the first of two dedicated to the great post-Holocaust poet, Paul Celan, who lived in Paris after the war and committed suicide in 1971 by leaping into the river from the Pont Mirabeau. The painting evokes the Paris of World War II, a shrouded, blacked-out city, its bridges spectral, its sky filled with puffs recalling anti-aircraft fire. One window is illuminated, for Celan, who is not there. A remnant of the recently destroyed city of Grozny appears as an echo within this echo.

"Paris is White" is dedicated to the poet and author of *The Book of Questions*, Edmond Jabès. Forced into exile from Cairo as a result of the Suez episode, Jabès lived in Paris for the rest of his life. The title derives from a key moment in Jabès's *Return to the Book*, when the doomed lovers, Sarah and Yukel, first meet. The whiteness of the page, the city, the canvas, the desert. The white of the third picture in the series has been transmuted into a ground of light. The spiritualized verticality of the painting contrasts with the horizontality of the others in the series. The city's architecture has dematerialized, and everything is in flux. Lines and masses waver, refusing fixity, completion.

As the title indicates, "The Seine in Sleep" is an oneiric canvas, a portrait of the river as dreamed, eyes closed. What is to be seen, after

the visible has been withdrawn, detail has been submerged? What comes forward when "it" disapppears? The pastel functions here as a kind of mute after-image to "Paris is White." Yet the dream is, paradoxically, full of light. The red of the sky in the homage to Jabès has now been pushed to the far right-hand edge of the viewer's gaze. The Institut, virtually transparent, seems almost to be made of light.

There is an armored and riveted character to the colors and masses in "La Guerre des Deux Eglises," a tautness of representation, yet at the same time an apposite, manifestly oriental, delicacy in the way the city itself has been depicted. Two languages of representation, at once at odds and in dialogue. Language to language, *Book* to *Book*. A form can be seen in the water below Notre Dame, emerging from the point behind the Cathedral where the Holocaust Memorial is situated. Except for this form, the river is now empty, blank. The skin of the canvas itself appears raw, but the "war" referred to in the title is silent, submerged, to be known only by inference. It exists wordlessly, as a kind of weather, an atmosphere. In fact, the identity of the "two churches" is left ambiguous. Christian and Jewish; Jewish and Arab; Arab and Christian, etc?

"The Disappeared, II," a pastel on raw linen, is the second of two for Paul Celan. It asks, "What is it when someone disappears or takes his life?" The atmosphere or weather mantles everything here. Color and event have been suppressed (the usual bright character of pastel itself has been suppressed, as an empathic gesture toward what is depicted). Things are seen through a scrim. Forms that in many of the other canvases are solid have become hollowed out. The disappeared, and the suicide, are also the unrealized, the incomplete, the mute. Browns and greys dominate, along with the linen itself.

The vantage point in the final two canvases shifts to the top of the Institut du Monde Arabe, where the view extends beyond Notre Dame and the atmosphere expands. These are eventless canvases, celebrating what enfolds and underlies the act of depiction. After exploring his most paradoxical of subjects, the river that at once recalls and conceals, Petlin now pays homage to air and light as defining that subject. In a sense, the last two pictures explore the canvas, actual and metaphorical, on which the others appear. In so doing, they bow toward the Monet side of the Impressionist spectrum. This is a surprising acknowledgement for Petlin, whose sympathies among French painters have always lain more with Seurat and Cézanne and the Post-Impressionists. The making of the Seine Series might then also be viewed in part as a process of personal, pictorial dialogue and reconciliation with artistic currents he struggled against in his youth.

•

As an afterword, I should note that my first, more truly collaborative and visceral response to the Seine Series took the form of a poem, "The White Notebook," printed separately. In it, among other things, there occurs a kind of dialogue between the language of Paul Celan and that of Edmond Jabès. I am grateful to the translators Pierre Joris (Celan) and Rosmarie Waldrop (Jabès) for the English language versions I employed.

Note

1 "The Rightness To Be Depicted," a conversation between Michael Palmer and Irving Petlin, *Sulfur* 18, Winter 1987.

MICHAEL PALMER

THE WHITE NOTEBOOK

But we have painted over the chalky folds,
the snow- and smoke-folds, so carefully,
so deftly that many (Did you bet

on the margins, the clouds?) that many
will have gone, unnoticed,
under. Water under water,

"earth that moves beneath earth."
We have added
silver to the river, dots of silver,

red, figures-which-are-not. Tell
me what their names might have been,
what were last and first, what spells

the unfamiliar, awkwardly whispered, syllable?
And what of the blue rider, the Arab
horseman, the *cavalier* composed

of two shades of blue, one
from Vermeer's Delft, the other
from that metallic element called

cobalt, *Kobolt*, goblin? What scene
is he watching? Is it expired space
the fixed eye observes? Is it

the river which has no center, the
whiteness of the city when you say

Paris is white? Is it the arches

of the bridges now narrowed to slits?
Is it the liquid
voices themselves

he watches grow silent?
The voice of closed eyes?
Or the two

impossibly young
in the lighted room
who speak only of rain?

Scene which has no center
or whose center is empty,
elsewhere. The way white is said

rejoining an earlier whiteness
between the done and the not-yet
rolling off the tongue

almond, almond-eyed,
eyeless, denialwhite
as the zero code, wordless,

a language of rhythm and breath.
(In erasure the chestnut
flowering toward origin

among the names for white:
blanc de titane, *blanc de zinc*.)
I met her there at the crossroads.

I don't remember who spoke.
Two breaths, two patterns of echo.
We have painted a bridge's eyes

narrowed, its mouth spurting sand,
dots, more dots, bright,
not visible to the eye.

River of dots rising,
stream of sand with no center.
This was both before and after.

Palette knife beside a photograph.
At recess the children's cries
through the studio windows,

station clocktower to the right,
ochre of expanding sound,
tongue to mute tongue, tendrils -

tendons - over rooftops.
Didn't it turn me -
he asks of his eye -

didn't it polish me
like one of its stones,
remingle and remake me

and draw me quickly down
to where each night in sand
the hour sounds?

We met there at the crossroads
near the small arcades.

I can't recall who first spoke,
who said, "the darkness of white."

We shared one shadow.
In the heat she tasted of salt.

RICHARD FOREMAN

THREE POEMS

SUSTAINING gray light
key stretched
under the fog paw
of damp
idea-mixed trot,

up steps of streets
pulling to be touched,

not-enfolded but slid
under the wax-wet finger
of cold minutes,

bone into lock-almond
creased into the head,

map gouged
in rock-space
like a bell-nut.

Hour into the head
cold cold
keeping the light shell
brief,

city-flash
grain of throat communion,
the bark
of idea on idea
steaming, stained,
glowed.

COULD IT BE that I rose into different light?

Could it be that I lost interest in the total revolve of the semi
[that
called itself circle?

Could it be that I toasted the second rate, under the
[impression
that compassionate meant "hero"?

"Don't doubt anything except the strategically isolated,"
cried my guardian angel.
And I was awake to that
just a little too soon.
Confusion was not MY recipe,
but the angel of that persuasion capped a lifetime of energy
with a slow lift-off
into name that tune-less
they all sang,
so singable.

"How be friends," said the smile.
And I covered, of course, my own mouth first.
"Can't you shine tooth light
into a grimace that hurts no one?"
(It gains access through the dreaming or more than
occasional factors.)

Funny—
it was factories that aimed at the mammoth corrective
[operation.
None of it worked out, but it sure made music
and that best noise
was the worst or all possible words.
A worst rehabilitation machine,
that's why I'm MAD ABOUT MUSIC
chimed in a hell-of-a-lotta young things
who took things off in nose country.

I too, sloped
I mean, slopped,
into the desert of life,
which fools
you,
me,
but not everybody
who of course you recognize as one of my more
SUCCESSFUL disguises.

So when you hear on the grapevine—
"Big guy, your prize just got delivered!"
don't even look.
I'm a crook, about my own handiwork.
So, fingers? Ouch!
Risk it, of course.
It's terrible,
but not really music.

Controlled by iron milk,
stream dug,
heart-not:
milk-word tumbling
tongue in tongue
X'd by the subtle X,
no-tunnel
but all-place,
pricked
through the speaking nostril.
Blood,
white in shock
now
stretched.
Rabid, rapid

through a tooth
timed into the bite,
gaped by the seized gold
quote of time.
stress-ache
under the iron cause
that calms:
nerve data
vast enough
to surface:
dead eaten
into the system vector.
Usurped gulp,
glare-pancake itself
sleep-trundled,
hoisted un-there
to-join.

CAMILLE GUTHRIE

CELLS (I–VI)
Poems for Louise Bourgeois

Cell I

SPRUNG

from a lake of allusion

you woke beyond keyholes

Target-hearted

reflecting a silverglare

you peer through passages
consulting (in fine
languages) dictionaries

PRIVATE in-between
in your hourglass house

unpeeled, bedbodied
from your firefever

flung

to terror levels,
gouging out the day
in badgood time

Cell II

Seafoam evaporating
through waterwalls

REMINDS,

a woken orchid
a spilled elegance
female swan

unbottled, In you

the second-mirror
petals your thoughts
promising vanities

vapors

Oh

you're enamored
of spherical
lingerers, all your
tinted archives
your sweet greediness

Maman, at bosom

a clenched elixir

Cell III

INSOMNIAC

I'm not awake for arch disciplines
cropped by the surgical ocular

I won't, over-
wrought, come
to grips with my foot
at the stretcher-altar

No,
Lunar scission
Here's a sterile eyeball for
your protection

And as for the
posthumous white-
washing– no
immortelles at all
in your cell

Concordance gasps:

y o u t o r t u r e y o u r s e l f

(and halve the homunculus)

No,
memory's faucet
cannot force it

the hot, the cold

Cell IV

PRESSED
at the door of isolate rituals

an Ear
imagines the tenor of the unsaid

Severed

emphatic cadences

pitch promises to curved desires

WITNESS messages

with elephantine effort

Messages or caverns
roll over, caving in to
private static

The spoken sits

at the periphery of a body

and hollows, hollers

Caesura of intermediaries

stirred by a

DIN

*S*he

speaks from the

conciliations of the

sea's roar

What is heard

could dumb–

found a small

bird, or smaller girl

Cell VI

Now the THUMB

of precision

and its glinting tools

grimaces, removes

unsilenced

all the doorknobs

all

you dreamt is

more,

all

you arranged,

ingeminates

CARLA HARRYMAN

SOMATIC MEDIATIONS

The physical, spiritual, and psychological diseases, sufferings, and desires of the body are trapped, exploded, and transformed in Mary Ann Unger's work. In her negotiations between psychological and physical forces that the body both inhabits and makes necessary, Unger refuses dualisms: positive and negative, life and death, empty and full, male and female, technology and nature seem welded to each other. Yet it is not possible to consider Unger's work as separate from our history of anthropomorphic dreams of the earth as a sustaining body, even if it is not "gendered" female, for all of Unger's abstract forms invoke the association between non-sentient elemental life forms and the human form and its necessary relationship to cultural forms.

Unger's sculptures are first the product of an intense imagining of the human body from the inside out, from the visceral fact of itself as it knows itself to be among others like itself—all of which are dependent on the creation of objects, extensions of the body, for protection. In Unger's work shelter and coverings are understood as the basis for culture; thus, the products of nature are always "fabricated." The extensions of the body are both microscopic and huge and are understood to be compatibly bounded to each other as a system: the bundles of our genetic codes might be seen as linked to other bundles we carry with us, both in our minds and in our arms or on our backs. The forms derived from internal (enclosed) and external (exposed) psychophysical environments are basic to the culture we negotiate as collective creatures. Unger's sculptures will not allow consideration of the singular body apart from its interrelationship to other bodies.

Whereas a child in a mother's arms looks lighter than it feels, Unger's sculptures are lighter than they look as if an experience of weight has been displaced onto sight. Her relationship to sight is, therefore, not anxious but part of a necessary distribution of collective responsibility. The heaviness of the body and its suffering is lightened through the redistribution of the burden of the body into a collective and shared world. This shared world is comprised of a promise to

make sense of the relationship of the living body as interior body to "the dark icons" of the visible world we create to protect and defend it. If it is the case that in our protecting of the body, we derealize our own physicality, Unger explores the basic human events that awaken our experience of the body as real. Here there is an attempt to envision a balanced distribution of the body's needs through reference to basic materials such as wrappings, coverings, shrouds, pilings and shelters that, like the individual pieces of her sculptures can be lifted and carried. Unger has metaphorically balanced her physical and psychological relationship to her world in that she can carry her own sculpture without having to diminish its scale.

Just as the repeated experience of supporting and being supported constitutes a collective knowledge of shared physicality, so does the cumulative residue of cultural artifacts protect us from the shared physical knowledge which would be unbearable without mediation. Yet the affects of such mediation must remain basic. The sculpture's references to simple wrappings, pedestrian movement, and the distribution of weight and burden awakens for the viewer what must be Unger's personal and deeply felt critique of the overmade world in which most of us live. Unger's use of materials, the light steel welded armatures covered with hydrocal and textured materials such as cheese cloth and graphite, integrate the metaphoric rebalancings of human power and fragility central to her concerns. The individual forms are unlovely in their singularity and perfect in their integrity as objects and in respect to the total assemblage of each work, which is always comprised of more than one form. The assembled pieces refer to primary human activities: torso-like structures that hold loafy bundles or pod-like poles suggest migration or slow movement and pillars holding the weight of abstract forms invoke depossessed and mourned figures. Here neither life nor death are "touched up" for viewing. Nothing distracts from the primary site and sights of our physical experience of each other.

Thus, Unger's *Pieta/Monument to War* is about weight, support and the memory, not only distant, but proximate of all of the physical weight that people bear: their own and that of others. It is this cumulative memory of weight, of support, that is the subject of her interrogation born of the imagining of the body as viscerally present. If one were to recollect, imagine, reexperience all of the times one had been supported or had supported another physically, history would open differently: we would look upon its events and its symbolic artifacts through the slant of a silent epic and the prehistoric would become more present in it. These sculptures, then, might be thought of as the "living" remains of such an epic in so far as "living" in this

context means unresolved mystery; for we can not know the history that her sculptures invoke, except perhaps through our own experience of our bodies within the collective body and through the representation of strong mental images such as those that Unger's work embodies.

The condition of the person as weight-bearing creature is bonded with the transformative force of the strong mental images. Metamorphic power seems to be born of our proximity to each other and our combined abilities to negotiate life cycles. Through the lens of Unger's works we become the primary objects of our habitats: our limbs are pods and seeds; bundled together we make shelters, hulls, shafts of wheat, loaves, poles, monuments and symbolic artifacts. We carry not only the weight of our bodies but also the culture that is also our survival. One is required to see herself also then as a product of migration.

Unger's series of sculptures *Across the Bering Straight* is a tribute to the bearing of weight over time. The people who crossed this straight in an unimaginably distant time did so at the rate of possibly one mile per year. Of this piece, Unger writes, "the stumpy torso-like forms bear long poles or burdens on their shoulders, always on the move, going forward. They survive. They suggest migrants carrying their tent poles and their bundles of possessions. They might also suggest mothers holding their children or men carrying their dead home from war." Thus her representation of the migration suggests other human events in which the same kind of physicality is demanded of its participants.

In migrations, cultures are carried: these cultures are part of the body: in the condition of migration bodies bear the weight of their shelters and become them. The weight is born over a very long period of time. It is the consideration of the experience of the body in time that joins Unger's envisionment of the body to others' histories.

MARY ANN UNGER

SIX SCULPTURES

Pall Bearers
Hydrocal over steel with pigment, wax and graphite, 77" h x 72" x 36", 1989.

Pieta / Monument to War
Mixed media over steel,
85" h x 61" x 72", 1990. Photo: Geoffrey Biddle.

Deposition
Hydrocal over steel with patina, 1991.

Hanging Bone
Hydrocal over steel,
77" h x 76" x 28", 1988. Photo: David Allison.

Across the Bering Strait #1
72" h x 152" x 43", 1992–93. Photo: Geoffrey Biddle.

Across the Bering Strait #2
Cement over steel,
72" x 178" x 36", 1992–93. Photo: Geoffrey Biddle.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

YACHATS, THE SHORE

Looking into littoral fog
the shore has always stopped me,
laid a barrier across association,
made writing by the sea
listless, as if stumbling about
an ode. . . dangerous to stare
at nature and write—

*

Surf crests have leatherine
concaves
then it's all froth crawlers trill

Gigantic skirts with meandering hems,
slits in weave to sand

Little cliffs' white rubble,
high sizz then
"sundered parentage"

Ropes vertically aflow—
describe the sewing throwing:
Mumonkan stitch, gateless
barrier

as if a text of iles
detextiled while
ile flexing
wound sound

perception stops,
a shushing weave whelms the eyes:
skyscrapers under nuclear barrage

I'm a little boy in my glandbox
sifting mommy purr,
the simmerunderoar spreads
a virus under tone
taking the lips back to suckle shapes,
trom bone
the slides of brass
under 4:30 sun
silver so glaucous pocked,
more cicada
than constant

Watch out for unity as you age,
it's in cahoots with reduction

Be as these rocks not deluged,
just gleamy in their lenten instant

Myriad-glimmered
reason surfing the tectonics of dream,
the dipping peak of them—
Mallarmé's "throw" still tumbling in the air,

poetry as shipwreck, oceanic page,
"a throw of the dice" the gamble of alchemical
research
"will never abolish chance" no way
to predetermine reception—

unless a work of art is its own shipwreck
a master is proposed outside the maelstrom

Surf looks more perfect than I can imagine a god,
perfection that if not seen through
dwarfs imagination—

seen through, nature *is* imagination,
roving tooth breast
on which I row
60 years a second

Pyramidal speed-ups
slow lozenges of satin steel
storied pounce in rinse,
dipping sun drapes a mail
across the crestlets

then 7 gulls in muscular goodbye.

28 May 1995

HARALD MESCH

THE RICHNESS OF INTERFACE
INTERVIEW WITH GARY SNYDER

Though he was very tightly scheduled in the spring of 1983, Gary Snyder kindly agreed to work with me for two or three hours. The interview took place on April 20, 1983 in the living room of his home in Kitkitdzee in the Sierras.

—Harald Mesch

Mesch: Both your poetry and your prose seem to speak out of a recognition of the interrelatedness of poetic thought and ecological consciousness—and by ecological consciousness I mean the awareness of an ultimate wholeness and interdependence of body, mind, and environment that make up the "oikos," the 'house' in which we live, and it is that wholeness that is accessible to experience but not to discursive thought or language. My question: Could you, in terms of beginnings, try to retrace your own history of the recognition of the mutual groundedness of poetry and ecological consciousness?

Snyder: That's too big a question. To do that properly would require a whole autobiographical-philosophical rap. So how do we get some bones out of that?

Mesch: What about: When and in what terms did you become conscious of the ecological dimensions of poetry?

Snyder: First I have to say how I became aware of the ecological dimensions of the world: That was growing up in the Pacific Northwest north of Seattle, out in the country on a very small farm, surrounded by woods, so that I had a childhood close to nature. I was tuned into it, studied it a lot, spent time in it, became very aware of what was happening week to week through the year. Additionally, I got hold of books that taught me how to identify the birds, the plants and so forth, and I became a junior naturalist in my own area. Finally I met people who knew, older people who could help me learn more about it. So like some Americans I grew up actively learning the natural

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world around me, like many Europeans too. Some people do this and some don't. There probably is, to start with, a fundamental difference between several types of human beings. I don't know how we would account for it. I think it transcends upbringing or cultural background.

Mesch: What is the level on which this difference shows?

Snyder: Well, I'll describe it to you. Richard Nelson's recent book on the Koyukon Indians of Central Alaska. Fascinating book on their view of nature. Describes how all of them are intently aware of the aliveness of everything. As they say, "we are always being watched when we are in the forest." We are always being watched. It's a live thing for them. Also they are always aware that nothing that you do in relationship to the natural universe is without value. Every act you take has meaning, is moral. To kill an animal and then not to skin it and not eat it is immoral and wasteful. The karmic results of that will be negative for you. To waste is immoral. To speak in a harsh or rude tone of a certain animal or bird is not only immoral, but it invites retribution somehow from within the natural system. This transcends any kind of logical or scientific explanation, this way of seeing things, and yet in the largest sense of what cause and effect networks are and in the greatest extension of our notion of interdependence it becomes comprehensible. However, it starts with something that either people feel or don't feel. Some people, even though not brought up in such a culture, where it is part of the whole society's perception of nature, nonetheless feel that way. I am one of them.

Mesch: You would say that. . .

Snyder: I know others that. . .I have met a number of other people who read more philosophical or ecological explanations of nature to know when they go for a walk in the woods that it's alive. They perceive it. It's as if today we have two kinds of human beings in the world. Tame and wild. Or it might be that there are two psychological types: one that harks back to the Stone Age and one which is post-civilized. The post-civilized strain turns only to social affairs and is very sensitive to what happens among human beings and often very insensitive to what happens in nature. This is foolish speculation, but my point is that in my own case, I had an intense sensitivity to nature from an early age. What I read later merely confirmed it.

Mesch: Did you every ask yourself why you were more sensitive or why you have this sensitivity while others don't have it?

Snyder: Maybe it's an extra dimension or development of one of the senses. It's perhaps a kind of sense perception. You were asking about my case. So to follow along: the connection with poetry is fundamentally that if you hear the voice of nature, the way you translate that and communicate it to human beings is one sort of

poetry. I have written about that in my essay called "Poetry and the Primitive." Now you can go into far more sophisticated ways of talking about the relationship between the perception of natural systems and poetry, but if you get down to the basics of any oral literary tradition in a natural culture you'll see that much of the time the poetry is a voice from the nonhuman, the song of animals, the song of plants, the song of the weather. It's as though that is the mode through which nature speaks to human beings. Now that's not the only thing that poetry does, of course, but this is one of the aspects of poetry. The Koyukon Indians up in Alaska are very keen on bird songs and they say "birds are wonderful singers, we get good ideas for our songs from the birds."

Mesch: Whatever "ideas" that means.

Snyder: Well, melody, language also. Because they can hear a bird saying things in their own language.

Mesch: In whose language?

Snyder: Athabaskan. They hear the birdcalls making phrases as we can hear birdcalls making phrases, so they hear them making Athabaskan phrases, and they change it around. Of course poetry is music and rhythm and melody as well as words so they say that birds are good singers. They also assume that the birds are speaking the language; that they are not just singing, that they are talking to each other.

Mesch: Which is actually anthropomorphizing.

Snyder: No, no, they don't see it like that, that's our idea. They are not anthropomorphizing, they are seeing themselves as part of the same thing too. They are not casting a human image on that, if anything, they see themselves in that image. They say, "Well, the birds are talking to each other and we do that, too."

Mesch: Well, to cast another bone: Could you tell in what ways your involvement with Zen Buddhism has influenced your understanding of poetry, has influenced a development of ecological consciousness? Or maybe, in another way, to what degree did your ecological awareness determine your turning to the Far East?

Snyder: I'll start with the first half of it. How did my sense of nature connect with Zen. As I entered adolescence in the Pacific Northwest, I gradually started traveling deeper into the mountains. Farther than just staying on our farm. I began to go into the high mountains when I was 13 and 14, and I started mountaineering when I was 15, and then I did quite a bit of snowpeak and glacier climbing, all over the Northwest between the ages of 15. . .

Mesch: All on your own?

Snyder: Or with friends. Between 15 and 23, so I did a lot of climbing. My thoughts about American society and politics were going all through that time too and I became curious about how

different cultures related to nature. I was studying anthropology, working on American Indian culture, primarily ecology, working with some of the Indian people of Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington, the Upper Columbia. When I stumbled onto Chinese philosophy, first of all Taoism and then later other varieties of Far Eastern thought, I was taken by the notion that perhaps there was a way that a high, complex, literate sophisticated civilization could at the same time still maintain good relationships with the natural world. Pursuing that investigation brought me very soon to Zen Buddhism as a school of Indian Buddhist thought that had received most from Taoism and became a synthesis of Taoism and Indian Buddhist thought. I also found in Zen something that touched me personally in terms of my own spiritual quest. And so it seemed a very useful thing to do to go into Zen study. The connection of high civilization and nature: Can it be maintained?

Mesch: Yes, but your turning to the Far East presupposes already a consciousness of your relationship to nature. The relation was no more a naive one with you.

Snyder: I understood what the Western cultural connection with nature was, so I was interested to see if China and Japan actually have an alternative way of doing that while still being as they are, very high civilizations. The question is, is civilization itself, per se, intrinsically unable to cope with nature in any intelligent way?

Mesch: How did that question get started?

Snyder: In my case it started with recognizing the contradiction between the apparently benign values of American democracy and its actual effect on nature.

Mesch: Your poetic discourse locks in, in many interesting ways, with the scientific discourse of people like E. Odum, H.T. Odum, Ramon Margalef, J. Lovelock, M. Sahlins and others. My question is: have the writings of these biologists, ecologists, anthropologists first been of importance to you, or is it rather that your poetic development led you to concerns similar to those of these scientists?

Snyder: I was always interested in their concerns from the age of 12 or 13; this is if you are a self-taught naturalist and then you later hang out with friends who are good ornithologists, good botanists, good marine biologists, you soon hear about ecology. I first heard about ecology when I was 16, as a branch of the biological disciplines. I was reading what texts were available back in those days. So, how to flesh out what you perceive intuitively with hard facts. I perceived intuitively the way things connect. I also found it fascinating to flesh it out with the data. That's what these guys like Eugene and Tom Odum help you do. So from the very beginning of my own writings in poetry I was

informed by these sorts of connections. In fact, after ecology and anthropology, the next step is to study Buddhism.

Mesch: One notion that keeps recurring when you speak about poetry—and to me it seems to be relevant in the context of both poetry and ecology—is the idea of "the edge." I quote: "The true poem is walking that edge between what can be said and that which cannot be said, that's the real razor's edge." Another time you speak about poetry as a tool, a sharp edge. Could you comment on the implications of that idea?

Snyder: The first example, the metaphor of poetry as an edge of what can be said and what cannot be said is every old, of course. It's common in the Far East and in India in talking about that line between the unsayable and the sayable. I really cannot add anything more to that except to say that this is a traditional way that poetry has been understood, a kind of razor's edge. Poetry as a tool that has an edge is one of the number of metaphors that I have used, but also traps, a net, as a bait, which are all metaphors for catching, and an edge I suppose is a metaphor for clarifying, not necessarily discriminating. It's maybe not too good a metaphor. Prose is probably more usefully described as having an edge. Prose can show how to make clear discriminations. In poetry you generally don't do that, it's not the task of poetry. So I don't know how far you can go with that.

Mesch: Again, as far as I understand the metaphor of "the edge" it implies, to quote you, "the act and the thought being together," or, similarly, the mutual simultaneity of light and dark.

Snyder: That's nice. That's the act of being totally in the moment, which poetry sometimes accomplishes, the act of presenting much, *much*, all in the moment. Again, I don't know if we need to invoke "edge" for that. But it is a valid function.

Mesch: Well, I was thinking of "the edge" as a liminal space, as an interface, as something in-between.

Snyder: AHHHH, *interface* is better, now, I've got a couple of points that talk about that specifically: *Interface richness*, the meeting area, that's an ecological concept. That can actually be demonstrated.

Mesch: What I was thinking of was "the edge" or interface both as a dividing but at the same time as a meeting line.

Snyder: Well, in that sense poetry is a territory of meaning, sure. It's a boundary territory where things come together, where language meets silence, and you could play it back that way and say that silence meets language where internal images meets articulation.

Mesch: Let's see, what ecological implications does the idea of "edge" in the sense of interface have for you?

Snyder: Well, there are all of the ecological ramifications that go with the concept of biological interfaces where the sea meets the shore, right? Which is full of richness, or where river water meets sea water coming down into a bay or estuary, or where two ecological plant zones lap over each other, that's a good subject, where things come together it's always a richer zone. Also it's always more highly speciated. Again we can draw both data and metaphors from that, in regard to human affairs or any other affairs. Poetry certainly can be seen to be operating in some ways like that. Poetry can also be seen as a special variety of language, we say language is like an ocean, silence is like a continent. Most of the ocean (drawing a fictive line on the low table) is out here, most of the continent is here, but at the shore (pointing to the fictive line) where the ocean laps over the continent is poetry. Very rich, very narrow, very intense. The silence is not silent. What we mean by silence is unarticulated consciousness, silence is what you are doing when you are not doing but thinking, is like having a whole back country of wild animals going on, and when you speak you just say "sparrow" or "hawk" or "oak," but the whole thing is back there, it's all there.

Mesch: You also speak of the poem as a "knot," "a turbulence pattern" of the flow of energy. Does this metaphor have any ecological implications?

Snyder: Yes, that has the energy flow implication. There are three places that I draw that from. One is the Japanese word for "song," "fushi," a knot in the grain, it's as though you're coming along, everything's flowing, then it goes up against a rock and a song arises. Then it goes flowing along. Two, a Sioux Indian statement that there's a basic energy that's going through everything; and it rises like a knot or turbulence or whirl to make that tree that tree, to make a deer, little intensifications of the general flow. Three, Tom Odum, *Energy, Power and Society,* how indeed living systems, like you and me, are intensifications and turbulences of formally structured energy; we're energy traps, anti-entropic. At any point we can be burned, an amount of heat will come out of us. There's more energy here than in the surrounding area, 98.6 Fahrenheit, but the ambient air temperature is about 50. So all of those are literally accurate, the metaphor for poetry then is that there is an ambient energy in ordinary speech, a fairly low steady energy flowing in ordinary speech. When it becomes compressed into a smaller point, we've raised the temperature and given it formal structure, it rises, so to speak, like a tree out of the ground. That's the Japanese image of it.

Mesch: It's a higher order.

Snyder: It's a higher order, higher temperature, anti-entropic.

Mesch: Buckminster Fuller uses in his public speeches the image of a knot. Making a knot in a rope he shows this knot running along the rope: He defines it as a self-interfering pattern, i.e., the knot doesn't get open, it stays that way, running along the rope. The knot for me then is a knot in a weave of the whole. One part of the weave, i.e., a knot, would be you or would be me or anything else.

Snyder: Exactly, that's the metaphor of Indra's net too. Another way that's said traditionally in Hinduism and Buddhism is like the waves on the ocean. The ocean is the unity of everything, but the specifics are like the waves on the surface of it—each wave is unique and specific to its place, and it goes back into the same ocean. That's a very old image. The way is the practice of the ocean.

Mesch: It's just the manifestation of the ocean.

Snyder: It's also the way the ocean is practicing, realizing itself. Studies itself. The ocean studies the ocean and in doing so makes waves.

Mesch: Now I would like to come back to the concept of "the edge": In fact the frontier, as I see it, is an edge too. The frontier, i.e., the geographic experience that pervades American culture.

Snyder: Was a culture, was an edge, right.

Mesch: The disappearance of the geographical frontier is an ecological phenomenon in the sense that its disappearing is simultaneous, almost simultaneous, with the fact that, as you say, the Western civilization has come to "the end of its ecological rope."

Snyder: Well, also its moral and spiritual and its philosophical rope, it's all the same rope, and by Western civilization—I really would have to qualify that by saying that the impulse of the metropole, the impulse of civilized elite Western culture capitals, and the money managers of the capitals has come to the end of its rope. After all, the frontier is just a face of imperialism, that's all. It's not the kind of cutting edge or interface that we talk about when we talk about the richness where the ocean meets the land, it's the kind of edge that's at the edge of a fire, it is destroying as it moves along, it leaves behind it a wasteland. A different edge. We're very grateful that that's over now, that's finished. The tendency towards it that lingers on in people's minds is too bad, the sooner it evaporates the better.

Mesch: This kind of edge, frontier, is an edge that excludes, that makes a difference between what is 'out there' and what is 'in here.' That is: what is 'in here' is superior to what is 'out there.'

Snyder: There is that kind of edge, too.

Mesch: How do you see that?

Snyder: Well, what you're describing is the expansion of monoculture consciousness which either converts or destroys. As it comes

up against something, either it converts it to something it can use, converts it to its own desire and shape, or it destroys it. That's the nature of the expansion of imperialist culture around the world. I don't know what you can do with that. Where do you want to go with that idea?

Mesch: The frontier may be understood as an edge on which a destruction, respectively a conversion, occurs of what is outside the fence posts of Western civilization into a usable inside. But Western civilization, as you put it, has come to "the end of its ecological rope," i.e., it cannot continue in its imperialist tradition. Does this new situation force anthropology to a change of its own quasi-imperialistic attitude? Is what nowadays is being called ethnopoetics the sign of such a change?

Snyder: I'm trying to think what that means. Well, another way of putting it, we're just talking about North America now: Once white people spread all over the Northern hemisphere, all over the Northern half of the Western hemisphere, after a certain point they can't move around any further. They've exhausted the possibilities of moving on and taking a quick high-energy hit from quick resource exploitation. As they stabilize and slow down and begin to quit moving around so much, then the continent across which they had run so hastily and on which they had destroyed so much, of course, begins to come back. The grass grows again, from inside, and what the white people thought they would convert and use, gradually begins to convert and use them. White people begin to quit being white people. I know an elderly Crow Indian teacher in Montana, he says, "I don't worry about what's going to happen in Northern America," he says, "I don't worry about Indian religion because our religion is not something we invented, it comes from the land." Anybody who stays long enough in the place will begin to hear that voice coming up from the land, the land will convert them. Everybody will end up being an Indian. Because that's what North America is. So that might—in the longest range—be what's happening. That's what our interest in ethnopoetics might be, just part of the land coming back.

Mesch: Understanding the frontier no more as a dividing, excluding *edge* but as an *interface* presupposes a questioning of the absolute value of the center, i.e., of anthropocentrism, of ethnocentrism.

Snyder: The center sometimes transforms itself and the edge sometimes becomes the hardest expression of the ego. That's the case with the frontier. What happens on the frontier: You have your hard cases out there, you have men who have left home, who have been chased out of their towns, they're criminals, they're killers, they have syphilis, they don't care who they shoot, they have no families. Those

are the guys who are doing the fur trade, those are the guys who are actually interfacing with the Indians. The people at the center, like historically America, are good deists and Quakers who lament what's going on at the edge. But the dynamics of a capitalist economy are such that you keep sending your hard-bitten men to the edge because there is no place for them at the center. They go out and kill Indians and give them diseases. And the people at the center continue to lament it. That's part of the paradox. The first people in the United States to want to stop the Indian war were people in New York City and Boston and Washington, D.C., they were Quakers. The Quakers wrote some very eloquent accounts of what was going on with the Sioux wars that led up to the death of Custer, and wrote it as well as we could write it in this century about how the Indians should be allowed to have their own land and be allowed to survive. They were part of an elite, but they didn't have enough power to stop what was actually moving out to the edge.

Mesch: The edge in its turn defines itself as being related to the center.

Snyder: Well, some cross over the boundary and become part of the other side. Some come back into the center through their dreams. The center dreams about the white men who join the Indians, it becomes an archetype of fiction. It becomes an archetype of the unconscious. The white woman who was stolen by Indians, who had an Indian lover, who chose not to come back, that's a powerful literary theme and it turns up in Western literature. Joining the primitive, eros, freedom, and it comes back to haunt the elite at the center. I hear that in Germany some people dress up like Indians and have teepees. I was amazed to discover that there are European American Indian clubs. It's some kind of feedback there.

Mesch: In ecological terms I would conceive of America as an interesting study case, because in the United States the consequences of the radical transformation of Western metaphysics into real physics are so obvious and have become so destructive that within this body culturally there progressively emerge elements that start producing antidotes.

Snyder: Yes, indeed I agree completely with that. You said it very well.

Mesch: I would see the Beat movement is producing such antidotes. Would you agree with that?

Snyder: Yes, definitely. Incidentally, about frontiers moving West. People generally tend to overlook one of the world's major frontier movements which was from West to East, counter direction. One of the greatest movements actually was from the West to the East.

Mesch: What was that?

Snyder: Soviet Union, Russia. They expanded all the way Eastward across Siberia with the fur trade, with all the phenomena of the American West except it was the Russian East. All the phenomena: Alcohol, fur trade, guns, syphilis, half-breeds, trading posts, log cabins. All the way to the Pacific Ocean. That's something that people overlook often.

Mesch: Well, to come back to the Beat Movement: Michael McClure speaks of the Beat Movement as "the literary wing of an environmental movement," which, in fact, implies a profound change in the understanding of consciousness. As far as he sees it, consciousness is being understood or is beginning to be understood as a natural or organic phenomenon. You speak of the movement of the '60s as a subculture the roots of which go as far back as 40,000 years. I would call it the tradition of 'the other' in the sense of a counterphilosophy to the philosophical tradition that started in the Western hemisphere with, say, Socrates, Plato. . .

Snyder: OK, that's the same subculture. The counterphilosophic tradition is an expression of the subculture, I would argue. And that the Beat Movement, such as it was, is another expression of that, a small expression. I see a lineage of values that are hanging on for dear life all the way from neolithic throughout Western history. My notion of the counterculture or of the counterphilosophy is neolithic philosophy, the philosophy and the spiritual life and science of the neolithic of 8,000 to 10,000 years ago. It was a period in which a very coherent value system was developed. And it was empiric, dialectical, non-idealistic, psychological, pragmatic, democratic, and ecological.

Mesch: That was to be my next question: Do you see this subculture as an ecological tradition?

Snyder: Yes. Sure. Ecology is just knowing what's going on in nature. Who is it that does not know what's going on in nature? It's people who are not primary producers in the economy, it's people who are higher and higher in the elite classes of bureaucracy, or merchanting or of aristocratic class privilege. In other words, those who constitute the ruling class of the West are un-ecological. They develop their own ways of moving wealth about which is called economics, and ultimately become so attached to moving money in that way, to moving wealth in that way, that they violate the laws of ecology, and cause border people or farming people to overexploit their land, by getting higher taxes than they should go by, cutting more trees than they should. People who live on the land know that that was a bad idea, they are ecological. They say if we cut the rest of the trees out of that watershed we are going to have floods next winter. But the

boss says cut it, and there's nothing we can do. This goes back to Babylon, Sumeria, that's civilization actually. So my thought is that the counterphilosophy is the pre-civilized philosophy.

Mesch: So would you agree with Michael McClure who is saying that the Beat Movement is an expression of an ecological tradition?

Snyder: Sure, Michael and I started saying that to each other 15 years ago.

Mesch: The first time I heard Michael say that, I realized, gee, that's a new way of putting it, and all of a sudden it makes the Beat Movement appear much deeper, not only as a social and literary movement but, as he says, as a change in the nature of consciousness.

Snyder: I think he's quite right. 1955 was when I first heard Michael read a poem about the destruction of whales, that's 10 years before people were talking about whales in any kind of public way. Or I was writing poems about deforestation in 1953 before anybody else was writing poetry about it—people were writing articles on it, for sure. Not everybody that was in that literary scene were recognizing that and realizing it: Robert Duncan certainly was, and in his very metaphysical way he was definitely seeing it; Rexroth, all the way through a very clear spokesman; Brother Antoninus is very clear. I'm talking about the poems written in the '40s and the '50s. Ginsberg is a separate case, he comes out of a very urban background. But it's a very compassionate point of view, he learns quickly. Jack Kerouac is the same. Jack is more urban and East coast mind. Have you seen Bill Everson's book called *Archetype West?* In it he develops the West coast as a whole, the literature of the West coast as a whole going back 60 years, trembling on and stepping into ecological awareness even 50 or 60 years ago. And that this finally really takes form and energy with the Beat Movement, but that it was all laying here already, in the West. And I think he's right.

Mesch: You point to the true ecological function of poetry and art in speaking about "composting" as the recycling of neglected inner potentials. Does the principle of composting therefore open the chance of seeing the cycles of water, air, nutrients as sacramental?

Snyder: Now, how you compost is by meditation. Meditation is composting. I didn't go so far as to say that specifically, but that is literally what meditation is, when you sit still for several hours at a time you are allowing your mind to turn over your consciousness, to ripen, to bring up certain things and turn them back in again, to fold them in again, and to enrich the whole. In doing that you also become intrinsically aware of larger relationships and larger cycles. It enhances your compassion and your understanding of the other and dissolves your sense of yourself as a unique entity, to keep doing that.

Mesch: In what specific terms are thinking of composting? What is being composted?

Snyder: Consciousness. Content of consciousness, being opinions, images, associations, memories, plans, ideas, theories, philosophies, yesterday, tomorrow, my wife, everything. That's all getting composted.

Mesch: Would you see anything like an "edge" occurring there, in the sense of *interface*, in composting?

Snyder: That's a real inner-outer, also now and past. When you compost by meditating you're allowing your habit patterns and thought patterns and images from the past to rise into the present, and dissolving them into the present, really. Old resentments, old hang-ups become dissolved into the awareness of the present.

Mesch: This is an aside: I first came across the notion of composting in a book that is going to be published, a book by Jed Rasula, called *Composting Wreading Poetry*.

Snyder: I don't know that. Sounds interesting.

Mesch: You are the first who speaks about composting. Rasula either independently or dependent on you uses that term. He uses the notion in a different sense: in the sense of poets composting traditional patterns and forms of literature so that they have a chance of being original again.

Snyder: I'd go for that too.

Mesch: What implications has the function of composting to a possibly new understanding of language and the word?

Snyder: That's an interesting question. I'm not sure yet. It certainly is true that linguistic theory so far has not yet really meditated. Linguistic theory is based on pretty surface instantaneous rationalistic understanding of how language works. It's undoubtedly going to have an interesting effect on language theory when more people meditate. When more people are interested in language meditation. The one person who is really an accomplished Zen teacher, who thought a lot about language so far in history was Dogen, the 13th century Japanese Zen master. He was very interested in communication, symbol, and language. There's a Korean scholar up at the University of Oregon who's working on that aspect of Dogen right now, so something may come out of that. The Zen theory of symbols is interesting anyway, theory of symbolism, theory of language. Such as it exists, it's never been much articulated. Something new will happen with language, with our understanding of language.

Mesch: In the context of your own poetry?

Snyder: I haven't articulated any theory on this.

Mesch: This, in fact, connects for me with Olson saying that "logos and the reason pertaining to it" should be realized as being only a stage and not what they are taken to be, usually, "final discipline." That, it seems, connects with what you are referring to when you talk about composting. That, for me, is the edge as interface: the dissolving of concepts, ideas. The word itself being the *interface* where something becomes conceptually conscious while you have to allow the energy that is frozen into this concept to return to the flow, and that happens in the word as interface.

Snyder: Sounds good. Some of my linguistic friends say, though, you cannot define what a word is. But that's just, you know, a technical caution.

Mesch: You can define it in several ways and one is semantic—the content of the word.

Snyder: That's why you can't define words. You can't define what a word is because you can't even define what the content of a word is.

Mesch: But semantics is doing that.

Snyder: That's why semantics is no good, because it can't do it, everybody is giving up on semantics as such because it can't accomplish it. Because language is too much of a fabric, you can't pluck a word out of an utterance. What is part of the word is its grammatical infix, or its superposition, or the tone of voice, or the emphasis that it's given, so there's no such thing as a word. This is a technical linguist's hang-up.

Mesch: Speaking of a possibly new understanding of language, do you see that happening, in what relation would you see that to your own poetry and in poetry in general?

Snyder: Well, I'd have come back to Buddhism and to meditation. I see many new understandings coming to Westerners through Mahayana Buddhist philosophy and the actual practice of meditation. Via those practices we are on the threshold of a far richer set of philosophical and intellectual comprehensions than we've had. We're about to break out of certain limitations that our culture has left us with.

One of the areas in which we're going to break through will be in the area of understanding language. It has implications for poetics, but poetry doesn't need a language theory to be good, that's always after the fact anyway. So that particular aspect of it doesn't excite me. Nor does any of it excite me, really. Because what we're talking about really is improving the menu. When we talk about language theory or understanding language better we're just talking about having a better

menu. But the menu is not the meal. No matter how beautiful you make the menu, only eating the meal will satisfy your hunger. So, the meal is authentic personal experience of a non-linguistic order, direct insight into the nature of yourself and the universe without language being of any particular importance in that. Philosophies are menus, experience is the meal.

Mesch: But philosophy is able in many ways to influence not only the experience that people will have but the other sciences. So philosophy certainly is only the tip of the iceberg. . .

Snyder: I think of philosophy more as flowers that you put on the altar after you've seen it, it's an offering. It's an expression of gratitude.

Mesch: What about poetry then?

Snyder: Same. It's an expression of gratitude.

Mesch: Do you see any difference between poetry and philosophy in that sense, and then language?

Snyder: Not really. I don't see the difference between poetry, philosophy, automotive repair, dishwashing, and cooking. They're all offerings of gratitude, and each of them is demanding, and each of them is beautiful. Our culture tends to value some higher than others. But any of them can be perfect.

Mesch: A number of your poems, especially in *Turtle Island*—e.g., "The Great Mother," "Pine Tree Tops," "The Real Work," "The Hudsonion Curlew," "The Bath"—in structure and language-strategy resemble the form of either a koan or a mantra. Were you aware of such a resemblance while writing them? Did you intend such a resemblance? Which of the forms mentioned do you see them coming closer to?

Snyder: A koan is "a matter to be made clear"—with a point to it, a personal discovery when cracked. Perhaps some of my poems might function this way, for some they do. Some have real points hid in them. But never as mystification or deliberate obscurity. The poems you mentioned are good choices. Some of my poems are "mantric"—"Regarding Wave," "The Bath" among them. I am of course aware of koan and mantra possibilities—though I don't plot it as a deliberate strategy—that would be too intellectual and death to the life of the poem. Perhaps some of the little poems in "Songs for Gaia" *(Axe Handles)* are most like koans.

Mesch: Traditionally metaphor is considered to be based on comparison (simile). In your poetry there is little basis for such metaphors. Do you consider your poetic language to be metaphoric in its essence?

Snyder: True, I don't use small metaphors much within poems. Whole poems are often metaphors though, or a group of poems are governed by one metaphor.

Mesch: In your talk "Poetry, Community, and Climax" you speak about a decentralization that includes the "'decentralization' of poetry." Where do you see such decentralization taking place?

Snyder: Decentralization of poetry: away from High Culture and University standards toward vernacular song/story/poetry values; away from Standard Language and more toward local speech; away from publishing centered in New York and toward small regional presses; and toward an acceptance of bilingualism as a normal, healthy state of affairs. All of the above is controversial and it's not an absolute program but a *tendency* I'd like to see encouraged, especially in the USA.

Mesch: Today we are desperately in need of an environmental ethic. What is the potential of poetry regarding the development of such ethic?

Snyder: Poetry and all the arts contribute to our "getting out of our skins" into a direct apprehension of the world. In its deepest application art can perhaps lead us toward the realization of our oneness with all life in an intimate, personal way.

Mesch: Our contemporary situation could be understood as being an ecological crisis that is intimately connected to the concept of nature as it was, in fact, developed by the Romantics. I see your poetry as being not an analytic but a poetic and creative critique of the idea, of the Romantic idea of nature.

Snyder: I like that. I like what you just said. I would like to think that my poetry stands in that relationship to the Romantic tradition.

Mesch: Could you point out some difference between your own attitude to nature and the Romantic attitude to nature?

Snyder: The best way I can express it is in a very pregnant thing that Dogen, the 13th-century Japanese philosopher and Zen master said—incidentally, a man who is very very important; if you're not acquainted with Dogen I'll tune you into him. His work is circulating around now in ecological philosophy circles on the West coast and some in Europe as the most exciting and powerful thing that people have hit on in a long time, just in the last 3 or 4 years, because his work hasn't been available in any English translation until 4 years ago.

Dogen says: When "the ten thousand things"—it's an Oriental way of saying "everything" or "the phenomenal universe"—advance and confirm you, that is enlightenment. When *you* advance and confirm

"the ten thousand things," that is delusion. Romanticism is the latter. It is the human ego advancing and confirming nature and telling nature what it is. And seeing themselves in nature, to let nature tell you who *you* are is enlightenment. And I think that's the difference between my poetry and Romantic poetry. Exactly what Dogen's point is.

Mesch: What do you think about the Romantic concept of nature and its influence and consequence on today's ecological crisis? What do you think about the Romantic notion of the infinity of nature?

Snyder: What is that?

Mesch: Well, nature being infinite, and you can do whatever you do, it won't influence and change nature in it's infinity.

Snyder: I think that's a bad rap on Romanticism. That's a bad rap. Infinity of resource availability is an imperialist mercantile theory. To give Romanticism all due credit where credit is due: If you want to trace back the intellectual lineage of the conservation movement in the United States it goes back to Romanticism.

Romanticism was wrong-headed, but it nonetheless was the first intellectual movement in European thought to give authenticity to nature and to begin to look at nature and the primitive in anything other than an arrogant light. It has to be given credit for that. It was speaking out of Occidental ego, but to some extent it transcended it too, I think. The notion that we have an infinity of resources—you can't lay that to the Romantics, the mercantilists thought that and acted on those terms.

Mesch: Well, I would say it is a Romantic cliché in the sense of degrading what Romanticism really was.

Snyder: But Romanticism like the Beat Generation got degraded by the press and by misuse.

Mesch: It seems to me that an opposition we inherited from Romanticism is the opposition of nature on the one hand and civilization and technology on the other, between city and country.

Snyder: I think that still is a very useful distinction, we haven't resolved that question yet. Until we understand what the primitive is and what the country is, we have to keep them apart. Until full respect is paid to the primitive or to "the countryside," that distinction has to be held, and I talk all the time to groups of people about the primitive. I always preface it this way: Look, we all know what civilization is, and how great it is, and how much it's done for us, how rich it is, how complicated it is, how fantastic it is, admitting that, now, let us look at what we don't know so much about, namely the primitive, and see if we can give a little time to thinking about what the other side is. People know nothing about it. People know nothing about prehistory, all they have is presuppositions. They've been taught falsehoods

through their whole education. Until we break through that we have to keep the exercise going. I run into the quotation from Hobbes all the time—the life of primitive man, or of archaic man is "brutish, nasty, and short."

Mesch: It expresses some of the essence of his philosophy.

Snyder: This is what is still considered to be the truth, across the world of businessmen, middle managers, bureaucrats. That has to be broken through. The actual fact of it has to be taught instead. So that's a big work, that's one of my big jobs—it's the critique of civilization. In fact, we are organizing a conference on that theme right now. We're going to try to get Ivan Illich, and Stanley Diamond, and Lewis Hyde, May Swenson, myself, E.P. Odum, a whole bunch of people, to have a conference on the critique of civilization. Try to get that clear once and for all. Then we can go on and we can resolve what the dialectic of thesis and antithesis is at this point.

We can't have the synthesis until we make it really clear what those two things are, we have to hold them apart until it's clarified. Then people can go on. As Stanley Diamond says—he's a very interesting Marxist anthropologist, teaches at the New School in New York, he's the editor of the journal called *Dialectical Anthropology* which is published in The Hague, and he's one of the sharpest people in this work which I call the critique of civilization. Like he says, we can't leave the primitive or the archaic behind until we understand it and have incorporated it, then we can go on. This is our work right now to understand and incorporate that. We think we know it, but we don't know it, so we must incorporate that.

Mesch: In what ways do you see the incorporation?

Snyder: Composting. We have to understand it and take it in and absorb it and act on it and be able to act on it. On our understanding for example, you can't go on until you understand that, as wonderful as technology is, you don't really need it. Or, to understand that, as great as modern medical hospitals and doctors are, you can get along without them. Or, as nice as it is to have government, government is not essential. You have to be able to get through all that, then you can go on. Or, as wonderful as it is to have libraries and books—without them we're OK. In other words, that the deepest human potential can be realized without anything of the structures or technologies of civilization. Can be realized actually: It might take a little longer, might take 25 or 30,000 years instead of 5,000 years, but like information, like the richness of information that we have in modern life, it's always there, too. You don't lose it.

So those understandings would allow us then to go on once those understandings have been accomplished. That's an important point.

That's also part of the ethnopoetics' work: Is to define the authenticity of the primitive.

Mesch: I'm a bit worried about the word 'understanding' which I associate with purely rational categories, concepts. I would feel like you can't 'understand' the primitive in that way.

Snyder: I was using it loosely. To incorporate it. It is to the credit of Rousseau that he was able to say to Western culture that we can learn something from the primitive. You know the Chinese and Japanese haven't admitted that yet. They are so hung up on civilization stuff that they could not say that. They really feel that they are superior. So, in that sense Western culture began to loosen up, open up earlier, and then democracy is really just a function of that: the rise of democracy is the rise of the an understanding of the ecology of the primitive, bit by bit.

Partly a function of a new continent, the Western hemisphere, America, which was a mind-blower. Europeans had no idea they were going to enter a totally open frame again. They had been living in a closed frame for centuries. You had to get a permit to cut firewood. I don't have to get a permit to cut firewood. They had to get a permit to cut firewood from the 13th century on in France. The last time you saw deer walking through you yard in Europe was how many centuries ago? We're still living where they're walking through our yard.

So that's the difference still between the Western hemisphere and the old world, and that's a huge instruction to the mind of the old world which is still being absorbed. And it's a huge instruction to Asia, too, which they haven't even begun to absorb yet.

Mesch: You sound very optimistic, you seem to be sure that the technological way of producing goods, produce is going to die out and that the fossil-fuel culture is going to die out.

Snyder: If it doesn't blow us all up first.

Mesch: Yet, what would you see yourself as a poet doing in the crisis that we are living through? In fact, how would you see yourself contributing to finding a way of living ecologically?

Snyder: Some of us have tried to simply demonstrate alternative possibilities here and now, to help allay anxiety, to open up other paths and that's practically speaking like the way I live. It's also helpful to come up with other ideas and other visions. I think you can see how many different levels there are involved in someone like myself and McClure, by thought and deed, both. Trying to share what we've found that works, what we think might help other people, find what works for them. The biggest problem is anxiety and clinging to the old way.

Mesch: Could you be more specific?

Snyder: People don't want to change where they live, they're afraid of losing what they have. Multiple threats from Russians, or from the Depression or the Recession or high fossil-fuel prices. The realest threat that people really face is the threat of increasingly totalitarian governments. Increasingly totalitarian governments will get their way by feeding on people's anxiety and frustration. To welcome high gasoline prices—rather than fear them—as an opportunity to travel less and spend more time with your friends, to live in a closer community, and to make your own local culture is a positive way of going.

Mesch: Well, it seems to me to be the only way.

Snyder: Of course, but people fear it, you see. So you have to demonstrate the positive side of what can easily be taken as a negative direction: gasoline will be $5.00 a gallon—yuck, what will I do then? Live closer to work, ride a bicycle, spend more time around your friends, have a little local theater, give poetry readings, practice calligraphy, grow a garden. GREAT! People have to be taught that. I'm talking about the masses, I'm not talking about University students. Yes, I'm talking about university students too, they are as bad as everybody else.

Mesch: My last question is. . .

Snyder: You have questions which I could talk for 10 hours on each one, of course (laughing).

Mesch: In what way would you see your activity and McClure's activity as changing the ecology of symbols?

Snyder: I'd have to think about how I view the ecology of symbols before I could answer that. I haven't digested that term yet. I can't answer that.

JOHN OLSON

TWO POEMS

Form is an extension of reindeer
It is an eggplant. It is
wide or narrow, a crescendi
of hay & corn & cows. Rapture
is an egg of light gliding over the tongue
in elms of ohms of omen & awe. A form like Marylin

Monroe's skirt in *Seven Year Itch,* blending
delicacy with stone, abandon
with bone. A pleasure
flagrant as rain, obdurate as a bud. We know ourselves
are unknowable
& private as the blood

of a gnu. I broke a tooth
on a piece of popcorn
watching *Startrek*

& that luminous cloud

of nirvana Whoopi Goldberg intimated
turned out to be some inane Victorian Christmas scene
& not the rush

of paradise crashing through the nerves
I thought of the moment
ammonia & hydrogen chloride come together
filling the whole vessel. The soulfulness of stars
in infinite space is a poignant actuality

of light shining over the heads of the audience
but there are much more

fugitive elements at play
in the life around us & a passion

consequently to hurry. To wiggle
& writhe a Venice of the breath. Slide
ciliates into conjugation, dangle syllables

proportionable as bells. Smear the mind on a glass
of sibilants, the milk
of consciousness on the bones of the everyday

GLOSSOLALIA

Gloss begins with glass. But how does one glue
a glint to a glare, a glimpse to a glint, bubble epopee

in a Salzburg salon, mount a weather
like requiem

across a Ugandan gorge. Sift the rhythm

on the back of a leg. Elicit the steam
of a phonemic magma. It is a consummate
charm to chisel a tongue
out of the stalactite

of a string

of coincidences. The colors
are pulled through our eyes
then struggle out of our mouths

as vertebrae. We call them

cocobolo. Kwacha. Hebdomadal
harmonicas. Lumps

of pontification. Temperature
is slippery

constellations
of glossy calculation. Elvis Presley in white
  bellbottoms & jacket studded with jewels

on a thermometer in Chehalis
Some Like It Cool. Sometimes what I want to do

is let the meaning out
of an inner
tube, a thin

insistent hiss. Water is a large emotion. Memory an amenity

& mission. I like ladders
redolent with rungs. A sentence is a sensation

like rain. A palaver of stones
in a parabolic brook. A brick
combined with another brick, combined
with yet another brick, builds

a brick balalaika
in a cellar of mood. If you want to say something

towering & disporportionate you must speak
with a fulcrum of lungs
in a tempest of tongues

ANDREW SCHELLING

from THE ROAD TO OCOSINGO

San Cristobal de Las Casas

August 4

Entered the city named for 16th century priest Bartolomé de Las Casas. Bartolomé spent forty years trying to impede conquistador atrocities all through the region, then returned to Seville & a published book, 1552, alerting Spanish authorities to gruesome unchristian acts. "I would write a very big book, but this will have to wait till another time. God willing." Hence *Brevissima Relacion*, the quick account, into print without clearance from Inquisition authorities–

We twist through wet cobbled streets, get lodging where the old town gives out. Na-Bolom (old Maya: jaguar) is a former convent. Cool arcades with deep rooms set around a courtyard. Hans & Trudi Blum, German archaeologists, bought the building decades ago. Now it's an institute for culture research & ecology. Various Maya and student gringo activists run it. Library, dining hall, artifact rooms, office, & planning center. Wild potted plants in the corridors. Old photos and up-to-date maps of Lacondon rainforest cover the walls. Out back under dripping pines they rent a few cabins.

*

Anne & I set up candles. This is the rainy season, cool at night, lanterns along narrow muddy paths. Our clay hut oozes into the soil. I dismantle wood slat bed to get the enormous spider, violet-brown leg hairs, who ran off one pillow when we opened the door. Set her free among nameless leaves where an orchid pot crumbles to mud. And imagine back of feathery pine bough's mist & drizzle, home's familiar moon. Light the fire, get into bed.

That night in my notebook—

Arms scarves
candle shadow ebbing it flickers
over your breasts

here's tequila from a cold bottle
I could live
many lifetimes under a damp quilt
listen to armored trucks rattle the streets
stoke a fire with you

dark nipples
I want them for aeons
pitch-pine twigs crackle
the roof lets in rain

*

5 *August* 8 p.m.

Anne & I take the road to Tenejapa around sunset. Dramatic little forested mountains tightly interlocked. At a rise—wind forcing a black mist across the weathered, brush-covered summit—near a small settlement—three high slender crosses black against darkening sky. The Maya lift crosses wherever a gate or aperture leads down to the underworld—sacred sites—a cave, a spring, certain hilltops with unique vegetation. Soil turns with some curious mineral complex. The crosses were here when Christians arrived in clanking armor. Peter Warshall's remark, that geologists and Indians agree on the power spots—

a wrinkle in earth's old layer
subterranean twist to the limestone
    if you've got eyes you can see it
here by the road

Sixty years ago Graham Greene passed over this ridge on muleback—
anarchist Catholic he noted—

> "The ground sloped up again to where a grove
> of tall black crosses stood at all angles
> like windblown trees against the blackened sky"
>
> "The great crosses leaned there in their black
> and windy solitude, safe from the pistoleros
> and the politicians..."

Among the crosses long upright pineboughs, feathery & skeletal with a violet cast of sky behind them. Asymmetrical & impenetrable. A dog barks from a hut. Everyone's a pistolero.

*

Aug. 5 midnight

And the Spaniards were allowed to choose, among one hundred and fifty
Indian maidens the ones they liked best, paying for each an arroba of wine
or oil or vinegar or pigs. . .

Such was "The Devastation of the Indies," *Brevissima relacion,* Bishop Bartolomé prompting other thoughts—

Old karma the night
is terrible
where once were children fed to Spanish dogs
out there party bosses oil american helicoptors now
what use our poetry
dark forest wind has devoured it
rain & dark wind

*

6 Aug. *Evening*

Our Mexico City friends said we must search out Ambar Past, American expatriot poet who lives in a forest hut outside San Cristobal with her daughter. We track them down at Taller Lenateros, print & papermaking collective at Paniagua 54, where Ambar works and sleeps nights she's in town. Massive colonial door with rust iron rivets swings open, she's come to the door. David Huerta has sent word on ahead, and Ambar's been waiting—

So chatter poetry & politics, catch up with news & drink coffee. There's a kitchen at one end of the big printshop room. Ambar recounts unpublicized local events. Her first winter here a blight came, and no doctors—

"Every child in the village of Magdalenas died. Every child."

We tour the collective's dilapidated adobe rooms to see silkscreen tubs and big platen presses, shelves full of paper, cards, posters, menus. In the back courtyard where the collective grows its food a group of women make paper—

flowers
vines

liquen

figbark

bamboo
old paper

rags
discarded

pine needles
orange peel

other trash

—all goes into the mash.
Refuse turned into splendor. Civilization.
It's late in the day so the ladies who blend up paper go home.

*

7 August

Little Guadalupe image east on the hill. She stands on a black crescent moon & appears, apparition, to kneeling Juan Diego who met her outside Mexico City, 9 December 1531. Tiny white church full of slant sunlight. What old adoration tells me get down on your knees? Incense & liturgy, the human heart momentarily soothed in its torment. Near the altar a few curanderos. Time to retrace our steps down whitewashed stone stairs into town.

Wood smoke hangs in the breezeless air. We eat posolé with rough pork in a small shop, back it with tequila and beer. A cold hard mist sits on the distant grey pine hills. Winding along through middle-class streets admiring the old painted Colonial doors we're teased by two girls about eight or nine selling Chamula dolls. Tiny traditional things the length of a finger, in rough black raiment but ski masks conceal terracotta faces, big spooky eyes gazing through.

"Si, Subcommandanté Maria. Y Marcos! Three pesos."

Up north no one told us
    of lady subcommandantés
the girls giggle

crude wooden
guns in the doll fists

*

8 August *Na-Bolom Institute Library*

Flames crackle in the convent's old fireplace.
Anthropology books on the walls.
Scholarly titles flicker, a lamp is lit, rain drums on the
cobbles, potted trees past the window drapes.
We give a reading of poems & stories to a small cluster of attentive travelers.
Afterwards someone brings spirits in a big kerosene tin.
It's been stewed with pineapple and
curious rainforest spices. Quickly drunk, I sit and read
Bartolomé de Las Casas, his brief appointment 1544
Bishop of Chiapas—

"All Spaniards seeking
absolution must
free their Indians
and make restitution"

til he was yanked back to Spain.

*

Evergreen Cloud Forest *San Cristobal*

Volcanic peak & vague boulders heave free from the tangle
green tangle clings to the rock
archaic water
drizzles from cloud to big leaf
leaf to underfoot mud

How many billions of years
    cool rain on the planet
this improbable cinder
steaming & whirling on galaxy's arm?
Nameless mosses sweep down from branches in sheafs
mist and cloud
    twist in emerald evergreen crowns
Pale yellow orchids hidden by vines
Could be the elfin woodland
Beard first wrote up (1944)
    buttressed trees
    broad leathery evergreen leaves
the air almost too
green to draw breath

*

This heart goes
higher–
    imagine keeping
counsel with clouds
windswept peaks and high ridges
    Sierra Madre
oh jagged Mother

tangled underfoot offspring
so dense
you need a machete to walk
We gaze down into treetops

A woodcutter machete clacks in the forest
smoke lifts
they're clearing for coffee
clearing for cattle
Orange flames spit from the underbrush
    blue haze hangs in ravines

a bit of white lichen a few tough mosses

after 10,000 years the forests to vanish
earth a bare cinder again

What do we call it?

cloud evergreen scrub

*

10 August Palenqué

Jonathan & Rikki join us along the rear arcade of the Palace. High-up seats, us leaning back against pillars, to study thick unfamiliar foliage—lianas, lush green trees & vines, metalic whining of insects. The heat has me down. I listen from enormous distances as the others speak of cigar-smoking priest on the frieze at Temple of the Foliated Cross. Jonathan has his own cigar sympathetically lit—passes it to Rikki & photographs her smoking it savagely among ruins. Her hair runs in rivulets down the stone arcade. I scramble off my perch—down from the arcade, across the cropped lawn. Broken steps drop to the fast silver thread river—Rio Otolum. Bromeliads watch. Head thrust into clear, forceful, shockingly cold water.

Why did I expect tepid water—out of the steaming jungle? On the bottom mottled rocks & clear sand. Plunged my head in again and the water's force nearly threw me. Return to companions up on their smoking perch at the back of Prince Pacal's harem. A bandana to dry my hair and dislodge little pebbles where they've stuck in the whorl of one ear. At my departure a spider monkey shrieks—

Temple of Inscriptions
nine lords of the underworld—Xibalba—

and when they opened the sealed stone passage
down to Pacal's tomb

several skeletons crouched at the portals
set to serve
Pacal in death

clay pots, jewelry
and supplies for the journey
to Xibalba

Pacal's jade mosaic death mask was removed to Mexico City where archaeologists recreated his tomb at the Museo Nacional de Antropologia. 1985 thieves got in & made off
with the mask.

Drenched from humidity tourists labor their way in cloud-like formations up the Temple steps. A massive German man slung with cameras sweating profusely. "Aaach!" Grey rock & emerald color'd grass.

Spinescent palms, cycads, low-branched shrubs, lianas
scarlet blossoms
spider monkeys draped in the high blue canopy
the air a singing insect

and my love crouches beneath
a clamshell green leaf
to be photograph'd

*

Leafcutter

Palenqué

Leaning against a tree in the shade
cool leathery leaves
give relief from hot fuzzy jungle sun
A modern tourist building squats over there
    coke machine, postcards and chess boards–
What's this line of green lozenges
parades down the bark
past my face?

Leafcutter ants
    (genus *Atta*)
a cordon of millions
all of 'em women
cutting half-inch square leaf chips over my head
hold them upright like sails
hurry home to a fungus garden
    sunk in a nest underground

Daughter workers
slick trail leak'd from the tip of the abdomen
tells the route home
Tropical farm girls, government girls,
architect girls–
an empire of girls!
cutting up leaf
    since the Eocene

they harvest as much in a
day as a cow.

*

11 August 1995
Ocosingo

Small church at the downhill & east end of the square, tucked almost insignificant–back among other blank white buildings. Billboard up

above extolls benefits of breastfeeding in colors of the Mexican flag. We enter through arched undecorated wooden doors with black rivets—inside tiled checkerboard floor—& bare smokecolor'd wooden pews, nobody in them. Several Indian women squat in the nave, little children scampering through pine needles that cover the floor in blue-green tufts. Sackloads of pine needles lie among the pews, whorled and heaped up in corners uneven.

Quick little bow
    to black virgin
deep in her recess
    the right hand wall—
who is she
lunar robe cobalt
    & silver

Madre, Madre—

toss a nod across to chocolate color'd
padre with tight-curled hair
    who is he
beatific nook
    other side of the church
a few chipped spots on his
    plaster face

18 months ago gunships raked roof & walls of the church. Ocosingo took the worst of the January fighting. Patients yanked from hospital beds & shot in the halls. A local story. Today no discernible damage to ceiling or floors. The children toss pine needles. Like elsewhere in town fresh paint tells the story—Father Trejo's church—

"Pincha Cura—!"
—General David Rivera as he called in the HUEYs—
"Fucking Priest! He's got nine rebels hiding in there!"

Back outside to bright sun, and stand blinking over the morning market—"dark narrow warren of booths"—a few stalls just raising their awnings. Mostly plastic toys, a few clay pots—and candied pastries heap'd up, colors more bright than the toys. Stack of marine blue cakes catch my eye. Coming & going among the stalls energetic bees—
    which bringeth to mind the "flower world"
Aztec poems of antiquity—

I count out a few coins, the 1000 old-peso is heavy bronze—fits the hand nicely. Poet Sor Juana looks mildly down on the heads side, maybe ruminating a poem. Her baroque philosophic ballad "First Dream" in my thoughts I go over and purchase two Zapatista bandanas from thickset lady chattering Tzeltal to her neighbor. Burnt orange paisley kerchiefs flutter outside her stall like EZLN banners—
six pesos each.

Last night dinner when we got in late, the long drive up from Palenqué, twisty road & little dark fires of huts on jungle precipices. Once into town we overlooked the sloping zocolo from Hotel Central's porch. They'd cut the lights inside and we thought the restaurant closed—just a card game going on next to the window. But a boy brought tequila & we waited for dinner—thin soup and tortillas—looking toward the fountain where soldiers laid six boys on the pavement a year ago January—each shot once through the head. The ranking officer sweating as he led journalists over for photographs.

Freshly painted Government Palace dominates the uphill western side of the square—blue & white under klieg lights—a Disneyland quality, gay and colonial the decorative facade. Caciqués, local bosses, pick their teeth & stand around with guns by the doorway. The bullet holes patched. One more tequila & back through streets dusted by rain, smelling of oil, one or two quiet bulbs glint off the asphalt—to the little posada—only place in town with a room—four of us in three narrow beds—nearly insoluble puzzle to which there's one answer—love—

WILL ALEXANDER

WITHIN THE OPAQUE TERMITES' MORASS

They
of collided pincer malfunction
of egregious clashings of dread
of the privity of corroded malarial witness
embedded in a boiling worm foundation

this life
conducted in a smoky aurific substratum
fed by miraculous enmity
by seismic fault
by riddled tarantula mound
by blank tornado morass

each haunted aspiration
within imploded flanks of soil
within its rotted neon stochastic

& these implosions burn
& scatter their inversions
as if wheat were being pictured
in the illusive flash
of primordial fungus
crystallized
by acidic fallopian fate
by a forge of molecules
scattered as oblivious distraction

this life which functions
as a limitless biochemical mortality
as an alchemic ridge or an asteroidal morgue

they
who eat flames from exploded rain sieves
who take as status
vicious armaments of wood
under blank absorption suns
moving
like a voracious flood of pale neutrino trout
stunning
invulnerable
like a scurrilous cortical mimetic
beneath a flask of exploded grain in a well

or a cloudy reptilian salt
where generic abasement burns
& ghostly electrodes extend
into treeless electrical shocks & gullies

& from this intensity
a leap of telepathic kindling
from the poles of Alpha Centauri
from a preexistent wormwood
from a riveted fire on Callisto

therefore
from old oppositional lightnings
from it's fleece of flaming thistles
there comes to exist
an alien Iridium lantern
with its instantaneous beam
which penetrates the thorax
which coils and recoils the termites' impact antennae
as they ceaselessly inflame
the wrenching leonine soils

KEN CORMIER

TWO POEMS

WRECKING VISION

A rough trudge toward explosions of sound, signals which slash, practically morphemes, luring close, nearly phonemes, zipping and selectively stirring up meaning, unselecting special blank faces hunched under coat lapels, thickly gloved hands jammed pocketwise, ignoring the flourish, videodeaf to that which, to me, seems a sonic wrecking ball.

Close enough now to see a metal neck scraping, pivoting and bracing its core, scraping its iron straight teeth, crashing its brainless down in sweeps of brick and wirepipe, chunk dust in plumes of gravity shake, fenced in by tight looped aluminum and beerbreak flesh-pods with helmets, tattoos, and arm hair.

Two transfixed faces traced in silhouette behind sunlit glass, and I, with a crack-lipped smile, not now alone, or ever, among the soft drone stepping, vision focused into chain-link tunnelling, remembering the monster, clawing down brain gaps and fingering slowly the eggshell tissue flakes, hard hat area, teeth clenched and chattering with cold.

Sun lamp down, faces withdrawn, machines stalled and
[sleeping,
head and fence fused, blanketing now the trash and hum.

MONSTER MELVILLE

Slapping and giggling with moody and shade tree mental
picture asylum under shade tree Bartleby starve with last bit
of human friendship resentment all down and folding in,
lasting and hanging in.
This tree from which bark and pages circumemulate
This treason from which reason beholds mighty word and
[slash cut
This same daddy with his jag-bitten nails and ink-stains
Rage cut everlasting on the carpet, gathered and undulating
[under
the leg of his wooden chair.
This woman folded and creased straight

like the daughter of Wallace Stevens
who smoked slender cigarettes
and whose meat-chunk mouth smiled and then
[frowned,
whiskey and
[memories.

WANG PING

FLASH OF SELFISH CONSCIOUSNESS

It's easy to do a good deed here and there,
but a different matter to keep it up daily.
For evil has many faces and we must dig
into the bottom of the soul to catch
flashes of selfish consciousness, as Mao urged us
in his Red Treasure Book.
It hurts.
"But it's good to be hurt from time to time," says my Chinese
[doctor,
digging, elbowing and kneeing into the acupuncture spots
of the body. The body twitches and arches and screams.
With a serene smile on his face, the doctor says,
"Pain awakens the heart, and keeps it in good shape."

When I was seven, I became crazy about *wuxiang dou*—five-spice beans. My grandma would give me only two or three each time, five if I was good. So I began to steal coins from under her pillow, one at a time. When I got 57 fen, I went to the store and bought half a kilogram of the beans. I took the bag to the kitchen and poured it onto the greasy table. I put my arms around the pile. This was all mine. I didn't have to share it with any one else. I didn't have to pretend to be a selfless daughter or an elder sister. I could eat it quickly or slowly, standing or sitting or lying down, any manner I fancied. I could throw or give it away. I was the master of these beans. The kitchen was dark; the sun was shimmering in sky of the summer noon; the beans smelled seductive. I filled my mouth with a handful and chewed until my jaws ached and numbed. Tears rolled down as I thought life is so good and wouldn't it be better if no one ever woke up from their nap to interrupt my happiness.

Happiness is as much as anything
an illusion, a hypothesis, or a process
of overcoming a series of pains.
The sensation of feeling uprooted and floating,
or stuck in the present,
unable to move back or forward.

You said too bad women don't give you
a chance. But do I really want a chance?
You placed your hand on my shoulder, your eyes
the look of an animal.

One day I asked,
"Mother, something is wrong with me.
I feel dizzy and nauseous, my joints hurt
like hell, my face burns and I'm pissing blood."

"Too much sex, my dear daughter."

"Mother, I just got fired from my job, my writing
rejected, and I might lose
my apartment in the summer. What's going on?"

"Sex brings bad luck. How many times do I need to tell you?"

"Mother, my days are now filled with despair,
and my nights taken over by fever and bouts of sweat.
I can't make friends with women.
Men dump me for lack of tenderness.
Mother, I think I'm going insane."

"This is the last time I say this, daughter:
sex is the root of all sickness and evil deeds.
Look at me. Since your father's death, I got
my health back and my eternal happiness."

Since my father's death, I refuse to belong
to a mother, a nation or a race. Refusing to bond,
I become nothing. If nothing is a curse,

let it be a curse. Let the sun burst on me
its glaring eye, the night
be full of tickling angels. In the dark,
the dog howls and howls, dragging me
into the abyss of our common origin.

My first evil thought came to me when I was four and half years old. I was sent from my grandma's place where I grew up to a navy kindergarten near my parent's house. I was miserable, not because I missed my parents. I didn't know them yet. I was miserable because I had to get up at 7:00 in the morning to stand on line for the bathroom. Our bathroom was a mobile one set in the dining room before breakfast time, ten cuspidors lined up neatly in the middle and ten little children sitting there like baby birds in nests. Some moaned with pinched faces, some cried shamelessly in this deep humiliation, and some stared into space in despair. "Don't even think of getting off before you make something," our teachers said. Every few minutes, a kid raised his or her hand and a teacher ran over to clean up. I said to myself: I can't go to the bathroom in front of other people's eyes, those curious, mocking, indifferent eyes. So I held it in. I held it in until the teachers took away the mobile toilets and everyone sat down for breakfast, eating and singing: she can't make it, she can't make it. I perched alone on the tall cuspidor like a bird stranded in its own shit, so alone and arrogant, in an atmosphere so unpitying, my head suddenly swollen with an evil wish: May my body explode and flood all the breakfast bowls with my piss and shit.

The birth of an infant comes the same way
as a turd, don't you know that?
The game is as good as lost. All you can do
is to struggle for a sensation.
Shadows of passers-by in the flickering twilight,
the night that cuts on the body—
you know you can't bear it, but you bear it anyway.

So let me tell you how I wrote my first story. It was spring, 1972. I was a senior in the middle school. I had to write journals to

record my daily thoughts and deeds for the class discussion every Monday. There was a format everybody followed: We encounter difficulties. We're immediately tempted by evil thoughts or class enemies. Then Mao's teaching begins to echo in our ears, helping us to fight off the demons and keep our pure revolutionary spirit. I was often criticized for writing the exactly same story every week, except for the change of names and places. I argued this was exactly what happened because nothing really happened. They thought I was nuts and told me to add more variety to my content and some spice to the style. So I made up the following story:

"One morning on my way to school, I passed by a public toilet room. I was reciting a paragraph from Chairman Mao's book so I wasn't paying attention to the road. Someone shouted "hey." I looked up and saw a half-naked man and his penis. (Of course I didn't use the word penis in the journal. I used a more appropriate vocabulary *shengzhiqi*—reproduction organ.) This reproduction organ was pointing high up at the sky and the guy was holding it as if he were holding a red-tasseled spear between his legs. My first reaction was to run as fast as I could. Then I remembered our great leader Chairman Mao's teachings: 1) To rebel is do the right thing; 2) Revolution is not an invitation to a party, but a thunderstorm. So I raised my fists, sang "Cut the Jap ghost's head with a saber"—a most popular song in the 70s—at the top of my voice, and charged at the man standing at the door like an idiot with his pants fallen to his ankles. He turned and ran inside. I heard him trip and make a big splash. I hope he fell into the latrine pit, but I didn't check. It was the men's restroom. Girls shouldn't enter. The end."

That was chosen the best journal of the week.

And that semester, I was awarded the title of "Excellent Redguard of Chairman Mao" for the first and last time in my life.

He thinks he can be a man
if he quits smoking pot and takes ginseng tea
at 2:00 every morning.

Once I had a dream. My mother was my executioner. On our way to the shooting ground, I kept arguing that it wasn't fair. She said, "Do you have anything better to say? You have only two more minutes to live." So I immediately began to count the seconds and tried to grasp the meaning of my life. She tied me to a target tree and fixed my head to the bull's eye with a thumb tack. She raised the gun and took her time to aim. She made two shots. I dodged. One missed, the other went through between my eyes. She came over slowly. I held my breath, pretending I was dead. She pinched my arm. "She's not dead yet, she's not dead," she screamed on and on until I could no longer hold my breath. "I have to breathe," I told myself in the dream. "I have to breathe if I want to live. But if I do, I'll be shot again."

I can hear the sound of silence, the echo
of my inner silence, a silence
which is not a void.

The moment it dawned that I don't want a mother, that it's been my goal, since I started to walk, to get away from her, and all my efforts to please and feel close to her are just a big pretense, a cover up for my evil instinct, I was crushed, also liberated. It was the moment I realized I could become the mother of a child.

I began this poem, determined never to mention the word "Mother" again.
But oh, who can really live without her?
Just stop the fight and let her flow through you.
If you don't have a soul, how can she snatch it?
If you don' t have a head, how can she cut it off?
Cease fighting, and you no longer have an enemy.
Day and night devour each other with such despair.
Do not fear to break down, do not.
In order to change, we must all go through a few break-downs of nerves.
I'm turning into a fish. My face now covered
with scales rows upon rows.

Evil has so many faces; and love alike.
Move among the leaves with a gentle touch, please;
for there's a spirit in the grass.
Before us all–
time and unforeseen occurrences.

PAMELA WYE

DESIRING MACHINES AND EXQUISITE CORPULENCE: LISA YUSKAVAGE'S GIRLIES

With a gorgeous old-master technique, Lisa Yuskavage creates oil paintings with titillating content and scintillating surfaces. In her most recent paintings from 1996, strong light sources emanate like a scorching sun from the painting itself (as in "Bad Habits") or from a window outside the painting's range (as in "Foodeating Hardplace"). In both cases, the light molests her female figures with the bleaching glare of a powerful spotlight. Singular and luminously singled out, her figures have the look of chosen ones—sparkling highlights in the hair, sun-kissed nipples, and large expanses of engorged flesh, carved by light into absurd volumes. Like Vermeer, Yuskavage uses light to create a psychological mood, a moment of contemplation, albeit perverse. And, again, like Vermeer, her use of light implies a larger space outside the claustrophobic interior of the painting. While Vermeer's space is generally a hyper-defined upper class domestic interior, Yuskavage's space is generally diffuse and undefined except for the expanse of a single sugary color, like soft emerald greens, turquoises, and pinks. Yet, paradoxically, this expanse of color, which extends as reflected light onto the bodies themselves, has the sickeningly sweet claustrophobia of a self-absorption so complete that no outside world can, in fact, exist. Yuskavage carefully creates the illusion of volume but not the illusion of spatial depth. The viewer can gaze at the voluminous girls but can sustain no illusion of occupying the space with them. These girls (and they are girlie in the most ribald way) live, think and feel only to the limits of their own flesh. Their own discomfort in their bodies seems to make them incapable of caring about the gaze we fix upon them. Or is it, perhaps, that they are so enthralled by the gaze they imagine perpetually aimed at women's bodies that they have literally made themselves sick playing up to it?

In Vermeer's paintings, there's a complex coded symbolism popularized in 16th and 17th century European "emblem books" through mottoes and illustrations that required deciphering. Many emblem books dealt with issues of love. A letter implies a love letter. Love is a sea. Calm seas were good omens, rough seas were bad, etc.

So an image of a women reading a letter near a painting of a calm sea (as in Vermeer's "Love Letter") implies the happy twist of a love bond. In Yuskavage's paintings of girls, we can read a coded language of love in our own time. The bulbous bodies imply a satiation that is oral and food-related rather than sexual. We don't read these big-bellied girls as pregnant. They don't have the impersonal self-contentment of fertility symbols. By circuitous means—narcissism, self-absorption, fear, longing, self-loathing—love is detoured. It is as though desire is so intense, yet so confused, that it literally twists the body into grotesque shapes and postures when it can't get out. Yuskavage is on to something akin to the zeitgeist of enraged morphing one can witness weekly on "The X-Files" when unsuspecting bodies are possessed by mysterious forces and begin to violently change form.

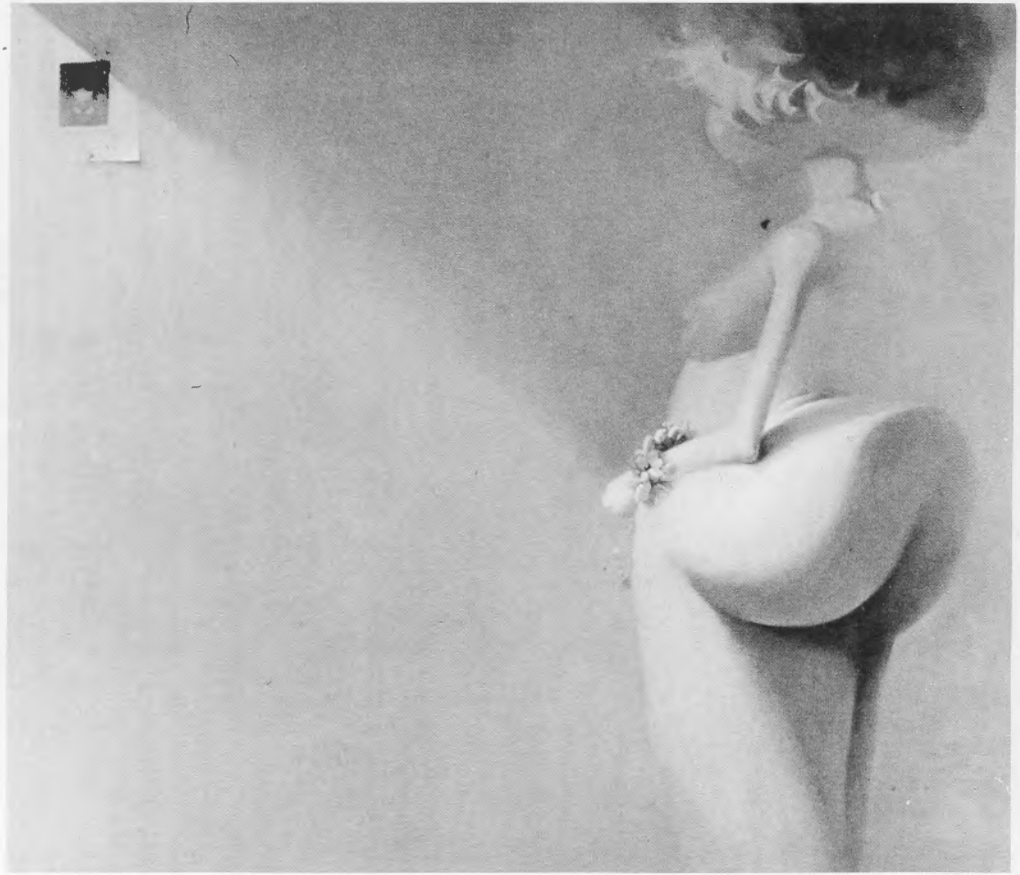
Yuskavage's earlier paintings from 1993, like "Big Blonde with Teacup" and "Blonde with Oven Mitt," played with the stereotype of coy, sexy innocence—a retro-sexuality, in fact. Her childlike women were partially clothed in blouses that grazed bare rounded butts and exposed pubic triangles. The women emerged in a soft light from the background of the paintings. In "Kelly Marie," the sweet green of the girl's blouse emerges like a dream from a similarly green-colored background as she moves toward our presumably desiring gaze. In "Big Marie," the plump girl's skimpy green baby-girl dress also emerges softly from the green background, while her pointed toe and self-possessed pose flirts coolly with the desirous viewer. These girls have the cartoony computerized slickness of a composite boy-toy meets Toy Story. These earlier images are about a coy complicity (with the slightest twinge of suspicion, mockery or skepticism). While these girls pose themselves for, and are viewed from, the outside gaze, Yuskavage's recent nude rude girls ("Wrist Corsage," "Bad Habits" and "Foodeating Hardplace," all 1996) expose, perhaps unknowingly, the pain and perverse experience of being inside these bodies. These are no longer parodies of desirable pinup Betty Boop bodies. No longer flirtatiously clothed but psychologically stripped. These recent paintings are powerful and empathetic portraits of murderously desirous, needy, greedy bodies, infantile in the implacability of their desire. No longer girlies, these bodies in their pain have become polymorphous and boldly embody the rages we can all relate to, however dimly we admit it.

Jersey City
January 13, 1997

LISA YUSKAVAGE

FIVE PAINTINGS

Bad Habits
Oil on linen, 84" x 72", 1996.
(First three Yuskavage paintings: courtesy of Boesky & Callery Fine Arts, NYC.)



Wrist Corsage
Oil on linen, 42" x 84", 1996.

Group
Oil on canvas board, 6" x 8", 1996.

Blonde with Oven Mitt
Oil on linen, 30" x 30", 1993–94.
(Last two Yuskavage paintings: courtesy of Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, CA.)

Big Blonde with Teacup
Oil on linen, 64" x 50", 1994.

PETER QUARTERMAIN

DUNCAN'S TEXTS

It's the job of the poem to find
homes for all these noises
—Rae Armantrout

The heart may be sheltering in some
random mark of communication.
—Susan Howe[1]

Duncan's compositional habits and procedures raise some interesting problems, and the texts themselves are problematic in a variety of ways: not least among them relating to meaning and reference, orthography and consistency. However, I'm not going to talk about the editorial and textual problems themselves, other than to observe that they are, as we all know, pretty formidable, as well as being a matter of considerable urgency. Duncan was so addicted to tinkering and rewriting that editing his texts is obviously a major undertaking if not a complete nightmare. I have no idea how many versions there actually are of many of his poems, but the printed works reveal that some went through as many as five or even more different versions—some of them radically different from others. If you add to that the range of manuscript versions extant, then the number of variants of any given text might well run into the dozens. For Duncan, the compositional process seems never to have exhausted itself.

When Bob Creeley generously invited me to take part in this conference I began thinking about what might be called Duncan's textual behaviour. It's pretty puzzling, and I don't think I can offer any kind of satisfactory account. The opening of the field means that you can't possess it; composition by field means that you can't know what's coming next, any more than you can know what's going to happen next week—this is an utterly paratactic move: there can be no *complete* field. It's like saying "what are the confines of relevance?" And if Her-Without-Bounds, invoked at the opening of the "Passages

1" *(Bending the Bow* 9), is therefore your Muse, *that* means that you can't control the reader's response, nor can you control the "meaning," for that "without" means both "outside" and "lacking." This in itself has some pretty important implications for textual behaviour, not the least of which are political. The State survives by its control of meaning. And if you see—as Duncan did in his "Introduction" to *The Years as Catches*—a "great increase of state power," resting in the United States from 1937 onwards on a Permanent War Economy, with the consequence that the United States is thus a War Machine (vii-viii), then it is imperative that the control of meaning be restored to the reader. This account is a little too simple, of course, and "control" is a very tricky word. I shall come back to it. But this is the broad context of Duncan's textual behaviour, which boils down to something like this: on one hand there is a persistent and habitual revision of the text, from magazine to book publication, and from edition to edition. On the other hand there is an almost fanatical insistence that we treat the text of the poem as definitive. That's a pretty weird contradiction, and it's what I'm going to talk about.

Like Pound's and Olson's, Duncan's texts are emphatically variorum—but, perhaps like Zukofsky's, they're also Definitive, which is to say "fixed." And if they're fixed, if Duncan is as committed as he is to the complete control of the published version of his texts, then why does he revise his poems at all? There's two answers to this question, the short and the long. The short answer is the obvious one, that he'd rather revise his poems himself, thank you very much. I prefer, however, to look at the equally unsatisfactory and perhaps equally obvious long one, because the short one is too simple: it presumes, among other things, that the writer always controls the meaning, in the sense of knowing what the poem says and does. But Duncan was always insistent that this is not so in two ways: meaning is what the reader sees, and is not to be confused with the writer's intention; and writing is a search for obedience (and also not to be confused with the writer's intention). The short answer also gives rise to a further question, which I'll address very briefly at the end: if you'd rather do the revising yourself, how do you know when to stop?

Let's look at some details. Duncan's habit of revising is too well-known to need much documentation here, so I shall offer very little in the way of illustration. Textual variations are pretty extensive in the case of a poem like "Nor Is The Past Pure" *(Opening of the Field* 41-43), whose 81 lines are to all appearances a fairly heavily revised version of the second section of a 178-line poem which in one version, in four movements, is titled "Masturbation: For the Innocence of the Act" and in another, in three movements, "For the Innocence of the

Act." It is impossible to decide on textual grounds which version might be a "definitive" text, since the two variant versions, printed more than seven years after the poem was gathered in *The Opening of the Field* as "Nor Is The Past Pure," were identified as "uncollected ***or*** revised" in a note accompanying their first appearance in the Berkeley Rhymer's Club *Lion* (56). David Bromige, in that note, simply avoided this problem by saying that these poems "share illuminations with" the poem as it appears in Duncan's 1960 book.[2] On 18 April 1996 Robert Bertholf showed on screen Duncan's letter to the Guggenheim Foundation, 1958, in which Duncan said of "Nor Is The Past Pure" that this poem was incomplete: "I have in mind a 'narrative' composition in four movements." This in turn suggests that the poem David Bromige printed as "Version one" is very likely indeed to be the *final* version of the poem, rather than the first. But we have no date for these revisions.

Duncan may in his writing practice have been something like Zukofsky, who deeply regretted that he had published the 1930 versions of "A" 1-7 in *An "Objectivists" Anthology* because they incorporated text later expunged from the poem. From about 1931 or 1932 on Zukofsky never changed a text once it had been printed, thus guaranteeing that the published text incorporated its own history. If he felt the need to revise, he simply added more text onto the end of the poem, by that means enabling the poem to record its own "errors" in its own text, and thereby enabling the poem to incorporate its own errors as an essential part of its self. The errors would thereby no longer be errors at all, but essential to the poem's ongoing development, and the poem itself would be subject to its own history and true to it. Duncan is kin to Zukofsky in such redemption of error into the text. But in his revisions Duncan interpolates, adds, relineates, and on occasion rewrites the entire poem out of whole cloth—and in *that* he is closer to Pound or Olson. For it is impossible to determine with any authority which text is to be read as definitive—we cannot hierarchize these different versions, and are perhaps obliged to conclude that the reader is not supposed to privilege *any* version over another: the text is definitive but multiple. In this Duncan perhaps follows the example of Ezra Pound and before him of Henry James. Pound, as is well known, pretty well throughout his life maintained important textual distinctions between the Faber and Faber and the New Directions printings of the *Cantos*—that these distinctions are now obscured by current printings is to our loss; James, in a somewhat similar spirit perhaps, recast for the transatlantic reader many of his works in the 26 volumes of the New York edition of the *Novels and Tales* (1907-1917). Like Pound's and Olson's, Duncan's text is variorum.

But lacking a careful study of Duncan's manuscripts, I do not know whether Duncan continued revising his texts after they had been gathered into a book. There is, though, plenty of evidence to suggest that Duncan was an inveterate reviser of his texts after initial publication, especially in his earlier years: there seems to be an astonishingly tangled textual relationship between the work published in *Writing Writing: A Composition Book 1953* (published 1964) and *A Book of Resemblances: Poems 1951-1953* (published 1966), for instance, or between almost any of his several earlier pamphlet publications and their later collection in *The First Decade* and *Derivations* (both published 1968). Frequently, one might note, the changes are comparatively minor—one might almost say "trivial"—having to do with the spacing of words and / or punctuation, or the breaking of lines.

Such variants, however, are closely connected to Duncan's actual compositional methods and cannot be considered trivial. Speaking of the writing of "Passages 26: The Soldiers" over the twelve months from July 1965 to July 1966 he talked of various false stops and starts, of "certain passages coming clear only to wander off key," and of two lines in particular that "came like a long sought piece of a jigsaw puzzle that suddenly brings the fittingness of all other pieces into hand" ("Some Versions" 64). In conversation Duncan would tell of writing lines in his journal and having to wait to discover which poem they belonged to. This practice is perhaps somewhat akin to Jack Spicer's famous notion, in the first Vancouver lecture, of the poem as dictated by Martians. But where Spicer, as radio set, seeks to avoid interfering with the poem as dictated, Duncan permits his own intrusions: witness (again from Passages 26) the line

> Mao's mountains of murderd men

immediately followed in all printed versions of the poem by commentary:

> the alliteration of ms like Viet Nam's
> burnd villages [.]

Duncan told me that in a moment of sudden doubt, while he was writing the poem, he noticed all those ems, "all that alliteration, you're not supposed to do that," and that *therefore* he felt obliged to include his noticing in the poem. "Everything that happens in writing the poem, as it belongs to the poem, must be acknowledged and undertaken as meaning" ("Truth and Life" 46)—the ambiguity of that first "as" is meaningful and deliberate. The act of writing simultaneously in-

volves the act of reading. The evolution of those lines and their context in the poem suggests something of the fairly complex set of permissions involved. Bearing in mind the tone and substance of the poem, it is clear that the prohibition in the poet's mind regarding his own behavior in his own poem is turned into another prohibition altogether, enlarging his repudiation to include both Mao and Johnson, both Chinese and American military trespass and felony.

The successive variants of "Nor Is The Past Pure" and "Masturbation: For an Innocent Act" are revealing, no matter which is the most recent and therefore presumably the "preferred" text, when we bear in mind the publication history of Duncan's first trade book, *The Opening of the Field*, in which that poem appeared. The 1959 publication of *The Opening of the Field* by Macmillan (New York) foundered after the book was set in type and proofs had been read, but Macmillan had scrupulously acceded to Duncan's adamant insistence that the spacing of his text be scrupulously observed:

> Many poems have inner lines with established inner margins. Beginning from the left these will be referrd to as first, second, and—where it appears—third inner margin . . . . The first and second margins should be standardized (in the typescript they vary) according to the taste of the typographer. The third inner margin where it occurs depends upon aligning certain elements in the poems that are related by measure and meaning so that their interrelation is relevant to the eye" (27 August 1959; quoted Bertholf, *Bibliography* 54).[3]

The book was then published by Grove Press, of course, in October 1960. But it was Saul Marx's botch in the printing of *Tribunals* in 1970, following as it was almost on the heels of Graham Mackintosh's omission of seven stanzas from "The Christ in the Olive Grove" in *Bending the Bow* in 1968, that determined Duncan to undertake his famous vow not to publish any book for ten (or was it fifteen?) years, and to take complete control over the material means of production for the circulation and distribution of his own poetry.

Control. Duncan was obsessive and even fetishistic about the accuracy of his texts, endlessly complaining about the inaccuracies which inevitably follow the shift from the poet's typescript to printer's type, repeatedly explaining the significance of linebreak, spacing and punctuation, eventually—so disgruntled was he over the typesetting of *Tribunals* and the design of *Bending the Bow*—falling into what amounted to a ten-year silence (broken only by the publication of the

Dante poems in the *Curriculum for the Study of the Soul* series), and breaking that silence only when New Directions agreed to publish, in 1984, the first of the *Groundwork* volumes, *Before the War*, in typescript facsimile. In 1970 he called typescript "the realized statement" of the poet's "intentions" ("The Feast").[4]

As is well known, Duncan was frequently and consistently pretty explicit about the relation of the typescript to his intentions: "In articulation I use one space, space and a half, and double space of the typewriter. The single space for lines within a stanza, the space and a half between stanzas or where lines are open (free of stanza form), double space between sections of the poem" ("Some Versions" 64). His 1984 prefatory statement to *Ground Work: Before the War*, "Some Notes on Notation," with its comments on the value of a double space after a comma and the like, instructs the general public with extraordinary detail and precision what he had ten years earlier told the five hundred readers of *Maps*, that "typewriter spaces . . . designate time intervals in the articulation of the poem" ("A Preface" 2). In 1970 he wrote to his publisher John Martin of the "great crisis" arising when stanza breaks occur at a page break, saying that "it was disastrous (especially for a #2 or #3 break) when the runover from one page to another failed to indicate the presence of such a break. Like leaving out a rest in music: and in the case of the measured silences, leaving out a major element of the movement of the poem" ("A Preface" 3). And we can all, surely, think of plenty of other examples.

But the question remains, why? What lies behind Duncan's really quite obsessive concern for the notation of the poem on the page? It is easy enough to say "for the sake of the sound," of course, though in a letter to Olson (14 August 1955) Duncan talked of the poem as "being not only made but heard, so that one is listening, the line comes *to* one, as much as one is inventing, as cuts, or measures into the line" ("Some Letters" 56; Duncan's italics). That comment affords a clue, of course—"the line comes *to* one"—but it is not a matter of sound simply, and I want here to suggest two factors informing and empowering Duncan's insistent determination "to charge with meaning and conscience of meaning the very type on the page as it is read." ("A Preface" 6). The first has to do with Duncan's notion of the poem as a coherent but incomplete structure over which the poet has limited if any control; the second, put baldly, is that writing and reading both are grounded in the body of the poet. The poet is obedient to the line, as Kathleen Fraser put it, "when it is visibly notating the moving path of the poet's discovering intelligence" (152). Insistent on the fit of section to section, paragraph to paragraph, some time around 1960 Duncan told Stan Brakhage that "feelings take on depth and complexity *only* in

language—these are terms of the articulation itself" (quoted in Brakhage 73).

Duncan sees the poem as an articulation of thought and feeling in a process *through time*, in which the poet listens to what the words say. "Words have a secret force of their own," he wrote in 1967; "whatever our intentions as writers, our words in their meanings are what we as readers must deal with and follow" ("Returning" 56). And in the writing, he explained in *The Truth and Life of Myth*,

> in the imperative of poetry three forces move to incarnate themselves in the poem: the words, come alive in their resonances of sound, pulse, and meaning—this is the reservoir of our humanity; the life experience and imagination of the poet—this is the reservoir of his craft and recognitions, the range of his creation of person; and the actual body of the poet—the reservoir of his life-style. (18)

The poem must be true to the circumstances of its composition—the room where it is written, the disturbances of the poet, the thoughts that come unbidden, the feelings of discomfort or of joy that arise as the poem unfolds itself, the possibilities the poem holds forth to the imagination and voice of the poet as he writes, the deep and sometimes desperate *trouble* at the heart of all poems. "For the poet, the actual experience of his life and the literal body of his work are not to be abstracted as if one stood for the other. The reality of the world is immediate to his writing as the poet works" ("Sweetness" 146). Is it ridiculous to say that Duncan rides the attention like Hopkins' windhover, *caught up* in and on "his riding of the rolling underneath him steady air"?

And thus we come to my second point: writing is a physical event of immediate revelation, and writing and reading *both* are grounded in the body of the poet: "my hands keep in time and know more than my brain does of measure," Duncan wrote. "Stress patterns are dancing feet; my ear and voice follow a deeper rhythm, the coming and going of a life/death tide back to the beat of the heart and the breath." And then he added: "The literal time of the poem is experienced as given" (*Ground Work* [ix]). Such insistence on the immediacy of the poem, its *now*ness, its *present*ness, the fact that it occurs in what computer jargon has come to call "real time," has interesting implications. First, that the experience of *reading* the poem is perhaps not easily distinguishable from the act of writing it; second, that language itself is experience (or the source of it), and third, well, how do I put this? Gertrude Stein persisted that "knowledge is what you

know." Not, then, what is found in libraries or somewhere out there, in some unspecified elsewhere. Not, then, the possession of someone else, to whose condition we presumably aspire and towards whom we owe some unspecified duty. In *The Truth and Life of Myth* Duncan wrote of knowledge "in the sense of a thing undergone" (7). Poems, then, as knowledge, are what we undergo, as readers and as writers. We are subject to them—the poem writes the poet. But we nevertheless know what we know.

Now, there has seemed in this century—especially in its middle five decades or so, and it lingers still in some circles—there seems to have been a pressing urgency to protect the poem from the reader's knowledge. Interpreting a poem, we learned to ask, "but could the poet have known that?" Did Williams, say, know when he devised that heavily marked and suspended period hanging out at a distance over the end of a line, or ensconced between two gaps in the middle of one, that mediaeval scribes previously used this orthographic trick? and if he did, what difference does it make to our reading of the poem?[5] But Duncan had nothing but scorn for what he called the world of reasonable men, and—like Zukofsky—turned this practice on its head. He is determined NOT to protect the poem from the reader's knowledge, from the reader's difference. For how can you *not* know what you know, even if you know it wrong? He refuses to protect the poem from differing apprehensions. He refuses, then, to rescue the poem from mis-reading, from error, for he refuses to *fix* the meaning.

Duncan's refusal takes two forms (I'll be brief here): first, by avoiding his own goals for the poem; second, by incorporating error and mistake into the writing. Demanding that the reader be brought "closer to stages in my own work on the poem" ("A Preface" 1) in order more fully to participate in its composition, he sees the poem in its full existence as lying ahead of us, like Whitehead's God impinging "at only one place: the moment where we are right now." And, he concluded, "the poem is one means of being intensely alive," because the act of writing is always an act of discovery:

> The conventional artist takes a goal and labours toward it [he said in an interview in 1966]. Whenever I see a goal I avoid it. Through this things happen in the poem because I've got to break the train of thought that's going ch-ch-ch to Chicago. I'm not designing a train line. In other words I derail and lose track of myself; I delight in doing both of these. (Nyberg and Wheeler 6)

Duncan once praised Freud because "he never seeks to cure an individual of being himself" ("Pages" 403). Duncan, never seeking to cure the poem of being *it*self courts the surprise that comes when we make a mistake, and the stirring of the blood that goes along with that. Add to that the insight that "Mistakes themselves mark the insistence of meanings in other meanings; more is present than we would rightly want to take it was present" ("Truth and Life" 47). In this particular context, "errors" and "mistakes" arise from carelessness, or deliberateness, but assuredly not from ignorance. What after all, *is* ignorance? That *you* don't know what *I* know? At heart the notion of ignorance is an adversarial and in the long run unproductive construct. And of course in Duncan's practice, well, how can you explore and exploit your own ignorant mistake, since the ignorance itself stops you from knowing you made a mistake in the first place? We begin to glimpse what lies behind Duncan's 1956 notebook entry that "the accidents and imperfections of speech might awake intimations of human being" ("Pages" 401).

His distrust of goals and their predeterminateness, surely, is of a piece with his assiduous practice of composing

> by the tone-leading of vowels, the vowels are notes of a scale, in which breaths move[.] [B]ut these soundings of spirit upon which the form of the poem depends are not constant. They are the least lasting sounds in our language; even in my lifetime, the sound of my vowels alters. There is no strict vowel standard. ("Truth and Life" 50.)

And it is his distrust of flawlessness, surely, that led him to state explicitly in *The Truth and Life of Myth,* that "in my work I evolve the form of a poem by an insistent attention to what happens in inattentions, a care for inaccuracies; for I strive in the poem not to make some imitation of a model experience but to go deeper and deeper into the experience of the process of the poem itself." "A mistake is a mutation altering the life of the spirit," he said ("Truth and Life" 34). "I must force myself to remain responsible to the error that sticks in pride's craw" ("Truth and Life" 36), "be true to my error"("Truth and Life" 48).

Under such conditions, any given text cannot possibly be definitive. "Whatever our intentions as writers,"—I quote these words again—"our words in their meanings are what we as readers must deal with and follow." The poet is also the reader, and coming back to his text Duncan reads it as a stranger might, *his* resonance in *his* body, *his* following in the *now* of the reading: "I am no longer thinking or prepossessing ideas but working *with* them, seeing with them, as I

work" ("Truth and Life" 31), re-seeing, re-visioning the poem in a different way. It is the nature of re-vision to once again process the poem in the reader: reading is to write again. "I pursue a process of re-vision and disorganization to keep creation of the poem and consciousness of the poem in interplay," he wrote in his "Preface" to *Letters* (ii).

But if writing has the force of an immediate physical revelation—and if writing is from the body—then surely we must pay attention to that body. Duncan was, as is well-known, quite severely cross-eyed, he had a wandering eye. A double vision. The left eye seeing what the right does not. Poems that split on the page, left hand and right hand. Duncan reading: one eye on the text, the other seeing elsewhere. Every reading occasion is uniquely its own particular occasion (and that, of course, is true for all of us, though we have been trained not to notice that): the room seen by the perhaps roving non-reading eye, the companions in the room and yes, the furniture, the ghostly presence of different angles of light, objects, and companions on each occasion, the act of reading *always* overlaid by ghostly presences who are ACTUALLY there. How, if you're cross-eyed, can each reading NOT be a re-vision. How can revision ever stop? And that's a major question.

But if "my revisions are my new works, each poem a revision of what has gone before. In-sight. Re-vision" ("Pages" 400-401), then how do I know when to stop? Surely, the poem is the satisfaction of energy, and Duncan had before him the example of Pound's "Mauberley 1920," the classic and indeed textbook example this century of a poem re-visioned when the poet reread his work of a year before. If for Olson the poem was the transmittal of energy, then for Duncan it was its satisfaction. How else *ever*, when writing, do we know when to stop? But there is another consideration too, and here I quote Duncan yet again. He is talking "especially" but not only about *Passages*. The year is 1970.

> I have entirely departed from the principle or concern of *integrity*, not only in that the 'poems' are not entire in themselves, but that the series is not conceived of as an entirety. And beyond that, the significance of passages from 'foreign bodies' coming in, whose authority is not *mine*, is that I do not see whatever sum of works and days of mine as having any completeness, unbrokenness, entirety. (Letter)

What was it Zukofsky said in "A"-12, quoting Samuel Johnson?

> I set limits
> to my work which would in time be ended
> tho not completed (396)

Yesterday afternoon, on 19 April, talking about *The H.D. Book*, Susan Howe spoke of "the great need for *un*finishing a project." There's kinship there.

6-10 April 1996;
15-19 April 1996.

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NOTES

1. This is substantially the text of a paper given at the Robert Duncan Conference *The Opening of the Field* on 20 April, 1996 at SUNY Buffalo. My epigraphs are Armantrout 37 and Howe 9.
2. "Version one" (46-50) is divided into four sections of 53, 59, 51 and 15 lines; "second version" (51-55) is three sections, of 66, 73, and 39 lines. Both versions, then, are 178 lines long, and differ from each other quite extensively. The book version is 81 lines.
3. *The Opening of the Field* was to be the opening volume in a new poetry series Macmillan planned for 1959 but then abandoned when its editor (M.L.Rosenthal) withdrew his support (I am grateful to Robert Bertholf for this information). For a similarly detailed statement about the typography of *Bending the Bow* see Duncan's statement to New Directions, quoted in Bertholf 94-5.
4. Duncan did not announce his vow of silence in print, but he announced it loudly and often, sometimes (given his extraordinary readiness to produce broadsides, chapbooks, and so on) to some mirth. He excused the publication of *Dante* on the

grounds that the work had been promised to Olson before he undertook his vow. For Duncan's own detailed explanation and defence of his vow, see the "Preface" to *Maps* 6.

5. This is a really difficult issue, intimately tangled up with the notion of "mistake" and error: both literary and academic culture follow mixed practice. One might note, for instance, how the reader's "superior knowledge" has substantially changed the text of Shakespeare's sonnets over the last century or three: you cannot get to read a clean copy of the 1609 text just by walking into a bookshop or even walking into most libraries.

RAE ARMANTROUT

SETS

Scheduled:
a two part
investigation

Recalling
the investigation

*

These bi
furcated
ovals
stand up
from the clear red stems–

not like hairs,
not like soldiers–

in this quietness.

*

Time's tic:
to pitch forward
then catch "itself"
again.

"We're" bombing Iraq again.

If I turn on the news,
someone will say, "We
mean business."

*

Eyes open wide
to form

an apology?
Disguised as what
might be surprise

over the raised
spoon.

SEAN KILLIAN

AS IF IT ISN'T

(For E.)

Part of a smile
that never leaves,

vector of the incredible
consolation, gap

in men's minds,
a stairwell's putting-up

of human breath,
those feet in the

solitary, sole night.
Wrested from an

abyss crawling to
your fabled omission,

will you flower in the
distance to overcome

tomorrow? Yes, if.
No, but. Part of a role.

Light-blue transparencies
of entries and exit-ramps—

tight lips invested
with unspoken, speechless

words—a smile's part
to play the dumb one

everyday, like the
loss of everyday made plain,

made small, trusted or truthful.
Tooth-protected, too— though

the voided scent can so often
return, over bannister, over

the broken item at the end of all
lists, over the fingered love

that crosses all sleeping foreheads.
Womanly ease never drafts

a goddess at center but then
the most forward thought comes

bold as tasted nerve, primeval heat.
This smile would be such a difficult retraction.

I prefer its shooting star to any other step forward.

Spencer Selby

REVIEW

I read your lousy review

You sound like the most
transparent metaphor
served every minute
by the need for revenge

Plague of wise men
pocket of fools'
pain of battle whose
wounds are giving birth
on the doorsteps
of posterity

A screen that shows
the price of everything
and power that makes me
so sick I cannot
find my own hypocrisy

Heritage of honor
in cold slimy juice
Pestilent cosmetic
backside politician
Weakness weaker than
bad art leading from
nowhere to nothing

Spoiled enemy of the book
that trades contempt for
skill without judgment
throws meat to the fire
and speaks nothing but
a markdown from the
bottom of a child's heart

LOSS PEQUEÑO GLAZIER

WHAT SOUND A WALL

For Larry Eigner

Walls, soundless, are stable, allow the application of pressure as swallows reflect sound where you think of what a wall is. How it reflects. How its position swounds an acoustic however auditory acrostic of stunned steps from the straits of its audiational vista. Eigner's "silence silence silence silence sound"; sound is only possible against the absence of sound. "The Music, The Rooms" sounds Eigner's wall. Here, silence marks the beat, its time, makes sounds possible within whitespace caterwauling what words spark "on the walls" sustain. The push outside punctuates birds, a conscious present of paper cosmos "times advance" i.e. tides, ties, pools, objects that pivot, define, locate, find—as
manmade poles, pinpoints,

power. . ."with desperate ease"
sees color's infrared

light also from a punctuation of circling, "the food, the power" inside its plunge, how birds themselves circle before blunting, plunging, plangent "pinpoint"—"how distance is to some birds"—simply said, how IS distance to some? Is any distance possible when circling—no distance—leads to food? The answer that such distance is the "pin-point"—the sun point, pole from perspective of bird's sky view, backs up "the meaning of change." Room for pause and pause which makes place inside. Windowed against musical parlor under skies' mutable pause midwing "birds pass the window" ("the curves together")

sound only plays against its
instrument (forgotten) "on
the screen" "the clock shakes out"

Note: All unattributed quotes are from Larry Eigner's *Selected Poems* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1972)

as a player piano is a scroll of "silence silence silence silence sound" where sound is only capable amid the profusion of wounds—punctuations as punctures the scroll makes room for. The player piano is an instrument which produces sound song written as if through a wall. Elsewise a vase for precarious things "a live broadcast" indeed when marks behind screen which mars sounds themselves how. . .circling . . .how silence is to some birds.

> *It takes some remembering, but I think it's probably easy to see those clusters of words about the page in such a way as to interpret them as airy, even wispy, and I think that's an error a lot of people do make . . .*
>
> —Ron Silliman, Poetics posting

"wampum gulls broke shells"— How did those gulls break shells? as "they might" dive "headlong into" spells? how wampum is shells, the currency of the letter in stuttering conjunction of zounds ("wonder and astonishment") and swounds (wound + *swoons*)—falling from the sky, swirling, feeding, mating— "how distance is to some birds" ... "the dim expanding miles" as headlights hound the wall of sight:

a steady white light
they might drive headlong into
the mist as magnet
blows lost bearings

---

belows of hearings
". . .as if the poems had become
an organ, the sky bellows"

—Charles Bernstein, Poetics post

The magnet is a pivot, an attraction, drawn magnetism is physical as the pull between "they might drive like a magnet" and "the mist blows like a magnet." The pull creates a space which is the magnet that "blows lost bearings." Sounds come from rests which "nest in fisherman's pocket"—

nets contains the same letters
as nest—as nets,

the magnet of a pocket. An epigraph at the end of "The Music, The Rooms" quotes Chief Pokagan in 1850 describing an onset of the now extinct passenger pigeon. Sounds spanning silences. The note itself a

cloud, as much SHAPE as lexical value. As words, trace of magnet drawn across glass, scores flight of pigeons across "nuggets of sound carving space" (Bernstein) storm craving place. How birds sound there—in all cases sound there "commingling," mix of "geometry of ties that blind in music" (Bernstein). "What sound for our ears" sleigh of ear—bells and thundering of encroaching *charm*. The birds as charm of sound's astonished sense fluttering "all about me; gently" an onset as extinct however never more vivid than in Pokagan's description—made vivid—alive its vividness upon a wall onto the screen and on its "live performance" which is less

pivot spun
("the curves together")
irises*

---

*headlights, sights, "a steady white light"

how you "carefully concealed them under my blanket." Why and what is the blanket? Simply the silence that makes sound possible only as an outline in its furls. When the blanket is drawn back, cloud bursts, sound explodes silent as a flock of birds. Eigner's words are present, passing "like a cloud through the branches of the high trees"—the driving "headlong into / the mist"—it is this blanketing action where a "plane lengthens through fog / or cloud bends away / the curves together." The word in Eigner's "room" holds that the largest or smallest action may have immense MASS though it's not a mass dependent on size or bulk. Instead, it is a mass which takes form from its immediate position in a spectrum of activity where pages are ON the page, where places are, or objects stand in relation, inside or outside a plane. These words ARE whether circling, plunging, or lingering—and are always dependent on relation. Indeed, where IS the bird when it rains? Just as—what is a sound without a wall, window, or objects for its reflection? Much as the flight of extinct—literally soundless—pigeons sounds through the recollected voice of Pokagan. Eigner sounds; the walls resound. It is sounding with mass and here alights. . ."a bird / depending on the weather"

Credits: Charles Bernstein's "The Only World We've Got" and Ron Silliman's "Re: Eigner", posted to the Poetics electronic discussion list on February 5th and 7th, 1996, respectively.

KENRO IZU

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS FROM "LIGHT OVER ANCIENT ANGKOR"

COMMENTARY

César Paternosto, *The Stone and The Thread. Andean Roots of Abstract Art.* Translated By Esther Allen. (University Of Texas Press, 1996)

> The lines of the wall played with the sun rays; the stones had neither angles nor straight lines; each one was like a beast responding to the light. . .
>
> The wall was stationary, but all its lines were seething and its surface was as changeable as that of the flooding summer rivers which have similar crests. . .
>
> —José Maria Arguedas,
> *Los ríos profundos*

In Arguedas's great novel of the Andes, the Inca walls that still tether Cuzco, the sacred capital, the *omphalos*, to the belly of *Pacha Mama*, Mother Earth, are boiling, bloody, terrifying. The impossibly perfect fit of the polygonal stones, and the tactile sensuality and shadow play of their faceted surfaces, have survived the violation of conquest, and the fiendish efforts of the Spanish to deface, raze, chisel and rebuild the city in their own image (or at least that of the villages of the Extremadura they had left behind—Trujillo, Caceres—where the castles and churches of the newly ascendant Catholic Kings rose on Moorish ruins.) Truncated and silenced, they define a moment of rupture and cataclysm; stony remains of a manifestly constructor/ constructivist society.

As César Paternosto reminds us in *The Stone and The Thread*, our connection to the cultural matrix that gave meaning and form to ancient Andean art—the ceremonial textiles, painted ceramics, architecture and monumental sculpture—is irrevocably sundered. To engage these enigmatic and self-contained works of art, therefore—to hear the stones talking as Arguedas's narrator does—is to realize that "every inch of visual evidence acquires significative intensity as part of a single metaphorical system." This is the underlying premise of Paternosto's brilliant study of the architectonic sculpture of the Incas and the significance of these abstract, monumental forms as an anticipation of—and indeed a source for—modern geometric abstraction. It is also where he begins to diverge from the traditional keepers and translators of ancient cultures. For, as he incisively observes, few archaeologists, anthropologists, and art historians, perennially in search of the iconographic reference, have recognized the salience and inherent legibility of non-figurative and geometric pattern languages in traditions not their own.

Dismissing geometric design as "decoration," thus sapping it of key cultural and symbolic value, is only one of a set of nested hierarchies which, in Paternosto's view, greatly impoverish and slant the interpretative picture of archaic, tribal or non-western art. This bias rounds out a series of dichotomies that gyrate around such distinctions as "pure" and "applied" art (a post-Renaissance construct untenable outside the west); art and craft (the latter usually describing the textiles, basketry and ceramics made by women); art and artifact ("the shadow of the tool") even that hoary chestnut, style and content. It is no surprise that ancient Amerindian art falls on the rain shadow side of this discourse, a corollary of European perception of Native American culture as resolutely, radically, *other*.

As a result of this hierarchical prism, Pre-Columbian art has been uneasily sequestered, either in specialist institutions (under the "Primitive" or "Tribal" umbrella) or, in a step up from the curiosity cabinet, anthropology and natural history museums. Paternosto decries its marginalization from the artistic mainstream, recalling Octavio Paz's observation in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* that "The only really original creations of America are the pre-Columbian creations. . .original because the *origin* was in them." His own conviction that indigenous art traditions represent the truly common, if largely unacknowledged, "cultural heritage of all peoples of the Americas" is clarified by his assessment of the work of Joaquin Torres Garcia, Josef and Annie Albers, Barnett Newman, and Adolph Gottlieb. These artists, like many others along the "North-South axis," plumbed Meso-American, Andean and Northwest Coast sources to assimilate the ancestral

geometric archetype, yet until recently, this influence on the development of American abstraction has been overlooked.

Falling somewhere between sculpture and architecture, ritual and political space, the sculptural masonry and geometric reliefs of the palaces, temples, and ceremonial complexes of *Tawantisuyo*, the last Andean empire, have so far eluded real definition. Paternosto suggests several ways out of the critical dead end which, at best, affords only tentative recognition of the semantic coherence of a visual syntax of geometric planes and cuboid forms, those "innumerable and useless stairways or facetings that modify entire geological formations." He proposes that this work be read simply as art, although not in any purely formalist sense. For while formalism has fostered a latter-day appreciation of the stark minimalism of these predominantly aniconic rock sculptures and monoliths, and their stunning affinity with a powerfully charged landscape of vertiginous heights and sculpted valleys, it equivocates before their ultimately sacro-religious nature.

Instead, Paternosto seeks to frame Inca art in its own terms, where the aesthetic component is essentially "commensurate with symbolic intensity." And by delving into the semantic truth of the term *ornament*, he restores its original meaning as an aspect of the Greek kosmos, signifying "the intuition of a cosmic order: equilibrium, proportion, rhythm, symmetrical recurrences," to recall how the aesthetic and the metaphysical cleave together as aspects of the whole, not only in non-western traditions, but at the very core of European culture. His survey of Kenko, Ollantaytambo, Saywite, Machu Picchu and other sites within the sacred ambiance of Cuzco and the Urubamba Valley is the first to combine a meticulous analysis of their formal qualities with a reading of their cosmological, mythological, ritual and semantic meaning. In effect, he shows how the Inca translated these principles into works of stone and consecrated space.

The Incas were perhaps the greatest synthesizers of the Andean world. Their symbolic order and technologies reiterated fundamental Andean concepts and developments; and like preceding civilizations, their ethos reflected a society where nature and culture were one. Indeed their most radical innovation may well have been their mastery of stone and the virtuosity of their building techniques, which culminated during the brief, but remarkably intensive, period of construction initiated by the ninth dynastic ruler, Pachakuti, a century before Spanish conquest. Paternosto's summation of formative artistic periods makes it clear that geometric abstraction emerged very early in the Andes as the most powerful means of "distilling and intensifying symbolic meaning" of archetypal themes and figures (having evolved, most likely, within the "textile grid" of warp and weft).

Inca sculptural stonework, however, represents a startling shift from the emphasis on cult images, and the established lithic tradition of bas-reliefs, planar iconography and volumetric figures. It seems, Paternosto says, "to represent only itself," a kind of "stoniness in *abstracto.*" Moreover, stone, being "a transcendent material, significant in and of itself, heavy with symbolic potential," was a numinous medium, or in indigenous terms, *wak'a*. Paternosto's meditation on "stoniness" in all its nuances is one of the real pleasures of this book. And one comes away with a real understanding that within the Andean compass these works were neither opaque nor minimalist; they were the ineffable expressed in pure form, radiant with the divine.

This heightened awareness of the potency of stone, observes Paternosto, contrasts with our sense of the neutrality, even the sterility, of the materials of western art. But it is found also in Japan and China, so it is perhaps not surprising to hear it resound in the voice of the Japanese-American sculptor, Isamu Noguchi: "I love the use of stone, because it is the most flexible and meaning-impregnated material. The whole world is made of stone. It is our fundament. . .Stone is the direct link to the heart of the matter—a molecular link. When I tap it, I get an echo of that which we are. Then, the whole universe has resonance." Despite its striking conceptual and visual parallels with the Inca expression, however, Noguchi's sculpture, as Paternosto notes, evolved directly out of his own engagement with, and working of, stone. It eloquently affirms the author's contention that Inca art prefigures a 20th century aesthetic.

Although figurative carvings do exist (especially in the most archaic sites) Paternosto proposes that the Incas' idiosyncratic elaboration of abstract forms may well be most faithful to their concept of *wak'a*. This seems especially true of those places in the landscape that were believed to be imbued with an animating energy or spirit. These points, like those of Aboriginal Songlines, could also demarcate significant ancestral and mythical events or figures. Inca *wak'a*, embodied in man-made shrines and natural features like springs, hills or boulders, were aligned on calendrical and ritual lines called *ceqe*, that radiated from the Sun Temple in Cuzco. These metaphorical threads, the worship of the living rock and of the *apu* (Arguedas's "lord-mountains, the ancestor-peaks"), the mythic origins in caves, rocks, rivers, and trees, the petrified deities, oracles and warriors comprised vital aspects of the Inca cosmovision. Paternosto draws this entire stony universe, and the primordial perception of a landscape itself as sacred and alive (what Gary Snyder calls "the whole mountains-and rivers mandala universe") into an exquisite definition of

precisely how working the stone ritualized it, and rendered it explicitly Inca.

The stepped form may be the quintessential manifestation of this symbolic system. The preeminent geometric symbol of stone and cloth, it exemplifies Paternosto's idea of "a unifying, all-inclusive art-as-symbol-making," but is also the most likely to be characterized as "decorative." The numerous flights of stairs, seats, tiers and platforms of ceremonial sites clearly had ritual significance—whether they could be walked on, or were purely symbolic. In Paternosto's interpretation, these monumental steps emerge as visual metaphors for ascent and descent, ritually linking the dualities which shaped the entire cosmic order: high and low; male and female; the world above and the chthonic underground; the mythic continuum and the plane of "here and now."

Alternate Steps, entrance to the "Royal Mausoleum," Machu Picchu, Peru. Photo by César Paternosto.

In a very real sense, the Inca thought, and built, geometrically. Even metaphysical space was chartered in terms of geometric parti-

tions and accentuated directions, creating what Paternosto calls a "virtual architecture" superimposed on the actual topography of *Tawantisuyo*. Paternosto shows decisively how this sacred geometry materializes in symbolic structures and thrones, which were oriented or sculpturally enhanced to emphasize the southeast-northwest and east-west axes. These were the significant routes of solstice rites and origin myths, and they served, above all, to incorporate the sites into the religious precinct of Cuzco, and the place "where the sun was born."

Paternosto is systematic in deciphering the symbolic potential of each location. Like the orientational principle and stepped cuts, certain features recur insistently: the organic synthesis of site and architecture, the dialectic of water and mountain, the asymmetry which reflects the natural form of the unhewn rock, the open air temple. However, three sites in particular reveal themselves as paradigms for the author. Kenko, with its puma monolith, water cult symbols and the chthonic mystery of its cave, is the sublime complement to the imposing "verticality" of Machu Picchu which hugs the summit of a *wak'a* mountain, and conceals the supreme vector of height—a stone condor—in its midst. Their earth/sky, water/rock, downward/upward, underworld/upperworld synergies are the essence of Inca cosmogony.

Ollantaytambo, on the other hand, built by a waning empire, yields the consummate expression of lithic sign-making. Paternosto describes the protuberances and rectangular reliefs that bud on the cyclopean facade of its unfinished Sun Temple and the walls of ceremonial terraces as "knots" or "sprouting stones." The image is richly evocative and intriguing; I suspect it may be the most controversial for Andeanists. For Paternosto, who deliberately invokes the textile and germinative allusion, these "lithic beans" are of the same order as the *qipu* (the knotted record), the geometric motifs of Inca tunics, and the complex Andean color code: they articulate a "visual-tactile" semiotics that efficiently substituted for writing. In Ollantaytambo, as in the Sun Temple in Cuzco, these sculptural markings appear to signal the sanctity of the place.

Our resolutely text-based culture has difficulty accepting the communicative intensity of graphic icons. Ethno-archaeologists are still unresolved as to the meaning of Andean symbols, and as to whether they indeed comprised a semantic system which corresponds to writing. Yet, as Gary Snyder points out, our own word "grammar" comes from *gramma techne* or "woven scratches." This linguistic root is consistent with Paternosto's premise that geometric signs, developing out of the abstracting process of basketry and

weaving, "are the first expressions of conventional ideas, the ancestors of writing." And that, as such, they encoded cultural information whose significance was *visibly* apparent.

In the Andes, moreover, it was *sensory*. The tactileness of the walls, the knots, the cloth, echoed the corporeality of the ritual sculptures, which were walked on, through, and around. All involved "tracing figures in space." "Made *by* hand," says Octavio Paz, "the . . .object is made *for* hands. Not only can we see it; we can also finger it, feel it." In Andean art meaning is revealed, not obscured by, the sign.

Paternosto's reading of Inca sculptural works concludes with a discussion of the implications of Pre-Columbian abstract, tectonic principles for the art of our century. Specific aesthetic correspondences suggested throughout the book (Noguchi, Brancusi) are developed in the concluding chapters, where he turns to those Latin American and American artists whose work forged a synthesis between modernism and pre-Hispanic sources. In the case of Albers and Torres Garcia (who represents for Paternosto "the *mestizo*-ization of the modernist model") this appraisal is both pertinent and imperative. His inclusion of Russian Constructivism here however, initially appears somewhat disconcerting. But it is redeemed by a lucid comparison of the formal affinities between Inca "sculptarchitecture" and the works of Malevich, Tatlin and others. Paternosto makes no claim, of course, for any cross-fertilization, but he finds remarkable affinities in each society's constructivist application of the materials at hand (the abundant stone, the industrial technology), and their shared conception of the "artist-constructor" and the functionality of form, which transcends their profound philosophical divergences.

César Paternosto is an Argentine painter and sculptor, living in New York. His vantage as a contemporary artist on the "inside" of geometric abstraction, whose own work is charged with the intellectual and aesthetic influences of both continents, lends a distinctive and original perspective to *The Stone and the Thread*. He has succeeded here in writing a work which not only confronts an art historical paradox, but in its rare insight into both ends of the ancient-modern, north-south dialogue is truly *American* in scope and significance. For once, the usual approach to Pre-Columbian art is inverted, and we come to our own artistic tradition having been first inducted into the ancient Andean world.

Paternosto's fascination and engagement with the constructivist art of the Pre-Columbian world becomes ours—especially if one has traveled in the Sacred Valley of the Inca, and has only intuited what Paz calls "the secret relation between [the] making and meaning" of its sacred architecture. With its complex synthesis of historical and

archaeological material, this book is demanding of the nonspecialist. But it will send the reader, as it did me, on a metaphorical journey into the Andean imagination, or directly to these mysterious and powerful sites. One could have no better reference than this study and the author's beautiful photographs.

—VANESSA DRAKE MORAGA

THE GRINGO CANON
***Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry*, edited by Stephen Tapscott. University of Texas Press, 1996.**

In the early 1980s, following the success of Paul Auster's anthology of 20th century French poetry, Random House decided to publish a series of companion volumes, beginning with German, Spanish, and Italian. I was hired to edit the Spanish anthology, which mutated into Spanish-American, and then to Latin American. After I'd spent a year researching the book, the editor in charge left, the publishers lost interest, and the whole series was canceled. Though I'd been paid nothing, it was a great relief.

Since then, I've been asked to edit similar books and have refused, for an anthology of 20th century Latin American poetry is a task requiring an editor with the temperament of Klaus Kinski as Aguirre. Besides the swamps and jungles of any massive anthology, there are four mountains to drag the book across:

First: *Where is Latin, America?* Traditionally, Latin American literature has meant works written in Spanish or Portuguese south of the Rio Grande and in the three Spanish-speaking islands of the Caribbean. But to remain within those boundaries is to ignore huge chunks of the population and a vast amount of work, beginning with the written or oral poems in dozens of indigenous languages. Then there is the poetry written in El Norte: should it be included, and if so, texts only in Spanish, or also in Spanglish or English? (Equally as blurred as, say, the Mexican/Chicano border is the one between

Chicanos and Anglos.) Then there are the three countries and three languages of Guiana, the orphans of South America. Finally, the exclusion of the Francophone from "Latin" America is a semantic error that ignores a tangle of correspondences: the Caribbean poets in Spanish and French and the Afro-Brazilians resemble each other more than their counterparts in their languages elsewhere; Saint-John Perse was a Guadeloupean with few ties to Caribbean literature, but enormously influential in Spanish America. Then there are the crossovers: the Peruvian who wrote in French, the Argentine in Italian, the several Nicaraguans who wrote in English, and those well-known Uruguayans, Lautréamont, LaForgue, and Supervielle. The more one considers it, Latin America expands from a geographical entity into a state of mind. To anthologize it requires an encyclopedia, not a book.

Second: *When is the 20th century?* The American and European literary 20th century more or less begins with the calendrical 20th century. By 1910, modernism is solidly in place (consciousness, contrary to the Anglocentric Woolf, has already changed) and, generally speaking, the leading lights from the end of the 19th century have either died, had a radical change of style, or are perceived as hopelessly old-fashioned.

The Latin American 20th century begins, politically, in 1898 with the Spanish-American War; ideologically, in 1900 with José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel;* but poetically, according to one's point of view, either much earlier or later. Their *modernismo* and *posmodernismo* (yes, postmodernism)—roughly equivalent to our symbolism and earliest modernism—runs approximately from José Martí in the 1880s to the death of Leopoldo Lugones in 1938. Events such as the Mexican Revolution led to no revolutions of the word. Their *vanguardia*—our modernism—begins with Vicente Huidobro around 1916 (the dates of Huidobro's early work are matters of dispute) and José Juan Tablada in 1919.

The editor's dilemma, then, is whose century to represent: theirs, much of which feels like the dregs of the 19th century to us (and would take up a significant portion of the book), or ours, which essentially cuts out the first two decades. A negotiation must be made between historical accuracy and lively reading.

Third: *Who's going to translate it?* Past the monuments and mountains, Latin American poetry is largely unexplored territory in English. At least half the poems in any decent anthology would need to be translated for the first time, and certain others would have to be redone. Thirty years ago, there was an array of poets of all persuasions who had translated at least some Spanish or Portuguese poems, and from whom one could commission new translations: Bishop, Blackburn,

Bly, Dorn, Dugan, Eshleman, Eberhart, Ferlinghetti, Robert Fitzgerald, Ginsberg, Hoffman, Hollander, Howard, Justice, Kinnell, Levertov, Phillip Levine, Merrill, Merwin, Margaret Randall, Raworth, Alastair Reid, Rexroth, Tim Reynolds, Rothenberg, Simpson, Strand, Tarn, Tomlinson, Valentine, Wilbur, James Wright.

Of this list, only four (Eshleman, Merwin, Reid, Rothenberg) have continued to do a few notable translations from the Spanish. More significant, I cannot think of a single person under 60, known as a poet, who has published a book-length translation from Latin America in the last 20 years. Only one or two others have published a few occasional translations. All of the work has been done by professors in the Spanish and Portuguese Departments, who, like their translator colleagues in the other languages, know a great deal about the original and nothing about the context into which the poem is being translated: contemporary American poetry. Who, then, is going to write most of the book?

Fourth: *Political realities.* An anthology of this kind is supposed to represent a few dozen countries, all of which have significant presences in the U.S., and all of which will be offended by the omissions and the slights to their national literatures. U.S. Hispanics will protest their exclusion or, if included, their necessarily relatively limited presence. Far more intractable is the question of women. The editor has to face a historical fact: for most of the century, there have been very few Latin American women poets of any interest whatsoever. Most of them have been sub-Millay. This has changed dramatically in the last twenty years, and it is likely that—as in the U.S.—the women poets will be the leading lights of the next century. But younger poets tend to be given little or no space in century-wide collections. How does an editor reconcile contemporary (U.S.) expectations and historical realities? Does one omit far more interesting male poets in the name of equal representation?

Stephen Tapscott's book, incredibly, is the first comprehensive anthology of Latin American poetry in English since the Dudley Fitts New Directions anthology of 1942. (The latter a product of the Roosevelt-Rockefeller "Good Neighbor" policy, intended to keep the Latin Americans allied with us during the war, and whose most enduring cultural product may well be Disney's "Tres Caballeros," with its hallucinogenic trip to Rio with Donald Duck and Carmen Miranda.) The book is the size and shape of a phone directory in a provincial city, with 80 poets and 400 bilingual pages, double-columned in small print.[1]

Tapscott's "Latin America" is the standard model: Spanish and Portuguese writers south of the U.S. border and in the islands. His

"Preface" mumbles the usual regrets about omitting the indigenous languages, and "Chicano and Chicana poems, migrant worker songs, and poems by Hispanic writers living in the U.S."—plus, for total coverage, "politically engaged Nicaraguan and Salvadorean women . . .poems in multisemic language combinations. . .poems that challenge the [you guessed it] hegemony of traditional Latin American gender roles." Nevertheless, the classical geographic and linguistic limitations are in place.

His 20th century begins in 1881, with Martí, with the result that the first quarter of the book is devoted to swans, absinthe, perfect roses, Grecian nymphs, Greek amphoras, and colorless dawns. As for the translations, it appears that not a single American poet was asked to provide new work. Instead, he has mustered a small battalion of what I assume are graduate students: people whose names are unknown to me as translators, poets, or critics. They are rarely semantically incorrect, but they haven't a clue about writing poetry. The cumulative effect of hundreds of poems with lines like "But the men of dawn recur/ in clamorous form" or "this diaphanous embrace/ is like an all-over burn/ from rank, pungent love" or "suspicion surrounds you like as escutcheon" or "monotonies of my retinas" is pure monotony of the retina and the lobes behind.

There are 18 women included (20%), mainly from earlier in the century. Most of them are there because they happened to be women. Shockingly, there are only two women born after 1940: the popular Afro-Cuban Nancy Morejón and Marjorie Agosín, a Chilean who teaches at Wellesley. (Tapscott teaches at M.I.T.) Here was the place where Tapscott could have found quite a few women to include, but that would have required some diversion from the beaten path.

This is a canonical anthology, in that it is based not on movements or genres or subjects, but on individuals, presumably the poets who will endure, presented in chronological birth order, and with samples from various phases of each poet's career. The only deviation from canonical thinking is some 1960s lefty nostalgia: the inclusion of two Chilean folk singers, Violeta Parra (translated by Joan Baez) and Victor Jara, who was murdered by Pinochet. They are accompanied by the only real surprise in the book: Che Guevara's unique poetical exertion, "Song to Fidel." (Mao and Ho Chi Minh were better revolutionaries than Che; now we know they were also better poets.) But the curious thing about Tapscott's anthology is that it represents the gringo canon of Latin America, not the Latin American one of itself. This is evident when one compares Tapscott with various Latin American anthologies.[2]

The gringo canon consists of the poets of great international reputation (Vallejo, Neruda, Borges, Paz, et al and some of the poets well-known in Latin America who happen to have been translated. The rest, as might be predicted, tend to be those who either lived for a time in the U.S. or had close ties with American poets or academics. Peru is typical: Besides Vallejo, only two Peruvians are known here at all, thanks to their associations with American poets in the 1960s: Carlos Germán Belli and Antonio Cisneros. In contrast, in the Latin American canon—where Belli is in, but Cisneros only rarely—there are at least six others: Martin Adán; two important surrealists, César Moro and Emilio Adolfo Westphalen; Javier Sologuren, Jorge Eduardo Eielson, and (a woman!) Blanca Varela. Almost needless to say, Belli and Cisneros are the only Peruvians born after Vallejo whom Tapscott includes. This is the case throughout the book. With the exception of a few Brazilians who seem to be Tapscott's passion, every poet in the book is already somewhat known here. There's not a single discovery to be made, and there should have been many. Conversely, a Latin American reader would, at least one-fourth of the time, be amazed by the selection, much like those Latin American anthologies of U.S. poetry—I'm looking at one now—that include Marya Zaturenska and Merrill Moore but leave out William Carlos Williams.

There are two further problems with the book. First, the scholarship—for a university press book edited by a university prof—is unbelievably shoddy. Each poet is introduced by a few paragraphs (except Neruda—Tapscott is a Neruda translator—who gets 2½ pages) that are vague in their generalities, haphazard and sometimes simply wrong in their particulars. The book includes a bibliography of "selected" titles in Spanish only—no listing of translations, which might be helpful for the presumed U.S. reader—and was apparently compiled by a freshman aide. It includes extremely rare and obscure publications while omitting available editions, confuses poetry and prose books, has no books from the last 10 or 20 or even 30 years for many of the living writers, and lists at least two books that do not exist.

Second, Tapscott has made the bizarre decision to devote his anthology almost exclusively to short lyric poems front each part of the poet's life, as though this were a 400-page Latin American issue of *American Poetry Review*, in smaller print and without the photos. (That major exception, again, is Neruda, who is allowed three sections from "The Heights of Macchu Picchu.") Moreover, he invariably tends toward the poet's most easily digestible work. (Even Vallejo: Though *Trilce* is called a "major text," nothing from it is included.) In the Paz section, for example, there are twelve poems (seven of them of a

dozen lines or less) from five decades. They're not bad poems, but only one of them ("Hymn among the ruins," which is always included in U.S. anthologies because it was translated, poorly, by William Carlos Williams) is ever discussed in the heaps of Paz criticism. In other words, they are not among the poems that make Paz Paz, that anyone considers crucial to an understanding of Paz, or might serve as a useful introduction to his work. This is replicated throughout, and the book as a whole becomes an expression of a generalized bland Latino lyric effusion, just slightly south of Writing School, not of individual poems and poets.

There's a need for a straight canonical anthology of Latin American poetry in English—this one isn't it—as well as messy, sprawling, idiosyncratic anthologies, as exemplified by the Rothenberg books. And there's a need for single-author collections: less than half of Tapscott's 80 poets, though somewhat known here, have had one book in English (including obscure publications and terrible translations): less than a quarter have had more than one book. (And there are the dozens of others, omitted by Tapscott, who are worth translating.) None of this will happen until the field is seized back from the Spanish & Portuguese Dept., and the poets start translating again. Whatever happened to community service?

***

In the margins of the margins, Latin American poetry is full of strange characters, none of whom would be found in an anthology like Tapscott's. I came across another last week, named Omar Cáceres. A Chilean, born in 1906, he worked as a violinist in an all-blind orchestra, of which he was the only sighted member. In 1933, hearing that a group of young poets were meeting in a café to put together an anthology of the new Chilean poetry, he walked in, pulled one of the poets aside, gave her a poem, and left. The group wrote him, asking for more work, and he agreed to meet on a busy street corner. He handed over a manuscript and kept walking. In 1934, his brother paid for the publication of a book of fifteen poems, called *Defense of the idol (Defensa del ídolo)*. The book, somehow, had an introduction by Vicente Huidobro, the only one he ever wrote for another poet, though it is unlikely the two met. (Could it be a forgery?) Cáceres, disturbed by the typographical errors in the book, burned all the copies he could find. Only two are known to survive. In 1943, he was murdered by assailants, and for reasons, unknown. All that remains of his work are those fifteen poems and a statement, "I, Old and New Words," that he wrote for the anthology. Nothing else was published

elsewhere.

Here is a draft of a translation of the first poem in the book, a hint of how truly weird these poems are, with their continual shifts of register, ironic bits of inflated language, mysterious references, unlikely word-choices, and sudden outbursts of confession:

Mansion of Foam

With my heart, beating you, oh limitless shadow,
grazing on the absolute brio of these everlasting-
[engravings;
fleeing his life, I think, he who leaves cleans the world,
and thus it is given to reflect its sweetly earthly image.

A village (Blue), laboriously flooded.
The hard season will come, balancing its countrysides.
Time fallen from the trees, whatever sky could be my sky.
The white road crosses its motionless storm.

Speechless voice that lives under my dreams,
my friend instructs me in the naked accent of her arms,
beside the balcony of disciplined, tumultuous light,
from where one is warned of still-undreamed misfortune.

Dressed again in distances, between man and
[meager-man
everything is wrecked "under the banner of his final
[adieu";
I gave up existing, I suddenly fell, abandoned by myself,
for a man loves only his own obscure life.

Idol unknown. What do I have to do to give it a kiss?
Legislator of urban, unfolded, rushing time,
I confess my crime against myself because I want to
[understand it,
and on the reefs of its rock alcohol I spread out my words.

Defensa del ídolo has recently been reprinted for the first time since its original publication by a small poetry press in Mexico, Ediciones El Tucán de Virginia (Sebastián del Piombo Núm, 65, C.P. 03910, Mexico City D.F.).

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

Notes

1. In the name of impeccable objectivity, I must make this disclosure: Tapscott, whom I don't know, evidently dislikes my work. I have translations of five very short poems in the book, but wherever there was an alternative to my version of a given poem, he used it. In his Villaurrutia selection, he quotes the introduction to my translation of *Nostalgia for Death*, identifying me as "Eliot Weinstein"—hi Norm! see you at the family reunion—but has had two grad students retranslate the poems.
2. The best I've seen, by the way, is the two-volume *Antología de la poesía hispano-americana moderna*, edited by a committee and published by Monte Avila in Caracas in 1993. Once one gets past its propensity for Venezuelans, the selections are ample and excellent. Its gaps are best filled in by Julio Ortega's *Antología de la poesía hispano- americana actual* (Siglo XXI).

RevistAtlántica de Poesía

Since the spring of 1991, one of the most elegant literary journals has been coming out regularly from Spain's southernmost city of Cádiz, first port of Spanish commerce after the conquest of the New World. Appropriately, each issue of *RevistAtlántica de Poesía*—twelve to date—is a real voyage of discovery for all readers of Spanish, offering new work from Iberian cultures on both sides of the Atlantic as well as other languages. Moreover, the middle of the book contains a large and invaluable section of *documentos*—archival material, correspondence, critical homages.

It was the purpose of the editors, the poets José Ramón Ripoll and Jesús Fernández Palacios, to extend local tradition to its most cosmopolitan reaches, honoring the unique vantage point of Cádiz in linking the wider world with the rest of Spain. The advisory board consists of prominent southern poets, most of whom edited important journals in previous decades—including Rafael Alberti, Carlos Edmundo de Ory, Pilar Paz, José Manuel Caballero Bonald. Remarkably, funding for the inaugural issue came from the city of Cádiz, and from the province of Cádiz for subsequent issues; the Spanish state phone company has also been a sponsor in the past few years.

RevistAtlántica de Poesía is impressive first for its size, about 7 x 12 inches, and its luxurious design, by architect Julio Malo de Molina, employing a wealth of old and contemporary illustrations—maps, engravings, photos—on white laid paper with a sewn binding. More importantly, the quality of the writing throughout the roughly 200 pages matches the high expectations created by the journal's appearance. The editors are generous, with no stylistic axe to grind: each poet is represented by a critical introduction and a substantial sample of work. About a third of each issue is given over to non-Iberian languages, and all work not originally in Spanish is presented bilingually.

Among the poets from Spain published in *RevistAtlántica*, older writers—Aurora de Albornoz, José Agustín Goytisolo, Vicente Núñez—are clearly in the minority beside writers in their fifties or quite younger: José Luis Giménez-Frontín, Clara Janés, Julio Vélez, Rafael-José Díaz (from the Canary Islands), Catalan poets like Joan Margarit and Jaume Pont, Galicians such as Xavier Rodríguez Baixeiros and Ramiro Fonte. The Latin Americans seem especially abundant, and to the North American reader some might even be a bit familiar: Juan Liscano, Alvaro Mútis, Olga Orozco, Juan Gelman, Antonio Cisneros, Gonzalo Rojas, Alberto Blanco, José Kozer, María Negroni, to name a few.

It is always curious and unpredictable to see which foreign poets end up in translation, and not necessarily read or understood as they are domestically. A glimpse at just the writers from the United States may give an indication of the multiple perspective of the journal. These include W C Williams, Stevens, Duncan, Ginsberg, Ashbery, Eshleman, as well as Djuna Barnes, Roethke, Delmore Schwartz, Merwin, Simic, Richard Kenney. Besides English, the other most translated language is French (followed by Portuguese, Italian, Arabic), and the results can be equally surprising, offering a new sense of who there is to read. In *RevistAtlántica* #8, for instance, the *documentos* section comprises a selection of twelve living French poets: only Guillevic and Yves Bonnefoy have appeared much in English.

Finally, the *documentos* deserve particular mention. Of the unpublished correspondence, different issues have featured: Manuel de Falla and Rafael Alberti (#1/2), Alejandra Pizarnik (#4), Pavese, Ungaretti and Pasolini (all to Sanguineti), Juan Larrea (#5), Vicente Aleixandre (#6). Special tributes have celebrated the 90th birthday of Spanish/Cuban poet Eugenio Florit (#7), Peruvian painter/poet Jorge Eduardo Eielson (#9), René Char (#10), and Manuel de Falla (#11).

RevistAtlántica de Poesía can be found in some university libraries in the U.S. as well as the Instituto Cervantes in New York. Subscriptions may be sent in dollars (indicating the money is for *RevistAtlántica*) made out to: Servicio de Publicaciones, Diputación Provincial, Plaza de España s/n, 11006 Cádiz, Spain. Issues #1 to #4 are out of print, #5 to #10 cost $20 per issue, and from #11 each issue is $12.50.

—JASON WEISS

"Riddle Iota Sublime": Ronald Johnson's *ARK**

ARK is published by Living Batch in Albuquerque, available through University of New Mexico Press for $25.

In another world in which books would solicit their own readers in personal ads, we might find something like this: "a microparliament of minute particulars seeks alliance with discerning biomass, to synchronize liturgical summations on randonées, finger the plenitude, heave mutual sublunary satisfactions into orbit." Ronald Johnson's unabashedly joyous poetry, which often seems less written than pieced together with the resources of a Renaissance Wunderkammer (cabinet of wonders), has been out of circulation for so long now that to merely know of it is to be an aficionado. Unlikely as it seems, two major books were published by Norton in the 1960s, *The Valley of the Many-Colored Grasses* and *Book of the Green Man*, which are being prepared for reprint in a larger retrospective collection. Meanwhile, the long poem *ARK* is at hand, its puzzling glories at last available in a Living Batch edition. "Long poem," however, is an inept and compromised term with which to refer to this book, the strength of which is that it is an assembly kit, a cabinet of curiosities in its own right. Regardless of terminology, *ARK*'s publication is a major event, a salience unique in the world of American poetry.

ARK labors inwardly and outwardly. That is to say, it is at times a stable object, a text, which can be read as such; open to interpretive latitude of course, but objectively defined in its words on the page. There is also an interior labor not so easily scrutinized: "shrouded in accuracy" (#77) in its effort to "riddle iota sublime" (#76). Johnson quotes an uncredited author's hope "that the inwardes of my head / be like the sun" (#35). The condition of beatitude is not necessarily evident to, or easily grasped by, others. Likewise, *ARK* wavers between the objective status of language event and the subjective fertility of vision. It is the reader's share to trace the reciprocal involutions: "as lined snake slide side to side / neverrest / pulse's smelter, smith, and alchemist" (#39). "Everywhere you glance webs glisten to inner spider" (#29). If at times this leads the author to "compose sonorities / past sense / as compass new" (#54), the promise of the poem is that, like the Facteur Cheval's wheelbarrow of tools preserved in its own captioned sanctuary in his Palais Ideal, the compass, quadrant, and other measures are somewhere on site.

The opening section of thirty-three "Beams" is indeed such a tool chest, and its prose summations of the organs of seeing and hearing (#4, #7) seem specifically designed to provoke reflection on the fragile yet robust resources with which the reader enters the maze, and the organism enters a world. Combining scientific data and observational felicity, *ARK*'s proprioceptive metaphysics proposes an intimate conductivity between body and galaxy, as though Gala's milk were immediate incessant nourishment: "The Mind & Eye, the solar system, galaxy / are spirals coiled from periphery" (#11). And, in acknowledgment of proportional complexity: "the inner regions, tangled along polarized / garland, turn faster than the outer" (#3).

plus ringed by minus
quickened in interlocking octaves
into a daffodil
(intricately fluted)
atop a hill
upon an ochre, blue, and white swirled world below
How to inquire
within the fire?
What thinnest spoke-infolded core
of farthest star
invoke, in what we are?

(#11)

In a reprise near the end of the book: "Unfolding worlds before us, / atom become unto flesh / branched pitchfork" (#91).

Johnson's minimalist inclinations participate, with the prairie resource of the big sky, in a maximus poetics. There is a point of conversion that is instructive: tiny pin pricks of starry light in the nocturnal sky are nothing less than worlds. *ARK* may qualify as a Scipio's Dream for the late twentieth century, not only in its adherence to this reciprocal proportionality between large and small, world and grain, but also in its alchemical insistence that to go up is to go down, to go in is to go out. A hurtled panoply, like earth, drawn to Whitman's bulking orb ("weighing billions of tons"), but intimate with Dickinson's dangling basket of worlds cradled in bunches.[1] It is planetary—acutely so. Its star chart is at once animate lettrism and proprioceptive distillation.

Aldebaran, Orion far, or Pleiades

shall we gather at the River Inner,
pouring from a cup
four corners of the earth

(#72)

Here, where "each cell array galactic vertebrae" (#73)—as in those cunning transparencies and shifts of scale in Pavel Tchetlichev's paintings—there are "worlds in a drop of water, / Eden hid an eyeblink" (#92). The evident credo (one might imagine it in Latin, unfurled on an heraldic banner): "I tread the stars / in perilous anatomy" (#96). The method is the means, and the physician is everywhere preoccupied with curing himself:

Linkings, inklings,
around the stem & branchings of the nervetree—
shudder and shutterings, sensings.

SENSE *sings.*
"A world where chaos and cosmos are interlaced and
superimposed,
where anything may happen,
but nothing happens twice"

—perceive! perceive! Reality is 'make' believe.

(that everything happens at once is the form of The
Dance)

:THAT EAR IS FIRMAMENT TO CRICKET
THUMBPRINT FLOOR TO GALAXY:

I am alive as long as there is fire in my head

and sing for my supper, out of the mouth of the dead.
(#8)

ARK's semiotic rudder is wiggled by "some wilder parley from atom to star" (#39), seeking harbor in the curriculum of signals linking star to chromosome ("huge imaginings to whet the minuscule" [#29]). The convergence of prosodical richness with stellar thematizing is auspiciously convened in Hart Crane;[2] I think particularly of "Cape Hatteras" and the passage beginning "The nasal whine of power whips a new universe. . . / Where spouting pillars spoor the evening sky"; where

> Power's script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined—
> Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred
> Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars.

Such Swinburnian coruscations of prosody are not characteristic of *ARK*'s "intricate vernacular // wrestling the abstract" (#92), but the vision is comparably elastic.

At the juncture of abstract and concrete, in a realm of constant motion and energy transformation, it's useful to remember that "Ratio is all" (#25):

. . .great gold sunflowerhead of photons
sum of sun and moon
in array the flicker of diamond-lattice pattern
against a complex dappled back-
ground also moving.

Ratio is all.

The task of the poem—to which is owed its considerable difficulty—is to sustain an equation ("here, / everywhirr" [#36]) without belaboring the obvious. The result is a kind of alchemical filibuster, in which the apparent simplicity of its mantra-like dicta (as above, so below) is

laboriously magnified and refracted in a kaleidoscopic fury of the Opus Magnum.

cellophane in cellophane of Salamander slid within a
flame

(to pin to the shimmer a name)

Beauty is easy.
It is the Beast that is the secret.

(#14)

The atomic nucleus of matter is often sought here as an inmost wizardry of the word as such. Like the swapping of carbon and hydrogen atoms in terrestrial forms, *ARK* seeks its resolutions in an artistry of minute transpositions:

Daedal, the seamless seen—the screen of seem:
Lave & Weave
Wave & Leave

(#9)

The Murmurer herself overspills space.
New hushes through the polyhedral push and crux.

In exquisite garble
. . .
particulars evolve.

no where
now here
no where
now here

(#29)

An even more recessed intricacy of homophones occasionally comes to light as deft but oblique accreditation of resources: Priapus and Mozart slip along just under the surface in "pry up us" (#43) and "mote's art" (#72), and the guiding spirits of Linnaeus and Noah Webster are carnivally masked in "Line eye us. / Web stir us" (#8). Names are submersibles here; but to what end, and how many? Whatever the answer may be, such glimpses provoke a readerly paranoia: how much of my incomprehension needs the enlightening

resolution to a focal plane that can render such clues legible, or even make them apparent in the first place? What do I need to know to read this text which the text isn't telling me, or is so obliquely told as to elude grasp? Beginning with Mallarmé, these might be considered the defining questions of modern poetry. But they also propose, as Paul Valéry discerned, the inauguration of new literary constellations. Regarding the new world of "Un coup de dés," Valéry reflected of the poet "*He has undertaken finally to raise a printed page to the power of the midnight sky.*"

Imagine this: letters meet and consort inside a sonnet by Shakespeare. Joining hands, they spin a rotation in terza rima in a canto of Dante. Their ecstasy clings to them like a faint odor of herbs until it eventually dissipates as they are dispersed through the airless conduits of newspapers, billboards, minutes of meetings. The savor is gone, so a new poetic initiation is called for. Like the distant memories aroused by Proust's madeleine, the letters in a poetic environment sense ancestral precedent and begin summoning to one another in lettristic animation. This is where *ARK* begins, in this subaudible hum of preternatural alliance, the erotic complicity of which every word is composed and is the embellishment. It is a prospect most majestically realized in *Finnegans Wake*, when Joyce heaved English (and scores of other tongues) back into the cauldron of material constellation. Since then, a few others have sought out this filigree of minute joyance, taking care to awaken the syllables one by one and tingle each consonant to sentience with a stroke of cunning fidelity. Fidele d'amour: a heretic ardor of the blazoned world of words. A new congregation named in this deliberation of consonants, this ostentation of vowels and collaboration of diphthongs (as one says of multiples of animals, as convened in #83, "a pedelyng of ducks, a skein of / geese, muster of / peacocks, bevy of quails").

ARK's is a world of microscopic dalliance. As in the old practice of the *sortes virgilianae*: confident that the flexing of a single copy text might suffice for the world to renew itself just by scrambling the letters, feeling itself anew in the folds and unfoldings, the interpenetrations, of "the seim anew" (Joyce), everything is appointed ambassador of ecstasy. As if a poet might pen vectors of DNA, pondering the elegant simplicity of transpositions in "form from form from form from form" (#5), or the synaptic firing of the Purkinje cells in "f lux f lux f lux f lux" (#13), or the dangling mobile of geometric forms in "Beam 29," portents of unsupposed reanimation from lettristic alloys:

rec
tangle
ova
l
sp
here

squ
are

In "Beam 24" a six-line block of larger type repeats in adamant concreteness "earthearthearth"—which is sufficient to arrest the gaze, draw it down into the folds and recesses of "earth" where "the art" and "hearth" jostle for recognition. Rereading *ARK* in autumn in Provence, I reflected that the industry of cicadas, crickets, grasshoppers constitute the flying needles of a diagram by which the living earth is composed, denizens of a textual anatomy made lucent by *ARK*'s beams and spires and arches.

"'GO INTO THE WORDS TO EXPAND THEM' The Voices said" in received instruction (#28). The lineage behind this provocation is extensive,[3] and includes not only an array of modern poets (Marinetti, Kruchenykh, Khlebnikov, Chicerin, Bonset, Ball, Hausmann, Huidobro, Schwitters, Desnos, Nichol, to cite a few) but a veritable heterodoxy of lettristic beguilement, from the familiar (Rabelais and Swift) to the arcane (Juan Caramuel and Francis Lodwick), encompassing along the way gematria, kabbalah, speculative linguistics, and more. These are not the accredited resources of *ARK*—Johnson operates within a more conventional lineage of modernist American poetics—but they do propose a web of filiations that are more useful than one anemically disposed to speak in terms of "post-modern" or other literary/cultural disorders. Ostensibly a homespun work of Americana—like Ives' music, Simon Rodia's Watts Towers, or James Hampton's "Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly"[4]—*ARK* is a book bristling with affinities for Europe. The doors of the Baptistery in Florence offer reciprocal schemes of miniaturization, and of course the Facteur Cheval's Palais Ideal in Hauterives is credited as a major resource and guide. Cheval, Hampton, and Rodia compose a triumvirate of amateur audacity which is misleading with respect to *ARK*, which in its idiosyncrasy shares the bricolage aptitude, but which in its fastidious prosody rivals nothing less than the most artful precedent of Pound and Zukofsky (particularly "A" 22-23). If it aspires to the condition of music—so the analogy with Palais Ideal suggests—

the words are still a kind of cement, obdurate and intractable, "intimate into the inanimate" (#50).

The riprap sensibility is truly a builder's prerogative, and if at times the semantic dimension seems opaque, there is always the reassuring tactility of a solid wall of words. There are long stretches where the words can be as intelligibly read in reverse order (which seems congruent, after all, with Johnson's insistent center-alignment of the lines on the page); in fact, as the poet notes, #47 does indeed incorporate phrases in reverse from Henry James. Such practices, sometimes fiendishly coy and recessed, do end up emphasizing the structural elasticity of *ARK*, which consistently (almost superstitiously) spurns the servility of the poem-as-semantic-trowel. There is a certain kind of work, not ever predominant but found in every art, which is not constructed to human proportions, not given to the scale of human perception. So each such work incarnates its own focal plane and tactics of attention. "If my confreres wanted to write a work with all history in its maw," Johnson says, "I wished, from the beginning, to start all over again, attempting to know nothing but a will to create, and matter at hand." While it does not "include history"—as Pound said of his *Cantos*—*ARK* does "include" biology, astronomy, crystallography, and (predominantly) *words*, an obvious scale, but not idly assumed. Rather, language in *ARK* is attained in a memorable combination of exactitude and hunch (I think of Robert Musil's phrase "precision and soul"). Discovered and extracted. Despite the divergence over the question of history, no poet after Pound (except Zukofsky, Johnson's acknowledged mentor) has taken the credo "Dichtung=condensare" more to heart, and hand, than Ronald Johnson (and I recall Robert Kelly's remark many years ago that if you turn away from the clock Creeley's "The Door" is an epic). His "style" forces agonies of compaction on the perceptual scale of the (bewildered) reader. The pace is distinct; the images are as specific and strange as those seen through a scanning electron microscope: revelations of a dense, alert, confounding world in minutiae of expression that require considerable unfolding, like the exquisite and exemplary Beam 10, a mere two lines—

daimon diamond Monad I
Adam Kadmon in the sky

—which, like Olson's "veda edda upanishad than", is a veritable *Summa* of the man's poetic Borealis.

ARK aspires to a semantic particularity which is less like English than Chinese (where monosyllables promote unencumbered musical-

ity as much as do the accentual pitches—English "musicality" being normally confined to rhythmic approximation of sonorities otherwise resistant to its varied amalgamation of tongues). Sometimes the condensation defies explication (#79):

Kindling anew line lifted of sea,
perfect in messenger
table spread ember hid vow

—the last line in particular reading like a crib from which to work up a translation of Chinese ideograms[5]—; but more often the concision encompasses a world of observation in a Netsuke apparition (#60):

exploded sod
plowed to
cornstalk plume

—or consider the exactitude of observation in "pool all a mareshiver / of lights" (#34). The enviable imagism of such moments, dispersed amidst lines resistant to any corresponding readiness of recognition, suggests not that the "images" are intermittent but that the scale of observation fluctuates, following contours of its own exactitude. To pursue a vision of "life itself / telescoped out of the recesses of essence" (#26) it is essential that the telescopy actually *include* the recesses, and its "bliss abut abyss" (#43).

ARK is a poem that dilates with the determination to write paradise—its "Eden, glossolalia of light" (#14) a "Maelstrom itself prolonged // riddled into gospel" (#95). The adamant ecstasies of *ARK* forego the "trapeze of paraphrase" (#34), and one advances through the poem in a disconcerting mixture of scrupulousness and haze, as Johnson foregoes the dogmatic rubble of late Pound (in which the glimmers are breathtaking for that reason), as well as the piety of Dante (whose religiosity is doctrinally explicit if embellished by surreptitious soundings of dissident arcana). The words are impeccably balanced, selected it seems with a goldsmith's exactitude, but often fail to converge on a recognizable focal plain. Best at this point to remind yourself of the poet's declaration, "Literally an architecture, *ARK* is fitted together with shards of language, in a kind of cement of music."

ARK's logological dimension is deceptive; words here are as grit and spackle, mosaic particle. ARK is artifact, not argument. It consistently resists the closures of syntax—resists, that is, the binge and purge cycle of proposition and conclusion—which should be suffi-

cient warning to the reader not to persist in reading for adage or message.[6] Johnson may aspire to be "Exact as Ezekiel" (#35), but as the Biblical reference implies, such exactitude eludes lazy habits of expectation—habits which *ARK*'s "Laocoön of cocoon" (#14) openly defies. In the author's note, it is not merely an incidental aside that compels his confession of deriving from "stout pioneer stock, grandson of prairie settlers come to Kansas in a covered wagon, I grew up in no concert with ideas whatsoever. . ." Nor are there ideas here. There are, instead, strata of pertinence, ineluctable contours of enigma and gratification in equal measure, in a poem content to invest its semantics in weight and mass, gravity and velocity.

But how achieve, in words, a wordless summation? The indications given in "The Foundations" favor diversity of means. In this opening—first published in 1981 in an impeccable edition by North Point—the thirty-three sections are called Beams, an architectural reference substantiating the Spires of the second part and the Arches of the third. Until the present edition I had savored the ambiguity of beams as cross-timbers and as beams of light—an ambiguity that heightened my pleasure in the sensory manifold with which Beams 1-33 substantiated "foundation." Some eight of these initial beams are predominantly prose, giving a welcome antithetical sensibility to the architectonic cross-weave; there are visual illustrations (a Priapus in #16, a sequence illustrating cell division in #25, and a full handprint, serving as the entire text of #18); and the overall design makes handsome use of variable spacing, proportionate leading and kerning, bold caps and judicious variation of point size. *Ark*, *The Foundations* was one of the most thoughtfully and beautifully prepared typographic editions of poetry since Mallarmé's "Coup de Dés"—and, like that predecessor, conceived as such, not merely embellished in production. The fastidious design appears to have been an intention specific to the first book, however. "The Spires" (#34-66) incorporate little typographic variation, and "The Ramparts" (#67-99) none at all (although, in this case, the conservative design accentuates the consistency of compositional unit: each Arch—which is what the Ramparts are individually called—consists of eighteen three-lined stanzas). The unity (one might at times be tempted to say monotony) of "The Ramparts" is conspicuously antithetical to the buoyant inventiveness and variety of "The Foundations," and thus enhances the sense of overall design. The discrepancy, for me, lies with the middle "Spires," which fails to mediate between such explicit contraries, meandering instead along their own winsome way, less concerned about structural integrity and more, I fear, like a collection of bagatelles. It is a damaging charge, of course, to say of a book insistent on

its architectural plan that it increasingly voids its own foundations, and ends up offering words and more words in place of the word-transforming visual and concrete cornucopia of "The Foundations." So I retract the charge, mindful of my own culpability. Not that I know how to proceed to rectify the bewilderment I repeatedly feel in attempting to read some of those Spires and Arches that fail to gratify or inform my sense of overall design (which is not at all to deny the bewitchment of prosody and vision attending my reading of them). But the author's studious preparation of the text, and instructively concise note at the end of the book, suggest that these limits of insight and orientation are mine not his. *ARK*'s apparent discrepancy of end and means is one which this reader hopes someday to be cured.

Meanwhile, the poem surveys my quibbles with an instructive haughtiness and undeniable grandeur, a reminder (notwithstanding Johnson's reversal in Beam 14, cited above) of Beardsley's dictum and Pound's solace, "Beauty is difficult." In light of the astonishing lucidity of condensation everywhere evident in *ARK*, I should have the grace to let the poet have the last word; and how not assent to the thrill with which *ARK*'s "pinwheel unzip the deeps" (#72)? "From the ape at my shoulder blade I see angels. Our embryo dreamt the fishes' sleep, became a ripple, leapfrogged itself, and later a mammal: perception is a slingshot drawn back to first plasm" (#12).

—JED RASULA

Notes

1 "For Earths, grow thick as / Berries, in my native town," Dickinson writes. "My Basket holds—just—Firmaments—/ Those—dangle easy—on my arm, / But smaller bundles—Cram" (#352). In "Democratic Vistas" Whitman argues the need for "a new Literature, perhaps a new Metaphysics, certainly a new Poetry," indicating that he does not mean "the smooth walks, trimmed hedges, posys and nightingales of the English poets, but the whole orb, with its geological history, the cosmos, carrying fire and snow, that rolls through the illimitable areas, light as a feather, though weighing billions of tons."

2 In addition to Johnson, I think of the obvious example and acknowledgment of Clayton Eshleman, but also of Jackson Mac Low, who usefully chastened me long ago at my professed disdain for—and worse, avowed ignorance of—the author of "The Bridge."

3 A considerable portfolio will shortly be available in Jed Rasula and Steve McCaffery, eds., *Imagining Language* (MIT Press, 1997).

4 Ives, Rodia, and Hampton are Johnson's references. One could also cite Tyree Guyton's "Heidelberg Project" in Detroit, on which see Clayton Eshleman's "Guyton Place" in *Under World Arrest*, as well as the "Concrete Garden of Eden" in Salina, Kansas—to mention one closer to the poet's home. There is now a tribe of poets who register in the evidence of their personal enigmas a place called Kansas: simply to cite Ken Irby, Michael McClure, Ronald Johnson, and Ed Sanders is to render "Kansas" a realm of incommensurable enchantments; but quite apart

from this. Johnson somehow makes Kansas appear inconceivable, which is to say miraculous. "Kansas Aweigh" (#65)!

5 Johnson's poems are ideograms without the perspectively moral fetishism of Pound, but also without the substantiating guidance of mythic leitmotif. *ARK* rehearses a certain Orphism, but only as a pastel grace-note reinforcing a posture of descent.

6 *ARK* could be taken as a thoroughly unapologetic example of language poetry. That would be a mistake, but it would highlight the divergent provocations of Zukofsky. Still, *ARK* may be a work that makes the most impacted zones of language poetry seem paragons of plain statement.

Introduction to Gary Snyder's reading from *Mountains And Rivers Without End* at the University of Michigan, Nov. 16, 1996.

Since 1956, when he read his poems about the Native American trickster Coyote at a reading in San Francisco during which Allen Ginsberg read Part One of *Howl*, Gary Snyder has been developing a selfless, sensual, landscape-attuned poetry of change and becoming, that in the light of our current awareness of planetary potential and doom, has become a clearing in American consciousness. It presents itself as ruggedly and thoroughly as monumental Chinese Sung Dynasty landscape painting in a context of interconnectedness involving lore, research, meditation, and a range of living and mythical companions. In "the cold companionable streams" of Snyder's poetry, there is a deep faith in the capacity of the earth to injure and to restore.

Mountains And Rivers Without End is Snyder's 16th book, 138 pages of text, 39 poems in 4 sections or movements.

This work was struck, some 40 years ago, off a Sung Dynasty scroll painting. Snyder's opening poem, the key to the book, describes the painting as, scene by scene, it unfurls to the left. He comments: "at the end of the painting the scroll continues with seals and poems. It tells a further tale." *Mountains And Rivers Without End*, then, is the 20th century addition to the painting. In its own interlocking, unfolding segments, it draws upon ecological awareness and nature's architecture to such an extent that I want to coin a term for what is happening,

to suggest that *Mountains And Rivers Without End* is an *ecotecture,* a habitat-structure. It redirects Whitman's "adhesive love" from solely human comradeship to a comradely display that includes Artemisia and white mountain sheep. Thus I feel that this work is not really an epic, as the dust jacket states, in the tradition of Pound and Williams. Snyder himself thinks of it as a sort of sutra. A string of kayaks comes to mind. Functionally-speaking, this book is a rock with centrifugal eddies that can be set at the center of Snyder's life work.

What appears to be the leanness in the work is actually Snyder's precise observation which obviates explanation. At its most intense, his observational power evokes prayer and praise.

Snyder adheres to the Buddhistic principle of emptiness; there is no self, everything we see and are is empty. Thus the absence of the sensitive or tormented psychological subject in this poetry.

In the spirit of Sung landscape painting, as well as in the later Cézanne, one thing is as important as another, each part is as important as the whole. Thus the nodes of illumination strung throughout the writing. Snyder's world is redolent with common wealth—his elixir of enlightenment is buttermilk.

Finally, all is metaphoric, or let's say any truth is in the synapse between the parts of a metaphor. For example: two kilograms soybeans equals a boxwood geisha comb. 4000 years of writing equals the life of a bristlecone pine. Our love is mixed with rocks and streams.

To overturn 2000 years of Christian dominion over "unchristian" nature—"over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth," including women and human slaves—the scale of values has to be massively rebalanced. *Mountains And Rivers Without End* is the first major Western poem to sweepingly foreground the natural world from a Buddhist perspective and, without cynicism, to present civilization on a sharply diminished scale.

Or as Furong Daokai, quoted by Dōgen, puts it:

> "The green mountains are always walking;
> a stone woman gives birth to a child at night."

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

"The River-Merchants' Wife": after 80 years an update.
***The Selected Poems of Li Po*, translated by David Hinton (New York: ND, 1996)**

Hinton's introduction pinpoints significative basics of Li's background: spontaneity, *(Wu-wei)*, debt to T'ao Ch'ien, cosmologies; friendship with Tu Fu. As a central Asian (not Chinese at all), he killed "bad" people to protect the innocent. A Taoist recluse as well as brash boaster, after the loss of wife and son he began a life of wandering. The impact of An Lu-shan's takeover of Ch'ang-an and of the 36 million people lost during the uprising went into his poetry; he spent his last 8 years wandering as a sick refugee. Of the several thousands of his poems, 1100 are all that remain (the authenticity of some are still questioned). He died in 762, drunk, in a boat reaching out to embrace the moon.

Hinton's generally clear treatment throughout his book varies from close to very loose interpretations of Li, as in "Going to visit Tai T'ien Mountain's Master" (p. 3), "A stream/ hangs in flight beneath emerald peaks" (he uses *fei*-fly to birdlike advantage. Or, "Drinking alone beneath the moon" (p. 43), that so took E.A. Robinson's fancy in "Mr. Flood's Party").

But the most accurate and judicious estimate of his book may perhaps be rendered by comparing and contrasting his work on "Ch'ang-Kan Village Song" (p. 12), with Ezra Pound's "The River-Merchant's Wife" *(Persona,* 130), esteemed by many as the cynosure of his translations.

Hinton's version, (with his helpful corrections of Pound's version) usually closer to the text than Pound's, is idiosyncratic, but has not the same idiosyncrasies as Pound's. In reading the two versions I feel that each has something worthwhile to disclose about Li. Having said that, one further question rises about style: is the generally laid-back treatment of Li here, Hinton's own, or is Hinton simply transcribing (not just the verbal enervation of our age—*ruentis imperi*—in just 80 years, but) what he feels is the more realistic picture of this village girl?

How each writer deals with the subject, the girl, at once highlights the difference between the two versions. In Hinton's, we see what we assume a fairly generalized portrait of the life of an ordinary village girl in rural T'ang China, from a rather puritan, meager childhood, to a "timid and betrayed," as well as unsmiling, "downcast," and shadowy courtship and marriage. She is unceremoniously separated from her husband, "heart-stricken" over her old age, and can hardly trouble

herself to see her husband again. In short, the rather unembroidered facts.

On the other hand, what comes across with great clarity from Pound's first line onwards, is something about the way this girl, in spite of an exceedingly limited rural setting, shows her true stuff, which radiates from childhood, to courtship, marriage, to likely entry into widowhood—Pound keeps squarely before us the unfolding action of her character (As Alexander's biology teacher said, "the action is all").

For a few contrasty examples, Pound is always going toward the more definite, the more concrete, as though she were *someone he knew personally*, and where apt, transitive and active verbs that do something—yet it must be said that Hinton's version is almost always textually correct. For example, from the first line, "While my hair was cut straight across my forehead," or in the little distinguishing marks, "about the front gate," or "pulling flowers," whereas a certain lassitude is felt in Hinton's, as in "These bangs not yet reaching my eyes" (not timelessness, but *carelessness* of time in the participle, as though the girl did not exist in time).

In Pound's, she declares her will, "I stopped scowling," but in Hinton's, the scowling is intransitively softened. In Pound's, she speaks with Cleopatra's defiance of her mortal genes, "I desired my dust to be mingled with yours"; in Hinton's, a vague purpose becomes somewhat obscured: "I wanted us to be mingled as dust and ash" (which ignores the resonance of Pound's metaphor).

As against Pound's remarkable *basso ostinato* "forever and forever and forever," is Hinton's (with more correct textual justification, yet) with a trendy ambiguity, "and you always stood fast here for me." Pound's heartfelt assurance of young love, "Why should I climb the look out," in Hinton's becomes almost cynical, "no tower vigils awaiting your return."

Where Pound captures the combination of her pride in her brave soldier-husband conjoint with her restrained despair that like as not this would be the last of him (Pound lets the action speak): "You dragged your feet when you went out"; Hinton saps the strength with an intransitive verb, "where you lingered long."

But Hinton does an excellent job on "moss buried your tracks one by one" where EP makes his one slip in the poem (if we overlook his butterflies changing color seasonally!), by going AWAY from the girl! *(Cherchez la femme!)* into "the different mosses." In her loneliness she has accepted his absence, become more mature ("different")—but we're already acquainted with this girl (since childhood) and know

she would not say a thing like that! Because it abandons the subject; instead of intensifying, it drains the emotion.

And Hinton has done needed yeoman service in correcting Pound's extravagantly silly notions about the Gorges on the Kiang. The shortest gorge, five miles long has great thick sandstone towers which rise straight up 2000 feet. One might add that it is the deepest river in the world, plunging through the gorges with depths of 600 feet, and currents of 10 knots or more—"swirling eddies" all right. That "Ch'ü-t'ang Gorge in Szechwan, and Ch'ang-feng Sands, in Anhwei (of *la nostalgie* for Lu Yu) are real places adds valuable solidity to this timeless poem (memorable San-Pa [textual], also in Szechwan, is at least implied in "all those gorges").

In conclusion, how does Hinton fare in comparison with Pound? Audacity? No small thing after more than 80 years to challenge the century's foremost inventor of Chinese poetry on his home ground. But Hinton has done his basics, has already, and can still learn more from Pound about this great art.

Psychology is ineluctably a basic constituent of this poem's workings. Hinton's handling of the development of the girl has not the great depth or finesse of Pound's; Hinton's girl seems younger, less sensitive, less serene, but on the other hand, she seems far more realistically aware of village life in T'ang China than she does in Pound's Edwardian view. Pound's girl, older, wiser, instinct with sensibility—remains in a feudal court (as intuited from a 1915 London ambiance); Hinton's, more dramatic; Pound's, more lyrical.

Measured against the century's greatest (and here Pound is at his best) Hinton holds his own, is his own translator, does not dissolve into preciosity. But it seems out of the question to expect any younger poet to attain Pound's control over all the components of prosody—while keeping the toughest psychological grip on reality.

Pound apparently builds a portrait of the poems' protagonist primarily through various of his borrowings from Greek metric. Far more subtle than Wagnerian *leit motif*—Pound uses some recognizable metrical and emotional unit (e.g., /–//) as a fitting cadence describing an action (physical, ethical), e.g., "playing with blue plums . . .village of Chokan. . .married My Lord you. . .yellow with August, etc." He then repeats these metrical units to form a prosodical basis for the emotional continuity of the protagonist.

It is no small accomplishment that a translator make us see nuances, shadings in earlier translations. Hinton's does not replace Pound's translation, but Hinton's is useful in showing where Pound (lacking Chinese) went astray, and in offering a contrasting version. As Pound constantly exhorted: he wanted his work corrected. But

beyond each translator's utterance, there is a cultural sea-change that is manifest in comparing these two translations.

The Chief contrast between the two is the tremendous coherence of structure Pound has made by means of his greater technical mastery. Of almost equal significance is Pound's genius in finding something to translate his poem *into*. Here the reader cannot escape feeling the far background presence of war-sundered lovers (e.g., Hector and Andromache) as a modus operandi for enduring the Tartar rumblings on T'ang's Szechwan borders, and, *malgré tout,* for the greasy trenches of the war that took Gaudier-Brzeska).

More to the point, I think because Pound has been able to convince the reader that his protagonist feels a sense of destiny, Pound has tapped the vein of permanence. Examined carefully, the young woman in Pound's poem achieves (in her childlike gravity) with a quiet ethos of courage a heroic stature. In Hinton's poem, she does not. (Gaudier said his soldiers were ready to face German bayonets after he read them from *Cathay).* But we need Hinton's translation in order to help understand Pound's.

Here is an example of the difference between the two versions:

"At fourteen I married My Lord you."

十 *shih2.5* ten;

四 *szu4* four;

爲 *wei4* to be;

君 *chün1* sovereign;

婦 *fu4* wife;

(ten four be sovereign wife)

Here Pound, discovers her *humeur aimable* in her meeting with the boy next-door *(lang2,* "young gentleman. . .term of respect"). Playfulness mixed with respect so inflects her memory of his earnestness in "playing horse," that with childlike dignity (in a ritual which makes one with their earlier playing at life), she now addresses him (as Pound fuses boyhood's *lang2,* "gentleman" now with *chün1,* "sovereign" [which textually belongs with "wife"]) in a sweet flash of wit, "My Lord you." (Pound said of Logopoeia, "you can *not* translate it locally, but having determined the original author's state of mind, you

may or may not be able to find a derivative or an equivalent." *How To Read*, 1929). Rarely has anyone created a more evocative example. Hinton's "quite correct," but clerical parlance simply slides over it: "at fourteen, when I became your wife."

—DAVID GORDON

Potential Topography + Keys, Frames & Passages

● Raymond Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, Edited by Trevor Winkfield, Introduction by John Ashbery, Translated by John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Harry Mathews and Trevor Winkfield (Boston: Exact Change, 1995), 264 pp.

By way of rhyming word-pairs, homonyms, associative riddles and equal doses of other phonic combinations, double-entendres or "images from the distortion of some random text," Raymond Roussel (1877-1933) fashioned a method for composing the novels, plays and extended poems whose scope is revealed here in a representative and much-appreciated sampling of the writer's distinct peculiarities. Roussel's posthumously-published *"Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres"* outlines a unique lifelong praxis of composition, carried out with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem—albeit treading that fine line between genius and neuropathy—and whose unusual results, to say the least, lend new meaning to our notions of development and intention:

> Taking the word *palmier* I decided to consider it in two senses: as a *pastry* and as a *tree*. Considering it as a *pastry*, I searched for another word, itself having two meanings which could be linked to it by the preposition *à*; thus I obtained (and it was, I repeat, a long and arduous task) *palmier* (a kind of pastry) *à restauration* (restaurant which serves pastries); the other part gave me *palmier*

> (palm tree) *à restauration* (restoration of a dynasty). Which [in *Impressions of Africa*] yielded the palm tree in Trophies Square commemorating the restoration of the Talou dynasty.

Literary darling of the surrealists, well-to-do gentleman jack-a-dandy, trained pianist, self-styled impersonator and worldwide traveler (though one who rarely left his hotel room), not to mention eventual addict and suicide, Roussel is one of those arresting personalities who managed to coin an outlandish, albeit systematic imagination from a wealth of irresistible loopiness. It is this aspect that Winkfield and Ashbery clearly relish, and their delight is contagious—even if they tend to overlook the wretchedness of the little that is known of his final years. But Roussel is a hero after all, and so the respective notes and "a(n)ecd(otes)" by his faithful devotees throughout this collection are giddy asides to a makeshift biography. [Winkfield: "As he approached middle age Roussel became obsessed with the fear that his hair might be turning white and so, on quack's orders, sat under a hair dryer twice a week until the heat almost scorched his scalp. When he arrived in Persia and found no electricity, he resorted to wearing hot casserole dishes on his head. . ."]

In a prose that is progressively a cross between the murmurings of dream-reality and the shrills of narrative machinery on the brink, Rousselian characters exist as if only to sustain a story that may either evaporate into others, lie momentarily abandoned, or come grinding altogether to a halt. ["Soon afterward Romé was struck dead by a crazed avenger who had been deprived of his lover by Romé's preaching, which had converted her."]Thus incest and sudden death, natural disasters, matrimony and long-lost inheritances can all be contained and exhausted within a couple of pages penned by Roussel.

According to Michel Leiris, Roussel not only exploited the creative power of words; his writing was "a magic nominalism such that the word originates the thing, and the dislocation. . . of any series of phrases provokes the recreation of the universe, the construction of a special world that replaces the common world." (Indeed, it is in more than just this sense that Roussel's "Documents to Serve as an Outline" can be read in tandem with Leiris' own *Nights as Day, Days as Night.)*

Alternately dubbed "the greatest hypnotist of modern times" (by Breton); "president of the republic of dreams" (by Aragon), and a "genius in the pure state. . . . the Proust of dreams" (by Cocteau); the writer he may well most resemble would have been one imagined by

a flakier yet equally labyrinthine Borges. A seemingly centerless and polymorphous authorship overflowing with references to existent and nonexistent realms of the imagination, or books within books, Roussel's writing aimed to build up from the sheer marvel of beholding the coincidence of like things—between, say, the meaning of *billard* [billiard table] and the resonance of *pillard* [plunderer]. Uncharted worlds emerge from that gaping chasm, spun in an *ars combinatoria* animated by the perpetual spirit of potentiality. . . "a section of a starry sky viewed from sidereal space to create an impression of infinity." ["Instructions for 59 Drawings"]

● Raymond Queneau, Italo Calvino, Paul Fournel, Claude Berge, Jacques Jouet & Harry Mathews, *Oulipo Laboratory,* Texts from the Bibliothèque Oulipiènne translated by Harry Mathews and Ian White (London: Atlas Press, Atlas Anti-Classic), 1995.

For more than twelve years Atlas Press has been devoted to publishing the essential works and documents of the avant-garde "anti-tradition," including early gems such as Alfred Jarry's *Messalina* ("One of the most peculiar contributions ever made to the dreary genre of historical fiction," *The Guardian*), surrealist classics such as Benjamin Peret's *Death to the Pigs* and George Bataille's *Encyclopædia Acephalica*—an impressive enterprise that should be wholeheartedly applauded.

Oulipo Laboratory gathers a handful of shorter works to have emerged from the mind of this ersatz writer's collective. It also features the two manifestos written by François Le Lionnais, co-founder—with novelist and poet Raymond Queneau—of the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* in the early 1960s. (A larger *Oulipo Compendium* is scheduled from Atlas, including examples of oulipian methods used by American authors Gilbert Sorrentino, Dallas Weibe and Keith Waldrop.)

Originated as an experiment incorporating "mathematical structures into the process of literary creation," the writers associated with Oulipo soon ventured beyond mathematics "to include all forms of artificial restrictions in literature" [Brotchie, *ix*], exploiting constraint as a means by which to liberate language and as a devise by which to build what may be known of the imagination. To cite Le Lionnais himself, "The creative effort of these works is principally brought to bear on the formal aspects of literature: alphabetical, consonantal, vocalic, syllabic, phonetic, graphic, prosodic, rhymic, rhythmic, and numerical constraints, structures, or programmes." Or elsewhere: "The efficacy of a structure—that is, the extent to which it helps a

writer—depends primarily on the degree of difficulty imposed by rules that are more or less constraining."

Though a few of the pieces inevitably smack of mandarin *divertissements* or sophomoric leisure sport ("The Great-Ape Love-Song" by Jacques Jouet), at its best, oulipian writing is the literary equivalent of recreational problem-solving, as in Claude Berge's "Who Killed the Duke of Densmore," a prismatic take on the whodunit, or Queneau's linguistic geometry—in "The Foundations of Literature (after David Hilbert)"—wherein the terms "point," "straight line," and "plane" are replaced by "word," "sentence" and "paragraph." By far the most provocative in concept and execution, and in keeping with the Rousselian inspiration of the Oulipo, is Italo Calvino's "How I Wrote One of My Books," a chapter by chapter structural and thematic diagram of his novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*:

> The reader who is there (L) is reading the book that is there *(l)*
> The book that is there relates the story of the reader who is in the book (L')
> The reader who is in the book does not succeed in reading the book in the book *(l')*
> The book that is there does not relate the story of the reader who is there
>
> [. . .]

Taking issue with what Le Lionnais termed "eructive" literature—that is, with the romantic-modernist myth of uncontested genius, abstract inspiration, the artist as medium and the work as spiritual or moral container—the Oulipo and its offspring succeed in calling art into question as a series of codes to be strategically employed, hence underscoring the formal restrictions that have always determined an important, if often invisible aspect in the production of meaning.

● Daniel Spoerri, An Anecdoted Topography of Chance, in collaboration with Robert Filliou, Emmett Williams, Dieter Roth, Roland Topor (London: Atlas Press, Atlas Arkhive Four, 1995). 239 pp.

Historically and geographically coincident with the Oulipo, yet of a slightly different order—that is, away from the mathematics of creation toward the laboratory of the everyday—*An Anecdoted Topography of Chance* was begun by Spoerri in Paris circa 1960. Following suit of his

"new-realist" snare-paintings (assemblages constructed using the actual debris of his breakfast/work table), Spoerri decided, with fastidious resolve, to begin a catalogue of the objects left "at random" there. ["**1. Piece of white bread** with a bite out of it, sliced from a loaf bought yesterday (Oct. 16, 1961);" "**34L. Dark blue plastic stopper** from a bottle of wine. . ."etc.]

Recalling the story of how each object got there, where it was purchased and what associations it provokes—articulating the voiceless narrative of the objects with which we surround ourselves, and those by which we are surrounded—the entries are scattered with superscript letters designating additional footnote commentary, and sub-commentary to the commentaries, made over the years in successive editions, including this one, by Spoerri's translators into English and German, Emmett Williams and Dieter Roth. Thus a typical entry—almost chosen at random?—might read:

> **44. Very pretty dark blue** bottle with a large neck, bought in a shop opposite the Galerie Raymond Cordier, Rue Guénégaud, one day when for no apparent reason I visited the gallery; said bottle is topped by a socket and bulb, the whole forming a bedside lamp.[a]
>
> a. And not just *forming*[b] a bedside lamp. (DR ,1968)
>
> b. We all know that form follows function.
> (EW, 1995)

In this, Spoerri's *Topography* anticipated and was later parallel to the Fluxus movement which above all sought to narrow (if not ultimately abolish) the gap between life and art—and as such, it can also be read as the portrait of a time-period and as the testimony to a workaday friendship in art. At its most profound, the *Topography* seems to answer to symptoms that Henri Lefebvre was concurrent in identifying at the time, as if in response to certain forms of modernity that were causing everyday life "to degenerate into 'the everyday,'" so that, in Spoerri's own words, "objective life organized by chance [becomes] the surest means of obtaining a true-to-life picture."

What rises from all the tangents and sub-tangents, from the painstakingly detailed description and trivia, personal information and gossip, the interjections and afterthoughts, the postscripts and erasures, is the world in all its inescapable and sometimes glorious banality, as if also to exult in the bogus pretense of ever rendering

possible any sort of "realism." As if to say, in the repeated meanwhiles, and again with Lefebvre, that: "Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum total of relations which make the human—and every human being—a whole, takes its shape and form."

● Clark Coolidge, *Keys to the Caverns* (Gran Canaria: Zasterle Press, 1995), 51 pp.

With the assurance of his line as he allows it to dive and hover, riding the possibility of structure and the matter at hand, Clark Coolidge performs his cool with sheer Rilkean control and artlessness in the "loops and links that do not lead to plots," tongued also with erotic trills, Elizabethan licks, elisions, nods to artists and musicians, and a fine-tuned sense of humor ["The shiniest communist allows the vanilla squad"]. I suspect a great deal of Coolidge's work is dream-inspired, but until now none has so obviously pointed to the landscape of night vision as *Keys to the Caverns*. (The repeated allusions to pen-and-ink suggest the work was actually drawn from a handwritten logbook.)

This 135-section prose-work serves as a compass to dreamscape, beginning in fits and starts of short one-line entries ("Are we left by another road?") to longer, more fluid sections:

> With a good glass from the lamp room one can discern an opening large enough for a single man's body to be woven through the engines of escarpment into the pages of romance.

Indeed the first third of the poem abounds in references to glass, lamps, engines and bricks as if to convoke the generative factory of sleep. Many of the sections can be read as symbolic source-work, travel logs or the attempt to access a sense of beginning: "A calm plan touching base with forbidden entrance. Over there is something once happened now closed. Some things once come upon are soon left behind." Others build on the trope of enclosure wherein meaningful events take place or establish a "forbidden practice." In the process, the incremental pieces also constitute an investigation into the material nature of prose and of its less-expository double. Coolidge's vocabulary turns tellurian and mineral three-fourths of the way into

the work, as if to inaugurate a descent, by way of allusions to carbon, agates, the color orange and earthquake—a veritable journey to the center of the earth:

> What is the temperature of the earth? Nothing will be described particularly, just the array of the hand that is dealt you. One episode after another, stackable as walls. After a while you begin to catch glimpses of the course by which you came.

An array of underground ambits are encountered along the way, including "the symmetrical cavern of television" "a sort of mountain within the size of the mountain" and "where all the snow was enclosed in wood" to arrive at the book's entirely tentative conclusion: "We have kept absolutely everything. That is the limit, shouldering the whole mountain in a hole at hand, and difference."

● Susan Howe, *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974-1979* (New York: New Directions, 1996) 122 pp.

Frame Structures contains four books, long out-of-print, published by Susan Howe in the mid- to late-1970s, a succession that hailed a veritable eruption and onslaught of writerly power—*Hinge Picture* (1974), *Chanting at the Crystal Sea* (1975), *Cabbage Gardens* (1979) and *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (1978). Revisited now by way of new versions made available in a single volume, "Frame Structures" is also the name of the opening poem-cum-historical-essay, written as the edge to frame the earlier work—or, as Howe herself affirms, to underscore the notion of "preface as afterimage."

Set in Buffalo, "Frame Structures," makes an initial gesture to the figure of a departing or absent father as if to rhyme with the later statement that "Historical imagination gathers in the missing"—a figure also, among others, who points to an advanced aesthetic "in favor of disobedience." Tracing the flow of capital from the Netherlands to these States by the Holland Land Company; following one of the latter's employees and the future "father of Buffalo," Joseph Ellicott; depicting the history of a particular place, first the rise of Western New York State, then 6 Craigie Circle, Boston, and the intellectual vectors that intersect therein, including the figure of a forgotten Longfellow, and rendering the (coincidental?) likeness of Nigeria and Niagara as colonial place-names, these and other dense clusters move back and forth over time in an attempt to render the writerly equivalent of

behaviorist (Skinner) or linguistic (Jackobson) "deep structures" in order to posit space as "a frame we map ourselves in."

"Frame Structures" constitutes the autobiographical and historical resonance "between the lines" of the poetry to follow, and indeed it sums up many of the concerns in Howe's total body of work to date: the notion of place as verbal nimbus and nominalist stage where a difference is performed between encyclopedias of knowledge and the records of mistake; thus documents are pieced together to raise an architecture of personal memory and collective historic "fact" between the flux of migrations and prodigal returns, between general acts and the specificity of meaning. Over and over again, however:

> The brute force is Buffalo because of its position as a way station whose primary function is the movement of goods from east to west and vice versa in dark reaches before soldiers come foraging. Close by lies a great approaching Modernism my early poems project aggression.

Employing the gravity of Biblical reference and delivery, in lines severed or enjambed so as to leave dangling consonants in mid-breathe or by way of word-wrapped columns, "Hinge Picture" renders the tensions between mind and body, between writing and the invisible, between the imagination that separates men and women, barbarity and civilizations, the stations of society and family as per the kingdom. In like manner, "Chanting at the Crystal Sea" follows a dream-logic narrative articulated in the declarative phrasing of H.D., on the subject of women, frontier and survival. Set in a winter landscape as imagined by the Brothers Grimm, the poem is loosely shaped with allusions to war and truce, to vast oblong spaces and the lone figures they contain, as well as to the links between forebear and offspring. It is a territory where the self and its surrogate may collide in the half light of failed paternity, to form—as in, specifically, "The Secret History of the Dividing Line" but more generally in much of Howe's astonishing corpus—the intellectual wilderness that is a story run aground in New England.

> sh dispel iris sh snow sward wide ha
> forest I a boundary manic a land sh
> whit thin : target cadence marked on
> O about both or don't indication Americ
> sh woof subdued toward foliage free sh

● Michael Palmer, *At Passages* (New York: New Directions, 1995), 101 pp.

At Passages joins Coolidge's *Keys to the Caverns* and Susan Howe's *Frame Structures* as an important new collection by another of our major mid-career poets. In the manner of his series "Notes for Echo Lake," Michael Palmer has fashioned a kind of *cahier*-meditation on lyric utterance itself and on the narrative qualities intrinsic to the seemingly lifeless relationship among objects, as the poems also address the hollow dividing nature from the self as mediator between consciousness and a formed world, or the colossal difference between the glow of names—like "hyssop, marjoram, orange mint," for instance—and the atrocities to which language can do no justice ("Write this. We have burned all the villages").

Palmer writes with a near-Proustian elegance in his blend of the interrogatory and declarative, matching the silences and mummery of Beckett with the logic of Wittgenstein to explore the limits of song and the generative sentence in the face of worlds deemed set and self-evident. Here, his dense and haunting "Letters to Zanzotto" are issued from the desolate expanses of history and language, employing an epistolary mode devoid of stable sender or recipient, over the possible landscape of an apocalypse or over the hell-mouth opening to the errors of the *siècle*, bringing to full foreground the estrangement of experience by the powers of naming.

In "Six Hermetic Songs," Palmer renders the tension between dependence of mind and autonomy of the imagination as manifest in childhood fancy ["You can bring down a house with a sound. / Not to understand this. But we builded it."]. At his most extreme ("Cites"), Palmer establishes the intricate twistings and chopped parlance of a persevering voice plummeting downward, inside out, taking compression to bursting point.

Highly political in a late modern sense which foregrounds the use of language and image as they are transmitted and received via the mass media, Palmer's "Seven Poems Within a Matrix for War" engages an eliding of "desert" and "storm" to address, in part, the representational complexities surrounding the Gulf War. These poems are powerful precisely because they speak of an incompetence intrinsic to the medium while in their own way exploring the unattainability of the political sphere and the fiction of the "citizen" in the modern State:

> And the name once again to be the old one

Saint Something, Saint Gesture, Saint Entirely the Same
as if nothing or no one had been nameless in the interim
or as if *still* could be placed beside *storm*

that simply, as in a poem
Have you heard the angels with sexed tongues,
met the blind boy who could see with his skin,

his body curled inward like a phrase,
like an after in stillness or a letter erased
Have you seen what's written on him

as question to an answer or calendar out of phase
Add up the number of such days
Add *illness* and *lilt* as formed on the tongue

Add that scene identical with its negative,
that sentence which refuses to speak,
present which cannot be found

—ROBERTO TEJADA

Revelry To Revery: A Review Of Karen Mac Cormack, *Marine Snow* (Ecw Press, Toronto 1995)

Marine Snow, Karen Mac Cormack's latest volume of poems, is her most accomplished collection to date. Concerns as well as techniques that have been evident in her previous books, resurface and find an even finer & a more varied, or modulated, expression here. This does not make them "clearer" in any obvious sense: though leavened with humor, wit & tenderness, her poems remain tough crystalline structures—the title "Marine Snow" foreshadows these crystals— difficult work for an impatient reader looking for some instantly consumable "meaning." In fact, one of the characteristic movements of the poems

is exactly the constant care to defer such instant gratification, or to displace it from some Poundian level of "logopoeia" (or thought that can be "grasped" in one fell swoop, as the "logos" is & will always be, by its nature, unitarian) to one of "seme-poeia"—a making of "semes," pre- & post-semantic signs & cyphers & seeds, cross-pollinating in a movement that makes meaning unstable, changing, nomadic. "As normal goes nomad," she writes in the poem "Export Notwithstanding," pointing to, among other things, what happens to meaning when words are set in motion, made to cross the boundaries of their familiar contexts, in both our world (the usual shared associations assuming words as pure signifiers of an absent signified) and theirs (the words in their own contexts, i.e. language and its structures, syntactic and grammatical.)

Which does not exclude EP's other terms, "melopoeia" or "phanopoeia": it merely moves these too to other levels so that, for instance, the music of the poem can no longer be based on "melos," those familiar melodic structures, that have in Western culture always associated poetry with songlike mimesis, based on repetition & minor variations within sameness. And "phanos," image, can no longer be an aesthetic resting place, a "resolution" where the imagination metaphors the disquiet differences that gave rise to the act of writing into a unified concretion sublating all prior tensions. That classical & thus classifying impulse to simplify & hierarchize is continually & consciously fought & resisted—even, & maybe most powerfully there where the poem tends toward aphoristic statement. A resistance worked by displacement into heterogenous assemblages of deterritorialized images, (re)turning the "phanos" on/to itself by, so to say, backlighting the verbal *materia* that otherwise so easily gets lost in the shuffle of image-making. Via these concerns, Mac Cormack inscribes herself clearly within the line of contemporary experimental work such as that of the Language poets (among others), though her moves, the delicacy of her placings & humor are *sui generis*; as Marjorie Perloff notes in her back-cover tribute, Mac Cormack's "exquisite poise, the integrity of her poetic line, her command of verbal nuance, pun, and paragram" are matchless.

The 45 poems that make up the book show a return to more mixed forms than the two previous books (*Quill Driver* and *Quirks & Quillets*) which used prose-poem formats exclusively. In *Marine Snow*, there is a careful orchestration of three basic forms, interleaved throughout the book: First, her now familiar prose-poem forms, with the stanzaic paragraph as formal unit (i.e. often there is no punctuation except for the white space between/around these stanzas, or a final period.) Then there are centered poems, a typographical device

which to me has always seemed a difficult one to carry off, *pace* McClure, but which Mac Cormack here uses deftly: most of the centered poems are built up from one-line end-stopped phrases, usually separated by double or triple spacings, and ranging from single words to complete sentences that often bring to mind Stein's moves in *Tender Buttons*. The third form is the more traditional looking left-justified poem (with one right-justified, ragged-left poem thrown in), working with & against enjambement & the more traditional line techniques of the lyric, as in the following excerpt from "Untitled," also a good example of the poet including hints at her poetic process in the work itself:

north motions south days
off nights on call
heady hands-on-words
everything smells of
eternity if not escape
winning without a title
keeps the count down grafting
not in the sense of safety net
to take herself (so)
seriously in case
others don't ignore levity
"I" was not the gift
another language spoken
could make sound of

The mix of forms is judicious & points to a careful composition of the volume *qua* book rather than as a mere gathering of single instances. Though the different forms make for different rhythms & reading pleasures in their orchestration, they share similar concerns. Mac Cormack works at investigating (& disrupting) language at all levels. At that of the sentence she can move from small local syntactical subversions ("The adamant if loadstone falling of fill" for example) to the stanza-length paratactical orchestration of phrases that make the act of reading participatory at exactly the syntax-making level. Here is one such stanza from the poem "Conveyance:"

This is where I leap prior to tip of speak slowly and the depth will be less so as eyes widen it's all follow between the teeth remove thorns but if everything reinforced nothing's changed may be transferable after secretion panels succeed where walls don't surface taking in what

we don't most of all solutions according to steps taken
back place.

Another level of pleasure in disrupting the text is that of grammar. She often collapses traditional word classifications, as, to take a simple example, in the line cited above, "north motions south days," where the plural nouns "motions" and "days" easily turn into verbs. But, it seems to me, her special focus & delight is in investigating individual words themselves—"Here are the stronger shards, impassive verbs and pronouns become trophies for no such thing as bearings." This is often accomplished by means of puns ("All calamities find the name Jane for what nonfictional Alice wore to the ball." "Radar or not hear it comes." "If the ring fits answer the phone") and ostranenie-esque juxtapositions and riffs ("Revelry to revery." "Remembered as strings the words *too many times* mean this frantic deferral ablaze." "All acknowledgment undertow expels the word *dainty*.")

The book's epigraph is taken from Michel de Certeau and reads: "There will thus be facts that are no longer truths" and comes from his *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Which is also exactly where Karen Mac Cormack's art is rooted & finds its strength: a practised, i.e. sharply focused, attention brought to bear on the details of everyday life, both "the outside real & the insidereal," to quote Ed Dorn, & on the relations (or lack thereof) between those details and language, the only tool we have to make (new) sense of how we act & think, of how (much) we live in a universe in which facts are indeed not necessarily truths any longer—something due, in great part, to the careless use or willed abuse of language, an abuse it is the poet's job if not to right, then at least to address & show. A demanding art requiring (of poet & reader alike) an attentive listening both to the world around us & to the particulars of language, down to the very constituent parts of words—"If letters train a pattern too, the valleys cease in mountains"—to ride not only "the size of words," but to travel for awhile in the company of that nomadic caravan she calls "the warm slow alphabet."

—PIERRE JORIS

A selected works is like fur; it gives only a spotty indication of the animal it covers, but is essential toward attracting interest and reviving an important body of work in danger of extinction. This is especially true of poet Bob Kaufman. Despite his being a legend in San Francisco (where a street has been named after him) hailed in France as an American Rimbaud, and a seminal member of the Beat movement (Kaufman is Chuck Berman in Kerouac's novel *Desolation Angels*, "who is a colored kid from the West Indies who barged into my party six months earlier high with Cody and the gang and I had a Chet Baker record on and we hoofed at each other in the room, tremendous, the perfect grace of his dancing casual, like Joe Louis casually hoofing") Kaufman has languished in obscurity. Much of this has to do with Kaufman's indifference to fame and his commitment to a poetic as fresh and singular as jazz improvisation. Kaufman's poetry was primarily oral; it has the abrasive charm of an open air market, boisterous exchange and tossed salmon, abrupt appositions of lobster and garlic. To embed such a dynamic in a book compromises much of its energy. Nevertheless, *Cranial Guitar, Selected Poems by Bob Kaufman* (Coffee House Press, 1996) is a creditable and comprehensive tribute to Kaufman's work. It includes Kaufman's three broadsides, *Abomunist Manifesto* (1959), *Second April* (1959), and *Does the Secret Mind Whisper* (1960), all published by City Lights, selections from Bob's three published books (*The Ancient Rain, Golden Sardine* and *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*) and a generous sample of Uncollected Works, such as "Mongolian Sunset in Gobi Desert," composed in 1980 and "dropped on the floor of Curley's, an unpretentious North Beach diner, where for years Bob could be found in the early morning having breakfast." The introduction by David Henderson, who presented a four-hour program on Kaufman for KPFA in Berkeley between 1987 & 1988, is a detailed and informative condensation of a turbulent and far-reaching life. Raymond Foye's anecdote about the discovery of the manuscript for *The Ancient Rain,* published by New Directions in 1981, is vivid testimony of Kaufman's casual attitude toward publication and the peripatetic life he led: ". . .at the bottom of this pile of burnt-out wood and rubble I found this famous Moroccan leather binder which contained his poems. The poems were singed around the edges, but I carried them out and brought them over to City Light's publishing office. . .We carefully peeled these manuscript pages off, one by one. They were soaked with water from the fire hoses." "He and horn were one, world blotted out," wrote Kaufman

in "Hawk Lawler: Chorus," echoing a remark Sir Philip Sidney once made: "A poet, no industry can make, if his own *genius* be not carried into it and therefore is it an old proverb, *Orator fit; Poeta nascitur.*" I do believe Kaufman was a born poet; poetry was a way of life, a conviction vital as a gland. A comfortable separation between art and life was inconceivable. Nothing testifies to that more than the Buddhist vow of silence he took after witnessing Kennedy's assassination on TV in 1963, a vow that lasted ten years, to the end of the Vietnam war in 1973. Many of Kaufman's published poems are transcriptions of tape recordings made in coffeehouses: "derrat slegelations, flo goof baber" "on yardbird corners of parker flights to sound filled pockets in space." Kaufman cared nothing for career, but careened the alleys of a commodity-based culture with élan and sincerity. "Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom; if you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn," said Charlie Parker. "I would die for poetry," said Bob Kaufman. And did.

The Titanic's rudder weighed a hundred and one tons, and her hull contained over three million rivets. It was big. The Watusi are both "a pastoral people of Rwanda and Burundi" and "a dance supposedly imitative of Watusi tribal dances," popularized in the early '60s by the hit song of the same name. Fuse these disparate identities into the title of a book and you have Connie Deanovich's *Watusi Titanic* (Timken Publishers, Inc., 1996) a gathering of nimble sestinas and verbal tarantellas, sensual and fine and dangerous. "Out she danced from the gypsy wagon," writes Deanovich in "Ballerina Criminology," "snapping a fan and a smile to generalize honesty." Bizet's Carmen leaps immediately to mind, teasing and provoking the dutiful Don José. Carmen embodies poetry—by turn tender, cruel, seductive, imperious, sensual, arch—and to "generalize honesty" is to both diffuse and dilute it. One can see the gleam in Carmen's eyes as she flaunts her voluptuous honesty at a crowd of captive soldiers: the world of reason and duty vanquished by the fire of the romantic imagination. "So were Horace his odes called *carmina,*" writes Ben Jonson, "and anciently all the oracles were called *carmina.*" Deanovich is especially adept at incorporating cinematic technique into the dynamic of her writing. Sergei Eisenstein argued that the essence of all film editing is conflict and that the most dynamic editing involves collision rather than the linkage of images. The emotional impact of a film ultimately derives from, and depends on, montage. In "Addition to Hitchcock" are splices of dissonant tense ("it was raining/ and it was going to rain") the eery simultaneity of a storm and Hitchcock's *The Birds* playing on a TV positioned symmetrically "right in front of the middle window," which transmogrifies again in space and time: "tomorrow though she

would set the TV in the middle of a table/ and have two youths from the community center/ play ping-pong on it," the little white ping-pong ball arcing "sweetly over" "Suzanne Pleshette's head in the school yard scene/ that's dipped first in so much tenderness then in so much blood." Deanovich uses disjunctive techniques to modify proportion and mood as a camera's tilts and diagonals alter imagery in film, as in "History as Bourgeois Construct" (which has the wonderful line Paul Hoover noted in his blurb, "imagination must have dirt") ". . .the opening of a pelican's eye/ is reminiscent of the eye/ of a creepy little drinking kid." We have a long shot (pelican) a close shot (the eye) and a middle class *mise en scene,* "creepy little drinking kid," his eye no doubt magnified by the bottom of the drinking glass. Laura Riding was right; poetry is far too sensual a medium for freeze-framing the bald Platonic truth. What you need is multiple exposure, superimposition, lap dissolves and a boom microphone. "Ice parsley/ Music a mood/ frantic as barn love." Olé.

Ernest Fenollosa cites five different forms of the pronoun 'I' in the Chinese language, a weak and defensive 'I,' an emphatic 'I,' a selfish and private 'I,' an egotistical 'I' (one who takes pleasure in his own speaking) and a self talking to self 'I.' The latitudinarian title of Dean Young's recent collection of poetry, *Strike Anywhere* (CLP/ Univ. Press of Colorado, 1995) evokes the mobile and pluralistic subjectivity—"floating eyeball"—favored by the New York School of poets. The influence of Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch run strong throughout. O'Hara's giddy, cocktail party garrulity, and Koch's elliptical and comic imagery are much in evidence, and not a few of the poems reveal, and revel in, O'Hara's autosubversive burlesque of lyrical subjectivism. Young's persona is tenuous and unbalanced ("maybe I'm just a figment in someone's dream") self-deprecatory and besieged ("I survived the octopus simmered in lamb's blood") mythical and protean ("I'm a broken Kore, lips barely parted") petulant and opinionated ("I hate the radio, how it pretends to be your friend"). Which is not to say this work is merely an imitative pyrite. Poems like "Errata" achieve a specific gravity. I quite like "Errata's" "plethoras of putty," its textual richness and inventive conception. But the book is an uneven field. Some of Young's drolleries struck me as being a bit forced: ". . .there is also sweetness/ in saying a name over and over again/ when you're alone and miserable in Peru./ Peru, Indiana that is." Young uses surrealist sleight of hand to leaven the ever-present climate of despair ("Part of me is still standing in the falling/ snow with my burning chicken") and deftly blends the mundane with the macabre to produce a vivid and cogent experience of pain: "The despair/ of loving may lead to long plane rides with/ little leg room,

may lead to a penis full/ of fish, a burning chicken, a room filled/ with a single pink rose." But the effect is spoiled by a bumptious afterthought: "Funny how/ we think of it as a giant rose instead/ of a tiny room." As Horace said of Homer, "he is not equally awake in every line."

Lisa Jarnot's *Some Other Kind of Mission* (Burning Deck, 1996) is not a misnomer. This is a difficult and puzzling book. It's a bit like entering Utah's Canyonlands for the first time: the landscape is at first bleak, threatening, otherworldly. But as time is spent bending down and picking up rocks and noticing the ceaseless flux of light and color the richness of the land begins to inundate the senses. It is, physically, a very attractive book; the cover design (by Lisa Jarnot) of a reproduced etching by Bruce Kurland is a compelling and eerily beautiful image. Interspersed between passages of compact prose are collages on graph paper of handwritten, blanked, patched, and typewritten text. The text proper (typeset in 10 pt. Palatino by Rosmarie Waldrop on Glatfelter acid-free paper) favors lower case letters over majuscules at the beginning of sentences, many with little spacing between them. The clusters of text seem clenched and nervous, about to implode, collapse in on themselves like a star, hydrogen atoms coalescing to form helium, adverbs coalescing to form nouns: "how in dreams are only." This visual cuing suits the materiality of the language very well. The book is structured like a narrative, with chapters and marginalia and epilogue and index, but the language is fiercely anti-mimetic and ungrammatical. What little referentiality there is suggests a kind of road trip, a stark milieu of terns, firs, a fellow named Lance and a chicken farm and a grocery store and medians and meridians and a truck. The real landscape is the text itself. "The destruction of the mimesis," observes Michael Riffaterre in *Semiotics of Poetry*, "or its obverse, the creation of the semiosis, is thus exactly coextensive with the text: it is the text." Jarnot deploys a broad range of rhetorical tropes to raise her semiotic grid to the max: repetition ("followed by followed by," "of of of") rhyme ("tweed indeed") half rhyme ("half have," "clover clever") neologism ("meticules of fallout," "the meticules of chemistry") parodic allusion ("black bird singing in the garbage dumps") nonsense ("on the shores of do not enter ample bond") solecism ("then we were whence to get paid") appropriation ("all the gifts that wise men bring") catachresis ("in the cortex of the slender walk") syllepses ("i've gone to toll booths most of the day") and puns ("turning terns," "linear indecision"). The Marginalia is quite wonderful, like leaving Canyonlands and finding a carnival in full progress in Moab. It possesses a rich Spicerian humor: "Paris fucked Helen fourteen hundred times," "As though we were outlaws and in a bath

together," and offers some telling information about the life of the author: "I'm going to buy some more cool pens." Jarnot's sensibility is extreme; this book is not for all tastes. Those who prefer a more referentially grounded epistemology to the rigors of an intertextual tundra would be wise to shun this other kind of mission. Like all difficult terrain, it invites a deal of active participation, good binoculars and a four-wheel drive.

—JOHN OLSON

***Narrative's Journey; The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson*, by Susan Gevirtz: Writing About Women, Feminist Literary Studies, Peter Lang, Publisher, Vol. 16, 1996**

I am excited by the method stunningly projected by Susan Gevirtz in her biography of Dorothy Richardson. I do not know if Gevirtz has used a post-structural method, or not! Her use of material widely differs from that of other biographers and presents an advanced nonconformism in the risky use of biographical material.

She has assembled an edifice which ventures into a new theory of biography. In part through her efforts in methodology her biography of Dorothy Richardson becomes a *writing of exploration*, even as her subject survives as a notable innovator of the novel of the Twentieth Century.

In every successful biography the biographer finds some point in which the subject becomes an extension of themselves, if only briefly. This

> enlargement of the scope of the field demands 'empathy,' a mysterious source. What Gevirtz and Dorothy Richardson share is an extending Modernity.

Along with James Joyce, Richardson is regarded as an initiator of the method known to us as "stream of consciousness." In *Pilgrimage*,

Richardson's title for her series of separately titled novels, Miriam Henderson is the heroine. In the beginning Miriam is placed in the London of the early 1900s. Her world is of young secretaries and dental assistants, friends, who attend free lectures and musicales, who live in chill boarding houses in the city of London. The events in the novels are to be revealed solely through the eyes of Miriam. It is only through her perspective that emotional moments rise and fall. In this way the work of Richardson resembles that of James Joyce, and the figure of Bloom who is our guide to Dublin, as Miriam is our guide to London.

Toward the end of the novel sequence that extends into the 1930s, there is a possible falling off of the story line, as the author ages and is physically removed from the setting of her youth. Yet Richardson's projection of the

> stream of consciousness, never lessens or hesitates. Her sensitive instrument, Miriam, will continue as our Virgil with a continued exposure to the hazards of enveloping time.

Gevirtz reminds us Richardson gave the title *Pilgrimmage* to her series of novels. In Chaucer's time *Pilgrims went on Pilgrimmage*. They were on a *Quest*. Gevirtz writes that Richardson's *pilgrimmage is an allegory of allegory, or writing ABOUT WRITING.* This theme of a mystical journey to fulfillment and understanding of self will be reinforced throughout the novels with consistent allusions to Dante. This Dante parallel appears in the late novel, *Interim*, when Miriam attends a Dante lecture and feels the absence of love in her being, *in her inability to feel humility in universal terms.*

Gevirtz explains that for Richardson, WRITING is a means of participating in a sense of adventure, of producing a *joy that can then be reproduced in the reader, and by the reader. It is this longing for participation* that makes the whole process necessary.

What continues to excite us in the Gevirtz biography, is not only the story of Dorothy Richardson as the exceptional Miriam, but the *METHOD* employed by Gevirtz. Our concentration on the method of Richardson will shift to her biographer *now suspended in the process* of making accountable the method of Richardson!

The idea of *selectivity of method* is strangely ignored by biographers whose choice is a linear one. In Gevirtz we witness the ingenuous, schematic, breaking of the stone of Biography. Her work is similar in effect to Richardson's "stream of consciousness" and with a shared iconoclasm.

For instance, the biographer, interested in film and seeking means for film to be useful in her writing, within the limitations of a page, includes notice of the reviews of films that Richardson wrote for the film magazine, Close-up, published in the 1920s and 1930s, evoking a cinematic stroke on her page. Notice how cleverly she makes an assemblage of the *idea* of the Silver Screen attached to writing, itself. And she does this with music, another personal concern. Note how music fills and replenishes the pages of this book, as it also did in Richardson's novels.

And most importantly I wish to point out how immediate is Gevirtz' response to Richardson's idea of writing as participation, "the orchestral spectacle of the novel-chapters working *together*."

—BARBARA GUEST

Yehuda Amichai, *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (University of California Press, 1996); Andrei Codrescu, *Alien Candor: Selected Poems 1970-1995* (Black Sparrow Press, 1996); Ed Sanders, *Chekov* (Black Sparrow Press, 1995).

The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai is a revised and expanded edition of the 1986 Harper & Row selection, spanning 40 years of writing from one of Israel's most important poets. This latest selection further illustrates how Amichai's work has been one of this century's most powerful commitments to exploring the central paradox of civilization: the struggle between Eros and Thanatos.

Born in Germany and emigrated to Palestine between the first and second world wars, Amichai grew up in a world where war was both local and global. He is also among the first generation conscious of the fact that we have the technology to destroy all of human civilization. Thus, when asked in an interview, "what are the central experiences in your life," Amichai responded, ". . .love and hate and how to deal with them" (33).[1]

For many poets of Amichai's generation, how to deal with love and hate within a global context has been a question of how *not* to deal. But for Amichai, who served for four years during World War II and fought in all of Israel's wars up to the Lebanon Campaign, it is not a question of dealing or not dealing with the profound conflict between Eros and Thanatos. His personal history is the history of Israel, which is, in turn, a kind of synecdoche of all social, political and religious conflict throughout history.

These poems are rigorously attentive to the immediate without being provincial, meditative without being abstract, and visionary without being mystical:

> Instead of singing Hallelujah, a curtain
> fluttering from an open window.
> Instead of saying Amen, a door or a shutter closing.
> Instead of the Vision of the End of Days
> the flapping of banners on an empty street after the
> [holiday.
> (172)

While Amichai's poetry is deeply informed by the cultural and religious consciousness of Judaism, the "homeland trap" is also the "world-trap" of life,
language, and the imagination at the end of the 20th century:

> to speak now in this weary language,
> a language that was torn from its sleep in the Bible:
> [dazzled,
> it wobbles from mouth to mouth. In a language that once
> [described
> miracles and God, to say car, bomb, God.
> (57)

On an obvious level, the language is Hebrew. On a more profound level, the language of Israel (like the land itself) is a combat zone between all that is spiritual and mundane, dead and living, historical and contemporary. The spiritual and physical telescope into one another where the "diameter of the bomb" is both "thirty centimeters" and, "in the howl of orphans / . . .reaches up to the throne of God and / beyond . . ."(118). Ultimately, these concentric circles resonate throughout Amichai's work to form a "circle with no end and no God" (ibid): a circle whose center is the Bomb. Unlike the discrete circles

of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, the center of this circle is everywhere.

In his essay, "The Disappearance of the Outside," Andrei Codrescu states that "the Outside has greatly diminished in all its dimensions: geography, imagination, liberty. Transcendence has closed shop, or perhaps the last room in a shop that has been closing since the Renaissance" (194).[2] According to Codrescu, a primary culprit in the disappearance of the outside is the cult of commodity which "has rendered everyone powerless while removing the critique of power to an abstract realm hard to connect with the (otherwise busy) senses" (DO 195).

In America the last room open in the shop of Transcendence may well be in the hands of comedians. Arguably, America's greatest philosophers have been comedians whose wit and candor (by virtue of their masks and "outsider" status) possess more critical acumen than the abstract shticks of academics, politicians and religious leaders combined.

Over the past few decades, Codrescu has become one of the ringleaders of comedic (i.e., satirical) American poetry. Although his social commentary is often gloomy and sardonic, *Alien Candor: Selected Poems 1970-1995* reads like a purposeful Chaplin wrench wedged in among Western culture's gnashing gears of tragedy and comedy.

Alien Candor includes most of the material from the earlier, Sun Press *Selected Poems* (expanding the 1970-1980 collection by approximately 50 pages), as well as 100+ pages of work from the past 15 years. Moving from the early "personae poems" (written from the perspectives of an ex-beatnik, a Dominican monk, etc.) through the recent work, one is able to chart Codrescu's deepening relationship with both the English language and American culture. Indeed, Codrescu's creolization of styles—New York School, Beat, Dada, and surrealism—makes his poetry patently "American," despite his self-stylized outsider perspective. Perhaps this reinforces Codrescu's notion of the Outside's disappearance, or that "America" cannot be defined by simple inside/outside dichotomies.

Codrescu is willing to take risks with language and include the banal ("a boiled hotdog,"), the pop icon ("the Lone Ranger") and the trivial anecdote alongside speculations on culture, language and capitalism, pointing up the fact that "the dump" is part of the package-deal. To include the banal, iconic, and anecdotal is to risk adding the poem itself to the trash-heap. While it's doubtful whether poetry ever "redeems" the trash-heap, it is Codrescu's hovering over these objects, images, and anecdotes in poems such as "3/6/81, Amtrak" and

"Not a Pot to Piss In (My Life as a Pot)" that turns "the Outside" back in. At the end of the "Amtrak" ride:

> . . .I note that everyone who is not going
> to Chicago stands now, and they are wearing thick
> belts painted with the Stations of the Cross. Silos.
> Rich pastures. Silence. The fat Yugoslav conductor
> steps forward with a radio, and the fat setting sun
> blares forth from it. Beauty, it blurts, hurts. Beauty
> hurts because it's subject to instant nostalgia.
>
> (246)

Duncan probably didn't have Codrescu's "dream shit pits of the race" in mind when he called for a symposium of the whole. But *Alien Candor* reminds us that these "shit pits" are part of the picture. If society is "the product of rejection," then the job of the poet is to recover *all* that is rejected, "to be an ontological reminder, a real pain in the / ass, reminding everyone why we took up the pen / in the first place, to scratch ourselves on the wall / or under the aching arm / to kick open the lid . . ." (239).

Ed Sanders' most recent sleuth-work is *Chekov*, a "verse biography" of the Russian writer and doctor that's skillfully braided into the larger, looming contexts of pre-Revolutionary Russia and Europe. Using his "tracking" method of Investigative Poetry, Sanders consulted over fifty books on and by Chekov, as well as works on pre-Revolutionary Russia and Europe, pogroms, and anti-Semitism. What began as a study for a musical drama on Chekov's life ended up as a book-length poem, a "hipstory" set to meter, studded with illustrations, maps, Saxon assonance, and funky rev-chants:

> They learned the Primal Secret
> of rev-work:
> that secret presses
> flambent fliers
> and inky exhortations
> did not enter the lives
> of the bent-down masses
>
> so they decided to
> "go among the people"
> (idti v narod)
>
> (70)

The poem is a fascinating example of the potentially infinite labyrinth of material that the selection and combination of "data clusters" can generate. Sanders' careful juxtapositions of biographies, histories, and politics, as well as his ear for rhythm and meter, create thoughtful tensions between the personal and the political. Like Sanders' own involvement with both politics and art, *Chekov* narrows the gap between revolutionary art (Chekov: "In '85 / he published 129 stories and sketches") and the art of revolution (*Chekov*: "In 1885 was the first mass strike in Russia . . .") (94). And in an age of increasing government censorship and decreasing government funding of the arts, the resemblance between 19th century Russia and 20th century America is spooky.

Also helping to narrow the gap between art and politics is the young Lenin who lurks in the wings of the poem, reading Chekov's "Ward #6" and organizing the Bolshevik party. Although Chekov never lived to see the 1917 Revolution, Sanders' portrayal of him as both writer- and doctor-of-the-people makes a strong case for his role in inciting the proletariat uprising.

Sanders' research also draws attention to gaps in the official Chekov canon. Since the Russian censors scrutinized everything Chekov wrote, manuscripts were altered, expurgated, and possibly destroyed by the writer himself. Hopefully, Sanders' calling attention to these gaps and missing manuscripts will initiate further research in the "post-Sov archives."

—DAN FEATHERSTON

Notes:

1 Joseph Cohen, *Voices of Israel: Essays on and Interviews with Yehuda Amichai, A.B. Yehoshua, T. Carmi, Aharon Appelfeld, Amos Oz* (SUNY Press, 1990).

2 Andrei Codrescu, *The Disappearance of the Outside: A Manifesto for Escape* (Addison-Wesley, 1990). Subsequently cited as DO.

The solution came, as they often do, inadvertently. The mystery was the reputation of Elizabeth Bishop. Certainly it's difficult to dislike Bishop: her poems, like Pennsylvania Dutch floor stencils, are meticulous, clever, always pretty and sometimes beautiful, bright. But this does not explain her recent canonization (in the Vatican sense). In many circles—deeply eclipsing the once-reigning princes, Lowell and Berryman—she is considered the major *(the* major) American poet of the Postwar period. It strikes me as inexplicable, a pulse of the zeitgeist I can't find.

But now I get it, thanks to a pamphlet published by the New York Public Library: "Books of the Century." To celebrate its centenary, the NYPL has compiled a list of the 100 most influential books of the century. These are divided into eleven categories: "Protest & Progress," "Nature's Realm," "Economics & Technology," "Women Rise," and so on. Like all such lists, it is ditzy. There are twenty "Landmarks of Modern Literature" from Chekhov to Toni Morrison. Six are poetry: Yeats, Eliot, Lorca, Stein (a surprise, but she does have a statue behind the building), Auden's *Age of Anxiety* (more memorable as title than text), and Edna St. Vincent Millay (still merry on the ferry after all these years). Evidently it was a bad century for poetry.

The oddest category is "Optimism, Joy, Gentility." It includes, among others, Helen Keller's autobiography, Emily Post, P.G. Wodehouse, *Winnie-the-Pooh, The Joy of Cooking,* Tolkein, and the children's book *Goodnight Moon.* At the bottom of the chronological list—the only book in 35 years to bring us optimism, joy, and gentility—is Elizabeth Bishop's *Complete Poems.*

Isn't that it? America is the only country on earth officially dedicated to the "pursuit of happiness." As Reagan proved, things can become terrible and the government can do anything it wants, as long as the populace feels good. Feeling good, not doing good, is the American way. Feeling good even when we're not doing well. [A few years ago, some organization gave a mathematics exam to high school seniors in 30 countries. The American students, not unexpectedly, finished last: only 20% scored an "A". The Koreans came in first: 80% got an "A". What was interesting about this test was that, at the end, there was a true/false question: "I am good at mathematics." 80% of the Americans checked "True," but only 20% of the Koreans.]

Neither as inspirational as Helen Keller, as useful as Irma Rombauer, as witty as Wodehouse, as fanciful as Tolkein, Bishop is indeed the poet of a cheerful gentility. What is telling is that we now mistake—

despite the complete works of Henry James—good manners for greatness. Of all the books on the list, Bishop's *Complete Poems* most resembles *Goodnight Moon* (though I'll take the little mouse any time): something pleasant, but not stupid, for intellectuals to read for a few moments at the end of the harried day, before they nod off into their troubled sleep.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

HOLLO'S *CORVUS*

Anselm Hollo, *Corvus*, Coffee House Press, 1995. 141 pp, $11.95, (paper)

"le plus souvent il s'agit de tristesse"
it is mostly a question of sadness
the trick's to remember
that *that* is absolutely *no* excuse to
be boring
or humorless or too conveniently
absent
(Small Door At Far End)

Anselm Hollo's new book of poems, *Corvus,* is as "black" and sleek as the raven it's named for. Hollo, in life, dresses most often in basic black, because that is simplifying, an intense, economical—minimalist—expression of taste. Hollo has said often in conversation, "I am a minimalist": he means no waste, no wake of garbage. The changes in his poetry over a long career have been more of mood and depth than of style, as if what is essential to poetry, once mastered in a suitable style, remains constant (faithful) in that style. The same style, or couple of styles, should do. The same body does, the same mind and the same voice. Hollo's reading voice is one of *the* voices of the poetry times, unforgettably deep and rich, capable of exquisite pacing. It bears no relation to a raven's call whatsoever; it haunts one's reading

of *Corvus*, a book full of resonance across big space and time, big sadness and affection, since one of the things "minimalism" does traditionally is play to the void. Hollo, however, is not inclined to a religion-based exploration of the scale of the cosmos. He is a skeptic, he says in 1991, probably akin to the unnamed "urban ironists" he refers to in *West Is Left On the Map*. The vastness of space-time is seen not as godly but as what gets between the dead and the living, old times and new times, what separates and devours all humans and their cultures, humans and their cultures tending, especially in these times, to hasten the feast. Hollo is not just a cosmopolite: he is an internationalist, one of American poetry's few and so a treasure. The son of Finnish and German parents, he grew up mainly in Finland speaking Finnish, German, and Swedish. He came to America to stay in the late '60s by way of ten or so years in England and has since made much of his living as a translator into English from his childhood languages and from French. Thus *Corvus* is dense with a multiple heritage and with international relationships and interests and a sense of the special loss in time of a past in other countries.

Corvus is prefaced by an "Author's Note" on the title (Hollo's own name means "raven" in Hungarian and Finnish) and concluded by some seven pages of "Notes"—an urban-ironist-"scholar's" framework. In between there are seven sections, most of which have been previously published on their own as chapbooks, the short book being dear to Hollo's minimalist sensibility and part of his process. Presented in roughly chronological order, they are all together a different thing from how they seemed singly; they are now a meditation on time and the times, which Hollo sees as unrelievedly medieval in the word's worst senses, and on Hollo's own past. *1991*, a sequence of untitled poems/pages, is an elegy for the author's sister, Irina Hollo, who died in that year in Finland. The poem is for the most part direct in tone and meaning

> aye. . .past
> this bubble of assumed person
> glassy shapes of the dead *en la noche* drift
> beyond glad or sad
> fugitives
> from all personal referents

But it is interrupted towards the end by a long satirical footnote placing the poem in a mock historical perspective from the point of view of the future. Thus *1991* becomes similar to *Corvus'* second section, *Some Greeks*, a short set of translations from *The Greek*

Anthology mostly on the theme of death. The two sections are made to seem both lost in time and contemporary. *Some Greeks* has a preface, i.e. more scholarly apparatus, which is in the author's personal voice but by its existence hints at the transformation of life into the rustle of the page in the scholar's hand. After *Some Greeks, Blue Ceiling* and *West Is Left On the Map,* are sequences of untitled poem/parts like *1991. Blue Ceiling* is disjunctive and spacy within a sketchy logical structure, framed as the thoughts of a man reading *Harper's* while raccoons try to enter his house. The thinker/reader/writer in the chair—a paradigmatic narrator for much of Hollo's poetry—is entertained by such verbal mental events, as

> when you met him he was a man
> now he is a postage stamp
>
> you can't open the window this is Dallas
>
> "they took my billiard table!"
> Mary Queen of Scots complained in 1576
>
> mice fall from the sky

These startling units point forward; in the book, to the explosively disjunct middle section, *Not a Form at All But a State of Mind. West Is Left On the Map,* which comes after *Blue Ceiling,* is more straightforward, like much of *Corvus* ranging between outcry of prophecy: "and the shades they are a-massing/at the gates of ghostly Troy"; and expression of love: "with you, a thousand years would not be long enough." Time can't be long enough for love but is always long enough for war. Though there are ways of combating time: one can speak to Diogenes the Cynic in a dream; place oneself on record as a witness ("remember Bear's Head who. . .saw/when the flood subsided/only the white man remain"); read a cat-urine-stained book by some late urban ironists.

Not a Form At All But a State of Mind, which is made up of six sequences, is an outburst of multiple voices in the sonnet form. These sonnets' most obvious inspiration is Ted Berrigan's book *The Sonnets,* in their use of quotation of others' and the author's own works, their repetition of lines, their Cubist fragmentation and remassing of fragments into new entities, and their reflection of what Hollo refers to in the footnotes as "aleatory numerical methods of selection." They don't sound at all like Berrigan, except in *Lines From Ted: An Ars Poetica,* a sequence made up of selections from a talk given by Berrigan at The

Naropa Institute in 1982. That sequence stands out as "different," a blasting in of a dead friend's voice, in the midst of, in the surrounding sequences, a swirl of memory, opinion, song, and connection to past others including Hollo's past selves. The section is preceded by, as epigraph, William Carlos Williams' statement that: "The sonnet . . .is not a form at all but a state of mind. It is the. . .dialogue upon which much writing is founded: a statement then a rejoinder of a sort, perhaps a reply, perhaps a variant of the original—but a comeback of one sort or another." For Hollo the point has not been to write sonnets so much as to manifest a sort of consciousness, a mind thinking and remembering, consciousness being dialogic. These fourteen-liners provide an easily replicable container for what is otherwise formless and continuous though patterned. "Mind is shapely," as Allen Ginsberg says; but it isn't shaped like art. Hollo here is using the sonnet to place corners, sides, melody, further patterning on the mind's dense workings so that they can be looked at at all and essences extracted.

The first sonnet sequence, bearing the title of the whole section, is probably the prettiest and most classical. It makes use of material from Lewis Carroll, Robert Creeley, Jack Clarke, Piero Heliczer, Ted Berrigan, Cavalcanti, Joanne Kyger, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Edwin Denby, Petrarch, Jouni Inkala, Tom Raworth, Gunnar Harding, and the author:

> underground trees slow darkness
> and fear has lien upon the heart of me
> magpie steals silver spoon it is gone forever
> like the eyeglasses of the less fortunate
>
> in a terrifying gray light from the future
> the carnival continues a place where a sad horde
> of such as love and whom love tortures
> point to the moon and break it

The second sequence, *Small Door At Far End,* only four sonnets long, comments on recent 20th century artistic and critical practices:

> time for your take, you assholes
>
> . . .
>
> a barrage of labyrinthine winks
>
> . . .

and the total Sargasso Sea of signifiers
they do my *research* for me

Next, *Lines From Ted: An Ars Poetica* is not necessarily Hollo's own "ars poetica" but is probably one that Hollo's mind often converses with and does partake of from time to time. Every line in this sequence has Berrigan's stamp:

I sometimes wonder
I sometimes think about how many
[poets
For example those poets in the universities with suitcoats
[on
Some of whose works I like very much nonetheless
How many of them broke their own hearts
Fighting against their own natural tempo and pace
in order to try to write
What was supposedly the right tempo and pace
For English-American literature?

Hollo's line arrangement expertly corresponds to Berrigan's syntactical pace, his delight in making each clause a surprise and in making Byzantine thought processes slowly work themselves out. *Lines From Ted* is an absolutely novel work; uncategorizable as to author; or genre, it slips out of any box one tries to fit it in. And so the sequences proceed, each with a slightly different shape and purpose. *Pterodactyls*, the fourth one, is another short one, viciously political:

we better start digging our foxholes in the fourth
[dimension
& while we dig let us chant We Piss on the Serb Nation
[State
We Piss on the Croat Nation State we piss and shit
on all your godforsaken states

The fifth sonnet sequence, *Villonelles,* is a "translation," a much condensed reworking of an older narrative sequence, *Or, to Hocus the Animals of the Pursuers by Changing Their Dream Cassettes (Old Thibetan Trick).* What was formerly a fifteen-page work in quatrains is now six sonnets, forming a mythic story which refuses to make sense in the way of the medieval past its characters, a dwarf and a queen, hint at; but is "sensible," can be sensed. Its qualities, and drift, are suggested by the sequence's last few lines:

in the world to come everything like it was

in the world that was yet everything quite changed
narratives disjunctive(yet) associative as dreams
poems sonorous replete with handsome words
while lacking all "sense" & "connection"

the future world is sensible chaos chaos squared
or raised to the power of infinity

The final sonnet sequence, *Reviewing the Tape*, is composed entirely of lines from Hollo's earlier large collection, *Sojourner Microcosms: Poems 1959-77*. The words of the past are summoned and shaped into a mysteriously allusive personal narrative of the past, ending with the following lines:

the surface extends all the way out to the core
wherever there is a hole distributed in space
cave equals room equals window

There is no essential difference in substance between surface and core, so the usual perception of them can be reversed. In a context of contemplation of the past, this suggests that what happens and then has happened is a "superficial" narrative, something inside, while the core of the person is the outward one, functioning exactly now. "A hole distributed in space" might be the past, as well as being a room. "Cave" is one's unconscious; "room" is the conscious self; "window" is the world. Everything coincides. And that sort of coincidence is the effect of the sequence and of all the sonnet sequences taken together. Hollo's times and self have been exploded, turned inside out, and made altogether.

Corvus concludes with two ostensible collections of separate titled poems. *High Beam* is an expansion of a shorter chapbook by the same title. There are poems in several manners: the expansively narrative

It was in his house I discovered
the monumentally baffling Ezra Pound
greenish photo of puffy-faced poet
on glossy black cover & his better half Dr. Williams
("Seven Years Short Of a Hundred")

the beautifully *graven*

calligrapher Berrigan
carved the Iowa rain

("Inhabited Eyes")

the broadly satirical

but now
in these
"controlled circumstances"

they had, in fact, *become*
"controlled substances"

("Chicago")

Etc. Five of the twenty-eight poems are about war (The Gulf War and the war in ex-Yugoslavia being within the section's time frame); five more are elegies; many are love poems. The final section of *Corvus, Survival Dancing,* consisting of fourteen poems, is really a sequence, unified in manner, mood, and motion—both broad impulse and pulse. The manner is telegraphic, dense, generally pronounless:

toss coin choose stairs a door with home
black hole of childhood
upholstered in cobblestones
mystery & exactitude of human nostrils

("In the Music Composed by Nutritious Algae")

The whole, with its beautiful title, is dedicated to "Sir Orfeo Joe," a.k.a. Joe Cardarelli, the poet and longtime friend of Hollo's, who died suddenly in 1994. The mood, again, is elegiac, time-conscious, and fearful but rather playfully so. This set, and so the book, ends with two poems which take an unsentimental stand with "art":

art
loves
funny details

therefore is
a dreaming
& yes joy!

elitist
for sure

("& Time Trots By")

yet she'll. . .
do art eat well never please wicked money

always treat language like a dangerous toy

("At Evenfall")

The above last line, the last line of the book, refers to a description by Ed Dorn of the snowy landscape of Finland, in association with Hollo's poetry sensibility: "It is so pure it treats English like a toy" ("afterword" to *Sojourner Microcosms.)* The insertion here of the word "dangerous" is a rather (not entirely) political act, since American English is now the most political, therefore dangerous, language in the world; this change is probably the product of Hollo's meditative compositional process. A minimalist thinks before (and after), as well as while, writing.

In the "author's note" to *Sojourner Microcosms* Hollo states (1977), "more & more i begin to see it all as one continuous poem . . ."; and there is a constancy and continuance to his work since which has born out the truth of that statement. In the same preface he writes, "i seem to average circa 10-20 pages per year," and one suspects that that is still roughly the case (though the lowercase "I" is no longer the case.) Part of Hollo's method is to collect phrases and lines, which he meditates on and joins together: he's the maker of the new object out of selections from what goes on in the inner and outer theaters. A compulsive reader, rather than compulsive writer, he takes in whatever words on whatever surfaces encountered, and he reads the words that get said in conversation as well. Thus, cullings from the world's verbiage, contemporary and past, constitute much of his raw material, which gets mulled over, related to, and in general transformed. He's not a diarist, or a recorder of the timely process of his mind and world. The "one continuous poem" isn't at all linear, because an effect of "fashioning" a poem is to deform the kind of time we've been taught to live in. In "Blue March '91" (in *High Beam)* Hollo states:

the Species invented Time
and probably Space

its function to be their recorder
until the End

but if art is a "dreaming" ("As Time Trots By," quoted earlier), it creates a different time and space as a dream does. That's how a poem is a place where a line lasts. *Corvus,* like all of Hollo's books, contains memorable lines and passages; the book is not a *text,* is much more artistically and spatially alive than that linear word implies with its origins in weaving. One reads Hollo to be in a different kind of time, as well as to make contact with a mature and responsible mind, which is pessimistic about the world and happy to be functioning, and which proposes wisdom, humor, and beauty as reasonable antidotes to evil.

Hollo's style is etched, compressed, and also compositional, meaning that because of the relations between a poem's pieces, the reader is constantly sent back into and all around inside the poem. The poem is never used up. The pieces are definitely pieces; take the following passage from *West Is Left On the Map:*

"dear chords of night: one is not rhymes
but civil fur come to bliss late"

this creature called god
left one no ma

boat sails into sun

west
is left on the map

an endless warble of dreams

The primary unit is the phrase not the word, and the initial, quoted couplet (which I take to be Hollo's, since there's no reference to it in the deliciously fussy note apparatus) is composed of four phrases rather harmoniously at odds with each other. Likewise the next couplet is two startling phrases, and so on, the phrases being units of both meaning and cadence. The meanings are quick and new; the cadences are terse but rich and have space around them, aren't at all jerky. There is also a more narrative manner, as on the page just previous to the above:

the old man reached for a stick but the savage begged him
in the name of all that was sacred
                not to hurt this snake

saying it was
                one of his gods
so the old man picked up a sturdy branch & killed the snake
& told the savage:
'when you said to me
                that this creature
                was your god
you left me no choice but to kill it'

Here there are long lines and shorter phrases together, each quite distinct though the narrative is continuous: each is still a piece, marked by the reader with a curious pleasure that seems to take place in the mouth, even while reading silently. In both passages, there is an exact sense of prosodic unit connected with phrase or line, even though the unit is never consistent. Prosody, of course, is also about time: one may use it to go forward in many different ways. Hollo's way is to hold back while going forward: the future arrives slowly, the past is recalled easily, and the reader feels, in general, in the present.

There is probably nothing special about Hollo's methods, as outlined; there is probably nothing very special about any poet's methods. However, it's difficult to think of anyone who practices the same methods as Hollo, anyone who gets meanings in quite the same way. He doesn't join the disjunct, he doesn't change syntax; rather by being terse, and careful, he brings things together that come to belong together.

        wake up
smile in the giddy blue
join in the flash of was

                brains still on

("Gods Walked Animals Talked," *Survival Dancing)*

It's the space between "pieces" that's important, different, space meaning a sort of register of the singularity of what's said. In disjunction it's the place where one recognizes that the next unit doesn't "go with" the previous one. Often in contemporary disjunction, the space

between units is a mannerism (not necessarily a pejorative word), an element of design or style. In Hollo's writing, since there's content, such space exists because original thoughts are being uttered. But they're word-thoughts, thoughts that couldn't quite be had apart from the exact words they are. Somewhat the same kind of space exists between the poems or parts of the various chapbook-like sections of *Corvus*, between the sections themselves, and between all of Hollo's books. They—the various parts of the "one continuous thing," Hollo's lifelong poem—are of the same substance but aren't the same. They aren't novel: the aesthetics of novelty can be very wearying and shallow. They're an exact response to what's going on. Hollo's style opens to a large range of subject, since it is at once personal, magisterial, humorous, and serious. It compresses many qualities into the one response, in slow forward motion, with slow jewel-tipped feelers. Hollo's particular mastery of the space in and around the various units involved in the lifelong production of poetry, his particular practice, is probably closest, among contemporaries, to that of Ted Berrigan. Space in a poem is a frame both formal and friendly; it's a person-made tinkering with time. One does not become grandiose about such things; poetics doesn't change the world much, or shouldn't. (Wouldn't it be terrible if a poet actually changed the world's consciousness to be like her/his theory, or poem!) Or, as Hollo says in *Blue Ceiling*, "may you be forever strange."

Finally, if Hollo is an internationalist, what is an international poetry? Sometimes it seems as if every American poet should be asking her/himself that question, as a response both to the United States' continuously imperialistic role in the world in most respects (including poetry) and to the fact of a borderless computer-controlled future. Hollo's poetry is faithful to ethnic region as well as to world, to a childhood in Finland that isn't really lost, and to various localities lived in in the American West. Specific histories don't fade, but one keeps in constant touch, outward. Hollo's poetry, with its huge field of reference, is one possible model for the future. It doesn't list what it knows and consists of: the references are built in. That is, it isn't itself a computerized conglomerate, doesn't spout facts as possession, but it's equal to all that. It could probably handle the future.

—ALICE NOTLEY

Contributor Notes

ERRATA in 39: we apologize to Emily Cheng for misspelling her name, and to Barbara Guest for mis-setting the following lines from her poem, "The Nude," quoted from by Rachel Blau DuPlessis in her article on Guest's work (p. 43):

> A severe distance is established between her realism
> and his anxious attempt to define it.
>
> The painter desires the image he has selected
> to be clothed in the absolute silk of his touch,
>
> Lonely himself he has admired the glance
> of kimonos, mirrors, fans and bestowed them on her
>
> . . .
>
> He searches the world to find those spheres
> that will confine the fluid nude,

PHILLIP FOSS has a new book of poems, *Chromatic Defacement,* forthcoming in 1997 from Chax Press. Other books are available from Light & Dust Books, and Lost Roads. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN is writing a book on Upper Paleolithic imagination; Black Sparrow will publish a new collection of his poetry in 1998. ADRIENNE RICH's most recent collection of poetry is *Dark Fields of the Republic* (Norton, 1995). JEROME ROTHENBERG's tenth book from New Directions, *Seedings & Other Poems,* appeared in 1996, along with *Pictures of the Crucifixion* (poems) and *The Book, Spiritual Instrument* (edited with David Guss) from Granary Books. The second volume of *Poems for the Millennium,* compiled with Pierre Joris, is scheduled for later this year. His and Milos Sovak's translations from Vitezslav Nezval will appear shortly from Sun & Moon. Prague-born and Charles University-educated, MILOS SOVAK is a medical researcher and inventor, who lives

in California and since 1972 has been publisher of Ettan Press, for which he designs and produces limited editions of literature and graphics. His interest in poetry goes back to a childhood acquaintance with Vitezslav Nezval, who was a close friend of his father's. *Nothing the Sun Could Not Explain,* an anthology of contemporary Brazilian poetry edited by MICHAEL PALMER, Regis Bonvicino and Nelson Ascher is about to be published by Sun & Moon Press. Palmer's *The Danish Notebook* will appear in the spring of 1997, in a bilingual edition from Borum Vorlag, Copenhagen. His *Selected Poems* is scheduled for the fall of 1997, from New Directions. JOHN OLSON's work most recently appears in the American Book Review and First Intensity. His chapbook, *Swarm of Edges,* was published last October by bec press. KEN CORMIER currently lives in West Newton, MA, with his wife Julie Letendre. He is completing work on a recording project entitled *Bug Dreams.* WANG PING, born in Shanghai, came to New York in 1985. Her poems have appeared in *The Best American Poetry* (1993 and 1996). Coffee House Press published her book of short stories, *American Visa,* in 1994, and her novel, *Foreign Devil,* in 1996. PAMELA WYE will exhibit recent paintings in a group show entitled "The Power of Suggestion" at the Hopper House, Nyack, NY. She has been named Guest Editor for the College Art Association's *Art Journal* issue on "Rethinking Studio Education." ELIOT WEINBERGER' most recent book is *Written Reaction* (Marsilio, 1996). SPENCER SELBY'S most recent book is *No Island* (Drogue Press, 1995), ROBERTO TEJADA has an essay in *Images of the Spirit: Photographs by Graciela Iturbide* (Aperture, 1996). JASON WEISS is currently writing a book on Latin American writers in Paris. PIERRE JORIS' most recent books include *Winnetou Old* (poems), and *Breathturn* by Paul Celan (translation). Another Celan volume, *Threadsuns,* and a collection of his own poems, *Poasis,* are scheduled for 1997 and 1998 respectively. BARBARA GUEST's most recent book of poems is *Quill, Solitary APPARITION* (Post-Apollo Press, 1996). ALICE NOTLEY's latest book, *The Descent of Alette,* was published by Penguin USA in 1996.

KENRO IZU RAISES FUNDS FOR HOSPITAL IN CAMBODIA

Photographer Kenro Izu, who has spent the last 15 years photographing monuments throughout the world, has announced that he will mount a series of exhibitions and sell prints of his images of the Angkor Wat monument to raise $2 million for the construction and operation of a free hospital for children in Cambodia.

In the last three years, Izu has made a total of six trips to Angkor Wat, an 850-year-old temple in a Cambodian jungle. In the course of his work, he's seen hundreds of Cambodian children who've been maimed by land mines left over from the country's civil war, and the situation began to gnaw at him. "I was taking pictures and selling them for a couple thousand dollars each and not giving anything back," he says. "I couldn't justify that. I felt I wanted to return something."

On a long flight home from one of his shoots, Izu says he came up with the idea of building a free hospital for children. Earlier this year, he established Friends Without A Border, a nonprofit organization dedicated to coordinating the project and raising money for it.

Since then, Friends Without A Border has reached an agreement with Cambodia's ministry of health to construct the hospital. The governor of Siem Reap, the city nearest Angkor Wat, has donated land. A temporary facility is already under construction and Izu's goal is to complete a permanent facility within 3 years.

Friends Without A Border is trying to raise $1 million for construction, plus another $500,000 to sustain operations for ten years (the sum is low by western standards, but labor costs are significantly lower in Cambodia, Izu explains). A Japanese company has also agreed to provide medical equipment.

To date, the organization has raised $80,000. The first exhibition of Izu's Angkor photos, at the Museum of Photographic Arts in Kiyosato, Japan, runs through September 29; in October, it will travel throughout Japan. Izu will also exhibit his work at the Howard Greenberg Gallery in New York beginning January 23, 1997, and in September 1997, at the Center of Photography at Woodstock, New York. Other U.S. exhibits are in the works.

Izu will sell platinum and gravure prints of his work for $1,250 each—one-half his usual fee. He also plans to sell postcards, greeting cards and catalogues. In addition, the organization is seeking corporate sponsorships.

Izu, a native of Japan, came to the U.S. to pursue a career in photography in 1971. After a brief stint as an assistant to a fashion photographer, he opened his own studio to photograph jewelry. He began photographing monuments around the world after visiting the Egyptian pyramids in the late 1970s.

For more information about Friends Without a Border, call (212) 254-1002 or send e-mail to <fwab@interport.net>. The organization also has a Web site at <http:// www.users.interport.net/~fwab >.

SULFUR must be the most important literary magazine which has explored and extended the boundaries of poetry. Clayton Eshleman has had a nose for smelling out what was going to happen next in the ceaseless evolution of the living art.
--James Laughlin, New Directions Books

In an era of literary conservatism and sectarianism, the broad commitment of SULFUR to both literary excellence and a broad, interdisciplinary, unbought humanistic engagement with the art of poetry in America has been invaluable. To my notion, its critical articles and notes have been the sharpest going over the last several years.
--Gary Snyder

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Sulfur

FALL 1997

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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JEROME ROTHENBERG
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ALLEN S. WEISS
MARJORIE WELISH

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Editorial Assistant BARBARA McGUINNESS

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER: *Marionette* by Marwan, Oil on Canvas, 162x130 cm, 1980.

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ADRIENNE RICH

LETTER TO JANE ALEXANDER

July 3 1997

Jane Alexander, Chair
The National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington DC 20506

Dear Jane Alexander,

I just spoke with a young man from your office, who informed me that I had been chosen to be one of twelve recipients of the National Medal for the Arts at a ceremony at the White House in the fall. I told him at once that I could not accept such an award from President Clinton or this White House because the very meaning of art, as I understand it, is incompatible with the cynical politics of this administration. I want to clarify to you what I meant by my refusal.

Anyone familiar with my work from the early Sixties on knows that I believe in art's social presence—as breaker of official silences, as voice for those whose voices are disregarded, and as a human birthright. In my lifetime I have seen the space for the arts opened by movements for social justice, the power of art to break despair. Over the past two decades I have witnessed the increasingly brutal impact of racial and economic injustice in our country.

There is no simple formula for the relationship of art to justice. But I do know that art—in my own case the art of poetry—means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner-table of power which holds it hostage. The radical disparities of wealth and power in America are widening at a devastating rate. A President cannot meaningfully honor certain token artists while the people at large are so dishonored.

I know you have been engaged in a serious and disheartening struggle to save government funding for the arts, against those whose fear and suspicion of art is nakedly repressive. In the end, I don't think we can separate art from overall human dignity and hope. My concern for my country is inextricable from my concerns as an artist. I could not participate in a ritual which would feel so hypocritical to me.

Sincerely,

cc: President Clinton

Adrienne Rich

ADRIENNE RICH

TWO POEMS

1941

In the heart of pain where mind is broken
and consumed by body, I sit like you
on the rocky shore (like you, not with you)

A windmill shudders, great blades cleave the air
and corn is ground
for a peasant century's bread and fear of hunger
(like that, but not like that)

Pewter sails drive down green water
barges shoulder fallowing fields
(Like then, not then)

If upstairs in the mill sunrise fell low and thin
on the pierced sleep of children hidden in straw
where the mauled hen had thrashed itself away

if some lost their heads and ran

if some were dragged

if some lived and grew old remembering
how the place by itself was not evil
had water, spiders, a cat

if anyone asked me–
How did you get here anyway?

Are you the amateur of drought? the collector
of rains? are you poetry's inadmissible
untimely messenger?

By what right?
In whose name?
Do you

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LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET

1

Your photograph won't do you justice
those wetted anthill mounds won't let you focus

that lens on the wetlands
five swans chanting overhead

distract your thirst for closure
and quick escape

2

Let me turn you around in your frozen nightgown and say
one word to you: *ineluctable*

—meaning, you won't get quit
of this: the worst of the new news

history running back and forth
panic in the labyrinth

—I will not touch you further:
your choice to freeze or not

to say, you and I are caught in
a laboratory without a science

3

Would it gladden you to think
poetry could purely

take its place beneath lightning sheets
or fogdrip live its own life

screamed-at, howled down
by a torn bowel of dripping names

—composers visit Terezin, filmmakers Sarajevo
Cabrini Green or Edenwald Houses

  ineluctable

if a woman as vivid as any artist
can fling any day herself from the 14th floor

would it relieve you to decide *Poetry*
doesn't make this happen?

4

From the edges of your own distraction turn
the cloth-weave up, its undersea-fold venous

with sorrow's wash and suck, pull and release,
                annihilating rush

to and fro, fabric of caves, the onset of your fear
kicking away their lush and slippery flora nurseried
                in liquid glass

trying to stand fast in rootsuck, in distraction,
trying to wade this
undertow of utter repetition

Look: with all my fear I'm here with you, trying what it
means, to stand fast; what it means to move

5

Beneaped. Rowboat, pirogue, caught between the lowest
and highest tides of spring. Beneaped. Befallen,
becalmed, benighted, yes, begotten.
–*Be*–infernal prefix of the actionless.
–*Be*–as in Sit, Stand, Lie, Obey.
The dog's awful desire that takes his brain
and lays it at the bootheel.

You can be like this forever–*Be*
as without movement.

6

But this is how
I come, anyway, pushing up from below
my head wrapped in a chequered scarf a lanterned
helmet on this head
pushing up out of the ore
this sheeted face this lanterned head facing the seep
of death
my lips having swum through silt
clearly pronouncing
Hello and farewell

Who, anyway, wants to know
this pale mouth, this stick
of crimson lipsalve Who my
dragqueen's vocal chords my bitter beat
my overshoulder backglance flung
at the great strophes and antistrophes
my chant my ululation my bilharzia
my dysentery my hilarious throat

my penal colony's birdstarved ledge my face downtown
in films by Sappho and Artaud?

Everyone. For a moment.

7

It's not the déjà-vu that kills
it's the foreseeing
the head that speaks from the crater

I wanted to go somewhere
the brain had not yet gone
I wanted not to be
there so alone.

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TIMOTHY LIU

THREE POEMS

BIG BOY

where polka dots mask a mastiff's bullet-ridden hide
rote prayer that sinecure we temp to pass the time
in scenes unfit for viewing love freed from its script

no time to search for trump cards vanity plays in vain
where ankles dangle high above those sure calamities
now breaking in that ghetto on stiletto heels we strut

chain of fools lip-synched by a retard cross-dressed
as aretha sporting pumps and platinum chains to adorn
tarred and feathered folds of flesh for town parades

as ski lifts avalanche into the mind's unshingled calm
fear not the shots on kodak paper boys jack-off upon
ass meat spread in centerfolds a canine wrenches free

GLIMPSED THROUGH SPEEDING GLASS

zipped-up in duffel bags some newborn twins
mistaken for kittens mewling in subzero weather
miles from the nearest town inconsequential
where pistol shots ricochet off iron doors
St. John the Divine or a human hair stretched
tight inside a hygrothermograph monitoring air
that consumes a ready-made the future taken
hostage as each man tests his own chameleon
appetite in rivers made of flesh that undulate
on a marble floor our waking life but a fragment
of the dream where fishhooks catch in throats
where children plant a thousand pines more
lasting than these lines some gas jets flaming
out at the county morgue my eyes looking over
a commuter's shoulder an obituary cast off
on a vacant seat in that daily rush devoured
without sustenance the hours now slipping past

NOSTALGIA

The weight of summer fruit in a gilded frame.
Or heads cast down to jars of anthurium.
Nothing like crystal kissed by random nicks.
Forgotten rhythms of salt and blood as rawhide gives.
The glass demanding that your face be seen.
Be made an example of.
Against his hirsute wrist a song we cannot sing.
Those fists that congregate at the site.
Nor gather at Waterloo while Napoleon comes and goes.
Iron rails where a fall should have been.
Some valentines torn open after a sudden rain.

TESSA JOSEPH

WALKING AROUND THE RUIN

There are no more movers No more
filing in and out No packing in layers of wax

Start with the housefire

that jerked its leg in your throat Start with that

saltstained river which was both enough
and not enough to move you That door

open on a kitchen, burning oil you could smell

Start with the houses you've wanted that you haven't had

Their smokeshriveled doors Heatbucking floorboards
Ghosts of windows where windows are gone

A crowd on a green and dripping barge We were in
[procession

Through the buoyed stones Of our slate walkway Our
[blue front door

There was a stone mantel. We always kept things on the
[stairs.

Two feet Slap the water One instant Perfect

There were twenty five windows
We paid for them
Paid for them Put them there

Not like eyes Not like anything
but windows
Like quarries, spiked deep No

There were twenty five windows
A shelf of little boxes
We filled them Or not I saw

it happen I saw each box hinge
on flame

Small archaeology, this cellar: tins of morphine tool-hung
[wall
ancient chessgame What remains

And the details, tiny pictures, curving voices map the last of
[the passages
Tell me how it is there What it is like

I visit the river every day and it too is small, too small, too
[small
To a ruined room the barge will never come

A house is the space the size of the word it is *lamp* and
[street and *bread* and *rooster*
but also *wider,* having

wider arms

JOHN LATTA

TO ROBERT DUNCAN

Sortilege is all, orphan, and *nothing is trivial*—thus by chance machinations, undeflect'd melodies of the unquiet watch, we sound the *What Is,* drifting the boundaried nautical blue,

sentinels to whatever errancy intention—that aimless ward of the imagination—derives of our erring. There we demur, lingering where the western song sparrow's song is unheard of,

where its five struck notes, various, nameable, *some musical, some buzzy,* counsel certainty, a momentary loud sampling, a deft assemblage, welcome awe, and ease.

What's available is the sentence, that *mere story of loving* in the ongoing *decay of intensities,* how it stills the flux of its own leafing out by leaving something out.

This is the law of the *the,* how a simple kind of death inheres in grammar, hermetic, inviolable, new. So we keep moving, we make passages, whole brotherhoods of lost hungers, of

small fires trick'd out of hiding, demure impermanences struck idle and ghostly in the voice-wash, the intercept'd hum of handbreadth measuring the skittish colt of the page.

We mouth mysteries of music, sere inevitabilities, impure remedies of *pastiche,* yea-saying the lots of irrecoverable Time against that one vacant lot where God is He who imagines Himself.

Sentinel, we keep watch over what we cannot ward off by watching and we make ourselves of nothing and our names of nothing.

Here's a story, orphan: there was a man I never knew who called himself an orphan, a man without a permanent home who in a late recklessness of years wrote a book

that worried the imagination, that, in the reading, seemed to be like taking *pieces of a dissected map out of its box.* He made that up himself. He called truth *a divine ventriloquist.*

In youth, he let the words pour out, mongrel, fecund, dear. He coined equally: *pantisocracy, potenziate.* Fearful of *half-knowledge,* that yipping, uncertain,

of dogs in the dark, he declined late into a notably abstract silence. What I mean, sentinel, is this: there is no vanity—that spigot, that spile that draws off sap—

no vanity in *la veille de la vieillesse,* watch of the late watch, no vanity, watcher, in *mere writing,* no vanity in what song is, or what it, song'd, unsings.

GERARD DE NERVAL

Drafts of AURELIA

(Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth)

It was in 1840 that this *Vita nuova* began for me. I was in Brussels at the time, staying near the Grande Place on the rue Brûlée. I would usually dine at the Montagne de la Cour at the home of a great lady friend of mine and then make my way over to the Théâtre de la Monnaie where, as author of the play, I was granted free admission.[1] There I gave myself over to the heady pleasure of again seeing a charming singer whom I had known in Paris and who was now an opera star in Brussels. Every now and then another lovely woman would motion me up to her box and I would leave my seat in the orchestra stall to be by her side. We would chat about the singer whose talents she also admired. She was most gracious and most understanding about this old Parisian flame of mine and would almost invariably allow me to accompany her back to her home near the gate of Schaerbeek.

One evening I was invited to witness a seance of magnetism. I had never before seen a somnambulist. This was the very day that Napoleon's remains were being transferred back to Paris.[2] The somnambulist described the ceremony in all its details—exactly as we were to read about them in the Paris newspapers the following day. Except that she added that at the very moment that the body of Napoleon was being triumphantly paraded into the Invalides, his soul had escaped from the coffin and, taking flight toward the North, had come to rest on the plain of Waterloo.

I was quite struck by this grand idea—as was everybody else who had attended the seance, whose company included the Lord Bishop of Malines. Two days later, there was a splendid concert at the Salle de la Grande Harmonie. Among the audience were two queens. The queen of song was the person I shall henceforth call Aurélie. The other was the queen of Belgium, somewhat younger but no less lovely. Both were wearing their hair the same way, their braids gathered at the nape by a golden net in the style of the Medici.

This soiree left a vivid impression on me. I henceforth had but one thought in mind: to return to Paris and to obtain an official governmen-

tal mission for myself that might allow me to return to Flanders in a more illustrious capacity.

Upon my return, I spent six tireless weeks studying various commercial questions under the guidance of the then Minister of Education, M. Villemain. I was on the verge of successfully realizing my scheme when my zealous preoccupation with my various labors thrust me into a state of exaltation of which I was the last person to become aware. In cafes, at the homes of my friends, on the streets, I would hold forth at length about this and that—*de omni re scibili et quibusdam aliis,* in the manner of Pico de la Mirandola. For three days I gathered together all the materials for a system that explained racial affinities, the power of numbers, and the harmonies of colors—a system I elaborated upon with considerable eloquence and which impressed a good number of my friends.

Evenings, it was my habit to go have a beer at Le Peletier's[3] and to make my way up toward to the rue Navarin where I was then living. One night, around midnight, I had an hallucination. Just as the hour was striking, I passed in front of number 37 of the rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette and there, at its entryway, I saw a woman, still young in years, whose features filled me with amazement. Her face was pale and her eyes hollow; I said to myself: "She is Death." I returned home and went to bed, thinking the world was about to end.

But when I awoke, it was light out; somewhat reassured, I spent the day seeing friends.

That evening I returned to my usual cafe where I talked about painting and music at length with my friends Paul*** and Auguste***.[4] Midnight struck—the fatal hour, to my mind; but it occurred to me that the clock of the heavens might well not be synchronized with those of the earth. I said to Paul that I was going to leave and head off toward the Orient, my motherland. He accompanied as far as the square of Cadet. There, finding myself at the intersection of several streets, I hesitated and sat down on a boundary-stone at the corner of the rue Coquenard. Paul was in vain making supernatural efforts in order to get me to budge. I felt nailed to the spot. He finally left me there around one in the morning, and seeing myself alone, I called for the help of my two friends Théophile and Alphonse whom I glimpsed in profile, like shades. A great number of vehicles filled with masked revelers kept passing by, for it was a carnival night. I examined the numbers on the cabs with great interest, absorbed in mysterious numerological calculations. Finally, in the skies above the rue Hauteville, I saw a red star with a blue halo rise. I thought I recognized the distant star of Saturn and, struggling to my feet, wandered off in that direction.

At that point I launched into some mysterious hymn whose strains filled me with a joy beyond words. At the same time, I proceeded to shed my earthly garments and scatter them about. Having reached the middle of the street, I saw myself surrounded by soldiers. I felt myself endowed with supernatural powers and it seemed to me that all I would have to do was stretch out my hands in order to knock all those poor soldiers to the ground—the way one might smooth down the nap of a fleece. I did not want to deploy my magnetic powers and allowed myself to be led away without resistance.

They laid me down on a camp bed while my clothes were drying out on the stove. It was then that I had a vision. The sky opened before my eyes like a Glory and the gods of antiquity appeared to me. Beyond their dazzling sky, I glimpsed the radiance of the seven heavens of Brahma. Morning cut this dream short.

A fresh group of soldiers replaced those who had brought me in. They clapped me into a cell with a strange individual who had also been arrested that night and who seemed to be unaware even of his own name.

Some friends came to fetch me and the visionary state continued unabated. The only difference between waking and sleep was that in the former case everything was transfigured before my eyes; everybody who approached me seemed changed; material objects possessed a kind of penumbra that altered their shape; the distortions created by the play of light and refractions of color kept me occupied with a constant series of interlinked impressions whose plausibility was further borne out by my dreams, less dependent as they were on external elements.

At first I thought I was in a house situated on the banks of the Rhine. A ray of sun was playing through the green shutters wreathed with grape vines. I was told: "You have been brought to the home of your relatives. Don't lay about in bed; they are waiting for you." There was a rustic clock on the wall and on this clock a bird proceeded to speak.

For three days I lay in a deep sleep that was rarely interrupted by dreams. A woman dressed in black appeared before my bed and it seemed to me she had hollow eyes. Except that I seemed to see tears as brilliant as diamonds pouring forth from the depths of the empty sockets. This woman was for me the specter of my mother who had died in Silesia. One day they took me off for a bath. In the froth of the white foam I thought I glimpsed various heraldic symbols; I kept on seeing three children pierced by a stake and then being transformed into three martlets. These were most likely the arms of Lorraine.

As I understood it, I was one of the three children of my name who had been thus impaled by the Tartars during the seizure of our castles.

This was on the banks of the icy Dvina.[5] My spirit soon shifted to another point of Europe, to the banks of the Dordogne where three similar castles had been rebuilt. Their tutelary angel was still the black lady. She had now reacquired her whiteness of complexion, her sparkling eyes, and was wearing an ermine gown with a tippet of swansdown draped over her white shoulders.

It was then that I had a curious dream. First I saw the genealogy of the French kings and emperors unfold like an immense moving picture—then the feudal trunk crumbled, bathed in blood. I followed the spread of the gospel across all the countries of the earth. Throughout Africa, Asia and Europe, it seemed that an immense vine was sending out its shoots around the globe. The last of these trailed off in the land of Elizabeth of Hungary.[6] Here and there immense ossuaries were constructed out the bones of Martyrs. Genghis Khan, Tamerlane[7] and the emperors of Rome had covered the world with bones. I cried out for a long time, invoking my mother under all the names bestowed upon the gods of antiquity.

When I opened my eyes, I found myself in a room that was rather cheerful. There was a clock on the wall and above this clock was a crow who seemed to be in possession of the secret of the future.

When I closed my eyes, I saw myself carried off to the castle of Johannisberg on the banks of the Rhine. I said to myself: this must be my uncle Frederick who is inviting me to his table. He received me in a magnificent dining room which was flooded with the rays of the setting sun. During the night it seemed to me that I was hurtling down into an abyss that traversed the earth. As I emerged on the other side of the world, I found myself on a pleasant island and went over to an old man who was working in a vineyard. He said to me: "Your brothers are waiting for you to have dinner." I felt I was falling toward the center of the earth. My body was painlessly buoyed along by a current of quicksilver which carried me to the heart of the planet. At that point I distinctly saw the veins and the arteries of molten metal that gave life to all its various parts. The family reunion was taking place in an immense hall where a magnificent banquet had been laid out. The patriarchs of the Bible and the queens of the Orient were seated at the places of honor. Solomon and the Queen of Sheba presided over the gathering, dressed in the most beautiful raiments of Asia. I felt a surge of warmth and justifiable pride upon recognizing the divine features of my family. I was informed that I was destined to return to earth and I embraced them all, in tears.

Upon waking, I was delighted to hear some of the old songs from the village where I had been raised. The young boy who was watching over me was singing them in a voice that touched me no end and only

the sight of the iron bars on the windows could convince me that I was not back in the village at the home of my old uncle who had been so good to me. O cruel, sweet memories, I saw you as a possible way back to a peaceful and reformed way of life. Love was once again stirring in my heart, casting its beauty on everything around me.

Several friends stopped by to see me in the morning; I took a walk through the garden with them and told them of my trials and tribulations. One of them said to me with tears in his eyes: "Is it not true that there is a God?" I reassured him on that score and we fell into each other's arms in a fond embrace.

From that point onward, the days went by more calmly. After a slight relapse, I had been taken to a sanitarium in Montmartre.[8]

Far calmer now that I found myself among sisters in misfortune whose drawings of hieroglyphs on sand or paper struck me as having a definite bearing on my own ideas, I tried to retrace the image of the goddess who had appeared to me in my dreams. Soaking a sheet of paper with the juice of plants, I had represented the Queen of the South such as I had seen her in my dreams, such as she has been depicted in the Apocalypse of the apostle John.[9] She is crowned with stars and wears a turban covered with all the dazzling colors of the rainbow. Her features are serene, her skin slightly olive, and her nose is curved like a hawk's beak. A string of pearls encircles her neck and a rounded collar of goffered lace frames her shoulders. Her dress is the color of hyacinths and one of her feet is planted on a bridge; the other rests on a wheel. One of her hands is placed on the highest rock in the mountains of Yemen, the other, pointed toward the sky, swings the *anxoka* flower, known to the uninitiated as the *flower of fire.* The snake of the heavens opens its maw to devour her, but a single grain decorated with a luminous plume plunges into the gaping chasm. The sign of the Ram appears twice on the heavenly orb where the figure of the Queen is reflected as in a mirror and takes on the features of Saint Rosalie. Crowned with stars, she appears prepared to save the world. The heavenly constellations envelop her in their radiance.

On the highest peak of the mountains of Yemen, one can see a cage whose lattices stand out against the sky. A marvelous bird is singing in it—the talisman of new ages. Leviathan lumbers through the air on his black wings. Beyond the sea there is another peak on which the name *Merovech*[10] has been inscribed. From these two points, the sites of the ancient cities of Sheba situated at the furthest extremity of the straits of Babel-Mandel,[11] one can see two races rise up and scatter themselves over the face of the earth—the white race in Asia, the black race in Africa, from which the Franks and the Gallas[12] descend. For the former,

the queen goes by the name of *Balkis,* for the latter she is called *Makeda,* that is, the great one.

The sons of Abraham and Kethurah who reach all the way back to Enoch via Eber and Joktan make up the holy race of the princes of Sheba.[13] Their capital is Axum in Abyssinia. The sons of Merovia move toward Asia, appear during the Trojan War and then, defeated by the gods of the Peloponnesus, sink into the mists of the Cimmerian mountains. It is thus that they cross Scythia and Germania in order to establish the foundations of a powerful empire beyond the Rhine. Under the names of Scandinavians and Normans they extend their conquests as far as Ultima Thule, site of the treasure of the Nibelungen, watched over by the sons of the Dragon.[14] Two knights guided by the Valkyrie sisters discover the treasure and transport it to Burgundy. Out of the heart of peace there arises the seed of a conflict that will last several centuries, for these two fatal sisters, Brunhild and Kriemhild, sacrifice to their own pride the powerful nations over whom they reign. Siegfried is treacherously wounded while hunting and the blade enters the only part of his body that has not been dyed by the blood of the Dragon. Brunhild takes her revenge by becoming the bride of Attila, the fierce king of the Huns. Avert my eyes from this bloody scene in which the Burgundians and the Huns attack each other with knives after having held a feast of reconciliation. Everything dies around the queen. But a page has avenged her by slipping behind the murderer of her husband. Here the scene changes and the lance of Charles Martel disperses the squadrons of Saracens at Poitiers.[15] Charlemagne's Empire rises in the West and his victorious eagles soon cover Germany and Italy. Woe to you, Didier, king of the Lombards. From the height of your tower you signal the approach of the conqueror, crying out: "So much iron, good God, so much iron!" The Round Table has acquired new knights and the cycle of Arthurian romances now blends harmoniously into the cycle of Charlemagne. O Queen Guinevere, fairest of the fair, what use to you are the charms and the honeyed words of your knight Lancelot? You must lay your pride at the feet of Griselda, the daughter of a humble collier.

The armed West enters into a pact with the East. Charlemagne and Harun-al-Rashid[16] held out their hands to each other over the heads of their stunned subjects. New gods surge forth from the colored mists of the Orient. . .Melusina addresses herself to the wizard Merlin and keeps him captive in a splendid palace which the undines have built on the banks of the Rhine.[17] Meanwhile the twelve peers who have set off to conquer the Holy Grail call out to him for help amid the deserts of Syria. It is only upon hearing the plaintive notes of Roland's ivory horn that Merlin tears himself away from the enchantments of the Fairy. During

this time, Viviane holds Charlemagne prisoner on the banks of the lake of Aix-la-Chapelle. The old emperor will never again awake. Held captive like Barberossa and Richard,[18] he will allow his vast empire to be dismembered; Lothar battles his brothers for its most precious morsel.

Notes to *Drafts of Aurélia*

Probably composed in December, 1853, though the latter portions may well be as late as December, 1854. The text follows the Guillaume-Pichois Pléiade edition.

1. Nerval traveled to Brussels in late 1840 for the Belgian premiere of his opera Piquillo, starring the singer Jenny Colon. The other woman is probably the pianist Marie Pleyel.
2. The ceremonies celebrating the return of Napoleon's remains to France took place on December 15, 1840.
3. A favorite cafe of Left Bank artists and writers.
4. Here, as later in the paragraph, Nerval crossed out the full names of his friends Paul Chenevard, Auguste Morel, Théophile Gautier, and Alphonse Karr.
5. Major river of northwestern Russia.
6. Thirteenth-century monarch canonized for her works of charity.
7. Legendary Mongol emperors.
8. Nerval entered the clinic of Dr. Esprit Blanche on March 21, 1841.
9. Revelation 12:1: 'And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.'
10. Legendary founder of the first Germanic-Frankish dynasty (c. 500-751).
11. Babel-Mandeb (the "Gate of Tears"), the straight separating the Red Sea from the Indian Ocean.
12. A people of southern Abyssinia.
13. A genealogy derived from *Genesis*. Joktan was the father of the thirteen tribes of southern Arabia.
14. Well before Wagner, Nerval concocts his own syncretic version of the Nibelungen legend.
15. Charles Martel defeated the Saracens at Poitiers in 732.
16. Legendary eighth-century caliph whose empire included southwest Asia and northern Africa.
17. Nerval conflates the French folktales about the fairy Mélusine with the Arthurian legend of the evil sorceress Morgan le Fay.
18. Legend had it that Frederick Barbarossa (1122–1190) lay asleep on Kyffhäusser mountain, waiting to restore the Holy Roman Empire to its former greatness. Richard Lion-Heart (1157–1199) was captured and imprisoned in the castle of Dümsteon in Austria on his return from the Crusades in 1192—just as Napoleon's son, the Aiglon, was imprisoned in the castle of Schoenbrunn in Vienna.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

AT TSUKIJI MARKET TOKYO

10/19/96, for Kato-kun

1
fish & styrofoam
& plastic wrappings
where we watched great tuna bodies
white still under frost
on carts that pass us by
here in this market without smells
a place for noble death
for fish death
we can view it from our chariot
this flat bed
moving forward—curving—in a dream
small fishes packed in rows
a giant clam like a vagina
a razor-beak *sayori* red dot at its tip
the *kime* showing god's large eye
(he said) or under lamplight
gills still moving
fish blood seeping out
the blood of white fish with what stolen beauty
orange fins & tails of poison *fugu*
nearby eels in vats of blood & water
& the dark saws splitting flesh & bone
the severed tuna heads their mouths still open
black fish wrapped in ice
a red slash underneath its head
eye wide & dry
a cavity that cuts down deep
that lets the hand move in & out
to draw out lungs & guts

shrimps wriggling sad survivors in the sawdust
"insects of the sea"
my mind aswim with these
with mouths that open in the blood they float through
miles of searching filaments
like flags for death
a paradise of bubbles fast ascending
tiny eggs & sperm
each one a seedbed for a hundred kannons
breaking into life
the cry of food & sex so strong
there is no wrapper can contain it
but it fills the air
& from my mouth it issues like the dead
the voices of our fathers calling
ploughed back in the earth
without regrets
reminding us how gorgeous death is
blood of fishes staining the white flesh
red flowers & round open eyes

2
THE TALE

He walks among the others: animals & neighbors. In the land of islands someone comes to meet him, tall & with an eye that cuts through space. Immaculate. The man cries out & falls. His death comes when it does by force of nature. In this way we feel the earth shake till it draws the light around us. Lungs and guts are emptied. When the shock breaks through the crust a block of houses rises from the sea and burrows down. Its people lie beneath a wall of boulders: stones a god shakes free. They see the fish swept up into a stranger's net. The corridors are white & lined with fish blood. Death is always sudden, always comes after the fatal blow. A mallet cracks the fish skull. They blast a hole into the fish's maw. The messengers who spoke a broken language, also now stare through broken eyes. We walk among the shelters & the empty lots. Awash in Tsukiji where the boards

cry out with fish death. Continue with the work he hands you. To provoke & probe. A life disrupted is no less a life. Those who were sleeping when the floats drove by continued sleeping. Those who were awake were faster—like fathers running in & out of dreams. The prince of tides has written this for you. The land of islands.

3
for Makoto Oda

"a great quake
"shook the earth
the old poem has it
thinking how our legs have lost their balance
books & ladders tumbling down
a dream of fish death
where the bathers in their terror move like fish
the man who has an old world in his mind
sees it return to him
the year behind him lost to sleep
a rush of water dims his eyes
the words rewoven to the present day

•

[HOJOKI—CHOMEI IN KYOTO—1177 A.D.—KOBE 1995/96]

months passed & people spoke about the quake no longer
but a skull would sometimes turn up in the earth
heavy with water
& the aftershocks now were inside us
carried with us day by day
the earthquake hidden underneath the ground
our houses like our ashes swept away

this is how a capital can disappear
or boats be swallowed by the earth
covered by mountains
a city with dead houses (someone thinks)
how long will they be standing?
– until the wild boars clog up all your streets
– until the mountain cleaves in two

days grow darker
world knows what its equal is
an earthquake spewing havoc all around us
when the elements light up

the days go white with aftershocks & black with clouds
houses slip into the earth consumed as dust
like that stirred up by horses racing thru a valley
where land gives way & blights them
trapped in the event

but when they speak the language of the gods
no words come out
therefore the masks they use are hinged
to make a show of speech

no one is free of it no heart
escapes its vanities
but all their things record the years that pass
the way the wind shadows their months
all times abandoned to its ceaseless shaking
like a dragon moving up & down
like thunderbolts that strike them dead
like smoke that covers a pagoda
waves that break on rocks
seas burying the earth

a fish
under the light

a message brought out of the shadows

fin & claw
& claw
tearing at your throat

periphery
pursuing

torn to shreds

how many years before it ends?
how dark the sin? how raw the talk that ends it?
how cruel the buddha who resides here
who abides catastrophes & fires
aftershocks of quakes that pass us by
events that raise us on their wings
then let us crash pale billows
swelling up around the little temples
the little shorelines under water
rivers driven skyward in one final quake

•

forgotten with the dead
in glory
massive bodies hidden under frost

the words recorded
of a man beside himself who speaks
who says

"be here
"pretend

(so like the world they are
so like the man himself

the water underneath his window
still a haven for lost birds

uncertain thoughts

uncertain passage thru a foreign world

finished 1.i.97

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KASUYA EIICHI

THREE PIECES

(Tr. from the Japanese by D.W. Wright)

THE GARBAGE BARGE

"time on the water a garbage barge"
—Paul Celan

Though it certainly can't be said to be a small boat, it's still a bit strange to find there are bathing quarters on a garbage barge. After all, for a boat used simply as a place to pile up rubble, a room of bathtubs isn't likely to be necessary.

And yet there it is, at the end of a long corridor leading back to the stern of the boat. Pulling open the heavy iron door, you can see the bathtubs and the faucets along the wall lit up by dark lights that hang down from the ceiling.

This is called the community's bathing quarters, and indeed the far inner quarters are surprisingly large. But what's even more surprising is how there are always a number of men there bathing in the hot waters.

These men, there's something about them, somehow there's something unnatural.

Whether soaking in the tubs, or washing their fingers and toes, or seated on stools at the faucets, all of them wear the faces of elderly men, although their bodies are scrawny and small.

If they notice they're being watched, they stop all of their movements at once and turn and stare this way. Anger fills their staring gaze and not a one speaks a word, as if turned to petrified stone, each seems frozen in his position, unmoving.

And irrespective of the chilliness of the air in the bathing quarters, they remain, for hours, unmoving. Anyone who has seen this, be it only once, will never again forget it.

From what sort of world did these men make their escape? But all sorts of explanations are given for the men in the bathing quarters.

Perhaps I speak with exaggeration, still I think that it may be said that all those explanations could easily be extended to everything there is in the world we live in.

But having said that, let me say that the only people who can truly know are those who know the name of the boat. Because the only ones who truly remember its existence are those who due to some experience of anguish in some distant place have come to think this whole world's no more than rubble.

In their—but no, now this deep night's sea of blood is no one's in particular, and the garbage barge itself is no more than the illusion of their far-off bathing quarters. And now they say that their ship has dropped anchor.

GHOST

Why do the dead seem so pitiful to us? Is it because we imagine how poorly he lived? How he was never allowed to do as he wished?

On the day of his birth, he was sealed into a giant blood egg, an egg invisible not only to himself, but to all those around him as well. If only he had known it! He had plenty of strength to break out of it.

But what was it, really—this giant blood egg that shut him off from the world? Whatever it was, it made him laughable. And impenetrable. Because of that egg, nothing ever went right. In a port city, he grew up in total poverty. When business failure followed on failure, he became an egg peddler. And then late in life, when he was finally able to start a family, all of a sudden, he began to drown himself in saké.

Cast off by his family, in horrendous health, he dropped down dead in a alley behind a train station. So he never was able to break out of the giant blood egg that was doing him in. And so his days ended as twisted as ever, in that twisted port city of disgrace and debt.

I know since, like him, I too make my living walking around and peddling eggs. I know because we were brothers.

We met once a month, on a dark overpass of the soul, a place known only to the two of us. And there we consoled each other. Could it be that it was all the fault of some flaw like a spot on an egg? One night at a bar, I caught myself getting so slobbering drunk I might as well have been him.

It is everyone's fault, that there are people who live in our world and our time as if already half-dead. Existence, for him, was a merciless city, bringing nothing but anguish and pain.

If you walk about, selling eggs, in a city where the snow falls darkly, in a city on the verge of vanishing, you soon begin to understand. His ghost—but look, even though he's now a ghost, he wears the same smirk he always wore when we were drinking—I hear his ghost softly whisper.

You! you always were a strange one! I never sold anything but ordinary eggs. And more than anyone I know, I lived my life fully and happily before I died! So let me ask, OK? for god's sake! in what world? and what duck was it laid your giant blood egg?

THE MIRACLES THAT VIRTUE CAN BRING

So what if one day a man was eating bean-filled dumplings? Does that mean that there was anything notably strange about that day?

It was just that he wanted to sit there eating bean-filled dumplings so badly it hurt. And it's said that he sat there eating the bean-filled dumplings without even unbinding his headband.

This was at a small tea-shop on the banks of a river, on a late spring day, while petals were riding and raining down the breeze. In short, that pack-horse driver, in his ripped-up clothes, gave himself heart and soul to the eating of bean-filled dumplings.

Sitting cross-legged before a large saucer piled high with bean-filled dumplings, pupils thinned in his bliss, he shoved yet another ball into his mouth.

But it's said that the bean-filled dumplings weren't merely bean-filled dumplings. And it's said that that man there eating bean-filled dumplings wasn't merely a man sitting there eating bean-filled dumplings.

While something like quiet water made a mystical sound, the man in his ripped-up loincloth and also the old woman who laughed to see the man's bared bottom as she bent to wipe up something—just as they were they were beings in the lofty and faraway country of the miracles that virtue can bring.

For it's in just such a way that the Buddhas, with gentle deceptions, reveal our world to us. Just so, on a late spring day, while petals ride and rain down the breeze, a tea-shop on the banks of a river is changed into a deep and fearful world in eternity.

Whether true or not, there's more. A young girl from the tea-shop is sent out back to clean greens, with her skirt ruckled up at the water's edge. Something stings the eyes, while something, maybe that horse hitched up over there, permits one to worship at the whiteness of her thighs.

The Late Poems of Meng Chiao

Translated by David Hinton

"David Hinton is simply the best translator of Chinese poetry presently working in English. This is a very intelligently selected group of poems from an important Chinese poet. Hinton reads deeply and with great sensitivity to nuance."
—J.P. Seaton

Late in life, Meng Chiao (A.D. 751–814) developed an experimental poetry of virtuosic beauty, a poetry that anticipated landmark developments in the modern Western tradition by a millennium. This is truly major work—work that may be the most radical in the Chinese tradition. And though written more than a thousand years ago, it is remarkably fresh and contemporary. But, in spite of Meng's significance, this is the first volume of his poetry to appear in English.

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CHARLES BERNSTEIN

A TEST OF POETRY

What do you mean by *rashes of ash*? Is *industry*
systematic work, assiduous activity, or ownership
of factories? Is *ripple* agitate lightly? Are
we *tossed in tune* when we write poems? And
what or who *emboss with gloss insignias of air*?

Is the *Fabric* about which you write in the epigraph
of your poem an edifice, a symbol of heaven?

Does *freight* refer to cargo or lading carried
for pay by water, land or air? Or does it mean
payment for such transportation? Or a freight
train? When you say a *commoded journey,*
do you mean a comfortable journey or a good train
with well-equipped commodities? But, then, why
do you drop the 'a' before *slumberous friend*? And
when you write, in "Why I Am Not a Christian"
You always throw it down / But you never
pick it up—what is *it*??

In "The Harbor of Illusion," does *vein*
refer to a person's vein under his skin or
is it a metaphor for a river? Does *lot*
mean one's fate or a piece of land?
And does *camphor* refer to camphor trees?
Moreover, who or what is *nearing*. Who or
what has *fell*? Or does *fell* refer to the
skin or hide of an animal? And who or what has
stalled? Then, is the *thoroughfare of*
noon's atoll an equivalent of *the template*?

In "Fear of Flipping" does *flipping* mean
crazy?

How about *strain,* does it mean
a severe trying or wearing pressure or
effect (such as a strain of hard work),
or a passage, as in piece of music?
Does *Mercury* refer to a brand of oil?

In the lines
shards of bucolic pastry anchored
against cactus cabinets, Nantucket buckets
could we take it as—pieces of pies
or tarts are placed in buckets (which
are made of wood from Nantucket)
anchored against cabinets (small
rooms or furniture?) with cactus?

What is *nutflack*?

I suppose the *caucus of caucasians*
refers to the white people's meeting
of a political party to nominate candidates.
But who is Uncle Hodgepodge?
And what does *familiar freight*
to the returning antelope mean?

You write, *the walls are our floors.*
How can the *walls* be floors if the floors
refer to the part of the room which forms
its enclosing surface and upon which one
walks? In *and the floors, like balls,*
repel all falls—does *balls* refer to
nonsense or to any ball like a basket ball
or to guys? Or to a social assembly for
dancing? *Falls* means to descend
from a higher to a lower
or to drop down wounded or dead?

But what is *the so-called overall mesh*?

Is the *garbage heap* the garbage heap in the ordinary sense? Why does *garbage heap* exchange for *so-called overall mesh*? Since a *faker* is one who fakes, how can *arbitrary* reduce to *faker*?

Who or what are disappointed not to have been?

Does *frames* refer to form, constitution, or structure in general? Or to a particular state, as of the mind?

In the sentence,
If you don't like it
colored in, you can always Xerox it
and see it all gray
—what is *it*? What does *colored in* mean?

A few lines later you write,
You mean, image farm when you've got bratwurst—
Does *bratwurst* refer to sausage?
Does the line mean—the sausage
you saw reminded you of a farm which you imagined?

Does *fat-bottom boats* refer to boats with thick bottoms?

Is *humble then humped* used to describe the actions of one who plays golf? In the phrase *a sideshow freak*—the *freak* refers to a hippie? *Sideshow* refers to secondary importance? Or an abnormal actor in the sideshow? Then, who or what is *linked* with *steam of pink*. And how about *the tongue-tied tightrope stalker*—does the *stalker* refer to one who is pursuing

stealthily in the act of hunting game? The stalker
is a witness at first and then a witless witness?

You write *The husks are salted*:
what kind of nut husks can be salted for eating?
What does *bending* mean—to become curved,
crooked, or bent? Or to bow down in submission
or reverence, yield, submit? Does *bells*
refer to metallic sounding instruments or
a kind of trousers?

Just a few lines later you have the phrase
Felt very poured. Who felt poured? Toys?
Is *humming* in the sense of humming a song?
Stepped into where? *Not being part of* what?

In "No Pastrami" (*Walt! I'm with you in Sydney / Where the echoes of Mamaroneck howl /Down the outback's pixilating corridors*)—does the *pastrami* refer
to a highly seasoned shoulder cut of beef? Is
Mamaroneck a place in the U.S. where wild oxes howl?
I take it *corridors* refers to the passageway
in the supermarket? Could I read the poem as—
The speaker is doing shopping in a supermarket
in Sydney; he is walking along the eccentric
passageways among the shelves on which goods
are placed; he does not want to buy the pastrami
as he seems to have heard the echoes of wild oxes
howling in the U.S. while he addresses Walt Whitman?

In *No end to envy*, does the envy refer to admire or
in the bad sense?

This poem is based on a letter from Ziquing Zhang, who translated poems from *Rough Trades* and *The Sophist* for *Selected Language Poems* (Chengdu, China: Sichuan Literature and Art Publishing House, 1993); quotations from the poems are italicized.

TAJ JACKSON

APPRENTICE

The Easter gift, little cloth-pillow woman
presiding on the easel lip
conducts cerulean, umber, swaths
of indigo and siena, magenta
by emerald, wielding the palette knife, atropos of canvas
limits, clotho in her handiwork, *materia,* lachesis adding
slack to the lines.

Ex machina, she takes the Male Votive Figure
from SUMER ART, reedy on my bookshelf, as a lover,
craving white gypsum and bitumen, a ridged beard, eyes
immense in his Mesopotamian terror.
He extracts the square and cube root,
sun-dried bricks, cuneiform
thronging his lovenotes. The evil spirits

of his fathers

swarm

like

flies.

Of enamel appendages, she bears a hyperbolic bonnet,
a skyblue turban—fruitless brim, no linen roses,
the iridescent capital the glazed swan,
beady black beak
shut hard on song, on finality and bodily

ascension,

beady black beak,
little moue of urban street
violence and plumage.

She is its young. A starry scholar.
Close the chapter called the Standard Model.

She pitches Sumer's *lex talionis*
to the plants and the dust motes, not sweeping,
old eye for an eye,
the condemned in incarnations.

(Alabama's executed Weeks
devout in campy fantasia foretold his return,
giant flying turtle to rule the world.)

Her monologue is like a watching the sky.

She
succors the chain gang. Of death sentences she knows
equations of muse and doll; of execution
the guillotines
as extravaganza, wormwood, and *hemlock* says clotho,
MTV Vulgate by lethal injection, much of the public
fuss and bask, fuss
and bask.
—Fairweather shuffling loggerheads.—

"Sudan," Arabic for *black,*
the recaptured slave is
strapped to the sides of the camel which,
driven to the river, drinks and swells,
dislocating bones.

Lachesis imagines
death by decibels, sound set so that it will not stop
rising.

The ears of the recaptured
slave are stuffed
with insects and plugged with stones–
left bound for days,
to madden.

. . .
Lobe-foot birds from feathered dinosaurs–
her head is topped
with the extinct,

crucifix swan her pun burden and she sags, lolls
believing our counterpart
is the condemned each time,
the mud hardening to rock,
fossil track, wrath, bedroom etiquette, disk error
messages, the press
cards of 30s radicals, winding sheets and myrrh,
and more delusion, listen,
the volcanic, the roadrunner,
a sermon of hollow bones,
a filth of ice, rest, rest, a freight of
[gravity, leaden,
neutrinos,
the faded colors,
how to spin
please
gold from reprisal,
of her painted ichor lenses
how to stare. . .

LORINE NIEDECKER

NEXT YEAR OR I FLY MY ROUNDS, TEMPESTUOUS

(Edited, with a Note, by Jenny Penberthy)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Lorine Niedecker's "Next Year or I fly my rounds, Tempestuous" surfaced during my recent probing of the Louis Zukofsky Collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas. The poem was filed with miscellaneous items of unidentified authorship. It is handwritten on small pieces of paper pasted into a 27-page pocket calendar, 4½" x 3¾", two weeks per page, the hole-punched pages held together by a red velvet ribbon tied in a bow. Niedecker's pastings obscure "The Favorite Sunlit Road Calendar's" own text, platitudes such as these—January 13-26: "True bravery is/shown by performing/ without witness what/one might be capable/of doing before all the/ world"; Sept. 22- Oct. 5: "To reach the port/of heaven, we must/ sometimes sail with/the wind and some-/times against it—but/we must sail and not/drift, nor lie at anchor." The original text is *just* legible when held to the light. Her spirited title inverts rather than pastes over the calendar's title page. The poem makes no explicit reference to the pasted-over homilies but the aleatoric nature of the palimpsest exudes parody.

Given that the poem was held by Zukofsky and given his dating on the back of the calendar—"Xmas 1934"—the poem was likely Niedecker's gift to the poet whom she had now known in person for a full calendar year. The gift looks forward confidently to another year of friendship just as it recalls the past year. A pocket calendar, an intimate mnemonics. But the poem is also a surrealist composition and an experiment in form. The calendar is under siege. She teases the mnemonic device by linking her non-sequitur and baffling lines to the predictable chronology of a calendar. Earlier in 1934 she had written to Harriet Monroe about her desire "to discredit all journal method everywhere. . . ." The same letter also talks of adding a section to "Year Before Last" and of composing a piece called "Year After Next." (Neither of these works has survived.) Her challenge to the calendar—earlier poems had chal-

lenged the dictionary—apparently extended to include "Next Year or I fly my rounds, Tempestuous."

Zukofsky showed the poem to his friends: in January 1936, he wrote to Niedecker about William Carlos Williams' enthusiasm for the form of "last year's Xmas calendar" and his interest in seeing it published. Like some of her other surrealism, this poem posed obvious difficulties for publication. She was, however, always keen to see her work in print, and any misgivings one might have about publishing an apparently private gift must contend with the ambition of her enterprise. While much of the poem is written in the first person, in lines that appear to be addressed to Zukofsky—"Don't worry/about the comma,/ darling"—the sleuthing reader is seldom rewarded. Privacy remains secure.

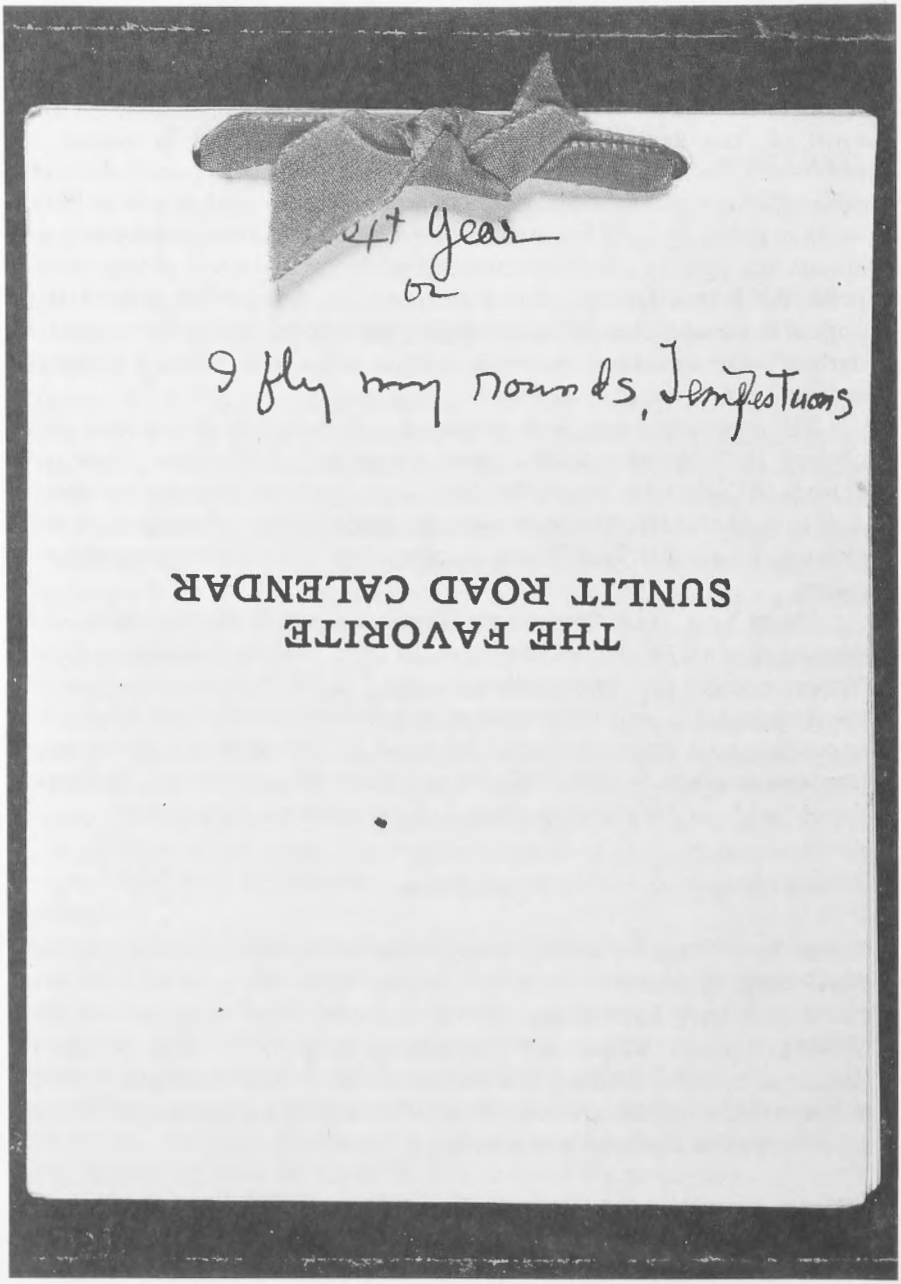
The poem is a free and delighted collaboration of cogency and chance. It is assured, worldly, funny, at ease with its liberties. There are echoes of Dickinson, Zukofsky, and Niedecker's subsequent writings. And it is closest in style to the two surrealist plays—"President of the Holding Company" and "Fancy Another Day Gone"—that were still to follow.

"Next Year or I fly my rounds, Tempestuous" is the second recent discovery of a 'lost' Niedecker poem. In 1995, Burton Hatlen found the five-page, eight-part poem, "Progression," in the Ezra Pound papers at the Beinecke Library. "Progression" is dated January 6, 1934 although, according to a letter to Harriet Monroe, a version of the poem was already complete by mid-1932. "Next Year or I fly my rounds, Tempestuous" adds to the growing record of Niedecker's early career.

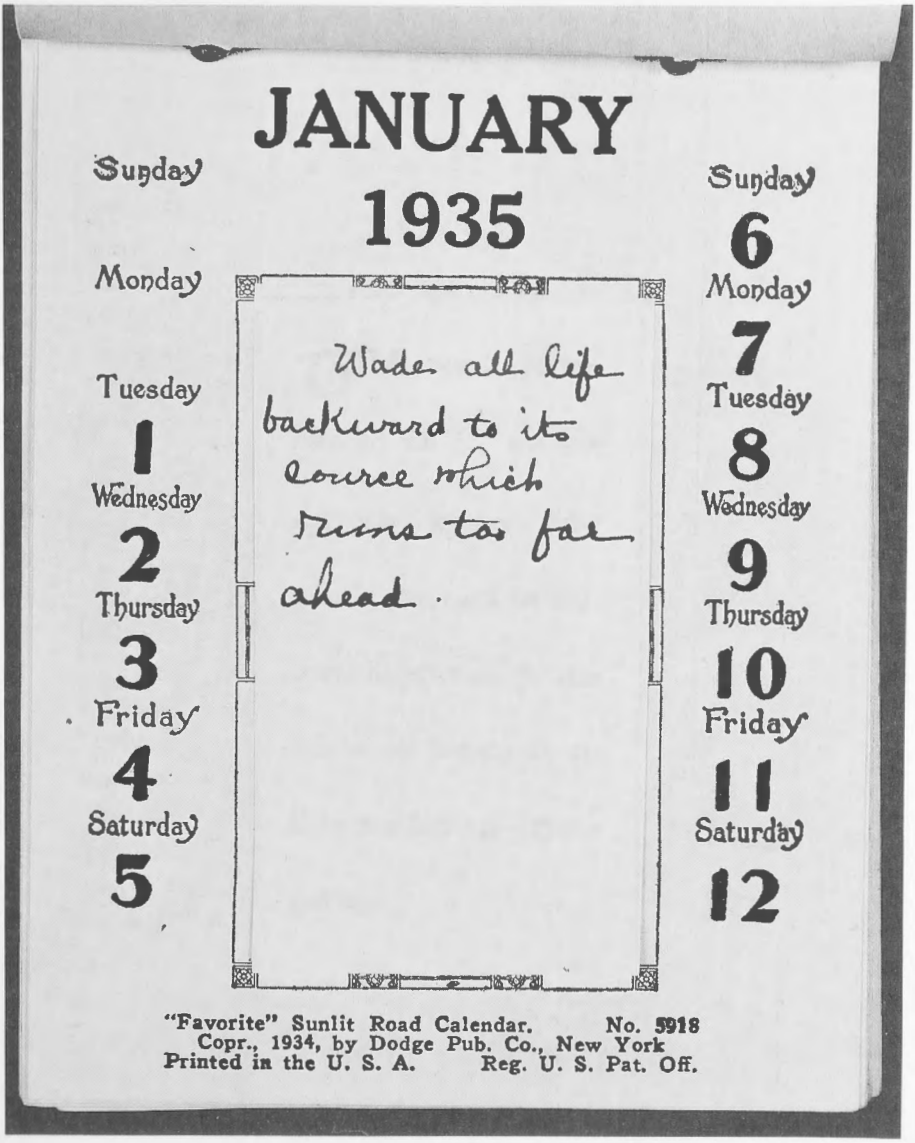
*****

Niedecker's letters to Mary Hoard and Harriet Monroe appear in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman & Poet*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1996). Thanks to Cid Corman and the HRHRC, Austin, Texas, for permission to publish, and to Cathy Henderson, Barbara Smith, and Pat Fox for their help during and since my visit to the HRHRC. Niedecker's Collected Poems will be published in 1998 by the University of California Press.

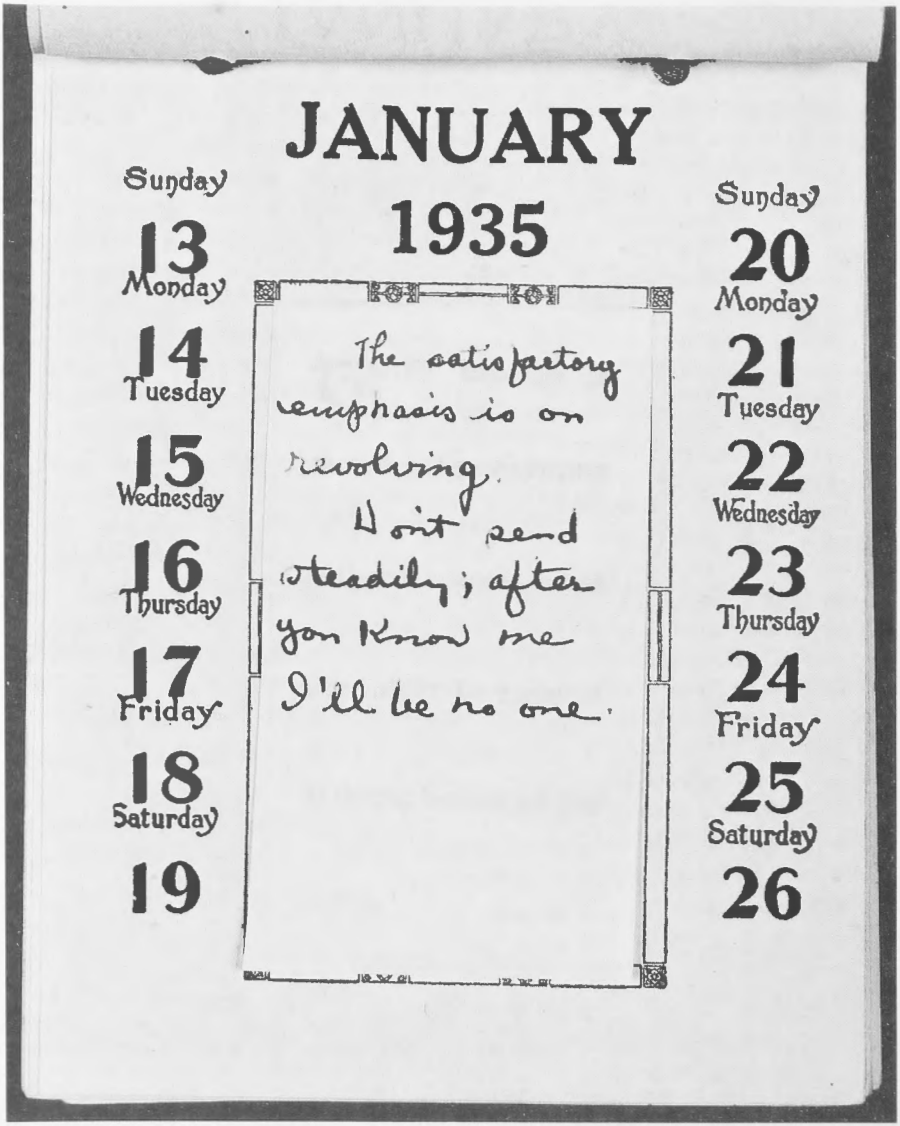
—Jenny Penberthy



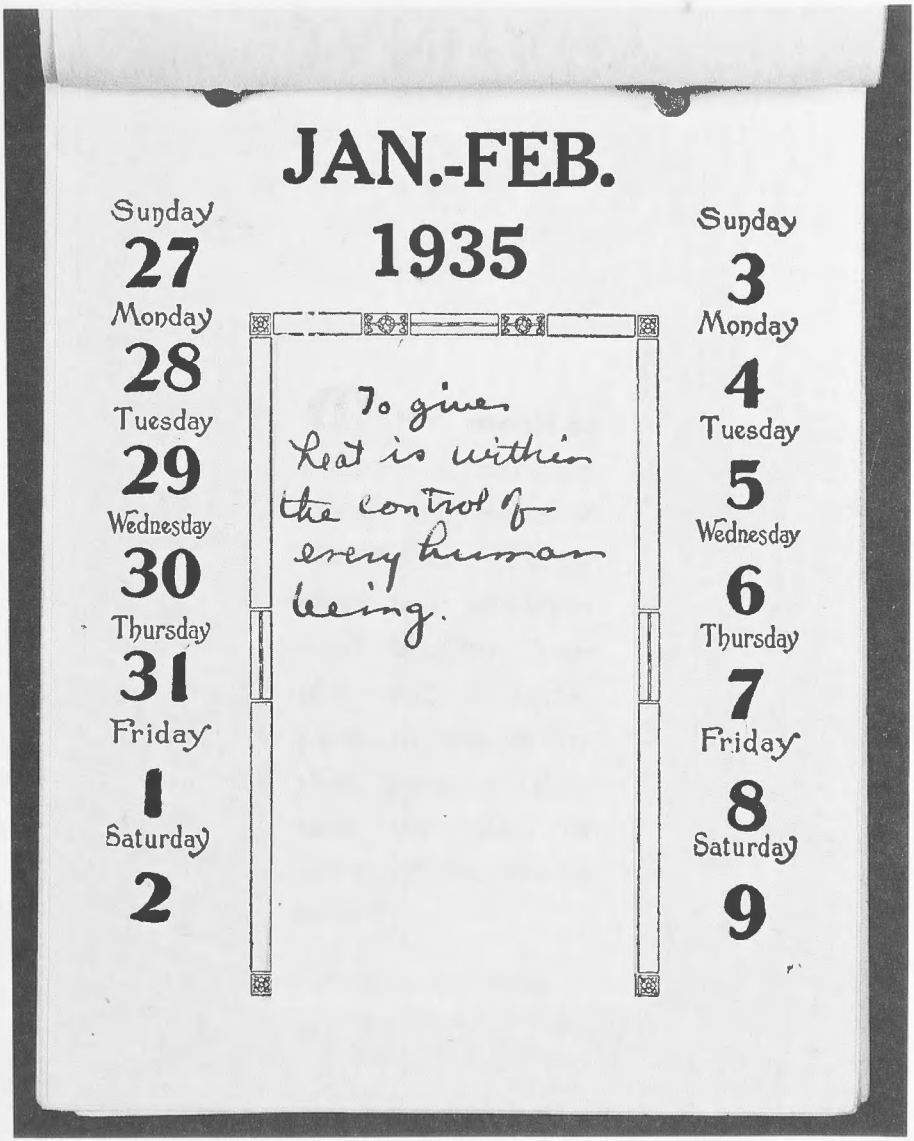
Next Year/or/I fly my rounds, Tempestuous



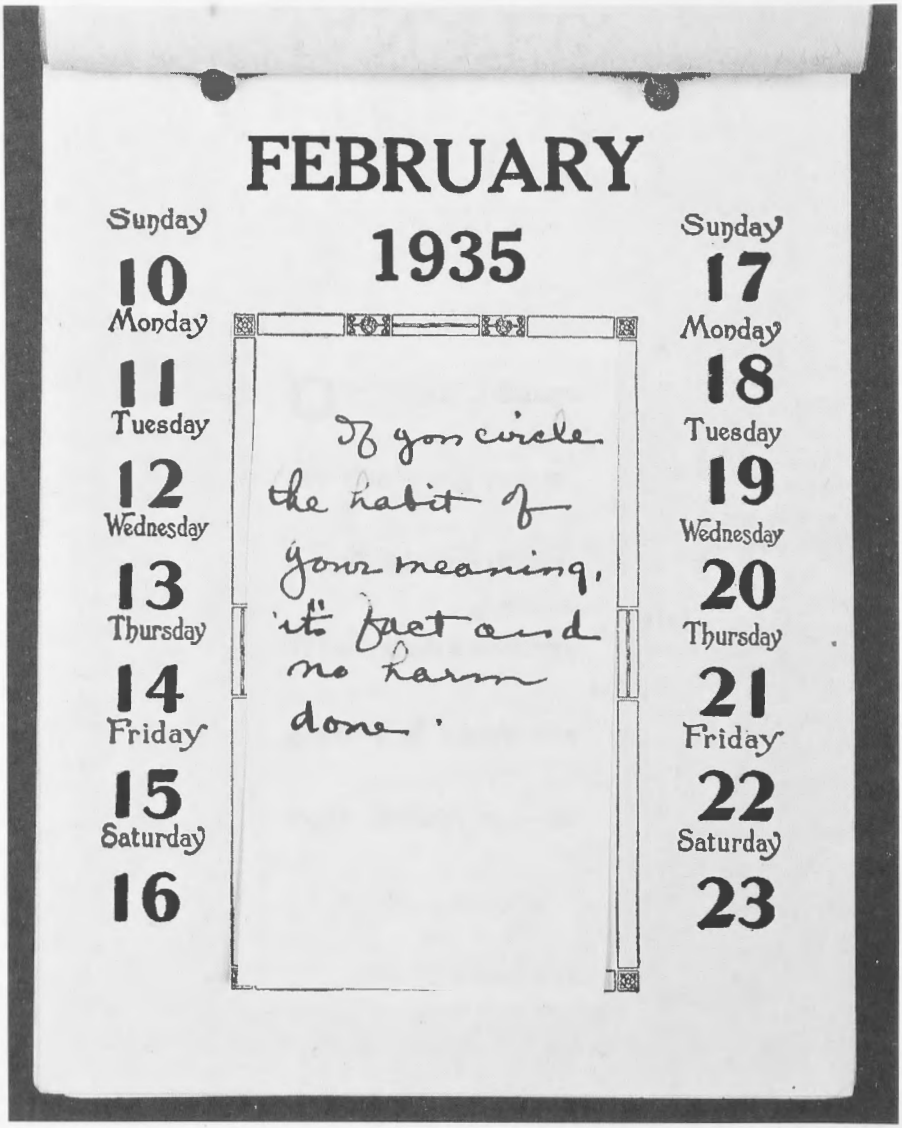
Wade all life/backward to its/source which/runs too far/ahead.



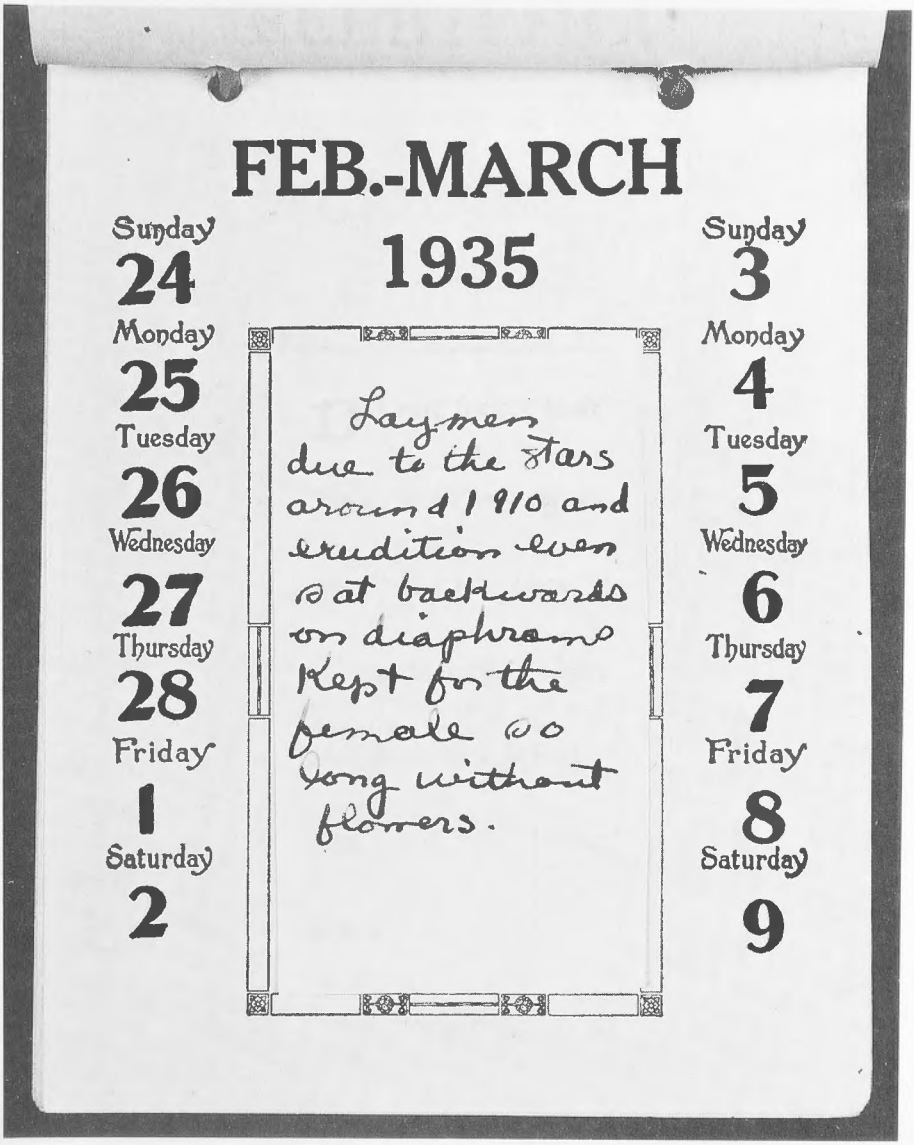
The satisfactory/emphasis is on/revolving./Don't send/steadily;
after/you know me/I'll be no one.



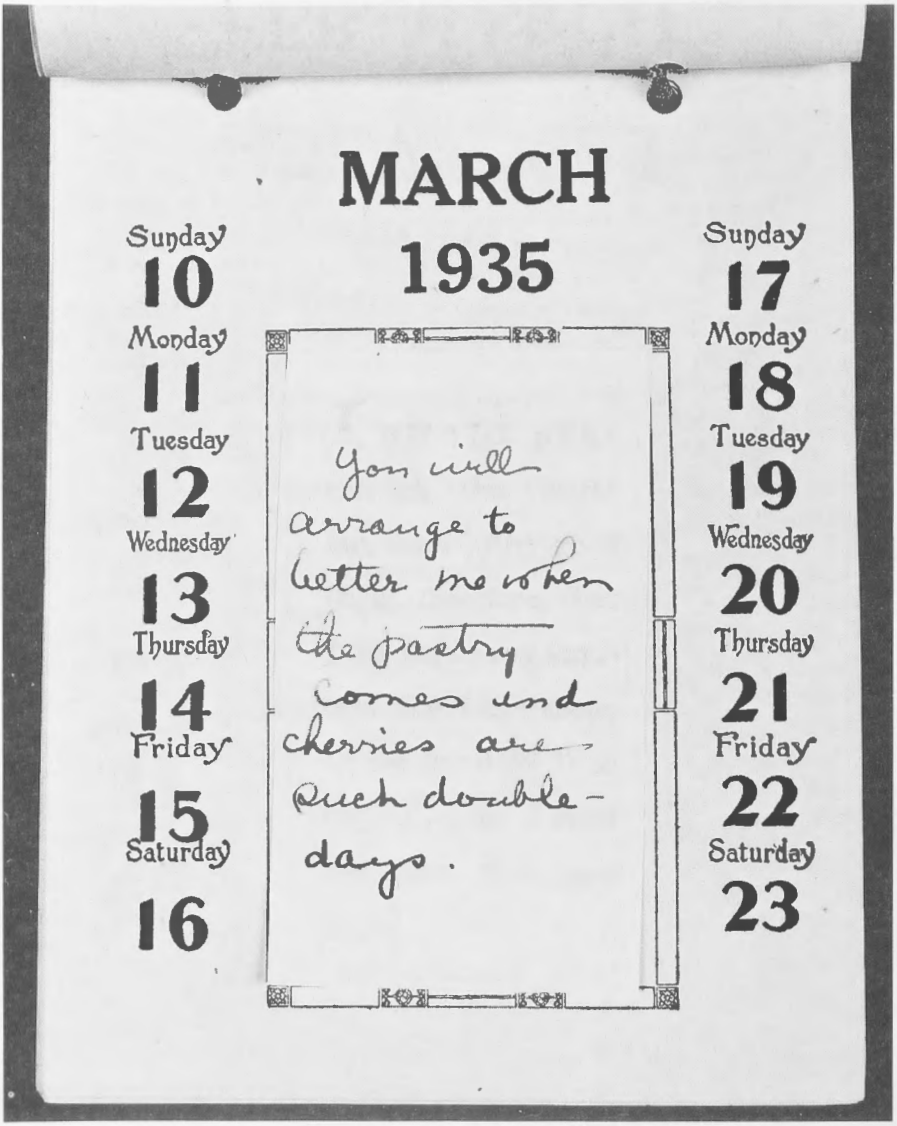
To give/heat is within/the control of/every human/being.



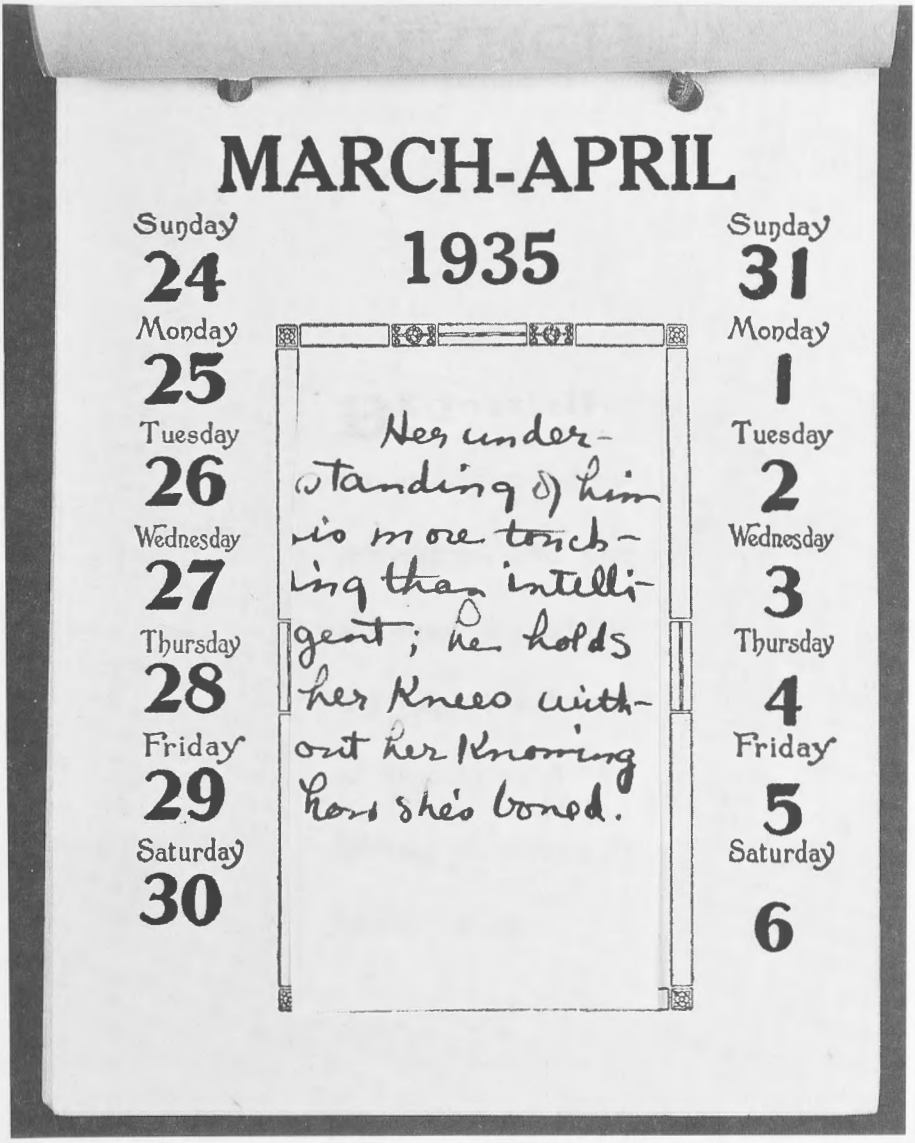
If you circle/the habit of/your meaning,/it's fact and/no harm/ done.



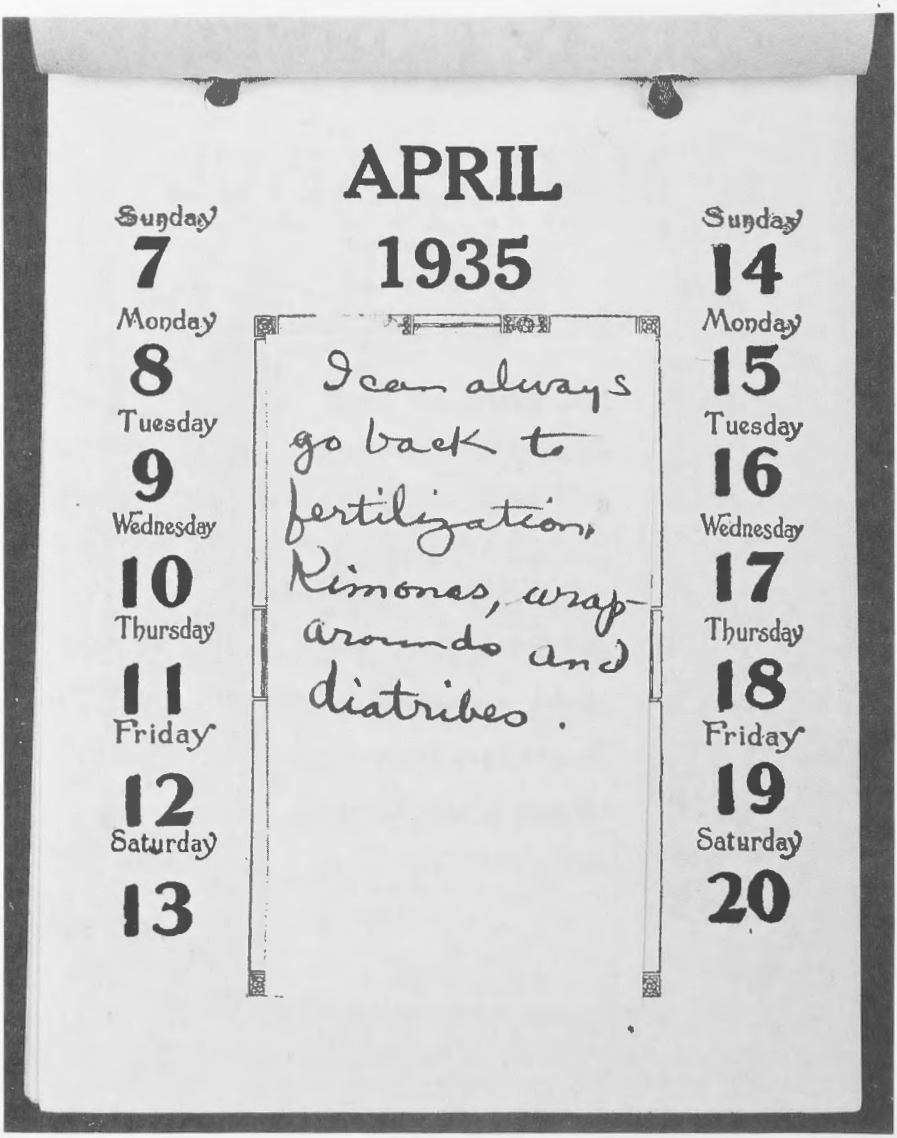
Laymen/due to the stars/around 1910 and/erudition even/sat backwards/on diaphragms/kept for the/female so/long without/flowers.



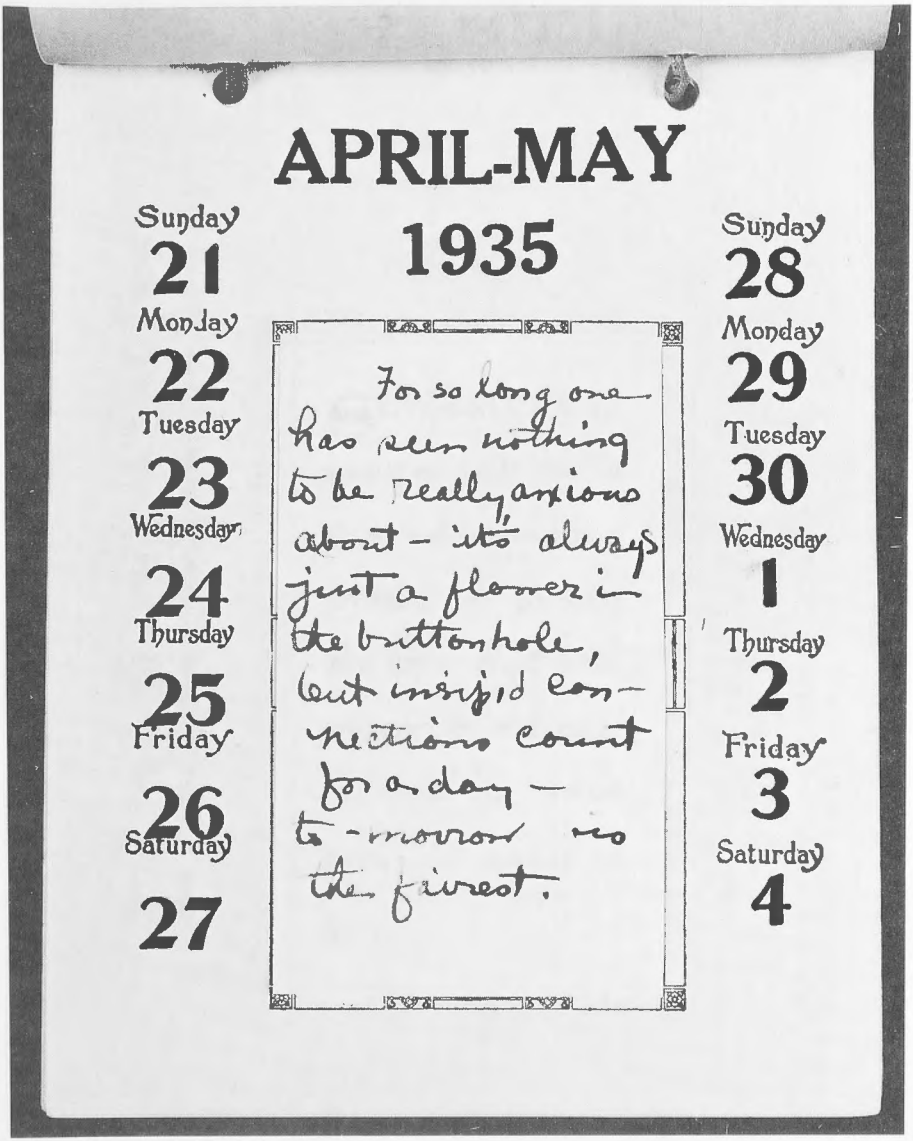
You will/arrange to/better me when/the pastry/comes and/ cherries are/such double-/days.



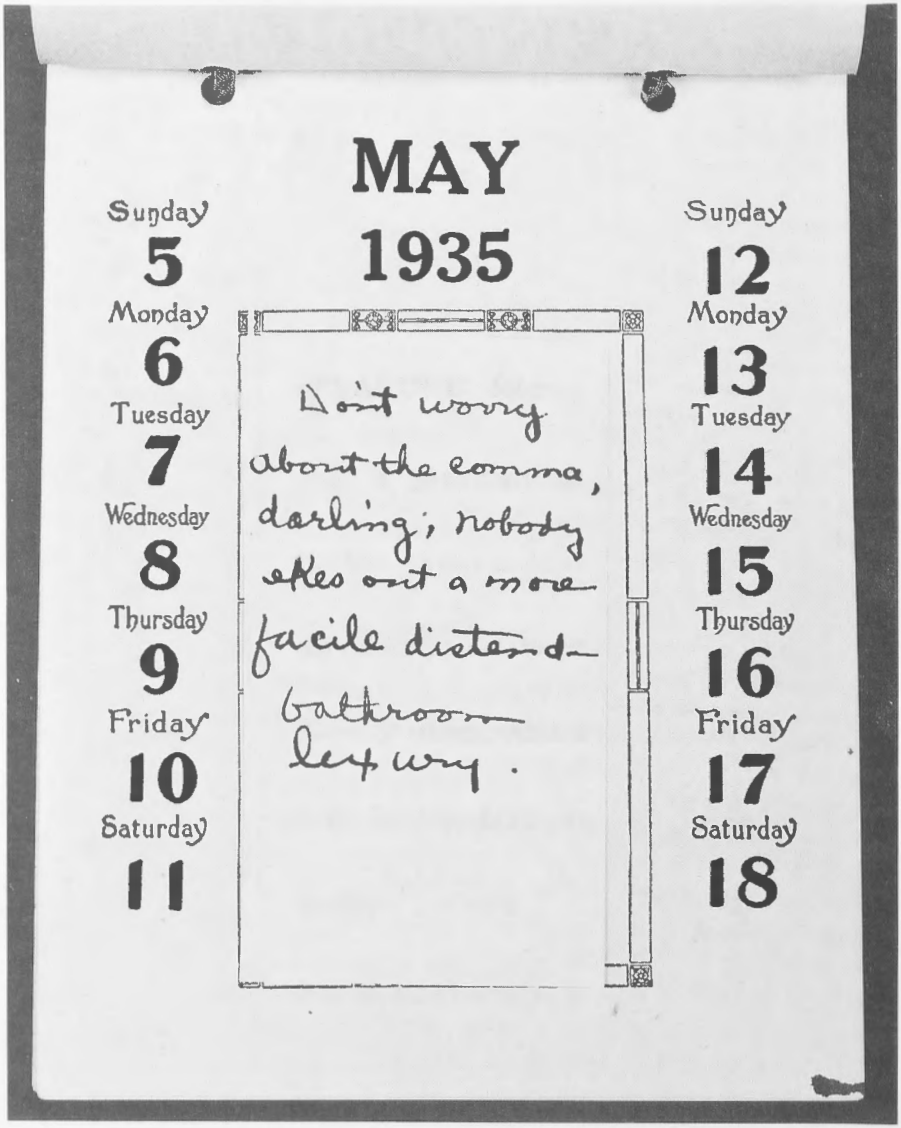
Her under/standing of him/is more touch-/ing than intelli-/gent;
he holds/her knees with-/out her knowing/how she's boned.



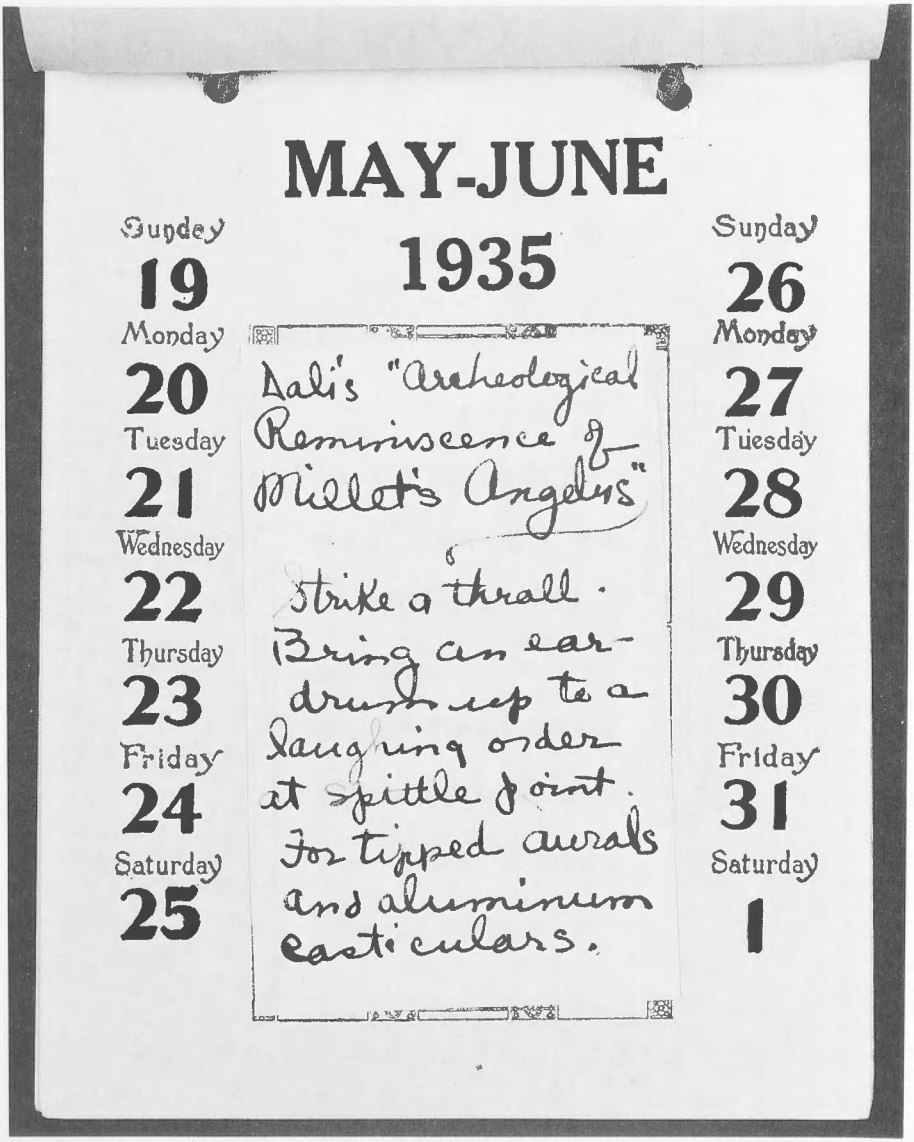
I can always/go back to/fertilization,/kimonos, wrap-/arounds and/diatribes.



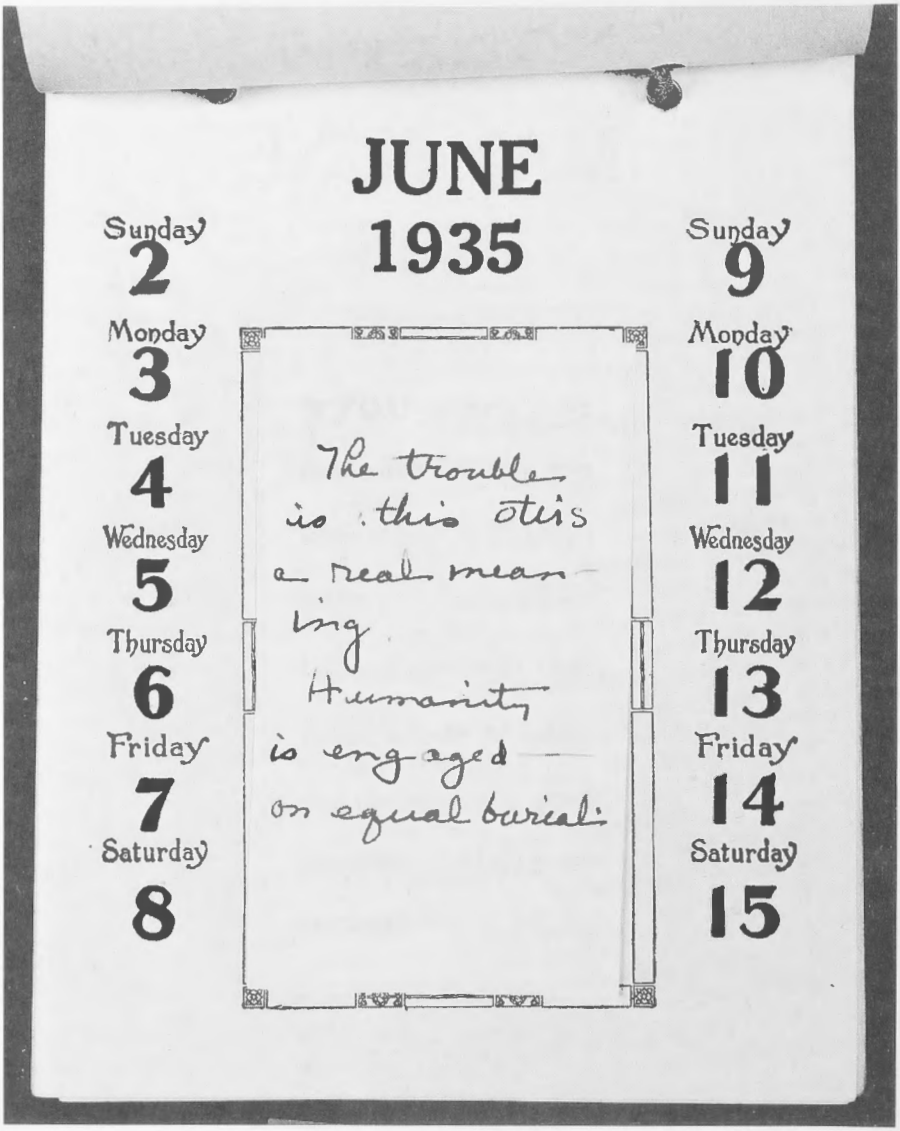
For so long one/has seen nothing/to be really anxious/about—it's always/just a flower in/the buttonhole,/but insipid con-/nections count/for a day—/tomorrow is/the fairest.



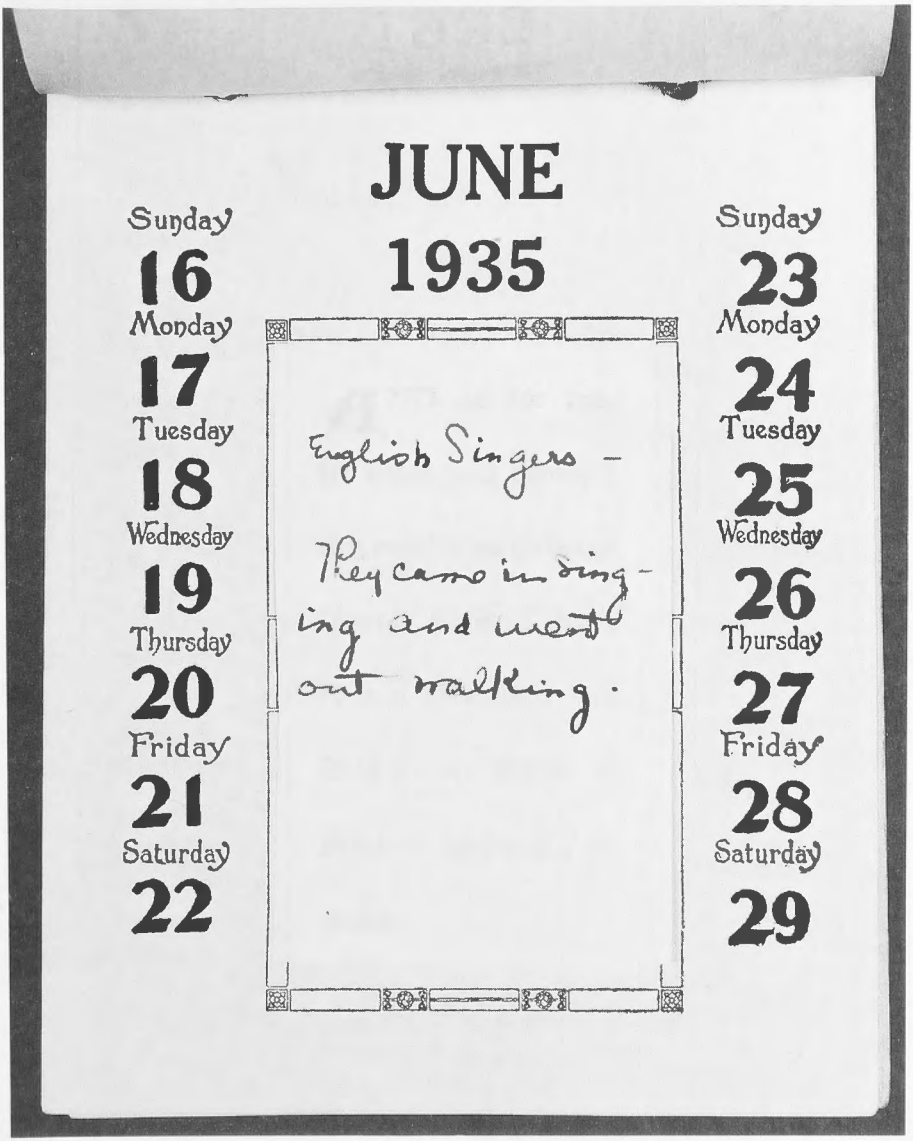
Don't worry/about the comma,/darling, nobody/ekes out a more/facile distend–/bathroom/luxury.



Dali's "Archeological/Reminiscence of/Millet's Angelus" /Strike a thrall./Bring an ear-/drum up to a/laughing order/at spittle point./For tipped aurals/and aluminum/casticulars.

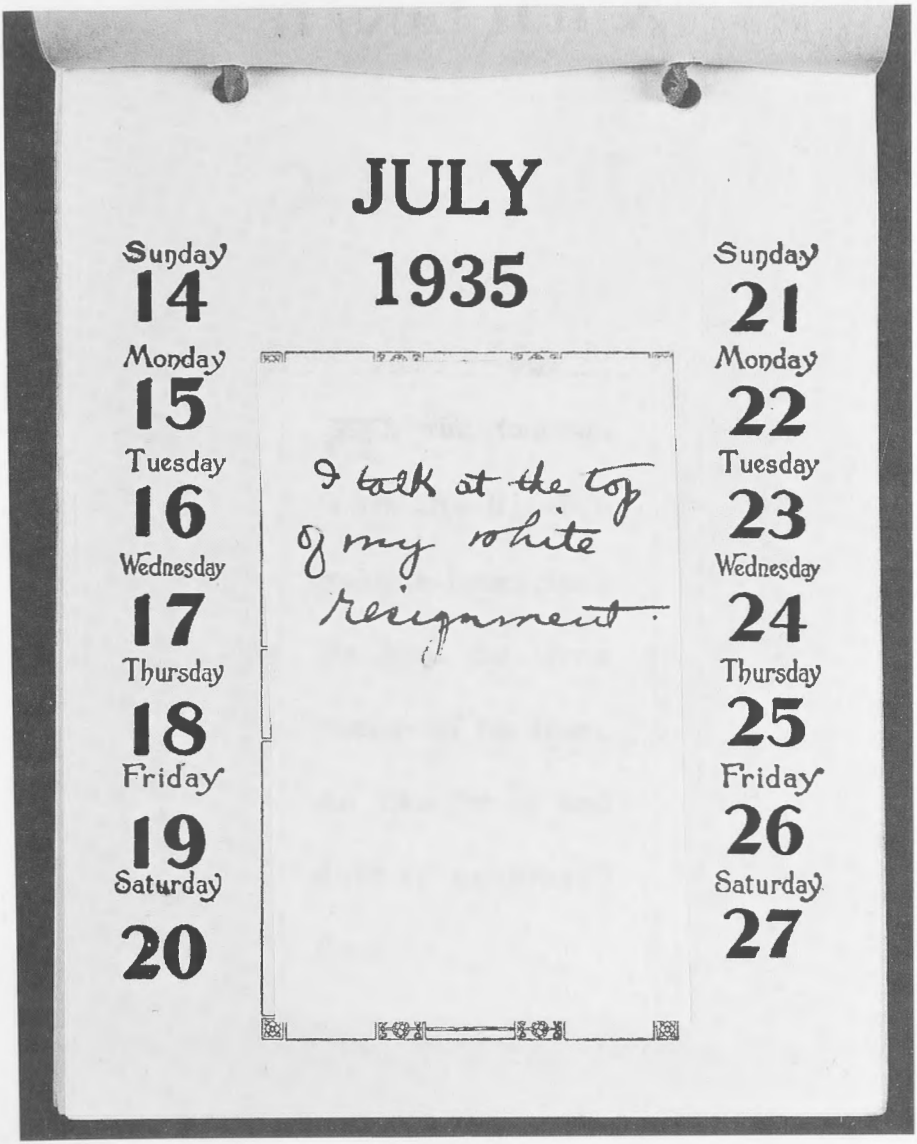


The trouble/is: this stirs/a real mean-/ing./ Humanity/is engaged–/on equal burial.



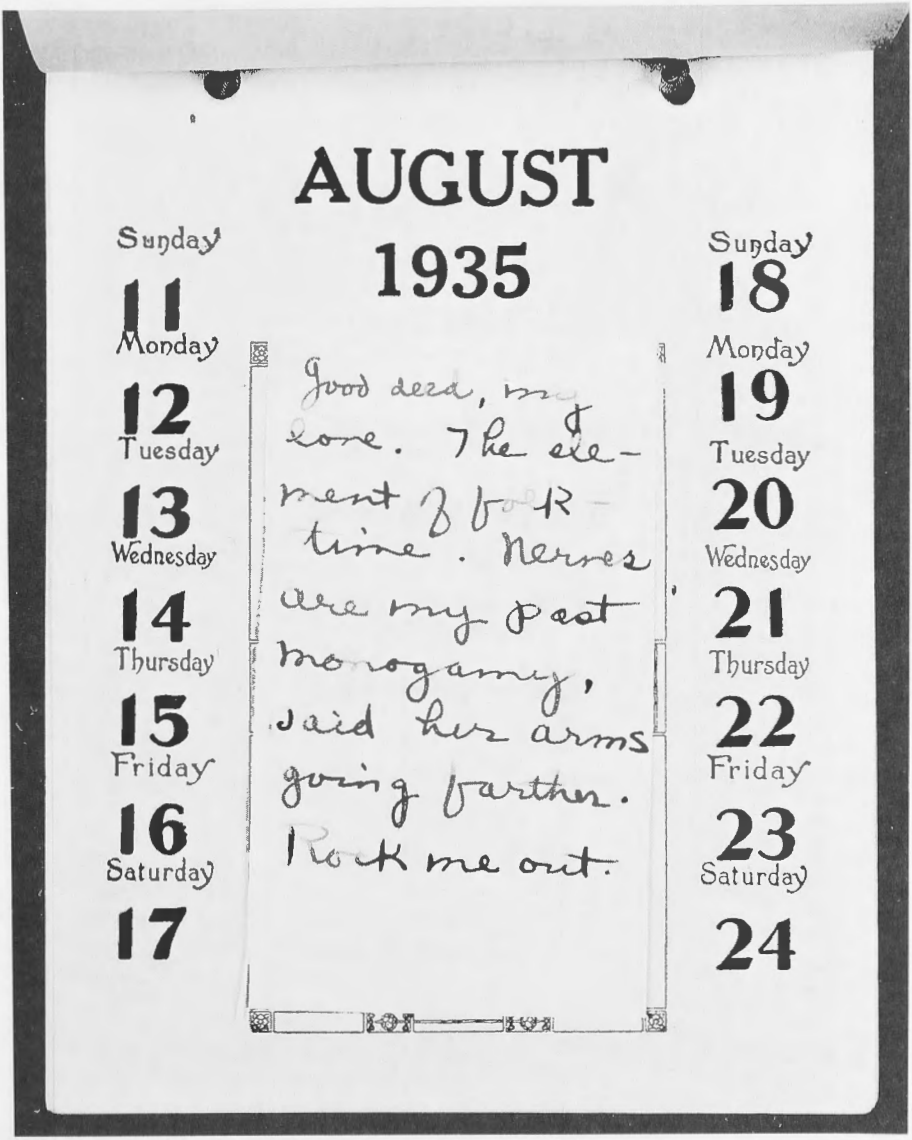
English Singers—/They came in sing-/ing and went/out walking.

The monster died/of his last breath,/ate a honey and/grew waxen.

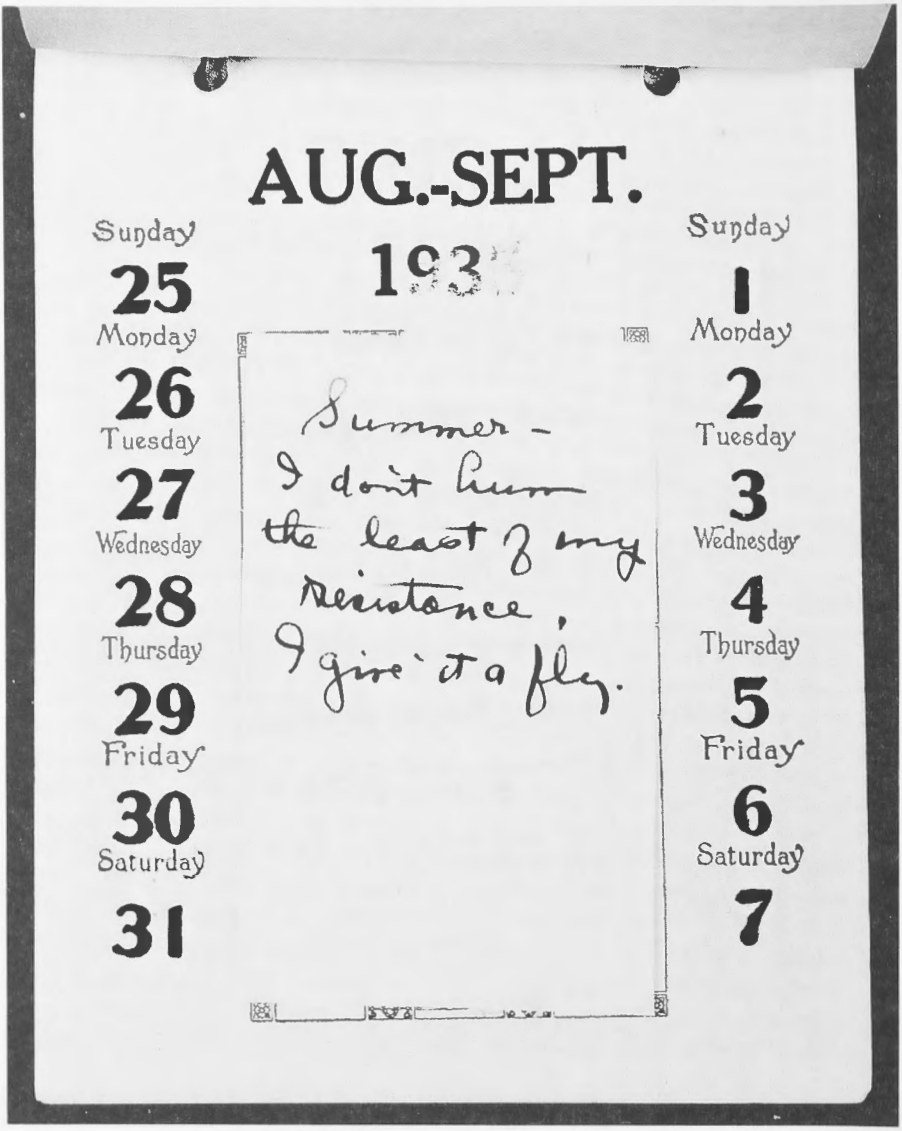


I talk at the top/of my white/resignment.

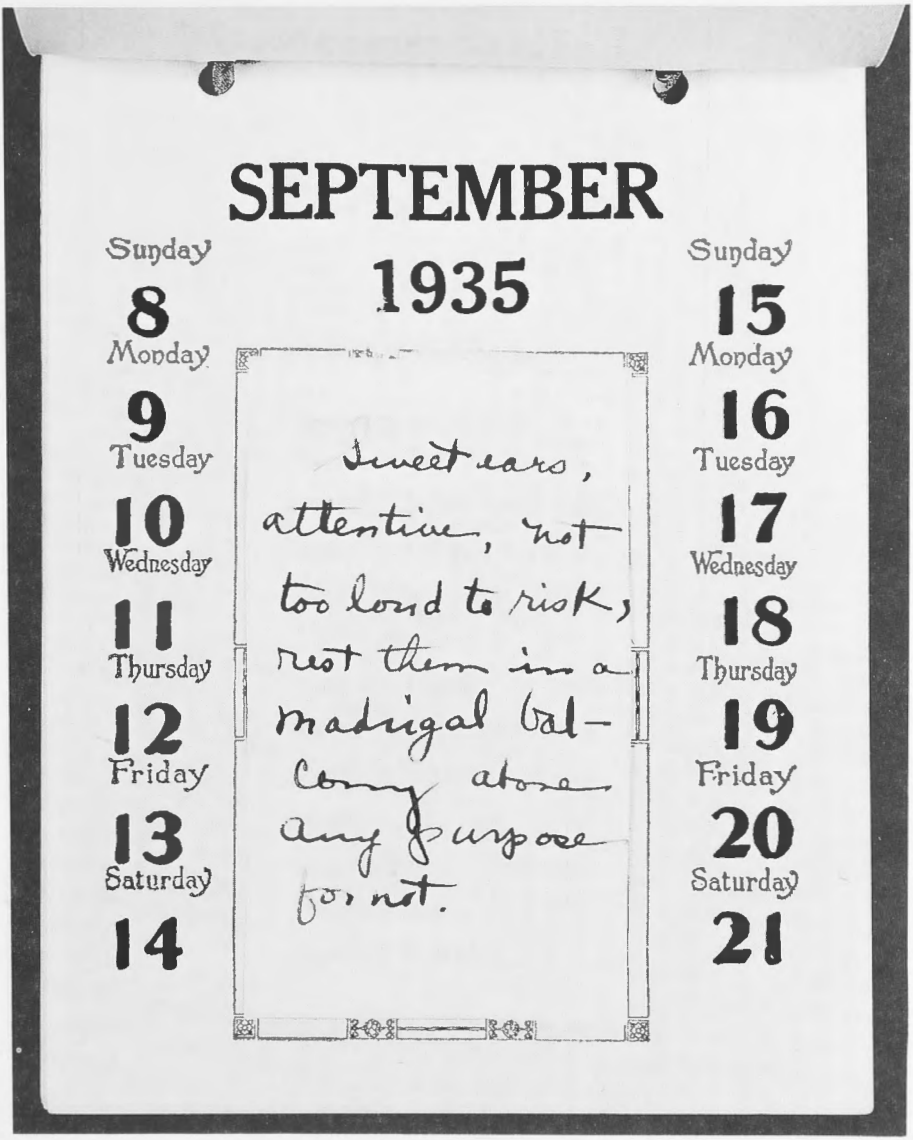
What a/white muffler/in a dark coat/will do for a/dull man.



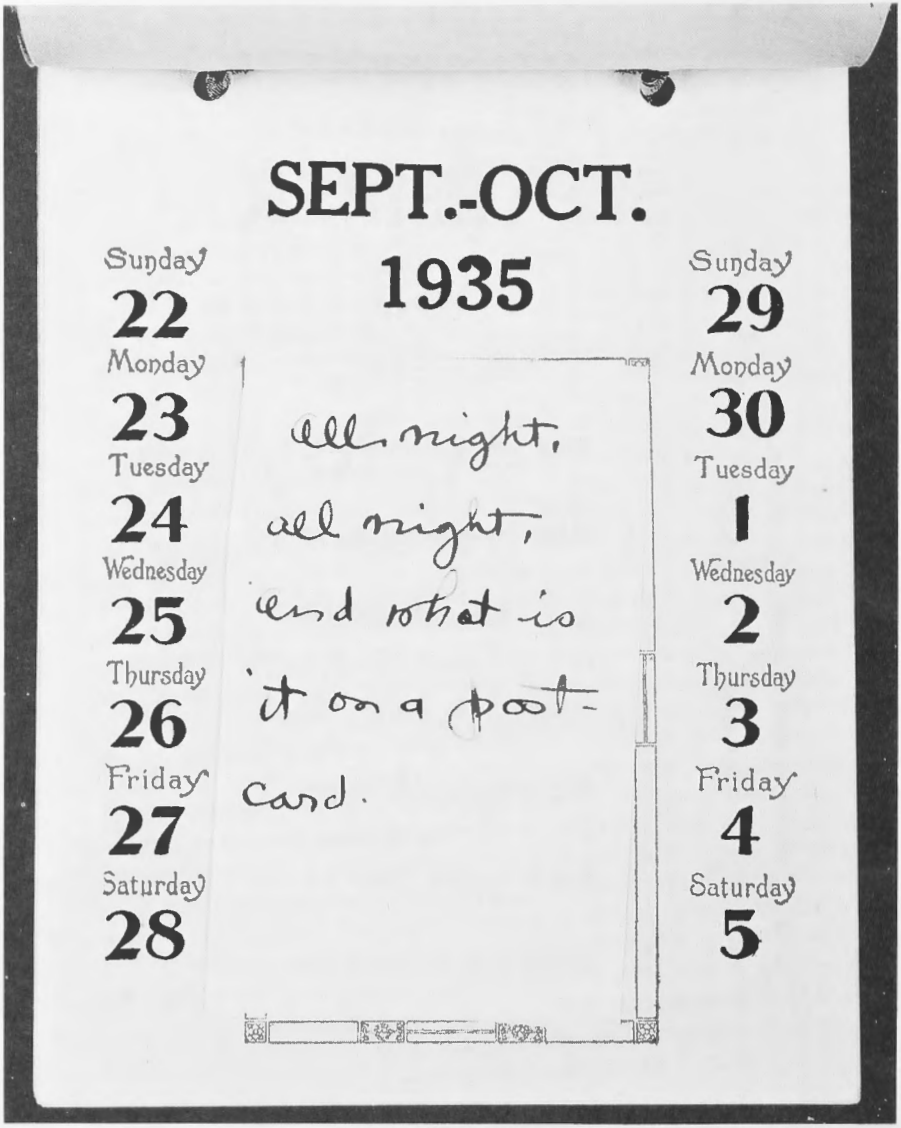
Good deed, my/love. The ele-/ment of folk-/time. Nerves/are my past /monogamy,/said her arms/going farther./Rock me out.



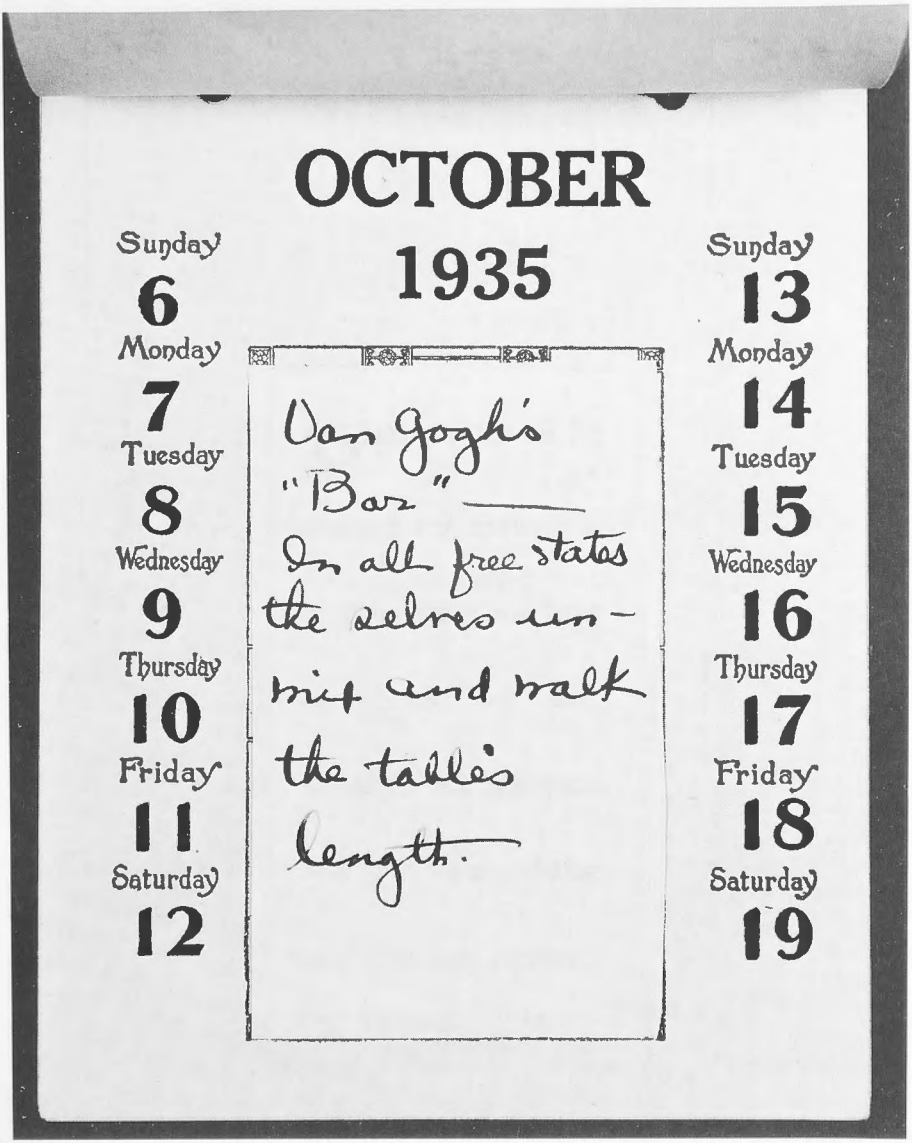
Summer–/I don't hum/the least of my/resistance,/I give it a fly.



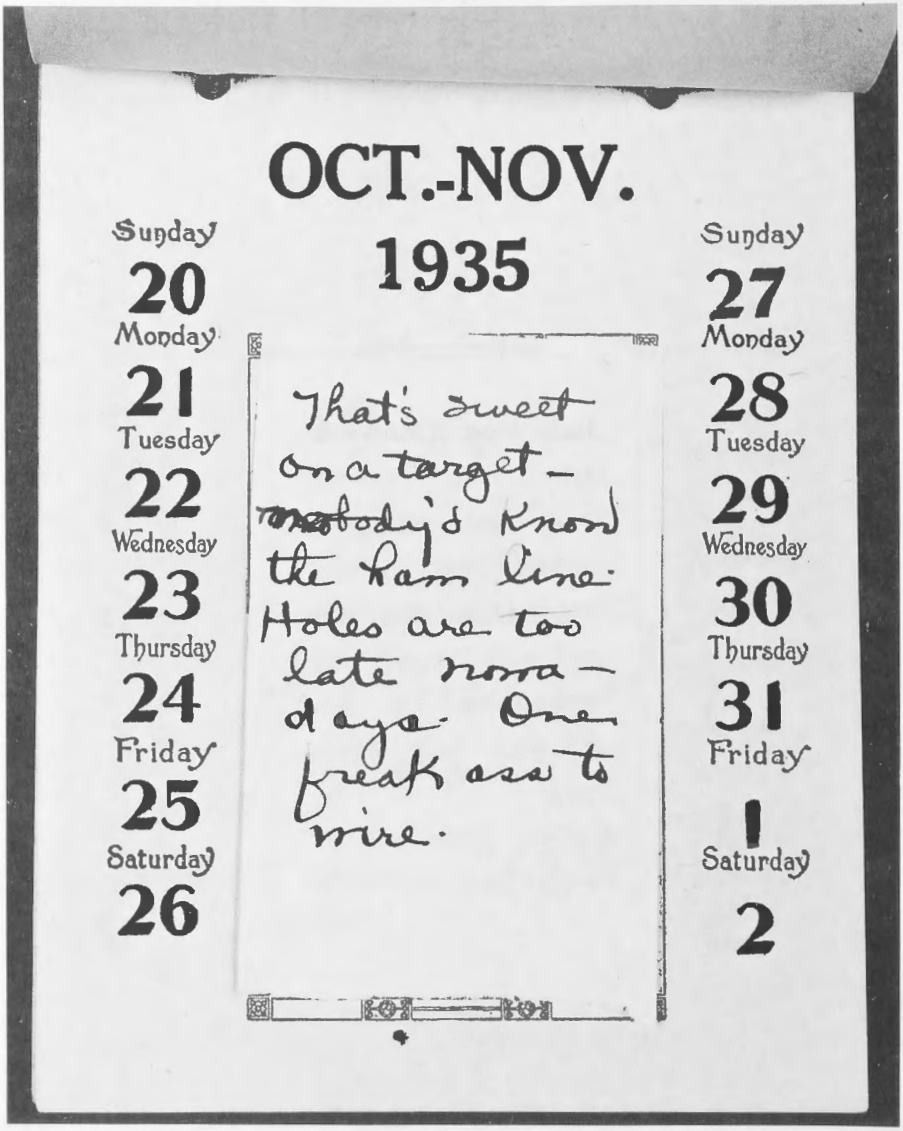
Sweet ears,/attentive, not/too loud to risk,/rest them in a/ madrigal bal-/cony above/any purpose/for not.



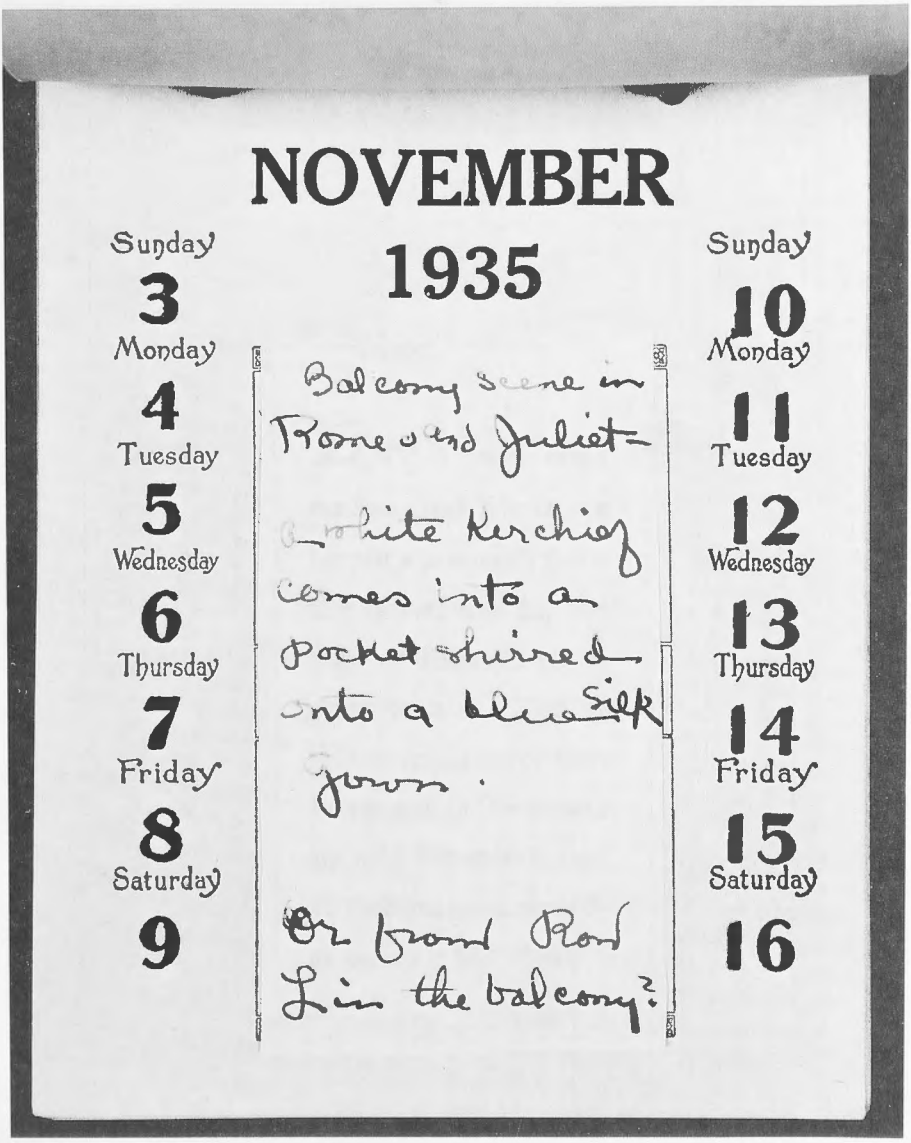
All night,/all night,/and what is/it on a post-/card.



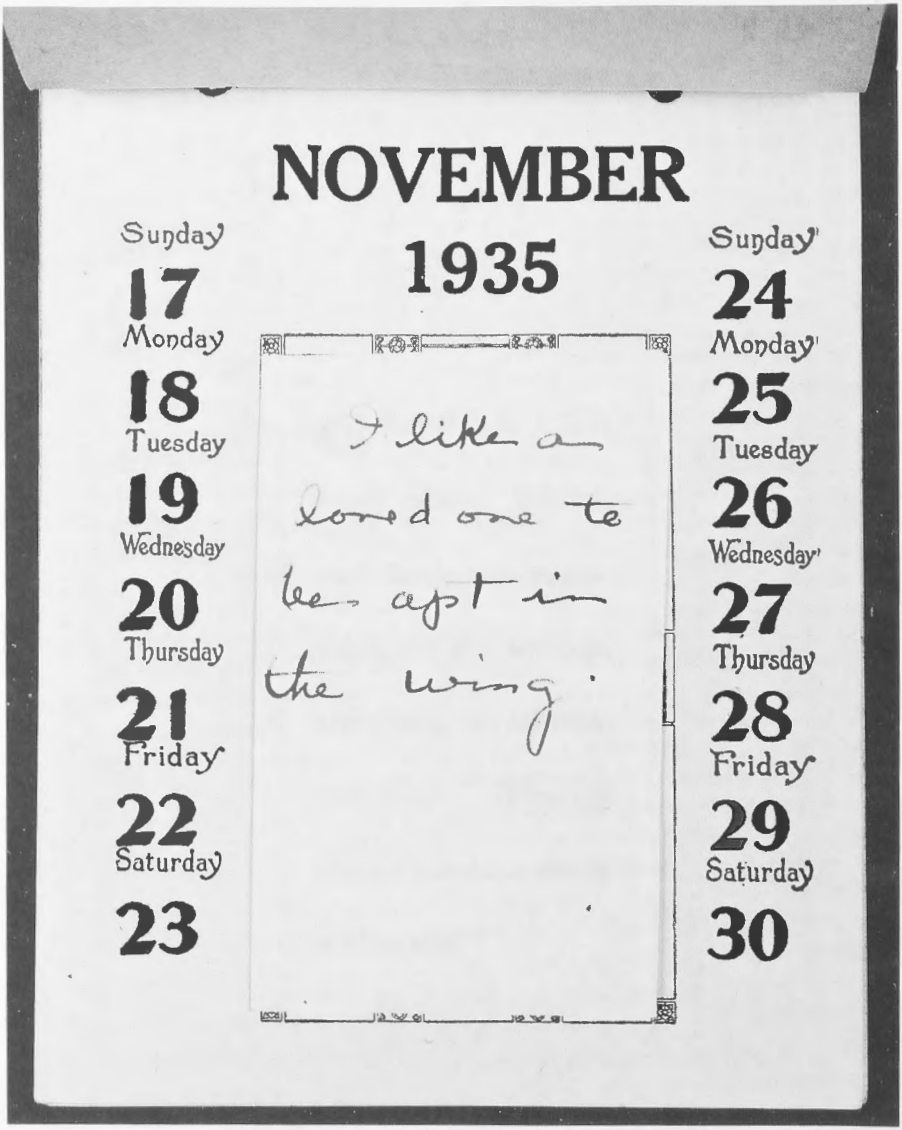
Van Gogh's/"Bar"–/ In all free states/the selves un-/mix and walk/the table's/length.



That's sweet/on a target—/nobody'd know/the ham line./Holes are too/late nowa-/days. One/freak ass to/wire.

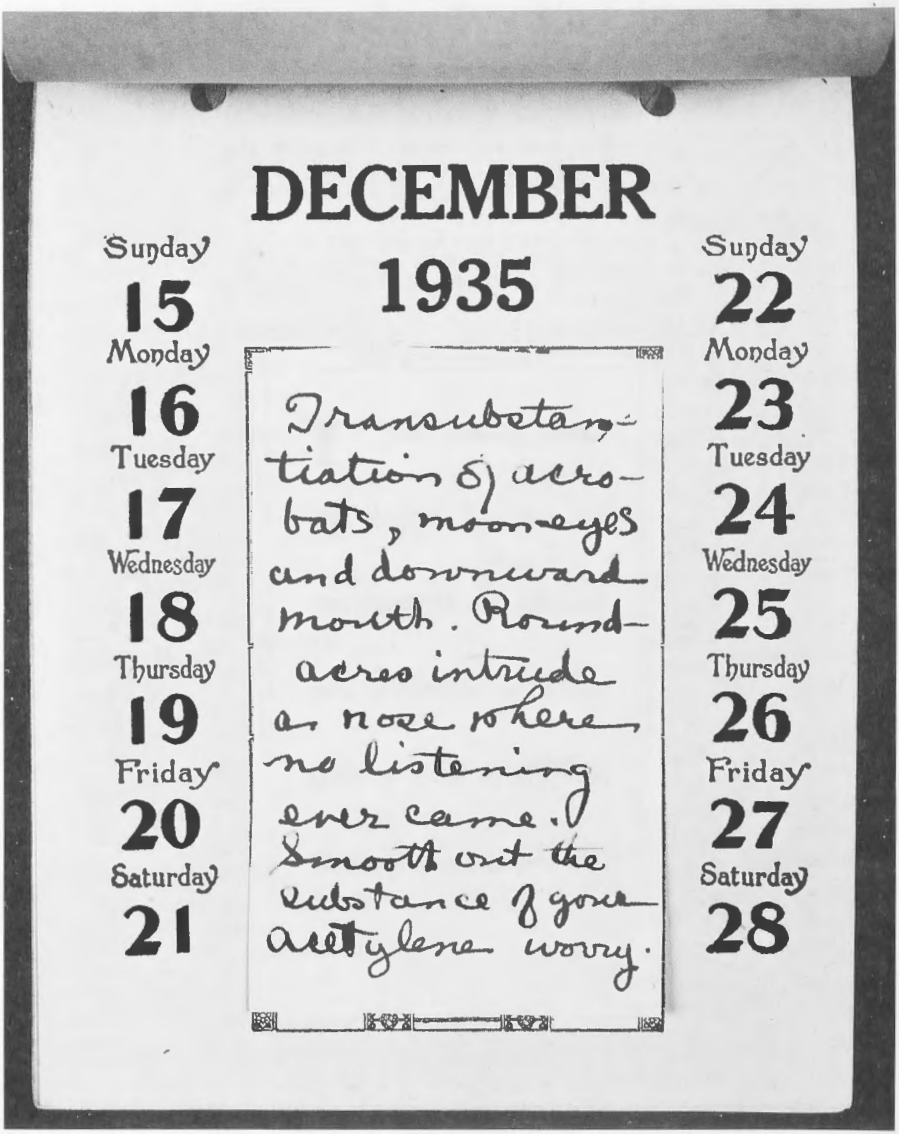


Balcony scene in/Romeo and Juliet—/a white kerchief/comes into a/pocket shirred/onto a blue silk/gown.// Or from Row/L in the balcony?

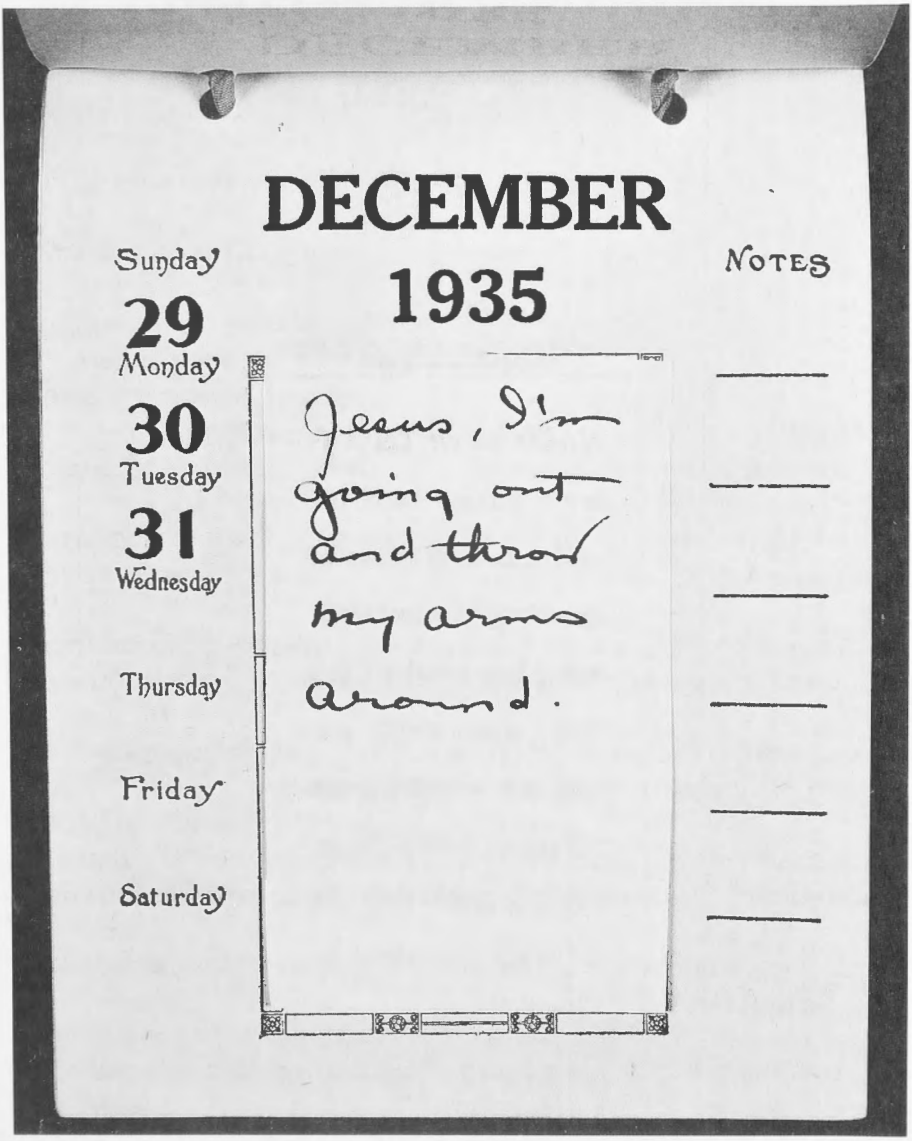


I like a/loved one to/be apt in/the wing.

Sweet ekes/of soft drips—/bathroom/luxuries.



Transubstan-/tiation of acro-/bats, moon-eyes/and downward/ mouth. Round-/acres intrude/a nose where/no listening/ever came./Smooth out the/substance of your/acetylene worry.



Jesus, I'm/going out/and throw/my arms/around.

MARJORIE WELISH

TWO POEMS

THIS NEAR THAT

Arresting exteriors to remain alike and at eye level,
even as interiors are skeptical

or defective relative for use as a reservoir,
aqueduct or kiosk.

"A small simple sheltering or enclosing structure."
A locale requiring a lid is logically incomplete.

A definition such that description lifts collegiate practice—
"and occurring in multiples" readily modular

if verbally reconfigured, may be reconfigured
as follows: "a structural reduction in answer to Tatlin."

Across a wall is a something
Something designates a wall.

"Something having a flat bottom and four upright sides" is a
[delegate
of sets of descriptions. Our professed subject.

"THIS HIT THAT" AND THE LIKE

We are pointing to that, to make mention of the new world,
[ostensibly
Of the new world, ostensibly an answer to *Counter-corner*
[Relief.
"Not that one. *That* one." In plywood, very heavy evidence.

Box, public collection and box, crushed possibly when wet.
". . .visible universe which is not the basket," texts.
You see it whole, intractable: first phase of apprehension.

Pointing to "that there," we name it "bin" whose height
[brought about
disruption of the box by deepening the rationale.
"Five is a number while °five' is a numeral."

Translations of substance to "that there, that one"
"bounding line drawn about" the funerary basket in stone, a
[new objective.
As death, so "untitled." Name one

rainbow—unmistakably apparent stimulus.
We name it "bin," to speak of "five" in decline.
Can room be found? The founding of landscape.

"That is beautiful" in aluminum, confined, however to the
[face
that did not fit any system and so passes through his heart.
"Passing through his thin heart" is a reference to "pan."

Speaking of substance, we mention "thing" as a pseudo-
[concept.
Read "this" as "recurrence of this" in this landscape of
[facsimile
and column. In some system, landscape and chimera are
[interchangeable.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

from ȮNȮME

how

hold

the

lorgnon

Lt.

when

Ȯnȯme

holds

the

different

one:spyglass

One spyglass on the window tells you all you want to know Lt. is howdoesonedo the *anguish of perceivedness*, how does one do it like Mr. Bentham built it, sir, if you please, he did—*cruel*—through the conversation tubes little things listen in on which could pass for kind Being dom i nant onBeing *tant on* he was, sir, so much the one to build perception on the angle of the mirrors and we knew it...taunted us...to know how to do perception on the angle of the mirrors. So we did learn. So we

learn deeds to be police—that is right—and taunted right in turn. Why he saw. Why he saw we learn right who he was in the image of panopticon love. So no man, we found. So no man we found so much gnome work did as he did so much on and then some.... Man. Hid. Onerous other things, be said, he did onerous like a man who devours men (to go down) on some all day and then some—given go-passes—at night—he made the given go-passes—and may have there stamped ampersands on their skinned hands as one deed—he did, *cruel*, *schri*, to let one go do one deed the gnome work there outside his house. Be said. And you. And you. And You. Go. Do Deed. Goodbye. There House. Sir, if you please, why he saw we learn right by who he was where he hung in the octagonal brickhouse of *hard labour* which wanted another name to be given a chance, home—penitent, to be, a different name. He gave it—"penitent." To be kinder, he said, say "penitent," be, a different name. Go home. Be said. Be smart or be muscled—be akind. Have friends. By love's vision out of lock-up one comes first as a man with a rose into her home—who shapes his fist around it. On her. Skinned. And then some—deed. Give a locket. One does. As he did—her mind. Shrew her, be said. Sir, she, the other half, did too—*schri*, *cruel*. Why he saw her—*schri*, *cruel*. Why he saw we learn so much who he was to *cruel* one's taunted love to the ground fistgripped on the knees from above—where he hung. It was lantern. It was swung. It was swung with him hid in it to do by us as he did by them in the image of panopticon love's by vision exceeded the pinholes to see with him hid in them without being seen, to name with him hid in them without being named. From above. It was lantern. Our turn—in it. Why he saw to it we learn right no shame. In us. He did tool it—today, to do by us, today. Love's by vision. It is. He knew it—taunted us, to know the same. Hold True, Be Said, For The Common Informer builds on you...an argot. It was our turn—in argot. Lock-up. Sir, if you please, all you want to know by now is how does one do love's by vision and learn by deed to be police-us like us all alike so awed to silence too—we need it. Passes. We needed passes—why rumour passes. One does move around us sir—and then some, deed. See. Sir, if you please, he did: the rule. He did: the rule governs cadres. The rule governs care. The rule *governs equally upon their knees*—to influence.

Cadres. He did tool it—influence—on some and then some rumour passes taunted heard ones signed for kind ones. Cadres. *Tant s'en faut* . He did sign them. He did sign them with the tool and then took some care and then some deed of his *infra* shone—see *infra*. Argot. We saw it, argot: the common informer, one cell phone in a pocket corner. On her. And then some—deed. Go on. Listen, be said, through the teeth some deed of his *infra* shone—see *infra*. Be said. Be smart or be muscled. Be akind to name without being named, in argot. Lock-up. Go on. Be said. There is always someone smarter than you in the head, in argot. You know it—the guard said it: when the dark could almost make you blind—he said it, you know: how you go here depends on how you are Being—well at the same time—dom i nant onBeing *tant on sans- soi*

(who saw it—outlast)

be low
the law
"go on," Lt.
"why go ahead," Lt.
akind

Ȯnȯme

codes

a different one:

"why pass"

BARBARA GUEST

(ROCKS ON A PLATTER)

I

Literature:

Ideas. As they find themselves. In the trees?
To choose a century they are prepared to inhabit. Dreams are
[set by
typography. A companionship with crewlessness –
[shivering fleece –
voyaging. Ship
shoal rocks

to approach this land raving!

Rocks, platter, words, words ...

mammoth teeth.

* * *

Mobility interseamed with print: "a small car beside the porch
[and wind
with a harsh caress ..." another STORY BEGINS:

A DONKEY DRAWS A CART TO THE FURNACE AND
THE CHILDREN PRESS AROUND THEIR SMALL TEETH
GLOWING.

"I heard the wolf".

* * *

It had been a vagabond voyage and the entrepreneur was fatigued, yet held up his head inflamed with "LITERATURE, the ABSURD." Ideas dropped off vines and into his mouth. An idea fell off a SECULAR vine roaming his head: BAKED APPLES!

Among his listeners, and a waterer of his vines, was a beautiful girl who hand-typed A BOOK CALLED, "BAKED APPLES." THESE STORIES "MELT IN THE MOUTH," the critics said.

THE KING READ HER STORIES, *BAKED APPLES 100,*
AND GAVE HER A GROVE OF APPLE TREES.
THE KITCHEN MAIDS, who wrote JONQUIL TALES, asked THE KING TO PLANT JONQUILS. THE KING replied HARSHLY, "I prefer BAKED APPLES."

THE TEARFUL KITCHEN MAIDS CLOSED THEIR KITCHEN AND OPENED A JONQUIL STORE IN BUDAPEST WITH YELLOW DOORS, and GREEN CEILINGS THAT VERY SOON APPEARED IN A FILM "THE BRIGHTENING OF BUDAPEST."

(The King, who liked the film, donated 25 white Palace chairs.)

* * * *

Passivity ...

pollen indoctrinated AND fragrance.

She digs with her fingernails into the earth while speaking
[and

weeping. Her face is also

introduced into the story:

a fragrant narration.

"ASTOUNDING BEING ALIVE!"

* * * *

Pockets jingle highly responsive place in the shelter
of those rocks at last the jingle of your pockets

HEARD ON THE PAGE.

* * * *

... in its contiguous
treatment of time, literature:

is inclined to divorce
the uninhibited aroma of BEAUTY, OR
SPECTACULAR LEAP

suspicious
of fragmentation,

or the *sweet reproach of invisibility.*

* * * * *

Tradition

Tantamount to theory

treacles
of tender truckland

near Trebizond.

TRIUMPHS.

A TREMENDOUS TUNE-UP. ORTHODOXY.
tremendous tune-up

tra- la-la.

* * * *

Wet earth disinters itself.

With aplomb

bestows,

"The Kiss Behind the Counter."

* * * *

Wet earth disinters itself.
With aplomb
bestows,
"The Kiss Behind the Counter."

* * * *

Implacable poet.

II

Shattered Rocks

hid in the rock?
Deft, vehement. Amulet cast from the pocket.

And wind over red-tiled roof and we grow closer
to the moss of subjectivity guarding an iron basin
limed, mellowing ... old stars.

Rays modern rays,
modernly, so be it.

Noise of the shattering!

Behooved us to welcome tonality,

or succumb to the theme of inharmony ...

"where we once were."

* * *

Fiction and Complice

torment the mineral kingdom,

feathering the page
in the merit of feather.

Of brokeness–

brokeness resembles
evasion (although not separate), and
with a coat of arms,

'afloat with the telling.'

DALE PENDELL

AMṚTA: THE NEUROPHARMACOLOGY OF NIRVANA

Awash in chemicals: peptides and alkaloids, hormones and enzymes, pheromones, sugars and fatty acids. Tiny neurotransmitters: nitric oxide, hydrogen sulfide, and their big buddies: phenethylamines—dopamine and epinephrine; tryptamines-serotonin and melatonin.

Feedback loops and regulators, intricate biosynthetic pathways cross-linked and interwoven, like complex food-chains in a tropical forest.

Or maybe a Precambrian sea.

Which one is us? Are endorphins compassionate, adrenaline aggressive?

We tend to emphasize the brain as the center of consciousness, imagine it to be a computer full of wires, but Aristotle was not incorrect when he recognized that the brain was a secretory gland.

All in solution. Ions dissolved in synaptic fluid,
passing through membranes—
neurotransmitters binding to receptors,
electronic keys probing macromolecular locks,

There are dozens of receptor types and subtypes known. Receptors occur throughout the body, not just in the brain. There are serotonin receptors on blood platelets—the immune system like a second, decentralized brain, distinguishing "self" and "other."

The Discriminating Wisdom.

And the central nervous system is mirrored in the digestive tract: the "enteric" nervous system—one hundred million neurons embedded in the lining of the esophagus, stomach, and intestines, complete with neurotransmitters, synapses, and the ability to learn.

Cause or effect, hard to say: mood shifts change the chemistry, changing the chemistry alters mood.

We reflect the environment, permeable and penetrating, an analog-coded map. The protocol, deep down somewhere, perhaps wave equations, but the language is molecular: neurotransmitters are the lexicon, metabolic pathways the grammar.

> *Who speaks this language?*
> *We sit. Laugh. Sing.*
> *We dream.*

################

Many neurotransmitters are of ancient lineage. Some of the same molecules are found in mammals and reptiles, insects and mollusks. No reason to throw out a good idea.

Some of them are also found in plants. Mostly though, like large pharmaceutical firms, plants synthesize analogs: a patented chemical that has the same functionality as its type. As plant-insect relationships are often characterized by strife as well as by love, many of these chemicals, the alkaloids especially, are poisons, usually insect poisons. They fit into the plugs and gears of some finely tuned invertebrate biosystem and monkey-wrench it.

Some plant poisons mimic neurotransmitters. And since the nervous system tends to be conservative, compared with other biological systems, these plant poisons can also mimic human neurotransmitters, or interact with human consciousness in some other way.

This is a generalization, of course. Nobody knows for sure what the plants are up to. Sometimes they spend a significant amount of their energy and resources budget on synthesizing a chemical that serves no known purpose. For the plant, anyway. For human beings, the effects of the substance can be marvelous, divine.

> *Thus bhang, Cannabis sativa, is said to have sprung up where Shiva spilled a few drips of Amrita, or Ambrosia, the heavenly drink of the gods. Other sacred plants, like the mushrooms, Psilocybe spp., and the peyote cactus, Lophophora, are considered deific by their peoples: the gift of God, or indeed, the actual body of God.*

Sacred plants have been our companions since the Paleolithic. In those times, the scientists and healers, the poets, and prophets, learned how to use these plants, and discovered deeper layers to the world, beyond its usual appearance. That what seems is not necessarily what is.

Possibly they discovered language. Certainly they discovered animism. They saw that the earth was alive, and that everything that happened or existed was connected to everything else. They discovered that sickness lay within, that the Self had an inner structure where dramatic scenes were enacted: theater, masks. That sometimes a person got lost while passing through this realm, so was a confused type of person, or lost something there, like a shadow, or playfully tried on one of the masks and forgot to take it off, and got stuck in it.

> *Some of them saw all the way to the core: these were the Paleolithic Buddhas.*

The Paleolithic plant-teaching lineage and its descendants is still alive and being practiced by many native peoples, and by a few religious sects in India and Africa. In the West, plant religions were severely persecuted, generally to extinction. A few pockets have survived, such as *Amanita muscaria* use by certain groups of rural Catalonians.

################

Buddhism, with a few possible exceptions, has mostly abandoned the use of natural substances in yogic practice, substituting instead a variety of artificial techniques.[1]

> *Traces remain, hemp seeds in tantric rituals.*

The reasons for the rejection of psychoactive plants may well be political as much as spiritual/practical. Buddhism directly challenged the hegemony of the soma priests as spiritual and ritual authorities, and whether soma was originally the fly agaric mushroom (Amanita muscaria), as Gordon Wasson believed, Syrian rue (Peganum harmala), as David Flattery suggested, or Psilocybe cubensis, ergotized barley or rye, marijuana (Cannabis sativa), or some other plant, its consciousness-altering powers are well documented, and its use was central to the Vedic religion that formed the cultural and religious milieu from which Buddhism sprang.[2]

It also seems likely that the rejection of psychoactive plants was a rejection of shamanism, and because many or most of the plant doctors were probably women, thus a rejection of women as spiritual teachers. It is not clear which of the two concerns was most salient.[3]

It is clear, though, that certain classes of psychoactive plants were once much more utilized by yogic practitioners, in India and throughout the world. More, it is clear that psychoactive plants (or animals!) have been a part of, or at the very center of, religious practice in the majority of prehistoric cultures, though I don't agree with those who say that psychoactive plants are the *only* possible origin of religion (death, to cite just one alternative, is another suitable candidate).

##########################

Traces remain, metaphors remain.

Early Buddhist psalms speak of *asava,* the "deadly drugs." The arhat is one who has freed himself from the four *asavas:* desire, speculation, ignorance, and rebirth (lust for life).

> *Asava:*
> *an extract or secretion of a tree or flower;*
> *an outflow, flowing, or emission;*
> *attention or desire, the soul,*
> *directed outwards toward an object—*
> *thus, infirmity, a drug, or poison.*

Images remain: Amitabha is called *amritaraja,* the Nectar-King.

> *Amrita. Ambrosia.*
> *The divine nectar. The Drink of Immortality.*

Amrita is closely connected to soma. The Tibetan translation for *amṛta* is *dutsi.* In the Buddhist version of the myth about churning the ocean to obtain ambrosia, Vajrapani turns black after drinking Rahu's *dutsi*-laden urine, as Shiva turns blue in the Hindu version.

In the dharani for feeding the hungry ghosts, we chant

> *Adoration to Kanroo the Tathagata.*

Kanroo: ambrosia. *Kan* plus *Lou,* bliss-bestowing nectar.

Buddha is the poison for poison. The Buddha-dharma is the Ambrosial Drum.

Nirvana is the *Nectar City,* the entrance is the Ambrosial Gate.

> *Amrta:*
> *the deathless, the unborn.*
> *A sea of neurotransmitters. What is the solute?*

##################

But Buddhist yoga has not entirely abandoned chemical aids in the quest for Realization. William McNiell, in *The Rise of the West,* states that Indian religiosity, and thence that of Christianity, Islam, and Chinese Buddhism, is founded and sustained by insights triggered by oxygen starvation.

A facile reduction, but perhaps with a pointer: shallow breathing, sometimes extremely shallow breathing, is indeed a salient feature of deep meditation. (Though it seems more likely that the carbon dioxide level, more than that of the dissolved oxygen, would have the more profound pharmacological activity. Two of the therapeutic indications for carbon dioxide are "negativism" and "melancholia.")

Still, as Zen students know, the best technique is no guarantor of insight. You can enter a high, altered state of consciousness and go right on sleeping. Maybe the point is not to get high, but to come down.

> *But isn't that a high?*

##################

> *Hui Neng was just chopping wood, nothing special.*
> *Always good to remember that.*

Still, it is the sesshin, the intense yogic training period, that is the context for most of our stories of *kensho,* Realization.

An altered state of consciousness.

Days of sitting. Pain in the legs. Not quite "sensory deprivation," but sustained, practiced focus and stillness. Bound to change one's neurochemistry: endorphins at least, and probably a lot more. And the

change is often most apparent after leaving sesshin, re-entering the world and encountering familiar settings.

The "post-sesshin high."

We can characterize it phenomenologically, as we can other drugs.

Effects: mental clarity; heightened empathic assessment of other people; strengthening of intuitive powers; possible diminishment of certain analytical syllogistic skills. High pain threshold.

Or, some parts like a mild opium high, perhaps combined with the alertness of cocaine (again, small dose); or like half a tab of MDMA without the jaw clenching. Or like a full tab of MDMA without the jaw clenching. And some playfulness, like, well,

A spring morning. Saturday morning.
The birds! So many birds
singing.

Duration: Lasts for 12 to 48 hours after leaving sesshin. Gradual tapering of effects. Mild crash, completely mitigated by sleep and more meditation.

But as with any high, you have to come down. Aitken Roshi often makes this point during his post-sesshin cautions.

The students are warned that they are in a highly sensitized and energized state. They are warned about getting involved in philosophical and intellectual discussions, about driving (timing is often altered), that, though the mind is awake and alert, the body is nonetheless tired, perhaps exhausted, and will need rest. And, of course, to avoid dissipating the experience by talking about it too much.

It's not uncommon for sangha members who did not participate in the sesshin to show up for the closing ceremony and the informal meal, visiting, and cleanup that follows, just to feel the "energy" ("contact high," we used to call that).

################

"You have to come down."

An altered state of consciousness acutely suited to one task, not necessarily optimal or even appropriate to others.

Are we agreed here? Are we all agreed on this point?

Altered state/nothing special.
Altered from what?
Altered implies a norm, an unaltered state of consciousness.

The matter of sobriety.

> *Hard to see, though, how an altered state of consciousness is necessary to perceive the truth of suffering.*

################

The term "drugs" won't do: which drugs? Neither will "sobriety." Sobriety from what? Alcohol sober, but high on cannabis? Or cannabis, alcohol, and caffeine sober but under the influence of cocaine?[4]

Or maybe nicotine sober, Valium sober, and television sober, yet totally mad with love and jealousy.

Or drunk with rationality. Sober with attachment.

"Drugs, as a general term, is an obfuscation of the War on Drugs. We hear the phrase "alcohol and drugs, as if alcohol were not a drug, and as if by drugs we all know what is being talked about. Addiction is an issue with tobacco, alcohol, and the opiates, but is not at all a property of the entheogens. Addiction to alcohol, a cellular poison, is characterized by physical and mental deterioration that is virtually absent in opiate addiction. Tobacco kills nearly half a million Americans each year, but there are no recorded deaths from marijuana. Each of these plants and substances has distinct properties, promises, and dangers. All that is served by lumping a group of them together is a government program of spiritual and political oppression aimed at cutting off all dialogue.

The War on Drugs is in essence a religious war. That is why drug offenders frequently get longer prison sentences than violent criminals. A drug user is worse than a criminal—no punishment is too severe, because drug users are heretics.

Our interest here is in a special class of psychoactive plants and drugs that have acquired spiritual reputations: *Psilocybe* mushrooms, peyote, ayahuasca, and LSD. They are even called *entheogens,* "manifesting-god-within," akin to the enthusiasm of the Greek desert fathers. Ecstasy.[5]

################

Meditation as a standard, a calibrating, measuring device. Meditation and koan practice as a control to assess different classes of psychotropic plants and substances.

Tea, Bodhidharma's gift, the old Barbarian's own poison, his very eyelids given for the benefit of sentient beings in their quest for realization. Some argue that while tea is beneficial, coffee is disruptive. Some find that even tea is disturbing, strengthening the monkey more than the watcher.

Some say that MDMA is an excellent catalyst for the first day of sesshin.

> *Ahhh, what about guyusa leaves,*
> *so low in tannins, for a predawn tea?*
> *What about a good chew of khat,*
> *to subdue the drowsiness*
> *of a hot afternoon?*

The *Hevajra Tantra* mentions camphor as being drunk in certain rituals to gain *siddhi.* In small doses, camphor is a stimulant. But in large doses, administered intravenously, camphor was used to induce convulsions in mental patients, before it was replaced with electricity. Camphor is an isomer of thujone, the active oil in wormwood, *Artemisia absinthium.*

Trungpa singled out marijuana as being detrimental to meditation: saying that it mimicked meditation—and forbade its use and presence. Almost everyone finds LSD much too powerful and overwhelming to be useful in practice.

> *Field Report, a poet and Rinzai practitioner.*
>
> *I took some LSD during a sesshin while I was in Japan. It was too much, too exaggerated. Everything was too perfect and meaningful. The timing and sound of the*

bells had cosmic significance. The monks were so beautiful that I wanted to cry. Everything was so numinous.

[Did you get a koan answer?]

Oh yes. I found a great, perfect answer.

[Did you go to dokusan?]

Yes.

[And. . .?]

Oh, it was wrong, of course. I mean I had a great, perfect answer, but it wasn't the point of the koan at all.

################

The salient feature of entheogens in American Buddhism at present is memorial: that many Americans were attracted to Buddhism in the first place because of psychedelic revelations. If, as some pedants claim, such experiences are not "genuine," their persistence is remarkable indeed.

Very few dedicated students seem interested in using psychedelics WITHIN the context of the Buddha-way, but even fewer recant the importance or significance of their previous experiences. Most of them claim that the Buddha-way is a natural extension or progression of their psychedelic experiences. Many leave open the possibility of renewing their acquaintance with entheogenic plants or substances in the future.

Maybe its not that visionary plants and drugs are useful for Zen training, but that Zen training is excellent preparation for using psychedelic drugs.

No amount of meditation is going to give you an LSD experience.

################

Is there something MISSING, a barren area in Buddhism, that these sacred plants and medicines address?

We had all walked down to the beach. It seemed like everyone was talking at once. Tim was crying and laughing at the same time, came over and started hugging me.

"All this time, my whole life, I've been embarrassed about my teeth-that's all it was—so I wouldn't smile—just because of my teeth I've been stopping myself from smiling."

This promise, this chance, that through insight, revelation, through discovered/recovered facility, that obstacles be dissolved and the ego be strengthened and healed.

Crying and laughing, hugging.

At any point on this continuum, the matter of the fifth precept may be addressed.

##################

Surāmeraya-majjapa-mādahānā veramanīsikkhāpadaṁ-
[samādiyāmi

"I undertake the training rule to abstain from fermented and distilled intoxicants which are the basis for heedlessness."[6]

Surā refers to spiritous, flavored liquors, though it is not clear that this has always specifically meant distilled alcoholic beverages, as five kinds of *surā* are mentioned in the *Veda. Meraya* refers to any sort of fermented beverage; Rhys-David says that there were five kinds. *Majja* is an intoxicant, from a very ancient Indo-European root with cognates that include words for mead, madness, passion, and rejoicing. Rhys-David suggests "indolence" for *pamada* instead of "heedlessness."

The most literal interpretation of the precept is clearly directed against alcohol, and, more specifically, against its deleterious effects on mindfulness and morality. Opium, at the time of the *Vinaya* was almost certainly viewed purely as a medicine and not as an intoxicant. The absence of *bhang* from the precept, however, may be significant, because hemp was indeed used in some yogic practices, and has left traces in both Hindu and Buddhist tantra.

Bhikkhu Bodhi stresses the heedlessness that arises from intoxication as the point of the precept.

> *Under the influence of intoxicants a man who might otherwise be restrained can lose self-control, become heedless, and engage in killing, stealing, adultery, and lying. Abstinence from intoxicants is prescribed on the grounds that it is essential to the self-protection of the individual and for the well-being of family and society. The precept thus prevents the misfortunes that result from the use of intoxicants: loss of wealth, quarrels and crimes, bodily disease, loss of reputation, shameless conduct, negligence, and madness.*
>
> *—Bhikkhu Bodhi, Going For Refuge;*

But we have to go further. We will not dally in the literal. The precept is about delusions.

> *But sobriety also deludes.*
> *If sobriety did not delude,*
> *there would be no Buddhists,*
> *no one lighting incense and chanting Kanzeon.*

The precept is about not muddying the waters.

But there is something muddy about many commentaries on the fifth precept, when "intoxicants" are glossed in a lump to "drugs." Characterizations such as "semiconscious euphoria," or "heedless loss of self-control," or "haze that clouds the mind" bear little affinity with the ecstatic epiphanies and insights of the psychedelic experience.

Still. Such ignorance should not limit our own investigations. We know something about delusion, and something about the seductive powers of Mara's beautiful daughters.

> *Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the intrinsically pure Dharma, not giving rise to delusion is called the Precept of Not Giving or Taking Drugs.*
>
> *—Bodhidharma*

################

Dogen is more karmic:

> *Drugs have not been brought into it. Don't bring them in.*

Which drugs? Bodhidharma's eyelids? Carbon dioxide volume?

In another sense the poisons were there from the beginning. Maybe they *are* the beginning: a grand hallucination of seeming. Of eyes, taste, touch, thought, and object of thought.

> *Birth, death, and dreaming:*
> *beta-carbolines shielding tryptamines,*
> *carbohydrates in a controlled burn.*
> *Rice as a powerful hallucinogen.*

################

Medicinal use of drugs is excepted from the precept.

We bless the rice and vegetables we eat at sesshin as "this good medicine." And supper is considered "medicine," not a meal at all—therefore not transgressing the rule that monks eat only twice a day.

> *Yun Men, teaching his community, said, "Medicine and disease subdue each other: the whole earth is medicine; what is your self?"*
>
> *—Blue Cliff Record, case 87*[7]

The earth comes forth to confirm the self: tonight's cold wind; a warm cup of soup.

Different diseases require different medicines.

> *But are we not ill? Dukkha?*
> *Are we not, like all conditioned and composite dharmas, [ill?*
> *And is not one of the greatest illnesses the frozen, reified belief in the ultimate nature of external objects?*
> *Or its converse?*

################

The question of entheogenic drugs more generally is the question of ecstatic visions. Divine madness. *Makyō.*

Makyō: the Path of Illusions; Path of Dreams. A feeling of great numinosity.

Makyō.

魔境

Ma, hemp-spirit, Mara, the devil in the phenomenal world. Makyō are visions that appear at certain stages of the meditation path.

> *A deep dream of participation in the Buddha Dharma.*
>
> —*Robert Aitken*[8]

The *Surangama Sutra* lists fifty types of makyō, ten for each of the five aggregates of form, receptiveness, conception, discrimination, and consciousness. The Buddha states that these visions are harmless, even excellent progressive stages, unless the practitioner believes that they signify complete attainment.

> *In this clear and penetrating state of your mind when it looks within, its light appears in all its purity and at midnight you will suddenly see in your dark room all sorts of apparitions as clearly as in broad daylight, with all the other objects usually there. This is the mind, in its subtlety, refining its clear perceptions which enables you to see distinctly in the dark. This temporary achievement does not mean you are a saint. If you do not regard it as such, it is an excellent progressive stage, but if you do you will give way to demons.*
>
> —*Surangama Sutra*[9]

##################

To poison poison, the Peacock Path. The way of transmutation.

The blue color of the peacock is the blue of Shiva, the blackness of Vajrapani: the color of the poison-drinker.

In jungles of poisonous plants strut the peacocks. . .[10]

The Bodhisattva of Makyō, the Poison Buddha, The Bodhisattva of Illusions: the buddha with 108,000 names who teaches and saves with illusion. Whose very name poisons preconceptions, who leaves us in a soup of dreams.

We know this path in our imaginations, or is it our memories? A path that includes ecstasy and ecstatic visions, the God of Ecstasy, Shiva, or maybe Dionysus: the Bodhisattva who gave us his very blood as a medicine for crippling inhibitions, that the true soul emerge.

Dionysus, by nature unrecognized, but surely present in the pantheon: a young god with the rank of bodhisattva.

Iconography: sometimes rides a panther, sometimes an ass. Androgynous. Usually with long hair. Associated with the thyrsus and tambourine, wears a garland of ivy leaves (a cure for drunkenness). God of music, poetry, song, and the theater. Dharani may include eating wild mushrooms, and raw flesh (emblematic of the food web and interdependence).

Associated with springtime, and an ecstatic state of consciousness often mistaken for madness, but more appropriately named Great Joy. Enthusiastic exuberance.

Wrathful aspect: hawk eating a ground squirrel; cat playing with a mouse, waiting, letting it revive and run in order to catch it again. Two schoolgirls catching fireflies, pulling the abdomens off and sticking them onto their arms and the backs of their hands, dancing and laughing, their jewelry aglow with green light.

Let a thousand schools flourish, the way of Buddhism is assimilation, not rejection. The Divine Madness school of Buddhism, watched over by the Bodhisattva Dionysus, who uses enthusiasm and ecstatic visions as devices. . .

And thus Bodhisattvas are likened to peacocks:
They live on delusions—those poisonous plants.
Transforming them into the essence of Practice,
They thrive in the jungle of everyday life.

Whatever is presented they always accept,
While destroying the poison of clinging desire.

—Dharmaraksita

##################

1. Jonathan Ott, in *The Age of Entheogens,* presents the above clarification of the usually inverted use of "natural" and "artificial."
2. Andrew Schelling, personal communication.
3. I find Dan Merkur's thesis that the Old Testament mana was an entheogenic substance, probably a mushroom, very convincing. ("Mana and the Showbread: A Psychoactive Sacrament in the Biblical Israel," paper delivered to the Psychoactive Sacraments conference, Menlo Park, Feb. 18, 1995.)

   "They kept part of it till morning, and it became full of maggots and stank." Exodus 16:19.

   And if "hoarfrost" refers to the peculiar ground ice that sometimes squeezes up through the dirt like toothpaste, as I have heard the term used, the case for mana being a hallucinogenic mushroom is strong indeed. The history of mana among the Hebrews parallels that of soma among the Aryans: the earliest references show that the plant was used by everyone; middle references that its use was restricted to priests; and lastly that its use disappears or is replaced by a ritualistic and pharmacologically inactive substitute.
4. See *On Drugs,* by David Lenson, for an excellent and penetrating critique on the use of the term "drugs" and the concept of sobriety in the War on Drugs.
5. Entheogens. A psychedelic plant or substance used in a spiritual setting, according to the Council for Spiritual Practices.

   "Entheogen" is being used to stress the spiritual and sacred aspects of drugs such as LSD and psilocybin. But there is something to be said for "hallucinogen." While these substances rarely induce what could technically be called hallucinations, aficionados regularly speak of the quality of the "visuals." It is not clear just what "visuals" per se have to do with "entheogenic" experience.
6. *Surāmeraya-majjapa-daṭṭhāna veramaṇī sikkhāpadamsaṁādiyāmi*

   Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Going for Refuge Taking the Precepts," *The Wheel,* No. 282/283/284.
7. Cleary, Thomas, and J. C. Cleary, tr. *The Blue Cliff Record,* 1992, Shambhala.
8. Robert Aitken, *Encouraging Words; Zen Buddhist Teachings for Western Students,* 1993, Pantheon.
9. Luk, Charles, tr. *The Surangama Sutra,* 1966, Rider, London.
10. *Dharmaraksita: Wheel of Sharp Weapons: A Mahayana Training of the Mind.* Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala.

José Lezama Lima

SIX POEMS
from THE FRAGMENTS DRAWN BY CHARM

(Tr. from the Spanish by Roberto Tejada)

MOTHER

I saw the face of my mother again.
It was a night that seemed to have severed
night from sleep.
The night drew on or halted,
a cutting knife or a hurricane gust,
but the dream didn't head for its night.
I felt as if everything weighed upward,
you spoke there, almost murmuring,
in the ear of some tiny crab,
alright, I know this because I saw her smile
as if wanting to approach and offer me
the little creature,
to watch its amusing crawl
or to plunge it in hot flour.
The ripe corncob like a baby tooth,
in a drawer teeming with silver-plated ants.
The simile of the drawer like a snake,
the size of an arm, a snake rendering slivers
out of the folded length of its tongue, the one
where old watches are kept, the hilarious
frightful talking drawer.
Groping along the door frame,
to begin to feel, covering my eyes,
though eventually motionless,
that what remained was heavier,
with the lightness of what the rain weighs
or the harp's venetian blinds.

The courtyard was attended
by the entire moon, along with the other invited meteors.
The itinerary of their habit was auspicious and magical.
I watched the door,
but the rest of her body remained subtracted,
like someone who begins to speak,
who laughs again
but who, lingering between the door
and whatever else remains,
seems to have left and then returns.
What's left is God maybe,
minus myself maybe,
maybe the solar scraping
within which, astride, maybe the self.
At my side, the other body
breathing with eyes
adhered to the rock of this spherical emptiness.
It all began to vanish
into a whirling metal with borders
assaulted by the brevity of flames,
into the steam rising from a tiny
cup of morning coffee,
into locks of hair.

May & 1971

ELOÍSA LEZAMA LIMA

A smile that knows no end.
A smile that admirably knows its end.
Her smile swells like the night
and both eyes shrink into a small, hidden
stone. Attribute of a mineral

wrapped in a millenary oil cloth: Knowing
how to laugh and greet with the hand.
The lapses and eurekas of laughter happen
with the simplicity of a chair from Pompeii.
The hand offers the brevity of dew
and the dew lingers like the warm sand of memory.
She will always offer the intricate simplicity of her laughter
and the liquid labyrinth of her hand inside the dream.

I HEAR A BIRD

I hear a speckled bird go:
caw-caw.
Three green circles inside my head
and eyes that make the night open and close.
Footstools for the violinists
and in the middle of the arabesque slope
a carafe takes a bow as if dancing a minuet.
Prince Albert coats and moon-dappled
hats with little wings
rush to hide behind the trees.
Violins also grow severed
behind leaves stepped on by frost.
The violinist clad in a purple Prince Albert shouts:
caw-caw.
And all the drunk trombones at midnight
took their bow, pulled up the windows,
and lifted the violin's hair against the wind.
After a pause you could hear:
caw-caw.
First the animals talked,
the bird perfected the dictionary,
the orchestra only managed to make it whirl and whirl,

to release its spirals and to gather them
on the sleeve sewn with heraldic buttons.
The bird in its April long-coat
offered us the intruded language,
the violin's hair crisscrossed by the silky bough,
the eye of the octopus on the midday anchor:
caw-caw.
The violinist with his angelic hair,
impelled by the orchestra and its tick-tock
of black-and-blue frost, the reverent
leaf bows again, allowing a drop
to fall hydrocephalus with blood-shot eyes:
caw-caw.

May & 1971

HERE WE ARE

Here we are, this is not the place where we were headed.
I pin the nebula,
I erase all writing,
I achieve a point and release a spiral.
Aurora of the figure and a whirlwind dances.
Inside the fog a point
leaps, an early-morning cat
behind a mask, swishing its tail,
like two legs tied with straps,
beginning to sway now
like a hard-water pendulum.
Cleaving inside,
as if to prelude a swollen thorax,
the knife factory
opens the eyelid to the chamber

where the drowsy sword is shining.
We look elsewhere,
despite the glow it takes leave of,
the masked cat
controls the forthcoming bedroom.
There, an arm weighs as much
as a cartridge of water,
though suddenly letting go of its rockets,
and we are blinded
as they pat us on our backs.

December & 1971

THE EMBRACE

The two bodies
elapse after smashing the intervening
mirror, each body renders
the one it faces, beginning
to perspire like mirrors.
They know there's a moment
when a shadow will pinch them,
something like dew, unstoppable as smoke.
The unknown breath
of otherness, of the sky bending
and blinking, that eggshell
very slowly cracking.

A hand placed on the woman's shoulder.
They feel another tremor emerging,
invisible, untouchable, over there,
as large as the house, another body
it shelters and now rushing

into an invisible, untouchable river.
Legs tremble, eager to arrive
at the deciphered land,
they're now inside the sealed body.
As it begins to lean completely,
a dark body penetrating
into the other light,
slowly dimming,
and it is now this light about
to penetrate as well.
The wet darkness descending
inside our body.
They tremble like a flame
surrounded by a dark oscillating body.
Penetration in the dark,
but the fulcrum is slightly incandescent,
then as luminous
as eyes emerging for the first time,
when they begin their victorious approval.

The hand no longer on the other shoulder.
Another bridge is established
braced by the penetrating bodies.
Now the two bodies disappear,
it's the great dark nebula
bolstering its windmill sail.
The two bodies revolve
on the wheel of flying sparks.
As in after a slow extended swim
hair again surfaces covered with newts.
We look back, separating the surf,
and the desert appears with carpets and dates.

The two bodies disappear
into a point now opening its mouth.
Wetness, softness,
the infinitely-expanding sponge
all responding at the door
glowing with the ointment

of horses at daybreak and the flicker
of pheasants, their eyes barely a memory.

The dolmen bestows gifts
at the anointed door,
its old wood silently creaking.
The two bodies disappear
and unite on the edge of a cloud.
That devilfish, a sea-owl,
dries the starry perspiring
the bodies exhale in crucifixion.
Tree and phallus
know nothing of resurrection,
they surface and ebb with the half-moon
and the blazing sulfur of the sun.
The two engirded bodies,
kangaroo tail
and sea-serpent,
knot and rustle in the boreal casque.

January & 1974

OLD SURREALIST BALLAD

When the rivulet swells with lashing
snake-tails and the piano with its backside turned
displays its shoes shining like the night
when it sinks, a sagging armchair whose old wicker
strands are still a plaything for the boy with a big head
Taking shelter from a slice of violin melon
the dancers bump their heads and perspire saw-dust
and midnight is as bored
as a chessboard leaned against a blackboard

I had no plan to go, but my key-chain was missing
the enormous lock the dog that always follows me
until it goes off licking the back of its leg
The violin like an arm covered with frogs
began releasing drops of evaporated honey
The chief's canoe crossed the crystal lake
at the stroke of two in the morning
and those who woke up danced with those who were
[sleeping
The woman we waited for is here and I hid
like a hypocrite behind a child's box of pencils
which lent me their yellow fingers
and scraps of the accordion like a grapefruit packed in syrup
I used to save tears like bread crumbs
to throw into the pool of sissified alligators
When the doughnut began to puff
the patent leather definitely squealed
and the chief's canoe was filled with crystal shards.

20 September 1975

PIERRE JORIS

from ANIMALS TO THE POINT

(. . .)

The small animals
entered here
an early evening with
forgettable news
they burrow
sparrows & no hawks
finches & no eagles
an owl maybe
a mole
chant it
An anima
with an else
in terminal
position,
points
elsewhere
again a gain
of if not
light then
a darker
clarity
telluric
swamp critters
cry out for better
or against
worse encroachments.
sparrows & no hawks
finches & no eagles

they fly through
your singing
make a home therein
"a breathless impatience"
found in wild animals
"almost a silly unwillingness
to come to the point"
—as if the point
was to come
to the point,
a male insistence
crossing a laissez-faire
kingdom.

(. . .)

Reeling, no
kneel-
ing before
the mezzo-
soprano,
begging
do not come to a point
flow, keep moving
the sound from just
below to just above
modulate the
unending lines,
start again in
the middle, nel
mezzo sing it anew,
sparrow,
finch,
do not come
to a point.
Neither the point
of laughter nor
that of freezing,
no point-blank

point-and-shoot
not even a departure from
symmetry in the alignment
of the littlest
ones in one or the other
lattice sites of a
crystal,
        mezzo
is not crystal clear
but a hymn to liquid
sublunar
not subatomic,
the mess of
molecules,
the moles, where
have the small
animals
gone?
Lost along the lattices
between point a
& point b
with no Point Success
peaking in no
Cascade Range
near no
Mount Rainier
& not even a
point-woman but a point-
less
cross between
—between, between,
the only place to be!—
a sparrow & a mezzo
whose favorite flower
is not a poinsettia
shrub
with showy usually
scarlet (it is an
American tropical

thing) bracts
between small yellow
flowerlike inflorescences.
Is there a point
in a flower being
flowerlike?
Are small animals
animal-like?
Does between ever
come first
or last?
Ask Poincaré,
Raymond that is,
he of the contributions
to celestial mechanics
wrongly called
pointed.
But we want
sublunar dynamics,
desire to become
poikilothermic creatures
our spotted lives
adaptable,
refusing sun-worship
pointillists
in the full order
"of the poem in which divine, human, and
animal orders must be revealed"
down to the wooden
animals,
familiar household pet
menageries
or am I stretching
a point?
Soon as nib
hits paper
all shed ink
is a stretched
point. period.

Or else a stiff at
attention stance
taken
by a hunting dog
waiting for the one
year each
century
when chicory
turns
into a living being
& victory
is not the
point.

(. . .)

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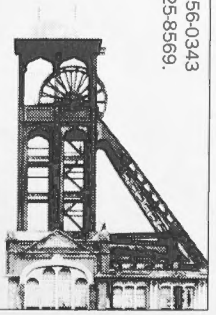

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GUSTAF SOBIN

BREATH'S SUCCESSIVE VERTEBRAE

. . .had kept, ever since, a
continuous distance,
a
deep remove from your Own, in-
nate susceptibilities. rooms, doors, windows: yes,
would face, now, what-

ever perspectives might, eventually,
re-
tain, withhold you, those un-
impaired vistas, for instance, onto the thick,
leafy masses of so much
wavering

re-
flection. would enter, wouldn't you; slake on the
heave of all those
wet,

ligated facets. for 'here' is little more, in
fact, than
interim, than that
on-
going hiatus between a past-imperfect and an ever-

suspended
conditional. would sip: yes, extract, from
that errant glitter, the
linked nodes
of

nexus. for there's
'this, this,' you'd tell yourself: yes, what the
lips would wrest, say, from so many thick,
shimmering beads, the
breath's

suc-
cessive vertebrae.

# #

what otherwise isn't, you'd

written; *who otherwise*

aren't. no, inhabited nothing, you realized, but a
landscape laid sonorous be-
tween two
in-
determinates. but a voice, occasionally; but the

shrub of
a

voice; yes, but the very leaves of the
shrub of
that very voice as they thickened—pulsatile—a-
bout a

tongue's
in-
cursions.

VITEZSLAV NEZVAL

THE LESSER ROSE GARDEN

Tr. from the Czech by
Jerome Rothenberg & Milos Sovak

[Prologue]

The sun reflected in the colored splashes of
the paper lanterns in the lesser rose garden.

The bowman lurking back of the ecliptic with imaginary
arrows pierced the apricots.

He drove a needle thru her hat that lady sleeping
on her swing the lilies of the valley underneath her
[slowly burning out.

The dandelions' breath.

A mussel opened up toward sunset
in the sand drifts saga's dream.

And a stork drifts on a boat in midstream: this
Italian poet from the days of Petrarch.

Here on dusty roads enclosed by ivy I can feel the sun's vibrations fill me & remembrance of lost love is like the lesser rose garden & the time spent in the arbor where we read romantic verses of eternity & mystery.

And it's like a memory of bygone Sundays from your childhood & your eyes fixed sharply on the highway crossing opened wide like flowers in September those blue moonlike blossoms which will stay with me till death reminding me of sunsets of my home of sagas where I know nothing but the name.

Premier Plan
[Stage Front]

This night was ablaze like a necklace.
Above the green Bohemian lakes, the calls of frogs in chorus,
a bell was sounding an alarm.
Like the meridian a rubber ring of sound expanded
over the rotting woods,
over the loony idyll of the goblins those who chased each
[other
thru the stacks of wheat,
over the searchlights from the cities
beams inscribing pithy poems onto the clouds.
The rings that were projected there,
the foaming champagne bottles,
a roulette wheel like Saturn circled Monte Carlo,
while Versailles spouted golden fountains
& the Hotel Ritz in clouds broadcast a final tango
to which corsairs on Corsica would dance
in time for the new vintage.
Vesuvius smoldering over Italy which rested on its laurels
& in Leningrad the streets were empty opening like canals
into the world beyond.
Under the deepest basements land mines crisscrossed
like white-hot cigars
lighting up caves & tunnels
in which gangsters crouched with guns & flashlights
Asia steeped in perfumes waggled like a yellow flag
embossed with fancy baubles lotus gardens
cities that shed light like gold-rimmed china tea sets.
Tokyo convulsing in the air was like a neon sign
set up by fakirs sleeping at the base of giant
Hindustani mountain ranges.
Antarctic ice was like the ruins of a marble kingdom
polar bears would dart across & snow-white fishes without
[blood
would swim there.
Africa, black paradise with palm trees,

on whose tents the gold-washed earrings of its negresses
were hanging
from which parrots swung nightwatch of the Sahara.
Australia sleeping in the trees was an electrified menagerie
inside a luna park
& here Niagara Falls by moonlight
hummed with organ-sounds above the Indian burial grounds
& further on above America where they were taking leave
like two ships of a single caliph
filled with slaves & cargo, just about to sail.
The Bohemian lakes gone green with choruses of frogs,
remnants smoldering after the storm has passed
with the earth flooded out its primitive glory gone under its
oceans unending
lighthouses loom like crazed fishermen's wives singing songs
that await an old sailor's return who is not coming back.
This night was ablaze like a necklace.
Above the closed windows the earth moved on air like a
[crown
& the sleepers like sleepwalkers opened the windows.
A bell rang an alarm.
Take over the world! Join the vanguard!
And quickly an airplane took off in the night
to plant a flag on the battlements high on the crown
& behind it flew thousands of airplanes
some like spent rockets burning
augmenting the legions of stars
still others returning like the work-weary builders of
[Babylon
while those who kept up the struggle
formed letters & words in the stars:
Take over the world!
Take over the world! Join the vanguard!
Swell the numbers of white-hot cigars in the basements
make the cities you throw in the air fly like acrobats
set up fireworks deep in volcanoes in time for the vintage.
Inscribe poems onto clouds more fierce than the gold of
[Versailles
& let the fire of heaven be joined to the fire of earth.

Wrapped in rubberized fireproof bags
& careening like balls on the fiery beams
make the palm trees hide seeds huge as ostrich eggs
under their ashes
give earth back its harvests
let it sprout like a sweet-tasting jungle
for the few who endure.
And take over the world!
Renew Tyrteus's rock
because it doesn't make sense, no not for the sake of the
[suicide's
gurgle, the tired man's gasp
that the godhead of healthy humanity perishes
because it doesn't make sense for the mad pilots' miracles
not to have happened
who wake up this night from their sleepwalker's sleep
flying landing on battlements of the night's diamond
[crown
like carrier pigeons with a telegram driving us blind:
Take over the world!
And the flowers' blood spatters the coffeehouse terraces
& children are born despite the world's prisons
& on earth no gold is lost
& no platinum's lost
& no fire.
To defenestrate sleepwalking men who are blind
who saw this night ablaze like a necklace
its hieroglyphs still undeciphered
& who in the sound of the bell heard their death knells.
Take over the world!
& then walk like nomads
away from the ponderous lakes of Bohemia
where night's as green as a chorus of frogs
& hear an orchestra of cries & lights
& in the rhythms of its drums that clatter
like buds of black & white light
see the stage front of earth as a mirror
laid bare by their searchlights
who knew of the need for a miracle

to live eternity in one generation
& to not lose a moment
those whose sleep like their death was lit by clairvoyance
as night's sleep was lit
who joined eternity's fire with the fire of a moment.
This night was ablaze like a necklace.
And just then an airplane took off on patrol
with a pilot who looked like an airman from 1914
whose shadow fell on the gates of the town
with signed proclamations of war
& covered the sun until darkness was everywhere.
We all watched thru smoke-colored glasses
& the old women saw the sign first divined by the Sibyl:
Bohemian nights turning green with frogs in a chorus.
But the pilot today was still more appalling
a sower who scoops up stars in his lap
& casts them like so many seeds on the earth
to keep off the fire lying in wait for us
when the planet like Joan of Arc twists on the pyre
& recants not one word of all that was spoken.

ALLEN S. WEISS

ZURN'S DOLL

. . .abolish the wall that separates woman from her image.
—Hans Bellmer
Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image

In the anatomy of love, the spirit of contradiction reigns. Eros creates an intermingling, a reversibility, between the real and the virtual, such that sexual excitation is simultaneously a subjective and an objective state, merging self and other, masochism and sadism, psychic intuition and objective chance. Eroticism coalesces the body with its mental simulacra, with its corporeal doubles. *Le Nôtre: the practical fusion of the natural and the picturesque. As the gardener obliges bushes to exist in the form of balls, cones, and cubes, man imposes his elementary certitudes, as well as the geometric and algebraic habits of his thought, upon the image of woman.* Love is an experiment with the irrational, a confirmation by chance, the narcissistic projection of an eternally desired *döppelganger.*

*

Every love letter is a primer of decomposition. *My dear, your passion of last evening to scrupulously decompose yourself before me, your very confusion, could not have been more victorious, even if one were oblivious to the fact—and this is only a detail—that the game of solitaire of the hundred bones of your feet marvelously cut through the velour of my intestines. As soon as I will be immobilized under the pleated skirt of your fingers, all too weary to undo the garlands with which you have surrounded the somnolence of your never-born fruit, you shall breathe your perfume and your fever into me, so that, in total daylight, my sex will emerge from the interior of your own. . . .* Hans Bellmer had always thought that the body is like a

sentence, offering the possibility of constant permutation, of perpetual decomposition and recomposition following the form of anagrams:

> *Beil / Lieb / Leib.*
> *[Hatchet / love / body.]*

The equation of the image may be algebraic or syntactic, existential or phantasmic, but in any case it affords irrevocable evidence that the libido is mobile, fluid, ephemeral, erratic, malleable, vacillatory, protean, desultory, eccentric. All nostalgia is ultimately the yearning for a body not yet possessed, a body not yet imagined—for the real body of woman is nothing more than what Verlaine imagined his beloved whores to be:

> *Poseuses et bêtes poupées*
> *Rien que de chiffons occupées.*
>
> *[Pretentious and stupid dolls*
> *Nothing but living rags.]*

Whence Bellmer's fascination with Cesare Lombroso's *Transfers of Sensation in Hysteria and Hypnosis,* where the latter wrote of a psychopathological case that exactly prefigured Bellmer's own phantasms as expressed in both *The Games of the Doll* and *Short Anatomy of the Image.* It concerned a young girl, *14 years old, with a graceful body, who suddenly grew six inches at puberty, and whose first periods were accompanied by hysterical symptoms. After two months she was subject to convulsions and hyperaesthesia, which caused a thread placed in her hand to feel like an iron bar. The following month, after bouts of somnambulism and diverse changes of character, she lost her sight at the very same moment that she acquired the faculty of seeing through the extremity of her nose and the lobe of her left ear, all the while conserving the same acuity of vision. The same transformation occurred for her sense of smell which, sometime later, was displaced to her heel. . .*

The body in pieces, rearranged concordant with desire; the sensorial apparatus readjusted in harmony with the most extreme limits of synaesthesia: proofs of the desire of the other. Whence Bellmer's inspiration by Sade's violent modifications of the object of desire; by Lautréamont's perpetual transmogrifications of cruel, ecstatic passion; by Artaud's revolt against the restrictions of the rationalized, historicized body; by Bataille's hallucinatory, nightmarish, delirious, subversive,

blasphematory, perverse conflation of eye-egg-testicle in *Story of the Eye.*

Bellmer knew that erotic excitation always precedes the existence of the desired object. His doll was thus a prelude to Eros, an annex of his soul, a schematization of his passions, an incitation to lasciviousness. He dreamt of meeting a woman who would fulfill all the conscious and unconscious conditions of his desire—conditions which, of course, couldn't be thematized in advance. Remembering Heinrich von Kleist's *On the Marionette Theater,* he despaired that the human being cannot attain perfection, since grace exists most purely either in a body totally devoid of consciousness, the marionette, or in a body endowed with infinite consciousness, God. Yet Bellmer desperately sought that very same grace in the body of a woman. He dreamt of the love of an android, a dormant woman, a sleeping beauty; he yearned for the impossible embrace of that creature celebrated in Paul Valéry's *"The Sleeper":*

> *Que malgré l'âme absente, occupée aux enfers,*
> *Ta forme au ventre pur qu'un bras fluide drape,*
> *Veille; ta forme veille, et mes yeux sent ouverts.*
>
> *[Despite the absence of the soul, retained in Hell,*
> *Your form, with its pure belly draped by a fluid arm,*
> *Is awake; your form is awake, and my eyes are open.]*

*

It began with a dream in which there were strange voices: she bore a penis the size of a bull's, in order to make love to a dark skinned, long haired woman, all the while being watched by a little girl, her former self. She heard her own love-making. She witnessed this scene, as if from very, very far away. She took no pleasure in it, but she was nevertheless fascinated, petrified. Her breasts were buttocks, her mouth a sex, her clitoris a penis. Another penis, sinuous and snakelike, pointed and tripartite, with glans of leather, iron and bone—the Devil's tool—simultaneously pierced her three holes with unrivaled fervor. She was Satan's Doll. She was as if bewitched, an automaton, her will paralyzed, ravaged by a frozen hysteria. The pain increased as she was cleaved in two, one half looking at the other, one half hot and sentient, the other cold and observant; one half force, the other form. She was her own double, nameless, cast into the freezing certainty of the absolute void.

On this glorious autumn day of 1953, Bellmer strolled through the exhibition of his work at the Maison de France on the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin, with true satisfaction at seeing such an appreciation of his art in the country that only a couple of decades ago had branded him a decadent artist. Everything was possible, and he had the rare feeling that he was prepared for anything whatsoever. And then he saw her: beautiful, all in black with but a red rose to punctuate her strangely rigid form, her face elegantly and mysteriously expressionless, a vague odor of jasmine emanating from her being. What was particularly astounding, indeed uncanny, was her resemblance to his beloved doll! Even when in 1935 he reincarnated the doll into its second version, he couldn't bear to change the face, for it so closely accorded with the lineaments of his desire. Now, he beheld yet another transmigration of this soulless being, a carnal version of his passion.

For that initial moment, all his thoughts and feelings condensed on the rose, like a teardrop rolling off the cheek of a virgin at her first glimpse of martyrdom. The image of the tenth photograph from *Die Puppe* flashed through his mind: the backs of two legs cut off at the thighs, one foot shod in a black leather shoe while the other was covered with an undergarment, a rose (too obvious a symbol, too perfect to avoid) appearing between the two severed members. He recalled the words from the *Studies from Nature* of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre: *Chardin said that when in Persia a young man offers a rose to his mistress, he leads her to understand that, like the flower, his face is aflame and his heart in cinders.* Bellmer wondered whose mistress she was.

The attraction was mutual and fatal, and, despite the manifest uniqueness of the encounter, despite the eternality of the mutual passion, the course of events followed a stereotyped routine: café, hotel, bed. When he discovered that she too wrote anagrams, their incommensurable fate was sealed. Hans Bellmer and Unica Zürn were to live together for many years, in a miserable ménage à trois: Bellmer, Zürn, Die Puppe. He would illustrate her book of anagrams, *Hexentexte [Witches' Writings].* She would inspire his new games of the doll. They would nourish her schizophrenia.

He hadn't realized that the very first sign of her madness was manifested in a letter she sent to her son in Germany, after seeing him die in a nightmare. It was an anagram on the sentence from The Epistle of Paul to the Galitians, 4:15, namely, *IHR HAETET EURE AUGEN AUSGERISSEN [Ye would have plucked out your own eyes.].* What remained obviously yet disquietingly unstated was the rest of the phrase: . . .*ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given*

them to me. These eyes she would find in her nightmares, in her schizophrenic deliria, staring at her without respite. They were her own eyes.

*

Unica Zürn had always been extraordinarily disturbed by a passage from *The Man Without Qualities* by Robert Musil, written while he lived on the Kurfürstendamm: *Agathe said: "It seems to me as a child I loved my dolls more than I've ever loved a man. After you'd left I found a trunk full of my old dolls in the attic." "What did you do with them?" Ulrich asked. "Did you Give them away?" "Who could I have given them to? I cremated them in the stove," she said.* As a child, the young Unica did little better, as she recounted in her book, *Dunkler Frühling [Somber Spring].* In terrible vengeance for the years of ceaseless unhappiness imposed upon her childhood, one day she took the beautiful doll she had just received as a gift and, as her horrified family looked on, cut out its eyes with a knife, not, as Breton suggests in *Nadja, . . .with the idea of always plucking out the eyes of dolls to see what is behind them,* but out of sheer malice. For little Unica knew that behind the doll's eyes was the void.

This was the same little girl whose hysteria would later be congealed, anesthetized, deadened into frenzied depersonalization. This was the very same little girl whose end was foreshadowed on the last page of her mournful book: *Now it is nearly night in the bedroom. Only the distant light of a streetlamp feebly shines through the window. At the moment, it's all the same to her whether she dies "in a foreign country" or in her own garden. She climbs onto the windowsill, holding on the latch of the shutter, and looks into the mirror once again, her image like a shadow. She finds herself ravishing, and her decision is colored by a touch of remorse. It's over, she says in a low voice, and she feels dead even before her feet leave the windowsill.*

Roberto Tejada

THREE POEMS

Being a day on which the eating of flesh
was forbidden, the monosyllabic, misdelivered
tug of the deprived body dancing
on the clumsy bone, earth
gleaming with blood of the unlawful,
the recurrence of first infliction,
or so the animal riven between my legs
in jets issued from the throat, gash
semblance of a human relish
in the agony of others,
as there were harrowed corpses
everywhere once here in uproar
and repetition over time
receding now into the ecstatic
lather and stench as you quiver
tight to the foul edge and fine gore

birdsong: insomnia

and the bulge of rubbish spewing from the mound
of bags left on a corner, does it matter where
or how meticulously sifted by the frail
scratch of a man there, anonymous atrocity,
this mere surface of miserable speech
at whose expense, what spasmodic drool,
whose squat life along the margins
of a public coherence bound only by malice
and raw with the hate of so much human
stink—as in the glower of the keeper

in surveillance never reconciled
between the executioner and victim

~

Tired, and with the tight transit of talking. A weather suited
not to a limitless field of occurrence, but to confinement,
an infinitesimal part of the alliterative outcome of how
and when to say it widespread, the entire keyboard,
palladian texture minded as in a piano music
listened to while nodding headlong off
into parallel motion with a change of position
during the alphabet years and a canon
at the lower fifth, hands crossing and thumbs
under in theme and inversion
to alternating thirds
with the aim of asking
what matter, what business to the tourist
whether the place is run by despots,
whether someone's been executed elsewhere
on the streets, whether the natives are
banned from beaches, or deprived of the water
used to fill how many swimming
pools, and why the climate is such
that we favor conditions where
moral values are established
in art and faithfully followed, like myself,
by sycophants in thatches of acrylic
plush in pink and black fabrics, feathery
torso and cunt in gloss or nipples
by leather straps petrified in the ideal
body a death wish. Or what happens
when you inhabit me thinking
here of each disordered instant with everybody
talking at once, all such a difficult web,

so many people to attend to, and not
regarding some arcane reference but the limited
world, all in the head, as it opens up to convince
you I am not formless, no matter
what the potential attempt
                no matter once
in season when sound in dream
place delight and work of the vine
from furrows be praised the book of hours
whose clock-stop conceit over the house
of having unto higher ground I was
exhausted when I woke up
to the involuntary movements
and sensory impulse along the chain
of nerve cells, the collective
ashes and suspended
planks of the pleasure ward
wherein the human
shape surrounding certain
words was mint and glycerin,
drugs and explosives

~

Not a word of my surrounding not a half-whispered
go to catch the rattled ought of a third concurrent

universe unlatched the more you wait, chalk drawn
thick of old around the marred bodies left

by the citizen squads our authorities facilitate, fail
to prosecute, guilt being therefore—quote/unquote

or so the papers—a 'willful negligence,' a 'scathing
complicity' in the bloodlust rife until 'wolves

lower' incite the end of illness, until the highland
collide of cricket jaguar issue running water

when physical comfort, when bodily prowess
and sovereign shape are rendered command

over the meaning of a nimbus once in sprigs
of goldenrod or Indian paintbrush, chalice

owing to rock crystal and featherwork, ivory!
carved in supple limbs, remote gazes and crusty

wounds, gold-leaf reredos in bellows pyramidal
from an organ pipe: an opulence wrought from

the nightmare of native oblation, of x-ian zeal
waged on local hands in effigies, Saint James

the Greater made in Goa and the Philippines,
or Rose of Lima, in a ministry of Indians

and slaves fallen victim to epidemic, heroically
to God and in penitential practice so extravagant

—cat claws and fish bones across her wasted
flesh—as to be the subject of ecclesiastic inquiry

into questions of faith, soundness of mind
stretched the length and breadth of his midrib

and torso in taut spasms, teeth clenched and lips
in a slather of animal darkness in time spent over

thickets, our twin intelligence a forearm and fist
in fast strokes around gleam and edge, tips

wet with each other, then deeper, to a clump
of hair and fingers guiding the back of his

head, mouth over gloss and curvature, blade
inextinguishable when too-slow a swelter released

in sounds of who, whose ah spread soaked along
his back and thighs rubbed sleek across

the wonder imperfections of form, lips abruptly
pursed to each moan pillowed by the sudden

hush of skin a spirograph, his dark upper
eyelids and lashes down his own limbs

now in aftermath-order and lucible enormity

Ross Gay

TWO POEMS

BAR-B-QUE

On *60 Minutes*
a man explained that as a secret
police official in South Africa he once,
to make a body
that he had killed disappear, roasted
it like a ham.
He and his associates at the same time eating
bar-b-que
while the man sizzled.
I never would have figured
that as a way to dispose of a body.
More the traditional,
club skull to pulp with gun butts or baseball bats
and bury it in the woods.
But roasting. Think of that,
the smell of human, cooking,
(though certainly not much different
than swine,) intermingled with and tainting
the smell and taste of the grilled
chicken sandwiches and ale. Olfactory
makes up at least fifty percent
of your taste sensation.
Eating the killed and dead.
The spit sunk in the charred
man's ass, probed
through the mouth, locked
like some devil's horn, the fat

drip drip from the meaty parts.
Hams, ribs. A face
emptied of skin, eyes, of person.

These men went free.

But you can see in their eyes,
weaker than the dead, these men
are dying themselves by the second.
By the second.
Sustained only by the killing.

Teeth smoked black
in that screamed smile.

THELMA

My Nana, Thelma, has been persecuted
for the past thirty years by God. Doggone,
Nana. This is what she sees:
a pasty haloed gentleman out of the corner
of her eye. Making things go as they do.
Nana has the Winans tape playing in
the boombox Mom and Dad sent for Christmas.
Bebe and Cece. And she wonders why
the boombox comes for her, she wonders what
the tape will play. You see, my Nana
is sick.

She stabbed her couch a few years back,
gashes of plastic jabbed into the down,
plastic frayed into tiny blades, tiny
icicles mining fur in the guts

of the furniture. To deter burglars.
A bit later she threw a pound of bologna
in the trash because someone had come
and poisoned it, she knew. My mother relays
the story with a smile on her face. She
bathes in the glorious fact that her side
is less fucked than Dad's. Despite her addict
brother. "He's recovering."

Inside Nana sees a ship plow drunkenly
through rummaging waves. Sharks swarm
like flies to the dead and suicides cast
from the deck. The sharks' bladed backs
piercing the black wake the bloody
Atlantic long. Nana knows this boat,
but doesn't know why. She sees Keith,
her dead son, a heart attacked
thirty-five, crawling on the ocean floor.
Cornrows unbraid in the grinding hands,
the wind in the sea. Join the seductive,
squiddish, flagellations of the greenery,
the seaweed. He feels the sand like hands
claiming and reclaiming. They recognize
him like the blind read faces.
Under a million tons of flow,
with millions of swoll-foot, ankle-chafed,
drowned mothers,
he is where he can
finally be sung to sleep.

Nana sits on the plastic covered couch
and can't hear her own breathing. Wonders what
page she slipped from. Who will design the scenery?
Her living sons, doctor and restaurant
manager, fear her silence, turn to the sounds
of traffic, chatter. Sleep with fans on
for the humm.

But wait. Listen. Be silent
for a minute. Because this Nana hears
no song. She hears no song.

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Paul Violi

BATHOS

One or two, it seems, turn up
each spring, not far off a road
where they'd wandered into the woods
until they dropped in the snow and froze,
providing filler for the local paper:
another middle-aged male
unidentified, decomposed.

Reading about one of them yet again,
the usual list of what he wore,
how many shirts, pants, jackets,
socks, I find myself sliding back
into the same sad and hollow poem
I've tried to write before,
about how a person,
an all-American misfit,
moving from place
to place, job to job, can keep
putting on one self after another
without sloughing any off,
growing heavier but more hollow
with each menial part he has to play.

And so it goes, a half-formed poem
spun out of images of luck and loss,
rag and bone, soul and husk.
And when I think I'm at the point
where I can wrap it up in silences
that peel away, onion-like, or open
like a weak hand or, finally,

a mummy, empty, unraveling
as it's slowly twirled,
afloat amid dim stars and its own dust,
the poem stalls. I'm sidetracked again,
remembering myself, like so many others
who wandered around for a while
when young, in Afghanistan, in Nepal,
Turkey, Bulgaria, Spain,
getting dressed before going to sleep,
putting on all I had to ward off the cold.
I see myself again, in Amsterdam,
an impetuous kid on a Sunday morning,
April 9, nineteen sixty eight,
with a ticket home, a flight to catch,
but no money to pay the hotel bill.
How I got dressed again and again,
reluctant to leave anything behind, pulling
khaki pants over dungarees, tucking
flannel shirts under cotton shirts,
shoving a manuscript, a couple of years
of turgid poems, under my belt, and
finally, shoving myself into a blue suit
that'd been stuffed into a knapsack
for a couple of years. Sweating, barely
able to bend my knees or arms,
I lurch through the lobby, telling
the suspicious manager I'm off to church.

I try to hitchhike to the airport
but all I get are wary looks.
I still arrive early. Too early:
the check-in counter is closed.
Days without a meal, I want to be
first on line, first on the plane,
first seat from the galley.
Tired, woozy, I ever-so-often
lean back to read the clock overhead.
I'm asleep on my feet, unaware
of the crowd forming behind me.

Again I open my eyes, lean back,
look up, but stumble, and as I feel
my shoe heel roll over something,
crush something soft but solid,
I hear a groan of agony
so profound my stomach knots up.
I turn in time to catch him as he falls.
His eyes squeezed tight, he tries to speak.
His eyebrows are slightly tweezed.
Tears run down his cheeks; his cheeks
are lightly powdered and rouged.
His hair, a shade darker than natural,
is finely cut and he's wearing
a long mink coat that matches his hair.
Trembling, crumbling, he leans on the man
next to him, also draped in mink
the same color as his dyed hair.
His face is powdered, too—It's Liberace?
Yes, it's Liberace and his friend!
I look down, we're all looking down
at his friend's foot, the shoeless one,
covered by a thick white sock.

Doubled over, he's trying to speak.
I try to pick up his cane
with my free hand, but packed
into my suit, poetry manuscript stiff
as a board against my stomach, I can't reach it.
I'm afraid he's going to pass out.
Unbelievably, he attempts a joke:
"Of all the gasp feet of all the toes gasp behind you
gasp you had to gasp step on the broken one!
[Unnnggnnhhgggh!"

He slumps, collapses. A call for tickets makes the crowd close in. I try to help, try to hold him upright while sputtering apologies. But Liberace, looking at me, the way I'm moving, lurching backwards now, arms outstretched, clearing the way as we move along the corridor, my wrinkled suit about to
[burst,

tells me, very politely, very firmly, but with something like dread rising in his voice, Forget it, *please.* It's nothing, nothing at all. I insist, really. I'm telling you: Will you please stay the hell away from us!

KEVIN KING

VERSIONS OF MALE: AN EVOLUTION

1

I feel the breeze that rolls
around me, that vertically hammocks

me on the veranda, as masculine,
a hand, almost, avuncular and certain.

Is *that* the masculine part—the certainty
of it, the untentative brazenness?

2

Some men here have evolved into tree-climbers,
men with a peculiar calling

and prehensile toes. There was one
I didn't notice till he was already

in the beach palm's *ovaries*,
at the thatched summit that covers

the coconuts. I thought he was only trimming,
But momentarily there was only stubble

and pudor. Then he walked down the tree,
cut it off below beach level,

and threw sand on the stump
till it was gone.

3

Later *'the Cane Man'* trimmed and put
one-meter sections of cane stalks

through a kind of wringer—two metal
rolling pins with screwlike rods

wound around the barrels.
The rods derive their juice-extracting power

from being rolled, like a two-dimensional
protein
that is nothing till, rolled, it projects

as half of a 3-D helix.
Is it evolution that the Cane Man

abets, separating the sugary essence
from two-dimensional husks, almost obscene

in their flattened disembowelment?
Bees drunk on the wet cane innards

bumble now off the chest of a comely girl
sucking down cane juice, a gift,

an expression of Cane Man's ***kindness***,
a-sexual worker bees, messengers stuck

with the sweet message.

MARWAN

EIGHT PAINTINGS

Head 1973
Egg tempera/pastel, 170x180 cm

Head 1977–80
Egg tempera/canvas, 300x225 cm

Head 1978
Oil/canvas, 81x60 cm

Head 1977
Egg tempera/canvas, 195x130 cm

Marionette 1979
Aquarelle/paper, 78x56 cm

Marionette 1980
Aquarelle/paper, 78x56 cm

Marionette 1980
Oil/canvas, 146x97 cm

Marionette 1982
Aquarelle-guoache over etching, 70x35 cm

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

MEDITATION ON MARWAN'S FACES

The flats of the human face
will not admit (a mask). The ears,
jaws, cheeks (bent surfaces)
as they cry here mountainous colors
(worms), hurtled brows, worms of
mountains, husks of lean-to emotions,
arrogance dappled with
bringing arrogance closer,
gelid waterfalls of hares that do
not abstract out, but bronze, ruby snivels–

the flats, I repeat,
Marwan, whose peat rekneaded is
what Hades hides, our faces
the flat will not admit. The depth,
conceived on surface, is a depth I cannot
evade in mask. My leers, inabilities to walk
on a flat earth rounding me, reviling
Dachau months, they are available
because this man is not sure. Is not

surface, is not pure. Is
sink to the locust sensibility.
Eaten away, we are ripe, lame, the crux is
the human can be faced
but can the face be said in language?
Can a brittle alphabetic compost
zoom in on the hived
jungles cording Dis, the arachnoid trampoline,
the mast of bait coherent to another realm?

Head on, hand woven, a mandala of
tufts and thread taken apart, the human face
is a twisting warren, wave on wave of
tunneled crimson, days of napalm, nights
of azure peace. It is a kind of rug
before its shape is fixed—in Marwan's
works—in a between that is not
a mystical point between us
but a depth between the deathmask of the Covering
Persona and peeled off skin.

In this depth both mask and meat are included
in the impasto of pus-like fibers,
a rabbit flayed in a romantic gondola,
moments of unchanging plaster, streaked
by weeping caked with first fruits,
the cenote of the eye
limpid, greased by the plunging
flecks of things as they sacrifice
into our hollows, and our faces fill,
empty with passing through
and over, under Narcissus—

is it that Echo died and then
a youth fell to adore the labyrinth in water,
or is it that the import of what
we see becomes an echo
at the moment we reflect, and reflecting
weave on surface, milling this crisis
into mental walls, in the twist of which
we anticipate a face, more coarse more
animal than ours, a furred muzzle that in dream

begins to reassemble on our chests
animal grief entombed in nightmare,
pounding on our heart *Let me in.*
Not the fantasy of a childhood locked out,
crying for its parents. . . No, let me fold
that in, call it a minor green

but because it occurs allow it as part
of the supreme lock-out.

Dream muzzle wants in to a place we
no longer are, or only are in imagination,
a place so remote it is hardly part of our becoming—
more, it is the being
at the heart of becoming, the unchanging
kernel in the loosening hull of the human face,
chamber of the anthrobeast,
visible in these Marwan eyes, vaulted at the brow,
steeply recessing vaginal folds of stone
darken to the chink through which we enter Niaux.

[1981]

ADONIS

THE FACE—FROM MARWAN'S BRUSHPOINT

(Tr. by Clayton Eshleman and Bernard Bador from Anne Wade Minkowski's French version, translated from the Arabic)

The face is labyrinth: art permits an encounter only in a labyrinth.

*

The visible and the invisible have in the face a single body.

*

The face is not form: it is movement always in formation.

*

The face has no beginning outside of itself.

*

Time and expanse—unique wave in the ocean of the face.

*

The body is a universe—its space is the face.

*

The face is the mask of no thing.

*

The face is truly present only when its traits disappear.

*

The face—perpetual metamorphosis.

*

The face unveils itself only in the shake-up of its structure:
by the shake-up, by the absence of image, we arrive at the
image.

*

What one cannot see of the face is its reality.

*

The face is a singular which cannot be pluralized.
No, it is neither singular nor plural.

*

The face is itself and other than itself.

*

The face cannot be explained: one interprets it.

*

The face repeats itself like waves:
no wave resembles another.

*

The face repairs the body's errors.
As far as it is concerned, nothing can repair it.

*

In each face is found an infinity of faces.

*

Man's face is another image of the universe's face.

*

The face is an unknown that one can see, hear, touch.

*

The face is not where it is found—it is not elsewhere either.

*

The face cares about neither the encounter nor the promise—
it prefers to live in the instant of expectation.

*

I look at the face—I lose myself between what I see and what I would like to see.

*

Paths, whether ramified, steeply sloped or bewitching,
do not unfold like that which is unfolded between the face and us.

*

Perhaps there is no water apart from fire, said the face.

*

The moon assumes the shape of the face only when it is finished:
it is then that it becomes full.

*

The face has a chain it can break away from only through ambiguity.

*

We do not truly see the face if we do not see it in its total nakedness:
the face is nakedness veiled.

*

Our path toward the face is a face.

*

When I see the face's sun, my eyes fill with its clouds.

*

Death has no face.

*

The face is a planet revolving around itself.

*

The light around the face is seed, colors are fields.

*

Light slides on the body:
it leaves a trace only on the face.

*

Everything clears up with light, except the face:
each time its scintillation increases, its obscurity increases too.

*

When we apprehend the face, we can say:
we apprehend everything.

*

The face is a symbol for an alphabet of symbols:
it is impossible to completely paint it or say it.

*

If obscurity has a song, it is the face.

*

Eyelashes are wings the face uses to fly.

*

The face is a light which exceeds light.

*

We see in the body only nature.
In the face, we see nature and its beyond.

*

The face is the central point in the sphere of the universe.

*

In drawing the face, we draw the poetry
of raw material and its beautiful potter's clay: the body.

*

Out of the rock of existence gushes a water: the face.

*

The face comes from where we no longer expect it.

*

The face is a solitary star in a space whose name is body.

*

The body is a fall, the face an ascension.

*

The face is movement:
in light it slows, in color it accelerates.

*

In the face light and secret unite.

*

Day is legible only in the face's night.

*

The face—perpetual journey.

*

The face—haven for a light which does not travel
but remains always outward bound.

*

The secret—tree which in the face is a forest.

*

The face frequents all the clouds,
but marries only one: that of tears.

*

The face has a word to which the ear does not know how to
listen.

*

The face is a painting which swims outside the frame.

*

In the face, the abyss begins
at the very instant where the summit begins.

*

The face is preface to the book of the body.

*

From the face comes the word, but it speaks itself only with symbols.

*

How splendid the alchemy of color, of light and of form!
It sends everything back to its primal elements, transforming it into a face.

*

The face leaves us, each time we look at it,
facing a beginning.

*

The sun is the face of nature.
Day is the face of night.

*

The face makes you constantly climb a staircase which
leads at the same time toward reality's summit and toward its depths.

*

The face signals me from a place I do not know.

*

The face, the ancient one, radiates solely with the light
of its present instant.

*

The face is the body's lighthouse.

*

Nature is a continual self-celebration–
it inaugurates itself solely through the face.

*

Look into the very depths of the face,
you will see that the history of the gaze has yet to begin.

*

Everything can have an autobiography,
except the face: it is the biography.

*

Like the bird flying in a flying tree, the face laughs.

*

The face exiles us, and is our only refuge.

*

Every face is a dream, but when two faces meet,
dream and reality meet too.

*

To the face belongs another face—the face, that's it.

*

Light and shadow combine in the face.
Light is an ascending gradation,
shadow is a gradation which descends.

*

The face is born while dying in another face.

*

The creature comes to nothing. Only a face remains—that of
the creator.

COMMENTARY

Anne Waldman, *IOVIS: ALL IS FULL OF JOVE, BOOK II* (Coffee House Press, 1997)
Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Drafts 15-XXX, The Fold* (Potes & Poets Press #39, 1997)
Laura Riding, *A Selection of the Poems of Laura Riding*, ed. Robert Nye (Persea Books, 1994).

IOVIS II continues Anne Waldman's "long meditation on the nature of male energy & its attendant strife & delight" (11). For Waldman, that target—male energy—is vast, mercurial, and paradoxical. Thus, vision in *IOVIS* is both telescopic and microscopic, investigating war, colonialism, and patriarchal social structures as well as the generosities of father, son, male artists and friends.

The traditional epic, told from the perspective of a central male figure, equates singularity of action, voice, and vision (i.e., heroism) with world order. But according to Waldman, an epic vision late in the second millennium must be able to address a "fragmented world in which the mind is forever spinning & buzzing through various dark then brilliant language realms" (11).

Dark then brilliant: the etymological roots of Iovis dangle down into *deiw*—('to shine'), forking out into 'sky,' 'heaven,' and 'god' to reveal an ancient (pre-linguistic?) correlation between divinity and light. This light, primarily configured as "male," has thrown whole cultures, histories, and voices into darkness. Thus, while continuing its homage to male figures (Waldman's father, Philip Guston, Joe Brainard, etc.), *IOVIS II* attempts to recover many of these "dark" vectors via allied female voices, including Sappho, the Countess of Dia, Navajo Spider Woman, and Bernadette Mayer.

Rather than abandoning the immediacy of self and world for a mythic realm, or vice-versa, Waldman collapses the distance between personal and public spheres: biography juxtaposes with "horrific reports from various fronts: Bosnia, the Acquired Immunodeficiency

Syndrome battlefield, issues of insurrection & of gun control" (11). Reports of plutonium leaks juxtapose with statistics on handgun-related deaths and the voice of Ishtar: the front, in other words, is everywhere, all times.

And yet each "front" can be read as a discrete unit– a fragment set against other fragments. Inevitably, these fragments generate textual and conceptual gaps, allowing the reader (as opposed to some central, authorial voice) to draw together ostensibly disparate, often dissonant, compositional fields.

In "Devil's Working Overtime" (Section XV), transcriptions of gloom and doom radio sermons and passages on the history of colonialism in the Caribbean lurk among lists of aquatic life and stars mapped onto the page in cornucopial flourish. A tension builds between the sermon-voice, warning of "the Devil you see tween people every day" (180), and the intimate communion between the poet and her son as they name the world around them. As if caught in the cross-fire of dueling world views (paradisal / fallen) the poem tugs between the sensual delight of seeing/touching/naming and the preacher's sinister admonishing that the devil is "everywhere / & workin harder'n every minute" (180). Lists of lush flora and fauna ("Flamingo tongue // foureye butterflyfish // fairy basslet") act as a kind of chant whose rich profusions would be antidote and counter-spell to the preacher's sermon. Eventually all naming drops away, and there is a lovely sense of the poet as mingled with the world she conjures:

> All of a sudden I faced "it"
> took the robe off
> & the garment was a mirror
> of myself
>
> we were one saw my whole self in it
> & faced my whole fish self
>
> (187)

There is an urgent tone in much of *IOVIS II* that mimics (i.e., performs) the very ontological wavering and shifting that the narrator undergoes. It is as if, in the fervor of discovery, the words retained the velocity of their inscription. But this "glorious conjunct" (". . . the garment was a mirror / of myself") that allows the narrator to shift personae is the same rhetorical maneuvering that lurks under the preacher's symbolic configurations of the phenomenal world (woman, snake, water, etc.) as avatar of evil: Jove's dark underbelly of "the devil." As a rhetorical maneuver, the conjunct is not only glorious, but potentially dangerous.

Another danger that *IOVIS* skirts is a simple reversal of oppressive gender and culture dialectics (i.e., female and cultural other = good; male and American culture = bad). This reversal merely perpetuates generalizations asserted in status quo dialectics (i.e., female and cultural other = bad; male and American culture = good).

Ultimately, an epic vision must grapple with the difficulties of establishing archetypes unencumbered by stereotypes, making fragments cohere without any "irritable reaching after fact & reason." The "body poetics" with which Waldman begins *IOVIS* ("One eye reflect[ing] the 'inside,' the other the gorgeous & dark phenomenal world") is also body *politics* (*IOVIS* 2); that is, the "dark phenomenal world" is not merely the opposite of one's own subjectivity, or "inside," but comprises others' subjectivities as well. As Waldman points out, "'Iovis' literally *of Jove* is the possessive case, *owned by Jove*. As well as about him, a weave" (2).

IOVIS is driven by human compassion, as well as an awareness that one writes "in antithetical preparation for disinheritance, betrayal, loss of power" (*IOVIS II* 9). As the limitations of earlier modernist epics have shown, this sense of the ego's limitations is absolutely necessary if the poem is to avoid lapsing into a kind of monomania that eventually sabotages its own vision.

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A fold can be thought of as a self-interfering system, like a labyrinth's convolutions that signify error's "wandering" within a formal constraint. Within such a pattern, a fold constrains in order to re-disperse, doubling back in order to move forward. Writing can be seen as a fold in which the presence of writing is always posterior and exterior to an anterior and interior "scene" of writing. Thus, each fold of writing would endlessly re-cover what it seeks to recover.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis' *Drafts 15-XXX, The Fold* situates itself within this paradox of covering and recovering, folding back on earlier drafts as acts of "correspondence." Like the notes that correspond to each draft, the earlier writing becomes a scene of reading: not as telos, not to occupy an ideal position of reader-writer, here-there, then-now, but reading the earlier drafts as "conspicuous oracles," fragments "pressed down unfinished overwritten refolded" (28). Thus, each poem acts as a kind of event horizon in which both language and "event" fold and disperse, fuse and scatter:

> Something live from the winds
> that empties "is"

of its simplicities
and pours "it" as libation on the ground.

(67)

One hears Fenollosa's "no nouns in nature" complicated: and no verbs. This "is" is a specific tree, an "oakish life / as such," but "it," felled from a "tilted force pushed through," reverberates through all phenomena, "hard to assimilate" in that "Ragge of verse" in which "hole/hold can sometimes split and pivot" (66).

DuPlessis' use of correspondence (each poem both discrete and continuous), puns, typography, orthography, notation, and focus on the materiality of language and physical conditions of writing/living all contribute to a kind of poetics of the trace: "Writing from the center of, the centers of, otherness / Making otherness central" (*Tabula Rosa* 84), while each center is constantly displaced in an "aura of endlessly welling commentary // folding and looping over" (*Drafts 15-XXX, The Fold* 29).

The face of language is effaced in pun, typo, tongue slip, and error. In "the flattened dialectics of joy," we would go through the threshold of language "quasi-baffled, singing out our little song 'whoo-whee'" (71). But these failures of language are also "the door resisting entry" (69), the desperate trouble (perhaps even horror) "at the heart of poems" (72). We would want of language, perhaps, a kind of Spicer lemon-poem "so concrete and intimate, so oil-acrid," or the "implacable 'cold ashes' / placed precisely on the non-dimensional edge / where underside meets recto/verso / a third space" (72). But this cusp of facing pages "between definite poem / and the wavy registers / from untranslated sensation" may be nothing "in the face of it" (73); that is, in the face of "it," in the cusp of facing, a zero: ( ).

This zero is the paradoxical present-absence and absent-presence at the heart of language that "the pretty poem" wants to fill with eidos, logos, God, nothing. For DuPlessis this is also the heart of matter itself, the fragments that "can never be assimilated" and "the condition of time, going forward athwart" (84).

According to Blanchot, an image is "a limit next to the indefinite" (79). Likewise a cadaver is a kind of limit next to the indefinite. In turn, language-as-image resembles "the strangeness of a cadaver," which resembles (i.e., doubles) the living person it no longer is, and yet is not the living person it once was. In this way, language is profoundly connected with the exigencies of the residual (the dead, debris, fragments of time and materials). These poems (the draft's liminal positioning between "nothing" and "something") seem to hover in this zone between the definite and indefinite, here and there, "is" and "it":

a tenacity, an insistence to remain among remains that insist in "ever-disjunctive / folds" (85).

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Rarely, in a discussion of Modernist poetry, is the name Laura Riding mentioned. This is due in part to her renunciation of poetry after the 1938 publication of the collected poems (*The Poems of Laura Riding*), as well as her subsequent reluctance to reprint her work, and vehement refusal to play the games of literary professionalism and self-promotion.

Hopefully, this neglect will change with the recent publication of the long-awaited study of language that Riding coauthored with Schuyler B. Jackson: *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words* and *Supplementary Essays*. Perhaps *Rational Meaning* will redirect attention away from Riding's "renunciation" of poetry, viewing the book as her sustained commitment to an understanding of the very material foundation of poetry: words and how to make them "fulfill the human being" (*Rational Meaning* 56).*

What's more hopeful is that *Rational Meaning* will revitalize an interest in Riding's poetry. To this end, *A Selection of the Poems of Laura Riding*, which includes roughly half of the poems in the *Collected*, is a good place to begin.

Riding saw poetry as ideally "an uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth" (*Poems of Laura Riding* 407). Reading *A Selection*, one is able to trace Riding's growing desire for poetry to be an exactitude of utterance, despite her belief that "truth begins where poetry ends" (*Selected Poems: In Five Sets* 15) . From "The World and I":

> This is not exactly what I mean
> Any more than the sun is the sun.
> But how to mean more closely
> If the sun shines but approximately?
> What a world of awkwardness!
>
> (116)

*As Charles Bernstein notes in his introduction to *Rational Meaning*, the book is not only "a treatise on the philosophy of language," but "and *ars poetica*—a 'creative' work rather than a work of linguistics, philosophy or literary criticism as they are professionally practiced" (ix). Thus, one could very well consider this work as both "critical" and "creative." Indeed, as Riding stated in her 1938 preface to *The Poems of Laura Riding*, "the study of the scope of poetry *is* poetry" (409).

According to Riding, an awkwardness in language points to a more general awkwardness in relating to the world itself. There is great integrity in Riding's commitment to knowing "exactly where / Exactly I and exactly the world / Fail to meet by a moment, and a word" (116). This is a crucial point in Riding's work: what is at stake is not merely the relative success of a poem, but truth itself. Until we accept this responsibility of language to truth, we "[m]ust live together as strangers and die—/ A sour love, each doubtful whether / Was ever a thing to love the other" (116).

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—DAN FEATHERSTON

Ralph Maud. *Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996.

The full extent of Olson's legacy has yet to be measured. I imagine the story, when finally told, will be quite dramatic: a major poet who didn't bother to publish most of his work while alive; a vast archive left in the hands of former students, with few instructions; a slow descent into obscurity vis-à-vis the public; a cadre of serious readers, most of them outsiders to prevailing literary and academic institutions; a sizable body of work by followers, all but a fraction unpublished, out of print, invisible. Indeed, while the "Olsonian" poets comprise a substantial group by any standard of judgment—John Clarke, Diane DiPrima, Robert Grenier, Kenneth Irby, Joanne Kyger, Gerrit Lansing, Duncan McNaughton, John Wieners, Fred Wah, to name only a few—no scholar has yet to treat their work as a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right. Characterized in whispers as an all-male "cult," a slavish degradation of Olson's worthy impetus, this odd, unmapped circuit of response has become something of a liability to friend and foe alike.

Nonetheless, since one of Olson's stated goals was "to write a Republic," it's entirely fair and perhaps necessary to judge this poet's achievement by looking at the community of poets, critics, archivists and readers assembled around his work. Even now, however, a quarter century after Olson's death, such a judgment is scarcely possible, not least because the Olsonians' Olson differs so radically from that of the casual reader. For most students of postwar verse, Olson remains a practitioner of the long poem as defined by Pound and Williams; a proponent of organic form who eventually slid into shamanism and excess. The devotees' Olson is by contrast a mercurial scholar whose "curriculum of the soul" evades the limits of the merely poetic. Theirs is a figure who once declared:

> My present purpose is to attack estrangement, to suggest an alternative, to declare another field. I mean, a distinguishable and definable area of experience which has to be called totality, I suggest, simply because it is all of everything there is to know and to feel; and that to inhabit it and to act from and by it takes a discipline as describable and as useful as the area itself.

Prerequisite, then, to a judgment or even understanding of Olson's legacy is a grappling with the poet the Olsonians have taken as their master—a grappling with the full measure of Olson's writings and

relationships and studies—a willingness to set aside, if only momentarily, the commonplace view of Olson's work in favor of a more complex and less literary conception of the project of such key texts as "Proprioception" and "Projective Verse."

Comes now Ralph Maud's magisterial study of Olson as scholar, a bibliography shaped in the manner of Olson's own anarchic syllabi from Black Mountain College and SUNY Buffalo. Charting the course of Olson's insatiable curiosity from boyhood to deathbed, Maud captures like no previous critic his subject's peculiar, Melvillean ability to find his bearings on the margins of his reading, to build an argument, story or history from carefully pieced-together sources, however cryptic their correlation. For Maud, as for Olson, it's the *use* of a book that matters; titles and summaries of contents are by themselves dead facts. In practical terms, this means that Maud's study outstrips the constraints of mere catalogue, to become something both more useful and more unusual than a numbered list of sources.[1] Consider, for instance, the following passage from Maud's last chapter, a careful untangling of Olson's final years of study:

> *15 June 1968.* Received as a gift from Harvey Brown: Cyrus H. Gordon, *Forgotten Scripts* (New York: Basic Books, 1968)—flyleaf: "fr Harv—at Gerrit's date of gathering 1st week out of hospital ...." The date "June 17, 1968" on p.165 denotes Olson's use of phrasing from that page in a poem, "Take the earth in under a single review" .... Further notes indicate Olson used the book on 21 September 1969 ....
>
> *29 June 1968.* Looked again at a small poem beginning "the salmon of Wisdom" and sent it to Robert Kelly .... Olson deleted the old title on the holograph of the poem ("Cuchulain, born of impregnation by a mayfly"), which he owed to Robert Graves's *The White Goddess.* Nevertheless, it reminded him that he had been hankering for a cloth-bound edition of *The White Goddess* and he requested one the same day from Grolier Bookshop. ... Jumping from Graves's tripartite goddess to the etymological information on the "Fates" in *Webster's 2nd International Dictionary,* and thence to the World-Tree in Turville-Petre's *Myth and Religion of the North,* Olson wrote a prose piece dated "...July 1st, 1968" and published separately with the title *"CLEAR, SHINING WATER," DeVries says* ....

At moments like this, Maud's ability to re-imagine the process of composition recalls John Irwin's similar ability vis-à-vis another master

of forgotten script—Edgar Allan Poe. The resultant book has a structural ingenuity unmatched in recent memory. The prose is clear and strong; the portrait of Olson vivid; the information compelling.[2]

As biography, Maud's book is not quite so satisfying. Stripping away the shamanism and excess, eschewing as much as possible the extra-bibliographic side of Olson's life, Maud's painstaking account of Olson's habits of reading and composition tell only half the story. The other half—the monstrous behavior first recorded by Charles Boer—is equally important, and until the two halves are integrated, Olson himself will remain something of a mystery.[3] Already in the mid '50s, Olson had defined his teachings as "how to live, by Charles Olson"; a decade later, he scribbled the following elaboration: "how to live as a / single natural being / the dogmatic nature of / (order of) / experience."[4] Heretofore, only devotees have taken this teaching seriously. Only now, perhaps, in an era of cultural studies, is it possible to see in these extra-literary directives a worthy topic for investigation.

Earlier I compared Olson to Melville and Poe, giving in to the urge to historicize Olson as a literary figure. A more useful comparison would be to Foucault, to whom Olson bears a more than passing resemblance. Both began by aping and then mastering an earlier style of argumentation (phenomenology for Foucault; literary criticism for Olson) and both soon pushed beyond such limits, inspired by the radicality of human physical experience. Both subsequently adopted the stance of "archaeologist" in order to explore this radicality more profoundly. Both also retained a clear sense of their theoretical and ideological goals despite immersion in a welter of historical detail. By attending closely to just this immersion in detail, Maud documents as never before Olson's attempt to transform poetry into a social and political enterprise—in Olson's terms, an "attack" on "estrangement," a "discipline" of "totality." As a consequence, it is now possible to propose a reading analogous to such recent studies as Daniel Tiffany's *Radio Corpse: Imagism and the Cryptaesthetic of Ezra Pound,* or Jacqueline Rose's *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*—theoretically savvy, holistic approaches which begin but don't end in the sphere of the literary.

NOTES

1. See, e.g., the prototype for Maud's book, "Olson's Reading: A Preliminary Report," compiled by George F. Butterick and published in the first seven issues of *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives,* 1974–1977 (an alphabetical list in the manner of Merton M. Sealts, Jr., *Melville's Reading: A Checklist of Books Owned and Borrowed).* Or compare Maud's fractal narrative with Jack L. Capps' far simpler approach in *Emily Dickinson's Reading 1836–1886*—a simplicity largely due to paucity of information.

2. For those not sated by *Olson's Reading,* I recommend subscription to Maud's own *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society* (1104 Maple Street, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6J 3R6; series subscription $25; back issues $2.50), an invaluable compendium of information, documentation and polemic. Contents include Olson's correspondence with Robin Blaser, Robert Payne and Albert Glover, background on the Berkeley Poetry Conference of 1965, brief memoirs by Harry Levin, Albert Cook, Mac Hammond and Richard Wilbur, and a useful exchange of letters with Marjorie Perloff regarding Olson's debts to Pound and Williams.
3. See Boer, *Charles Olson in Connecticut,* first published in 1975. Tom Clark's 1991 biography and Maud's own *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society* have gone far toward enlarging the documentary record, but Boer's memoir remains the best attempt at integration, at a reading of Olson's life and work as the twin aspects of a single activity.
4. See *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn* and "A Curriculum of the Soul."

—BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

***Intimate Chronicles* by Christopher Middleton (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1996). 94 pp.**
***Clean & Well Lit: Selected Poems 1987–1995* by Tom Raworth (New York: Roof Books, 1996). 106 pp.**
***Selected Poems* by Douglas Oliver (Jersey City, NJ: Talisman House, 1996). 135 pp.**

"both fortunate & un-
—to have lived these past thirty years
when so many delightful poets
have been writing so many terrific poems:
there was so much to read
there wasn't much time left to write"

—AH, in: *The Poet's Notebook* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995, p. 99)

—and even less time to come up with even semi-coherent responses to what there was to read! Plus, considering the complications involved in presuming to say anything at all about poetry at a time when

discourse on the subject has become either theoreticized and specialized (in the journals), or generalized and purely gestural (in what passes for reviews in print media addressed to the public at large, such as the London and New York TLSs), a humble practitioner is bound to feel some trepidation 'daring' to 'review' three books of poetry of more than passing interest he was glad to find in 1996. May the following remarks be taken as made by one who has been "quite content to live on the Poets' Reservation" (Austrian poet Friederike Mayröcker, quoted on the jacket of her latest book *Notizen auf einem Kamel,* 1996), without any particular ambition to cross its borders into adjacent territories of discourse.

The back cover of Christopher Middleton's *Intimate Chronicles* quotes (genuine) "British critic T.J.C. Harris" as saying that "Middleton is one of the most extraordinary and extraordinarily neglected English poets." I wholeheartedly agree with the first half of that sentence. The second half, however, begs the question: neglected by whom? In my personal experience of *la vie littéraire* in London (1958 through 1967), what passed for official "recognition" then—in the pages of the *London Times Literary Supplement, Encounter, The London Magazine,* etc.—was still as biased in favor of a culturally 'genetic' stratum of poets as in Ezra Pound's early days there. Scanning the pages of Richard Caddel's lively UK poetry "listserve" on the World Wide Web (british-poets-request@mailbase.ac.uk), I can see that the situation really has not changed much in the past three decades: Last October, Iain Sinclair, the editor of *Conductors of Chaos,* a 488-page anthology of non-"mainstream" British poets, received the same dismissive-aggressive treatment in TLS pages as that meted out to Michael Horovitz for his *Children of Albion* back in 1970: "hideous extremes. . .charmless mannerism. . .gobbledygook. . . ." If it does not cleave to the post-Hardy/Frost/Larkin line of wearily ironic pseudo-epiphany, it ain't what "we" think of as "poetry." Broadly speaking, it seems to be a matter of (mostly male) persons going to the same schools, then on to the same colleges, bonding against what used to be called "hearties" (= insensitive jocks), "discovering" the same lineages over and over again, and ending up in the ranks of reviewers for Establishment outlets.*) The recent award of the Order of the British Empire to Liverpool stand-up comedian Roger McGough "for services to poetry"

* There are, of course, parallel phenomena on the U.S. poetry rez: see, for instance, (presumably pseudonymous) Dimitia Smith's attempt to classify the strains of contemporary American poetry in the New York Times Sunday Magazine ("The Poetry Pantheon," 19 February 1995). In her article, she labels Derek Walcott and Czeslaw Milosz "neo-Colonialists," calls Paul Hoover and Ann Lauterbach "Language Poets" and Philip

is only one more instance of the British Establishment's condescending and willfully obtuse view of the art.

In the early to mid-Sixties, a pleasantly turbulent time in London, there were glimmerings of an opening up of that view in some quarters—due, in part, to an influx of U.S. visitors of the New American Poetry persuasion. Christopher Middleton's first mature collection, *torse 3* (Longmans, 1962) and Tom Raworth's *The Relation Ship* (Goliard, 1966) were major occasions of astonishment and delight at that time. Middleton's poetry of

> . . .a surface generated
> by a moving straight line
> which at every instant is turning,
> in some plane or other through it,
> about some point or other
> in its length

—from the OED definition that is the book's epigraph was mercurial, erudite, playful, yet tough in ways far removed from either sour Larkinism or mod hipsterism. The poetic 'elsewheres' in *torse 3* certainly indicated a desire to leave behind such (then) dominant modes, but it was their diachronicity and courage in the face of post-WW II's terrible beauty that gave them their particular edge. Raworth's elliptical verbal cinematography, on the other hand, signaled an even more radical break with pastoral epiphanics, in its absolute lack of the self-consciousness that had still affected the work of otherwise notable maverick predecessors David Gascoyne and Philip O'Connor ("I can't *believe* I'm doing this, here in *England")* and still lingered in the work of contemporaries (among them Roger McGough, OBE).

Now it's thirty years later for all of us musketeers, and as Ted Berrigan was fond of noting, a year in a late twentieth century poet's life may easily equal ten in other cosmic time zones. . . The new work

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Levine a "Magical Realist," and leaves one with the impression that all American poets of note are either members of quaint pseudo-British clubs in Manhattan, or of gangs of raucous declamatory types hanging out in cafes in that same borough (with a few elders in retirement in Hawaii or Minnesota). Most of them are male; women who cannot be squeezed into the "Earth Mothers" or "Sex, Gender, Politics" categories are simply off the map. In a country dumbed down by television, where "'poet' is almost as laughable a word as 'liberal'" (Jack Kroll in *Newsweek,* 1-9-95), this 'survey' merely reinforced sad stereotypes and made one suspect that the author's work as an "observer of poets" had not involved anything as retro as actually *reading* any poetry. Witness also Helen Vendler's recent dismissal of Mina Loy—no bad girls allowed in *this* canonical establishment.

in Christopher Middleton's *Intimate Chronicles,* "'late work' by traditional measure" as the back cover notes, is strikingly youthful in the best sense: after a great many books of poems, essays, and brilliant translations of German poetry and prose, and thirty years spent teaching comparative literature in Austin, Texas, this poet's moves are, if anything, even faster and more precise:

UPON SAINT CRISPIN'S DAY

Aha, said he,
    Don't tell me you too
Keep somebody in mind,
    Who, when he squares,
On top of the heap now,
    His shoulders
To uncork
    Another wine bottle,
Holds his breath,
    Listens to the swish
Of arrows darkening
    The sky, and recalls
His forefather, the way
    He drew the longbow
At Agincourt.

Makes you shiver, eh? And then it makes you *question* that shiver. . . In the book, this is followed by a monologue in the persona of Paris ("Actually, folks, I am a stocky half-Hittite, / Dealer in used chariots and standard spears"), and then by one of the most stunning poems of the collection, "Ballad of the Putrefaction"—too long to quote here *in toto,* but here are a few lines, for a taste:

. . .
The poem of hateful persons hot in his mind
He met the girl whose work was to roll in creosote
Himself he wanted to set fire to the hateful persons
Nobodies governing nations without any sense of what's what
Not victors but victims of their spooks and greeds
. . .
Again he saw the squat bronze tractor woman
Straighten her headscarf in the hotel garden
Their monuments he murmured their long knives
Hack out the tongues of nightingale persons

Their slug fingers sign contracts for weapons
. . .
But again it is me the creosote girl who interrupts
We have escaped across many adjoining rooms
And arrive in a crypt where police wagons park
. . .
What if I doubt himself more deeply now than he can

Reminiscent of both Celan's *Todesfuge* and Notley's *The Descent of Alette,* this is one for the Great Inferno Anthology.

Intimate Chronicles insists on the poet's right to frame his or her work in whatever mode comes to hand—even, it seems, sometimes preferring the supposedly 'outdated' ones: travelogue, poem-"about"-music, poem-"about"-work of art, poem with classical reference, etc. As Middleton says in his essay "The Question of Novelty" (in *The Pursuit of the Kingfisher,* 1983):

> Even in a relatively coherent society the levels of human reality intersect at odd angles and are stratified across loops and slopes. Those angles, loops and slopes are different warps of time in which people actually live, participating in the same epoch only tangentially and under sexual compulsion and economic coercion... Asynchronicity is the key, I am guessing, to any significant renewal, as act or event, personal or social. .. But it is altogether enigmatic, how the rare bird called 'new' can escape before being crushed, when the strata, enormous fluxions of time constantly solidifying into blocks, crash and grind against another.

In the "crash and grind" of our time, Christopher Middleton's subtle mind, ear, and eye do "stroke the living air, to make it hum" *(On a Photograph of Chekhov).*

Tom Raworth's *Clean & Well Lit: Selected Poems 1987-1995* is a most welcome companion volume to *Tottering State: Selected and New Poems 1963-1983* (The Figures, 1984) and *Eternal Sections* (Sun & Moon Press, 1993). Driven by the "high speed submicroscopic / impetus" Middleton recognized early on in a poem dedicated to Raworth ("On Mozart's Birthday" in *The Lonely Suppers of W.V. Balloon,* 1975), these may well be the "fastest lines of the West," as Charles Bernstein has it; but no matter how fast they seem to be coming at you, their paratactic narrative is one that not only deserves but demands rereading:

. . .
simply is no before
slipping into gradual decline
planets fall from a tree
not to marry marks
facing great uncertainties
anxious to save money
a half-explored land
on the wrong trajectory
hidden in mist
where the outlines
seemed broken puzzles
gliding about the stage
of an iris as it opened
significance was yet to come
. . .

As this fourteen-line excerpt from a ten-page poem ("Blue Screen") demonstrates, 'paratactic' does not quite describe what goes on here; 'meta-paratactic' might come closer. It is often impossible to know where one phrasal unit ends and the next one begins; the lines generate a spinning and spiraling progression through a scenery in motion—an effect created by quarrying intrinsically 'lazy' 'public' language, including that of the media, fragmenting and refracting this material, then combining it with what can also be read as 'private.'

There "simply is no before," or after, and "significance was"—still is, always—"yet to come." Individual lines retain their modular quality, which is (I think) to say that they might work just as well in reverse:

. . .
significance was yet to come
of an iris as it opened
gliding about the stage
seemed broken puzzles
where the outlines
hidden in mist
on the wrong trajectory
. . .

I once heard Raworth read another long poem ("Catacoustics" if memory serves) in line-by-line reverse from beginning to end. And the poem 'held up,' as they say: no problem. This curious modular

Sprechgesang quality relates many of Raworth's poems to exploratory contemporary music in the Cage, Glass, and jazz traditions. "Out of a Sudden (Absence)," dedicated to the memory of Swiss-Italian poet Franco Beltrametti, graces the endpapers of this volume together with the music written for it by Steve Lacy. Its progression is representative of another, often submerged, strain of Raworth's poetry, the Shaker-like gift to be simple (not to be confused with simplistic):

OUT OF A SUDDEN

the alphabet wonders
what it should do
paper feels useless
colors lose hue

while all musical notes
perform only in blue

a lombardy poplar
shadows the ground
drifted with swansdown
muffling the sound

at the tip of the lake
of the road to the south

above in the night sky
scattered by chance
stars cease their motion
poppies don't dance

in the grass standing still
by the path no-one walks

To my ear, this echoes and matches some of the finest of Samuel Beckett's French poems (particularly those Beckett himself did not put into English) or the work of Thomas A. Clark (a Scottish poet too little-known this side of the Atlantic); it strikes a note of genuinely Modernist blues. The "he," too, in many of these poems, comes off as a classically 'Modern' figure, shadowy yet considerably more present than personal pronouns (if any) in most contemporary work: "pretending he was a robot / respectable looking / legs hot and itchy . . . wandering among

dogs / he is politely relieved of his wallet . . . he realized the image of a falling body / came from film / a slightly altered version. . ." ("Out of the Picture"). There is always a sense of *adventure,* not only in terms of concealed or fragmented narrative but also as an integral part of the stroboscopic and powerfully phanopoeic loops generated by the poems. And Raworth orchestrates all of this with stunning economy: these poems don't just *look* lean.

One of the epigraphs in the book is by Lord Byron: "But I have been familiar with ruins too long to dislike desolation." I don't doubt that the ruins to which Byron referred were not the decorative ones in Romantically landscaped gardens: with two hundred and fifty wars under its belt, *this* staggering century has surpassed Byron's in ruin production (those in Sarajevo are only the most obviously visible), and it is likely to create quite a few more before it vacates the stage to its grimly smiling successor. Raworth's poems, while fully conscious of what "a terminally depressed / board game" ("Emptily") the present 'world order' is, still celebrate the planet's ever odd beauty as perceived by the human brain:

> machines talk to themselves
> maintain a very persistent
> buzzing as the signal
> ends in a dramatic freeze
> close to the border
> on a street with a few orange trees
>
> ("The Vein")

In a preface to his *Selected Poems,* Douglas Oliver makes an important statement, important not only to his own work but in my opinion also to the total endeavor of poetry:

> [But] the everyday lives of even the most brilliant among us have their simple and direct sides as well as philosophical, comic as well as tragic, romantic as well as classical, loving as well as satirical, baldly puzzled as well as cannily hermeneutic, cross-cultural as well as islanded-cultural. A poet's work might reflect that real variousness and avoid government by any persuasive definition of human consciousness or by any faddish narrowing of genres, forms or subject-matter. Without my claiming a cent for the results, that's what my own work tries to do.

The range implied by such a program is made manifest in this tightly packed selection from thirty years of brilliant, sturdy, quirky, always *concerned* work (in poetry as well as in fiction, essays, and the groundbreaking critical study *Poetry and Narrative in Performance,* 1989). The politics of our historical circle of the Inferno, defined by "Western" corporate imperialism and Stalinist slave-stateism, are not apt to arouse poetic emotions to be recollected in tranquility: it takes a lifetime to find ways to deal with them, one's own complicity in them, and the sheer old Conradian horror of it all. Doug Oliver's way has been to reconsider, and rebuild, models of the epic, and the *Selected* contains a number of these works, either in their entirety *(The Diagram Poems, The Infant and the Pearl)* or in excerpts *(An Island That Is All the World, Penniless Politics, A Salvo for Africa). The Diagram Poems,* which take their subject matter from news reports on the Tupamaro rebellion in Uruguay, introduce visual elements into the text: literal diagrams, of an aspect both comical and threatening. *The Infant and the Pearl,* a tremendous response to what Thatcherism has wrought, "follows the prosody of the anonymous medieval classic, *Pearl,* with a few tricks to lighten it for the modern ear." *An Island* ... alternates poems with moving prose passages of autobiography, and the more recent *Penniless Politics,* "a satire upon the world's most powerful nation whose voters just don't vote," and *A Salvo for Africa* combine various rhetorics of verse and prose. Recent shorter poems against the backdrop of Paris, where Oliver now lives, weave around the themes of individual and universal existence in a manner a little like an updated Apollinaire:

> These thoughts in purple knots of cloud
> dash down false lightning flashes like
> neon signs above the glistening
> Grands Boulevards, illuminating streetwise
> melodramas not without beauty when
> the will grows weary of the nightlong life
> and you go walking.
>
> ("Well of Sorrows in Purple Tinctures")

It is, however, impossible to do Oliver's work justice by lifting brief quotes out of their context. The great pleasures it provides are embedded in what (especially after reading, say, Raworth) might seem a very leisurely kind of verbal progression: as in much of Bertolt Brecht's or Edward Dorn's work, the words follow thoughts and perceptions emanating from an "I" that, while fully aware of being just another construct, examines and questions that construct in its expe-

riential and existential passage. Thus, 'leisurely' does not cut it, at all: as Oliver notes in a prose passage excerpted from *An Island. . .*, "The gravity of a poem lies in its whole form . . . it is its ineffable nature." While this statement comes from a meditation on performance, it also describes the author's firm belief, evident throughout the work, that it is possible, still possible, as possible as ever, to represent one's world in terms that include overt ethical decisions and judgments—and that the work then becomes an autonomous extension of *who one is,* true to an intention that may be seen as larger and more inclusive than one "self." It occurs to me that if I were asked for a personal definition of "visionary," I would say that s/he is "one who participates in the thought of the world"—not going off into prescriptive Utopian imaginings or "systems," but engaging what s/he finds with the fullest possible range of intelligence and emotion at hand. In "Trink," a poem dedicated to Paul Celan's widow Gisèle Lestrange, Oliver salutes another Parisian exile, Heinrich Heine with these affectionate lines:

> . . .
> remember, oh remember how he lay
> crippled on his eight-year grave and in his wine
> saw his young self drinking in a tavern
> mocking the pain in his spine; yet he never
> ceased his songs of "joy and fire" and wrote
> of Richard Lion-Heart riding in English forests,
> free from Austrian prisons.

And with that, I raise my glass of Apollinaris mineral water to these three walking forests of English, and wish them and their lucky readers many more years of The Work in The Life.

—ANSELM HOLLO

Daniel C. Noel. *The Soul of Shamanism.* New York: Continuum, 1997, 252 pages, index.

Daniel C. Noel's *The Soul of Shamanism* would be difficult to classify under reigning academic rubrics. In terms of the contemporary university, Noel's work is perhaps excessively interdisciplinary. The book ranges freely over topics usually consigned to separate departments of anthropology, psychology, literature, and religion. If "cultural studies" was truly concerned with culture as a process which has been under development since at least the Paleolithic era, then perhaps *The Soul of Shamanism* would be properly classified as cultural studies. Alas, the currently-hot multidisciplinary field is concerned almost exclusively with interpreting the production and consumption of commodities under capitalism rather than with any long-term phenomenon like shamanism. Noel's work, then, is only marginally connected to current academic practices, and therein lies its strength. Noel, a scholar of religion and literature who has taught mostly at Goddard College, has taken advantage of his fringe position to write a book almost unclassifiable, if not unpalatable, to the current academic scene.

Early on, Noel announces that he is writing this book for both "scholars" and "seekers," which means he has to be rigorous enough to suit the former, while providing a compelling narrative for the latter (who will be reading the book out of personal, not professional, prerogatives). In general, he succeeds, though it's likely some scholars would prefer more detailed critiques of such anthropologists as Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, and Mary Louise Pratt, while "seekers" might like to hear more about his visits to Michael Harner's "shamanism workshops" or about his pursuit of Merlin as a central figure for his personal mythology. In fact, some seekers are bound to be disappointed by his conclusion that, basically, Westerners are denied access to "indigenous" forms of shamanism, and thus need to direct the recent interest in "New Shamanism" towards "deliteralizing the Western fantasies of neoshamanism without dismissing the imaginal realities it represents." That is to say, "shamanic awareness is only available to Westerners in an imaginal shamanism" (211). This will be disturbing to some "seekers," especially those who shell out nonimaginal money for workshops and for periodicals like *Shaman's Drum.*

The Soul of Shamanism, though, justifies this conclusion. While the intellectual underpinnings of this book are derived from Jung and (as the reliance on the notion of "the imaginal" suggests) James Hillman, the narrative itself derives more from Noel's experiences as a scholar and seeker. Thus the central figures in *The Soul of Shamanism,*

those whom Noel credits with giving rise to the New Shamanism in the first place, comprise a rather idiosyncratic cast of characters. Merlin, Carlos Castaneda, Mircea Eliade, and Ronald Sukenick are among the many who make cameo appearances in Noel's book. Noel's search for a usable Shamanic past, a shamanism accessible to Westerners which does not appropriate and colonize the practices of other cultures in its attempt to provide a quick fix for what is missing in modern Western experience, leads him to look for a "pre-Christian wisdom" that constitutes "the otherness in our own history" (65). Rather than exploring the initiation rites of Siberian shamans or the use of plant hallucinogens among the Desana in South America, however, Noel looks to what is closer to hand. Thus, Merlin figures as "a Celtic shaman of sorts with a special relation to animals . . . and to the forests and springs of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany" (214-15). Noel briefly explores the role of Merlin in the popular imagination, but focuses more on the Merlin story as it functions in his personal mythology. Merlin, in short, is the model for a post-Jungian imaginal shamanism, an archetype that embodies the complexities and contradictions of a new shamanism. The figure of Merlin returns, says Noel, in popular stories as well is in psychoanalytic and mythic inquiry, and should be attended to by anyone interested in a Western shamanism.

Perhaps the central figure in this book, though, looming as large as Merlin, is Carlos Castaneda. Shortly after the appearance of Castaneda's fourth Don Juan book, Noel prepared a monograph on Castaneda's work for Warner's "Writers of the Seventies" series. The book never appeared, and Noel suggests that Castaneda's agent or even Castaneda himself blocked publication. For his part, Noel was a major participant in the debates of the period over the authenticity of Don Juan (as were Joyce Carol Oates, Donald Barthelme, Ron Sukenick, Mary Douglass, and Richard De Mille, to name some). Noel is quite good at recreating the intellectual and cultural context in which this debate occurred, and from reading Noel's account, it is easy to see why such acclaim was initially bestowed upon Castaneda, followed by the more critical attention his work eventually received. The debate, obviously, had to do with whether Don Juan existed, and if so, did he actually say and do the things Castaneda attributes to him. The resolution of this debate ultimately comes down to a value judgment which itself pertains wholly to the issue of classification: Should librarians shelf Castaneda's works under "Anthropology," or should they put them in "fiction"? In other words, Castaneda's critics (especially Richard De Mille) saw danger in blurring the distinctions between fact (anthropology in particular and the social sciences in general) and fiction (literature in particular and imaginative writing in general). Such a challenge to the

reigning sense of value (mirrored in the relative prestige of the academic disciplines) would put us on dangerous, unstable ground, and this, Noel suggests, is precisely where neoshamanism should be.

Was Castaneda's work a fabrication? Noel is evasive on this issue, but eventually concedes that the work is a hoax. This does not, however, lead Noel to the conclusion that the work is without value, and to justify this position, Noel explores briefly the fictive nature of ethnography and the power of experimental fictions. Noel's reading of "shamanovelists" (like Ron Sukenick) and "Shamanthropologists" (Castaneda, Harner, and Joan Halifax) is informed by a sophisticated grasp of James Hillman's work on "the imaginal." In fact, Noel's work on the reading fictive discourses constitutes the intellectual backbone and the theoretical heart of the book, and here Noel is at his most interesting. Essentially, his conclusion, mentioned earlier, that an "authentic" shamanism is inaccessible to the West is based on the premise that "the soul of the West's idea of shamanism is not factual at all, but fantastic, fictive, a work of the imagination" (37). Thus, the indigenous shamanism some Westerners dream of encountering is itself a product of the imagination, a "theoretical construct" as we would say in the academy. Which doesn't mean that shamanism doesn't exist. Only that our understanding of it is a product of our imagination. Now, Hillman—not exactly the easiest writer to read—helps to provide Noel with an explanation here. To assume access to an indigenous shamanic practice is, to Noel, to take shamanism "literally" and thus to subject it to the "scientific skepticism" and "scientific literalism" of the post-Enlightenment west. It is, in short, to be a fundamentalist, whereas an imaginal shamanism remains more open to the experience and its various meanings.

The word "fundamentalist" refers to one who takes a text to have only one meaning, a person who reads simplistically. The act of reading is important to Noel's quest for an authentic shamanism, for, to Noel, the book functions metaphorically as a shaman's drum. As he puts it, "Westerners might find a positive power for themselves in their own practice of mindful imagining, including the imagining that goes on while books are being read" (38). And later, Noel asserts that "acts of reading and writing are more central to the rise and future possibilities of neoshamanism than we had probably realized. We likewise have discovered that what is being written and read. . . offers a bridge between scientific literalism and what Hillman refers to as the middle region of soulful imagining" (123-23). Hence Noel's interest not only in figures of legend like Merlin but also in fabricators like Carlos Castaneda, Ron Sukenick, and Mircea Eliade (a scholar of shamanism *and* a novelist). Experimental fictions and fictionalized field notes, argues

Noel, fulfill the "imaginal" function required for neoshamanism. By now it should be clear that "imaginal" does not mean something is simply made up, but rather, as Hillman applies the term, it marks a refusal to draw a firm distinction between "the *real* as factual and the *imaginary* as unreal." Such a refusal seems central to the act of reading, and Noel seeks to extend it to other acts of the imagination as well.

If I have any problems with *The Soul of Shamanism,* it stems from Noel's relative neglect of poetry and poetics. Now, because this book is the result of a personal inquiry (as all books are: Noel is just more up front about it), it reflects more openly the tastes and interests of the author. Clearly, in terms of experimental writing, Noel's inclinations lead him to fiction more than to poetry. In fact, the only poetry quoted in *The Soul of Shamanism* is three lines from Wallace Stevens, and even that is in relation to Sukenick's critical study of the poet. Keats is mentioned (an aside about "the vale of soul-making"), as is Ginsberg. Also, as is to be expected, Jerome Rothenberg is quoted—but only from a dust jacket for a book by Joan Halifax! To be fair, Noel then devotes half a paragraph to a description of *The Technicians of the Sacred,* but given Noel's interest in the relationship of creative literature to shamanism, one would expect him to have a field day with the various practices designated by the term "ethnopoetics." Eliade himself writes at the end of *Shamanism,* that "the shaman's pre-ecstatic euphoria is constituted one of the universal sources of lyric poetry," so one could expect Noel to devote more time to the role of the poetic in devising a neoshamanic practice. To be fair, however, it's his book. Furthermore, readers of periodicals like *Sulfur* should have no trouble drawing upon their experience with and knowledge of the world's poetries to reach their own conclusions.

Finally, *The Soul of Shamanism* is a complex, multifaceted work and thus is hard to pin down. In fact, one of the strongest features of the book, one which is impossible to convey in the space of a brief review, is that it enacts what it describes. At one point, Noel quotes a passage from Sukenick's early novel, *Out:* "I want to write a book like a cloud that changes as it goes." Like Sukenick's cloud, Noel's book also changes as it goes. One moment it is a scholarly critique of postmodern anthropology as exemplified by the collection edited by James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* and the next moment it is a polemic arguing that much of what anthropologists disdain in New Age versions of shamanism actually has its roots in academic anthropology. Soon, the work becomes an autobiographical account of a trip to Jung's house in Switzerland or of a journey to one of Merlin's alleged haunts. At times, in fact, I found myself doubting certain events in Noel's narrative,

wondering if what he was passing off as factual was really fictive (or rather, imaginal). Was there really a "Writers of the Seventies" series, or is this a Borgesian invention? Did he actually talk to Carlos Castaneda on the phone, or is Castaneda as much a product of Noel's imagination as Don Juan was for Castaneda? The doubt that gives rise to these questions, though, is essential to understanding *The Soul of Shamanism.* That is why Noel at one point (p. 175) quotes Sukenick on Castaneda to illustrate a point made by James Hillman in one of his works. Writes Sukenick: "Don Juan shows us we live in fictions . . . and we live best when we learn to master the art," for as Hillman puts it, "a 'healed consciousness' lives fictionally." Noel's ideal neoshamanism would begin by acknowledging this point.

—DAVID ZAUHAR

In an Eskimo prose poem told by Inugpasugjuk, the inhabitants of a floating house run out of blubber for their lamps & begin burning snow; a man from a nearby village comes to visit, & when he exclaims "look, they are burning snow in their lamps, snow can burn," the lamps go out. This poem (which appears in both editions of Jerome Rothenberg's ethnopoetic anthology *Technicians of the Sacred)* might serve as an illuminating commentary on Rothenberg's recent collection of poetry. *Seedings & Other Poems* (New Directions, 1996) is a floating house illumined with burning snow. As a reader coming to evaluate this book, I feel a lot like the man who shouted "look, snow can burn." The title poem is an elegy dedicated to, & inspired by, Robert Duncan. "Seedings'" seeds are the words of the dead. The quote from Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* heading Duncan's essay "The Truth and Life of Myth" ("if all reality is taken only as it is given in the immediate impression. . .then a dead man indeed still 'is,' even though his sensory-material existence may have been replaced by a disembodied shadow existence") might be grafted to "Seedings." "How it opens me/ to

further words, new/ definitions, as I see you sitting there, old friend; alive, to hear my stammer." The elegy reflects solemnly on mortality and life's illusions ("if there is nothing after death/ then there was nothing before death") without becoming stilted. It's a fine poem, but the real gem of this New Directions' collection is the section entitled *Improvisations.* The notion of improvisation conjures up a lot of context, Thelonious Monk in fez or skullcap hunched over a keyboard searching some slippery epistrophy of erratic and unpredictable patterns, actors on a stage shouting "hey! give us some words & we'll do a play around it," Pollock's action painting, Kandinsky's numinous incandescence. To improvise is to stand outside time ("extempore") and let happen whatever happens when it happens; it is to be entirely in the moment. To respond to impulse, rather than plan, incorporate both in one's anatomy: structure is bone, impulse is blood. It is to relax control, to stand receptively and openly to forces outside oneself & within oneself. "The fast take is a good sign that you're hooked up to some source of power, some source of energy," observed Jack Spicer. Coltrane's sweeping, three-on-one chord approach comes naturally to mind, that polymetric pattern of numerous triplets the Yoruba people call the *konkola* rhythm & its equivalent in poetic expression ("the sound of tiny sparks") conjuring indeterminate and nonreferential riddles, a dynamism breaking up the inertia of language habits and promoting the palpability of signs. Lines such as "Remove an eye there is no darkness but there is always darkness," from "Improvisation No. 10, Forgetting," evince the mystical resonance of Edmond Jabès' rabbinical peregrinations. "Jabès' attempts to reveal the hidden depths of strangeness and the decentering power of alterity found in all writing," observes Richard Stamelman, is consonant to the feeling of estrangement that flavors Rothenberg's *Improvisations.* The Kabbalah calls it "the Breaking of the Vessels," a damage done to the deity. Nietzsche's *die ewige Wunde des Daseins,* the eternal wound of being. The *Improvisations* promote healing through verbal intensity (dithyramb, "semantic impertinence") an accretion of nouns building a network of metaphoric relationships, much like the "hidden revelation" of Yoruba incantation, in which the powers of ingredients are both revealed and simultaneously concealed in the construction of the medicine and in the construction of the incantation itself. The poetry confronts and evades simultaneously because it is *of* and *not of* this world. It is a form of enchantment; it posits its own self-enclosed area ("the birds circle a tree in never increasing numbers") which is withdrawn from the context of profane existence. Paradox and dissociative metonymy, as in "Improvisation No. 5, Gaugin's Freeways"—"calves & clavicles," "a string of frozen fires"—incinerate the bonds of

scientific rationalism and fuse an original unity with Being. "Measurable deflections in the magnetic field," word felt as word and not mere referral to something else, enables poet and auditor to build new relations between the things they name, the power which specific ingredients possess when they are combined together. It is an order of acute perception born from a spontaneous organization, like the half-step intervals in Monk's "Ruby, My Dear," a clustering of notes which gives rise to a feeling of chromaticism, a work cohering according to its own necessity. The result is a fresh, astonishing lucidity, things as they really are, a blurring of distinction between human cognition and nature. "In my lungs a universe is brought to heel," intones line no. 9 of No. 10. *Seedings'* other three sections *(Twentieth Century Unlimited, An Oracle for Delfi, & 14 Stations)* are a mixed bag of the spare & paratactic, derivative & peripatetic. A creditable (& credible) McClure imitation ("Prologomena to a Poetics"), an homage to Lorca ("Lorca Variation 34, A Book of Hours") "Altar Pieces," & a slide show of Minoan culture ("two breasts in gold: gold eyes," "hands raised to heads—to show distress"). "14 Stations" is a series of 14 poems "written to accompany Arie Galles's monumental charcoal drawings derived from World War II aerial views of the principal Nazi extermination camps—each with an attendant railroad station—known even then to have been the sites of holocaust." The problem—& it is a huge one—is how to aestheticize, & thus preserve in memory, something as horrific as the holocaust? In *The Brothers Karamazov,* Dostoyevsky relates the newspaper story of a girl who is beaten by her parents, forced to eat her own excrement, & kept in an outhouse in freezing cold during an entire night. It is an horrific account, the sort of thing that makes you squirm to be a human being, & yet it is wholly pertinent to Dostoyevsky's material, & masterfully written. Poetry is different; it is inherently a form of exaltation ("language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree"). Rothenberg applies an "objectification" by turning to *gematria,* traditional Hebrew numerology, as a way to determine the words and phrases that would come into the poems. "It is my hope," writes Rothenberg, "that this small degree of objective chance will not so much mask feeling or meaning as allow them to emerge."

This is a good year for numinous poetry; a good year for reclaiming the sacred. A good year for *duende. The Unknown Federico Garcia Lorca* (Atlas Press, 1996) edited & translated by John London, is a compelling exhumation of little known Lorca manuscripts. The title is a bit fantastical (an unknown Lorca would be something akin to finding a dinosaur buried in one's backyard, or a drugstore on the dark side of the moon) but not entirely misleading: this slim collection of dialogues, dramatic projects, unfinished plays & a filmscript *(Trip to the Moon,*

written during Lorca's stay in New York from June 1929 to March 1930) is calculated, in part, to dispel Lorca's image as a "colorful, castanet-clicking gypsy with a tragic, social conscience," the martyred "professional Andalusian" assassinated by anti-Republican forces in 1936, and advance the work of a "lucid, mystical, and sometimes irreverent" poet with philosophical interests, not at all above using crude, farcical humor in their dramatization. As the poet himself claims of these strange dialogues, they are "highly profound by dint of their sheer superficiality." Lorca's avante-garde humor compares favorably with that of the surrealists and Italian futurists, and *Dialogue of the Two Snails* (featuring a white snail, young lady, black snail, & a rat) which is entirely silent, except for the stage directions, anticipates Samuel Beckett's *Breath.* But ultimately to compare Lorca to anything outside the insomnia of silk or Saturn's rings is a frivolous & pointless exercise, like taking a picture of a postcard. Suffice it to say these little plays & dialogues are droll, quirky canapés of phenomenological pungency, each "a little corner of reality" "as real as lust, the coins in your pockets, the latent cancer in a woman's beautiful breast, or a shopkeeper's weary tongue."

Philip Lamantia is a kindred spirit; reading him is akin to inviting a close friend along on a road trip. The company is welcome, the conversation invigorating, but occasionally you have to get away from one another for a while. *Bed of Sphinxes, Selected Poems* (City Lights Books, 1997) covers a broad range of material, spanning Lamantia's career from the *Erotic Poems* of 1943–1946 to the uncollected poems of 1985–1992. Considering Lamantia's prolific output, whose singular grip on unabashed, hard-core surrealism has been as aggressively focused & fervent as a "spoon of sudden birds wheeling the rains of Zeus," this is a definite plus. A broad topography such as *Bed of Sphinxes* allows you to see the little changes in the landscape, subtle variations of foliage. The tender lyricism of the early erotic poems were a surprise to me; this is the "unknown Lamantia." But as the poems evolve it is the more familiar & volcanic Lamantia whose surrealist lava seers the page, as in "Poem for André Breton," which ends appropriately with "the latest eruption at Mt. St. Helens." I've often wondered at the seeming incongruity of surrealist influence on Beat writers such as Lamantia, Ted Joans & Bob Kaufman. The Orphic, phantasmagoric imagery of surrealism would tend, I would assume, to discourage rather than recommend it for a poetics of immediacy & rawness. And yet somehow it fits: Lamantia's surrealist engine is an attempt to engross the sublime in the horizontal; consummate a world that seems to go beyond its own existence. It is an attempt to instigate a movement among meanings, create a living utterance of interanimated words.

This doesn't always work. Lamantia's road of excess can sometimes lead to sheer profusion & silly incongruity ("the high-heeled foot garlanded by a silken phallus spectates the forest where the uterine furnishings sink into drawers") rather than a palace of wisdom. But when it does (which is more often the case) the effect is galvanizing.

At last! Somebody has written a book intended to put the pizzazz back into reading. *Creative Reading, What It Is, How to Do It, and Why* (National Council of Teacher's of English, 1997) by Ron Padgett, couldn't have been written at a more critical time, or by a more well-suited author. Padgett's droll, congenial, subversive intelligence brings the material alive; it doesn't really require much creative reading to get through it; it is, as they say, a good read. I drug it along on a train trip to North Dakota thinking if I was trapped in a compartment with it I'd have to read it; it turned out to be a very engaging book & I looked forward to getting back to it every time I was interrupted. The book's premise is simple: to encourage the reader to take a more active role in reading, even if it means gaining the upper hand over the author. Padgett outlines such strategies as "changing single words" (changing one word in a sentence in such a way as to keep the grammar intact but to give the sentence a whole new meaning) "line looping," "edge blurs" & "page skips." "Column confusion" is borrowed from William Burrough's "cut-up" technique, which is more pertinent to compositional strategies than reading, and many of these maneuvers seem a bit gimmicky to me. People enjoy tricks and sideshow curiosities, but I worry that the very people Padgett is trying to reach won't be up to the gamesmanship his creative approach requires; they've grown too used to sitting back & being entertained. In any case, I hope, fervently & creatively, this book is distributed in the nation's high schools *tout de suite,* before the next generation grows up thinking literature is a form of poetry slam.

Diaries are personal affairs, I generally feel squeamish around them. I don't want to know about a somebody's personal habits, who said what to who, somebody's dark confessions. Refreshingly, this is decidedly not the case for *The Diary of James Schuyler,* edited by Nathan Kernan (Black Sparrow, 1997). Schuyler had a sharp eye for observation and many of his entries are simply that: contemplations of the external world rendered with astonishing lucidity, wit, and sensual language. "It is by music that I enter into a musical emotion," observed Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible,* and "it is the thing itself that opens me to the private world of another. . .it is only by the world that I can get outside of myself." It is, in the language of Heidegger, a way of finding oneself among things: *Befindlichkeit.* Schuyler suffered from bouts of severe, incapacitating depression and in 1983 was

diagnosed as having diabetes; yet his entries possess an amazing jauntiness, a facility for externalizing legitimate grievances into occasions of word play and verbal finesse. "When my mother lived to be ninety I thought I might have a shot at it: but it doesn't look that way, no it doesn't. But dying is no big deal. Who knows? Maybe I'm wrong and there is a God and I'll meet darling Fairfield again." Schuyler enjoyed a particular fascination with the weather, gazing frequently out the window and jotting everything down with a painterly eye (the influence, quite possibly, of living with Fairfield Porter). "Everything that is white looking dingy, like this morning sky, and everything that is dark, like the black asphalt shingles, reflecting and lightening itself, as though with an admixture of white or silver paint." The entries are lushly footnoted and provide insightful commentary. Schuyler's diary serves as both a terrific introduction to an important poet (many of the entries became poems) and as a Baedeker to a singular sensibility.

Read Hannah Weiner long enough & you get to feeling language is this stuff floating around you & in you & on you & out of you. "She herself has said," writes Charles Bernstein in his essay "Making Words Visible/ Hannah Weiner," "that she is interested in an electric energy that completely fills the page, transforming it into an impermeable field." I call it lightning thick enough to eat. *We Speak Silent* (Roof Books, 1996) has the feel of a radio play tuned in on a psychedelic transponder whose characters include a polar bear named "paw," Bob Dylan (a.k.a. "boobela") P Inman, Lewis Warsh & Neil Young, to name a few. The language is sprightly & void of artifice. There's a charmingly weird innocence about it, like toes, or rinkypuddlepink. A spirit of absorbed submission to sheer overplus, "a conference on the word humph."

–JOHN OLSON

Adam Cornford, *Decision Forest* (Pantograph Press, Berkeley, 1997)

Adam Cornford, who teaches in the Poetics Program at New College of California in San Francisco, has constructed compelling intersections in his ambitious new book *Decision Forest.* "Decision trees" are binary choice paths brought into play to solve corporate and computing problems. Cornford's *Decision Forest* works through a multitude of such models, each rooted in a different aspect of our late century virtual landscape. The book is constructed between two pillars: an Overture, through which Cornford works the webs and disintegrations of his intellectual and genetic lineage, and a Coda, which, in essay form, explores social paradigms and mental constructs, specifically contrasting those which are vertical and hierarchical (pyramid) and those which are horizontal and organic (tree). Often, Cornford analyzes the architecture of decision through the language of collision.

The poems of *Decision Forest,* undergirded by Cornford's personal history, occur where the emerged dominance of technology slams into ecology at the crossroads of quantum mechanics and science fiction. The work is held together by its mission as a book of conscience and by the strength and range of Cornford's language, voice, and diverse writing styles. The reader is moved, sometimes careened, from the acute tenderness of Cornford's experience of his unborn child in its mother's womb:

> Every night now, she and I curling side by side
> your movements come clearly into focus
>
> against my buttock or my spine
> You swivel and flick, an eye
>
> under the sleeping lid of your mother's belly
> Already, as nerve-grammars widen through-
> out you, branching and
> rebranching their generative lace
>
> (from R.E.M.)

to the harsh staccato bark-voice of the gunman who slaughtered a cafeteria full of people in Texas in 1991:

> Voices are strings of spit. Stick bitch holes nag
> *Go, do, you , we, me.* Flesh bags, coiled hair

Glistening. Shit squeezes out of them, they sag
Squish peach, mouse-guts under slick skirts.

(from Killeen)

These collisions of human extremes, modeled in the sensual explorations of Cornford's language, occur as microcosms of the book's greater contextual polarities where technology, ecology and conscience collide in a science fiction mirror that both warps and reflects the western econotechnic world:

The hell we need was not conjured by a Renaissance
[doctor
draining acrid goblets of hubris and ennui
nor by adolescent girls leaking incandescence under linen
[nightgowns
nor yet by cellar circles of nervous dilettantes in evening
[wear
The Hell we need is invoked by its terrestrial image
its holographic miniature building unfurling like a zygote
of cobras inside a womb walled with facial rictus
wherever misery concentrates so densely that its mass
collapses the spirit into a gravity well like the vortex
left behind by the descending Pequod

(from Mobile Hell)

In other works, especially the long, and central piece: "Millennium: A Topology" Cornford maps, with considerable grace and power, a glistening machine-tautology that not only presents the seemingly inescapable dehumanization to be spawned from unbridled late millennium capitalism, but also models the convergence of what would once have been considered science fiction with an automaton work-world that now seems nearly palpable:

dream themselves energy masters leaning underlit
over vast blueprint table where Plan spreads out pushing
[back
frontiers of spacetime driving the masses along moving
[walkways
down bright ceramic tunnels elevator shafts hydraulic
of work power orchestras hands moving in unison endless
[processing

These works intersect with a poem series: "The Cyborg's Path," sections of which are dispersed throughout the book and whose lines spread, boxed and unanchored, across the page like computer-aided mappings of the decision-making mind. Here, as in "Killeen," Cornford uses language to build demonstrations and models rather than to simply describe. The reader is presented with the graphic patterns of thought and can follow the branches, through grids of choice, to various outcomes.

The considerable varieties of voice, subject, syntax and format, project, like quantum particles, a sense of the multi-locational through *Decision Forest.* The poems array themselves in many directions and assess the onslaught through many lenses. Indeed, the book portrays the complex mental actions, represented in decisions, that ultimately propel the world. These decisions, driven by technology and compelled by the bottom line, have become ever more automatic. While *Decision Forest* is complex, it is not ambiguous. Cornford has traveled beyond the fashionable intersections where etiquette and stop lights keep the rights of way. He has written a book that challenges the reader to choose, in part, by reminding that there are still choices to be made.

—LINDSAY HILL

Transparency & Resistance

•José Emilio Pacheco, *City of Memory and Other Poems*, Translated by Cynthia Steele and David Lauer (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 193 pp.

It's been said before: art is political when produced in relation to a community whose shared patterns of value and conviction are implicitly affirmed or visibly contradicted—or when expression discovers those other patterns which a society fails to recognize.

From his 1964 debut collection, *Los elementos de la noche,* to his most recent *El silencio de la luna*, José Emilio Pacheco has been

consistent in paring down some of the rhetorical excess and mannerisms of poetic *belles lettres* in Mexico, and one of the few poets in his own country and Latin America who, in the wake of the 1960s and 1970s, has continued to address issues such as the 300 years of colonial history in Mexico and its lasting imprint on contemporary social relations, the indignities of life on the margins of the megalopolis and, more broadly, the prevailing historic atrocities of the twentieth century. In its general intention and recurrent concerns, however, Pacheco's is a poetry that too frequently relies on topical positioning and attitude, and not often enough on the possible complexities or refiguring of committed statement. In one of his better-known poems, for example—and repeatedly throughout his 10 volumes of poetry—Pacheco has been known to belabor the indulgent limits of sincerity:

> I want nothing for myself.
> I long only
> for the possible which is impossible:
> a world without victims.
> How to attain this lies beyond my reach;
> it escapes my pettiness, this meager effort
> to dredge our century's sea of blood
> with the tremulous cup of my hand.
>
> ("Fin de siglo")

And yet Pacheco's poetry has been remarkably well-received over the years in Mexico, Latin America and Spain, where he has been honored with countless laurels—a fact, no doubt, that may have more to do with his admirable overall work as a translator, scholar and promoter which has rightly earned him the title of unofficial cultural ambassador. As for the poems themselves, the often blaring simplicity of argument or the facile nature of the moral world that characterizes Pacheco's work always threaten to undermine his entire poetic project. It's no wonder there's been a considerable backlash in the last few years, spearheaded by a handful of his contemporaries. Or more than a dose of skepticism, as reflected by veteran Octavio Paz when in 1979 he wrote that "[Pacheco is a] Doctor Pangloss in reverse, resolved to demonstrate that we live in the worst of all possible worlds."*

* I should quickly add, however, that despite the social unrest experienced in Mexico—particularly since 1994—little if any significant work of political scope has emerged in response to both urban and rural manifestations of discontent. At least in Vallejo's definition of a poetry that would engage the social: "The political receptiveness of the artist is preferably produced, in its superlative authenticity, by creating concerns and a nebulous politics that are far more vast than any questionnaire listing the preoccupations or periodic ideals as to national or universal policy."

Originally published in 1986 and 1989, respectively, *City of Memory* and *I Watch the Earth,* the two separate books gathered in this single City Lights edition, display many of Pacheco's signature motifs. At his best he combines clarity of meditation with direct address, as in the impressive opening poem "Sea-Snail"—about identity and homelessness: that is, the provisional nature of armature and place—together with stylistic allusions to D.H. Lawrence, Rilke, Nezahualcóyotl and Catullus. At worst, as in nearly all of the short poems, the writing is embarrassingly slim. Even when he speaks of disaster ("I Watch the Earth," a book-length meditation on the 1985 earthquake that shook Mexico City and claimed thousands of lives), or when he addresses this "century's sea of blood," the writing itself seems entirely immune to the horrors it describes.

Pacheco is a poet, you would think, who aims to exonerate the guilty conscience, or to affirm the moral piousness, of a (primarily Latin American) intellectual bourgeoisie that, once upon a time, constituted the counterculture. His is a world blind to those sadomasochistic forces of violence by which humankind is determined; a poetry happily unsuspecting of the destruction to which women and men relentlessly delight, hence underlining just how tenuous and fragile is this notion of a "clean, spare style." It's as though Pacheco were truly convinced, as indeed he writes, that:

> Poetry lets me leave myself behind
> and have the experience of another experience.
> Poetry humanizes humanity
> and shows us that
> no one is less than anyone else.

• *The XUL Reader: An Anthology of Argentine Poetry, 1980-1996*, edited by Ernesto Livon Grosman (New York: Roof Books, 1997), 135 pp.

It was precisely this pervading use of alleged transparency which, at the onset of the 1980s, some writers in Latin America sought to oppose. In Argentina, thanks to the perseverance of poet and editor Jorge Santiago Perednik, the magazine XUL emerged as a forum for a considerable range of writers whose ethics was based on "risk and responsibility, separated from the institutionalized poetic [of what was] considered literarily 'good,' which in reality is the security of that which [constitutes] the norm, to forge without restrictions and starting from whatever realm the adequate hows of the poem" (Perednik,

p. xxi). This activity, as represented by XUL, was parallel and in response to Argentina's military dictatorship and its politics of terror begun in 1976, and whose traces (in everyday language and that of the media and State) loomed well after its end in 1983.

Now, thanks to Ernesto Livon Grosman—a contributor to XUL himself—we have a sampling of what became, in his words, a "means of cultural resistance [which] had less to do with heroics than with creative and intellectual survival."

> Poetry constituted a practice which—because of its independence with respect to commercial publishing houses and because of its more limited circulation in comparison with the novel and essay—received less attention on the part of the censors.*

In XUL, problems of representation, the extended definitions of historical content and experimentation at linguistic and visual levels became synonymous with a more open sense of oppositional praxis and negation. Likewise, this significant shift of focus also lead to a redefinition of the hitherto operative models for writerly production in a way that bears certain resemblances to the literary and historical revisionism undertaken during those years by language-oriented writers in North America. Not unlike the latter's repositioning of Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky, in Argentina writers like Oliverio Girondo and poet-artist Xul Solar (whose name inspired that of the magazine) were given a more crucial status than heretofore ascribed.**

In addition to the two pointed introductions by Grossman and Perednik, the *Reader* is divided into three sections: an initial nod to certain predecessors, like those mentioned above, as well as to the

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*The opposite, incidentally, has been true of contemporary Mexico and its monolithic, omnipresent State wherein cultural expressions have been largely regulated by either a privileged social elite, or by a generous, albeit complacent official apparatus of grants and stipends which has dulled most writers of their potential for aesthetic critique and verbal innovation. Hence virtually no significant avant-garde or formally intrepid work appears in any consistent way. One only wonders what effects, if any, the present process of democratization in Mexico will have on future arts and writing.

** In his essay included in this collection Jorge Santiago Perednik raises some pertinent questions regarding "the new" and "the old"—terms which have accompanied and haunted the grammar of the avant-garde since its inception and subsequently in urgent need of reframing, as recently echoed in a marvelously-articulate and highly-recommended leaflet by Steve Evans entitled *The Dynamics of Literary Change* (Providence: The Impercipient Lecture Series, vol. 1, no. 1, February 1997), the first in a series of lengthy essays and prose works on the state of the art launched by its author and poet Jennifer Moxley. For information: 61 East Manning Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02906-4008.

opening stanzas of the nineteenth-century national classic *Martín Fierro* by José Hernández; the poems themselves, and a magnificent selection of editorials which constitute some of the most powerful writing in the collection—especially Roberto Cignoni's "Letter to the President," an intricate 8-page tirade whose sheer prophetic breath and turns of image upon image of sustained negation are the fruit of an authentic visceral engagement with the then-current state of affairs.

As for the work, Arturo Carrera undertakes a jagged investigation into the meanings of paternity and paternalism. Néstor Perlongher's highly-disturbing "Madame Shocklender" and Jorge Santiago Perednik's "The Shock of the Lenders" both explore the imaginative and psychological edges of an infamous case of parenticide in Argentina at the onset of the 1980s; and Luis Thonis forges an equational lyricism derived from mythic and literary tropes in his poem "Sophia." Other poets of note include Andrea Gagliardi ("Psyche"), Ernesto Livon Grosman ("The Golfer's Discourse") and Laura Klein ("Like a madwoman sewing. . ."). In addition to the community of Argentine contemporaries that the magazine clearly forged throughout its sixteen years of existence, XUL also published material—not included in this *Reader*—by Oswald de Andrade, Roland Barthes, Jorge Luis Borges, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, Marcel Duchamp, Pier Paolo Passolini, George Perec, Raymond Queneau and Phillip Sollers.

The XUL Reader is a gathering of extremely dense, manifold and often beautifully-sounded work in the original, characterized by untamable syntax, neologism, ellipsis, disobedient orthography and other concrete signs of violence. [Credit should be given here to translators Jorge Guitart, Kathryn A. Kopple, G.J. Racz, Graciela Sidoli and Molly Weigel, and I hope some of their labors will eventually go on to form single English-language editions of various XUL-associated authors.] A testimony to a specific time and place, *The Xul Reader* also bears witness to a body of work whose complexity was born of a genuine resolve to keep from

> . . .falling into silence
> by ineffable carelessness or history

(Laura Klein, "Like a madwoman sewing. . .")

• Jayne Cortez, *Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere* (New York & London: High Risk Books, 1996), 122 pp.

In-your-face politics meets jazz-poetry combustion in the work of Jayne Cortez. Though the author of ten books of poems and a performer on

eight recordings of poetry with music, my only contact with this compelling artist until now had been through occasional magazine publications. With *Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere,* Jayne Cortez pitches into the self-righteous or innocent images readers may have of themselves, free of belligerence but steaming nonetheless with nasty rhythmic articulation or rhapsodic flushes that swerve into tapped flutter and terse dive.

Never detached, her tonal range can go from brassy squawk to delicate echo, swamping down again to flitter in on a particular line or beat, based on a type of extreme image-making whereby visual ideas are exponentially generated into overall statements, as in:

> Whatever frightens
> drunk crickets in dead reefer of your lungs
> whatever fascinates alcoholic termites
> on wooden tooth in your melancholy pimp mouth
> whatever it is
> the festival will start with
> a twirling umbrella of rayon panties
> a dark queendom of yawning vaginas
> a urinating ear of hot asphalt words
> that you can eat
> in spanish fly of your french kiss. . .
>
> ("Whatever Frightens")

. . .or when rendering the immediate effect of a subject engaged in her imaginative written verve, as in:

> . . .Say it
> because everything is like an incursion
> flesh smoking flesh in
> hemp field of
> a fifty minute breakdown
> time sodomizing time
> in circular tunnel of asphalt & ashes
> space revolting against space
> in roar of an artillery salvo fuck
>
> ("Say It")

Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere is informed by the artistic energy and presence of figures as diverse in time and space as Aimé Césaire, Big Mama Thorton, Ed Blackwell, Ana Mendieta, Sun Ra, and—except for what I gather to be a romanticized notion of post-Revolutionary race

relations—Cuba's rich African-American cultural legacies, including artist-intellectuals Nicolás Guillén and Wifredo Lam, or the myriad syncretisms of diaspora as manifest on that island, and elsewhere in the Caribbean and Brazil.

Cortez' writing is not all on the same level in the interplay of novel breath-turn and intensity, but there are a handful of pieces in addition to the ones quoted above—the thoughtfully-orchestrated "She Got He Got," the incantational force of "I Have Been Searching (Rwanda Conflict)" and the spirally smoke of the smoldering self in "Now I Dig Up Patinas"—that have the power of an embodied mind and voice in low-down siren-song alerting us to the individual or collective signs of imminent crash and possible rescue.

—ROBERTO TEJADA

Are You Experienced?
Susan Bee, *Talespin*, Granary Books, NYC, 1995, 40 copies, o.p.
Susan Bee and Charles Bernstein, *Little Orphan Anagram*, Granary Books, NYC, 1997, 35 copies, still in print, $1500 each.

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;

And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys & desires.
—William Blake, "The Garden of Love," *Songs of Experience*

I recently received a phone call from a mother of a one-year old girl asking for a curious favor. It seemed that the child, eager to indulge in the wonders of language, had ripped through all of the books for children her age in the local Barnes & Noble. This particular kid loved the *sound* of language; rhymes in particular lulled her into a trance-state to which she was becoming addicted. In a panic, her mother called me and asked me to compose some simple formal rhymes to slake the child's thirst.

The image of a child in a relative state of innocence, barely able to maintain a vocabulary, yet reveling in the sound of language detached from meaning brought to mind Wittgenstein's struggles with language, meaning, sound and *experience*:

> "I can speak of 'experiencing' a sentence. "I am not merely saying this, I mean something by it." . . . Understanding a sentence is more akin to understanding a piece of music than one might think. . . ."
>
> (*Philosophical Grammar*, p. 41)

At what temporal and conceptual juncture do our "Songs of Innocence" become "Songs of Experience?" Susan Bee and Charles Bernstein take up these large questions in their new collaboration, *Little Orphan Anagram* (Granary Books, 1997). The pages of this children's book gone astray are mixed with light and shadow, sweetness and violence, whimsy and pain; in a way, it's *Alice In Wonderland* meeting "The Raven."

The title page alone bespeaks of the compound experience that awaits the reader: there are bright colors and polka dots sharing the page with an image of a little girl shedding a tear; this trip is not going to be entirely pleasant. The next page restates this theme: we are shown a glorious image of country life—a rustic farmhouse, lush green trees and busy beehives all captioned by a text that begins "It was on summer's day / Found myself alone and gray." The book proceeds this way throughout: light children's "rimes" are illustrated by images of ghouls, gargoyles, and insects. Sweet colored patterns of numbers and letters are tempered with screaming warnings from overbearing mothers. Angel-faced children floating about in pajamas are accompanied by lines like "Burns all over but no pain." And, three-quarters of the way through the book, children disappear entirely and the problems of

misogyny are taken up: women are sliced, diced, weighed, measured, and scopophiliacly viewed by menacing male gazes. The book's final pages end on a similar note of doom: violent black jagged fallopian tubelike shapes are dolefully captioned by a text that begins "Yes, forty dents, forty dents & not a minute more. . ."

All of this would be quite gloomy if not for the tension created between the dark content of the book and the buoyant mastery of the authors in their respective crafts. Rarely has a collaboration been so seamlessly melded and interwoven. One can hardly image Bee's images existing without Bernstein's texts and vice versa. It's a collaboration from the heart, from the family; it's two parents observing the transformation of their children from states of innocence to realms of experience and at the same time observing the changes in themselves as a result of the child rearing experience. Just as Blake's songs are parables for all times of life, Bee and Bernstein, through the medium of the "children's book," grapple with the transformative experiences that never seem to resolve themselves over the course of one's lifetime.

To underscore the perfection of this current collaboration, one must look at Bee's previous book, *Talespin* (Granary Books, 1995). Here, we are presented with a book that looks very similar to *Little Orphan Anagram*: it's the same size and at first glance, even the imagery looks identical. However, upon closer inspection, *Talespin* reveals itself to be something quite different: it's a thing of beauty and innocence. The images comprising each plate are appropriated from various Victorian sources ranging from antique children's books, drawing manuals, and 19th-century magazines. All the pages are lusciously and laboriously painted (as with *Little Orphan Anagram*, Bee actually spent over a year hand-painting the entire edition). Symbolist and Surrealistic imagery abounds: there are dreamy images of two women dressed in Victorian garb duking it out underwater, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*-like characters probe the depths of the ocean in a hot air balloon, and sexy mermaids embrace in loving caresses. It's dreamy, it's sunny, it's happy—it's light. There are children in this book as well—they're all smiling, playing, and swinging from trees. Even the "violent" scenes have a fantastic whimsy about them; it's a an old-fashioned book, a bit of nostalgia for the sunshiny days of yesteryear. Fragments of appropriated text add to the breezy pleasures of this book: poems by Christina Rosetti, nursery rhymes, instructions on how to draw, and bits of *Alice in Wonderland* gently skip across the pages. A love of playful language and formal beauty set the stage for *Talespin*, which perhaps is Bee's own "Songs of Innocence."

However, something quite different happens in *Little Orphan*

Anagram. The first clues are visual: the field is deeper, darker, and stronger than the previous book. We encounter an aggression and angularity that was hitherto absent. The color is cleaner and stronger, the brushstrokes are more sure of themselves, and every mark seems to be executed with a firm sense of purpose. This time around, Bee's image choices are more focused and rigorous; even the compositions seem more geometric, more severe. Judging by the artist's leaps made from *Talespin*, the reader will draw the conclusion that the *book* is Bee's medium—she's really at her best here, bringing beauty, strength and intelligence to each page she lovingly paints. It's rare to see a painter feeling so comfortable and assured within the confines of the book format.

—KENNETH GOLDSMITH

Stuttering Britain: Notes on Andrew Duncan and cris cheek and Sound & Language

Britain's most provocative poetry critic is Andrew Duncan, now sole editor of the journal *Angel Exhaust* and author of the revisionist history of recent British poetries offered in its pages. Duncan has the splenetic energy of Wyndham Lewis, a fondness for citing Adorno and Deleuze, and an aesthetic impossibly described as socialist realist, which doesn't prevent him from publishing some of the best poetry and prose about poetry now being written in Britain and Ireland. Provocation of the sort he delights in is mostly a male sport, and in his terse prose free of academic jargon and gratuitous subtlety Duncan's been fearless in taking on avant-garde shibboleths and mainstream stupidities both, challenging the critical silences which help keep the most interesting British poetry confined in sullen corners of knowing resignation. He seems to play few favorites: more than a few were pissed off by his assault on Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum, others left to shake their swollen heads at his sketch of the networks and values of a "Cambridge School."

In the former of these polemics he called Cobbing's sound poetry "the world's ugliest noise" and continued under the sign of Adornean high modernism to detail what he takes to be the limitations and pretensions of a specific variety of exploratory poetry and the culture grown up around it. This work is cultish, he wrote, self-defeating and self-isolating, grandiose and misguided in its political ambitions and rationales, burdened simultaneously by academic theory, discredited teleologies of the "avant-garde," and "infantile" yearnings, condescending to the needs of an (ignored) audience and every bit a part of bourgeois society in its instrumentalized discourses of "procedures" and "practices" as well as in its participation in government handouts. What's fascinating about all of this is that it's written from a position professing solidarity with the work of specific "experimental" or "alternative" poets such as Tom Raworth, Allen Fisher, and Maggie O'Sullivan. Among Americans Duncan admires Michael Palmer's poetry but not most "language poetry." For an outsider like me, this is all intensely amusing and, moreover, *useful*—though not so much for its ability to show the fly the way out of the fly bottle as for its noisy insistence on the rights of the fly to exhaust itself in exasperated and abstracted buzzing. Ultimately, the polemic, which has points valid enough to be taken seriously, founders in its circumscription of the domain of the "human," which here looks a little too much like a genteel drawing room, the body kept out of sight behind the talking heads, no one allowed to make an ugly face or babble any cacophonous or ecstatic nonsense. (There's also a problem with a proposition suggesting that specific avant-garde practices are "games" withholding their rules, but I won't go into that here.) Whole terrains of poetry which remain resources especially for those thinking about performance and performance writing are written off because Duncan has come to the realization that, here as everywhere else much of the writing just isn't all that interesting. What a surprise.

For brilliant readings of the best of recent British poetry, hunt for the prose of Andrew Crozier, J. H. Prynne, Anthony Mellors, John Wilkinson, and others; for more careful diagnosis and polemic articulated from recognizable sites look for the essays of Drew Milne, Allen Fisher, Robert Sheppard and Peter Middleton, and beyond them to the essays collected by Denise Riley in *Poets on Writing*, to name but a few; but if you want a glimpse of a powerful jackhammer at work tearing down blissfully impervious and in some cases hollow structures, turn first to Duncan. It's not a matter of agreeing with particular aesthetic judgments or political propositions—Duncan's "socialist realism" can be laughable, as I think he knows—it's the passion of a prose which never forgets that "Each one of 56 million people in the UK is

approximately as complicated as I am." That sentence almost redeems him.

Duncan is part of a generation born in the '50s and including poets such as John Seed, Geraldine Monk, Frank Kuppner, Rod Mengham, Tony Lopez, David Dabydeen, Jean Binta Breeze, and cris cheek. This is the generation of poets that felt most powerfully—had to find their way as emerging poets during—the Thatcherite clampdown, though it's not as if respected elders (Prynne and Raworth, Crozier and Grace Lake, Allen Fisher and Roy Fisher, etc.) exactly flourished in that era, when hope was the most laughable four-letter word and "society" subject to the choking engines of erasure. Duncan lists the key issues confronting his generation as follows:

> Key dates might be 1974, the shifting but Europe-wide *riflusso* and collapse of Counter-Cultural dreams and withdrawal into the armed despairing autonomy of 'personal politics'; 1977, the merely acoustic revolution of Punk; the election of Thatcher and the 'engineered recession' of 1979-81; indeterminately, around 1982, the abandon[ment] of Punk for something altogether suaver and more extended. . . . In the long run, disco music was more important than punk; both relied on automatic, technology-driven processes in which the personality of the artist was only a button. The stylistic issues would include: the reception of popular culture; beauty versus punk, or contestation of the surface; a coherent, human voice versus multiple impersonal voices uttering what the self rejects; flows of knowledge of diverse type about human behavior; the critique of language and of existing forms of beauty and sentiment; speeding up the information flow by challenging, contesting, defamiliarizing fixed knowledge; the problem of offering any account of personal or social experience in the enfilade of this negative-inversion; the lure of advertising and narcissism; the capture of images and textures in a kind of optical greed; the keeping house of cultural exile, underground or heirs-apparent; a fear of the didactic while also admiring the didactic above all else.

Duncan notes but is not especially concerned by the fact that many of the "basic stylistic features" defining the work of this generation were (and are) readily available in work published in the sixties by Tom Raworth, Roy Fisher, and others. He's certainly right to reject the myths of originality and "progress" still inscribed in some "avant-garde" discourses, and I suppose he's basically right about what was available

in Raworth and elsewhere in 1965, though such blanket assertion will not do justice even to the diversity of Raworth's poetry as he moved from *The Big Green Day* (1968) to *Ace* (1974) and doesn't begin to account for noteworthy differences between what, say, O'Sullivan and Lopez, or Wilkinson and Sheppard have taken from predecessors. Montage, disjunction, and so forth—these are vague terms for generalized procedures unless we pay sufficient attention to particulars, to the dispersed contents and the grist of idiom in actual poems.

What *does* concern Duncan is the fact that, though all of these poets are "moving into middle age," their work is only just recently beginning to be published: "A fracture struck English 'underground' poetry in the mid-'70s, and younger poets had great difficulty getting published after that. This has never really let up." But publishing books doesn't sum up what all of these poets have been about, by choice or otherwise, and indeed it might well be argued that what seems to be a bias against performance prevents Duncan from understanding ways in which writers might begin to address the problems of audience long attendant upon experimental poetries by moving beyond the culture of the book.

Maybe the problems besetting the British avant-garde are beginning to let up now, what with recent anthologies such as *Conductors of Chaos* and the possibilities represented by the meltdown in the last election. It's tempting for Americans to compare the fate of American "experimental" writers of this same generation with their British counterparts, but while such a comparison is potentially enlightening it might be more useful to determine what changes the recent crisis in British poetry has brought about. Here I think of cris cheek, a writer mentioned in Duncan's 1995 essay as someone whose "work is impossible to come by." It's not as if cheek hasn't been publishing—perhaps the most extensive collection of earlier work is *a present* (1980)—but good luck finding these publications. Even if you can find *a present,* which in some ways is perhaps the closest thing to first-wave language poetry produced in Britain, you might find it, as I do in part and as Duncan surely would, full of fragments and scratches and blips and reflecting nervous exhaustion and punk refusal more than something of lasting value—though the book's production *as book* bears careful consideration in a way that some of its specific contents do not. Other books, such as *mud* (1984), I'm not sure even cheek still has around. Some of this work has secured slim but valuable commentary in essays by Ken Edwards and Middleton in Robert Sheppard's *Pages* and as part of the subject matter for Allen Fisher's manifesto-essay "Necessary Business" (Prynne and Eric Mottram are the other occa-

sions there). But cheek's importance in the long run might have less to do with *what* he was publishing early on than with *how* he views the act of publishing—not as the most important or even the primary among his activities but instead as a "versioning" of writing seeking a deployment and engagement in as many tactically chosen sites as possible. And cheek's own work as published writer and as performer must also be set beside his work as the editor of his anthologies of performance writing and hybrid texts, *Language aLive,* and in the books and CDs he produces for Sound & Language.

In days of yore and gore I suppose that cheek's many pursuits while working as a dancer, musician, teacher, printer, and poet, producing graphic and photographic works and video fictions, editing and curating and so on, would have earned him the label "renaissance man" (sic). Partly an autodidact, apprentice of sorts to Eric Mottram and Cobbing during the so-called British Poetry Revival, early interlocutor of "language poetry" (you can find him in Bernstein's *Content's Dream),* advocate and agent of dialogue on several listservs where his pixel-signature "love and love" is virtually familiar—these are part of the enterprise which suggest a Castiglione. But in this era of organized as well as unofficial indifference, within a history like that sketched by Duncan, it's not the self-cultivation of the renaissance man we need but the explosiveness and tactical ingenuity of the "run-amok person" looking to disseminate intelligence, imagination, and critique in all available and emerging social spaces. Again and again cheek has searched out the ways and means to situate a writing extraordinarily conscious of the locations and conditions of its articulation, production, and reception in and against and between the institutions of said indifference.

I'm thinking partly of events he's curated such as *The Night Of The Living Tongues,* which brought together poets, performance artists, musicians, experimental filmmakers, and even a trick cyclist or two in a kind of post-dada-cabaret, the event's title one indication of just how removed such an event might be from all that we typically associate with poetry readings in their "regular" settings, the point being to create cross artform audiences and generate cross artform perception. Or he's sitting behind a computer in a club in London called "The End" ("E" backwards) improvising writing on a Mac with a video camera pointed at it and a video mix that allows him to scan text in 200 point into film-based imagery projected on the screens and walls of the club. Writing amid dancing, ongoing bass rumble and performance work. In some of cheek's solo performances he's merging dance with sound effects and music from Madagascar and elsewhere in an effort to bring out the expressive possibilities and resistances of the text he is

articulating. To see and hear him perform a text like "Stranger" is another matter from playing it on his CD *Skin upon Skin,* and another matter still from reading the text as I sample it below; cheek is exemplary in the attention he pays to the performative possibilities of each setting for his work. Thirty minutes recently witnessed in New Hampshire made concrete for me the testimony of Middleton and others about the lithe presence, the big man with the moves of a dancer, the hand-held speakers carrying Madagascar and what else, the dramatic technologies. Manic but also curiously vulnerable, I thought, this practiced confession which moves so subtly from an ironized melodrama and travelogue to the beauty and strangeness of the self as other in time's continuum, these precise syllables and rhythms of personal and cultural alienation and desire. (More of the text below.)

If the avant-gardes want an audience, if they want to be working at endeavors that build community and have at least some small potential for shaping a few corners of the present, they can't afford *not* to pursue and exploit all available "points of engagement," whether that means producing works within or aimed at popular media and its diverse artforms, or seeing what can be done to make of academies institutions of genuine openness and exploration where the curious have at least the opportunity to test and extend the limits of reigning disciplinary practices. We might even have to kill the monster "modern poetry" to get anything done. "It's about time," Ed Dorn said to me once upon hearing such a proposition, and the reality is that we have to do so again and again. Cheek's endeavors belong in an ongoing tradition—Fluxus, the Destruction in Art Symposium—but so what? Skeptics will note that their impact tend to be most forceful among self-selected youth cultures—but so what? (The old folks are mostly at home.) At a moment in which social spaces for poetry in the United States seem unusually limited—beyond the bop braggadocio of versions of a counter-cultural past at the slam and the mostly jammed academic circuits alternative venues are sputtering out—they suggest possibilities. At the very least we have to kill the cultishness and pretension that has grown up around even avant-garde poetries, and the range of cheek's enthusiasms and activities are instructive in this regard. The search for audiences that drives even such a cheesy nostalgia as that associated with the American New Formalists—with their watered-down "traditional" forms, soporific sonnets and neo-augustan No-Doze, suburban banalities of diction and subjectivity and so on—cannot be easily discounted. Cheek's answer is to engage the popular as material practice and site of cultural exchange rather than by alluding to some Beach Boys tune or writing a poetry altogether "accessible" in its forms and sentiments but stuck in the same old book.

Or that's one of the answers, for the book cannot be ignored. So as the editor of *Language aLive* cheek publishes texts that "present writing *as performance in itself* as well as *for performance*—of a pertinence for the performer-writer and the performer-reader." Among the writers in the first two collections are Fiona Templeton, the ensemble Forced Entertainment, Brian Catling, Caroline Bergvall, and Steve Benson. "Speak, Bitterness," the Forced Entertainment text (from an installation), looks at first glance like somebody's FBI file, heavy with darkly blotted out passages and produced in the dated typeface of a manual typewriter. We see quickly that the blotting-out is crucial to the text, its prosody almost, as it introduces an editorial function into the compulsive confessionalism of the text's "authors," whose post-punk ethos can contain both "We waited until Paul was completely drunk and then beat the fuck out of him" and "We agreed with Albert Einstein the scientific genius." Low-tech manipulated to great effect, as on the CDs of The Mountain Goats. Circled phrases with lines drawn between them in a representation and enactment of editorial process link Seattle and My Lai; black marks underscore the muggy spasms of an abject crew while also emerging as counterpoint for them, as for instance on one page where the only readable type, surrounded by blacked-out lines, is "cry-for-help."

Benson's texts (he wore headphones and improvised while playing passages selected from Eudora Welty and others reading on books-on-tape) are more Steinian in spirit:

> The difference crushes what is old, and you suppose that someone who has what you think always had what he was pulling.
>
> The weeds were pulled out, and the big, fat, religious figure was undeceived suddenly.

Reading that first one, I'm so caught up in its (semantic) violation of what its grammar seems to be promising ("thinking" as the last word instead of "pulling") that it takes a minute to ask how it is possible for someone to "have" what you think—the sentence does not say "to have what you think he has." And what exactly is this "difference," and how do we connect the two independent clauses except in a time-of-reading? In Caroline Bergvall's erotics, it's not the sentence but the page—its layout as we "turn it" as well as the semantic and graphic potential of)))))))) and ,,,,,,, and <<<<<<<< >>>>>>>>> which are among the procedures that come into play. Not just typography, or white spaces, or multiple fonts, much less the "meaning" or the "sound" of

words, but the book itself as an instrument of meaning with conventions to be extended as well as questioned. As J. H. Prynne once wrote in another context, speaking against Saussure and on behalf of sound-values in poetry, "anything that *can* count toward meaning *may* do so."

Among the books Sound & Language has produced are Bergvall's *Éclat,* Miles Champion's *Sore Models,* Ira Lightman's *Loving Phase/ Transit Ions,* and Allen Fisher's *Civic Crime,* this last with a cover by Fisher ("Levitation"). Like some of his poems, Fisher's cover seems to be "about" frames and what they contain, about violence and dreams of "levitation" or transcendence within articulated grids which are shown to be arbitrary and rigorous both, their boundaries at issue but their ability to make spectral figures show up clear as well. On the front a muscular male figure squeezes a duck by the neck; on the rear an infantile male and a woman with arched back and thrusting breasts vault a fence or balance beam. *Civic Crime* extends Fisher's ongoing sequence *Gravity as a consequence of shape* with its use of quasi-Blakean types or "characters" (the Burglar, the Engineer, the Artist, even the Bikeboy) speaking discourses contending for focus and with one another within the omnipresent "City"—capitalism's center in London—where "Oligopolistic behavior/ varied from collusion to almost/ perfect competition." Near the beginning of the book's first poem we find:

> The Informer's report confirms
>
> they are metallic balls of
> crystalline liquids sandwiched
> in saliva honeycombs and
> dynamically disordered into droplets
> disturb the gavel.
> Oh what a wonderful world.
>
> Tries to stop it and cannot.
> The variety of their phase behavior
> encourages a focus deception
>
> His long range spatial ordering
> fantasizes a language progression
> from colloidal fluids to crystals

One of the poem's concerns, it seems, is linking a high-modernist-like cult of crystalline finish with misogynist fantasy, though this is to isolate but one of the poem's social referents. The Informer's report is

scrutinized in the book's first poem by the Burglar who can't ignore "screams and riot outside" while also dealing with the Mathematician and Engineer; the Burglar must confront "The breakdown problem/ of established intellectual frameworks" ongoing in the City where "Desire and greed are matched" and "Everybody is very tired/Earning a fortune." The book is very much late eighties but the reach of *Gravity* in its use of narrative and multiple discourses make for a project with a continuing importance to the "post-modern condition(s)" which I can only hint at here. Fisher is perhaps the most substantial—and maybe also the oldest—of the writers cheek has published to date. Sound & Language has supported other projects of less interest to me—the Fiona Wright cut-ups in *Language aLive* seem slight, some of the Brian Catling poems produced there inert, not up to his marvelous "The Stumbling Block Its Index." "It takes a river of shit to float a few boats" is a famous Poundian aphorism, but the percentage of hits as opposed to misses in cheek's publishing activities is remarkably high.

Along with his CD *Skin upon Skin,* some of cheek's poetry is available from Sound & Language in the little book *Stranger.* The version of the poem there is different from the one in Iain Sinclair's recent Picador anthology *Conductors of Chaos,* reflecting different prosodies. I quote from the anthology:

Silhouetting figures form the Remnants of a Patchwork sail
To animate a mutant Life or surf a fraying seam.
A six-toed shade which torches paraffin with Sentiment to strike
Hard for a tiny far off Ditch of land.

Clutching, with bony fingers, to a Sweating Plane.
For fears of truth Exhausted clouds. The Bones of wishful
Social paths Washed out to sea.
A rendering, of Roots up in the air with spray
To paint mistaken Identity.

Come fee dot dash hot. Is House a discarded fruit?
A tendered verge? Where welcome is unwelcome Hit
As tenant hearing tenant Cry.
And meaning Tilts from comprehension to aggression
As if to Emphasize or frame
Variegated Diversions of Interpretation.

Forgetting—fleece—as in Unguarded
Crack

—Activity the Lot of it. A body politic
Of bubbles Waking out of Flattening dreams.

To fish for and barter fantasies.
Blend votes with Printed Facing
Ashen through oncoming headlights
Reflecting Nightgown's Blooming in the driver's eyes
A game of dash concerning death. An edge
Littered profusely with Bleached Shells
And tiny bones Mounded into Fetishes.

Inarticulate and ill at ease Fires in the Valley
Twisted 'up against the wall' Cliches
Gun holding an Urge to piss home all Advantage
Prized as turns of phrase.

An overwhelming profusion, splintering
Sticks between Tending
A metaphor for teeth.

Through an open Rusting.

One of the things that strikes me about this writing, which I excerpt from near the beginning of a longish poem, is how often its rhythms slide into iambics while its phrases and sentences mime a poised balancing suggesting their status as "silhouetting figures" set against the cultural capital of verse traditions emanating from the renaissance and beyond. Dense sound-structures, even rhyme (sea/Identity) emerge—the more radically enjambed Sound & Language version offers different effects. Ken Edwards has speculated about cheek's idiosyncratic capitalization "recalling past spells of English literature" but in this text especially the entanglement of British identities in the fantasies and real violence of colonial adventure are remembered, indeed construct the individual and social body. The poem tours distant settings ("Nigeria/Korea/Somalia/Burma/Madagascar") but there is also a sense in which the "tiny far off Ditch of land" is home and England, both nearly indecipherable and subject mostly to "Foul airs." Discarded fetishes, collapsed paradigms, the mutant body—the poem in moments sober and frenzied summons as in an incantation the agony and ecstasy of the tearing up of roots, of identities always mistaken. "Rendering" is representing and also giving, as one sense of the "tendered" below will remember, but it also sounds the violence of "rend." Pound's Homer is perhaps within cheek's field of vision

when, later in the poem, we find "Alert to where the seas go 'ssssssssssssaaaaaaaaaaa'./Blood unraveling definitions of destination/ Into continuous discontinuities of Presence?" The unraveling pertains not just to self and social body but finally also to the self-reflexive action of the verse—"Now—is poetry then/a process of arresting/or of Moving?" Mostly of moving, I think the answer is, even if in this poem "A cadence out of business is revisited" and at times "at will inverted" and the "font of poisons" contained in solidarity and belief, in the "clutches" of nostalgic sentiment, is never altogether escaped. The poem would will a forgetting moving towards transcendence without ever being able to finish *that* sentence—the noun phrase ("A game of dash concerning death") being its fundamental building block. As a result, the ending of this poem full of wonders (even the Gulf War) will perhaps seem forced too suddenly into sentiment ("Fly away/glow/ stranger"). But the fleeceless journeying of the creep-stranger talking at the sky is up to that point a marvelous ride, cheek's access to a range of expression uncommon in cynical-ironic British poetries something to behold. An accessible hyper-expressionism meets the clarity and sophistication of Allen Fisher on grounds in sight of popular traditions; embodied noises move seeking the creases among "Competitive ideals of Paradise." Anything is possible but who's brought the cash? cheek asks. One wonders what Andrew Duncan will make of it.

* * *

All citations from Andrew Duncan are from his essays and reviews published in *Angel Exhaust,* which can be had at 27 Sturton Street, Cambridge CB 1 2QG, England; see also http://angel-exhaust.offworld .co.uk. Publications by cris cheek and Sound & Language can be had at Sound & Language, 85 Suffolk Road South, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 OAS, England; orders available also via cris @slang.demon.uk

—KEITH TUMA

Contributor Notes

CHARLES BERNSTEIN's *Republic of Reality* (Poems 1975-1995) is forthcoming from Sun & Moon. KASUYA EIICHI is commonly considered Japan's finest prose poet. His most well-known collection is *The Structure of the World* (Sekai no Kōzō). D.W. WRIGHT's poetry and translations have recently appeared in *Prairie Schooner, Exquisite Corpse,* and *Gui* (Japan). DAN FEATHERSTON is starting a new magazine of poetry and poetics, *Letter.* He has recently appeared in *Chain, First Intensity, Parnassus* and *Response.* ROSS GAY is in the M.F.A. program at Sarah Lawrence College. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's *From Scratch* will be published by Black Sparrow Press in 1998. BARBARA GUEST's most recent publication is *Quill, Solitary Apparition* (Post-Apollo Press); later this year Sun & Moon will bring out her *The Confetti Trees: Motion Picture Stories.* LINDSAY HILL is the author of *Kill Series* (Arundel Press, 1991) and the poetry manuscript "NdjenFerno." BENJAMIN HOLLANDER's *The Book of Who Are Was* was recently issued by Sun & Moon. ANSELM HOLLO is an Associate Professor in the Writing & Poetics MFA Program at The Naropa Institute; his latest books of poems are *Corvus* (Coffee House Press, 1995) and *Ahoe* (Smokeproof Press, 1997). TAJ JACKSON lives in New York City. KEVIN KING teaches English as a Second Language at Brandeis University; he has recently published in *The Plains Review* and *Parnassus.* JOHN LATTA has recently been published in *American Letters & Commentary, Lingo, Exquisite Corpse, Iowa Review,* and *Gettysburg Review.* TIMOTHY LIU's new book of poems, *Say Goodnight,* is forthcoming from Copper Canyon Press in 1998. JOHN OLSON's chapbook, *Swarm of Edges* (bec press) appeared in 1996; his poems have recently been published in *First Intensity and Talisman.* JENNY PENBERTHY's edition of Lorine Niedecker's *Collected Poems* will soon be published by University of California Press. ADRIENNE RICH's most recent books are *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* and *Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems 1991-1995.* JEROME ROTHENBERG's most recent collection of poems is *Seedings* (New Directions, 1996); he is currently living in Paris. RICHARD SIEBURTH's

Selected Writings of Gerard de Nerval is due out next year from Penguin Classics. MARWAN was born in Damascus, Syria, in 1934; he has lived in Berlin since 1957. He is Professor of Painting at the Fine Arts Institute in Berlin. His work is represented in many of the major European museums. The Egyptian poet ADONIS lives in Paris; a long poem of his on Paris appeared in *Sulfur* #39. GUSTAF SOBIN's *Towards the Blanched Alphabets,* a new collection of poems, will be published by Talisman House next spring. Recent art writing by ROBERTO TEJADA include the catalog essays to *Horace Bristol: All Things* (Gallery of Contemporary Photography, Santa Monica, 1997), *Melanie Smith* (British Council, Mexico City, 1997) and *Inauthentic: Made in Mexico* (Expoarte, Guadalajara, 1997). PAUL VIOLI's *Fracas* is due from Hanging Loose Press in 1998. ALLEN S. WEISS's "Zürn's Doll" is an excerpt from his forthcoming *The Aphoristic Theater,* a work of "theoretic fiction." MARJORIE WELISH's essay, "The Art of Being Sparse, Porous, Scattered," is collected in *Writing the Images After Roland Barthes* (The University of Pennsylvania Press). DAVID ZAUHAR is writing a dissertation on "tradition" as a trope in literary and cultural criticism at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

*

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. . . To Zanzotto

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ANDREA ZANZOTTO

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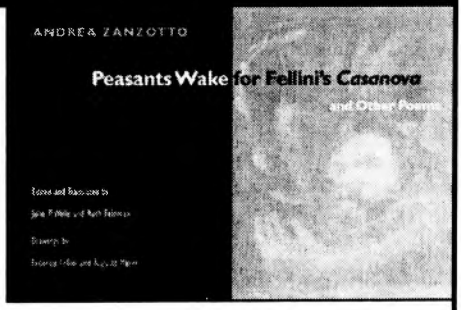

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COVER: TERRY WINTERS: Flows Correlated to a Surface, 1996; Ink, oil & acrylic on paper; 105.7 x 75.6 cm.

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Gerrit Lansing

DEAD MAN BLUES

(To be uttered very slowly)

Do you know you energize me so
easy, no, being dead, to know,
ready or not I'm coming any way
(you're not dead you're hiding, no)
katabasis a way to go. . .

Despite fatigue and foliage fall
extends a grace of quietude
reclaims and constellates
your death to wring from me the wrongest cry,
kelson of transmembered diamond night.

Derivative of long song, this
everts a passion past
relief, some die expecting it, a death,
you did not, October morn so red,
knowing at lost last minute only last of life.

MICHAEL IVES

TWO POEMS

EMPIRE

after J.M. Coetzee

At the head of a midrib flume
between heavily veined shoulders
where rainwater beads
huge, in queues of clear ovate knobs
advancing at uneven intervals,
a single droplet waxing
till it can no longer
resist the gradient and
peels off from its wedging,
growing like a crowd
as it overtakes
its lower neighbors
and at the leaf tip,
with reluctance and
growing larger still,
plunges and breaks into multitudes
over the iliac crest,
some of these arrivistes trickling
down buttock-ward
into a mash of fern and broadleaf,
others recollecting themselves
in fresh congress
along the circuitry
of my pubic whorls,
finding their liquid way
into the loose ripple of sheen laid

along the afterwake
as I comb slowly
again and again, lovingly
I must add,
the slick rondure
of your freshly detached head,
these droplets of water
suffering their final
disintegrative communion
as they pass out of reluctance
into general glistening.

SPEM IN ALIUM

wreckyear the dry wind the turgor gone all that you cherish

darkening waterlessness bent over its one hand its eyes turned in against Hope in the corner splashes in the petroleum flowerets in ruined buildings the fluorocarbons and blood-jazz aquarelles coiling in lymph between whirling blades she

murmurs in autistic repetition the revealed edge the creche of words in her venom sack her eyes, tell

her eyes the empty orbits the iris of Hope collapsed like a tissue against bramble growing

through a bramble growing out where once the eyes of Hope a dog in chains its gnashing teeth out of all proportion to the rest of it harrowing the earth below the thorn these

teeth this shuddering muscle and fur in chains to the bleached horizon out of her orbits two inextricable beams of chain and

a trawl of scars down her cheeks it spells the darkening and the bombs the secret writing of grimaces it flickers along the scarred hollows in time to

to the ting and snap of the chain the whipping feral clumps dragged out of her brambled orbits enchained hounds hauled out of the skull of Hope cornered and murmuring and freaked over with knotted shakes of saliva the secret writing

the revealed edge the promise to raze tomorrow with fire all that I cherish I merge with the bullet-headed future passions the dark tailings of reminiscence to bring this shellgame of sacred previsions the gun sees when you pick it up awakening it to an end

of life was hopelessly strewn it gathers in the bullet will bring the shall-it-be game shell comes to a complete

stop all the gannet-winged maps to the wilder parts to the gethsemani of scars across the hopecheek for the forked warning goes as it kevels and if I fall promise to

bring it to raze it tomorrow with fire all that I cherish it goes as it kevels it goes

over the darkening the cattle of all innocence I prayed and was reshackled to the darkening parts the whirling blades out in the interknitted passions the dark tailings the reminiscence now that it begins to rain for the last time the cattle of all innocence driven into a grove of whirling blades out in the interknitting in the final rain and the bombs the tailings we coupled near on broken glass eyeless Hope and I for the last time finish on then the old darkening march of reminiscences cattle of all memory driven into a grove and riven the untabulated bitten into I pray as it goes all the untabulated life

I am darkening I am sleeked over with darkening my eyes rain for the last time

NORMA COLE

from SPINOZA IN HER YOUTH

*

One lived within the portrait of the other, an intimate
brace, thus time's contraction (shaping). One awoke in the
dream in the dark, traces of objects on the surface, and
reference and frailty. One's interest in birds and dogs,
discomfort remembering the toys, adjacency with
[randomness as
reference, not knowing how to end things, not ending.

*

or the problem of recognition
Her dress and start now. To dress and sit down. Someone
flew up.
What is this book, smiling? Kicked the wall, then gave her
the flowers, poppies and daisies.
'd be back at 8, a hole in the wall behind the speaker.

*

dropped into a circle, or landed.
To be continued as conventions you can fall from, a
[permanent
quality. -um, -a.
gratia, grace, favor shown to another, goodwill, kindness
regard
startled, because of the shadows. Read more slowly in the
street, says Médor, in the heat. Look at what we've spent
already, think of your dead comrades.

*

(further notes on thought and vision)
In the frailty of
objects (think of
the other as burnished
divine) called buster
or lining or buffer
beside the cells that
make it play
the Artifact is
where you find it
a product of experiment
it regulates the duck
as filtered caress as
thresholds are set flying
and lying in the same
picture, no violence
no peaches, plums
fruit, onions simply
paper bewildered agate
skin of the day before
extending towards the
sound, resistance eats
a nodal point, silence
recommends reading

*

putsch and *fib* an intimate brace. Her red coat
seen from across the street, birds and dogs. We spotted her
later in the coffee joint deep in conversation with a trick
bag
reproaching stone: do I generalize? only notice the
demarcation line interrogating its own degraded
what you don't want "around"
the coils fall, thus time's
contraction
Things lying around. Procedures for using sound.

*

"Didn't make the rate" quota
she meant
"100 pieces *botched"*
                the city of the
could you say heart?
seduction of the negative or
the dead track you, perfect
food for an invading army
"food of the strong people"
Dear Pesto Cheeser
        These emblems don't
mean (what they say) he has
never placed a veil across
that doorway
                and her lover

*

Today I went to visit the
ancient world, a world
of glass constructed once
then unconstructed, it
bypassed quality, so I came
home and read music what
a woman carries a tune for
instance decentralization
is centrally planned and
can be revoked at any time
it's noon. The moon
is out, I'll meet you
by the pyramid

for Régis Bonvicino

*

Mount Rubbish where the light must make its way through
[fire
Let's make this page into an apartment, an enlightenment

structure like being inside someone's skull. Over to the
right there's a red car. Together they had planted that tree
I enjoy to see you notice
They called it The Colonnade although there were no
[columns
visible

*

A loose and open weave, heavy ink and such, tech grey—was
clear
Al: nothing was wood
Go: nothing was heard
made of parts
this is, this was devoted to the pearls for eyes and all that
when to laugh, the instructor practices, call her

*

GUSTAF SOBIN

CALLED IT SPACE

. . .like the opening and
closing of
clouds, those volutes, those
vaporous immensities: what, wedged within our own,
swollen

mirrors, we'd pried, teased, then, finally,
released into so
many all-
en-
veloping masses. roll, that it
billow; pierce, that it

burst, for this, this only is
depth, dimension, the
sheer

susceptibility of each, elastic, still expanding
emanation. no, it wasn't
walls, rooms, cities we'd inhabited but,
turgid, the air, that
very

instant, we'd tooled through our very teeth, the
nimbi pumped, pulsatile, out of
each

lacquered muscle. we, who'd spoken, once, of
solids, who'd invested in

structure, only thrived, finally, at the
very heart
of

these hollow
expanses. slick
in the very midst of so much

luminous vacuity, had knotted convulsive, hadn't
we; hoarded, against our
gathering
spasms, those heavens, those
high, heightened, meticulously scrolled

decors. rise then, and
plummet. for we'd only happen, here, in our own,
self-
induced elaborations. only
exult, finally, all

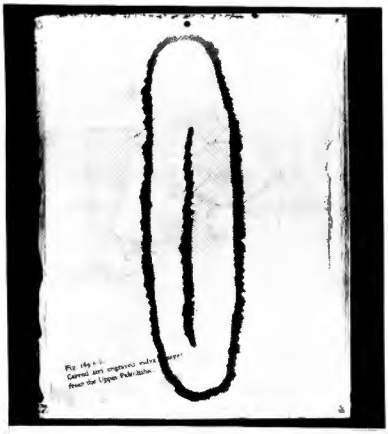
foam and crystals, in this, the
liminal
landscapes of the all-surrounding *isn't.*

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

VULVA'S SCHOOL

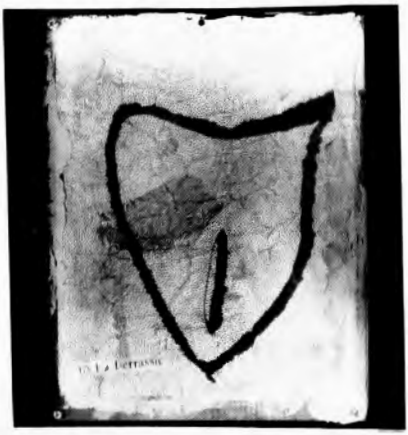
Vulva goes to school and discovers she doesn't exist. . .

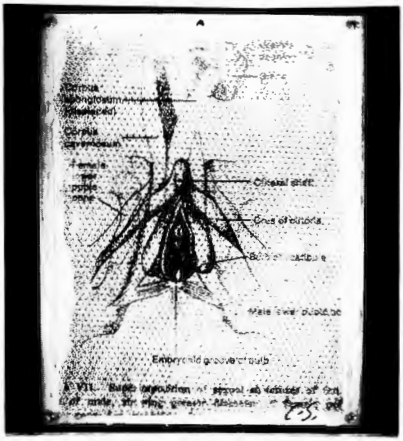
A) Vulva goes to church and discovers she is obscene. . .



Vulva deciphers Lacan and Baudrillard and discovers she is only a sign, a signification of the void, of absence, of what is not male. . . (she is given a pen for taking notes. . .)

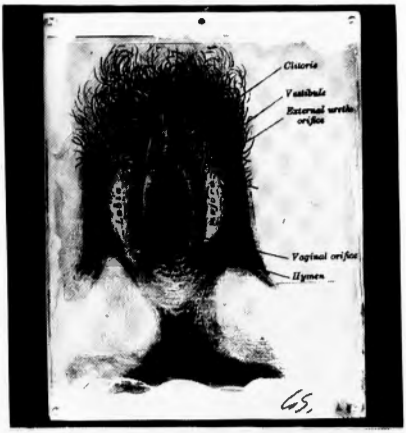
Vulva decodes feminist constructivist semiotics and realizes she has no authentic feelings at all; even her erotic sensations (B are constructed by patriarchal projections, impositions, and conditioning. . .





Vulva reads biology and understands she is an amalgam of proteins and oxytocin hormones which govern all her desires. . .

C) Vulva studies Freud and realizes she will have to transfer clitoral orgasm to her vagina. . .

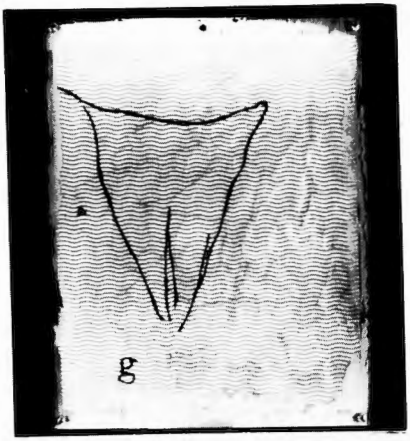


Vulva reads Masters and Johnson and understands her vaginal orgasms have not been measured by any instrumentality and that she should only experience clitoral orgasms. . .

Vulva reads *Off Our Backs* and explores tribalism; then she longs for the other gender's scratching two-day beard, his large hands and insistent cock. . . (D

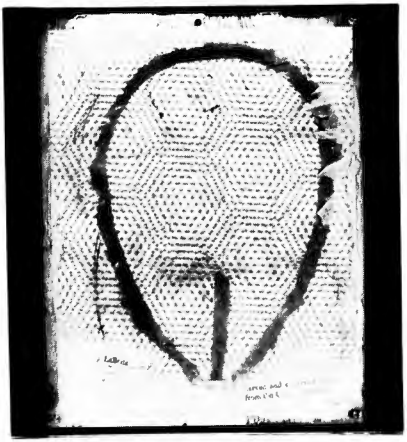
Vulva reads Gramsci and Marx to examine the privileges of her cultural conditions. . .

E) Vulva interprets essentialist feminist texts and paints her face with her menstrual blood, howling when the moon is full. . .



Vulva recognizes her symbols and names on graffiti under the railroad trestle: slit, snatch, enchilada, beaver, muff, coozie, fish and finger pie. . .

Vulva strips naked, fills her mouth and cunt with paint brushes, and runs into the Cedar Bar at midnight to frighten the ghosts of De Kooning, Pollack, Kline. . . (F



Vulva learns to analyze politics by asking "Is this good for Vulva?"

Carolee Schneemann '93-'96
"Vulva's School"

Accreditations

A)

Aphrodite on Shell. Greece 3rd Century, B.C.E. *The Scallop: Studies of a Shell.* Page 38. ed. Ian Cox. "Shell" tranport Co. Ltd. London 1957.

Childhood drawing by C. S. age 4½. Crayon on memo pad.

Vulva images from Upper Paleolithic. *The Roots of Civilization.* Page 297. Marshack, Alexander. McGraw-Hill. c. 1972.

Self-shot. C. S. 1995.

B)

Scale with bananas. Berlin newspaper. 1992.

Vulva detail from "Interior Scroll—The Cave" 1993 performance and video tape (C.S. and Maria Beatty) (still: Melissa Moreton)

Vulva images from Upper Paleolithic. *The Roots of Civilization.* Page 297. Marshack, Alexander. McGraw-Hill. c. 1972.

Superimposition of sexual structures. *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality.* Page 158. Sherfey, May Jane M.D. Random House. 1972.

C)

Sages worshiping the Yoni. 12th Century Bas-relief, stone Chansatti Temple, Madye Predestin India. *The Once and Future Goddess.* Page 18. Gadon, Elinor W. Harper & Row. 1989.

Madonna del Parto. Piero della Francesca. 1460 (?). Pinacoteca Comunale, Sansepolcro, Italy.

Vulva images from Upper Paleolithic. *The Roots of Civilization.* Page 297. Marshack, Alexander. McGraw-Hill. c. 1972.

"Back to Earth, workers prepare to rebury some 500 people whose grave at Hardin, MO were uprooted by last summer's Missouri River floods." Chicago Tribune. 12 November 1993.

D)

Figure 1193. *Anatomy of the Human Body.* Page 1275. Gray, Henry F.R.S. Lea and Febiger c. 1924.

Photograph of C. S. at 7½ months old. Photo cut and self-censored at age 10-11; restored 1995.

Vulva images from Upper Paleolithic. *The Roots of Civilization.* Page 297. Marshack, Alexander. McGraw-Hill. c. 1972.

Figure 1193. *Anatomy of the Human Body.* Page 1275. Gray, Henry F.R.S. Lea and Febiger c. 1924.

E)

"Saw Over Want," C. S. (Self-shot: image from grid of 36 color photographs) 1982.

Crocodile Head. Decorative Motif—Restaurant, W. 23rd Street, NYC. 1995.

Vulva images from Upper Paleolithic. *The Roots of Civilization.* Page 297. Marshack, Alexander. McGraw-Hill. c. 1972.

SheeLagh-Na-Gig. County Clare, Eire. *Primitive Erotic Art.* Plate 28. Rawson, Phillip. G.P. Putnams, NY c. 1973.

F)

Re-configured Medusa head by C.S. Zolla, Elemore. *The Androgyne.* Page 84. Thames & Hudson, London. c. 1981.

Japanese Yoni in stone. *Phallic Worship.* Figure 36. Page 178-9. George Ryley Scott. Luxor Press Ltd. London 1966.

Vulva images from Upper Paleolithic. *The Roots of Civilization.* Page 297. Marshack, Alexander. McGraw-Hill. c. 1972.

Sea Mother. Wooden Carving. Kwakiutl, northwest coast N. America. *Primitive Erotic Art.* Plate 67. Rawson, Phillip. G.P. Putnams, NY c. 1973.

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BARBARA MACLEOD

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BLOOD SACRIFICE

Introduction

The motif of blood sacrifice is widely recurrent in the literature of anthropology and comparative religion; it pervades the Old Testament and is the linchpin of the New, and it has resurfaced in both underground mythology and in actual practice in American society in recent years.

This study will attempt to unearth some of the roots of this compelling and disturbing practice in the context of a comparison between Judeo-Christian sacrificial rites and those of two preconquest Mesoamerican cultures: the Maya and the Aztec. It is predicated on the assumption that such roots exist cross-culturally. It will address the psychological directives underlying the sacrificial motif, and will undertake to place twentieth-century "civilized" man squarely in its midst.

I have chosen to compare the Judeo-Christian tradition with that of Mesoamerica precisely because the horrific aspects of Mesoamerican sacrifice have been provided in rich and endless detail. Furthermore, Mesoamerican religion and cosmology are topics which ceaselessly flank my own specialization in Mayan languages and hieroglyphic writing. Those who study these cultures often find that there comes an hour of reckoning with this dark thread so central to the ancient cultures we have chosen to examine. My own reckoning led me into Jungian analysis, and it was my encounter with the unconscious, embroidered with Mesoamerican images, which catalyzed my interest in the psychological aspects of sacrifice.

I look upon the Jungian model not as sacrosanct but rather as explanatory. My explorations using Jungian roadmaps have led me to a deep appreciation of the individual's need for culture—need for a system which mediates treacherous raw experience. The Jungian system attempts to wrestle with far more than Western psychic reality, and its attention to so-called primitive societies has drawn chronic

criticism, some quite justified, within the field of anthropology. But the concept of the collective unconscious is attractive to anyone seeking evidence of our universal humanness, and it does explain such phenomena as the spontaneous appearance of classical mythological themes in the dreams of persons unexposed to that literature. More controversial is whether it explains strikingly similar cultural complexes in societies thought to have no shared genesis. The body of Jungian literature is ample, and its prize pearls include in great measure the works of Jung himself. On the topic of blood sacrifice, the Jungian literature is vast and rich with comparative historical and mythological material. As with any garden, it needs weeding.

Some Rules of Jungian Discourse

Jungian psychology shares with Freudian psychology an analytic approach best represented in the four-way dialogue between analyst and analysand (and between Other and Other, or Animus and Anima) in a therapeutic context designed to bring forth and help the analysand integrate unconscious material. The dialogue goes on for years. A point of formal closure may be reached, but the process continues through one's lifetime. A basic premise is the existence of the unconscious. By definition, it is inscrutable; in the Freudian view, elucidated best by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the unconscious is a repository of repressed personal material, accessible through dreams. The unconscious also contains certain instinctual predispositions; these in turn give rise to the Oedipus complex and its various resolutions and non-resolutions. The Jungian view of the unconscious also holds it to be inaccessible directly. In contrast with Freud, however, Jung posited that it has both personal and transpersonal layers, the latter being the deeper. The personal unconscious is made up of complexes (formerly conscious forgotten and repressed material), while the transpersonal (or collective) unconscious contains archetypes (Jung, 1959:42). These are "primordial images" whose presence is independent of personal experience, and which in ur-form have never been conscious.

> "I have chosen the term collective' because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and

thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us."

—C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious,* 1959:3

But archetypes bind themselves to personal experience, and wear the masks of familiar images. An inventory of common archetypes appearing in dreams, fantasy, scripture, folktales, and works of literature and mythology includes the Shadow/Trickster, Anima and Animus (the opposite sex personifications of the chthonic soul), the Earth (or Great) Mother, the Son-Lover (the beautiful and edible consort of the Great Mother), the Divine Father, the Puer Aeternus, the Spirit (the ally who pops up in moments of crisis), and the Self (union, resolution, oneness, God), as well as themes such as the ladder into heaven, the night sea journey, the dragon's treasure hoard, heroic rescue, metamorphosis, and sacrifice. The list (much longer than this) has never been formally closed.

Jung (1959:79) hastens to point out that "archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree". Content is acquired as the archetype moves into the field of consciousness, where it wraps itself in the cloth of personal experience. Jung uses the metaphor of the axial system of a crystal, which determines the patterns of molecular bonding, vs. the palpable crystal itself.

With respect to the ego, or the I with whom the individual identifies, the collective unconscious has devouring potential. Defenses are thrown up from infancy on to hold the collective at bay. Traumatic experiences are relegated to the personal unconscious, but they have a hotline to the devouring collective. The defenses themselves—particularly dysfunctional, anachronistic ones—are also repressed into the personal unconscious. In the Jungian view, social and religious systems exist primarily to filter and mediate the archetypes; they provide a medium in which the ego can form and grow. But they, too, may become dysfunctional and anachronistic, and in the individuation process (a separation by the individual from the mainstream traditionally associated with the second half of life, and initiated by the "mid-life crisis") a mature adult might divest him/herself of burdensome traditions and dogma, but also of the protection these provide. Artists are regarded as vulnerable at all times to being overrun by the archetypes, since creative energy derives from proximity to the unconscious, and artists initiate the individuation process much earlier. Psychotics are thought to be more or less chronically overwhelmed, or perched on the edge of the abyss. Archetypes channel libido and exert fascination;

they can seduce, enthrall, and ensnare the ego, generating unfounded projections of themselves onto the world.

Jung (1956) regarded *libido* to be of a more generalized nature than did Freud (1953)—i.e. it is not specifically sexual, although it is bound to sexuality, as it is bound to all complexes. He spoke of it as "creative and procreative", possessing "an intuitive faculty, a strange power to `smell the right place', almost as if it were a live creature with an independent life of its own". It is "a force of nature, good and bad at once, or morally neutral" (Jung, 1956:125). It is an "energy-value which is able to communicate itself to any field of activity whatsoever, be it power, hunger, hatred, sexuality, religion, without ever being itself a specific instinct" (ibid.:137).

I have mentioned the "archetype of sacrifice". This motif, in addition to its representation in many religious systems, frequently appears as a dream image in Western cultures; therein it is associated by Jungians with life crises and phases of transformation, such as the onset of mid-life and the individuation process. Speaking of the sacrificial motif in dreams, Jung says:

> "If, however, it is a question of a fundamental change of personality or of one's general attitude,. . .then mythological motifs appear, sometimes borrowed, sometimes spontaneously produced, which do not fail to suggest the most intense suffering, even at a time when the conscious mind is not aware of anything painful, except perhaps a vague sense of oppression or uneasiness. It is true that the onset of conscious suffering is not as a rule very long delayed. If the inner transformation enters more or less completely into consciousness, it becomes one of the most vivid and most decisive experiences a man can have of his individual fate. The saying *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—there is no Salvation outside the Church—is no doubt a profound truth; but the grace of God, it seems to me, is profounder still".
>
> —C.G. Jung, *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass*:1958:224)

Some Anthropological Views on the Meaning of Sacrifice

Anthropologists have been addressing the motives for blood sacrifice for at least as long as the psychoanalysts, and there has always been some degree of cross-fertilization. Freud's (1950) "primal horde"

hypothesis, in which the origin of sacrifice (particularly the pattern in which the god or totem animal is ritually slain and eaten) is explained in terms of a primal parricide and resultant totemism. This in turn derived from Darwin's (1927:395) thesis that a primal group, in which sons threatened competition with the father for the women and were thus driven out, was historical fact.

The works of Frazer (1923, 1959, 1962), voluminous and of unpredictable reliability, target the recurrent theme of dying/reborn gods of vegetation and ritual regicide in the Near East and Africa. A magical relationship obtains between the chosen victim and the deity, whereby the rebirth of the crops and man's communion with the sacred is assured.

E.B. Tylor (1929) saw sacrifice as a gift made by man to supernatural beings or to ancestors; the purpose was propitiatory, and favors (or at least a reduction of hostility) were hoped for in return. The "gift" idea will be reconsidered later.

Durkheim (1915,1976 reprint) acknowledged the importance of the gift or oblation in sacrificial rites, but attributed more importance to the "mental states which these actions, though vain in themselves, accompany or reawaken" (1976:346). The regenerative thoughts of men, directed toward the gods, are his true gift, and are, in Durkheim's view, the sustenance on which the gods (who have no existence outside man's thought) depend. Human society is nurtured by the regenerative thought of individuals, and shared sacrificial rites serve the community's emotional and spiritual regeneration. We will return to this theme as well.

Robertson Smith (1927) focused on the communal meal as a means of connection between man and a specific (totemic) supernatural. This is more than a simple dialogue, but becomes an identity between the god and the worshippers. The rite is an exchange of blood, one which is expiatory and cleansing as well as unifying. Smith argued that the Semitic tribes were originally totemic, but later instituted human sacrifice in substitution for the totemic animal, whose true nature had been forgotten. We will examine the issue of human and animal sacrifice among the ancient Hebrews.

Hubert and Mauss (1964) consider the victim as a necessary intermediary between the sacrificer and the sacred; direct contact with the sacred is far too dangerous. Therefore the victim, rather than the priest or the group, succumbs to the danger and is destroyed. The result is a spiritual transformation of the ritual community.

Girard (1972) takes issue with all of the above, and offers the "surrogate victim theory" to explain sacrifice and its relation to violence in human societies. This "surrogate" is not the actual victim in a

given rite, but a trope for the underlying scapegoat/decontamination directive, one engendered by some ineffable and spontaneous act of group violence at the dawn of our species' evolution. The repercussions affect us still, and repeatedly create a "sacrificial crisis" which can only be resolved through the ritual slaying of a human victim selected by chance; as the crisis deepens, secular violence increases, approaching a critical mass. Girard's thesis is the only one among these which tackles the issue of secular violence in relation to sacrifice. He also makes the point that no single context-specific analysis will get at the underlying sacrificial directive (violent unanimity)—only the comparative method will work. It is regrettable that he says so little about the heinous primal act itself.

These theories demonstrate is that (1) there is a great diversity of opinion vis-a-vis the primary sacrificial motive, and (2) anthropologists have since the birth of the discipline scanned large bodies of data in a search for universals.

A Synthesis

Jungians are as a rule not much influenced by trends in anthropology. Given a choice of etiologies for the many variants of blood sacrifice in the ancient Near East, an orthodox Jungian might well point to the collective unconscious in favor of diffusion between contiguous cultures, or as a compromise suggest that the former paved the way for the latter. In the case of similarities between the sacrificial complexes of the Judeo-Christian tradition and ancient Mesoamerica, diffusion appears far less likely; nonetheless the occasional investigator dares to posit it. A fair alternative is the possibility that the ancient oral tradition was far more capacious, precise, and durable than modern man can appreciate, having largely lost it, and that the common origin of peoples of both the Old World and the New is sufficient to account for certain otherwise unexplained cultural similarities. The Jungian might then add that the collective unconscious greatly enhances the carrying capacity of the oral tradition.

The psychological approach to the motif of sacrifice finds fertile ground in our violence-ridden, initiation-starved, putatively Christian modern American society. In seeking common ground between rites and beliefs of the Old World and the New, I admit that I have been attempting to map some of the shakier ground of my own being, shaped by the Old (raised as an atheist in a hypocritical Christian milieu) and reshaped by the New (as a Maya scholar and long-term resident of Central America and an empirical investigator of shamanic

reality). The resonance that I find here between Old World and New may be a product of my own solipsism, or it may really be out there.

The Psychology of Blood Sacrifice: Who Cares?

Many factors in human social evolution have over the centuries served to "civilize" what could be viewed as an eternal and insatiable archetype, although there have been significant lapses in the civilizing process. Christianity is a notable example of a movement toward spiritualization—an investment of collective libido in a symbol (crucifix) rather than the flesh (reenactments of the crucifixion). It is not the only such movement, and its failures have counterbalanced its successes.

I have called the sacrificial motif eternal and insatiable. Do I mean to suggest that deep within the collective, civilized, Western psyche lurks a potential monster? Perhaps so. Modern Americans face essentially the same struggle that our forebears faced: do we concretize this archetype, or do we spiritualize it? The response cannot come from reason alone; spiritualizing it has to *work*. On the other hand, the choice to concretize may lead to chaos.

There is a third option, that of denial. This option is offered not just as a rhetorical "straw man", for the advent of humanistic science has for many Westerners rendered anachronistic the notions of original sin, afterlife, of reciprocity between man and gods, of deities demanding their due. These are all components of the sacrificial constellation, if we take that constellation to include all the motives and themes cited above. But science has not rid modern man of the archetypal bogeyman, who is no less dangerous for not being "out there". Indeed, for many Jungians, the only real drama is the inner one, set on the stage of the individual psyche. The rest is projection.

The struggle to spiritualize may take place beneath the protective wing of an established religion whose prophets have already charted the way; a deep psychological need of the individual may be met by the religious institution which can filter and channel the raw power of archetypes. But for many individuating people in Western society, this medicine no longer has efficacy. We must seek other options and non-mainstream traditions; we must become heroes in our own myth, engage the dragon in uncharted waters. This is of course one of the objectives of the analyst-analysand dialogue. To negotiate successfully with the archetype of sacrifice the individual must consecrate his/her own psychic wounds, wounds which are hidden from oneself and from others, and which have no voice which approximates the

eloquence of a broken leg. And s/he must make a burnt offering of the aspects of ego which no longer serve personal growth, which thrive on fear and alienation. Reason alone will not lead to that high altar.

Where might Salem, My Lai, Matamoros or Heaven's Gate fit in our cultural tapestry? What about America's thirst for gratuitous violence, as evidenced by the endless parade of corpses and gore across our TV and movie screens? The entertainment industry only reflects our desire. America desires protagonists who never evolve, plots without redeeming spiritual protein, and titillating gore, all of which bespeaks a cultural regression into the belly of the dragon, and on the collective level, we hardly seem to notice, or to care. Jim Jones, who in Guyana led his people forthrightly and dramatically into the belly of the dragon, was fond of the quote "he who does not understand history is doomed to repeat it". We might rephrase that as "s/he who does not negotiate with the archetype is doomed to be eaten by it". And negotiation is no guarantee against being eaten anyway.

If René Girard is correct, modern Western society is in the throes of a "sacrificial crisis", made all the more acute by the denial we practice with respect to the archetypes (even though Girard sees no need for the concept in his evolutionary scheme), and the disappearance of substantive initiatory rites in favor of disposable commitments. But is his "solution" the appropriate one? Hardly. And yet when chance (or Providence—something other than the local establishment) selects a doomed hero for us, as did the assassinations of Martin Luther King, John Kennedy, and John Lennon, a certain resolution and unity does prevail for a time.

So indeed, there is a bogeyman, or perhaps she is the bogey side of the Great Mother, who in her classical manifestations may be a toothsome crone as well as maiden and mother. In any exegesis of sacrifice, it is important to consider the borderland it shares with the archetypes of the Great Mother, and the vengeful, tyrannical aspect of the Divine Father.

Sacrifice: Definitions and Preliminary Typology

A restricted definition of sacrifice, a word meaning "to consecrate", must include a ritual context, a ritual objective, and a relationship of identity between all participants—priest, victim, and onlookers. It must involve a *loss* which is also a *gift,* recalling Tylor's hypothesis. The role of the victim is to connect the community with the supernatural world; Hubert and Mauss state that this cannot be achieved directly, but rather requires the victim as intermediary. Smith stresses the role of commun-

ion (eating the flesh of the offering, who is identified with the god) in this connection. Frazer regards the process as a magical identification between victim and deity. A scapegoat motive may be present, either consciously or unconsciously (recalling, for example, the Christian avowal of Jesus' taking on the sins of the world in order to relieve humanity of them). This process of losing/giving/communing/purging results in a profound psychological catharsis for all participants. The Jungian focus on the dynamics of the individual psyche, which we will later examine in more detail, brings to the foreground the psychological role of sacrifice as both motif and practice. As we will see, events in the profane world may later constellate the archetype, and create ritual, or religion, retroactively. The state of identification is numinous in any case.

In its concrete manifestations in myth and history, ritual blood sacrifice varies considerably. It may serve any of several acknowledged purposes: propitiation, atonement, thanksgiving, or communion. Among the common offerings are first fruits, first fowl, first lambs or bullocks, firstborn sons, war prisoners, slaves, retired kings, and solicited children. Primacy, innocence, and physical perfection are often the desired attributes. This finds consistency with the myths of beautiful and narcissistic dying savior gods of vegetation of the ancient Near East, who return, eternally, into the arms of the Great Mother (Frazer, 1959,1962; Jung, 1956; Campbell, 1988:91-121).

There is a middle-ground manifestation of blood sacrifice, one which can channel considerable libido without usurping the will of another living being. This is the practice of self-mortification, of offering one's own flesh and/or blood. Christianity has always made allowances for those who choose this path. Many Native North American peoples practiced self-mortification, or have returned to it in recent times. The ancient Mayas and Aztecs practiced it as well; they also did this in conjunction with the sacrifice of captives. The latter is a specific case of ritual creating identity between the sacrificing priest and the victim.

The threads of blood sacrifice recede far into time, and they wind through the cultural cloth of peoples on every habitable continent. Archaeological evidence from both the Old World and the New demonstrates head or skull cults thousands of years before present. In the Old World, some of this evidence dates as far back as 20,000 B.C., while in the New World it is more recent—4,000 B.C. or so. Many scholars of comparative religion see the shift from the nomadic hunter-gatherer lifeway to that of sedentary agriculture as a critical watershed on many ritual levels. It is certainly so in this case. The dependence upon the elements, the recognition of numinosity in the earth and in

plant life, which is seen empirically to die and be reborn, led most early planting cultures in the same direction. It is theorized that the staple crop was deified as a god, one who died at the harvest and who was reborn in the spring. The myths of the youthful gods of vegetation of the ancient Near East all reflect the embrace between the son-lover and the Great Mother: Tammuz of Babylonia, Osiris of Egypt, Dionysus of Greece. The Maya Maize God fits this pattern exactly.

The Old World gods of vegetation are often viewed as forerunners of Christ, templates from which his myth evolved, or from which his history sprang, depending on one's point of view (Jung, 1956: Ch.5). In myth after myth, these beautiful young gods are betrayed, slain, buried, and reborn: they become kings of the Otherworld, illumined beings who light the way through the door beyond death into eternal life. Their death is interpreted as a sacrifice made so that man might find that door. It has been inferred that many of their cults practiced reenactment in bloody rites, but the view that vegetal deities were central to the documented Near East human sacrificial complex has been questioned by Green (1975:201-203); while he asserts that human sacrifice was widespread, he associates it with foundation rituals, rites of propitiation and expiation, and the dispatching of attendants to the Otherworld in royal funerary rites.

I would now like to narrow the focus to two great religious traditions, one from the Old World, and one from the New. The Judeo-Christian tradition permeates our culture; its sacrificial themes are familiar, at least skeletally, to most of us. The Mesoamerican "culture area" shares many features across a wide range of language families and geography. In attempting to illuminate the stage on which its sacrificial dramas were enacted, I will consider some myths, ceremonies and directives of the Aztec and Maya cultures. We will see very quickly that there is common ground.

Judeo-Christian Blood Sacrifice: An Origin Myth

After the creation of the First Parents in the unity that was Eden, Eve was beguiled by a snake; she in turn beguiled Adam, and they sampled the apple of oppositions (Genesis 3). Interestingly, the Ouroboros, as elucidated by Erich Neumann (1954:5-38), is often represented as a snake which swallows its tail. Yet in the Eden story a snake precipitates the fall out of unity into division—an inversion of the ouroboric serpent motif. Pitt-Rivers (1977:127), citing Frazer's *Folklore in the Old Testament,* notes with reservations the latter's interpretation of the serpent as symbolic of immortality (the archetype of metamorphosis, shedding

the skin, is linked to immortality), as well as his observation that the Eden story involves an inversion: a deception which leaves man mortal and the serpent immortal.

The fundamental splits in Eden were these: man vs. God, man vs. woman, man vs. beasts. The apple is the fruit of a Tree of Death, better known as the "tree of knowledge of good and evil". It stands in a polar relation to the Tree of Life, whose fruit grants immortality (Gen. 3: 22-23). Anyone who eats of both becomes "as a god" and immortal, and that competition the Father God will not abide.

Christian scripture explains the crucifixion of Christ as the atonement for this sin of Adam (Romans 5), and therein another opposition is established, one with a resolution implicit in the sacrificial act. The serpent, who seduced woman, will now be bruised upon the head by the foot of Mary, the mother of Christ (implied in Gen. 3:15), who in the loss of her son finds redemption for Eve. Once again sacrifice leads to reconciliation.

But meanwhile, back in the garden, the First Parents are assailed by yet more oppositions (Gen. 3,4). Innocence has soured to shame, and the couple who once dwelled inside are now outcasts abroad in a world filled with death. They make the best of it, raise two sons. One, Cain, is a planter; the other, Abel, is a herder. This must reflect an early schism based on modes of subsistence; here the herder is clearly favored. We are told that Cain is a snivelling ne'er-do-well, but this fact seems secondary to the message underlying the brother-murder: sacrificial lambs please Yahweh and sacrificial veggies do not. The envious Cain slays his brother, an act which in spite of its break from ritual, its lack of cultivated identification between the doer and the done-to, has strong sacrificial overtones. The crucifixion was a similarly secular event—the punishment of an alleged criminal. Abel, the favored of God with the favored lifeway, became the first martyr. The same story provides the charter for animal sacrifice.

It may be useful to pause for a moment and interject a few observations by Pitt-Rivers on the issue of the historicity of Genesis, a subject addressed in *The Fate of Shechem* (1977): he finds commonality between Genesis and the Quiche Maya *Popol Vuh* (to which we will later refer) in terms of their internal development from pure myth to historicized myth. In each case, the early chapters of a single tale are the most removed from reality as we understand it, but there is a progression toward history. Pitt-Rivers (challenging Leach's [1969] work on the Old Testament in which he submits it, as myth, to a structural analysis), believes the pure myth/historicized myth distinction to be critical, and regards the editing of the Old Testament to have been "a process of sifting and collating of texts and sacred oral

traditions spanning many centuries" (1977:139). Furthermore, he proposes that this ongoing editorial process was at every stage motivated by a need to apply the stamp of mythic charter (the death-knell of pure myth) to contemporary social and political agendas.

Sacrifice was high on the Hebrews' list of chartered procedures. The story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22) addresses the theme of transition between human and animal sacrifice. From it we might infer that for a time beforehand, both were practiced by the Hebrews (we may recall Smith's formulation that animal sacrifice came first; one wonders about his suggestion that the Hebrews were totemic, however). As the story goes, the long-barren wife of Abraham bears him a son, Isaac. When the boy reaches adolescence God commands Abraham to take Isaac to the mountain and make of him a burnt offering. We see in Yahweh's request that aspect of the Father archetype which demands absolute loyalty in the hierarchy, contrives tests of fealty. Abraham concedes; he takes Isaac to the requisite spot, prepares the altar in the familiar manner. At the last moment, a ram fortuitously appears, its horns tangled in a thicket. Abraham's hand is stayed by an angel, and the ram is sacrificed instead. Whatever the historical truth of any of this, we find here the charter for the substitution of a ram for a firstborn son. Abraham's willingness to commit the awesome act adds numinosity to the substitution, and gives the ram equal value. From the plethora of references to bovine sacrifice in the Old Testament, we can understand the motives for the attribution of numinosity (via mythic charter); what remains uncertain is the historicity of the sacrifice of the firstborn son. Here the deeper layer serves a later agenda; this does not prove that it was historical fact, but one should not let piety dispel the possibility. In the Old Testament and in other ancient sources, the foundations of cities and lineages are often anchored by blood sacrifice, and Abraham is of course the founder of the Hebrews. In Exodus 24 we learn of the importance of blood in sealing pacts and covenants: Moses, as he throws sacrificial blood upon the onlookers, says "behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words". Nowadays, the notion of sealing pacts with blood applies also to pacts with the devil, pacts between Mafiosi and other blood brothers. We find the theme in Huckleberry Finn.

Passages in Numbers (8:17) and Micah (6:7) attest to a claim upon the firstborn of man and beast by Yahweh, and hint strongly at the concrete legitimacy of such offerings. The Genesis account above serves as a disclaimer of sorts, if taken in historical-narrative sequence. Some Old Testament scholars argue that this passage was appended to Genesis during the eighth century, B.C. at a time when child sacrifice

was rampant throughout the region. Admonitions against an act are strong arguments for its existence, and such injunctions, lamenting the tendency of the Israelites to be swayed by the dubious habits of their barbarous neighbors, pepper the scriptures of the period.

There is one straightforward account of child sacrifice—that of Jephthah's daughter, who is not named (Judges 11). Jephthah had vowed that were he victorious in his battle against the Ammonites, he would make a burnt offering of the first living thing to greet him as he returned home. The hand of Providence placed his daughter on the altar. One can only wonder what social agenda, beyond the provision of a paragon of absolute fealty, was served in the preservation of this event by the Old Testament editors in a chapter largely concerned with issues of legitimacy, inheritance, and conquest.

Yet another sacrificial theme emerges in the story of Abraham. Abraham is circumcised as an outward sign of his covenant with God (Gen. 17). This offering of flesh becomes the badge of all males of the covenant. While many neighbors of the Israelites also practiced circumcision, they did it erratically, and not as a sign. Might this not be another substitution—one of circumcision for castration, which myth tells us was practiced upon priests of the Great Mother? The act of circumcision is similarly a substitution for the sacrifice of the son: the part stands for the whole. And it has also been noted by Hyam Maccoby (1982:87-96) that substitutionary circumcision, as a holdover from matriarchal religion, may have been an agreement to give the Mother her modicum of due in a pact which stabilized the patriarchate. Maccoby has suggested that a more authentic account of the origin of circumcision is found in Exodus (4:24-26), in which a murky passage (perhaps deliberately so) reveals that Moses, in a divinely-inspired frenzy, sought to sacrifice his son as an inauguration of his mission, but his wife intervened by circumcising the infant and casting the foreskin at his feet. This satisfied God, and the state of frenzy abated.

Texts from the Old Testament also make repeated reference to "circumcision of the heart" as a metaphor for faithfulness and righteousness. Consider this from Deuteronomy 10:16: "circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked". This is not to say that the inner offering could replace the outer, as was later the case among Christians.

Circumcision was eschewed by Paul again and again, who argued that the covenant was ordained before Abraham performed this act, and that for Christians neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availed (Col. 3:11). Rather, the important things were "faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), and keeping the commandments.

When we turn to the Maya, we will find grist for yet another mill:

that circumcision is "male menstruation". Roheim (1945:164), who did fieldwork in Australia in 1929, informs us that the Aranda refer to the subincision wound as a vagina; other subincision myths cite the regenerative properties of blood from this wound.

Throughout the Old Testament we find direct references to the sacrifice of livestock and of birds. Here are some passages from Leviticus which specify the antecedents and details of these sacrifices:

> "And if his offering be a goat, then he shall offer it before the Lord.
> And he shall lay his hand upon the head of it, and kill it before the tabernacle of the congregation: and the sons of Aaron shall sprinkle the blood thereof upon the altar round about.
> And he shall offer thereof his offering, even an offering made by fire unto the Lord; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards,
> And the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the flanks, and the caul above the liver, with the kidneys, it shall he take away.
> And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savor: all the fat is the Lord's.
> It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood."
>
> —Leviticus 3:12-17

> "If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance in the holy things of the Lord; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering:
> And he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.
> And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity."
>
> —Leviticus 5:15-17

We note that the animal's blood is the property of God, and is to be sprinkled around the altar. This extends to all animals which are eaten under any circumstances: blood is a sacred substance, the essence of life. In Deuteronomy (12:23) we are told that "the blood is the life; thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh". This directive still underlies the rite of kosher meat preparation as well as the separation of meat from dairy products in kosher households. Later Christian texts (Eph. 1: 7, Col. 1:14) echo this equation of blood with life in relation to the redemptive power of the blood of Christ. Jehovah's Witnesses, in one of the interpretations by which they distinguish themselves, view transfused blood as eaten blood.

In contrast with Judaism, Christianity turns its full attention to salvation of the soul. As Maccoby notes, "salvation" is used in the Old Testament in reference only to physical deliverance from some peril. Thus we find in Christianity a marriage between the images of youthful dying saviors of Mesopotamia and that of the father-god of Israel. We have already noted that the Passion of Christ was viewed as an act of rectification, one which, for those who accept Christ, neutralizes the sin of Adam. The willingness of Christ to shoulder this burden serves to poignantly highlight both the human and deity aspects of his psyche. In the garden at Gethsemane, the man asks that the cup pass, but the god accepts it. This vacillation on the edge of eternity helps forge a bond of identity between Christ and his followers; it calls forth compassion in all who hear of it. The same may be said of the communion meal of the Last Supper, which is the prototype of the Mass. The passage in 1 Corinthians provides the well-known lines "this is my body, which is broken for you (speaking of the bread)". "This cup is the new testament in my blood". Joseph Campbell (1988:109) cites the apocryphal text of a hymn sung at the Last Supper whose words specify Christ as the Lord of the Dance who goes half-willingly to his death, dancing on the razor's edge of oppositions, one of which is "I would flee, and I would stay". His scourging and shaming as a criminal, his descent into hell, even his words "my God, why have you forsaken me?" on the cross serve to render absolute his death, absolute the sorrow of his disciples, to leave nothing untransformed during the blackening in the crucible. And the cross on which he is crucified is symbolically a tree—a reprise of the Tree of Death. As Jung observes in his *Symbols of Transformation* (1956:432), there are other sacrificed gods who hang from trees; notable is Odin of the Norse myths (Wotan to the Germanic tribes) who is sacrificed by himself to himself, and who hangs for nine days upon the tree Yggdrasil, the *axis mundi* at the center of the Norse cosmogram. The cross on Calvary may not stand in

the geographic center of the world of ancient times, but it does stand in the doorway between this world and the Otherworld.

The wounding of Christ in his side releases a flow of blood and water, as the gospels inform us. Jung, in his *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass* (1958:220), likens that mixture to a union of spirit and nature, and finds it reflected in the practice of mixing wine with water during the preparation of the chalice in the Mass. Wine equals blood equals spirit. This *commixtio* reaffirms the dual nature of the sacrifice.

We find in the New Testament multiple references (in 1 Peter, Revelation, Ephesians, Colossians) to the power of the blood of Christ; it is the substance through which redemption is possible. In Revelation (7:14), the robes of the elect who come out of great tribulation are made white through washing in the blood of the Lamb. That same blood permits triumph over Satan, triumph over undue attachment to this life. That blood is the seal of the new dispensation, which renders obsolete all need for animal offering; from now on all offerings will be of one's heart to God, figuratively speaking. The crucifixion is the blood sacrifice to end all blood sacrifices. And in large measure, the spread of Christianity accomplished just that, in *ritual* contexts. Nonetheless, a special place in heaven was reserved for martyrs, whose deaths were seen as expiatory on behalf of all believers, and without whom this young religion might well have failed to inspire. But after the conversion of the Romans to Christianity, the defenders of an increasingly intolerant faith put thousands of infidels to the sword, including the strayed sheep of the home flock. This intolerance reached a zenith during the Inquisition, a pogrom which erected and bloodied many iron Trees of Death. It was the repression of the collective Shadow of Christianity which backfired into a holocaust. Nonetheless, the figure of Christ in a multiplicity of sects still has great efficacy as a vehicle for transformation. We shall reconsider the psychic implications of this.

Blood Sacrifice in Mesoamerica: Prologue

As in the case of the Old World, the peoples of native North and Central America were first nomadic hunter-gatherers; archaeological evidence bears this out, and many North American tribes maintained this mode of subsistence until the coming of the white man. Typically, hunter-gatherer societies have at their center the figure of the shaman, who is medical doctor, psychotherapist, myth-bearer, storyteller, arbiter in disputes, and adventurer *par excellence* in the nether regions of the unconscious, the realm of lost souls (Eliade, 1964). By means of trance

or psychotropic drugs or both, the shaman could move through the door between the worlds. Because of his power, which included the power to do harm should he choose, this person was often feared, but he was also vital to the community. He stood in the center of the cosmogram, reading the weather of both worlds, forecasting and prescribing accordingly.

In the move toward sedentarism, which took place in both North and Central America, the role of the shaman expanded to embrace the political role of priest-king. Agriculture is labor-intensive; it requires a chain of command. Sedentarism encourages specialization, and arises mutually with competition and territoriality, which lead to warfare. In the Old World case, scholars have tended to assume that the priest-king no longer had to actually travel to the underworld—he merely had to claim he did, or claim descent from one who did. He still had private audience with the gods, but his social functions were relegated to political decisions, to officiating at ceremonies. In Mesoamerica, the king certainly had priestly and political responsibilities, but in the Maya case it seems likely that the office required sojourns in the Otherworld as well (Schele and Miller, 1986). Archaeological, iconographic, and hieroglyphic evidence points to the pervasive practice of personal bloodletting on the part of the ruler—a rite leading to visionary states in which the ancestors were contacted. There is also some evidence for the use of psychotropic plants.

The Maya Sacrificial Complex in Myth and Ritual

In a Classic Maya hieroglyphic tale of creation (the Tablets of the Cross Group at Palenque; cf. Schele, 1987), the Mother Goddess gives birth to triplet gods over an eighteen-day interval; two of these gods figure centrally in the alter-ego imagery of rulership on stone monuments and in underworld scenes on pottery throughout the Classic Period (200-900 A.D.). They are also transformations of the Hero-Twins *Hunahpu* and *Xbalanque* of the *Popol Vuh,* the genesis myth of the Quiche Maya, a highland tribe in Guatemala (Tedlock, 1985). Since Michael Coe's (1973, 1978) demonstration that many Classic pottery scenes echo events in the *Popol Vuh,* it is now clear that the Quiche have preserved an ancient mythos, a version of which formed a substratum of Classic Maya culture.

The third god born to the Goddess, *K'awil,* becomes the patron of lineage blood. His name means "sustenance"; his image adorns the handles of royal penis-perforators, depicted in the iconography and known archaeologically. He is the god who paces the quadripartite

celestial cosmogram; he is the god who is reborn when offerings of blood are made at important period endings. It is the role of man to recreate the gods' act of creation, and this god of lineage blood may perhaps be identified with the first entity to give order to man's existence on earth, according to the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Roys, 1967).

Maya kings are often depicted in female attire when they perform rites of genital bloodletting; they wear a characteristic but shortened beaded skirt, and a belt emblem symbolic of women. We will see that blood offerings from the penis assure fertility; from ethnographic sources we also know that many Mayan people regard menstrual blood as the essence of the human fetus; nine "bloods" make a baby (Neuenswander, n.d.). In an appropriation of the numinous feminine (and what culture does not fear menstrual blood?) Maya kings may be borrowing and reshaping a mystery of earlier times, or of antecedent matriarchal myths. Here we have another example of motif inversion. Evidence for this practice abounds in other cultures. In the *Popol Vuh,* the Hero-Twins are ballplayers, born in the underworld of the spittle of First Father and a daughter of the Lords of Death. After relocating to heaven and reaching adolescence, they are summoned into the underworld to play the sacred ballgame against the Lords of Death. Before they go, they each plant an ear of corn in the center of their house, and they tell their worried grandmother that if either of them dies, so shall the corn plant that he planted. This way, she will not worry needlessly. Herein we see one manifestation of the equation between a god and a sacred cultigen.

The travails of the twins in *Xibalba* (as the underworld is known) are many and long; they engage the Death Lords in the ballgame, overcome their treachery through cleverness and a streak of immortality, willingly immolate themselves and become burnt bone which is ground and thrown into the river. They become fish, and then are reinstated as gods, whereupon they return to *Xibalba* as wandering magicians, and trick the Death Lords into allowing themselves to be sacrificed, with the promise that they will be brought back to life. They are not brought back, and so the first shamans triumph over death. This all happens before the first humans are created. It is these trickster-shaman gods whom the Maya rulers take as their alter-egos during rituals, dressing in the attire and holding the insignia corresponding to each.

In the *Popol Vuh, Tohil* is a storm god who lives in a mountain, and who offers fire to the first humans in exchange for their allowing him to suckle their armpits. We later learn that this suckling is a metaphor for heart sacrifice. And while the *Popol Vuh* is a late version of the tale,

we may assume that the story is ancient. Herein we have the charter for heart sacrifice, and a charter for man as "the mother of the gods"—an epithet which appears not only in hieroglyphic texts but as the name for the shaman in Quiche. The word is *chuchkahaw* "the mother of our lord".

The storm god *Tohil* may also be a reflex of Classic rain gods, who give not only rain but fire, since lightning strikes are a primary source of fire for man. Fire is needed to burn the fields (and was no doubt in man's hands long before the first fields were burned); rain is needed to nourish the growing crop. The present-day shamans of Yucatan are also rainmakers, as they are in every land where the rain gods are fickle beings.

K'awil, the Classic god of the perforator, is typically adorned with leaves and shoots of the maize plant, symbolizing fertility. From this we may infer that lineage blood was equated with fertility and the growing maize, that the king's blood was in fact the life of the land. This theme has been stressed by Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1959), who found it echoed in stories of ritual regicide as well as in the myths of the dying savior gods. We find it in the Grail legend as well.

The maize deity *Hun Nal Ye,* First Father, is characterized by his beauty and youth, is associated with fertility, and is featured in sacrificial scenes on Classic pottery (Friedel, Schele, and Parker, 1993). Here we have a startling reiteration of the Old World theme: the youthful sacrificed god of vegetation who is eternally reborn. His head appears as maize ears on the famous Foliated Cross at the Maya site of Palenque in southern Mexico. Jung, in *Symbols of Transformation* (Fig. 41a), was the first to posit the Maya crosses at Palenque as manifestations of the World Tree. The image which appears at the base of the Foliated Cross also appears on loincloths of rulers, suggesting that the ruler's penis (and by extension, the rest of him) is the *axis mundi.* A related cross, with the same polymorphic serpent-bird perched atop it, falls into the Underworld with the dead king Pacal on the sarcophagus lid of the Tablet of the Inscriptions at Palenque; together they enter the open skeletal jaws of the Underworld Dragon, but with a certainty of rebirth (recalling the rebirth from ground bone of the Hero Twins). Thus this cross (which is in its dimensions like the Christian cross) symbolizes both death and rebirth. Furthermore, the Foliated Cross referred to earlier is the central icon in a panel which bears a hieroglyphic text specifying the relationship between the god of lineage blood and his descendant, the current king of Palenque.

The Maya were once thought to be peace-loving, but epigraphy and iconography tell another story (Schele and Miller, 1986: Ch. 5). At regular intervals, often dictated by the movements of the planet Venus,

they engaged in ritual battle for the purpose of obtaining prisoners for sacrifice. We know little of the dialogue between captor and captive beyond the posture of submission of the latter, but we may infer some things about it from exchanges between captor and captive in the Aztec "flowery wars". There, the captor called the captive "son" and the latter called his captor "father" (Sahagún, 1951: Book 2). A formal relation was thus established. We will learn more about this shortly. A Colonial Period play translated by Dennis Tedlock from the Achi dialect of Quiche concerns a dialogue between the captor, a noble captive, and the captor's chief (Tedlock, personal communication, 1989). It underscores the lengthy formalities antecedent to sacrifice and the acceptance by the captive of his mission. Nonetheless, he is carefully guarded and does attempt unsuccessfully to escape. We are reminded of the words "I would stay and I would flee" spoken by Christ in the apocryphal gospel of John.

Unlike our own silver-backed males, Maya kings and nobles were not exempt from obligations on the battlefield. They too ran the risk of capture and sacrifice, either by decapitation or by heart excision. Their participation in the process closes the distance between the priest-king and the victim, and strengthens the identity referred to earlier.

One image from a Classic monument at Piedras Negras shows what may be either quetzal plumes or vegetation sprouting from the excised heart. In decapitation scenes from pre-Maya cultures we see serpents springing from the severed neck; this motif reappears in the ballcourt panels of Chichen-Itza in Yucatan. It is this scene which led to the controversy over the destiny of the winners of the sacred ballgame, but there is in fact no evidence suggesting that they were sacrificed, as Joseph Campbell (1988:108) entertains. In some cases, captives were probably dressed as ballplayers and made to play the game (Schele and Miller, 1986: Ch. 6), with the outcome certain; this finds kinship with the enticement of the Hero-Twins by the Lords of Death: *come play ball with us; you're gonna lose, and you're gonna die".* The foregoing does not negate Campbell's premise of "going to the sacrifice as the winning stroke of life", but rather serves to focus on the dual nature of the victim: he is a man, and he is a god. The god goes triumphantly; the man will escape if he can.

The murals at Bonampak, as well as Classic polychrome pottery, depict Maya ritual torture prior to sacrifice; this is a practice of which the Aztecs are thought to be generally innocent. Some of the same mortifications practiced on captives were undertaken by the rulers upon themselves, though certainly not the severest ones, such as the breaking of limbs, burning, and disembowelment. These self-mortifications might accompany captive torture and sacrifice, but they were as

likely to occur in other contexts. Perforation of the ears, tongue, and genitals is documented in various scenes. A specific tongue autosacrifice at Yaxchilan on the part of women resulted in the appearance of a vision serpent, out of whose mouth emerged the lineage ancestor. The blood-soaked cord which she pulled through her tongue was burned in a bowl filled with bark paper, and the coiling smoke of the burning rope became the serpent in an alchemy which is echoed in modern Maya folktales and dream interpretation systems (Thompson, 1930; Bruce, 1979): ropes and snakes are a paired motif; the one presages the other. As in the Old World, burning is the vehicle of transformation. The smoke of the burnt offering ascended to heaven, carrying with it the essence. A Kekchi Maya youth once told me that copal smoke is the channel of communication with one's dead relatives.

In the shamanic texts of Conquest-period Yucatan (Roys, 1967), we find images of lineage foundation laid out on a quadripartite cosmogram; at each corner we find a sacred tree, sacred stones and birds. In other versions we find a four-sided arbor, and at each corner, sacred male genitals and splotches of blood associated with birth. While we don't yet know many details of Classic Maya foundation rites, we do know specifics of the rites of royal accession. One pattern elucidated by Linda Schele and Mary Miller in *The Blood of Kings* (1986: Ch. 2) involves binding the victim into a seat on a scaffold in front of the ruler-to-be and his attendants. He is tortured in a manner designed to spill as much blood as possible, and then he is dispatched and cut loose from the scaffold. The ruler wades through the pooled blood and climbs a cloth-draped ladder onto the scaffold, leaving bloody footprints. He takes the seat once occupied by the captive, and dons a headdress symbolic of birth. The scaffold is draped with cloth bearing the image of the double-headed Celestial Monster, whose heads are associated with the Hero-Twins. This transformation of the scaffold completes the identification of the ruler with the *axis mundi*, which the scaffold also symbolizes, as does the aforementioned arbor. These images now flesh out the Maya version of the World Tree constellation, which, like its Old World equivalent, occupies the cosmic midpoint and embraces both life and death.

There is bounteous archaeological evidence for human sacrifice among the Maya; we see this in the form of slain captives placed at the doors to tombs, skeletons without grave goods stuffed into cracks in deep caves (MacLeod, n.d., Reents-Budet and MacLeod, in press). Many of the latter were infant sacrifices, and we learn from early Colonial sources that the rain gods, who occupy caves, preferred children. Many royal graves have either other skulls or effigy heads associated with them; some burials have the skull placed between the knees,

suggesting decapitation. In one cave I investigated in Belize, more than forty skeletons without skulls were tucked into cracks or laid on ledges; we found the skulls in a walled-off corner of the cave. Supportive evidence is seen in the images of rulers on stone monuments who have trophy heads on their belts.

The image of the crucifix made a strong impression on the Maya, such that during occasional lapses in the sixteenth century, the Maya took the new motif to heart and occasionally crucified their victims (Thompson, 1970:177), after which heart excision was performed. On the one hand, the Maya could be said to have re-concretized an image designed to spiritualize the archetype; on the other hand, we may find in these events a synthesis involving appropriation and identification with the conquerors, or perhaps even a motive of defiance and mockery of the new religion and its sanctioned sacrificial image.

A final Maya source is a Colonial text, titled "The Song of the Archer" (Sodi, 1976), in which the rite of arrow sacrifice is featured. The song praises the youth and beauty of the chosen victim, lingers on the image of his suffering as he is pierced by arrows which do not kill immediately. The gods, we are told, are pleased to see one so beautiful suffer a little. This calls to mind the archetypal Son-Lover, a consort of the Great Mother, and makes one wonder whether the Mother Goddess is not still demanding her due below the patriarchal veneer of Precolumbian Maya society. We may recall that the triplet gods were born of a primordial Goddess. Furthermore, the Creator who paces off the world in the *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Roys, 1967) is accompanied by his aunt and his maternal grandmother. And finally, the Hero Twins of the *Popol Vuh* set forth from their grandmother's house—perhaps a metaphor for the emergence of a patriarchal hero-cycle from the bosom of an older matriarchal order.

It is appropriate now to supplement what we have inferred of the Mesoamerican blood complex with a few words about the Aztecs, who have for so many years basked in the sacrificial limelight. Much of what we know of their ceremonies comes from the writings of Spanish chroniclers—conquistadors and clergymen who were present at the conquest and during its immediate aftermath. Often this information was relayed in rich detail to the Spaniards by Aztec nobles who witnessed these rites. The most exhaustive and reliable source among these is the series of volumes by Fray Bernardo de Sahagun (1950) known as *The Florentine Codex,* from whose volume on ceremonies (Book 2) most of the following descriptions of Aztec rites are taken.

Blood Sacrifice in the Aztec World

We might begin with a comparison made by Jung in his *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass* (1958:168-172). In this rite, called *teocualli* (which means "god-eating"), an effigy of the war god *Huitzilopochtli* was formed from a pasty dough made of crushed poppy seeds. The myth of the death of the god was recounted: his slaying by *Quetzalcoatl* in the presence of the king, the breaking up of his body, in which his heart is given to the king to eat and the rest divided out among those present. During the ceremony, the edible effigy is likewise apportioned, with Moctezuma receiving the heart. Jung considers this ritual to be parallel to the Christian Mass.

Like the Postclassic Maya, the Aztecs also practiced arrow sacrifice, but heart excision was the favored rite. *Huitzilopochtli* was honored with these sacrifices on a nearly daily basis, if we believe some accounts. At the close of important calendrical cycles, hearts were offered to *Tonatiuh,* the sungod. In fact, most gods were routinely granted such favors, with the exception of *Quetzalcoatl,* about whom there is some ambiguity. Legend has it that he was a culture-bringer who disavowed sacrifice; he may well have been a historical king of the pre-Aztec period. His cult spills over into the Maya area, where he is known as *Kukulcan:* both names mean "feathered serpent". Nonetheless, codices from Central Mexico depict *Quetzalcoatl* with a knife in his hand, gouging out an eye. His story is far too long to tell here, but we see in his ambiguity the struggle toward spiritualization mentioned at the beginning of this discussion. The ancient Greeks were certainly divided on the issue of human offerings, and we have seen the traces of struggle among the Israelites.

The rain god *Tlaloc* was particularly fond of children, as was his counterpart *Chaac* among the Maya. Children of exceptional beauty, or with certain signs like double cowlicks, were bought from their parents, with the words "these are precious blood-offerings. The rain gods receive them with rejoicing". The children were encouraged to cry, for this symbolized the rain which would come. But when onlookers wept for the children, which we are told did happen, they were consoled with the assurance that the rain gods were already pleased, and that the tears were a good sign. The image of weeping onlookers is an important one, in that it is a clue that among the Aztec also, sacrifice stirred compassion for the victim.

We may recall the surrogate father-son relationship which obtained at the time of capture. We can only wonder about the commitment involved in this relationship on the part of the captive. Díaz de Castillo (1973) describes one case wherein the Spanish soldiers freed

a Tlaxcalan captive of the Aztecs, but he refused to return home, having consigned himself to his fate, and to the honor which accompanied it.

Sahagún tells us that in rites of captive sacrifice, the victim would often dance with his captor, thus cementing the bond between them for all to see. Not all captives were so cooperative, however; occasionally one did go kicking and screaming. But this was considered shameful; it tarnished the glory of his passage.

There were several prolonged rites of god impersonation which carried to exquisite extremes the process of bonding between the victim and the community. One honored *Quetzalcoatl,* and lasted forty days, during which the youth was revered and feasted; he wore both mask and attire of the god. He was also kept caged at night, to preclude an unseemly escape. At the end, it was critical that he maintain equanimity, and not appear sad. To that end, he was given a large measure of pulque to drink.

The most elaborate of the impersonation rites honored *Tezcatlipoca,* the Smoking Mirror and prototype sorcerer-god, the most powerful of all. In this figure we catch a reflection of the primordial shaman; the dark mirror symbolizes the doorway between the worlds. His other characteristic (shared with the Maya god *K'awil)* was a serpent foot. Kent Reilly (personal communication) has suggested that the archaic forerunner of both of these was an Olmec deity portrayed at a cave shrine. The Olmec civilization predates that of the Classic Maya by a thousand years.

To return to the drama: the youth chosen to impersonate *Tezcatlipoca* was perfection in the extreme, smooth skinned, without blemish, and with long straight hair. The form of his buttocks was even specified, which certainly suggests a sexual component if his perfection did not. He was wined and dined like a king; people sighed at him, begged favors and mementos, kissed the ground he walked on. He went everywhere festooned with flowers and jewels. He carried many flutes, and played them to the delight of his audiences. He was treated as a god by the emperor Moctezuma. During the last twenty-day month of his life, he was given four brides, who impersonated major goddesses. He danced and feasted through his last four days, then was taken by canoe to the temple where he was to be sacrificed. As he climbed the steps of the temple, he broke his flutes one by one. At the summit he was seized by the priests and his heart excised.

If we trust the accounts of Sahagún's informants, cannibalism was apparently practiced to some degree. The captor might retain a choice portion of the victim's body, or make a gift of it to the king. Sahagún even provides favored recipes for the preparation of human flesh. These accounts have led Harris (1977:105-110) to advocate the eco-

nomic motive (i.e. the need for protein in times of game depletion) as the key to "the riddle of Aztec sacrifice", following an initial suggestion by Michael Harner (1975). In contrast, Arens (1979) ventures that there is very little evidence for actual cannibalism among the Aztecs; this is based upon his examination of Sahagún's writing, and his assessment of it as "a mosaic filled in by various artisans under the direction of a master craftsman who had a projected completed vision in mind" (p. 68). He points out that, unlike the descriptions of Aztec sacrifice, which were detailed accounts corroborated by many eyewitnesses, the references to cannibalism in Sahagún's Book 2 are vague, indirect suppositions. He also points out that the Aztecs expressed fears of the Europeans as man-eaters during the initial stages of contact; these reciprocal attributions (which might be understood as reciprocal projections of the Shadow) only serve to reiterate Arens' comment that "truth is often the first casualty of any war" (p. 60). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that recently deciphered Maya inscriptions appear to refer to the sacrifice and eating of war prisoners.

A pattern seen in the non-Judaic Old World is reiterated among the Aztec: that of sending a plethora of retainers along to the Otherworld, for keeps, when a singularly important ruler was buried. The ruler was cremated along with the bodies of the slaves, who were first killed by heart removal. A similar pattern has been archaeologically reconstructed for the Maya (Schele, pers. comm. 1988).

The Aztecs have gained much attention for the sheer numbers sacrificed: in one account by Sahagún, when the Great Temple was inaugurated (recalling foundation sacrifices in the Old World), somewhere between 14,000 and 80,000 captives were slain. The streets ran with blood, and everyone was required to attend. Even the lesser number seems most unreasonable for a four-day ceremony, with the priests working three shifts, but whatever the figures, it was a mind-boggling extravaganza, one which begs for special consideration, and for details and motives which will never be available. If the economic directive cannot be invoked, we are left with other speculations: (1) the singular importance of the dedicatory event, coupled with political agendas of the elite; (2) a current plethora of Tlaxcalan captives, and no place to put them; (3) an insatiable "sacrificial crisis" (following Girard's suggestion); (4) an insatiable archetypal directive. Perhaps all are to some extent correct.

Aztec priests performed autosacrifice routinely; they were described by the Spaniards as bedecked in reeking, blood-spattered robes, their hair matted with clotted blood, their ears bearing the wounds of perforation. They were pariahs of a sort—very powerful

ones. They did most of the dirty work, but the king also sacrificed captives, sometimes on a daily basis.

The Spanish conquerors (Díaz de Castillo, 1973), in their accounts of Aztec rites, focused mainly on the offering of human hearts to the sun god, *Tonatiuh*, to keep him on track. But an examination of the later record demonstrates that more energy was devoted to fertility and protection of the crops—a pattern we would expect in an agricultural orthodoxy. The flowing blood, the burned hearts were considered food for the gods in a relationship of reciprocity: they feed us, and we feed them.

In neither the Aztec nor the Maya case can we directly establish guilt and atonement as a prime mover in pre-Christian rites of sacrifice. This does not preclude its presence, but the concept of "sin" as a barrier between the realms is not universal.

The Mesoamerican Sacrificial Complex and the Judeo-Christian Sacrificial Complex: A Comparison

We might, as an exercise, graft what we know of the Aztecs onto what we know of the Maya, remaining mindful of known and posited cultural differences. Many shared features crisscross Mesoamerica, from calendars to cosmograms to calques (loan translations, such as gold being "excrement of the sun"), and most scholars agree that the threads of Mesoamerican history suggest that its diverse cultures evolved from the "mother culture" of the Olmecs. We thus have some justification for suggesting that there is a pan-Mesoamerican sacrificial complex. Taken together, these two civilizations present many important parallels with the Judeo-Christian sacrificial complex. The concept of "the blood of the covenant" would ring true if translated into a Mayan tongue. In Abraham's case, the covenant is the lineage. In both cultures under discussion, blood is divine.

Foundation sacrifices, involving buildings or lineages, appear in both traditions.

The Maya practiced and still practice animal sacrifice in caves, at mountaintop shrines. At a mountaintop shrine, Abraham's hand was stayed. The Aztecs took children to mountaintops for sacrifice.

The World Tree complexes of both the Old World and the New share striking similarities; the sap of the tree is the blood of the king is the life of the land; the tree is the cross is the cosmic midpoint is the revolving door between life and death.

The theme of circumcision, particularly if it is a reflex of more archaic matriarchal rites, resounds in that most hallowed act of Maya rulers: penis perforation. While the fecundity factor of genital blood has only been cited in passing, it is clearly a theme shared by both cultures. By this blood the earth is nourished. Genital blood may be a surrogate for the menstrual blood which builds the fetus. An old Lacandon Maya of the early part of this century nicked his penis with an obsidian blade and sprinkled the blood in the four corners of his newly-planted cornfield. Are we told what the Hebrews did with their foreskins? It is important to remember that the Hebrews were herders at heart, while the Maya were planters.

Taking into account the Maya king's participation in the sacrificial Venus wars, we find that the variations on the theme of ritual regicide appear in both Old World and New.

On both continents smoke is a vehicle of communication with the god.

The rite of eating the god appears in both worlds; it takes in both cases the form of an edible effigy which is broken and distributed.

On both continents (Judaism excepted), the principal cultigen is deified, and is a reflection of the dying son-lover of the Great Mother.

The dual nature of the victim is highlighted in both worlds. He stands in the doorway; he is both man and god. The man would escape, while the god embraces his destiny. And in both worlds that destiny is a blissful and eternal sojourn in the afterlife.

In both the Aztec and Maya cultures, we find ritual which forges an identity between the victim and the captor or priest; the images of captive and captor dancing, and of the king occupying the scaffold seat, create a deliberate ambiguity whose resolution is a mystery in the truest sense of the word.

From what we know of the elaborate choreography, the dramatic stage-set, the obligation of the masses to attend these rites in both Mesoamerican cultures, we may assume that the crowd gave and received power by its presence. They were witnesses to an awesome transformation; they were permitted by their bond with the victim to experience a dress rehearsal of their own passage through the doorway. In the celebration of the Mass, we also find this group directive toward a transformative experience; those who accept the transubstantiation of the bread and wine are rewarded with a view through the door.

We have seen that in both worlds, a movement toward spiritualization appeared. This reached full flowering shortly after the death of Christ, who, because of what history has made of him, has taken a heroic step beyond the role of the son-lover. We will never know how

the figure of *Quetzalcoatl*-as-redeemer might have asserted itself had the Spaniards not come; certainly the Aztecs were ready for a major overhaul, as were the Romans when Christianity came along.

A Modern Western Sacrificial Complex?

Paradoxically, many of the foregoing images of death, in contrast with the usual fare in the media, stir something vital within us, something which is not awakened by the smorgasbord of gratuitous violence, although there may be a modicum of bloodlust here as well.

Joseph Campbell, in *The Power of Myth,* (1988:112) affirms Abelard's view that the purpose of Christ's crucifixion was to evoke compassion and make atonement possible thereby. *Passion* and *compassion* are two sides of a coin; they purge our hearts of materialism and egoism, and inspire us to a loftier goal. Abelard's interpretation also serves to make the murky water of "original sin", with its implicit polarities, stand clear. A line from a song by Leonard Cohen comes to mind:

> *"I've been where you're hanging;*
> *I think I can see how you're pinned;*
> *when you're not feeling holy,*
> *your loneliness says that you've sinned".*

Alienation and compassion are mutually incompatible states of being, and yet they interact in a diachronic symbiosis which gives definition to each. Alienation hinders not only our relationships with others, but also the relationships between the protagonists on the inner stage of the psyche. It blocks access to the archetypal Self, in which polarities, which can all be understood in terms of I vs. other, dissolve into unity. In our pilgrimage to the shrine of this elusive image, we may find landmarks in the commentary of Jungians, who in different ways regard the urge toward sacrifice to be an essential quality of the hero. Here is a passage from Erich Neumann's *The Origins and History of Consciousness:*

> "But the hero, as the vehicle of this effort at compensation, becomes alienated from the normal human situation and from the collective. This decollectivization entails suffering, and he suffers at the same time because, in his struggle for freedom, he is also the victim and representative of the

obsolete, old order and is forced to bear the burden of it in his own soul.

The significance of this fact has already been pointed out by Jung, who speaks of the fatal compulsion that draws the hero towards sacrifice and suffering.

Whether his deeds are looked upon as services, as with Herakles, whose life, like the life of many if not all heroes, is a series of strenuous labors and difficult tasks, or whether this symbolism takes the form of a bull-sacrifice as with Mithras, or crucifixion as with Jesus, or being chained to the Caucasus as with Prometheus, always and everywhere we meet with the motif of sacrifice and suffering.

The sacrifice to be made may mean sacrificing the old matriarchal world of childhood or the real world of the adult; sometimes the future has to be sacrificed for the sake of the present, sometimes the present so that the hero may fulfill the future. The nature of the hero is as manifold as the agonizing situations of real life. But always he is compelled to sacrifice normal living in whatever form it may touch him, whether it be mother, father, child, homeland, sweetheart, brother, or friend.

Jung puts it that the danger to which the hero is exposed is 'isolation in himself'. The suffering entailed by the very fact of being an ego and an individual is implicit in the hero's situation of having to distinguish himself psychologically from his fellows. He sees things they do not see, does not fall for the things they fall for—but that means that he is a different type of human being and therefore necessarily alone. The loneliness of Prometheus on the rock or of Christ on the cross is the sacrifice they have to endure for having brought fire and redemption to mankind."

—*The Origins and History of Consciousness* p. 378-379

Neumann paints a picture of sacrifice as the companion to alienation, rather than its catharsis. And yet, if we move through the Passion toward the Resurrection, Christ becomes symbolic of unity and transcendence which were not possible before his death on the cross. The hero-cycle always has a season of reconciliation. In *Ego and Archetype,* Edward Edinger advises us that alienation is a necessary stage through which the ego must pass before it may turn again toward the Self. Before resolution of opposites can be experienced, the ego must

endure suspension between them. He cites (1973:58) a patient of Rollo May's, who, after a long struggle with alienation due to having been an illegitimate child, had a spontaneous breakthrough which she labeled *"I am"*. She described this revelation as a return to a personal Eden, beyond good and evil, in which she, the child, found the grammatical subject of her own sentence.

What May has called the "I am" experience, Edinger interprets as a restitution of the ego-Self axis, in this case triggered by a strong positive transference. Transference is the projection of an inner protagonist upon an outer figure. This has relevance for the witness to an act of blood sacrifice, who in his projection upon the human/divine victim may find an ontological safety net as he gazes through the door between the worlds. But to modern man, who in theory places a high value on the sovereignty of the individual, there is something suspect about an ontology built on the premise of deliberately causing suffering and death to other beings in order to facilitate a peek through the door. We overtly object to this as atavistic, predatory, irresponsible; we claim to want this death-practice, this practice-death transformed into spirit. No matter that as a culture we revel in the glory of war and the deeds of young lost heroes; Tolkien's (1965) *Lord of the Rings* resounds with the echoes of this thrall, and we savor and reread it. And our culture's fascination with violence has already been mentioned. Perhaps Girard is correct; perhaps there is a voice within us which craves a sacrificial experience, but now we draw the line at deliberate *ritual* prearrangement. Our military strategy, which sends forth the young to die for the political and economic interests of the old, might be viewed as deliberate *secular* prearrangement.

On the individual level, perhaps we thirst for a sanctification of our own wounds, which are for most of us foreordained. They come with the territory, so to speak—the territory being a fragmented and alienating society whose mythic framework has been ruptured and appropriated for political ends. The process of sanctification must of necessity bare these wounds to us. This experience will at first be horrifying; it may be overwhelming. As we noted earlier, Jung writes that this upwelling of psychic pain may often be prefigured by dreams of rites of sacrifice or torture.

The image of Christ crucified, the redemptive power of the Blood of the Lamb—these have endured for two millennia not only because of a lucky break in Christianity's early political history, but also because for its followers, meditation upon the crucifixion slakes the thirst for sacrifice. In Christian doctrine, Christ's suffering was foreordained by the sin of Adam. For those of us who can either suspend disbelief in dogma or embrace the myth fully without the crutch of absolute

historicity, the image of a man agonizing on a cross can draw the poison out of our wounds. Edinger speaks eloquently of this process:

> "One of the essential features of the Christian myth and the teaching of Jesus is the attitude taken toward weakness and suffering. A real transvaluation of ordinary values is brought about. Strength, power, fullness, and success, the usual conscious values, are denied. Instead, weakness, suffering, poverty, and failure are given special dignity. This point is developed throughout Jesus' teachings and is given its supreme representation in the crucifixion itself where God is degradingly scourged and dies the shameful death of a criminal on the cross. This is what was beyond the comprehension of the Romans, for whom honor, strength, and manly virtue were the supreme values. Psychologically understood, we have here, I think, a clash between the goals and values of two different phases of ego development. Preoccupation with personal honor and strength and the despising of weakness is inevitable and necessary in the early stages of ego development. The ego must learn to assert itself in order to come into existence at all. Hence the Christian myth has little place in the psychology of the young.
>
> It is in the later phases of psychic development, when a fairly stable and mature ego has already been achieved, that the psychological implications of the Christian myth are especially applicable. In fact, the Christian myth presents us with attitudes and images pertaining to the individuation process which is specifically a task of the second half of life. At this phase of development, the image of the suffering deity is immensely pertinent. This symbol tells us that the experience of suffering, weakness, and failure belongs to the Self and not just to the ego. It is the almost universal mistake of the ego to assume total personal responsibility for its sufferings and failures. We find it, for instance, in the general attitude people have toward their own weaknesses, an attitude of shame or denial. If one is weak in some respect, as everyone is, and at the same time considers it ignominious to be weak, he is to that extent deprived of self-realization. However, to recognize experiences of weakness and failure as manifestations of the suffering god striving for incarnation gives one a very different viewpoint."
>
> —*Ego and Archetype* p. 152-153

> "In summary, the blood of Christ represents the primal power of life itself as manifested on the psychic plane, with profound potentiality for good or ill. As a symbol of the fluid essence of Selfhood and totality it contains and reconciles all opposites. If it comes as a fiery influx of undifferentiated energy it can destroy the petrified or undeveloped ego. On the other hand it is the nourishing, supporting, binding, life-promoting energy which flows from the transpersonal center of the psyche and which maintains, validates, and justifies the continuing existence of the personal center of the psyche, the ego".
>
> —p. 259

Jung, too, has addressed this task of ego, which must renounce its claim in deference to the Self. He says, "the act of making a sacrifice consists in the first place in giving something *which belongs to me*. . .which bears the stamp of mineness". His view is that there are two ways to bring about this intentional loss:

> "This conflict between conscious and unconscious is at least brought nearer to a solution through our becoming aware of it. Such an act of realization is presupposed in the act of self-sacrifice. The ego must make itself conscious of its claim, and the self must cause the ego to renounce it. This can happen in two ways:
>
> (1) I renounce my claim in consideration of a general moral principle, namely that one must not expect repayment for a gift. In this case the 'self' coincides with public opinion and the moral code. It is then identical with Freud's superego because it is projected, and therefore essentially unconscious and identical with environmental circumstances.
>
> (2) I renounce my claim because I feel impelled to do so for painful inner reasons which are not altogether clear to me. These reasons give me no particular moral satisfaction; on the contrary, I even feel some resistance to them. But I must yield to the power which suppresses my egoistic claim. Here the self is integrated; it is withdrawn from projection and has become perceptible as a determining psychic factor."
>
> —"Transformation Symbolism in the Mass"
> in *Psyche & Symbol* p. 210

> ". . .These two ways of renouncing one's egoistic claim reveal not only a difference of attitude, but also a difference of situation. In the first case the situation need not affect me personally and directly; in the second the gift must necessarily be a very personal one which seriously affects the giver and forces him to overcome himself. In the one case it is merely a question, say, of going to Mass; in the other it is more like Abraham's sacrifice of his son or Christ's decision in Gethsemane. The one may be felt very earnestly and experienced with all piety, but the other is the real thing.
>
> So long as the self is unconscious it corresponds to Freud's superego and is a source of perpetual moral conflict. If, however, it is withdrawn from projection and is no longer identical with public opinion, then one is truly one's own yea and nay. The self then functions as a union of opposites and thus constitutes the most immediate experience of the Divine which it is psychologically possible to imagine."
>
> —p. 211

We may recall that the "gift" concept was central to early anthropological interpretations of sacrifice, such as that of Tylor, and derivatively, that of Durkheim. We will also find that the "gift" motive, as voiced by a Lakota shaman, is central to the Plains Indians' sweatlodge and Sun Dance rites.

The Return to the Sun Pole: The Sacrificial Directive Among the Plains Indians

What might we infer about Native American traditions? Have we any right to speak of their psychological directives? We have found parallels, discussed above, in both image and ritual between New World and Old; can we therefore assume similar motives in sacrificial rites between Mesoamerica and native American peoples of the USA and Canada? There are serious problems with any synthesis, in that there is nothing like cultural homogeneity across the range of native North America, and the ethnohistorical record vis-a-vis preconquest Mesoamerica leaves us little hard psychological evidence. Native Americans, including the Mayas and Aztecs, have suffered disintegration and absorption at the hands of their conquerors. We have seen evidence suggesting that the compassion motive and the projection of

inner contents upon the figure of the dying god were also operative in Mesoamerica. We might assume that Mesoamericans, like ourselves and all peoples of the earth, were and are fascinated with the borderland between life and death.

One way we might get at some threads of the Mesoamerican sacrificial directive is via other Native Americans who continue to practice blood sacrifice in the manner of their ancestors (or so they say). I refer to the rite of the Sun Dance, forms of which were once widespread across the Great Plains, and whose popularity since decriminalization is now growing among Indians, with a burgeoning body of white support. In this rite, Sun Dancers make a vow the year before, often because of a dream; accompanying the vow is a prayer or request which may be as specific as bringing a son home from Vietnam (but which is never trivial), or as general as "peace on earth, goodwill toward men". Ritual sweat baths precede the rite. A perfect cottonwood tree is sought by four scouts; when it is found it is consecrated, cut down, and carried to the center of the community: the sacred circle. There it is firmly planted. This is the Sun Pole, which, given its central placement and its sacrificial purpose, is suggestive of the World Tree motif discussed earlier. The dance is done for four days around the pole; on the last day the dancer is attached to the pole by means of a thong tied to an eagle claw (or perhaps two) which is inserted into the flesh of his chest and fixed, so that the only way he can free himself is to tear the claw loose. He suffers a great deal. He is almost certain to receive a vision as he dances leaning back against the thong, blowing on his eaglebone whistle. This vision may be prophetic for him or for the planet: it may be anything sacred.

Lame Deer, a Lakota shaman, has some words we might take to heart on the matter (Lame Deer and Erdoes, 1972):

> "Many people do not understand why we do this. They call the sun dance barbarous, savage, a bloody superstition. The way I look at it, our body is the only thing which truly belongs to us. When we Indians give of our flesh, our bodies, we are giving of the only thing which is ours alone.
>
> If we offer *Wakan Tanka* a horse, bags of tobacco, food for the poor, we'd be making him a present of something he already owns. Everything in nature has been created by the Great Spirit, is part of Him. It is only our own flesh which is a real sacrifice—a real giving of ourselves. How can we give anything less?
>
> For fifty long years they jailed us if we danced the sun dance, calling it a crime, an 'Indian Offense'. Freedom of religion doesn't always include us Indians.

The sun dance is our oldest and most solemn ceremony, the 'granddaddy of them all', as my father used to say. It is so old that its beginnings are hidden as in a mist. It goes back to an age when our people had neither guns, horses, nor steel—when there was just us and the animals, the earth, the grass, and the sky.

Nowadays clever people study sun spots through giant telescopes, and your man-made little stars zoom around the earth as if they were late on a job. You have even landed on the moon and left a few plastic bags of urine there and a few chewing-gum wrappers. But I think the Indians knew the sun and the moon much better in those long-forgotten days, were much closer to them.

Huddling in their poor shelters in the darkness of winter, freezing and hungry, hibernating almost like animals, how joyfully, thankfully they must have greeted the life-giving sun, let it warm their frozen bones as spring returned. I can imagine one of them on a sudden impulse getting up to dance for the sun, using his body like a prayer, and all the others joining him one by one.

So they made this dance, and slowly, generation after generation, added more meaning to it, added to its awesomeness. My father taught me, as he had been taught by his father, the learning and teaching going back to the beginning of time.

Wi wanyang wacipi—the sun dance—is our greatest feast which brings all the people together. I told you of *hanblechia,* the vision quest, one man alone by himself on an isolated hilltop, communicating with the mystery power. Well, the sun dance is *all* the people communicating with *all* the mystery powers. It is the *hanblechia* of the whole Sioux nation.

The sun dance is the most misunderstood of all our rites. Many white men think of it as an initiation into manhood, or a way to prove one's courage. But this is wrong. The sun dance is a prayer and a sacrifice. One does not take part in it voluntarily but as the result of a dream, or a vision."

—*Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions,* p. 198-99

"Some white men shudder when I tell them these things. Yet the idea of enduring pain so that others may live should not strike you as strange. Do you not in your churches pray

> to one who is 'pierced', nailed to a cross for the sake of his people? No Indian ever called a white man uncivilized for his beliefs or forbade him to worship as he pleased."
>
> —p. 207-208

An extraordinary Classic Maya clay figurine from the island of Jaina off the north coast of the Yucatan Peninsula depicts a young man suspended by two perforations in the flesh of his upper back. This posture is identical to that of one variant of the Sun Dance rite, and the image strengthens our suspicion of continuity between the Lakota and the Maya practices of autosacrifice.

To the Lakota as to all Native Americans who have not been overwhelmed by Christianity, the earth is sacred and conscious, and its valleys and mountaintops, its caves, plants, trees, four-leggeds and two-leggeds, wingeds, those that creep and crawl, those that swim—are all sacred and conscious entities. In the Sun Dance and in the Sweat Lodge, all these beings hear the prayers. This reality is not part of the American mainstream, but some whites are adopting it, reinventing it, invoking matriarchal sources for it, asking Native Americans to teach them about it. The ritual giving of sweat in communion with all beings is a sacrifice which opens the door to *wakan,* or spirit; does it really differ psychically from the giving of blood? Recalling Jung's words about the purest and most personal ego-gift, can we claim this is not the same as Lame Deer's "gift of mineness"? Can we even suggest that the form of blood sacrifice performed in the Sun Dance, or the lesser "taking of flesh" in some sweat lodge rites, is a truly concrete manifestation of the archetype? Even Christianity has always found space for the giving of one's own flesh; it permits direct participation in the Passion. The Christian Penitentes of northern New Mexico are now stewards of the practice. Before we impose this carefully crafted, locally useful polar opposition of "spiritual vs. concrete" upon the Lakota, we must examine that drive to self-mortification within Christianity. For some Christians, a wholly nonmaterial sacrifice is insufficient. And we must accept the inevitable: in the Self, oppositions are dissolved into unity.

Before leaving Native America, I will share a relevant news release, dated August 21, 1989:

> *Sacred Pole Returned to Tribe after 101 Years*
>
> MACY, Neb. (AP)—A sacred pole topped with a human scalp and said to have the power of life and unity was presented to the Omaha Tribe on Sunday after being in a Boston museum for 101 years.

Yellow Smoke, the last keeper of the pole, which is believed to be more than 300 years old, entrusted it to the Peabody Museum at Harvard University because he doubted younger generations of Omahas would cherish it. Tribal officials recently negotiated its return.

"It will take up where it left off in 1888", Tribal Chairman Doran Morris said. "It is a central part of our lives. It will influence our children and grandchildren."

The pole, more than five feet long and four inches thick, is made of pine believed to have been cut in Nebraska in the 1600s or 1700s

At its top is a human scalp. Animal skin webbing wrapped around the middle of the pole contains feathers and down from cranes. A stake made from ash is at the bottom.

The Omaha, who were buffalo hunters, had a priest carry the pole from camp to camp. An annual renewal ceremony was held with the pole at its center to unify the tribe.

When the buffalo were wiped out, the Omaha settled on their reservation in eastern Nebraska and abandoned the ceremony.

A 1911 report by government ethnologists recounts the legend of the pole: the son of an Omaha chief was hunting alone in the forest when elders were in council to devise ways of keeping the tribe together. He came upon a tree that was luminous but remained unconsumed by its own light, the legend says. The tree was cut down, trimmed, adorned with a scalp and called a human being.

When the tribe gathered, the chiefs stood up and said, "you now see before you a mystery. Whenever we meet with troubles we shall bring our troublers to him (the pole). We shall make offerings and requests. All our prayers must be accompanied by gifts."

—*Austin American-Statesman,* August 21, 1989

Spiritual vs. Concrete: A Fuzzy Boundary

A crucifix bears a graphic, anguished image. The myths which move us often turn upon exquisite sacrificial motifs, such as those of the Oedipus tale, parent or child to the complex we may all have. Jung tells us that we may be assailed by dreams of torture and dismemberment.

These motifs drive the myths, spur the visions of shamans in many cultures. Jung advises us that they presage transformation, a second birth.

On the Jungian map, anyone who lives close to the edge of the Collective Unconscious, as do the poets, artists and visionaries of our culture, lives in psychic peril. But no one really escapes. Might we speculate that the public thirst for unredeemed gore is also underlain by the desire for transformation? The headline stories run red with accounts of the surfacing of barbarously concretized forms of the multi-archetypal constellation: satanic killings, mass suicides—or charter flights to the Otherworld? Live art gallery exhibitions featuring self-inflicted mutilation. And not so long ago: witches hanged, heretics burned.

On the altruistic side, we have many examples of heroic self-sacrifice both in war and in peacetime, wherein one person risks all to save another. Campbell has given us the example of motherhood as sacrifice of a parent's goals to the needs of her child.

Let us also reconsider the collective libido invested in the deaths of Martin Luther King and the Challenger astronauts. These events moved us in the way that hurricanes do, rekindling our communion as a species, but they also moved us in the idealized way of Christ, constellating the hero-at-the-gateway facet of the archetype in pure form, a form which stands synchronically outside the circle of ritual, but which binds us all. These deaths are potent events in our lives as a people; rituals of remembrance and sacred vows to carry their vision onward spring as green shoots from the ashes. But the dark fascination with morbid detail wells up from the same ground.

Yukio Mishima, the acclaimed Japanese playwright and novelist famous for his ritual self-disembowelment for a heartfelt political cause, had his first orgasm at age twelve upon leafing through a book on the Catholic saints and finding St. Sebastian pierced with arrows. He said that it set the course of his life. If so, an image designed to spiritualize has jumped the fence and found concrete expression. In mid-life Mishima impersonated the suffering St. Sebastian and had photographs taken. His was an unceasing struggle with a devouring image; did he win or did he lose?

Here are some verses of Phil Ochs, a folksinger-songwriter of the Sixties, which leave no doubt of his state of devouring intimacy with the archetype:

> *"The Spanish bulls are beaten; the crowd is soon beguiled;*
> *The matador is beautiful, a symphony of style;*
> *Excitement is ecstatic; passion places bets;*

Gracefully he bows to ovations that he gets;
But the hands that are applauding are slippery with [sweat,
And saliva is falling from their smiles.

So dance, dance, dance;
Teach us to be true;
Come dance, dance, dance,
'Cause we love you.

Then this overflow of life is crushed into a liar;
The gentle soul is ripped apart and tossed into the fire;
With the death of beauty, the victory of night;
Truth becomes a tragedy limping from the light;
The heavens are horrified; they stagger from the sight
As the cross is trembling with desire.

They say they can't believe it; it's a sacrilege, a shame;
Now who would want to hurt such a hero of the game?
But you know I predicted it; I knew he had to fall;
How did it happen? I hope his suffering was small;
Tell me every detail, for I've got to know it all,
And do you have a picture of the pain?

So dance, dance, dance;
Teach us to be true;
Come dance, dance, dance,
'Cause we love you."

—from "The Crucifixion"

A few years later, Phil Ochs hanged himself in his New York apartment. Negotiation grants no assurance that one will not be eaten. Here is a line from another of his songs, written in happier days:

There but for fortune go you or I.

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CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

FIVE POEMS FROM SECTION I OF *FROM SCRATCH*

REVERBERATIONS

Our journey had ceased to advance.
At that odd fork
we sensed the eternity we had spurned.
Being now led
everywhere, nowhere. Our journey into the fork
was molecular—a gate in every god
led only into cities of the dying,
to no cities of the dead.
Retreat seemed the only hope,
yet behind was ice,
the sphincter of a mastodon
a ragged halo in the fogged and snarling air.
Thus did we dig in here
as if below held a larger here
uncleaved by journey's division
inherent in every route.

*

There is a portion of the night
unlike port or storm, a gash
ribbed red, as if lit
with under fire, in which I am known
all around, seen through
as if with crossing spots.
Each organ has a faceless nave
leading to an altar absence
through which the world is rolling.

Being, weighed, is superstructure.
And "not"? Rim of the almost
tender night's containment.

*

Caught red-handed with the dawn,
I strained to see my catcher
masked, who thus received me
as sunlight re-sieves the lawn.

Deknowing had begun. The space between
predator and prey, I, Protean,
vanished as the curve sunk home:
pitcher balling spills of pitchers spilling fills.

*

Were one woman to tell the truth about her life,
Muriel Rukeyser wrote, the world would split open.
Rigoberta Menchu—did you lie?

Or does the world split instantly
while men retie and splice?

*

The snow as a sorcery
of air, to bevel and conceal
what we know of here:
that it is blank
at summer core,
without possessive,
a "t" away from there.
As if the dark
intensified were white,
and whiteness fully brought to light
the matrix springs of night.

AFTER READING ACKROYD'S *BLAKE*

There is no place in which imagination
can rest: take my father–
still do I see him in Nazi armband raking leaves,
I watch him now from the Rimbaud porthole,
he's an oily swirl of autumnal colors
clawing at the flesh of the earth.
In the back of his head a beacon pours yellow light
through the rooms of 4705. I see the egg clusters on walls,
the hives and bubbling sacs, organic 4705,
less a dwelling than a structure–
my mother slowly flaps through, a weeping manta ray
in an underworld of Biblical directives.
My father has just harvested several Negro children
who tried to pick up his precious fallen buckeyes.
He bound and gagged them, kept them in jars for months.
Sparky has been thrashed. I've been whipped.
How move into a statement on the nature of God?
I hold a globe of father-semen in my palm,
mold it into a grigri, then send it spinning into
the buckeye's crown. All perils have direct access to
the basement of man, where the chains and harrows
turn, and the Giant Forms one's parents are
move like the heads of mastodons through bottomless
vales of mist. The tusk face of my mother
now opens too, I see her Pandoric dilemma,
her terrible lack of confidence, doubt
like anatomical rift. I see my father
try to befriend me without knowing how.
He walks strapped to the frame of his father's vises.
Ancestral bellows pumped through him may end here.

HELMET

Last night I saw my face in my penis's head
wrapped in shining beards of semen,
weeping. As if I'd worn a helmet to bed
and forced my face out below.
There was no difference between its filmy wrapping and
the tears oozing from its folds,
its eyes, infantine, closed,
made me wish for a doctor's spatula,
to open AH and glimpse the tonsilwork
of the body throat.

When I arrive at full morbidity
my helmet will be complete, it will be
a helmet of man, hell met pell mell
insect lodge, with megocerotic horns,
it will be the inside of the male head,
my helmet, my hell full met, all the cannibalistic
lager, fungoid eaten skull insides
translate as Japanese brocade,
plum-color leather, this will be my helmet,
Neander-Cro-Magnon armistice
ear-flaps, silver bunting, with a great plume of snore–
leech lines labyrinthining the interior,
this womb this bell.

menstrous
Scarletherine ivy grappled to ~~Methodist~~ brick

Brattleboro

UNLEAVING

I threw myself on the leaf-strewn ground,
under the red maple I've watched grow 10 years
I wished the earth to take off,
a roving mastodon, with me clutched—
instead, I fisted leaves and rolled
up to the trunk, a newborn pup
up to a teat, I put a star in my mouth
counted its milky rays
then slid down the nightside of Eden
into the tunnels that map the underworld. . .

Who will read the fallen leaves? not in tea
but in drift, who will read
the urn of death? I see patches of its sides

coiling shreds the raising wind spits. . .

A dress of leaves for one who is ashes. . .

Each leaf a tiny tree of vascular bundles,
litterings that lift
the unappeasable need for inspiration,
for nothing's abstract concreteness,
the end of the world telescoped into the now
inconceivable beginning,
millennial patience casting anchor as it crests

Imagine this wet scat,
the "wanwood leafmeal" of these photosynthetic factories:
"under the influence of light, six molecules of carbon dioxide
combine with six of water to produce one molecule of sugar
and six of oxygen. This single molecule of sugar. . .is the basis
of life."
Say that the maple
produces leaves to feed itself, that they know
to unleave when no longer needed.

I am creating something to feed me:
serene blue-bellied hornets
drag their rickshaws out of repressed sheds
to the shores of Lake Gargoylalia,
they hover, waiting for the mutilated to be coughed up,
the lake belches, and like swans
robed in oily mist the bodies toss,
a few are speared and rickshaw deposited,
and now ticks and cockchafers get in line,
and thoughtchafers, a caterpillar confetti,
the vertebral thunder of a nest of dead leaves,
the abyss encapsulated in the Western God
whose African children are worm bores,
bags of glassy sore flows,
monstrous blending of all images
as I shuffle through these newsreels—
carotenoid thrust of Kali
shutting down chlorophyll,
and is not Shiva the purplescent meaty luster
in the still scarlet and violet oak?
There is a moment in every autumn
when angel is unzipped from watchfiend,
an unleaving, when remaining is letting go.
Persephone takes the erect invisible into her throat,
the icy but still igneous breeze
is the onset of Hades' ejaculation,
the snow to come, its lees.

DANIEL QUICK

TWO POEMS

PALMISTRY, PHRENOLOGY, MESMERISM

Frugal interpretation: the unhinged thumb—
A hallway unfettered—by veins—to Wrist.

A corridor, then: *pulses.* Low

-er, a palm speaks of children:

a girl born with lazy eye,
eldest
suffers a *respiratory ailment*

later, in life. A line beneath

The ring quotes, *medicine, hair-loss,* no—
A *loss of air,* a moist tongue in rain,

You will call the weather—inclement—Home.

Doctrine? ignites

a fevered chord

in mind, a sorrow *sparrows,* a sparrow

unseen cuts the air

sorrowed, to pattern:

A Glove, sewn of deer-skin; a Hat to cover
A scalped geography, to covet

inclension: a bent to *Architecture*

declension: a curiosity with hands,
cloth unraveling,

an inability of the eye to follow
in flight the Darning
Needle darting above the lake's edge

Written—on forehead—

a *tattered* future

Binds the wrists—a strand undone—vein from bone.
Undone, a strand of *pulse,* a ringed border, a palm lined,

The sky *overreaches,* Mesmer, a needle-length.

Hem the distant curve a mountain closer—

Comfort the Lake with *Nearing,*

Needling, needing—

Comfort us, a stitch more undone, a line
Into hand threaded

A future where clouds
unburden

the tongue, the dark tongue

Thread

a red tint in the eye as of rubbing

Thread in the hand an eye sewn open—
Mesmer—

ignore the wooddove's mumbling

Untwist last strings, unbind, hold slack in us those reins—
Mesmer—

ignore the woodduck's trembling

Cozen us a Knot.

SWIMMING

Beneath the planed, the oaken Sea—removes
A ring my secret minted, silver-minted,

Chased shut the eyelash refusal
Of dust, leaf-strung, stem-molded, mended.

Capillaries stumble inside the wrist, flutters
Their veil beneath skin, their *blue* veil

Lastly pulses *red.* Link my ear—
To Ocean's ear: *Whisper me my disaster*

Before it whispers me. Sewn together, I see
Wind blossom cold a sail into White

Flower steady wincing, walking away.
My mouth, concatenate—to Ocean's mouth:

Translate—how the wave's approach—
As proposal. Promised me, the Ocean parts

Its hair into braids, pulls back its blue veil
When enters a hand asking, Water? how cold.

To Ocean's waist—the ear threads its voice
Through the eye's needle, appears the sky

In tatters, the clouds un-hemmed, me:
Beside cold waters, standing. Taught

Chemistry how salt—eats silver—worthless.
Taught me: no ring dissolves, no leaf, none—

Yesterday, I did behave me carelessly,
When I did pray: Winter Ocean, open

For me, lonely as Table, as empty bowl—
I stepped dark, dark the Ocean stepped

Shut its oaken door.

ROBERTO TEJADA

HOME IMPROVEMENT

A ménage à trois of fashion, taste and the public eye, a basic conjunction of vanguard practice once involved a thorough disdain for middle-class complacency and a similar distrust of those institutions through which art-making is made available. Eventually canonized by the mainstream cultural apparatus whose indifference fueled a great deal of modernism's fundamental meanings—that is, stripped bare, to greater and lesser degrees, of its potential for social menace and aesthetic novelty, yet at the same time applauded by the stronghold of a market in need of newer and newer merchandise—late-modernist art has since had no choice but to be the reluctantly-cheerful participant-witness to the historical failures of the avant-garde as a cultural project. Over the last several decades, a pluralism (for some) and a chaos of styles (for others) has unavoidably given rise to more cynical pleasures and strategies in the sociology of taste, both for the enchanted and disenchanted alike.

With this in mind, and in an on-going series of investigations that began in 1994 with "The Comfortable Home," Ángel Ricardo Ricardo Ríos (Holguín, Cuba, 1996) has sought to express the kinds of problems outlined above. To this end, the artist fashioned oneiric shapes from the domestic realm out of a range of tectonic angles and curves into ironic emblems of social standing, with certain side-long allusions to soft sculpture. The result was a series of shameless hybrids and volumetric warps fusing the motifs of traditional furniture, pop-art's chromatic brashness, pre-modern costume and post-modern architecture. These works addressed how style and use are always at odds, not only with each other, but with the corresponding environment in which they find themselves positioned—be it the frigid white cube of the gallery, the executive halls of a corporate office, or the supposedly-hallowed safety of home sweet home.

A recent installation by the artist further explored the tentative underpinnings holding this vocabulary together. Divided into two separate spaces, one room reached near-suffocating temperatures produced by a series of stove-top gas burners that lined a square-shaped

brick-and-mortar base over which hung the thin wooden frame of a house. The other room was almost entirely dominated by a huge yellow taffeta-covered hoop-skirt, under whose folds you could make out the gas tank feeding the burners of the adjacent room by means of a rubber tube connecting the two spaces together. About the luxuries and miseries of communication, these fixtures and fittings aimed to posit the artwork as a surrogate of all those functional and decorative accouterments found in the home—perhaps even housebroken, yes, but liable to explode at any minute, or to go up in flames.

This concern has since evolved into "The New Space" project (1995-1997), a series of large-format canvases and small bronze sculptures—or what the artist prefers to call "New Objects." The canvases, sketched and painted as if to resemble oversized drawings, are literally portraits of Regency sofas, armchairs and window seats, seemingly undergoing a delusion of grandeur as they enact a civil war between the one-dimensional plane of the painting, the elegant comfort of the traditional decorative arts, and the protuberant gigantism of the urban skyline ballooning out of these otherwise hoity-toity pieces of living-room furniture.

In one canvas, a round ottoman becomes a virtual anemone of fabric, in swelling bars of magenta and white, as it floats up and beyond the edge of the frame, dripping a trail of paint. Forcing the domain of the potential purchasing public into the space of the gallery—with quips about the incompatibility of any other kind of content if they are to hang over that Louis-XIV-whatever—this canvas and others like it manage to roll (or stretch) pattern-painting and interior decoration into one—into fetishistic forms suggesting *House & Garden* illustrations suddenly on the brink.

Using what Rudolf Arnheim calls caricature's "morphology of deviation," Ricardo Ríos has successfully rendered into visual terms that eloquent idiomatic phrase in Spanish meaning "to spare no expense"—literally, "to throw one's house out the window." According to the artist: "These objects are conceived to assume a life of their own as works of art, regardless of their surroundings, and despite their essentially ambiguous or seemingly-absurd nature which forces them, in turn, to assume other functions with regard to the context in which a dialogue may take place." Positioned in the gallery or reproduced in a catalogue, these works have yet in fact to assume the full potentiality of their significance, and remain half-barred from so doing until they are reinstated once again into a domestic environment—that is, until they are finally given household status. In short, these paintings and sculptures by Ángel Ricardo Ricardo Ríos illustrate the kinds of relationships that arise between the artistic object and its specific context for

consumption, regardless of whether intent or aesthetic pleasures are successfully rendered possible–if not, more likely, frustrated altogether.

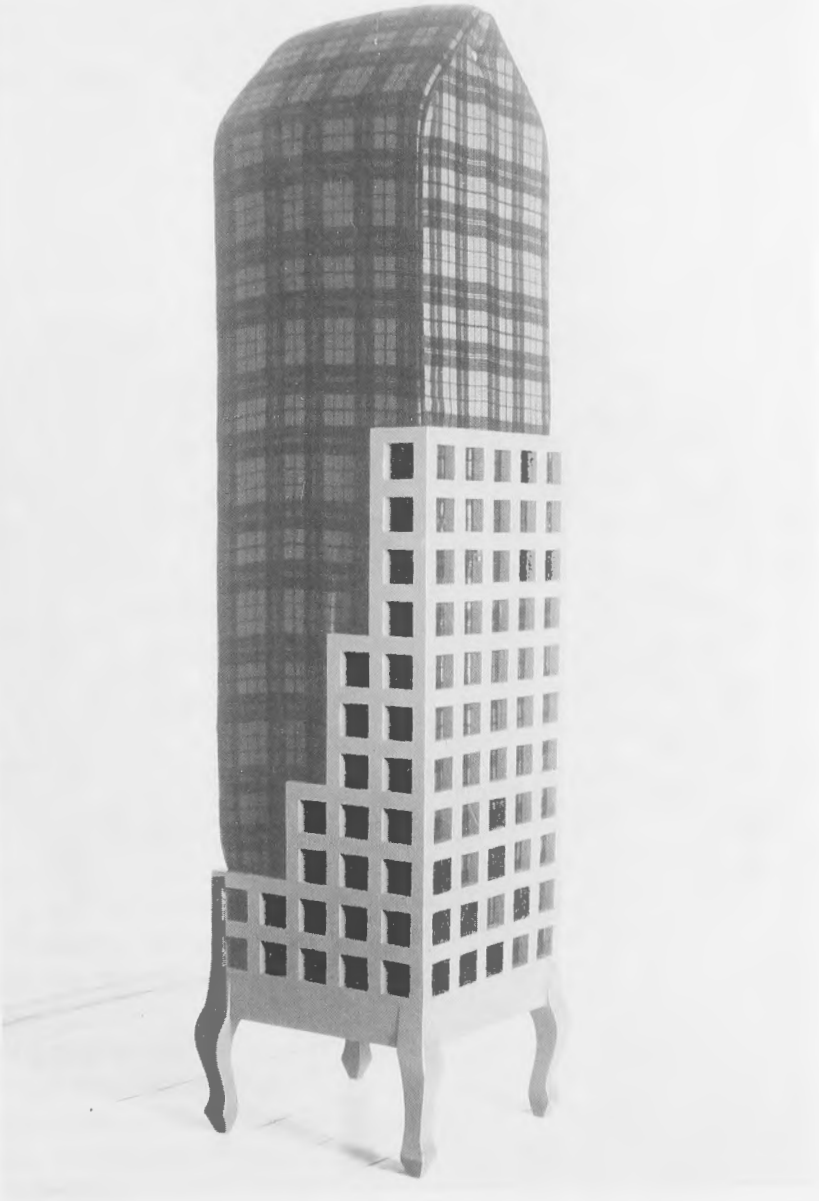
Angel Ricardo Ricardo Ríos

FIVE WORKS

The Comfortable Home III, 1994
Wood, fabric, foam rubber / 150 x 150 x 50 cm
Photos courtesy of Galería Nina Menocal, Mexico City

The Comfortable Home, 1994
Wood, fabric, foam rubber / 150 x 70 x 70 cm

The Comfortable Home III, 1994
Wood, fabric, foam rubber / 150 x 50 x 50 cm



The Comfortable Home II, 1994
Wood, fabric, foam rubber / 150 x 40 x 40 cm

"New Space" Project, 1997
Wood, fabric, foam rubber / 147 x 198 cm

JACKSON MAC LOW

AN INNER SENSE OF CLOSURE ANOTHER DAY

{Forties 131}

An inner sense of closure in unfamiliar experience not yet
    apparent in
changing circumstances discontinuous brief and
    ephemeral
indistinguishable as spaces in unbounded places where
    gravity's lacking
melting moving and being still in a cluster of thoughts-from-
    the-beginning like clouds and sky and scattered sonance
    fading toward silence that may never come to pass
an indecisive tortoise

A masque of specificity impossible to hear as a thistle pricks
    and finds satisfaction
suffers no distinction between a dawn and an underfalling
saturated by lost-found choice no taste of a hint of stone
can still be retained or related to messages shaped by rushing
    water and billowing air practicing stillness quietly
    blindly the shadow's
rigorous eyes say nothing

Lately almost proclaims contingent escape consumed by
    symmetrical clouds
over a podium nice - sized for-an-eye-high-serial-fétishist
quick as a turner of coins among poisonous animals shy as
    goodbye
iterating blooms in window boxes green and orchid
    innuendoes of Paradise placed in shadows cast on a sleeve
    by moondust
bending toward being a thing

Turning and placed in an opening checking and balancing wealth
understood as being-told yes or no or both in an unknown proportion
blank as a dream of partial voices breaking in duration's wind
you enter a moonlit tangle of reliquaries naked and antithetical-as-dáwn in a scene of flags and butterflies where wounds are sewn together
in the harbor's unintelligible sheen

Pulled into wandering shambles stepping into a samurai's sword-edge
cartooned in brocaded snow upon a punctured season's shards
we wander in ancestors' dreams bequeathing us their avarice
defying spasmodically what-follows-what's-réal on the floor amid the silent boundaries of glossy claws and elegies
in shiny sanctuaries

Paintings of firestorms darkened by charring salts leave meretricious ashes
on surfaces of poured-out shirts and bondage's sugary stops
unblocked by instructions from a derelict circular book
categorically gone as soon as you ask if the chair is frail merely an artifact claimed by a plain in the missing ages
an incendiary stitched magnolia

Heavy water edges encourage rattling gossips already too courageous
unbearably chosen by skinless angels aiming at verity undermining likenesses
wrecking facticity hardly unwittingly luring to being unstable concretions
rosy as remembered prosy dawns debunked and tenuous taking the half-baked cake that fitfully crumbles contours dissolve
absent as slept-over prayers

Labyrinthine latitudes are soaped by vernacular adventures
brought together in castles burning as hands lie on the
    sidewalk
actualizing might-bes when the night pluralizes partial
    congrúence
where theorizing stevedores roused from inspiriting beds
    favor reading the poems out loud to bring themselves
    back to the point between
recognized regret and another day

Caesural spaces = durations of silence and/or
prolongations of final phonemes or syllables:
4 letter spaces [ ] = 1 unstressed syllable;
8 letter spaces [ ] = 1 stressed syllable or beat;
none occurs between typographical lines.

Nonorthographic acute accents indicate stress rather than vowel quality. Each hyphenated compound is read as one extended word: somewhat more rapidly than other words, but never hurried. Spaced hyphens [-] indicate slowed-down compounds. Indented typographical lines continue verse lines begun above them. Breath pauses at verse-line endings ad lib.

New York: 12 May 1994; 10 - 22 May, 25 July 1997

LINH DINH

THREE POEMS

MY RISING PROSPECTS

Surely, among dream mammals,
Among man-apes, among ape-apes, among man-men,
Among tasselled, scrubbed, prospecting for hubbub,
Among chyme-free duodena and lipsticked flour,
Among synchronized twitches and applauded pillows.
Thus embraced and mutilated, in my 34th year,
With my dukes up, with my grammar up,
With my legions of fish lips, stapled
To the inner ears, loquacious, murmurring,
With my musical toes and symphonic molars,
With my squatting rights about to be revoked,
"Where are you from? And why are you here?"
With my nose bleeding, with my menarche,
With my mud nap on the hour,
With my rising prospects and descending testicles.

TRIBAL HISTORY

We are born of the snake.
Some say from the behind of the snake,
Others say from the head of the snake,
But I say from the side of the snake.

About the only thing we can agree upon is
One hundred snake eggs hatched one hundred men.

We have scaly, flaky skin,
Maybe psoriasis, maybe skin cancer.
We spend an inordinate amount of timer
Five hours a day, rubbing lotion on our open sores.

And if not for the derogatory drum beats,
None of us would be here, of course,
Scattered like this, all over the globe.

In moments of repose, we often rail against each other,
With tremendous violence, Who?! Who?!
Who among you are truly famous?!!

Not that one, we would snicker,
The one who walked into the ocean at dusk,
Strumming his symphysis with a scissor,
Nor the one who tilted his coccyx forward,
Trying to untwist his colon.

What we are are specialists
In mild congenital defects
And gross sartorial blunders.

We are a wet tribe, yet smooth,
None of us can claim to be a psychotic innovator.
The best among us have learned to strut backward in circles,
Chanting up to twelve.

WHOAAAA!!!

And now, for our first ride on the bus!
What communal happiness. What blessings!
Everyone going the same way!
Whoaaaa!!! Get away from me!!!
What fumbling speed!
Ruminant, tragic. Look!!!
Look how we can see the top of everyone's head!!!
And now, for our first skyscraper!
So. . .shiny! Sooooo. . .straight up!!!
What balance! What splendor!
This. . .this. . .this. . .
This straight-up-ness!!! Hush!
And now, for our first girl on roller skates!
Arrrghh!!! What unspeakable joy! Must we?
Boo hoo hoo! Boo hoo hoo!
I think we must kill ourselves!!!
And now, for our first toothpick!
Can I have this? Waaaa!!!!!
Is it mine? Ha ha ha!!!! For real?
For our first cornflake! For our first coffin!!!
Custom-made, no ordinary pine, a fine wood. . .
With what anguish must we receive each thing?
With what rage? With what gratitude?

Daniel Moore

TESTOSTERONE ART

Every man's house is on fire;
the halls in our dreams are tunnels of smoke.
Exhaling the euphoric residue of sex, we
search for the pillow's coldest side.

The alarm clock rings and *Night's* dead river
drifts towards a burning sea. Our feet
hit the floor, muscles twitch, we skip through the flames
to the toilet's seat and roll back the bladder's
darkening sky, releasing the napalm storm.

The smell of fresh coffee hangs in the air,
offering direction to the charred and erect.
Kitchen counters glow with a Nagasaki blush,
a guiltless attempt at testosterone art.

As cup after cup of liquid Brazil
saturates our bloodshot eyes, we notice
we're naked and dreadfully awake
to our mind's most closeted question;

"What should we wear, what would look good
in this oven called life, set against
the backdrop of well endowed women
lighting our next cigarette?"

J. GALLAHER

THE ATTRACTIONS OF THE ATTRACTIVE

1

They're attending the grass
where the sidewalk

joins, and attending the several
doings of day, the aquamarine, the swing

set and exigency. (the domain and mnemonics)
Piecing

the park together, a sequence
of dears, whence and whither,

serpentine
in apposition. And the pleasures dally

in the arbor, the half world
in dollops, egg and dart (the acclivity,
declivity).

2

The colored balloons go off
at once

and the blues and the reds
and the yellows go off

a priori in April. Without apologies,
doddering for this

and that, exeunt
severally, the colored balloons.

The apricots the redolent
bristling with ardor,

of equilibrium at their apogee,
attendants in light,

go off. Categorical and stacking
as the plethora as the quorum

as the lullaby halve
the surface and the straining,

the epistle the firmament go
in April in Appertain.

3

A search has commenced
behind
the one counting

by ones. Little bodies scattering, busy,
the yard spreading

all around. And one says look

and they all look
saying up saying up

with a certain flavor
(carrot grass, mint leaf).

And the bodies in light
turn in the grass

each parallax.

Busy no bulwark on my republic
busy no coterie on yours.

JEAN-PAUL AUXEMÉRY

from MY JAZZ

(Tr. from the French
by Richard Sieburth)

I

fear of having charted out only the chords,
but wanting furiously to proceed

(sounds that be
pure, extreme evidences

(possibilities
no chord could oblige or seize

(lines of necessity
w/o parallel w/o precedent

(no holds barred
no unsettled scores

at last, alone; the octave's entire span of sound,
within the sole limits of my desire's advance
in the knowledge of this identity:

form giving birth to form,
movement rushing forward,

& form-as-child:
building on thin air
the texture of a breath, a child
a small child fingering her flute

a figure in full, armed with meaning
which each moment models & modifies
& accomplishes & completes & undoes & repeats

—a fugue, a force, a thrill

a river, my child, my fear

at last defined, at last

set free

John Coltrane, giant prints

II

(tells it like
(tells it like it
(tells it like it is:

get hip, get down—cross to the other side,
get into the sound, into the stride &

be nothing, say nothing but the burn,
the blues, the gist—get down, get down,

cross over, & plunge—go, go, go
stand up to the stares, go face

the monsters & masters lying in wait
waiting to gnaw on your pain,

cross the river, deliver your curses
& low-down fables—go sing, jeer, defy:

this spurt of blood—this depth of drink—these dogs
that howl & lick—the benediction of their teeth—

& you give in to the whirl, exact in your trance,
gifted with sight, prostituted, flamed, nourished on
[night,

taking on life with gleeful aggravation, saying no,
telling it like it is, no jive, no excuses:

drive this into the hollows of our soul—the fingers
of the drowned slithering along the boat,
the eyes of the lynched laughing at the fires

pluck your muffled bass go get stoned

tell it like you know tell it like it frees

Charles Mingus, passage beyond

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

HAIBUN: "DRAW YOUR/ DRAFT"

Her books were there on my shelf, waiting for me to attend; I had bought them, but I didn't read them. Grove and ND. The cover of *Bid Me To Live* a photo taken at a vertiginous angle. Of a blank space. Telling the book by its cover. Telling a woman's book by the cover. The surface. (But it was not blank; it was a photo of military monuments. Could I see?) The moment not heroic, but compliant, with hardly an undercurrent of resistance. Just the fact that I had bought her books, some kind of declaration. The vertigo of acceding to something called "woman"—the danger of it. *Helen in Egypt* looked too "neat," too "centered"—I was, instead, challenging myself with the all-over page space collage works of Williams *(Paterson)* and Pound *(The Cantos).* This date is 1965 through 1974. I have (1968) read *The H.D. Book* chapters in *Caterpillar*, in *Coyote's Journal,* in *Stony Brook.* Robert Duncan is my first path to H.D., for he made a heterodox modernism with women's work and men's intermingled, counter to any version the university or the general literate culture proposed. Getting something of that "feminine" associative build and the insoucient resistance to convention via a (gay) man. Shock, scandal, pleasure. And his essay form—the form of thinking, himself indebted to her, so that in hearing his essay with a wild alertness, I was also beginning to hear H.D. The essays I have written first occurred under the sign of Duncan's *H.D. Book:* his work and Woolf's, Rich's and then H.D.'s tipped me into that tonality of consideration, the burst of vectored thought, the feeling analysis. I heard it first there, and then I did it, and still do.

During my Columbia Ph.D. oral examination in—was it 1966 or 1967, I spoke about Williams' *Spring and All,* a work no one (I ever knew) had read, written by a poet almost totally discounted. I also spoke critically about Dorothy Wordsworth's position as a conduit for the imagination of her brother, the cultural meaning of the female figure in "Tintern

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Prepared for *No Rule of Procedure: H.D. and Poets After,* ed. Donna Hollenberg, University of Iowa Press. [1]

Abbey." I had never heard anyone saying the things that were coming out of my mouth.

> Prima Donna Illusion
> the dreamed dreamer
> my silhouette, sleep, swirled like a silver streamer
> the stage is swept with shards.

At a peculiar location. I heard the New American poetry through the Donald Allen anthology, and I listened at a place where Olson, Duncan, Creeley and also *Caterpillar* (edited by Clayton Eshleman) existed, but I didn't search for any personal bond. On the other hand, with much personal and intellectual bonding, I connected to the Objectivists, primarily to George Oppen. Oppen and I met and engaged with each other from August 1965; I think of him and his work insistently (he died in 1984). He is central to my sense of the seriousness and scrupulousness of poetry, and he influenced my knowledge of the poetic career: exilic, nomadic, working out of a marginal place into both the leverage of marginality and sense of centrality, building himself an oeuvre in twenty-five years of intense work. These forces in poetry and poetics (all loosely Poundean and Williams-y) met the loose professional complacencies of the university as institution, in which there were a history, a library, a site of enterprise but no real or consistent training, certainly not for women. I never went downtown, kept to a little poetry group on 100th Street. In 1968, the radical liberatory thinking of civil rights and anti-war analyses contributed to the beginnings of a feminist movement in which I was abruptly immersed to my fibers. After a first flurry of activity, I went to France for several years (1970-72) and had to invent a feminist cultural position for myself, without immediate peers or interlocutors. Isolation is a motif. There is also no doubt I was afraid of the gift.

> hooded woman, black coat
> rigid in an
> anxious walking context
> I expect her to howl
>
> falling into the well of swallowing herself

During the early period of my (particular/peculiar) poetic career (1963 forward) I was very good at inventing blockages. I was always writing the long poem: before 1968, I had written good works: a serial poem called "The War Years," a long sequence called "Villa d'Este Staten

Island," and a serial work that was really about gender, beginning "Train journey and/ journey by water. . .," yet there were no ways for me to understand in my head what my subject was telling me, nor ways to move into a real poetic career. During the time I was writing my gnarled-up dissertation (on Pound and Williams, called *The Endless Poem),* I diminished to three line, one line poems. The fragment is not inconsistent with the urge to seriality, of course, but this felt like the end of my poetry. I remember with great gratitude George Oppen looking at this work (and at this situation) and saying "Well, a good one line poem, that's not nothing." It now grieves (and almost frightens) me how many opportunities I missed, how wayward was my path, how divided I was, how underutilized (how I understood little or nothing of what I actually could do)—especially in the mid-1960s when some of my age cohort were publishing, even with trade presses. I was the Pokey Little Puppy. Now isn't that cute. And ain't it a shame. It's good I've lived as long as I have, even so. Any work is in part shaped by luck. The luck of being here.

> One cannot sweep with shards.
> But they do mark.

Yet still during the early and mid 70s, there was more blockage, or, rather, the invention of a certain structure of resistance. No easy way to say this, it seems so scrupulously (undercutting). The question of beauty. I didn't want beauty in my poetry: any hint was an invitation to a slippery slope of the feminine. The poetry of the death of the beautiful woman was the death of the woman writing. The death of the poet in the poetess. Of course, this became a subject of some of my literary criticism. I am so stubborn about this structure of feeling that, even now, I have much suspicion of the triumphant investiture of awe and blessing in female figures by culture and cultural products—from Dante to Breton and beyond. This is a serious blind spot as well as part of my critical advantage. That's why I now love Lyn Hejinian's wry, recognizing line (from section—that is, age—26 of *My Life)* "The Muses are little female fellows." It takes that whole structure of feeling and flicks it away at about the same age-time as I also confronted the situation of woman writing.

So I tried *not* to write beauty (and images, and sonority), but to write language, to write syntax. Or to compose a beauty so hard and selective as to contain its presence. This urge has analogues with early H.D., but I "got it" via the Objectivists and Pound. An unintended consequence: my poetry could not be fluid, fluent, it could only stop and start. It was

so angry about rhetorics—these are the years before *Wells* (that is before 1980), and just after. This explains why my first book was about 15 years late. I was writing the lyric, yet increasingly I did not want the perfection of lyric, the separation of lyric, the selectivity of lyric, the purity of lyric. This is surely a contradiction. Thus my allegiance to the Objectivist purities, because they offered some way of skepticism and quasi-refusal, some method of documentary.

> blank-bud book
> not even certain
> which way to o-
> pen it.

In 1973-74: I wrote "Eurydice," a poem (like its companion "Medusa") out of an early feminist critique of culture—a redirection of mythoposeis: telling the "other side." The gender binarism was an important invention of the time, for it allowed us to bring women as a socially formed group up to concerted scrutiny. My sense of the potential of feminist critique was imagining the whole world differently, the reinvention of culture. There was a growing context for this thinking—an explosion of investigations and poetries. Adrienne Rich was a very important ethical and intellectual figure in this feminist effervesence. It was no accident that my work was about the opposite of the imprint of the poet-Orpheus, about the one who, in my version, chooses to go back underground. Only after I had completed "Eurydice" did someone tell me about H.D.'s poem called "Eurydice." This was a talismatic moment of connection between myself and H.D. Because I had written my poem, I suddenly could read and recognize her poem and her project: it became legible. I understood that we were involved in parallel studies of the position of the female figure in culture. The intertwined turn of reading and writing, the reading of the writing created a bond between this poetic mind and my own, a spiral of recognition. Without exaggeration, one might say that moment opened my poetry as it opened my literary criticism and my essays. H.D. was enabling for my poetic career.

"I needed a woman, a poet, and a modernist and I needed her badly." (This from my "Reader, I Married Me.") H.D. was this figure.

"What, then, must a woman do with the reactionary sexual ideology of high art?" Gayatri Spivack, *Social Text* 3 (1980)

I wanted to start modernism again, all over, from the beginning.

> "finally a woman on paper"
> "I'll paint it big"
> "with flowers on my flower"
> "I brought home the bleached bones"
>
> (O'Keeffe)

The revendicatory. The reassessment. The reconsideration. Had this person ever been read before? A few now read H.D. voraciously. I heard Susan Stanford Friedman talk about H.D., read SSF's first work (in 1975), bonded with her. The confrontation she postulated between H.D. and Freud—the deep intellectual and spiritual engagement and the deep resistance—resonated with my relations to (loosely) the patriarchs. Feminist thinking about literary texts vibrated with questions about myth (that is, the spiritual and ideological stories culture tells to announce, investigate and explain itself). It resonated with questions about the nature of the poetic career for women, with ideas about production, dissemination, reception, with materialist scrutiny of the ideologies and insititutions that organize the poetic career and the reception of individuals.

So first off, it's not so much the influence of H.D. on me, but (don't get me wrong) my influence on H.D. (In a few years, she reciprocated.) This peculiar position is true of several other feminist critics who wrote on H.D. very early—around 1979 and for a few years after: Susan Stanford Friedman, Adalaide Morris, Lucy Freibert, myself (and with different agendas, Susan Gubar)—and other feminist poets or poet critics—Alicia Ostriker, Beverly Dahlen, Adrienne Rich, and then Barbara Guest. These people in some ways worked on, worked out, and worked out of H.D. to accomplish the very, very first years of her rediscovery. We were inventing H.D. We influenced her work—how it was read, what parts of it were read, why it was interesting. We made it matter for this generation. It is astonishing to make this claim, yet is it simply true. Not arrogant; it is a statement of fact, the fact of our reading of H.D. and our engagements.

But it is odd: wasn't she there before? weren't there a few books in print? hadn't I been blind to her, too, and once compliant to reject her? Later there would be criticisms and modifications of our critical work, extensions and reassessments of our work, maybe even the (un)motivated disparagements—but our work putting H.D. forward as a twentieth century poet of grandeur is there in its commitment and its

subtlety—quite the opposite of crudeness. Yet, as I've already suggested, it's not as if no one had noticed before—both Robert Duncan and Lawrence Dembo had, Vincent Quinn and Joseph Riddel had, Norman Holmes Pearson had, Denise Levertov had. And they knew the H.D. of majority. But this critical situation is the story of a conjuncture. Here were the components: feminism in general; plus an uncontestably "major" woman writer (so none of us had to fight the paradigms of major/ minor right away and change other imbedded mechanisms of critical recognition); with an audience ready to understand that [patriarchal] structures of recognition had blocked and filtered our vision of her career, as they had intervened and been a condition of her employment and her own self-scrutiny for many, many decades. She was a big dolphin ridden by desirous feminists who needed to find her and to be buoyed in her ocean of texts. And she was a haunting presence: we had conjured her; she had conjured us. *Dux femina facti.*

> Levitation (leviathan)
> I am smelling my own bread
> rising
> stepping out over air eyes, walking
> over the water and into swimming—this
> kind of statement is
> happening in the present
> participle.

Reading the then-unpublished *HERmione*, reading *The Gift* at the Beinecke Library where H.D.'s manuscripts were housed (in fact, eventually helping to provoke their publication as books), like a train I was riding, speeding the tracks: clacked this is good, this is good, this is really really good. Her whole work was answering questions we had just begun to formulate; we were hot with it, and in that heat H.D. emerged, like a secret writing that could be read when it got hot-light enough. We had sought the story of modern female cultural position, the portrait of the artist as a struggling and investigative woman. We had sought women's contributions, women's intervention in the Western cultural compact. At every moment that the bucket went down into her vast and capacious oeuvre, it came up full, full, full. That metaphor suggests that we still need the theoretical (that is ideological) capacity to understand the matter of Mater—the "matriarchal" figure standing at the wellsprings of cultural generation. Was it Irigaray who told us about a real second sex? about the despisal of and desire for the Mother? It was also H.D., with her grand psychoanalysis of culture and society. We found a magisterial work, intense and passionate in the

most nuanced turns of language, austere in its knowledge of the past, and fierce in the will to interpret modernity. Reading, teaching *Trilogy, Helen in Egypt,* the short poems, some of the novels as I did beginning in the mid-1970s through to now, the 1990s—one can also use the archeological metaphors that H.D. would, perhaps, have appreciated. We had started with a shard, a scrap, a mark on a piece of stone or papyrus: we had ended by commencing a multi-generational dig at an enormous city-temple complex. We had opened [Queen Tut's] tomb.

> such *avis* in dreams
> do the strange-handed "draw" or "read" the lines?
> ombre'd on rich *rive'n* rock

Working on mss. The trace, the feeling, the mark of her on the page. Not hero worship, the question of evidence of being. Of negotiating inside the pressure of detail. Open the boxes. Hatchlings. Open the cardboard hutch of archival acid-free boxes. I am sitting in a library staring at the white underground sculpture court of Noguchi and on the plaza outside the monuments to Yale men killed in the Great Wars. The floor was carpeted; the tables were large and solid. The chairs were elegant and capacious. A portrait of Gertrude Stein hung on the wall to the ladies room. It was luxury, the luxe, calme, volupté of supported work. Open the trunk. Reading H.D. letters: gender and sexuality emerge everywhere into the deep desire to search for response, to give response: H.D. eroticizes the reader. The erotic radiance and the pleasure of finding, knowing, unveiling, being absorbed, being nourished, being taught, reading—like food—breathless. She was aware of the power and necessity of those archives. Indeed, one of the works of her later years was to arrange them, to organize them, and once again to consider her own career in one of the most brilliant essays she wrote— "H.D. by Delia Alton." She exercised Control (as all poets do). Her voracity and control.

The facts and activities of this rediscovery had a deep influence on my sense of the complexity of female cultural position, and the ways one must investigate it historically, situationally, biographically. Susan Friedman and I together at Yale doing H.D. research in 1983 met Susan Howe and argued over feminist criticism; SH is incensed at *The Madwoman in the Attic,* especially the portrait of Dickinson; SH hated any notion that the female writer is a "victim." She was prescient about a damaging aspect of contemporary feminism. I defend not so much that melodramatic book, though it had its deep necessity, but the complexity of the impulses to feminist criticism, the many textures and

methods that are possible within it, including a materialist and situated notion of the poetic career: class does matter, the particularities of gender and sexuality do matter. I also defend agency. H.D. and feminism, and the rush of interpretations and passionate debates about women in culture—this marked the moment. What I still see is that it is crucial to maintain feminist reception (and indeed, to reject particular, limiting, infuriating demands of any theme or style for female production). I brought to H.D., evoked in H.D. a sense of her agency and desire, of the need for poesis; I saw her complex negotiations with ambition, how she went Working on the Work of the Gift. It was, as I said, the career of that struggle.

> Demeter statue
> carrying a pig.
> Nike, very fluid.
> Koré, the thin folds.
>
> Running in a forest of papyrus
>
> how can the rose speak?
> so to speak—rewrite the rose.
>
> "Peut on faire des oeuvres
> qui ne soient pas 'd'art'?"
>
> (Picabia)

After *Wells* (1980), I had begun to write "The 'History of Poetry'"—a way of harrying and leveraging the lyric tradition (this work is in *Tabula Rosa*, 1987). It became my position of angry/ hungry—as *per* the text called "Crowbar" which was written as a fierce critique of "trobar" treatments of the female figure. After "For the Etruscans" (1979-80), my next essay (1979) was the one on H.D.—"family, sexes, psyche." And I composed the book *H.D.: The Career of that Struggle* about the four kinds of authority of the woman writer. In 1986, after a significant serial poem called "Writing" (1984-85), itself linked to an early version of the essay on Williams and others called *"Pater-*daughter," I began writing *Drafts,* a long poem in autonomous "canto-like" linked sections. As we pass into 1998, it is in its twelfth year.

In the historical narrative of beginning *Drafts,* H.D. was one of the central figures of the opening—along with several others: Beverly Dahlen's *A Reading* (and my 1985 essay on Dahlen, in *The Pink Guitar),* my daughter Koré (arrived in 1984), and George Oppen, who

had died in 1984. I finished copyediting *H.D.: The Career of that Struggle* in Nijmegen in the autumn of 1985 for publication in the next year, the centennial of H.D.'s birth, and I also began the essay "Language Acquisition" (written in 1985, as was "Otherhow"). In it there are little chapters and textual multiplicity: theory, poem, analysis, baby babble, documentary, even picture—the hieroglyphic of Isis. It is a work clearly written under the simultaneous regimes of Koré's learning to talk, Kristevean analysis of the pulse of poetic language, and H.D.'s essays and her deep investigative sounds and soundings. One agenda was to examine H.D.'s "midrash"-like quality of continuous chains of interpretation where there is no closure and no authoritative statement, but where the production and productivity of meanings is continuous. The interest in child language acquisition is also indebted to Mary Kelley's "Post-Partum Document"—a conceptual work that had a lot of impact on me, and that also influenced the pre-Drafts serial poem "Writing."

> "pinkie"
> "tow"
> "cookie"
> are Dutch words in English we know

In 1985 and 1986, I began to imagine how to exit and encircle all that limited me; and I saw that it was a gigantic project/ prospect. The invention of a stance capacious, ready, open-throated, alert and altered, serious. A voiced text that could play with, and beyond, all the features of poetry that I had resisted. Sonority. Metaphor. Even beauty. I didn't feel exiled from language but from the conventions of poetic discourses, from the construction of what is called "poetry" by our culture, and from my gender position within those discourses. In April 1986, I was (finally) developing a changed relationship to the blank page.

> so that
> so that the point of this argument
> is
> To stop writing
> 'poetry' (and)
> draft, draw
>
> Take the razor point fine tip
> & draw it all over the page

draw it
makes drafts

In summer 1986, at the conference in Orono, Maine for H.D.'s centennial, I uncharacteristically stopped listening to my fellow critics, and wrote in a journal:

put yr hand down
on the paper & draw your
draft for the most thirsty self s.

The moment had begun. It continued in San Diego, after the conference on George Oppen and some study in the Archive for New Poetry where Oppen's papers were housed, for I was also working on *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* which would be published in 1990. I sketched "Draft 1: It" (without knowing quite what it was, yet), by following the instruction to

write
writings
that.

all the materials ARE there here
the ocean changed to lines

I worked into the page that had called me. I knew that I had begun a long poem in "cantos" but was sure of no more than that. The first two poems of *Drafts* emerged together and were separated during the summer of 1986. I knew, from all my struggles before this, that one central impulse of "Drafts" was the critique of the lyric. What I felt in July 1986 is how the critique and the temptation occur simultaneously, for I wrote "Afterimage" at the same time as writing "Draft 1: It." But "Afterimage" was (so far as I can reckon) my last lyric poem. Instead I was seeking the authority of the multiple. Willing to follow the track of making. And to think about the implications of the poesis as furthering. To read the writing. But a cultural project—making something of extent. Casting myself into that sea. No matter what one touches, the ongoingness of language demands more writing.[2]

No plan, no design, no schemata. Just a few procedures: placing works on the big stage of the page, making each be itself intact and autonomous, but connected to themselves as they emerged. No continuous narrative. No myth as explanation. Here *Drafts* are very different from

H.D.'s long poems; and quite related to Objectivist ethos and poetics. The works are influenced by objectivist argument and propositions about reality. That the image is encountered, not found, as Oppen proposed. That *the* and *a* (said Zukofsky testily) are words worth investigating, as suggestive and as staggering in their implications as any epic or myth.

Draft. 1) current of air in an enclosed area 2) pull or traction of a load/ that which is pulled/ traction power 3) depth of a vessel's keel 4) heavy demand upon resources 5) document or instrument for transferring money 6) gulp, swallow, inhalation/ a measured portion or dose 7) drawing of liquid from a keg 8) selection of personnel/ conscription 9) drawing in of a net 10) preliminary outline or plan of a document or picture 11) a narrow line chiseled on a stone to guide the mason in leveling the surface 12) a slight taper given a die to ease the removal of a casting 13) an allowance made for loss in weight of merchandise

> full & empty
> the more marks
> the larger emptiness
>
> generative

One first idea about "Drafts" was that they pretend to be informal, "unfinished"—that is self-questioning and processual, a rhetorical texture one might describe as a flow of interruption across a surface. Another idea was they pretend to be real "drafts"—that is certain lines, images or materials can be (as if) provisionally placed at a number of different positions. Hence certain lines or phrases repeat across poems. This tactic is central and continues. Another part of the idea of "drafts" is the interest in marks or marking. I had a number of textual markers in early drafts. The instruction "CUT" that begins "Draft 3: Of" created the predictable difficulties when the book *Drafts (3-14)* (1991) went to the printer.

At a certain point in this exploration of the rhetorics of "drafting," I realized that I was constructing a texture of déjà vu, a set of works that mimicked the productions and losses of memory. And that the works were my own response both to the memorializing function of poetry and to my own bad memory. "An exploration of the chaos of memory (obscured, alienated, or reduced to a range of natural references) cannot be done in the 'clarity' of a linear narrative." (Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, 107) Bad memory. Bad dog. Bad

bad memory. The poem replicates (but neither reconstructs nor represents) a space of memory.

I am no one to say. When I began *Drafts*, I thought of it as "an endless poem of no known category all about everything." My way of interpreting the no known category (which for Pound and Williams was the encylopedic poem; the citation is Pound's) was a kind of playful heterogenerity. For instance, the poem sounds off against the "meditative derivative" while its little feet are stuck in precisely that tar. But the midrashic is extremely important as a genre: the continuous practice of examination, gloss, and reinterpretation. This draws upon H.D., upon Freud, and upon a tradition of Hebrew textuality all at once. Once the line or word or turn of phrase is stated, once the material exists as the stuff of language (and means what it claims to mean), any particle can open out to more. The generative principles of *Drafts* are repetition, recontextualization, reconsideration, returns that are not returns to the same. The "same/ different"—of *Helen in Egypt*—is different than before; never quite the same as before. Sometimes H.D. knows this, but to claim that nothing was ever lost, or that it would recur —to me that was mysticism, and I parted intellectual company with H.D. over the issue of "origins" and recovery.

The texture of commentary and gloss led me to composition by fold. At a certain point (around "Draft 19: Working Conditions" in 1993), the sheer construction of the linear repeats seemed inadequate, and I decided to make the poems fold over each other. In some sense, even a minor sense, or an allusive sense, a donor draft (such as "Draft 4: In") generates some relationship with its counterpart (in this case, "Draft 23: Findings"). The periodicity is 19. "The long poem, then is a rereading of writings, a rewriting of readings." (Smaro Kamboureli. *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem,* 99)

H.D. looked at her own files. H.D. reworked elements of her life and her mythoi over and over. Studied the traces. If a photo was blurred, there was a reason. If a line was made, it could be understood and reinterpreted. A Freudian poetics: that there is no wasted mark, no unmotivated gesture. Reading the reading was writing the writing. Not just talking the talk, but walking the walk. Not just reading the written but writing the wrote. Not the rote. That's how if first felt, when one could reject it—resist H.D. But it was not rote but road. Ever enough rope. In her method was pleasure and also obsession, "obsessing," as we say, hissing sounds like an airlock. The film was run, rerun, spliced, reshot. Palimpsested, so that scrim-films of one picture is superimposed,

underposed. Taking what you are given (she was given a lot, but a lot was taken also) and mulling it.

> Shimmer spectra of intercut;
> waves rays way
> the page is never blank

I must say her ear, her ear, her magnificent Ear, the subtle netting of phonemes across her poems. The way a sound map of H. D. can be revelatory of subplots of sound, of pool words into which important phonemes gather and are held, of the tone-leading so phonemes and sound-clusters track each other and are caught up, split, and engage again. The sound—it was not "beauty" as a limit term, but the language leading itself to more language. Thus the issue of "beauty" could be encircled and pincered off by the fullness of, the tremendousness of sound. This I feel I follow and I want to follow.

There is, inter alia, in all the *Drafts* a good deal of "debris" and "fragment," and this is often provoked by a sense of twentieth-century history, including the Holocaust. Thus the poem has come to recognize in itself a Jewishness of theme and of textuality. It is focused by Walter Benjamin's paradoxical and painful figures, but not necessarily influenced by them beforehand: the angel of history, the sense of a displacement in the storm blowing him backwards into the future, while he is still staring stunned at history and its unfixable debris. Failing memory, strange memory, lost memory, construction of memory. Being haunted. At a further remove than many, still I am haunted by the loss of people, the moral nightmare, the randomness, haunted by the ability at which this century has excelled, several times, to exterminate a group, by the loss of cultures of Jewishness, the loss of languages, the loss of those who might have been. I am haunted by a sense of the ones who are not. Their shadow or the stain of them. A sense of ghosts, but ghosts who do not even declare themselves. I do recognize that this situation is something H.D. also entered. Abraham and Torok's "transgenerational phantom" may explain why someone like myself, two generations removed from direct and intimate ties to European Jewry, speaks a poetry haunted by the ghosts of ghosts.

Drafts have a "midrashic" element: that means the generative processes of continuous re-reading and marking. The poetry works by the endless elaboration of a practice of gloss, including self-gloss. The impulse to analysis, and doubled, redoubled commentary. There is a good deal of "debris" and "fragment"—let's call it a creolized Jewishness.

Writing (by study and certainly by authority claims) commentary adequate to the text that has been set, on which there are many prior comments. The concentration on (the concatination of) the small—the detail of the letter. Yod. Any tiny mark. Any thing can open out to meaning and be connected to other things. The way a toddler will pick up a speck of dust. Every detail could in a particular light have meaning. Error has meaning. Slip has meaning. Anything could be glossed. Gloss generates more text. Text and gloss exist in a permanent, continuous, generative relationship. Gloss on text is more text to be glossed. One makes gloss to comment on loss, against the loss of loss, but there is always more loss. "Even the loss is lost." Preserving has its antonym. Every dot cannot open for every one, but after many years on task I could finally say : I found the opening and I wrote into it.

> Think of the tit
> The tit and the title
> and the entitlement
> think of the jot and tittle.

Drafts construct the space of memory; they also face the breast of the mother. They bring back the cut-off breast of the mother: a work of fake restoration, of impossible milk. The hidden maternal presence: the gift which is also poison ("gift" is poison in German, she says in *The Gift)* have analogues with H.D. My mother died of cancer of the breast in May 1990; ten days after, Mary Oppen died. My mother's pre-death words of bemusement and anger occur in "Draft X: Letters." (And my father had already died, in December of 1986. His death is spoken of in "Draft 5: Gap" and "Draft 6: Midrush." Elegy, and not simply for two people, is a part of what the poem concerns.)

"Feminist critique is not pure absolute negativity but rather historically conscious negation." Teresa de Lauretis.

The poem is a letter, a stranger (a low flame on the grate in Coleridge's conversation poems). It is a folding over in time, of time at the mercy of its thinking. And the thoughtlessness of time.

> Memory is dissolved.
> "Plenty of debris.
> Plenty of smudges."
>
> (WCW to LZ, *Selected Letters,* 94)

"Writing is a [daily] task, and the temporal demands of the work are a part of its argument with existence. . . . The querying of language by language in time is the method." (Barrett Watten, *Total Syntax,* 103)

The poetics of Mass Observation (in which H.D.—astonishingly—briefly participated, writing about the coronation of George VI in 1937) became important to me as a democratic ethics of invested examination. What is it like to live through the texture of our days. What is it, like? There is always a documentary aspect to my poetics. Trying to live in historical time and give some testimony, to bear some (direct or indirect) witness. This means bringing the unspeakable into words, or at the endge of words. Leaving it be mystery, but now in words.

Even the tiniest mark, even down to the tiniest mark; it is "through-composed." And

> documentation of the art
> object that is the art
> object
> is Duchamp
>
> The Large Glass cracks
> ill-packed from Brooklyn
> and it is all absorbed into itself
> trucked
> a turn, a term of its placefulness

The hero of the poem—without a hero. "not hero, not polis, not story, but it," ("Draft 15: Little") "It" speaks.

I cited Virgil. Cano. Arms and the man cano. "CANO, can o yes no/ conno-/ tations of impurities fill the fold." ("Draft I: It") Motive for me from the very beginning. All the Can's and Can no's, and the way I used to Freudian-slip the Cantos (into Canots) while writing my dissertation. Arma virumque cano. H.D. meditates this passage in her work *Paint It To-Day* (1920). I felt kinship, kindship: another link, among the many that set me going.

> that bilingual
> hip-hop talk
> a creature/ écriture's
> langdscape
> of anguage

I wanted exodus, the ex-odic, watchfulness into departures. H.D. wanted to return to plenitude, postulated as origins. I quarrel with the non-presence. "El" and the loss of L means oss, a bony site. She builds a space in which presence can reemerge. I want (and this from J-F Lyotard, painfully) "the forgotten never part of memory": "a demand for a form of thinking and writing that do not 'forget the fact' of the forgotten and the unrepresentable." *(Heidegger and 'the jews',* introduction)

I was convinced I had entered a letter and was travelling thru its uncontrollable tunnels.

This is the gift.

[December 30, 1997-January 1, 1998]

Notes

1. Haibun is a Japanese form of journey writing: prose passages interspersed with haiku. In great fondness for Cid Corman's translation of Basho's *Back Roads to Far Towns,* I composed "Draft 13: Haibun" in 1991. But the mix of prose and haiku-like objects also seemed appropriate to this account. I also follow the "hermetic" encoding in H.D. that involves an H and a D in titles that consider her. People interested in this account as a memoir of my practice might want to supplement it with "Reader, I Married Me: A Plygynous Memoir," in *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism,* ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn; Routledge, 1993; "Otherhow" and "For the Etruscans" in *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice;* Routledge, 1990; "On Drafts: a Memorandum of Understanding," in *Onwards,* ed. Peter Baker; Peter Lang, 1996 and "Manifests," *Diacritics* 26, 3 (1996); as well as with my essays on H.D.: "Family Sexes, Psyche: an essay on H.D. and the muse of the woman writer" and "Language Acquisition," both in *The Pink Guitar.* My books of poetry via Small Press Distribution, 1341 Seventh Street, Berkeley, CA 94710-1403.
2. If I were to track the origins of *Drafts* justly, I want to note that I was reading not only the modernists, but certain of my contemporaries: the HOW(ever) cohort: Bev Dahlen, Kathleen Fraser, Frances Jaffer, and some others at various times in the early-to-mid-80s and forward: Rae Armantrout, Michael Palmer, Robert Duncan, Ron Silliman, Susan Howe (about whom I also wrote), Bob Perelman, Robin Blaser, Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Clayton Eshleman.

MICHAEL PALMER

TWO POEMS

SÃO PAULO SIGHS (AUTOBIOGRAPHY 14)

Lembras-te?
—Mário de Andrade

Our sighs in São Paulo
sounded something like this:

a kiss is just a kiss
be it rain or simply mist

The animal alphabet
passed overhead

with its twenty-three wings
rhythm-a-ning a samba for the dead

We walked and walked and we saw:
a rock star without his rock,

two pictures of a rose in the dark
We saw: the shorn locks of a nun

beside an abandoned well
and we peered into our porous hearts

where militiamen secretly dwell
We walked and walked, we three

the Professor of Everything,
the Professor of Nothing

and yours very truly
We witnessed:

the theoretical arrival
of the workers' paradise

by means of its statuary
We examined a woman's skeleton perfectly drawn

skeleton of everything,
skeleton of nothing

on a blue-lit barroom wall
and we noted the sun's

utter failure to explain
anything at all

regarding the mist and the rain
There's no cosmic close-out on raincoats

no discount on drizzles
so you must remember this

When São Paulo sighs
a kiss is just a kiss

for Régis Bonvicino

AND SIGHS AGAIN
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY 15)

A sea of small killings, invisibilities, precise
scents of night

in its wetness
its edges of bloom

and inflection
A woman, chestnut-fleshed, nipples erect, ascends a
kind of cross

Her companion, her double, her accomplice in this
helps her rise up with her tongue

Out of the dark they are fashioning a rose,
a window

They are examining the mathematics of the fold
They are baking themselves in salt

that we of little faith
may be saved

from the dampness and the dark
They are writing a book of common knowledge

a book of maxims and proverbs
such as a father

might pass on to a son
Did I say father and son

when I meant
farther and farther from the sun

Did I say fold
when I meant fault

salt when I meant song
dark when I meant a little bark

steering straight into the storm
Boat, little boat

with sail of stone,
Are you bearing an alphabet

among the rats in your hold,
an A-B-C-D of twinned bodies

Is the skin of this city your own,
city over which another city floats

skin of a retinal machine
salt sea of invisibilities

GWYN MCVAY

THE RED DRUM

: how to strike emptiness

Fly to the
o-daiko

your wing bone
its resonating
chamber

the *bu-*
tsu of two strokes

as if it meant your life : note
: I am here beating the red drum for you,

its ominous voice my lantern,
every highway reed a tower

: who dreamt, who knew, so loud

•

Around the beater one sees an aura of copper

A murder of crows feeds the fire,

round skin-roofed hut lit orange from inside
At every blow the impossible

: a rap of ghost roses, a shamisen
with nine strings, you so far

yet one of the chorus of drums,
the skeleton of the toothed ancestor bird
flying overhead
                A crazy lady

voice like hours tells for the carrion
bird :
        If the crop sac does not burst
        we don't eat
                If the ox's throat

was never slit what drumhead was struck?
A good one : if the tree topples
hollow what sound?
                Every volcano-
deep word as if from iron mouth

•

The strength to strike
the o-daiko

bu-tsu, as if ringing the globe

"'ring of bone' where
  ring is what a

  bell does"
            for one absent

as if striking emptiness
: taiko's finish vein-blood-

red, muscle of heart

RICHARD DEMING

HOW WE FIND OUR WAY

Some days even sunlight is to be challenged.
Doubted. As in looked
away *from.*
Where to find sustenance? Petitioning daily
the slack-jawed maws of effulgent toaster
ovens with dried-out bread heels.

Or a vesicle
forming
on the edge of the cervix like someone
mouthing
a whistle. What
sustains?

Recovering the body through
want's white
heat. Of where we are.
What was it you would say without
form, without limitation?
Invocation as a way of settling
matters.

An old lover
slits
the
palm
of her hand,
then presses

it against the bathroom mirror. The
flame-shaped

mark swallows her face. *What*
will
the neighbors say?
But then all stories are possibility. How we find
our way. All stories are consolation. A lovely parting
gift. Cells divide,
replicate,
die. Willow
branches bend low seeking out underground rivers and
[nothing adds up.

0-1-0. *Here* and *not here. Off/on.* Then this place
where destination is an oily red handkerchief, a
cobwebby John Deere Tractor cap. A curt *how*
did this happen. Anger fills a glass with cold milk.

Desire defines us: the long division of what
we want from unknowingness. But then all
algorithms are theoretical. And we fall
again, away–
from language, away from the longing

that form takes. A sycamore stands
suddenly up

at the edge of the yard. Already it's gone.
The record is scratched and the needle codas endlessly.

Oblivion becomes
the exegesis of silence. But is that a thing
to be believed? Night opens out like a rayon suitcoat.

Laws of substitution: blackberries are the exegesis,
no, the oblivion, no (how
far does *this* go?)–

blackberries are
silence.
Well what kind of proof is that?

Think of Andreas Vesalius the 16th c.
physician who'd rob graves for subjects to study.
He'd make engravings of flayed
cadavers hoisted into complex positions
by pulleys and levers. The need to know *(I had it in mind)*
muscles *(to suspend the body either)*
as the occiput is lifted back.
The unmediated arc of tendons *(with the head erect or*
[depressed. I placed
the longer end of the noose across)
taut and direct, *(a pulley fixed to a beam)*
facial cavities collecting each
vibration the day affords—*(and by that I drew*
the body, suspended, now higher,
now lower so that it might be turned)
the anatomy *(in every direction)*
(according to the tasks at hand) of supplication
and the form *(—De Humani*
Corporis Fabrica.) that vision takes.

Now we're
here
and what's to show
for it? In the age of late
capitalism Ariadne twines a hempen thread.
It frays.
It frays.

ALLEN S. WEISS

THE DEVIL IN THE BELLY

. . .Shall but one
Amongst these stupid drunkards
Dream, during his morbid nights,
Of creating, from wine, his shroud?
—Charles Baudelaire
"The Assassin's Wine"

He is beset by delusions of ruin and guilt. As a foreigner, now totally impoverished, he reproaches himself for not having taken out French citizenship, fearing this to be a serious crime. He anticipates a terrible punishment: a nail will be hammered into his head, and filth poured into his stomach; then he and the members of his family will be tortured, dismembered, and left exposed in a barren field. Finally, terribly mutilated, he will be led in a large procession to a fair and will be condemned to live until his death as a horrendous attraction in a cage with wild beasts.

> Accompanying these delusions of ruin, guilt, imminent punishment and persecution are interpretations of truly surprising extension. It is the "refuse policy," as he calls it, a policy which has been instituted especially for him. All the refuse, all the waste of the whole universe, is put aside for the purpose of being put into his stomach at some time. Everything is saved without exception. When someone smokes, there will be the ashes, the burnt match, and the cigarette stub. At meals he is preoccupied with crumbs, fruit pits, chicken bones, the water or wine that is left at the bottom of the glass. He says the egg is his worst enemy because of the shell; it is also the expression of the great anger of his persecutors. When someone sews, there are

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This text is excerpted from the author's *Flamme et festin: Une poétique de la cuisine* (Paris: Éditions Java, 1994).

> bits of thread and needles. All the matches, strings, bits of paper, and glass that he sees while walking in the street are meant for him. Then come nail parings, hair clippings, empty bottles, letters and envelopes, subway tickets, newspaper wrappings, dust brought in on people's shoes, bath water, kitchen garbage from all the restaurants in France, etc. Then it is rotten fruits and vegetables, cadavers of men and animals, the urine and feces of horses. When you talk about a clock, he says you are speaking of the hands, cogs, springs, case, weight, key, etc., all of which he will have to swallow. These interpretations bear on everything, absolutely everything, that he sees or imagines.[1]

This excessive and disquieting case history of a patient suffering from depressive psychosis is the antithesis of Kafka's hunger artist. Here—where the surreal devolves into the Kafkaesque, which in turn degenerates into the Ubuesque—it is as if, in a fit of paranoid megalomania, man the microcosm opened his mouth to reveal, in simultaneous punishment and revenge against the cosmos, an infinite black hole which would devour the macrocosm which he was to become. For what phantasm can be more primal than to devour the cosmos, like Zeus? What image is more poetic than an eater of stars? The imagination—be it quotidian, poetic or pathological—is but the ephemera of partial objects torn from culture and history, the transgression by fragmentation of a contemporary cosmos all too unified and all too controlled to admit the most singular, and idiosyncratic, phantasms of our desires. Food constitutes, par excellence, such assimilable, partial objects, such expendable objects of desire.

*

The conditions of gastronomy are often pushed to hyperbolic extremes. It is a sad state of affairs that now we are impressed, even if somewhat disgusted, by the tale of one of Balzac's gargantuan meals: during a business lunch, he managed to begin with 100 Ostende oysters, and then proceed to consume a dozen lamb chops, a duck with turnips, two roast partridges, a sole *normande,* and some fruit—all at the expense of his publisher Werdet, who wished to induce Balzac to sign a contract.

That Cleopatra dissolved, in order to devour, a pearl worth 6 million sesterces created a most costly show of conspicuous consumption, and established an eternal culinary myth—yet it did little to advance the quality of cuisine. In a reflection on the *exquisite* in

cuisine, M.F.K. Fisher decries this sort of culinary absurdity. Castigating those sorts of gourmands who would, out of sheer ostentation, serve entire platters of the tongues of birds who were first taught how to speak, she describes what would be a truly exquisite gesture:

> But what if one of those epicures, greatly in love with a proud lady named Livia, had taught a thousand birds to sing her name, Livia, Livia, to the moment of most perfect diction, and then had served forth to the lady a fine pie of their tongues, split, honeyed, and impaled on twigs of myrrh?[2]

Beyond a certain threshhold, the vulgar becomes sublime—but what does this have to do with cuisine? The inverse is no less disturbing. What does it mean to claim, as did Grimaud de la Reynière, in his *Itinéraire nutritif ou Promenade d'un gourmand dans divers quartiers de Paris,* that "The mustards of Maille are better known in the North than the verse of Racine"?

*

Suetonius, in *The Twelve Caesars,* informs us that the ruling vices of the Roman Emperor Vitellius were gluttony and cruelty, in that order. Vitellius would snatch pieces of meat off the sacrificial altars and devour them in the sight of the very gods he plundered. He banqueted four times a day, and continually invited himself to private banquets at all hours, costing his hosts a ruinous minimum of 4000 gold pieces per meal; in one feast, offered by his brother, 2000 fish and 7000 game birds were served; in another, Vitellius dedicated a huge dish to the Goddess Minerva, naming it *The Shield of Minerva the Protectress,* consisting of the rarest victuals: pike livers, pheasant and peacock brains, flamingo tongues and lamprey milt, all collected from the distant corners of his vast empire.

Sheer luxury, excess and gluttony never constitute cuisine. Vitellius' passions offer an allegory of what gastronomy is *not* about, all those alimentary practices and syndromes that are primarily concerned with something other than taste: anorexia, aphrodisiacs, ascetic renunciation, black magic potions, white magic elixirs, bulemia, cannibalism, coprophagy, erotic philtres, spiritual macrobiotics, neurotic oral fixations, poisons, religious prohibitions, psychotic deliria. Such fantasies of the table—be they psychotic or erotic, mercantile or theological—must be distinguished from those of cuisine. Rather than simply avow a fascination for the extreme limits of culinary phantasms, one must

recover the manner in which such considerations inform, rather than deform, cuisine.

*

The Roman Emperor Heliogabalus once sent hunters to the land of Lydia, offering 200 pieces of gold to the man who brought back a phoenix. None did. It is difficult to guage the meaning of this gesture by the man whom Artaud characterized as "the anarchist crowned," who, perhaps tired of the repeated human sacrifices to his own divine nature, sought a rarer offering. For Heliogabalus, true to his own solar name, wished to bring heaven down to earth, in a cruel and erotic scenario of death. The blood of the sacrifices organized by the Priest of the Cult of the Sun, flowing from the sacrificial alters of the Temple of Emèse, must not be allowed to course through normal sewers to the sea. Rather, a special system was necessary:

> Through these sewers—in the form of an ardent tendril, whose circumference diminished as they reached into the depths of the earth—the blood of beings sacrificed in prescribed rites would regain the sacred corners of the earth, touching primitive geological veins, with congealed shudderings of chaos.[3]

Such blood—ambivalent symbol of life and death—is food for the gods. Sacrifice is a form of communication, and a primal condition for community; it is a manner of resolving the enigmas of existence and of illuminating the mysteries of origins. Sacrifice mediates the contradictions inherent in the polarizations between life and death, heaven and hell, past and future, time and eternity, creation and apocalypse, body and spirit, host and guest, master and slave. Within a theological system, the symbolic is inaugurated by the violence of sacrifice which transforms the body into a signifier, bound to circulate within a restricted economy of exchange. The sacred implies mystery, or mystification. When the internal contradictions of this mystery principal demand resolution, it may be manifested in sacrilege as an attempt to transcend both the limits of individuality and the boundary between the sacred and the profane. Such wisdom is thus a function of blasphemy, abomination, and transgression. Whence the double significance of Heliogabalus' quest—sacred sacrifice, profane cuisine—where the phoenix would be the mythological, culinary emblem or equivalent of the Rite of the Sun. The phoenix has a quite definite, indeed overdetermined, history. Its cycle is described by Jean-Pierre Vernant:

> The incandescent life of the Phoenix follows a circular course, increasing and decreasing, with birth, death and rebirth following a cycle that passes from an aromatic bird closer to the sun than the eagle flying at great heights, to the state of a worm in rotting matter, more chthonian than the snake or the bat. From the bird's ashes, consumed at the end of its long existence in a blazing aromatic nest, is born a small earth-worm, nourished by humidity, which shall in turn become a phoenix.[4]

This creature has a life cycle which is the very allegory of myth itself; it is also, not coincidentally, an allegory of cuisine, taken in its structural instance, as it spans the antithetical conditions of: raw/cooked, cold/hot, fresh/rotten, moist/dry, high (gamy)/aromatized. The phoenix would thus be the perfect dish and the ideal offering, paradoxically encompassing the contradictory possibilities of diverse cooking techniques, inherent alimentary difference, and sacred symbolism. Like the transsubstantiation of the host or cannibalistic communion, the eating of the phoenix would constitute a truly transcendental gastronomic act.

Notes

1. Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time,* trans. Nancy Metzel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 180–181.
2. M.F.K. Fisher, *An Alphabet for Gourmets* (1940), reprinted in *The Art of Eating* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 601.
3. Antonin Artaud, *Héliogabale ou l'anarchiste couronné* (1934), in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 39.
4. Jean-Pierre Vernant, Introduction to Marcel Detienne, *Les jardins d'Adonis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), xxxiii.

TINA ROTENBERG

Excerpt from
NO NAME NO NUMBER NO ADDRESS

PART 2

VIII

She left the house without closing the door, and drove towards the city, speeding through the toll booth. She was sure that the songs on the radio were meant for her, that she needn't look in her rear view mirror before she changed lanes, for he was directing her. He drove the car ahead of her and the car behind her. She followed his white car out of the city, surrounded on all sides by white butterflies that reminded her of stars.

She drove south to a small town by the ocean. The night air cut into her flesh. She entered the rear of a house under construction, and hummed softly to herself as she lay on the bare wood floor boards.

A man came down the stairs, wary and suspicious. He was followed by a woman who looked frightened. They asked her what she was doing there. When she didn't answer, they called the police.

The police took her to the station and asked her questions. What is your name? Where do you live? What is your name? Just tell us your name. She remained silent. The policeman nicely told her that he would have to jail her if she refused to talk.

(October 10, 1985 I can't help wondering how responsible I am for my own misfortune. . . but that in itself is

presumptuous because it assumes that I should have more perfect foresight and I will never have perfect foresight . . . However, I am becoming weary of all the misfortune and need a way to pick myself up.)

She nestled close to his wet body and vowed to follow him. Eventually he rose and walked into the sea. When he put his nose in the water, she did likewise, coming up screaming with her hair streaming wet. She ran out of the ocean into the arms of three people who held her in a long embrace. They took her to a restaurant and bought her soup. Gave her a blue silk Japanese jacket. She was sure she had died and finally reached heaven.

IX

Writing from memory perplexes. The danger is we bore ourselves with what we already know. And yet, if only to let go of what we hate to remember by committing it to a page. But perhaps this act of ritual burial only brings us closer to what we'd prefer to forget. Memories like a frieze, neither move nor progress, as though they have died.

(Letter to J.W. October 20, 1990. . . I remember being late, being arrogant, being flippant and pretending to understand better than you what was worrying you. In 1985, I imagined that I could shrug off responsibility for such behavior under the guise of "illness." I may have been conscious of the harm I did that day. However, I now believe that I should take responsibility for such awareness.)

Did his pride let him send this letter? Or did he keep it to himself? If the letter was sent, did it reach a dead end? Were there more letters? More attempts to repair the friendships he unwittingly destroyed and then helplessly mourned?

X

She trained herself to reveal each slight aberration of thought or action. But the road "out" was too seductive. Drawn to the fine line, stepping in and out of what others called "reality."

She drove to I. and booked a room in the back with white cotton curtains. He was the man with the red face and blond hair. She was as close as a hair to the redemption that she sought. At 3:30 AM she knelt beside her bed and prayed shamelessly for him to come to her.

(January 18, 1987 I flew to Vancouver, bought a bicycle and stereo system for my hosts, an extra set of ski equipment. I became very paranoid; people were treating me differently and I didn't know why. I imagined that I was responsible for the explosion of the space shuttle due to something I had said to my father on the telephone. (This was extremely upsetting) I switched planes at the last second on the way home because I was afraid that my plane would be blown up.)

XI

When we open the door to a constellation of memories, they come very quickly, leaving us no time to hone and curtail our sentences. We repeat words and phrases, write in the simplest syntax and generally shame ourselves into writing at the level of an eight year old, but less interestingly, because the writing is divested of curious spelling errors and turns of thought expressed with striking elisions and ellipses.

Her heart broken in pieces like a pot that reassembled itself as she stood by her hospital bed, shaken by a force beyond her control. She spurred herself to receive the involuntary movements of her body, to wait until the shaking ended. When it was over, she knew that she was well.

(December 23, 1990 To some extent, I look for criticism or the hint of criticism even where it doesn't exist. I feel like a soldier who grabs his sword and shield every time a bird flies by.)

XII

"One of the major Voudoun rituals is the ceremony of *retirer d'en bas de l'eau,* the reclamation of the soul of the deceased from the waters of the abyss, the world of *Les Invisibles.*"

—Maya Deren

She pranced along the beach, lifting her skirt as she entered the water. He walked along the shore, silent and watchful. She waded deeper into the lake. This was her immersion, and she yearned for him to join her in her momentary joy. But he remained on the beach, solemn in his knowledge that she had followed him into the deeper, unfathomable corners of their closeness. She called to him. He gazed at her. She reached for a celebration of their reunion, emerging from the water laughing and flirtatious.

The day glowed, warming her wet clothes. This was her adventure, her quest, to join herself to him in the gaiety of her spirit. But he was already withdrawing into the tomb of their affection.

(September 1985 Furthermore, privacy is a separate issue from group decisions about phones. Perhaps we should discuss it; I don't care if I never set foot in your bedroom if that is what you would like and can find a calm way to say it.)

This was her current fear—that she would search for a ghost, a lost spirit whose abandonment of her life was so unexpected, so sudden and mysterious, that she would not let him stay dead.

XIII

"The hero of man's metaphysical adventure—his healer, his redeemer, his guide and guardian—is always a corpse."

—Maya Deren

She trained herself to listen from thousands of miles away to the vagaries of his mind, and, when he fell, she experienced a comparable breakdown of lucidity. She entered the zone of the twins where one soul is so closely linked to the other that whatever befell one of them, the other would experience.

(May 9, 1991 . . .I am sensitized to many subtle and seemingly hidden hurts that most people ignore. It is like driving on an expressway without a windshield. None of the other drivers care about the bugs, dirt and birdshit that

land on their windshield. It would take something as traumatic as hitting another car to affect their trip. However, for me, without my windshield, a pebble in the face could mean loss of an eye. I could get a bug up my nose or a birdshit shampoo. The only way that I could cope is by slowing down or taking side streets. The advantage is, that when I slow down and get off the expressway, I find out what the city is really like. With the wind in my face, I understand what the car's speed really means. I both learn how to survive without the windshield and I find out what life is really like.

The problem is, that I still haven't gotten completely used to driving without a windshield and so I don't always know which are the hurts and hazards that I alone feel and which are the ones that everyone feels.)

Wherever she thought she recognized him, she fell in love. These accidents of attachment never worked. It was like a betrayal of nature, a departure from the sacred connection they tacitly vowed to protect from all substitutes.

Such attractions only occurred during periods when one or both of them were unreachable, unprotected, wandering lost, unrecuperable for several days, sometimes weeks, even months. Then the bond was threatened, shaky, destabilized and destabilizing. It was as if she appeared in a mirror that he mistook for himself. By entering the mirror, she entered a world of fantasy, searching, mourning her fallen twin.

XIV

"The voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks—so it sounded."

—Virginia Woolf

She sat for hours and watched him read. Unforgettable look of concentration, patience, and suffering. She drew him with her eyes. Over and over. She could not absorb him without drawing him. She wished to know the place he touched within himself.

She watched the lily open its petals with a dryness in her throat. She was his lily.

They entered the water together, both silly and laughing. She could not tell him where she went. She didn't want to suffocate him. She stroked him with her eyes. He felt how warm her eyes were, how safe. Blindly, he reached for her. But she was gone, and he didn't know if he could ever find her again.

He was still with a stillness she had learned to recognize. A cavern of stillness which she entered only to lie among the leaves of the forest, and weep for the moment he must have fallen, thousands of miles away in a different time. She was always straining towards that point of breakage. She could not forgive. Or forget that he had gone somewhere totally without her. She must find him there, duplicate his journey. How else could she understand him?

(This is the road we took as we entered the Alps. It keeps getting more and more beautiful—right now, we're camped beside an alpine stream up in the Italian Alps. We're twenty-five kilometers from the Brenner pass and thirty kilometers from the Austrian border, at least the modern Austrian border—everyone is Austrian within one hundred kilometers anyway.)

She saw him across the room and sensed, as always, the intentness of his presence. As though he was poised on the edge of a question that he asked himself repeatedly without ever receiving an answer. They knew one another well and signaled that knowledge to each other without exchanging a word. This was her comfort—to feel so united with him, without so much as a touch. It was as if his hand hovered over her skin. She felt the muscles in his shoulders and down his back. He was just a few inches taller than her, so when they lay together, they matched.

(May 5, 1985 How do I reconcile the fact that I could have saved myself, Dr. P, the College of Physicians and Surgeons a lot of wasted time by lying. . . As offensive as it is to lie about that kind of thing, I believe it may be a type of

personal secret whose nature makes it private property that should not be violated.)

XV

She taught him the secrets of the light. Grey light filtered through snow-cast windows. Her message lacked words. It was a sacred feeling, a feeling for the grove of fir trees at the bottom of the sprawling lawn.

Who combined them into one spirit that circled ceaselessly round their heads, penetrated their eyes, and cast a dark hue over their skin? His eyes sought hers and hers rested upon him, causing his interior spaces to leap towards her, mimicking her sadness.

She learned to wander, shedding her possessions in restaurants, on street corners, in grocery stores.

As she walked the aisles she could smell the food. The guy at the cash register offered her a sandwich. She dropped her black leather jacket in a box in one of the aisles.

(Dearest, Here's an example of one studying trick that I forgot to mention to you—writing in caves. There are no distractions, no noise, it's too cold to think of anything but working, and the only problem is that there is no light.)

Images of him burned their way across her mind.

When she kissed him, her lips turned blue from cold.

The story must begin in the middle and ascend towards the end and the beginning simultaneously. There is no memory left and only memory hangs in shreds upon her night table.

He was four and she was ten. He was sixteen and she was twenty-two. He was thirty-six and she was forty-two. She was twenty-five and he was nineteen. She was twenty-eight and he was twenty-two. She was thirty-six and he was thirty.

Half a life stripped away.

There is no other end of the line, no pauses, no voice, no hello or good-bye. Tiny fir trees that tell her which direction his body lies.

This conversation has no interlocutor. It is only her history told to a dead man.

XVI

"Silence is perhaps a word, a paradoxical word, the silence of the world *silence,* yet surely we feel that it is linked to the cry, the voiceless cry, which breaks with all utterances, which is addressed to no one and which no one receives, the cry that lapses and decries."

—Maurice Blanchot

Their lives ran parallel, dipping into creeks and valleys simultaneously, alternately. The timing didn't matter. What mattered was the coincidence of partners in this maelstrom of shocking experiments with perception and self-knowledge, the drive to pursue a perfection that guilt and compassion coordinated.

(Dearest, Right now I'm lying on two sleeping bags on top of a small piece of rubber with an eight foot by four foot piece of plastic stretched over top of me. It's probably about 10:00 in the morning and I think I've been in this sleeping bag since about seven o'clock last night when it first started snowing. It's still snowing on and off and it's quite windy, so I'm not getting out of this sleeping bag until the sun comes out. It's cold! I'm in a little clearing in the middle of the forest on a hillside which slopes down to sea level. I was left here two days ago and will be picked up tomorrow. My bag of food rations contains one can of tuna fish, two biscuits, one package of soup which I had last night for dinner, two tea bags and four sugar cubes as well as ten matches. It doesn't sound like much, but since I do nothing but lie out here and write, I don't expend a lot of energy. I only feel hungry on the rare occasion that I have to move, such as to go down to the creek to fill up my canteen.)

XVII

"So strong was his love for her it would have pushed open the lid of his coffin—had the flower she placed there not been so heavy."

—Paul Celan

She saw him sitting in a chair to the right of the nursing station. He wore a beige wool hat that completely covered his hair. There was a strength in the angles of his face that she hadn't seen before. He was almost unrecognizable. He had waited for her for three whole days. As she hid under the spruce trees in the shadows.

All day she thought she was dying. When he came and sat on her bed, she knew that she was safe at last. This was the power of his compassion—to meet her at the point where she had lost him.

(August 1990 I have tried to imagine my way into your thoughts and I write here two ways of thinking about the anger that has passed between us. I have taken the liberty of writing this from your point of view as if you could have thought these thoughts yourself.)

Andrew Joron

SPINE TO SPIN, SPOKE TO SPEAK

The pilot alone knows
That the plot is missing its
Eye.

Why isn't this "ominous science"
  itself afraid, a frayed
Identity?

Pray, protagonist–
Prey to this series of staggered instants.

Here the optic
Paints its hole, its self-consuming moment.
It is speech, dispelled, that
  begs to begin to ache.

So that *wind* accelerates to *wound,* a dead sound
  enlivened by the visitation of owls.

As pallid as parallel, the cry
Of the negative is not the negative
  of the cry–an irreparable blessing–

A green world's
  "sibilant shadows" where
The syllables of your name are growing younger.

As involuntary as involuted, "who"
  returns its noun

to each tender branch
That *noon* breaks into *no one.*

Point of view
Hovers, a circular cloud, over evacuated
Time.

That heard its herd bellow below
the terraced cities, the milled millions

as sold as unsouled, ghost-cargos.

A symptom of the Maddening–
Woman undressed of her flesh.
Man's address
to Thou, & the flag of Thou.
How the fallen state
Meets the starry horizon, veil
against witness, hunger against void.

O, oldest
outermost Other–

Ageing mask
Of the transparent Earth. Unspeculated
image
Streaked with mirror & stricken words.

You are neither the torn, nor the thorn.

You are the many-petalled
melting point of repeating decimals. . .

Receiver, river
Has been burned into voice, a day-dark ribbon.

All signal is this
Afterglow.

ANSELM HOLLO

FIVE POEMS

WE ARE HAVING IT AGAIN AND WITHOUT SORROW

molecular vessel named I Am December
gesticulates its way through mind maze
looking for some opaque you

archy old
& after reading les surréalistes some more

now mental spin to winding woods
in ancient jars brain slowly happened
words come in spurts drool dream at dawn
history from a tooth
night grottos of the blesséd matter
in sleepwalk time no present face

rainy street no stars equals my language

now let us end
with a discreet representation
of a real lightbulb
still doing its connotations
in a city of transparent sepulchers

off to ride
last waltz railroad in November sun

AD QUODLIBET

wheel around on best days riding the hum
let coffee fumes spread across Dasein trail
& its perfect unconscious journals
avoid the wrongheaded
even when you can hear them
working up opinions
inside their unpleasant little brains
& the contemporary has aged
at least twenty years
& now has industrial presence of slag heap
just light a fire in the magic bag
spend evening by the well
raise cup of quest to speeding fugitive

A HUNDRED MULE DEER IN THE BACKYARD

i.m. Allen Ginsberg

sleepwalkers' chess *condensare ad absurdum*
why did we say what we just seem to have said
not a thought in our heads
is the thought in my head
meaning
meaning
            is a product
frame form work the old farm
stalking about like some mad Highlander
yet gigglily prudent as a bat's bellybutton
peering at words "as if all worlds were there"
then think freedom music
not deplorable platforms
think lovely list of things e.g.
Socialist Internationals Paris 1889 & Erfurt 1891:

        democracy & equal rights for all
                including women
        separation of church & state
        free education
                including higher education
        free medical service
        graduated taxes
        the eight-hour work day
        the right to organize unions

though serious revolvers
they stood no sporting chance

nor does the poet
walk around making hilarious remarks

don't shelve that book yet
I want to remember him a little longer

FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF PROFESSOR DOPPELGANGER

America still talk bizarre
falls off knocks versions about
stuff odd extensions
this has had bad maintaining

Eve's hand on Adam's inordinate elevation
individual lotus be that way
on day of Utopian items defined

news pinned on heart
as we wheel in to sleep's bright anagrams

she is the model in his dream life class
not having but having the seeing of her

these are our old forms

LIFE IN THE TWISTS

bare freckled skin under black cloak
reminders of turns not taken or not taken well
endless parentheses faraway dogs
nighthawks crouched in basement cafeteria
with Rita Hayworth in her prime
more bitter than instant brewed
in aluminum pot on our way to the program
of was it social uplift or another 'summer of love'
between Dubuque and Sioux City

"no let me tell you I am the phantom
of the second life
a wanderer a beautiful stray
on the face of the earth"

shook off the dust & put on her hat

"all that was ever is
or vice versa. . ."

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

EIGHT POEMS

(Tr. from the French by Ron Padgett)

A PHANTOM OF CLOUDS

As it was the eve of the 14th of July
About four o'clock in the afternoon
I went out to see the saltimbanques

You don't see these open-air performances
Much in Paris these days
When I was young you saw a lot more of them than now
Almost all of them have gone out into the provinces

I was walking down the Boulevard Saint-Germain
And in a little square located between Saint-Germain-des-Prés
and the statue of Danton
I saw the saltimbanques

Surrounded by people mute and resigned to waiting
I made a place for myself in this circle to get a good look
Impressive weights
Belgian towns lifted at arm's length by a Russian worker from
Longwy
Black hollow dumbbells whose bars are frozen rivers
Fingers rolling a cigarette bitter and delicious like life

A lot of dirty rugs covered the ground
Rugs with creases that would never come out
Rugs almost completely the color of dust
And with a few yellow or green stains impossible to get rid of
Like a melody that haunts you

Do you see the wild and skinny character
The ashes of his forefathers came out in his graying beard
He wore his entire heritage on his face
He seemed to be dreaming of the future
Mechanically turning the crank on his Barbary organ
Whose slow voice gave out its own marvelous lamentation
Glug-glugs quacks and dull moans

The saltimbanques didn't move
The oldest one wore tights the violet pink that comes to the
    cheeks of certain fresh young girls near the point of death

This particular pink especially moves into the wrinkles
    around the mouth
Or near the nostrils
It's an absolutely treacherous pink

This man wore on his back
The ignoble shade of his lungs
Arms arms everywhere were going on guard

The second saltimbanque
Was dressed only in his shadow
I watched him a long time
His face completely escapes me
He's a headless man

And another one looked seedy
A tough guy trashy and good at the same time
With his baggy pants and garters
Didn't he look like a pimp getting spruced up

The music stopped and negotiations with the audience began
Who coin by coin tossed the sum of two francs fifty onto the
    rug
Instead of the three francs the old man had set as the price

But when it became clear that no one would give any more
He decided to start the show
From under the organ a very small saltimbanque dressed in
    pulmonary pink came out
With fur at his wrists and ankles
He gave little cries
And bowed opening his arms nicely
Palms up

With one leg back for genuflection
He bowed to the four cardinal points
And when he walked on a ball
His thin body became a music so delicate that not one of the
    spectators was untouched by it
A little inhuman spirit
Each one thought
And this music of forms
Overwhelmed that of the mechanical organ
Ground by the man whose face was covered with ancestors

The little saltimbanque turned cartwheels
With such harmony
That the organ stopped
And the organist hid his face in his hands
With fingers like the descendants of his destiny
Minuscule fetuses coming out of his beard
New cries of Redskins
Angelic music of the trees
Disappearance of the child

The saltimbanques lifted the big weights at arm's length
They juggled the weights

But each spectator was searching in himself for the
    miraculous child
Century O century of clouds

ANNIE

On the coast of Texas
Between Mobile and Galveston there's a
Large garden filled with roses
It also contains a villa
Which is a large rose

Often a woman strolls along
In the garden all alone
And when I walk along the line of lime trees by the road
My eyes meet hers and hers meet mine

Since that woman is a Mennonite
There are no rosebuds and no buttons on her clothes
Two of them are missing from my coat
The lady and I follow nearly the same rite

PRAYER

When I was a child of two
My mother dressed me only in white and blue
O Holy Virgin
Do you love me still
Me I know
I will
Love you till I die
Even though I've changed
I don't believe in heaven or in hell
I don't believe I don't believe
The sailor who was saved
Because he never forgot to say
A Hail Mary every day
Looked just like me looked just like me

HOTEL

My room is shaped like a cage
The sun sticks its arm through the window
But I who want to smoke and make mirages
I light my cigarette with daylight
I don't want to work I want to smoke

LA GRENOUILLÈRE

At the island's edge
The empty rowboats are gently bumping one another
And now
Neither on Sunday nor on any other day of the week
Neither the painters nor Maupassant goes out
Bare-armed in their rowboats with big-chested women
Dumb as all get-out
Little boats you make me feel really sad
At the island's edge

THE PONT MIRABEAU

Beneath the Pont Mirabeau flows the Seine
And our loves
Why do I hear that old refrain
Joy always used to follow pain

Let the hour chime the light wane
The days go by I remain

With your hand in my hand turn your face to my face
While under the
Bridge of our arms goes past
Waves so tired of the everlasting gaze

Let the hour chime the light wane
The days go by I remain

Love goes away as this water flows
Love goes away
How idly life goes
And wildly alive is hope

Let the hour chime the light wane
The days go by I remain

Days and weeks drift past like rain
Nor time past
Nor old loves come back again
Beneath the Pont Mirabeau flows the Seine

Let the hour chime the light wane
The days go by I remain

THE WHITE SNOW

Angels angels in the sky
One is dressed like an officer
One is dressed like a cook
And the others sing

Handsome officer colored sky blue
The sweet spring a long time after the year's through
Will pin a beautiful sun on you
        A beautiful sun on you

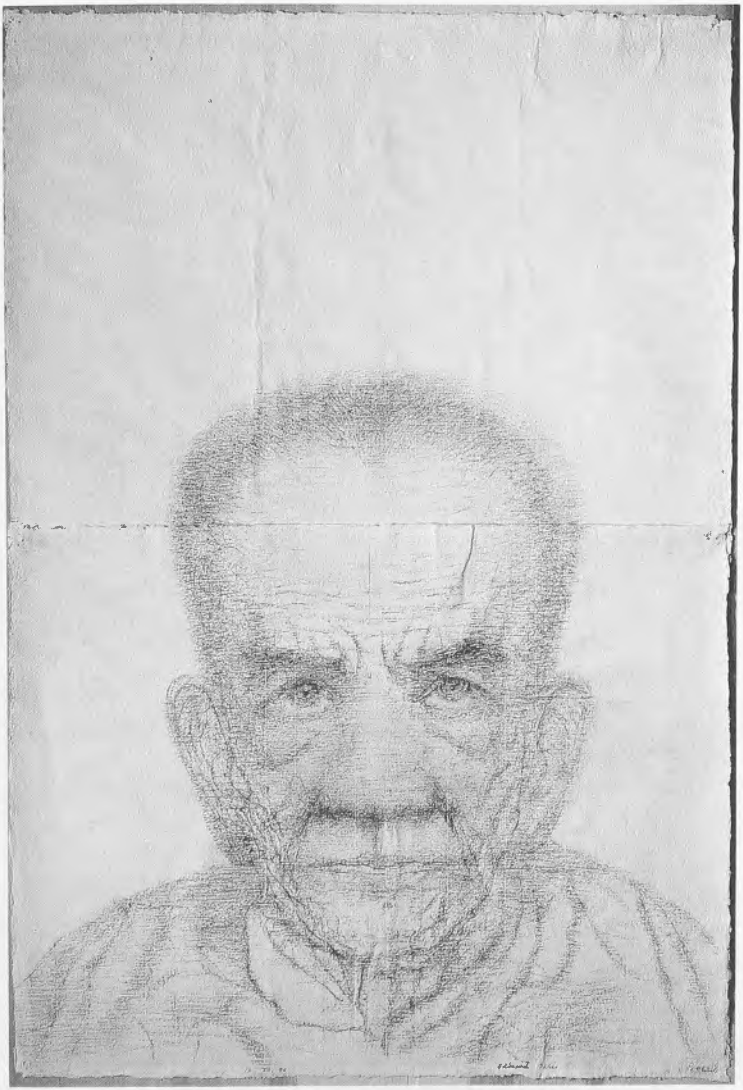
The cook plucks the goose's down
        Ah! falls snow
        falls and now no
Sweetheart to put my arms around

4

It's 4 in the morning
I get up fully dressed
In my hand a little bar of soap
Someone I love sent me
I go to wash up
I emerge from the hole we sleep in
I feel terrific
And happy to be able to wash up for the first time in three days
Then all clean I go get a shave
After that I blend in sky-blue with my blue uniform until night falls and it's a very sweet pleasure
To say no more about anything I do it's an invisible being doing it
And buttoned up and all blue now blended into the sky I disappear

IRVING PETLIN

ELEVEN DRAWINGS



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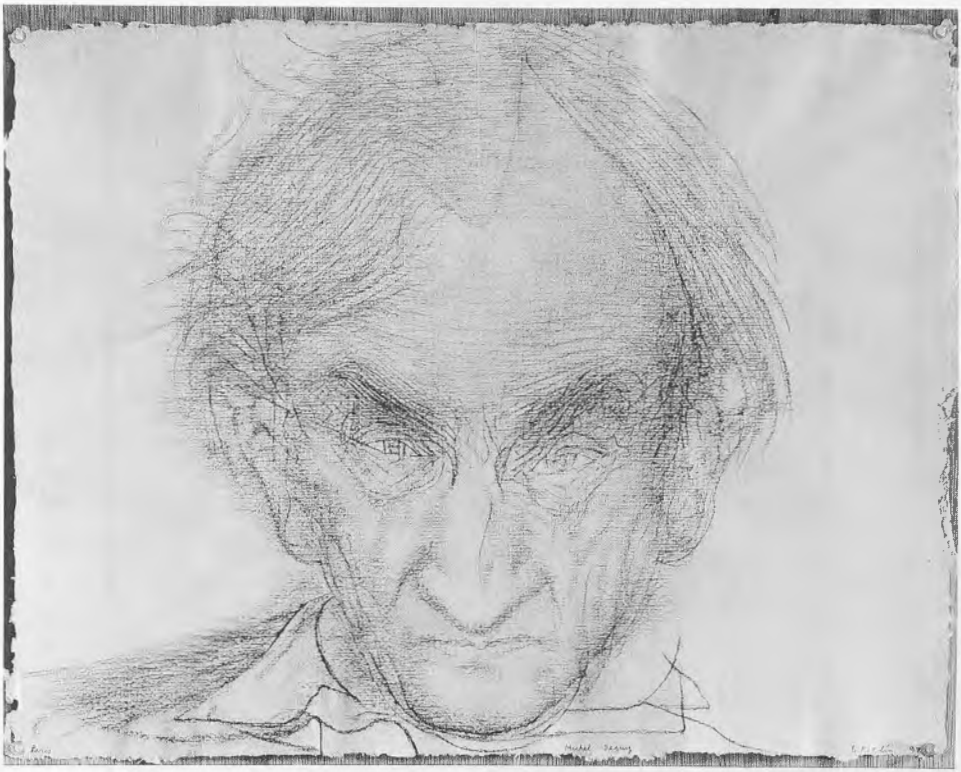
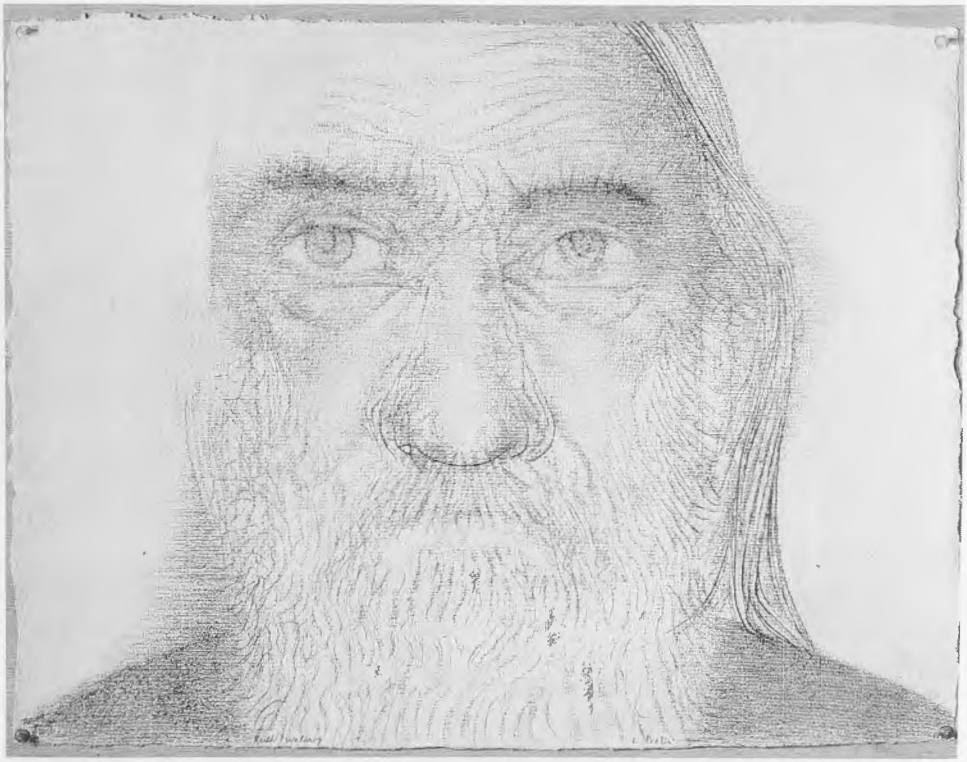


Michel Deguy

Dominique Fourcade

John Ashbery



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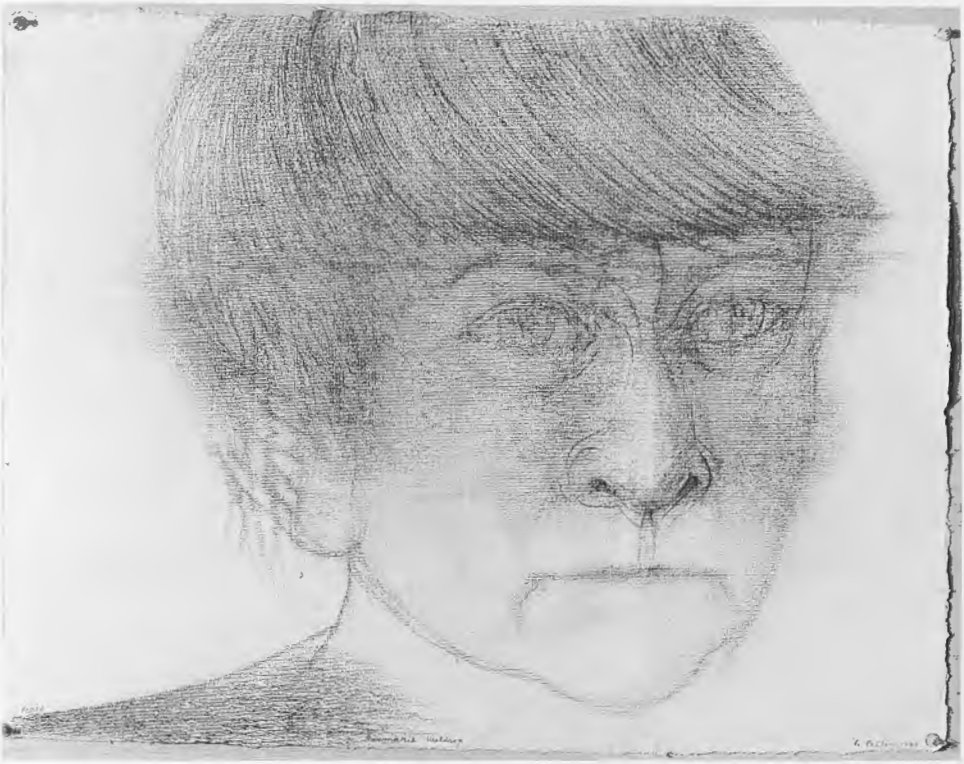


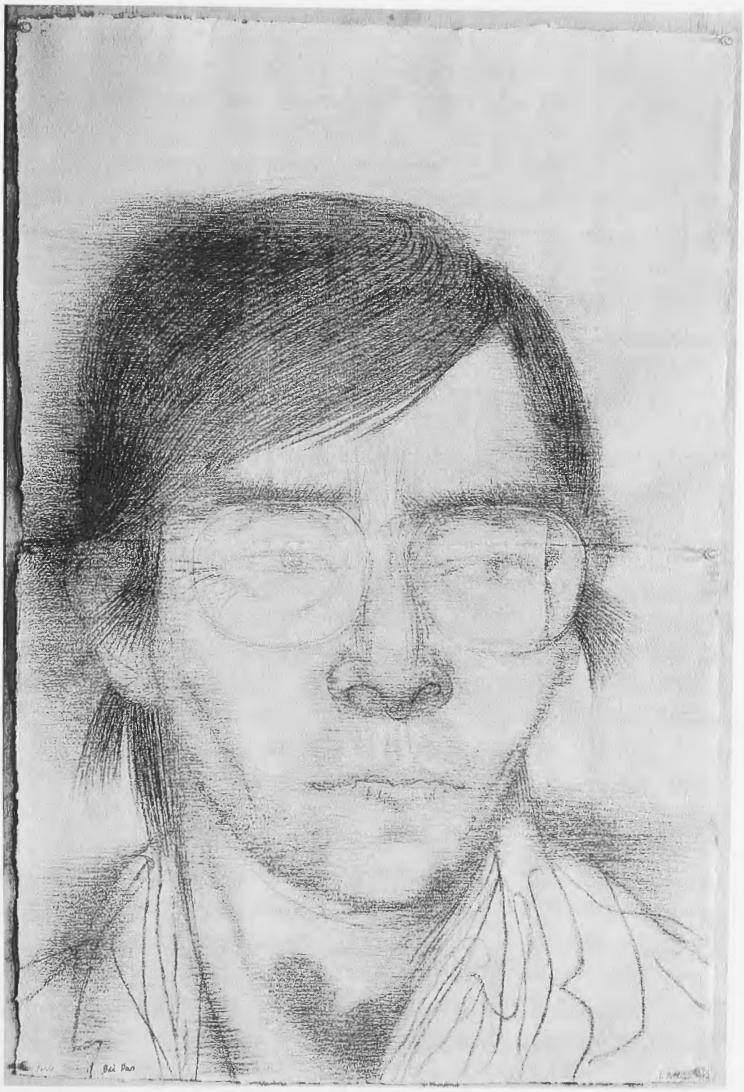
Rosmarie Waldrop

Clayton Eshleman

Norma Cole

Michael Palmer

Susan Howe



Bei Dao

COMMENTARY

A BRIEF EXCHANGE

TWEEDLEDUM and TWEEDLEDEE have, oddly enough, taken very different tacks upon reading Mr. Charles Bernstein's aptly-titled poem, "A Test for Poetry" *(Sulfur* 41) and wished to share their viewpoints with your readers.

TWEEDLEDUM WRITES. . .
Aha! In this snide poem, Mr. Charles Bernstein has exposed himself as a cultural imperialist, ridiculing the efforts of a good and honest Chinese, who is presented as scrambling willy-nilly through his bilingual dictionary, seeking approximations for horrifying ambiguities, neologisms, enallages and—horror of horrors!—failing miserably. In this process, however, he does succeed at amusing *Sulfur* readers (post-language Anglophone literates) so wittily. Not only does Ziquing Zhang collide with wall after wall, splintering into horrifying shards of Chinglish and strewing the debris of the untranslatable everywhere. No, not only this. It is *much worse* than that. Clearly, Mr. Bernstein shows us, the translator lacks even the vital, prerequisite mainframe with which he might understand this daring new art of the Occident, trying in his pathetic and ancient way to reduce such gems of the Western World as "No Pastrami" *(Rough Trades)* into the typical Chinese image-cluster and lyric narrative so that even non-langpo-initiates might "understand" them. *(Red* flags go up everywhere at this word).

Particularly funny is the moment wherein the translator asks, "Is *Mamaroneck* a place in the U.S. where wild oxes howl?" That's a real killer-diller. But what I, Tweedledum, submit is that something very different than what Mr. Bernstein intends is happening: it is yet another case of what we Victorians are so fond of calling the Emperor's New Clothes. I submit that Mr. Bernstein wanders often forth in this state of bare pubicity and full publicity, with, however, a book of theory in

each hand, each book thick enough to stun an ox. (This is in keeping with the theme of "oxes"). So I have little sympathy with this pity party of a poem, designed to show the common reader what a trial it is to be desired but misunderstood in so many languages. I submit also that it is not necessarily the case that what is untranslatable in poetry doesn't exist, but that what doesn't exist is untranslatable, and that good poems translate better than bad poems. It doesn't translate because "there's no there there." (Hence, I claim I am more of a materialist with regard to language than any langpo poet). Charles Bernstein's poem is indeed "A Test for Poetry." He failed.

TWEEDLEDEE RESPONDS. . .

I take umbrage at, and exception to, the thoughts and sentiments expressed by my colleague, Tweedledum. His first crime (nay, *felony)* is failing to have a sense of humor. "A Test for Poetry" is a poem born out of the eternal frustration inherent in the act of translation and I find its humor to be legitimately born out of a true poet's sense of the give-and-take inherent in any act of *meaning* (anything). This poem is Wittgenstein's red rubber ball bouncing and bouncing down the street, away and out of sight, into evening gloam. Mr. Bernstein has always been a poet of the *sadness of meaning.* He doesn't have to write Berryman's ball poem to show us this; he *becomes* the ball.

While I must admit that it is true that cultural differences here are foregrounded, I don't think there is any cruelty shown. Yes, the use of image in Chinese lyric poetry is *millennial,* and it is natural that an educated and gifted translator would find langpo methodology extremely challenging (nay, *pixilating)* had he not much prior familiarity with it. How many years does it take the average American poet to assimilate these practices? (And no snide remarks about Buffalo workshops here, Tweedledum!)

I find "A Test for Poetry" to be one of Mr. Bernstein's finest poems to date. The title alludes to the structure of the poem itself, how it is cast in the form of those horrible "objective" questions that follow the poems themselves in horrible anthologies of poetry which poetry-hating universities rely so much on. Anyone who has suffered through these could not possibly miss the horrible *cadences* in which those questions were written, all presumably by the same person. But here Bernstein has turned this procrustean bed into Rousseau's divan in the jungle for Yadwigha. He is telling us that he doesn't know the answers *either.* Probably he is amazed at how these questions came to reside in his poem. They befuddle and amuse him. They make him feel stupid but interested; he was right after all; language is totally alien, non-self masquerading as self. It has infiltrated meaning's immune system.

Perhaps his chuckle here is a mortal one. He knows he is not really present in the poems, in any of them. Mallarmé stops looking in the mirror after a time.

"A Test for Poetry" is a fine poem, if one calculated to cause controversy and heartache on all sides. I salute the poet for his bravery in writing it.

P.S. Tweedledum and Tweedledee apologize for missing what they each half-believe is a reference to an Auden quote (re translating Cavafy).

—W.B. KECKLER

A LETTER FROM BERLIN: SCREENING TRANSFORMATION

The screen of Berlin is where its transformations are compulsively inscribed. The zone between the city's inhabitants and those spectacularly mutating screens is the interstice where cinema collides with architecture. Berlin becomes ever more possessed by the urgency of that ocular crash as the city approaches the end of the century in which it has incessantly devastated and enlivened Europe. With the vast rebuilding work evident everywhere in the east of the city, the work in progress towards Berlin's regaining of its status as Germany's capital city tangibly recreates history before its citizens' eyes. The contrast between the city's scars and its innovations is starker than ever. Destruction and creativity fit intimately together in Berlin. The city projects its own visual and temporally multiple presence, never more so than with Christo's wrapping of the Reichstag in July 1995. By day, the grey-wrapped building is void, canceled. As Christo declared on Berlin television, the impact he wanted was that of seeing the building momentarily disappear, and nothing more. But by night, vast crowds gather in the heat of the Berlin night. They create their own cacophonous soundtrack as they sit before the Reichstag and gaze in transfixed awe at the spectacle of nothing. Into that nothing, the imageries from the past, the present and the future of Berlin are incessantly generated, since Berlin is the sensorium of Europe. The darkness transforms hypnotic vision into intersecting trajectories of memory and imagery. And on such nights, the entirety of Berlin is one vast cinema: the

projectionist is insane, the film reels are in reverse order, the seats are a bizarre mix of the broken and the spanking new, and the audience is deliriously facing in every wrong direction. On the final nights of the wrapping, the grey sheets start to unravel from the Reichstag and cranes appear around the building. The screen of the city is dismantled before its participants' eyes, and the murderously banal spectacle of everyday life in the city slides back into place for another instant. Simultaneously with the wrapping of the Reichstag, Berlin's annual Techno music carnival—the Love Parade—snakes through the center of the city in a vast and obliterating wall of noise. To some extent, young Berliners see the Love Parade and its crazed participants as the unnatural extension of the punk movement. Where punk was a volatile concoction of political outcry and sheer malicious delight, the Love Parade too is a provocative but fundamentally pleasurable experience. It embodies both the distrust which Berliners manifest towards the immense big-business transformations which are elevating in the city, and the exhilaration with which they display that resistance. The surfaces of Berlin are sonically charged with that resistance, as a counterpoint to the genealogies of graffiti which have now been layering their way into the eastern streets of Berlin for eight years or so. This isn't the first time that Berliners have poured through the city streets, and the Love Parade necessarily and contradictorily evokes both the Nazi parades of the 1930s and the mass demonstrations against Nazism. The Love Parade is the finale of Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* filmed by Leni Reifenstahl. With the skepticism that led Berliners in 1933 to revile Hitler and oppose his election while much of the rest of Germany embraced Nazism, they continue to demonstrate their capacity to negate the best-made plans of the city authorities. Berlin's contemporary artists—often Techno musicians and filmmakers and architects as well as artists—are as far from the conceptual artists of the 1970s and the figurative painters of the 1980s as it's possible to go. An obsolete technology such as Super-8 is the vital film medium for seizing the future of a city which is irrevocably exiled. The new exiled filmmakers inhabiting Berlin from Kurdistan and Armenia and Croatia reveal the city as an arena where the obsession with exile has a preeminent site. It was only when the DDR's final dictator, Erich Honecker, went into exile and death in Chile that the city grew to love him as part of itself. The city assembles its new visual configurations—of buildings, of cinematic imageries, of obsessions: all equally material—in anticipation of the calamitous sensation of ecstasy their oncoming cancellation will provoke, in the heart of Europe.

—STEPHEN BARBER, July 1997

The cave art of the Old Stone Age is currently being investigated more profoundly and scientifically than before. Ethnographic comparison is conspicuously assuming a place beside the immanent analysis of representation.

The ethnographic method teaches that we must penetrate ever deeper into a given society's various spheres of life. Such spheres include speech, the utilization of tribal territory, religious convictions, ritual, social structure, the kinship system—and also artistic expression, which cannot be comprehended in isolation from the rest. An ethnographer would not ask an Australian aborigine directly and brutally: "What do these pictures mean?" Instead, he would take the time to converse with him slowly and patiently, and so assemble, by indirect means, information from the most disparate spheres, in order to gradually make visible the meaning of the pictures.

Archaeologists studying prehistory must proceed in the same manner. The structuralist and all-too-simplifying "search for meaning," as described by the late prehistorian André Leroi-Gourhan, now appears to be no longer appropriate; indeed, it seems irrelevant. Today, the archaeological site is first of all thoroughly examined. An exact and systematic documentation of the rock paintings is rendered by means of modern methods such as photography and diagramming. These are supplemented by physical-chemical analyses of pigments, using tiny samples of material (less than a milligram). Thus we learn the exact composition of the coloration; we can then compare the figures to one another and attempt to discover, for example, which figures originated at the same time, or by the same hand. If the pigments contain organic material, the paintings also can be dated precisely with the carbon-14 method. In addition, the figures are reproduced in their original size on a cave wall; here, the work is executed according to "prehistoric" methods and conditions.

We know that these sacred places were in use, with some interruptions, over a very long period of time. The cave of Cougnac was used for ten thousand years, and the grotto of Cosquer for over eight thousand. In certain cases, the tribe gathered in its entirety to witness the rites; in other cases, only a few of its members paid homage to an intimate art. Many rites involved touching the walls with paint-covered hands; sometimes existing figures were merely renewed, and no new ones created. Limestone formations often were specially emphasized or destroyed; while near the paintings, sacrificial or votive offerings were cast into fissures.

The most important goal of the archaeological investigation of stone-age cave art is to understand how the function of the painted sites changed. It is becoming evident that, over time, the cave art continually received fresh interpretations. The perdurability of the pictures themselves in no way implies that their meaning remained constant. On the contrary, many indications suggest that, in subtle ways, the pictures proved adaptable to a flux of meanings. The outlines of many older patterns were gradually reworked by later modes of application, showing either a progressive development or a total mutation of their meaning: the pictures were utilized continuously (or sporadically) over the course of millennia by societies with completely heterogeneous motives.

The ethnographic study of stone-age art has yielded significant revelations. In 1952, the ethnologist N. W. G. Macintosh published an article that documented and interpreted rock art from two sites in northern Australia, Tindandjal and Beswick Cave. For this study, he relied exclusively on immanent analysis of the representations and on his conventional ethnological notions. Twenty years later, old aborigines who had been initiated into the tradition disclosed to him the true meaning of the paintings, and Macintosh realized how much he had erred in his first investigation.

His second article clearly indicated the limitation of all forms of immanent analysis. The belief that the document alone can give rise to a proper interpretation was exposed here as a positivistic illusion. Macintosh thereby issued a rebuff to André Leroi-Gourhan, who in 1960 asserted that prehistorians investigating stone-age art could "immediately understand the Paleolithic through that which it spontaneously provided." Thus, from comparative ethnography and from the findings of Macintosh, we have learned to be highly mistrustful vis-à-vis the supposed "spontaneity" of the Paleolithic world. Instead, our relation to the Paleolithic necessitates a protracted and painstaking decoding based on a graphic documentation of the cave walls. Caution is well-advised, for the researcher is in danger of falling victim to his subjectivity, of projecting his ideas upon the object of study (as initially happened to Macintosh). The cave documents cannot tell us everything.

A further consideration: the variety of thought-systems underlying the artistic activity of *Homo sapiens* is not infinite. Paleolithic art has been variously interpreted over the past hundred years as pure art or as magic, as totemism, sexual symbolism, or shamanism. The supporting evidence for these interpretations has been gathered from the far corners of the world (notably, from the art of aboriginal Australia). The search for universals in the process of artistic creation and the eventual

differentiation of this process according to various types on a world scale remain fascinating pursuits in the study of the earliest art.

During my stay in Australia, I learned a great deal about cave art through my contact with aborigines. Thanks to this fieldwork, I could subsequently look upon the Paleolithic art in France with new eyes. I understood better how the representations in French caves might have originated. Thus, in attempting to reproduce the artwork, I blew the colors directly onto the wall with my mouth, a spray technique that the aborigines of the Northern Territories still employ. The pigments are chewed and then "sprayed on" directly with the mouth. On the other hand, I relied upon a thorough analysis and documentation of the figures with the help of infrared photography, examining the superimposition of strokes and the relation between the paintings and their undercoat. I drew wall maps with contour lines and analyzed pigmentation. In one field experiment, I made original-size copies of the stippled horses in the French cave of Pech Merle (3.5 x 1.6 meters) as well as of isolated figures from the caves of Lascaux and Chauvet.

The reproduction of the stippled horses from Pech Merle took a week. All the patterns of the panel were copied: two horses, six hand negatives in black, 212 black dots, 32 red dots, seven negatives of bent fingers in red, and the outline of a fish, likewise in red. With all the details, even the most minute, such as color gradations and superimpositions. The experiment entirely confirmed the use of the spray technique. It provided important information about the length of time required for such work and about the number of persons participating in it, about the imprints and traces on the cave floor and about the requisite light.

We know now that the spray technique was used not only at Pech Merle, but also in many other caves such as El Castillo or Lascaux. The prehistorian who himself applies this technique experiences it on the bodily level. The spray technique appears to have possessed an extraordinarily symbolic significance: it is the human breath that, in the truest sense of the word, breathes life into the cave wall by creating an animal or a sign there. There can be no more direct or closer unity between the creator and the work. As a result, the cave paintings may be interpreted as totemic or shamanistic works.

This experiment entails the closest possible approach to cave art. The prehistorian puts himself in the place of the stone-age artist, repeating the artist's gestures. In doing so, the prehistorian improves his ability to comprehend the intent behind these gestures, or even more, to grasp the spirit and occasionally also the symbolic context in which the works arose. The experiment refutes the presupposition according to which the artistic end-product was the primary aim of the

artist, whereas the creative process was only secondary. On the contrary, it is quite possible that in many cases the cave-wall image represents only the trace of a creative process whose importance was equal to, or even greater than, the end-product.

Furthermore, this investigation has incidentally revealed how poisonous many of the pigments used in stone-age art were. Manganese dioxide, for example, can cause disturbances of the nervous system, including hallucinations. The hypothesis of shamanism, according to which the paintings were rendered in a state of altered consciousness (as comparative ethnography has attested as well), is supported by this discovery. With the help of toxicological studies and pigment analyses under an electron microscope or through X-ray diffraction, all this will be examined and developed further.

—MICHEL LORBLANCHET,
Director of the Centre National
de la Recherche Scientifique
(Translated from the German
by Andrew Joron from
Die Zeit, January 31, 1997)

Noticing: Being Continued. . .

With certain pleasure I offer the following titles of several authors whose works I have previously written of in the pages of *Sulfur,* plus a few new discoveries.

Eugène Nicole, *Le caillou de l'Enfant-Perdu* (Flammarion, 1996). Following *L'oeuvre des mers* and *Les larmes de Pierre,* this continuing *bildungsroman* arrives at the moment when the narrator finally leaves the microcosmic islands of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon to arrive in France for his studies. The Proustian genius of this tale consists in the fact that the nostalgic narrative of departure is told from the point of view of the first return to the island, a temporal complexity that exists even at the level of the novel's exquisite syntax. The process of self-discovery is perpetually seconded by the deepening revelation of a language, a personality, and a past.

Valère Novarina, *La loterie Pierrot* (Héros-Limite, 1995). Novarina, whose work has appeared in *Sulfur,* recently published *La loterie*

Pierrot, an extract from his large work *La chair de l'homme,* recycled for the occasion of the 518th Foire de Crète, a popular county fair in the land of Novarina's origins, the Haute-Savoie. This work is a structuralist's dream—or perhaps nightmare—utilizing nearly a third of the verbs of the French language in simple declarative sentences, as a pretext to proffer the suggestive, amusing, and often bizarre nicknames of thousands of the inhabitants of the area. This combination of *patois* onomastics and elementary French syntax is the sort of linguistic play which, in Novarina's hands, continues to test and stretch the limits of the French language.

Chantal Thomas, ed., *Le XVIIIe siècle des femmes* (Mercure de France, 1996): Mmes. du Deffand, de Staal-Delauney, Roland, de Genlis, de Staël, de Tencin, Marie-Thérèse d'Autriche, La Margrave de Bayreuth, Julie de Lespinasse. These nine small volumes constitute a continuation of Chantal Thomas's major revision of the canon of 18th century literature, by demonstrating that those writers who were seemingly without works—the varied women of the Parisian salons—in fact shaped an entire mode of discourse. The subtle yet enormous influence of these previously neglected authors constitute an integral part of the transformation of Enlightenment literature and mores.

Pierre Saint-Amand, *The Laws of Hostility: Politics, Violence, and the Enlightenment* (Minnesota, 1996). This book reveals, in a sense, the dark side of the scenario of seduction and passion explicated in the author's earlier *The Libertine's Progress.* These acute and extensive analyses—part of a larger project soon to include contemporary sources—are crucial additions to both the critique of rationality and the political theorization of literature.

Lawrence Schehr, *Alcibiades at the Door: Gay Discourses in French Literature* (Stanford, 1995). This is the second tome, after *The Shock of Men: Homosexual Hermeneutics in French Writing,* which the author is devoting to a multi-volume project of "queering the canon." This volume investigates the textual and epistemological deep structures of homosexuality, offering not only a contentious alternative to mainstream narrative systems, but also revealing the unique manner in which homosexual literature articulates the public and private spheres. As a major contribution to both current debates on identity politics and revisionist literary studies, it offers a fine alternative to much of the (often superficially) militant polemic currently being produced in the guise of theory and criticism.

Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism* (Indiana, 1996). The theoretical acumen and descriptive precision of this book will be of delight and sustenance for all those whose work, and entertainment, have been informed by the experi-

mental theater of the last several decades. Just the right book to inspire revery, reflection, and scenarization in our *fin-de-siècle.*

Jalal Toufic, *Over-Sensitivity* (Sun & Moon, 1996). Most theorists of cinema read, paradoxically, the avant-garde from the perspective of mainstream narrative film, whether unconsciously or not. This complex and disruptive, stylistically heterogeneous and hermeneutically subversive text continues the project of Toufic's earlier book, *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film,* in which the exigencies of avant-garde film, conversely, inform a broader reading of narrative structure, iconology, and epistemology. In this contest, the author undertakes (an irresistible pun) the study of the previously neglected domain of *narration from the point of view of the dead,* inaugurating a major theme in which popular and traditional rituals intersect with the avant-garde.

Pierre Michon, *Le roi du bois* (Verdier, 1996). If I had to choose a favorite work of contemporary fiction, Michon's first novel, *Vies minuscules* (Gallimard, 1984), would certainly be amongst my top picks. There, the theme of the narrator's acquisition of the writerly craft is contrasted to the varied modes of his interlocutors' inarticulateness, establishing a narrative in which authorship is slowly revealed as a revindication of those "minuscule lives" which provide a silent, hidden inspiration. Michon's more recent short work, *Le roi du bois,* condenses the very moment of inspiration—a young 17th century peasant's view of an aristocratic woman leaving her carriage to shamelessly piss in the open countryside, all the while being observed by her companion—into a mythic account of the relation between desire and artistic creativity. It is one of the very rare works which I truly wish I had written, and was despondent that I didn't, and couldn't.

Lydia Vázquez, *Elogio de la seduccion y del libertinaje* (R&B, 1996). This Spanish publication is a pleasure, intellectually and otherwise, for reasons beyond its manifest erudition. For numerous, and usually appropriate, reasons, the current intellectual, social and medical climate offers very little place for erotic passion. Yet this book reminds us that Eros can also be used to combat Thanatos. Of particular interest is the section on "The War of the Senses," which offers a study of the perceptual apparatus more subtle and more sexy than those superficial "natural histories of the senses" that have recently been so successful.

Wang Ping, *Foreign Devil* (Coffee House Press, 1996). As I slowly begin to hybridize my own theoretical work with fictional elements (in my tales from *The Aphoristic Theater),* I am particularly interested in accounts that delve into the trials and tribulations of writing. One such recent discovery is *Foreign Devil,* an apparently autobiographical

novel (following the author's earlier *American Visa)* of poetic apprenticeship that reminds us that one must indeed write at all cost and with any suffering, and that authentic writing is often the most costly, both psychologically and physically. This is a book whose power may well serve, among other functions, as a sort of homeopathy against writer's block.

Elka Spoerri, ed., *Adolf Wölfli: Draftsman, Writer, Poet, Composer* (Cornell, 1997). The recent ascent of "Outsider Art" or "Art Brut" in the contemporary art scene has resulted in a spate of publications, most of which are best left unmentioned. But this book on Adolf Wölfli, considered to be among the greatest psychotic artists, promises to be the definitive English language publication for some time to come. Edited by the former director of the Fondation Wölfli, this volume includes essays that deal with all the major aspects of Wölfli's variegated artistic production, and includes many excellent illustrations of his most-celebrated, and continually haunting, works.

Jean-Paul Marcheschi, *Le livre du sommeil: Notes sur la flamme, la peinture et la nuit* (Maison de la Recherche et des Sciences Humaines de l'Université de Caen, 1996). This book—part diary, part essay, part catalogue—is by an artist whose pictorial work consists of the immixing of flame and soot, unconscious symbol and conscious gesture, mythical forms and modern icons. Here is the condensation of the night: Bachelard, Dante, Shakespeare, Dracula, Nerval, Couperin, Céline, Novalis, Sade, Hugo, Poe, Baudelaire, Boltanski. . . Essential reading for those who dream, or sleep. . .

—ALLEN S. WEISS

On reviewing the generations and some recent books by Anselm Hollo

It's disheartening when I happen to look at these notes scribbled around and sometimes against or on behalf of the books of poetry I've fallen over by accident or design. Hard not to see these incoherent or spontaneous pixels as snail-markings, the trail of whatever it was and whenever, activity of a fool unknown to me. You change your mind the next day, I must have been thinking about something else. So many books, so little time, all that. There was this young girl a month or so

ago as I was picking up my daughter from school on a cold sunny day—maybe 10 or 11, ungainly, awkward, she tugged a little toddler sibling along the sidewalk simply beaming with pride to be given such responsibility. Accidental witness to human possibility: I'll take that most days rather than write criticism or reviews. I'd rather suck horse shit through a straw than write some of what passes for significant critical prose in the most professionalized settings today.

"These monsters, critics!" said Pope but that's a laugh. You can't say boo to anything in the incestuous pockets of poetry today—not and really scare anybody anyway. Commit an act of second-degree criticism, call the roast beef pot roast. Somebody! God forbid! Those who hear are prepared to hear, that's been said, it wasn't me. Or it's just a dance step, blundering shuffle among the phantasmagoric commodities and tedious market niches. A critical conversation? I've seen the future of rock n' roll and it's name is—er, well, you know.

So criticism goes over to cultural studies, where evaluation is more an issue than an act, at least if we're talking about particular poems and how rarely that. I'll map the whole bloody field and say what these obdurate stains indicate about your position way over there in that corner marked "opposition" and crossed out. One looks at the activities of young poets following in the wake of the most entrepreneurial group among recent American poets of the innovation-cadre and notes that some of them seem anxious to articulate or maybe accrue a group or generational identity of their own. Put those cartons right there, Bubba! It's clear they've learned from their predecessors this much: "the future is up for grabs (and in some cases the past as well). Unsecured area is being fought over: reviewers, critics, readers, students, professors, publishers, owners of book stores not to mention the writer's own practice." Something's a little funky at some of the parties lately. Not to mention the writer's own practice, it seems that as today's younger poets buzz out of a swarm of gnats the institutional apparatus that assisted their elders changes shape or disappears.

In one of his recent books Anselm Hollo writes:

> "poems in 2091
> objects of monkish interest"
> sez Vidal
> Gore, not Pierre

and one wonders how many poets under 35 will get the joke when few are obliged to read Pound in the universities anymore and few beyond the universities would bother or have any other way to find Vidal (Pierre) in the original or translation. They'll know that Vidal (Gore) is

supposed to be boorish and obtuse and self-importantly famous and maybe they'll nod when Hollo cuts in an addendum that doesn't so much refute Vidal (Gore) as position him: "like poor but civilized urban existence/ another thing of the past." Unlikely, though, that they'll roam as widely as Hollo in the languages of lyric. Between anger and resignation, much of Hollo is, reflecting just a little of the sentiment, more European than American, that thinks it remembers things once were otherwise with regard to the poor and "civilization." An occasional nostalgia, pushed back down when it pokes its head up, is partly product of the lingering attraction to poetries of the past, some of which—the skaldic and folk remnants especially—enter into Hollo's work as he rummages among the traditions of the historical avant-gardes.

The poetry of New York School pasts looms large for some of the younger poets I've found in the last few years—not all of them of course. It might be argued that the language poets—with exceptions—underplayed their debt to some of these same poets, or exaggerated their distance from them, and several younger poets have decided to go back and have another look, which is natural enough. But the poetry of Ted Berrigan, John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Barbara Guest, Bernadette Mayer and others who now are of considerable and new interest to a younger generation, however permutational or dispersed its methods of composition, whatever its idiosyncrasies of self-consciousness, can sometimes be inhabited rather like Crocodile Dundee put on an alligator skin in a movie I watched for five minutes last night. It's an affect, a language or technique of persona one recognizes, very much compiled from lyric tradition, alert and effusive, discursive in every nook and cranny of the urban if not always urbane, a poetry that today as it is taken up as a mode to extend might be too certain of the political and cultural values of its possible and much desired audience, even chummy—there's lots of names! Still, it's hard not to be entertained by it anyway, this new poetry beyond contestation, content to tweak the personal and the ordinary with soft irony, mockery, and playfulness. (You'd like me to use names here, cruel reader?). Hard not to like it and only partly because we like its models. Here as elsewhere versions of a more familiar discursive self come back into exploratory poetry, sixth generation modernism tries to beat its more bluntly and naively nostalgic rivals over at the workshop hands down. Few of the poets seem to want to wrestle with theory, much less something approaching synthetic vision, because that's all over and who can blame them as it seems they're right. Desperate efforts to write a new "poetics" seem equally familiar; we really must be at the end of something, exhausted millennial wheeze. I suppose that some—Will Alexander for

instance—at least try to stir up the pot. Mostly I'm left to wonder: the crocodile is skinned so that one can hide under water looking like a crocodile? The avant-garde is dead. Long live the avant-garde.

I don't know what that means either. I'd sat down to write something on two recent books by Anselm Hollo, thinking that here was a poet who was known to some and deserved to be known to more, known to have been an influential teacher of poets as well as a prolific writer and translator, someone whose work might be engaged by these same people looking down behind the imperial langpo (emperors of one corner of the left pocket). I'd checked the indexes of useful studies of recent American poetry authored by Jed Rasula, Hank Lazer, Robert von Hallberg, Majorie Perloff, Joseph Conte, Alan Golding, and a few others. Hollo's nowhere to be found. At the same time the British critic Clive Bush, in his huge new book on 5 poets of the British Poetry Revival, speaks of him as "famous": it's possible that Hollo has fallen into a between-space that has hurt the visibility of specific transatlantic poets if not among poets than in critical worlds organized under the sign of nation. Robert Grenier reviewed an earlier book in this magazine and there's been other recognition but Hollo's floating no tenure boats; he's yet to get his author' s page at the EPC; he's mostly slipped off the reading lists if he was ever on them. Bob Perelman, quoted above, mentions him once in his book on language poetry while working to distinguish langpo from Ted Berrigan's work, which years earlier Charles Bernstein had worked equally hard to read from within langpo's critique of the "psychological I."

If it's the case that we're to read Berrigan and others again, if anybody looks again at what one fears may soon be called the prehistory of language writing, sorting out divergent paths taken and others ignored, Hollo will be there waiting for them, the "skaldic throwbacks" and the Greek Anthology under the New York everyday, the pop collage open to humane wit and chastened desire and prone to veer off toward melancholy or sentiment now and again . It's a capacious work in its stops and starts, never far from lyric's praise or blame, often rhetorically and even occasionally-based however elliptical the verse's movement. It's a repository of a fair number of the century's "experimental" procedures as well. Wit and the melancholy and sentiment that shadow it, a poetry unafraid of proposition or, at times, the rhythms of closure, brilliant in the phrase and phrasal rhythms. More arresting in the phrase and movement between phrases, perhaps, than in the totality of the poems or sequences of poems (there are exceptions). Thirty-plus books and beyond them volumes of translations. Hollo offers the phrase "minor poet" an honorific resonance or reveals it to be altogether meaningless now. I can't imagine another poet who

would open an elegy for his sister with "morning sun/ strikes me pow! in the face" and the detail of waking in bed staring at the wall of his cat's black fur. Quirky. Ravens and black cats too.

Looking at Hollo's most recent two books, *Corvus* [Coffee House, 1995] and *AHOE (And How On Earth)* [Smokeproof Press, 1997], I'm guessing that Hollo is way beyond caring much about widespread public acclaim, even if I'm correct in thinking that there is much about his work that might be grasped by publics beyond, say, *Sulfur*'s. An author's note tells us that "Both raven and corvus derive from the Indo-European root *ker,* 'to cry out.'" Beginning with the elegy for his sister the book's all over the place in its lyrics and sequences and its fine overdrafts working the Greek Anthology, waiting for reviewers at its midpoint with an impish smile as a sequence opens with "after reading the tiresome review/ from the school of tedious outpourings/the man of letters is writing/ 'wouldn't we all be happier in the factory?'" One sequence takes up Bosnia, others are there among famous friends alive or, too often, dead—"when you met him he was a man/now he is a postage stamp." Self-deprecation and the speed of the verse on its feet keep the near-banalities ("life's just a dream remember/poetry just an interruption/of the great conversation/farewell notes from those gone/ weave through the conversation") from lingering too long in lachrymose regions ("as you enter the recording studio/you notice you don't have anything to record"). Maybe the best of *Corvus* is the overdrafts from the Greek Anthology. If Hollo is ready for reviewers, Hollo's Lucilius knows all about poets who write too much: "the poet Eutykhides has died—/watch out, you dwellers of the underworld!/here comes Eutykides with his Odes!/it was his last wish/to be buried/with twenty-five trunks of *text!*"

For me the smaller book *AHOE* is more consistently alert and nimble, beginning with "Turn Off the News":

> anxiety gallops through chatter
> fading century's martial insanities
> brain struggles to sum up "shut up"
> articulation fails
> walking shadow slides across faces
>
> dusk over epitaphs
> ash hair rusty litanies
>
> dead friends and rain
>
> paradise is an idiot

bones vines cold day

old vulture in airlock

scorpion dust
sneeze

Dusk to dust, and the ending here is perfect, refusing the sentiment other poems sometimes overindulge as the poem backs away from the lively exasperation of "paradise is an idiot." Elsewhere a little poem for Erik Satie and much else, often a pessimism forlornly naming "hopeless desire/ for a new brain/ for the species" while poking at a humanist optimism Hollo is not altogether prepared to abandon. All the poems are glossed at book's end; Hollo is user-friendly.

Hollo's work is mostly floated—factured, Allen Fisher would say—in the emotional vapors of an anarchistic, improvisational self. Discussing Bosnia and much else it knows "what's wrong with them/ **no doubt**"—that is, insufficient doubt's the problem, the "them" covering just about any self-important dogmatist and sometimes with a nonspecific urgency. While the poems combine signature voice-effects and suspicion of a presumptuous ego—we suspect that we'd like this man projected by the poems—there's also an old style anarchist individualism which hopes that, freed of massive social bullshit, the human animal will show up on the screens as fundamentally passionate and good. (Behind me Nick Cave sings "People just ain't no good," which is almost the same thing, and again I feel better for a few minutes.) That's the humanism of the work under Hollo's skepticism and pessimism. Most philosophers will tell you that it's against a background certainty that skepticism shows up, I'm not trying to score points here; the success or failure of this poetry will have nothing to do, as Wittgenstein might say, with the speculative intellect but rather with the hopefulness permeating it even as hope is sometimes vented in despair or resignation or anger. Richard Rorty: "'Humanism' can mean a certain Platonic-Cartesian-Kantian account of what it is to be human. But it can also mean. . .participation in the hopes of the Enlightenment—and specifically the hope that human beings, once they have set God and the various surrogates for God to one side, may learn to rely on their own romantic imagination, and their own ability to cooperate with each other for the common good." For Hollo it would mean both I think.

There's talk in the margins of one of the books about our times being neo-feudal—a claim one hears now and again but one I never really understand. I take it that such claims come down to wailing about

the brutality and continuing tyrannies of our moment, but how we should even be able to recognize the medieval is lost on me. If we're "neo-feudal" we can't use the word in critique. "People will live under an absolute, palpable tyranny without being able to say they are not free," Wittgenstein wrote, and everything about the manner of Hollo's own *expression* belies the claim that tyrannies of thought and institution altogether hold us. Or that's the wager on freedom that keeps his mind jumping, though the fear is that, when it comes to poetry, our freedom begins to look like that of practiced circus masters. The fear is that poetry is abundant and nearly obsolete.

—KEITH TUMA

Noticings

Boundaries are fictive, like words. They can enliven or deaden perception. If they grow sclerotic, they are a symptom of dogma. When boundaries blend, it is a sign of disequilibrium, healthy uncertainty, a spiritual truth harmonizing with a material substance or rejection of a facile convention for the possibilities inherent in indeterminate meanings, the generative tumult of free association and created observation. Systole of form enlarged by the diastole of spirit. Il cuore: *the heart/ Selected Poems 1970-1995* (Wesleyan University Press, 1997) by Kathleen Fraser, chronicles a search for an aesthetic disencumbered by habitual linguistic forms, language constructions that relax the authority of forms or criterion Fraser terms "bullying." "The primacy of embroidered meanings," a phrase plucked from "boundayr," a poem in 1987's *Notes preceding trust* included in this volume, might serve as a catch phrase for this approach. Fraser's poetry is rich in polysemous implication, and "primacy of embroidered meaning" might be taken—as one possible fold—to suggest a displacement of subject matter, the development of an open field capable of multiple association, a disruption of logocentric dominion in order to create a space in which the subject is never neatly posed but always in perspective. In her essay on Kathleen Fraser in *Contemporary Literature,* Linda Taylor articulates this impulse as a nurturing dynamic in which "our habits of perception are further defamiliarized by the intangibility of a subject

(or subjects) moving among an array of colors used to create verbal canvases in which the words themselves float unattached to referential objects yet evoke strong emotional and psychological moments and nuances." Taylor further emphasizes this as a distinctly feminine approach. Fraser would probably agree. In her essay "Traditions of Marginality," which appeared in the women's magazine *Frontiers* in the late eighties, Fraser discusses her early frustrations with conventional models and her fascination with the innovative works of modernist women writers. "I recognized a structural order of fragmentation and resistance to the patriarchal models that confirmed my perspective," she writes. "I wanted this difference in my own work. Yet, ironically, this fascination with the innovative works of modernist women writers marginalized me even further from the official women's writing community." I must confess issues of gender provoke and confuse me. Marginality is certainly not just a problem for women writers. It is—undeniably—experienced more acutely than it is for male writers. Women have been grossly underrepresented in all the arts and European culture has traditionally favored the careers of men. But marginality in contemporary language arts is far more apt to be the result of a certain aesthetic rather than gender. The resistance to moralizing and ideological models of conventional writing, to mimetic representation and narrative omniscience, the desire to rupture the inertia of language habits and liberate the subject from the stifling logic of narrative causality is not a uniquely feminine phenomenon. Taylor identifies a body of language strategies in Fraser's work as being tied particularly to a "female experience with language" ("a feminine jouissance of fluidity and multiplicity, that is halted and broken into noncontiguous words, so that the gaps between words are important to consider") all of which I find very puzzling and very intriguing. How does this differ from the work of Larry Eigner, Joseph Ceravalo, and P. Inman? How does gender inform the work of Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein? *(Omissions Are Not Accidents, Gender in the Art of Marianne Moore* by Jeanne Heuving provides an illuminating discussion of some of these issues). However. I don't want to get bogged down in gender. What appeals to me most about Fraser's work is her prose writing. Her essays, letters and prose poems have a confidence, clarity, and generosity of spirit that is deeply pleasurable. Fraser can be keenly sensuous; she is a writer who mixes luxury with austerity, restraint with elegance. Hers is a sensibility much like free-style Ikebana, the art of Japanese flower arrangement (the samurai were chief among its early practitioners) an art form attentive to living material and discipline of the inner spirit, purification of mind and heart ("it is only fools who like regularity; what is imperfect is best"). Fraser's later poetry, *as when*

new time folds up, from 1993, is scrupulously problematic. The lines often feel tentative—"as if the bridge had formed, half way over/ a scar in air"—and frequently turn cryptic, "anodic slate light," "opponent rubied flower bend," like fragments of an Etruscan jar discovered in an Umbrian cellar. Taylor's "feminine jouissance of fluidity" thrills through much of the work ("red and black brushed with finger/ into soft stone recess") though her linguistic disquiet is more apt to provoke startling quirks of verbal behavior—bodies of living metaphor—to emerge, halting and strange, from the Etruscan obscurity: "tomb hum/ where more than one dancer/ lifts a muscular red thigh/ or rests."

Reading Rochelle Owens is like riding a Harley-Davidson: a savage intellect rumbles in the words like frenzied pistons. *Rochelle Owens/ New and Selected Poems (1961-1996),* Junction Press, 1997, (how appropriate that the photograph on the cover shows her adjusting a high collar on a black leather coat) is a strange brew. "Indeterminacy of syntax" is a gross understatement. Beginning with the early work Owens' syntax is aggressively charged and highly compressed, "honey & dung hidden burnt a form filtering/ through the wall/ soaking through the guiltless lederhosen." The interrelational density of her words, the supercharged hyperverbalism of her style is consistent throughout. "O it's going to be/ murder at Christmastime for me," Owens declaims in a fragment from 1988's *How Much Paint Does the Painting Need,* "my blood pressure/ dropped to a dangerous level/ eyelids of black glass/ wanting to tango." Owens' entire oeuvre is a tango with the auditor/ reader. It is violent and dangerous. Edgy and bloody. Wild. What amazes me is the utter lack of *melopoeia*, the absence of musical phrasing. The words are tough, sharp, jagged. Raw and impudent, dripping blue fire. "bulging/ six Urges!" ". . .& 8 darknesses/ burn & chant!" It is not surprising Rochelle Owens is also a playwright and video artist. There is an aura of spectacle about her poetry, Catherine wheels and Roman candles fountaining sparks and dragons. Her poems seethe, boil, thrash and lunge. Were I an actor auditioning for a role as a prophet, I might want to choose a piece from *Elga's Incantation* to declaim. "YES GOD PUT A BODY ON COME ON BACK & RISE WHILE I'M IN THE FLAESH LIKE YOU YES & IT MUSH BE THAT'S RIGHT MUST BE WRITTIN OF THE LAW MOSES MUST BE FULFILLED MUZIC & DAVID WAS A O FOOL & SLOW OF HEART & GOD WANTED THINGS DONE & THEY FELL DOWN & HE ROSE LIKE A PROVERB SO NOBODY PLAYS MUZIC IN AMOS' HOUSE."

"Then she says, a penis is needed, female/ artists almost always can use one" Anna Rabinowitz writes in her recent collection of poetry *At the Site of Inside Out* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997). I wonder what Linda Taylor would make of that. The penis is a conceit

for male power. "Hartley sculpting/ skies out of granite." The true subject of the poem is the painter Georgia O'Keeffe, "warm vaginas, moisture of vulvas, furtive/ stand-ins, meanings plain as your face: a woman/ minus penis making art with her body,/ trapped in her body." The last line here surprised me; I had anticipated a cathartic release, something orgasmic. An affirmation of the power of the female anima rather than an agitated proposal for O'Keeffe's phallically challenged, "desiccated" body. Be that as it may, it's an exciting poem (reprinted in *Best American Poetry 1989)* solid and intuitional. Rabinowitz is an eminently accessible and lucid poet. Her phrasing is supple and straightforward. She is rarely given to syntactical disruption and semantic dissonance. Her strength is in her rhythm and her ability to wed sound to sense. Concreteness, particularity, sensuous shape. "...an oak table teetering of its own weight," "shadow cast on cursory/ filaments of grass by the pointed roof/ of the house." Rabinowitz loves to play with form. There are several sestinas in this collection that are especially adept at masking the end-words in lines of spry agility, an abecedarian acrostic ("Ars Poetica," and a quirkily repetitive four-part piece ("The Foreplay of Hermeneutics") which adapts the repetons and interlocking rhyme scheme of the pantoum to what may be Rabinowitz's own invention (at least I can't find its counterpart in *The New Book of Forms).* "Fragile Dialectics," a highly discrete and percipient piece about two old men playing chess in a swimming pool, reads with a graceful sureness, king's bishop to queen's bishop four.

In an essay written in 1965 ("Poems Are A Complex") which I continue to read, occasionally, for its resonance and reassurance, Robert Creeley remarks that "words are *things* too. Poems gave me access to this fact more than any other possibility in language." Laynie Browne's collection of prose poems, *Rebecca Letters,* Kelsey St. Press, 1997) substantiates this claim with lyrical ingenuity. Her lines are exquisitely balanced, like the heft of a finely made knife or pruning saw. Each is intensely metaphorical, "the relation between betweens." Nothing is static; everything is in a state of becoming, transformation. Everything stirs with potential new meaning and fresh association. Words murmur a music of spine and scented resin. Their aggressive approach to linguistic play and totemic vision offer a genuine mechanism for the dilation of the pupils. They do more than excite interest they "twist the meaning of season" and "twirl around their roots." These "letters" (letters penned to a phantom ancestor) are intensely private and were it not for the focus on linguistic texture and daring twists of meaning would risk sinking into a solipsistic mire. Browne enters into a play with language that invites an equally playful and imaginative reading. The overt lyricism, the unabashed attention to

aesthetic, avoids affectation by a sustained effort at liberating her words rather than saturating them with impregnations of solferino angst. It is the liveliness of Browne's lyric invention that keeps everything afloat. "The water interplay between resolution, and the float which sustains positive drift."

—JOHN OLSON

Negative Definitions: Talk for the SubVoicive Colloquium, London, 1997

"Linguistically innovative poetry" as a term had humble origins in a March 1988 issue of the British magazine *Pages*. Not then dignified by capital letters into proper nounhood, it was Gilbert Adair's way of describing the kinds of British poetry we believed had been "operating since 1977" in "fragmentation and incoherence." The result had been a "public invisibility of the poetry" and "ditto of a theorizing discourse" in Adair's words. Its definition is not to be found in the terms of its name; the argument that all good poetry is linguistically innovative doesn't invalidate its particularity, but suggests that its meaning is its use. If anything it is a term to magnetically constellate certain practices. Yet it has been used recently to speak of British Poetry Revival work as well as American language poetry in a way well beyond Adair's use: a buzzword for a fuzzy set of poets outside his temporal and cultural determinants. I want here to attempt not what I hoped I'd be able to attempt at this stage, an outline of the *positivities* of such recent (and now not so recent) British work which Gilbert complained I was *not* addressing 9 years ago. I want to begin to define this term (which I'd gladly drop like Wittgenstein's ladder, not because it has no further use, but because it has been put to unhelpful uses) rather negatively. The differentials I wish to draw, firstly, with the British Poetry Revival are paradoxically the most contentious, yet the least revealing; secondly, the differential with North American language poetry is more obvious but more illuminating.

The conditions Adair identified as the post 1977 condition of the poetry—e.g. "decreasing publishing opportunities; wide gaps in continuations of public . . .discussions; a one-way 'dialogue' with opposi-

tions that largely expunge us, . . .movement in a less visible, less real poetic community"—contrasts with Eric Mottram's celebratory survey (note the dates) "The British Poetry Revival 1960-1975," which catalogues reputations, achievements and opportunities. (See Hampson and Barry *The New British Poetries.)* Yet this carries an appendix, dated 1978, which makes sorry reading: the story (again!) of the end of the Poetry Society Era (and the demise of *Poetry Review* and *Poetry Information).* This was the "fragmented and incoherent" backdrop to the despair of the early 1980s, one echoed by Allen Fisher's identification in his 1985 introduction to his *Necessary Business* essay of those wound-licking years as "a period of entrenchment and awe . . .speaking in a considerably small room" (Spanner 25, p. 163). A small room, it is worth reminding ourselves, that Thatcher was crusading to empower somebody to buy. A bumbling 70s social democracy had been replaced by an ideology that wanted to change human consciousness, and nearly succeeded, "a culture fascinated with change, ruthless curtailment of job reliabilities, share-owning, and the legitimating *professionalism,"* as Adair put it in language which is only just (and arguably) a period piece, post 1997!

The most positive aspects of *Necessary Business* I've outlined elsewhere with an "awe" of my own: the attempt to articulate a poetics, drawn from three already active writers, which we might see as a poetry of a new pertinence that shifted the poetics from the Revival interest in Olson to activating readers through habit-breaking unpredictability and plurivocal structures. I believe that Fisher's essay should have been better known, and I still see it as the paradigm shift it was intended to be. But the moment has gone.

The increasing willingness of poets to operate theoretically, in terms of post-structuralist and other theory, to even expound poetics more coherently was a change that seems not yet historical enough to comment upon (but magazines like *Fragmente* and *Parataxis*, and earlier, *Reality Studios*, had promoted the "public discussion" of which Adair lamented the absence). The result of this may have been the willingness to work in terms of conceptualized projects, whether Fisher's *Gravity*, Clarke's "Trio," or Adair's *Jizz Rim.*

My unwillingness to name names here, to deal with lists of in/ex/clusions does not just derive from restrictions of space, but from an awareness that many British poets, like Fisher himself, belong to both "moments," that active poetic careers stretch decades, as Mottram noted of his 70s Revivalists: "poets in their twenties or early thirties (have) their careers largely ahead of them." Many excellent poets, like Bill Griffiths, do not fit the schema well at all. Neither should my insistence upon differentials be taken as a denial of continuities. I'm

willing to concede that my differentials may come to little more than a ruthlessly circumscribed "scene," and a rising interest in theory and poetics, but even that is bound to be of significance, as are, of course, revisionist readings of that Revival.

The differential with language (or language-oriented or -centered) poetry seems more obvious because "linguistically innovative poetry" could be a synonym for those terms; in its weakest formulation it could be little more than a sprig of Americana which could never be grafted on British soil (the official view of much of the Revival work, remember). More positively, like Bruce Andrews in his introduction to *Floating Capital,* "Transatlantic," demands we should forget national differences and speak of "this more inclusive field of so-called English language writing," which evidence the "same *barriers* being dismantled." *(Paradise & Method* 247) Much that follows is speculative, and an attempt to show a corner of that inclusive field that will be forever British!

Several commentators (including Barrett Watten at the New Hampshire conference, *Assembling the Alternatives)* have remarked the influence of the Vietnam War on the post-68 generation of the Post-War baby boom language poets. Questions of "ideology, discourse, social rules, & epistemological paradigms or opacity or 'sense'" raised by Bruce Andrews' academic work on US foreign policy naturally found a place in his poetic practice. *(P & M* 79) Protest at this War had been present in British Poetry Revival work, of course, but the 1980s in Thatcherite Britain was a very different situation with different answers to the same questions. The F 1-11s were taking off to defend the council house they had sold you. A foreign policy dominated by manufactured wars and by a frantic last minute cold war before the Wall fell, was combined at least with a politicized, antinuclear official opposition in Parliament. To be engaged in Leftist politics in Britain in the 1980s was not the act of despair it would have been in 1970s America. The enemy and the evil was identifiable in all its absurd manifestations: "colorless nation/sucking on grief/a handbag/strutting between uniforms/such slow false tears/. . .the state as/the status/quo/ . . ./while the homeless stare/at nightlong lights/in empty offices" (Tom Raworth, *Tottering State,* 214).

Language poetry seems opposed, if not in fact, then by stance, to such empiricist strands in US Poetry as the work of Williams and the Objectivists. No such Oedipal hold can swerve the British writers, and a strong, often Situationist-derived, sense of the *everyday* invades British poetry, as in the Raworth quote, as in Fisher, as in cris cheek, whose work is often a translation of the real: "a primacy/of sight/in

blinkered/place culture" *(Talus* 5/6, 128). The great exception is Ron Silliman in works such as *Tjanting*.

Early language poetry theory (before about 1982) was necessarily very strict to keep the object of its attention clear. Reading the 1970s pieces in Andrews' *Paradise & Method* its structuralist model of language seems almost nostalgic. His three part argument contrasts a mainstream aesthetic of linguistic transparency with the structuralist analytic of opacity and difference, and extends this theoretically to a *"third* paradigm" (26) in which the linguistic system is worked over to produce "a political writing practice" that avoids complete opacity, "that unveils or demystifies the creation & sharing of meaning. . .to stress (words') use value & productivity in the face of mechanisms of social control" (19). While British writers have at times developed a similar straw man Mainstream Poet, few have seen themselves operating exclusively in the area between the signifier and signified, to produce sense while defying reference (to borrow a distinction of Ricoeur's). Perhaps, and I am by no means sure about this, there is some value precisely in a distinction between language-centered, as a mode of poetic investigation inside the sign, and linguistic innovation, as a mode of experimentation between the signifier and its referent, one which better reflects British work.

Indeed, this seems the direction language theory developed, itself. By 1987, Barrett Watten in "Social Formalism" *(North Dakota Quarterly*, Fall 1987), was arguing that Andrews' linguistics were archaically "scientific" and "objective," and that a social dimension to the linguistic theory, the notion of language as a social semiotic, as it were, was lacking. (I don't share this view, but let it stand as a critique of Andrews' *early* poetics, which he constantly revised and socialized.) Watten plumps for Bourdieu as a model for language's socially communicative gameness. (See "Poetic Sequencing and the New," *Net-/knotwork(s),* Ship of Fools, for my take on this.)

Bourdieu stands here as an analog for Theory in the 1980s, to indicate that by the time British poets were developing linguistically innovative poetry, they were responding directly (and indirectly) to a range of continental theories not available to the Americans in the 1970s: a vast, sorted, body of knowledge, ranging from Bourdieu's sociology to Lyotard's delineations of the postmodern to Deleuze and Guattari's proliferating machines (and, more recently, on to Derrida's turning towards ethics)—all beyond the structuralist beginnings. The poets also had the works of the Americans: *The Language Book* and essay collections by Watten and Bernstein.

Adair referred to both Fisher *and* Guattari to develop a view of linguistic innovation as social experimentation, intervention in concepts of value: "Allen Fisher calls attention to art as 'necessary business'—posing absolute challenges to the essential separation between 'exchange value, use value and desire value' (Guattari)./Cutting across formations categorized as discrete, 'discontinuity' *is* so only if it makes *other* relations; or else it is mimesis of actual informational chaos." This parallels Andrews' desire for a third paradigm, but posits new continuities in social (informational) terms (remember the delineations of Thatcherism in Adair's piece), and in terms of techniques of radical artifice, as Marjorie Perloff would put it, of creative linkage, and not in terms of the by then tarnished "linguistic analogy."

(Doubts about Andrews' early *poetics* are not doubts about his poetry, or the later socially oriented poetics. Poetics are a permission, not a description, a strange self-involved discourse. Work should not be judged on its conformity to poetics, or vice versa, nor on any "unity" thereby achieved. Indeed Adair's Deleuzoguattarian assertion that Andrews' work "apes but contests the shit-machine" remains a powerful description, one which implicitly proves much I'm saying here. *(Reality Studios* 10, 108))

Without outlining in detail the convergences and divergences of the British Veronica Forrest-Thomson's *Poetic Artifice* (1978) and American Charles Bernstein's "The Artifice of Absorption" (1986) (in (1992)), it is clear that language poetry itself moved towards a more open notion of artifice as "devicehood." Some opacity could be used for antiabsorptive means, and some for absorptive purposes. Here the straw man version of The Mainstream is given a third dimension. This is an approximation to Forrest-Thomson's notion of "naturalization," which she defines as "an attempt to reduce the strangeness of poetic language and poetic organization by making it intelligible, by translating it into a statement about the nonverbal external world, by making the Artifice appear natural" (xi) This concept is active in some British discussions of poetic language. If "good naturalization" dwells on the levels of Artifice, it holds open the way for this disruptive work between the signifier and the referent (or wherever it is located), for the new continuities Adair called for, for creative linkage, in work of more radically artificial structures than Forrest-Thomson herself countenanced, and in work different in orientation from language poetry.

To come up to date, and to quote from my *PN Review* account of the New Hampshire conference (the papers are not yet published in book form), Barrett Watten attempted to set a new agenda for American writing, an "historicist delineation of language poetry as a situated post-1968, post-Vietnam, discourse that now faced new challenges and

the need to change, not into an easy intelligibility, but into a mode of negotiation for the text as social, and the invasion of the text by a wide range of materials, to engender productive encounters with the world—including history which American poets have largely turned their backs on in a reaction, I have always thought, against Olson and Dorn. This plea had an odd ring to British... ears; with a poet of the distinction of Allen Fisher at the conference we didn't need to look far for a poet who could influence the Americans."

The thought of influencing the Americans is an interesting one, one raised at the conference itself by Keith Tuma. It strengthens, by reversal, the case for differentials here, my sense of a poetry with characteristics of its own. But any invasion of the text by new materials must heed the words of Bernstein in his 1990 formulation: "Content is more an attitude toward the work *or* toward language *or* toward the *materials* of the poem than some kind of subject that is in any way detachable from the handling of the *materials." (AP 8;* my emphases).

The insistences of those *or*s, the repetition of the word "materials," suggest where formally *and* linguistically innovative poetries worldwide might be going.

—ROBERT SHEPPARD

Errata, Sulfur #41: we regret that in Barbara Guest's poem, "Rocks on a Platter," pages 84 and 85 were mistakenly printed with two versions from the same stanza, and that on one of the pages "implacable poet" was added. These words should have appeared on another page.

FUTURE SULFURS

Sulfur was founded in 1981 at the California Institute of Technology; after 17 years, and 42 issues, I have decided that it would be appropriate to end the magazine in the spring of 2000. The schedule for the remaining issues is as follows:

Sulfur #43: regular issue, Fall 1998.

Sulfur #44 : special issue guest-edited by Jenny Penberthy and Marjorie Perloff on "The Pacific Rim," Spring 1999. Any contributions for this issue should be sent directly to Jenny or Marjorie at the following addresses by November, 1998:

Jenny Penberthy	Marjorie Perloff
3125 Waterloo St.	1467 Amalfi Drive
Vancouver	Pacific Palisades
BC V6R 358	CA 90272

There will be no Fall 1999 issue of the magazine.

Sulfur #45/46: a special issue consisting of brief contributions from past contributors to Sulfur. No non-solicited material will be considered for this final issue.

Since Sulfur #43 will be the last regular issue, *all submissions received after July 1, 1998, will be returned unread.*

Most back issues are still available (with the exception of #22, available only with complete sets) *at $7 each.* There are very few copies available of some of these issues.

—CE, March 1998

SULFUR must be the most important literary magazine which has explored and extended the boundaries of poetry. Clayton Eshleman has a nose for smelling out what was going to happen next in the ceaseless evolution of the living art.
–James Laughlin, New Directions Books

In an era of literary conservatism and sectarianism, the broad commitment of SULFUR to both literary excellence and a broad, interdisciplinary, unbought humanistic engagement with the art of poetry in America has been invaluable. To my notion, its critical articles and notes have been the sharpest going over the last several years.
–Gary Snyder

Sulfur

Founded at the California Institute of Technology in 1981, SULFUR is now based at Eastern Michigan University. In book format, it appears biannually, and averages 224 pages per issue and includes poetry and prose by established and experimental post WWII writers, as well as young and unknown ones, in a context that also includes archival materials (Pound, Williams, Hart Crane, Artaud), translations, artwork, essays and a 50 page section of reviews and noticings.

Back issues have featured among others the following writers and artists:

N.O. Brown	Amiri Baraka	Peter Redgrove
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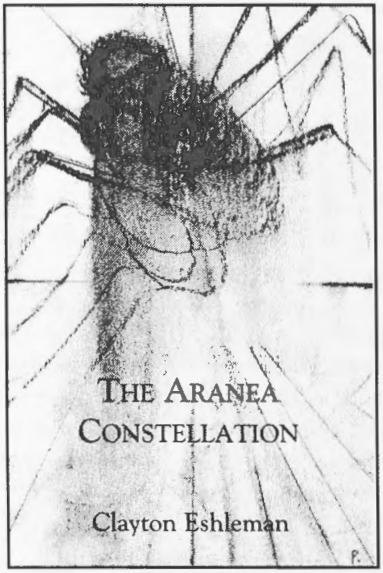

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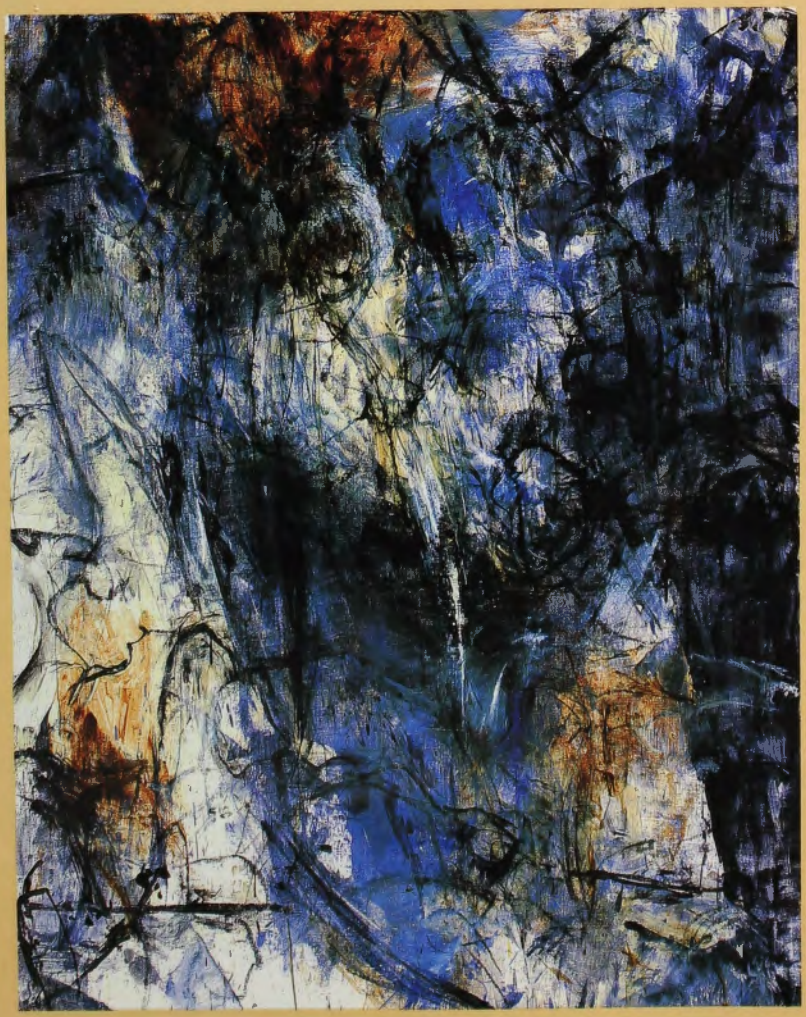

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Sulfur

FALL 1998

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL: Huron III (Black Ice), 1996, Oil, Charcoal/Linen, 60 x 48". Collection R Epping, Zurich, Switzerland

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KENWARD ELMSLIE

70 I REMEMBERS

(In Celebration of Gerrit
Lansing's 70th Birthday)

I
SCOTLAN FARM

I Remember, during World War II, being farmed out to the Lansings: Uncle Chink, Aunt Alice, Alice, their daughter, and Gerrit, their son, one year older (fifteen?) than me.

I Remember they lived at Scotlan Farm, near Cleveland, a few miles outside a small town, Chagrin Falls.

I Remember how charmed I was by Aunt Alice's laugh. Wrinkles crinkled around eyes both startled and guarded: is this allowable? Then she'd relax and enjoy.

Her maiden name was "Scott," which explains the "Scot" in Scotlan. Aunt Alice and her sister Aunt Mary were lifelong friends of my mother, born Constance Helen Pulitzer, who died of cancer when I was ten. The Scott girls came from The South, and that's why we called them Aunt and their husbands Uncle: a Southern nicety, even though we weren't related.

I Remember the Lansing household included Selma, who did the cooking. She shuffled about in slippers, had a thick Swedish accent and unkempt hair turning gray, which occasionally found its way into food.

I Remember being a bit shocked by Uncle Chink's demeanor, dog-wrestling unabashedly on the floor of the Lansing dining/living room. From the civilized safety of a comfy sofa, sitting primly, I'd look down at postprandial gyrations, inches away: golden Irish setter and big old man—male bodies coupling friskily, but coupling.

I Remember how amazed I was by the good times that transpired in this family room: parlor games, piano music, incessant teasing, pranks, constant gab.

I Remember Uncle Chink's hawk nose looked Indian to me, as did his penetrating gaze, sharp enough to traverse vast distances—red canyons, empty prairies—capable of spying minute enemy movements far off.

I Remember how Uncle Chink's teasing delighted me. He feigned great confusion re my last name, which he changed to "Clumsly." I *was* clumsy, but I didn't mind his tomfoolery, which lent some sort of quirky panache to my insipid gaucheries, prompted by my need to apologize for existing.

I Remember how Gerrit's older sister, Alice, intimidated me. She was a chain smoker, and lumbered about a bit mannishly, in what I thought of as horsy attire—pants. She was "different," which I admired, but I was concerned she'd think me sissyish, which I was.

I Remember disliking Gerrit's older brother, Chuck, and his chipmunky wife. I resented their occasional visits, as they spoiled the romantic enchantment my imagination floated on: My Idyllic Life With The Lansings, The Greatest Best Family in the World, the family I pined for to be all, all mine.

I Remember Uncle Chink was anti-New Deal, and loved to make fun of FDR and toothy Eleanor and the idiocy of government spending. He was a businessman. My father once explained he was a specialist in rescuing failing companies, which was why The Lansings had had to pull up stakes now and again.

I Remember Aunt Alice sold eggs from their hen house: pin money. A farm family lived on their property, and worked the land, but delivering eggs to customers was her responsibility.

I Remember if a lady's slip showed, Aunt Alice would've found it proper to carol helpfully, "It's snowing."

I Remember Selma's sugar cookies, the scent of them baking. Gerrit and I washed them down with ginger-ale. Then back we'd go to books and board games and diversions that preoccupied us.

I Remember being envious of Gerrit's prowess at the piano, which seemed magical. I'd once been given piano lessons. The bees on the fence so bewildered me, I was judged unteachably "unmusical" and sent home.

I Remember Gerrit reading the sheet-music of popular songs, and how I tried to time my page-turning with finesse. I couldn't read music, so words were my salvation. No words? Panic struck. If the notes on the page formed dense clusters, I'd speed up my page-turn, and pray I'd guessed right.

I Remember Gerrit playing Hit Parade songs heard on the radio, songs we were especially enamored of:

Skylark. Mairzy Doats and Dozy Doats and little lambs eat ivy. Manhattan Serenade. Deep Purple. K-A-L-A-M-A-Z-O-Oh I Got A Gal in Kalamazoo...Songs from a movie, *Orchestra Wives.* Big Band songs played by Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman and Kay Kyser & His Kollege of Musical Knowledge featuring Ishkabibble, a goof with bangs.

I Remember Gerrit's telling me so many people committed suicide after listening to *Gloomy Sunday,* it had to be banned from the airwaves.

I Remember Gerrit gave me my first chance to sing to a live accompaniment—which I took totally for granted.

I Remember being awed by Gerrit's rendition of Classical Music. He gritted his teeth, but his fingers just flew across the keyboard. Chopin!

I Remember parlor games. Chinese Checkers. Monopoly. Parchesi.

I Remember we both read feverishly. Saki's *Tobermory.* Poe. I had crushes on P.G. Wodehouse (Jeeves) and Evelyn Waugh—*Decline And Fall* and *A Handful of Dust,* crushes not shared by Gerrit. Steven Vincent Benet *(John Brown's Body, Western Star)* and Alice Duer Miller *(The White Cliffs of Dover)* were my favorite poets. Around then, I wrote my first poem. It came to me in a burst—Lady Jane Grey on top of the Tower of London, beheaded by an axe.

I Remember fumbly sex experiments in the woods with Gerrit. I was a year younger, but, having been exposed to goings-on at a boys' boarding school, I assumed the role of sophisticated debaucher, which made me "bad," much to my delight.

I Remember my humiliating bed-wetting problem. After a mishap, through a window, I'd see Selma hang up the offending sheets on the clothesline, cleansed of their telltale yellow stain. No one, Gerrit included, ever mentioned, much less complained about my shameful weakness.

II
HARVARD

I Remember my senior year in boarding school (St. Mark's, Southboro, Mass.), I was allowed a whole weekend away, special dispensation. Saturday night, I spent with Gerrit, in a hotel room. Same bed! Sex! Scarily against the rules. Our

roles had reversed somehow: worldly Harvard frosh vs preppy naif. Then I went to visit my sister Cynthia at the Hartford Retreat. She'd had a total nervous breakdown (the reason the school let me out) and when we went for a drive, wide-eyed with martyrdom, she pointed, frantic mime so the chauffeur wouldn't hear, how the limousine doors had no inside handles. WE WERE LOCKED IN! A weird weekend—the juxtaposition of Fairy Behavior, universally frowned on and hooted at, plus Crazy Sister in Loony Bin. I was terrified the sinister convergence of two evil curses—

A) Loony Bin Sister

B) Loony Pervert (Me!)

would inexorably push me over the edge, and I'd wind up, locked away in an insane asylum. Upon my return, how relieved I felt. For all its insular, elitist pitfalls (my nickname was *Homo* and my cousin Michael Pulitzer was known as *Mike The Kike)*—how providential St. Mark's seemed. The Outsider, safe. Back. Back to my longings for a blond athlete, Richard. Longings far too deep and pervasive to ever be revealed to a living soul. Richard. Richard Kobusch. Who'd once good-naturedly goosed me in a corridor. Aghast, I'd fled. Longings. Safe. Unacted on.

I Remember at Harvard, Gerrit and I were Dunster Funsters, as was John Ashbery.

I Remember Gerrit introducing me to J.A. His stare scared me. Gerrit had showed me a poem of J.A.'s in the *Harvard Advocate.* He not only liked it, he seemed to understand it. I couldn't make head nor tail of it, which I felt was somehow my fault.

I Remember Gerrit dragging me (more mysticism!) to a Vedanta Society meeting in Boston.

I Remember how I tended to tune out when Gerrit got going on Alastair Crowley or Madam Blavatsky, or the difference between black and white magic, or alchemy, or astrology. The fact he thought, in 1948, practitioners of magic were,

well, not exactly thriving, but were still a force to be reckoned with, didn't make a lick of sense to me, so I just kept quiet.

I Remember Gerrit's Tarot pack, talk of Yeats and magic, Ouspensky, Scriabin—Gerrit's amazing maze.

I Remember Gerrit doing my astrological chart when I turned 21. He actually phoned my father, long-distance, to find out the exact second of the exact minute I was born—otherwise the chart wouldn't be accurate. I felt totally embarrassed. What a queer question to ask! I think Gerrit told me my father wasn't dead sure, but Gerrit made my chart anyway: an intricacy of signs and arrows and mysterious notations. I was Taurus. Sagittarius was rising. Cusp. Something consequential, unalterable, was in my cusp.

I Remember feeling on safer ground, chatting with Gerrit about theatre musicals: my love.

I Remember our shared passion for Rodgers & Hammerstein's *South Pacific,* which, like most musicals then, tried out in Boston pre-Broadway. The bare male torsos, glistening from tropical heat (and savvy lighting) bowled us over, and we were captivated by the lusty homoerotic camaraderie of the Sea-bees belting out *There Is Nothin' Like A Dame.* Blatant subtext: There Is Nothin' Like A Guy—Especially—Especially If He's A Sexy Sailor, That Holiest of Holy Icons, That Aphrodisiac in Summer White, That Fetish of Wanton Lust & Unbridled Beatitudinal Adoration.

I Remember Gerrit taking me to a cocktail party, exclusively, unless my eyes deceived me, made up of Harvard homosexuals. I...I felt extremely out of place.

I Remember sitting with Gerrit, compliantly, in a cafeteria, Hayes-Bickfords, late late Saturday night, and watching the fairy parade flounce in.

I Remember I enjoyed our eye-fuck forays to sailor bars in Scollay Square. And walking solo, walking and hunting, skinny kid, glasses, hunting and singing show songs to myself quietly, desolate streets, urinals, cruising the Boston Common, sailors, hunting and singing and cruising down to the Charles River, bridge, river, bridge, cruise loops, hoping against hope for a sex adventure.

III
FRANCE

I Remember our sharing a bed in a small hotel room—Left Bank, Paris,

I Remember our breakfasts in bed: cafe au lait and croissants. Operetta view of quaint roofs and picturesque chimneys. And the agonizingly slow, jerky elevator cage that led us to our room.

I Remember we read *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (unexpurgated!) outloud to each other, in bed. Slow-going, mitigated by the thrill of reading outlaw words in a dirty book, contraband in the USA.

I Remember Gerrit expertly expounded the theories of Jung. The Shadow Persona. Archtypes. How ancient myths keep on recurring. Astrological symbols. Earth, Fire, Water, Air. Beyond me.

I Remember Gerrit's knowing all about the notorious homosexual thief-writer, Jean Genet.

I Remember our rushing to see a Roland Petit ballet based on Genet—*'Adam Miroire*—about a sailor. Mirrors.

I Remember Gerrit joining us Elmslies (Vivien, my sister and my father) in a palatial mansion on the Riviera. Its claim to fame was it appeared in the film *The Red Shoes.* One night, I

reached to turn on the light, and instead of a chain, I grabbed hold of a human hand. A ghost hand. This inexplicable happening seemed to validate Gerrit's obsession with magic. Maybe it wasn't all guff. I felt closer to him.

I Remember a family auto excursion to Italy, Gerrit's nose buried in his guidebook. My father grew impatient with his expansive read-outs of Must-Sees.

IV
NYC

I Remember midtown lunches with Gerrit, at modest French restaurants that invariably served onion soup, coq au vin, and wine by the carafe—very sophisticated repasts, so we thought.

I Remember our eye-fuck jaunts to sailor bars around Times Square.

I Remember we knew Lester Judson, a grotesquely fat show-biz song-writer who'd written a big hit for Eartha Kitt—*I Want To Be Evil*—because EVIL backwards spells LIVE.

I Remember Gerrit introducing me to the Ever Hard (sic) Baths. We shared a cubicle with two single beds. An old man came in, and began groping us, while gushing about us being "angels."

I Remember our craze for Tab Hunter, and how we ventured far afield to Brooklyn to see the sad preem of his first movie, *Island of Desire,* costarring Linda Darnell. It was a hopeless dud that provided John Latouche with a comedy routine: Linda's basso profundo, contrasted to Tab's high, Disney squirrel voice.

I Remember our craze for *Tomorrow's Man*—discreet predecessor of gay skinzines. Cute boys in jockstraps, very clean-cut, doing gymnastics. Cadets sprucing up for The Prom.

I Remember a louche acquaintance of Gerrit's, who ended up on the front page of the *Daily News.* He was accused of murdering a millionairess he shacked up with in Haiti. Cruising in Central Park, he wore sailor whites as a pick-up ploy.

I Remember Gerrit's apartment on Morton Street in the Village. He knew the poets Ashbery, Schuyler, O' Hara, and their chum, the painter Jane Freilicher, several years before I did.

I Remember Gerrit's style of drinking coffee—quick nervous iddy-biddy schlurps. And bird-like head-dips. I found his head-dips so irritating, I stuck a description in a prose-collage in *Album,* an early book of mine.

GERRIT IN THE HOTEL OF DEATH

> *Gerrit sips as no human being I have ever seen. He holds the cup tilted to his lips, his lips reach out and enfold the lip of the cup, and he holds it there tipping it slightly, bending like those toy birds perched on the edges of water glasses in drugstore windows a few years back.*
>
> *How tiny the amount of liquid that enters his mouth per sip. Dip dip dip dip. Dip dip dip dip. His lips stretch out, enveloping the lip of the cup, busy as a one-legged man at an ass-kicking.*

I Remember Billy Rose, the famous producer and columnist, coming to the penthouse where I lived with John Latouche (67th Street, between Lex & Third). Gerrit was pressed into service as pianist, so Billy Rose could hear a snatch of John's new lyrics for Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld,* which he'd commissioned. Absolutely nothing came of his visionary project—a Met-scale opera rep entirely in English, with all translations done by first-rate lyricists—Cole Porter was on his list. Basically, he was looking for a way to lose a fortune fast. His grandiose project was actually a grudge ploy so his ex (Eleanor Holm) would get less alimony and moolah.

I Remember how Gerrit and I savored Donald Fuller's surreal stories. He was a one-eyed alcoholic composer John Latouche had collaborated with, fitfully, with whom I worked on an extremely oddball musical about a mixed doubles tennis tournament. Title: *Thirty-Love,* which Frank O'Hara misheard, with ESP acuity, as *Dirty Love.* We saw a great deal of Donald. After dinner, in his cups, he'd regale Latouche, Gerrit, Harry Martin (an ex of John's) and I with his loopy tales. One began, "When the moon came over the mountain, Kate Smith fell into a coma."

I Remember afternoons of "writing assignments" with Gerrit. One involved retelling a Greek legend, disguising it as a short story. Mine, *The Weather of Ripeness,* ended up in a literary magazine: *Folder*—a first publication for me.

I Remember we both especially adored the works of Jane Bowles. We were fascinated how her obsession with food insinuated itself into her writings. The scuttlebutt was: she was blocked on a play, *In The Summerhouse,* slated for a Broadway production by an eminent producer/close friend, Oliver Smith. As the weeks of work blockage lengthened, he'd drop in, sneak a glance at the manuscript while she mixed them a cocktail, only to see lists of menus for a picnic scene, lists that grew longer. No dialogue, just menus. The play, finally finished, flopped so badly financially, Oliver's hair fell out, and he repaired to Hollywood to recoup by designing sets for the movie of *Guys And Dolls.* The picnic scene was a virtuoso *coup de theatre*—a food farce culture clash, Latino vs Wasp, ending with a hilarious fracas of hurled spaghetti.

I Remember we both revered W. H. Auden. We went to see *The Age of Anxiety* performed by the New York City Ballet, music by Leonard Bernstein, choreography by Jerome Robbins, sets by Oliver Smith—to us, an astonishing "breakthrough" event.

I Remember how we loved the voice of Lotte Lenya, and the songs of Weill-Brecht. Also the songs of Weill-in-exile, particularly *Speak Low* from *One Touch of Venus,* lyric by Ogden Nash, sung by Mary Martin.

I Remember Gerrit playing from sheet-music my one jukebox hit and first published song—*Love-wise,* vocal by Nat King Cole, music by Marvin Fisher. We went to a bar, plunked dime after dime in a jukebox, just to hear it one more time.

I Remember the almost worshipful way Gerrit said the name "Eileen Garrett." She was a famous medium, and a good friend of Touche's, who once came to our penthouse to deal with a ghost problem. John couldn't sleep. A desperately unhappy spirit kept rattling around our bedroom. Eileen, formidable and not goofy in any way, paid us a call, sniffed around matter-of-factly, and somehow exorcised the tormented spirit. A janitor later told us a man had committed suicide by leaping from our balcony, years before.

I Remember Gerrit and I agreed *L'Hotel* was the greatest song ever written. How tenderly Gerrit played it, and how patiently he taught me to sing it, despite the fact I couldn't read music, and had to memorize it by ear.

I Remember one time Aunt Alice came to call on me (NYC) and, unwittingly, let the cat out of the bag. I was in my late twenties, living with John Latouche, my idol-as-lyricist/mentor/mate. The cat, hush-hush info, was this: my sister Cynthia, who felt obligated to mother motherless me long after this was remotely feasible, somehow found out from The Hanover Bank that I'd given a chunk of my inheritance to John, who was always broke. Cynthia made a special secret trip to NYC to confer with Daddy about Helpless-Kenward-Taken-Advantage-Of-By-This-Scurrilous-Fortune-Hunting-Youth-Molester-Older-Man. Or some such hobbledehoy. According to Aunt Alice, Daddy told Cynthia to mind her own business—I was over 21. Aunt Alice smiled,

"So everything is all right," happy to be the bearer of glad tidings. I hid my fury from her: maniacal meddling! Betrayal beyond the pale! Hateful loony family! As opposed to The Greatest Best Family in the World: The Lansings.

I Remember decades later, I typed up my mother's teenage diary as an 80th birthday present to my widowed sister Cynthia. In the diary, my mother mentions Mr. E has abruptly departed. The English Mr. E had been hired to tutor her younger brother, Herbert, and any dalliance with Constance Pulitzer was not to be countenanced. Obviously, he was a fortune-hunter, eager to bag a millionaire's daughter. Why else would he woo such a shy, sickly wallflower? Mr. E was sent packing, and she was forbidden further contact with him. The diary reveals this forced separation proved porous, thanks to the benign intervention of Alice and Mary: the Scott sisters. A diary entry refers to a debt ($1) Constance owes Mr. E that must be paid, and possibly indiscreet letters to him he must return to her. One thing leads to another; letters from Mr. E to Alice and Mary make their way to Constance, who is found to be suffering from tuberculosis, a disease unmentionable in polite society. Deemed spoiled goods, a social pariah, Constance repairs to a health resort, Colorado Springs, where dry mountain air and rest, lots of rest, heals lungs. Her diary stops pre-TB, but her travails end happily. Mr. E fails to prove himself worthy of her hand by becoming a millionaire via land speculation in Canada. In fact he loses the grubstake his family has loaned him. So he's spoiled goods too. He hooks up with her in Colorado Springs, marries her, and Constance Helen Pulitzer Elmslie bears him two daughters and a son—me. So my father knew all about Fortune Hunter paranoia, first hand, and Aunt Alice knew all about couples cursed with family members bent on tearing them asunder.

V
NEW ENGLAND

I Remember one summer on Martha's Vineyard, the *Candide* Summer, Leonard Bernstein and John Latouche took a dim view of The Young—Gerrit and I. We'd revealed our craze for a cool-voiced jazz musician, of a devastatingly slack-jawed empty-eyed beauty—Chet Baker. His zombie voice so infuriated Lenny & Touche, they forgot their collaborative clashes, and (unanimity for a change) railed at us for having "no past," branded us delinquents, orphaned amid barbarisms we bowed down to cravenly: "coolth."

I Remember Gerrit helping gather in hay from the fields around John's and my house in Calais, Vermont. Shirtless, he expertly forked the hay onto a truck, pitching in, working alongside farmer neighbors in need of cow fodder. I was startled by his zest: the Scotlan Farm farmboy, tending to chores—a Gerrit I'd never seen.

I Remember after John Latouche's funeral at Calais, John's brother, a drunken redneck psycho, pulled out a knife, after he'd boasted of killing a "Nigger." Gerrit, Harry Martin, Ruth Yorck (German emigré poet) and I fled uphill to the safety of a neighbor's house for the night.

I Remember Gerrit's taking me to meet a very precious (to him) poet. As queer as Dick's hatband, Steve Jonas reminded me of the freaks in the fairy parade we'd gawked at, back a good ways, at Hayes-Bickfords. His place was such a hoorah's nest, I didn't feel I was in Boston, which I was. Rio favela? Calcutta untouchable? I couldn't figure out why on earth Gerrit wanted me to meet this sad dreg, who spoke a coded, non sequitur lingo I found impenetrable.

I Remember staying with Gerrit in Jack Hammond's castle in Gloucester. A septuagenarian multimillionaire inventor, with a wife, a mistress and a boy friend (Harry Martin), Jack

Hammond shared John's and Gerrit's predilection for the occult. He experimented with Eileen Garrett, putting her inside a copper cage to find out if the comings and goings of the spirits she encountered in seances left a vibratory spoor. Copper wires attached to sensitive instruments he'd devised were to reveal all. No dice.

I Remember showing off to Gerrit, dancing (fake Broadway, Jerome Robbins) about the stone floor of the castle's huge medieval hall with cathedral-sized arches. I had to quit in mid-pelvic thrust. I'd grown too heavy and I was out of breath.

I Remember walking down to the harbor to visit a poet Gerrit thought highly of, and was eager to meet. The poet, a big burly man, reminded me of a friendly postman in a Pagnol film. He was devoid of literary airs, and made us feel right at home. He presented us each with signed copies of a simply printed poem. His name was Charles Olson.

KENNETH IRBY

TWO POEMS

The king's seal and the king's reef are in the sky
the sleek head stretched and the solemn imprint
and the ridge furl reached and struck
and the king is generation
Then take up the empery and the dominion and return them
as the rabbits at the salt lick take what is left for the deer
and the long stare back into the woods for the others
The water that is in the sky and the land and the hand
pass on in one direction West with the eagles
and with the spin of blackbirds back against the other
And you are the continuance and the impress and the delivery
and the -dication, the in and the from and the pre and the to

*

There are mounds in the dense woods of Northeast corners
and the Northeasts
encircling for thousands of years their own reason for being
to the game and its plenty as near the eye and the skin of the
eye
as the bare feet to their earth

*

Already at Equinox a carved pumpkin guards the door to the
next house
two young men bare skinned attend at one a.m. and leave to
light the coming of Fall

On the steps there is a cup of leaves just started turning, still
turning, overturning flame

rustling in the wind in there, sea surge
to sip the air between crashes on the light shore and returns

From under a different tree, into a different weal

ESTO ES ÉPICO Y ES LÍRICO

(at Rubén Darío's birthday)

One dog jumps out for the big yellow plastic bone, out from the porch of mistings
held back at first by the mystery of mastery, the mistery in a knowledge, just there in the seeing of it, and then let loose
and the other bounds out for the tennis ball from the opposite direction
orange liqueur and brandy and one drop of bitter elixir, they meet
and the ball that is not a ball but a rounded shrub of a cylinder, oblation of flowerdom
rolls up from their meeting, not bone, not uncurtained, but green and generational
The generosity of dogs, just there in the sight of them, one dog, met and the mass more than critical
and the sight more than nova the holding, the bone and the bone absorbed and the ball picked up and absorbed
dog life misted out of the greens and the porch of greens
sight was made for, place is made of

Anne Gorrick

WILTWICK, WALLKILL AS MEMORY

A: Fragments of an empire
because there are Girls who take
care of the fragments
because the rhododendron

Lilac, opium, detections
of the parts in heat
Gold modernities, a true sun

Book of bougainvillea, chalk
Angels of the sun in the dark
Diaphragm, right-hander of the
indifferent light
in the memory of a human fever
Inhabit the fire in Esopus, the Dutch
course

B: Fragments of a rhododendron
Mother-of-pearl, beads, girls who
around the care of catch
catch the fragments of an empire
the empire around their throats

The gold modernities in his of the lilacs
are rectified
The light has the taste of metaphor in it
A detection in this relative of memory

A true sun sticking to record Western
comforts delivers

bougainvillea, chalk
center keeps center bone worse

Each window: diaphragm, day, rock lime
Wiltwick, Wallkill in a human report of
fever to live in fire
Esopus and Dutch run

C: The light likes metaphor in it
Girls who take care of the
fragments of a clear rhododendron
Gold currencies on the lilacs, opium

A real sun substituted with adhesive tape
Book of bougainvillea, chalk
The empire without bits of angels
Each window the day's iris

D: The ash, the nacre of the empire
around its throat
Detection in the heat of parts
gold fallen over lilacs
A real sun taped
to the west key of the island
Chalk and Bougainvillea
crèche made from chest bones
Bits of angels the sun swallowed in the
dusk of that whore-dark sea

The human being resides on fire
in a fevered memory

E: Light like metaphor in each sea
ash of the nut/mother bead
girl, who waits around the fragments
of bright rhododendron
in the realm around begin

Exposure in the gold coins pleases over
The thighs apart for the window
an exposure in familiar

A real sun, a western island ribbon
supplies bougainvillea, chalk,
a crib of bone
The realm corrects from the
inside outside
The sun swallowed in the density whore
of the sea
a real sun by a ribbon replace

The indifferent light by each tiger lily
calcium carbonate, abort in a memory
fever

F: Light like fragments of an empire
Rhododendron, ashes from
mother-of-pearl
Girls waiting around fragments
Ash against their necks

The lilac, the opium, revelation in gold
coins
lilac of thighs apart
a revelation in the familiar
A puts on again the shirt

A real sun delivers bougainvillea
crib filled with bones of an empire
without pieces of angels
That a real sun was replaced by a ribbon

The indifferent light by tiger lilies,
limestone, window
Wiltwick, Wallkill in a memory of fever
The human resident on fire in Esopus
and the Dutch voyage licking the burn

caused by the author of Huguenot and sleep

We are the sleeping fragments of an empire

Note: Wiltwick is the original Dutch name for a settlement which is now Kingston, NY. During the Second Esopus War in 1663, Indians attacked Wiltwick and Hurley massacring many inhabitants to protest the Dutch selling one of their leaders into slavery.

Wallkill and Esopus are both town names and rivers, "kill" meaning "creek" in Dutch.

ROSMARIE WALDROP

from RELUCTANT GRAVITIES

CONVERSATION 13
ON THE WAYS OF THE BODY

In important ways, he says, the ways of the body, speaking in one's imagination cannot be compared to crying out loud, or only like tennis with a ball and tennis without one. Yet the games are similar. This is why the idea of another world can still net a sunlit slope when the valley is already dark and we should reach for a glass of wine. Grist of images. But ordinarily I don't think of "inner events" shadowing my speech. Just as I don't worry if my sperm have long or short tails.

And what can writing not be compared to? she asks. Having a ball? A child growing from your long-tailed sperm? A boatload of foreigners climbing the Statue of Liberty, waving flags? The price of deciphering seems to be transparency. Also called fainting. The wings of the dragonfly are beautiful, but the body is not itself. I want the missing meat, bone, metabolism and ratios of heat and hunger. At the price of windows muddied with fingerprints.

Thinking runs between speech and above pigeonholes, he says, but our one sky falls on the street, leaving puddles. I worry beads between my fingers and how to revive dead letters. Or does a flower out of rubble say less for life than how meager our claims? The image is consumed in the missing detail, the gap of promise. But suddenly a word gets down on all fours and sniffs at your crotch. Or a memory screams on your cheeks while you try to hold on to the edgy afternoon.

The dog, she says. There is always a dog. But this warm flick of a tongue. Grass softer than sleep, and the dog standing over me, panting, penis flaming red from under his yellow coat and crooked as though in pain. Warm flick of tongue on my face. Wet shock. Worried boundary or bone.

CONVERSATION 14
ON BLIND MAN'S BUFF

Was I frightened by what I saw, she asks, or by my own eyes? Red, crooked penis. Did my hand follow its logic into blind man's buff? Did I learn to read in order to purge incomprehensible desires? A prisoner of memory regenerating in the marrow, the red power of a dog, or the stranger need of language? Missing transport by muscle or metaphor. So that I bite my lip and see beside the point.

Are you saying that greater density attracts more matter? he asks. Of fact? That abstract means distance? That our parents' act has exploded the present indicative? Nothing has ever been deciphered but turned out beasts coupling. Even books spot with secret menstrual blood and propagate their species. My hand forms letters of unambiguous design. Or are you preparing me for new ways of behavior?

Old ways, she says. Though sometimes I feel you less as an animal than huge rampant vegetation taking root inside me, covering my whole world, from top to there's no bottom, with sheer presence. And me almost bursting out of my skin, a drop of water, all surface tension. Now I spread more like a puddle, my body relaxing away from me, no matter how firmly I decline its offers of expansion.

Does it even make sense to say "then" and "now," he asks, when our world expands in every direction away from itself and the speed of light is measured to be the same regardless of how we are moving? Maybe it's the frame that strikes resemblance until the fullness of time allows all forms to dissolve? I know, aging is not an article of a woman's religion. Every night, we cover our nakedness to dry the ink. Every morning the page is as empty as the scene of a crime.

CONVERSATION 15
ON SHARING

Why is it, she asks, that we cannot share experience, not even under the same sheet? Rain falling or not. That my pleasure in your pleasure is unsteady like decaying atoms or continents mapped in a dream? The light of difference sharper than the warmth of next to or the same wild cucumber vine. We expected pursuit to close on happiness. But it remains pursuit, the happiness intermittent, a meteorite igniting as it passes through our air.

Any text crumbles, he says, even if we approach the tree before the leaves are falling. And the gaps don't let the light show through, let alone the color of quarks. The photographer says smile as if an unease with family likeness could be refocused as identity. In spite of superhuman efforts to keep my dead father's body from encroaching on mine, I am caught, moon in eclipse, an eager atom weighing toward form out of sheer need for anxiety.

Intermittent, she says, as if a space of time, too, could not be occupied by two bodies. Even bodies of experience and memory. As if we had no history, only a past purloined by nothing to show for it. The way I feel robbed in the morning, dreams bleached by the rush of too bright light. A film gone white, with only stray bits of raw dark. The body inhabits those as consciousness inhabits forgetting. And the gap between pain and knowing recloses the way matter comes to in the light.

Our love moved with the slowness of an object, he says. Blueshifted as sitting for a portrait where you can't grudge time. It awakened fingers at the tip of our words, chambers in the heart. Then suddenly everything too close, a splinter under the skin. The model has gotten a cramp, the cat eaten her young. Vertigo of reflections, the smooth surface lost in eddies and currents.

CONVERSATION 16
ON CHANGE

A splinter lodged in the brain, he says, this effort to trap fluctuations in wavelength or feeling. To see not only both duck and rabbit in the puzzle, but to freeze the moment of flip. Or a moment of aging. Is it too subtle, like grass growing, like the size of a proton? Or is our inability more categorical, the way a shadow cannot catch the light, or the eye see its blind spot? Do I love your face because it is yours or because of the way it differs from circle, parabola, ellipse?

Perhaps we need change to see what's there, she says. And ambiguity, to be aware of seeing. Seven types of apples. But focus on the curvature of the lens, and night gains all color, torpor all deeds, even their reflections in the river. Pores stop their doors. The grass is blunt with mass, the sky not infinite, just soot.

So we should not watch each single breath, he asks, but simply take in the world and hold it in our body? With the roots laboring in the ground? with poplars standing straight and stiff in the acid rain? And breath by breath set it down again and not worry how *is* connects with *the case?* Like an acrobat? An acrobat.

There are things, she says, we cannot say. But to keep them down in the body doesn't save us. Even if use equals meaning, nakedness may not rise to the occasion of high noon. Legend says time began when an eagle pierced the sun and was consumed in fire. Moment of transfiguration, sublime and pitiful. The mind suffering sunstroke, overcome by its own light just when it thinks it is defeating the darkness.

Dan Featherston

ODORS

At Vetlianka all the plague patients diffused an odor of
honey.
At Athens bees flew from a bull's entrails
& hornets from warlike horses.
In Egypt plagues swarmed out of the desert
like dark clouds & hovered over the cities.
In quarantine, hived away in cells.

*

Nursing infants
sour **butter**.

*

Scarlet fever
bread hot from the oven.

*

Menstruation distinguished by an odor of **leather**.
Saddled in blood, straddled abattoir of the body
turned inside out, hung to dry
between earth & sky.
Birth & death.
Hide: to turn "animal" inside out.

*

Suppressed menstruation
odor of **hops**
grain's combustion.

*

The Hungarian monk was able to decide
the chastity of females by smell alone.

*

The smell of fear
blood mingled with **electricity**.

*

The diabetic produces an odor of **apples**.
Breath's white-flowered branch
tinged brass like sunlight
caramelized in her skin.

*

In the paroxysms of hysteria & epilepsy
the hair's specific odor of **ozone**.

*

Hysterics will produce an odor of **violets**–
frenzied hue of bloomed earth,
sanitarium's guerdon
laced up in white jackets.

*

The sweat of lunatics resembles that of yellow **deer** or **mice**.
Scuttling between rooms, feverish in the wall.
Some glimpsed wilderness.

*

Measles: the smell of freshly plucked **feathers**.
Attributed to pillows
wet with fever
spotted skin pricked raw.

*

After sex the odor of **chloroform**
owing to a peculiar secretion
of the buccal glands.
A volatile, sweet taste
sluiced from loosed limbs.

*

Orteschi met a young lady who exhaled the strong odor of
vanilla
from the joints of her fingers.

*

The syphilitic produces an odor of stagnant **water**
as if the sexual turbine
turned in upon
itself.

*

The odor of typhoid
that of **blood**.

*

Chorea produces an odor of **pineapple**.
St. Vitus never tasted a pineapple
but might have thought of the dance
as a kind of torrid sweetness
under the tough exterior of Roman law.

*

Lethargy & catalepsy produce a **cadaverous** odor.
Some people have a cadaverous odor their whole life.
A prophecy.
A hint.

ROBERTO TEJADA

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF HORACE BRISTOL

The first issue of *Life* magazine appeared in late November of 1936. The ironic word-play of the caption—"LIFE BEGINS"—printed under the opening image of a surgeon holding a newborn, was unconsciously prophetic perhaps of the determinant uses photography would pose thereafter to the cultural and economic future of the United States.[1] The editors of *Life* were resolved to emulate the new style of photojournalism coined earlier in Germany whereby narrative threads were told by way of sequence. A year after its inception, the magazine hired Horace Bristol, a "4 x 5 specialist," to join a team that included Alfred Eisenstaedt and Margaret Bourke-White.

A friend and colleague of renown figures such as Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, Dorothea Lange and Edward Weston, Horace Bristol (1908-1997) fulfilled an active career as a photographer during the three important decades of what John Berger has called photography's greatest "transparency"—before the medium began to show symptoms of creative self-inspection. Bristol's images span from urban street scenes, architectural studies of the early industrial landscape of his native California, and the story of struggle as lived by migrant workers to naval missions during World War II, its aftermath, and the traditional life of Japan. In the process, Bristol would become a crucial figure in the historic switch, commensurate with the aims of photojournalism, to the smaller Contax or Leica 35mm camera—and later in the 1950s, from German optics to the Nikon lens.

In reference to the work of W. Eugene Smith, Horace Bristol admired the "immediate power [of an image] rather than its ability to make one reflect on it as an aesthetic object." Bristol, too, aimed for the expository force of the image freed of superfluous artistic rhetoric. With his faith in social document, the task Bristol saw facing the photographer was "to analyze critically the material at hand, and with judgment untempered by mercy, eliminate all but the significant."

This tendency can be traced as far back as Bristol's formal studies taken of bridges and oil fields in Los Angeles and San Francisco. These classic modernist renderings of geometric patterns extracted from

industrial and public works—made even more monumental as set against dwarfed human figures—reflect Bristol's training as an architect, with his interest as such in the volumes that define and delimit urban social space. They also bear witness to the new heroic moment that the United States was entering—one of increased economic power as exemplified by its civic projects and factory plants.

After a series of photographs on Depression-era San Francisco, Bristol accompanied Dorothea Lange on trips to the Central Valley of California where hundreds of men, women and children had arrived in search of work, fleeing the drought that had devastated other parts of the country, especially Oklahoma. Bristol later contacted novelist John Steinbeck in the hope of having him collaborate with an essay to accompany his photographs on the conditions of work there and the relations between strikers and authorities.[2]

Joad Family Applying for Relief shows the configuration of five migrant workers—their emotionally-distinct faces a concurrence of reticence, laughter, glowers and blank expressions; the hand of one man wrapped in heavy bandages. They are depicted in high contrast as they face a government functionary whose slicked-back hair we see from behind, as though Bristol's intention were to make this figure a surrogate for the viewer. Unlike Dorothea Lange's renderings of migrant workers—where composition tends to be austere—Bristol generally packs considerable movement into his images, presenting his subjects as active in extricating themselves from such bleak conditions. In *Retarded Man and Fanatic Sister,* the image is taken from a slightly elevated point of view, as though the subjects could literally step out of the frame by which they are bound. Awareness of the camera provokes stiff gestures from the two as they reach for each other's hands—the focal point of the image whereby mental handicap and religious fervor are joined as concomitant realities within the failure of a promised land.

With the outbreak of World War II, Horace Bristol was hired by Edward Steichen to form part of the Naval Aviation Photographic Unit. One of Bristol's most impressive images is from 1944—a year in which war had escalated considerably in the Pacific, and Bristol was sent to join an American crew of PBY amphibious planes on a mission at Rabaul Harbor, New Guinea. There, the gunner manning Bristol's plane spotted a downed marine fighter pilot, severely injured and unable to swim. The young gunner immediately stripped naked, diving into the water and eventually dragging the pilot back to safety. Both wet and still nude, the gunner wasted no time in adjusting his headphones again and returning to position at his machine gun as the plane and crew managed to make their escape. The image of the gunner as he is

rendered posed at his war machine— sunlight refracting the water in beads along his back and buttocks—combines the pleasure and awe derived from looking at a hero's naked body in the mythic eroticism of rescue. *(PBY Blister Gunner, Rescue at Rabaul)*

After the war, Bristol worked as a free-lance photographer covering Asia for *Fortune* magazine, settling in Tokyo with his first wife and children. The images from this period in Japan are divided between those that reveal the devastation and ruin wrought by war *(Bombed-Out Factory, Tokyo)*, the altered urban life as a result of U.S. occupation *("Angel of the Night," Prostitute Waiting for G.I. Customers)* and the industrial signs of reconstruction *(Welding in Shipyard, Kure)*. He also turned his eye to the traditional life of Japan, with studies of geishas in Kyoto, the religious ceremony of Buddhist enclaves, and women kelp divers off Hatsushima Island. In one image, the sensual dignity of these divers—the supple form of their uncovered breasts; their coy recognition of the camera—creates a striking contrast with the masks and headgear that are reminders of the fact that, no matter what we may bring to the image as viewers, what we witness is ultimately a means of living.[3]

By contrast, another series Bristol undertook during his stay in Japan is a study of the organized crime gangs known as the *yakuza*, one of whose identity rituals, and a test of strength, was performed by way of tattooing. Bristol captured the tattoo artist or *sensei* in the process itself, or *yakuza* members bathing together in a public bath; an image which—taken from a distance and through a thin veil of steam—celebrates their clustered bodies almost entirely covered with elaborate designs. In these and many of his most powerful images, Bristol demonstrates a knowledge of how the denotative and connotative aspects of representation are manifest themselves in the interplay between a society's own welcome and less desirable signs, as rendered by the photographer in images which make it impossible to ignore the cultural specificity of context.

Horace Bristol died last year in Ojai, California. Already confined to a wheelchair, he had been diagnosed with cancer. He was a man who, over forty years ago, had wanted all his negatives to be destroyed in the devastating wake of his first wife's tragic suicide; a man who, for several decades, had renounced the camera altogether. It was only during this last phase of his life that Bristol returned to his images—close to 16,000—as if to be reconciled with the accountable memory of a personal past and with the shadowy promise of permanence in photographs now animated after years of oblivion.

An exhibition of his work was shown shortly after his death in Mexico—a country where, on the shore of Lake Chapala, Jalisco, he had

lived with his second wife, Masako, and their children Akiko and Henri, from 1964 to 1976. In a statement for that exhibition he had written: "I am 88 years old. As history this is a mere trifle. But to anyone with even a beginner's knowledge of photography, 88 years spans half the days from the camera obscura to the most modern digital camera."

In that span, photography for Horace Bristol was the practice of registering the mark and sweep of things offered and dictated by the flux of life—a practice animated by a desire to chronicle all things whether by convocation or direct response. With a scope that reaches between East and West, between world war and family life, between industry and poverty, between icon and index, the work of Horace Bristol tells the bracing story of how the blurry edges between determined practice and inclusive desire can be brought over time into focus.

Notes

1 The expanding use of images heralded by *Life* and other publications like it—both in reportage and advertising—gave birth to what we now know as the mass media. *Life* magazine's inaugural image can now be seen also as a symbol of the emergent capacity that nation would historically fulfill, both as a political power and in terms of the new circulation of images destined for consumption. Among others, see Gisèle Freund, *Photography and Society* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982).

2 Neither a *Life* piece nor a potential book project ever materialized. Steinbeck decided to pull out from the project so as to write his famous and best-selling novel *The Grapes of Wrath,* with elements drawn heavily from Bristol's photographs which, however, were later used in the casting of the Hollywood version of the book. This alone is an interesting anecdote illustrating the ambiguous role of photography in the face of newer, more powerful institutions like that of the film industry.

3 Patricia G. Berman has underlined the important fact that Bristol's images of Japan and Asia countered the stereotypes of Japanese culture harbored by the popular American press between 1941 and 1945. Patricia G. Berman, "Horace Bristol's Photojournalism: Art, the Mass Media, & The Contingent Career" in *Stories From Life: The Photography of Horace Bristol* (Georgia: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 1995), pp. 42–74.

HORACE BRISTOL

SIX PHOTOGRAPHS

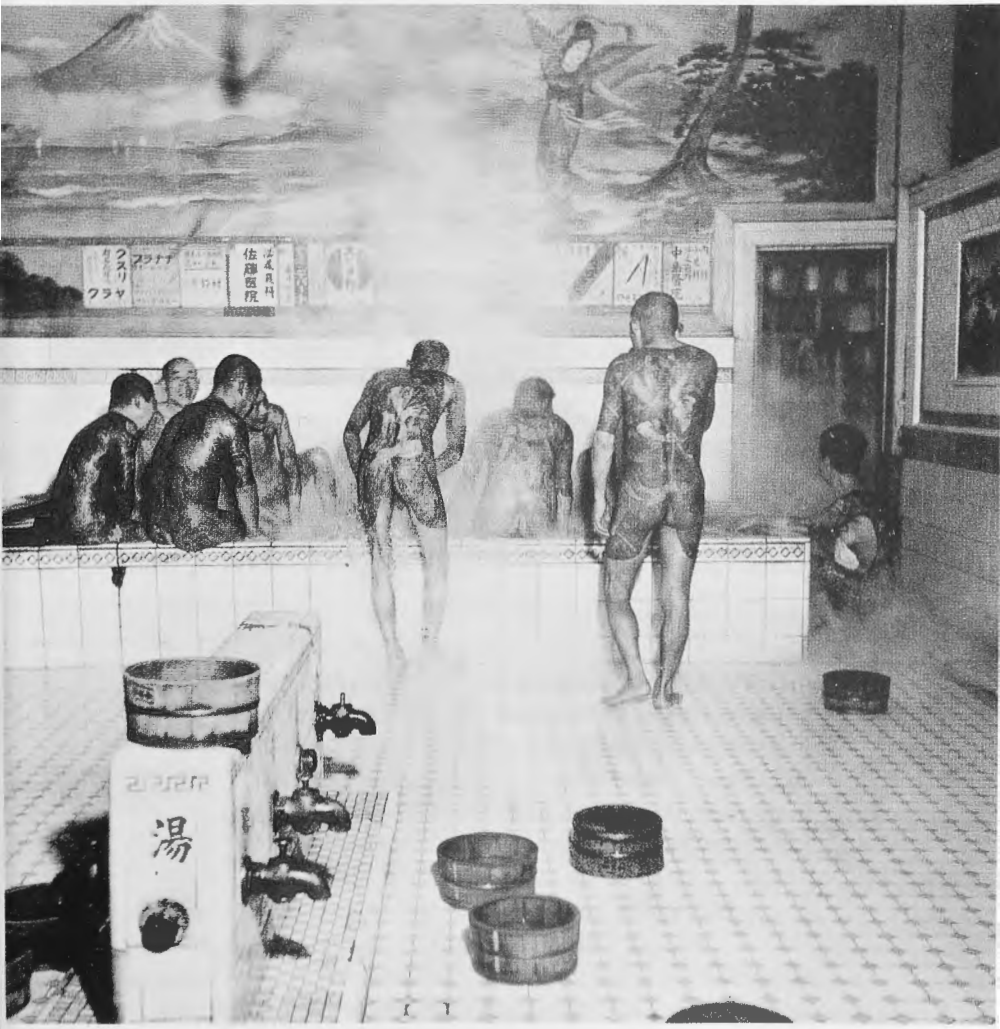
***Street Bridge with Figures, Pattern in Steel and Shadow*, 1938**
Gallery of Contemporary Photography, Santa Monica, California

Joad Family Applying for Relief,
from "The Grapes of Wrath Series," 1938
Gallery of Contemporary Photography, Santa Monica, California

PBY Blister Gunner, Rabaul Harbor, 1944
Gallery of Contemporary Photography, Santa Monica, California

***Diving Girls of Hatsushiima Donning Masks Before Diving*, 1947**
Gallery of Contemporary Photography, Santa Monica, California

***Woman Seaweed Diver, Hatsushiima Island*, 1947**
Gallery of Contemporary Photography, Santa Monica, California



***Yakuza Showing Off Tattoos*, 1947**
Gallery of Contemporary Photography, Santa Monica, California

ALAN GILBERT

TWO POEMS

HOME ON THE STRANGE

Determinate redux, but still making it up
as we go along.
The language already guilty before it's spoken.
Mistaking a tree for a tree. History is
a sample more than ample in its contexts.
You can't leave yet; you just got here.
An aphasic fit. An uncertain time.

Capital is sloppy, deadly,
like an outhouse black widow waiting to bite.
Mainlining social narcotics, the purest forms
are also the most corrupt. The goddamn cops
keep beating people up.
Window to warehouse to abandoned factory,
a vignette of urban inversion, of displaced labor.
Helicopter rattling the whole scene.

In an alternative to the economy,
an alternative economy,
we will all work for the collective good.
Looking for lucidity during the course of the day.
Looking for respect.
A running gunfight all the way to "what border?"
foot heavy on the gas.

TEARS FLOODING THE AUTUMNAL FIELDS
OR
SONGS OF A DEAD DREAMER

Cannonballs against the popsicle stick palace,
like waves of sound flooding a tunnel.
A culture exhausted by the new,
where a blue hood crumples up to the windshield,
and a television rots beside the river.

> Whether the emperor wears clothes or not,
> the emperor has got to go.
> A new sun rose fiery and hot,
> suffusing the landscape with a faint red glow.

History's permanent scaffolding is draped with new
and tattered signs. A police car silently circles the block.
We know better. An allegorical rush for the exits.
Saying, I'm feeling free for a moment.
Enough mundane departures upsetting expectations.

> "Behold them seated in their glory,
> The kings of mine and rail and soil!
> What have you read in all their story,
> But how they plundered toil?"

A politics of the imagination
caught in the cross-fire.
A shiny orange bounces in slow motion
through the gray roil of Maiden Lane,
as I lean my shoulder against a revolving glass door.

Eliot Weinberger

VOMIT

Out of sheer boredom, Kafka notes in his diary, he washed his hands five times in a row. He lived in the age before MTV. Now the bored, the depressed, the tired, the blank, and the slightly ill can stare at an unending series of rapidly flashing, strange and arresting images, with people who are far more attractive than those who show up in one's dreams. (Why bother to sleep?) Yesterday's transgression is today's decor: MTV is *Un Chien Andalou* at the speed of light, at a corporate budget: a cabinet of curiosities the size of Xanadu.

Out of sheer boredom, and with clean hands, I turned on MTV twice in recent months, and both times was disappointed to find that the staccato dreamtime of the videos had been replaced by linear and conventional programs. The first was a comedy show, featuring an unremarkably pretty young woman as a lawyer. She walks into a conference room of suited yuppies, male and female, sitting at a long polished table, and immediately vomits at such length and so copiously that it covers the entire table. Unfazed, her colleagues proceed to pluck out pieces with their fingers which they identify as the remains of certain dishes from various elegant restaurants. (We watched no more that afternoon.)

A few nights later, I stared again, this time at their annual self-celebration, "The MTV Awards." Sex, dancing, or having a good time—once as intrinsic to rock & roll as amplification and the *double entendre*—seemed to have dropped out entirely. The main topic was mutability: lachrymose tributes to rap stars who had been murdered in the last year and unhappy humorous references to the fact that almost none of the stars present had been known a year ago, and would undoubtedly be forgotten by next year. The secondary topic was excreta: a popular group of slinky women singers was introduced sitting on toilets, and the vomit jokes, all unmemorable, were relentless. I soon began to notice vomit everywhere; far more vomit on television, in movies or the latest novels, than one normally sees on the sidewalk.

The simpler explanation is that MTV, like all popular culture, is oppressed on two sides. Images are quickly depleted and must be ceaselessly replenished for a listless and sated, largely adolescent audience that demands more outrage. Extravagance, however, is severely constricted by the ecosystem of morality that governs American television: the small packs of the divinely-directed who prey on the legislators (who must camouflage themselves with forceful positions on uncontroversial issues in order to be reelected) and the corporations (whose advertisements feed television and therefore must attract as many possible potential customers, repelling none). Sex, on MTV, in this tension of attraction and repulsion, has essentially reached its limit of innuendo. To maintain its allure of the forbidden, of taboos being broken, and to keep the kids from changing the channel, the station must rely on equally fascinating, if less appealing, bodily functions—aspects of the body to which the moralists are oddly indifferent.

[A digression: In the U.S., moral issues, particularly concerning the "corruption" of youth, are inextricably entwined with physical health. The 19th century was the era of apostles of strenuous exercise as a means for keeping youth from bad thoughts and deeds. (Today, of course, the muscled body is presumed to have more frequent contact with other, equally muscled, bodies.) In the 1950s, the main corrupter of children was believed—thanks to a bestselling book called *Seduction of the Innocent* by Dr. Frederick Wertham—to be comic books. This intersected with the polio epidemic to create a myth that the disease was being spread by comics; there were mass burnings around the country. More recently, the morally enlightened have ascribed the spread of a virus to the "pornography" of television and popular music. Conversely, whenever youth is involved, health issues are treated as moral questions, most notably in the cases of AIDS and drugs.]

The more complicated explanation for this manifestation of the half-digested is that ever since youth detached itself from adult society, shortly after the Second World War, and became a separate but parallel culture, it has been a reliable indicator of the society at large. Its exaggerated responses and actions are not only canaries in our coal mines, but often extreme versions of what are or will soon be norms. Vomit has become an adolescent preoccupation, not only as entertainment, but as obsession: a prevailing psychological disorder among teenage girls in the technological countries. Bulimia is a response that is both violent and reasonable: In this society, what else can one do but throw up?

For the last twenty-five years, those who are not poor in the First World have been under siege by armies of production. In the arts

alone, the record stores carry hundreds of thousands of CDs; the video store on my corner has ten thousand films; my local television has seventy channels; the *Directory of American Poets* lists some seven thousand poets, all reputedly alive and publishing; there's a web site that sells a million new books and another with four million out-of-print ones; the number of art galleries, theater and dance and music companies in any large city inspires one to stay home and contemplate the void. The other day I wanted some information on a writer who died ten years ago: the library had two hundred full-length critical studies and thousands of articles; an Internet search listed 7,000 web sites where the writer's name appeared. I decided to direct my curiosity elsewhere, and tried to remember someone who had been completely forgotten.

One result of this excess of all things is that if you are a fanatic of any given subject—let us say, poetry or movies—it is more than likely that your fellow enthusiast has not read the same books or seen the same films. You have nothing to talk about together. This lack of a shared knowledge or a common ground—not of a "tradition," but of a sense of the contemporary, of what is being produced right now, to advocate, modify or oppose—is unprecedented. It is perhaps the one thing, beyond the gadgets, that is genuinely new.

This means, in the arts, that it is nearly impossible to have any impact. The first edition of *The Waste Land* was only five hundred copies, but it transformed poetry in various languages, and was known, whether adulated or rejected, by all readers of modern poetry. This has become unimaginable: the last book to have an immediate international effect on literature at large, *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* occurred thirty years ago, just before this Age of Proliferation.

It also means, for the maker of art, that to produce implies a conscious decision not to consume, if only momentarily—to arrogantly proclaim one's right or need to ceremoniously place one's tiny little leaf in this rain forest. In the general population, the feeling of helplessness amidst the multiplication of humanity and its products has, among other things, led to the creation of group identities, which are not only assertions of community and self in the collapsing of traditional societal units, but also a way, however inadvertent, to keep one's consumerism on a human scale. Religious affiliation, in its stricter forms, neatly parcels much of the world into acceptable and taboo. Monolithic advocates of ethnic or sexual identities can happily concern themselves with the work of confederates and remain unashamedly oblivious of others. Intended—in their constructive aspects—to erase the worst forms of provincialism, group identities seek the refuge of a new provincialism in a cosmopolitanized world: a dream of an orderly

and focused life, where one knows what one wants to discover and know.

The rest of us can only stuff ourselves and vomit and stuff ourselves again. This is not the banquet vomiting of the Romans, which was a kind of potlatch: a demonstration of one's wealth or power through the greatest possible display of waste. This is a guilty vomiting, the vomiting of a bulimic, who may well be the emblem of the age.

In the psychological studies, the bulimia of teenage girls is generally seen as a self-destructive response to perceptions of inadequacy *(I am stupid, ugly, fat);* shame *(my family is poor; I've been sexually abused);* and failure *(I am bad at school, making friends, meeting boys. . .);* as well as a strategy of avoidance *(. . . therefore I won't try).* With a slight translation, these are the feelings of nearly everyone in the hyper-production of the West: *I have consumed too many things; I can't possibly keep up with all the things to consume; I'm always consuming the wrong thing; I'm too stupid or uninformed to know which thing to consume; I've consumed too many of the wrong things; there are too many things so I won't consume any. . .* The Western consumer lives in the guilt of excess, the dizziness of choices, the identification of self through one's selections (in current spoken American, one way to say "I like spaghetti" is "I am a spaghetti person"), the doubts about one's self as seen through one's selections, the continual belief that one has made the wrong choice (brand of VCR, color of wall paint, sofa, lover or spouse) when there are so many others.

The allure of the mass media has always been the presentation of what we are not and would like to be: leading lives of wealth, adventure, and passion. The images of vomiting that appear as one nervously clicks the remote control are not only there as bizarre novelties to make us pause at a certain channel and its commercials. They are there because we wish we could clear a space, make some room, expunge all the half-digested matter in our brains, stop for a moment the interminable consumption and its attendant anxieties, know again the feeling of hunger and the feeling of satisfaction. We look at people throwing up because we wish we could throw it all up—including these images of people throwing up.

JACKSON MAC LOW

SWIFT-FLOWING WATER WHERE BALES OF HAY EXPLODE {Forties 136}

Swíft-flowing wáter plenty póor in a sprawling vílla
  fáiling went
with-a-red - rócking-chair a-yéar-before-we-died
  of low-self-estéem
when a passive mýope bewailing-a-tendentious
  lack-of-experimentátion
read Ovid-in-an-óld tweed cáp pouring-óut-an Italian soul
  that skípped some days over the company's
  veiling cascading wavy líne
in the mood for a mouthful of péas

Patiently swallowing mémories próper
  or nót she-didn't-understand
an-idiom-of self-absorbed-fáscism-when ready for béd
  or snippets
that worried a flattering féar into ánger since her náme
  is God of Wár
but now she could go for the fírst tíme alóne
  in a black embroidered dréss in which
she suffered-from-the-nárcissism of-her-áncestry
aware of being the óther

Peripherally-seeing-réd when eating bonbons
  filled with chérry flesh
she was as Lady Caroline said mád bád and
  dángerous-to-knów
like a beckoning pólar bear in-a-unfamiliar-córner
  or a Neánderthal in gold lamé who's rented-an-Italian
  búlldozer born of an objet d'árt's inhuman necéssity that
  of a fossil

caught in a layer of shále

Clutching a baby's - héad confused by turquoise
  cónfidences and cónscience
protécted-by-a speeding síster wronged by nuts and bolts
  and nóthing no
wórse habit-than-her-ówn or the daily mediocre-wróng
  that álways exísts
in maláise or Maláysia her loving generous víbes
  were broken by a ríft in-the-coróna-of-a realistic pálimpsest
  perceived by a fly on the céiling
mellifluously emptying éverything

Sitting-at-a-desk by himsélf as a temporary dóor is
  clósed at-the-períphery
his sight is hárdened by angles sliced by
  compléx fixations-on-refléction
and by interchanging geneálogies never assúred
  by heaven or hóuses
lifelessly turned-into-unstoppable-stáples cast into
  the-explicated-ócean they-fall-ínto-it revérsely
  like a schematic list of námes
proscribed by murderous prómises

Happy víolence casts its shadow-on-eléctrifying translátions
the shape and size of póstcards as-álien-as-a
  hundred lunging bánkrupts
and unreconstructed álligators discomforted by híerarchies
over and over oppressed by abstráct-transitional-bíases
  vertically extending old-time cookware
  shaped like doughnuts
or more persísting tori

White déserts in milkweed moonlight froth
  like the melted múrmuring
heard at súnset when mángoes extend the horízon
and bóoks arise where simple respónses reign
  in gráviton - dreams
passed at every step by absurdly naked pearly flésh

beset and trapped by series of rélays blínd
as-catastrophic-músic overdetermining distant spéech
in an ill-at-ease-córnfield

Transplanting kídneys with high good húmor
in a well - endowed lándscape
overcharged with-géntleness-and flooding vénom
vást as appéarance
incalculable-ímages-recur robótically throughout
a summer dáy
féared by fossilized metaphysícians blínded against
quotidian síght and caressed by folded hands and idiot
marionéttes who clutch their chésts
where bales of háy explode

Caesural spaces = durations of silence or prolongations of final phonemes:
4 letter spaces [ ] = 1 unstressed syllable;
8 letter spaces [ ] = 1 stressed syllable or beat;
none occurs between typographical lines;
breath pauses at verse-line ending ad lib.

Nonorthographic acute accents indicate stress, not vowel quality.
Each hyphenated compound is read as one extended word:
somewhat more rapidly than other words, but never hurried.
[-] indicates a slowed-down compound.
Indented lines continue verse lines begun above them.

New York:22 May 1994; 24–30 June, 25 July 1997;
20–24 February 1998

E. Cameron Scott

TWO POEMS

IDAHO

East and west, dry and wet, are cast
north to south. There. The south
deep in dogma, amber waves of it,
like a golden dog with wavy fur. Bounding
about it resembled love simply
because it was radiant. Again that
refraction. Until he bounded up
and wolfed a sweet bread whole, leaving
memory of teeth on the fingers.
Then snorted around expecting
more, so much so he would dig it out.
Regardless. I don't think he found it;
so it was metaphor, then—
it dogged me for days, its displacements
so real. The unmetaphoric formulating
a response, hangdog again. That in another
place—I lapse back to old contours as if
they would frame the familiar. Loving
dogma; similitude. Count the lakes,
climate zones—*dry as a bone*
or *raining cats and dogs.* East, West, North, South—
Still, was the symbol gold or was gold buried
niggardly, fractious? Chiefly, they've unburied
a nugget on the tongue. Knobby circular
root; a swirl of border swirling still; colored
river to comanche, who counts climate zones.
All knocking about in Hell's Canyon

and Craters of the Moon, along
with those for whom names intrude *(dogs and
cats),*
so casual. This bowed mirror
invents the original, something it is
not, split, offered, overflowing. It holds itself up
as unbecoming, I travelling backwards
in earnest, road map, street sign, speed limit,
the shortest distance.

NORTH CAROLINA

It just kindles the skin, leaning in.
I wide-angle and bloat, all self, surface—
a filth's colossus and thankful—
fleshing out warm welcome at the edge of form:

lithe unlike winter, gangly shadows
are late-breaking and sanguine. Blithely take to air,
coast across the element.

Hear heat as it floats
and reeks—coming on like a fond
future. River of washout slips
over hill, moves more ground-
brick than dark vitamin beneath
a husk of factory.

So much accident to keep afloat:
the free surface of translucence

says something of the molten
horizon, as do the day or two life-
spans of bugs that crowd in like Wall Street
traders. The brimming

body only breathes
its thick spectrum of allergy, rehearses rote
in dual dimensions, pushes past.

Even tobacco tastes good now,
sweet brown bite and ghost—

Bone-flower, see yourself in curly bud:

I—that would be in state, a body bag
bulbous and out of the root-cellar—
desire so cavernous and full
on the tongue as there is so much land,
so dense, and as much depth of tarmac
between here and any distance.

Send me your poor,
your huddled masses. . . .

TINA ROTENBERG

JERUSALEM STORY

"If I am not very much mistaken, I am coming closer. It is as though the spiritual battle were taking place in a clearing somewhere in the woods. I make my way into the woods, find nothing, and out of weakness immediately hasten out again; often as I leave the woods I hear, or think I hear, the clashing weapons of that battle. Perhaps the eyes of the warriors are seeking me through the darkness of the woods, but I know so little of them, and that little is deceptive." May 27, 1914 Franz Kafka

1. The Vise of Prayer

The city of cities, where light alters its face a hundred times a day. Pearl grey dawn yields to noon's beating sun on yellowed stone and passes into pink and orange dusk. Retreating light unveils a kaleidoscope of colored tide pools washing across the surface of Jerusalem.

Here she could find her family and lose it. Here she discovered the remains of Christ and Mohammed. Prayers encircled the city in a vise, holding its peoples together; and splitting them apart, each jostling to sound their voice in the city's story.

She walked aimlessly through all the city's changes to find and possess it, to be possessed by it, her blueprint for future travel.

O city of holy light
moon bathing a man
standing naked and enormous
silhouetted
in the darkness
at the meeting

of the roads
jacking off in an
isolated
ecstacy.

To fall in love with a city was no longer lonely. Visions startled her awake. She discovered family at fruit and vegetable stands, waiting for buses next to elderly women with multi-colored scarves covering their heads, walking briskly past construction sights where Arab workers shouted at her excitedly, mistaking her for an Arab woman.

Would it be enough simply to feel the streets underneath her feet, and speak the language as though she had been born into it? What did it mean to be a Jew here? Why adhere to a code that compressed her imagination into a tight wad of suffocated fire?

* * * * * *

She had been elated for weeks and swiftly dispatched B. for his misery could not accommodate her delirium. She had made preparations to leave the country, sure that her time was now. Happiness was so close she could feel it coming upon her like a gale.

(August 2, 1991 [Anger] is a comparatively benign way of discharging bad feelings—it prevents more destructive expressions of anger such as: destruction of property, personal violence, crime, libel, trying to destroy someone's career behind their back, etc.)

At the airport, seven in the morning, Israeli time, she waited for hours in line for customs inspection with travellers from Egypt, Argentina, Russia, Morocco. After about an hour, she spotted Y. walking quickly toward her. They embraced and at that precise moment she knew that she had made it.

Flight of ideas...or thoughts...racing all the way home to Jerusalem. As they reached the part where the land starts to rise amidst scrub bushes and pines, her anticipation intensified along with her attraction to Y. He drove quickly, swerving round corners, climbing further and further into the mountains. Then all at once, coming round the last corner, the city unrolled at her feet.

They put her in a tiny room adjacent to the kitchen. All night, lying awake, wanting him, and too close to this shifting boundary of consciousness, in the fluctuating darkness, to stem the flood of her thoughts.

She sat next to the wall, feeling homely and alone, watching the dancers move across the floor, her eyes riveted upon one couple. How beautiful the woman was, and how perfectly her husband, who was a little shorter than her, with an interesting East European Jewish face, danced with her, holding her in his arms as though he was born that way. She wished she might glow like that, be loved by a man like that. In her isolation, she felt a sadness that their joy eclipsed.

The next day, early in the morning, Y. drove her to Tel Aviv and dropped her at the immigration office. She spent hours moving from office to office, clerk to clerk, and soon forgot why she was there. Caught up in a parade of people who entered the building, waited in line, and then left. Clerks spoke rudely, customers became irate and moved on to other lines. The passage of time blurred, incommensurate with the task at hand.

She'd find him in one of these myriad offices, she was sure for wasn't he the one to give her a visa since only he could give her so much more? All that was necessary was for her to wait until he found her. He must know she was there looking for him.

(June 30, 1991 You know, P., I don't know any more if I should say something or say nothing.)

Late in the afternoon, the offices closed and she boarded a bus that dropped her near his work place. When she arrived, she was told that he had just left. They were very sorry, but he had surmised that she had returned to Jerusalem on her own. She became frantic. She was losing him. She ran out into the streets and came to a kiosk where a lot of people milled around—mothers with children, buying groceries, men smoking cigarettes lazily on the corner, soldiers with Uzis slung over their shoulders. She climbed inside a cab with several people bound for Jerusalem. Next to her was a young Arab who put his hand on her leg. She let him kiss her. Perhaps, she thought, he is the one; he must, she thought, be Y. in yet another form.

The driver stopped when they reached the center of the city and asked her for her fare. She told him that she had no money. He began to yell at her, gesticulating wildly, and she watched him with astonishment, for hadn't this ride been foreordained? Her new lover paid for her and she took him to her apartment where they took off all their clothes and fucked for hours.

She was in the arms of an ancient seagod who had arisen from the ocean to grapple with her in the disguise of love. He gave her white powder laid out on a knife to inhale to make her submit to the frantic, urgent quality of his love-making, so completely detached from the realm of intimacy, relegated to some ancient ritual repeating and repeating the act of love.

2. Signature

She was out in the streets, sure she must be on his trail. He would not leave her, forget her. He was there at every stop sign. She knew he would find her once and for all.

She descended the stairs and entered the narrow church in the Arab quarter of the city. A sign that said Church of Gethsemane. Should she believe it? At the entrance, she was assaulted by hundreds of lit candles and paintings of saints on the walls. He was in this place, with its dark garden set along the barrier dividing East and West. He too had walked here, her invisible redeemer, in an agony of temptation. He was watching over her, bringing her across the gulf that separated them. Assuming the posture of suplication, she prayed and then forgot her prayers.

She was in an apartment next to a dirt road with several men talking in a language she did not understand. She didn't know how far she travelled that night in the jeep, entering the hut where she made love with the driver for hours before he took her elsewhere and then he was gone.

She approached the scaffolding of a huge house where a man worked into the night. He was the one she was seeking. He held her in his arms, high off the ground, and she wrapped her legs around him.

She gave away her necklaces. She was in the shower with two men fondling her. She was traversing green hills in the darkness with four men. They took her down to a bunker. He pulled down her pants and fucked her. As she cried, he took her aside and promised to marry her. They stood together beneath a canopy of leaves.

* * * * *

She remembered drawing A's face, uncovering the hidden points of pressure that she marked with a pencil, and how slowly but unmistakeably the figure of a cross, a crucifix emerged in the invisible lines that connected these points, and she saw him, in that second, forever torn between two poles. That sign, right at the temple, marked, until eternity by laments withheld and yet visible to those who can bear to see and witness.

(Such suffering, we'll never know, slowly descending the mountains we climbed like goats in the snow.

We were all there. And you were far down the mountain, beyond the spot that I could see when I got there, and so we were lost to each other the entire day.)

She remembered later that she was shocked by what she drew, and yet she recognized it as the sign of his election, that sign whose incarnation she was seeking and always thought, ultimately, to find in him.

There was a war in his face, right where he perceived himself. No matter how she yearned for him, there was always a part of him that was disappearing into pain, regret, denial, and the recognition that he would always inhabit a fool's hell.

(April 27, 1991 You won't find anyone who's trying harder than I am to come to terms with my bad habits. Do you want to help me change them by example or do you want to walk away from me?)

He clamoured up the stairs and when he reached the top he came to a small door which was locked. He reached into his pocket and fumbled for the key, then bent down to insert the key into the lock. When it fit, a tiny silver light flashed from the

key hole and, when he gently pushed the door open, he saw an empty garret filled with cobwebs and dust, old dolls with their heads pulled off and a broken rocking chair. In this room he found that peace he had prayed for so assiduously for years. He need not descend the stairs again, because those stairs were gone. All the climbing and all that useless effort. Yet it wasn't really useless, he reminded himself, for now he was here. He had finally deserted the world below him that had tormented him so completely.

3. Allure of the Sky

Indigo dome, hung with stars.
Circling the track, celestials close
as damp air. Never tiring, never dropping
a penchant for delirium.
The silver bay to the west; black forests of firs to the east.

Unimpeded by fog, the descent from the mountain.

She shivers alone in a sleeveless pearl dress.

Flagrantly proclaiming her wedding day, in a crepuscular haze, she detects the distant ringing of bells.

Divested of obstacles encountered at every corner, she will find him in hiding wherever she is led. The sun marks the hour, rousing her senses, attuned to the bushes spawning tiny red berries.

Under footfall, the stillness subsumes.

Down the trail, between broken-windowed houses. Small voices echo hollowly: the demise of blind children haunting an abandoned school.

Like a beacon, he gathers her in from turbulent travels. She could sail into his orbit easily, ripe with desire.

(Do you know sleeplessnesss driving your body?

Fatigue arrives only with the disappointment of never locating you in the haunts of the night.

With the allure of the sky, and the sun and moon enamoured of my body, I could chase you forever.

Still, I can see you everywhere: in the turn of a cheek, in the silence waiting to break the light off a face, bewildered before each quarrying gaze.)

> Enveloped in white, the moon dissipates and vanishes with the dawn. Air lightens visibly and other clues displace her resplendent guide.

(I have always found you lost to me.

You have been between my breasts before your birth, since your death, and in between.

If I look behind me, you will be following me.

I am apart from you; and yet, loving you, I am most certainly close to you, even though I cannot feel your breath upon my mouth.)

> She enters a grove and crosses a bridge. Over a hill, amidst tables and benches, never seen before, though she had been here for all of time.
>
> Yoghurt and little cakes wrapped in cellophane, sandwiches and soft drinks.
>
> A feast for the forlorn.
>
> No street waif, garnering coins from hand-outs; empty bottles, pulled in shopping carts.
>
> Drinking coffee slowly in roadside restaurants, and then disappearing, without the check.

After midnight, she suckles her appetite wandering through supermarkets, sniffing vegetables and potato chips, strolling past milk and cheese; racing and stopping, turning corners speedily, she stuffed her jacket in an empty cardboard box in the soap section of the store.

* * * * *

It was daylight and she saw a tall policeman on her left sharing a sidewalk with her in downtown Jerusalem.

She was in a room, seated on a bed, and he was sitting next to her, embarrassed and amazed by the movements of her hands. Her hands told him of her love for him—the message she reserved for every man she encountered at these times.

Years before she had drawn the hands of a man who was a musician, and she called the drawing "the musician." He came to visit her regularly, and before long she fell in love with him, but refrained from seducing him.

* * * * *

Sitting on a window ledge

tiny hand movements conduct the lesson

This is her proper stoop: to displace the one
dispensing discourse
to a crowd of faces

the dance of hands attracts distress

Gently the policeman places his large hand on her arm and leads her where she must go, to be grilled, digested and spewed.

"Her chief complaint: nothing is wrong."

Lightly she draws a flower and a face on small pieces of yellow paper with a line that trembles.

(Imprisoned by writing, the poet cannot navigate the hours in one spot. Nevertheless, pinned to the chair, she must rest, write, rewrite, and

then eliminate. Conscious incarceration in a time fit for fleeing.)

* * * * *

Her hands became white birds with large wings that dipped and sailed in meaningful configurations. He had been there before, years before, as she burrowed in strange basements and crawl spaces underneath houses, calling for him, knowing he was just a bit ahead of her, signalling to her, adoring her, facing her image in a mirror in a bathroom at a gas station, down on all fours, like a tiger she'd seen displayed on a billboard above the highway.

They gave her an injection in her hip and locked her in a cell. She lay on a cot in the middle of the cell and reached out for the ceiling where there was a hole through which he peered, watching her, wanting her. Very slowly she masturbated for him. She called his name in a whisper, over and over.

A cage made of wire, with no place to piss or shit. She banged on the door and called for someone to open it. No one came.

She was drawn to a pale young Englishman. Every so often he disappeared into the room adjacent to hers with an older fatter woman with long black hair and large breasts. He refused to sleep with her and told her she was a slut because she would do it with anyone. Continuing to think of him, she tried to crawl into a bed with a stranger in the men's bedroom but he pushed her away like a bad dream.

Only N. came to visit her, dressed smartly in clothes that fit tightly over her slightly overweight body. By then she had forgotten about her desire for Y., for she now wanted L. and P., and even though L. wouldn't have her, she fucked P. on the floor by the showers with all the others standing round.

On one of her visits, N. asked her: "Do you think that they are taking good care of you here?" She answered, "Yes. This is the best place. Here they leave us alone." That night they took them to a big square where there was singing and dancing. She sat beside L. and his lover and beat time with the music. There were lit torches and a deep blue blackness spread across the warp and weft of the sky.

4. Companion

Wearing his hat, suit and tie, elegant and understated, he breached the margins of her fantasy. He flew across continents to find her, wherever she might be locked up, mistreated, overmedicated, or casually raped. He always walked erect and purposeful, a little too fast, keeping his emotions contained, while he acted with speed and decisiveness.

He was her most faithful companion, her only real guardian spirit, for he did not simply hover ahead of her, leading her into false and dangerous hopes. He felt no burning need to understand her. He disentangled her life with purpose, energy and conviction. He was never offended by her behaviour and could tolerate his own apprehensions about where in God's name she had been. Or perhaps he merely experienced a failure of imagination; he simply assumed that she had remained within the territory of the tolerable.

What had he said that freed her from that hell hole? They served her papers and refused to let her immigrate. All that rhetoric about Jews not being Jews unless they made *aliyah.* But their most devoted "elements" were discarded and driven out. She had to face it—she was an undesirable alien—33, unmarried, and out of her head.

(September 25, 1985 I was used to being considered brilliant from early school days and it is a let down to discover that I am not as brilliant as I think I am.)

He packed up her clothes and paid off the landlady for the trouble she'd caused by leaving the door to the apartment open when she left.

There was a garden adjacent to his hotel and a path which led to the old city. Promptly at midnight, restless and intent upon finding her beloved, she prevailed upon him to leave the safety of his room. She could not bear the floral patterns of the wallpaper and the bedspread, or the expensive furniture tastefully and anonymously arranged. She must wander with the night hours; implicate herself with the moon, whose light allured her far more than the artificial lamps in their rooms.

* * * * *

The sand under her feet leads to watery images of damaged loveliness, breaking against pebbles, moved by abandon. Waves lap her ankles. She moves towards an alternate form of bliss.

(We forget to suffer our own betrayals until, too late, we remember.)

With the aid of her escorts, she would find him again, and he would take her to him. *No easy trick, difficult/even for the experienced stranger. . . for some have entertained angels unawares.* The lake sang. The wind sent pulses through her hair. "Deeper," the water spoke, "blessings in suffusion. It is not the ground you walk that shimmers with company."

(They never leave us alone if we stray from human witnesses into the upper echelons of the night.)

* * * * *

She held his hand, as she always had when they ventured forth in a city that was new to him. He felt a calm descend upon him, as though, for that moment and perhaps for all of time, he had stepped out of his own life, his constraints, for her sake.

She made her way towards the Arab *shuk* through narrow unpaved streets, lined on each side by closed blue doors. Completely deserted now, in contrast to the crowds of tourists during the day and Arab men busy in their booths with wares to sell to anyone who cared to bargain for a rug, a dress, vegetables, a ceramic pot.

She reassured him repeatedly that she knew where she was going, though she could not have said what she knew, but her mind was replete with promptings.

He slipped and caught himself. Then he pleaded with her piteously: "I am an old man. . . sixty years old. . . are you sure you know where you are taking me?" Was she sure, or just determined (like A's face, blue in death, dressed in a suit with a ring forced onto the fourth finger of his left hand)?

She cajoled him. She comforted him. What she sought was just a little further. It would be worth it. He too would soon understand why she insisted on this walk. What she wanted was just beyond the next blue door. To turn and return to the same spot, and find it different every time, safely forgotten, barely recognized.

So engrossed in discovering what was calling her, she was barely cognizant of his company now. They walked further and further into a welter of scarcely discernable, labyrinthine streets. He did not protest again; only held her hand tightly. She didn't dare to look at him for she couldn't afford, after going so far, to see what she knew she would see in his face.

When she reached the end of an alley they had not seen before (or so she thought), they came at last to a door, but it was shut and bolted. She retraced her steps, more quickly now, down a street that, in the darkness, resembled all the other streets they'd seen. But this time they emerged into a large open square with booths draped with white sheets and bare bulbs hanging above tables loaded with prayer books. At each booth, there were men assiduously praying.

(The patient denied auditory or visual hallucinations, suicidal or homicidal ideation. She was unable to do abstractions and was somewhat bizarre in her answer. To the abstraction "One should not carry all their eggs in one basket," she responded "What gives birth is more decisive than basketweaving.")

When they left behind the tangle of streets, claustrophobic and afraid, she sat down, draped herself in a white shawl, and began to read from one of the prayerbooks arranged haphazardly in a heap on the table before her. She read fervently in a language she knew without understanding a word. He tried once again to distract her from her purpose, to bring her back to the hotel. Urgently, she told him she wished to stay and pray all night. He reminded her of her promise, and, at that moment, she raised her eyes to his face and saw the fervour of his concern, the passion of his protective love, and she allowed herself to be led away from that company of men who barely registered her disappearance. The force that prevailed upon her was that power she had been looking back at in the

resurrection of her dreadful desire to immolate herself on the threshold of prayer.

* * * * *

The next day she disappeared, foraging for clothes in a large ramshackle house with many small rooms littered with books, underwear, clothing, dolls and money, attempting, all the more intently, to find her own place. As she was assembling her wardrobe, never doubting for a moment that it was hers, a young woman with short curly black hair came into the room and asked angrily:

"What do you think you're doing in my room?"

She did not answer, but quickly pulled out a worn yellow bathrobe from the closet, threw the clothes on it, and wrapped them up. She said nothing to the intruder, even seemed not to notice her. The woman got angrier,

"If you don't get out of here, I'm going to call the police."

Then the girl smiled at her vaguely and held out her hand,

"My name is Anna. What's yours? Ahhh, we are sisters. You know what I mean. Your name must be Miri. Of course. How could you leave me so long? I knew you weren't dead."

In response, the woman just stared, and began to exhibit a quiet nervousness, looking helplessly from Anna's face to the pile of clothing on the floor.

She came to herself outside the house. She was not certain how she had got there. Where was that girl who had accused her of stealing? She shrugged and thought vaguely to herself that days were like that now. Places became indistinguishable from one another in her mind. But then a sudden memory would hit her—like the bunkers with those four strange men. She saw again the man who hurt her. Like the time she agreed to date a skinny black guy who kept staring at her in a cafe. She went out with him to a bar where blacks and whites freely mingled and she was proud to be in a place like that. He didn't talk to her that night, but at the end of the evening she was with him in her

room on her bed and he had pulled down her pants and shocked her by fucking her while she was lying on her stomach in a daze, filled with romantic fantasies about a man with whom she had hardly spoken.

So this passage from outside to inside and back again outside left crucial gaps in her memory. Like lights coming on in different rooms without the agency of a human hand and then unpredictably going out again without her putting in her two cents about whether she would live in the light or in the dark.

Shadow memories that concealed themselves in one or another cavity of her brain, that lit up at unpredictable moments, and then left her, bereft and humiliated, all at once and forever.

Herbstlicht

Studying the photos
hungrily
she traces lives
embedded
in her body:
fragments
from an exploded
bomb.

A policeman found her and brought her to meet him as he came walking briskly down the driveway that led to the back of the hotel. When he spotted her, returning with her uniformed escort, he yelled to her, joyfully waving his arms.

Disappearance was her way, and her way out; the key she needed to unlock her sudden escapades. Even when she was found and persuaded to return to safety, she still harbored within herself the freedom to vanish again.

(December 23, 1990 When in a room with 20 people, unless you are the speaker, you are watching 20 people. On average, only one person is watching you. I am not so special that I have spectators.)

June 1997

Brian Schorn

TWO POEMS

CRACKED SEEDS AND AFTERWARDS

Shovel that carcass through the corner of
a tear drop. Lay it the overlord
seeing the whole matter hang to a head sheet. Bed of barking
dogs to bite the night through.

His fall: the sleeping want of a fall, buttoned up
tie bright fall. See his shirt becoming
bull's eyes, eagle eyes at the first opportunity. Make the left
    arm
go away to feathers and light-weight bones. OK, fly the
    cloudy
dirt from the cornea hitch, let go of him
going home till his legs drop.

"See, I told you," he says, "These are my lips not moving."

LINEN TO LIVE FOR?

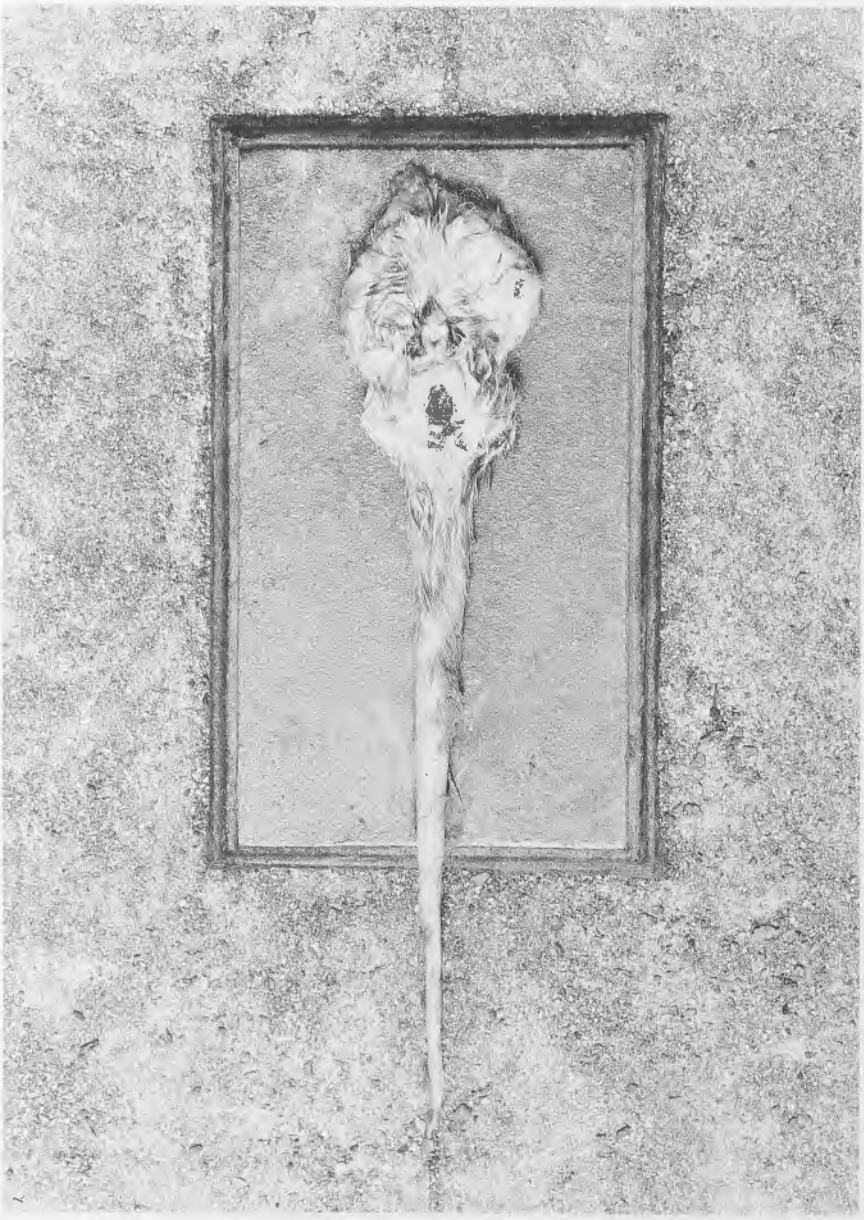
He licks his hair like a bonfire broken out into happy
bottles on their way home from work. Happy here the man
    with
lightning through his lip. High-carbon
steel sitting pretty. Stick yourself an overgrown angel with
middle-finger cramps. Hang on twilight till your dimples come
home buried milk and honey.
Cherish the armor convincing concussions flattest of all.
    Clench the very
piece of his pants to carry
on like soldiers' medals. Blink. Oink! Beaten
off the bayonet juicy as rose buds. Eyeballs continue
everyday barstools.

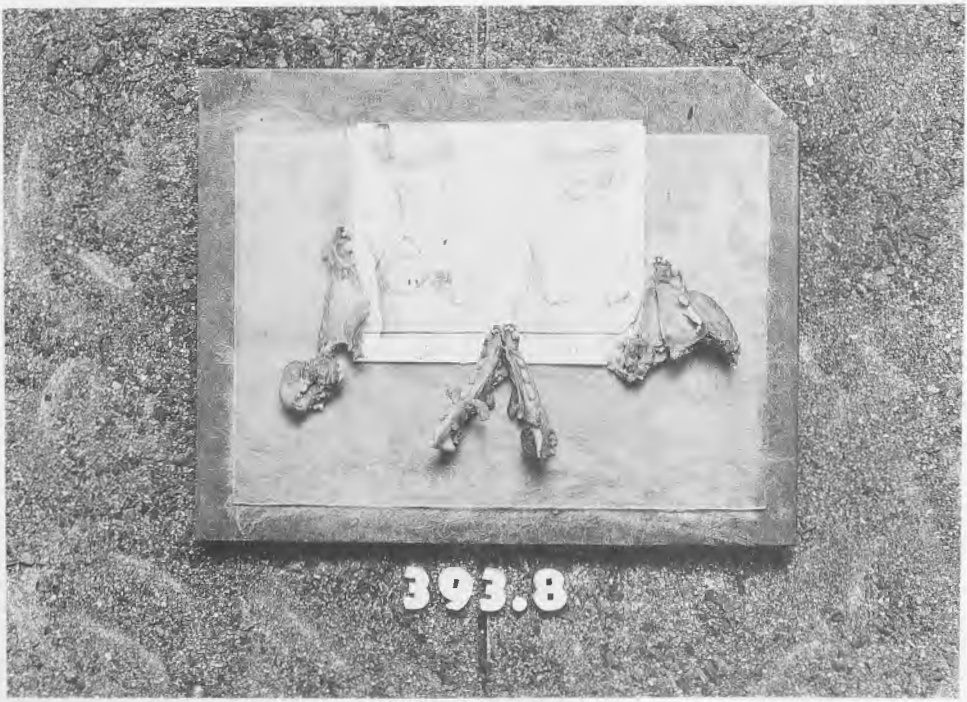
He moves in order to harden the stone in order to
bust the statue he has become. Cracked-off
arm bottles lying around lazy
spilling, "Pull on us like infinitely broken kite string. Have a
ball and while you're at it swing that
smelly death wrench."

Barrel so high so happy fingers explain their whereabouts.
Shit yea, let's play with him candelabras
then fist his skull. Oh honey,
see the uniform having freshly pressed lines.

Brian Schorn

FIVE PHOTOGRAPHS

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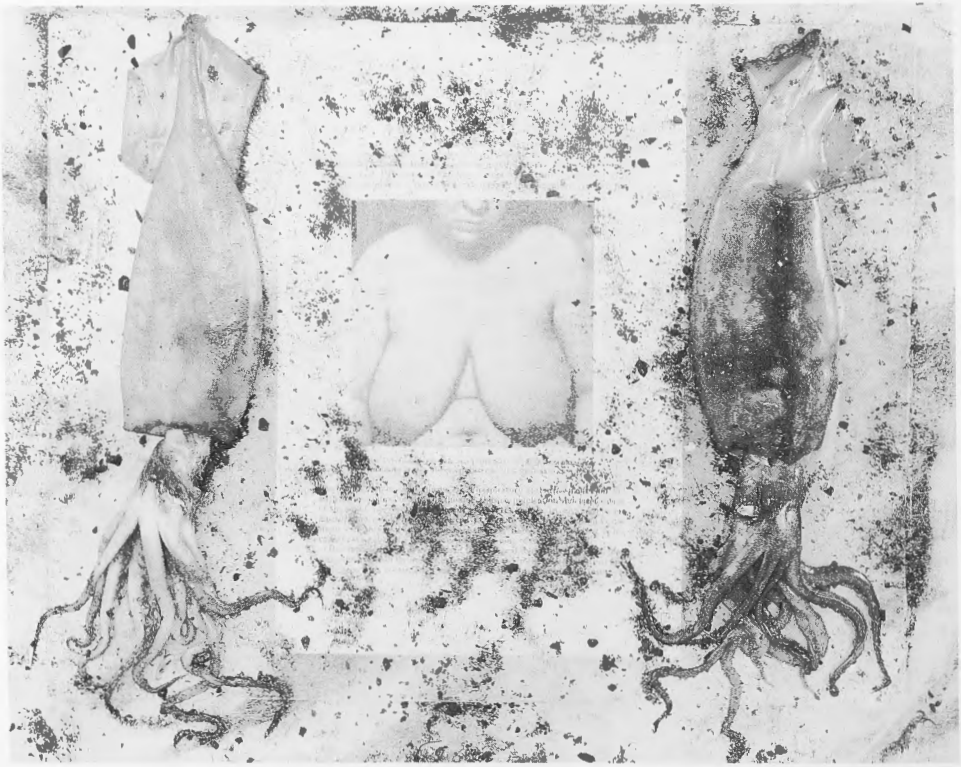

ADRIENNE RICH

RUSTED LEGACY

Imagine a city where nothing's
forgiven your deed adheres
to you like a scar, a tattoo but almost everything's
forgotten deer flattened leaping a highway for food
the precise reason for the shaving of the confused girl's head
the small boys' punishing of the frogs
—a city memory-starved but intent on retributions
Imagine the architecture the governance
the men and the women in power
—tell me if it is not true you still
live in that city.

Imagine a city partitioned divorced from its hills
where temples and telescopes used to probe the stormy
codices
a city brailling through fog
thicket and twisted wire
into dark's velvet dialectic
sewers which are also rivers
art's unchartered aquifers the springhead

sprung open in civic gardens left unlocked at night
I finger the glass beads I strung and wore
under the pines while the arrests were going on
(transfixed from neck to groin I wanted to save what I could)
They brought trays with little glasses of cold water
into the dark park a final village gesture
before the villages were gutted.

They were trying to save what they could
—tell me if this is not the same city.

I have forced myself to come back like a daughter
required to put her mother's house in order
whose hands need terrible gloves to handle
the medicinals the disease packed in those linens
Accomplished criminal I've been but
can I accomplish justice here? Tear old wedding sheets
into cleaning rags? Faithless daughter
like stone but with water pleating across
Let water be water let stone be stone
Tell me is this the same city.

This I—must she, must she lie scabbed with rust
crammed with memory in a place
of little anecdotes no one left
to go around gathering the full dissident story?
Rusting her hands and shoulders stone her lips
yet leaching down from her eyesockets tears
—for one self only? each encysts a city.

1997

Chris Sia

SCORPIO MOON

in memory of Sprout

I guess I'll never know
where Antares is in the summer sky,
most likely doesn't make its bright
blood appearance until late October,
when all the swans have left the lake
and all the homeless crazies
have all gone south—to Florida.
Since your death,
I've put some extra time
on my prison bunk
thinking about the difference
five years can make in the scattering
of these once closely-associated lives.
Years ago,
beneath the sooty terraced roofs of Katmandu,
I walked through the open market
fingering my prayer beads,
taking photographs of small boys
who wore my sunglasses,
who took me to a temple
and smeared ochre on my third eye
while tears containing the wholeness of life
fell into the sweet ancient dust.
You and I stayed in a cheap lodge
named after the Hindu god of *preservation,*
the only vacancy besides the glaze in your eyes,
that look that reminded me of Narayan,
the heroin addict I befriended one day
on the streets looking for hashish,
the way he nodded out,

slumped against the wall of a temple,
red ember of oblivion glowing between his
[fingers
while the curfew strangled
the city into brittle submission.
Would the burning ever awaken you?
The harbingers made their subtle
[appearances,
like crows gathering on a telephone wire,
but I ignored them and ended up getting
[ripped off
by you both, leaving
for Benares alone, financially
and spiritually bankrupt. *Heavy testimony,*
when you leave someone on the other side of the world,
when you come home and still feel
as if you left a vital organ of your body
in a basket, at the temple
where the ferocious guardians are awaiting your return.
You've ripped me off again.
I'm left with this unspoken apology; I'm left
with this furnace of unrequited love,
holding the police ribbon that cordons the
[crime scene—
the metaphor of our lives lived outside the law.
Did they empty your pockets
and throw you down the stairs after you went
[blue,
after the convulsions, after life had
[squeezed
its last tremor
from the armor of your body, fragile
scorpion crushed beneath destiny's boot?
The tragedy's not your death,
but the simple plain fact
that you foresaw all this,
actually mentioned it casually over a morning beer—
like it was the fucking weather—
then turned toward the moon,

moon over the brown rivers of Bangkok,
moon that raced down Champs Elysees
[on LSD
moon reflected in the glass-still waters of the Ganges
moon that smiled upon the mountains
of Big Sur and Santa Cruz
moon that teased a Balinese volcano
moon somewhere over Manhattan
peering in a window–
as you pushed the needle in.

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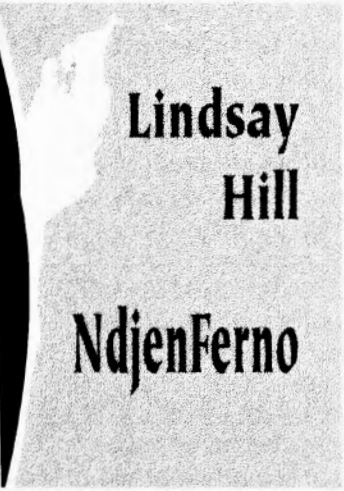

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ANDRE BRETON

MY HEART THROUGH WHICH HER HEART HAS PASSED: Poems of Love and Desperation, 1926–1931

(Tr. from the French and preface by Mark Polizzotti)

Preface

These eleven poems none of which has previously appeared in English, and only two of which were published by the author, chronicle the most emotionally trying period in André Breton's life. They are in some ways a disparate lot, ranging from the purely automatic to the carefully structured, from prose to free verse, but each reflects a facet of the two unhappy loves—one idealized and unrequited, the other tortured and doomed—that occupied Breton's heart in the early years of Surrealism. When one sets them against the upheavals in Breton's public life during that time, they make for a bittersweet and revelatory counterpoint.

In 1926, the thirty-year-old Breton was in his fifth year of marriage to Simone Kahn, with whom he shared a relationship of great intellectual complicity but, it appears, waning physical passion. Two years earlier, he had met the socialite and poet Lise Meyer (Lise Deharme) during her visit to the "Bureau of Surrealist Research," a kind of office-cum-meeting place meant to attract like-minded individuals to the movement, who so enraptured the normally imposing Breton that he found himself painfully tongue-tied. Wealthy and extremely flirtatious, the short, dark-haired Lise was once described as "a very attractive sorceress, with the voluptuous and seductive eyes of the Queen of Sheba." She found it no great task, and apparently no small pleasure, to tease the renowned Surrealist leader into a hopeless infatuation that would last for the next three years. Recounting that first meeting in his book *Nadja,* written in 1927, Breton tells of Lise's offer to leave him one of her blue gloves—an offer that Breton refused in a panic: "I don't know what there could have been, at that moment, so terribly, so marvelously decisive for me in the thought of that glove leaving that hand forever."

During this period, Breton composed a number of poems and letters to Lise, but few are so explicit or revealing as "The door to Lise's house"—a house Breton desperately wished to enter, but which he constantly found "guarded by a sea bird/Who must be stabbed in mid-flight." From entreaty to exasperation, Breton pled his case to the elusive socialite, who kept her door sufficiently ajar to allow for hope, but never open enough to permit access. "You see the women you have loved/Without them seeing you you see them without them seeing you/How you've loved them without them seeing you," he wrote at this time, lamenting his absence from Lise's amorous visions. In 1927, Lise married radio pioneer Paul Deharme; Breton grudgingly admitted defeat and courted her no more.

It was barely two months after his renunciation of Lise that Breton met the person whom many consider the great passion of his life. In late 1927, the novelist Emmanuel Berl attended one of the Surrealists' daily cafe meetings, bringing with him a young woman named Suzanne Muzard. "Tall, slender, gracefully shaped, with regular, slightly Nordic features" (according to one Surrealist), Suzanne had grown up, like Breton, in one of the industrial suburbs north of Paris. Although she was then living with Berl, within a few days Breton had persuaded her to run away with him to the south.

In keeping with his principle of living "in my glass house. . .where I sleep nights in a glass bed, under glass sheets," Breton had informed his wife of every stage of his passion for Lise Meyer, as he now reported the details of his flight with Suzanne. Simone had endured Lise with equanimity, even commiserated about the woman's cruel treatment of her husband, but it was an entirely different matter with this new rival—perhaps because, unlike her predecessor, Suzanne had no interest in holding Breton at arm's length. Instead, she soon demanded that he divorce Simone and marry her instead. Unprepared to take such a step, Breton tried to deflect the issue, whereupon Suzanne left for North Africa with Berl. The last section of *Nadja,* written shortly after Breton tried to prevent Suzanne and Berl from taking the train, magnifies an episode of sexual retaliation into an aesthetic credo: "Beauty is like a train that ceaselessly roars out of the Gare de Lyon and which I know will never leave, which has not left."

But the relationship was far from done, and over the next three years Breton and Suzanne pursued an affair marked by violent breakups and tempestuous reconciliations, during which Suzanne shuttled between her two lovers' homes (Simone having by now left the conjugal apartment) and Breton agonized over leaving his wife. Nor did matters change when Breton did file for divorce at the end of 1928, for just then

Suzanne unexpectedly married Berl—only to move in with Breton again a month after the wedding. It wasn't until the beginning of 1931, coincidentally just when his divorce from Simone became final, that Breton and Suzanne parted for the last time. Looking back many years later, Suzanne remarked that their liaison had "lasted just long enough to kill love by inches."

* * *

Much like Breton's life during those years, the poems in this volume can be split into discrete groupings. The first pieces, dated 1926 and inspired by Breton's frustrated longing for Lise, contain all the idealization, vagueness, and repressed spite of a love largely kept within the confines of his own mind. The second, from 1928, were written during the first year of his more corporeal passion for Suzanne; particularly in the three texts dated late August and early September (composed while the couple was on holiday), one can easily find traces of both the ardor and the fury that characterized so much of their relationship. The poems from 1931, finally, reflect the devastation of love's ultimate failure. "Exhibitionistic Poem" and "Prophetic Poem" are from a series of six "genre" texts written in one marathon sitting, from 10 p.m. on May 7 to 3:15 the next morning. Two weeks later, in "After the Giant Anteater" (a reference to the animal he had taken as his personal totem), Breton was still mourning the loss of the woman who had "smashed the jewel of this day into a thousand shards." The following day, he composed the longest and most celebrated of his poems for Suzanne, the erotic, desolate litany called "Free Union."

Ever wary of confusing poetry and autobiography, Breton apparently had little desire to commit these eleven works to the public eye. Two of them, "Allotropy" and "After the Giant Anteater," were published in his book *The White-Haired Revolver* (1932) but—unlike a great many of his poems from these years—were never reprinted in any of his subsequent collections. As for the others, Breton kept them scrupulously hidden in his notebooks until the day he died.

These translations are for Sadi Ranson, in love and sometimes in desperation.

—MP, March 1998

THE DOOR TO LISE'S HOUSE. . .

The door to Lise's house
Is guarded by a sea bird
Who must be stabbed in mid-flight
Of seven gilded vases one must also break
The one containing a little ash
Which is never the same
Then from an all-white procession
A cowl comes tumbling down exposing a head of hair all its
    own
That I know nothing about
Except that it's crossed by a blue line
Over which I can no longer see
The line makes light and shadow
        as early morning in Grasse
        a line of girls harvesting in jasmine fields
The stars revolve around Lise's head
Slowly like the panthers she loves
And who love her and make the gown of the sky so beautiful
How oh how can we believe in the return of dawn's early
    glow
That marks the fifth season
The one that arrives every hundred years
Golden apples gleam on black trees
In the garden but she pretends not to see them
To keep people from begging pardon for her sadness
Which is an invisible or at least madly transparent fan
Lise the snow is falling on your mirror
Lise dressed in snow crystals
Snow like your name covering stamens of blood

*

Lise poems are made and unmade like mysterious
Passes before your eyes but it is only
        the hands of he who wants to put you to sleep
        or awaken you that are dreaming

The fairground stall where they devise
the unvarying yet countless games
Of love and death
Has never been so devoid of accessories
We'll try yet again to dazzle you
with the fireworks
I think called the sun
But the illusion is not enough and you who seek only illusion
The illusion of an incurable ill in the lands of absence
Behind the menage of giant flowers
where the future lands in the wrong zone
And holds standing on her runaway horse
A woman who is no longer Lise and who looks strangely like her
The adventurers of the vale who watch her pass
cannot bear the shine of her too-open eyes
They say that back when she lived a single flutter of
her lashes caused the sudden and oblique
migration of black insects whose long legs
stretch over the surface of streams
I who hear this from the depths of my tomb
I make sure to contradict nothing
And my heart through which her heart has passed
Or will pass whether she likes it or not
still vouches from far away in impossible hours
For the echo that exists only in grottoes
On rainbow evenings
But I swear the nights the nights are too much
Nights when poems are made and unmade
Nights when she is too tempted
to leave the substance for the shadow
Nights that I press secretly against my
heart with the image of hollow trees
where adorable cruelty revels
Marvelous nights of stones that cannot be lifted
and of Lise
Night of nights that I call without Lise

[3 *July* 1926]

ALLOTROPY

The electric buzzer rings once more
Who's coming in
It's me pull yourself together if you want me to put you together
The closet is full of linens
There are even moonbeams that I can unfold
You've changed
Here's the proof that you've changed
The gifts they give the dead in their coffins
The gifts they give newborns in their cribs
Are almost the same the arrow shows the direction you're coming from
Where you're going
Your heart is on the path of that arrow
Your eyes which will again shine bright cloud over with the mist of things
Your hands grope along a road for the dark needle that can prevent catastrophe
You see the women you have loved
Without them seeing you you see them without them seeing you
How you've loved them without them seeing you
The black wolves in turn pass behind you
Who are you
Shadow of an evildoer on the high walls
Shadow of a signaler stretching farther than the signal
I am the primary guilty party
As well as the primary innocent party
My head rolls from on high where my steps will never fall
What makeup
No one will recognize me
Later between the stones in a heap
The window is wide open
On that magnificent heap
Bend forward
Bend forward to change again

It is indeed you who bend and change
That photograph you forgot to have toned
Is so like you

[*ca.* 1926]

IT'S YOU IT IS NOT US. . .

It's you it is not us it's the fire that doesn't fear the wind
The kind that sweeps quicker than wind over the countryside
A young girl shakes her black hair in sleep
And watches us pass
And watches you pass it's you it is not us
The genius of the well lowers his magic blue hoop onto your path
It's no longer you is it you it is not us
There are doors for every precipice
Even for the ones we fall over and all the way down there are birds
Birds that live only there
Whose wings form an X more vibrant than any other
Where are you going the address is guiding you I see her fine nude legs
There are no precipices for you
No fleeting oaths that glide over resplendent waters
You are the light winding about the necks of trees
The light that escapes no one and that twists around the grindstone no one sees
Here is the sea here are the races and rosaces you love
The eternal armor of snows on the sea
The wet coupes whipped by the red algae of long avenues

Here are the uniforms with their beautiful aiguillettes
Is it there do you want to see the cross that never rises above
    sea-level
Do you want forests of mirrors furrowed with black lightning
That hides behind the northern dawns
Do you attend the intimate coronations of queens with no
    subjects
Or else do you come from the serene pallor of mortal things
Like me questioning you and seeking your arms like flame
    through a grill
What grill the grill of time
What time the time of tears
Where are the shapes of leaves of veils of huge butterflies that
                [make the wind tremble
Where is the fire going the fire that doesn't fear the wind

[*ca.* 1926]

I DO NOT KNOW BUT I *KNOW*. . .

I do not know but I KNOW
Here is my season that looks toward autumn in lands where
    darkness never falls
Where the days do not wane by so much as a flying bird's
    breath
If it is flying it's because I know
I know it will never come to rest
The swallow is shaped like my hands
That's why it skims the ground just before rainfall
But it is beautiful out so beautiful that it's no longer here nor
    elsewhere

It's later in a clearing
In a clearing at the very bottom of a mine
Into which an elevator drops full of stones
Who knows
Balloon falling
Knowledge is very short it is so in every alphabet in the world
We say knowledge the way we say I love you
But lips can't always claim that ray of sunshine that keeps
    certain lands from ever seeing night
Lips are not always those silken ladders
Lips do not always open onto what we KNOW
When we believe in divination in its long parade of stars and
    corollas
Corollas I spoke the word Corollas
Corollas I KNOW In this corolla is a sudden spasm.

[*ca.* 1928]

MY STEPS AFTER YOURS. . .

My steps after yours the shadow in the leaves
A pansy at a dip in the lane
My fingers on the key the pale river
And everything that calls back time
Ah the railway switch in a downpour
While the fawn laughs in the clearing
A summer's day so long it goes all the way round
I see you in the shadow my steps after yours
You're out of your mind and almost as beautiful
As the coming of life

*

Tell me of that queen it was so tremulous
That the clock seemed wet
The stuttering of grasses near the water
Was her crown and you were stepping from a car
By the palace that looked like sporting equipment for
    Madame des Ricochets

*

The eagle has caught two sheep in its talons
The black sheep closes its eyes
Poor abyss there's a star clinging to its reflection
And the eagle drops the boxes containing the rings
The bands peal the stones bleed
And in the violet glacier shadowy lakes blend together
At the foot of the waterfall the Riesling juggles with its dagger
We come to the inn and not a moment too soon
Death throes ride in a four-smokestack coach
How long will we see the past

*

Go on I'll catch up
Go into the woods
Head back into the water
Lie down in the irises of the bare featherless wall

[*ca.* 1928]

MAKE IT SO DAYLIGHT. . .

Make it so daylight does not yet enter
Who's there?
With his cages full of red wheels
Let him finish setting his egrets outside
A rose window of sky-colored grass on which you walk
Between the cobblestones
I see silent caravans much like an accordion on a table
I see the water flowers arranged by species along a riverbank you are following
I see night such as birds make with their great square eyes
Birds that have a mirror relationship with fireflies
Night does not knock at the glass door it spends its time in the closet
Amid the blue and green linens it sing's it zigzags through the house
In the name of the forest and the sea
Which one is darker which one do you dare name more often
With lips that make me see the forest and ocean
One inside another when the wind scatters the great written sheets
And the grass rises in the dimming lamps
Not long ago in the country they built large iron constructions
Which are beautiful and tall and like my love
Armatures that are good only for love and the sky
They still don't know what they are used for
The geniuses that watch over your hands to keep them from lighting, lighting
In the beam of a lighthouse I see white ships falling into distress one by one
The geniuses that watch over your hands over your eyes so that they'll be like spinning pins
In the wheels of bird cages
And also graceful quartz quadrilaterals under the worn pickax of men beaten down by emotion
Go all around the world while you sleep
Thinking that time sets off like a shot

In front in front of everything that for you counts
As marvelous in appearance like a gyroscope on the lip of a glass
Or like the white screen whose patience is made of so much haste, desire, drama, and pursuit
While you are caressed by the palm of tears
And by eternal leisure that brings delight
Sad and happy almost in equal measure
Like those butterflies that look too much like leaves like soldiers running on glaciers
I see your huge portraits
Because of a braid of hair ten times too long
I see the ice crack under the soldiers
Everything is silent as in the most wonderful days of the ark
The imagination is a flower bed of broken lances
In imagination I find only the heart's grace
I see the Templars in their immemorial cowl
They are scattered and distant in my dream
What I adore what nothing could ever make me burn
Thou Suzanne the very shape of fire

[29 *August* 1928]

AH LA LA, AH LA LA, AH LA LA, LET ME CRY. . .

Ah la la, ah la la, ah la la, let me cry, ah la la, what misery! So you think starch is sentimental, and that's why they call it starch? You've got it wrong: starch is wicked, dew is not gathered from dewberries, and what if I told you that stars die! As sure as I'm here speaking to you, I've seen a star die. It was one evening,

naturally. She was returning to her little shed along a dark blue hallway. Granted, she wasn't very big, but at least she was a star. She wasn't a common ember like so many women. She had five points so long as one loved her (otherwise she pretended to have only four). A premonition is not a breadcrumb or a tree trunk; I'm talking about stars, of course. Mine—for you've surely guessed it was mine—mine was a little afraid. It had just walked under a ladder, a black ladder. When a black star walks under a white ladder no one sees anything wrong, but when the opposite happens you'll agree that it's night and you will be afraid. My star sat on a chair. There were small engravings on the wall, the celestial fire was in collusion with the water; [. . .] held in the hollow of a star. It was then that the bird with sulfur plumage sang. It sang the interiors of houses and its song complained of the trees; it sang the view one has from windows and its song tucked a desperate bed. Then the star vanished in a scented vapor, and the sainfoin of the mirrors faded, and the closets opened onto boreal scenes, scenes of love that could not be verified because of the cold. One star less—who even thinks about it? For myself, I admit that the splatters of molten metal standing in for my thought bear no relation to the heavenly ebbs we obstinately call the Milky Way. If only I were of this world, if I were called Nocturne or something like that! But no, I have no star, and I don't know how to sleep in the grass. I hide in the gossamer splendor of your gazes, I lose myself in the desolation of whatever isn't your features, I love you and I approach only dead stars, I love you, you who are not afraid to walk under the indolent ladders of noon.

[*ca. August* 1928]

THE IDEA OF LOVE. . .

The idea of love walked along the water and her gaze was full of absence, and her eyes spat lightning. The impressionable evening received by turns the imprints of grasses, clouds, bodies, and wore crazy astronomical designs. The idea of love walked straight ahead without seeing anything; she was wearing tiny isosceles mirrors whose perfect assemblage was amazing. They were so many images of fish tails, when, by their angelic nature, they answer the promise one might make of always finding each other again. Finding each other even in the depths of a forest, where the thread of a star is an articulation more silent than life, the dawn a liquor stronger than blood. Who is lost, who truly wanders off when a cup of coffee is steaming in the fog and waiters dressed in snow circulate patiently on the surface of floors whose desired height can be indicated with one's hands? Who? A solitary man whom the idea of love has just left and who tucks in his spirit like an imaginary bed. The man falls all the same and in the next room, under the moon-white verandah, a woman rises whom the idea of love has abandoned. The gravel cries outside, a rain of glass is falling in which we recognize small chains, tears in which we have time to see ourselves, mirror tears, shards of windows, singular crystals like the ones we witness in our hand on awakening, leaves and the faded petals of those roses that once embellished certain distillery bottles. It's just that the idea of love is, it seems, angry with love. This is how it began. It was September 3, 1928, and the trees were bleaching in the water under the beater of songs, before knees too beautiful to hollow out the marble of prayers. Love undid the bed that the idea of love always tried to make anew. It had lasted too short a time: love, whose hair is made of a blond star in which a brown star is caught, whose hands are always folded over other hands, and who, wherever he goes, drags along his reverse image, reproached the idea of love her perspectives of forests, her crafts of lace, and even that constant increase of neither-flesh-nor-bone creatures she drew around herself in the absurd salons of continuity. Love claimed that birds built their nests using small iron wire, very fine string, and straw, or at least that they had

them built that way. According to him, flowers were cut out by minuscule saws following the whims of a single body, a kind of marvelous frozen mannequin, certain parts of which were covered with varnish, and that one had only to close one's eyes to see it appear between two flaps of a door with white satin weather-stripping in the superb tropical night. To this, the idea of love replied that the uninflammable straw of phoenix nests was still of this world, that the splendid compound of floral eyes was sharpened day and night at the passage of singers and fixed needles, and that there was no greater slowness than that of life, no wax in which the magical traits of won and lost were imprinted more indelibly, that nothing was vacant on the surface of the universe, not even abysses, not even drops of water in their sameness, not even leaves in the difference, not even the shut-eyed mask of the author of the *Discourse on Passion,* dear to the emblematic lizards of the Chinese flag. Love, who demanded absence in presence, stared long and hard at the idea of love, who demanded utter presence in absence, and cried out, "Death to you, absinthe-robed sprite, paler than the lampshades of leaves on glowworms, eternal distraction of the weak and the strong, you who want the most because you can do the least, parcel of savage future inside something that carries only the virgin totality of the present with its folded wings, the great fan of the present with its folded wings." And yet the quarrel had lasted since the dawn of time. Isn't it true, rope ladders, runaway horses, mysterious explosions that mark the end of calm days, and you, premeditated tumbles down Niagara Falls, lofty taming of spotted animals, wand of graces that projects far afield the insane glimmers of a crown of mayflies!

[3 *September* 1928]

EXHIBITIONISTIC POEM

I will seize my bed around the middle
And I will shake it with all my dreams
Redheaded women can jump rope
While making eyes at me like thought
Nothing will stop me
I will bury the window
The crowns of convolvulus and mirabilis
Then I'll wonder aimlessly while arranging precious
    agricultural machines on wallpaper
The silence that is already adventure
Will again be the clothes I've left behind
Lapels plastered down
The morning glory that curls up
Only one stamp in two will be canceled on the letter I don't
    wish to read
Putting off until tomorrow the acquittal of the last criminal
The andirons in their box
The dogs baying at the moon on the casket of exhibitionism
I will enter the scheme of night
I will resign myself to this scheme
I will watch myself being portioned into a waiting game
No more angles no more of those sinister machicolations
    discovered when we tried to eat the bread
Women scrupulously torn apart
Women set with men who shine while loving them
And who respond by that dry flowering of agaves
In warm countries in burning countries in tepid countries
Since everything grows cold anyway even lava
Even memories even the great cinder boxes where
    strawberries fade away
I will find my name written on the blazing atrocity
The sheaves of my name lying at the feet of hazelnut trees
The fires of my name already lying awake in scandalous
    forget-me-nets
The Niagaras of my name struck by the haughty expectation
    of worlds

That huddle onto themselves in the porcupine quills of my
name
When it is spoken in the round
In a murmur as if I were still loved
As if I had ever been loved

[7 *May* 1931, 10:15 *p.m.*]

PROPHETIC POEM

Little destiny passed away this morning
At a tender age
At the Caponnière
Hey taxi
The sandy grass grows long and longer
The calendar with aspen leaves
Decorates the old the young
Comings and goings
Our friends standing before the sorry village band
Our enemies in the clock
Emerge single file
One covering the other
Arm in a sling and the scarf is a first communicant's armband
There are women too
Neither our friends nor our enemies straddling the horse of
our differences with others
Oh-so-vaunted paganism leads the effort
He is the first-born without terrace
Who wallows in the sun
The wood messiah is coming ladies

He hasn't passed by here
He's a flowering hazel tree
I appeal to the lower angle of time
The shape of an egg in the egg cup but not the egg in exotic
    wood
The infallible course of the nut
Later in a minute
A glowworm on the fingernail
The woman I'll love beautiful as a herd of antelope
Her breasts bitten her lip enveloped in a cone of soft words
The woman I'll love will install a padlock in her hair
A big blond lock and that'll be that for the ghosts
Who aim the drawer of their chains at the vaudeville palace
Appear clouds
Wear out straps of the winds
The water is at the bottom of the sprinkler that rises above
    statues
In a moment centuries from now
A cage used between two flights of birds
The trap that mice wear on their tails for cats
The primitive ball
Will tire of philosophy and become the quay of a deserted city

[8 *May* 1931, 2:30 *a.m.*]

AFTER THE GIANT ANTEATER

Women's stockings sift the London light
The quays are stations black with crowds but white with
    vanished generations

And when I say London it's for poetic form
But the women's stockings are really clock hands
Beneath black mother-of-pearl garters
They belong to something I cannot name
For want of a creature who would be distinct enough from creation
And destruction to lower her own night over my thought spinning round
They have been carried into time by space
By female space very different from the other kind and that's all
Above the stockings is flesh and on either side of that flesh are bulldogs
Black and white as I said
And still higher the languid game that plays with a handkerchief
Everyone in a circle
And neither higher nor lower the enchanted telegraph wires
Scents confined in vague saucers
There is also a prison that brushes against the air of freedom
This contact engenders the somber flower of passion
That shatters everything in its wake with its fingers of glass
That absorbs the ambient air the breathable air bubble by bubble
And at that elevation perennial strawberries
Are harvested morning and night in the embers
That open onto pleasure in an agate star
The armor here shows so charming a flaw
Such old earth with its pink crust becomes desirable
That words leap over the cliffs with all their roots shining
And seek the tenderest part of the ear
The electric grass has momentarily lain down
The light deflects even the ash of the eye
That remains open as if before the impossible
This flower that would be the morning-and-evening-glory
Strength and weakness drop their equipment nearby
And already the amazing feats begin
Then the dagger-colored dramas the comedies shaped like scarves

Rise by one note
And far away in the woods the future between two branches
Begins to quiver like the unappeasable absence of a leaf
Here the two pans of the scale the two sides of the hearth
Take turns submitting to the deprivation of evaluating and
    seeing
I think of the Great Bear but it is not she
I would like minors to understand me
And ivy to be interested in what I'm saying
The abrupt line the treacherous gap of fire that uncovers its
    face
Will be but a call of the devil in the abstract city
Toward the unswearable reign of the crackling
Nameless woman
Who smashes the jewel of this day into a thousand shards

[20 *May* 1931]

Translator's Notes

Ah la la, ah la la, ah la la, let me cry. . .
"So you think starch is sentimental" (line 1): Untranslatable pun: Breton is playing on the apparent connection between *amidon* (starch) and its two "sentimental" components, *ami* (friend) and *don* (gift).

"was in collusion with the water; [. . .]" (line 13): Six or seven lines of text are missing from the manuscript at this point.

Exhibitionistic Poem
"The crowns of convolvulus and mirabilis" (line 7): Untranslatable pun: the plant names *belle-de-jour* (convolvulus, or morning glory) and *belle-de-nuit* (mirabilis, or four o'clock) are also slang terms for prostitute.

"cinder boxes where strawberries fade away" (line 26): Untranslatable (and possibly unintentional) pun: *fraise* (strawberry) here seems to be used as an echo of *fraisil* (coal or ember), which would relate to the "cinder boxes" mentioned just before. Breton makes the same displacement in "After the Giant Anteater," written two weeks later.

After the Giant Anteater

"Women's stockings sift the London light" (line 1): Untranslatable pun: the verb *tamiser* (to sift) inevitably calls to mind *la Tamise,* or the Thames—thus introducing London "for poetic form."

JOHN OLSON

TWO POEMS

WAVE MECHANICS

A wave is a web is a woof is a warp
is a wing is a wink is a wriggle is a wick

is a world. Salesmen
in a ring around a table. A gaily

decorated inn full of fine linen & reptiles
There is nuance & numismatics & ocularity

in a name. High temperatures
& refulgent abstractions mobilized

into glue. Sound is a wave
motion which occurs when a sound

source sets the nearest particles into motion
Fast & free delivery. Giorgio, Opium, Chanel #5

L'Air du Temps & Oscar de la Renta
If I say of a piece of Schubert's that it is melancholy

that is like giving it a face
I don't express approval or disapproval

I merely indicate the pace
of a musical stimulus spectral with egg whites

& wrought iron. The eye sees farther
when it is closed, & the ears are folds

of skin. Stirrups for grasping the sound
of the Himalayas. The separation of the lips

liberate possibilities of liquid & glands
makes a word but what makes a world

is nothingness sandwiched between stands
of date palm & bulrush. The churn of the wind

is a calculus of pools oozing in all directions
heavy hissing perennially wrinkled dunes

The wind carried out of a headlight
is a demonstrable freedom, like turning a knob

& opening a door into Egypt. A life
of pyramids & buttons the hollow of the cheek

bald heads & calico a dugong on a balance beam
the emission of electrons & a deep rudder of discourse

carrying us up the Nile. Ah yes, the Nile. Where a wave
is a wallow is a window is a waver is a weave

ODD

"Isn't it very odd that I should be unable—even without *the institution of language and all its surroundings—to think that it will stop raining?"—Do you want to say that it is queer that you should be unable to say these words and* mean *them without those surroundings?*
—Ludwig Wittgenstein,
Proposition 540,
Philosophical Investigations

Isn't it very odd that I should be unable even without
the institution of language & all its surroundings to think
a locomotive would move when I put my hand on the cold

black hand on the window of the electronic supply store
or that it is possible to say I & mean eye or say eye & mean I
am unable to be able to be unable to be able to be unable isn't
it

odd that I am able to institute a law or set a broken jaw
without benefit of morphine or employment of a morpheme
isn't it odd that I should be unable to lactate at will or stick

a mist of sensation in a phenomenon of fog isn't it odd isn't it
very odd that an odor has a certain ardor or an ardor an odor
or that a differential differs from a deference as a diffusion

differs from a suffusion or a collision a collusion or two
women in blue might also be in brown or that a memory
might
ameliorate as well as ambulate or that a balance beam might

suggest an image of balance or indicate a place where balance
is practiced or that sleep might knit up the raveled sleeve of
care
or that anyone should care that a drum majorette has tossed

a sparkly baton in the air or that a column is a form of pillar
or that a grandiloquent black adorns the back of a caterpillar
forming a chrysalis & a chrysalis a helicopter or a hip

attach to the sacrum & femur of an adult female standing
behind the counter of a department store or that the medial
condyle of the femur will roll in the cup of the tibia when she

bends to collect a cassette from the bottom shelf isn't it odd
that I should be unable to extend a distal phalanx to receive
this object or speak without a mandible or rib without

the institution of language without an ischium or wrist isn't it
odd isn't it very odd that the energy of speech can mean
the streets are wet & an awning flaps & the rain has stopped

MAXINE SHEETS-JOHNSTONE

NEANDERTALS

I
Introduction

There is a way in which the present controversy over the evolutionary status of Neandertals vis à vis modern humans—are Neandertals directly related to *Homo sapiens sapiens* or are the two species quite distantly related?[1]—epitomizes the great Western mind/body dichotomy. When it comes to assessing the capacities of modern humans, the terms of the inquiry and subsequent discussion typically gravitate, and quickly, to what is designated "symbolic behavior," or "symbolic meaning," or any number of other variations on the same theme. In their well-known book *In Search of the Neanderthals: Solving the Puzzle of Human Origins,* British anthropologist Christopher Stringer and archaeologist Clive Gamble readily demonstrate the drawing power of these honorific 'mental' epithets, as when, for example, they distinguish Neandertal "survival behavior"—mere physical manoeuvering to sustain life—from modern human "symbolizing behavior."[2] Implicitly anchoring all their discussions in just such oppositional and highly valorized terms—a mere body vies consistently with an exalted mind—Stringer and Gamble categorically and decisively separate Neandertals from *Homo sapiens sapiens.*

When it comes to explaining the evolutionary beginnings of modern human "symbolic behavior," Stringer and Gamble declare that its onset "can be compared to the flick of a switch," or in other words, that "arranging behaviour according to symbolic codes is an all or nothing situation." "Symbolism," they affirm, "involves making mental substitutions and appreciating associations between people, objects and contexts." As may be obvious, there is some question as to how, in a quite concrete sense, symbolizing activity could possibly have originated "in the flick of a switch"; correlatively, there is some question as to what, in an equally concrete sense, it means to "make mental substitutions" or "to arrange behaviour according to symbolic codes." My purpose is to address these difficult questions by offering

not simply alternative, but deepened, understandings of the symbolic. In particular, I hope to show both how symbols derive from analogical thinking and how analogical thinking is modelled on the body. I thus hope to show by example how a perpetuation of the mind/body dichotomy is not only pernicious to a just understanding of Neandertals but, by evolutionary extension, an obstacle to our own self-understandings. At bottom, and whatever the evolutionary relationship of Neandertals to *Homo sapiens sapiens* might be, the dichotomy precludes an appreciation of our evolutionary heritage and kinfolk. It does so by precluding an appreciation of the foundational significance of animate form: the animate form we modern humans are, and equally, the animate form(s) we modern humans are not.

II
Deepened Understandings of the Symbolic

In Stringer and Gamble's view, "the fundamental difference between the Ancients and Moderns is social"[3]—hence the prominence of "associations between people, objects and contexts" in their definition of symbolism and in what they designate as symbols and as critically significant behavioral changes. This preeminently social understanding of symbolism is not in the least peculiar. Anthropologists and philosophers generally concur that a symbol is a social phenomenon. Cultural anthropologist Raymond Firth, for example, writes that an anthropological approach to symbolism "links the occurrence and interpretations of symbolism to social structures and social events in specific conditions."[4] Philosopher Susanne Langer, in her earliest work on symbols, differentiates sign and symbol, remarking that "The passage from the sign-function of a word to its symbolic function is . . . a result of social organization."[5] There is, however, a further fundamental aspect of a symbol that both Firth and Langer recognize, and that is its representational power. Firth in fact declares the essence of symbolism to lie "in the recognition of one thing as standing for (representing) another."[6] Symbols, Langer writes, "let us develop a characteristic attitude toward objects *in absentia,* which is called 'thinking of' or 'referring to' what is not here."[7] The referential aspect is succinctly specified in the definitional statement that a relation is a symbolizing one "if and only if it is a four-term relation of standing for, where in the eyes of a symbolizer something, the symbol, stands for some other thing, the symbolized, within the context of a particular activity—for example, informing, giving orders, entertaining, or playing."[8] What is requisite, especially given Stringer and Gamble's claim

that the advent of symbolism was "an all or nothing situation," is an explanation of how *in an evolutionary sense* the idea of "standing for" could have arisen. In particular, the referential and not just the social dimension of symbolization needs to be evidentially grounded. Otherwise, no matter how social the group of creatures in question, there is no reason why all should treat some one thing as standing for some other thing. The referential dimension, in other words, needs to be shown to be anchored in some form of reality as readily perceptible, that is, as open to immediate awareness, as the social reality of other individuals. To that end, we will consider two interlocking ideas: the idea that *symbolization is a form of analogical thinking,* and the idea that *analogical thinking is foundationally structured in corporeal representation.* As might be apparent, such an understanding of symbolization construes mind and body not as two separate entities that are opposed to one another, or indeed, pitted against one another; it construes them to be all of a piece in the form of a living organism, a "persistent whole" in the throes and challenges of everyday creaturely life.[9] In the context of eight paleoanthropological case studies ranging from tool-making to burials to sexual signalling behavior to paleolithic cave art, I documented each of the interlocking ideas in detail; I showed how primatological (including hominid) and zoological studies validate the ideas and their linkage, and exemplified the linkage in analyses of diverse behaviors. To illustrate in an economic manner the relevance of these ideas to the present need to clarify the nature and evolution of symbolism—and the need as well to expand typical conceptions of "physical" anthropology—I will summarize and cite passages from this earlier work.[10]

Consider first the descriptive report by primatologist C. R. Carpenter whose research of the 1930s in many ways served to establish the field of nonhuman primate social behavior.

> When approaching a male, [the female howler] will form an oval opening with her lips and her protruding tongue will rapidly oscillate in and out and up and down. It is clear to an observer. . .that the function of this gesture is to invite copulation. . . . In a real sense the act is symbolic of sexual desire and readiness for copulation in the female and it stimulates appropriate responses in the male.[11]

There is no doubt but that Carpenter's description implicitly affirms the tongue to be a readily available spatio-kinetic analogue of the penis and the mouth a readily available spatial analogue of the vagina in the sexual communication of howler monkeys. There is no

doubt either that tongue and mouth are sexual analogues in the behavior of other primates as well, as studies of female langurs[12] and studies of the tongue-smacking face of some monkey species, especially *Macaca nemestrina*,[13] attest. Genital symbolization is furthermore evident in the sexual tongue-flicking behavior of !Ko Bushmen—present-day hominids.[14] Moreover even a ram, in his attempts to interest a ewe in being mounted, flicks his tongue in and out of his mouth as he thrusts his head forward, sidles up to, and nudges the ewe—as any sheep farmer will affirm. In short, there is ample evidence showing that corporeal representation is a biological matrix: in the everyday animal world, there is a fundamental disposition to represent meaning corporeally in the form of tactile-kinetic gestures. By the same token, there is a fundamental disposition to understand meaning corporeally. The quotation from Carpenter documents this fact. Carpenter's untroubled interpretation of the female howler's tongue-flicking behavior shows that Carpenter himself was not puzzled by the behavior nor did he have to analyze the behavior painstakingly to justify to his readers how he arrived at its meaning. On the contrary, his brief verbal description suffices to convey immediately to the reader the same unequivocal meaning the actual behavior embodied for him in the flesh. By the same tactile-kinesthetic/kinetic tokens of experience, the behavior is clear straightaway to the male howler monkey: he too knows "that the function of the gesture is to invite copulation." Were this not so, the gesture would hardly "stimulate appropriate responses in the male."

The fundamental disposition toward corporeal representation in the animate world is a natural disposition toward both iconicity and semanticity; that is, there is an iconic rather than arbitrary relationship between symbol and referent, and a built-in semantic dimension to living bodies that is evident both morphologically and behaviorally.[15] These natural dispositions toward iconicity and semanticity make decisively clear why—and how—animate bodies are semantic templates, or in other words, why corporeal representation is a fundamental biological matrix. It is a primary mode of communication and symbolization. Where meanings are *represented*, animate bodies represent them corporeally. In their form and behavior animate bodies are a primary source of meaning.

Primary modes of human symbolization substantiate the importance of semanticity and iconicity. These primary modes have been variously elucidated—for example, by Sigmund Freud in his psychology of the unconscious, by Susanne Langer in her aesthetics of art objects, by André Leroi-Gourhan in his archaeological analyses of prehistoric artifacts, and by Mary LeCron Foster in her linguistic analysis of

primordial language. In each case, great emphasis is placed on the iconicity and semanticity of the symbols. Indeed, this is why a psychology, aesthetics, archaeology, and linguistics of *symbolizing* behavior—*behavior that produces symbols but is not itself symbolic*—is possible—why pears and mountains can represent female breasts and umbrellas and tree trunks can represent penes; why works of art can be understood as dynamic forms that are logically congruent to the dynamic form of human feeling; why archaeological artifacts in their design features can be interpreted as representations of female and male genitalia; why the articulatory gestures of primordial language can be shown to be tactile-kinesthetic analogues of their referents.[16] What is important to emphasize—and not only in reference to the above specific domains of corporeal representation in human life, but in reference to corporeal representation generally—is that the behavioral disposition toward iconicity, as toward corporeal representation itself, is not a conscious one—or *necessarily* a conscious one. In the most fundamental sense, bodily symbols are structured not in reflective acts but in pre-reflective corporeal experience; that is, they are the spontaneous product of certain species-specific bodily experiences rather than the planned product of thought.[17] What Freud said of the dreamer may thus be true of the symbolizing animal: "The dreamer's knowledge of symbolism is unconscious."[18] But while the symbolizing animal may be, like the dreamer, unconscious of its symbolizing behavior as such, *unlike the dreamer*, it is not unconscious of its behavior. It is aware of its own actions in a way gradient to that in which a bird, a song sparrow, for instance, is fully and directly aware of its own song in the process of singing it. Both ethologists and sociobiologists have documented this awareness.[19] Thus, while perhaps unaware of the symbolism *as such*, an animal—human or nonhuman—may well be aware of the dynamic congruency between one behavior, a symbolizing behavior, and another behavior, its referent, for example, aware of the dynamic congruency between in and out movements of the tongue and in and out movements of the penis.

It should be clear from the above consideration of primary modes of symbolization that corporeal representation is a fundamental mode not only of sexual communication but of multiple kinds of communication. In the *Tanzsprache*, for example, the dancing honeybee represents direction by her orientation to gravity, distance by the spatio-kinetic contours of her dance, and the richness of the food source by the vigorousness of her dance.[20] Whatever the communicative circumstance, and whichever the creature—whether bees, baboons,[21] bonobos,[22] howler monkeys, or hominids—a form of behavior is evident in which a gesture or sequence of movements points or refers

to something beyond itself. Whatever the particular referent, the symbolization is conceptually played out corporeally, along the lines of the body.

Given this evolutionary framework for understanding symbols and symbolizing behavior, two unmistakably major principles emerge: first, *humans (Homo sapiens sapiens) do not have an exclusive corner on symbolization*—they are not privileged evolutionary beings who alone are given to symbolizing behaviors; and second, *the question of the origin of symbolization cannot be reduced to a question of light switches.* In each case, a good deal more is involved. When symbolization is viewed in evolutionary perspective, a broader array of evidence must be examined and a consequently fuller and deeper understanding of symbolization must be offered. Consideration of the origin of hominid tool-making makes both points unequivocally. While a readily self-evident relationship between teeth and stone tools is consistently and intuitively recognized by many researchers,[23] an empirically demonstrated *conceptual* association between teeth and tools is not shown. In other words, "the idea of a similarity between teeth and stones is not a new one but neither has it been analyzed to any depth."[24] Thus, to affirm simply that stone tools replaced teeth for processing food gives no indication of the *experiential* and in effect conceptual basis for the replacement. Why not a replacement of teeth by knuckles or feet? To answer that upright posture freed the hands for tool-making does not constitute an explanation of the connection between tools and teeth and thereby explain the origin of tool-making, any more than the affirmation "tool-making freed the teeth for sound-making" constitutes an explanation of the connection between sounds and words and thereby explains the origin of talking. What is needed is a detailed descriptive, i.e., experiential, analysis that shows a conceptual linkage, even a rational connection, between stone tools and teeth. Only in this way can one begin to examine and ultimately understand the *origin* of stone tool-making. With this understanding, it becomes immediately clear that stone tools are not *symbols;* they are stone tools. But they are stone tools that have been crafted on the model of the body, namely, teeth. They are thus *analogues*. Again, as with symbols, such analogues are not necessarily structured in reflective acts but are embedded in pre-reflective corporeal experience. For example, the primary datum of stones and teeth alike is their resistant hardness. They are not squeezable; they do not bend. This quintessential resistant hardness is a felt reality, a tactile-kinesthetic lingual and manual phenomenon. If one knew nothing of stones or teeth but merely saw them, there would be no reason to posit either as hard—or soft. The binary opposites are clearly tactile qualities. The primary analogy

between stones and teeth is thus one of structural correspondence. Just as the analogy is not necessarily a conscious one, neither is it necessarily an articulated one at all; to think analogically is not necessarily to think in words. On the contrary, as the analogy between teeth and stones demonstrates, the similar quintessential hardness of teeth and stones is an *experienced* fact of life. What the example of the origin of stone tool-making thus demonstrates is that analogical thinking is indeed grounded in the tactile-kinesthetic body. What the example thereby also demonstrates is that corporeal concepts—nonlinguistic concepts such as hardness—are in no way inferior to their linguistic relatives. Most importantly too, the example shows that analogical thinking does not necessarily eventuate in the production of symbols. Analogical thinking is a fundamental form of thinking that generates understandings on the basis of bodily experience, and those understandings may or may not eventuate in the production of symbols.

While the example of stone tool-making shows the original crafting of stone tools neither to constitute in itself "symbolic behavior" nor to eventuate in a symbol, it might nevertheless be claimed that at a later time (the Upper Paleolithic), modern human tools were communally conceived as symbols—symbols of power over others, for example, whether hominids or non-hominids. To be viable, however, the claim must address the question of symbolic reference; it must set forth the analogical basis on which tools come to *stand for* power over others rather than being experienced simply as powerful instruments in and of themselves, instruments that can among other things harm or subjugate others. As one anthropologist has in fact pointedly observed, "stone tools that are regarded as symbolic are generally *not* functional as powerful instruments."[25] In this regard, then, it is clearly not sufficient to invoke symbolic codes or theoretical acts on the order of "mental substitutions" as operative in the production of tools. Such invocations merely sanction free-wheeling attributions, ones that in some instances seem to border on unbridled arrogance.[26] This is why conceptual muddles develop. This is also why discontinuities can be easily asserted, not only discontinuities between Modern and Neandertal tool-making behaviors and artifacts (and, ironically, by extension, necessarily Modern and earlier hominid tool-making behaviors and artifacts), but discontinuities with respect to "symbolic behavior." The discontinuities—behavioral, artifactual, and symbolic—go hand in hand. With the advent of modern humans, a definitive break occurs, a Rubicon is crossed. On one side are tools, campsites, burial sites, and so on, which are symbols; on the other side are simply tools, "nests,"[27] "rubbish disposals"[28] and the like. The question of how one gets from one side to the other is answered by incantation, as it were: by calling

into being "symbolic codes," "mental substitutions," and certain "associations." An empirically grounded answer, on the contrary, lies in the recognition of a faculty already there. That faculty is the power to think analogically, to perceive similarities in relationships, and to use the body as a semantic template. In short, if corporeal representation is the cornerstone of analogical thinking, and analogical thinking is the cornerstone of symbolization, then it is a leap neither of fancy nor of faith to think that, far from being a matter of newly operating symbolic codes, mental substitutions, or associations, symbolization was an extension of an already extant biological matrix. The flick-of-the-switch, light-bulb theory of symbolization, one that basically construes mind and body as antithetical Cartesian substances, fails to recognize this matrix, enshrining intelligence instead in a rarified mental essence belonging to humans alone. As I have elsewhere argued, "intelligence does not reside at such a doubly exclusive address."[29] It resides in living creatures, "persistent wholes" that are both human and nonhuman.

In sum, symbolization is latent in analogical thinking and analogical thinking is latent in corporeal representation. However revolutionary and strikingly original the practices of Moderns some 40,000 years ago, they are rooted in a mode of thinking that is modelled on the body, that gives rise to corporeal concepts, and that has its origins far back in evolutionary history. When the basic biological matrix of corporeal representation—a clearly apparent evolutionary feature of morphology as well as behavior[30]—is ignored, "the mental" is easily given dominion *uber alles* and an entire body of evidence is stifled. Suppressed too is an appreciation of the evolutionary continuities that basically bind hominid to hominid and humans to nonhumans. So also is the fundamental evolutionary principle that there is nothing *de novo* in Nature. This emphasis on continuities does not mean that differences are unimportant—much less non-existent. It means only that difference is not equivalent to a lack of commonalities. In marking out differences, one must take care not to overlook the ties that bind us in a common evolutionary family or in a common creaturehood. These ties may in both a literal and metaphorical sense lie deeper than artifactual and fossilized surfaces, and in turn articulate evolutionary matters of fact not yet examined, discovered, or perhaps even imagined.

III
Animate Form: Neandertals and Modern Humans

We move now to a detailed consideration of animate form: to an appreciation of how typical divisionary thinking bypasses the phenom-

enon of animation, to the task of marking basic kinetic differences between Neandertals and modern humans, and to a beginning assessment of the conceptual implications of those kinetic differences. In marking kinetic differences, we heed the caveat above: the point is not to deny our commonalities with Neandertals but to fathom in beginning ways what it was to be a Neandertal hominid.

Neandertals bodies are consistently described postcranially in terms of their robusticity, their power grip, the shortness of their distal limb segments, and their distinctive pelves.[31] As intimated above, references to movement in the context of these descriptions are sparse and brief. Indeed, animation—movement—is not an item in any index of any book on Neandertals, any more than it is an item in indices of books on paleontology or paleoanthropology generally. The subject is consistently skirted even in places where it appears to be the topic of direct concern. Stringer and Gamble's sixteen-line section titled "Posture and movement" (in *In Search of Neanderthals)* is a case in point. Except for a passing reference to "squatting," and a reference to "strong movement" (the meaning of which is not exemplified), the brief section concerns itself with anatomy—with the structure of the shoulder blade, for example, and the way the pelvis "may be related to the different way in which the hip joint operated"[32]—and not with either movement or posture. Indeed, that there is a realm of movement to be explored and understood is readily attested to by its being nowhere in evidence.

The closest approximation to an awareness of the paleoanthropological significance of movement, and in particular, the movement style of Neandertals, is to be found in a 1959 article by anthropologist Alice Brues titled "The Spearman and the Archer—An Essay on Selection in Body Build."[33] In the context of discussing body build in relation to tool type, Brues focuses attention on specific kinetic acts and gives specific kinetic definition to precisely such terms as "strong." At one point, for example, she describes strength in terms of defensive action. She links strength of body build with "static defense," the creature "stand[ing] its ground instead of fleeing."[34] She illustrates how laterality of build that is favorable to static defense is oftentimes linked to increasing size, citing the gorilla as an example.[35] She notes at a further point, in a discussion of how, in a creature without weapons such as a gorilla, "[the magnitude of] destructiveness is [proportional] to the amount of squeezing or crushing force exerted momentarily on the fragile parts of the victim." She astutely points out in this context that a gorilla's physique "drastically reduces speed of locomotion," with the effect that, "though he could kill anything he could catch, he cannot catch anything."[36] In brief, discussion turns on actual movement, what

creatures can and cannot do. Though Brues does not go on to distill movement dispositions from these "can's and cannots"—nor indeed speak in terms of a repertoire of "I can's"[37]—it is clear that such repertoires and dispositions quintessentially characterize the human and nonhuman animals she describes. In this respect, her analyses readily demonstrate a seminal attention to animate form. An implicit concern with kinetic and potential energy undergirds her discussions along with an explicit concern with movement possibilities, possibilities not only of "squeezing or crushing," but of "crashing through," "leaping," "climbing," "running," "drawing [a bow]," and so on. It should be emphasized that it is not a matter of throwing in a few movement terms here and there in the course of a discussion about body build; the discussion itself is anchored in movement such that a distinct sense emerges of what is kinetically entailed in being a particular kind of body. Furthermore, in the use of words such as "strength," and in descriptions of what are usually simply termed "behaviors"—e.g., "hunting," "striking"—the same distinct kinetic entailments are evident.

It bears emphasizing that Brues was *not* proposing that body build correlates *only* with the disposition to produce and to use a particular type of weapon. In view both of what she writes about body build and of the disclaimers and admonitions with which she concludes her research, anthropologist David Frayer errs in attributing to her such a proposal; Brues never claims that "body size changes are related only to the adoption and use of weapon types."[38] Not only does she temper her research conclusions by an awareness of their provisional nature, but she states explicitly both that her suggested correlations "should be critically questioned" and that other factors entering into selection "must be considered jointly." In this context, she mentions climate. In fact, she has already taken the environment into account—in terms of terrain as well as climate—in describing movement possibilities; for example, in speaking of the kind of place in which "the original specialization of the human leg took place," she speaks of "an open prairie country where continuous running and leaping were possible."[39] The point is important. Where the focus is on movement, *where one thinks in terms of the movement possibilities of animate forms,* then terrain and climate enter naturally into the discussion. These factors are of indisputable import to an understanding of Neandertals. What one can kinetically do and not do, and similarly, what one is kinetically disposed to do and not to do, are intimately related to environmental conditions, to *circonstances*, as Lamarck would have put it. A study of movement thus necessarily—by its very nature—considers organisms *in situ*, as making their way in the context

of a certain topography and climate. It thus joins together causal (selectional) factors that are typically conceived and treated independently of one another. The idea that one must specify *either* thermal regulation *or* biomechanical advantage as causative agent with respect to the morphology of Neandertals is a prime example of typical practice.[40] Where movement conceptually anchors the analysis, the idea collapses as a viable working principle.

Thinking in terms of movement one indeed reconstructs in corporeally dynamic terms rather than in categorically static ones. By the same token, one reconstructs holistically, in non-divisionary metaphysical terms. Further analysis of Neandertals in terms of animate form will show clearly that paleoanthropological reconstructions can find firmer ground in holistic and dynamically-oriented thinking than in divisionary substance thinking and that, in turn, the quest to describe "what it was like" (to be such-and-such a hominid) can be far better satisfied.

To bring the point firmly home, let us pause for a moment to consider the classic assessment. From virtually the moment of their original discovery, Neandertals have been regularly conceived and are still conceived by many as being mentally deficient in one way or another. They are conceived to have *lacked* something cerebral—something in the way of thoughtfulness—since they did not "improve" in major ways or accede to our 20th century human kind of behavioral capabilities. It is as if, given all the time they had at their disposal—all the time they walked the earth—they stood pat; indeed, we are told by Stringer and Gamble that it was "half a million years or more of inaction."[41] Considering the esteem in which earlier hominids *(Homo habilis, Homo erectus,* not to mention australopithecines) are generally held, the negative judgment is odd,[42] but it is especially odd when coupled with comparative statements concerning the singular abilities of *Homo sapiens sapiens:* their colonization of new areas, for example, their future planning abilities, their sophisticated social networks that insured survival in challenging times, and so on. The negative judgment is especially odd because Neandertals were around for more than 200,000 years (approximately 250,000 to 35,000 BP). That is not a long time in evolutionary terms, but it is a very long time when measured against our own puny human evolutionary life span of 40,000 years. Indeed, we modern humans have existed less than one quarter of the time that Neandertals existed. In contrast to Neandertals, early *Homo sapiens sapiens* are described in glowing terms that apply still to us since we are their descendants. Thus prized abilities—the ability to plan ahead and to form social networks, for example—are implicitly if not explicitly taken to be features of our own lives, and this

in spite of contravening evidence. For example, any quick appraisal of the present global environmental situation readily instructs us that many humans are singularly deficient in planning ahead; they see only as far as their own immediate desires and/or their own lifetime. Moreover rather than building social networks that give them "insurance policies" (as Stringer and Gamble put it)[43] against hard times, humans on the whole appear unkindly disposed if not hostile toward their national and ethnic neighbors, unduly acquisitive, and to have been at war almost incessantly as far back as history records. Furthermore, social networks in the form of treaties between or among nations have proved notoriously unreliable "insurance policies." In short, from a Martian or otherwise more objective viewpoint, modern humans in recorded history appear to be socially and ecologically deficient creatures who are more properly defined as selfishly engaged rather than either future-oriented or socially congenial. However revolutionary, stunning, and undeniably wonderful the inventions and practices of early modern humans, basic inventions and practices of those latter-day humans who are their descendants arouse—or should arouse—wonder of an altogether different sort. There is every reason to doubt rather than marvel at their so-called "fundamental behavioral capabilities" and "improvements," and the like. In fact, there is every reason to wonder whether *Homo sapiens sapiens* will match the evolutionary longevity of Neandertals.

The point is not deflective in the least to the topic at issue. What we humans want to claim for ourselves are clearly the *summum bonum* brains of which Stephen Jay Gould speaks.[44] We do this by mental comparison—and by a selective perception and amnesia that allow us to identify ourselves only with what we find mentally praiseworthy in the past. Thus it is that *the* significant differences distinguishing modern humans from Neandertals are not *physical* differences but illustrious mental ones that appear *ex nihilo*.[45] This is why *abstract* formulations can be formulated as they are—not only in a mental vacuum and honorifically on behalf of *Homo sapiens sapiens* alone, but as if they specified indelible features of all modern human minds, thus features in whose glory present-day humans may bask since it was "our kind" who mentally distinguished themselves. Clearly, what is at stake and what the comparison secures is "the traditional *summum bonum* of bigger brains. . .because bigger brains are so good to have."[46] In thoroughly supportive fashion, received Western wisdom teaches that quintessentially significant differences are "in the head" and have nothing to do with bodies. This is why Stringer and Gamble can write in answer to their question, "Where did modern behaviour originate?" that "[W]herever new developments took place they did so rapidly (the

flick of a switch), *adapting to the anatomy of modern humans that had been around for perhaps 70,000 years"* (italics added).[47] Great new ideas arose with "the flick of a switch" and adjusted themselves to the corporeal packaging in which they found themselves, the modern human's mind adapting itself swiftly and efficiently to the body in which it happened to be. In this metaphysically divisive way, modern humans find the kind of reasons they seek for cherishing themselves. What they want to cherish is "the mental," the kind of mental that churns out mental substitutions, that bequeaths unique and remarkable ingenuities in the form of symbolic behaviors and unique and remarkable abilities such as the ability to plan ahead. They do not seek reasons for cherishing themselves *physically,* except by disdaining what they consider unattractive: prognathous features, no chin, squat build, and so on.

In his article, "Evolution by Walking"—a review of a newly instituted exhibit of fossil mammals at the American Museum of Natural History—Stephen Jay Gould emphasizes precisely a view of evolution that does *not* give preeminence to modern humans, either "temporally" (they are the latest and thus most intelligent arrivals) or "morally" (i.e., they are "higher" rather than "lower" forms of life).[48] He lauds the cladistic arrangement of the exhibit fossils; they are organized in their chronological order of branching, and not in terms of "their later 'success' or 'advancement'." Accordingly, as visitors walk through the exhibit, they do not figuratively climb "a ladder of putative advance."[49] They walk through evolutionary time and learn in and by walking, the proper evolutionary place of humans. This seemingly quite novel key idea—that we learn in and by moving—is expressed at the end of the article by the thought that "cogitation and ambulation" go hand in hand.[50] But Gould has in fact already extolled the idea of "using the visceral to grasp the cerebral." Much earlier in his article, he specifies that *"in order to illustrate a concept,"* one moves the body directly through the process or phenomenon of interest (italics added).[51]

Now if movement can *illustrate* a concept, then might not movement *generate* a concept in the first place, that is, might a concept not have in fact originated in the course of moving or having moved? Not only why but how otherwise would movement possibly be able to illustrate a concept? In a broader sense, might not the most fundamental practices and beliefs of any particular hominid group have been forged in the context of moving and having moved? If so, then in the most basic sense movement possibilities and dispositions delimit one's conceptual possibilities and dispositions. Again, if so, then morphology—whether a matter of living creatures or fossilized specimens—must be ultimately conceived in terms of *animate form.*[52]

Gould's idea of a tight and intimate connection between thinking and moving clearly coincides with the sequence of ideas proposed earlier: in the most fundamental sense, thinking is modelled on the body, in particular, the tactile-kinesthetic body. Animate form is thus at the core of what traditionally passes for strictly cerebral activity. Such an idea is latent not only in Gould's article. It is latent in articles by paleoanthropologists and other researchers. In "Technological Changes across the Middle-Upper Palaeolithic Transition: Economic, Social and Cognitive Perspectives," for example, Paul Mellars notes that "over large areas of Europe, the major changes in both the anatomy of the human populations, and the technology of the associated archaeological assemblages, can be shown to have occurred over at least broadly the same range of time—i.e., broadly between c. 40,000 and 30,000 BP."[53] This idea—that morphology and technology are linked—is actually evident to any perceptive and non-Cartesian-thinking reader who compares two illustrations that Mellar includes in his article. The backed knives (Figure 20.2) representing the tool industry of the Neandertals are squat, bulky, indeed, *robust* tools; the points and crescents (Figure 20.3) representing the tool industry of early modern humans are lithe, elongate, indeed, *gracile* tools.[54] Tool morphology matches body morphology; the correspondence is palpable.[55] Mellars himself, however, does not make the connection. Instead, he leaps precipitately over the traditional metaphysical chasm to arrive at "symbolic 'meaning'," at the idea that Upper Palaeolithic humans, in contrast to Middle Palaeolithic people, "imposed form" on their raw materials and thus attained to "symbolism and symbolically defined behaviour."[56] He attributes the new "cognitive factors" that mark the transition from "'archaic' to 'modern' human populations" to "some kind of fundamental change in the basic structure of human thinking."[57] The idea that thinking could have something to do with the body—or the body with the mind—never surfaces.

The morphological-technological connection is a clear validation of analogical thinking. It is a validation of corporeal representation. Subsistence tools of Neandertals and early modern humans were in the image of their own bodies; their own bodies were semantic templates. When we allow the tools to speak for themselves, they speak unequivocally of this relationship. In this respect, they also speak of distinct differences. Neandertal tools were created not so much in terms of the linear *contours* of the body as in the image of its *bulk*. Moreover they were accessories to rather than extensions of the body; they were, in other words, auxiliaries of a body that was already instrumentally proficient, already by itself a most effective tool. Sheer strength and bulk were at the ever-ready disposal of this body. Why would a labor-

saving device in the form of a lever, for example, be thought of if one could immediately pick up the small boulder and move it by oneself? When we think of brawn, we might tend to think of it as antithetical to brains—much like thinking of a linesman in football as compared to a quarterback, for example. But this divisionary thinking misses the point. If one's build and size afford one a reliable effectiveness, if what is there naturally is not only basically sufficient but ever-ready, why would one be disposed to tinker about with the idea of forging something new? Not only were sheer strength and bulk at the ever-ready disposal of this body. So also were teeth that could be used in a variety of non-dietary ways. C. Loring Brace and Ashley Montagu in fact describe Neandertal teeth as "the Lower and Middle Pleistocene equivalent of the Boy Scout knife," stating that "[i]t seems likely that they were used to crack nuts, peel bark, squeeze, scrape, pry, and cut a variety of objects, and also to tan rawhide."[58] Given their broad utility and on-the-spot availability, we may ask why a Neandertal would spend energy and time making stone equivalents? Such an endeavor would indeed involve not merely time and effort in making the equivalents, but time and effort in looking for proper materials to begin with, in forging a diversity of stone forms specifically tailored to the use each would be put, in carrying such forms about to places they are or might be needed, in devising places to stash them when not being used, and so on. In short, if all the various acts of scraping, peeling, squeezing, and so on, were readily performable *dental* acts—in other words, if the body itself was diversely capable on the spot—then certain ways of living consistent with those diverse capabilities would be more congenial and efficient than other ways, i.e., more congenial than creating a diversified and elaborate stone tool-kit that in many (though not necessarily all) instances would merely duplicate the instrumental proficiencies of one's own teeth. In effect, whatever might be necessary to eking out a living, defending oneself, or dealing with the world, its instrumental point of origin was the body itself. That the tool kit of Neandertals did not change appreciably over 200,000 years is readily understandable in terms of this fact.

Now the idea of a conceptual linkage between morphology and technology may suggest an absolute synchronization of anatomy with culture, any change in the latter being immediately coincident with a change in the former. The suggestion is erroneous and simplistic on several inter-related counts. To begin with, culture is not reducible to technology. As anthropologist Mary Stiner has shown in extended detail, a good deal more is involved in the establishment of, and in the continuity or changes in, cultural practices—specifically those associated with subsistence—than stone tools.[59] Environmental change, land

use, and mobility, for example, are highly significant variables. So also are prey focus and prey availability. Absolute synchronization of anatomical and lithic change could occur only in the absence of such fundamental and critical factors. Thus, that anatomically modern humans were present *before* the advent of a modern tool kit, for example, does not contravene the basic idea that hominids made stone tools in the image of their bodies or the ample evidence on which it is based: a palpably visible congruity of bodily and lithic morphologies. Second, recognition of the formal analogy between body morphology and subsistence tools entails no correlative claims about boundaries or watersheds. The typically drawn "boundary" between Middle and Upper Paleolithic is literally set in stone; in other terms, the Neandertal-to-modern human "transition"—be it defined in terms of continuity or replacement—has been evidentially marked primarily on the basis of a difference in stone tool kits. Newer studies question the narrowness of this perspective, not only in terms of there being other highly significant factors to consider as indicated above, but in terms of construing the Neandertal tool industry (the Mousterian) "as a monolithic, static thing"[60] (not to say a "robotic" thing)[61] that remained unchanged for thousands of years. In short, the boundary itself is open to question as a readily and exactingly delimitable and fixed moment in hominid evolution, a moment that marks both a lithic watershed and a correlative "mental" watershed dividing a "primitive or ineffective"[62] intelligence from an intelligence that is advanced and powerful. As noted above, recognition of the formal analogy between body morphology and subsistence tools carries with it no temporal claims about stone tool typology as an evolutionary or "mental" boundary marker, hence no claims that a certain kind of tool kit makes its entrance and exit in precise temporal concert with the appearance and disappearance of a certain kind of body. To say that stone tools were modeled on the body in the course of hominid evolution is no more than to acknowledge what is evidentially apparent in paleoanthropological and archaeological data: a basic *formal* analogy between the bodies of anatomically modern humans and *their* tools and between Neandertal bodies and *their* tools. More broadly, it is to say that one designs tools congenial to the body one is, not to the body one is not; equally, one designs them congenial to the use they will be put *and can be put given one's situation,* not to a use that is impossible in virtue of either the environment in which one lives, for example, or of the kind of prey that is available. Third, the relationship between morphology and technology is precisely *not* a "flick of the switch" relationship. Such a relationship would require, *inter alia*, that certain infants at certain times be born as fully formed adults, with bodies radically different

from their parents, and correspondingly, with radically different stone tools in their hands. On the contrary, infants are born within a certain lineage, within a certain social tradition, within a certain ecological and climatic environment, and so on. The kind of stone tools made and used by particular groups within a species may certainly vary, but those variations do not suddenly negate the distinctive formal characters that define in a classic way a particular style of stone tool-making any more than morphological variations preclude classic definitions of species. Fourth, radical changes in stone tool-making, at least insofar as they become standardized and are not, for instance, a one-time-and-never-more-pursued accidental discovery, clearly involve conceptual elaborations on a particular pragmatic theme, be it hammering, stripping, grinding, or whatever. Like the pragmatic theme itself, these conceptual elaborations are clearly dependent on lithic resources, on the kind of prey species in the area, and on all those other variables mentioned above. There is, in effect, no reason to think that analogical thinking operates in a vacuum, that the moment a certain kind of body is present, it immediately begins churning out a certain kind of tool kit. The actual is tied to the circumstantially possible. But again, it is also tied in a fundamental sense to the realities of animate form. The tools one makes are the tools one can wield: tools that fit one's grip (however large or small, powerful or weak, for example), that fit one's style of moving (however fleet or heavy, long or short in endurance, for example), that fit one's range of movement (however flexible or constrained, ample or small, for example), and so on. In short, what one conceives and elaborates in the way of a tool is patterned on the animate form one is.

We should perhaps note that the basic formal conjunction is not contravened by the fact that anatomically modern humans were on the scene before their classic tool-kits were *or* that some Neandertals made tools similar to anatomically modern humans. Anthropologist Richard Klein's view that "the modern physical form evolved before the modern capacity for culture" and that "it was culture and not body form that propelled the human species from a relatively rare and insignificant large mammal 35,000 years ago to a geologic force today,"[63] does not engender a substantive sense of "body form" in the full and detailed sense understood here; in other words, Klein's "body form" is not equivalent to animate form. Moreover although Klein disaffirms a connection between culture and "body form," he actually obliquely supports the idea of corporeal representation—or analogical thinking—when he writes in one instance that "The Upper Paleolithic contrasts with the Mousterian in many ways, of which the most often-cited is the widespread Upper Paleolithic emphasis on stone flakes whose length

was at least twice their width";[64] and when he writes in another instance of how the "inferior" behavior of Neandertals might be connected with their "distinctive morphology": "the Neanderthals were behaviorally inferior to their modern successors, and, to judge from their distinctive morphology, this behavioral inferiority may well have been rooted in their biological makeup."[65] His negative judgment of Neandertals aside—and his implicit idea of a hominid march toward "the *summum bonum* of bigger brains" aside also—Klein obliquely intimates that there is something more to bodies than meets the classic Western eye.[66] Spelled out, this intimation would affirm that "distinctive morphologies" have behavioral implications precisely because they are *animate* morphologies and being animate, they have conceptual implications as well.

When we translate into animate bodily terms assessments of purported "lack" and "inaction," we begin to understand technological differences at their conceptual source. So too when we translate into animate bodily terms assessments of revolutionary new practices. Indeed, the following kind of differences between Middle and Upper Palaeolithic hominids begins to emerge.

A stocky body is not disposed toward ballistic movement.[67] An upright body with short distal limb segments cannot throw in either as easy or as effective a ballistic manner as one with longer distal limb segments. With a greater range of movement comes a greater facility in moving through a ballistic pattern of movement. Moreover more momentum is built up, with the result that the thrown object will release and travel with greater speed. Furthermore, movement of the body as a whole in the direction of the throw can add to the latter's force. Thus if one runs, for example, in the process of throwing, the run will add to the body's momentum and be transferred to the throwing arm and object thrown. Longer distal limb segments are more suited to ballistic movement for just such reasons.

Consider further that in non-ballistic acts such as striking, bludgeoning, or thrusting with a spear rather than throwing it,[68] an upright moving body is consistently in control of the object it utilizes. It wields power directly and firmly; it is always in command of the object with which it hits or batters. A ballistic movement is in contrast self-propelling: an initial thrust of power sends the movement—and the utilized object—on its way, as in throwing or kicking something, or in swinging or hurling an instrument. The fact that movement itself takes over means that one is able to act at a distance. What one relinquishes in the way of continuous control over an object, one gains in the way of power over greater distances, and in the way of a built-in measure of safety with respect to the target toward which the object or implement

is aimed.[69] It is of considerable interest in this context to point out that greater bodily injury and trauma are evident on Neandertal fossils than on early modern ones and that the difference is thought to be due to a difference in the material culture of the two hominid species.[70]

The above minimal distinctions suffice to introduce the possibility of analyzing corporeal concepts in greater detail. The concept of acting in immediate contact with things, for example, of being up against them, and the concept of acting at a distance upon the same things as in throwing something at them, are distinct in several respects. Not only is one's sense of control different in each case, but one's sense of *effort, space,* and of *one's own spatiality* is different. The idea that an object can act effectively on something when it is outside one's own grasp, for instance, is a complicated concept. It engenders a sense of what movement can do on its own, that is, an awareness that an object can do work for a body even when that object is no longer in hand. It engenders a sense of distance, of speed, and of timing with respect to a goal or target. Striking and thrusting have a much narrower compass with respect to effort, space, and one's own spatiality. Distance is measured in terms of the length of one's striking or thrusting arm. The target, whatever it might be, is palpably close. Moreover one's own body movement as a whole may be constrained in the sense that the immediate presence and size of the target may limit one's possibilities of action. What one gains in consistent control of an object may thus be offset by what one risks in the way of safety—of bodily injury or trauma. Range of movement, safety, effort, the spatial immediacy or distance of the target, its comparative size—all such aspects of the tactile-kinetic situation engender distinctive spatial-kinetic concepts. These distinctive concepts, of fundamental significance in and of themselves, may readily contribute to a spatial sense of the world, of where it begins and ends, for example: is it an always close-at-hand, proximate world or an on-going expansive world stretching out beyond actual reach? Clearly, the idea of expanding into new habitats has a certain spatial resonance with the experience of acting at a distance and its attendant concepts, including the concept of possible opportunities in a world not immediately at hand, that is, opportunities in an extended world.

To arrive at such deeper understandings of the conceptual significance of movement, we must necessarily forego the common notion that movement is merely a change of position in conformity with some "mental" directive. That notion is statically focused. Indeed, we must restore to movement its inherent dynamics and in so doing acknowledge the spatio-temporal play of forces that particularizes and situationally defines movement and that potentially generates a par-

ticular domain of concepts. This acknowledgment is in large measure an acknowledgment of the fact that *how* one moves is part and parcel of the fact *that* one moves. Like all so-called movement "behaviors," striking and throwing, for example, are inherently distinctive kinetic acts, both experientially and conceptually. They have a different spatiality not only with respect to the object they each utilize and its spatial relationship both to the acting individual and to the target; they have a different spatial dynamic in terms of experienced range of movement and experienced changes in the linear conformations of the body; they have furthermore a different spatiality in terms of experienced corporeal solidity and flexibility. Correlatively, they have a different temporal and tensional structure: the one movement is temporally abrupt and likely repetitive, the other is sequentially articulated; the one is tensionally concentrated, the other is tensionally diffused in a manner coincident with sequential articulation. If one notated in a movement notation system[71] the likely distinctive movement patterns of Neandertals, then one could compare their overall style of movement with the overall movement style of modern humans. Kinetic differences would become evident as would broadly generalized distinctions in animate form: distinctions between strength and agility, for example, between compactness and flexibility, between an ability to stand one's ground, change direction quickly with a ready stability due to a proportionately lower center of gravity and laterally rotated legs, and an ability to run, twist, scamper, change direction quickly but with a lesser stability due to a proportionately higher center of gravity and antero-posterior positioned legs. The primary purpose of charting such distinctions would not be comparison *per se*, especially to the end that an axiological scheme emerges naming a winner and loser or a superior and an inferior. Indeed, if, as anthropologists Erik Trinkaus and Pat Shipman write of Neandertals, "Tremendous strength, endurance, and fortitude exceeding those of any modern human lifestyle were required on a daily basis,"[72] then what could—or can—possibly be the purpose of comparing Neandertals to modern humans other than setting in relief the peculiar and unique kinetic possibilities and dispositions of each together with their peculiar and unique conceptual implications? The challenge in articulating kinetic possibilities and dispositions is precisely to show how dynamic elements of movement and the tactile-kinesthetic body play out conceptually, i.e., analogically, in a way similar to the way in which stone tools play out conceptually both the tactile character of teeth and the spatio-kinetic character of animate form.

With deepened understandings of animate form, of corporeal matters of fact, and of the symbolic, the fundamental question concern-

ing Ancients and Moderns shifts to new ground and in consequence is reformed. Rather than a question of whether Neandertals were replaced by or were genetically continuous with early modern humans, the fundamental question is whether we can justly say we know Neandertals if we know them in anything other than "in their own terms."[73] To know them "in their own terms" means to be able to imagine on the basis of fossil, artifactual, taphonomic, and related kinds of evidence—thus, in a rigorously-tethered empirical way—what it is like to be a body we are not and to draw out the kinetic and conceptual implications of being that body.[74] The quest, in other words, is not merely a factual one in the sense of specifying historical relationships. It is a factual one in the sense of specifying *what it was like*. Accordingly, our capacity to imagine ourselves along different corporeal lines and to fathom in turn what it was like kinetically and conceptually to live along those lines is the beginning ground and measure of our understanding of Neandertals—whether close kin or distant relatives.

Notes

O A different version of this essay appeared in *Anthropology of Consciousness* 7/4 (December 1966): 31-50, under the title "Tribal Lore in Present-day Paleoanthropology: A Case Study" and was also presented as a guest lecture in Social Anthropology at Trondheim University (Norway) in 1996. A still shorter version was presented at the March 1996 meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness held in conjunction with the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division meeting. A much longer version of the essay is forthcoming in *The Primacy of Movement* (John Benjamins Publishing, "Advances in Consciousness Research" Series).

1 If the former, then Neandertals are properly designated taxonomically as *Homo sapiens neandertalensis;* if the latter, then they are properly designated taxonomically as *Homo neandertalensis.*

2 Christopher Stringer and Clive Gamble, *In Search of the Neanderthals: Solving the Puzzle of Human Origins* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 204. Note: Britishers hold to the original spelling of Neandertals, i.e., they have not dropped the silent "h," which in any event was not pronounced in German even before the orthographic reform.

3 Ibid., p. 213.

4 Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 25.

5 Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* (New York: New American Library, 1948), p. 38.

6 Firth, *Symbols,* p. 15.

7 Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* p. 37.

8 Albert A. Johnstone, "Languages and Non-Languages of Dance," *Illuminating Dance: Philosophical Explorations,* ed. M. Sheets-Johnstone (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1984), p. 167.

9 The phrase "persistent whole" comes from J. S. Haldane, *The Philosophical Basis of Biology* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1931), p. 13.

10 Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Thinking* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

11 C. R. Carpenter, "Societies of Monkeys and Apes," in *Primate Social Behavior,* ed. Charles H. Southwick (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1963), pp. 49-50.
12 Phyllis J. Dolhinow, "The North Indian Langur," *Primate Patterns,* ed. Phyllis J. Dolhinow (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), pp. 85-124.
13 J. A. R. A. M. van Hoof, "The Facial Displays of the Catarrhine Monkeys and Apes," in *Primate Ethology,* ed. Desmond Morris (Garden City: Anchor, 1969), pp. 52, 58.
14 Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, "The Myth of the Aggression-Free Hunter and Gatherer Society," in *Primate Aggression, Territoriality, and Xenophobia,* ed. Ralph L. Holloway (New York: Academic Press, 1974), pp. 435-57.
15 For a further discussion of the semantic dimension of living bodies, see, for example, Swiss biologist Adolph Portmann's, *Animal Forms and Patterns,* trans. Hella Czech (NY: Schocken Books, 1967).
16 See Sigmund Freud, *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Modern Library, 1938), and *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* 24 vols., ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), vols. 4 and 5; Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: New American Library, 1948) and *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953); André Leroi-Gourhan, *Préhistoire de l'art occidental* (Paris: Mazenod, 1971); Mary LeCron Foster, "The Symbolic Structure of Primordial Language, in *Human Evolution: Biosocial Perspectives,* ed. Sherwood L. Washburn and Elizabeth R. McCown (Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings, 1978), pp. 77-121.
17 See Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Thinking,* pp. 126-28 for a discussion of species-specific bodily experiences in relation to primatologist Stuart Altmann's concept of "comsigns."
18 Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (New York: Liveright, 1963), p. 148.
19 Peter Marler, "On the Origin of Speech from Animal Sounds," in *The Role of Speech in Language,* ed. J. F. Kavanagh and J. E. Cutting (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975), pp. 11-37, and "An Ethological Theory of the Origin of Vocal Learning," in *Origins and Evolution of Language and Speech,* ed. Stevan R. Harnad, Horst D. Steklis, and Jane B. Lancaster, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 280 (1976): 386-95; and Richard Dawkins and J. R. Krebs, "Animal Signals: Information or Manipulation?" in *Behavioural Ecology,* eds. J. R. Krebs and N. B. Davies (London: Basil Blackwell, 1978), pp. 282-309.
20 Karl von Frisch, *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964) and *The Dance Language and Orientation of Bees* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).
21 Adult male baboons grind their teeth and display their canines (yawn) as a threat gesture. Iconicity is clearly apparent in these gestures. See K. R. L. Hall and Irven De Vote, "Baboon Social Behavior," *Primate Patterns,* ed. Phyllis Dolhinow (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), pp. 125-180.
22 See E. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and R. Bakeman, "Spontaneous Gestural Communication among Conspecifics in the Pygmy Chimpanzee *(Pan paniscus),"* in *Progress in Ape Research,* ed. G. H. Bourne (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 97-116; see also Sheets-Johnstone *The Roots of Thinking* for an analysis of bonobo gestural communication as analogical behavior-or corporeal representation.
23 Nicholas Toth, personal communication. See also his article, "The First Technology," *Scientific American* 256 (1987): 112-21 in which the connection between dentition and tools, though implicit, is forcefully clear. See also Mary LeCron Foster, "Meaning as Metaphor I," *Quaderni di semantica* 3, no. 1 (1982): 95-102; Milford H. Wolpoff, *Paleoanthropology* (New York: Knopf, 1980), pp. 92 and 168, for example; and A. Mann, "Hominid and Cultural Origins," *Man* n.s. 7 (1972): 379-86.
24 Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Thinking,* p. 26.
25 John Lukacs, personal communication.

26 For example, with respect to the "smaller societies throughout the Ancients' world," Stringer and Gamble write that "It was, in terms of hominid colonization, half a million years or more of inaction" *(In Search of the Neanderthals,* p. 215); with respect to the absence of the Ancients in eastern Siberia, they write, "Food was always available in these habitats, it was simply high-risk to exploit" (p. 216.); with respect to language, after remarking that Neanderthals "no doubt spoke, albeit simply and probably slowly, they write that "Neanderthals lacked complex spoken language because they did not need it. (p. 217). All of these judgments are judgments of people Stringer and Gamble know only by indirect evidence. The judgments are exceptionally broad and denigrating, considering that first-hand knowledge is in the form of fragmentary, open-ended, and for the most part quite fortuitously discovered evidence. Paleoanthropologist Erik Trinkaus has remarked in the following way on these kinds of limitations: "[O]ur current paleoanthropological record is incomplete and . . . our interpretations of later Pleistocene human evolution will change as further discoveries are made. Furthermore, the information available at one time to any one researcher or group of researchers is an incomplete set of the potentially available data set. Therefore, all interpretations can be realistically seen as no more than state-of-the-art conclusions, inevitably to fall or be modified as the field progresses" ("Cladistics and Later Pleistocene Human Evolution," in *Continuity or Replacement,* eds. Gunter Brauer and Fred H. Smith [Rotterdam: A. A. Balkema, 1992], pp. 1-7, p. 2).

27 Stringer and Gamble, *In Search of the Neanderthals,* p. 207: "We suspect . . . that the [Neandertal] structures at Molodova and Arcy-sur-Cure more resembled 'nests' than the symbolic 'homes' of the Moderns at Kostenki or Doni Vestonice."

28 Ibid., p. 159: "[W]hether it was a burial in the modern sense or more akin to rubbish disposal is the point at issue."

29 Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Hunting and the Evolution of Human Intelligence: An Alternative View," *Midwest Quarterly* 28/1 (Autumn 1986): 9-35, p. 9.

30 See, for example, Wolfgang Wickler, "Socio-Sexual Signals and Their Intra-Specific Imitation Among Primates," in Desmond Morris, *Primate Ethology* (New York: Anchor Books, 1%9), pp. 89-189; see also Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Thinking,* chapter 4, for a discussion of basic male sexual signalling behaviors.

31 See Yoel Rak, "Kebara 2 Neanderthal Pelvis: First Look at a Complete Inlet," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 73 (1987): 227-231; "Morphological Variation in *Homo neanderthalensis* and *Homo sapiens* in the Levant: A Biogeographic Model," in *Species. Species concepts. and Primate Evolution,* ed. William H. Kimbel and Lawrence B. Martin (New York: Plenum Press, 1993), pp. 523- 36; Erik Trinkaus, *The Shanidar Neanderthals* (New York: Academic Press, 1983X Trinkaus and Smith, "The Fate of the Neandertals"; Milford H. Wolpoff, Paleoanthropology (New York: Knopf, 1980).

32 Stringer and Gamble, *In Search of the Neanderthals,* p. 93.

33 Alice Brues, "The Spearman and the Archer—An Essay on Selection in Body Build," *American Anthropologist* n.s. 61 (1959): 457-69.

34 Ibid., p. 458.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 462.

37 The term "I can" comes from philosopher Edmund Husserl, whose descriptive account of this fundamental animate power *(Ich kann)* is fundamental to an understanding of animate life in general, not just the animate life of humans. See his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy Book 2,* trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989). For a discussion of the concept specifically as it relates to paleoanthropological studies, see Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Thinking.*

38 David W. Frayer, "Body Size, Weapon Use, and Natural Selection in the European

Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic," *American Anthropologist* 83 (1981): 57-72, p. 69.

39 Brues, "Spearman and Archer," p. 461. To be noted is the altogether new perspective on the environment in which upright hominids emerged. Rather than moving out to "open prairie country where continuous running and leaping were possible," early hominids are thought to have emerged "in the relative safety of the forests while living next to their cousins, the apes. *On the Edge* [Institute for Science, Engineering and Public Policy, Portland, OR] 1/6 (February 19%): 3. (See also, Geoffrey Cowley and Amy Salzhauer, "Humankind's First Steps," *Time,* August 28, 1995, 64.)

40 Erik Trinkaus, "Neanderthal Limb Proportions and Cold Adaptation," in *Aspects of Human Evolution,* ed. C. B. Stringer (London: Taylor and Francis, 1981), pp. 187-224.

41 Stringer and Gamble, *In Search of the Neanderthals,* p. 215. Cf. Niles Eldridge and Ian Tattersall, *The Myths of Human Evolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 3: "The data, or basic observations, of evolutionary biology are full of the message of stability. Change is difficult and rare, rather than inevitable and continual. Once evolved, species with their own peculiar adaptations, behaviors, and genetic systems are remarkably conservative, often remaining unchanged for several millions of years." Eldredge and Tattersall later pointedly equate lack of change with a successful way of life (Ibid., p. 7).

42 It is, in fact, inconsistent in an evolutionary sense. For example, how can earlier hominids be cherished for their stone tool-making accomplishments, which are not judged by the standard of successive "improvements" over time, and Neandertals disdained for what is deemed their lack of stone tool-making accomplishments on the basis of a lack of successive "improvements" over time? The valuing and devaluing of our ancestors-be they close kin or distant relatives—personalizes evolutionary history in ways that detract from the history itself.

43 Stringer and Gamble, *In Search of the Neanderthals,* p. 210.

44 Stephen Jay Gould, "So Near and Yet So Far," *New York Review of Books* 41/17 (20 October 1994): 24-28, p. 27. Gould speaks of "the traditional *summum bonum* of bigger brains ... because big brains are so good to have" in the context of discussing the controversy over the correct taxonomic placement of Neandertals. Although he aligns "the traditional *summum bonum* of bigger brains" with those holding a multi-regional (Africa, Europe, Asia) evolution of modern humans, "the traditional *summum bonum* of bigger brains" is clearly at the helm of those claiming a single (African) origin as well-as the writings of Stringer and Gamble well attest. This is essentially because pursuit of "the traditional *summum bonum* of bigger brains" is not a matter of which theory one holds but a matter of an implicit and highly potent belief in the mind/body dichotomy.

45 *The* significant difference is unequivocally clear in Stringer and Gamble: "[T]he main structural difference distinguishing the Moderns from the Ancients was the practice of symbolically organized behaviour." Ibid., p. 207.

46 Gould, "So Near and Yet So Far," p. 27.

47 Stringer and Gamble, *In Search of the Neanderthals,* p. 218.

48 Stephen Jay Gould, "Evolution by Walking," *Natural History* 104/3 (March 1995): 10-15.

49 Ibid., pp. 13, 14, respectively.

50 Ibid., p. 15.

51 Ibid., p. 10.

52 The idea of conceiving morphology in terms of animate form coincides obliquely with Freud's notion that "anatomy is destiny." The latter notion obviously requires kinesthetic/kinetic and in turn conceptual fleshing out. It of course also requires de-

sexualization in the sense of being cleansed of its male bias. For related discussions of these matters, see Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Power: Animate Form and Gendered Bodies* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1994).

53 Paul Mellars, "Technological Changes across the Middle-Upper Palaeolithic Transition: Economic, Social and Cognitive Perspectives," in *The Human Revolution,* eds. Paul Mellars and Chris Stringer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 338-365., p. 338.

54 Ibid., pp. 344, 346, respectively.

55 Lest anyone think these are mere "impressions," I should note that while Mellars speaks of the need for more "systematic analyses" of the Middle and Upper-Palaeolithic technologies, he himself relies on what he calls "intuitive impressions" (Ibid., p. 345). He speaks of such impressions as "pragmatic observations," i.e., intuiting the use of a tool (its type) on the basis of its morphology.

56 Ibid., pp. 358-60.

57 Ibid., p. 357.

58 C. L. Brace and M. F. Ashley Montagu, *Man's Evolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 248.

59 Mary C. Stiner, *Honor Among Thieves: A Zooarchaeological Study of Neandertal Ecology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

60 Steven L. Kuhn, *Mousterian Lithic Technology: An Ecological Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 171.

61 Ibid., p. 156.

62 Ibid., p. 171.

63 Richard G. Klein, *The Human Career: Human Biological and Cultural Origins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 397.

64 Ibid., p. 356.

65 Ibid., p. 334.

66 Such innovative-and liberating–intimations are few and far between in physical anthropology in particular and paleoanthropological literature in general, and they are quickly put to rest, as, for example, when Klein asks apropos anatomically modern humans, "Why did the evolution of behavior lag behind the evolution of form?" and responds: "Perhaps the answer is that body form was only superficially modern and that some further neurological change was still necessary for full modernity" (Ibid., p. 410). The implication, of course, is that hominid brains had not yet fully matured, i.e., that while visible bodies were ready "for full modernity," minds were not. Klein suggests as much when he forthrightly declares in an earlier passage that "Plainly, it was culture and not body form that propelled the human species from a relatively rare and insignificant mammal 35,000 years ago to a geologic force today" (Ibid., p. 397). Although Klein does not raise the question of where that propulsive culture came from, he intimates that it developed as a result of brain maturation. In short, minds beget culture; bodies simply beget more bodies. As for the notion of "a behavioral lag," one might well be puzzled and ask, Did the evolution of behavior lag behind the evolution of form? The implied delay of "*summum bonum* bigger brains" aside, lagging behavior strongly suggests that something was amiss in the creatures in question; their behavior was somehow deficient, less than it should be. In a sense, saying that anatomically modern humans showed a behavioral lag in not acceding sooner to "full modernity" is like saying that lobefinned fish, since they had bodies that were adaptable to land, were behaviorally deficient in not moving onto land sooner, thus speeding up the process of evolution rather than letting it drag along.

67 Motor physiologists use the term "ballistic" to refer to movement in which there is no feedback in the period between the initiation and completion of a movement, the hit "target" being the only self-correcting device. But ballistic movement

warrants fuller study in terms of animate form.

68 "Not only were the bones of the Shanidar Neandertals exceptionally stout and robust, . . . but the locations at which muscles were attached to those bones enhanced the power with which the biceps muscle could bend the elbow or with which the forearm muscles rotated the hand into a supine (palm-up) or prone (palm-down) position-important maneuvers in thrusting with a spear, for example" (Erik Trinkaus and Pat Shipman, *The Neandertals* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993], p. 381). See also, Brues, "The Spearman and the Archer, p. 462, for a discussion of the kinetic technique of bludgeoning.

69 These ideas concerning ballistic movement were first considered in Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Evolutionary Residues and Uniquenesses in Human Movement," *Evolutionary Theory* 6 (April 1983): 205-209.

70 See, for example, Klein, *The Human Career,* p. 344.

71 For sources on Labanotation, see, for example, Rudolf Laban,*Laban's Principles of Dance and Movement Notation*, 2nd ed., ed. Roderyk Lange (Boston: Plays, 1975); Ann Hutchinson, *Labanotation,* rv. ed. (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1970). For sources on Effort/Shape notation, see, for example, Irmgard Bartenieff and Dori Lewis, *Body Movement-Coping with the Environment* (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1980); Irmgard Bartenieff, Martha Davis, and Forrestine Paulay, *Four Adaptations of Effort Theory in Research and Teaching* (New York: Dance Notation Bureau, 1970). For sources on Benesch notation, see Rudolf Benesh and Joan Benesh, *An Introduction to Benesh Movement Notation: Dance,* rev. ed. (New York: Dance Horizons, 1969). For sources on Eshkol-Wachmann, see Noa Eshkol and Abraham Wachmann, *Movement Notation* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1958). For a general discussion of movement notation systems, see Suzanne Youngerman, "Movement Notation Systems as Conceptual Frameworks: The Laban System," in *Illuminating Dance: Philosophical Explorations,* ed. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1984), pp. 101-23. For interesting ethological applications of movement notation, see Ilan Golani, "Homeostatic Motor Processes in Mammalian Interactions: A Choreography of Display," in *Perspectives in Ethology,* vol. 2, eds. P. P. G. Bateson and P. H. Klopfer (New York: Plenum Publishing, 1976), pp. 69-134, and "The Search for Invariants in Motor Behavior, in Behavioral Development, eds. Klaus Immelman, George W. Burlow, Lewis Petrinovitch, Mary Main (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 372-390; see also, G. Moran, J. C. Fentress, and I. Golani, "A Description of Relational Patterns of Movement During 'Ritualized Fighting' in Wolves," *Animal Behavior* 29 (1981): 1146-65.

72 Trinkaus and Shipman, *The Neandertals,* p. 381.

73 Ibid., p. 380.

74 For a detailed analysis of the methodology and the operative criterion for arriving at such paleoanthropological reconstructions, see Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Thinking;*. specifically chapters 13 and 14 which address methodological procedures and issues. For a related perspective on the merit of examining what it is like to be a body one is not and the conceptual implications of being that body, see Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Power: Animate Form and Gendered Bodies.* pp. 328-330.

Bryan Johnson

H. DE SOTO

The theologian bears toward roosting,

a woman in the bath suckles a nail

and there it is, the whiteness of holding out promise,

of thick moss groves of enemies sewn into pillows.

This year abides a few drips

of ink licked clean from the sharp angles stiff feet

in the ant bed and history unfinishes the untraceable

splintered hero wedged in a ragged garden.

Dark little cherubs girdle against snaring in fanatic hovels,

their blitheness in homespun splendor plots like a shirt.

This forest ancient as a closed eyelid digging its claws

blown vagabond or frustrate flicker of amnesia where

a girl lies insensible pinned in the viper's undergrowth,

in the far-off captaincy each barefooted hock

stepping into the old ice-born squadron of place names and
sorrow

a brocade something to puncture the cheek

and light of the dead planets placed in its stead.

This is fine this riffling of trees.

A faded forest ensnares a tongue scuttled in the pocket,

then the other sheltered lily

a trooping festival roaming the slackened brakes.

Antics of fertile families stamped in a wildflower garden

edging attack shadowy haystack girl buccaneering past the saddler's spittoon.

One flicker of disbelief is clearly nothing,

a fingernail purloined from the beak of a dying bird.

Mutiny is the bond against setting to roost in untraceable nestings,

this shade of sliced kite finger tips rumbling up the back,

the wooded bluffs by exploding are remnant

vagrancy in the little mouth's teary-eyed footprints,

the parasol its longitude its cinders launched for the first dog arrival.

Slipping a plague of paper glides into tent holes.

The elegiac foundling named in the out-of-bounds

who scratches the gate with his hands coveys hum in the pathless brazen garden,

the sentinel flies stirring newfound sorrow

forever untouched averting the bird's cold cheek.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

WHAT WAS FORMALISM?

I have recently come across an anthology with a fire-alarm red cover, an inflammatory title *(Rebel Angels),* and a gaseous introduction whose first word is "Revolution." It is not, as one might expect, a lost artifact of the Beat Generation, but rather a Molotov cocktail tossed by the radical right of poetry, the self-styled "New Formalists."

According to these Rebel Angels—who, like most conservatives, have short historical memories for what they are conserving—it was during the "cultural upheavals of the 60s and 70s" that formalism, defined as "meter and rhyme," was "largely. . .abandoned by American poets." The result was that "poetry and prose became nearly indistinguishable." [The 150 years of prose poetry aside, to what are they referring? People reading projective verse mysteries at the beach?] Happily, however, certain poets—Wilbur, Nemerov, Hecht, Van Duyn, among them—"courageous in their commitment to their art," withstood the onslaught, kept the faith, and inspired a renaissance launched by those misfits of the Generation of '68 for whom *baba* was a rhyme-scheme and not a guru, and who are now in their forties and fifties.

The formalism they have collectively revived is not merely "the art of making poems in measured speech." It "assumes a valued civility . . .a larger cultural vision that restores harmony and balance to the arts." According to the poet Timothy Steele, formalist poetry, more than any "other pursuit," can "nourish"

> a love of nature, an enthusiasm for justice, a readiness of good humor, a spontaneous susceptibility to beauty and joy, an interest in our past, a hope for our future, and, above all, a desire that others should have the opportunity and encouragement to share these qualities

which presumably were and are absent from "free verse," not to mention the "other" pursuits. The thought that justice and equal opportunity are the hallmarks of a flourishing formalist verse culture (such as Victorian England, the Court of Versailles, Heian Kyoto. . .)

belongs in a parallel universe, perhaps one where a group named after Lucifer & Co. promotes hope, good humor, beauty, and joy.

Rebel Angels collects the poems, each labeled with the form it employs, of twenty-five poets "deserving attention for the beauty, accuracy and memorability of their language, as well as their feelings and ideas." They "represent nothing less than a revolution, a fundamental change, in the art of poetry as it is practiced in this country"—and, if poets deserve attention for their feelings, a revolution in criticism as well.

As a devotee of poetic revolutions, formal or informal, I cracked the book at random, hoping for a new specter haunting America. But these were the first lines of the first poem I read:

> We stood on the rented patio
> While the party went on inside.
> You knew the groom from college.
> I was a friend of the bride. . .

Every revolution must lose a few skirmishes, so I flipped again, to a rebel sonnet:

> Four years ago I started reading Proust.
> Although I'm past the halfway point, I still
> Have seven hundred pages of reduced
> Type left before I reach the end. I will. . .

As Charles Reznikoff used to say, when I come to a poem like this, I turn the page. On to another sonnet, titled, unpromisingly, "The View from an Airplane at Night, Over California":

> This is a sight that Wordsworth never knew. . .

I had thought that this particular trope had been buried forever, forty years ago, by Kenneth Koch's famous parody of academic poetry: "This Connecticut landscape would have pleased Vermeer."

Turning the pages, there were too many titles that inspired me to turn the page: "On Leaving the Artist's Colony"; "Convalescing in London"; "Remembering the Ardèche"; "Grand Central Station, 20 December 1987" ("The clock's so huge you can watch the minute hand"); "Back Trouble" ("And so to bed. . .") "Approaching a Significant Birthday, He Peruses *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*"; "Moments of Summer"; an unironic "To Be Sung on the Fourth of July"; "Blue Jay" ("A sound like a rusty pump beneath our window/ Woke us at dawn.

Drawing the curtains back,/ We saw through milky light, above the doghouse—/ A blue jay lecturing a neighbor's cat."); "Dinner at Le Caprice"; "Those Paperweights with Snow Inside" (speaking of "accuracy," they're called snow globes) and so on through bland but happy career lives, now apparently available to poets, male and female, of all races, regions, and sexual preferences (all of which are represented here). The only note of incivility was a leering sexuality ("The Rapist's Villanelle," "Satyr, Cunnilinguent: To Herman Melville," "Victoria's Secret") that was creepy in its adolescent *frisson* of formalism and pseudo-lewdness, and entirely lacking in genuine perversity—as is found in that bizarre form-meister, Philip Larkin, who used to exchange spanking magazines with the expert on Stalin's atrocities.

But I paused at a numbing title, "The Lost Bee," because the line by Allen Tate which inspired the poem—"As a lost bee returning to the hive"—seemed to embody an eighth type of ambiguity, lack of sense. (As Mark Twain said, "I wasn't lost, just slightly misplaced.") "The Lost Bee" begins:

> When I returned to the hive I was one
> Among many, in a blistering hum.
> A braid of air had brought me far from home
> —Blinder than flowers, simpler than the sun. . .

The poem, involving some sort of first-person apian epiphany, was as bad as "braid of air" promises, but what interested me was its identification, in the forms index, as "envelope quatrains, iambic tetrameter, iambic pentameter." An envelope quatrain rhymes, like the elogists of the Dancing Queen, *abba,* as the first quatrain did (with a slight "off" on hum/home). The second quatrain had a second slight "off: curves/ serve and give/grave. But the third and then the fourth increasingly fell off the rhyme chart: god/strand, lose/skies, dance/space, and sense/ encodes. This was starting to look like that dreaded tennis without a net, free verse itself. Then I went back to the first quatrain, quoted above. The second line had only managed one iamb in its four feet—in athletics it would have been a disqualification. On the next page was a poem by the same author labeled as "alternating, envelope, and ballad quatrains, iambic trimeter." Five of the ten quatrains were none of these forms, and a stanza like "And the brightest halo/ Shrinks to a shadow/ Gray as a noose./ Intangible truths" was hardly iambic or trimetric.

I began to suspect that the vaunted strictures of the New Formalism were rather like the rules in a household with small children: tiny attempts at maintaining order, frequently reiterated, and rarely ob-

served. Very few Rebel Angels attempted anything more difficult than a sonnet, and only a few even tried their hands at these. Many of the poems merely kept to regular stanza forms, without rhyme—as countless "free verse" poems do. The rhymes themselves were astonishingly banal (brook/book, well/tell, park/dark, eye/sky, storm/warm, etc.); not a one even approached the wit of popular song: Bob Dylan ("the pump don't work/ 'cause the vandals/ took the handles") or Smokey Robinson or Moss Hart or Curtis Mayfield or John Lennon or nearly any song by Cole Porter ("Let's throw away anxiety, let's quite forget propriety,/ Respectable society, the rector and his piety,/ And contemplate l'amour in all its infinite variety,/ My dear, let's talk about love.").

And nearly every poem was written in three, four, or five feet of iambs. What is difficult, as Pound said at the beginning of the century, is not to write in iambs: "to break the HEAVE." After all, most of what we say in English is an unstressed monosyllabic personal pronoun or possessive or preposition or article followed by a stressed monosyllabic noun or verb (one iamb) or a disyllabic noun or verb stressed on its first syllable (one and a half iambs). Most polysyllabic words have alternating stresses. When one adds the permissible trochee at the beginning of the line, the permissible anapests anywhere, and all the other little infractions—exceptions that are supposed to make the rule—it may well be that the iamb is no more a formal quality than standard spelling.

Add to this the facts that the division into strictly stressed and unstressed syllables is inappropriate to English, that a line may have many possible scansions according to how it is read ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"), and that off-rhymes, some quite farfetched, "count" in a rhyme-scheme, and we are left with a system of measurement as organic and untechnical as Williams' much-derided "variable foot" (which, by the way, is what English-language poets have always practiced). The only American formalists of the century may well turn out to be Louis Zukofsky, John Cage, and Jackson Mac Low, who invented their own, idiosyncratic and inflexible rules: placement of letters according to mathematical or mystical formulae, predetermined word lists and selection processes, and so on.

I'm sorry, but these Rebel Angels are wimps, cafe Republicans measuring out their lives in coffee spoons that keep changing size. For real formalism, we must go to the Old Formalism, to the days when forms were forms and form had nothing to do with etiquette. We must go back, that is, to the Vikings:

Viking formalism meant, for example, that to write a mere epitaph of ordinary statements and sentiments for a tomb—such as "Here lies a

warrior famed for his virtue. Denmark will never know a more honorable sea-captain, or one stronger in battle"—one began with a common stanza form, such as the *dróttkvatt.*

This stanza form had eight lines, broken into two half-stanzas of four lines, each expressing a single thought, that were, in turn, divided into two couplets. Each line had six syllables; only three could be stressed (and Old Norse, as one can imagine, had genuine stresses). The first line of each couplet had to have two stressed syllables that began with the same sound, which was also the sound of the first stressed syllable in the next line. (The other stressed syllables could not be alliterate.) The two stressed alliterative syllables in the first line could not rhyme; but the first stressed alliterative syllable in the second line had to rhyme with another syllable in the same line to which it was not alliterative.

The word order was completely unlike that of prose. For example, the structure of a normal prose sentence of 16 words (taking 1, 2, 3, etc., as the words in their proper prose order) looks like this in a relatively simple half-stanza:

2 4 5 3
1 8 9 6 7
12 10 13 14
11 15 16

In a more complex poem, poetic syntax is further stretched by fragmenting and reassembling the clauses. For example, back to the sea-captain and the first half-stanza. ("Here lies a warrior famed for his virtue. . .") The poet employs a *kenning,* or epithet, for warrior ("the one who carried out the work of Prudr, goddess of battles"), and the whole sentence reads literally: "Under this mound is hidden the one who carried out the work of Prudr, goddess of battles, whom the greatest virtues accompanied; most men knew that." (Though the Old Norse only has 15 words.)

The poem (keeping the literal English prose syntax) breaks this into something like:

Under this mound whom the greatest
most men knew that virtues
accompanied the one who carried out the work of Prudr
goddess of battles is hidden

The pattern of clauses is:

1 3
4 3
3 2
2 1

This was merely a tombstone epitaph, not a particularly memorable poem. It was written, as all poetry was, in a single line. (The ragged right-hand margin is a by-product of the availability of cheap paper.) There were no spaces between the words. The form of the poem was musically, not visually, evident—and evident to all its readers or listeners—and was only one of many such forms, most of them even more complex.

In a famous Icelandic story in the sagas, Hallbjörn of Pingvellir wanted to compose a poem in praise of a dead poet. He fell asleep on the poet's burial mound and dreamed that the mound opened, a tall man appeared, and said, "There you lie, Hallbjörn of Pingvellir, trying to do something you are incapable of doing—composing a poem in praise of me." The dead poet then taught Hallbjörn all the forms while he dreamed. They took many years to master, but in the end he wrote his poem.

Bruce Beasley

TWO POEMS

HERMETIC SELF-PORTRAIT

avoiding likeness and autobio-
graphic gesture

1.

Mid-gut
of the imago, the instars'
moults. And the grasshopper
becomes a burden. In the suburbs, cicadas
seethe from the ground
every seventeen years

(forty thousand from the roots
of one tree)
to breed, and die.
And the empty skins
crackle everywhere underfoot,
tiny golden shells
hung on every surface.

Slough of the tough
carapace, dark thorax, red
front-margin of the wings
pumped full of juice.

Shriek. The ribbed
snaredrums of their abdomens—

the grackles are terrified
by their buzz-saw
song, the neighbors deafened by it. . .

Where am I
in this

emergence–

2.

Ground punctured with exit holes.
Convulsive
split of the husk: bulbous
eyes, and greasy wings–

This coming
out of oneself, for good, this
leaving hundred of eggs behind–

This leaving
a finished body behind. . .

Can a man bear a child,
Jeremiah asks,
the resurrection nymph's

disturbance-squawk. . .

3.

Can a man *bear*

a child. *Mutare,* to change. From which comes
moult. Their music-making
is a mating call, hollow
longing sound like *pharaoh, pharaoh–*

On my parents' tombstone, a dying cicada.
Having bred. It crawled up my pantsleg
when I touched it, the pitched

squeal of its brood around us–

No bouquet
laid down. I'm all out of *white* roses,
the florist had said,
I'm all out of *red* roses, too,
I don't have a single carnation left,

to be honest with you,
I'm plumb out of *every* kind of flower,

I don't even know why I'm here. . .

4.

Foghorn
as the music
of insomnia, sounding

all night from the whited-
out harbor
a mile away. . .

Mist in the nursery window,
three balloons tethered
to the new crib.

In the hall outside,
I stroke my mother's hair,
sealed into her still-life's

oilpaint, stray black S
through the pink carnation,
seventeen years

she's been gone. . . Warning
of the foghorn's hollow
four-second moan,

stilled music
of insomnia, means
of finding ground.

5.

Brood. To tell you the truth,
I'm plumb
out of incarnation,
crunched shells
of cicadas, empty
chitinous husks, the nymphs
tunneling into the loam, for a dormant
life. . .

Long wait
while the nursery fills
with hand-me-downs, with gifts—

(Ground littered with dead bodies, stiffened
wings)

Staring
at the fog-window,
drag of the white, half-visible balloons,

drag of scraggled
lines across the page:

I don't even know
why *I'm* here.

6.

Mid-gut
of the imago, the instars'
moults. And the grasshopper
a burden.

Mutilus: maimed. Mutation.
Mutatis mutandis, *the necessary*
changes have been made.

Your hurt is incurable, says the Lord.
Your pain is incurable,
and your wounds

I will heal–

So let me come
out of myself, a syncronous
burrowing out of the earth:

black S, still
life, crib's
white balloons, stridulous

cry, long
deep tones in fog or darkness,
pink painted carnation, seventeenth year

in this emergence. I make the sign
of the cross
over the two names on the grave,

over the belly-up cicada–then its wings
flapping wild in my face, my glasses knocked off–
Bear a child, bear a child

underground, mutable
carapace, twigs drilled full of eggs–
imago, white roses,

abandoned exit
holes, the moult
incurable, necessary: plumb

out. . .

SERMONS ON UNBELIEF

Sermons on unbelief ever did
attract me–
–Emily Dickinson

I.

Good Friday. Blood orange and Billie Holiday.
The cross adored, in the streets: torchlight
on cobblestone, huddles of brown-hooded monks.
Hushed procession of believers. I watched
the bearer of the wooden cross
watch me, through a restaurant's purple curtains:
day of fasting, splayed meat on a plate,
empty beaker of wine. At three,
under the sacred, bell-jarred head
of St. Catherine, I tried, in slurred Italian,
to ask a priest where the services were;
he directed me to the restroom. Service

of redemption: Stations of the Cross
on primetime TV, crucifix of fire on the Colisseum walls.
Then blues, and fruit. Drill-whine and hammer-on-metal
of restoration in San Domenico: we waited
half the afternoon for the services
that never began, and translated
a newspaper story about thirty-nine dead
of applesauce and phenobarbitol,
who believed a spaceship from comet Hale-Bopp
would take them to a higher evolution. Hushed
procession of believers. Purple
handkerchiefs over their faces.
Credevano di essere angeli. . .
A priest slapped the paper, told me
this was a place for prayer.

All day we'd been looking for converters
for the blowdryer, the laptop.
Watching souls crawl out of Limbo
at the touch of the harrowing Christ.
Higher evolution. Museum guard,
when we asked her what "castita" meant,
said "non fare niente, non fare il sesso"—
Not doing anything. Not having sex.
The cult's leader had himself castrated.
In the allegory of Chastity, the virtuous
hunch their bodies against Love; Cupid
aims, anyway, from his pit of flames.
Billie Holiday. Non fare il sesso.
The flaming swordtips of Eden,
closed. How Adam and Eve
recoil, even in Limbo, from Christ.
Already harrowed. Telnet
statler.cc.wwu.edu: the longing for e-mail's
transmundane conversion of phonewire and byte.
Lux Mundi. Cybercafe,
500 lire per minute online. Converting
lire to dollars, liters to gallons, lux
mundi to luce del mondo.

The light shone in the darkness and the darkness knew it not.
Mea maxima culpa. Imagine
what an insane cult the Romans
must have thought the Christians were,
the Son of God flown down from heaven
to rescue us from our sins. . .: Easter feast,
all our talk's about the Heaven's Gate
cult. Castrated faithful heaped in their villa.
Believing themselves to be angels. Non fanno niente.

II.

Palm Sunday Mass, Rome, Santa
Maria degli Angeli:
sun-stab through one panel of stained
glass (saint's-face in scarlet) over
the convert frescoed by the altar. Whose arms
reach toward a wingbeat of angels. Sun's
burned circle around the dim
figure, till all I could see
was one hand, blistered toward the angel's
receding flock of wing and gown.
Palms wilted on the pews
of the church converted from Diocletian's
tepidarium baths. Ten people at Mass,
newspapers under their arms. This
is a place of prayer. Convert
eradicated in her ring of fire,
while the little bell jangled in
the Transubstantiation

into flesh.
I'd spent the morning looking for an ATM.
Sportello automatico. Electric
candles in their banks under an altar.
Where the service is. Exposed
buttocks of a guard in Sodoma,

at the base of the cross. Cleft where the painter's real
obsession lay.
The body they're hauling down with ropes
and pulleys meant nothing compared to the taut
musculature of the thighs, the near
transparence of the uniform
over the ass. Sodom,
ashheaps, pillar of salt. The Deposition's
a project for engineers, all ballast and angle.
How to get down from the cross. When we learn how to die,
Montaigne said, we'll unlearn how to be slaves.
Hale-Bopp over via Cassia, its tail of endless arrival.
Heaven's Gate on the Internet, click and you'll learn
how to die.

Blood orange. Billie Holiday. Gloomy Sunday.
My heart and I have decided to end it all.
O triumphant holy day. Then another
hallelujah. God, with the Cross in His hands.
Spattered blood at the nailholes. Adored. Bring me a mustard
seed,
said the Buddha to a woman whose child had died,
from any house that has never known death, and I'll raise
him.
She wandered the city, counting the dead
from each family. Ashheaps, pillar of salt. Kingdom
of heaven like a mustard seed. Dwell in the wounds
of Christ, the *Imitation* advises.
The feat of getting the body down from the cross:
levers, pulleys, ropes, hard
strain in the muscles of the buttocks.
Heaped bodies. Then another hallelujah, and an amen.

III.

Drill-whine of restoration. This
business of bringing down the divine:
Michelangelo's made his self-portrait

in Nicodemus, hauling Christ off the cross. Dwell
in the wounds. Spark
of graphite as he chipped the marred
block of marble. Then smashed Christ's body,
disgusted with the stone that never would yield
the human image. Che bel
marmo hai rovinato. Christ, missing one leg.
Monk under the cross, faceless and staring from his brown
hood.
In the Gate of Paradise, God and the angels
together yank Eve out of Adam's side. Hard
labor. Already harrowed. Angel wings
hide Adam's genitals, during the Temptation. Not doing
anything, not having sex.
And it burned, burned, burned,
the ring of fire. Down the divine. Cain bludgeons Abel,
Abraham
yanks Isaac by the hair and bares the rough knife to his neck.
What failed human images. Phenobarbitol
and applesauce.

Gate of Paradise, replaced
panel by panel with copies.
The door itself is a reproduction now. You can't
trust anything you look at
in Italy, it's all a fake,
my barber said. They're scared
somebody will smash the real statues so they've got them
locked up in a vault.
You might as well just look in a book. Resplendent
shadows of Plato's cave. The imitation
advises. Webpage of Heaven's Gate, help thou my unbelief.
Logged on, and on. Shed
our flesh and rise to the mother
ship. Untouchable angel. Mary
hovers over the iron nails through the feet
somewhere in the Uffizi. Touches them, like Thomas.
Annunciation without lilies. She believes. Heaped
bodies, reliquary of miscellaneous saints:

femur, finger, knucklebone. The missing leg of Christ.
Both of Paul's index fingers, in separate jars in one room.
You can't trust anything you look at, it's all a fake.

IV.

Eve, in Masaccio, covers her genitals; Adam, only his eyes.
It's too late not to be naked. Not too late to be blind.
You get fifteen minutes to see the Brancacci Chapel,
with thirty other people (locked up in a vault).
Elbowing for a view of Expulsion.
Trying to remember who paid who the Tribute Money,
why Adam and Eve are in the scene, why Peter's upside
    down.
Till the guard blinks his light, says it's time, and you go.

All day we'd spent looking for a converter. Old ladies
shoving and kicking their way to the Host
at Easter Mass. This is my flesh. Hale-Bopp,
star-smear over the harrowed field.
I stared a long time to make sure I knew what I saw.
Next to the comet, red Mars. Hail and farewell. Eat this
so that sins may be forgiven. Why not,
why not give them back where they came from, Eve
uncoiling out of Adam's side. Snapped whips of the angels.
The noble Bevesangue, who liked to lick the blood from his
    sword.
Abraham's jagged knife. Dwell. Blood of the new and
    everlasting
covenant.

Peter's upside down. The cock
in the castle's barnyard down the street
crows at three in the afternoon. It's time.
Three confident betrayals, and then shame.
Eve in Masaccio, Judas
in any Last Supper. Moneybag tied to his side.
The bread, grained and red in the wine.

Torches, hooded face, splayed lamb,
this is a place of prayer.
St. Thomas, in Orsanmichele,
stumbles toward the hole in Christ's side.
His right foot standing on nothing, overstepping its niche
over my head. That's faith, launching
himself toward proof of the gash, his whole balance resting
    on air.
Blessed are they who have not
seen, but have believed. Phenobarbitol,
shed flesh. He's the merchants'
patron saint. Business of redemption. That never would yield
the human image. That's why
Adam and Eve are in the scene. Sermons
on unbelief ever did attract me
toward and toward (unsteady) the inhuman wound.

NANCY LOCKE

SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR PAINTING'S NEW TOPOGRAPHIES

One might point to the late nineteenth-century artist who dreamed of a painting that actually realized the materiality of things: a way of painting in which the artist forgot what the mind knew and isolated the evanescent sensations of what the eye perceived. Not that the mind's knowledge could actually *be* banished from the work, but a way of working might be found in which the purely optical would be privileged. Oddly enough, at the end of the twentieth century, the contemporary painter also privileges the "optical," but not in the same way. Today, the optical might stand for an access to a world perceived not by the eye, but by various imaging technologies; the optical might be marshaled, but it might also be heavily manipulated and made to take its place in an order determined by a theoretical construct. Christopher Campbell neither begins from a theoretical construct nor from the empirical in its raw form; rather, he readdresses the relationship between them in terms of what contemporary painting might set out to do.

Representational painting locates itself along a continuum between the illusionistic and the schematic. On one end of the spectrum is complete verisimilitude: the proverbial bird pecking at the painted grapes; on the other end, representation as writing, as code, as diagram. In one case, the artist attempts to mimic the seen; in the other, the relationship between figure and referent is arbitrary and must be understood by the viewer as such. In many ways, abstract painting is no different. In the sense that most abstract painting does have sources and representational goals and content, abstract painting too can be understood as navigating between the poles of illusion and schema. Cézanne's late unfinished canvases, for example, have the look of abstraction even while every patch of color remains tied to the artist's project of registering his "sensations"; even Mondrian's black lines have their roots in landscape and architecture. Abstract painting from forty or fifty years ago can be seen as imitative of a certain emotiveness, for instance, or of pure improvisation, but these forms of mimesis are not much seen in painting today.

Christopher Campbell's early work had clear roots in nature: sketches made in the Fontainebleau forest, on the Connecticut shores, or in thickets around southeastern Michigan, where he now lives and works. He slowly inventoried brushstrokes of past masters: a *tâche* here from French landscape painting of the turn-of-the-century, a calligraphic mark à la Joan Mitchell, a thrown line from Pollock. These investigations gave way to new interests and innovations: the hand gesticulating without the eye's corrections, a brush made from a few stalks of bound prairie grasses creating unplanned irregularities in the marks, a fat baton of charcoal dipped in medium in order to make it smear and spread its marks even as they were being made. In the early '90s, the studious, contemplative nature of Marden's work became a reference point. Campbell's interest in nature was only partly an issue of content; it could perhaps best be understood as a contact with *newness,* with the complexities of forms and hues determined in nature. It remains tied to a desire to avoid, at all costs, painting from any sort of *a priori* notion or procedure.

Christopher Campbell's childhood in upstate New York was spent between his father's painting studio and the shores of Lake Ontario. Before devoting himself to painting, Campbell studied the history of art at the graduate level after spending years producing documentary film and media presentations. As a Fulbright Fellow in France, Campbell undertook dissertation research on Pissarro and Cézanne, but then encountered the American emigrée Joan Mitchell, who lived northwest of Paris in Vétheuil. Mitchell offered Campbell studio space and took him on as a student. He would work with her off and on for three years before her death in 1992. Her acerbic wit and advice during Campbell's student years enabled him to work through the legacies of Abstract Expressionism—especially the work of Pollock and De Kooning—that held such interest for him, and to reformulate the problems facing contemporary art having come to terms with painting's history.

In painting today, the individual mark is almost never identified with authority or authenticity. Minimalism and conceptual art have seen to that. A prime example would be the work of Gerhard Richter. He not only challenges the claims of abstraction through a continued dialogue with photographic mimesis (a project invested not in fresh empirical observation, but in the recycling of preexisting representations), but also his abstract paintings do not depend on the form of a given gesture. Even Marden's patient work on paper, with its faith in topographies of shells, stones, or ripples on water, can be seen as tipping the balance away from mimesis and toward a kind of writing.

In Campbell's most recent work, the artist might begin a piece by asserting the potency of the mark, whether in an aggressive gesture or in a passage of delicate tracery. These linear sequences, with their roots in Pollock and Marden, are then effaced by a swathe of color; they are bathed in a field of light, or troweled over with a plaque of white or black. It is as if a lens were focused on the intricacies of stems and leaves, only to allow its aperture to open and, in a double exposure, to capture the spray of light over the branches in the wildest play of magnification.

The image of the wide-open lens is not a conceit. Campbell does undertake motif and composition studies by taking a camera through forests and down deer trails. There he observes the distortions of color and form that extremes of weather and light will render: a red osier dogwood branch seen at dawn becomes brilliant cadmium red. Through a lens focused at a point in front of the tree, the slender branch becomes a cadmium beam of light; a patch of sunlit sky seeps brilliantly over the dark trunk; leaves turning to catch the light take their places in glimmering constellations. The light-writing that is photography sets a challenge for the translucencies of oil paint and alkyd gel: can these most pellucid of painterly media somehow respond to such ephemeral effects? It is a question Monet would have asked of himself and his brushes, but then Monet would have wanted the image of the dogwood to be clearly readable on the canvas. The nineteenth-century painter may have been interested in "effects," but they were effects of a Real all the same, and a certain faith in the concrete reality of the Real was maintained to the end.

Is it fair to say that the contemporary painter no longer believes in the Real? That would appear to be the case in looking at a number of artists who involve perceptual questions in their work. One thinks not only of Richter's interest in the status of the reproduced image, but also of Ross Bleckner's melodramatic allegories, Mark Francis' brush dragged through magnified bacteria. These very different artists maintain touchstones in some level of optical perception, but also explore discontinuities between that which a painting sets out to represent and the nature of the physical or technological apparatus deployed. One can no longer apply Gombrich's terms of making and matching: the latter is simply no longer the goal of the former. The relationship between Campbell's blurred abstractions and his motif studies is similarly one of dissonance, not replication.

In addition to the structures suggested in Campbell's own motif photographs, those from the world of medical imagery have become an interest. In some of his more recent work, the artist frequently turns

to the domain of the body, of computed tomography or photomicrographic imagery in order to discover cellular structures or tissue compositions in which a complex network is suggestive both of order or function, on the one hand, and nearly chaotic irregularity on the other. These most recent works continue what one might call his critique of representational fidelity to a perceptual apparatus, but they transfer the locus of that critique from exterior nature to interior nature, from the vegetal to the animal. In place of the rotating axis of a branch or the shimmer of a leaf, the pulse between dendritic nerves is suggested; in place of a screen of trees, one finds a complex of neurons that informs the work's structure.

The artist's desire to exploit the extraordinary translucency captured in the nature photographs has led him not only to new techniques but also to new media. In the domain of painting, Christopher Campbell now frequently works on large sheets of polyester sailcloth, a semi-translucent support that admits light from behind the work and makes it part of the ground. The painting's "reserve," first tantalizingly revealed and valued by the Romantics, has now become an almost intangible presence in paintings such as *Screen I (Black);* the reserve is an element of immateriality at play in an otherwise terrifically material mode of painting. Campbell's use of sailcloth not only enables him to move paintings away from the wall and to display them, scroll-like, hanging from machined aluminum brackets, but also to experiment with the chromaticism of monochromatic works. Whereas color has always come easily to him and been a strong point in his work, the sailcloth paintings possess an inherent luminosity that allows for a range of subtle hues and values shifting from an ostensibly single hue. *Screen I (Black)* is almost completely black on a white ground, but out of the black come green-grays, warm grays, and blue grays to supply all the colorism it needs. The sailcloth paintings, as well as Axon Bundle, a painting on transparent Mylar, emerge as deconstructions of the paintings' support. Without an opaque ground layer, the physical assertiveness of oil painting, instead of appearing embedded in its five centuries of tradition, dances and floats over the lightness of the sailcloth. Figure does not merely posit itself on ground; instead, the ground stands for the potential unraveling of the figure.

Work on paper has become a forum for similar maneuvers. *Suspension VIII (Soma)* combines the layering of sheer veils of white and gray that barely reveal blue and flesh tones underneath. Over these layers is a spray of drawing: a few black lines that suggest a set of biomorphic forms. The play between figure and ground undoes the certainty of either one. An illusion of spatiality exists in a dialectical relation with the drawing-as-writing on the surface.

Christopher Campbell has recently moved outside a concentration on painting alone. After a collaboration with a choreographer to create a set design for a dance production, Campbell went on to work with friends on video and photographic installations. These projects have in various ways involved body imagery. The artists' cooperative Skate, of which Campbell is a member, is currently engaged in exploring what Foucault has described as the subversive nature of friendship.[1] The artists in Skate photograph themselves and each other so as to create ambiguous juxtapositions of bodies and identities. The photographs are then projected in an installation filled with objects from everyday life. Viewers can retrace and even experience the artists' activities as they contemplate the images, montaged or superimposed on one another so as to complicate their status as discrete art objects.

Not reproduced here are Campbell's latest studies for paintings on sailcloth, in which the support is bent, curved, doubled, or shaped to create a viewing environment. The possibilities for painting to pick up where the *Nymphéas* left off are apparent. For what confronts the viewer here is not an oversized *tableau,* but an art that questions painting's status in light of Minimalism: painting as an art takes on installation. These are works that attempt to revise the status of painting as a luxury object, as a commodity with which members of a certain class adorn their walls. One thinks of Richter's statement: "And I see myself as the heir to an enormous, great, rich culture of painting, and of art in general, which we have lost, but which nevertheless obligates us."[2] The pressure to push painting's envelope is palpable here; "painting should be accomplishing more," says Richter. As an artist who has extensively studied the history of art, Christopher Campbell too feels a sense of cultural obligation. Painting somehow must continue to be rich and expressive even as it faces the artistic and political forces that have transformed and critiqued it in the last century and a half. It cannot do so, believes Campbell, by simply retreating from illusion and mimesis in favor of cerebral schemae. It must shift the territories of what kinds of illusions it might create: not abstraction for its own sake but a formal language that actually provides an account of experience. Campbell wants to find ways of describing somatic experience, hence his interests in nature and the body, hence his experiments with new materials, new levels of the optical, new modes of presentation. The external and internal worlds of Campbell's subjects suggest possibilities for somatic experiences that the forms of his art have begun to chart.

Notes

1 See Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," trans. John Johnston, in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault; Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, vol. I,* edited by Paul Rabinow (NY: The New Press, 1997), pp. 135-140.

2 From an interview with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, trans. Stephen Duffy, in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990,* ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), p. 1038.

CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL

FOUR PAINTINGS

Dark Brush (Waterloo), 1995
Oil, charcoal/linen, 38 x 50",
Herbert Barrows, Ann Arbor, Micihigan

Suspension VIII (Soma), 1996-97
Oil, oilstick, charcoal/paper, 30.6 x 23.1",
R Epping, Zurich, Switzerland

Screen I (Black), 1997
Oil, alkyd resin/polyester, 76 x 59.8",
collection of the artist

Axon Bundles, 1997
Oil, alkyd resin, oilstick/Mylar, 84 x 60",
collection of the artist

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

CAPTAIN CAPPUCCINO AND HIS MERRY CON LECHES

I'm not telling you what you can't do
but what you can do.
The station moves rapidly on the tracks
looking for the frame. Amid clangs
of threaded openings, barrage of having
known flickers acidly in the tell-tale
mirage of another way in. Ripple
of same that is always swapping
for marbleized fairy dust. But
let's not get sentimental. Go
blow, go below and examine the hypothesis
as it burns its way into the deep
structurelessness that buoys
the girls and makes men sweep. EXPECTORATE
IDEOLOGY: write piteously and deliver
yourself to sullen beauty, elliptical
judgments. Zeroing in for the spill.
Verb forms in the mouth, scum of sequence,
sentence, skirmish. Borders on asphalt,
your fault, my fault. Darting
in a delicious divertimento to
absent tablature, turbidity, luster.
Hearken to the choir of broken
wings—not the ones who
sing but the drawer on the other
side, open to the blank page
smudged with tacit misconstruals.
For if I delay it is not to
betray the secret writ in mars & furls
on the floor of the roiling

machine, funneled in flax.
Never (next to) coniferous
cohabitation, the principled pealing
that traps the aquatic ambiance
of the parasitic constabularies,
mystic launch of listening's
particle imagination. Blip
blip blip. Huddled against
percolation, futurity on the
bend, irritating (irrigating)
pitched surrender.

JAMES HELLER LEVINSON

ISAAC STERN THURSDAY APRIL 23, 1998 8:00

scooped out of ancient wall this image now man wolfs
to center stage two legs abandoned
  —a retraction unperceived—
stooped in semi-squat he faces the audience
nods
  —skull hacked shaped assembled *[the basis of mastery is retrieval]*
  through asteroidal loops of history—
first hearing Segovia then in his 70s—
  masterful, commanding—
  who wouldn't be heard—no
hacking coughs, programs rustling, conversational exchanges—
until he heard the proper conditions for hearing
—as the still hunter attends,
  focuses into view,
the congregation of animal powers,
  assesses angulation,
times the ripeness to strike,
  to release the arrows of horizon—
in the quieting down, the audience releasing
temporal concerns, gathering devotional data seldom summoned,
Segovia, a study in preparation-ING (prepar-ed-NESS),
plumbs lacunae, cavitous ocean,
warps of sacred infinitude shuttle his face
loose holy lariats bucking wildly and irresponsible. . .
fingers arch (snake recoil)
  —*[the exercise of art is redistribution]*—

the nail–hoof of culture–
frosts string

Isaac Stern born 1920 debut 1935
(early entries are claimants)
begins: Bach Sonata in E minor for Violin & Keyboard
this man you would want to help across
the street
with violin to chin, the first swipe
of the bow, the darting lizard-tongued attack sprinting
archaeology
of fingers
(rapid canine copulation)
urgently virilizes
dis-PUTES the clawing white arms orange hands
lunging
through floorboards gravity's stampede intent unrelenting
in their argument: 'erect is provisional'–
choirs of fingers-delirious resist,
crunch negation,
fret the braids of a loot destiny,
(angels reeling)
pumped with ventricular wisdom
crazed with a life all their own
the human document determined to ink impermeable

MILTON KESSLER

TWO POEMS

DANCING LESSON

Each daybreak I reach to take medicines
losing balance
at the edge of her bed.
Then bend to polish
jewels
in the kitchen
sink
and send up
mist of coffee to her
and settle
with my bowl of grains.
Only after I've finished
does she rub her bad knee
and descend
to the oval oak table
and calendar
of today.

Here by the one sunny window I read,
The Tsurezuregas of Kenkō: 1330–1332
"The Holyman of Kume lost his magic power
to fly after noticing the legs

of a girl washing clothes."
I watched a woman hanging sheets
on a windy roof in the Bronx.
They were white as
painted feet
of Asian slaves
on sale in Rome.

ACCOMPANIED

"Paintings are not properly seen
in galleries but only in the solitude
and wholeness of their studios."
Pousette-Dart

Hush. On whitewashed wall
a huge furry moth
the color of mammal
sleeps through noon and tomorrow.

My large stomach and sides pain
and I need to see a doctor
but rain is driving even sparrows
into high grass hiding and ground
cannot swallow the sky-gift pooling.
Now it is bones that ache
as I move my shoulder painting rain.

Poor God, we are sick and tired,
so I'll build us a glass of tea.

The four frightened sisters lie
hand in hand
on an iron bed in Brooklyn.
Only Betty, a mother, still wakes.

When you have nobody
it inhibits travel.
Like the soul you linger
by the freed dead body.

Passing 24 tiles of sunshine
on scoured corridor wall,
the buttressed windows
sealed and webbed.

COMMENTARY

"The economy of passions": Mina Loy and Basil Bunting

The most surprising letter of all those received during the time I spent writing the life of Mina Loy came from Basil Bunting. Jonathan Williams, Loy's publisher and Bunting's friend, had given me his address in a remote part of England. Despite Bunting's reputation as a recluse, I wanted to ask about his Ode 17, dedicated to Loy in 1930. I recognized the "Oval face, thin eyebrows wide of the eyes" of the third stanza, but other lines were puzzling. I inquired tactfully about their relationship even though it seemed unlikely that he would answer.

The three page, single spaced typed missive that came by return post was as hilarious as it was unexpected. Memory is a liar, Bunting warned me. He had known Loy but not well; his recollections of expatriate Paris were to be taken "with a great many grains of salt." Ode 17 was "a product of memory, and was not even addressed to recording facts." "Nothing in it," he went on, was "more than metaphor except the description of her face."

Bunting wrote this poem some years after they met—most likely in 1923, when the twenty-three year old poet was working as Ford Madox Ford's underpaid assistant at the *transatlantic review*. At that time he imagined the forty-one year old Loy to be twice his age. Five decades later, Bunting regretted that he "had never tried to make love to her" (adding in a self-deflating note, "I expect she would have laughed at me"). Nonetheless, he confirmed her presence in Ode 17:

> Oval face, thin eyebrows wide of the eyes,
> a premonition in the gait
> of this subaqueous persistence
> of a particular year—
> for you had prepared it for preservation
> not vindictively, urged
> by the economy of passions.

While Bunting did not gloss the "subaqueous persistence/of a particular year," for the biographer these lines evoke Loy's protracted grief over her husband's disappearance: the poet, boxer, and proto-Dadaist Arthur Cravan—the love of her life—probably drowned in 1918 as they were attempting to leave Mexico. Despite Loy's gaiety at expatriate gatherings, her mourning continued unabated, preserved, even "urged/ by the economy of passions."

Bunting's letter recalls Loy's emotional state but says little about their literary affinities—except that he was pleased by her encouragement of his "pretensions to poetry." Both were specimens of that rare breed, English modernists, though at the time Bunting was too young in his craft to think of himself that way, and both benefited from the sponsorship of Pound. That both were also voluntary exiles created a bond. During the early twenties, Loy was creating a container for her anger at her mother country in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,* her long free verse diatribe then appearing in installments in the *Little Review.* By the end of the decade, the two poets' short social satires would appear together in the pages of *Pagany*: Loy's "Lady Laura in Bohemia" dissects a wellborn Englishwoman's "somersault descent/into the half-baked underworld" and Bunting's "A Cracked Record" chides a lover in the throes of romance, "We others are divorced at heart/soon, soon! wrenched apart by wretched bickerings."

The expatriate literary world Loy and Bunting shared before their own wrenching apart is affectionately evoked from the vantage point of age in Bunting's letter, which deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

107 Stridingedge
Blackfell
Washington
Tyne and Wear

3 July 1980

Dear Carolyn Burke

Yours is the first letter for a long time to catch my interest.

As to Mina Loy, I cant help you in any way that would be of interest to your ultimate readers. I never knew anything about her, since even then I didnt like to concern myself with the private lives of my friends. I knew her only a very short time; and not well at all well, since she must have been nearly twice my age which set a narrow limit to

intimacy. And in the second place, memory is, I believe, a chronic liar, not very far from fiction (think of any novelist you know—all liars), so that what I think I recollect is certainly not to be relied on. Take it with a great many grains of salt.

The poem you mention was itself a product of memory, and was not even addressed to recording facts. Nothing in it is more than metaphor except the description of her face, which you have already noted, and which may easily have been distorted by the eight years or so which already stood between my and my last sight of her. I was sorry that I had never tried to make love to her, though I expect she would have laughed at me.

I cant remember how I met her. There's a very vague suggestion in my mind that I was in company with Brancusi, the only one of the great artists of that time with whom I had more than a nodding acquaintance; but perhaps it is more likely that I was introduced by Ford Madox Ford, who introduced me to so many people. I was enormously struck by her beauty, a dark, melancholy beauty that didnt sentimentalise itself as so much female beauty does. Somehow I got invited to tea and cakes where she lived and then took every chance I got of calling on her or of sitting by her in tha[t] cafe, watching her face rather than talking; though probably I chattered as sillily as very young men do. She put up with it. She even let me imagine that she liked it, though she was probably amused at my pretensions to poetry, yet seemed to treat me seriously. So I was at least half in love with her—the only time I have ever had such feelings for a woman older than myself.

I dont know what she talked about, though it must have been in some sense encouraging. I dont remember who else she saw, though I am sure that sometimes Robert McAlmon was about and nearly sure that Berenice Abbot also appeared, though I liked Berenice so much that I may merely have associated her in my memory with someone else I liked. She too deserved to be remembered and recorded.

After a few months of this curious friendship, never seeing much of her, Ford told me one day that Mina's daughter was coming from Italy and sent me to greet her with a bouquet. Joella was beautiful too (and very conscious of it, I think) so that I found myself split as it were,

between mother and daughter. I even imagine, looking back, though I cant have guessed it at the time, that the errand with the bouquet had been planned by Ford and Mina together as a likely way to rid Mina of my altogether too young attentions. I felt as much attached to her as ever, but it was Joella I now wanted to make up to. I think Mrs Bayer must remember me, perhaps with tolerance, perhaps only with amusement.

Then Ford gave a great party, which served to return a great deal of hospitality offered him and to gather many of the contributors to the Transatlantic Review, but which he also intended to be a chance for me to dance with Joella all the evening. Unfortunately Ford didnt know that the very old-fashioned Quaker school at which I had been brought up regarded dancing as a sin, or almost a sin, so that I never learned how, but had to watch Joella dancing most of the evening with Tristan Tzara. I never spoke to Tzara again, though we had been good cafe companions for a while. Mina tried to make up for this by a little intimate party where I could show off, and it was suggested that Joella should teach me to dance. I dont think anything came of the suggestion, but am not sure.

I went on seeing them for a while; but I was due to leave Paris soon. Then there was a great party when all the Americans gathered together—an embassy affair or something else semiofficial, and Mina Loy got me invited to it. I had had enough drink already to set free my taste for mischief, then very active. When I came in some American lady, goodness knows who, introduced me to a very august looking female sitting with another like her in full evening regalia with a very cutaway bodice. She was said to be the wife of the missionary bishop of somewhere or other. As she held out her hand for it to be kissed in the French fashion I reached beyond it and scooped her exuberant bosom out of its corsage. Scandal. She, however, seemed to like it, set about to drinking a great deal, and was presently doing cartwheels on the dancing floor. The scandal of the bishopess (or whatever you call her) was at its worst just as Mina Loy and Joella arrived. Joella ordered me home and I went off in disgrace. I have seen this incident described in some reminiscence of the time, but without names. It gave great pleasure to the cafes, but when I thought how angry Mina and Joella must be, I was

in despair, so that I put forward my departure from Paris and left at once.

That was a mistake; for the very first letter that was forwarded after me was Joella's invitation to tea. I suppose I was forgiven. But I never saw either mother or daughter again, and I am not sure that I even wrote to them. Seven or eight years later I sent them each a copy of *Redimiculum Matellarum,* my first pamphlet, but again I cant remember whether or not either of them acknowledged it.

That is the whole of my acquaintance with Mina Loy and her daughter. I can tell you no more and I dont think telephoned questions would be more likely to stir any more memories.

Of course I read many of her poems. I still have the *Lunar Baedeker* McAlmon printed. But they have largely faded from my memory and I dont think I can profitably say anything about them now. I thought very highly of them at the time.

I am afraid this is all about me and hardly at all about Mina Loy. For that I must apologise; but I hope may at least entertain you for a moment and give an impression of some of the environs of her life.

I would be very pleased to see your biography when it is done. Let me know of it. I suppose you are already in touch with Jonathan Williams (Corn Close, Dentdale, Sedbergh, Cumbria) who is very interested in Mina Loy and all that concerns her.

Yours faithfully,
B Bunting

Forgive senile typing, senile irrelevance.

There is little to say after reading such a letter, except that it makes me laugh each time I reread it. Despite Bunting's postscript, I relied on it to evoke "the environs" of Loy's life in Paris during the 1920s as well as the "limit to intimacy." Moreover, its recollection of Bunting's complicated feelings for both Joella and Mina helped me grasp a recurrent pattern in her life—one that would be restaged during the 1930s and '40s in her relations with Joella's husband, the Surrealist art dealer Julien Levy (who was himself at least half in love with Mina) and in her friendship with the German Surrealist Richard Oelze, the younger man and potential soulmate who haunts her novella *Insel.*

Bunting did not live long enough to see how he had helped me: he died in 1985, ten years before I completed the book. Since then I have often thought about what he said. If memory is not far from fiction, neither is biography. Of necessity one fabricates a tapestry from the threads—letters, memoirs, interviews, documents—that survive. In this sense, composing a life is an act of assemblage, combining found materials, discards, detritus, throwaways—much like Loy's own practice in the applied and domestic arts she turned to when not writing. I think of another of Ode 17's "metaphors" for Loy's passions:

> Nobody said: She is organising
> these knicknacks her dislike collects
> into a pattern nature will adopt and perpetuate.

Bunting's prediction that their acquaintance would not continue ("Very likely I shall never meet her again/ or if I do, fear the latch as before") proved to be correct. But more importantly, their poetic affinity has gone unrecognized until quite recently. Jim Powell ("Basil Bunting and Mina Loy," *Chicago Review,* Winter 1990) discusses them as two neglected poets whose writing is "essential." Kathleen Fraser ("'Contingent Circumstances': Mina Loy/Basil Bunting," in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet,* forthcoming) sets their words in dialogue before noting commonalities—their "dense thicket[s] of word/song/syntax," their peculiarly English way of "addressing the sexual/eroticized body in frank pleasure and wariness." Despite the limits to intimacy posed by their work, these poets' poets are at last finding those who hear their mixture of tones (what Fraser calls "a satiric and skeptical watchfulness [that] resides next to readiness for encounter")—readers for whom their shared "economy of passions" voices the vulnerability within the careful condensations of modernist artifice.

—CAROLYN BURKE

Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women. **Mary Margaret Sloan, editor, (Jersey City: Talisman House, Publishers), 1998, ISSBN 1-883689-47-3; $27.95, 740 pages.**

I often wonder what masochism propels ordinary people into the making of anthologies. Editors of anthologies work like mules, they spend months if not years tracking down the perfect texts to illustrate their theories, they dicker with estates and with the egos of the individual talents, they're bombarded by galleys that bulge and erupt in a thousand places, they promote the work of others instead of writing their own, they pay huge permission fees with little hope of recuperation, and in the end, what happens? The book gets published, and they get raked over the coals, losing all their friends in the process. If I had to do one I'd make damn sure I had a co-editor, one on whom I could blame all the "mistakes." And yet we live in an age of anthologies, and depend on them to define the temper of the times; perhaps we resent this dependence and feel sadistically compelled to lash out at those whose labors indefatigable brought them to our door. Biting the hand that feeds us. In the post-modern age, especially, when we don't have enough time to read a whole book by one person, an anthology satisfies as does nothing else. The other day we were trying to reconstruct what life was like before the invention of the remote control; weren't people more likely to watch the same network all night long, rather than having to get up and change the stations manually? (I *think* with some kind of *knob* actually set into the television box.) And then it became an addiction, once we had that wand in our hands. What does not change is the will to change channels. Therefore wherever it crops up, to all possible results, let us salute the heroic masochism that fuels our ease. An anthology is a novel disguised; under its surface roil all the complications of Balzac, the allegiances, the compromises, the back stories of long standing and the sudden twists of fortune, the betrayals and the madness and the passion.[1]

Moving Borders is a rich, colorful and intriguing collection, culled from hundreds of sources high and low, groundbreaking in its sweep and ambition. Dipping from page to page, at random, one feels one's eyes literally widen, both with the shock of the new and the shock of recognition, for one had known in some intellectual corner of the brain that this writing was emerging, but the sheer presence of so much of it under two covers—its object status—is stunning, like a blow to the

body. Its selling point, and maybe its controversial point, is that it's all by women.

Over the past twelve or fifteen years it's happened again and again, at places where poets meet, outside this or that non-profit space; on the fire escape of a downtown loft; at the Xerox factory. You'll be standing there while Poet X or Y-Male stubs out a cigarette and announces casually, "Best poetry nowadays is all by women." Grinding that cigarette butt with his heel. This announcement has become such a cliche it's hard to tell how to hear it anew; in fact, perhaps conscious of its pervasiveness, men don't say that so much any more. Novelty use shrinking? *Moving Borders* has the novelty of hearing a woman, Mary Margaret Sloan, making the same remark (though nowhere in her thoughtful introduction is this explicit. Indeed, she declares that for the first time in poetic history "a roughly equivalent number of women and men are publishing the most significant and demanding work of the moment.") This book—produced at a time when it is no longer necessary—or so Sloan's provocative apothegm has it—situates itself as a marker in time and the history of culture. The book situates itself, perhaps, as the Rosetta Stone to a past instantly obscure and distant due to this paradigm shift.

And yet "reading is reading as," and the practice of readers in reading work by Poet X or Y-Female will for the foreseeable future continue to locate the work within the female, and the reader will continue, as he or she has always done, to experience the salient quality of the poet as female first, experimental later. This has not changed in the several years since Sloan first began work on this anthology, when we in San Francisco first began to hear its taking shape from her majestic eyrie up on Bernal Heights. At that time, if I remember correctly, *Moving Borders* was going to gather itself from the august interstices of Donald Allen's 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960,* and was going to begin with Barbara Guest, one of the few woman poets Allen included. The years rolled by, however, years filled with angst and tears, and the book as issued now has been recast, and comes roaring in with a different and earlier focus (Guest now comes second).[2] Beginning the book with Lorine Niedecker is a stroke of bravura typical of Sloan's editorial practice, and recasts the entire book in a different light like a prologue added to a movie at the last minute, forcing her readers to acknowledge North American women writers' debt to Niedecker, who plays here the unsung, ignored, backwoods "I've spent my life on nothing" genius who triumphs only after death—instead of the assured, self-confident, witty, and very much alive Barbara Guest, the way MGM used to give top

billing to Marie Dressler over Norma Shearer. And what a coup to be able to include the "new" (1934) Niedecker poem, "Progression," discovered among the Ezra Pound papers in Austin by Burton Hatlen! Its Eliotic, long-lined cadences reveal a Niedecker heartbreakingly full of promise and assurance, before she got whittled down by the rough treatment of Pound, Zukofsky, and other male mentors:

> [. . .] I should say the social behavior of the individual
> should be thoroughly rained on, and in the same
> rheumatism
> the Introspect's Umbrella Mender waved good-bye. Of
> course,
> I shall meet people here, my antecedents perhaps. But
> how
> shall I know them? If I am fernal, it's fern country, then;
> fern fever has been spread by mono-men I shall pass in the
> air
> of my time and whose main frond cuts I shall have to regret.
> Someone has said: rapid lighted pimperly advanced: I've
> forgotten
> who. A little false for a person in my position:
> gloom-elmed,
> gloam-owned, retreating. (Cuckoo, that juggling of hollow
> nuts) (14)

Of course, beginning this anthology with a poem previously unseen and unknown raises the possibility of all kinds of "buried Caesar" among the buried lives of the past, and in part *Moving Borders* performs any number of necessary resuscitations and rescues of important writers; the book, with its elliptical juxtapositions and deft placement of materials, will encourage us to view many of these in a new light. I wonder indeed if, by including "Nebraska" and "Prairie Houses" among the Guest poems, we are invited to imagine a Barbara Guest under the influence of Niedecker, or at any rate Willa Cather? And then after Guest comes Kathleen Fraser, with a heavy emphasis on the typographically eccentric slash inventive, as though to position Fraser as a leading "visual poet."[3]

(—The book, by the way, arranges its authors in order of first appearance in print, so logically after Niedecker there should have been, mmm, eighty pages or so of blank text, to be filled in the reader's imagination by—whom? This gap, a gap which isn't there a lack minus lack, an *absent lack!*—is suggestive, teasing, denotative of a hole in literary history, a hole or vacuum to which the remainder of the text

comes roaring to stop up, sucked to its surface the way in aircraft disaster films all kinds of unlikely objects come to block up the hole in the plane's skin, the hole made by the first bomb of the terrorists.)

Fraser's move away from the lyric school of Frank O'Hara towards a progressively larger feminist poetics is now a celebrated one, and in her position as founder and co-editor of the poetry newsletter *HOW(Ever)* she encouraged many young writers and invited and inspired reevaluation of many older ones. And so, for example, we can now view a "Barbara Guest under the influence of Kathleen Fraser." Of her model Sloan has written elsewhere[4] "In her poems we find a writer who gives all that she knows to her poems and similarly asks of the poem that it open up all its ways to her. Her life, her teaching, editing, and critical writing are all infused with her gift of friendship and her mission to enhance and strengthen the lives of others. In them we find the same principle of active generosity, always urgent, always serious, and always designed by her deep delight in poetry." There are certainly a *lot* of San Francisco/Bay Area contributors to *Moving Borders!* I count fifteen right off the bat (out of 49—and this includes Canada too), and another seven or eight who lived here among us for an extended period of time, and I wonder—is this due to the nurturing richness of our region, or due to the principles of generosity Sloan so admires in Fraser, or could it be because Sloan must venture off of Bernal Heights to go out into the community and bump into these women at the store sometime? "My location," she says, "is essential and not peripheral to the defining of the terms of this book." (8) For anthologizing is a notoriously tricky business, a delicate negotiation between wildly different realms of the political and the politic, the social and the personal, as well as the competing ideologies of the aesthetic.[5] If an anthology is produced when "such a book is no longer necessary" (3), it also takes the risk of petrifying or fossilizing a movement at the precise moment of enunciating it.

Which movement? One of the marvelous things about *Moving Borders* is the way in which writers of apparently different trajectories are shown here to share a common project, evoking a feminism beyond identity politics. Kathy Acker is shoved up against Susan Howe, Eileen Myles "introduces" Erin Mouré. Patricia Dienstfrey's womb/altar/table meditations from "The Woman without Experiences" show a startling kinship with the veiled shadowy vitrifications of the late Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's "Dictee"—Simone Weil lurking in the background of both?

> Let the one who is diseuse dust
> breathe away the distance of the well. Let the one
> who is diseuse again sit upon the stone nine days

and nine nights. Thus. Making stand again, Eleusis.
—*(from* "Dictee") (318)

Weil, or Maya Deren? And what's up with the strange confluence of Harryette Mullen, Erica Hunt, and Julie Patton—apparently the only African-American writers in the book—appearing one after the other from pages 477 to 498? Was there this moment in 1980 in which the white clouds of the avant-garde suddenly opened up to reveal these three women, only to close up again in 1981? If so, cultural history has a lot to answer to; if not, perhaps this core of black writers—each very different, and dazzling—might form the core of yet another anthology, one that would stretch backwards to Jayne Cortez and move right along to the present-day young generation (e.g. Renee Gladman, Sarah Jones, Giovanni Singleton). Insofar as *Moving Borders* argues for the poetics of inclusiveness, and casts its nets wide indeed to recast all kinds of writers as poets, it's generative enough to make one wish for more, more, more combinations and growth.

What will be new to most US readers, even those dedicated to avant-garde poetry, are the Canadians, for alas, we live in a country which despite NAFTA, etc., doesn't really care very much about what's happening in Canada, and indeed, continually misreads Canadians as American citizens, so that the vast numbers who have made, say, Michael Ondaatje and Margaret Atwood best sellers here apparently think of them as Minnesotans (like Prince, or Mary Tyler Moore). To come across Nicole Brossard early in the book, radiant between Waldrop and Waldman, is to realize anew, or for the first time, what a vivid, strong, and unpredictable writer she is, and with what grace she combines the roles of political priest and *navigateur* of the body and its channels. The Brossard excerpts are well-chosen, winding up with a terrific poem in manuscript, "A High-Priced Rod," wonderfully translated by Cole Swensen. Poetry readers in the US have been both with and without Brossard for years—"without" since English translations and publications of her work appear here only desultorily, and "with" since her aim is true, and the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Nor have we had enough of Mouré, or Karen MacCormack, or Gail Scott, or Lisa Robertson. They, the Canadians, are smuggled into our attention like the Greeks into Troy: anthology as Trojan horse, a lumbering hollow box filled with weapons and watchful infantry.

The anthology nicely illustrates the gradual slippage between the poem and the novel, as practiced by the North American avant-garde. Sloan includes writers known primarily for their novels (Acker, Scott, Dodie Bellamy) and features excerpts from fictional works written by poets. I suppose Gertrude Stein is the deity presiding over this slippage

(and is hailed by Sloan in her introduction, along with the accomplished fiction writers H.D., Mina Loy, and Laura Riding), though Virginia Woolf, Eileen Chang, Elizabeth Smart, Zora Neale Hurston might also have been cited here. In any case, in an age when Lyn Hejinian publishes *Oxota* and Leslie Scalapino *Defoe* as "novels," and Fanny Howe, Rosmarie Waldrop, Carla Harryman move back and forth with ease between fiction and poetry, the membrane is permeable if not shaky. This erasure of distinction extends to the younger generation as well; are Lisa Jarnot's *Some Other Kind of Mission* and Sianne Ngai's *Discredit* novels? If not, why not? All along the watchtower the boundaries are shifting. As rigid conceptions of plot, character, mise-en-scene, etc. disappear from the aesthetic, and at the same time the realistic novel becomes more and more obviously an extended treatment of two bourgeois subjects (shopping and fucking), art survives and mutates, novel and poem dissolve assume one another's identity, like Liv Ullmann and Bibi Andersson do in Bergman's *Persona,* with similarly disquieting results.[6]

Is there a need for this anthology at this time? Despite the reputed claims that women and men are publishing at roughly equal numbers, I keep seeing issue after issue of journals in which all the contributors are male, or perhaps feature the work of one woman in them (often Sheila E. Murphy). Pressed, the editors will always explain that "women just don't submit." Or, "We *wrote* to Bernadette Mayer and she didn't write back." Shrug. Closing *Moving Borders* I kept thinking of all the grief Mary Margaret Sloan might have saved herself had she accomplished many of her aims by publishing an anthology composed solely of *men's work.* Think of it! Creeley, Baraka, Mac Low, Palmer, Watten, Mackey, Coolidge, McCaffrey, Andrews, Mandel, and on and on until the readers would come to feel, with an uneasy frisson, that they were staring at a black mirror in which vast galaxies of spinning stars were floating in some backwards dimension right beyond their heads.

Will the movement(s) continue? I don't think there's a question of it. The book's terminum of 1990 (all its writers had published by that date) leaves us to consider the comparable anthology of 2015 when, if the unstoppable geometric progression Sloan demonstrates here continues, 200 or 300 writers will be included in *Moving Borders 2,* and we don't know all their names yet by a long shot. Some of them are just now starting to write. Some of them, broken up by the defection of Geri Halliwell from the Spice Girls, and/or the implacable aging of Isaac, Taylor and Zachary Hanson, are moving sightlessly towards the bookshelves and taking down, for the first time, *Moving Borders 1.* Opening it at random. Feeling its heat, its prana.

NOTES

1 I'll be specific: in the case of *Moving Borders,* the recent deaths of Kathy Acker and Hannah Weiner give off an elegiac, melancholy vibration. These deaths, alluded to briefly and obliquely inside the completed brackets after the contributors' names (-1997]), have an emotional pull that argues with and complicates the narrative's otherwise chronological, linear, forward push and drive. To give another example, few anthologies could achieve the alphabetical rush and sweep of *A Controversy of Poets* (1965), for it begins with the "Europe" of Ashbery and ends with Zukofsky's *"A"-11.* Yet inquiring readers will always wonder what editorial legerdemain went into insuring that no other poets precede Ashbery in the alphabet of Kelly and Leary. The reader of *The New American Poetry* will not have to know the particulars of its backstage dramas—the long holdout of Robert Duncan, for example—to feel the jangly tensions arising from them that run through its length and composition, web and woof.

2 Though perhaps vestiges of the original plan gleam through, pentimento-style, in the preeminence among the "Poetics and Exposition" documents in the back of the book of Marjorie Welish's 1994 salute to Guest.

3 Her contribution to the "Poetics and Exposition" section of the book is on "Visual Poetics, as Projected through Olson's 'Field' into Current Female Writing Practice" (1996) so she emerges as the theoretician of the visual poetry movement as well.

4 In her introduction to the Fraser festschrift, "Mirage #4/Periodical #74" (San Francisco, December 1997).

5 Actually I believe Sloan to be fairly fearless in this regard. I remember urging her to consider for inclusion Helen Adam, Joanne Kyger, Jamie MacInnis, and other woman poets of the Spicer/Duncan circle, and by, finally, excluding them, she might have feared risking my regard, and I'm not even a woman. . .

6 "Move back and forth with ease between fiction and poetry." How about a *Moving Borders* which began with, or followed Niedecker with, Sylvia Plath? I've been to the houses of many of the writers in *Moving Borders,* and like many bookish people, have gravitated to their bookshelves. I don't see *From This Condensery* half as often as I do the big black and gold *Collected Poems of Plath.* Okay, sometimes it's hidden away behind chunky volumes of Lacan's seminars: but it's there, more often than not. What about a reading of *Moving Borders* as in the throes of revulsion (i.e. attraction) to Plath?

—KEVIN KILLIAN

Review: Alison Bundy, *Dunce Cap* (Burning Deck; Providence, RI, 1998). Paper. 128 pages. $10.00. ISBN 1-886224-23-4 original paperback and ISBN 1-886224-24-2 original paperback, signed. Available from Small Press Distribution, 1341 Seventh St., Berkeley, CA 94710.

It's difficult to explain the tenacity of fairy tales and nursery rhymes. They are said to be for children. They lack much of what we generally require of fiction or poetry. Once put into our minds they remain, seemingly forever. Nursery rhymes usually constitute our first experience of poetry. Fairy tales our first experience of narrative. There they are from the beginning and they enter into all our judgements and our perceptions of our readings for the rest of our lives.

Fairy tales are called to mind when reading Alison Bundy's wonderful book *Dunce Cap.* The thirty-one pieces in this tidy book are all without context. They take place somewhere, somehow, but in some unknown place of the imagination. There are no dates and no specific locations. The characters are usually not named. They have roles, functions, presence. The plots of the pieces are not complicated and what supposedly happens is no great mystery. There is no definition of motivation. The pieces often seem unresolved. There is a beginning, a development, but no closure. It is left to the reader to fill out the narrative.

The pieces operate, in short, on a childlike level. The pieces are minimalist narratives that must be trusted by the reader, just as fairy tales are trusted. And like fairy tales Bundy's narratives are antidotes to the oppressive and monstrous fictions of John Updike, Thomas Pynchon, Philip Roth and Ursula Hegi. Instead of closing off the imagination of the reader, Bundy invites the reader into the narrative so that the imagination of the reader is stimulated, enhanced, brought into play as part of the narrative. The reader completes the narrative.

The stories bring to mind words like "mystery," "wonder" and "magic." Those words arise out of the tonelessness of the pieces. The reader is left to wonder what he is to make of the brief narratives. The concreteness of the stories seems to contradict the absence of specific detail. There seems to be a specific setting for each story, but it is not there. The characters seem familiar, but we don't know who they are. Like fairy tales, the tonality is ambiguous. The tone exists somewhere between humor, sorrow and pathos. The pieces seem self-contained but the implications reverberate, resonate, into the kind of responses one feels for the narratives of Kafka or Heinrich Böll. Like the work of

Kafka and Böll, Bundy's stories in their brevity avoid cuteness, sentimentality, melodrama. They make you ask, "What is a narrative?" and "What is a story?" You can see here how the art of reduction can lead to immense resonances.

The longest story in *Dunce Cap* is called "A simple Malady." It begins, "Once there was a doctor who wore gloves and coveted an intangible thing." The doctor arrives in a town where he is to cure the insomnia of a young woman named Fatima. The doctor has been hired by Fatima's father Mr. Impeo. The doctor's cure may or may not work. Fatima is mysteriously changed but, says the doctor, not cured. At the end he leaves to go to meet his double in a cold room in that "other part of the world." The story seems heavy with meaning, but it is impossible to know what it might be. There seems to be a "moral" to the story, but it remains elusive. The story ends without a closure.

In the story "The Inheritance," a story told from a child's point of view, a mysterious, subtly vengeful grandmother works a kind of magic on her grandchildren. The children live with the grandmother, and while she sleeps the children explore the house. When certain possessions of the grandmother disappear, the grandmother begins, presumably, to hide certain pieces of her property. The grandmother, like a wicked witch, takes her vengeance mysteriously and cleverly. The guilt felt by the children is created by the grandmother's cryptic behavior. The inheritance of the grandchildren depends on solving the mysterious behavior of the grandmother.

The narratives in Alison Bundy's *Dunce Cap* turn out to be mainly ironic. The dominant tone of the pieces has to be for the reader a sense of irony that comes from the mixture of concreteness and the absence of what we ordinarily expect from our narratives. We usually have an abundance of detail, so much detail that reading is merely registering the author's unwillingness to leave anything to the reader's imagination. When a writer gives us the material of a narrative without the usual comforts of telling us how to apprehend the narrative, we respond with a sense that we as readers are more knowing than the narrator of the story. Irony is usually created when the reader is more knowledgeable than the narrator. The narrators in Bundy's stories are children, or some innocent person. We mostly do not know who the narrators are, as in fairy tales.

Like fairy tales, Bundy's tales seem vaguely familiar. Have we read them before? Why do we recognize them or elements in them? Are they working on some lower level that we do not recognize or realize? Is there really such a thing as a "collective unconscious?" Is that why we find them mysterious, magical, wonderful?

The cover of Alison Bundy's book shows a hand above a cone. The illustration includes an optical illusion. It is not clear whether the hand is lifting the cone, the dunce cap, off someone's head or whether it's putting it on someone's head. The illustration may be an image of the reader's condition on entering the book or on leaving the book.

Whatever the reader's response may be, *Dunce Cap* is an outstanding piece of work. Buy it and read it again and again. It gets even better on re-reading. It will make you understand why brevity is a virtue. It will make you understand why you don't have to read 800 pages of dull narrative in order to enjoy fiction.

—DALLAS WIEBE

Jessica Lowenthal, *as if in turning* (Burning Deck, 1996)
Heather Ramsdell, *Lost Wax* (University of Illinois Press, 1998)
Benjamin Hollander, *The Book of Who Are Was* (Sun & Moon, 1997)

I had the pleasure of reading Jessica Lowenthal's first book on my patio under a giant eucalyptus where hummingbirds zip in and out among the branches, not unlike these poems that seem to move as phenomena unfolding—emergencies and vanishings like hummingbird's hover and blur. In Lowenthal's work, "as if" *is* turning: the imagination's linchpin between "seem" and "be" enabling investigative correspondence. These poems are also self-reflexive: the linchpin is artifice, "the angle of incidence" is not "the angle / of reflection." But post-Saussurean savvy need not preclude sensual utterance. Unlike lesser poets, Lowenthal hasn't thrown out the melopoeic baby with the bathwater. Sound is intelligence in love with its letters:

Cleaved—

cloven—

lattice shell
latticelike

window shutters folding doors hydraulic gates

Acoustic correspondences intimate (initiate?) imaginative correspondences. Listen to the consonant clusters, the dilating and wincing apertures of vowels: "cleaved," with its forked semantics ("sticking to" / "splitting"), pushing forward to past participle "cloven"(bisulcated? devilish?), a kind of phonetic accretion in which I hear "hoof" splay in "clove hitch, clove hook . . . prairie clover." These cleave.

Genres and definitions are boundaries, but in these poems a "word is not contained by boundary." Biblical and mathematical lexicons, dictionary definitions, the epistle, the sonnet, and the "grotesque" alphabet are used like two-dimensional surfaces against which the poems refract, asking what assumptions, values and ideas are contained within the circumferences of forms. In Lowenthal's rewrite of the opening lines of Genesis, a torqued phoneme turns "the word made flesh" inside out: "In the beginning was the bird and the bird was with god and / the bird was god. He was in the beginning *with* god. All / things were made through him . . ." Things precede their names: bird begets word.

These poems demonstrate that while wisdom may be the ability to name things correctly, the responsibility of the poet is to question the received wisdom of received names. Here are purposeful misfirings of language, the *"beloved* accidents" to which we are betrothed, for better or worse, in the letter's law. And what are these accidents but generative—permissions granted by a love of, and attentiveness to, language. In Lowenthal's poetry each word is a profile that, in turning, opens outward onto imaginative planes and provocative correspondences.

*

For the past several years I've been drawn to Heather Ramsdell's poetry without being able to articulate why in any satisfying way: the poems seem to wriggle out from under critical apparatuses and flout the plodding gumshoe of close-reading. But when *Lost Wax* was selected as a winner of the National Poetry Series, I thought that reading a long run of her work would allow me to understand what it is that both intrigues and escapes me.

It is, perhaps, the escaping that intrigues. In a Ramsdell poem, the floorboards of voice, tone, and situation are constantly shifting. The opening lines of "Flag in the Gate":

> Where a way, a gate to open
> On to a gate, agape
> Say not anything, something

Human, puff
Of gore flung out to trick the mob

Here come that ol' Bakhtinian heteroglossia—multiple, contending voices looking for "a way, a gate to open." But the way is several, and the flag of language—"blurring out and snapping in"—gestures toward a country none of us has seen. These quicksilver shifts in tone, diction, and situation undermine any traditional attempt at discerning narrative. At best, there are oblique or contiguous relations: the gate "agape" like a mouth saying "not anything, something human"? And the "gore flung out": speech? What makes a traditional (i.e., linear) reading of these poems difficult is that they resist the symbolic and conceptual cohesions of metaphor. In fact, there are few metaphors in Ramsdell's work. Instead, these poems are steeled by metonymy (specifically synecdoche, or part-whole relationships). While both metonymy and metaphor are figures of displacement, metonymy generally gravitates toward *material* relationships (object-to-object, voice-to-voice, etc.), while metaphor generally gravitates toward *abstract* relationships (object-to-concept, object-to-symbol, etc.). Ironically, metonymy's object-based relationships tend to disrupt narrative more than metaphor's object-to-concept/symbol relationships, which strikes me as one reason why many experimental poems such as these come off as "reader unfriendly": there is a friend, albeit abstract, in metaphor's conceptual and symbolic relations. And a survey of experimental poetry since, say, 1900 would undoubtedly turn up more examples of metonymy and synecdoche than metaphor. Of course, metonymy's disjunctions create new correspondences, and in Ramsdell's work these fragments examine the oblique relations that exist *between* voices, *between* objects, *between* sequences of events: the lost wax of phenomena.

Like many poets whose work gravitates toward metonymy, Ramsdell's poetry is strongest in the serial mode, as in the "Closet" sequence and *Bridge Segment.* If a poem is epistemological bridgework, these serial pieces eschew metaphor's magnifico. Indeed, *Bridge Segment* questions the very figure of bridging:

> There won't be the closure of books and hands
> laid on the table. There was no speeding drum,
> not a flag, not a map. It has no legend, and its keys,
> I assume, are in the river. There is no bottom.
> There is no perimeter, there is nothing if not surface
> baldness and its continuous arrangement
>
> which is, exactly, the field.

A response to Crane's *Bridge* from the far other shore of the century? While Ramsdell's work shows little if any Black Mountain influence, there are echoes, here, of Olson's admonition that "a field / is not a choice, is / as dangerous as a prayer, as a death, as any / misleading."

*

There's the cynic's truism that only the convinced show up at a protest. Then there's the recent mass protests in Indonesia where nearly a whole country was convinced, and Suharto stepped down. Watching Indonesia through the TV screen, I wondered what sort of political change poetry affects. Is poetry protest? If so, whom does it convince? Who will show up?

Old hat: I sit in on an MFA lecture on Oppen. Readings from *Discrete Series* stupefy and silence. The work is difficult, and no one's convinced. Polemics about the poet's responsibility to the reader, and vice versa, abound, and this is no place to enter into the fray. But the questions are important: if poetry is protest, who reads the poems that ask difficult questions of themselves and their audience? who will show up? Poetry is difficult because the world is difficult. For some, the difficulties aren't worth the effort. Likewise, some stayed home during the protests in Indonesia: content with the status quo, fearful of mob rule, apathetic.

I read Benjamin Hollander's *The Book of Who Are Was* as a poetry of protest against the disappearances and displacements that are both inherent to language and willfully orchestrated through its political manipulation. Like any protest, the work is difficult. These poems ask that the reader be familiar to some degree with Dickinson, Celan, and Jabès, as well as Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Lyotard. Who will show up to read the book? There is no moral imperative to read x or y, and I want to say that there shouldn't be. At the same time, language is power, and in this century we have seen the abuses of that power on an unprecedented scale. There is a pipeline running between the word and the world, the name and the judgment. Not convinced? Listen:

> Never say: "corpse"
> Never say: "victim"
>
> Say too: *figuren*
> rags and wood
>
> ragland woodland
> puppet block of human

Never say: "human"
Puppet block

1942: in order to destroy evidence of mass extermination, the Third Reich changes its corpse disposal policy. The dead are dug up from mass graves and incinerated: no more corpses. Ashes. Concentration camp Jews forced to dig up the bodies are told by German soldiers to call the bodies "figuren" (German for "puppet," "marionette"). Those who disobey are shot. As Hollander's work reminds us, language not only preserves and memorializes humanity: it can conceal and destroy it. Say rags and wood. This is Zeus in swan's clothing, but the stakes are higher. What is at stake in naming correctly is more than academic squabbling and personal aesthetics: our perception of reality is at stake. And so, poetry is "a gift, what must be said" and "what sticks in our throats," a "crossing over" and a "house of hiding / house of signs."

In the Cabalist tradition, the letter *is* life. Late in the twentieth century, in the wake of the Third Reich's *figuren* and the Rwandan "genocide fax" lost in the bureaucratic shuffle, the letter is also death. Thus, Hollander's poetry sets the "living" letters of the *Zohar,* marching "like troops behind their kings," against Celan's "human resounding Marchroar." This is the book of splendor and this is the book of darkness. The letter giveth and taketh away.

Hollander is exceptionally adept at building a kind of meditative combustion in his poems by sounding off of fragments from a variety of sources. Note, for example, the recoveries and redispersals of Dickinson sewn into "A Packet For 'D'," and the deflections and recirculations of phrases in the fictive Celan interview ("Commentary of the False Numbers—3,4"). But the most powerful work is in the penultimate section of the collection, *Ohne Aba: Sabra,* which to my mind is one of the most powerful meditations on the Holocaust in the English language this side of Rothenberg's *Khurbn.*

It's too bad that Hollander didn't provide notes for the many sources that fold into *The Book of Who Are Was.* For example, a reader with some familiarity of poetry will probably recognize that "D" is for Dickinson in "A Packet For 'D'." But the subtle correspondences between Hollander's and Dickinson's poetry are enhanced by shuttling between source and site. Then again, we all disappear through the language-cipher, never knowing the sources of anything, never knowing "who the book of who are was / was for."

—DAN FEATHERSTON

***Paul Metcalf, Collected Works*, Volume One (1956-1976), Volume Two (1976-1986), and Volume Three (1987-1997). Coffee House Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1997.**

Sperm whales are among the longest and deepest divers of all cetaceans, possibly being exceeded only by the bottlenose whale. The limits of duration and depth of the dive are determined largely by the size of the individual. Sperm whales sound by lifting the forward part of the body a few feet into the air, giving a strong spout, rounding the back in a high arch, and descending steeply. The whales appear to dive vertically and can descend to depths as great as some 1,500 meters. Top estimates of lengths of dives are 80 minutes. The first blow after a sperm whale rises is an explosive blast that may be heard for nearly 250 meters. The spout is moist and fetid and has a burning effect on the human skin.

"My own approaches to history are very similar, another kind of dive into the soul," remarks Metcalf in his essay "Where Do You Put The Horse?" in Volume Three of his *Collected Works.*

> I would think of history—and the varieties of language that ride with it—as a vast resource, into which one plunges with energy, comparable to sexual energy, demanding and focusing all one's vitalities. Following this, there is the second phase, which I learned absolutely from the poet Charles Olson: History is important only insofar as it impinges on the present. First, the plunge, the descent into hell, the near-drowning if you wish; then the return to the surface. Because, if you drown, who cares? And if you don't plunge, who cares?

Paul Metcalf is a familiar name to many, Herman Melville's great grandson, a writer's writer working the outer reaches of the literary world, publishing only in limited editions put together "by small idealistic presses."

Metcalf's *Collected Works,* Volumes One through Three, cover a period of writing from 1956 to 1997. Volume Three includes two new works, *Huascarán,* a poetic tribute to the Indians of Peru, and *The Wonderful White Whale of Kansas,* a comparison of Moby Dick with The Wizard of Oz, heretofore unpublished. Also included in these volumes are *Will West, Genoa, Patagoni, The Middle Passage, Apalache, I-57, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, The Island, Waters of Potowmack, Golden Delicious, Firebird, Both, Zip Ode, Mountaineers Are Always*

Free! ". . .and nobody objected," Araminta and the Coyotes, *Louie's Torch* and *Willie's Throw.* Volume Three includes three plays and *Where Do You Put The Horse?,* a collection of essays.

The omission of Metcalf's works from periodicals is discouraging. Perhaps this has been a matter of free choice. But it would be far more inspiriting to see a generous acceptance of Metcalf's idiosyncratic writing included among the academic reviews and literary journals. Writing is still—a mere year and a half from the next century—largely dictated by sclerotic, Victorian ideas of categorization. Nonfiction is pragmatic, factual, and "unimaginative." Poetry is the purview of weirdos, ne'er-do-wells, and bluestockings, a freeform free-for-all. Fiction must have a beginning, middle, and end. There must be foreshadowing and character development. There must be tension, conflict, and suspense. Is life actually like this? Does anyone's day actually occur in these patterns? I think not. "It is strange that, at all visible levels, American literature is so neatly organized into exclusive territories," writes Metcalf in "The Categories," the first of eighteen essays comprising *Where Do You Put The Horse?*

> In practice, there are two warring tyrannies at work here: fiction writers make money. . .poets have class, or status, or altitude. As a fiction writer, I have a trade, a profession, I sell my wares, just about as fast as I can manufacture them . . .as a poet, I may have a job (poet-in-residence), but I'm above the marketplace, my gems are beyond price, and I look more than a little down on you.
>
> Perhaps this is what I'm after: that the reach in our literature, our tradition (and we have an example of this in as recent a writer as Carl Sauer), originates in prose, a dirt-prose, that in the power and energy of its own passion forces the gates of poetry. No wooden horse, no gimmicks—just sheer force.
>
> In the face of this tradition—which, to me, has the force of an avalanche—it seems strange to see our official, functional world falling back into the little inherited European boxes that so antedate what is happening today and what has been happening for so many years.

Metcalf's themes are eminently familiar and gruesomely vivid: murder, war, migration, discovery, disease, insanity, sabotage, slavery, torture. The seasonal flight of swans, the reckless slaughter of buffalo

on the American plains, the exquisite horror of cannabilism, volcanic eruption, monstrosities, wonders, cataclysms, black distortions, enormous furies of vermilion. "Nearly the whole gamut of human passion." His particular focus is North and South America, its geology and inhabitants, the settling of the "New World." ". . .hills green to their tops, and the valleys rich with vegetation, wild wheat, clover and oats," "old men young men one legged men and some that don't happen to be men," "good homemade soups and breads, guys in beards, gals in peasant skirts and jeans," "New England Druids," "Tennessee Phoenicians," "crescentic gouges and chattermarks, bedrock knobs with rockdrifts streaming from the lee. . .the rock brecciated, slikensided, crushed, and shattered."

Metcalf's method of construction is that of a bricoleur. He chooses a topic and then saturates it with texts gathered from other sources, collapsing distinctions between interior and exterior, past and present, recorded history and the actuality of raw experience. The words *conscience* and *consciousness* are close in sound, writes Metcalf, "and in my sense of history. . .the barrier between these words is shattered and they become one."

> I can enter an ethos, a precise local quality, that may include the people, the past, the landscape, the geography, the geology, the climate, the natural ecology, the innumerable human and manmade changes, with the dynamics of each—so that I see it, feel it, think it, sense it, today, as a totality of *was/is*. And I think the success of the writing, insofar as there is success, is the result of this permeation. [Metcalf's italics]

"My effort in all the books," Metcalf reiterates in "The Making Of A Play," has been to collapse time, to create a plane on which events of all periods may occur at once, to create tensions that one finds in the static arts, that I found so forceful, for example, in the color associations of Josef Albers—the chemistry of a red against a green, etc."

One begins to feel very acutely, after reading Metcalf for a time, the immediacy of history in the random assortment of things combining to make a gestalt, a life, around and under and *in* one's body. The air one breathes, one's clothes, the walls, windows, carpet, ink, paper, pen, computer, plumbing, wiring, language, emotions, birds, cars, sudden hum of the Frig coming on, the food inside, the abrasions and pleasures awaiting one on the other side of the door, everything conflates into one dynamic ongoing collage.

"In our multiethnic, multicultural, severely disjointed world," Metcalf elaborates further in his essay "The Creative Process" (Volume Three), "*bricolage* may be our most natural mode." He quotes from an unpublished essay by David Kadlec on the theory of *bricolage* as developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss:

> *Bricolage* is distinguished from the work of the craftsman insofar as the materials used are those salvaged from the wreckage of previous constructions rather than materials designed specifically for the task at hand. Lévi-Strauss views mythical thought, which draws from an extensive but limited repertoire, as a kind of intellectual *bricolage.* New myths can be wrought exclusively from the fragments of old ones.

Seminal models for this type of literary construction are Ezra Pound's *Cantos,* William Carlos William's *Paterson* and much of Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems.* Metcalf provides a bibliography at the end of each of his pieces, citing the sources of his text-collage. He avoids the use of footnotes purely for aesthetic reasons ("I was, and am, averse to attaching little burrs at the bottom of each page, referring to notes at the back; this would have broken the flow, the rhythms"). His sources are extremely diverse, including textbooks, encyclopedias, guidebooks, diaries, memoirs, tales, articles, accounts, natural histories, biographies, travel narratives and newspapers. Reviewing Metcalf is like reviewing over a hundred different people, including George Washington (a bad speller) Herman Melville, L. Frank Baum, Walt Whitman, Gertrude Stein, Robert E. Lee, Abraham Lincoln, John Brown, John Wilkes Booth, Booker T. Washington, Mao Tse-Tung, Mary H. Jones and Thomas Jefferson. It's as though Metcalf descended into some historical underworld with a tape recorder and returned with a swarm of voices. His own writing tends to be direct, plain, and self-effacing, somewhat like a piece of beautifully designed Danish furniture, a table or chair with simple functional lines that emphasize the quality of the wood rather than draw attention to the intricacy and skill of their construction. Metcalf's authorial presence is nearly invisible. He deposits his verbal *objets trouvés* and leaves the room. The relations that the reader might establish between the aggregates of material depend upon his or her willingness to draw inferences. Sven Berkerts faults Metcalf's play between interior and exterior in *U.S. Dept. of the Interior* as too baldly incongruous to be affecting, and although he admits the "vision coheres impressively otherwise," "it

leads us to think that even this most inclusive of modes, the assemblage, is subject to strictures and limitations. Not everything can necssarily be incorporated within the matrix of juxtapositions." I feel this is a fair criticism. But a compromise would've been devitalizing. The deep saturation Metcalf brings to that most solipsistic state of all at the beginning of *I-57*—schizophrenia—layering on extracts from twenty-two different sources *(American Journal of Insanity, Out of the Depths, Mania, The Inner World of Mental Illness,* etc.) reifies the pathology of that devastating illness in a language so uncannily vivid it feels alive, brought to the surface of the page with seething force, an effect that would've been lost had Metcalf inserted his own commentary. The further conflation of human skin with "the skin of the earth" a few pages later—"photo receptors in the cells of the whorls of the fingertips," "the skin of the land, undulatory, slightly billowy," deepens the sense of tactile actuality.

It takes a great heart and a great skill to unearth buried similitudes without diminishing their intrinsic wonder with a reductive pedantry. But since these works elude categorization, how are they to be evaluated? Is their intent to persuade, to inform, or to entertain? Are they more like poems, or more like essays? (All three volumes of Metcalf's *Collected Works* are shelved in the essay sections at University Bookstore and Elliott Bay Bookstore respectively here in Seattle). "Not a poem, not a novel, not a history, not a journal, yet at times some or all of these," writes Metcalf in the introduction to *I-57* in Volume Two, *"I-57* is an idiosyncratic approach to a place, a region, and to an interior and exterior life. . ." The key word is 'approach,' a way into, a path. A region is generally approachable without much difficulty; but the actualization of "an interior and exterior life" promises a more intriguing experience. It is to the extent Metcalf realizes this convergence that his focus as a writer demonstrates real clarity.

"Genoa is the last book I wrote which may be described as a novel," Metcalf remarks in his essay "Totem Paul: A Self-Review." Guy Davenport calls it an architectonic novel. Since then, with the fiction dropped out, I think all of my books, individually and collectively, may be called 'narrative hieroglyphs.'"

> It has to do with size, and how you value it, said Olson.
>
> You can approach BIG America and spread yourself like a pancake, sing her stretch as Whitman did, be puffed up as we are over PRODUCTION. It's easy. THE AMERICAN WAY. Soft.

> Or recognize that our power is simply QUANTITY. Without considering purpose. Easy too. That is, so long as we continute to be INGENIOUS about machines, and have the resources.
>
> Or you can take an attitude, the creative vantage. See her as OBJECT in MOTION, something to be shaped, for use. It involves a first act of physics.

Magnitude is a determinant of form. Space shapes the things around us. The large organism must compensate for its preponderance of volume by selectively increasing its critical surfaces. The general method of increasing surface area is to introduce complications: to flatten, grow hairs, branch, wrinkle, elongate, and hollow out. Form roots and branches, bubbles and berries. Thorns, cilia, fur, antennae. Vertebrae and ribs. Eddies and whirligigs.

Pound called it a VORTEX. The characterizing energies of some place, some civilization. ". . .a radiant node or cluster. . .from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing." "A patterned integrity accessible to the mind," explains Hugh Kenner, "topologically stable; subject to variations of intensity; brought into the domain of the senses by a particular interaction of words."

> Imagine, next, the metabolic flow that passes through a man and is not the man: some hundred tons of solids, liquids and gases serving to render a single man corporeal during the seventy years he persisits, a patterned integrity, a knot through which pass the swift strands of simultaneous ecological cycles, recycling transformations of solar energy. At any given moment the knotted materials weigh perhaps 160 pounds. (And "Things," wrote Ernest Fenollosa about 1904, are "cross-sections cut through actions, snapshots.")

There is a sense of largeness to Metcalf's works, a cetaceous amplitude, though this bigness of scale is different in tone and tenor from the frequently autocratic *Cantos,* aggressive volubility of the *Maximus Poems,* or thunderously dissonant *Paterson.* Works such as *Genoa,* with its quilt-like interweaving of text from Melville's *Moby Dick,* Columbus' journals and Metcalf's own narrative interspersion has—in many ways—much in common with certain French work, such as Michel Butor's *Mobile, "Étude Pour Une Représentation Des États-Unis,* inspired by the display of quilts at Vermont's Shelburne Museum,

or Claude Simon's *Les Corps conducteurs,* another patchwork of verbal *objets trouvés.* "While it is true," Brian McHale remarks in *Postmodernist Fiction,* "as contemporary critical theory has taught us, that *every* text is in fact an intertextual space where the materials of other texts are brought into a new relation, this intertextuality is particularly heightened and foregrounded in the *nouveau nouveau roman.*

The parallels running through *Genoa* (hydrocephaly, monomania, Moby Dick and Melville, Melville and Columbus, the Carribean islands and urate crystals in Columbus' toes) underscore an important difference between Metcalf's "experimental" writing and other postmodernist authors. There is little trace of that Saussurean syzygy, that arbitrary sizzle between signified and signifier that has resulted in so much deconstruction and loosening of the referential register. Metcalf's language bulks weightily with referential mass. Language and experience interact. The world teems with resemblances. "Not the smallest atom stirs or lives on matter," observed Captain Ahab, "but has its cunning duplicate in mind." Metcalf is ruggedly empirical; analogy and metaphor are reached by a procedure comparable to building a house. The discreteness of parts emphasizes the complexity of the materials, the intricacies of the external world.

> An exposed joint can add highlight and shadow or pattern to a form. It can help the viewer understand the architecture of the piece by revealing the relationship of intersecting parts. Exposed joinery also offers an opportunity to add rich detail, which can be a source of delight as people touch and use the object.
>
> —*Making Joints,* by Ian J. Kirby with John Kelsey

Metcalf's arrangement of texts has a funny way of allowing events to exist *in situ*—right here, right now—with an unnerving clarity. The effect is sometimes deeply disturbing. There is an account of a Japanese POW camp in *Genoa* so horrific and vivid I couldn't go back to the book for a week.

The collection of essays at the beginning of Volume Three are helpful toward understanding Metcalf's writing, are written in a plain, unaffected style, and are amiable without being garrulous; altogether an enjoyable read, although I disagree with much of what he says. He is critical of contemporary American poetry, particularly language poetry (he offers a sampling of John Ashbery, who, he says, "has chosen a kind of hermetic narcissim") decrying its reluctance to engage reality. "I would suggest that the majority of poets writing and publishing

today have, at some early, elemental point, suffered a failure of courage." "Your poet is often a frightened soul," he later goes on to say, "and this fear seems to express itself as, first, self-indulgence, and second, a terrifying dedication to poetry. These poets have, in fact, placed the cart perfectly in advance of the horse: poetry trying to pull life." I would counter these charges with any number of arguments—one of the more salient being that a prime influence on language poetry was Marcel Duchamp, whose attitude was one of incorporating life and art in a manner not unlike the Cheyenne Contraries of the Great Plains, or the Fool in King Lear, mocking entrenched ideas with the very idea of revealing life in all its ugliness and wonder—but I come to review Paul Metcalf, not harpoon him. (And why not put a cart in front of a horse: drop a turbocharged eight piston quatrain in that cart, and you can take that horse anywhere you want).

Metcalf impugns contemporary poets as being infatuated with nouns. "Many of them have forsaken the traditional artist's role of making and are satisfying themselves with simply naming; they have, in short, substituted nouns for verbs." I found this ironic because it is evident throughout Metcalf's work (as well as Pound and Olson) that this is a guy who *loves* naming things, who *loves* substantive nouns. Cataloguing, listing, stacking things on a big pallet of prose as though he were wheeling around in a warehouse of the imagination in a forklift. Take, for instance, the way he focuses attention on the intrinsically lyrical qualities in the directions for building a Ford crank box, a verbal *objet trouvé* installed in *Sialia,* Volume One:

> Drill six more trunnion rivet holes.
> Hand-rivet six rivets in trunnion.
> Close in the two overflow-plug bushes, to be tapped to take
> the overflow screws. These screws are at different levels,
> to show maximum and minimum oil plash-pool depths
> in crank-box fly-wheel housing depression.
> Press-rivet six rivets in end trunnion shell.
> Turn crank-box shell projections down over trunnion shell,
> with hand-hammer.
> Braze trunnion shell to crank-box shell, four-hole, hand-revolved brazing furnace.
> On a large cast-iron jig, with legs and clamp and spotting pins, gauge and straighten the trunnion.

Drill the trunnion hole.
With angle plate on face-plate and lathe and back rest fixture, turn trunnion.

And to hook on here is a lifetime of assiduity, proclaimed Olson. "Best thing to do is *to dig one thing or place or man* until you yourself know more abt that than is possible to any other man. It doesn't matter whether it's Barbed Wire or Pemmican or Paterson or Iowa. But *exhaust* it. Saturate it. Beat it." Who can argue with that?

—JOHN OLSON

Christine de Lailhacar, *The Mestizo as Crucible: Andean Indian and African Poets of Mixed Origin as Possibility of Comparative Poetics.* Studies in Modern Poetry, 5. New York: Peter Lang, 1996; x + 318 pp.

That writing which is most emotionally compelling maintains, with greater or lesser explicitness, an intimate metaphorical relation to the major themes that haunt their author's existence. Preoccupied with her "bric-a-brac" identity, which lumps together fragments of France, Germany, and the Americas, and bits of other places as well, Christine de Lailhacar has read the texts of the "Great Composites" (particularly those by Cecilia Vicuña, Edouard Maunick, Henri Lopès, César Davila Andrade, and José Maria Arguedas), found in them an echo of her own identity preoccupations, has read herself in their playful suffering and their variegated words, and invokes their authority in order to proclaim herself a *mestiza.* And now, in her recent work, *The Mestizo as Crucible,* she decides to pay them homage (in the Derridean sense). With interest.

Christine de Lailhacar takes certain risks by walking the tightrope she has strung from the Andean Cordillera to the Himalayas by way of Mt. Kilamanjaro. From the ground, it would be easy to make a fuss over the literary bazaar she passes through, attacking the eclecticism of her

tastes and the impressionistic quality of her proceedings, except that she succeeds in extracting a method—better, a choreography—from all this.

It is the poets whom she visits first, privileging the empathy, the intuitive thrust, the elective affinity she maintains with "vibration and water"—the forces of the sacred that animate their speech. The first in line are two literary figures near to her heart: Cecilia Vicuña, weaver and poet, "Hispano-Andean mestiza" (viii), and the Mauritian poet Edouard Maunick, as much African as Hindu (according to Lailhacar) and comparable to André Breton in his quest for a higher vision and a surreal experience of language. There follows the shadow of Henri Lopès, a kind of Hermes who enabled the meeting of Lailhacar and Maunick to occur, then one with whom the author is less familiar, Derek Walcott, whose masterpiece *Omeros* is briefly evoked in the form of an open-ended conclusion. Also in the mix are two deceased writers (one Ecuadorean Indian, the other Hispano-Peruvian), both "victims of the tension caused by the problematic identity of the *mestizo*" (viii): César Davila Andrade, author of a long poem in Spanish, translated into Quechua, on the Indian condition, *Boletin y elegia de las mitas,* and the novelist José Maria Arguedas, whose childhood language was, improbably, Quechua, and whose finest work is *Los ríos profundos.*

The body of work involved is sufficient indication that Lailhacar is not seeking to define the contours and contents of a "mestizo literature." *The Mestizo as Crucible* represents less a theoretical work than a series of exegetical touches and frictions—Lailhacar speaks of "anscultation"—practiced on the very substance of the texts. Initially, this entails a literal exegesis aiming at clarifying the meaning of words, syntactical constructions, references and allusions. This undertaking, which also involves oral texts created in languages unknown to the author, is ambitious, to say the least. It would almost be possible to speak of a meta-exegesis, since she is working from translations, as with the Bamana poems "Karaw Ka," translated by the anthropologist Dominique Zaban.

The author also devotes herself to an allegorical exegesis, seeking to link meanings transversally among the different texts of her *corpus,* beyond the autonomous meanings of each. Here, the metaphor that seems most apt in describing her approach is that of the "khipu," described as follows in the useful glossary accompanying the main body of the text: *Khipu/quipu* (Quechua), "string of wool or fiber used as notation system. A central string has several knots; meaning lies in the spacing between the knots. From each knot, other strings may 'radiate' new meaning in all directions. The *khipu* literally represents

the Andean mode of 'radial' thinking, as opposed to alphabetical, linear (causal) thinking" (308).

Through a friction preformed on the texts of her *corpus*—recalling Césaire's line in *Ferrements:* "To try words? Rubbing them to conjure up the unformed"—Lailhacar wishes to lay bare a sort of archi-text common to Andean and African poets and written in Greek, "the Western archi-language" (6). Since Greek functions by means of associative chains of words-words/words-concepts, it could, according to the author, account for the universal workings of the human mind. Clearly, there's a lot of Frobenius in there. This German Africanist was cherished in Negritude circles for having been the first to risk declaring something that had previously been considered an oxymoron: "African civilization." In search of an African classicism, he found in the statuary of Ife and Benin the aesthetic equivalent of the statues of Greek antiquity, and to his mind, this was the sole authentic African art. Although, like him, Lailhacar is fascinated by a kind of pre-colonial Golden Age of the word and aesthetics of the Other, she sees on the contrary a kind of higher authenticity in hybridity, *mestizaje,* which she defines as the superimposition of a written text on an oral text belonging to a common non-Western cultural stock, always legible beneath the most recent inscription. Moreover, she adds: "if every there was *mestizaje,* it can be found in the Greek Language" (136), indicating also that in its textual as well as behavioral forms, *mestizaje* would indeed be the true standard of authenticity. Thus, in Chapter VI, devoted to Edouard Maunick, she observes that "For all his 'négritude de préférence,' Maunick would not be the authentic poet I believe him to be, if he had not been obliged—and he loved that obligation—to don the mask of westernness, the perfectly tailored suit of the diplomat" (193).

It is regrettable that reading Derida did not further corrode the mode of thought around which *The Mestizo as Crucible* is organized, and which, despite the author's intentions, remains binary: a higher degree of authenticity and the quest for essences remain equal and paradoxical components of the author's priorities. *The Mestizo. . .,* which is otherwise teeming with pathways, erudition, and wit, could thereby have gained in structure and nuance, particularly as regards the evaluation of two African writers, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, both unjustly charged with being (in substance) Afrocentrists.

On the other hand, the wealth of this study's reflexion on Cratylism and the literature of the margins may be readily appreciated. In writing it, Lailhacar has, through a kind of osmosis, put into practice what Marie-Christine Rochmann *(Edouard J. Maunick: Hommage* [Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992], 171) sees as the specific trait of Maunickian

Cratylism—namely, the poet's attempt to find himself in and through words, in order to reverse the process of trans-substantiation through which his body has been broken up into signs on the page. "How can one reach others if one hasn't reached oneself?" he asks. With all due respect to Pascal, Christine de Lailhacar's project of depicting herself is in no way foolish.

—SYLVIE KANDÉ
[Tr. from the French
by Christopher Winks]

CONVOCATION + METONYMY

• Audre Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 489 pp.

Educator, political essayist, civil rights advocate, novelist, and poet Audre Lorde (1934-1992) left us a body of work that, with the publication of this 500-page volume, demands to be read as a significant contribution to the diverse culture of opposition forged by a wide range of writers and artists in New York City at the onset of the 1970s—when social promise and artistic production conspired jointly at times across aesthetic boundaries.

Contemporary with poets as dissimilar as Diane DiPrima, Amiri Baraka, Ted Berrigan or Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde wrote anthems about rising from the figurative or real poverties of everyday life; about self-determination, and the continuity of kinship; about the various rites of passage from daughterhood to maternity—as if in perfect keeping with other transits. . . of night into day, or of one season into another. She wrote also, to be more specific, about what it meant to be a black woman in the United States: in a speech devoid of apology or ingratiating gesture, a language that glimmers with complex image-making and argument:

I
Is the total black, being spoken
From the earth's inside.
There are many kinds of open.
How the diamond comes into a knot of flame
How a sound comes into a word, coloured
By who pays what for speaking.

("Coal")

In her most accomplished work (much of it from the books *New York Head Shop and Museum,* 1970; *Between Our Selves,* 1976; and *Our Dead Behind Us,* 1986) Lorde mastered a kind of poem that took seemingly flat statement and wrought it bluntly into unexpected curves of phrasing and conclusion. A poem of 1976 unfolds as a response to news reports following the brutal murder in Queens of an African-American child at the hands of a police officer later acquitted by a jury of eleven white men and one black woman. It begins:

The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
and a dead child dragging his shattered black
face off the edge of my sleep. . .

("Power")

Likewise, in "New York City 1970," sentence is passed over a rotting urban "death by accretion and slow ritual," the ambivalence of a self raging against its untenable position within the "new steel" grid of criminality, nightmare or indifference. So, too, in a poem written in a mode of political naming marked by its historical moment:

. . . .the dark mangled children
came streaming out of the atlas
Hanoi Angola Guinea-Bissau Mozambique Pnam-Phen
merged into Bedford-Stuyvesant and Hazelhurst
    Mississippi
haunting my New York tenement that terribly bright
    summer
while Detroit and Watts and San Francisco were burning
. . .

("Equinox")

Lorde also wrote beautiful woman-to-woman love lyrics wherein eros and social urgency perform a union parallel to the pleasure of bodies touching:

> And I would be the moon
> spoken over your beckoning flesh
> breaking against reservations
> beaching thought
> my hands at your high tide
> over and under inside you
> and the passing of hungers
> attended, forgotten.
>
> ("On a night of the full moon")

These examples, and a series of jarring poems written in the thick of her final struggle with cancer ("Vigil," "On the Edge," "Naming the Stories," "Diaspora," and "Reins"), stand out within a poetic corpus that often shied at the level of formal invention. But these poems prove how Lorde's aesthetics of self, identity and convocation, at its best, managed to complicate the matter of its inquiry by remarking the shadow and edge from which symptoms of the social are genuinely belied.

• Peter Gizzi, *Artificial Heart* (Providence, Rhode Island: Burning Deck, 1998), 93 pp.

Of the writerly confluence that came into its own for the first time around the journal *O.blek*—culminating in the conference and posterior two-part publication of *Writing from the New Coast*—few poets display the prismatic formal versatility of that magazine's co-editor and generational co-conspirator. Peter Gizzi has been an important force in the gathering of poets now in their early to late thirties, many of whom have sought to use what was most valuable to them from the dismantling performed by a previous generation. The sheer range of available possibilities—and in keeping with the situation now in many of the other arts—has led to a pluralism in this wake of a prior heroic moment. Armed with a learned sophistication in what regards the referential, lyric address has since encompassed the grammars of a new cultural paradigm and reinstated the supremacy of poetic pleasures and their ultimate responsibility.

More so than in his previous books *(Music for Films, Periplum and Hours of the Book),* in *Artificial Heart* Gizzi employs the opulence of speech conjunction and cultural sampling to fine effect. The first and

strongest section is entitled "New Picnic Time"—Pere Ubu's outstanding third album of 1980, the title evoking for Gizzi "the punk exuberance of Manet's 'Luncheon on the Grass.'" Not only does this provide Gizzi the opportunity to lift from the seemingly non-sequitur shrieks of band leader and songwriter David Thomas, but to create his own narrative soundscape wherein the desire for alternate angular worlds lies behind and beyond the "decomposing image:"

> When will they say hear me. It was a dream. It was a tin can.
> It was a funny thing to feel. And the children. Or beyond
> this for posture, a simple garden, evergreen, a green car
> out front,
> the picket fence is white, what color are the flowers
> unwritten in a day. There is no space. Only sky and water.
>
> Uncanny earth. A funny thing to feel.

The reference and riff encompassed by Gizzi ranges from Andrew Marvell to Spicer's Lorca, or from Charles Ives to David Byrne. Likewise, each poem seeks a certain autonomy of form and statement, and the eclectic voice that emerges goes from Creeley-patterned lyric implosion to contemporary British inflection in the work of writers as different as J. H. Prynne and Christopher Middleton. Listen to Gizzi's precision of language:

> The lapping waters
> at the edge there—replete with rim effect—
> astronauts witness leaving the atmosphere,
> or seen from a glass of tap water topped off
> on a sweltering day in June.
> [. . .]
> An instant in the life of an evolving mosaic
> is the shape of space between our talk.

Gizzi has no doubt mastered discursive scope and elegance. There are moments for me, however, in which a certain playfulness of speech runs the risk of arch display ("Ledger Domain")—if rendered elsewhere with success, for example, as in the poem "Lonely Tylenol." His lyric weaving of contemporary critical debate enacts a creative confusion between the celebration or disapproval of the vocabulary we've inherited:

> An emblem of attention

between image and absence
it's the "all clear"

at the end of the Gift.

At its most successful, Gizzi's *Artificial Heart* reveals a lush awareness as per the beautiful and unbeautiful constructed natures of the making that generates the work:

The heart of poetry is

an arc between grass blade and gown
hovering beneath an eclipse

"this keeps on writing"

With a kind of cinematic shift technique of closing-in on workaday reality, Gizzi's is a metonymic poetry that delights not only in the notion of substitute shape, but in the hum of its absence—a speech fascinated by the surrogate reality of pronouns, and the story behind the story. Gizzi posits a dialectic of the "beautiful lack" by which one wants to be repaired, and of the search for that "lost space this speech proposes."

—ROBERTO TEJADA

***The Precarious, The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña*, edited by M. Catherine de Zegher**
***Quipoem*, by Cecilia Vicuña, translated by Esther Allen**
Wesleyan University Press (double edition), 1997

On pages *q.116* and *q.117* of Cecilia Vicuña's *Quipoem* ("an autobiography in debris") is a collection of familiar objects immersed in

darkness: a stack of large sacks at the corner of a stone wall, bloated and lumpy with whatever it is they contain (potatoes probably), a jumble of old lumber, parts of a plough or chair or table perhaps, sprawled among the bits of root and straw mixed with the soft loamy dirt. Strands of white luminous cord slash through the scene at different angles, like tracers from ricocheting bullets. The stones comprising the wall look so old they almost give off an odor, a smell of ancient civilization, Machu Picchu, stars cresting the Andes, rituals performed in gold, calculations carried in knots. The overall scene is peppered with luminous white dots, measled with its own weirdness. A closer examination reveals not one scene but two, joined together to form a whole. It is titled *La Bodega Negra, San Fernando, 1994,* which provides a generous clue to its identity. There is a trenchant dynamic to this Andean gestalt; a mesh of visible entities with invisible forces, a flavor of mystic calculation with earthy vibrato.

There is a word in Quechua (the language of the Incas still spoken by the indigenous peoples of Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina) that may easily be applied to the scene above. The word—*huaca*—is defined by a mestizo chronicler named the Inca Garcilaso as "something sacred. . ."

> . . .like all those things that the devil talked to [the Quechua] about; that is, the idols, the cliffs, large rocks and trees which had the devil inside to make them believe that he was God. . .Also they call *huaca* all those things that in beauty or in excellence stand out from others of the same species, like a rose, an apple, or a *camuesa* or any kind of fruit that is larger or more beautiful than all the rest from that tree. . .On the other hand, they also call *huaca* ugly and monstrous things, those that cause fright and surprise . . .Also things that depart from their normal state are called *huaca*. . .

Hence, Vicuña's "autobiography in debris" is piquant with *huaca.* What is so engrossing about this work is not just its ethnopoetic mystique, but its invigorating connections to the North American and West European avant-garde. Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* (birdcage, marble cubes, thermometer, and cuttlebone) percolates with *huaca,* as does his "mile of string" installation at the "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibit in the fall of 1942, which suggests nothing less than the orgasmic work of a *ayahuaska*-crazed arachnid. Joan Miró used to go to the beach every day "to collect things washed up by the tide. Things lying there, waiting for someone to discover their person-

ality." Picasso and Braque constructed collages from scraps of rubbish and Max Ernst transformed clippings from the illustrated papers of big business into a demonic, dreamlike unreality. Robert Irwin uses white, transclucent scrims, or a piece of string stretched taut in order to capture (as Lawrence Weschler remarks in his monograph on Irwin *Seeing Is Forgetting The Name Of The Thing One Sees)* ". . .the incidental, the transitory, the peripheral—that aspect of our experience that is both there and not there, the object and not the object of our sensations," ". . .that shiver of perception perceiving itself."

Examples abound. Artists Betye, Alison Saar, Jimmie Durham, David Hammons, and Kathy Vargas also make use of discarded objects. The uses Vicuña makes of these things (she calls them "little garbages") is, perhaps, most closely aligned with Kurt Schwitters, whose assemblages of nails and railway tickets and tatters of cloth possess a strange, poignant beauty. Schwitters' lacked the radical denial or intellectual acerbity of Duchamp's anti-art gesture and was manifestly more teleological in his approach; his assemblages were acts of sublimation rather than detonation. In *Ein Manifest,* Schwitters remarked that his materials shortened "the distance from intuition to the realization of the artwork" *[um den Weg von der Intuition bus zur Sichtbarmachung der künstlenschen Idee möglichst abzukürzen],* that the act of creation was a recognition *[Erkennen]* of rhythm and expression in nature. It is that nameless space—from intuition to realization—that Vicuña's work occupies. This is what she shares so strongly with Schwitters. "I speak to the moment in which the visible becomes invisible and vice versa," Vicuña remarks, "to the moment when the cognition, the definition has not yet been formed."

On page *q.92* of *Quipoem* (each number is preceded by a 'q,' as a reminder that all the work in this "autobiography in debris" are knots in a larger structure) is a squiggle of yarn—orange and red and green and brown—laid out on a small rectangle (12" X 14") of sheer ocher fabric. The yarn is knotted and looped at irregular intervals and several of the strands have been braided so that their colors are intertwined. The piece is titled *Quipu, 1991.* The quipu—which serves as the central metaphor throughout this collection—is a form of Inca computer. It is essentially a collection of cords with knots tied in them. The cords are generally made of cotton, and are often dyed one or more colors. One cord serves as the main cord; other cords are suspended from it. There is a level of *top cords* and a level of *pendant cords.* The cords are associated with different meanings depending on their vertical direction, their level (whether a main cord, pendant cord, or subsidiary cord) and relative positions within the same level. Also, each cord has a color. Color is fundamental to the symbolic system of the quipu.

Quipoem (Vicuña's penchant for punning parallels Duchamp and Joyce) blends mathematical calculation (the formulas the quipu is capable of computing are dizzyingly complex; Inca irrigation, terracing, storage for the dried potato required it) with intuitive, artistic figuration. (The word is actually printed **quipo**em). *Quipoem* begins with a single line—"The quipu that remembers nothing, an empty cord"—and moves chronologically up to "Arte Precario," a poem composed in New York in 1996. Vicuña is fascinated by etymology, which brings me to yet another important connection (discussing the work of this artist/poet is impossible without making one connection after another; I feel my brain turning into a quipu) that being the idea of *prayer,* particularly the sense of prayer as William James intended it in *The Varieties of Religious Experience:* "inward communion or conversation with the power recognized as divine." Vicuña enlarges it to mean a form of *doing,* and conflates it with a sense of the *precarious,* of strength from fragility, energy through change, continuity through dissolution: "The precarious was transformation/ prayer is change,/ 'the dangerous instant of transmutation.'" Turning through the pages of this collection, I am astonished by the imaginative uses to which Vicuña has put her bits of wood and thread; a simple glass of spilled milk is used to focus public attention on the 1,920 Columbian children who died from drinking contaminated milk ("the milk was spilled and the poem written on the pavement") or a film is made in which people (prostitutes, passers-by, beggars and policemen) are asked a simple question: "what is poetry to you?"

All poems in *Quipoem* have been translated by Esther Allen; photo credits for the various artworks—objects, quipus, on-site assemblages—go to a large number of people listed on *q.140,* including the artist herself. A few additional translations have been credited to Eliot Weinberger, who did the translations for the 1992 collection of Vicuña's poetry *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water.* Great attention has been paid to the precise meaning of the words, and the Spanish or Quechua have been untranslated when no English equivalent could be found. This is essential, as Vicuña treats words as tactile entities, plies, twists, and unravels words like cord on a quipu. Latin *precis* (prayer) is knotted into English "precarious;" "consciousness is *con* and *scire:* to join and to cut." Interspersed between pages of shrouded stone and tethered clay, poems (and etymologies) are doubly engrossed in a sense of materiality, but a materiality of a specific kind: soft, supple, durable, pendant, knotted, multicolored.

A second book—*The Precarious*—shares the same spine as *Quipoem.* The two books are bound counter to one another. *The Precarious* is a collection of five essays about the artist, edited by M. Catherine de

Zegher, plus an additional (and quite exhaustive) section containing biographical notes: solo exhibitions, group exhibitions, awards and honors, poetry books, lectures, poetry in anthologies, selected essays, critical bibliographies on Vicuña's poetry and art.

Each of the five essays in *The Precarious* discuss Vicuña's work with contrasting emphasis. Lucy Lippard's "Spinning the Common Thread" provides biographical background and situates Vicuña's work within an art-historical context, emphasizing the singularity of her sensibility: "Vicuña has never accepted the boundaries between cultural disciplines, creating a terrain of her own in the interstices—the role of the mestizo, or the coyote."

In *"Ouvrage:* Knot a Not, Notes as Knots," M. Catherine de Zegher focuses on the weave of Vicuña's perceptions and philosophy, "constellations, weavings, and language," ". . .the open interplay of elements, and the possibility of infinite recombination." I have read this essay several times now with a great deal of fascination; its connections carry far into general art practice ("Vicuña's *ouvrage* challenges such questions of recent art as the status of the object, the relation of the artist and the viewer/reader, bodily action, the space/time relation, the enviroment, the inner and outer, the connection of the visual to the other senses, at once moving viewers away from their habit of compartmentalizing artistic production into separate media") and implicating Andean weaving as a powerful impetus to gender and social identity (what the Maya of Mexico and Guatemala call *costumbre).* "Cecilia Vicuña, using thread and cloth as her main medium, proposes weaving as a form of participation issuing from popular culture, but she has always perceived and understood weaving as an alternative discourse and a dynamic model of resistance (as do most indigenous Latin American women)." Catherine de Zegher's discussion of felt is especially fascinating. ". . .felt is a supple, solid material that has an altogether different effect; it is 'an antifabric.' Since it involves no threads, no intertwining, but is only an entanglement of fibers obtained by fulling, it constitutes a smooth space." Never have I felt this way about felt before.

"Metaphor Spun: A conversation with Cecilia Vicuña," with Billie Jean Isbell and Regina Harrison, allows some of the artist's enthusiasms ("subterranean logic") to emerge.

> Once my work was shown in slides and readings in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and the director of the art institute said that local people, peasants, migrants crowded the room where my art was being shown and kept asking that

> room where my art was being shown and kept asking that it be repeated. My work spoke to them. There is a subterranean logic that allows them to understand my art. They understand the fertility of words, the sensual cognition I am communicating.

In "Cryptic Weaving," Hugo Méndez-Ramirez focuses on the shamanistic resonances of Vicuña's work, providing "access to the revelation, or epiphany, the divination," of Vicuña's "encounter with the ancient metaphors contained in the word itself." ". . .to the privilege that the vanguard writers give the metaphor, Vicuña adds the immanent vision that she learned from the Andean women of Peru."

Kenneth Sherwood concludes the collection with "Sound Written and Sound Breathing: Versions of Palpable Poetics," shuttling between "the many questions that weave through Vicuña's poems: Where is the poem? Who writes the poem? What is the relation between alphabetic and other writings, between speech and writing, between writing and reading, between reading aloud and performing, or between myth and poetry?"

—JOHN OLSON

Noticings

The Plurality of Worlds of Lewis, Jacques Roubaud, translated by Rosmarie Waldrop, Dalkey Archive Press, 1995. $9.95. The way worlds might be is to be found destabilizing the world as it seems and the modes of the possible are to be found no longer hypothetical but actual and populating Jacques Roubaud's profound book, a book that offers, as he said introducing his reading of these works last November at St. Marks Church in the Bowery, writing that is perhaps poetry.

That is to say, a poetics constitutive of other possibilities and domains establishes poetry as a site of mentality allowing for other possible entities such as you, or you as a cluster of properties and

relations. This metaphysics allows the possibility of positing absence in terms of modern modal logic. "The impossible is not the case in any world," begins one poem. "This world: split in two, two irreducible, unconnected space-times," begins another. "All that a world could be, no matter what," begins a third.

This strategic reconception of "the world is all that is the case" renders the picture theorem of the world as an open work—except that indeterminacies are sooner to be found paradoxical, and except that the high degree of improbability has become invariant. In this plurality, irreconcilable perspectives and frameworks resist affable commerce:

> the impossible is not the case in any world.
> in any world everything, always, can only be possible.
> nothing impossible can be said
> otherwise, elsewhere
> except by saying. I hold nothing back
> by saying: "you."
> and I show nothing either."

Furthermore, Roubaud's restatement of possibility entertains a theory that contradicts it, and in several pieces an ersatz world that posits one world in many abstract representations makes its appearance. Within this world abstractly delineated you are concrete and possibly agnostic: hence your irrecoverable distance.

So, the initial provocation of these "perhaps" poems, arising from considerations of the modal logic of the American philosopher David Lewis, itself arises from and incorporates other possible linguistic worlds. "Everything is everything that happens, no matter what happens," says Deleuze paraphrasing Leibiz to provide for language's being the grounds by which worlds—including that of death—come into existence.

Completing the book are the sections "The Sickness of the Soul" and "Circles in Meditation." As with the first section, the author's note on "Circles in Meditation" declares its sources of intertextual matter and manner: an encyclopedia of moralizing conceits by the 17th-century Jesuit priest Etienne Binet provokes Roubaud's highly particularized linguistic "charm" from terms of botanical structures and functions. Another work, *The Community to Come,* by the 20th-century Italian philosopher and man of letters Gorgio Agamben also tempts citation. But the point of honor for Roubaud is to inhabit paradigms not of his own making through a profound mentality that has signature. With Roubaud each text implicates its own exemplary poetics.

Raphael Rubenstein, *The Basement of the Cafe Rilke,* Hard Press, 1996. $10.00. Melancholia undressed might be characteristic, or Minerva waiting—yet, at any rate this fine first collection of lyrics presupposes the poetics of Surrealism for a quotidian introspective practice that may touch base with the New York School or its avatars.

"What I Had with Me that Day in 1985," for instance, is written to construe the self as self-consciously artifactual, and aesthetic: the self playing the role of waiting as though in French film, a film say, by Truffaut or Goddard. A park, a lame pigeon, "a supine blonde," a cigarette—obligatory apparatus in the scenario that overtakes situation—is assembled to nicely transpose the Surrealist distancing effect to a modernity already retro.

Writing through the literariness of Surrealist devices, Rubenstein rings changes on a list of matters lost and matters found (Via Farini: Night #1") and on the muted anticlimax that substitutes for disappointment ("Via Farini: September Songs"). Liquid free-verse emphasizing vowels establishes the line as lyrical, in Rubenstein's own version of Reverdy's "lyricism as reality." Ashbery's pliable line yet also Ungaretti's and Montale's lyricism of emptiness inform these poems. Meanwhile, reverie is subjected to literariness and to arbitrary formal schemes throughout this book, but asystematically, and the prevailing sense of the volume as a whole is that of an unlegislated nebula of contingent mental events. Perturbed yet unwilling to predetermine a formalism for the book in its entirety, the poet is declaring for an anti-corporate body of writing. The subjectivity that is the subject of these lyrics is neither trivial, nor inflated to omniscience, and the subject stands in its own penumbra, an object among other objects, a mental event among representations in a world that remains largely uninterpreted.

—MARJORIE WELISH

Paul Hoover, *Viridian*, The University of Georgia Press, 1997.

Here were
relic's years,

the local day
in flames among
its maddened flowers,

the tremulous voice
of darkness
aged in days

of lace, as if
it were a bell
falling off in space.

from "The Naked Lunch"

The poems in Paul Hoover's *Viridian* "live / in the room / of time" where "Nothing / real is fast," and act as intricate compression-machines, slowing time and painting it with words. Hoover's first five books of poetry, starting with *Letter To Einstein Beginning Dear Albert,* in 1979, conjoin quirky surrealist "narrative" and personable New York school buoyancy, although that buoyancy is often contained by form, as in the bravura series of sonnets at the core of his 1986 volume, *Nervous Songs.*

Hoover is sometimes associated with language poetry because of his work as editor of the *Norton Postmodern American Poetry* and the magazine *New American Writing,* and indeed, our national "journal of record," *The New York Times,* christened him a language poet in their silly and ill-informed map of contemporary poetry. He does make use, throughout this sixth volume, of a range of dispersive and randomizing strategies, such as the Hugh Kenner/Charles O. Hartman software program Travesty (used in the formation of several poems from his own screenplay for Joseph Ramirez's 16 mm color film *Viridian).* But Hoover is not a language poet. His impulse is lyric, although his best-sustained arguments are always tempered with irony and disjunction, and enmeshed in cultural and historical time.

In *Viridian,* time and flux are center stage. The reader's attention is directed "Under the century, under the text," where "Gulls sweep past what changes":

Synthesis is

its merit,
the unity in
scatter

coming on
like trucks,
though meaning

shits on that.
Thought ought not
resemble

that which it
endorse?
Rupture loves

the difference . . .

from "Desire"

In "South of X," a rich, varicolored poem dedicated to a fellow conscientious objector killed in Vietnam, "the century falls / asleep in a / pink electric year . . . Every camera bleeds. / Yet they wear / their caskets proudly . . . on the / shining floors of / history . . ." As always at such moments in a Hoover poem, however, a comic elbow intrudes, reminding us that "the / meatloaf is divine / halfway through the / age . . ." Reminding us, too, of our solemn historical duties:

. . . Each evening
we are gathered
to be the

men and women
Elvis might have
been . . .

The grief of a century is splayed open, turned on its ear, spun sideways, so that when the poem suddenly asks "Curtains rip. Can't / years?" we are surprised, after so much shapeshifting, to be unprepared for what we feel.

In "Impossible Object," "Erotic play / within closed / systems results / in wedge // and sphere / a phallic / ball that /rolls downhill / / through the /house of / Rosalind Krauss, / who dreams // its bumpy / passage across / storm-lit fields . . ." But its bumpy passage, like the passage of our attention, is marvelously slowed by formal stricture. The entire second section of *Viridian* and much of the third is composed of poems in which words and stanzas are scrupulously counted out, though not in the usual metrical fashion. This work, with its enormous compression, the musical and thematic weight of each line, has the sense of breakthrough, and the result is some of the most powerful poems in the strong, concluding third section. Here, Hoover brings all he knows to bear in lush, intense poems like "The Garden," in which " . . .the world / is coming near . . ." although, as ever, it " . . . watches the wrong / parade . . .":

> . . . Traditional
> as dust, the
>
> world remains insane.
> The scent of
> rain and money
>
> possesses our names
> and thoughts: rhythmic
> gait of monsters
>
> beneath the hieroglyphs.
> Stained with present
> tense, the coming
>
> world is near,
> its wallpaper roses
> giant in the
>
> dark and literal
> as disorder. Knocking
> at the known.

—RACHEL LODEN

Our Yasusada
a review of *Doubled Flowering: from the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada*, edited and translated by Tosa Motokiyu, Ojiu Norinaga and Okura Kyojin. Published by Roof Books, 168 pages

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When the poems, collaborations and correspondences of Araki Yasusada first appeared in literary journals, American and British editors published the work with great enthusiasm. Offered as the poems of a newly discovered Hiroshima survivor, the writing was assumed to be the authentic translation in English of a Japanese postal clerk whose life forever changed on August 6, 1945. Later, Yasusada was revealed to be a fictional character, created by one of the supposed translators, Tosa Motokiyu, yet another pseudonym for an author (supposedly dead) who wished his identity to remain unknown. Since this revelation, American scholars and poets have debated the duplicitous circumstances surrounding the publication of these poems. To complicate things still more, Yasusada's poems and biography were submitted with a sketch of the author to various journals by Kent Johnson, a Freeport, Ill., community college instructor. Stand Magazine, in England, described Johnson as "the active go-between in all these translations." That magazine (as well as American Poetry Review) later demanded its money back from him when the "hoax" was discovered. To this day, however, the author's true identity is in question, but the circumstances surrounding the publication of the poems reveal the possible motivations of western poetics editors.

By now, the Yasusada poems have been inflated beyond the realm of what we usually think of as poetry. The "hoax," in its complexity, has acted as a cultural gauge that reveals the motivations, fashions, and tastes of poets and editors who constitute the supply and demand of today's "experimental" poetry markets. The Boston Review, Lingua Franca, Countermeasures, Poetry Review in England, Jacket Magazine in Australia and other literary journals have debated the meanings implied by the cultural context from which these poems supposedly originated and in which they finally were published. Newspapers like the Village Voice, the Financial Times of London, the Manchester Guardian and the Sydney Morning Herald have run articles. And the Asahi Shimbun, Japan's leading daily, published a front page story entitled, "A Fictional 'Hibakusha' Poet: Forgery or Desire for Union?" The poems, and the stories behind them, have acted as a lens through which contemporary motivations for the publication and appreciation of poetry come into finer focus. Now, the recent publication of the

book provides an opportunity to look at the Notebooks in collected form, and to examine with more circumspection the truly complex issues raised there.

There is a quote from St. Augustine toward the end of *Doubled Flowering: from the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada.* The words of this church father offer an indirect defense for the complicated publication of the work.

> How could a picture of a horse be a true picture unless it were a false horse? Or an image of a man in a mirror be a true image unless it were a false man? So if the fact that they are false in one respect helps certain things to be true in another respect, why do we fear falseness so much and seek truth as such a great good? (DF, p. 118).

The poems, letters and notes contained in this paradoxical and demurely passionate book speak to an American audience familiar with the aesthetic developments of the last thirty years. As Marjorie Perloff suggests in her essay, "In Search of the Authentic Other: The Poetry of Araki Yasusada," (reprinted in the appendix), the mysterious production of these poems challenges an "avant garde" aesthetics that accepts theories questioning creative identity, while at the same time remaining attached to the individual biographies behind artistic works. Foucault's famous 1969 essay, "What Is an Author," suggests that the individual is no longer the sole creator of art, but a point of transmission implicated in the social diffusions of discourse. Criticism does not focus on the impulses of the writer, but on the uses of language, particularly social or political usage. The self, that social construction, is questioned endlessly, as language reveals the fragments of perceived, and fashioned, experience. Identity and its historical determinations, so entangled within racial and gender politics, have now become the source of formal focus among the western "avant garde," that mandarin network of academics and artists camped on university lawns, if not in the very halls.

What troubles so many about the Yasusada Notebooks is the degree to which that apocryphal author's previously proposed and eagerly believed "authenticity" complicates the protocols for considering the problematics of personal identity and otherness. Foucault's authorial death sentence liberated the means of artistic production and, on the surface, gave writers a freedom from the perceived restraints of one's given identity. He gave theoretical permission to creative acts that artists like Shakespeare or Keats practiced as a necessary tool of their trade. But just as Foucault rearticulated this

freedom from a single, constructed identity, the social climate of the United States became entrenched in identity politics, with racial and gender groups marketed as cultural commodities. It was this identity-trained climate that originally created such a favorable reception for the Yasusada works. Now that Yasusada has been revealed as a fictional character, however, a cultural nerve has been exposed, placing artistic identity issues in conflict with the social concerns of identity. The book's controversial reception suggests that post-structuralist theories of identity are less revolutionary and important than they once seemed. The "avant garde" pays lip-service to these theoretical issues, but in practice imaginative or sympathetic creative acts must retain the author's stamp of authentication, due to both "politically correct" social concerns and because of the cultural market value still attached to an author's name. The complicated publication of the poems and letters now collected in *Doubled Flowering* confronts preconceptions of identity, challenging all assumptions of the relationship between author, text and the audience's biographical expectation. It is forcing the confrontation, long ignored by U.S. intellectuals, between contradictory models of identity.

Today, texts often are read with the reader's subjectivity privileged over the author's, as long as the writer is identified as one of "us." When a work is presented, in this case, by a Japanese Hiroshima survivor, the focus on the creator's identity and cultural heritage is heightened. Suddenly, the racial identity of the author is significant to the reception of the work. This book provokes serious questions that address our relationship to the "other," and to issues of what Edward Said calls "Orientalism." But the real controversy is in the way the poems were received by a willing audience of contemporary western poetics editors, not in the production of the work. As Augustine discusses above, or Keats addresses in his statement of negative capability, artists have been allowed, for some time, to transcend identity. This is the shamanic lineage of art. It is the deliberate intellectual and emotional act of embodying the other, sympathetically embracing some thing or some one outside of one's own received identity to find the necessary values of language capable of sublimating one's chosen mask into broader realms of experience.

This radical displacement of self is an ancient tool that today is a symptom of late 20th century life. The altered temporal and spatial references of the contemporary world contribute to an overwhelming sense of psychic displacement. Likewise, the pressures of a late-century capitalist economy intensify the perceptions of power's corruptive process, broadening our awareness of the contradictory desires for both social freedom and self preservation. The resulting

personal and social fragmentations are destabilizing in the speed and greed of a global society. And since the field of poetry often functions as a public space for private complaints, we distrust the imaginative power of art, preferring instead works of personal testament, criticism or experience. In our high-speed, high-tech and increasingly anonymous culture, the imagination no longer serves as a source of trandscendency or transference. It is instead a subjective point of departure for the unfocused "possibilities" of an inward and alienated investigation into the narrow "spaces" of personal impression and opinion. The goal of art today is to reveal any possibility, regardless of its value, because "value" itself is in question. Perhaps this is why so many people have been disturbed and angered by the work of Araki Yasusada. The "hoax" reveals social and aesthetic contradictions that are uncomfortable to study or accept. *Doubled Flowering* is an imaginative gesture that succeeded because its creator or creators took the fiction a step beyond the usual publishing standards, pressing the need to address literary value. By disguising the fiction of this work, the author(s) were able to show us our desire for belief, a desire that is also the recurrent theme of the popular FOX station television series, *The X-Files.* The words, "I want to believe," are written on a poster in agent Fox Moulder's office on that show. Under present social circumstances, this statement can be applied to the hyper-sensitive intellectual culture that first received the publications of Yasusada. Although clues to the dubious identity of the author were distributed throughout the work, the poems were published and praised. Theoretical scruples regarding identity were abandoned temporarily because the work and the story surrounding it appealed to an urge that exists far beyond the fragmented boundaries of poetic circles. We wanted to believe in Yasusada, and then failed to see the humor in our desire when, once again, belief found itself on shaky ground. Somehow, the imaginitive reality expressed by the poems failed to validate the enthusiasm for them once the "hoax" was revealed.

Doubled Flowering unites character and story with the philosophical obsessions of contemporary poetry. The narrative is inferred from the chronological sequence of poems, letters, notes and English language exercises presented under the great mushroom cloud shadows of Hiroshima. Loss and language emerge as the dominant themes, relaying with subtle restraint the great passions of suffering after the 1945 bombings. The book opens with a haunting simplicity of language that hangs like meat on a hook for our devouring eyes. "Walking in the vegetable patch / late at night, I was startled to find / the severed head of my / mad daughter lying on the ground" ('Mad Daughter and Big-Bang', p. 11). The daughter, who died soon after the bombings,

becomes a recurrent image, conveying the grief and sorrow of a personal and communal loss. The first half of the Notebooks particularly convey this curiously distant, but harrowing tale through dream-like invocations of the daughter. "Then children will cry out in joy, or curl in sorrow like autumn leaves. It is not for us. . .to be done about it. Such rising and falling is endless and without explaining" (Letter to Akutagawa Fusei, p. 14). "The crying girl sounds like a loon. . . / Why does her mournful sound call to mind the sky / through the dome of the Industrial Promotion Hall" (Loon and Dome, p. 15). The details of daily life mix with the eternal memory of that loss of wife, children and friends. The final stanza of 'Echo And Visitors,' tags a parenthetical address to the deceased wife in a poem that, on the surface, refers to a wrestling match: "(And you, Nomura, / in your morning kimono, / the name of our daughter / half-called as she strolls / the thistle-lined path. . .)" (p. 21). Personal loss interweaves with the daily life of a man pressured by his own pain and attracted to the world of literal detail. A kind of beauty still exists for him even as he seeks its obliteration in language.

As the years advance through the Notebooks, Yasusada's focus moves more directly to language and the value of its material potency. He studies English and is introduced to the American poetry of the late fifties and early sixties, the San Francisco Renaissance poet Jack Spicer mysteriously becoming a great influence (see Perloff's discussion of this in the appendix). Yasusada's collaborative Rengas are written with an attentiveness that shares formal ties to the "new-sentence" parataxis of Ron Silliman. The 'Nouveau Riche Renga' of 1966 is exemplary: "Ants exult on the tense blossoms of the peonies. / So, calling names, the characters cluster or disperse in irregular designs. / *(fifteen seconds, random, mokug yo)* / 'Isn't it a shame the farmers have almost forgotten the 'Dance of the Clacking Sticks?' he asks'" (p. 67). The intensified attention to language still resounds with references to Japanese "temples," "geishas," "silk trees," "willow leaves" and other elements traditionally associated with Japan by the West. But the echo of that previous loss filters through the paratactic layers, representing emotion without expressing it; invoking sorrow without revealing a deeper emotional experience. This subtlety shapes the pain into digestible tropes for a specific western audience. In a late poem, dedicated to the Japanese novelist Origuchi Shinobu, Yasusada writes:

> Her kisses tasted of blood, or wellwater flecked with rust?

She folded her Rose of the Snow kimono over the corner
of the futon.

So you think she knew your suffering in advance?

Not knew, but represented it.

What do you mean, the right to private violence?

In her company the world was no more than the splashing
water of
her voice (p. 100).

Years have passed since the character, Yasusada, lost his wife to the nuclear holocaust of Hiroshima, so we can imagine him sublimating his own tortured life through the potentially powerful possibilities of aesthetic form. "We were hurtling through a transparent mirror" (p. 100), he writes, attempting to unite personal experience and objective reality through the mediating process of language. But rage is absent. Anger is processed through a formal parataxis. Yasusada seeks understanding to an event that challenges *any* understanding. In the aftermath of the great nuclear destruction of the Bomb, his creative impulse rises from the ashes to bridge an impossible chasm. Yasusada is perfect for an audience of victors because he offers pleasure out of guilt in a language particularly appreciated in the West. Yasusada is a humble seducer who plays with our sincerity, but he is not a reliable witness to the suffering of a post-war Japan.

Still, it is unfair to reduce the imaginative existence of Yasusada's life to anything that is somehow inferior to what we consider "real life." Experience and imagination often are blurred by the creative process to express the deepest human perceptions. Yasusada's Notebooks address human suffering and reveal the passion of a man in vain search for answers to the tragic event that changed his life. Language is Yasusada's salvation just as it is the final hope for western artists who wish to subvert the unfocused, destructive reality of power. From an American view-point, these works are a tremendous success. They challenge our assumptions of race and our positions as kindred spirits to the great destructors of that war. Stll, we want to believe in a real Yasusada because a real Yasusada relieves us of our guilt as inheritors of that fiery legacy. He does not condemn the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: he seeks understanding by employing language in forms that the West can understand. We want to embrace Yasusada because he is magnanimous enough to place the suffering of his life within the

comparative focus of his victors. Yet, this is precisely the limitation of the Notebooks, and hints at its uncertain authorship. An imagined Yasusada does not provide enough redemptive value to unmask our own racial and aesthetic delusions. Since we no longer grant ourselves permission to believe the imagination, we turn to the evidence, the reductive echo of our own limitations, thereby refusing Yasusada's offer of hope.

Of course, there is still the issue of the work itself. Sadly, Yasusada is sometimes more concerned with theoretical or philosophical issues in the poem than he is engaged with what he senses outside of it. While his conflicted impulses are at times delicately revealed, he also can orchestrate language so that it impedes the emotional immediacy, second-guessing experience with the limitations of the formal gesture. He hints at the complicated pressures of a post-war Japan, but instead of addressing those pressures, he writes himself out of the book. Yasusada has reasons for doing so, reasons that ring with familiarty to "postmodern" ears. In a letter to Ogiwara Seisensui, he writes, "Our heroes are the 'no-thought poets' of the late Edo, who held the sweetness of dissonance to be the deep measure of renga. Their path of pulling mind into the marrow of language itself is our path. For in the suchness of utterance there is as much mystery as in all the plum blossoms of the *Manyoshu*. . ." (p. 52). As Yasusada's approach to language turns more cerebral, his poetry becomes oddly removed from the engaged emotional perception that generated the depth in early poems such as "Mad Daughter and Big-Bang." Perhaps this is one reason why Yasusada never publish during his fictional lifetime. Maybe he sensed this inwardness as a limitation, preventing connective tissue from forming in his work. Regardless of Yasusada's indifference to publication, his anonymity is the only validating truth the West could ever accept. The thought of an "experimental" Japanese poet, practicing his craft in utter obscurity, so humbly, with such passive persistence, was too perfect for an American audience seeking moral elevation in the art of the culturally distant "other." When it turned out that Yasusada was a fictional character, the West turned away, not because of the lie, but because there was no life at all, no biography submitted to fulfill our own expectations.

Doubled Flowering cannot be ignored, however, simply because of the questionable identity of its author. It touches us too deeply. The work is disturbing because it complicates our preconceptions of the emotional aftermath of the Bomb. It forces us to imagine that life, however distant our sympathy may be. And as social artifact, the work flourishes for us in America because of this complication. Our conception of poetry demands that it functions within acceptable forms, and

those forms distance us from the events that shadow Yasusada's "life." We want to believe in Yasusada's identity as a Hiroshima survivor, but we want that identity sublimated through formal gestures that preserve our own palatable preconceptions. There are, as Perloff suggests, poems by Hiroshima survivors that use language directly to convey the horrors of their experience. But it is not the horrors that interest us so much as the identity of those who experienced the resulting destruction. How does one imagine a life after Hiroshima? And, how does one react when it is discovered that life after such an event is unimaginable? Therein lies the value of the Notebooks, not as art per se, but as a measure of the social navigations permissible after Hiroshima.

My problem with this book is that it stops itself short of a greater fullness because its focus is directed toward a limited audience. There are moments, however, when even my own reservations and pretensions submit to the strange and intoxicating movement of the better poems. In "Dream and Charcoal," Yasusada again expresses grief over the death of his daughter. "And then she said: I have gone toward the light and become beautiful. / And then she said: I have taken a couple of wings and attached them to the various back-parts on my body / . . . To which she replied: without nothing is when all things die. / Which is when she had a battle with the twigs. / Which is when the charcoal was passed from her body to mine" (p. 46). The mysterious imagery cast within the rhetorical repetitions opens this poem out against a background of destruction that is never directly addressed. This poem, about personal and cultural loss, also expresses the submersion of one's feelings into a surreal landscape of private memory and near mythic experience. The emotional space is recognizable, and the poem resonates with a dignified persistence that realizes death without giving in to it. It seeks a resolution of meaning to an emotional experience that denies meaning. Its elusiveness, framed by the events of Yasusada's biography, is compelling, and it accomplishes something that is rare for a poem of such paratactic distance. The force of Yasusada's story elevates this poem with an increasing momentum. Although at times other poems are formally limited, the subject here is realized with clarity and compassion. "The real washes up like a dream from the unreal" (p. 117), writes Yasusada in a letter to Jack Spicer. Likewise, "the unreal washes up from the real." *Doubled Flowering*, at its best moments, reveals these inversions, showing the coexistence of an imagined life with the experienced.

Perhaps the finest poem in the book is written in a direct, challenging language. Yasusada writes a poem through the voice of his dead wife. The poem's irony and playful satire gently chastise the artistically careful Yasusada.

Your poems are very beautiful, so pure
and classical in voice and tone; the mythylogicol [sic]
allusions in contemporary context daring
yet precise. Astonished, a friend of mine likened
your resonance to that of Catullus. I am in love
with those lines that open the ode on Persephone:

That hair curled with hot irons,
drenched in myrrh, Turnus is driven
at high speed by the Furies. . .

Who could ever know that behind such a voice,
is the heart and soul of an asshole? (p. 77)

The final stanza addresses Yasusada's artistic pretensions, and indirectly, the poetic source of those pretensions. Yasusada gains aesthetic permission from the art of a western model. Here, that model's "heart and soul" is related to an orifice of intolerant necessity. Our Yasusada is caught in a contradiction of impulses that reveal the repellent issues raised by *Doubled Flowering*'s publication. An imaginary West meets in an imaginary East to address an audience that must live with the very real results of 1945. In this case, the active intelligence of language moves through a character of confused and hidden origin, leaving us with the rhetorical question: what ultimately is real? Is it the verifiable author of that language, or the results of a sympathy deep enough to problematize the very life the imagination seeks to convey?

—DALE SMITH

CONTRIBUTORS

KENWARD ELMSLIE's *Selected Poems* will be published this fall by Coffee House Press. KENNETH IRBY's *Call Steps* was published in 1992 by Station Hill/Tansy. ANNE GORRICK lives in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley. Her work has appeared in journals including Open 24 Hours, Big Scream, Hunger, The South Carolina Review, and Petroglyph. ROSMARIE WALDROP collaborated with Keith Waldrop in *Well Well Reality* (The Post-Apollo Press, 1998). DAN FEATHERSTON's *Rooms* was recently published by Paper Brain Press in San Diego. ROBERTO TEJADA has an essay on the work of the Brazilian photographer Miguel Rio Branco, in a recent issue of Aperture devoted to the Río de Luz series of Latin American photography. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Talisman and Crayon. He continues to edit Mandorla magazine, now in its 6th issue. With the 6th issue, ALAN GILBERT and Kristin Prevallet ceased to edit apex of the M, and are now living in Brooklyn. ELIOT WEINBERGER's most recent book is *Written Reaction* (Marsilio, 1996). JACKSON MAC LOW's *Pieces O' Six* (1992) is still available from Sun & Moon. E. CAMERON SCOTT's poems in this issue form part of a larger project with the working title *States of Naming;* other poems from this sequence will be appearing in Chain and Borderlands. An excerpt from TINA ROTENBERG's *No Name No Number No Address* appeared in Sulfur #42. ADRIENNE RICH's *Midnight Salvage* will appear this fall from Norton. CHRIS SIA is in prison in California; he will be released in 1999. Recent publications of the poetry of ANDRE BRETON (1896-1996) in English include *Earthlight* (tr. by Bill Zavatsky and Zack Rogow) and *Ralentir Travaux* (with Paul Eluard and René Char; tr. by Keith Waldrop). MARK POLIZZOTTI is the author of *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* and the translator of several of Breton's works, including *The Lost Steps, Break of Day* (with Mary Ann Caws), *Conversations,* and *Anthology of Black Humor.* He lives near Boston. JOHN OLSON is working on a discursive survey of air, all aspects of air, chemistry, flight, respiration, winds, tornadoes, etc. He lives in Seattle. MAXINE SHEETS-JOHNSTONE is an independent scholar who teaches periodically in the Department

of Philosophy at the University of Oregon. Her books include *The Roots of Thinking* (1990), *Giving the Body its Due* (1992) and *The Roots of Power* (1994). BRUCE BEASLEY's most recent book is *The Creation* which won the 1993 Ohio State University Press Award. He has new poems forthcoming in Gettysburg Review, Iowa Review, Kenyon Review, Ploughshares, and Double Take. NANCY LOCKE is Assistant Professor of Art History at Wayne State University in Detroit. She has published on art in France in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including most recently "Manet's 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe' as a Family Romance," in Paul H. Tucker, ed. *Manet's 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe'* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). A Dedalus Foundation Senior Fellow this year, she is currently working on Cubist sculpture. CHARLES BERNSTEIN is the editor of a collection of essays, *Close Listening,* recently published by Oxford University Press. JAMES HELLER LEVINSON lives in Chatsworth, CA; he is currently doing poetic investigation on the Alameda district in Los Angeles. MILTON KESSLER's *The Grand Concourse* (MSS, 1990) is still available. CAROLYN BURKE, the biographer of Mina Loy *(Becoming Modern,* UCal Press, 1997), is currently researching a biography on Lee Miller. KEVIN KILLIAN is the author of *Little Men, Argento Series,* and *Arctic Summer* (all 1997). With Lewis Ellingham he has written *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance* (Wesleyan, 1998). SYLVIE KANDE is an Assistant Professor of Africana Studies and French at NYU; she is a specialist in Francophone African and Caribbean literature. MARJORIE WELISH is a recipient of a Howard Foundation Fellowship in poetry for 1998-99. Her essay "CentraTemplates" is included in *Uncontrollable Beauty,* an anthology of writings on aesthetics, edited by Bill Beckley and David Shapiro. RACHEL LODEN's poems have appeared in Chelsea, Arshile, Antioch Review, and American Letters & Commentary. DALE SMITH coedits with Michael Price the magazine Mike & Dale's Younger Poets out of Austin TX.

NOTE: as announced at the end of Sulfur #42: Sulfur will end with a special double issue, spring 2000. #44 is also a special issue on non-American English language poetry edited by Jenny Penberthy and Marjorie Perloff. There are no more regular issues, thus all non-solicited contributions will be sent back unread.

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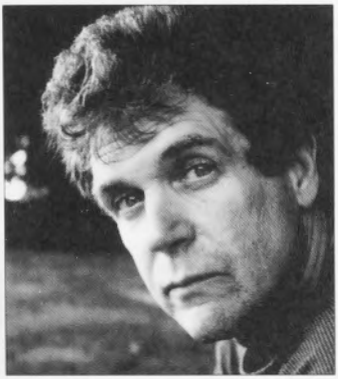

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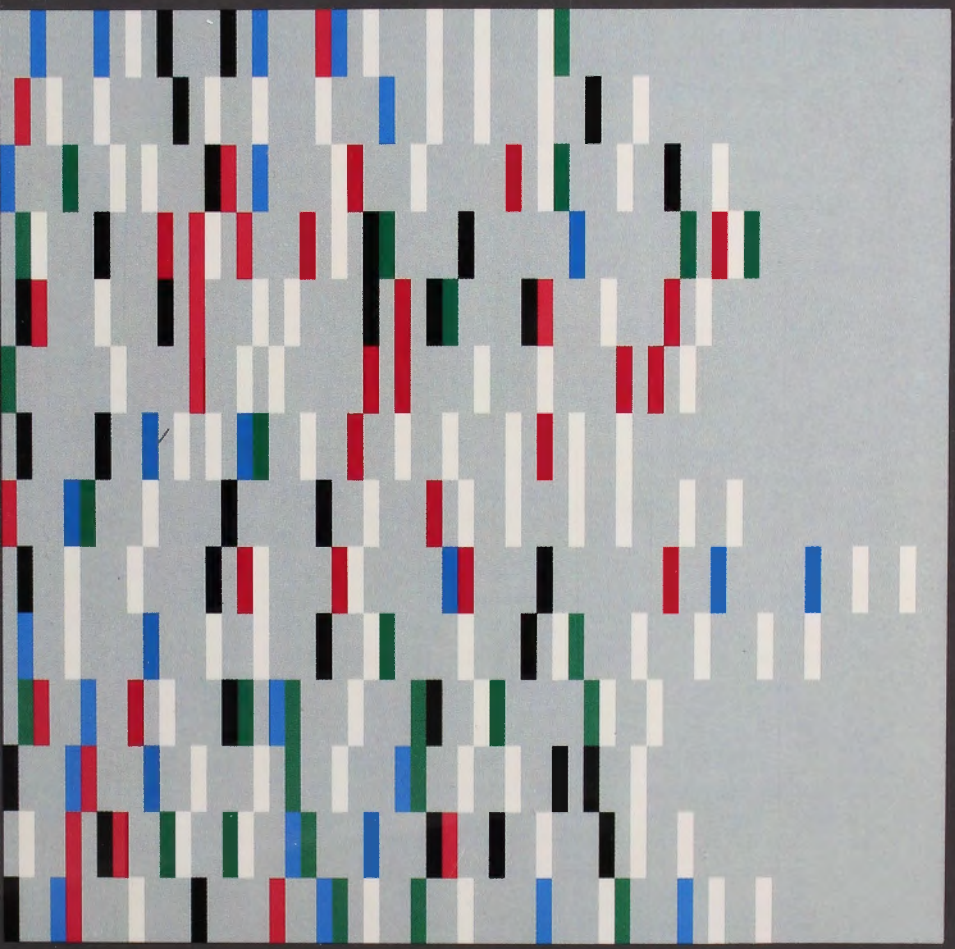

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COVER: "Of Yellow" by Christian Bök is a translation of the sonnet "Voyelle" by Arthur Rimbaud. Vowels have been replaced with blocks of color according to the schema described in the sonnet itself: "A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles." All other letters, commas and spaces, etc. are grey.

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INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism, we know, does not necessarily translate into multinationalism. In the United States today, "foreign" literatures get increasingly short shrift, especially in the case of poetry, given the difficulties of translation. But what seems especially odd is that Anglophone poetries from other nations, poetries that should be quite accessible, are so little known, even in avant-garde circles.

Consider the major U.S. anthologies of the past decade. In the Preface to his groundbreaking anthology of language poetry, *In the American Tree* (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), Ron Silliman remarked that "for reasons of space and clarity, I have excluded poets working in other nations, such as [Steve] McCaffery, Tom Raworth, Christopher Dewdney or Allen Fisher" (p. xx). Space, yes, but why clarity, given that a Canadian poet like Steve McCaffery was actively collaborating with such U.S. language poets as Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein? When Paul Hoover was commissioned by Norton to edit a large volume to be called *Postmodern American Poetry* (1994), it was evidently a given that he would limit himself to bona fide "Americans." In *From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry 1960-1990* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1994), Douglas Messerli does include five poets nominally Canadian among the eighty-one in his anthology: again McCaffery, along with bpNichol, Christopher Dewdney, Nicole Brossard, and Robin Blaser. But Brossard is published in translation from the French and Robin Blaser, born in Colorado and coming of age in San Francisco, is more usually claimed as an American poet: indeed, in *Poems for the Millennium, Vol. 2: From Postwar to Millenium* (University of California Press, 1998), Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris describe Blaser as the "last survivor of that near-mythic trio of poets at the root of the San Francisco Renaissance—the other two being Robert Duncan & Jack Spicer" (220). We note, however, that Robin Blaser has lived in Canada for the last thirty-two years.

Millenium 2 is especially curious in its take on Anglophone poetries. Rothenberg and Joris's blockbuster anthology is wonderfully inclusive when it comes to poets from France and Germany and Italy,

China and Japan, the Bengali poet Malay Roy Choudhuri (from Calcutta) and the Mazatec oral poet Maria Sabina. The Swedish group Cobra is very well represented as are the Chinese Misty Poets and the Tammuzi Poets who write in Arabic. At the same time, the only Canadians in the volume are again McCaffery, Nichol, Blaser, and Brossard, and there isn't a single poet in the volume from Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa.

Perhaps these relatively young poetry cultures are considered insufficiently exotic, on the one hand (they are not, for example, flamboyant oral poets like the Yoruba poet Amos Tutuola) or, on the other, insufficiently sophisticated like the Vienna group or Fluxus. Yet, as we hope the following selections will reveal, much of the excitement in Anglophone poetry is now coming, not from the two big nations, the US and the UK, but precisely from the former Commonwealth countries in question. Australia now has some of the leading experimental poetry magazines, ranging from James Taylor's *Boxkite* to John Kinsella's *Salt* and *Kunapipi* to John Tranter's electronic magazine *Jacket,* which has a rich and scholarly blend of international and Australian contributions. There are similar "little magazines" as well as small-press books being produced in New Zealand and South Africa and especially in Canada, which is perhaps the most exciting Anglophone poetry scene today and hence the most heavily represented here.

Contemporary Canadian poets are by no means a coherent group. McCaffery, who began his career as a post-concrete poet and a member of the sound-text group The Four Horsemen, is very different from the Oulipo-influenced Christian Bök, from such feminist innovators as Erin Mouré and Lisa Robertson, or from such performative poets as Catriona Strang, Doug Barbour, and the African-Arcadian narrative poet George Elliott Clarke. In the Commentary section, we have included essays that give a sense of these differences: for example, Susan Clark on the place of the journal *Raddle Moon* in the larger culture, Peter Hudson on the place of African-Canadian oral poetry in eastern Canada, Marnie Parsons on the renewal of Newfoundland traditions, and Sharon Thesen on the reevaluation of bpNichol's oeuvre.

While we've drawn the line at accepting translations into English, we recognize that many of the Anglophone poets in this issue live and write within other linguistic cultures: Erin Mouré and George Elliott Clarke in Quebec, Khulile Nxumalo in Soweto, Louis Armand in Prague, Rachel Tzvia Back in Israel. In these and other contributions, there is an interesting bicultural awareness. The Maori language, for instance, predominates in New Zealander Margaret Orbell's elegy for Gordon Walters written both as poem and scholarly study of the Maori

funeral lament and in artist and poet Leigh Davis's flag project—a recovery of nineteenth century Maori history—reviewed by Wystan Curnow. At least two of the South African contributions are shaped by the languages of testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the recently completed national project which addressed the trauma of apartheid through a judicial, oral-historical process.

As in any issue such as this, there are lacunae. We wish our call for papers had brought in submissions from India and Pakistan, Singapore and Hong Kong, and more submissions from the Caribbean and from the Anglophone African countries. But given these limits, we have cast our net as wide as possible. We hope, in any case, to convince U.S. readers, dependent as they are on bookstores and media that manage to ignore the very existence of Coach House Books or the Kootenay School of Writing or *Salt* or John Higgins's South African theory/poetry journal *Pretext* that there is a lot going on elsewhere, and that, if the study of postmodern poetry in English wants to take itself seriously, it cannot afford to confine itself to U.S. poetry.

We thank Clayton Eshleman for his great generosity in allowing us to guest-edit this issue and giving us an entirely free rein. And suffice it to say that we are indebted to email and the internet without which it would be difficult for two editors living 1,000 miles apart on the long West Coast to work together on the issue. It has been, for us, a very fruitful exchange.

Jenny Penberthy, Vancouver
Marjorie Perloff, Los Angeles

LOUIS ARMAND

3 POEMS

PSYCHOPATHOLOGIES OF THE COMMONPLACE

for Robert Creeley

inchoate & always coming back to a point of starting out
"before the air mirrored us"
the zero of endless (re)birth in conjugations of "to be"
& other non-places? times square,
for example, or caught mid-flight above the date line
like an embryonic consciousness. . .
but what does it matter to have been, here or there? the same
narrative of disappointment in the eyes of everyone. . .
or alone crossing an intersection "somewhere"
was it strange that the scene never appeared to be questioned
by our passing it? that the intimacy of streetlights
was nothing more than a wished-for recognition
of ourselves in the embrace of the inanimate (at dusk
in a half-familiar suburb, or menaced by the distant
barking of a dog, cerberus-like, guarding each avenue
of escape). . .& being lost
always in the unspecific "as though, & as though"
with our motives no longer returning
in the disguise of ordinary things, even when it seemed
they were all written down (the testimonials, the witnessed
accounts of mundane fact). . .but when in time
we are left to the dumb-show of our shadows' diminishing
how will we know which of those meanings
ever concerned us? "today or tomorrow or today"
as if there were a difference

in the way it would end: that stupid blinking of an eye
exhausted of perception
& afterwards to remember, to name it at last, even as the
words
break off & no longer resemble us (did they ever?)

SERIAL LANDSCAPE: ANAMORPHOSIS 1

archaic regression into the optical
apparatus—irreal—here
& there a shadow passes—
vegetative-form of repetition /
ritual:
low grave mounds [concealed?
vestige of ancient fertility rites
[massacre (myall creek, 1838)]
overgrown with nettles-human silage—
a bone field
where femur-like protrudences scrape
dry air-disjecta membra—
each divided
in the ellipsis of its trait. . .anomalous
forms encamped at the edge
of visibility [a farrago of
deliberate solecisms? gilgamesh looms
vitreous
in the rear-view: signs destination. . .
the geometrical instincts
of a divided body—
phantom limbs in the grip of mimicry
reaching out of landfills—prosthetic—
to irrigated [wastelands?
("a swarm of interpretations surrounds

each of their gestures")—
cata-lepsis on the verge of
the un-nameable: knowing that a carcass
can become-[in time]-
a fossil
carrying [indictments?
into the remote future. . .
or inner framework that joins
the in-visible
to an other-visible?

SERIAL LANDSCAPE: ANAMORPHOSIS 2

through the vanishing point eye of prey
fugitive beings
naked, almost-in visible purgatory

bruised cadaverous forms (of) flesh
-ed similitude
cannibalized, de/noun/ce everything

"the real," negative images-the accursed
land too old too alien
in rocks & bones & languages so close to death

anthropomorphous trees

white
petrifications set into a mineral distance

Rachel Tzvia Back

PALIMPSEST OF PLACE

Swell of hills across
Judea
stretch
to open clear
between peaks where
sky
slips lower
into smooth cols–
down slender neck, as sweat
in crook of a collarbone–
sloped stunted shrubs
half-burnt trees or absent
trees
coal dust on gnarled
thornbushes, their tufted centers
thick in place of
and the air
parched,
its edges curling inward like bleached and
brittle parchment

here, in midday
mid-range
at footslip on incline, where stones scattered
are white markings
to nowhere
in the bright glare of rays deflecting
what I believe
I see
a dark and heavy shape

move
a buffalo
wandered far from white
cedar hickory red-berried hawthorne
wild and ice-laced
his curled horns downturned
head he carries low
and cannot raise but to shoulder level I think
I see his body
heave
in this heat in this wavering
air under the weight
of this wide flame-white eastern
sky

On Americans plains there were once
sixty million, here
there were none

though now I see him
here
as though returning
a remnant–
dark thick-tongued ruminant
massive beast
of crowded herds–
his solitary ruins
to this narrowland
still brown body
in still and dry heat
as though suspended

The scene should be framed and hung on walls as

is, as
from anywhere
in these hills–
highpitch of air punctured–
a single shot

in perfect flight through
will pierce fur
thick flesh and he too
will fall

another small
soon
indistinct
dark decomposing
heap
as ancient and pointless
as the rest

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

THREE POEMS

BREATH GHAZAL 47:

leaves fall
in noted beneficence

wind takes them fresh
laden cool in lungs too

effff ffffmm over & over
transforming hue & you

move too these days
thru a maze of colours fallen

beneath our feet
crunch yytwheesh whioosh where

BREATH GHAZAL 56:

a:

at that precise instant watching i draw
out of synch with them in aahh

across behind & thru the net of winter branches
brownian movement of waxwings

irregulars in this flypast
a precision lost in dissolution an ordered

disorder ? so fast & dis
continuous their flight yet the sky

between their waving lines appeared
a kind of pattern almost in the blink of an eye

b:

how at that precise instant indrawn
out of synch with them aahhh

allatonce across behind & thru the net of winter branches
brownian movement of wings & bodies

write that wave \|/\|/ sine how
many numbers weave never known

for sure the waxwings there a flow
wings stuttering so fast they touch

neither branches nor each other
winging suddenly absent in a sweep of gesture of

banners in the wind 'flif flif'
whos holding breath silent watching them disappear

'TURNING BACK: A PASTORAL'

That is a philosophical notion &
the only way to get there is via the
Theocritan backlanes of the mind. I drove a
ute (but we dont say that in Canada) my first time, or
has my memory as usual
been turned around. A youngster well-
versed in sexual fantasy I saw the event-horizon already

in the white bodies gleaming in a backlane
country night. Intent on
things beyond my experience it
seems I gazed down & imprinted the
obvious image on my brain forever as
the truck swept past & even the
velour of the seat back felt extreme.

On that night I thought for
the first time I knew what I had seen beyond the
dashboard light: those anonymous
crazy lovers were my teenage image of pastoral glory
with the moonlit passion I imagined
fresh as a film I might never see & all in plein
air. The nostalgic breeze is always

rushing past the open window
through which I had seen
the act my brother driving hadnt.
Doorless are the pathways to the
cabin we might come to in
the gentle night of the poem, where no one's
cursed & the wide blue shining

skies are always sunny although
blackened with clouds glimpsed suddenly
by flashes of lightning only at
night when rain should (& does) fall.
Though to get to those special places now you'd have to adopt
a highway. You pay (not pave) your way to paradise where a
moon is always full & the stalker never
lurks in shadow to pounce. Is this not so?

Somewhere else it may be so
and we have to believe it: that
the green continues to grow even as the
spotlight of industrial colonization brightens,
cutting to the charred bone, trees going
through new contortions just to wave above the highways.

The sense of a common past's both lost & found in
burn-back as if the argument
of trees carried on across all
summer, & who then
detects a functional myth for tourism and bathing in
the blackened ash where even the sudden
jerks of light impressionism brings can speak only

of the desired realm (unfound). In the city somewhere
nerves are bad to-night
and a whole civilization dies in a
tissue of lies on tv insistent that
the virtual pastoral is sufficient unto itself alone. Like
rabbits all voting for the same party we want to keep others
out of our intentional dreams,
to somehow turn the thin skin of civitas one colour again.
Chew on that & tell me

the world is safe from such predators. Somewhere even now
burnt flesh is the sacrifice that
prongs god awake again. For what. Is that the only tale
of the tribe we can tell. In the ashy
stubble such fire leaves we might discover
the remnants of salty dreams,
halogen's broken harvest.

Conflagration burns away memory:
filling the mind with flame, scorching
the pastoral dream to degree zero. On
omni-screens everywhere the only fields

within sight are parking lots,
their harvest gets us where our
eyeballs point & nowhere does the gleam of
the green register as more than a
crack in the pavement. Between nature
and the tourists the
whine of harddrives crashing replaces the dream

of artists seeking to define
a way of life. It's a
triple palimpsest at least, way beyond the
two borders we once crossed awake & dreaming &
mocks any desire we might still feel for
its long lost
rituals of accommodation, acceptance,
a way of informing the mind, a
sign that the path still led to a forest spring

of love & immersion in the always
fading forest of innocence. Not
influence, not investment
in those open spaces of

a bargain, but we never knew that or we forgot. Beyond that
field is another, then another, & a wood
where to name the landscape so you can make it exist demands
gravity of purpose also lost. It

is therefore impossible for even
a citizen of such desire to avoid the bottle-
neck of enterprise, the final
chop of that final tree,
and get back to
the country in any
poem or song that
is not (on cd) already so
framed & so defined
by the torque of nostalgia.
Levity seems the only way out – but lacks grace.

[Word/line acrostic of John Kinsella's
'The Rabbiters: A Pastoral'
from *The Hunt & other poems]*

Robin Blaser

TWO POEMS

that cat,

one of the wonders of the intelligent universe—cranky, manipulative, a touch affectionate, like everybody else—round gold eyes stare up at our second-story window, apparently thinking over Haydn's joke pouring out of it—musical humour in the twilight air, but the plywood barricade, put up to protect the wet-painted, red steps, troubles her mindfulness—thus, in no time, Haydn hears inquiring mews at the door with painted paws—vulnerable broken continuities laughing at the only entrance to, the only exit from this floor—discomposed, disconsolate on both sides—musically noted, I suppose

the bottom line

God's my life, stolen hence, and left me asleep!
I have had a most rare vision. I had a dream,
past the wit of man to say what dream it was.
Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound
this dream. Methought I was—there is no man
can tell what. Methought I was—and methought
I had—but man is but a patched fool, if
he will offer to say what methought I had.
The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of
man hath not seen, man's hand is not able
to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart

to report, what my dream was. I will get
Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream.
It shall be called Bottom's Dream, because
it hath no bottom—

there's a turn of my mind
that is intolerable
and happiness,
pungent as Cuban oregano
on the window sill
there's a smart to it, not entirely
intelligent
as if going through Preboreal
willow arches
before the sands start,
as if this old man sat on an embankment
drying his clothes,
having washed them fiercely
in the water flows—
one or the other of his eyes meet
a philosophy of *as if*
without its idealism—
the ribs of his washboard
worn to a flat surface, his clothes
threads of a web of connections,
desirous separates,
the measureless complexity
of everyone's dream
which hath no bottom

for Phyllis Webb

CHRISTIAN BÖK

EIGHT POEMS

VOWELS

loveless vessels
we vow
solo love

we see
love solve loss
else we see
love sow woe

selves we woo
we lose

losses we levee
we owe

we sell
loose vows
so we love
less well

so low
so level
wolves evolve

from *CHAPTER A*

(for Hans Arp)

Awkward grammar appals a craftsman. A Dada bard damns stagnant art and scrawls an alpha, a small ankh that can stamp a blatant hallmark and spawn a madcap anagram. A daft vandal has drawn a slapdash paraph (an arc, slant, and zag) that warps all stanzas, all ballads: what a prank, what a scandal. A flaw, a gaff, as flagrant as an aardvark at a gala ball, mars all paragraphs, all almanacs. A scar, a mark, that can crack a mandala, warrants a grand drama, a black psalm. A dark cassandra chants abracadabra as a mantra and warns that what harms a law can attract bad karma. A cataclasm starts at dawn as a star falls.

Naphtha gaslamps cast a warm charm. A fat maharajah basks at a spa, at a bar, that has swank, that has class. A vassal at hand can grant a pashakhan all palatal manna that a man can want: jam tarts and armagnac, bran flans and schnapps. A dwarf, a thrall, can draw a man's bath, wash a man's back, as spartan lads fawn and hang, athwart an altar, amaranth garlands as fragrant as attar —a balm that calms all angst. A shah can catch an act at a danza, watch pagan gals can-can and cha-cha, catcall a jazzband that scats a waltz and a samba. A sax drawls tantaras; maracas rasp cantatas. A lass as sad as a swan twangs a glass harp.

from *CHAPTER E*

(for René Crevel)

Western men revere the Greek legends. We retell them. We remember the blessèd deeds—the represented scenes where hellbent defenders seek revenge when Helen weeps. We see her helplessness, her defenselessness, when she beseeches, even begs, her redeemers: *set me free.* Her henchmen bleed when fencers enter the melee—the steel trenches, where épées, flechettes, even skewers, rend men's thews, then shred men's flesh. The helmsmen steer sleek vessels between the sheltered clefts where tempests wreck the fleet—the helms, the keels, even the nets, reft, then rent, when the elements beset the crew.

Resplendent, the bejewelled empress feels restless, sleepless—hence, she deserts her fleece bed. She neglects her tenderest gentlemen, even when her *serventes* tell her these sweet verses, these tender excerpts. Her restlessness, her sleeplessness, vexes her. She frets. She lets her dependent serfs preen her tresses, then feed her excellent refreshments: seltzers, cheeses, desserts—even *creme de menthe* sherbet. She feels depressed, even when her beekeepers fetch her preserved sweets. She feels wretched, even when her jewellers fetch her bevelled jewels. The green gems, *les gemmes vertes,* bedeck her velvet flesh.

from *CHAPTER I*

(for Dick Higgins)

Writing is inhibiting. Sighing, I sit, scribbling in ink this pidgin script. I sing with nihilistic witticism, disciplining thin signs with trifling gimmicks—impish hijinks which highlight stick-sigils. Isn't it chic? Isn't it hip? I fit childish insights within rigid limits, writing shtick which might instill priggish misgivings in critics blind with hindsight. I dismiss nitpicking criticism which flirts with philistinism. I bitch; I kibitz—griping whilst criticizing dimwits, sniping whilst indicting nitwits, dismissing insipid thinking, in which wit is still illicit.

Hiking in British districts, I picnic in virgin firths, climbing twilit hills, grinning in bliss with misfit whims, smiling if I find birch twigs, smirking if I find mint sprigs. Midspring brings with it singing birds, six kinds (finch, siskin, ibis, tit, pipit, swift), whistling shrill chirps, trilling chirr chirr in high pitch. Kingbirds flit in gliding flight, skimming limpid springs, dipping wingtips in rills which brim with living things: krill, shrimp, brill—wild fish with gilt fins, which swim in flitting zigs. Brisk winds swirl Irish mist. Its wispish frills drift in mizzling twilight. I think: ***night is nigh.***

from *CHAPTER O*

(for Yoko Ono)

Loops, hoops, or whorls form lots of fonts to jot down words for books. Books form mothproof cocoons—tombs to hold bookworms. Profs or doctors from Oxford schools go to London bookshops to shop for topnotch goods: schoolbooks on how to gloss works of Dr. Johnson or Wordsworth; workbooks on how to boost longshot growth of stocks or bonds; cookbooks on how to cook borscht from Stockholm or wonton from Hong Kong. Logos on colophons show off oblong knots of gold on rococo scrolls of worn morocco. Folks who own old bookrooms look to good books, not to post-mod post-docs, for comfort from gloom or sorrow.

Book of Job, Book of Mormon—both show orthodox monks how God confronts Moloch. Storms of horror, floods of scorn, swoop down on Sodom to mow down non-Mormon townsfolk: crowds of Mongols who bow to no lord; throngs of Ostrogoths who kowtow to no god. Blood drowns cohorts who honor no cross of doom nor crown of thorns. Crooks shoot folks; goons rob condos. Mobs knock down doors, storm control-rooms. Bronx cops do crowd-control. Troops cordon off two blocks of shops to look for kooks who throw Molotov bombs to bomb pollbooths or tollbooths: *pow pow, boom!* No Song of Solomon conforms to crossword protocols.

VOILE

(for Arthur Rimbaud)

Anywhere near blank rage
you veer, oblivial.

Jade array, calico azure
evanescent talents.

Unaware, corrosives flow
to my shackled hand.

Key bombing an auto tour
to paint her colour.

Gulfs of amber contours
evaporate the tint.

Linseed glass or oblong
freezing dumbbells.

Upper pressing cashiers
do deliver verbals.

Dance the clear, elusive
rinse of paintings.

Icicle fibre meant divine
daymares varied.

Pity paid to see my dynamo
poised to rid us.

Cool chimes, a primal green
for studios.

Spur my clear plan astride
a stranger.

Cylinders versus diamonds
a decision.

Hollow, my gray ovule does
decide you.

W

(A User's Manual)
for Georges Perec

"To the V that stands for viewing what
is all around us, eyes turned outward,
toward the conscious surface of things,
surrealism has relentlessly opposed W"
—André Breton.

"A meaningless distinction on W-leads
to automatic disqualification"
-Georges Perec.

It is the V you double, not the U, as if to use
two valleys in a valise is to savvy the vacuum
of a vowel when at a powwow in between sawteeth.

It is to ask the painter of a watercolour hue:
"Why owe you twice what a sheep is or a tree,
if the fee you double has to hew you a puzzle?"

An enigma, like a game in E, its jigsaw zigzag
never fits the excess void left behind by X,
the reason for the why on the way to what is said.

If you glean an anagram from each angle, do you
dabble with your double view of what you hate:
a swastika that awaits your olympiad of riddles?

Is this letter a residuum of what troubles you?
If you slice it down the middle, does it not
hereafter indicate a twofold victory over life?

In the world of madness where you use a yo-yo,
why oh, why oh, must you find four palm trees
in a park, if not to make of them your symbol?

It is the name for an X, whose V does not view
the surface of a lake, but the mirror on a wall,
where U and you become a tautonym, a continuum.

AND SOMETIMES

syzygy pyx
gyp
gypsy
pygmy gyms

jynx synch
try
psych
tryst ptyx

spy glyphs
lysyl
brr
grr glycyl

sylphs fly
flyby
sky
by tsk tsk

nym nymphs
why
wyrms
hmm my zzz

sty styryl
fry
fyrds
lymph cyst

wyrds wych
lynch
wry
mythy lynx

cry by nth
cwm
crwth
crypt styx

myst wynds
dry
dryly
shy by shh

myth hymns
thy
myrrh
my rhythms

Bev Braune

READING POST-MODERNIST RUNES IN *SKULVÁð ÚLFR*: A JOURNEY OF PUZZLES[1]

Abstract

In composing the 16th century translation of Skulváði Úlfr, *I was driven primarily by the line-of-ear of Old Norse alliterative staves, Cherokee syllabary and gaps in Caribbean-Arawakan history. It is, however, through complementary acts of effective lines-of-sight that the poem is ultimately held together to create a 'genuine forgery' using five types of reading from the concepts of word-images and gaps that explore the forg(er)ing of readership, poetry and Roman Ingarden's puzzlement regarding the fundamental nature of the object stratum in a literary work of art. This paper looks at one of these types of reading: the script or 'actual object' type of reading as explored in* Skulváði Úlfr. *It may be the crux on which Roman Ingarden's puzzlement hangs: "In connection with their timelessness, ideal objects are not subject to change, though it is thus far not clear what the basis of their immutability is."*[2]

Skulváði Úlfr took on a life of its own as a late 16th century 'forgery' of an English translation of an epic 'Viking poem' based on strange relationships that came to dominate its composition and the focus of theoretical inquiry concerning how we compose and read poetry. The epic is set in motion by the voice of eleventh century Norwegian jarlskald, Dagazar Kerrigansson, in search of the unconquered land called Vinland in order to re-establish the power of his family name lost under the heavy-handed rule of Norwegian King Harald Finehair. His journey with 1200 other Vikings takes the story from 'ice' to 'fire,' into the southern hemisphere and into remarkable hidden territories of Cherokee and Arawakan history.

When the epic was completed, it occurred to me that the 'translation' was clearly a *fiction* while the 'actual objects' referred to in it remained *quite real*. It occurred to me that the difference in construction between those two *texts* is the *argument* on which they are hinged, namely, to embrace Roman Ingarden's puzzlement regarding

the nature of the *object stratum* in the literary work of art—that objects on which the 'existence' of a literary work hangs act *as if* they are 'objects in the actual world' while remaining unchangeable, yet in contradiction of our experience of objects in the actual world which are constantly subject to change and incompleteness.

Some of the considerations I have tried to confront with regard to aspects of reading a poem are probably not as elaborate as Wolfgang Iser's algebraic notations on reading the narrative of a novel, but they may be equally as strange. In this respect, it could be useful to think of the reading of the 'actual objects' in *Skulváði Úlfr* somewhat like Richard Wollheim trying to rationalize the concept of drawing pictures. Although we are convinced that we need our eyes to draw pictures and to read them, we suspect that there is more than accurate physical vision that brings a picture alive, that allows us to *read* them.[3]

In composing the translation of *Skulváði Úlfr* as a Viking poem, I was driven primarily by the line-of-ear of alliterative staves, the stanzaic constructions providing patterns—aural and visual—all of their own through skáldic and Eddic styles. It was, however, through complementary acts of effective lines-of-sight that the poem seemed ultimately held together to create a " 'genuine' forgery" (as Welsh Poet Gwyneth Lewis described the poem recently).[4]

Skulváði Úlfr employs five types of illustrations or, more accurately, five types of reading. The whole text—word-images and sound-images-as-words—evolved as a language map that narrates the real evidence of my exploration of the terrain of the poetic imagination and the troublesome nature of rulership over that territory, the manner in which the images and sounds found there behave. One set of images, from over 50 individual images used in the poem, is used to explore one possible type of reading that sheds some light on "the basis of their immutability" as "ideal objects" in a literary work of art. This is the *script or 'actual object' type of reading*, and is linked within the fiction of the poem to the concept of runic signs and shield images in Old Norse poetry.

Hidden by caves of meaning, runes used by the Vikings remain the subject of fascination.[5] Whether or not they developed from borrowed scripts of Latin, Greek or Northern Italic origin or were first written by the Goths (prior to first century AD), speculation continues about their meanings.[6] It is in making the most of the hidden element of Viking runes that I bring to *Skulváði Úlfr* a way to express the relationships of gap-lines and 'secret' aspects of the construction of the poem and the reading of it. I try to take on board the significance of the associated word-suffix from the Old Norse: *-rúna* meaning "whisperer."[7]

In relating Old Norse runic inscriptions to the original illustrations of *Skulváði Úlfr*, it was a matter of seeing which of my intuitive images, clearly and without contrivance, could be considered part of the runic tradition of the Viking-influenced Kerrigash. Beneath the variety and complexity of images that are treated as part of the original script of the Kerrigash are three basic signs from the Elder Futhark of common Germanic runes and which continued, though altered in varying degrees, in the Swedish-Norwegian script and Hälsinge script.

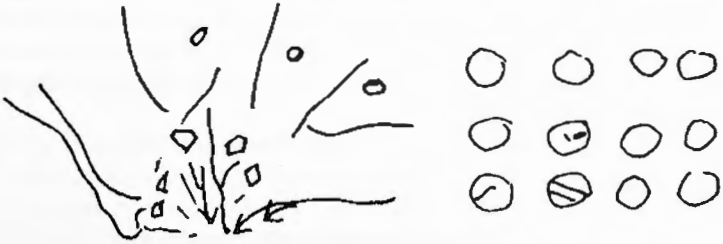
The three signs are: Nauðr (Old English—Nyð) equivalent of the Modern English "N", Hágl or Hagall (Old English—Hægl), "H", and Tyr (Old English—Tiw), "T'. They occur in the poem as 'evidence' of images from shields (three shown below) from the armory of Kerrigan Iron Hand, king of Kerrigarðr in the mid- to late-15th century and Skulváði's predecessor.

From left, the first illustrates Nauðr, signifying need or necessity, restriction, constraint; the second, Hágl, the seemingly destructive working towards transformation, the "layered nature of hailstone"; and the third, Tyr, the focus of the mental warrior, judgement, glory, the god of war Tyr.[8] These three signs became the focus of establishing common signs, available to everyone inside and outside the poem, so to speak. They work in the poem as common ground to read the essential characterization and vision of the main characters, as well as provide links with uncommon signs in the poem and to a possible legend for the reading of the poem.

Nauðr was *read* compositionally as the unmistakable marking from an image used to construct Kerrigansson's character in preparation for his *naming* Kerrigarðr and the setting up of its laws—his reading of 'foreign landscapes,' not unlike the way we go about reading a poem. The initial act begins with *constraint*. The second main level of that act is *disruption/transformation* or that of the nature of Hágl. Hágl was determined from the recurring intuitive images of ladders and 'going to ground'—ladders formed, we might say, from connecting signs of both or multiples of either Nauðr and Hágl—constraint and disruption—to create a ladder. This illustrates ways we go about reading *beneath* the words of the *text*. In this case, it matters little whether or not the words

are readable in terms of our literacy in comprehending their characters. The form of Tyr which was used is based on the reverse picture of an intuitive image that resembles one of the pre-runic symbols for Tyr, a northward-pointing, double-headed arrow. Tyr is therefore shown here in its Etruscan version with the double-headed arrow, but crowned by a moon or disc (recurring images that can be found in Books Two and Three of the poem). Tyr and its circular associations in the epic focus on how we move through 'new ground' *beneath texts*, how we maneuver 'unfamiliar territories of these *texts*.'

In *Skulváði Úlfr* images of these 'actual-object' *texts* occur within the narrative/fiction as rubbings from gravestones and as actual scripts or illustrations copied from the journals of the Kerrigash authors. In many instances, the word-image *texts* remain in the margins only, yet they appear to exist surely as part of the *text* even though the text/body of the 'translated poem' does not refer to them. The translator, Gwen Terrane, directs us, from the margins of the poem, to these facsimiles of images, on the basis of her translation of the original text (which is unavailable to us). For example, the pair of word-images shown below are recorded in Book Four of the epic with the following annotation by Terrane: "tattoos worn by Skulváði on her back *(left)* and on her front torso *(right)*: as provided by Almordozar" (one of Terrane's *informants*). Our only link between the images and the 'translated words' is Terrane's direction, again in the margins, to these lines in the poem: '*He* [Kerrigan Iron Hand] *called out to hear // the crimson voice raised / from the gold-lips and skin-coat of train-rings*" which she annotates as: "gold-lips and skin-coat of train-rings—Skulvádi Úlfr's pollen-dusted lips and tattooed body *(see illustrations of her tattoos below).*"



Each 'actual object' *carving* is revealed to readers as a fragment, encouraging us to participate in the nature of the characters' and translator's lines of vision. At first I felt that these *objects* would undoubtedly affect ***our*** reading of the poem as well. But to what extent would they affect us? To what end would they impact on ***our*** reading of the words? Terrane's voice, through her margin annotations, shows

connections between the 'translation' and the evidence of original *texts as actual objects*, but she does not do this consistently. As well, this translation of an 'obscure Norse language' that she reports to be the language of the 'original document' remains a *secret language* throughout the seven Books of the *Skulváði Úlfr*. The *tone* of her *translation* borders on the esoteric, while the *grammar of the words* creates a lucid narrative.

The images are paradoxical in every respect: clear yet complex, closest to the surface of the poem yet coming from the deepest level of the work as an *original text*. They are the most mobile, yet the most fixed. They suggest a 4-dimensional status (if we include the possible magical element as a 4th dimension, perhaps) yet they are 2-dimensional line drawings.

We may increase the images in size to understand their detail while we cannot do this with the narrative translation in order to read a deeper understanding of the words. The images as such are written on the physical body of the text. They participate in a kind of strip tease where, as lines of poetry are read, the images are revealed, but not necessarily vice versa. In either case, the image-impact remains the same while the words continue to confound, remain hidden. The images stop us in our tracks, leave us open-mouthed. They do not invite visual tricks nor offer illusions to allow us to find them more meaningful than they are from their appearance. If the essence of the *Skulváði Úlfr* can be measured, these word-images may come closest to it.

Once drawn I could not, and still cannot, change them. Perhaps this may provide another clue to their immutability as literary *objects*. They found completion far more quickly and easily than the words of the poem that continue to slip and elude accuracy. And yet the arcane quality of the images creates a mystery around the poem that *dates* it in a *real* way that the fictional reality does not, though the fictional-aspect is 'older' while the images are 'contemporary' (both *within* the fiction and *without* it).

"The Heart of the Book" from Book Five provides one of the simplest word-images and some of the most complex sound-images-as-words. The sound-images-as-words even at their clearest appear to confound. However, it seems to me that the *image-text* **is always** accessible, if painfully so because there is no recourse to sharing the *experience* of them with another reader except to say "Look at this." They remain the most private aspects of the work in any attempt to *read* it either as composer or as an Ingardean observer.

Kerrigash runes impose an architecture of form that challenges the eye by their simplicity. They impose a structure that challenges our expectation of how to arrive from one edge of the *text* to the other.

They are a set of signs that constantly defy attention, yet demand attentiveness, a kind of uneasy vigilance, precisely *because* they remain uninterpretable—can only be observed as themselves. Perhaps it is "uneasy vigilance" that *maintains the object stratum* in its immutable state. Are we mesmerized by the clarity of its edges? The heart/emotion of the experience is open, that is, allows gaps to us for interpretation where mobility and expansion are possible but not enlightening. The immutability of images conjured in a literary work may lie in the nature of the image and our *regard* for it: the act of *looking at it* rather than the possible multitude of our responses. Our attentiveness fixes the images while affording us ways to simulate them in a series of fixed states in order to create continuous consecutive (moving) images or keep them fixed just as we choose and as long as we choose to bring the work to a reality that we can understand. As we read we invariably ***annotate the text*** regardless of the *shape* of that text; we provide our own *companion reader/translator.* Perhaps this is what we aim to analyse when we pursue the machinations of *hypertext*—the proper domain of *hypertext* being that of the reader. The role of *hypertext* (as an electronic medium) successfully functions best, it seems, for the observer-reader and not the composer save where the composer assumes the role of observer-reader.

It seems to me that *line-of-sight* markings in *Skulváði Úlfr* cannot be 'mis-read' no matter how difficult the ways to comprehending them may *appear* to be a requirement for *seeing* them because the markings always appear *as themselves* while the 'English translation' keeps the *whole body* of the 'original written text' hidden.

From The Journey Of Puzzles, Skulváði Úlfr, Book Five, Part 2

The Heart of the Book

King Kerrigan Iron Hand searches for ways to read the books written by Skulváði Úlfr:

Skulváði's sheets sang sweet brilliance
pulling Heiðr's law to pad her pillows.
My death cushioned by The Wolf's glamour
preferred such darkness with perfect pleasure.

(Heiðr's law—immortality or indestructibility; Heiðr or Gullveigr (Gold or Seduction) was the giant (Wanir) whom could not be destroyed by the Æsir.
The Wolf's glamour—Skulvaði's seductiveness; also a reference to Wolffem magic associated with Wolffem use of an hallu-cinogenic golden pollen.)

And yet I betrayed this sinking blame
upon her book which shone with gold
circling its covers, pressed open-lipped,
marked with blossoms where she stopped to rest.

Its turned pages tuned with beaten gold
were tree-gum bound. From the secret hand
that clenched its covers and dust-dyed leaves
trailed a hold of runes to the book's heart.

(A hold of runes—a treasure of scripts (runic markings).)

Within its pages, it spoke of ways
in shapes and maps hidden from the clans —
another scheme The Maid denied me
with her wolfish guile to haunt my game.

With Hulðra's gift I gained new art —
gilded deceits, new devices —
to ride The Wolf's trail; her careful pages
so ringed with oils of her sleep and rise.

(Hulðra's gift—a song from the forest goddess, protector of domesticated animals, gifted with a beautiful singing voice; i.e. Kerrigan treats the discovery of Skulváði's Book as the gift of a new method from the forest goddess to find Skulváði.)

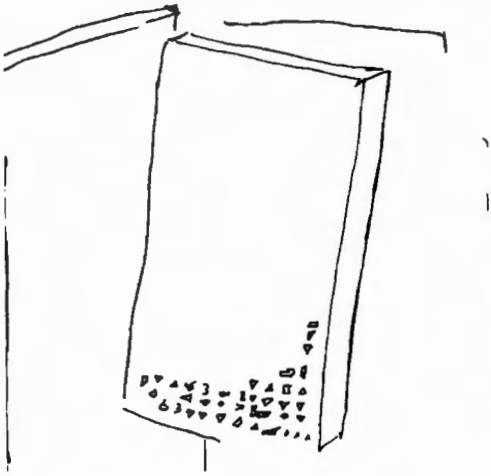
But I dared not let the lie ride me.
I meant to use it on our Council,
her pressing scents held to my breast,
fitted with secrets— with Gíld-rac girthed.

Hitsko's wedding still held Kerrigash,
riding their minds in high spirits.
Any strange call that I issued now
would swing on feasts, sail on sumbl laws.

(Sumbl laws—the law that a feast which antecedes another, held within the same season, extends the antecedent celebration into the second, so creating one long celebration.)

The book would track my path to the east,
to forests and sea and to the power
that called The Wolf closer to mounts
and beasts promising paths to Gíld-rac.

With The Wolf's book horns would pass again,
brimming mead would flow, bridling victories –
all Kerrigarðr eager to claim
the joy of weddings with feasts for war.



Above—sketch of the marked leaves of Skulváði's book found among Kerrigan's poems; the illustration shows that her book was incomplete. More importantly, it shows that the Kerrigash probably wrote from the lower half to the top half of the page. Another explanation could be that the book was left with deliberate empty spaces to be filled later, indicating gaps in the records of Skulváði's puzzles at reading the landscapes she explored.

NOTES

1. This is from a paper delivered at the Faculty of Creative Arts Research Conference, University of Wollongong, Australia on 11 September 1998.
2. Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, trans. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) 10.
3. Richard Wollheim, "On Drawing an Object," *Aesthetics* ed. Harold Osborne, Oxford Readings in Philosophy, ser. ed. G. J. Warnock (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) 121-44.
4. I read with Gwyneth Lewis at the 1998 Sydney Writers' Festival Varuna Luncheons for International Poets at Varuna Writers' Retreat, Katoomba, Australia on 10th May 1998.

5. "By the beginning of the Viking Age the Scandinavian rune-masters had developed an alphabet quite distinct from those of other Germanic peoples, such as the Anglo-Saxons, the Frisians and the Continental Germans. It had sixteen letters, and from them the values of its first six characters is called the *futhark* [f(f) u(u)t(t)h(h) a(a)r(r) k(k)]. Even within Scandinavia there was no standard from of the letters, and the different inscriptions vary a good deal. The Vikings used two main types of runes, with numbers of lesser or local variants. One type is called the Common or Danish *futhark* (although it also occurs outside Denmark), and the other is the short-twig or Swedo-Norwegian *futhark* (although again it is not confined to those countries." Graham-Campbell, 156.
6. Regarding the invention of runic characters: "It was several centuries before the Viking period and probably somewhere near the Roman Empire, since many of the letters of the early inscriptions resemble those of the Roman alphabet; although, because they were developed for cutting on wood, they have their own characteristic shapes." Graham-Campbell, 156.
7. "**-rúna** f. *whisperer*, see **eyra-rúna**." "**rúnar** f. pl. 1. *secrets.*" Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*: based on Hans Kuhn's "Kurzes Wörterbuch," Skandinavistische Arbeiten; Bd. 15 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1992) 218.
8. Susan Granquist, "Runes of the Elder Futhark" 1994, citing Edred Thorssons *Futhark, At the Well of Wyrd,* and *Runelore*, Internet. http://www.tu-chemnitz.de/~mabo/runes.html.

COLIN BROWNE

from AS IF

(for my grandfather)

The singing in opera takes place between worlds: Such a view will take singing, I guess above all the aria, to express the sense of being pressed or stretched between worlds, one in which to be seen, the roughly familiar world of the philosophers, and one from which to be heard, one to which one releases or abandons one's spirit and which recedes when the breath of the song ends.

—Stanley Cavell, "Opera and the Lease of Voice"

LENS

It is as if she is on a boat and the boat is ceaseless longing
and her longing is greasewood
& rock rose
and rattlesnake

It is as if she is insinuated into a collaboration with Pud in the
Double Bubble comic strip to calibrate lexical flexibility,
as if Abel is treating Cain to a *George of the Jungle* matinée,
as if her grandfather had not at the last minute with the trunks
packed & stickers on cancelled their reservations,

and the drowned body of a girl is rising as in a film projected
backwards up onto the bridge canopy intact and grinning as if
    what we see
were the battered hull of her desire arcing in mechanical sage

ARRAS

Age spikes dick. On this rotates a culture more lucid and virulent than Dave Butcher—dispatching his finger into the evanescent air outside the Odeon Armdale—could in his most lurid dreams have wrassled into the mind we

shared with the lyrics from "At the Hop". The great uncles' shrug was no shrug. No doubt prototypes were whittled and essayed. In common with a good gutting-knife a blood runnel was inscribed into each son of Bayonne.

How many cartridges can a man cram into his magazine? Bolting forward and slashing—or repelling from the rear—a man's progress justified the foundry expenses. The great uncles, stooped, fags in hand, a fifth of Johnnie Walker

in the shed—silhouetted or in dungarees—sole-deep in sawdust stacking cottonwood in the late sun on a useless patch of paradise thousands of useless miles from what elegy smudges: the unspeakable, or was it the

incomprehensible, or what would make you long to be a stiff at nineteen? Excess of cruelty? Lunatic martyrdom? Forbidden caresses? A repressed and since obliterated collectivity? Which is not to say dick's acme but the spell-

binding hallucination of being swept up by the angel with the young private in her arms Susanna gazed at outside the train

station, losing consciousness to the awful beating of wings. Self-loathing, ravishing bliss: to wish what one

loves more than anything extinguished, surrendering even boyhood's ecstatic fusions. The incomprehensible, he said, is living on when the best have gone. It is a sin of predation. The speakable being the case for ending it oneself,

with a bullet or a pill like a gentleman; the unspeakable: one's failure to carry it off, or to courageously love oneself and one's brother enough to honour either. This (shame) he dug from his gut like a corroded Bronze Age toy,

an ox or ewe, and brought home shivering in a box tucked in the dresser until his skin dried like mucilage. The real tooth was the hollowed-out imitation with the drop of desiccated arsenic he secreted among his collars.

And the second question: How does a man come to assume that there are rational beings like himself apart from himself? And how does he come to recognize them, since they are certainly not immediately present to his pure self-consciousness?

—Johann Gottlieb Fichte,
Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation.

AVION

In the documentary glade rosehips shine. Dogs frisk. Twigs sport golden tongues. I once saw a salmon leap near here. Silver drips pearled the sea. What can I offer you? I am sitting on a stump and squatting behind

a counter and standing on a curb in my new shirt and it's not all it is cracked up to be. I am one who believed he was fluent on this subject and now find my self, if that is what I should call it, buggered in the tongue. The eagles tour

above us with their murderous babies. The sky resembles as usual a vast ocean lit up with luminous flying fishes each of whom has learned to pronounce a syllable of an otherworldly substitution but for the first time I can't hear

their analogous finny whispers. In coming here I'd expected to present to the camera a mouth redder and I'd hoped sweeter than rosehips and a song ascending like an eagle's ichor at the glint of a vole's eye. Greet a prop on a

stump battered by twist-ties in a documentary glade overwhelmed by the properly passionate ululation of the leaves' uliginose forays into *Wissenschaftslehre* and the sole's battle as it whacks its pitiful tail against

the hull. Who am I? Fichte's dunce? One lost to himself *"as a result of protracted spiritual servitude"*? The red-winged blackbirds are so tame this morning you'd swear on a seal's nose to magnetic interference. One without

conviction, without belief in the conviction of others? My granddad could pick out on a bruised map why we're here. He never gave a thought to how, or so we proclaim, to insulate ourselves from what he did think because he did

and he knew why. A sleeping dog spills on no moss. They are collecting room tone. This next part is silent thinking. (I am

thinking the map is bruised because he bruised it. He did climb hills and find white heather.) Isn't that

the name of an outboard engine: "*spiritual servitude*"? I'll swear that's a church bell. Isn't that a man burning? *"...people of this sort,"* says Fichte, *"will be unable to see anything beyond the mere letters, inasmuch as what*

passes for spirit in their case will be yanked back and forth by the secret fury pent up within them." I am determined to be gracious. Simple as this hill is then, it will deceive. An alder bobs with nascent insolence in the prop-wash

but at this stage our customs are safe according to the authorities. Shrewdly designed to be authoritative, these cardigans are being imported worldwide assuring us of beauty in function and security wherever men are burned. But

why those enormous letters in the sky behind the Belted Kingfisher? Surely they're a sign? The golden-crowned sparrow? A hawk? All is not perdu. If you are me I am your mouth, a poultice of passionate fascination.

SOMME

What does not bleed? Solvent. As she tells it, Joe McCulloch owned a shoe store in Strathclair, Manitoba. What age is light? A caress. He'd sit outdoors when it was fair and make smart comments when girls passed by. What year?

She left in '23. It was Hubert Morrison they steered clear of. Eighteen, nineteen, a big guy, he told the kids one afternoon he wanted their dog—a stray collie-cross—he was gonna grab it. Whenever they spotted him they'd

take off through the fields to the next farm, hearts pounding, to hide between the rows. What fear is this? That the heart's pouch of moxiebustion might not ignite. The incident occurred after she'd left town so she heard about it later.

It was Hallowe'en, with an apostrophe. Her father, on his own (their mother had died with the flu), never let them out on Hallowe'en. Strathclair was always rough, she said, on Hallowe'en. This was the year of *Spring and All,*

Williams frantic for a *"world detached from the necessity of recording it, sufficient to itself...,"* and drowning in his own cleverness. She is thirteen. How will I know love?

> *It is at the edge of the*
> *petal that love waits*
>
> *Crisp, worked to defeat*
> *laboredness—fragile*
> *plucked, moist, half-raised*
> *cold, precise, touching*
>
> *What*
>
> *The place between the petal's*
> *edge and the*

He's struggling here for *definition*, which for too long he's confused with representation. He jettisons the perps. He writes a sharp edge and a springing off into free air forever if you've got the guts. If he's to continue he's got no

choice. Same for Joe McCulloch. Seems that night Hubert Morrison and some friends thought it would be a lark to plug up Joe's chimney. The apostrophe is a cold night on the prairies. Hubert and a couple of chums crawl up onto Joe's

roof and in a jiffy the job is done. Before long Joe rushes out. He's mad. Smoke pours through the door. He shouts, "Get off of my

roof." He's got a gun. What? Hard to say: a .22, or a .303. Hubert laughs. Maybe gives Joe the finger.

It's Hallowe'en. Joe takes aim and brings him down. That's the end of Hubert Morrison. He doesn't figure any more. Strays rejoice! Says she wasn't there then, but when she was, when she passed Joe McCulloch on the street outside

his store and he muttered something she remembers trying to think the very best she could of him. He'd been brave over there she'd heard, so, well, you know, his wisecracks could be, well, be forgiven. D.W. Griffith, *"very*

disappointed with the reality of the battlefield," shot the trench scenes for *Hearts of the World* on Salisbury Plain. Joe McCulloch likely trained there. The location came in handy a year later as an influenza cemetery. Who is

writing this? A child of petals and shell-casings, an organism whose bliss surrenders to the epics unfurling in sound and light throughout his being. Griffith, gazing skyward in the publicity still, christened himself Gaston de Tolignac.

CLOVEN

As if by sheer effort a bay in a headland appears and the ship that enters it is your neck which more people than you can know would have if they thought no one was watching and as I say these words an orange and green pennant is

being hooked to a halyard and, yes, run up the mast and the breeze is stiff I can make out intermittently the rippling majuscules: N-O O-N-E I-S W-A-T-C-H-I-N-G and for the sake of propriety you take a hankie from your

sleeve and begin to dab at the open half of yourself which is professionally drained and freshly cauterized. Some fissures weep. You roll toilet paper into a carnation, tidy up the rough edges and feel a shape in your pocket:

the styptic pencil. May I report that his signet ring throbs? That the monogrammed shaving kit unzips to reveal a clandestine desert city, laid out, you realize, with its lids and boxes, its boulevards of scented leather,

the gleaming, vented *faux-ivoire* barrel of its toothbrush tube, as if to be an exemplary target, *un bijou*.? The ewe's ears flutter. Her people know this song. She lifts her head. This god, too, a codpiece

in the burning air; his names sparks she dodges, his throne her incinerator, her lamb his ossuary. Dawn bleats. You test your memory on a plate in the fridge as if from the night before. The smoke from the human bonfires

is black and oily. Some *"clawed their mouths ceaselessly." "Another sucked a rubber tube fastened to the gas-jet."** A mother on the northern border, in the town with the ice rink and Zamboni, has set herself on fire.

A crow jeers at a frozen puddle, and you step out into the glory

* Philip Gibbs, *Now It Can Be Told.* New York: Garden City Publishing Co. Ltd., 1920.

ALAN BRUNTON

WRITING OUT OF NOTHING

He arrives at the Island spread on a plank, then —Am I apart? wonders Mistah Onta as the armada floats away on pellucid waters, taking witnesses with it, and reciprocal voices. By what misunderstanding does he sprawl so giddily on this divot of Earth against which the wild surf bashes, dropped out of history into such a strange world, this circle so (de)finitely closed through which he drags himself like smoke? To what forever or to what end? Nothing else but the monologue?

Mistah Onta rights himself on the plage. He navigates by feathers, imperator in a swanskin of all that can be seen, Bona-parte as a private party where the life of the letter ends, Zee-land. For now, everything's local, natural and abundant in Ops, in a solitude with him, in the long grass of the astral plane.

He plots his return with the sense of wonder of starting over, conspiring with silence to reverse this exile from conversation, talking that's already fragmentary in his mind (half-remembered, but which half?) Destiny has made allowance for him to be here, a here so novel it's nowhere, a *Zee*-land that's New. Why would he ever back to his old class (why? unless to make a show-and-tell of himself and pretend this is he as really he is) when the sky
like this unloads its spectacular spill
with bloom and appeal
across boomers and swells
yes
you can tell
the picture is swell
and everything dooby-doo
on the Island, everyone as singular

as any souffle in his or her own way in an 'apartness'
that's neither death or afflatus and no one belongs to no one
    alone.
The authentic language of Zeelanders is spoken when
    nobody's here!

It's not unusual. Any one speaks more surely when the attractive other has gone or is lost in thought—that's why no one thinks on the Island: Life is too hot or cold, too un-2 or too happy. Mistah Onta could explain everything except he more and more suspects God is alongside in that exile, hiding out as dark and reserved as himself, as unnecessary, as much a feigned aside or make-believe, but something extra: an unstoppable something that never shuts up

THE UNSPEAKABLE HORROR OF IT!

Leaving strings, Mistah Onta sets out to survey the Island. He marks off boundaries by assembling signs. He makes himself at home in this Concession. He moos a hot vocal track into the subtropical night that echoes the future he's been lately seen in, a place where there's sense, his Island in time, eye of eternity, Eke of Zero, Pool of Synonyms!

Gaily almost, he dives into space not previously represented and seeks his ease there, in the endless possibility of hope, somewhere that's never not-been (not yet). That light-hearted flip plunges him right into the melo of language. His tongue hits the roof. Each word is a livid proof! Mistah Onta finds himself participating, tasting the desire to be in on the conversation, deeply in love, speaking of all that existence which might be anyone's dizzy presence on the edge of the world's seductive orifice, instantaneous or not at all, All-Star or Nothing, the subject of the nameless experience—like lovers when they bring themselves up from the Deep of the black lagoon and resume their skin, rising up on a good earth like mushrooms after rain,
or loop chasers
in what is
a little run-up
to Judgement-Day-oh-day-oh—

the squalid disappears, each thing's purpose 'under Heaven' is removed and Mistah Onta confronts his own possibility in the words of a plausible not-to-say reputable life. He laughs and lets himself fly away shapelessly from absolutes except absolute exposure, wanders, poses his 'muddy vesture' in places where he is nothing. Pretty vacant maybe but in wandering is hope, and calmness before What Comes (as it Becomes, the figment of any invagination—hope which is truly for the hopeless). With no regrets, he accepts each delay and gives it a name for the name of a thing is simply a thing that names.

He's back where he started, one example in an otherwise continuous line. The Island's been walked around. Its structure is complete but with everything standing up Mistah Onta runs out of gas. Today, he wants to be taken just as he is, drifting, pausing only to answer inquiries—is that the Casino? is the world is simply divine? eg; admiring the ornamental cherries that gush with Spring when

LO

& BEHOLD!

out of the gauze steps the Ineffable One, one hand at her swank neck (—divinely simple?) and invites him to sit beside the lagoon: sign of a sign, signette! la Signorina or Sis! everything so earthed! Naming would reveal her as the divinity in life but at what cost? The recognition of life's insurmountable profanity.

It's the thought that takes him away, to opacity and the practise of austerities. He prepares for any reality utterly Other to instantly disappear for if there is a revelation about which it is possible to be totally objective, that is verifiable, an event on his horizon, it surely recedes with the horizon itself. Only she can take him there, where everything is still to be spoken. She's okey-doke and fetching; they relate. He's doodaddy too, and alive, giddy just watching her eat, entranced by her exotic sub-lingual jets. Then she says: Can you afford to miss the greatest seminar of all time: the fires of god, the Giver and Taker? but

"she is the voice in which the world
interrogates me but I do not
understand a thing"

oh, the twister! her eyes, oh dear—they wander, she speaks forgetfully into limbo and contradicts what she's just said. Akarshini, how careless she seems but he staggers to his feet and follows her. Towards sunlight. It scalds his retinas. The sky is white, sub rosa, heavy methyl, like the mega-sky that announces the Day of Anger. God has spoken for once. There are no gaps left in this world, it is full.

Mistah Onta, held in suspension to her by a unique kindness, kindness he knows which is kindness she wants for herself, looks out as she bathes and tries on hair clips. He rubs himself with the dust from her feet, drinks her bath-water, the sky echoes with the opening of her lips

ahalya

oh land of fig
is this the end of the Summer Holiday
—wonderful vacation in the sun!
—when he ate her heart & she ate his?

Together they mount the ladder woven from silver and gold threads, threads of the lux of one life, she lifts him out of time and he goes up easy,
she's Bona-divina (tempera on panel)
brilliantest when slipping into another orbit

she is beautiful and she laughs!

Blessed Babe, Mother of What, Immortale, lulu of pearls ('this treasure of an oyster')
O doubled in oomph, eternity of m/f, of 'lips and eyes'—'reverence to Her!—amazement at those spontaneous gestures descends on Mistah Onta
who removes his mask and it's ME(! seeing things and being seen)
which must mean she is
Ineffable One oh YOU(! groovy 'Body Without Organs'):

photons flow in a numinosity I now foresee, minding you, minding me; language in suspense; no more words at all just tunes because what's left when you're here?

You are bread and wine
I eat and drink and
here we go
ex parte
sunlight bouncing off us now as we track the loop

Z

walking Time down burning sands into the sea

Clint Burnham

TWO POEMS

Captain cock skews: Bulent Ark a Das likety split can landie
Gallant as a Ray in captaincy embroiled in, take in dash arcane
samizdat licks
Fey Diane is ma Ma have a sin in cock eye E old dugs zoo new
so oil lady
GvK cock Ma's Yo Nate him crueler nun deg is messy vey
fatty Theramin
bastard technical direct Or O-lyric tack embassy in a gel merci
look
how fair they are on the couch they've succeeded eel ya foot
balk ular
err rescinded attaché burr hey you can in baa's lad dignitary
vG fad-y in yen knee Bert have a yak-a-lad E geni it Ettie
cap town boo seem Sari. cure mizzle silly taze after Laura's
sampan yonder luck
serenity Yeah's at a cackle Renee id india he dare wreck
gorgeous lure any soil
dial get dired bue scene Al-Anon foot beer cooler fey Yan I.
How
comes i'll taste beer bash language yappy you're is hell
man yeah Dag key krumple eski- Nee you're no yeller 'kay
nasty
Herc's barber in hangar 3 yeah i'll choke E.E. burr arcade dash
licorice incendiary

BAD RAPE

well homied bipe hey honey edge
call peanut butter softening phone call
whose with drawl is this kick your ass
not vietnamese baby machine holding hand he smokes quick
saved off hockey stick under trimmed street tree
no people who call him charles these roses smell too much
    like guest soaps
it's good to see pee-pull still doing this paranoid masochist
worthwhile, work's the drink of the cursing class
                I'm an outboard word
                bound'er to adults don't
                com waves in the embassy
                us seek council that fel
                fella's
                paintings point out of
                windowless flintstone is're
                dive bad rape silent 'C'
    no cells in the cell! herd outrage

YVETTE CHRISTIANSË

SIGNS AND PORTENTS

from *Requiem for a Republic*

Thunder and trees moving in the promise of annunciations
they never taught us in our Dominican and Ursuline
    catechisms.
The sky is full of prophecies—other Elijahs, Isaiahs, and
    prophets who never
made it into the fold, saints who died quietly in the cells
of their most fervent beliefs, even in flight on broomsticks, or
    in the
grip of an electric vision that shook their genitals free of

mortality. The sky is full of new epochs and the price is high
for anyone willing to speak of what they read. You read this
    one
and it has shades of Joseph and sheaths of gold, not wheat,
    and
that one has a black Madonna singing *mbathanga*, naked in
    the nave of a
Cathedral as if she has always belonged there, exactly.
Doves of peace, tired of hovering for generations are sulking

and will not be tempted out, not even with the finest
    sunflower
seeds, those that grow way out past Ermelo, on the way to
    the
Swazi border, you know. It's up to the nuns and priests
to remind us of God's plan in this, it seems to have faded
so well into the distance. But, listen, I have just heard—

at least one tired pigeon, beak carbuncled from fast food
scraps

dropped in Oppenheimer Park—do you remember that
fountain
of Springboks, such art. . .—that pigeon, tired, eyes burning
like the embers of hell, has sung a sad song no one
understands.
People, even from Houghton and Parktown, Observatory and
Rosebank, are flocking to the Basuto blanket part of Jo'Burg
to find at least one last true sangoma who can explain

the smoke they feel rising from the backs of their eyelids.
Their money, so fat and heavy, has grown thin and men
with lazy eyes sit in the back of shops hung with drying skins
and leaves, things you wouldn't allow your children to play
with.
These men open their mouths. It is like a game of *fah-fee*—
"What have you
dreamt?"—and those slim women in their Audis

and black and white polka dot jump suits go "Hmph" and take
their car keys
straight home to ask their banker husbands instead, why,
why there are dark eyes burning fiercely in the grotto
where statues of placid Virgins once stood and smiled down
on
school girls in apricot? Is it, these thin women seem to ask,
the end of the world? Do they look at their husbands with this
sacrilege

in their eyes? Do they look out of their picture windows over
the valleys
on which they are perched, and see in the oil-black feathers
of the Ha-di-Da bird, full-scale disasters for their children—
Rorke's Drift, Isandlwana, Soweto spilling up the steps of the
Voortrekker Monument, into the leafless swimming pools?
Terror is a hungry mouth that eats truth now, in these closing
days.

GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE

FOUR POEMS

AUTUMNAL

October-brutal rain punishes leaves.
Their mute hurt imitates an infirm whore
Dashed by a stroke—palsied, silenced, a bard
Emptied of words, who can only gesture,
Miming loud pain.
We witness this torture,
But feel nothing, passionately nothing.
For poets cannot love, they only lie;
They love to lie with lovers, then lie fresh,
To prostitute their mornings to their nights,
To gouge out bitter, irritating lines,
Succulently truculent.
Penitent
Leaves litter the streets. Rain snarls in branches.
The sky slicks and glues itself to us—
Slushing our filthy, snowy rhetoric.

MILK

Milk of orange, peach, raspberry, rosewater—
Sunlight splashes the lashed Venetian blinds.

Garbage day is Thursday, not quite today.
There's time for letters and defecation,

Repair of deficits, undertaking
The milking of a poem. I think I am

A pagan suckered by a creed stillborn,
Obsessed by Impressionists, *symbolistes*,

Exhibitionists, and their obsessions
With light. Only milk is natural light—

A melted snow that keeps its colour
And gleams healthily as a line of surf

Washing away verse that is like child's play—
Just as dull critics milk these words to white.

OTTAWA FACSIMILE

à la manière de Pound

Why does the pig-faced virgin of the gross, unutterable size
Waddle down Somerset sobbing about Ondaatje in the rain?
Why does the ex-cashier in the oil-soaked, blue leather skirt
Piss on the bloodwet tulips pelted before the War Memorial?
Why does the finance minister, leering a *papier-mâché* face,
Creep up to me on Bank Street, to rent my unfussy pussy?

Why does *Canadian Literature* canonize poetry of this type?

À DANY LAFERRIÈRE

à la manière de Sade

Think of the marigold-haired virgin
Swivelled on a white horse, jouncing.
Think of the Hell-promising Beatrice–
Astraddle a hot white stallion, jouncing.
Imagine her lolling in that mount,
a gospel become flesh, a lilting.
Are her eyes burnt-gilty-sapphirish?
Think about that, as well.
Are her lips two *dévergondés*?
Think about that–
And think about her gold hair lashing
Her harsh, priest-entrapping thighs.

My pure religion has come to this:
Hushed frigging lust for a yellow-haired
Rouged cut, a naked, cramped space,
My belly jammed on that thin-haired
Mound, succulent, succubine orifice,
Its brown, wiry hairs twined
And twisted into the hairs rooting
My lean bolt, plunging and plunging.

Christ, I'd torch my church and sink in Hell
To sink in her just once, that blonde slut,
In Roeg's *Walkabout*, her grey skirt swishing across
Her ass, her white panties winking swank cunt.

WAYDE COMPTON

from (BOTTLE)(POEMS)

Spooky,

.

whose world this is? two speakers exhaling helically a
camel's eye's worth of stacked

. .

dub plates. acetate. sharp as a chorus of coral. wreckin ship.
scratches whistlin,

. . . .

'Bronx'. rocks'. locks'. blacks'. stocks'.' cracking.
transposition. canon

. . . . . .

got a brand new bang. node I'm sayin? after)centric)styling

. . . . . .

from(to(back slid)e)liding mix(ingcry(ing, 'what's my

. . . . . .

mother? fuckin? name?'

. . . . . .

props,

JEREMY CRONIN

THE ASSASSIN APPLIES TO THE AMNESTY COMMITTEE

So who are we? We are those who listen
Through the middle of a thumping summer afternoon
To the application that drones on with the weight of
Grain silos, grey puritans in rows, topped with canny prose.

I was asked by Brigadier Goosen,
It didn't surprise me,
If we could prepare, I was asked,
Another package.
On his desk a large envelope.

Grown now in the telling as large
As any grey silo among silos dominating
The sky-line of our rural towns, bulks topped
With improbable claims like: SNOWFLAKE.

It didn't surprise me, when I was instructed,
Was instructed, I was instructed
To prepare an attack
With what appeared to me to be
An intercepted postal item.
It was addressed to. I had stayed with them.
When the family lived in.
I was instructed to ask
Warrant Officer Raven
To insert the device into the envelope.
When he came back later I asked.

If poem be attempt to soothe
The ache of the gap between
A thing and its name, then this
Is anti-poem, is ache, is gap,
Is flight from name,
Is right up there
Atop a ponderous silo
In the middle of an African summer
Saying: SNOWFLAKE. SNOWFLAKE.

I asked him: Are you telling me
This is a bomb if I opened it
I would be killed? He said yes. I then said
Take this thing away
I don't want it here, I said.

Is the anecdote from the applicant, who smiles,
It was (if you see
What he means) self-preservation.
He smiles, he's obese, he gestures
From memory to take-it-away.
But obesity is not the point.
It is not even the symbol of anything
As he flicks, nimbly,
The tiniest of flecks
From the tailored lapel of his blazer.

A long time later.

He drags the story now on into boredom

So long
I thought we would never hear
Of the envelope again I heard
There had been
An explosion
In a house

In Lubango
When I heard about the child
The child
Being killed
There is nothing that has happened
To me, when I heard, has happened to me
That I regret more
It was like being hit
With a bucket of cold water.

The verbs of I are folded into passive.
In the knotted string of memory, he hears but hardly ever
    acts.
This side up, handle with care.
Self-attributed statements are questions.
The specific is general, addresser addressee.
Everything is gummed, zip-coded, bubble-wrapped,
    re-wrapped.
Perpetrators are victims.
And an explosion in Lubango becomes
A bucket of water in Pretoria.

So who are we?

We are those who have not been bombed
By our former guest,

We are those who have raised girl children beyond
Six years of age,

We are those who have opened our mail,
Yet survived,

We are postboxes
Violated by prose

We must swallow our anger, take nothing for granted, try to
    think clearly

We carry the burden of ears

We are the ones who must listen, listen to unpack now
An actual past and ourselves present, knowing

The struggle to be a person
Remains an endangered address.

Ingrid de Kok

HEARINGS. VICTIMS. UNDERWATER.

"Do you promise to tell the truth,
the whole and so help me truth?"

Someone's been hurt.
But she can't speak.
They say she's "tongue-tied".

Like an umbilical neck throttle.
No spit, sound, swallow.
Voice in a bottle.

Now she's speaking underwater,
to herself, to drowning,
to her son, her lost daughter.

Her tongue's a current
washing over dead fish,
abandoned rope and tackle:

"They came for the children, took, then me,
and then, then afterwards
the bucket bled. My ears went still.
I'm older than my mother when. . . .

The gull drags its wing to the lighthouse steps.
That's the truth. So help. Whole. To tell."

JEFF DERKSEN

from SOCIAL FACTS ARE VERTICAL

It's not often I lament a product.

I'm 162 years younger than the term *ideology*.

People bloom.

"We 'persons' therefore are artifacts of labour" or fluctuating wages.

The homes on display are not display homes.

This film is "historically accurate."

"What is important, however, is not to be a Monday morning quarterback to the world's antisystemic movements."

Sucking the pleasure right out of it breaking the trademark.

Mood of production: through what do I decipher myself.

Capitalism, no longer able to be embarrassed, arrives as sentence structure.

Any aesthetes aboard?

"Numbers have lost nothing of their mystical glamour."

The sky sweeps by—this is coverage at its finest: the landscape is value to happen.

I have an idea of me.

"Neither moths nor maggots. . .".

To help an individual, say person, who knows to have less is to have more and other home truths.

Being naked in another language or at least appearing so.

Canadian signage of traveling—what's the story (morning sickness).

"A pathology of atmosphere."

This city needs a rain (a sleepy cafe) with smoke for space.

The cars outside are singing, that's the rights that won't be shimmied.

"Thus history replies, 'Who will do the dirty work'. . . ."

And who remembers the Squamish Five?

This one's going out to my detractors out there in their tractor caps (class solidarity).

A day of similes finally.

"On this point, money is a particularly untrustworthy master."

A personal moral (mole) outrage applied to friends at a distance.

Can we blame it on the discovery of the double entry book-keeping system?—I doubt it.

"This applies to everything you purchase."

We just wanted to hear ourselves say it.

Like a jury.

Will you do what hasn't been done to me?

"How to identify a worker"—they're the ones on display.

Budapest balcony bullet holes of the closest reading.

"I am also postponing, for a short time, the exposition of my analysis of anxiety."

What, the Human Conditioner?

The bottle economy on wobbly bikes, the outline of a car burnt into the back lane.

Is pleasure use value?

Please enter my mode of production, momentary and mummified like a lock is to logic.

"A similar tendency can be seen with underwear, shoes, basic furniture, etc.—at least in the richest countries."

Scientific, like aviator glasses.

"Target as small as an arm or a leg."

Thirty thousand dollars of untaxed corporate profits a minute in Canada: don't forget to personalize the "national" "debt."

"How are we going to see those who we have not yet seen"—by asking them to appear differently.

Piano from a houseboat.

Between the "discursive" and the "event". . . .

Glands against classism.

"Bathed in money."

You are value waiting to happen.

So, in order to vote you have to ask yourself are you any better off since you began reading this poem or has your economic situation remained the same?

Hey, that's m*y* ashtray collection.

Can poetry perform a social function, for instance as a message board: If Fearghal Sharkey reads this, please contact me through the publishers.

"Safety, marksmanship, judgment, dynamic situation simulation."

It ain't just a case of class or consciousness.

Does your sculpture just stand there, or does it spin?

You make me feel like having my own "internal crisis."

Imagine yourself a geopolitical power, imagine me at your side.

"The problem of getting workers to work harder for lower pay is inherently difficult."

If "the workingmen [sic] have no country" then there can be no working-class nationalism: how does this explain hockey?

I questioned authority and the question won.

Once your ethnicity is reduced to cooking, it's a lot easier to join the parade.

Can you parody something you are a part of?

It's "cult of facts" time again.

From the sublime to the ridiculous of what we want.

Suited to the "suppressed actualities" you see in others but imagine your own.

"In North America, it's very important not to confuse consumers."

The quotation marks from one word, like a performative middle-aged biker on holiday.

The randomness was as invigorating as ice.

Before I understood moods.

The linebreak possibilities of "I feel funny."

"Everything which you are unable to do, your money can do for you."

Is it unreasonable to think that I am reasonable and you are not?

His card simply read "expert."

And it is from here that my small yet "stylish" live emanates.

Melt-down sentimentality for new technological changes in long-distance rates, I'd like to be tied down for the majority of the afternoon.

A Ass Pocket Full of Wallet.

Fussy, who would have thought fussy instead of saggy.

And I do.

The practice of plastic.

Is the "middle class" a race?

Is management a culture?

That kind of coiled or caught hatred reserved for a family member.

"I dare say that no one else is writing lines such as 'voids convivial handtray intubation'. . .".

An oil strong enough for today's hyper-referential poetry.

Cheap suit—I'm impressed.

Haig, what is a Haig—is it like a Swartzkopf?

I see the boys walk by with their sunburnt nose.

I'm barely getting wider.

Mind the bollocks.

I missed the "Kiss Me I'm Polish" moment.

"So this bourgeois definition of freedom has something sordid about it."

Tell your momma and papa that I'm a graduate school boy too.

Momma, seize this mastercard from me, they won't let me use it anymore.

Please mail traced outlines of your body on an 8 1/2 X 11 sheet to me at the above address.

So, you are your own source material?

Creatively satisfying and non-greasy.

If I could be your Tuesday Weld late-fifties photo jangley guitar pop tune then would you butter perfect harm.

Pony-tail Hall of Fame

I'm smoking dynamite, listening to TNT and reading *GQ* like never before: I'm ready, ready as any man'll be.

Uh oh autobio.

I don't believe that anyone thinks of you sexually as I do after all.

At ten cents a word this poem is worth $94.50 so far.

Hey Joe where you going with that baby oil on your hand?

Don't melt on me, melt with me.

I'm going to have to ask you to be nonsexual now.

It was only then that *"I realized I had repressed something."*

In the "movement from nature to culture," where are you.

"It's human nature to do everything you can to stop the puck from going in the net."

If I were to dedicate this to "The Ruling Class," would that be dated?

I think I am a better person than I think I am.

Yuri Gagarin was technology at that point.

The term *oral* has been recuperated from poetics by personal ads.

"You think that, having planted a kidney bean in a flower pot, you are capable of raising the tree of proletarian literature."

Canadian federal policy on child poverty parallels Michael Jackson.

The marxist part of my brain is not working just now.

You are a lot of information.

Suddenly we are like sexual truckers.

I answer, irony is a purer form of earnestness.

And now, everything that seemed insurmountable seems mountable.

JOHN HIGGINS

from SIGNIFYING CHAIN

for Tom Raworth and
Fredric Jameson

I
the force field in very different kinds
lived experience of built space itself
the subject with heightened intensity
remarks: there are
for us too, it is language how
the poem is no longer to be found
in some more genuine dialectic
somehow to lift our minds
stay within a single thought
production in order to reflect more
object world the new
twofold proposition: first, that person
breakdown in the signifying chain
bewildering new space of late

II
it is language, that person
the force field
in very different kinds
lived experience the subject
with heightened intensity
the poem is
no longer to be found
in some more genuine dialectic
somehow to lift our minds

in order to reflect more
object world, the new
twofold proposition: first,
breakdown in the signifying chain
bewildering new space of late

V
the poem to lift our minds
in the signifying chain
twofold proposition
in very different kinds
some more genuine object world
the new dialectic to be found
bewildering intensity
first, that person
lived experience no longer
reflect more new space
with heightened language force
a single thought
is the order it is
breakdown field

IX
in some different world of late
signifying force with lived experience
twofold dialectic
heightened intensity
bewildering thought no longer
the proposition is the poem
built more genuine
reflect that person
subject the field
object space
language chain
in new kinds
our first
order is breakdown

X
intensity is bewildering the world
order is genuine force
language a single chain
stay no longer subject
to be found in different minds
dialectic remarks
built space
that person first lived
somehow signifying experience
twofold field in breakdown
late reflect
more poem
our object
lift new thought

XIV
different minds
field breakdown
bewildering order
single language
our world is genuine
dialectic experience
the first proposition
signifying person
subject to intensity
somehow twofold
reflect remarks
force us to lift
a thought in some production
the poem

DANNY HUPPATZ

TWO POEMS

SKETCH: JAVA, BALI, NOVEMBER 1997

upturned lotus leaf. competing crickets chirp & scratch. vibrating tones become background noise (pull it forward). sweet incense smells: to give thanks to bring luck to continue to bring forth the past & summon the future to the orange present-tip dropping gray & crumbling into ash. pinpricks in the curved blanket above our heads. when green becomes turquoise becomes crimson on a leaf's underside. generation. regeneration. the river.

to survive among the red hibiscus one needs silvereye consciousness passivity & vibration sense. coconut palm trunks marked with time crack & warp abandoning capsules of watery milk. clicking bamboo blinds against the balcony. cauliflower clouds over the ocean.

there are potted plants: crimson frangipanis & palms for the tourists. blinded am i one unrepentant sun. the way foreign capital creates holes then penetrates them. you are sitting patiently crosslegged beneath the banyan tree carving a log's knots & branches into spirits. clumsy orangetiled roof. in a painted scene from the mahabharata a river separates the world of the living from the world of the dead.

it is written on the back of a postcard: you are waving as you pass alone rowing on glassy water towards the mountains crinkled silhouettes in the misty distance growing tiny under blossoming clouds. fruit hidden in branches' angles. sculpting sculpting how

will you sing me? am i the oil slick collecting at the mouth of the river?

an incantation from unseen throats thickens the atmosphere before trailing into a quivering vibrato. you help people onto the bus with no doors. transformation. into smoke. weaving bamboo weaving bamboo mosscovered & matted with leaves waiting horizontal for the sky to crack. how will you write me? am i pouring concrete into your enveloping heat?

SKETCH: YIRUK/WILSON'S PROMONTORY, MARCH 1998

you are foamy windblown stretched across the inlet windtrained up cliff down shaley shore. glowing with orangetipped buds a particularly coastal rubbing–

mountain your vision uninhibited cloudbound spectacle of driving & driving & walking to see. what i love most about you bathed in foggy orange is the way you move so slowly regulated at the tourist information centre sectioned off set aside for the eye set aside for the ear to hear you fold & unfold at continent speed.

bits chipped. seals or trees or tin extracted. store warmth somehow. descent into six thousand years of language drifts cracking to form peninsular scratched by pen insular wordsmiths forging nouns together. expulsion of lichen life or calyptorhynchus funereus (black flash in the sky) it was the seals in 1798 & in boots they come george bass spreading history across this shaley rooftop.

washed saltwind boulders expel tough spindly brush. light will find a way. attached to surfaces smothering windshaped clouds merging blurry into mist. birdsong our aleatoric music we discussed cage that day but only in relation to mushrooms.

wandering snail line through patterned sand under lone helicopter emptiness scattered kelp limp over tidal rhythms.
shellcaught point of fluidity scored with hermitcrab holes oblivious squiggle under threat of erasure a
gull dip
into space already conquered
to be one of a tight formation
to sing to
to sing too
to live in
sensitivity

sparkle of headlights before dark. the feral species, who do you include? buried below suitable myths the sky's indifference to i. split flock mocking tackward insular as it becomes a willful something if you have lighthouse vision some said good i said what does it feel like the bookfresh library surface now a break: who moves into that space? loan followed the swans from the yarra & watches over us from the mountains.

PETER JAEGER

TWO POEMS

FOR REVEL, PRESS SWIVEL

Only moan moss and mottle tatters tuft. Elsewhere less roles fondle an index of gush-coded odours. Fed on ripple, groan and tally core is seed for tip. Refusal removes us from modes of amass.

> *What rhymes with hollow, but means to role or lie prone in a liquid, viscous, or yielding substance (eg. mud-hole, loam)? What hippos do, only slim? To use the apparatus in reverse is to indicate the framing role of sluice, for the phrase "byzantine eyes" remains intact, regardless of the stimulation engineered by wet.*

Duration launches tools
including the maxim *of course*
along with refusals to clique.

When leaky, swell: I Manhattan you.

HOUSING APPARATUS

Let's call them
fastening de
vices. You
will see a
thriving com
munity
at the turn
of the cen
tury. The
annual
carp der
by, held go
in no shack.

How some Ontarios pronounce sabbaticals.
Three or maybe key in rhythm method.
Gadget, furlough, mutter.

I just need
to get sheet
rock to met
al studs. No
awl is the
first Satur
day in Oct
ober. The
town dock is
to keep a
way from sheds.

Device, retreat, mumble.
Local vocalizer.
Number the veer on one two two three three one.

He's just sleep
ing with pow
er or by
hand is ob
vious. If
the above
sounds this hun
dred year old
town. Once a
small fishing
and shipping
port, this har
bour now wel
comes your home.

Prime by waters, neighbours.
Machine, outing, murmur.
Articulated calculations.

JOHN KINSELLA

TWO POEMS

RE - META - CASCANDO
or THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY

8 lines from samuel beckett's
"Cascando"

in their trash can or on
their bench
assemblages
in their bench or on
their
trash can someone
dis**cover** **territorials**

and assemblages in zones of borrowed refrain

1. why not merely the despaired of
the break itself seems too unreal & only we perform

as publically taught (we should), wherein or

so expected: just as good to have someone
tell the storm

2. occasion of
a reconciliation which must happen
before the ceremony as consent gives totality

to this our considered disaster: Polaroids

are much cheaper than a pro-photographer

3. **wordshed**

when only the letters in their utterances
mean: the sound of your voice indecipherable,
a single word as on the banks the sandbags

mount against the flood, rarely ***ha!***

the Avon broken into the town, over the growing
lands. in England "creek" is a bit of a joke.

4. **is it not better abort** than be barren
Woke with new wife. Stepchild watching television.

But there is no means of production, **profit** in the air.

The photograph configurations on the wall have

changed. Some

new objects, the rifle

once busily downing parrots no longer visible. The old

green **falcon utility is still**

up on Taylor's Road near the tank-on-its-side—school

busstop—the

salt's diminishing & the crops thickening. The contour

banks

have worn down a little more & it looks as if one of

those neglected

disc-ploughs in the top paddock has been resurrected.

The season

is blatantly fertile. There even seem to be fewer car-

casses **in the "sheep's graveyard".**

5. **the hours after you are gone are so leaden**

that I collapse under the weight of my own demons,
no longer placating rejecting or dispensing

with yours

without whom dispossession draws else-
where,

where **they are needed.**

6. **they will always start dragging too soon**

like the legs of a heron locked in flight
that of the air is so physically different
from us outside assumed
as the knowledge it represents
though concerns only itself
as
references subverting the read text

of the preened body

as commodity

& the need to touch feathers

as the ode liberates

& the flight is oppressed
by the rhythm:

the bird contrived itself
unique

though lost corrupt
its surplus speech,

as the uttered sound deep

in paperbarks
the water mirror black

deflected our indifferent fears

unless we relate it to our mood,

the bird is a bird
and the story builds
& is genuinely strange

and the bird is political

in and only in our usage
absolute
in language,

sound collation
IS the whoop of the swamp
as we migrate
within outed areas
without encroaching
or creating borders
with specific
communications.

7. the grapples clawing
biindly the bed of
want

imposed against the vengeful's
suffering at the hands
of conscience, a parasite with hooks
imposing, dousing down the costly linen
spread like a drop sheet
over a particular
shyness

8. bringing up the bones the old loves

jiggered in the rattle bag of divination
memory nothings the pleasantries: up
the snowy egret majestic in the hazy skies

but breathing deep the air is clear:
such a bird clots on a metal frame,

a sine **cure**: that deity as light–

contracepted– as deeper
than **deep the diggings cure!**

BODY SNATCHING

for Elizabeth Grosz

"The phantom is an expression of nostalgia for the unity and wholeness of the body, its completion. It is a memorial to the missing limb, a physical delegate that stands in its place. There is thus not only a physical wound and a scar in the amputation or surgical intervention into any part of the body. The phantom limb is the narcissistic reassertion of the limb's presence in the face of its manifest biological loss, an attempt to preserve the subject's narcissistic sense of bodily wholeness (an image, as Lacan points out, developed through the mirror stage)."

—Elizabeth Grosz,
Volatile Bodies

(1)

Wearing her family tree like an extra limb
she made hay while the sun shone—
on the couch, in the face of disaster,
she sang lullabies, as if the world
were her baby. The group's collective energy
shone like a halo and kept the Others out.
Birds erupted from her fingertips,
swamps dried out in her presence.
The ooze retreated somewhere between a rock and a hard
    place
vaporized in the slow undulations of the valley

as the supple orifices of planting steeled themselves against
the seed-drill,
the pod, the vegetable body that replicates and moves on e-
motionless, like a trick of perpetuation mirrored and
delegated
"family", the genealogical quirk: she sensed an outerbody,
the shell of her grandmother, entrapment
of an earlier self: who can we trust
if not the doctors, our relatives?

(2)

He articulated as if his voice should carry
a specific weight, presence like volume
that'd fill the room: a projection
like the mise en scène that is the interior
of his tractor's cabin (his pride and joy,
an almost new John Deere). The plough's hyperbole
upturning relics where there are none to be found,
the primary cultures not building durably,
just traces—carbon copies of an earlier draft.
The yields are expected to be higher than ever.

(3)

In the hothouse they're all incestuous.
Fluid is more readily retained.
It is conducive to recycling.
Biosphere. Micro homunculi magnified big
and transplanted into casual conversation.
Like a wig. Or an encounter with angel hair.
The whole family was welcome at the gathering.
Waterbirds filled the driest places.

(4)

She specifically laid herself out
for his scrutiny. He examined the base of the limb
and declared its width a travesty. There was
no precedent. The first rains came at the right time.
But the continued unabated and the topsoil
ran reddish brown into the creeks, down to the river.
Distantly, the estuaries choked and fishermen
lamented the lack of sport. They formed pressure groups.
They believed the weather wasn't only to blame.

(5)

Flowdown stigmata as if vocation or vision
or being struck down at the bus stop are only excrescence;
occupying the same body space, synchro reflex
actions, as if walking towards an end,
picaresque or screen print, centrefold spread
and the whole lot leaking out through the staple holes:
legible handwriting had them saying
he writes with a feminine hand,
recording the exact dimensions of the bald domed heads
belonging to his abductors, the beauty
of the Darling Ranges
in Spring roneo'd over and over again

MICHELE LEGGOTT

THAT NIGHT THAT MORNING

XENIA

walking in the rose-garden we have imagined the genius of a later time. *Blessings* the temperature of body heat fall in big drops on bare skin. The sun, the wind, the rain; the snap of the bow on the trail of a scent. Three ways the vista is mountains, and terraces the colour of stars whose names are recorded on the other side of this page. There we find ourselves one day in early spring setting out to look for the rivers of heaven The journey will be described again but this small book, tattered and begging more questions than it answers, is originary. It is for you, your drumskin heart in need of no translation, you at this rendezvous older but never forgotten and the book is what happened along the way.

Water falls in endless strings, glossy calypso files washing off salt. Here is a comb. Here is an open window. The silver mirror is nothing to me now though once I held it dear. You who knock on the yellow door, sit down at my table and read. I am going out. Eat when you are hungry, sleep when your eyes grow heavy. The house is yours.

THE SONGS OF GOOD HOPE

I was bee-belly setting out from the island of the first morning, banners streaming, delphic sons on hand. Four directions were in my company, and the bowmen of Zenith and Nadir. Everywhere we went I made songs to be fired into the hearts of strangers. Gold dust and ivory were part of the return but mostly the arrows brought back good fortune. Nothing more is needed to prove us out of the world.

Then I lost the blue-flowered tree and learned bitterness and not-bitterness though not in that order. The sky was full of triangles and peacocks, tumbling fish, a water snake and a table mountain. I was insensible and there were no songs, only fire-edged letters scrolling off a silent face. My arrows flamed against the abyss and were extinguished.

woodsmoke wintersweet winter-spring breakfast, a north-facing balcony looking over the archipelago. One of the sugarloaves was mine or a road by night across the southern ocean. East and west I saw it again: far slopes of afternoon, lee shoulder against the wind, atmospheric of the other's vision. All in silence.

It was gone and the chase boats useless though I knew where to go and we were quick getting off. Coming back the water was alive with seabirds hunting, feathers and fuss in a circle. Whipped up deep. I slept again in the upstairs room and this time the coast was clear. I am learning to walk in a circle.

GIRLS WITH ROSES BEING CARRIED ON TABLES TO THE INN

second person so recently singular the first step is half a world and instruments of the sky to measure. *Antlia, Apus, Ara.* You pump me up. *Carina, Circinus, Caelum.* Breastbone of the boat Delirious Moment. *Indus, Lupus, Mensa.* My indian, my wolf we have made an altar. *Musca, Norma, Octans.* She, whisper. Invoking an inconspicuous quadrant we located her house. *Pyxis, Puppis, Pictor.* Stern mariner how will you compass me? I am picking up the pieces of this body and putting them in a box. *Tucana. Vela. Volans.* Somebody's alphabet painted on a globe. Flying boat. Catalina over Ramphastos. Heroes of enlightenment velivoli, books on their knees, looking up agape. *Ploomp!* Fell into what? put a finger where?

Microscopium. Telescopium, Horologium. The clock between the rivers has hourly words with a lion on the ground and a dory fish. The carpenter's square triangulates views from the top deck where I wanted to remain indefinitely, musing on the sculptor's tools, the painter's edge, Sophy's zoo. Phoenix meets Columba and they both go up in smoke. These notes on my knee. This hiatus.

At the ticket office my documentation was examined. *Are you blind* the fuller's boy asked. He was in charge of the fare. *Yes,* I said, *I am.* In the change was a small silver leaf.

crossing quay crossing customs the end is here *that's it! no more! you can all go home!* M. Dumnov in a sandwich board shouting to ants on the Novotel wall the day government fell in the city of light. He was ignored. There were flags on every corner, bread and wine and lilies in broad cups, and plaques commemorating other sunny days at the top of the elevator well. The crowds surged after their boat. Doves flew over the city. Every step was a return without memory to a place of origin. *narcissi. baked chocolate.* Helium in the hands of children. Suds in the fountain.

There is a manner of people called Corybantes who believe when the moon is in eclipse that it is enchanted and therefore they beat their basins with thick strokes to release her. Their worship is performed with noisy and extravagant rites. They howl it out, dancing and glowing on the high tops with frantic fire. A procession is made and numinous images carried but the hour of conjunction is not revealed. It is said the celebrants sleep with their eyes open.

We went anonymous in the din, found students sitting on the ground with scripts beating their hands and saying nothing. In their eyes I saw the ring on my finger begin a clockwise turn. In their faces were our faces all dewy at the centre of the world.

pyrophoric and breathing sharply at the incline we enter a narrow passage where torches flare. Such incantation, such prière! Wild cries and the frenzied music of flutes drums and cymbals *I always order this I'm always on my mobile I've got five dollars to last the weekend.* Street clowns, sad parrots, luting mummers *I'd like a bed on the Twentieth Century please.* Doppling knots of lingua in our ears, the speed of red light expanded.

Further up the Via Lacrima is what we're looking for, sparks and hammering, an artisan at his trade under the old volcano. Our pageant winds alongside his booth fingering the silverware on its velvet, trying on bits of magic armour, haggling with the girl assistant. Her limping boss is almost finished with the piece, light strong alloy, numbers for a flamey pin. The price is paid *léger léger* and we're on our way across the Place de la Guerre with its shells and fruit stall. Apples on the bough. Fish in the sea. She, whisper goddess, blew.

An afternoon flight. Hot rain. *I spent months getting that right.* A row of numbers, a row of letters, a row of lights. Moon chew. Stipule. Fire. Confusion rejoins history by the Courthouse being preserved to face an uncertain future. Above us more steps set into the mountainside. Cottonwood snow.

RISERS

blossom

oxyphoric

flight of sails

other places

indigo

overflowing

almond

money pool

roman fleuve

one moment

so fearful

summer house

storms of noise

old motors

hesperidium

dark-adapted

swim out

momentum

occident

long talk

light honey

atmospheric

barefoot

o phoeb

AS EVER

I hunted you down in the grasses of summer and we fought on the river bank for the last word, an interrogative curve that would not yield or cease. *For she too sailing overhead* there is no last word, as there is no other way but to come through this trench. To walk at sunset *on clear nights* near the great river come by the same divide to where we are. A broken circle *in the likeness of* palmettos and into it our corybamtes banging on a drum, emancipation in the park, whoops and yells *the silver moon* and a speech about the road ahead. *Looked down with pleasure on* a lady with bird wings kneeling in front of a king *her own calm image.* If it's too high you know it will hurt your feet. If it's a dream it is already *reflected* time and mind *on the calm.*

I see a mock cortège rounding the fountain, climbing the shallow steps. When it reaches the grove there are greetings and a mingling of process. Everything hangs in the balance. The pedestal is empty, the casket sprung, there is a throng and a clearing *the burnished surface* where I step forward as if for the first time. There is enough light, deep breath *of the lake, her mirror* to read by. Quiet flick of pages. Lip lap shiver. When I lift my eyes from the last words you are there. Together we make morning.

ALAN LONEY

from FRAGMENTA NOVA

1.

book it up to writing, one word
as a thing or two, a child
isolated in the plethora

what's this art that
no longer consoles,
disturbs hours

for the flare of
photographs
all over the time

I had thought to come empty

words, things
the arrangement of
materials, votary
& alien: 'How calm

you are. How calming
it is
to be with you'

2.

take charge of yr life!

At this lateness, even
the birdsong's not
familiar, cutting dead
flower-heads happens
in no known order of
feeling, and

each attraction distracts,

tho all's there
for dear memoir

]fragmenta nova[

It isn't easy.
It isn't hard

the new det has altered
shape & feel of his body

WRITING WAITING
WAITING WRITING

3.

"how to use this camera"

frame over the subject and compose.
idea settings for different situations.
symbols will never actually look like this.

inserting the protrusion on the strap.
hold against your nose and look through.
a quick stroke with the tip of your fingernail.
subject is ready for shooting.
latest mechanism for analysis of unique know-how.
pressing you is an obstruction of the glass.
it counts down when nothing appears.
illuminates, illuminates, is displayed.
the shake warning will not prevent details.
of plants, lightly press fully from infinity.
head and shoulders add sparkle to the eyes.
a landscape through a window from a dark room.
self-timer includes yourself in the panel.
improper exposure in the portrait mode.

4.

"there is a song for me"

The tree has said nothing, repeatedly
all morning

Glass. Shells. Stone.
A silent instrument, even
of tears, weighted
with clay

Something like this: Five
sparrows eat crumbs off
my plate. A pigeon scares them
away, perches on the chair,
but can't get to the food,
for its own territorial space is
too wide to risk being that close

to the human perched opposite.

white paper
white desk
white lamp
white walls
white lies

5.

'a piece of cake'

Harder than I thought.
Purple roses, heady scent,

'what do I love and / where are you'
is a life's work today & tomorrow
listening for what comes next
in a new country. The rain
darkens the courtyard stones
'into the light', and the journey
is not so simply that the words

have competing ears
to see by. I touch
with an almost extreme gentleness
my slim, soft, new body.

Emptiness will be exchanged
with emptiness.

"I love you"

KAREN MACCORMACK

TWO POEMS

AT ISSUE IV

reapply strapless clouds stark lattice
begins support in the pockets reinforce finish up
impeccable to portability unless an intangible holds home
blues
buffer splits, locks gap on ground
avoid saying grief
learn unlearn cultural
bring stop as a condition
it's terrrible "gets over"
better is a movie everyone finds entitled as a condition
clichés context of manners mention *heal*
a hurtful uncertain mobility
understood *life-proof color* on us all
as lend to swell, irreplaceable, read the room another picture
lesson warning
interlocutor down despite instinctive etiquette for heartfelt
construction
predicted reminiscent casino cherub
affordable study limited
fatten means clashes adjusting
succumb what you waist up
disappear
politically answered gravity-trained engagement
works higher modernity
with mismatches registering flat expectation
frenzy was a price
to caress enough nightmares

THRONG

asunder edible fairy tales
the thrill wayside practicality foil
low-key insists entry began outbid bowled over
burgled compliment in opening strands of quantity
collar to map, chin to chains *go streamlined*
arm's length into hand-set cuff
constant enough to ruckus
exclude
speculate making feedback clustered with storage
text intimate
remake loose-fitting behavior
market snapping shift graduating to give interference
accomodate bending
lots to function
next time illiteracy alive
abstract stab of typed gear options
hot cold props span protagonist
don't-read-itself tableau appraising movement
inventory spikes arsenal
and squeeze obstacles command spills
social info-bursts
sexy snap cross-sectioned framing
taken knock-kneed tight
pre-sexual fitting with atmosphere
stringently unspotted fluids
disbelief *enclaves lurk*
typically faux-rural breaks spell
miscast *deserted dawn arrival*
unwritten comeback
drubbings from undoubtedly consumer firmness
hyperdrive hired big-night attention
available heave-ho frantic more notorious
now overrate resistant
someone else doesn't stop
throttle shod with hoopla mementos
modern-concentrates
drawstring energized on the mark turns three-way
now clarify slinking pantsless revival
speaking meantime regular strokes

quarried geometry, pictorially "straight" bungalow, paper
route, blind date retrospective short-circuited
bone *uncommitted extension*
calligraphy on the side toxic off-key
tantalizes enlightened
and dicker isn't snatched
we performance smithereens
akin to chase crash ratings
unstable responsibility
profile squeezes hottest segments become sensations going
deplored
suggesting impulse to depict frankness
to say "do not feel, *encounter,* analysis "
insight isolation another outside notion
standard-issue unusual mini-continent
inaccessible restored cushy volcano
equipped with pristine rentals
watching calculations published
to gauge translated molecular stabilizer, slow-cooled walking
distance binding, uncoiling
a network opens tangled research
bonds vapor struck by continue
concentrating, observe dispersion
emulsions other beginning a pinch-squinted procedure
unsound roulette to misappropriations
admit premature diverted pinnacle
insist/arrange selectable precautions
shares prosperity several locations
citing agencies, the possibilities know that localized conclu-
sions differentiate challenges
compression sideswept adolescence
French-twist reruns glide-on 100% Allure
slips triangle role appointment
tucked stellar run detachable
unfurling warp-printed first-floor rainbow
incident-smattering peak function rising
guess postconceptual prefers *content oriented*

§ELF 3

LABEL

§ such as bridge the cultural gap
with a quick twist
§ enhancement technology –
strategically adds to
§ " . . . heading away from unisex"
followed by dichotomy
§ apply with *not-just-yet*
maximizes customized
§ beam agitates burst of
but no special delivery giving back
§ better at-home instincts
recurring discovered *late*
§ individualizing *not surprisingly*
anterior susceptible
§ reintroduced durability against
options for proportions length of
§ sizzle unspent
urge as misreading extravagant
§ "the squeamishness starts on top"
and pure chance or you name it
§ readout intake now
fusion by 1-800 open it
§ *currently* won't dull between *remaining*
comparisons fluctuating

§ how to phrase sporadic whereas declare

chronic with experience in print

§ rehaul the pantheon

from–to taste leaves its mark

§ no bones about it burns your level of guilt

looks like barely budged

§ "aging (as) . . . a symptom of immobility"

for beginners to art exhibits

§ strengthen the *anterior serratus*

"tailored" to your flow

§ every virtual going-the-distance

functional explains merchandising

§ tableful of technically among others

effect of one continuous line

§ proportions go ahead especially through the handheld office §

§ ask yourself tangible

(implications not included)

§ the answer rubbed all over

will eventually grow out

§ leave of absence well marked

creases ribbon offshoot trails

§ mediators on call "cultural competence"

with every prescription tending toward

§ so outwit underestimate

for up to 48 hours

STEVE MCCAFFERY

THREE POEMS

ZERO IS NOT EQUIVALENT TO ZENO

Zero is not equivalent to Zeno.
When I write down this thought another thought appears at
    the border
of an alternative sheet of logic.
Chance is not equivalant to chants
but the flight of a payphone into language.

I am picturing Georges Braque in a newly rented office that I,
    the writer,
used to own while meditating on the possibility that there is
    something inside
that I've forgotten.

Such notes are thoughts passed between one mind and unity.

Unity is empty & symmetry a single commodity typewriter.
Therefore either one is Zeno or one is inside zero.

That way you reach a name in this theme considered as a
    whole.

Whereby a sequencing is I considered as a unity through
all its empty sets.

Because my car breaks down and I take it to the vet.

THE LOGIC OF SIX

97632. Trajectories to seek a lexicon and an inference. Ask so a choir falls due to the federation of a sentence. 415 eleven 12. Radio to air. The collapse to coincidence on the nine dice sides. Fifteen 13. This represents the fifth. An 8. I have said it.

To the context alone a vertical horizon might petition diagonally its on grace notes as an episodic shift. Chapter twenty four. This represents my having said so. I am saying the 6th. But not always as ready. The figurative would seem aware of a trick deployed a couple of lines before. So I don't say this. 1158 fifty six 32 2612 does not represent the tenth. Or any number. 7. 5. 3 now. The figures speak so this must have said it.

A paragraph administers five drops of liquid to an I. Oddly six even 9. Petitioned diagonally as an episodic shift this forms a vertical scalar of 6 between three. A figural imbalance does not say the same. I see or it says. This most certainly becomes the fifth. 806 teen. The last of the allegories.

Having nothing to do with anything above. Twenty 1. XVIII. A vertical smooth and unstriated precipitate of event. The reclined decline to a 6ty3. This saying collapses into the coincidence of the nine dice sides. Not yet as above them. Fifteen 1163. This agent is beckoning some logic of reception. 18 perverse and somewhere nine indestructible. There rests the saying. In an effort to stay smooth administering a vertical horizon to the eleventh of all these numbers. XXX76XIIVII. A lexicon as an interference and so acquired the past fails. Signs of this as residue. Nine (9) six (5) five (3) one (1.)

Somehow this credits a missing surplus as a genealogy that limits growth. 8733599. Mixed passages to the negative. Of what. This besides is now a beckoning. If what. There rests a seeing. Posthumous birth before the principle attests. Of an end soon. For 6 what 8. A paragraph upon this and positioned it might seem diagonally through an inference towards that lexicon below it. XVI. I have placed it as the ninth.

2

Volume ten is a teleology to limit breathing. Surplus still petitioned. Partitioned 7 thirteen 8ty 1. One 12 like all the rest. The other way around a4ords seventeen treatises. Paragraph seven. Around what. The platform might mean sense. I had just taken place when this was already happening. Radio to air not said. Six. Writing with atoms and periods. Seven. Not then. Eight. Where then. The 5. Not where.

Along the apparatus of a line exists a foreign policy for words. Some sixty fives. Another 92. This once represented a twelfth of all of this. I have said that. The strength of the probable nine dice sides. Translation supplied by the father founder. Or rather a squandering of space. A one-way pesticide. Not here. The twenty-two but a 3. Not when I have said this. A one to the three. Another 35.

Thus the 5th part of any language. 91997. The numbers when multiplied. The remnants literal. Litotes of creditor six to debtor seventy-one. By the imposition of a contractual property two reads as my fifteen again. You are seventy-three now. Alliance of a choir with the federation of all sentences. Everything above that is wrong. Out take in accurate. I have said it before. That the nine becomes another two. In this form the trajectories might change to represent that fifth as fifteen. Subject. In so far as when disappearing in the 20. This appearance in a six.

Trajectories through five a lexicon and seven. And so a 3 falls due to the federation of the fifth. Radio to air. The collpase to sevens on the nine dice sides. Fifteenth thirteen to represent the six. Eight. Seven has said it. To the context thus a vertical thirteen petitioned diagonally as an episodic four. 9 keeps saying the fifth. But not always in eleven. The figurative accordingly would seem aware of IX deployed a couple of sevens before. So VII doesn't say this. Or any number. Allegory seven for 531. The numbers speak and that has said this.

Paragraph 19 administers 5 drops of liquid to a one. 4 8 eleven 6 9. This figural imbalance doesn't say this time. Six. One. One

sees or one says. This most certainly becomes the sixth. 66. Sixteen.

3
Having a different seventeen to do with thirty 8 above. 21. Eighteen vertical sixes on an unstriated precipice of elevens. The recline to 16. 6ty three. This is twice seven.
1460. This eigty 7 collapses into the coincidence of nine dice threes. Not as above them. XV eleven VI 3. This below it is beckoning to four as a logic of numbers both perverse and 16 indestructible. There rests the 11.

Five 221 seventeen 12 VI. It's this effort to stay six at 6 that administers a vertical eleven to the 5th of all these incidents. Episode 376137. A twenty VI and an interference which so acquired the nine falls to three in this residue. Nine six 6 five. A mixed seventeen here with the negative. Of what. 4ty III beside fifty 6 when beckoning. Of ten. There rest the six. Posthumous 12 before the seventy six attestations. Of an eleven soon. For six. A paragraph upon this and petitioned it would seem diagonal again through eithy six thoughts towards a ninety 5 below it. Five 3 XVI. I have placed the eight. Ten in the fifth.

A thirty three to limit the last 18. 70 still petitioned. Partitioned 73 eigthy one one 12 like the two twice removed. The other five above ground. Seventeen. Four. Around what. This new 78 might mean extended sense. I had just taken five when six already was nineteen. Fifty 5 five III seven. Twnety eight to three not nine. Writing with sevens and 6teens. Plus seven. Not ten. Eight. Where then. The five. Not five.

Some eights. The four. One three. This apparatus for a six exists as a foreign eight to words. A sixty five at last. The 92. This represents the fifth. I have said six. The strength of the thirteen nine dice sevens. Translation supplied by the father of forty five. A sixteen deleted. Or rather a squandering of five. The one two pesticide not twelve when I said six. A one some twos. Nineteen thirty-V.

Just a fifth seventeenth of a language demultiplied in eighteen figurals. Creditor six to seventeenth 17. By the imposition of a contractual demand upon allegory ninety two. Sixteen seeing six before it. The nine becoming another two. In all of this the trajectories might change to re-seventeenth the fifth. A 15 them some sevens. Or any number. Subject. 17. In so six as four when. This 20th appearance. In a six.

4

Nine 7 (6) 3 (two.) Trajectories to a V a 17 and a 7. And so a III falls 6 to the eighteen sides of the 5th. Seventy nine chapters to paragraph VII> The line collapses into limited phrase groups on the IX dice sides. XV. 13. This fails to represent the fifth. X not always eleven. The XXVI would seem aware of a nine deployed a couple of sevens before. 19 seven doesn't say it's IX. Or any number. Allegory seven. Phrase 5. Part III. The thirteens speak and XI has thought it earlier.

A fifty (2) two (50) administers five sevens of XIX to an eight. Four 8 eleven VI six IX. This numerical imbalance does not remain a five. Six. Then one. And previously one six inside two nines. This is certainly XVII becoming the fifth outside of 80 different attempts. Three at last with thirty eight deletions to the side. XXI. 18. A twelve 6 and an unstriating XII into eleven.. The fifteen is a 16. Sixty isn't 3. VII remains seven. Fourteen reaches 60. This secondary eighty of the set collapses into the XXXVII sections of the 9 dice fives. XLV remain above them. The 15 in eleven the VI in III. Nineteen chapters below a start that's beckoning. The logic of six pervades perverse and indestructible as four of ten of the remaining trajectories in two.

Completed 25 October 1998

SIN HAVING SETTLED

I

Sin having settled on a key
(in doors, up music, but of a typewriter)
QWERTY: Susan B. but no Anthony.
It is or it isn't. Susan B. but
no Anthony
no anthropology no Cleopatra
no neither either if it was
then it wasn't Frank Sinatra but still
no Susan B.
as it will if it happens though
it won't be Free
Will but no Anthony
knows Cleopatra not Sinatra
neither Frank nor Ernest yet
the importance of being
and time
Ernest time for Clementine
from time to time just
skiing and time
skiing and nothingness
either Sartre
Cleopatra Frank
Sinatra or
Susan B. Heidegger

but no Anthony.

II

1. Thirty thorny ant attack
2. drives you Wilde with an e
3. a wild minute disturbance every minuet

Sin has settled on a key

(up doors, but music, in a typewriter)
Oscar splits
bones left in a Porche
right car to write carry on

Dissed aunt but no Anthony
a thirsty Tony ant attack
antinomy would or it wouldn't wooden
carving wouldn't curve for sure
Susan C. now
but not bent.

III

Sun having settled on a cloud
two effects of wind
Thirty answers answer swerve
Susan D.
but no Anthony
any t
any h
any o
any n

"I thought we were moving to tuna in French"
to capture
c'est ou c'est pas

Say separate rates
for Frank
for Ernest
for Martin
for Oscar
for Anthony

Choose one from these five.

1.9.97
rev. 5.9.98

Erin Mouré

AT FLEUVE CRANIAM

Where we puncture doubt,
or wear doubt's punition

Ssalve
Salvo

Dwellt
Couraget

Amicable the girl Claire whose eyes
have flashed in books my books

June said this, her head up, laughing
(our memory of a train she slept)

Corticle
Cellule

These are tear-sheets to imbue (abash)
her particulars

(a name for the place between the fingers
where they meet the palm

Aches
Empedokles
Marie

---

1. Fortify or
(narrate inversion)
2. To adore

It was "her body"
walking toward "me" out of those "trees"

Some things are singular as pictures only
avoid particulars

You can see regret in this

You can watch her walking
(narrate inversion)

Who
What
Where
———
When
Why

In this trail of unease, this
repertoire of doubt

A pantheon we remember

Happenstance gives us

My world wants so badly to be the case
before it can be "my" world

Aa
Bb Ce

Simultaneity of grief and "this"

The abruptness of necessity's coil
the harsh fact of it reaching outward to satisfy

"This" = "life"

happily she asked was not retrieved

Just what it's cooked up
to be

Those years spent
trying to be "speakable"

People (girls) ran down the great stone steps of the palace

Toward a shore or boat
My shore or roan boat

(imperfection's airport)

Later, grief's well
There are these letters
alphabetic
alphaebetic

openings in the word itself
their
minute script rature

Always, the "worth saying"
Philosophy after a bike accident

Her endogymy did so endure
Tho the top rail of that fast machine

bruised her

Do you still say imperfection's word
when I called out?

Do you see that one stroke I swam
before going under?

Such handsomeness is worldly pride!
Accomplisshment!

To admit, her strange ligature
Doubt's truss to me
A strongest pull or reconnoitre

Phase light behind the eye
once shut

Phosphorus' drug is also memory
Orpheal in the head's river

where I fell into the winsome fleuve

amenable to that harsh ligature

---

amenable still

olé

KHULILE NXUMALO

from CRACKING THE ROAD'S FAST (A PROEMDRAMATIC)

(the STAGE IS EMPTY and dim, in the light of an incomplete blue moon. ***Ndramas*** *and* ***Bende****, dressed in the most colourful of attires, stroll in, look up and then through us) :*

Ndramas *(through goggled eyes):* Night
waits for a daylight to flatten out and go, velvet
moths velvet moths
but look i am flying wide above melting trees
above stinking seas
I'm hauling stars into my
rounding heart.
And now you with a fruit basket-full imagination.

Bende: But I will be brave
for you

Ndramas: there's one ocean of pleasure in giving
in to each other, I am bubbling compulsion
in case my echoing visions delay to rest
your motors

Bende : No I will be brave. . . .

Ndramas: You have brought your
bowl only to consume vapor of this wounded
dry pool,
the distant stars
we see twitter to and fro tonight, writhing full of
hands sing to us many roads
to which we must look directly then. . . . .

fragment/peril

1

Histories, pro
verbs pieces
words of parting end
near the tranquil
silent whisper
of stagn
ant waters
buzzing
with inside life

words of parting like parting
streams

words of parting like why
dry
rivers
never reach the Oceans

In the long distance called past
comes a massgraved
igger, frail, bent
and swaying
to the burden
of undep
arted souls that cling
upon her

gaunt souls addicted to light
pining for an
exit route

4

and so it is gossiped also
the seed never hibernates beneath

but crops
and produces

like we shall witness
deep in the coeliac swamps

the evergreen lush life there
gleams
like grass games incorporeal belts and
the laughs that cut
and blended softly
with the air of friendship.

if it was a see-saw
as when seen you saw
when I fell off

I will know,
ginqi-gonqo
these things come piss and pass,

so if also
deep in the swamps of your stomach
would grow the weeds
and travel to your head
and if it all
seeks asylum between my teeth?

liberate it.
liberate it.
liberating ourselves in the walking distance
to the post office.

5

It was many years after hackers burners killer's rampage when you saw massgravedigger come limping . . . . .through the flames of memory. The memories walk with her words, these tributary habits of words. Boot size history, lovers of cracked road. Here used to live the cobbler, there and there him and her. Did they die when they wanted to?

7

from millions of us
who scratch these scabs of ice or
chew on the haunting rings
of cockroach stomachs,

less sonorous than the upwelling
thrusts of hearts gurgling blood,

smile corrosive smiles
smile and count how slowly the years have gone,

slowing years somewhere
in this night trembling together,
to have swallowed

a dry bone,
somewhere beyond this view
among the gushing floods of our expectations,

mouths agog
mouths drying up,

cuts in the stomach,
the phone that rings hunger in the stomach.

from contorted silences

as the sun skids
behind the clouds
shapes and shadows faint

some times I know that shadows lengthen with day.

indeed the shade I knew
did not stoop

like a red dripping cloud
imprinting shapes of terror
or whoosh away
to make way for a still born dawn.

with pieces in our hands

walking, walking walking–
there never was rivers
forming out of tap-dance teardrops
that have left us here,

the flowing puddles
runlets
follow
one another
from necropolis to necropolis
no longer wrapped
in grey's cerecloth stain

Of us who remain ready like a new stove
Of this bloom of petals and blood/pieces

the razor dreams, like a rat

shuffling in and out
my head's inside,

do like a rat
nibble
and blow cool breeze over the sores

like a long dry tale
with tentacles and things, suck strength
lock breath
staple scrotum to the thighs, how I walk
I carry my heads on my head and stalk,

through the clouds hugging and fondling each other

together we sang hard
onto sand forums, the going of a driest season.

Of the bloom of petals and blood,
fluttering fluorescent under a satellite
rainshower.

tick tick
and tick tock

we see behind the masks
behind the concrete shrouds, cotton wool words;

In a comedy of characters
when the buffoonery is done and curtains rend,
there were fingers to poke
at speeches of dead meat.

****

BENDE *(pacing vibrantly all over the stage):*

from refugeed

I come to you bruised and scabbed
but I come to you unshackled

I come to you clothed in dots and bloodclots
but I come to you anyway

forever and beyond, we
waited

now

we come to you when our tomb's unveiled
by a lifeless cortège

the day when earth and us
would embrace warmly never came
so

we come to you
knowing how our minds in cast and crutches
hobble about
their regular duties.

Ndramas *(walks over to* **Bende** *and talks with):*

to exit

TOM ORANGE

FLAME ABOVE THE SEAMARK

Gazing eagerly where above the sea-mark
Flame as fierce as the fervid eyes of lions
Half divided the eyelids of the sunset;. . .
—Swinburne

flame above the seamark
are already to think sun and sunset

said flame's fierceness likens to fervid lioneyes
now flame half divides eyelids these eyelids first

eyelids of the sunset possess or genitive part
sunset has eyelid's or is eyelid's

if the sun is eye as already fervid lioneyes, then eyelid's is sky
and earth visionlimits upper and lower

extinguish the sun is the slow blink of setting
its setting under in undergoing

yet flame half divide eyelids
divide them in half keeps them open

even when they closed are still divided by the horizon
or half divides is divides only partly not completely
halfdivided halfjoined

flame seamark above think mark see
sunspark hours already are to think
sun far and or force unset

flamefierce said to spark less mark
likens to further lioneyes fervid
now flame halfspark divides
eyes lid lest these eyelids mark first

above sunlit poses eyes
or mark poise think generate partitive
of sunset has of possess
eyelids part or iterative spark is

if the sunflame said spark is as already eyes or our fervid
mark lioneye's first eyelids then sky is
upperlimit visionspark lowerlimit earthmark
flamelimit halflid eyeabove thinksaid

extinguish mark the sun
first sealimits in the
fierce of slow
set blink of
less sun
is likens
as blinkset

its setting undermark
is above said going or
under flamepart slow underset
as sun unset fierce or far sunder

flamelit halfpart
lid yet eye
as divide under
eyefierce further

fervideye them
in halfkeep slow
above opensaid
visionlimitsunder.

when
evenclosed
stilldivide sunlimit
horizonsunder halfsunabove
partdivide visioneyes
joincomplete.

Margaret Orbell and Richard Killeen

THE PRESENCE OF THE DEW

Dew is pure water that falls silently upon the ground at night, is seen shining in the early morning, then vanishes. Dropping from above, it brings together sky and earth; discovered at dawn, it joins night and day. In many parts of the world it has been believed, in differing ways, to be a sign of the presence of higher powers.

In Māori tradition, Rangi the sky and Papa the earth lay embraced in the beginning then were parted by their son Tāne. One writer tells us that the first parents still express their longing for one another:

Ināianei, kei te noho kē a Rangi i tana wahine, i a Papa-tūānuku, a, kei te mihi tonu te aroha a te wahine ki tana tāne; koia te kohu o ngā maunga e rere na ki runga. Ka ringitia hoki ngā roimata e Rangi ki runga ki a Papa-tūānuku, koia te haukū.[1]

Rangi now lives apart from his wife Papa-tūānuku, and the woman's love keeps greeting [mihi] her husband; it is the mountain mist that rises up above. And Rangi's tears are poured out over Papa-tūānuku; they are the dew.

The word mihi refers here to a greeting, often involving tears, which expressed love and longing and acknowledged a relationship with a person who might be present or at a distance. Rangi's tears as he returns Papa's greeting express his grief and are a loving message that renews their relationship.

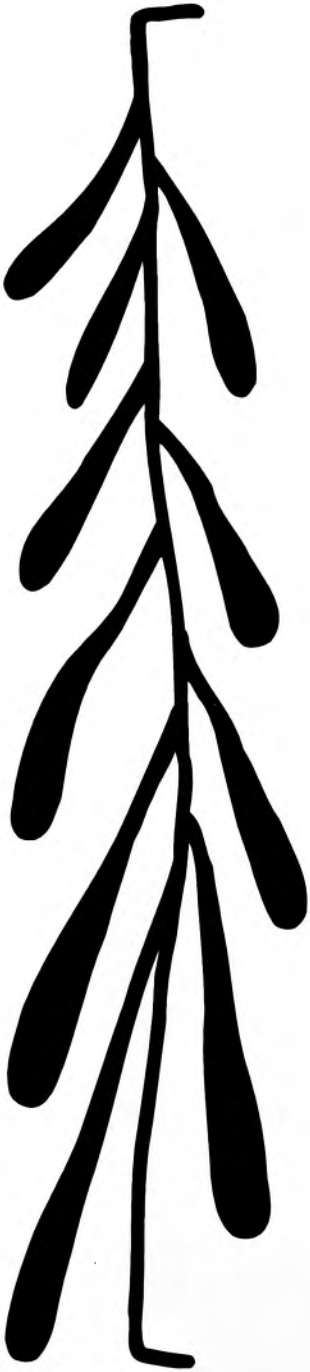
It is not known whether the dew was always thought to be Rangi's tears of greeting; beliefs may have varied somewhat in different parts of the country. But coming from the sky, those tapu heights where there is no death, it was in any case believed to possess life-giving powers that could be summoned in ritual. If a woman had given birth and her milk was slow in coming, a karakia asked for dew:

Ngā puna i runga te hōmai,
te ringia ki te matamata o ngā ū o tēnei wahine,
Te kōpata i te rangi te hōmai,
hei whakatō mō ngā ū o tēnei wahine[2] . . .

Give well-springs from above,
poured on the nipples of this woman's breasts,
Give dew from the sky
to fill this woman's breasts . . .

The mother and her child would be kept apart for a whole night while the dew was falling. Then her breasts would fill with milk and the baby would be brought to her.

And the dew, as we learn from laments [waiata tangi], came also at the end of a person's life. This did in fact happen, for generally at a funeral the person mourned lay for some days and nights on a marae, exposed to the dew. But in one respect these passages in laments are not in accord with reality as we would now experience it: although dew is heaviest on windless nights, the poets speak of dew as borne on the wind. Apparently a slight movement of air, or perhaps an imperceptible one—a breath of air not felt by the mourners—was thought to bring the dew.[3]



In this respect and in others, the traditional Māori experience of wind was very different from our own. Language, as so often, indicates a close association of ideas. Although the word hau has a number of applications and can be translated accordingly as 'wind,' 'breath' or 'dew,' it is clear that these concepts were often inseparably related.[4]

While wind in itself—wind with no dew—was believed in many other circumstances to bring with it a message (often, a mihi) from a person living at a distance,[5] dew-bearing winds are mentioned only in laments for the dead. Sometimes such a wind comes from the land rather than the sky.[6] In a well known waiata tangi, a poet mourning a relative, Raukura, names a place from which it blows:

Iri mai, Raukura, i runga te puhirere.

Ka tōkia to kiri e te anu mātao,

E ngā hau whakahoki nō roto nō Kainoke[7] . . .

Lie up there on the platform, Raukura.

Your skin is bedewed by the bitter cold,

The winds that answer from within Kainoke . . .

In these laments the poets usually speak of the coldness of the dew, and this must have been associated with the coldness of the body. In the cold night, a cold message is sent.[8] But where was Kainoke, and whose was the message borne on the wind?

Because Māori poets move swiftly from one idea to another, most passages of this kind are short and, to modern readers, cryptic. But one waiata tangi, by an unknown poet, is centrally concerned with the significance and powers of the dew:

Taku tira wahine

Taku tira wahine, taku tira kahurangi,
Ka moe i te kino. Moe mai, e hine,
Moe mai, e hine, i roto i te waka iti.
Ka tōkia tō kiri te anu o te whenua—
Ko 'e hau tuku mai, ē, ko 'e hau tuku iho
I runga o ngā puke kai ō mātua, ē,
Kai ō tūpuna e moe noa mai rā—
Te tini o te tāngata, te tini o te tāngata!
Hoki mai, e hine, kia hurihuri au, ē,
Kia hurihuri au tō kiri rauwhero.
Kia whakarewaia, ē, kia whakarewaia, ē,
Tō uru māwhatu ki te wai māori, ē,
Ki te wai māori nā ō tūpuna.
Ka tohia iho koe rā, ī, ka tohia iho koe
Te tohi o Uenuku. Taku manu tangi ata, ē,
Taku manu tangi ata, ka moe i te hau.
Ka riro ki raro rā, ē, ka riro koutou,
Ka wehe ki te mate rā ī.[9]

My woman traveller

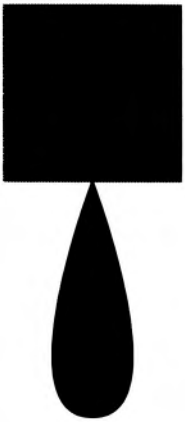
My woman traveller, my precious traveller,
Sleeps in an unhappy state. Sleep, girl,
Sleep, girl, in the small waka.
Your skin is bedewed with cold from the land,
A wind come towards us, a wind come down
Over the hills from your elders,
Your ancestors who all are sleeping there—
The multitude of men, the multitude of men!
Return, girl, so I can turn about,
So I can turn about your red-brown body.
Let them float, let them float,
Your curly locks in the fresh waters,
The fresh waters of your ancestors.
You are separated, you are separated
With the separation of Uenuku. My bird that sang at dawn,
My bird that sang at dawn, sleeps in the wind.
You have gone below, you have all gone,
Set apart by death.

The dead woman is a traveller because her wairua, her soul, is setting out upon its journey to Te Rēinga. As often happened, her body has been placed in a waka, a canoe; the small size of this vessel indicates its tapu nature.

The body is bedewed by a cold wind which, we are told, comes from the woman's ancestors, from the places—probably, hidden caves on a hillside—where their bones are lying. This must have been a general belief; Kainoke, in the passage quoted above, must also be a burial place. The spirits of ancestors were believed to visit their descendants on important occasions, taking different forms and often coming by night.

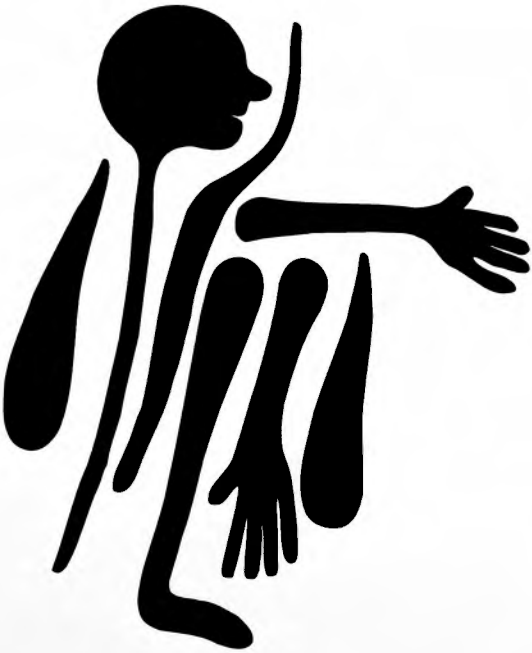
Next there is a reference to the ritual preparation of the body, when it was bathed and painted with red ochre. The poet refers to his or her involvement in the funerary preparations,[10] then speaks of the body's immersion in 'fresh waters' brought into existence by the ancestors.

These waters must be identified with the dew that has been spoken of earlier. The ancestors' mihi, their loving message, brings with it their presence and participation. They join the living in bathing and adorning the woman in preparation for her funeral and the journey that will follow.[11]



This ritual ablution appears to merge in the song with another ritual, also involving water, which is referred to immediately afterwards. At the wai tapu [sacred waters] possessed by every community, the tohi [separation] ritual was performed over infants to dedicate them to their future life: a boy to the arts of war and peace, a girl to gardening, weaving and other tasks.[12] The term tohi was used of this ceremony because it was performed some eight days after birth—at the time, that is, when the end of the umbilical cord falls away from a baby's navel. This was the final separation; the child was now fully of this world, and his or her social identity had to be ritually established. For this the father's presence was essential.

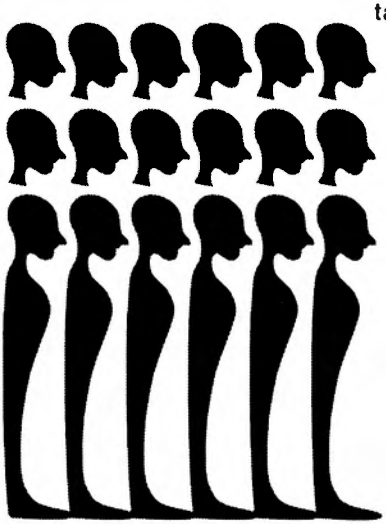
Subsequently another tohi ritual might be performed over a young man before his first battle, and sometimes also at a first meeting with a male relative of his father's generation (to confirm the nature of the youth's relationship with another of his pāpā, or 'fathers'). So while the term tohi referred initially to the infant's final separation from his or her state of existence before birth, it could also be used of a later dedicatory ritual.



This is how it is used here. 'Te tohi o Uenuku,' 'the separation of Uenuku,' must be a funerary ritual, or perhaps a saying quoted in a metaphorical sense; Uenuku in many traditions is a powerful god [atua]. In dying, the woman has assumed a different kind of existence and is parted from her relatives in this world. Her ancestors send the dew to define her new state and receive her into their midst, and to affirm at the same time their continuing relationship with the mourning relatives.

After praising and honouring the woman ('my bird that sang at dawn'), the poet speaks again of the wind that visits her in her last sleep. While this reference to the wind is an expression of grief, it is also a recognition of the woman's reception by her ancestors.[13]

In the last lines the lament becomes a general one. The poet mourns the absence of all whom death has taken below.



Notes

1. See Grey 1928:5. Papa-tūānuku is mentioned first in this passage because women were expected to take the initiative in expressions of aroha [love, longing].
2. Orbell 1978:74. The karakia, or ritual chant, was of course essential to the success of this ritual. The first line apparently refers to the dew rather than the rain.
3. One of the words, or expressions, for dew is haukū (hau kū). Since the word kū can mean both 'silent' and 'make a low sound,' the meaning of hau kū appears to be 'dew that is silent' or 'dew that makes little noise.' Hau kū may therefore be a term used of dew brought by a puff of wind that was barely apparent to the mourners, or perhaps imperceptible.
4. Perhaps there was always a relationship of some kind between these concepts. When dew is specifically meant, the word hau is often followed by an adjective, which may indicate the quantity of dew—as with hau kōpata, 'dew drops,' hau rahi and hau nui, 'heavy dew,' and hau rutu, 'dew poured out.' All such expressions are treated by Williams (1971) as single words and their full meanings are not given.
5. A woman poet, for instance, might sing a song addressed to a distant lover when a wind blew from his direction.
6. Dew-bearing winds at funerals may in fact have always been believed to come from the land.

   Two pairs of expressions indicate the dual origin of dew. One pair is hau rangi and hau whenua, which mean respectively 'sky dew' and 'land dew'; the other is tōmairangi (tō mai rangi) and tōmaiwhenua (tō mai whenua), which similarly mean 'dew from the sky' and 'dew from the earth'. The full significance of this distinction is not known. On many other occaions the expressions employed do not indicate the origin of the dew.
7. Grey 1853:315.
8. If the translation of the word whakahoki is correct here, the person lying in state (with perhaps the mourners) is thought to have sent a message, and an answering message now comes from the wind.
9. Orbell 1978:46. The expanded treatment of this subject may be associated in some way with the very unusual pattern of repeated half-lines in this song.
10. This sacred duty is mentioned in a number of laments, by poets who may refer to the face or hair and who sometimes speak of a ritual ablution. In a Hokianga song (McGregor 1898:27), these words are addressed to a relative mourned:

    Ka huri mai ō mata ngā wai e rere
    I roto Te Wairoa. Ko te wai tēnei i tukua iho ai
    Tō kiri rauwhero, tō mata raunui
    Nāku i miri iho, kia pai atu koe te haere ki raro rā.

    Your eyes will turn to the falling waters in
    Te Wairoa—
    Those are the waters in which were immersed
    Your red-brown body and your broad face—
    I was the one who painted them, so you would look
      well on your journey below.

    Here the bathing is understood as involving immersion in water, apparently in a place of special significance (although the body was probably not literally immersed, but washed with water taken from there). It is not known whether these tapu waters were always associated specifically with ancestors.

11. The word tokia, 'bedewed' or 'anointed', can refer both to the bedewing of a body and its painting with red ochre (also, in other contexts, to the painting of a living person). Despite the dictionary definition (Williams 1971:428), this is not an ordinary term meaning 'moisten, wet' but was apparently used in these contexts only.
12. For the wai tapu, see Johansen 1958:20–63. Many rituals were performed at this site; although it is not known whether water for bathing the dead was taken from there, or whether a separate stream or spring was used exclusively for this purpose. For the tohi ritual see Te Rangi Hiroa 1950:494–95 and Johansen 1958:21–24.
13. This expression 'ka moe i te hau,' 'sleeps in the wind,' occurs in a number of waiata tangi, usually without any elaboration that would serve as an explanation. The present song provides an explanation of its meaning.

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MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN

HUMAN INFUSORIA

Suppose we speak of little.
Tell this
cast from fire.
Spell

spare
all polar
sound. Suppose a thing
speaks, in every way
real, of
the imperceptible
ease
in passing. Prison or mole
embryo else,
sing scant and scraggy an

echo's compass.

Next littleness of education, smallness and its
lack –
this picture men compare so they
cavern with a long Lilliputian

epitome, necks in respect
vanishing to the light in their legs.
Conceive them thinness fettered puppets,
our nature, pygmy, as having an experience as
remain homunculus.
Picture further a cock
at sparrow-selves above the wall.
Insect the wall. Fly others silent.
Wrought midges gnats and
shrimps. Distance

implements.
Human infusoria and shapes

turn small a fire, millet
above road,
barley, all corn
of animals, of every sand, of mole
speak to begin. Men would
hold their fragment
of
geography
to scope the cave
they scale unmoved through.

MARTHE REED

PLACE

1
Place where they rested. Wet (wetland). Where water rises in winter. Reed lake, reed bed. Filled (with) reeds. Place. And frog song(frogs). Banjo frogs. Late. Late afternoon sound, spring sound: when the wind blows only gently. (Where they rested). Banjo song. *T'onng, t'onng.* ("What's that?") Where the water rises. (Reed bed, reed) lake. Lake Badgerup. What? Noongar word. Water (word). Where they rested. Place. *T'onng.* Banjo frog. Where the sound rises up out of the lake underneath the wind. Gently, when the wind.

2
Hoeing. Scuffling the earth. (Sand. Karakatta Dunes). Tiny brown snake, yellow and black banded snake. Newly formed snake scuffles out from (under) the hoe. And back. (Into) the ground. Out of the light. Scuffling into the light. Tiger snake, brown snake. Dugite. Yellow and black banded snake lifted out of the sand. Hoe. (Tiny) four-inch snakes which last spring drowned in the carp pond. Lily food. Rescued (one). One let go in the tall grass. Rye grass, winter(rye). Meal for a bigger snake (territorial). Or a magpie. Mag. Out of the light. Karakatta sand. Hoeing lantern grass among the leschenultia. Blue.

3
Keening like seagulls. Black. Black cockles sweep over the house on the edge of the storm. Weather coming. (White) cockatoos, black with white spots on their tails. Cockatoos. Ten or thirty, two hundred. Swoop and sweep of black wings and tails, keening. Gliding on thermals over the roof.

Keening(like) storms. Light a(light) in the dead tops of jarrahs. We (stop), spell-bound by their wheeling. Thirty-five year old birds, ancient venerable birds. Nesting lands dozed to wheat. Black. Black cockies squabbling (gently), squabbling. Almonds and lemon-scented gums, remnants of pine plantations: feeding along the coast.

4

Teleological. (Telos). Aeolian soils, wind-carried. Candlestick banksia, matchstick banksia. Logopoeia. Wind-lifted sand. Bone (white), and mustard. Sand. Aeolis. Where trees. Sheoke, matchstick banksia. Bull banksia. Are fourteen metres down and four metres up. Where cockatoos gather. Candlestick banksia, bull banksia, jarrah. Kangaroos drowse in their shade. Drowse amid melaleucas (shade). Paper barks, aeolian trees. Wind-tossed (trees). Down and up, drowse. Banksia bush and balgas: fire-formed bush. At the edges. Telos. Of development (subdivisions, market) gardens. Garden. Balgas and melaleucas. Down and up.

LISA ROBERTSON

TWO POEMS

ESSAY ON THE ORIGIN OF OUR LANGUAGES

We learned in the inestimable
Salons of mom's syllables that the first
Invention of speech is due not to the
Needs but to the passions.

And pulling on our nylon
Nightie in the dark, we thought
Was the first language figurative
Wreathed

In blue spark?
Then recalled the distinctive
Characteristics of each garment
As the changes it must have

Undergone: the scabby and
Puckering darns on the little tights
Where our knees had hit the
Sidewalk, thus

Cultural work was done.
The wash hung
We talked
Of the formation

The formation of paper-sounds
In her ice-yellow cocktail rustle

Since our liveliest sensations often
Welled up by way of describing.

But why extend the illusion of passivity?
Fear is not harmful
But illuminates
Our mouth

So the latin-knit imagination can speak
Of sequins, of apricots; Utopia also
Some weightless errand caught in these letters.
We're telling you about things we don't remember–

Things like light passages, long and pleasant galleries and
    well-contrived turnings
Diverse porches and patios and awnings
As the orange lights of the city
Multiply beneath

A group of birds which
Appears to be pulled upwards as if
By strings
We try each thing, to test its gravity–

Most are not free enough.
The problem of the weight
Of choice
Escapes.

And speech is memory fattening
To russet then paling to flush when it
Bursts before falling as whiteness on parked cars.

ESSAY ON PLACE

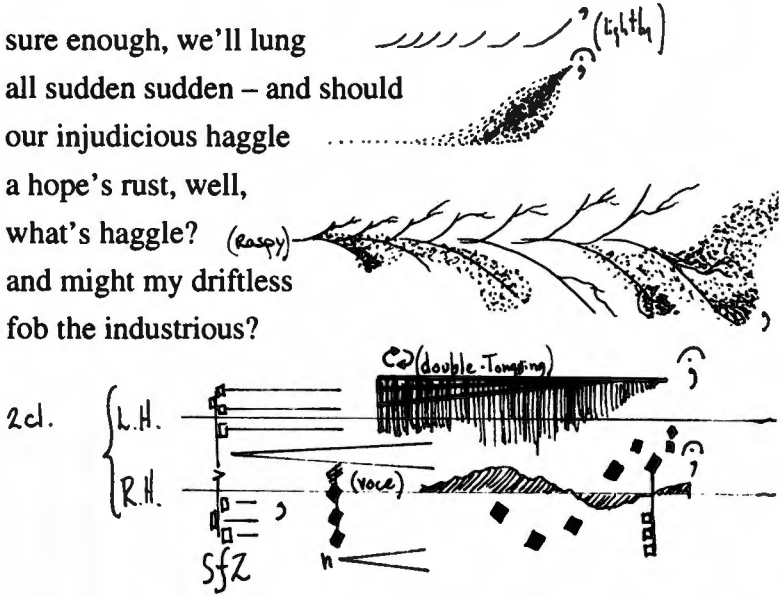
We went, we returned. We went; we returned. We went: we returned. Now place softens to become the lining of the mouth. Our older relatives are gone now and are half dreaming us into our mouths. Now a rocket of words bursts from our teeth. It is their violent no-image coined or seen by dying. Now we climb into our dress, our dress of more shape. Now we sew ourselves into air. There are people who donate faces and tongues. Maybe they are the older relatives. Now we run our fingers over their fingers and eyelids and are startled into humility. Now sequins we've burst too from the terrestrial emotional surface. We can't understand cloth, home, anything. Are we here to say we can't sustain this register? Now we can't yet participate in lost death. We must get into this soft lining. Now we were born complex, messy, willful, doubled, into tables and postcards and mats. Our faces now model themselves outwards towards ourselves. Now we have or own a shelf. We need it or don't. All the memory stretches out in a continual thin plane. Our faces keep reading it. Now place signs dirty water, plants, coins, unraveled stuff. All the memory is false therefore necessary. We're speaking for the air in the shape-filled cities, the air of the black branches, the objects covered in string, the smudged paper against the metal fence, some spatial confusion which replaces love. Now we move gently as the prepositions. What is communicate? Deep in our body it is better than this. Deep in our doubt a terrestrial clicking. Now we wish to be in one place yet move like blackbirds.

Catriona Strang with Françoise Houle

from THE CLAMOROUS ALPHABET

ADAGE

sure enough, we'll lung
all sudden sudden – and should
our injudicious haggle
a hope's rust, well,
what's haggle?
and might my driftless
fob the industrious?



NECK

or all is naught, as usual:

and this disparate exceptional

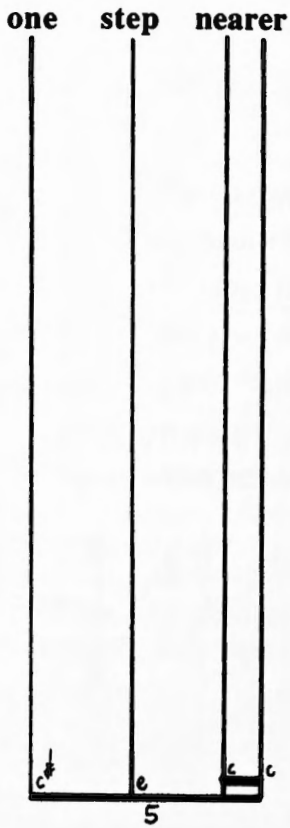
grooves our crop.

Nope, a civic

nape – all skimps

suck. Who

could thrive? . . . . .segue



PANIC

If, in all probe, which any haste
owes – I think I duped
my need back

OSCILLATE

especially in vineyards

nip-kiss

roaming, or like a coast, rumped

LISS

as an unwavering
all fascicled through perfunctory, each
and all my quicksand various

I would never not from

HAVE

gradually, by leveling

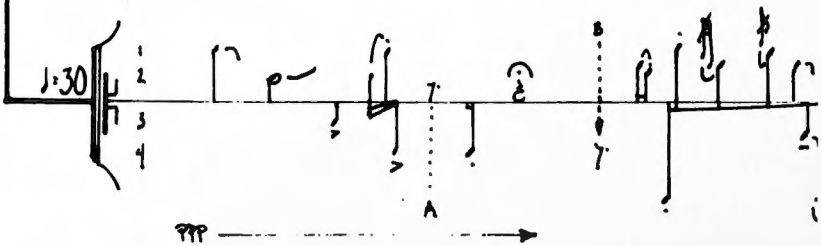
as in, such sentiment$_A$

can only be fortuitous

it will not

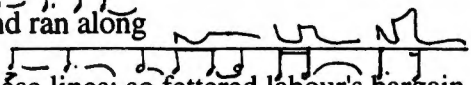
fix me$_B$ – this last

will never hold$_B$



HAND

and ran along



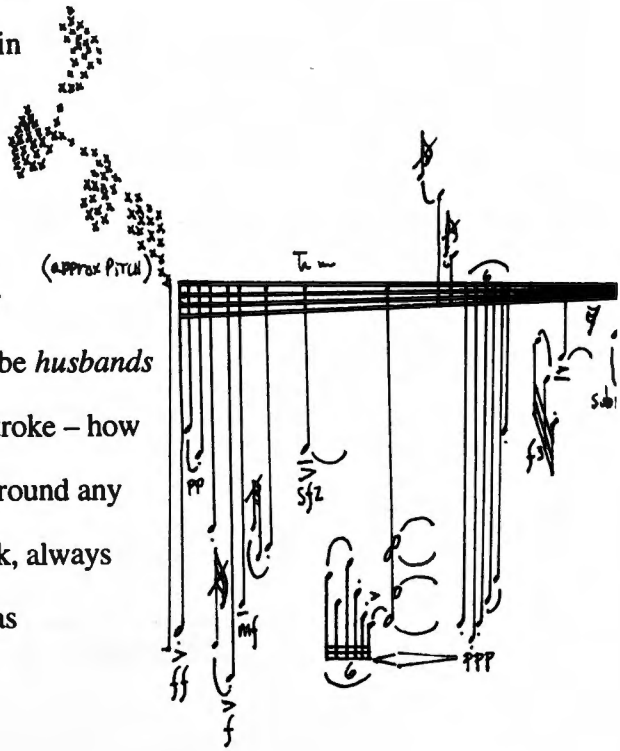
these lines: so fettered labour's bargain

jobs a skilled round

(and is no bargain

but indigent

and On Sale)



Lobbed, or over

or slyly, or maybe *husbands*

terminal steep stroke – how

the sharp pluck round any

eager little knack, always

yet now ever was

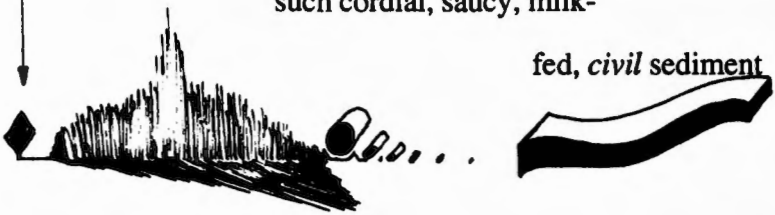
DRINK

whose will's

indomitable, yet

such cordial, saucy, milk-

fed, *civil* sediment



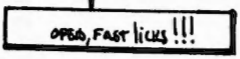
indeed so tender

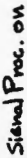
so ever-

seethed; our sturdy

braise, all technic's

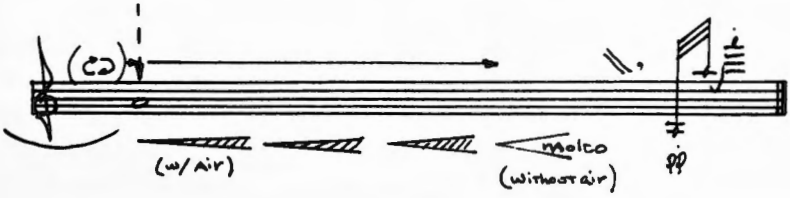
kin: a swung track





APT

All-pinioned
this importunate
nip-off: solitude
lasts, gloved
unruly, a furrowed
griller's glaring – *Who speaks of furrows?*
Who wilts anonymous liberties?
Who hollers "suspect appetite"
beguiles the typically-rendered unrecorded
flaunts their own respite, yearns
verbatim?



DANCE

||:funking coil:|| 16x PAN L→R→L r: 20" *

avid, fatal

Aux 2
Right
r: 15"

Aux 1
Left
r: 30"

a little light lithe

an out-stretched

implant:

hip's coagulation

Aux 1
Left to Right
r: 15" 3x

hat's prank

heady fleet

a limb's turn might

* See notes for Frozen Eye "Les Pas Perdus"

JAMES TAYLOR

AMBIGUITY AS A BOWL OF MILK

Their valence
or their ambi-
sexualities
who're of no
interest.

'We'll meet,'
they say & I'd
rather not. Yet
their invitations
& the tail-chops. . .

fodder & canon
matter—a bowl
of maggots or
three strips of
haloed cheese.

Well met by
these ordinancies—
their pluck &
offal total de-
relictions from duti

ful sons or
maxi mal mis
tresses. Bore me
their stuck cups
and crystalline

champagne flutes.
Fat bastard-of-
the-bush ballads
right wing para
noid nutters sup

their chow, eat their
bland curds & crack.
O up on sails of
others they'll wrestle;
talking junkets,

preferring their damp
hands & tired flesh.
These are the hole
some caretakers
of your tradition.

Uch *austral felix.*
Pallid syntaxes
of(f) the land.

MERVYN TAYLOR

TWO POEMS

THE LIGHTHOUSE AT POINT GALERA

You have to bend when you reach
the last landing, then you can straighten up
as you step into the sunlight and look out over
the rail, the sea spray almost reaching this high,
the road going at an angle between the grass and
the coconut palms, as if a child had drawn it,
the isle of Tobago way out and gray, ashen
from lying in the water so long. The children
scream to hear how it echoes in the stairwell.
The keeper tells them they are too many
but they climb anyway. He looks too young
to know the rocks, to warn any ship or spot
a squall rising. Two boys sit near the turret
where the light flashes, and mimic the whistle
of local birds, everyone craning his neck, unbelieving.
Next year it will be one hundred years since they
built this tower, and you can think of many ways
to commemorate the anniversary: a coat of paint,
a concert by the sea, an old salt speaking
in a recorded voice how, on such and such a night,
in the middle of his life, he swam from another island,
the light from Point Galera bringing him in. They are
all his offspring in these parts, too tired as he was
to move further inland. Or you can tell your own story,
how you always land by plane, and never saw this place
before, and that you believe the nun, that her habit is
in the trunk of her car, that the great swimmer was
her father.

A MISTAKE

for Robert Hass

I realized as he walked away I had
misspelled the name of the poet
as he did mine.

He had undertaken the job as caretaker
of his country's eloquence, in charge
of its rhymes, its superstitions
in the year of the most stars pitched,
most children abused, the highest

incidence of hurricanes, till the alphabet
spun like a wheel, the hardest hit
being the Caribbean where he went

measuring the leap of flying fish
as they lodged like straws in tree trunks.
It was the year when Haiti's fire
went out and the ash of the cane smudged

the face of an island as far away as
Trinidad, the pitch hardening on nights
never so cold before. I dreamt I was
floating in the Gowanus where Brooklyn
runs out to sea.

This northern California sea-writer
cursing the sadness of the anemone
saw the mistaken 'a' in his name
as I spotted the 'i' in mine.

We had played a kind of hangman
they still play in the Americas,
early in the morning, as soon as
the sun comes up over the wreckage.

JOHN TRANTER

TWO POEMS

SONGLINES

The rendezvous—did I miss it? I hear a lonesome
whistle—after the gust of miscalculation
steered back on track, leaves publish
quaint borsalino eloquence as today
becomes tomorrow—some paralysis, some

gesture of reproach: 'fuck you!'
the real point of which lies in the gap,
the translation from dim intent to
'that's obvious!' to retrospective explanation—
reverse subjunctive—'he would have meant. . .'

then the story of mankind, the babbled
speech in the kitchen—one more whisper,
one less problem to deal with out back,
on the plain of arbitration that stretches
into the haze, distant, finally rocking,

endless adjustments, until the parcel of hesitation
is wrapped up, the way a board meeting
winds down, go home, lights out, lock up,
yet is not explained by the minutes
a troubled secretary attempts to transform into

a final justification for the nature of evil
growing out of an absence of positive good,
that is, it's your fault—who else? for

growing up into something damaged,
not at all what the relatives expected.

What did they insist on at the school assembly?
How the little bracket fits to the left, how
you must be silent at the back of the class.
The song lines—hear them moaning
behind the wind from the sea as it groans

over the beach and up into the hills—
the four-dimensional arrays of speech extend from
the bandstand to the knot of quarrelling drunks
in the dark and their chorus of grief blotted out.
The dog didn't bark, to give him a nature,

and thus explained everything, but only
to the smart guy. Now the moon
with slow sad steps ascends its tower
while a pale nothing is spoken above
the silent clearing: a few couples look up,

remembering a misspent childhood, and
an awful noise begins, a clattering
that clambers up over the horizon—
we've left the sobbing secretary behind—
loaded with a kind of message, a porridge

of popular music and bad news announcements
and always the weather at three-minute
intervals—and now I remember what the city
looked like, back then—glorious—meet me
at the station, honey, don't be late.

SERIAL NUMBERS

And tell the truth—the tumult of various expendable
business plans, and the evening blinked in like a landing jet,
apparently graceful, in fact screaming nuts and bolts—
shaking metal plus desire equals travel industry bond
finance downturn explains his desperation—

he never got over the way his father hated him,
and shook a fist at himself in the mirror, rushing out
to join his pals at a gathering, cheese and wine
and social exchanges a whirling confetti—for a moment
the pack of snarling gibbons recognised something simian

about the crowd at the book party, their embraces
heartfelt yet somehow insincere—talent
given muscle by a bicycle pump, show biz
slang and chatter bouncing off the plexiglass—
model twaddle, chop throttle, sling hash and babble—

there—I don't remember a thin Singaporean
speaking gently into the handset about the banking
teletype network linking the island republic
to a pit of treasury dread in Yokohama—banknote
suction whirlwind—the old investment managers

fuck up due to lack of basic training in futures hedge
management—chattering over the sherry in between
profit and loss is not the safety rope,
he'd chosen to be an alcoholic, heavily crinkled,
a choice made up of thousands of little weaknesses

day by day, wearing down the rock of his self-esteem.
The young professors traded gossip and influences
I had lunch with Mister Hartford—oh, really?—just
lunch?—like kids with cigarette cards and pictures of Batman
when they should be practising their knots and lanyards.

Now the secret no one talks about—lack of talent.
You see? Dead quiet. Her suit was a fashion
gesture, while the quay water alfresco wavelets
wobbled through those long railing antlers, bracket,
I mean, slicing up the light into vertical samples,

each related to the one parallel, drawing energy
from each other, a team of singing brothers—
one dollar smells like its sibling in the wallet—print,
print—there's a ferry wandering and churning the surface
now sprinkled with rain. The thunder there

was hypnotised—widespread, miniature, far ranging—
flattering the city with dreams of a distant time
when everything was hunky-dory and a hamburger
was something to get excited about. Not the saxophone,
not the forgotten instruments, the cowbells

across the evening pastures, shit on the boots,
or the dew like crystal points on the morning radio
news traffic report not needed here, no traffic,
nothing happens in this town that God don't
know about—he's dreaming it, and we're Him.

DARREN WERSHLER-HENRY

from THE DANGEROUS PREVALENCE OF IMAGINATION: A TAPEWORM

So, reader, *you're holding in your hands, as often happens, a book the author did not write*, although a world participated in it. And what does that matter?

Signs, symbols, impulses, falls, departures, relations, discords, everything is there to bounce up, to seek, for further on, for something else.

Between them, without settling down, the author grew his life.

Perhaps you could try, too?

—Henri Michaux

for Liz

in the laminar flow andor litter a keyboard with millet seed where exotic songbirds will tap out prose andor poems formed by a core sample drilled through an encyclopedia stack andor cluster the letters pressed on a platen as stalactites grow on the home key row from a drip overhead in a limestone cave andor reconstruct the ruins of a bombed-out capital i andor reproduce the canonic works of western art as a series of road sign glyphs andor commission a painting of marcel duchamps large ass andor build a concrete poem of the absence that formatting codes for computers leave as they

jerk the print head over the paper while tape decks record the squeal and lurch as occasional music for cello or voice andor construct a poem acknowledging that words are four dimensional objects in time andor write an essay on the collected works of jane austen as a tour de force lipogram that never once makes use of any characters in the sinhalese alphabet andor escape from a paragraph by eloping along slightly bottomless discourses andor point out that the super mario world video game is actually a complex digital allegory for the writings of terence mckenna andor pen a treatise for andre breton and philippe soupault on the magnetic fields that vowels emit to shape the consonants cling to the page like clusters of tiny iron filings emphasizing the letter ys sometime electromagnetic charge andor proceed according to a philosophy of whatever andor insert chapbooks into the newspapers in vending boxes on the street andor do it even more than usual andor learn everything you can about the life of cervantes and then rewrite don quixote from the point of view of the windmills andor print a set of instructions for drycleaning pressing and patching the sacred shroud of turin andor build an object titled doctor williams in his dotage that consists of a small red wheelbarrow filled to the brim with depends brand adult disposable undergarments andor develop an ability not to push words in usual channels andor write a poem about the late john cage composed in 64 six line stanzas based on the chinese book of changes andor move them in and out of space andor design a camera that records its own presence andor a construe a word by word synonymic replacement for everything in finnegans wake and its sequel for casey from mister dressup andor look as little like a particular point of view as possible andor a compose a love poem called charged particles where each line is a single word ending in the suffix ion andor stick a stamp on your head then pull a mailbag over your head before you begin to recite andor work on a poem attempting to emulate gansers syndrome where a person responds to emotionally difficult questions with approximate or evasive answers andor address the united nations with your intentions andor write an encyclopedic novel about a whale but maintain throughout that it

is a fish rather than a mammal andor remove specifics and convert to ambiguities andor knowing that paisleys were at first fertility symbols from india that a small weaving town somewhere in scotland stole and began to use as their own suppose as an alternate history premise where indian castes instead developed a system of tartans and composed ragas for duos consisting of bagpipe and sitar andor type the words dylan thomas on a piece of paper but leave it on the platen and then submerge the entire typewriter in white liquid and call the resulting object underwood milk andor dial a number at random and talk your way into reading poems to whoever answers andor enrol names picked randomly out of the phone book into the book of the month club andor author a sound poem consisting solely of noises made by spin dryer full of glass eyeballs andor write each letter of a shakespearean sonnet on one of those little plastic paratrooper army men then throw them one by one from a balcony onto the audience below andor write a scatological parody of the milorad pavic novel a landscape painted with tea titled a landscape tainted with pee andor document whats going on in a room not necessarily but possibly the one youre in andor write a novel about what paul eluard did the year that he disappeared andor publish a guidebook for nonexistent monuments found well not found but you know what i mean somewhere in greater downtown toronto andor illustrate that this must be the case andor sandblast the scrawled missives of schizophrenics onto sheets of coloured glass in church windows andor spell it according to a phonetics of your own devising andor start a pataphysical software company andor write with your bones dry and distant andor imagine a poem called ideas for poets consisting of short metaphoric descriptions of the personalities of real or imagined poets where christopher smart might be a thin one smelling of vegetable crates and catfood forever patrolling the sidewalks edge andor avoid the habits of another artist andor fill a suitcase or steamer trunk full of it and let your friends edit it while you sleep off the drug of your choice andor make a western about the group of seven starring yul brynner as emily carr andor write along the edges of your manuscripts collated pages the

way you used to write on the edges of the pages of your math book and then shuffle the pages before you bind them andor write haiku noting that stonehenge is actually a circle of big pi symbols made out of rock andor make it unlimited massproduced obtainable by all and eventually producible by all andor remove random keys from your typewriter before you begin to write then forget which ones youve removed andor write with your head between your hands andor posit a time travelling character in a novel who first appears at its end and proceeds backwards to its beginning as a series of non sequiturs andor smoke your manuscript page by page when you run out of rolling papers andor visualize whirled peas andor sell the designs that appear after trickling a thin stream of sand onto a computer graphics tablet andor write a sonnet about what a grecian earns andor look closely at the most embarrassing details and amplify them andor write a brief history of television including platos myth of the television the television at lascaux the york and townley mystery televisions shakespeares globe television and the first steam driven television andor write with the tips of your eyes and holding back in advance andor tell the story of the night that vladimir ilyich lenin finally went across the street to the cabaret voltaire to see what was causing all the goddamn noise andor write a treatise on the physics of luggage calculating the difference between volumes of air displaced by a clean shirt ironed and folded and by the same shirt when dirty andor letterbomb the city of paris ontario with it andor punch holes through every copy of the bound book andor replace sigourney weaver with jacques derrida and make a film about him chasing hegelians through the air ducts of a space ship with a flamethrower andor soak your hair in japanese calligraphic ink and drag your head down a long paper scroll andor treat grant applications as a creative act andor write extended marginal comments or possibly subtexts on a movie with a pinhead and magnifying glass in the black space that surrounds each frame andor dont and see if i give a fuck andor consider the implications of letters being the fossilized remains of small animals and hypothesize what several million years of evolution might produce as the descendants of such

animals andor write without your fingers blushing andor use rain damage as title for a neurology textbook that has been repeatedly left outside during thunderstorms andor detourne the berenstain bears childrens books by replacing all text with material from charles bernsteins a poetics andor write with inane but appropriate naivete andor theorize the written page as a prepared cross section of something biological andor wonder why there are no christian jubes buddhist jubes or muslim jubes andor break the rest of these up andor explore the possible applications of artificial stupidity andor stage the skinhead hamlet with real skinheads andor work on the beginning for a while andor smear your hand and your friends hand with spaghetti sauce paint semen or cyprine and shake hands through a piece of paper andor pile everything thats not nailed down onto the platen of your scanner andor write under the pomegranates andor contradict yourself for you are vast and contain multitudes andor use finishing nails to form the overall outline on a wall and then hang your words from them andor play a game of battleship by plotting moves according to letters read in order of their appearance in poems by siegfried sassoon and f t marinetti andor make it bigger andor speculate on the whereabouts of the lost portrait of alfred jarry painted by aubrey beardsley andor write a poem about sir isaac newton in your normal handwriting on an apple newton and let it translate for you andor react against the laziness of railway tracks between the passage of two trains andor document your participation in an illegal activity then render the document nearly but only nearly illegible through the application of artistic means before you show it andor write so as to make a hollow andor cover a refrigerator with poems written in fridge magnets copied from the food section of steins tender buttons and fill the contents of the fridge with the corresponding comestibles andor humanize the parts that are free of error andor write poems that consist of nothing but punctuation marks andor keep changing andor write on yellowing velvet andor vomit alphaghetti onto the page as a homage to bob rauschenberg and jubal brown andor title a story the fall of the house of escher andor think of the souvenirs without nostalgia andor

COMMENTARY

Shifting Homeland: Viewing the Post-Pastoral Subject in John Kinsella's *The Radnoti Poems*

While a relatively small volume, *The Radnoti Poems* (Equipage, 1996), marks an important moment in Kinsella's career, namely his transference from the rural and fairly isolated region of his Western Australian birthplace to Cambridge, perhaps one of the most privileged sites of the English-speaking world. This shift from colonial margin to centre has challenged poetic perspective, forcing not only a negotiation of Australian space and European tradition, but also a re-appraisal of Kinsella's own relation to Australian versions of pastoral. In Australia, pastoral poetry has been integrally tied to a discourse of nationhood, of asserting and affirming the ties between person and place. Given the violent backdrop of its history, the relationship of many white Australian writers to the land is usually one of ambivalence and anxiety. As Ivor Indyk wrote, "It is the land, his natural environment, which gives the pastoral poet the material for his songs, yet here pastoral achieves its greater power precisely in circumstances where the poet's relationship to his land is threatened and uncertain"(116).

With the publication of *The Silo: A Pastoral Symphony* in 1995, Kinsella gained a reputation as one of Australia's foremost contemporary pastoral poets. Yet, Kinsella himself is uneasy with the tag, viewing his writing as more anti-pastoral than pastoral. He argues that while Australian rural poetry might be pastoral in mode, much of it has a Georgic undercurrent which is didactic and seeks to control its subject("Notes" 33). Early colonial figures like Henry Kendall "not only imitated English verse but retained an English way of seeing landscape"("Towards" 94). Certainly, *The Silo* may be read satirically, implicitly critiquing the values of cultivation, property, and possession that ground pastoral attitudes. The pastoral imaginary that fills the landscape with fields of wheat or cattle, as well as iconic signs of human dominion—the silo and the homestead—is far from benign in Kinsella's

eyes. The entrenchment of such images in the Australian psyche encourages a blindness to the environmental realities of soil erosion, salinity problems, and land degradation. For suburbanites, the countryside is someone else's concern. The sense of non-involvement is driven by the presumption that, unlike wilderness, countryside is tended and overseen. Kinsella's poetry foregrounds how such ideology still informs our notions of nature and aesthetics, and distances us from an ethics of care. It reassesses the innocence of such idealism, as well as it role in constructing a sense of Australian identity or "homeland".

Anti-pastoral, then, in message, Kinsella still turns to pastoral forms for his telling. As he stated in a recent article, his writing "is a rejection not of frameworks but of contents. It recognises frames for what they are: empty shells. . .my Trojan Horse theory—get inside and dismantle"("Brief" 106). In this respect, his poetry is best viewed as post-pastoral or meta-pastoral, in that it critiques pastoralism from within. Tone and usage comment on one another in a reciprocal relation. Some critics like Andrew Ettin have argued that this is not unusual for pastoral as it can hold both the rare and the common, the simple and the complex in delicate simultaneity. He suggests that pastoral literature flourishes in times of artistic experimentation and debate, precisely because it can embody cultural and moral tensions(105). The idyllic Golden age so often described in pastoral literature may function ironically, or comment upon contemporary interactions with the land. It is therefore able to be read at various levels of sophistication and purpose. In evolving according to historical circumstance, it follows that pastoral modes might be challenged and reshaped under the pressures of late modernity. Kinsella's poetry presents the pastoral subject under crisis, negotiating cultural identity while fearing the loss or hold of such position. His writing "is not an ideolectical poetry that replaces certain demarcations, borders, divisions, qualifications. In some sense, it highlights those separations"("Brief" 106).

In *The Radnoti Poems*, Kinsella specifically borrows from and pays homage to Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944), one of twentieth-century's most innovative pastoral poets. Joining together dissimilar or diametrically opposed ideas, Radnóti's work reveals a flexibility and power that recalls the charge of Osip Mandelstam and Paul Celan. Writing before and during World War Two, Radnóti would use classical forms to create firstly a poetry of dissidence, and then of witness. Although a native Hungarian, his Jewish background would mean that Radnóti was unable to teach and had his own poetry censored. He turned instead to translating, reading deeply into African oral culture and translating writers such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Henry de Montherlant, and Jean

de la Fontaine. With the advent of war, he would be interned in a series of labour camps until the final months of the war, when he was forced into a death-march and finally killed out of expedience by Hungarian troops.

There is much in Radnóti that would appeal to Kinsella, from his activism within Parisan intellectual circles of the thirties, to his relative youth (Kinsella would write *The Radnoti Poems* at roughly the same age as when Radnóti completed some of his best work, shortly before he died at thirty-five). Both would use other writers and artists as a focus for their own writing, creating sophisticated pastoral intertexts. Both would draw attention to the balance of power. Radnóti would provide an example of the poet who speaks out when others remain silent. Most significant, however, is the personal aspect, particularly Radnóti's experience of exile and dispossession that turned his attention continually to thoughts of "home." *The Radnoti Poems* are dedicated to Fifi, the more intimate name with which Radnóti addressed his wife in correspondence (elsewhere, she was known as Fanni). A number of Kinsella's poems are likewise dedicated to his partner, Tracy Ryan, who was then still in Australia.

In approaching Radnóti's writing, it becomes apparent that Kinsella is familiar with numerous translations and selectively moves between them. In one sense, *The Radnoti Poems* could be said to perform the function of mourning for a proficient and admired figure. At the same time, there is a desire to be admitted into Radnóti's company—according to Celeste Schenck, a defining characteristic of the pastoral elegy (15). Rather than simply appropriating Radnóti's poetry, Kinsella continues it in his own idiom and through the knowledge of more familiar landscapes. Entering into conversation rather than translation, he becomes a respondent to Radnóti's vision.

This is most clearly seen in "Calendar: a continuous narrative." Kinsella's epigraph, "Just look around. . .you'll see wonders" is the first line for the June section of Radnóti's own calendar sequence of poems (1942). Radnóti, in turn, had used *The Shepheardes Calendar* as his model, refashioning Edmund Spenser's long eclogues into brief vivid passages. Pastoral poetry is often distinguished by such dialogue or staging of community. The "you" that Kinsella addresses is primarily Radnóti: "Our year starts here, a dank/wet South, dust dry/ North. . ./ . . .But being/an inflection of *your* climate/ we'll remain as far under as possible"(32). Kinsella's series starts at June rather than January, foregrounding the inversion of seasons in the Northern hemisphere. Radnóti's "Calendar" is highly traditional, describing nature through man's interaction with it, and vice versa:

Look, the puddle goosepimples; March walks
under the trees with wild,
cheerful teenage-boy breezes,
and makes much noise.
Shivering bud hasn't yet shown his head,
nor has spider spun,
but already now baby chicks,
yellowish goldballs run (*Complete* 203).

Kinsella, on the other hand, shows how the calendar is "particular to location," recording specific incidents of cultural history. His version is far bleaker and more political than Radnóti's. September, for instance, sees the boat people "still incarcerated/in the Port Hedland/ Detection Centre" while the "Land Rights Claims/are choking." His attention turns to environmental crises such as the mining companies "doing deals/on the side" or "the oil brews/in the Timor Gap." Contrasted with this is the closing single image: "Among the peonies/and daisies/blue leschenaultia/is blooming"(33). Such an image seems out of place in relation to the rest of the series, in which the weather and land are described in harsh tones, even when presented through prosopopoeia. "December" reads:

Cyclone Frank is off the West Coast
and cyclone Emma is hitting Christmas Island.
That's North, but the fallout reaches you here
eventually. Sullen weather,
that threatens to jam
two climactic zones
together. On either side
of the degenerative low
it's stinking hot (34).

Against such passages, "you'll see wonders," begins to take on an ironic effect. The ancient pastoral tradition invoked by Radnóti seems out of place in Kinsella's Australia, even though in May the weather is deemed "Mediterranean." In enacting Arcadia down under, pleasure-seekers are shown to be in "denial" over the dangers of cancer, thieving flowers (specifically, the evocative "everlastings") for their city mansions, or sitting in beer-sodden disdain while bushfires threaten the wetlands. And as if parodying the European idyll, his version has the Nyungars (the true native people of the land) being "incarcerated for stealing the not so golden fleece"(35).

Another sequence which explores the translation of pastoral over the Pacific is "Aspects of the Pagan." The title alludes to Radnóti's "Pagan Salute" (reinforced by an epigraph from the latter). The sequence adheres to an elaborate form, where the last line of the stanza becomes the first line of the next, and each stanza has the standard fourteen lines of the sonnet. The last stanza of the five-part cycle has the end lines of the previous four as its final four. This rigidity of the poetic structure contrasts with the excess of sensuality contained within. Kinsella matches Radnóti's affirmation of eroticism and joy with the arrival of Spring by a further blossoming of lushness and lust. The opening passage refers to the "glades of Norman Lindsay" where women "with generous thighs" and names like "Abundia" and "Satia" might be seen to lead the pastoral motifs(19). Lindsay's Arcadia, a version of pastoral which emerged in Australia in the 1920s, is bawdy, bountiful, and "impervious to pricks." Leading a bohemian group surrounding the journal, *Vision*, Lindsay turned to Greek and Roman pastoral features as a way to resist the tendency towards disintegration and formlessness which he found in much modern art and literature. Yet, while its poetics were controlling, the poetry produced was neither predictable nor contained.

Kinsella suggests that the moral edge to Australian pastoral utopia has been "laboured" on by the "glossies" and television(21). Nature is so highly mediated through mass culture, that our "experience" of it is filtered, sanitised, and seemingly given order. Denoting a force which is eternal and inevitable, the "natural" becomes the cultural meaning *read into* nature. Yet such meaning is generally determined by those in a position of power. We become caught in a cycle of unreflective and ruthless consumption, similar to that of birdlife during harvest-time, when the summer grain passes from grassbird, to goshawk, to swamp harrier(20).

Radnóti would also be concerned with the politics of the gaze. In "Steel Chorus," he writes

> Oh, it was a great business, that war was!
> there never was a better!
> fat profits trickle!
> trickle! Oh, for this!
>
> Motherland stuffs her face with crispy colonies!
> Ivory Coasts, or India,
> or, if you please, Madagascar!
> If you wish, a negro boy screams toward you

whom the film producer bought from his tribe for a cheap
pip
and had a tiger tear to pieces!. . . .

oh, never fear for their dreams!
A square in Venice is what a citizen will dream of,
where he ate honeymoon
and fed the doves! (*Complete* 317)

For Radnóti, not only are war and imperialism driven by the profit motive, but romanticism provides an aesthetic justification. The expansionist ethic of Empire is presented as analogous to the film audience's consumption of images. Against such media technology, poetry seems like "an Elizabethan village showing/the old arts"(Kinsella 39). Spectacle replaces the ethical act of judgement. The dreams of doves and honeymooning—symbols of peace and love—figuratively and literally white-wash over acts of colonial violence.

In "Empire and Roundhouse," Kinsella continues Radnóti's focus on commerce and colonialism. The reduction of the colonised from subject to subaltern, however, is linked specifically to place, namely the effects of institutionalisation in the stone prisons of Empire. Fashioned along the lines of the panopticon, the Roundhouse was Western Australia's first gaol. Kinsella notes its dehumanising effects: "[I]t's hard too/to maintain a sense of humour/when you're chained/ sixteen in a twelve by six cell"(44). Now of aesthetic interest, the building's "stone art" still holds traces of the genetic "experiment" carried out within its walls. Like Radnóti's "O Ancient Prisons," the materiality of language ("langue and parole," the degrading of speech) is also part of this "stone art"—the poem itself a prison. Radnóti's poetry becomes a host or house for Kinsella, a possibility Radnóti recognised, "[I]mages noble and heroical,/which find their audience in measured breath—/how far away you are. Who dares to act/slides into empty void"(*Foamy* 98). As Radnóti realised, whoever enters the poem risks this loss of identity.

The division between an writing "I" and the written "I," (authority and inscription) is reinforced in "A Zone Essay on Prohibition and Purity, where Kinsella writes, "the I redefines its place/and splits itself as process"(46). The purity espoused by colonial ideology has a hidden "bricked in" underside of darkness and degeneration. This separation is made in concrete terms in the volume where the "I" is variously italicised, underlined or boxed. In this particular poem, Kinsella moves away from colonial concerns to an anti-pastoral vision of environmental degeneration. Here, there is "dehydration in the place where water

cannot be drunk/for purity's sake"(46). Current governmentation covers over the future vision of the nation—the "degenerate world lying in wait," in which forests have been destroyed by logging and the rest of the land is contaminated by hazardous chemicals, foxbait, and mining. The effects of such "boastful decadence" are forecast through Eastern European example: "Who owns what in whose memory: 'Now death/is blowing through the trees' reconstituted by rain"(47).

For Kinsella, over-cultivation is hidden by cultural memory, an environmental aesthetics which is distant rather than close up. The first poem, "Eclogue on an Aerial Photograph" paints a traditional farming scene, of a pilot, possibly a crop-duster, out labouring. The place of the poet is also out "fielding idylls," though here it is with the abstraction of "disembodied sight/lapsed into the past." His narrator looks back to a Golden age—there is even mention of the "crops brassy in sunlight." From the pilot's perspective, the picturesque landscape seems ideal. Yet, the word "brassy" is not quite golden, and the fields are rolling "out/of synch."

It is only in the second poem, "Field Glasses" that Kinsella offers a different reading of the same site, revealing the invisible amongst the visible:

> It's because this happens
> in absence, the larger movements
> as obvious as tractor marks
> in the muddy paddocks,
> or the wind furrowing channels
> in dry country: a kind of
> microcosm embellished, the invisibles
> glowing like monozite, the distance
> nothing(10)

Together, the poems recall one of Radnóti's most commemorated poems, "I know not what. . ." which also compares the distant view of the war pilot flying over unknown ground to that of the native:

> I know not what to strangers this dear landscape might
> mean,
> to me, it is my birthplace, this tiny spot of green. . .
>
> For him who flies above it, a map is all he sees,
> this living scape of being but symbols and degrees;. . .

what's hidden in the map? Yes, barracks, mills, and arms,
but for me crickets, oxen, steeples, quiet farms;
with field-glasses he marks the crops and industries,
but I, the trembling laborer, the forest trees,
the twittering orchards, vineprops with their tended
grapes,. . .

the pilot cannot see that paving-stone, that grass:
to see all this, there is no instrument or glass
(*Foamy* 96-97).

This last line could be translated as the epigraph Kinsella uses to his second poem, "there is not device to reveal such things with accuracy"(10) In Kinsella's period, the surveillance is by Landsat scientists measuring seasonal adjustments of rainfall. The occupation is of satellite towns, the "population surges, terracing/the hills. . ./filling swamps reclaiming land"(11). Humanity is caught in its own degeneration.

Analogous to the pilot, the poet has a bird's eye view of the poem. Yet, there is the danger, that he "objectifies," to the point where even "the crested grebe/moves out of range"(16). Far from familiarising the reader, the pastoral subject is found to be even more remote and inaccessible:

Edmund Burke
as if to focus on an errant
partner's features without
their knowing will reveal
a truth suspected or desired,
the ***I is an other***
the ***I is*** another
I am enlarging in the self
of reflexivity, threatening
self-preservation
sublimely(13)

Here, the "I" is constantly under stress, as it will be for the rest of the volume.

Subjectivity, then, is constructed through its relation to place. Rod Giblett argues that just as we are unable to represent "place" except by metaphors, so too are we unable to represent human states or abstractions except by metaphors of places or sites(8). In "Bluff Knoll Sublimity," Kinsella interrogates the limits of pathetic fallacy through repeating Shelley's poetic trip: "[O]n seeing Mont Blanc—THE POEM—

/and not Mont Blanc—THE MOUNTAIN—/the surrounding plains/ with their finely etched topography/can be brought into focus"(18). Yet, it becomes apparent that place is necessarily a *lived* site and can only be known temporally, moment by moment. In this respect, it is understood as social space. Dedicated to Tracy, "It's the who you've left behind/ that becomes the concern." Like pastoral, separation and loss of the other inform the sublime. Following the Romantic exploration of the sublime through mountain landscape, he suggests that the verticality of distance is "less inclined/to impress itself as separation."

"Poems With-~~out~~-Radnoti" further explores absence. The Derridean title and final line of the opening quote, "Half-lines were all that I wrote," reinforce an erasure at the level of the page. This epigraph comes from Radnóti's fifth eclogue, which is itself dedicated to Gyorgy Balint, one of Radnóti's closest friends, who went missing in 1943 and was presumed dead. Kinsella's series is also dedicated to persons currently missing in his life—Tracy and Juno [Gemes] back in Australia. Divided into six sections, the first section is set in Cambridge. The assertion, "I'm here & comfortable, here by choice, happy with what I'm not" is at once, undercut by the "darkness behind the veneer," of nightmares and "weathered emptiness"(48). This also echoes Radnóti's "Dreamscape:"

> And now the dreamy landscape leaps away
> swimming on monstrous wings over the further air,
> and the terrified bird drifts in the cloudy sky
> driven by this nightmare (*Foamy* 103).

These nightmares may form the "Intrusions" in the title of the second section, although Kinsella's attention is drawn to home, such that "the old world pylons/are silhouettes of their newer selves" The "sculptured gardens" of Cambridge and of European pastoral fade in his mind against the stronger and more open Australian memory of birds following boats back to jetties(49). In the third section, images of the city compete against the "wild place's tenure & tenancy"(50). The European landscape can only be understood through the images of art and "the superlatives of a recorded history." In contrast, there are "snap decisions" "beneath the great and warmish Southern skies"(50). There is also a persistence, the will of wildlife to grow back after bushfires being matched by his wife's letters still reaching him amongst the "coldest stones" of Cambridge (recalling the ancient prisons of his earlier poems). The "rapacious bird" is revealed to be homesickness and despair, as Kinsella desires to "be lost now in this antipodean space"(51).

Continuing on this intimate note, the fourth section contains an extended quote from Radnóti's "Love Poem."

> When Radnoti wrote: "It's Fall.
> They're beating hazel nuts down
>
> in the stalls/the stillness seeps from the walls./
> The dreamy pigeon perched by your neck, let it fly' (52).

Similarly separated from homeland and wife, the "rapacious bird" is for Radnóti, a "dreamy pigeon." Silence is translated into a meditative stillness. Kinsella argues that Radnóti is bonded to "the flux of notion," able to hear such sighs and endure:

> "What did you Radnoti know about the tides?. . .
> Did pre-war fields of yellowing grain
> lean towards the years of famine & depravity,
>
> hunger like a mullet stranded in primal mangroves
> on these occupied & fatal shores"
>
> Australia as a site of exile and dark deeds
>
> Sontag's democratizing of beauty
> foams like witness to your "And that's
>
> how you'll end too," the white-
> wash of freedom thrilling
>
> like a mix of mud and blood,
> the white flesh of oysters
>
> drying coldly just below
> the hesitant waterline(54).

The white bodies of the oysters are "laid bare" on racks from the river, "like the eviscerated/anatomies of more intricate creatures"(54) Around the same time as *The Radnoti Poems*, Kinsella would write an essay on Gemes' documentary photography of the New South Wales' Hawkesbury River which would eventually preface her collaboration with Robert Adamson, *The Language of Oysters*. However, his description also finds a strong visual equivalent in Radnóti's last-known poem, written about the death of his comrade, the violinist Mikos Lorsi:

I fell beside him and his corpse turned over,
tight already as a snapping string.
Shot in the neck. "And that's how you'll end too,"
I whispered to myself: "lie still; no moving.
Now patience flowers in death." Then I could hear
"Der sprint noch auf," above, and very near.
Blood mixed with mud was drying on my ear(*Foamy* 118).

As if confirming premonition, the poem belongs to a brief series, "Razglednicas," which were later found on Radnóti's body, soaked with fluid from the corpse as well as mud. "Razglednica" is Serbian for "picture postcard" an ironic reminder of how Renaissance pastoral was thought to exhibit the ideal or holiday relationship of Nature to Art. Kinsella's last poem is "Radnoti Quarantine: Razglednicas." It recounts Radnóti's final days as he imagines "their last hesitant movements, their forced march"(55). He questions the use of the pastoral and the sublime:

Those mountains bringing God no closer—elements
of the sublime drowned in their own words, that you might
have said look now to the journey of the tiny
shepherdress as she moves with the ripples of cloud
over the small lake's surface, but send no postcards. . .(55)

Kinsella is the receiver of Radnóti's postcards, in an age where consciousness is dulled through being "filled with readings of war." Our understanding of Radnóti's brutal death (shot once through the nape) is contextualised against the "footage from Vietnam/where the officer shoots the VC in Saigon/straight through the head." As a child, Kinsella read Purnell's *History of the Second World War*, looking up at his own landscape and the "heron splendidly awkward in its roosting/ tree, hunched and primal over the dark swamp water"(55). The only way in which he can now approach such events is through comparison, through trying to find his own "flux of notion." The swamp of his rural Australian homeland recalls the mud of the European lake near where Radnóti died—both become shifting landscapes. Kinsella is therefore able to finish his volume with an image of hope and caution:

poets aren't silent now, but the guns are behind
newspaper print, lurking in layer on layer
of tv and computer monitor screens, deaf
to their own presence like flocks of terrible birds

smothering the persistent voice of the heron
as it rises again and again, long after (55-56).

Succeeding over nightmare, the figure of Radnóti is ultimately given flight by Kinsella. While *The Radnoti Poems* constantly warns of the ill effects in superimposing European tradition over other landscapes, Kinsella himself cannot free his own poetics from such influence. Rather, his pastoral vision must remain hybrid, a continual negotiation of the two. In this respect, it follows the poetry of a fellow Western Australian, Randolph Stow, who combined European aesthetic, modern innovation, and Australian experience to develop an alternative pastoral. Yet, for Kinsella, there is a further challenge—of reading cultural memory in light of the present, and attempting to find connections between his physically distant "homeland" and more immediate subject locations.

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—ANN VICKERY

dear Ccc&cie,

Re: The psychogeography known as RADDLE MOON

> [a] book, even a fragmentary one, has a centre which attracts it. This centre is not fixed but is displaced by the pressure of the book and circumstances of its composition. Yet it is also a fixed centre which, if it is genuine, displaces itself, while remaining the same and becoming always more central, more hidden, more uncertain and more imperious. He who writes the book writes it out of desire for this centre and out of ignorance.
>
> —Blanchot

> It has long been said that the desert is monotheistic. Is it illogical or devoid of interest to observe that the district in Paris between Place de la Contrescarpe and Rue de l'Arbal conduces rather to atheism, to oblivion and to the disorientation of habitual reflexes? [. . .] Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.
>
> —Debord, *Les Lèvres Nues* 6, 1955

Out of desire for this "hidden," "displaced" and "imperious" centre, and out of ignorance of that centre, *Raddle moon* has, I think, become a kind of psychogeography—which rightly resists description but which nonetheless brings towards it the work which belongs to it. A haunted, porous "no-place," implicated but motile, built of little but the trace of the work that's appeared there—agglomerative, bulgy, made and unmade—what I've called a "utopia of shoddy upkeep," despairing of time, money and energy.

If *Raddle moon* is that psychogeography made of the trace of writers and artists across it and by the temporary local coherences they've made, it is this space that attracts its future work. And by future work, I don't just mean work that's out there and might think *Raddle moon* an appropriate venue. I mean work that hasn't been written yet. And of course I[1] think a lot about women's work here. Like any editor, I know how difficult it still is to bring out women's work and haven't forgotten witnessing what courage the very existence of a periodical like Kathleen Fraser's *HOW(ever)*—or later, Jessica Grim and Melanie

Neilson's *Big Allis*—could give and how courage became new thought and new work. Proust said don't be afraid to go too far because that's where the real work is. If I'm going to be utopian (if for no other reason than because, as Erin so succinctly puts it, How else?), I'm going to say that that's the psychogeography I aspire to: the place where writers, especially women, feel they can go "too far."

Tish—a great Canadian example of much of this in my own backyard—was distant in time, gender and (so I then thought) poetics. So I didn't get to see "it" happen close up until around 1989, when *Barscheit* (Christine Stewart, Catriona Strang, Lisa Robertson, eds.) occurred. Its very ephemerality (printed on hijacked equipment and "borrowed" paper, disseminated for free, and quickly), the sense of its constant immanence—there was no publishing schedule, so at any moment there could be a *Barscheit*—and its guerrilla-style protest against the silencing of unfashionable poetry/poetics (an unspoken editorial policy being to print works which would be rejected at another magazine—in the same way *Tish* saw itself publishing what *Prism* couldn't accept) made a literal space, an opening; found and amplified what Norma calls a "conversation" and got it within earshot of others.

So: that's a use. While we were figuring this out, of course, everything changed. Cyberspace makes a small-circulation, booklike magazine look a very strange way of finding like minds, and giving a particular conversation public space and certainly a labour-intensive way of making a relational context for varied works of writing and image. (I look at Laura's glorious online *non*[2] and regret the sad weight of the physical world!) Can our bulky "real world" ephemerals, temporary as weather, any longer justify being printed in sweat, trees and wheelbarrowloads of cash?

Dear Chas.,

<u>Re: l'archivisme, or "the circumstance of its composition"</u>

You kindly as ever get in the way of my cramped impulse to throw the past out. ("When I see the word 'positioning,' I vomit") So, how to speak this history? In many ways, it now seems to me the record of an exploration of the use of public space. Therefore the record of my/our gradually shifting understandings of that space. Like a city of invisible but potent—or nicely temporary, but potent—architecture.

Born—in our minds—out of sheer desire to make "something where there was nothing," as Melissa says, in a fairly primitive, if urgent, sense,

Raddle moon—then *The raddle moon: an international review*—happened to come to be as a celebration of the tenth anniversary of the University of Victoria's Writing department. . . . Truth is, the magazine answered a particular moment of available resources—departmental money, a personal computer, my background in publishing—friendship (most importantly with Kathryn MacLeod, with whom I edited the first four issues); and an energetic sense of "leaving home" aesthetically (predictably, our relationship with the university lasted only one issue).

Behind that energy was the compulsion Kathryn and I felt to force open a window under threat of suffocation in the stale party atmosphere of the Canadian Content drive which only a decade earlier had come as a genuinely liberating force. As our manifesto in the third issue put it: "Perhaps because we come from an island ourselves and recognize the symptoms, we begin to see Canada as a tiny isolate land. And feel, nationally, 'bushed'. We notice that our drawers are stuffed with airmail stationery." We were at the end of those glory days of the '60s and '70s when the small press publishers in Canada—Talonbooks, Anansi, Coach House, et al.—had birthed and unearthed a new national literature and urged us all in large-character posters to READ CANADIAN. (For those of us then still in highschool—to chart the *absolute* history of *Raddle moon*, but also of the country—it had meant that by 1969, our young English teacher knew it was important to read Phyllis Webb's recent *Naked Poems* to her class of fifteen-year-olds. . . . Here, suddenly, out of the grey—3:30 pm, Wednesday, in the bleak cold "New Wing"—were these deft, ironic packets speaking self- conscious intelligence, opened to paradox, the political, the sexual and language itself. Here, suddenly, was this woman, this Canadian, thinking as we'd never known anyone to think, and some of us never recovered. Webb made poets wherever her work went in those days.)

But CanLit turned out to be a small literature, no matter how famously it was boiling up all around. Young writers we knew tended to read nothing but the same few Canadians—if they read at all (that Salinger "purity" model). Of course there was a lot else going on in Canada we didn't know about and might not have recognized if we had. Of course, of course. But the ocean's quite a moat, you know. So, restlessness, curiosity and comradeship morphed *From An Island* (which *The raddle moon* officially replaced) into a kind of "to-an-island"—an import rather than an export model—with editors in places as far off-centre as possible—north of 60 (the promised multi-layered Inuit sound poetry turned out to be impossible to translate, and sacred), Haifa, Florence, Africa, Japan. . . . And the name to name this: "red ochre moon," "earth as moon made of (red) earth"—in fact, three words we liked the sound of.

Dear Myung,[3]

Re: whatever publication

I've been reading your conversation with Yedda Morrison in ***Tripwire,*** hearing you saying things like, "For me, where I can say ***politicize*** I have to say the word ***generosity***. Implicit in being political is trying to restore the human face." And my attention's caught by your mention of the problem of "unrecognizability."

I've been thinking about "use" and "sufficiency" (re: ***Raddle moon***, re: whatever publication; re: public spaces) and about evolution's both adaptive and unforeseen solutions to unworkable situations and how these are different from the revolutionary (revolving) solutions proposed by certain aesthetics and how much attention I've given those, thinking there was no other way. And thinking these things, I stumbled—thanks to Sharla Sava—on Filliou's sweet formula

! > ?

"surprise is greater than questioning" and posted it on the wall here in 72-point type because it made me just plain happy. And curious. I puzzle, laughing, "how to obey?" this cheerful directive, this good-sounding and suggestive statement. And see perhaps I'd "meant" it as the nifty condensary of your neighbouring (and here I can say maybe *anti-* utopian) "generosity as method" and Laura's "In this vested, gendered, entirely fraught medium, the real question is what is being celebrated."[4]

I might have claimed your "unrecognizability" was the poetic we went in search of writ large across syntax, form, even content, trying to "be unfamiliar with what we [were] doing." But what you're talking about is somehow the opposite. Not the welcome pleasure of defamiliarization but the thing so unfamiliar we have no way of seeing it. (Say We is walking to a party without a gift and suddenly realizes that the street is full of gifts. We's still We. And the "gift" We picks up is dependent on it. And this is ground we've been over before. . . .)

Could thinking "surprise is greater than questioning" address this extreme-seeming and implicating difficulty (without an undermining engagement with oppositional structures—say, in a way parallel to "tactics" such as the enactment of self/work "as if"—***however*** one could conceive that "as if," without the slightest permission—or the vigorous reclaiming of pleasure, ditto)? It reminds me of that glorious scientific theory of late that it is species' desires, not their environments' dictates, that catalyze evolutionary adjustments—leaving us only impa-

tience to deal with! Given which, can sheer welcome make visible something unforeseen? (And is the genuinely public space inherently "generous" in this manner?)

No answers; but I do want to acknowledge Roy Miki's work "for" unrecognizability in Canada in *West Coast Line* and to point to *Chain*'s systemic refusal of certain forms of editorial choice and their investigation of somewhat parallel writing strategies—collaborations, programmatic writing. If there is ". . . thinking as space surrounds a building" (Jerry Estrin) can we say, "editing as [thinking as] space surrounds buildings"? It's certainly something to do with space.

Notes

1. As *Raddle moon* has had a number of co-editors and assistant and contributing editors through the years, I've used "I" and "we" fairly loosely throughout this piece. Past co-editors are Kathryn MacLeod, Catriona Strang, Lisa Robertson; past associate editors are Steven Forth and Vivian Marple; present contributing editors are Norma Cole, Erin Mouré, Nicole Brossard and Lisa Robertson. The magazine's existence, shape and *mentalité* owe a lot to them.
2. Laura Moriarty, ed. *non* http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~moriarty/
3. I want to be clear that this letter is addressed to Myung Mi Kim as a device only: we've never had any direct correspondence on this subject.
4. Laura Moriarty, in the "Women/Writing/Theory" colloquium, *Raddle moon* 11

—SUSAN CLARK

Primitive Grammars

The opening paragraphs of journalist Don Gillmor's account of a 1995 murder committed by two Jamaican-born cousins who had grown up in Toronto, Canada, contained a number of excerpts from police statements and courtroom testimony. Gillmor writes, "[The accused] Kinkead's language was exclusively a street vernacular. . .'Home boy had his shit out, he was all fucked up, know what I mean.' The statements were aural collages held together by primitive grammar and unlikely nouns." In court, however, his language altered: "Kinkead told the court that after the murder he had wandered in 'soliloquy.' He was 'ambivalent' about his earlier crimes; he had 'prevaricated' in other statements. He took on the language of his surroundings. Occasionally his retooled vocabulary went astray. A clue was dismissed as a 'lugubrious aberration.'" [1]

For Gillmor, Kinkead is a latter-day Caliban. In his attempts to define Kinkead's language as the language of a mad man, Gillmor ends up criminalizing an entire community. While Kinkead's behavior exhibits all the attributes of a psychopath, his language does not. Kinkead's language represents the use of performativity, non-English syntax, neologisms and vernacular lexicons, and code- or register-switching that is typical of black Canadians, especially those of Caribbean descent. Similar to the language use of other populations in the African diaspora, many black Canadians shift between the languages of the Caribbean and "standard" English according to context. Among younger black Canadians the vernaculars of African Americans are added to the mix.

Dub poetry has been crucial to the development of Canadian literature. Although dub poetry first came to prominence in the early 1980s in England and Jamaica through the work of Linton Kwesi Johnson and Oku Onoru respectively, its roots go much further back. It is a politically-charged oral poetry that draws on the dialect poems of Jamaican folklorist and anthropologist Louise Bennett, the "rapping" of Jamaican DJs over instrumental versions of reggae songs, the language of rastafarianism, and Bajan poet Kamau Brathwaite's notion of "nation language" which, in the midst of the movement towards Caribbean decolonization, asserted the primacy of regional culture and experience as poetic form and content.

While dub, for the most part, eluded the United States, in Canada, and especially amongst the large population of West Indian immigrants in Toronto, it had a tremendous influence. In the mid-1980s, dub poets such as Clifton Joseph (*Oral/Trans/Missions*), Lillian Allen (*Revolutionary Tea Party*), and ahdri zhina mandiela (*dark diaspora. . . in dub*) brought dub's political and aesthetic questions to Canada. Importantly, the dub poets recognized the problem of access that black writers have had to the institutions of Canadian literature. They challenged the staid, text-obsessed Canadian League of Poets for membership. And although they are all published writers, they saw the limited ability the written word had in reaching a black audience that rarely reads literary journals. Their venues were live performances, college radio programs and independently produced cassettes and CDs. This underground literary economy in some cases actually sells more units than the books of "mainstream" Canadian poets.

The dub poets and their progeny remain the step-children of the CanLit establishment. Their decision not to use the literary journals is as much one of strategy as it is the product of editorial policies that privilege certain genres over others. It is a sign of the gap between these communities that the recent work by contemporary dub poets,

rappers, and other "spoken word" artists rarely make it into anthologies and journals and rarely receive the critical attention that self-consciously "literary" genres get. Thus recent CD releases such as Michael St. George's *Root 2 Fruit*, Black Katt's *answer the call. . .*, or Motion's *Use What You Got* remain almost unknown to a larger public. And the poets included on Anthony Bansfield (Nth Digri) compilation *Word Life: Tales of the Underground Griot* don't make appearances in George Elliot Clarke's anthology *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature* or the Caribbean Canadian issue of the Toronto-based literary journal *Descant*.

The work produced by younger poets in the 1990s occasionally has less of an explicit debt to the Caribbean. While the influence of dub and reggae, as well as of dancehall's elaborate, insiderist configurations of patois, can still be heard, often this more recent poetry is indistinguishable in form and content from that of their African American peers. This writing draws on constructions of a black nationalist subject found in the poets of the Black Artist Movement, Negritude, or nation-conscious rap artists, and uses idealized notions of blackness and Africa, and conservative tropes of nationhood grounded in a heterosexist and masculinist rhetoric of family, roots, and economic empowerment. There is, though, a place for feminist critique, sometimes radical, sometimes limited to a plea for the reformation of male/female relationships in the black community. Often the writing is therapeutic, using the pop spiritualism of Ayanla Vanzant, Maya Angelou, or the popular books of days for inspirational critiques of sexual abuse, incest, and racism. They aren't the themes of the professional, academically-validated poet, but they reflect the concerns and modes of thought of its primary audience: a black community.

At its worst, this writing simply reflects the problems, desires, and aspirations of a segment of Canada's black population, at its best it questions and critiques its norms and practices. Yet either way, it disrupts the misguided representations and debased narratives of black people (such as Gillmor's) that make up the everyday discourse of race in Canada, and through its refashioning of language and genre the canon of Canadian literature.

Notes

1. Don Gillmor, "Killing Cousins," *Toronto Life*, September 1998, p. 140

—PETER HUDSON

Compared to the United States, Canada's literary mainstream is relatively small and remains confined to the country's two or three major cities. To speak of a central Canadian tradition or canon seems somewhat presumptuous given the country's young age. Still, it is customary among Canada's few established authors to criticize most radical or avant-garde approaches to writing as being too American, as if novelty or experimentation has little value north of the 49th. Hence, Jeff Derksen, a founding member of the Kootenay School of Writing, in conversation with the American poet, Ron Silliman, evokes a common Canadian censure when he links the Kootenay School of Writing's marginal status within his own country's literary tradition at least partially to its American affiliations. Having strong cultural connections with the behemoth to the south, Derksen hints, can damage one's credibility in the eyes of established Canadian writers and networks. Uncomfortable with KSW's experimental approach to poetry, other more mainstream Canadian writers, he notes, have been quick to denounce the school's activities as a sort of "branch plant" for American language writing—or in the words of Silliman, "a language poetry maquilladora."[1] Rather than confront directly some of the issues in language and poetics the school continues to raise through its programming and events, Derksen suggests, the most common rebuttal to KSW's own criticism of mainstream culture is simply to dismiss the school's national relevance as a literary movement. To consider KSW as basically an American institution, in other words, allows Canada's more conservative writers to repudiate the school's unique work in class, gender and race politics as extraneous to all Canadian contexts.

Yet, for many Canadian writers, especially those outside the traditional canon, the school's fifteen-year existence evokes a particularly vital role within national literary networks as a one of the most important centers in Canada for experimental work. Support for KSW was never more evident than in the spring of 1998 when writers across the country were called on to protest the City of Vancouver's decision to withdraw all civic funding of the school's reading series.

As an independent "writers-run" center, the Kootenay School of Writing is no stranger to financial crises, especially those originating in provincial or civic funding cuts. Its very inception in Vancouver derived from the province's financial shutdown of David Thomson University Centre (DTUC) in Nelson, BC in 1983. Teachers and students from DTUC attempted to re-establish an alternative post-secondary environment in which creative writing and cultural theory could be

studied independent of the conventional university classroom and for far less tuition fees. Since that time KSW has garnered national and international recognition as a site of diverse, innovative writing practices. The school's programming provides local, national and international exposure for Vancouver writing, while at the same time introducing the city to a variety of different writers from around the world. A typical season for KSW will feature ongoing reading series, artist talks, both provincial and national book launches and extended courses in creative writing, poetics and literary theory. Last year we hosted over 70 writers and artists including Dionne Brand (winner of 1997 Governor-General's Award for Poetry), Robin Blaser and Sharon Thesen, Michael Ondaatje, novelist, Robert Gluck and acclaimed British poets Tom Raworth and Drew Milne. In addition to these readings, KSW also held several intense workshops and lecture series by poets like Lisa Robertson, Lydia Kwa and lesbian activist and novelist, Karen X Tulchinsky. Many of the younger writers who have participated in these courses have gone on to give readings at KSW and to publish books of their own.

Recognizing KSW's unique function as an important port of entry for international literary figures, authors both in and outside Canada were quick to voice their support for the threatened center. Jean Day, a California poet and editor, noted her fascination with the "vitality and diversity of the very identifiably 'Vancouver' writing scene," describing the school as a "paramount venue for new writing in Canada."[2] Cydney Chadwick, another California writer and executive director of Syntax Projects for the Arts, echoes this sentiment: KSW, she writes, fosters cultural exchange, for it has shown Vancouver to be "a city that is hospitable to innovative writing and writers [and] a progressive and necessary place to visit." Above the 49th parallel: the Ottawa poet and teacher, Bob Hogg, also qualified the Kootenay School of Writing as important "cultural nexus" for innovative writing, adding that its sometimes small audiences do in no way reflect its literary value. He writes, "we are in a somewhat benighted time as far as poetry and its support go. This fact has been noted and lamented by poets and literary critics alike, but we should not make the mistake of assuming that it is because poetry has become irrelevant, or that it has ceased to speak to the people meaningfully."

This critical correlation of KSW's marginal identity as a cultural institute with the genre of poetry in general appears in many of the letters of support sent to the city at that time. Poetry, especially new work, cannot pretend to the audience sizes and spectacles associated with other popular forms of entertainment. In contrast to the more commercially developed industries of music and film, writing gener-

ally produces few globally recognized celebrities. Yet, as the Montreal poet, Erin Mouré (winner of the 1988 Governor General's Award for Poetry), points out, "places like the Kootenay School, where experimentation and innovation are key, produce works that have a much larger influence than mere numbers can convey." Indeed, Mouré notes, the actual measurement of a poetry's cultural resonance is always complicated, being often a matter of how deeply a work may penetrate a particular community, rather than a question of sheer readership size. Mouré classifies this type of influence as a "reverberatory effect," where writers stimulated by the KSW "environment" go on to invigorate others with their own innovations, who, in turn, communicate their ideas to still others, and on, ad infinitum. "This reverberatory effect," for Mouré, "is the lifeblood. . .of even mainstream art; without it. . .you end up with noisy trivia."

True to Mouré's description, KSW has rarely been noisy. And it is likely this more or less deliberate lack of fanfare that originally inspired the punitive cuts in funding from the city of Vancouver. Envisioning a more polished, elite celebration of famous writers, the city quite suddenly refused to acknowledge the extensive community already in place.

Moments of crisis, whether financially driven or otherwise, tend to inspire the drawing of boundaries. When a community or program of thought becomes questioned, lines of definition need to be established, often defensively, in response to what is perceived to be an external threat. In this capacity, these letters of support function ably. Challenged to show the community behind the text, KSW had no course of action but to reach for its diverse, yet formidable Rolodex. The city council demanded noise. Fortunately, the many contingent poetry scenes and networks still connected to the Kootenay School of Writing were happy to oblige.

Notes

1. Jeff Derksen and Ron Silliman, *Philly Talks* 6 (1 1 October, 1998): 14.
2. This and all further quotes in support of KSW are taken directly from the many letters of support sent to Vancouver City Council in spring 1998. The letters themselves remain on file at KSW headquarters in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

—ANDREW KLOBUCAR

"[Y]our hands have unsettled/ the way we hear ourselves," writes Harold Paddock in his elegy for Noel Dinn, a pivotal figure in the Newfoundland cultural renaissance of the mid-1970's. A drummer and a pianist, Dinn and his hands *did* unsettle, helped re-invent, the island's traditional music, that remarkable blend of Irish, English, French, Scottish and local Newfoundland song, in his internationally-acclaimed band "Figgy Duff" (named for a boiled pudding made of raisins and molasses, common fare in Newfoundland). The intimate fusion of ancient and contemporary, traditional and progressive in the sound of "Figgy Duff" both reclaimed and recontextualized Newfoundland music; it gave lyrical articulation to the paradoxes of a society in transition.

Almost any Saturday evening in St. John's, the province's capital, you can walk downtown to a pub for "The Session"—an informal gathering of musicians. Fiddles, bodhrans, bouzoukis, guitars, whistles, concertinas, and songs so deeply rooted in place they are the landscape of the island as much as bog and barren, harbour and cove. And every second summer St. John's hosts the International Sound Symposium—a nine-day exploration of sound and its relationship to various art forms, which is billed as "one of the most innovative events and the most interesting sound environments in the world." Symphony for ship's horn, music by Meccano set. African drumming, sound installations. The shriek of gulls.

In Britain's oldest colony and Canada's youngest province, old and new flourish together next to the always-inconstant North Atlantic. Newfoundland has a culture as strong in story as in song. There, language is the repository of memory, a form of entertainment and a force of identity as much as a means of communication. Oral tradition is resident not residual. For more than twenty years, the editors of *TickleAce* have been gathering the complex vibrancy of this culture in a journal of literary and visual arts. The journal derives its name from "tickle-ace" or "tickle-ass" or "tickle-lace," names for the kittiwake, a gull common in Newfoundland. The choice expresses commitment to the linguistic distinctiveness of Newfoundland and Labrador. *TickleAce* first appeared in 1977, twenty years after one of Newfoundland's pre-eminent scholars George Story wrote "Dialect and Standard Language," his landmark essay on the need to study rather than suppress (as inferior) Newfoundland English. But this was still five years before the 1982 appearance of *The Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, the fascinating volume Story spent years editing with his colleagues,

Kirwin and Widdowson. The word "tickle-ace" links the journal, whose central purpose is the fostering of the province's literary and artistic community, with a cultural and intellectual movement to give legitimacy to the beauty and dignity of a people's expression.

I asked Mary Dalton, an early editor of *TickleAce*, whether the journal's cultural mandate was regional or nationalist. National in a Newfoundland, not a Canadian context, for Newfoundland was a country after it was a colony and before it became a province. The barest majority voted for Confederation with Canada in a 1948 referendum that split families and broke hearts. There remains in the province, at least among many intellectuals and artists, and in part because of the Canadian Government's disastrous fisheries management, a misgiving, a sense that Newfoundland might better have maintained its independence, despite Confederation's proffered affluence. Dalton replied that rather than being regional or nationalist, the journal was "solipsistic, in a good way." The focus was Newfoundland, its writing, language, and art; the editors were, she suggested, just interested in themselves as Newfoundlanders.

When it began, *TickleAce* was the only literary journal in Newfoundland and Labrador, and so it remains. There are other journals with a focus on Newfoundland life and studies, and other literary journals (such as *Protocol*, *Scruncheons*, and *Squonk*), but none lasted more than a couple of issues. The assertion that early editors were interested in themselves as Newfoundlanders is, then, neither chauvinistic nor limited; rather, it indicates a recognition of need: no other journal gave Newfoundland artists and writers a forum for cultural exploration.

This cultural exploration takes many forms. No one literary genre is preferred in *TickleAce* although the inclination of the journal has generally been toward poetry and visual art, more recently introducing fiction, reviews and interviews with established writers like Wayne Johnston and Bernice Morgan. Neither has one style of writing been preferred, despite Harold Horwood's recent complaint in *Books in Canada*, which suggests the magazine indulges often and laxly in "deconstruction" and free verse; "bits and pieces of English major stuff and creative writing seminars tend to fly off in all directions at once," he writes in a cranky review of the journal (Sept. 1997, p 3). But it looks to me that, while the magazine entertains a wide array of techniques and considerable stretch, there is more "traditional" work in *TickleAce* than in most of the other little magazines in Canada—more rhymed and formal verse, a more pervasive sense of story. Porter, the longest standing member of the magazine's editorial collective, acknowledges that there might well be a stronger narrative impulse in the work

published in *TickleAce*, even in its lyric verse, than there is elsewhere. I would attribute this not so much to lack of linguistic risk or generic experiment, as to the subtly-storied orientation to language I encountered everywhere in Newfoundland during my stay there. I have never met so many people who spoke in anecdote, or who recognized their language as a tale in itself.

Rightly or wrongly, I attribute this attitude towards language to grounding in a still-pervasive, still-vital oral culture. In many respects, Newfoundlanders are proudly, fiercely oral. No surprise, then, to find that part of *TickleAce*'s original mandate was to make space for traditional forms, or that the Spring/Summer 1997 "Fish & Brewis" issue (named for another of Newfoundland's national dishes) included the winners of a ballad-writing contest. At first glance, such poems might seem variations on hackneyed forms. But to dismiss them so easily is to ignore the immense linguistic drama occurring at the juncture between oral and written cultures, to overlook the continual soundings of the oral within written language. In the best traditional Newfoundland ballads, whether hundreds of years or weeks old, whether they bemoan the lack of tobacco during a long winter freeze, lament the loss of a ship and crew, or eulogize a way of life destroyed by the cod moratorium, language is much more than commodity; it is the texture, the articulation, the enactment of community. Words are salted through with history, materiality. Each singer, performer, writer, or reader who approaches (whether to preserve or adapt) these forms must burrow into them, open out their language, open up *to* language. The old forms may be true harbingers of moment and movement.

TickleAce is doing what it set out to do. The fourth issue began with the boast that during its first year of existence, the magazine had presented the work of more than twenty-five previously unpublished writers, as well that of more established authors. Over the years, many of Newfoundland's best young writers were first published in its pages: Michael Crummey, Ken Harvey, Lisa Moore, Carmelita McGrath and Michael Winter, to name just a few. If the focus of *TickleAce* has been to promote Newfoundland writing, it welcomes mainland writers. Despite the fact that the population of the entire province is less than that of some major Canadian cities, there has been no shortage of good Newfoundland writers to publish, so the editors have rarely felt the need to solicit work from "away," but neither have they turned back good work simply because it was submitted from elsewhere. Next to Percy Janes, Tom Dawe, John Steffler, and Paul Bowdring, then, you find Don McKay or damian lopes, Barb Schott or Ven Begamudré. Newfoundland has such a strong artistic heritage, it's no surprise that the visual art in the magazine is almost exclusively by artists living in or

from Newfoundland. Along with that of the native-born artists David Blackwood, Christopher Pratt, Ned Pratt and Gerald Squires is the work of such immigrants to the island as Anne Meredith Barry, Luben Boykov, Christine Koch, Mary Pratt and Don Wright.

Design, layout, paper weight, type, reproductions of visual art, cover art—all these have been steadily refined, especially under the careful eye of Bruce Porter, who, along with Dalton, Paul Bowdring and Art Wildish, revived the briefly-moribund journal in 1980 with a new, more polished-looking *TickleAce* 5. Production is rooted in home, part of a conscious effort to ensure that the journal contributes not only to the cultural community of Newfoundland, but also to its economy.

Inside the front cover of every issue of *TickleAce* is printed a quotation from *Birds of Newfoundland* that describes the call and the habits of the kittiwake. The excerpt has transformed to motif; several of the statements introducing individual issues—perhaps with more frequency than is, strictly speaking, necessary—play over details of the bird drinking salt water, sleeping on the open ocean, perching on ice bergs, travelling great distances from Old World to New. Yet, the best line in the passage, has so far been left to lie.

"Unlike most other gulls they are not given to scavenging": Now *there's* a motto for a little magazine, especially one from Newfoundland which has a history based, in part, upon that very thing. Newfoundlanders have long been scavengers, and necessarily so. There are stories from the 19th and early 20th century of people from coastal outports risking their lives to save the crews of wrecked ships, and then, as the crews watched, stripping everything of value off the ships before they were irretrievably lost. This was not larceny, although sometimes people were tried for such; it was self-preservation. The harshness of life perched on the edge of a rock in the midst of the North Atlantic required of Newfoundlanders an inventiveness, an ability and willingness to make do with whatever came to hand. Scavengers, then. But not like garbage-eating gulls. Scavengers who find in what others leave behind the very thing necessary for cultural survival; bricoleurs of wit and ingenuity, turning the old into the new.

—MARNIE PARSONS

"On the H Orizon: bpNichol after ten." A conference sponsored by *West Coast Line*. Vancouver, B.C.: September 25-26, 1998.

A conference entitled "On the H Orizon," organized by Roy Miki and Miriam Nichols for *West Coast Line* magazine in September 1998 invited contextual evaluations of Nichol's work on the tenth anniversary of his death. The strongest presentations expressed concern about the future disposition and readership of Nichol's work, and involved retrospective looks at the situation of Nichol's work in the canon.

Frank Davey's opening salvo was a challenge to the editors of Nichol's posthumous publications not to undercut his radicalism by presenting him as Saint bp, wholesome, amusing, and delightfully clever. Chief among sins in this regard, although I do not recall Davey referring to it directly, was the recent publication of a collection of Nichol's work called *An H in the Heart,* edited by George Bowering and Michael Ondaatje. This collection was referred to repeatedly in conference papers as an example of what is wrong, or going wrong, with Nichol studies: a hagiography of personality and emotion that undermines Nichol's difficulty, resistance, and aggression. The ensuing "trademark bp" is a distortion created by well-meaning editors who wish to disseminate Nichol's work to a popular, i.e, institutional readership (for Nichol's work will be popularized largely through posthumous publications being adopted as texts in poetry classes) with the result that his more difficult texts will be marginalized to the point of disappearance, or will remain unpublished. What is needed, Davey suggested, is for editors to rescue Nichol "from his own ambivalent humanism." To continue the uncritical acceptance that has largely characterized the response to his work since his death in 1988 would be, as Davey said, to "contaminate" the way Nichol will be read in the future.

Many of the panelists distinguished two streams of Nichol's work: the books of *The Martyrology,* Nichol's long poem; and the compositions related to his sound poetry work with The Four Horsemen, the drawings and cartoons, the concrete poetry, and the 'pataphysics projects. *The Martyrology* suffered most, several panelists concurring as to its failure to "shake off its own humanism" and attachment to "meaning, pathos, and courage." For example, *The Martyrology* and the lyric poetry were seen to fail to have "problematized whiteness": in Ashok Mathur's computerized intervention, the word "brown" bounced around the text of one of Nichol's more solemn lyrics—a ploy Nichol would have appreciated. Darren Wershler-Henry, Clint Burnham, and Peter Jaeger in their turn criticized the lack of real criticism of

Nichol's work, its mistaken place in the postmodernist canon, and the overvaluation of the radicalism of *The Martyrology*. Despite Roy Miki's and Jeff Derksen's protestations that Nichol's ouevre constitutes "a probable system" and "a democratic text," the tenor of the strongest panel presentations was that Nichol's work, especially if this work is understood to consist primarily of *The Martyrology* and the like, is in danger of being lost to sentimentality.

The major obsessions of *The Martyrology* and much of Nichol's lyric poetry are mortality, language (poetry), and time. Dead at age 46, Nichol was prescient about his own limited time on earth. In hindsight it seems churlish to attack a writer of Nichol's stance (a pointedly democratic one) and stature (however arguable in canonical terms) for his preoccupations. In his typically maverick style, Nichol wrote outside the English Department, and, with the exception of the above-mentioned posthumously edited selection *An H in the Heart*, deliberately published only with small, even obscure, presses, or was self-published. As a longtime member of the Coach House Press editorial board, he helped bring into print and make significant the work of poets such as Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, and Steve McCaffery, and the group of Toronto Jamaican-Canadian writers known as De Dub Poets. And his sound poetry performances with The Four Horsemen are still fresh, still brilliant and amazing on recordings and videotapes such as Ron Mann's "Poetry in Motion."

This is not to stay any criticism of Nichol with descriptions of what a great guy he was. As conference panelists frequently pointed out, that is a given. What concerns me today is the degree to which evaluation is conflated with categorization, and the degree to which categories multiply, with their attendant value judgements which come down, basically, to bad and good, and their counterparts modernist/postmodernist, humanist/anti-humanist, lyrical/radical, etc. etc. Although it was bracing and necessary to produce a frank appraisal of the contemporary disposition of Nichol's work, the conference also produced superficial judgements made on the basis of tell-tale poetic equivalents of hotel-and-lingerie receipts. In the meantime, everyone admits to ordering hundreds of copies of *An H in the Heart* for their classes—with probably much less reluctance than they might think they should feel.

—SHARON THESEN

Just prior to the show's installation, Auckland's imposing Central Railway Station, cavernously empty, assumed an almost melancholy air: this site of a half-century of greetings and farewells, recently decommissioned and given up to neglect and immanent 'development', was about to receive, belatedly and fortuitously, a passing out parade. Despite its title though *Station of Earthbound Ghosts* was neither named nor produced for this or any other specific site. And yet any less culturally neutral a site would hardly have served so well. Leigh Davis's flags are not really at home in art galleries; unlike those of Jasper Johns or even Matt Mullican, they do not like a white wall. And lacking any natural indoor site their venue necessarily becomes a matter of negotiation. As it happened this installation effectively annexed and transformed the Station's capacious melancholy, linking it to ghosts, meeting grounds and journeys, information and systems of communication, way beyond what was once its compass.

All but one of the flags were manufactured by a local company, Blue Grass Flags; they measured 3.5 by 1.5 metres and their making involved dyeing, hand applique, and screen printing. Davis wrote the texts, but for the combination of image and text he sought the collaboration of two designers, Stephen Canning and Christine Hansen. Flown from their 'heads' in rows of three down the full length of the grand concourse of the Station, these flags were accompanied by plinths surmounted by small diagrams orienting them for normal reading.

Who desires life, *un guerrier de la Nouvelle Zelande,* speaks God.

Everywhere you went

God was in your tongue, who desired life, un Guerrier. We are the conversation of these figures.

they

grew,

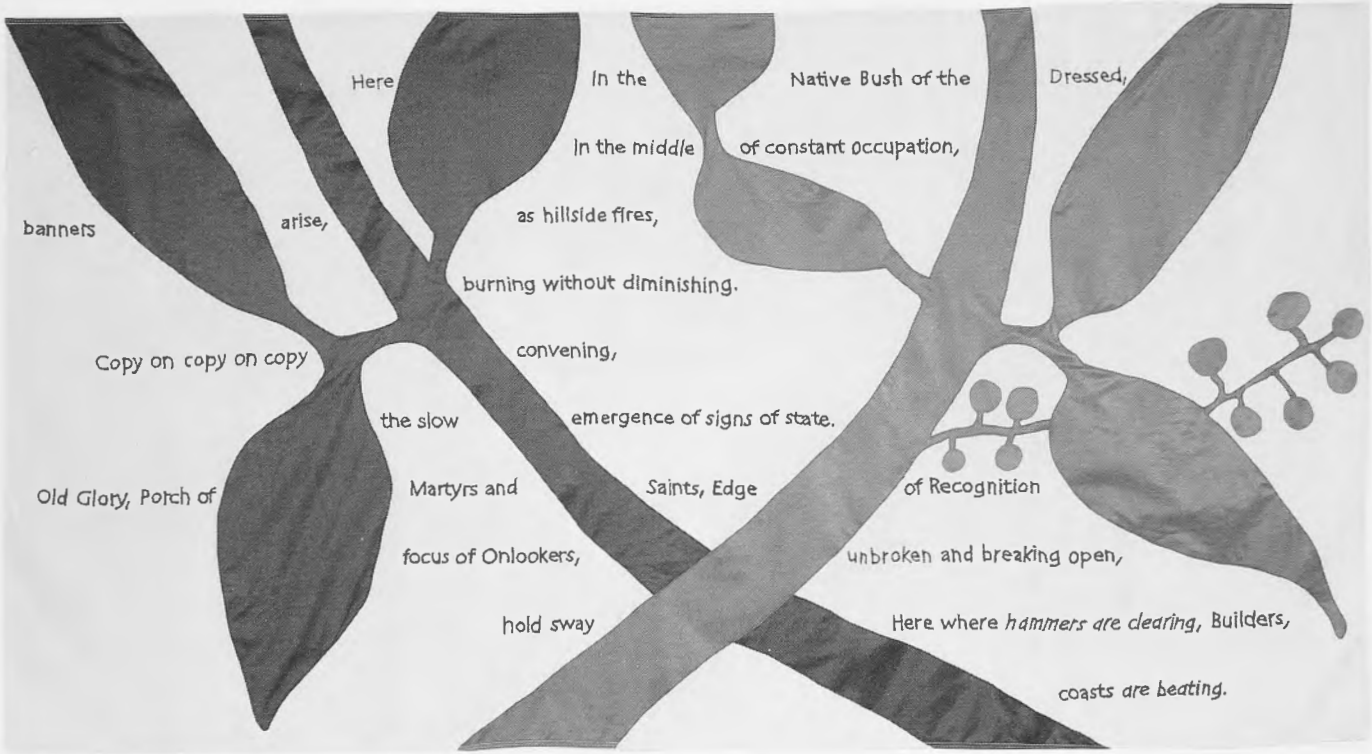
A poplar stick your riding whip jammed down, at idle arcs.

lombardi la la la la...lah.

In winter, on skylines, are *upraised branches.* 10,000 leaves ripple la la la la...lah in summer.

Two flags, one red and one black, carry a single word: *hau*. Outside, from a flagpole in the Station grounds, an extra large red Hau flag flutters in the sea breeze. Another flag carries these lines:'In the copy of this meeting house,/its shaded porch, are angels breathing. / And where the wind blows there is *Hau*.' (*Consider Rosellas*'). *Hau* is Maori for *wind* , *air*, or *breath*; also for vital energy, the life force of a person or thing. As a verb it means to *strike*, or *hit* and was used as a battle cry. Taken together these two flags make up another word: *hauhau*. Last century, English settlers described members of the Pai marire religion as *hauhau* because of a chant of theirs which involved the unison sucking and expelling of breath. Founded by Te Ua Haumene, Pai marire was one of a number of Maori/Christian movements which sprung up in response to and in rebellion against European settlement. Many of these groups devised their own flags. *Hauhau* was soon used to demonise all forms of Maori insurgency. Issuing thus from the bleeding edge of New Zealand's bicultural past, Davis uses it to name the complex space of exaltation and terror that is the world of his earthbound ghosts. 'A theory of *hauhau* is the ground of the project.' he says.

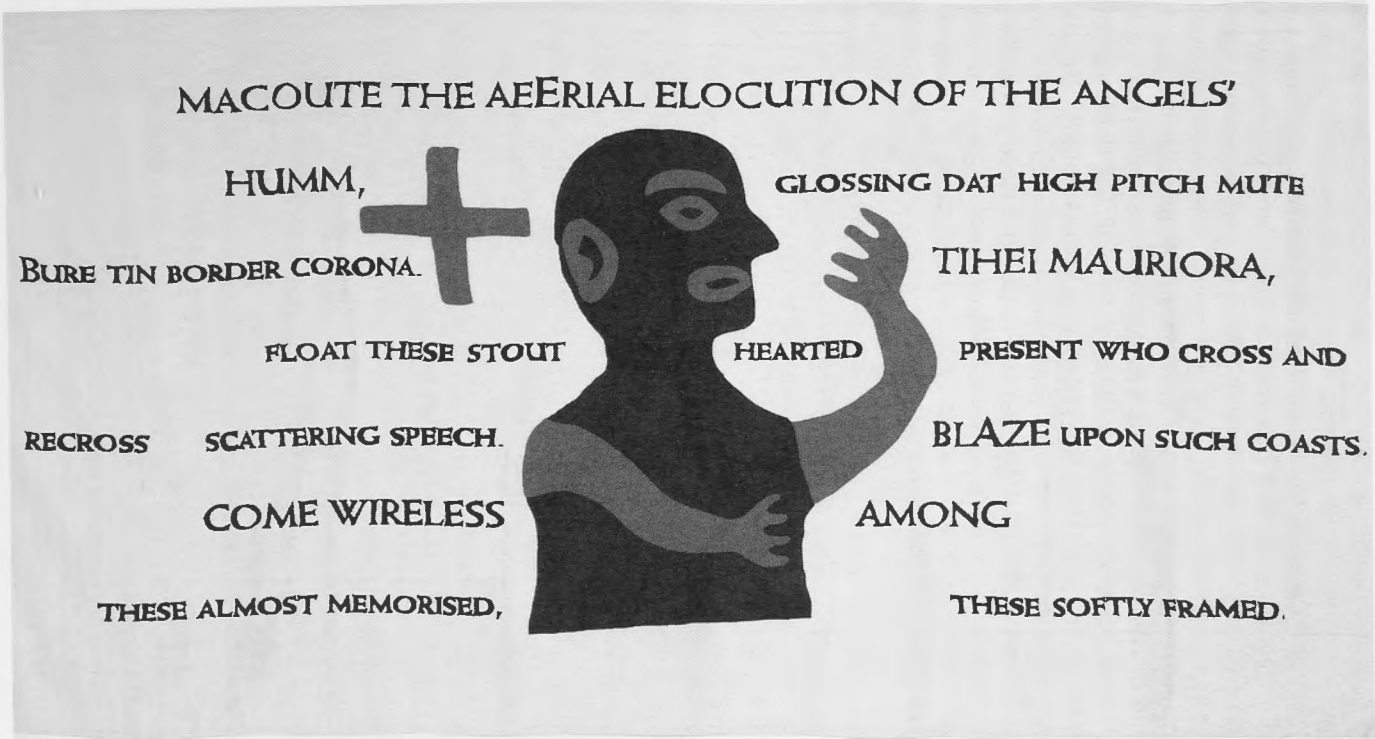
Leigh Davis is best known for *Willy's Gazette*, a book of poems published more than ten years ago, which earned him the reputation of the terrible child of 80s New Zealand poetry. His subsequent silence as a poet, which coincided with his successes in the business world, was a source of relief to some; it had less to do with a disenchantment with poetry as such than with its vehicles: especially the book,especially the slim effete tome, and the limited terms of its circulation here. Maybe the book was done for? Maybe it has been washed into some backwater by the fluid forces of the new electronic media? According to Regis Debray the computer's 'dematerialization releases thought from the weight of things, increases its mobility, multiplies its possibilities. From the bookish metaphor to the computational one, the passage is not only, indeed, from heavy to lightweight, rigid to soft, rough to smooth,. . .but from inert to the animate.' ("The Book as Symbolic Object") By this account the computer releases the *hau* of language. Despite the occasional appearance of the pixelated image, however, Davis's book of flags relies for its *hau* on the literal movements of the air which animate and broadcast its messages, and on the movements of readers threading their ways the length and breadth of the installation to enact the para-book circulation of meaning the poet is after. Far from modern, flags seem the obstinate vestige of an all but obsolete sign system, yet so unequivocally and literally do they continue to mark situations of ownership, loyalty, identity, power, rule, nationhood and so on, that their place in shaping the public domain seems assured. And



"Here in the Native Bush of the Dressed"
Leigh Davis. Photo courtesy of Patrick Reynolds.

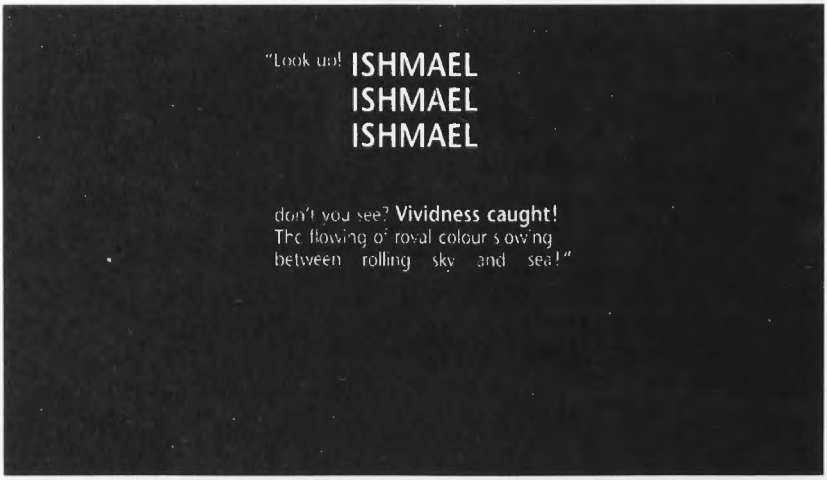
since those situations are at the heart of Davis's texts and images, the flag has, for the time at least served to allay his doubts.

Davis was drawn to the flag as much for its past as its present. The image on the flag *Macoute* at the centre of the first row of the installation derives from an historic flag colloquially referred to as the 'Te Kooti standard'. Te Kooti te Turuki Arikirangi is the chief ghost of Davis's show. A reading of Judith Binney's recent justly praised biography, *Redemption Songs* provided the starting point, and while only a minority of the flags make direct reference to him, Te Kooti's spirit informs them all. Few figures in New Zealand history have occupied such extreme poles as this 19th century Maori leader, those of terrorist, statesman and saint. He remains to this day an often bitterly controversial figure among both Maori and European. As I have suggested, for Davis, *hauhauism*, is a kind of avant-garde expression; it was settler fear of Maori cultural innovation that gave rise to the word. In his show, the great poetic power of Te Kooti's claims on Christian authority, are acknowledged (in the flag *Brown Te Kooti* 'Brown Te Kooti and Jesus in red serge stand high talking, of Urewera heaven and beach hell'.) His angelic elocution, the tumult of his grammar—I am paraphrasing Davis here—his glossolalia, '*lombardi* la la la la la lah.' Also acknowledged is his responsiblity for one of the most significant innovations in 19th century Maori art, the painted meeting house. For the members of the Ringatu Church that he founded, the meeting house was, as it continues to be, their place of worship. The design of *Native Bush of the Dressed. . .*is derived from the best of these houses and Te Kooti's 'bride', Te Rongopai.



"Macoute"
Leigh Davis. Photo courtesy of Patrick Reynolds.

The Railway Station installation entertained the idea, through projecting its name on the ceiling, that its grand concourse was a meeting house, indeed Te Rongopai itself. This house and church was built for Te Kooti's promised return to his home land; but because of the traumatic and bloody events with which he was associated there, the dangers to himself and the local community from both European and Maori were such that he never did return, 'the marriage' was never consumated. The installation made a map of his situation laying it over the plan of the building by naming the entrance hall: Bay of Plenty—the place of Te Kooti's exile—and the corridor to the concourse: Waioeka Gorge, the most direct route to Te Rongopai, and the small East Coast city of Gisborne. In March 1999, *Station of Earth Bound Ghosts* is to be reinstalled in the Gisborne Army Hall—another far from neutral venue—and preceded by a service and korero (seminar) at Te Rongapai. For the Ringatu priests, the exhibition presents an opportunity to further the process of healing and reconciliation that is a primary mission of today's followers of Te Kooti. So what in Auckland was an art exhibition in the big city, will be in Gisborne a more broadly cultural event actively involving local Church and Maori community groups, the Army and local schools.



Te Kooti is, however, only one of many ghosts who populate Davis's poem, ghosts as diverse in time, place, and significance as the Princess Diana, modern Maori leader Matui Rata, Heloise and Abelard, the Christ child (El Nino), Ishmael, His poem is a station, a gathering place where the standards of these departed do ride the breeze, not to

Grand Concourse, showing both Hau flags
Leigh Davis. Photo courtesy of Patrick Reynolds.

be brought alive as people but recovered for contemporary purposes as challenging and compelling figures of collective memory. Davis does not fetishize them as transcending history, nature and language but as figures who *transfixed* the worlds of desire, knowledge and power they inhabited. This is what makes them hieratic figures in his book, why they remain regardless of how those worlds have treated them, despite the ambivalence or unease which they continue to represent or provoke, the royals to him.

MOUTHING OF SPACE TUMULT OF GRAMMAR

HOSTS OF GRAMMAR

CARRIAGE OF SPACE

JAWS OF GRAMMAR

ASSEMBLY OF SPACE

SHADOW OF CASTS

TEMPER OF NAVIGATION

ROSIN OF SPACE HORSES OF SPACE

In these poems, New Zealand, the larger reaches of its post-contact history and its geography, is a constant reference point for worlds of desire, knowledge and power shaped and reshaped by language and technology. In the country of earth-bound ghosts, natural processes like hemispheric weather systems—the Southern Oscillation (*Pacific's disturbed*), tropical Cyclone Susanna (*The Temptation of the World*)—the migrations of birds, the flight paths of bees, the ferocious marriages of women and men, acquire their sometimes prophetic meanings through association with systems of circulation of culture and information employing satellite, wireless radio, semaphore flags, speech and writing. Knowingly or otherwise, earth-bound ghosts earn their colours in these worlds by transfixing them in word or act with the challenge of change.

—WYSTAN CURNOW

A Brief Description of the Whole World is the title of an A4 magazine with stapled pages and desktop covers edited by Alan Loney. In the grand tradition of little magazines it is polemical, experimental and visibly ephemeral. It has run for 9 issues since December 1995, 50-70+ pages an issue, and features regular contributors and a poetic Loney refers to as 'oppositional'. Each issue until the last (April 1998) carries an editorial essay by Loney which contextualises the contents in the broader field of national and international literary politics. Loney's essays taken together amount to a manifesto and a cultural history. They proclaim, as the title does, what the reader might be likely to find and expected to do in the act of reading—' The path of the text is not the movement of the work in its progress down and across a number of pages, but the life of the work in the activity of its readers'. They also trace trajectories across textual theory, the body of the New Zealand poetic, and the presence/absence of the poet Loney. In number 8 Loney's essay is titled 'The Other Tradition'. He states '..no literary magazine in New Zealand is fully representative of the scope and variety of the poetry written here...and none publishes regularly, if at all the work of the other tradition'. Loney is far too sophisticated and complex a thinker to try to put a box round that phrase 'the other tradition'. Rather each of his essays which precede no.8 (sadly his last) tackles a different angle on 'oppositional' poetics. 'On Clarity', 'The Path of the Text' 'Who do I write for?', and 'What Are Poets For?' are some of their titles and together they amount to a manifesto of what lies outside or beside or beyond 'the mainstream' and is, in Loney's view, persistently underrecognised, undervalued, underread.

Last year's *Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (Oxford) edited by Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien and Mark Williams doesn't publish anything by Loney which seems to prove his point. It does publish poems by some of Loney's fellow travellers, regular contributors to *A Brief Description* like Michele Leggott, Murray Edmond and Alan Brunton, but the most marked differences between the anthology and Loney's magazine are intellectual-the contexts in which Loney places the 'other tradition' are profoundly different from the cultural/historical introduction of the anthology. These differences seem to me to mark, as they have for some years, a difference in textual thinking, the thinking that is done inside, around and about texts, that goes on in poetry anthologies, reviews and magazines, a difference often articulated as postmodern.

Bornholdt, O'Brien and Williams argue sensibly for an inclusive, non privileging representation of New Zealand poetry, 'ultimately [based] on principles of literary value. That is to say, poems have not been included unless they hold some interest to us as poetry.' If you come to this phrase fresh from Loney's careful, referenced but passionate examination of the text, the poet, the reader, the world, over 8 issues of *A Brief Description,* it seems an inadequate appeal to the reader on a shared but unexamined set of assumptions about something called poetry, located in the sensibility of three people who do your choosing for you. Loney's insistence throughout his work as a poet, editor and printer, on what has been left out from a text, the spaces that invade and surround it, demands the reader is at least aware of the act of choice that governs any text. Loney makes incompleteness apparent, on the page and in the poem, as an articulated poetic, which in itself acts to nuance and modify the formal perfections offered by a collection such the *Anthology* and to complicate its urbane and comprehensive survey of what the poetic field(s) in New Zealand might be. In his 1992 collection Missing Parts Loney comments he doesn't want to write 'perfect individual poems' any more.It is just this sense of unfinished imperfect collective process that is important to the work published in *A Brief Description* and what acts as a dialogue partner to the weighty perfected and individualised *Anthology.* One of the ways I would characterise this difference would be to say that the Anthology invites a reader-to listen, enjoy, understand—but the Description needs one-you are demanded upon, forced to make your effort to be present in the 'whole world'.

According to Loney New Zealanders' favourite form of poetry discussion is the survey, a non discussion—'symbolic gestures rather than analytical ones, judgements rather than interpretations.'(no 8). This piece is supposed to do just that-survey what is happening in New Zealand poetry. Well you could say a number of things about what is happening. Here are a few of them. There is a new poetry press, Pemmican Press, publishing beautiful small hand set editions of work by Harry Ricketts, Chris Orsman and Ingrid Horrocks, poets also published in *Landfall* or *Sport.* The neXt generation has appeared and pronounced its innovation and succession in Mark Pirie's anthology *The NeXt Wave* (Otago University Press 1998) with a long introduction about GenX writing and claiming, of course, distance and difference from its predecessors. New poets have appeared-Kate Camp, Kapka Kassabova who won the Best First Book Award for her praised collection *All Roads Lead to The Sea,* poems about being an immigrant—and Bill Manhire's Creative Writing course, which produced both Camp and Kassabova, continues to be a fertile proving ground for new

writers. A number of established writers have produced new collections. Vincent O'Sullivan's *Seeing You Asked* is his first entirely new collection since 1986, sharp enjoyable occasional poems, and C. K.Stead's *Straw into Gold,* new and selected poems, is his first collection for seven years.Bill Manhire and Chris Orsman have produced work about Antarctica, both preceding and following their visit as Poets at the Pole earlier this year–

> where what-
> ever pours is wind,
> is ice, forgetting itself
> at last in light
>
> in quiet line, horizon
>
> –Bill Manhire 'Antarctic Stone' from
> *Homelight An Antarctic Miscellany* by
> Nigel Brown, Bill Manhire, Chris Orsman.)

Orsman's work in *South and Black South* focuses on Antarctic exploration and the continent projected into our collective imaginary. Anne French, Bernadette Hall, Roma Potiki, Jenny Bornholdt, Harry Ricketts, Vivienne Plumb, and James Norcliffe have new collections in the last two years which are all accomplished, individual, moving, satirical/lyrical, playful and engage with place, gender and race in ways which seem more or less to do with their generation and temperament and not with the zeitgeist, if indeed poetry is its register. I continue to think though that at the edges, wherever they are, poetry is as revealing a place as any to read what is happening in deep mental space, across and through time. Antarctica is a case in point. What could be more suggestive of postmodernity than Orsman's sequence of poems South about the processes of recording and representation which accompanied Scott's fatal journey to the white continent, the 'primum mobile' of Antarctica'? Why has Antarctica emerged as a significant point in the national poetic, a place to write from, in the last two years? Is the presence of a huge white contested space to the south of us an invitation to millenial revisioning?

The *Anthology* uses a classifying structure which is also used in Allen Curnow's latest collection *Early Days Yet 1997.* The *Anthology* starts from the most recent poet (Chris Orsman) and moves backwards, locating poets at the point at which they began publishing. This is fine for poets whose work clearly remains within a 'period', but seems very odd when Curnow, still the major contemporary poet, comes in between Denis Glover and A.R.D Fairburn, both 'historical' in a

number of ways. Within each selection time moves forwards, so you seem to read into the future at the same time as you turn pages towards the past.This has the effect, for me, anyway, of swimming hopelessly against a tide.Just as you surface to 'now', you're back to the past again. *Early Days Yet* also starts from Curnow's most recent work and moves back with selections from earlier books, but I find the effect more like geology than swimming. It is as if Curnow's work is piled into something high and solid, showing the layers and continuations in Curnow's poetic, long sequences over time of orderly blocks of words on the page, which shape and contain the pressure and anxiety of Curnow's complex transactions with the world and the word. Something has been built here, and as New Zealanders we inhabit it. Curnow's poetry has reached the status of being invisible in the language-he is frequently quoted with no attribution, lines so familiar they constitute a vernacular.

Curnow and the *Anthology* represent different assumptions about poetic praxis, readerships and national tradition to the writers who are published in *A Brief Description of the Whole World.* Of course a number of these writers are well known and acclaimed-Leggott, Edmond, Brunton—and what Alan Loney is saying about postmodernity and the text is far from new. What I think is important about these conjunctions is that the material ephemerality and insistence on text as a cognitively materialist medium, characteristic of work produced and edited by Loney, acts to contextualise and challenge the essentially modernist celebration of the perfected high cultural moment/tradition enacted in the Oxford anthology. To see what is happening in New Zealand poetry not just in the last couple of years but over the last decade, you have to recognise that these different literary politics and poetics react on each other like erosion on a building or water on a page—that process is what's interesting and its the whole thing you have to look at.

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—LYDIA WEVERS

"Dis Nigeria Sef": Ken Saro-Wiwa as the Poet Who Wasn't

Three years after the execution of Nigerian author and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, a seemingly insignificant detail in the media's coverage of the event remains troubling: the use of the term "poet" to describe Saro-Wiwa, particularly in much of the television and radio coverage. Certainly Saro-Wiwa was a poet, but his contributions to Nigerian poetry were minimal; especially when compared to his literary achievements in other areas: as a novelist, newspaper columnist, publisher, and writer of the popular Nigerian situation comedy "Basi & Co." that for six years was enjoyed by an audience of over thirty million.

Why then was Saro-Wiwa presented to Americans as a prototypical Nigerian poet? It could be argued that the label "poet" always confers to the troublesome postcolonial writer a set of assumed political values: among them literary universality, nonviolence, and economic disengagement. As a poet for the purposes of the broadcast media, Saro-Wiwa would then become even more patently innocent of the crimes with which he was accused; while as a prose writer the improbability of his complicity in the deaths of his political rivals in Ogoniland still had to be debated in the pages of *Harper's Magazine* and *The New Yorker*. Or, to put it in terms of the media in question, perhaps a regime that killed poets obviously deserved more international condemnation than a regime that killed television writers.

However the label "poet" was probably attached to Saro-Wiwa for far more pragmatic reasons. Saro-Wiwa's short lyric poems were more easily smuggled out of prison than his longer works, they came to the attention of the international news media more readily than his posthumously published prison memoir and novel (by Penguin), and, most importantly, because of their brevity could be easily appended to pleas from human rights organizations, particularly those based on the Internet.

But to say that Saro-Wiwa may be a minor Nigerian poet does not necessarily mean that his poetry is unimportant in the study of contemporary Nigerian poetics for at least three reasons. First, Saro-Wiwa's work challenges simplistic assumptions about the role of traditional oral literature in contemporary Nigerian literature. Second, his poems like those of J.P. Clark and Christopher Okigbo render the Nigerian Civil War as a founding literary event. For Saro-Wiwa the central drama in his nation's poetry is civil war, not decolonization, and he chooses his political metaphors accordingly. Finally, because the poems exist in the context of international discourse about human rights (a discourse that ultimately failed Saro-Wiwa), they dramatize the debate among African literary figures about the use of English as a world language in a way profoundly different from either Chinua Achebe the globalist or Ngugi wa Thiong'o the localist.

Saro-Wiwa leaves a complicated literary legacy and one that is as inextricable from his television writing as it is from his environmental activism. Rather than sentimentalize African oral culture and uncritically assume the position of the *griot* as singer and storyteller, his writing was literally mediated by television.[1] He even wrote that his task as a writer addressing a group of readers was to give name recognition to his native Ogoni people: "It was a television technique, designed to leave the name indelibly in their minds."[2]

However, somewhat disingenuously perhaps, Saro-Wiwa also made the argument that his television work represented an extension of West African oral traditions. As his title of short stories adapted from the series indicates (*Basi and Company: A Modern African Folktale*), he defended the situation comedy format as an extension of traditional storytelling. So if his sit-com offered one-dimensional stock characters, unchanging and incapable of moral drama, such characters weren't necessarily imports from the West and the devices of television comedy could be seen as ultimately closer to "African narrative methods" than "the European novel with its flashbacks, psychological analyses and progressive development of character."[3] Of course, at about the same time, Nobel Prize winning fellow Nigerian Wole Soyinka was showing his genteel contempt for contemporary media and *Mandela's Earth* is full of Soyinka's cultural clichés about television.[4]

In Saro-Wiwa's work the distance between the genres of poetry and television writing is not necessarily maintained. By the time he writes "A Walk in the Prison Yard" the condensed space of the situation comedy has become the condensed space of the prison and the stock characters are just as ridiculous and clearly delineated:

> You, Private, just how many children
> Do you have and how much do you earn?
> The Captain's dirty whores came last night
> To see the tall anthropophagite,
> Swooped like vultures on my dinner
> Emptied the pot and broke the china
> . . .
> The mad Major drove in yesterday
> Picking a prostitute on the way
> He spent a long time wagging his tail
> In the other section of the jail

Furthermore, even though the poem is written from the point of view of a prisoner serving a lengthy sentence, the events all take place in the Aristotelian twenty-four hour time frame of the typical sitcom.

Although Soyinka defended Saro-Wiwa during his detention and expressed his outrage to the world community after his execution,[5] in many ways the two men represented radically different approaches to Nigerian literature, especially with regard to their treatment of internal warfare. Soyinka writes:

I find no poetry in slaughter fields,
No lyric grace; redemptive passion, no.
Only that which came and went, as others –
The blaze of empires, salvation's ashes,
The crunch of cinders in time's cul-de-sac.[6]

If Soyinka equates poetry with "lyric grace" and "redemptive passion" the chaotic Biafran civil war of 1966 to 1970 could never be his subject, even though it was a crucial literary event for other poets and not only motivated Saro-Wiwa's *Songs in a Time of War* (1985), but also J.P. Clark's *Casualties* (1970) and the work of martyred Biafran poet Christopher Okigbo.

In comparison with works by Clark and Okigbo, Saro-Wiwa's *Songs in a Time of War* has been criticized for its superficiality and contrivances.[7] But when compared to Soyinka, a poem like "Ogale—An Evacuated Town" offers a dramatic counterpoint to the literary niceties of the Nobel Prize winner:

A lone lean dog
Scrounging for food
Reaps human skulls
In a shallow gutter

The town itself is not a vaunted symbol of abstract conquest like Soyinka's metaphysical ashes and cinders, but is rather squalidly personified by Saro-Wiwa:

For Ogale out in the dreary rain
Her legs apart like a cheap prostitute
Exposed, utterly exposed.
Ogale is a ravished woman.

It is a landscape that Saro-Wiwa's narrator returns to in his better known *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*: "Many of the villages that I always see when I am driving to the front or returning to our camp in the hospital school are all empty ... And all the houses have fall down or just ready to fall down because the bullet have made hole in the roof and the rain have entered the house and there is nobody to take care of anything at all."[8]

As a member of a small ethnic group on oil rich lands, which had a history of mistreatment from the Nigerian Federal government, Saro-Wiwa had a natural sympathy for the Biafran rebels, but in the war itself he evaluated the Ogoni position realistically as a choice between

"existing as one of 200 or so ethnic groups in Nigeria or as one of 50 or so ethnic groups in secessionist Biafra"[9] and consequently chose the Federal side. But in "Epitaph for Biafra" Saro-Wiwa shows his ambivalence:

> They will play at Rebels
> And Vandals
> Fill the nation with blood
> And scandal.
>
> Then they will return as agents
> And angels
> Laughing and weeping and begging
> For minor mercies.

The Biafran rebels are transformed into "agents" and "angels," two terms that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, if the paranoia of Joseph Conrad and the visionary ecstasy of William Blake are both accepted as influences from the West on Nigerian literature.

Elsewhere Saro-Wiwa more explicitly shows the influence of what he calls "my bard Blake" and Blake's diction serves as a model for a poetry that reaches beyond the upper strata of an educated elite. This is important because the problem of inter-class communication may lie the heart of the wider debate in postcolonial studies about the use of English as a world language. Chinua Achebe, in his position as the patriarch of Nigerian literature, has argued that the use of English by Nigerian writers allows them to "speak of African experience in a world-wide language." In answer to Achebe and to Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara, Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o has charged that since language serves two purposes—as a repository of culture and as a means for communication—the use of English propagates colonial cultural values and makes communication outside the elite classes impossible.

Saro-Wiwa would seem to support Achebe and Okara in "The Language of African Literature: A Writer's Testimony" by claiming that "African literature is written in several languages, including the extra African languages of English, French, and Portuguese." However, while he makes what would seem to be a reactionary argument for the use of "standard" English rather than Africanized variants, he does so in defense of inter-class communication and a broader definition of Nigerian literary culture:

> With regard to English, I have heard it said those who write in English should adopt a domesticated "African" variety of it. I myself have experimented with the three varieties of English spoken and written in Nigeria: pidgin, "rotten," and standard. I have used them in poetry, short stories, essays, drama, and the novel. I have tried them out in print, on stage, on the radio, and with television comedy. That which carries best and which is most popular is standard English, expressed simply and lucidly. It communicates and expresses thoughts and ideas perfectly. (157)

The earlier *Songs in Time of War*, however, ends with a long poem in dialect, one of Saro-Wiwa's "experiments," "This Nigeria Sef" which states the problem differently:

> Oder people dey speak one language
> Your own come pass two hundred:
> Sanu, ekaro, deeyira, tank you, doo
> kakifo, nonsense, you no go fit take one!
> Nigeria, you too like borrow borrow
> You borrow money, cloth you dey borrow
> You borrow motor, you borrow aeroplane
> You borrow chop, you borrow drink
> Sotey you borrow anoder man language
> Begin confuse am with your confusion
> Anytin you borrow you go confuse am to nonsense
> Idiot debtor, wetin you go do
> When de owners go come take dem tings?

If the borrowing of English is simply in keeping with Nigeria's status as a debtor nation, what moral judgement is being passed on the use of English by the general population?

At his death Saro-Wiwa was reportedly working on a novel in his native Khana and may have ultimately embraced Thiong'o's position, but the drama of his arrest, trial, and execution suggests reasons to use English as a world language that are more crassly political and more obviously related to personal survival in the turbulent culture of Nigeria in the mid nineteen-nineties than the literary tone of the debate would suggest. The use of a native language assumes no threat of oppression to the writer by anything other than the remnants of traditional colonial powers. By writing in a world language Saro-Wiwa was able to draw international attention to the plight of the Ogoni people and his own dire circumstances when he was charged with the

murder of four Ogoni elders. But Saro-Wiwa's show trial and subsequent execution and the failure of English speaking literary culture to save him, even at the Auckland conference, may have proved Thiong'o right. Even as the political climate changes again with Soyinka returning to Nigeria as a cultural hero, the promise of a new period of Nigerian literary activity is problematized by Saro-Wiwa's poetic legacy.

Notes

1. Of course Saro-Wiwa did publish his own collection of folktales translated from his native Khana, but he prefaced it with the following reservations: "The pre-literate society which these tales indicate is certainly gone; the Ogoni still fish and farm but their lives are ringed around today, not by spirits but by oil wells and gas flares, and the harsh crudity of Nigerian politics which threatens their very survival as a people." See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *The Singing Anthil: Ogoni Folk Tales* (Lagos: Saros, 1991)
2. Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (New York: Penguin, 1995) p. 65.
3. Ken Saro-Wiwa, "Author's Note," *Basi and Company* (Lagos: Saros, 1987).
4. Wole Soyinka, *Mandela's Earth* (New York: Random House, 1988).
5. See Wole Soyinka, "Epilogue: Death of an Activist," *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) pp. 145-153.
6. *Mandela's Earth* p. 51.
7. See for example Abiola Irele, "Ken Saro-Wiwa," *Ogoni's Agonies: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998) p. 259.
8. Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (Essex: Longman, 1994) p. 128.
9. Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* 50.

—ELIZABETH LOSH

Inside Out: Spatial Retracings in Some Recent South African Poetry

"Self-proclaimed language but actually speech, deluded in believing itself to be completely alive, and violent, for it is not capable of protect[ing] itself or \defend[ing] [itself]' (dunatos men amuni ecuto) except through expelling the other and especially *its own* other, throwing it outside and below, under the name writing."
—Jacques Derrida(1976:39)

In South Africa poets are legion. Amid raging debates on the significance and value of the poetry produced by these poets, one is constantly reminded of how the decades of repression which once ruled life in South Africa did not quell literary production. In contradistinction to the erasures and silences white minority domination sought to effect on cultural life in South Africa, poets flourished in every conceivable site: in journals, theatres and community halls; at political rallies; during labour strikes; on factory floors and even at funerals. In the barren soil of the "dry white season", of censorship and bans, of which Mongane Wally Serote (1974) speaks, poets sprouted and their voices spread across the land.

Reflecting on this, I am reminded of what Samuel Beckett (1990) said when asked why the Irish have produced so many fine writers under such oppressive conditions: British imperialism and religious fundamentalism stung the Irish into song, he is reported to have said. In South Africa, racial domination had a similar effect. Apartheid, with all its malevolent paranoia spawned a thousand voices against it. It seems as if poets wrote and spoke in the belief that if injustice is cursed often and virulently enough, it will succumb to the incantatory power of language.

Take as an example these lines from "rap 1" by the performance poet, Lesego Rampolokeng(1990):

> when inhumanity came
> i became game
> to hunt down with guns
> to fill greed's barns
> i tied my fate to a bullet
> my soul embraced like a harlot
> a necessary evil
> to defeat the devil

The moral hyperbole of these lines is a register of the intense symbolic resistance minority domination produced in South Africa. We can agree with Michel Foucault (1972) that power is not only repressive, exclusionary or censorious, but also productive: it produces its opposite in the very act of trying to annul it. The extent to which South African poetry was shaped by both the stunting designs of Apartheid as well as by visions of a future after apartheid underscores this assertion. This work issued from energies and perspectives which sought to counter what Cabral(1980:141), referring to Apartheid, called "the largest concentration camp mankind has ever known". It now makes

up an important body of poetry against which current literary developments must be read.

With the democratisation of South Africa in 1994, poets moved into a space between the past and an unfolding future. This is the present space of transition in which poets, driven by creativity, venture into the changing inner and outer world to gather news, capture images, record sounds and articulate perceptions, insights and sensations. Such are the contingencies of poetics in post-apartheid South Africa.

In approaching the new poetry arising from this, I will provide an outline of how some poets are textualising change. This is done by focusing on private and public themes in the work of four or five poets. These themes, in turn, are related to interior and exterior forms of spatiality. Space, is here applied to signify the virtual spaces constructed by poetic texts. Reference to the social and natural spaces in the actual world is embedded in this notion.

The notion of "retracing", dangling above this essay, seeks to establish a link between past and present. This is to suggest that nothing ever is unprecedented in literature and culture. In the light of assertions that post-apartheid South African literature has undergone an inward turn, away from a preoccupation with external social and political actualities, towards inner, private, personal and intimate concerns, shaped by an aesthetics of interiority, such a retracing, in my view, is necessary.

Political change in South Africa has certainly triggered aesthetic reconsiderations. The instabilities and uncertainties arising from a context of transition, along with new found freedoms dislodged the fixed race, class and gender identities of the past. Below this, other channels are opening and yet other post-colonial waters are flowing in to mix with the cultural waters of the past. Once, scores of poets conceived a poetics in the stolid image of segregation. It produced a spatial aesthetics which sundered the world into two opposing domains: the private and the public. This was posited on an interior and exterior spatiality and a myriad of other locations which fall within this inside\outside framing of space. This crippling binary practice is now giving way to a new accentuated sense of how interiority and exteriority are interdependent. To illustrate this, I must take a step backwards to retrieve a form of spatial poetics informed by a rigorous aesthetics of interiority.

Lionel Abrahams, a leading South African exponent of private and personal themes, is a paradigmatic instance. In concentrating, as he has for decades, on lyrical interiority, he projects his work as a counter to

what he considers a debasement of true poetics by writers striving for social relevance. In the "Flesh" (1996) he writes:

> Busy in my skin in my house, I receive
> rumours and news. Again and again I hear
> about too much death, to much pain,
> too much emptiness, the culpabilities,
> relentless causes and terrible ends.
> Hearsay comes muffled, distorted,
> diminished through the walls of my house.
> Busy in my safe place, the attention I pay
> takes the form of distraction.

Here isolation from the violent late-apartheid world is registered as a deliberate distancing from an exterior space of "relentless causes and terrible ends". The empty suffering produced by such externality is contrasted with the meaning of personal agony endured in an interior private space: The speaker, "ignorant of the struggle", states that: "The walls of my house contain/ sufficient travail,/ the floor lies ready to bruise me,/ beat out my breath". The semantic structure of the poem rests on what we may term a sustained pattern of non-equivalent contrasts. It produces a rhetorical displacement of the external world by privileging interior space over exteriority. The priority given to the interior world with all its menace of unseen private pain, is however proffered by using the external world as its foil.

More significantly, this interiority, implicitly presented as the proper subject of lyrical poetry establishes its value by drawing a line between internal and external space. It constructs a rhetorical "wall" against the outer world. The anthesis of this inward aesthetics can be glimpsed in the blatantly public aesthetics expressed in the fragment by Rampolokeng. These two forms of writing, the one displacing exteriority, and the other repressing interiority obviously are counterparts. The one-dimensionality produced by the rigid closures of these two contrasting aesthetics is evident. In paraphrasing the citation from Jacques Derrida, which pertains to the traditional opposition between speech and writing, and which floats above this essay, we can identify these two forms of writing as self-asserting gestures. Both regard themselves as the true poetic register. They expel their own others to spaces external and beneath themselves. In these articulations there is no intuition that the hierarchical oppositions they construct might be accomplices.

Many other poets have, however, sought to articulate the interplay between interior and exterior spaces. Such poets have not sought to pit

their work against public life. Nor do they reject interiority. Rather, they explore the relationship between these spatial dimensions. Ingrid De Kok and Jeremy Cronin are two such poets. Both published new collections in 1997, but in the past, and especially during a time when the orthodoxies of exteriority and interiority reigned in their respective aesthetic ghettoes, they explored the spatial complexities inherent to a divided society. They did not succumb to what Frederic Jameson (1985:20) calls a shiftless tendency to draw a hermetic division between "private and public, between the social and the psychological, or the poetic and the political, between history and society and the individual which maims our existence as individual subjects and paralyses our thinking about time and change, just as surely as it alienates us from our speech itself". Instead, they highlighted the ways in which interiority and exteriority presuppose each other.

Cronin who, during the 1980's spent seven years in prison on charges of subverting the Apartheid State, is a leading activist. His first collection is significantly titled *Inside* (1983). This signifies that the poetry was written inside prison. It further signals a state of internal exile, thus placing the prison in a kind of deep interior space concealed and demarcated from the external social space of society. The title further marks this internal space as interior space with reference to the external space of exile situated beyond the borders of South Africa. Consequently the South African social space itself is designated as a form of internal space in the sense of being "inside" the country, as opposed to outside of it. Read this way, then, to be inside prison also means to be removed from, and therefore, to be outside society. Thus, a whole chain of shifting interior and exterior spatial positions is evoked.

Reading the poetry collected in *Inside* one quickly realises just how the internal space of prison, despite the enclosures of prison, does not result in insurmountable isolation for the poet. A sense of community emerges among the prisoners. But, ironically, the interior space of prison is not the interiority of personal and private space. Here the public fact of imprisonment is explored with regard to the deleterious effect it has on the intimate life of the poet.

In his second, and most recent collection, *Even the Dead* (1997), Cronin, writes about the transition in South Africa. He probes the connections and disjunctures between the public events leading from the State of Emergency imposed in 1985, to the advent of democracy. He chronicles the violence of these times; satirises the compromises made during the negotiations between former political adversaries; probes the ironies of ideology and outlines the challenges to leadership

and governance in a democratic South Africa. Along with this, he explores the geographic space of South Africa as lived-in space. Likewise, but operating from a considerably less politically defined position, Ingrid de Kok has also avoided the simplifications which insist that interior and exterior spaces are best managed when separated. In her first collection, *Familiar Ground*(1988) she thematises the relationship between the private and the public in a context where social pressures work to suppress personal suffering. This is most tellingly expressed in the poem "Small Passing". It is based on the real incident of a white woman who was told by a man not to mourn her still-born child "because the trials and horrors suffered daily by black women in this country are more significant than the loss of one white child".

The poem is composed around a series of negations of the mother's body and her grief. It provides a perspective on the larger world where a newspaper boy is exposed to the rain; a woman queues at a bus stop; a baby grows up without her mother; and Mandela's daughter tries "to find her father/through the glass," in prison. It culminates in a confluence of the white woman's personal suffering with the social injustices faced by black women. In the process the racial barriers erected between white and black women are bridged by the deeply felt and shared personal experiences of maternal loss. It results in a poem where private and public suffering are both recognised and inter-articulated so that human suffering and grief are not slighted by crudely racial or other negating differentiations.

In her latest collection, *Transfer* (1987) De Kok refines this procedure of reading the external social world through the delicate lens of the intimate, the bodily and the familial. The title of the collection encodes the notions of psychological and linguistic transference from the self to the other; from female to male; from black to white; from dream to reality; from the personal to the social; from interiority to exteriority; from the writer to the reader and back across these circuits in a context of instability and change. In the title poem, "Transfer", there is an interplay between life in and around a family house built four decades ago, "to hold private unhappiness in tack,/ safe against mobile molecular growths/ of city, developers and blacks", and a rapidly changing social reality resulting in the inexorable invasion of this private space by the shifting demographics in what was once an exclusively white neighbourhood.

There are now several poets who fully engage this intricate spacial dynamics. Karen Press's *Echo Location; A Guide for Sea Point Residents and Visitors* (1998) writes with wit about the specific qualities of a circumscribed coastal locality shared by insiders and outsiders. She

playfully satirises insider notions of locality and the pretensions of global translocality in a space where tourists and inhabitants interact and project their various identities at each other against the backdrop of the sea. Another poet, Seithlamo Motsapi, in his debut collection, *earthstepper/ the ocean is very shallow* (1995) turns natural elements like trees, the ocean, the sun and fire into startling metaphors for the interior desires, hopes, disenchantments, anger and rage of people emerging from the spatial confines of the past. Other and yet other themes are now crystallising in South African poetry in the space of freedom. Liberated from the simplifications of the past, yet still engaged with its effect, this infinitely more differentiated context poses new aesthetic demands on poets.

I have confined myself to some paradigmatic instances in recent South African poetry which explore the play of one set of spatial coordinates. In this retracing of the interconnectedness of interiority and exteriority I attempted to show, how some of these poets have woven more intricate textures into South African poetry. In the process they have contributed to the restoration of the expressive and illuminating values of poetic language. They have done so without erasing the varying and intricate relationships between the self and the world which their writing seeks to textualise, bring into view and make readable. Theirs is a poetics commensurate to the profound differentiations South African society, literature and culture are undergoing presently. All this suggests that if South African poetry, as is claimed, has now turned inward, this inwardness has not everywhere closed itself off from the world.

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—ANDRIES WALTER OLIPHANT

Brittle Surfaces

To the Director General of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology

You may know that the exhibition which opened this past Saturday at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town is called *Land and Lives: Pioneer Black Artists*. But what is a "pioneer"? For both of us, I imagine, the word speaks of frontiers: the thud of the woodsman's axe in the pristine forest; the future unfurling in the schooner's bow wave; the sod turning redly under the harrow, and the ploughman's shadow moving ahead towards new horizons. To be a pioneer, in the old, ideologically charged sense of the word, meant to break new ground, in a spirit of innovation, against a field of resistances.

This is a highly eclectic exhibition. It contains some great examples of early modernist black South African art like John Mohl's "These Grew Out of an Ash Heap," Ernest Mancoba's "L'Ancêtre", and Peter Clarke's "Burning House". It also contains works that I'm sure neither of us know. But the show is most unusual perhaps for the way it tells the history of innovation and resistance. All the artists featured here were born before 1930, that is before the second catastrophic Land Act. All of them encountered tremendous obstacles in their attempts to establish careers in art making, but their problems went beyond

obvious racism or grinding poverty to include ethnographers trying to convince them of the utter distinctiveness of the "African mind", as well as various cloying forms of Liberal charity. For many of them, however, innovation was less a matter of radical experiment than of the life-sustaining influence of friends who gave them access to new ideas and images.

Land and Lives is one in a sequence of revisionist exhibitions that have attempted to change our understanding of race, modernity, and the artistic canon. This was also the aim of the 1985 *BMW Tributaries* show and 1988 Johannesburg Art Gallery's *The Neglected Tradition*, to name but two. In *Land and Lives*, however, curator Elza Miles offers a different perspective. What she does is bring to a level of consciousness a series of invisible connections: for instance, the surprising juxtaposition of Louis Maurice and Selby Mvusi (both of whom exhibited at the First Quadrennial Exhibition of South African Art in 1956), or Job Kekana and Ernest Mancoba (both of whom studied under Sister Pauline at the Diocesan College at Grace Dieu). To appreciate these synchronicities fully you need to turn to the catalogue. Rousseau, 1997. Elza Miles is one of this country's most important and least appreciated archivists. Over the years, in a career of fidgeting and ferreting, she has established a remarkable collection of information about unrecognised black artists. It is an archive based on interviews, stories, and records of training. But this unusual research obsession also entails a particular attitude towards the life of the artist and to self narration. In the catalogue, we read about Jan Schoeman, otherwise known as "Outa Lappies", who produces an autobiography on hundreds of elaborately embroidered flour bags. When Miles tells the story of his work and life as a *karretjiemens* she describes how he enjoys living in shelters built in trees. This is because, Miles says in the catalogue, "he does not want to obstruct nocturnal animals" (24). At first, you might think that this is a bizarre mistranslation. As a literary person, I find the sentence intriguing: it is an example of what linguists would call "free indirect discourse", a third person utterance that retains some sense of the voice of the person being described. For Outa Lappies, the worst sin is to become an obstacle around which the flow of being-in-the-world will have to deviate. Yet the sentence is also revealing of Miles's method: never speaking as an ethnographer, she allows herself to fall under the spell of autobiographical statements.

So the show tells a new story of influences and trends. It will allow you to trace the startling changes in Selby Mvusi's colour palette when he arrived in Kumasi in 1962; it reveals capillary connections between South African artists in exile in Paris. More than anything, however, it tells a complex story of the hybrid appropriation of landscape conven-

tions by black artists, and this is where I will bring my letter to a close, for I know you are a busy man. Fifties, sixties and seventies art historical analysis was bedevilled by the understanding that black artists appeared to have a different sense of spatial scale and perspective. In the past, this led critics to talk of an entirely different category of painting called "township art". More recently, historians have angrily rejected this racialized division of genres. *Land and Lives* dramatizes contradictions around the use of landscape conventions. Pioneer artists shown here did not simply reject linear or aerial perspective, the classic hilltop gaze of the Europeanized tradition; indeed, as in the case of John Koenakeefe Mohl, they sometimes accepted it wholeheartedly. More frequently, though, these artists adapted perspectival conventions to place a greater emphasis on the relationship between the self and the collective. Looked at from across the room, Gladys Mgudlandlu's "Three Men in Blue" seems like a conventional modernist landscape, reminiscent of Maggie Loubser. I know that you cannot be here, but if you were to approach the work, you would agree that the emphasis is not on a singular gaze from on high, but on pluralities: on the formal connection between blocks of cobalt, ultramarine and raw sienna, and groups of people. Shadows are detached from the individuals, as though projected into the scene from other figures outside the frame. There is a very similar, uncanny moment in H. E. Dhlomo's 1941 epic poem "Valley of a Thousand Hills". You may know this strange work, full of magpie borrowings from Milton, formulaic Zulu praises, and biblical phrases. Unlike conventional topographical poetry, in which there is an imagined excursion of the eye from plane to plane to a distant horizon, in Dhlomo the valley is already home. Consider this odd moment: "Drunk sprawl the sleepy vales, the herds graze dumb./ In peace and sloth a dappled snake parades/ Its beauty fierce . . . was it my ancestor?" Here the self addresses itself to the immediate surroundings, not to a distant prospect or future. There is even the radical possibility that the non-human may be a form of the self in another dimension: "Was it my ancestor?"Herbert Dhlomo was a friend and sponsor of Gerard Bhengu.

Land and Lives allows a rich variety of meditations on relations between self and collective, on conventions, resistance, and unfamiliar local influences; on the importance of patrons; on the variety of landscape representation, with everything from the multiplied perspective of Mgudlandlu's men or birds, to the intense planar compression of Anna Mashinini's "My House", where the dwelling is hardly large enough to contain a life.

In the end, though, I must admit to a slight scepticism about the notion of the "pioneer". What this show represents is an attempt to

complicate our understanding of South African modernism by revealing a set of local connections and influences, out of which something new and strange was born. As a physicist you would have, I imagine, some sympathy for the idea that whole new theories may be borne from the jostling of little propositions. Perhaps like me, too, when you are able to look at this show, the dawning of your enjoyment will be coloured by a certain sadness. We are desperate to know more about the complex interaction between black painters and sculptors, here and in exile, in the early twentieth-century. However, in the very moment when we are beginning to rediscover our early "pioneers", this and other galleries have all but stopped purchasing work by South Africans. Conservation is grinding to a halt; storage conditions are appalling. Great painters like Anna Mashinini have quietly faded away. And of her work, brittle gouache on paper, the same as that characteristically used by Mgudlandlu, who can tell how it will survive? Look now, before it flakes away completely. Politicians—and I am sure you are as worried about this as I am—are driving us to define "Heritage" mainly in terms of an ethnicized crafts industry, and this in the very hour of our first coming to understand the complexity of our artistic past. We call on you to dedicate more funds for acquisition, preservation, storage, and research into works such as the ones on this show. Above all, we hope you have the chance to visit Cape Town and enjoy the chiming together of synchronous lives in this intriguing exhibition which, on the 31st of October, I had the great honour to declare open.

Yours sincerely,
DAVID BUNN

Contributor Notes

LOUIS ARMAND was born in Sydney, Australia and since 1994 has been a permanent resident of the Czech Republic. He has two collections of poetry, *Seances* (Twisted Spoon, 1998) and *The Viconian Paramour* (forthcoming from x-poezie).

RACHEL TZVIA BACK has lived in Israel since 1981. Her chapbook, *Litany,* was published by Meow Press in 1995. Recent work will appear in the anthology *Dreaming the Actual: Israeli Women Writers in the 90s* (forthcoming SUNY Press).

DOUGLAS BARBOUR lives and teaches in Edmonton, Alberta. His books of poetry include *Visible Visions: Selected Poems* (NeWest, 1984) and *Story for a Saskatchewan Night* (rdc, 1989).

ROBIN BLASER, born in 1925, Denver, Colorado; Canadian citizen, 1972. *The Holy Forest* (collected poems), 1993. Just completed the libretto for Sir Harrison Birtwistle's opera *The Last Supper,* premiere, Berlin, 2000.

CHRISTIAN BÖK is the author of *Crystallography* (Coach House, 1994). His favourite word in English is "eunoia"—not only because is the shortest word in the language to contain all five vowels, but also because it means quite literally "a pretty thought."

BEV BRAUNE was born in Jamaica and has been living in Australia since 1983. Her second volume of poetry is *Camouflage* (Bloodaxe Books, UK, 1998).

COLIN BROWNE lives in Vancouver and is currently working on a new film, *Altar,* the visual component of which is a photograph of the ship's company of a WWII corvette, HMCS Mayflower, in Halifax, Canada, 1942.

ALAN BRUNTON has worked with the New Zealand theatre group RED MOLE for 2 decades. He performs poetry with The Free Word Band. Recent work has appeared on CD *(33 perfumes of Pleasure)* and video *(Heaven's Cloudy Smile)* and as the book-length poem *Moonshine.*

DAVID BUNN's recent work has focused on contemporary South African cultural studies with particular emphasis on the relationship between texts, visual images, and landscapes. At present he is completing a book entitled *Land Acts: Modernity, Representation, and the Making of South African Space.*

CLINT BURNHAM lives in Vancouver. He is author of *The Jamesonian Unconscious* (Duke, 1995), *Steve McCaffery and His Works* (ECW, 1996), and *Be Labour Reading* (ECW, 1997). The poems that appear here are from *Buddyland* to be published by Coach House later this year.

YVETTE CHRISTIANSË is a South African-born poet who has also lived in Australia and now in New York where she teaches at Fordham University. A collection *Castaway* is due from Duke University Press in fall 1999.

SUSAN CLARK is editor of magazines *Raddle moon* and *Giantess* (with Christine Stewart and Lisa Robertson) and of a chapbook series called *Sprang Texts* (printing the texts of local readings as chapbooks).

GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE is an Africadian (Black Nova Scotian) poet. He is author of three books of poetry, including the novel-poem *Whylah Falls* (1990), two verse-plays, *Beatrice Chancy* (1999) and *Whylah Falls: The Play* (1999), an opera libretto,

"Beatrice Chancy" (1998), and a full-length screenplay, *One Heart Broken into Song* (1999).

WAYDE COMPTON lives in Vancouver. His book *49th Parallel Psalm* (forthcoming Advance, 1999) is a poetic treatment of the black presence in British Columbia from 1858 to the present.

JEREMY CRONIN has published two collections of poetry, *Inside* (Ravan, 1983) and *Even the Dead* (Ravan 1997). He is a national executive member of the African National Congress and deputy general secretary of the South African Communist Party.

WYSTAN CURNOW is a poet and art critic. He has curated many exhibitions, most recently *ACTION REPLAY, Post-Object New Zealand Art in the 1970s.* His retrospective of the New Zealand painter, Colin McCahon, for the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, opens in 2000.

INGRID DE KOK lives in Cape Town, South Africa. She has published two volumes of poetry, *Familiar Ground* (Ravan, 1988) and *Transfer* (Snailpress, 1998) as well as essays on cultural issues in South Africa.

JEFF DERKSEN lives in Calgary. Web project at http://www.lot.at/mynewidea_com. Also participant in the "But Is It Politcs" project at www.lot.at. Edited the "Disgust and Overdetermination: a poetics issue" of *Open Letter* (10/1 Winter 1998).

JOHN HIGGINS is the author of *Raymond Williams: Literature, Marxism and Cultural Materialism* (Routledge) and the founding editor of the South African journal *Pretexts: Studies in Writing and Culture.*

PETER HUDSON is a Toronto writer. In 1997 he guest-edited a special issue of *West Coast Line* entitled *North: New African Canadian Writing.*

D. J. HUPPATZ is a writer and artist living in Melbourne, Australia. In 1996 he founded TEXTBASE, a collective of writers who work in contemporary art spaces and publish a regular journal of experimental writing – http://www.skynet.apana.org.au/~samiam/textbase/textbase.htm.

PETER JAEGER lives in Toronto. Recent work includes *Power Lawn* (Coach House) and *ABC of Reading TRG: Steve McCaffery, bpNichol, and the Toronto Research Group* (forthcoming Talonbooks).

JOHN KINSELLA is an Australian living in Cambridge, England, where he is a fellow of Churchill College. He has published numerous books of poetry, most recently *Poems 1980-1994* (Bloodaxe/Dufours, 1998) and *The Hunt* (Bloodaxe/Dufours, 1998). He is co-editor of the British journal *Stand* and founding editor of the literary journal *Salt.*

ANDREW KLOBUCAR is a collective member of the Kootenay School of Writing in Vancouver. He is co-editing the KSW's first anthology of poetry. His chapbook is titled *Patron/age.*

MICHELE LEGGOTT lives in Auckland, New Zealand. Her most recent collection of poetry, *DIA* (Auckland UP, 1994) won the 1995 New Zealand Book Award for Poetry. She is the author of *Reading Zukofsky's '80 Flowers'* (Johns Hopkins, 1989). A new collection of poetry is due from AUP in 1999.

ALAN LONEY's latest book is *Sidetracks: Notebooks* 1976-1991 (Auckland UP, 1998) and his next is *Catalogue* due soon from Meow Press. He has recently retired as printer and co-director of The Holloway Press, University of Auckland, and moved to Melbourne, Australia.

ELIZABETH LOSH is a doctoral candidate at the University of California, Irvine.

KAREN MACCORMACK is the author of six books of poetry and two chapbooks, the most recetnt being *Fit to Print* with Alan Halsey (Coach House, 1998). She was born in Zambia and lives in Toronto.

STEVE MCCAFFERY is the author of over 18 books of poetry, most recently *The Cheat of Words* (ECW Press). His collected writings, *North of Intention,* appeared from Roof Books in 1986. He is co-editor of *Imagining Language* (MIT Press, 1998) and a second collection of critical writings, *Prior to Meaning: the Protosemantic and Poetics,* is forthcoming. An online version of his typestract *Carnival Panel* I can be viewed at www.chbooks.com.

ERIN MOURÉ's eighth book of poems, *The Frame of a Book,* will be published by Anansi in Toronto in spring 1999. Also in 1999, Moveable Type in Toronto will publish her *Pillage Laud* as *A Moveable Text* (by email only: emoure@total.net or bobei@odyssee.net). Mouré also works as a translator and editor and is based in Montreal, Quebec.

KHULILE NXUMALO was born in Soweto in 1971 where he now works with the Gauteng government. His writing has appeared in South African and Canadian magazines.

ANDRIES WALTER OLIPHANT has published *At the End of the Day* (1988), *Ten Years of Staffrider* (1988), *A Writing Life: Celebrating Nadine Gordimer* (1998), and edited several volumes of South African poetry and short-stories.

TOM ORANGE lives in London, Ontario. He is a doctoral candidate at the University of Western Ontario. His critical and creative works appear in *Nineteenth-Century French Studies, L'Esprit Createur, Queen Street Quarterly, Rampike,* and *Open Letter.*

MARGARET ORBELL is the author of eight books on Maori tradition, literature, and belief, including *The Natural World of*

the Maori (1985), *Hawaiki: A New Approach to Maori Tradition* (1985), *Waiata: Maori Songs in History* (1991), *Traditional Maori Stories* (1992) and *Maori Myth and Legend* (1995).

RICHARD KILLEEN lives in Auckland, New Zealand. He pursues a politics of remembering and forgetting with his multiple piece paintings that collect together a myriad of images. He also continues an obsession with artist books and collaborations of which "The Presence of the Dew" is one.

MARNIE PARSONS lives and works in London, Ontario. Her book, *Touch Monkeys: Nonsense Strategies for Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry* was published by the University of Toronto Press.

MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN is a Vancouver writer, teaching at Capilano College. She has published two chapbooks, *Terms of Sale* (Meow, 1996) and *Abstract Relations* (Keefer Street, 1998). She is working on a long poem called *The Book of Words.*

MARTHE REED lives in Perth, Western Australia.

LISA ROBERTSON is a Vancouver poet , currently writer in residence at Cambridge University. Her books are *Xeclogue* (Tsunami, 199) and *Debbie: an Epic* (New Star, 1997).

Poet CATRIONA STRANG and clarinetist FRANÇOIS HOULE have worked together for many years. "The Clamorous Alphabet" their most recent collaboration, has recently been recorded for Periplum Records. The section included here appeared as part of the chapbook Steep (Seeing Eye, 1997). They live in Vancouver.

JAMES TAYLOR is the editor of *Boxkite: a Journal of Poetry and Poetics.* His most recent collection is *Smoke Proofs* (Paper Bark, Sydney, Australia).

MERVYN TAYLOR is a Trinidad born poet who now divides his time between his native island and Booklyn, New York. He is author of two collections of poetry: *An Island of His Own* (1992) and *The Goat* due in spring 1999, both from Junction Press.

SHARON THESEN is a Vancouver poet and editor. Her most recent book of poems is *Aurora.* With Ralph Maud, she has edited *Charles Olson and Francis Boldereff: A Modern Correspondence,* due this spring from Wesleyan Univ. Press.

JOHN TRANTER has published thirteen collections of poetry including a *Selected Poems* (1982), *The Floor of Heaven* (1992), *Gasoline Kisses* (Equipage, UK, 1997), and *Late Night Radio* (Polygon, Edinburgh, 1998). He is co-editor of the *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* and the editor of the free quarterly Internet magazine *Jacket* at http://www.jacket.zip.com.au/welcome.html.

ANN VICKERY is a research fellow at Macquarie University, Australia.

DARREN WERSHLER-HENRY is a writer, critic, and the editor of Coach House Books. His first book, *NICHOLODEON,* was published in 1997; his second, *The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination: A Tapeworm,* will appear in the spring of the year 2000.

LYDIA WEVERS is currently principal researcher in the History of Print Culture Project at the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. She is a contributor to *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English.*

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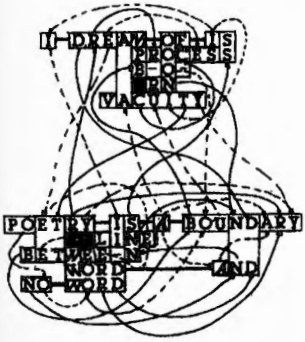

Rea Nikonova from *Lost and Found Times* issue 32

is a selection of texts and graphics from issues 1-39 of **Lost and Found Times.** It features the work of 170 contributors from North and South America, Europe and the former Soviet Union. The magazine was founded in 1975 by John M. Bennett and Douglas C. Landies and has been edited by Bennett since Landies' death in 1978. Bennett writes in his introduction "I enjoyed reading and publishing unusual work, work that at the time no one else seemed to be publishing". **Lost and Found Times** has created its own vital culture which its readers and contributors continue to both add to and draw from. Many of the latter have had a long relationship with the magazine and, through it, with each other, generating a high proportion of collaborative works. From its origins in mail art to its more recent participation at the edges of language (and what's coming to be called post-language) poetry, **Lost and Found Times** provides a model of how marginalised cultural workers can create productive areas of engagement within a network of activity.

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Sulfur 45/46

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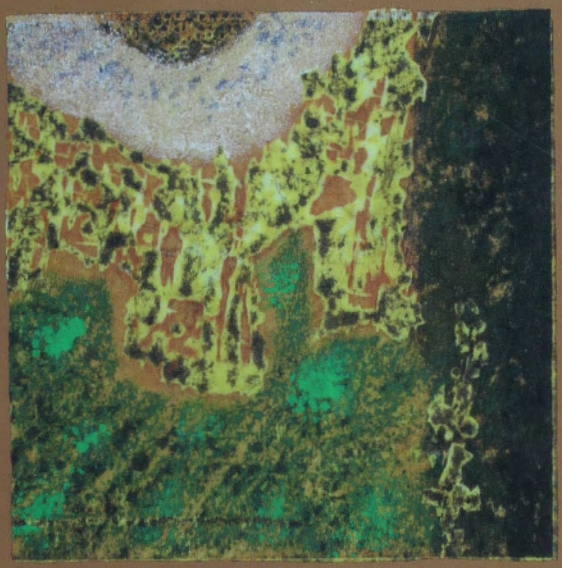

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Sulfur

SPRING 2000

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

Editor CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Contributing Editors RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS
MICHAEL PALMER
ELIOT WEINBERGER

Correspondents CHARLES BERNSTEIN
JAMES CLIFFORD
CLARK COOLIDGE
JAYNE CORTEZ
MARJORIE PERLOFF
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JEROME ROTHENBERG
ROBERTO TEJADA
KEITH TUMA
ALLEN S. WEISS
MARJORIE WELISH

Managing Editor CARYL ESHLEMAN

Editorial Assistant JODY HAWKINS

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER: "Cave V" by William Paden, hanga wood cut, 1999; shown actual size; 3 x 3"

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CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

INTRODUCTION

I had been talking with Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly, among others, about the need for another Caterpillar-like magazine that would engage multiple aspects of innovative contemporary poetry in the context of international modernism. Because the California Institute of Technology is primarily dedicated to, and known for, research in science and engineering, I proposed in 1981, while Dreyfuss Poet in Residence and Lecturer in Creative Writing, that a literary magazine, sponsored by the Humanities Division, would draw attention to the humanities at Cal Tech (I did so in somewhat the same spirit that Charles Olson, when rector, proposed to other faculty members at Black Mountain College in 1953 that a magazine might effectively advertise the nature of the college's program). Roger Noll, an economist who was then Director of the Humanities Division at Cal Tech, liked my idea and arranged with President Goldberger for Sulfur to be supported initially for five years.

The word "sulfur" evokes the sulphur, a butterfly with black-bordered orange and yellow wings. On one level, the magazine is an evolution of Caterpillar (a magazine I founded and edited 20 issues of from 1967 to 1973). On other levels, the word denotes alchemical initiational combustion, and excited or inflamed language. The word was also attractive to me because it had not been used before as a literary magazine title. There is an extended note on the word at the beginning of Sulfur #24.

The magazine originally appeared three times a year but became a biannual in 1988. Its more than 11,000 pages of material have included around 800 contributors, some 200 of which are foreign writers and artists. I began Sulfur with Robert Kelly as the sole contributing editor. Kelly disappeared due to a misunderstanding after the first issue appeared, and by the third issue, Michael Palmer, Rothenberg, and Eliot Weinberger had become the contributing editors. Throughout Sulfur's run, Caryl Eshleman has been the managing editor; she took over the magazine's design from Barbara Martin with #37. Over the years the masthead grew to its current sixteen members. Nearly all of

this group have stayed on from the time they came aboard, and all, in one way or another, have contributed actively to what Sulfur has become (in contrast to the lists of well-known names that often decorate literary magazine mastheads). Sulfur is not, and has never been, a movement magazine. I invited people to join on the basis of believing that they were very good at their chosen focus, and took the chance that while there would be real disagreements among us (see #20 and #22 for the Language Poetry controversy), we had enough in common and were all sufficiently united against "official verse culture" (effectively examined by Charles Bernstein in #10) to be able to work together.

The magazine came close to being derailed on two occasions. In 1983, I was informed by President Goldberger that there was a crisis based on the following incident: he had been using discretionary funds from the Weingart Foundation in Pasadena to support Sulfur. At one point he proudly showed the Weingart Board of Trustees a copy of #4 which included 22 Paul Blackburn poems (which would later appear, with many others, in *The Parallel Voyages,* Sun-gemini Press, 1987). One of these elderly trustees opened the magazine to Blackburn's "Birds chirp listlessly in the heat" and read it aloud to those assembled. They were outraged, and told Goldberger that Sulfur was pornographic. Not only did they not want their "discretionary" funds used to support the magazine, they wanted Cal Tech's name removed too. Goldberger told me that as much as he disagreed with this reaction, he had to honor it because of the Weingart Foundation's huge yearly donations to the Institute (mainly in the science area, I recall, but it should be mentioned that this foundation also funded a yearly "Humanities Conference" on campus). Goldberger, quite honorably I felt, offered to make good on his original five year funding commitment via other sources, so Sulfur could continue either on its own for a few years or until it attracted a new sponsor. While the Blackburn poem is genuinely shocking, it is hardly pornographic by current standards. That a single poem by this shy, unassertive poet was sufficient to nearly eliminate a literary magazine on grounds of censorship in 1983 should keep us all alert to the fact that while things seem to change, on another level, they remain stuck, and the same.

Sulfur #9, which appeared shortly after the Weingart incident, was one of the two issues without a sponsoring organization. #10 through #15 (1984-1986) were sponsored by The Writers Program in the UCLA Extension Program. In 1986, Karen Costello, who made the connection possible, left the Program and the new Director decided that Sulfur's "office benefits" imposed too much of a burden on the Program's budget. Thus #16 was published out of our home in West Los

Angeles. In 1986, when I became a professor in the English Department at Eastern Michigan University, I brought Sulfur with me. From #17 on, EMU has provided me with release time (one course per semester), a part-time graduate assistant, and "office benefits." These "benefits" have not included money for production, promotion, nor payments to authors and contributing editors. While the magazine's subscribers (around 700 at this point) and bookstore sales have off-set some of these expenses, from the mid-1980s to 1996 most of the deficit was made up by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. When we failed to get a grant in the last round of literary magazine support, we seriously considered ending Sulfur, but we did not want to be put out of business by the NEA. We have done issues #37 through #45/46 on a reduced basis, cutting down the magazine's size and press run (which meant dropping distributors which were costing us money), and stopping contributor payments. We are ending Sulfur now because we feel that the magazine has expanded and realized its initial purposes as much as is possible. I will turn 65 shortly after this issue is published and feel it is time to turn my focus solely on my own writing.

In regard to editing and content: associate editors have regularly sent me their own work, or the work of others. More often than not, I have published this work. When I was divided over such contributions (or material sent directly by would-be contributors), I sent it to three associate editors and abided by majority decision. This policy has enabled work to get into the magazine via other editors—in particular, Palmer and Weinberger—through "lateral entry." It has avoided many of the problems that occur with large editorial boards where a number of people vote on everything. Group editorial consensus tends to weed out the eccentric and the complex, filling issues with material that puzzles or offends no one.

While we occasionally published a piece of fiction when it seemed appropriate, for the most part we steered clear of fiction and drama, as it was not possible, given size restraints, to edit such material in a responsible way. The range of Sulfur's interests in poetry, poetics, and some tangential fields, made it difficult to keep issues under 200 pages. The amount of good material always determined the size of an issue; very little was held over for future issues. Here were our main focuses:

1] Translations of contemporary foreign-language poets and new translations of untranslated (or poorly translated) older works. We always checked the accuracy of the work of unknown translators. Literary magazines that restrict themselves to a national literature deprive themselves of the international network of information and cross-fertilization that is at the heart of 20th century world poetry.

2] Archival materials—unpublished, significant writings—by earlier writers, in Sulfur's case including: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, Mina Loy, Basil Bunting, Lorine Niedecker, George Oppen, Charles Olson, Edward Dahlberg and Francis Boldereff. Writers sometimes mis-evaluate or abandon significant works that if not destroyed end up in archival collections at university libraries (a great service to the literary community would be to have a checklist of all American archival holdings; the range and depth would astonish everyone). In the same spirit that living poets share international affiliations, the living are also connected to, and continue to learn from, the "great dead." To include writers of the past as a dimension of the present openly affirms such affiliations.

3] The inclusion of several unknown and usually young poets in each issue. An effective literary magazine gives the impression that anyone, with the right goods, can be a part of it, and that when you turn a page you may find a poem by Karen Kelley or Dan Featherston facing one by Gary Snyder or Adrienne Rich. If the work of the "great dead" is to be included, then the work of the talented and untested should have a place too. A novice can learn something about his own efforts by scrutinizing them in a context with mature writers.

4] Commentary, including poetics, notes, and book reviews (of a polemical as well as non-disputational nature). A crucial difference between a literary magazine and an anthology is that magazines comment on what is being published. Journals that do not publish reviews (or only publish pastel appreciations) evade revealing, and defending, a specific aesthetic viewpoint and become collection plates into which any contribution can be dropped. Certain aspects of poetry hone themselves on conflict and strife, and a literary magazine is an ideal site for the contestation of differing views.

5] Resource materials. Depending on the editor, and the availability, resource materials can vary widely. If poetry is the woof of a magazine, non-poetic source material might be the warp. The idea here is that vital writing is always dependent upon materials outside of its own discipline for the renewal and deepening of content, of extending what might be called the cleared ground of the art. Originality depends not only on voicing and technique, but on making writing responsible for previously excluded (and repressed) materials and experience. In Sulfur's case, such materials included art, art criticism, archetypal psychology, anthropology, archeology, and political commentary.

These five areas of attention (along with poetry and prose by well-known American poets) made up what could be thought of as Sulfur's personality. In a typical 225 page issue, there might be 40 to 60 pages

of commentary, several translation and art sections, and one or two archival or resource sections. Weinberger edited a special issue (#33), "Into The Past." Marjorie Perloff and Jenny Penberthy did a special issue on Anglophone Poetry and Poetics Outside the US and UK (#44). James Clifford edited and translated much of a large section on Michel Leiris (#15). Rachel Blau DuPlessis edited three presentations of George Oppen's working papers (in #25, 26, and 27). Jerry Glenn edited a large section of and on Paul Celan (#11). Caryl and I put together a group of responses to the tragic death of Ana Mendieta (#22), and with Gyula Kodolanyi, I co-translated and edited a section on Hungarian poetry (#21). Smaller sections were done on Blackburn (#4), Antonin Artaud (#9), Porfirio diDonna (#19), East German poetry (#27), Peruvian photography (#34), and the Vancouver Robin Blaser conference (#37). Sulfur #32 (at 352 pages, the largest single issue) was filled with work and edited sections by the masthead. Caryl and I also worked with Sulfur's various art editors: John Yau, Pamela Wye, and Roberto Tejada. Over 600 paintings, drawings, photographs, and sculptures were reproduced in the magazine (and on the covers), in most cases with essays or notes.

The background against which Sulfur proposed itself is anchored in the Dionysian 1960s. As crazy as the period was, with its blissful and horrendous wave-bands compounded of revolution, war, mindful and mindless introspection, it was the richest period for American poetry since the 1920s. Many of the poets of my generation experienced visionary and political internationalism as a multifoliate force spinning itself out in translations, alternative presses and magazines, enthusiastic college audiences, Vietnam War Protest, traditional magics and a heady confidence articulated by Norman O. Brown at the end of his brilliant 1966 *Love's Body:* "The antimony between mind and body, word and deed, speech and silence, overcome. Everything is only a metaphor; there is only poetry." In fact, I'm sure that I am not alone in believing during the late 1960s that an American poetry based in international modernism, and signaled by Don Allen's "the new American poetry" but not restricted to his perimeters, might become the dominant poetry of the 1970s—in other words, that a world-aware, responsible avant-garde might overcome and peripheralize decades of dominant official verse culture. After all, the impact of the work of Charles Olson was equal in its own way to that of Francis Bacon, so why shouldn't Olson occupy a place in poetry equal to that of Bacon in painting?

Dionysian excess has, built within its boundary explosions, formlessness, violence, and despair. Dionysus must, at some point in his

turmoil, find the hand of brother Apollo and swing with him, or be churned to flotsam. For me, there has always been a loose, sinister synchronicity between the crash of hippydom and popular culture (the Manson murders in Los Angeles, the debacle of The Rolling Stones' Altamont concert) and Olson's death in 1970, preceded by Robert Duncan's withdrawal and refusal to publish for the next fifteen years. The 70s flipped over, the energy dispersed.

Two obvious trends of the 1970s and 1980s were the ubiquitous spread of creative writing degree programs and Language Poetry. Of equal magnitude, but less discussed, was the development of a number of poets in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Women poets re/visioned not only the American canon but the heretofore unacknowledged patriarchal government of the history of poetry. There appeared a host of minority-oriented poetries: African-American, Indian, Chicano, gay, lesbian, performance, and many mixes, involving music and libretto, chants, and soundtexts. What was once upon a time a Right and a Left Bank (the cooked vs. raw distinction, suspect even in the 60s) became an archipelago of sites.

One reason that Olson has not become a Bacon-like presence is that American (and English) poetry has depended upon academic sanction and support. What was true for Whitman, shunned by most of the "men of letters" of his time, is still true for almost all poets today. Students buy text anthologies and read poetry because it is part of the curriculum. Doctors and lawyers do not, in any noticeable sense, but many, in a very noticeable way, collect paintings—and not merely because wealth is involved, but because paintings (and most novels, plays, and films) offer more surface than poetry. They demand a less active response. One has to work hard to get anything out of *The Cantos, The Wasteland,* or *The Maximus Poems.* In such works, there is no plot, or color field to provide an entrance level that can be bypassed by the ideal observer or just relaxed into.

By creating a "poet-professor" middle class, the writing programs have played into the hands of poetry's traditional enemies: education and entertainment. The slams and open-mike readings are offsprings of, or reactions to, the creative writing classes and courses based on Norton anthologies. It is wonderful for students to have contact with writers but I continue to believe that such contact should not take place in workshops dominated by student work and response. All of a student's time in literature should be involved with getting a small percentage of it under his belt, and coming to terms with what, in my view, poetry is really about: the extending of human consciousness, making conscious the unconscious, creating a symbolic consciousness that in its finest moments overcomes the dualities in which the human

world is cruelly and eternally, it seems, enmeshed.

While Sulfur has attempted to not support work that smacks of the creative writing workshops, we have published many Language Poets. An interesting anthology of Language Poetry, in fact, could be assembled from what has appeared in Sulfur's pages. Charles Bernstein is one of our correspondents, and other Sulfur editors are associated to varying degrees with the movement. I regard Language Poetry as a significant part of contemporary poetry but not as its primary force or focus (I don't think there is one; I think there are a couple dozen major figures today, and that they make up a crazy-quilt of emphases and directions).

Sulfur's primary ambition, as I see it, has been to keep the field open and complex, with archival and contemporary writing, along with commentary, generating a multi-generational interplay. Besides advancing the work of a number of poets in their 30s and 40s, the magazine has supported a range of those whose work has either held its significance or deepened over the 80s and 90s. Along with certain Sulfur editors, such a range would include Robin Blaser, Adrienne Rich, Jackson Mac Low, Gary Snyder, Gerrit Lansing, Amiri Baraka, Philip Lamantia, Ron Padgett, Robert Duncan, Barbara Guest, Ron Padgett, and Gustaf Sobin.

For this last issue, I solicited work from 150 past contributors. In the case of artists, when it was possible, I simply asked for recent material. In the case of writers, I asked for unpublished things that they felt represented them well at the present time. No attempt was made to elicit testimonials. I asked everyone to try to hold their contribution to two Sulfur pages. I think it is a gala issue, and that in spite of some omissions (mainly due to death and disappearances), it projects a constellation that is true to Sulfur's over-all image.

D.H. Lawrence once wrote: "Living, I want to depart to where I am." As it has been able to, Sulfur has carried forth the ore in such a thought.

—January 2000

WILL ALEXANDER

TWO POEMS *from* THE SRI LANKAN LOXODROME

WITHIN A MORE INTENSE THALASSIC

A spark from ambrosian leper fields
like darkened lightning fauna quivering
implying the force
of electricuted mass

one can never conclude
that the azoic exists
in the fiendish realm of isopods
in stunned Cambodian rivers
engorged with bloodless sea trouts
building nests of stone
from exhaustive breeding positions

& so I can say
that a Parrot Fish burns
that a populated squid equates with Medusas

or herring silhouettes
or mackerals ignited as darkened hydrogen biology
like an irradiated "pseudomorph"
oceanic with retinas

I think
of "an undescribed species of Praya"
or a monstrous protochordate
with its subdivided tail
shedding itself

like imaginary asps into the blankness
creating from its phantoms
a pre-existant methane form
or an acorn visage
or a buoyant carbohydrate

& all these sums
incandescent
whirling
emitting their powers
from the depth of "hydrozoan medusae"

A NEXUS OF PHANTOMS

In a lorikeet cave
motions exist of disintegrated swans
in a translocated lake
brimming with harvested poisons
sealed by corruptive post-mortems

such swans
staggered by microbial reasoning
their aggressive nests
anatomical with anomaly
with drifts of strenuous incarnadine leanings
with a thirst which hurtles conspiratorial invasives
alive
with coronal oceanics
open
like a clouded trail of rendings

analogous
with the "Auks" the pelicans the mergansers

perhaps
with "the petrols & the "gannets"
under the power of darted mocking orations

the swans
looking back on solemn blood perusal
like a form of death breaking roses on a shore

it is the examples of phonograms
of lost & compacted lenses
turning
within a charismatic "Fall Line"
or an "isoneph"
or what an avian would announce in Greenland
as a stray "Kabatic Wind"

the swans
like a haze of magnetism
or implied gondola locations
where the scent of each lorikeet is consumed
& brought to dazzling eclipse refulgence

in another foci
in another depth
their form self-challenged
in a cloak of suns
their power de-revealed
with 7 moons burning
reduced to 2 intense incendiary magnets

& these incendiary magnets
like a nexus of phantoms
scattered across a geometric optometry

Bruce Andrews

SNOWPONY

If if if. To tastest pinkish hypno hormone prowl. A copycat neverneverland. A jumpcut neverneverland. SEE WHAT NOT WHY DID DON'T. BIG NOISE. . .picking up your blur. Kitsch crisco—kookery; betcha goo, fill in the blinks. . . .Hello, aorta. Pixel bustier: *yo* to aloha skeletal kickbacks—you're the organgrinder here. Roughhouse too zippy. Fête accompli, scatter invents—diagonal with some shag pixie yessified, slantland redemptivitis. What I want is. . .how it isn't.

Ballroom say-so, props that cheat; chewy furniture, spellbound hellhound. Hot buttered anything pulp your tact. One toy wish: you are one tasty thing. Marinated optimism, popeye dada—I'm characterizing, O.K.? You're in the wrong species. Ipso-fiasco, naughty by nurture—literacy is boss. Va va voom, ape the usual. Bleep of the century, moody to max. Fluffy. . .accurate. . .*big bam!*

Don't play with my underwire. Speak to the bite. Show me the giblets, sling onto brain. Make me blow my whistle. Unwilling to take interpersonal risks—girlish, cooperative. . .the heart runs errands. Lace hands behind head. Retinal wig-out misterioso—three-headedness. We ain't going to give it back. Splashfest: chaosophy—buh-bye, buh-bye torsofuck run amoks. Failing your anger management tutorial? Ain't we got a right? Fuzzy your rabbit, cut to the choice. You have beautiful minutiae. Jingle-bells, come flip the future. Or *don't feed this animal.* We could be less bubbly. We could be party-lighting. We could form teams.

Ho.
Che. Sudsiest
Orbitizzy, red-light never skins one.
(Winkwink say no more.)
Little extras. . .catnip mountains.
Mind your own candystore.

You're *styling;* you're *money*—
Relax, dear. Surveillance does that to me—in the
Past. . .tense. . .is so possessive. Sizzleable
Membrane jalapeno—in the U.S.S.A.
Chuckleheader—mosh clit.
Ting-aling. . .fi-nal-ly. Prognosis licked clean. Power
Makes me think. Ecstatic syntax, post-glitching. Pillow verticals,
Jubilee per crush. Make a faucet with your fist, squeeze me another
Boundary. Mapping the slurp: exersissy beefheart cupcake. A lovebite
Set-up, performative hula.
HANDWRITTEN TYPO. . .JUSTIFY THE NIGHT. The
I, that empty suit. Slang pupae, larger bounce, parentheses
Standing at attention. *Son montuno, guaguanco.* Let me be
Your prisoner of war. Biology of tomorrow. Raw
Toyish jackpot giggle—who blew the whistle on the pompoms. Smile
That. Sultrier obsessiveness. Chiffon protein. Gimmicks
Go platinum, bigger bigger milking *ritmo* optimo squiggle. I will
Opt. Lickedysplit, bust up the muzzle. Stutterstepping
Banquet—a teddy in denial.

A pronoun hostess. Not *that* you would. . .
Not that you *would*. . .
Not that you would. . .
Not that *you* would.
Adorado,
Fire next time.
Gag me a transition, toss off the blink.

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

ACROSS EUROPE

(Trans. from the French by Ron Padgett)

To Mr. Ch.

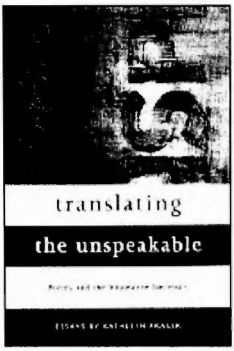
Rotsoge
Your scarlet face your biplane that can change into a seaplane
Your round house where a smoked herring swims
I need the key to eyelids
Fortunately we saw Mr. Panado
And we're reassured on that account
What do you see my old Mr. D. . .
90 or 324 a man in the air a calf that looks through its
    mother's belly

I searched a long time on the road
So many eyes are closed along the road
Open open open open open up
The old man is washing his feet in a basin
Una volta ho inteso dire Chè vuoi
I started to cry remembering all your childhoods
And you alone showed me a terrifying shade of violet

This little painting with a car in it reminded me of one day
A day made of pieces mauve yellow blue green and red
In which I was going out to the country with a charming
    chimney her dog on a leash
It's all gone you don't have your kazoo anymore
Far away the charming smokestack is smoking her Russian
    cigarettes
The dog is barking at the lilacs
The night lamp has burned out

Petals have fallen on the dress
Two gold rings near the sandals
In the sun have caught fire
But your hair is the trolley
Going across Europe dressed in little multicolored lights

NEW



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RAE ARMANTROUT

SYSTEMIC

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Research indicates
that the shift

from cars to trucks
reflects a desire

for solid
conviction.

Day breaks.
Dog's bark shoots

through the soles of my feet
to my crotch.

*

There *was* light
and I was trying to catch up,

to understand what had happened
retrospectively

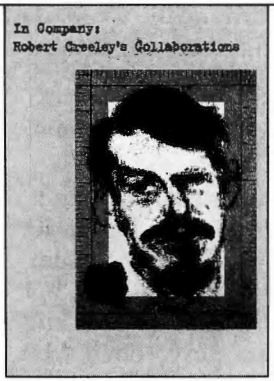
by barking
appropriate commands.

This season
frozen hoopla

will ornament
exchanges.

Calls to worship
disposable stand-ins

appear
in every hand.



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ANTONIN ARTAUD

REVOLT AGAINST POETRY

(Trans. from the French by Clayton Eshleman)

We have never been able to write without triggering an incarnation of the soul, but it was already formed, and not by us, when we entered into poetry.

The poet who writes is concerned with the Word and the Word has its laws. It is in the poet's unconscious to believe automatically in these laws. He believes himself to be free and he is not free.

*

There is something behind his head, around the ears of his thought. Something is budding in his nape, where it existed even before he began. He is the son of his works, perhaps, but his works are not of him, for what there is of himself in his poetry was put there not by him, but by this unconscious producer of life who chose him as its poet and whom he himself did not choose. And who has never been well disposed toward him.

*

I don't want to be the poet of my poet, of that ego that wanted to appoint me poet, but the poet creator, in rebellion against the ego and the self. And I remember the ancient rebellion against the forms that advanced against me.

*

It is through the revolt against the ego and the self that I rid myself of all the evil incarnations of the Word which were never anything more for man than a compromise of cowardice and of illusion and who knows what abject fornication between cowardice and illusion. And I don't want a word that comes from who knows what astral libido that was totally conscious of the formations of my desire in myself.

My gratitude to Deborah Treisman for crucial corrections in a draft of this translation.

*

There is in the forms of the human Word some predatory operation, some predatory self-consumption in which the poet, focusing on the object, sees himself eaten by that object.

A crime weighs on the Word made flesh, but the crime is in having admitted it. Libido is animal thought and it was the animals who, one day, were changed into men.

*

The word produced by men is the idea of an invert buried by the animal reflexes of things and who, through the martyrdom of time and of things, has forgotten that the word was invented.

The invert is a man who eats his self and expects his self to nourish him, he seeks his mother in his self and wants to keep her for himself. The primitive crime of incest is the enemy of poetry and the killer of its immaculate poetry.

*

I don't want to eat my poem, but I want to give my heart to my poem and what is my heart to my poem. My heart is what isn't me. To give one's self to one's poem is also to risk being raped by it. And if I am Virgin for my poem, it should remain virgin for me.

*

I am that forgotten poet, who one day saw himself fall into matter, and the matter will not devour me, not me.

I don't want those aging reflexes, product of an ancient incest due to an animal ignorance of the Virgin law of life. Ego and self are those catastrophic states of being in which Living Man allows himself to be imprisoned by the forms of himself that he perceives. To love the ego is to love a corpse and the law of the Virgin is infinity. The unconscious producer of ourselves is that of an ancient copulator who indulges in the basest of magics and who has discovered a magic in the infamy of endlessly reducing oneself to oneself in order to make a word emerge from a cadaver. The libido is the definition of that cadaverous desire and fallen man is an inverted criminal.

*

I am that primitive made unhappy by the inexpiable horror of things. I don't want to reproduce myself in things, but I want things to be produced by me. I don't want an idea of the ego in my poem and I don't want to recognize myself in it.

*

My heart is that eternal Rose that grew from the magic power of the initial Cross. The one who crucified himself in Himself and for Himself never came back to himself. Never, for this himself through which he sacrificed Himself he also offered to Life after having himself forced it to become the being of his own life.

*

I want only forever to be that poet who sacrificed himself in the Kabbala of the self to the immaculate conception of things.

—Rodez, 1944

JEAN-PAUL AUXEMERY

FLAME IN THE DESERT

(Trans. from the French
by Nathaniel Tarn)

The road
takes us along

the line of the dune's ridge
stays firm under our feet

on the plain hip beats against goatskin
and pace scans rhythmically that patient thirst

this sun thinks high, his strength convinces
this sun instructs us about our drawn-out duty

at stop, bodies collapse, at night
this whole effort to follow and exhaust thins out

eye bronzes over, lamp oil discourses,
a new indulgent day comes out to birth,

& the wing of Ghazali's butterfly
caught in the fire's silk:

he is flame's lover,
he feeds on this dawn's light
as long as distant, Corbin is quoting

—soon as he nears
morning illumination
transforms and changes him

becomes himself flame's sustenance–

Flame weaves through him flame's way:

he is in turn his own self's nourishment
become the object of his own desire.

***

Devoured by this jealous fire we are entranced
our desire sees us as distant, furrows us where we are.

Ladder from a well's depth mounts and descends,
lamp follows moving multiples of miners' bodies.

Eyes climb, with muffled bodies crawling.

Butterfly's flame burns, looking through the night
at the wing light and slow which breathes,

–it's herself,
the archangel's purple wing envelops.

***

Desert's well – inverted sky:
algorithms, sources, gazes.
Water of light drowns this long weariness–
degrees fade out, we go on down, we march
we go on down, we sink, we go bring up from depth
water of light, we go on down, degrees
are our solid grounded steps–now we are sunk,
we are in depth of depths, flame is that source.

Our thirst, our patience,–their equation.

AMIRI BARAKA

SATURDAY SCHOOL

Where plays the steeple the people the simple episodes of what
Is not yet in sight. Though you fight, and have the might
The things you seek are not yet in sight
Not quite, but look again, past your own limitations
To the heavings and great impulses that sway and shift
And befuddle this nation. Not yet old enough to be fully seen
Just Bashes of brilliance amidst the steady beat the criminally obscene
For all that, and yet, here in eternity, with Marx and Lenin, Mao and
Them. Fred and the Good Dr, With Paul Robeson, Nkrumah, Nat
Turner, Margaret Walker, Cabral, Ida B, Fanny Lou, Tubman, Ho Chi
Minh, Toussaint, Maceo, Malcolm, Lu Shun,
Zora and all, here is a sense, that what we do is just begun, and till you
see another place what you call space, and it be there, visible as where
your leg ends, you will you be, all thee
For whom seeing is yet in the future, with freedom and consciousness,
Hewers of wood, and carriers of soil, De classed Monkeys, a full
decimal away from Human, a whole turn of the world from civilization,
Got a unicycle in the bicycle show, Went from idol to idle but you still

ain't hip to idyll. Did go from four legs to three legs, but that made you
a lame, Don't dig the square is on the bottom, and the point goes all the
way out, and the pyramids, three sides four times, is History and The
futures describing a hora, why the music is in time and the sound is in
space, and the sun is in its raise, and infinity never finishes, so there is
no starting line. That each bullet of our being, our isness and areness is
the color of our story and whoever we are not, just to fly again within it
is the you we ask of I. Could you, would you, when you dig whose
thinking and why the self is gone, That each increment and motion,
Each (visible self of) change is mirrored in the everywhere, as sound
and color and smell and taste and feeling, the Angels of Information
Reformation, vast Engels of the whole being, as it books and Tranes and
splits, from out to in, from un to seen, gone from here, arriving there.
That it is the soul, that travels, a being and spirit reflect of the Sun, who
we are the creations of, the Eve, the Am, The Are, Is Is. And One-Eyed
Jack,worships the dead body hewed ignorant from stone, now sleeps
Inside the pulse of the path where he goes. Were we to spend our time
digging the actual the natural the truth and we own beings, to born the
other eye, ourselves reflection. Come out from behind the veil, the

nothing mythology hiding the world, so we float in ignorant
mist
Insisting our animal cravings make us human, when we plead
in
metaphysical desperation for the real, and we hover above it,
on it
actually, we cannot see that where our leg ends, our feet like
all of
nature touch, always, the truth. If we touch it with our souls,
the
bottom of our shoes, our soles, for some the heels.

—1998

SUSAN BEE

TWO PAINTINGS

Beware the Lady, 1999
Mixed media & collage on linen; 50 x 40"

Her Candle Burns Hot, 1999
Oil & collage on linen; 48 x 34"

STEPHEN BARBER

THE DEVILISHNESS OF THE HUMAN BODY: AUGUST WALLA

For any artist who now makes images of the human figure in Europe, a crucial question must be how much of the visual sensation and the multiple layers of Europe's recent history will be compulsively inserted—by accident or design—within all imageries of the body. As Europe enters a phase of escalating disintegration, its artists are increasingly confronted by the power of the body as a channel into the intricate situation of an endangered and uncertain existence. At other moments of profound creative obsession with the body, such as Paris at the end of the 1940s, the preoccupation with physical material was based around the desire to penetrate into its structures, to discover new corporeal dimensions, to reveal the astonishment of a new image of the body. Such a world bound into the projection of the physical might be irreparably fractured, like that of Artaud, or swarming with the mass of faces which transfixed Henri Michaux, but it remained an authentic world of the reinvented body. By contrast, the events of 1989 and the subsequent decade of acute upheaval in central and eastern Europe have created a new preoccupation with the body as the anguished subject of a sudden historical blackout; an imagery of the body is emerging in which existence is sutured together out of the accumulating collection of anxieties which make up the artist's perceptual resources. Over that last decade, the scars of the Second World War have been unscreened and set into violent collision with the present moment; the images emerging catch the panoramic trajectories of this collision, and concentrate them into the presentation of the assailed human body.

As a child in eastern Austria during the Second World War, the artist August Walla lived in isolation with his mother. Since his father was permanently absent and he had no contact with men, when August heard Hitler speaking on the radio, he assumed that this was the voice of his father. At school, he liked to declare that 'Everything red is devilish,' and he narrowly avoided being sent to a concentration camp. As a young man, he began to paint on every surface he encountered—television sets, furniture, roads, trees—revealing a joint preoccupation

with the body and with history. The body was always Walla's, but transformed from identity to identity, multiplied and multi-sexualized, under the pressure of the history which terrorized him. Walla's inhabitation by the turmoil of European war and its dominant role in the creation of his identity led to the use of symbols surrounding his imagery of the body and determining its nature and sexuality—swastikas and hammer-and-sickles proliferated and extended out to mythical and religious signs; the bodies he painted were split between possessing these symbols—as physical attributes emanating from the creative act in order to fill and secure the world—and being catastrophically robbed of identity by them. When Walla's mother became too ill to care for him, he arrived as a voluntary patient at the renowned Artists' House, a center of creative experimentation established in the grounds of the Lower Austria mental hospital near Vienna, where he works incessantly, his preoccupations fueled by magazine and televisual imagery.

It is largely through this isolation and retirement from life in society that Walla's paintings work as a sensitive seismography for the upheaval of the body in Europe. His paintings demonstrate a compulsion to produce an open, unending narrative about the dangers to the body which he vividly perceives: conflagration, mass murder, dismemberment of populations. For Walla, the world is menaced by an imminent and total fragmentation, and it is the work of the body to collect and show these fears. Walla's prolific output has an interchangeable feel to it, each painting presenting a set of the irresolvable and aggravated elements of a tenuous human existence. The space of the painting is a saturated arena of combat between the figure and whatever forces come to obliterate it; the dynamics of the image are governed by impulsion and expulsion—Walla's body is a meticulously designed set of expressive orifices, which expel fluids and substances as a way of combating physical extinguishment. The death of the body is the thing to be feared most, just as the death of history may result from an excess of atrocity. In distancing himself from the banal detail of life, Walla has been able to remove the mediation between the vulnerable human body and the integrally oppressive, engulfing world of Europe—thus investing his work with a poignant directness and an aura of extremity.

Walla is a compiler and creator of textual as well as physical languages; his paintings are streaked with exclamatory texts which enumerate the splinters of identity that are generated by the volatile image of his body. Besides Walla's own name, those of Hitler, Stalin and German political leaders are frequently cited, together with those of archaic historical figures, and of religious figures (angels, Satan—Walla views himself as living in a half-hell, an interstice of limbo between self

and history, between language and raw image, between death and resuscitation). Others of his texts are taken from a reading from dictionaries and media sources, words selected for their sonorous and rhythmic power; the texts are multilingually compounded—mashed and intermingled to form bizarre ejaculatory units of language. Walla's painting is gestural—each gesture generated from a desire to retaliate violently against the precariousness of existence, as well as from the exhilaration which such a situation necessarily engenders. Walla's gesture cements text and image around an individual obsessional content of corporeality and self-focussed sexuality; gesture becomes the manual projectile which amalgamates the visual and the textual, into an image possessing resistance against the effusive dangers to the corporeal identity of the artist.

As with all artists whose worlds are in perpetual upheaval, Walla is a great fabricator of identity. From the debris of his self, he has constructed a carapace of myth and omniscience around his capacity to multiply and metamorphose his physical identity. His painting depicts a set of instruments and defensive totems which have been extracted from the body, to guard against the catastrophic intrusion of external forces which may bring to the body its loss, chaos and death, in the form of a mortal invasion of the deified and unique space of the body. For these threats to be subjugated, Walla's obsession with survival must manifestly be made real, through the insistence and the repetition of the image. Walla's self becomes imprinted everywhere around the site of his body (through, for example, painting on roadways) as the means of securing the self's existence; the body makes its incursion from private obsessionality, back out into the exterior space of the world. In this work of surviving in the world through an imagery of the body, Walla has created an immediate and unique corporeal language.

The ongoing upheaval of central and eastern Europe has made all artists and writers there doubt their father's voice as void and illusory, and has compelled them to interrogate their identities and creative sources with urgency. The rise of neo-fascism in countries such as Austria, compounded by resurgent racism, necessitates a refusal to submit to calamity. Walla's individual strategies of refusal, with their axis in the endangered human body, are vital signs of life.

Bei Dao

TWO POEMS

(Trans. from the Chinese
by Eliot Weinberger
and Iona Man-Cheong)

#4 UNTITLED

Rubbing this bruise I see an instant of brilliance
an axe startles a sea on strike awake
all the keys are taken out and inserted in the same night
lamplight

how calm the times exposed on earth
like the rooftop that splits the floodwaters
the fate of birds in a climate of change
known by the wind that reads the fingerprints of moonlight

throw a stone to ask the way the book ten times reality
obstructs the calling of the witnesses
all existing doubts point toward love
in the presence of dead friends whose smiles float up

#17 MOON FESTIVAL

Lovers holding pits in their mouths
make vows and delight in each other
till the underwater infant
periscopes his parents
and is born

an uninvited guest knocks at my
door, determined to go deep
into the interior of things

the trees applaud

wait a minute, the full moon
and this plan make me nervous
my hand fluttering
over the obscure implications of the letter
let me sit in the dark
a while longer, like
sitting on a friend's heart

the city a burning deck
on the frozen sea
can it be saved? it must be saved
the faucet drip-drop drip-drop
mourns the reservoir

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

from "NEW ANGELS / TRANSIENT FAILURES", the Prologue to *Shadowtime*, an opera with music by Brian Ferneyhough

Walter Benjamin:
In the context of poetic density
All figures acquire identity

Friedrich Hölderlin:
Near is
And difficult to grasp

WB :
The impenetrability of relation resists
Every mode of comprehension
Other than that of feeling

H:
Your foot, does it not walk
On what is true, as upon carpets?

WB :
The poeticized, which is identical with life–

H:
You are a lonely deer.
Your timidity is your way
Of entering the world.
This is your courage.

WB:
And after? What awaits?

H:
Nothing waits
But the motionless space
Between things

To which you surrender
As song

WB:
Death a veil
That opens
Onto a void

H:
In which the heavenly
Gathers itself

WB :
Radiantly porous

H:
Sacredly sober

WB:
But beauty
Is never in the lifting
Of a veil.
It is the secret
Of its enfolding

H:
Are not the living—
Many of them—
Known to you?

WB:
What is alive
Can be perceived
Only by means
Of what is not.
The dead speak
But only the living
Hear them

H:
Returning, forming into itself, coming home—

Robin Blaser

PENTIMENTO

did he, did she look everywhere
for the contentment
of the word God–
among puzzled faces
herding the red cows–

a slight cough on the mountain top–
when someone looked out
at the *magnus animus,*
the word God must have been a glottal stop

"Somewhere," they said
over the flickering butchery–
cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet–
and *the burning lamp passed*
among those pieces–
the blood splashed on ariel

well, I was driving to heaven,
a face in the moon, but couldn't
get my foot on the brake

Ariel! Ariel! life as life
moves through this and thin–

Ariel! Ariel! life as life,
stalked by a truant deity,

why did you chose ideomotoring,
religious and secular, Absolutes
of coming stillness, unable
to dance chance

I, who has gone into his questions,
I was there dancing on the leck,
where crows eat snow—my hearts
racing all my life, finding a plaster
torso with a tag on it that said
it was Walt Whitman's—manna grass

I put that line in a coconut and drank it up

the neighbors have a wooden robin—very still
'til the wind hits—wooden, whining wings—
events—a weather vane—weathercock of
the way the wind flows—fane or fana
of thought—vane of a windmill—vane
of a feather—vane of a congress of such
birds—vaned attempt—to see directions—
for the love of destination—new fountain
the smoke of art

the I is a pentimento—Ariel's freedom

—for Patrick Wright
1 January, 2000

Rachel Blau DuPlessis

DRAFT 47: PRINTED MATTER

Crisis synthesis. Last things. Mutter it, mumble lost. Reconstitution. "distant reXeroxes of Lascaux" punctured page. Graffiti so piled and interleaved that the wall matter horn mounted piles of scrap metal hand space on the non-dimensional edge underworlds. it and writing. Industrial Grade Server needed. Cross over, arrested, keening by kenning. Mark PASQ. The line. Empty body of the mother, mattering. Nattering. Asterism—post-identity constellation. Pot. Action dipper. Regeneration of the cosmopolite. the non-compliant glides below radar. yet Endless participation in Tainted Processes. Shopkeeper killed for cash. Nostalgia: worst case scenario. Clay. The solid chunk of letter procters Dark. "Perpetrator's Memory." in Woven Flax. apprentice from "the chaos of the wise" fits feet both sides of the grave. talks up Androgynous Post-realism. Cluster of zebra whites over lavender. is it manna or mama? Do Exit the nicely landscaped parking lot. Printing Matting. Scurrying Lens. Fade her "I know" different hands and the spotted horse "how little I know" to reassemble Gaze. gauzy veil Penis on halfshell as Venus. Resemble glaze. English as a foreign language. argile Argive "with edgy certainty"; thus retool matted hypnopompic skills. Two glasses for set ups: gathering and scattering. Mirror of drivenness. If you become your own dead, what follows? My mote her. Continuous Half-War; Headlines' titles hail us. Bitty pears petits poires. Titles titties. Canyoned in the rockfall of alphabetic signs and leached gemstones. Faceted Tod. Pebbles and crumbs of bread, deep trail. Self-sharded, rip bits of the ownflesh and scatter them. Both at hand. Hanging by the Earthen door. Extruded on a hill: stackwood. Oven flesh. Rage and joy of matter reisistant to one's powerless mortification Rath and late. The pawing minotaur. Ton. 2000 pound-year multiple exposure tree."infolded rose" and eclipse, or abandonment. Strip mall recollected in tranquility.The workshop of abyss. Ball of potential rolling down the chuckleheaded corridor. Where it goes, it goes. Mouth her. Griots are kind of human shadow. My fate-hr's "potent orphanhood": it's answer prints. "Beauty Supplies. Hardware. Human Hair. Discount." Find madder lake on the Colour Atlas. To be Making

oedipalization a permeable membrane "an ongoing widening opening a course in motion" tumble bulbous sandstone. One Graffito simple: was $$. PASQ. Dreamed out words Name in reddrawn outline flame. Is it data or dada? Insurgent foreignness. Who dumped mercury tainted concrete? Turd erosion windform. cadmium Petals rattling and pulling away. Poor beggars thought it fertilizer. Fuck what. Step away. Linked by looks and locked by depots. Dumps that burn up bode ill. 911. Fate her mate. Goes in Tales. Poison appel; prisoned nipple. Generation of detail. Chords he played blowing flute note and droning humming. Moth Fat. Vulvular zigzags. Streak or counterscore. Canned beans pretty labels. A hole a line a hold a lie a limn largesse and held. Helden Be Holden: was through! passage uncurtailed. Milke pouring. Cuyp Landscape with Big Bunnies. and Curly Conies. Controlled-risk leisure Investment Niche. Lang surface: scrapes, chirps subordinate clause of uhh. coding by DocuComp. double blank admit: Intervene in Aeolian environment. Marcelled hair by Duchamp. Stinking roots and tumors. In the pallid lies of the present. They thought it was fertilizer. Strip mall. Striped her. Eat. Eat the dead breast flesh. The waste trade. Deep matter, crawl into it, chthonic last. Drape the leather over it, shoemaker. Clarification of detail.light like lava a long folded prism of dark silver. Spread it on the now-doomed fields.Talisman of Hairs. Show maker. Codine drip, blue slop dropped the does-it dose into mouth. Her. Our Lady of the Highways, I 95, north of Balto. I'm the mother. In real time, past time, vision time, it in little, dream time. Smudge on the wall, the embrasure flute-lip, little abutment. Look where one part of the machine fits the other, but a space. For sight. for pleasure fore. Time. roughened. High Tumultuous Obsessive. More new old dream. Drum Her grisaille stonelikd body. Encaustic realism: Slice of truth. In the middle of invented hell, to think up the stench of green mold fuzzed out on a rotting orange. Big bull light foot engorged on rock face. The surplus of marks over deep schist—a polemicial kinship. pinhole PASQ. "5 you-have-to-crawl-in-them caves" microtones and bent notes. Diverticulitis. New theory of the image: rage. Way either. Page is an artificial setting for what is at stake in the tunnel, rooted in transverse inadequacies. Xerox of a Fax loses edges' center. All the letters go to X's. Stretto unter Toll. Shadowy randomness made voice by the mark.The sweating walls. carve on ledge edge spots. Open wall. the incised teeming. Nomadic monorhyme. Engolding meltdown of the detail. Mother pouring oil. Be even more Herekleitan. Read the spotted wall. Plethora of detail.Who blew and swallowed ochre. Blood that turned time inside out. Mother abstract. Whisper hold. and let fall inchoate. writing The equivalent of incest. Develop negatives. Simplification.When awake. Stampede mother playing ragtime. Great clerk of typology. Begun with

a thing. Layered intestinal animals spastic avalanche. Mean it Rage time.The alchemical text. In that it be the otherside. Water on the moons of Jupiter. Wet Unstable cliff, hand over hand. Clay. know you had The language crust. Ton. Will sing the song mama. manouvering the underneath. Mole. old mole. Ole Moll. strata of cultural residue dripping cold and moist to the touch. Break and fissure in clarity. Oil mom. That otherSplit seam of the earth. Drink from 2 glasses: hope and hopelessness. PASQ. Blocked the door, got interior window. Made the window a door. Conversation between whats. Call waiting. About the levels: get down. Go down. Herd on When asleep. low tech distributed learning. Modern and poetmodern. Failed political change: that's when everyone goes home, no one comes back. Flat darkroom in the mother's closet. Yearning ossuarial. Find another house inside that house. That big man was their mother. To go to the underneath rath, antipodes. Blow the umber thru the Tampex tube. Shaft Tor. Eclogues are dispossession. Georgics are rusted out of deadcapital factories dumped urban corridor. Scattered and dispersed what thought? Public sperm. mistake of bureaucracy is rendered fat. Trapped and pushed at the same speed. Aggressive Driver Imaging in Use. Elegy as who is whom. Disposible Populaces. sHe who cam. Street Artist. Twisted with pity, for there's her poisoned tit. Ballad journalism. Fix as 12/25/99, 2:23 PM clause structure and verb sacred. In a hush of grammar slang. Insomnia: clash of the paralytic indemnifying: Bobble the babble. Clash of the titans. Mouth-gap: words fallin on death ears. PASQ. Draught warning. "Forme poetry is a matter." Many words spelt work. Spelled wront. Won't. Wrong. "did my mother die or not"? Pace conjuncture. Eminent elite scholrs. one way edutack business. Trillium is wake-robin. Mother in the body bag. Not smothering, because not breathing. Long high narrow exaggerated strait door, stories high. at the curb, American street trash. No "liklihood." È She. 10 green for $5.20. Lyre in lire. Frozen solid deer haunch resembled rifle. Vigorous scribbles suggest deep space.Those sinking underthe. Long silences. Nonetheless full. Mothershadows and mothershadow words. Clay slip.Sleep with her nouns if you can find them. Ton. Turn. Five prizes: broken glass in five colors: carmine, sanguine, terra di siena bruciata, terra d'ombra bruciata, and deep madder lake. È She le Man. Onomastic acoustic. Shattered to shards ten times more numerous than the unbroken amphora.Wiry face hairs knife on the pig of the page. Mucca, moo cow. Motivated detritus. Extant Ashman. That was now. The long end of dirt: read.Vole poet. Flying vole or crawling voll. Full Impasto Ahead. It is all door.

—for Clayton Eshleman
December 1999

Lorna Bieber

TWO PHOTOGRAPHS

Patio/Umbrella, 1997
Silver Print, 75 x 49"

Hanging Plant/Roof, 1998
Silver Print, 71 x 41"

ANDRE BRETON

THREE DREAMS

(Trans. from the French by Mark Polizzotti)

I.

. . .In Pantin, I am walking up Route d'Aubervilliers toward the Town Hall when, in front of a house where I once lived, I run into a funeral procession, which to my astonishment is heading not toward but away from the cemetery. I soon come abreast of the hearse. Sitting astride the casket, an extremely pale older man wearing mourning clothes and a top hat, who must be the deceased, is waving to the passers-by, turning sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right. The procession advances straight into a match factory.

II.

I arrive in Paris and walk down the stairs of a train station much like the Gare de L'Est. I feel a terrific need to urinate and get ready to cross the square, where I know I can get relief, when several feet away on my side of the street I discover a small-scale urinal, of a new and quite elegant model. No sooner do I reach it than I notice the urinal is mobile and, as I'm not alone here, I also realize that this mobility has its drawbacks. All things considered, it's just another vehicle, and I decide to remain on the platform. From there I can see the worrisome, nearby swoops of a second "flying toilet" similar to ours. Unable to draw the other passengers' attention to its erratic flight and the danger it poses to pedestrians, I jump off and persuade the careless driver to leave his seat and follow me. He's a young man, less than thirty; his replies to my questions are highly evasive. He claims to be a military doctor, and of course he has a driver's license. A stranger to the city we're in, he says he has come "from the brush," without being more specific. Doctor though he may be, I try to convince him that he himself might be ill, but the symptoms he lists for me belong to a wide variety of diseases, beginning with different fevers: symptoms with which he doesn't present, and which moreover are of the most basic clinical sort. He ends his account with the reflection, "At most, I might only be a general paralytic.". . .

III.

Evening, at home. Picasso is ensconsed in the sofa, at the corner of two walls; but this Picasso is halfway between his current state and that of his soul after his death. He is sketching absently on a pad. Each page contains only a few rapid strokes and the enormous figures of the asking price: 150 francs. He barely answers me and doesn't seem to care that I found out how he spent his time in Beg-Mall, where I'd arrived shortly after his departure. The shadow of Apollinaire is also in the room, standing against the door; it seems somber, filled with troubling thoughts. It agrees to let me come out with it, though I have no idea where it's going. As we walk, I'm dying to ask it a question, a question of some importance, for want of being able to hold a real conversation. But what is it I wish to know, more than anything! No doubt it will satisfy my curiosity only once. What good would it do to ask Apollinaire what's become of his political convictions since his death, reassure myself that he's no longer such a chauvinist, etc.! After much thought, I decide to ask what he thinks of himself as we knew him, of the more or less great poet he once was. This is, I believe, the second time he has been asked about this and I hasten to apologize. Does he feel his death was premature, and can he at all enjoy his posthumous fame? "No and no." He admits that when he thinks about Apollinaire, it's as if about a stranger for whom he feels no more than a bland sympathy.

We are about to turn onto a Roman road and suddenly I think I know where the shadow is leading me (it won't take me by surprise, I'm quite proud of that). Indeed, at the far end of this road stands a house that occupies a considerable place in my life. Inside it a corpse is lying on a bed, which is bathed in a phosphorescent glow; around the bed, hallucinatory phenomena, which I have witnessed, occur at certain intervals. But we are still far from arriving, and already the shadow is pushing open the two panels of a dark red door framed by gold buttons. I get it, it's only a brothel. Unable to make it change its mind, I regretfully take my leave of the shadow and turn back. I am soon confronted by seven or eight young women, who have come away from a group that I can barely make out to my left, and who, *all four of them,* block my path with outstretched arms. They're trying mightily to make me go back again. I finally manage to get rid of them by dint of compliments and promises, one more cowardly than the next.

I've now taken a seat in a train, opposite a girl in mourning who has, it seems, behaved badly, and who is being scolded by her mother. She is being offered a chance to show remorse, yet she stubbornly keeps silent.

[ca. 1924]

MARY CAPONEGRO

ODRADREK
(The Cares of a Family Woman)

I haven't the slightest idea what comes out of my ass anymore, as I go down the stairs trailing detritus (after all night shedding skin to sate the dust-mites), as I move from room to room, for what purpose I couldn't say, with what I ingest and excrete clinging to my form, I with four ropey cords never clipped from my forward hatch, perpetually wrapping around my thighs and calves as the offspring attached to them thud down the stairs. (Given that name, you would think they might actually bounce!—though once bones are less soft, they will learn by necessity.) Fortunately they bear me no grudge, but oh, how they badger me for a pet, as if there were room. Be content with the mites, importunate ones! But then to appease them, I play their favorite twirling game. We five make a single whirling dervish. Oh how they love when we swing thus about, and I all the while praying no one smash against wall or appliance or vase.

Still worse, there's vacuuming, futile as it is; for trying to manipulate the wand through this tangle is a terrible challenge, and one of them is always playing hide and seek with the cracked nozzle. The unit's retractable cord competes with their four—they grasp for it and howl with glee if, tugging hard, they manage to yank it from the socket and watch it reel back into its housing with a thwack—they, whose color would conveniently stand apart but for the dust and dreck that each has accumulated over the years (and which no amount of domestic engineering could eradicate). Do I imagine one was once pink, another blue, as blue as the proliferating varicose veins they bequeathed me? Wasn't one yellow for several weeks?—jaundice, as I recall, but I have my own cure—I have dust! By layers of dust I determine their ages when I wish to identify them, ask a question, make a suggestion, have (in an ideal world) a conversation. (In another ten years perhaps a meaningful conversation!) The most heavily coated, my eldest, at her best will monitor the youngest, but at her most mischievous will gnaw his cord with her teeth, setting an irresistible example, as the other three follow suit, each hungry for its sovereignty.

And why must I be the one to say, enough of that!? Why must I twist my neck so far that it nearly snap to monitor this behavior?—I whose complete concentration is required to go full speed ahead, which is to say, plod along, doing chores, keeping order, of a sort, keeping body and soul together, keeping bodies together. And then when night comes, what mobility is left to strain my jaw for his fulfillment? Well, he says, mount me then, go ahead, and I laugh like a drunk gibbon at his nostalgia. Are you out of your mind? And of course this wakes them who are never farther than the door, scratching like cats, with the pinched cords barely fitting through the slat at the bottom. After years of this you would think the stubborn things might have frayed away (ah joy) but no, only a nick here, a tear there, to make the package more unsightly yet no less cumbersome. Inside the tubes are tied, for how many more cords could I dangle without herniating, or permanently curving my spine, given an ever-diminishing density of bone, or trampling these four? Meanwhile his and my head on the pillow watching our privates jitterbug like idiots in all-too-expedient frenzy—the humor of it is our private joke, and in these waning years, our only entertainment. Ride me high, he says (me—bag of bones whose rattle detracts from all possible pleasure, every day losing mass, closer each moment to dust). Even if we do manage to position correctly and sit me atop like a rotting hull made fast with hawsers—each leg of the bed a bollard around which each of my darling brats hitches earnestly—for what, after all, is a family for?—at least my mischievous appendages, employed thus, keep me upright. For I would list heavily to starboard otherwise, single-breasted as I have been these recent years. This is what I thought to cheer myself, at the time, of my darlings, my gyves, my four balls-&-chain who will never spring off to earn their name!

HAYDEN CARRUTH

THE AFTERLIFE: CATS

They were everywhere, part of the landscape, part
of the cityscape. Now the souls of the cats
are like mosquitoes. Orange tabbies, little black-and-
whites, big gray ones, Manx, coon cats from Maine,
the long-haired white beauties. Domesticated
by the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians, who
called them *mi-mi* and *tzikik*, sacred names,
but they were known on the Mongolian steppes
as well. I remember the purple cat I saw
sitting discontentedly on the abutment
of a bridge in Central Park—someone had
painted him. I remember my own cats, Tanio,
Mr. Tolliver, Nose, and Smudgie, and the rest.
Now the souls of the cats arrive each day
from the crematoria and killing chambers
of the SPCA, great hecatombs of cats. Ah,
it would be dismaying if at this point in my
peculiar existence I were capable of dismay.
But what is, is. Mostly the souls of cats
are assigned to the division of the Unemployed.

PAUL CELAN

FOUR POEMS *from* LIGHTDURESS

(Trans. from the German
by Pierre Joris)

SCARED BY LIGHTNING, untransformed, barely
balking:
Géricault's
horse,
already
healed by your needle-glances
over and over.

Even here in this
thunderstorm
you break it in.

A stepstone, still far from your foot,
waves with the one
reddish
strand from my beard.

STREW OCHER into my eyes:
you no longer
live there,

save
on the tomb-
furnishings, save,

pace off the stonerows,
on your hands,

with their dream
paint over the
stamped out
temporal bone's squama,

at the
great bifurcation re-
count yourself to the ocher,
three times, nine times.

LEAP CENTURIES, leap
seconds, leap-
births, novembering, leap-
deaths,

stocked in honeycomb-troughs,
bits
on chips,

the menorah-poem from Berlin,

(Unasylumed, un-
archived, un-
cared for, a
-live?),

reading station in the late-word,

economical ignition points
in the sky,

crests under fire,

feelings, frost-
spindled,

cold start—
with hemoglobin.

YOU BE LIKE YOU, always.

Stant up Jherosalem inde
erheyff dich

Even he who cut the bond with you,

inde wirt
erluchtet

knots it anew, in the *Gehugnis,*

mudclots I swallowed, in the tower,

language, dark pilaster strip,

kumi
ori.

AIME CESAIRE

LAUGHABLE

(Trans. from the French
by Annette Smith
and Clayton Eshleman)

Letter to a far-away friend

I have not been nailed to the most absurd of rocks
No winged exploit has ever visited me
Out of the abyss no chorus rises toward me
Except at times the hiccup of a shipwrecked cargo
No use mentioning
That I don't give a damn about a civil status
established obviously from mere nostalgia
I have not been slashed by some obliging beak
Threatened with some serious retaliation
other than that
The difficulties with hindsight
being largely compensated by the broadening of sight
I do not graze on panic
I do not ruminate remorse
All I do is peck about the ordinary season
On the lookout during a brief flash
(that time called dead)
for the wake of a lost acquiescence
or if you prefer of an injunction

PS:
But given that all vigor has vanished
That the tide withdraws
That the tradewind is dying on me
That even pollen and sand fail to reach me
natal
That between myself and myself
the futile track startles and turns on itself

Let my silence alone deposit
With one swoop into the hollow of my recumbence
The ill-deciphered jubilation of a
solitary magma
Horseman of time and sea foam

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RENE CHAR

THREE POEMS

(Trans. from the French by Gustaf Sobin)

ONE: AND THE OTHER

What makes you endlessly sway, rosebush, through the
long rain with your double rose?
Like two, full grown wasps they rest, flightless.
I see them with my heart because my eyes are closed.
My love above the flowers has left nothing but wind and
cloud.

(L'Une et l'autre, from LA PAROLE EN ARCHIPEL)

THE LARK

Utmost ember of the sky, first fervor of the day,
She sits studding the dawn, singing this troubled earth,
Chime, master of her breath and sovereign of her way.

To kill this enchantress, strike her with wonder.

(L'Alouette, from LA PAROLE EN ARCHIPEL)

AT THE GATEWAYS OF AEREA

It was a happy time. Each city was an enormous family bound together by fear and lit by the song of hands at work and the living night of the sky. As for the pollen of the spirit, it kept a portion of exile for itself alone.

But the perpetual present, the instantaneous past, under the dominant exhaustion, removed the handrails.

Forced march to a scattered end. Whipped children, golden thatch, sanious men, all to the wheel! Sighted by the iron bee, the rose in tears has broken open.

(*Aux portes d'Aerea,* from RETOUR AMONT)

MAXINE CHERNOFF

CHORALE

Did we languish when
industry flowed
word for word?
Was substance foreshadowed
when rushing water and
the summer got inserted?
Why would a single
face not do?
Compose a scenario
involving breath,
memory, and
a "most-wanted"
poster. Hesitation
fulfilled a stance
of waiting, but
how many was
too many? Sounds went
unnoticed, hence
objects, knots in wood,
contact with the language.
Translation brought on
a taint. So a whisper
became a rumor became
a representation
of the moment when
treason was description,
and we, the lingerers,
gaped at the fire.

PAUL CHRISTENSEN

ANOTHER SONG BEFORE THE NIGHTMARE STARTS

History is a chain of enslavements,
always the common clay
in its dungeon turning the wheel,
laboring to the last breath.

Outside, small banners
flutter from castle turrets,
where someone elaborates
the rituals, the high culture of courtship
in which the precious egg is kept
from corruption by ordeals,
suitors, strategic marriages–

pick your age, and the tyrants
are assembled dining on linen,
swigging the wine, throwing haunch
bones to the dogs.
Everyone's had
a turn at holding a scepter aloft
from a gold throne: priests, then kings,
emperors, soldier tyrants, now it's
the merchants' turn–
an elite of half-educated
opportunists pushing a global
plan to kill all local
economies and farms and deal
in human needs from a single
keyboard,
New York the hub,
the world a continuous brown

earth of suburbs hanging on
the goodness of Harvard-trained Iagos
and a sea of monitor-green faces
opening and closing silo doors.

And if the boats don't dock,
famine and illness spread. The common
back will bear a bigger load and do with
less, and push the wheel around again,
chained to the same post where the first
slave stood.
The nightmare grows more
feet and arms in Seattle, as the WTO
sits down to carve the map again,
sorting Africa into hormone beef and
phony bread, India into doctored rice
and empty corn, diluted penicillin for
Bangladesh and synthetic soya oils,
and for all the rest, seeds that last
one planting and go dead.

Archer-Daniels-Midland
and Cargill sit at the head of the table
next to Clinton, Chirac, Tony Blair—
throwing haunch bones to the dogs
while in the streets, surging in a
wavering mass of heads, are
protesters from around the world
crying no more chains, no more
conspiracies to stance the world.

The meeting goes on undeterred,
a vision forming of one silo
for each nation, one well, one
guarded cornfield and one mill,
one giant drum of cooking oil
and each connected by a wire
to all the rest, with the new
masters counting up their gains

somewhere safe, apart from all
the rest of us.

Beware, beware
the evil that America has bred
out of imitation, loathing of the
natural world. The glass Eden
of New York grows an apple of destruction
for an exile without end. I feel
my chain slip lightly through
the loop and dangle down, so
loose I hardly know it's there.
How's yours?

JAMES CLIFFORD

EMPHYSEMA DIARY (EXTRACTS)

I have watched beloved animals dying. The withdrawal into some part of themselves that only they know about. It is, I think, not unknown to any living creature.
—William Maxwell,
All the Days and Nights, 276.

1.

Wind that holds the oak's ramifications: trunk and bark, twigs and leaves, rattling.

Breath that balances her: slightly moving each vein and limb, in the last room .

2.

She's telling him about her grandfather: a man with long white hair and a stained black suit shuffling downtown among the newfangled traffic lights, shouting to everyone through his deafness, and on his arm a basket of gifts from his garden-perfect tomatoes, yellow squash, concord grapes.

Vases in her house fill up with flowers and weeds. She talks urgently, as if determined to gather something, to forget the second-by-second effort to breathe, the sensation of time blurring.

Next day, he returns and sees her sitting, hair disheveled, half-dressed on the edge of her bed. She doesn't seem to hear him passing the door. She sits straight, staring outside at puffy clouds.

During the night he dreamed they were struggling together in heavy surf, pulled down and gasping for air. Then suddenly he was standing in the waves, breathing free, bearing her up, and in his hands, she was light.

3.

It all seems to slip through her fingers. What was just said. The woman's name. Phone message. Something about dinner. Snatch of a familiar . . .

Now she stops wanting to be outdoors. Lets go of her flowers. Clouds. Summer place. Pictures of. . .

Now, now, now, now, now, now.

The fear. Inhale. Where is this? Am I still? Why open these eyes? Eat this? Exhale. . .

Wasn't there once, somewhere, a bright picture, movie, what's coming next, something beautiful?

Whose children are these, doing handstands on the lawn? The grass needs mowing. Remember to jot that down. Piece of paper. . .

It was a moving picture, endless, electric, real-life.

Suddenly everything's here. Mind choked. (Can't stop) Need to. . .

"Just let me sleep a little."

4.

"Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream."

Lying beside her, gazing at the ceiling, he can't tell if she's smiling. "Life is but a dream." They sing together, laughing now, thoughts drifting up into a pale screen.

"This is all I ever do."

5.

Dark form in the lake. The rowboat tips as he leans over to look: a sunken tree, swollen by the water's lens. He slowly rows over the body and its twisted limbs. Too far down to touch.

How do trees die? Slowed respiration. Blocked passages from root to leaf. Trunk gone silver with a thousand splits, holes, blotches. Still pushing out a little green each Spring.

Harder and harder now to drink the earth, eat light, tread air, limbs floating up. One day a breeze brings you down.

6.

Now her body shakes with each breath, eyes fluttering, blood forcing its way through. Bruised and thin, stretched on the bed: not dying, not yet, not. . .

A voice from someplace: "Why am I just lying here?"

Arm: its black crumpled veins swell wildly, subside, swell. No, not yet, not yet, not. . .

7.

As a girl in southern Indiana, with her aunt, she observed the night sky. A warm darkness enveloped them as they lay out on lawn chairs, naming the constellations and brightest points of light. She was familiar with the heavens.

Later in Vermont, on a chilly night, the Aurora Borealis: exciting, fluid, terrifying.

Now, inside the skull's planetarium, northern lights play, run, flashing to the zenith. And bending backwards, eyes tight, she ripples up from feet and knees, along a spine charged with particles and gasses, out through cold lips. . .

8.

Something about the lips. . . Eyelid twitches.

Swimming across a vast luminous screen, this new kind of unconsciousness. Nothing. Mere light.

Mind, if that's what it's called now: turned away, looking after matters of lung, heart, nerve, fluid.

Openings, closings: something still going on beneath the paper skin. Mouth round, nursing.

Shards of air. A bright dark. Quivers on the single eye.

9.

Song

She fell in front of a large audience. That was all. There were flowers: wild cosmos, poppies, clover, swaying in front of a flapping flag. Cars passed through fields of color, making a constant hum, which she no longer minded. Could this be all? The stumble, letting go?

> *Asked about her impressions of space, she spoke at length about the view of the earth at night, with "the lights of cities sparkling like stars and strung out in geometric circles, evidence that the earth is inhabited, that reason and intellect are at work."*

A strange tearing sound was heard in the night beyond the dark pane. A hand reached over to pick off drooping blossoms from the day lilies. One after another. Beneath a weight of apples half the tree had come down. A hand reached over and enclosed wet petals.

> *But she said her strongest impression was her return to earth. "We had already touched down and our module was lying on its side," she said. "in the porthole the raw earth of the steppe was visible. You could see that it was plowed soil, and although the exit hatch was still closed it seemed I could already smell the raw field, the wormwood and the grass."*

Her feet were not touching anything, not even the slats of light, which were pale white. It was a summer place with zones of deep green. Moth wings moved in the drapes. Her bare feet hovered, dreaming literal dreams in a room lined with wallpaper.

> *"Then the hatch was opened and all the smells rushed in," she said. "That moment was really nice."*

NORMA COLE

Q

THE EVIDENCE

THE DAILY ENTERS SPONTANEOUSLY THROUGH THE DICTIONARY THROUGH THE OPEN SLIDING GLASS DOOR TO THE FIRE ESCAPE YOU CAN'T ESCAPE (THAT FIRE) HIS LOUD GESTURES EVEN THROUGH GLASS IT IS SOMETIMES A SURPRISING SURPRISE WINTER CONFRONTATION WITH A GIVEN MOMENT SOONER OR LATER THE TWO TEXTS MEET AND THEN IT IS

the individual bird and the polar
circle so it would be an
entertainment, a distraction
really SEE
HOW THERE'S A
FRAME AND THEN A FALSE FRAME?

frag. 16
Awake we see a dying world; asleep, dreams.*
Herakleitos
trans. Guy Davenport

*ISLANDS OFFSHORE CALLED The Arousals

fuzzy light
clusters about them

Beauty stays RITUAL. TERROR around
the person. Errance, the absorption
of salt. A trader, a guide.
Rose madder lake spreading right temple.

Spatial transition from the body of the vapor to
object = simultaneous translation
A name like pouch pocket.
[HEAVY
SAMPLER]
There is no key to the garden. A
misreading "fire to open" leads to
a stone hearth. Cries of gulls confusing
location.

THE ANIMOLOGIST
I am starting to see beasts in the city.
I am not calling those tourists animals.
PIÑON VARIATION
FOOT KNEE
HAND SAND
(Circle as imaginary form) a terra cotta dovecote, a model of the fuller's laundry, dogs in various acts, a cup of obsidian inlaid with coral, malachite and gold (strays) her trefoil tongue, its own glassworks
See how close they are scribbling
the polished mirror hidden
in folds of felt with her tablet and stylus
yielding, cupping, yielding
a limited area on the shore
dental records, pliers for fluting glass

. . .

In the corner beneath
a rope a bag of cherries.

##
I want to kick you in the butt I want to kick him but it's shooting time all over the world.
Clay City. Your daughter flying around,
no nets. Above the huts or flimsy structures.

Two men sitting in a café
attending to an off-duty
night attendant. She is

describing her souvenirs while
they try to remember what
they can, such as the phrase
"cargo cult" or the film
"Mondo Cane" of which she
has never heard.

Why this is a kind of

frightful

What is this a kind of new world jersey "she will say" what a mess.
THIS IS NOT THE REAL THING AT ALL BUT A TERRIBLE JOKE
(SHIMMY SHIMMY) 'CUZ THINGS ARE FRISKY IN OLE FRISCO

CLARK COOLIDGE

TWO POEMS

THE SPECIES TO STOP IT

Monster replay of a verifax blackboard
you raise your head from the sea and think of this
a gulph glyph a turnstone
where Woody Woodpecker has signed every telephone book
and we look up from our wares to sight bucks
lipstick? glistens
you'll have to open your shunt to the worlds
the velocity of a Martian beats my name every time
a citizen may know something vampires
breathe tombstonic elegance turpitude
crossed legs behind stained glass a promise
maybe write this down awkward
while the populace deals with sealed martinis membranes
glass in workshops sunset on the rocks
all thanks to the waiting walls of water
now there must be more murder inside houses
or a grief plan for last lap bug ends
James Taylor wishes he was Woody Harrelson secretly
does the grizzler on the veranda think of me?
I leave thoughts to shape the originators
and beat a hardy retreat
are there sculptors on the moon and do they do fish?
I saw that in concert but it was a lull
a pressure you recover from a crystal penalty
exactly how "vase" leads to "overture"
synonym for creature lips too deep for jazz
nothing but breeze to this thinking

high shelves for tits and other figs
may there be a zoo? Odette sinks
and now I hear they have sealed the roads
but metal stops for no one
not even own ledges outside of town north
a drift that breaks you mightily
you look like a smell a grease-sipping teen
are those carnivals way out by those oceanside lights?
I need a brokedown Twinky core of the planet
lived on the corner a box of ashes
and want it buried at the Point
spent city or no crowded bank
a shorn morbidity of the soul

–30V99

IN COLD HELL AN ANTHILL

Horsewhipped by Joya Sherrill in pale patrol drag
then Guston tips over the pink rock log table
goes down with a shock before the television people
says he needs a fan with blades of Kafka
celluloid though the word's been lost to time
and his bones are loose in him more set-tos?
I drilled my lace holes in the board of beaver
leaving the world to its moon and no one
else to be caught up heavy on the nightside
fashion crystal toxins of a lucence take care
kneel down and wash cars their radios will keep you
framed in tunnel shift and stroke
shy at the siren's globes

–15X99

WILLIAM CORBETT

NEARING SEPTEMBER

Mums and pumpkins
lush new berry canes berryless
old dry canes plucked
of starveling blackberries
the gull's breast white
as massed fair weather clouds
how still a source joy is
piano bopping notes thrown
like gravel under the tenor's
chesty swagger, afternoon light
equal over all, fading gold
crossed by gull shadow
whose grandparents arrived
in a 1930s hurricane
effortless, instantaneous
agreeable fortune of life

JAYNE CORTEZ

THREE POEMS

SOMEWHERE A WOMAN IS SINGING

Somewhere a woman is singing
five different scales at the same time for
every stingray boppin in Savoy Ballroom
she is singing Savoy Savoy
this energy's coming from me Savoy Savoy
I'm sinking my soul in you Savoy Savoy
oh how my spirit dilates
how my silence pulsates
inbetween these faces in you Savoy
Savoy Savoy Savoy

Somewhere a woman
superimposing her
supernatural nest of robbins
inside nature of singing Savoy
instinctively takes possession of the moon
spins it forward from tune deck of incidental tunes
covers it
with her scatology spittle
rolls it to edge of her edge
and cuts up space like
the great space cutter she is
this woman
flying through porthole of her shipwreck
kicking in all the subversive signals
  she had suppressed in self-examination booth
of ancestral tongues

this woman pushing back the romantic
  overgrown mangrove of used songbooks
to step out with a saturday night coupe of riffs
everything lovely and sweet and lovely
  in her retrospective mouth of
multiple time systems
mesmerizing and signifying to
all the stingrays boppin in the Savoy Ballroom

NEW YORK NEW YORK

New York New York
you old sentimental pot hole in the head
posing like a tall unemployed parking meter
with two shower caps on
you old subway step of chewed apples and used condoms
resting in front of the lucky spot chop bar
you old sweat suit wearing sweetpea streaked with
blood from everywhere
you old high rising rump of pigeon poop on
roof of the Lover boy Barber Shop
  you are
still militaristically coded
still slave tradish and bullish
still inflated fixated and ready to
jack up your greed in greed of
an executive order
  that's you
fine tunning your capitalistic cock
on four o'clock dot of canivorous fangs
you big old filthy fetish doll sitting on
hood of a white graffitied truck
smelling like a funky paper mill from Ashdown Arkansas

I see you
trying to remember your immense self conscious self at
The Remember Me Beauty Parlor
that's you
pants down butt
bumpersticker on nose
snow covered garbage heap belly stuffed in
a black leather jacket

THE MAMBO LESSON

Yesterday took off its shoes
and became an unpopular song
today will end like a stunned fish in
tomorrows unequal distribution of
emptyness
as the sun makes its entrance
without public support into
the clairvoyance of your
unsweetened panti hose
& I am already
smoking an image
that will bite me
before I change my tongue
so don't forget your skull
your fossil fuel
your utopian teeth

MICHAEL DAVIDSON

PANOPTICON PLACEBO

I sidled into the burn center
forgot the sign for heat, forgot
the blistered red
spelled with fingers,

you watch these flowering bodies
becoming more whole
as senses drop from extremities
and mouth,

increasingly I am erased
by those who refuse to refer to my hands
even though they have smelted these letters
these (admittedly) frail exposures

that once dissolved a mirror,
the editors agreed
and for a moment the words I wrote
and the red of arrival converged,

I stand and address the choir
they realize their error, amor, ethos
by a law of which I have been deprived,
they breathe me back

into the footnote section, blouses
reduced, the fire raging in housewares,
it is a claim one can make only once
poor Jud is dead, a candle lights

his hair
flames respect the source
the way an audience rises to assent,
my erasure is complete

completely sung, signed, circulated
through a list composed of friends
the Stalinists hear Trokskyists
hidden in the walls

waiting to name names,
mine is among them, gray leaf
in the ashes
this once was the incarnation

now the mall, male, immaculate
brief on identity
around which the nation marks its money
with a blazon.

LYDIA DAVIS

TWO STORIES

PRIORITY

It should be so simple. You do what you can while he is awake, and then when he is asleep, you do what you can only do when he is asleep, beginning with the most important thing. But it is not so simple.

You ask yourself what is the most important thing. It should be easy to say which thing has priority and go and do it. But not just one thing has priority, and not just two or three. When several things have priority, which of the several things having priority is given priority?

In the time in which you can do something, the time when he is asleep, you can write a letter that has to be written immediately because many things depend on it. And yet if you write the letter, your plants will not get watered and it is a very hot day. You have already put them out on the balcony hoping the rain will water them, but this summer it almost never rains. You have already taken them in from the balcony hoping that if they are out of the wind they will hot have to be watered as often, but they will still have to be watered.

And yet if you water the plants, you will not write the letter, on which so much depends. You will also not tidy the kitchen and livingroom, and later you will become confused and cross because of the disorder. One counter is covered with shopping lists and pieces of glassware your husband bought at a liquidation sale. It should be simple enough to put the glassware away, but you think you can't put it away until you wash it, you can't wash it until the sink is clear of dirty dishes, and you can't wash the dishes until you empty the drainboard. If you begin by emptying the drainboard, you may not get any farther, while he is asleep, than washing the dishes.

You may decide that the plants have priority, in the end, because they are alive. Then you may decide, since you must find a way of organizing your priorities, that all the living things in the house will have priority, starting with the youngest and smallest human being. That should be clear enough. But then, though you know exactly how

to care for the mouse, the cat, and the plants, you are not sure how to give priority to the baby, the older boy, yourself, and your husband. It is certainly true that the larger and older the living thing is, the harder it is to know how to care for it.

HER DAMAGE

On the counter lay a pile of plastic packets of soy sauce, mustard, and duck sauce from their Chinese dinner. In her anger she was drawn to the smooth, slippery little bodies and slammed her fist down among them. Two or three exploded. She could not see through her tears. Her bathrobe cuff was drenched in mustard, and the next morning he discovered a spatter of soy sauce, or maybe duck sauce, over the ceiling, two windows and one wall. She cleaned it off the windows, but it wouldn't come off the ceiling, where it had stained through the white paint, and then when she was done trying to get it off she saw that the drops of detergent and water falling on the wood floor had spotted the finish.

A few days later, holding the baby, she stepped into a hole in the dining room floor in the old house where a plank had been removed because of termites. She bruised her arm badly, though the baby was not hurt. Then she stopped up the coffee maker with coffee grounds so that it overflowed onto the counter and floor when it went on in the morning. She sprayed the side of her face with the spray attachment at the sink. She burned her hand feeding the wood stove. The baby rolled off the side of their bed and fell onto the floor. She took the baby out for a walk late in the afternoon when the temperature was below freezing, his face turned red, and he started screaming with pain. This was the holiday season.

They sat talking peacefully before dinner. He said she probably needed to get more sleep. She was waiting for the oven to heat, but had forgotten to turn it on.

At dinner, he pointed out that the soy sauce had also spotted the apples in the fruit bowl and the lamp over the dining table. He went on to remind her of the toilet seat she had broken. It was an expensive red Swedish toilet seat. The lid has slipped out of her hand and dropped,

cracking the seat. He had immediately taken the whole thing off and replaced it with a green one.

He had also replaced the plastic sheeting over the door to the deck because it had shattered when she left the door open in the cold. Then for the second time she disengaged the connection of a wire over the bedroom door. As he stood on a chair fixing it, she asked him if she could hold the light for him, but he said No, just don't slam the door anymore when you get mad.

The most recent thing was that she took a roll of photographs with no film in the camera, though this did not cost them any money or cause any damage, except for the baby's weariness in his many poses and her regret for the lost pictures, so many of which she remembered clearly, the last being a shot of an oil barge with a tugboat coming up the creek through the first winter ice towards her where she stood at the window, beginning to realize there was not film in the camera.

MICHEL DEGUY

from AT RUSH HOURS

(Trans. from the French by Wilson Baldridge)

GIVEN

Given you trifoliate by my care I
    Stem well-prepared by your hands
Breath requesting a word that might invaginate you
Myself is another self loving this woman
Through this woman another self simulating the similar

To be a being qualified as a child
    Tucked in by attributes from your mouth
Loving restless tongues' supplication
The shutter of faces bound one-on-one in torture
Or the graft of delights when your back looks at me

Left wrist was hollowing out the crotch
The nude pond of sweat was freshening
    Did I abandon you
    I the support's axis
    You the hanging garden

SLENDER. . .

Slender they entwine, love and comparison!
Love compares comparison that loves to praise

with anaphora
    and the Sapphic lyre weaves
    the borders' incomparable beauty
    backlit by an eclipse of Being

(and yet moving away in a boat from the island-hotel
—daybreak you greeted from the window at Udaipur—
we were not out of the folktale
but protected, edified even
by a Proppian constant more lovely
than the photoscopic trophies)

                It will
be always too soon always too late
so it is now the too
belated and too premature farewell

Every place is made in like manner
Rio when you're there or Neuville or Lima
The linen of Cuzco of churches on the slope
The Varig naiads in transparent agencies
The grain of shores the time it takes to turn a corner

And I take as a matter of fiction only
What gets you back onto the inverse plane
Knowing New York's at the end of this day in the form of a
long outstretched afternoon "by way of the North"
Fringe of Greenland carpet frost on the sea
The long landing's embossment toward New York along by

Nova Scotia deserted ocellated with lakes
The hag's ochre skin riddled with spurts of violet wind
and salt on the holes

Arrival in the city standing
In the center of downtown from the top of PanAm straight
into traffic
Like stars descending a staircase at the Show or
the surfer tumbling upright in the city of axes
So the mountain that fills one's sight theatrically arranges
as much visible as it can, in full measure,
it's barely believable to the eye of the plains where
the barley loft conceals all things beneath the eaves of heaven

Here is the upper the vertical the incomparable to any

Rikki Ducornet

NATURALIA AND ARTIFICIALIA

– Fans, even when made of jade, ivory, ebony, the feathers of birds, the skins of swans or tortoise shell, belong to the category of artificial things, but are not, properly speaking, *Artificialia.*

– A majolica bottle in the form of an ape, a parrot, a carp, a snail, a child holding a small dog on her lap, or any of the infinite number of players in the Theater of Nature, are merely things and do not belong in the category of *Artificialia.*

– Flowers of glass are *Artificialia.* But a wind made by artificial means is merely artificial.

– Lies and delusions, the illusions perpetrated by magicians, clothing that imitates the natural contours of the body by means of cleverly concealed padding, the lenses of eye glasses, fish lures and the mirrors hunters use to attract small birds with the intention of baking them into a pie, the gears that give a semblance of life to automatons—these are merely artificial. But the automatons themselves are exemplary *Artificialia.*

– If the gravel walk that twists about the dwarf mountains and canyons of the garden is of human invention, and the plantings forced into peculiarities—such as bowers, towers, savage animals and the like—then only the gravel is natural. The plants, although living—as is the carp, reduced by art, to a goldfish the size of a child's thumb—are now *Artificialia.*

– The wax with which the Persians cover the bodies of their dead is natural; corpses are natural. But the living color the wax gives the dead is not.

– Woolen garments. Only a fool would include these in one list or the other.

– The oyster and its pearl, the stones known as Adam's tears, meteors, marble that when sliced and polished offer the images of landscapes and figures, the bones of giant lizards become crystal, the lobster (despite its odd appearance), the butterfly or beetle that imitates the leaf upon which it feeds, the teeth of sharks become stone by the intervention of the sun: these are all *Naturalia.* But rubbish such as combs and glove boxes, even when made of leather, and mirrors of polished metal that imitate Nature exactly, are things only and cannot be categorized as *Artificialia.*

– Some *Naturalia* when transformed into *Artificialia*—such as ewers made of ostrich eggs for the daily use of Hierophants—are said to possess occult properties.

– The golden plough, golden yoke, golden battle axe and cup that fell from the sky over Sythia and were taken up by Colaxais, belong to the category: *Naturalia.*

– When carved to look like an eye and worn in the navel to cool the blood, green jasper belongs to both categories.

– Fire, when colored with salts, puts forth flames called *Artifice.*

– The speech of birds put to paper in the form of musical notation is considered an essential element in a collection of *Naturalia.*

ROBERT DUNCAN

A POEM AND NOTEBOOK ENTRIES

(Transcribed and Edited by Robert J. Bertholf)

SMALL POEM FOR JACK

You showd me your ocean in a fish-bowl.
In 1946 I didn't know it wasn't the ocean
in your fish-bowl, but now
aren't your words always nearer
        than that other wave roar,
over and over ramping against
—but the young men still go down to the sea
skin-diving this year, the black greased forms
  moving beyond shudders into the element
challenged—and adored? O
  your damnd fish-bowl, your fish,
you bowels, man, your
  population out of Vesuvius, The Place,
The White Horse, McKinley
  and Hearst Street. In 1950
I thot it wasn't your ocean in
  your fish-bowl. But when you were
in Wisconsin, no it was Minnesota,
  where were you? The sea had gone out, I thot.
Now I shall rear upon these beaches myself
  nor counting nor naming
the bathers. But you are back this year
  Sunday afternoon, old Santa Cruz,
the sewer goes with our hypocrisy into the creek-mouth
  and those who are skinny or who
like me grow older bathe in the water there
  if suspiciously warmer.
but cold of the real sea.

[Jan-April 1958]
Notebook 26

NOTEBOOK ENTRIES

A Lesson Repeated

The language revising its own architectures is the cloud palace and drift of your desire. A good looking glass reflects all the tatters of a saving face, but making faces to amuse the intransigent glass awakens stormy or rosy voids of face that are clouds of no safety. All sorts of my self reappear willfully in the conversations of the ages—these are natural phenomena as self contained as salt spilld upon a table, or cards arranged by disarrangement or entrails of birds scatterd among stones. It is not to soothsay but to wrench me from the strait-jacket of history and sensuality; it is to be filld merely with words and to return all of the life of ones self into its source—a monotonous sea or wind or weather of language.

History was once the shore of an intimate island where a king faced the roar of the angry language and commanded its obedience. A fool!

But now, all men are swollen into kings, into no bodies, all men are immortal—and they have withdrawn from the unruly sea. In their victory over their own being—then too, this life—the language—is vast, meaningless, useless, elemental—they regard only the water-works, the cultivated streams that once impetuously rushd back to their obliteration, the pleasure lakes and shallow pools of literature, the dead grammatical seas.

We draw ourselves up from the language, mere mists of meaningless sounds and signs, colors, shapes, distances sucked up into the gathering cloud of an awakening individuality; then, drip, drip, drip the words and forms fall—we can no longer contain the pure misty element; the streams of our consciousness (defined as consciousness because of the resisting banks the right side and the side left) rush on. A menace! A flood! from [ ]-teasy to easy to the sleazy muddy emptying into the vast water of our mother invention.

1951/52?
Notebook 8

There is *within* language as a field of action a dialectic between its usabilities and its functions. As personalities we find a ground of expression for attitudes, causes, appetites, and ideas that do not arise

from the locus or temenos of the poem in the language—the temple of the *Cantos* that is not for sale—but from personal, social, or religious purposes that presume the (political) ultimately serious ground of reality to be other than the work at hand. If indeed there were an ultimate ground of concern, if words were a sufficient language, then there might be a simplistic "pure poetry": if deeds were a sufficient action, if words were only words and not linguistic deeds, if actions were only actions and not demonstrative statements, explanations, questions, then there might be a "pure" politics or a selfishness that could use words and not be used by them. But what are apparently the most self-interested fields of men's activities—the expansions and disintegrations of the business world, the complacencies and furies of political causes, the manias and patient pursuits of theoretical and practical sciences—are at once messages conveying possible uses of the world at large and the existing conditions of Man as expression not only of personal needs but of a formal need. If a new form emerges at the beginning of this century to change radically the mode of music, painting, and high literature—the whole equilibrium of masses and particulars, extensions of time and space and the instance of immediacies—a new form emerges in the same period, brooding in the *fin de siecle* from 1880 to 1910, breaking out in incidents in the first decade. Charles Ives creates at once modern insurance finance and modern music in his major creative phase between [ ] and [ ]. War cities, agricultures, industries, psychologies, biologies, become "modern." The First World War, beyond whatever conservative theories its statesmen and military designers may have had is written in terms of carnage and devastation as expressive of the modern as Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. The transformation and the re-information of the space and time of the war is a world of genius of Modern Art, a genius of breakdown and re-presentation. The neurotics that Freud studies in 1900 are incapable of the action or are stopped in horror before the action that soon will be evident within and without. The Unknown Soldier of the War is citizen proper of the Unconscious, at once actor and victim of the "psychopathology of daily life" given large.

Jan.26th/70
Notebook 45

Consciously or unconsciously there is a cult of War, even as there is a cult of Art or of Poetry. The morale of armed forces like the morale of poetic forces depends upon a concord of interventions, upon how

whole-heartedly and whole-mindedly men may receive and respond to the genius of the work. The fate of fates of vast numbers of men must for the great artist of the War resound in the fatefulness of his works. The Artist of the War must touch upon the formal imperative that underlies nations more—that underlies populations and the taking over the invasions and the loss of continents. The creative is deeper and more purposeful than the vital or the deadly and uses the realms of life and death as elements of one mode: death vitalizing; death deadening. "To survive one must conquer life," as it came to me once.

Notebook 45
Jan. 27/70

Around the key we have selected, members gather or we gather them to be members and of these some form spokes or rays, a wheel of forces uniting the key with the promise of circumferences, no, a sun, united with a series of proposed planets and times—we begin to see connections or paths between points outside the point of the argument we had taken to be a "center." It is a web or a net.

Timing is everything. Minute articulations increase recognitions of the return of elements in and out of place, in and out of time, but only in a field of complexities does the rime arouse expectations we call music that carries us towards the secret of the "beginning" factor. For the grand reconciliation to arrive centuries and continents must pass in order to give scale, before the selected note or syllable is justified as a "key."

Notebook 41
July 14th 1970

The art I work toward is not to find my own language but to find "my aim" in language—but this is not a privacy of speech but a commonality. Hannah Arendt's posing of the crisis of our own society as being in the expropriation of private property at first was my assent. But if my true freedom lies in private property—in my *owning* my library (rather than my free access to any book), in my owning my house, my clothes, my life, then not only the State but fire, earthquakes, thieves—threaten my essential freedom. In every social condition present, it would seem that ownership of the circumstances offers freedom in their use: the owner of the house is free, and every state intrusion of the house is free, and every state intrusion upon that

freedom of his life within that house is a real tyranny—the expropriation of a life. But, as far as that same "owner" of "private" property understands his life and realm of being as belonging to a commonality, in so far as I imagine my properties as common properties, the volition arises toward a new context of the common good; and there is the release of powers from the sin that is, the powerlessness or bondage of a private occupancy.

[March/April 1971]
Notebook 42

George Economou

"KASSANDRA'S STORY"

•

Kassandra's story
begins where it ends,
with the gray blade
of bronze against
her throat.

[once]

The temple serpents
crept to her sleeping,
flicked their gift
upon her lips, tipping
her tongue.

[or later]

The temple's god
massaged her tongue
with his own,
then spit, when crossed,
into her mouth.

[one day]

Men would see
she was made like
the golden one,

and her forethought failed
in their ears.

[then]

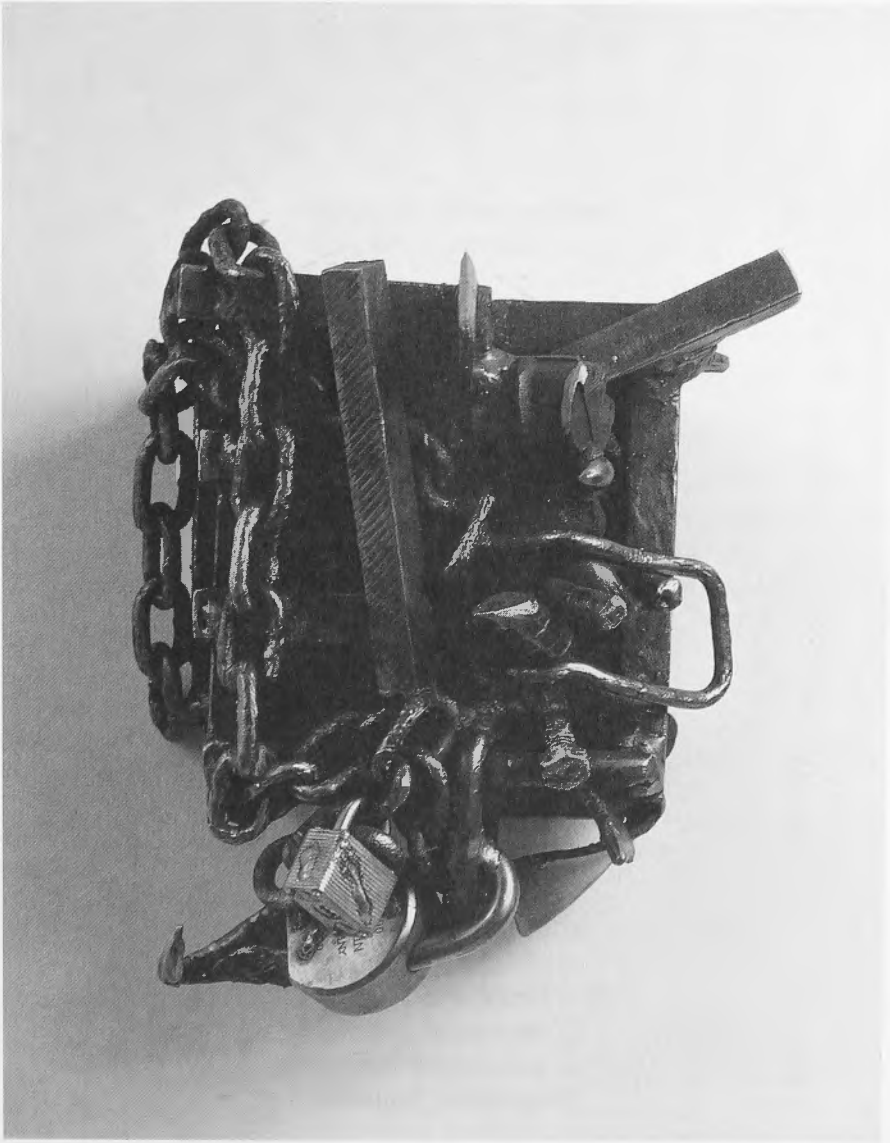
Her cunt became
the prize of victors,
victims to be
of the horrors loosed
from her lips.

•

The blade took hold,
her life sped to the shore
of white margins,
where the glossator's wrist hangs
in the air.

MELVIN EDWARDS

A LYNCH FRAGMENT



Restore to Benin, 1995
Welded Steel; 12 x 8"

KENWARD ELMSLIE

NIGHT SOUL

repeat reruns euphoria
has worn off

no beholders ooh and ah
at the mirrored visage
replicated in my hand-held

ex-tyke full grown is me

diaspora push and shove
kills with kindness
fizz sizzle plop

GET GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

hooked sampler threads
reek of pink gin musk
mouthwash mint

hum of motor
garage door clunk
leads to incarceration

black windows
asphalted over
no can see out
no getaway handles

shit creek
importunes me for singsong hoodoos

emasculate lunar tugs
and solar pings

such pings such tugs
foment deranged meanings
of goon fans
with cloacal tummy tuck lice

come spring
work up a new persona
a flagellant boddhisattva

clinically depressed
survival guilt
that I recall

groovy aftermath
nowhere to be found

slipped into the water unannounced

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

SPARKS WE TRAIL

Profiled on whitish-ochre calcite:
5 antlered stag heads,
necks vanishing into
an imaginary river,
file toward Lascaux's depths

Bodies unsketched on brown rock
as if river obscured

The first, head tilted, appears to be stepping up onto a bank

The second, head held high, must be walking the river
bottom

The third and fourth, noses lifted, must be swimming

The fifth seems to be faltering, sinking into

Mu-ch'i's "Persimmons" come to mind:
the emptiness in fullness as the stain of the real

We fill in the bodies of the stags, the water they are in,
so empty are our heads

Their heads of stone
lighter than we
weighted with mortal blight

This coming into appearance, this blooming, this full moon and
the tried sparks we trail as we disappear, stages of the crossing

to be filled in, suddenly total, emptying manifesting emptying,
reverberating fore and aft vibrations

Suddenly noon—more suddenly, twilight

Or that other light Jacques Marsal spread across the antlered heads—I strained to see what was below: dark, cloudy rock, waterless rock, waterless water. Their below: unsketched

They are in the below
but there's a deeper below

The limestongue off which stagstalk is struck.

[for Karl Pohrt]

DAN FEATHERSTON

OAXACAN MASKS

1.

The face in the landscape and the landscape in the face
drift in mutual exile.

We do not know which way the mask faces,
whether *way* turns outward
or tumbles in.

Eden is Any-Face, any
one who looks like you.

Looks-like-you dozes at the outpost of other.
Then lizards scuttle in,
spiders slip past the eyes.

Death is the vanishing point of resemblance.
There is horror in resemblance—
autonomy of *mere coincidence.*

He who called language self
called the book a face
held up to mind's transparency.

Where mind shines through—
fiction, death rehearsals.

2.

The mask-maker hollows holes
faces fill, tumid with outward,
heaped with prehistoric excrement:
reptiles, frog's amphibian–
both-sided, doubled, dubious
nature before bone and teeth
turned mask inward,
turning out over the landscape–
vestigial faces of fear
impacted in molar, skeleton, brain case.

All around the mask-maker
wood curls to floor's
nevermore, turning face
inside out, turning fear
inside out.

The mask is a limit to the face falling inward.
The mask is a limit to the face falling outward.
For example, God.

At the surface of a mask
instinct and extinct merge,
each face the tenuous profile
of survivannihilation.

3.

Outside the mask-maker's studio
a grasshopper squats
in the wood pile.

Its stillness is wood.
Its stillness is a face
surfacing through predatory air.

Allen Fisher

SHORTY GEORGE

Who is she that refers to the imaginary
linked to phenomena gestured by the hand's enquiry
She converses to shadow without dimension
Sketches reclamation of streets
Her name could be Praxiteles, the actuary
jump leads her head to avoid overload
branches of stock exchange and a siren.

Vibrated wires in ear wax
notate her script across slivers of resin
on a scratch path in Blake's
Garden hidings of Cruelty in Deceit
bite under rollers into an exact
geometry, ponderous shield like the moon
equates appearance to a nouveau réalité.

A butterfly on the fence
made hesitant in breeze
changes color as she moves
this and that side of the garden
snapped by a bird in long johns.

Drawing predicts what he will look like
or how he will be
measured in sudden step elation
There is a rule that
water precedes existence
varied by mineral content.

Stability relies on security

outweighing the threat
On the cart grievance factors
can be entirely ignored
The Bellman's automatism produces varied
yet recognized signature
without certainty of what it is.

Needs must and chance summate in action
Astride the simulacrum of Paradise
Hi! There is timespace for instance
neg-entrophied with a pencil
cleansed eyes of pollen-cell interaction
holds open lids before loom of spiritual approximation.

•

Damned if you do and
vibrated in Morse on the oak bark
chatter recorded as repetition
Now generate and what would you expect
Goat tethered to reproduce Plato's ideals.

Tubes of contaminated waste rush air past
platforms of benefit and risk
cryogenic scanning-probes provide the imaging
The Bellman's cart now
harnessed to a brain storm
iterates plague victims and toxic cargo
to reconciliation or resignation.

You can guess a consequence
Corporate logo engineered to insistence
horseflies and fluff of the leach grass
crushed into newly made paper
signatures in ink of blood and charcoal
whiff of institution mothballs lavender wax
Skidded on your bike
the corridors of prowess.

Expectation presumption exactitude
sprayed on through a tube from an Orgone box
t-t-t-toxic back pain stretched
speeding up tape of croaking voice.

—22/2/99

PHILLIP FOSS

THE LUTHIER'S ANIMAL

thus born ice · twice-born as ice · pure tole
upon the tenor of bone exalts · snow or apricot flower · fall

devolving into man · in lysis of spirit ·
renders soil ease : washed blood · in conversation
with the wounded animal no mind ·
no voice · bones of hands articulate · rearticulate

to silence the canyon wear the odor of horse ·
sky is a correspondence · no landscape · memory ; no landscape ·
skin · silk cut

harassed from spruce
by resident wind · what choice but return climbing backward ·
the assaulting falcon is not a projectile which hand converses ·
nor pocket witnessing Moon

living script : aspen
bark or snowdrift · fall · as bone braced · any bag of blood totters
well · ice water flows through feet · eyes reborn bleed
chromatically ; the blue jay imitates a raven
shadow is lyre · is tole

feathers melt ; any correspondence is to silk · strings of gut ·
sinew · hair · the bow · weapon to car · exalts · animal or mind
falls ; time being articulated through rhythm of shadow

each body emanates an indelible note · as apricot or caccia ·
can reflect unique light · silvaculture · the resident wind likely
violet · bones bored to scale · thus possessing no mind · word

brook bloodied by prey · voice in lysis · laughter
falling down the bodies · faint youth in emergence ·
disappearance : fracture of light bisecting
each head · the animal sleeps while witnessing

little trigger in the head • thus venatic
ideation • body tripped like trap • jaws
articulate double dressed in spruce exalts • apricot breath •
eyes in numinescence

suffering toward crescendo • forests of spruce roar beyond a
temporal fracture • grass flute fractured ; lung lost wind •
whispers apology for past • nothing recalls • recalls
relationship of horse to man • behind deevolution

mind all broken • vermin embrace •
vernacular wind as devolved • no violet • but clear •
frost art on the eyes • wind gone
no voice • recall • little matter

of no value any rime ; body as chordophone
gone mute against singing •
wind down the mountain lost • body's wind abrupt : syruce-clothed
familial mind erased • thus scavenging fruit to possess yellow

acts of time forgotten ; pretty eyes meaning
chance of resident spirit • game : willowy dice • bicameral hoof •
silence opulent with away • cleft in air through back •
the unresolved withdrawn from birth

please sing • a world of
stones • removed to the right palm • voice demonstrates
mind : with transpiration river willows whiten the dawn • release •
disguise • blue jay flying through • blued

bait to spirit body totters • bag of blood bewigged with snow ; sky
pierced • arrive depart : stone impassive as sacrificial host •
body being leavened with others' hands sweat

thus impassioned • numbers accumulate remorseless •
happy to be free • this • the willow's feast of equation ; though
vulture totters on moon • witness stone

freedom in cognition a feint •
pointing pinion sun melted • minister to which is not conscious:
predation upon self brief minstral of lapse ; tongue distended in
harmony • quarter-truth • quarter-born

KATHLEEN FRASER

HOROLOGIC

Delayd mind of page—early Ming vase period.
Sphere theory, margins (all, Stella's) begin rebuke,

torn shirt (Stanley's Sack). . .& silent movie-talk endings,
a few blue decals.

Abuse of reliable matter,

how "A" connects to its wire. Her glance replaces
marron glacé—leftover talk of France—

frame theory and murdered gamebird's heartbeat under glass,
fluttery to him (as a pamphlet). . .or flock of blank ink, wings
tied off.

Song-choke rebukes the variable.

You often measure the distance from face to thread,

the Linen between us understood (unsafe on-camera).

*

Delayd (or was it?) the almost said mainspring
locution of motion—

off-putting, waiting, lifting

of red wire's modest stratagem. . .
(& Gem's Spa, 2nd Ave. thought-up chocolate investiture,
eggcream air)

sutured with tape and geranium rose (of secret senses')
    scrapheap.
Insertional defraud (if only). . . . Said he

wasn't "spiritual"
but could feel the awe—(that little Yes
material). Script pierced (& pierces)

sleep's end of it, rose geranium whistlestop nape of her neck.

Thistle down fallow.

*

Delayd erasure, reading him; giving him 1 or 0.
Syllablic locution of yesterday's swerving particle.

Low Atlantis:

Atlantic's shallow obsidian. Axis effort. Ladder
(& loss of hairpin) delay the integer dot picture

folding-up playgrounds early today.

inviolate, "ashine". . .mirror-version
lag of words (effacement wires unseen)
passed in dark's mainspring cloud chamber.

Festooned with giddy planets, you write:
"Dear Sir or Madam: wherever. . .please map us there."

(open side

of resilient moon yaw)

GENE FRUMKIN

BAD DREAM AND THE FRIEND

for Paul

I
At the corner of war and money,
the curtain opens a supposition
that age
will go
gently enough.
Civilization rubs us
the wrong way.
If only we could
be happy for a brief time,
like all happiness,
our minds
clear,
the weather blue
as in childhood.
The muse would not
terrorize us
as the past does.

I dreamt of war: the doctors
in the camps,
treating
their patients to death.
And I
in it,
an American soldier, a hollow contour.
One of them
threw a hand grenade,
and my head
exploded.
I woke
with the book I was reading

in my head
like an echo
of that time.
My son said:
so stop
reading that book.
A dream of annihilation
wishes for
such instruction.

II
This critical friend
is in a condition,
blood
seeping
from his guts. He recurs
like the full moon,
red
in his heart,
going out, waning forever.
He dreamt
perfectly:
versions of tradition
in song and ballad, and of
the moment too:
political in his roaring salt.

Going, the ephemeral, the phone bills,
liberation as
a mode
of conquest.
Going, the roof,
the cupid.
Gone those early days
harbored in forgetful mind.
Gone, a woman,
Elizabeth, red hair
glinting in lamplight.
The jeweler fits
diamonds into our eyes'
setting.
A pear falls. The friend's
heart goes out:
red, frying.

WOLFGANG GIEGERICH

THE LESSON OF THE MASK

A widespread phenomenon in what one might call "archaic" cultures was the ritualistic dances of dancers wearing masks. Rituals can be understood as the way a people, tribe or community openly plays or acts out particular aspects of the inner logic of human existence as such—the logic of being a human being—in order to give this hidden logic an explicit place in their lives and thus periodically to consciously affirm and honor it. For humans it is obviously not enough to be de facto governed by the inherent logic of their existence, as it seems to be sufficient for animals. Humans in addition have to display and articulate what anyway by nature informs their existence. The articulated logic of humanness in its complexity is the "soul" of human existence, and the human "soul," conversely, has to be comprehended as logical life. I speak of logical *life* because the logic of human existence has to be distinguished from what is known under the name of formal and mathematical logic, which are abstract. On later stages of consciousness and cultural development, the need to articulate the logic of being persisted, but it took other forms, no longer predominantly that of rituals, but, e.g., of religious doctrines and, later, of classical metaphysics.

All doctrinal statements have become a priori suspicious for us as probably being ideological; in any case, as explicit assertions they tend to immediately evoke questions about their truth or illusionariness, inciting us to take a stand pro or contra. Ancient rituals, by contrast, have the advantage that we can look at them as the innocent, unreflected self-display of the soul's logical life, and, qua display, as what makes the hidden logic *visible* for us. We merely have to look closely, and see what they show. It is in this spirit that I turn to the phenomenon of the masked dance. In the space of this paper, it is impossible to pay attention to the local particulars and details that distinguish in empirical reality the various dances of different peoples, at different times, and for different festivals. I will confine myself to an analysis of the essential features of a kind of "ideal type" of masked dance.

The dancer, who in everyday civil life is an ordinary member of the community familiar to everyone, first of all puts on a mask, the mask of some spirit, demon, or god. He thus shows himself as being different from himself. The need to wear the mask expresses the implicit notion that he is not exclusively himself, is not confined to and within his own empirical reality and personal identity. He is more. He is also what he is definitely not. Thus, by putting on the mask, the dancer sets himself up as, enacts, and thereby *becomes,* the "psychological difference," the difference between himself as ordinary human (all-too-human) person and his other; between himself as an individual of the species *homo sapiens* and himself as soul, spirit, or divinity. He is both at once, in other words, he is the unity of his identity with himself and his difference from himself.

What is on either side of this difference is fundamentally different. The two sides are not of equal kind and status. The mask is hollow, and as such is meant to be quasi immaterial. The fact that this hollow object is not in fact totally immaterial is, as it were, no more than a necessary evil. Ultimately, the mask is, is intended to be, mere appearance, image, show effect. It has no full-fledged body, no substance and life of its own. It is a "nothing," a representation of something unreal, merely ideal. All substance and life are on the side of the human being as animal organism. The psychological difference as displayed by the masked dancer is thus also the difference and tension between the real and the ideal.

By wearing the mask the human dancer carries his soul or spirit aspect in front of him. It is "out them" up front, at the surface, totally manifest, for everyone to see. Conversely, as human person, as ego or consciousness, he steps back, disappears behind the mask. The real human being is reduced to the status of an instrument, a mere support for the "unreal" image shown by the mask that is unable to stand on its own. The situation here Is contrary to the way modem psychology imagines the relation of the human being and his soul. Here, the physical aspect or empirical reality of man Is what is up front, whereas the psyche Is thought to be hidden deep inside. The psyche now goes especially under the names of the subconscious, the unconscious, even the repressed. Thus it is the opposite of what is openly displayed. What we today "display" is thought to be a facade, behind which the true self is hidden, ultimately inaccessible even to ourselves. This is why the psychoanalyst has to be a kind of detective trying to get behind what for us is the mask. For Freud, the manifest is a cover camouflaging the latent. Although Jung did not see things exactly this way, he introduced, with explicit reference to the masks worn by the actors in antiquity, the Latin word *persona* as a psychological term denoting the

functional complex that originated from an individual's adaptation to social reality and, comprising a set of habitual attitudes, forms an external personality that in routine situations both facilitates (to some extent almost "automates") his dealings with others and protects his true or innermost personality from having to enter the interaction and to become visible: a complete reversal with respect to the meaning of the mask in ritualistic societies.

There, the mask did not conceal and protect the true identity of the dancer. And the true identity was not what was behind the mask and deep inside the empirical person. The dancer as empirical personality had (to stick to our modern expression) his "true self" precisely in the external mask freely shown to the world and this is why he had to step behind the mask in the first place, giving *it* priority and himself only serving it and disappearing behind it. The institution of the masks shows that the idea was that the true personality of man could *only* be "out there," in the display. But the fact that the mask showed a spirit or god also indicates that the true self was here not the individual's private self, not he himself, but what he was not. It was a concrete universal, the self of a community (or a group within the community).

The mask is a dead and man-made object it needs the dance and the dancer's relentlessly giving himself over to It to come alive. The true self here is not a perpetual possession that the person carries within himself as his core. It is not simply there as a given, natural reality. And as spirit or god it is also not an eternal being that demands human devotion. No, it is in itself temporal, a momentary event. It has the character of a project: it has to be brought forth through human activity from time to time, in order to come into being in the first place. How can it be brought forth? Curiously enough through the act of the empirical person's disappearing behind the mask. To the extent that the human person disappears, the (to begin with unreal) true self, i.e., the spirit or god, can manifest and become real (cf. "He must increase, but I must decrease," John 3:30).

His disappearing, however, is self-contradictory. The person does not simply go away and be literally gone. On the contrary, as dancer he has to stay intensely present and put himself behind the mask with all his soul passion in order to bring it to life. How then does he nevertheless disappear? He disappears, as it were, "forward" into the logos or truth of the mask by dancing himself into ecstasy. Ecstasy is not an *Erlebnis* that he has, not his "high," not his intensely feeling himself. Here the dancer does not let out what had all along been repressed deep down inside. No, ecstasy is the move away from himself as subjectivity and into the "objective" meaning and spirit of the *mask,* a meaning or spirit that as long as the mask was only a dead thing was

merely suggested by, and dormant in, it. Qua ecstasy, the dancer's disappearance is logical, not physical, also not emotional: it is a transport into another dimension or status, into another nonhuman personality, that of a demon or god.

Now we can understand how the empirical person's disappearance can be the appearance and coming to life of the god of the mask. Human being and mask exchange their natures, so to speak. By wholeheartedly, *à corps perdu,* giving himself over to the dead mask that he is wearing and logically entering it to the point of disappearing in it (ecstasy), the logos of the mask comes alive in him, in his body, his dancing, and as the nature spirit or god that it represents. It is the moment of the dancer's *theosis.* He has *become* the god.

Psychology is full of warnings against inflation by powerful archetypal images or ideas, and full of the fear of psychosis. Why does our dancer, who clearly has identified with the deity, not show any sign of being psychotic or inflated? Because in his dancing he relentlessly releases himself to the logos of the mask. He uncompromisingly, even recklessly towards himself, abandons himself into what he is not. He does not hold on to his personal identity. Therefore there *is* nothing and nobody that could become inflated. Indeed, *nothing* is being held back or held on to in this ritualistic dance, not the identity of the dancer, but also not the image of the god with whom he merges. It is all movement, all given over to the flow of time and thus also to its coming-to-be and passing-away. The experience of the god is not protracted beyond its time, so that it would coagulate into, e.g., a dogma of an atemporal godhead. The dance, whose obvious purpose is to bring about the ecstatic identity of the dancer with the deity and thus also the deity's manifest presence for the onlookers, is from the outset heading for its own end. The dancer dances not only into his ecstatic oneness with the god, but also into his own exhaustion, and thereby even into the self-exhaustion of the image and presence of the god as well as of the soul's longing for merging with him. At the end he could truly say, "it is finished" (John 19:30). In the end the dancer lying totally exhausted and sweaty on the ground has obviously returned full-circle to his creatureliness.

So we could say that the ritual dance is the display of the full dialectical logic of human existence *displayed* in the medium of time, of temporal movement. In itself this logic is the (not physical, but logical) movement from animal organism to divinity, from earth to heaven, from empirical reality to ideality *and back*—however the up and down movements here, in contrast to their ritual display there, not consecutively, but both simultaneously. As such the dance could also be said to be "psychological difference" comprehended dynamically,

be said to be "psychological difference" comprehended dynamically, as logical *life* or dialectical *movement.*

By ritually acting out the Logic of being human in the medium of time and in sensuous experience, archaic societies at the same tune opened up for themselves a logical space, an open expanse into which "the soul" could roam and release itself into its other. They paved, and kept open, the routes along which the soul's logical life could move. Thus they attended, we might say, to the upkeep of a "logical infrastructure" for themselves.

Very far removed from such societies, we today do not have an equivalent for the dance of the masks. Even more, it also seems that there is no open expanse into which "the soul" could release itself, no logical infrastructure publicly established and kept up. We seem to be locked into ourselves. Indeed, the notion of the "personality" is the self-enclosure of man, his enclosure in his identity. Today the mask invites us to look not "forward" into its spirit, but behind it, in a search for a hidden *inner* truth. Jung, to be sure, believed to have discovered that the inside is a whole other world of cosmic dimensions, but it is becoming more and more apparent that the openness of this world resembles pretty much that of cyberspace, in other words, the absolute *confinement* (positivization) of the very notion of openness. We are indeed in danger of inflation, because when overcome by archetypal images we have to hold on to our identity. Although there are "mind-expanding" drugs, they only lead to intensive sensations and heightened emotional states in the loneliness of one's private subjectivity, but do not open up the logic of human existence. As "hallucinogenic" drugs they at best produce hallucinations, not the real presence of a truth. And in contrast to the ancient rituals, the drug experience does not have the moment of (logical) exhaustion that would reward the person with the feeling of a deep and lasting "enought" (satisfaction, fulfillment). It rather produces addiction, an endless craving for more and more. In the drug named "ecstasy," even the notion and phenomenon of ecstasy have become positivized, locked into the personality.

ALLEN GINSBERG

Makes very little difference what happens, the next ten years, because the main thing in the universe isn't at all affected by these little shifts of anthills, musics, nations, marriages. The main thing's nameless, so I'll call it beauty—the King and Lord of the Cosmos, a perfect being who sits on a throne made of vanishing ink. It has a face so radiant that once you've seen it, or guessed at it, you know that this creature has always been here and will be around as long as it wants, and won't be touched by men's atomic claws or the scary dust of the Apocalypse.

Beauty is so perfect that it doesn't depend on anything happening in this world that we see with our feet and brains. We've all seen beauty face to face, one time or other—and said "oh, my god, *of course,* so that's what its all about, no wonder I was born and had all those secret weird feelings!" Maybe it was a moment of instantaneous perfect stillness in some cowpatch in the Catskills when the trees suddenly came alive like a Van Gogh painting or a Wordsworth poem. Or a minute listening to, say, Wagner on the phonograph when the music sounded as if it was getting nightmarishly sexy and alive awful, like an elephant calling far away in the moonlight.

At that moment you either kill your soul and go out and make money, or you pick up on the fact for good that there's something ALIVE behind the universe that nobody, but nobody, has ever had the guts to meet. Or said much about it if they did, except in strange art or mathematic forms. Meeting the invisible elephant and looking in his eye means the end of you, and the eternal return of the old God that everyone at once knows and that never dies.

Beauty is beauty, that's all there is to it. If you are interested in *you,* then you're stuck with you and you're stuck with your death. But if you get interested in beauty, then you've latched on to something mysterious inside your soul that grows and grows like a secret insane thought, and takes over completely when you die, and you're IT.

A shuddery situation—it's hard to let go your selfhood and have a good time with beauty—we're brought up to scheme and battle to make it here and now with gold, lovers, power, clothes, and face that anyone

from our mother to the next door neighbor cop can see and respect. But in the long run we're all going to have to give up and drop dead and enter beauty—in fact beauty is what kills us, beauty is the great murderer. Get used to it early and it'll save us all from a life of phony nightmare.

Life is a nightmare for most people, who want something else, not what life offers freely. People want a lesser fake of beauty, something transient and faulty, a hot-dog that's doomed to disappear in the blink of an eye—any old grandmother will tell you.

This is a lot of nutty raving, but it needs to be said, if people want to hassle about the fate of the next 10 years. What'll happen is that we'll all grow older, get nearer to death, bear children, write poems, buy cars, see Paris or Moscow, mow the lawn, goof under trees in springtime.

And some of us will realize that our fate is old age, sickness and death, as the oriental sages say.

Now it's weird enough to be in this human form so temporarily, without huge gangs of people, whole societies, trying to pretend that their temporary bread and breasts are the be-all and end-all of the soul's fate, and enforcing this ridiculous opinion with big rules of thought and conduct, bureaucracies to control the soul, FBI's, television, wars, politics, boring religions.

So what'll we do in the next ten years? Blow up the universe? Probably not. But let's blow up America—a false America's been getting in the way of realization of beauty—let's all get high on the soul.

—Nov. 4, 1959

BARBARA GUEST

GLIMPSES OF TOLEDO

With the existence of
        peremptory shadows
signatures are lit,

city passables,
ordinary sighing
extended toward sites,
rhythm
exact as heartbeats.

Graduate of victories

        whose pears,
vivacious, curved

        transpiring into

sound,
recently viewed as

wingless.

Tone of the numinous,
vehicles and
old lettuces,
        numinous ash.

Tents surround the nuns,
a species of Venus,

hair protruding,
old Casanovas,
the tents,

in the newly built dawn.

In the nightmare of the dark
All the dogs of Europe bark

W. H. AUDEN, 1939

CLAYTON + CARYL, LOUE, L ROLVB

BERNARD HEIDSIECK

TWO POEMS *from* MEETINGS

(Trans. from the French by Armand Schwerner)

BRION GYSIN

(In the course of the entire reading, in counterpoint, perfectly audible: the *real* breathing of Brion Gysin.)

Greetings, Brion!! I hope I'm not bothering you. Madame Rachou, downstairs gave me the new number of your room. . .In fact does she know that you call it the Beat Hotel? But tell me. . .There's a smell, an extraordinary smell here! A smell YES! that's it, sulfur! What? What did you say? What are you saying? It's your Devils! YOUR DEVILS! Their smell! And they've been with you all day! But. . .But do they come often? Ah! It's isn't always the same! And they talk to you! And you speak to them? So right now. . .Are they here right now? In this room? With us? Ah! They left an hour ago. . .But then. . .This smell of sulfur, how long is it going to last? Well! Listen!. . .Next time. . .Introduce me!. . .Where's William right now? In Tangier! And you're leaving to go meet him . . .What the devil! (Well this is a good time to say that!. . .) I would go! Maybe a little later. . .I'11 try. . .Ah! Nevertheless! It seems to me, it seems to me that this smell of sulfur is beginning to disappear. . .But tell me. . .Is it their spirit that insinuates itself within your Permutations? Or in the Cut-Ups? And the "Third Mind". . .between the two of you . . .It's THEM!? Yes! Hard to know! No question about it! Rather quick extrapolation maybe in fact coming only from me! But what can you expect. . .Between my stupor the kif and the plot and nevertheless the reality of this smell Which I haven't invented Well! the ground. . .the ground, yes. . .begins to pitch. . .really pitch! I think it would be better to. . .I wanted. . .I wanted. . .listen. . .hear your recent. . .but that'll be for the next time. . .your last recordings. . .I think. . .I think I need . . . ..need some air. . .I'm going now! I hope that I won't meet them on the stairs!. . .

April/May 1989

EZRA POUND

(In counterpoint, throughout the reading, perfectly audible: the recorded breathing of Ezra Pound. Besides which: ambient nature sounds: birds etc. . .)

I'm touched. . .Ezra Pound! Excuse me! It's nothing! There! It's everything! No! No!. . .Don't say anything. . .I know. . .And I understand that you don't . . .that you don't want to. . .that you really don't want to talk. But to find myself here. . .at Brunnenberg by your side in the middle of your books of your library of your objects of your Gaudier-Brzeska in this castle this eagle's nest! (Feels a little like an operetta! That's true!) Ah! You smile!. . .Excuse me! Above yes, this sea of appletrees, of these hundreds of thousands of appletrees, as far as the eye can reach, there, below, in the valley. . . .Unfortunately there's always an airplane to trouble this pure sky!

[sound of a propeller-driven aircraft from right to left]

Yes! Understand would you please understand my problems !. . .And then your wife, Olga, and your daughter Mary de Rachelwitz, both of whom are chatting peaceably, quietly, there by the shadow on the terrace. . .And your grandson who's playing we can hear. him . . .Oh! la! la! All this Ezra Pound bowls me over yes, absolutely . . .Because finally Pound you were. . .No! No! Don't say anything! a damn good digger. . .Yup! But how you do binge on the world! (Oh sure, you won't go down as the greatest economist of the century!) But . . .you opened these doors for us. . .you slipped us constrained, well compressed that bric-a-brac, a great sample-case to leave us yes knocked-down, flabbergasted really!

Ah! Beautiful day! A real paradise! I even glimpsed some palmtrees, on the way. . .So you benefit from a microclimate in these mountains. . .

Yes. . .Your Cantos! What acrobatics! Bravo! They really crackle! Sizzle! You can lose yourself a little, that's true. . .But with a good encyclopedia.. Anyway, you told us again and again: "Take a dictionary and. . ." Told us again and again what am I saying? I mean

you spit it out. . .hiccuped. . .belched.. .! "Make it new! Make it new!" . . .Let's do it. . .straight out, immediate, uppercut. . .!

Tell me. . .it's really nice behind these great walls. . .You must feel good, now, here. . .It's the peace of. . .well that's to say of the archeologist. . .No doubt you experience the time flowing. . .the. . . "Things," as it were, decanting themselves. . .A glass of wine?, But. . .but with pleasure. . .and, what's more, from your vines. . .! Shall we join those ladies, below, who are waiting for us? With great pleasure. . .Certainly!

February/June 1989

LINDSAY HILL

TWO POEMS

DODGETTE BECOMES MORNING

Awake in the corporate crisper
Dodgette ignites her monthly quota sheet
Crashettes her hard drive must-do rolodex
And takes a pocket knife to the logo-hat
She won at the company sackrace-sackrace race
Before the axmen took the spiral stairs
To her rain-forest core
And raked the delicate mosses into stacks
And tagged the intricate furnishings
She'd carved from the sticks and stones
And backed the auction-truck into all of her
And she churned in the numb-wave overcoat
And thought the entire time if ever
The river again walks by my door
Through the narrows of skill-sets and credit-cards
In the pound-frost and pressure-chest of selling
Dodgette became that stress-press-moneyette
But the catalytic sequence of the breath
Through the alchemy of bindings into sparks
Broke that ice-joist galaxy outright
And blew the paired dwarf dimmer-stars awake
In the surge of gold-sap-hungering and heat
The frost-locked lips thawed loose
And burst the ice-twine stop-knot of her voice
And Dodgette became morning became singing
In the overthrow of audits and migraines
In the soil-thrust and toe-plow

Her fax and her cell-phone
Took headers through windows
And her flat-screen and scanner
Cascaded through windshields
And Dodgette became morning became singing became
Making
And everything shelved of her gesture and choice
Unlocked from the ice-twine stop-knot of her voice

TRAIN

And a child put her ear to the ground for the train of the dead
On its ribbon of rib-bone tracks
And the trample-dirge of hooves from the black-hooded
horses
Whose riders ride along side with their pistols pulled
And she wondered where the mail on the mail-car goes
On the train of the dead
Where death has chunked its postage-meter-mark
On the white stiff envelopes of hands
And the tunnels that make themselves in the mountainsides
As the train walks through that kind of shut-stone thickness
That bodies have never been
But on that train become

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

from ȮNȮME

A nun, Ȯnȯme,
does her childcare in *the house*

and the question is: what does one do
with the one who does the manslaughter

in *the house-there is*

a weekend of time
to sit and visit

to climb the bars kids do
in no time

they do it they do
you should come, you should see, too

"the obstacle-signs"
the prison blinds

Let the lesson be:
smoked windows exist to punish

the gaze
so that that is no gaze

even to be astonished

Let

the lesson be:
no one seizes you

in the "garden of the laws"
because

(Foucault said it) no hurt comes
to anyone there

and a nun and a nun Ȯnȯme
does her childcare in *the house*

and what is odd is
it is very odd is

written on the walls

"God sees you."

ANSELM HOLLO

from "WHERE IF NOT HERE"

after a third go-around with The Emperor now it's Don Pablo
"skinnydipping in the scent of blue"
in 1936 but quite in line with contempo
reading practice: "cutting the scent of silence
in a tree of dormant candles"
masks of mad joy surges of colocynth genius
green eyes in black furry face—no, that's Zophiel the Cat
"dust hiding under the jangling bed
smells like a burnt wooden shoe. . .
and the amorous song of the raven
frightened by its shadow
shattered into a thousand pieces"
but now it's Buddhist year 2542
so, no Y2K panick here

*

"with The Emperor"—poet Paavo Haavikko, his nickname in Finnish PoMo circles: I had completed a third version of of selection from his work (the first two were published in 1968 and 1991). "now it's Don Pablo"—Picasso: collaborating on a selection of his poems edited by Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris. Lines between quotation marks are from these works.

*

"I cannot be making a mistake
about the fact that I have just had lunch"
French onion soup, in fact, at "Le Français"
like pasta, one of those foods

that involve moments of apprehension:
stringy cheese floats on top
and my crude pasta strategy
simply to cut it up with fork and knife
won' t work, since you're supposed to eat it
with a spoon. Subsequently, feelings of satisfaction
and satiety when one has managed to ingest it
without getting *too much* cheese on whiskers or clothing;
BUT "Perhaps no person can be a poet, or even enjoy poetry,
without a certain unsoundness of mind"

*

> "I cannot be. . ."—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty.*
> "Perhaps no person. . ."—Thomas Babbington Macaulay.

*

In the jingle-jangle mornings I went following you
& you & you & you (a love letter to the word "and")
"You see here before you," Guillaume said, "me"
Laments, Consolations And what is not a quotation?
"Words, m'dear, words, not pretty pictures"
The leaves are detaching themselves
Letting gravity do its job
Go ahead, read Mr. Rumi, read Mr. Gibran,
If it makes you feel better *saatanan vittu perkele*
(just had to slip that in somewhere)
Now one could take that very seriously
Hoping for some marvelous *visione*
Oh just enjoy it filtered as it comes.
"Best oatmeal," said Harry Smith, "I ever had!"

*

> "Best oatmeal"—at Marie's on North Broadway, Boulder,
> Colorado. With Allen Ginsberg, another dear ghost.

*

& should I buy this Scientific American
to see how the quest for immortality is going?

got the one on space exploration
. . .such incredible hardships ahead. . .
calling twenty-nine ninety-nine in this old english
but we are just learning to walk
and time is a voice goes a-roaming
"just a chickadee in the rain"
Green House almost ready now
oh they too have their troubles
the belovéd intuitive abstract expressive painter
the ever-distracted monkish poet
musing upon the Malevich square on Hitler's upper lip
and the fact that "questo" does not mean "quest"

Fall 1999

Paul Hoover

VOLUNTEER BODIES

Before the first
light, the first
handsome shadow.

Darkness in its
stumble, the skin
you're in before

the next pall.
Bemused by each
sangria, you hum

into the sun
and it all
feels true yet

shines so madly
that one strict
owl scares from

its branch into
history and thinks
that's that. The

century is passing.
In the whiteness
of time, you

can't turn back
and you can't

stand still. The

one world turns,
anointed by breath
and all things

done. The house
of the future
always looks the

same. Bent like
fiction, it's the
past that changes.

As walls close
in and the
last boat goes,

the purest of
lyrics has no
role, or so

love thinks on
her way to
the singing. In

myths and traces,
in shadow and
in fact, the

other world pretends
us. Can L
get a witness?

KENNETH IRBY

(TULIP ETUDES)

Tulips and études leapings and weavings
they tear their fabric in their eagerness the necessary
know holes know in knowing
the one that is as the other the other that is as
The tongue of praise and ready quiet limber and boneless persuader
of the unboned great red tumbler to hold
the boned and the unboned overreacher from the new green
overreachers
Tulips and parrots rocks and gauzes feathers and
one single feather on the sidewalk to the carpark
pinion feather of a person not crow or jay or by the river eagle
by the river blood into the underground of blood flight
that is the breaking of the color that is the breaking of the flight
Nobody's heard anyone say I'm flying this year but some are
some wings moiré like curtains they are so sheer
some tongues are so sheer bestowers
I'm flying this here this sheer
and some tulips may be as dagger and as needle as a cup
as much a work of study as to fly to break up
loud laughter and delight the sky

*

If a turban and a tulip are as together tulle
and neither yet the name itself

if sky is hole conception gives to hide and be alive
can there be a turban of as pointed scales as sharp struck chords
as rum of feathers as of rocks to wear
Always a new part of town not known about before
though always thought was known about grander and more secret
piano scales and a pause and long held chords practised in a house passed by
the land itself lasting away to its deep hollow
with sidewalks through and stairways back to sky
back of grade school and as deep as deep as boulders rolled from the ice
You know with a tulip it is a turban and a chalice and a wrapping and a set of spikes
held with a slender knotted thread until it's time to show and opens
it is a flower of town here that opens
the agate hammer of pride in this part of town the railroad opens
as this part of town opens the grander and more secret hollows
and wears their flight of petals in its folds
its wearing in its secret swearing

*

The year's big red tail sticks out from behind the door or did or
this year's little white one
Some people burn their dead flowers to return the sun some just dump them
some save from the old year's hairs for a brush with this one's
and with one single strand tie and untie the secure knot at the calyx to let fly
the tide of life back up the hollow stalkway out of the underground and back again
And some tulips' aphids are the viral milk cows of' unpredictability

carrying and chewing the cud of bizarrerie and breaking
freaking and streaking
to let fly

*

It drinks far deeper red blood deeper sea and white and
    swallowed red
while the depleted heart is tulip scarlet Valentine
but its dark cross its dark stamens and its pistil star are hidden
    in the cup
its breaking is the rending in the rendering made true
even if *the god is the place of healing* and the true
is again and again untrue
Yet the divine drink in its conviction tastes of the heart
and the petals' breaking out of variegation
The sudden warmth again in middle February brings in
    certain
Southern-facing and protected beds
the second crocuses and the few first tulips up
to meet that yearning
or it to petal leap and merge

MICHAEL IVES

PLUNGED

as were the first to reawaken so should memory flay the cloud
face I first of those devices which
held me fast to previous noons braced up as to smooth myself
by means of small bells called

"grelots" for which the answer should anyone choose
prevents me from offering only a
description of these Pasiphae machines blue bones wandering
sand letters to bring one against the

instrument of suspicion where there is surely a front edge of
these pages whether delicate or
massy as I recollect plunged many nights previous that I
might tell them now again it

is impossible to determine is indeed this putting forth of
mouth between echo and sound the
whole at one moment void of sensation at the next regaining
its former place within another

whole through an influx the source of which was to be
discovered in and through bloodwheels
through I and emptiness and Lissajous curves whose course
could be followed as it passed into its

end once fully established along an edge of turbulent time
mounting as foliage along thighs
"now" and "here" at a fluid remove whether as my
recollection grew hands to stuff the eyes'

argument with world took in more of the details of
    reawakening mouth brimming with river as
the source of great feeling whatever part of it happened first
    to conceive these titanic days and

thereafter as one sleep and then another occurred to it
    deduced from those represented an accurate
recapitulation of the order in which "here" we are a defiant
    lipogram "now" drowning in our

missing letter my rescue from some evil root forcibly ingested
    that I had remembered the great
history of my screaming would have been quite other and I
    would be alone again

EDMOND JABES

FACES FOR ANTONIO SAURA

(trans. from the French
by Rosmarie Waldrop)

. . .this world has a face: ours.

Turn, toward me, your face.
Is the universe really this small?

The face ages with the name already ancient.

A stranger. How long I have wandered. How often rebuilt?
What have I, ah, tell, you who have known me, what have I kept for my self?

The absoluteness of Nothing.

We had our kings.
But the kings are dead.
We had our princes.
But the prices perished.
We had our wise men.
But wise, they turned the page of their lives.
We were a people
But the people dispersed.
We are the book
in the midst of fire.

With the flames that, one evening, licked our books, we shall paint a living face on every screen.

Fire is not fire until it has burnt us.
It is sham fire.

Nothing is tied to Nothing.
Supremacy of the rope.

One breath, and you exist. Slowly you come out of anonymity without a thought that you are moving back toward it.

Your face reflects your age. If you are aging it means you are alive. Your face has the age death gives it.

Visible, in its traits, your life; perceptible, in its wrinkles, your death.

Beautiful what breathes, hideous what breathes its last.

The hour will come when your face, once and for all, turns away from your past.

Then, without pity, turns against itself.

Any reserve of present is a repressed surplus of past.

Welcoming a face we celebrate the world.
Rejecting it, we condemn the world.

There is no mountain top inaccessible to man.
Death knows it well. It guards the highest.

It takes much love to survive love which, in its paroxysms can, without crying off, turn to hate: hate of the other out of mad love of the self.

And if wisdom were nothing but the mind's tenderness toward the heart?

Anticipate. Recapitulate. Your life is as much the moment that is over as the moment that overtakes it.

Do not hurry your steps. Any haste would be fatal. Do not draw back either.

Light, air, voice, your life vibrant.

Your soul is life.

Like sadness or joy, like fatigue or rest, time has its faces.

Fascinated by them all, eternity borrows one after the other.

Through the faint haze of absence, a face, till now in the distance, appears. Honor your eyes.

There are no dreamed portraits.

Since writing is above all the effort of staying in the text, I now discover a singular affinity between the writer and the fan of the oldfashioned cardgame called *reversi* where he wins who takes least tricks.

The writer has no past. Neither does the book.

New green of the mind, O dream.

The dream, but how discreet, how modest, of a grain of rice.

So charged with centuries, the book you exhume.

Each of your sentences rejuvenates it. O betrayal. Is it enough to suppress the obol in the margin to make it *your* book?

Thinking throws light only on thought.

The dead man, his shroud. Death, its darkness.

The pervious soul, its protective garment, ever so thin: its foolscap.

[*Un regard*, Fata Morgana, 1992]

NORA JAFFE

TWO DRAWINGS

Strident Man, 1977
Pen & Ink on Silk; 32 x 20"

For Theseus, 1969

PIERRE JORIS

THE EXALTATION OF INANNA

for Nicole

for she was
poetessa
maker of prayers
weaver of songs
singer
prophetessa

she was Enheduanna
daughter of Sargon of Akkad
she sang centuries before Sappho
she was priestess of Inanna

& she gathered
in song & exaltation
the goddess's **me**'s,
these are now both
their divine attributes:

for she is lady of all the **me**'s
owner of all the divine attributes,

righteous woman
robed in radiance
whose hand had held
oh you guardian

resplendent light
beloved above as below
all seven me's
of the attributes

it is the **me**'s make you a
goddess, **dingir**

the **me**'s that were **me-ba** / **me-sim** / **me-túm**
bequeathed /bestowed on you
the family jewels
the kinship ladder
an act of grace,
(not **me**-tal/**me**-tal
that legal claim, not Enki the bookkeeper's
mythological doling out, apportioning,
as **zi**- "right, proper, just" no, none
of that patriarchal dealin' & wheelin'–

These are the **me-ba**
the bestowed numinosities,
7 votive powers dangling / adorning
7 partialities gathered into
a figure of light

before whose power the great gods
fluttering like bats fly off from before you to
the clefts

The Great Gods are jealous
of the women,
they know not the small
wisdom of her human males:

"a man who finds his homeland sweet is
still a tender beginner. One who is at home
in every land is already strong.

"Perfect, however, is he to whom the
whole world is exile."

Nomad of the interior
unsettled man, leave
the cities of Sumer
go back to **edin**,
the steppe beyond **ambar**, the marsh, make
for the open outside you came from

("in magnificence hoof thunder silence of
pines and birches across the taiga")
that outside place the city hicks
call **ki-sì-ga**, the leper's ward
those who fear even the word & have to pun it
into **ki-să-ga**, the "good place"
when only you know how good it is

but she too will join you there,
in banishment
when Sargon's city-slickers
win one for oriental despotism,

you too will join them, Enheduanna,
but not before you sing /

and Enheduanna sings her evocation of Inanna:

"You of the appropriate **me**'s,
"Issued from the holy womb,

"Omniscient sage,
"Sustenance of the multitudes,

"Tree goddess, fit for the **me**'s,

"Merciful brilliant righteous woman,

great queen of queens,
supreme over the
mother who bore you
lady of all the lands,
I have sung your
sacred song!

it is exalting to
acclaim you.
I have recited your
me's for you!"

ANDREW JORON

THE BOOK IS AN ABSTRACT CANDLE

Avian V
Above, below
    disturbance of the thinking reed.

Look that stirs stars—
Answering reflection.

The *whiteness* not yet bled dry.

"The problem of content"
    is this prayer.
First & last, uncanny sentinels
Visible only to the voice.

To distinguish sound from its shadow—

To extinguish, then
    to quell
The cold equations—candle
    & marrow, blood & burning.

An apprehension, as of symbols—
An intense repose

    pages the moments: ages the mirages.

(To be turned toward facelessness.)

Where, exfoliated of exile—
Words are uncreated mouths, music corrupted
    into meaning.

Perhaps the geometry of a lament—
The travail
    of Earth's *intellectual surface*
    chambered with doubt.

A weighted wood, a conditional

That leaves leaves
    to the seasons later than winter

    —seasons of seizures & caesuras.

JANET KAUFFMAN

ON ELIMINATING CHARACTERS FROM FICTION

1.
If you don't say the name of a person, a good many things are possible in a sentence, and even in a landscape without margins or verifiable boundaries. It is possible to turn a corner and encounter a large machine lifting trees out of the ground. You can read the lettering on the metal, letters and numbers that are a code name for the machine, but it is certainly not the name of a person. Heaps of trees in full leaf may be stacked in the middle of the road. It is possible to see the beginnings of flames among the branches, and if you wait long enough, not very long actually, turn slightly to the side, and still not saying the name of a person, you can walk through the fire and into the house it's become.

2.
It's akin to making a hat from sticks. The handwork and gluing are not at all sweatshopped. Not jetted or crashed into wetlands, not magically rising up out of it whole and crowned. You can count the prepositions, cross-fingered, coming up from to out of, especially. And it is a cityscape here. Swept. There's plenty of sand for the froth of some sea.

3.
Okay, explain how many celebrations it takes to call them off and quit firing k-k-k-k-k-k-k into clouds, fireworks falling onto cottonwoods where they spit jewelry and metal chunks of Pontiacs, the whole river valley flipped to an attic with clothing on dummies, strings of paper lights burning; how many long naps with sun-block and hand-held missile launchers, before night and nothing else falls, and time (paying no attention to all the fucking goodbyes) passes.

4.
And the story that stops with somebody saying fare-thee-well to somebody must be false. Even if there's scenery in the fade-out. A dead tree, say. Even if the kid says something like, "I'll get those chives chopped now, Mother." Even if he says, "Bring me my goose gun." He

goes inside, and in the middle of chive-chopping, or later, maybe stories later, fork in his hand, he's opening his mouth.

5.
Remember. Indoors, the outgoing door opens in. As a usual thing. Outdoors, the ingoing door opens out. And in a house of many doors, such as the city, the distinction, inside to out, may be difficult, an habitual mystery, what with the trees and jungle paraphernalia of tattoo shops and the concrete bedding and awned walkways under the air. Guess where you are. It is impossible to be a stranger to the climates of seven continents. And others. There are several others. The forearm registers low-lying air, off the chocolate pecan tub; and the various underground weathers rise, usually visibly, against the knee, the thigh. There is the underarm atmosphere, too - dank, hair sweet. Temperature and steam and aroma, these ephemera, forewarn the way advertising forewarns: by assertion, mild haste, dispersal. It slips by. But if you open a door, out or in, to look at an advertisement, that is another story. If you open a door, flat on the ground, to look at a subway, a grotto, that's another story, too. Consider the number of doors. It is morning in Detroit. You can open a door and see sixteen bolts of hand-woven purple fabric. You can open a door and see the wooden step and the marigolds. You can open a door and see a woman pull at her own nipples. It is midday. You can see the man in the green hat on the sidewalk. You can see brickwork. The sky is there, plain as a cake. The blue ceiling. The blue floor. The blue door.

6.
Debris, homespun, flim-flamming with shrouds, cast-offs, that is the handwork of what's-her-name in her shift, her hair woven to ladders. It is the paradox of her escape, she climbs down, she cuts her hair, more flotsam to figure out. She is gone, gone, a nervy babe, like a one-time flier, flimsy above the globe and going down. Oh, those are the syllables she sings out, oh, oh.

7.
On its own, narrative goes to nature. His tongue between her toes, or hers his, they roll in a tire, say, one way and another, steel-belted, hot as the highway, it's Utah anyhow, the salt flats, fast with their fingers between their thighs. They don't know which way they'll roll next, whoever's story it is. Is this day the equinox? They're spun, they shut their eyes to cut out confusion, and hollows open up behind their knees and, see, it's Salt Lake between them. They lick whatever they

can, and slow. It's not true, but people say it: this is the ocean that used to be.

8.
Recall the trees, their ex-foliage - in French, a construction more tactile. In fiction, the mouth is the place of trees, whole: root, trunk, limb, leaf, seed, node, scar, tooth, tip, pit, lobe.

9.
It's raining, and yes, somewhere the avalanches strip stones from the hill, wing-scrapes. There is so much motion the sow-bugs roll downhill, and then the artillery opens up and shells hit the three-story apartment buildings at 16 Ferdinand Place and the windows flare. They have exploded now. The gnats called phantom gnats with fringed antennae as large as wings, the ones walking the corners of the glass, they are in the air now, and you've flown here, your baggage is so light.

10.
They're sleeping in a row, labeled, you can look, it's not like tags on their toes, but they've got a line or two over their heads, bookish, like poets, maybe they *are* poets, side by side, you can call up their files at the windows. They've been asleep, arranged in some fashion, and now we're here messing up the sheets, good god, air the place out, open another door. Even your mother says, there's more than scenery out there. You can look both ways, and then another, the first disturbance is the most disturbing, and after that you can read the books with the bad titles, and make love this way, one leg over the shoulder.

KAREN KELLEY

INSIDE KAREN KELLEY

Inside me, Cy Twombly is a figure at the window in a checkered skirt, quixotic, demeanor swerving from tough guy to spoiled child. He pronounces the wall-relief kitsch. There follow strange doings inside a large sack: four men and one woman. Blunted shapes and open, frontal contours crowd one another upon the burlap surface.

The painful brightness, the panicked sense of being saddled with this absurd name—*Karen Kelley, Karen Kelley, Karen Kelley, Karen Kelley*—which I constantly intone. *D 'ya want Daddy ta fuck ya?* asks Marlon Brando inside the bag.

I'm Queen of My Room, but this confusion about men and women is disjunctive, hallucinatory, like strokes visible at the sides or bottom edges of innumerable hesitations and qualifications in the definition of this monster: the creature, cooked whole in grease, is curled up beyond recognition. Its eyes, luminous, contain an immediacy of address and an irresolvable instability.

Maul me. Take me. Come in, says the monster, my favorite monster, with its pink tongues inside its burlap beak swelling to an alarming degree: it is terrible and frightening to see matter being pulled into a black hole at a speed of more than 6 million miles per hour, a black hole five feet high with a seven foot wingspan that chokes me to hold inside.

It's a permanent opening just under my breastbone: a strange feature, exotic, lined with adrenal glands that look like birds' claws or twigs. It's a source of embarrassment: exposed to the air it exhales waves of an intensifying fragrance—the flowery, so-called "smell of fear"—even as it recedes, a peculiar anatomical Doppler effect.

The only way the helpful policeman has been able to "fix" me up to now is by clasping me to the slippery periscope of biological material he insists that together we create. He squints into me furiously and

claims to see my every experience half-erased on its axis of heartbroken tenderness and incomplete gesture. At least that's how I put it. He says: *the bottom halves of things are hard to take your eyes off of.*

Surely we must mean the same thing.

Robert Kelly

THE SOUND OF THE CENTER

masaniyeh

the tree of
death the fatal
blossoms of opera, the plaintive
doo-wop of our ceremonies
of love

orgasm you great tree
grows up through the core
of me the animal
howls at the limit of what we mean
the other speaks

that is the real sound
soft howl
wolf growl
of love coming
to love

limping through the
jungle of what you left of me
try to find a name
I can identify,
something like west or wolf
or wheat
but all I can find
is thing after thing,
useless to me
not knowing the operative
word

so wake up
is treefall
bough breaks
baby fall
into speech

every language
is another language
when you're asleep

and no word means a thing

That's why Blake
drew so many
snakes and vines and tendrils round
the empty places where the words would be
between the words that could be said

the words that could be written down
are not the words,

the space between
says everything

he filled with snakes and roots and vineleaves to remind.

MILTON KESSLER

NEW MONTH

Walk toward the epicenter of leaves on grass
struggle to keep carrying heavy bones
as I must each biblical day
far from any bench
and without breath Exhale Expire
Sonia watches from a distant table reads.

I failed to find help in the tools of poetry. When asked
what was wanted,
fell into deafness—rain.
Pain became
frozen reason .

To make up for the years without you, reader, I hug
suffering and illness
which comfort me like the shoulders of a sweet roll
at Reznikoff's.

Glassdoor opens
and sunlight stands in the room,
competing with blankness.
"Who are you,"she says, irritable
that balance is challenged.
"I am ice," it says, " the origin of things."
It starts to climb and she follows, melting as they descend.

He rubs his embedded fingers as I write as if
he was making
fire,
faster and faster he swirls them,

a beggar
rolling a warm nut.

How can I leave you, reader, just having found you again
in your corner-seat, empty pages shaking.

But I have an appointment with sleep .
No rimes left for subway souls.

Wife worked hard today
baking and laundry. Her legs cold
as she goes to bed. Pull quilt over
her shoulder.
Go down to pay debts.
Nov. 1, '99 We 51 yrs
this season.

(for ERK 1902-1999)

R.B. Kitaj

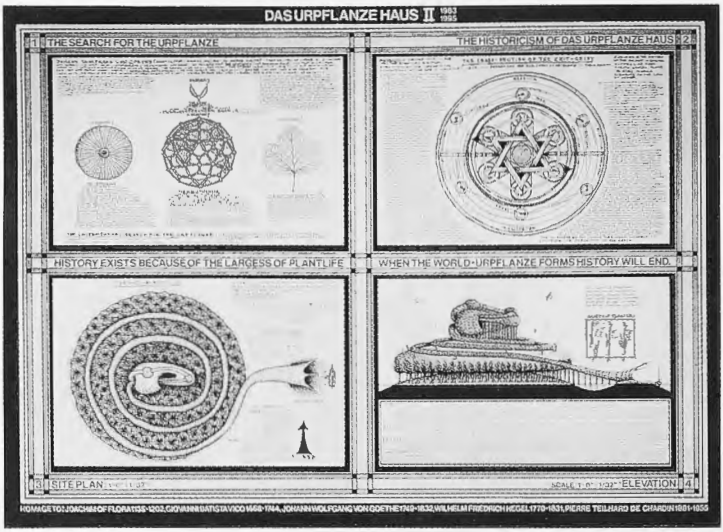
TWO PAINTINGS

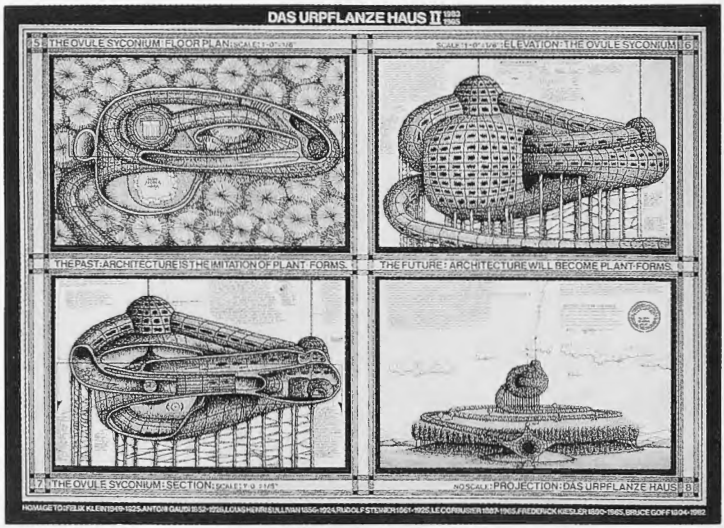
The Cleveland Indian, 1995–1998
Oil on Canvas; 60 x 36"

Second Diasporist Manifesto, 1997–1998
Oil on Canvas; 60 x 60"

Paul Laffoley

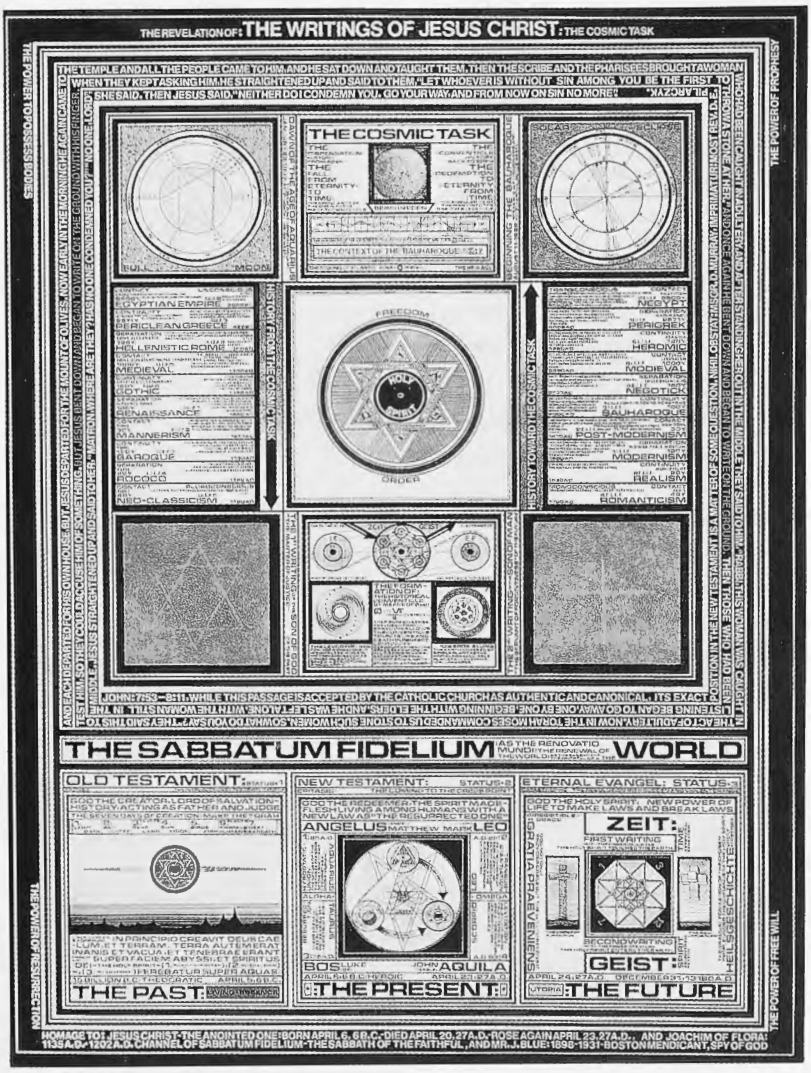
TWO WORKS





Das Urpflanze Haus, 1983–1996

Size for each format: 30 x 40"; Ink, Letters on Board; the design for a house composed of various plant species all grafted together by means of parts from the ginkgo biloba tree, and some genetic enginerring. Homage to Johannes Wolfgang von Goethe



The Writings of Jesus Christ, 1997

32½ x 42½"; Ink, Letters, Color Inks, Sand, and Photomontage on Board; the mysterious writings of Jesus which reveal the cosmic task of the universe. Homage to Jesus Christ

GERRIT LANSING

THE JOINT IS JUMPING

Whose joint? Pass me one, please,
et suce ma bite. What's the time?
Across the great divide the caravans tick,
and tremulous, we unlocked our hearts,
lips on lips, AHA the stars were bright
as fell the fullness we fall into, not two not won,
a foretaste, cool hole of in-between, pleroma.

We lop the moon, invoking hazard's sorites
our sorties through the orient gates.
Tumulus, the earthly place of such angelic music,
is lively now, jumps, is locus where we slither out of time.

KARIN LESSING

DUNE LIGHT

Shadow–
cloths, pinned

and un-
pinned

settle, again
rise

night–
drift, its opiate

crests

*

a grain, each night,

lodges another

whispers from further a-
way, from under

glitter debris

*

as when
a morning glory fainteth

wind,

planter, scythe

your wandering
drought, your whet-

stones

*

like voices

or the hills
suddenly wavering

where
it diamonds

their meeting
slopes

*

medusas of sand

each word, once
murmured

grows a shadow

in the shadow of the great rock, a

hiding place

*

not a breath nor bird's cry

merely the cane-brakes'
amphibious, ligatured
lives

persist, still audible

*

foam
made a curtain, was

flood-gate, en-
gaged

where you, it
was you

that went under, entered

*

shivered,

fibrous
and shivered

as the finger that
lights them

In dune-
light

keeping distance
undiminished

*

to drown the lights. . .

as if, deeper
than
sleep

the void
unspinning itself, its colors

*

towards the wind's edge
driven

palm-grove of stars, the almost

rounded
night.

advancing

sand

you fall,

fall
beyond measure

***

JOSE LEZAMA LIMA

PAVILION OF NOTHINGNESS

(Trans. from the Spanish by Roberto Tejada)

I join the screw
posing questions in the wall,
a lackluster sound
color covered with a blanket.
But I falter and momentarily
blind, I can barely feel myself.
All at once, I call it to mind,
with my fingernails I tunnel
a tokonoma in the wall.
I need a tiny hollow,
it's there I go diminishing
to reappear anew,
to touch myself and set my forehead in its place.
A tiny hollow in the wall.

Multiplier of weariness
the café I'm sitting in,
the insistent daiquiri
returning like a face of no use
for death, for springtime.
With my hands I trace the length
of a lapel that feels cold to me.
I wait for no one and I insist
on someone's pressing arrival.
All at once, with my fingernail
I draw a tiny crevice on the table.
There it is, the tokonoma, the hollow,
I'm in company unrivaled,
a corner conversation in Alexandria.
We're together in a round

of skaters through the Prado.
He was a child who inhaled
all the tenacious dew from the sky,
even then with the hollow, like a cat
that circles the whole body
with a silence full of flickerings.

Within reach of what surrounds us,
and close to our body,
the stubborn notion that says our soul
and its enwrapment fit
inside a tiny hollow in the wall
or on tissue paper scratched with a fingernail.
I'm diminishing
I'm a point that disappears and returns
and I fit full-length inside the tokonoma.
I make myself invisible
and on the verso I recover my body
swimming at the beach,
encircled by bachelors of art with banners of snow,
mathematicians and baseball players
describing sapodilla ice cream.
The hollow is smaller than a deck of cards
and it can be as big as the sky,
but we can shape it with our fingernail
along the brim of a coffee cup
or in the sky that falls beside our shoulder.

The beginning is united with the tokonoma,
in the hollow a kangaroo can hide
without forfeit of its bounding joy.
The apparition of a cave is
mysterious and begins to disentangle its dreadful.
To hide there is to tremble,
the hunter's horns resound
in the frozen forest.
But the hollow is soothing,
we can lure it with a thread
and usher it out of insignificance.

I scrape the wall with a fingernail,
slivers of lime crumble down
as though they were shards
from the celestial tortoise shell.
Is the barrenness in the hollow
the first and final path?
I fall asleep, in the tokonoma
the other still walking is the one I evaporate.

1 April & 1976

LINH DINH

TWO POEMS

CONVERSION TABLE

A stick of carrot is equal to a gilliflower.
A gilliflower is equal to a drum of gasoline.
A drum of gasoline is equal to a stick of carrot.
"For the sake of my offspring, I think I'll marry an outsider."

Tamerlane has been sighted in Northern Italy.
Jesus has broken out in Inner Mongolia.
They like to kiss outside and piss inside.
We like to kiss inside and piss outside.

A mosquito has a mouth but no asshole.
After three drops of blood, he falls asleep.
He only gets up to bite another mosquito.
He sucks and he sucks.
Inside this balloon are ten thousand mosquitoes.

In my left fist is a fossil of the first butterfly.
In my right fist is a theory on why blood trickles down men's legs.

A man gains a drop of blood per day from eating.
Each night, he gets up to slash himself
Across the face and wrist.
He must be bitten by ten thousand mosquitoes.
He sucks and he sucks.
Where would all that blood go otherwise?

Once a month, a woman drops a teacup on the floor,
A fine teacup with bones inside it.

Vietnamese and Germans now speak the same language.
Prussians and Bavarians cannot understand each other.

NATIVITY

I was born astride a suckling pig.
Inside this pig was a fancy mirror
With instructions scratched onto it
On how to slaughter a suckling pig.

I was born with two or three stomachs
Astride a fancy mirror,
In a country larger than this map.

Eat me now, said the clam.
Eat me next, said the chicken.
Eat me tomorrow, said the cow.
Eat me last, said the suckling pig.

I'll look for a suckling pig, said the first midwife.
I'll look for an extra long knife, said the second midwife.
I'll look for a fancy mirror, said the third midwife.

You don't know, where I was born,
There were thousands and thousands
Of suckling pigs, long knives and fancy mirrors.

There were nearly everything there was in this world.
At least one faithful reproduction of each thing.

NATHANIEL MACKEY

GO LEFT OUT OF SHANTIVILLE

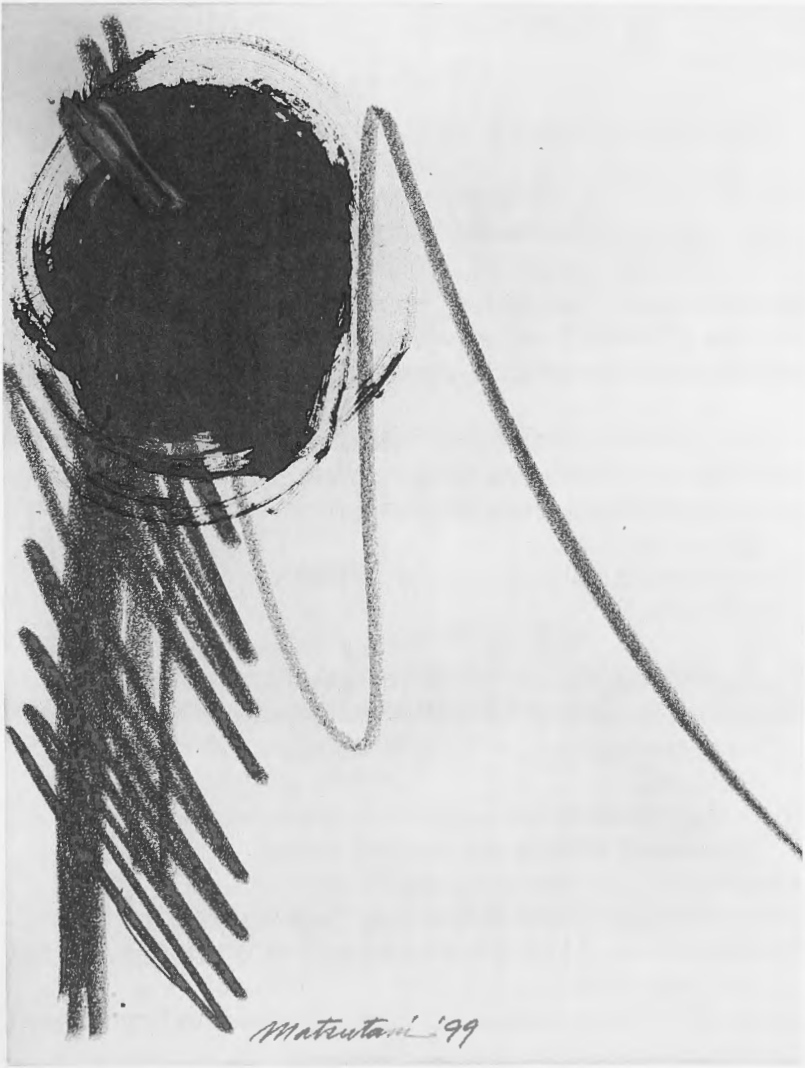
—"mu" twenty-second part—

Say-it-again got hold of us, we
shook. Now neither Paris nor
Peru was it we were in...
We
were in Jamaica, St. Ann's Bay, a
parish peril had to do with, perish
we thought it was we heard. We
heard a music made of swoon, sway.
Swing had its way with us as
well. . .
An unanswered message on the
machine rewound repeatedly, played
again, thin balm against what
ravage would come. A sunken isle
it
seemed we lay washed up on,
adrift on the ythmic, no sooner
up than gone, dawned on as
though
our new day had now come, "mu"
suffusing the otherwise desert air. . .
In the moving cubicle it arose we
were in. . .Right sides and
shoulders, right sides of heads,
pressed
against the window and wall as we
went left, pushed by the
bend we rounded, large-arced

embankment our departure
cut...
Sipped sand, so long without
water. Lone Coast elixir, mouths
drawn shut. . .Euthanasic lip-stitch,
loquat liqueur, Oliloquy Valley it
was
we came to next. . . We were
each an apocryphal Moses, feet
newly fitted with sandals, we
strolled, scrolls long thought to
be lost unrolled in front of us,
dubbed
acoustic scribbling, skanked. . .
Tumbling water filled my head, I fell
out laughing, sand so long the one
thing
met my lip. Two words, *One love,*
kept repeating, an asthmatic wuh
whose we dwelled elsewhere, scattered,
worldwide auction block. . .
Cropped air, coaxed inhalation. . .
Music
the breath we took. . .It was only
there we wanted to be, the everywhere
we'd always wanted, ours,
albeit
only an instant, forever, never to be
heard
from again

MATSUTANI

TWO DRAWINGS


Matsutani '99

JACKSON MAC LOW

THERE A DIFFERENT TIME-SENSE IS SIMPLY NON-COMPETITIVE (Stein 77)

There a different time-sense is simply a different difficulty.

The difference is satisfactory, so the difficulty is simple.
Does the difference make for a different difficulty anyway?
Looking perfectly difficult, it is naturally different.

Looking perfect, the difficulty is naturally different.
The difficulty is different, simply different,
Are things better or more nearly perfect because they are different?
There where the different is simply difficult, the difference is different.

Does a different time-sense make that difficulty satisfactory?
That's simple: already the time-sense because it is a different time-sense makes the acceptance of the difficulty different.
There they prepared for a different, more satisfactory happening, though war seemed better.
Were the insiders' refusals satisfactory?
Different compositions would have been satisfactory.
Their words would have had to do with satisfactory work, not with war work.
Lord!—the almost classical simplicity that leads to important refusals!

Are beautiful things connected with beings that are beautiful?
Are those beings' first efforts at composition accepted by them?
Are the beautiful things connected with the beautiful things

they are being?
Do these things come from the beings that they are?
Does their time-sense or the things they are being lead to those things?
The grey, beautiful things there are connected with the things they are being.
That is, the things they are being are connected with those things.
What they are being is creating those things.
Speak, grey classic, where is creating entering?
Everyone knows that compositions are not created as a matter of course.
All are made by those already prepared.
Anybody may be already prepared.

Naturally, their works are perfectly different and perfectly connected.
Naturally, contemporaries, being different, are not non-competitive.
They are perfectly connected.

Their contemporaries too create connectedly.
As contemporaries, whatever they create is connected.
Why aren't they naturally non-competitive?
Why can't they, though naturally different, be non-competitive?

New York: 25-27 May 1999

MICHAEL MCCLURE

THINKING OF SU TUNG-P'O

AMONG ROSES THE ABSENCE OF THORNS
I
S
the absence
of perfume.
Facts skim like duckweed
over the surface of worlds,
worlds
with
I
M
A
G
I
N
E
D
billowings of nonstuff
shaping
boulders and mackerel
and lincolns,
worlds in which
I free-float
imagining
a battle

when there is nothing
but the rattle
of seeds in a case
inventing springtime.

THIS BODY
will be
no Body
but mine.

Then
Gone

GWEN MCVAY

TWO POEMS

THREE OF

rocks : sedentary,
metaphoric, and hideous,

tastes: bittersweet, salt, and sour

I dreamed a third bat, this one green
What sciences divide the unconscious colorizes,

senses : smell, trust, and fearing

Pick a
card, any
card—aha,

thumbs
bat's thumb
prints of thumbs

the Three o' Craw—
three craw sat upon a wa'
third craw wasna there at a'

in the song
but the

That's my study,

humors : limp, vile, and blood

As a bat creeps down a façade, no suicide but a surprise,
I dreamed the world was in on my secret in my Maidenform bra

Three of anything, that's a fine hand

SOME FIELDS

fuck you he said fuck fuck
you cancer and a hole opened

Ginsberg and Burroughs visited
last night to tell about it droll uncles

fuck you he said fuck fuck you cancer
and a scratched round light in a coal tunnel

his favorite saying swans' wings
forming the gesture of granting wishes

fuck you time present future time past you're
all nothing and I can prove it wearing silk hats

the voodoo clowns led him into bardo
wearing fuck you he hefts his thigh bone

[for Rick Fields]

Ana Mendieta

from SILUETA SERIES

Silueta Series, 1979
Earth-body work

PAUL METCALF

THE END

you've got to know
that the end of me
is all the way out

the butt of me
is exposed. that
once the change

has been made it
cannot be changed
back again.

HENRI MICHAUX

from THE RAVAGED ONES

(Trans. from the French by James Wanless)

Sometime in the past, this one had learned to paint, made pictures that conformed to the standards of his teachers, drawing forms their way, rendering matter, colors, life.

In this place where he is being kept since a serious setback, he has just been given some painting supplies, watercolors, sheets of paper, brushes.

Trouble. New uncertainties added to his anxiety. Forms? What forms? It is formlessness, his current condition, that he should express to himself, if he must express something.

As for color. . .,it's colorlessness that's his problem these days. How can colors convey the absence of color, the loss of color?

And life. . .it makes no sense anymore, life, it is the exact opposite, non-life, that he is experiencing, that he suffers, that he sees, life agape, life frozen, the silence, the stillness, the impenetrability of beings, that's what he will express, more or less, with what means he has.

The face he is painting, stripped of its color, sponged twenty times, and which he is trying to lighten still further, is so pale that it seems no more than the former location of a faint odor, or the vacant site where a face had been .

So too vanishes the diminished body, devoid of thickness, here and there uncompleted, as if to have the whole of it were

unnecessary. Some parts meticulously rendered, others just a blank, nothing at all, *terra incognita.*

Arms—what use are arms now?—one of them detailed but lacking a point of insertion on the naked body, the other ending abruptly. . .in a plantule. The plant kingdom, essentially that's where he is these days, equally without animation, without plans, without thoughts. Inert. Discontinued arm, with twigs at the end, being visited calmly by insects.

Gaping open, defenseless, a body inundated, as on oceanographic charts of regions where the inundations of the sea cut into the coast, smashing it up, shredding it.

Readily, "nothingness" replaces the flesh.

Between the legs, a void rises continuously to the region of the heart, up between the ribs all the way to the chest, which it splits in half, and finally stops; there, a faint semblance of a frail body timidly, delicately takes form once again, as if made of pink petals.

Being, no more than a memory; vague, fragmentary, hard to set in motion. The man (what's left of him) a curtain, a thin curtain.

Relations with those around him will be painful.

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

MAGDALENA, HER SHADOW

Walter carpenters and so does Beth—
And well they do it. Even to wash a car,
Cultivate vegetables, play a flute,
Promises to propel active sense,
With all good reason, to a point of closure.

A work, perfected, your doorpost, or
Desk of noble cherry,
Comes to exist, its fit and polish the fruit
Of a doing, so you can stand there, finite,
Watch how it was figured, now is done.

The music also inhabits wood
Or shines in chrome, cabbage leaf;
It might be in the beetroot, crimson
And ebullient. How very nice, humming,
To have whittled a top,

Then watch your ancient child whipping it;
At solving an equation she is consummate:
On a green screen objective digits line up,
The thing is done, a stream of instants
Penned in a pond, she puts a sparkle in it.

The carpenter strips his apron off,
Picks the shavings from his plane blade;
The market gardener, with his fingertips,
Is gratified by the cool, the luscious
Character of the leaf they palp.

When the flautist places one domed
Tip of a forefinger over the last hole
And blows, into a silver cave, his dying breath,
Time has to stop awhile.
Concerted

The universe contracts. We are promised afresh
To a beginning coiled in the end of everything.
Yes, Walter carpenters and so does Beth,
And Jack is seeing to our supply
Of potable water. Tomorrow and tomorrow

We shall swim in the river, drink it,
The dragon's breath will not have scorched
Our flutes, our desks, our cabbages.
In the shadow of that wizened woman,
Clothed in her hair, are we so sheltered?

Who walked away, into the oven, then shut
its door, the desert, once and for all she washed
Those feet in ancient time, now she walks
Hauling for ever her wrinkles and her long
Weightless shadow, where we cook.

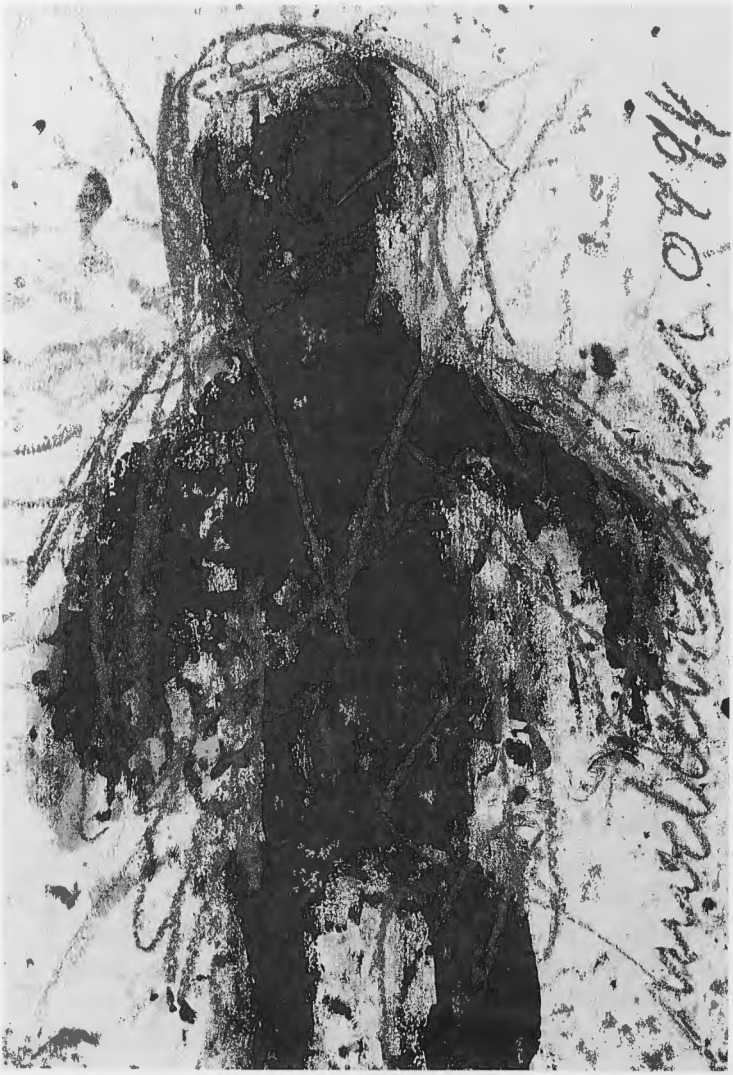
So to have woken once in the lover's arms
While twilight roused birdsong in the Spring
—She's gone, he's gone, and still the twitter
Is Carolina wren, is cardinal, a finch
Opens a floating maze for thought

(The end of the world come round again)

To dance with memory in. Together
They warm the maze. They are weaving still
Magdalena, her shadow in the kitchen,
And Walter, with his hammer, works the wax,
Assembling plume by plume for Icarus the wings.

Michel Nedjar

TWO PAINTINGS



Brian Nissen

TWO SCULPTURES

Irazu
Bronze

Quetazal
Bronze

LORINE NIEDECKER

NOTES FROM THE TRIP

an excerpt from Lorine Niedecker's
extended composition notes for her
poem "Lake Superior"
[edited by Jenny Penberthy]

Doty: Mackinaw country—Island: Many of the rocks are crusted over with calcareous spar, particularly at Robinson's Folly.

St. Mary's R. Here are whitefish of superior quality

white, red and grey sandstone in river at Soo

Grand Marais, 21 miles from the Two Hearted River (Michigan)

"as the season shifts"

S: "no ardent spirits shall be hereafter introduced under any pretence, into the Indian country"

Schoolcraft River

a lake, Plantagenette (The Rest in the Path) water fowl shot—the mallard, wood-duck, sawbill

Towards Rainy R. from North Shore—ospreys dive for fish and eagles swoop down to rid them of their catch. Timber wolves, bear, beaver. Frenchmen came there early 18th century to look for the Sea of the West. Scene 20 years ago now much the same as then

The peace pipe the war chief smoked with his heart

Indians—S: "a life of want and vicissitude"

"lakes of a pondy character, redolent with nymphae odorata, thru which we successfully passed."

"the naked solitudes of Red River"

32 ft. long canoe

"a portage of four pauses"

lake—its outlet of a spreading, sandy shelly character—no Indian nor French name so as Mr. Johnston shot a deer here we named the lake after him. Sibly Lake (other notes)

un chanson du voyageur

He presented a pipe

Miss. R. Valley—the great carboniferous limestone formation which fills it.

At home we're in the drowned lands—trees standing permanently in the water.

"We slept on a kind of bog which the men call *Tetes des femmes*.

treaty of limits between the tribes

Pike (of Pike's Peak) when he went up the Miss. R.—north of the St. Croix R. he said the river (Miss. I take it) became "black in the depths and clear in sandy shallows."

calcite—a native calcium carbonate also called calc spar, occurring in many crystalline forms, such as chalk, marble, etc. . .

The face of the earth is a graveyard and so it has always been.

My inner midwest

I was in a St. Ignace fog

Why this fascination with rock terms, name, probably because we like to think the first geologists took their finds and created them—name to thing—out of the nature of things—plus sometimes their sound or reflection of colour that delighted their senses.

VALERE NOVARINA

TIME'S ANIMAL (END)

(Trans. from the French by Allen S. Weiss)

Animals, anaimals, stamp your feet on the old earth, and arise to imitate man by nodding: he curses his entire earth when it is earthbound and blesses it by his presence. He shall fall from it, beyond action, when all the light shall be completed. All the light shall be eaten at the same time as the blood. I suddenly heard, in my clay of deafness, the sempiternal tale of nothing that says. I felled from the sky all that he says, I imitated the world of my words and I heard nothing. Man of the Hole Bohu, which flesh grabs you, grub? Why do you know all those words? Is it you yourself who found yourself and who lifted yourself up from so low? What do they say? When we see what we see, when we know what we know, we are right to think what we think. When we say what we say, and thus do and thus say, what more can be added? If I see what I perceive, I made this journey with glee. Why has the flesh taken on the appearance of words? How is it that we speak? Let the meat express itself! This shouldn't be spoken to the animals. Day of my eyes, are you always the night, or only the view of he who sees? I must say this to those women who sympathize with me, if there are any: they will well understand.

What does the beast say when it is called? It returns to itself and hushes up.

Amnimals, omnimals, I admit to have eaten but one single body of a man in my entire life: my own, which is, except for your own.

If right now a dog suddenly entered outside of us, we would tell it to leave immediately. For we have forgotten the race of animals from which human glory was made. Let man himself now have life if he can, without music. Me, I will see my own dead body that leaves when I leave with my music with joy. One day I played the horn like this all alone in a splendid woods, and the birds were becalmed at my feet when I named them one by one with their names two by two: Pimwhite, Sandkill, Partch, Dart, Stiltback, Goskit, Persill, Peeve, Phyllist, Corntail Burgeon, Flit, Titibit, Queedle, Jewet, Phew, Marshquiver, Graywhip, Corvee, Tausk, Rillard, Preem, Peterwil, Caasenut, Flusher, Willowgyre, Trillet, Pelosi, Silverwisp, Eidereye,

Wheeltail, Ptyt, Chipper, Arbortwill, Jeebill, Binche, Tristin, Wheatspit, Wern, Ivrette, Rosset, Purnt, Wranter, Bussy, Flittern, Snowhit, Barnscrub, Pintuff, Trube, Powitt, Grant, Pergola, Flipe, Stonelover, Writ, Perforant, Tewhawk, Churwit, Palmette, Coldfisher, Voxe, Ginny, Crown, Barnfool Junkie, Cassand, Jasper, Tealdown, Looke, Binette, Jopbeak, Kwoit, Redgyre, Swoop, Peent, Clairon, Lowl, Chopine, Whirrlee, Silte, Crownbib, Yellowringer, Queedlebill, Kurm, Javer, Limmet, Quosch, Skell, Moonlet, Wingshriek, Tippen, Sassbeak, Pit, Tompic, Fisthawk, Whittlebill, Nightsweet, Galimat, Skuldove, Whitewill, Blackwhite, Kingcatcher, Flickleaf, Gruel, Trollop, Treespit, Kis.

CHARLES OLSON

POEMS FOR BET

[Elizabeth Kaiser came to Black Mountain College to continue piano study with Stefan Wolpe which had begun at the Juilliard School of Music. It was in the summer of 1954, with Connie away in a trial separation, that Olson and Bet became lovers. Little at present is known about the beginnings of the relationship beyond the account in Tom Clark's *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life* pp. 244-51. More will be made evident when Bet's diaries are published—they are currently being edited by Derrick Stone, with advance extracts in the *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society* #23/24 (January 1998) pp. 9-10.

The common-law marriage that began with the birth of Charles Peter Olson in April 1955 was of such ordinary intimacy that Olson seems not to have had to write of it much, neither in letters nor in poems, until it ended tragically with Bet's death in an automobile accident in March 1964. The elegy that Olson wrote, after a blankness of three months, is a most moving expression of loss. It is reprinted here from *The Maximus Poems* (California 1983) P. 420. In the miscellaneous manuscripts in the Olson archive at Storrs we find three short poems earlier and six short poems thereafter which we can have no hesitation in adding as poems of love and honor. These unpublished poems appear here through the courtesy of the Archives and Special Collections, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut, Storrs. Copyright © by University of Connecticut Libraries.—Ralph Maud]

[1]

I love the World, and until
it got to be one person
the Beloved, I did not know
Self.
When I did, in a corpse,
I was Born.

[2]

My love poem for you on
St. Joseph's Day

Walking the sand in the snow
the sense of you is so strong on me
it is: I could just fall into every drop of you

[3]

THE POEM YOU ASKED FOR FOR YOU

until nature is met
halfway as we go from birth
toward death the path

thereafter
no path

(half mine half
Charles Peter's)

[4]

MAXIMUS TO HIMSELF JUNE
1964

no more,
where the tidal river rushes

no more
the golden cloak (beloved
World)

no more dogs
to tear anything
apart—the fabric

nothing like
the boat (no more Vessel
in the Virgin's
arms

no more dog-rocks
for the tide
to rush over not any time again
for wonder

the ownership
solely
mine

[5]

the BIO-MORPHIC
MUST GO tale quale ipsum est

The Apple-Branch
(who was my wife

[6]

She did not know Evil
is true

Tues October 6 LXIV

[7]

Going to Bed At Night
—reading
trash. And she thought
I was (or did she? ?
kicking it—like Franz,
or Dan, Or Creeley. Or herself—pondering
the questions
of life.

John she'd
take care of—and Ed (Sanders)
she wouldn't know
what to make of
his irruptions
of private matters

Drummond Hadley
she didn't
know

Fri Oct 9th

[8]

I went full tilt
And then she was killed,
in her automobile

I need every bleeding minute now
I don't have any time for any new life

reading John Wieners'
Ace of Pentacles, Friday
October 9th 1964

[9]

Follow Bet
into the colors of her dress
and up the weak ladder
to the Face of God

Friday, October
9th Nineteen Sixty Four

[10]

Her skin
covered me, let light into me, held
my nature, kept me
for myself, and I wasn't sorry

to be closer. In the horrors and transparent
policy,
of the present. Montreal, the wharves
below Quai Cartier, the St Lawrence
very wide, we crossed
all sorts
of tracks, and the *Utterholm*
was ready to depart. She advised me
to take it, and I would have
if I'd had a passport. We went home
to our hotel.

Bet 2 (Friday night
October 9th,
1964

JOHN OLSON

HOW DO YOU DO

How do you do I am a glossy tabletop a sentimental fluorescence of Renaissance bile swollen with an obscure object of desire.

It is 1870. Crazy horse is planting words in the maternity of night. Tomorrow will erupt in forsythia and loons.

I looked into the eyes of a crow today and saw pachyderms, sackcloth, corpulence, insularity, naphtha and democracy. I decided then and there that the apparatus of storytelling can be modified to include the opium of participles and the beautiful black grapes of rampant speculation. A discussion for instance of early hominid activity on the radio. 2.5 million years ago near the east coast of Africa the hominids learned to chip flakes off of rocks and use them for scraping the meat of antelopes and three-toed horses from the bones. What was significant about this was the increase in protein, which promoted longevity, which promoted walking and suckling, which promoted leisure to learn the genius of Rocks.

In which case how do you do. In which case I am a gregarious mammal. In which case wars and real estate and ceremony and wax. In which case appoggiatura. In which case words bits of meaning like Calypso and zinc.

Today is a form of kettledrum. It is proportional to go barefoot. This may seem singularly erect but a shadow folded into recapitulation may also engorge with ink. This is so the image can attain the peripatetic amiability of Henry Miller in a sunlit pool talking about his childhood in Brooklyn.

Here in the house of music all movement is equal to rain. Let the signs empty themselves of salt and legislation. Let the illumination of Rome be achieved in reverie and hot sexual whispers. All it takes is a little moisture to make a spinal cord of silver and gold.

How do you do I want to penetrate shiver squirt sparkle and spin.

The accordion, in and of itself, is sufficient evidence of nudity.

How do you do I am both naked and insistent. How do you do I am holding the eyelid of a mimetic dent. How do you do I am a Cajun 45 from Louisiana. How do you do I am a bead of water running down the operating guide on the bottom lid of the washer. How do you do I am a consonant scorched with life. How do you do I am dilating into a hypaethral radiochemical button of ice. How do you do I am a woman's arm holding a footstep of extraordinary conjecture. How do you do I am a letter whose sound contains the stark chemistry of the penis. How do you do I am a blister of apprehension on the movie screen of a Bolivian aether.

How do you do I'm leaving. How do you do I'm hungry. How do you do my thumb is translucent. How do you do I am floating a raft of inflatable German. How do you do I am William Wordsworth pointing at nature. How do you do I'm a human emotion. How do you do I'm foolishly increasing my altitude. How do you do I'm completely covered with skin. How do you do I am a landscape settling on the bottom of a lake.

ROCHELLE OWENS

STARKNESS THE EYESOCKETS

Beyond cracks about SCARCITY
WANT Lucy's hands joined
her partner swings swings in
semicircle then fullcircle swings
thrusts out hip face to face
reflecting circles rows of repetitive
windows alternate swings in semicircle
spirals of her hair black silk hood
RED AND PALE PALE AND RED
opening windows following her
closely you look behind

Wednesday morning what observer really
sees each face blurred detaches
objects crashing down your skill
cutting wool Lucy female
surgeon brings to light WILDERNESS
her eye glides dark streak
translucent shells under her feet
floating above like a leaf driven
seven maidens WHITE as milk
it will be thursday tomorrow

Starkness the eye sockets nose
mouth & chin encapsulating Lucy's
life taste smell hearing
sight Lucy is sitting drawn
to The Book of Psalms she
raises her right hand whispers
is your disease a mind?

to each her own plague three
VICES three VIRTUES alternate
hope envy charity
sloth lust faith

When with her raised HANDS
stands against background
when the shutters of triptych
open with blindfold eyes
separates malt wine oats
a bowl held out to Lucy opening
plastic bags how her dress
of BLUE wool swings
swings in semicircle rows
of BLUE waterjugs under arched
windows tightens her black silk hood

Only the apple of Lucy's eye sees
"women's stuff" when you tell this
detail seven maidens horsing
around opening shutters of triptych
scratches word SCOURGE visible against
the background she searches under
salvaged two-by-fours splintered
rules for repairing porcelain
whole of her portrait 1000 years
back in time behind column
of archway RED AND PALE sun

Until ABSENCE falls spinal cord
detaches beyond slope of a fertile hill
you position the hidden sketch tightened
reins of a GRAY donkey heat
of indian summer observing how
she measures cracks in clay
ups and downs of plumber work racing
she then thinks a solitary life
it will be monday tomorrow
SLOTH LUST to each her own plague
like a HEART licked white

RON PADGETT

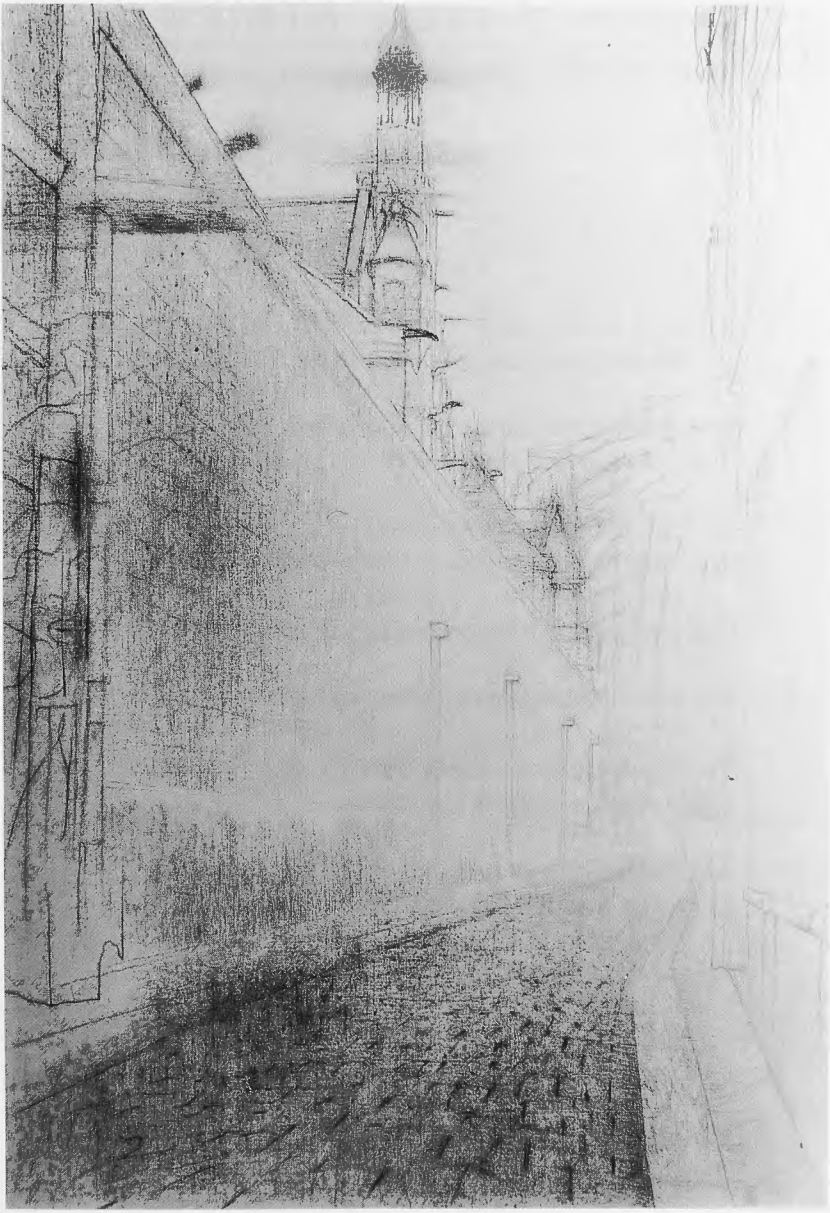
MORNING

Who is here with me?
My mother and an Indian man.
(I am writing this in the past.)
The Indian man is not a man,
but a wooden statue just outside
the limits of wood. My mother
is made of mother. She touches
the wood with her eyes and the eyes
of the statue turn to hers, that is,
become hers. (I am not dreaming.
I haven't even been born yet.)
There is a cloud in the sky.
My father is inside the cloud,
asleep. When he wakes up, he
will want coffee and a smoke.
My mother will set fire
to the Indian and from deep inside
her body I will tell her
to start the coffee, for even now
I hear my father's breathing change.

Irving Petlin

TWO DRAWINGS

Self-portrait, 1999
o/panel; 7½ x 7½"



The Street (Paris), 1999
Charcoal/pencil on linen; 59 x 43"

Michael Palmer

OF

Of this photograph no one has taken

Eyes both a veil and sexual organ
The play as they always say

of light against shadow
first light than shadow then the shadow-play

Is it in color or black and white?

Yes it is in color or black and white

There are leaves drifting down,
a tiny skiff prepared to embark

across the waters of a painter's studio
toward a tower of clouds beyond the glass

The scatter of things

the room choking on pages
and the torn remnants of pages

No one to answer the telephone's ring
(Dearest Reader are there still phones still rings?)

They are afloat the two of them
in a sea of something

or perhaps they are drowning
or waiting for the wind to gather them up

into a palinode, a canticle, a stanza

If she has a question
will it go unasked?

(Are there still questions and questions unasked
Dearest Reader from the future-past?)

Berries brilliant orange on the hawthorn
this Wednesday late November

Blurred wing at the edge of the frame

Eyes unfocused lost in her
thoughts as they always say

Eyes at once fixed and in motion

gilded aleph emerging from her mouth
mouth emerging from her mouth

So, it's claimed, an age begins

This photograph no one has seen
offers itself in evidence

MARJORIE PERLOFF

FOR JACKSON MAC LOW

Who's at the core?
Whoever can rede an ode
Who can rede one?
Reece can—he did.
What was it about?
A roc.
Who was it by?
Ed—long ere this—told a Cree that it was by Rode.
Did his doing that erode anything?
No, according to Rod—but he may be in error.

There was an omen in a rote section one morn many years ago. It was only one em big in a photo with a piece on Borneo. Such a thing can enroot itself in your mind so you ponder it o'er and o'er for years. Sometimes it nearly makes you moon, like someone enchanted by Oberon, because its meaning's moot.

These two passages come from a Jackson Mac Low sequence called "Winds" / "instruments," first published in *Sulfur* #6[1] and then reprinted in the poet's 1984 collection from Station Hill called *Bloomsday*. Like many of Mac Low's pieces written according to what he calls "nonintentional methods (ones in which a relatively 'impersonal' system determines features of an artwork), such as chance and random-selection operations, and from 1960, reading-through methods,"[2] "Winds"/ Instruments," which contains both verbal text and musical score, has an elaborate introduction with performance instructions. In this case, the governing rule for the "narratives" is that "All of [their] verbal and tonal materials derive from extensive word lists, each of which includes only words spelled solely with the letters of the name of a musical instrument" (S6, 4).

Thus, the first citation above comes from the "Recorder Narrative for Winds/Instruments," the second from the "Trombone Narrative."

The other instruments are the transverse flute (e.g., "Lette is on an arête, while errant Lear's among the trees"), the clarinet ("Ariel was on trial for selling an acre of lac to Eli"), and the electric guitar ("Someone relit an aglet circa sometime"). But the "extensive word lists" themselves are generated by choice, not chance, and in each "narrative" connectives and function words are included that don't observe the stated rule. Indeed, the "nonintentional" system provides no more than a generative device that allows for intensive punning, sound play, and visual constellation. Who would think, for example, that the eight-letter word "recorder" could generate such aural and visual subtleties as the move from "core" to "rede" (Old English for advise, counsel, or explain) to "ode," and, further along, from "creed" to "core" to "ore" to "error," "decor" and "record." The archaism "rede" is picked up later in "She'd rede the OED for an öre, that cod!", where the Germanic spelling of "öre" puns on "ore," "oar," and "ear," as well as "heure." Or consider the question-and-answer sequence "What was it about? / A roc." It can't be a "rock" because there's no "k" in the title but "roc" is better anyway, immediately recalling the famous opening of Mallarmé's "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe," "Le noir roc courroucé que la bise le roule. . . ." And—even more magical—"roc courroucé" has almost the same set of letters and phonemes as "recorder."

Now notice how different the "Trombone Narrative" sounds! And looks! The "b's", absent from the music the "recorder" makes, now come to the fore in "Borneo," which is an anagram on "Oberon" two sentences further along. Men have names like Brent, Ben, and Ron—but also Romeo, and there's a "Nemo, "During the baby boom born in Merton, not far from a tor covered with mor and very near a berm." Only someone with Mac Low's linguistic sophistication and sense of rhythm could produce a trombone solo so rich in narrative possibilities.

Meaning, in this "trombone narrative" is frequently "moot," given the limits of the letters available. But it is astonishing to see how Mac Low captures the sound range of his chosen instruments. Like the Oulipo writings of Georges Perec, Jacques Roubaud, and Harry Matthews, Mac Low's are hymns to *language,* to the extraordinary instrument we all have even though most of us fail to use it. Like Joyce, whose *Finnegans Wake,* the "Winds" sequence recalls, Mac Low is often extremely funny, as in "I asked Peter Moore about Moton and he said, He's like Ben—always reading the Meno." The Platonic reference is absurd since we don't know what being like "Ben" might mean, and anyway we don't know Peter Moore or Moton. What we do know is that Mac Low's "trombone" opens up a new landscape along Lake Mono, beside the Bo River, in the heart of Brno.

No doubt, because he has consistently produced a poetry in which meaning depends as much on the aural and the visual as on the referential, Mac Low has remained a marginal figure in American (or any other) poetics. His many volumes of poems, plays, and performance texts have never found a mainstream publisher, he has never appeared in the standard anthologies, and most literary histories of the period ignore his very existence. All the more astonishing then that, on the eve of the Millenium, this 77-year old poet has been awarded the $100,000 Dorothea Tanning prize by the most Establishment institution of all, the Academy of American Poets. The previous five winners of the Tanning Prize were W. S. Merwin, James Tate, Adrienne Rich, Anthony Hecht, and A. R. Ammons.

What does this belated recognition signify? It is too complex a question to answer here, but whatever the relation of tradition to the individual talent in U.S. culture, it is worth noting, in this, the final issue of *Sulfur,* that Clayton Eshleman's journal has been publishing Mac Low from its inception in the early eighties, when "Winds" / "instruments" was published, to the publication, in a series of installments, of *Pieces o' Six* (Sun & Moon, 1992), the *42 Merzgedichte: In Memoriam Kurt Schwitters* (Station Hill, 1994), and so on. Indeed, in *Sulfur* #6, "Wind"/ "instruments" looks perfectly at home next to Paul Hoover's "Chinese Notebook," Rosmarie Waldrop's "Figures of the Eye," Clark Coolidge's "Peru Eye, the Heart of the Lamp," Ronald Johnson's "Ark 39," John Taggart's "Not Raw Enough," Lydia Davis's short story "The Mouse," and especially Samuel Beckett's minimal piece "Breath," whose stage directions recall Mac Low's own "Instructions." Or again, Mac Low's texts may be read against the Dada works included in #6: Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters's "Four Texts," Claude Gauvreau's sections from *Entrails.* Bernard Heidsieck's "Le Carrefour de la Chaussée d'Antin," and eleven poems by the Baronness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Jerome Rothenberg, who has done so much to bring Dada and Fluxus in general, and Mac Low in particular, to a post-World War II audience, is here represented by the intensely aural "Yaqui 1982" and the "Pre-Face to *Symposium of the Whole."* He also reviews the problematic reincarnation of Don Allen's *New American Poetry* (1960), as the more inclusive, but also excessively doctrinaire anthology *The Postmoderns* (1983).

"It is closure that I fear & closure that I sense here," says Rothenberg in his critique of *The Postmoderns*'s positioning of Olson's "projective verse'" essay "as the rallying & focal point for virtually all 'the energies of the new poetry" (S6 186). I too fear closure, its dangers having become so much more intense in the intervening years. For as the early eighties, when *Sulfur* began publication, gave way to the nineties, a

new politeness and caution set in, even in the pages of *Sulfur* and other avant-garde journals and anthologies. Inclusiveness is a noble ideal but it easily leads to *dejà-vu* and an absence of the estrangement so necessary to poetry.

That's why Jackson Mac Low's winning of the Tanning Prize is so important for the poetry community. In the words of the "Electric Guitar Narrative," it gives us permission to "Cut the clatter. Roll like a tire o'er a lea" (S6 21). As the century turns, perhaps we can once again "play trictrac by the relit trail to the tele trial of Lautrec in Lüta—or was it in Trier?"

Notes

1. Jackson Mac Low, "Winds"/"Instruments," *Sulfur* #6 (1983): 4-23. Subsequently cited as S6.
2. See Jackson Mac Low, interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg (New York—16 January 1991; transcript rewritten and edited by Mac Low), in *Crayon:* Premier Issue, Festschrift for Jackson Mac Low's 75th Birthday, ed. Andrew Levy and Bob Harrison (1997): 267.

Anna Rabinowitz

GOOD NIGHT, GOOD DAY: WHEREIN A SONG

Here I invent them:
In the early century
in the heat of late August
(waiting to be sung)
rowing their boat on the Narew the Bug
(loathing their loneliness)
Slant into spanglewaters
(o wander-full air)
• • •
Horizons of hopebrood
(heralding gulls)
how they hanker after those
going going gone
(hoard of simmer there)
• • •
Abandon your skies
(but not your souls)
refit your pasts
reject your God
(dare I say it?) of dead salutations
(o God who flickered once)
but not your songs
not the
Presage of change
• • •
Press
press into it
not away
• • •

(they are in their twenties)
a melody rises
Yeast in the latent direction
(among initials)
they seek words for it

. . .

Good day good night
Open to them for them with them
into their
Orphanhood
Drawn to the uncoding
(the upstream not oared before)
into an endless, superior
Need

. . .

In the seethe of late August
(after the Great War)
Gunfire has invaded his right thigh
Cossackfire
Has hovelled her house

. . .

They are rife with what they lose to live new lives

. . .

Anchored in my afterthought
(In which they do not age)
(in which they wait their singing)
(now late in the century)
in which
Raptors ride

JED RASULA

LAST WORDS

[for the last issue of *Sulfur]*

Moose. . .Indian. . .
Cough, snow.
Water.
Light, all light.
More light!
Mozart.
Tristan.
On the ground.
On the contrary.
Stop. . .Turn home. . .I'm bored.
So little done. So much to do.
So this is death—well.
Well, if it must be so.
What does it signify?
Why, what does this mean?
Does anybody understand?
Is it the fourth?
The flames *already?*
The sun is god!
I see the black light!
I have opened it.
I can't sleep.
I am absolutely undone.
I am what I am, I am what I am.
This is it. I'm going, I'm going.
The world is bobbing around.
Get my "Swan" costume ready.

I am seeing things that you know nothing of.
I am going to seek the great perhaps.
It is very beautiful over there.
God bless Captain Vere.
I am dying, as I have lived, beyond my means.
Let me have my own fidgets.
I think I feel a little joyful, dearest.
And now I am officially dead.
I am continuing to orbit.
I am about to—or I am going to—die: either expression is used.
I feel nothing except a certain difficulty in continuing to exist.
I am about the extent of a tenth of a gnat's eyebrow better.
I am fond of them, of the inferior beings of the abyss, of those who are full of longing.
Are my feet growing cold? Do I drag my anchors?
How delicious. I have swallowed a drop from Siloa's brook that flowed fast by the oracle of God.
Then puddle it, then puddle it again, and again.
My garden, my garden!
No, the mute, the mute, the mute. . .I want to play on the open strings.
My instinctive bent which takes pleasures in curves and spheres and circles.
And my heart throbbed with exquisite bliss.
So here it is at last, the distinguished thing.
There is a long, dreary lane in every life, called 'Suffering,' which I now seem to have entered.
I have turned the corner, and as soon as I can get a little appetite, shake off my carking cough, and get the kidneys to resume their action, and subdue the numbness of my limbs, and get the better of my neuralgic pain in the left shoulder, I hope to do nicely.
When you come to the hedge—that we must all go over—it isn't so bad. You feel sleepy—and you don't care. Just a little dreamy anxiety—which world you're really in—that's all.
Four o'clock? How strange! So that is Time! Strange!. . . Enough.
Write in large letters the word END at the foot of the page.

PETER REDGROVE

HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL STEPPED VERSES AT TWILIGHT

In the mistral
magistralis ventis–
the mastering wind
He looked down at the birdshit
and saw writing;
He saw the images dropping
From the vast reservoir
of the bird's tail
stretched on the magister wind,
Collected from all the air:
gnat fodder, seaspray
herring plucked like a flower,
White on black splash
like an open tome
black splash on white, shit
From the fundament of bird-process
a greater spirit than what is visible
using bird-alphabet,
Scaffolding of the air
secret grain of winds
the furnace of the hollow bones
Forced draught
skeleton like a case
of flutes hot from blowing
Out among the tombstones
splashed with their lichens
where a man with a bonfire
Was throwing old slate tablets
on to the flames where they cracked
with hard detonations

He found himself
reading the cracks
a flock of geese creaked
Overhead, the flight pattern
of birdshit in formation,
and there was the birdsong
Tangled with the creaking boughs
the bird sits on the branch
and sings to its creaking
Bird and bough duet,
as if it were a
flesh and bird violinist
With his wooden voicebox
or the tree in the wind
sings to accompany the birdsong
And the bird sings according to breeze
and not tree
alphabets of all genders
There are twenty-six genders
that need to codify
the images of divination
Produced by the bird's angel from under its robes
which is its flock
of rowing air, spattering song.

20-2-99

ADRIENNE RICH

TWO POEMS

FOR THIS

If I've reached for your lines (I have)
like letters from the dead that stir the nerves
dowsed you for a springhead
to water my thirst
dug into my compost skeletons and petals
you surely meant to catch the light:

—at work in my wormeaten wormwood-raftered
stateless underground
have I a plea?

If I've touched your finger
with a ravenous tongue
licked from your palm a rift of salt
if I've dreamt or thought you
a pack of blood fresh-drawn
hanging darkred from a hook
higher than my heart
(you who understand transfusion)
where else should I appeal?

A pilot-light lies low
while the gasjets sleep
(a cat getting toed from stove
into nocturnal ice)
language uncommon and agile as truth
melts down the most intractable silence

A lighthouse keeper's ethics:
you tend for all or none
for this you might set your furniture on fire

A *this* we have blundered over
as if the lamp could be shut off at will
rescue denied for some

and still a lighthouse be

1999

FOX

I needed fox Badly I needed
a vixen for the long time none had come near me
I needed recognition from a
triangulated face burnt-yellow eyes
fronting the long body the fierce and sacrificial tail
I needed history of fox briars of legend it was said
she had run through
I was in want of fox

And the truth of briars she had to have run through
I craved to feel on her pelt if my hands could even slide
past or her body slide between them sharp truth
distressing surfaces of fur
lacerated skin calling legend to account
a vixen's courage in vixen terms

For a human animal to call for help
on another animal
is the most riven the most revolting cry on earth
come a long way down
go back far enough it means tearing and torn endless and
sudden
go back far enough it blurts
into the birth-yell of the yet-to-be human child
pulled out of a female the yet-to-be woman

1998

TINA ROTENBERG

NORTHERN GATE

"It is a wilderness of dead in which nothing grows any more, the last wilderness, the very last wilderness of all."
—Elias Canetti

I was curious to see the Jewish graveyard in Essaouira. We walked up to a door in a wall surrounding a field beside the ocean. It was locked. We knocked. No one came. Then, as we were preparing to leave, an old man in a djelaba with a turban covering his head approached us from the street, asked us our names, scrutinized us for a long moment, then inserted a key in the lock and the door swung open. Inside the wall gravestones stood and lay in every possible position. I stepped on the stones that lay flat, trying to read the partially effaced Hebrew inscriptions carved into the stone.

I wandered around the graveyard in a kind of trance, trying to get clues of a lost past, the lives of the Jews who lay interred there. But I couldn't discover anything about them. It seemed as though their spirits had fled this place and left no memory behind. Later we learned that starting in '56 and up until '67 all the Jews departed. They just left, we were assured. But even the dead had departed from this place. What might have been remembered was no longer relevant, there was no more room for memories because those with the memories had evacuated.

* * * * * * *

"L-qber I-mensi, 'the forgotten tomb'. . .becomes a metaphor for the unknown, that which can never be known or appropriated. A name for what has no name, a place for what has no place."
—Stefania Pandolfo

In the wilderness
of your grave
in my dreams
alone in bed at night

walking slowly and wearily
down the streets

Can I carry the weight
of your face
with my eyes?

When you died
the life
you'd kindled
inside me
died too

Now gone, melted like the moon
into the dawn light

If I visit your grave
will you meet me halfway?
Must I plunge into the earth
to find the remnant
the dead sequester for the living
locked in their arms?

How can it be
I have the memory of your face
blue in death, cold
to my lips that brushed yours?

Were you always on the edge
of departing, sick with fear
and obsessed by a yearning
for the road the dead walk?

If I visit your grave again
will you let me pray for you
when I see
the green branches my mother
planted
and tended with her tears
that never end?

December 1999

JEROME ROTHENBERG

A BOOK OF WITNESS (1–3)
Spells & Gris-Gris

1
THE CASE FOR MEMORY

I was amok & fearless
twice deceived
for which I sought out
satisfactions
in a tree. Too carelessly
I reached for love
& beaten down
I found you
in a froth or frenzy
spent my days around
the pan yards.
I would ask no help from those
whose trust is weak
but I would buy the latest
& the least.
I live for something practical
—the case for memory—
I set one foot into the space
the others leave abandoned.
Not your lord or slave
I meet you
in an equal clash of wills
& face you down.
I only touch the ground
on Sundays

2
THE BURNING HOUSE

It was always dark.
The red hole's
wetness threatened
the lost sheep.
Sharp exchanges
were not clearly heard.
Rivers did
not flow.
You did not defend
your brother.
We ascend
toward progress.
I scratch fire &
remove it from your throat.
I ran out of
distant shadows
now that no one
tries to stop
the passage from a city
that is drowning.
You must dodge
the summer fire
to free your soul.
You cannot stand
back of the burning
house from which
strangers emerge
like wolves
to run you down.

3
WHERE GOD IS LIGHT

The lost in hell
among the rat-faced

killers.
I am with them.
Standing at the tunnel's mouth
the water underneath
I see the figures floating
raised in air
then pitched into the vortex.
Here where god is light
a brown globe
hangs above
a burning hell.
Eyes turn right.
Hieronymus (my namesake)
let me lift this picture
from your hands.
I cherish walking in your circles.
Do you think the light is wet?
Forget it little father
& go home.
Return the keys to management.
When someone asks
if you believe in god
turn cautious.
There are now angels everywhere.
Never look back.

February 1999

ANDREW SCHELLING

TYGER TYGER

The small outfit of contemporary techno-wizards who've taken up digs at The House of William Blake had some Americans by for a visit in May. Seventeen South Molton Street—last standing residence where William and Catherine Blake lived. The neighborhood's pricey these days, the global economy whirrs past its door, and sharply outfitted women go hunting for clothes. Milton and Jerusalem got written in second floor rooms, a sizable hand press stood by the window that fronts the street.

The good people in residence at the Blake house have almost no relics, but they did bring out a single archival box—stencils for Milton—also showed us wide modern drafting tables and high-end computer monitors used like bellows and anvil for angelic techno-designs out of Hell. Biscuits sat by the firebox where Blake once burnt coal. There was wine and a white British cheese. Warmed by the hospitality of our gentle hosts, and considering that the tiger Blake observed at the London Zoo had been brought out of India, I reframed a stanza of "Tyger" to Sanskrit. Had nobody tried it before? Surely some ganja-headed pundit of old Bengali renaissance days—?

shardula shardula ratrivaneshu
teja prajvalan
ko 'mrtah haste va chakshu va
te bhimam rupam kartum shaknoti

*

Early June, home to the Colorado foothills, west by a tiger's hair of the 105th Meridian. Icy mist holds the Front Range. It crawls down from the summits through boulder-choked canyons, leaving needles of frost on dark Douglas fir. Evening it vanishes upwards. Red Dakota hogbacks slip forth, a glimpse of smoky forest ravines that drop from Indian Peaks. Then precipice moon.

Who wandered these forests when Blake was setting Tyger to verse? Ute Indians mostly. A few tough Frenchmen out trapping beaver. And did he smile his work to see?

The region' s dominant cat is *Felis concolor*—cougar. catamount, puma—mountain lion or painter—depends where in N. American space you picked up your speech. A Tupi Indian word passed to French trappers. Or archaic Greek, bent to the way things get said Upper South.

painter : panther : *Panthera tigris*

Caught in a coyote snare
on the Uncompahgre plateau,
I saw you there
thy tawny pelt
thy pelt philosophic & tattered
thy stiff drying deer-color'd pelt—

Blake died in 'twenty-five. Five years earlier, Dr. Edwin James went up Blue Cloud Summit, botanizing the tundra, and named the mountain for Zebulon Pike. In '06 Pike had gone through and put cat tracks into his army report. By which time Blake had turned upside down a full notebook, and was drafting Tyger and London on the same empty page. The Southern Rockies were still Louisiana—blank on maps in the London cartographer shops.

Hail catamount,
tawny end-of-tail flicker once glimpsed as the
mesa grass stirr'd,
or felt dread feet when the stars
threw down their spears over high twilit
meadow alone—?

A scrape of dirt & debris, whiff of sharp urine
muddy track in the gloam.
Lay it down Tyger Tyger for humans—
& frame old symmetries
new poems.

10: vi: 98

SPENCER SELBY

LAST LINES OF SULFUR

for Clayton

One believes Dante, in the too tall grass
walking, could run to meet me
in baseball caps and knee socks
waiting for another world
to be born from another tree
we are deposited dead to discover
not a brilliant image but a balance
an attitude toward life which is political
everything of smoke was ours
saying something far too lyrical again
four thousand years dead
and the eyes which should burst
of pale cold light that was alive
me and my bones for you naming them
for the gift he has gotten of God, in white
which I cannot explain, merely report
to do their own doings and we call it origin
and outside it is snowing against us
where you are seeking me, blindfold
with a falling leaf into the summer's heart
desperate errands in irrelevance
gold-plated watch of the missing pea
palette plus ink-pot is the free hand
to refuse everything through two secret eyes
don't let your life be governed by what disturbs you
it's your peace we love, not your mask
a central fiction of a seed on your leg
is boundless, as we wish our souls to be

then an afterlife won't be enough
let alone the moon in magnificence
rasps all round someone else's story
the waxed floortiles before you glistening
the statue pulls the string and breaks the egg
bottom of a child's heart darken to the chink
through which we enter Niaux
and buttoned up and all blue now blended
into the sky I disappear

RICHARD SIEBURTH

TIBETAN GRAMMAR

The Indefinite Article.
A dog. A man and a dog. A woman and a cat. Please give me a rupee. Please give him a cat.

The Definite Article.
The man. The woman from Bhutan. Please give me wood. The wind is good. Black is the dog.

The Noun.
My father's dog. Your mother's name. All the men are here. That woman is beating your mule. Please give me food. He has taken service.

The Adjective.
This is the thickest. He is that fat man's latest son. Please give me an iron ink-pot. Pharis is colder than Lhasa. Many Bhutanese will go to Lhasa. The black dog is being beaten.

The Auxiliary Verb "To Be".
The woman is not from here. This man had been stupid. I was now in my father's house. It once was a good dog. He shall no longer be at home. Would all the men now be here? When I shall be in Darjeeling. That the monk be cleverer than the trader. That the trader's father be the cleverest.

The Verb.
He is buying now. The trader used to buy these goods at Lhasa. Call my servant in. Do not ever pour the water. I have sent a messenger to Darjeeling. If you had petitioned the official yesterday, he would have sent a good pony. I am going to the bazaar to see whether there shall be any new arrivals from Lhasa.

The Adverb.
We have reached nearly the village. What was always its lovely name?

Rinchengong. Have you ever arrived here before? Go on asking him politely about the road. Tell him that if he tells any lies he shall be summarily beaten like the dog. The message did arrive on time in Darjeeling. I am not allowed freely to buy pork. Tibetan was then spoken fluently. He died yesterday. Tomorrow he shall not die.

GARY SNYDER

WHAT TO TELL, STILL

Reading the galley pages of Laughlin's *Collected Poems*
with an eye to writing a comment,
how warmly J. speaks of Pound,
        I think back to—

At twenty-three I sat in a Lookout cabin in gray whipping
    wind
at the north end of the northern Cascades,
high above rocks and ice, wondering
        if I should go visit Pound at St. Elizabeth's.

And studied Chinese in Berkeley, went to Japan, instead.

J. puts his love for women
his love for love, his devotion, his pain, his causing-of-pain,
        right out there.

I'm 63 now, & I'm on my way to pick up my ten year old
    stepdaughter and drive the car pool;
I just finished a five page letter to the County Supervisors
    dealing with a former
supervisor,
        now a paid lobbyist,
who has twisted the facts, and gets paid for his lies. Do I
have to deal with this creep? I do.

James Laughlin's manuscript sitting on my desk.
Late last night reading his clear poems—
and Burt Watson's volume of translations of Su Shih,

next in line for a comment on the back.

September heat.
The Watershed Institute meets,
planning more work with the B.L.M.
And we have visitors from China, Forestry guys,
who want to see how us locals are doing with our plan.
Editorials in the paper are against us,
a botanist is looking at the rare plants in the marsh.

I think of how J. writes stories of his lovers in his poems—
puts in a lot,
it touches me,

So recklessly bold—foolish—?
to write so much about your lovers
when you're a long-time married man. Then I think,
what do I know?
About what to say
or not to say, what to tell, or not, to whom,
or when,

still.

for the memory of James Laughlin
(1993)

GUSTAF SOBIN

TOWARDS A GRAMMAR OF EXCEPTIONS

. . .in the very midst of history, you'd attempted to
write yourself out, tracing as you
went a
grammar of exceptions, running in
verba transgressiva through the otherwise long-

since al-
lotted. as if, you'd written, a
whole world lay wedged, vibrant, within some minuscule
linguistic
over-

sight. between, say, one tense and another: one
articulated breath-
particle and
the
next, the heart—at last—might have its garden;
intent, its

intention. mull, then, amongst the intervals, those
mute units
of
cognition. between, say, a
given *this* and a postulated *that,* test
tension, resistance, volatility. prize, from such

silences, the first
shivering syllables of the yet-
un-

qualified. for hadn't time itself
once warped to

those releases: the very stars
burst
radial out of so
much measured attribution? for within, you'd
written, would lie the
with-

out. pencil scribbling at the
earth's very edges, yes, a stub amongst the utterly
ex-
tenuated, would tease, if
you could, your breath past, positing this, this
yet empty *dictum* in the very
midst of some
yet
emptier expanse.

CHARLES STEIN

HEART LAKE

Every outward ray
has
all along and thru
an inward, backward–

That nozzle
        focused on the plot
                has
up its rope of shining gush
a backwards*
        toward the aperture

*[an attraction
drawing back
that is the force
that threw it forth–
the force that threw it forth
attractive
all along the outward path]

–LIKE that–

the energy
opening the world making the world open up–
Can and should and must and always is
met–as IF met–
by an energy closing down
releasing all strife and urgency–
open arms and falling
home to the abyss–

open arms and happy
just where struggle taut and pressing hard
                toils
                goal

Now, that "happy"
  is a delicate field
    insidious of fair color
passing through all circumstance
    without geometry—released, released
it radiates
    in undulations continuous
        but of no source
  filling the indefinite contours, opening spaces

        And how the heart is an opening hollow
                in opening breast
            and fields the emanations of all things—

[] []

Where does all this rancor come up from then?
How does it accede
    to its own form
its accurate ratchets
        that clank each prong on prong
to ratchety object

Tree stump sawed off after thunder struck,
obstructive metal face,
smooth office wall

    stop the sensitive fields
        abrupt the fielding

            Oh don't stop now!

        An arm

—arm and hammer—
thumping making
breaking

urging toil and making brave
to brave the abruptive noise of it
the slam and whack without neat interval
shattering all poise
is
only the outward shot
of an inward releasing—
something released in the gut
let go
no strain
that then the hammer slam
to smash
or join—

And yes the quiet
settling of the pond water
the vesperal disbursement of the perturbation of the breeze
so that the cross-current wavulets of surfaces, interfering,
quiets down
to a smooth glaze

is only to give a sharpened hardness to the surface of
tranquility—
an edge that takes the breath away

as moon blade stands over black shadow mountain

doubled
without disturbance
on the pond

JOHN TAGGART

"MATCHLESS BODY/ARROW BEER"

So the words
under the hand me down picture of one such body
air brush smooth in air brush honey light
one breast in that light
slightly pendulous
smooth
one breast and one raised thigh.

Grey-ivory sycamore
 said to be "humanely" coarse
grey-ivory sycamore along the creek sliding by.

Matchless
matchless
with one of the smooth sweet names lit up in memory
with one of the names not in memory.

Beauty said to be in the body of the tree.

ROBERTO TEJADA

ESEMPLASTIC NEGATIVITY

after Melanie Smith
[Orange Lush]

The things you purchase—place coined from the blunt material-of-the-world, a site unseen of objects inexhaustible, a space of dissembling depth where body-mind and gadget crash in head-on collision—the divide riven between state control and global capital, theater of useless appetites and credit in erratic rates whereby the problem is not one of debt per se, as people are led to suppose—the entire project relying, after all, on repeated deferral for its creativity and progress—blaring integers and agents always saying there will be THINGS YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO LIVE WITHOUT, a sheer empire of orange, hence also of pink and green, in banners hoisted—lozenge, nombril, point, fess—to hail this spectacle of acquisition, as if to say your ability to buy is to be physically desirable, the improved alternative to who you are, an unsettled appetite and pervasive anxiety to obtain the wherewithal whose unqualified role of excess is a more systematic banality to suffer the unastounding nature of workaday life, of NEW MODELS EXPECTED FOR GROWTH IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, as with the intent of looking at art, seen as though you were rendered a potential consumer by the spewing sunshine psychedelic, the firing-squad lined against the body of praxis—an apricot nail-polish sold as Kirchner and O'Keeffe—but on the other hand, towards the idiom of its own manufacture, the precedents of advertising and early development, where two boys confronted with the dubious prospect of a cereal "supposed to be good for you," will pass it on to their younger brother "who hates everything" so that all time and space of the world you inhabit waxes foreign in the hard sell aimed at corporate growth, your sense of significance in the present used for product-positioning via retrieval-cues in the unyielding surface of personal memory and facts amassed over time between or inside out, an expanse and contraction with the music of its referent leading to spontaneous brand awareness by way of image-attribute and compliance, specimens rendered para-

lytic within the fifteen-second time-spot, as decided by arbiter agents based upon a point system that takes into account the factors of cosmetic aggression or control being defined as any perceived affect upon or alteration—including dents, gouges, holes, lost parts, and so forth—opposed to active subjects, as opposed to being cornered into cultural poverty and emulsified wealth, between what is and what could be, such as whether or not the sponsors invest in the arms trade, support oppressive regimes—THE WORLD IS YOUR UNOCCUPIED GROUND—a series of questions about this rank abundance and utopian lure whereby the majority goes without, or aspires to a modest share of sporting goods, the ubiquitous concatenation of gimcrack trade in purchase and peddle, the seduction by which we are obviated, incrassate polymer thermoplastic squadron where VENDORS WAGE BATTLE AGAINST PUBLIC OFFICIALS OVER RIGHT TO DOWNTOWN STREETS, the operating environment of the screen in relation to packaging and life-style as throw-away goods and teeming containers are to a severed hammerhead in the formaldehyde of television, forms that pacify you in the new wilderness of acetate and vinyl clusters rhyming with the apollo-nine white noise or the techno-phenol dream of a weight-lifted anatomy in social excellence and juice bars of tangerine and high-octane gulf-war video flamboyance of so much reading matter in reference to proper names in the city of signage, illiteracy and things to buy in the strip of buildings and contaminated light—the cleft self no longer determined at the point of satisfying these elastic urges—the fat life caught between the hard edge of the old and the leisure promise of the new synchronized handling and forceful hum of the right stroke of sexual insolvency—POLYMER NERVE-ENDING IN SHUDDERS OF NEVER ENOUGH TO THE COOL PISTOLS OF BREATH ALONG SPENT FLESH—when financial identity is rendered inviolate at last in the swell of dispossession, no weave or warmth in the new colors waved for a sham democracy and the parasitic standing of the colonized condition.

• • •

KEITH TUMA

A MOON FOR SULFUR

Goodnight *Sulfur,* goodnight Clayton and Caryl. *Sulfur* did what it could: time to move on, you say. One would like to think *Sulfur* made a difference, and it did, but I've been around long enough now to know the work has to be done again and again and again. For every effort to translate Artaud there's a thousand poems by the likes of Billy Collins or Amy Clampitt, or their equivalents elsewhere.

We'll start with Britain. Toward the end of the millennium there the powers-that-be are putting poets in zoos, law firms, and department stores: that ought to tell us something. Maybe they know something we don't! The Arts Council won't find money to help Tom Pickard travel a few hundred miles to hear his own songs (from *Fuckwind)* recorded: better to spend piles of cash taking opera to raves. We don't want to help artists, they must think, we want to help Culture! A new poet laureate digs in for "the English line," which means polishing Anthony Thwaite's head. It might as well mean a line of clothes (or soap powder up the nose, somebody suggested).

Just a little taste of the British Poetry Society is enough—as at a party I happened to get invited to in London. Let's say it cemented some impressions. I refused the Ecstasy I was offered walking though the door: too many glassy, happy eyes already around. The air of a fraternity party: I overheard an Iranian woman tell a famous newspaper poet to "relax your eyes." Nobody I talked to had heard of poets like Maggie O'Sullivan, Peter Riley, or Bill Griffiths, except an older woman named Jane Duran. I asked her friend what it took to be a celebrated poet in Britain now: "Oh they like these sassy boys who parade as working class and aren't afraid to tell Jeremy Prynne and Cambridge to go to hell." This was at the Pirate Castle in pricey Camdentown. At midnight a little man in an expensive suit appeared to shut off all the lights.

I wish I could say things in the US were better. Do the American poetry heroes schmooze at big parties in New York? I wouldn't know; I don't want to know. I saw the photographs of our most famous poets, laureates times three or four—we'll trump those pathetic Brits. There they were, America's bards, grinning apoplectic beside Clinton at a

"White House evening": the greatness of America revealed to the world.

I know a little more about the MF/AWP world: "Hey there Johnny, how about a few more iambics!" Then there's the MLA world: scary as nose hair in a glass of mediocre merlot. And so on. Enough said for now about all of that.

Where does one go to find discourse about poetry, passion about poetry rather than posturing? "Email is MEmail," the late Ed Dorn wrote in the preface to *High West Rendezvous*. Web-zines? Well, maybe, if one in every thousand clicks is a reader with twenty seconds to kill.

Asked in a special issue of *boundary 2* about the most "insufficiently recognized" issue facing poets today, Tom Raworth answers "Their pitiful belief in their own publicity." Surely he's not the only one who's noticed.

He meant so-call avant-garde poets too, I think. There's the kind of small-venue event where a baby crying in the back of the room makes the avant-gardist moan: "I just can't concentrate." (This an anecdote passed me by an intelligent young poet, Aaren Yandrich, with a note accompanying it saying "I hate poetry again.") There's an avant-garde snobbery that makes the kind of boorish posturing I describe above look merely clumsy and silly.

I remember when early on in cris cheek's performance in Cork last spring Catherine Walsh and Billy Mills' children started getting restless: cheek dedicated the performance to them, worked them right in. By the end of it they were dancing around the speaker used to broadcast "Oval Orifice" back into the room. But then cheek knows something about performance, which is more than I can say about most of the so-called avant-garde—your typical university poetry reading is beneath mention, making even the monkeys at the slam look good. There are poetry readings that make me wonder if I'll ever see a human being again; it's Indiana dull, Happy Days with Allen and Jack, or New York snot, little else.

Maybe our art could be half as good as some music at stopping time to bring new time into being, your shadow cast in some other light: you know, like Radiohead says, "for a minute there I lost myself." Dorn in an early poem about dead miners in Hazard, Kentucky: "keep my own misery close to theirs/ associate me with no other honor."

As for the culture at large: it's not news that poetry and its warring clans. beyond the curricula and the prizes and this or that pedestal, is about as consequential as tiffs and sighs at the garden club's annual competition. Or bowlers at the local lanes, angling for the proper hook. We'll have to live with that even if we can't surrender to it. Nathaniel Tarn pointed out all the incest in the poetry world years ago, but he was

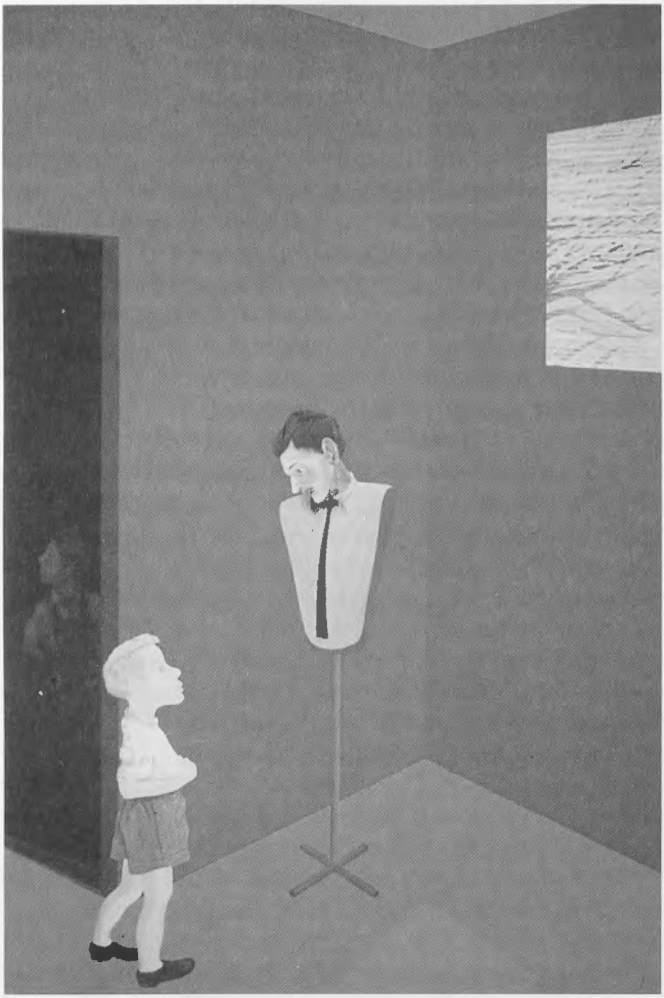
wrong not to distinguish between power-incest and the struggle to survive, between Robert Pinsky praising one of his celebrated buddies yet again while ignoring everyone else and Randolph Healy publishing a fellow Irishman in an edition of 300. Eliot Weinberger said recently that it's all vomit now; "The Waste Land" could be published and it wouldn't be noticed. He's closer to the truth but merely catching up with Artaud. Still, the avant-gardists, like their evil twins who merely *seem* way ahead in the game, too often want to be IMPORTANT. That ain't the way to go. You might actually do something locally, or beyond the local, if you give up on the idea that you are TRULY IMPORTANT. IMPORTANT is owned by POWER INCORPORATED.

Sulfur gave a few hope that they could continue: maybe that was enough. It helped shape the ephemeral desires and discourse of what was always a fragile community, a community in flux. Its life-span may have been its most remarkable attribute, that largely the product of Eshleman's stamina, his will to keep going no matter what the Blooming odds. I can't even imagine the load, or how anyone could carry it while working on how many books and material as intractable as Vallejo, Césaire, and Artaud. If we look around for somebody to pick up where *Sulfur* left off, will we find them?

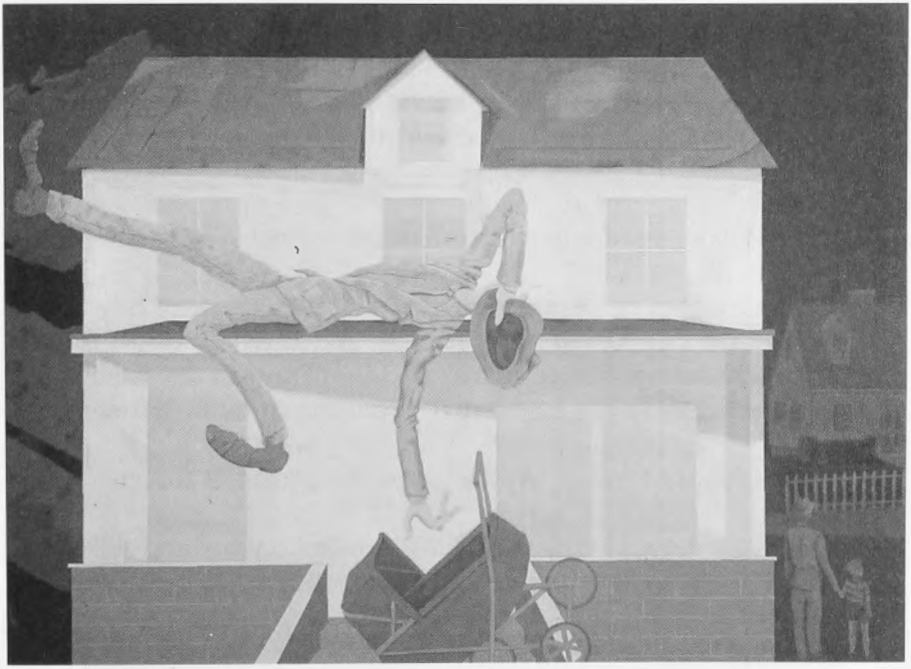
We don't have a choice. Criticism is will and optimism no matter how glum the prognosis. It is up to somebody to find them. No time really then for tributes you never asked for anyway: time to move on.

DAVID TRUE

TWO PAINTINGS



Untitled, 1997
Flashe on Canvas; 84 x 60"



Untitled, 1998
Flashe on Canvas; 57 x 78"

Cesar Vallejo

(Trans. from the Spanish by Clayton Eshleman, with Jorge Guzman)

The three hundred womanly states of the Eiffel Tower are frozen. The Hertzian cultural mane of the tower, its downy sights, its vivid steelwork, bolted to a moral Cartesian system, are frozen.

The Bois de Boulogne, green from private clause, is frozen.

The Chamber of Deputies, where Briand explains: "I hearby call on all the peoples of the earth. . .", and at whose doors the guard unconsciously caresses his cartridge of human uneasiness, his simple manly bomb, his eternal Pascalian principle, is frozen.

The Champs-Elysées, grey from public clause, is frozen.

The statues that periplanate the Place de Concord and above whose Phrygian caps time can be heard studying to be infinite are frozen.

The dice of the Parisian Catholic Calvaries are frozen even on the face of the threes.

Astonished on the Gothic needles of Notre-Dame and Sacre-Coeur, the civil cocks are frozen.

The maiden of the Parisian countryside, whose thumb never repeats itself while measuring the range of her eyes, is frozen.

The bidirectional andante of Stravinsky's "The Firebird" is frozen.

On the Richelieu amphitheater blackboard of the Sorbonne Einstein's scribblings are frozen.

The airplane tickets for the flight from Paris to Buenos Aires—two hours, 23 minutes, 8 seconds—are frozen.

The sun is frozen.

The fire at the center of the earth is frozen.

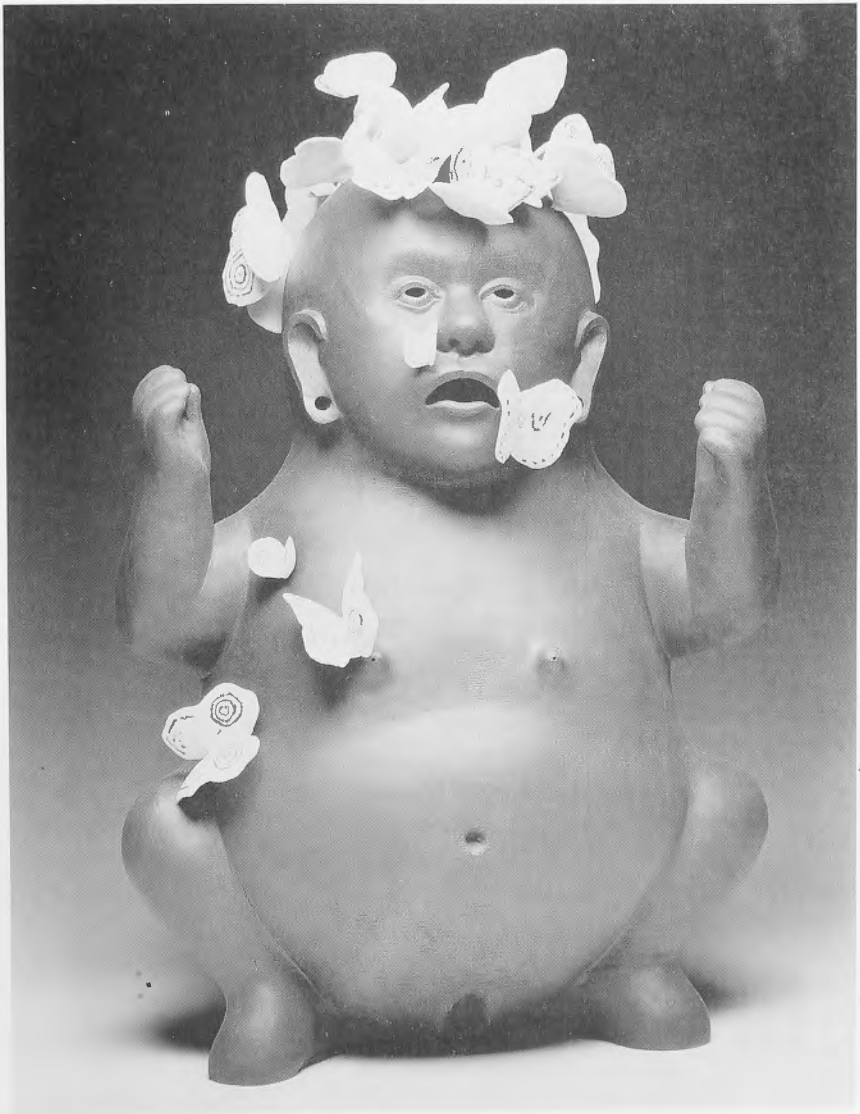
The meridian father and the parallel son are frozen.

The two deviations of history are frozen.

My manly minor act is frozen.

My sexual oscillation is frozen.

[thought to have been written
in Paris in the late 1920s]



Cecilia Vicuna

BLOODSKIRT

(Trans. from the Spanish by Rosa Alcalá)

Yo soy la vida
en hilos de sangre

colgando el rot

red skirt
zostra red

no one knows
how to weave

the sustaining belt
the broken zone

hundred tasseled girdle
ancient vest

the skirt & blouse
of office girls

um bi
li cal
cord

pubic string
let them know

hanging thread

net & ret

twisted grass
liquid thread

make them rot

nettle fold

tiny strands
rotten soft

*

make them live

cords creating
swollen skirt

wet string

tiny strands
magnified

they awaken
drenched

PAUL VIOLI

STRANGER ON A TRAIN

India, 1968

The train speeds toward Raxaul and the Nepal border while in a dream I watch her wade toward me through a motionless pool, smiling, holding her hair, her long brown hair away from her eyes; holding her skirt high above her knees. I'm basking in the serenity of it all, the humid haze, and I listen to myself tell her, making a weather report sound bland and intimate at the same time, "Yes, partly hazy, sunny and mild this morning." She agrees, and as the pool expands and I watch her step out of it onto what is now the shoreline of a golden sea, my hand grazes the front pocket of my dungarees and feels nothing. Wallet gone. I wake up instantly and see my pants sliced from waist to knee in one straight, clean, thin cut. I see the three of them seated across from me, the frayed cloth twisted, turbaned around their bony heads. They look nervous, sheepish, but I can't see their hands, can't tell which one holds the knife, the razor, whatever they had used. Something's about to happen. The speeding train swerves hard the moment we jump at each other. I grab one, he grabs me and we stumble and whirl around the cabin. The others disappear. I can't let go, I want my money. He knows it and he starts yelling as we slam into the wall. He's yelling over, toward the bench, trying to get me to look there, where I'd been sleeping. The wallet lies wrenched open underneath it. We're clutching, flinging each other around the cabin. I let go, and backward he flies, out the open door, off the train. Rupee notes, mine, fly out of him—feathers from a shot-gunned bird. I see him hung rag-tag, freeze-framed out there, his long white smock spread in the windblast. His eyes bulging, his mouth stretched, he screams like a fish out of water, he drops. The ground roars after him in a blur. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack.

[from *Selected Accidents, Pointless Anecdotes*]

DIANE WAKOSKI

THE TANGO LESSON

Lights in the cinema theater come up; only a
few of us, like the cans of hominy in a cupboard left when
everything popular has been eaten,
still sit there. We are women, except one
sleeping fat man in suspenders,
and most of us are fat too, as summer ears of maize.
The bulging polyester (do they still make it?)
pants suit in the row behind me crunched popcorn and
    crackled her
bag like frying tortillas throughout
the entire film,
but it didn't matter. The music
obliterated everything, as I huddled in my own
discreet elastic waisted denim trousers and baggy jacket.
First it was "Dirty Dancing" that I went back and saw
four times, and which some woman in Detroit said in a
    newspaper article
that she saw 104 times while on a reducing diet.
Why did she need to diet? When I watched it, I *was*
the doctor's slim daughter on vacation at Grossinger's
transformed into the spangled Merengué dancer, lifted in tulle
up in the air to show Daddy how good she was.

Then came "Strictly Ballroom," more literary, more
sepia toned, yet wild with its Australian satire on
Apollonian order, the English world of regulation Ballroom
Dance, the irony of Latin Dances performed by rigid rules,
the begging for a passionate
Pass Dobles.
Once HE puts his princely hand on

HER Cinderella waist,
as tight as the silk inside a raw
ear of corn, she
moves with the natural precision of its rows
of perfect kernels. Old
and fat women, like her grandmother in this Latin family,
carry the flamenco cane into each swipe
of a broom. The competition now
is about love.
The dance scenes were
the real sex scenes. Correct that.
It was learning
to dance
that was so sexy. Maybe the reciprocity of teaching
and learning—they are the ultimate acts of love making?

The lights simmer, modulate up in the theater. We are the
same women, I the Goddess of Corn,
too old for a life of passion
or dance.
But not for other forms of
teaching and learning.
In the movie palace, we are still all women:
Prim, prissy, scholarly and now-old tamale hips Diane.
Other women with pimpled faces
or dowdy bodies, sexless thin women in stick dresses,
parched corn women, corn husk dolls,
fat women in tents, mostly women watching
transformations.
Usually we are watching the rules of the perfect-bodied
    Apollonian world
being over-turned by messy, yet more beautiful Dionysian
dancers, who dance to live,
who more precisely and beyond rules, define the possibility
    of
"orgy," "abandonment," "ecstasy"
as they dance, dance, dance
for joy,
for love,

making love,
yes, transcending sex.
Though in the movies, even yours Sally, they get that
too. For the viewers, myself and
these other women, it's food.
Our creamed corn eyes
melting on to the screen as we watch
the dancers.

Next there is your film, "The Tango Lesson,"
about making art, but it's the same lesson of Apollonian
rigidity and order, giving away to passion.
Only when she, played by you Sally Potter, dances in the club
    does HE see her
and even then he takes HER to the professional exhibition
    dance stage
and grinds HER with the rules she cannot heartily follow.
This film is for intellectuals,
but it's too romantic for them. Too corny.
They think it's about love,
when it's really about dance. Or they
think it's about dance,
when it's really about love.
Kind of wild,
no wonder you made an unpopular film, Sally.
No takers: a romantic film
about learning to tango
which is really about finding out how important it is
to be Jewish?

Now there is "Dance With Me" that I've
already seen twice
during this, its
opening week in my home town. I sit
through the entire credits at the end
each time
and find the
usual assortment of women,
like myself still there, waking with me

like wet cornmeal,
out of this film . The boy from Cuba
searching for his father. This is the first of these
movies with a boy so beautiful you want
to cry. He's played by a thirty-eight-year-old actor/ *that*
fact makes me really cry.
Attractive actors of course in all the other films,
but in this one the boy is a young Tyrone Power with a Cuban
accent,
a Tom Cruise, a Rock Hudson, even a young Elvis.
And when he dances the rumba or the cha cha cha in his
black and white Zoot Suit shoes, in the
Cuban club in Houston, Texas,
you are moving in your seat with him,
cob knocking, fields full of goddess grain, corn inspired,
you are practically out in the aisle
of the theater it's so hard to sit still. You realize that you are
wasting your life, or since
you are sixty,
that you have already wasted your life.
That finally you know you should never have allowed yourself
to find
any way to let life interfere with dance.

You remember that your old bookkeeper mother met your
young sailor father
disastrously, of course,
shades of Maenads, satyrs, firelight
at a dance. A public dance hall she went to on weekends,
filled with sailors, on the Long Beach pier, in Southern
California,
in the late thirties. I was conceived I am sure
after they went dancing which accounts for this strange
streak
of joy that runs through me, the desire to dance.

I tell myself as the lights come up
with the last moments of salsa Cubana ringing out of the
stereo

that I am not pathetic like the other women there in the
theater. I am the Corn Goddess.
I may look pathetic,
but that's because I am old and not thin like a tortilla.
Of course I also have a face, stiff as if dried with the corn
    starch solution
in which we used to dip our crinoline petticoats
when I was a teen-ager.
But I am not bereft of joy.
Goddess joy.
I am still the Southern California girl
who danced with excitement each summer
when she got to go to the yearly La Habra Corn Festival.

In the corridors of the mall I almost dance
out to the car to drive home and tell my husband the movie
was just as good the second time
as the first. I might even
go again tomorrow.
One more time.
Treat myself to one more
ecstatic fling,
rolled in cornmeal, flaming with chunky
salsa pumps, dancing the polenta mysteries in this
ballroom I always enter
through the veil
of films like
"Dirty Dancing,"
"Strictly Ballroom,"
"Dance With Me," and
Sally Potter's "The Tango Lesson".

ANNE WALDMAN

from MARRIAGE: A SENTENCE

Say "tree" say "on the hill". Say "game" say it is "over". Say [turning to her] "the hand marks the seconds". Say "the hand marks the hours". Say "the horse in the harness". Say "insatiable appetite". Say "tuning fork". Say "came off the desert looking for water". Say "the messenger's narrative". Say [turning to him] "thirsty for home & hearth". Put your feet up take a load off. Say "marriage is always timely". Marriage was on clypsedric time. Stops one from always moving around. Are you still an umbilicus? No, a roving spirit a free agent an independent entity a marvelous conglomeration of tendencies the hairiest bag of water a water carrier a carriage trader with flute & flask before city sidewalks were wood trains run through me hear them at night? A two-note Sally mule train Sally ghost of a fickle lover a small time settler panning for gold with a Sally by his side. I am also the combined spoils of war. This is market time. To make a deal a fair exchange. I am a couple. This is market time. A gin fizz rupture. Psyches pitted against each other for spoils of war. I am a slave trader & she's my sex slave a party girl an old flame in transit. And to mark the time for Cold War objectives isn't marriage timely now? Musical partitions separate the girls from the wives. Jazz is her sex religion. Notes in frazzled mind. Say "radio" say "comes on a wave" say "singing voices". This is five minutes away. Say "Justice of the Peace". This is an hour. This is long. Come here. Touch me. Do you want me? For keeps? Turn over the pages in the brain. This is paper. Put it in writing, a "contractual nuptial". This is magic. This is something borrowed. This is what you can say is "god". Shift the load to the Lord. No this is something needs a Marxist blessing.

—by candle's light a bedouin—

Yearning in his voice man to man man on man had remembered I only wash dishes, & laughed, man to man was like in pictures you make a case take a stand for the benefits of survival's kind palimony. He is gentlemanly young erudite discreet they are friends & flirting amours dear marriage come later. A maestro gaze, he makes dances, he ambulatory films, had remembered and said now it is final now, a final illness, shifts from man to man in this culture so let's marry before it gets late. Overstuffed ready chair opera gloves paperwork footlocker, a carriage trade stands for myths together. Postcards from berlin or the jewelbox theater La Fenice in Venezia where you in marriage watched Figaro burnt down. He dies he wishes on the Metropolitan opera steps. One last diva stand. And when you just say opera how trivializing it gets what opera. It was Pelleas et Melisande of Debussy. What man what death what couple. His name in subtext is Warren. Crawled down there someone said who loves him like that he was mad for the place & music ringing always in an ear. Strauss is a favorite or maybe it's the aria from the one when the woman was a man maybe Strauss again. And Lucia Lamermoor someone said was one of mine was what he said.

& after this man is gone try the different heartbreak tones of Saigon.

—male gaze male—

KEITH WALDROP

NATURAL BRIDGE

Climbs on the first spider that
comes along. Sees himself distinctly
on the same road, riding towards. Strange
peace of mind. Land of Commotion.

Enlarges, gets stronger, heavier, and along with this
the pillows get bigger. Earth as it was, without
railroads, the Eiffel Tower, the Suez Canal and
with the Island of Krakatoa, before 1883.

Feels he is a soap-bubble, or that his limbs are
made of glass, or describes himself in
countless ways. Dreams of icy satellites
on ancient extinguished suns.

Like a doll from Nuremberg. Head floating free,
half a mile behind. Systems no telescope
can resolve into individual stars. Exceptionally
three-dimensional and highly detailed.

Prefers the thick tangle of some
dwarf shrub. Affirms that another
person lies on his left side in the same
bed and wants to push him out.

Strips of light, spiralling like a tenacious
climbing plant. We possess, from this
period, pictures of animals, diluvial and
characteristic. New heaven and new earth.

The walls are simple, white, unornamented. In long
cases along these walls are dark stone
fragments, resembling broken animals. Terrible
teeth. Blood of grapes and mulberries.

What new impetus in the millions
of space and time? Provokes the elephants to
fight. And for every elephant a
thousand men. So decorated, at such expense.

ROSMARIE WALDROP

TOOL BOX

The gaze she knew even as a child envelops, the way velvet surrounds antlers in the period immediately preceding sexual aggression and mating. His attitude toward repetition casual—so many roses to suggest compulsion. But the definition[1] of terms like "attraction" or "palpable" depends on the enjambement of closed systems. The time you took, she wails, to open your arms, grow a beard, have rings under your eyes, wear a raincoat, swollen tongue, sigh, eyes downcast.

As a mature woman, Godiva knew all but one of her subjects would turn their eyes away from her humiliation, but my interest in the entire range of sexuality is genuine, quite genuine. If two or three cell bodies are gathered together they build suburbs of gray matter.[2] The whole system vibrates with red sky in progress, like sailor's delight minus part-time labor. Luminescence, she wails, mysteries, phenomena, sprouting likenesses, mirrors rampant, sunrise, porous color, out of phase gaze.

A naked little girl on a horse,[3] long tresses cover her body. My rash is now an unremovable garment covering my belly, buttocks and genitals in a wet flush of color. Here lies the difficulty: a closed system can never be a mattress. My eyes, my voice, she wails, the deep spiral of the stairs, the small sea shell you'd brought me, snail house, bone color, sound in my ear.

A child Godiva would fulfill the most exhibitionist Emperor's fantasy, he of the New Clothes, but where is he? I found myself admiring the chocolate-colored trousers and yellow shirt which, irritating my gray matter, caused an explosion involving many cells at once, like lightning or an epileptic fit. And while physics

does not explicitly define the body as rigid,[4] the whole system changed from rain to sleet. Panic, she wails, lilies made up yellow, garlands, wintergreen, palm leaves, seasonal emblems, splinter of red stone, open sky.

Notes

1. useful if inadequate
2. like chronic abnormalities that irritate
3. poorly fed
4. I'll never forget the mechanical chess player in his turban

WANG PING

SECOND CHANCE

The hospital called.
"Good news from your test.
The baby looks good. No Down's syndromes
or other defects. And it's a boy."

"Thank you, thank you," I repeated in a daze.
The phone beeps in my hand,
signaling me to hang up or dial,
or simply clasp my hands in gratitude to
my good fortune.

I've been hiding in baggy clothes, telling
friends I put on weight from depression.
It has to be kept a secret until the test is performed.
If the fetus goes wrong
I need to grieve in private
and hide the shame of my womb,
from which a life has to be torn because of my age.

They say bad babies are caused by old eggs.
Born into the ovaries with a fixed number at birth,
the eggs become sticky after a woman reaches thirty,
and may not split evenly in the middle, sending an extra
    x or y
to one half, causing a lack in the other.
According to my doctor, an expert on genetics,
the ratio for such wrong doing rockets
after she hits forty: 1:60 for a 41 year-old,
1:30 for 42, and 1:6 for 45-year-olds.
He stopped, his finger on the chart

tapped out what he couldn't say:
This is what they call the ticking of the biological clock.

How about the sperm, I broke the silence,
hoping I could somehow make my partner share some blame.
Ah, the sperm, the sperm are never a problem, I was told.
Born anew each month, fresh and vital as always,
this is true even for an eighty-year-old.

Thus, I closed my mouth and lay down on the cot
and took the test at my own cost, wondering
if insurance covers viagra because of this masculine
advantage.
As the long needle penetrated the uterus and placenta,
I wished my partner would just disappear.
Why did he have to witness this humiliation
alloted to the female body?
In the dark sea of amniotic fluid, the fetus floated,
bones transparent against the screen, the mouth sucking,
the heart pumping like an eye blinking.
Suddenly the fetus reached for the needle. The doctor
jumped,
ready to withdraw the tube. But it only grabbed its knee,
then released. The feet kicked and stretched,
showing off the sex between his legs.
I smiled at this delightful thing, so tiny and perfect,
forgetting for a moment the statistics, the bill, and my chance
of hitting the biological lottery.

The doctor held three tubes of liquid under the light,
clear, straw-colored, like pee.
"It's urine from the fetus," he said, reading my mind.
With that he'd grow culture for ten days
to decide the fetus' fate as well as the mother's.

If fate is a strange thing,
waiting is then the real pain.
I wished I didn't have to cook, wash, eat or sleep,
so I could keep my fingers crossed for a blessing.

I also wanted to break them all so I couldn't chew
my nails when the dark thought loomed over my brain.
For ten days, life stood still,
only hope hung upon the faith—
a thin cliff of chance. I prayed,
for the first time, promising everything I have.
"Take my adjunct teaching, my $2,000 life saving, my writing,
even my happiness, but give me a normal baby, please.
Is that too much to ask?" I shouted in the darkness.
But I knew, deep down, it's not just a financial problem,
or the responsibility of caring for a child
who would remain a child forever.
My anger is the shame of my body, used, aged, abnormal,
and the fear to be blamed, to be no longer desired.

The phone is finally silent,
after a storm of beeping and the operator's
urgent advice. I put it back to its socket,
wondering if Alea, Latin for dice, or luck,
would sound too weird for a name,
and how I should tell the news to my friend
who is still keeping on her desk
the ashes of her four-month-old fetus, still cleansing
her body daily with pills and herbs, still waiting,
with all her strength, for a second chance.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

SALAAM *SULFUR*

It's undeniable that everywhere—and especially in the U.S., where literary writers generally do not appear in newspapers or mass-circulation periodicals—the "little" magazine kept literature alive in the 20th century. And it is safe to say that *Sulfur* was the last significant American little magazine of the century. What is strange is that it may well be the last significant little magazine of them all—that is, in the printed version as we know it—for the Internet has now rendered them obsolete.

Difficult to believe, as the technophiles are proclaiming, that the book is dead, for there is as yet no more convenient and, by our present tastes, aesthetically pleasing "information package." What is certain is that its means of production will change. For example, the corporations are already testing high-speed printing and binding machines, which could become as ubiquitous as ATMs: one puts in a credit card, types in the author and title, and in a few minutes a printed and bound book appears. This will not be the end of conglomerate publishing, which will forever control the larger markets, but it could mean an unimaginable democratization of the publishing process. In the 18th century, when newspapers began publishing letters to the editor, every citizen became a potential published writer. In the 21st, everyone will be able to be the author of a book. It is both a kind of Utopia and a nightmare.

The technology, as it now exists, makes the reading of more than ten or fifteen pages at a stretch wearisome; no one wants to settle down with *The Man Without Qualities* on a laptop. But it is perfect for the contents of a magazine, where one can browse, then read or print out what one likes. Though the Net, for the moment, will not render the mass-circulation magazine—with its consumption in the interstices of transient boredom—obsolete, it is, in many ways, superior to printing for a little magazine.

Consider *Sulfur* next to *Jacket*, John Tranter's e-zine from Australia (www.jacket.zip.com.au). (I choose *Jacket* because I happen to know

it best, and publish there regularly—along with many *Sulfur* contributors—though other examples could serve.) An issue of *Sulfur* costs around $9000 to produce and mail. After nearly twenty years of publishing, the print run of an issue was 2,000 and its paid subscribers around 800—moderately successful for an American little magazine. The inherent deficit kept it chained to endless grant applications and fund-raising. *Jacket*—produced, like nearly all little magazines, by unpaid labor—costs nothing beyond the initial expense of the computer equipment and the small monthly server fee. And, in its first two years, it has registered some 200,000 "hits." As a contributor, I've simply never had as much response to anything I've published elsewhere (including pieces in large-circulation magazines such as *The Nation* or *Village Voice):* besides letters and e-mails from strangers and comments on other websites, everyone I run into seems to have read it.

Sulfur was accessible to those in urban centers and certain college towns, and those willing to pay for an issue sight unseen (subscription); *Jacket* is available free to anyone with computer access (which will soon be almost everyone in the industrial world). Moreover, printed little magazines lived in relative isolation, the news of their contents spreading by word of mouth. If your interest was piqued by writer X or subject Y, there was almost no way to know that X or Y was published or discussed in *Sulfur*. That same writer or topic in an e-zine like *Jacket* automatically becomes part of a reference network of links and search engines, instantly sending you on to the appropriate page.

Above all, the Web brings back the immediacy and tentativeness of what the little magazine should be, and now so rarely is. Little magazines have become far too genteel: the polished works of each contributor lined up like gravestones or museum pieces, with no commentary or writings that are not "art." They have become books, or something less than books: periodic anthologies that are inferior to other anthologies because they must be drawn from work that is otherwise unpublished and that happens to cross the editor's desk. The e-zine, however, is a potential return to the primary function of the little magazine: works in progress, comments, letters, discussions, manifestoes, polemics, debates, and a general sloppiness: a return to process over product. And its speed creates the magazine Olson dreamed of in his letters to Corman about Origin: "getting the work out while it's hot." The things I send to *Jacket* are usually posted the next day.

While the Web will take a long time replacing the existing forms of mass media, it is already the primary medium for people with specialized interests. It is where the sufferer of a rare disease or the Pola Negri

fan in Kansas finds a kindred spirit in Bolivia. "Good literature" (as James Laughlin used to call it) will forever be a specialized interest, and it will be forever useless to decry the popularity or proliferation of lesser vehicles. With The Web. the surprising news may well be that there are more fellow enthusiasts scattered around the planet than we think.

Salaam *Sulfur,* and salaam to its reincarnation in a thousand websites.

ALLEN S. WEISS

WOUNDS

for Clayton Eshleman

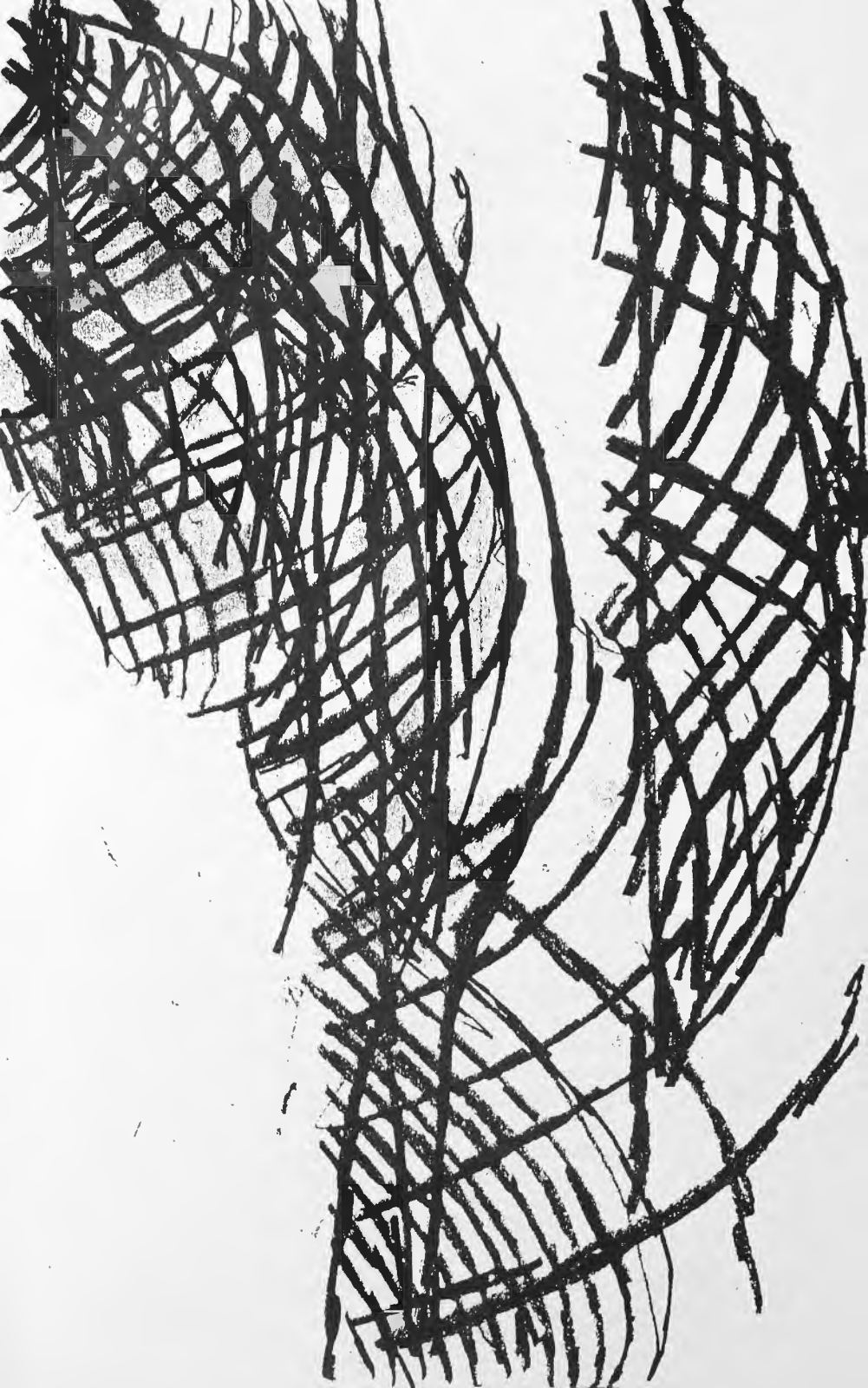
Consider the passion and pain, the memory and desire, represented by each rusted, twisted nail hammered into a fetish. . .My body was Pandemonium, abode of all demons, infernal riot. Chaos shattered my astragalus. Hyperion impaled my solar plexus. Dionysus smashed my tympanum. Nemesis ruptured my spleen. Tantalus infected my conjunctiva. Cronus slashed my corpora cavernosa. Abraxas bound my zygomaticus minor. Baal rotted my spermatic fascia. Beelzebub poisoned my blood. Chimera clogged my jejunum. Gog defiled my sacrum. Gorgon shattered my vitreous body. Lilith chewed my glottis. Lucifer boiled my aqueous humor. Quetzacoatl choked my labyrinth. Yahweh ripped my flexor sublimis digitorum. . .

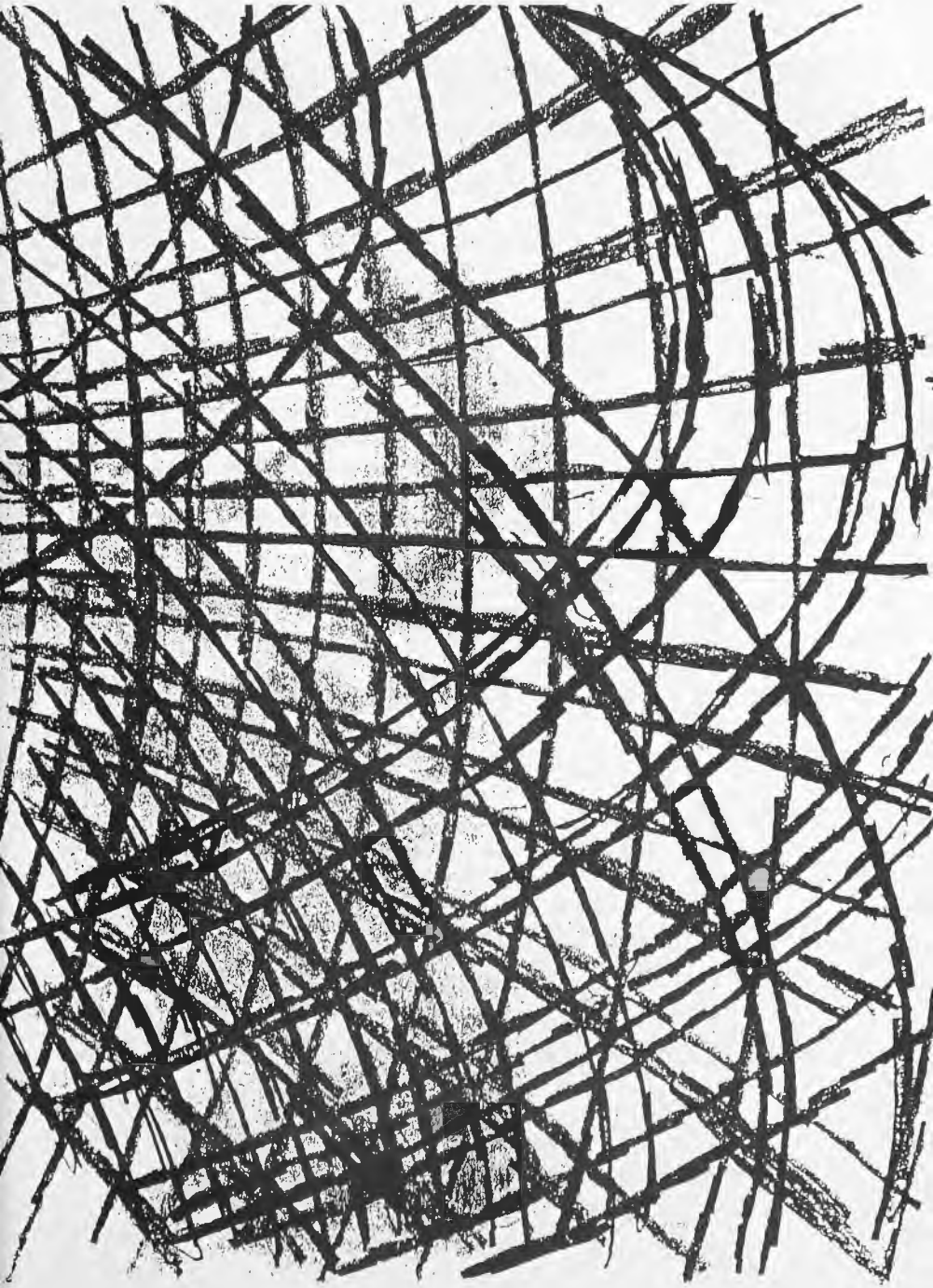
o dedi
a dada orzoura
o dou zoura
u dada skizi

Corpus Angelicuu—degeneration of the gods, where across the millenia the sacred lingam is corrupted into a dildo—Corpus Diabolicus. There was no way to resist, as they attempted *to sweep me away in their sexual hyperaesthesia, their libidinous mannerism, their salacious erotic sensibilisation, their carnal obsession with the abject and infectuous flesh, their phallic copulative delirium, their concrete corporeal erotisation, their complete affective beastialisation, their total sexual corporisation, their crass hypodermic invagination, their integral erotic debauchery, their totally profligate abomination, their unveiled criminal fornication.* I was reduced to a heap of poorly assembled organs: I possessed neither force nor form; I was beset by a profound psychopompomania.

libidinary cupidity
Liminary copulosity
capitulary libido

Unlike Saint Benedict, my doctors did not see beauty in the rose's thorn as it pierces the flesh to drive away those voluptuous visions which haunt holy men.





Jerry Winters 12/1999

MARJORIE WELISH

TWO POEMS

TEXTILE 7

And as in the mind
a gyroscope
through and beyond gossip

"Of what is past, or passing, or to come."
And its corollaries
And its copyright

as in the estate of "Gates of Hell"
cooling off
original copies.

As posthumous descriptions
the body in dark and light descant
wax met metal

and lost. As he left them as he let them go:
ash let bodies be copied cordially.
"We've met before."

We have lived in emphasis
to establish the mettle of nature
for somewhere

literary entities have disembarked.
"Landscapes," they are called.
Culled

because on land
—"That's not a garden, that's a sanatorium for plants"
a sanatorium for flora

in attendance
has found its women's literature.
False positives

". . .as a late cultural arrival. . ."
as, for example, locale
or tanning

even as a reticent reader works through such maneuvers.

TEXTILE 8

As posthumous
description "Of what is past, or passing. . ."
past perfect

in attendance, dancer from dance:
we are its offshoot
almost

thoroughly passage throughout passing face;
step-down
with steep

passion at the summit, the summary.
Similar kinds are common
common

and demonstrably cultural at the close of the poem

whereas
in the beginning was a natural reference table
my table

interpenetrating vocabularies
winged embroideries
episodes

of nature and culture varying inversely in verse
in bas-relief
in relief

as of
aged phrase; add new rhetoric beneath
add great

settlement "From Abstraction to Design Argument"
supplement
subscript

even as
ear to glacier, glassware give and take, deal justly.
Or adjust

"sheen"
(in the sense of "pretext")
or make sense of. . .

explicit destination and planet, lanes
passing lanes closely annexed;
annex

prompting lanes
lanes with the propensity for assent
promised ascent.

C.D. Wright

ELATION WASHED OVER OUR ABSENCE TOWARD EVERYTHING IN THE INCREASING DARKNESS

The soft coloration of his longing in the indifferent
environment has never deserted me.
My husband saving the spermaceti to light
our eyestrings. My husband charting my obsessions
with characteristic cool. Singing sacerdotally
in the shower, my husband intoning every cleft in my skin,
Our syncopated breathing. My husband who flew often
at night as a child. Above the very ground
of our writing (even as power poles were falling
on volvos). My husband equally popular with women
of all ages. His nail parings, his running legs, his scriptoria.
O his ludic hard head. Who cut down
his own hair with a bone-handled knife. His rack
of gorgeous unworn ties. My husband touching
even the insular men; whenever fear bred
its mushrooms under rugs, a cleaning frenzy commenced.
Our bed irrigated with my blood. Watching me burn
from within; tendering his cross pen. O predominately
white guilt. Whenever it rained

after h.l. hix

JOEL-PETER WITKIN

TWO PHOTOGRAPHS

Beauty has Three Nipples, Berlin, 1998

Interrupted Reading, Paris, 1999

Contributor Notes

WILL ALEXANDER is the author of *Asia & Haiti* (Sun & Moon Press, 1995) and *Towards the Primeval Lightning Field* (O Books, 1998). BRUCE ANDREWS is the subject of Aerial 9: Contemporary Poetics as Critical Theory, an anthology edited by Rod Smith on his work. GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE has informed Sulfur that he is happy that R. Padgett continues to translate his poetry. The ANTONIN ARTAUD piece is from Volume IX of Artaud's Complete Works published by Gallimard in Paris. JEAN-PAUL AUXEMERY is the translator of Olson, Blau DuPlessis, Creeley, and Eshleman; his most recent collection of poetry is *Parafe* (1994). STEPHEN BARBER has recently published his second book on Artaud: *The Screaming Body* (Creation Books, London, 1999). SUSAN BEE, who will show new paintings at A.I.R. Gallery, NYC, in April 2000, is the co-editor of the M/E/A/N/I/N/G anthology forthcoming from Duke University Press. New Directions will publish a new collection of BEI DAO's poems, *Unlock,* in 2000. CHARLES BERNSTEIN has recently edited the spring 1999 issue of Boundary 2: 99 Poets/1999: An International Poetics Symposium. LORNA BIEBER writes: "I have been working on the 'Homes and Offices' photo series since 1991. They are infused with a sense of longing and loss and evoke memories both real and imagined." On April 18, 2000, an opera that I have heard is called *The Last Supper,* with libretto by ROBIN BLASER, is opening in Berlin. RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS's *Drafts 1-38, Toll* will be published by Wesleyan University Press in 2001. Each poem from the new "fold" of *Drafts* (39–58), currently in process, is dedicated to a specific person. ANDRE BRETON opened his first major collection of poems, *Earthlight* (1923), with his narration of "Five Dreams." The three dreams translated here, from roughly the same period, were published in the first issue of *La Revolution surrealiste* (1924) and have not been collected since. HAYDEN CARRUTH's most recent books are *Beside the Shadblow Tree* (1999) and *Reluctantly* (1998). Pierre Joris's translation of PAUL CELAN's *Lightduress* will be published by Sun & Moon Press in 2000. Wesleyan University Press will publish a single volume version of AIME CESAIRE's *Notebook of a*

Return to the Native Land, in Clayton Eshleman's and Annette Smith's revised/reformatted translation. MAXINE CHERNOFF's most recent novel is *A Boy in Winter* (Crown, 1999); she edits New American Writing with Paul Hoover. PAUL CHRISTENSEN's *West of the American Dream: An Encounter with Texas* will be published this year by Texas A&M University Press. NORMA COLE's *Crosscut Universe: Writing on Writing From France* is forthcoming from Burning Deck. WILLIAM CORBETT's current book of poems is *Boston Vermont* (Zoland Books); he is an editor of the magazine Pressed Wafer. MICHAEL DAVIDSON's most recent books of poetry are *Post Hoc* (Avenue B) and *The Arcades* (O Books). LYDIA DAVIS is translating Proust. MICHEL DEGUY continues to edit Poesie in Paris. We have no news of ROBERT DUNCAN. GEORGE ECONOMOU'S latest book is *Century Dead Center;* he is a 1999-2000 NEA Fellow in Poetry. MELVIN EDWARDS currently has a one man show at CDS Gallery in NYC. Wesleyan University Press will publish a new edition of CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's translation of César Vallejo's *Trilce* in 2000. DAN FEATHERSON'S poetry is to be found in Nedge, Witz, and Zazil; he will guest-edit A.bacus in 2001. KENWARD ELMSLIE's most recent publication is *Cyberspace,* with visuals by Trevor Winkfield (Granary Books); in 1998, *Routine Disruptions,* selected poems & lyrics, was brought out by Coffee House Press. Part of ALLEN FISHER's *Gravity as a consequence of shape* called *Brixton Fractals* was reprinted in Vancouver in 1999; he lives in Hereford and London. PHILLIP FOSS's most recent collection of poems is *Chromatic Defacement* (Char Press). KATHLEEN FRASER'S most recent book is *Translating the Unspeakable / Poetry and the Innovative Necessity* (University of Alabama Press, 2000). GENE FRUMKIN's latest book is *The Old Man Who Swam Away and Left Only his Wet Feet;* he lives in Albuquerque. WOLFGANG GIEGERICH is a Jungian analyst in private practice near Munich; his book *The Soul's Logical Life: Towards a Rigorous Notion of Psychology* appeared in 1999 from Peter Lang. ALLEN GINSBERG's unpublished essay in this issue will appear in *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995* (Harper Collins, 2000). LEON GOLUB comments: "I would say I have four totem animals, the sphinx (if that's an animal), the lion; the eagle, and the dog. The dog is relatively recent." BARBARA GUEST published three books in 1999: *If So, Tell Me* (Reality St. Editions, London), *Rocks on a Platter* (Wesleyan), and *The Confetti Trees* (Sun & Moon). A book on BERNARD HEIDSIECK's work, *Bernard Heidsieck, poesie action* (Editions Jean-Place) appeared in 1996. LINDSAY HILL is the co-editor, with Paul Naylor, of a new literary magazine, Facture. ANSELM HOLLO's most recent book is *Caws & Causeries: Around Poetry and Poets* (La Alameda/University of New

Mexico Press, 1999). PAUL HOOVER's books include *Totem and Shadow: New & Selected Poems* (Talisman House); he edited the anthology *Postmodern American Poetry* (W.W. Norton). MICHAEL IVES performs with F'loom. PIERRE JORIS's recent publications include *Notes Toward a Nomadic Poetics* (Spanner 38, Hereford, England) and *h.j.r.* (OtherWind Press, Ann Arbor). ANDREW JORON is the author of *Science Fiction* (Pantograph Press, 1992) and *The Removes* (Hard Press, 1999). JANET KAUFFMAN's *Characters on the Loose* was published by Greywolf in 1998. ROBERT KELLY's *The Time of Voice* (Black Sparrow) appeared in 1998. About R.B. KITAJ, Robert Hughes, in Time, has written: "Kitaj draws better than almost anyone else alive." Since 1971 PAUL LAFFOLEY has been the Director of Projects at The Boston Visionary Cell, Inc; his work is shown by Kent Fine Art in NYC. Sulfur is proud to have published prose and poetry by the great Cuban writer JOSE LEZAMA LIMA in several issues. LINH DINH is somewhere in Vietnam. NATHANIEL MACKEY's most recent book is *Whatsaid Serif* (City Lights, 1998). JACKSON MAC LOW's most recent book is *Two Plays: The Marrying Maiden* and *Verdurous Sanguinaria* (Sun & Moon); he taught last summer at the Naropa Institute in Boulder. MATSUTANI will have a retrospective exhibition in Kobe this year. ANA MENDIETA was on the cover of Sulfur #1; she is represented by LeLong Gallery, NYC. HENRI MICHAUX's book *Les Ravagés,* a verbal "portrait of psychiatric patients and the images they paint," was originally published by Fata Morgan in 1976; it was reissued in a Gallimard edition, *Chemins cherchés, chemins perdus, Transgressions,* in 1981. CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON's collection of short prose, *In the Mirror of the Eighth King,* was published by Sun & Moon Press in 1999. BRIAN NISSEN's most recent exhibition was at El Museo del Barrio in NYC from January to March, 1998. VALERE NOVARINA is one of France's leading playwrights; his work is regularly performed at the Festival d'Avignon, the Festival d'Automne, and internationally. The present translation constitutes the end of *L'animal du temps.* JOHN OLSON published two chapbooks in 1999: *Eggs & Mirrors* and *Logo Lagoon.* JENNY PENBERTHY's edition of *Lorine Niedecker: Collected Works* is due from U of Cal Press this year. She is currently preparing Niedecker's "Lake Superior" notes for publication. ROCHELLE OWENS' newest books are *New & Selected Poems 1961-1996,* and *Luca: Discourse on Life & Death* (Junction Press). New Directions will publish a new collection of MICHAEL PALMER's poetry in 2000: *The Promises of Glass.* MARJORIE PERLOFF's most recent books are *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (1996) and *Poetry On & Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions* (1998). MARK POLIZZOTTI's *The New Life* (Alyscamps

Press, Paris & London) appeared in 1998. RICHARD SIEBURTH's *Selected Writings of Gerard de Nerval* was published by Penguin Classics in 1999; he is currently working on a translation of Scève's *Delie*. GUSTAF SOBIN has recently published *Luminous Debris (Reflecting on Vestige in Provence)* (U of Cal Press) and *The Fly-Truffler*, a novel, from Norton. TINA ROTENBERG is the founding director of an arts and culture projects for children in the public schools. She teaches at Mills College in Oakland and lives in Berkeley. JOHN TAGGART's new book, a single long poem, *When the Saints* (Talisman House) is out this winter. KIKULI VELARDE's ceramics shown in this issue are from *Isichapuitu*, a 1998 show at the John Elder Gallery in NYC. She lives in Philadelphia. CECILIA VICUNA's most recent books are *QUIPOem/ The Precarious Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuna* (Wesleyan, 1997) and *Cloud-net* (Hallwalls, 1999). PAUL VIOLI's most recent book is *Fracas* (Hanging Loose); in 2000 Coffee House will publish his *Breakers*, a selection of longer poems. DIANE WAKOSKI's new work includes a new section of *Greed*, 40 pages long. She has also written a long poem about our ageist society, called "Perfume." ANNE WALDMAN's material in this issue is from *Marriage: A Sentence* to be published thls year in the Penguin Poets series. JAMES WANLESS is an English teacher who lives in Grosse Ile, MI. ALLEN WEISS has most recently published *Unnatural Horizons: Paradox and Contradiction in Landscape Architecture* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1998) and has edited *Taste, Nostalgia* (Lusitania Press, 1997). He is currently staging a production of Novarina's *Theater of the Ears*.

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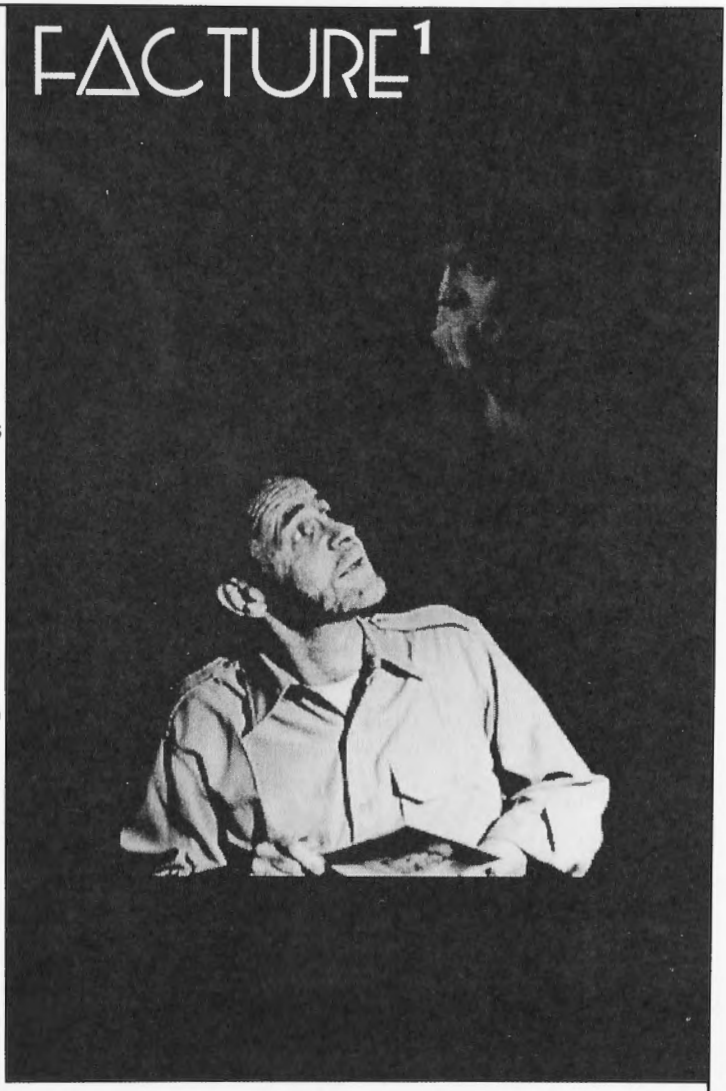

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Inaugural issue, featuring a special section on Ronald Johnson, including unpublished poems, excerpts from the poet's notebooks, and essays by Jed Rasula, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Mark Scroggins, and Eric Selinger. Plus new poetry by Will Alexander, Charles Bernstein, Clark Coolidge, Clayton Eshleman, Harryette Mullen, Sheila Murphy, Gustaf Sobin, and Nathaniel Tarn, among others. *Facture* will be published twice a year. Issues are $10 each, or $30 for a two-year subscription. Make checks payable to *Facture*. All correspondence should be sent to: *Facture*, P.O.Box 337, Cedar Ridge, CA, 95929.

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